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Urban Ring Progress Report

To: Robert W. Golledge Jr.
Secretary, Executive Office of Environmental Affairs

From: Kenneth S. Miller, P.E.
Deputy Secretary for Planning

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The following is a summary of the Executive Office of Transportation's progress on planning and environmental review for the Circumferential Transportation Improvements in the Urban Ring Corridor project (the Urban Ring). This memorandum is in response to EOE's requirement for semi-annual progress reports related to planning for the Urban Ring.

Urban Ring Project Background

The Urban Ring planning and environmental review process has been underway for many years, dating back to the 1970s. The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) began the current phase of formal planning and environmental review for the project when it undertook a major investment study (MIS) that was completed in 2001.

The MIS identified the Urban Ring corridor running through Chelsea, Everett, Medford, Somerville, Cambridge, Brookline, and Boston; defined major destinations and connections with radial transit lines; proposed a strategy for implementing the project in three phases; and developed conceptual plans for each of the three phases.

- **Phase 1**, parts of which have already been implemented, includes a set of limited-stop bus routes through the Urban Ring corridor. The MBTA's Crosstown bus routes (CT1, CT2, and CT3) are the existing elements of Urban Ring Phase 1.

- **Phase 2** comprises a series of bus rapid transit (BRT) routes through the Urban Ring corridor. These services would overlap with each other to provide riders with improved accessibility throughout the corridor, and maximize the connections to radial transit lines. BRT travel speeds would be enhanced by dedicated lanes, exclusive roadway segments, and traffic signal priority where appropriate.
- **Phase 3.** The MIS included three potential alternatives for Urban Ring Phase 3. Each of these alternatives would preserve the BRT routes, but would also add rail service to the western portion of the corridor. The Phase 3 rail service would run generally from Assembly Square at the northern terminus through Sullivan Square, North Point, Kendall Square, Cambridgeport, the Kenmore / Boston University area, the LMA, Ruggles Station, and Dudley Square. Phase 3 may be either light rail or heavy rail. After the 2001 MIS, there has been no further analysis or definition of the Urban Ring Phase 3 or its relationship to the MBTA system.

Upon completion of the MIS, the MBTA executed a Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for Phase 2 that was completed in November 2004. The DEIR evaluated benefits and impacts of various BRT routings, alignments, and connections. The DEIR recommended a locally preferred alternative (LPA) for the Urban Ring Phase 2 that comprises six overlapping BRT routes serving the Urban Ring corridor.

The DEIR was originally intended to be a document that satisfied both state and federal environmental review requirements. However, changes in federal project guidance in 2004 prevented the MBTA from being able to make the document compliant with federal Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) standards in time to meet the November 2004 filing deadline.

Therefore, the DEIR satisfied the state Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) requirements, but not the federal National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements. As a result, a supplemental filing is necessary to satisfy these federal requirements. This document will be a revised DEIR/DEIS (RDEIR/DEIS), and it will reintegrate the MEPA and NEPA review processes.

Status of the Environmental Review Process

The Executive Office of Transportation is the new project proponent for the Urban Ring planning and environmental review. The change in project proponent from the MBTA to EOT is the result of Chapter 196 of the Acts of 2004: An Act to Restructure the Transportation Systems of the Commonwealth, which realigns state transportation planning and management structures. Among other changes, this law calls for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to fund the capital costs of future major transit system expansion projects. Therefore, the Commonwealth,

acting through EOT, has taken charge of planning for these transit expansion projects, including the Urban Ring.

Since taking over the Urban Ring project in late 2005, EOT has re-started the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) participation process; developed a detailed scope for the RDEIR/DEIS document; issued a request for responses (RFR) and conducted a consultant evaluation process; selected a consultant team to execute the RDEIR/DEIS analysis and prepare the document; and begun work on many of the tasks required for completion of the RDEIR/DEIS.

Citizens Advisory Committee

In its November 17, 2005 Certificate establishing the Special Review Procedure for Urban Ring, EOEA added new members to the Urban Ring CAC in order to ensure that the body includes appropriate representation for affected municipalities, resident groups, educational and cultural institutions, and public agencies. EOT convened the newly-reconstituted CAC for the first time in March 2006, and has held a total of four CAC meetings since undertaking the project, on March 7, June 8, July 25, and September 12.

EOT has worked with the CAC on the following tasks since reconvening in March 2006:

- Discussion of the environmental review process
- Review of the RDEIR/DEIS scope
- Participation in consultant evaluation process
- CAC structure and governance (including selection of a chair and vice chair and designation of subcommittees)
- Participation in a bus tour of the Urban Ring corridor
- Discussion of alternatives and analysis requirements

Request for Responses

EOT developed a scope of work for the Urban Ring Phase 2 RDEIR/DEIS. It disseminated the scope to several agencies, including the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), EOEA, and the MBTA, as well as to the CAC. EOT solicited feedback from these parties, revised the scope, and issued it in an RFR on June 2, 2006 in order to hire a consultant for the RDEIR/DEIS.

The RFR scope of work included the following principal tasks:

1. Project Management Plan
2. Public Participation Plan
 - CAC meetings
 - CAC subcommittee meetings

- Legislative briefings
 - Stakeholder outreach briefings (hosted by other organizations)
 - Major public meetings
 - Brochures, web page
3. CTPS Coordination
 - 2030 horizon year
 - Consistent with Boston MPO 2007 RTP
 4. Purpose and Need, Existing Conditions, Future Baseline Updates to DEIR information
 5. Goals, Objectives, Evaluation Criteria
 - Update DEIR goals and objectives
 - Update DEIR criteria, consistent with (but not limited to) FTA New Starts criteria
 6. Alternatives
 - Future Baseline – FTA review and approval
 - DEIR Locally Preferred Alternative
 - 3 new alternatives (based on up to 25 route “variants,” including those in EOECA Certificate)
 - Define mode, route, connections with other lines, connections with land use, right-of-way requirements, service and operating plans, maintenance, safety and security
 7. Transportation Impacts and Mitigation
 - Regional travel
 - Transit system
 - Urban Ring Phase 3 interface
 - Traffic, roadways, and parking
 - Freight
 - Waterways
 8. Environmental Impacts and Mitigation
 - Land use
 - Displacement and relocation
 - Neighborhoods and populations
 - Visual resources and aesthetics
 - Air quality
 - Noise and vibration
 - Plant and animal species, habitats
 - Water resources
 - Energy
 - Geology and soils
 - Hazardous materials
 - Electromagnetic fields and moving metal
 - Public services and utilities
 - Historic and Archaeological
 - Parklands and open space

- Construction impacts
 - Cumulative impacts
9. Capital, Operating and Maintenance Costs
 10. Alternatives Evaluation
 - Cost effectiveness
 - Comparative analysis
 - Locally preferred alternative
 - Phasing plan
 11. Financial Analysis
 12. RDEIR/DEIS Document
 13. RDEIR/DEIS Hearing
 14. New Starts or Small Starts Application to FTA

Four teams of consultants submitted proposals for the Urban Ring Phase 2 RDEIR/DEIS on July 14, 2006. The four teams were headed by the Louis Berger Group, Inc.; DMJM Harris Inc.; Earth Tech Inc.; and the URS Corporation. The Consultant Evaluation Committee met several times to discuss the consultant proposals. On August 15, 2006 the Evaluation Committee conducted interviews with all four consultant teams; the CAC Chair and Vice Chair participated in the interviews and provided input to the Evaluation Committee.

Based on proposals, interviews, and the input from the CAC representatives, the Evaluation Committee selected Earth Tech Inc. as the preferred consultant team. EOT notified Earth Tech Inc. and the other consultant teams on August 21, 2006, and has been working with Earth Tech Inc. to develop and execute a contract since then. The final executed contract is expected to be signed within the next two weeks.

RDEIR/DEIS Analysis

Even before the execution of the contract, EOT and the Earth Tech consultant team have been collaborating on early action items to move the process forward. The following are tasks that are currently underway, arranged according to the corresponding task on the overall project scope:

Task 1 – Project Management Plan

- Developed project master schedule. Coordinated this schedule with the public involvement plan and the schedule of CAC and Subcommittee meetings in order to sequence the technical work and key decision points to ensure maximum exchange of information with project stakeholders and opportunity for review and comment.

NOTE: The current project schedule is designed to produce a RDEIR/DEIS document in time to meet the EOEA submission deadline of November 30, 2007. EOT, the Earth Tech team, and the CAC are working together to establish meeting schedules, submission deadlines, and work plans that will help to realize

this schedule. Although it is still early in the schedule, these tasks remain on track for November 30, 2007 deadline.

Task 2 – Public Participation Plan

- Prepared draft Public Involvement Plan (PIP) and coordinated it with the CAC schedule.
- Coordinated with the CAC on the type and timing of CAC-related technical reviews needed during the course of the work.
- Worked with the CAC to create technical Subcommittees.
- Initiated agency coordination with the MBTA and other federal and state agencies with Urban Ring interfaces. Established coordination channels with Urban Ring Compact municipalities.
- Established framework for project web site and acquired domain name www.theurbanring.com and prepared to launch site to the public.

Task 3 – CTPS Coordination

- Continued to coordinate with the MPO and CTPS on key issues such as future land use and transportation network assumptions for the horizon year 2030.

Task 4 – Purpose and Need, Existing Conditions, Future Baseline

- Initiated base map update process at selected locations in the corridor using combination of GIS, aerials, and ground survey.
- Initiated data requests to the 7 cities and towns in the corridor to obtain existing and future baseline information on transportation and the environment.

Task 5 – Goals, Objectives, Evaluation Criteria

- Began work on updating the project goals and objectives, and evaluation criteria established in the MIS and DEIR in order to reflect latest existing and future baseline conditions.

Task 6 – Alternatives

- Met with CAC on September 12 to discuss variant and alternatives process. Agreed upon schedule of technical work, subcommittee reviews, and intensive analysis to develop list of variants to be evaluated and framework for creating and evaluating the No-Build, New Starts Baseline, and Build Alternatives.

Tasks 7 through 14

- Nothing to report yet.