



April 13, 2021

Mr. Jeff Parenti, Deputy Chief Engineer  
Mr. Mark MacLean, Civil Engineer V  
Department of Conservation and Recreation  
251 Causeway Street, Suite 600  
Boston, MA 02114

Re: Birmingham Parkway Feasibility Study

Dear Mr. Parenti and Mr. MacLean:

We commend DCR on this effort to reimagine the roadways in this rapidly evolving corridor in the City of Boston and we appreciate very much the opportunity to comment.

We would also like to thank you for the clear, articulate, and well-organized public presentation on March 25th. The entire project team was extremely well prepared and responsive to public questions and comments.

### **Overarching Goals and Principles**

We strongly support the project purpose as stated in the recent public presentation: “To improve vehicle, pedestrian and bicyclist safety while also enhancing neighborhood connections, better accommodating all users, and eliminating excessive pavement/increasing public green space.”

Building upon this stated purpose, we would like to express some guiding objectives from the City’s perspective:

**Simplify multimodal routes and paths and make them more legible.** As the data presented by DCR on March 25 reveals, many of these roadways are overbuilt, and roadway capacity is excessive. Going forward, right-sizing the roadways makes sense. In addition, there are issues with clarity and legibility for all modes, such that making these improvements for all modes will make the multimodal experience safer and more accessible.

**Expand neighborhood and regional access to open space, recreation, and the Charles River.** The Charles River is an exceptional local and regional open space resource. However, due to an overemphasis on automobile throughput in the existing system design and with limited safe pedestrian and bicycle crossings to the Charles River, access by other modes can be very challenging.

**Increase and make safer pedestrian and bicycle access.** The City's long term transportation plan, Go Boston 2030, calls for increased pedestrian mode share by 50 percent citywide and bicycle mode share fourfold citywide. In light of these goals, we strongly support any measures that will enhance bicycle and pedestrian access and safety.

**Consolidate parkland.** There is much open space here, but due to the design of roadways, some elements of the system are cut off from others, resulting in fragmentation. As roadways are reconfigured, a guiding principle should be to integrate and consolidate the open space as much as possible, which would also translate to ease of access for users, and management and maintenance for the DCR in the resulting open spaces.

With reference to the park and roadway design options, we would like to offer the comments below.

### **Comments on Design Alternatives**

#### **The "Eye": Reconfiguration of Nonantum Rotary**

We favor the placement of open and recreational space as shown in Alternative 1E. It makes sense to increase open space along the water's edge and relocate it away from the busy, noisy Turnpike. At the same time, we prefer the proposed design of the intersection of Parsons Street, Leo Birmingham Parkway and Soldiers Field Roadway as shown in Alternatives 1C and 1D (over 1E), as this intersection design in 1E appears confusing, inefficient, and potentially unsafe.

#### **Traditional Intersection Designs Versus Rotaries**

We strongly favor the more traditional, four-way intersections with traffic signals shown in Alternatives 1A and 1D to the roundabouts shown in Alternatives 1B and 1C. With their

double lane approaches and exits and gradual turning radii, we believe the roundabout designs would encourage high speeds and create “multiple threat” crash scenarios where a yielding driver can block the other driver’s view of a crossing pedestrian. Moreover, by providing clearer, simpler pedestrian crossings controlled by signals, the four way intersection designs would better support local neighborhood access to the open space along the Charles River.

### **Leo Birmingham Parkway**

We strongly favor the approach shown in Alternative 2B, which combines two bidirectional travel lanes in the southern carriageway and replaces the north carriageway with a multimodal path. This option would yield the greatest amount of usable, accessible open space of the three alternatives while placing the open space next to the Charles River. Placing bidirectional lanes in the same carriageway would also help to increase friction and reduce the temptation to speed. As you know, this design is also consistent with a recommendation of the BPDA’s Draft A-B Mobility Plan (see <http://www.bostonplans.org/getattachment/02411c03-f3ac-4375-8b37-d35e587caed9>, pages 88 - 92)

While we strongly favor Alternative 2B, we would also like to suggest some changes to this design:

#### **Wide, separate, and co-located bicycle and pedestrian facilities in multimodal**

**path:** We suggest that the multimodal path incorporate *separate, parallel, and co-located* pedestrian and bicycle paths. As part of this co-located path, we would recommend a two-way bicycle path that is at least 12’ - 14’ wide and the pedestrian path with be a minimum of 8’ - 10’. While co-located, the paths should be of different materials--for example, the pedestrian path could be concrete while the bike path could be paved--to visually reinforce the distinct uses of each path without relying on signage or striping. The co-location of pedestrians and cyclists also could serve to simplify the maintenance of the paths.

**Emergency vehicle access:** The additional dimension required to create separate, colocated bicycle and pedestrian paths would provide sufficient right of way for emergency vehicle use, if necessary. In this way, the carriageway used for vehicle travel lanes would not need to have additional dimension to allow emergency vehicles.

**Narrow travel lanes and shoulders in carriageway:** In order to increase friction and reduce speeds, we strongly recommend reducing travel lanes to 11' and limiting shoulders to 1', so that the total roadway width does not exceed 24'. If using the existing pavement and curb lines, any additional dimension should be conspicuously marked with cross hatching so that it is clear that it is not intended for travel. Or, consider on-street parking to narrow the roadway.

**Temporary, tactical conversion of north carriageway:** Alternative 2B would also lend itself to temporary, "tactical" conversion of the north carriageway to use as a multimodal path. This could be achieved at minimal cost, and we would strongly support this tactical conversion as early as summer 2021, if possible.

### **Opportunity for More Dramatic Restructuring of the Roadways**

While we commend and strongly support the proposals as discussed above, we would encourage DCR to consider a more dramatic restructuring of Soldiers Field Road and Leo Birmingham Parkway to further rationalize the roadway network, the parkland, and the development parcels. This may be feasible through the assembly of multiple parcels that are currently under single ownership.

For instance, perhaps Leo Birmingham Parkway could connect to Soldiers Field Road, or vice versa, farther east, in an alignment with North Beacon Street. This would allow DCR to further expand open space and retire a portion of Leo Birmingham Parkway or Soldiers Field Road, which would further simplify the roadway network by removing one leg of the Parsons Street/Soldiers Field Road/Leo Birmingham Parkway intersection. While this may not be feasible in today's project, we encourage DCR to think about such opportunities, as this area is seeing interest from developers. In addition, these opportunities may influence the design and evaluation of today's alternatives, as some are likely better suited to enable dramatic restructuring of the roadways and expansion of open space in the future.

Other changes could also be envisioned that would provide benefits to all owners and users, in addition to harnessing development to help finance far-reaching improvements to the public realm.

To summarize, we applaud DCR goals to improve vehicle, pedestrian, and bicyclist safety while also enhancing neighborhood connections, better accommodating all users, and



eliminating excessive pavement and increasing public green space. And we appreciate very much the opportunity to comment.

We look forward to input from and coordination with the Boston Transportation Department concerning the thoughtful options presented in DCR's March 25 presentation as well as the continued opportunity to discuss and provide feedback to DCR on the next iteration of options.

Please let us know if you have any questions or need any clarification on any of the points made in this letter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John W. Read".

John (Tad) W. Read  
Senior Deputy Director for Transportation & Infrastructure Planning

cc. Vineet Gupta, Director of Planning, BTB