



EXTRA INFORMATION

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**Lauren S. Rosenzweig, Chairperson
ACTON BOARD OF SELECTMEN**

December 1, 2008

Barbara Lucas, Chair
Suburban Mobility Subcommittee
Boston Region MPO
10 Park Plaza, Suite 2150
Boston, MA 02116

Re: Town of Acton Suburban Mobility Grant Application

Dear Ms. Lucas:

The Town of Acton is submitting the following letter of interest outlining our desire to participate in the Suburban Mobility Grant Program for the federal fiscal year 2009. Our primary objective in pursuing a suburban mobility grant is to address parking and traffic congestion at the South Acton Rail Station. At the same time, our intent is to create travel choices and increase mobility for all residents. These goals are motivated by a desire to create a sustainable, accessible community.

Project Background

The Town of Acton owns and manages a commuter parking lot at the South Acton Rail Station. Increasing fuel prices, additional parking fees at other MBTA lots and a deteriorating economic climate have led to an increasing demand for parking at the South Acton Station, exacerbating the parking shortages and traffic congestion in and around the rail station. As the main parking lot reached capacity several years ago, the Town of Acton identified three overflow lots within walking distance of the rail station. Over the past several months, these lots have also reached capacity. Parking shortages not only frustrate residents and negatively impact the community surrounding the station, they also suppress demand for MBTA services, forcing commuters to travel longer distances to park and/or drive alone to work.

The community is actively engaged and vocal about parking congestion at the South Acton Rail Station. Led by the Town's Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC), the Town held a forum for people and businesses interested in local public transportation options in June 2007. This forum drew nearly one hundred individuals, reflecting a wide array of community interests including commuters, local businesses, the disabled community, various immigrant groups, schools, and nonprofit agencies. Shortly after the June forum, also in 2007, Robert Guptill of the Central Transportation Planning Staff researched and prepared a "Technical Report: Analysis of the Potential for Demand-Responsive Services in the Town of Acton". Among the key findings in this document is the identification of flexible, on-demand service or a less flexible form of route-deviation service as the most suitable options for Acton.

Building on the momentum achieved in the forum and the continuing concerns expressed by commuters, in the spring of 2008, the Town of Acton and the TAC began to prepare for the suburban mobility program by accomplishing two main tasks. The first was to issue a community-wide travel survey to understand resident travel patterns, preferences and priorities. This survey effort included an online survey available to all residents as well as a shortened, paper version that was distributed to students in the junior high school and high school and clients of local social service organizations. In total some 4160 surveys were completed, including 960 online surveys and 3200 paper versions. This data will be instrumental as the Town finalizes the design of its transportation program and plans for implementation. The second task was to contract with an external consultant to conduct technical analysis and support the TAC as it crafted a short-term transportation program to address commuter needs and develop service options for residents.

Town of Acton Proposed Project

While the Town is still refining and finalizing the transportation program that will be submitted in the Suburban Mobility Grant application, we have made considerable progress in developing a proposal for transportation services. We envision a multi-faceted program that will be comprised of integrated programs that will address Acton's specific transportation problems as well as support mobility and provide options for residents. The Town of Acton's proposed program will likely include parts or all of the following elements: 1) parking management strategies at the South Acton Rail Station; 2) shuttle services from a remote parking lot; 3) peak period flexible demand response "flex-services"; and 4) coordinated operations of existing demand response services, including the Town's taxi voucher program, in development now.

Accordingly, the Town is pursuing a holistic approach to service that takes advantage of existing resources and facilities to create choices and options for residents. Thus, while the main focus of the project is intended to address parking and traffic congestion around the South Acton Rail Station, the approach will also provide options for older adults, persons with disabilities, and persons with low incomes. Our program addresses the key concerns of residents, reflects documented demand for travel choices, and builds on supplemental data to introduce new travel options.

The Town of Acton anticipates that this program will require funding from a variety of sources and recognizes that not all elements are fundable by the Suburban Mobility Program. As a result, we will explore several integrated strategies that could generate some much needed revenue if included in our overall approach, such as parking management and coordination with other existing programs to increase efficiency. We hope to use the Suburban Mobility Program to fund new services, specifically remote parking shuttle and flex-services during peak periods.

Regional Approach and Local Model

As Acton examines transportation needs and travel patterns in our community, it becomes increasingly evident to us that travel is not limited to political jurisdictions and borders. In particular, data clearly documents the need for Acton residents to travel to and from regional destinations. Likewise, as we examined local solutions, we recognized that many commuters to the rail station come from out of town and therefore, we considered their needs and the impacts of local decisions on non-residents. Accordingly, we anticipate that as we gain experience addressing local transportation issues, the Town of Acton will increasingly look for opportunities to coordinate and integrate our transportation programs with neighboring communities in search of an increasingly regional approach and solutions.

In addition, as the Town of Acton pursues its transportation program, we are willing to document our experience so that the Town of Acton can be a reference and model for other communities addressing similar issues. We are willing to record our data collection, analysis, and conversations that led to our decisions and approach. Likewise, we are willing to share our experience with implementation, management and financing, so that other communities can learn from our experience.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this letter of intent for the Suburban Mobility Grant Program for the federal fiscal year 2009. We appreciate your guidance to date, and we look forward to continuing to work with you and your staff as we progress with this project. We are available to meet with you at your earliest convenience to review the process for the full application and business plan.

Sincerely,

Lauren S. Rosenzweig, Chairperson
Board of Selectmen