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September 13, 2010

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Azad Kidher
Project Manager
Massachusetts Department of Transportation
10 Park Plaza
Boston, MA 02116

Re: **Mass. Ave. Corridor Project**

Dear Mr. Kidher:

As you may recall, this office represents Eric Berger, a resident of the Town of Arlington who opposes the Town's plan for the redesign of Massachusetts Avenue, known as the "Mass. Ave. Corridor Project."¹

I am writing to call your attention to a bewildering and dangerous design flaw in the current version of the Town's plan which is soon to be re-submitted to the DOT. In particular, the proposed 14'-wide westbound travel lane from the Alewife Brook Parkway (Alewife) to Lake Street does not allow sufficient space for through traffic to pass vehicles stopped to make left-hand turns. The result will be significant traffic congestion and unsafe intrusions into the adjacent bike lane. I explain in further detail as follows:

Among the concerns raised by the DOT in rejecting the Town's initial 25% submission is that the "11' lane and the 5' bike lane [heading westbound from Alewife] will be blocked by vehicles turning into driveways and create additional midblock backups."² This is so because the plan did not provide for a left turn lane, thus requiring any vehicle attempting to turn into a driveway or onto a side street to stop in the one through lane of traffic.

Despite its self-serving assertions to the contrary, the Town has failed to resolve this problem in its revised plans. In the revised plans, the Town has "widened" the westbound travel lane from 11' to 14' by eliminating flush medians.³ Still, there are no left turn lanes until Lake Street. In a "Project Update" available on the Town's website, the Town declares, "One of the biggest changes in the [revised] plan is the

¹ The Massachusetts Department of Transportation project number is 604687.

² See MHD District Four Interoffice Memorandum from Emil Vezaarov, EIT to Brian Fallon, DPE, dated February 19, 2010.

³ A "Project Design" drawing for the eastern portion of the project posted on the Town's Mass. Ave. Corridor Project website shows that the width of that portion of the one westbound travel lane between Alewife Brook Parkway and Lake Street is 14'.

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removal of flush medians. The new design uses that road width to make a wider westbound lane (towards Arlington Center). The wider westbound lane allows cars to pass a vehicle stopped to make a left turn, or a delivery truck double parked on the right.”

Simple arithmetic shows that the Town and its planners are mistaken. In fact, a 14’ lane is *not* sufficiently wide to allow through vehicles to pass other vehicles stopped to make a left turn.

The DOT’s *Project Development & Design Guide* provides that “When a roadway...is under design, the largest design vehicle likely to use that facility on a regular basis should be used to determine the selected design values.”⁴ The operating width of a transit bus, as provided in the *Guide*, is 10.5 feet. The operating width of passenger cars and light trucks is nine feet. Under the Town’s revised plan, it is mathematically impossible for any vehicle (car, bus or truck) to swing out to the right of a stopped vehicle in the 14’ westbound travel lane and pass it without entering the bike lane and taking up at least three feet. The only way a transit bus could swing out to pass a passenger car is to move so far to the right that half of the bus enters the bike lane *and encompasses the entire five feet of that lane*. In this scenario, five feet of the bus is in the travel lane, five feet is in the bike lane, and ½ foot is between the right-hand edge of the parked cars or the north curb of Mass. Ave.

The very purpose of bike lanes is undermined if motorists are expected and encouraged to use the bike lanes as *ad hoc* travel lanes on a heavily traveled section of Mass. Ave., especially at such a time when they are zipping past cars waiting to make left turns. The public safety consequences of this arrangement are frightening and offensive to the stated objectives of the Mass. Ave. Corridor Project.

Safety issues aside, the traffic problems flowing from the Town’s revised proposal are also nightmarish. The first side street on Mass. Ave. traveling westbound from Alewife is Boulevard Road, a mere 200 feet from the intersection with Alewife. The next side street, Lafayette Street, is just 50 feet beyond that. Therefore, it is virtually certain that during rush hour, the blocked line of vehicles in the westbound lane of Mass. Ave. will extend into and through the Alewife Brook Parkway, blocking north-south traffic on that roadway. This gridlock will have far-reaching consequences.

On Mr. Berger’s behalf, I strongly urge the DOT to reject the Town’s revised plans on account of this serious design flaw. Based upon the foregoing, it is clear that the only means to solve the blockage problem and to maintain safety of all users of Mass. Ave. is to restore the two westbound travel lanes.

⁴ See Massachusetts Department of Transportation “Project Development & Design Guide” at p. 19.

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In closing, I ask that this correspondence be made a part of the official record of this Project. Please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned with any questions.

Very truly yours,



Michael J. Rossi

MJR
Enclosure

cc: Frank Suszynski
Laura Weiner