



Mass Ave Partial Reconstruction Project
Working Group Meeting 1
Thursday, May 18, 2023
3:00-5:00 PM
Zoom

ATTENDEES

Working Group Members	City Staff	Public
Sukia Akiba	Jerry Friedman – DPW	Sarah Bell
Steven Beaucher	Diane Stokes – DPW	Artie Bonney - Kleinfelder
Darren Buck	Elise Harmon-Freeman – TPT	Dennis Carlone
Christopher Cassa		Betty Desrosiers
Makayla Comas-Race	Consultants	Sandy Durmaskin
Gary Dmytryk	Christi Apicella – McMahon	Emerson Gagnon
Debby Galef	Natalie Press – McMahon	Marie Gannon
Diane Gray	Anna Sangree – McMahon	Phil Goff
Denise Jillson	Dan Lamere – McMahon	John Hawkinson
Timothy Keefe	Rosie Jaswal – Toole	Glenn Heinmiller
Laurie Pessah	Greg Avenia – Kleinfelder	Fr. Vasken Kouzouian
Ruth Ryals	Maggie Cameron – Kleinfelder	Marc Levy
Daniel Stubbs	Edmund Mitiguy – Kleinfelder	Kathryn Moll
		Linda Moussouris
<i>Not in attendance:</i>		Josephine Mullan
Eitan Normand		Sacha Pfeiffer
		Joseph Poirier
		Kathy Roberts
		Margaret Studier
		Jimmy Tingle
		Chris Tracy
		Kathy Watkins - DPW
		Eva Webster
		James Williamson
		Pam Winters
		James Zall
		(one anonymous attendee)

Key:
DPW = Public Works
TP&T = Traffic Parking & Transportation



MEETING SUMMARY

The following is a summary of the first meeting of the City of Cambridge Mass Ave Partial Reconstruction Project Working Group. For more information, see cambridgema.gov/massavepartialconstruction.

Welcome and Overview

Jerry Friedman, Department of Public works, initiated the meeting and welcomed other City staff members, the consultant team, Working Group members, and the general public, before handing the presentation to Christi Apicella, McMahon, of the consultant team. Christi started by explaining the remote participation instructions and explained that while this conversation will be mostly among members of the Working Group, there will be opportunity for public comment later in the meeting.

Christi reviewed the agenda for the meeting and explained that the focus of the meeting is to get people acquainted with one another and to understand at a high level what the project hopes to accomplish. Christi introduced the consultant team, and described the role of the Working Group, which is to serve as community representatives, advise on key issues, and communicate the details and goals of the project back to the wider Cambridge community. With a diverse set of backgrounds, Christi explained that the Working Group is positioned to bring a wide range of perspectives to the project so that the City, consultant team, and Working Group members can all learn from one another and help develop a project that satisfies the needs of all users of Mass Ave.

Working Group Introductions

Following the welcome remarks, Christi invited Working Group members to introduce themselves, their affiliation, and why they were interested in being part of the Working Group. A bio of each Working Group member is attached.

Project Background and Overview

After introductions of Working Group members, Jerry described the project background. Jerry explained what values drive street design in Cambridge, which includes providing safe and accessible facilities, focusing on moving people and goods, not just their vehicles. Jerry stressed the importance of providing access to trucks and deliveries to ensure business needs are met.

Jerry also described the policy context for this project, starting with the Cambridge Bicycle Plan, which created a framework for developing a network of bicycle friendly streets and supporting programs and policies in the City. He also described the legislative context, and the legal mandate of building separated bike lanes on Mass Ave as dictated by the Cambridge Cycling Safety Ordinance (CSO).

Jerry then discussed the project purpose, which focuses on safety and experience for all modes, and maintaining loading and short-term parking access for local businesses while meeting the requirements of the CSO. He described the project milestones and how a Working Group has been convened to help shape the concept design.

Jerry also described the benefits of a “partial construction” approach, which will allow more parking and loading space to be retained while still meeting the requirements of the CSO. He described the features of “partial construction”, which include separated bike lanes (separated by flex posts or curbs), removal of the median except at signalized pedestrian crossings, upgrade of affected utilities – all at a medium cost and medium time frame when compared to the “quick-build” and “full construction” approaches.



Basis for Design

Christi introduced the basis for design, which describes what the project will do, and what the project will not do. Jerry talked about the importance of balancing the needs of all users while meeting the requirements of the CSO and staying within the limits of the partial construction design. Jerry explained the safety benefits of separated bike lanes, and the importance of providing as much parking and loading space as feasible. Parking and loading spaces are anticipated to be accommodated on one side of the road or the other depending on specific access needs. The project will also incorporate transit improvements, including transit priority and bus stop improvements.

The project will not make wholesale changes to the basic curb lines, or large-scale streetscape/landscape improvements. It will also not include subsurface utility reconstruction, replacement, or upgrades except where needed for accessibility, safety, bus stops, traffic signal infrastructure, or necessary repairs.

Working Group Questions

The meeting transitioned to a question and answer led by Working Group members. The goal of this discussion was to clarify the scope of the project and the roles and responsibilities of Working Group members. Questions/comments included:

Debbie Galef: I understand that major underground projects are not part of this, but does this area need major sewer separation?

Jerry: Right now, the City is working with the MassDEP, the EPA, the City of Somerville and MWRA on a Combined Sewer Overflow Control Plan update in parallel with this project. The City might need to combine that effort with Mass Ave. Potential sewer updates have a longer planning horizon.

Darren Buck: New crosswalks have come up a couple of times. I've observed that if general lanes are congested, it is a multi-threat scenario and dangerous for pedestrians. Are HAWKs/signals being considered versus flashing beacons?

Jerry: Yes, we are considering treatments other than beacons, including HAWKs, which will be discussed in later meetings.

Laurie Pessah: You mentioned that we might be looking at bus stop locations. What process/approvals does the T have in terms of how bus stops are moved?

Jerry: The City works with the T (meets monthly), including discussing bus stop changes/relocations. Ultimately, the City controls where bus stops go and does not need permission, but City works with the T. The City is trying to meet T standards for bus stop spacing, which is a collaborative effort. Fewer stops can mean faster travel time, but we do not want that to be at the price of accessibility.

Ruth Ryals: Two-part comment: (1) This might not be part of the project, but it seems like part of making the Avenue work involves slowing cars and trucks, while also getting bicyclist to obey laws. Regulation is important, not just design. (2) Where we have opportunity to plant more trees and landscaping, it would help make the Avenue more beautiful and welcoming.

Jerry: We will absolutely look at trees and are working with the existing programs and the City arborist. Once the plans are fleshed out, we will figure out where trees can be planted.



Chris Cassa: Can we look for opportunities for people to sit, even if it's not part of the scope of this project? It's important to slow cars on turns where there are a lot of ped and bike conflicts. Is potential intersection hardening in scope? Brattle Street is an example, as is Broadway and Galilei Way – building islands to prevent people from taking turns at reckless speeds.

Jerry: Those techniques to slow car turns are more quick-build and are in scope for this project.

Denise Jillson: When biking through Porter Square, there is an intersection with a bike signal. Surprisingly a lot of people don't stop despite the bike signal. Can every intersection have a bike signal? Also, we need to consider how trees will be watered once they are planted – can we get property owners to install spigots when they are renovated? There are very few spigots along Mass Ave.

Steven: Question about scope – with all the intersecting streets and complicated junctures, will we consider real estate on side streets (e.g., meters added) or is only Mass Ave in scope?

Jerry: For regulations (parking regulations), side streets are in scope. We plan to take a walk as a group to look at more of these types of details.

Timothy Keefe: It would be great to have on-site meetings as Jerry suggested. Obeying of traffic laws is a challenge (for bikes and vehicles). It would be good to get input from police and fire, and what is the plan to enforce traffic laws?

Jerry: We currently work with both, especially fire department. It will be important to coordinate with both going forward.

Chris Cassa: It's important for the Working Group to think about how difficult it is to ride the corridor as a bicyclist. People may be running red lights to avoid dangerous situations. No particular group should be singled out as Working Group moves forward.

Toolbox of Potential Design Elements

After the Working Group Questions discussion, Christi transitioned into the description of the "Toolbox" of potential design elements. Christi asked the Working Group to think about where these elements might be able to be applied along Mass Ave as they are reviewed.

Rosie Jaswal, Toole, of the consultant team, described the different potential treatments that are being considered for the project, including:

- **Bicycle facilities** – there are different types of separated bicycle facilities possible under partial construction, as well as bike signals. There might be a need to raise the bike lane to sidewalk level in some areas, but it will be mostly street level.
- **Pedestrian facilities** – facilities include crosswalks, crossing islands, leading pedestrian intervals, accessible curb ramps, beacons, and raised crossings.
- **Bus facilities** – bus priority treatments include floating bus stops, dedicated bus lanes, curbside bus stops, and bus stop optimization (bus stop location and spacing). Bus priority treatments will be applied to mitigate delay.



- **Driving** – the design could include dedicated turn lanes, side street restrictions, and signal upgrades and timing adjustments. Parts of the median might be retained to prevent turns onto side streets.
- **Parking and loading** – curbside considerations include floating parking, side street curb regulations, loading zones, accessible spaces (both curbside and “floating”), and off-peak parking in bus lanes.

Christi then asked the Working Group to review the presentation, visit the corridor in person or on Google, and share thoughts at the next meeting about where potential toolbox design elements could be implemented as “homework” for Working Group members.

Working Group Discussion

The meeting transitioned into another discussion led by the Working Group members.

Questions/Comments included:

Ruth Ryals: current signage is bad – often confusing, and not paid attention to by any mode – walkers, bikers, drivers.

Christi: Let us know where specifically these issues exist so we can address these issues.

Darren Buck: One thing missing from the toolbox is consideration of vertical elements for traffic calming – including raised crossings across Mass Ave. Also, a question – wondering about which side of Mass Ave will receive parking – is there a general pattern of general traffic and transit where it is more beneficial to maintain 24-hour bus facilities?

Christi: We are looking at where MBTA (T) buses are delayed to see where improved bus stop spacing, amenities, and full-time/part-time bus lanes may be warranted. We are also looking at parking flexibility – it is likely that it will not be just one side or the other, it will depend on specific needs.

Jerry: To add, the City is working with T planners about their aspirations for the corridor as part of the Better Bus Program.

Ruth Ryals: We should look at moving bus stops to somewhere outside of Porter, as buses are often delayed trying to access Porter Square.

Christi: It is important to think about how bus riders are accessing Porter Square Red Line/Commuter Rail, but we are looking in general at bus stop placement and spacing.

Christi: To Working Group members – do you have recommendations about how we can engage with other members of the community?

Steven Beaucher: If the project team can share posters/comment books, I am happy to collect comments/thoughts at my store.

Denise Jillson: Many members of the business association are located along Mass Ave, and can share any info via email or telephone, or targeted mailings, and can help get information out.

Laurie Pessah: I am happy to share resources with the Baldwin school council – parents are a major user of the corridor.



Ruth Ryals: I am happy to be a resource to put up posters and talk about the meeting, especially if there is an email where people could send comments/questions. It's important to think about business owners further up on Mass Ave, some of whom are not English speakers, that we should reach out to.

Jerry: I also wanted to mention that we have the ability to do a "road show". For example, we might do one at the Cambridge Senior Center. If you can collectively think of other locations to visit, that would be helpful. One potential approach would be to set up tables at other events.

Ruth Ryals: I wanted to add students as important stakeholders, including Lesley and Harvard students. Their voice is important here, and it would be good to engage them.

Debbie Galef: Neighborhood councils/groups (Baldwin neighborhood, for example), could be a good place for City staff to visit. Also, it important to reach people in other neighborhoods who use Mass Ave.

Chris Cassa: The Livable Streets Alliance has done a lot of outreach to transit users, and could help doing more engagement. Also, Walk Boston/Walk Massachusetts could be good resources.

Darren Buck: Echoing importance of students (elementary, middle, and high school), kids taking the bus and biking to school are important stakeholders.

Diane Gray: I can serve as a resource for Harvard to inform faculty and students about the project.

Public Comment

Following the Working Group Discussion, the meeting transition to open public comment. Questions and comments from the public included:

Pam Winters: Agree with comment about watering trees. Also, it seems like most of this work is supporting bicyclists. What is being done for cars, with 40,000 resident car stickers?

Jerry: The City takes tree watering very seriously, especially during times of drought. The City has an existing watering program. As you mentioned, the project is required to implement a bike lane – Mass Ave is a major corridor for all modes, but has not worked well for bicycling. This is rebalancing of modes. Also, we recognize that this is a major concern for small businesses, which is why we are trying to reach as many businesses as possible.

James Williamson: I live in Burns Apartments, an elderly disabled community. It is important to think about this not as a transportation corridor, but more holistically as a place. Something that has a community dimension, and consider how it looks aesthetically, more like a boulevard, not just a thoroughfare. Procedurally, it is important to have a more transparent meeting process so people can see others and have a Q&A option. Also, I am agnostic about the median, but I see it as a pedestrian refuge, so I hope it is looked at carefully. Lastly, my biggest concern is from the way bicyclists ride their bicycles – people should feel free and comfortable to talk about that if that is their concern. There is an ideology that infrastructure alone is the answer, but there is plenty of evidence that is not the case. It is important to talk about behavior.



Christi: We plan to go out and talk to people in senior facilities, so thank you for your input. We are trying to incorporate more aesthetic design, despite this not being an urban design project. We will revisit the Zoom Q&A function.

Eva Webster: I would like to speak on behalf of customers who patronize Mass Ave businesses. I am someone who used to go to Cambridge quite a lot, and it used to be a pleasure to visit Pemberton Farms, restaurants, and shops. I am concerned that if this Working Group is not careful and only prioritizes bicycle movement over the needs of vehicles/drivers, the commercial base will be affected.

Christi: Thank you for your comment. This is why we are looking at a partial construction option to retain as much parking/loading space as possible.

Jimmy Tingle: There was a comment about the number of cars in the City – do we have any ideas of how many bikes use the City? Is there any movement to have bike counters on Mass Ave?

Christi: We do have bicycle counts as part of our data. Multimodal traffic information is part of our analysis.

Jerry: We will talk about data collection at subsequent meetings.

Linda Moussouris: I live on Mass Ave near the old Season to Taste storefront. I have concerns about what City has done on North Mass Ave with very little public process and notice. This area is barely urban, and bus lanes and bike lanes are barely used. People do not want to visit anymore. Is there going to be any revisiting of what has been done in that area?

Jerry: Yes, we are looking at everything from Cambridge Common to Alewife Brook Parkway.

Linda Moussouris: Bike lanes and bus lanes are largely empty. In Boston, at certain hours, bus and bike lanes are shared. Is there a possibility of shared lanes?

Jerry: At a future meeting, we will talk about why we don't think that's a safe idea.

Next steps

Jerry concluded the meeting and described that the next Working Group meeting is tentatively scheduled for Thursday, June 22. Working Group members were reminded to try to visit Mass Ave prior to the next meeting and report back on where they think the toolbox elements might be implemented.



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Mass Ave Partial Construction Working Group
Member Bios

Sukia Akiba – Sukia is CEO of The Soul Supplier, a real estate and financial planning firm. She has served on the City's Commission on the Status of Women and BIPOC Business Advisory Committee. Sukia is currently an Executive Board Member of Green Cambridge and is interested in bringing her perspective as an active environmentalist to the Working Group.

Steven Beaucher - Steven is the owner of WardMaps located at 1735 Mass Ave and resides nearby. He is a founding member of Mass Ave for All. He is interested in the opportunity to work with a diverse set of pedestrian, bicycle, and business advocates, as well as residents, to implement the project in a way that best balances the needs of all users.

Darren Buck - Darren is a public sector accessibility/pedestrian/bicycle planner and a resident of North Cambridge. He looks forward to bringing his professional expertise, as well as daily experience as a multi-modal user of the corridor, to the Working Group.

Christopher Cassa – Christopher is a lecturer and researcher at MIT and Harvard Medical School. He is interested in transportation issues, and has served on several relevant groups, including the Grand Junction Path Working Group and the Memorial Drive Alliance. He is currently a member of the Mass Ave for All Working Group, working with business owners, residents, and advocates to build consensus.

Makayla Comas-Race - Makayla is a community organizer trained in urban planning, with a focus on racial and economic development and advocacy. She is the Community Engagement Manager for the Livable Streets Alliance, and serves on the Cambridge Transit Advisory Committee.

Gary Dmytryk - Gary is a past President of the Association of Cambridge Neighborhoods, and a former Board Member of the City's Commission for Persons with Disabilities. He resides directly on Mass Ave and is interested in understanding the detailed technical aspects of design decisions and trade-offs.

Debby Galef - Debby is a resident of the Baldwin Neighborhood and is a member and past Chair of the Cambridge Pedestrian Committee. She is interested in working with the group to ensure a project that provides as much benefit for multi-modal users as possible while respecting the perspectives of businesses and other stakeholders.

Diane Gray – Diane is a Senior Campus Planner at Harvard University. She currently serves as Harvard's representative on the Cycling Safety Ordinance Advisory Group. Diane will bring the perspective of Harvard's multimodal users, and of campus operations such as shuttles.

Denise Jillson – Denise is the Executive Director of the Harvard Square Business Association, and a Cambridge resident. She is interested in bringing the perspective and concerns of the larger local business community to the Working Group discussions, and to help communicate information back to that community.

Timothy Keefe – Timothy is the owner and director of Keefe Funeral Home, located at 2175 Mass Ave. Keefe Funeral Homes is a third-generation family business which has operated in Cambridge since 1951. Tim has expressed interest in bringing the perspective of a small business owner/operator to the Working Group.

Eitan Normand – Eitan is a civil engineer with the MBTA, currently specializing in accessibility improvements, and is a member of the Cambridge Bicycle Committee. Eitan is interested in bringing a combination of bicycle, transit, and accessibility perspectives to the Group, as well as his experience balancing technical and physical trade-offs to develop feasible projects.

Laurie Pessah – Laurie is Director of Special Projects, Board Administrator at the Broad Institute. She was formerly a bicycle and pedestrian planner in both the public and private sectors. Laurie is interested in bringing her perspective as a daily multi-modal user of Mass Ave and mother of two students at the Baldwin School, and her experience with public advisory meetings, to the Working Group.

Ruth Ryals – Ruth is President of the Porter Square Neighbors Association and formerly owned her own business. She is also a co-founder of the group Mass Ave for All. Ruth is interested in helping to implement the project in a way that balances the needs of multi-modal corridor users, with the needs of the local business community.

Daniel Stubbs - Dan is a Sr. Project Manager at the architectural firm Perkins + Will, and a Board Member of the Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities. He is interested in bringing the perspective of the disabled community to the planning and implementation of the project, as well as his experience as a design professional.