



Walk
Boston

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Andrew Hargens
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Dear Mr. Hargens:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Massport's Charlestown Haul Road/Rail Feasibility Study. This project is very exciting, for it affords a unique chance to examine a major pedestrian and bicycle connection of regional significance. The study area covers a critical segment of the corridor needed to connect pedestrian and bicycle paths along the Mystic River on the north and the Charles River and Boston Harbor on the south.

Existing Path Connections. Existing pedestrian and bicycle paths form the framework for this connection between the rivers:

1. On the south, the Boston Harborwalk follows the Little Mystic Channel from the Charlestown High School site and extends through the Navy Yard along the harborfront. It connects directly with the Charles River path network under the Zakim Bridge.
2. On the north, the DCR Mystic River paths currently end at the Somerville-Boston border. From there to Route 99, a new pedestrian and bicycle connection along the MBTA bus yard is being studied with MBTA funding. South of Route 99, the Boston Harborwalk extends to Medford Street between the Schrafft Center and 465 Medford Street and parallels the Mystic River waterfront behind Schrafft's.

The Critical Path Segment. Pedestrian and bicycle paths parallel to the harbor or the rivers are missing in only one portion of the Mystic River/Charles River corridor. This missing piece coincides almost exactly with the study area for Massport's feasibility analysis. (See attached map)

Medford Street in the Future. All Haul Road options are intended to directly improve Medford Street by diverting trucks. Plans shown to date call only for retaining the sidewalks that are already there, or adding walkways abutting the new Haul Road itself. In meetings on the feasibility study, community representatives suggested narrowing Medford Street to accommodate better pedestrian and bicycle connections. None of the alternatives discuss such paths or a connection to a regional network. The report simply suggests that pedestrian improvements and perhaps bicycle improvements can be considered at a later stage of the haul road design process. The existing half-mile strip of landscaped property along Medford Street is involved in nearly every alternative. We hope this landscaped property can be retained to buffer Medford Street and future pedestrian and bicycle paths from the Haul Road alignment.

What's to be done? The Medford Street corridor should include provision for pedestrians and bicycles, and the next phase of the project should include an examination of precise pathway route alternatives that are both pleasant and safe. To fulfill the vast potential of this corridor as a pathway for pedestrians and bicyclists, the feasibility analysis of the Charlestown Haul Road should include:

1. The connections between this corridor and paths to the north of this corridor along the Mystic River frontage in Somerville. Examination should include reference to the MBTA bus garage discussions and to DCR's proposed master plan for pedestrian and bicycle paths between Route 99 and Alewife Brook, and the point where the Mystic Paths join Route 99.
2. The connections between this corridor and paths to the south, along existing and proposed paths adjacent to the Little Mystic Channel. Public ownership of much of the property abutting this Channel suggests that this is possible.
3. The best location for the pathway through this corridor - should it be adjacent to Medford Street or to the Haul Road? Should it be on the north or south side of the chosen street? It should be at the same elevation as Medford Street (not below grade at the Haul Road elevation.)
4. A clearly marked and reasonably direct pedestrian route, via sidewalks and/or other off-street path connections. The route should be signed in much the same way as the Harborwalk now is.
5. A clearly marked and reasonably direct bicycle route, whether it is on-street or a part of a pathway design and construction.
6. A potential widening of the path in this corridor beyond the present Medford Street sidewalk widths to accommodate local walkers and those using the regional path system.
7. Crossings where the pathway meets Medford Street or the proposed Haul Road; the location of these crossings must be safe and signalized, with excellent sight lines for pedestrians and bicyclists, as well as motorists using the Haul Road.
8. The relationship of the pathway to the landscaped areas that abut Medford Street. Landscaping should be retained and perhaps expanded. Fencing may be required between the Haul Road and pedestrians or bicycles.

Conclusion. The proposed route for the haul road follows a logical pedestrian and bicycle route for a connection between the Charles and Mystic Rivers. The feasibility analysis report does not address this issue, focusing exclusively on the traffic implications for trucks and autos along or near Medford Street. We are concerned that a major opportunity for a pathway connection of regional importance is being overlooked. MassPort can help by examining the route as part of its Haul Road feasibility analysis.

Thank you again for this opportunity to comment.

Sincerely

Wendy Landman
Executive Director