

**Report from the Earmark Subcommittee to the North Shore Water Resilience Task Force**  
***Infrastructure Timeline Analysis Update and Recommendations, 10-9-2024***

Many communities in the Ipswich Watershed face substantial new costs for PFAS compliance, including treatment, on-going media replacement, and disposal. Some face other critical infrastructure upgrades, too. A regional solution may be more appealing and economical than communities all taking on these costly investments individually. And if consensus on a regional approach is reached, this improves the likelihood of securing federal and state funding compared to communities all going it alone.

However, the recently enacted PFAS compliance deadline, the urgency of other local infrastructure upgrades, and a limited window in which the MWRA connection fee is waived all mean *communities are facing fork-in-the road infrastructure decisions in the near term* about whether to improve/upgrade their systems or invest in connections to an alternate regional source.

Task Force-funded studies are evaluating the potential costs, benefits, and feasibility of various ways to improve supply resilience and ecosystem health in the watershed. Initial findings suggest that scenarios involving *expanded reliance on a combination of the Salem Beverly Water Supply Board (SBWSB) system and the MWRA within the watershed* are worth continuing to investigate. The reports are being finalized and will be presented to the Task Force in detail at its next meeting.

It is already known that for SBWSB to serve the demand of additional lower basin communities, it would need to restore the treatment capacity of its plant to 24 MGD. However, under normal operations and funding constraints this would take a minimum of 7-10 years, which is 2-5 years after the PFAS compliance deadline. This timeline could possibly be accelerated to 5 years with substantial Task Force progress in the near term and securing of funding.

*The impending fork-in-the-road decisions facing many Task Force communities, the temporary MWRA connection fee waiver, and the need to fast-track the SBWSB treatment plant upgrade if that system is to expand all mean the Task Force needs to accelerate decision-making over the next 6-10 months for many of the regional water supply alternatives to remain viable.*

In light of this, the Earmark Subcommittee recommends the Task Force pursue *all the following*:

- An intensive phase of investigation and negotiation to determine if increased reliance on SBWSB, the MWRA, or both emerge as top preferred options for the region. This will require review of study results; discussions with the SBWSB Board, the cities of Salem and Beverly, and the MWRA; negotiations among all affected communities to define a preferred supply scenario, fair cost sharing schemes, and parameters for intermunicipal agreements; identification of funds; a firm yield analysis for the SBWSB system; and regulatory and legislative action.
- Investigation of ways to bridge a potential 2-5 year gap between the PFAS compliance deadline and the availability of SBWSB and MWRA supplies, including any combination of temporary/emergency sharing, limited new filtration, temporary extreme water conservation measures, regulatory flexibility, and other possible strategies.
- Expansion of the facilitation team.
- Development of an interactive decision-support tool to help all stakeholders explore the benefits, costs, and trade-offs of various supply scenarios.