



December 16, 2013

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 Expanded Environmental Notification Form for the Silver Line Gateway proposal – MEPA# 15124

Dear Secretary Sullivan:

WalkBoston has reviewed the Expanded Environmental Notification Form for the Silver Line Gateway Bus Rapid Transit proposal, which will provide additional MBTA service between South Station and the Seaport District into Chelsea and East Boston. **The new transit service will be a welcome addition for residents needing improved access into the heart of the metropolitan area.**

The focus of this proposal is new transit service that will extend from Logan Airport to the Mystic Mall in Chelsea, on routes that use both existing streets and a new busway to be constructed on former rail right-of-way. The route from Logan Airport into Chelsea follows existing streets (including the Coughlin Bypass Road under several East Boston streets), the Chelsea Street Bridge and Eastern Avenue to connect to a new off-road busway to be built on an abandoned right-of-way of the former Grand Union Railway. When this right-of-way reaches the main MBTA line that serves coastal cities such as Lynn, Salem and Beverly, the busway will be parallel to the rail line and separated by a fence.

Although virtually all of the right-of-way will be used for the new bus service in Chelsea, sufficient space exists to construct an 8' wide multi-use path parallel to the busway. The multi-use path is expected to provide access between community origins and the new stations on the busway, as well as providing recreation for residents.

The right-of-way for both the busway and the walkway is wholly owned by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, which purchased it from CSX as a potential location for transportation improvements.

Our comments are as follows:

1. The existence of the abandoned rail line is especially fortunate for the City of Chelsea, as it facilitates construction of new transit service in a community that is underserved by direct transit line connections to job centers.
2. Travel times between Chelsea and Logan Airport, as well as the Seaport District and Downtown Boston will be improved, increasing the number of destinations accessible by environmental justice populations living in Chelsea.

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3. The proposed busway lies at the boundary of a large residential area within the city, and separates it from an industrial district. The location should offer good access for many residents from their homes or from nearby workplaces.
4. The proposed busway station serving Downtown Chelsea is located a bit farther from the city center than the existing commuter rail station. Because it is farther, signage will be important to help people find it, and marketing may be needed to encourage use of the station. This marketing could center on the large congregation of transit users in Bellingham Square at the heart of the central business district.
5. The existing commuter rail station is to be relocated behind the Mystic Mall. The proposed site is surrounded by retail and industrial uses, but also a considerable amount of vacant land. It would be useful to know of regional or local development plans that might provide increased density of land uses in this area that could generate traffic for the new bus service.
6. Although the Mystic Mall station is located in a district that is low-density in terms of land uses, it is also a job center with its many retail and industrial uses, and will be made more accessible to Chelsea residents because of this new service.
7. The recommended off-vehicle fare collection will require careful explanation to new users.

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 that reads "Wendy Landman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Wendy Landman
Executive Director

Cc MassDOT Highway Administrator Frank DePaola
MBTA General Manager Beverly Scott