

## A Greenway Paved with Misinformation

Ever since we began objecting to the Greenway committee's changed plans for South Main in 2023, we have been fighting a stream of misinformation coming from supporters, while the evidence we've found in bike transportation design manuals and communications with MassDOT has itself been declared to be misinformation. Here's a sampling:

### Transportation Bond Funding

In 2023 we were told that if the South Main shared-use path wasn't built, the \$2.4 million T-Bond allocation would be forfeited. We wrote to MassDOT ourselves, asking if this was so, and were eventually told that the money could be used for either the shared-use path or the "bike boulevard" design preferred by the neighborhood. (See [here](#).) In response to MassDOT's declaration, the Greenway committee wrote that **they** would not request the release of the T-Bond money unless their design was chosen. So *that's* where the "forfeiting" really originated.

### Engineering Directive E-20-001

VHB, the engineers for the project, declared that a MassDOT Engineering Directive prohibits construction of bike boulevards on roads classified as 'arterial' (including South Main). We refuted this claim in detail ([here](#)) on May 29, 2024, but the Select Board either ignored this document or dismissed it out of hand, and the Board and VHB continue to claim that the neighborhood's preferred design is against "current standards."

The Select Board asked the neighborhood to prepare a memorandum for KP Law, the town's counsel, making the case for configuring South Main as a bike boulevard. We sent the requested document ([here](#)) on June 19, 2024. But when the Board went to the KP Law for an opinion, on December 2, 2024, only a Select Board Greenway proponent and VHB spoke to them, again citing the "evidence" of the Engineering Directive. The neighborhood's memorandum was not presented. Unsurprisingly, counsel gave the town an opinion ([here](#)) supporting the Greenway design and warning against implementing the neighborhood's preferred design.

This one false claim has been the most destructive piece of misinformation we have been dealing with. It resulted in the collapse of the most hopeful compromise proposal, called "build both," and seems to have justified the Select Board's rejection of all evidence presented by the neighborhood that bike boulevard is the appropriate facility for South Main.

## **Ignoring Actual Guidelines for Bike Facilities**

Both Massachusetts and the Federal government publish manuals for the construction of bike facilities, and all of these manuals recommend that streets with South Main's traffic volume and speed accommodate bikes on the road in a "bike boulevard" design – which is what the neighborhood has been asking for and is what the Greenway committee itself was planning prior to 2020. (See discussion [here](#).) The Select Board chose to ignore these documents and believe VHB's (false) claim that the recommended design is inapplicable to South Main.

## **Regs for Thee, Not for Me**

The Greenway committee cites MassDOT regulations when they appear to rule out neighborhood proposals, but ignores them for their own designs. Ignored guidelines include 10' path width, turning radii for curves near the concrete bridge and switchback, speed humps (inapplicable to arterial roads), required distance of path from fences, minimum height of fences between the path and roadway, and numerous warnings about using sidewalks as bike paths. (Writeup [here](#).)

The two compromise proposals offered by the neighborhood, "build both" and marked bike lanes, were both scuttled by the town's insistence on adhering to (alleged or real) MassDOT regulations for the neighborhood designs. The Greenway committee created the South Main connector project as a municipal, not DOT, project for the specific purpose of avoiding having to adhere to DOT requirements for a 10-foot wide shared-use path. Yet when the neighborhood proposed a compromise involving 4-foot bike lanes and 10-foot vehicular lanes, the committee insisted that MassDOT regulations had to be followed – 5-foot bike lanes and 11-foot vehicle lanes – resulting in an overall paved width that was unacceptable to the neighborhood. (Read more [here](#).)

## **Lies About Tree Cutting**

At the 2024 Greenway Forum, a resident asked about trees being cut in the section below Fort Hill Road. The chair of the Greenway committee said that "the shared-use path affects zero trees," or "a limited number of...weed trees," and "I believe it's less than four." What she failed to say is that a 2022 survey had tallied 33 trees that would need cutting, and that enough large trees had to be cut that a Mass. Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) review would be required. And she neglected to mention that when the committee learned this, they preemptively had four trees cut down in an effort to avoid having a MEPA review. See discussion [here](#).

### **“International Standard”**

In the FAQ published by the town about Article 2, they claim that the “international standard” for shared-use paths is 8 feet wide. Look it up on the internet: the standard is 3 meters wide, which is 2 inches short of 10 feet. They claim that they requested and were granted permission to create a path 8 feet wide. We doubt this because MassDOT does not provide design exception decisions to projects not being built by MassDOT, and because in Jan. 2024 the Greenway committee wrote, “The WMRG Committee pursued T-Bond funding with the express intention of avoiding the standard 10’ path width.”

### **South Main and Route 9**

Various people, speaking with Greenway supporters in 2024, have come away with the impression that if the shared-use path isn’t built on South Main, the Route 9 bike path project won’t be built. We wrote to MassDOT and were told that this wasn’t the case, that the projects are independent and there is no contingency between them.

### **How Many Cyclists?**

When the Greenway committee is arguing that the shared-use path needs to be built, they claim that only 4-7% of cyclists would ride on the street (a claim we refuted [here](#)). But when they want the neighborhood to stop worrying about bikes on their former sidewalk, they say that they expect virtually all through bikers will ride on the street. Make up your mind! Here’s what we think: Once the Route 9 bike path is open, we expect nearly everyone biking between Route 9 and the Rail Trail will ride on a designated bike path (our former sidewalk) if one is offered to them.

### **Eliminating Parking**

The Select Board plans to ban parking on the eastern side of the street, saying that this will “improve visibility.” This is nonsense – our visibility concerns are with bikes riding critically close to driveways on the shared-use path, and cars on the street are on the far side of that path and do not obstruct visibility. Banning parking on the east side just eliminates the most frequently used parking on the street.

The parking ban may be to accommodate the granite curb the Greenway design installs on the eastern side of the street. This curb, which is not wanted by anyone in the neighborhood, would prevent cars from parking partially off-street on the grass buffer as they do now. Banning parking will keep parked cars from occupying more of the roadway than they do not. But the curb will also reduce the usable width of the street for cyclists (they have to stay away front

the curb to avoid crashes), and it will make it impossible for cyclists to swerve into the grass buffer if necessary to avoid a collision.

The Board also says, in the Article 2 FAQ, that a bike boulevard design – bikes sharing the road with cars, as they do now – would require the elimination of all parking, which is false. MassDOT's [Project Development and Design Guide](#) states, in section 5.2.3, that “on-street parking is often found” on roadways with shared bicycle/ motor vehicle accommodations.

## **12 Years!**

The Greenway committee is fond of saying they've been working on “the” shared-use path for 12 years, since 2012. They're referring to the Route 9 path; the design for the shared-use path on South Main was hatched only in Oct. 2019, and the neighborhood wasn't notified of the change of plans until April 2023. They say we could have come to committee meetings to learn about the changes, but...there was a global pandemic happening at the time, remember? People didn't go to indoor meetings unless there was a good reason for doing so, and the last we'd heard, the Greenway plan was something the neighborhood enthusiastically supported.

Still more rebuttals to Greenway misinformation can be found on our website here:

[Responses to Arguments](#)