

July 16, 1991

Dear City Councillors,

I am writing to express my whole hearted agreement with the enclosed editorial. I hope you won't spend our hard-earned tax dollars on any lawsuit against this (or any other) aspect of the Central Artery project.

Sincerely,

Julia L Bell

67 Montgomery St.

Cambridge 02140

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A scheme-free Charles Crossing

The small parcel of land on the Charles River that will be touched by the Central Artery project is a tangle of gravel factories, rail yards, warehouses and elevated highway. It will remain unappealing no matter what kind of bridge crosses the Charles.

That reality ought to guide state Transportation Secretary Richard Taylor as he decides on a plan for the Charles River Crossing. His decision must be fiscally prudent and not impede the timely completion of the project.

A special design committee has labored for months to devise an alternative to Scheme Z, the controversial version of the crossing proposed by the state Department of Public Works.

The committee identified issues that need to be resolved by Taylor, but it was split on its final recommendations. After two rounds of voting, it narrowly approved a proposal called Alternative 8.

This plan has several attractive features.

- Several loops in the desolate North Point section would go underground to provide a more pleasing and accessible edge to the Charles. This is easily worth an extra \$30 million.

- A ramp and reconfigured tunnels at Sudbury Street in Boston would siphon off traffic from the North End and Charlestown. They are a bargain at \$60 million.

- Cable-stay bridges would be designed for the main Charles River crossing. This visual enhancement is clearly worth \$20 million.

But Alternative 8 contains other elements that would escalate the cost and delay completion of the project by several years.

- To reduce the ramps at North Point and to eliminate a second bridge over the river, a complex of tunnels would be built from the North End to Leverett Circle. This is an intriguing plan, but at \$200 million it is expensive, even by the standards of the multibillion-dollar artery project.

- Instead of a ramp over the Charles, a tunnel would divert northbound traffic from Storrow Drive to Interstate 93.

The \$100 million that would be spent on the tunnel would also buy environmental problems. Sediments on the riverbed would be disturbed, and contractors would have to get rid of great quantities of extra fill. Federal regulators would probably demand a time-consuming environmental review of this section of the project.

The design review committee was not asked to

consider the price tag, but Taylor must. If he calls for any changes in the original plan, he will need to make the case before the Federal Highway Administration for more money. The state by itself could afford only the more modest improvements.

Even if Taylor endorses every aspect of Alternative 8, Cambridge has said it will go to court to stop the entire project. City officials contend their objections are environmentally and aesthetically based, as though the bridge were crossing the Charles at Harvard Square instead of North Point.

This desolate area has been a transportation corridor for 150 years, and the intrusive presence of Interstate 93 and the rail yards suggest it will remain so for the next 150. If Taylor agrees to depress the ramps close to the river, he will be satisfying the city's legitimate concerns.

For all the furor over the Charles Crossing, it comprises a half-mile of the seven-mile artery-tunnel project. And of all sections except the harbor tunnel, the crossing affects the fewest people.

Plans for the project have been around for so long that it is easy to forget the benefits it will bring to transportation in eastern New England.

The Central Artery is outmoded, and it inappropriately cuts through the center of downtown Boston. Its replacement by tunnels will unclog the flow of north-south traffic and open up 22 acres of land for housing and parks.

Traffic to the airport has badly outgrown the two harbor tunnels and the makeshift transit system to East Boston. Construction of a third tunnel will speed traffic from the Massachusetts Turnpike and allow nearby South Station to become a major terminal for airport-bound buses.

There are ancillary benefits as well. The chaotic highway system through East Boston will be revamped, and green space will be added to buffer the neighborhood from the airport. Spectacle Island will be transformed from an abandoned dump to a park. Both sides of the Charles will be passable to foot travel for the first time in generations. Especially important in the recession-plagued construction industry, thousands of jobs will be created.

The Cambridge suit is mischievous and ought to be dropped. Taylor needs to devise a package of improvements that will be acceptable to federal highway administrators. The artery project is far too important to be delayed any further by the Charles Crossing debate.



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CONSENT COMM. # 33 5-916

Comm. from Julia L. Bell, 67 Montgomery
Street in opposition to the City of
Cambridge filing a law suit regarding
the Central Artery Project.

In City Council,

August 7, 1991

Placed in file