

WORKING GROUP MEETING #5

Thursday, August 6, 2020

5:30 PM – 7:30 PM

Zoom Virtual Meeting

Working Group Members	City Staff	Public
Rebecca Bowie	Bill Deignan – CDD	Shawn Bonneau
Christopher Cassa	Andrew Reker – CDD	Robert La Tremouille
Amy Flax	Jerry Friedman - DPW	Jason Stockman
Kathryn Lachelt Brown	Greg Hanafin - CDD	Heather Hoffman
Caroline Lowenthal	Erik Thorkildsen - CDD	Phil Michael
Katrina Sousa	Susanne Rasmussen - CDD	Bruce Lederer
Bill McAvinney	Patrick Baxter - TPT	Sophie Galimore
Jason Alves	Lillian Hsu - CAC	Luis Mejias
Michelle Lower	Joseph Wallenstein - IT	Brian Cafferelli
		Chris Balerna
Not present:	Consultants	Chelsea Bouchard
Joseph Aiello	James Turnbull – Kleinfelder	Karl Alexander
Tom Evans	Matt Tremblay – Kleinfelder	Ben Elgart
Sarabrent McCoy	Natalie Raffol – McMahon	O R Simha
Brad Pillen	Michelle Danila – Toole Design	George Schneeloch
Diana Prideaux-Brune	Kaki Martin – KMDG	Ilan Levy
Robert Ricchi	Andrew Keel – Hatch	Doug Feinburg
Jose Luis Rojas		Judith Nathans
Nicholas Dard	Public	Laura Kershner
Ambar Johnson	Amber Christoffersen	Robb Johnson
Miguel Perez-Luna	Katlyn Couleur	Lourenço Dantas
Dalila Salcedo	Alan Lai	Kerren Steckler
Florence Toussaint	Paul Lyons	Rick Corsi
	Altaf Mulla	Chase Bosworth
	Laura Cohen	Ace Young
	Paul Flores	Clara Fraden
	Tia Vice	617-xxx-8311
	Gavin Lund	617-xxx-7150
	Keith Collins	617-xxx-7055

**Key: CDD = Community Development Department; TP&T = Traffic Parking & Transportation;
DPW = Public Works; CAC = Cambridge Arts Commission**

The following is a meeting summary of the Working Group Meeting #5 for the City of Cambridge's Grand Junction Multi-Use Path and Conceptual Transit Design Project. For more information see <https://www.cambridgema.gov/CDD/Projects/Transportation/GrandJunctionPathway>

Introductions and Welcome

The meeting was initiated by Bill Deignan, Transportation Program Manager, City of Cambridge, opened the meeting with a brief introduction of the virtual platform, agenda, project team, and City staff. Andy Reker, Transit Planner, City of Cambridge, noted the Working Group members in attendance. The ground rules for the virtual meeting were described with Working Group members periodically given an opportunity for ask questions and comment throughout the presentation, while members of the public were asked to submit questions in writing or wait until the public comment period.

Project Recap

Bill continued with a recap of the project purpose – to design a multiuse path adjacent to the Grand Junction railroad corridor. He also reviewed the limits of the project, from the Somerville line to just above Memorial Drive in Cambridge. Eventually the intent of this project combined with other future projects is to make regional connections to the Somerville Community Path to the north at the Green Line Extension and across the Charles River to the Paul Dudley White path and facilities as part of the Allston I-90 Interchange project to the west/south.

Despite a pause in Working Group meetings, the City has met with the project team and stakeholders to address urban design, public art, lighting, and have been coordinating with ongoing development projects. Bill referenced the MIT computing center between Mass. Ave and Main Street, a dorm project in the Fort Washington Park area, and Alexandria Real Estates project at 325 Binney Street as examples.

Chris Cassa asked if the MBTA section of the path had been resolved. Bill responded that there is no particular problem to be solved, but at each phase of the project there will be a process of addressing questions as they arise.

Bill continued with an overview of the schedule. The project team is now finishing conceptual design and moving into 25% design this fall. The sixth Working Group meeting will take place in the fall or early winter, which will be followed by a community meeting. At that point, 25% design plans will be submitted to agencies in early winter with the expectation that comments will be received in late winter/spring 2021. The remainder of the design will largely be completed through the rest of 2021.

Bill then reviewed what was heard in previous meetings and key take-aways. At the previous meeting in December 2019, the Working Group reviewed concepts for crossings and intersections.

Urban Design, Public Art, and Lighting Concepts

Kaki Martin, Klopfer Martin Design Group, provided an overview of placemaking, urban design, and public art strategies for the corridor. The team will use a “kit of parts” strategy consisting of elements that can be deployed along the corridor, sometimes evenly (i.e. lightly) and sometimes more sporadically (i.e. furnishings). Kaki focused on lighting fixture options and a series of fencing options that incorporated public art for this meeting.

Kaki reviewed cross-section changes from south to north, as the team is getting into next level of detail:

- Cambridgeport: Most opportunities for planting and elaboration on existing open spaces. Representative of typical cross section for path, with the preferred 14’ width for the path based on new guidance from bicycle and pedestrian design guides. A 2’ shoulder is provided on both sides of the path, and another 2’ for a fin fence to provide separation from the path and rail corridor.
- MIT Campus: Bounded by MIT facilities ROW on the left. Path narrows to 10’ keeping the standard 2’ shoulder on each side and the 2’ for the fin fence. From Mass Ave. to Main Street the path can widen back to 14’.
- Binney Street: The path is constrained again at 10’. The team will look foot by foot to find opportunities to add urban design and placemaking elements. Due to the limited ROW; easements may be needed.
- North of Cambridge Street: Path switches to east side of tracks and expands back to the preferred width of 14’ wide.

Questions/Comments were taken from several Working Group Members:

- Chris Cassa asked if there is room in the Cambridgeport section to have trees on both sides of the path. Kaki responded that the team will take this into consideration.
- Caroline Lowenthal asked if the tree area in the Cambridgeport section could be used for furnishings or other design elements. James Turnbull, Kleinfelder, responded that it’s all MassDOT ROW, but the team believes they will be able to introduce more urban design elements like seating and plantings.

Kaki continued on to discuss public art. There are opportunities for art at the nine crossings/entry points to the corridor, but also along the corridor itself. She reviewed the idea of a lenticular mural/fence to incorporate art along the length of the corridor. The lenticular fence included a faceted solid base and mural applied to angled fins extending vertically 4’-6’ depending on the height of the base. The project team analyzed sight lines, also known as a viewshed analysis, along neighboring streets and along the path, to understand how to maximize the visibility of public art in particular locations. With limited public art dollars, the intent is to locate murals in the most visible and most traveled places. Of the nine entry points, six have a high impact (see slide 26). The viewshed analysis (slides 27-29) show visual impact, with the deepest red signifying the most impact.

Next, Kaki showed concept level ideas of how to translate precedent images of a fin fence/lenticular mural into strategy relevant to this location. She reviewed the primary goals for fencing, paramount of which is to provide the required barrier between the path and tracks. In addition to addressing safety, the fence/mural can also be used to provide identify and as a wayfinding tool.

Questions/Comments were taken from several Working Group Members:

- Jason Alves asked if there are/could be any noise mitigation benefits to the fence, and also asked if the 2' buffer space in the Binney Street section where the path is only 10' could be added to the path. Kaki responded that the 2' buffer is necessary between the path and vertical objects bounding the path. James added that the 2' buffer is also needed to provide transition space into the existing grading on the left to make sure bike pedals and handle bars do not strike the fence causing potential injury to the rider. Bill responded that they have not yet considered using the fence as a noise barrier, but can think more about it. This would likely mean a more solid fence. Susanne Rasmussen, City of Cambridge Director of Environmental and Transportation Planning, added that any future rail would be electric light rail, not commuter rail, and so would have a lower noise level than a commuter rail train.
- Caroline Lowenthal suggested that using the fence as a place to put maps for way finding could be added as a goal. Kaki agreed.
- Chris Cassa commented that if the fence it not optional he would prefer not to see a large amount of the budget go to a fence that is not attractive. Kaki responded that it is an on-going discussion of how to allocate the project budget and that a cost estimate would be completed as the project moves forward.

Kaki continued by showing four ideas that project team created that involve an overlay of art on fencing that meets the fencing goals by providing repetition and being cost effective:

1. Faceted Concrete Base with Fins Perpendicular (to the path of travel along the trail): The concrete base is painted and fins applied on top of it. The fin height can change along the corridor depending on sight line needs of each area. The concrete base can be installed with less excavation than a typical post and beam fence, making it a cost effective option for labor and installation. Cost savings may also be found through repetition of the fence design elements, in comparison to installing a fully custom fence along the length of the corridor.
2. Faceted Concrete Base with Angled Fins: Angled fins (not 90 degrees) would have the effect of the murals blending together from one panel to the next, but may feel less transparent. This option would require less fins. The angle of the A hybrid option is also possible to provide more or less transparency depending on the location.
3. Curb Height Base with Perpendicular Fins: The base would be 4-6" high, which would provide more transparency and more mural canvas with longer fins. There could be greater construction

challenges than with a thicker concrete base. The art on the fins would also be more vulnerable to snow and dirt the closer the fins are to the ground.

4. Curb Height Base with Angled Fins: This is essentially the same lower base as #3, but with angled fins.

Questions/Comments were taken from several Working Group Members:

- Rebecca Bowie asked if it was possible to see the mural when walking down the path with the 90-degree fin orientation. Kaki responded that the view shown is modeled accurately in 3D with the perpendicular angle. What varies between the angled and perpendicular fins is the length of time you will be able to see the mural when going the same speed. The team will be fine tuning strategies to optimize the angle of the fins for mural visibility and the feel transparency through the rail corridor on the other side of the fence.
- Kathryn Brown asked if graphics on the fins will be computer generated or if there is opportunity to work with local Cambridge artists. Kaki responded that there is opportunity; the intent is to diversity and expand the number of artists participating in the mural program. Kathryn also asked if there will be any public art that is not murals, such as sculptures, things to climb on, etc. Kaki responded that public art dollars are limited, but the team is trying to stretch them and will add other art elements to the list.
- Bill McAvinney commented that more damage may happen with the low base and the concrete base is more durable. The low base would only increase visibility of the railroad track.
- Chris Cassa commented that there is a push in East Cambridge for Neighborways and asked about local people being able to draw in intersections on the ground, particularly at Little Binney. Kaki responded that the project team will look into this idea.

The members of the Working Group and public were asked a check-in question on public art, with the following results:

As budget allows, where would you most like to see public art incorporated along the Grand Junction Path?

- Along straightaways: 13%
- At entry points and crossings: 25%
- A mix of both: 63%
- Not sure: 0%

Kaki continued by reviewing path lighting, which will be applied consistently along the corridor to ensure everyone feels safe on the path. There are two city standards for lights: Selux Saturn and Cree Edge, as seen on the Waverley Path and Loughrey Walkway, respectively. Bill added that lighting may not be decided by the project team or City, as the MBTA may have strong opinions on the lights used.

The members of the Working Group and public were asked a check-in question on lighting, with the following results:

Which path lighting fixture option do you prefer?

- Selux Saturn: 33%
- Cree Edge: 17%
- No strong feeling: 50%

Tree Inventory Update

Andrew Keele, Hatch Associates, provided an update on the tree inventory along the corridor. The tree inventory for several segments of the corridor was shown to provide an example of how the project team is evaluating trees and identifying planting opportunities. In general, stumps or dead trees, and invasive tress will be removed while other healthy trees that conflict with the path, will potentially be transplanted to new locations along the path. Tress in good condition will remain, and the project team will look to see where new trees may be planted both in the corridor and in adjacent properties.

Waverly Street was called out as one of the best opportunities for new trees. A thin green strip that runs along the path near Fort Washington Park is another opportunity, as well as an expansive green space towards MIT. Near MIT, a number of different subsurface utilities will pose challenges to tree planting. North of Binney Street there are a large number of tree transplant candidates.

Questions/Comments were taken from several Working Group Members:

- Bill McAvinney asked which side of the fence the lighting would be on. Kaki responded that that is still to be determined.
- Michelle Lower asked if the slide showing the light shielding is accurate and if leaving the lights on would be an issue for neighbors in some stretches. Kaki responded saying that both lighting options have the option for focusing the light on the path while minimizing adjacent light pollution. It was also noted that both fixtures have remote control features.
- Jason Alves asked if a section was skipped on plantings. James responded that they intentionally only highlighted key areas. The full tree inventory plans can be posted with the presentation online. Bill added that the inventory will get paired with a planting plan in the future.
- Caroline Lowenthal commented that East Cambridge has the least tree cover in the city and would like to support choosing trees over other elements if there are trade-offs.
- Jason Alves asked if it would be possible to plan trees on abutting properties in the section between Binney Street and Cambridge Street if there is not enough space on the path. Bill responded that the City has a back of sidewalk tree planting program where they offer to plant trees on private property where the owner commits to maintenance and that can potentially be offered here.

- Chris Cassa commented that there is an opportunity to reach out to large developments for landscaping against the tracks. There was a recent thread on “See Click Fix” regarding complaints of a concrete path between Cambridge Street and Medford Street.

Andrew explained that there are a number of different considerations for tree planting the project team will take into account when moving the design forward. These include path narrowness, weather, salt use, wind, canopy coverage, habitat value, heat stress resistance, and species diversity.

Intersection Analysis Update

Michelle Danila, Toole Design, provided an update on the intersection analysis completed to date. The intersection with Broadway was not included as it is part of another project. The focus of the update was how intersections operate when the path is crossing:

- Mass Ave between Albany St/Vassar St: Vehicles will be stopped before the crossing so as not to block the path. Bicyclists and pedestrians on Mass. Ave. will be able to access the path during this phase.
- Main St & Vassar St/Galileo Galilei Way: Path users will cross at the intersection in a protected phase. Right turns will be stopped while path users are crossing.
- Binney Street – “Little Binney”: At this location the path switches from the east side to the west side of the tracks. Due to roadway characteristics and volumes, a raised intersection with a Rectangular Rapid Flash Beacon (RRFB) is recommended. An RRFB is activated by path users which will have warning lights to alert vehicles to yield. The City will coordinate with the adjacent development site, which is looking to provide a separated bicycle lane on the eastern edge of Binney Street, so that a seamless connection is provided to the path.
- Cambridge Street: At this location the path switches from the west side to the east side. The project team is recommending relocating the existing crosswalk and combining it with the path crossing. They are also looking at signaling Cardinal Medeiros Avenue at Cambridge Street so that intersections can be coordinated and optimized. On-road bicyclists will connect to the path in a mixing zone on the sidewalk.

Questions and comments were taken from several Working Group Members:

- Caroline Lowenthal commented that adding a traffic light at Cardinal Medeiros is a great idea.
- Amy Flax commented that having protected pedestrian and bicycle crossings without turning cars is a great idea.
- Rebecca Bowie asked if the Cambridgeport south section of the path is now fully funded. Bill responded that this is not yet known because a full cost estimate for the project will not be developed until 25% design. The City received some additional funding as part of the re-zoning commitment in the Binney Street area. The goal will be to build as much as possible. Rebecca followed up asking if it is possible to spend more money on beautification rather than extending the path. Bill responded that is possible.

- Bill McAvinney asked if the Binney Street RRFB crossing would be automated for a push button. Michele responded that they will look into if it's possible to have an automated RRFB. Bill McAvinney said he believes one is used on the Minuteman Bikeway.
- Chris Cassa asked if there has been discussion regarding the Grand Junction path under the BU Bridge. Bill responded that there has been discussion in terms of the Allston/I-90 project. There may be opportunity for the MBTA to rebuild the bridge, but it is all currently uncertain.

Public Comment

Questions were submitted via the "Q&A" feature of Zoom throughout the meeting. The following questions were addressed live during the public comment period:

- Ilan Levy: On paths around the Charles River/MIT, as well as what was described today, there is no shade anywhere. Biking and walking can get hot, so there should be protection from weather. The path also looks more industrial and less welcoming.
 - Bill responded that the City is trying to maximize shade wherever possible, but it is a tight corridor. They will look for opportunities within and outside the corridor to maximize tree canopy.
- Luis Mejias: Is there an opportunity to create access to the path north or west to the stretch between Binney Street and Cambridge Street? This is a long stretch with no access points.
 - Bill responded that it is a challenge to get public access through private property. The City is looking to see if there are any public access points that come close, and is also talking to neighbors so although no locations have been identified, it's not off the table.
- Robert La Tremouille: This project will be extremely destructive if it goes south of Memorial Drive (to I-90 project). Hope to see connections made via Henry Street to Vassar Street or MIT's suggestion of a connection at Fort Washington Park to connect to Memorial Drive.
- O R Simha (responding to the idea of additional pedestrian crossings of the railroad): Was involved in establishing a pedestrian crossing at Fort Washington Park, so it is possible. It took a combination of political will and cooperation of people on both sides.
- O R Simha: Was the potential for backups across the Harvard Bridge into Boston and Boston traffic conditions taken into account as a result of the installations proposed?
 - Bill responded that there was analysis in VISSM and all operations on Mass Ave. were examined. The analysis did not show a great increase in queuing into Boston. The crossing at Mass. Ave. is not adding time that traffic is stopped, but changing where traffic is stopped by holding it back outside of intersections.
- O R Simha: Will any of the prospective transit or rail proposals require catenary structures for power to the transit vehicles?

- Bill responded that this project not looking at what future transit options might be. At this point they are making sure the space is available in the ROW so there could be two track transit in addition to path in the future.

Due to time constraints, the following questions were answered by City staff in the Q&A panel:

- Jason Stockmann: Between Binney and Cambridge St, will the GJT be on the east or west side of the tracks? Will it be possible to create a pedestrian connection to the Linden Park Neighborhood (Cornelius/Michael/James Ways)? This would be helpful to bike commuters from this part of Wellington-Harrington who wish to avoid biking on Cardinal Madeiros, which is not bicycle-friendly. If this neighborhood connection were created, it should be implemented in a way that is sensitive to the neighborhood and addresses any concerns about noise.
 - The path will be on the west side between Binney + Cambridge. As we advance the path design, we can look at opportunities for pedestrian connections to Linden Park area. We hear your concern about noise.
- Luis Mejias: We really need a crossing between Wellington Harrington and E Cambridge between Binney and Cambridge Street. Has this idea been eliminated?
 - We hear the desire for an additional crossing. It is difficult to establish new pedestrian crossings across railroads in Massachusetts. The state Department of Transportation has a policy that requires each new pedestrian crossing be created by removing 2 other crossings. For this project, we are looking at how path users are given good connections at the existing street and pedestrian crossings.
- Jason Stockmann: Thanks Jason A. for your question about using the fence for locomotive noise mitigation. We have a problem in Wellington-Harrington with late-night noise from idling locomotives between Binney and Cambridge Streets.
 - Thanks! We hear your comment.
- Luis Mejias: Please don't fence the path in so it feels confining. 6' should be used sparingly. People on the path will want to be able to see out and people on future trains would be able to see into the path. More visibility is better.
 - Thanks, Luis. We hear your comment.
- Heather Hoffman: I'm no fan of Ailanthus, but, at this point, the City of Cambridge's tree canopy is depleted enough that I don't support removing any trees at all unless there is absolutely no other way to do something that clearly needs doing. Are you proposing to remove them solely on principle, i.e., that all so-called invasive species must die, no matter what?
 - Thanks for your comment. We're continuing to look at a tree and planting plan for the project. In general, our project team would advocate for removing ailanthus on principal. Ailanthus is a fast growing tree that will displace the native species we want

to promote, however we certainly understand the concern over tree canopy, and we will make every effort we can to improve canopy cover.

- Luis Mejias: Can the light fixtures be integrated into the fence (base) to help preserve ROW, especially where the path is so narrow?
 - Thanks for the question, we can look at opportunities to incorporate lighting in the fence.

Next Steps

Bill concluded the meeting by reminding the Working Group another virtual meeting will be planned for the fall to review what will be presented at the next public meeting. Working Group members can contact the City via email on the Grand Junction project webpage if they have suggestions for meeting formats, breakout groups, presentations, outreach strategies.