

24 May 2006

Ms. Luisa Paiewonski, Commissioner
Massachusetts Highway Department
10 Park Plaza, Suite 5510
Boston, MA 02116

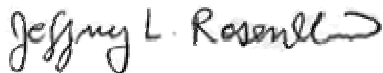
Re: Update on MassHighway Project 602247— Commonwealth Avenue Reconstruction

Dear Commissioner Paiewonsky:

I am writing to thank you on behalf of our advocacy coalition for taking our concerns seriously and facilitating the April 27 meeting with the City of Boston. I would like to brief you on the follow-up meeting with the City of Boston on May 2 (attendance sheet attached). (A) There were a number of points of agreement; (B) Details of the BU bridge intersection are still under consideration by the City; (C) There remain a few areas where we believe neither public safety nor public policy are well served by the current design and where we are not in agreement with the City of Boston's position. A summary is attached and our recommendations are underlined.

Most of the changes we propose should not have major cost implications (most quantities remain much the same; much will be constructed relatively late in the schedule.) To the extent that there may be additional construction costs they are to fix problems for which the City, its consultants, and MassHighway all have an interest in correcting, and therefore toward which all will need to contribute. We hope that it will be possible to give a Notice to Proceed for this contract quite quickly. In order to do so, some complicated decisions remain to be made, albeit difficult ones. We believe that the opportunity for significant improvement to the safety and accommodation of all users in this high-profile area is worth the additional effort needed to make it a reality. We will be glad to continue to assist in any way we can.

Best Regards,



Jeffrey L. Rosenblum, P.E.
Executive Director, LivableStreets Alliance

cc: Jim Gillooly, Joseph Mercurio, Kimberly Sloan, Wendy Landman, Valerie Fletcher, David Watson

attachments (2)

ATTACHMENT A: Follow-up Summary

(A) Areas of general agreement with specific cautions.

A-1. Commonwealth Avenue cross section. The City concurs that a designated bike lane should be provided. Boston and MassHighway both insist on 11' travel lanes. We believe that the bicycle and pedestrian community is willing to accept this dimension, though 10.5' is preferred in order to maximize space between cyclists and the "door zone" of parked cars. There is general agreement to narrow the median offset to one foot (note that there is less than 1-foot offset currently in place on the newly-reconstructed Huntington Avenue). The concurrence of MassHighway for the one-foot offset is needed.

A-2. Intersections. The City of Boston seems to be in agreement that the signals should be re-timed so that pedestrians can cross Commonwealth Avenue in one phase, subject to coordination with trolley priority. We believe that short cycles are also needed to improve pedestrian compliance. Acceptance of the modifications by all parties will be required.

We also agreed that curb cuts, ramps, crosswalks, and trolley crossings need minor revisions to provide adequate safety and utility for all users, especially those in wheelchairs. Also, attention to pedestrian desire-lines should inform design revisions. Chris Hart at Adaptive Environments identified additional concerns regarding ramp design and sidewalk clearance. Acceptance of the modifications by all parties will be required. The Disability Commission must ensure that the project be in compliance with ADA regulations.

(B) The BU Bridge intersection modifications

We had a productive discussion about the BU bridge intersection, although no specific design revisions were reviewed at the meeting. As of May 24th, the City has not provided any additional design details to either LivableStreets Alliance or MassHighway Project Manager Kim Sloan. The City has indicated that their re-design will hopefully eliminate both of the islands, and involve re-timing the signals. Acceptance of the modifications by all parties will be required.

B-1. Adding turn-lane onto BU Bridge. The City has indicated verbally that they plan to maintain two turning lanes onto the BU Bridge from Comm. Ave. outbound. They will not be considering any re-routing of traffic as was presented by LivableStreets at the April 27th MassHighway meeting as a solution that would improve conditions for all users, including vehicles. We strongly believe that increasing the travel-lane cross section for the express purpose of increased automobile traffic at the expense of all other users is not in the public's best interest. We believe that this is a tremendous opportunity that should not be lost (see B-2). Once the second turn-lane is installed, it will be very difficult to build momentum for a Phase 2 (and more expensive) in the future.

There was a general direction that single phase pedestrian crossings are especially important at this intersection, that a bulb-out would be desirable on the south-east corner, and that pedestrian islands, particularly the one at the northwest corner should be eliminated. We discussed the importance of increasing sidewalk widths to accommodate the large number of students. We agreed that signal poles cannot be left as shown on the contract documents where they block pedestrian and wheelchair circulation.

B-2. Rethink circulation at BU bridge intersection. As we presented on April 27th, we believe that there is a tremendous opportunity to change the traffic pattern to include the two under-utilized lanes to provide a perpendicular crossing of Comm. Ave.. Not rethinking circulation through this intersection would be a lost opportunity for a design that best serves all users (including vehicles).

We suggest that it will be impossible to provide adequate pedestrian and bicycle safety while simultaneously accommodating vehicle volumes at this critical intersection, unless the traffic circulation is changed. If it is necessary to restrict contract changes to the current contract limits, then a minor re-design of the intersection should be decided upon that will provide for easy accommodation of this perpendicular move. This would then be accomplished by a concurrent change in the islands at the intersection of Mountfort and Lenox Streets under a separate contract outside the contract limits.

LivableStreets was asked by the City of Brookline's Transportation Board to give a 30-minute presentation about our ideas at their May 18th meeting. David Friend, Assistant Director for Transportation, expressed verbal support for the concept, and for collaborating with the City of Boston and Mass. Highway in their further development.

(C) Areas of remaining concern

C-1. Narrowing of the curb-to-curb dimension approaching Kenmore Square. The City was unwilling to change the curb line at this location. This transition from a bike-lane to a shared lane is unsafe and not desired. Difficult decisions will need to be made to provide this safety—removing some parking, or removing some trees. We believe that MassHighway should resolve this safety hazard in favor of a continuous bike lane. We recommend that the parking be eliminated and that the trees remain.

C-2. Bus Bays. The City is not willing to eliminate the bus bays shown in the contract and stated that the traffic flow must be maintained. We believe this is poor public policy. The new MassHighway Design Guide and MBTA policy both support a curb extension and bus stops in the travel lane, as do we. This gives priority to public transportation, which moves more passengers per vehicle than a private vehicle. The current design would either block the narrowed sidewalks at many bus stops with a bus shelter, or would require placing the shelter where it gives little protection to riders. By eliminating bus bays along Commonwealth Avenue, the sidewalk could be preserved for pedestrians as well as improve the efficiency of public transportation. We feel that MHD should decide this issue in favor of pedestrians and public transportation by eliminating the bus bays.

C-3. Street vehicle design speed. Street designs providing for higher than the desired vehicle speeds are thought to be counter productive to both slowing traffic to and providing adequate safety for all users. We believe that 25 MPH is an appropriate design speed for this street. We do not have the information regarding progression of signalization for us to provide feedback regarding our concern of speeding traffic. The city appears to desire a faster speed than we think is appropriate. We strongly believe that slower vehicle speed does not automatically mean lower throughput. In addition to the major collision in 2005 (which we identified at the April 27th meeting), this past Wednesday, on May 17, 2006, a vehicle spun out of control and struck a traffic signal masthead in front of the BU Bridge. We hope that the issue of speeding vehicles is corrected in this design so as to avoid unnecessary tragedies in the future.

C-4. Miscellaneous items. There were a few details that were not discussed. **Brick sidewalks** are undesirable; if there is an insistence on brick, only wire-cut brick should be used. Rough cut bricks are acceptable for accent strips that are not in the pedestrian travel zone. Several **sidewalk design** issues were also not addressed specifically, such as narrow widths in several locations, driveway skirts that are not flush with walking right of way, problems with curb cuts, excessive sloping issues, and curb radii at certain intersections. LivableStreets discourages the use of **pedestrian push-buttons**, and at several intersections, the timing for concurrent walk does not last as long as the vehicle green. **Transit prioritization** was not addressed; we feel very strongly that any project should take this into serious consideration. No details about this component of the project were made available to LivableStreets, so we cannot comment on the plan.

BOSTON PUBLIC WORKS
ENGINEERING

DATE: May 2nd / 06

SUBJECT: Comm Ave Ø1 - mtz

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