



TOWN OF CONCORD

Transportation Advisory Committee

141 Keyes Road, Concord, MA 01742
(978) 318-3290

TO: MassDOT

CC: The Concord Select Board; Kerry LeFleur, Town Manager; Representative Simon Cataldo; Representative Carmine Gentile; Senator Mike Barrett; Elizabeth Hughes, Town Planner; Alan Cathcart, Director of Public Works; Eric Simms, Director of Sustainability; Steve Dookran, Town Engineer; Town of Concord Climate Action Committee; Monica Tibbits-Nutt, MassDOT Secretary; Melissa Hoffer, MA Climate Chief

FROM: Town of Concord Transportation Advisory Committee

SUBJECT: Public Comment on Route 2 Corridor Improvements Study

Thank you for this opportunity to provide public comment on the Route 2 District 3 and District 4 Corridor Study. The Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) for the Town of Concord appreciates MassDOT's effort to improve transportation conditions along the Route 2 Corridor. We thank VHB and MassDOT for this initial analysis of the complexity of conditions, usage, and constraints, and for providing some concept-level design examples for public examination. Below are comments the Committee submits for consideration.

1. General Comments

1.1 Opposition to Proposed Widening

Our Committee strongly objects to scenarios outlined in the study that seek to expand Route 2 from four (4) to six (6) travel lanes at intersections within the Town of Concord. Route 2 already poses a significant barrier for pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists traveling across Route 2 at the signalized at-grade crossings in Concord. Throughout our Committee's public outreach efforts, creating safer crossings for local traffic, particularly pedestrians and cyclists crossing Route 2, has consistently emerged as the top priority for the majority of Concord residents. Expanding Route 2 as a barrier by adding additional travel and turning lanes will only exacerbate this issue, further endangering vulnerable road users and undermining efforts to promote more sustainable transportation options in our community.

1.2 Future changes to Route 2 should enhance, not diminish crosstown connectivity for all road users

Starting with the work on the Town's 2018 Envision Concord – Bridge to 2030 Comprehensive Long Range Plan, discussions and surveys of our residents consistently indicate that our most urgent priority is safer and more comfortable crossings of Route 2 for pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists. This need was reaffirmed by local stakeholders in the Town's most recent 2023 survey of residents, business owners, and Town employees.

Design concepts that would widen Route 2 within the Town of Concord by adding 1-2 travel lanes and/or additional turning lanes raise serious safety and connectivity concerns for pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists alike. Widening the highway at these crossings would increase the time pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers spend crossing these intersections, and may raise the risk of collision with fast-moving highway traffic.

While we acknowledge MassDOT's effort to include pedestrians and bicyclists in the design concepts laid out in the Corridor Study, data and experience have shown that painted crosswalks and bike lanes are insufficient to ensure the safety of vulnerable road users, especially when facing vehicles traveling at highway speeds. While these incremental improvements are a positive step in the right direction, they provide inadequate protection on Route 2 at its current width and would not mitigate the heightened risks associated with widening the highway and adding more lanes for vulnerable road users to navigate.

We are doubtful that sufficient mitigation strategies would emerge in subsequent detailed design proposals for these intersections that would adequately compensate for any increase to the number of travel lanes and/or the widening of Route 2.

1.3 At-Grade Intersection Design Guidelines for Route 2 are needed

In support of safe pedestrian and bicycle crossing of Route 2, our Committee supports the following improvements for crossings of Route 2 in Concord:

- a. Enhanced pedestrian refuge areas
- b. Shortened crossing distances
- c. Traffic light timing that provides adequate time for safe pedestrian crossing
- d. An Operation and Management Plan for all Route 2 traffic signals

2. Feedback on Some Concept Design Examples

In addition to our overarching concern regarding highway widening, the Committee would like to provide specific feedback on several design concepts proposed for intersections within the Town of Concord.

2.1 Route 2 at Baker Avenue Extension/Elm Street

We strongly support adding sidewalks, crosswalks, and bike lanes to the intersection of Route 2 with Baker Ave. Extension and Elm Street. This area currently lacks these facilities, making it dangerous for cyclists and nearly impossible for pedestrians to cross safely at this location. With new commercial development under construction on Elm Street and a planned affordable

housing project on Baker Ave Extension, these amenities would be a timely enhancement to safety and accessibility in the area.

We support the improvements outlined in design concept 1, however we oppose design concepts 2 & 3, which propose significant widening of the roadway on the approach and departure to/from Baker Avenue Extension/Elm Street. These scenarios would create an excessively wide barrier for local traffic attempting to cross the highway, which we believe is unnecessary and detrimental to community connectivity and safety.

2.2 Route 2 at Main Street (Route 62)

Main Street/Route 62 is the major local travel connection between Concord Center and West Concord. Any widening of the Route 2 crossing or addition of highway lanes here could profoundly impact local mobility. Therefore, we have significant concerns about design concepts that propose increasing the number of lanes at these intersections.

The Committee is particularly concerned about the proposal to add a dual-left turn lane for the westbound approach at the intersection of Route 2 with Main Street, as outlined in concept 2. Although the concept plan shows two lanes heading westward on Route 62 to accept dual-left traffic from Route 2, these two lanes must then combine to one lane to match the remaining road to West Concord Center. Residents already contend with significant congestion along Route 62 through West Concord during peak hours, and we fear that design concept #2 will move the current congestion of the single storage lane into the intersection itself due to the narrow right of way of Route 62 / Main Street. We urge MassDOT to conduct a thorough evaluation of this proposal to enhance highway flow without detrimentally impacting congestion levels or compromising community livability along Route 62.

2.3 Route 2 at Walden Street (Route 126)

We want to express particularly strong support for the pedestrian and bicycle enhancements proposed at Walden Street, including increased pedestrian refuge areas, shortened crossing distances, and a buffered bike lane. We strongly urge MassDOT to replicate these enhancements at other at-grade intersections throughout Concord.

3. Important Factors Not Considered in the Current Study

3.1 Mode Shift

The Committee is disappointed that the study's scope did not include thorough analysis of transit options and potential for mode shift, especially considering the direct parallel of the Fitchburg Commuter Rail Line through the study area.

A more comprehensive approach to transportation planning in the Boston metro area is required by the Massachusetts Global Warming Solutions Act and its prioritization of cross-departmental policy actions. Relying solely on expanding infrastructure designed for single-occupancy vehicles

represents an outdated strategy for alleviating congestion. Many state DOTs and the USDOT are now exploring ways to reconnect communities previously divided by highways, yet MassDOT's current proposals risk further dividing ours.

We urge MassDOT to develop strategies that promote public transit use, enhance cycling and pedestrian infrastructure, and reduce reliance on cars.

3.2 Redesign of the Concord Rotary and redevelopment of the MCI Concord Property

We share MassDOT's view that redesigning the Concord Rotary presents a significant opportunity to improve traffic flow and enhance safety for all users along the Route 2 corridor and within the Town of Concord.

The closure of MCI-Concord presents an unprecedented opportunity to comprehensively rethink this intersection, ensuring that future designs seamlessly integrate with community needs and promote sustainable transportation practices.

We urge MassDOT to engage in collaborative discussions with local stakeholders to identify design improvements for this location, with a particular emphasis on enhancing safety and access for pedestrians and cyclists, as well as safety for motor vehicles, and improving access to public transit.

3.3 Grade-Separated Crossings

We understand that the scope of work for this study did not consider any grade-separated alternatives east of the Concord Rotary due to extensive planning, substantial permitting, and potential right-of-way acquisition challenges. However, our Committee has identified an urgent need for grade-separated crossings to support pedestrians and cyclists crossing Route 2. These crossings could facilitate the mode shift required to achieve our transportation, mobility, equity, and climate goals at both the local and state levels.

A bridge for pedestrians and cyclists to cross over Route 2 at Main Street / Route 62 would be a particularly valuable improvement. Creation of a trail beside the MBTA commuter rail line where it passes under Route 2 might also be an effective solution for enhancing crosstown connectivity. A solution like this would allow for greater flexibility in redesigning this intersection.

In conclusion, Route 2 serves as a dividing line within our town, separating our two village centers and all our school districts. Any changes to the width of the highway and number of travel lanes will profoundly affect our community's cohesion and safety. Therefore, we urge MassDOT to engage closely with Concord's residents and the Transportation Advisory Committee to ensure that any final designs reflect our community's safety priorities and support sustainable transportation goals.

Thank you for considering our comments. We look forward to continuing our collaboration with MassDOT to achieve safer, more accessible transportation corridors for all residents.