

STEP Meeting Notes

November 17, 2008, 7-9 PM

Visiting Nurse Assisted Living Center 259 Lowell Street

Attendees: Ellin Reisner, Wig Zamore, Karen Molloy, Andrea Yakovakis, Jim McGinnis, Kristie Chase, Paul Morgan

Notes by Karen Molloy

Inner Belt/Maintenance Facility & other discussions from recent GLE Advisory Group meeting

At the Green Line Advisory Group meeting on 12 November, John Burckardt, from Parsons Brinckerhoff presented a requested analysis regarding proposed siting of the GLE maintenance facility. The result supports EOT's original proposal to put the facility at Yard 8. (At the request of members of the Advisory Group and other project stakeholders, other sites were also studied.) The presentation drew many comments from project team members and attendees who are concerned by the proposed use of Yard 8, as the cost to Somerville will be quite high. Inner Belt is the last undeveloped area in Somerville, an area the City desperately needs for economic development. As Representative Denise Provost pointed out, the MBTA is already the biggest landowner in Somerville (for example, the entire commuter rail maintenance facility is already located in Somerville) and the lack of taxable land makes the City of Somerville's budgets impossible. She said that equity needs to be interjected in the maintenance and storage railroad uses in the City. Ellin stated that the project team never evaluated the environmental justice characteristics of each location in the study. This evaluation needs to be part of the cost-benefit analysis; Somerville is in desperate need of economic development and we need to see this analysis in the context of a land use development plan. Jim stated that the Secretary's Certificate for the DEIR identified the importance of providing local environmental justice populations with fair access to stations, as well as avoiding disproportionate impacts on those groups. He said he believes that EOT is showing inappropriate deference to Cambridge development, noting that the North Point site adjacent to Yard 8 is undeveloped and that North Point had historic railroad use as well (the historic usage was mentioned in the presentation). He also said the project was moving the 20-vehicle burden currently borne by Cambridge (at Lechmere) to Somerville. The GLE Advisory Group will take up the matter of the Maintenance Facility again in January.

Earlier in the meeting Scott Peterson, Central Transportation Planning Staff (CTPS), gave a presentation on ridership analysis. Using CTPS' travel demand model methodology, the forecast year used was 2030 and the transportation networks and land use assumptions are adopted from the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). The model used the 2006 Existing Conditions traffic, ridership, and land use data, so it did not take into account the increase ridership the MBTA has seen this year due to increased oil cost. Lee Auspitz stated the well-known fact many of us keep in mind: that when analysis was done for the Red Line Davis Square station, it only estimated one quarter of the actual ridership. Many on the project team questioned the results and how they were derived. We would like to see the actual data as the boarding, low vehicle miles traveled and other conclusion are questionable and the important issue of new ridership was not addressed.

Kristine Wickham of VHB presented the Union Square alignments under consideration in the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) and Environmental Assessment (EA): an in-street running loop option that would operate a single track along Somerville Ave., Prospect St. and the MBTA Fitchburg Line commuter rail corridor, an alignment that would remain within the MBTA Fitchburg Line right-of-way, and an in-street running alignment that would operate exclusively along Somerville Ave. The Fitchburg Line alignment will be carried into the DEIR/EA. The in-street running option and the loop option were evaluated to determine which will be included in the DEIR/EA. The in-street running alignment is seen as too problematic.

The minutes of the GLE Advisory meeting are available at:
<https://www.commentmgr.com/projects/1228/docs/AG%20meeting%20minutes%20111208%20-%20final.pdf>

Green Line Extension

EOT is supposed to submit the draft DEIR by 1 December, but it will be late. It's unclear what went on in the 4 months EOT did not hold GLE Advisory meetings. The Urban Ring's DEIR is due 30 Nov.

The GLE team met with Monica Lamboy at City Hall last week about the need for a master plan for economic growth at Inner Belt. STEP, Steve Mackay, the residents at Brickbottom, all see this need. The Mayor has been silent on the matter. Part of the overall picture of the future of Inner Belt is the Kraft Group's potential interest in the area for a soccer field.

Ellin and Ken will facilitate the 24 Nov STEP MGNA public meeting about the GLE terminus. Discussion about some publicity details ensued.

Grants

The New England Grass Root Foundation funding cycle is coming up.

Other

The 501c3 application is still pending; last contact was in August. Use of a tool for putting out a newsletter was briefly discussed. MGNA uses Constant Contact (as do many other groups) but it is costly to an organization that is not a 501C3.

We could ask National Charrette Foundation to train people to hold charrettes on GLE land use.

Ellin and Wig attended the Rutherford Ave meeting. Under discussion is getting rid of the circle, creating a street grid, at Sullivan, narrow Rutherford to 4 lanes and build a bike lane. Removing the underpass would create green space. Future IKEA traffic has not been taken into account.

Next meeting

15 December from 7-9pm at the Visiting Nurses Association (VNA) at 259 Lowell Street, in the private dining room on the 1st floor.