

27 February 2006

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

Mr. Thomas Tinlin, Acting Commissioner
Boston Transportation Department
1 City Hall Plaza, Room 721
Boston, MA 02201

Mr. Joseph Mercurio, Executive Vice President
Boston University
One Sherborn Street
Boston, MA 02215

Re: MassHighway Project 602247— Commonwealth Avenue Reconstruction

Dear Ms. Paiewonski, Mr. Tinlin, and Mr. Mercurio:

While we are pleased that the reconstruction of Commonwealth Avenue between the B.U. Bridge and Kenmore Square has received the funding commitment from the city and state, **we are disappointed that the project has not involved key advocates to be part of the design process** beyond the 25% design public hearing held July 8, 2002. It was discouraging to have read in the January 1, 2006 Boston Globe article that the stalled project had restarted and progressed to 100% design over the past year without community involvement.

LivableStreets Alliance recently requested copies of the 100% design plans from MassHighway and conducted an initial review in collaboration with WalkBoston, Adaptive Environments, and the Massachusetts Bicycle Coalition. **This letter is requesting a meeting within the next few weeks to include representatives from MassHighway, Boston Transportation Department (BTD), Boston University (B.U.), and representatives of the advocacy organizations listed above** to share our collective concerns with this project. We believe this project is about to go out to bid and construction may begin soon—therefore, time is of the essence.

An extraordinary amount of work is proposed in these contract documents with the intention of improving one of the major arterials of Boston running through the heart of Boston University. The goal of the project—to provide a reconstructed street that will benefit all users—however, will not be achieved to its fullest potential. The design focuses on automobile flow with missed opportunities to improve user safety, efficiency, and overall experience of pedestrians, transit and bus riders, and bicyclists.

Our key concerns with this project include: (1) Narrow width and choice of surface material of sidewalks at certain locations; roadway and sidewalk grading; and design of street corners and driveway aprons. (2) Unsafe and awkward design of many of the ramps, crosswalks, and islands. (3) Lack of a designated marked space for bicyclists and lack of attention to transitions for cyclists into and out of the project boundaries and movements at key intersections. (4) Signal timing issues including excessive pedestrian wait times, lack of signal prioritization for trolleys and buses, and relationship of synchronized vehicle signals with overall traffic speed. (5) Elimination of a significant number of existing trees.

Many of our concerns are supported by state and city policies and guidelines. The intent and detail of the current MassHighway Project Development and Design Guidebook requires meeting the needs of all users and emphasizes the importance of context sensitive design—this amplifies MassHighway Engineering Directive E-98-003 which requires “reasonable provisions to accommodate bicycles and pedestrians in project designs.” The “Streetscape Guidelines for Boston’s Major Roads” published by BTM in 1999 directs projects “to provide for the equitable sharing of the public right-of-way between motor vehicles, pedestrians, bicycles, and transit.” It also indicates, “designated and marked lanes should be the preferred means of accommodating bicycles.” The “Boston Bicycle Plan” (2001) published as part of “Access Boston 2000-2010” specifically identifies this stretch of Comm. Ave. as a priority for improved bicycle accommodation. In 1999 a Mayor-appointed Pedestrian Safety Task Force, part of Boston’s “Walk This Way” program, identified Comm. Ave. as one of the city’s most dangerous streets. The objectives of these documents have not been adequately accomplished in the current designs for project 602247.

Please contact me at your earliest convenience at (617) 939-3824 or jeff@livablestreets.info to set up a meeting to discuss this important project. We look forward to working collaboratively with you to help make this the best project possible.

Best Regards,



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

cc: Ms. Kimberly Sloan (Project Manager); WalkBoston; Adaptive Environments; Massachusetts Bicycle Coalition; Boston City Councilor Michael Ross; State Representatives Michael J. Moran, Kevin G. Honan, and Frank Israel Smizik; State Senators Steven A. Tolman and Cynthia Stone Creem