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Business

Recreation plan gets red light

This time, construction keeps Storrow Drive open

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Bikers and joggers hoping to enjoy a car-free Storrow Drive on Sunday mornings will have to wait.

State officials say they have put on hold a proposal to close a 5-mile stretch of the riverway road to cars. The move would have opened the road for bicycling, in-line skating, and other recreational uses, similar to how Memorial Drive in Cambridge is used on Sunday mornings from April to November.

Rick Sullivan, commissioner of the state Department of Conservation and Recreation, said yesterday that concerns about heavy traffic caused by the repair of the Storrow Drive tunnel prompted the decision. "We just can't accommodate that right now," said Sullivan, whose agency oversees Storrow Drive.

The state has been repairing the 55-year-old Storrow Drive tunnel since May, but the bulk of the work will start next month. The \$11.5 million project, which will involve rerouting traffic, is expected to continue through November, and if the work is not done by then, it will start again in the spring.

Sullivan said the Sunday closures would have further complicated the repair by impeding construction and creating higher costs. He said the agency may eventually consider whether to close Storrow on Sundays for recreational uses.

"It's a very interesting idea, one that we will work on with the conservancy in the future," he said.

The Charles River Conservancy, a nonprofit group dedicated to protecting the parkland along the Charles, had been working on a proposal to close the westbound side of Storrow between the Longfellow Bridge and Harvard Stadium, from 7:30 to 10:30 a.m. on Sundays from April to November. Traffic is light during those hours, and inbound lanes would have stayed open.

The group modeled its proposal after the Memorial Drive Sunday closures.

"People just love it," said Renata von Tscharnier, the conservancy's president. "Because it is so successful, it prompted us to make the Storrow Drive proposal."

After months of talks, state officials and the conservancy agreed last month that closing Storrow would not happen this year. But von Tscharnier hopes it will happen next summer.

"It's a process," she said. "It takes time. Obviously, safety comes first and the emergency repairs are priority."

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