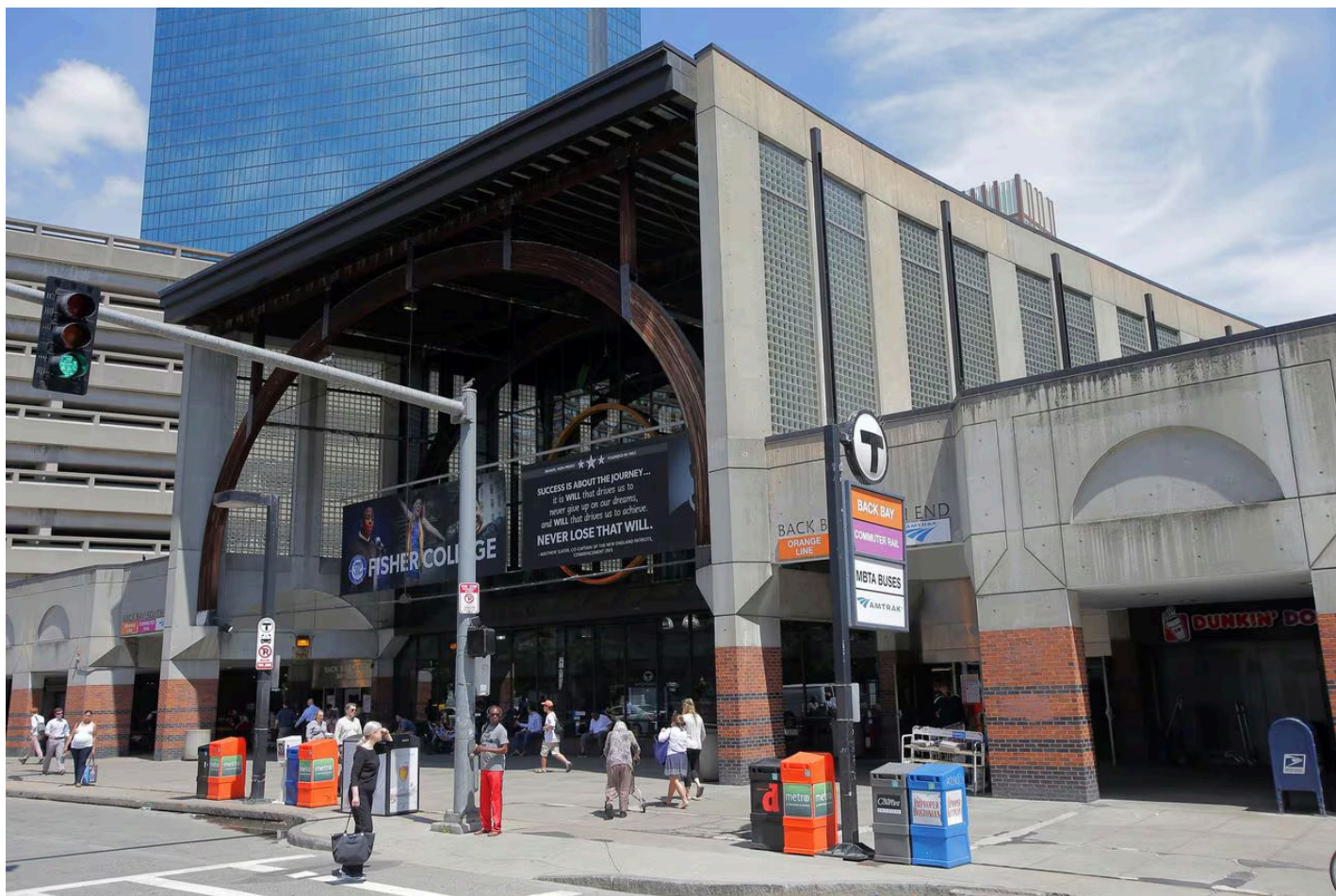


Progress at Back Bay Station? Builder of long-dormant development signs lease deal with the state.

The long-term lease deal with Boston Properties would enable the developer to build a long-planned 27-story office tower at 171 Dartmouth St.

By [Jon Chesto](#) Globe Staff, Updated April 5, 2024, 5:04 p.m.



Long-planned development atop — and improvements to — Back Bay Station inched closer this week when developer Boston Properties signed a long-term lease to take over the Back Bay Station garage, where the firm plans a large office tower as part of an agreement with MassDOT to upgrade parts of the station itself. LANE TURNER

The Massachusetts Department of Transportation has just signed a long-term lease deal with Boston Properties that would enable the developer to put a long-planned 27-story office tower next to Back Bay Station.

The transaction, filed with the Suffolk Registry of Deeds last week, is the [latest air-rights deal for MassDOT as it seeks to spur construction over the Massachusetts Turnpike.](#)

Boston Properties has long held city permits to build an office tower on a platform over the Pike that currently holds a parking garage, as part of a broader redevelopment of Back Bay Station. Now, the company controls the property under a 99-year lease, with payments expected over the deal's first few years. Boston Properties has agreed to pay base rent of \$20 million and to spend \$37 million on station improvements.

Under the agreement, Boston Properties will take over the western portion of the Back Bay Station garage, with a ground footprint of 1.4 acres at the corner of Dartmouth and Stuart streets. The developer plans to tear down that part of the garage and build a 660,000-square-foot office building there, with ground-floor shops and restaurants and several levels of parking.

The project would be part of a broader, 1.3-million-square-foot redevelopment that Boston Properties has planned around Back Bay Station. Eventually the developer wants to put two additional towers there, one where the east portion of the garage now stands, fronting Clarendon Street, and the other next to that, on what is now a bus turnaround area off Clarendon. Once all the work is done, the station block would have 1,400 parking spaces, according to the MBTA's Scott Bosworth, compared to about 1,500 today.



[The multiphase development](#) won Boston Planning & Development Authority approval in 2017, though [171 Dartmouth](#) is the only building to be fully permitted. Construction on the new buildings has not started, but Boston Properties has spent \$30 million on renovations to shore up the Turnpike tunnel underneath the garage, to support the weight of the future towers and to coordinate lane closures with two air rights projects further west over the Pike.



Boston Properties has plans to build an office tower at 171 Dartmouth St., next to Back Bay Station. MASSDOT

Bosworth, who heads up transit-oriented development at the T, said the developer would most likely wait to land an anchor tenant before moving forward with a building. However, the company will move ahead with station and concourse improvements as part of an agreement with MassDOT, he said, including new lighting and ventilation at the train station, which serves the Orange Line as well as commuter rail and Amtrak, as well as a new connection to Stuart Street. Other anticipated improvements include expanded waiting areas and new retail spaces within the station's main hall.

Boston Properties executive vice president Bryan Koop said resolving the MassDOT lease negotiations now for the office tower at 171 Dartmouth St. helps remove significant uncertainty from the development process. The project “continues to be of interest to large space users focused on healthy buildings,” he added, but the company is not in talks to bring in a significant tenant at this time.

Air-rights projects over the Pike — even ones on existing platforms such as Back Bay Station — have always been tricky propositions.

But several have been moving through the pipeline lately, including the two projects underway west of Massachusetts Avenue. One, developed by Samuels & Associates, is almost done, at 1001 Boylston, and features an office tower and a separate hotel, [along with some ground-floor retail](#). The other, a life sciences campus near Fenway Park developed by IQHQ and Meredith Management, is underway, with crews currently building a two-acre deck over the Turnpike between Beacon Street and Brookline Avenue.

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