

**Stephen H. Kaiser
191 Hamilton St.
Cambridge Mass. 02139**

To : The Cambridge City Council

From : Stephen H. Kaiser

Limited but Important Progress on the Volpe Project

At the December 1 public hearing by the Ordinance Committee, the general sense from Council members present and the public comment was that the zoning proposal should not move ahead. Concerns were expressed about insufficient information, economic infeasibility, lack of participation by Federal agencies in their own project, and a need to be more sensitive to the needs of the City-wide planning study.

However, one element of good news did not receive sufficient recognition at the end of the discussion. A change in priorities was expressed by the Planning Board to recognize the importance of public transit services provided by the Red Line. Under a new item, "transportation," the Board noted the problems associated with more traffic and parking in an already congested area, and their comment letter of November 30 identified the Red Line as the most important planning and service element in the Kendall Square area. The Board called for more attention for infrastructure services, so that transit capacity and reliability can be improved to keep pace with new development.

The full text of the Board comments on transportation is as follows :

"At the November 17 hearing, the Board heard additional information on potential transportation impacts of development not just on the Volpe site but throughout the area studied in the K2C2 process. This information revisited the assumptions that were made during that study, looking at potential scenarios in which development occurs at a faster rate than anticipated in 2011, and assessed what additional impacts might need to be considered.

"One of the variables discussed in this study is that predicted traffic impacts from commercial development can vary widely based on whether space is occupied by lab uses, which tend to have lower employee density, or office uses, which tend to have higher employee density. In order to normalize this difference in impact, the Board recommends setting the same maximum parking ratio for office and lab uses, using the more restrictive standard of 0.8 space per 1,000 square feet, which would further limit overall traffic impact.

"However, the larger concern in the Board's opinion is the impact on transit. The impacts on traffic will be limited by the current capacity of the regional road system, which is not likely to expand significantly.

"The transit system, particularly the Red Line, is the best opportunity to support future growth in Kendall Square, but the system faces obvious challenges with the current capacity and reliability of service. While improvements are technologically feasible, they will require financial and organizational resources to achieve.

"The current zoning language specifies the need to perform a traffic study and to incorporate a program of transportation mitigation improvements into a Final Development Plan. At the suggestion of staff, the Board recommends updating that language to require a more robust transportation study and transportation mitigation program that accounts for the entire transportation network in the area, including transit along with other modes of transportation.

"This type of program would incorporate requirements into the phasing of a project based on determined thresholds, so that required improvements would keep pace with anticipated development impacts."

The Board recommended modifications to earlier zoning drafts, especially in Section 13.18 to reflect these new priorities, including subsection (5) "The impacts on Increased demand for public transportation services in the Kendall Square area and measures to offset or mitigate such impacts."

Sincerely,



Stephen H. Kaiser, PhD