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SOUTH COAST RAIL MARKS FIRST YEAR OF CONSTRUCTION

Just 15 months after the first construction contract award on Phase 1 of South Coast Rail (SCR), there is great progress along the rights-of-way (ROWs) that will carry riders in late 2023. Construction began on the Fall River Secondary in June 2020 and on the New Bedford Main Line/Middleborough Secondary in October 2020. Construction activity is visible in every city and town along the ROW. Station foundations are being constructed, utilities installed, and new ballast, ties and rails put in place. Phase 1 will provide riders with a one-seat trip between Boston and Taunton, Fall River and New Bedford for the first time since the late-1950s.

The construction numbers are impressive: 32% of the rail has been replaced or upgraded on the Fall River line, and 9% on the New Bedford Main Line/Middleborough Secondary. Sheet piling and pile walls are being installed, with more than 10,000 linear feet on Fall River and 3,900 on New Bedford/Middleborough. More than 175 workers are working at sites along the right-of-way (ROW). Bridges and culverts are being replaced and grade crossings upgraded.



Preparing the site of Freetown Station

While building a railroad is a linear project, the work is taking place in multiple locations. Because the Fall River Secondary work began first, construction at the Freetown and Fall River Depot Stations is starting to reveal the elements that will serve the stations: footings, station platform foundations, walls and bridges and culverts are visible. The layover site at Weaver's Cove is being reshaped to host six tracks for overnight storage and a crew building. Replacing the Assonet River Railroad Bridge is a tale of its own: see the feature article and photos on page 3. Our team designed a way to replace the bridge over the Assonet River in the middle of a forest. Our contractor executed the replacement during a period of unusually high river levels.

In Middleborough, our contractor has built new sidings and work is well underway on the new Middleborough Station. Heading south, the MBTA is coordinating work on the East Taunton Station and railroad bridges and coordinating with MassDOT's Route 24/140 Interchange Improvement Project, which will enhance traffic flow in the area. Site clearing is completed at New Bedford's Church Street Station. Work on the New Bedford Station will ramp up this fall. Material and soil deliveries are taking place at the stations and at the Wamsutta Layover site. Our contractor is installing steel sheeting walls and soldier pile with precast panel walls to retain earth along the ROW.

The Phase 1 signal system includes purchasing and installing communications and signal cable and equipment for the entire ROW, and incorporation of Positive Train Control (PTC), a system that improves train safety. The scope provides for testing and commissioning the entire new Phase 1 system to ready it for passenger service.

Building for the Future

Railroad construction requires deliveries, movement of soils and equipment, and cooperation with the current freight operator to replace the aging rail. The [spring fact sheet](#) showed how ballast, the stone beneath the ties and rails, is produced and readied for delivery.

The rail itself takes a different type of journey. The last of three deliveries of new continuous welded rail occurred on August 11 when a rail train offloaded 60 strings of continuous welded rail, each with a total length of 1,600-feet, along the New Bedford Main Line, passing through Freetown, Lakeville, Berkley and Taunton (see the image on page 5). Each train was 2,000-feet long, with two locomotives and a special off-loading car. Altogether, the trains placed 27 miles of rail that have been staged along the ROW in preparation for being installed.

Soils movement is another element of construction. The SCR Phase I program involves the excavation of more than 400,000 cubic yards of materials. While this extensive earthwork is necessary to complete the construction of the various improvements, the MBTA is committed to managing and re-using these materials in an environmentally sensitive manner. Soils are removed, tested and reused along the ROW and to reshape sites such as the layover facilities and stations. Some of the soils are even used to contour sites for aesthetic purposes. Soil segregation, management, and tracking are key focus areas during construction, as well as implementing daily controls for dust and keeping the dust and soils within the work areas.

Track outages are established in cooperation with the freight operator on the ROW, Mass Coastal Railroad. Because Mass Coastal continues to serve its customers throughout the region, SCR coordinates with the operator for extended track shutdowns, or outages. These outages allow SCR to undertake major elements of the construction, such as replacing miles of track, installing new bridges and culverts, and reconstructing grade crossings without commercial freight operations limiting the continuity of work. Working around the clock during these times, the contractor can make much better progress than if working between trains. Because these events require a lot of resources and have impacts – materials, equipment, staff, detours, lights and noise – SCR shares the information in advance using the project email account. (See page 5 to sign up for email notices.)

Environmental protection is an important element of SCR. Crews install and maintain perimeter erosion controls, place stone access driveways and ditches and dust control methods to prevent impacts outside of the construction area. This protection also includes the use of silt fences, hay bales, and compost filter tubes.

The environmental staff also monitor compliance with permits issued by conservation commissions and confirms that resource areas are protected. The team's responsibilities include: protecting wetlands delineations and limits of work; implementing plans to protect endangered species; checking stormwater controls and dewatering; monitoring implementation of dust control protocols; and protecting cultural resources.

What to Know about Construction:

- Typical hours of construction are Monday-Friday, 7:00 AM to 7:00 PM or until dark
- The exception is for track outages: these are 24-hour day work periods usually over 4-5 days; communities will be notified in advance of these events
- Construction pest and rodent management are required and ongoing
- Dust control and management are required and monitored
- All contractors and site personnel are complying with health and safety regulations regarding COVID-19

You can visit the project website and sign up for weekly updates and project information at <http://www.mass.gov/southcoastrail>

Construction Questions

To report a construction-related issue on the South Coast Rail project, call the hotline at 617-222-4099. It will be answered Monday-Friday, between 7:00 AM and 3:30 PM (except holidays). All voicemails left outside of these hours will be received on the following 7:00 AM to 3:30 PM weekday shift. We will respond to all complaints.

The SCR team is available to talk with or meet with residents, businesses and elected officials during construction to discuss issues and update stakeholders. Write us at SouthCoastRail@dot.state.ma.us.

What's Coming

Spring, summer and early fall days have permitted SCR's contractors to make significant construction progress across the ROW. While that's good news for the schedule, the South Coast Rail team understands that construction can be inconvenient. Our team appreciates the patience and understanding of everyone affected by construction as we make strides in delivering commuter rail service to the region on schedule. The MBTA also thanks its city partners, municipal leaders, and stakeholder groups for their continued collaboration and support of the project.

Our website, emails and briefings will let you know what's coming as we build South Coast Rail. We're looking ahead to the day we can say "All Aboard" at every new station.

Rolling on the River

To bring commuter rail service to South Coast Rail (SCR), the MBTA is in the process of replacing or rebuilding seven railroad bridges along the Fall River Secondary. Railroad bridge construction is always a major undertaking, but the challenges are multiplied when a bridge must be replaced in a relatively inaccessible and environmentally sensitive location.



Rolling the Assonet River Bridge to its location

Keeping Everyone Safe

The rail lines – called the right-of-way (ROW) – that will carry trains to Taunton, Fall River and New Bedford have been unused or carrying only slow-moving freight trains for more than 60 years. Unfortunately, people have gotten into the habit of walking their dogs, riding bicycles or running along the tracks. No one should ever walk on or along the tracks or cross the tracks. This warning has become even more important now that the ROW is an active construction site on MBTA property. There is no safe place on the ROW except in a train or using a designated public crossing. This includes bicycling or operating an all-terrain vehicle on or near the tracks.

The MBTA will be providing safety training to every community in the runup to revenue service in 2023, but the rules of safety apply every day. The MBTA will undertake a railway safety program for all corridor communities. The MBTA is dedicated to increasing visibility and awareness about rail safety. The MBTA will be bringing information to the region to reinforce its safety message.

“Over the river and through the woods” describes the Assonet River Bridge. The Assonet River flows 7.4 miles in a westerly direction through Lakeville and Freetown, then joins the Taunton River near Assonet Neck in Berkley. The river has had a role in the region’s history and flows between ponds, cranberry bogs and under a railroad bridge in a heavily wooded area between Myricks and Beechwood Road.

Designers and contractors frequently face challenges when replacing bridges. SCR originally envisioned constructing the new bridge just west of the existing bridge on temporary beams supported by temporary piling. The new bridge could be completely assembled on this temporary structure, then slid sideways into place after the old bridge was demolished. The SCR contractor team took this idea one step further.

First, to provide easier working access for cranes and ironworkers, the contractor assembled the entire bridge at an open flat site next to the track approximately a quarter mile north of the river. This included bolting and welding together all the bridge steel and even applying waterproofing to the bridge deck so that work would not need to be done over the river. The entire bridge was then lifted by heavy-duty rubber-tired transporters and moved sideways above the nearby track.



Assembling the Assonet River Bridge

Once over the track, the bridge was lowered onto two carts, each with four railroad axles. Each cart also carried a removable portion of the temporary beam that would be used to support the bridge and slide it sideways at its final location.

The crew rolled the bridge on the carts the quarter mile south to the river, connected the removable portion of the temporary beam to the rest of the temporary structure, and slid the new bridge off to the side. Once it was off to the side, the crew rolled the carts (along with the removable portions of the beams) back to the original assembly area and off the track. This allowed railroad traffic to continue to operate without interruption until a few weeks later when it was time to demolish the old bridge.

The next step was to take up the old tracks and dismantle the old bridge. This included demolishing the existing stone abutments and setting in place new precast abutments slightly behind the old abutment locations. The removable portions of the temporary beams were then returned and bolted into place and the new bridge was rolled back to line up with the track. At this point, the contractor used jacks at all four corners to lower the new bridge into its final position on top of the new precast abutments.

Ballast was distributed across the new bridge and rail and ties were installed. Demolition of the old bridge, setting the new bridge and reconnecting the railroad track all took place within one outage of 11 days when the freight operator shut down its service to permit the Assonet River Bridge construction and other rail and bridge work. As an additional challenge, this work was completed with the river flowing at a high level due to the series of heavy rainstorms that hit the region in the weeks leading up to construction.

A Positive Result

The Assonet River Bridge installation combined traditional roll-in techniques with a unique approach. It also helped to limit the environmental footprint of the construction. Multiple lines of environmental protection barriers successfully controlled impacts to the Assonet River and its wetlands during a record seasonal rainfall.

For more visuals and a time-lapse video of the bridge replacement, go to <https://www.mbta.com/projects/south-coast-rail/update/new-asonet-river-bridge-installed>.



Meet the Team: Randy Hunt

A large and transformational program like South Coast Rail requires a deep bench to design, build and implement. The professionals you have met in this column have specialized in transportation design, engineering, environmental protection, public outreach and construction. Some have been involved in SCR for their entire professional careers.

Meet the newest team member, Randy Hunt, Senior Director of Administration on the MBTA's SCR team. You might ask what attracted a professional CPA with a career in government and the private sector to South Coast Rail? In essence, SCR needs the blend of skills and creativity Randy brings to the project. As a member of the Sandwich Board of Selectmen, he came to understand town issues and concerns. During his 10 years as a State Representative for the 5th Barnstable District, he worked on transportation,

telecommunications, health care policy, elder affairs and more. In the private sector, he worked for large accounting and manufacturing firms and later set up his own practice.

These experiences make Randy an excellent fit for SCR. His position calls for a breadth of strategic, financial and communication skills to support the team's construction and environmental specialties.


Need to understand an audit, a contract or a community's concerns? It's likely that Randy has seen that challenge and met it. Planning and implementing ideas for city, town and legislative outreach also comes naturally for someone who has been on the inside of these groups.


Randy appreciates both structure and creativity, and he found both in his days playing bass guitar and in the State House. He can share the goals and details of a piece of complex legislation, conduct an on-line interview and work with the outreach team to find new ways to share the latest information about South Coast Rail. We're pleased to have him on the team and hope you get to meet him soon.

Contact Us

For more information, contact us at:

 SouthCoastRail@dot.state.ma.us

 617-222-4099

 To learn more about the project and sign up for email updates, visit the website at: www.mass.gov/southcoastrail

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Ballast being delivered by train car at the Route 79 Bridge