

**River Street Reconstruction  
Site Walk # 1 – Mobility & Safety**



**Tuesday, May 14, 2019  
6:00 PM – 8:00 PM  
River Street**

## ATTENDEES

<b>Working Group Members</b>	<b>City Staff</b>	<b>Public</b>
Patrick Barrett	Patrick Baxter – TP&T	Debby Galef
Daniel Beaulieu	Jerry Friedman - DPW	John Goodman
Abby Duker	Susanne Rasmussen - CDD	Robert Winters
Melissa Greene	Rachel Tanenhaus - CCPD	
Randy Stern	Tegin Teich - CDD	
Christopher Tassone		
Andrew Tarsy	<b>Consultants</b>	
	Christi Apicella	
	Rich Houghton	
	Rick Plenge	
	Natalie Raffol	
	Peter Stidman	

**Key:**

**CCPD = Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities  
 CPD = Cambridge Police Department  
 CDD = Community Development Department  
 DPW = Public Works  
 TP&T = Traffic Parking & Transportation**

## MEETING SUMMARY

The following is a meeting summary of the Mobility Site Walk for the City of Cambridge's River Street Reconstruction Project. For more information see [Cambridgema.gov/riverstreet](http://Cambridgema.gov/riverstreet).

The site walk was led by Patrick Baxter, TP&T City of Cambridge and included seven stops from Carl Barron Plaza in Central Square to River Street at Memorial Drive. A summary of public comments discussed at each stop is provided below. Attached is the flyer for the Mobility Site Walk.

1. Comments made at Carl Barron Plaza – southern corner of Mass Ave and Prospect Street

- Prevalence of brick, perhaps too much brick on the sidewalk. The sidewalk is uneven and a tripping hazard.
- There appears to be a drainage issue because water pools at certain locations in the plaza.
- The way the plaza and elements within it are laid out does not encourage activation. People walk through use the outside of the plaza, not the center of the space.
- Some participants noted that the super leading pedestrian interval at Mass Ave and Prospect Street works well, though others have heard complaints and confusion about it. A leading bicycle interval was suggested.
- Current users should be considered in the design, as well as strategies to integrate both current and new potential users. Strategies could include making the area more beautiful and adding tables and chairs.
- The right turn from River Street to Mass. Ave around the plaza is a congested point for traffic.
- The City should consider a dedicated transit way between Green Street and Mass. Ave.

## 2. Comments made at River Street at Franklin Street

- Consider shifting River Street and/or plazas to increase the space dedicated to the pedestrian realm. Options could include:
  - Shifting River Street north to increase the area dedicated to the pedestrian realm adjacent to the church.
  - Instead of having a long extension of curb and raised concrete at the western part of the VFW park/median, reconfigure the street to allow that currently unusable area to be incorporated on the south side of River Street to increase usable space between the buildings and street.
- There appears to be a drainage issue with water pooling at the southern corner.
- Confusing crossing pattern/long crossing distance at Green Street leads more pedestrians to cross at Franklin Street, where the crossing is shorter and more direct.
- Some said drivers of private automobiles use the busway to cut through from Green Street to River Street.
  - Some said drivers are also using it for parking during short trips into Amazon.
- Some expressed confusion about which buses stopped at which stops on Western Ave and Magazine/Green Street.
- Question about the purpose of the brick and paved area between the tree planting (VFW park) and Green Street– it is not useable and seems of no benefit. Midway in this conversation, a pedestrian walked along it.

### 3. Comments made at River Street at Pleasant/Cottage Street

- Difficult crossing conditions for pedestrians because of the following:
  - Poor sight lines on Auburn Street
  - Parked cars obstruct sight distance
  - Difficult to see cars turning from Pleasant onto River Street
  - Cars do not yield to pedestrians crossing across Pleasant Street
- Consider closing Pleasant Street at River Street or realigning street to create distinction between Pleasant Street and Cottage Street. This would also allow for expansion of Tubman Square green space.
- There is a nice view from Tubman Square to what is locally known as “The flatiron building.”
- Some traffic cuts down Pleasant Street and then uses Kinnaird Street.
- People, potentially from other areas, use unregulated parking on River Street as vehicle parking for extended periods of time.

### 4. Comments made at Western Avenue at Howard Street

- Grasses in landscaping curb extensions have a tendency of overgrowing planters and encroaching in the cycle track. The project team mentioned planting selection and maintenance need to be considered to maintain sight lines.
- People who bike were seen traveling eastbound in the cycle track, which may be a result of there not being a similar quality facility in the eastbound direction. Some participants noted not minding bikers traveling in the wrong direction. Some suggested that even if River Street has a similar facility, there may be still be a desire to travel eastbound on Western Ave because of the streets it connects.
- River Street has narrower right-of-way than Western Ave. and only one lane of parking, so it is not possible to create the same cross section on River Street.

### 5. Comments made at River Street at Howard Street/Kelly Road

- Poorly marked crosswalks with one crosswalk missing.
- The exclusive pedestrian phase used at this location is unusual in the City. The city has a policy that concurrent phases be used to minimize the amount of time pedestrians wait for a walk signal.
- Desire to understand who is using the unregulated parking.
  - City is carrying out an analysis to understand how parking is being utilized.
- Although not many people get on and off the bus stops on the middle section of River Street, the buses are carrying thousands of passengers and many people use them to get to Central Square, or to other bus routes and the Red Line.
- Bus stops on River are nearside of intersection, which is less desirable than farside, like on Western Ave. Farside stops allow buses to get through a green

light before stopping and don't create as much of a desire for drivers to weave around them, particularly to turn right.

- Eastbound left turners from River Street onto Howard Street have tendency to speed down Howard Street to try to make the green light at Western Ave.
- Suggestion to consider making Putnam and Kinnaird one-way streets instead of two-way streets to reduce conflict?
  - While one-way streets may help avoid drivers having to acknowledge each other and pull over to pass:
    - Residents are often concerned about access challenges created by living on one-way streets
    - Less potential conflict and a wider single lane may encourage people driving to drive faster.

#### 6. Comments made at River Street at Putnam Avenue

- Street trees are lacking west of Putnam Avenue which contributes to the corridor feeling more auto-focused
- There is a trade-off between tightening the radius of the curb at the intersection and accommodating MBTA Bus Route 64 right turn onto Putnam Avenue.
  - It is possible to consider rerouting MBTA Route 64 down River Street into Central Square instead of turning right onto Putnam.
- Speeding was raised as an issue, which sparked conversation about introducing traffic calming and placemaking/gateway treatments to encourage people driving to slow down as they enter this Cambridge neighborhood.
- Pedestrian phase is exclusive at this signal and is called automatically each cycle, which again, is not usual in the city.
- The hatched out area on the south side of River Street appears to be used as de-facto bus receiving lane from Memorial Drive since there is a bus stop at the end of it.

#### 7. Comments made at River Street at Memorial Drive

- There is a need to encourage MassDOT to provide separated bicycle facilities and potential bus priority/bus lanes across the River Street Bridge.
- It is important to coordinate with the planned development in the Allston Landing area.

The site walk concluded at River Street and Memorial Drive. The second site walk will be held on June 11, 2019 with the topic of urban design.