

March 18, 2010

Robert Antico
Massachusetts Department of Transportation
Charles River Basin Accelerated Bridge Program
251 Causeway Street, Suite 700
Boston, MA 02114

Delivery by Adobe PDF via email to Robert.Antico@state.ma.us

Subject: River St and Western Ave Bridges Reconstruction

Dear Mr. Antico:

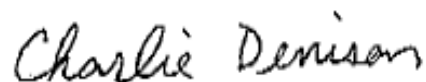
We would like to take this opportunity to provide some suggestions and comments regarding the River St and Western Ave Bridges reconstruction project.

We are of course very pleased that the bridges are to be reconstructed, and are glad that one of your priorities is to ensure that the bridges better serve all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users, boaters, and motorists. However, there are three main points we would like to make to your team that we think are key to the overall success of this project:

1. It is essential that the scope of the project be expanded to include the network of intersections and roadways immediately around these bridges, as they currently pose safety and access issues that must be addressed.
2. Pedestrian and bicycle safety and access must be a primary objective of this project, including improved access not only on the bridges but to and from them as well.
3. Traffic flow must be better controlled and more clearly defined to improve safety and mobility, particularly through improved signalization and signage, curb adjustments, and roadway markings.

We have created two conceptual designs of improvements we think you can make as part of this project, which we have attached. We have also included a detailed appendix explaining in detail our recommendations for this project. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Charlie Denison, Board Member & Advocacy Director
Also endorsed by: Charlotte Burger, Boston Cyclists Union

Robert Antico re: Anderson Bridge Reconstruction Project
March 14, 2010

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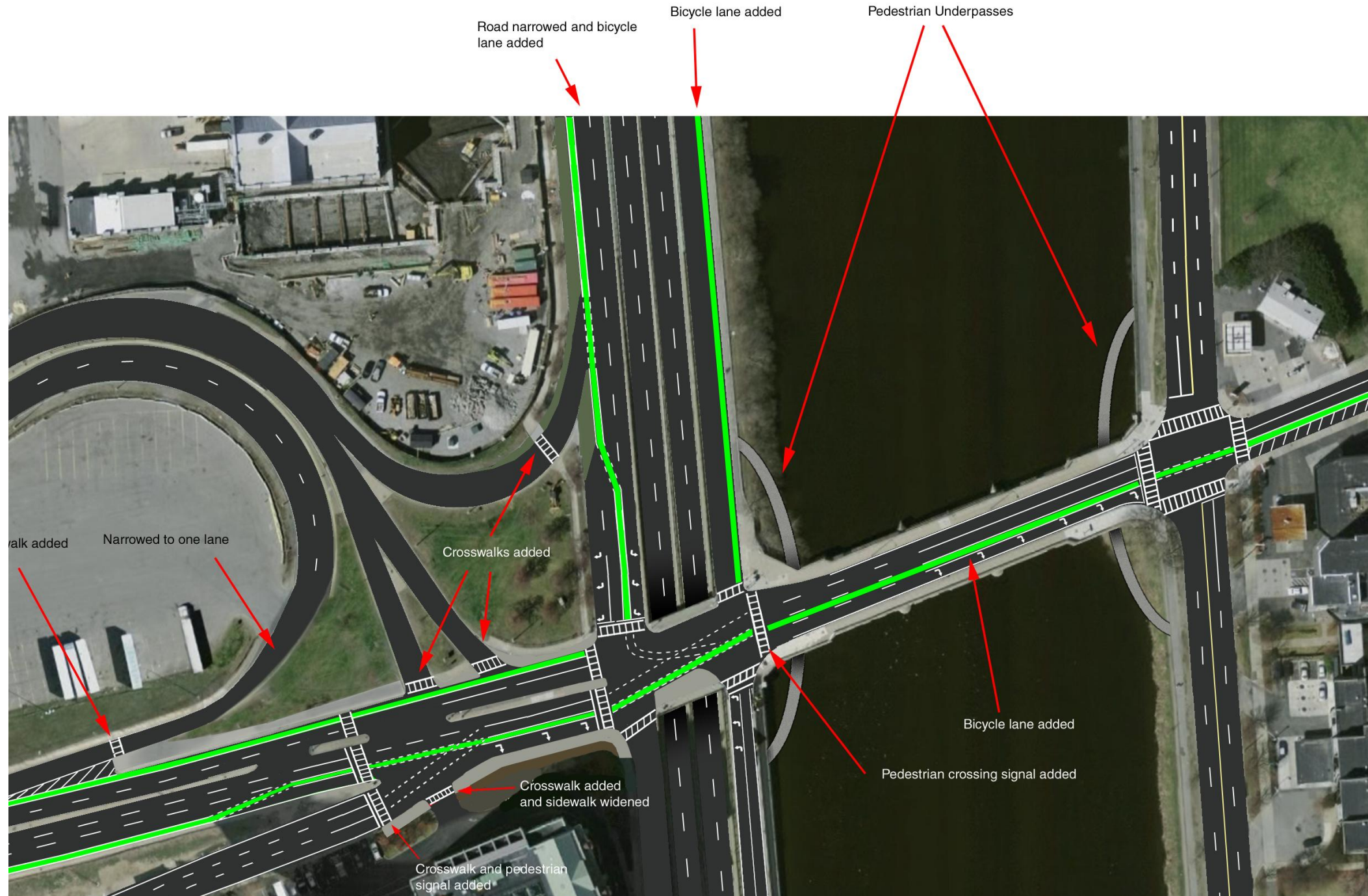
Sue Clippinger, Cambridge Transportation Department
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Appendix

Conceptual Diagrams and Detailed Recommendations

Conceptual Diagram: River Street Bridge and surrounding roadways

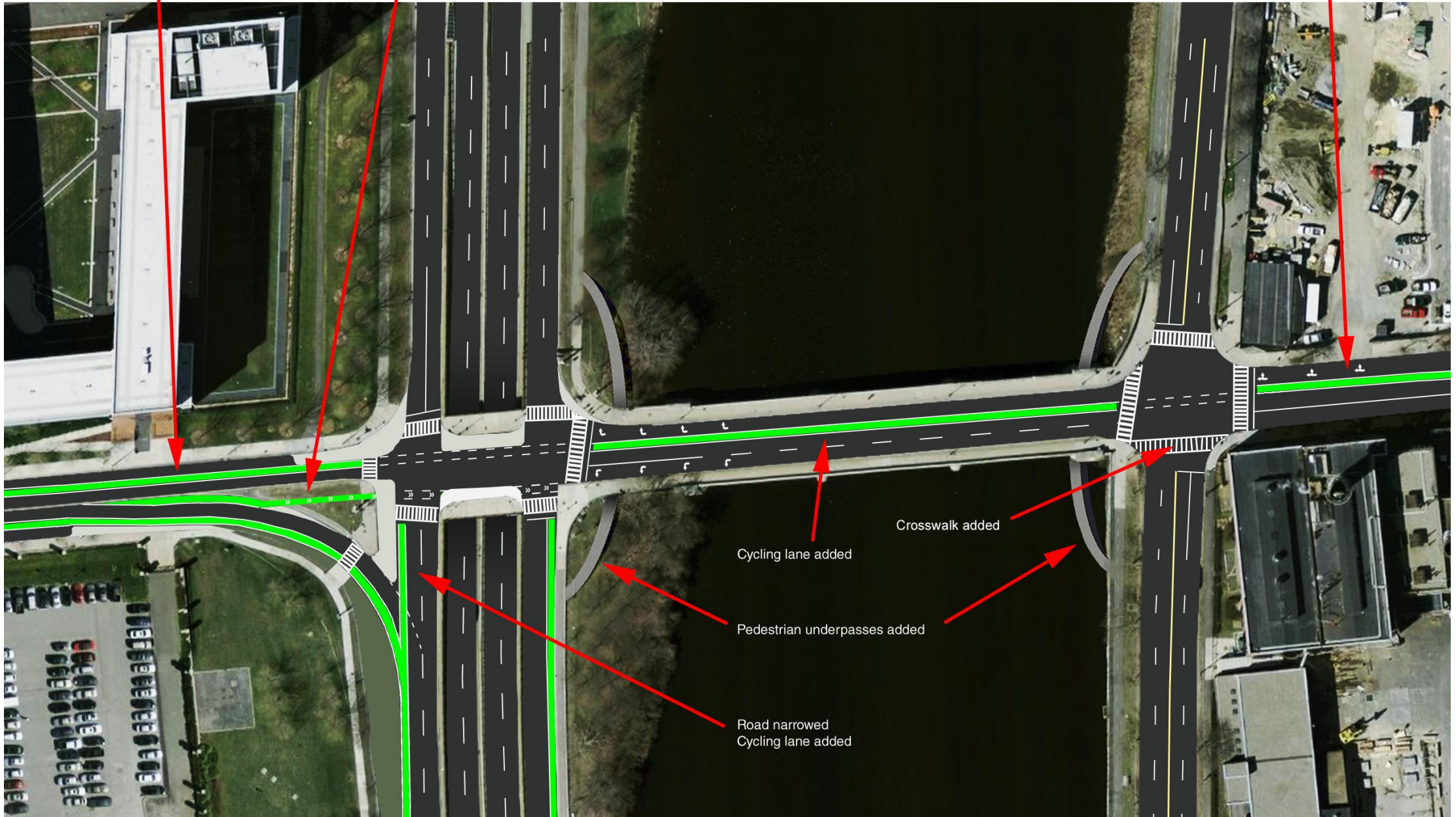


Conceptual Diagram: Western Ave Bridge and surrounding roadways

Planned cycling lanes

Cycling lane conduit added

Planned cycling lane



Cycling lane added

Crosswalk added

Pedestrian underpasses added

Road narrowed
Cycling lane added

Detailed Recommendations

Project Scope

The Accelerated Bridge Program is legislatively focused on creating structurally sound bridges within tight funding and time constraints. And, based on recent ABP staff comments, it now seems likely that the scope of the ABP work will stop, on the Boston side, on the in-land side of the bridges over Soldiers Field Road, with a still unclear stopping point on the Cambridge side.

However, it will do the Commonwealth no good and reflect no credit on MassDOT to have solid structures that do not adequately serve regional transportation needs. Therefore, ***it is essential that MassDOT look at the entire street circuit created by the two bridges on both sides of the river***, including the bridges themselves, the connecting segments of Memorial Drive and the Soldiers Field Road frontage road and the intersections of each of these, as well as continuing west along Cambridge St. at least up to the Mass Pike exit ramps (eastbound and westbound). Rather than the "bottom-up" approach that starts with the structural needs, ABP needs to take a "top-down" approach and start by thinking about the mobility needs of the entire spectrum of users - and then plan to create a structure that serves those needs.

In particular, while MassDOT's ABP designers seem aware of the safety issues created by weak parapets and curbs, not enough attention is being paid to the statistically ***much greater safety hazards created by the intersections on either side***. These must be part of the ABP design process - if not also part of the ABP construction effort.

Even beyond the intersections, especially on the Cambridge side, it is vital that MassDOT work with DCR and the City of Cambridge to deal with ***safety issues along Memorial Drive and up Western Ave and River St*** - the presence of several parks and a pool make these busy pedestrian areas.

Project Process

The complexity of this area will require creativity and compromise. It would be good to work with Boston and Cambridge staff, DCR, and transportation and park advocates through a series of ***small-group charettes to explore innovative options***. For example, this might be a good place to install separate bicycle signals or bike boxes.

General Design Recommendations

- We ask that **pedestrian signals be timed automatically** (no push-buttons should be provided) **and concurrently with traffic**, with a leading pedestrian interval of at least five seconds where needed to reduce conflicts with turning traffic. (Most of the signals in this area are currently automatic and concurrently timed, but they do not have a leading pedestrian interval.)
- All **crosswalks should be zebra-striped** for maximum visibility.
- Bridge walls/railings should be designed so that **pedestrians can see the river** as they walk across.
- The current 8.5' wide sidewalks on both bridges have a much narrower usable clear space because of pedestrian nervousness about walking too close to traffic and the location of the street lights. **Street lights designed to maintain the historic look of the bridge should be moved to the parapet.**
- A **bike lane or cycle track in the direction of traffic should be added to each bridge**. We ask that bike lanes be colored green wherever possible and continue (dashed) through the intersections.
- We ask that **bicycle-signal heads be considered to provide a leading bicycle phase** where it would be beneficial for bicyclists to get a head start over motor vehicles (in particular going eastbound on Cambridge Street this could be quite useful).
- While preserving parkland is important, safety for pedestrians and bicyclists is even more important. The **creation of pathway underpasses**, so that people pushing baby carriages, cyclists, pedestrians, skaters, and others do not have to go through the intersections at-grade should be strongly considered. Even if time and money constraints do not allow these to be fully built, as much work as possible should be done to create the tunnels through the embankment for future finishing work -- if it isn't done now it is unlikely that it will ever be funded!
- On all bridges and surrounding roadways, **curb radii should be tightened and sidewalks should be bumped out** as much as possible, to help pedestrians cross and prevent motorists from making high-speed turns through the intersections.
- Throughout the project, please look into providing **bus queue-jump lanes and/or traffic signal priority** at strategic locations where buses may get stuck in traffic. Because of the high volumes of automobile traffic through this area, transit reliability can be an issue at peak hours.

River Street Bridge

The Bridge Itself

- We support **the addition of an eastbound bike lane as was described** at the first public meeting by narrowing the 3 existing travel lanes. Care should be taken such that it connects well to the planned bike lane on River Street in Cambridge and the planned bike lane on Cambridge Street in Boston. We encourage you to have your consultants consider making this a **physically separated bike lane (a.k.a. cycle track)**.
- Please **re-stripe a crosswalk on the west side of the bridge for the Charles River Path** crossing, and **add an automatic pedestrian crossing signal** (no pedestrian signal currently exists)
- **Slowing down cars coming over the hump on the River St. Bridge** is vital for safety. Narrowing the lanes, adding signage, and utilizing other traffic calming measures should all be explored.
- Motorists are often unaware that the River St. Bridge is one way, so they often don't use the left-most lanes then end up making a left turn from the middle lane. **Signage and roadway markings should be added** instructing that the bridge is one-way, that left turns may only be made from the left-most lane and that right turns may only be made from the right-most lane.

Cambridge Roadways/Intersections

- The River Street Bridge/Memorial Drive intersection works pretty well, and would benefit mostly from **improved sightlines for pedestrians** by adjusting the bridge walls as described above.

Boston Roadways/Intersections

- The **Charles River Path just south of the River Street Bridge is dangerously narrow** and has obstacles within the right-of-way. Please widen the path (cantilevering it if needed) to ensure that is a safe width for the volume of pedestrians and bicyclists who use it (12' is desirable). If the path cannot be widened at this time, the bridge should be constructed in such a way to allow for this in the future.
- The **intersections on the Boston side of the bridge are extremely pedestrian- and bicycle-unfriendly, and are very confusing for motorists**. The limits of this project should extend through the intersection of Cambridge Street/Soldiers Field Road and Cambridge Street/Mass Pike exit/DoubleTree Hotel driveway.
- The stretch of **Cambridge Street from just west of the Mass Pike exit (eastbound) to the River Street bridge should be restriped to contain a continuous colored bike lane and to make the lane configurations very clear to bicyclists and motorists** (including signage and lane markings as needed). This bike lane should be to the left of right-turning traffic, should

continue dashed and colored through the intersections, and should connect seamlessly to the bike lanes being striped on Cambridge Street by the City of Boston. (Currently, the City of Boston restriping project ends at the eastbound Mass Pike exit. It is therefore essential that this ABP project meet up at least to that point.)

- The ***sidewalk along the south side of Cambridge Street should be widened and bumped out*** to better accommodate pedestrians and to help guide traffic coming off of the Mass Pike off-ramp to the appropriate lanes on Cambridge Street.
- ***Crosswalks and pedestrian signals should be added across Cambridge Street*** at the intersection with the Mass Pike off-ramp/DoubleTree Hotel driveway, including across the Mass Pike off-ramp itself.
- ***Crosswalks should be restriped and signed more clearly, and curb radii tightened as much as possible at the MassPike entrances on the north side of Cambridge Street.***
- This may be too far west to be considered as part of this project, but we would like to see the ***MassPike off-ramp (westbound) narrowed to one lane*** as it feeds into Cambridge Street and a crosswalk clearly added and signed across it.
- The ***Soldiers Field Road frontage roads should have bike lanes added in each direction***, and lane configurations should be made much more clearly. (Removal of one of the 4 southbound travel lanes will most likely be needed to add a bike lane.)

Western Avenue Bridge

The Bridge Itself

- As with the River Street Bridge, we support the creation of a ***bike lane or cycle track across the bridge*** (in this case a westbound one), to connect to the future Western Ave bike lanes in Cambridge and Boston.
- As with the River Street Bridge, please add ***signage and roadway markings*** to better communicate that the bridge is one-way and to show which lanes left and right turns are allowed from.

Cambridge Roadways/Intersections

- The Western Ave/Memorial Drive intersection works well. However, it would benefit from a ***crosswalk and pedestrian crossing signal from the southwest corner to the southeast corner***.

Boston Roadways/Intersections

- We feel strongly that the ***western edge of the project should be just to the west of the Western Ave/Soldiers Field Road intersection***, as this will line up with the future bike lanes on Western Ave striped by the City of Boston.
- Please ***clarify the lane configurations through the intersections and continue the bike lane west*** from the bridge past the Soldiers Field Road intersection(s), connecting to the future Western Ave bike lanes planned by the City of Boston.
- Create a ***signed and striped eastbound bicycle connection*** from eastbound Western Ave onto the porkchop island, across to a widened south sidewalk on the Soldiers Field Road bridge and finally connecting to the Charles River Path and Western Ave Bridge sidewalk.
- ***Continue the bike lanes on the Soldiers Field Road frontage road*** as described in the River Street Bridge section above, in both the southbound and northbound directions.
- Build ***sidewalk bumpouts and restripe and resign the pedestrian crossing of the Mass Pike entrance*** off of the Soldiers Field Road southbound frontage road.

Concluding Remarks

We understand that this is a very challenging area that has many problems and very high volumes of traffic. However, we greatly appreciate any effort you can make to help make this area more pleasant and safer for pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, and motorists alike. The reconstruction of the bridges can not only address the structural deficiencies of them but can also bring very long-awaited and substantial improvements to the surrounding roadway and pathway network that will benefit us all for many years to come.

LivableStreets and other advocates would very much like to meet with your team in person at some point during the design process to better share our ideas and help you work through many of the challenges that this area poses. We hope to be a resource and ally so that when you do go before the public you have good solutions that people will be pleased to see.

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, Board Member & Advocacy Director, LivableStreets Alliance, who may be reached at 617.852.6125 and charlie@livablestreets.info.