



May 9, 2014

Richard K. Sullivan, Jr.
Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs
Attn: Rick Bourre'
100 Cambridge St., Suite 900
Boston MA 02114

RE: Comments on the Single Environmental Impact Statement for the Silver Line Gateway Proposal – MEPA# 15124

Dear Secretary Sullivan:

WalkBoston has reviewed the Single Environmental Impact Statement for the Silver Line Gateway Bus Rapid Transit proposal. The new MBTA service, which will run on a separate right-of-way between Everett Avenue and Eastern Avenue with connections through East Boston, will provide access between Chelsea and South Station and the Seaport District of Boston.

The proposal includes very positive improvements for the City of Chelsea, with significantly improved transit connections to downtown and the airport. Stations are pleasantly and attractively designed, with raised platform floors that align with the floors of the Silver Line Gateway buses, thus providing easily accessible service. Landscaping is to be added along the shared use path and the BRT where feasible, improving the route as a pleasant walking facility. The MBTA has planned for off-bus fare collection to speed the boarding of buses and reduce fare collection procedures on-board each bus.

Overall, the proposal is a very positive addition to the MBTA network of high-capacity services. However, some questions need to be addressed based on our review of the current plan:

1. The discontinuity of the shared use path may affect good pedestrian access to each of the stations. The proposed shared use path parallels the route of the BRT buses between Eastern Avenue up to Broadway. West of Broadway, there are some parallel sidewalks, but the path itself is not continuous. It would be useful for the MBTA and the City to consider longer-range goals for the planned walkway and not preclude future extensions to the walking route. For instance, the walkway might be extended from Arlington Street to Everett Avenue. Such a continuation of the path would provide direct access by foot to the commuter rail station at Everett Avenue. A continuation of the path would also afford some recreational uses of the path by both pedestrians and bicyclists.
2. At the Everett Avenue terminus of the BRT, pedestrian connections are provided to both the BRT terminal station and the new commuter rail station. However, there are presently no nearby crosswalks to help pedestrians cross Everett Avenue near the turnaround loop of the BRT. The proposed narrowing of Everett Avenue at this location would be a good location for a crosswalk. Otherwise, the nearest crosswalks appear at Spruce Street – 400 feet to the south, and Carter Street - 400 feet to the north. These distances are excessive for most pedestrians. An Everett Avenue crosswalk at the entrance to the BRT and commuter rail stations would be appropriate and useful, and should include a pedestrian phase of the proposed traffic signal at this location.
3. A similar crosswalk protected by a proposed signal would be appropriate at the crossing of the rail line and the BRT on Spruce Street. A pedestrian phase should be added to this signal.

MAKING MASSACHUSETTS MORE WALKABLE

4. At the Arlington/6th Street crossing, which is called the Downtown Chelsea station, the proposal calls for narrowing streets and instituting a one-way pattern on two of those streets going away from the rail tracks and the BRT route. The narrower streets will make pedestrian crossings safer. The proposed traffic signal should include a pedestrian phase to assure safe crossings to get to the station.
5. Figure 2.2-13, which details the Arlington/6th Street crossing, shows a concrete sidewalk on the south side of the BRT station platform. Figure 2.2-14 indicates that the sidewalk reaches the Washington Street Station, which is about 150 feet away. Completing this connection would be useful for full pedestrian access through the corridor, and should include wayfinding signs to help pedestrians reach the station.
6. Lighting the way for pedestrians is important. Many riders will be using the BRT service after dark, particularly in the winter. If the walking route is not well lit riders may be discouraged from using the stations because of safety concerns, especially for people traveling alone during the times of day when there may be few other people nearby.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this proposal. Please feel free to contact us with questions you may have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert Sloane". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Robert Sloane
Senior Planner