



ARLINGTON TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

7 Twin Circle Drive, Arlington, MA 02474

January 7, 2010

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

RE: Draft Environmental Impact Report, Green Line Extension

Dear Secretary Bowles,

The Arlington Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) is writing to comment on the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for the Green Line Extension that is currently under review. We believe the Green Line Extension project can have a significant positive environmental impact on the region that includes Arlington, Medford and Somerville when the terminus is brought to Route 16.

Bringing the Green Line to Route 16 would serve an additional 10,000 residents living within one-half mile of that station. Getting more of these motorists out of their cars to use public transportation will improve our environment in many ways – reduced greenhouse and pollutant emissions, reduced congestion, and better quality of life. Four points are discussed below that would help local residents to choose the Green Line instead of their cars.

1) New pedestrian and cyclist paths are being developed by DCR that could easily connect to a terminus of the Green Line at Route 16. These projects include bike paths being developed in the Alewife and Mystic River reservations. It appears that these investments by DCR have not been factored into the DEIR. To take advantage of these investments and get more people out of their cars, it is necessary to allow easy pedestrian and bicycle access to the station from across Route 16 and Boston Avenue. For potential pedestrians and cyclists living on the other side of Route 16, easy and non-threatening access across Route 16 is essential to gain ridership. The ability to cross the Route 16 intersections Boston Ave and Auburn need to be upgraded, as does the ability to walk/cycle safely under the railroad bridge.

In designing access to the station, care needs to be taken to minimize conflicts between pedestrians, motor vehicles and bicycles in all forms of conflicts. For example, with its current configuration of 4 narrow lanes, few cyclists would choose to use Route 16. Fortunately, DCR is working on improving this with bicycle paths. Also, the station layout itself must be more pedestrian and bicycle friendly than represented on the station layout in the report (fig 3.7-27).

2) The pedestrian and bicycle boardings during the peak hour for Alternate 2b are estimated in the DEIR as 720 pedestrians and 40 bicyclists, extrapolated to 2030 from 2000 census data. This does NOT take into account the added pedestrian and cycling network being constructed by DCR that could make it easier for the some of the thousands of local residents to walk or cycle to the station. We believe the estimates of cyclist and pedestrian boardings at a Route 16 terminus in 2030 may therefore be significantly understated by the DEIR.

3) The DEIR indicates the taking of office buildings at 200 and 222 Boston Avenue, which house successful businesses contributing to the economy and to the tax base of Medford. This might be avoided by adjusting the Commuter Rail and Green Line tracks slightly to the east. We know there is hesitancy to take residences, but the general layout and traffic circulation at the proposed Route 16 Station does not provide comfortable pedestrian or bicycle access. Adjusting the land taking could enhance the usability of the station, reduce the land taking costs, and retain the property value base for Medford.

4) The pros and cons of allowing rider connections between the Commuter Rail and the MBTA at the Route 16 station were not discussed in the DEIR. The ability to connect to the Commuter Rail at Route 16 would allow Commuter Rail riders better access to the local community including Tufts and commercial locations, increasing potential ridership and rider convenience. This would need easy pedestrian access from the Commuter Rail to the Route 16 station, probably under the existing bridge at Route 16. Its potential benefits should be analyzed. It should be examined.

There are many advantages to performing the project in one phase rather than two. If in two phases, the significant environmental and other benefits of the Route 16 terminus will not be realized for 8 to 10 years, if at all. Separating the phases will add roughly \$50 million in 2008 dollars to the cost, and future inflation will increase this value. This estimate may not include the effort to go through the DEIR and other processes a second time. Very importantly, performing the project in one phase will most likely provide the best possible ridership-cost benefit ratios, which are critical in the competition for needed federal funding for the whole project. Finally, with two phases, the local residents will experience a second round of major construction disruptions. *If at all possible, we urge that the full project be done in a single phase.*

For the above reasons, the TAC suggests that 1) further exploration of the pedestrian and bicycle access to a Route 16 terminus with the impact of the DCR investments and pedestrian and cyclist friendly improvements, 2) a redesigned station layout considering the land taking needed and improved pedestrian accommodation, and 3) the option of rider connections to the Commuter Rail be conducted. This should be done in an expedited but thorough manner before acceptance of the DEIR. We suggest that the focus of this effort should be on the many regional, air quality and financial advantages that can be gained by including the Route 16 Station in the initial phase of the project.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely

Edward Starr - Chair
Arlington Transportation Advisory Committee

cc: Arlington Board of Selectmen
cc: Brian Sullivan – Town Manager
cc: Representative Sean Garballey
cc: Senator Ken Donnelly
cc: Steve Woelfel, EOT Green Line Extension Project Engineer
: attn Kate Fichter