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CAMBRIDGE MA.

Michael Halle

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April 9, 1998

The Honorable Cambridge City Council
Cambridge City Hall
Cambridge, Massachusetts

The Honorable Council,

I am writing this letter to voice my support for the city's proposed North Massachusetts Avenue reconstruction plan. As Chairman of the Cambridge Bicycle Committee, I have been a part of numerous discussions within the general, pedestrian and bicycling community throughout the entire time that the North Mass. Ave. plan has been formulated. I believe the city staff and consultants embodied the diverse goals and needs of each of these groups into the plan as it developed; the final work is an excellent compromise between sometimes opposing interests. While neither the plan nor the process by which it was achieved is, or could be, everything to every one, I believe both serve as models for other towns and cities as they rebalance the needs of their communities away from automobile dominated highways and back to people-friendly, vibrant streetscapes.

I would like to elaborate on why I believe this plan is a good one. First, it is designed to reduce the speed of automobile traffic along Mass. Ave. Speeding is a primary contributor to fatalities and injuries involving motor vehicles. Speeding dramatically increases the risk of death or injury to pedestrians. Speeding makes parking, driveway access, and turns from side streets intimidating and dangerous. Speeding discourages drivers from stopping at businesses along a roadway, for fear of tying up traffic or being involved in an accident. Finally, speeding frightens pedestrians, particularly the disabled, the very old, and the very young, from walking or otherwise traveling through their neighborhood. A busy roadway can deny an elderly person, a parent with a stroller, or a person in a wheelchair access to much of our city, just because of fear. That's not right, and it isn't fair. By slowing traffic speeds along Mass. Ave. while maintaining traffic volumes, this plan helps give back the neighborhood to the whole community while assuring that cars can still get where there are going without using quiet side streets.

From a bicyclist perspective, the improvements in bicycle facilities in the new plan are a landmark in the city's commitment to encourage safe and convenient travel for all modes of transit. If we design roads for cars, only cars will travel them. If we design roads for cars and bicycles, we make it clear where drivers, bicyclists, and pedestrians belong and must be responsible. Cities that have installed bicycle lanes have demonstrated that good bicyclist

behavior has become more common, including riding in the direction of traffic, not riding on the sidewalks, and even wearing bicycle helmets. Beyond safety, we want to bring more people to our businesses without requiring more parking spaces. Bicycle and pedestrian friendliness does just that: it creates a sense of place, a location to go *to* and not just drive *through*.

In public meetings, some members of the community have been outspoken in their criticism of one or more aspects of the plan or the planning process. Many of these questions involve very local issues such as access to a street or driveway or business parking. I believe that the city has a genuine desire and commitment to address these needs if in any way possible, as city planners have spent much of the process to date going from door to door and neighborhood to neighborhood talking to the people to plan affects. Not every problem has an answer: a new legal left turn makes access to a side street easier both for neighbors and for through traffic. I believe the city will do the best it can to compromise between these issues.

Other neighborhood criticism involves more global concerns, such as why the median strip was removed, why the neighborhood could not have been surveyed for their ideas, or why the plan developed over time instead of as a set of competing ideas. I believe this criticism address important issues, but respectfully propose they approach the answers in the wrong way. I believe a median, or any other design element, should be a tool of a designer charged with accomplishing a set of goals. A design element should not be a goal in itself (unless it has historic or esthetic value, which the median on Mass. Ave. certainly does not). A project of the scale of this one requires vision, continuity, and expertise of professionals guided by both the future hopes and present needs of people in the community.

The goals voiced in the community meetings included improved access and safety for pedestrians and bicyclists, maintained driver access and safety, availability of parking, convenient (but not too convenient) access to side streets, and an attractive streetscape. This plan is a collection of compromises that meets these goals, assembled over the past year by the city's best engineers, designers, and consultants. I trust the city hires the best people to do their work, and I trust their judgement in carrying out their charge once they understand it.

To those who question these professional's ability to create a safe plan or even measure a street width, I ask, "Whose vision is the current Massachusetts Avenue? Who designed it? Whose interest did they value? Whose opinion did they ask?" If we cannot agree that our city can design a safer, more livable streetscape than an aging, barren, pedestrian-unfriendly expanse of asphalt highway designed in an age when cars and more of them were the answer to all the world's ills, we have much broader issues to address than the design of a street.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Halle". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Michael Halle

Consent Communication #12

5-225

A communication was received
from Michael Halle, transmitting
a letter of support for the
city's proposed North Massachusetts
Avenue reconstruction plan.

In City Council April 13, 1998

Referred to

7:00 pm hearing