



Massachusetts Chapter

July 23, 2010

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

Re: Comments on Green Line Extension FEIR

Dear Secretary Bowles:

In December the Massachusetts Chapter of the Sierra Club submitted to the EOE #13886 our comments on MassDOT's Draft Environmental Impact Report on the proposed extension of the Green Line from its current terminus at Lechmere Square in East Cambridge, to Somerville and Medford. In our statement we expressed strong support for this project and included several recommendations that we felt would further improve the new transit line, particularly concerning the design of its stations, and lessen possible negative impacts. Most notably, we criticized the planned siting of the new line's maintenance facility in "Yard 8," abutting Somerville's Brickbottom neighborhood. We advocated instead a serious analysis of two alternative parcels located farther away from people's homes and businesses. On January 15 the Secretary issued his Certificate on the DEIR, directing the transportation planners to prepare a Final EIR that addressed outstanding issues including the location of the maintenance facility.

After receiving much feedback from the City of Somerville and the affected neighborhoods, the FEIR has moved the maintenance facility away from Brickbottom to a parcel known as "Option L," located in the Inner Belt industrial district near the Boston Engine Terminal where commuter rail locomotives are serviced. We congratulate the state's transportation planners for their increased openness to public input. Yet there still remain issues to be resolved with the new location, and the state should weigh the benefits of moving Option L closer to the BET to reduce the costs of land-taking for the project.

The Chapter deplures, however, MassDOT's plan to make College Avenue the "temporary" terminus of the Medford branch for several years, one mile short of its final destination of Mystic Valley Parkway/Route 16, due to a shortage of funding. College Avenue is designed to be a station serving Tufts University and the surrounding neighborhood, one whose primary access would be by foot and perhaps also by bus—not via heavy auto traffic like Route 16, a station better suited to serve motorists coming from other suburban communities including Medford and Arlington. Having lived through the construction and opening of the new Orange Line in the Southwest Corridor a generation ago, *none* of us in Roxbury or Jamaica Plain would have tolerated any attempt by the state to truncate the line at Ruggles or Stony Brook, no matter what the justification. The same principle holds here, and the residents of Medford and Somerville are rightly concerned that the completion of that final mile might recede into the indefinite future. By spreading out the timeframe of the project, moreover, the state will end up spending more money in the end. The proposed delay is a sterling example of false economy, and we are now further dismayed by a report in the July 11 Boston *Globe* that the project's completion has been further pushed back, from 2014 to 2015 (http://www.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts/articles/2010/07/11/long_awaited_green_line_extension_to_somerville_medford_delayed_again/). We're left to wonder if this project will finally be completed even then.

We also wish to address our concerns with several additional aspects of the proposed Green Line extension, as put forth in the FEIR:

- The redesigned Monsignor O'Brien Highway adjacent to the new Lechmere station is unnecessarily wide and will encourage traffic to speed, presenting an obstacle for pedestrians wishing to access the nearby East Cambridge neighborhoods. Many T users regularly take the Green Line to shop at the Cambridge Galleria. While the Sierra Club recognizes the necessity of moving Lechmere across the street to build this extension, the prospect of having to cross a multilane blastway, on top of the added walking distance, might discourage some T riders from wanting to make the trek.
- Erecting a high-rise building on the site of the old Lechmere station might also serve to impose a bleak psychological barricade upon alighting passengers, a wall further separating them from the destination neighborhoods across the street. Any development on this parcel should maintain sufficient, attractive open space and good sight lines, perhaps through the adaptive reuse of the old bus station into a plaza with a public market and other urban amenities.
- We support the design of the Somerville Community Path from its planned terminus at the Inner Belt to North Point, ultimately connecting downtown Boston with the network of paths and trails radiating to the northwest. As one who often walks along the linear park in the Southwest Corridor on my way to the T, I believe that the residents of these neighborhoods also deserve such a first class resource.
- Union Square station needs to be designed and built so the line can be easily extended to Porter Square in the future, enhancing the connectivity of our transit system by creating a second transfer between the Green Line and the Red Line. But maps of the station and neighborhood appear to show the tracks dead-ending at a wall in the lower lobby of the station, with the Prospect Street embankment and a structure across the street (an electrical substation) further blocking the way (see the four Union Square maps and diagrams, especially https://www.commentmgr.com/Projects/1228/docs/057_DEIR-EA_V2_Figure%203.7-32_Union_Square_Station_Plan.pdf). When questioned during the June 30 hearing, however, the moderator assured participants that nothing would be constructed on that site to preclude a later extension. The Sierra Club hopes that this assertion is correct. This station also needs to provide easy pedestrian access to the Square itself two blocks from the station, as well as convenient connections to the half dozen bus routes traversing this neighborhood.

The Green Line extension is a critical project not only for the communities that it will directly serve, but for the entire region as a whole. But if it is to become a success in enhancing the urban fabric by providing alternatives to the private automobile—not only transit but enhanced walking and bicycling options as well—it needs to be well-designed and -built from the start. It is incumbent upon the Secretary to evaluate the recommendations of the public to make this valuable addition to our infrastructure the best project it can possibly be.

Respectfully submitted,

John Kyper, Transportation Chair
Sierra Club, Massachusetts Chapter