9C South Main St. / PO Box 901
Haydenville, MA 01039
jweigang@gmail.com

November 27, 2023

Francisca Heming, District Highway Director
270 Main Street
Lenox, MA 01240

Dear Director Heming,

I am writing as a representative of my neighborhood on South Main Street in Haydenville. Nearly 40 residents of our two-block stretch are strongly opposed to a plan by the Williamsburg Mill River Greenway Committee and MassDOT to replace the sidewalk on our street with a "shared-use path"—what we think of as a bike path because it would be a roadway where it's legal for bicycles and e-bikes to be ridden.

Our street, which runs parallel to Route 9 across the Mill River, has a speed limit of 25 MPH and is not heavily traveled. (A survey by the civil engineering firm Fuss & O'Neill in 2015 measured traffic at 809 cars per day, with a peak of 80 cars per hour.) The bicyclists among us have never had any hesitation in riding on our road or problem doing so—it's a fine example of a street where bicycles and cars can safely share the road.

Our sidewalk is used by pedestrians young and old—the people who live here. The homes adjacent to the sidewalk do not have expansive front yards; the sidewalk lies mere feet in front of some homes, and it is directly adjacent to fences and foliage in front of many other homes. All of this contributes to a cozy, relaxed feel which is part of the character of our neighborhood.

The proposed shared-use path would change the nature of walking in our neighborhood. Pedestrians would lose a place where they can walk without concern—perhaps while listening to music or a podcast on earbuds—and would forever have to be aware that they were really walking on a bicycle roadway: keeping to the right, staying alert, listening for "On your left!" coming from behind them, and making no sudden moves without looking around first. One resident explained that he doesn't take his 6-year old on the rail trail bike path because the youngster doesn't understand "on your left": what that phrase implies and what you must immediately avoid doing. If our sidewalk is replaced by a bike path, we will lose the place, directly in front of our homes, where children of all ages can safely be.

The proposed path is crossed by 19 driveways and handicap ramps along the 1300 feet of our existing sidewalk. Because of the way the neighborhood is built, up close to the sidewalk, residents backing out of their driveways (and some residents stepping out of their front doors) have severely limited visibility up & down the sidewalk. This is not an issue for a sidewalk populated by pedestrians, who move slowly and can stop instantly. It becomes an issue when the path carries bicyclists, who, going even 5 MPH, can travel 50 feet in the time between a motorist looking both ways and backing onto the path. There are no comparable visibility issues for bicycles on the street; the shared-use path creates new safety issues for cyclists—and potential liability issues for the residents.

Are you aware that the South Main Street Connector project will replace an existing sidewalk with a shared-use path in a thickly-settled residential neighborhood? Are you aware that the residents adjacent to the sidewalk are adamantly opposed to this plan? Are there no regulations about the creation of shared-use paths—standards that must be met for the safety of pedestrians and bicyclists alike?

We have been told that if the shared-use path is not approved—if our sidewalk is not sacrificed—then the $2.4 million T-Bond funding for the entire S. Main St. project will be forfeited. Is this correct? Funding is available for turning a sidewalk into a bike path, but not for building a sidewalk where there currently is none and taking steps to improve the safety of the road for cyclists?

I have searched the Internet for instances of bike paths taking the place of sidewalks and have found, to date, only two examples, neither of which is in a residential neighborhood. One is along Industrial Lane in Broomfield, Colorado, and the other is on Court Street in Westfield, MA. The Industrial Lane path is, as the street name implies, along an industrial corridor. Court St in Westfield is a formerly residential neighborhood, but all the houses save one have been converted to businesses. With one exception, all of the driveways crossing the Court St. path lead to parking lots—meaning that drivers won't be backing up out of these driveways—and there is ample visibility up & down the path. Though I've found only two shared-use sidewalks in my searching, what I *have* found, in abundance, is statements about the importance of keeping pedestrians and bicyclists separate, for the safety of both, and urban designs providing separate pathways for bicyclists and pedestrians. These guidelines and examples are being ignored in the plan for our neighborhood.

Any attention you can give to our situation would be greatly appreciated. If you know who is responsible for oversight of the Mill River Greenway T-Bond funding, please let us know and we will contact them directly. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Jim Weigang

Enclosed:

1) A brief introduction to the plans for South Main Street in Haydenville.

2) A petition, drafted at the point that the residents along the street—particularly the sidewalk abutters—realized how united we were in opposition to the shared-use path. The one change the Greenway committee made in response to this petition was to abandon their plan to move power poles to the opposite side of the street.

3) A subsequent letter detailing our safety concerns with the planned path.

From: Jim Weigang <jweigang@gmail.com>
Date: Tue, Dec 19, 2023 at 10:18 AM
Subject: South Main St. in Haydenville
To: Heming, Francisca R. (DOT) <Francisca.Heming@dot.state.ma.us>

Dear Director Heming,

I am writing again as a designated representative on behalf of my fellow neighbors and abutters along South Main Street in Haydenville.

We have heard, through the Williamsburg Mill River Greenway Committee and the engineering firm VHB, that efforts are being made to determine whether the T-Bond funding for the South Main St. connector project would support a Bicycle Boulevard solution for our street (per MassDOT and FHWA criteria and guidelines from the MassDOT Municipal Resource Guide for Bikeability), rather than constructing a shared-use path or separate bicycle lane.

The Greenway committee has circulated a "Bicycle Facility Matrix" of options for the street which seems to us to make a case against the Bicycle Boulevard solution, which is the much-preferred option for the overwhelming majority of neighbors and abutters along the street. We strongly disagree with their conclusions based on what we have learned from MassDOT and FHWA literature on the subject. We would like our voices--the abutters of this project--to be heard along with the Greenway committee's, and we would greatly appreciate it if you could forward the attached document to the parties in Boston who are making the decisions about funding. Please cc me, as neighbor/abutter representative.

Thank you for your attention in this matter.

Jim

Attached: Bicycle Accommodations for South Main St..docx
(appended below)

Bicycle Accommodations for South Main St.

December 19, 2023

The neighborhood of South Main Street in Haydenville overwhelmingly prefers that our sidewalk **not** be converted to a mixed-use bicycle path but instead that the roadway, long used without problems by both bicycles and cars, be made safer for bicyclists by means of "bicycle boulevard" elements—specifically, widening the road, lowering the speed limit, installing speed humps, and painting "sharrow" markings on the roadway. (See our petition of September 10 and map of petition signers, and the MassDOT's Municipal Resource Guide for Bikeability.)

The engineering firm VHB, working with the Williamsburg Mill River Greenway Committee, produced a "Bicycle Facility Matrix" of options for South Main Street in Haydenville. The matrix includes the following description of a road suitable for shared bicycle lanes:

> While not a bikeway, shared lanes are best used on local neighborhood streets with low speeds and low traffic volumes where bicycles can share the road without special provisions. Generally, the speed differential between motorists and bicyclists is typically 15 mph or less and motor vehicle speeds of 30 mph or less. Traffic volumes on the roadway are typically less than approximately 1,000 vehicles per day.

South Main St. *meets* these guidelines.

- Bicycles HAVE shared the road on South Main without any "special provisions" and without incident for decades.
- The speed limit on the street is currently 25 MPH. If bicycles are traveling at 10 MPH, the speed differential is 15 MPH. Both of these figures are within guidelines.
- Traffic volume on South Main St. was measured in 2015 by Fuss & O'Neill at 809 cars per day (**not** "~2000" as the VHB matrix shows), which is well within guidelines. This figure is corroborated by MassDOT reporting 696 cars/day in 2022 on Bridge St., which, until the recent bridge closing, carried most of the traffic from South Main St. over to Rt. 9.

Moreover, the proposals for South Main St. include widening lanes to 14 feet, reducing the speed limit to 20 MPH, and installing speed humps to force cars to slow down. These changes, together with sharrow markings reminding cars about bicycles, will make South Main St. **even safer for cycling**.

Note that the section of road in question here, South Main St. between Fort Hill Rd and the Haydenville library end of the street, is 1,500 feet in length—about ¼ of a mile. A bicyclist going 10 MPH will spend less than 2 minutes on our road. We residents spend our *lives* here, walking on the sidewalk as pedestrians, walking our dogs, and pulling in & out of the driveways to our homes.

MassDOT classifies South Main St. as a "collector roadway," and this has been put forth as a reason why sharrows are inappropriate for the street. We believe this label should not

disqualify our street for bicycle boulevard treatment when it meets all the objective criteria—criteria which are based on the REALITY of the road, not on a questionable pigeonholing of the street in a subjective classification scheme. (E.g., collector roads are described by FHWA as having speed limits of 35-55 MPH, not 25 MPH.) South Main St. runs parallel to Rt. 9, which carries 94% of the traffic between the towns (11,792 cars per day on Rt. 9 per MassDOT, vs. 809 for South Main). Despite its collector status, South Main St. is very much a *neighborhood* road.

Further responses to the VHB bicycle facility matrix:

1) Regarding "bicycles may ride on sidewalk" as a downside for the "Sharrows" option (fourth column in the matrix): The neighborhood is willing to accept this possibility; it's not a problem for us. We suspect that the occasional youngster whose parents are uncomfortable with them riding in the street (think: training wheels) may wind up on the sidewalk—as they might even now—and we wouldn't object to that.

2) Regarding "confusion" around off-road, on-road transitions: Practically everyone who uses a bike path rides on a road for some distance in order to reach the path, and does so without getting confused. Route and wayfinding markings—including sharrows—are an integral part of the bicycle boulevard model which serve to obviate any anticipated confusion. The length of South Main St. in question is only ¼ mile of straight road with only one significant intersection and no confusing elements to speak of.

3) We object to characterizing the bicycle boulevard option for South Main St. as having "High Potential User Conflict." Again, the street has been shared by bicycles and cars without ANY provisioning for decades, without incident. If South Main St. were in a city, with 2,000 cars a day going 35 MPH on it, it might be high-risk, but that's not what South Main St. IS. With a lowered speed limit of 20 MPH and speed humps, the street will be substantially safer even than it is now. There is no basis for characterizing the bicycle boulevard option as "high risk."

4) Regarding the shared-use path option (the first column in the matrix): We have detailed our objections to this option in our petition and subsequent Safety Concerns letter: The proposed SUP would take the place of our sidewalk, and bicycles would then be riding directly across, and within inches of, the ends of existing driveways, front walks and handicap ramps, creating a situation with extremely limited sight lines ripe for collisions. Employing bicycle boulevard elements with sharrow markings would keep bicycles traveling at the current safe distance from the ends of driveways.

5) Regarding the separated bike lane option (the second column in the matrix):

- Re. "This was preferred option 2 for the neighborhood." The neighborhood has not collectively expressed any acceptance of this option.
- The description says, "This type of facility is desired when pedestrian and bicycle activity is expected to be high and user." [*sic*] We do not expect pedestrian and

bicycle activity along South Main St. to be “high.” How much bicycle and pedestrian traffic do the planners expect? How does this compare with, for example, measured traffic levels on the rail trail south of Look Park? Even after the Rt. 9 path is completed, we expect pedestrian+bike traffic along South Main to be a fraction of what is seen on the rail trail in Florence .

- Note that “This treatment is generally used when vehicle speeds are at or over 25 mph.” We propose lowering the speed limit to 20 MPH with speed humps.
- The proposed 10.5- and 11.5-foot vehicular travel lanes are brutally narrow—that’s roughly the width of the lanes on the library bridge. Unrestricted parking on a street like that (as indicated in the matrix) is unrealistic: cars parked on opposite sides of the street would practically block the roadway. This is particularly problematic for South Main St. above Bridge St., where cars routinely park on both sides of the existing 14-foot lanes. Narrowing the width of travel lanes will make the street *more* dangerous for bicyclists who choose to ride on the street.
- The separate bike lane will cause problems for snow removal. Snow will have to be plowed off the street without putting it on the bike lane, and then snow on the bike lane will have to be removed without putting it back in the street or on the sidewalk. With only 24 inches between the bike lane and sidewalk, it’s not clear how this will be done, given that for some residents the 24-inch buffer must also hold snow cleared off their sidewalk.
- The bike lane would be crossed by 19 driveways and handicap ramps along its ¼-mile length. It is not clear how these would be accommodated given the elevation of the bike path above the roadway and the only buffer zone between the road and bike lane being the road shoulder.

A separate bike lane is overkill for the South Main St. It would seriously disrupt the village character of the neighborhood to install what amounts to a bike thruway along a reduced-size carway. Expected bicycle traffic does not justify this option.

From: Heming, Francisca R. (DOT) <Francisca.Heming@dot.state.ma.us>
Date: Wed, Dec 20, 2023 at 4:40 PM
Subject: RE: South Main St. in Haydenville
To: Jim Weigang <jweigang@gmail.com>

Good afternoon Jim,
I received the below message and will get back to you as soon as I review the info and back in office.
Meanwhile, I asked Mark Moore, Project Development to contact you.

Thanks-Francisca

From: Jim Weigang <jweigang@gmail.com>
Date: Wed, Dec 20, 2023 at 5:58 PM
Subject: South Main St. in Haydenville
To: Mark Moore <mark.moore@dot.state.ma.us>

Hi Mark,

Thank you for calling today! Attached is the S. Main St. neighborhood's most recent document, an effort to make the case for "bicycle boulevard" elements as a means of connecting the rail trail with the future Rt. 9 bike path. There are links in this document to our previous missives, a petition and a safety concerns letter, which argue against the Greenway's proposal to replace our sidewalk with a shared-use path.

We are making adjustments to our bridges proposal and will send that along soon.

Thank you for your efforts to find out what is possible to do to help preserve the character of our quiet little neighborhood.

Jim

Attached: Bicycle Accommodations for South Main St..docx

From: Moore, Mark (DOT) <Mark.Moore@dot.state.ma.us>
Date: Thu, Dec 21, 2023 at 8:53 AM
Subject: RE: South Main St. in Haydenville
To: Jim Weigang <jweigang@gmail.com>

Thank you Jim,

I will let you know as soon as I hear about the Earmark Funding.

Mark J. Moore
MassDOT-District 1
Project Development Engineer
(857) 368 1030

From: Jim Weigang <jweigang@gmail.com>
Date: Mon, Jan 8, 2024 at 12:11 AM
Subject: South Main St. in Haydenville
To: Mark Moore <mark.moore@dot.state.ma.us>
Cc: Gerry Shattuck <gerryshattuck@msn.com>,
Heming, Francisca R. (DOT) <Francisca.Heming@dot.state.ma.us>

Hi Mark,

One of my neighbors, Gerry Shattuck, has unearthed a great deal of MassDOT and FHWA reference material on bicycle facilities, all of which has made us realize that what our neighborhood has been proposing in place of a shared-use path amounts to making South Main St. be a "bicycle boulevard." And a bike boulevard seems to be the MassDOT-recommended means of accommodating bicycles on our street--with a shared-use path being appropriate for streets with much higher vehicles-per-day and higher speed limit than our quiet village street.

We have put what we've learned and how it relates to our street into a web page, which can be seen here:

https://southmain01039.blogspot.com/p/bicycle-boulevards.html

If you could take a look at this, we'd appreciate it. Are we missing anything here? (The home page, southmain01039.blogspot.com, outlines our concerns with the planned shared-use path and why we think a bicycle boulevard is a good solution for the street.)

Would this recommended-solution status make it more likely that a bicycle boulevard would be approved as an alternative use of the $2.393 million T-Bond funding for Williamsburg?

Jim

From: Moore, Mark (DOT) <Mark.Moore@dot.state.ma.us>
Date: Mon, Jan 8, 2024 at 3:09 PM
Subject: RE: South Main St. in Haydenville
To: Jim Weigang <jweigang@gmail.com>
Cc: Gerry Shattuck <gerryshattuck@msn.com>,
Heming, Francisca R. (DOT) <Francisca.Heming@dot.state.ma.us>

Jim,

Thank you for the information. The District is reviewing the information as it relates to South Main Street. We are also working on an answer to the question regarding the $2.3 million Transportation Bond Bill. I hope to have an answer soon.

Mark J. Moore
MassDOT-District 1
Project Development Engineer
(857) 368 1030

From: Moore, Mark (DOT) <Mark.Moore@dot.state.ma.us>
Date: Tue, Jan 9, 2024 at 12:22 PM
Subject: RE: South Main St. in Haydenville
To: Jim Weigang <jweigang@gmail.com>

Jim,

Francisca will be sending you a formal letter in response to your December 19 email and the MassDOT response of December 26th. [*typo; reply was on the 20th*]

The letter will confirm that $2.393 million T-Bond funding is available for South Main Street for either design concept. It is up to the Town to decide how to proceed with design.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Mark J. Moore
MassDOT-District 1
Project Development Engineer
(857) 368 1030

Maura Healey, Governor
Kimberley Driscoll, Lieutenant Governor
Monica Tibbits-Nutt, Secretary & CEO
Jonathan L. Gulliver, Highway Administrator

MassDOT Massachusetts Department of Transportation Highway Division

January 12, 2024

CERTIFIED MAIL7016 0600 0000 8650 1747
RETURN RECEIPT REQUESTED

SUBJECT: **PROJECT DEVELOPMENT** – Williamsburg
Bicycle and Pedestrian Concerns on South Main Street

Jim Weigang
9C South Main Street
P.O. Box 901
Haydenville, MA 01039

Dear Mr. Weigang:

The Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) District One office in Lenox has been informed by the Community Grants Administrator's office that the earmark for the South Main Street Connector is available to be used on the project.

MassDOT encourages your continued involvement in the public engagement process as the town of Williamsburg develops the design for this municipal project. When town officials determine that the project is ready for implementation, MassDOT will execute a reimbursement contract with the town of Williamsburg to begin expenditure of the earmark funds.

Thank you for your continued support and participation in transportation improvement projects in the Commonwealth.

Sincerely,

Francisca Heming

Francisca R. Heming
District Highway Director

PLF/njg
ecc: ProjDev, PlanLen; Carrie Lavallee, P.E., Dep. Admin. & Chief Engineer; William Sayre and Denise Banister, Select Board - *141 Main St. P.O. Box 447, Haydenville, MA 01039-0447;* Sen. Paul W. Mark - *paul.mark@masenate.gov;* Rep. Lindsay Sabadosa *lindsay.sabadosa@mahouse.gov;* U.S. Rep. Jim McGovern - *94 Pleasant Street, Northampton, MA 01060*

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