

LivableStreets Rethinking urban transportation

e-bulletin #17

November 10, 2006

Greetings!

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Boston magazine

The End of the Road. Boston has a long history of ruining itself to make room for drivers and their infernal cars. It's time to start taking back our streets.

*By Joe Keohane
November, 2006*

STREETS AND DEMOCRACY? This past Tuesday, "Election Department drivers got stuck in traffic and the city [of Boston] was forced to speed surplus ballots to the polls in police cruisers." In an odd twist, our streets and transportation system failed us and put democracy at risk. "The city ran out of ballots Tuesday at about 30 precincts in Mattapan, Dorchester, Roxbury, Jamaica Plain, and East Boston, heavily minority areas where voters turned out in droves to support Deval L. Patrick for governor." [Source: Boston Globe](#)

[Click here for a comprehensive calendar of events.](#)

LivableStreets E-bulletin has over 2000 subscribers!

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1. LIVABLESTREETS ALLIANCE, MASSHIGHWAY COMMISSIONER PAIEWONSKY TO RECEIVE MASSBIKE "INFLUENCE PEDALER" AWARDS MONDAY EVE.

Excerpt: "The nonprofit LivableStreets Alliance has been working to reshape notions of how cars, people, and public transit should coexist."

[Click here for the entire article...](#)

Good news: The enormous parking garage near Haymarket—the 2,310-spot concrete monstrosity erected as part of the Government Center "urban renewal" project—is reportedly up for sale, and may ultimately be razed. If this happens, we should all go over there and pound the rubble with our shoes, the way the Iraqis did when that Saddam statue came down.

The obliteration of this architectural horror would mark a long-overdue reversal—a brief reprieve from the tyranny of the



LivableStreets Alliance will be presented with a 2006 "Influence Pedaler" award at MassBike 2006

Bike Night.

MONDAY NOVEMBER 13

6:00 - 9:00pm

Ryles Jazz Club in Cambridge [\[Click here for directions\]](#)

\$30 (member), \$45 (Non-Member/ includes trial membership)

MassHighway Commissioner Luisa Paiewonsky will also be receiving a 2006 "Influence Pedaler" award. The evening features special guest speaker Richard Fries (BikeCulture Magazine, Pedro's USA, cycling commentator, pundit), dinner, cash bar, Influence Pedaler Awards, Big Ring Volunteer Awards, silent auction, and, of course, free valet bike parking.

[Click here for more information...](#)

2. AMIDST OPPOSITION, MBTA BOARD OF DIRECTORS APPROVES FARE INCREASE, GOVORNER-ELECT PATRICK ISSUES STATEMENT

Globe: "The MBTA board, saying it had no other way to balance its budget, voted unanimously yesterday to approve the T's second set of fare hikes in three years over the objections of top elected officials and the protests of riders, who booed the final vote."



Khalida Smalls of the T Riders Union displayed Farezilla the fare monster (John Tlumacki/ Boston Globe)

[The Boston Globe Nov. 10-- Outcry over T fare hikes; After 2d increase in 3 years, riders call on lawmakers to revamp funding](#)

Governor-elect Deval Patrick issues first "issue" press release, November 9, 2006:

"I am disappointed that the MBTA fair increase was voted forward today. It is clear that the MBTA revenue system needs a good long look and significant reform, but raising the fares is the wrong answer. This places the fiscal burden on workers, students, and tourists using public transit to visit our beaches and historic sites. We should be working to attract new riders by making the subway,

automobile. For all the talk of Boston being a "walking city," we've gone to staggering lengths to make the place more car-friendly through the years, bulldozing countless gorgeous old buildings to accommodate drab garages, cutting a nasty gash through the middle of town to build the Central Artery, and tearing up the tracks of highly efficient trolleys to make way for a bright and glorious future of congestion, smog, rage, and traffic fatalities.

Those of us who do opt to get around on foot must endure the noise, the stink, and the ever present possibility that stepping off the curb could result in being dashed into a fetid rain of meat confetti. And if you think you can play it safe and not cross the road at all, think again. As an April CNN.com headline told us: "Boston police fire on SUV for driving on the sidewalk." Even if you discount the bullets, the conjunction of the words "SUV" and "sidewalk" indicates something's gone awry.

A handful of people have offered ideas for easing traffic woes in the city, from a London-style commuter fee to a surcharge for suburban drivers who cause accidents in town. One guy in Cambridge even painted a happy blue mural in the middle of a busy intersection outside Huron Village to "calm" drivers. But all of this misses the point. We don't need to slow people down

commuter rail, and buses more efficient and appealing. I have said for months that this is the wrong action at the wrong time."

For more information, read the [June 12, 2006 LivableStreets "Special MBTA Issue" E- bulletin.](#)

Feature article 1-- ["FISCAL CRISIS: From piecemeal to no meal at the T"](#)


Feature article 2-- ["FAIR BURDEN: Public Speaks Out Against Fare Hike."](#)

Click here for the **LivableStreets Alliance ["Citizens' info sheet" on the fare increase.](#)**


Click here for the **MBTA's [brochure on the fare increase/restructuring.](#)**

Click here for ["Mr. Nice Guy-- Everybody loves Dan Grabauskas. But can he keep the MBTA's customers satisfied?"](#), an article recently published in MassInc's Commonwealth Magazine.

More from today's news:

 [Nov. 10-- MBTA's GM: 'We're broke'; Says new fare hike may not be enough.](#)

 [Nov. 10-- MBTA board raises fares; riders object](#)

 [Nov. 4-- Concerns voiced over MBTA fare increases](#)

3. LIVABLESTREETS, DCR, MBTA COLLABORATE PEDESTRIAN/BICYCLE IMPROVEMENTS TO LONGFELLOW BRIDGE AND OTHER AREAS



Last week, the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) striped 5-foot bicycle lanes on the Longfellow bridge. This was done as part of a larger initiative by

or hit them with new fees. We need to start getting rid of motor vehicles altogether. It's time to create at least one car-free thoroughway in every neighborhood in town. Pronto.

I recognize that suggesting such a thing is akin to eating peanut butter off a crucifix. Bostonians, as Americans, view driving as a God-given right, on par with the right to cultivate morbidly obese children and then sue Coke for it. But there are precedents. Memorial Drive in Cambridge is closed to traffic on Sundays from late April to mid-November, transforming the raging thoroughway into an Elysian field, only paved, where skateboarders, sunbathers, and squirrels frolic with the blithe assurance that, at least for the moment, they can do so without being killed by a speeding UPS truck. Elsewhere, places like Bogotá, Colombia, and Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium, have created car-free zones. If the Belgians can do it, so can we.

Before the you'll-have-to-pry-the-steering-wheel-from-my-cold-dead-fingers crowd starts sending me hate mail—I'm not the only person suggesting this. The nonprofit LivableStreets Alliance has been working to reshape notions of how cars, people, and public transit should coexist. The Franklin Park Coalition has been lobbying for a traffic

Commissioner Burrenington to improve access for pedestrians and bicyclists on DCR property in the urban Boston area using the existing road striping contract.

Late this summer, the DCR asked LivableStreets to conduct a rapid advocate input process to gather key areas of concern. Within 1 week, LivableStreets compiled the results from over 20 advocacy groups and individuals. The "DCR Bike/Ped Advisory Committee," comprised of advocates, cities & towns, and DCR staff, reviewed this report at their last meeting and recommended priorities. Commissioner Burrenington is committed to having several high-priority items done this fall, much more will be done this spring (road striping can only be done when the temperature is above 40 degrees F).



But anyone who has (or has tried to) walk across the LongFellow bridge all the way to/from the Charles Circle, knows that it is an unwelcoming place. Pedestrians are forced to use a 1-foot "sidewalk" (except when there is a lamppost taking up that foot). Wheelchairs and parents with strollers are forced to go down a ramp into the roadway and risk their life competing with the vehicles. Not only is it shocking that this "wrong" was allowed to happen in the first place, but not to have been corrected in so many decades is remarkable. LivableStreets proposed a "quick fix" solution that involved using concrete "jersey barriers" to provided a protected walkway where there currently is none. Unfortunately this idea was rejected by DCR snow clearing staff concerned with the effort needed to keep it clear in the winter. The DCR is hoping to install a sidewalk this spring on both sides to solve the problem.

ban in that park on weekends. In October a chunk of Storrow Drive was closed off for a Hub on Wheels bike ride.

More promising still, Boston City Councilor Sal LaMattina recently proposed converting Hanover Street in the North End to a pedestrian mall. The idea, endorsed by the mayor, calls for the strip to go car-free during weekends in the summer, transforming it into an Italian-style piazza. If that works, they'll make it permanent.

Others, meanwhile, are taking up the opposite side of the debate. In September the Boston Redevelopment Authority commissioned the Toronto-based Urban Marketing Collaborative to rebrand the blighted Downtown Crossing area; preliminary suggestions include reintroducing cars into the district. Weirdly, the lefty Globe has rallied in favor of more traffic. A recent op-ed, for instance, quoted the paper's architecture critic, Robert Campbell: "Many of us, if asked, will say we prefer 'open space' to streets. But we're far more likely to be saying this while sitting at a sidewalk café on Newbury Street than picnicking on Boston Common." The problem with this argument is that it's built on rickety logic—the implication being that we go to Newbury Street because of the traffic, rather than in spite of it. (Also: picnicking?)

Fact is, the reason



An other obstacle in this effort is the (seemingly never-ending) Charles/MGH Red-line MBTA project in the area. Because there is not a legal sidewalk on the Longfellow Bridge on-ramp from the Boston side, the MBTA contractor would not install wheelchair ramps nor crosswalk markings on north of the station protecting pedestrians going from Cambridge Street to the Bridge. (However this MBTA Charles/MGH project came up with a design without any thought into bicycle accommodation is a topic for another story.)

Following are some of the areas completed over the past month as part of this DCR initiative:

1. Bike lanes on Longfellow Bridge.
2. Crosswalks @ Soldiers Field Rd. at Ramp "A" and Arsenal Street Bridge, Brighton.
3. Crosswalks @ McGrath Hwy and Washington St Somerville.
4. Crosswalks @ Memorial Drive @ Anderson Bridge & JFK Drive Cambridge.
5. Stop line at the main Arnold Arboretum entrance.
6. Stop line at Francis Parkman Drive at Kelly Circle.

4. DID YOU KNOW: THE MORE TRAFFIC ON YOUR STREET, THE FEWER FRIENDS YOU HAVE?

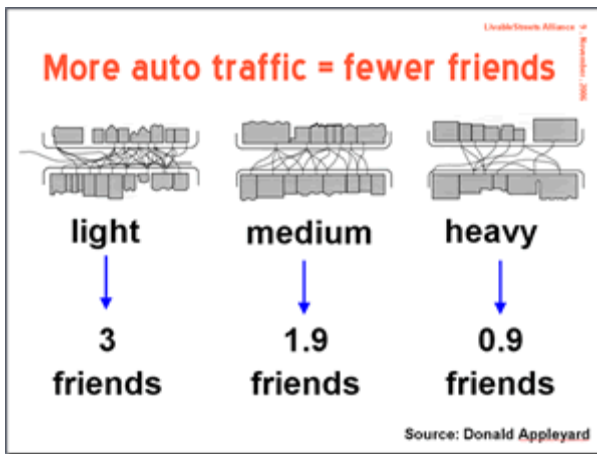
"People have always lived on streets. They have been the places where children first learned about the world, where neighbors met, the social centers of towns and cities, the rallying points for revolts, the scenes of repression... The street has always been the scene of this conflict, between living and access, between resident and traveler, between street life and the threat of death." (Appleyard, "Livable Streets", 1981.)

Downtown Crossing has hit the skids has less to do with the absence of gridlock than the grim, low-rent atmosphere that hangs over the place. Actually, you could argue that, in terms of foot traffic, the Crossing has been a success. On weekends it's wall-to-wall humanity—albeit not the kind of humanity Globe editorialists tend to mingle with.

The Newb, for its part, is already one of the city's most popular streets, and its appeal will only grow if people are allowed to walk down it without being run over, elbowed by trundling tourists, or suffocated by the toxic cologne clouds that hang over the packed sidewalks. You'd get more foot traffic, but it would seem like less.

Restaurants could expand outdoor seating. Instead of the intermingling, migraine-causing bass lines of passing cars, you could have live musicians. Sure, we'd lose the valet parking, and the posh set might wail and rend their Armani garments at the thought of having to walk an extra block, but that would be kind of funny to watch, in a class-warfare sort of way.

Of course, this idea will require a snout-to-tail overhaul of our public transit system, along with a major infusion of funds. But if the city is made less car-friendly, the T will see an increase in riders, and therefore revenues. And with more riders comes more political pressure to transform the T into the modern, efficient system



In the late 1960s Appleyard conducted a renowned study on livable streets, comparing three residential streets in San Francisco which on the surface did not differ on much else but their levels of traffic. The 2,000 vehicles per day street was considered Light Street, 8,000 traveled on Medium Street and 16,000 vehicles passing down Heavy Street. His research showed that residents of Light Street had three more friends and twice as many acquaintances as the people on Heavy Street.

Further, as traffic volume increases, the space people considered to be their territory shrank. Appleyard suggested that these results were related, indicating that residents on Heavy Street had less friends and acquaintances precisely because there was less home territory (exchange space) in which to interact socially.

Light Street was a closely knit community. Front steps were used for sitting and chatting, sidewalks for children to play and for adults to stand and pass the time of day, especially around the corner store, and the roadway for children and teenagers to play more active games like football. Moreover, the street was seen as a whole and no part was out of bounds.

Heavy Street, on the other hand, had little or no sidewalk activity and was used solely as a corridor between the sanctuary of individual homes and the outside world. Residents kept very much to themselves, and there was virtually no feeling of community. The difference in the perceptions and experience of children and the elderly across the two streets was especially striking.

Excerpted from [Project for Public Spaces](#).



New York's
Transportation Alternatives released a study in October,

the city deserves, as opposed to something you'd find at the Ninth Circle of Hell's eBay store.

No doubt it will take time to disabuse people of the notion that car ownership is a precondition for happy and rewarding urban life, but we need to keep plugging away. Once Hanover and Newbury streets are secured, we should move on to the new development at Fort Point, then Charles Street, maybe knock off a couple of blocks in the South End. Should any of these areas suddenly become desolate, pedestrian-free wastelands, I'll admit defeat and treat Robert Campbell to a coffee drink of his choice, to be sipped beside the Mass. Pike at rush hour.

It'll be a bastard to pull off. It'll require a lot of political will. It'll raise an unholy stink from drivers, but the incessant demands of motorists are what got us to where we are today. Boston wants to be known as a progressive city, a city with big ideas. If nothing else, a serious push to reclaim the city for pedestrians would get us the world's attention, and maybe spark similar reforms in other gridlocked, smog-filled American cities. They'd call it the "Boston Model" of urban development (sorry, Bogotá). And if all this makes driving around the city more difficult, so be it. Boston's a city. If you like driving so much, move to Framingham. I hear there's plenty of parking.

"TRAFFIC'S HUMAN TOLL: New Yorkers who live on high traffic streets have a measurably lower quality-of-life."

It has long been known that New York's heavy traffic too often leads to injury and asthma. With the release of "Traffic's Human Toll" there is new, measurable evidence that high traffic volumes also impose significant negative impacts on New Yorkers' quality of life.

"Traffic's Human Toll" finds that New Yorkers living on streets with high volumes of traffic spend less time outside and are more likely to restrict their children's outdoor play compared to people who live on "medium" and "low" traffic streets. The study also finds that compared to residents on low traffic streets, residents on high traffic streets are twice as likely to be disrupted by traffic while they are walking, talking, eating, playing with kids and sleeping.

Further, the study finds that New Yorkers on high traffic streets harbor more negative perceptions of their block, are more frequently disturbed during sleep, meals, and conversations, and, in two of the four study areas, possess significantly fewer relationships with their neighbors compared to residents on low and medium traffic streets. Based on these findings, it is no surprise that 49% of all respondents stated that reducing the number of cars traversing their street would "totally improve" their quality of life. Of those respondents residing on heavy traffic streets, that figure jumps to 62%.

[Click here for more information and to read the executive summary.](#)

5. REGIONAL PLANNING AGENCY UNVEILS BIKE RACK PROGRAM WITH MUNICIPAL INCENTIVES

by Amanda Patterson, Staff Writer for LivableStreets Alliance

New bike racks should soon be appearing in cities and towns thanks to the Metropolitan Area Planning Commission (MAPC) and the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). MAPC negotiated a deal allowing cities and towns to order discounted bike parking equipment. And the MPO secured federal money to reimburse the purchase price of the equipment. It is likely the first arrangement of it's kind.



"No one we are aware of has negotiated this kind of deal," said MAPC transportation and land use planner, Scott Walker.

Three bike parking equipment companies have agreed to

Originally published in Boston Magazine, November 2006.

[Click here for the entire article.](#)

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offer a substantial discount to 101 cities and towns in Massachusetts. This includes most municipalities inside I-495, as well as the MBTA and Department of Conservation and Recreation. According to Walker, all Dero, Madrax, and Cycle-safe catalogue items will be available at the discount.

To further sweeten the deal, and encourage cities with tight budgets to take advantage of the offer, the MPO secured \$1.4 million of federal money over the next three years to be given to projects expected to improve air quality. This money will reimburse cities and towns for the purchase price of approved equipment.

Municipalities will still have to pay for shipping and installation, and Walker acknowledges that it may be harder for smaller cities and towns to pay up front and wait to be reimbursed.

For now, the DCR and MBTA are eligible for the discount but not the reimbursement -unless they negotiate with a town- because, as Walker said, "We were afraid the big agencies would use up all of our reimbursement money."

While all of the items in the three catalogues will be sold at a discount, the MAPC has established quality control criteria for reimbursement eligibility.

[Click here for more information...](#)

Also, see MAPC's [Draft Regional Bike Plan](#) released last week.

6. OCTOBER HUB ON WHEELS BIKE RIDE A SUCCESS! STEVEN MILLER, CO-FOUNDER, STEPS DOWN

Success! The rain held off until noon, 100's of volunteers came before dawn, and 2000 people participated in the Second Annual Hub On Wheels Citywide Bike Ride and Festival. Thanks to DCR Commissioner Burrington, Storrow Drive was closed to traffic and open to cyclists!



The post-ride Festival in City Hall Plaza gave Americans their first glimpse of 7-time Artistic Cycling World Champion, Martin Rominger as well as World Champion Trial Bike rider Jeff Lenosky.

Hub On Wheels Co-founder Steven Miller steps

down. After two years of incredibly hard work starting what is now known as Boston's Hub On Wheels, Steve stepped down as Executive Director. Known for his ability to forge key relationships within the City of Boston, bring good people together, and nurture collaboration, Steve succeeded to do what many thought impossible: raise the level of awareness about bicycling within City Hall.

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