

Henrietta Davis
120 Chestnut Street
Cambridge, MA 02139

May 10, 2017

Secretary Stephanie Pollack
Massachusetts Department of Transportation
10 Park Plaza
Boston, MA 02116

Dear Secretary Pollack:

Thank you for the opportunity to serve on the I-90 Task Force. As the former Mayor of the City of Cambridge and a long-time Cambridgeport resident, I'm pleased to work with DOT on this important project, to serve as a liaison between MassDOT and the Cambridge community.

As the city directly across the river from this project, the residents of which extensively use the highway network and pathways across from us, Cambridge has a direct stake in decisions about this large project and the process leading to final plans. Allston and Brighton on one side and Cambridge on the other may be separated by a river, but we are incredibly interdependent. It is essential that the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) reflect that interdependence.

Based on three recent, well-attended community meetings on this subject (two of them including DOT staff presenters) and in consultation with Bill Deignan, the city's staff representative to the I-90 Task Force, I have the following specific, urgent requests: that issues important to the City of Cambridge – especially the neighborhoods of Cambridgeport and Riverside – be thoroughly addressed in the DEIR now being drafted.

1. SUPPORT FOR INTEGRATED, BALANCED TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM: COMMIT TO PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENTS IN THE PROJECT AREA

As overriding policy, Cambridge is committed to a balanced transportation system – including cars, trucks, and buses as well as transit, commuter rail, walkers, joggers, bikers, and boaters – all planned and constructed in ways that enhance the environment. The I-90 project requires all these elements in an integrated approach. We understand the need for decisions about the Turnpike before the existing viaduct deteriorates, but we are disappointed that the focus of the project so far has minimized the non-highway parts of a balanced system, in one of the most environmentally sensitive assets of the Boston Region – the land adjacent to the Charles River.

REQUEST: Commit to planning specific public transportation and environmental mitigation steps so that the I-90 project can achieve a fully balanced system to the maximum extent possible, including:

- West Station planned, with timetable and adequate access by all modes.
- Grand Junction rail lines and bridge with ability to connect transit, pedestrians, and cyclists to Kendall Square.

2. ACCESS TO CAMBRIDGE FROM SOLDIERS FIELD ROAD: DOT SHOULD STUDY 3 OPTIONS (SKETCH PLANS OF TWO ADDITIONAL OPTIONS ATTACHED) AND DEFER EXIT RAMP DECISION

For the DEIR to have credibility in Cambridge, it is essential that it include detailed descriptions, analysis, and comparison of alternate ways to travel from Soldiers Field Road to Cambridge – not just the current DOT plan, which eliminates the exit ramp to the River Street Bridge.

REQUEST: Include three options to compare in the DEIR:

- Current DOT plan that eliminates the exit ramp from Soldiers Field.
- A new option would include the shortest possible exit ramp with a right-turn only to River Street into Cambridge (sketch plans attached).
- A second new option that extends the underpass for Soldiers Field Road from the new Cambridge Street South in Allston (in the current DOT plans) to the existing underpass under River Street in a continuous cut-and-cover, providing for a narrow surface road and expanded park on the decking over Soldiers Field Road (sketch plans and renderings attached).

FURTHER REQUEST:

- Defer any decision to eliminate the present right-turn exit capability from Soldiers Field Road to River Street Bridge pending a broader analysis focused on the complex moves to/from Cambridge, the Turnpike, and Soldiers Field Road via River Street and Western Avenue bridges.

(Please note that in neither of the above requests am I asking for delay in the DOT/Harvard/Boston plan to relocate Soldiers Field Road and build the new underpass intersection for Soldiers Field Road and the new Cambridge Street South planned for Allston.)

3. THE COMPLEX SYSTEM OF ROADS SERVED BY RIVER STREET AND WESTERN AVENUE BRIDGES: UNDERTAKE COMPREHENSIVE STUDY WITH DESIGN OPTIONS

The pattern of often-congested roads in the area served by the River Street and Western Avenue Bridges is part of a single, complex system that feeds traffic to and from many areas of Cambridge and Somerville. Indeed, River Street and Western Avenue constitute a one-way pair of two major Cambridge arteries that tie into the Turnpike, Soldiers Field Road, and Memorial Drive, all currently congested with long delays. With changes planned for I-90 and Soldiers Field Road access and egress, feeding this traffic through new neighborhood streets in Allston, as well as changes planned by Harvard for getting to/from the Doubletree Hotel and its extensive future developments in Allston, this system requires a comprehensive analysis.

The two crumbling bridges themselves, which cross both the Charles River and Soldiers Field Road, were previously scheduled for urgent reconstruction in the Accelerated Bridge Program. Those plans did not take into account the proposed street grid and access routes for the Turnpike and Soldiers Field Road through Allston. Past plans for the reconstruction of both bridges need to be reviewed and modified as part of such a comprehensive, integrated study.

REQUEST: Understand and plan for this complex system by the following:

- Commit to undertaking a comprehensive, collaborative and open study of this River/Western system, and whether and how it can function efficiently with the changes proposed by the I-90 project.
- Revise design plans for these bridges in a process with substantial community involvement and prepare revised environmental impact reports, to include options for pedestrian/bicycle underpasses as unanimously endorsed by the Cambridge City Council.
- Include in this study options for exiting from Soldiers Field Road to Cambridge (as described above in paragraph 2).
- Defer any decision regarding elimination of the present right-turn exit capability from Soldiers Field Road to River Street Bridge pending this broader study.

Separating this study from the current I-90 process will enable this bridge/highway system to receive the attention it requires without delaying the current I-90 process.

4. THROAT DESIGN: ANALYZE FOR FULL IMPACTS ON CAMBRIDGE

The three options for the Turnpike in the “throat” area (Pike viaduct, rail viaduct, or all at-grade) need to be analyzed for their direct impacts on Cambridge. The area is directly across from Magazine Beach, the second-largest park in Cambridge, and many Cambridge residents live near the impacted area.

REQUEST: Provide greater specificity about these impacts on Cambridge in the DEIR, focused on five factors:

- **VISUAL:** What will each of these options look like from across the river?
- **NOISE:** Measure actual pre-construction and predicted post-construction conditions from the residential neighborhood. Include consideration of noise barriers and other ways to reduce noise.
- **ACCESS:** How will each option impact plans for the Grand Junction, a major interest of Cambridge as a future connection for pedestrians, bikes and transit? How will access to paths and park be provided for Cambridge from the BU Bridge?
- **CONSTRUCTION:** Is each option buildable without an undue burden of noise and lack of access for Cambridgeport and other Cambridge areas during the construction phase?
- **PARKLAND:** Is there more parkland created above and beyond pathways that will provide Cambridge with a visual buffer?

5. NOISE: SHARE METHODOLOGY AND PROVIDE RESOURCES

At each community meeting, residents expressed grave concern about noise from this project once it is completed. Residents now report sleep-disturbing noise from the Turnpike when windows are open in the warm weather. The special conditions of the roadways being next to the “hard” surface of the river magnify the transmission of tire and motor noise from trucks, cars and motorcycles. Will future conditions improve noise conditions, or increase the burden on residents at home and in the river parks?

REQUEST: Assist Cambridge in understanding and dealing with potentially major negative noise impacts:

- Provide Cambridge a full briefing on the details of methodology and assumptions in its noise study now so that we review these issues in detail prior to the DEIR.

- There may be costs related to this noise problem. I request that DOT make funds available to Cambridge for an independent noise consultant as soon as possible, so that we are equipped to review and critique the noise analysis to be presented in the DEIR and are able to suggest noise barriers and other methods of reducing the noise levels.

6. PARKLANDS AND PATHWAYS ALONG THE CHARLES RIVER: ENHANCE OUR MAJOR RIVERFRONT ENVIRONMENT AS PART OF THE I-90 PROCESS

Cambridge and Allston residents use the parkland on both sides of the Charles. The revised plan is a major step in the right direction by relocating Soldiers Field Road inland, putting it in an underpass, and expanding the park next to the river. But many in Cambridge agree with the Allston community that this parkland should be expanded even more by moving Soldiers Field Road further into the Allston area, thereby creating an area large enough to be an attractive destination. We also agree that current DOT plans have not yet developed an adequate "People's Pike" as requested by Allston residents as a truly walker/biker/jogger-friendly approach from Allston neighborhoods to the river, not simply sidewalks on new, busy streets.

Since all current I-90 project options directly impact protected parklands, parkways, and pathways in the area, I urge that "all possible planning to minimize harm" to such valuable assets, as required by environmental laws, be developed as mitigation measures for inclusion in the DEIR and not added later after decisions are made. The potential to enhance the environment is an essential element in choosing among the transportation options.

REQUEST: Improve the environment in the areas impacted by the I-90 project:

- Develop an option as part of the DEIR that would relocate Soldiers Field Road further from the river, thereby providing expanded parkland in the Cambridge Street South area and along a wide swath of riverfront.
- Include environmental mitigation measures throughout the project area in the DEIR as part of the required planning so that the I-90 project does not merely minimize the harm but uses this opportunity to greatly improve our environment.

7. CONSTRUCTION IMPACTS: PLAN NOISE AND TRAFFIC MITIGATION MEASURES

Cambridge will experience severe noise and traffic impacts during the multi-year construction of the I-90 project. Noise will impact large areas of Cambridgeport and Riverside, as well as Magazine Beach, Putnam Avenue and adjacent neighborhood streets, and extended areas along the Charles River. Noise will ricochet off existing buildings in the BU area and bounce directly into Cambridge. With construction restrictions on the Turnpike and Soldiers Field Road, significant traffic will seek alternative routes, including Memorial Drive, River Street, Western Avenue, Massachusetts Avenue, JFK Street, and connecting roads. Also, construction dust is likely to be carried directly across the river.

REQUEST: Deal with noise and traffic impacts:

- **NOISE:** Share for review by Cambridge a draft of operational limitations (such as no nighttime work) and other mitigation techniques to lessen noise impacts.
- **TRAFFIC:** Provide detailed analysis of traffic impacts on Cambridge along with specific Transportation System Management recommendations for how best to handle it. DOT funds will be essential to mitigate these impacts on Cambridge streets.

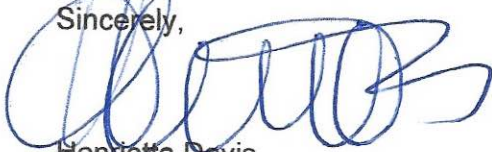
- **NOISE AND TRAFFIC:** Share both these analyses with Cambridge prior to the DEIR so City staff can work with DOT to establish needed rules, restrictions and mitigation measures for public review.

In conclusion, it is obvious that although the I-90 project is to be built across the river in Allston, there will be major impacts here in Cambridge that need to be addressed in the DEIR. I trust that this letter has conveyed the seriousness of these issues.

Finally, along with City staff, I would like to meet with you and key project staff to discuss these issues further. I will call your office to find a suitable time on your calendar.

Thank you for your consideration. I very much appreciate the efforts of MassDOT under your leadership in tackling this important and sensitive project.

Sincerely,



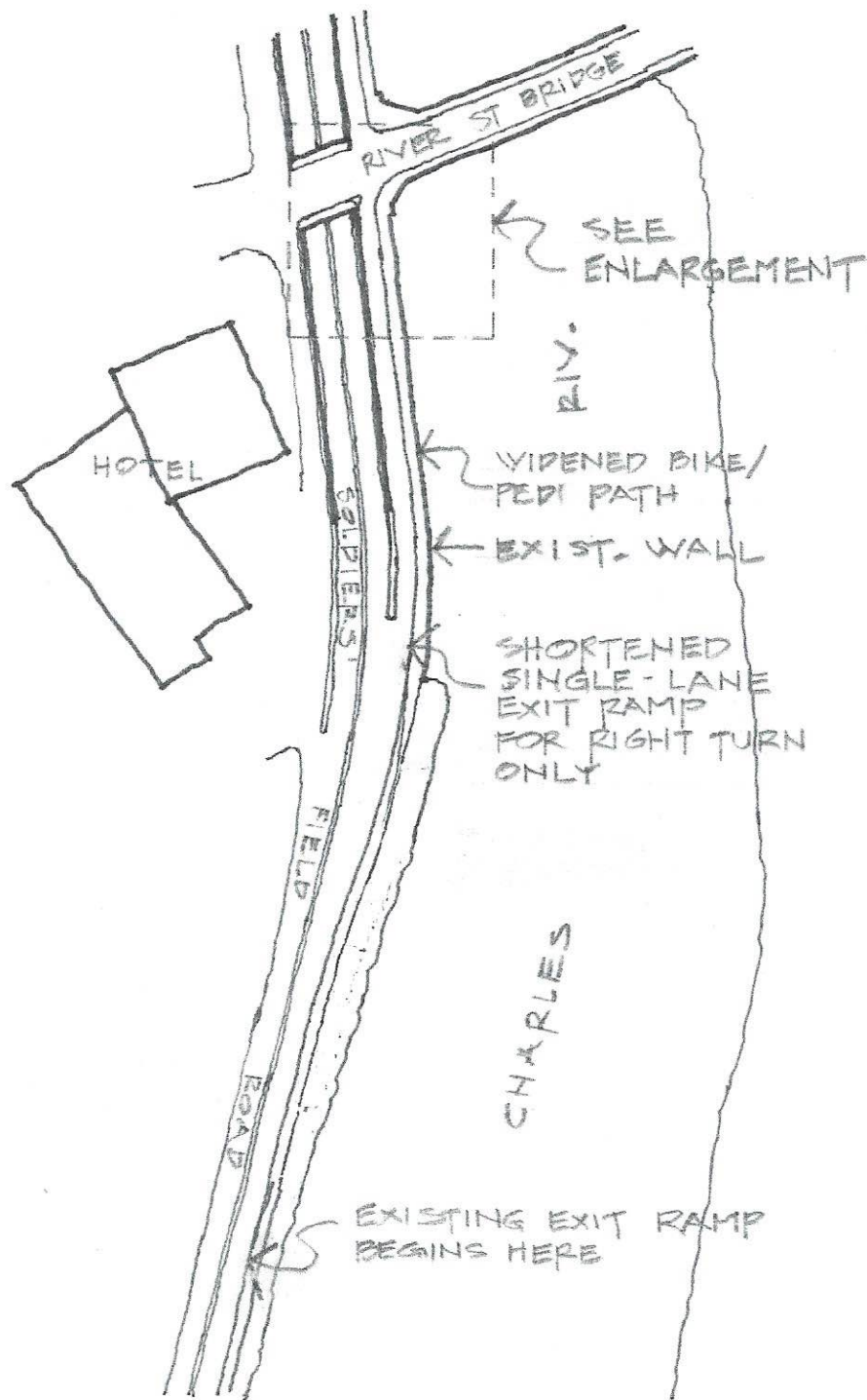
Henrietta Davis
617-259-0737

ATTACHMENTS:

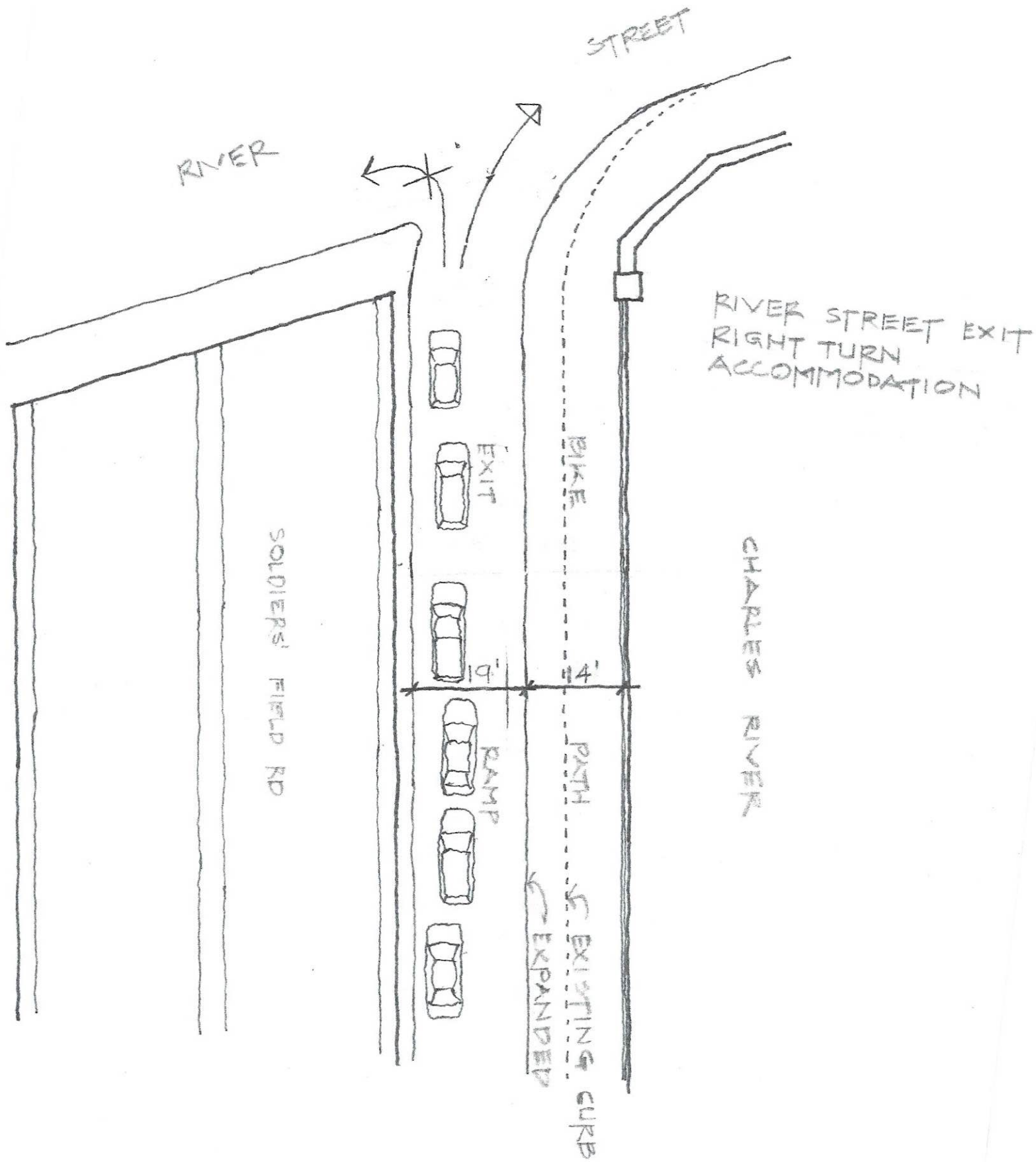
- A. Sketch plans of new right-turn exit ramp from Soldiers Field Road to River Street
- B. Soldiers Field Road new surface road and additional parkland

cc: Thomas Tinlin, Highway Administrator
Michael O'Dowd, I-90 Project Manager
Louis A. DePasquale, Cambridge City Manager
Cambridge City Council
Cambridgeport Neighborhood Association
Riverside Neighborhood Association
1-90 Task Force

ATTACHMENT A NEW RIGHT-TURN EXIT RAMP



RIVER ST EXIT
RIGHT TURN
ACCOMMODATION STUDY



NEW PROPOSAL

BENEFITS

1. BETTER ACCESS FROM SOLDIERS FIELD RD TO RIVER ST BRIDGE
2. CONNECT KEY PARCELS AND PARKLAND
3. MORE PARKLAND
4. REDUCE ROAD NOISE IMPACTS ON PARKLAND

NEW 2 LANE SURFACE ROAD OVER 1/2 OF CUT & COVERED SOLDIERS FIELD ROAD

RIGHT TURN FROM SURFACE ROAD TO RIVER ST BRIDGE



MassDOT PROPOSED PARKLAND

30' WIDE ADDITIONAL NEW PARKLAND OVER 1/2 OF COVERED SOLDIERS FIELD ROAD

CURRENT MASSDOT PLAN



SFR sloping down
(purple)

SFR moved away from
river but continues to be
open to the sky & barrier
between park & adjacent
parcels

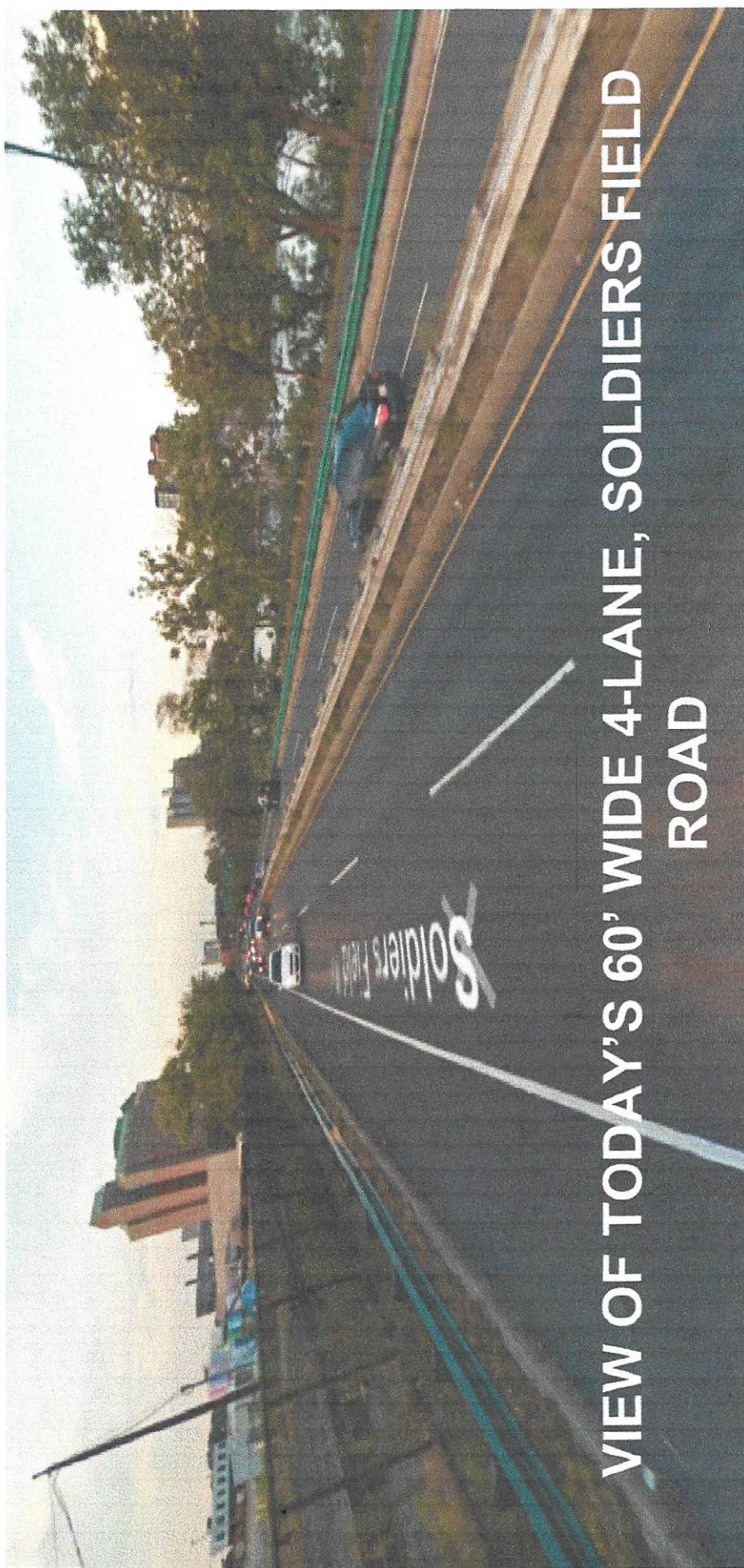
SFR in tunnel with decking
above to create at-grade
crossing to river park

THREE UNDERPASSES (CURRENT MASSDOT PROPOSAL)



NEW PROPOSAL TWO UNDERPASSES + 1600' ADDITIONAL DECKING





VIEW OF TODAY'S 60' WIDE 4-LANE, SOLDIERS FIELD
ROAD

