



WalkBoston

September 10, 2007

Gerald Autler
Boston Redevelopment Authority
Room 910
City Hall
Boston, MA 02210

RE: Draft Project Impact Report, Harvard University Allston Science Complex

Dear Mr. Autler:

We have reviewed the DPIR for the Harvard University Allston Science Complex, comprising the initial elements of the development of 200 acres in the Allston neighborhood of Boston. Our comments address the pedestrian environment, parking and proposed changes in traffic patterns that will affect pedestrians.

Summary of comments

- The proposed Harvard Allston Science Complex marks the beginning of development of 200 acres in the City of Boston. It will be the guide to detailing pedestrian paths and walkways for the whole district.
- The proposal suggests a hierarchy of pedestrian facilities that reflect the differing functions of walkways along major and minor streets and off-street facilities such as greenways and courtyard paths.
- Design standards must be determined for pedestrian facilities – widths of sidewalk, space for landscaping and street furniture, etc. for walkways along streets. Design standards for off-road paths should also be instituted and might present different standards for different paths in the hierarchy.
- For maximum convenience and comfort for pedestrians, the edges of the Science Complex should serve as pedestrian and bicycle routes while the interior of the complex should be reserved to pedestrians.
- Separate walking and bicycle paths should be provided wherever possible.
- Off-road pedestrian paths should provide for eventual connections to the Charles River, into the residential community, and to the proposed Barry's Corner retail area.
- Pedestrian access from the Science Complex to the existing river crossings should be detailed for the Anderson Bridge, the Weeks Footbridge and the Western Avenue Bridge. Connections between sidewalks and the riverside walkways at each bridge should be included. This is especially important at the difficult pedestrian crossings of Soldiers Field Road/Storrow Drive on Western Avenue and at North Harvard Street.
- Traffic calming features should be added at or near the intersection of Western Avenue and Stadium Way, such as curb extensions at major intersections, street trees, curbside parking or mid-block crossings.
- Additional analysis of pedestrian service should be provided, such as the levels of service at intersections, and prospective signal timing to maximize pedestrian crossing times.
- Paving materials should provide flat surfaces for mobility-impaired pedestrians and for wheelchairs.

- Changes in transit service, routings, stops and nodes should be determined as an early part of planning.
- Public access to shuttle services should be provided by Harvard and MASCO.
- Harvard and the City of Boston should work closely in planning for Barry's Corner to connect the new retail facilities with the Harvard Allston major and minor street walkways, greenways and courtyard pedestrian walkways.
- Commercial activities located within the Science Complex along Western Avenue and Stadium Way should be carefully related to the proposals for retail areas in Barry's Corner.
- Pedestrian safety should be uppermost during and after construction.

Overview of the proposed Allston Science Complex

The proposal calls for 537,000 sq. ft. of above-ground space within four buildings. An additional 52,000 sq. ft. of research support facilities will be built below ground, along with a distributed energy facility and parking for 350 cars. (An additional 150 cars will be parked across Western Avenue.) Many pedestrian access points will be required for the buildings, which include research and office space, retail space, an auditorium, a day care center and a café or restaurant open to the public.

Major pedestrian sidewalks and paths are outlined for all four sides of the site: Western Avenue, Rena Street Extended, Stadium Way and a pedestrian/bicycle corridor called Academic Way. New sidewalks and paths will be constructed to interconnect at the four corners of the complex and are designed to accommodate both pedestrian and bicycle passage. Smaller-scale paths serve the publicly accessible courtyard. Parking and loading access for the Science Complex is from Rena Street Extended.

New pedestrian facilities will be added to Western Avenue. Rena Street Extended, Stadium Way and Academic Way are new facilities that will include pedestrian sidewalks and paths. Some temporary extensions of pedestrian routes outside the Science Complex may be constructed to improve connections into the nearby residential neighborhood and to Barry's Corner.

Relationship of the Science Complex to the Institutional Master Plan

Although the Science Complex occupies only 8.5 acres, it is an integral portion of the planning effort for the entire 200 acres and the proposed 9 – 10 million square feet to be built over 50 years. In reviewing the proposal, we referred to the draft institutional master plan for the 200 acres in Allston. We discovered many instances where this project will have a major impact on the remainder of the facilities to be constructed throughout the areas to be built by Harvard, setting standards and examples through decisions on detailing of facilities. Yet the pedestrian environment information in the Science Complex DPIR is not specified, and precision is desirable for all details of pedestrian service because of the precedent they will set for other projects in the 200-acre development area.

Of direct importance to this project, the institutional master plan shows a pedestrian facility network focused on walkways along the major streets abutting the Science Complex – Western Avenue, Stadium Way, Academic Way and Rena Street Extended. Although these thoroughfares have sidewalks and facilities for bicycles, there are no clear indications of the intended design standards for these facilities. There are no indications of proposed sidewalk widths, landscaping, street furniture, transit stops, or how the space will be divided between pedestrians and bicycles. There is no discussion of potential traffic calming for the project,

including sidewalk extensions at the major intersections to be constructed as part of this project where Academic Way and Stadium Way meet Western Avenue. There is no analysis of the level of service to be provided to pedestrians at these major intersections. There is no indication of how the project will provide for mobility-impaired pedestrians or people in wheelchairs through ramps at the intersections or through flat surfaces on sidewalks that do not involve the use of bricks or paving stones. There are few indications of how entrances to the buildings and the central courtyard and the locations of bicycle racks can be made easily recognizable and accessible from these four surrounding thoroughfares. All of these design details must be addressed to assess the project's pedestrian friendliness.

An integral part of the institutional master plan is an extensive network of mid-block pedestrian ways that may interconnect the new development throughout the 200 acres. This project includes the first major piece of a potentially large off-street network: Academic Way (the north-south path), will begin life as the edge of the Science Complex and eventually become the heart of the "West Yard" to be formed when the Science Complex is enlarged to the west. Through temporary connections, Academic Way should be linked to both Rena Park and Seattle Street as part of the implementation of the Science Complex. We recommend that Greenways such as Academic Way have design standards that include wide sidewalks, separation of pedestrians and bicycles, directional signage, and places to rest.

Abutting the south edge of the complex is Rena Street Extended, a short local street with sidewalks, which, for purposes of this project, serves principally as the access to on-site parking and loading. Yet it could serve as a major pedestrian/bicycle route. This street is a boundary between the Science Complex and the proposed longer-term Rena Park, which extends between North Harvard Street and Stadium Way. The park provides a buffer between the Science Complex and the residential community of Allston, and connects the existing public library on North Harvard Street to Stadium Way. The park is also the front yard for proposed Harvard housing. The park and the housing proposals suggest that Rena Park will be small-scale and low-key, more like the Academic Way Greenway than the heavily trafficked Stadium Way and Western Avenue. This community street character is incompatible with access for loading docks and parking ramps, and presents a negative side of the Science Complex to the community. We recommend that the parking and loading functions be handled on a street that is less residential and park-oriented. Without this relocation, we fear that Rena Park will become the service and parking access for not only these buildings, but also for the future buildings planned as the other half of the "West Yard" which will complement the Science Complex on the west side of Academic Way.

Within the four surrounding thoroughfares, the Science Complex takes on aspects of a small academic enclave. The mid-block path through the Science Complex, sometimes called Bertram Way because it eventually will connect to Bertram Street near Barry's Corner, should have smaller, more intimate dimensions, and be reserved primarily for pedestrians, complemented by "Please walk your bike" signs, as in Harvard Yard.

For safety purposes, all intersections should be carefully examined to determine the details of signalization for pedestrian and bicycle safety. High on the list will be the intersections of Academic Way and Stadium Way with Western Avenue. Traffic calming measures such as curb extensions may be appropriate for both intersections.

Existing and proposed transit connections that affect pedestrian movement patterns

Four existing bus routes serve the areas to be connected to the West Yard. Shuttle services are currently operated by Harvard between Allston (at the HBS Rotary and the Stadium) and the main campus and by MASCO between Harvard Square and the Longwood Medical Area using Massachusetts Avenue as its route.

To serve the Science Complex, Harvard proposes to add shuttle services:

- A fixed route service connecting Harvard Square, the Stadium, Barry's Corner and the HBS rotary via North Harvard St.
- A fixed route service connecting the Science Complex to the Longwood Medical Area via Storrow Drive.

Precise street routes to be followed by these services and bus stop locations are not detailed in the DPIR. An additional feature of the shuttles may extend the route from the Science Complex to the Maxwell Dworkin Building located in the center of the law school/divinity school/science buildings on Oxford Street.

New shuttle services from the west and north may be desirable. Services from the west are especially promising because of the potential use of the Turnpike, immediately adjacent to the Allston campus.

We are concerned that the proposed transit network may be insufficient to adequately serve the Science Complex, and that transit services may be overwhelmed by the addition of the demand for services to and from the Complex. Our concern arises in part from the unstated demands that may come from students looking for access between the older campuses and the new Science Complex to move between classes, for research purposes, and to get to services and facilities not provided at the Science Complex in its initial stages.

To increase the use of transit for access to the site, it may be appropriate to consider a lower target for the extent of auto access to the site. The present vehicular access target of 50% of total traffic to the site is much higher than should be attainable in an academic environment. We believe that the goal for the Allston Campus should be to meet the level of non-auto access that is achieved by the Cambridge campus. As reported in Harvard's 2006 Parking and Transportation Demand Management report, "Approximately 85% of employees commute to campus using alternative modes of transportation (public transit, bicycling, walking) — an increase of 2% over 2005." (Source: <http://www.upo.harvard.edu/Reports/ptdm.html>).

Transit should be fully integrated with pedestrian ways through both the campus and the neighborhood. A centralized transit hub should be considered. Transit stops should be constructed for the array of services provided – the MBTA, the shuttle and other bus/van/taxi services. All transit stops should include shelters for riders and schedule/route information for users at each site. Transit stops should be constructed with appropriate conduits to allow for the addition of electronic signage that displays real-time customer information.

It would be desirable to have shuttle services open to the public. Opening these services would provide additional mobility for both students and neighbors and would help establish pedestrian movement patterns as the 200-acre development is constructed. Residents would

have options of walking, bus or shuttle routes to Harvard Square and to the Longwood Medical Area, and would have access unimpeded by inclement weather.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this DPIR. Please feel free to contact us for clarification or additional comments.

Sincerely,

Wendy Landman
Executive Director

Robert Sloane
Senior Planner

Cc Secretary Ian Bowles, Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, attn: Briony Angus, MEPA Analyst