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MXD Mitigation Grand Junction Transit Study (Cobb)

1 message

Stephen Kaiser <skaiser1959@gmail.com>

Thu, Jun 9, 2022 at 6:00 PM

To: kathyborn <kathyborn@gmail.com>, Ellen Shore <eshore@cambridgeredevelopment.org>, Bob Simha <Simha@mit.edu>

COMMUNICATION to the BOARD of the Cambridge Redevelopment Authority

From : Stephen Kaiser

I have mixed feelings about the contract signed by the Board with the consultant to Boston Properties to provide a study of a transit service along the Grand Junction corridor. I am aware of the fact that the Kendall Square Transportation Task Force was an initiative by MassDOT which fizzled when MassDOT pulled out its sponsorship, and the Cambridge Community Development Department was unable to carry the project forward. Thirty years ago there was an effort to create an Urban Ring looping through Cambridge and Boston, but also was abandoned by MassDOT as a comprehensive project. Entities like The Kendall Square Association and Boston Properties tried to give assistance, but after the August 2017 Final Report with Cambridge and MassDOT as dropouts, the report fell down the memory hole.

Thus I welcome the initiative to fund a study, using an outside consultant to try to move transit planning forward. The study at \$300,000 is neither massive nor insubstantial, and the developer runs the risk that MassDOT and MBTA will give the same amount of attention to transit service they have given over the past five years -- which is nothing.

However, this year, things are different, and we will have a new Governor in January. Hopefully we will have a new outlook on transportation priorities and how to get projects moving through the planning process. Except for the Big Dig, transportation planning is an element that has been missing in state government since 1990. The WSP report could be available in October, just prior to the November election. It might become a factor in political debates. If the WSP report generates any discussion, such conversation is most desirable and will keep the report from being stonewalled. We will also have a new City Manager in Cambridge, who may be able to improve the quality of transportation planning response in the city. We seem to have an MBTA which seems to be heading off the cliff, bureaucratically and financially. I would hope for a major emphasis by a new Governor to assure improved performance from the MBTA. The WSP report could be useful in providing alternatives and analysis to get us going in the right direction.

The problem I have is with the packaging. Everything has been assembled by a private developer, including funding and the choice of a consultant. I would have preferred a choice of at least two proposals and if the CRA signs the contract they should provide the funding out of its regular budget. It looks too much as if the CRA is fronting for a private developer, and while I cannot imagine a better developer, I believe that the CRA should be completely in charge of all of its business.

The Board vote has been taken, and the precedent has been set unfortunately. The timing is right, politically, and massive growth and traffic congestion at Kendall Square requires that something be done. I thank Boston Properties for their initiative, and I recall well that the last significant transit study of Kendall Square was submitted in October 2005 by Boston Properties. I would stress to WSP that the best conceived transit system will be undermined if typical MBTA operations involve a neglect of bus or train bunching. Its own study will be considered a failure if it does not deal in depth with bunching.

I look forward to reviewing the WSJ report in October. I will be fair and honest about those elements which are competently and thoroughly done. Where that is not the case, I will be candid in my criticism.

Stephen Kaiser
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SUBJECT : MXD Mitigation Grand Junction Transit Study (Cobb)

- Draft Motion: *Authorizing the Chair and Executive Director to enter into a professional services contract with WSP to conduct a feasibility study of transit service on the Grand Junction rail corridor for an amount not to exceed three-hundred thousand dollars (\$300,000).*

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