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State Green Line extension funds a “big win,” Sciortino says

By S.H. Bagley

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BOSTON - The state’s funding for the Green Line Extension passed in the House of Representatives. It is expected to get through the Senate before the weekend.

If everything goes to plan in the Senate, the Green Line Extension construction process will get a shot in the arm.

The House’s latest Transportation Bond Bill includes \$700 million for the subway extension, on the floor this week, and money for other Somerville projects which will be voted on later this summer, Provost said.

The Green Line funding is almost half of the total bond bill. The total bill is \$1.6 billion.

“This should be a big hurrah for the Green Line funding,” State Rep. Carl Sciortino said. “This is a big win for us.”

The boost comes in an amendment intending to cut down on the number of times the project has to go out to bid. “It’s to set up pilot projects for a design build amendment,” State Representative Denise Provost said. That means “usually, when you do big projects, you go out to bid for a designer, then you go out to bid again for a builder. The [amendment] streamlines that process.”

If passed, the amendment would only have to go out to bid once, to a general contractor responsible for designing the Green Line stations and getting them built. Provost said if these projects are handled by two separate firms, they tend to get delayed by arguing back and forth between designer and builder.

“The other beautiful thing,” Provost said, “is it tends to produce projects that come in on time and tend not to go over budget.”

Sciortino said the bill will further streamline the project’s development by asking the Federal and State-level engineering and environmental reviews be conducted at the same time.

In response to U.S. Congressman Mike Capuano’s statements at a March press event where he said setting a completion date for the Green Line Extension was a political trap, Provost said “The fact that the date is not set in stone but written on a legally binding document has been extremely helpful in holding federal feet to the fire.”

“I can’t guarantee the Commonwealth can meet the deadline,” Provost said, “but I can use it, and I have.”

Provost said the Patrick Administration had inherited the delayed project from previous governor Mitt Romney, who as governor pushed the project’s completion back to 2014 from original end date 2011.

The bond bill also includes money in earmarks for several projects in Somerville, Provost said, including Washington Street reconstruction, to be taken up in the second half of the bond bill later this spring. “I put them in earmarks,” Provost said.

Sciortino said the Washington Street money was included after the ongoing community frustration over the condition of the street. “Washington Street is front and center. That’s what’s been heard loud and clear,” Sciortino said. “We’ve got legislators asking, you’ve got 45 percent of the bill, and you’re asking for more? And we absolutely are.”

The bond bill still has to make it through the State Senate. If it passes the Senate, it goes to Governor Deval Patrick to be signed into law.

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