



CITY OF BOSTON • MASSACHUSETTS

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
MARTIN J. WALSH

October 21, 2020

His Excellency Governor Charles D. Baker
Massachusetts State House
Office of the Governor, Room 280
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Governor Baker,

I am writing in support of the Charlesgate Revitalization Project. Over the course of my administration, I have put forward an agenda that provides for a thriving, healthy, and innovative Boston. Preserving open space and investing in sustainable green infrastructure have been cornerstones of this work.

My administration has invested over \$60 million in critical stormwater management projects along the Muddy River and the Emerald Necklace park system. This work follows the goals of the *Climate Ready Boston* plan, including strategies for improving environmental quality and resiliency for Boston's waterfront. We have worked with partners like the Emerald Necklace Conservancy, the Charlesgate Alliance, the Esplanade Association, the Charles River Watershed Association—and others, who are also directly involved with the Charlesgate project—to achieve these improvements to our open spaces. These investments and efforts are vital to the improved health of our rivers, our long-term environmental and economic resilience, and quality of life for all of Boston's residents and visitors.

The coronavirus pandemic has reinforced the value of our beautiful, public green spaces, which have supported our residents' physical and mental health during these difficult times. Frederick Law Olmsted's visionary work creating the Emerald Necklace in the 1800's is still proving to be the benchmark of modern urban green infrastructure. We need to preserve and build upon that legacy.

Your administration, specifically the Massachusetts Department of Transportation, has provided a tremendous amount of thoughtful and diligent work on the Storrow Drive EB Bridge Replacement Project # 606728 and the Massachusetts Turnpike Bridge Replacement Project #B-16-052. This is the meeting point of two great open space systems which have national significance: the Emerald Necklace and the Charles River Esplanade. Together, these projects can transform the vehicle, bike, and pedestrian infrastructure in the region while also providing an opportunity to restore Charlesgate to its historic environmental and cultural prominence.

This unique situation and our decisions here and now will be felt for generations. For decades, roadway infrastructure has isolated, disrupted, and polluted some of Boston's greatest parks and waterfront spaces. We have a chance to change that. At a time when the importance of green space is more apparent than ever, this is a once-in-our-lifetime opportunity to fully realize the benefits of interconnection.

The following recommendations are key steps that MassDOT can take in order to ensure the health, longevity, and resiliency of Charlesgate Park and the Muddy River. In turn, the City and the Commonwealth will benefit from enhanced environmental sustainability and stormwater management.

- “Daylighting” the remaining culverted portion of the Muddy River, which is now under Storrow Drive. The “daylighting” needed is the last 250 feet of the Muddy River where it joins the

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Charles, eliminating the need for the current 70-year-old dilapidated culverts north of Beacon Street to improve stormwater storage, eliminate a flood choke-point, and improve habitat connectivity. This will allow for maximum light, air, and unimpeded flow for the Muddy River and improve the water quality of both the Muddy River and the Charles River. The Muddy River is the number one polluter affecting the Charles River today.

- Provide treatment for currently untreated MassDOT runoff from Storrow Drive and the Bowker Overpass using green stormwater infrastructure for roadway drainage to the Muddy River and Charles River. This will massively improve the current quality of untreated stormwater entering the Muddy River and the Charles River, and provide open space improvements.
- Eliminate the key “pinch point” at the Patterned Behavior mural on the Esplanade and create a safe and inviting pedestrian and bicycle environment where the Emerald Necklace and the Charles River Esplanade meet with new safe crossings and generous pathways.

Both MassDOT projects occur at the missing links between some of Boston’s most heavily frequented people-powered path networks: the Emerald Necklace Park System, the Charles River Esplanade pathways, the Dr. Paul Dudley White Bike Path, and the Massachusetts Avenue Bridge. Supporting and encouraging more people to walk and bike is a top priority for the City and essential in our pursuit of both our mobility and climate goals. In order to create the safest possible accommodations for people-powered transportation in these parkways, please further consider:

- The bridge over the Mass Pike at Charlesgate (#B-16-052) is the only point where the Emerald Necklace connects the Fenway neighborhood to the Charlesgate district and Kenmore Square. Currently, families, students, fans, and visitors moving between neighborhoods and children walking to the park must walk on a narrow chain link edge of a roadway unprotected from heavy, high-speed traffic. Simply put: it’s not safe and it’s not inviting. When MassDOT rebuilds this bridge in coming years, please make the sidewalks on this new bridge as generous as possible including separated bike paths, or build a separate connection for encouraging and protecting people-powered transportation from the high-speed vehicles.
- Currently, the connection between the Massachusetts Avenue Bridge and the Esplanade is a major choke-point in our people-powered transportation network. Work planned in this area should aim to create accessible connections between the Massachusetts Avenue Bridge to the Esplanade and Emerald Necklace beyond.

As we move forward in building a city for future generations, we must all be sure to do our part. As a City, and a Commonwealth, we must strive for better to deliver equitable, meaningful, resilient, accessible and safe spaces to the entire Boston community and the region. These projects accomplish that. I thank you in advance for your consideration of this important matter. I hope that you will support these projects and the additional thoughts shared above, and I look forward to continuing our collective work to make Boston and the Commonwealth some of the best places in the world. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me directly or you may contact Yissel Guerrero or Alyssa Ring in my Office of Intergovernmental Relations at (617) 635-3817.

Sincerely,



Martin J. Walsh
Mayor of Boston

CC: Secretary Stephanie Pollack, Massachusetts Department of Transportation
Secretary Kathleen Theoharides, Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs