



City of Cambridge

Executive Department

YI-AN HUANG
City Manager

CMA 2025 #233
IN CITY COUNCIL
September 15, 2025

To the Honorable, the City Council:

I am writing in response to Awaiting Report #25-32, which requested that the City engage in discussions with leadership from the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) and the Harvard Square Business Association (HSBA) regarding a proposal to explore the feasibility of repurposing the long-abandoned MBTA tunnel in Harvard Square into a commercial or cultural space.

Over the past several years, various City staff members have had the opportunity to engage with the HSBA on this concept. These conversations have included site visits and tours of the tunnel itself, which has remained unused for an extended period. I want to express my sincere appreciation for the HSBA's continued interest, creativity, and advocacy in advancing this idea. Their commitment to revitalizing underutilized infrastructure in Harvard Square reflects a broader vision for innovation and economic resilience in our commercial districts.

It is clear that Harvard Square, like all of our business districts, must continue to adapt and evolve in response to shifting economic conditions and regional competition. In this context, bold and imaginative proposals—such as the one under discussion—can potentially play a valuable role in shaping the future of our urban spaces. I recognize the importance of both large-scale and incremental planning efforts to ensure that our commercial areas remain vibrant, inclusive, and economically sustainable, particularly during times of financial uncertainty.

Since the passage of this policy order, I have continued to engage in conversations with representatives from the HSBA, as well as with members of our State Delegation, the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT), and the MBTA. I am grateful for the willingness of our partners at the state level to engage in this creative concept, especially given the many pressing challenges currently facing our transportation and transit agencies.

With regard to the proposed allocation of \$72,000 for the development of a Request for Proposals (RFP), it is important to clarify that the full cost of the feasibility study that the RFP would seek to fund could require an investment in the range of \$500,000 to \$1,000,000 and a viable funding source for this next phase has yet to be identified.

At this time, I remain open to continuing the conversation with the HSBA and other stakeholders. However, I believe it is prudent to await further engagement from MassDOT and the MBTA before proceeding with any formal next steps. Their input will be essential in assessing the feasibility, regulatory considerations, and long-term implications of this proposal. In addition to further engagement, identifying a viable funding source for the feasibility phase will also be a critical step in determining the path forward.

Very truly yours,



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Yi-An Huang". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Yi-An Huang
City Manager