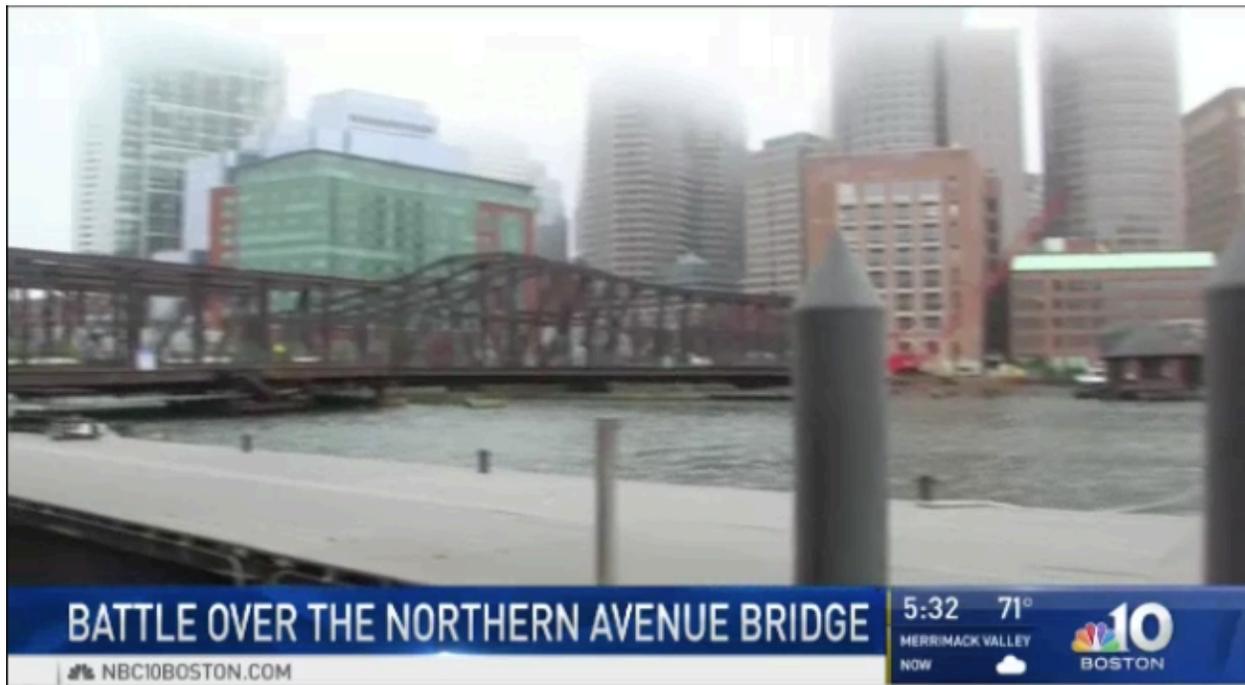




Battle Brews Over Boston's Northern Avenue Bridge

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The city of Boston and area residents are battling over the future of the reopening of the Northern Avenue Bridge in the Seaport District.

It's an unused bridge in one of the most congested parts of the city, and while those who live and work in Boston's Seaport District would like to see it re-opened immediately, there is a battle over who would be able to use the Northern Avenue Bridge.

The bridge on South Boston's waterfront was first built in 1908. It closed to traffic in 1997 and closed to pedestrians in 2014. Now, the

city of Boston has plans to renovate and re-open it, but the debate over the design of it has left some divided.

Options on the table include a bridge that would be open to all traffic, one that would be pedestrian and cyclists only, and one that would allow public transit. Boston Mayor Marty Walsh created a task force to help come up with the most viable option.

Rick Dimino, president of A Better City, is the chairman of the task force. He said he understands the desire for a public space on the bridge similar to the Greenway, but said the problems the Seaport is facing when it comes to transportation cannot be overlooked.

“To prematurely discard what might be an opportunity to help manage a transportation challenge would be irresponsible,” Dimino said. “But I think there's ways to do it all. If we can connect pedestrians and bikes, serve as a destination and serve a traffic need, we need to look at ways to preserve that opportunity.”

Stacy Thompson, executive director of the LivableStreets Alliance is also part of the task force and advocating for a space that would cater to cyclists and pedestrians. She envisions a place for pop-ups and events and fears the full potential won't be reached if the bridge is also used for general traffic.

“If you are sitting outside at a beautiful restaurant, you don't want to be sitting next to four lanes of traffic or a bus sitting in traffic, you want to sit in a beautiful green space,” Thompson said. “The community does have a lot of transportation challenges, but the bridge isn't going to solve all of those challenges.”

The group said emergency vehicles would have access regardless of which design is picked.

Walsh, who has already committed \$46 million to the project, said he is confident when it comes to the debate on easing congestion and creating a pedestrian-friendly destination, the city will be able to bridge the gap.

“I don't want just a bridge,” Walsh said. “I don't want a two-lane car bridge going into the waterfront. I think there's an opportunity here and I've talked to enough people to see about doing something special here.”

The task force has a few more meetings before they hope to come up with something. There is no deadline, but with the bridge at risk of collapsing, they said the sooner, the better.