

Charles D. Baker, Governor  
Karyn E. Polito, Lieutenant Governor  
Jamey Tesler, Secretary & CEO  
Jonathan L. Gulliver, Highway Administrator



August 23, 2022

David Archibald, Chair  
West Newbury Select Board  
381 Main Street  
West Newbury, MA 01985

Dear Mr. Archibald:

Secretary Tesler forwarded me your letter dated June 27, 2022, regarding the Rocks Village Bridge, carrying East Main Street/Bridge Street over the Merrimack River at the Haverhill/West Newbury line. MassDOT appreciates the Select Board's interest in preventing additional incidents involving over-height vehicles striking the bridge, such as that which occurred on March 17, 2022.

In response to prior inquiries from members of the State delegation, MassDOT staff reviewed the feasibility of instituting a heavy commercial vehicle exclusion (HCVE) affecting the section of East Main Street/Bridge Street that the bridge carries over the Merrimack River. There are several reasons MassDOT does not support an HCVE.

When the bridge was rehabilitated in 2013, the design was developed to accommodate all types of traffic/vehicles, as the bridge provides inter-local and regional connectivity between communities in the area and is one of only three crossings of the Merrimack River in the area. If trucks and other larger vehicles were not allowed to cross at this location, they would be required to travel over four miles south to the Bates Bridge in Groveland/Haverhill or over six miles north to the Chain Bridge/Hines Bridge in Amesbury/Newburyport. In accordance with Chapter 85, Section 2 of the General Laws, these neighboring municipalities would each need to grant permission for this additional truck traffic to travel along the alternative routes through their community. MassDOT policy also requires that minimum truck volume warrants be met to justify an HCVE on a roadway, which are usually in the 5-8% range of the average daily traffic. A previous study showed the percentage of heavy commercial vehicles that use the bridge does not meet this threshold.

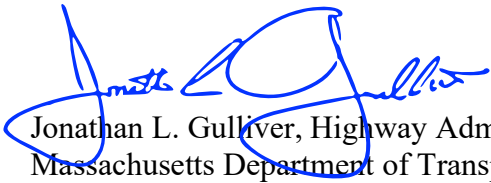
In order to provide drivers with more advanced notice regarding the vertical clearance restrictions on the bridge, MassDOT developed a plan that includes regional and local signage, and in road pavement markings approaching the bridge. The plan proposes to replace the current warning signage on the portal entrances on each side of the bridge with more visible, horizontally positioned clearance signs. In conjunction with the portal signs, MassDOT is proposing warning chains be installed with the chain bottoms being set at the actual low clearance of 12'-6" to alert drivers if their vehicle make contact. The plan also includes more robust signage at local and regional locations outside of the Rocks Village Historic District, including on Route 113, I-495, and I-95.

MassDOT previously submitted the relevant portions of the proposed signage and pavement marking plan to the Massachusetts Historical Commission as part of a Project Notification Form (PNF) for the permanent bridge repairs and consulted with the Rocks Village Historic District Commission on the proposal at a virtual meeting held on August 22, 2022.

MassDOT will commence the permanent repair work to the bridge once the Massachusetts Historical Commission review process concludes. We expect to be able to commence the work this month and have it completed in September. MassDOT will finalize the associated signage and pavement marking improvements and implement them as soon as possible, subject to approval and the availability of materials.

MassDOT looks forward to completing this important bridge repair effort as soon as possible and continuing to work with our local partners to assess and implement feasible treatments to prevent additional incidents from occurring.

Sincerely,



Jonathan L. Gulliver, Highway Administrator  
Massachusetts Department of Transportation

CC: Senator Bruce E. Tarr  
Representative Lenny Mirra  
Senator Diana DiZoglio  
Representative Andres X. Vargas  
Honorable James Fiorentini, Haverhill Mayor