



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

Governor Deval Patrick
Massachusetts State House
Room 105
Boston, MA 02133

June 4, 2014

Dear Governor Patrick,

We are writing to urge you to release \$500,000 "...for the design and permitting to improve safety, bus prioritization, and accessibility at the intersection of Fresh Pond parkway and Mount Auburn Street in the city of Cambridge" as authorized by the 2014 transportation bond bill (Ch. 79 of the Acts of 2014).

If you commute inbound from Belmont, Watertown or West Cambridge, there is one problem you always have to solve — how to get past the congestion on Fresh Pond Parkway. The roughly 5,000 who daily take the 71 or 73 bus to Harvard Square often wait through a long queue of traffic along Mount Auburn Street by the cemetery. Thousands more in cars are stuck in the same mess or in the parallel messes on Brattle and Huron. Fresh Pond Parkway is among the most congested roads in the Commonwealth. The parkway channels a huge volume of traffic through a series of busy intersections and most of those intersections simply cannot be eliminated.

There have long been conversations about how to improve the intersection of Mount Auburn Street and Fresh Pond Parkway. A group of us recently met in Cambridge to brainstorm possible directions. The City of Cambridge, which owns Mount Auburn Street in that stretch, hosted the meeting and state's Department of Conservation and Recreation which owns Fresh Pond Parkway, sent a strong team.

The MBTA also participated in the conversation, confirming that, by far, this intersection is the most significant bottleneck for the buses serving Watertown and Belmont. Improvements at this intersection could dramatically improve service on those busy routes. Belmont and Watertown also sent representatives who emphasized their willingness to collaborate.

As the conversation shifted into brainstorming mode, there was a sense of excitement in the room — it became clear (a) that no one has really studied the intersection in many years and (b) that there are real opportunities for improvement.

Aerial views of the intersection make obvious how much wasted space there is in the middle of the intersection. That huge empty expanse takes a long time to clear once the light turns to red. To allow motorists to clear the intersection, there are significant intervals when the lights are red both ways — that means that cars and buses are waiting when they should be moving. And, of course, the long crossings are very unsafe for pedestrians and cyclists. At a minimum, it is clear that the geometry of the intersection can be substantially improved. And a wide range of other options merit consideration.

The problem is regional and is created by congestion on a state-owned roadway. The solution will require sustained collaboration between several state agencies and several municipalities.

We appreciate your consideration and hope that you will release funding to study this problematic intersection.



Senator William N. Brownsberger
Second Suffolk & Middlesex



Senator Patricia D. Jehlen
Second Middlesex



Representative Jonathan Hecht
29th Middlesex



Representative David M. Rogers
24th Middlesex