

**EALS letter to Arlington Advocate etc.**  
**March 31, 2009**

The East Arlington Livable Streets (EALS) Coalition is a growing group of 60+ neighbors that came together last summer to form a collective neighborhood voice on transportation-related issues. EALS strongly supports the removal of one traffic lane along Mass Ave in order to provide a more safe and comfortable environment for pedestrians and cyclist. In the aggregate, we believe that the project will be a tremendous enhancement to our neighborhood.

Our vision for Mass Ave does not resemble today's commuter through-corridor, creating a barrier in the center of the neighborhood. Instead, it will be a community seam that provides more frequent and safe crosswalks and a more pleasant environment for those on foot or bike to travel along it. Improvements to the street and sidewalks along with more efficient parking will promote a more active business district as nearby residents discover that Mass Ave can be the "main street" for our community. Additional street trees, landscaping, and benches will help to strengthen Capitol Square's "sense of place", further enhancing the stores, homes, restaurants and galleries along the Avenue. In summary, Mass Ave will become a far more livable street.

EALS believes that most of the elements found in the Town's current plans for Mass Ave will help fulfill our vision. We FULLY support the transformation of today's four+ lane free-for-all into a three-lane configuration that offers more predictable traffic patterns and left and right turn lanes to minimize the lane blockage that occurs today. The consultants' current traffic counts and projections to 2018 levels show west-bound traffic volumes are 20-30% lower throughout the day, and we feel entirely comfortable with their recommendation that a single lane (along with left turn lanes at Lake and other local streets) can handle this west-bound traffic. East-bound traffic volume is significantly heavier throughout the day, however, and two east-bound lanes are maintained where back-ups are likely on the approaches to Rt. 16 and Lake Street.

**The removal of one traffic lane along the mile-long corridor will provide space for a host of benefits for nearby residents and businesses, including:**

- Wider sidewalks in the business district: at <10' wide, sidewalks in much of the Capitol Square district are woefully inadequate. Wider sidewalks will provide space for additional greenery, benches, bike racks, bus shelters, and outdoor cafes. These streetscape improvements will attract many more of the thousands of residents who live within a 15-minute walking distance. Critical for the abutting businesses, however, is predictable and timely reconstruction of these sidewalks and adjacent road surface.
- Bike lanes: bike lanes in each direction will provide a safe space for bike commuters, recreational riders or neighborhood families wishing to catch a movie or ride to Arlington Center. Currently, Mass Ave is only comfortable for experienced urban cyclists and the nearby Minuteman Trail does not connect well to most places in Cambridge, is unlit at night and does not provide access to Mass Ave homes and businesses. Many East Arlington residents are cyclists and need options for getting around in ways other than driving and walking.
- Crosswalks: Crossing 66'-80' wide Mass Ave anywhere other than at a traffic signal can be an extremely uncomfortable experience, especially at night. Two pedestrians were

killed in separate incidents while trying to simply cross the street in the late '90's. While today's thermoplastic crosswalks and yellow pylons are helpful, the proposed three-lane configuration will be a huge improvement, for it provides space to include pedestrian refuge islands in the center of the street, between the two directions of travel. This means walkers need to only worry about vehicles stopping for them in one or two lanes at a time, whereas now, one must rely on the halting of traffic in all four lanes to safely cross. (One of our few concerns with the current plan is the recommended removal of traffic lights at Teel and Linwood Streets—these provide a safe pedestrian crossing for Hardy School children and parents at Teel and for those hoping to access Spy Pond Park via Linwood.)

Some neighbors and businesses fear that the proposed plan will increase traffic congestion on Mass Ave. Traffic to/from Mass Ave is controlled almost entirely by the traffic lights at Rt. 16, Lake Street and in Arlington Center. These three lights play a more dominant role in how long it takes motorists to drive through East Arlington, no matter how many lanes of traffic are provided. If Mass Ave were three, four or ten lanes wide, it would still take the same amount of time to pass from the Center into Cambridge. We cannot let fear of traffic back-ups for very short periods of any given weekday trump the ability to make a more pedestrian-friendly environment 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Our coalition feels that this project is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to take a highway-like road and create a neighborhood main street that will become the true center of East Arlington.

Signed,

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