



Conservation Law Foundation



September 27, 2023

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg  
Secretary of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

We write in strong support of the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) application for USDOT’s FY2023 Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods (RCN) Program to help realize the potential benefits of the I-90 Allston Multimodal Project located in the City of Boston.

We represent a diverse group of community based civic organizations, representatives of local institutions and businesses, economic development groups, environmental and open-space organizations, and active transportation and transit advocates. We have worked together, many of us, as members of the project Task Force, for over 9 years to plan the future of our neighborhood in hopes that the Allston I-90 Multimodal Project can finally help improve the safety, connectivity, and access to an improved quality of life for the people in this region. In addition to this formal role, many of us are neighborhood residents and stakeholders who live and travel throughout the project’s area.

After nearly 70 Project Task Force and public information meetings, and site walks with government leaders, we feel confident that this project is a worthy match to the goals in the RCN program.

The I-90 Allston Multimodal Project presents a transformative opportunity to remove an existing elevated highway and suburban interchange and replace the burdensome and dividing viaduct with a new at-grade interstate and urban interchange that will physically and psychologically reconnect communities to each other and to the open space resource along the banks of the Charles River. The reconfiguration of the interchange will enable more than sixty acres of land to be reclaimed for new neighborhood development anchored by a new rail station and transit hub. The I-90 Allston Multimodal Project will greatly enhance livability and connectivity for residents of Boston's Allston neighborhood, an environmental justice population defined by both Federal and Massachusetts laws, while enhancing local and regional mobility for bicyclists and pedestrians and creating a significant new multimodal passenger train station for the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA). It cannot be emphasized enough how much we as community leaders hope to see the day when this project is completed properly, and our community can benefit from greater safety and accessibility for all modes of travel to and through the project area and the new neighborhood it will unlock.

In 1965, Massachusetts officials opened the Allston section of the I-90 highway, shoehorning an eight-lane elevated viaduct between Boston University and the Charles River, dividing a vibrant working-class community, removing trackage and passenger rail stations, and wounding important riverfront habitat in the process. This highway was designed and built prior to the protections now provided by the National Environmental Policy Act and Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act, and was financed without a dollar of federal funding. Some 60 years later, the people in this area of Boston still endure the harmful impacts from this obsolete, failed transportation decision that placed a need for a regional highway above the needs of people, the environment and our neighbors.

The Allston Viaduct is already close to the end of its useful lifespan. For almost a decade, MassDOT has worked with the community to consider options to replace the Allston Interchange and structurally deficient Viaduct. In December 2022, MassDOT selected the Modified At-Grade design plan—the clear consensus option supported enthusiastically by the Task Force and neighborhood leaders—as its preferred alternative. We are committed to continuing our work with MassDOT to see

the project to completion as soon as possible to build a future where the needs of public transit riders, cyclists, pedestrians, and the health of the river are as important as motorists traveling on this section of interstate. The I-90 Task Force has confidence that the project is closer than ever to being realized, with MassDOT recently creating a realistic funding plan and a schedule that can obligate any federal funds before October 2026. The project has never been closer to happening, but we know that some federal funds are critical to getting the project across the finish line.

We believe that every goal of the Reconnecting Communities and Neighbors program would be achieved through the I-90 Allston Multimodal Program. We participated in USDOT's "Interested in Applying?" Webinar on July 11, 2023, and listened closely as to whether our project in Boston would fulfill each of the USDOT's seven selection criteria in terms of project outcomes. We enthusiastically believe this project meets your criteria with respect to equity and environmental justice, access, facility suitability, community engagement, equitable development, climate and the environment, and workforce development and economic opportunity and believe you will agree after reviewing the potential future of our neighborhood if this project moves forward. Having partnered with MassDOT on this project for nearly a decade, we know that it does. We also know that this project is in total alignment with each of these opportunities that Christopher Coes, Assistant Secretary for Transportation Policy (USDOT), listed in his remarks to open the webinar:

- "Imagine if, instead of having to drive a mile or two or more out of your way to get around a rail line or freeway. You can drive right over it, or walk across it to a scenic Greenway to get to that favorite ice cream shop or to your healthcare or job. The reconnecting communities and neighborhoods program calls for exactly these type of projects that restore communicating activity, remove the barriers to mobility, access, and economic development, while also empowering community voices to not only be a part of the vision, the implementation, but also the long-term change."
- "This program is going to invest in high quality public transportation, help support pedestrian walkways or other ways to again improve mobility and connectivity. This program also seeks to address the barriers, not only to community connectivity, but also some of the environmental justice challenges that are happening, whether it is air pollution and the like."

- “Ultimately, the goal of this program is to not only reconnect communities harmed by transportation infrastructure, but create a true pathway for community-supported plans and activities that lead to great capital transportation projects that are championed by those communities.”

These are the exact arguments we have been making for the last nine years. Specifically, there are several elements of the project that most directly address these goals of the Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods program:

- The construction of West Station as a new passenger rail station and bus hub with a bus/bike/pedestrian connection across the highway and rail at Malvern Street
- The construction of the Agganis Connector to enable pedestrians and bicyclists from Allston and Brookline to directly and safely access the Charles River
- Rebuilding the dilapidated and functionally obsolete Cambridge Street Overpass and Franklin Street Footbridge, which are vital connections between the two halves of Allston yet are not designed in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and have suffered years of neglect. MassDOT is currently evaluating a replacement vs a rehabilitation of the Cambridge Street Overpass; in order to meet the goals of the community and of this program, the final option must not include a fence along the median and must include high-quality bicycle and pedestrian accommodations for users moving both along and across the overpass.
- The construction of the “People’s Pike” pathway and buffer park to create a bicycle and pedestrian connection between Allston and the Charles River that is separated from highway on- and off-ramps, while providing noise and air pollution mitigation for the heavily burdened Ashford Street/Pratt Street neighborhood
- The expansion and improvement of the pathway along the Charles River and the restoration of the riverbank

As residents, business, environmental, institutional, and transportation advocates, we remain deeply invested in the future of Allston and hope you will join us in supporting this grant application. It is a pivotal step to finally bringing transportation access and improvements that will benefit our neighborhood for generations to come. We are proud to endorse this grant application and look forward to helping show our support in any way we can.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Bowie, President, Cambridgeport Neighborhood Association  
Robin Chase, CoFounder of Zipcar, NUMO, Cambridgeport resident  
Anthony D'Isidoro, President, Allston Civic Association  
Kate Dineen, President and CEO, A Better City  
Seth Gadbois, Clean Transportation Attorney, Conservation Law Foundation  
Laura Jasinski, Executive Director, Charles River Conservancy  
Brendan Kearney, Co-Executive Director, WalkMassachusetts  
Wendy Landman, Cambridgeport Resident  
Anna Leslie, Director, Allston Brighton Health Collaborative  
Vick Mohanka, Acting Director, Sierra Club Massachusetts  
Galen Mook, Executive Director, Massachusetts Bicycle Coalition, Allston resident, I-90 Task Force  
Reggie Ramos, Executive Director, Transportation for Massachusetts  
Jessica Robertson, Allston resident and I-90 Task Force member  
Fred Salvucci, Brighton Resident  
Stacy Thompson, Executive Director, LivableStreets Alliance  
Jack Wofford, Cambridgeport Resident  
Fred Yalouris, Cambridge Community Representative, I-90 Task Force  
Carl Zimba, President, Charles River Alliance of Boaters  
Cathie Zusy, President, Magazine Beach Partners  
Karen Mauney-Brodek, President, Emerald Necklace Conservancy  
Jarred Johnson, Executive Director, TransitMatters

CC:

The Honorable Maura T. Healey, Governor, Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
The Honorable Kimberley L. Driscoll, Lt. Governor, Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
Monica Tibbits-Nutt, Acting Secretary and CEO, MassDOT  
Jonathan Gulliver, Highway Administrator, MassDOT  
Quentin Palfrey, Director of Federal Funds and Infrastructure, Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
The Honorable Michelle Wu, Mayor, City of Boston  
Jascha Franklin-Hodge, Chief of Streets, Transportation, and Sanitation, City of Boston  
Christopher Coes, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Transportation Policy, USDOT  
Paul Baumer, Program Manager, Office of Infrastructure Finance and Innovation, USDOT