

HOUSE No. 1083.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in General Court assembled.

The Metropolitan Park Commission submit herewith a special report as directed by Chapter 273 of the Acts of 1899 in regard to the advisability of taking land and constructing a road or boulevard between the Middlesex Fells Parkway at Mystic River and a point on Charles River near Cottage Farms. The act reads as follows:—

[Acts of 1899, Chapter 273.]

AN ACT RELATIVE TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF A BOULEVARD FROM THE MIDDLESEX FELS PARKWAY TO THE CHARLES RIVER.

Be it enacted, etc.,

SECTION 1. The Metropolitan Park Commission is hereby authorized and instructed to investigate the advisability of taking lands for and constructing a road or boulevard from Broadway Park in the city of Somerville, at the southerly end of the Middlesex Fells Parkway, or from any other point in said Parkway near the Mystic River, to the Charles River at or near Cottage Farms. Said Commission shall consider the various practicable routes and the cost of construction, and shall report the result of its investigation, together with its recommendations, to the next General Court. Any expense incurred under this act shall be deducted from the unexpended balance of the general appropriation for Metropolitan Boulevards.

SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon its passage.

Approved April 15, 1899.

The Commissioners have familiarized themselves with the matter to be reported upon by examination of the ground

and by the investigations and report of their landscape architects and engineer, and more particularly by a study of the various purposes which the suggested road or boulevard would serve, and its probable cost. As a result they early reached certain conclusions which may properly be stated as the basis of their report.

First. A road or boulevard between Charles River and Mystic River at or near the points suggested is desirable and indeed necessary to the completeness of the park system of the metropolitan district.

Second. Many other public needs beside those connected with the park system require a more ample road than now exists between these points.

Third. Considerations of economy suggest that all these public needs be provided for at one time.

The region to be crossed by the road or boulevard suggested by the act under which this report is made lies north of Charles River and wholly within three miles of the State House. It is a part of the compactly built central portion of the metropolitan district in which population is giving way to business. The roads crossing it toward Mystic River are generally inadequate for present needs, and therefore a barrier to the development of the district. Charles River divides the district into a southerly half and a northerly half, and, in the same way, divides the parks and boulevards of the district into a south and a north system. South of Charles River the Boston parks, the metropolitan parkways and reservations, and certain modern roads or boulevards, such as Beacon Street, Commonwealth Avenue and Blue Hill Avenue, are all so connected with each other as to form a well united system easily reached from the business centre of Boston itself and affording easy access to that centre from all portions of the southerly half of the district. North of Charles River a different condition exists. Extending to Mystic River there is a congested territory divided between the cities of Cambridge and Somerville and the Charlestown District of Boston. Within this region there is no unity of government, and consequently no general plan of parkways or improved roads and boulevards. The esplanade along the southerly edge of Charles

River leads to the west. Beyond Cambridge and Somerville the Metropolitan reservations and parkways are gradually being connected into a well united system by a parkway from Charles River by Fresh Pond to Middlesex Fells, the banks of the Mystic River, the boulevard called Fellsway across Mystic River to Middlesex Fells, and the parkway from Fellsway to Revere Beach. The parkway from Charles River to Fresh Pond can never provide a direct communication between the northerly and southerly portions of the park system. The rest of the northerly half of the park system, however, unites with Fellsway at Mystic River, and thence forms a single parkway to Broadway Park in Somerville. Although this park is only about three miles from Charles River and the State House as the crow flies, yet, by the park drives for which the land has thus far been secured, it will be about thirteen miles distant. As a consequence, Middlesex Fells and Revere Beach, each of which is from five to six miles distant from the State House in a straight line, will be distant by the park drives respectively about fourteen and twenty-two miles. Obviously, then, a short road or boulevard from Charles River to Broadway Park is desirable and will be necessary if the north Metropolitan Park System is to be completed and brought within easy reach of Boston and the southerly half of the district, and if those living in the northerly half of the district are ever to be able to comfortably make use of the parks south of Charles River.

The cities and towns north of Charles River have long suffered for want of good roads to and from Boston. The explanation is simple. In early years the broad marshes about Mystic River were impassable, and the principal roads from Boston ran north through Charlestown or west through Cambridge. Population settled compactly about these roads but avoided the marshes. The steam railroads following the valleys between the hills separated the population of Charlestown, Cambridge and Somerville and formed a barrier to new roads to the north; the old roads remained narrow and unconnected. It was not until 1870 that a new road and bridge over Mystic River gave any approach whatever between Everett and Medford Square to the towns north of the Mystic marshes, and it was not until 1890 that the Harvard Bridge

gave a new entrance to Boston across Charles River in the three miles between West Boston Bridge and Cottage Farms. Even Cross Street, which formerly gave the only line of easy communication between the Somerville hills, is now encumbered by electric car tracks, so that heavy traffic is poorly accommodated, and pleasure carriages are forced to seek the steep roads further west. In spite of these obstacles, however, there has been a great increase of population north of the Mystic River within the last few years, and a consequent increase in the need of easy communication with Boston, which has forced upon that city the rebuilding of Malden bridge between Charlestown and Everett and is now clamoring for the rebuilding of the bridge over Mystic River at Fellsway and Highland Avenue.

These facts are enough to warrant the conclusion that, aside from the mere requirement of a connection between the parks of the district, there is a practical business need for a wide, direct new road from Mystic River across Somerville and Cambridge to Boston. Nor is this need solely that of the cities and towns to the North. It is the need of the entire district, and especially of Boston, whose prosperity is closely linked to that of the suburban cities and towns. The only reason that roads to satisfy such necessities were not provided long ago is found in the fact that they were required not so much by Somerville or Cambridge as by Boston and by the towns north of Mystic River, and that there was no single agency by which such widely separated necessities could be met. The power of the Middlesex County Commissioners to lay out roads through this region was taken away by the charters of the cities of Somerville and Cambridge. Now that the system of Metropolitan parks is being provided for, however, there is reason and the opportunity for united action, together with the means of making such action bring the greatest benefit to the several cities and towns interested, at the least possible cost to each.

The barrier which the congested region between Charles River and Mystic River offers to all classes of transit was fully recognized when the general plan for the Metropolitan Park System was outlined in the report of the preliminary

Commission to the Legislature of 1893, but that Commission and its advisers believed that with the increasing demand there must come some ultimate solution of the problem. They therefore made Broadway Park in Somerville, which is about the same distance from the State House as Cottage Farms, the terminus of the northerly half of the proposed system.

The fact that the need exists for both a pleasure drive and a traffic road from the neighborhood of Broadway Park at Mystic River to Boston and the park system south of Charles River, taken in connection with the great expense of providing for either class of travel, suggests the wisdom and economy of providing for both at one time by the simplest form of road which can be made to accommodate both. The rest of this report may therefore be confined to a consideration of the proper location for such a road and the proper form in which it should be laid out and constructed.

From Broadway Park the general course of a road or boulevard to accommodate both classes of travel at the least expense is easily determined as far as Washington Street in Somerville. Directness, economy and the necessity for providing an easy grade, all require that the route should be east of Prospect Hill, where the buildings are mostly houses of a comparatively inexpensive sort, and where the grade can be made safe for driving and reasonable for traffic. A route further west would pass through pleasanter surroundings, but would be indirect and of difficult grades, and could not be made to provide for both classes of traffic. Such a road would be a mere pleasure drive, and ought to be considered only in connection with some objective point further west. Doubtless such a pleasure drive may be desirable in the future as a means of communication with Cambridge, Brookline and Newton, but at present it would be a mere luxury. The fact that the road or boulevard here suggested would form the direct line of passage for all classes of travel makes it clear that the land abutting on it would soon be devoted to business purposes, and that the form of the road should therefore be either of the character of Fellsway, a double road with grass space in the centre and a restriction line for buildings, or, what is better, the more ample form of

two traffic roads with a driving road in the centre between two grass spaces and rows of trees, and without restrictions for set-back of buildings from the traffic roads.

From Washington Street, Somerville, to Charles River the route is less evident, and, in the opinion of the Commission, cannot be wisely determined upon at the time of this report. The reasons for this conclusion may be briefly stated, and it is hoped will be found sufficient to warrant the Board's unwillingness to submit at this time a definite plan for this portion of the route.

Cottage Farms on the south side of Charles River is reached by an inadequate old bridge which must soon be rebuilt or removed. It is in itself an unimportant point, being too far east for connection with the future bridges to Brookline, and too far west for convenient connection with the park system of Boston or with the business or residential section of Boston. It must, therefore, be taken as merely suggestive of a general point of termination on Charles River. Other points not far removed suggest themselves as better points of termination. These are the proposed Magazine Street Bridge, the Charlestown Bridge and road to the Fens, and the Harvard Bridge or the new West Boston Bridge. These points are all connected by the esplanade being built by the city of Cambridge along the north bank of the river. Of these, however, only Harvard Bridge is as yet built, and it is uncertain when any other than the West Boston Bridge will be built. Aside from the uncertainty as to these matters, there is further cause for delay in the fact that a union of the steam railroads is now suggested which, if it takes place, will undoubtedly simplify the location of tracks and have a great influence in the matter of eliminating grade crossings. Determination of these matters is almost essential to a determination of the best location for the suggested road and boulevard in this section. It seems possible, therefore, at this time to decide merely that the suggested road and boulevard ought to have its terminus at either West Boston Bridge or Harvard Bridge, and that the form of construction ought to be that of two traffic roads with a park drive in the

centre. Such a form of construction would utilize to a considerable extent existing roads, and would be but little more expensive than a double roadway or a broad single roadway, because the expense of taking the entire lots on one side of existing roads would be little more than that of taking portions of these lots. The cost of the road or boulevard thus suggested will be chiefly that of the necessary land, and construction will require no unusual expense except perhaps in connection with the crossing of the railroads.

In brief, then, this Board has reached the conclusion that there are many and diverse needs for the road and boulevard suggested by the Act which directs this report, that these needs are increasing each year, and that it is wise to begin as soon as possible to provide for them. Economy suggests that a roadway according to the best modern views ought to be planned at once for both park and pleasure driving, and that the authority to provide such a road as far as may wisely be determined at this time ought to be given to this Board or to some other single agency.

In its opinion, such a road may be located at once along the most direct and economical line in Somerville between Broadway Park and a point on Washington Street near the railroad bridge over the Southern Division of the Boston & Maine Railroad. A road to this point will be in line for any location which can be availed of in the future to Charles River at West Boston Bridge or Harvard Bridge or any other point on the esplanade. The fact that the road is determined upon to this point will make it easier to determine the rest of the location in connection with the elimination of grade crossings. At the same time, it will be complete in itself because Washington Street is the highway between Harvard Square, Cambridge, and Sullivan Square, Charlestown, and the point of termination is that from which the best roads now connect with all existing bridges into Boston and the region south of Charles River. The construction of a short piece of single road from this point will form an improved connection with Prospect Street across Cambridge to Massachusetts Avenue, and probably some arrangement can be made with the city of Somerville to pro-

vide this road, and with the city of Cambridge to set aside either Prospect Street or the nearby Columbia Street as a road for pleasure travel.

The Board therefore considers the laying out and construction of a road or boulevard suggested by the Act under which this report is made as advisable from Broadway Park to Washington Street, Somerville. The cost of the land of this section of the roadway in the form suggested would probably be about \$600,000, and the cost of construction about \$150,000.

Respectfully submitted,

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