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Carrie Lavallee, P.E., Chief Engineer
MassDOT
10 Park Plaza
Boston, MA 02116

Re: Reid Overpass: Major Projects, Project File number 611987

August 21, 2026

Dear MassDOT Project Team,

The Charles River Conservancy appreciates the opportunity to submit comments following MassDOT's August 6, 2026 in-person public meeting at the Morse School regarding the Reid Overpass project. We recognize the work your team has done since the January informational meeting and appreciate that the two updated designs reflect input offered by community members, advocates, and key stakeholders over the past seven months.

We continue to encourage meaningful progress on the next stages of design. This project is a rare opportunity to reshape a critical riverfront gateway for generations.

MassDOT must ensure that the final design serves Memorial Drive's actual role: a dense urban parkway within the Charles River Reservation and a greenway used daily by people walking, biking, taking transit, visiting Magazine Beach, attending school, and accessing the river. It should be designed for its purpose as such, and certainly not as a speedy highway.

As the project proceeds, we strongly request the following:

Continue to coordinate closely with DCR

MassDOT must do more to coordinate this project closely with the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR). Memorial Drive is a DCR-managed parkway, and the adjacent Charles River Reservation properties are owned and managed by DCR.

DCR must therefore be in the room—literally and figuratively—throughout design, decision-making, permitting, construction planning, and public engagement.

It was disappointing that DCR did not have a representative present at the August 6 meeting. We appreciate that a representative of the City of Cambridge was in attendance, but the absence of the agency responsible for Memorial Drive and the riverfront parkland was conspicuous and unacceptable.

As we wrote in our February 2, 2026 comment letter:

> *Because Memorial Drive and adjacent Charles River Reservation properties are owned and managed by DCR, it is vital that MassDOT work in close step with DCR throughout design and construction. Aligning with DCR's priorities for parkland preservation, riverfront conservation, and public recreation access will ensure that proposed changes enhance—and not compromise—the character and ecological health of the Memorial Drive Greenway. The Reid Overpass project is a tremendous opportunity to strengthen the partnership between MassDOT and DCR to create a unified, world-class vision for this section of the Charles River.*

That point remains. MassDOT should publicly identify how and when DCR is participating in the project, clarify DCR's role in selecting a preferred alternative, and ensure that DCR representatives are present and substantively engaged at all future public meetings.

Signs are not enough: Design the road for safe speeds

Traffic calming and designing for an enforceable safe speed must be fundamental, not secondary, features of the final project. Speed kills people, and we support implementation of MassDOT's Safe System Approach to uphold the City of Cambridge's commitment to Vision Zero. As MassDOT knows, the recent speed data shared for Memorial Drive demonstrate a serious problem: Despite posted 25 mph speed-limit signs, most drivers are traveling above the limit.

Signs alone are not sufficient. If the roadway is designed to encourage speeds that are unsafe for an urban parkway, many drivers will continue to travel at those speeds. The built environment must guide drivers toward safe behavior through self-enforcing traffic-calming measures. One life lost because a roadway was designed for speed rather than safety is one too many. MassDOT should not accept a design that treats preventable severe injuries and deaths due to excessive speed as an unavoidable tradeoff.

Despite federal highway funding, treat Memorial Drive as a parkway

The preferred alternative must reflect Memorial Drive's role as a dense urban parkway and greenway—*not* as a highway.

We strongly urge MassDOT to pursue the necessary waiver and design exception to use narrower travel lanes than otherwise prescribed by federal highway standards. A standard designed for high-speed highways should not dictate the design of a riverfront parkway in one of Massachusetts' densest urban settings. The project should be evaluated against the realities of its location and a commitment to public safety.

Improve clarity and expectation of public engagement activations

The language that promoted public participation at the August 6 meeting was misleading. For one, community members took time to attend in person since there was no virtual participation option. More importantly, MassDOT's public messaging reasonably indicated that attendees could provide comments at the meeting, but the subsequent communication stated that verbal comments did not constitute official comments and were not entered into the record.

The event announcement stated:

> *The purpose of this meeting is to provide the public with the opportunity to become fully acquainted with the proposed project.* ***All views and comments made at the meeting will be reviewed and considered to the maximum extent possible.***

The meeting flyer likewise stated:

> *All interested parties are encouraged to attend, ask questions, and* ***provide input*** *as MassDOT works toward identifying a preferred alternative for further design development.*

Yet, after the meeting, an email from MassDOT stated:

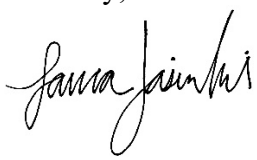
> *While August 6th was not a formal hearing and this* ***does not constitute an official comment period****, our team asks that you provide your comment by August 28th.*

These messages create inconsistent and confusing expectations for the public. If MassDOT invites people to attend a meeting and provide input, people should be able to rely on the understanding that their input will be recorded, reviewed, and meaningfully considered. Participants should not learn only afterward that verbal comments were not part of the official record.

The Charles River Conservancy appreciates MassDOT's continued work and the incorporation of community feedback into the updated concepts. Before selecting a preferred alternative, MassDOT should commit to genuine, visible collaboration with DCR; adopt a roadway design that produces safe operating speeds; pursue narrower lanes and other parkway-appropriate design treatments; and clarify language around the public engagement process.

The Reid Overpass project can and should deliver a safer, greener, more accessible, and more unified Charles River riverfront. We remain ready to work constructively with MassDOT, DCR, and community partners to achieve that outcome.

Sincerely,



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