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## Green line extension may bring Somerville benefits from rail lines

Plans include stops at Assembly Square, Union Square

BY KEITH BARRY  
Daily Editorial Board

Somerville and Medford may receive more transit service if a Green Line train extension first proposed in 1984 becomes a reality.

After years of putting off a Green Line extension to concentrate on reopening the commuter rail south of Boston and putting the existing Green Line track underground, the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) has taken a step forward in bringing more rail stops to the towns surrounding Tufts.

In December, the MBTA awarded a feasibility study for the extension of the Green Line to West Medford to the consulting firms of Parsons Brinckerhoff and Vanasse Hangen Brustlin. The study is called "Lechmere and Beyond" and will examine the possibilities of extending rapid transit, rail, and bus service past Lechmere station, the current terminus of the Green Line.

"The planning process starts with the MBTA's 25-year plan, which is called the Program for Mass Transportation (PMT)," according to Clinton Bench, the manager of Transit Service Planning for the Boston Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO).

Massachusetts is legally obligated to complete projects listed in the PMT.

Projects on the 25-year plan are dealt with by the MPO in a regional transportation plan.

"The Green Line for Medford Hillside is at least in that first document, the PMT. It is addressed in the regional transportation plan as well," Bench said. "As long as it's in that document [the PMT], it can move on to the next step. It takes the support of cities, towns, elected officials, and citizens. And it takes money."

According to Dennis DiZoglio, the Assistant General Manager for Planning and Real Estate for the MBTA, "unless something happens where the commonwealth tries to substitute it, they are committed to build it." However, "the MBTA doesn't have any money to build it," he said. DiZoglio said that the project's inception depends on whether or not it will receive federal funding.

The MPO rates the Green Line extension as medium priority and estimates the cost at \$375 million, saving commuters a total of 1,647 hours of commuting time



Ford Adams/Tufts Daily

**The MBTA is reviewing proposals to extend the Green Line to Somerville, but budget constraints make it unlikely that the project will be started in the near future.**

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per day. Based on ridership estimates compiled by the MPO, the Lechmere to West Medford extension could save riders an average of 20 minutes per trip. The same report said that riders would further benefit by not having to transfer from bus to rail in order to reach downtown Boston.

The new stations would be located in areas designated for revitalization, such as Union Square. According to a preliminary map released by the MPO, one station would be located close to the corner of Boston and College Aves., the current location of Curtis Hall, Tufts-owned fields, and the Cousens Gymnasium parking lot. Other stops would be near Union and Ball Squares.

The line would terminate at the end of Boston Ave. in West Medford, past the Alewife Brook Pkwy. Tracks would run alongside the existing Boston and Maine railroad that passes behind Hill Hall in Medford, now used by the MBTA commuter rail and Amtrak trains.

Though eight rail lines run through Somerville, the city is only served by the Davis Square stop on the Red Line. According to the Somerville Transportation Equity Project (STEP), Somerville has the second highest usage of MBTA transit of all towns served.

"We need to build the Green Line, and we should've built it long ago, let alone now being in danger of missing our deadline," STEP's Avi Greene said. "We need it economically, we need it to reduce the terrible traffic in Somerville, we need it to create jobs, and we need to clean up the environment."

The least economically developed areas of the city are those which most heavily rely on bus transit, which is slowest and most dependent on traffic and weather. East Somerville, which has a high immigrant and minority population, is the area least served by public transportation in Somerville. Greene said that a similar revitalization to the one that came to Davis Square after the Red Line was brought there would come to economically depressed parts of Somerville that would be reached by the Green Line.

STEP estimates that a commute from Swampscott to North Station via commuter rail -- covering a distance of 12 miles -- takes 26 minutes. A trip from Union Square in Somerville to North Station by bus and rapid transit -- covering 2.5 miles -- takes 30 minutes depending on traffic. Students who have tried to travel from Tufts to the CambridgeSide Galleria at Lechmere are familiar with the difficulty of making that relatively short trip by bus or rapid transit.

Inequity in transportation also extends to the amount paid by cities to the MBTA. Even though Somerville only has one stop, it pays the same amount to the MBTA as cities such as Newton, which has several stops with parking lots along with a commuter rail connection and an express commuter bus to Boston.

According to Greene, the extension of the line is also environmental. "Around the same time that the state was judged to be out of compliance about ozone levels that were illegally high, building the green line was part of our state implementation plan," he said.

Even though the feasibility study brings "Lechmere and Beyond" a bit closer to fruition, it still has economic hurdles to cross, such as statewide budget cuts, and a number of ongoing projects with priority above the extension such as the reopening of the Arborway line. "Right now, it appears that the legislature is saying that they don't have the money, and the executive [branch] has been saying that they don't have the money, but I think what we really need is leadership and ownership from both of those parties to make a solution here," Greene said.

The PMT estimated that the soonest the West Medford extension could be completed would be in December of 2011. DiZoglio said that the feasibility study was a good first step for the project. "There still needs to be a discussion on the financing. Does it get us closer? Yes. Does it mean it's going to happen?"

We don't know yet."

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