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James Gillooly, Commissioner, Boston Traffic Department  
By e-mail to [james.gillooly@boston.gov](mailto:james.gillooly@boston.gov)

Dear Mr. Gillooly:

I am writing about the planned reconstruction of Commonwealth Avenue near Boston University. My credentials, in case you need to check them, are online at <http://john-s-allen.com/bikexpert/witness/bikeres3.htm>. To state them briefly, I have lived and cycled in the Boston area for more than 40 years, and I have been active in bicycling advocacy for 35, at the regional level and over the past couple of decades at the national level. I travel all around the USA in my work, and I get to see what succeeds and what doesn't as bicycling infrastructure.

I ask you to install the bike lane treatment which Paul Schimek has proposed. This is the most sensible option, for the reasons he gives, and these additional ones:

- **Much of this stretch of Commonwealth Avenue is a retail business district where truckers make pickups and deliveries.** Double parking is a reality, whether we like it or not. Double parking in a bike lane leaves two lanes open for travel. Bicyclists must merge out of the bike lane to overtake double-parked vehicles, but this is a normal maneuver which they must use in many other locations. Double parking with a separate bikeway, on the other hand, seriously reduces capacity of the street. Also, truckers must then carry goods across the bikeway. Often, as experience in other cities has shown, truckers park in the bikeway, and bicyclists then must divert onto the sidewalk or thread between parked cars into the street to continue their trips.
- **Changes in the traffic mix are underway.** A cycle track treatment not only requires more width, for clearance on either side, but it is based on inflexible assumption that there are two classes of traffic: bicyclists, and today's motor vehicles. Increasingly popular types of vehicles -- cargo tricycles, pedicabs, electrically-assisted bicycles -- go slower than the speed limit, but are wider and/or faster than is typical of bicycles. Gasoline- and electrically-powered mopeds also are gaining in popularity. In cities where the traffic mix is diverse, all of the slower vehicles, motorized and non-motorized, end up crammed into the separated bikeway. A travelway without parked cars in the middle can much more flexibly accommodate a changing and diverse traffic mix.
- **Very important technological developments in motor vehicles will occur over the next couple of decades, during the lifespan of the reconstruction.** Robotic crash prevention will

become routine, for one thing. Though not all consequences can be foreseen, this can be predicted to reduce crashes due to driver error -- including car-bicycle crashes as long as bicyclists are in sight of a vehicle's sensors and do not abruptly change direction. For this reason as well, it is best to place bicyclists where they are visible, and to maintain the flexibility afforded by wider roadways, rather than to lock in an inflexible design which hides bicyclists behind parked vehicles.

- **Delay and loss of traffic capacity result from turning motorists' stopping and yielding to through bicycle traffic with a cycle track** (rather than merging across a bike lane as in Paul Schimek's proposal). The result is delay and loss of capacity as traffic is forced to a stop in the right-hand lane.
- **Keeping a separate bikeway clear of snow in winter is impractical.** That has proved to be the case with the Vassar Street and Concord Avenue bikeways in Cambridge, which are raised above street level, as well as the Western Avenue bikeway in Allston, which is at the curb of a crowned roadway, so snow piled up to its left melts and refreezes across the bikeway.

I also ask you to look beyond Commonwealth Avenue for solutions to bicycle travel issues around the Boston University campus. Why? While Commonwealth Avenue is convenient for through bicycle travel, it cannot serve well for local trips, typical of student travel on and near the BU campus, *no matter what treatment is applied* – cycle tracks or bike lanes. Here are some specifics of the problem, and potential solutions:

- **The median of Commonwealth can be accessed and traversed only at a limited number of locations.** For this reason, bicyclists on Commonwealth Avenue who wish to travel opposite the direction of traffic on that side must cross to the other side to travel legally with the flow of traffic, and then cross back. Completing many trips legally requires continuing past one's destination, then making a U turn and doubling back. As Paul Schimek's research shows, crossing and turning movements have a high crash rate. In addition, the inconvenience and delay resulting from the longer travel distance promote hazardous wrong-way and sidewalk riding.
- **Safe and convenient two-way travel both north and to the south of Commonwealth Avenue can be achieved by establishing connections on streets and paths parallel to Commonwealth Avenue**, so that local bicycle and pedestrian traffic need cross Commonwealth Avenue only at most one in any trip -- and never need pass through the busy and congested intersection of Commonwealth Avenue with the Boston University Bridge. The parallel connections would also improve the campus by turning its focus away from busy Commonwealth Avenue. I have described some of these possibilities online at <http://streetsmarts.bostonbiker.org/2013/01/30/connecting-the-boston-university-campus/>.
- **I draw your attention to the Allston Turnpike Interchange project** as important in advancing parallel connections. There is already discussion of construction of a pathway paralleling the Turnpike from Lincoln Street in Allston to the BU Bridge. Also, the planned West Station and connections across the Worcester Line railroad tracks will greatly improve access to the BU campus by public transportation, on bicycles and on foot. There needs, however, also to be a connection under the BU Bridge. As the article I linked in the previous paragraph shows, there is already enough width next to Soldiers Field Road for a wide pathway, and a path could also go under the elevated Turnpike viaduct. The path would also

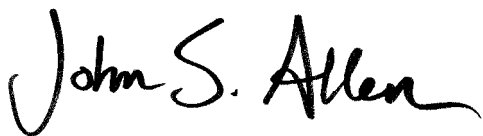
need a grade separation at the Boston-Worcester railroad tracks, which could be incorporated into the Turnpike project. Improving the disused area between the BU Bridge and the Turnpike with lighting and amenities, including perhaps a station on the proposed light rail line into Cambridge, would complete this transformation.

I also ask that Boston University provide support for bicycling to its students, in two important ways:

- **A bicycling hub/maintenance/information center on campus.** This concept was pioneered by the University of California at Davis, providing many services of use to student cyclists and also establishing a supportive atmosphere and the opportunity to convey information about safety and skills. The person best able to discuss the concept is UC Davis bicycle coordinator David Takemoto-Weerts, [dltakemotoweerts@ucdavis.edu](mailto:dltakemotoweerts@ucdavis.edu). I note that Harvard University has taken up the idea as well.
- **State-of-the art orientation materials and available bicycling riding-skills, safety and maintenance training** as offered through the League of American Bicyclists Smart Cycling Program or the Cycling Savvy program of the American Bicycle Education Association. This is crucial because most students arrive at Boston University with little if any preparation for urban cycling. You may contact me for more information, as I maintain the e-mail list for Massachusetts instructors in both of these programs.

I thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Very truly yours,



John S. Allen

Member, Waltham Bicycle Committee

Member, Board of Directors, Charles River Wheelmen

Member, National Committee on Uniform Traffic Control Devices Bicycle Technical Committee

But expressing my own opinions

cc:

Nicole Freeman, Bicycle coordinator, City of Boston

Robert Donohue, Vice President for Government Affairs, Boston University