



State Plans To Improve Charles River Path

Tree-covered with spectacular views of Boston and Cambridge's skylines, the Charles River pathway system provides a refuge for runners, walkers, bicyclists, and inline skaters alike from all of the pollution and noise of streets. But even though this public amenity is excellent, there is a lot of room for improvement. Fortunately, staff from Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) and the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) agree, and have released a study on how to improve several hairy intersections and other major sections of the path.

MassDOT and DCR's Planning Office implemented the study in the Fall of 2009 as part of the Accelerated Bridge Program, which will provide over \$400 million to improve six structurally unsound bridges along the Charles. Because so many people use the Charles River Path, part of the funding will go toward improving the safety of the pathway, especially where it intersects with the bridges.

As part of the study, MassDOT's design consultants from Halvorson Design, HDR Engineering, and Alta Planning + Design analyzed the existing conditions of the Charles River Pathway system for pedestrians and bicyclists. The study's project area spans from the Galen Street Bridge in Watertown Square to the Craigie Dam Drawbridge in Charlestown. Some of the particularly poor areas highlighted are:

- Elliot Bridge, Cambridge Side
- Hawthorne Street crosswalk
- Allston: access is limited
- Boston University Bridge: no access to path from Boston Side
- Charlesgate: no access to the Emerald Necklace Park System
- Longfellow Bridge: poor connections



In addition to specific connectivity issues, other problems include overgrown plants, goat paths, and broken/missing pavement along the trails. Notable public feedback included encouraging the design team to plan for bicyclists of all abilities (namely, children), improving lighting structures, widening the path when possible, and enforcing no vehicular right turns on red lights.

The design consultants are set to finish drafting recommendations for improving the overall pedestrian and bicycling facilities by Spring 2012, when another round of public meetings will be held to provide feedback for the recommended bike/pedestrian facilities. For more information, contact Stephanie Boundy at 617-973-8049 or Stephanie.Boundy@state.ma.us.

T to cut trains in severe storms

New winter plan aimed at reducing delays, shutdowns

The MBTA intends to run fewer trains in severe winter weather as part of a plan revealed yesterday to avoid a repeat of last winter, when the T drew harsh criticism for stranding thousands of riders in the snow and cold because of equipment failures and track problems.

The truncated schedule will have the greatest impact on customers on the commuter rail, which runs less frequently than subway and bus service but is more likely to be hampered by snow and ice, with nearly 400 miles of exposed track. A problem on one train or track section can cause cascading delays. On multiple days last winter, three of every four commuter trains were late, and some stalled for hours.

Now, 23 percent of commuter rail trains will be canceled in advance - to try to allow workers and equipment more breathing room to keep up with storm fighting while giving remaining trains a better chance of arriving on time. Buses and subways will see less dramatic reductions.

“What we learned from last year is trying to maintain a full schedule will be difficult for us in a severe storm, both on subway and commuter rail,” said Jonathan R. Davis, acting general manager of the MBTA.

Davis said he hopes customers will be understanding, particularly if the T does a better job of providing real-time information about problems and conditions.

There is no specific snowfall amount or temperature reading that will trigger the winter schedule. Instead, T operations officials will confer on a case-by-case basis, asking riders to turn to a new website, mbta.com/winter, where they have posted the foul-weather schedules and created a clearinghouse for winter transit issues. A redesigned home page and mobile website are supposed to make it easier for riders to find useful information quickly.

Both MBTA and commuter rail officials said they are making more employees available not just to clear snow and repair equipment but to aid with customer service, and they intend to do a better job communicating with each other as well as with the public.

“The people are prepped, the supplies are there, and we think we’ll have a better response than we did last year,” said Hugh J. Kiley Jr., commuter rail general manager.



For foul-weather schedules and up-to-date information regarding winter transit issues, go to:
www.mbta.com/winter

How Biking Can Save Cities Billions of Dollars in Health Expenses

Nearly 70 percent of Americans' car trips are less than two miles long. It's a no-brainer that biking instead of driving to take care of these trips is a great way to get exercise while cutting air pollution. While we've always assumed that the cumulative effect of many individuals making that choice would be longer, healthier lives and cleaner air in our cities, a recent scientific study put some rigor to our hypotheses and proved us right.

Last week, the journal *Environmental Health Perspectives* published findings from a study by scientists at the University of Wisconsin on the economic and health benefits of switching from a car to a bike for trips shorter than five miles long in 11 metropolitan areas around the upper Midwest. Combining data on air pollution, medical costs, mortality rates, car accidents, and physical fitness, the researchers found that if inhabitants of the sample region switched to bikes for half of their short trips, they'd create a net societal health benefit of \$3.5 billion per year from the increase in air quality and \$3.8 billion in savings from smaller health care costs associated with better fitness and fewer mortalities from a decreased rate of car accidents.

"We were conservative," Jonathan Patz, a professor of population health studies and a co-author of the study, told NPR. The study assumed that Midwesterners would bike only when the weather was the best—about four months worth of days per year—which is most likely false, seeing as frosty Minneapolis was named the country's best city for biking in 2010. And if the study were conducted somewhere with warmer weather, the results might be even more dramatic.



The Easiest Ways to Go Green

Get started on a green path with these simple steps:

Stop Idling Every moment you spend idling your car's engine means needlessly wasting gas, as well as rougher wear on your vehicle. Idling for more than 10 seconds wastes more gas than is needed for startup. Overall, Americans idle away 2.9 billion gallons of gas a year, worth around \$78.2 billion.

Turn Off Your Computer Save energy and wear and tear on your hardware by shutting down your computer at night. You'll save an average of \$90 of electricity a year.

Sign Up for Green Energy More than half of all electricity consumers in the U.S. now have the option of purchasing green power from their utility. Find out how you can buy it by visiting the Department of Energy's state-by-state list of providers. You can also check with your own utility to see what's available.

Turn Down the Thermostat It definitely pays to give a thought to your heat and thermostat, since most households shell out 50 to 70% of

their energy budgets on heating and cooling. For every degree you lower the thermostat, you'll save between 1 and 3% on your heating bill. Do the same thing in reverse with air conditioning.

Wash Your Laundry in Cold Water An easy way to clean green is to turn the dial on your washing machine to cold. Most loads don't need hot water, and 90% of the energy used by washing machines goes into heating. The higher the water temperature, the higher the cost to you and the planet.

Pay Bills Online Save natural resources as well as late fees by enrolling in online bill-paying options. Paperless billing not only saves trees, it also eliminates the fossil fuel needed to get all those billing envelopes from them to you and back again. Plus, you'll save money on stamps.

Jettison Junk Mail Around 100 million trees and 28 billion gallons of water are used to send junk mail to

Americans every year, according to greendimes.com.

You can stop 75% of unsolicited mail by registering on the Mail Preference Service on the Direct Marketing Association Website (DMAChoice.org). Within 90 days, most unsolicited mail will stop.

Print on Two Sides Know what? It's not that hard to print on both sides of the paper. But even though most software programs give that option, most of us still print only on one side of the page. Consider this: the U.S. alone uses 4 million tons of copy paper annually, about 27 pounds per person. Save money and your local landfill. Print on two sides.

Carpool It! If your drive to work is 25 miles each way and at least half is in typical stop-and-go traffic, you'll save almost 10 percent of your monthly carbon emissions by carpooling. Not to mention the gas dollars you'll save and the fun you'll have sharing office gossip with your friends.

"NEVER DOUBT THAT A SMALL GROUP OF THOUGHTFUL, COMMITTED CITIZENS CAN CHANGE THE WORLD. INDEED, IT'S THE ONLY THING THAT EVER HAS."

- MARGARET MEAD

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