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Timothy P. Murray, Lt. Governor
Jeffrey B. Mullan, Secretary & CEO



July 28, 2011

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Re: Update on the Central Artery Tunnel System

Members of the Board:

As I approach four months as the Acting Highway Administrator, I would like to provide you with an update of the status of our work in the Central Artery Tunnel System.

1. Light Strapping: Late Sunday night, our crews, supplemented with outside contractors, completed the installation of the redundant strapping on all lights in the tunnel and ramp system. As you know, this system was developed as an interim (3-5 year) solution to the light corrosion situation while our engineers evaluate options for a long-term solution.

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2. Water Infiltration: As we discussed at the July Board meeting, MassDOT personnel and contractors continue to address water leak issues on a nightly basis. Addressing water infiltration will require resources over the long term as has been documented in several reports, including the base report, an Executive Summary, and an abbreviated summary of the status and our approach. All of these reports are enclosed with this letter and are available on our website.
3. Long Term Maintenance Plan: On June 29, Secretary Mullan announced our plan to develop a long-term maintenance plan for the Central Artery Tunnel system. On July 13, 2011, MassDOT issued a Notice to Proceed to HNTB to develop the plan, including a systematic approach to the items remaining from the Stem-to-Stern review undertaken several years ago. As the Board may be aware, all short-term issues identified in the Stem-to-Stern report have been addressed. HNTB is in the process of developing the maintenance plan, which will identify existing and future expected maintenance needs and estimate the costs necessary to implement solutions that ensure the tunnels remain safe. Included will be a plan to systematically address the lights, water infiltration, soil freeze and thaw issues behind the South Station Transportation Center and other issues we know will require particular attention over the long term. We expect completion of the plan this Fall.
4. Soil Freeze Issues: In regards to the soil freeze and thaw issue mentioned above, I enclose, for your review, a copy of a report we recently completed on maintenance issues attendant to the thawing of soil behind the South Station Transportation Center. The soil was frozen to accommodate jacking work during tunnel construction and since 2002 the slow and expected process of thawing the frozen soil has continued. While some ground settlement was expected, the thawing has caused greater settlement than predicted, causing voids beneath the infrastructure, including the MBTA tracks and the I-90 connector tunnels. That requires regular monitoring and creates additional maintenance expense. This is similar and at the same location as the condition relates to the MBTA that I previously reported to the Board in February 2010.

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5. Tunnel Safety Information: We have developed a Tunnel Safety web page (<http://www.massdot.state.ma.us/Highway/TunnelSafety.aspx>) and are using it on a regular basis to post information on the condition of the Central Artery Tunnel system as that material becomes available. We are also devoting a large amount of staff resources to developing these plans and to addressing these issues on a daily basis, and are preparing a monthly status report as an additional means to keep the public informed of the status of these items.

I am the lead contact on all of these matters, and am available to you to answer any questions you may have. I will provide the Board with a status report on our maintenance progress at each Board meeting. In addition, I intend to supplement this letter with additional materials we are developing, particularly on the soil freeze and thaw issues. Should you require additional information on these or any other related issue, please do not hesitate to contact me directly.

Sincerely,

Frank DePaola, P.E.
Acting Administrator
MassDOT Highway Division

cc: The Honorable Thomas M. McGee, Senate Chair, Joint Committee on Transportation
The Honorable William M. Straus, House Chair, Joint Committee on Transportation
Jeffrey B. Mullan, Secretary and Chief Executive Officer, MassDOT
Pamela Stephenson, FHWA Division Administrator
Jane Estey, Esq., Special Assistant to the Board

Enclosures