

Here to there is a \$300,000 study

Mobility in region under scrutiny

By Priyanka Dayal TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF

WORCESTER — A \$300,000 study aimed at improving the movement of people and goods in Central Massachusetts got an official kickoff yesterday, when members of the public shared their concerns about traveling around the region.

The wide-ranging study, a partnership between the Central Massachusetts Metropolitan Planning Organization and the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission, will examine how to enhance mobility for everything from cars to bicycles to freight trains. It will consider transportation strategies that support economic development, while keeping in mind environmentally sensitive areas.

"This is not a study about cars," said Donald J. Cooke, managing director of transportation systems for Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, the lead consulting firm for the project. "This is a multimodal study that will take into account all types of transportation."

The study area includes the city of Worcester; Holden and West Boylston to the north; Boylston and Shrewsbury to the east; Grafton, Millbury and Auburn to the south; and Leicester and Paxton to the west.

The first of four public forums was held last night at the Worcester Public Library.

Dan R. Benoit, a Worcester architect, said he wanted to see a link between the trains that stop at Union Station and the buses that leave from City Hall in Worcester.

"There (should be) some way to connect Union Station to City Hall and Main Street," he said.

Eric Denoncourt of Clinton said there should be more commuter trains between Boston and the Greater Worcester area. Five new trains were added to the Worcester line last month. The schedule still doesn't work for someone who wants to spend a few hours of the day in Boston, Mr. Denoncourt said.

"Unless you work the 9-to-5 shift," he said, "you're stuck at one end or the other."

Participants named Interstate 290, Route 9, Route 122 and Route 122A as

congested roadways that could use improvements. Many said there should be a better east-west route for drivers traveling from one side of Worcester to the other.

Others advocated for roads that are more safe and amenable to bicyclists and pedestrians, especially the elderly and people with disabilities.

The next public meeting is scheduled for January, followed by a meeting in the spring and a meeting in the summer. The study is scheduled to be completed next September.

The study will focus on developing short-term, low-cost alternatives before considering more costly, long-term options, said Mary Ellen Blunt, a transportation program manager at CMRPC.

The public can check the status of the study and add comments online at www.vhb.com/worcesterregionalmobility.