



WalkBoston

July 15, 2008

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

RE: Environmental Notification Form (ENF)
Commonwealth Avenue Phase 3 Landscape Improvements
Newton, MA
MEPA # 14269

Dear Mr. Bowles:

We have reviewed the ENF for the Commonwealth Avenue Phase 3 Landscape Improvements in Newton. We are pleased that walking and pedestrian facilities are major organizing features of the development. We are commenting because details of this worthy project may need further analysis to serve the needs of pedestrians safely and comfortably.

WalkBoston is the Commonwealth's leading advocate for pedestrians and safe walking. We work throughout the state encouraging walking, advocating for pedestrian improvements and working for design improvements. We have extensive experience helping residents and local government with pedestrian issues, safe routes to school, and safer street crossings.

In the case of the Commonwealth Avenue project, we commend the emphasis on rationalized pedestrian crossings of both the boulevard and the carriageway.

We noted that proposed crossings of the carriageway call for granite pavers of various sizes. Granite pavers have a relatively long history of use in Massachusetts, but do not provide a crosswalk surface that is a benefit for all types of pedestrians. These pavers raise specific questions:

1. Granite pavers cause difficulties for wheeled vehicles of any kind, such as wheelchairs and baby carriages because of the rough surface and cracks between pavers. For others, the surface and the cracks between pavers pose difficulties for, among others, disabled persons or those wearing high-heeled shoes.
2. Over time, granite pavers settle or break under vehicular traffic, frequently in an irregular, causing an unintended roughness in surface and specific hazards where pavers go missing or are destroyed.
3. Maintenance of the pavers is an issue that occurs regularly, Despite offers of continued care, budgetary difficulties and agency staffing problems can confound the best intentions over time. Without proper maintenance, granite pavers can rapidly become hazards for walkers.
4. A somewhat separate issue is pedestrian safety in the face of oncoming traffic. Granite pavers are not always visible to motorists in the same way the painted crosswalks are. The reduced visibility of the pavers may require supplementary signing and pavement painting.

With many if not all of the curbs to be reset along this portion of Commonwealth Avenue, pedestrian needs should be included. For example, many of the existing curb radii at intersections are being increased to provide for more smooth passage of vehicles. If traffic moves faster as a result, pedestrians may be in danger at these intersections. In some instances this also results in numerous islands for pedestrians to negotiate along circuitous paths across a single street.

Signage for the project seems to avoid mention of the presence of pedestrians and the need for motorists to respect the rights of people on foot. The few "Pedestrian" signs are to be removed and destroyed, as are the few "Children" signs and the "Speed Limit 30" signs – all of which are designed to provide for pedestrian safety. It is difficult to believe that there are no plans to replace the pedestrian warning signs on this 21st century project.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the Commonwealth Avenue project. Please feel free to contact us if further questions arise.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Wendy Landman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Wendy Landman
Executive Director