

19 July, 2022

Doug Rice, Commissioner
MA Department of Conservation and Recreation

Dear Commissioner Rice,

We write as representatives of the [Memorial Drive Alliance](#), a collective of Cambridge and Boston based environmentalists, cyclists, pedestrians, runners, city officials, and members of prominent local community organizations. We are committed to the improved mobility and resilience of the Memorial Drive Parkway, and share DCR's mission to protect and enhance our Commonwealth's natural resources for all to enjoy.

Overall, we are pleased that the DCR has thoughtfully addressed many concerns that stakeholders expressed with the initial Memorial Drive Phase III design released in early 2022. Members of our group **enthusiastically support** the following elements of the revised design:

1. The road diet, reducing vehicle travel lanes from four to two, for most of the project area.
2. The effort to preserve and protect the culturally important allée of London Plane trees and addition of new London Plane trees (+22) and native trees (+59).
3. The elimination of proposed retaining walls, keeping the pastoral nature of the riverbank.
4. The elimination of Gerry's Landing Road eastbound slip lane and increase in usable parkland.
5. The improved stormwater management features and the reduction of impervious surfaces.
6. The addition of two new pedestrian crosswalks, benches and other amenities for park users.
7. The restoration of sidewalks along the north side of Memorial Drive.
8. The improved pathway connections under and over the Eliot Bridge.

However, we continue to have **strong concerns** about aspects of the revised design and request to see the following feedback reflected in the next design phase:

1. Fully separate paths by repurposing the existing roadway: The plan specifies a new 10' paved path directly beside a 5' aggregate path for most of the project area, inviting safety conflicts among users traveling at different speeds. **Repurposing the existing roadway** will enable critical separation between travel modes in this high-traffic area, a concern that has been consistently raised in public comments. In addition to enhancing the safety and comfort of users of all ages and abilities, locating the paved path within the existing roadway right of way will offer significant environmental and economic benefits by eliminating the need to regrade the steep slope along the riverbank, eliminating the use of bioengineered coir rolls and increasing the amount of parkland available for stormwater capture and retention. Signage and surface painting as well as the careful planting of new trees between the two path types can further reinforce safe, separated multimodal travel.

2. Implement additional traffic calming measures: The road diet and elimination of highway-like guardrails alone will not prevent cars from driving at excessive speeds, as is evidenced on Greenough Blvd and Fresh Pond Parkway. Rectangular Rapid-Flashing Beacons (RRFBs) are insufficient on roads with faster travel speeds, and are routinely ignored by drivers and are not compatible with the pastoral nature of the riverbank. Alternatively, in addition to **reducing the speed limit to no greater than 25 mph**, consistent with Cambridge's non-residential roads, further physical interventions are needed and preferred:

- Additional, raised crosswalks including one initially proposed between Hawthorn and JFK Streets;
- Improve safety of people crossing Hawthorn St by making physical changes to reduce the speed of westbound vehicles turning right off of Memorial Drive and improving the sight lines;
- Treatments such as speed tables, speed humps, pinch points (medians and curb extensions), *and* chicanes along both tangent and curve sections to reduce perceived roadway width and lower vehicle speeds; and
- Gateway designs that cue drivers that they have entered a parkland environment, such as physical and visual distinctions including art, greenery, or parkland signage to communicate the transition to a low-speed, pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly corridor.

3. Restore the viewshed with smaller plantings rather than viewing platforms. As proposed, the placement of viewing platforms invites safety conflicts among users who are stopping to admire views and other users who are continuing to move along the paths. By protecting the natural riverbank with planted edges and vistas (rather than installing an engineered edge) the need for viewing platforms can be avoided.

4. Leverage nonprofit partners, neighboring institutions, and the City of Cambridge to support park amenities and plantings. Partners have expressed interest in supporting tree planting and ongoing maintenance, which is of great importance for their long-term success. Similarly, the DCR should work with partners to site and care for key amenities, including seating, water fountains, and trash bins.

5. Coordinate with MassDOT on urgently needed improvements to the Eliot Bridge. We understand that MassDOT is developing a plan to restore the crumbling masonry of the bridge; it is important that these two capital projects be coordinated.

Overall, we support the DCR's efforts to expand access to Charles River parkland, enhance safety for active transportation and recreation, improve water quality, and preserve the cultural history of the pastoral landscape. We look forward to continuing a productive conversation on how to achieve these shared goals.

Respectfully,

The Memorial Drive Alliance Steering Committee

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Memorial Drive Alliance

A Better Cambridge
Bike Harvard
Cambridge Bicycle Safety
Cambridge Citizens Coalition
Cambridge City Councilor Quinton Zondervan
Cambridge City Mayor Sumbul Siddiqui
Cambridge Committee on Public Planting
Cambridge Residents Alliance
Cambridge Urban Forestry Task Force
Charles River Conservancy
Friends of Memorial Drive
Friends of the Community Path Extension
Friends of the Grand Junction Path
Friends of the Mystic to Charles
Green Cambridge
Green Streets Initiative
Harvard Square Neighborhood Association
Livable Streets Alliance
Longwood Area Cyclists
Mass Bike
Mothers Out Front
People for Riverbend Park Trust
350 Cambridge-Somerville
Rte. 16 Traffic Calming Coalition
Sierra Club MA
Somerville Alliance for Safe Streets
WalkBoston