



May 12, 2014

Richard K. Sullivan, Jr.  
Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs  
Attn: Alex Strysky  
100 Cambridge St., Suite 900  
Boston MA 02114

RE: Comments on the Environmental Notification form for the second phase of the Clipper City Rail Trail Phase II in Newburyport and Newbury, MA  
MEPA# 15191

Dear Secretary Sullivan:

WalkBoston has reviewed the Environmental Notification Form for the Clipper City Rail Trail Phase II, which calls for a new multi-purpose trail on a 1.5 mile section of former rail property – the old City Branch line – in the eastern part of the city. Phase II will also extend along a significant portion of the Merrimack River waterfront in the city center. This new trail adds to the existing 1.1 mile rail trail (Phase I) which links the MBTA commuter rail station and Merrimack River not far from the center of the city. A later Phase III will join these two segments in the vicinity of the existing commuter rail station south of the city, but not along the Merrimack River.

Our review leads us to offer these comments:

**Design the trail for expansion**

The proposal for Phase II includes an 8-10 foot wide path. The right-of-way for the trail is irregular, as it passes through publicly owned land that includes 19.4 acres. With this space, plans should recognize the possibility that the path will need to be widened if it is successful in drawing users. Many rail trails in Massachusetts are 10-12 feet wide, permitting a 5-6 foot path in each direction. For example, an extension of the Bruce Freeman Trail in Acton will provide a 12-foot trail with 2-foot wide shoulders on both sides to allow space for pedestrians to step aside from other users of the path if they feel the need to let them pass (a possibility if bicycles are passing).

**Design the rail trail to include runners**

Rail trails are a success in Massachusetts. Concurrent with the growth in use, new paths need to be carefully designed to serve a wide variety of users. Phase II of the Clipper City Rail Trail appears to be a very desirable facility, and it makes sense to design it to accommodate runners who are frequent users of trails. Runners often prefer a softer surface than that favored by cyclists and walkers; stone dust has frequently been used because it is resilient and provides a comfortable running surface.

Phase II of the Clipper City Rail Trail has significant right-of-way space that would allow more than a basic bicycle and pedestrian path. With space available, a parallel running track should

be considered for the Trail. Even if such a running track is a future addition to the facility, space for such a track should be preserved for the future. In a state known around the world for the Boston Marathon and the many sponsored running events, runners should be included, along with the walkers and bicyclists who may be the prime users of the proposed facility.

**Connecting Phase I and Phase II in the city center**

Plans for connecting Phase I and Phase II of the Trail along the Merrimack River in the waterfront area of Newburyport are not included in this document. Omitting mention of such a potential connection seems to diminish the potential created by Phase II construction. Phase II, paralleling the Merrimack River, terminates at Custom House Way, at a point that appears to be adjacent to a portion of the existing Waterfront Promenade Park. This open space has a seawall and boardwalk that can extend the walk two to three blocks further west. Admittedly, at the western end of Promenade Park, an off-street right-of-way may be difficult to find. Sidewalks may have to be used to pass along these few blocks, but if completed, this connection between Phase I and Phase II would afford a 2.4 mile loop around many of the older portions of the city.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert Sloane". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Robert" and last name "Sloane" clearly distinguishable.

Robert Sloane  
Senior Planner