TO:	MassDOT	DATE:	July 23, 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 25, 2024		
:	**Core Working Group Representatives:** Timothy Dexter (MassDOT, Chair) Jason Santos (DCR, Co-chair) Bill Deignan (City of Cambridge, COC) Brendan Kearney (WalkMassachusetts) Dira Johanif (CRWA) Elizabeth Leary (BU) Fred Yalouris (Community) Jason Palitsch (MetroWest Partnership) Kane Larin (CRAB) Laura Jasinski (CRC) Matt Petersen (City of Boston, COB) Seth Gadbois (CLF) Shallan Fitzgerald (Harvard University, HU) Tom Nally (ABC)		

Overview

On July 23, 2024, the MassDOT team for the Allston Multimodal Project virtually held the third meeting with the Throat Area/Charles River Working Group. The Working Group discussed new sketches for shoreline alternatives and parkland options.

The main topics of discussion were:

- Spatial distribution between the Paul Dudley White (PDW) path and buffers before Soldiers Field Road (SFR) and facilities;
- Parkland design options; and
- Parkland stormwater management, vegetation, and lighting.

Meeting Summary

PERMITTING AGENCIES

The project team met with permitting agencies last week to inform on Working Group progress and discuss feedback to date. The Army Corps emphasized that when considering the project's eligibility for the Massachusetts General Permit, they will look for a design that minimizes impacts in addition to the one-acre fill threshold. The project team will continue to periodically meet with permitting agencies to update them on the project's status and share new concepts.

POLL FEEDBACK

After the first WG meeting, CRAB shared a poll with stakeholders to gather feedback on the shoreline options. Comments still question feasibility for reducing the lane width of SFR and raising concerns about a pile supported walkway being generally unfavorable. There hasn't been much enthusiasm for the vertical walls along the side of the river. CRAB will continue to distribute the poll and share feedback at future WG meetings.

CRAB also amended their stance on wave attenuation features. They support either a planted edge, a stepped edge with wave attenuation features, or a combination of both.

Shoreline Alternative Sketches

All options depict a planted river embankment at a 3:1 slope, 12' of shoreline treatment at the water's edge, and a sheet pile wall with an elevation of 1.5' and a top of path elevation of 4.5'. Further exploration is needed of the ideal sheet pile wall height – it ideally will need to be at an elevation of 0.0', which may potentially result in a low retaining wall.

Features	Sketch A: Shared path	Sketch B: Separated paths	Sketch C: Separated paths - Reduced widths
Pedestrian path width	8 ¼ '	8'	7'
Bicycle path width	8 ¼ '	12'	11'
Buffer between pedestrian and bicycle facilities			
Width	1'	3'	2'
Treatment	Trapezoidal lane delineation (flexible)	Permeable paver buffer	Permeable paver buffer
Buffer between PDW and SFR			

Width	7.5’	3’	6’ (Minimum width for planting under DCR standards)
Treatment	Landscape buffer with plantings and 5’ jersey barrier/concrete wall	Narrow retainer wall with barrier rail	Landscape buffer with plantings and narrow retainer wall with barrier rail

SKETCH A: SHARED PATH

- Comments:
  - PDW could either be combined pedestrian and bike path with delineation (via the trapezoidal piece, drawn line, or something else) or a true shared path.
  - Wall design adjacent to SFR buffer is open to design considerations.
- Support:
  - It was speculated by participants that a barrier wall could help with noise absorption, and screening views of vehicles.
  - Wall is low enough to maintain shoreline view from SFR.
  - There was some support for a shared-used path without the trapezoidal delineator. Consider paving to delineate the direction of travel vs separating bikers and pedestrians.
- Concerns:
  - Conflicts between path users.
  - Path would likely end up as bi-directional on either side of the center delineator vs. separated bicycle and pedestrian paths, which may be the DCR standard.
  - Narrow paths, especially for bikers, 8’ is minimum.
  - Jersey barrier/concrete wall may not meet DCR standards.
  - Jersey barrier/ concrete wall may feel unsafe for path users as they wouldn’t be visible from the roadway.
  - Trapezoidal lane delineation is confusing and could be hazardous.
  - Trapezoidal lane delineator could impede snow removal efforts.

SKETCH B: SEPARATED PATHS

- Comments:
  - PDW alternative shown with maximized separated bicycle and pedestrian path widths.
  - Maximized paths show consequence to vegetative buffer between PDW and SFR which would not meet DCR minimum width of 6’ for tree planting.
- Support:

- Concerns:
  - The narrow buffer between the paths and SFR will make path-users feel too close to the roadway.
  - Lack of vegetative buffer between PDW and SFR raises health concerns.
  - Pathways will be too hot without shading.

SKETCH C: SEPARATED PATHS – REDUCED WIDTHS

- Comments:
  - PDW alternative showing separated paths with 1' reduction for pedestrian and 1' reduction for bike pathways. (7' and 11' widths instead of 8' and 12' widths respectively).
  - Pathway reductions allow for the minimum acceptable width for a planted buffer adjacent to SFR.
- Support:
  - Separated paths provide more safety for bikers and pedestrians.
- Concerns:
  - 6' of planting isn't enough space for large trees.
  - A robust landscape buffer can cause damage to the surrounding infrastructure, like the proposed retaining wall and pathways, as the tree roots grow.

Discussion

SHEET PILE WALL

- Comments:
  - Boaters will prefer the sheet pile wall over the granite wall and prefer any obstruction be minimized.
  - The design team is exploring design alternatives to help reduce the height of the sheet pile wall down to Elevation 0' so it isn't exposed. The water level is generally between 0 and 2, and almost always between 0 and 1.1.
  - There is potential for a retaining wall to make up the grade difference to show a 3:1 slope that can be planted along the shoreline, and then a vertical wall to allow us to keep the path in the upper elevation. This may make the shoreline edge more difficult to maintain because it can't be readily accessed from the path itself.
  - Are there patterns to the sheet pile wall that will leave some of it exposed while still attenuating waves?
  - The project team hasn't considered a boulder revetment because the underwater stonework would count towards the fill threshold.

PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLE FACILITIES

- Comments:
  - A softer treatment like stone dust between the pedestrian and bike paths may be better than the paved buffer to encourage bikers to stay in their lane. However, a softer treatment may require more maintenance, raises drainage concerns, and may not be resilient enough for heavy use. It also presents a potential hazard for bicyclists because it can migrate and create a slippery surface.

BUFFER BETWEEN PDW AND SFR

- Comments:
  - The planted buffer between the paths and SFR will help address critical shading on pathways, and the pathways will be too hot without it.
  - The project team is cognizant of the Environmental Justice (EJ) community and will be conducting a full GHG analysis as part of the MEPA and NEPA processes.
  - The types of plantings for the vegetative buffer will be determined after design is chosen.
  - Lighting hasn't been incorporated into the designs yet. There are many options that could be explored.

Parkland

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.

PARK OPTION A: LINEAR LAWN

- Concerns:
  - The pedestrian and bicyclist intersection at the bottom of the Agganis pedestrian ramp is unclear and could cause conflict.

PARK OPTION B: CENTRAL LAWN

- Not supported by ABC, CLF, COC, CRC, WMA.
- Concerns:
  - The lookout area is a nice space.
  - The long switchback for the bike movement from the Agganis Footbridge to eastbound PDW raises concerns.

- It's hard to picture pedestrians and bicyclists navigating the oval.

OVERALL PARK FEATURES

Amenities

- Comments:
  - Water fountains
  - Shading
  - Lighting
  - Are there anticipated plans for cyclist parking?
  - Is there potential for a BlueBike station?
- Concerns:
  - Should include bathrooms, or at least be designed so that bathrooms could be incorporated at a later point.

Design

- Comments:
  - The parkland will be utilized as a passive park space in addition to a commuting corridor as this is a convenient point of water access for a lot of people.
  - The vision for the park should be more of an active transportation park with supportive amenities; native, low maintenance plantings; and stormwater management.
  - There should be signage with educational information throughout the park that showcases its environmental impacts.
  - BU supports design to show open space as it will not be underutilized by individuals seeking to enjoy the river and parkland.
- Concerns:
  - It looks like the parks were designed around the paths, with elements like lighting, vegetation, etc. being plugged in after. Recommendation to design parkland and integrate connectivity.
  - Oval may not be the best option for central path connectivity.
  - There are already several lawn spaces around the Charles River that are underutilized because they are in marginal spaces, often sandwiched between infrastructure and inaccessible waterfront.
  - The recreational space should be more intentional.
  - Access for emergency and maintenance vehicles.

Environment and Vegetation

- Comments:
  - No need to implement lawns just for the sake of lawns.
  - Alongside DCR, we should discuss ways to support a greener, resilient shoreline with more biodiversity.
  - It would be good to see more wetlands.

Stormwater

- Comments:
  - Both options will have to accommodate the same capacity of stormwater. There is flexibility in the split between aboveground basins and underground infiltration chambers.
  - The project team should look into other underground stormwater treatment designs.
  - The project team is required to meet stormwater standards in MA, which will be evaluated through the MEPA and NEPA processes.

Roadway

- CLF, CRWA and CRC continued to express their frustrations about the path users being squeezed against SFR.

Agganis Footbridge

- There have been numerous comments about how the pedestrian bridge connects to the parkland and PDW.
  - Include an inbound ramp for the Agganis Footbridge.
  - The design team is evaluating a pedestrian bridge alternative to achieve ramps in each direction by moving the crossing further west. Considerations for shifting pedestrian bridge design include:
    - Proximity to BU property
    - Maintaining full vehicle access to Nickerson Field
    - Clearances over proposed rail infrastructure
    - Location and clearances of footbridge over SFR

Paul Dudley White Path on land under Grand Junction and BU Bridge

- The current design accounts for extending the pedestrian path below the BU Bridge. The Grand Junction Bridge replacement and abutment alignment will create newly available

width and sufficient width and height exist below the BU Bridge to provide PDW access adjacent to SFR.

Path Widening near the River Street Bridge

- The current design removes one of the two SFR outbound ramp lanes to River Street/Cambridge Street. As a result, the PDW Path width along the ramp limits will increase from the approximate existing 8-ft width to 12-ft, while still providing enough ramp width for passing a stalled passenger vehicle. Graphics were presented to show the 2017 Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) SFR ramp concept that removed both lanes and provided a wider PDW Path and landscaped area that narrowed at the River Street/Cambridge Street intersection to tie into the existing sidewalk. However, this concept was replaced with the current design that removes one of the two lanes as a result of discussions between MassDOT and the City of Cambridge as well as comments received during the DEIR comment period.
- The idea to cantilever the PDW Path over existing wall along the SFR outbound ramps was discussed. MassDOT has not studied the feasibility of cantilevering the path over the river, however, there are concerns with adding additional weight to the wall as it was constructed on wooden piles as well as the need to evaluate any potential historic impacts.

Next Steps

- WG members asked to bring sketch slides back to stakeholder groups and come to the next meeting with more feedback and questions.
- Miro Board exercise at next meeting to identify order of preferred alternatives by each stakeholder.
- Project team to discuss potentially developing additional sketches.
- Project team to continue to review comments and questions that were raised.
- Project team to continue to review feedback from the CRC and CRAB surveys.

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
Stacey Donahoe	SME	MassDOT
Bill Deignan	Core Working Group Member	City of Cambridge (COC)
Brendan Kearney	Core Working Group Member – Pedestrian Advocate	WalkMassachusetts (WMA)
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)
Laura Jasinski	Core Working Group Member – River User	Charles River Conservancy (CRC)
Matt Peterson	Core Working Group Member	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)
Christine Liu	Working Group Member (Alternate)	Charles River Conservatory (CRC)
Glen Berkowitz	Working Group Member (Alternate)	A Better City (ABC)
Shannon Hasenfratz	Working Group Member	Harvard University
Anne Canaday	SME	MassDOT
Kevin Thompson	SME	MassDOT
Chhavan Nuon	SME	MassDOT

Chris Calnan	Project Team	TetraTech
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
Monique Hall	Project Team	BRR
Nicole Sharma	Project Team	HSH
Susan Harrington	Project Team	MassDOT
Taylor O'Neill	Project Team	HSH