

M a k i n g   t h e   C o n n e c t i o n :  
**THE URBAN RING CORRIDOR**  
AND THE FUTURE OF GREATER BOSTON



A Position Statement  
by A Better City's  
Urban Ring Institutional  
and Business Committee

December 2006

## Acknowledgements

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# A Position Statement by A Better City's Urban Ring Institutional and Business Committee

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## Executive Summary

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In 2005, A Better City (ABC) established an Urban Ring Institutional and Business Committee to provide a forum to share information, build consensus, and promote transit improvements in the Urban Ring corridor. These institutions and businesses have not, until now, spoken in a coordinated fashion about the importance of transit linkages, public transit investment and the Urban Ring to the future of metropolitan Boston. This Position Paper articulates the many reasons why an unprecedented, diverse group of institutions and businesses stands united in its support for improved transit in the Urban Ring corridor and offers our recommendations on how to move this important project forward.

### *The Urban Ring is a Statewide Economic Development Imperative*

The Urban Ring links a series of vital and growing residential and commercial areas in metropolitan Boston and encompasses many of the region's fastest-growing clusters of jobs and economic development. By 2025, the corridor as a whole is projected to see a 15% increase in the number of residents and a 45% increase in the number of jobs.

Demand is growing for better linkages between residential communities and job-rich areas in the corridor and especially for better connections among the many educational, medical and research institutions and businesses concentrated there. By creating better transit access, workers in Boston, Brookline, Cambridge, Chelsea, Everett, Medford and Somerville – as well as many other suburban communities served by the MBTA's commuter rail network – would be able to commute without the need to bring automobiles into already congested commercial areas.

Transit infrastructure is also a much-needed lifeline for the region's growing life sciences industry, much of which is concentrated in a "life sciences necklace" – an area essentially concurrent with portions of the already planned Urban Ring corridor. Collaboration among institutions is an increasingly important criteria used in determining federal funding awards, and thus better connectivity and improved transit linkages among the medical and education institutions along the Urban Ring corridor are critical because they would enable this vital collaboration. In 2004, this region's 27 academic research institutions together secured \$2.3 billion in funding from the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

The infusion of federal funding supports tens of thousands of jobs each year and helps keep our life sciences economy strong and growing. We must do what we can to improve our chances for these awards, as well as allow these important businesses and institutions to grow.

Finally, the Urban Ring would be an important regional and statewide asset that would strengthen the economy and livability of metropolitan Boston's urban core. Transit linkages like those created by the Urban Ring are essential to support the level of density that is a key component of economic success and a critical strategy in the Commonwealth's sustainable development or "smart growth" strategy. If the Urban Ring is built, existing and new jobs would cluster in key employment centers throughout the corridor, while dense residential development throughout the Urban Ring corridor could help address the metropolitan area's housing affordability crisis and connect residents to job opportunities.



Broadway, Cambridge

### *The Urban Ring is Critical for Increased Systemwide Transit Capacity and Better Linkages for Mobility*

The existing MBTA transit system consists of a series of "radial" rapid transit and commuter rail lines that run into Boston's urban core. The system makes it easy to get from Boston's suburbs and neighboring urban communities to downtown Boston and the financial district—but moving around within the urban core often involves unreasonable amounts of transfers, time and trouble. The circumferential Urban Ring would transform travel throughout the MBTA system by enabling transit riders whose destinations lie elsewhere to transfer directly to numerous destinations throughout the Urban Ring corridor. **Urban Ring stations would allow critical connections from the Urban Ring corridor**

to every MBTA commuter rail line, all four rapid transit lines, every major highway coming into Boston and more than half of the MBTA's local bus routes. In addition, this wealth of transportation connections to the Urban Ring corridor eases access to areas of high job density for Massachusetts residents throughout the state. For example, an employee would be able to use commuter rail, rapid transit or the bus to transfer to the Urban Ring, easily connecting to any of the Urban Ring's strong economic centers.

The Urban Ring would similarly create synergies with planned radial expansion projects. With the MBTA's current configuration, users of these new and improved services, such as commuter rail expansion projects, would end up in one of a handful of downtown stations and have to transfer if their destination was elsewhere. With the Urban Ring, however, these expansion projects would connect riders to a far greater variety of jobs and other destinations. **The Urban Ring is not a competitor to proposed radial transit expansions—it is a complementary investment that would enhance the appeal of using both existing and proposed transit and commuter rail stations throughout greater Boston.**

Finally, eliminating the need to travel downtown and transfer would also benefit the entire MBTA system by unlogging overcrowded rapid transit lines, especially in the system's downtown core. By allowing rapid transit passengers, especially on the near capacity Red and Green lines, to make more direct connections to their destinations, the Urban Ring would alleviate congestion on core portions of the rapid transit system which have reached or are soon to reach capacity.

### *Next Steps*

Transit improvements in the Urban Ring corridor have a long history, marked by both important advances and frustrating stretches of inaction. One constant throughout this time has been strong and ongoing political support from local, state and federal elected officials. Boston Mayor Thomas M. Menino has been a long standing supporter of the project and organized the "Urban Ring Compact," a coalition of 6 regional cities that came together to support better transit in the corridor. Congressman Michael E. Capuano has provided leadership in winning an earmark for Federal funds for the next stage of the environmental work and

a close examination of Urban Ring tunnel options.

The on-going support of Mayor Menino, Congressman Capuano, the Compact Communities, the legislature and the Governor's administration will be critical to the future of the Urban Ring. The Executive Office of Transportation (EOT) must partner with the project's many stakeholders, the Urban Ring Citizens Advisory Committee and the ABC's Urban Ring Institutional and Business Committee to move this important project forward.

One of the keys to advancing transit improvements in the Urban Ring corridor is recognizing and acknowledging that **the Urban Ring is not a single transit mega-project, but a vital corridor in which there are short-, medium- and long-term opportunities for significant incremental improvements in transit connections and service.** In order to realize these opportunities, the incoming Governor and administration, the legislature, the Executive Office of Transportation and the MBTA must take the following five steps:

1. Define and implement a new incremental approach to making transit improvements in the Urban Ring corridor, including identifying the most promising "early action" improvements.
2. Take all necessary steps to incorporate the Urban Ring into all of the Commonwealth's official transportation planning documents, including the upcoming "Journey to 2030" long range plan.
3. Make investments necessary to complete "early action" improvements and better position the Urban Ring for future funding via New Starts or other Federally funded programs.
4. Develop a comprehensive finance plan for the Urban Ring that works in concert with state-wide transportation finance strategies.
5. Develop a joint project management team that includes EOT, the MBTA, MassPort, the Executive Office of Economic Development and the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, which is led by a single agency. This project management team needs interagency cooperation and support and should be given priority within the Governor's office.

## I. Introduction: A Better City's Urban Ring Institutional and Business Committee

A Better City (ABC), formerly known as the Artery Business Committee, brings together institutional and business leaders in support of infrastructure investments and projects that are vital to sustaining and growing the Boston area's economy and ensuring that Boston remains one of the most dynamic and unique cities in the world. Even during the 17 years when ABC's efforts were focused primarily on the Central Artery/Tunnel Project, ABC supported substantial investment in the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) transit system as a compliment to the Central Artery's highway network. ABC has been a long standing supporter of the Urban Ring and believes it to be an essential component of metropolitan Boston's future transportation system.

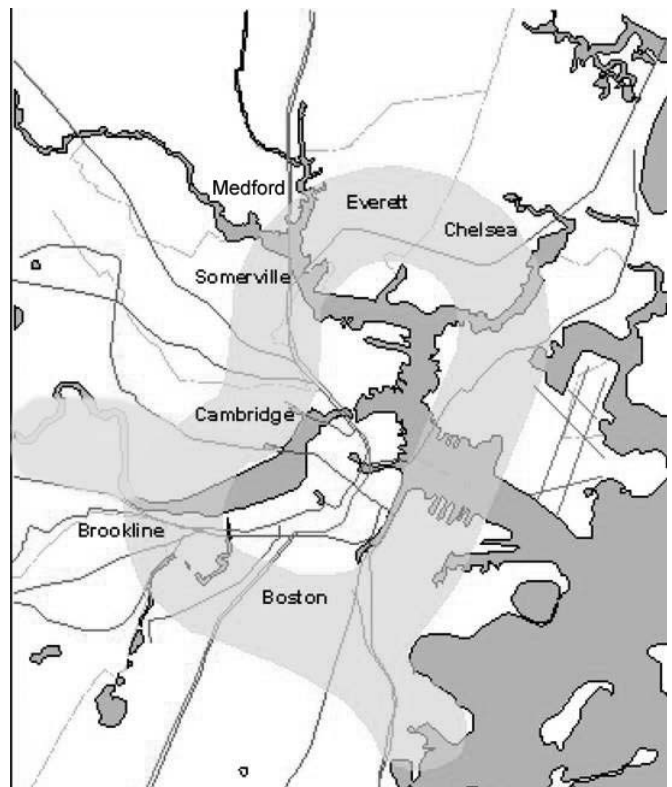
In 2005, ABC established the Urban Ring Institutional and Business Committee to bring together leading institutions and businesses and provide a forum for sharing information, building consensus and promoting transit improvements in the Urban Ring. This corridor is home to an impressive array of businesses and educational, medical, research and cultural institutions that are critical to metropolitan Boston's regional economy. **These institutions and businesses have not, until now, spoken in a coordinated fashion about the importance of transit linkages, public transit investment and the Urban Ring to the future of metropolitan Boston and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.**

The Committee strongly endorses the position that the Urban Ring is an essential investment in the economic future of Massachusetts, one which will provide greatly improved transit service to tens of thousands of residents, employees, visitors, students and others throughout Boston, Brookline, Cambridge, Chelsea, Everett, Medford, Somerville and beyond. A circumferential transit investment that will connect the "spokes" of our regional transit system, this project will enable growth and development in areas of Boston and the region that would otherwise be inhibited by congestion and a lack of mobility.

This Position Paper will describe the Urban Ring corridor, summarize the economic and transportation benefits of the Urban Ring and articulate the many reasons why this diverse group of institutions and businesses stands united in its support for improved transit in the Urban Ring corridor. It will also offer our recommendations on how to move this important project forward.

## II. Project Description and Urban Ring Corridor Characteristics

The Urban Ring encompasses a circumferential corridor encircling downtown Boston, roughly fifteen miles long and one mile wide. The route is currently planned to begin at Logan Airport and continue through Chelsea, Everett and Somerville, into Cambridge past Kendall Square and across the Charles River to Boston University, Boston's Longwood Medical and Academic Area, Roxbury, the University of Massachusetts at Boston, the South Boston Waterfront and ultimately back to the airport. Serving all these communities is an essential component of the Urban Ring.



Institutional planning efforts by Harvard University and Boston University regarding the future development of the Allston/Beacon Yards area have spurred interest in an Urban Ring corridor that would include a "West Station" at Allston. This new station would connect the Framingham/Worcester commuter rail line with academic and other development in Allston and at Boston University's West Campus, the major bus and Red Line node at Harvard Square, bus and future Green Line connections at Union Square, and the major bus and Orange Line node at Sullivan Square, Charlestown. This corridor would serve many key economic development opportunities in the seven-city Urban Ring region, and would be a valuable complement to the corridor, serving the Cambridgeport, MIT/Kendall Square, and East Cambridge areas.

## Job and Residential Growth in the Urban Ring Corridor

The Urban Ring corridor includes many of metropolitan Boston’s major growth areas for both homes and jobs. The corridor is currently home to nearly 300,000 residents and one-third of all jobs in the seven-city planning area. By 2025 the corridor as a whole is projected to see a 15% increase in the number of residents, a 20% increase in the number of households and a 45% increase in the number of jobs. Within a half-mile radius of currently planned stations within the Urban Ring corridor, employment growth is expected to increase by more than 50%.<sup>1</sup>

While the exact nature of the optimum transit services to serve the corridor has yet to be established, the Draft

Urban Ring station. The Phase 2 DEIR projected the Urban Ring could carry 150,000 passengers daily by 2025, roughly the size of today’s Orange Line and larger than the projected ridership of both the Blue Line and Silver Line in 2025.<sup>2</sup>

### Critical Transportation Linkages

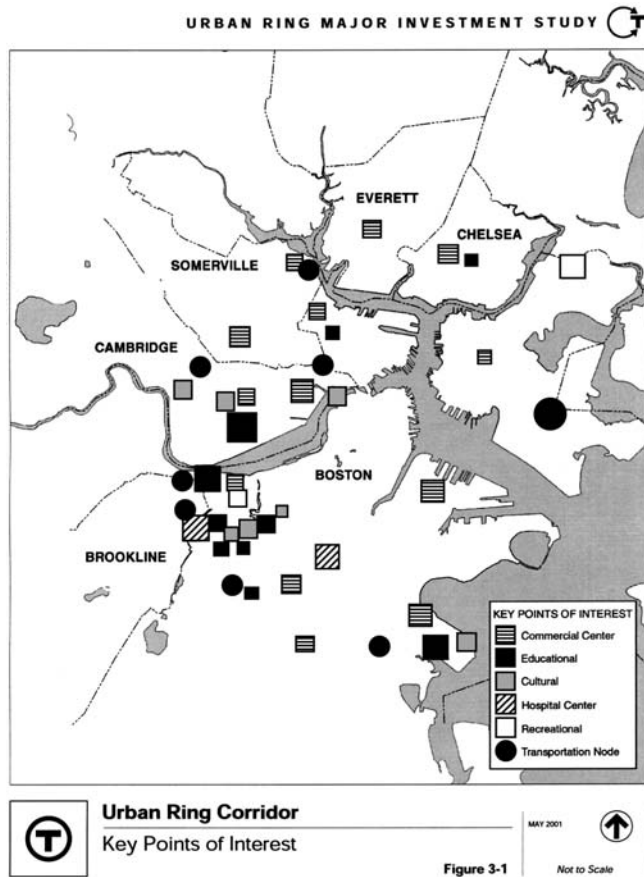
Urban Ring stations would serve cities and towns throughout the MBTA service area, connecting the new transit service to every MBTA commuter rail line, all four rapid transit lines, every major highway coming into Boston and more than half of the MBTA’s local bus routes. As envisioned in the DEIR for Phase 2 of the Urban Ring, the system would consist of 43 new and improved stations, including 37 Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) stations, three new commuter rail stations (Sullivan Square, Gilman Square and Union Square), three expanded commuter rail stations (downtown Chelsea, Yawkey and Ruggles) and the existing JFK/UMass Red Line and commuter rail station. A fourth new commuter rail station, referred to as West Station, would be added as part of the western and northern corridor.

### III. The Urban Ring is a Statewide Economic Development Imperative

Transit improvements in the Urban Ring corridor are at once an investment supporting job growth, a lifeline for the region’s growing life sciences sector, and a “smart growth” tool that would serve dense development in greater Boston’s urban core. The Urban Ring is an economic imperative – a project that would support strategic economic growth in Massachusetts for generations to come.

### Linking People to Jobs and Jobs to People

The Urban Ring corridor includes parts of Boston, Cambridge, Chelsea, Everett and Somerville where job growth is a key municipal priority.



#### Critical Centers of Commercial and Other Activity

Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) clearly identifies a network of 43 Urban Ring stations with surrounding “station areas” of one-half mile radius (the distance people will walk to use the station) that would serve most of the critical commercial and residential activity centers in the Urban Ring corridor.

If built, by 2025, more than 295,000 people will work within walking distance of an Urban Ring station and 225,000 people will live within walking distance of an



Chelsea, MA

The economies of Chelsea, Everett and Somerville are re-emerging and those municipalities are actively seeking better transit to support economic development, including redevelopment of brownfields sites. The Urban Ring would serve 5 million square feet of new development planned for the North Point project in East Cambridge as well as passengers and employees at Logan Airport, one of the densest concentrations of blue collar jobs in New England. And the growing South Boston Waterfront/Seaport District and Boston's new convention center are located in the corridor. The Urban Ring would support tourism and the visitor economy by linking the convention center to hotels and other visitor destinations throughout Boston and neighboring communities.



Development near Wellington Circle, Medford

The Urban Ring would improve access to the jobs located in all of these areas and would link employees of all income and skill levels to a wide range of job opportunities by creating better transit linkages. Workers in Boston, Brookline, Cambridge, Chelsea, Everett, Medford and Somerville—as well as many other suburban communities served by the MBTA's commuter rail network—would be able to commute without the need to bring automobiles into already congested commercial areas.

And in an era where the workforce is mobile and skilled workers can easily relocate to other parts of the region and the country, the Urban Ring can help maintain the competitive advantage of institutions and businesses throughout the corridor. Better transit service can, for example, make Urban Ring employers more competitive by making their jobs more attractive than those in more sprawling areas where commuting requires driving in increasingly congested conditions. Transportation hassles have become a major quality-of-life issue for many workers and families. In a recent poll by MassINC, for example, Massachusetts residents cited “roads and the traffic situation” as their second most



Biotech Facilities Near Kendall Square

critical quality of life issue (after the affordability of housing).<sup>3</sup>

### **Enabling Economic Growth in the Life Sciences Sector**

One of the fastest growing and most promising sectors in greater Boston is the life sciences sector. Key portions of the region's life sciences sector are clustered in and near the Urban Ring corridor, making up the newly-named “life sciences necklace.” The life sciences necklace includes areas of Somerville near Tufts



Broad Institute, Cambridge

University, Charlestown Navy Yard, Cambridge's Kendall Square area, MIT, Harvard's existing campus in Cambridge and planned campus in Allston, Boston University, the Longwood Medical and Academic Area, Boston University Medical Campus, BioSquare, Boston Medical Center and the Boston Marine Industrial Park in South Boston. Life sciences institutions and businesses in these locations are involved in basic and clinical research, clinical treatment, biotech and pharmaceutical research, development and production.

Metropolitan Boston is home to this thriving life sciences sector in no small part because of the region's 27 academic research institutions, which together secured \$2.3 billion in funding from the National Institutes of Health (NIH).<sup>4</sup> The area's research strength has spun off large business clusters across the entire spectrum of life sciences, including biotech companies, medical device manufacturers and pharmaceutical companies. The life sciences sector also includes Boston's medical institutions, national leaders in both research and clinical care.

While much of the economic growth spurred by these medical and educational institutions is currently funded by this NIH and other federal funding, collaboration among institutions is an increasingly important criteria used in determining federal funding awards. **Better connectivity among the medical and education institutions along the Urban Ring corridor is therefore critical because it would enable better linkages between institutions, enabling and increasing this vital collaboration.** This infusion of federal funding supports tens of thousands of jobs each year and helps keep our life sciences economy strong and growing. We must do what we can to help ensure that we can maximize our chances for this critical federal funding.



Harvard Medical Facilities

With this growing life sciences sector so heavily dependent on interaction and connectivity, the institutions and businesses need to be served by high quality transit in order to connect workers to jobs and connect collaborative activity among the various life sciences nodes. One of the most important life sciences clusters—and the one perhaps most in need of improved transit service—is Boston's Longwood Medical and Academic Area (LMA).

The LMA's more than 200 acres are home to some of the country's most prominent academic and medical institutions and is one of the fastest growing areas in the City of Boston. Longwood already encompasses 16



Longwood Medical and Academic Area

million square feet of development, with another 3 million square feet permitted or proposed. In this medical and academic area, 40,000 employees and 18,800 students travel daily to school or work, joined by 2.2 million patients annually.<sup>5</sup>

But future growth in this area could be constrained by traffic congestion unless transit access is improved, and the need for additional transit services is a significant constraint on the growth potential of the Longwood Medical and Academic Area. The LMA is heavily dependant on the limited capacity of the D and E branches of the Green Line, a number of MBTA local bus routes and an extensive network of institutional and private shuttles. Parking is already constrained, with on-site parking prioritized for patient access and limited employee parking, and parking areas are being redeveloped into new clinical care, research and academic facilities. In addition, the majority of vehicular trips in Longwood and the neighboring Fenway area now consist of through trips. Both areas would benefit from increased transit options and improved traffic flow if increased transit options intercepted automobile trips before they entered dense employment areas. Neighboring residential areas would also benefit from increased transit options, decreased dependence on new



Longwood Avenue Traffic

parking facilities and less traffic congestion.

The LMA is only one location where the Urban Ring would help spur the development of the life sciences sector. Another is Boston's Allston neighborhood, where Harvard University is planning a major sciences campus and Boston University has made major investments. The Urban Ring corridor can and should be expanded to include a western "spur" to Allston at Beacon Yards, similar to the existing spur at the eastern end of the Urban Ring, which splits into separate lines going to the University of Massachusetts and the South Boston Waterfront. This western spur could serve as a first step toward an alignment that serves a variety of transit connections and economic development areas such as Harvard Square in Cambridge, Union Square in Somerville, and Sullivan Square in Charlestown. The areas around MIT and Kendall Square in Cambridge and BioSquare and Boston Medical Center in Boston are other key clusters of life sciences activity that are in need of the improved transit service in the Urban Ring.



Kendall Square, Cambridge

### **Pursuing A Region-wide Smart Growth Strategy**

The Urban Ring would be an important regional asset that would strengthen the economy and livability of metropolitan Boston's urban core. Transit linkages like those created by the Urban Ring are essential to support the level of density that is a key component of economic success and a critical strategy in the Commonwealth's sustainable development or "smart growth" strategy. If the Urban Ring is built, existing and new jobs would cluster in key employment centers throughout the corridor, while dense residential development throughout the Urban Ring corridor could help address the metropolitan area's housing affordability crisis and connect residents to job opportunities.

The "urban cores" of many metropolitan areas throughout the United States are eroding as jobs and homes move out to the suburbs. Greater Boston has been more successful than other major urban areas at



Residential Development in the Fenway

maintaining both residential population and jobs, in no small part because of the MBTA's commuter rail and rapid transit system. The Urban Ring would strengthen the City of Boston's status as the commercial center of New England, linking residents throughout the region to jobs in the urban core and especially in Boston, where nearly 300,000 jobs—more than one-quarter of all jobs in Boston—would be located within walking distance of an Urban Ring station.

The circumferential transit services provided by the Urban Ring would also serve the needs of growing businesses and institutions that increasingly have multiple locations within the Boston metropolitan area. Creating public transit connections among urban core locations allows businesses and institutions located in dense areas, where expansion is challenging and expensive, to "decentralize" without abandoning the urban core by allowing them to relocate or expand some functions to locations elsewhere in the urban core while keeping all of their locations connected. For example, the Urban Ring would provide better transit connections between Boston University's Charles River campus and its medical campus. It could similarly connect Brigham and Women's Hospital, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, Children's Hospital and other hospitals in the Longwood area to satellite facilities in Boston's Crosstown and Cambridge's University Park as well as to affiliate academic facilities at Harvard.

**Finally, the Urban Ring would strengthen the urban core by improving transportation access and economic opportunity for residents, including low income and working class residents, throughout the corridor.** Data included in the Draft Environmental Impact Report documents that residents of areas near planned Urban Ring stations are poorer, and less likely to own a car than residents of the seven-city Urban Ring region as a whole. For example, 22% of those living within walking distance of an Urban Ring station live in households



The Urban Ring would similarly create synergies with planned radial expansion projects. Currently radial expansion projects are being considered for two rapid transit lines (the Green Line extension to Somerville and West Medford and the Blue Line extension to Lynn) and a number of commuter rail lines (such as improved service for the Fairmount and Worcester lines and new service to New Bedford and Fall River). With the MBTA's current configuration, users of these new and improved services would end up in one of a handful of downtown stations and have to transfer if their destination was elsewhere. With the Urban Ring, however, these expansion projects would connect their riders to a far greater variety of jobs and other destinations. **The Urban Ring is not a competitor to proposed radial transit expansions—it is a complementary investment that would enhance the appeal of using both existing and proposed commuter rail stations throughout greater Boston.**

One important synergy between the Urban Ring and potential commuter rail improvements would involve the idea, suggested by Harvard University and others, for a new West Station commuter rail station in Allston along the Worcester commuter rail line. If an Urban Ring corridor were extended west to Allston—a possibility that will be evaluated in the next round of environmental review documents—this important development hub and transit station would be far better integrated into the regional transit system than if a new station in Allston were to be solely a stop on one commuter rail line.

Finally, eliminating the need to travel downtown and transfer would also benefit the entire MBTA system by unclogging overcrowded rapid transit lines, especially in the system's downtown core. By allowing rapid transit passengers, especially on the Red and Green lines, to make more direct connections to their destinations, the Urban Ring would alleviate congestion on core portions of the rapid transit system which have reached or are soon to reach capacity. **By 2025, the Urban Ring would shift more than 25,000 daily riders off of the overcrowded Red and Green Lines, providing superior, more direct and convenient service to these customers, while creating capacity on the critical Red and Green Line links that enable growth in transit ridership to downtown destinations.**<sup>6</sup>

### **Reducing the Need for a Growing Private Shuttle Bus System**

The need for substantially improved public transit service within the Urban Ring corridor can perhaps best be demonstrated by looking at the growing network of private transportation services that are being provided by institutions and businesses in the corridor.



Shuttle Buses at Boston Medical Center

Particularly in the “life sciences necklace” portion of the Urban Ring, existing rapid transit and commuter rail service is limited and MBTA buses travel over a highly congested street network. The institutional and private sector has increasingly had to step in and fill the void by providing an expensive, parallel private transportation network of shuttle buses.

This private system currently operates at and above capacity, further documenting the need for improved public transit. Private institutions are investing in highly desired services linking critical components of our regional economy – including six key routes that provide connections to Kenmore, Yawkey, Ruggles, JFK/U Mass, Harvard Square and North Station that together carry 8,000 passengers daily.<sup>7</sup> While the institutions have begun working together to identify redundancies and inefficiencies in the existing private shuttle system, the longer-term solution must involve better circumferential transit.

An analysis done by VHB, an urban planning and engineering consulting firm, has identified approximately 50 shuttle bus routes connecting businesses and institutions to key transit nodes, remote parking and each other. These shuttles carry over 25,000 passengers per day, with an annual ridership of 5 million passengers. Perhaps half of this ridership could instead be served by a circumferential transit system such as the Urban Ring. This system currently costs the sponsoring institutions and businesses at least \$14-18 million annually. Improved transit in the Urban Ring corridor could allow some of the private funds currently spent on the private shuttle system to be reduced, and these funds invested in other uses, including in economic development, growth initiatives of the individual institutions, public private infrastructure partnerships or jobs.

## V. The Current Status of the Urban Ring

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Transit improvements in the Urban Ring corridor have a long history, marked by both important advances and frustrating stretches of inaction. One constant throughout has been strong and ongoing political support from local, state and federal elected officials.

One of the driving forces behind Urban Ring transit improvements has been the communities along the corridor. Boston Mayor Thomas M. Menino was an early supporter of the project and, in 1995, organized the “Urban Ring Compact,” a written agreement between Boston, Brookline, Cambridge, Somerville, Everett and Chelsea. Together, there are nearly one million residents in these six communities which would benefit from the completion of the Urban Ring, and employment is expected to increase by more than 50% within a half-mile radius of currently planned Urban Ring stations throughout the Urban Ring corridor. These “Compact Communities,” under Mayor Menino’s leadership, came together to determine ways to enhance transit access within and between communities, as well as help enable greater residential access to Boston-based jobs.

The Urban Ring has also found political and financial support from Massachusetts’ Congressional delegation. The project’s Congressional champion has been Congressman Michael E. Capuano, another early supporter who recently provided leadership in winning an earmark for Federal funds for the next stage of the environmental work and a close examination of the Longwood Area Tunnel.

Finally, support from a broad cross section of stakeholders in both the non-profit advocacy community and in the business community has been a key factor in keeping the Urban Ring moving forward. Such support has been a crucial factor in securing funding for needed project evaluations and studies. Most recently, in 2005, the institutional and business leaders who came together to form the ABC’s Urban Ring Institutional and Business Committee, with strong support from Mayor Menino, Congressman Capuano, and Governor Romney’s administration, helped secure \$2 million for the next phase of the environmental work.

Last year the Secretary of Environmental Affairs recognized the breadth of community, institutional, business and stakeholder support by enlarging the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) overseeing the completion of the state and federal environmental review documents. In addition, an energized consultant team has recently been selected to support the planning effort. Now, **the Executive Office of Transportation (EOT) must work collaboratively with the CAC and the**

**ABC’s Urban Ring Institutional and Business Committee to move the project forward expeditiously and in compliance with the already-extended schedule. The ongoing support of Mayor Menino, Congressman Capuano, the Compact Communities and the next Governor’s administration is critical to moving this project forward.**

The history of the Urban Ring clearly illustrates what can happen without such focused efforts to move forward. While the Urban Ring currently enjoys some real momentum, there have been long periods when progress has been slow, often with months or even years of no activity.

Study after study has established the need for, and benefits of, substantial transit investments in the Urban Ring corridor in order to support economic development and improve transit linkages. As one study commissioned by the MBTA summarized:

In general, it is clear that without a major investment in the corridor, traffic conditions and transit operations will deteriorate significantly by the year 2010. Growth in emerging activity centers in both Boston and Cambridge will be restrained without a major investment in the corridor. In addition, if the Circumferential Line is not built by the year 2010 costly improvements may be necessary to deal with capacity problems on key links of both the Red and Green Lines. Finally, opportunities exist both for transit line right-of-way and for the shaping of new development if planning for a Circumferential Line proceeds in a timely manner.

This conclusion is taken from a never-released circumferential transit feasibility study prepared 17 years ago, in May of 1989.

This 1989 feasibility study led nowhere until 1994, when the MBTA’s Program for Mass Transportation (PMT) concluded that there was significant demand for



North Point Development

an “inner circumferential transit line” and that this project would attract the largest number of new trips of any project examined, alleviate crowding on the rapid transit and bus lines and produce the second largest air quality benefits of any project examined in the 20-year capital plan. Based on the PMT, funds for a Major Investment Study (MIS) were secured in 1995 but the start of work on that document was delayed for more than a year and the MIS, initially slated for completion in 1997, was not published until 2001.

Similar delays have affected the environmental review process for the Urban Ring under the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA), with the deadline for a final Environmental Impact Report (EIR) on Phase 2 of the Urban Ring having been extended more than three years from its original completion date of October 31, 2005 to December 31, 2008. **For Massachusetts to stay economically competitive, these delays must end and we must work together to move this critical project forward.**

## **VI. Recommendations: Moving Ahead with the Urban Ring**

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ABC’s Urban Ring Institutional and Business Committee is committed to serving as the catalyst that will help this vitally important effort move forward. The Committee is prepared to ensure that the institutional and business stakeholders throughout the Urban Ring corridor are active and effective participants in moving the Urban Ring ahead and in working with the seven cities within and adjacent to the Urban Ring corridor, as well as all other interested stakeholders, to make the promise of improved transit in the Urban Ring a reality.

**The first step in reinvigorating the Urban Ring is for the Commonwealth and all interested stakeholders to recognize that the Urban Ring is not a single transit mega-project, but a vital corridor in which there are short-, medium- and long-term opportunities for significantly improved transit connections and service.** Where possible, investments in the Urban Ring corridor should be made incrementally, meeting the transportation needs of the most critical minimum operating segments and early action items, while planning for subsequent improvements to the entire corridor continues. In order to realize these opportunities, the Committee calls on the incoming Governor and Administration, the legislature, the Executive Office of Transportation and the MBTA to take the following five steps:

**1. Define and implement a new incremental approach to making transit improvements in the Urban Ring corridor and adhere to scheduled timelines.** Working

closely with the recently-expanded Citizens Advisory Committee, EOT and its consultants should identify a series of early action steps that could be taken to provide improved transit services in the short- and medium-term. Such early action steps could include better integration of existing public and private transit services, station improvements at key transfer stations, acquisition and protection of critical rights of way, and improved and new service in identified segments of the corridor. EOT should also identify the most critical minimum operating segments in the corridor and devise strategies to make incremental improvements within these segments to support strong economic growth and promote mobility. All elements necessary to complete these early action items should be presented and individually evaluated in the Revised Draft Environmental Impact Report and Draft Environmental Impact Statement scheduled for publication by November, 2007.

Moreover, preventing any further slippage in the already-delayed state and federal environmental review processes is a critical element in re-establishing credibility and the new Administration’s commitment to real transit improvements in the Urban Ring corridor. The new Administration and EOT must therefore commit that they will adhere to the existing schedule and will not seek any further deadline extensions. To ensure that this schedule will be met, the transportation agencies must quickly identify and program all state and federal financing necessary to complete the environmental review during the current fiscal year and the first part of FY 2008.

**2. Take all necessary steps to incorporate the Urban Ring in the Commonwealth’s official planning documents.** Both the new Administration and the legislature should prioritize transit improvements in the Urban Ring corridor when making planning and investment decisions, particularly during the next year. Several planning processes that will begin in 2007 will shape the Commonwealth’s plans for investing state and federal transportation dollars. Transit improvements in the Urban Ring Corridor, including early action items, must be incorporated into the MBTA’s Program for Mass Transportation and the Boston Metropolitan Planning Organization’s “Journey to 2030.” In addition, all capital investments made within the Urban Ring corridor, including rehabilitation and expansion projects, should be engineered to complement future Urban Ring investments.

**3. Provide funding necessary to complete early action items and position the Urban Ring for future funding via New Starts or other federally funded programs.** While the incoming Governor will not need to obtain full funding for the entire set of long-term transit

investments in the Urban Ring corridor, strategic investments must be made now to complete key steps in the design, engineering and environmental review processes and begin implementing priority early action items. During the next four years, the new Administration should complete all state and federal environmental review documents (final as well as draft), apply for federal New Starts or Small Starts funding and begin implementing the most promising short- and medium-term actions.

**4. Develop a comprehensive finance plan for the Urban Ring that works in concert with state-wide transportation finance strategies.** While substantial funding will not be needed for several years, Massachusetts needs a comprehensive transit finance strategy to meet all of the Commonwealth's high priority transportation needs, including but not limited to transit improvements in the Urban Ring corridor. The next Governor and legislature should work together, building on the work of the Transportation Finance Commission, to craft and implement such a transit finance strategy.

The long-term potential of the Urban Ring will not be realized without substantial public investment, investment that is more than justified in order to realize the many economic and transportation benefits of improving transit in the Urban Ring corridor. Finance strategies for the Urban Ring should also support an incremental approach to transit improvements in the Urban Ring Corridor, which will make it more realistic to fund over a period of time.

**5. Develop a joint project management team that includes EOT, the MBTA, MassPort, the Executive Office of Economic Development and the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, which is led by a single agency. This project management team needs interagency cooperation and support and should be given priority within the Governor's office.** Such a team would enhance the stature of the project within state government, provide continuity in project development for the long term, and establish a multi-agency investment strategy to support significant regional economic development.

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<sup>1</sup>Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, [Circumferential Transportation Improvements in the Urban Ring Corridor: Draft Environmental Impact Report \(November 2004\)](#). (hereafter Phase 2 DEIR).

<sup>2</sup>All demographic and ridership information is from the MBTA's Phase 2 DEIR.

<sup>3</sup>MassINC, [The Pursuit of Happiness: A Survey on the Quality of Life in Massachusetts \(2003\)](#).

<sup>4</sup>Massachusetts Technology Collaborative, [The R&D Funding Scorecard: Federal Investments and the Massachusetts Innovation Economy \(2004\)](#).

<sup>5</sup>This information was compiled by the Medical, Academic and Scientific Community Organization, Inc. or MASCO and can be found on their website at [http://www.masco.org/aboutLMA\\_facts.htm](http://www.masco.org/aboutLMA_facts.htm)

<sup>6</sup>Phase 2 DEIR.

<sup>7</sup>All data on private shuttle buses is from an unpublished analysis conducted by Ruth Bonsignore and her team at the consulting and engineering firm of VHB.



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