



WalkBoston

July 15, 2009

John Palmieri, Executive Director
Boston Redevelopment Authority
City Hall, 9th floor
Boston, MA 02200
Attn: Tad Read, James Fitzgerald, Lauren Shurtleff

RE: Columbia Point Master Plan

Dear Mr. Palmieri:

WalkBoston is pleased to have the opportunity to review and comment on the draft Columbia Point Master Plan. The district is extremely important to the city's future, with many potential changes to take place within an area the size of Back Bay or the South Boston Waterfront District.

We are happy to see that substantial pedestrian benefits are built into the Master Plan and are central to its redevelopment. Sidewalks line all of the major streets and city blocks, including new blocks proposed by the BRA. A path network takes advantage of not only the existing Harborwalk around the perimeter of the peninsula but also the very large parcels that are the basis of the redevelopment of the district. To provide a significant pedestrian network, paths are proposed for easements within the large parcels owned by a variety of property owners. These new, relatively long paths will provide new and useful links to the people who already live in the neighborhood and for people who will live, work or go to school here in the future. A basic and very beneficial pedestrian network can come into being in Columbia Point if the Master Plan is used as a guide for long-term development.

Connection to Transit.

A very large issue remains to be resolved – walking access to and from the MBTA Red Line Columbia Point/UMASS Station. Current access for pedestrians is complicated and potentially dangerous for pedestrians. WalkBoston does not believe that the proposed improvements are adequate to meet the needs of pedestrians or to allow this development to fulfill its potential as a Transit Oriented development.

WalkBoston urges the inclusion of pedestrian crossings as a major issue in the master plan and the proposed traffic study as well as any and all future studies of the intersection of Mt. Vernon Street and Morrissey Boulevard's many connecting roadways and the links to Kosiusko Circle. Pedestrian studies should include projections of traffic volumes of pedestrians using Columbia Point's sole connection between public transportation and the east side of Morrissey Boulevard.

Our assessment of the existing and future conditions is summarized below.

Walkers from all of the properties east of Morrissey Boulevard have just two points for crossing the Boulevard today:

1. Morrissey Boulevard Pedestrian Crossing No. 1: A footbridge leads over Morrissey Boulevard between the Synergy and the Sovereign Properties. 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.
2. Morrissey Boulevard Pedestrian Crossing No. 2: At-grade crossings for pedestrians are limited to the sidewalks at two intersections of Mt. Vernon Street:
 - Mt. Vernon Street at the Morrissey Boulevard northbound off-ramp and its continuation (“the Chute”) up to Day Boulevard.
 - Mr. Vernon Street at the Morrissey Boulevard southbound on-ramp.

In addition to crossing both northbound and southbound traffic on the Morrissey Boulevard on- and off-ramps, a pedestrian at the Morrissey Boulevard/Mt. Vernon Street intersections must cross north-south traffic on Mt. Vernon Street.

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

The pedestrian connections to the MBTA Red Line Station are thus critical to providing full access for the entire pedestrian network east of Morrissey Boulevard. Fortunately, a recommendation is included in the Master Plan for a traffic study that will address the streets around these difficult pedestrian movements. To quote the Master Plan:

“The planning process for the Master Plan has revealed the need for more detailed analysis of the capacity and operations of Morrissey Boulevard, Kosciuszko Circle, and the I-93 access ramps. Not only are these roadways owned and maintained by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, but they are used disproportionately for regional (as opposed to local) traffic. The complex, regional nature of the circulation issues on these roadways requires a separate analysis that involves the cooperation and collaboration of the Commonwealth.....

Key issues to be addressed by this study and comprehensive plan should include, but not be limited to, the following:

- *A full analysis of existing and future traffic conditions;*
- *An analysis of alternative solutions, including the options listed in Chapter 6, Multi-modal Transportation.*
- *An analysis of the impacts of Master Plan buildout on these roadways, including the proportional impact of each of the redevelopment parcels at full Master Plan buildout in the larger regional context. In part the goal would be to determine levels of*

- responsibility on the part of each development for improvements to these roadways.*
- *Recommended new design solutions for these roadways to accommodate long-term local and regional growth.”*

We wholeheartedly agree that this study must take place. However, this outline of a proposed study does not mention or discuss the needs of pedestrians who cross the Morrissey Boulevard corridor on the Mt. Vernon Street alignment or on the existing pedestrian bridge. WalkBoston strongly recommends that these pedestrian movements be included – in fact featured – in both the master plan and the future traffic study.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to provide comments on the Master Plan for Columbia Point. Please let us know if you have any questions or need further detail.

Sincerely,

Wendy Landman
Executive Director

Robert Sloane
Senior Planner