



COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
THE GENERAL COURT
STATE HOUSE, BOSTON 02133-1053

December 4, 2013


Secretary Richard A. Davey
Massachusetts Department of Transportation
10 Park Plaza, Suite 4160
Boston, MA 02116

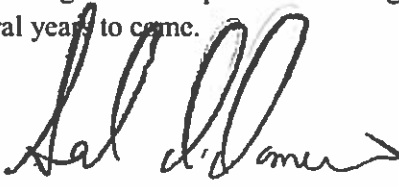
Dear Secretary Davey,

We are writing to urge your careful consideration of the recommendations for the Cambridge Street Bridge project that were sent to you in the attached letter dated December 4th by a consortium of community organizations from Allston and Brighton. This letter largely encapsulates the concerns and proposals from community members who attended the public meeting hosted by MassDOT on November 19th.

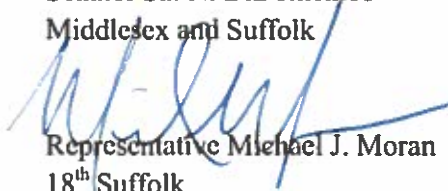
The upgrades that are being made to Cambridge Street as part of the bridge deck replacement are much needed, however there is still room for improvements to the plan before the project is finalized. We support additional community meetings for both this project and the I-90 Viaduct Interchange Improvement Project, which will have significant impacts on the neighborhood and users of the Cambridge Street corridor for several years to come.

Sincerely,


Senator William N. Brownsberger
Second Suffolk and Middlesex


Senator Sal N. DiDomenico
Middlesex and Suffolk


Representative Kevin G. Honan
17th Suffolk


Representative Michael J. Moran
18th Suffolk


Councilor Mark Ciommo
Boston City Council, District 9

December 4, 2013

Richard Davey, Secretary and Chief Executive Officer
Frank DePaola, Administrator, Highway Division
Massachusetts Department of Transportation
10 Park Plaza
Boston, MA 02114

RE: Final Improvements to Project #606376 Cambridge Street bridge over I-90, Allston, Boston, Massachusetts

Dear Secretary Davey and Administrator DePaola:

Thank you for your attention to our earlier letters dated July 3 and November 12 regarding the reconstruction of the Cambridge Street overpass. We also appreciate the public meeting on November 19 that was hosted by your department and attended by more than 150 people.

We are pleased that MassDOT has made improvements to the the Cambridge Street Overpass project since the first public meeting in June. However, the design presented at the public meeting on November 19 left several key issues unresolved and several of the improvements proposed in our earlier letters have not been included.

The issues that we hope you will address before completing the project design are:

- **Do not install a median fence.**

The Allston community has been unequivocal in its opposition to a new six-foot-tall fence in the Cambridge Street median from Lincoln Street to Harvard Ave. This proposal is unacceptable to the community and inconsistent with MassDOT's Healthy Transportation Directive and the GreenDOT Initiative to promote and encourage trips by walking, bicycling, and transit. The community understands that MassDOT considers Cambridge Street too dangerous for pedestrians to cross without a signalized crosswalk.

The appropriate solution is to make the street less dangerous and add signalized crosswalks, not to erect a fence.

Fortunately, the proposed design makes progress toward taming Cambridge Street vehicle traffic by removing a travel lane on each side, narrowing travel lanes, and adding bicycle lanes. Adding physical barriers between vehicle lanes and bicycle lanes would also contribute to traffic calming. Erecting a six-foot-tall fence would have the opposite effect. Such a large median fence would reinforce the existing perception of Cambridge Street as an extension of the Turnpike and the dangerous driving behavior that results. We are not aware of any other location where a six-foot-tall

fence is present on a city street, except alongside Green Line trolley tracks. We urge MassDOT to eliminate the proposed fence and add additional traffic calming.

- **Install a signalized pedestrian intersection at the Mansfield Street location.**

The overwhelming response at the Nov. 19 community meeting was that a signalized crossing is needed, supporting the argument that was made at the first public meeting and in our letters dated July 3 and November 12. We appreciate that MassDOT has taken our suggestion for a pedestrian intersection at Mansfield St into consideration, and we understand that there are engineering challenges that must be resolved in order to install a pedestrian intersection at that location. There are many pedestrians who cross at Mansfield Street currently, and many more who would cross if there were a safer way to do so. There is also a strong desire line from the Franklin Street pedestrian bridge to Linden Street, but we understand that the bridge's flawed design with a vertical split between the north and south lanes makes a crossing at that location more difficult. In addition to the overall need for a safe crosswalk, there are bus stops at both Mansfield Street and Linden Street, and it is inappropriate to continue providing bus stops without providing a safe way for bus riders to get to them. We urge MassDOT to find a solution and install a signalized pedestrian crossing.

- **Use physical barriers between the bike lanes and auto lanes.**

The proposed paint-buffered bike lanes should be replaced with a physically separated cycletrack using a grade separation or attractive physical barriers such as planters. Bike lanes elsewhere in Boston, even with a paint buffer, are routinely blocked by driving or parked cars, while cycletracks (bike lanes protected by a physical barrier) effectively separate bicycle and vehicle traffic without relying on police enforcement. Cycletracks also provide a greater feeling of safety to cyclists, encouraging use by families and other more cautious cyclists. While maintenance concerns prevent drilling into the deck surface, this is not an issue on the sections of Cambridge Street approaching the bridge deck. Additionally, many options are available that do not require penetrating the deck, including planters such as those pictured below. Another option would be to build a sidewalk-level cycletrack such as MassDOT is proposing for the River Street and Western Ave bridges, a solution which could better integrate the overpass with future improvements to Cambridge Street.



- **Maintain the left turn onto Highgate Street.**

Harvard Ave and Brighton Ave in Allston Village are already highly congested and this has a negative impact on the Allston Village business district. MassDOT's proposal to eliminate the left from Cambridge Street onto Highgate Street would prevent traffic from bypassing congested Harvard Ave and exacerbate traffic problems on Harvard Ave, harm local businesses, and unnecessarily inconvenience drivers and cyclists turning onto Highgate towards Packards Corner and the residential neighborhood between Highgate Street and Boston University.

- **Eliminate the dedicated right turn lane at the Harvard Ave intersection and continue the on-street bike lane through the intersection.**

We have noted in our previous letters our concern with routing the bike lane onto the sidewalk as it approaches Harvard Ave to make space in the road for a dedicated right-turn lane. Painted sharrows are not sufficient for an intersection as complex, busy, and dangerous as this one. This proposed configuration will create bike-ped and bike-bike conflicts on the north side "shared-use path" that could be avoided with a better design. The existing dedicated right turn lane is seldom used and a combined through/right lane would be sufficient to handle right-turn volumes. This would allow room to continue the bike lane in the street through the Harvard Ave intersection, thereby improving safety and operations for cyclists and pedestrians.

- **Convert the southernmost lane of Cambridge St between Harvard Ave and Linden St into an exclusive bus-bike lane.**

As our previous letters noted, the traffic using the eastbound lanes of Cambridge Street is coming from a single lane on either Harvard Ave or Cambridge Street west of the intersection. Therefore two travel lanes immediately east of the intersection are unnecessary. This "opening up" of Cambridge Street from one to two lanes also makes the roadway less safe because it encourages cars to rapidly accelerate into this new lane.

Furthermore, the proposed configuration will make it unsafe for cars turning right from Linden Street onto Harvard Ave because of the need to merge from a stop (while on the incline of Linden Street) with accelerating vehicles already driving on Cambridge Street.

To solve these problems, the eastbound bike lane should begin at the Harvard Ave intersection, either as a buffered bike lane, or an exclusive bus/bike lane.

- **Dramatically improve the aesthetics, cleanliness and perception of safety of the overpass and footbridge.**

In both of our previous letters we asked MassDOT to improve the aesthetics of Cambridge Street and the Franklin Street pedestrian bridge to improve the safety and quality of life in the neighborhood. However, we have not received an adequate response to this request. We agree that crash-test and projectile-prevention requirements must be respected. However, the existing chain-link fencing on the overpass and the pedestrian bridge does not provide any structural function and could be replaced by a more attractive option with comparable safety features. Our previous letters have included photographs showing examples of interstate highway overpasses from around the country where more attractive fences have been used.

The request for MassDOT to make aesthetics improvement is not a frivolous one. As noted in Chapter 10 of MassDOT's award winning Project Development and Design Guide, "the aesthetics of the bridge crossings are very important due to their high visibility in the built environment... In order

for a bridge to be truly successful, it must be attractive [for] the human-level experience of a pedestrian, or bicyclist”.

The Environmental Justice community that surrounds Cambridge Street has long suffered from the poor design of this section of Cambridge Street and the overall impact of the Massachusetts Turnpike dividing and degrading the physical appearance of our community. It is entirely appropriate for a project of this magnitude to mitigate the past, current, and future negative impacts of the Turnpike’s presence in Allston.

Mitigation is also required for the small businesses in Allston Village. The disruptions caused by the two-year construction period will significantly increase traffic on Harvard Ave - which is already a highly congested corridor - and discourage people from visiting Allston Village businesses. Cambridge Street is a gateway to the district, and it has long done the neighborhood a disservice by greeting visitors with a dirty, dangerous and neglected entrance to the community. The Cambridge Street overpass project creates a much-welcome opportunity to create a gateway that residents and business owners can be proud of.

We appreciate MassDOT’s plans to replace the existing lighting with more attractive, pedestrian-scale lighting. In addition, the existing chain-link fencing should be upgraded, and the two trees that are being cut down for this project should be replaced with new trees and other landscaping wherever conditions within or nearby the project scope allow.

- **Commit to another public meeting on the Cambridge Street overpass project.**

In light of the community response at the November 19 meeting and the many issues still pending at the time of the meeting, we believe the community deserves a chance to review the final plans before they are put out to bid. We appreciate that MassDOT has already extended the design phase and added a second public meeting in response to community concerns. Even so, we believe it would be constructive for MassDOT to hold another public meeting before finalizing the project design.

- **Follow through on promises of robust community process on the I-90 Viaduct Interchange Improvement Project, including the Cambridge Street corridor.**

We would like to thank MassDOT for committing at the November 19 meeting to conduct a robust community process for the I-90 Viaduct Interchange Improvement Project. Specifically, we welcome the following commitments included in the MassDOT presentation:

- “Full evaluation of existing pedestrian and bicycle facilities between North Allston and Allston Village as part of I-90 Viaduct Interchange Improvement Project scope
 - “Design will include ‘new, modern pedestrian and bicycle accommodations’
- “Full evaluation and design of Cambridge Street corridor mitigation required as a result of the I-90 Viaduct Interchange Improvement Project.”

In addition, District Projects Engineer Mark Gravalles committed that **the Cambridge Street Overpass project will not preclude or prevent any improvements or design decisions that may be desired by the community in conjunction with the I-90 Viaduct Interchange Improvement Project.**

We thank you once again for taking into consideration the needs and concerns of the Allston residential and business community, the thousands of commuters, workers, and shoppers that rely on a safe and functioning Cambridge Street, and the undersigned organizations dedicated to improving safe and

universal access on our city streets. Please do not hesitate to contact us for further detail on the above proposals.

Sincerely,

Allston-Brighton Bikes
Galen Mook, Organizer

Boston Cyclists' Union
Pete Stidman, Executive Director

CommonWheels Bicycle Co-Op
Jessica Robertson, Board of Directors

LivableStreets Alliance
Charlie Denison, Board of Directors, Advocacy Chair

WalkBoston
Wendy Landman, Executive Director

PENDING CONFIRMATION:

Allston Civic Association
Paul Berkeley, President

Allston Village Main Streets
Scott Matalon, President

Barrington Vaughn Brinson Memorial Fund
Lisa Smith, mother of Barrington Vaughn Brinson

Boston Center for Independent Living
Bill Henning, Executive Director

Charles River Conservancy
Renata Von Tscharnner, President

City of Boston Mayor's Commission for Persons with Disabilities
R. Ben Roux, Chairperson, Advisory Board

Institute for Human Centered Design
Chris Hart, Director of Urban and Transportation Projects

Massachusetts Bicycle Coalition
David Watson, Executive Director