

FINAL COMMENTS ON LONGFELLOW BRIDGE OPTIONS
As Described in Bill Logue's October 1, 2010 Draft Narrative
And As Discussed In the October 6, 2010 Public Meeting
Submitted by Bob O'Brien of Downtown North Association

These final comments are meant to clarify and amplify, and in some cases refine and revise, two earlier sets of comments submitted on September 10th and October 1st respectively, which are incorporated herein by reference. They are also meant to convey the sincere appreciation of the Downtown North/West End community to the staff of the Department of Transportation, to their consultants and facilitators on this project, and to our fellow Longfellow Bridge Task Force members for a planning process that has been unflinching collaborative and constructive, cooperative and creative, positive and productive – not to mention edifying and encouraging. We are proud to have been a small part of it. Nonetheless

A. With Respect to the Draft Executive Summary: In my view, there are at least two matters that need additional emphasis and specificity:

- ❖ **The Historical Role of Regional Parkland Management Agencies in Ownership and Operation of the Longfellow Bridge:** As previously noted, conspicuous by its absence in the draft Executive Summary and elsewhere in the draft narrative is the fact that until quite recently the Longfellow Bridge was owned/operated by the regional parkland agency: initially the Metropolitan Parks Commission, which then became the Metropolitan District Commission, which then became the Department of Conservation and Recreation. The nature and scope of MPC/MDC/DCR responsibility in this regard reflected a longstanding public and legislative understanding that Longfellow Bridge was an integral element of the Charles River parkland system. As noted, this fact is of more than just historical interest since it underlies the basic conviction of many on the Task Force, myself included, that the scope of the Longfellow Bridge reconstruction project must necessarily include its connection to the Storrow and Memorial Drives parklands.

- ❖ **Understatement of the Implications of that Context:** In its next to last paragraph, the draft Executive Summary now states that *the Task Force saw significant opportunities to address issues at the bridge approaches to Cambridge and Boston and with connections to the parklands for pedestrians and cyclists.* I believe that this substantially understates the case from the perspective of the Task Force, which has consistently and successfully argued for a comprehensive approach to bridge design that fully integrates the bridge approaches and links to the adjacent parklands. From our perspective, this is not just an *opportunity*, it is a *necessity*.

- ❖ **Reference to 4F and other Parkland and Permitting Issues:** Given their relevance and importance, there also needs to be some mention in the Executive Summary of the regulatory and permitting issues – 4F and otherwise – that may be involved in some or all of the possible strategies that have been considered by the Task Force and may be required to improve the bridge approaches and the parkland connections as part of a comprehensive bridge design solution. While these matters are described somewhat more fully elsewhere in the document, this is another matter that is conspicuous by its absence in the draft Executive Summary.

B. With Respect to the Proposed Bridge Cross-Section Options: Although there may be some continuing disagreement about important details, there seems to be general Task Force consensus on the adequacy and appropriateness of the three inbound and the three types of outbound and inbound bridge cross-sections options that are being recommended for further evaluation in the environmental assessment (EA) process. I am assuming that in the EA process itself, within limits that faithfully reflect the spirit and intent of each option, there will be some flexibility in adjusting the details of these designs -- e.g., the precise width of motor vehicle travel lanes and their consequences of other modes of travel. Notwithstanding this flexibility -- perhaps because of it -- I would suggest consideration of the following changes to the options as now shown:

- ❖ **The Possibility of a Motor Vehicle Travel Lanes of Less than 11' Should Be Shown:** Although there is reference in the draft narrative to the possibility of a design exception to allow 10'6" motor vehicle travel lanes -- and the desire of some on the Task Force for 10' lanes based on recent bridge precedents elsewhere on the Charles River -- all of the options in the draft narrative show lanes of 11' or more in width. Given the expressed sentiments of many Task Force members for serious consideration of the a narrower motor vehicle lanes, it seems appropriate and advisable that at least one of the options in each direction should show a bridge cross-section of 10'6" to assure that this possibility has standing in the EA process. And it should be further noted in those options that a 10' motor vehicle lane could/should be evaluated as well.

The most likely candidates for showing such an alternative would be the two options with a 2-motor-vehicle lane cross-sections -- i.e., Outbound Alternative C and Inbound Alternative A -- in which the available space for other modes of travel are correspondingly most constrained. To maintain future flexibility regarding the re-allocation of modal space, the additional foot that would be gained might better be given to the bicycle lane or buffer; but I will leave that to others since there are strong arguments in favor of a wider sidewalk as well.

- ❖ **Elimination of the Proposed Bi-Directional Function Proposed for the Bicycle Lane in Outbound Alternative B -- in Favor of a Wider Sidewalk:** There seems to be little, if any, support among bicycle advocates for a 2-way bicycle lane as proposed in Outbound Alternative B, not least because 2-way bicycle traffic presents some perhaps intractable access-egress issues. For that reason, it does not seem appropriate or advisable to advance such an option for further environmental assessment or to support the expanded width required for that purpose. On that basis, I would rather recommend that Outbound Alternative B should be shown with a 12' and 1-way bicycle lane and a 15' foot sidewalk, identical to what is now shown for Inbound Alternative B.

The illustrative changes suggested above might somewhat simplify the presentation and comparison of the various conceptual designs being recommended for further review, while retaining the flexibility to combine the elements of one option -- specifically including a broader and more explicit range of motor vehicle lanes widths -- with those of another in fashioning a final preferred alternative. Although I do not think that a symmetrical approach to the inbound and outbound cross-sections appears most likely to finally emerge as a preferred strategy, the options suggested above would at least allow for that possibility in two scenarios, rather than one, as now shown.

C. With Respect to the Traffic Evaluation of the Proposed Options: Regardless of the final configuration of the six bridge cross-section options recommended for further environmental assessment, I would urge that they be subject to the following types of traffic evaluation, in addition to what would otherwise be done in any case:

- ❖ **Both of the 2-Motor Vehicle Lane Options Should be Evaluated for an HOV Lane during Peak Commuter Periods:** On the basis of such evaluation, and if a 2-motor vehicle travel lanes option is recommended as a preferred option in either direction, the EA should include an informed operational recommendation as to whether, when and where an HOV lane might be considered for implementation. This should address its applicability during the project construction period and could also contribute reducing vehicle queues and otherwise improving circulation efficiency during peak commuter periods.
- ❖ **All Options Should be Evaluated for Multi-Modal Traffic Demand and Performance During Off-Peak Periods:** On the basis of such evaluation, and in the event that 2-motor vehicle travel lanes option is recommended as the preferred option in either direction, the EA should include an informed operational recommendation as to whether and when a convertible lane might lane be considered for implementation, and if so, for what periods of time. Even if this option is only considered for weekends and holidays, for example, it could have still have a quite positive effect on the recreational and residential use of the bridge with likely fewer education and enforcement problem than might be expected during the normal work week

D. With Respect to Bridge Approaches and Parkland Connections: Beyond the Task Force consensus that the current design and function of the bridge approaches and parkland connections are a part of the problem and must be a part of the solution, there have also been a number of promising, if preliminary, attempts to develop such a more comprehensive and integrated strategy that could fully realize the multi-modal potential of the proposed bridge cross-sections.

On the Boston side of the Charles River, these have involved consideration of both 2-lane and 3-lane vehicle approaches to Charles Circle; improved pedestrian and perhaps bicycle links to the Esplanade, which might relieve and/or reallocate circulation through that intersection; and better signalization, signage and striping at Charles Circle to better handle that that burden at various times and in various places. In that context, at least four things at least appear clear:

- ❖ A combined strategy will be required since no one of those solutions will be adequate to solve multi-modal circulation problems in this vicinity, particularly including those created by the various pinch-points at the southern end of there bridge.
- ❖ While the prospects for such a strategy appear to be encouraging, based on Task Force presentations and discussion to date, no combined strategy has yet been formulated – or even fully outlined.
- ❖ Significant elements of a combined strategy appear to require the widening of the bridge at critical points and related changes to the adjacent parklands, many or all of which have important 4F and other regulatory/permitting implications and requirements.

At this late stage in the Task Force process, the responsibility for defining and evaluating the details of a comprehensive and integrated strategy for the approaches and the parklands will have to fall to the environmental assessment phase itself rather than to the Task Force itself. But is nonetheless seems appropriate and advisable for the Task Force to define some parameters and standards for that process, which might include the following:

- ❖ Any proposals to widen the bridge, either by relocating its foundation wall and/or by cantilevering its deck, need to be identified clearly and individually. On that basis, the projected parkland and transportation benefits of each such intervention can be clearly and individually described and evaluated against its burdens on the parkland and otherwise.
- ❖ Any such bridge-widening proposals should be considered from a multi-modal perspective, and not just in terms of its benefit of motor vehicle circulation alone. In that larger context, consideration of a three-lane motor vehicle approach, for example, should include narrower lanes and other strategies that would not preclude pedestrian and bicycle circulation in this area. No such solution should include elimination of pedestrian and/or bicycle circulation directly into Charles Circle, even if additional parkland alternatives are also made available. Consideration should also be given to widening the bridge in this area to provide improved pedestrian and bicycle circulation on the bridge even with a 2-lane configuration for motor vehicles.
- ❖ A signalization, signing and striping plan for Charles Circle should be defined as part of a comprehensive and interactive strategy to take specific advantage of the specific bridge cross-sections and the related approach and parkland strategies that are determined to be preferable in the EA process itself – rather than generically or hypothetically.

E. With Respect to Other Important Considerations: In previous written comments I have urged the need for Task Force attention to a variety of other important issues for the Longfellow Bridge Project, including:

- ❖ Project costs and related bidding, contracting and construction management options – e.g., design/build and other such strategies.
- ❖ Construction period mitigation plans, including a proposed traffic management plan that would be tailored to the proposed construction sequence and schedule.
- ❖ A series of other considerations including paving, planting, painting, signage, banners and sidewalk furniture; lighting of, on and under the bridge; programming and commercial possibilities; and governance structures that support the management and maintenance of the Longfellow Bridge for the longer run.

Although most of these matters are referenced at least briefly in the draft narrative, they have not been addressed by the Task Force in an serious manner. And as the case with other important matters, these issues and opportunities will clearly need much more consistent and systematic attention in the environmental assessment process.

To that end, I would recommend two course of Task Force action at this stage in the process:

- ❖ The Task Force report should emphasize that these matters should be important elements of the EA process and of the recommendation of the preferred alternative that results therefrom.
- ❖ Given the critical nature of still unfinished business on this work-in-progress, the Task Force should further request and recommend that a community participation mechanism similar to the Task Force should be continued through the EA phase and into project construction. This might include, but not be limited to, continuing the Task Force itself or some reasonable facsimile thereof.