

# NOTES FROM STEP MEETING 28 August 2006

August 28, 2006, 7-9 PM

SCAT, Union Sq. Somerville

Attendees: Ellin Reisner, Andrea Yakovakis, Karen Molloy, Wig Zamore, Jim McGinnis, Kristie Chase, Steve Mulder, Lori Segall, Enid Kumin, Lynn McWood, Alex Heil, Matthew Mittelstadt, Jeff Reese, Bhupesh Patel, Alan Moore.

Notes written by Karen Molloy

## 1. **Somerville Transportation Projects: TIP, UPWP, and RTP**

Wig Zamore reported that the Boston MPO received twice as many comments as usual during the public comment period on the TIP and UPWP. Many comments were in support of Somerville projects; to the MPO's surprise, there were a number of letters in support of Union Sq. At the MPO meeting in late August to vote on the plans, 1/2 the public attendees were from Somerville. Two notable Somerville items were approved for 2007: a small earmark for planning in Union Sq, and the first \$5 million of a \$25 million earmark for planning and engineering the Orange Line MBTA station at Assembly Sq. (The latter is due largely to the efforts of Congressman Capuano). Note that the remainder of the funding for an Assembly Sq station will not be realized until a TOD plan (a commitment to intense job creation (office/research and development) and/or intense transit-oriented housing; either of which would justify a T station) is nailed down. In another words, if the area simply becomes committed to more big box development, the funds for building a T station will not materialize.

Wig further reported that in spite of all the public support for Somerville projects and presence of Somerville project line items in the TIP, *not one Somerville project in the TIP in the last 4 yrs has actually started*. For example Community Path extension is still in draft, and the Green line Study has halted. Green Line holdup factors include the Commonwealth-CLF negotiations are stuck, the DEP recommendations are on hold in the State Accounting office pending the outcome of the gubernatorial election. In general, many projects in the TIP are feeling financial squeeze. Factors include the skyrocketing costs of construction, escalating projects costs, and as result the increasing backlog of projects.

Green Line Environmental Impact Review has not begun due

to the SIP holdup.

2. **Distribution and analysis of the STEP bus survey**

We discussed distributing the bus survey, which has been translated into Spanish and Portuguese. Patti Davis offered to get it translated into French. (The online survey is live; linked from the STEP website. So far 85 have responded online, 20 have filled out paper surveys; these results are great considering we have not publicized the survey at all since ArtBeat. The online survey will eventually be linked from the City website too.)

Outreach about the survey and distribution will take place in September through community agencies, listservs, local newspapers and possibly study the Brazilian and Spanish newspapers, our legislative delegation newsletters, at bus stops, libraries, local cafes, and laundromats and other businesses. The deadline for receiving the surveys is the end of September.

We will distribute the surveys by hand on Sat 16 Sept, Wed 20<sup>th</sup> and Thurs the 21<sup>st</sup> of Sept. Suggested list of distribution points ( T stops, bus stops, supermarkets and other areas in the city) will be forthcoming. We will seek volunteers for distributing the survey on the STEP listserv. As well, we'll drop off surveys at locations where people can pick them up (libraries, cafes and so on).

We will publicize the survey distribution the week prior in the Somerville Journal "Community Notes" and Somerville News.

We will be presenting the survey results to the City and to the (T) for Green Line mitigation.

Alex Heil offered to enlist his students at Tufts to help distribute surveys and to analyze the survey data.

3. **STEP participation in Green Line Forum and local events**

The Green Line Forum is an umbrella of like-minded groups : STEP, Somerville Bike Committee, Cambridge Health Alliance, Friends of the Community Path and Livable Streets. It is currently seeking a an American Public Transit Association (APT) grant (\$5K) for administrative staff to support Green Line outreach activities such as mailings, web and so on for 2007.

Ellin Reisner is drafting the grant proposal.

Discussion touched on whether to have some kind of event before the election regarding the Green Line. However, there is not much news with which to update people, and many folks will be busy working on local elections. Perhaps after the election we could hold some sort of rally to raise awareness that \*nothing\* has been happening on the project. It would be useful however to get something for the candidates regarding the Green Line. Many have spoken publicly about supporting other transit projects such as Fall River Commuter rail extension.

The topic of new private development (condos) being planned for Boynton Yards was raised with respect to its relationship to potential Union Sq T stop and TOD.

#### 4. **Community Path Meeting Report**

Karen Molloy, Alan Moore, and Bupesh Patel reported on the City's meeting last week (22 August) about progress of the Community Path. The main topic of discussion was the news that the Cambridge Health Alliance is preparing to sign over to the City a portion of their parcel of land located off Central Street. The next section of the Community Path to be built, between Cedar and Central Sts., would pass through 1.5 acres of land that belongs to the Cambridge Health Alliance. Currently a partially-used parking lot and green area of vacant land, the triangular-shaped parcel would retain several parking spaces used by CHA and Verizon, with the remaining area to be cleaned up (now filled with layers of trash accumulated over many years) and designed with community input as a landscaped area of the Path (park, garden, etc). Discussion included a proposal to approach designing and integrating the area in two phases, and an acknowledgement that the Green Line Extension would pass near this area.

#### 5. **Organizing Mark Chase's parking presentation**

Jim McGinnis reported that Mark Chase gives a presentation on the book "High Cost of Free Parking" by Donald Shoup. [First chapter of the book is available as free download at: [www.planning.org/bookservice/highcost.htm](http://www.planning.org/bookservice/highcost.htm). Jim proposed that STEP (and perhaps Union Sq Main Streets and/or Livable Streets would be interested) sponsor an evening of Mark's presentation. We agreed it would be a valuable event. Parking

takes up a huge amount of space in Somerville, at least 1/4 the city is reserved for parking. (In some cities, up to 40% of land use is devoted to parking.) Jim will organize the event, which will be held sometime in September.

**6. Participation in Union Square Farmer's Market**

Jim McGinnis has arranged for STEP to have a table on 9 September at the Union Sq. Farmer's Market from 9am-1pm. Jim and Kristie Chase will staff the booth. If others are interested in assisting they should contact Jim or Kristie.

**7. TOD Study**

Bupesh Patel presented the preliminary/draft TOD study he was commissioned to do for the City. In his presentation he compared and contrasted the maturity of economic zones across the city. The TOD study is a working document; more discussions based on his recommendations to follow in future meetings. One.

**8. PDS Meeting with Sheriff DiPaula on jail construction**

Ellin Reisner reported on the possible jail siting in Innerbelt. One reason Mayor Curtatone is interested in the project is because it would bring with it a new police station. So far there has been no invitation for community input on this. The prospect of a jail would have an impact on potential Green Line TOD for the area. No one at the meeting knows what happened to the Brickbottom-Innerbelt design competition held last spring.

**9. Report on Urban Ring regarding relationship with the Green Line extension**

Ellin reported news from Joe Beckman that in a recent Urban Ring Committee tour of the Urban Ring route Joe pointed out that the Green Line Extension is actually a section of the Urban Ring, which surprised and pleased many on the committee. Under discussion is a proposal for light rail between Kendall and Lechmere. The next Urban Ring meeting will be held on 12 Sept at the Transportation Bldg.

**10. Articles of Organization Review**

We reviewed and made recommendations.

Next meeting: 25 September. Location TBA.