MassDOT committed $5.9 million to fund construction of the Commonwealth Avenue Carriageway Redesign Project.

By Jenna Fisher, Patch Staff
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NEWTON, MA — MassDOT has committed $5.9 million to fund construction of the Commonwealth Avenue Carriageway Redesign Project as a State Prioritized Bicycle and Pedestrian Project, the city announced Wednesday.

Frederick Law Olmsted designed the Newton portion of Commonwealth Ave as part of the Emerald Necklace park system. It was built in 1895 with a line of the Middlesex and Boston Street Railway in the median, with Norumbega Park, an amusement park at the end of the line on the Charles River in 1897 to increase use of the line. Streetcar service was cut back to the Boston border in 1930 and buses last ran on Commonwealth Avenue in 1976, according to historian Bob Pollock.

The redesign will focus on a disconnected segment of the carriageway from Lyons Field to east of Auburn Street near the Marriott Hotel.

The project proposes to create more green space and a walking and bicycle path by rerouting traffic from north of the median to the south side of the road.
The project will also link area trail networks, including the Charles River Path and the Riverside Greenway trail network, and will connect with Weston’s proposed shared use path on the other side of the Charles River Bridge, running along Commonwealth Avenue from the Newton to Natick borders.

Part of the project aims to increase access to the Charles River at the boathouse and improve safety for pedestrians and bicyclists where there are no signs to drivers to watch for them.

A virtual public meeting to review the preliminary design for the project is set to happen sometime this fall, though nothing has been nailed down yet, according to the mayor's office.

The Riverside Greenway Working Group, the Lawrence and Lillian Solomon Foundation and MassDOT, Bike Newton the Newton Conservators and residents in Newton Lower Falls and Auburndale have been working on the project, according to Newton Mayor Ruthanne Fuller.
In many ways this is a continuation of proposals from Jane and Phil Hanser, who in 2012, set out to document safety problems of the Carriage Lane. They came up with a number of solutions of their own, from stop signs to signals that have slowly been implemented throughout the years, according to CommonwealthAveCarriageLane.com.

The funding for the project comes mainly for the bicycle and pedestrian project comes from statewide highway funds.

Newton is also getting $300,000 for a new technology-enabled transportation service to run between all three MBTA lines and the Wells Avenue Business District, before expanding citywide. The idea is this will build on the city's NewMo (Newton in Motion) for senior citizens.

The state has also committed $2.3 million to cleaning and painting the structural steel on the bridge that goes over I-95.

Got a tip? Patch reporter Jenna Fisher can be reached at Jenna.Fisher@patch.com or by calling 617-942-0474. Follow her on Twitter and Instagram (@ReporterJenna). Have a press release you'd like posted on the Patch? Here's how to post a press release, a column, event or opinion piece.