

## Sidewalk spat could stall greenway work

By Casey Ross

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**A**n intractable turf battle over 125 feet of downtown sidewalk is threatening to delay completion of the Rose Kennedy Greenway's first major development and poison efforts to build pedestrian-friendly parks between North Station and Chinatown.

Despite more than two months of talks, developers of the InterContinental Hotel, city officials and environmental groups still are locked in a heated dispute over a plan to reroute pedestrians around the hotel's automobile traffic.

"After billions of dollars of public investment to move the Central Artery underground . . . the Surface Artery should not be compromised to serve automobiles," the Conservation Law Foundation states in a letter to protest the current plan. "We do not need another Central Artery above ground."

The opposition to the hotel plan, spearheaded by the pedestrian group WalkBoston, has drawn a flood of comments to state regulators who have delayed a deadline for resolving the matter four times to allow more opportunity for compromise.

If an agreement is not reached within weeks, regulators could call for a deeper review that would set back completion of the \$500 million hotel as well as the greenway's first steps toward a more walkable downtown.

The hotel's developer, Extell Boston Harbor LLC., has vowed to negotiate an agreement with city officials and advocates but insists the sidewalk plans were hashed out years before WalkBoston mounted its protest.

"The developer worked intensively with every permitting agency, including city agencies, to come up with the specific design that was acceptable to them as the permitting process requires," said Ann Carter, a spokeswoman for Extell.

The parties are currently considering alternatives to a two-lane traffic pullout in front of the hotel that would force pedestrians to walk under the hotel's awning or fight through vehicle traffic to continue along the greenway.

"We're concerned about the precedent set by this first big development," said WalkBoston director Wendy Landman. "One thing that has come out of this is that we need a better process for dealing with the evolution of projects along the greenway."



Pedestrians navigate a temporary sidewalk at the 500 block of Atlantic Avenue yesterday. (Staff photo by Ted Fitzgerald)

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