



**THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS**  
**EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF TRANSPORTATION**

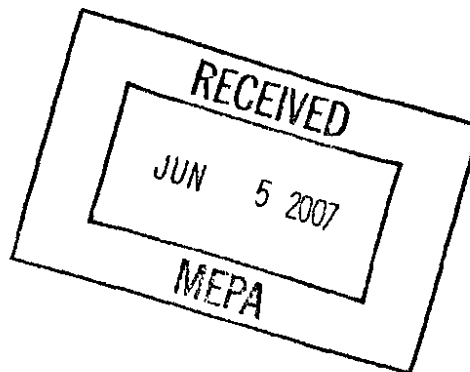
**EOT**

DEVAL L. PATRICK  
GOVERNOR

TIMOTHY P. MURRAY  
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

BERNARD COHEN  
SECRETARY

May 31, 2007



Secretary Ian A. Bowles  
Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs  
Attn: Richard Bourre, EOE #12565  
100 Cambridge Street, Suite 900  
Boston, MA 02114

Re: Circumferential Transit Improvements in the Urban Ring Corridor – Phase 2  
EOEA #12565  
Notice of Project Change to Special Review Procedure

Dear Secretary Bowles:

The Massachusetts Executive Office of Transportation and Public Works (EOT) is currently preparing a combined Revised Draft Environmental Impact Report/Draft Environmental Impact Statement (RDEIR/DEIS) for Phase 2 of the Circumferential Transit Improvements in the Urban Ring Corridor (Urban Ring Phase 2). The RDEIR/DEIS document is due to be completed by November 30, 2007 per the Certificate issued by Secretary of the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA) Stephen R. Pritchard on November 17, 2005. This Certificate established a Special Review Procedure (SRP) for Urban Ring Phase 2, and it stipulates that any change to the schedule would require a Notice of Project Change (NPC). With this letter, I request a NPC for the SRP for the exclusive purpose of extending the filing schedule by six months due to circumstances beyond EOT's control.

EOT is currently on schedule with its technical analysis and its public involvement process to meet the November 30, 2007 deadline for filing the RDEIR/DEIS. However, members of the Urban Ring Phase 2 Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) and other project stakeholders have raised serious concerns about the demographic assumptions that underlie the Urban Ring Phase 2 ridership projections. These demographic assumptions were established by the Boston Region metropolitan planning organization (MPO), and are therefore out of EOT's control.

EOT is concerned that a lack of confidence in the demographic projections would undermine our efforts to work with CAC members and other stakeholders to make difficult choices about Urban Ring Phase 2 alternatives. This would make it impossible to achieve a consensus on a locally preferred alternative (LPA) in time to meet the November 30, 2007 filing deadline. Therefore, I would like to request an extension of the SRP deadline for the RDEIR/DEIS by six



months, to May 31, 2008. I propose to use this extension strictly for addressing the concerns raised about the Boston Region demographic assumptions. I make this request in deference to the concerns of project stakeholders, in response to an issue that has arisen in spite of EOT's best efforts to adhere to the schedule established in the November 17, 2005 MEPA Certificate.

## **Project Description**

The Circumferential Transit Improvements in the Urban Ring Corridor (Urban Ring) is a proposed system of public transit improvements in a 15-mile long, one-mile wide corridor located just beyond the Boston central core, in Chelsea, Everett, Medford, Somerville, Cambridge, Brookline and Boston. The Urban Ring is intended to serve key activity centers within the corridor, and to connect the spokes of the MBTA's existing radial transit system. This would improve transit access and mobility for people in the corridor and throughout the region by enabling faster connections within the Urban Ring corridor; providing better transit travel times from existing radial transit lines to points in the Urban Ring corridor; easing congestion in the central subway system; and increasing overall MBTA system ridership.

The Urban Ring corridor passes through areas with existing travel demand and future development potential, and a portion of the corridor generally follows the alignment of the previously proposed Inner Belt Highway. The project would provide connections to existing and planned radial bus, transit and commuter rail lines.

The Urban Ring is proposed for implementation in three additive phases:

- Phase 1 would make a series of improvements to the existing bus service network in the Urban Ring corridor, particularly improvements to the MBTA's Crosstown and Express Bus services.
- Phase 2 would add a series of new, overlapping Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) routes in the corridor, along with expanded bus routes and transfer connections with rapid transit and commuter rail lines. This would entail new commuter rail stations at some locations in the corridor.
- Phase 3 would add new light rail or heavy rail transit service in the western portion of the corridor, generally from Sullivan Square in Charlestown to Dudley Square in Roxbury.

Phase 2 is the subject of the current planning and environmental review.

## **Urban Ring Phase 2 MEPA History**

On November 30, 2004, in compliance with the Administrative Consent Order (ACO), the MBTA filed a Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) with EOE. Amendment #2 to the ACO further required EOT to submit a DEIS through the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process on or before October 31, 2005, provided that the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) accepted proposed modeling revisions and the Commonwealth has identified the source of 50% non-federal matching funds. However, neither of these conditions were met in time to file the DEIS before the deadline.

In a letter dated May 18, 2005, the MBTA informed MEPA of its intent to re-link the EIR and EIS. In that letter, the MBTA explained that it is currently seeking the guidance of the FTA in the development of the DEIS for Phase 2 to comply with the requirements of NEPA. Additionally, the MBTA stated its intention to combine the DEIS with a Revised DEIR (RDEIR) in a joint document, which would respond to the comments received during the DEIR public review period.

On May 20, 2005, MEPA issued a Certificate on the DEIR in which the Secretary determined that the "... *DEIR submitted for this project adequately and properly complies with [MEPA].*" The Certificate then went on to state, however, that this finding was conditioned on the MBTA submitting a Notice of Project Change (NPC) in which it describes proposed changes to the Special Review Procedure (SRP) proposing a process, including dates for the MBTA to re-establish the coordinated federal/state review as well as to make proposed changes to the Citizen's Advisory Committee.

At the time, the MBTA and its consultant evaluated the level of effort necessary to complete the RDEIR/DEIS. Based on that review, the MBTA estimated that it would take 18 to 24 months from the time that MEPA issued a certificate on this Notice of Project Change and the consultant received a Notice to Proceed in order to complete this work.

On August 31, 2005, the MBTA filed with MEPA an NPC to the SRP Certificate. A draft of the NPC was given to the existing CAC, who provided comments on the NPC. In the NPC, the MBTA proposed the following chronology to re-link the MEPA and NEPA process:

- File a RDEIR/DEIS for Urban Ring Phase 2 with both MEPA and the FTA no later than November 30, 2007.
- File a Final EIR/Final EIS for Urban Ring Phase 2 with both MEPA and FTA no later than December 31, 2008.
- File a Draft EIR/Draft EIS for Urban Ring Phase 3 with both MEPA and FTA no later than December 31, 2010.
- A Final EIR/Final EIS will be filed at a subsequent date, yet to be determined. As previously anticipated, the Scope for the Phase 3 EIR/EIS would be defined through a coordinated MEPA/FTA process at a later date. The Scope of this Final EIR for Phase 3 would be issued in the same time frame as the Certificate on the Phase 2 FEIR.

The NPC went on to explain that the MBTA's ability to meet these dates is contingent upon several factors, most importantly, completion of all of the federal components to the FTA's satisfaction. Since the project now is (and hopefully will continue to be) eligible to compete for federal New Starts funding, this coordination is expected to be quite important. Alternatives to the currently proposed project phasing could also result in changes to the above outlined schedule.

In the NPC, the MBTA also recommended that the Secretary reconstitute the CAC to broaden the participation to include representatives from more neighborhood groups, additional public agencies, and additional institutions. The MBTA recommended that as part of the public review of this NPC, stakeholders use the public comment period to notify the Secretary of their interest in serving on the CAC.

MEPA accepted public comments on the NPC (including nominations for membership to the CAC) until September 27, 2005. In a letter dated September 30, 2005, EOT informed EOE that it secured the necessary funding to complete the RDEIR/DEIS. Additional correspondence in September 2005 informed the MBTA and EOE that in accordance with Chapter 196 of the Acts of 2004, EOT has assumed financial responsibility for capital costs of major expansions of the MBTA system. In keeping with this financial responsibility, EOT's Office of Transportation

Planning (EOT Planning) has assumed responsibility for planning and environmental review of major expansion projects on the MBTA system. As a result, EOT Planning now directs the expansion planning of the MBTA, including the RDEIR/DEIS for Urban Ring Phase 2.

On November 17, 2005, MEPA issued a new certificate on the Special Review Procedure agreeing to the dates in the NPC and establishing new membership for the CAC.

### **Urban Ring Phase 2 RDEIR/DEIS Progress and Status**

EOT Planning has vigorously pursued the deadlines included in the November 17, 2005 Certificate. EOT Planning prepared and issued a request for responses (RFR) for consultant services to complete the RDEIR/DEIS and hired the Earth Tech, Inc. consultant team. Since EOT hired Earth Tech, the project team has adhered to an aggressive schedule in terms of technical analysis and public process. Since September 1, 2006, the project team has completed the following tasks:

- Prepared a Project Management Plan and project schedule
- Prepared a Public Involvement Plan to guide the public process
- Developed a project web site, [www.theurbanring.com](http://www.theurbanring.com)
- Identified data needs and distributed data requests
- Reviewed status of the regional travel demand model, and prepared data and assumptions necessary to establish Existing, No-Build, Baseline, and Build Alternatives for modeling and analysis
- Developed a preliminary list of over 50 route variants
- Assembled the most promising variants into a set of four preliminary Build Alternatives
- Refined the four Build Alternatives and expanded the analysis to include several additional sub-options
- Executed detailed technical analysis of the alternatives, including travel demand modeling, ridership projections, neighborhood and environmental impacts, and cost estimates
- Held ten meetings of the new constituted CAC
- Formed CAC subcommittees for Alternatives and Variants, Traffic and Transportation, Finance and Development, and Noise, Vibration and Electromagnetic Force Impacts and held a total of seven subcommittee meetings to date
- Held two rounds of public meetings: the first round included a set of three public meetings in Chelsea on December 7, 2006; Cambridge on December 9, 2006; and Boston on December 11, 2006; the second round included a set of three meetings in Everett on April 4; Fenway in Boston on April 9; and Somerville on April 17
- Provided over 40 project briefings to numerous groups, including neighborhood groups, advocacy groups, business groups, and public agencies

In short, EOT has been pursuing the November 30, 2007 filing deadline for the RDEIR/DEIS actively and in good faith. EOT remains on track to meet the November 30, 2007, and is seeking to extend that deadline only to address concerns raised by members of the CAC and other stakeholders.

### **Demographic Assumptions**

Members of the Urban Ring Phase 2 CAC and other stakeholders have raised concerns with the demographic assumptions that underlie the Urban Ring Phase 2 ridership projections. In keeping with federal guidance, the Urban Ring Phase 2 ridership projections are based on the

horizon year 2030 demographic assumptions that were officially accepted by the Boston Region metropolitan planning organization (MPO) for its 2007 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP).

In the Urban Ring corridor, the year 2030 projections for employment growth included in the Boston Region MPO's current RTP are lower than the year 2025 projections included in the Boston Region MPO's 2004 RTP. In addition, there are a number of rapidly-growing employment centers within the Urban Ring corridor that include only minor employment growth for the 2030 horizon year.

As a result, members of the Urban Ring CAC and others have asserted that Urban Ring Phase 2 ridership projections based on these demographic assumptions would be too low. These concerns have been discussed thoroughly in a number of Urban Ring Phase 2 CAC meetings, and were also expressed in formal comment letters on the draft RTP from A Better City, the Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, the Conservation Law Foundation, Harvard University, the Judge Baker Children's Center, and the Medical Academic and Scientific Community Organization.

The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), the regional planning agency for the Boston metropolitan region, has been working on a long-range plan for the past three years. MAPC is currently completing this plan, which is called MetroFuture. The MetroFuture plan includes a vision for year 2030 population and employment that is different from that of the Boston Region MPO's 2007 RTP. MAPC has indicated that the MetroFuture demographics reflect "smart growth" principles that should reflect more robust growth in the highly urbanized Urban Ring corridor.

In light of the concerns raised about the current demographic assumptions, and the potential for a demographic scenario that better reflects current planning and regional vision, I propose that we seek to reflect the MetroFuture demographics in the planning for the Urban Ring Phase 2 RDEIR/DEIS. In order to do this, the new demographic scenario must be officially accepted by the Boston Region MPO. EOT has already begun coordinating with MAPC to facilitate the appropriate development and review of the MetroFuture demographic scenario to allow acceptance by the Boston Region MPO.

### **Proposed Schedule**

With this letter, EOT requests an extension of 6 months for the RDEIR/DEIS filing deadline. Because this extension will affect the subsequent filing deadlines, I also request six month extensions for those filings. Therefore, I propose the following filing schedule:

- File a RDEIR/DEIS for Urban Ring Phase 2 with both MEPA and the FTA no later than May 31, 2008.
- File a Final EIR/Final EIS for Urban Ring Phase 2 with both MEPA and FTA no later than June 30, 2009.
- File a Draft EIR/Draft EIS for Urban Ring Phase 3 with both MEPA and FTA no later than June 30, 2011.
- A Final EIR/Final EIS will be filed at a subsequent date, yet to be determined. As previously anticipated, the Scope for the Phase 3 EIR/EIS would be defined through a coordinated MEPA/FTA process at a later date. The Scope of this Final EIR for

Phase 3 would be issued in the same time frame as the Certificate on the Phase 2 FEIR.

I am hopeful that the Boston Region MPO, in cooperation with EOT and MAPC, can develop and accept a revised demographic scenario in time for Urban Ring planning to fully reflect these updated assumptions. In order to do so, it will be necessary for MAPC to submit a draft version of the scenario to the Boston Region MPO by mid-July 2007, and for the Boston Region MPO to review and accept it by the beginning of September 2007. EOT is coordinating with MAPC and the Boston Region MPO to facilitate these milestones.

If these targets for the new demographic scenario are missed by short periods, EOT will make every effort to respond flexibly and should still be able to meet the newly established RDEIR/DEIS deadline. However, the Boston Region MPO's completion and acceptance of a new demographic scenario is not in EOT's direct control. If the timeline for the new demographic scenario appears to be in jeopardy, EOT will keep EOEEA, the CAC, the general public, and other stakeholders apprised of this fact, and will address the issue in an appropriate manner.

I wish to reiterate the fact that EOT takes this NPC request very seriously. EOT and the Urban Ring Phase 2 project team have been working diligently and making a good faith effort to meet the November 30, 2007 filing deadline for the RDEIR/DEIS. We only make this request in order to provide the most constructive, cooperative possible environment for selecting a preferred alternative and finalizing a RDEIR/DEIS.

This letter will be posted to the project website at [www.theurbanring.com](http://www.theurbanring.com). It will also be provided to all CAC members and distributed electronically to all members of the public on the project's email list. I request that the Secretary provide notice of this NPC in the next edition of the Environmental Monitor and accept public comment on the NPC for twenty days, then issue a Certificate on the NPC.

If you have any questions, please contact Ned Codd, EOT Manager for Plan Development, at 617-973-7474.

Sincerely,



Bernard Cohen  
Secretary of Transportation

cc: Urban Ring Phase 2 Citizens Advisory Committee Members  
Congressman Michael E. Capuano  
Congressman Barney Frank  
Congressman Stephen F. Lynch  
Senator Jarrett T. Barrios  
Senator Cynthia Stone Creem  
Senator Jack Hart  
Senator Patricia D. Jehlen  
Senator Steven A. Tolman  
Senator Marian Walsh  
Senator Dianne Wilkerson  
Representative Salvatore F. DiMasi

Representative Paul J. Donato  
Representative Linda Dorcena Forry  
Representative Gloria L. Fox  
Representative Kevin G. Honan  
Representative Rachel Kaprielian  
Representative Elizabeth A. Malia  
Representative James Marzilli, Jr.  
Representative Michael Moran  
Representative Eugene L. O'Flaherty  
Representative Anthony Petruccelli  
Representative Denise Provost  
Representative Kathi-Anne Reinstein  
Representative Michael F. Rush  
Representative Byron Rushing  
Representative Jeffrey Sanchez  
Representative Angelo M. Scaccia  
Representative Carl Sciortino  
Representative Frank Israel Smizik  
Representative Marie P. St. Fleur  
Representative Timothy J. Toomey, Jr.  
Representative Brian P. Wallace  
Representative Martin J. Walsh  
Representative Martha M. Walz  
Representative Alice K. Wolf  
Representative Willie Mae Allen  
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Robert W. Healy, City Manager, City of Cambridge  
Jay Ash, City Manager, City of Chelsea  
Mayor John F. Hanlon, City of Everett  
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Mayor Joseph A. Curtatone, City of Somerville  
Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization – Transportation Planning & Policy  
Committee  
Marc Draisen, Executive Director, Metropolitan Area Planning Council  
Richard A. Dimino, President & CEO, A Better City  
Philip Warburg, President, Conservation Law Foundation