

Notice re: Culvert and Small Bridge Working Group Request for Input

In 2018, State Senator Adam G. Hinds (D- Pittsfield) filed an amendment to the FY19 state budget (Amendment #1193), which established a working group to review regulations and make recommendations regarding the repair or replacement of Massachusetts' culverts and small bridges. (i.e., spans less than 20 feet).

Purpose of the Culvert and Small Bridge Working Group:

The working group has been established to:

- Identify and evaluate the costs and benefits of existing environmental rules and regulations, engineering standards, and permitting processes, and their impact on the replacement or repair of deteriorated or substandard culverts & small bridges;
- Make recommendations to implement cost-effective policies, procedures, and guidelines for the replacement or repair of such structures, in an expedited manner; and
- Make improvements in storm resiliency and natural resource connectivity, which consider degrees of risk, ecological value, cost, and efficient permitting.

Why is Culvert Replacement So Important?

It is estimated that Massachusetts has more than 25,000 known culverts. Many of these culverts are reaching the end of their service lifespan; are damaged, undersized, or otherwise inadequate; and require timely repair or replacement. Many communities throughout the Commonwealth, and small towns in particular, struggle with regulatory hurdles and engineering costs associated with maintaining or replacing this type of infrastructure. Moreover, municipal officials and public works employees may lack the expertise required to navigate the new environmental standards for stream crossings and climate resiliency. Climate change is an increasing concern for communities when dealing with culvert and small bridge infrastructure, as they need to accommodate increased storm flows, frequency, and flood levels at these locations.

The Small Bridge Grant Program, managed by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT), and the Culvert Replacement Municipal Assistance Grant Program, managed by the Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game, were created to assist municipalities with direct funding for small bridge and culvert projects. Even with these limited resources, municipalities would require a significant investment of financial and technical resources to address the total culvert repair and replacement need.

Input:

The Culvert and Small Bridge Working Group is soliciting input from stakeholders to inform its final report to the State Legislature. At a minimum, please respond to the follow questions:

- What challenges have you faced in repairing or replacing culverts and/or small bridges in your communities?
- What opportunities do you see for improvements to engineering standards, permitting processes, or funding availability for these types of projects?

Comments, suggestions, and responses to the above questions regarding culvert or small bridge repair or replacement should be sent to massdotenvironmental@dot.state.ma.us by May 24, 2019. Please include "Culvert Working Group" in the subject line of the email.