

**MINUTES OF MEETING
URBAN RING PHASE 2 DEIR/S
GENERAL PUBLIC MEETING FOR BOSTON AND BROOKLINE**

LOCATION OF MEETING: Northeastern University, Egan Research Center, Raytheon Auditorium
Forsyth Street, Boston, Massachusetts

DATE/TIME OF MEETING: Tuesday, June 3, 2003, from 6:30 to 9:00 p.m.

ATTENDANCE: 35 (attendance log)

PROPONENT: P. Calcaterra, MBTA J. Freeman, EarthTech
J. Doyle, EarthTech B. Johnson, Bevco
D. Elvin, ESW J. Maxtutis EarthTech

JOB/TASK NO.: MBTA Contract No. X2PS92
General Public Meetings

PURPOSE/SUBJECT: General Public Meeting for Boston and Brookline

BACKGROUND:

The MBTA held a general public meeting to review the overall progress of the Urban Ring Circumferential Transit Improvement Project; provide information on the current alternatives and environmental analysis for the project's Phase 2 DEIR/S in the portion of the corridor that includes Boston and Brookline; and receive public comments about the project. Handouts were provided.

DISCUSSION:

1. Welcome

P. Calcaterra welcomed participants. Attendees introduced themselves. Calcaterra said meeting minutes will be sent to those who provide addresses on the attendance log.

P. Calcaterra said the MBTA began actively pursuing circumferential transit service improvements about 10 years ago. He said the areas in a corridor approximately 15 miles long and 1 mile wide immediately surrounding the downtown core contain many important regional institutions, places of employment and residential neighborhoods. He said the Urban Ring is intended to help connect people within the corridor and throughout the region with these economic and residential activity centers without requiring a transit trip into the downtown core by providing a network of transit services that intercepts and distributes transit customers before they reach downtown.

2. Presentation

J. Doyle gave a presentation (handout provided) that described the project corridor and existing transit network. He outlined the opportunities that the Urban Ring presents for improving the regional overall transportation system, the MBTA transit network, economic development and the environment. He mentioned the strong grass roots support for the project that resulted in the formation of the Urban Ring Planning Compact in 1995, and summarized how the full three-phase Urban Ring project was defined during the Major Investment Study (MIS) completed in 2001. He noted that the project is now in Phase 1, which includes the optimization of existing bus routes and the preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Report (DEIR/S) for Phase 2. He said Phase 2 includes a network of bus rapid transit (BRT) routes, as well as three new commuter

rail stations and improvements to five others. He also described the characteristics of BRT service.

Doyle then described the proposed Phase 2 BRT and commuter rail elements for the portion of the corridor in Boston and Brookline. He said commuter rail improvements would be made at Yawkey Station, Ruggles Station, Uphams Corner (as part of MBTA's Fairmont Line Improvement Project) and JFK-UMass. He said BRT service being evaluated would cross the Charles River on a modified Grand Junction Rail Bridge, provide bus-only ramps connecting the MassPike and Cambridgeport, and travel past the Sear rotary and the Fenway to serve the Longwood Medical Area, Melnea Cass Boulevard, Ruggles Station, Dudley Station, Boston Medical Center, Uphams Corner and JFK-UMass. He also showed the proposed BRT connections at Logan Airport. Doyle then showed plan and section drawings of station prototype concepts. He also provided a ridership forecast summary.

J. Maxtutis discussed the use of intelligent transportation systems (ITS) technologies to help BRT vehicles move faster and more reliably through mixed traffic. He said ITS technology would focus on the coordination of traffic signals to give Urban Ring vehicles preference at critical intersections. He said the ITS package that will likely be recommended in the DEIR/S would improve travel times up to 10% by giving BRT vehicles preference at intersections with levels of service (LOS) ranging from normal operations, known as LOS A and B, down to LOS E, which is more congested. He said the project team is coordinating efforts with the transportation departments of the municipalities in the corridor.

J. Freeman summarized the Phase 2 environmental impact analysis in historic buildings and archeological resources, noise and vibration, air quality, parklands impacts, and hazardous materials. He said the Urban Ring will not will not require the taking of any homes. He said impacts on parks along the Charles River and in the Fenway would be minimal in Phase 2. He said Phase 2 will likely have a positive impact on land use and economic development in Boston and Brookline; he said Phase 2 will also likely have significant net positive impacts on environmental justice populations.

J. Doyle summarized agency and public participation opportunities, including a public hearing when the DEIR/S is made available for public comment in July. Doyle summarized the Phase 2 schedule and highlighted upcoming milestones.

P. Calcaterra previewed the next steps in Phase 2 and noted that the DEIR/S will provide much of the information to demonstrate the value of Phase 2 in a federal New Starts application.

3. Questions and Answers

M. Delgado said he expected to see service to Kenmore Square. J. Doyle said Phase 2 BRT service is planned to connect to all branches of the Green Line with connections made west of Kenmore; Phase 3 rail service may include a direct connection to Kenmore.

Delgado asked if the environmental analysis will highlight areas where the Urban Ring may create new recreational and green spaces. Doyle said the conceptual planning of the BRT routes attempts to accommodate features such as bike and pedestrian paths where such plans by other are known, including the proposed Cambridge Community Path. In some locations of the corridor where busways are being planned the available right-of-way is not wide enough to safely accommodate adjacent bike and pedestrian paths. J. Freeman said the streets on which BRT vehicles will travel are relatively narrow, so opportunities to increase open space are limited.

K. Wepsic said the lack of a BRT Green Line connection at Kenmore will limit the capability of the Urban Ring to provide relief to overcrowding on the Green Line. J. Doyle said the BRT connections to the Green Line B, C, D and E branches will provide effective connections to relieve overcrowding; P. Calcaterra noted the potential Phase 3 rail connection to Kenmore.

J. Bassett asked for further description of the busway connection to the MassPike near the BU Bridge. J. Doyle said the concept involves bus-only ramps on both sides of the Pike connecting it with Cambridge via a modified Grand Junction bridge over the Charles River. The BRT connection from Cambridge into Boston being evaluated would use the modified Grand Junction bridge described above along with a bus tunnel on the Boston side of the bridge. The bus tunnel would pass beneath Commonwealth Avenue, the Green Line, Turnpike, and commuter rail line, emerging at a portal in Mountfort Street near St. Mary's Street. Several participants expressed concern about the potential cost of the tunnel and structures needed to accomplish the eastbound off ramp connection from I-90 to the Grand Junction Bridge. A resident of Brookline encouraged the MBTA to coordinate planning in this area with Boston University, which is in the midst of making campus improvements in the area. J. Doyle stated that the project team is comparing the costs and benefits of this alternative to a less costly variant that involves improvements to the surface route via the BU Bridge.

A participant asked what will happen if there is no money for Phase 3. P. Calcaterra said identifying funding for the entire project is an important part of the DEIR/S. He said the phased implementation of the project is designed to deliver transit improvements that, if necessary, can stand alone and still provide significant benefits. Therefore, he said, if Phase 3 cannot be built due to a lack of funds, Phase 2 elements would continue to operate.

A participant asked if the eventual rebuilding of the existing BU Bridge will affect Urban Ring use of the Grand Junction bridge. P. Calcaterra said there will likely be no significant impacts.

A participant asked for a description of how the Grand Junction Bridge will be configured. P. Calcaterra said the number and location of the bridge's piers would remain, but the superstructure will be widened to accommodate two-way BRT travel, rail, and the proposed Cambridge Community Path.

G. Linder of Massport asked the MBTA to check with Massport on vehicle height clearances, especially at Terminal B.

K. Wepsic asked about the status of the court consent order requiring that 60' articulated compressed natural gas (CNG) buses be tested by the MBTA. P. Calcaterra said CNG vehicles are now being tested on South Street.

I. Keefe asked if Ruggles Street will be widened as part of the Urban Ring project. J. Doyle said the number of auto travel lanes on Ruggles Street will remain the same in the preferred plan, but the additional BRT exclusive lanes will result in a net widening to increase the transit capacity of the street. K. Lagios expressed concern that the widening of Ruggles Street will adversely affect the pedestrian environment. J. Maxtutis acknowledged this concern and said the width of sidewalks will remain the same, though they will be relocated to accommodate the approximately 20 additional feet of street width. He said crosswalk signals times will be lengthened to allow for safe crossing.

K. Lagios asked if the BRT lanes will be open to the LMA shuttle and similar private transit vehicles. P. Calcaterra said the MBTA is working with MASCO to determine if Urban Ring service

can replace much of the LMA shuttle service, but the use of BRT lanes by any remaining shuttles has not yet been determined.

A participant asked if the MBTA has studied the Route 66 corridor from Wellington south. P. Calcaterra said that corridor serves a different travel market than the circumferential corridor and has not been studied as part of the Urban Ring, though it has been part of a separate study by CTPS.

K. Wepsic said that from an environmental justice perspective, is important that the types of jobs generated in the project corridor are suited to the skills and experience of corridor residents. She asked that such information be included in the DEIR/S.

A. McKinnon asked if the federal New Starts application for the Urban Ring will be in competition with other MBTA projects, including Silver Line Phase 3. P. Calcaterra said they will not compete; the application for federal funding for Silver Line Phase 3 will precede that for the Urban Ring.

J. Labeck of the Isabella Stuart Gardner Museum requested a meeting to discuss vibration issues. P. Calcaterra said he will contact ISGM to set up the meeting. Labeck expressed concerns about the impacts of bus turnarounds in the area of the museum and asked if auto traffic reduction estimates for the Fenway/Museum area are available. J. Doyle said area-specific auto traffic reduction estimates are not available, but the region-wide 24,000 daily vehicle reduction would not represent a large reduction in the Fenway area.

Labeck asked if the variants involving a bus lane on Louis Prang Avenue will require the taking of a traffic lane or the widening of the Fenway. Doyle said the clockwise loop variant involving Louis Prang Ave. appears to offer the best travel times for buses; and curb widths in the area would not be widened because bus-only lanes would be created by removing existing on-street parking along the Fenway between Louis Pasteur and Palace Road and re-striping the existing travel lanes.. Labeck encouraged the MBTA to incorporate the “natural” places in the area where taxis and private autos tend to drop off visitors.

C. Apicella asked how frequently vehicles would travel through the Fenway area. J. Doyle said there would be three BRT routes operating at 10 minute headways in each direction during the peak period , resulting in a total of 18 BRT vehicles in each direction per hour.

G. Hebert asked if the placement of BRT station locations on one side or another of an intersection affects ridership estimates. J. Doyle said small changes in station location do not affect the ridership estimates performed by CTPS unless the station is moved into another Traffic Analysis Zone (TAZ). Hebert noted that some of the conceptual intersection layouts showed BRT vehicles making left turns from the right lane and asked if there is precedent for this. J. Maxtutis said this includes an advance green signal for the bus. The project team is aware of this and is developing the concept further to address these concerns..

B. Steinberg of APT said he is concerned about pedestrian safety on Ruggles Street in areas where the street would be widened. He said it is important to remember that Phase 3 rail service is planned to run underground, while Phase 2 BRT service will run mostly at-grade, which adversely impacts performance. He said APT is against BRT because of it has limited benefits compared to rail and urged the MBTA to build the Phase 3 components of the Urban Ring. He said he is also concerned that dedicated BRT lanes will eventually be approved for use as haul roads for freight trucks, thereby reducing the demand for and use of the rail freight infrastructure, which is better connected to Boston’s port facilities, safer, and more efficient than trucking. He

said he will also submit written comments. J. Doyle pointed out that the only BRT segments that may include truck traffic would be the existing South Boston Haul Road and the planned East Boston Haul Road.

A participant inquired about the history and composition of the CAC. P. Calcaterra said the committee is a group of 21 people appointed in November 2001 by the Massachusetts Secretary of Environmental Affairs who represent the municipalities, major institutions and neighborhoods in the corridor. He said CAC meetings include a public comment period.

K. Wepsic expressed concern that ridership forecasts for the Urban Ring may be flawed, noting that the CT3 route has been shortened because actual ridership has not met forecasts. P. Calcaterra said that although ridership forecasting is by nature imperfect, it is used to compare alternatives and not as a prediction of actual ridership. He said the Urban Ring DEIR/S is incorporating data from the Central Transportation Planning Staff's (CTPS) improved ridership model, which provide the best forecasts available. J. Maxtutis said the model used by CTPS is accepted by FTA and used by other Massachusetts transportation agencies.

The meeting ended at 9:05 p.m.

Distribution:

Attendees (by USPS or e-mail as requested)

CAC Members (e-mail)

CAC Alternates (e-mail)

Agency Participants (e-mail)

J. Hunt, MEPA

D. Buckley, MEPA

L. Dames, MEPA

A. Brennan, MBTA

P. Calcaterra, MBTA

J. Cosgrove, MBTA

D. DiZoglio, MBTA

D. Parcon, MBTA

P. Butler, FTA

R. Doyle, FTA

D. Laidley, FTA

M. Mellow, FTA

A. Motter, FTA