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## SEEKING TO IMPROVE ACCESSIBILITY AND SAFETY, DCR UNVEILS PLAN FOR PARKWAYS

**The Boston Globe**

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The Department of Conservation and Recreation released a \$200 million Parkway Master Plan on Friday that outlines proposals to improve the utility of its roads in Greater Boston.

The plan, which was completed in August 2020, outlines templates for all of the agency's roads, referred to as parkways, and individual plans for properties spanning 30 municipalities between Wakefield and Milton, and east of Waltham.

In a statement to the Globe, a spokeswoman for DCR wrote that "final review and release was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic."

Short-term modifications include adding crosswalks, shared-use paths, marked bicycle lanes, and curb ramps for increased accessibility. Longer-term goals include full parkway reconstruction and raised bike lanes that offer a height separation from vehicular traffic. In an effort to prioritize these goals, DCR created an office of Green Transportation last year to oversee its parkway projects.

The recommendations are based on findings from a 2015 study conducted by Toole Design Group.

DCR Commissioner Jim Montgomery said he hopes the plan will "guide DCR's plans in a more equitable and environmentally beneficial direction."

"The primary objective behind the development of the DCR parkway master plan was to create a comprehensive document to inform the future planning for DCR parkway reconstruction and maintenance initiatives, a strategic plan, if you will, for our existing capital expenditures," said Montgomery during a telephone conference call Friday.

A priority, he said, will be implementing more wheelchair ramps on sidewalks to make them more ADA compliant, which community organizers have said is necessary to make the parkways safer as well as more accessible.

Brendan Kearney, deputy director of WalkBoston, said the 2015 study commissioned by DCR was a necessary first step toward expanded accessibility.

"We've definitely seen more people in the last year embracing being outdoors [because of COVID-19]. It's good they got a sense of what's missing to make their paths and parkways fully compliant for people in wheelchairs, people pushing strollers, and bikes of all shapes and sizes," he said in an interview.

Montgomery said DCR plans to fund the improvements through capital investments over the next 20 years, and the department believes it will not have to request additional funding beyond the capital improvement maintenance programs already in place.

The Friday announcement came as a surprise to some advocacy groups, who said they had not been updated about the project in nearly four years.

Stacy Thompson, executive director of LivableStreets Alliance, said the group had not heard from the DCR in at least three years.

Thompson said she hopes the plan will focus on making parkways multi-use and de-emphasize motor vehicles.

"It's just about a lot more than just managing their parkways and roadways. This is about recognizing that centering and prioritizing walking, biking, and climate resilience is how we will conserve our natural resources for future generations," Thompson said.

Becca Wolfson, executive director of Boston Cyclist Union, also said she was surprised to hear of the plan's release because she had not heard about the DCR's study in four years, but she hopes it will lead to more accessible and safe biking.

"Many of the fatalities that have occurred in the past few years, as well as serious crashes, have been on DCR parkways. The fact that [the parkways are] some of the least friendly and most dangerous spaces means people don't have access to really important green space," Wolfson said.

According to findings reported in the DCR plan, there were 12,967 crashes on its parkways, 7,557 of which did not report a "severe outcome," between 2004-2014.

The plan has already been used to make safer changes on DCR parkways, according to Montgomery, and it was the guide for projects such as Nonantum Road, Truman Parkway, and Greenough Boulevard.

The Greenough Boulevard renovation, Kearney said, was an example of “holistic” solutions for pedestrians, bikers, and drivers.

“Greenough Boulevard is a great example of how they were able to right-size the road, think about stormwater and how they were addressing it in a project and improve the path that can be used for biking, walking, running,” said Kearney.

In March, the state Legislature named a commission to recommend ways for DCR to improve its management, operations, and the condition of its assets, including its parkways. The commission was charged with looking at whether assets, such as the parkways, should be transferred to other agencies.

“[The commission] was also thinking about if parkways should be transferred to MassDOT,” said Laura Jasinski, a member of the DCR special commission and executive director of the Charles River Conservancy, in a Zoom interview. “And so, this [plan] was key in kind of determining any next step with parkways.”

Kearney said he believes that many DCR parkways can become multiuse recreation and transportation spaces with the proper design and resources.

“It’s going to take money, it’s going to take staff time, and it’s going to take capital funds to make those changes,” he said.



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