



City of Cambridge

Executive Department

YI-AN HUANG
City Manager

CMA 2025 #65
IN CITY COUNCIL
March 24, 2025

To the Honorable, the City Council:

In response to Awaiting Report Item Number 25-7, regarding a request to work with appropriate departments to prepare a communication to DCR Commissioner Arrigo, urging that a study of traffic conditions at the intersections of Western Avenue and River Street at Memorial Drive and Soldiers Field Road (commonly referred to as “the box”), be included in their FY26 Capital Plan, with the goals of improving efficiency and safety at these intersections, please find attached from Brooke McKenna Transportation Commissioner, Traffic, Parking, + Transportation Department and Jeffrey R. Parenti, Assistant Commissioner for Street Management/Traffic Director.

Very truly yours,

Yi-An Huang
City Manager





CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

TRAFFIC, PARKING, + TRANSPORTATION

MEMORANDUM

To: Yi-An Huang, City Manager

From: Brooke McKenna
Transportation Commissioner, Traffic, Parking, + Transportation Department
Jeffrey R. Parenti, PE, PTOE, PTP, ENV SP
Assistant Commissioner for Street Management/Traffic Director

Date: March 20, 2025

Subject: Awaiting Report Response 25-7

In response to Awaiting Report 25-7 which requested to work with appropriate departments to prepare a communication to DCR Commissioner Arrigo, urging that a study of traffic conditions at the intersections of Western Avenue and River Street at Memorial Drive and Soldiers Field Road (commonly referred to as “the box”), be included in their FY26 Capital Plan, with the goals of improving efficiency and safety at these intersections, we report the following:

Background and Context

The intersections of River Street and Western Avenue with Memorial Drive serve as vital gateways for the neighborhoods of Riverside and Cambridgeport. Additionally, regional traffic passes through these intersections to access Soldiers Field Road and the Massachusetts Turnpike. The corresponding intersections in Boston, on the other ends of the River and Western Avenue Bridges, are a critical part of this local street network because of their proximity to the Memorial Drive locations.

Western Avenue is congested in both rush hours and at some other times of day and the week as well. Narrowing Memorial Drive, currently 4 lanes, would allow for a wider Paul Dudley White Bike Path and additional green space along the river. Safety continues to be a concern, especially for vulnerable road users. Finally, with the Allston I-90 project starting in a few years, Memorial Drive may see increased vehicle traffic.

These four intersections have posed a challenge to DCR, DOT, MBTA, Boston, and Cambridge and roadway users of all modes for many years. A few previous studies have been completed but with few actions taken, especially on the Cambridge side.

The intersections are commonly known as the River-Western Box, shown below. All four are owned and operated by DCR, although DOT has completed some upgrades on the Boston side intersection within the last 10 years.

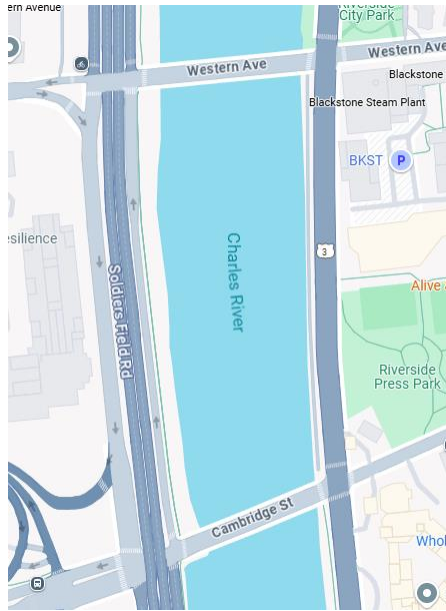


Figure 1 - The four intersections of the River-Western Box

Action

We are sending a formal letter to Commissioner Brian Arrigo of DCR. In the letter we ask DCR to begin an engineering study of the “Box” as soon as possible. DCR did have an item in their 5-year capital plan for this study after the Memorial Drive Phase III project limit was reduced to exclude the River and Western intersections about 4 years ago. Our request asks DCR to prioritize the item in the next fiscal year, which begins July 1 of this 2025.

Finally, the City asked to be included when the agency scopes the work.