



Massachusetts Chapter

May 21, 2010

Secretary Ian A. Bowles
Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs
Attn: MEPA Office EOE #14101
Attn: Holly Johnson, MEPA Analyst
100 Cambridge Street, Suite 900
Boston, MA 02114

Re: Comments on Red Line/Blue Line Connector DEIR

Dear Secretary Bowles:

The Massachusetts Chapter of the Sierra Club strongly supports the proposed extension of the Blue Line from its present dead-end terminus at Bowdoin Square, to a new connection with the Red Line at Charles/MGH station several blocks away. This project would entail boring a new tunnel from a point just east of Government Center station, underneath Cambridge Street and past the existing Bowdoin station, to a new Charles underground platform with an entrance from the headhouse of the existing Red Line station. East of this center platform, two short tail tracks for storing trains would extend underneath Charles Circle. Since the new tunnel would dive deeper into the ground at Bowdoin and also eliminate the curve at its present terminus, that station would either be removed entirely (the preferred “Alternative 1”) or relocated slightly while retaining its present headhouse (“Alternative 2”).

We believe that this link will be of great benefit to the passengers who regularly travel these two transit lines, as well as to riders on the other lines who use the downtown transfer stations. For those who regularly depend upon the Red Line or the Blue Line, the benefits are most obvious: Travelers coming from Cambridge, Dorchester or Quincy would have to endure one less transfer to reach the Airport. Residents of East Boston and Revere visiting Massachusetts General Hospital or its many associated doctors’ offices would save themselves *two* transfers, for a one-seat ride to their destination. The list could go on, but the benefits for other subway riders are equally evident: I live in Roxbury and work in Government Center, relying every day on the Orange Line. Frequently on my way home when I board the Forest Hills train at State station, I encounter people arriving from the Airport and carrying heavy baggage who must also squeeze their way onto the already crowded train—often to go just one stop to change again at Downtown Crossing. Both they, and we, would be better served by construction of the Connector, which would allow them a direct transfer to the Red Line while reducing the congestion at the existing downtown transfer stations.

Although the Chapter has no position regarding the elimination of Bowdoin station, we recognize the operational advantages, including the time savings, of a nonstop run over the half-mile distance from Government Center to Charles. Bowdoin is essentially a redundant station to Government Center two blocks away, and its removal would save MassDOT an estimated \$100 million in design and construction costs for its replacement. Befitting a station primarily serving the nearby businesses and state office buildings, it has for many years been open solely during normal weekday business hours and is thus of limited usefulness to nearby residents of Beacon Hill and Charles River Park. Yet if this stop is to be eliminated, MassDOT needs to ensure that the populations that currently use, or could use, Bowdoin will benefit after its removal:

I refer to the proposed modernization of Government Center station (DEIR, p. 3-12), which is beyond the immediate scope of this project but directly relates to it. Besides replacing the ugly, cramped, deteriorated 1960s era bunker-like headhouse on City Hall Plaza—emblematic of its age, it once sported a fallout shelter sign above the



Massachusetts Chapter

entrance—there are plans for a second headhouse connecting directly into the Blue Line to be located in front of the John F. Kennedy Federal Building, no more than half a block from the existing headhouse to Bowdoin. If Bowdoin station is to be eliminated, this new entrance *must* be operational before that move occurs, preferably with multiple access points on both sides of Cambridge Street and across the intersection with Sudbury and Somerset Streets. If, however, Bowdoin is removed without the construction of an adjacent second access, this omission would mock the promise of the DEIR that its elimination “would allow for relatively faster travel with *little transit access penalty* to passengers, who could board at either the Government Center or Charles/MGH Stations” (p. 3-14, emphasis added).

At the other end of this short extension, the underground platform at Charles station could also benefit greatly from a second entrance. This new stop would entail a center platform extending 320 feet easterly from the existing Charles headhouse to just past the corner of Grove Street. Passenger access would be provided solely via the headhouse, utilizing escalators and an elevator to connect the platform with the entrance and the access to the Red Line platforms. We urge MassDOT to examine the feasibility of constructing a second entrance at Grove Street in place of the planned emergency egress stairway at that location, which would improve access to both Mass General and Beacon Hill, while also allowing passengers an alternative to the hazardous street level crossing at Charles Circle (“I commuter calls intersection unsafe,” *Boston Globe*, April 3, 2010, page B2, http://www.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts/articles/2010/04/03/commuter_calls_charlesmgh_station_crosswalk_treacherous/).

To avoid the supports of the existing Red Line trestle and station, the two tail tracks will diverge at about a 60 degree separation underneath the Circle. The southern leg will end at the corner of Charles Street, the northern leg underneath the Mass. Eye & Ear parking lot (which will also serve as a staging area for tunnel construction). While the possibility of extensions later on is beyond the scope of this project, we do need to consider the future of the Blue Line, the shortest of the MBTA’s four transit lines and the only one to terminate in downtown. Once the extension to Charles is open to the public, it cannot fail to increase ridership—especially if the Line is ever extended on the other end to Lynn—fueling the need for more interconnectivity with the rest of the system. Over the years there have been various proposals to extend the Blue Line to the west, most notably to Kenmore Square and beyond to relieve pressure on the overburdened Green Line through the Back Bay. Our concern now is that the center platform and the tail tracks be constructed so as not to preclude the possibility of any such extension in the future.

The Red Line/Blue Line Connector is a critically needed addition to Boston’s transit infrastructure, one that by all rights should have been constructed decades ago. We believe that the concerns and suggestions that we have voiced on the DEIS can only make it yet a better project.

Respectfully submitted,

John Kyper, Transportation Chair
Sierra Club, Massachusetts Chapter