



March 10, 2017

Department of Environmental Protection
Wetlands and Waterways Program
Attn: Ben Lynch
One Winter Street
Boston, MA 02108

Subject: Comments on the Ch. 91 Application No. 16-4842, MBTA Charlestown Bus Facility – Shoreline Stabilization and Yard Improvements Project, Mystic River, Boston & Somerville MA

Dear Mr. Lynch:

We are writing to comment on the Charlestown Bus Facility project described in the recent chapter 91 application No. 16-4842 filed by the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA). The Mystic River Watershed Association previously commented on the Environmental Notification Form (ENF) filed by this proponent related to the same project (EEA #15487).

Our organization is highly supportive of the vision for improving climate resiliency, public access to the Mystic River, and continuity with multi-use pathways and parklands throughout the watershed described by the proponents. However, as described in the comments below, we believe **the proponent must put forward specific plans for the design, funding, and construction schedule of the multi-use path and must specify the off-site mitigation activities they will undertake before a Ch. 91 license should be granted.**

MyRWA Mission

The Mystic River Watershed Association (MyRWA) is a non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation and enhancement of the Mystic River Watershed. The mission of MyRWA is to protect and restore the Mystic River, its tributaries, and watershed lands for the benefit of present and future generations and to celebrate the value, importance, and great beauty of these natural resources. This includes working to improve the water quality in the Mystic River and all of its tributaries.

MyRWA appreciates the important role of safe and efficient public transportation to enable public access to the watershed's natural resources, and so we understand the need to repair and upgrade this facility so that the important service it provides can continue. We believe that the function of the MBTA buses staged at the Charlestown facility, which serve nearly 100,000 passengers daily, plays a key role in our watershed and its communities.

Serving Twenty-Two Communities

Arlington Belmont Burlington Cambridge Charlestown Chelsea East Boston Everett Lexington Malden Medford Melrose Reading Revere Somerville Stoneham Wakefield Watertown Wilmington Winchester Winthrop Woburn

20 Academy Street, Suite 306 · Arlington, MA · 02476-6401 · (781) 316-3438 · www.MysticRiver.org

Multi-use pathway and public access impacts

A primary goal of MyRWA is to promote public access to the Mystic River and its tributaries, especially through the formation of continuous greenways that provide recreation and transportation resources associated with the river. We are therefore highly supportive of the multi-use pathway concept put forward by the proponents.

The continuous linkage this pathway would establish from Somerville to Route 99 in Boston would create an alternative transit corridor for residents and visitors traveling through the most densely populated area of the Mystic River Watershed.

We are in favor of the easement to the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) to allow the DCR to complete the multi-use pathway on the river-side of the flood prevention wall, and we believe **the planning and design for this path should be done concurrently with the shoreline stabilization and facility modernization** work proposed in the proponent's combined application. As the proponents suggest in their application, the design of the path is dependent on the design of the embankment and other features of this project. Moreover, as noted in the comments to the ENF from Boston Harbor Now, this easement was recommended in DCR's 2009 Mystic River Master Plan. That document described this link as 'critical' to the continuous path system put forward in the Master Plan. The Master Plan also alluded to certain challenges in integrating this parcel, such as the removal of munitions storage facility. The proponents have not alluded to the Master Plan in their application, and it is unclear if the concerns raised there are relevant to this project or have been addressed.

The multi-use pathway is described by the proponents as an integral element of their application, and it is certainly key to satisfying the public access provisions of the Chapter 91 application for a project classified as a water-dependent use under 301 CMR 13.04(1). However, the public has not had the opportunity to review and comment on the specific nature of the proposed path, and the proponent has offered no assurance that the path will be designed, funded, and constructed in a timely manner. As such, ***the proponents should provide evidence of further planning as to the nature and features of the pathway, the funding and schedule for its construction, and the funding and staffing for its operation and maintenance*** before receiving a Ch. 91 permit.

Under the current proposal, the DCR would assume responsibility for the design and construction of the path after the easement and Ch. 91 permit are granted. We are aware that the DCR has limited financial and staff resources for such planning and construction projects, raising significant questions about the feasibility and timeline for construction. (MyRWA has advocated to the state legislature repeatedly for increasing the resources available to DCR, and would gladly support efforts to fund a well-designed multi-use path at this site.) **We are invested in ensuring that the path is built with appropriate consideration given to the width and surface treatment of the path so that it can serve users of all ages and abilities.** This is necessary for the path to serve as an important link and to impact regional mobility.

Illustrating our concerns about the lack of specificity in the proposal regarding public access, we have noted that the pathway was repeatedly referred to as 'multi-use' in the proponents' earlier ENF filing, yet is referred to repeatedly as a 'bike path' in the project site plans submitted with

Serving Twenty-Two Communities

*Arlington Belmont Burlington Cambridge Charlestown Chelsea East Boston Everett Lexington Malden Medford
Melrose Reading Revere Somerville Stoneham Wakefield Watertown Wilmington Winchester Winthrop Woburn*

this combined application and elsewhere in the combined application. It is unclear whether this discrepancy represents a change in design or merely a variation in terminology, and is it generally unclear what the features of this path are intended to be.

We suggest that the proponent collaborate with the DCR to put forward a plan for the multi-use pathway for consideration alongside this combined application. We believe this new path offers transformative opportunities for public access and public awareness of the Mystic River, as well as potential secondary benefits in reducing traffic and automobile emissions. A carefully engineered design for the pathway, well-formulated to align with the shoreline construction and yard improvement plans submitted by the proponent and the DCR Master Plan, is a necessary condition for reaping these benefits and complying with Ch. 91 regulations.

Our request that DCR and the proponent work together immediately to propose a design for the multi-use path is consistent with the comments filed by the DEP Waterways Regulation Program, and repeated by Secretary Beaton in the ENF Certificate. Both comments called for consultation between the two organizations.

Wetlands Mitigation

We look forward to evaluating the off-site wetland resource creation the proponent has proposed to comply with the 1:1 mitigation they have committed to. We understand that this off-site mitigation will entail 59,800 sq ft to mitigate the total area of impacted intertidal and subtidal wetlands, accounting for the reclaimed intertidal wetland mitigated on site.

The proponent should propose specific mitigation projects, as close to the project site as possible, and seek public input on those projects immediately. We note that there are ample opportunities for salt marsh restoration in a footprint of this size in tidal and inter-tidal areas on shoreline adjacent to this MBTA facility.

Coastal Resiliency, Flood Prevention, and Stormwater Impacts

While not the focus of the Ch. 91 application, we wish to reiterate our approval for the thoughtful design of the shoreline stabilization project offered by the proponents. In our comments on the earlier ENF, we have applauded the use of natural buffers in the project design, the creation of a new wetland resource area, plans to make use of native vegetation to achieve flood prevention as well as habitat creation, the engineering of the flood prevention wall to be three feet taller than the 100-year FEMA storm elevation, and important enhancements of stormwater filtering on the site.

We were encouraged to see that the rain garden alluded to in the ENF was included, adjacent to the bus repair garage, in the project site plans submitted with this application. To improve the quality of the stormwater discharged from the site, we have advocated for the inclusion of the bioretention area mentioned by the proponents in the final plans and also support the possible movement of materials handling operations away from the river. **The proponents should clarify the status of the bioretention and materials operations features.**

Serving Twenty-Two Communities

Arlington Belmont Burlington Cambridge Charlestown Chelsea East Boston Everett Lexington Malden Medford Melrose Reading Revere Somerville Stoneham Wakefield Watertown Wilmington Winchester Winthrop Woburn

20 Academy Street, Suite 306 · Arlington, MA · 02476-6401 · (781) 316-3438 · www.MysticRiver.org

We would also like to offer our agreement with several of the endorsements made in the ENF Certificate. The Certificate calls for the use of native plantings and natural fiber blankets in constructing the embankment, and consideration of a design change to increase the steepness of the embankment to minimize impacts on land underwater. The Secretary also calls for evaluating off-site mitigation options for creating or restoring salt marsh in the Certificate. We concur with and echo this guidance.

We thank the Department for the opportunity to comment on this important project.

On behalf of the Mystic River Watershed Association,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Patrick M. Herron".

Patrick Herron, Executive Director

cc: Maria Hartnett, Epsilon Associates, inc.
MyRWA Policy Committee

Serving Twenty-Two Communities

*Arlington Belmont Burlington Cambridge Charlestown Chelsea East Boston Everett Lexington Malden Medford
Melrose Reading Revere Somerville Stoneham Wakefield Watertown Wilmington Winchester Winthrop Woburn*

20 Academy Street, Suite 306 · Arlington, MA · 02476-6401 · (781) 316-3438 · www.MysticRiver.org