October 13, 2009

Secretary Ian Bowles
Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs
100 Cambridge Street, Suite 900
Boston, MA 02114
Attn: Anne Canaday

RE: Environmental Notification Form (ENF)
Mystic Valley Parkway Bridge No. 2 over Alewife Brook
Somerville, MA
MEPA # 14487

Dear Secretary Bowles:

WalkBoston has reviewed the Environmental Notification Form (ENF) for Mystic Valley Parkway Bridge No. 2 over Alewife Brook in Somerville.

Located on an historic parkway bridge, the project is a reconstruction that will add significant width to the bridge cross-section to widen the bridge sidewalks and better accommodate pedestrians and bicycles, while maintaining access for automobile traffic.

Our understanding of the project is that the DCR plans to retain the curb-to-curb width of the bridge, striping 12' lanes with 8'4" shoulders that could be converted to bike lanes in the future. An addition of 8 feet to the sidewalks will make both directions 10 feet wide to better accommodate pedestrians and bicycles and connect to the existing and proposed multi-use paths in the adjacent riverbank parks.

While we are very pleased that the sidewalks will be widened, we urge DCR to consider the following possibilities:

1. With the guidance of DCR, we have learned over time that a parkway is not solely a road, but a park that has a road that passes through it. The Mystic Valley Parkway is a case in point. It is a set of continuous open spaces located within neighborhoods that are densely built. These open spaces are the major parks available to nearby residents. Since roadways are but one element of the parkway, they should not be allowed to determine the character of this remarkable string of urban parks.
2. It is difficult to imagine traffic moving more rapidly than 30 mph inside a park. That should be the maximum speed. All speed limits in the park and on the parkway roads should be made 30 mph or less to safely accommodate non-motorized traffic.
3. The parkway and its roads are intended for non-commercial traffic only. We have serious reservations about the need for 12' lanes for traffic if no trucks are using the bridge. Wide lanes will encourage drivers to move faster through the corridor, to the detriment on non-motorized traffic of all kinds. Since it is not a truck route and will never serve heavy trucks in the future, it seems that narrowing the travel lanes to 11' or less could be accomplished without inconveniencing traffic. This very simple design feature would produce safety benefits for pedestrians, bicycles and vehicles by slowing speeds.

4. The shoulder of the roadway should be designed for installation of bike lanes, even if not intended immediately. The Mystic River Corridor Parks are destined to become increasingly attractive to bicycle riders for both commuting and recreation. As bike traffic grows, all parts of the Mystic Valley Parkway should be upgraded to accommodate on-road bike lanes that are sufficiently wide for rider safety. The bridge sidewalks should be reserved for pedestrians, in keeping with a long-term goal of separate paths for pedestrians and bicycles through the length of the riverbank parks.
5. The Mystic Valley Parkway Bridge No. 2 is in line to provide major access to the future Route 16 Green Line station at the Somerville/Medford line. It has been described as one of three key routes people will use to get to the new station. That means that there will be peak hours of all types of traffic on the bridge. It should be designed to accommodate peak hour transit rider traffic on foot and by bicycle.
6. The nearby rotary at Mystic Valley Parkway and Alewife Brook Parkway is only a few hundred feet from this bridge. This rotary is to be redesigned to bring it up to modern standards in connection with the proposed Green Line extension to Route 16. The rotary is on the walking route to the new Green Line station, a new senior housing facility, Dilboy Stadium and the Mystic River Reservation, and is currently extremely dangerous to cross, as there are NO pedestrian accommodations of any kind. The plans (or at least conceptual changes) for this rotary should be considered when deciding how to reconstruct the bridge so all the elements ultimately work together for the benefit of all the users.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this ENF. We look forward to further development of the project.

Sincerely,

Wendy Landman
Executive Director

Robert Sloane
Senior Planner

Cc DCR Commissioner Rick Sullivan
DCR Planner Dan Driscoll
MHD Chief Engineer Frank Tramontozzi