

Sun Chronicle

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Mansfield told: Join train fight

► Selectmen, officials, activists urge public to turn out to Jan. 15 meeting in Norton to stop rail line from going through area

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MANSFIELD — The campaign to keep the new South Coast commuter rail line out of the area is making its next stop in Mansfield, as residents hear warnings about the impact that one of the proposed train-track routes could have on the town.

“Mansfield cannot benefit one iota

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‘Mansfield cannot benefit one iota from this line that would come through us, because we’re full. We do not have any more room.’

Selectman George Dentino

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from this line that would come through us, because we’re full,” said Selectman George Dentino. “We do not have any more room.” Gov. Deval Patrick has promised to have

train service running from Boston to the economically-depressed cities of Fall River and New Bedford by 2016.

“People take that 2016 and say, that isn’t imminent, that isn’t anytime soon,” said veteran Norton activist Heather Graf, who has for years spearheaded opposition to the local route option. “The problem is, the decision on which way it will proceed is being made now.”

Patrick’s proposal is only the latest state plan for train service to the South Coast.

In 1995, the MBTA announced three possible routes for the trains: Stoughton; Middleboro/Lakeville; and Attleboro.

► MANSFIELD: Town joins train line fight

FROM PAGE B1

The last proposal is the one that would impact Mansfield, as well as Norton and the city of Taunton, which would be split in half by the tracks.

MBTA officials said the Attleboro route was their preference. But after a fierce lobbying effort by Graf and the group Citizens Concerned About Tracks (CCATS), officials switched course in 1999, and said the Stoughton route was their preference.

But Patrick has restarted the process from scratch, this time under the auspices of the Executive Office of Transportation. And the Attleboro route is back on the table.

Christopher McGowan, who made a failed bid to win a selectman's seat last spring, is representing Mansfield on the newly reconstituted CCATS. Last month, he told selectmen the trains would have two key impacts on Mansfield:

► 2.7 miles of new double tracks would cross Route 123 and Richardson Avenue, bisecting Mansfield in a wetland area, to connect with the MBTA tracks than run through the town.

► An additional 36 trains would run through Mansfield each day, on top of the scores that already do, to serve the South Coast — but none of them would stop in Mansfield.

In an interview, Graf said the negative impacts of the South Coast line rolling through Mansfield extend far beyond that.

First of all, Graf said, "They already have (train) service" in Mansfield. "It's a



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'I just can't imagine anybody seeing a benefit to it. That will be up to Mansfield to decide.'

Heather Graf, above
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safety risk, for one thing. And it's just air quality, and more diesel trains running through the town that's on tracks that run up near people's homes and businesses."

She added, "I just can't imagine anybody seeing a benefit to it. That will be up to Mansfield to decide."

After hearing from McGowan, who is also Mansfield's representative to the Southeastern Regional Planning & Economic Development District (SRPEDD), selectmen praised his work so far, and made it clear they agree with the position he and Graf have taken.

Three selectmen came out in favor of the Stoughton alternative — George Dentino, Louis

Amoruso, and Ann Baldwin.

Selectmen David McCarter said, "I'm not going to go so far as to say to pick which one. Just don't pick us."

Dentino said the state was wasting time and resources by repeating a process that already reached a conclusion.

"This has all gone on before. This has all been addressed," Dentino said. "The individual communities were in tremendous majorities that the Stoughton alternative was the only one." He added that the Stoughton alternative was also the least expensive route for the trains.

Town Manager John D'Agostino recommended that residents go to the official state Web site at www.southcoastrail.com and offer their own comments and feedback. CCATS has also set up a Web site at ccats.org featuring extensive information on the history of the South Coast rail project, the impact on the area, photographs of the affected regions, and more.

Graf also stressed that residents should attend a public meeting the Patrick Administration has set for Tuesday, Jan. 15, at 7 p.m. in the gymnasium at Norton's J.C. Solmonese Elementary School, 315 West Main St.

"You have to be thinking, decisions are going to be made now — which way to proceed, which route is going to be preferred," Graf said. "You can't be thinking in terms of 2016."

FOR MORE information, visit www.ccats.org or call Heather Graf at 508-226-0898.