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Report touts Big Dig's environmental benefit

CO emissions said to drop 12%

By Ralph Ranalli, Globe Staff | May 9, 2006

The Central Artery and Third Harbor Tunnel project is resulting in significant reductions in air and noise pollution, as well as other aesthetic benefits, according to an environmental impact report released yesterday.

Traffic data in the report, which was compiled by the Economic Development Research Group, also shows the project is reducing vehicle emissions, which are exacerbated by stop-and-go traffic. Results reveal an estimated 12 percent decrease in carbon monoxide emissions, the report states.

In neighborhoods surrounding the old elevated artery, the new underground traffic pattern has already reduced noise levels by 25 percent to 33 percent, depending on the time of day, the report states. The project also is creating 320 acres of new parks and has increased abutting land values by \$1 billion, the report states. Mariellen Burns, a spokeswoman for the project, said that while the project's benefits have long been expected, "it's nice to finally get some hard numbers."

Environmental groups, however, said yesterday that, given the project's \$14 billion price tag, the benefits have been comparatively meager. Seth Kaplan, a senior attorney at the Conservation Law Foundation, called it "tragic" that the group has had to sue the state over a 1990 promise that mass transit improvements would be part of a larger strategy that included the Big Dig. Jeremy Marin of the Sierra Club said that because traffic is expected to keep growing, the Big Dig "is not a long-term solution."