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Troubled bridges reaching for aid

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Mystic Valley Parkway Bridge in need of repair. ~Photo by Bobbie Toner

Last May Governor Deval Patrick filed legislation that guaranteed the acceleration of the project to repair and replace some of the states deteriorating bridges. Then in August of last year, that legislation was signed into law. According to Accelerated Bridge Program's website, there are about 500 bridges under the control of either cities and towns, the Massachusetts Highway Department (MassHighway) or the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) across the state that were dubbed as being structurally deficient. The State has allocated a little over \$2 billion to MassHighway, and a little over \$900 million to the DCR.

The funding is set up to take care of the most frequented bridges in the most need of repair across the Commonwealth first, like the Longfellow Bridge of the Charles River, the Whittier Bridge in Amesbury, the Route 9 Bridge of Lake Quinsigamond in Shrewsbury and others. Then, the rest of the funding will be allocated through a proposal system. Among the bridges in the running for the priority list of ones in need of repair and restructuring is the Mystic Valley Parkway Bridge over the Alewife Brook, which lies between Somerville and Arlington. Last Wednesday, the DCR threw a proposal

dinner at the VNA conference room in which they gave a presentation about the bridge.

This particular bridge currently is in need of repair, and the DCR has decided that its rehabilitation should be extensive. The bridge currently has two wider driving lanes and two very narrow sidewalks. One of the ideas for the renovation is to widen the bridge, enlarging both the driving lanes and the sidewalks with the possibility of adding a shoulder, as well as making both safer and easier to navigate.

According to Alan Moore of Somerville, one of the topics which raised the most attention at this meeting was the one to "widen the sidewalks for both pedestrian and bicycle usage and adding shoulders for possible conversion to bike lanes in the future." This comes in the wake of the Green Line Extension programs decision to extend to the Mystic Valley Parkway (Route 16). The new Green Line T stop, along with other factors, have most people believing that this stretch of road will attract many other bikers and walkers in the future.

Moore stated, "Many agreed that this Alewife Brook and Mystic River area could eventually attract as many bicyclists and pedestrians as the Esplanade in Boston." This proved to be a convincing argument with listeners present from: "LivableStreets Alliance, MassBike, Somerville Transportation Equity Partnership, Somerville Bicycle Committee, WalkBoston, Mystic River Watershed Association, Friends of the Mystic River and Medford Green Line Neighborhood Alliance, Senator Pat Jehlen's office, the City of Somerville and residents from Arlington, Somerville and Cambridge," according to Moore.

This project will be part of the DCR's \$900 million budget and will take place between 2009 and 2011 if it is accepted as one of the priorities. Because of the DCR's previous promises to improve the area's biking and walking paths near the Alewife Brook and the Mystic River, this bridge should be a shoe-in for a spot on the master list.

For any more information on this project and others, visit the Accelerated Bridge Programs website at <http://www.eot.state.ma.us/acceleratedbridges>.