



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
MASSACHUSETTS SENATE

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December 15, 2014

William Tuttle  
Office of Real Estate Development and Asset Development  
Massachusetts Department of Transportation  
10 Park Plaza  
Boston, MA 02116

Dear Mr. Tuttle,

I write to comment on the choice among development teams that MassDOT faces in developing parcel 13 on the MassPike.

I first want to congratulate MassDOT for driving to move forward on a development project of enormous potential value to the City of Boston and the Back Bay and Fenway neighborhoods. The space around the Hynes station has remained a gaping hole in the neighborhood for much too long. I understand that, as the Civic Vision for the Turnpike Air Rights points out, "Given the cost premiums related to air rights, the right balance between economic feasibility and public benefits provided in the Guidelines may only be achievable during strong real estate cycles." So, it make sense to move quickly when the development climate is favorable.

In choosing among the development teams, there are a host of essential considerations which I am in no position to comment on — most importantly, the financial strength of the developers, their competence to manage a very complex construction project, the economic viability of their particular proposals.

However, I do wish to underline three considerations:

1. The project that MassDOT moves forward with will be subject to review by the Boston Redevelopment Authority, which has, after long negotiations with Back Bay residents, supported height limits in the area north of Boylston street. While some flexibility should be expected, a proposal to develop far above the 120 foot height precedent in the area would be directly inconsistent with the Civic Vision for the Turnpike Air Rights in Boston. Such a proposal would face well-organized neighborhood opposition and risk final disapproval and ultimate project breakdown. MassDOT should select a proposal that will remain economically viable if scaled to substantially respect the governing principles



for development in the area. The Peebles group proposal stands out as offering to meet this test, at least in its initial form.

2. The need for affordable housing and student housing in particular is a central ongoing concern in Boston. The Boston Residential Group proposal stands out in its dramatic offering of 460 beds of student housing. Provided that BRG is able to confirm an institutional partner who will guaranty order in the housing, that is a hugely positive element. MassDOT should assess the commitment of institutional partners to the project. In preparing to write this letter, I did speak with Roger Brown, President of Berklee College of Music, who indicated clear interest in additional student housing and also in other building space, but said that he had not yet been approached. The other proposals are less clear as to how they will contribute to addressing the city's affordable housing needs. MassDOT should consider carefully how the other proposals will evolve physically and economically under pressure to provide more on-site affordable housing.
3. The area is highly congested already. MassDOT should give consideration to traffic and parking congestion impacts of the proposed development — on this dimension, the BRG proposal is attractive in that it adds minimal parking capacity and includes entirely transit/pedestrian uses.

I have been deeply impressed by the quality of all three proposals, by the sophistication of the citizen advisory group assembled to review them and by the high caliber of the professionals involved by the development teams, by the BRA and by MassDOT.

I am confident you will make a good decision weighing all the relevant considerations.

Sincerely,



Senator William N. Brownsberger  
Second Suffolk & Middlesex