



WalkBoston

June 29, 2009

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

RE: Environmental Notification Form (ENF)
Alewife Brook Greenway
MEPA # 14431

Dear Secretary Bowles:

WalkBoston is pleased to review the Alewife Brook Greenway Environmental Notification Form (ENF). We have found the proposal extremely interesting, as it expands the off-road network of trails and walkways that are so important to metro area residents for transportation and recreation. The ENF details improvements that will be made for both pedestrians and bicyclists on a corridor between Alewife Brook MBTA Station and the Mystic Valley Parkway that leads through Cambridge, Somerville and Arlington, and has connections to the Minuteman Pathway, the Linear Park/Community Path route into Somerville, the Mystic River parklands and future paths into Belmont and Watertown.

This is an extremely important piece of the regional trail network. We are happy to endorse its construction and even happier to realize that it may be constructed relatively rapidly as part of the national stimulus construction agenda.

In our review, we noted a few concerns of importance to pedestrians:

1. The proposed network does not provide for fully separated bicycle and pedestrian paths. In two segments of the proposed improvement (1. Between the Mystic Valley Parkway and Broadway; and 2. between Henderson Street and Massachusetts Avenue) there appears to be a partial separation of bicycle and pedestrian paths. By contrast, there is only a single path between Broadway and Henderson Street and between Massachusetts Avenue and the MBTA Alewife Station. This will result in an effective capacity of two 10'-wide paths in the areas of separated paths and only one 10'-wide path in the other parts of the corridor. We are concerned about the safety of pedestrians in portions of the corridor where the capacity is limited. In those areas, consideration should be given to a wider cross-section on the path to accommodate potential demand.
2. The proposal does not indicate whether there will be signage to can foster safe walking. Pedestrian safety in mixed walking and cycling traffic can be an issue of concern, depending on the volume of traffic that uses the paths. While we would prefer separate facilities that are clearly designated as such, it does not appear to be feasible throughout the entire corridor. We therefore suggest that signing and warnings be provided to make the route safe for all users. This might include, for example:

- Lane separation lines for the north and south directions.
- Signs warning pedestrians to stay to the right of the path.
- Signs advising cyclists to ring a warning bell as they approach pedestrians from behind.
- Route signs designating a cyclist trail along the paths that abut Alewife Brooke Parkway.

3. The Boardwalk parallel to Alewife Brook Parkway has the potential for becoming a bottleneck, as it accommodates all path traffic in a narrow corridor. The boardwalk overlooks and is cantilevered over the river in the section extending north of Henderson Street and is one of the most accessible portions of the pathways for nearby residents. It is also close to Dilboy Field, which has occasional special sports events. If the boardwalk accommodates both pedestrians and cyclists and is closely fenced on both sides, it has the potential for becoming heavily used and potentially unsafe for people on foot. Would it be possible to widen the boardwalk to at least 12 feet in this location?

4. Seating and observation areas should be maximized. The path promises to be a very pleasant route. Many people will want to sit occasionally along the route, and children, among others, will be interested in closely examining the stream.

5. For the security of people who are using the path lighting may be appropriate. Lighting of the paths would extend their usefulness to walkers and cyclists in evening hours and in fall and winter.

6. Crosswalks may be needed in several locations. Near the Dilboy Park baseball diamonds, a fence opening and curb ramp have been provided that appear designed to help people cross Alewife Brook Parkway. The addition of a crosswalk in this location would be appropriate. Other crosswalks should be examined to cross Alewife Brook Parkway at Massachusetts Avenue, at Matignon Road, at Powder House Boulevard (two curb ramps), and at Broadway. For continuity of the path network, a Mystic Valley Parkway crosswalk should be considered at the north end of this project.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to provide comments on the ENF. Please let us know if you have any questions or need further detail.

Sincerely,

Wendy Landman
Executive Director

Robert Sloane
Senior Planner

Cc Dan Driscoll, DCR Bicycle and Pedestrian Planner