



May 14, 2009

Frank A. Tramontozzi, P.E.
Chief Engineer, Massachusetts Highway Department
State Transportation Building
10 Park Plaza
Boston, MA 02116
Attn: Martin Leelman, Project Manager

Re: Comments on Jackson Street Safe Routes to School project, Northampton MA
Prepared for Public Hearing on May 20, 2009

Dear Mr. Tramontozzi:

WalkBoston appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Jackson Street Safe Routes to School project in Northampton. We have been involved with Safe Routes to School projects since 2000, and are currently under contract with the Commonwealth to provide services to many schools across the state (more than 50 from 2007 – 2009). We have long advocated for physical improvements that enable and support programs that encourage children to walk to school.

This project is the first of a series of improvements that will be undertaken near 5 schools in five Massachusetts municipalities. We hope that this project and the others will pave the way for subsequent, similar projects across the state. They are desperately needed for the health and safety of our children.

Location and setting: The project addresses the portion of Jackson Street between Prospect Street and Gleason Road, a distance of about 2500 feet. Jackson Street carries approximately 6300 motor vehicles per day, and is anticipated to carry 6900 vehicles 10 years from now. No counts or projected numbers for pedestrians using the streets or sidewalks were provided for the area.

Project description: The proposed Jackson Street project consists of improvements including sidewalk widening and reconstruction, school driveway entrance reconstruction, pavement markings, granite curbing, fencing, wheelchair ramps, signage, traffic calming measures, and a new pedestrian ramp from Jackson Street to the Northampton Bike Path below it.

- Sidewalk widening and reconstruction: a permanent concrete sidewalk is planned for about 1500' of the distance along the east side of Jackson Street between Prospect Street and Barrett Street. The proposed sidewalk is to be 5.5 feet wide, enlarged to 10 feet wide between the bike ramp and the existing crosswalk at Barrett Street.
- School driveway entrance reconstruction: The existing wide radius of the school entrance driveway will be reduced. The new driveway will require drivers to make slower turns, providing greater safety for walkers.
- Crosswalks: 8' wide crosswalks are planned for three of the legs at the 4-way intersection of Jackson and Prospect Streets. A single north-south crosswalk is planned for the intersection of the three-legged intersection of Jackson and Barrett Streets.
- Raised Crossings: The 8' wide east-west crosswalk at Barrett Street leading to the school will be rebuilt as a raised speed table. An additional raised crosswalk is planned for the other end of the school property near the entrance to the parking lot. Thus two raised

- crosswalks – one at Barrett Street and the other 320 feet further north at the school driveway, will serve the school. The two raised crosswalks will be supplemented by signs warning of the raised crosswalks and pavement painting to emphasize their location.
- Warning signs and pavement markings: Speed table warning signs and pavement markings are to be located both north and south of each crosswalk. No signals are planned.
 - Pedestrian ramp to the Bike Path: A permanent connection between Jackson Street and the bike path is proposed via an accessible ramp. The Bike Path can currently be accessed only at Blackberry Lane to the west where the Bike Path rises and meets Blackberry Lane at grade. The Bike Path is reported to be an increasingly important means of access to the school for students commuting on bikes and on foot.
 - Wheelchair ramps: Ramps are located at the crosswalks at the intersection of Jackson and Prospect Streets and at the north-south crossing of the intersection of Jackson and Barrett Streets. Wheelchair access will be an integral part of the 8' wide raised east-west crosswalks.
 - Concrete curbs: New curbs are proposed along the Jackson Street sidewalk between Prospect and Barrett Streets, and again at the school entrance driveway.
 - Fencing: A 4' chain link fence is proposed between the school entrance driveway and the north property line to discourage children from crossing Jackson Street where there is no crosswalk. A 6' chain link fence is proposed for the ramp to the Bikeway, to be connected into the existing fence at that location.

Comments –

This is a prototype for improvements on routes leading to schools. We think it is a wonderful idea and are happy to see it getting underway. We offer the following considerations:

1. It is possible that initial operations of the raised crosswalks will require crossing guards or flashing lights to warn motorists of children crossing.
2. The proposed sidewalk on the east side of Jackson Street has many interruptions for cuts that lower the sidewalk at each driveway resulting in a roller coaster effect for people on the sidewalk. Are there any studies that explore whether walkers or more probably, cyclists, might be affected by such cuts? Would it be possible to keep the sidewalk level and require vehicle to cross up and over the sidewalk?
3. Adding a crosswalk at the far north end of school property might be considered. At the point where the internal sidewalk network in the Hampton Gardens projects leads to Jackson Street, jaywalking by children has been reported. Jaywalking by children is unsafe and may not be controllable by simply fencing school property across the street.
4. Follow-up actions might include analysis of pedestrian and bicycle numbers to determine whether there has been an increase in these two modes, review of the safety of the raised crossings, and the effects on Jackson Street traffic (if any) after project is completed. The analysis might give guidance to similar projects.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this project. Please feel free to call if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Wendy Landman
Executive Director

Robert Sloane
Senior Planner