

T line's extension at risk

Failed NorthPoint sale delays new Lechmere station

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A grand plan to extend the Green Line to Somerville and Medford could be in danger of derailing.

The collapse of the multibillion-dollar NorthPoint project in Cambridge has thrown a monkey wrench into long-standing plans for a new Lechmere Station to anchor the \$600 million extension.

Under plans for a new city-within-a-city at NorthPoint, the project's developers agreed to build the MBTA a new, \$70 million-plus Lechmere Station. In return, the builders, a partnership between Boston and Maine railroad and local real estate executives, were to have been granted additional land.

But the project's development team has since split up amid a bitter legal feud, while a deal to sell the property recently collapsed.

And local officials who have championed the rail extension are now watching nervously.

"We all know that until the station is relocated, there is not going to be an extension," said state Rep. Denise Provost (D-Somerville). "There is a contract in place, but that developer is gone so there is no successor to the developer to carry out the contract."

State transportation officials say they are beginning to draw up contingency plans to move ahead with the station without help from a developer.

That would likely mean either borrowing more for the project, using state bonds, or trying to cover the extra costs with federal transportation dollars, one official explained.

"We are aware of the situation and we are undertaking contingency planning," said Klark Jessen, a spokesman for the state Executive Office of Transportation.

But it may be easier said than done finding extra money amid hard budget times and competition among various projects for scarce resources, Provost said.

Meanwhile, state officials are under an increasingly tight deadline to complete the project. Under an agreement aimed at staving off a threatened Conservation Law Foundation lawsuit, state officials have agreed to have the new Green Line extension up and running by 2014.

Preliminary applications for federal funding are due this September.

"Lechmere station is critical for the expansion," said Somerville Mayor Joseph Curtatone. "Making sure that happens is critical."

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