

A BRANDING & IDENTITY STRATEGY FOR DOWNTOWN CROSSING

FINAL
RECOMMENDATIONS

MAY 2008

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CITY OF BOSTON



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BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

For more than a century, the City of Boston has relied on Downtown Crossing to be an important economic engine for the region. The area has been known as the region's primary retail district, attracting a diverse range of people. Recent market forces, however, have combined and resulted in a decline of the retail prominence of Downtown Crossing. New uses such as residential, educational, institutional, office space, business, arts, culture, and entertainment are creating a richly layered neighborhood.

In November 2004, Mayor Thomas M. Menino announced the creation of the Downtown Crossing Economic Improvement Initiative. While the initial emphasis was on physical upgrades, the initiative has grown to include an examination of the direction and vision for the area. A vision has emerged for a more vibrant, unified district with a greater emphasis on retailers who can increase economic vitality and become a catalyst for positive change in the neighborhood. The initiative is a private/public partnership, led by the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA).

Two major events—the redevelopment of the former Filene's Department Store Block into a mixed-use development, and the completion of the Rose Kennedy Greenway including the Crossroads Initiative—marked this as an opportune time to develop a strategic plan to harness and direct the economic resurgence of the Downtown Crossing neighborhood.

In October 2006, a multi-disciplinary team of international and local experts was assembled by the BRA to conduct an Identity and Branding Strategy for Downtown Crossing. The team was lead by Urban Marketing Collaborative (UMC) and included Moore Iacofano Goltsman, Inc. (MIG), 1600over90, BSC Group, and Intelligent Space Partnership (ISP).

In total, 15 professionals from five consulting groups with expertise in retail development, organizational needs, physical and urban design, marketing and branding, communications, pedestrian movement modeling, and transportation planning created this strategic action plan for Downtown Crossing's stakeholders.

The following key issues and opportunities have been identified:

- Downtown Crossing is transforming from a retail hub to a true urban neighborhood with diverse activities and users
- There is tremendous pedestrian traffic (>6,000 people per hour), an asset that needs be harnessed to assure economic vitality
- The residential population within a 20-minute walk will rise to 42,000 people in the future
- There is a significant amount of retail space (1.3 million square feet), but Downtown Crossing will best succeed by becoming more than a retail center
- Downtown Crossing is surrounded by the Financial District, Boston Common, Theatre District, Chinatown, and the Government Center, providing built-in financial drivers for the success of the district
- Downtown Crossing has an impressive range of architecturally significant buildings and is rich in history
- Education and marketing can correct many of the misconceptions about Downtown Crossing
- A permanent solution to the Downtown Crossing Association business organization needs to be developed.

This report is based on extensive fact-finding initiatives that were summarized in an Existing Conditions report. The initial analysis and workshops conducted by the team laid the groundwork for establishing the vision and the resulting strategic action plan. This report sets out the vision from which all strategic action items are based, and provides a decision-making framework for all stakeholders to use to move forward to the next level of implementation. It also sets out strategic goals, action items, timing, responsibility, and funding required.

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

The goal of this report is to develop a practical and feasible plan for Downtown Crossing that addresses the needs of the City of Boston as well as those of consumers, businesses, residents, property owners, and developers. This work plan is a culmination of a series of events that included the following:

- Existing conditions analysis by each major discipline to identify key issues and opportunities including economic development, physical and urban design, transportation and pedestrian modeling, and marketing and branding
- A pedestrian conditions technical report analysis of the pedestrian flows and in-depth surveys of 394 visits
- Extensive key person interviews and meetings with over 200 local stakeholders
- Physical analysis, conducted on a street-by-street, block-by-block, and building-by-building basis
- Regional competitive positioning of Downtown Crossing for existing and proposed developments
- An internal workshop with the City and BRA staff
- A community meeting and feedback on the vision and strategic options
- Weekly conferences with team members and the BRA
- Internal team meetings to reach consensus on plan development.

This report includes the following sections:

VISION

The vision for Downtown Crossing is based on the strengths of the area. This springs from the inherent truths of the district to create a holistic, aspirational message. The vision sets the tone and direction for Downtown Crossing. All action items flow from this vision statement.

STREETS, BUILDINGS, AND OPEN SPACES

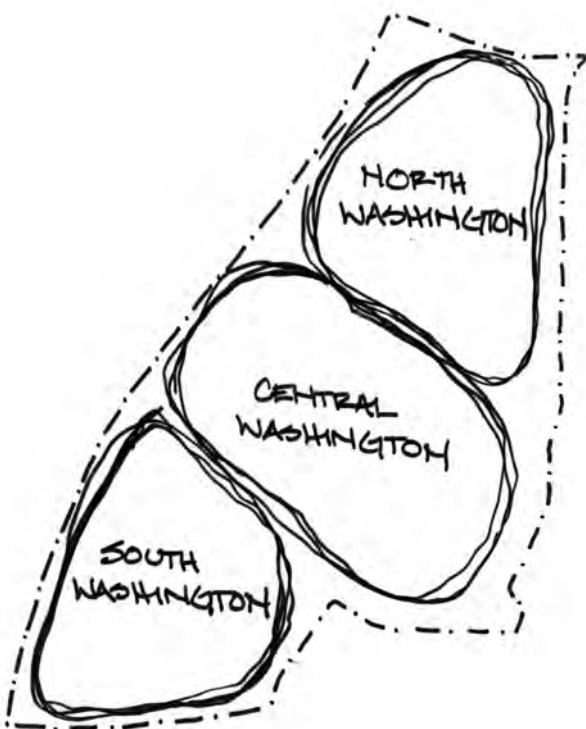
The public and private sectors need to create the most pedestrian-friendly environment in the country. Downtown Crossing should be designed to be a place where people gather and socialize, and create dynamic friction between the pedestrian and the business storefronts. This will allow retailers to take better advantage of high pedestrian volumes. Enhancements to the physical environment include transportation infrastructure, signage, building façades, and landscape elements.



View of the Back Bay from Downtown Crossing.

ECONOMIC VITALITY

Dividing Downtown Crossing into three distinct retail districts assists in understanding the unique role, strategy, required linkages, and retailer potential for each one. Retention and recruitment programs can be developed to ensure that existing and new businesses are able to take advantage of the changing and diverse target markets. Other programs, including pushcart vending, are an important component of the overall Downtown Crossing experience. Finally, a capable management organization is required to oversee the delivery of these programs and services.



MARKETING

A comprehensive, far-reaching marketing and communications plan is required to reach Downtown Crossing's diverse target markets. The plan includes a wide range of initiatives that will assist in making the vision of Downtown Crossing as a unique neighborhood into reality. The brand concept takes the program out to the public to solicit consumer, retailer, residential, tourist, and investor interest.

The final summary lays out a decision-making framework for those stakeholders involved to understand what is required to move the process towards implementation. The starting point for the overall plan, however, is the vision.

Finally, a series of catalyst projects have been integrated throughout this report that have the potential to create excitement and provide attributes unique to Downtown Crossing. These projects join the many development projects that are planned or currently underway in the district. Some of the catalyst projects are:

- *The "Thought Bubble"* — an exciting re-envisioning of a library to become a public gathering place and meeting space
- *Pedi Cabs* — a system of bicycle taxis, letting residents and visitors enjoy Downtown Crossing and other attractions in Downtown Boston like the Boston Common and the Waterfront in a more relaxing way
- *The Cycling Center and Bike Corral* — this one-of-a-kind center will make it easy and enjoyable for commuters and visitors who want to avoid congestion in Downtown by providing services for cyclists
- *The Innovative Food Hall at the Corner Mall* — this development will be a unique attraction for Downtown Crossing by providing a new food experience for workers and visitors

INTRODUCTION

Because Downtown Crossing is an area in transition, it is important to envision the area for what it will be when the transformation is complete. This vision is what Downtown Crossing ultimately will become if the initiatives in this document are met. While no one can predict the future, this vision is important to keep top-of-mind as progress is made in Downtown Crossing.

VISION

Downtown Crossing is Boston's meeting place. It's where commerce and leisure intersect, and diverse people interact with one another in a lively, 24-hour neighborhood.

Several unique areas within Downtown Crossing encourage people to explore its eminently walkable, distinctly urban streets. A college sophomore can discover African jewelry on a tiny side street, while three blocks away a young couple casually strolls the tree-lined promenades and wonders if they should perhaps look into an apartment in this eclectic neighborhood.

Downtown Crossing encourages people to spend time with others, or simply interact in the social spaces that dot the neighborhood. The frenetic rush of true city life is everywhere, and the sidewalks are packed with locals and tourists taking it all in. Brand new retailers like Muji sit side-by-side with longtime tenants and neighborhood institutions like the Brattle Book Shop. Elsewhere, people take a break from the hectic pace and discover areas where they can enjoy a more leisurely pace. It's where an office worker in a café takes a quick break to simply people-watch. It's where tourists from Copenhagen not only walk the Freedom Trail, but also enjoy lunch at the foot of a public art display at one of the plentiful corner green spaces.

While proudly displaying the bountiful history of one of America's great cities, Downtown Crossing also looks to the future with innovative approaches to all new ventures. The area showcases forward-thinking retailers, groundbreaking art, bold cuisine and sustainable design. Aspiring entrepreneurs from the Financial District learn about the latest business trends at the Thought Bubble. And local foodies pack the neighborhood's newest restaurant, housed in a beautiful, certified Green building designed by a London architect.

By harnessing Boston's abundant social and creative energy, Downtown Crossing thrives as an attractive atmosphere for all types of formal and informal happenings, creating a true crossing: Boston's meeting place.

KEY MESSAGE

Downtown Crossing is Boston's meeting place. It's an urban neighborhood where commerce and leisure intersect and a diverse mix of people are encouraged to innovate, interact and explore.

CORE PRINCIPLES

These 10 terms summarize the attributes that distinguish Downtown Crossing from other urban centers.

1. MEETING PLACE
2. DIVERSE
3. NEIGHBORHOOD
4. UNIQUE AREAS
5. WALKABLE
6. SOCIAL SPACES
7. HISTORY
8. FORWARD-THINKING
9. SUSTAINABLE
10. LEARNING

INTRODUCTION

The urban design approach works together with the retail and marketing strategies to realize the vision of Downtown Crossing as a highly livable district where people can walk, meet, live, work, learn, and explore. Strengthening the physical framework will help the district become a destination as well as an urban neighborhood with its own unique identity.

URBAN DESIGN

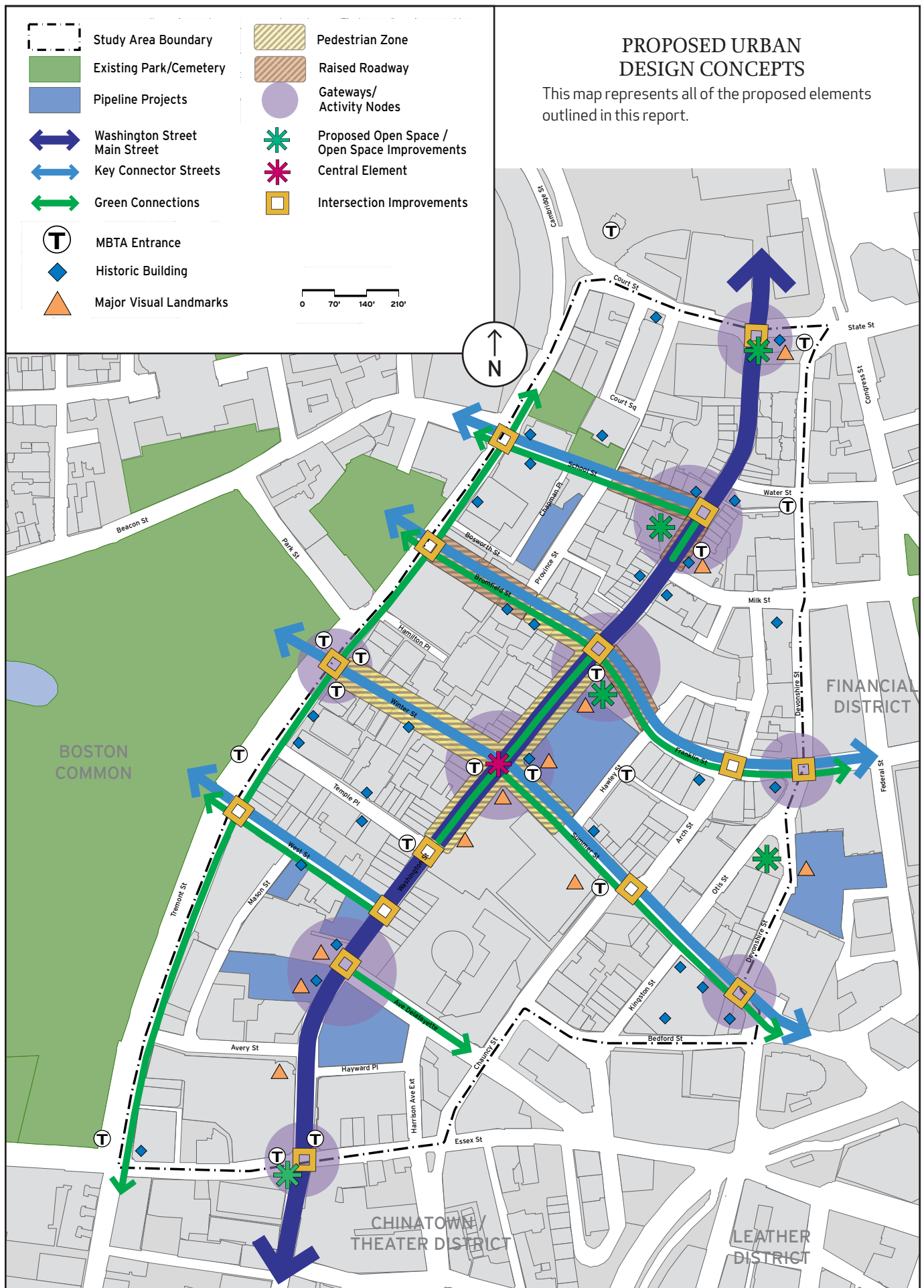
From a physical perspective, Downtown Crossing is envisioned as a place that:

- Fosters a vibrant and robust pedestrian environment
- Supports and promotes a variety of transportation modes
- Provides opportunities for social interaction
- Celebrates the historic nature of the district
- Provides a distinct identity for the area
- Offers a safe, clean and comfortable environment
- Enables 360 degrees of living.

Tens of thousands of pedestrians use the area each day, with an active and vital pedestrian-only zone in the center of the district. The Pedestrian Zone and streets offer opportunities to relax, slow down and enjoy the environment with new benches, pedestrian-scaled lighting, and landscaping at key locations. The streets and open spaces should be designed to better serve residents, tourists, commuters, students and shoppers. Public art at gateways and key locations will bring color and vibrancy to the district. Landscaping and trees, where possible, will humanize and brighten the environment. Open spaces should offer relief to the dense urbanity of downtown Boston and be varied in character and use to add interest to the district. Buildings should serve as visual landmarks, with renovated façades, new signage, and nighttime illumination. Cafes, outdoor seating and spill-out from retail stores should activate the area and engage users, day and night.

OUTLINE OF CHAPTER

This chapter begins with a review of the local context of Downtown Crossing. It then provides an analysis of the district's assets, issues and opportunities; a brief overview of current practices from comparable cities; and a discussion of pedestrian modeling that was completed for the project. The chapter concludes with a set of urban design recommendations, which are organized under public realm and private realm recommendations. The public realm recommendations target specific improvements to the Pedestrian Zone, streets, and open spaces. Private realm recommendations focus on suggested enhancements to the district's built environment.



BACKGROUND

Situated at the heart of downtown Boston, Downtown Crossing enjoys a highly urban setting in close proximity to many of the city's distinct and defining features. The district is influenced by the adjacent neighborhoods as well as by recent developments and projects occurring in the downtown. The urban design framework makes strong connections between the district's distinct character and the surrounding context, and coordinates with City planning initiatives.

PHYSICAL CONTEXT

Downtown Crossing is located in the center of downtown Boston, adjacent to some of the city's most distinct areas and neighborhoods. The district is immediately surrounded by four key districts:

- Financial District to the east is characterized by large skyscrapers and a substantial workday population
- Government Center to the north, with its monumental urban renewal-era buildings and plazas and large number of state and city employees
- Boston Common and Beacon Hill to the west, a significant and renowned open space adjacent to one of Boston's most historic residential districts
- Chinatown and Theater District to the south with their distinct cultural orientations, student populations and evening attractions.



View of Downtown Crossing looking down Washington Street.

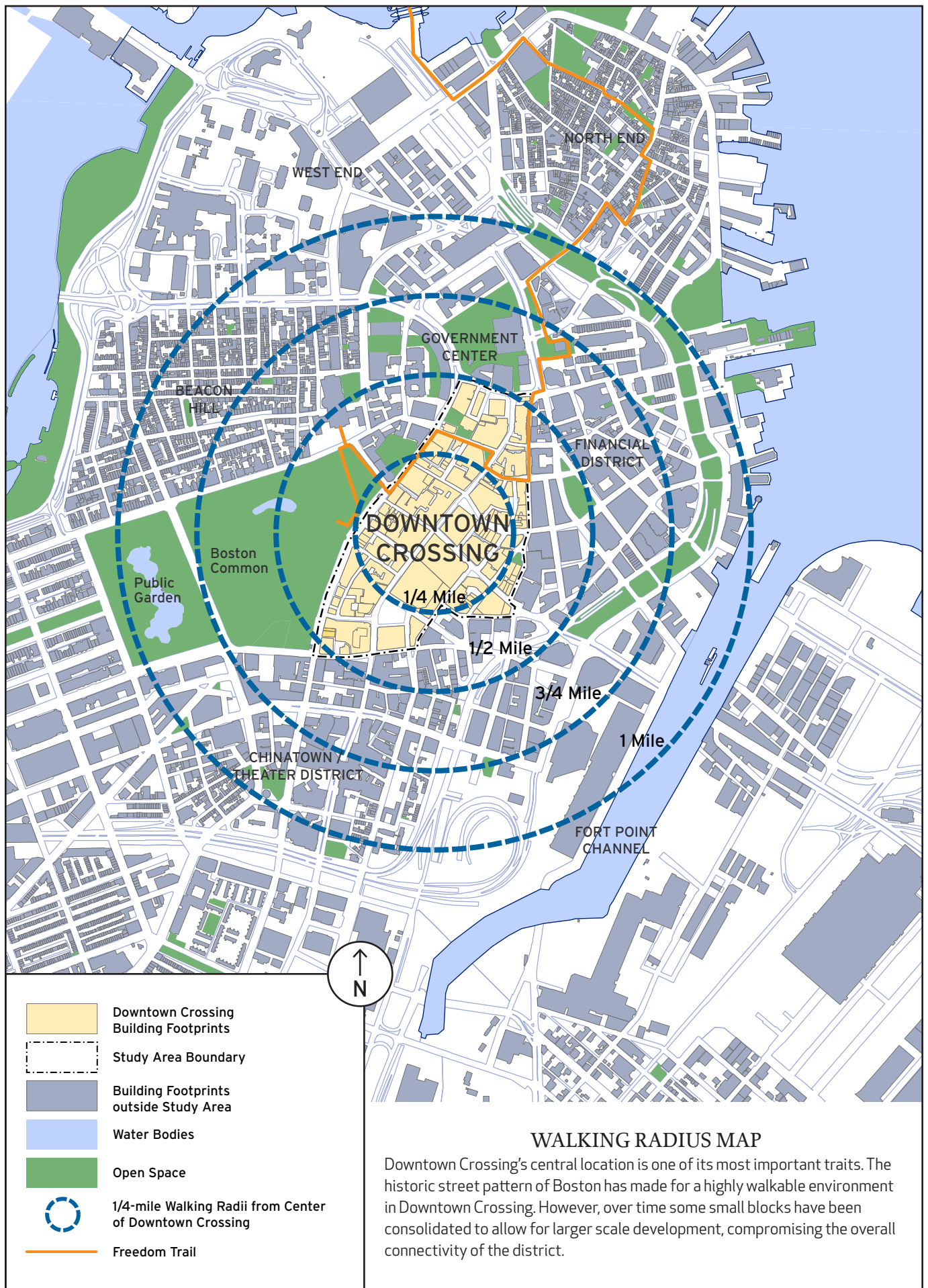


Many public, community and cultural amenities are located nearby, including City Hall, Quincy Market, Faneuil Hall, the State House, Massachusetts General Hospital, and the New England Aquarium. The area is well-served by the MBTA system, including subways and buses. It is also close to North and South Station, which connect the district via train to the greater Boston region and beyond.

A significant portion of the Freedom Trail runs past many of the historic structures within Downtown Crossing, attracting a large tourist population to the area. The nearby Boston Common and the Public Garden provide opportunities for active and passive recreation for local residents and downtown employees and serve as destination spots for tourists. The Boston Convention & Exhibition Center, located in emerging South Boston, is less than a fifteen-minute walk. Post Office Square is a popular, well-designed, and well maintained urban park providing visual relief and color among the skyscrapers in the Financial District. The harbor waterfront and open spaces along its length are also amenities near to Downtown Crossing. When completed, the Rose Kennedy Greenway will not only be a significant collection of parks and plazas, but will also strengthen connections between downtown Boston and the waterfront.



Wayfinding and embedded pathway markers of the historical Freedom Trail.



The built form of Downtown Crossing reflects the transition between the large-scale, large-footprint Financial District and the finer-grained and soft-scaped Boston Common and Beacon Hill. Tall skyscrapers east of Washington Street transition to smaller mid-rise buildings to the west along the Ladder Blocks. However, rather than acting as a seam for these two parts of the city, Downtown Crossing's lack of distinct identity and challenging pedestrian environment function as barriers, creating poor connections to either side.

Washington Street is the primary commercial street through Downtown Crossing, though in recent years it has been in decline partly due to competition from other commercial centers in the city. Newbury Street in Boston's Back Bay features high-end retail offerings in close proximity to Downtown Crossing. The street's character is small-scale with the adaptive reuse of former three to five story rowhouses as boutique shops. The sidewalks are wide and tree-lined with pedestrian-scaled lighting and other amenities that contribute to an enjoyable walking and shopping experience. Copley Place and the Prudential Center, also in the Back Bay, compete with Downtown Crossing and offer a mall-like setting for retail. CambridgeSide Galleria in Cambridge is another competitor, also offering a mall setting. Faneuil Hall and Quincy Market are primarily tourist-oriented, featuring a food court flanked by cobble-stoned pedestrian ways and retail stores in the North and South Market buildings. Downtown Crossing has the potential to offer a unique experience unlike any other district or retail setting in the Boston area.



Adaptive reuse along Newbury Street features high-end retail offerings in close proximity to Downtown Crossing.



Quincy Market is primarily tourist-oriented, featuring a food court flanked by cobble-stoned pedestrian ways and retail stores.

PLANNING CONTEXT

The Big Dig and the Rose Kennedy Greenway are major projects with significant planning, land use, infrastructure and transportation elements impacting downtown Boston. The Big Dig, formally known as the Central Artery/Tunnel project, is a multi-billion dollar project to underground the I-93 expressway that runs through the downtown. The former expressway viaduct, built in the 1950s, effectively cut off the North End and waterfront neighborhoods from the downtown. The process of under-grounding the expressway is complete, and the Rose Kennedy Greenway is being built on the reclaimed surface above the underground expressway.

With the Big Dig project nearing completion, the City of Boston has begun the Crossroads Initiative to re-knit the fabric of the city. The initiative includes the redesign of 12 streets that will connect neighborhoods on either side of the Rose Kennedy Greenway and increase access from the downtown to the harbor. Key streets highlighted in the Crossroads Initiative that run through Downtown Crossing include Winter/Summer Street, State Street and Essex Street.



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Summer Street — Summer Street begins in Downtown Crossing at the intersection with Washington Street and Winter Street; it serves as a bookend and entry gateway that connects downtown Boston with the harbor and South Boston. Large numbers of pedestrians use Summer Street to access the Financial District, South Station, Boston Common, and several MBTA stations. Improvements to Downtown Crossing around the 100 percent corner at Washington, Winter and Summer Streets would strengthen the western gateway along Summer Street.

State Street — The northern boundary of the district, State Street is a major downtown roadway, well-traveled daily by workers, tourists and residents. It is the historic link between downtown and the harbor, and the redevelopment of Long Wharf will serve as a destination and activity node at the street's eastern end. Improved pedestrian connections and the revitalization of Downtown Crossing will create a similar node at the western end of State Street, strengthening the connections across downtown.

Essex Street — Essex Street is the southern edge of Downtown Crossing and is to be renovated to link Chinatown, the Theater District, the Leather District, and Downtown Crossing. Intersection improvements, new signage, special paving, and widened sidewalks are planned for Essex Street, establishing a strong southern edge to the district.

The Walk to the Sea is another plan to connect downtown to the waterfront. The proposal includes a three-quarter mile long pedestrian pathway from Government Center and City Hall Plaza, through City Hall, past Faneuil Hall and Quincy Market, into Waterfront Park, and finally to the water's edge at Long Wharf. The beginning of the pathway at Government Center and the northern end of Downtown Crossing will bolster pedestrian activity in the district.

