

January 28, 2014

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

RE: Project #606376 Cambridge Street bridge over I-90, Allston, Boston

Dear Secretary Davey and Administrator DePaola:

Thank you for the many recent improvements in the design for the Cambridge Street Overpass in Allston, Project #606376. Project Manager Mark Gravalles and MassDOT engineers have listened repeatedly to the community's concerns and incorporated many of our suggestions. The new design gives the community much to look forward to. In particular, we thank MassDOT for these items, which represent enormous improvements over the current conditions:

- A new signalized pedestrian crossing at Mansfield Street;
- Cycletracks physically separated from motor vehicle traffic;
- Lighting and fencing that improve the aesthetics and perception of safety in the area.

However, with the goal of slowing traffic speed and creating a safer street for pedestrians and bicyclists, there are still a few final modifications to the design that we hope you will agree are essential to make this a project of which we can all be proud:

**1) Do not install a median fence.**

The project is likely to reduce vehicular operating speeds by reducing the width and number of travel lanes. The addition of a signalized crosswalk at the Mansfield Street stairs should also reduce vehicle speeds and reduce pedestrian crossings in the Linden Street area. Based on these factors, we suggest that it is premature to conclude that a median fence will be necessary after construction is complete. Furthermore, as a large number of residents have commented at all three public meetings, insisting that despite a fence pedestrians will continue to cross at mid-block locations, we believe that a fence will make conditions more dangerous, since those pedestrians who do choose to make the dangerous mid-block crossing will no longer be able to use the median as a refuge.

We therefore propose two possible solutions:

- **Do not install a fence as part of this project.** Instead, re-evaluate Cambridge Street after the new design has been operational for several months to determine if a fence is necessary.
- **Install planters instead of a fence on the portion of Cambridge Street not on the bridge deck.** Planters, such as those on the Boylston Street overpass over the Mass Pike (pictured), can provide a vertical obstruction that reduces or



eliminates mid-block crossings. While a fence can encourage higher vehicle speeds and is unacceptable to the community, planters add value to the community and slow traffic. If the vertical split of the north and south sides of the overpass presents a problem, narrower planters can be installed separately on the two sides.

While dangerous, crossing Cambridge Street at Linden Street is not illegal, due to the fact that it is more than 300 feet away from the nearest marked crosswalk (see 720 CMR9). Linden Street is approximately 400 feet away from the crosswalk at Harvard Avenue, and also about 400 feet away from the newly planned crosswalk at the Mansfield Street stairs. A fence would block this legal crossing movement at Linden Street, while at the same time promoting an illegal movement: speeding.

## **2) Reallocate excess space from roadway to bicyclists and pedestrians.**

The current design is an improvement over the previously proposed paint-buffered bike lane. However, the resulting design creates very tight quarters for bicyclists and pedestrians to share, while allocating more space to vehicles than is needed. With the shoulder space, the travel lane closest to the crash barrier is effectively 14' wide, which will counteract other efforts to calm traffic. This runs contrary both to the community's expressed preference for slower traffic and GreenDOT policy goals of increasing walking and cycling. We therefore request the following design changes:

- **Reduce both travel lanes to 10.5'.** At the intersection with Harvard Ave, the westbound through lanes are 10.5' feet and the turn lane is 10'. If this is acceptable for part of the street, then it should be acceptable for the entire length of the project. At a minimum, the inside travel lane can be reduced to 10.5' for the entire length of the project. Reducing lane widths will create more space for other modes and will help to calm traffic over the entire bridge.
- **Reduce the width of the outside shoulders on both sides.** It is our understanding that, on arterials, the minimum width for shoulders is 2 feet, while the design proposes a 3-foot shoulder on the outside lanes. Allocating extra space for the rare vehicle breakdown comes at the expense of space needed to minimize conflicts between bicycles and pedestrians which could occur far more frequently. A 2' shoulder will still provide ample space for snow clearance and provides the required shy distance from the BR-2 barriers.
- **Reduce the center median to 4' wide.** A 6' wide median is a waste of roadway width. We request that all signage be installed on the southeast side of the median (Cambridge-bound lanes) and that the northeast side median (Allston-bound lanes) be narrowed to 1'. The lane configurations during construction permit vehicle traffic on several feet of the bridge deck cross section that is currently median, so it should be possible to shrink the median in the final design.
- **Reduce the inside shoulder to 6" on both sides of the median.** Other MassDOT projects, such as the Western Ave and River Street bridges, have 6" shoulders on both sides of the bridge. This should also be applied here.

**Incorporating all of the above suggestions would create 4.5' on the northwest (Allston-bound) side and 2.5' on the southeast (Cambridge-bound) side which should be reallocated to the bicycle and pedestrian space.** This additional space will reduce potential conflicts between bicycles and pedestrians, especially on the northwest side of the bridge, which sees heavy two-way bicycle and pedestrian traffic. The narrow bike and pedestrian space proposed in the current design may lead to community complaints, while reallocating space will mitigate those potential concerns, while bolstering efforts to calm traffic.

**3) The new pedestrian crossing should be built with standard traffic signalization.**

The proposed flashing signal with strobe should be replaced with a standard green/yellow/red traffic light with walk/don't walk signals and auditory signals that sound during the pedestrian phase. Standard signals have higher rates of compliance for vehicles to stop, and it is our understanding that this option is preferred by the City of Boston Transportation Department. Regardless of the type of signal, it should change to pedestrian phase immediately upon activation by a pedestrian. In addition, an auditory walk signal is necessary for accessibility for the vision-impaired.

**4) Install a temporary crosswalk at Mansfield Street immediately upon the start of construction.**

MassDOT has acknowledged the need for a new pedestrian crossing, and, commendably, has found a way to safely incorporate one at Mansfield Street. This crosswalk should be installed in a temporary manner as soon as construction begins. The need to safely cross Cambridge Street is an immediate one, and the community should not have to wait two and a half years until the final phase of the project to do so. If the Mansfield Street location is blocked during certain phases of construction, a pedestrian signal phase should be implemented at Lincoln Street, along with a new crosswalk on the western side of the intersection.

**5) Median Landscaping from the Mansfield Crosswalk to Lincoln Street.**

We thank MassDOT for agreeing to remove the median fence on the northeast end of the project scope. It would be a great enhancement to plant trees and other plants in this median instead of a concrete or asphalt strip. A model for this could be Commonwealth Ave near the BU Bridge where there is a row of trees planted with 20' spacing in a 4' median. We have requested, through the City Council and Mayor's office, that the City provide the needed support and ongoing maintenance for these plantings.

If adding irrigation is not feasible, stormwater tree pit design should be used so that runoff from the street is diverted into the planting area where stormwater is absorbed and associated pollutants are filtered. Storage chambers below the planting area can hold additional runoff for plant uptake or groundwater recharge.

**6) Clear visual distinction between sidewalk and cycletrack.**

To reduce the likelihood of pedestrian / cyclist conflicts, we recommend the use of clear signage and permanent coloration of the cycletrack using dry-shake color hardeners or some other permanent (not painted) coloring. Dry-shake coloring is a powder that is hand broadcast onto the freshly placed concrete and then worked into the surface with a float or trowel. Merely painting the lane would create an additional maintenance cost to the taxpayers.

**7) Study eastbound operations at the Harvard Ave intersection before final striping to determine the feasibility of a bus-bike lane.**

The community has repeatedly requested that the outside eastbound lane between Harvard Ave and Linden Street be striped as an exclusive bus-bike lane. There are currently no lane markings on Cambridge Street approaching Harvard Ave from the southwest. In our observation of this intersection, cars operate as though it were one through/left lane, and one right turn only lane, while buses use the right hand side of the street as a through lane due to the bus stop in front of Stingray Body Art. Therefore the right hand lane on the northeast side of the intersection, between Harvard Ave and Linden Street, could be striped as a bus-bike lane without impacting vehicle operations. This would improve bus operations, increase safety for bicyclists, and reduce the tendency for

cars to aggressively accelerate up the hill. We request that before striping is complete, MassDOT collaborates with the City of Boston to study this intersection and determine whether a bus-bike lane is feasible. At a minimum, bike markings should be installed as “priority sharrow” lanes, such as Boston has used on Brighton Ave, and Brookline has used on Longwood Ave. NACTO design guide optional designs for priority sharrows are shown at right.



We greatly appreciate your attention to our past concerns and your diligent efforts to incorporate our suggestions into the design for the Cambridge Street Overpass. We hope that you will look at these few remaining concerns just as seriously.

Thank you again for your attention to these comments and commitment to transforming Cambridge Street into a safe, accessible, and attractive gateway to our community.

Sincerely,

Allston-Brighton Bikes  
Galen Mook, Organizer

Allston Village Main Streets  
Alana Olsen, Executive Director

Boston Cyclists Union  
Pete Stidman, Executive Director

CommonWheels Bicycle Co-Op  
Jessica Robertson, Treasurer

LivableStreets Alliance  
Steve Miller, Board of Directors

WalkBoston  
Wendy Landman, Executive Director