

walk

BY ANN HERSHFANG

Great highway design guide

Massachusetts will give more priority to pedestrians and bicycles thanks to a revised highway design guide and lots of work from volunteers and state leaders. The Project Development & Design Guide sets the rules for roadway design around the state. The purpose of the new guide is to “give communities more flexibility,” “remove bureaucratic red tape and costly state mandates,” and emphasize “the unique qualities that make communities special.” Weighing in at 10 pounds, the new MassHighway Project Development & Design Guide allows much more flexibility with roadway design than in the past. Chapter 3—Basic Design Controls—begins with allocation of space on a road right of way. Pedestrian needs are first[!], followed by bikes and transit, then vehicles. It is undoubtedly the most forward-looking manual in the United States.

The Guide took three years and hundreds of hours of volunteer and agency time to develop. WalkBoston participated to speak to needs of walkers. Monthly we argued, and helped edit and rewrite, as did others on the 31-member statewide Task Force. Other Task Force members included bicycle and disability advocates, environmentalists, consultants, design professionals, and staff from Regional Planning Agencies, municipalities, Massachusetts Highway Department [MHD], Federal Highway Administration, and Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation.

Some highlights of the Guide: it is possible to propose less than 12-foot lanes on roadways through downtowns and historic landscapes; even 9-foot lanes are allowed. Pedestrian and bike facilities are required. No more endless delays as local designs get stuck in MHD districts as there is a set time limit for MHD responses.

Since publication, MHD has been training its staff and informing consultants, municipalities and [continued]

BY BOB SLOANE

Applying walking basics

Reviewing the environmental filings made for both public and private development and transportation projects is one of the tools WalkBoston uses to improve the walking environment. We submit comment letters to the reviewing agencies that point out ways in which projects can and should be improved for walkers. We can't review all projects so we try to review those that are prominent or that will affect many. Among our recent reviews were Storrow Drive, the MBTA Green Line extension to Medford, 120 Kingston St. [on the Rose Kennedy Greenway], and a high/middle/elementary school campus in Taunton.

One of the most significant projects that we recently reviewed is Harvard's new Allston campus, now in the permitting process. The campus master plan includes a variety of pedestrian facilities connecting the new and old [Cambridge and Business School] campuses and the surrounding neighborhoods. WalkBoston looked at the hierarchy of pedestrian connections, the dimensions and shared uses of walkways, off-street greenways, and interior courtyard paths. Our comments addressed such issues as design standards, separation of pedestrians and bicycles, critical connections to be made, access to transit, traffic calming, paving surfaces, and walkers' needs at major intersections. Our reviews are posted at walkboston.org/projects/current_efforts.htm.

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

This summer I moved from the South End to Charlestown. I also took a vacation in Portland, Oregon. Both experiences have increased my appreciation for the basics of walkable streets. Some of these basics are noted below along with a few examples of what doesn't work well. Hopefully we'll all be inspired to fix them.

Wide sidewalks. Wide, uncluttered sidewalks make walking pleasant. In downtown Portland [and on Main St. in Charlestown] some sidewalks are 12' – 16' wide. This really welcomes walkers and adds to the vitality of the area.

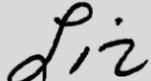
Narrow streets, few travel lanes, parking. Many of us have dashed across a wide street and held our breath to make it. How much more pleasant it is to stroll across a narrow street with few travel lanes. Monument Ave., Charlestown's main street that leads to Bunker Hill Monument, is one way and has only one travel lane with parking on two sides. This makes walking to the monument agreeable. The cars are few and walkers are protected from moving cars by parking. In downtown Portland, many streets use this layout. It's easy to walk.

Crosswalks at intersections. Crosswalks should be located where people want to walk. On Bunker Hill Street, there is a brightly painted crosswalk in front of my new building that leads to the park across the street. There is also a pedestrian signal. The combo makes crossing this street safe in that location. In contrast, City Square, built by the Central Artery Project, has no crosswalk across Rutherford Ave. to connect City Square to the new Paul Revere Park. There is an underpass, but it is hard to find and seems out of the way. Similarly, neighborhood access to the Community College Orange Line Station is poor. In both cases, good design would make a huge difference in accessibility.

Adequate and predictable signal timing. The most frustrating part of most walks (the part that leads to jaywalking) are signal lights with long cycles for cars and very short cycles for pedestrians. Fortunately the City of Boston is getting better at timing its signals appropriately. Good timing gives walkers enough time to cross and comes every 30–45 seconds. Countdown lights are also helpful.

Walkable streets are at the heart of a great community. Bostonians are fortunate that many of our streets are already, or can easily be, walkable. We each need to pay attention to what would enhance the walkability of our routes and make it happen through neighborhood advocacy or advocacy with WalkBoston.

Have a lovely fall, with many walks.


Liz Levin

Boston

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MORE WALKABLE

WINTER 2007

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WalkBoston encourages walking throughout Massachusetts for transportation, health and vibrant communities. Our education and advocacy programs give voice to citizens to make their communities walkable.

mission

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walk maps

Want to walk somewhere new, learn more about a familiar route you take, or provide walking directions for a visitor? WalkBoston has the maps to help. Just stop by the office or call to obtain printed maps or download them from our website. Available walk maps include:

- Boston Medical Center/BU Medical Center neighborhood
- CityRoutes—Start! Boston [includes Boston T stops and timed routes]
- Rose Kennedy Greenway—2006
- South Boston Seaport District and Convention Center
- Mass General Hosp. routes/sites
- Commonwealth Ave. Mall Sculptures
- Avenue of the Arts
- Institute of Contemporary Art: connecting land, water and art

snow & ice

WalkBoston recently completed a set of detailed recommendations about improving the clearance of snow and ice from Massachusetts sidewalks [see the report at walkboston.org/projects/current_efforts.htm].

The recommendations focus on creating public awareness of the problem and improving the clearance done by property owners, improving municipal management and enforcement, better training for roadway plow operators, and more sensible rules and regulations at both the state and municipal level. WalkBoston will present our recommendations to public works officials from across the state at workshops this fall.

bricks & trash

Bricks We are working on a policy about the use of bricks as a sidewalk surface. We will address whether and/or how they should be used, and related installation/maintenance issues. Our disability and universal access colleagues have approached us about this issue, particularly as the use of bricks seems to be growing.

Trash In our work with many of Boston's Main Streets programs, we have become increasingly aware of the problem of trash. Many residents cite trash as a significant impediment to walking. WalkBoston has helped design anti-trash programs with Main Streets offices, and currently is developing recommendations for effective management of this important quality of life service.

walk talk

“Takes all modes to create real mobility.” Bernard Cohen at Mass Bicycle and Ped Advisory Board, 6/07

“Jaywalking is illegal but everyone does it, since you can grow old waiting for some of the lights to turn green.” The Rough Guide to Poland

“When driving in a city, remember that discourtesy to pedestrians can turn out to be manslaughter.” Advice on roadway etiquette/Emily Post

“Replace a Sunday drive with a Sunday walk.” Little Rock billboard

Allan Rohan Crite, South End artist, dies at 97. Crite never owned a car and walked everywhere. What he saw in his everyday life became the things he painted and drew. [South End News, 9/13/07]

membership application

Complete this form & mail along with your check made payable to: WalkBoston, Old City Hall, 45 School Street, Boston, MA 02108.
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 FRIEND \$65
- corporate levels: AMBLER \$400 STRIDER \$2500
 STROLLER \$1000 RACEWALKER \$5000

Your donation is tax deductible as a charitable contribution.

MHD guide [continued]

groups at public sessions across the state. National awards have come from FHWA and the Federal Transit Administration, the American Planning Association, the Historic Roads Annual Conference, American Public Works Association, and the American Assoc. of State Highway and Transportation Officials.

WalkBoston thanks Luisa Paiewonsky, Tom DePaolo and many others at MHD; Doug Foy and Steve Burrington who conceived and helped to implement the change, and advocates across the state for their persistence. We now have choices; let's make use of them. Check out the new manual at: www.mhd.state.ma.us

make a difference

Tools to help you advocate
Want to find out more about walking or how to improve your walking environment? Download the following help from www.walkboston.org:

- Pedestrian Advocacy 101 slide show
- Making a more Walkable Community
- Reporting form on walking conditions
- About Walking—laws, facts, quotes and reasons to walk

Report problems
Notice problems such as broken lights, clogged drains, damaged sidewalks, missing crosswalks, poor snow clearance, trash or graffiti, or problem motorists? Here's how to report them.

- Boston: Mayor's hotline 617.635.4500
- Somerville: dial 311
- Moter Vehicle complaint form: mass.gov/rmv/forms/21171.pdf