



Memorial Drive Alliance

"A Parkway is not a Road. It's a Park With a Road in it."

January 27, 2022

RE: Memorial Drive Phase III – Environmental Notification Form

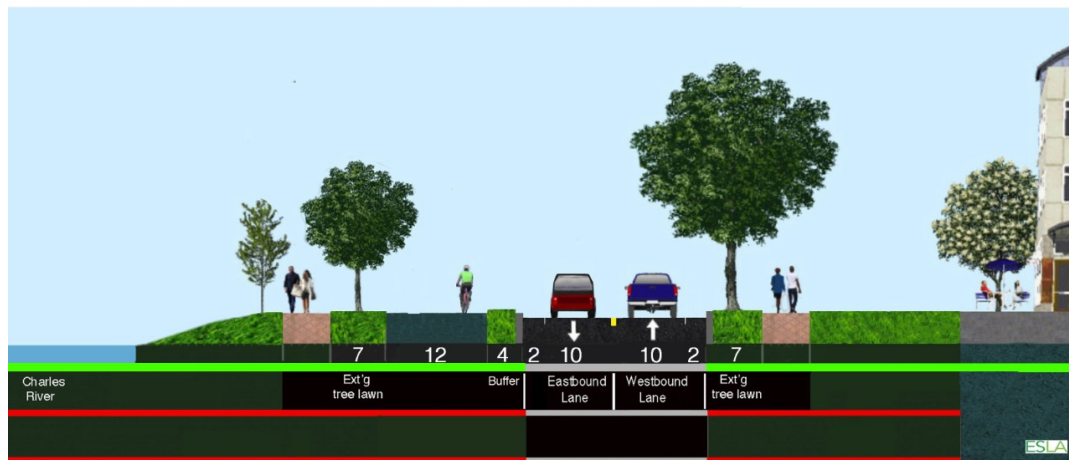
Dear Secretary Theoharides:

The Memorial Drive Alliance is composed of a diverse set of neighborhood and advocacy groups focused on environmental, community, and transportation concerns. We are aligned around a road diet throughout the entire length of Memorial Drive and the improvement of the adjacent riverfront parklands (memorialdrivealliance.org).

We are enthusiastic about DCR's planned lane reductions along this segment, which will bring slower vehicle speeds, safer connections for pedestrians, and improved pathways for people who bike, walk, run, roll, and skate. This investment in our riverfront is sorely needed, as the paths along Memorial Drive from the BU Bridge to Gerry's Landing are in a serious and hazardous state of disrepair. These changes will transform the riverfront to a more balanced, and recreationally-focused, parkland use, accessible to all.

The reduction in the number of travel lanes from four to two, we believe, creates a wonderful opportunity to work within the existing right of way to provide a protected bi-directional bike path, grade-separated from automobile traffic. The adaptive reuse of the existing roadway will be far less disruptive to the existing landscape than altering the slopes of the river to accommodate a shared use path. Having faster moving path users in the existing right of way also has the advantage of freeing up the sidewalks along both sides of Memorial Drive. We encourage DCR and its consultants to consider this less intrusive and less costly alternative. Separation of this path from cars by a bioswale or planting bed, as was described in the plans, would allow for both physical and visual separation from cars (see, recommended cross-section, below).

PROPOSAL FOR MEMORIAL DRIVE WITH CYCLE TRACK + 2 TRAVEL LANES



The Memorial Drive Alliance is concerned about major proposed changes to the riverfront that would result from introducing nine feet of additional pavement along the river bank. Widening the path to this extent will cause significant and avoidable environmental impacts, such as increased flooding and erosion as well as the removal of existing vegetation resulting from substantial re-grading and changes to the profile of the river bank. Steeper slopes along the water's edge will be more difficult to maintain. We support keeping the edge of the river vegetated for this entire section of Memorial Drive rather than introducing modular concrete block retaining walls that are not in character here. It is also worth noting the path's southern, largely unshaded exposure, which will greatly exacerbate the heat island effect of an increase in the paved surfaces.

Sycamore allée We would like to see a rehabilitation of the iconic sycamore allée between Ash Street and JFK. There are a number of trees exceeding 4 feet in diameter. Historically, the sycamores were planted at 40 feet on-center. We recommend replanting sycamores wherever there are gaps; this would mean planting approximately 30 new trees - primarily along the south side of Memorial Drive). It is worth noting that the iconic sycamore allée was intact until the late 1990's (see attached photo taken in 1999 below). We recommend that soils be tested and appropriately amended, and that all large trees receive a deep root feeding for increased vigor.

Last, we realize that the pandemic has made a community process and public meetings more challenging. The Memorial Drive Alliance came together in 2019, when DCR initiated a series of public meetings to discuss the entire length of the Memorial Drive parkway. The members of the Memorial Drive Alliance would like to have the opportunity to meet with the DCR and environmental program staff related to the design of the project.

In closing, we would like to thank the DCR for their investment in our parkland and encourage the continuation of a road diet for the remaining segments of Memorial Drive. We, the undersigned members of the Memorial Drive Alliance, look forward to engaging with the DCR to work together toward a Memorial Drive that is safer, more comfortable, and more beautiful for all.

Respectfully yours,

The Memorial Drive Alliance
memorialdrivealliance.org

The Memorial Drive Alliance

*A Better Cambridge
Bike Harvard
Cambridge Bicycle Safety
Cambridge Citizens Coalition
Cambridge City Councillor Quinton Zondervan
Cambridge City Mayor Sumbul Siddiqi
Cambridge Committee on Public Planting
Cambridge Residents Alliance
Cambridge Urban Forestry Task Force
Charles River Conservancy
Friends of Memorial Drive
Friends of the Community Path Extension
Friends of the Grand Junction Path*

*Friends of the Mystic to Charles
Green Cambridge
Green Streets Initiative
Harvard Square Neighborhood Association
LivableStreets Alliance
Longwood Area Cyclists
MassBike
Mothers Out Front
People for Riverbend Park Trust
350 Cambridge - Somerville
Rt 16 Traffic Calming Coalition
Sierra Club MA
Somerville Alliance for Safe Streets*



The iconic Sycamore Allée 1999