



Mass Ave Partial Reconstruction Project
Working Group Meeting 3
Thursday, September 28, 2023
3:00-5:00 PM
Zoom

ATTENDEES

Working Group Members	City Staff	Public*
Steven Beaucher	Jerry Friedman – DPW	Preston Mueller
Christopher Cassa	Andreas Wolfe – TPT	Max Heller
Debby Galef	Andrew Reker – CDD	Victor Ying
Denise Jillson		Angela Hofman
Ruth Ryals		James Williamson
Diane Gray		Naheet Trivedi
Darren Buck	Consultants	Ashley DiCaro
Eitan Normand	Christi Apicella – McMahan	Tom Bryan
Laurie Pessah	Erin Fredette – McMahan	Ron Axelrod
Daniel Stubbs	Rosie Jaswal - Toole	Stephen Kaiser
Not in attendance:		
Gary Dmytryk	Other Attendees*	
Makayla Comas-Race	Linda Spencer - DPW	
Timothy Keefe	Diane Stokes – DPW	
Sukia Akiba	Becca Wolfson - MBTA	
	Kristen Kelleher – DPW	
	Greg Avenia – KLF	
	Ed Mitiguy – KLF	
	Emily Buck - McMahan	

Key:
DPW = Public Works
TP&T = Traffic Parking & Transportation
CDD = Community Development Department

*based on meeting registration



MEETING SUMMARY

The following is a summary of the third meeting of the City of Cambridge Mass Ave Partial Reconstruction Project Working Group.

For more information, see cambridgema.gov/massavepartialconstruction.

Welcome and Overview

Christi Apicella, McMahon, initiated the meeting and welcomed City staff members, others from the consultant team, Working Group members, and the general public. Christi reminded Working Group members and attendees of the remote participation instructions and explained that this meeting will aim to engage as much as possible with Working Group members by limiting the number of panelists and encouraging more conversations among Working Group members, City staff, and the consultant team.

Christi then handed it over to Jerry Friedman, Department of Public Works, who explained the meeting agenda and goals, which included the discussion of concept designs for the segment of the Mass Ave between Linnaean Street and Waterhouse Street. Jerry gave a recap of the project schedule, showing that based on the project timeline, after the current concept design stage, the remaining stages would include final design and construction. Jerry mentioned that the purpose of the meeting will be to obtain feedback from the members of the Working Group on the concept designs for this section of the corridor, specifically at key intersections within the segment of Mass Ave between Linnaean Street and Waterhouse Street.

General Project Updates

Jerry gave an update on the ongoing business and stakeholder outreach efforts. A flyer was distributed to all first floor businesses along the project corridor, which provided information on the project, including the removal of some parking to allow for separated bike lanes. The flyer was handed directly to staff on site at each business location. The flyer allowed businesses to respond with concerns and set up appointments to discuss with the City. A total 170 flyers were distributed and seven businesses have replied so far to set up these discussions.

In person stakeholder meetings have been requested by two stakeholders, The Burns Apartments, and North Cambridge Senior Center. These meetings will be scheduled for the fall.

Other emailed comments from the public have included requests for traffic calming on Rice Street and improved bike left-turns at Rindge Avenue. Comments have also been received voicing concerns about the removal of on street parking potentially resulting in business closure along Mass Ave. Christi indicated that the business and stakeholder outreach efforts are ongoing.

Project Recap

Jerry gave a recap of the construction limits, and discussions that the Working Group has had so far. These include discussions around cross section trade offs between modes, and how specific design elements can impact bike and pedestrian movements, which came up during the Working Group's review of Mass Ave between Rindge Avenue and Beech Street.

Jerry then introduced Becca Wolfson (MBTA), who provided the group with an overview of the MBTA's bus priority vision in Cambridge. The MBTA has plans to increase bus service over the next five years,



which makes the focus on transit priority along key corridors an important initiative. Becca indicated that the MBTA has identified Mass Ave as a key corridor that would warrant transit priority and approached the City to work with consultants and the Working Group to develop a design. Based on past projects, Becca shared that bus lanes have been found to be an effective form of bus priority, however it is understood that they come with tradeoffs.

South of Porter Square Design Direction

Next, the meeting transitioned to talk about the segment of Mass Ave between Linnaean Street and Waterhouse Street. Jerry indicated that notes and comments made by the Working Group during the site walk of this segment, completed in August, were recorded and considered as part of the design concepts.

The “generic” cross-section alternatives that were previously presented to the Working Group were summarized. These include

- a. Full time bus lane in both directions.
- b. Peak hour bus lane in one direction, which would allow for curbside use during off-peak times, with a full time bus lane in the opposing direction.
- c. Full time bus lane in one direction only, with buses in the opposite direction operating in mixed traffic, allowing for full time curbside use in the opposite direction.

Jerry reminded the group that other options such as center running bike lanes and center running bus lanes were considered during the 2022 feasibility study. Although center running bus lanes have proven to be successful in parts of Boston and other cities, they are outside of the partial construction scope of this project, and can create challenges for transit users to access the middle of the roadway. Jerry explained that in comparison to other sections of Mass Ave within the project limits, this portion has less traffic demands and less overall bus delay, which provided more flexibility in the concept design alternatives to balance the needs of higher levels of commercial activity in this stretch. Andy Reker, CDD, provided graphics showing lower peak period bus delays along this segment of the corridor in relation to other segments. In terms of center running bike lanes. It was explained that they have proven to have very limited application, due to the desire for cyclists to access adjacent destinations in most situations. They also complicate signal timing and phasing, leading to additional delays for all users.

Andreas Wolfe, TPT, then shared the typical proposed cross section alternative suggested for the section of Mass Ave between Linnaean Street and Waterhouse Street. The cross section includes separated bike lanes in each direction, and a bus lane in the northbound direction. Curbside use is maintained in both directions, and one general purpose travel lane would be provided in each direction. Rosie Jaswal, Toole Design Group, then highlighted key features in the concept design, including additional crosswalks based on existing crosswalk spacing and input from the Working Group. These are proposed to be located across Mass Ave at Sacramento Street, Mellen Street, and between Everett Street and Waterhouse Street. Existing crosswalks at the signalized intersections throughout this segment would be enhanced with pedestrian crossing islands and/or improved pedestrian crossing times. Rosie also shared the draft for proposed curbside use allocation, which included additional accessible parking, strategically relocated loading zones, and an additional Bluebike station located south of Garfield Street. Rosie noted that the specific designation of curbside uses is still a work in progress and will be finalized based on input from the Working Group and businesses.



Questions/Comments:

Ruth Ryals: Asked whether or not the small triangle of curbed space by Waterhouse Street is part of the project study area, and the potential to create greenspace there.

Jerry: This area is within the project study area. We will touch upon this only briefly later in the meeting, and have time for more detailed discussion at a future meeting.

Ruth Ryals: Pointed out that the metered parking proposed south of Everett Street is a decent distance away from the retail uses on Mass Ave.

Denise Jillson: Noted that this area of on-street parking south of Everett Street, in front of the Law School, was removed in about 2018 to allow for the existing buffered bike lanes, and its removal has had a significant impact. Was in favor of reinstating the on-street parking in this area.

Steven Beaucher: Was overall pleased that the typical sections for segments of Mass Ave were based on data indicating that the needs for various segments were not necessarily the same.

Diane Gray: Noted that a bus lane in the northbound direction, as provided in the concept design, would also be beneficial to Harvard shuttle buses and school buses which would both be permitted to use the bus lane. Asked if floating bus stops would include shelters.

Andy: The floating bus stops would be designed to accommodate bus shelters, however the details of that design are not known at this time.

Debbie Galef – Brought to the group’s attention that the existing and proposed Bluebike stations along this corridor are all on the northbound side. Although agreed that providing an additional Bluebike station at Garfield Street as proposed is great as it fills an existing gap in the Bluebike system. Indicated that it may be helpful to see all existing and proposed Bluebike stations on a map.

Darren Buck – Would be helpful to know how many school/Harvard buses currently use this route that would benefit from the addition of a northbound bus lane.

Becca Wolfson (MBTA) – The MBTA has concerns about dropping down to one travel lane (that would include buses) in the southbound direction, as this could lead to more bus delay than is experienced today. MBTA would prefer a weekday morning peak hour bus lane in the southbound direction, which could then switch over to curbside use at 9:00 AM, when a majority of businesses would start to open.

Focus Areas and Discussion

Andreas transitioned the discussion from the overall corridor design to specific focus areas. These included three locations;

- Garfield Street at Mass Ave
- Shepard Street/Wendell Street at Mass Ave
- Mass Ave from Chauncy Street/Everett Street to Waterhouse Street



Garfield Street: Andreas shared the concept design for the intersection of Mass Ave at Garfield Street. This location currently has an outdated flashing beacon at the crosswalk, and the crosswalk does not provide a crossing island. The concept design includes updating the crosswalk control to a more standard and modern Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacon (RRFB) and including a pedestrian crossing island for the crosswalk across Mass Ave. The pedestrian crossing distance would be shortened from 4 lanes with no crossing island, to three lanes with a crossing island. Andreas noted that a signal warrant was run for this location, however the traffic volumes did not warrant the installation of a full traffic signal.

Questions/Comments:

Steven Beaucher: The unsignalized left-turn from Garfield Street could result in vehicles “inching out” and blocking the bike or bus lane. Traffic on Garfield Street currently cannot clearly see the flashing lights. Can an RRFB sign be included that is facing Garfield?

Andreas – The newer RRFB signs and lights would be more easily visible from Garfield Street.

Steven Beaucher: Has adding metered parking on the side streets been considered?

Christi: Adding metered parking to side street is currently being considered.

Shepard Street/Wendell Street: Andreas shared that the intersection of Shepard Street/Wendell Street at Mass Ave is an offset intersection, meaning the two intersecting side streets do not meet Mass Ave at the same location along the avenue. This creates challenges with the existing crosswalks being angled as a result. Andreas shared the concept design for the intersection, which includes restriping the Wendell Street approach from two lanes to one lane, moving the southbound bus stop from farside to nearside, constructing floating bus stops, and constructing curb extensions to shorten crossings.

Questions/Comments:

Chris Cassa: Could there be a pedestrian crossing island between the bike lane and travel lane on the southwest side of the intersection, where the concept design currently just has a striped buffer.

Rosie – There is not adequate space to provide an ADA compliant curbed crossing island at this location without restricting heavy vehicle left-turns from Wendell onto Mass Ave.

Ruth Ryals: Changing to one lane on the Wendell Street approach could create significant queuing. There is already queuing at this approach with the two lanes. Does this change also mean there will be additional parking along Wendell Street?

Rosie - Yes, the existing left turn lane will be replaced by extending parking closer to the Mass Ave intersection. Signal timing adjustments can also be made to help address the potential for additional queuing

Debbie Galef: Shifting the crosswalk on the southside away from the corners of the intersection as shown in the concept design could mean that pedestrians cross outside of the crosswalk if the desire line is from corner to corner. Although not a significant distance, moving the crossing south slightly means additional distance for the pedestrian.



Eiten Normand: Concerned about the bike box location for bikes travelling through to Shepard from Wendell Street. The location seems out of the way and not within the direct path for bicycles making this movement.

Andreas: We can look into relocating the bike box to be at the Wendell Street stop bar.

Darren Buck – A southbound bus that is stopped at the floating bus island would block visibility for vehicles behind it. Vehicles could be tempted to go around stopped buses, including crossing the buffer or centerline, to turn right onto Shepard. May want to consider leaving the bus stop as far side for this reason.

Andreas: If a vehicle were to go around the stopped bus they would be entering a lane with opposing oncoming traffic. This would be a fairly significant aggressive driver behavior that we would not normally anticipate. There may be space in the painted median to provide a hardened centerline to help prevent that movement.

From Chauncy Street/Everett Street to Waterhouse Street: Andreas summarized the issues for this portion of Mass Ave including long distances between crosswalks (approximately 750 feet between Everett Street and Waterhouse Street crosswalks), and bus stop operations. There are two potential concept design options for Mass Ave between Chauncy Street/Everett Street to Waterhouse Street. The first includes shifting the northbound and southbound bus stops at the Waterhouse Street intersection north to the proposed mid-block crosswalk. This would allow space to provide a southbound bus queue jump lane at the Waterhouse Street signal. The other potential concept would maintain the bus stops at the intersection. Both concepts would include the mid-block crossing to mitigate the existing long distances between crosswalks.

Questions/Comments:

Diane Gray: Pointed out that keeping the bus stops at the intersection would allow there to be a signalized pedestrian crossing at the bus stop. It may be beneficial to ask riders using this stop if they would prefer to cross at a signalized location.

Chris Cassa: Concerns with existing speeding in the southbound direction through this portion of the corridor. If there is one alternative that would be conducive to slower speeds that would be preferred.

Debby Galef: The pedestrian crossing island that would be provided at the crosswalk at the Waterhouse Street intersection under the second concept is a benefit.

Public comment

The meeting transitioned to public comment. There was one live public comment:

Ron Axelrod: As a resident on Shepard Street, is there potential to provide streetscape improvements between Garfield Street and Waterhouse Street?



Jerry: Unfortunately, streetscape improvements are not in line with the partial construction that is within the scope of this project.

Public comments from the Q&A chat:

- Can bikes share lanes with buses? Isn't that sometimes a better solution in some sections or streets to optimize "throughput"?

Andy: Bike/Bus lanes can be appropriate depending on bus frequency within the bus lane. This corridor sees fairly frequent bus service, and it has been identified as a corridor for increased service. The feasibility of a shared bike/bus lane decreases as bus service increases. In addition, shared bus/bike lanes do not meet the Cycling Safety Ordinance definition of a Separated Bike Lane, which is required for the Mass Ave corridor.

- How are the business notices actually distributed? Dropped at door? Handed to someone?

Kristen Kelleher (DPW): All notices are handed to staff on site at the business.

- For blocks without identified loading zones, could you show where those properties are supposed to be serviced? (i.e. do they have side street access or a parking lot?)

Rosie: Existing loading zones are being maintained. Curbside use needs will be discussed with businesses as required .

Next Steps

The project team will continue communications and outreach on the project to businesses and stakeholders along the corridor. There is an optional site walk of the segment of Mass Ave north of Day Street scheduled for October 12th at 5:00 PM.