

DRAFT

March 29, 2021

David Mohler  
Chair, Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization  
10 Park Plaza, Suite 2150  
Boston, MA 02116

cc: Matt Genova, TIP Manager

Dear Mr. Mohler,

As \_\_\_\_ of the Belmont School Committee, I am writing in regards to the Belmont project under your consideration, "Community Path." The School Committee [and the Supt?] has reviewed and endorsed this letter.

The Belmont School Committee supports the Belmont Community Path project.

The School Committee and School Department have worked cooperatively in the preceding years to account for this major infrastructure project, while moving forward with a major school renovation.

The School Committee recognizes the needs of all families with respect to transportation modes and resources, and endeavors to ensure safe and accessible arrival to and dismissal from all schools while complying with related state and federal regulations. The School Committee recognizes that the schools are major transit activity generators; reducing vehicular activity in the school zone improves safety.

The School Committee, School Department, and the Belmont High School Building Committee recognized and integrated planning for the anticipated Alexander Underpass, for its safety and access improvements to the newly designed campus. The building committee incorporated general pedestrian and bike improvements by reducing student parking on campus and creating additional sidewalk/shared path access routes. The campus will nearly double its student population, serving some 2200 students.

High school students in the Global Capstone course, studied commute patterns/modes to the campus in 2017 in preparation for the building project. They found 16% of students walking or biking and proposed ideas for increasing such transit with incentive programs (walk/bike with contracts) and increased bike racks. Their surveys revealed families' desire for better bike lanes and support for bike culture, as well.

In relation to walking and biking transportation, the Belmont Schools have taken steps to support students and families in other ways, including:

- Provided review and input to the Complete Streets prioritization plan (school routes)
- Coordinates with Belmont Police Department for School Crossing Guards
- Collaborated with Community Development Dept. to improve safety zones with signage and infrastructure improvements in school zones
- Supports Safe Routes to Schools (MA DOT) program at the elementary and middle school level in partnership with parent-teacher organizations
- Supported 4 different school-based applications to MADOT/Safe Routes to Schools Infrastructure Assessment Award program
- Supports the MA DOT/SRTS award/project for the Wellington School

The School Committee approved as part of the ongoing operational work of the district, to: “continue to collaborate...and to work toward the goals of Belmont’s Climate Action Plan.” The 2007 plan states 37% of Belmont’s carbon emissions by source are attributed to transportation. The 2018 update identified the majority of emissions by source attributable to transportation and heating. It sets a target of 50% electric vehicles by 2030, while acknowledging non-emitting sources must be sustained to achieve target reduction levels.

School bus transportation costs continue to outpace revenue growth and the district relies on fees paid by families to offset these escalating bus costs. With Belmont being small, a significant percentage of students live well within 2 miles of the school they attend; by law the district is not obliged to provide transportation for a majority of students. The committee recognizes that welcoming and safer pathways for students to bike and walk supports students who utilize this affordable transportation option, while reducing bus demand. Neighboring peer districts Lexington, Arlington, Newton, and Melrose, have integrated multi-use paths into arrival/dismissal plans and school maps successfully.

The Committee recognizes that active transportation has a positive impact on student health. The model Wellness policy for schools provided by the USDA and CDC states that “...physical activity before, during and after the school day, are strongly correlated with positive student outcomes.” And that, “...students who are physically active through active transport to and from school, recess, physical activity breaks, high-quality physical education and extracurricular activities – do better academically.” The model policy includes “active transport to and from school, such as walking or biking,” as an area of wellness to promote. Belmont does several of the suggested activities outlined in the model currently. The path would provide free and accessible recreation space. Peer districts have utilized paths for Wellness and PE programs, and team-athletic training.

Finally, the School Committee has not thus far deemed it necessary to take a position on any particular segments of the planned route, it has consistently identified the Alexander Underpass as a critical safety improvement for the students and families.

Sincerely,

On behalf of the Belmont School Committee