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April 18, 2017

Thomas Tinlin, Highway Administrator
Massachusetts Department of Transportation
10 Park Plaza, Suite 4160
Boston, MA 02116

Subject: Follow-up from April 13, 2017 meeting about MassDOT Project 60663, Highland Ave, Needham Street and Newton Bridge over the Charles River Corridor

Dear Mr. Tinlin,

We sincerely appreciate MassDOT's presentation to Newton and Needham on April 13, 2017, updating both communities on the Highland Avenue/Needham Street Corridor Project. We now feel we have an understanding of the challenges, changes and proposed future plan and schedule. We understand that MassDOT feels it is necessary to push the schedule of the project back from the FY'18 TIP to the FY'19 TIP because it cannot complete the Right of Way work in time to meet the FY'18 TIP deadline. We understand as well, that based on MassDOT's Complete Streets review, MassDOT would like to incorporate protected bike lanes into the project consistent with MassDOT's current policy; we understand that upgrading the design to accommodate the protected bike lanes will not impact the timeline, as the ROW delay is dictating the timeline, although it will increase the cost.

While we understand the reasoning, we remain committed to seeing this project through on the original timeline and hope we can work together to problem solve how this can be achieved. Our basic position has not changed from that expressed in our letter dated March 24, 2017 and from our comments at the MPO meeting on March 30, 2017. Specifically, Newton and Needham believe:

1. The current roadway is unsafe for pedestrians and cyclists and congested for motorists. Plans to redesign this vital corridor have been underway for at least a decade, and both communities were gratified when the project was placed on the FY'18 TIP.
2. The Highland Avenue/Needham Street project lies at the heart of the N2 Innovation District. Continued and future growth for both housing and businesses is predicated on the completion of this project on time. Pushing the project back one year could jeopardize a transformational mixed use development on Needham St. in Newton and the economic development of the corridor in both communities.
3. Newton and Needham recognize that protected bike lanes can provide increased safety for all users of the road. We believe that simpler alternatives for protected bike lanes exist that might facilitate redesign at lower cost and avoid potential future delays in the timeline.
4. Newton and Needham recognize that demands on the roadway differ in each community and believe that the roadway design solutions do not need to be the same on both sides of the river, which could favorably impact the timeline.

Administrator Tinlin, we do understand the challenges you face on this project and appreciate your willingness to meet regularly with both communities. In turn, we would like to offer to work with you diligently over the next few months to find creative solutions to keep this project in the FY'18 TIP.

Very truly yours,



Seth Warren, Mayor

City of Newton



Marianne B. Cooley, Chair

Needham Board of Selectmen

cc: Representative Denise Garlick
Senator Michael Rush
Senator Richard Ross
Senator Cynthia Creem
Representative Ruth Balser
Needham Board of Selectmen
Stephanie Pollack, Secretary of Transportation, MassDOT
David Andersen, Deputy Chief Engineer, MassDOT
Tom Currier, Supervising Project Manager, MassDOT
Kate Fitzpatrick, Needham Town Manager
Rick Merson, Needham Director of Public Works
Anthony Del Gaizo, Needham Town Engineer
Lee Newman, Needham Director of Planning & Community Development
Devra Bailin, Needham Director of Economic Development
James McGonagle, Newton Commissioner of Public Works
Nicole Freedman, Newton Director of Transportation
Barney Heath, Newton Director of Planning & Development
Dori Zaleznik, Newton Chief Administrative Officer
Deborah Crossley, Newton City Councilor
Brian Yates, Newton City Councilor
David Kalis, Newton City Councilor
Cheryl Lappin, Newton City Councilor
Richard Lipof, Newton City Councilor