

Transit Advisory Committee

November 2023

Abbreviated meeting summary

Attendance

Members **Present** (9) Bill McAvinney, Arthur Strang, Jackson Moore-Otto, Jim Gascoigne, Peter Septoff, Katherine Rafferty, Devin Chausse, Makayla Comas; Melissa Zampitella

Absent (1) Carl Rothenhaus

City staff (3) Andrew Reker (CDD); Adam Shulman (TPT)

Others (21) Tara Kamal Ahmadi¹ (Service Planning); Tom Rovero¹, John Schwarz¹, Sabine Quinn², Laura Marrero², Sarah Paritsky³, Shayna Take³ (Central Square project team); Cecilia Cobb⁴, Bruce Kaplan², Rachel Burckardt², Joel Anders²; 9 members of the public (total viewers and phone-in listeners)

Note: CDD = Community Development Department; TPT = Traffic Parking and Transportation Department; ¹ = MBTA = Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority; ² = WSP; ³ = Regina Villa Associates; ⁴ = CRA = Cambridge Redevelopment Authority

Welcome and Meeting Summary Approval

Andy Reker (AR) began the virtual meeting at 5:34 PM by welcoming members of the Transit Advisory Committee (TAC), members of the public and presenters. AR gave a tour of the virtual space for people joining by application and telephone and shared ground rules for virtual meeting participation.

AR then conducted a roll call of the members of the TAC – 9 members were present, 1 was absent. The committee conducted a roll call vote to approve the meeting minutes for the September 2023 Committee Meeting. The committee voted 5 in favor, with 1 voting present, and 2 as absent. The committee approved the meeting summary.

Presentation: MBTA Central Square Accessibility Improvements project

AR introduced Tom Rovero who introduced other members of the project team. The team then presented on the Central Square Accessibility Improvements project. TR noted that MBTA had begun design before the COVID-19 pandemic and completed conceptual and 30% designs. At the beginning of the “stay at home” public health measures, the MBTA paused design development. After some time, they restarted and now have completed 100% designs in order to move to construction.

The project team reviewed the project including:

- Purpose and outcomes
- Proposed improvements – renovate 1 elevator, install 2 new elevators, modernize 1 escalator. Other improvements include:
 - proposed headhouse design to show general design and accessibility measures
 - station brightening repairs – damaged floor tiles, concrete, plaster, warning strips, benches
 - Cleaning and painting of interior surfaces
 - Repairs for structures where there is a joint between the 1910-1984 structures and trench drains
 - Platform lighting – replacement to LED lighting and increased brightness to requirements for accessibility and MBTA Standards for lighting for security, adding additional lighting at stairwells
 - Wayfinding for existing signage – modifications and upgrades; replacement of braille signage
 - Digital displays
 - Areas of refuge
 - Escalator modernization and escalator canopy refurbishment
- Construction impacts –
 - Platform work during daytimes
 - Surface-sidewalk level work – safety fences at all times, expanded during evenings and overnight
 - Minimized impacts to Red Line service
 - Planning for temporary bus stop relocations

The city then turned it to members of the TAC for Questions and Comments. The project team responses are in italics.

- One member expressed asked for more details about the areas of refuge.
 - *The area of refuge will be visible to the outside. After the door closes in response to an emergency, it will not lock and a person can open the door, if necessary.*
- One member asked for more information about the bathroom upgrades
 - *The ventilation in the “back of house” areas of the station will be upgraded. This will also allow for additional ventilation of the bathroom at the outbound platform.*
- One member asked for more information about the construction impacts at platform level
 - *The platform is narrow at points and we have made efforts to minimize narrowing the platform further with construction barricades and work zones. We do not expect that platforms will be closed off at any point during construction.*
- One member expressed support for all the improvements included.
- One member asked about the gap between platform and subway cars, especially the new models of Red Line vehicles.
 - *The design has made the gap between platform and vehicle as small as possible and the design of the platform edge tactile warning strips supports this.*
- One member suggested that coordination with private shuttles will be important
 - *The MBTA project staff will work MBTA bus operations, which will support any changes needed where shuttle buses share stops with the MBTA*
 - *The city will also be reviewing curb access needs including private shuttles. There will be many overlapping projects with impacts to curb access here so we*

are sensitive to make sure that all existing needs can be accommodated with minimal negative impacts.

- AR read a text comment from a member of the public with concerns about public notification for bus stop location changes
 - o *The MBTA will be providing public paper notices, posting information on the website, and will hire customer service staff to be on-site to help orient riders when bus stop locations change*
- One member shared a concern about extreme rain events and this station improvement project
 - o *The MBTA has studied climate vulnerabilities at Central Square. This location does not have a vulnerability to major storm surge events.*
 - o *The City has also studied climate vulnerabilities and is currently engaged in infrastructure improvements in The Port neighborhood that will rebuild infrastructure and add new infrastructure to manage flooding from severe rainstorms. A developer-supported project at Mass+Main also built stormwater retention infrastructure and larger stormwater drains. In the near future, the City will be rebuilding Mass Ave in Central Square and we will study the stormwater and drainage in the area to identify additional improvements.*

Presentation: CRA Grand Junction Transit Study

AR then introduced Cecelia Cobb (CC) who then presented the members of the Grand Junction Transit Study project team. The project team then shared their presentation on the following topics:

- Update on the project progress
- Review of the following topics:
 - o Study background
 - o Transit mode and equipment, technology
 - o Routes/alignments and frequencies
 - o Selected alternatives
 - o Needed infrastructure improvements
 - o Ridership data

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- A member asked how are is the project team coordinating with the T?
 - o *Met with the T rail transformation teams and confirmed basic assumptions and considerations in the RailVision project*
- A member asked for more information about service to Lynn
 - o *Previously studies of transit on the Grand Junction have looked at west of metro Boston. Previous CRA work has identified a need to study travel demand for north metro and North Shore communities to Kendall and Eastern Cambridge*
- A member asked if this is an opportunity to advocate for other improvements like the North-South Rail Link
 - o *We certainly hope that this is a launch/jumping point*
- A member of the public asked about mobility, transportation, and travel needs for residents of Eastern Cambridge

- *A project team member noted that the Commonwealth of Massachusetts will be doing a household travel survey and recommended that people participate if they are selected*
- *City staff also pointed to other city planning initiatives that included transportation and mobility as topics: Envision Cambridge and “Our Cambridge Street”. Note: there is also a Wellington-Harrington neighborhood planning initiative*

City and MBTA Updates

Andy Reker (AR) presented upcoming meetings for the TAC, including:

- Thursday, December 7th

Next scheduled joint meeting of the Transit/Bike/Pedestrian committees:

- Wednesday, November 15th – Which will discuss Massachusetts Avenue

AR then provided an update on City and MBTA projects affecting Cambridge, including:

- City Projects with updates:
 - Restarted free shuttle service from Kendall/MIT Red Line and Lechmere Green Line to CambridgeSide mall
 - Mass Ave Partial Construction
 - City Project subcommittee observation of bus stop blockages
 - On 1 hour in October, the committee observed 10 vehicles blocking bus stops but 0 buses prevented from pulling to the curb to serve the bus stop at Porter Square bus stops
 - Bus stop improvements at the Rindge Avenue/Russell and Comeau fields bus stop
 - To take place in November
 - Aberdeen Avenue @ Mt. Auburn Street intersection
 - Work to begin on signals this fall-winter; however, traffic pattern changes in spring
- MBTA Projects With Updates
 - MBTA published two documents: Bus Network Vision and Bus Priority Toolkit

Public comment

AR then opened the meeting to public comment.

- One member of the public had a number of concerns with public notification on the Mount Auburn Street and Aberdeen Avenue
 - *City staff posted flyers in advance of the public events which included a couple of open house/street pop-up events and a community meeting. They also reached directly out to management and owners of buildings along Mount Auburn Street.*
 - *A member of the TAC also offered to help facilitate communication with facilities along Mount Auburn Street and ask for direct communications to go to clients and patients at medical buildings*
 - *More information can be found at the project website:*
CambridgeMA.gov/streetsandtransportation/projectsandprograms/mtauburnaberddeenintersection

The meeting was adjourned at 7:08 PM

Version Information

Draft: 11/3/2023 - AR

Approval: _