



September 26, 2008

Secretary Ian Bowles
Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, MEPA Office
100 Cambridge Street, Suite 900
Boston, MA 02114

RE: Comments on the Environmental Notification Form (ENF) for the Merano Project at the Bulfinch Triangle (Parcels 1B/1C) in Boston
MEPA # 14304

Dear Secretary Bowles:

WalkBoston appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the ENF for the Merano Project at the Bulfinch Triangle (Parcels 1B/1C) in Boston. We are highlighting issues and raising questions of importance to pedestrians – for both the developers and the City of Boston – which we hope can be answered at this stage.

This project occupies a prominent location on a street that is a continuation of the Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway within the Bulfinch Triangle. Nearly 70% of the site's daily trips will be made on foot or by walking to nearby transit stations. Pedestrians are thus central to the successful development of the site.

The street frontages of the project present unique issues for pedestrian circulation. Many of the pedestrian issues arise because of area planning and construction completed before the design of this project. To the extent possible, sidewalks in and bordering Beverly Street should meet the design guidelines in the STAF commitments for the Greenway.

Valenti Way has become a difficult issue in nearly all the proposed developments within the Bulfinch Triangle. This proposal, along with two adjacent projects, appears to have both service and parking access points along this street, which is insufficiently wide to handle significant traffic volumes. In addition, traffic service is complicated by the potential for pedestrian impacts where Valenti Way intersects with the access points to the Orange Line/Green Line Superstation at Haverhill Street.

The Beverly Street and Causeway Street frontages of the site

Despite the fact that Beverly St. is a continuation of the Rose Kennedy Greenway, it is unclear from the document what width of sidewalks will be provided on the Beverly Street frontage of the site.

- Will Beverly Street have sufficient width for a minimum 5' clear width for pedestrians, exclusive of signs, lights and street furniture?
- Will parking be allowed along this street to provide a physical separation between vehicles and walkers?
- The Beverly Street sidewalks will include a driveway into and out of the building for parking at the porte cochere. The driveway should be narrow and curb radii should be tight. The sidewalk should be level where the driveway crosses it. A warning signal for pedestrians using the sidewalk to cross these driveways should be provided.

- On Causeway Street, the sidewalk appears to vary in width. Will there be design standards for pedestrian access that are sufficient to ensure clear widths for good pedestrian flow?
- Traffic signals that allow pedestrian crossings of Causeway Street have not been indicated, where level of service F has already been reported. Will there be crosswalks with signals or other protection for pedestrians? There may be a need for explanatory signs that encourage walkers to cross the street in the safest locations.

The site frontage on Valenti Way

Valenti Way is a one-way street westbound from North Washington Street to Canal Street, and is the major cross street through the Bulfinch Triangle. It is connected at Beverly Street with the Greenway streets and the off-ramps from the northbound Artery into North Washington Street, as well as traffic from southbound Washington Street. Valenti Way will be the principal pedestrian route between the North End/West End neighborhoods and the proposed nearby supermarket that is accessed solely from Valenti Way.

These access patterns are part of the Central Artery/Greenway planning and design which led to a complete reconstruction of area streets. Because of area development and access considerations, there are now too many conflicting traffic operations and pedestrian movements on Valenti Way. We think this leads to the need for the proponent, working with the City of Boston, to respond to the questions below. The answer to these questions is of considerable interest to adjacent developers, particularly those associated with the proposed grocery store diagonally across the street from this project.

- Will service access vehicles— particularly large trucks – be able to enter via Valenti Way and exit without turning around on the site? Does this mean that some trucks will be backing out or in to serve the site? How will this affect pedestrian safety?
- Is it important to this development to have both private vehicles and truck access connecting to the site from this block of Valenti Way? Is the option of private vehicular access through the porte cochere insufficient to meet demand?
- What volumes of pedestrian traffic might be expected along Valenti Way? Are these volumes affected by the nearby grocery store?
- What are the widths of sidewalks on both sides of Valenti Way which serve pedestrians using the grocery store and the transit station further down the street? These sidewalks must have a clear 5’ width for walking, which may restrict amenities such as trees.
- How will truck drivers leaving the buildings along the street be made aware of pedestrians on Valenti Way? At the building’s truck access ways, can signs and sound devices warn pedestrians of trucks about to cross the sidewalk?

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this Environmental Notification Form. We look forward to working with the proponent, the City, and the neighborhood to achieve a wonderful new development.

Sincerely,

Wendy Landman
Executive Director

Robert Sloane
Senior Planner