

## **Anderson Memorial Bridge Underpass Advocacy**

### ***An Abbreviated History***

[The Charles River Conservancy](#) – April 2018

The Charles River Conservancy's interest in Charles River bridge underpasses began in 2006, when the Conservancy conducted an analysis of the 17 miles of pathways along the Charles River shoreline with a grant from the Barr Foundation. The resulting report recommended adding pedestrian underpasses to river bridges, and the Conservancy submitted the report to the Department of Conservation and Recreation.

In 2008, the Conservancy's attention was refocused when Governor Patrick launched the Accelerated Bridge Program (ABP). The \$3B program included the rehabilitation of Anderson Memorial, River Street, and Western Avenue Bridges, among others, and the Conservancy saw a once-in-a-century opportunity to incorporate underpasses into the renovation plans for these three bridges. The organization immediately began advocating for underpasses. Major obstacles quickly ruled out the possibility of underpasses on the Cambridgeside, so the Conservancy narrowed its efforts to the Boston side.

The Anderson Rehabilitation Project, the first of the three projects to proceed, was wholly state-funded. It required both state and federal permits. These were:

- Boston Conservation Commission – Order of Conditions
- Cambridge Conservation Commission – Order of Conditions
- MA Department of Conservation & Recreation (DCR) – Construction Permit
- MA Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) – Environmental Notification Form (ENF) Certificate
- MA Water Resources Authority (MWRA) – Section 8(m) Permit
- US Coast Guard – General Construction Requirements
- US Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) – PGP Category 2
- Section 106 Approval with the ACOE as the lead agency
- National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) – Section 106 Review

Urged by the Conservancy and other advocates, MassDOT conducted an underpass feasibility study, which it released in January of 2011. The report determined that underpasses would be structurally possible but could have 'adverse' effects on the visual character of the bridge and surrounding area.

Also that January, MassDOT also began the MEPA permitting process for Anderson Memorial Bridge Rehabilitation Project. The Conservancy and other underpass advocates urged MEPA to request MassDOT include underpasses in its plan for Anderson. In March, however, MEPA's Certificate declined to require the inclusion of underpasses.

After the disappointing MEPA decision, the underpass advocacy team forged on. Over the next spring and summer of 2011, the CRC garnered the support of 29 elected officials, 32 organizations, and over 600 individuals.

With growing support, Conservancy Founder and President, Renata von Tscharner, and allied elected state officials, met with MassDOT Secretary Mullan twice that spring and summer. Secretary Mullan maintained MassDOT's preference for at grade solutions and opposition to underpasses. At-grade solutions would include, but not be limited to, signal upgrades, improved site distances, new crosswalks, widened approaches and queuing areas, ADA compliant ramps, on road bike lanes over and approaching the bridges, and signage improvements.

After some follow-up correspondence, Secretary Mullan announced a significant modification in the work on Anderson, saying, "MassDOT has committed to design and construct the bridge project in a manner so as to not preclude the eventual construction of one or more underpasses" in the future. With this promise, MassDOT agreed to move a utility pipe contained within the structure of the bridge that would interfere with future underpass construction.

With this success, the Conservancy continued to activate support for underpasses. The Conservancy hosted Issue Forums, the first of which hosted at Northeastern University and chaired by former governor Michael Dukakis, as well as small group meetings. It also launched a letter writing campaign, and got many appointed and elected officials, as well as heads of advocacy organizations, to write letters in support of underpasses.

In 2012, the Conservancy received a grant from the Barr Foundation to hire Gill Engineering to produce underpass feasibility studies and cost estimates for Anderson, River, and Western Bridges. Conservancy President and Founder, Renata von Tscharner, presented Gill's design report at a January 2013 Accelerated Bridge Council Meeting. Officials of MassDOT re-asserted that though Anderson Bridge has been designed to accommodate the possible addition of an underpass, MassDOT has no intention of adding one.

In March 2012, MassDOT presented a design study recommending against an underpass. In April 2013 MassDOT and the MEPA office held a public meeting showing a design without an underpass. The MEPA Certificate followed and construction was underway.

Early in 2014, the Conservancy commissioned six underpass renderings by Fennick McCredie Architecture, funded by a grant from the Barr Foundation. The renderings were based on Gill Engineering's study, and demonstrated the feasibility and possible appearances of underpasses under all three bridges. The renderings for Anderson Memorial Bridge can be viewed in the appendix to this document.

That same winter of 2014, MassDOT announced that the River Street and Western Avenue Bridges had been removed from the Accelerated Bridge Program because of scheduling concerns and that Anderson Memorial is "significantly delayed." MassDOT cited the underpass design modifications as one reason for the delay. (There were also delays in permitting and in the manufacture of identical brick required to restore the historical accuracy of the bridge.) The Conservancy and other advocacy groups decided to give priority attention to the Anderson underpass, leaving River and Western for later

when reconstruction of those bridges is again on MassDOT's priority list for new construction.

On July 9, 2014, MassDOT Secretary Davey, Highway Administrator DePaola, and Highway Chief of Operations and Maintenance Tinlin, met with representatives of the Conservancy, Boston Cyclists Union, Cambridge Running Club, and the LivableStreets Alliance. At that meeting, the officials stated that MassDOT "will support construction of underpasses" on the Boston side of the Charles River for Anderson, River, and Western Bridges, with the first step by MassDOT to be retaining Gill Engineering to develop 25% design plans for an Anderson underpass "on an expedited time table, so that it can be added to the current extended construction activities for the bridge itself." They also committed to include River and Western bridges as part of MassDOT's plans for major reconstruction of those bridges when funds become available. They also agreed to consider River and Western underpasses as possible elements of mitigation for the I-90 Mass Turnpike Allston Interchange project, which was then being planned. Secretary Davey wrote to the Conservancy on July 31, 2014: "We are happy to support the underpass through the Boston abutment of the Anderson Memorial Bridge and engage in the process necessary to ensure the feasibility of this project."

The news of beginning design on the Anderson underpass and committing to future support for River and Western underpasses gained media attention from local press. Gill Engineering submitted its design proposal to MassDOT and negotiations followed. Gill's team of subconsultants includes:

- Carol R. Johnson Associates, Inc. – Landscape Architecture
- Epsilon Associates, Inc. – Environmental/Permitting
- GEI Consultants – Geotechnical Engineer
- Howard/Stein-Hudson Associates, Inc. – Public Involvement
- Peter G. Furth, Ph.D. – Bicycle & Pedestrian Consultant
- RDK Engineers – Electrical Engineer (Lighting and Power)
- Rosales + Partners – Architecture
- Surveying & Mapping Consultants – Field Survey

In the spring of 2014, the Conservancy and other underpass supporters formed a Coalition for the Anderson Bridge Underpass (The Coalition). Jack Wofford, a seasoned transportation lawyer, negotiator, and mediator, chairs the Coalition. Members are representatives from:

- Boston Cyclists Union
- Boston Preservation Alliance
- Boston Society of Architects Historic Resources Committee
- Boston Society of Landscape Architects
- Boston Running Club
- Brighton-Allston Historical Society
- Charles River Alliance of Boaters
- Charles River Conservancy
- Climate Reality
- Institute for Human-Centered Design

- LivableStreets Alliance
- WalkBoston

In the early fall of 2014, MassDOT staff informed the Coalition of a concern that adding an underpass to the at-grade improvements that were well underway would be interpreted as undercutting its position that those improvements were required for the safety of pedestrians and cyclists. At its meeting on October 20th, the Coalition unanimously agreed:

“Underpasses do not undercut the need for safe surface conditions for walkers, runners, cyclists and other users, both along and across the Charles River. It should be clearly and repeatedly stated that underpasses are advocated in addition to the required surface improvements. The key is to emphasize that underpasses and surface improvements serve different functions; neither is an alternative for the other. Indeed, pedestrians, cyclists and others need both alternatives; Eliot Bridge, which has only an underpass and no marked or signalized ways to cross at-grade on either side of the river, demonstrates that both are needed, particularly when at night the user for safety reasons might prefer to cross at surface rather than in the underpass.”

Negotiations and internal review of the scope of the Gill contract continued and were underway when, in November, Charlie Baker was elected Governor; he assumed office in January 2015. He appointed Stephanie Pollack as his Secretary of Transportation. The Coalition wrote a letter to her, co-signed by all Coalition members, to demonstrate major public support for underpasses.

The leadership transition caused some pause, since Secretary Pollack needed time to review many projects, including whether to authorize the 25% design work for the Anderson underpass. On June 11, 2015, at a public meeting convened in the Cambridge Public Library by the Cambridgeport Neighborhood Association to discuss the Charles River and its parklands and pathways, MassDOT’s project manager for the Anderson Underpass announced that the Secretary had approved beginning 25% design work. The Anderson Underpass, he said, would be a stand-alone project separate from the bridge restoration. It was not possible, he announced, for the underpass to be added to the ongoing construction activity.

MassDOT and Gill Engineering met several times with the Coalition during the summer and fall of 2015 as design work proceeded. The target for completion was August 2015. In October of 2015, after internal review of the design report, MassDOT held a public meeting to present alternative pedestrian/bicycle options generated from the Gill feasibility study. The feasibility study included a boardwalk option (that would construct a boardwalk in the river under one of its existing arches) and an underpass option (that would create a wholly land-based tunnel through the bridge itself). Both options were compared with “no-build,” described as the at-grade improvements already well underway. Over 50 people attended and voiced unanimous opposition to a boardwalk in the river and unanimous support for the land-based underpass option. The crowd expressed praise for MassDOT in bringing the project this far.

Design work continued during 2015 and 2016, with periodic meetings of Gill Engineering, MassDOT, and the Coalition.

On November 7th, 2016, MassDOT formally submitted the underpass proposal to the Massachusetts Historic Commission (MHC) for review and comment. On December 7, 2016, MHC wrote MassDOT with the determination that: “While the proposed project will be an ‘adverse effect’ to the historic bridge, MHC understands that it is a very important life safety improvement to the area for those pedestrians and bicyclists who use this route.” It went on to say: “MHC accepts the adverse effect and proposes the development of a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) in order to resolve the adverse effect.” The “consulting parties” were named as the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), the Boston Landmarks Commission, Boston Preservation Alliance, and the Charles River Conservancy. The Cambridge Historical Commission was later added to the list. The MOA was to develop “potential mitigation stipulations” and require that MassDOT submit design drawings at two stages for community stakeholder consultation. [It was later clarified that 75% and 90% drawings will need to be submitted for review by MHC.]

Drafts of the MOA circulated in the spring of 2017 while design work continued. On July 31, 2017, MassDOT sent MHC 25% project plans and underpass design options and the draft MOA. On August 24, 2017, [letter misdated as 2016], MHC replied that “staff of the MHC have reviewed the underpass design options and prefer” the modified arch, which, the letter noted, “has a differentiated arch from the others on the bridge while using materials and colors found on the bridge.” MHC once again “accepted” the adverse effect and specifically added “in consideration of the mitigation described herein.” That mitigation is the modified-arch design, reflected in the 25% design work completed during the fall of 2017. A final MOA with 25% design plans was then assembled.

MassDOT’s administrator signed the proposed final MOA on December 29, 2017, and DCR, “as the owner of the proposed pathway leading to the pedestrian/bicycling underpass tunnel,” signed on February 5, 2018. The other consulting parties signed later in February. MHC signed and accepted on March 12, 2018. The MOA requires consultation on design progress at 75% and 90% completion.

The next step will be advancing the design to completion. The scope and cost of that work has not yet been negotiated. According to MassDOT, funds for such design work and construction are not currently available.

The current preferred design follows:



EAST TUNNEL PORTAL ENTRANCE  
NTS



TUNNEL INTERIOR  
NTS



WEST TUNNEL PORTAL ENTRANCE  
NTS

Appendix:

Renderings commission by Fennick McCredie Architecture demonstrating the feasibility and possible appearances of underpasses under the Anderson Memorial Bridge.



Anderson Bridge Underpass, Option A



Anderson Bridge Underpass, option B