

Joint Transportation Committee Meeting
November 15, 2023
Meeting Minutes

Note: CDD = Community Development Department; TPT = Traffic Parking and Transportation Department; MBTA = Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, DPW = Department of Public Works

Attendees: Cara Seiderman (CDD), Michael Mantello (CDD), Andy Reker (CDD), Stephen Meuse (TPT), Jerry Friedman (DPW), Alison Harris, Scott Kilcoyne, Mark A. Boswell, Guido Cuperus, Eitan Normand, Amy Flax, Randy Stern, Conor Henrie, Debby Galef, Robin Bonner, Sandy Goldberg, Peter Septoff, Carl Rothenhaus, Tara Kaman Ahmadi, Rosie Jaswal, Christi Apicella, Anthony Gallucio, Chrissy Gabriel, Jennifer Sweet, Howard Moshier, Danielle Desilets

Guests: William O'Connell, Greg Avenia, Catiana Jean-Pierre, Joan Pickett, John Pitkin, Sharon Cerny, Betty Saccoccio, Vickey Bestor, Gary Dmytryk

Welcome and Meeting Summary Approval

Cara Seiderman (CS) began the virtual meeting at 5:33 PM by welcoming members of the Transit Advisory Committee, Cambridge Pedestrian Committee, Cambridge Bicycle Committee, members of the public, and presenters. Mike Mantello (CDD) gave a tour of the virtual space and provided attendees with how to participate.

The joint committee voted in favor to approve the meeting minutes from the previous meeting.

Presentation: Mass Ave Partial Construction

Jerry Freidman from the DPW introduced the various members that would be presenting on the Mass Ave Partial Construction Project. This reconstruction is a multi-departmental effort made up of members of various city departments as well as a working group made up of residents, businessowners, institutional representatives, and people who walk, bike take the bus and drive on the corridor. He then explained how this will be the first in a number of presentations before the committee about the partial reconstruction of Massachusetts Ave, given the length and complexity of the corridor. The partial reconstruction of this corridor was decided as the most feasible option after several years of study, and a formal recommendation to the city council in April of 2022. The section of the corridor covered in this meeting was the section from Waterhouse Street to Linnean Street.

Goals:

- Improve safety for biking and walking
- Provided additional street crossing locations
- Improve the experience for transit riders
- Maintain short term parking
- Stay within the limits of "partial construction"

- Balance the needs of:
 - o Bikers
 - o Bus operations
 - o Pedestrians
 - o Drivers
 - o Businessowners
 - o Those who need to access the curb

Partial Construction consists of:

- Separated bike lanes using flex posts or curbs
- Removals of the median can occur (where necessary)
- Upgrades to bus stop facilities
- A Medium length implementation timeline
- A Medium cost compared to quick build and full build projects

Partial Construction is not:

- A full sidewalk reconstruction

The City has asked the Massachusetts Ave Partial Construction Working Group to:

- Help determine the desires for the various needs of the street, such as long- and short-term parking, crosswalks, and bus stops in accordance with the goals of the project.
- Communicate these goals and the construction process and timeline to the community

The City ruled out several design options for this corridor including:

- Center running bus lanes
- Center running bike lanes

This section of Massachusetts Ave between Linnean and Waterhouse has several design considerations including:

- Less overall bus delay
- Fewer locations with conflicting turning movements
- A higher level of commercial activity on both sides of the street
 - o The result is that more curb access is needed here than in other sections

The draft plan for this section includes these features:

- Separated bike lanes
- Northbound bus lane
- Floating bus stop islands
- Crosswalk signal timing improvements
- Vehicle signal timing improvements

- 3 new crosswalks
- New curb elements to improve safety and curb access
- About 80%-90% of parking spaces will be preserved

City staff and consultants then went into detail about improvements to various areas along the corridor:

Garfield St.

- o Pedestrian signal island
- o A traffic signal may be warranted here
- Wendell & Shephard St.
 - o Protected corner island for bikes
 - o Floating bus stops (which the city is looking to move to the far side of the intersection per-MBTA preference)
 - o Crosswalks straightened and shortened
 - o A single lane approach on Wendell St instead of two
 - o A possible bike box on Wendell
- Chancey & Everett Streets to Waterhouse St.
 - o Increased crosswalks to make up the large gap between crosswalks on this section
 - o A proposed queue jump lane
 - o Bus stops near Waterhouse St.

Upcoming Project Related Events:

- City will be meeting with businesses, stakeholders, and other members of the community about this section of Massachusetts Avenue in the coming weeks
- December 5th – there will be a community open house at the Porter Exchange Building
- Winter 2024:
 - o The City will begin to present on sections of Massachusetts Avenue north of Linnaean St.

The presenters then turned the meeting over to members of the joint committee. Responses to committee member comments are in italics.

- One member suggested that there should be two Bluebike stations in this section of Massachusetts Avenue given the number of destinations. The member also suggested the City install a station on the southbound side of the street.
- One member suggested that if there was a bus stop to be cited near Waterhouse Street, that it should be cited south of Waterhouse Street so that there could be an easier connection between the inbound 75, 74 and 78 buses and the outbound 77 and 79 buses.
- One member was concerned that Wendell Street already backs up a lot with the turn lane, and so she is concerned what would happen without the turn lane. The member is also excited about the addition of Bluebike stations and (although outside of the project area) the turning of the small green area north of Waterhouse Street into a more usable greenspace.

- One member wanted to confirm that there would be pedestrian refuges between the bike lanes and the car travel lanes as well as the pedestrian refuges in the median.
 - o *Pedestrian refuges may not be feasible everywhere but the City wants them in as many places as is feasible.*
- One member asked what the design guidelines were on the distance between the end of parking spaces and the corner of a block. He was in favor of losing more parking if it made it easier for drivers, pedestrians and cyclists to see each other.
 - o *The daylighting standard is: 20ft from the intersection to the end of car parking.*
- One member asked how the City is making the choice between more feet of bus lane versus more feet of parking at the Waterhouse Street intersection.
 - o *If the bus stop cannot be midblock, you have more parking, but it also changes how the bus interacts with the intersection. Both options that the City is looking at for this intersection have both positives and negatives for bus operations.*
- One member was pleased with the project proposal as it will encourage cycling. He also asked how the project aims to slow down traffic on this section of Massachusetts Avenue. The member suggested speed humps and islands as options.
 - o *Right now, the lanes are completely straight. In the new design there are gentle chicanes that will slow down traffic. In addition, slower traffic in the singular travel lane will set the pace for everyone else behind. The City firmly expects speeds to go down after the partial reconstruction.*
- One member asked if outdoor dining will be able to continue post partial reconstruction.
 - o *If there is a parking spot that can be used for outdoor dining, outdoor dining will continue.*
- One member asked if there will be space for added tree planting?
 - o *The urban forestry group is currently working to add trees to this section of Massachusetts Avenue as part of their overall tree planting efforts.*
- One member suggested a crosswalk be installed at the Martin Street intersection
- One member recommended more outside seating
- One member suggested more bike parking spots on Massachusetts Avenue.
 - o *Members of the public can use the bike parking suggestion form to get bike parking in their area.*

<https://www.cambridgema.gov/CDD/Transportation/gettingaroundcambridge/bikesincambridge/Parking/bikeparkingrequestsmap>
-

Presentation: Improvements to Jerry's Pond

CS introduced members from IQHQ who presented their proposed improvements to the Jerry's Pond area.

One member of the IQHQ team began the presentation by explaining the three-year history of the project and the number of permitting phases that the IQHQ team has gone through so far. The priority of the project is public access to the space.

A second member of the IQHQ team continued by presenting two maps, one of the existing area and one of the proposed IQHQ plan for the parcel. Highlights in this proposed plan include:

- A 33 dock Blue Bike station
- The MBTA Alewife Headhouse will get a facelift
- A boardwalk around Jerry's pond
- A possible path around the community garden
- The north side of Rindge Ave will get 33ft extra width of path space
- A natural walking path to ensure people are walking on pathed areas instead of the nature preservation areas
- Possible improvements to Alewife Station bus lanes
- Increased seating
- A restrictive covenant that will ensure that habitat area is protected

Construction will begin in 2024.

The member from the IQHQ team turned it over to members of the joint committee. Responses by the City are in italics, responses from the IQHQ team are underlined.

- One member asked about how IQHQ can accommodate cyclists from Rindge Ave to the headhouse.
 - o One member of the IQHQ team stated that the goal of the internal walking path is access to nature rather than cycling.
 - o Another member of IQHQ stated that IQHQ did not take into account cycling as much as other considerations such as pond shape. The reason is that due to the restrictive covenant, IQHQ can only disturb the soil so much. The internal nature path is a way that IQHQ prioritized reducing soil disturbance.
 - o IQHQ has not proposed to advance a change to make the DCR path better for all users.

Following there was a brief discussion of path hours.

- o Different areas may close at open at different times depending upon usage and upon items in the restrictive covenant
- One member wholeheartedly agreed that the DCR path needs to be enhanced. The internal nature path doesn't address cycling and pedestrian safety. The member believed that enhancement to Jerry's Pond would increase usage of the DCR path. The path they said is a "critical connection".
- One member stated that pedestrian and bicycle separation is vitally important. The proposal does not include separation.
 - o There will be a 12ft wide multi-use path.

- *There is not enough space for two-way biking in the 12ft space allocated.*
- The cycle path that is proposed will not change the desire lines. People will commute from Rindge Ave to the headhouse. It does not change a whole lot on either side. There is no bike facility to the area along Rindge Avenue for the rest of the street. Improving the DCR path and connections to and from Rindge Towers would be a more effectual effort than improving bike connections east/west along Rindge Ave
- One member of the joint committee asked if there was a connection between Rindge Ave and the headhouse. Will people still have to bike through the parking lot?
 - Yes, but the boardwalk will bring pedestrians off of the multi-use path so that there will be less “people with their heads down texting” on the path for bicycles to avoid.

City and MBTA Updates

MBTA Track Improvements:

- Closures of the Red Line in February, July & December of 2024. These closers will each last longer than 9 days. The MBTA is taking feedback from residents on these closures.

The city will host a number of meetings about Cambridge Street:

- November 29th
- December 2nd
- Tuesday December 12th virtually

Notes About Upcoming Joint Committee Meetings

The joint committee may opt to have a hybrid meeting in December.

Public Comment

There were no members of the public who gave comments.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:38 PM