



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
JOSEPH A. CURTATONE
MAYOR

January 8, 2010

Secretary Ian Bowles
Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs
MEPA Office
Attn: Holly Johnson, MEPA Analyst
EEA #13886
100 Cambridge Street, Suite 900
Boston, MA 02114

Re: Green Line Extension DEIR/EA

Dear Secretary Bowles:

I am writing to recommend prompt MEPA approval of MassDOT's Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR)/Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Green Line Extension as a Final Environmental Impact Review (FEIR) document; conditioned upon a written commitment from MassDOT to (1) eliminate the Yard 8 maintenance facility from consideration; (2) complete the design and engineering to the Route 16 terminus so that if resources are made available, the Route 16 terminus can be constructed at the same time as the rest of extension; and (3) complete the 100% design of the Community Path from Lowell Street to Northpoint, while assisting the City to secure funding for construction.

Closing the MEPA process now will allow the project to advance toward its mandated 2014 deadline, thereby ensuring the greatest accrual of environmental benefit to our community and the region.

In addition, I strongly urge that the MEPA certificate direct MassDOT to improve station design and location – with an emphasis on multimodal connectivity - during the preliminary engineering process and commit to a robust public process going forward.



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Introduction

I want to begin by thanking Governor Patrick, Secretary Mullan, former Secretary Aloisi, and the entire Green Line project team for the hard work that went into producing the DEIR. The transition to preliminary engineering represents a key milestone in this critical, but long delayed, regional transportation project.

Somerville does not just want the Green Line, it needs the Green Line. Our community is one of the densest in the nation, having been built around a vibrant transit network that was in place through the early part of the 20th century but subsequently dismantled. Today, we are burdened with a street network that hosts significantly more cars per square mile than any other metro Boston municipality and barriers created by two raised highways that divide our city. Further, freight and commuter rail lines crisscross our neighborhoods and a massive maintenance facility (the Boston Engine Terminal - BET) dominates our largest economic development district. All of these factors contribute to making travel across Somerville hazardous, significantly increasing our levels of air pollution, and severely inhibiting commercial development within our 160 acre Inner Belt/Brickbottom District.

Today, with only one rapid transit station in Somerville at Davis Square and access to two adjacent stops in Cambridge at Porter Square and Charlestown at Sullivan Square, 29% of Somerville residents use transit to commute to work. This percentage is as high as Brookline which houses 16 transit stations. The Green Line Extension represents a tremendous opportunity to significantly increase the ridership on the MBTA, a benefit felt both locally and throughout the entire region through reduced congestion and improved air quality.

That said, public transit generally, and the Green Line specifically, must be more than a means of transporting people. It must be designed to solve existing problems and anticipate future needs. Though an expanded light rail system will inherently improve air quality by reducing the region's long term over-reliance on cars, the environmental benefits of the project will be vastly increased through station design and siting that prioritizes bus, bike, and pedestrian connectivity and a robust public process before, during and after construction – including a prescribed system for mitigating noise and vibration impacts. The City's ongoing strategic land use decisions will further contribute to facilitate transit-oriented development around the stations thereby generating new riders for the system and economic development for the Commonwealth. Accordingly, the City will work in partnership with MassDOT, the Department of Housing and Community Development, and other agencies to maximize the project's benefits.

This letter further outlines our proposed key elements of a successful Green Line Extension. An accompanying letter from Monica Lamboy, Executive Director of the Mayor's Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development, will provide a more detailed breakdown of our specific comments and requests.



Maintenance Facility

Throughout the planning process I have taken the position that, should MassDOT make a compelling case, Somerville would be willing to locate a second maintenance facility within our borders, provided that it would be designed and operated to meet criteria in three key categories:

- Quality of life - Any facility should not adversely impact the quality of life of residents in the area.
- Economic development - Any facility should not impede or deter future economic development in the InnerBelt and Brickbottom districts, including on the site of the facility itself; and
- Access - Any facility should not augment the existing access barriers between Inner Belt and Brickbottom and instead, should be designed to reduce barriers to the greatest extent possible.

I have also made clear that, as a matter of environmental justice, Somerville should absorb only those functions and facilities related to the extension project -- and that our community should not be further burdened by regional infrastructure that does not serve our residents and business community, unless mitigation measures are provided.

Yard 8 fails to meet each of the three criteria above and must be summarily eliminated from consideration as part of the Green Line Extension project. The Yard 8 location would immediately and severely degrade the quality of life for the district's only residents, occupy a prime development parcel, and create a permanent barrier between the Inner Belt, Northpoint, and Route 28. *Moreover, Yard 8's continued inclusion as the preferred alternative would indicate complete disregard for unified opposition to the site from Somerville and Cambridge public officials and community members.* Simply put, this would not bode well for the planning process going forward particularly in light of Somerville's stated willingness to accept a facility.

Indeed, while the City continues to believe that Mirror H is the best location for the facility, we acknowledge that Option L represents a real opportunity to meet both the operational needs of MassDOT and the City's key criteria. Once Mirror H or Option L is selected, the MassDOT should implement a vigorous and public planning and engineering process to ensure that the maintenance facility is designed to have minimal negative impact on our long-burdened community.

Station Location and Design

The Green Line's environmental benefits will only be fully realized if the project serves to eliminate noxious land uses and, where appropriate, promote high-density, high-value, transit oriented development. Stations located on major streets should have access from both sides of the street to increase visibility, encourage use and raise land values. The architectural design should be compatible with its environs yet highlighted as a distinctive landmark.

The Brickbottom/Washington Street Station, as proposed, is not properly situated or sized to meet the current and future needs of the Inner Belt and Brickbottom Districts and needs to be



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significantly refined during the design process. First, it must have access points designed to meet the needs of the existing neighborhoods to the north, as well as the future development in the Inner Belt and Brickbottom Districts, which is anticipated to be between 7 and 10 million square feet. Second, it should be relocated to Washington Street to provide the best bus, pedestrian, and bicycle connectivity possible. The community commits to work closely with MassDOT on the strategic refinement and relocation of this station.

The proposed Union Square Station has the opportunity to significantly stimulate economic development in the Union Square and Boynton Yards areas. Attention must be paid during the design process to facilitate access directly into Boynton Yards to the south, as well as the heart of Union Square to the north.

At Gilman Square, only the minimum amount of the City's property (aka "Homan's Building") should be taken to facilitate the Green Line Extension. Our intent is to use the balance of the property for transit oriented development that will support transit ridership in the area. I am in the process of determining how to complete the transfer of land at no cost to the extension project.

Community Path & Multi-modal Connectivity

The Community Path Extension will provide a critical and safe link for bicyclists and pedestrians from surrounding neighborhoods and beyond. The existing path serving Davis Square receives tremendous use and has significantly increased ridership, offered air quality benefits and improved the lives of residents. It is imperative that MassDOT recommit to funding the 100% design of the path from Lowell Street in Somerville to North Point in Cambridge as a part of the Green Line Extension. The Path provides the most direct connectivity for bicyclists and pedestrians and its creation will help to support the system's success as well as the City's efforts to promote active and healthy transportation options. To this end, the City commits to providing the link between Cedar Street and Lowell Street and to working with MassDOT to secure funding to complete construction of the Community Path simultaneously to the Green Line Extension. Such an approach would both save money and improve the overall benefits of the project.

In order for MassDOT to achieve the full environmental benefits of the Green Line Extension, stations must be designed and located to facilitate multi-modal connections. In short, by enhancing these connections we will remove cars from our streets and make our community safer and healthier. Providing light rail alone will not accomplish this difficult task. We need a coherent and efficient network to support bus, rail, bike, and pedestrian connections. The existing bus system should be analyzed and modified in conjunction with ongoing Green Line planning and construction. Bus routes and stops should be moved, added, or eliminated as needed to provide direct and efficient connections to the new rail station as soon as they become active. As stated above, the Community Path design should allow for safe and easy access to stations for bicyclists and pedestrians. Finally, while Somerville supports bus pull-in areas, we request that the MEPA certificate recommend against MassDOT's current plan to provide "kiss n' ride" vehicle drop-off points and ensure that only the minimum amount of land



necessary is set aside for parking of maintenance vehicles.

Long Term Connectivity

Although the Commonwealth is planning for a specific project today, great care needs to be taken to ensure that future transit extensions are not precluded based upon current constraints or demand. In particular, the station design and location at the terminus of both spurs—Union Square and Route 16—should not preclude the potential to extend the Green Line to link with Porter Square or West Medford. Further, an additional future station in the vicinity of Boynton Yards must be anticipated, albeit to be constructed some time in the future.

Public Process

Although the DEIR process has provided a significant official public input component for the Green Line plans, it should not represent the end of proscribed community involvement. In order for stations to be successfully woven into our pre-existing urban fabric, as well as anticipated future development, neighbors and business owners must be consulted on specific plans for station design, access, location and construction. Both the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning process will be increased by proactive and predictable community engagement. Moreover, while the DEIR spells out projected noise and vibration impacts, MassDOT should clearly define procedures for further mitigation if stated targets are not reached, or if construction produces unanticipated effects. Similarly, a procedure for determining compensation should be included for instances where secondary mitigation proves insufficient. Therefore, I respectfully request that MassDOT clearly define an ongoing proactive public process beyond the conclusion of the MEPA process.

Conclusion

The most serious environmental impact associated with the Green Line Extension is delay. The project is long overdue and risks failing to meet a court mandated deadline of 2014. Meanwhile, Somerville continues to suffer the costs of the Commonwealth's transportation infrastructure while reaping few of the benefits. We must now put the latest delay associated with the maintenance facility behind us and move the project forward.

I ask that EOEEA assist us in this historic effort by now issuing a certificate that accepts the DEIR as a final submission; provided a written commitment from MassDOT to eliminate Yard 8 as an option for the maintenance facility, ensure design and engineering of the entire Green Line to Route 16 and Union Square, and 100% design of the Community Path extension between Northpoint and Lowell Streets. The Secretary's certificate should provide overarching guidelines for the design/build process going forward, particularly in the areas of station location and design, multimodal connectivity, long range planning and community engagement.

I have attached prior correspondence on Green Line issues to this letter for inclusion in the DEIR review process.



Sincerely,

Joseph A. Curtatone
Mayor

Attachments:

Letter to Steve Woelfel – September 12, 2008

Letter to Secretary Cohen - December 9, 2008

Letter to Secretary Aloisi - January 28, 2009

Letter to Secretary Aloisi - May 12, 2009

Letter from Somerville Board of Aldermen to Secretary Aloisi – June 22, 2009

