

# UC Berkeley

## Places

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Boston Visions

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*Design competitions typically ask entrants to respond to a specific program, such as that for a signature building or a symbolic public space. The problem is defined at the outset and is limited in scale; a first award can result in a lucrative commission and in the realization of the designer's ideas.*

*Occasionally, however, a competition is open-ended, seeking not plans for what will be but ideas for what could be. Such competitions ask for visions, challenging participants to frame problems as well as answers. There is no commission awaiting the winners, nor any commitment that the proposals will be implemented or even accepted.*

*Two recent competitions (Milwaukee's ICDC and Boston Visions) have posed an even more searching challenge—developing visions for the city of the future. In each, competitors were forced to contemplate multiple, jumbled scales and contexts; to demonstrate a broad understanding of the processes by which urban form evolves; and to wrestle with complex, interlocking problems that transcend physical design and raise issues of social, economic and environmental justice.*

*Despite the special challenges the Boston and Milwaukee competitions posed and the likelihood that competing would lead neither to commissions nor to direct implementation of ideas that*

*were presented, both attracted hundreds of competitors who collectively demonstrated a tremendous vigor in their submissions. Places asked Antonio DiMambro, president of the Boston architecture firm *Communitas*, which won two first awards in *Boston Visions*, to comment on why a designer would participate in a visionary design competition, how such visions influence city design and how participating in *Boston Visions* has influenced his own work.*

**View of downtown Boston with Logan Airport in the foreground.**



## BOSTON VISIONS

Visionary design competitions are important cultural events in the life of a city. When properly conceived and programmed, they can elicit an incredible richness of ideas—ideas that are very bold and sometimes shape the form of the environments in which future generations will live, or ideas that are simple, yet, if implemented, immediately would enhance our daily life.

For me, participating in Boston Visions was a unique intellectual challenge, an opportunity to explore ideas outside the constraints of real-life projects. I also believe that as an architect, planner and urban designer, it is my responsibility to participate in the cultural debate about the future of our cities.

City visions can generate fruitful debate on both new development opportunities and current issues and problems. They can capture the imaginations of citizens, inspire them and embody their cultural and economic aspirations. They are ideas that, if realized, are often enriched by the political and economic implementation process.

Many examples of this come to mind. In Italy, Giancarlo De Carlo's plans for the historic center of Urbino and for the expansion of its famous university remain textbook examples of good contemporary city planning and design. In Boston, Frederick Law Olmsted and Charles Eliot's "Emerald Necklace" and Kevin Lynch's "High Spine" visions have shaped the form of the city in undeniable ways. What makes these three visions exceptional and their realization so successful is that De Carlo, Olmsted and Lynch have had an enviable ability to observe and read the environment, to listen to people and to create powerful images that society was ready to accept and implement.

Visionary designs have always influenced Boston's development. They seem to occur in 40- to 50-year cycles or when the city is in a period of crisis or poised for change, and they have helped shape the city's physical design. Four such visionary plans that culminated in additions to the city's fabric are David Sears' development of Boston's Back Bay neighborhood, Olmsted and Eliot's Emerald Necklace and regional park system, Charles Davenport's plan for the definition of the Charles River's Boston edge and the "high-spine" concept connecting Back Bay to the Financial District with high rise development. Some of these designs when presented were considered unrealistic; for example, Lynch's ideas for redeveloping downtown were presented in the 1960s, when the city was experiencing a substantial decline in population and no one believed the city center would continue its historic prominence.

**View of downtown Boston  
2088 with a new city of  
120,000 residents replacing  
the airport in the middle of  
the harbor.**

The Boston Visions competition was organized at a critical time in the city's history. In the past decade Boston has enjoyed its most extensive development boom ever, which has dramatically transformed the skyline and rejuvenated the downtown. Boston, traditionally an industrial-maritime city also noted for its strong educational institutions, has emerged as a financial, high-tech and research center. The building boom that transformed downtown Boston has also spread to neighboring suburban areas and to communities along the regions circumferential routes.

Boston's recent development has had undeniably positive impacts on the city as a whole, but has also generated several pressing problems, such as a housing shortage, an overloading of transportation systems and the over-taxing of a decayed and insufficient infrastructure. The economic boom has by-passed inner-city communities, such as Roxbury, Dorchester, Chelsea and East Boston, where many unemployed minority residents live. Some critics have questioned whether continued growth along the pattern of the 1980s would change the city's urban and historic character and lessen the city's livability and quality of life.

The competition was organized to generate new ideas on how to deal with these issues. Participants were encouraged to develop ideas for a new planning framework that would carefully control growth, for a new civic design bill of rights and for a new public mandate to establish an appropriate public transportation framework and reclaim forgotten neighborhoods, create meeting grounds and build a proud new public realm. The intellectual challenge was to generate new ideas and images that would address the issues Boston faces in a comprehensive, bold and thought-provoking way.





# BOSTON 2088

My approach to tackling projects has been influenced and strengthened by my firm's intense involvement in Boston Visions. I continue to tackle design problems at the large and small scale. I search for new and effective ways for dealing with and solving planning and design challenges associated with diverse topics such as regional transportation systems or the delivery of affordable housing. I believe these problems are all interrelated and must be dealt with accordingly.

Since the competition, my firm has received two commissions with important visionary aspects. The first, Roxbury Visions, is a study to propose visions and stimulate a community debate about the future of a physically run down, economically depressed but socially rich and diverse Boston neighborhood. The second is a master plan for the redevelopment of Long Island, the largest island in Boston's harbor, to accommodate an array of human and health care services for the city's poor residents as well as recreational facilities for the region. These projects are wonderful opportunities for debate in the public arena.

City visions cannot be exported. Rather, they should be generated from extensive analysis of a place and thoughtful synthesis of the cultural background of its people and institutions. Unfortunately, in the past fifty years, cities have forgotten that their beauty lies also in their aesthetic and morphological diversity. Most large American cities have opted for the "formula projects" often destroying existing valuable environments. Consequently, they have similar Manhattan-like skylines, convention centers, mega-malls, large hotels with multi-level lobbies and sports com-

**This vision follows Boston's five-centuries-long tradition of expansion into hinterland and harbor. From the filling of the Mill Pond to the creation of the Back Bay, from the eighteenth-century lowering of Beacon Hill to air rights development over expressways, the forces behind reclamation and rebuilding have varied in technology and scale, not in concept.**

**Boston's seventeenth-century core city retained a key administrative, economic and symbolic role even as residents moved westward and southward along radial transportation corridors. The present pattern of radial and circumferential routes and new interstitial and sub-center development, together with denser rebuilding in the core and some neighborhoods, can continue for another three or four decades.**

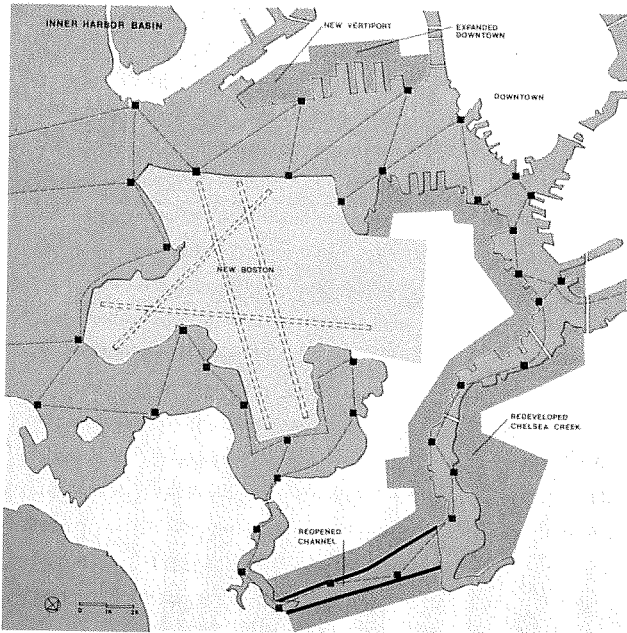
**After that time, reactive and piecemeal planning and building will no longer suffice. Lands within the Route 128 boundary will be substantially developed, and further western and southern expansion appears increasingly costly in terms of traffic congestion and loss of rural landscapes. The time has come again to look to the sea for Boston's inspiration and regeneration and to redress inequities.**

**This vision follows Boston's historic models of waterfront development and identifiable neighborhoods to create a complementary New Boston. New Boston is firmly integrated with adjacent, long-overlooked neighborhoods and celebrates Old Boston's maritime legacy and unique setting.**

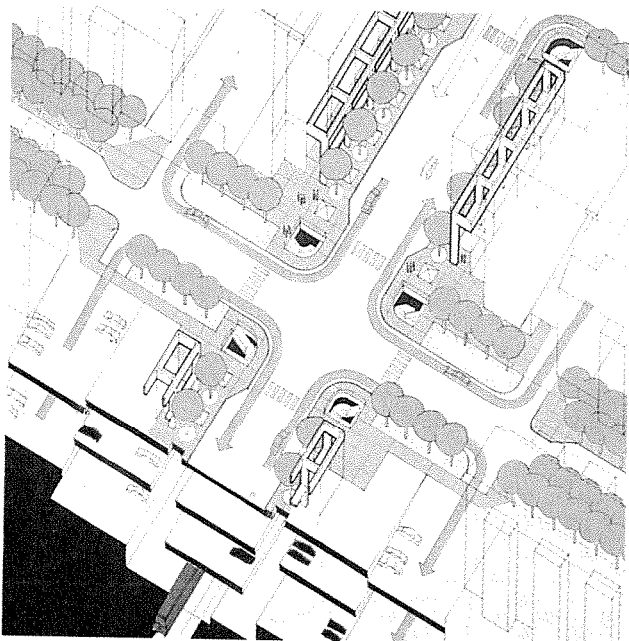
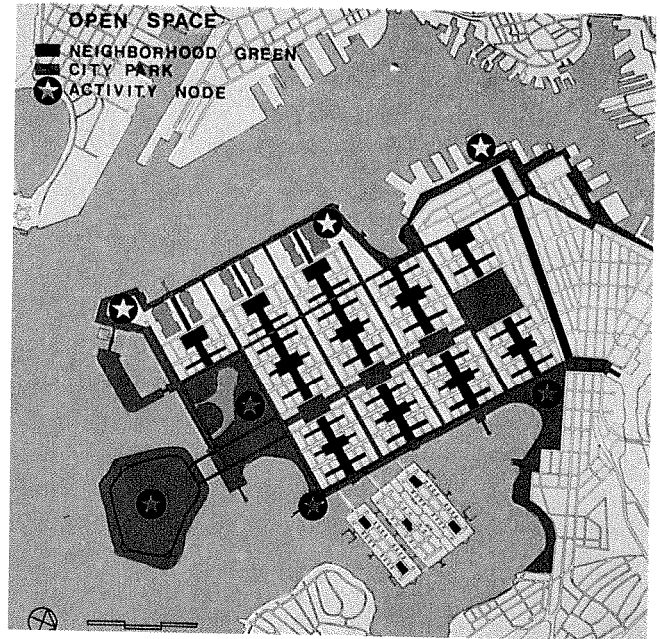
**Boston 2088 proposes a broad restructuring and expansion of the metropolitan public transportation system to liberate new planning and living options. The regional planning and public commitments needed to fulfill this vision are relocating air transport facilities, integrating and expanding regional transit and capturing the Harbor's potential.**



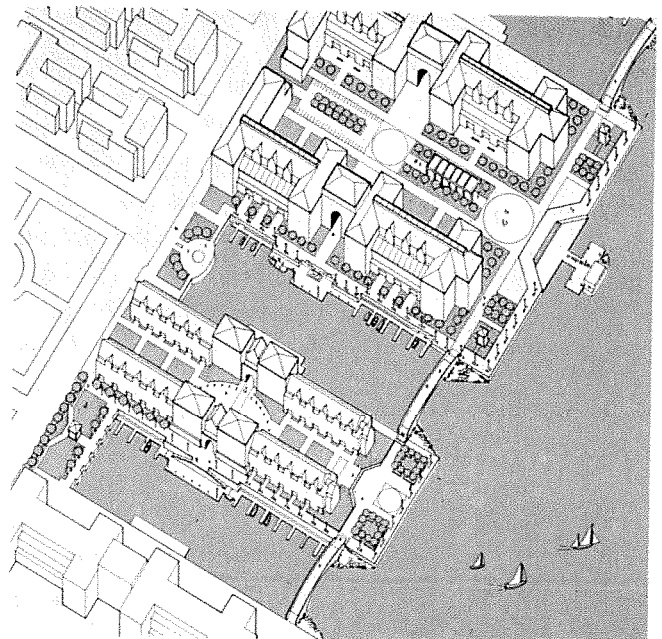
**Diagram of the Inner Harbor Basin, with route of harbor ferry public transit service and areas for mixed use harbor front development.**



**Diagram of the proposed open space system, which links eleven new neighborhoods to the regional system of parks along the water's edge.**



**Diagram of proposed organization of parking facilities and subway system along the main boulevard connecting new neighborhoods.**



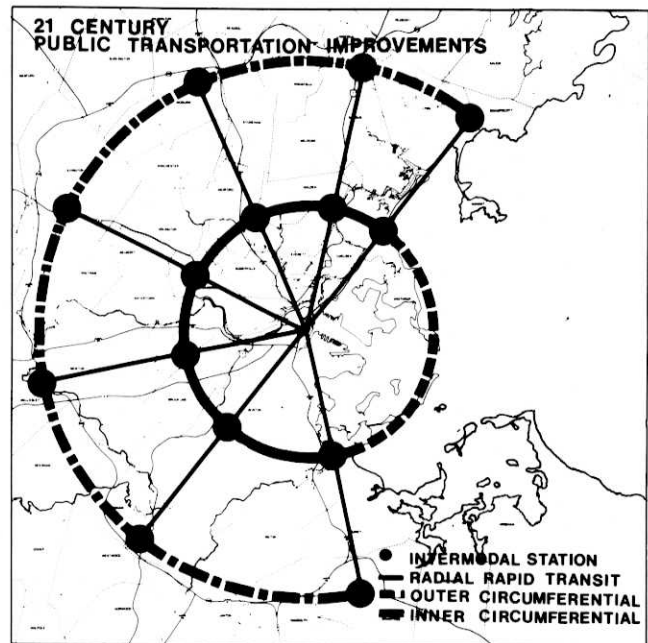
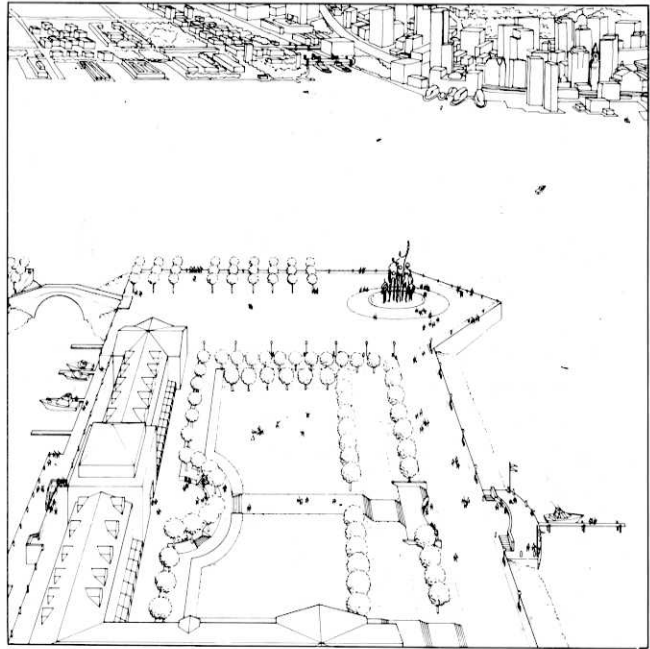
**Proposed mixed-use harbor front development. The new image recalls the historic piers of old Boston, while emphasizing pedestrian accessibility to the water.**

plexes. I hope that in the next century, American cities will rediscover and cultivate better ways of managing their growth and controlling the transformation of the built environment.

I encourage the new generation of architects and planners to reject passionately the crippling social and professional attitudes of the "age of cynicism." New generations have to face difficult challenges, the most pressing of which is making peace with the environment. I hope future planners will see themselves as something more than problem-solvers, analysts and policy-makers. I hope future architects stop fussing about various "isms," "neo" and "post" labels.

I hope that as planners and architects shape the future of cities, they will abandon the piecemeal, homogenizing and *laissez-faire* approach of past decades and rediscover the comprehensive and purposive art of city design. I hope in the future, architects, planners and urban designers will pay more attention to bridging the disciplines instead of compartmentalizing them. These are essential tasks in the reclamation of a more meaningful and substantial role in the process of building and caring for the environment.

**View of Immigrant's Plaza,  
which celebrates Boston's  
multi-ethnic heritage.**



**Diagram of high-speed public  
transit system, with radial  
and circumferential routes  
connecting downtown core  
with regional subcenters.**



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## Relocate Air Transport Facilities

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Logan Airport, designed for the relatively compact city and hub-centered ground transportation system of the 1940s, is increasingly dysfunctional as the passenger cachement area shifts west and propeller planes have yielded to thundering jets, convoluted flight patterns and congestion.

Logan would be replaced by a new airport 35 miles northwest of downtown on the site of an old military air base, Fort Devon. Existing air facilities at smaller cities in the region, such as Providence, Worcester and Nashua, would be upgraded. All would be interconnected by ground transportation. For people traveling between Boston's core and other city centers, a compact Verti-port (Vertical Take-Off and Landing) on the South Boston waterfront would be readily accessible via ground transport and harbor ferries.

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## Create Neighborhoods, Social Streets and Lively Centers

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The relocation of Logan would free 2,400 acres of publicly owned land. Where the airport is now, 11 New Boston neighborhoods would circle a green mall and stretch from East Boston to Apple Island. East Boston's street grid and scale would continue into the new neighborhoods, and the older community would gain space above the harbor tunnels and below-grade access highways. South of these new neighborhoods are public services and spaces that would serve the wider city and region: harbor-front piers and an institutional and commercial center. An isthmus would lead from the eastern tip of New Boston to Apple Island Sanctuary.

Transportation infrastructure is integral to the scale and livability of the new neighborhoods. Each 18-block community would have an individual identity and focuses on a square with a transit station, meeting places and public institutions. This square, in turn, is linked to adjacent neighborhoods by pedestrian boulevards with all residents living within three blocks of this "heart" and transit station.

Neighborhood population (7,000 to 20,000) and buildings (four to ten stories) would be of a comfortable scale, yet dense enough to support the infrastructure costs.

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## Restructure the Transit Network

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Boston's ground transportation system perpetuates inequity and inefficiency. Public transit is limited to radial corridors while private vehicles enjoy access to both radial and circumferential routes. Transit passengers must make time-consuming downtown transfers to accomplish cross-town and inter-urban trips; drivers face delays at harbor tunnels and bridges.

Radial transit lines would extend to Route 128 and connect with circumferential routes. Increased vehicle capacity at the Boston core, via a third harbor tunnel, would be balanced by high-occupancy vehicle lanes on circumferential highways. For inter-regional passengers, a new high-speed rail line would be developed away from the present congested shoreline corridor. Connections between transportation modes and routes would be catalysts for sub-center development.

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## Celebrate Boston's Inner Harbor as Common Ground

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The Inner Harbor is a common ground for all Bostonians, from ferry passengers to strollers to those who admire skyline and water from windows. The airport relocation and transit restructuring would create a new harbor basin, which would be not a barrier but a vital transit facility for local passenger travel, complementing land-based rapid transit.

New Boston's piers would echo traditional waterfront architecture. These parallel pier buildings would frame skyline vistas and terminate New Boston's axial open spaces. On New Boston's southern shore, multiple pedestrian bridges would connect the pier ends in a continuous esplanade where key focal points link past with present and evoke collective memory in everyday life.

—Antonio DiMambro

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