



April 30, 2013

Secretary Richard K. Sullivan, Jr.
Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA)
100 Cambridge Street, Suite 900
Boston MA 02114

RE: Comments on the UMass Boston Campus Master Plan/Boston, MA
EEA #14623

Dear Secretary Sullivan:

WalkBoston has reviewed the master plan for UMass Boston and offers the comments below.

We are very pleased that the master plan deals boldly with pedestrian access to and through the campus. The most exciting portion of the planning is the removal of the vast and deteriorating parking platform under the major buildings, which affords the possibility of returning walking paths from the top of the platform, 25 feet above grade, to a ground-level network throughout the campus. This major change will allow walking paths to become a major portion of the master plan activities, and open opportunities to provide new ways of connecting campus pedestrians into the surrounding neighborhoods, museums and waterfront.

A new campus focus will be a central open space, surrounded by the library, the student center, the new science center, etc. Pedestrian paths flow through this focal area from all parts of the campus outward to the Harborwalk at the oceanfront. This new path network is deliberately laid out to serve likely destinations directly. Paths are permitted to extend out from the campus center without conflicting with vehicles because of the proposed relocation of the perimeter University Drive on the north and west sides of the campus further away from the central open space at the library and student center. The expansion of perimeter driveways outward will also allow for a direct vehicular connection to and from Mt. Vernon Street.

A major extension of the pedestrian path network leads directly from the campus center diagonally toward Mt. Vernon Street at the gateway into the campus. The gateway serves both vehicular and pedestrian/bicycle traffic. From this point, Mt. Vernon Street, described here as a 'Main Street,' becomes more important than in the past. The street appears to have sufficient width to permit adequate traffic circulation, wider sidewalks and the addition of bicycle paths or cycle tracks. Mt. Vernon Street can also be used by the campus shuttle buses that ferry students to and from the MBTA Red Line Station facing the west side of Morrissey Boulevard.

Mt. Vernon Street leads from the campus gateway to the area around the Bayside Expo center recently purchased by UMass for campus expansion. This site is not included in the master plan, leaving a major site unexplained in terms of use or traffic generation. We anticipate that the site will become at the very least a location for remote parking, with connections provided by the sidewalks, bicycle facilities and shuttle buses on Mt. Vernon

Street. At a later date, the site may become a satellite location for the university or perhaps a residential area for students. It is important to note that virtually all pedestrian and bicycle connections between this site and the main campus are from Mt. Vernon Street.

East-west crossings.

A very large issue remains to be solved – walking, biking and vehicular access to and from the existing Columbia Point/UMASS transit station on the MBTA Red Line on the west side of Morrissey Boulevard. Current access for pedestrians is complicated and potentially dangerous. Walkers and cyclists from all of the properties east of Morrissey Boulevard have just two points for crossing the boulevard today:

- Morrissey Boulevard Pedestrian Crossing No. 1: A footbridge leads over Morrissey Boulevard between the grocery store and the Boston College High School. The footbridge is not specifically addressed as a future element of the plan for pedestrians in Columbia Point. Depending on its remaining useful life, there may be a role for it in future connections for walkers.
- Morrissey Boulevard Pedestrian Crossing No. 2: At-grade crossings for pedestrians are limited to narrow sidewalks at two intersections of Mt. Vernon Street - at the Morrissey Boulevard northbound off-ramp and its continuation (“the Chute”) up to Day Boulevard and at the intersection of Mt. Vernon Street and the Morrissey Boulevard southbound on-ramp. A complete crossing of the Morrissey Boulevard/Mt. Vernon Street intersections requires pedestrians to cross north-south traffic on Mt. Vernon Street and both northbound and southbound traffic on the Morrissey Boulevard on- and off-ramps. In addition, the sidewalks under the Morrissey Boulevard overpass are too narrow to adequately serve pedestrians and bicycles.

Without the complications of Morrissey Boulevard, Mt. Vernon Street might be able to efficiently accommodate both two-way through vehicular traffic and safe pedestrian and bicycle access across Morrissey Boulevard. However, adding in the turning vehicle movements from Morrissey Boulevard complicates crossings significantly. Turns are intricate and closely spaced, and volumes are high as they are associated with regional through traffic linked to Kosciusko Circle, Day Boulevard and I-93. As the intersections along Mt. Vernon Street under the Morrissey Boulevard overpass currently function, they offer only substandard and potentially unsafe pedestrian and bicycle movement. These movements between the MBTA Red Line Station and the east side of Morrissey Boulevard potentially affect many of the residents and visitors to Columbia Point.

WalkBoston urges the inclusion of pedestrian and bicycle crossings in any and all studies of the intersection of Mt. Vernon Street and Morrissey Boulevard’s many connecting roadways. These crossings at the MBTA Red Line station are the most critical to providing full access for the entire pedestrian/cyclist network east of Morrissey Boulevard, both now and in the future. This set of issues should be fully explored, including key issues, but not be limited to, the following:

- A full analysis of existing and future traffic conditions, including pedestrian and bicycle traffic;
- An analysis of alternative solutions.
- An analysis of the impacts of master plan buildout on these roadways, including the proportional impact of all of the university’s parcels at full buildout

- Recommended new design solutions for these roadways to accommodate long-term local and regional growth.

We appreciate your consideration of our comments and look forward to your responses to them.

Please feel free to contact WalkBoston with questions you may have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert Sloane". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Robert" and last name "Sloane" clearly distinguishable.

Robert Sloane
Senior Project Manager