



THE GENERAL COURT OF MASSACHUSETTS  
STATE HOUSE, BOSTON 02133-1053

March 10, 2021, via email

**Re: Project No. 608482**

To: Massachusetts Department of Transportation/McGrath Highway Resurfacing team

As state legislators for the neighborhoods most-impacted by the project area, we write to offer comments and feedback on the McGrath Highway Resurfacing project.

First of all, we want to say thank you to the Department of Transportation (MassDOT) for advancing this forward-looking proposal. For many years, local residents and sustainable transportation advocates have hoped for a future where the six- or seven-lane width of the McGrath Highway could be reduced to just four lanes. This project will realize that ambitious goal through a much needed “road diet,” making the area safer for all users, especially cyclists and pedestrians.

Moreover, we celebrate the fact that MassDOT is advancing the Grounding McGrath project to the 25% design phase, and we recognize that the pending resurfacing plan will help facilitate the longer-term vision of an at-grade multimodal boulevard. As it stands, the McGrath Highway is like a scar on the Somerville landscape, bifurcating the city and walling-off traditionally immigrant and working-class neighborhoods — a reminder of the failed auto-centric policies associated with the era of urban renewal. We are grateful for the steps MassDOT is now taking to partner with the community to undo the historic injustice this highway represents.

**While there’s a lot to like about the current plans, we are also writing to request that physical separation be provided alongside the new bike lanes.** The resurfacing plan currently indicates a painted buffer as the only protection for cyclists along the McGrath Highway, but given the speed and volume of automobile traffic along Route 28, some form of physical separation is absolutely necessary.

**With posted speed limits of 35 miles per hour, and with multiple lanes of automobile traffic in each direction, adding some kind of physical separation is critical for ensuring safe access for cyclists of all ages and abilities.** Sources such as NACTO Urban Bikeway Design Guide and MassDOT’s Separated Bike Lane Planning & Design Guide indicate that a painted buffer would be insufficient and that protected bicycle lanes are needed along the McGrath Highway. Research has repeatedly demonstrated that many people want to bike but are hesitant to do so without being physically separated from automobile traffic. MassDOT has rightfully identified the McGrath Highway as having incredible potential for meeting the needs of everyday biking – but to ensure this project meets the needs of our constituents and makes good on the potential of the Route 28 corridor, physical separation (such as jersey barriers, armadillos, concrete blocks, or at the very least, flexible posts) from automobile traffic is necessary.

## State of Good Repair Work

We appreciate that the scope of work for the resurfacing project includes state of good repair work such as new surfaces, signage replacements, and spot repairs — and we wish to draw your attention to the unacceptable condition of the railings/guardrails and sidewalks along sections of the elevated roadway. Please make efforts to bring missing, damaged, or out-of-place railing sections up to a state of good repair, and please ensure that all sidewalks are ADA compliant.

The present condition is a terrible eyesore for everyone entering the City of Somerville, and the railings that have fallen out of place continue to cause a potential hazard for pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists alike. Here are just two of the many examples of what needs to be fixed along the McGrath Highway, including missing or broken guardrails and missing sections of the sidewalk:



## Connectivity to Adjacent Facilities and Other Pending Projects

Protected bike lanes and state of good repair upgrades along McGrath Highway will also help to complete a significant section of the safe bike network serving Somerville, Cambridge, Everett, Charlestown, Medford, Boston and other destinations.

To the south, the resurfaced McGrath Highway bike lanes will connect with the curb-separated bike lanes recently added to the O'Brien Highway as part of the Cambridge Crossing development and Lechmere Station relocation, which then connect to the separated bike lanes MassDOT recently installed along Charles River Dam Road, leading all the way into Boston.

To the north, the resurfaced McGrath Highway bike lanes will connect to the new bus/bike lanes on Broadway in East Somerville. Meanwhile, MassDOT is actively working with us and our constituents and municipal partners on advancing safety improvements to the Route 28/Route 38 intersection, including improvements to the Kensington Underpass/Connector and better connections across the Mystic River to the Northern Strand Trail and other destinations.

## Other notes and concerns

- We are grateful that MassDOT is working with the City of Somerville to establish a pedestrian crossing to Foss Park at Blakeley Avenue. As this work proceeds, please make efforts to ensure the continuity of protected bike infrastructure and pedestrian access along Route 28 north of Broadway (just beyond the scope of this resurfacing project) up to and including the area of the Route 28/Route 38 Signal and Intersection Improvements project. As you know, MassDOT considers this area a “top 200 crash location,” so taken together, these projects offer a big opportunity to improve overall safety.
- Please narrow the automobile ramp that runs up to the McGrath Highway between Washington Street and Cross Street — please consider making this ramp a single-lane road with a protected bike lane — and please look to reduce the turn radii at Cross Street to better protect cyclists as well.
- Please take steps to bring truck parking in front of the Superior Nut Company into conformity with standard traffic and parking regulations. As present, large trucks park perpendicular to Route 28 and actually take up space in the middle of the roadway without any sort of warning for automobiles or any accommodation for cyclists or pedestrians. While we would like to be supportive of this local manufacturer, safety of all road users has to be the priority.
- Please make accommodations for future connections to the Somerville Community Path and the future Grand Junction Path in the vicinity of the Somerbridge Hotel, the Rufo Road intersection, and the Twin Cities Plaza.
- Please look for opportunities to lower the speed limit along McGrath Highway. 35 miles per hour is too fast for a road that runs through some of the most densely populated neighborhoods in the Commonwealth.

In conclusion, the McGrath Highway Resurfacing project has the potential to greatly enhance the network for safe cycling in Somerville, Cambridge, and across the surrounding communities — but our constituents expect and deserve to be protected from automobiles when biking along the McGrath Highway. Once again we thank you for the attention you’ve paid to the project area with your work so far, and we respectfully encourage you to consider and adopt the recommendations we’ve made with this letter.

Very truly yours,

Rep. Mike Connolly  
Senator Pat Jehlen  
Rep. Christine Barber  
Rep. Erika Uytterhoeven  
Senator Sal DiDomenico  
Senator Joe Boncore  
Rep. Jay Livingstone

cc: Jamey Tesler, Acting Secretary of Transportation and C.E.O., MassDOT  
Patricia A. Leavenworth, P.E., Chief Engineer, MassDOT