

# Notes from STEP meeting 25 February 2008

Date: February 25, 2008, 7:00-9:00 PM

Location: VNA, 259 Lowell St.

Attendees: Ellin Reisner, Wig Zamore, Karen Molloy, Steve Mulder, Andrea Yakovakis, Jim McGinnis, Kristie Chase, Avi Green, Bob Nesson, Eric Bourassa, Naomi Slagowski, Lilly Shoup, Todd Kaplan, Elissa Gargan, Allan Patterson

Notes by Karen Molloy

## 1. Brief reports on:

- a. **Posting on Somerville Voices blog** – The folks who run the Somerville Voices blog have asked Ellin to write/post an article on the Green Line Extension on this new site that is starting up. There is already an anti-Green Line/anti-gentrification post there.
- b. **Meeting with EOT** – Ellin spoke with Kate Fichter about an EOT/VHB meeting with STEP. We'll come up with dates, agenda thru email. STEP does not yet have a recommended position on the Union Sq. T stop location or route, but we would like EOT to study 3 alternatives. As far as we know, no one is working on a street grid to carry TOD in Union Sq. (or at any of the stops).

(Offshoot conversation took place about Green Line Extension headways: EOT states that the Green Line Extension to Tufts could have a 5-minute headway; to Union Sq., a 7-minute headway.)

- c. **Other meetings** – Ellin also has spoken with Ezra Glenn at MIT about possibility of design competition for the station designs; possibly could happen in 2009. Wig and Avi attended a meeting at Harvard 3 weeks ago about the Green Line and the Urban Ring. Attended by urban planners, engineers, Fred Salvucci. Harvard has a proposal for connecting Harvard Allston campus, Harvard Medical School with the Urban Ring. (BU also has a proposal for connecting its holdings. Wig and Avi communicated the Somerville interest in linking Assembly Sq and Innerbelt to these areas of discussion. Also expressed Somerville's interest in eventually seeing Union Sq connection with Porter Sq Red Line.
- d. **Launching STEP's new discussion forum on Green Line stations** – Right now it is empty. Can we handle website, listserv and forum? Or make the STEP website a blog? (Took offline for further pursuit by a subcommittee.)
- e. **Alderman request for commuter rail station at Ball Sq.** – Ellin attended the BAO subcommittee meeting addressing this issue. David Mohler from EOT also attended. (Alderman Sean O'Donovan who had originally proposed the idea was not at the meeting. David Mohler explained that the Union Sq stop is the SIP mitigation. Having a stop at Ball Sq would require a lengthy environmental review process etc. Introducing diesel pollution to Ball Sq is not mitigation for a project with the goal of mitigating vehicle pollution in Somerville.
- f. **Grants/funding research** – Ellin has found 4 foundations for possible grants; has forwarded the info on to Naomi and Lilly.
- g. **Organizational matters, preparing for annual meeting** – We'll hold the annual meeting in April to elect new officers, renew memberships, etc.

- h. **Engaging local planners and architects in community design committee** – We need to do outreach to the listserv, BSA, etc. Would be good to get some inspired help for Union Sq as the VHB designs were disappointing. The Boston Architectural College is holding a class on designing the Union Sq Green Line station. (They have asked Wig to visit but he could not make it.) It's a design class, not community focused. Would be nice if they shared the results with Somerville.

## **2. Eric Bourassa, co-chair of TROC and MassPIRG consumer advocate focused on transportation and transit**

Eric stated that MassPIRG supports the Green Line and would like to support and collaborate with the community in any way it can. MassPIRG has heard from its members that transportation and transit improvements are a big priority now.

The October 2007 MassPIRG report, "Derailed by Debt" looks at how the MBTA is saddled with a huge debt (\$1.8 billion) that is the root of much of its problems. For example, if the MBTA were relieved of its debt it could pay for deferred maintenance. The debt is mostly caused by Central Artery/tunnel commitments.

(Summary of this report can be found at <http://www.masspirg.org/home/reports/report-archives/transportation-agenda/transportation-agenda2/derailed-by-debt> and full report at <http://www.masspirg.org/uploads/AS/bR/ASbRnnDkSDFIFNB6MT5vpg/MASS-MBTA-Funding-1.3.pdf>). Recommendations in the report include the State relieving the MBTA's debt. Without debt relief from the state, the MBTA will be forced to implement significant service decreases, and enact fare increases.

MassPIRG advocated for the Bond Bill (\$800 million for Green Line Extension, Fairmont stops, Blue Line Extension). The Bond Bill must pass by 31 July. The Senate has stuffed unrelated and controversial items into the bill, so we cannot consider its passage a sure thing. In fact MassPIRG is lobbying to separate out the other items.

MassPIRG seeks ways to collaborate and organize calls to action. And is focused now on communicating the ways in which transit is an investment in the future. In March it will release a new report on the importance of transit in the face of global warming, and the need for MBTA, RTA expansion in our region.

MassPIRG is currently canvassing on transit expansion and debt relief. Eric said that when they canvass in the city, people talk about service problems. When they canvass out in a suburb, people wish the (T) were in their neighborhood.

Ellin stated what we all have observed: people don't know that all transportation is subsidized not just rail, but highways as well. (Andy Singer's cartoon best illustrates public perception: [http://www.somervillestep.org/files/cartoon\\_singersubsidy.gif](http://www.somervillestep.org/files/cartoon_singersubsidy.gif)) Discussion shifted to how the State Senate is still against the gas tax even though everyone knows the State is in a fiscal crisis. NY and CT got their .20 gas tax, but the makeup/dynamics of MA legislature is quite different from theirs.

## **3. Glatting Jackson TOD designs – New Partners for Smart Growth presentation**

Wig showed slides from Glatting Jackson's presentation at the February New Partners for Smart Growth conference in Washington DC. (<http://www.newpartners.org/agenda.html>, <http://www.glatting.com>) The presentation focused on designing transit and land use as one cohesive project. Points include organizing TOD with open spaces as a unifier, and planning transit, land use, public space and zoning at once. (Note: Dan Burden from Glatting Jackson, who also runs a non-profit Walkable Communities, (<http://www.walkable.org>) is giving a talk sponsored by Livable Streets on 10 March.)

**Next STEP meeting:** 24 March 2008 Location: TBA.