

# Advocate's Corner

## Jeffrey Rosenblum, Executive Director, LivableStreets Alliance

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The LivableStreets Alliance is a non-profit organization that believes urban transportation has the power to make Boston a more connected, livable city. LivableStreets envisions a system that balances transit, walking, and biking with automobiles.

**Q. What makes the LivableStreets approach innovative?**

**A.** While most advocacy organizations focus only on one transportation mode, our organizing principles are quality of life, health, vibrant neighborhoods, and economic vitality, and our vision encompasses all transportation modes. "Getting there should be half the fun," we like to say.

**Q. What are unique challenges faced by LivableStreets?**

**A.** The issues we are tackling are so interwoven with all aspects of urban existence (housing, economic growth, employment, recreation, health) that it is very difficult to get people thinking holistically. It is a difficult balance being visionary and realistic.

**Q. What recent success gives you hope?**

**A.** A year ago, we read in the newspaper that a one-mile stretch of an important street through the heart of the Boston university campus was about to be reconstructed. It was clear looking at the final designs that it was a car-centric design—no bicycle accommodation, an additional auto lane added while not widening the narrow sidewalks, poor pedestrian signalization, and no transit prioritization.

Quickly assembling a coalition of bicycle, pedestrian, and accessibility advocates, we crafted a proposal that would improve the street for all users. The MassHighway Commissioner took our safety concerns seriously, temporarily halted the project, and invited us to present to the senior management team at MassHighway and the City of Boston. Though commitments were made to improvements, we are continuing to track this project to ensure they are followed through.

**Q. What national and international trends have the most potential for Boston, and for groups like LivableStreets?**

**A.** I am encouraged by the ways that corridor planning and transit-oriented development are connecting land use, transportation and housing. Context-sensitive street design is being taken seriously, finally bringing us out of the grips of



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suburban design standards that have for decades been inappropriate for urban street design.

I also believe that the economics of transportation are coming into balance. We are confronting the real costs of parking, congestion charging, pay as you go insurance, carbon taxing, and other economic factors that are creating a level playing field that brings other modes more into balance.

**Q. What piece of advice would you give to transportation advocates and/or planners?**

**A.** Our success depends on strong relationships and on earning technical credibility and respect. Relationships must be nurtured, and we must spend the time to really listen to the people you are advocating against as much as we 'lecture.' The concepts we develop must be sound and stand up to technical scrutiny. But don't play street design expert—we are "amateur experts," providing conceptual design ideas that need professionals to flesh out.

More than anything, though, advocacy is a ton of hard work punctuated by the occasionally lucky break. My advice is to be patient, work hard, and always be tuned in for that gem of an opportunity that can be used to make real change happen. And don't forget to have fun doing it!