



WalkBoston

November 23, 2006

Secretary Robert Golledge
Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, MEPA Office
100 Cambridge Street, Suite 900
Boston, MA 02114

RE: Comments on Expanded Environmental Notification Form for the Green Line Extension in Cambridge, Somerville and Medford.

EOEA # 13886

Dear Mr. Golledge:

WalkBoston appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Expanded Environmental Notification Form (EENF) for the Green Line Extension submitted by the MBTA. We are commenting because of concern about the pedestrian issues associated with this proposal.

If the EENF is to become a single EIR as requested, we would like to see these issues addressed:

1. Philosophy of the project.

- Pedestrian access to the project should be paramount in planning the new facility. This is an unusual project, with virtually no parking envisioned at transit stations. All riders will arrive on foot – directly from their homes, from a kiss and ride drop off spot, from a bicycle parking area or from a bus stop. Thus, pedestrian movements should guide station locations and designs. Sidewalk widths, surfaces, street furniture, signing and street crossings are major concerns. Bus stops and drop off sites must be incorporated into the design to maximize convenient pedestrian access, Bicycle storage racks must be provided at all stations.
- Consideration should be given to extending the Green Line terminus to Mystic Valley Parkway at the Mystic River at the Medford/Somerville line, as is recommended by the Medford Green Line Neighborhood Alliance, to serve an additional densely populated area and to spur transit-oriented development. This terminus should also be evaluated in terms of potential ridership and ways of integrating it with area bus lines.
- Potential integration with commuter rail service should be examined as EIR work gets underway. For example, the proposed location of the station near Tufts University may be worthy of consideration for commuter rail service. Since Tufts can be considered a regional destination, a commuter rail station nearby may attract more riders to the MBTA system. The proposed Tufts station is roughly the same distance from downtown Boston as Forest Hills, where a commuter rail station is also immediately adjacent to the Orange Line rapid transit station. No stations are

proposed for this geographic quadrant of the region where riders can be exchanged between the Green Line and the commuter rail line except for North Station.

- The proposed Community Path should be integrated with the transit proposal from the beginning. The Somerville community agrees on the need for it. Medford residents and officials should be interviewed for views on extending the path from Lowell Street in Somerville to Route 16 at the Alewife Brook Parkway via the Green Line right of way.

2. Planning for the Community Path.

- The available railroad right of way has sufficient width to include a path for nearly its full length. The path can be constructed at the level of the tracks or up the hillside on an alignment supported by retaining walls. If absolutely necessary, the path could be cantilevered above track level.
- For safety, the path should be completely grade-separated. All new or rebuilt bridge structures should be wide enough to accommodate the proposed Community Path beneath them. Bridges to be retained should be examined carefully for adaptations that accommodate a right of way for the Community Path. Bridge issues for the pedestrian pathway will be particularly difficult at McGrath Highway and at Washington Street, where grade crossings may be unsafe because of heavy street traffic.
- Pedestrian access between cross streets and the Community Path should be maximized. All street crossings above the right of way should have ramps between the path and street level.
- Between Washington Street and Lechmere Station, the Community Path should share the alignment of the Green Line extension. A bridge shared with the Green Line will be the only way for the pathway to cross the Fitchburg Commuter Rail Line.
- The relocation of Lechmere Station in Cambridge is on schedule for construction prior to the Green Line extension. It is important that the station project be designed and built to permit connections to the Community Path from the relocated station and the North Point walkways.

3. Maximizing access and use

- Pedestrians will literally be coming to this project from all directions. The project should facilitate access to all cardinal points surrounding each station, and not just north-south over the bridges. Pedestrians and cyclists should be able to arrive at stations directly from the Community Path. Additional right of way crossings may be necessary where existing north-south streets do not suffice.
- An extension to the Mystic Valley Parkway site offers the possibility of extensive transit-oriented and pedestrian-friendly development around a new station that affects both Somerville and Medford. Transit-oriented development will help grow ridership at this station.
- In examining the proposed extension to the Mystic Valley Parkway, it is important to look at potential pedestrian connections into the neighborhood north of the river to maximize the transit market for the terminal station. At Route 16, the proposed extension of the Green Line can also connect with the growing network of intercity pathways along the Mystic River and Alewife Brook.

- As recommended by the Medford Green Line Neighborhood Alliance, a station between College Avenue and Winthrop Street in Medford Hillside may be extremely desirable. It could replace the need for the two closely-spaced stations proposed for College Avenue and Winthrop Street. The densely populated area within a half-mile radius might be better served at this location, and it might be the best location to serve Tufts University riders. Several bus lines run along Boston Avenue and can readily serve this location.
- The dangerous pedestrian path from the end of Brookings Street in Medford should be replaced with a bridge connecting this neighborhood to the proposed new Green Line Station. The bridge will provide good access for this portion of Medford Hillside to the Green Line, as Brookings Street forms the central axis of the residential neighborhood which lies north of the tracks.
- Somerville High School, directly on the Green Line Extension, will provide many potential users of the Green Line Extension. Great care should be taken to design good connections to the High School, as well as the adjacent City Hall and Main Library.
- Both Somerville and Medford may want to examine the potential for air rights above the tracks to expand open space in the city or to provide the basis for other needed construction, such as housing.

4. The Union Square Connection

- To best serve pedestrians, the proposed Union Square station should reach the heart of activity in the square. An underground station beneath Webster Avenue at the square should be examined to provide efficient and easy access from the business community and the surrounding residents. All station options should be connected to the square's pedestrian facilities by convenient pathways or sidewalks.
- The Community Path should be extended into Union Square. An opportunity exists to coordinate the path with local development. Somerville is redeveloping the area adjacent to the Fitchburg Commuter Rail Line. The 80-acre Boynton Yards Revitalization Area, planned as a mixed-use area, already includes office buildings constructed as the first step in the renewal process for the area.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this EENR. Please feel free to contact us for clarification or additional comments. We would be very pleased to work with the MBTA on this important project.

Sincerely,

Wendy Landman
Executive Director

Robert Sloane
Senior Planner