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Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Michael E. Capuano
8th District, Massachusetts

WASHINGTON OFFICE:

1414 LONGWORTH BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-2108
(202) 225-5111
FAX: (202) 225-9322

DISTRICT OFFICES:

110 FIRST STREET
CAMBRIDGE, MA 02141
(617) 621-6208
FAX: (617) 621-8628

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Thomas Broderick, PE, Chief Engineer
Attn: Shoukry A. Elnahal, PE
Massachusetts Department of Transportation
Highway Division
10 Park Plaza
Boston, MA 02116

Dear Chief Engineer Broderick,

I write to offer comments on the River Street and Western Avenue Bridge Rehabilitation Project. I believe this is the final bridge rehabilitation project currently proposed for the Charles River Bridges. While I have had concerns about specific rehabilitation proposals, I do commend the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) for addressing these bridges' structural deficiencies.

In general, I support MassDOT's design for the River Street and Western Avenue bridges. The plans call for adequate room for all uses of the bridge – vehicle, cyclist and pedestrian. This is critically important, as these two bridges are highly travelled by all forms of traffic. In terms of aesthetics, these bridges have badly deteriorated since the last 'face lift' some decades ago. In addition to bringing the structural integrity of these bridges up to the required level, rehabilitating them to be on par with their original beauty. Lastly, the intersections on both sides of each bridge – particularly the intersections with Soldiers Field Road – are difficult to navigate, especially if one is unfamiliar with them. I appreciate that MassDOT will be addressing these intersections to make them more easily navigable and safer for all.

However, I do wish to draw MassDOT's attention to what I believe is deficiency in this design. Specifically, I refer to the lack of pedestrian underpasses for each of these bridges on the Boston side of the Charles River. From the design proposal provided by MassDOT, it is impossible to discern if the bridge plans would allow for future underpass construction. If it does not, I strongly urge that the design should. Additionally, I suggest that MassDOT take advantage of the flexibility of the Design/Build contracting method, and offer underpass design and permitting for these two bridges, and also the Anderson Bridge, as an option to the Western Avenue/River Street contract. Given MassDOT's inclination on other projects to push forward with viable pedestrian alternatives, I do not see why MassDOT would not wish to pursue these underpasses as well.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important project. I look forward to traveling on the restored Western Avenue and River Street Bridges.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michael E. Capuano".

Michael E. Capuano
Member of Congress

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