

Transit Advisory Committee

April 2022

Abbreviated meeting summary

Attendance

Members **Present** (9) John Attanucci (Chair), Saul Tannenbaum, Peter Septoff, Casey Berg, Carl Rothenhaus, Sylvia Parsons, Kristiana Lachiusa, Devin Chausse, Jim Gascoigne

Absent (7) Arthur Strang, Kelley Brown, Melissa Zampitella, Jackson Moore-Otto, Matthew Coogan, Bill McAvinney, Katherine Rafferty

City staff (4) Andrew Reker, Kelsey Tustin (CDD); Adam Shulman, Andreas Wolfe (TPT)

Others (4) Josh Weiland, Olivia Mobayed (MBTA); 2 members of the public

Note: CDD = Community Development Department; TPT = Traffic Parking and Transportation Department; MBTA = Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority

Welcome and committee introductions

Andy Reker (AR) began the virtual meeting at 5:32 PM by welcoming members of the TAC, members of the public and presenters. AR gave a tour of the virtual space for people joining by application and by telephone. AR then shared the TAC's ground rules for virtual meeting participation. Kelsey Tustin (KT) then conducted a roll call of the members of the Transit Advisory Committee – 9 members were present, 7 were absent. The committee then approved the meeting minutes for the March 2022 TAC meeting.

TAC Secretary Election

AR began the meeting by confirming the TAC Secretary as a follow-up from last month's TAC Officer Election. After sharing the Statement of Interest, AR asked committee members to confirm the Secretary, Carl Rothenhaus. The TAC confirmed this position unanimously with 9 votes.

Presentation: Updates to Porter Square Safety Improvements

AR then introduced Andreas Wolfe (AW) from TPT. AW is the Street Design Project Manager for the Porter Square Safety Improvements project. AW gave a presentation that focused on the preferred alternative design and other alternatives that were considered.

Preferred Alternative

- Beech Street to Porter Road
 - Includes two travel lanes and separated bike lanes in both directions.

- Features to note include the removal of metered parking from Mass Ave and moved to side streets, and no transit-specific infrastructure.
- Porter Road to Upland Road
 - Includes existing three southbound travel and turn lanes on Mass Ave, and optional additional parking on Upland Road.
 - Features to note include single through lane and improved bicycle separation on Somerville Ave. It does not include bus-specific infrastructure but maintaining travel lane capacity will mean no negative impacts to buses.
 - It was noted that separated bike lanes create challenges in key sections of the square. More analysis is needed.
- Upland Road to Roseland Street
 - Includes two travel lanes and separated bike lanes in both directions.
 - Features to note include an extended bus stop in place of loading at Porter Square station and optional parking modifications on Mount Vernon Street.

Other Alternatives (not chosen)

- 2A: One travel lane, one loading lane, separated bike lanes
 - This alternative significantly impacts traffic flow without considerable benefits. Drivers and transit riders would experience 3-5 minutes of added delay.
- 2B: One travel lane, bus lane with part-time loading, separated bike lanes
 - Loading zone would become a bus lane during peak, but still adds 3-5 minutes of delay for transit riders before reaching the bus lane.
- 3: Dedicated bus lanes in both directions
 - Bus lanes do not provide the intended benefit here, but bus priority is under consideration for the MassAve4 project.

AW then shared a graphic that described the reason why the traffic queue would be longer than the bus lane in this situation.

TAC members asked the following questions. City staff responses are below the question in italic text.

- One member of the TAC expressed concern about the left turn at Upland Road in the current alternative. Since this is already a major contributor to the traffic, it will continue causing delays at the bus stop.
 - *TPT proposed removing the left turn at the 2nd community meeting. The community feels that this will have a major impact resulting in more traffic on other streets.*
 - *DPW is managing other sections of the street where they are recommending a medium-build alternative. This recommendation includes removing the median along the sections north and south of the square. Bus lanes are also under consideration here. The city will make a recommendation after completing community outreach.*
- If the project is implemented without bus priority, will the impact on buses be evaluated?
 - *The project is not expected to result in reduced capacity. The lanes may be narrowed in certain sections, but the number of lanes will be maintained, which shouldn't negatively impact bus service.*
- What will the metered parking replace on the side streets?

- *Currently Mount Vernon is residential parking. Upland Road is pending based on conversations with an abutting hotel. Davenport Street will have two metered spaces.*
- How long is the new lane between Porter Road to Upland Road? Can trucks fit without blocking the lanes?
 - *This area needs to be shortened to fit separated bike lanes as part of the Cycling Safety Ordinance (CSO). These lanes will be the minimum width possible.*
- Are you going to paint the bus stops red?
 - *The conflict point along the bike lane will be painted green. The city does not typically paint bus stops unless they are part of a bus lane.*
- How are you evaluating and adjusting these projects? For example, the North Mass Ave bus lane is being converted from loading to parking, and the public hasn't heard about how or why this decision was made.
 - *People weren't using the loading on North Mass Ave, so there were improved bus times all day. The loading layout was not familiar to most people, and the city heard that they wanted it to be parking for part of the day and a bus lane for the other part of the day. The city could not originally implement parking due to concerns with the fire department, but parking was always the preferred design. Now the city can implement parking. After 9am, there will be reduction in service in the southbound direction. The northbound bus lane is not changing, where there has been the most significant impact on bus service.*
- The MBTA is not adding more service for routes in areas that don't have bus priority lanes. How are you communicating this rationale to the public?
 - *While we would like to have bus lanes in Porter Square, bus lanes would not offer an effective solution in this location. Instead, a primary goal for the MassAve4 project is to have bus lanes. This has been discussed in the long-range plan and the city is in favor of these improvements, but we also need to ensure that these bus lanes will result in effective solutions. The city has learned lessons from the North Mass Ave project that they are considering in projects moving forward.*

AW concluded the presentation by welcoming TAC members to the third Porter Square Community Meeting which will take place on Tuesday, April 26.

Discussion: TAC Subcommittee Work Plan

AR then transitioned to a discussion focusing on work plans for the subcommittees.

Two subcommittees were suggested in previous meetings split up by functions: Infrastructure + Planning and Outreach + Engagement. City staff sent out a survey to the TAC members with this structure in mind. AR then reviewed the results of the survey, which offered a sense of interest in the subcommittees and the availability of members.

A new modified proposal has been developed in place of the previously proposed structure of these subcommittees. This was developed based on discussions with the Chair and Vice Chair. This proposal includes 3-4 interest areas, such as:

- City projects and policies
- Coordination with other city groups

- MBTA projects and policies
- MBTA service planning

AR then opened the discussion to the TAC members for feedback.

- One member asked if these committees would be ad-hoc style or standing committees for these four general topics which would change based on current events. They also expressed concern for if there is bandwidth for four separate committees.
 - Other members offered reaction to this, including the suggestion to combine topics based on those related to the MBTA and those related to the city so that there are less committees overall.
 - One suggestion included using time during the monthly TAC meetings to allocate to the subcommittees.
 - Another member suggested starting with one subcommittee to see how it works and add more subcommittees over time. This member also expressed that these subcommittees could fragment the larger committee. They also put forth the idea to have a subcommittee focused on equity as a topic area.
 - Saul – start small with one committee and see what works and add other committees over time. However, it feels like its fragmenting the committee. A committee should also focus on equity as a subcommittee topic area
- Another member asked how much city staff can support for these subcommittees. AR responded that allocating regular TAC meeting time to the subcommittees can help maximize city staff time and ensure that the meetings are meaningful.
- Another member expressed uncertainty for a committee focused solely on equity. Instead, equity could be a foundational charter for the other topics, such as outreach and research.

AR summarized that the committee is suggesting two subcommittees: one focused on MBTA-related projects, and another focused-on City-related projects. AR then asked for a sense of interest for each of the proposed committees, which resulted in interest from 2-4 members for each committee.

AR concluded this discussion by suggesting that the conversation would continue during the next monthly meeting. In the meantime, we will reach out to the TAC to confirm who is interested in each of the groups.

Public Comment

There were no public comments during this comment period.

MBTA, City, and TAC Updates

KT presented upcoming meetings for the TAC, including:

- Transit Advisory Committee Meeting, May 5
- Joint Committees Meeting, May 18 (April 20-cancelled)

KT went on to review other updates for the TAC, including:

- Several city projects with updates

- MBTA projects with updates

One member asked if the city had an update about meeting in person. AR responded that the city has not confirmed yet but hoping for in person meetings by June or July.

TAC members involved in the Fare Free Working Group made comments about their recent discussions. One member explained that Fare Free is complex in Cambridge since low-income areas distributed throughout the city, so there isn't a specific line or route that should be targeted. Instead, they should consider a pilot that makes all routes free. Another member explained the reimbursement structure between Boston and the MBTA, which is very inexpensive to subsidize.

Public comment

There were no public comments during this comment period.

Meeting was adjourned at 6:57 PM

Version Information

Draft: 4/14/2022 KT + AR

Approval: 5/5/2022 Unanimously with 10 votes