



## **PUBLIC MEETING #2**

**Tuesday, December 8, 2020**

**5:30 PM – 7:00 PM**

**Zoom Virtual Live Q & A Session**

The following is a meeting summary of the second public meeting for the City of Cambridge's Grand Junction Multi-Use Path Design Project. The meeting was held as a Question-and-Answer Public Information Session to complement the online Virtual Open House StoryMap (<https://arcg.is/1OyjvH>). The Virtual Open House StoryMap is available from December 4, 2020 to January 4, 2021. For more information see [Cambridgema.gov/CDD/Projects/Transportation/GrandJunctionPathway](http://Cambridgema.gov/CDD/Projects/Transportation/GrandJunctionPathway).

### **1. Welcome and Overview**

Andy Reker, Transportation Planner, City of Cambridge, opened the meeting at 5:30 PM. Andy reviewed the instructions for participation in the Q&A session. Responses to questions asked during the Q&A that could not be answered, or those submitted via email are to be posted on the project website following the meeting. Andy also reviewed the instructions to use Closed Captions for the meeting.

### **2. Virtual Open House StoryMap Tour, 5:30 PM – 6:00 PM**

Bill Deignan, Transportation Program Manager, City of Cambridge introduced city staff including Susanne Rasmussen, Dir. Environmental And Transportation Planning, Patrick Baxter, TP&T Engineering Manager, Jerry Friedman, DPW Supervising Engineer, as well as the design team including Kleinfelder, KMDG, McMahon Associates, Toole Design, and Stantec, all present to answer questions as needed. Bill introduced the StoryMap and the goals for the Grand Junction Multi-Use Path.

Natalie Raffol, Senior Transportation Planner, McMahon, provided a tour of the StoryMap functionality, including:

- Scrolling through the information and navigating each section
- Navigating through key locations tour
- Navigating through the interactive corridor map
- Opportunities for submitting comments and feedback

Bill also mentioned how to sign up for the mailing list by clicking links in the StoryMap to the project webpage

(<https://www.cambridgema.gov/CDD/Projects/Transportation/GrandJunctionPathway>).

As there was time left before the Q&A was set to begin, Bill asked for questions regarding the StoryMap. The first question was a comment regarding a character length limit to comments submitted through the StoryMap. Bill and Natalie acknowledged that the limit is 1000 characters. Andy then reviewed the process of signing up for the project mailing list through the project website. Both Andy and Bill reiterated that their e-mail addresses are available for those interested to reach out through that channel.

### **3. Live Q&A, 6:00 PM – 7:00 PM**

At 6:00 PM Andy reiterated instructions for participating in the Q&A for new attendees. Bill reintroduced the City staff members and the consultants, before restating the goals of the project and the meeting. He mentioned that there have been over 500 visitors to the StoryMap since it was released on Friday December 4. Before taking questions, he noted that some advisory members were in attendance and thanked them for their input.

Live questions submitted via the Q&A panel in Zoom were addressed first, followed by those submitted in advance of the meeting from the StoryMap. Following the pre-submitted questions, the remaining live questions from the Q&A panel were addressed.

### **Live Questions Submitted Via Zoom**

1. *The first question is a combination of several questions from the Q&A panel regarding the southern end of the path and the connection to Memorial Drive and the BU Bridge. There are concerns about the safety of Brookline Street and the BU Bridge roundabout. Is there a possibility for a direct connection to the Charles River? If not, could Vassar Street be a connection to Memorial Drive?*
  - a. Response from Bill: Getting this path from the existing endpoint to the river have some complications, including utilities, project lines and a narrow passage under Memorial Drive. As the agreement with MassDOT allows for the path only by leaving space for two tracks to allow for future transit, and because the arch under Memorial Drive is so narrow, the path cannot fit without widening that arch. The intent is at some point to make a direct connection to the river, but that will have to be undertaken in the future. For now, there are some enhanced pavement markings along the roadways leading from the path endpoint to Memorial Drive. The DCR controls that roadway, so coordination would be needed there to plan enhanced treatments. Additionally, because it is unwieldy to move tracks, the path right now is planned for whichever side of the existing

track has space. At the southern end, this is the side closer to Waverly, rather than Vassar. You would be able to use Vassar by crossing over the tracks earlier at Fort Washington Park. You could then go down to Memorial Drive and cross over there at Amesbury Street. That's another consideration until a direct connection is made and we need to make sure people know their options.

2. *What is the process for finalizing the design? Schedule of meetings? Who makes final decision?*
  - a. Response from Bill: We will look at all comments from the public, plus MIT, MassDOT, abutters and other partners. We will make adjustments to design, then bring those back to the Advisory Committee and discuss. From there, the project would move into final design. At that point, we need to get a permit from MassDOT and MIT to build on the parts of the path that are on their property. Once those permits are in place, the project would be put to bid and a contractor would be acquired. It would likely take at least 18 months from there for construction – this estimate would depend on whether MIT gets a different contractor for their portion, as they will have a separate process for construction.
  
3. *Is this meeting being recorded and if so, when will it be available?*
  - a. Response from Bill: We generally don't record meetings and this one follows that general rule and is not being recorded. We are going to be posting the questions and answers on the project website after the meeting.
  
4. *My concern, based on Charles River bike path, is that bicycles and pedestrians really need separate lanes. Sharing space makes an unpleasant experience for both. Why does this plan have a shared path?*
  - a. Response from Bill: In principle, we agree that separate spaces for bicyclists and pedestrians would create more comfort. However, this is a very constrained corridor. For a multi-use path, we would ideally want a cross-section of 14 feet plus 2 feet on either side for shoulders. We do not have that much space here, and in some places the path goes down to 10 feet with 2 feet on either side. There is one space where people are separated by direction as the path passes under one of the buildings south of the main street crossing. People there are separated by direction rather than mode of travel since it would be easier for path users to understand.
  
5. *Vehicular traffic on Massachusetts Avenue headed towards Boston currently often backs up beyond where the Grand Junction Multi-Use Path crossing would be. Will the signals here be coordinated with the Vassar Street signals to prevent motor vehicles from obstructing the crossing?*

- a. Response from Patrick: There will be a new signal at the path crossing, roughly halfway between the existing signals at Vassar Street and Albany Street. The signals will be coordinated so that they work together. In order to address delays, we will be adding turn phases, in order to limit turners onto Massachusetts Avenue and prevent some of the congestion there.
6. *At path crossings, what is the plan for bikes and pedestrians. Do they have crosswalks with lights?*
  - a. Response from Patrick: Massachusetts Avenue will have a new signal. The crossing at Main street will be at the existing signalized intersection of Main Street and Vassar Street. The segment around Broadway is not part of the design here, but the crossing will be at the existing signal. The crossing at Binney will have a Rapid Rectangular Flashing Beacon, or RRFB, since that's a lower volume street. We are looking into the potential for an automatic beacon that would activate without the need for a button. At Cambridge Street, there will be a new signal with a fully protected phase.
  - b. Bill also pointed out that each location on the StoryMap has diagrams regarding these operations.
7. *I know at one point there was an issue near the Catholic Church at Cambridge Street and Cardinal Medeiros and that someone would need to cede some land. I'm assuming that worked out? Or what happened?*
  - a. Response from Bill: I am happy to report that because of some rezoning, Alexandria Real Estate has donated a large strip of land going down to Binney Street and has also acquired the strip of land needed from the church. They will be reconstructing portions of the parking lot near the church so that the land is available for a path. The building on Cambridge Street that most recently had a beauty salon has been taken down. That space will be turned over to the city and become a pocket park that will be a great amenity for the path, the street and the neighborhood.
8. *Is funding for entire path a prerequisite for building all the sections of the path?*
  - a. Response from Bill: No, not necessarily. Funding has been received for most parts of path, except for section from Pacific Street to the Charles River. We are hopeful that general funds will cover that section. The cost estimate has not been put together yet, so once that is complete they will evaluate whether path will be built in stages or all together.
9. *Who selected the lighting fixtures, and has the exact color temperature of the lamps been assumed yet? Who would decide that?*

- a. Response from Bill: In looking at lighting fixtures, we looked at different fixtures the city has used before, since the electrical department needs to be able to maintain them. We chose the fixture based on input from city staff and the design team. The color temp and such has not been selected yet, but the design team has experts that will be selecting that. The light selection is LED and flexible for different lighting patterns. This can ensure that the light will not flood nearby homes.

10. *Have you estimated traffic flow from different sections of the path?*

- a. Response from Patrick: In terms of path flow estimates, there are some numbers prepared by MAPC, posted in previous Grand Junction Working Group meeting slides on the website. We are seeing numbers as high as 500 peak hour cyclists. These estimates are heavily dependent on connections, and this is just a forecast.

11. *There are so many crossings at Cambridge Street, especially with people using the bus stops on either side. Is there a design such as a woonerf or a shared street that would slow traffic down and allow for safer crossings of all traffic?*

- a. Response from Patrick: The concern for something like a shared street would be the high volumes on Cambridge Street. We are familiar with places where shared streets are successful and they typically have lower traffic volumes than this. On Cambridge Street, we need more regimented traffic control, especially for users that would not be comfortable with navigating a shared street environment.

12. *Will there be snow removal on the path?*

- a. Response from Jerry: There will be snow removal in winter. It will probably be a combined effort from the DPW, perhaps MIT and some other owners that are partnering on the path. The CRA does their existing piece already.

13. *Have there been any big changes to the rough schedule since the June 2019 meeting?*

- a. Response from Bill: While I don't recall exactly what we had put forth as the schedule at that meeting, right now our thought is we will finish design in 2021, go out to bid in early 2022 and go to construction then as well. A lot depends on getting final approval from the state. When we get that approval will affect the timing to some degree.

14. *Is the decision on the path design made by the CDD and not City Council?*

- a. Response from Bill: Generally, decisions on design come from city staff. The City Council approves spending, but doesn't get involved with specific design questions.

## Pre-submitted Questions

1. *A consistent path size and mixed ped/bike path would be safer than separating users for a small distance and forcing them back together in one lane. Consistency minimizes the number of times conflicts occur.*
  - a. Response from Bill: We are trying to keep the path consistent but we are in a constrained right of way, varying between 10 and 14 feet. Because of that, we have chosen for it to be mixed, except for the one stretch under a building just south of Main Street, where users are separated by direction, rather than by mode.
  
2. *It is critical to the fairness of both Wellington Harrington and East Cambridge to have an entry/crossing of the path between Cambridge Street and Binney Street. Having entrances only at the edges of our neighborhoods does an incredible disservice to both, forcing us residents to travel lengthy distances to actually reach the path, negating some of its usefulness. Further, a crossing mid-way would help connect our parts east and west of the path.*
  - a. Response from Bill: In earlier versions of the plan, we had not shown connections into the neighborhood. Making those connections was a comment we received from the public and Advisory Committee. So, we are now showing a crossing to the Linden Park neighborhood. However, we are not showing a crossing there. That's more complicated and we would have to look into it further in the future. A crossing there might need approval from the state or federal government. There are some questions as well about how a crossing would work, given the land use changes in the area.
  
3. *A flush/raised crossing is preferred at the Binney Street Crossing. Please consider speed bumps or other complete streets safe infrastructure to mitigate speeding drivers. It shouldn't have to be the path users' responsibility to beg to cross the street by pressing a button. Flashing beacons are just more visual street clutter.*
  - a. Response from Patrick: There will be somewhat of a raised treatment, though there are some limitations given the railroad crossing. The path has to cross at the same grade as the railroad and it is difficult to change the elevation of the railroad. We are looking at an updated version of an RRFB with automatic activation. The RRFB is fairly small, so it wouldn't add much to the visual clutter more than typical pedestrian signage would.
  
4. *Is this being coordinated with the city of Somerville? It would be helpful to show how the path transitions into their planned separated bike lanes on Medford St.*
  - a. Response from Patrick: We have a three-piece coordination effort. There is a city reconstruction project planned for Gore Street. Somerville has a project on their

side, and then this project. Those projects will have our base maps in their project to be able to see our plans as they make theirs.

5. *Most likely out of scope, but with the added barriers between train tracks and pedestrian/bike paths, could we consider reviving/enacting quiet zones from the train horns? The sound pollution is terrible for health and the added barriers + the safety arms (on Gore St) seem to provide more than enough protection to both car and pedestrian alike.*
  - a. Response from Patrick: That wouldn't be in the scope of this project. The additional safety improvements as part of the path would not justify the quiet zone based on FRA requirements. The quiet zone would require a full replacement of gates. You would need a median at Gore Street, or you would need the full four-side gates that prevent people from trying to drive around.
  
6. *Why so much switching sides?*
  - a. Response from Bill: The existing tracks are not necessarily right down the middle of the railroad right-of-way, as there were different numbers of tracks at different times and places along the right-of-way. Our goal was to find the space for the path while leaving room for two tracks in the future. Without trying to rebuild the tracks that exist, we needed to put the path where there was already room. We had to switch sides to do that.
  
7. *Could the pedestrian crossing from Pacific to Vassar St be realigned to match the desire line?*
  - a. Response from Bill: That section of the right-of-way is owned by MIT and that's a crossing that they put in several years ago. I think moving it would require reconstruction of some of the MIT buildings. There's also a grade difference that impacts the crossing so that's not something we would be looking at in this project. The two grade crossings in the MIT area will stay in their current locations.
  
8. *How does someone make a left onto Cambridge St here? Should be a way to cross at this location.*  
[Note: This is referring to coming north up the path and making a left onto westbound Cambridge Street bike lane]
  - a. Response from Patrick: The way to cross is a little indirect. Path users come up from the south, then must move to the right, east, along Cambridge Street to make the crossing. Once across, they then go left into the bike lanes that are on Cambridge Street. There isn't a crossing directly aligned with the path at Cambridge Street. The challenge here is to create enough space between this intersection and the intersection at Cardinal Medeiros Avenue so that there's enough room for a car to stop between the two and not on the railroad tracks.

9. *Instead of two-way on the south side of Main St, why not have a crossing here for pedestrians and southbound users of the track?*
  - a. Response from Patrick: This is something we have looked at among a few alternatives, including splitting up northbound and southbound crossings or having all path users crossing at the tracks. We concluded that since we have the existing signal where cars stop, it makes sense to use that. There is a plan for a protected phase there. Since you need to move laterally to use the path regardless, it makes sense not to have two crossings back-to-back.
  
10. *It would be great to provide a more direct line of connection between the new path and the neighborhood. The current connection (wrapping around Fort Washington Park) is awkward on a bike. Can you use the dogleg portion of the potential pocket park to extend a pathway link to the intersection of Albany and Erie?*
  - a. Response from Bill: That is a good point and we are looking into a connection there. The city owns a piece of former road, shown in green on the map, that does go all the way to the intersection. There are also two streets on either side of Fort Washington Park, so we are looking at creating improved bicycle/pedestrian connections in those areas.
  
11. *What happens here? Why is there no connection depicted? (At Main Street, with the intersection at Galilei)*
  - a. Response from Patrick: One reason that's not shown is because it already exists. People will come over from the south side of Main Street and get onto the existing section of the path north of Main Street.
  - b. Bill segued into a discussion of the section near Binney Street: The area around Binney will be rebuilt as a park and the Grand Junction path will get built there as part of that project. That is on a slightly different timeline.
  - c. Andy added that there is also a separate design process going on at Broadway.
  - d. Jerry clarified that at the Broadway intersection, the CRA will be adding separated bike lanes. The intersection of Broadway and Galileo Galilei Way will eventually be a fully protected intersection. One quadrant has already been completed.
  
12. *Why was the traffic analysis conducted during the Spring and Summer of 2020? That time period wouldn't be representative of actual conditions because of COVID19.*
  - a. Response from Patrick: We would agree. We Are not doing any traffic studies with volumes collected in 2020. The volumes used for these analyses were actually conducted in 2019 during more normal times.



13. *Could some of the pocket parks have environmentally useful features like plants that are useful for birds and pollinators, and/or places to grow food? I realize they may truly be "pocket" parks but even a couple planters containing pollinator plants (monarda, swamp milkweed, goldenrod, etc.) or greens, tomatoes, herbs, etc. could make a big difference: show people what's possible, and make the spaces prettier and more interesting. And signage about the value of pollinator plants, and/or herbs, green veg, etc. could create tiny moments to increase people's awareness.*
  - a. Response from Bill: That is something we can look at. These are smaller areas, and we do have community gardens as places for people to grow their own food so we wouldn't be doing that here. However, we do try to do a lot of native plantings and good pollinators are often among those.
  
14. *What are some funding options for the part of the Path, mainly in Cambridgeport, that is not currently funded? Why is the City funding the portion in East Cambridge and not funding the portion in Cambridgeport?*
  - a. Response from Bill: Our intention is to try to do the entire path. Since the original bond was passed that funded the more northerly and easterly portions of the path, we have had a few other commitments of funding due to development commitments and similar sources. We are hoping to have the funding fully there through Cambridgeport.

**City staff then answered a few additional questioned submitted via Zoom:**

1. *Is there a reason why the Cambridge Street crossover is located where it is?*
  - a. Response from Patrick: There is a two-part reason why the crossing of Cambridge Street works better to the east. First, there is an existing pedestrian signal at that location that serves a lot of people crossing Cambridge Street. Our goal was to not move that signal too far away so that the current users, many of whom are seniors, would not have to adjust too much. We were able to repurpose the crossing to serve existing users and new path users. The second reason is to create space between the two intersections, so that vehicles have room to stop and not be on the railroad tracks.
  
2. *Are there any updates on the northern portion in terms of connections to the Green Line Community Path Extension?*
  - a. Response from Bill: There have been a few studies on different options for making those connections to the north. Some are in Cambridge and some are in Somerville. Making that connection is something we thought about as part of a phase 2 for this project – it's something we will think about taking up with

Somerville after this project, maybe during construction. As developments come up in that area, there have been discussions between the cities about making the connection between those two paths. The reason we can't make a direct connection is there is a pinch point in Somerville so that the path can't go directly up the railroad right-of-way. To make connections possible, separated bike lanes will be put on Monsignor O'Brien Highway until Third Street. Beyond that, we need to figure out how to make the middle piece of the connections. There is a proposed hotel that has a commitment to build a narrow ramp up the grade change. They are trying to work with the Green Line Extension project about a way to make a connection from the top of that ramp to the Somerville Community Path. We are looking at options and opportunities as they come up but we will focus on it more after this portion of the project.

3. *Can you address public safety along the path? The stretch between Mass Ave and the Pacific St crossing in particular.*
  - a. Response from Bill: At this point, I can tell you that we are planning to light the path and make it so that it's as porous as possible given location next to railroad. With any project like this, public safety comes up and we don't yet have all the answers. It is probably worth a conversation with Cambridge Police and MIT police.
  
4. *Do you currently have a process for responding to conflicting opinions in an affected neighborhood, like Linden Park with its potential connections to the path?*
  - b. Response from Bill: We're going to be looking at all the comments, and the number of people reinforcing comments one way or another. We did put the Linden Park connections into the plan based on requests from residents and from the Advisory Committee. We have similar kinds of connections from the linear park in North Cambridge and we have heard that they've been convenient for neighbors and have been well used for recreation and commuting. This plan is something we are going to leave up for comments for a while. Currently, we are showing two connections, so it is possible that if there were one that more neighbors agreed on, we could have just one. However, two is probably better since it would split up the traffic between them.

#### **4. Next Steps**

Bill concluded the meeting by reiterating that the City is accepting comments from the StoryMap through January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021. He mentioned again that those interested can visit the project website to sign up for e-mail updates on the project.