
ALLSTON BRIGHTON

More than 125 sign letter urging state to revise plan to rebuild Cambridge Street bridge in Allston

Posted by Matt Rocheleau

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By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

More than 125 residents, businesses, and organizations have signed a letter urging the state's transportation department to revise a plan to completely rebuild the busy Cambridge Street bridge in Allston.

The letter asks the state to: add at least one more spot where pedestrians can safely cross the bridge and remove a fence proposed to run down the median of the bridge; make aesthetic upgrades to the plan, including planting more vegetation; and improve safety for cyclists by expanding proposed bike lanes and installing vertical barriers between bike and traffic lanes.

The letter, which can be read in its entirety here and signed here, also asks to make the bridge safer for pedestrians during construction.

"Allston-Brighton was cut in half decades ago when the Turnpike was extended into downtown Boston, and Cambridge Street reinforces that division," the letter says. "This bridge reconstruction is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to begin repairing that damage by treating Cambridge Street not as a highway but as a neighborhood street that is used by people of all ages and abilities; on foot, on bike, on a bus, or in a car."

State officials said at a meeting last month that work is expected to start this fall on a two-year, \$10-million project to rebuild the bridge, which was built in 1964 and carries Cambridge Street over the Massachusetts Turnpike and commuter rail tracks in Allston.

The project will also include repairs to a pedestrian bridge that runs from Cambridge Street, over the turnpike, and connects to Lincoln Street.

The 475-foot-long, 92-foot-wide Cambridge Street bridge currently carries three traffic lanes in each direction, which sidewalks on either side that are about seven or eight feet wide.

Once complete, the bridge will carry two traffic lanes in each direction and bike lanes will be added along each side, officials said.

There would be a 10-foot-wide sidewalk on one side, nine-foot-wide sidewalk on the other side and six-foot-wide bike lanes abutting each sidewalk, officials said. Between the bike and traffic lanes will be a three-foot-wide buffer. Each of the four total traffic lanes will be 11 feet wide. A six-foot-wide median, with a fence running down the center, will divide the bridge's travel lanes.

According to traffic estimates counted in 2007, about 27,500 vehicles travel over the bridge each day.

The community letter to the transportation department thanks state officials for moving forward with the “long-overdue” bridge reconstruction project and for several components of the current proposal: reducing the number of traffic lanes, widening sidewalks, and adding buffered bicycle lanes.

But the letter also urges that some parts of the plan be changed.

“The need to prioritize pedestrians, cyclists and transit users will only grow in the years to come,” the letter says. “Census data show that nearly half of households in the vicinity of Cambridge St do not own a car.”

“This project represents a crucial opportunity to begin transforming Cambridge St back into a neighborhood connection, linking Allston Village to the Honan Library and the Gardner School, the river, Harvard University, Cambridge and points north, and linking North Allston residents to the many businesses, jobs and services in Allston Village and beyond,” the letter adds.

The letter was drafted by several Allston residents and local advocacy organizations. Organizations that have signed on include: the Allston Civic Association, Allston Brighton CDC, Allston Village Main Streets, Charles River Conservancy, LivableStreets Alliance, WalkBoston, Boston Cyclists Union, Allston/Brighton Bikes, A Better City, StartupLab Allston, CommonWheels, and MassBike.

Michael Verseckes, a spokesman for the state’s transportation department, said in an e-mail recently that the bridge deck is rated in “poor condition and it is at the end of its serviceable life.” Jersey barriers have for months blocked vehicles from driving on a part of the bridge that is in an advanced stage of deterioration.

“It is not unsafe for travel, however, its condition is such that it is more cost effective to completely rebuild the bridge as opposed to making significant repairs,” he said.

Construction is expected to begin this fall, though the exact timeline has not been finalized, Verseckes said. The project’s design is complete and state officials expect to advertise the project to contractors within the next few months and for work to begin shortly after.

While work is being done, there will be periodic closures to traffic lanes, sidewalks, the pedestrian bridge and surrounding roads.

For an estimated 18 months of the construction period, Cambridge Street will have just one eastbound traffic lane and two westbound travel lanes open between the project limits, which extend from the intersection of Cambridge Street, Harvard Avenue and Franklin Street to the intersection of Cambridge and Lincoln streets, Verseckes said.

During the remainder of the project, there will be two lanes open in both directions on Cambridge Street.

At least one sidewalk will be open throughout the project’s duration.

For a six-month phase of construction, Linden Street between Cambridge Street and Pratt Street will become a one-way southbound, reversing its current configuration as a one-way street northbound. During that period, northbound traffic on Linden Street will be rerouted to Harvard Avenue.

When portions of the bridge are being demolished, up to two lanes of the turnpike below may be closed, but only on an as-needed basis and only during off-peak hours, which fall around midday

