



TOP: PROPOSED TREATMENT OF THE MIT FRONT (LOWER PHOTO SHOWS EXISTING CONDITIONS). THE POLE MARKS THE FINISH LINE OF THE LOWER BASIN ROWING COURSE.

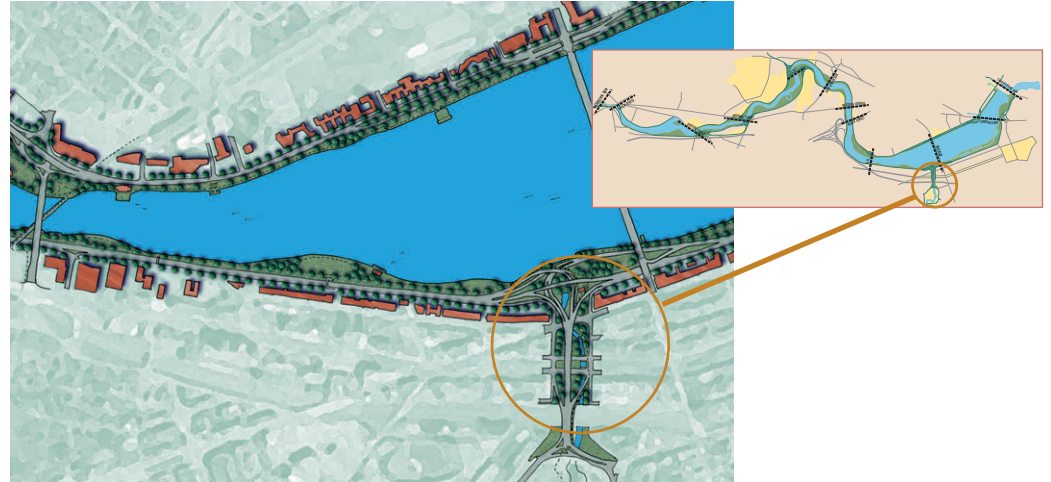
- **Add carefully placed benches set back from the lower pathway.**

Many people will use the sloping ground for sitting and lying down if new turf is provided.

- **Develop a public landing.** A landing will provide a place for boats to tie up and for people to

get onto the water. Care must be taken to avoid conflicts with rowers.

- **Create a terraced viewing area in front of the finish line for rowing sprints** to prevent spectators from damaging turf using some of the granite slabs along the shoreline. Install interpretive signage and information about river sports here.
- **Construct an overlook at the west end of the seawall.** Incorporate seating and lighting into such a structure, along with interpretive information on the history of boating along the Charles.
- **Discourage growth of the flock of feral geese,** which gather between this segment and Magazine Beach,. Provide signage explaining what feral birds are and advising against feeding them.



CHARLESGATE (3S)

Bowker Overpass between Charles River and The Back Bay Fens.

KEY RESOURCES

- *Storrow Drive (1951, 1955)*
- *Bowker Overpass (1966)*

INTRODUCTION AND HISTORY

Charlesgate follows the course of the Muddy River. It is the link between the two most important open space systems in the Boston area—the Charles River Reservation and the Emerald Necklace. The Fens, designed in the 1878 by Frederick Law Olmsted, had a tremendous influence on Charles Eliot, who apprenticed with the Olmsted firm from 1883 to 1885.

Charlesgate has had to accommodate many roadway and railway crossings throughout its history. Few areas of the Basin have undergone so many changes. Olmsted viewed Charlesgate very much as an extension of the Fens (it was originally known as the area’s “Beacon Entrance”), but it was transformed a few years later by a more formal treatment of

Commonwealth Avenue. Vestiges of these two previous transformations are still visible in the shadows of the Bowker Overpass, built in 1965 as part of yet another reconfiguration—the extension of the Massachusetts Turnpike.

EXISTING CONDITIONS AND ISSUES

The Turnpike extension and Bowker Overpass channeled and partially buried the once picturesque and heavily planted Muddy River. Though



AN AERIAL VIEW OF THE CHARLESgate IN 1954 BEFORE ITS BURIAL UNDER THE BOWKER OVERPASS. THE VIEW SHOWS THE MUDDY RIVER LEAVING THE BACK BAY FENS AND PASSING UNDER BOYLSTON STREET ON ITS WAY TO THE CHARLES.

There is strong potential for future private partnerships to redesign Charlesgate to strengthen links to the regional open space system. These pedestrian connections would benefit not only existing neighborhoods, but new development.

efforts were made to streamline the overpass, it casts a massive shadow on a large and vacant tract of parkland. The Turnpike itself broadened the historic barrier of the train tracks. Today only narrow concrete walkways over the Bowker Overpass link the Fens and Charlesgate, and even these paths do not provide a direct connection to the river.

Turnpike air-rights developments representing millions of square feet may be proposed in the coming years.

GOALS

- **Create a strong pedestrian link between the Charles River Basin and the Emerald Necklace.**
- **Transform Charlesgate into a healthy and attractive park area for a variety of users.**

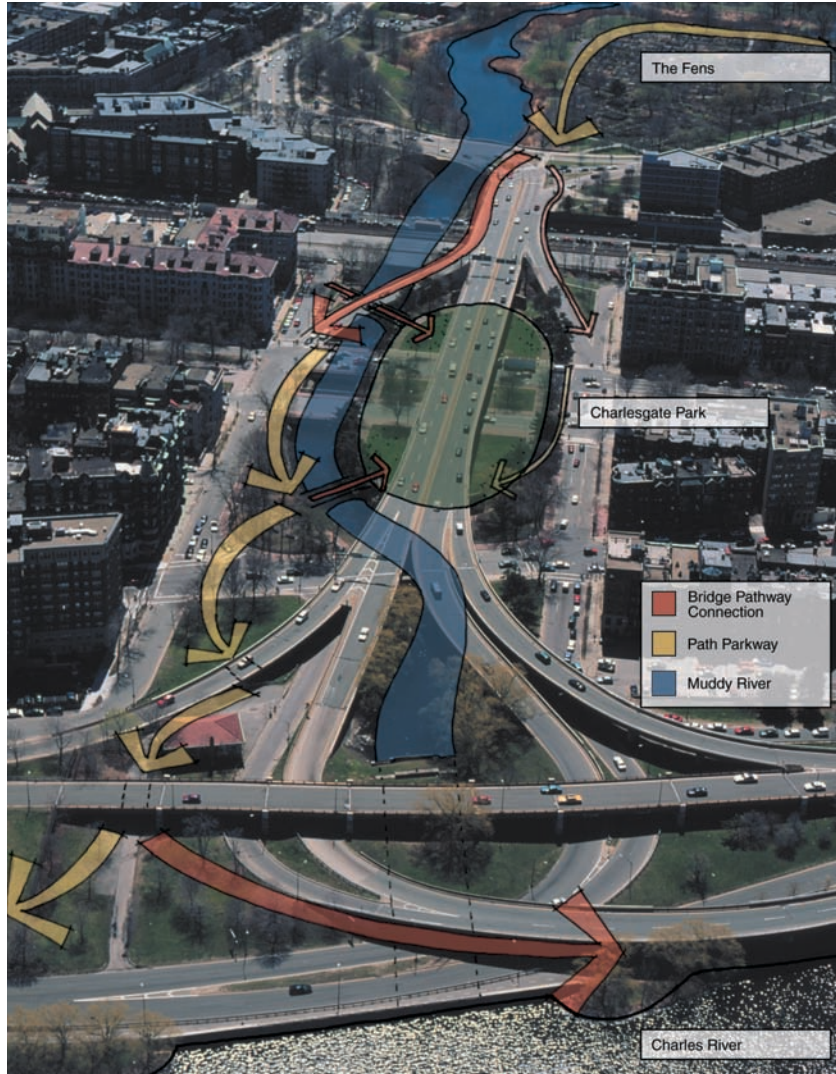
RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Restore Charlesgate.** In October 1998, a community design charrette on Charlesgate developed a range of provocative programming and design ideas for restoring the park. All the proposals advocated restoring the Muddy River and establishing pathway links to the Fens and the Charles River Basin. Charrette participants suggested both passive and active recreational uses for the park, taking full advantage of the carved-up territory and the presence of the Turnpike to separate different uses. Active uses such as a skateboard park were proposed for the area closest to the Turnpike, while quiet uses were envisioned for sunny areas on the banks of the Muddy River. Participants felt that the curving stone walls add little to the space and advised their removal.

Two major challenges confront the proposal to provide access to and through Charlesgate—the link across the Turnpike to the Fens and the link to the river through the tangle of roadway ramps over Storrow Drive. The existing sidewalks on the Bowker Overpass from the Fens to Commonwealth Avenue are only four feet wide, much too narrow



and unsafe. It would be inadvisable, however, to narrow travel lanes on the overpass to accommodate a wider sidewalk, and engineering constraints may make it



impossible to cantilever a new walk from the existing structure. The Bowker Overpass is almost forty years old and will need to be rebuilt within the next decade.

- **Re-establish the link between the Fens and the Charles River Basin.** When the Bowker Overpass is rebuilt, provide a ten- to twelve-foot pathway on its both sides, paying particular attention to the east side, which offers views of the Muddy River and the Boylston Street

Bridge designed by H.H. Richardson. Alternatively, construct an independent pedestrian bridge east or west of the overpass. A bridge on the east side would touch down at the terminus of Newbury Street and connect across the Muddy River to Charlesgate by means of a second, smaller bridge.

The at-grade street crossings, at or close to existing intersections, are manageable for pedestrians. By crossing underneath the overpass, park users could claim the park terrain. Effective nighttime lighting and public art also could help reclaim the park. A decorative pedestrian bridge over the Muddy River between Commonwealth Avenue and Beacon Street would link both sides of the park and lead directly to one of its nicest sitting areas.

The connection to the Charles River Basin is straightforward. Near the eastbound on-ramp to Storrow Drive is the old Fens Gate House, a lovely historic structure. Beyond the gatehouse is an open view of the river and a path to the edge of Storrow Drive. A fence would be necessary to prevent illegal and dangerous crossings at this point. The path would split here. One leg would lead to a new pedestrian bridge over Storrow Drive. The other would pass through a new opening in an existing stone wall, then follow an old ramp alignment past the fenced dog walk to the Harvard Bridge. A signalized at-grade crossing of Massachusetts Avenue at this point would lead directly to the existing path system. Further study is needed to determine an optimal alignment for these pathway connections and bridges. (A report on the Muddy River delta produced for the MDC in 1996 offers several sound recommendations for the Charlesgate area and should be consulted.)

The expense of connecting the Emerald Necklace to the Charles River Basin by way of Charlesgate would be substantial. Private participation through nearby development should be encouraged.