

17 May 2008

Frank Tramontozzi, P.E.
Chief Engineer
Massachusetts Highway Department
10 Park Plaza
Boston, MA 02116-3973

Dear Mr. Tramontozzi:

LivableStreets appreciates the opportunity to comment on the **Museum Road and Forsyth Way Project** in Boston (Project File No. 604997).

Based on the project diagrams and drawings shown at the May 13 public meeting, we think that this project will make some welcomed improvements to both roadways. However, we feel that the current plans miss some great opportunities to drastically improve conditions for pedestrians and bicyclists in the area.

Museum Road

Regarding Museum Road, the most important improvements that we think should be made are ensuring adequate sidewalk widths and improving pedestrian crossings.

We feel that the sidewalks should have at least an 8 ft walking zone (the area clear of any street furniture). From our understanding, the current plans have a width of less than that.

We are glad to hear that the corner radii at the intersection of Huntington Ave have both already been tightened in the current plans, however, we would like to suggest that they be reexamined to ensure for safe pedestrian conditions. The addition of curb extensions at the intersection should be considered as well to further improve the crossing. We would like you to also apply the same improvements to the intersection at The Fenway (reducing the turn radii, and adding curb extensions.)

Forsyth Way

Forsyth Way is a very heavily traveled road by both pedestrians and bicyclists, as it forms a very important regional connection between the Emerald Necklace, Northeastern University, and the Southwest Corridor.

The most drastic change being made to Forsyth Way is the narrowing of the roadway from 60 ft. The current plans call for narrowing it to 44 ft, with an 8 ft parking lane and a 14 ft travel lane in each direction. Since this is such an important corridor for bicyclists while also carrying a fair number of automobiles, we would ask that you narrow the road to only 46 ft to allow for a 5 ft on-road bike lane in each direction. This will allow for an 8 ft parking lane, 5 ft bike lane, and 10 ft travel lane in each direction. If it is not possible nor desirable to change the planned dimension of the roadway, leaving it as 60 ft, we feel that shared lane markings, or "sharrows", be painted on the roadway to reinforce to motorists and bicyclists that bicyclists can and should use the roadway if desired.

We learned at the public meeting that the 15 ft west sidewalk is considered a multi-use path. We do not feel that is true, since it is constructed like a sidewalk in almost every sense, and functionally acts as such, serving groups of people strolling around the museum. We feel that this should remain as a sidewalk, especially since the east sidewalk has the most potential for improvements.

We were surprised to learn that the east sidewalk is not currently in the scope of the project. We would like you to add this east sidewalk for a number of reasons. Because of the high number of bicyclists in the area, many of which are primarily using off-road facilities (both in the Fenway and within the Northeastern University campus), we would like you to consider converting the east sidewalk into a true multi-use path that serves both bicyclists and pedestrians. The path should be of sufficient width to safely serve a wide variety of users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, people in wheelchairs, etc. The path should be constructed using standards designated for multi-use paths and should not be merely a wide sidewalk, and should be signed as such, showing that both pedestrians and bicyclists are allowed use of the path. The path should interact with intersections as a path, and not just a sidewalk, with wide curb cuts and signage to warn motorists of bicycles crossing. Peter Furth from Northeastern University has submitted much more detailed comments regarding this potential path.

As with Museum Way, we also feel strongly that the intersections both be improved. (We understand that they are both currently out of the scope of the project, but should definitely be included.) At the intersection of Huntington Ave, the corner radii should be maximized and curb extensions should be added. A crossing of the east leg of Huntington Ave should be added, carrying the path mentioned above into the Northeastern campus. There currently is no crosswalk in that location, yet hundreds of pedestrians per day make this dangerous crossing instead of the much lengthier three-legged crossing.

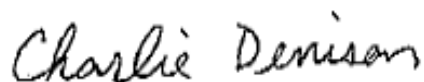
At the intersection of The Fenway, we would ideally like to see the “porkchop” island removed, the turn radii tightened substantially, and curb extensions added. The wide curves currently allow for rather high-speed turns to be made by motorists, posing unnecessary danger to pedestrians and bicyclists. Furthermore, we would like to see an additional crossing added to The Fenway. Ideally, if the island is removed, it would be from the proposed east side path across to the other side of the Fenway. If the island is to remain, the crossing should be from the island itself to the other side of the Fenway. Many pedestrians and bicyclists already cross in this manner, rather than make the legal three-legged crossing provided.

We realize that many of our comments and suggestions pertain to areas outside the current scope of the project and in some cases controlled by agencies other than the City of Boston. The end result that can be achieved by increasing the scope as described will be far greater than what the currently proposed design will allow. We also understand the importance of preserving the history of our state parkways such as The Fenway. However, it is extremely important that we not pass up opportunities to improve safety and better accommodate non-motorized users of these parkways. In fact, it would be negligent to not do so, especially in the name of historical preservation.

Please consider our comments complementary to any other comments submitted by WalkBoston, MassBike, and Peter Furth of Northeastern University. We have worked closely with them on this project to give helpful feedback to greatly improve the plans for both of these roads.

Please feel free to contact me to discuss any of our comments in greater detail. My e-mail address is charlie@livablestreets.info and my cell phone number is 413-478-9058.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Charlie Denison".

Charlie Denison
Board of Directors
LivableStreets Alliance