



WalkBoston

July 13, 2007

Commissioner Richard Sullivan
Department of Conservation and Recreation
251 Causeway Street
Boston, MA 02110-1301

RE: EOEA ENF 13777

Dear Commissioner Sullivan:

WalkBoston has been a steady participant in DCR's public process concerning the reconstruction of Storrow Drive, and we appreciate the time and care that has been given to providing opportunities for public participation. During that time, we have seen the options develop and be shaped by questions from affected residents and interested groups. We write in the hope that our comments will help to strengthen the review of the pedestrian impacts of the different alternatives, and ensure that the data concerning pedestrians is augmented and that pedestrian needs are fully addressed in DCR's planning and decision-making.

Summary Comments

- The reconstruction of Storrow Drive should be used as an opportunity to provide additional pedestrian access to the Esplanade.
- The selected option must accommodate safe pedestrian access during the surge movements that occur during large Esplanade events.
- More and better data on existing and future pedestrian volumes should be used as the basis for analysis.
- The reconstruction of Storrow Drive fits within a context of adjacent and regional transportation projects - that context must be included in the development and assessment of the options.
- We have concluded that there is not yet an option that adequately serves pedestrian access to the Esplanade. We find that Options D, D3 and A might be acceptable with further refinement, but that the other options in their present form are not.

Pedestrians and the Storrow Drive Project

The setting for the project is the City's famous and beloved Charles River Esplanade, host to many small and large public events, a bustling park, a sailing pavilion, walking and biking commuter routes, play areas and front yard to Back Bay and Beacon Hill. It is the premier regional open space of the Boston metropolitan area. The lack of vehicle access into the Esplanade is one of its great charms. The reconstruction project should emphasize improvement and augmentation of the Esplanade's benefits to both local and regional residents - all of whom must walk (or bike) into the Esplanade to enjoy it.

The volume of pedestrian traffic to the Esplanade is high during much of the year. DCR estimates 5,000,000 people use the Lower Charles River Basin each year, with 60 dates/year for concerts at the Hatch Shell, walk-a-thons, and other large events. Given these numbers, we

are dismayed that the reconstruction planning is being done with scant data on walkers for either daily trips or large events. The public, and the project, will be ill served if decisions are rushed prior to collecting and assessing such information and taking it into account. We are troubled that such a significant transportation project has advanced to this stage without good data. In fact, the number of pedestrians affected by the project and the importance of the events that occur on the Esplanade to the life of Boston and Massachusetts are so significant that they should be given an equal level of attention with vehicular movement.

The reconstruction of Storrow Drive will have significant impacts on future pedestrian circulation into and near the Esplanade. Although data is lacking to analyze the options from the perspective of pedestrian level of service, we have examined the current options based on our assessment of how well they handle:

- Daily pedestrian access to the Esplanade
- Surge pedestrian access during large events – these events are often are paired with reduced vehicular use of the roadway to allow parking and better pedestrian access

Our detailed comments are provided in an attachment to this letter. We look forward to further analysis that uses pedestrian movement data to guide the design of an acceptable option.

In addition to our comments on pedestrian access, we are concerned that a number of bigger picture issues have not been given attention in planning for the reconstruction of Storrow Drive. Brief comments on these broader issues are also included the attachment. We request that these issues be addressed as the project moves forward.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the options for Storrow Drive's reconstruction. Please feel free to contact us for clarification or additional comments.

Sincerely,

Wendy Landman
Executive Director

Robert Sloane
Senior Planner

cc: Nancy Farrell, Regina Villa Associates

WalkBoston Detailed Comments on the Storrow Drive Reconstruction Options

Ranking of the options

WalkBoston's ranking of the Storrow Drive options from a pedestrian viewpoint is preliminary due to the lack of data on existing pedestrian use of the corridor (both daily and during major surges of pedestrian traffic). In addition, a future design volume has not been stated for any of the existing or proposed Storrow Drive pedestrian crossings. New and better information could alter our assessment of the options. With these caveats in mind, WalkBoston's ranking of the existing options is:

- Possibly acceptable: D - D₃ - A
- Unacceptable in current forms and with current traffic volume assumptions: B₃ - C - B

As stated in our letter, we have concluded that there is not yet an option that adequately serves pedestrian access to the Esplanade.

Evaluation Criteria

WalkBoston's evaluation focuses on walkers and their access to the Esplanade.

- Pedestrian safety is uppermost. The preferred option must provide for maximum pedestrian safety at crossings of Storrow Drive (whether grade-separated or at-grade).
- A method must be found to accommodate and guide the surge of pedestrian traffic before and after Hatch Shell events.
- Pedestrian crossings at Arlington and Dartmouth Streets, common elements in all of the options, must be retained as a minimum number of pedestrian access points.
- The number of pedestrian crossings to the Esplanade should be augmented. Options should add to the cumulative capacity of Storrow Drive pedestrian crossings into the Esplanade between Charles Circle and Charlesgate, all of which are heavily used during large-scale events at the Hatch Shell.
- The Dartmouth Street overpass, proposed for reconstruction in its present location, will be redesigned to make it ADA-compatible. Options should not preclude ramp and/or stair connections to this overpass from Clarendon Street.
- Arlington Street is the single most important crossing for daily and surge pedestrian traffic. The capacity of the Arlington Street crossing should be increased.
- Paths within the Esplanade, as they are rebuilt or replaced, should be constructed to allow for separation of pedestrians and bicycles. Bicycle paths should be nearer the roadways than pedestrian paths.

The basis of WalkBoston's rankings

1. **Option D** provides the safest pedestrian access without vehicular conflicts. It also has the widest distribution of new pedestrian crossings into the Esplanade: Mt. Vernon, Arlington, Berkeley, Clarendon and Dartmouth Streets. Separate pedestrian and bicycle entrances to the Esplanade can be accommodated. No at-grade pedestrian crossings of the lanes of Storrow Drive are required at either Berkeley or Clarendon Streets. At-grade crossings of off-ramp lanes are required at Arlington Street (a quirk corrected by **Option D₃**.)
2. **Option D₃** provides the second best pedestrian access, but does not include crossings at Mt. Vernon and Clarendon Streets. Pedestrians are not required to cross off-ramp lanes to

- Arlington Street to get to the Esplanade. The Dartmouth Street footbridge is replaced. Two additional pedestrian access points could be added to this option: a Berkeley Street pedestrian crossing is feasible, but only by crossing an on-ramp to Storrow Drive at-grade (signals would be required for safety). Clarendon Street pedestrian access is not provided, but might be improved by adding a ramp from Clarendon to the reconstructed Dartmouth Street footbridge, if the footbridge remains located halfway between Clarendon and Dartmouth Streets.
3. **Option D3** also provides the single largest improvement of pedestrian access from Arlington Street to the Esplanade (This could also be included in **Option D**). Pedestrian crossings of off-ramps to Arlington Street are eliminated. A wide right-of-way for pedestrian access is created at Arlington Street because the eastbound on- and off-ramps to Storrow are slightly relocated (compared with **Option D**). New Back Street can be included in this wide right-of-way to accommodate even more pedestrian traffic as needed. Separate pedestrian and bicycle paths at the entrance to the Esplanade can be accommodated.
 4. **Option A** accommodates surge traffic on the surface, with pedestrians crossing the westbound expressway lanes and the off-ramps to Arlington Street at-grade. **Option A** needs to be improved to better accommodate pedestrians during large events. The highway and its off-ramps will need to be closed during large events, and the highway and ramp surfaces between the Hatch Shell and the Arlington Street entrance should be designed and rebuilt to accommodate the surges of pedestrian traffic with improvements to sight lines, lighting and signage.
 5. **Option A**, rebuilding the existing facility, and **Option B3** are surprisingly similar in the design for the entrance at Arlington Street. Both provide for a reconstructed ADA-compatible Fiedler Footbridge to accommodate daily traffic. A principal difference between the options is the handling of surge pedestrian traffic from Hatch Shell events. In **Option B3**, allowing large volumes of pedestrians to cross the westbound lanes of Storrow Drive is no longer possible, because the surface of the westbound Storrow Drive lanes has been lowered some 3 feet to accommodate a lower Fiedler Footbridge profile. We assume that this 3-foot grade differential will require fencing to prohibit pedestrian crossing of the westbound lanes. All surge traffic would be forced to use the Fiedler Footbridge or find alternative routes to cross at other locations, a prospect that is unimaginable for July 4 celebrations and other major events at the Hatch Shell. For this reason, **Option B3** is unacceptable in its service to pedestrians in this design.
 6. A variant of **Option B3** that adds a short westbound tunnel in addition to the eastbound tunnel should be examined. With both directions of Storrow Drive underground for this short distance, the pedestrian access between Arlington/Beacon Streets and the Esplanade is unimpeded. Surges of pedestrian traffic would not be required to cross highway lanes at-grade or use the Fiedler Footbridge which would not need to be replaced. Other pedestrian advantages of B3 stem from eliminating the Berkeley WB onramp and thus the Storrow curbside lane between Berkeley and Fairfield (plans only show this to Dartmouth). This space could be added to the Esplanade in this area where it is very narrow, sandwiched between road and water. Also, eliminating some of the heavy Berkeley traffic across the Back Bay to Storrow Drive would make Berkeley Street more pleasant for walkers and neighbors.

7. **Option B**, with signalized at-grade pedestrian crossings of both eastbound and westbound Storrow Drive, is not acceptable, given projections of future traffic volumes on Storrow Drive. It is the least safe of the options presented because of potential conflicts between high-volume, high-speed traffic and pedestrians who must cross both east- and westbound lanes of the expressway at-grade. If the intent of the reconstruction is to divert significant traffic volume away from Storrow Drive and convert it into a slower moving, much lower volume parkway, signalized at-grade crossings could be viable.
8. **Option C**, with a signalized at-grade pedestrian crossing of the eastbound lanes of Storrow Drive, is also unacceptable, as it presents an unsafe design for pedestrians crossing a high-volume, high-speed roadway.

Further Questions

The issues noted below are those we believe should be answered by DCR, EOT and the City of Boston, starting with those specific to the design of the reconstruction alternatives and concluding with big picture issues. A basic need is to make clear up front: (1) which agency will manage the design; (2) which agency will manage construction; and (3) what design standards will be used.

Project Design Questions:

- Volume of daily pedestrian crossings into the Esplanade from each of the access points between Charles Circle and Massachusetts Avenue.
- Volume of pedestrian surge traffic during major Esplanade events via each of the access points between Charles Circle and Massachusetts Avenue.
- Analysis of the functional network of paths – and separation of pedestrian and bicycle paths - to be constructed inside the Esplanade as a part of the roadway reconstruction.
- Analysis of the Charles Circle and Mass. Ave. pedestrian access to the Esplanade as safety valves to be used in conjunction with other crossings.
- Continuation of temporary use of the roadway for pedestrian traffic, as in Option A, where surge pedestrian traffic crosses over the WB Storrow roadway during large Esplanade events. .
- Design standards for pedestrian and bicycle paths and entrances to the Esplanade.
- Use of skateboards (manual or motorized).
- Use of rollerblades.
- Will the DCR Historic Parkway Preservation Guidelines be used for Storrow Drive?

Project Planning Questions:

- Can a significant amount of Storrow Drive traffic be diverted to the Turnpike, which is roughly parallel to Storrow Drive, serves much of the same through-traffic, and already has four westbound onramps in the Back Bay -- Arlington, Clarendon, Dartmouth and Massachusetts Avenue.
- How will the project reduce traffic impacts on the pedestrian environments of Back Bay residential streets such as Berkeley and Clarendon Streets?

Project Coordination Questions:

- How will the concurrent planning for the Bowker overpass be coordinated with the Storrow Drive project—during construction and after? An option apparently mentioned at a recent public meeting is to give the Bowker a non-conflicting westbound lane at the merge into Storrow, leaving only one through westbound lane on Storrow Drive at this point. Only one lane here would certainly affect the design of Storrow Drive to the east and should be figured in.
- The Longfellow Bridge reconstruction project appears to have a higher priority than Storrow Drive. Does this mean that more time can be devoted to more careful consideration of Storrow proposals? Does it mean that an inexpensive option should be chosen while deciding what the long-term future of Storrow Drive may be?

Project Regional Context Questions:

- Should very significant sums of money be spent to improve vehicle access into the city, or should we focus our investments on other, more sustainable, modes such as transit, walking and bicycling?
- How do the Storrow Drive options relate to the City's and the Commonwealth's commitments to reducing greenhouse gas emissions?
- How would congestion pricing (currently in use or under consideration in NY, Paris, London, and Singapore - among others) affect the requirements for Storrow Drive?