



**LivableStreets**

Rethinking urban transportation

August 3, 2009

Frank A. Tramontozzi, P.E. Chief Engineer  
Massachusetts Highway Department  
10 Park Plaza Boston, MA 02116

RE: ASSEMBLY SQUARE ACCESS IMPROVEMENT PROJECT SOMERVILLE, MA  
Project File No. 605680

Dear Mr. Tramontozzi,

We appreciate the opportunities to make our views known about this project at the public hearing and via this comment letter. Although this project has a defined geographic scope it will succeed, for Federal Realty and the broader community, only to the extent that it integrates well with a comprehensive multi-modal approach that is implemented throughout the Assembly Square district and beyond. In this regard we are confident that Federal Realty knows how to manage pedestrian streetscapes and urge that all due consideration continue to be given to improving pedestrian and bike level of service as well as their integration with the bus and Orange Line T- station services that must carry much of the burden of traffic reductions that are an integral part of the Assembly Square settlement with the Mystic View Task Force.

Starting at the southern end of the project area, we are grateful for the proposed improvements for pedestrians and bicycles being made along Lombardi Way, the new traffic signalization at Broadway and coordination of signaling at Mystic Ave, Lombardi Way and the U-turn. It is critically important that these road design changes are coordinated with the planned East Broadway streetscape improvements and the proposed redesign of streets around Sullivan Square being carried out by the City of Boston. We would urge you to check for congruity with these off-site projects before finalizing your project design and to coordinate with their future efforts as well so that all interests can remain aligned.

We like the plan for the continuous bike and pedestrian path from the intersection of Assembly Square Drive at Mystic Avenue to the IKEA "park", along the Orange Line tracks and behind IKEA. Federal Realty and IKEA have shown good faith in designing this shared use path and it is a major community benefit for the East Somerville neighborhood and residents from surrounding communities. Though outside the scope of this specific project, we urge the developers to fully integrate this path with the Orange Line T-stop and continue it to the Mystic River where it can be further woven into three additional paths: under Route 28 to Ten Hills, across the Mystic to Everett and along the river to Charlestown. These promise to be a major amenity for both the public and the developers' patrons.

We appreciate the additional work that Federal Realty and MassHighway are doing to accommodate pedestrian and bike connections via the Kensington Street connection under I93. This is a very challenging area, and has been since the 1970s construction of I93 through Somerville. We all should be prepared to do whatever it takes to provide crossing facilities that are as safe as possible.

Within Assembly Square we urge that bike lanes be planned for all major streets, including the cross streets which will intersect with Mystic and Middlesex Avenues. In this regard we hope the fact the Federal Realty

controls the abutting mall property will facilitate bike lanes all along Foley Street from the future T-stop to the Middlesex Avenue intersection.

We believe that nothing is more important than great pedestrian accommodations throughout Assembly Square. It is crucial within all Assembly Square plans to focus on real predictions and measures of pedestrian level of service, in concert with MassHighway's much acclaimed context sensitive project design manual. The same manual warns against use of traffic islands that may interfere with single trip pedestrian street crossings, especially if their purpose is to accelerate vehicular traffic to speeds that are unsafe within a pedestrian and bike friendly environment. Traffic islands extend the pedestrian travel path, further limiting light cycle time that can be devoted to vehicles. They thus should be used only when absolutely necessary.

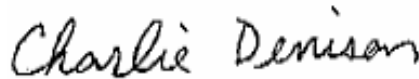
We applaud the intended use of traffic light count-downs for pedestrian convenience and intersection safety. As hearing commenters noted these should be deployed as extensively as possible within Assembly Square. We would also love to see the Assembly Square developers contribute similar benefits to key intersections along Route 28, especially at Broadway where Somerville citizens - including children, seniors and handicapped – have had a very difficult time as retail and traffic have increased within the corridor. It is to everyone's benefit that all modes of travel work well together both within Assembly Square and in nearby areas intensely affected by the Federal Realty and IKEA developments.

Finally, we are encouraged to see plans for integrated traffic counting devices at key intersections. This is exactly the kind of tool we and the developers will need to fashion multi-modal transportation strategy and tactics for our mutual benefit over the next generation of mixed use development at Assembly Square. We welcome sustainable development in Somerville and very much look forward to working with the developers and government to bring this about.

With best regards,



Ellin Reisner, President  
Somerville Transportation Equity Partnership



Charlie Denison, Board of Directors  
LivableStreets Alliance



Wig Zamore  
Mystic View Task Force



Carrie Dancy, Executive Director  
East Somerville Main Streets