



WalkBoston

October 14, 2011

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

RE: Comments on Environmental Notification Form for the Copley Place Retail Expansion and Residential Additions, Boston, MA

EOEA No. 14790

Dear Secretary Sullivan:

WalkBoston has reviewed the Environmental Notification Form for the Copley Place Expansion, and submits the following comments on the Copley Place project design, with a focus on the pedestrian and community design aspects.

The expansion to Copley Place will have very significant impacts on future pedestrian activity in the area. This whole project area has many pedestrians because of numerous hotels, Back Bay Station, Copley Square, the Farmer's Market, the Public Library, etc. Now is the time and opportunity to make it more pleasant and safer for them. The proponent will need to be cognizant of detailed walking needs throughout the development, because the pedestrian aspects of the site will play an extremely important role in the way it meshes with its surroundings and the possible help in alleviating traffic congestion.

Intersection of Dartmouth and Stuart Streets

With appropriate signal timing, the changes proposed for this intersection will make it much easier, more direct and safer for pedestrians to cross. No longer will there be frustrating waits on medians. The crossings are direct and narrower. This plan was tested in 1995 and worked well for both traffic and pedestrians.

One further improvement would help pedestrians. On Stuart Street on the SE corner, there is a bus stop for Routes 502, 503 and 504 that is positioned too close to the intersection so that the double length buses block the pedestrian crosswalk. We request that the proponent work with the City to remove one or two parking spaces to allow the buses to move further forward.

WALK – Don't WALK signals at this intersection should be timed for concurrent walk, as they are currently.

The Southwest Corridor Park

WalkBoston has reviewed the plans without a detailed drawing of the public areas around the project—sidewalk widths and other details, so it is hard to comment with great specificity. The proposed changes to the Southwest Corridor Park were presented for the first time a

week ago and there seemed to be widespread agreement they the proposed changes will need a lot of discussion, though there is support for making the entrance to the Southwest Corridor across from Back Bay Station more inviting.

The proponent should include a presentation of the history of the Southwest Corridor Park in the improvements that are proposed. One approach would be the inclusion near the entrance to the walkways of an 8'x4' enamel plaque such as the one at Roxbury Crossing, giving the history of the anti-highway movement and the Southwest Corridor project, which compares the present highly-valued results with the original plans for four lanes of traffic exiting here, no intercity rail, no urban trail or park.

Sidewalk along Dartmouth Street at Copley Place

This sidewalk should be no less than 12 feet wide, unobstructed, as it now exists along the façade of Neiman Marcus. The “winter garden” should be genuinely public, open 24 hours. There should continue to be outside seating, preferably using the same benches, positioned for conversation. The current gradually ramped approach from Dartmouth into the building should be retained and not replaced by steps.

Sidewalk on Stuart Street along Copley Place side

Advocates of a sidewalk along this edge correctly observe that quite a number of people walk in the road, across the exit ramp and on down to Dartmouth. There is a desire line here and the appeal of crossing Stuart to the narrow sidewalk along the Westin, dodging the loading zone trucks blocking the sidewalk, and then re-crossing back to the south is slight. Significant changes in the roadway, traffic island and Westin sidewalk would help to entice people to cross on this side of Stuart Street. The proponent should provide some design options to address this possibility.

Mass Turnpike exit ramp

WalkBoston requests that the exit from this ramp be painted so that only one lane of cars will exit, that rumble strips be added across the roadway and that blinking signs be added inside the tunnel warning Turnpike drivers of their upcoming exit into an urban and busy pedestrian area. The 25 mph warning signs installed some 15 years ago are not emphatic enough to slow cars. A stop sign (with advance warning in the tunnel, of course) could be provided at the end of the ramp, as now exists at the Turnpike exit onto Huntington.

Loop turn

The proposed narrowing of the loop turn from Huntington to Stuart at the end of the Westin is excellent, as is the elimination of the left turn lane on Huntington. The expansion of the island is also appropriate. It should be designed to be a pleasant park-like area with signs minimized or relocated.

Exeter/Stuart/Huntington/Marriott garage area

Much more work is needed on the Exeter/Stuart/Huntington/Marriott garage area— implementation of better signal timing, narrowing roadway widths and shortening pedestrian crossings. The blocks of Huntington/Stuart from Mass Ave to Clarendon were widened in the 1960s auto era, and are now too wide open for this dense urban area. Their width and layout encourage traffic to speed and endanger pedestrians. This project should make the cross-

section of the street narrower as happens outbound on Huntington Avenue at Mass. Ave. and inbound on Stuart Street at Clarendon Street.

Harcourt/Huntington/Ring Road intersection

The Harcourt/Huntington/Ring Road intersection should be reshaped and re-signaled, especially since increased volumes of traffic will be using Harcourt Street for access to the proponent's garage. Signs should be posted with a number to call to move or monitor trucks waiting there. Since many of the trucks will be idling at this location, they are a real issue for nearby residents.

Sidewalk and crosswalk materials

All crosswalks should be marked by striping on the roadway pavement. Reconstruction of crosswalks with pavers should not be considered, as they are a hazard to the disability community, parents with strollers, women with high heels and the elderly.

All sidewalks should be constructed primarily of concrete and not bricks. There is ample precedent for the use of bricks as decorative elements but not as the primary surface, because of the walking difficulties and hazards they create for many people.

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

Sincerely,



Wendy Landman
Executive Director



Robert Sloane
Senior Planner