

CAMBRIDGE COMMUNITY MEETING

SUMMARY MINUTES

LOCATION OF MEETING: Kennedy-Longfellow School, 158 Spring Street, Cambridge, MA

DATE/TIME OF MEETING: May 20, 2009 from 6:00 – 8:00 PM

ATTENDANCE: 72 (signed in)

PROJECT TEAM: Kate Fichter, EOT (Deputy Project Manager); Sue Clippinger, City of Cambridge; Kristine Wickham, VHB (Deputy Project Manager); Laura Castelli, VHB; Mark Louro, VHB; Regan Checchio, RVA (Public Participation), Nancy Farrell, RVA (Moderator); Charlie Patton, RVA (Public Participation)

PURPOSE/SUBJECT: The Massachusetts Executive Office of Transportation & Public Works (EOT), the City of Cambridge, and City Councilor and State Representative Tim Toomey sponsored the meeting to discuss the relocation of Lechmere Station and the Green Line Extension Project. Associated roadway changes, including multiple new pedestrian crossing of McGrath/O'Brien Highway, were also discussed by the City of Cambridge.

BACKGROUND:

The Green Line Extension Project is an initiative of the Massachusetts Executive Office of Transportation & Public Works (EOT), in coordination with the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA). This project will extend existing MBTA Green Line service from Lechmere Station through the northwest Boston corridor communities of Cambridge, Somerville, and Medford, with an extension of the main line to Medford and a spur line to Union Square in Somerville. The goals of the project are to increase mobility; encourage public transit usage; improve regional air quality; ensure a more equitable distribution of transit services; and support opportunities for sustainable development.

HANDOUTS: Winter 2009 Green Line Extension Project Fact Sheet

PRESENTATION:

City Councilor and State Representative Tim Toomey opened the meeting and thanked everyone for attending. He thanked Secretary of Transportation James Aloisi for his commitment to extend the Green Line and relocate Lechmere Station; both projects have been discussed for years. He noted that the cost of relocating Lechmere Station was originally the responsibility of the NorthPoint developer, but because of the lack of a firm timeline on that project, the Commonwealth has stepped forward to assume responsibility for the relocation. He urged the Commonwealth and the City of Cambridge to carefully look at the existing Lechmere design and to ensure safe crossings for pedestrians across McGrath/O'Brien Highway. He urged collaboration with the East Cambridge Working Group.

Representative Toomey said the other concern to residents is the location of the proposed Green Line Extension maintenance facility and its potential impacts on the residents of the Brickbottom Artists Association and the economic development of Somerville. He noted that there are also community concerns about what will happen to the site of the existing Lechmere Station.

Nancy Farrell, RVA, then explained the format of the meeting and reviewed the meeting guidelines. She stated that she would moderate the meeting and asked those present to follow some meeting guidelines, including keeping comments or questions to a reasonable length so everyone who wished to speak would have a chance. She then introduced Kate Fichter, Deputy Project Manager for EOT.

Green Line Extension Project

Ms. Fichter introduced herself and members of the project team (see Attendance). She explained that the extension of the Green Line is a legal commitment of the Commonwealth, and the relocation of Lechmere Station is necessary for the Green Line Extension to be implemented. She added that the designs for relocated Lechmere Station predate the Green Line Extension project – having been developed as part of the NorthPoint development project – but are being incorporated into the Green Line Extension project. She noted that EOT realizes that some residents and businesses of East Cambridge will be inconvenienced by the relocation, and EOT wants to listen to community concerns in order to minimize these inconveniences.

Ms. Fichter then discussed the goals of the Green Line Extension project: to provide transit to previously underserved communities; to improve regional air quality; to reduce traffic congestion in the project corridor; and, to provide opportunities for job creation and development.

She noted that the Green Line project has been studied for over 40 years. In 2005, the Beyond Lechmere study outlined a transit investment study. An Expanded Environmental Notification Form (EENF) was submitted in October 2006 and approved after an eight-week comment period. The purpose of the current phase of study is to refine the alternatives and propose a recommended alternative.

Ms. Fichter noted that the project is still in a relatively early stage, that of preparing a Draft Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Assessment (DEIR/EA). The project still needs to be submitted for Federal Transit Administration (FTA) New Starts funding, as well as to complete Preliminary Engineering, Final Design, and Construction. The entirety of the project is scheduled for completion by December 31, 2014.

The environmental analysis currently underway has examined: Green Line operations; community impacts, including noise and vibration; air quality; land takings; traffic and parking; the support facility; and, construction impacts. This analysis yielded a recommended alternative. The “mainline,” the longer of the two lines, will be constructed within the existing MBTA Lowell Commuter Rail right-of-way and will travel north from a relocated Lechmere Station to Mystic Valley Parkway/Route 16. The shorter of the two lines will be constructed within the MBTA Fitchburg Commuter Rail right-of-way and will travel to Union Square.

Ms. Fichter then reviewed the proposed station locations: relocated Lechmere; Brickbottom, Gilman Square, Lowell Street, Ball Square, College Avenue, Mystic Valley Parkway/Route 16, and Union Square. All stations will be ADA-compliant, with elevators and escalators. All will have pedestrian, bicycle, and auto drop-off access and nearby transit connections, where possible.

Ms. Fichter also discussed the support facility, which will provide vehicle maintenance and storage on the North Side of the Green Line to support the Extension and provide reliable service. It is proposed to be located at Yard 8 in Somerville because that parcel has the best

size, location, and layout. The site has also been in railroad use for many years. EOT will continue to work with the City of Somerville on potential area development opportunities.

Ms. Fichter discussed the Community Path, a proposed multiuse path to parallel the Green Line Extension from Lowell Street to NorthPoint. EOT is committed to completing the design for the path and is working with the City of Somerville and the Friends of the Community Path to develop a design that works for users and the MBTA.

Lechmere Station

Kristine Wickham, VHB, then presented the design for the relocated Lechmere Station. She noted that it is consistent with the approved NorthPoint development plan and remains within existing MBTA property so as not to preclude future NorthPoint development.

The new Lechmere Station will be relocated and elevated, and will be built on a new and realigned viaduct on the east side of Monsignor O'Brien Highway. There will be approximately 250 parking spaces at the station to accommodate commuter park-and-ride patrons and replace parking at the existing station. Vehicular access to the parking lot will be from Water Street. Pedestrian access will be provided along O'Brien Highway and East Street. Busway access will be provided at Water Street. The platform will be accessed using elevators, escalators, and stairs. Daily ridership at this station in 2030 is anticipated to be 11,000 boardings. Ms. Wickham noted that the concept drawing she was showing was only at the 10% design level.

O'Brien Highway Reconstruction

Sue Clippinger, City of Cambridge, gave a brief overview of the modifications to O'Brien Highway that will result from this relocation and construction of the station. The reconstruction has six goals:

- Minimize additional trips through O'Brien Highway/Land Boulevard./Gilmore Square
- Connect First Street directly to O'Brien Highway
- Discourage vehicles from cutting between East Cambridge and NorthPoint
- Provide the highest possible level of service for pedestrians crossing between NorthPoint and the East Cambridge neighborhood
- Design for current O'Brien Highway traffic volumes
- Provide bicycle lanes on O'Brien Highway

Ms. Clippinger noted that the new design would have five crossings between East Cambridge and NorthPoint to allow pedestrians more flexibility. She emphasized that all of the crossings needed to be safe.

DISCUSSION:

Alan Greene thanked Councilor Toomey for recognizing the East Cambridge Working Group in his remarks. He said that he had been going to Green Line Extension meetings for over a year and cannot believe that the addition of the Lechmere Station was added in at the last minute. With regard to the pedestrian plans, he said that people who live on Second Street will get a lot out of the design, but others will have to cross six or seven lanes of traffic. He said EOT and the City should be working with DCR to reduce the highway to four or five lanes. He also advocated that the remains of the existing Lechmere Station be preserved and converted into an open air market and development space. Ms. Fichter said it is not accurate to say EOT forgot about Lechmere, but in good faith hoped a new developer would purchase NorthPoint. Ms. Fichter said EOT is sensitive to the pedestrian crossing issue and has met with DCR and

the City on these issues. She agreed that the Commonwealth does not want to leave a hole where the existing station is and hopes EOT can help facilitate the development process with the MBTA.

A participant said that as a current Green Line rider, the MBTA cannot handle the current ridership demand to Lechmere. He also asked if there would be parking near the station. Ms. Wickham said that the existing parking would be replaced at Lechmere, but no other proposed Green Line stations would have parking. Ms. Wickham said that the Operations Plan shows that the Extension can provide peak-period level service, although additional vehicles need to be bought as well as infrastructure improvements made. Ms. Fichter noted that under the Operations Plan, both the "D" and "E" lines would pass through Lechmere.

Mark Jacob asked if it was true that the City of Cambridge had the right of first refusal regarding the parcel where the NorthPoint development is to occur. [Editor's Note: The project team has researched this issue and has been unable to find any documentation that the City of Cambridge has first rights to purchase the site of the current Lechmere Station]

Bill Johansen asked how many individuals will have to cross the Highway by the Galleria under this proposal. Ms. Clippinger said that the new design is very different than the current configuration. The changes will provide a shorter crossing on the Galleria side. Mr. Johansen asked if the walkway could be elevated, so that pedestrians could reach the relocated station without having to cross the highway.. Ms. Clippinger said that the new design makes it easier for pedestrians to cross in a lot of locations versus just one, and that elevated walkways are problematic for other reasons.

Steve Kaiser said he was happy to see EOT take the lead on the Lechmere project because the old approach was a failure of the public/private partnership. He said that the proposed new Lechmere station is the worst designed piece of the Green Line Extension. He added that the Boston and Maine Railroad claims ownership of 48 acres in the area, but can only demonstrate ownership of 20 acres. He said their land is undevelopable, and EOT has inherited a terrible burden. He suggested taking the approved NorthPoint design and throwing it out. Mr. Kaiser said that in 1999 and 2000, the MBTA and NorthPoint developers promised a pedestrian overpass that was never realized in the plans. He suggested that the City of Cambridge and EOT urge the MBTA to take the 48 acres by Eminent Domain, clear the title and have the land developed in a reasonable manner. He suggested using the benefits of such an effort to subsidize the Green Line Extension Project. He also said that he believed the approved special permit by the City of Cambridge is obsolete.

Rachel Stark said she is glad the Green Line Extension is coming near Arlington, but suggested that the MBTA needed to provide better pedestrian and bus connections at the end of the lines. Ms. Fichter said she was aware of the importance of these connections to stations, noting that with no parking and areas set aside for "kiss and rides," there will be an emphasis on non-automobile connectivity to the Green Line. She also noted the importance of parking enforcement in the communities served by the Extension.

Rosie Emperor asked if there would be any houses taken as a result of this project. Ms. Fichter said that there would be no houses taken. Ms. Emperor said she could not imagine how the McGrath Highway crossing could be made safe for pedestrians. She also asked where the drivers would park at Lechmere Station. Ms. Fichter said there would be a lot for employee and passenger parking at the relocated Lechmere Station.

Joseph Grassi said he was positive about the Green Line Extension, but had a few concerns. He said the new design of Lechmere Station is functional, but not as nice as the previous version presented by the NorthPoint development team and does not seem to be of the same quality. He noted that across the highway, the East Cambridge neighborhood was losing their local station, and residents will be forced to cross the highway. He also said the neighborhood is developing some residential housing on First Street and would not want to see First Street experience the type of automobile traffic experienced on Land Boulevard. Ms. Clippinger agreed that an important issue will be to keep commuter traffic off First Street and shifted to the east. It is an important challenge to make the scale, look, and speed consistent with the urban feel of Cambridge Street, not like Land Boulevard. Ms. Fichter noted that the new Lechmere design is not as elaborate as the previous version due to cost considerations. She added that the old design envisioned Lechmere as a terminal station and a gateway to the NorthPoint development, which is no longer the case with the Green Line Extension. She also said that the project team will be working with East Cambridge residents and businesses through the Preliminary Engineering phase to see if the design could be improved.

John Beron asked if traffic studies have been done for McGrath Highway. He said that currently pedestrian traffic can back up auto traffic through several light cycles. Ms. Fichter said there are design standards for complex intersections and improved signaling will help. Ms. Wickham added that the project team has collected the relevant traffic data and has calculated ridership and pedestrian usage to time the signals for the safest crossings. She said this information will be available in the DEIR/EA for the Green Line Extension.

Paul Cote, Green Line Extension Project Advisory Group member, said that he has been studying the plans for Lechmere station on the project website. He said that the station design and roadway network look like they were designed for motor vehicles and not for bicycles and pedestrians. He said there were limited sidewalks around the station near the bus connections; pickup/dropoff areas look very ambiguous; the station is surrounded by fenced parking instead of development parcels; the exit at the east tail of the platform should be an entrance as well; and the trees need to be incorporated into the design to change the perception of McGrath Highway. Ms. Fichter thanked Mr. Cote for his input and noted that the NorthPoint design had more space than the current design, which must fit solely within MBTA land. She noted that the station will be a major hub of bus activity and needs to strike a balance with pedestrian access and the need to keep the buses moving. She added that landscaping, including trees, will be come later in the design process.

Charles Fineman said that for pedestrians arriving at the current Lechmere Station, there is an information 'black hole' for those unfamiliar with the area. Signage is poor and misplaced. He suggested that the new station include better signs, including multilingual ones or pictographs. Ms. Fichter agreed and said that the MBTA is improving its signage, and this station is an opportunity to get it right.

Noah Chesnin, Conservation Law Foundation, asked if other sites for the maintenance facility are still under discussion. He inquired, for example, about the "Mirror H" proposal and its impact on East Cambridge. Ms. Fichter said that "Mirror H" is a proposal by the City of Somerville to keep the storage tracks within Cambridge, but the maintenance building in Somerville. She said that EOT was currently evaluating the proposal and needed to balance the needs of the MBTA system with the needs of abutters.

Chris Matthews, East Cambridge Working Group, said that much of the design for the relocated Lechmere has not changed from the NorthPoint plan. He noted that the developer had every

reason to make the intersections as nice as possible, but the state has different needs. He proposed developing a market square or "Lechmere Square" at the site of the current Lechmere Station.

Heather van Aelst, Brickbottom resident, said she wanted to express her support for the "Mirror H" proposal. She also suggested the new Lechmere site be developed with infrastructure needs kept in mind and asked how the Community Path fit in with the design. Ms. Fichter said the Community Path will be connected via the proposed Urban Ring busway.

Craig Mullenmeister, Arlington resident, thanked the presenters for holding the community meeting. He asked if the maintenance facility was a legal mandate. Ms. Fichter said that the Extension was required by regulation, and the support facility was necessary for the Extension to function. He asked what penalties the Commonwealth would incur if the project was not completed by 2014. Ms. Fichter said if the project is simply delayed, the Commonwealth must provide some interim air quality measures. If the project is vacated, another project needs to be substituted to provide the same level of air quality benefit. Ms. Fichter added that there are no plans to vacate the project. Mr. Mullenmeister also suggested EOT investigate tunneling options due to the cost of rebuilding bridges for the project. Ms. Fichter said that EOT investigated a number of tunneling options, and that summary report is available on the project website.

Michael Hegarty, East Cambridge Planning Team, thanked those present for having this meeting. He said he believed it was impossible to do this without including a design for Lechmere Square development. He also expressed disappointment that DCR and the MBTA were not present at the meeting to discuss traffic calming and pedestrian safety issues around McGrath Highway. He said the project represents a tremendous opportunity, but the overall benefits outweigh budget and coordination hurdles. Ms. Fichter said she understood his points and agreed in a general sense. She did urge participants to have a sensitivity to the current financial crisis. She apologized that DCR was not in attendance at the meeting, noting that she had not thought to invite representatives.

Bob Travis said he thought it was insulting that the MBTA was not in attendance at the meeting. Ms. Farrell noted that EOT is the entity responsible for planning projects. Mr. Travis asked about the project's impact on a local drawbridge. Ms. Fichter said that bridge does not interact with the Green Line and would not be impacted.

A participant who lived at Third Street and Otis Street said she did not want to see traffic problems exacerbated in her area. She said it was a disservice for the East Cambridge neighborhood to be asked to service others. She added that crossing McGrath Highway would be extremely dangerous and suggested depressing the roadway for pedestrians.

Ivy Turner said that she had attended dozens of West End meetings about pedestrian issues. She said that now that the project is complete, the plans for pedestrians had been a total failure in that area. She advocated installing a pedestrian bridge and preserving old Lechmere Square as a public space for the community. She suggested collaborating with the Glass Factory on the design and perhaps reconsidering the entire project.

Marie Saccoccio reminded EOT that some people impacted by the project were not attending this meeting because they are disabled and/or seniors. She said the site of the new Lechmere Station is not in a good location because these populations would have a difficult time crossing

the highway. Ms. Fichter said that these issues would be taken into account in the design. Laura Castelli, VHB, said the team will be following federal guidelines on these ADA issues.

Jay Wasserman thanks Ms. Clippinger for her presentation. He said the Number 5 crossing is particularly important because it is a gateway to the Galleria. He asked if it was still important that Lechmere retain its parking due to the fact that it will no longer be a terminal station. He also suggested that a developer build a bridge crossing like at Copley. Ms. Castelli said that general traffic along McGrath Highway has decreased since the Central Artery opened. It is expected to increase with NorthPoint development as of 2030, however, because it also includes Kendall Square development and less parking.

Wig Zamore said he believed it is a good thing that EOT has taken over the Lechmere Station redesign. He said it was imperative to make McGrath/O'Brien Highway as crossable as possible, by narrowing the width. He suggested the team work with the Glass Factory owners regarding the parking lot because it will be a gateway to the station. He said he would like to see the Community Path plans included in the diagrams as if it was all one project. He asked EOT to consider extending the Green Line Extension service to Porter Square. Mr. Zamore also asked about the status of the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). Ms. Fichter said the Commonwealth is currently working on the RTP.

**Attendance
(signed in)**

Jason Alves
Joe Alvin
John Baehrend
Elisabeth Bayle
Jose Borges
Lee Busch
Samir Charnalia
Noah Chesnin*, Conservation Law Foundation
Matt Ciborowski
Alice Costa
Paul Cote*
Mary Ann Dowornio
John Elliot
Fred Fantim
John Filoon
Charles Fineman
Craig Garvin
Stuart Goldman
Joseph Grassi
Alan Green, East Cambridge Planning Team
Joe Hardwick
Michael Hegarty, East Cambridge Planning Team
Heather Hoffman
Andrew Hum, East Cambridge Planning Team
Erica Jaquith
Bill Johansen, East Cambridge Planning Team
Steve Kaiser, Association of Cambridge
Neighborhoods
Lyn Kardatzke
Lew Klunk
Fran Klunk
Yugi Koga
Michael Lambert, City of Somerville
Jon Lenicheck, Office of Congressman Capuano
Judy Lindewood
Robert Lindewood
Perry Lubin
Charlie Marquardt
Robert Martel, Brickbottom Artists Building
Chris Matthews, East Cambridge Planning Team
Jim McGinnis*
John McLachlan
James McSheffery
Sandra McSheffery
Lynn McWhood, STEP
Fran Menezes
Alan Moore, Somerville Bicycle Committee
Kathleen Moss
Craig Mullenmeister
John Paul
Charles Poirier
Rose Ann Poirier
Ellin Reisner*, STEP
Phil Rinehart
Betty Saccoccio
Marie Saccoccio
Elizabeth Sayer
Tim Snyder, Office of Representative Toomey
Rachel Stark
Robert Staven
Mary Staven
Nancy Stiening, East Cambridge Planning Team
Melissa Tintocalis, City of Somerville
Rep. Tim Toomey, Jr., MA House of
Representatives
Ivy Turner
Heather Van Aelst
Adam Virgadamo
Jay Wasserman
Barbara Weir
Sarah Weir
Sarah White
Wig Zamore
Patty Zerhusen