

Southeastern Regional Coordinating Council on Transportation Meeting Minutes

May 15, 2025 - Hybrid
Microsoft Teams/City Hall, Attleboro, MA

In-Person: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Dan Brogan, SRPEDD	Virtual: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Kerri Victorio, GATRA- Angela Constantino, GATRA- Will Gardner, Fairhaven- Amber Davis, SRPEDD- Rebekah Rose, SRPEDD- Noah Soutier, SRPEDD
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Introduction

- Dan Brogan invited SERCCOT members for community presentations on topics of interest related to transportation obstacles and opportunities within SRPEDD’s region

Improved Virtual Accessibility for Future SERCCOT Meetings

- SERCCOT meetings will have a wide camera and room mics to ensure that virtual SERCCOT members will be able to engage meaningfully and hear/see things clearly

South Coast Rail Discussion

- Dan Brogan invited attendees to share any feedback they’ve received regarding South Coast Rail, particularly from riders, passengers, or clients who use the service, as well as from colleagues and service partners in related fields. What aspects of the service are working well, what challenges or issues have arisen, and any general perceptions or recurring concerns they've encountered from the public.
 - Angela Constantino, from GATRA, shared that there has been more demand and interest in transit service heading south from Taunton—toward Fall River and New Bedford—than heading north, which was unexpected. Originally, the assumption was that most riders would use the service for commuting to Boston, similar to other commuter rail stations. However, current usage patterns show higher traffic in the opposite direction, with people from both Fall River and New Bedford traveling to Taunton, and Taunton residents seeking service southward. In response to this shift,

- Ms. Constantino announced that beginning Monday, June 2nd, GATRA's Route 8 will serve the East Taunton train station on every trip, including Saturdays. Although the timing may not align perfectly with every train, this change aims to ensure consistent access to all trains passing through.
 - Mr. Brogan responded by noting that Ms. Constantinos observation aligns with other feedback he's been hearing—specifically, that there's a surprising trend of people traveling south from Taunton rather than north. He speculated that transit may be faster to places like New Bedford than driving and brings riders closer to downtown areas, making it a convenient option. Mr. Brogan also mentioned that New Bedford has several co-working spaces near the station, which could attract remote or hybrid workers. Additionally, with summer approaching, he suggested that some riders might be using the route as a connection to the ferry terminals for travel to the islands.
- Noah Soutier, from SRPEDD, shared a meaningful conversation he had with Bonnie D'Souza, a key advocate for the South Coast Bikeway. Ms. D'Souza highlighted a growing interest among bike enthusiasts from the Boston metro area in using South Coast Rail to access bike trails throughout the region. She hopes to welcome these cyclists to explore the recreational opportunities the South Coast offers. Mr. Soutier also mentioned that Ms. D'Souza informed him about the possibility of attaching a special bike car to the commuter rail—beyond the limited standard bike racks typically available on regular train cars. This option could significantly enhance multimodal travel by allowing cyclists to bring their bikes down on the train and easily access the South Coast's network of trails. He emphasized the opportunity for greater partnership and planning to support this kind of recreational and sustainable transportation connection between Boston and the South Coast.
- Will Gardner, from Fairhaven, added to the discussion about multimodal transportation and bike access connected to South Coast Rail. He shared that a group recently tested out the bike car on the commuter rail, emphasizing growing local interest in integrating rail and bike travel. He's involved with two local efforts—South Coast Bikeways and South Coast Place Through People—both of which are working on improving wayfinding for cyclists. His team is developing signage and route guidance from the New

Bedford Bridge down to the terminus of the bike path in Fairhaven. They're also exploring the possibility of extending wayfinding from the New Bedford rail station to the downtown area, to help visitors and cyclists navigate more easily. Mr. Gardner noted that long-term plans include extending the Blue Lane, which would further strengthen these transit-bike connections and improve access for recreational and commuting cyclists alike.

- Amber Davis, from SRPEDD, offered a valuable perspective from her weekend work at a nursing home, where she has spoken with staff who use South Coast Rail for commuting. She noted that many workers—especially those picking up PRN (as-needed) shifts—initially found the service exciting and considered using it to access higher-paying jobs in the north. A recurring concern has emerged around weekend and late-night service limitations. Some staff are hesitant to pursue those opportunities due to the lack of late-night return options, making them worry about getting stranded if their shifts end too late for the train schedule.
 - Mr. Brogan responded to Ms. Davis's concerns by acknowledging the significant barriers posed by late-night and weekend transit limitations, particularly for workers on nontraditional schedules. He noted that currently the last South Coast Rail train from Boston departs at 12:05 a.m., which might not accommodate third-shift or late-shift workers, especially on weekends.
 - He also addressed ongoing service reliability issues, pointing to staffing shortages—particularly on weekends—as a major challenge for South Coast Rail. These shortages have led to delays and disruptions, such as passengers expecting a train but receiving a substitute MBTA shuttle bus instead. Mr. Brogan clarified that these staffing issues stem from Keolis, the private contractor responsible for operating MBTA commuter rail services. He also shared that according to public updates from MBTA leadership, these staffing issues are expected to be resolved by June, which could significantly improve weekend service reliability and make the line more accessible for shift workers and other riders.
- Mr. Brogan shared community feedback he received from Gloria Sadler of Fall River, highlighting two pressing concerns related to South Coast Rail. First, many riders are confused about how to pay for parking at the stations, which can discourage use of the service. Second, there is growing anxiety about the potential for gentrification and displacement. As the South Coast becomes more connected to Boston, there's concern that rising demand

could increase housing costs in New Bedford and Fall River, potentially displacing longtime residents. Mr. Brogan stressed the importance of keeping these concerns front and center, acknowledging that while South Coast Rail brings economic and transit benefits, it is essential to work proactively with communities to prevent displacement and ensure equitable outcomes.

- Mr. Brogan discussed recent outreach efforts focused on improving awareness and access to reduced fare programs, particularly among older adults. He highlighted a recent presentation held in Fairhaven with representatives from SRTA and GATRA, where a common concern raised was confusion about eligibility and the application process for reduced fares. In response, Mr. Brogan expressed his commitment to supporting older adults and other eligible riders throughout the summer, offering help with both rider training and application completion. He encouraged attendees to coordinate similar sessions at Councils on Aging or within GATRA and SRTA service areas. Mr. Brogan also pointed out that while the MBTA provides resources for assisting with fare applications, the applicant must be present. He acknowledged that the \$25 round-trip fare to Boston is a financial hurdle for many and emphasized that expanding access through reduced fares is a key priority.

Interactive Park-Finding Map

- Mr. Brogan shared details about an interactive digital map currently being developed by SRPEDD to enhance community access to green spaces and essential summer resources, particularly for individuals without private transportation. The map is designed to show every public park located within 500 feet of SRTA or GATRA bus stops, making it easier for residents who rely on transit to find and reach outdoor recreational areas. In addition to parks, the tool will include filters for important public amenities such as splash pads, playgrounds, wheelchair- and stroller-accessible features, and restrooms. It also integrates food access information, such as the locations of sites offering free summer lunches and dinners for children and families. Mr. Brogan emphasized that the purpose of the tool is to support equitable access to cooling areas, outdoor recreation, and clean air. The map is still under development, but the interface will eventually allow users to filter by categories to easily find the features they need.
 - Mr. Gardner asked whether public bathrooms would be indicated on the map. Mr. Brogan confirmed that bathroom information will be included. He explained that many towns don't maintain consistent records on which parks have restroom facilities, making it difficult to track. Additionally, work

is being done to distinguish between different types of restrooms—such as permanent structures versus porta-potties—and tries to reflect that distinction in the filtering options.

- Mr. Brogan added that adjacent bike paths will also be included as a filter, allowing users to identify bus stops that provide easy access to nearby bike paths.
- Mr. Soutier expressed his appreciation for the project, calling it an incredible and timely resource—especially from a public health perspective. He emphasized the importance of addressing the intersection of park access and transit access. He noted that making the tool public-facing would greatly benefit individuals who may otherwise struggle to reach green spaces. He also highlighted the value of including information beyond park locations, such as restroom availability and nearby support or social services. Additionally, he mentioned the potential for the resource to assist those facing challenges like limited access to healthy food, reinforcing its broad relevance to public health.
 - In response, Mr. Brogan referenced a study conducted by [Groundwork Southcoast](#) that examined temperature disparities in New Bedford, Massachusetts. The study found that a more affluent, tree-covered suburban area was, on average, 19°F cooler in July than a densely populated, lower-income area with a high immigrant population in the city's North End. He notes how this study reflects significant inequities in environmental conditions based on neighborhood demographics. He explained that part of his project's aim is to help mitigate these disparities by increasing access to green space in the short term and, over the long term, encouraging the development of tree canopies, parklets, and other cooling infrastructure in underserved communities. His goal is to launch the interactive map by Memorial Day weekend or the first week of June so that people can benefit from the tool throughout the summer.

Other Transit News

- Mr. Brogan encouraged the group to reach out as the summer months approach, emphasizing the importance of community engagement. He mentioned that as more events are planned, there will be opportunities for individuals to get involved and also to address transit access for those attending these events. He expressed a willingness to offer support and collaborate wherever possible.

- Mr. Brogan also discussed the development of a transit education series aimed at improving rider knowledge. This series, which is currently in progress, covers a range of topics, including how to use the commuter rail app, pay for fares, use bike racks on buses, flag down buses on a flagging system, and navigate transit with accessibility needs like strollers or wheelchairs. The goal of the series is to help people feel more comfortable and familiar with local transit systems, particularly since surveys have shown that lack of familiarity with schedules and routes has been a barrier for many. He mentioned that these resources would be available on YouTube and would be included in the shared slides for easy access.
 - Mr. Gardner asked if the transit education videos were already available. Mr. Brogan confirmed that three videos have been released so far: one on mobile fare payment for South Coast Rail, another offering a general introduction to South Coast Rail, and a third demonstrating how to load a bike onto a bus bike rack.
 - [Link to Transit On Demand Playlist](#)
- Ms. Constantino shared an update about a new bus route connecting Fall River, Taunton, and Brockton. The contract has been awarded to Yankee Lines, with a tentative start date of July 1. She explained that they are currently working through the logistics of coordinating service across three different terminals and RTAs. The service will involve three buses operating hourly, with standard trips between the cities and one dedicated express bus running directly from Fall River to Brockton to help reduce travel time. The full route is scheduled as one hour between each city to account for possible delays, which could make a full Fall River to Brockton trip up to two hours without the express option. Ms. Constantino noted that public information will be shared soon and also mentioned that Route 8 will undergo changes in June.
- Mr. Brogan noted that SRTA's "Micro Connector" service is currently operational. It allows users in Fall River and New Bedford to schedule rides that bring them directly to the station. He mentioned ongoing efforts to expand the service area to Fairhaven, based on community feedback—particularly from the Fairhaven Council on Aging—which highlighted the need for more convenient access. Some residents have considered parking on the street in New Bedford to then use the Micro Connector and avoid parking fees, prompting efforts to extend service directly instead.
- Mr. Brogan also shared that discussions are ongoing with RIPTA to expand transit service to Fall River, he noted that any progress on that expansion is at least a year out.

- Mr. Brogan shared a legislative update, noting that there is currently a bill in the Massachusetts State Senate that, if passed, would make all RTAs fare-free on a permanent basis—transitioning from the current pilot program to long-term secured funding. He clarified that if the bill advances through committee and is signed into law, the earliest it would take effect is July 1st.
- Mr. Brogan announced a public community forum on [South Coast Rail scheduled for June 5th at 5:30 PM at Morton Middle School in Fall River](#). The forum, hosted by the MBTA and the City of Fall River, is intended to gather community feedback and perspectives on the progress of South Coast Rail.

Next Meeting: July XXth in Taunton

[Microsoft Teams Link](#)