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[News](#)

Some say BU Bridge repairs endangering bikers, walkers, geese

By Travis Andersen/Correspondent

Fri Oct 17, 2008, 02:38 PM EDT

Cambridge -

Cambridge City Councilor Henrietta Davis says that a state agency's roughly \$20 million reconstruction plan for the BU Bridge—a major thoroughfare connecting Cambridge to Boston—could endanger pedestrians and cyclists as the gridlock gets worse during construction.

“I'm not at all convinced that pedestrian issues have been addressed,” Davis told officials from the state Department of Conservation and Recreation—which owns the bridge—at a public meeting on Thursday night.

DCR will take bids on the three-year project this fall, with work slated to begin next spring, according to an agency press release.

The plan calls for two new bike lanes on the bridge; safer walkways at both ends; a purification system that would dump cleaner refuse from the bridge into the Charles River; new street lights; additional railings; and a complete deck replacement, among other improvements.

Several Cambridge residents shared Davis' safety concerns on Thursday, noting that ongoing sidewalk repairs have already closed one lane for cyclists and pedestrians.

“If we think that the current construction has been painful, it's not very big compared to what's coming,” said Susan Clippinger, director of the traffic department in Cambridge.

But area cyclists have expressed support for the plan. Ken Field, chair of the Cambridge Bicycle Committee, told the DCR panelists that he was, “extremely pleased with what you've presented today.”

Mike Misslin, a top engineer at DCR, said that commuters will face obstacles when the work begins.

He said that while DCR may ask the contractor to work longer hours to speed up construction, officials may have to take unpopular measures—such as having cyclists walk their bikes across the bridge during peak hours.

Officials said that the Cambridge-based advocacy group Livable Streets counted about 450 cyclists crossing the bridge between 8 a.m. and 9 a.m. one morning last week in a study.

“Maybe it’s time to think about taking those trains,” Misslin said.

In a separate development, at least one Cambridge resident said that the project would harm the surrounding wetlands. Robert La Trémouille, who lives at 75 Mass. Ave. and co-edits the Charles River White Geese blog, said that construction staging areas abutting the bridge would displace the birds.

When DCR officials said that they would preserve the birds’ habitat, La Trémouille shouted, “Nonsense! Nonsense!” That outburst prompted one attendee carrying a helmet to say to his friend, “I thought this was about the bikes.”

DCR plans to hold a second public meeting in Cambridge before construction begins. That meeting has not yet been scheduled.

Officials will close the bridge’s downstream sidewalk this weekend for the Head of the Charles Regatta, from 7 p.m. tonight until 5 a.m. on Monday. The agency will close one lane of vehicular traffic to allow pedestrians and bikers to watch the race from the bridge.

To subscribe for email updates on DCR projects in the Charles River Basin, e-mail dcr.updates@state.ma.us. Residents can also call 617-626-4974 if they have questions.

Comments (5)

Kathy Podgers

7 days ago

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The meadow next to the BU Bridge on the Cambridge side of the Charles River Estuary is an active wetland habitat and nesting area for many animals, including bunny rabbits, displaced migrating waterfowl, and of course the obvious ferrel white geese.

Red Tail hawks patrol the meadow, and hundreds of folks come to watch and photograph the animals in their own 'environment.'

This meadow is a precious Urban Wild and should be preserved and protected.

Unfortunately, there are those who see the wildlife as 'squatters,' and seek to have them removed, ignoring the very purpose of the Charles River Estuary.

The Charles River Estuary is a major wetland on the International Atlantic Flyway.

Now, I can agree with those who believe that geese do not belong on the golf course, or on the lawn in front of City Hall, but if you cannot find geese on the banks of the Charles, where can you find them?

It amazes me that the same folks who want to preserve and protect the Amazon and Anwr, are senseless when it comes to protecting for the Urban Wilds and wetlands in their own backyard!

For shame.

I oppose using the meadow for staging, which could easily be placed under the overpasses on memorial Dr,

and I oppose the drainage instalations, which could be easily connected to the pumping station adjacent to the bridge, and which just so happens is starting a project now.

Please, inform the DCR and Cambridge that once decimated the Urban Wilds won't recover anytime soon.

remember, carry in, carry out.

take care, literally, Kathy

Marilyn Wellons

6 days ago

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The DCR's plans endanger not only cyclists and walkers, but the DCR's supposed primary constituents-- people who refresh and re-create themselves in the Charles River parkland.

The urban wild downriver from the BU Bridge is critically important habitat for the resident animals AND for us city dwellers who need these rare, wonderful places. They reassure us that life goes on, that the natural world can flourish this close to all those cars, cyclists, and pedestrians.

At this particular place the DCR has worked since 1999 at habitat destruction through clearing and poisoning, to eliminate the White Geese--a 'non-native species'--from the river. The DCR Director of Plans confirmed this policy to me in 2000. No matter that the geese share this habitat with species the DCR says it favors: other waterfowl, hawks and songbirds, and the rabbits. Before the DCR began its campaign against the geese there were even muskrats here.

Now, having barred the White Geese from their primary feeding grounds at Magazine Beach and confined them to this land abutting the BU Bridge, the agency plans to obliterate it, and thus them, with the work zone and staging area that could be elsewhere.

The drainage system should be on the upriver side of the bridge and connect to Cambridge sewers or, if possible, the MWRA plant. The staging area should be under the BU rotary, which has ample space for it. But these locations wouldn't disrupt and destroy habitat for three years, finishing off the geese in the process.

The DCR combines its policy of habitat destruction with its public relations line, that it means no harm to the resident animals. It claims fences around the work zones here will 'protect' the geese, by keeping them from attacking the workers.

Deputy Commissioner Murray told the October 16 meeting that the DCR is a park agency with a transportation component rather than vice-versa. This idea may account for its decision to study pedestrian, bicycle, and motor vehicle interaction on the bridge during construction to come up with a safe plan for the surviving users, rather than to come up with one before construction.

Unfortunately, however, those of us who use the parkland as well as the bridge fare no better in the DCR's calculus, but count for as little as the White Geese.

gintell

6 days ago

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Let's see - in May the DCR started a 3 month \$2.3 mill sidewalk and underpinnings project and shut down a Cambridge to Boston lane and the sidewalk. Most of the time we have traffic tie-ups and no-one working there.

5 months later it still isn't done and it is reported to be about 2 more months (that'll be 7 in total). And soon they are to start a 3 yr project'; will that take 7 years? It'll probably still be being done while they shut down lanes on the Longfellow bridge to do its repair. What will be done to ensure that the project keeps its schedule?

obamahateswhitey

5 days ago

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Honestly even if the geese are temporarily displaced how far are they really going to go and wont they come back after construction is done?

Kathy Podgers

4 days ago

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@obama hates whitey: the habitat is the issue. The geese, ducks, hawks, and other birds, mamels, etc, neet a place to breed, nest and feed. It is for this reason that disturbing the habitat is just plain wrong headed.

The fact is, just 20 feet away, and in a protected space under the over pass, there is pleant of space for 'staging.' The DCR does NOT need to stage their construction activities at the meadow.

@ gintell: your point is well taken. I do believe that neither the DCR nor the City of Cambridge has been honest or transparent about this 'project.'

Marilyn Wellons has all the info, yet the Cambridgeport Neighborhood Association hosts the DCR who provided more diversion and failes to provide the info we need and want, while refusing to invite Ms Wellons who could provide to us all a factual and articulate outline of the DCR's true plans and time line. Login or register to post a comment:

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