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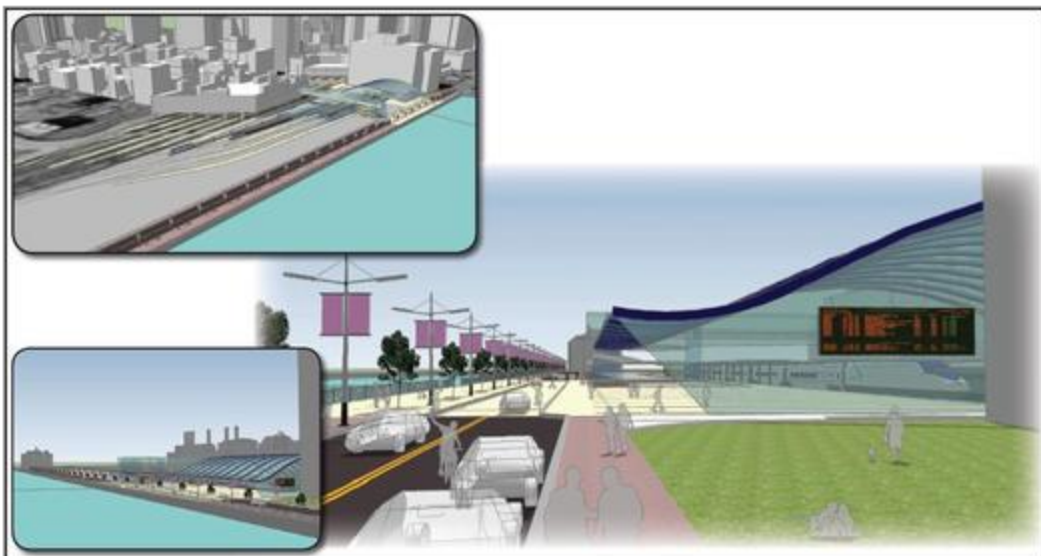
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DOWNTOWN, SOUTH BOSTON

State to soon launch \$43m planning effort for project to expand South Station

Posted by Matt Rocheleau August 20, 2012 05:49 PM

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(Massachusetts Department of Transportation)

A conceptual rendering of a future, expanded South Station.

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State officials will soon launch a \$43-million process to plan for a project that will cost hundreds of millions of dollars more to expand South Station in an effort to boost local and regional rail service.

The state-and-federally funded public planning process is expected to start this fall, will take several years to complete and will result in preliminary designs for a larger station and additional facilities, according to the Massachusetts Department of Transportation, which is leading the project along with the MBTA and city officials in Boston.

“I am pleased that the South Station Expansion project is getting off the ground, and MassDOT looks forward to working with our agency partners, elected officials, neighborhood stakeholders, and the general public over the next few years to plan for a bigger and better South Station,” state transportation department Secretary and CEO Richard A. Davey said in a statement Monday.

The planning effort will study ways to add new platforms and new terminal tracks, rework track interlocking to operate more efficiently, expand and upgrade passenger amenities, build a new daytime layover rail vehicle storage facility and improve the streetscape and urban design, including an reconstructing Dorchester Avenue and creating an extension of the Boston Harborwalk, officials said.

State transportation department officials said they are also working closely with the U.S. Postal Service to develop a plan to relocate a general mail facility on Dorchester Avenue to allow the rail station room to expand.

The planning effort will also include environmental review, engineering to the level of 30 percent and preliminary construction, department spokeswoman Sara Lavoie said in an e-mail.

The study process is funded through a \$32.5-million federal grant awarded for the project in 2010 and through a \$10.5 million match from the state transportation department.

The spokeswoman said the high cost accounts for "time-consuming and exhaustive" planning and review at the federal, state, and municipal levels.

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Actual construction of the project is expected to cost "hundreds of millions of dollars" more, she said.

Detailed construction cost estimates and a timetable for the project will be determined during the upcoming planning phase, she said.

South Station serves as a rail hub for trains from across New England, including MBTA Red Line subway service, Silver Line and other T buses, the commuter rail and Amtrak.

Officials said the project is a key piece of another major public transportation initiative: the South Coast Rail project, which is under environmental review. That project will provide rail service from Boston to Taunton, Fall River and New Bedford.

Making South Station bigger will also allow for better commuter rail service on the Fairmount and Framingham-Worcester lines and it would allow for Amtrak to implement its plans to increase regional service, Lavoie said.

When the 113-year-old station opened, it had 28 tracks; there are now just 13 tracks, which officials said is "significantly constraining current and future rail mobility not only within Massachusetts but throughout New England and the Northeast Corridor."

State transportation officials also said that the station "lacks comfortable, modern" passenger facilities and does not allow sufficient space for trains to wait while not in use.

"The Commonwealth is honored to have received federal funding to support this important endeavor, and we will work hard to lay the planning and regulatory framework for the future of the station," Davey' statement said.

For more information and to sign-up for project updates, [click here](#).

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