TO:	MassDOT	DATE:	July 16, 2024, 3-5 p.m.
FROM:	Howard Stein Hudson	HSH PROJECT NO.:	2021055.08

SUBJECT: Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT)
Allston Multimodal Project
Throat Area/Charles River Working Group
Meeting Summary as of July 18, 2024

:

Core Working Group Representatives:
Timothy Dexter (MassDOT, Chair)
Jason Santos (DCR, Co-chair)
Bill Deignan (City of Cambridge, COC)
Dennis Giombetti (SEN)
Dira Johanif (CRWA)
Elizabeth Leary (BU)
Fred Yalouris (Community)
Jason Palitsch (MetroWest Partnership)
Kane Larin (CRAB)
Christine Liu on behalf of Laura Jasinski (CRC)
Wenzheng Wang on behalf of Matt Petersen (City of Boston, COB)
Seth Gadbois (CLF)
Shallan Fitzgerald (Harvard University, HU)
Tom Nally (ABC)

Overview

On July 16, 2024, the MassDOT team for the Allston Multimodal Project virtually held the second meeting with the Throat Area/Charles River Working Group. The Working Group discussed shoreline alternatives and parkland options.

The main topics of discussion were:

- Path-user accessibility and safety concerns;
- Spatial distribution options for shared vs. separate at-grade facilities; and
- Park amenities.

Working Group (WG) members requested:

- A vegetative buffer – instead of a granite or trestle structure - along the river's edge.
- A reduction in roadway space via a width reduction or a lane reduction: (COC, CRAB, CRWA).

- Specifications about the designs, including path measurements and park amenities.

Meeting Summary

Last Week's Discussion

RECAP

In order to keep fill in the river under one acre, there's a maximum of 38' of space between SFR and the river available for shoreline and path improvement. The project team is trying to determine how to optimize the distribution of pathways, plantings, and parkland in this space.

There will be some sort of barrier between I-90 and SFR, but what the structure will look like has yet to be determined.

During the last meeting, the WG discussed:

- Additional seating areas
- Treatments to address wave deflection:
  - Stepped granite block edge
  - Planted edge
  - Floating wetlands
- Potential modifications to the design for Option 1:
  - Drop the bike path to the elevation of the pedestrian path
  - Potentially combine the bike and pedestrian paths and remove central planting area
  - Potentially increase the wall height between the PDW Path and SFR
  - Potentially decrease width of path(s)
  - There must be 2' clear offset from vertical elements on either side of the path
  - Benefits:
    - Creates additional planting area along SFR
    - Creates additional planting area along the river's edge, similar to Option 3

STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

The project team asked WG members to share what was discussed at the last meeting with stakeholders to gather feedback for discussion. Some stakeholders sent in feedback via email, which the project team will work into WG conversations.

WORKING GROUP MEETINGS AND STRUCTURE

- Comments:
  - It would be helpful to see iterations of the design that incorporate WG discussions.
  - The WG should consider the visual impacts of a wall and preserving historic parkland aesthetics.
  - The Shoreline Alternatives are shown as four options, but essentially there are two options – at grade or a supported structure. For either option, please consider impacts of infrastructure to existing surface and soils.

SHORELINE ALTERNATIVES

Option 1: Solid Fill

- Supported by members of the community and ABC.
- Comments:
  - This is the best option if the paths aren't too slimmed down.

Option 2: Varied Shoreline Edge

- Not supported by members of the community.
- Comments:
  - Raised walkway and its substructure must be high enough to not be a hazard for boaters, allow sunlight to reach the riverfront, and allow small boats to reach the river's edge for maintenance access.

WAVE ATTENUATION FEATURES

Planted edge

- Supported by CRAB and CRWA.

Either stepped edge, planted edge, or a combination

- Supported by ABC and COC.

BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN FACILITIES

Separate facilities (general)

- Supported by BU.
- Comments:
  - The pedestrian path should be no less than 8'-wide and the bike path should be no less than 12'-wide.

Separate facilities at the same grade

- Supported by members of the community, COB, and COC.

BARRIERS

Plantings between SFR and the PDW Path

- Supported by COC and CRWA.

Noise and solid barriers

- Supported by members of the community and COC.
- Will need to understand visual impacts of any noise/sound walls on an historic parkway.

Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities

SHARED FACILITIES

Analysis of 17-18' shared path at-grade or structure with planted buffers on both sides

- Concerns:
  - Difficult to use for visually impaired pedestrians.

SEPARATE FACILITIES AT THE SAME GRADE

Suggested 8' pedestrian path and 12' bike path with planted buffers on one side

- Comments:
  - The 6' spatial separation between paths may be flexible. The project team recommends a 2' shoulder from vertical elements on either side of the path, and at least 2' minimum of separation between paths.

SEPARATE FACILITIES AT DIFFERENT GRADES

- No additional comments.

VARIED FACILITIES WITH PLANTED BUFFER ALONG SFR AND INTERMITTENT PLANTINGS ALONG SHORELINE

- Concerns:
  - May be confusing to bikers

Discussion

- Comments:
  - There will be a spatial compromise if facilities are at the same grade.

  - WG members should consider what types of users will be using the paths. People should feel safe and comfortable.

Roadway

- Limitations:
  - Lanes and shoulder widths have been reduced in conjunction with the 2022 NPC.
  - Required to provide some barrier protection and roadway separation in between directions of travel and in between roadways.
  - Includes tracks for Worcester Mainline and Grand Junction.
  - 2040 projection from the 2022 NPC shows that we are above capacity for being able to reduce the lanes.
- The CTPS analysis is currently underway and will show a projection to 2050. It will be submitted as part of the MEPA process.

Parkland

OVERALL PARK FEATURES, STORMWATER, AND PLANTINGS

- Reduce river embankment steepness to 5:1 where feasible
- Passive park amenities including shade structures, seating areas, viewing platforms, passive lawns, etc.
- Stormwater management within the parkland
- Invasive species along river's edge to be replaced with easily maintainable plants that will deter reestablishment of invasive species
- Planted riverbanks will be prioritized over other methods where feasible
- Low growing planting options will be considered to prioritize river-viewing

PARK OPTION A: LINEAR LAWN

- Large linear lawn area
- Pedestrian overpass bridge at south end of the park
- 10' pedestrian riverside path
- Secondary internal 8' pedestrian path alongside 14' bicycle path with seating area
- Potential conflicts for bikers and pedestrians at park entry points
- Possibility of access to the water (assumes no structure)
- Stormwater infiltrated into the ground or collected via swales or basins
- Maintainable, native pollinator and wetland plantings
- Planted tree buffer along SFR

PARK OPTION B: CENTRAL LAWN

- Central oval lawn
- Extended overpass ramp (could allow for ramping in both east and west directions)
- Overlook with opportunity for shade structures
- Potential for riverside seating area
- Stormwater retention basin underneath the northern ramp
- Stormwater piped from other locations along SFR and collected via long, linear swales or large, open basins
- Grass species that can be moved a few times a year to collect, infiltrate, and clean stormwater

Discussion

- Comments:
  - The Agganis Footbridge structure will be the focus of another working group. This group will discuss touchdown and access points as part of the parkland discussion.
  - The park designs are flexible and can be modified.
  - Only DCR property will be treated within the park for stormwater management.
  - Having more natural growing plant material and less lawn will help deter geese.
- Concerns:
  - The connection from the left end of the parkland to River Street is a pinch point. During the first DEIR process, MassDOT and the City of Cambridge made the decision to remove one of the two off-ramp lanes to allow for widening of the PDW Path from approximately 8' to 12'.
  - The central lawn will attract geese as it is an open lawn.
  - There should be less lawn and more incorporations of meadows and wetlands.
  - The design team should pay attention to shading along the paths.
  - What are the planned park amenities? Final designs should include specific details about the amenities.
  - In both options, the bike lanes are along SFR and can't easily access the river's edge, which will result in bikers using the pedestrian paths.
  - The concepts are outdated in terms of bikeway design, and the project team should redesign the bike paths with a bikeway designer that's skilled at managing conflicts.

Next Steps

- WG members asked to bring slides back to stakeholder groups and come to the next meeting with more feedback and questions.

- Miro Board exercise will be moved to meeting four.
- Project team to review comments and questions that were raised.
- Project team to review stakeholder feedback from the CRC and CRAB surveys.
- Project team to develop a matrix of the shoreline alternatives for group to tentatively discuss at next meeting.
- Project team to develop sketches that incorporate design discussions to discuss at the July 30th meeting.

Meeting Attendees

Name	Working Group Role	Affiliation
Tim Dexter	Chair	MassDOT Env.
Jason Santos	Co-Chair	DCR
Greg Robbins	SME	DCR
Ruth Helfeld	SME	DCR
Zach Veaner	SME – Head Highway Designer	MassDOT
Stacey Donahoe	SME	MassDOT
Bill Deignan	Core Working Group Member	City of Cambridge (COC)
Dennis Giombetti	Core Working Group Member – MetroWest	Office of Sen. Karen Spilka
Dira Jahanif	Core Working Group Member – River Advocate	Charles River Watershed Association (CRWA)
Elizabeth Leary	Core Working Group Member – University Affiliate	Boston University (BU)
Fred Yalouris	Core Working Group Member – Community	Community Advocate
Jason Palitsch	Core Working Group Member – MetroWest	495/MetroWest Partnership
Kane Larin	Core Working Group Member – River User	Charles River Association of Boaters (CRAB)
Christine Liu	Core Working Group Member – River User (Alternate for Laura Jasinski)	Charles River Conservancy (CRC)
Wenzheng Wang	Core Working Group Member (Alternate for Matt Peterson)	City of Boston, Transportation Department (COB)
Seth Gadbois	Core Working Group Member	Conservation Law Foundation (CLF)
Shallan Fitzgerald	Core Working Group Member – University Affiliate	Harvard University (HU)
Tom Nally	Core Working Group Member	A Better City (ABC)
Glen Berkowitz	Working Group Member (Alternate)	A Better City (ABC)
Shannon Hasenfratz	Working Group Member	Harvard University
Anne Canaday	SME	MassDOT
Dave Andrews	Project Team	BRR
Erin Reed	Project Team	HSH
Jim Keller	Project Team	TetraTech

John Curry	Project Team	HSH
Mark Fobert	Project Team	TetraTech
Meredith Avery	Project Team	VHB
Monique Hall	Project Team	BRR
Nicole Sharma	Project Team	HSH
Susan Harrington	Project Team	MassDOT
Taylor O'Neill	Project Team	HSH
Chris Calnan	Project Team	TetraTech
Kevin Thompson	SME	MassDOT

Appendix

Appendix A – Letter from A Better City

Appendix B – Emails from Harry Mattison

I-90 Multimodal Project

Throat Area / Charles River Working Group

Comments Made in the Second Session, Tuesday July 16, 2024

The following summaries points made in comments from Thomas Nally representing A Better City at the second meeting of the Throat Area/Charles River working Group on July 16, 2024.

I want to preface my remarks by saying the most critical concern for us has been the need to find a solution for the bank of the river edge treatment that can be permitted so that the entire project can proceed without undue risk.

Option 1 Modification

- I generally agree with most of the suggested changes now being studied for Option 1 including lowering the bicycle path to match the height of the pedestrian path, modifying the wall height along Soldiers Field Road, and increasing the width of the planted buffer adjacent to Soldiers Field Road.
- We question the meaning of the “slimmed down” Paul Dudley White Path. At a minimum, the pedestrian path needs to be at least eight feet wide, and the separate bicycle path needs to be at least 12 feet wide. The dimension for separation, if any, needs to be evaluated, particularly in the narrowest portions of the Throat, but in any case, the two modes should be separate to make it safe for movement at different speeds.
- At this cross section location, which we presume is at the narrowest point of the Throat at Buick Street, the “Total Shore Width” from the northern edge of Soldiers Field Road to the far side of the sheet pile wall is 38 feet.
- It is not clear that the drawing actually shows the edge of Soldiers Field Road and its barrier aligned with the point of intersection of elevation 2.0 with the existing slope of the bank that defines the edge of the river.
- The location of the defined edge of the river varies through the Throat area as does the distance between the northern limits of Soldiers Field Road and the edge of the river.
- I want to verify the further assumption that this cross section represents the farthest extension of fill into the river, with less fill required at other points where the existing bank extends farther to the north, so that the option is in compliance with the requirement of the ACOE Massachusetts General Permit applicable to non-tidal waters limited to less than one acre of fill.

- Additional sections should be taken at other locations in the Throat besides the narrowest point to illustrate how the amount of fill required to accommodate the path and features on the bank will be reduced below the 38 foot intrusion in the river. The location of those sections should be indicated on the plan view of this option.
- If the pedestrian and bicycle path are located at the same level, presumably above elevation 4.0 feet to avoid the 100-year flood level, the intermediate wall between the two paths could be eliminated and the planted buffer between paths could be reduced or eliminated. Some of the dimension saved by this change could be added to the planted buffer to accommodate trees next to Soldiers Field Road.
- As mentioned last week, concern for emergency and maintenance vehicle access may be accommodated more easily with paths at one level.
- The concept of a stacked granite block edge near the water line as a way to reduce the impact of waves and wakes on boaters should be further investigated as an appropriate solution and verified with potentially impacted users.
- In portions of the Throat, consider substituting a vegetated bank at the waterline to contribute habitats to the ecology of the river while maintaining the desired wave and wake attenuation.

Option 2 Modification

- Last week we did not talk much about Option 2 that includes a boardwalk structure located over the river.
- It is important to note the origins of the boardwalk concept which occurred when we were under the misunderstanding that fill beyond the northern edge of Soldiers Field Road (that coincided with the edge of the river defined by the intersection of elevation 2.0 feet and slope of the existing bank) could not be permitted.
- As a result, A Better City proposed and advanced the boardwalk concept to accommodate separate pedestrian and bicycle paths of the Paul Dudley White path. In the construction staging plan that A Better City developed, we also recommended construction of the PDW path at an early stage of construction to provide a safe continuous path away from the construction activity across the site south of the path.
- In response to the concerns raised by the boating community, we recommended several design changes to the boardwalk design shown on the previous environmental documents, suggesting a long span, bridge like structure, supported by single columns rather than many piles, with the deck and substructure raised high enough to significantly reduce hazards, allow sunlight to penetrate to the river surface, and allow small boats to approach the bank to support maintenance activities.

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APPENDIX B

From: Harry Mattison <
Sent: Tuesday, July 16, 2024 12:49 PM
To:
Cc:
Subject: Re: I90 Allston River Working Group feedback

Hello,

In advance of your meeting about Parkland Alternatives, I'd like to mention that both designs have a lot of room for improvement from the point of view of someone walking or biking along the paths.

- Can the many sharp turns for cyclists be replaced with smoother, safer curves?
- Can crossing conflicts between people walking and biking in the same and opposite directions be reduced?
- Why do the separated paths merge into a single path when there is space for them to remain separated?
- Why does neither plan go all the way from the River Street Bridge to the BU Bridge?
- What is the point of the "rotary" that forms the oval in the center of the parkland? Are there other options that would be safer with fewer conflicts?
- Who is the "bike advocate", "pedestrian advocate", "community representative" and "accessibility advocate" that MassDOT said would be in the Core Working Group so we can discuss these issues further?

Thank you
Harry

On Tue, Jul 16, 2024 at 9:54 AM Harry Mattison <harrymattison@gmail.com> wrote:

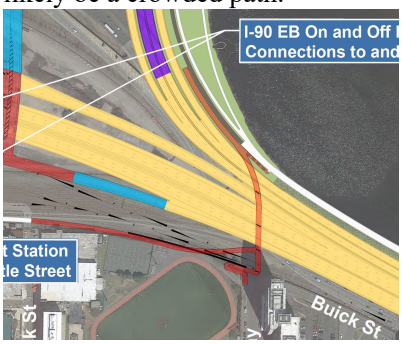
> Dear Members of the River Working Group,
>
> Thank you for being part of this important discussion. As a longtime advocate for improving the Charles River and someone who frequently bikes and runs along its paths, I would like to suggest some issues that I hope you will consider and include in your alternatives analysis.
>
> 1. **Soldiers Field Road with the 40 foot width of Memorial Drive**
>
>   MassDOT emphasizes that Soldiers Field Road is listed in the National Register of Historic Places and that the parkway qualities of the road must be respected. According to DCR's Historic Parkways Treatment Guidelines: *"Parkways are not intended to be high speed roadways and typical posted speeds rarely exceed 40 mph" and* parkways designated for pleasure vehicles only such as Soldiers Field Road should have lanes 9-10' wide *"to slow traffic & increase safety, reclaim green*

space, and restore the historic travelway and landscape"

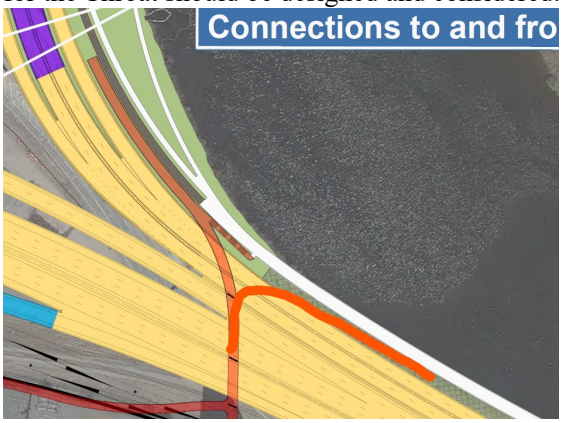
Memorial Drive functions satisfactorily as a 40' wide, 4 lane historic parkway. Your alternatives analysis should include Soldiers Field Road in the Allston Throat with these same dimensions instead of the 48.5' width currently proposed.

2. **Include an inbound ramp for the Agganis Footbridge**

   The current design proposal includes only an outbound ramp in the Charles River parkland. For the many people who will use the footbridge as a connection between Comm Ave and downtown Boston, this creates an inefficient route that includes a sharp turn to access the ramp in what will likely be a crowded path.

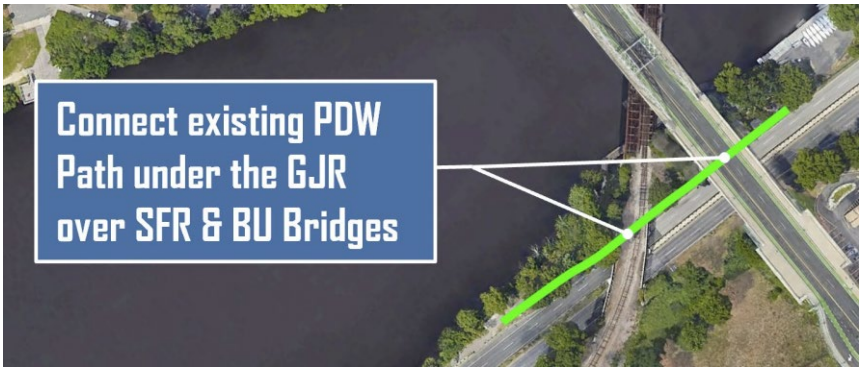


   An inbound ramp in the Throat would improve this design and make the paths safer by eliminating the need for cyclists to make a u-turn at the bottom of the outbound ramp. Fitting this into the design for the Throat should be designed and considered.



3. **Path widening near the River Street Bridge** Consistent with MassDOT Guidelines, a shared-use path should be at least 14' wide to accommodate substantial use by bicycles, joggers, skaters, and pedestrians, with a 2' shoulder on both sides. Creating separated paths for walking and biking is preferred.

4. **Connecting the existing PDW Path on land under the Grand Junction and BU Bridge**

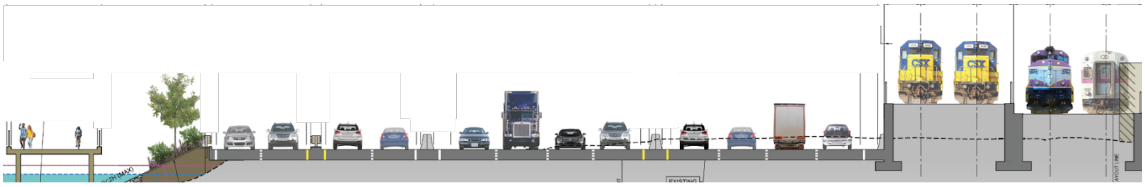


5. **Walk/Bike space on the new Grand Junction Bridge over Soldiers Field Road**

   The replacement for this bridge should include a walking/biking path on either or both sides that can connect Comm Ave, the BU Bridge, the Charles River paths on the Boston side of the river, and the Charles River paths on the Cambridge side of the river via a future reconstruction of the Grand Junction Bridge over the Charles. This design should consider the future development of the Boston University property adjacent to the BU Bridge and Soldiers Field Rd

6. **Noise and visual screening between the path and roadway**

   A row of deciduous trees is not enough to reduce the impact that 12 highway lanes and 4 rail lines will have on people using the paths, rowing in the river, and at Magazine Beach. Options for a solid wall or earthen berm along the edge of Soldiers Field Road and/or between Soldiers Field Road and I-90 needs to be evaluated.



7. **Maximize amount of path, especially for biking, on solid ground**

   A path on a structure that is not sanded or salted will be too frequently unsafe and unusable during the winter months. Bridges ice before roads because they are exposed to cold air from all sides, and therefore the path should be placed on solid ground to the greatest extent possible.

Thank you

Harry Mattison