

friends of the Community path



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From: Rebecca Schrumm of behalf of the Friends of the Community Path

To: To the MassDOT/MBTA Board of Directors

Re: Public comment on \$95 million contract (pending approval by the Board) for preliminary design and construction management for the Green Line Extension project. The contract is proposed to be awarded to a joint venture of the Gilbane Building Co. and HDR Engineering.

My name is Rebecca Schrumm and I speak on behalf of the Friends of the Community Path. We extend our great thanks to MassDOT and to the MBTA for all your hard work on the Green Line project and on the preliminary engineering contract proposal that will be presented to the Board today. We greatly look forward to further progress on the Green Line extension.

Moreover, we'd like to thank MassDOT for the following commitments they have said they are making to the Community Path extension.

- 1st is the 100% design of the Community Path extension from Lowell Street to Inner Belt in Somerville.
- 2nd - Funding the construction of the infrastructure that the Path and GLX will share.
- 3rd - Identifying property acquisitions needed for the Community Path

And finally, MassDOT has said they will do environmental testing along the Path if required by the Federal government

We hope to see these commitments reflected in this \$95 million contract and in future Green Line contracts, so we can feel secure in sharing this good news with our membership and the with larger regional bicycle and pedestrian community.

On a separate but related note, we hope that the interim offset project proposal for the Green Line delay will be announced soon. At several public meetings in 2010, MassDOT asserted that interim offsets would be proposed in the DEP Annual Report in January. However, to the disappointment the Friends of the Community Path and others, the DEP Annual Report did not propose any interim offset projects. We hope to see some interim offset proposals sooner rather than later.

In any event, we look forward viewing the contract and seeing the preliminary engineering underway, so that the Green Line and concurrent Community Path designs can move forward. As we like to say with respect to connectivity: *"To Lechmere – And Beyond!"*

Thank you for this opportunity for public comment.

My name is Alan Moore, also speaking on behalf of the Friends of the Community Path. As Rebecca said, we are delighted that MassDOT and the MBTA are on the verge of starting the preliminary engineering for the Green Line extension project.

Over the last few years, the State's recognition of the utility, air quality benefits, and cost-savings potential of multi-modal transportation paradigms has been a most welcome sea change.

We especially appreciate the recognition of the Community Path extension as a worthy zero-emissions transportation project with bike/walk synergy that will increase Green Line T-ridership at a low cost per rider. We sincerely hope that this recognition continues with the passing of the Green Line design baton from MassDOT planning division to the MBTA.

We hope that someday the Community Path extension will connect the many dozens of miles of the Minuteman Bikeway and Charles River Path networks. Still there is a critical missing link in this plan. That missing link is the one-third of a mile of the Community Path route from the Inner Belt area to the Lechmere-Northpoint area, where, as shown in a [map](#) and [photo attached](#) to my written comments, a multi-use path to the Charles River has already built. Currently, there is no continuing design and no design funding for this important section.

While we understand that this area is challenging to cross, we request that, at a minimum, one or more alternative "corridors" for the Community Path be reserved via a 10% design during the upcoming Green Line preliminary design.

Performing at least this conceptual design would be consistent with Secretary Bowles MEPA certificate that the Green Line extension design include the Community Path and not preclude its construction. We request at least this conceptual level of design be clearly expressed in \$95 million preliminary design contract.

We have previously expressed why this one-third-mile missing Path link from Inner Belt in Somerville to North Point in Cambridge is crucial. Three of the many reasons include:

- So that the Community Path can reach Lechmere-NorthPoint and does not simply dead-end in Inner Belt.
- For regional connectivity. That is, without the Inner Belt-to Lechmere section of the Community Path, there will be no actual path connection from East Somerville -- or any other towns via the Minuteman Path -- to Boston.
- The East Somerville segment around Inner Belt has the densest environmental justice and car-less household populations of any segment. It seems incongruous that this area would be among the only neighborhoods with no direct Path access -- as compared to the other more affluent communities that already have access to the Minuteman and Charles River path.

Lastly, I would like to address MassDOT's January 31 response to the SIP comments about the Green Line, specifically on page 135, regarding their timing/engineering reasons for not being able to construct the Community Path sooner, as an interim offset project.

We understand that the entire Community Path, even to Inner Belt, cannot all be built prior to the GLX, especially the station connections and bridge underpasses. However, as soon as the southern retaining walls are rebuilt, the Path extension could be constructed from Lowell St. to School St., a major accomplishment - being able to reach Somerville High School, Main Library, and City Hall, etc. We presume that track relocation and retaining wall construction will be one of the first GLX construction phases, therefore the Community Path could be built, at least in some sections, immediately afterwards.

In summary, we hope that the contract includes - or will be amended to include - developing conceptual routings of the Community Path connection from Inner Belt to North Point, so not as to preclude its construction. We also hope that path construction for Lowell Street to School Street can be considered as a portion of the interim offset proposal.

We look forward to working with MBTA and MassDOT, Green Line and the Community Path extensions, which together will vastly improve the quality of life and transportation in the region

Thank you very much.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION (maps at the end)

At least a 10% Preliminary Design for the Route of the Path past Washington St. is Needed

At this time, it may suffice to complete only a 10% preliminary design of the route of the Community Path from Washington St. all the way to the DCR Charles River path (via North Point's path network) to assure a full and complete alignment. As with the FEIR, a 10% plan presents routing options, cost estimates, approximate grades, and whether it depends on other factors (such as a highway or transit bridge attached to it). It would not require details such as streetlights, precise widths, land ownership, exact elevations, etc.

Appendix E of the Draft EIR included such design information on the Community Path, from Lowell St. as far as Washington Street. However, there were no details, no cross-sections and no indications of interactions between the path and the Brickbottom & Lechmere stations or with the proposed Grand Junction path from Somerville to Cambridge.

Support for the Path

During the FEIR Public Comment period, members of the public requested that the design and construction of the Somerville Community Path be included in the Green Line Extension Project (over 125 comments and 175 petition signatures). Many of these comments requested that the Path extend to Lechmere Station (adjacent to North point) as part of the Green Line extension Project.

In his final Green Line environmental certificate issued in July, Massachusetts Environmental Secretary Ian Bowles made specific mention of the Community Path recommending completion of this section of the Path:

I have received numerous comments on the FEIR expressing support for extending the Community Path all the way to a connection with North point in Cambridge, and requesting that MassDOT fund and construct the Community Path in its entirety concurrently with the Green Line Extension project.... I expect that MassDOT will continue its efforts to support the project as much as possible. In finalizing project design plans, MassDOT should consider future path connections to North point, and ensure that the final design does not preclude these future connections. I strongly encourage MassDOT to continue to work with the City of Somerville and advocates for the Community path to identify sufficient funding for the ultimate construction of the Path.

- Bowles, I. A. (2010) Certificate of the Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs on the Final Environmental Impact Report. <https://www.commentmgr.com/Projects/1228/docs/13886feir.pdf>

Additional Reasons for MassDOT to design the Path from Inner Belt to Lechmere:

There are many additional reasons why it makes sense for MassDOT to design this last section with the rest of the Path extension:

- The Path and Green Line designs need to be compatible and to have all joint design issues resolved before Green Line construction, or the state risks cost overruns later for lack of anticipatory problem solving (as has happened in Somerville with all the recent bridge re-construction that will now have to be expensively redone).

- Multi-modal access should be part of every transit expansion, including the Green Line Extension project.
- The Urban Ring project, whose bridge could include the Community Path, is not now being designed due to a lack of funding
- If this section of the Community Path is not designed, there will be no connection from East Somerville -- or any other towns via the Minuteman Trail --- to Boston.
- There are skilled locals here who have smart, efficient ideas for Path alternate designs in that section.
- North Point developers have agreed to build the Community Path connections beyond this section through North Point (e.g., mostly in Cambridge), approaching the Charles River Paths -- much of this already been built.
- Massachusetts needs a “complete transit” policy to match the “complete streets” policy as specified by the Massachusetts Healthy Transportation Compact
<http://www.massdot.state.ma.us/main/HealthyTransportationCompact.aspx> .
- This East Somerville segment around Inner Belt has the densest environmental justice and car-less household populations of any segment.

With Somerville Environmental Justice Neighborhoods in mind:

- Notably, about half of the proposed Path along the GLX route is in the Somerville environmental justice neighborhoods of Winter Hill and East Somerville. These neighborhoods have no direct Path access now, as compared to the other more affluent communities that already have access to the Minuteman and Charles River path.

As part of the Green Line extension project, the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) has committed to designing the Community Path extension from Cedar Street to Inner Belt, but not all the way to the East Somerville segment of the Path from Inner Belt to Lechmere/North Point. Ironically, this last segment (East Somerville)-- the only section of the Community Path that MassDOT has not yet committed to designing -- has the densest environmental justice and car-less household populations of any segment.

Appendix E of the Draft EIR includes much design information the path, from the Medford End as far as Washington Street. Thereafter there are no details, no cross-sections and no indications of interactions between the path and the Brickbottom & Lechmere stations or with the proposed Grand Junction path. The Path requires a complete design between Washington Street and Lechmere and the Friends of the Community path (and other groups) can help MassDOT with this design.

- Four of the Somerville public schools near the Green Line and proposed Path extensions are in environmental justice neighborhoods. The Path will create safe, active routes to schools with good air quality, helping to fight the epidemics of childhood obesity and asthma. After dropping their children off at school, many parents can hop on the Green

line to get to work. Older students can commute to jobs and after-school activities via the Path and Green Line.

- By increasing access to mode choices that do not require fossil fuel, the Path will help with ADA compliance and accessibility, bring cleaner air, lower household travel costs boost area business and tourist economies, reduce congestion, and provide desirable path access and recreational space in Somerville Environmental Justice neighborhoods