

M E M O R A N D U M

TO: Officials of Acton, Concord, Lincoln, Lexington,
and the Route 2 Working Committee

FROM: Frederick P. Salvucci, Secretary, EOTC
John J. Carroll, Commissioner, MDPW

DATE: June 27, 1977

SUBJ: Decision on Route 2 -- Acton/Concord/Lincoln

After years of study, restudy, participation, argument,
and deliberation on the future of Route 2 in the Acton/Concord/
Lincoln area, Commissioner Carroll and I are today announcing a
decision.

o Route 2 will be improved on its present location with
added safety features including some median separation,
some possible grade separation, and some access control.

The goal for Route 2 is to improve the conditions of a
controlled access highway.

o Route 2 will not be reconstructed as a limited-access,
grade-separated expressway.

o Route 2 in Lincoln will not be realigned to a new location.

In short, we have opted for a "safety upgrade" solution to the
Route 2 problem.

We are convinced that this decision is most compatible
with the transportation needs of the Route 2 corridor, the
requirements of Federal and state environmental laws, the
transportation priorities of the region, and the realities of
available funding. We also believe that this decision is the

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fairest to those most immediately affected. We have reached this decision after a careful review of the DPW's extensive environmental analysis, the many comments of public officials and interested citizens, and the record of the public hearings.

1. The Transportation Needs of the Route 2 Corridor

Route 2 is adequate from a traffic capacity point of view to perform its current transportation function. The extensive study carried out as part of the Environmental Impact Study indicates that with an aggressive transit program, the transportation role of Route 2 in 1995 will not be significantly different than today.

The section of the road where capacity problems are most likely to develop is the section within Concord. Yet the study clearly predicts that with an aggressive strategy to encourage public transportation, the traffic situation in this section in 1995 would be slightly improved over that experienced today. It is therefore not surprising that the public comment of both elected officials and private citizens as to this section has been almost uniformly negative to a major build option, and no case was made in the public review process that a "big build" project should be treated as a priority for very scarce funds. While this testimony is not in itself conclusive, the strong public sentiment expressed throughout the participatory process, in combination with funding constraints, regional transportation priorities, and environmental concerns, all suggest a strong case against a decision for major highway expansion.

The major problem on Route 2 has been safety. Lack of median protection, uncontrolled grade crossings, excessive intersections with inadequate sight distances and excessive speeds have led to accidents. The recent safety improvements to parts of the roadway in the Concord area have had beneficial effect, but more is required in Acton and Lincoln as well. The portion of the roadway in Acton at Hosmer Street has recently been revised to eliminate cross movement. Piper Road and School Streets also need attention. The portion in Concord requires improvements at the rotary and at Crosby's Corner, and some extension of the median barrier where possible. The portion in Lincoln requires additional guardrail and prevention of further curb cuts as well as possible acquisition of some access rights to remove existing conflicts.

All of these improvements can be carried out substantially on land currently owned by the Department of Public Works, although in some areas, especially in Lincoln, some additional land-takings would make more extensive intersection and safety improvements possible. We can accomplish these measures to improve safety within our funding limitations.

Finally, throughout the state and nation, experience has shown that the most significant improvement in safety has occurred with reductions in speed, so we are recommending continued and increased enforcement of the speed limits on the entire roadway.

An additional transportation need may be to close Route 2A through Minuteman National Park, although whether that is necessary on a permanent basis is uncertain. This is an issue which must be dealt with separately from the major Route 2 options, since Route 2A serves different traffic functions than any of the Route 2 options studied. Closing Route 2A to accomplish Park objectives will simply make certain traffic movement more circuitous than presently. We believe that by the time the Park plans are completed, 10 to 15 years from now, it would be possible to close Route 2A, if necessary, without overloading Route 2. In the meantime, we are proposing to work with the Park Service on a possible compromise solution: to close Route 2A on an experimental basis at certain times of peak park usage, such as important weekend days. This would be similar to the policy used by the MDC in closing Storrow Drive during Esplanade concerts. Such temporary closing of Route 2A would require closer cooperation than has so far appeared evident from two Federal agencies -- the National Park Service and the U.S. Air Force. Access to Hanscom Field through Air Force property via Hartwell Avenue in Lexington is operationally possible if the Federal agencies decide to share the objective of getting traffic out of the National Park. State agencies are prepared to work cooperatively with the Federal agencies to experiment with different means of attaining that objective.

A separate cluster of transportation needs involve the planning for Hanscom Field, some relief for Routes 4, 225 in Bedford, the possible Hartwell Area connector, and the MBTA studies at 128 and the Lexington branch railway. This set of problems are closely interrelated to each other, but essentially separate from the Route 2 question and will continue to be actively pursued in a coordinated way with citizen involvement through the already established processes of the Hanscom Field Task Force and the Red Line 128 studies.

2. The Impact on the Environment

Confining the improvements to the present highway area will avoid taking of and minimize intrusion into the surrounding conservation lands, watershed areas, and other open spaces, which are among some of the most beautiful, most historic, and most important lands in the whole Boston region. Indeed, Minuteman National Park is of national significance. Avoiding further intrusion of traffic noise, and interference into these lands is of great importance.

The Hobbs Brook Reservoir, owned by the City of Cambridge, is an important water supply and watershed area not only for the City of Cambridge, but for the region as a whole. Scarcity of water supply is an increasing, serious problem for Massachusetts. Secretary of Environmental Affairs Murphy informs us that state policy to deal with this problem will focus more and more on increased utilization of local sources

as the only strategy consistent with the continued existence of an adequate water supply for Massachusetts, so critical to our economic and social well-being. In this context it is of vital importance to protect existing local water supplies such as that of Cambridge. Significant changes to Route 2, particularly a shift to a northern alignment, would badly affect this important water resource, both during and after construction, and should be avoided if at all reasonable from a transportation point of view.

With a safety upgrade within the existing alignment, not only will intrusions into new areas be eliminated but environmental improvements can be incorporated into the existing roadway by such features as closed drainage in places, landscaping, and noise buffers as appropriate. In addition, the unique aesthetics and visual qualities of existing Route 2 can be preserved and enhanced. By contrast, a new road -- either expressway or arterial -- on the Northern alignment in Lincoln would intrude into parklands, water supplies, and other open spaces which require and deserve the most scrupulous protection.

Lastly, Section 4(f) of the Federal Department of Transportation Act of 1966 prohibits use of federal funds for any transportation project which requires the use of certain public lands unless there are no feasible and prudent alternatives to such use. It is clear to us from our preliminary

review that there are a number of properties potentially subject to the 4(f) process which would be adversely impacted by a northern corridor alignment. While it is not necessary for us to complete this 4(f) review because the "safety upgrade" solution has no 4(f) impacts, it is nonetheless clear that there would be serious legal and administrative controversies over the choice of a northern corridor expressway or arterial highway, where the existing alignment is so clearly preferable from environmental and other policy considerations.

We believe, then, that the wisest course of action is to improve the safety and operating characteristics of the existing corridor, confining the project area to the present roadway area as much as possible. This conclusion is strongly supported by the extensive environmental analysis conducted by the DPW and its consultants, as well as the overwhelming testimony at the public hearings from elected official, citizen groups, and individuals.

In reaching this decision, we are mindful of the arguments put forward by the officials of Lincoln in support of moving the road to the northern edge of the Town. They have argued that this approach would improve regional access to the open space resources of Lincoln. In view of the fact that the best known open space resource in regional terms will certainly be the Minuteman Park, the current

location of Route 2, which maximizes the distance of the highway from the Park and maintains part of Lincoln's excellent conservation lands contiguous to the Park, seems far superior for regional access to open space.

We recognize that the location of Route 2 within Lincoln creates hazards for those crossing from one part to the other, as well as for those who live directly on Route 2. To respond to these problems, we are prepared to work with the Town to develop a satisfactory design -- to enhance the aesthetics and safety of local pedestrians and vehicular travel time; A grade separated interchange at Crosby Corner, an underpass with no connection to Route 2 itself at Bedford Road, a pedestrian overpass to be located between Bedford Road and Crosby Corner are three steps which we could consider. To further improve safety, we are also prepared to work with the Town to inhibit development along the existing route to prevent new access problems from occurring in the future. Finally, back-door access is possible to some of the Lincoln streets which currently intersect Route 2, making possible the elimination of some of the existing curb cuts which create potential hazards. We are prepared to work with the Town to develop suitable design solutions to these problems. Now that the northern alignment is ruled out, we hope that more attention to developing and maintaining suitable design characteristics will be possible, through a combination of construction improvements and zoning control.

3. Regional Transportation Priorities

Our overall regional strategy is to give first priority to improving public transportation, with major public investment oriented to transit and rail upgrading. In the Northwest corridor, the Fitchburg Division of the B&M commuter service is one which has enjoyed an increase in patronage despite deterioration of equipment and service. Now that the purchase of the B&M right of way and vehicles is accomplished, the MBTA will begin to improve the roadbed and rebuild the cars. In addition, it should be noted that the extension of the Red Line to the Northwest which is a major policy commitment in this corridor, with major transit funds earmarked, provides for a direct transfer between the B&M and the subway at the planned Porter Square Station. This will vastly improve the public transportation access to the Cambridge institutional complexes of MIT and Harvard, so important to the employment base of the Northwestern suburbs.

Given such large commitments in public transportation, we are allocating our scarce highway resources to those road projects which directly serve transit or complement transit by providing access to areas presently served by roads which are much more congested and much less tied to the major highway network, rather than to highway projects such as a Route 2 expressway which would compete with transit investment.

It is also obvious that regional transportation policies must be consistent with our state and national commitments to energy conservation. A new expressway would be inconsistent with this goal, as well as with a policy trend toward lower speed limits for safety reasons.

4. Funding Constraints

For over two years, we have often pointed out that it seemed highly improbable that we would have the resources to do anything other than a safety upgrade along this stretch of Route 2, but we have avoided crystallizing the decision because of a hope that different sources of funding might be around the next corner, and because it would be improper to make a decision heavily based on unavailability of funding if that situation were about to change. At the same time there is a strong agreement that safety improvements along the existing route are appropriate if no major build options are likely.

It is now very clear that the lack of funding capacity to carry out a major build in this corridor is a condition likely to last into the indefinite future. We therefore intend to proceed responsibly in the near future to provide for safer operations on a roadway which is unlikely to change in a major way in the next several decades.

The federal funding available to Massachusetts for all highways other than Interstate are desperately short of our needs. We have attempted in the Federal Highway Act of 1976 to increase the available funds; we have continued to seek allies in other states in this effort; and we have spoken directly to the new Secretary of Transportation Brock Adams about our needs. Despite these efforts, it is clear by now that while there may be some national support for significant increases in Federal funding for special bridge replacements, and for completion of the Interstate Highway network, there is much less support for major improvements in the primary system.

Route 2 is part of the primary system. Statewide, for this system, we have available about \$10 million of Federal funds annually. These are made available on a 70-30 matching basis. We can assume, therefore, that over the next five years, there may be in the range of \$50 million available for projects in this category. Yet throughout the state, there are projects to improve the primary system which would total about nine times this much. In other words, estimated revenues exceed estimated project costs in this category by about 9 to 1.

In this context, the \$80 million (in 1973 dollars) estimated for reconstruction of Route 2 as an expressway would be an impossible burden on available funds. This funding constraint, which reinforces the transportation and

environmental considerations in the corridor, has been the subject of painstaking review for over two years, both in terms of this corridor and the entire state, and points a direction with statewide implications. There simply is not funding available outside of a few long established corridors to create major new rights of way. This fact, as well as the major environmental and political opposition to such action, underlies the basic reality of roadway improvements over the next decade. We must concentrate principally on protection of existing rights of way from erosion by development, with excessive curb cuts reducing the safety and capacity of roadways over time, and on upgrading of existing situations by careful and modest improvements in response to specific problems.

5. Other Considerations

In an attempt to deal with the funding constraints, Lincoln officials and others have asked us to consider stretching out the Route 2 project over a decade or two and constructing it incrementally. The first step, they urge, would be acquiring land in Lincoln for the northern alignment, concurrently with minor safety improvements on the existing road. This would be followed by construction on this new alignment. Later, the Concord and Acton sections would be reconstructed as expressways, if safety and congestion seemed to require such treatment a decade or so from now.

This proposal is fundamentally inconsistent with environmental requirements, as set forth in the environmental analysis and in a broad range of comments at the public hearing. Indeed, a "slow build" solution to Route 2 through Lincoln would have the worst possible total impact on the environment. For years, as land takings and then clearance and finally construction began in the northern corridor, the area would become a wasteland, with direct impacts on the noise, air, water and visual qualities of the vicinity. The Cambridge water supply, Minuteman Park, and the neighborhoods would be negatively affected by both the existing road and the long drawn-out preparations for the new road. There is a substantial chance, moreover, that existing Route 2 would never be "recycled" back into a smaller scale town road, as Lincoln proposed, and that the area would end up with both the existing four-lane road and the new one. Finally, the "slow build" proposal seems predicated on the assumption that eventually the big build decision would prevail in Concord which means that the environmental impacts of that decision would have to be weighed now. In short, environmental impacts of a "slow build" decision are too serious to allow us to select it and still comply with the letter and the spirit of Federal and state environmental requirements.

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Deputy Chief Engineer
Project Development

Aside from environmental requirements as such, we must be fair to the people affected. It is our conclusion that a "slow build" approach to Route 2 would be grossly unfair to the people who would be most directly impacted in all the towns for the entire 12-mile length of the project.

A cloud of uncertainty would continue to exist for many years to come -- for those in the present corridor and for those now in the path of the proposed northern alignment. Farmstands and other roadside businesses in Concord and elsewhere on Route 2 would be in a constant state of not knowing exactly how fast the project would proceed and whether they should make improvements, stay as they are, or move. The same is true of residents. Home values are already affected, sales are difficult, household plans are unsettled. The "slow-build" proposal is really no decision at all, postponing for years the hard choices and misleading everyone in the meantime.

Our responsibility as public officials require us to be as clear as possible in situations like this. Uncertainty itself is disruptive. We believe it is fairer to say clearly that Route 2 will not be moved and that it might be moved or it might be reconstructed at some time in the future. There have been enough studies and enough uncertainty on this issue.

We believe it is wiser for us to make the basic choices now, so that all interested parties can know where they stand and hopefully cooperate toward a common goal.



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02139
Tel. 876-6800

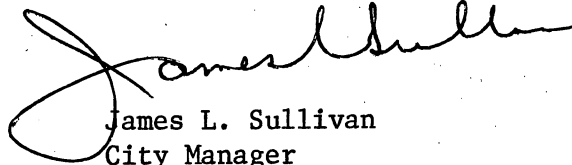
EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT
JAMES L. SULLIVAN
City Manager

July 14, 1977

To the Honorable, the City Council:

Enclosed for your information is a copy of the State's
decision on Route 2 improvements in Lincoln.

Very truly yours,



James L. Sullivan
City Manager

JLS/mbf
Enc.

Agenda Item No. 2

F-246

Communication from City Manager
relative to the State's decision
on Route 2 improvements in Lincoln.

In City Council,

July 14, 1977

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