

January 6, 2010

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

Delivered via Adobe PDF to holly.s.johnson@state.ma.us

RE: Green Line Extension Draft EIR (EEA #13886)

Dear Secretary Bowles,

LivableStreets Alliance strongly supports the extension of the Green Line, applauds all the effort made by MassDOT and their consultants and appreciates being able to submit these comments to EOEA as part of the MEPA process.

Overall, we are very excited about the Green Line Extension for the many benefits it will bring to the residents and visitors of Somerville, Cambridge, Medford and surrounding towns. High-quality rapid transit will give people a more frequent and more dependable transit option, which we expect will reduce the amount of automobile usage and automobile ownership in the area, as well as reduce congestion and bring about cleaner air.

The DEIR very clearly outlines the general design of the Green Line Extension, which as currently designed we feel is on the right track to fulfilling its true potential. However, as with most projects, the devil is in the details.

While we realize that a 10% design stage cannot contain all the details everyone would like, we feel that there are many improvements that will be necessary in the final EIR and subsequent designs to achieve a first class transit system. Therefore we think it's critical that the following issues be included as requirements in the MEPA Certificate:

Community Path Extension

- The DEIR should clearly state that the extension of the Somerville Community Path will be designed by MassDOT's contractors as agreed to in a February 24, 2009 letter from the EOT.
- For obvious cost efficiencies, the Green Line and Community Path extensions should be constructed as one project and clearly described as such by MassDOT in their project documents.
- MassDOT should commit to work with the City and other State and Federal agencies to obtain the necessary funding to build the Community Path extension as part of the Green Line extensions (as was done with the Linear Park as part of the Red Line and the Southwest Corridor path as part of the Orange Line), including applying for Federal New Starts funding for allowed bicycle and pedestrian access costs.
- The Community Path route southeast of Washington St. is still only conceptual. We understand that this is because the support facility location is not yet decided. When it is and the Path route is chosen, it should connect Inner Belt, the Brickbottom Station, the Brickbottom community and the relocated Lechmere Station.

Route 16 Terminus and beyond

- The Medford extension should be designed and constructed to Route 16 as one project, not in two phases (the first phase stopping at College Ave), for the following reasons: building in two phases is not a cost-effective way to construct this transit system; the shortened system will attract far fewer riders; and this strategy increases the chance that the Green Line is never extended to Route 16. Furthermore, the Route 16 terminus should also be designed such that it can be extended to West Medford easily in the future, as originally envisioned (while of course minimizing property takings as well).
- The plans should show how riders will safely access the Route 16 terminus station from Arlington and Medford and from the Alewife Brook paths that are being improved as a \$3.6 million ARRA stimulus project. (The current plans in the DEIR do

not show this.) Safe routes for pedestrians and bicyclists should be shown from the west side of Route 16.

- A multi-use path should be designed and constructed as part of or parallel with the Green Line Extension project from the Route 16 Station to the West Medford Commuter Rail Station. This is a distance that is easily walkable in 5-10 minutes if there was a direct connection between the two stations, and would allow for commuter rail to rapid transit transfer, and vice versa, boosting the ridership of both transit lines.

Union Square Terminus and beyond

- The Union Square terminus should be designed such that it can be extended to Porter Square easily in the future.

Pedestrian Access

- Pedestrian access could be improved at some of the stations by having more than one entrance or access point (such as a direct connection from the Gilman Square station to the Somerville High School/Library/City Hall complex). The Brickbottom Station design seems particularly poor in this regard for riders coming from the west and north.
- The location of drop-offs (kiss and rides), in particular at College Ave. and Brickbottom stations are directly in front of the entrance where pedestrian access is most important and requires vehicles to cross over the sidewalk at two locations. Pedestrian (and bicycle) access should be given higher priority than these motor vehicles connections. A drop-off zone along the street itself would be more appropriate and would not invade on the pedestrian space.
- Improvements for pedestrian access in general should be further studied, particularly the placement of crosswalks at the most desirable crossing points as well as the widening of sidewalks and addition of traffic calming measures such as curb extensions and raised crosswalks where possible. In particular, the crossing of McGrath Highway to reach the relocated Lechmere Station is an area of particular

importance. Furthermore, appropriate wayfinding signage for pedestrians (and bicyclists) to help people locate the stations would be useful additions.

Bicycle Access and Parking

- The amount of bicycle parking presently described in the plans (270 spaces) is very welcome but will be insufficient for the expected number of bicyclist coming to the stations. 270 spaces is only about 1% of the expected ridership. Based on the present parking at Red line stations, bike parking at 3-5% of ridership will soon be needed. Therefore we request that the amount of bike parking be increased to approximately 5% at the Union Square, Route 16 and Lowell St. (major intersection with Community Path) stations, and to 3% of ridership at all other stations. Also, the location of the bicycle parking (where specifically shown in the plans) are good at some locations but not at others. The bicycle parking locations should be as close to as possible to the entrance and in well lit and safe locations. Lastly, bicycle parking should be covered if at possible.
- More attention should be paid to bicycle access to and from the stations. MassDOT should work with the Cities of Somerville, Medford, Cambridge and DCR to create bike lanes, sharrows, and other facilities that connect directly to the stations. Bike parking at the stations should be clearly marked as well, including how to get to them when their locations are not readily apparent.

Bus Access

- The DEIR does not show at all how bus connections will be made to the new stations. This needs to be added to the plans. We recommend that attention be paid to how bus riders are intended to transfer to and from the Green Line.

Livable Streets Alliance is a Cambridge-based transportation urban planning non-profit that educates and advocates for a system that better balances transit, walking, and biking with automobiles to make the Boston-metro region more connected and livable.

Thank you for taking the time to consider these important improvements to the Green Line Extension project plans. Please don't hesitate to contact me for more information at (617) 621-1746 or charlie@livablestreets.info.

Sincerely,



Charlie Denison
Board Member & Director of Advocacy

CC:

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