

January 31, 2010

Tracy Osimboni
Massachusetts Department of Transportation
Charles River Basin Accelerated Bridge Program
251 Causeway Street, Suite 700
Boston, MA 02114

Delivery by Adobe PDF via email to Tracy.Osimboni@state.ma.us

Subject: Anderson Memorial Bridge Reconstruction

Dear Ms. Osimboni:

We would like to take this opportunity to provide some suggestions and comments regarding the Anderson Memorial Bridge Reconstruction Project, as presented to the community on Tuesday December 15, 2009.

Overall, we are quite pleased with the initial ideas presented at the meeting. It's clear that MassDOT is aware of the many current issues with the bridge and approaches and intends to utilize this project as a way to solve as many of them as possible for all modes of transportation.

The Bridge Itself

In favor of three lane configuration

We are very supportive of the idea of a 3 travel lane cross-section with bike lanes in each direction. This cross-section across the bridge will match up with the existing cross-section of North Harvard St in Boston and will allow JFK St in Cambridge to also be converted similarly, extending bike lanes into the heart of Harvard Square (something which the City of Cambridge has expressed an interest in doing).

Only widen bridge if using three lane configuration and widening sidewalks

We are supportive of the possibility of widening the bridge, with one caveat. We would not want the bridge to be widened in order to retain the current 4 travel lanes. Because JFK Street could not also be widened, it would be very difficult if not impossible to then retrofit it with bike lanes leading to Harvard Square. We would, however, strongly support widening the bridge in order to widen the sidewalks, particularly because of the high pedestrian volumes across the bridge, and the desire of some bicyclists to use the sidewalks as a connection between the Charles River Paths on either side.

Improve sidewalk accessibility

As you reconstruct the sidewalks, we ask that you remove the brick strips that run across the sidewalks, as they tend to cause discomfort and can pose a hazard to those in wheelchairs or strollers. However, brick edging along the sidewalks can be an appealing decorative element, if desired.

Intersections

As you are probably aware, both the North Harvard Street/Soldiers Field Road and JFK Street/Memorial Drive intersections have a lot of potential to operate more safely and efficiently for pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit.

For both intersections, we feel that the following improvements can be made for pedestrians:

- Tightening the curb radii at the corners
- Modifying the Charles River Path crossings to be straighter, wider, and more visible (including removing the porkchop islands on the Boston side)
- Modifying the pedestrian signals to have countdown timers, to be automatic (no push-buttons) and concurrently timed, with leading pedestrian intervals where appropriate
- All approaches should be posted with “No Turn on Red” signs

Dash-stripe colored bicycle lanes through intersection

For bicyclists, the bicycle lanes leading to the intersections will be a significant improvement. On the Boston side, it is probably desirable to dash-stripe colored bike lanes through the intersection itself to make motorists more aware of bicyclists and help guide bicyclists through the intersection. This would be similar to the treatment of bike lanes along Commonwealth Ave at the BU Bridge intersection in Boston.



Example of green dashed bike lanes from Portland, OR

Improve lane striping and traffic signalization

For motorists, on the Boston side, clearer roadway striping should be added to clarify the lane configuration. Signal timing should be adjusted to reduce conflict between Boston-bound left turning traffic onto Soldiers Field Rd and Cambridge-bound through traffic. Currently, there is a protected left for Boston-bound traffic that then becomes a permitted left as Cambridge-bound traffic gets a green light. It is very common for Boston-bound left turning traffic to continue to turn at the beginning of the permissive left phase, “cutting off” northbound traffic that has a green light. We suggest that you look into ways to alter the timing to reduce this problem.

On the Cambridge side, we support the prohibition of certain turn movements (particularly left turns off of Memorial Drive) to create more predictability, increase safety for all users, and where needed to preserve traffic capacity. We would also support the possibility of a road diet along Memorial Drive, to allow for the creation of dedicated left-turn-only lanes and/or bike lanes.

Add grade-separated crossings of Charles River Paths

Lastly, for the Charles River Paths on both sides of the river, in addition to the at-grade crossing improvements, we would very much like to see grade-separated continuations of the paths, so that pedestrians and bicyclists who wish to continue along them can continue without needing to cross the intersection. This could be done with boardwalks under the bridge, similar to the boardwalk under the BU Bridge, or tunnels under the bridge, similar to at the Eliot Bridge.



Boardwalk under BU Bridge

Thank you for considering our input as this project moves forward. If you have any questions on the above comments and suggestions, please contact Charlie Denison, Board Member & Advocacy Director, LivableStreets Alliance, who may be reached at 617.852.6125 and charlie@livablestreets.info.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Charlie Denison". The script is cursive and fluid.

Charlie Denison,
Board Member & Advocacy Director