

May 8, 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 dot.feedback.highway@state.ma.us

Subject: Symphony Area Streetscape Project, Boston (Project File No. 604871)

Dear Mr. Broderick:

LivableStreets Alliance promotes and advocates for streets that are truly multi-modal, that equally serve pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, and motorists. We believe that livable streets contribute to vibrant, healthy neighborhoods and economically successful business districts. We would like to take this opportunity to provide some suggestions and comments regarding the Symphony Area Streetscape Project, as presented to the community on April 26, 2011.

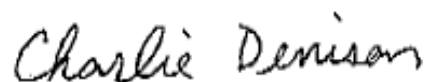
First, we would like to express our great pleasure with the proposed improvements to the pedestrian environment on all of the streets encompassed by this project. In particular, wider sidewalks on Mass Ave will better accommodate the crowds near Symphony Hall, and the additional pedestrian crossing in front of the Christian Science Plaza will create a much more direct and convenient way for pedestrians to cross Mass Ave. In addition, the raised crossing at Saint Stephen St will help to calm traffic as it enters.

However, we are very concerned that the bicycle accommodation throughout the project is insufficient and will create an unfortunate gap in the roadway bicycling network. At the southern terminus of this project, the City of Boston and MassDOT are currently reconstructing Mass Ave in the South End from Saint Botolph St to Albany St. This reconstruction includes 5' bike lanes throughout. At the northern terminus, the City of Boston has recently announced that it will be removing parking from one side of the street in order to restripe the roadway with 5' bike lanes in each direction, from the Harvard Bridge to the Christian Science Plaza. The current plans for the Symphony Area Streetscape project do not show the correct cross-section at either end for these adjacent projects.

LivableStreets believes that 5' minimum bike lanes should be provided in each direction on Mass Ave, as well as on Westland Ave if possible. The plans as designed will create a gap in the bike lane network since only sharrows are provided as bicycle accommodation. This area connects art institutions, tourist sites, Universities and key parts of the bicycle network. This reconstruction is an opportunity for Mass Ave to be a place where all people can get to and through safely. We understand that traffic capacity is always an issue, particularly at rush hours, however we feel quite strongly the bicycle accommodation should not be sacrificed for automobile capacity. In fact, the MassDOT Project Guidebook does not allow for such, as it states that minimum 4' shoulders should be provided on arterial streets, with 5' bike lanes being the preferred option. With creative use of lane assignments and signal timing, we think it should be possible to minimize any negative effects on traffic capacity while providing proper bicycle lanes throughout the project. We also understand that Mayor Menino is committed to bike lanes along the entirety of Mass Ave, and we suspect that the lack of bike lanes in the project is simply an unfortunate oversight.

Thank you for considering our input as this project moves forward. If you have any questions on the above comments and suggestions, please contact Charlie Denison, Advocacy Director, LivableStreets Alliance, who may be reached at 617.852.6125 and charlie@livablestreets.info.

Sincerely,



Charlie Denison
Advocacy Director

CC:

Tom DiPaolo, Assistant Chief Engineer, MassDOT
Lou Rabito, Bicycle/Pedestrian Engineer, MassDOT
Tom Tinlin, Transportation Commissioner, City of Boston
Nicole Freedman, Director of Boston Bikes