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State to discuss potential new Mass Pike ramps in Back Bay, future of Bowker Overpass

Posted by Matt Rocheleau June 12, 2012 05:25 PM

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(Boston Globe file photo)

Officials are eyeing plans to repair the Bowker Overpass, the 46-year-old elevated roadway that connects Storrow Drive to Boylston Street, crossing Beacon Street, Commonwealth Avenue, the turnpike, and Ipswich Street. Some neighbors and officials call an eyesore that should be removed.

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

State transportation officials plan to unveil analyses of expected traffic and other implications from four alternative proposals to build new Massachusetts Turnpike ramps in the Back Bay.

Officials also plan to discuss the future of the Bowker Overpass. Preliminary ideas for long-term solutions for the 46-year-old elevated roadway will be presented at a meeting Tuesday evening.

"We are at least several years out from any substantial changes that we'd embark on ... if even necessary," state transportation department spokesman Michael Verseckes said by phone, referring to both long-term solutions for the overpass and new ramp projects along the turnpike in Boston. "It's still very much in the early idea stage."

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But, he said, there are plans for more immediate structural repairs to the Bowker. The deteriorating, heavily used overpass that connects Storrow Drive to Boylston Street, crossing Beacon Street, Commonwealth Avenue, the turnpike, and Ipswich Street.

The state transportation department, according to [its blog](#), will hold a meeting Tuesday from 6 to 8 p.m. in the mezzanine conference room of the Central branch of the Boston Public Library in Copley Square.

The meeting is the third advisory group meeting of the Back Bay Ramps Transportation Study that launched in 2008, following a similar study that was released in 1997. The ongoing study aims to “investigate the potential for new or altered access to and from the regional express highway network in downtown Boston, with a primary focus on the Back Bay.”

The Massachusetts Department of Transportation had originally developed seven alternative proposals to build new ramp connections to and from Interstate 90 between the Allston tolls and Interstate 93. State transportation officials, with input collected during an advisory group meeting last June, selected four of the seven alternatives for additional analysis and design.

Those four alternative proposals are:

- Construction of a new I-90 westbound off-ramp to Berkeley Street with closure of the existing I-90 westbound on-ramp from Arlington Street.
- Construction of a new I-90 westbound off-ramp to Trinity Place with closure of the existing I-90 westbound on-ramps from Clarendon Street and Arlington Street.
- Construction of a new I-90 westbound off-ramp to Brookline Avenue.
- Construction of a new I-90 eastbound on-ramp from the Bowker Overpass northbound.

Since the last advisory group meeting last summer, the expected changes in traffic patterns and other potential impacts have been studied. The results of those analyses will be presented at Tuesday’s meeting.

Throughout the course of the Back Bay ramps study, there has been public interest in the future of the Bowker Overpass, including a number of community organizations and residents asking that the half-mile long structure that stretches over the Muddy River be downgraded to a surface road or

that stretches over the Muddy River be downgraded to a surface road or removed entirely.

Last March, a roughly one-foot-wide, 12-foot-long pothole ruptured across the offramp of the Bowker Overpass near Kenmore Square sending debris down on the river below, forcing the ramps temporary closure and disrupting traffic in the area during the morning commute, [the Globe reported](#). At the time, state officials said the overpass is still considered safe, though the deck has been deemed structurally deficient.

[In 2009](#), a chunk of concrete fell from the overpass and smashed the windshield of a vehicle below prompting emergency repairs to be made.

Given the proximity of the overpass to the study area the “critical interaction” between the overpass, new turnpike ramps and Storrow Drive access, the state transportation department says it has decided to expand the study scope to include “a preliminary analysis of alternative alignments” for the Bowker that will show anticipated changes in traffic patterns for the overpass.

At Tuesday’s meeting, transportation officials will discuss preliminary design concepts for the overpass that “are most feasible and that serve the community objectives for the future of the structure.” Officials will also be available to discuss a planned construction project to repair the overpass.

For more information on the Back Bay Ramps Transportation Study, visit the project website: www.mass.gov/massdot/bostonramps.

E-mail Matt Rocheleau at mjrochele@gmail.com.

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