



WalkBoston

March 4, 2011

Secretary Richard K. Sullivan, Jr.
Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA)
100 Cambridge Street, Suite 900
Boston MA 02114

Attn: MEPA Office, Deirdre Buckley
MEPA No. 14702

Dear Secretary Sullivan:

WalkBoston appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the Environmental Notification Form for the Rehabilitation of the Anderson Bridge between Boston and Cambridge. The proposal calls for reconstruction of the beautiful but deteriorating bridge including a new surface providing access for pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists.

The Anderson Bridge carries high pedestrian volumes, and as documented in the Charles River Basin Bicycle Pedestrian Counts (Fall, 2009), the pedestrian volume on the Anderson Bridge is one of the highest in the Charles River Basin. The 2009 weekday 4:30-6:30 PM counts showed a total of 1844 non-motorized users, and Saturday 12:00-2:00 PM non-motorized counts showed 1494 users on the Anderson Bridge. Pedestrians represented 85% of the total non-motorized traffic during those counts. Future pedestrian volumes are likely to grow as Harvard's Allston campus is developed further. Projections of pedestrian traffic need to be very clear about the volume of future pedestrian traffic and how those volumes will be accommodated on the Bridge.

We are concerned about several of the details of the proposal and request that they be given further attention during the upcoming design of the project.

1. A safe environment

WalkBoston believes that the bridge and its connections to Cambridge and Boston should be viewed as a safety-first area. The bridge provides local access between dense, high pedestrian and bicycle activity areas. That means that all practical measures should be made to reduce vehicle speeds and maximize the safety of the many walkers, runners and bicyclists.

For example, vehicle speeds should be minimized where Storrow Drive and Memorial Drive traffic turns on or off the bridge. Narrowing of curb radii is presently incorporated into the plans, but it should be extended even further to achieve a very tight radius that will slow turning vehicles – this is especially feasible because no trucks or buses are turning because they are prohibited from Memorial and Storrow Drives.

The curb ramps for wheelchairs should reflect the curb radii considerations. As now designed, it appears that wheelchair ramps are designed to be perpendicular to the outermost portion of the curve between on-ramps and the bridge. For example, the curve connecting westbound Storrow Drive and the bridge has a wheelchair ramp that faces away from Storrow Drive and

toward Harvard Stadium, which requires wheelchair users heading toward Boston to look over their shoulders at an oblique angle for possible oncoming traffic. This wheelchair ramp, and others like it, should be located perpendicular to the oncoming traffic so that both the wheelchair occupant and the oncoming vehicles have clear views of each other. Painted stop lines should be located well back from the crosswalk connected to the perpendicular wheelchair ramps.

As the Anderson Bridge is relatively short, with traffic signals at both ends and connections to narrow and busy streets, the speed of vehicles on the bridge should be very closely controlled. Sufficient signal time should be provided for pedestrians at each street crossing on both sides of the river.

One of the safety options under consideration is the elimination of the pork chop turn lane from the bridge onto Storrow Drive/Soldiers Field Road going toward Watertown. We urge that this design element be included because eliminating this lane would enhance safety for pedestrians at this location.

2. Narrowing the sidewalks

Plans and profiles of the proposed new surface of the Anderson Bridge show that the sidewalks will be narrowed by 6" on each side. We understand that widening the sidewalks to accommodate the volume of pedestrians has not been considered as an option. (While we believe that the design does not require crash barriers, if these were added to the bridge the narrowing of the sidewalk would be severe and should be reconsidered. The 1.5' wide crash barriers typically used on other bridges would be far too wide to be placed atop the sidewalks)

The narrowing of the sidewalks comes on a facility with sidewalks that are already narrower than they should be for such a heavily used pedestrian route. The existing sidewalks have been described as being 10' wide on both sides. These dimensions do not reflect the clear walking width that is narrowed in several locations by light posts and signposts. When the sidewalks are narrowed according to the plan described in the ENF, less clear width than is currently in place will be available to accommodate the growing number of pedestrians on the bridge.

Retaining the existing width of the sidewalks should be an absolute goal for the design. The clear width should not be interpreted to include the area occupied by light posts. Every possible means should be used to shift light poles to accommodate foot traffic on the sidewalk. One method would be to incorporate the light poles into the parapet wall, and another option that would reduce the impact of the poles would be to locate them immediately adjacent to the parapet wall, where they would have less impact on pedestrian traffic flow. With a proper design that considers the existing architectural elements of the bridge, the light poles could add to an already aesthetically-pleasing bridge.

WalkBoston applauds the reduction of the existing travel lanes from four to three as a step in the right direction. However, the width of the remaining 3 vehicle lanes is being increased to 10.5' for each lane. The possibility of 10' lanes should be reconsidered in the interest of not narrowing the sidewalk. At minimum, a 10' lane should be considered for the left turn lanes from the bridge, since no trucks or buses can make those turns onto Memorial Drive and Storrow Drive.

3. Underpass access on both sides of the river

WalkBoston joins with many other groups in calling for the addition of underpasses beneath the approaches to the Anderson Bridge on both sides of the river. These tunnels would provide continuity for walkers, bikers and runners along the river and eliminate the need for people using the river paths to intersect with the traffic swirling through the intersections on either end of the bridge. This would improve access for all non-motorized and motorized users of the bridge.

Conclusions

The Anderson Bridge is the major connection between the two campuses of Harvard located in Cambridge and Boston, and we believe that foot traffic will grow significantly over the next 50 years. The bridge should be a safe environment for all users. Sidewalks on the Anderson Bridge should not be narrowed, and if at all possible, they should be widened to accommodate current and projected foot traffic. Underpasses should be added along the river to accommodate growing demands from both bicyclists and pedestrians.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer comments on this project. Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Wendy Landman
Executive Director

Cc MassDOT Secretary Jeffrey Mullan
 MassDOT Highway Administrator Luisa Paiewonsky
 Boston Transportation Commissioner Thomas Tinlin
 Cambridge Director of Environmental and Transportation Planning Susanne Rasmussen