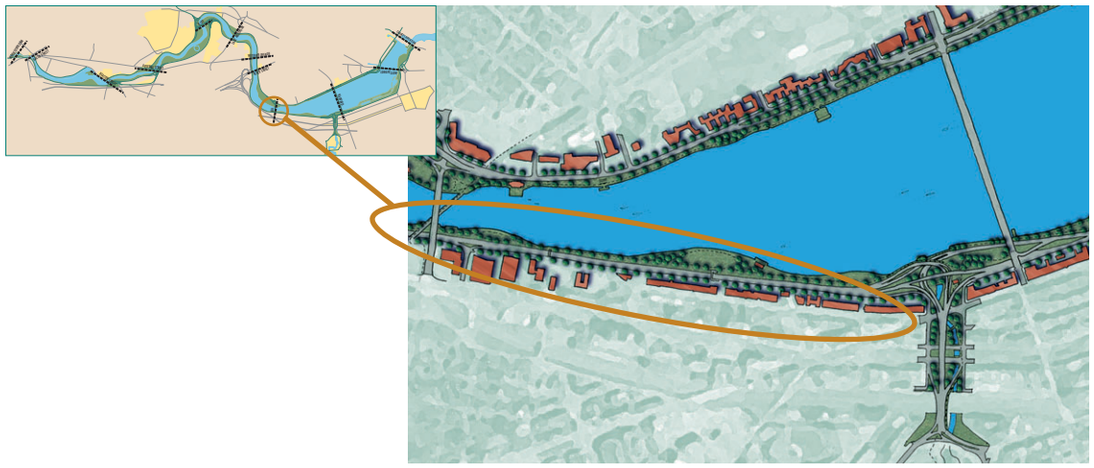


BOSTON UNIVERSITY BRIDGE (3N, 3S)

Storrow Drive between Charlesgate and Boston University Bridge

Key Resources

- *Boston University Bridge (1928)*
- *Storrow Drive (1951, 1955)*
- *Boston University sailing pavilion*
- *Boston and Albany Railroad bridge*

Introduction and History

Built on the site of the 1850 Brookline Bridge, the Cottage Farm Bridge was completed in 1928 and renamed the Boston University Bridge in 1949. It rises high to clear the Grand Junction (Conrail) railroad tracks below. This bridge marks the transition from the broad expanse of the Lower Basin, where marshes once spread far beyond the present seawalls, to the snaking course of the Upper Basin.

Existing Conditions and Issues

Given its strategic location, one would expect pedestrians to use the BU Bridge heavily, yet there is no direct link to the Basin pathways. On the south side the bridge soars high over the pathway. A set of stairs drops down on the wrong side of Storrow Drive, tempting many pedestrians to cross illegally at this point. It is possible to head downriver a quarter of a mile to a pedestrian bridge that returns to the reservation, but this circuitous path is neither marked nor handicapped-accessible. This stretch of the pathway forces users to travel long distances to reach abutting neighborhoods.

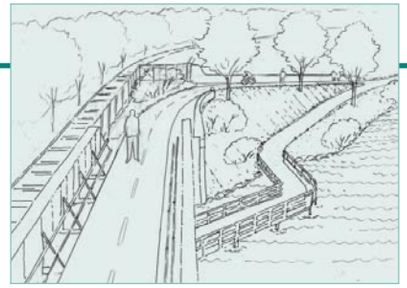
The Boston University sailing pavilion, abutting the bridge, poses several problems. It creates blind corners on the path that have resulted in collisions between bicyclists and pedestrians, and it blocks full views of the path, creating a security problem. At this pinch point in the river, novice sailors using the dock conflict with passing rowers and are occasionally blown up against the railroad bridge. BU students must travel much further to reach the race course than do MIT or Harvard students sailing out of boathouses downstream and on the Cambridge side.

There are also access issues on the north bank. The MWRA's Cottage Farm combined sewer outfall facility, the bridge, and the railroad all interrupt the riverside path, forcing it out to the intersection of the bridge and Memorial Drive. This intersection, despite signalization, can be hazardous for pedestrians. The pathways are narrow and uneven in this area. Automobiles turning east from the bridge onto Memorial Drive have limited visibility.

The Grand Junction Railroad Bridge, a double-barreled crossing with active tracks on one side and an abandoned roadbed on the other, is used rarely. The MBTA uses the tracks to shuttle trains each day at very slow

THE BOSTON UNIVERSITY SAILING PAVILION (UPPER PHOTO) AND THE GRAND JUNCTION RAILROAD BRIDGE (LOWER PHOTO, FROM THE BOSTON BANK). THE RAILROAD BRIDGE OFFERS OPPORTUNITIES FOR LINKING PATHS ON BOTH SIDES OF THE RIVER.

speeds; Conrail also uses them infrequently. This bridge links the two banks at a much lower elevation than the Boston University Bridge, presenting an opportunity for a new pedestrian link across the river.



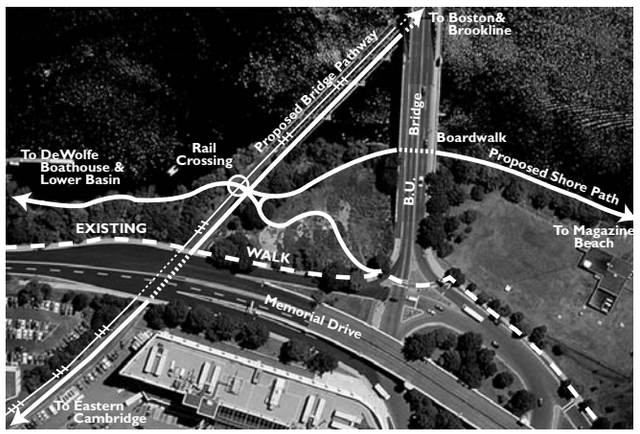
THE ABANDONED RAIL BED ON THE GRAND JUNCTION BRIDGE WOULD SUPPORT CREATION OF A MULTIUSE PATH CONNECTING BOTH SIDES OF THE RIVER (LEFT). BIKERS AND PEDESTRIANS WOULD BENEFIT FROM A NEW ENTRANCE TO THE RIVER PARK AT THE INTERSECTION OF MEMORIAL DRIVE AND THE BOSTON UNIVERSITY BRIDGE.

Goals

- **Improve the continuity and safety of movement along and across the river.**

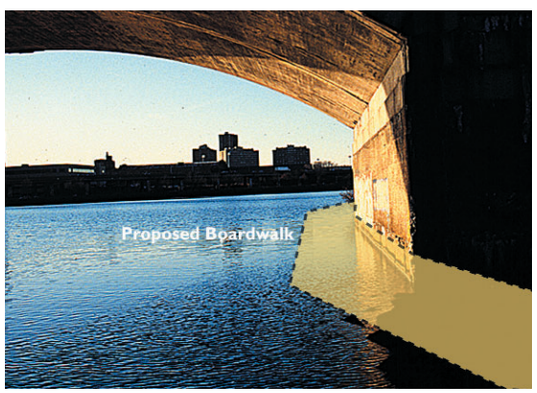
Recommendations

- **Move the Boston University sailing pavilion from the pinch point at the Boston University Bridge** to a location to be determined between the current site and the Charlesgate (page 114).



- **Use the abandoned half of the Grand Junction Railroad Bridge to provide pedestrian and bicycle access between the north and south banks of the reservation.** A multiuse path for foot and wheeled traffic would occupy the unused side of the bridge bed, and the active rail line would be securely separated from this pathway. Build an earthen embankment ramping up to the railroad bridge from the upstream approach on the south side. If the roadbed can not be used, cantilever the pathway off the railroad bridge on the upstream side. Establish connections in four directions on the north bank (shown in diagram, above).

- **Extend the upriver leg to cross on a boardwalk under the bridge and past the MWRA facility.** Move the MWRA fences back a few feet, maintaining the shoreline's natural state. This path would allow continuous waterside access by connecting to a new shoreline path along Magazine Beach. Because the bridge is one of the worst pinch points for water traffic on the Charles, avoid further constriction within the waterway. Consider cantilevering the walkway above the water surface.



- **Cross the railroad tracks at grade with a new path past DeWolfe Boathouse.** Several at-grade crossings already exist in Cambridge, one just fifteen hundred feet from the reservation. Should an at-grade crossing of the tracks prove infeasible, an alternative path alignment would climb the slope to the intersection of Memorial Drive and the Boston University Bridge.

- **Extend a fourth pathway up the railroad alignment into East Cambridge**, providing a direct link between BU and MIT and access to the river for Cambridgeport and East Cambridge residents.

- **In the event that active use of the rail lines is discontinued, connect Boston University's athletic fields and the Beacon rail yards directly to the Basin.** Future development of the parcel fronting the approach to the Boston University Bridge also would provide an excellent opportunity for a direct connection to the river.

- **Future rebuilding of the Boston University Bridge should provide pedestrian overlooks** to take full advantage of the views up and down the river.

- **Eliminate the free right turn at the Boston University Bridge/Memorial Drive intersection** and reduce the width of the Memorial Drive ramp inbound from the Boston University Bridge to favor pedestrians and bicyclists.