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Subject: Cambridge Planning Board and Transit Priorities at Kendall Square

To : The Cambridge Redevelopment Authority

From : Stephen H. Kaiser

Today, Wednesday, I am planning to attend four meetings, including the MBTA Control Board in the early afternoon and a meeting at Harvard with presentations by three former Secretaries of Transportation. This latter meeting will probably last past 5:30, so I will be at least an hour late to the CRA meeting planned for that time. I hope my report below will serve as a communication to the Authority and as a written public comment submitted for the record of the CRA.

The key event to report was the meeting on October 20 of the Cambridge Planning Board. The sole issue before them was the proposed zoning amendment (refiled) for the 14-acre Volpe parcel. This parcel has the potential for a total development of more than 3 million square feet. In a staff memo dated a week earlier, city planners made no mention of either transit or transportation. At the hearing, the planning staff gave a lengthy PowerPoint presentation on transportation -- devoted almost exclusively to traffic, with little mention of transit.

The six members of the Planning Board began by hearing public testimony, took a ten minute break and came back to offer individual statements of their views on the Volpe petition. All six members in their comments referred explicitly to transportation issues and especially to transit. In his concluding comment, the Chair Ted Cohen identified the Red Line as the single-most important factor in the future success of not only the Volpe center but Kendall Square generally. He and other members urged a lobbying effort to communicate to state officials the importance of improving capacity and service on the Red Line.

In my public testimony to the Board, I noted member Steve Cohen's concerns about approving any more development at Kendall Square, at a time when the Red Line lacks capacity to handle additional riders. The recently released EIR prepared by the Authority and Boston Properties considers both planned growth at Kendall, and the possibilities of implementing capacity improvements on the Red Line :

"The expanded transit analysis indicates that there is a great need for Red Line improvements if ... future ridership increases, creating demand higher than the available capacity. If improvements were implemented and trains ran according to the posted schedule of 4.5 minute headways, providing a peak hour capacity of 13,026 riders, there would be enough capacity to support the future demand,"

This conclusion in the report highlights the link between development and transit, and between transit and development. I believe the Board has grasped the impact and significance of this link, and is prepared to use the "bully pulpit" of the Planning Board as a source for improved transit service -- not only for Cambridge but for the region as a whole.

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