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# Urban Ring project is no urban legend

## Officials unveil vision for Phase II of the rapid transit service

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**State transportation officials have unveiled their vision for Phase II of the ambitious Urban Ring project that would create rapid transit MBTA bus service they hope will connect neighboring communities, lower commute times and link with the T's existing system.**

After 18 months of narrowing down route options, transporta-

tion officials have settled on their recommendation. The 25-mile corridor would run between Chelsea, Everett and Somerville, continue south to Cambridge, the Fenway and Roxbury and complete the "ring" through South Boston, Logan Airport and East Boston. There would also be spurs to Allston and South Dorchester.

Recently, project leaders have held public meetings in Chelsea, the Fenway and Cambridge (with another slated in Roxbury on Monday) to brief residents on their recommendation for the \$2.2 billion

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rapid bus service — which includes a \$1.5 billion underground tunnel between Ruggles Station and the Landmark Center.

"The existing MBTA rapid transit system does a good job of connecting to downtown Boston," Ned Codd, the Urban Ring project leader for the state's Executive Office of Transportation, told residents this week during a community meet-

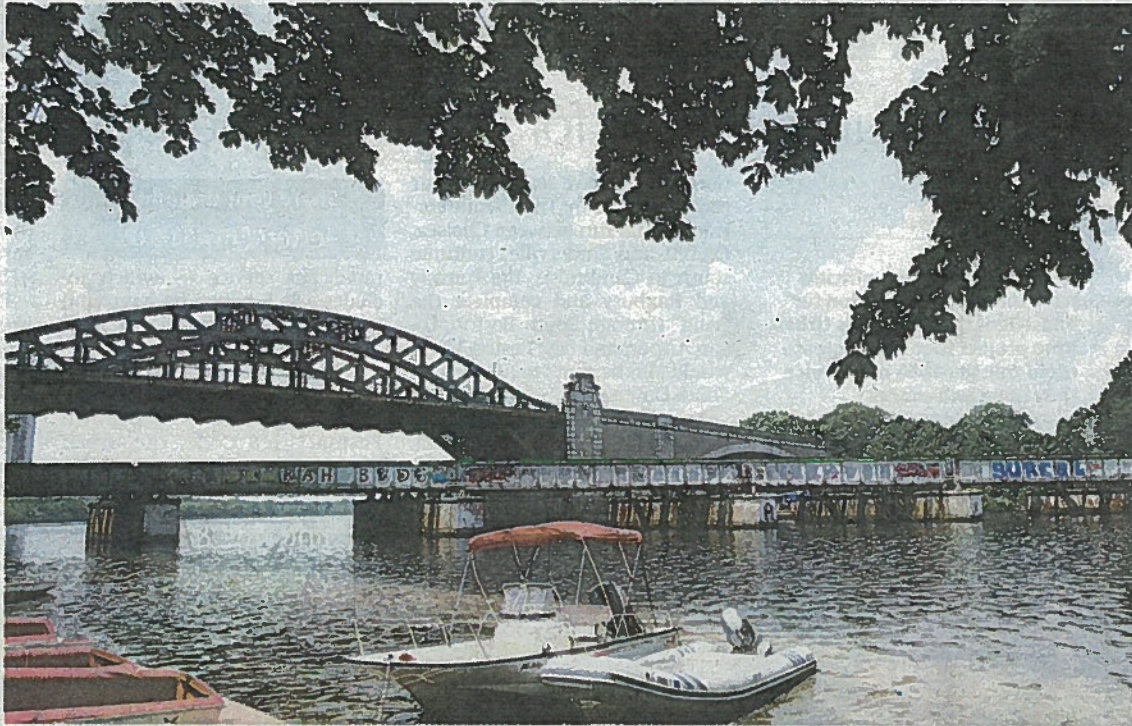
ing. "However, once you start getting outside of downtown, the radial transit lines start to spread out, leaving gaps in between."

The Urban Ring project is years in the making. Phase I added crosstown T buses in 1994, and Phase III would add either light or heavy rail service in some parts of the corridor. Officials hope to break ground for Phase II of the ring by 2015, though many hurdles still remain.

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# Urban Ring to connect communities, business



The Urban Ring's current Phase II proposal calls for rebuilding the Grand Junction Railroad Bridge, which runs across the Charles River and beneath the BU Bridge, and using it for rapid bus service.

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The goal of the Urban Ring's proposed Phase II, officials say, is to connect communities north of Boston that are growing rapidly with the major business, education and medical centers in and around the city.

Many of the major stops will connect largely to major universities (Harvard, BU, MIT) and medical centers (BU Medical Center, Longwood Medical Center) in the area. "There are very important sectors to the state and regional economy," said Ned Codd, the Urban Ring project leader for the state's Department of Transportation.

Population estimates for the Urban Ring corridor suggest a 26 percent increase to 495,100 people between 2000 and 2030, and they say the Urban Ring is necessary to help relieve the increased congestion and traffic problems over the next few decades.

## Urban Ring stops



But many challenges remain, especially from a financial standpoint.

Phase II's price tag is \$2.2 billion, based on 2007 dollars. Later this year, state officials will submit a funding request to the federal government's New Starts program, which officials esti-

mate could be as high as \$800 million. But project officials also say the Urban Ring's estimated \$14 billion to \$18 billion "cost-effectiveness ratio" puts it in a competitive range for these funds. The state would also have to match millions of dollars in funding.

## Proposed tunnel

Another concern is the proposed \$1.5 billion, 1.5-mile tunnel between the Fenway and Roxbury.

During construction, interim surface bus service will run throughout the heavily-traveled Longwood Medical area, primarily on Brookline, Longwood and Huntington avenues, and residents expressed concern about the issue at a community meeting Monday.

State officials also admit they don't know how long interim surface bus service would last, but Codd called the Longwood Medical area's transit needs "immediate, growing and considerable."

However, the project comes after a stirring report last year from the Transportation Finance Commission, which estimated that in 20 years, there will be a \$15 billion to \$19 billion shortfall in funding to maintain the state's current transportation system.

## Stations

### Commuter rail, Green Line stops?

The Urban Ring plan also calls for a new commuter rail stop in Sullivan Square, where currently there is only an Orange Line stop and area buses.

Officials are also considering adding an underground station on the Green Line's D branch between Kenmore and Park Street as part of the project.

## By the numbers

**40,000**

Number of vehicles the Urban Ring is expected to take off the road.

**174,300**

Number of daily boardings on Urban Ring bus service in 2030.

**36** The approximate number of stations along entire Urban Ring service.

## Projections

### Travel time:

(All projections based on 2030 population estimates)

**Sullivan Square to Kendall Square**  
Without Urban Ring: 27 min. with: 19 min.

**Kendall/MIT to Longwood Medical Center**  
Without Urban Ring: 33 min., with: 26 min.

**BU Medical Center to Longwood Medical Center**  
Without Urban Ring: 25 min., with: 18 min.

**Downtown Chelsea to Wellington Station**  
Without Urban Ring: 24 min., with: 6 min.