

**WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE – AND HOW DO WE GET THERE?
Some Additional Thoughts as the Task Force Heads into Overtime**

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Purpose: As we contemplate the final and additional meeting of the Longfellow Bridge Task Force, I am impressed, as are many, both by how much has been accomplished and by how much still remains to be done. I am also struck by the fact that what has already been done and what has yet to be done are quite directly related. The success of the Task Force has itself created the need for more planning, evaluation and permitting than was likely anticipate at the outset; and it now appears that those critical matters will have to be further explored, analyzed and finally decided upon in the succeeding Environmental Assessment (EA) phase of the process.

On that basis, as have some others previously, I would like to propose for consideration by both the Task Force and DOT that:

- ❖ In consultation with state and federal regulatory authorities, the EA process should be sequenced and scheduled in such a manner as to definitively identify, address and resolve:
 - First the critical bridge design and operational issues that will allow the ongoing reconstruction of the crumbling bridge span to move into final design, engineering and construction at the earliest possible date. These include setting curb-lines for most of the span based on the determination and evaluation of a preferred option from among the six bridge cross-section options being recommended by the Task Force, for which there appears to be a reasonable prospects of consensus.
 - Then the remaining design and operational issues that are clearly essential to a comprehensive bridge design solution but are less well defined and will clearly require additional time and attention. These particularly include issues and opportunities related to the design and function of the of the bridge approaches and improved pedestrian and bicycle links to the adjacent parkland, for which possible strategies are encouraging but not yet fully defined and vetted.

While an integrated solution encompassing the bridge cross-sections as well as the approaches and the adjacent parkland is ultimately requires, a preliminary decision on the former should not compromise the alternatives for the latter. And as a practical matter, given the of the current state of bridge repair, it does not seem either prudent or necessary to delay progress in one critical area progress while the EA process continues on other fronts.

- ❖ That the Task Force remain in place at least through completion of the EA stage, both to continue community input and feedback on the still critical planning, permitting and decision-making that remains to be done and to thereby enhance prospects that an EA alone will provide sufficient environmental review for this worthy and timely project.

What the Task Force Has Been Accomplished Thus Far: Among the many accomplishment of the Longfellow Bridge Task Force thus far, five seem especially notable:

1. **Project Scope:** We have achieved consensus within the Task Force and between the Task Force and DOT that, in addition to the cross-section of the bridge as it spans the river, the scope of this project must necessarily include both the links between the bridge and the riverfront parklands as well as to the local and regional streets and sidewalks in Boston and Cambridge.
2. **Bridge Cross-Sections:** We have determined a set of six multi-modal alternatives for the inbound and outbound bridge cross-sections, which collectively encompass the elements of an acceptable preferred alternative for the center span.
3. **Parkland Links:** We have identified and explored a series of thoughtful and creative options to expand and enhance the connections between the bridge and the parklands. These include the possibility of a new pedestrian bridge on the Boston side of the river, which could be designed and sited to enhance pedestrian and bicycle utilization of the bridge and in the parks.
4. **Bridge Approaches:** We have identified a range of options with respect to the design and function of the ends of the bridge, some of which involve the possibility of its being widened to address critical circulation pinch points on the Boston side of the river.
5. **Organizational Progress:** We have evolved into an informed and constructive forum that has focused and facilitated community participation in a creative, collaborative and expeditious manner.

What Remains to Be Done: In no small part because of the agreed-upon expansion in the scope of the project, there now remains almost more to be done at the end of the Task Force process than had been expected by many had to be done at its outset. This includes:

1. **Environmental Analysis of the Proposed Bridge Cross-Sections:** This will not only involve evaluation of the six cross-section options from a multi-modal traffic perspective and otherwise, but also the determination of a final preferred alternative that may be a synthesis of elements from more than one of the options as now shown. The latter will also have to address and resolve many final design details that have been referenced but not yet systematically explored by the Task Force.
2. **Environmental Analysis of the Proposed and Potential Improved Parkland Links:** While a series of encouraging recommendations for improved links between the bridge and the parkland have been advanced and appropriately applauded, they have yet to be fully and finally detailed. Although there is good reason to believe that a successful design strategy would emerge from further consideration of these critical issues and opportunities, important matters such as the physical and functional relationships between proposed parkland improvements and a possible new pedestrian bridge, as well as their combined consequences for pedestrian and bicycle circulation at the critical pinch points, for example, have yet to be detailed and evaluated.

3. **Required Section 4(f) and Related Analysis of Parkland Impacts:** Some or all of the proposed parkland and other improvements, specifically including potential widening of the bridge and a possible pedestrian bridge replacement, will have to be subject to the unavoidable *prudent and feasible alternatives* test with respect to their impacts on the existing parkland, for better and/or for worse. While there appears to be good reason to assume that the proposed improvements will meet those standards, they will necessarily involve a rigorous and detailed alternatives analysis, the results of which would be decisive as to whether or not such proposed improvements could be implemented as part of this project.
4. **Determination and Evaluation of Proposed/Potential Changes to the Bridge Connections to the Regional and Local Street and Sidewalk Networks:** Despite critical recognition that the interface between the bridge and the street/sidewalk networks are necessary elements of a comprehensive bridge design, there has been little specific or systematic attention paid to whether, how and when those connections could be improved, or even to the scope of the roadway networks that should actually be included in that effort. This obviously includes, but is not limited to, challenging issues involving the design and function of Charles Circle and environs, in both the short run and in the long term.
5. **Determination and Evaluation of a Comprehensive Preferred Alternative:** As a result of the iterative process outlined above, a comprehensive bridge design solution will have to be finally determined that fully relate and integrates the proposed bridge cross-section, the proposed bridge approaches and the proposed parkland links. That final solution will also have to address other matters referenced in previous comments – e.g., bridge paving, planting, lighting, and signage as well as cost and construction management/mitigation plans. The result of all of which should be a holistic strategy that can be recommended and approved as a preferred alternative for reconstruction of the Longfellow Bridge as a whole.

The point is that many of these outstanding issues and opportunities are at least as important as many of those that have thus far been addressed and resolved by the Task Force.; and if they are not adequately and acceptably addressed and resolved in the EA process, it is quite likely that a full environmental impact report on this project will be required, which could then seriously delay this urgent project.

A Future Role for the Task Force: Given the significance and urgency of the matters that will have to be addressed and resolved in the EA process, many of which are fundamental to realizing the consensus recommendations of the Task Force to date, I would again assert the value – and arguable necessity -- of a continuing role for the Task Force at least through the completion of the EA process. Based on past experience, there is every reason to believe this Task Force would expedite and facilitate the EA process, rather than complicate or delay it; and ongoing community participation would also be helpful in implementing an EA process that could be phased, but would not be bifurcated. For this purpose, any members of the current Task Force who wish to continue their work into and through the EA stage would be welcomed and encouraged to do so; and DOT could appoint replacements for any of those who may not choose or be able to continue. And DOT could otherwise supplement Task Force membership as appropriate and advisable to the EA stage of the planning and design process.