

City of Cambridge
NEW MOBILITY PLANNING
Advisory Group Meeting 4 Comments
June 16, 2021 – via Zoom

Attendees: Ruth Allen, Bruce Kaplan, Kathryn Carlson, James Cater, Chris Tassone, David Block-Schachter, Jane Gould, Megan Aki, Melissa Chan, Ray Hayhurst, Steve Miller, Roy Russell, Stephen Russell, Ilya Sinelnikov, Zef Vataj, Staff: Stephanie Groll, Bronwyn Cooke, Susanne Rasmussen, Joseph Barr, Brooke McKenna.

Potential Strategy 1: Create a digital curb management plan

This strategy deals with two different things.

1. Change how curbs are managed and accessed. Do we want to have drop off spots, what are parking rules?
2. Having a digital version of that and having an online version.

Are there digital curb management companies? What are other options?

Brooke McKenna [Assistant Director for Street Management] described the process that Traffic, Parking, and Transportation Department is undertaking to create a digital asset inventory.

Asset inventory is important first step to do digital management. City should coordinate with City of Boston who is doing this too. They have done curb mapping and have experience with challenges in updating base map on regular basis.

Concern--people who live or have businesses along major street corridors need to have parking/loading availability at different times. Small businesses have no control over when deliveries come in. What is the delivery? When will it be given to you? Will it change on daily weekly basis? How will people outside of Cambridge access the businesses? Small business is going down quickly. Sustainability of our customers that come in from outside the city is an issue. If we do something in one area, it has to be uniform for all areas. Otherwise it's too confusing. Bike lanes configurations, even the colors are different in different areas. Will landlords be involved in every phase of this planning?

Brooke McKenna

We are in the early days of planning any changes to loading zones and curb management--the internal work is getting an idea of what tools are out there now. Any changes will need to involve public process. Especially loading-- no one knows better than the small business owners what the needs are. This strategy is very forward looking, changes are not happening anytime soon.

1. An inventory of assets is a prerequisite for what city wants to do. Glad it's starting. Curious to understand what's being collected and how, and how is it being kept up-to-date? Going from no digital to digital is hard, but it's also a cost to keep it up.
2. There's a large difference between thinking of pilots in areas with businesses, where there's pick-up and drop-off of freight, which will be mostly residential (scooters, ubers, deliveries). Pilots come back to understanding what's on the street (midblock uber pickup zones in residential

street, plus UPS, ton of vehicles on residential streets can lead to 3-min wait if you're in a car or if you're a pedestrian, then cars parking on the sidewalk b/c they don't want to block the street). On residential streets, regulation isn't complex, but needs to be mapped with care and think about the curb cut interaction. I encourage the City to think expansively about digitizing these assets and the representations of the assets, so they can become positive for residential areas as well as the commercial areas.

There are now a lot of buildings that aren't being required to have parking. Craftsmen, painters, plumbers have no place to park. Need to bring their tools back and forth. People are turning down jobs in Cambridge b/c there's not parking. City has made it so they can't park. Bike lanes, bus lanes replace parking lanes. I was told about a plan to remove all parking on some of Mass Ave.

Issues of accessibility are crucial. Especially mid-block Uber spaces, some people who can't walk to it. Make it plain where the ride-hail will be.

Potential Strategy 2: Implement a Mobility Data Platform

Big concern about MDS. "Study privacy issues and concerns" action is on the list, but is last. I would be really concerned if you want to start tracking detailed or real-time info about these things. Context--why not just track personally owned vehicles on time? LA did MDS over strenuous objections. I worry about the invasion of privacy. Aggregate stuff from vendor is fine, but would really push back if you're tracking individuals.

1. Micromobility. You can create zones in Cambridge to require program operators to ensure that all zones in Cambridge have enough vehicles. You can enforce that.
2. Should create low-income programs and incentivization so people can use micromobility for free or low-fee subscription. Can control through MDS so ensure you can bring it to everyone.

Some bikeshare programs have docking stations for bikes and other programs you just drop bikes anywhere. There may or may not be a bike available some mornings because the bike went somewhere else. Should restrict to station-based devices. Not effective to drop on the sidewalk helter-skelter.

What are we trying to gain in the first place? Be clear about public discussion about this and that would allow us to deal with aggregate data. Start with goals, then move to actions.

There is a lot of complexity in these issues. You may be interested in a TRB report that explored issues of data access across different modes, as well as questions about what level to aggregate to protect privacy of individuals as they come and go.

MDS is just one data format for collecting data. It may not be MDS you want to adopt b/c there may be practical issues. To avoid get caught up in those, we should seek to get a mobility data platform.

Echo the comment for setting goals for data platform and the intent of the data. If you'll do effort to collaborate on data end with service partners, please also collaborate on the user's end to see how to help users with MDS. Also collaborate with other communities.

Stephanie Groll [Parking and Transportation Demand Management Planning Officer]
Cambridge has collaborated through MAPC with Boston, Somerville, Brookline, and Watertown on state micromobility legislation, regional scootershare vendor-selection lottery, and criteria for equipment and operating standards

Potential Strategy 3: Prioritize the public right-of-way for space-efficient, high occupancy modes and other City priorities

I like this strategy a lot. This is a good way to future-proof these new modes. It puts more gas on the fire that we probably need more bus lanes, it's intuitive. I also like that it doesn't presume an answer, like Strategy 4 which assumes the importance of a technology.

I love this as a starting point. It needs a slight addition.
"Get around without owning a car" is similar but not the same.
One of the emerging promises of micromobility is you can use small vehicles.

Stephanie Groll
We meant for this strategy to prioritize both HOV and small, space-efficient vehicles. We'll clarify that with "space efficient AND high occupancy modes."

This is only good if you can enforce it. Need to enforce things that already exist--parking in bus stops, bike lanes, bus-only lanes, but that is difficult and not always happening.

Assuming we're talking about travel within Cambridge, we have a lot of people who don't work here anymore. Lots who can't use scooter, skateboard to go to work, b/c they have disability or live here but work in Woburn.

When I see this, I have a fear that you're trying to eliminate regular transportation, like driving. When I see the words "parking freeze," I get scared. I understand we have to get more efficient, but there are modes some people are not going to use. And not make it so inconvenient for them to drive that they feel they have to leave Cambridge.

Stephanie Groll
Action b) Evaluate parking policies, including zoning, parking freeze, residential permits, and digital parking management tools is included in order to equitably serve the entire Cambridge community and support diverse mobility options.

"Evaluating the parking freeze" is specific to looking at the current limit on parking available to the public for a fee to see if that policy still serves the City as intended. This is not about putting a freeze on all parking in the City.

I concur.

I recall the consultant reported on a future forecast: what do we see in future trends? Everything went down except cars, bike popularity is maintained. Does this strategy address the drop-off in transit?

Susanne Rasmussen [Director of Environment and Transportation Division of CDD]

When you have bus only lanes that are shared with AV shuttles, you give those vehicles an advantage.

Interesting to observe the robustness of bikeshare, during Covid, when people switched from transit.

It is important to lay out why we're doing this. This group understands that intuitively, but the community will need this point to be made clearly--the attractiveness of mass transit buses depends on this strategy., e.g. "You will like your bus trip more if we do this."

What's being done regionally to make the public right-of-way more efficient? If people want to take the train or bus, doesn't seem like we're connecting those dots easily.

Susanne Rasmussen

The MBTA is undertaking a complete redesign of the entire bus system. We all have a lot of questions about what will come out of that process.

Potential Strategy 4: Guide AV implementation and support pilot AV shuttle deployments

This is an excellent list of strategy for AVs. Vehicles may be different and while we want to discourage AV ownership, we should remember that the vehicles may be smaller. We should be open-minded. Should get pilots on the road, and they should be electric.

When I think about what this framework is intended to do, does it improve the lives of residents? I get wanting to keep Cambridge at forefront of technology. I would be surprised if there are huge pilots, surprised if there are 500 shuttles. I think we'll be in pilot phase for a while. We shouldn't ignore it, but I would be concerned if this strategy is taking the focus away from Strategy 3, which has more predictable short-term benefits.

If this is something to potentially roll out, there is an opportunity to combine with another strategy. Ex. If temporarily converting a lot of parking, use AV shuttles to get to remote parking.

Maximizing the percent of AV trips that are in shared shuttles is excellent. Not sure if pursuing a pilot is the best use of resources. Would like to see the City encourage shared, electric vehicle trips in general. The question is how to discourage privately owned, non-shared AV use in city. What are abilities to legally do anything (taxation, etc.)?

I'll be blunt. There are a ton of pilots in AVs out there. Nothing in this strategy is uniquely Cambridge. Personally, I'm interested in what's happening, but I don't see any reason for Cambridge to be involved in an AV pilot.

Could do a pilot contingent on what we want to learn, but we don't add anything by doing an AV shuttle pilot. The point of a pilot is to test creation for low cost last-mile service to transit stations, but nothing about that is AV-specific. That's a worthy goal to test out, but that doesn't require an AV to do it.

I want to speak in support of Strategy 4.

You might look at number of shuttle buses currently circulating in East Cambridge, Binney St. and consider using an AV shuttle for this. To me this strategy supports other strategies to help people get to work without driving alone. There is a potential to reduce traffic on roads and have fewer vehicles parking if we can get more people to the MBTA easily.

If the high-level thing is to guide AV implementation, we should shape how that plays out. It's a good goal to support AV transit, but the details are wrong. How do we shape the market that is bigger than Cambridge? How to prevent replacement of private cars with AVs? How do we incentivize different AV formats like small vehicles? How do we get AVs to be useful? Local resources MIT/Harvard should shape the technology. The City should incentivize those people to experiment and find good options. Ex. Some people with disabilities for whom guiding a vehicle of any kind could be too hard so AVs could be helpful. Like Mexico City--you have informal transportation taking to places not served by transit--how do you mold AV technology to fill those gaps here?

2nd what was just said.

There are different kinds of AVs including micromobility, like scooters and bikes that move on their own). This is focused on AV cars, but there's been significant AV work on rebalancing small vehicle fleets. Should think about this in the City's plans because that is likely to happen sooner than we'll see an autonomous 2-ton vehicle on the streets.

Follow on a point--set up policies and incentives so it doesn't become easy for AV to burden public space. Reorient the larger goal in the title to be a follow on to Strategy 3, but it's a technology subheading. We do have to think about this b/c otherwise industry will shape it. To another point, the fact that cars are "regular" transportation is something we need to address.

Potential Strategy 5: Develop Transportation Electrification Goals, then Create Policies and Programs to Achieve Them

Not sure I agree that "any new form of transportation should be electric." If we're moving 10k people on e-buses, that may not be as good as moving 20k people on diesel buses. We need to move more people in fewer space.

Susanne Rasmussen [Director of E&T]

The T is pushing very hard on starting to convert several of their garages to charge battery electric buses. The T has identified Quincy and Cambridge Trolley Sq to convert first. There has been some controversy over starting with Cambridge, since the existing bus service out of Trolley Sq is electric, while other cities in the MBTA system run diesel buses. But, the T's overall strategy to convert the entire public transportation system to electric is on the agenda.

Add text to MBTA action: put in "in an equitable context" and "in a regional way"

This doesn't mention City of Cambridge and other government entities electrifying their fleets. Using contracting power to require all vendors to quickly convert to electric vehicles.

Echo previous comment.

Thinking about strategy to set target years, especially for private SOVs, equity is going to play a huge role. We're still in the world where electric-only and hybrid EVs are more expensive. If Cambridge were

serious, it could mean large subsidies that could dwarf everything else we talked about. Otherwise rich people will drive Teslas and meeting goals and poor people still drive gas cars.

Also, it's incredibly important to think about electrification of buses because diesel fumes and noise are part of the negative vision people have of buses. Cambridge can help T with finding where to locate these facilities, to put aside large swaths of land where they exist and aren't being used for other purposes, where they can put garages. As a city, how do we do our part in supporting that? It doesn't have to be in Cambridge per se, but Cambridge should engage in that issue to help solve that problem.

Susanne Rasmussen

City can't provide direct subsidies to people because it's a private betterment and that's against state law.

I have an out-of-the-box suggestion. Providing curbside charging solutions, you might look at the existing and coming private ownership of off-street parking spots. My guess is that most people who've bought a Tesla have also installed a charging station. If the City encouraged them to share access to the charging station, could open up a lot of charging. 10% might do it. That's a lot of charging.

I echo the comment about continuing to convert buses to electric battery. Diesel will be phased out by state eventually. There is funding for private EV vehicles, sponsored by the state, significant amount of dollars on the table. The City of Cambridge is starting to lead by example. You won't need the huge maintenance facilities, you'll just need a place to park them.

Melrose now has two telephone pole charging stations where people can park and charge with cord that lowers.

As well as charge e-scooters and e-bikes. You'll see electric pickup trucks and Cambridge already has an electric school bus.

Great strategy, overall. I'm wonder about Action B. Can it be expanded to include shuttles, working with shuttle providers around Alewife and outside Cambridge? Help them coordinate and locate a place to charge.

Danehy is one of the charging stations. People park there all day, they're not even hooked up. There are other cars that are trying to use that. Just because a vehicle is electric doesn't mean you should park there all day.

Do we have e-bikes coming? Would be great to be able to charge private and shared e-bikes. Lots of people w disabilities might take a bike if it could go itself. Think about equity in this strategy.

Susanne Rasmussen

E-bikes are being considered for part of the bikeshare system, but hasn't been decided yet.

Your delivery service brings in hundreds of trucks. As soon as we start putting pressure to convert to zero-emissions, they'll do it. They're looking for a way to do this, they just need a kick in the pants. Tell them: "You've got 6 months to electrify." Sit down with powers that be in the delivery services.

Susanne Rasmussen

That's another frontier--e-cargo bikes. Amazon is running some large programs with e-bikes in Manhattan. We know that with the density of deliveries being made, using cargo bikes is getting to be possible, like in Manhattan.

Other comments

Commend you for all the work you've done. It will be useful to other cities and towns.

Make sure equity is front and center in all the strategies--be specific about the populations you're trying to reach through that lens. Get one layer deeper, to which populations have been overburdened and think about who you want to serve.

I'm excited by a lot of what's in here.

In thinking about strategies for community conversations, don't put everything here under header of new mobility. Or don't address them all at once.

The City can play a role in some things becoming commercially viable. Micromobility doesn't have a supportable business model yet--it has a lot of venture capital supporting it, but are there short-term gains that could come with City support?

It's an exercise in navel gazing to predict some future theoretical world, while there are already practical problems that already exist today. How do help solve people's mobility problems today to begin to build trust over time?

Thank you for setting it up as it is. Lot of work, lot of info, lot of different comments. My concern, again, is small businesses. Go to the area business groups and neighborhood groups for outreach. City does a great job, but can do more with outreach. By not just telling us there's a meeting happening, but also telling those people who are affected what the City plans to change.

Will you talk about drones? Drones would alleviate traffic for package delivery.

Shows a lot of work during a hard time. Trying to salvage what you can from a hard spot. We have to remember the market is changing around us. Every car company is going electric in 5 yrs. Radical changes are coming. Think quickly about what are the implications of that and how we manage it.

We also need to take this chance to shape the market as it unfolds. Not just low-hanging fruit, but also visible things that send a public message that the city and community are paying attention to this and moving in the direction that will be necessary. I encourage you to think strategically about what are our goals, and how do we stay on top of the coming changes.

Public Comment

1. How will personal safety be taken into account? Will these AVs have operators so that people know there is some third-party in case it's just them and one other person in the shared vehicle?
2. How will you account for the fact that the mining process to get the materials needed to make electric vehicles is also very harmful to those communities where the materials come from? Some argue that electric vehicles may be worse in terms of their human impact.
3. How can community members participate in this discussion/work? There seems to be a lot of discussion around "equity," but the group seems to be speaking for "others". Equity requires allowing people to speak for themselves.