

City of Cambridge Net Zero Transportation Plan Advisory Group

Meeting #9 notes – Wednesday, January 24, 2024

The Net Zero Transportation Plan (NZTP) Advisory Group held its ninth meeting on Wednesday, January 24, 2024, at the Cambridge City Hall Annex and via Zoom. The objectives of the meetings were to:

- Share updates on community engagement plans; and
- Review options for actions to include in the plan and get Advisory Group feedback.

Below are important points and action items, followed by a summary of discussions.

Important points and action items

- Members reviewed plans for broader community engagement in 2024. Community meetings will take place on March 6 and 7. Advisory Group members encouraged the planning team to make sure that those meetings are accessible for people with disabilities. 3 members also volunteered to host events with their communities and organizations.
- Members also reviewed the revised draft NZTP actions. The technical consultants will continue to refine the actions before the next meeting, at which members will begin to decide which actions should be part of the NZTP.

Summary of discussions

Welcome and introductions

Advisory Group members, staff, and consultants introduced themselves for members of the public and, in response to the check-in question, shared things that they were looking forward to in 2024.

Broader community engagement

Advisory Group members reviewed initial plans for broader community engagement around the NZTP in 2024. The community engagement will be guided by the Advisory Group's process equity approach, which recognizes that an equitable process for developing the Plan:

1. Is guided by community voices;
2. Is transparent;
3. Prioritizes underserved, underheard, and historically excluded groups of people;
4. Reduces harm;
5. Builds long-term relationships; and
6. Is accessible.

In March, there will be two community meetings to introduce the broader community to the NZTP and gather initial reactions to potential actions. The meetings will take place on

Wednesday, March 6 (in-person at the Cambridge Citywide Senior Center) and Thursday, March 7 (virtually on Zoom Webinar).¹ Advisory Group members are all encouraged to attend.

Other upcoming activities include:

- Brief survey to get input on draft actions;
- Flyer(s) for community meeting & survey;
- Engagement led by the Community Engagement Team at the Community Development Department (CET@CDD); and
- Advisory Group-led engagement.

The Advisory Group-led engagement will comprise events or existing meetings hosted by Advisory Group members. Stephanie Groll (CDD) can join these events to share about the NZTP and hear thoughts from community members.

Advisory Group members encouraged CDD to make sure that the materials for community engagement are accessible for people with disabilities. 3 members also volunteered to host events.

Potential NZTP actions

Afterward, members reviewed revisions to the potential NZTP actions. The group briefly recapped important points from the last meeting.

- With existing trends and policies, transportation emissions are expected to decrease by 60 percent by 2050 (compared to 2019).
- The goals of the NZTP provide a way to assess the proposed actions. The four goals are to 1) improve mobility, 2) remove greenhouse gas emissions from transportation, 3) facilitate a just transition, and 4) strengthen community and connectedness.

Since the last meeting, the Arup technical consultants revised the actions based on feedback:

- Added actions related to land use, transportation demand management, vehicle ownership, and parking;
- Simplified language and reworded actions;
- Improved the fairness of some actions;
- Refined the estimates for emissions reductions associated with actions.

The revised actions are grouped into 8 categories:

- Active transportation;
- Community engagement;
- Electrification;
- Land use;
- Parking;
- Transportation demand management (TDM);
- Transit; and

¹ The community meetings were initially scheduled for February 13 and 15, but the dates were changed after the Advisory Group meeting.

- Vehicle ownership.

Stephanie Groll added context around some of the potential actions. Some of the actions are harder and/or more costly to do than others. In order to implement some of the costliest actions, it may be necessary for the City to spend less money on other City budget items. Susanne Rasmussen (CDD) added that there are limitations on the city's ability to spend money which may affect some of the potential actions. For example, under the Massachusetts constitution, municipalities cannot spend tax revenue to benefit private individuals. The proposed actions do not reflect exactly how the City could overcome this restriction. At the same time, the Advisory Group could name an action as a priority for the Group and recommend that the City determine how to implement it.

Afterward, members shared feedback on ways to refine the draft actions, along with other potential considerations.

TDM-1. Make the Parking and Transportation Demand Management (PTDM) Ordinance more enforceable to increase the use of buses, trains, carpools, bikes, and walking to work. Right now, the PTDM Ordinance mainly applies to larger office and lab buildings. This action would expand the ordinance to more people who work in Cambridge. Members noted that many people with children in Cambridge rely on having a car, and that driving in Cambridge is already difficult. However, members also noted that the NZTP is meant to be aggressive about encouraging people to shift modes. Actions like this one that seek to reduce car trips should be complemented with actions that propose better transportation options.

BT-1. Improve bus reliability and frequency

Members noted that the MBTA is currently facing a range of challenges which are affecting service. The City of Cambridge can help improve service by improving infrastructure (adding bus lanes and bus signal priority at intersections) and advocating for better funding strategies.

Members also highlighted equity considerations. More frequent and reliable bus service would improve transit equity in Cambridge, and more night-time and weekend service would be needed to make buses a more viable option. Members also raised the idea of participatory budgeting and planning around bus service and routes. The MBTA recently conducted participatory planning around the Bus Network Redesign, though funding and staffing issues have delayed the implementation of the redesign. Members also suggested that the City could encourage the MBTA to hire more Cambridge residents and advocate for these jobs to be CORI-friendly.

Finally, there was a suggestion to invite a representative from the MBTA or CDD's liaison to the MBTA to sit in on the Advisory Group's meetings.

AT-1. Fill gaps in the bicycle network to build a citywide, well-connected network of protected bicycle lanes

Members noted that some people in the Cambridge community are not in support of adding more bike lanes. Others noted that there may be opportunities for educational moments around the benefits of bike lanes to the community.

LU-1. Increase development density within a 10-minute walk of any major bus or subway stop
Members noted that there may be people in Cambridge opposed to increasing density, but there may also be opportunities to raise awareness and educate community members around the benefits.

TDM-2. Create a mandatory program that requires all offices with more than 25 parking spaces to offer a parking "cash-out" to all employees

This action could allow for more creative ways to use land for parking. Members raised questions about whether allowing private business owners to provide parking for people in Cambridge would increase the overall cost of parking. At the same time, if you charge too much for parking, people will not park there.

BT-2. Offer discounted transit fares for Cambridge subway and bus residents who don't own private vehicles

Members questioned whether reduced fares would be enough of an incentive to get car owners to take public transit and whether such an action would reduce revenue for the MBTA. While the magnitude of the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions might be less, the action would make transportation more affordable for people who do not use cars, which would improve equity because non-car-owners already pay for car infrastructure in other ways. Members highlighted that people who do not use cars shoulder much of the cost of the transportation system. Additionally, while actions like this might be less effective for existing car owners, they might reduce the pressure on young people who feel like they need to buy their first car.

Some members also went further and suggested that the City could offer free T passes to everyone, or at least people below a certain income. Members also recommended ensuring that the program works for people experiencing homelessness who might have difficulties providing a home address.

AT-2. Improve crosswalks and pedestrian connections citywide to incentivize walking trips

This action would involve adding more crosswalks, more raised crosswalks, rapid-flashing beacons, and other infrastructure to improve pedestrian safety while crossing the street. Members suggested talking to traffic engineers to understand how such an action would affect congestion for cars and buses if they have to stop more frequently.

VO-1. Create a subsidized carpool program that reduces single occupancy vehicle trips to work, grocery stores, pharmacies, hospitals, doctor offices, school, etc.

Members questioned whether this action would reduce how much people use public transit and highlighted that any options would need to be wheelchair accessible. Zipcars could also be a carpooling option.

CE-1. Introduce a community travel program to educate people about available transportation options

Members recommended having this program be led by trained Cambridge residents. There could also be opportunities to place flyers and advertisements at bus stops, libraries, and other public spaces to educate members of the community around infrastructure decisions.

Other ideas and input

Other ideas were as follows.

- Members recommended working with **food pantries** to understand how their needs for transportation might be affected by these actions.
- It would be worth looking into ways to improve **food and meal delivery** options. The City is currently working on a potential federally-funded program to buy e-bike delivery vehicles for use within Cambridge.
- Members also recommended reaching out to **Central Square business owners** around the NZTP and their needs.
- One member asked whether there is any **mapping of the bike network** to be less unfriendly to businesses. The bike network is being built out based on the Cambridge Bicycle Plan and is focused on major streets where major destinations are located. However, the goal is to ensure that streets remain functional for everyone.
- It would be good to highlight **opportunities for jobs and a just transition**.

Other matters and closing thoughts

In closing, members shared ideas for ways to communicate with community members around some of the harder actions. Some of the ideas are as follows.

- Emphasizing that the goal is to reduce single user car trips and not to restrict anyone from getting where they need to go. The NZTP will also include new options.
- Some people will see the NZTP as an attempt at gentrification. However, it is important to point out the benefits of the NZTP and the progress made so far. It is also important to let people know that their voices are valued and that we want them to be at the table.

The Advisory Group adjourned and will meet next on Wednesday, March 27, 2024, at 9 AM at the City Hall Annex.

Attendance list

Advisory Group members

- Guerlancia “Gigi” Laurent (Margaret Fuller House)
- Ibrahim Omar (Islamic Society of Boston Cambridge)
- James Pierre (Adius Arts Initiative)
- Nora Sears (De Novo Center for Justice and Healing)
- Ali Sorrels (Cambridge Women’s Center)
- Rachel Tanenhaus (Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities)
- Omriqui Thomas (Cambridge Public Schools student)
- Angela Vierling-Claassen (Cambridge resident)
- Lonnell Wells (Cambridge Bike Giveback)
- Yao Wu (Chinese American Association of Cambridge)

Community Development Department staff

- Stephanie Groll (Mobility Strategy Manager)

- Marlees West Owayda (Community Engagement Manager)
- Susanne Rasmussen (Director of Environmental and Transportation Planning)

Consultant team

- Michael Bangert-Drowns (Arup)
- Matthew Ciborowski (Arup)
- Brandon Chambers (Consensus Building Institute)
- Elizabeth Cooper (Consensus Building Institute)
- Julia Clarke (Arup)