

The Boston Globe

Remembering the Greenway

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LEGISLATORS SHOWED an admirable long-term perspective, and a bit of courage, late last week when they included \$31 million for the Rose Kennedy Greenway in a supplemental budget. Governor Romney can show the same traits this week by approving it.

Because the fatal accident in a connector tunnel raised new questions about the competence of Big Dig contractors and the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority, some Greenway supporters feared improvements to the ambitious street-level project might be sidelined indefinitely.

But the rationale for this particular appropriation is strong, and perhaps even stronger since the accident. As designated in the budget, the money would go exclusively to the preparation of three ramp parcels for development by nonprofit organizations. One parcel, in the North End, would be used for a community center, and possibly a YMCA. The second, opposite Long Wharf, would host a Boston Museum. And the third, running south from Rowes Wharf, would contain the New Center for Arts and Culture. All would add vibrancy to the Greenway, helping establish it as common ground for all Bostonians, and for visitors from near and far.

Building atop ramp parcels, however, is especially hard and expensive. Basic site preparation should be a public responsibility. The nonprofits will have plenty to do to raise the money for buildings and programming.

The tunnel accident has cast doubt on the ability of government to carry out a major construction project and produce a quality result. The focus now is on assuring that the roadway is made safe and that it will remain safe. At the same time, there is a powerful incentive for the Turnpike Authority and the rest of state government to show that they can bring to fruition at a high level a complex project like the Greenway. The Rose Kennedy Greenway -- the part of the Big Dig that most people will see -- carries the promise of enormous benefit to the region, but there are still major questions about planning and implementation. Success is by no means guaranteed. Another positive step would be for the Legislature to give more authority and independence to the Rose Kennedy Greenway Conservancy, which can rise above city, state, and turnpike turf wars.

One of those concerned about the Greenway, and encouraged by the Legislature's action last week, is John Drew, president of the World Trade Center and chairman of A Better City, a group that has monitored the Big Dig for Boston businesses. "It is a great sign that this is moving forward while the crisis exists," Drew said.

Romney should sign the appropriation. While not small, it is a one-time expenditure. The money is needed now. Failure to approve it will mean either a serious blow to the quality of the Greenway, or more money later.