



WalkBoston

March 2, 2010

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

RE: Comments on the Environmental Notification Form for the roadway reconstruction of Turnpike Street, Route 138 in Canton.
EOEA #14535

Dear Mr. Bowles:

WalkBoston appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the Environmental Notification Form for the roadway reconstruction of Turnpike Street, Route 138 in Canton. The proposal calls for reconstruction of the roadway between Sassamon Street and Randolph Street in Canton, and includes a sidewalk on the west side of the street. This sidewalk will be 5.5 feet wide.

We applaud the state for constructing this sidewalk in an area that is in need of facilities for the safety of pedestrians and are pleased to see a pedestrian network beginning to evolve in the vicinity of the town center and the educational campuses on Randolph Street. Our concerns about the installation of the new sidewalks are discussed below.

It appears that the proposed new sidewalk on the west side of Turnpike Street will complement the existing limited width sidewalks along this street north and south of the project area. When completed, this sidewalk plus the sidewalks to the north and south of it will provide a pedestrian facility extending along Washington/Turnpike Street from the Route 128/I-93 interchange to about 600 south of Randolph Street. This is commendable and very welcome. It also suggests the need for continuity of the sidewalks on the full length of this important local street and its connections via sidewalks on Washington Street and Randolph Street into the center of the community.

One of the problems we see regularly in sidewalk construction is that the necessary clear walking widths are not always preserved. Frequently, utility poles and signal utility boxes are placed directly within the sidewalk, significantly reducing the clear width available to pedestrians. This is the case with the existing sidewalks along Turnpike and Washington Streets which are very narrow and which have utility poles rendering them difficult to use, particularly for those in wheelchairs. We trust that the new sidewalks will be designed with sufficient clear width to enable comfortable and safe use by pedestrians and people in wheelchairs.

Adequate sidewalk widths are also important if bus service is provided. While there is apparently no current bus service along this portion of Turnpike Street, if future bus service is anticipated, the clear width should be enlarged where buses might stop – especially near intersections such as Randolph Street.

The sidewalk cross slope design should be closely examined for its effects on walkers or wheelchairs, in particular at driveways where steep slopes can be uncomfortable for both pedestrians and wheelchair users, can be slippery in snowy or icy conditions, and potentially dangerous if pitched steeply toward the street.

We note that the principal intersections with Turnpike Street at Randolph Street and at Washington Street already have traffic signals in place. As part of this project, countdown signals should be added in both locations to help pedestrians cross the intersection.

Wheelchair ramps are already in position at both sides of the intersection at Turnpike and Randolph Streets and at Turnpike and Washington Streets, and cut-throughs are in place in the pedestrian refuge island in the intersection of Turnpike and Washington Streets. However, no marked crosswalks exist to connect these facilities. Marked crosswalks should be added to both intersections.

We suggest that the plan include signs in advance of each pedestrian crossing to warn drivers to slow down and be alert for pedestrians.

Over time, we urge MassDot to consider widening the existing sidewalks on Turnpike and Washington Streets which are narrow and have frequent utility poles. In addition, new and improved sidewalks should be added wherever possible. Future construction of walkways along Randolph Street to the Blue Hills Regional Technical High School and Massasoit Community College would be a welcome improvement.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Environmental Notification Form for the roadway reconstruction of Turnpike Street, Route 138 in Canton. Please contact us for any clarification or additional comments that you may need.

Sincerely,

Robert Sloane
Senior Planner