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Executive Director

January 28, 2014

RE: Passenger Rail Station Location and Design Analysis Study

The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) and the Housatonic Railroad Company are moving forward with the next phase of the comprehensive passenger rail station location and design analysis study along the Housatonic Rail Line from New York City to the Berkshires.

To date, BRPC has conducted research, a land use suitability analysis, field work and two public meetings. Through these efforts, we have identified potential areas in your community where a station might be located and would like your community's participation in a working group session to:

- Review identified areas for a potential passenger rail station,
- Prioritize potential locations
- Provide additional insights in a working group session.

We hope that you and Sheffield public officials will join us on **Wednesday February 19, at the Sheffield Town Hall (6:30 p.m.)**.

For additional information, please look at our [website \(www.berkshireplanning.org\)](http://www.berkshireplanning.org) or contact Project Manager Brian Domina at bdomina@berkshireplanning.org or (413) 442-1521 x14.

A. Criteria for Passenger Rail Station Location—Municipal Level

To objectively compare Target Areas in all communities along the Housatonic rail line, a set of criteria were selected to evaluate the extent to which a passenger rail station would maximize economic impact to the community, maximize access and connectivity to and from the community, complement ongoing community development efforts, fit with community character, avoid and minimize operational difficulties while avoiding and/or mitigating adverse impacts. The list below demonstrates how these criteria were measured.

- 1. Maximize economic impact to the community**
 - a. Number of major employers within or near Target Area
 - b. Extent of existing commercial use in Target Area
 - c. Number of places of accommodation and dining establishments within or near Target Area
 - d. Number of cultural and/or recreational opportunities within or near Target Area
- 2. Maximize access and connectivity to and from the community**
 - a. Population density
 - b. Presence or proximity to major arterial road
 - c. Capacity and condition of roads in Target Area
 - d. Public transportation service
 - e. Pedestrian and cycling access
- 3. Complement community development efforts**
 - a. Identification of area in community planning documents
 - b. Identification of area in state or federal planning or economic development documents
- 4. Fit with the character of the community**
 - a. Surrounding land use and character
- 5. Avoid and/or minimize operational difficulties (TBD)**
 - a. Favorable track geometry
 - b. At least 240' of frontage along the tracks
- 6. Avoid and/or mitigate adverse impacts**
 - a. Presence of FEMA 100 yr. flood plains
 - b. Presence of habitat for rare or endangered species
 - c. Presence of Priority Conservation Area
 - d. Presence of ACEC
 - e. Presence of wetland resource area or river protection area
 - f. Number of brown fields

B. Ranking for Passenger Rail Station Target Areas –Sheffield

By applying the above criteria, Target Areas in Sheffield were evaluated and ranked.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Sheffield Center | 4. Rannapo Road/Ashley Falls Road |
| 2. Cook Road | 5. Sheffield Town Line to Sheffield |
| 3. West Stahl Road to Connecticut State
Line | Egremont Road |

Target Area	Strengths and Opportunities	Challenges
Sheffield Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three schools within 3 miles of Target Area • Village center district • Commercial and general business district • Existing commercial and retail activity • 4 accommodations • Served by Route 7 • Pavement management audit results in "Fair to Excellent" description • One of the least constrained target areas in Sheffield (north of Cobble Lane and before Silver Street, also Pike Road area) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACEC to west of track • Not served by BRTA
Cook Road	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commercial district • Served by Route 7 • Pavement management results in a "Fair" description • Higher density area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Track cuts through 100 yr. floodplain • Habitat area • Priority Conservation Area to immediate west of track • Senior Center is located within this target area
West Stahl Road to Connecticut State Line	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close to Route 7, served by 7A • Unconstrained area along Old State Road and southern end of Target Area • Could easily serve Connecticut communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FEMA 100 yr. floodplain on either side, but track does not cut through. North of Rannapo Road it does. • Rural district • Low density
Ashley Falls and Rannapo Road	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 accommodation • Some density • Pavement management results in a "Fair" description • Commercial district • Minimal commercial or retail use • Served by 7A 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priority conservation area • Habitat
Sheffield Town Line to Sheffield Egremont Road (N. Main Street)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close to some existing retail and/or commercial business • Collectors described as "Fair" • Sheffield is part of a greater Berkshire Economic Target Area (one of nine BRK communities) • Commercial district • Low density • Unconstrained to the north 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In southern area: No major employers within this TA • No top cultural or recreational destinations • Not currently served by BRTA • Rail line cuts through 100 yr. floodplain • Habitat for rare or endangered species to immediate west of track • Priority Conservation Area to west of track

The following target areas in Sheffield were analyzed and ranked in accordance with the Evaluation Criteria for Passenger Rail Station Locations – Municipal Level.

TARGET AREA RANKINGS (1 to 6)

1. **Sheffield Center**
2. **Cook Road**
3. **West Stahl Road to State Line**
4. **Ashley Falls/Rannapo Road**
5. **Town Line To Sheffield/Egremont road**

Of Note: The entire community of Sheffield is a Massachusetts Economic Target Area. The return of passenger rail service and implications of increased train travel through Sheffield is noted in the 2005 Sheffield Master Plan as well.

Discussion:

Sheffield Center: The Sheffield Center target area is has the largest unconstrained area in Sheffield. The area is served by Route 7, and contains four accommodations and offers three dining establishments. There are three schools near the Target Area, and existing commercial and retail activity. A recent pavement management audit describes collector roads in this Target Area as “Fair to Excellent”. From Cook Road south to Root Lane, the Target Area is zoned a village center; south of Root Lane, the target area is split into commercial zoning and general business zoning. The section of target area to the east is the less constrained. Constraints include an ACEC to the west of the track, and the area is not currently served by BRTA. Enhancing public transportation in the community of Sheffield was identified in a 2013 Community Development Strategy as a priority. Also of note: the Sheffield 2005 master plan notes the need to ensure safety of rail crossings if passenger rail were to return to the region. Because Sheffield center contains residential homes, issues of sound would also need to be addressed. While not addressed in depth in this section, safety and sound issues will be addressed as the study progresses to site specific selections.

Ranking: First (1st)

Cook Road: The Cook Road target area is just north of Sheffield Center, ranging from the intersection of Main Street with Sheffield/Egremont Road down to Cook Road. This smaller target area is zoned as a commercial district and served by Route 7. It has relatively high density. Pavement management audit resulted in a “fair” description. It has also been noted that the Sheffield Senior Center is located within this Target Area.

Ranking: Second (2nd)

West Stahl Road to State Line: This target area stretches down from the intersection of Route 7A and West Stahl Road down to the Connecticut State line along Old State Road. This target area does contain constraints of concern, including FEMA 100 yr. floodplains. It is zoned as a rural district. The constraints are most notable where the line intersects with the river, and there is increased density between East Main Street, East Stahl Road and Clayton Road. Accessible via Route 7 and Route 7A, this area is currently not served by public transportation. This Target Area could capture South Berkshire riders, as well as riders from nearby communities in Connecticut.

Ranking: Third (3rd)

Ashley Falls/Rannapo Road: This target area stretches from North of Pike Road, and descends along Ashley Falls Road. It has low density, except for the small area along Pike Road. It is served by 7A, and on the east side of the tracks, has few constraints. It has one accommodation, and is higher in density than the Rannapo Road/Ashley Falls and Town Line to Sheffield Egremont Road target area. Pavement management audits result in a “Fair” description. There is minimal commercial or retail use. It is partially constrained by nearby priority conservation area as well as habitat for rare or endangered species. Because of its relative low density and lack of ample commercial or retail activity, this location might better be suited for a regional station.

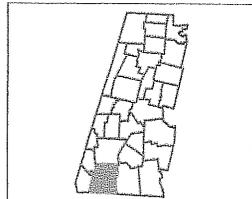
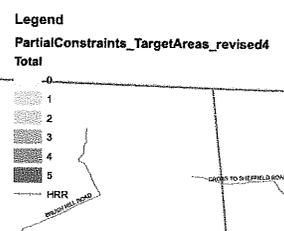
Ranking: Fourth (4th)

Town Line to Sheffield Egremont Road: This Target area stretches from the Great Barrington town line down to the intersection of Main Street with Sheffield/Egremont Road. Except for the early section right after the Great Barrington/Sheffield town line, this area is very constrained. Though zoned for general business, it has less commercial or retail activity than Sheffield Center. While the section of this Target Area stretching from Rebellion and Kellog Road to Sheffield Egremont Road is very constrained, the smaller section just below the Great Barrington Town line and parallel is less constrained but very low in density. A passenger rail station in this first section of the target area could serve both Sheffield and Great Barrington, but would require additional transportation to get rail passengers from the station to destinations in Sheffield. While the land use of a passenger rail station would work, the low density in this section makes it less desirable than Sheffield Center. This section is also served by Route 7. In terms of challenges, there are no major employers within this target area; no top cultural or recreational destinations, and it is not currently served by BRTA. Physical constraints include FEMA 100 yr. flood plains; habitat for rare or endangered species to immediate west of track, and priority conservation area to the west of the track. The reason why this target area is ranked second is due to the unconstrained area to the north. While not an ideal local station location, it could perhaps be a good location for a regional station.

Ranking: Fifth (5th)



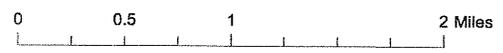
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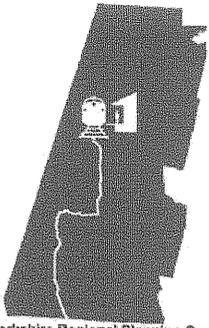


Sheffield



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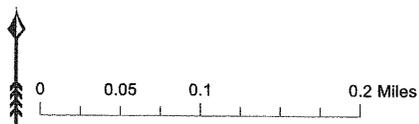
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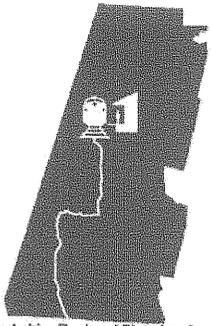
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Total



Cook Road





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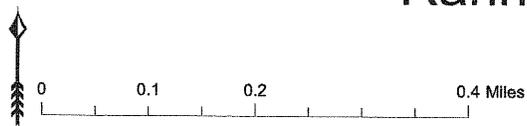
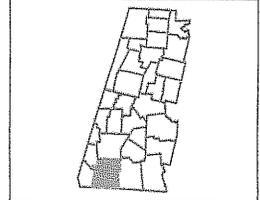
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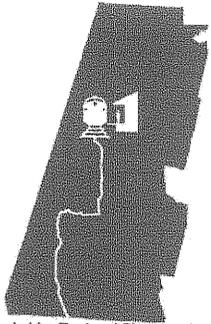
Total

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 - 1
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4
 - 5
- HRR



Rannapo Road/Ashley Falls Road





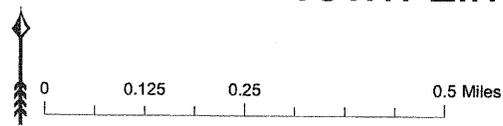
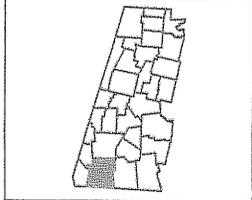
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Legend

PartialConstraints_TargetAreas_revised4

Total

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- HRR



Town Line to Sheffield Egremont Road