



December 17, 2008

Secretary Ian Bowles
Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs
100 Cambridge Street, Suite 900
Boston, MA 02114

RE: Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR)
The Reserve and Crossing at Olde Sibley Farm, Spencer, MA
MEPA # 13399

Dear Mr. Bowles:

WalkBoston is the Commonwealth's leading advocate for pedestrians and safe walking. WalkBoston has worked for over 18 years to promote walking, and in recent years has led the state's movement toward Safe Routes to Schools for all communities.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the FEIR for the proposed Reserve and Crossing at Olde Sibley Farm in Spencer. The document details a decision by the Massachusetts Highway Department and officials of the town to forego construction of sidewalks along the Route 9 frontage of the site, notwithstanding the state's legal commitment under MGL 90E 2A (1996) and MHD's 2006 Project Design and Development Guide to accommodate pedestrians. This portion of Route 9 is within 500 feet of existing sidewalks and is directly adjacent to the community's high school.

We think sidewalks should be constructed along Route 9 as part of this project, and have a number of observations about the site and its immediate surroundings.

1. Route 9 is the Main Street of Spencer for its full length through the town, with sidewalks from the center of the town along at least one side of Route 9 up to Sibley's Corner, at the intersection of Paxton Road. The distance from Sibley's Corner to the Reserve and Crossing site is about 500 feet according the map in the FEIR.
2. Walkers to the high school have been anticipated and accommodated along Main Street. In addition to the connections into the center of town, a crosswalk is provided for walkers at the front of the high school where it faces Lake Whittemore Drive. Virtually all people walking to the high school use this route.
3. Rebuilding Route 9 and widening it as part of this project affects nearly all of the road distance between the high school and the principal site entrance. A sidewalk could readily be incorporated into the redesign of Route 9 in this section. A crosswalk could be provided at the site entrance, where Route 9 becomes 4 lanes in this proposed reconstruction.

4. Sidewalks are proposed along all of the site's driveways and walkers will be able to use them for access to the new commercial facilities facing Route 9. Care should be taken to extend the sidewalks the full length of the main streets through the site to provide for easy walking to local stores. On reaching the commercial areas, these walkways should be connected with a logical extension of a sidewalk along Route 9.
5. The site of the proposed Reserve and Crossing at Olde Sibley Farm shares a long boundary with Prouty High School and is immediately adjacent to it. New homes are proposed for construction inside the site directly along the boundary with the school property. No sidewalk access to the school property is shown on the maps in the FEIR. If there are insurmountable difficulties in constructing a sidewalk in front of this project, perhaps an alternative walking route could be provided by working closely with the town to construct a sidewalk within the school property.
6. The existing Midstate Trail, which traverses Massachusetts from the New Hampshire line to the Connecticut line, passes directly through the southern half of this site. The site's sidewalks should connect directly with this trail, which will ultimately lead to the Cross-State Trail (further north) and other hiking and biking opportunities. Access to the trail by walkers or bikers in the Town of Spencer will of necessity occur via the proponent's site, either via the main site drive, or perhaps along the sidewalks of Route 9, which crosses the trail nearby.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this project. We look forward to working with you and welcome any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Wendy Landman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Wendy Landman
Executive Director

Cc: MA Advisory Board for Pedestrians and Bicycles
Luisa Paiewonsky, Commissioner, Mass Highway
Lou Rabito, Mass Highway Bicycle-Pedestrian Accommodation Engineer