

CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
TRANSIT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEETING NOTES

Date, Time & Place:
MIT building 32 (Stata Center), room 124
August 2, 2017, 5:30-7:30

Attendance

Committee Members

Arthur Strang, Alexander Taylor, John Attanucci, Joseph Beggan, Saul Tannenbaum, Andrew McFarland, Devin Chausse, Kelley Brown

City of Cambridge

Tegin Teich Bennett and Greg Hanafin (Community Development), Adam Shulman (Traffic, Parking, and Transportation)

Presenters, official entities, and members of the public

Phil Groth and Andy Smith (MBTA) were present, 4 members of the public were present

Committee Intros, administrative business, and updates

There were not sufficient numbers of members for a quorum to vote on minutes. Tegin Teich Bennett described public comment process. Phil Groth introduced Andy Smith, who will take over some of his responsibilities coordinating with the City of Cambridge.

Public Comment

There were no comments.

Update on Bus Priority Projects

Tegin gave an update on bus priority projects, including:

- Kendall Square Mobility Task Force (KSMTF) near term, high priority recommendations (Grand Junction transit demand estimation and design, a new CT4 route, and extending Routes 64/70 from Central Square to Kendall Square);
- CTPS Alewife/route 2 first mile/last mile study;
- Completed new bus stop shelters on Green Street and Aberdeen Avenue; and
- Next steps for better bus and bike facilities on Mount Auburn and Mass Ave.

Discussion:

- There was a discussion about the Grand Junction recommendations, which will include estimating path benefits and transit demand. MIT completed a feasibility study in 2015 that points out building access issues and pinch points related to the proposed path. Andrew McFarland asked about a loading zone near MIT, which Kelley Brown says was accounted for in the study.
- There was a discussion about the BU Rail Bridge crossing for the path and transit being outside the work of the current MassDOT project on Commonwealth Avenue. Tegin Bennett described the initiative to upgrade the bridge for the path and transit is a long-term project that will benefit from conceptual design in the near-term.
- There was a discussion about a MassDOT project to study commuter rail future needs. The study is expected to be about \$3 million dollars and the due date for the RFP is in September 2017. Tegin Bennett said it's a project the committee should be interested in and a comment was made that the Cambridge Redevelopment Authority should also be informed about the study.
- There was discussion about potential opportunities to increase efficiency of shuttles in the Kendall Square area. Various committee members expressed interest in participating in studying this, which will likely be taken on by the Kendall Square Association.
- Tegin Bennett described the CTPS first/last mile study findings: The study reported a time savings by rerouting MBTA buses onto Acorn Park Drive (as an alternative southbound route from Rt. 2). The study also estimated that the dedicated bus lane and bus priority signal for the jughandle would result in a small time savings, however further study of the full potential benefits for the jughandle is

needed. She also indicated that CTPS will be conducting additional follow-up analysis. Adam Shulman liked the idea of learning from the bus drivers.

- There was a discussion about bus stop improvements. Tegin Bennett said that these improvements can be expensive and it can be opportunistic to combine them with larger construction projects (e.g. Green St bus shelter and Pearl Street construction). There was discussion about concerns raised by local residents regarding advertisement and lighting impacts at the new Aberdeen Avenue bus shelter. The Committee discussed why it is so important for transit advocates to speak up to support transit projects.
- Tegin Bennett discussed the NACTO roadshow and some high level conceptual ideas for bus priority in different locations along Mass Ave: Rindge to Beech, northbound approaching Porter, Central Square, and Vassar to Memorial Drive. All these locations have high ridership and high unreliability and delay for buses. All are also targeted for separated bike lanes and may be incorporated in a separated bike lane pilots. The city has applied for a Barr Foundation BostonBRT grant with Arlington that would include north Mass Ave.

Committee discussion focused on southbound Mass. Avenue between Rindge Ave. and Walden St. for potential priority bus treatment. There was a discussion about whether a bus priority demonstration project at this location would demonstrate sufficient benefits relative to the perceived impact of taking away parking spaces. Tegin Bennett noted that the transit analysis study indicated that this segment had one of the highest levels of bus delay in the city, and traffic/signal studies showed removing a traffic lane for bus priority may be viable with other improvements. John Attanucci suggested removing the left turn from Mass Ave northbound onto Walden and that getting the signals right could have better benefits than a bus lane. There was a discussion about the pros and cons of having a median on Mass. Avenue. Tegin stated that more work and analysis is needed. Also, she reminded the committee that a demonstration project is typically accomplished through paint and signs, not significant construction work. There was a discussion about the 77 bus and whether improvements to its travel time benefitted riders from Arlington more than Cambridge. A response was that if Arlington residents didn't ride the bus, they would drive and add more car trips in Cambridge.

- There was a discussion about the status of the Mt. Auburn Street and Belmont Street reconstruction projects. Fifty-six percent of people traveling on one segment of the roadway are bus riders. The Belmont Street reconstruction project is expected in 2020. The City also applied for a Barr Foundation BostonBRT grant with Watertown to implement some of the bus priority treatments on Mt Auburn Street sooner.

Andrew McFarland presentation – Art of Engagement

Andrew McFarland, committee member and Community Engagement Manger at Livable Streets, presented strategies for engaging with the public and how to advocate for projects. He presented on public engagement tools. Key points included: changing the way we talk about transportation in a way that clarifies benefits for more people; moving beyond our existing social and professional networks to increase contacts, including promoting projects outside of public meetings; encouraging more direct, face to face engagement; and engaging the public in a way that fits your needs, skills, and audience.

Discussion:

- A comment was made that major institutions and politicians need to be engaged.
- Committee members expressed a desire to develop an “elevator speech” to promote a transit project and/or to promote transit in general.
- A comment was made there should be a transit improvement strategy for all the major arterial streets in Cambridge.
- There was a discussion about how to best identify a problem. Alexander Taylor said people are frustrated with the slow pace of change at the MBTA. Tegin Bennett discussed the lack of identity of a “bus riding community” compared to the cycling community. Andrew McFarland said people have the mindset that only the MBTA can do something about bus problems, not the city.

- There was a discussion about how to identify your audience/target. Committee members asked about how to overcome a disproportional focus on an individual's self-interest (such as when a person fights the removal of a parking space he/she wants to use). The Committee discussed giving voice to the many bus riders and the various challenges related to removing parking.
- Phil Groth reported that the MBTA is working on a public outreach plan for the upcoming service planning process that includes innovative tactics.
- Committee members discussed political engagement, such as talking to City Council candidates about the benefits of improving transit for both transit riders and non-transit users. City staff work on these initiatives for the city manager, but residents can have direct conversations with City Councilors.

Final Public Comments

No further public comments.

Announcements

The next committee meeting is Sept 6, which is the week after Labor Day weekend. Tegin Bennett asked Committee members to contact her if the date is a problem.

Adjourned at 7:36