



City of Cambridge

Executive Department

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Stephanie Pollack
Secretary and Chief Executive Officer
Massachusetts Department of Transportation
10 Park Plaza, Suite 4160
Boston, MA 02116-3969

Dear Secretary Pollack,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the report by the Allston I-90 Independent Review Team (IRT). I am pleased that MassDOT engaged the IRT to review and refine options for the Throat area of the project following the many comments and suggestions regarding improvements to options shown in the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) process.

As mentioned in the City of Cambridge's comment letter on the DEIR, the City had several concerns regarding the project in general and some specially on the Throat. Primary issues regarding the Throat include the noise impacts to Cambridge generated by vehicles (and during construction), visual impacts of a viaduct, reconstruction of the little Grand Junction bridge and ability to make connections for both rail and a multi-use path to Grand Junction and the ability to re-build the Paul Dudley White Path to a condition where many more users can comfortably walk, bike and enjoy an ecologically healthy Charles River. The City used these issues in assessing the refined and new alternatives presented in the IRT report.

I am pleased to see that the IRT took the time to understand community goals for the project and come up with creative alternatives to review. Based on our review of the alternatives, the new Hybrid Variant option looks most promising to meet both Cambridge's and the overall project's goals but additional study, particularly regarding noise, will be needed. The reasons for our preference are based on the information from the IRT report on the following areas:

Noise Impacts

As the IRT report notes "existing noise conditions for highway and rail noise in the Throat area exceeds these NAC (noise abatement criteria) and warrant consideration of mitigation measures" (p. 81). It goes on to state that "meaningful reductions" (p. 255) of noise can be achieved with the Hybrid Variant and that noise at additional receptors could be reduced as well (p. 172). As the report also states, these expected results have not been confirmed and will need to be modeled. Since modeling will not happen before a Throat option is chosen, there should be a commitment to mitigation should modeling not



show noise reductions as expected. This could be done through a variety of means including, but not limited to berms, landscaping, noise walls and/or sound absorbing coatings. Lower future noise levels for receptors on the PDW path and at Magazine Beach are a priority for Cambridge.

Visual Impacts

The lower height of the Hybrid Variant viaduct gives greater potential for mitigating visual impacts of a new structure from Magazine Beach through landscaping. Any new structure should also be carefully designed to be attractive and less visually intrusive than the existing one.

Grand Junction Connections

Good connections to the Grand Junction from West Station through Throat are important for connecting rail, a multi-use path to Cambridge, and keeping options open for future transit to Cambridge. The reconstruction of the little Grand Junction Bridge is an important benefit of the Hybrid Variant both as a way to help create future connections to the Grand Junction for both a path into Cambridge and future transit. The Hybrid Variant also keeps the 2-3 track connection to the Grand Junction.

Paul Dudley White Path (PDW) and Parkland

Both total and accessible public open space is increased with the Hybrid Variant and offers the opportunity for a wider PDW path and area for landscaping, noise mitigation and/or resiliency efforts. Having this space makes it possible to create a pleasant experience for more path users as well as space to enhance and restore the river's edge. It should be noted that the report showed renderings both with and without a guardrail at the river's edge. It is not clear why a guardrail would be needed. The creation of connections from Commonwealth Avenue to the river are also easier with the Hybrid Variant due to the lower heights of structures.

Thank you for the options presented in the IRT report and the opportunity to comment on them. Cambridge sees potential benefits in the Hybrid Variant option regarding noise reductions, connections to the Grand Junction, mitigating visual impacts and an improved riverfront with greater space for the Paul Dudley White path and landscaping. Please contact Bill Deignan in the Cambridge Community Development Department with any questions by phone at 617-349-4632, or by e-mail at wdeignan@cambridgema.gov. Thank you.

Very Truly Yours,



Louis A. DePasquale

City Manager