

Transit, Olympic boards 'coordinating' on plans



Photo by: Christopher Evans

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John Fish

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By: Erin Smith

Officials crafting Boston's new long-term transportation plan say they are coordinating with the group pushing to bring the 2024 Summer Games to the Hub but deny the Olympic bid is controlling transit strategy — despite close ties between the two boards.

John Fish, the construction magnate who is spearheading Boston's Olympic bid, also serves on Mayor Martin J. Walsh's steering committee overseeing the Go Boston 2030 campaign, which is soliciting feedback from residents to envision the transit system and transportation on the city's 400th anniversary.

The Go Boston 2030 campaign is fully funded by the Barr Foundation, according to a Walsh spokeswoman. The family of Amos Hostetter, co-founder of the Barr Foundation, is a financial donor to the Boston 2024 bid effort, according to Fish.

State Rep. Russell Holmes (D-Mattapan), co-chairman of the committee overseeing the transportation plan, was among a handful of lawmakers who met behind closed doors with Boston 2024 officials in October. The other co-chairman is Richard A. Dimino, head of A Better City.

Dimino's group released a South Boston waterfront transportation plan earlier this month that calls for an extension of the commuter rail lines from Worcester to the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center in the Seaport District and an expansion of South Station within the next 10 years — major transportation projects trumpeted as being in the works in the Boston 2024 Olympic bid. The sponsoring agencies for that report included the city of Boston, MassDOT, Massport and the Massachusetts Convention Center Authority — all named as partners by Boston 2024 organizers in their Olympic bid.

"It is only coincidental that the Olympics effort happens to be going on and in light of that, there's going to be coordinating," said Dimino. "There's no tax dollar relation in those two efforts. We're certainly going to be coordinating with the Olympic effort. It would be silly not to."

Fish insisted Olympic organizers are not influencing the city's long-term transportation plan.

"I think the opposite," said Fish. "I think the Olympic effort is being shaped by the city's plan for 2030. As I've said all along, I think the important discussion is where does the city want to be in 2030 and how does the Olympic program fit into that."

Fish said he's serving on Walsh's committee overseeing transportation planning as a public service.

"If anybody felt that Boston 2024's involvement had an appearance of conflict, I would be more than pleased to step down," Fish said. "All I want to do is offer my expertise and experience in construction to the benefit of the city."

Holmes openly admits he's in favor of Boston's Olympic bid and said he wants to take advantage of the

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transportation funding he believes will follow host status.

"I believe the Olympic transportation is going to be primarily focused on the downtown of the city, but I know that the neighborhoods will be able to build off of that," said Holmes, who wants rapid transit bus service in Roxbury and Mattapan. "The concern is what do you do with all the apparatus that is left after the Olympics? We want to make sure that all the decisions are made with that in mind."

Walsh's media team sent out a press release about the Go Boston 2030 campaign Thursday — an hour after the Herald began asking questions about the initiative. The press release, which came a day after the scheduled start of the street campaign, touted the initiative as a "bold new transportation plan for Boston for the next five, 10, and 15 years" built on input from participants' questions.

A Walsh spokeswoman said the "Question Campaign" and the Go Boston 2030 are run by nonprofit Interaction Institute for Social Change and funded by the Barr Foundation, which already spent nearly \$478,000 on the campaign last year and budgeted \$600,000 for the effort this year, said Walsh spokeswoman Bonnie McGilpin.

The Go Boston 2030 campaign is scheduled to be completed by spring 2016 — several months after Boston submits a final bid to the International Olympic Committee on Jan. 8.

McGilpin said in a statement, "The City of Boston's work to create an innovative transportation plan using direct input from our residents will proceed regardless of whether the City hosts the Olympics because the Mayor is committed to building a transportation system that works for a 21st century world class city."

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