



To: **Richard Davey**
Massachusetts Secretary of Transportation

From: Phil Goff, Co-Chairman East Arlington Livable Streets Coalition
David Watson, Executive Director, MassBike
Wendy Landman, Executive Director, WalkBoston
Charlie Denison, Advocacy Committee Chair, LivableStreets Alliance
Chris Hart, Director of Transportation Projects, Institute of Human Centered Design
Pete Stidman, Executive Director, Boston Cyclists Union

Re: Arlington Mass Ave Corridor Plan redesign project

Date: March 28, 2013

Dear Secretary Davey:

As a group of neighborhood and regional advocacy organizations that promote Complete Streets, safer walking and bicycling, and sustainable transportation planning policies, we are unanimous in our support of the Town of Arlington's current plan for the reconstruction of Massachusetts Avenue from the Cambridge line to Arlington Center. The Town's current plan includes the reconfiguration of the *de facto* four-lane street into a three-lane roadway with striped bike lanes, wider sidewalks, improved crosswalks with refuge islands and an assortment of streetscape enhancements. We are collectively writing to express our concern that MassDOT may give too much weight to a non-binding ballot question on the local ballot in Arlington that contradicts state policies and guidelines.

Public support for the Mass Ave project is strong throughout East Arlington and among a number of businesses in the Capitol Square business district. This has been made clear in numerous meetings in the past three years, including MassDOT's 2011 25% design hearing where over 60% of the public comments were made in support of the three-lane plan. More recently, MassDOT's Feb 26th 75% hearing drew hundreds of supporters from throughout the Town and public comments in support ran 3:1 versus those opposed. The Arlington Board of Selectmen unanimously supports the plan and would like to see the four-and-a-half year process come to a conclusion soon.

Similar to other projects that promote a reduction in the available space for motor vehicles, opposition has formed among some neighbors and businesses. For the past four years, the opposition group has become more entrenched and has tried to delay or stop the project on numerous occasions. Most recently, opponents to the current three-lane plan gathered enough signatures to place a non-binding referendum on the April 6th ballot for Town elections. The question simply asks if Arlington voters desire to "retain four lanes on Mass Ave in East Arlington as currently practiced."

The question discusses none of the safety benefits of the three-lane plan, whether four lanes would accommodate MassDOT design guidelines or the potential impact on funding of a "yes" vote. While we respect the use of a ballot referendum to guide local decision-making, the simplicity of the question is an



inappropriate response to a complex roadway design and engineering project. A resulting “yes” vote to recommend a four-lane plan would contradict MassDOT guidelines for safe bicycle accommodations and puts numerous pedestrian safety features at risk. Four travel lanes would also contradict the goals set forth in the Healthy Transportation Compact, the GreenDOT policy, the Governor’s “Way Forward” and the Mode Shift Goals to triple the share of walking, bicycling and transit use by 2030.

The Board of Selectmen has made clear their support for the project and, short of an extremely-unlikely lopsided vote, will continue to support a three-lane design in accordance with state policy and guidelines. However, in both individual meetings and at the 75% hearing, Town officials and community members have received mixed messages from MassDOT staff about the potential results of the referendum. This included hints that a majority “yes” vote for four lanes could endanger state support and funding for the current three-lane plan. This possibility is a serious concern to our organizations as a worrisome precedent to future roadway reconstruction projects that incorporate pedestrian and bicycle enhancements that may be controversial.

In conclusion, we strongly encourage MassDOT to maintain support and full funding for the reconstruction of Mass Ave in Arlington no matter the results of the simplistic non-binding referendum. To abandon support would send a message that MassDOT is unwilling to stand behind its own Complete Streets policies, guidelines and goals, and would encourage opposition to Complete Streets in projects throughout the Commonwealth.

CC: Tom Broderick, Chief Engineer, MassDOT
Kim Sloan, Project Manager, MassDOT
Senator Ken Donnelly
Representative Sean Garballey
Representative Dave Rogers
Kevin Greeley, Chair of the Arlington Board of Selectmen
Adam Chapdelaine, Arlington Town Manager
Congressman Ed Markey