



BACK BAY FENS * RIVERWAY * OLMSTED PARK * JAMAICA POND * ARNOLD ARBORETUM * FRANKLIN PARK

March 11, 2009

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Senator Steven A. Baddour (Rm. 208)
Representative Joseph F. Wagner (Rm. 134)
Co-Chairs, Joint Committee on Transportation
State House
Boston, MA 02133

Re: Transportation bills

Dear Senator Baddour and Representative Wagner:

The Emerald Necklace Conservancy is a public private partnership, a charitable corporation, founded 10 years ago to bring people together to renew, enliven, and advocate for the Emerald Necklace parks that stretch from Beacon Hill to Dorchester. Our constituency is all of us, people who use parks, and breathe cleaner air thanks to the trees in those parks and along the tree-lined parkways.

While we heartily support the general thrust of the Patrick administration transportation reform proposal as well as Senator Baddour's proposal, there is one change that we strenuously oppose: the transfer of authority for the historic parkway bridges now overseen by Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) to Mass Highway Department (MHD) contained in House #107, Section 68, and the proposal to transfer authority for the historic parkways as well as the historic bridges in the parks from DCR jurisdiction to EOT in Senate #10, section 55.

We are opposed to this transfer for the underlying reasons:

1. The supposed efficiency of putting all roads and bridges into one department runs counter to the competing efficiency and efficacy of keeping all parts of our parks in one agency, DCR;
2. Having to negotiate with additional public agencies over pieces of the parks would decrease the efficiency of public private partnerships like ours, the Esplanade Association, and Charles River Conservancy, and others, that raise millions of dollars for their respective park systems;
3. Transferring the parkways could irreparably transform the parkways;
4. The character of the parks themselves would be seriously damaged if the parkways had to adhere to ASHTO standards as land would be taken from the park to straighten and widen the parkways;
5. In an era where we look to increase transparency and accountability, the public review process associated with projects in the parks would be lost if the parkways and parkway bridges were managed by Mass Highway;
6. Mass Highway has not performed their maintenance duties well on some of the bridges currently in their domain, like the Curley Bridge over Route 9 in Boston, near the Brookline line, so we are reluctant to entrust more bridges to their care; and,
7. Our parkways were recognized as the envy of the nation by participants in the Historic Roads Conference held in Boston in April 2006.

The parkways are an important part of the infrastructure of our parks system and should be treated as part of the parks not as part of the highway system. While we very much understand the need for budgetary restraint during this tough economic time, it is our understanding from the proposal that this potential transfer will save the Commonwealth little or nothing. The cost to the parks and the public's access however would be considerable.

Our historic parkways and bridges provide citizen access between park areas and to paths inside the parks for walking, jogging, hiking and biking. Here in Boston The Emerald Necklace is the heart and lungs of our capital city—containing over half our city parkland and tens of thousands of trees. Trees benefit each of us by: absorbing carbon dioxide and other pollutants from the air, releasing fresh oxygen, protecting the water supply, absorbing noise pollution, and reducing energy use by blocking winter winds and lowering summer temperatures. From newly planted saplings to centennial trees, parkway trees are pretty and practical contributors to our quality of life. **In a highway culture, trees are in the way.**

EOT does not permit its projects in the same public process that the historic parkways and historic parkway bridges are currently permitted, and the result would be a decline in the public's right to review. This runs contrary to the movement for accountability and for insuring that transportation planners take into account the needs of green energy forms of travel, i.e. by foot and by bicycle.

The Emerald Necklace Conservancy strongly urges the legislature to retain the authority for historic parkways and bridges with DCR, whose priority is the stewardship of parks and the support of their recreational use by the public, rather than be transferred to EOT, whose primary function is transportation. We endorse funding DCR at a level that ensures the proper maintenance and preservation of the parkways and bridges with which they are entrusted in compliance with:

- Historic Design Intent—protecting and strengthening the character-defining features of the parkway (trees and grass areas in medians and along road edges, historic parkway widths and alignment, appropriate signage, etc.),
- Maintenance—codifying the Historic Parkway Preservation Treatment Guidelines, and,
- Management—enforcing regulations that prevent bus and truck traffic.

We stand ready to work with you to preserve the unique character of the parks and the parkways for the benefit of the citizens of the Commonwealth and the millions of visitors who come here each year.

We want to join with you on real reform. Moving the historic bridges and parkways is a distraction that neither saves money nor improves the care of those systems. As an environmental organization, we want to give our whole-hearted support to modernizing our transportation system, increasing support for public transportation, and green energy solutions. Please remove the proposal to transfer the historic bridges and parkways from DCR to MHD, so we can give you that unqualified support.

Thank you for the opportunity to present our views.

Sincerely,

Julie Crockford
President, Emerald Necklace Conservancy

Cc: Commissioner Richard Sullivan