



# The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

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CERTIFICATE OF THE SECRETARY OF ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS  
ON THE  
ENVIRONMENTAL NOTIFICATION FORM

PROJECT NAME: I-91 at Route 9 (Interchange 19) Interchange Improvement Project  
PROJECT MUNICIPALITY: Northampton  
PROJECT WATERSHED: Connecticut River  
EOEA NUMBER: 13935  
PROJECT PROPONENT: Massachusetts Highway Department  
DATE NOTICED IN MONITOR: December 23, 2006

Pursuant to the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (G. L. c. 30, ss. 61-62H) and Section 11.06 of the MEPA regulations (301 CMR 11.00), I hereby determine that this project **does not require** the preparation of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR).

Project Description

As described in the Environmental Notification Form (ENF), the Massachusetts Highway Department (MassHighway) is proposing to reconfigure the I-91/Route 9 Interchange (Interchange 19) to provide access in all directions to relieve traffic congestion and improve safety. The project aims to alleviate existing interchange operation deficiencies attributed to traffic volumes on Route 9, the strong reliance on the Calvin Coolidge Bridge (Route 9) as a means to cross the Connecticut River, and the current partial interchange layout of Interchange 19. The project is consistent with the long-term improvement recommendations of the *Connecticut River Crossing Transportation Study*, prepared by MassHighway with input from a Study Advisory Group (SAG).

The project consists of the following major construction elements:

- Construction of a new I-91 southbound exit ramp to Route 9, including new traffic signals at the intersection of Route 9 and the I-91 southbound entrance and exit ramps;
- Realignment and lengthening of the Route 9 to I-91 southbound entrance ramp;
- Construction of a new exit ramp from I-91 northbound to Damon Road;
- Construction of a new entrance ramp from Damon Road to I-91 northbound;
- Reconstruction of the I-91 northbound exit ramp to Route 9, including elimination of left turns onto Route 9 westbound; and
- Reconstruction and widening of Route 9 within the Interchange 19 area, including construction of additional turning lanes at the intersection of Route 9 and Damon Road.

According to MassHighway the project is not intended to increase road capacity, but will instead relieve pressure on nearby interchanges (Interchange 20 - King Street) and Damon Road by providing full access to I-91 from Route 9/Damon Road. The project site is adjacent to the Connecticut River, Elwell State Park and the Norwottuck Rail Trail.

The project is undergoing review pursuant to Section 11.03(6)(b)(1)(b), Section 11.03(6)(b)(2)(a), Section 11.03(3)(b)(1)(f), and Section 11.03(6)(b)(1)(a) of the MEPA Regulations because it requires the widening of an existing roadway by four or more feet for one-half or more miles; alters terrain ten or more feet from the existing roadway for one-half or more miles; results in the alteration of one-half or more acres of wetlands; and will result in the construction of a new roadway one-quarter or more miles in length. Furthermore, the project may involve the conversion of land held for natural resource purposes in accordance with Article 97 of the Amendments to the Constitution of the Commonwealth. The project will require numerous State, Federal and local permits including:

- approval under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act;
- a CE or Environmental Assessment under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA);
- a Section 404 United States Army Corps of Engineers (U.S. ACOE) Permit;
- a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Construction General Permit from the United States Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA); and
- an Order of Conditions from the Northampton Conservation Commission, or if the Order is appealed, a Superseding Order of Conditions from Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP).
- The project may also require a Section 401 Water Quality Certificate from MassDEP.

Because the project proponent is a state agency, the project involves state funding, and may require the conversion of Article 97 land, MEPA jurisdiction is broad and extends to all aspects of the project that may cause significant damage to the environment.

I would like to remind MassHighway, local officials and the general public that MEPA is not a permitting agency. The purpose of MEPA is to ensure a disclosure of potential jurisdictional environmental impacts associated with a proposed project and to evaluate whether environmental impacts can be avoided, minimized or mitigated. Many of the comments received will be addressed under local wetlands review under the Wetlands Protection Act, or as part of the MassHighway public participation process as interchange design proceeds. I expect that MassHighway will address relevant comments throughout these subsequent processes. I am confident that State agencies and interested parties will have additional opportunities to publicly participate in permitting processes to ensure that performance standards are met in accordance with applicable regulations.

### Project Relationship to Damon Road Improvements

It is imperative that the proposed interchange improvements be conducted in coordination with the imminent Damon Road improvements (currently at the 25 percent design stage). The Damon Road improvements were determined to not require the preparation of an EIR as part of a Secretary's Certificate on the ENF issued on August 24, 2000 (EOEA No. 12221). The Damon Road project consists of widening and repaving of 1.1 miles of Damon Road from Route 9 to Route 10. The project will include the installation of signals, granite curbing, left-turning lanes, and sidewalks. Certain drainage improvements were proposed as part of this project (a joint project between the City of Northampton and MassHighway), including addressing the current erosion problem at old Water Street. MassHighway must work with the City of Northampton, the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), and interested citizens in accordance with the MassHighway Project Development and Design Guide review process to ensure the seamless integration of these two adjacent road improvement projects.

### Transportation

The project is presented in the ENF as a transportation improvement project, designed to expand Interchange 19 into a full-access interchange capable of conveying traffic from both I-91 northbound or southbound to both Route 9 eastbound or westbound. MassHighway states in the ENF that the project will not increase roadway capacity, but instead will redistribute existing traffic trips within the roadway network. It is my understanding that the project is at the five percent design stage and many design considerations will continue to undergo evaluation (including environmental impacts, layout, intersection capacity, and signal placement) as design progresses. Furthermore, this project is proposed in response to the *Connecticut River Crossing Transportation Study* recommendation as a long-term improvement for the region. MassHighway should clarify for the City of Northampton and the general public what short-term and medium-term recommendations from the study have already been implemented and/or provide a timeline for implementation, at the next MassHighway public meeting for regional improvements and/or the 25 percent design public hearing for the adjacent Damon Road project..

MassHighway should consider several elements as design proceeds including: physical and temporal integration with the Damon Road improvements; alignment and functionality of the

Norwottuck Rail Trail; pedestrian crossings, bicycle and pedestrian usage along Route 9 and Damon Road; and limitation of direct environmental impacts to sensitive receptors such as active agricultural land, floodplain, and rare species habitat. MassHighway should evaluate how both construction and completion of the proposed interchange will affect use of the rail trail, flow of vehicular and pedestrian/bicycle traffic, and pedestrian/bicycle use and safety.

### Stormwater

MassHighway has stated in the ENF that the proposed stormwater management system to accommodate flows from Interchange 19 will be designed to meet MassDEP's Stormwater Management Policy standards and will result in an overall improvement in stormwater treatment for I-91 drainage within the project limits.

Under existing conditions, there is a severe area of erosion at an existing cross culvert and channel carrying drainage from Damon Road, I-91, a Northampton industrial park, and other local roads. The outfall and associated concrete headwall are in extremely poor condition. The downstream channel, which outfalls to the Connecticut River, has eroded very close to one of the piers on the Norwottuck Rail Trail Bridge. According to the Certificate on the ENF for Damon Road (EOEA No. 12221), MassHighway agreed with DCR that drainage improvements would be incorporated into the Damon Road project. It is my understanding that current design plans for the Damon Road project include drainage improvements up to the outlet; however, erosion along the channel between the outlet and the river's edge has gotten worse and additional slope stabilization is needed. MassHighway has agreed, as part of its commitment letter attached to this Certificate, to provide funds to the City of Northampton for additional drainage design work to ameliorate erosion beyond the outfall pipe.

MassHighway should coordinate with DCR, the City of Northampton, and the Pioneer Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization to determine how additional drainage improvements will be incorporated into the Damon Road project, or conducted as a separate emergency action, in advance of the Interchange 19 project.

### Wetlands

The project is estimated to impact 3.8 acres of Bordering Land Subject Flooding and approximately 4,000 square feet (sf) of Riverfront Area. MassHighway must demonstrate that the general performance standards (as defined at 310 CMR 10.04) for jurisdictional resource areas (as defined at 310 CMR 10.04) have been met as part of its Notice of Intent filing with the Northampton Conservation Commission. MassHighway should also demonstrate that proposed compensatory flood storage will be adequate. Furthermore, the project should be designed in compliance with MassDEP's Stormwater Management Policy.

As indicated in MassDEP's comment letter, given the preliminary design nature of the project, it is uncertain if the project will require a Section 401 Water Quality Certificate. MassHighway should monitor the project to determine the applicability of this requirement as project design proceeds.

### Rare Species

The project area is located within Priority Habitat (PH 1233) and Estimated Habitat (EH 874) as indicated in the 12<sup>th</sup> Edition of the MA Natural Heritage Atlas, effective October 1, 2006. The species known to occur within this area include rare fish, bird, mussel, and dragonfly species. The Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP) has noted its concerns about the project's impacts to water quality and quantity to the Connecticut River during construction and the effects on state-listed species. MassHighway should specifically address these concerns as part of its anticipated filing with NHESP in compliance with the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act (MESA), and mitigate impacts as necessary.

### Historic

The Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) has indicated that the project area contains multiple inventoried historic structures, and is adjacent to one recorded ancient archaeological site (19-HS-115). Additionally, MHC has deemed undisturbed portions of the project area as archaeologically sensitive. MassHighway should review and evaluate the project in accordance with the terms of the Programmatic Agreement between the Federal Highway Administration, MassHighway and MHC.

### Mitigation

As outlined in the correspondence dated January 24, 2007 from MassHighway, it shall complete the following in association with the continued study and design of Interchange 19:

- MassHighway will follow the recommended framework for public participation for interchange reconfiguration projects as outlined in MassHighway's Project Development and Design Guide;
- MassHighway will reconvene the Study Advisory Group (SAG) that was formed as part of the Connecticut River Crossing Transportation Study and shall invite DCR to participate in the SAG. Furthermore, the SAG should consider additional concerns raised by DCR in their comment letter on the ENF during subsequent project assessments;
- MassHighway and the SAG will establish a detailed schedule for proposed public meetings and workshops as soon as a consultant is hired for the next phase of project design;
- During the design process, MassHighway will reevaluate the feasibility of shifting the Damon Road off-ramps from I-91 Northbound to avoid a taking of Article 97 land associated with the Norwottuck Rail Trail;
- MassHighway will work with DCR during the design and construction phases of both the Damon Road project and Interchange 19 to limit direct impact due to equipment staging or construction activities to the Elwell State Park parking area and the Norwottuck Rail Trail; and
- MassHighway will provide additional funds to the City of Northampton for additional drainage remediation to be completed either as part of the Damon Road project, or as a separate emergency project, in advance of Interchange 19 roadway work. The Damon

Road drainage improvements will be designed to accommodate reasonably anticipated flows from the Interchange 19 project to avoid construction redundancy.

I anticipate that MassHighway will address salient concerns raised during the comment period on the ENF during the mandatory public review process outlined in its Project Development and Design Guide. Based on a review of the information provided by the MassHighway and after consultation with the relevant public agencies, I find that the potential impacts of this project do not warrant further MEPA review.

February 8, 2007

Date



Ian A. Bowles

Comments Received:

12/29/2007	Aquadro & Associates
01/04/2007	Sophie Theroux
01/08/2007	Joel Dansky
01/08/2007	Roy Kimmel
01/08/2007	Jon Liebman
01/08/2007	Tom Hartley
01/08/2007	Ben Winter
01/08/2007	Sophie Theroux (2 <sup>nd</sup> letter)
01/08/2007	Bernie D. Jones
01/09/2007	John H. Zieminski
01/09/2007	Ruthy Woodring
01/09/2007	Connecticut River Watershed Council
01/09/2007	City of Northampton, Department of Public Works
01/09/2007	Massachusetts Historical Commission
01/10/2007	Nicholas Horton
01/10/2007	Yvonne Boucher
01/10/2007	Rick McNeil
01/10/2007	Andy Morris-Friedman
01/10/2007	Mayor Mary Clare Higgins, City of Northampton
01/11/2007	James J. Maksimoski
01/11/2007	John and Elizabeth Lombard
01/11/2007	City of Northampton, Planning and Development
01/11/2007	William E. Dwyer, Jr.
01/12/2007	Roy Kimmel (2 <sup>nd</sup> letter)
01/12/2007	Division of Fisheries and Wildlife – Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program
01/12/2007	Joanne Krok Mackiewicz
01/12/2007	Paul B. Voss
01/12/2007	MassBike

01/12/2007 Pioneer Valley Planning Commission  
01/16/2007 Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection – WERO  
01/19/2007 Stephen Gilson  
01/20/2007 Jesse E. Brownback III  
01/21/2007 Frank J. Werbinski  
01/21/2007 W. Sydney Stern  
01/23/2007 Mary Kennedy  
01/23/2007 Michael J. Netto  
01/26/2007 Executive Office of Transportation – Massachusetts Highway Department  
01/28/2007 Michael and Christine Cahillane  
01/29/2007 Judith A. Harris  
01/29/2006 Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR)  
01/29/2007 Raymond L. Capers and Phyllis A. Capers  
01/29/2007 David K. Marshall -  
01/29/2007 Joanne B. Hoyt  
01/29/2007 Carolyn Nestor  
01/29/2007 Joanne Krok Mackiewicz (2<sup>nd</sup> letter)  
01/29/2007 Carolyn Yancey Kibe

LAB/HSJ/hsj