

**CITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
WESTERN AVENUE RECONSTRUCTION PROJECT  
COMMUNITY-WIDE PUBLIC MEETING #1, March 31, 2010  
MEETING NOTES**

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**Date, Time & Place:** March 31, 2010, 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM  
Cambridge Senior Center

**Present**

Committee Members

Bill August	Eran Segev	Anne Shuhler
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City of Cambridge

Susanne Rasmussen (CDD)	Jeff Rosenblum (CDD)	Bill Deignan (CDD)
Owen O'Riordan (DPW)	Kelly Dunn (DPW)	

*CDD = Community Development Department*

*TP&T = Traffic, Parking & Transportation Department*

*CHC = Cambridge Historical Commission*

*DPW = Department of Public Works*

Mass DOT

Mark Gravallese	Amy Getchell	Rob Antico
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Consultant Team:

Jerry Friedman (HDR Engineering, Inc.)	Rod Emery (Jacobs Engineering)
Cynthia Smith (Halvorson)	Chris Hart (Institute for Human Centered Design)

Public

42 persons

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**AGENDA**

Welcome .....	7:00-7:05
Overview of the project .....	7:05-7:15
The community input process .....	7:15-7:20
City policies and project goals .....	7:20-7:30
Surface redesign .....	7:30-7:45
Questions .....	7:45-8:00
Community input: positives and negatives about Western Ave: Break-out session .....	8:00-8:30
Report back .....	8:30-9:00

**\*\*\*SEE ALSO POWERPOINT SLIDES OF PRESENTATION\*\*\***

**OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT (Owen O'Riordan)**

**Project Schedule:**

Dec. 2009	Initial survey work complete
Feb. 2010	Begin community process
Jun. 2010	Complete conceptual design
Apr. 2011	100% design complete
Jul. 2011	Construction begins
Nov. 2012	Construction is completed

Project scope is Western Avenue from Franklin Street to Memorial Drive. The city will be replacing sewer, water, and electrical for street lighting. Private companies will be updating underground gas, electric, telephone, cable as needed. The city will be reconstructing the roadway and sidewalks, updating the traffic signals, replacing the lighting, and adding street furniture, trees, and other landscaping.

The work you've seen out there has either been initial survey work, or emergency repairs to the sewer system. The full reconstruction project does not begin until Summer 2011.

### **COMMUNITY INPUT PROCESS (Susanne Rasmussen)**

There is an Advisory committee which is currently meeting and there will be community-wide public meetings (like this one). Also, the project team has given presentations to neighborhood associations, conducted an informal on-line and post-card survey (200 responses), and are holding informal community walks of Western Ave. We also have a website: <http://westernavenue.info> which is regularly updated with project information. We will be conducting a workshop at the Cambridge Community Center, conducting a Youth Center outreach program, and meeting with the Central Square Business Association.

### **CITY POLICIES AND PROJECT GOALS (Susanne Rasmussen)**

Western Avenue is a... Regional roadway and Neighborhood street and Retail district and Front yard. The expectation of this project is to balance all of these needs.

The 2002 Cambridge Climate Protection Plan includes the goal of reducing single occupancy vehicle trips by 10% by 2010. In May 1999, the City Council voted to join Cities for Climate Protection (CPP), an international consortium of communities working to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases.

Rated the "Best Walking City in America" in 2008, Cambridge has more residents who walk to work than any other city in the country. It has the second highest percentage of non automobile commuters (56%, after New York City at 65%). Bicycle commuting increased 30% from 1990 to 2000 and cycling trips have doubled from 2002 to present. Although our size, density and compact land use give Cambridge a natural advantage, the rapid growth in bicycling and walking can be traced to the adoption and implementation of key policies.

In 1993, the City of Cambridge created its Growth Policy Document, Toward a Sustainable Future. Several policies are articulated that give clear priority for supporting non automobile travel and making improvements to the city's infrastructure which would promote bicycling and walking. The document was updated in 2007. The following are a few of the key policies related to this project:

Policy #22: Undertake reasonable measures to improve the functioning of the city's street network, without increasing through capacity, to reduce congestion and noise and facilitate bus and other non-automobile circulation.

Policy #23: Encourage all reasonable forms of nonautomotive travel including, for example, making improvements to the city's infrastructure to support bicycling and walking.

### **Surface design: Preliminary project goals**

These goals were developed in coordination with the advisory committee.

- Ensure corridor is safe for all users
- Maintain adequate traffic flow
- Reinforce residential character
- Improve conditions for walking, bicycling, and transit riders
- Provide disability access
- Improve access to businesses
- Reinforce appropriate traffic speed
- Help meet stormwater environmental goals through "low impact designs"
- Provide adequate parking
- Improve environmental sustainability

- Increase landscaping

## **SURFACE REDESIGN (Jeff Rosenblum)**

Mobility on Western Avenue has to balance the needs of all users:

- Transit riders
- People on foot
- Bicyclists
- Cars
- Trucks

The overall design of roadway and sidewalk will take into account the following:

- Vehicle travel lanes
- Intersections and pedestrian crossings
- Bicycle accommodation
- Parking
- Lighting
- Surface material for sidewalk
- Trees, plantings
- Open-space
- Green design elements

The city has conducted a study to understand the existing conditions of Western Avenue. The study included:

- Sidewalk/roadway conditions
- Accessibility
- Vehicle, bicycle, pedestrian volumes
- Peak traffic, queues, travel times
- Turning movements
- Transit circulation study
- Safety history
- Parking utilization study
- Tree inventory

Traffic data was collected using a combination of automatic counters (for daily vehicle/truck volumes) and manual methods (a person standing next to an intersection taking counts) for peak hour vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists. Data was collected during May and September of 2009 on typical weekdays and Saturdays.

Some key observations include:

- Pedestrian volumes are high at certain intersections—there are about 9 pedestrian crossings per minute during a typical afternoon peak at the Western/River/Green intersection (over 350 during the peak hour). There are about 200 during the peak hour further down the western end—there are about 3 pedestrian crossings per minute during the afternoon peak at the Western/Putnam intersection.
- Bicycle volumes are fairly consistent from one end of the corridor to the other. About 1 cyclist per minute travels on Western Avenue passing through the Western/River/Green intersection during a typical afternoon peak (about 60 cyclists per hour). When the cyclists get to the river, only about half of the cyclists appear to actually cross Memorial Drive, so many might continue their trips along the “inland” sidewalk on Memorial Drive, or disperse along other routes through the neighborhood.
- Vehicular volumes build from east to west. There are about 9,000 vehicles per day using Western Avenue in the area of Green and Pleasant Streets; and this increases to about 15,000 vehicles per day between Putnam Ave and Memorial Drive. (For comparison, Memorial Drive carries approximately 25,000 vehicles per day near Western Avenue; Mass Ave carries about 19,000, and Putnam Ave carries about 7,000).
- Vehicle traffic has two pronounced peaks during a typical weekday, between 7:30 and 8:30 in the morning; and between 4:30 and 5:30 in the afternoon. The afternoon peak is slightly higher.

Saturday vehicle traffic is also significant, with volumes between noon and 3:00 pm sometimes approaching those of a weekday morning peak.

- There are a number of ways to think about the vehicle data in terms of how people actually experience Western Avenue. For example, a pedestrian or resident may be focused on how much space is filled by vehicles at a particular location, and for how long. A cyclist may be focused on how fast vehicles are moving. A driver may be focused on how long it takes to get from one end of the corridor to the other. In terms of travel time, it typically takes about 3 ½ minutes to drive from Green Street to Memorial Drive during the beginning and ends of the afternoon peak (i.e. at 4:30 PM and at 7:00 PM). During the “peak of the peak” (approximately 5:45-6:00 PM) this same trip will take approximately 8 ½ minutes.

## QUESTIONS

**Note: Q=Question A=Answer C=Comment**

C: For traffic peaks, should look at Friday afternoons – they tend to be high

Q: How many data points do the traffic counts represent? What kind of variance is there?

A: Data represents “typical” peak hours for weekdays and Saturdays. We did not count during “extraordinary” events (i.e. Red Sox, etc).

Q: Is the Advisory Committee membership fixed?

A: Yes. However the Public is welcome to attend and comment at CAC meetings

Q: Is there any federal or state money going toward this project?

A: No – it is all City of Cambridge funding.

Q: Please elaborate on human services aspects of project

A: Elaine Madden from Economic Development explained that there is a separate process going on right now about revitalization of Central Square. She distributed a handout about the program.

Q: At peak times, what are the options to relieve traffic congestion?

A: We are looking to optimize traffic through the 4 River intersections. We are working with other government stakeholders (e.g., MassDOT, DCR. We are doing a detailed traffic analysis.

Q: What does the goal “Maintain appropriate flow and speed” mean? Will speed reduction be addressed?

A: yes – want to make sure that the “free flow” speed is appropriate and not excessive.

Q: What are plans to minimize disruption during construction?

A: The City has good mitigation experience on complex projects. Access to homes and businesses will be maintained, however there will be disruptions to parking from time to time. It is too early at this point to know the details of the construction process. DPW will specifically address this later in the process.

Q: Will Western Ave be closed like Brookline Street was during construction during certain times during the day?

A: No. There is too much traffic volume on Western Ave. Brookline Street had a very usable detour up Waverly/Albany streets, something that Western Ave. does not have.

## BREAK OUT SESSION

- Fill out questionnaire provided
- What do you like about Western Avenue? What don’t you like?
- Observations, write on map
- Summarize group

## **REPORT-BACK SESSION: SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK**

- Missing cross walks at many locations and some awkward crossings
- Road feels too wide
- Dramatic sunset views
- Varied architecture is nice
- Many trees, feels like a wide boulevard like Europe
- Symbolic nature of Western Avenue as people leave the city
- Careless driving just to get through this area
- Need more trees and more maintenance for them when young
- Corner of Putnam and Western needs more attention
- Creative street landscaping would be great
- During rush hour, intersections get blocked with vehicles
- Better Riverbend signage for that closure on Sundays
- More trash cans needed
- Enterprise makes a negative contribution to the community especially parking on the sidewalk
- No crosswalk on Pleasant at Western. Cars rolling stop – don't yield to pedestrians
- Parking is too close to intersections, hard to see as driver getting out of side streets
- Not all side streets have enough room for two way traffic, especially near Western
- Synchronize with traffic lights across the bridge
- Trees make a great buffer for noise
- Would like to see more variety of businesses
- Abandoned buildings are an eyesore
- There are lots of bicyclists and pedestrians around Mass Ave, want to better accommodate them
- Too many bus stops, consider consolidating
- Sidewalk café's are desired, would like to widen sidewalk
- Like to respect the neighborhood feel
- The bike lane has been a good recent addition, and should stay
- Bikes not well accommodated going north – use sidewalk or have to do big detour
- Street life should be encouraged; reduce barriers to parks/gathering areas; ends anchor the street
- Safety issue – street feels less safe than it could

## **ATTACHMENT: DETAILED GROUP FEEDBACK**

### **GROUP 1 FEEDBACK**

- During peak hour, cars block Western (such as at Howard)
- The catch basin at Howard and Western does not function properly
- Add yellow centerline markings on Howard (near Western) on River Street do same on Howard on opposite side of Western
- I like the mix of residential and retail – adds activity and neighborliness
- The trees are in need of help
- The new trees need watering
- The street needs more trash cans
- Most people don't know about Hoyt Park!
- Can anything be done with unsightly properties?
- Sidewalk issues at Enterprise is really bad
- There isn't a sidewalk along the island/park-space between River and Western
- The pedestrian crossing at Green Street is very awkward
- Look at location of crossings at Western and Pleasant, see if they can be better placed
- The retaining wall at the small park is falling apart
- Close a piece of Pleasant Street at the small park – force cars to Franklin; will help pedestrians
- Review sightlines coming out of side streets like Gilmore – parking is too close to the corners
- Brick is slippery in rain, and especially bad in winter
- Excessive vehicle speed is an issue

### **GROUP 2 FEEDBACK**

#### **Positives**

- Trees, flower boxes
- Real city street with homes and businesses
- Nice bike lane
- Effective open space, restaurants and café's create street life
- Basta Pasta block as a model
- River Park could create activity/street life

#### **Negatives**

- Road feels wide; parking makes it feel wider but is underutilized
- Block between Green/Franklin hard to navigate
- Safety concerns
- Trash

#### **General comments**

- It is hard to get a kayak to the river
- Western Ave. is a very plain street, not like a "boulevard"
- Street is not well lit
- The street is only a "means to an end"
- Traffic, buses, trucks, noisy
- People feel insecure riding on a bicycle especially by Memorial Drive because of speeding
- One way streets make it harder to get around
- It is hard to get north – the detour to River is long for bikes
- Make more active street life/good places to socialize (improve safety)
- Vacant dilapidated buildings are ugly
- Crosswalks missing at many locations
- Lack of yielding to pedestrians and speeding vehicles are problems

### **GROUP 3 FEEDBACK**

- Group consisted of 4 Residents, 1 commuter, 1 property owner
- Sunset is beautiful and special feature of the street
- Can imagine a cleaned up tree lined street
- Entering Western on foot or by bike is the first impression of Cambridge (untapped resource)
- Mix of architectural colonial/Victorian is nice
- Boulevard potential , like “Comm Ave” in Boston

#### **GROUP 4 FEEDBACK**

##### **Hopes**

- Below grade crossing at Mem. Drive.
- Interpretive elements

##### **Dislikes**

- Lack of landscaping
- Abandoned buildings near Howard - blight
- Speeders - dangerous, especially at night
- Bicycles going the wrong way
- Cars going the wrong way
- Blowing trash
- “Blocking the Box” Putnam intersection – horn honking
- Inconsistent traffic enforcement – (especially since police station moved)
- Loss of Police presence – no radar, etc

##### **Observations**

- Concern for the potential construction impacts to mature trees
- Need to protect tree roots
- There is an ash tree take a parking space for example
- Tree triage - New Orleans ex. 100 year plan impacts to Catchment areas – whole areas improved.
- No visual punctuation of the street
- Trees as a focal points
- Kids out playing along street R.O.W.

#### **GROUP 5 FEEDBACK**

- Progression of Western Avenue over the bridge, synchronize the light signals at Memorial Drive
- Reduction in noise – green space between roadway and sidewalk
- Rolling stop at Pleasant and Western is a problem
- Access to playing field (wayfinding signs to Hoyt)
- Underground utilities on side streets a possibility?
- Tree coverage – plan out in as many trees as possible
- Increase variety of businesses
- Concern about derelict sites
- Green Street south to Pleasant – better pedestrian crossing and throughout the corridor
- Improve pavement conditions for runners and cyclists
- Too many bus stops
- Extend restaurants onto the sidewalks – outdoor dining
- Like Christmas tree at Green Street park