

BU Bridge in need of some major refurbishing

By Christina Pazzanese, Globe Correspondent | April 27, 2008

Sure, it's unsightly, but the Boston University Bridge is a convenient shortcut for many pedestrians, joggers, cyclists, and drivers trying to shuttle between Cambridge and Boston. So two tipsters ask GlobeWatch why, then, hasn't something been done to fix the bridge or smooth over a nearby road on the Brookline border that serves as an informal bike route for those using the bridge?

"I walk over the Boston University Bridge daily, and it's in a sorry state, with rust, holes, bent railings, etc. Several months ago I noticed a crack in the sidewalk to the left as I'm crossing from Cambridge, before the actual bridge," writes Hans Jaegerstatter of Cambridge. "Rain water rushes into this, and the crack is now roughly 2-plus feet long and 6 inches wide. Rusted iron rods protrude along the edges of this, and when you look into the opening, you can see a huge cavernous space below. This isn't a shallow or superficial hole," he says. "Someone's foot will eventually go through this opening."

"I called the cities of Cambridge and Boston about this and was told that the bridge is cared for by the state," Jaegerstatter writes. "I then sent a couple of e-mail letters to state authorities, with no replies. The opening just gets bigger. Who is in charge of inspection and repair? And what safety is there in sporadic 'patching' in lieu of real, permanent repairs?"

Amit Virmani regularly cycles over the BU Bridge and notes that a section of Mountfort Street from Carlton Street to Commonwealth Avenue has been scarred by bumps and potholes for at least two years.

"As there's no bike lane on that street, sharing the road with cars (and potholes on the right side where the bikes usually travel) is very risky, and hits the pocketbook in terms of getting the bike repaired," Virmani writes.

A Globe reporter walking the bridge last week found many cyclists, joggers, and pedestrians passing over the large crack Jaegerstatter identified. The busy bridge had crumbling curbs, as well as cracked, uneven sidewalks and rusty metal railings on both sides.

The state and city respond

The Department of Conservation and Recreation is on the verge of beginning a \$2.3 million overhaul of the bridge, said spokeswoman Wendy Fox. "The staging is up and we're ready to go," said Fox, noting that the department is waiting only on some pro forma permission from CSX Corp., which controls the railroad tracks under the bridge, before starting. Once work begins, it should take about four to five months to complete, she said. The project will include repairing both sidewalks and curbs as well as those approaching the bridge, she said. Railings and sidewalk support beams will also be fixed. Construction will be done on one side at a time and require closing the sidewalk and an outside traffic lane while work is going on, said Fox.

As for Mountfort Road, it's on the Public Works Department's list for "permanent patching" this year, said Jennifer Mehigan, a city spokeswoman, which means that contractors "will repair the sections that require it only - not curb-to-curb resurfacing."

WHO'S IN CHARGE

*Rick Sullivan, commissioner
Department of Conservation and Recreation
251 Causeway St., Suite 600
Boston, MA 02114-2104
617-626-1250 ■*