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Residents voiced concerns regarding traffic during the renovation of the BU Bridge at a public hearing last week.

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Hearing on traffic as bridge sets to close

As the state moves to rehabilitate the BU Bridge over the next three years, residents are voicing concerns over how car, bicycle and pedestrian traffic will flow safely together during construction.

At a public hearing held by the state's Department of Conservation & Recreation last week, residents expressed concern that the work will amplify problems that already exist, such as narrow walkways on the Cambridge side and that the bridge's slope prevents drivers from seeing cyclists and pedestrians well.

Meanwhile, Cambridge City Councilor Henrietta Davis said she wasn't convinced that pedestrian travel has received the same consideration as bicyclists, though she applauded plans for two new dedicated bike lanes.

Several bicyclists also scoffed at the suggestion they walk their bikes across the bridge during construction, saying it's an unrealistic expectation.

However, DCR officials said they are committed to making the bridge safe for all travelers during construction.

"There is a real problem, no matter what you do with this bridge at either end, in terms of pedestrian versus vehicle interactions," DCR Deputy Chief Engineer Mike Messlin acknowledged. "We recognize that."

DCR will monitor all traffic across the bridge during construction and eventually determine how the new car lanes will run alongside the bike lanes.

The \$23 million project also involves installing safety rails between the sidewalk and roadway and a new stormwater drainage system.

FIRST OF MANY

The BU Bridge rehabilitation is the first in the queue for Gov. Deval Patrick's \$3 billion, eight-year accelerated bridge repair program announced earlier this year. State officials admit they've had to work quickly to simultaneously design the work, which is already 90 percent done, and seek community input. Another community meeting will be held in Cambridge prior to construction in the spring.

Greg St. Martin