



LivableStreets

Rethinking urban transportation



walkBoston™



2 July 2014

Commissioner Jim Gillooly
Boston Department of Transportation
1 City Hall Square, Room 721
Boston, MA 02201-2026

Vice President Robert Donahue
Boston University Government & Community Affairs
121 Bay State Road
Boston, Massachusetts 02215

Re: Design for Commonwealth Avenue Phase 2A

Dear Commissioner Gillooly and Vice President Donahue:

We appreciate you taking the time to meet on Wednesday, June 25 to review the plans and process for Commonwealth Avenue Phase 2A. The redesign is an exciting opportunity to build a model street that will help achieve our collective goals for safety, enhanced user experience, and multi-modal transportation. These goals are in line with mode-shift, climate change, and public health goals set forward in Boston's Complete Streets Guidelines, Bike Network Plan, and Climate Plan, MassDOT's goals to triple biking, walking and transit mode share, and the goals set out in the Boston University Master Plan. The project provides a key opportunity to re-build Commonwealth Avenue to protect the needs of the area's growing population of people who bike and walk, and address the decline of car traffic on the street and in the city.¹

Unfortunately, the current designs for the project do not achieve these admirable project goals. Widening street lanes and adding fences encourages cars to move faster, making the street less safe and less comfortable for people. The plan to narrow the already overcrowded sidewalks does not serve the thousands of people who walk on Commonwealth Avenue every day. The current bike lane, which has been the site of many injuries and at least one fatality, is not significantly improved in the design, though there is a clear opportunity here to prevent more tragedies from occurring.

¹ Bike use has increased as much as 135% since 2007, pedestrian volumes have increased 80% since 2001, and car volumes have decreased as much as 31% since 1987 in the project area, according to the Boston University Master Plan (sections 8.5.1-8.5.6)

The safety of our community and the student population of Boston University and many other institutions in the area demands that the plans for Commonwealth Avenue Phase 2A be redesigned to protect people and meet the project objectives.

- **Increase the comfort and safety of pedestrians**
 - Minimize sidewalk narrowing to maintain adequate width for pedestrian volumes and allow businesses to maintain outdoor café seating
 - Make crosswalks and curb ramps as wide as sidewalk walking zones
 - Minimize tripping hazards from curb ramps, for example at the corner of Pleasant and Commonwealth Ave.
 - Add curb extensions at all intersections
 - Time the walk signals to allow for a single-stage crossing of Commonwealth Ave
 - Make all walk signals automatic
 - Add a mid-block crosswalk at Alcorn St/Naples Rd

- **Protect people biking and encourage more people to bike**
 - Explore all options to add cycle tracks (protected bike lanes) without narrowing sidewalks
 - Parking-protected one-way cycle tracks
 - Center-lane one-way cycle tracks (similar to those used on Commonwealth Ave in the Back Bay)
 - Add bike boxes at intersections (traditional and two-stage turn queue boxes for those waiting to turn left)
 - Incorporate bike signals and leading bicycle phasing at intersections

- **Keep transit moving**
 - Add transit signal priority for Green Line trains and buses
 - Add curb extensions at bus stops

- **Design for safe and steady traffic speeds**
 - Green Wave: coordinate traffic signals to bike speed (15 MPH)
 - Make all travel lanes no wider than 10.5' (MassDOT regularly approves this)

We understand that project funding depends on final designs by FY15. However, funding a design that does not meet the objectives of the City, the University, or Boston citizens is not a win for anyone and public controversy slows the process more than would design changes.

These designs have not had a true public process; LivableStreets Alliance, MassBike, and many other advocates and citizens submitted comments at the 25% design meetings, but heard no response and received no follow up information on the project. To redesign such an important and heavily-used street without an inclusive process is contrary to the City's guidelines and goals.

We urge the City to engage in an inclusive public process to move plans from 25% to 100% design in order to build a street that we can all support. Past projects (including Connect Historic Boston) illustrate that the City can develop 0 to 100% design plans in less than a year.

We ask you to please respond to this letter by Wednesday, July 9, 2014 to let us know how you intend to address these concerns.

Sincerely,

Jamie Maier
Campaign Coordinator, LivableStreets
Alliance

Pete Stidman
Executive Director, Boston Cyclists Union

David Watson,
Executive Director, MassBike

Wendy Landman
Executive Director, WalkBoston

CC:

Nicole Freedman, Boston Bikes
Mike Wasielewski, BETA
Merrick Turner, BETA
Bill Conroy, Boston Transportation Department
Michelle Consalvo, Boston University
Ken Ryan, Boston University
Bill Egan, Boston Public Works Department

Attachments:

- Comment Letter on Design for Commonwealth Avenue Phase2A
- Marked up plans for Commonwealth Avenue Phase2A
- Photo example of curb ramp/crosswalk as wide as sidewalk to meet high volumes
- Photo example of cycle track
- Bike Network Plan

Other Materials

- Photos of existing conditions in project area
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BwkU70I9krTISDBseks1cHh6QWs/edit?usp=sharing>
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BwkU70I9krTIUTZfbXUtWldRMEU/edit?usp=sharing>
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BwkU70I9krTlbGVTWXZ5UEltcGc/edit?usp=sharing>
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BwkU70I9krTldTFNUEFwUWJBS28/edit?usp=sharing>
- Examples of how to meet complete street guidelines without moving the curb (courtesy of the Boston Cyclists Union)
Existing: <http://streetmix.net/mtrem2/12/commonwealth-avenue-existing>
Left-side cycle track: <http://streetmix.net/mtrem2/13/commonwealth-avenue-left-side-cycle-track>
Parking cycle track: <http://streetmix.net/mtrem2/14/commonwealth-avenue-parking-cycle-track>
- Video of crossing comm Ave
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BwkU70I9krTIUkhMN21NM0xrNTg/edit?usp=sharing>