



December 16, 2013

Richard K. Sullivan, Jr.
Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs
Attn: Dan Driscoll
100 Cambridge St., Suite 900
Boston MA 02114

RE: Comments on the Charles River Basin Connectivity Study

Dear Secretary Sullivan:

WalkBoston has reviewed the Charles River Basin Pedestrian and Bicycle Study for Pathways and Bridges, the so-called Connectivity Study. Our comments arise from the document and from the recent presentation of the study to the public.

The Connectivity Study is very exciting work, as it assembles the issues of movement along the basin very effectively, and points out the possibilities for positive changes in the paths, walkways and running facilities along the River. DCR should be very proud of this feat, and should proceed into implementation of priority aspects of the planning effort as soon as possible.

We were particularly heartened by the Study's general recommendations for the Basin: "DCR should strive to develop a 10'-wide paved path with a parallel soft-surface trail or shoulder for runners (emphasis added) where possible..... In "pinch point" conditions, a minimum 8' paved path, with 3' shoulder on one side, should be incorporated."

This acceptance of separate paths for runners and joggers – and also pedestrians – is a very important aspect of the planning and represents continuity with past planning efforts.

In the 2002 Master Plan for the Basin a stated goal was to provide safe and continuous bicycle, skating, and pedestrian access along the entire length of the Basin, with a "separation of footpaths and bike paths where doing so will not create excessive pavement near the shoreline." The master plan also called for reducing congestion and minimizing conflicts on the paths (presumably conflicts between bicycles and pedestrians).

In 2005, users were surveyed to discern attitudes about the river facilities. The survey asked respondents to list and rank how they used the Basin. The top twelve responses were, in order of frequency:

- Walking for pleasure
- Attending concerts or events
- Relaxing in the park
- Driving on the parkways
- Running or walking for exercise
- Biking

MAKING MASSACHUSETTS MORE WALKABLE

- Using Riverbend Park in summer
- Picnicking
- Enjoying the outdoors with children
- Inline skating
- Walkathons
- Informal sports

More than sixty percent of those surveyed used the Basin more than once a week for strolling, relaxing, attending concerts or attending special events. **Eighty-six percent asked for easier and safer pedestrian access to the Basin**, and an equal proportion **recommended separating pathways by user types**. Users also frequently called for more benches and places to sit, more wildlife areas, more park rangers, and more convenient parking.

If the Continuity Study can be regarded as an update to the Master Plan, we think it may be leaving out some of the emphasis that the authors of the two planning documents clearly stated. **In particular, the separation of bicycle and pedestrian paths does not seem to be as important an aspect of the plan as the users of the park suggested to be of high importance. WalkBoston believes that path separation should be integral to all elements of the plan, as it will help deal with the many problems inherent in an area that is so heavily used with so many potential conflicts between users.**

We urge consideration of the following:

1. The elimination of conflicts between users of the paths should be uppermost as a safety precaution. Conflicts arise where bicycle traffic is moving rapidly through areas where pedestrians are strolling, causing dangerous situations for all. The conflicts are particularly difficult for commuting cyclists, some of whom are loath to slow down.
2. An expansion of the definition of 'multi-use path' would open options that are not clearly included at the moment. Multi-use pathways in the Basin should have an element – probably a parallel, separate path – that would cater to slow-moving walkers, runners and joggers. The foot traffic path could be built entirely separated from the paved path or built as a non-cambered shoulder.
3. Multi-use paths are appropriate for areas where there is low density of use by walkers, runners and cyclists, **but should not dominate planning for the heart of the very heavily used park system in the center of Boston**. Instead, the overriding goal should be provision of facilities in which space is plentiful for all park users and potential conflicts between users are minimized using methods that are appropriate to each location.
4. Existing multi-use paths should be expanded all along the river to meet the definition of separation between paths based on user needs.
5. Recognition of what runners and joggers show about their desires for facilities would help in planning new paths. Narrow dirt paths that exist informally alongside many of the paved paths in the Basin demonstrate a clear desire for a softer surface preferred by runners. The softer surfaces can also be used by pedestrians and will clearly help separate cyclists from people on foot.
6. A demonstration of the path separation is included in the proposal for the Greenough Boulevard narrowing. The effects on users would be an important element to explore.
7. Path separation in the near term may only be possible on one side of the river. The Greenough Boulevard proposal and the Memorial Drive narrowing between the Eliot and Anderson Bridges point in the direction of path separation as a major feature on the north

bank. Continuation of path separation both west and east of these two segments would be a next logical step. Except at intersections, parkland seems to be available for new or modified paths.

8. An unfortunate aspect of all path planning along the river is the intersections with streets at the bridges. The narrow paths that exist at many of the bridges will be a major feature of riverfront paths for a long time, but should not preclude path separation away from the bridge intersections.
9. As long-term improvements, underpasses at bridge intersections are appropriate and important options that will enhance the recreational and transportation options for many Basin users.

We appreciate your consideration of our comments and look forward to your responses to them. Please feel free to contact WalkBoston with questions you may have.

Sincerely,



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Executive Director



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