

WalkBike Springfield

Residents working to improve the safety of walking and bicycling in Springfield

September 26, 2019

Patricia Leavenworth, P.E., Chief Engineer
MassDOT - Highway Division
10 Park Plaza, Boston, MA 02116-3973
Attn: Roadway Project Management Section

Dear Ms. Leavenworth

The members of WalkBike Springfield would like to make the following written comments on the Sumner Ave at Belmont Ave and Dickinson Street (The X) Intersection and Related Improvements Project (Project File No. 608717). Some members of our group attended the public hearing on September 17, 2019 and provided spoken comments.

1) The distance between crosswalks at the west end of the project (Main Greeting Road to Oakland) is too great. (The distance from Main Greeting Road to Oakland and Forest Park Ave is about 490 feet and 960 feet, respectively.) There should be a crosswalk with flashing beacon at Sumner Terrace across from the entrance to Forest Park – where pedestrian WILL cross!

2) Minimize the removal of mature trees on the section of Sumner along Forest Park by removing the bicycle lane on the south side as described below and constructing instead an enhanced multi-use path (MUP) for both pedestrians and bicycles on the south side of Sumner. This MUP would replace the existing sidewalk. We suggest that, within Forest Park, the additional necessary width to create the path can extend south towards the park, where there is currently a strip of lawn. This will reduce conflicts with utilities and avoid the removal of trees in the tree belt. Trinity Church has objected to the removal of trees in front of its land, and as a result, might agree to allow the widening of the sidewalk in front of the church if those trees can be saved. We suggest retaining the south bike lane in the design wherever the MUP cannot be accommodated. We suggest that an MUP is quite feasible between Main Greeting Road and Continental Street, and may be possible further east to Parkwood St with careful design.

3) To reduce the need to widen Sumner, reduce the width of the inner travel lane to 10 feet. According to the NACTO Urban Street Design Guide, “For multi-lane roadways where transit or freight vehicles are present and require a wider travel lane, the wider lane should be the outside lane (curbside or next to parking)... Inside lanes should continue to be designed at the minimum possible width. Lane widths of 10 feet are appropriate in urban areas and have a positive impact on a street's safety without impacting traffic operations. For designated truck or transit routes, one travel lane of 11 feet may be used in each direction.”

4) The distance for pedestrians to walk between crosswalks is too great between Oakland and Cliftwood (about 1,000 feet). Add a crosswalk with a flashing beacon near the bus stop at Beaumont.

5) Stripe a crosswalk across the entire Cliffwood/Sumner intersection. The design currently does not provide for a crosswalk on the western side. For all intersections paint crosswalks since any intersection is a crosswalk whether painted or not. Make driver's know to look for pedestrians.

NOTE information from 2011 about mid-block crosswalks from Kansas:

<http://www2.ku.edu/~kuttc/pdffiles/LTAPFS11-Mid-Block.pdf> "Consider providing a marked midblock crossing when protected intersection crossings are spaced greater than 400 feet or so that crosswalks are located no greater than 200 to 300 feet apart in high pedestrian volume locations, and meet the criteria below." (There is a chart in this document saying best is crosswalks no more than 200 feet apart: Table A-6 Distance between Marked Crosswalks, page 222.

<https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/Creating-Walkable-Bikeable-Communities.pdf>.)

6) Eliminate the counter-flow bicycle lane on Belmont and add the bicycle lane instead of sharrows on the right side of Belmont, in the direction of traffic. If the counter-flow bicycle lane is retained, the entrance to the lane from the roundabout north of the X must be redesigned. The current design requires cyclists to negotiate a very sharp turn in the same space as motor vehicles entering the roundabout from Belmont.

7) Again, too long a distance between pedestrian crossing east of the X, between Dickinson St and Ormond St. (About 700 feet). Add a crosswalk at Ventura, as there is considerable pedestrian activity in this commercial area and again a bus stop.

8) The multi-use path through Forest Park needs lighting to improve safety at night. Lighting is currently provided in the design, but at least one commenter at the public hearing objected to it.

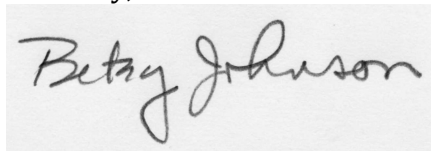
9) It is a common theme at MassDOT public hearings that commenters complain about perceived poor notification about the hearing, specifically that written notification is typically limited to a legal notice in one or two local newspapers. This issue came up again at this hearing. Although we understand that a legal notice is a required part of public notice, we would suggest that additional outreach regarding public hearings can be accomplished through two simple zero-cost steps: (1) Contact information for all neighborhood councils in Springfield can be found on a single City www page. An email to the neighborhood council in the affected neighborhood(s) at least one month in advance of the hearing will likely result in a mention at the next scheduled meeting and/or outreach by the council to its members regarding the hearing. (2) Nextdoor.com is a free www service that is organized by neighborhoods. There is likely a Nextdoor.com group for every neighborhood (or town, for small towns that may not have multiple neighborhoods) in Massachusetts. MassDOT can post hearing notifications specific to the municipalities or neighborhoods affected by a project, which will appear on neighborhood- or town-specific www pages

(e.g., <https://www.springfield-ma.gov/planning/index.php?id=neighborhoodcouncils>) and emailed to Nextdoor.com members who elect to receive email updates. Using these simple, zero-cost resources will vastly increase the reach of MassDOT's communication efforts. For the immediate future, the illustrations of the project should be available at the Forest Park Library.

10) We would like information on how MassDOT will keep the public informed of future design changes, and how the public can comment on such changes.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored background. The signature reads "Betsy Johnson" in a cursive, flowing script.

On behalf of Members of WalkBike Springfield

www.walkbikespringfieldma.org



www.facebook.com/WalkBikeSpringfield/

email: walkbikespringfield@gmail.com