Letter to Cambridge City Leadership on Making Busy Cambridge Intersections Safe for
Pedestrians and Bicyclists

Thank you for your efforts in improving transportation infrastructure in Cambridge to enhance safety for all users, including recently reducing the city-wide speed limit to 25 mph. This was in response to at least 165 reported crashes involving bicyclists in 2015,\(^1\) and two fatalities in 2016. We applaud your efforts, but the recent fatality on Memorial Drive reminds us that much more should be done to achieve Cambridge’s Vision Zero to eliminate all traffic fatalities and major injuries.\(^2\) We write to urge you to use authority granted by Massachusetts Municipal Modernization Act to create “safety zones” with 20 mph speed limits in all major squares and busy intersections, an initial list of which is included below.

The Graduate Student Council (GSC) represents the 6,800 graduate students of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in all matters concerning their quality of life during their studies at MIT. We support all measures that increase the quality of transportation services and infrastructure used by students. Cambridge is home to many graduate students from MIT and other educational institutions: approximately 30% of off-campus MIT students bike and 28% walk to campus, whose safety can be improved by reducing vehicle speeds in thickly settled zones.\(^3\) As noted during the announcement of the 25 mph city-wide speed limit,\(^4\) pedestrians are nine times more likely to survive a crash at 20 than at 40 mph.

Cambridge has accepted provisions of the Massachusetts Municipal Modernization Act that allow cities in the Commonwealth to create "safety zones” with speed limits as low as 20 mph. Furthermore, at a recent public meeting regarding the Inman Square redesign,\(^5\) Joseph Barr, Director of Traffic, Parking and Transportation for Cambridge, stated that to improve safety in the city’s chosen signalized intersection design, a 20 mph speed limit is currently being considered. We urge you to guarantee this level of safety as soon as possible and to implement similar “safety zones” in all major squares and busy intersections, including in the future redesign of Inman Square. This would be an important step towards a commitment to improve traffic safety throughout the city and to make related infrastructure improvements.

We recognize that traffic laws are not self-enforcing and compliance is frequently an issue. We applaud recent efforts to step up policing of safety-related restrictions in Inman Square and expect that during initial phases, similar targeted enforcement of safety zones will be required. Concerns about compliance should not, however, prevent the city from taking action that is recognized to bring substantial benefits to Cambridge residents.

We stand ready to work with you to improve road safety for all users in Cambridge in furtherance of Vision Zero.

Prepared by the External Affairs Board on behalf of the MIT Graduate Student Council, June 2017

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\(^1\) “Police Department Crash Data – Updated”, Cambridge Open Data Portal (2017)


\(^3\) MIT Transportation Survey, MIT (2016).

\(^4\) “Speed limit on city-owned streets being reduced to 25 mph”, City of Cambridge (2016).

\(^5\) “Inman Square Intersection Improvements Project – Community Meeting #2”, May 2, 2017.
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Graduate Student Council

Initial List of Targeted Major Squares and Busy Intersections:

Central Square:

- Massachusetts Ave, from Memorial Drive to Inman Street

Harvard Square:

- Massachusetts Ave, from Bow Street to Garden Street
- Brattle Street, from Hilliard Street to Massachusetts Ave
- Mt Auburn Street, from Story Street to Bow Street
- Church Street
- Eliot Street
- John F. Kennedy Street, from Massachusetts Ave to Eliot Street
- Dunster Street
- Holyoke Street
- Linden Street
- Plympton Street
- Winthrop Street
- South Street

Porter Square:

- Massachusetts Ave, from Beech Street to Roseland Street
- Somerville Ave, from Massachusetts Ave to Acadia Park

Inman Square:

- Beacon Street, from Concord Ave to Cambridge Street
- Hampshire Street, from Cambridge Street to Prospect Street
- Cambridge Street, from Fayette Street to Prospect Street

Kendall Square:

- Main Street, from Galileo Galilei Way to Broadway
- Ames Street

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6 Based on examination of data on Cambridge Open Data Portal, the Cambridge Bicycle Plan, and the MIT Media Lab’s You Are Here project.