

July 25, 2011

Thomas F. Broderick, P.E.
Acting Chief Engineer
MassDOT – Highway Division
10 Park Plaza
Boston, MA 02116-3973

Delivery by Adobe PDF via email to Thomas.F.Broderick@dot.state.ma.us

Subject: River St and Western Ave Bridges Conceptual Design (Project Nos. 605524 and 605527)

Dear Mr. Broderick:

LivableStreets would like to take this opportunity to provide comments on the conceptual design for the River St and Western Ave Bridge project (Project Nos. 605524 and 605527) as presented to the community on July 18, 2011. We are quite impressed with how the design has evolved since last presented to the community. The proposed improvements will not only fix the structural issues of the bridges, but will make the bridges and approaches safer and more accessible for all roadway users.

We are especially pleased to see the following:

- The scope of the project has been broadened to include the intersection of Cambridge Street with the Mass Pike exit ramp (eastbound) by the Doubletree Hotel. This intersection is particularly confusing and chaotic as it currently exists. We know it was challenging to broaden the scope, but the fact that this intersection will be improved for pedestrians, bicyclists, and motor vehicles will be a huge benefit of this project.
- Cycle tracks are now included both on the bridges and the approaches. We agree with the MassDOT team that the separated crossing option for bicyclists is preferable to the shared ped/bike crossing option. We also are very pleased to see a contraflow cycle track to allow cyclists on eastbound Western Ave to cross to the Charles River Paths.

- Sidewalks are being widened and turn radii are being reduced to alleviate pedestrian crowding and increase safety at intersections by slowing turning traffic.
- Pedestrian signals and crosswalks are being added where they do not currently exist. (As with our prior comments, we ask that you not include pedestrian pushbuttons, and to time the signals automatically and concurrently with leading pedestrian intervals.)
- The Charles River Path on the Boston side approaching the River St Bridge from the south will be widened. This is currently a dangerously narrow stretch of path that has a history of pedestrian and bicycle conflicts.

We ask that you try to include the following tweaks to the plan:

- Adjust the geometry to increase pedestrian and bicycle safety where Western Ave intersects Soldiers Field Road Frontage Road, including the possibility of removing the large porkchop island and creating more of a 90 degree right turn for vehicles proceeding from Western Ave eastbound onto Soldiers Field Road Frontage Road southbound. At minimum, post "No Turn on Red" signs at this intersection.
- On the southbound Soldiers Field Road Frontage Road, adjust the geometry of the on-ramp to the Mass Pike to be more of a 90 degree turn, narrowing the ramp if possible. In addition, please restripe the crosswalk and post large Yield to Pedestrian signage (this should be done even if the geometry cannot be adjusted). As it is now, motor vehicles travel much too fast and often do not yield to pedestrians crossing the on-ramp.

As with other advocacy and community groups, we also support the concept of pedestrian/bicycle underpasses for both of these bridges as proposed by the Charles River Conservancy. We recognize that there are many challenges to this proposal in terms of engineering, permitting, and funding, as detailed in the MassDOT report that analyzed the possibility of these underpasses. We hope that you will continue to pursue these ideas further despite these challenges.

Once again, we applaud MassDOT for its efforts to thoughtfully improve safety and accessibility for all roadway users as part of this project. MassDOT deserves much praise for broadening the scope to fix long-standing issues with many of the nearby intersections and approaches. These improvements will provide great benefits for many years to come.

If you have any questions or comments about our feedback, please feel free to contact Charlie Denison, Advocacy Director, at charlie@livablestreets.info or 617-852-6125.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Charlie Denison". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Charlie Denison
Advocacy Director

CC:

Robert Antico, Project Manager, MassDOT

Thomas DiPaolo, Assistant Chief Engineer, MassDOT

Lou Rabito, Bicycle/Pedestrian Engineer, MassDOT