



Debut of Northern Avenue Bridge Design Creates Debate Over Costs, Vision Zero Goals

Posted on [Thu, May. 7, 2020](#) Author [Steve Vilkas](#)



Project rendering shows the promenade and views of the two spans or “ribbons.”

City officials and project leaders recently [presented their latest plans](#) for the Northern Avenue Bridge Project with a design that takes a “people-first approach.”

Comprised of two spans referred to as ribbons flanking a decorative truss, one span is exclusively reserved for pedestrians (facing the Harbor/Rowes Wharf) while the other consolidates a single lane designated for emergency vehicles, shuttle buses, and cyclists (facing the Moakley Bridge).

This long-awaited design decision arrives after years of contentious conversation among multiple groups, especially respecting vehicle traffic and what, if any, would be permitted on the bridge.

With 40 engagements held so far, close to 250 individuals joined in on Wednesday and over 75 questions were asked. The Q&A portion was intense, with much of the aforementioned debate still driving concerns.

Characterizing many of the points of concern shared by attendees, longtime Fort Point resident Steve Hollinger stated that he'd be willing to support the bridge at one-third of its current scale, which he estimated might save up to half of the \$100 million set aside, an increase from last year's estimated \$46-83 million price range.

With COVID-19 affecting construction projects across the board, City Engineer Para Jayasinghe admitted that the pandemic might play a role in contributing to the overall cost.

Hollinger pressed for clarification and specific documentation on public transit benefits. With other attendees offering similar concerns regarding project transparency, Jayasinghe replied that the design offered "operational flexibility" for use in multiple scenarios including 9/11-like crises and if the nearby Moakley Bridge is ever closed for construction work.

Speaking on behalf of the Livable Streets Alliance, Executive Director Stacy Thompson said that "any method of building before assessing is not good practice" in reference to what she and others had observed with the presentation, calling for further clarity and consistency as part of the planning process.

Thompson went on to say that she did not see alignment with [Vision Zero](#) goals or modern transportation guidelines to keep people safe, and announced that Livable Streets had expressed these concerns prior to the meeting being held.

Matt White, general manager at the Barking Crab, expressed concerns over the potential obstructions to his establishment. The bridge will be raised an estimated 6-8ft for anticipated sea-level rise, which White said would "effectively block the Barking Crab's front door."

Further stating that the bridge's dimensions would affect the interior dining room facing Boston Harbor, White worried that the bridge would, in "curling around" Sleeper St., affect all deliveries and overall access. Jayasinghe's response was that Barking Crab and the project team should continue the conversation offline.

Many participants challenged officials to be more mindful of pedestrian safety and social distancing requirements. Jayasinghe stated that those details are being especially implemented.

Construction of the bridge is tentatively set for 2021, with a ribbon-cutting planned for 2022. View the presentation slide deck, including design plans, [here](#).

This project plan was also presented at the May 2020 Wharf District Council meeting. Read more from that meeting [here](#).