

PUBLIC STATEMENT BY MAPC REGARDING THE RECENTLY COMPLETED HEALTH IMPACT ASSESSMENT – NATURAL GAS COMPRESSOR STATION, WEYMOUTH, MASSACHUSETTS

February 6, 2019

MAPC recently facilitated and drafted a Health Impact Assessment (HIA), studying a proposed natural gas compressor station in the Fore River area of Weymouth, Massachusetts. MAPC facilitated and drafted this HIA for the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH).

Our HIA focused on the potential public health effects of the proposed station under normal, or typical day-to-day, operations. The purpose of the assessment was to paint a picture of likely health impacts if the station is built, making key decision-makers aware of potential health implications.

In undertaking this report, we recognized that a compressor station proposal is by nature controversial and fully expected it to draw close, serious scrutiny from neighbors. For that reason, we insisted upon incorporating public input and engagement into the HIA process. We encouraged – and received – public input and feedback since the inception of the project, and we adjusted both the elements of review and the assessment methodology to take this input into account. We would like to express our appreciation to all of the residents, officials, and other stakeholders who participated actively in this process, even while we understand that many of those participants are probably disappointed with the final conclusions of the report.

The HIA was limited in terms of scope, and the timeline was limited to eight months. We were not asked, nor did we undertake, an analysis of the potential impacts of public safety emergencies, such as a failure, fire, or explosion at the facility. We also were not tasked to consider the climate resiliency of the proposed facility, or to assess the long-term impacts of the compressor, or similar facilities, on exacerbating climate impacts.

We consider all three of these issues (public safety, climate resiliency, and climate change) to be extremely important impacts that should be thoroughly studied and taken into account before any approval of this facility. MAPC mentioned both public safety and climate in our HIA, because we consider them to be critical issues – but it was not MAPC's role to analyze these issues.

Reasonable and fair-minded people could certainly debate the findings of the HIA, the adequacy of the scope, and the ongoing evolution of standards for compliance, but we remain comfortable that the conclusions of our HIA are consistent with the data we analyzed and the requirements currently used to comply with clean air standards in Massachusetts.

Nonetheless, MAPC believes it is important to be open to criticism, and to learn from every project and study conducted at the agency. Just yesterday, we received a critique of the HIA by Physicians for Social Responsibility, and we will study and evaluate that critique fully and seriously. Others have also suggested that we seek a technical review of the HIA, and we are open to that as well. Perhaps by studying our analytical methods, as well as evaluating what was and was not included in the analysis, we can all learn how to improve future analyses. And, if the reviewer raises concerns about our methodology or conclusions, we will be transparent about posting their report on the project website.

In engaging a technical reviewer, we believe it is important to seek a high level of technical competence, experience with the field of health impact assessment and environmental health, and an

understanding of the energy field. We also feel it is important that we find an analyst who does not have a pre-formed opinion in favor or against the compressor. We are open to any suggestions from residents, local officials, advocates, or experts in the field about who might appropriately fill this role, and what elements they feel should be included in the analysis. We also plan to seek input regarding this technical review from the Society of Practitioners of Health Impact Assessment and The Health Impact Project, both organizations which have long supported HIA work and practitioners. At the same time, it is always possible for individuals to provide public comments through the project website, www.foreriverhia.com.

HIAs are, by design, limited in scope, geography, and timeframe. They do not typically include legislative or policy recommendations. However, as the Regional Planning Agency for Greater Boston, it is within MAPC's purview – outside of the HIA process – to make specific policy recommendations to further our core values of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, addressing health determinants, and helping cities and towns prepare for the effects of climate change.

MAPC does not support increased reliance on natural gas or expansion of the infrastructure used to extract, transport, distribute, and deliver natural gas. We believe the region (and the Commonwealth) must rely instead on more renewable and zero carbon sources of energy, while at the same time reducing energy demand.

Since the publication of the HIA, we have been asked if we support this natural gas compressor facility. The answer is that we do not. We base that opposition on the climate implications stated above, as well as ongoing public safety concerns.

Furthermore, we believe that the current regulatory framework unduly limits the ability of local governments and the Commonwealth to address issues of public safety and climate change, by leaving much of the authority in the hands of federal authorities who do not, at the current time, even recognize that climate change is a very real and present danger to our national health and future of the planet.

We are committed to expressing our concerns about public safety and climate, along with our opposition to the compressor station proposal, to regulatory officials at various levels of government in the course of the ongoing review of this proposal.

The process of facilitating and drafting the HIA – along with the controversy that followed its publication – only deepen our commitment to working through challenges at the intersection of energy, land use, public health, and climate change. We are focused on enhancing the region's environmental protections and accelerating our transition to renewables.

We invite feedback by e-mail, or via the public comment form on the project website. For more information, please contact Barry Keppard, Public Health Director, at bkeppard@mapc.org.