



Charles D. Baker, Governor
Karyn E. Polito, Lieutenant Governor
Stephanie Pollack, MassDOT Secretary & CEO



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Stacy Thompson
Executive Director
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Ms. Thompson:

Thank you for your statement of August 3rd summarizing the core issues of a group of interested community organizations and community representatives. I appreciate the longstanding commitment to this process shown by each of the signatories to your statement.

Before addressing your individual concerns, I would like to first take a moment to update you on where we are in the process. Today, MassDOT and the Federal Highway Administration released the Scoping Summary Report on the project. The Scoping Summary Report describes the project's purpose and need, documents the opportunities provided for public comment during the scoping process, provides responses to some frequently received comments, and describes the alternatives proposed to be carried forward into the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).

In an effort to be fully responsive to concerns raised during the scoping process, MassDOT has decided to carry four possible alternatives into the DEIS – a “No Build” option that rehabilitates the existing I-90 viaduct and three “Build” options. All of the “build” alternatives are multimodal and make transformative changes to the portion of the project on the former Beacon Park Yards. The three Build options all include a new interchange and associated street grid, a four-track, three-platform commuter rail station (“West Station”); and bicycle and pedestrian improvements. There are three different options carried forward for the area known as the “throat”, each suggesting a different approach. One involves a new I-90 Viaduct to carry the Turnpike, one that is further from the Charles River and does not require any construction in the River either during construction or permanently. Another puts Soldiers Field Road on a new viaduct and I-90 at grade, requiring construction in the Charles River but leaving no permanent infrastructure in the River. The third eliminates any viaduct and put all rail tracks and roadways at- or below-grade, an alternative that requires construction in the Charles River and leaves some infrastructure in the River permanently.

While we all want to see the construction of a multimodal project that unlocks all of the benefits we envision for the area, I must stress that we have been at this process for over five years while a critical piece of Commonwealth infrastructure has continued to degrade. We need to get to concurrence on a preferred alternative for the throat so that MassDOT can

turn to the important questions of how the project will be built, what we need to do to mitigate any adverse impacts on natural resources and nearby communities, and how we will reduce, manage and mitigate traffic during construction. If there is no concurrence on a preferred alternative this fall, six years after the state environmental review process was launched, MassDOT will need to consider abandoning the Allston Multimodal Project and rehabilitating the existing viaduct. We simply cannot allow the current state of the viaduct to continue as is without an end in sight.

As we move forward in the MEPA/NEPA process, I want to encourage you and the other signatories to continue to work constructively through the process to help make the ultimate project the best it can be. Your letter raised three specific concerns and for ease of reply, I will respond to each individually in the order you presented them.

The project requires better transit before, during and after construction. Specifically, two tracks of the Worcester Mainline must remain open during construction and West Station must be built early in the process and include a two-track connection over the Grand Junction Bridge to Kendall Square and beyond.

MassDOT shares your desire to maintain two track commuter rail service on the Worcester Line and that issue will be one of the considerations addressed in determining which alternative to select. To that end, detailed construction planning is underway with the goal of preserving two track service during construction as much as practically feasible. Nonetheless, during some phases of construction, the design-builder may be required to reduce mainline service to a single track due to a lack of horizontal space to perform active construction while maintaining highway traffic and also allowing pathways into and out of the work site. We believe this single track operation can be limited in length allowing for two track service from points west through Boston Landing before converging to a single track. Divergence back to double track to the east would be made at the Commonwealth Avenue overpass. As project planning advances, MassDOT and the MBTA will continue to work collaboratively to explore options to maximize the availability of two revenue tracks during all peak periods of commuter rail operations in a safe manner and without interruption.

MassDOT has heard the input regarding the desire for a rail connection between West Station and North Station, via Kendall Square, and has included such service in its Rail Vision planning. Specifically, as to the timing of the station construction, in the NEPA process MassDOT has abandoned our three phased construction approach as originally envisioned in the MEPA process. All components of the multimodal project will be constructed as a single unified project. We continue to explore options for implementing earlier service at West Station but cannot, at this time, commit to implementing full West Station construction as an early action item. Similarly, MassDOT has listened to the concerns raised by various commenters about the sizing of West Station. All of the Build alternatives under consideration include a four-track, three-platform West Station, sufficient to accommodate future

connections over the Grand Junction Rail Bridge through Cambridge into North Station. We have not and will not, however, expand our project to include replacement of the Grand Junction Bridge or the immediate implementation of new service over the bridge; those are separate projects which must go through their own planning and funding processes.

Repair of the highway viaduct is neither equitable or just. Advocates and MassDOT's own consultants have offered multiple hybrid and surface options that are reasonable and achievable.

MassDOT remains committed to getting to concurrence on a multimodal project and, as noted earlier, has opted to carry three Build alternatives into the Draft Environmental Impact Statement. One of those alternatives is a modified highway viaduct, which we believe meets the project's purpose and need and avoids some of the negative impacts of both the hybrid and at-grade alternatives. We have been at this process for over five years and, as you note, we have considered several variations including an at-grade project and a hybrid that places Soldiers Field Road on a viaduct. While we are committed to taking all three options forward into the DEIS, to assert that there are multiple hybrid and surface options that are reasonable and achievable ignores the tortuous history of this project. We spent over a year and significant resources to develop the Soldiers Field Road hybrid, which we believed achieved consensus support. Yet, when we filed the scoping report with that alternative, it was roundly criticized including, I believe, by many of the signatories to your statement. We heard those criticisms and have taken them to heart. As we move through the NEPA process one of our guiding principles will be to avoid long term or permanent impact to the Charles River; indeed, to avoid all impacts if possible.

The Charles River in Allston is a tremendous asset that should be restored, enhanced and made accessible. Mitigation measures must be thoroughly and transparently considered when selecting an alternative to ensure the least overall harm and most overall benefit to this important regional resource.

As noted above, we agree. We believe that any permanent impact to the river is inappropriate if there is an alternative that meets the project's purpose and need and avoids such impact. We are also fully committed to ensuring that the selected alternative ensures the treatment of all runoff to safeguard this vital resource. Once we get to concurrence on a preferred alternative, we welcome discussions around the appropriate mitigation for the river.

Thank you again for your thoughtful letter and for consolidating the issues of concern for your organizations and constituents. I invite your continued participation in the project and your ongoing input.

Sincerely,



Stephanie Pollack
Secretary and CEO

cc: Allston Brighton Community Development Corporation Allston Brighton Health Collaborative Allston Village Main Streets Charles River Conservancy Conservation Law Foundation Emerald Necklace Conservancy Green Cambridge Kendall Square Association LivableStreets Alliance Massachusetts Conservation Voters MassBike Transit Matters WalkBoston Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce Allston Multimodal Project Task Force Members - Henrietta Davis, Cambridge representative - Harry Mattison, Allston resident - Jessica Robertson, Allston resident