

June 3, 2009

Commissioner Rick Sullivan  
Department of Conservation and Recreation  
251 Causeway Street, Suite 600  
Boston MA 02114

Delivery by Adobe PDF via email to rick.sullivan@state.ma.us

**Subject: Neponset River Bridge Reconstruction**

Dear Commissioner Sullivan:

We would like to take this opportunity to provide some suggestions and comments regarding the Neponset River Bridge Reconstruction Project.

Based on what was discussed at the April 27 Public Meeting, we are very pleased overall with the improvements that are being planned for the bridge, as it currently serves as a vital link between Boston and Quincy. However, we have some important concerns that we hope you can address, namely (1) the lack of on-road bicycle accommodation on the bridge, and (2) the dangerous conditions for pedestrians and bicyclists at Neponset Circle.

### **Sidewalks**

**We are very pleased to learn that the sidewalk(s) on the bridge are planned to be significantly improved.** As you are aware, the current sidewalk does not meet ADA standards, both because it is only 5' wide, and because at the Quincy end there is a staircase with no ramps. In addition, there is currently no sidewalk on the Boston-bound side. The new 8' wide sidewalks on both sides of the bridge will be a significant improvement for pedestrians, those in wheelchairs, people with strollers, etc. In particular, the sidewalks will be a good accommodation for many bicyclists since the total 8' width is fully usable (the railings are being designed at such a height as to not pose as obstructions) and will have ramps at the Quincy end. We are also **glad to hear that you are planning to paint a center stripe down the sidewalks** based on a suggestion made at the meeting. This will encourage

users to stay to the right since the sidewalks are intended to be multi-use facilities.

### **On-road bicycle accommodation**

Our main concern, as brought up at the April 27 Public Meeting by us and others present, is the **lack of on-road bicycle accommodation**. We share the same concerns as the consultants regarding the speed of vehicular traffic on the bridge, and the risks it poses to bicyclists on the roadway. However, we feel quite strongly that on-road accommodation must be provided, both because state law requires it and because there are many bicyclists who would prefer to ride in the roadway instead of on the multi-use sidewalks. We thank you for agreeing to paint sharrows on the roadway and add “Share the Road” signs (a suggestion made by a bicyclist at the Public Meeting). However, we feel that this is not an adequate accommodation, in particular because vehicular traffic is so heavy.

**We therefore ask you to add bike lanes across the bridge.** We feel quite strongly that the lane widths can be adjusted within the currently designed cross-section of the bridge to accommodate a bike lane that is at least 4’ wide, although ideally a 5’ bike lane is preferred.

The current plan has a 2’ inside shoulder, 2’ outside shoulder, and 3 11’ travel lanes, for a total roadway width of 37’. We think there are a number of alternatives in which the lanes in the currently designed cross-section can be adjusted to accommodate a bike lane. The following are a number of alternative lane configurations that would achieve this goal:

	Current design	Alternative 1	Alternative 2
Inside shoulder	2’	1’	1’
Travel lane	11’	10.5’	10’
Travel lane	11’	10.5’	10’
Travel lane	11’	11’	11’
Outside shoulder	2’		
Bike lane		4’	5’

We realize that the ideal width of the travel lanes in the opinion of many engineers is 11’, in order to accommodate buses and trucks in particular. However it is quite common in the Boston area and throughout the U.S. for arterial streets and bridges to have travel lanes that are 10’ or 10.5’ in width, particularly when the extra roadway width is used for bike lanes. (See Attachment A for more information.) Many DCR-owned roads and bridges that allow bus and truck traffic as well as some arterials in Boston, Cambridge, and Somerville have lanes that are narrower than 11’ feet (both 10.5’ and 10’). In addition, MassHighway has used 10.5’ lanes on arterial streets in order to make space for bike lanes on some projects. We understand the

desire to best accommodate buses and trucks, so in both of our proposed alternatives we have included an 11' outside lane, which is where most larger vehicles typically travel.

The reconfiguration of the lanes and addition of bike lanes across the bridge will also have a traffic calming effect, causing motorists to travel more slowly and cautiously. This is very beneficial as it should help to bring down speeds that are currently well above the speed limit in many cases.

Our final point regarding the need for on-road bicycle accommodation is that it will serve as the best route for bicyclists to and from Quincy Shore Drive. The only alternative is the sidewalk on the Boston-bound side of the bridge, where bicyclists will have to travel down the handicapped ramp and along the sidewalk contraflow to the traffic on Quincy Shore Drive. This is a rather inconvenient and indirect connection for many bicyclists.

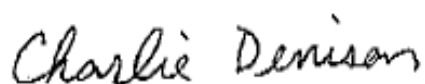
### **Neponset Circle**

Finally, we would like to ask you to **improve pedestrian and bicycle connections at Neponset Circle**, where users of the bridge currently must navigate very heavy traffic, with little or no guidance. The circle currently lacks crosswalks and pedestrians signals in many places, and also provides no accommodation or guidance for bicyclists, creating a rather dangerous and uninviting environment for non-motorized users. We realize that this is not part of this project, but we hope that you can make improvements to the Circle in parallel with the bridge reconstruction. (Perhaps you could use the same consultant team who is doing the Charles River Basin Pedestrian and Bicycle Study.)

Thank you as always for your commitment to making DCR parks, parkways, and bridges truly multi-modal facilities that best serve all users. We look forward to our continued collaboration as many more projects take shape.

If you have any questions on the above comments and suggestions, please contact Charlie Denison, Board Member & Advocacy Director, LivableStreets Alliance, who may be reached at 617.852.6125 and [charlie@livablestreets.info](mailto:charlie@livablestreets.info).

Sincerely,



Charlie Denison,  
Board Member & Advocacy Director

CC: Jack Murray, DCR  
Stephanie Boundy, DCR  
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Secretary Ian Bowles, Exec. Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs  
Rep. Martin Walsh  
Rep. Bruce Ayers  
Thomas Tinlin, Boston Transportation Department  
Nicole Freedman, Boston Bikes

Attachment A: Accommodating Bike Lanes in Constrained Rights-of-Way,  
(Association of Pedestrian and Bicycle Professionals)