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22



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The Green Line extension is estimated to have a higher price tag than first thought, calling into question the future of the project.

By **Matt Rocheleau**

The surprising news that the MBTA is projecting significantly higher costs for the Green Line extension project has caused an uproar — and sent officials scrambling for solutions.

Officials at the MBTA and the state Transportation Department on Monday said they were considering several different options for how to proceed.

Here's a closer look at the details of the various proposals that could address the funding gap, which is estimated at \$700 million to \$1 billion:

Option 1: Downsize the project to cut costs

There are at least three components of the project that officials may scale down, delay, or do away with completely.

- Getting rid of, or shrinking, plans for a vehicle maintenance and storage facility would result in up to \$149 million in savings.



End of Green Line extension?

MBTA officials said they may need up to \$1 billion more for the project — above and beyond the current \$1.99 billion price tag.

Read the MBTA report

A look at Green Line extension

- Reducing the size of the proposed stations could save up to \$40 million.
- Scrapping, or curtailing, [plans for a cycling and pedestrian path](#) — which would run alongside the trolley tracks and connect to existing paths — would save up to \$28 million.

Making those cutbacks would reduce the project's budget by up to \$217 million, allowing the state to focus available funding on “core project elements,” state officials said in a [report outlining the options](#).

But the cuts would still leave officials well shy of closing the funding gap. And there is significant risk to making such changes — it could prompt the Federal Transit Administration to reconsider its pledge of \$996 million for the project.

Additionally, scaling back would “reduce project benefits and disappoint project stakeholders,” state officials noted.

Option 2: Find more money

Officials have identified a few ways they might be able to secure more nonstate funding for the project:

- Reallocate \$158 million in federal funds that are currently earmarked for a separate, future project to extend the Green Line even farther north by building a station near Route 16. The move, which would require approval from the Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization, would delay, but not cancel the Route 16 station plans.
- Work with city officials in Cambridge, Somerville, and Medford to share some of the burden and to help find funding from private and philanthropic sources.
- Seek contributions from neighboring private institutions and organizations, such as Tufts University or the developer leading a revitalization project in Union Square.
- Ask for more federal funding.

But officials acknowledged in their report that each scenario carries a big question mark, since they would require the outside groups to be willing to share money.

Option 3: Re-bid the project

Another idea is to rebid the project, which, if it attracted enough competition from contractors, could result in companies submitting lower bids to do the same work.

But this scenario, officials say, would delay the project by at least a year, and would carry a pair of serious risks:

New bids could come in higher than they are now and re-bidding could trigger the Federal Transit Administration to reconsider its pledge of \$996 million for the project.

Option 4: Mothball or cancel the project

Officials are also considering indefinitely suspending the project or canceling it altogether.

Doing so would not only resolve the current funding shortage for the project, but it would also allow the state to avoid the risk that the cost of the project could increase again before its finished.

The state would also be able to reallocate unused state funding to pay for other transit needs.

However, it would also mean that the anticipated benefits of the project, as well \$996 million in federal funding, would be forfeited. And hundreds of millions in state funding would have to be spent for work already done and to shut down the project with “little benefit,” the report says.

It would also leave the state at risk of litigation.

The Green Line extension — meant to offset environmental impacts from the increase of traffic caused by the Big Dig — was first committed to in 1990s after an environmental advocacy organization threatened the state with legal action.

Option 5: Something nobody’s thought of

The state’s final option is a bit of a Hail Mary pass: to solicit input from the public to see if anyone has a brilliant idea for a solution.

Officials said they are accepting comment via e-mail — planning@dot.state.ma.us and info@glxinfo.com — through Sept. 9. And, at the state transportation board’s next meeting on Sept. 9, officials plan to allow extra time for public comment.

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