TO:	MassDOT	DATE:	July 30, 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 August 2, 2024		
:	**Core Working Group Representatives:** Timothy Dexter (MassDOT, Chair) Bill Deignan (City of Cambridge, COC) Brendan Kearney (WalkMassachusetts) Christine Liu on behalf of Laura Jasinski (CRC) Dennis Giombetti (SEN) Dira Johanif (CRWA) Elizabeth Leary (BU) Fred Yalouris (Community) Jason Palitsch (MetroWest Partnership) Kane Larin (CRAB) Matt Petersen (City of Boston, COB) Seth Gadbois (CLF) Shallan Fitzgerald (Harvard University, HU) Tom Nally (ABC)		

Overview

On July 30, 2024, the MassDOT team for the Allston Multimodal Project virtually held the fourth meeting with the Throat Area/Charles River Working Group. The Working Group (WG) discussed the design submitted by ABC and CLF and the Shoreline Alternatives Matrix shared by the project team.

Several members noted that it feels like the WG wants the throat area to provide too many things at once – stormwater management, commuting pathways, leisure pathways, recreational park space, habitat restoration, river-user refuge, etc. Even with compromises and concessions, there may not be enough space for the area to meet all of these expectations.

Meeting Summary

MODIFIED RIVERBANK AND PDW PATH OPTIONS MATRIX

The matrix (Appendix A) was created to capture all of the feedback from the WG discussions on the modified shoreline options. Impacts, all under an acre, are broken down by state and federal wetlands and waterways, including dredge and fill permit compliance. Options with a pile supported walkway will require a US Coast Guard permit. In addition, the matrix includes Section 4f and Section 106 Compliance, Ecological Interests, DCR Interests, River Users Interests, and Stakeholder Interests. In response to feedback from WG members, the project team will update the matrix to include:

- Shoreline Alternative Sketches A, B, and C shared at the July 16 meeting and ABC/CLF Sketch
- Concessions associated with past reductions of infrastructure cross section resulting in reduction of impacts to Section 4F properties

ABC AND CLF LETTER TO MASSDOT

Prior to this meeting, ABC submitted a letter to the MassDOT entitled "New Option 5 Design Concept: Throat/River Edge, I-90 AMP," Dated July 26, 2024, revised July 27, 2024. This letter was cosigned by the Conservation Law Foundation and included design sketches.

The attached Design Option 5 was presented and opened to discussion amongst WG members, and also added to the Miro board exercise alongside the WG Sketches A, B and C which were developed by the MassDOT design team and presented on July 23, 2024.

Presentation of New Design Option 5 as Proposed by ABC/CLF

ABC and CLF were provided the opportunity to share/discuss their New Design Option 5 with the WG members. Their design proposed the following:

1) An 11'5"-wide riverbank embankment with an elevation -1 at the shoreline slopes up at a 3:1 ratio to meet a 2' granite block wall with a base elevation of 2.7. Plantings and ecological treatments in the embankment area require further studies.
2) Guardrail atop granite blocks with a locked gate to provide boater and maintenance access.
3) Side-by-side 8'-wide pedestrian path and 14'-wide bicycle path at different grades. The paths are delineated by a 6" standard granite curb.

4) A 6'-7'-wide buffer between the PDW Path and SFR with shading plantings. Plantings will be confined to buffer area and not impede on roadway space.
5) Guardrail alongside SFR.
6) Stormwater infiltration and storage underneath planted buffer and PDW Paths.
7) 10'-wide lanes on SFR.

Discussion

SIDE-BY-SIDE FACILITIES AT DIFFERENT GRADES

- WG comments:
  - Consider what the curb would look like – chamfered curb, beveled curb, etc.
  - Consider a mountable curb that could allow for dismounting facilities for short distances to avoid conflict.
- Support:
  - Creative solution to address separate paths in limited space.
  - Similar to a bicycle path alongside a sidewalk at a city street location.
  - Supported by ABC, CLF, COB, and WalkMA.
- Project team comments
  - ADA-compliance
- Concerns:
  - Paths are too narrow to also be constrained – pedestrians constrained between wall and curb and bicyclists constrained between curb and parkland, "no elbow room." For example, if a family is pushing a stroller on the path, there is no room to "pass" them.
  - Design doesn't account for shoulders.
  - How will bicyclists and pedestrians navigate between paths and overlooks?
  - How will different types of pedestrians or bicyclists (sport, leisure, etc.) navigate sharing a narrow, constrained path?

SFR LANE WIDTH REDUCTION

DCR guidelines allow for a minimum road width of 10' on certain historic parkways. In 2021 however, former DCR Commissioner Doug Rice would not approve narrowing SFR to a width of less than 10.5'. Brian Arrigo assumed the position of DCR Commissioner in April 2023. In response to requests from CLF, ABC, and several other WG members, the project team will consider revisiting the proposed lane widths on SFR.

- Concerns:

  - Concern was expressed for safety with already tight lane width and compromised safety with any further concessions (SEN and MetroWest Partnership)

Shoreline, PDW Path, and Parkland Discussion

PATH AND PARK DESIGN

BUFFER BETWEEN PDW PATH AND SFR

Planted buffer with shading

- Supported by ABC, COB, COC, and CLF.
- WG Comments:
  - For the barrier alongside SFR, the design team should consider a glass wall on top of a crash barrier. This would maintain shoreline views for drivers on SFR while providing a sense of safety and visibility for path-users.
  - Structured soil silver cells can be used to help with root management.
- Support:
  - Provides necessary shading for path-users.
- Concerns:
  - The amount of space allocated for the buffer is not enough to plant large trees that would provide significant shading.

PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLE PATHS

Bidirectional, mixed-use shared facilities

- Supported by COC and DCR.
- Not supported by COB.
- Comments:
  - Narrower, shared-use paths would create more room for the planted buffer between the PDW Paths and SFR.

Separate facilities

- Supported by COB.
- Not supported by COC.
- Support:
  - Separated facilities is mportant for people with visual impairments.
- Concerns:

- Additional width related to separated paths and central buffer reduces potential planting space along SFR.

PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLE PATH BUFFERS

6" Granite curb

- Supported by ABC and CLF.
- Consider including accessible transition between grade separated paths.
- Concern that granite curb may make passing on paths difficult and will cause users to step off of curb.

BUFFER BETWEEN PDW PATH AND RIVER'S EDGE

2' Wall along PDW Paths

- Supported by ABC, and CLF.
- Comments:
  - Locked gate or another mechanism so DCR can maintain the shoreline but will not be readily accessible to public.
- Support:
  - Provides river egress for boaters.
- Concerns:
  - DCR noted that the guardrail and retaining wall is an impediment to maintenance access. Specifically, both the guardrail and the grade drop would prohibit maintenance; DCR needs at-grade, unimpeded access to slope for maintenance.

STORMWATER MANAGEMENT

- Comments:
  - The design team should prioritize nature-based solutions on the PDW Path and consider features like impervious pavements, bioswales, etc.
  - The project team will be conducting stormwater management analyses for projections beyond 2050 as part of the MEPA process.
- Concerns:
  - Concern expressed that Stormwater management has been approached as an afterthought instead of a priority.
  - The project team should scale stormwater management features to 2070 projections at the very least.

- Comments:
  - 2070 projections will be considered to meet the MEPA process, MassDOT is very forward thinking about designing for the future

Stormwater infiltration and management underneath SFR, PDW Path buffers, and PDW Paths

- Supported by ABC and CLF.
- Comments:
  - Must consider the elevation water table and proximity to the river.
  - Could only treat DCR stormwater.

Stormwater infiltration and storage under SFR/further from water's edge

- Supported by COB and CRWA.
- Support:
  - Considers elevation of water table and proximity to river.

SHORELINE

ENVIRONMENT AND VEGETATION

- Comments:
  - The project team is predominantly considering wetland planting on the embankment if plantings are located at or below the water level.
- Concerns:
  - Invasive species control.

MAINTENANCE

- Comments:
  - COB is considering creating a "Friends of the Throat" of "Friends of the Charles River Shoreline" group to assist with maintenance tasks.
  - Must consider DCR's current and potential capacity.

SHORELINE ELEVATIONS AND RIVER EMBANKMENT SLOPES

Shoreline elevation of 1.5'

- Not supported by ABC, CLF, or CRAB.

Shoreline elevation of 0'

- Supported by CRAB.
- Comment:
  - An elevation of 0' will accommodate the river's range of heights.

  - Being evaluated by the design team.
- Concerns:

Submerged wetland plants have been notably hard to establish on the Charles River and there is a high risk of invasive species establishment

Shoreline elevation of -1'

- Supported by ABC and CLF.
- Concerns:
  - Given the fluctuating river levels, there will be times when the entire embankment is submerged which would make it difficult to establish and maintain vegetation.
  - Not accessible from a maintenance standpoint.
  - Submerged wetland plants have been notably hard to establish on the Charles River and there is a high risk of invasive species establishment.

River embankment at 3:1 slope

- Supported by ABC and CLF as maximum.
- Support:
  - Easily maintainable if there is no wall between pathway and river.
  - Can attenuate wakes.
  - Can provide a refuge for river users.

RIVER EMBANKMENT DESIGNS

Combination stepped edge with a structured boardwalk wetland

- COB supports the floating wetland replacing a vegetation embankment noting the Wild Mile in Chicago.
- CRWA supports the floating wetlands in addition to a vegetated embankment.
- Not supported by CRAB's preferred option.
- Comments:
  - PDW Path would not be on the boardwalk.
  - Potential to add a floating dock.
- Support:
  - Separates respite functions from shoreline functions.
  - Offers habitat restoration and environmental services.
  - Less likely to become overrun by invasive species.
  - Less maintenance than planted embankment.
- Concerns:

  - Boardwalk freezing and maintenance.
  - Takes up river space.
  - Unsure how it would affect wave action and bounce back.

Combination planted and stepped granite edge

- Supported by ABC and CLF.

Sheet pile wall

- Comments:
  - The design team should consider some type of infiltration feature on top of the wall.
  - The wall should encourage base flow over surface flow to decrease the barrier impact of the wall at the river's edge.
- Concerns:
  - May not be possible to configure a sloping, vegetative edge alongside a sheet pile wall given the embankment grading.

EXPLORING PERMITS THAT ALLOW >1 ACRE OF FILL

- Discussions with ACOE have occurred.
- Not supported by COB.

SOLDIERS FIELD ROAD (SFR) WIDTH REDUCTION

- Supported by ABC, COB, COC, CLF, CRAB, and WalkMA.
- Not supported by MetroWest stakeholder and SEN.
- WG comments:
  - The speed limit can be lowered to address safety concerns.
  - As it's a historic parkway, the speed limit should be lower so drivers can enjoy the shoreline view.
- Support:
  - Narrower lanes and lower speed limits.
- Project Team comments:
  - There's ~1500' of SFR that's within the Throat Area of the project. There are no plans to narrow the parts of SFR within the Throat. The roadway suddenly narrow could create unsafe conditions. Slower speed and caution signs could be implemented to help address this, but such consequences must be included in road width analyses.
  - Impact of reduced lane widths on roadway safety.

Coordination with DCR

PRESENTING THE DESIGN

The project team will begin coordinating with DCR after deciding the preferred shoreline option and fine-tuning the design. The project team will use feedback from the WG to inform choices for the shoreline's design and features. The exact timeline for sharing the design with the DCR Commissioner is uncertain.

Miro Board Exercise

The project team created a Miro Board interactive Working Group activity for WG members to rank the shoreline alternative options.

- MassDOT's public outreach consultant provided a brief tutorial as to how to use the online interactive Miro board.
- Working Group members requested that the Miro board exercise be left open for additional time in order to compile Stakeholder feedback
- MassDOT expressed that this was intended to be used as an in meeting WG exercise but would respect the WG's requests to extend access to the Miro board for 1 week, through close of business on Tuesday 8/6.

Next Steps

- Based on feedback from this meeting, the project team will:
  - Discuss the impacts of having narrower lanes on SFR.
  - Alongside DCR, explore gates, access, and maintenance for a wall along the shoreline.
  - Explore options for shading plantings in the constrained buffer space between the PDW Paths and SFR.
  - Explore if and how graded PDW Path delineations are ADA-compliant.
  - Learn more about stormwater management options, like impervious surfaces and green infrastructure, and restrictions, including the water table elevation and proximity to the river.
  - Discuss floating wetland maintenance with DCR.

  - As part of the MEPA process, climate resiliency analysis will include a 2070 projection to meet the 2021 MEPA Interim Protocol on Climate Change Adaptation and Resiliency.
- Project team to update matrix.
- WG members asked to speak with stakeholder groups to determine shoreline preferences.
- WG members to continue Miro Board exercise until **August 6**, at which point it will be closed for comments.
- WG members to provide feedback on the Working Group structure and process at the final meeting.
- Project team to include instructions within the Miro Board.
- Next and final WG meeting to be held on **August 13, 2024.**
- The WG will not meet on August 6.

Meeting Attendees

Name	Working Group Role	Affiliation
Tim Dexter	Chair	MassDOT Env.
Greg Robbins	SME	DCR
Ruth Helfeld	SME	DCR
Bill Deignan	Core Working Group Member	City of Cambridge (COC)
Brendan Kearney	Core Working Group Member – Pedestrian Advocate	WalkMassachusetts (WMA)
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)
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
Zachary Veaner	SME	MassDOT
Chris Calnan	Project Team	TetraTech
Dave Andrews	Project Team	BRR

Erin Reed	Project Team	HSH
Jim Keller	Project Team	TetraTech
Jimin Kim	Project Team	HSH
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