



WalkBoston

November 18, 2008

Frank A. Tramontozzi, P.E.
Chief Engineer
Massachusetts Highway Department
10 Park Plaza
Boston, MA 02116

RE: Route 181 Reconstruction and Minor Widening project in Belchertown, MA
Project File No. 604433

Dear Mr. Tramontozzi:

WalkBoston is the Commonwealth's leading advocate for pedestrians and safe walking. We work throughout the state – encouraging walking, supporting pedestrian improvements and sponsoring walks. We have extensive experience in helping residents and local governments with pedestrian issues, safe routes to schools and safer street crossings and sidewalks.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the proposed reconstruction and minor widening of Route 181 in Belchertown and are pleased to have been notified by MHD about the project. We are commenting because we think there may be ways to further enhance pedestrian safety.

As we have seen in the plans, the project focuses on Route 181 between its intersection with Maple Street (the town center) and the Belchertown-Palmer town line. The reconstructed road will have two 11-foot wide travel lanes and 4-foot wide shoulders. The project will include safety improvement measures such as bicycle accommodation; sidewalk reconstruction; enhanced roadway drainage; improved sight distance in some areas; and installation of guardrail, pavement markings and signage.

We are concerned about pedestrian access in the Route 181 corridor for these reasons:

1. Safe Routes to Schools. WalkBoston is involved with a number of communities across the state in providing walking programs and encouragement, along with planning for physical improvements that could better accommodate children walking to school. In Belchertown, sidewalks connect to both the Center School on Rte 181 north of Maple Street and the Cold Spring School on Rte 181 at Old Springfield Road. Pedestrians going to schools are accommodated along Rte 181 by sidewalks between Maple Street and by a sidewalk between Old Springfield Road to a point about 2000 feet south on Rte 181. These sidewalks should be maintained and, if rebuilt, should be maintained at 4' or 5' clear walking width.

Poles, signs or other impediments should not be located within the clear walking width.

2. Continuous sidewalk on at least one side of the street. Sidewalks are available on both sides of the street between Maple Street and Old Springfield Road and along only one side of Rte 181 to a point about 2000 feet south of Old Springfield Road. Sidewalks should extend outward for at least 1 mile from schools, assuming there are residences where students might live within that radius. Along Rte 181 south of Old Springfield Road and within 1 mile from the Cold Spring School, there appear to be residences that might warrant extending the sidewalk beyond the 2000' length.
3. Crosswalks. Along Rte 181, crosswalks are provided at the intersection of Rte 181 and Maple Street and Rte 181 and Old Springfield Road. There is a single intersection with Rte 181 at Fuller Street that does not presently have a crosswalk. Consideration should be given to installation of crosswalks at the Fuller Street intersection, in addition to repainting the crosswalks at the two existing intersections.
4. Detailed design. Sidewalks already in place along Rte 181 should be reconstructed if possible – largely to bring them to a standard width. Care should be taken to assure that any widening of Rte 181 does not narrow sidewalk widths. Where possible, sidewalks should be separated from the roadway by a minimum of 4' to provide greater safety and comfort for walkers along this relatively high speed road.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this project. We look forward to working with you and welcome any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Wendy Landman
Executive Director

Bob Sloane
Senior Project Manager

Cc: MABPAB
MHD Commissioner Luisa Paiewonsky