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Boston builds first protected bike lanes on BU's campus

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The Massachusetts Department of Transportation begins building BU's first protected bike lane along Commonwealth Avenue.

PHOTO BY VIVIAN MYRON/ DAILY FREE PRESS STAFF

Boston University's bikers will get their own protected bike lanes to ride in by 2019 once the City of Boston finishes a roadway development project, which began earlier this year.

This is Boston's largest investment to date in protected bike lanes, according to Billy Hajjar, BU's director of Parking and Transportation Services. The lanes will run along Commonwealth Avenue and span from the BU Bridge to Packard's Corner in Allston. This lane is an effort by the City to provide a safer route for the estimated 3,000 cyclists who use these lanes every day, according to Massachusetts Department of Transportation spokesperson Patrick Marvin.

The construction of these lanes is part of a larger city roadway improvement project, which is expected to be completed by summer of 2019 and will cost the city approximately \$2.5 million, Marvin wrote in an email.

Construction crews are currently blocking off sections of sidewalks to work on their construction, installing pavement and bricks across campus, along with drainage and utility work overnight.

Marvin wrote that many groups are involved in the development of this project.

“The configuration and design of the bicycle lane was the result of a collaborative effort by MassDOT, the City of Boston, key stakeholders, advocate organizations, and members of the community,” Marvin wrote.

The new lanes will be 6.5 feet wide and will use around 9,000 feet of granite for the construction of the curb, Marvin wrote.

According to MassDOT’s project outline report, the project includes a three-foot wide curb, which will serve as a buffer between the bike and traffic lanes, in addition to the construction of both traffic and parking lanes.

Since most of the construction will take place on BU’s campus, the City and MassDOT are working with BU to ensure minimal construction disturbance to local residents, according to Hajjar.

“Though this is not a Boston University project, project planning and coordination has involved input and communication with BU’s Parking & Transportation Services, Police Department, Facilities Management & Planning and Government & Community Affairs ... to ensure the best possible outcome with the least impact from a day-to-day construction perspective,” Hajjar wrote in an email.

Hajjar noted that with the current bike lanes on campus, cyclists are often inconvenienced by traffic and cars parked along the road.

“If you’re riding a bike in one of those bike lanes, there’s traffic on your left (frequently pulling into the bike lane to pick-up or drop-off passengers) and on your right there’s usually parked cars (the doors of which can open unexpectedly) or delivery vehicles,” he wrote. “Once complete, the project will change that experience.”

With the addition of traffic signals just for bikers, both cyclists and pedestrians will have a safer experience.

“By providing physically-protected bike lanes and dedicated signal phases, the street should feel much safer for people riding bikes,” Hajjar wrote. “Street crossings should be shorter and safer for pedestrians as well.”

Andrew McFarland, community engagement manager for LivableStreets Alliance — an organization that advocates for safe and affordable transportation in Boston — said he believes these new bike lanes will encourage more Boston residents to bike.

“This is one of the highest bike ridership corridors in the city,” McFarland said. “When you build safe infrastructure, it encourages more people to bike.”

Several BU community members who bike on BU’s campus said they appreciate the construction of the new bike lane and are looking forward to its completion.

BU earth science professor Nathan Phillips said he prefers to bike to work because it is a reliable mode of transportation.

“For commute distances farther than walking, it’s the single most predictable commute in terms of time,” Phillips said. “I have zero anxiety about my commute time.”

Phillips also said he likes saving money and enjoys the health benefits that biking provides.

Zachary Joachim, a fourth-year doctoral student studying philosophy, said cars on Commonwealth Avenue do not respect the space of bikers passing by due to the current layout of the bike lane.

“The area on Comm. Ave. before the BU Bridge is a mess,” Joachim said. “Sometimes cars don’t always appreciate the fact that they have to share the road with cyclists. I think the bike lane changes will help this very much.”

Khushali Mashruwala, a sophomore in the Sargent College of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences, said biking is the most efficient way for her to travel to her classes.

“I live in one of the further dorms on campus, and so a bike is pretty convenient when you have to get to classes or work quickly,” Mashruwala said. “I usually cut off 15 to 20 minutes from the time it’d take me to walk thanks to my bike.”

Amanda Portis, a College of Communication freshman, said she is fearful of biking in a city, as she grew up biking on wider lanes and dealt with less cars in a suburban atmosphere back home.

“I grew up riding a bike on trails or on low traffic roads and being in the city is a huge change for me as I now have to be hyper-aware of the cars around me,” Portis said. “I really think that these new lanes will take away that fear or at least ease them.”