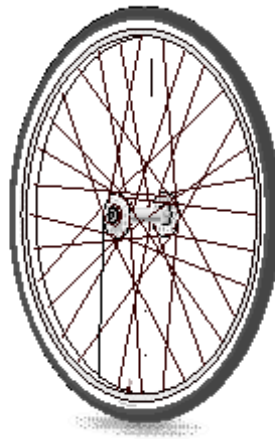


March 12, 2014

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Re: Connect Historic Boston project

These comments are in addition to the ones I sent on January 14. They are available online: http://john-s-allen.com/pdfs/CHB_Comments.pdf . I stand by those comments. I have the following additional comments.

Blackstone Block, Joy Street

I generally support the improvements in these parts of the project. However, I strongly disfavor other aspects of the project, and have suggested alternatives.

Inappropriate Project Goal

The purpose of the project is stated as “to improve access between transit and National Park Service sites.” Transit already comes very close to most of the sites. Boston is an important tourist destination, but it is an urban center, not a national park, and the stated goal of the project, to improve Boston as a tourist attraction, is inappropriately put forward out of context of Boston’s transportation needs as an urban center.

“Family-friendly” bicycle travel -- Mom, Dad and the kids pattering along at 6 miles per hour and enjoying the scenery, as promoted in project documents, is practical in on paths in parklands, along waterfronts, which in fact exist within the project area, and on abandoned rail lines. However, the proposed routes in this project are to be achieved for the most part by shifting bicycle traffic on major streets from street space to sidewalk space. This involves serious impacts on travel time for people who use the bicycle for daily transportation, and on motorists; on convenience of loading and unloading for buses, taxis and trucks, and on safety, impacting Boston’s viability as an urban center. At intersections, the number of conflicting movements increases: in particular, there are blind conflicts with motor vehicles turning across the path of bicyclists, and there are bicyclists traveling at speed where pedestrians do not expect them. Streets which are narrowed in all seasons by the sidewalk-level bikeways, and in winter also by snow, becoming less suitable for use by the regular, daily bicycling population. Streets are crowned and drain to the curbs, but sidewalk bikeways cannot be kept rideable in winter.

Boston's Hubway bike-share system provides bicycles only for adults. Providing bicycles for children involves serious issues of logistics and liability exposure, and I know of no bike-share program which does. Are families expected to bring bicycles with them on commuter trains or rent them at a bicycle shop, use them to get around in the city, and lock them securely at each site to be visited? This is a pipe dream. Walking, public transportation, duck boats and trolley buses are more convenient.

Project Fails to Serve Stated Goal

The stated goal is expressed as a generality which curries favor and funding from the National Parks Service and the Federal Transit Administration: again, "to improve access between transit and National Park Service sites". This goal is narrowly stated so as to reflect the funding source. If promoting tourism is the goal, then connections to additional historic sites would be appropriate. The Old North Church, in the North End, is Boston's most visited historic site. The Paul Revere house, also in the North End, is also a popular historic site. The project fails to connect to them, instead making a wide loop around the North End. The project does not connect to the Bunker Hill Monument, another important historic site. Essentially, it connects only where sidewalk-level bicycle facilities can be constructed, neglecting other design options, in particular, neighborhood greenways (low-traffic streets from which through traffic is excluded by barriers and diverters).

Also, there are paths in the Boston area, notably the Neponset River Greenway, which are suitable for family bicycling and have missing links. Connecting these would achieve much more at a lower cost.

Misrepresentation of Project Goal

The clear and obvious goal of the project, other than with the local improvements in the Blackstone Block and Joy Street, is to unleash a torrent of Federal funding to narrow major streets and shift bicycle traffic from street space to sidewalk space, onto so-called "cycle tracks". I have seen examples of cycle tracks which are functional, and pointed to them in my earlier comments. Numerous design elements of the ones proposed here indicate that they will be dysfunctional in terms of safety, level of service for bicyclists, and effects on other transportation modes, as I detailed in my previous comments and reiterate here. There are far better options for bicycle routes, as I have discussed.

No Traffic Study, No Public Involvement in Design

At all of the public meetings for this project and at what was described as a 25% design hearing, plans were presented for only a single design alternative. The major decisions about project scope, content and design had all been made before initiation of the public process. This approach compares very unfavorably with the process for other major projects, specifically, the Central Artery-Tunnel Project and the Longfellow Bridge reconstruction.

Project proponents' and consultants' description of traffic management for Connect Historic Boston amounted to no more than hand-waving. Traffic signal installations were mentioned but there was no description of their timing and no release of information about it. No analysis of traffic volume or level of service has been released to the public. Only plan drawings and sketchy PowerPoint presentations have been released. There was no description of traffic management during construction, or of a maintenance plan.

Project Degrades Access to/from North Station

A project which would truly improve access to/from the North Station transit hub would have to improve transit bus, taxi, tourist trolley bus and duck boat access, following up on the improvements at North Station in connection with the Central Artery-Tunnel project. Instead, this project degrades access to North Station, undoing the traffic safety and capacity improvement brought about by removal of the elevated Green Line tracks. The problem is worsened by the massive development planned for the empty space in front of Boston Garden. The lane reductions and conflicting movements due to the proposed median bikeway on Causeway Street and connecting bikeway links require relocation of taxi stands farther from the station, place pickup/drop/off traffic in conflict with moving traffic, and will increase congestion. The median bikeway also will inevitably become a refuge for pedestrians crossing Causeway Street, impeding bicycle travel. The bicycle routes to/from North Station are circuitous, indirect and impose delays and crowding.

More suitable, direct and conflict-free bicycle routes between North Station and downtown Boston would immediately cross Causeway Street, then follow Portland Street, Lancaster Street and Merrimac Street, as described in my earlier comments. More appropriate bicycle connections to the Charles River paths and to the North End would avoid Causeway Street, Lomasney Way and Nashua Street entirely, instead using paths around and behind the station.

Blatant Safety Issues

The conflicts at intersections will, as already mentioned, pose crash risks, and these would be augmented by the unwillingness of bicyclists to wait for traffic signals to change for their special, shorter signal phase.

Staniford Street slopes, so that bicyclists easily can attain speeds of 25 mile per hour downhill, on a two-way bikeway too narrow to allow safe overtaking in the face of oncoming bicycle traffic. This bikeway would cross motor traffic at a wide driveway, and pedestrian traffic at several places unprotected by signals. This is a “family friendly” bikeway?

Defective Provision for Bicyclist Left Turns and Through Movements

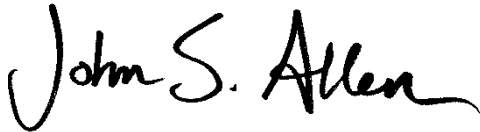
There are two conventional and workable ways for bicyclists to turn left: like other vehicle operators, merging to the left-turn position in the street before reaching the intersection, or else with a “box turn”, riding to the far right hand corner of the intersection and crossing from there. A special waiting area may be provided for a “box turn,” and this provision is relatively problem-free. The “bike boxes” proposed for this project would, however, have bicyclists ride up to the near side of the intersection, then swerve sharply left and cross ahead of two or three lanes of waiting motorists, with no way to know when the signal will change. The “bike box” on Cambridge Street eastbound at Staniford Street would require bicyclists to turn sharply by more than 90 degrees. Bike boxes installed as a surrogate for standard through or left-turn movements are dysfunctional. Research in Portland, Oregon has established that bicyclists do not use them. Portland has experienced a doubling of the crash rate at several bike-box intersections, including a fatality.

Boston already has installed some bike boxes, and an examination of one in operation reveals it to be a fiasco: <https://vimeo.com/81022106>

Summary

Other than the Blackstone Block and Joy Street plans, this project is not ready for prime time. It needs a major rethinking.

I thank you for your attention.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John S. Allen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'J' and 'A'.

John S. Allen