

April 25, 2014

Patricia Leavenworth, P.E.
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MassDOT
10 Park Plaza
Boston, MA 02116

Delivery by Adobe PDF via email to dot.feedback.highway@state.ma.us

ATTN: I-90 Interchange, Allston, Boston (Project #606475)

Dear Ms. Leavenworth:

Please accept these comments on the I-90 Allston Interchange project referenced above. These written comments are intended to confirm and supplement those made by us at your recent April 10, 2014 public hearing.

We recognize this project is about designing needed enhancements to auto and truck travel, yet we believe it has the potential to be about so much more. Back in the early 1960's when the Interchange was last designed and built, that construction was about motor vehicles and not much else. Today, this project offers two complementary and exciting powerful opportunities:

- Fix or redress subpar roadway operations and unreasonable neighborhood circumstances that, unfortunately, have impacted motorists, neighbors, and visitors alike for the past fifty years; and
- Broaden the planning process to consider and implement a world-class set of modern multi-modal transportation facilities with new connections that will most favorably support access, economic development, and livability not just in the Allston/Brighton community but many other Boston and Cambridge neighborhoods too as well.

Based on public presentations and discussions to date, we are hopeful that MassDOT agrees that this project offers the potential to be about more than cars and trucks, but to be about people, other travel modes, and neighborhoods too as well. We encourage MassDOT to view this as a new holistic urban roadway project. A project grounded in the goal to enhance the livability of existing and new neighborhoods, and founded in modern, Complete Streets principles, one that looks broadly at implementing world-class solutions for motorists, transit riders, bicyclists, and pedestrians alike.

With so much to gain, it is critical that we reach out for every opportunity to help this project fulfill its potential. We recognize that some of the following have already been incorporated into your conceptual thinking, and we encourage you to expand your I-90 Interchange scope of work so that the conceptual designs may consider each of the following:

1. **New direct connections between I-90 and the Fenway/LMA areas.** Can the new I-90 Allston Interchange and nearby sections of I-90 be designed in ways that create or at least allow new direct ramp connections to the Longwood Medical Area and Fenway district east of where the Turnpike goes under Commonwealth Avenue? Doing so could:
 - Enhance highway connections to important medical, economic, and residential areas.
 - Reduce vehicle demand that must use the new Interchange in Allston/Brighton.
 - Take traffic off Storrow Drive and the Bowker Overpass
 - Minimize elevated structure to both save money and enhance neighborhood connectivity in the area.

We are aware of planning studies undertaken by MassDOT in 2013/2014 as well as MassPike engineering studies conducted in 1997 regarding the feasibility of new ramp connections on the I-90 Boston Extension, so-called. Both studies found it very difficult to create any new ramps, and we believe the new I-90 Allston Interchange may represent the best and final chance to explore the feasibility of creating or at least allow any such new, and long-desired, ramp connection(s).

2. **New direct connections between I-90 and Soldiers Field Road/Storrow Drive, without the need to travel on Cambridge Street.** Can we study the feasibility of a direct connection between I-90 and Soldiers Field Road/Storrow Drive and, if feasible, what effects it might have on Storrow Drive and Cambridge Street roadway operations, adjacent land uses, and livability along both corridors? We see potential pros and cons to such a direct connection, and look forward to evaluating these carefully with MassDOT and others.
3. **Create an Urban—not Suburban—Interchange with slow-speed intersects with Cambridge Street.** Can we design an urban rather than suburban interchange with Cambridge Street, with new ramp intersections, ones with right angles, that put the safety of pedestrians and bicyclists first and foremost? We also suggest exploring options that implement highway ramps with quick transitions from high-speed interstate flow to slower neighborhood speeds.
4. **Cambridge Street should be designed and reconstructed between Harvard Avenue and the Charles River as a Complete Street, with slow-speed neighborhood operating characteristics.** Speaking of Cambridge Street, in lieu of what now operates like a Service Road that runs alongside a highway, can we design a neighborhood street, a complete street? A street design that purposely slows cars and trucks down to safe neighborhood speeds. A street that provides exceptional ways for walkers and cyclists to easily, comfortably, and safely get to the River Street bridge and river-side paths. In other words, can we design a Cambridge Street that is a radical improvement over the one we have today.
5. **Create a new off-road multi-use path called the People's Pike.** Can a new off-road multi-use pedestrian and bicycle path—called the People's Pike—be created to provide a wonderful direct connection between the new Cambridge Street and the Paul Dudley White Bike Path path along the Esplanade? And connect with Commonwealth Avenue too? We suggest a cross section of 25 feet wide, consisting of a 10' wide pedestrian path (5' wide in each direction), a 3' buffer, and a 12' wide cycle track (6' wide in each direction). We believe such a People's Pike should connect to and reinforce future mass transit services in the area. We also would like the People's Pike to be designed such that it can seamlessly tie into any similar path that may be created within the Grand Junction corridor in Cambridge and beyond to Somerville and Boston.

6. **Establish a new Mass Transit rail station(s) along with other Transit priorities.** Can one or two new rail “Indigo Line” transit stations be created to serve both local neighborhood and important institutional needs? Also, can bus prioritization be designed into the new Interchange to facilitate MBTA bus services that utilize I-90.
7. **Design with sound attenuation and mitigation of roadway noise as a priority, not as an afterthought.** Can the new highway be designed with sound walls and other noise attenuation/mitigation techniques (i.e., underground or depressed roadway sections) to minimize impacts to the various residential neighborhoods that abut the project?
8. **Reconnect several neighborhoods that have been cut-off by transportation infrastructure for far too long.** Can we reconnect the neighborhoods that abut the south side of the Interchange that for half a century have been put cut-off by something akin to the Berlin Wall—the elevated turnpike and very wide rail yards—that separates them from points to the north, places like North Allston, Harvard, and the Charles River? Specific reconnections to be considered should include between the Packard's Corner (and other points along Commonwealth Ave. such as Babcock Street, Alcorn Street or Malverne Street) to North Allston and the Charles River. We believe such new connectivity could take the form of new streets, bicycle paths, or pedestrian ways, and that these should connect to and enhance any new mass transit station(s) in the area.
9. **Create new urban parkland on the Boston side of the Charles River.** Can we design a new Interchange to allow Soldier's Field Road, which is now hard up against the Charles river to get pulled away from its shore, to create new open space and parkland along the Boston shore where none exists today? In other words, can this new Interchange be designed to allow the Esplanade, which today ends at the BU Bridge, to expand west towards River Street in Cambridge.
10. **New footbridge and overpass connections of Cambridge Street above I-90.** The existing Lincoln Street pedestrian footbridge is in a state of disrepair and fails to comply with modern accessibility design regulations. In addition, the adjacent existing Cambridge Street overpass above I-90 was designed to facilitate the 1964 temporary terminus of the MassPike onto Cambridge Street, a condition that has not been applicable for nearly half a century. Can the Lincoln Street footbridge be redesigned and reconstructed to serve as a modern gateway structure for vehicles that enter the City of Boston using I-90? Can the Cambridge Street overpass above I-90 be redesigned as a lower, more compact bridge structure that provides enhanced pedestrian and bicyclist access and safety, in addition to the possibility of new public/private real estate development opportunities?

LivableStreets advocates for biking, walking, and transit — creating safe streets and vibrant communities — to make the Boston region a better place to live, work, and play. We look forward to working through the answers to the exciting opportunities listed above. In closing, we offer the following quote:

“Our goal is to foster transportation decisions that balance the needs of all transportation users, expand mobility, improve public health, support a cleaner environment, and create stronger communities....”

That quote was said recently by MassDOT Secretary & CEO Richard A. Davey. We suggest this quote be used as the standard to guide the design of this very important project.

Finally, we will provide a Graphic Index to visually depict the locus of the items discussed herein under separate cover. If you have any questions, please contact Glen Berkowitz, Project Team Leader, LivableStreets Alliance Advocacy Committee, who may be reached at 617.621.1746 and glen (at) livablestreets.info.

Sincerely,



Glen Berkowitz, Project Team Leader
LivableStreets Alliance Advocacy Committee,
LivableStreets Alliance Board of Directors, Member

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