

11.14

walk 

MAKING MASSACHUSETTS MORE WALKABLE

BY KEN KRAUSE

North Bank Bridge—Our persistence paid off

Sometimes successful advocacy means making sure you are in the right place at the right time.



North Bank Bridge—Big Dig mitigation that almost didn't happen.

Early in her 10-year tenure as WalkBoston executive director, Wendy Landman started attending meetings of the New Charles River Basin Citizens Advisory Committee. Landman and committee members were concerned that three Charles River pedestrian bridges promised in 1993 by the state as mitigation for the Big Dig were still not constructed 12 years later. WalkBoston had long supported these plans for pedestrian/bicycle paths on both sides of the Charles River to connect the Cambridge, Charlestown and Esplanade park systems to the Boston Harborwalk and the Rose Kennedy Greenway.

“There was a long list of things the state had committed to do that were getting done, but the three Charles River bridges kept getting pushed down the list,” Landman recalls. “It was a matter of reordering the priorities. WalkBoston took this on as our cause, and several other stakeholder organizations joined in.”

Joining the conversation from the perspective of walkers and bicyclists, Landman had a practical and persuasive argument for honoring the bridge commitments. “The state was spending hundreds of millions of dollars creating an incredible park system that essentially was a set of dead ends,” she says. “The North Bank Bridge was absolutely the critical missing piece in the plan. Without the connection and with very limited access,

they were basically dooming these two new parks to very little use.”

MassDOT officials were sympathetic, but said the holdup was simply due to lack of funding.

Undeterred, Landman led a well-attended lunchtime walk in July 2005 to bring broader public attention to the significance of the “Lost Half Mile” in the Charles River Basin near the Zakim Bridge and the need for the promised bridges. Transportation, parks, environmental and elected officials, business and institutional representatives, local residents and commuters gathered for the walk at one of the “dead end” paths near the banks of the Charles. From there, Landman could easily point out how the bridges would link the nearby Museum of Science, Spaulding Hospital, North Point development in Cambridge, Paul Revere Park in Charlestown and other destinations.

A Boston Globe article on the morning of the walk prompted the state Secretary of Environmental Affairs to call WalkBoston and ask if he could attend, and an editorial in the Boston Herald a few days later said constructing the bridge was “a promise that simply must be kept.”

Then, timing again played a part.

“While we were able to push the North Bank Bridge project to the top of the agenda, what ultimately got it built was that it was shovel-ready when ARRA (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act) funds became available,” Landman says.

The North Bank Bridge was completed and opened in July 2012, a testament to WalkBoston and Citizens Advisory Committee energetic advocacy over seven years.

The other two promised pedestrian bridges – at the MBTA commuter rail bridge and the South Bank Bridge – still are being designed, but you can count on WalkBoston to continue to be there to make sure they become a reality as well.

BY BOB SLOANE

The Old State House corner: The corner that could

Boston’s Old State House, at the corner of State and Congress Streets, is known for its 1713 statues of the British symbols—the Lion and the Unicorn—installed up where the gable meets the roof. For some 200 years, slow-moving horse and pedestrian traffic swirled around it until the streets were transformed into traffic channels in the 20th century that surrounded a small island where a ring of stones commemorated the famous Boston Massacre of 1770 (an event that actually took place further down State Street!).

In 2011, the MBTA was planning to redesign this intersection as part of its improvements to the State T station. Their plans eliminated one roadway to create a commodious plaza for groups of tourists walking the Freedom Trail.

The MBTA’s plans called for 6-foot sidewalks on both sides of the street, a 24-foot wide one-way street to accommodate fire trucks and MBTA buses and a 7-foot parking lane for MBTA deliveries/pickups.

A major shortcoming of these plans was where the Freedom Trail passes the corner of the Old State House with its heavily-used door that leads into the Blue and Orange Line T stations, a spot travelled daily by over 26,000 people, plus another 10,000 people on the Freedom Trail. For these 36,000 daily walkers, the sidewalk would still to be only 6 feet wide.

So, WalkBoston got involved. We drew up and presented to the MBTA plans that would narrow streets and/or eliminate curbside parking and put that space into wide sidewalks. We also recommended a raised crosswalk near the MBTA entrance. While our extravagant hopes were not all adopted, we did manage to gain a sidewalk widened to 10 feet at the squeezed MBTA exit location and a raised crosswalk.

For many, this would seem a small victory. But for the 36,000 people a day here, it is a significant gain—of which WalkBoston is quite proud.

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1990-2015 — wow!

We will be celebrating our 25th Anniversary throughout 2015. Renew today—Don't miss any of the celebrations. Your support continues to make our work possible! Stay tuned for our schedule of walks, talks, and events across Massachusetts—we hope to see you there.



vision zero

Zero is the number of people permitted to die in Swedish traffic, according to national law. Pillars of the Swedish model include the reduction of default speed limits and the expansion of automated enforcement. On many city streets, the speed limit has dipped below 20 miles per hour. In a departure from most American traffic safety approaches, Swedish authorities have generally dismissed the effects of education or enforcement on pedestrian safety. “Design around the human as we are,” said Claes Tingvall, the director of traffic safety at the Swedish Transport Administration and a godfather of the “Vision Zero plan.”

New York Times 05/1/2014

thank you!

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11.14 our successes

WalkBoston makes walking safer and easier in Massachusetts to encourage better health, a cleaner environment and vibrant communities.

mission

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Teens and seniors shoot [speedguns]

This October 25th, with support from the Tufts Health Plan Foundation, WalkBoston held “Speed Gun Day,” a day where teenagers and seniors measured street speeds throughout Brookline in order to make walking safer.

Seniors and teens walk more than other people, according to WalkBoston. Many teens walk because they are too young to drive or don't have access to cars. Seniors often walk to stay in shape or because they're worried about driving safety. Nationally, the largest numbers of people killed or seriously injured in crashes with cars fall into these two age groups.

This past spring, WalkBoston used speed guns to measure average speeds at 16 spots in Coolidge Corner. During the exercise, traffic was relatively calm on Beacon Street (average: 22 mph) and fast on side streets, such as Babcock and Winchester (average: 31 mph).

WalkBoston is making an effort to draw seniors and teens together to teach basic urban planning concepts. The program is working with the high school club, Students Helping Older People, to find teens to work on walking issues, as well as with the Brookline Community Aging Network to find seniors.

WalkBoston works across Massachusetts in many commercial areas with significant safety issues for seniors. Our hope is to secure state infrastructure funds to ensure the needs of walkers of all ages are met.

BY CHRISTINE GIRAUD

Why walk audits matter

For years WalkBoston has been using the walk audit as a tool for Massachusetts communities to analyze the state of walkability in their areas. A walk audit is used to assess the walking environment of a street, school environment, or neighborhood. It helps point out deficiencies such as missing sidewalks or curb ramps, obstacles, and offers concrete solutions for improvement.

Fall River recently received a \$10,000 grant as part of a collaboration between the MA Dept. of Public Health Mass in Motion and the MA Assoc. of Councils on Aging. Julie Kelly, who oversees the Fall River Mass in Motion program, and Pauline Gousie, Director of Fall River's Council on Aging, used the funds to assess conditions around the Niagara and Flint Senior Centers because they knew the seniors would be the best judges of the area's walkability. They recruited “Senior Champions” to be trained by WalkBoston to identify barriers in the physical environment that prevented safe and enjoyable walking. WalkBoston also trained the local Traffic, Engineering, Planning and Police departments.

The six walk audits conducted over the summer of 2014 found places lacking crosswalks that would allow seniors to easily cross the street, and others where crosswalks were barely visible. The ripple effect was more restriped crosswalks and department heads looking at audit findings beyond the senior center area.