



walkBoston

June 17, 2009

Bill Tuttle
Massachusetts Turnpike Authority
Ten Park Plaza, Suite 4160
Boston, MA 02116
Attn: Parcel 9 Comments

Dear Mr. Tuttle:

Parcel 9 presents many opportunities to enhance the pedestrian experience along the Greenway, and WalkBoston is happy to see that there is substantial interest in the parcel. We have put together comments about elements of some of the proposals that we think will benefit pedestrians, and also several concerns that are raised by one or several of the proposals. We hope that our comments will assist the Turnpike Authority in its evaluation of the four options.

Emphasizing Pedestrian Use of the Greenway

While the emphasis on pedestrian use of Blackstone Street is admirable, activating street life along the Greenway should also be a major goal of the Parcel 9 development. We hope that the use of Parcel 9 will give the Greenway a primary role with lively activities and many pedestrian entrances, and that valet or other drop-off functions will be minimized.

Blackstone Street as a Shared Use Space

WalkBoston heartily endorses the reconstruction of Blackstone Street without curbs. No matter which development proposal is chosen, this type of reconstruction allows maximum flexibility in providing for pedestrians, rearranging the layout of market stalls, etc. With daily market use, Blackstone Street should be a car free district (except for deliveries for the market). If the market use is intermittent, the street should be pedestrian-only during market periods. To encroach on it with autos would be a very unfortunate use of limited street space for pedestrian circulation.

New Pedestrian Accessways

We think that through-block connections between Blackstone Street and the Greenway are a good idea. It would be helpful if the connections serve as corridors of activity as well as entry points for the market. However, we are concerned that creating an east-west pedestrian spine parallel to Blackstone Street and inside a Parcel 9 building may reduce street activities. WalkBoston would prefer to encourage street life along the Greenway, which means heavy use of sidewalks rather than drawing walkers inside buildings for their walking trips.

We very much like the idea of making new connections to the underused alleys of the nearby Blackstone Block. The narrow little streets and squares in this last remaining 17th century street layout would be delightful if activated with market-related cafes or other uses.

Parking

We are pleased to see that two proposals have no on-site parking. In this very pedestrian-oriented area, wherever driveways into a garage might be placed, they would need to cross busy sidewalks.

One off-site parking proposal places a garage on the other side of Blackstone Street and seems to require an automobile route incursion that goes directly through the market district/pedestrian precinct that is a focus of the development. We think that this would be an unfortunate design.

Pedestrian Bridge

One of the proposals suggests building a pedestrian bridge above the Greenway. WalkBoston believes that pedestrian bridges should be used only across limited access roadways or where at-grade streets crossings are unsafe. There is little existing or foreseeable demand for pedestrians to use the proposed bridge between Christopher Columbus Park and Parcel 9, and the at-grade crossings in this area have been designed to comfortably accommodate pedestrians. Unless the bridge is intended to provide specific educational or historic programming for which a bridge is an integral element, pedestrian access should occur at grade.

Wayfinding

Signage designed to attract people into the markets can be an appropriate and useful addition to the economics of the market and can enhance the streetscape. Wayfinding inside the market area is also a good idea to orient shoppers to access routes and walkways to nearby buildings.

A Pedestrian Experience for All

Special care should be given to retaining the market as a source of inexpensive foods – one Haymarket’s and greatest strengths. The project should encourage a wide range of providers from low-cost to more expensive. The developers should examine how to accommodate the vendors of inexpensive food, who may well be the greatest single generators of pedestrian traffic. These vendors may be reluctant to participate if a new street market does not allow for easy access by loaded vehicles and setting up tents to sell their produce.

Public restrooms on the ground floor should be provided. The building will be a focal point along the Greenway, and restrooms are essential for both the market and the series of parks across the Surface Artery.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to provide comments on the Parcel 9 proposals. Please let us know if you have any questions or need further detail.

Sincerely,

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Executive Director

Robert Sloane
Senior Planner

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 Vineet Gupta, BTB
 Nancy Brennan, Linda Jonash, Greenway Conservancy