



To: Keri Pyke, Jane Howard Date: October 25, 2011  
From: Michael Flanary HSH Project No.: 2010141.00  
Subject: Melnea Cass Boulevard,  
Background Projects and Decisions

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No urban corridor exemplifies the transportation planning and design paradigm shift from highway-building to “complete streets” more dramatically than Melnea Cass Boulevard. In the early 1960’s, this corridor was a recommended link of the Massachusetts Department of Public Works Inner Belt Highway Project, connecting the existing Southeast Expressway with a planned 8-lane Southwest Expressway. At the time, it was felt that “the impacts attributable to construction will be substantially eased by the opportunities afforded by coordination of expressway construction with urban renewal projects.” (p. IV-17). Land was taken at that time to accommodate a limited access multi-lane highway with significant land requirements for ramp connections and interchanges in a central part of Boston’s core. Even the massive Central Artery/Third Harbor Tunnel project involved fewer land takings for its execution.

This concept was abandoned in the early 1970’s as the result of a community outcry that had national proportions. Not only was highway building within circumferential Route 128 halted, but the wheels were set in motion for transfer of highway building funds to public transportation, again a major turnaround in public policy. Thus was born the Boston Transportation Planning Review, which resulted in both the Orange Line relocation to replace the proposed highway in the Southwest Corridor and the Circumferential Transit Project, now known as the Urban Ring. In 1979, the Southwest Corridor project design was accompanied by a *Southwest Corridor Development Plan*, developed in close communication with community groups and with the goal of making the corridor “a model for urban living in the future.”

This plan outlined specific parcel-by-parcel development opportunities tied to planned transit improvements. A number of these, including housing, a supermarket, offices and community facilities were targeted in the “Crosstown Street” corridor that was later named Melnea Cass Boulevard after a widely respected South End community volunteer and civil rights activist, who died in 1978.

Design of the “Crosstown Street” was overseen in the 1970’s by the City of Boston and the Boston Redevelopment Authority in conjunction with the Southwest Corridor planning and design overseen by the Commonwealth and the MBTA. While the need for a crosstown arterial traffic connector was acknowledged, the selected design did provide an easement for the future Circumferential Transit (Urban Ring) operations on the northeast side of the roadway. Efforts were made to limit traffic left turn lanes and to provide neckdowns at street corners to shorten pedestrian crossings. Now, close to 40 years later, the City is reconstructing the street in order to more equitably serve all its users – not only drivers, but pedestrians, cyclists, and transit riders. Safety is another major concern, especially at the high accident locations of the boulevard with Tremont Street and the Massachusetts Avenue Connector. The *Roxbury Strategic Plan* also notes that pedestrian improvements and traffic calming measures are desirable in this corridor to mitigate its effect as a pedestrian barrier between adjoining neighborhoods.

Some opportunities for Urban Ring services have also been realized along the corridor, mainly through express CT (circumferential) bus services that connect the Longwood Medical Area with Cambridge, the Boston University Medical Center in the South End, and JFK/UMass station on the Red Line. Future Bus Rapid Transit service alternatives all take advantage of the Melnea Cass transit easement as well.

Below is a listing of various reports and projects that have been written about MCB. The findings are in chronological order and the title of the document (in bold) is followed below with the writers, and the final indentation is a summary of the text.

- **Inner belt study (green book)**
  - Inner Belt and Expressway System, Boston Metropolitan Area, 1962
    - Recommendations: creation of inner beltway around Boston, seeing the success of Route 128 beltway. This proposal set the stage for the significant property takings in the Southwest Corridor that were made to accommodate the new highway.
- **Boston Transportation Planning Review: Southwest Corridor planning report, 1972**
  - This significant planning study recommended replacement of the Orange Line along Washington Street with a new rapid transit line along the corridor where land had been cleared for the Southwest Expressway.
- **Boston Transportation Planning Review: Circumferential Transit planning report, 1972**
  - This planning study recommended construction of an inner circumferential transit line in the former Inner Belt Corridor, including what became Melnea Cass Boulevard.
  - Mentions alternative transportation possibilities, including bus service and light rail options.
  - BTPR circumferential transit concept plan, see map attached.
  - BTPR circumferential transit concept plan with multimodal transit option, see map attached.
- **Final Environmental Impact Statement: Orange Line Relocation and Arterial Street Construction (Southwest Corridor Project), MBTA, March, 1978**
  - This report paved the way for the Orange Line relocation and construction of an “arterial street” from Massachusetts Avenue to Forest Hills along the Melnea Cass corridor and adjacent to the relocated Orange Line tracks along Columbus Avenue. The design of this street was advanced by the BRA and the City of Boston.
- **Southwest Corridor Development Plan, 1979**
  - This planning study carefully outlined development plans for the parcels of land that had been cleared for the abandoned Southwest Expressway and Inner Belt highways. As part of this planning and the creation of the “Crosstown Street”, by the City of Boston, land was reserved in the corridor for future transit service.
  - “[Melnea Cass Boulevard] will eliminate through traffic from residential streets, consolidate existing streets in the area, and provide necessary access for major new structures, such as those in the crosstown industrial park,” SCDP (page 4).
- **Circumferential Transit Feasibility Study, MBTA, 1986-7**
  - A more detailed study of transit options in the Melnea Cass Corridor. Before the MIS was completed in 2001, interim improvements in bus service along the corridor were implemented, including the CT1, CT2 and CT3 express buses.
- **Urban Ring MIS, MBTA, 2001**
  - EOT
    - <http://www.eot.state.ma.us/default.asp?pgid=content/urbanRingMtg&sid=about>
    - The MIS identified the Urban Ring corridor and destinations for service; proposed a strategy for implementing the project in three phases; and developed conceptual plans for each of the three phases.
- **Urban Ring Phase 2, Draft Environmental Impact Statement, MBTA, November 2004**
  - Further study of circumferential transit, including use of the reservation along Melnea Cass Boulevard.

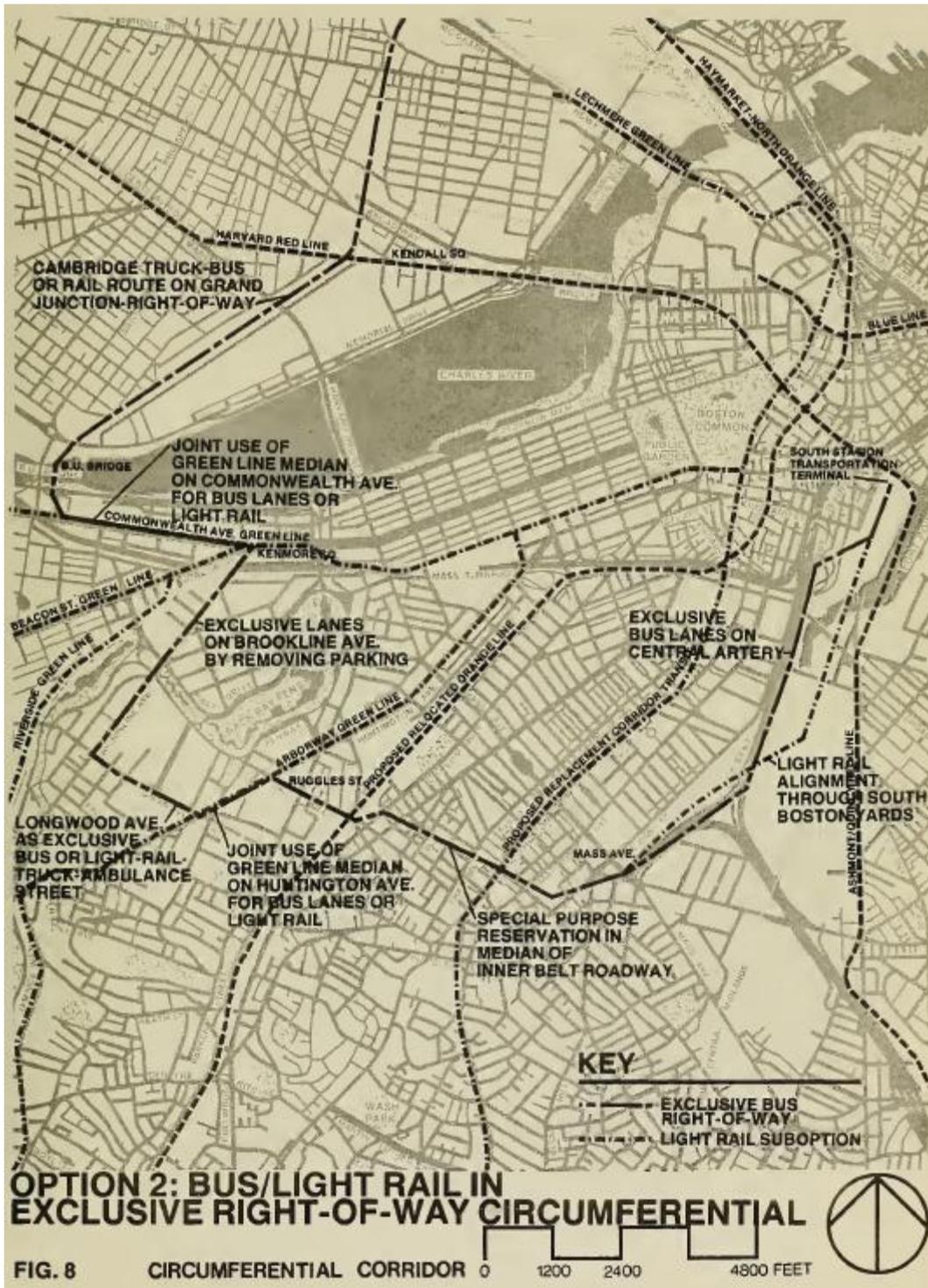
- **Roxbury Strategic Master Plan, 2004**
  - Report by City of Boston, Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA)
    - Report serves as strategic framework to guide change and encourage growth for the next ten to twenty years.
  - Priorities of report
    - Integrate and connect Roxbury with the larger network of parks, transit corridors/boulevards and business and cultural centers throughout the city (Open Space & Transportation)
    - Raise the community's awareness of Roxbury's many historic assets and strong architectural legacy; promote historic and cultural preservation as a tool for neighborhood revival (Historic Preservation).
    - Create a healthy environment and a rich array of cultural, educational and economic opportunities for the elderly and the youth of the community (Arts & Cultural Heritage & Economic Development & Job Creation).
  - Recommendations (relevant items)
    - Emphasize the importance of key streets in the community
    - Establish street design standards that reflect the importance of the pedestrian realm. Apply streetscape design standards developed by the City's Transportation Department. These guidelines are contained in "Streetscape Guidelines for Boston's Major Roads"(1999) and "Guidelines for Residential Streets"(2001).
  - Recommendations (continued)
    - One size does not fit all. Urban design standards for housing, commercial structures, industrial institutions, public facilities and open space should be adapted to reflect the scale and character of the immediate context.
    - Create buffer zones where industrial areas abut residential areas.
    - Requests for Proposals for all publicly and privately owned property that will benefit from substantial public investment in site preparation, infrastructure investments or financing should include clearly stated guidelines and criteria consistent with the goals of the Roxbury Strategic Master Plan.
  - Crosstown Corridor Principles
    - The Crosstown Corridor should function as a "seam" uniting Upper and Lower Roxbury.
    - The eastern half of the boulevard between Massachusetts Avenue and Washington Street should be developed for non-residential, job- generating uses. Existing industrial and commercial buildings should be adaptively re-used and appropriately sized vacant parcels should be designed to fully leverage their potential to increase the number of sustainable, well-paying jobs in Roxbury.
    - The portion of Melnea Cass Boulevard west of Washington Street should be developed with an emphasis on re-knitting the neighborhoods on either side of it. Residential and/or mixed-use development should be considered here.
    - The Crosstown Corridor should be developed in a manner that takes full advantage of its strategic geographic location and exceptional transportation access within the city and the metropolitan region.
    - Development of the public parcels should focus on uses that generate a range of quality, sustainable jobs that offer living wages and opportunities for advancement, including appropriate training programs that maximize Roxbury residents' access to those jobs. Some of these parcels may also be appropriate for mixed uses, including housing. Ground floor uses should primarily be non-residential and include retail and public-oriented uses that also generate jobs and offer opportunities for entrepreneurship and local ownership.
    - Melnea Cass Boulevard should be made more inviting for pedestrians in order to help reduce the perception of a divide between Upper and Lower Roxbury.
    - Requests for Proposals should take full advantage of Transit-Oriented Development principles to allow for greater development density but lower parking ratios, thereby minimizing traffic impacts.

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- MCB specific recommendations
  - Wider sidewalks, neck-downs and crosswalks at key intersections
  - Regularly spaced trees and light fixtures to define the boulevard
  - Lower scaled, pedestrian oriented and ornamental lighting and banners
  - A planted median
  - Wherever possible, building entries oriented onto Melnea Cass Boulevard
  - Service entries should generally be located at the rear of parcels. If they are placed next to housing, then delivery hours should be limited to hours that least interference with neighboring housing.
  - Building setbacks for new and renovated buildings should reinforce the street wall along Melnea Cass Boulevard.
  - Surface and structured parking should generally be discouraged directly on the Boulevard, should be required to include active ground floor uses.
  - Surface parking should be buffered with attractive fencing and generous landscaping. Structured parking on the Boulevard should be required to include active ground floor uses.
  - Melnea Cass Boulevard must be multi-modal and any reconstruction must incorporate both transit and bicycle facilities into its design. The Urban Ring and South Bay Harbor Trail projects will each enhance its character and contribute to the importance of Melnea Cass Boulevard. In addition to the dedicated path for the South Bay Harbor Trail, the roadway cross-section should provide sufficient width for bicycles to travel, without occupying an entire travel lane.
- **Southwest corner parcels (Parcels 8, 9, 10 next to Washington Street) 2008**
  - Report from Roxbury Strategic Master Plan Oversight Committee, with Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA)
    - Melnea Cass Boulevard, Washington Street and Parcels 8, 9, and 10 located on MCB.
    - “The process culminated in site analysis and feedback on recommendations for site configurations, uses, and design. This report reflects the ideas, concerns, and desires that the community expressed throughout the series of workshops.”
    - Majority of jobs in Roxbury are “healthcare and social assistance” and “professional and business services and information” sectors
    - Green jobs are desired in the area
  - Access/Circulation
    - Pedestrian environment
    - Easy access, navigation
    - Safe, pleasant
    - Good penetration- retail store fronts close to street
  - Urban Land Use Concept
    - Focal area should be at corner of Washington St. and MCB
    - Concept “begins to inform the land use, site configuration, and massing of the area”
    - Gateway in Roxbury – major urban corners should serve as the primary retail focus of site
    - “This energy should spread out among the primary edges before engaging the rest of the site.”
    - Community desires nice, affordable housing opportunities – wealth generation a key factor
  - Use and Design Guidelines
    - Health, medical, and green jobs
    - Buildings close to street

- **Revised Draft Environmental Impact Report (RDEIR) Urban Ring Phase 2, November 2008**
  - Report by the Federal Transit Administration, US DOT, EOT
    - EOT will continue coordination with the City of Boston regarding the planned Melnea Cass corridor center busway alignment. This reconfiguration would enable streetscape improvements to the Melnea Cass corridor, and would facilitate the creation of a planned shared-use path, the South Bay Harbor Trail.
    - EOT will continue coordination with the City of Boston regarding the removal of on-street parking on Albany Street to provide bus lanes in both directions.
    - The project would provide a direct, frequent connection between the Boston University's Charles River campus and the BU Medical Center.
  - From Presentation PDF <http://www.pdsomerville.org/files/02-26-07-CAC-Presentation.pdf>
    - Phase 2 of Urban Ring
      - "Once in the program, project must: demonstrate progress, maintain ratings annually, including cost-effectiveness."
    - In the program
      - 15 projects funded or pending - \$1.2 billion FY '08
      - 4 small start projects (\$52 million)
      - 23 projects – PE or Final Design
    - Original (A Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for Phase 2 was completed in November 2004)
- **Parcels 9 and 10 RFP (April, 2011)** Development goals (more in-depth in document)
  - Boston Redevelopment Authority
  - Implement the Roxbury Strategic Master Plan
    - Generate wealth
    - Catalyze new economic growth
    - Reinforce the physical, social, and economic fabric
    - Leverage the resources of Roxbury at large
    - Build a highly sustainable development
    - Create a successful transit-oriented development
    - Maximize the value of Parcels 9 and 10
- **From Keri's e-mail (via Jay Doyle at AECOM) (January, 2011)**
  - Task 2 language in the BTM design scope, January, 2011 RTP
    - Task 2, fourth bullet "work with BTM, abutters, affected agencies, and the Roxbury community to refine and where necessary redesign the plans shown in the Strategic Master Plan and Urban Ring Phase 2 to create a Conceptual Design that has the approval of the City and the support of the community. The Conceptual Design will be used as the basis for the Final Design."



FIG. 1 BTPR, Circumferential Transit Planning Report, concept plan (1972)



BTPR, Circumferential Transit Planning Report, concept plan with multimodal transit option (1972)