



WalkBoston

May 21, 2010

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

Re: EEA #14101

Dear Secretary Bowles:

WalkBoston welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Draft Environmental Impact Report for the Red Line-Blue Line Connector Project. This proposal has been on the schedule of potential investments for a considerable length of time. We are happy to see it move forward. We agree it can provide an improved level of service for transit users throughout the MBTA system. The proposal has great merit and should be advanced toward a greater possibility of being constructed.

Massachusetts General Hospital and the Mass Eye and Ear Hospital are clearly major employment sites that deserve good access. The recent improvements to Charles/MGH MBTA Station are excellent steps in providing better accommodations for transit users. However, there are drawbacks to the present station – principally in the pedestrian crossings required at this very busy traffic circle. We cannot offer a traffic solution to Charles Circle, but we see ways to mitigate the issues of the circle in the project design. Chief among these design techniques are those that might provide for pedestrians to avoid crossing the circle at grade and avoid its existing and future levels of traffic congestion. We think there are at least three methods that might help:

1. More direct access. The location of the proposed Blue Line Station is proposed to be directly adjacent to Grove Street, the principal access street into the Mass General /Mass Eye and Ear hospital complex. The density of employment at this site will be a driving factor in the increased use of transit on the proposed connection; transit users could benefit from a headhouse that would follow a more direct route into these major traffic generators. Access directly to Grove Street would seem to be a possibility in view of the station location that has been recommended.
2. Underground access. An underground connection could lead between the proposed station beneath Cambridge Street and the MGH/Mass Eye and Ear complex. This would provide particular benefit to pedestrians and would assist in encouraging the use of transit. It would be particularly beneficial in adverse weather conditions and would allow transit users to avoid crossing heavy street traffic.

3. A pedestrian tunnel between Bowdoin and MGH Stations would be smaller and less complicated to construct and operate than a rail tunnel. Moreover, a pedestrian tunnel would be able to build on and directly connect to the transit stations that already exist at Bowdoin and at Charles/MGH Stations. A rough calculation suggests that a pedestrian tunnel would need to be about 2000' long to reach between Bowdoin and MGH Stations. For a rough comparison with another local pedestrian facility, we note that there is 1500' of overhead walkway with moving sidewalks between Logan Airport's Terminals A and E. A connection into the Grove Street area at MGH/Mass Eye and Ear would be a natural complement to this proposal. We urge further consideration of this possibility.
4. In addition to the station and route, the site for the north tail track is located in the present parking lot of the Mass. Eye and Ear Hospital. This location may be in conflict with current planning for the pedestrian connections to the Longfellow Bridge, for Esplanade park expansion and for Eye and Ear hospital parking needs. As a result, we think this may be an inappropriate location for a tail track. Perhaps both tail tracks could be constructed in the general location outlined for the south tail track.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important project. Please feel free to direct questions to me at 617-367-9255 or bsloane@walkboston.org.

Sincerely,

Robert Sloane
Senior Planner