

HARVARD
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT



Stephanie Pollack
Secretary and Chief Executive Officer
Massachusetts Department of Transportation
10 Park Plaza, Suite 4160
Boston, MA 02116-3969

January 23, 2018

Dear Secretary Pollack:

It was a pleasure speaking with you to discuss the I-90 Allston Interchange project and alert you to some of the key issues Harvard University will be raising in our more detailed comment letter on the Draft Environmental Impact Report.

Importantly, we were pleased to be able to outline for you two additional contributions Harvard is prepared to make to financially support the introduction of an “early action” interim West Station as a new element of the Project, along with an increased contribution for the permanent West Station. Specifically, Harvard is prepared to make the following contributions to the project to ensure its success:

- Up to \$8M to fund an “early action” commuter station in Allston Landing South..
- An increased commitment to the funding of the full build regional West Station from the current one-third of an estimated \$90+ million facility to a \$50 million contribution, representing over half of the current estimate.

These additional contributions will support both an early neighborhood transit service (that may serve as a bridge to full service) and the introduction of the regional, multi-modal West Station. Together, these contributions will enhance the significant public-private partnership between Harvard and the Commonwealth that is already reflected in this project, as outlined below. These investments also represent Harvard’s deep commitment to the Commonwealth’s long-term economic growth, the University’s longstanding and constructive partnership with its neighbors, and the objectives we all share for the future of a connected and economically vibrant community in Allston-Brighton.

This project represents a generational opportunity not only to repair and replace the compromised viaduct, but also to modernize neighborhood circulation, address long-standing traffic impacts, and introduce new mass transit infrastructure in service of the neighborhood, the City of Boston, and the Commonwealth. These improvements would capture the opportunity to create a transit-oriented development node centered on the convergence of new north-south transit routes and enhanced east-west rail service while strengthening the



desired synergies between emerging and existing neighborhoods. I appreciate your taking an approach that seeks to capture this opportunity and also want to recognize your team for adapting the project over time in ways that have improved and enhanced the associated public benefits.

Harvard's direct contributions to the Project thus far

Harvard recognizes that it is a beneficiary of this project, as land that Harvard owns will become more readily developable after the project is complete. The new transportation network will be accessed by the University community alongside other regional institutions as well as the community at large.

It is significant to note, however, that this project, with all of its associated benefits, may not have been possible absent Harvard's significant investments over the past fifteen years in the area of the I-90 Interchange. Harvard first purchased the underlying rights to Allston Landing North and South in 2000 and 2003, respectively, from the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority. With the property still in the control of CSXT through permanent easements, Harvard later negotiated terms with CSXT leading to their vacating both Allston Landing North and South. The conditions of that agreement included substantial payments by Harvard to secure the easements from CSXT and required that CSXT remove all structures on the property, conduct environmental studies, and execute appropriate remediation before transferring the easements. Most of that work is now complete.

The end result of these fifteen years of investment and activity is the largely vacant rail yard that is now available for MassDOT to consider as part of this project. Certainly Harvard would have made these investments in support of the University's own institutional goals, but were these steps not taken, the rail operations that would exist in the yard today under easements in control of CSXT would present a potentially immovable obstacle to the options being considered by the Commonwealth.

We hope that these investments (currently amounting to well over \$400 million) serve as private contributions to public projects that may be leveraged in financing instruments accessed to pay for this significant project.

When the challenges of the failing viaduct came to light, Harvard was asked by the Commonwealth in 2013 to engage in a partnership to ensure the advancement of the critical I-90 Interchange project. Early concepts for the interchange focused on the highway's infrastructure and options to reconfigure the street grid in an urban setting. Harvard was among the early voices calling for the addition of West Station to the plan. Harvard's financial



commitment for that aspect of the project was ultimately a major factor in the 2014 announcement that added West Station as a prominent feature in the project.

It was in that spirit that the University made the following commitments to the project:

- Harvard would provide, at no cost to the Commonwealth, access to the land upon which the Project will be built—in addition to adjoining space to be utilized for the Project’s construction staging; and,
- Harvard agreed to fund one third of the cost of the permanent West Station—a projected contribution of \$30-\$35 million based on current estimates for the Station.

Since those commitments were made, and while the public process on the I-90 Interchange project was advancing over the last few years, Harvard made further contributions to advance the project, including:

- Financing the removal of the Houghton Chemical rail spur—tens of millions in engineering and construction mitigation savings with an even more favorable contribution to the at-grade options under consideration; and,
- Contributing land upon which the new Soldier’s Field Road will be located, opening up new parkland along the Charles River. This contribution itself largely offsets any parkland lost during construction of the project, assisting or fully satisfying compliance with federal 4(f) parkland requirements.

Harvard’s Support of West Station and the I-90 Interchange Project

Of the many important components and details contained in the DEIR, significant concerns have been raised by the Harvard community, neighbors, city leaders, and civic organizations regarding the timing of West Station’s introduction.

Harvard recognizes that some of this uncertainty regarding the timing of West Station relates to future demand that will only become clear when the University’s development plans advance – while the I-90 Interchange project will be largely under construction for the better part of the next decade.

On the path to regional transportation improvements, the North Allston community will have endured a significant period of disruption and inconveniences related to the construction of the new I-90 Interchange and related infrastructure. A primary outcome of this Project for neighbors and Harvard is the eventual introduction of commuter and regional service to this area. It is the University’s hope that by providing funding for an interim West Station facility, serious consideration can be given to an additional option for early phase 1 service even as the



specific timing of the full West Station remains under review. As we discussed, Harvard fully recognizes that the decision as to when service should be introduced at an interim or full multi-modal West Station, and at what levels, are determinations that would need to be made by the MassDOT after an assessment of projected regional development, ridership demand as well as impacts to existing service. In doing so, Harvard also hopes that as MassDOT considers taking advantage of the University's financial commitment to an "early action" station, it will consider the years of construction inconveniences endured by the local community in furtherance of this regional project in addition to assessing ridership and finances.

Additional Considerations

As Harvard provides this new funding, I also want to underscore our concerns regarding Phase 2 of the DEIR. The University will comment more extensively in its formal DEIR comment on this matter, but I raise it briefly here because of its specific relationship to the timing of West Station. In Phase 2, MassDOT proposes to temporarily double the lay-up capacity by building the permanent rail facility prior to the introduction of the final full West Station. This feature, which will not be introduced until after the highway and related infrastructure are completed, alters the sequence of construction in the plan contemplated over the course of the last year, pursuant to which the permanent West Station and the permanent rail facility were constructed at the same time, simplifying logistics for both.

Under the new sequence contemplated in the DEIR, infrastructure and lay-up capacity that is built as late as 2028 must then be removed before West Station in its final condition can be constructed. This scenario presents either a very short-term infusion of lay-up capacity reliant upon its elimination, or a longer-term impediment to the construction of West Station. In either case, it would make construction of the permanent West Station conditioned upon consequential decisions by the future MBTA.

The University understands that, in considering any transportation facility, MassDOT must have a balanced program in mind that serves all of the many functions of transportation service, including lay-up facilities. Harvard believes that such a balance has been achieved through a consistent lay-up program that had been the subject of public discussion for the past year. On balance, the University thinks that the advantage of a short-term temporary increase to layup capacity, beyond what had already been a part of the plan, is offset by these significant negative impacts. Perhaps there are ways to create milestones over the course of Phase 1 construction that may allow Phase 2 to be revisited before its implementation. While Harvard urges the reconsideration of Phase 2, we would certainly participate in any discussions aimed at identifying such milestones.

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Therefore, Harvard would strongly urge MassDOT to consider the following:

- Revisit Phase 2 of the DEIR;
- Initiate steps among the relevant stakeholders, including the City of Boston, which will take advantage of the north-south bus connection utilizing Malvern Street in Phase 1, as proposed by Boston University; and,
- Consider the relocation of West Station to the north of the rail yard in the final condition. The so-called “flip” would unlock considerable low-cost to no-cost public amenities, including:
 - A greater buffer between the neighborhood and the Project sound wall—a feature that could be introduced in Phase 1.
 - Creation of a protected, uninterrupted pedestrian/bicycle trail through the buffer.
 - Providing an opportunity to simplify the design of the Franklin Street bridge, enhance its utility to bicyclists, and eliminates the need to acquire private property to construct the ramps at Harvard Street.

As always, it was a pleasure to discuss this project with you earlier this week and I look forward to continuing the dialogue. Harvard will be sharing our new proposal with neighbors, elected officials, and others in the coming days. The University looks forward to continuing our work together on these and other consequential issues related to this important project. I thank you and the MassDOT team for the important improvements to this project that have already occurred throughout the public process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Katherine Lapp'.

Katherine N. Lapp
Executive Vice President
Harvard University