



WalkBoston

May 8, 2009

Secretary Ian Bowles
Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, MEPA Office
100 Cambridge Street, Suite 900
Boston, MA 02114

RE: Comments on the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) for Waterfront Square at Revere Beach, EOEA #14080

Dear Mr. Bowles:

WalkBoston is happy to submit comments on the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) for Waterfront Square at Revere Beach. This project is a Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) that embodies many of the precepts of concentrated development and pedestrian improvements that the state and region have been working toward. For this reason, our comments focus on whether the TOD elements will work well for pedestrians using the MBTA Wonderland Station, the new uses to be built on the site and people accessing Revere Beach and adjacent properties. We are pleased that many of the concerns we raised in our previous comments have been addressed by the FEIR, however (as discussed below) we continue to have some specific concerns.

We continue to be impressed that the project is being made possible by the joint efforts of the proponent and several public agencies owning property within the site. The public agencies – the MBTA and the Department of Conservation and Recreation have agreed to become part of the project to further the development goals of better, more intensive uses of their lands and increased use of the existing MBTA Blue Line terminus at Wonderland Station. Unfortunately, one site – the Seaside Site – has not been included in the development, even though it stands at the mid-point of the site and thus prevents contiguous development.

Summary of comments:

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- Pedestrian connections to adjacent parcels should be explored.
- All crosswalks should have pedestrian signals timed to afford safe crossings.
- Pedestrian access on the ground level of the South Parking Garage seems to include potential hazards for pedestrians due to the need to cross bus lanes to reach the rail station
- Pedestrian crosswalks are sparse along Ocean Avenue.
- Pedestrian ramps at the Wonderland Station seem to be replaced by elevators and a stair. Does the new plan still include ramps?
- The Transit Plaza may have significant use by pedestrians linking train and bus trips, and should include generous walkways covered for weather protection.

- All bus-rail riders are required to cross above the rail tracks on one leg of their journey. Is there a way to explore all at-grade access between buses and trains on only one side of Wonderland Station?

Many WalkBoston concerns have been addressed by the FEIR. These include:

- Pedestrian access to the Transit Plaza above the roof level of the Wonderland Transit Station will be accomplished as part of the South Garage construction in Phase I. These elevators will be available for movement between the rail and bus stations and each level of the parking garage. A similar elevator will be added in Phase II between the east side of the rail station and the Transit Plaza level.
- The proponent is committed to constructing a pedestrian bridge connecting the site to the beachfront, and has committed to long-term maintenance and repair of the bridge.
- Sidewalks located along Route 1A on both sides of the street will be retained and improved as routes for local residents to walk to the station and the businesses or offices on the site.
- Sight lines and pedestrian connections pass through the proposed Transit Plaza and the pedestrian bridge from the site to the beachfront.
- These sight lines and pedestrian connections also reach to the future Revere stop on the commuter rail line west of Route 1A, through the large parking lot at Wonderland Park, now used for daytime commuter parking (and a future development site).
- The site has connections to regional trails and paths – beachfront and the north-south Border to Boston trail which connects to the Northern Strand Community Trail (aka Bike to the Sea Trail).
- The crosswalk at Route 1A and the access to the MBTA South Parking Garage is moved to the north side of the intersection. Nearly 400 people cross here daily according to August 2008 counts. At the north side of the intersection, pedestrians will be able to have a traffic signal cycle and not be at risk to the many right turning vehicles entering the South Garage site.

There are certain remaining concerns that are raised by our review of the FEIR:

- Alternatives should be explored to connect the Transit Plaza with adjacent parcels such as the Water's Edge Apartments south of the Transit Plaza. Such a connection might be beneficial to this project because it could attract additional walkers to and through the site, either to the MBTA station or the beachfront.
- The Seaside Site, a parcel surrounded by this project but not included in these plans, is largely ignored. Pedestrian connections between this site and the north and south parts of this project and to the MBTA station and parking garages seem sketchy at best.
- A new crosswalk is planned at the intersection of Shawmut Street and the vehicular connection to the MBTA North Parking Garage. When the crosswalk is constructed, pedestrians should be provided with an adequate traffic signal interval to cross the street safely.
- Pedestrian circulation on the west side of the Transit Plaza at the entrance to the Blue Line station is shown in some detail in Figure F-2. The proposed Phase I South Parking Garage on MBTA property has a covered bus terminal directly adjacent to the Blue Line platform for easy pedestrian transfer between bus and rail services. The first floor of the Garage also houses kiss-and-ride and garage ramps. Pedestrian access between the drop-off lanes and the rail station appear to require crossing the bus lanes, and may be unsafe.

- Improvement of the pedestrian environment along Ocean Avenue is needed. Curb cuts for parking access along Ocean Avenue dominate the environment and only 6 widely separated crosswalks connect the site and the beachfront park.
- Existing pedestrian ramps at Wonderland Station provide pedestrian access up and over the station, independent of elevators. However, the ramps appear to be removed as part of the Phase II construction of the Transit Plaza and replaced by a monumental stairway. Will new construction include a physical replacement of the pedestrian ramps? If so, where will they be located in respect to the Transit Plaza, the MBTA train station and the MBTA bus station?
- The plan calls for elevators to be constructed on both sides of Wonderland Station to allow alighting riders to go up and over the station to reach either connecting buses or parking facilities. At the Transit Plaza level, peak period pedestrian movements may be significant, and may require generous connections between elevators, stairs and ramps. Perhaps these Transit Plaza pedestrian connections could be covered to protect transit riders from severe weather conditions? How many elevators are planned to accommodate peak hour pedestrian traffic between travel modes and the Transit Plaza? What volume of peak hour pedestrian traffic is expected?
- Can MBTA operating plans for arriving Blue Line trains at Wonderland Station be modified to reflect access to connecting buses? Currently, both inbound and outbound bus access takes place on the outbound side of the transit station, giving a direct at-grade route for alighting passengers to walk to buses, but requiring inbound pedestrians to climb up and over the station to the inbound tracks. In this proposal, future inbound access to rail from arriving buses will be at-grade on the inbound side of the transit station, and require outbound passengers to cross up and over the tracks to the outbound buses. Is it possible that arriving trains could be routed to the inbound side of the station, where they would have the same cross-platform access to buses without using stairs, ramps or elevators? Is it possible that this change in train routing could obviate the need to construct a Transit Plaza elevator on the east side of the tracks?

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) for Waterfront Square at Revere Beach. We hope our comments on the FEIR are incorporated into your requirements for the next phase of design and permitting documents.

Please contact us for any clarification or additional comments that would be useful.

Sincerely,

Wendy Landman
Executive Director

Robert Sloane
Senior Planner