

Riverside Transportation Conversation

Community Engagement and Feedback Summary
July 2022

Table of Contents

Background.....	2
June 28 Event	2
Survey	5
Where do you live?	5
How do you usually get around the riverside neighborhood? (Select all).....	6
Have you ever used the park created by closing Memorial Drive on the weekend?	7
Have you noticed an increase in traffic when parts of Memorial Drive are closed?	8
Open-Ended Questions.....	9
If you have noticed traffic delays, where are they? Please provide specific locations, street names, or intersections.....	9
Please tell us what you think about closing Memorial Drive on weekends to create Riverbend Park.	9
Do you have other concerns about transportation in Riverside?	10
Emails	10
Appendix: Poster comments	10

Background

For almost 40 years, the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) has closed a portion of Memorial Drive to motor vehicle traffic on Sundays to allow pedestrians, cyclists, and other to enjoy the riverfront roadway without cars. In compliance with state law, Memorial Drive is closed between Gerry's Landing Road and Western Avenue from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Sundays from the end of April until mid-November.

In 2020 and 2021, as the COVID-19 pandemic closed indoor recreation opportunities, the Cambridge City Council asked DCR to close the area on Saturdays as well.

Starting in the spring of 2020, Memorial Drive is closed from Saturday at 8 a.m. to Sunday at 7 p.m., including on Saturday evening.

In summer 2022, the Cambridge Traffic, Parking, and Transportation Department (TP+T) sought community feedback on transportation and traffic projects and concerns in the Riverside neighborhood. Staff from TP+T, the Community Development Department (CDD), and Department of Public Works (DPW) hosted an event on Tuesday, June 28, in Wheeler Park to provide information and gather feedback. Topics discussed included the Memorial Saturday and overnight closures; general transportation concerns in the area; and upcoming changes to River Street, the I-90 interchange, and MBTA bus routes. The City also published an online survey for those who couldn't make the event.

June 28 Event

PRE-EVENT OUTREACH

To get the word out about the event and survey, TP+T posted about 70 laminated posters on street signs in the Riverside neighborhood. These posters included information about the event and links to online event information and the online survey.

EVENT

City staff from the TP+T, CDD, and DPW attended the event in Wheeler Park on Tuesday, June 28, from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. Attendees snacked on lemonade and cookies, read posters, and talked to staff about the

City of Cambridge | Pop-Up Event

Riverside Transportation Conversation

Tuesday, June 28 | 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.
Wheeler Park / New Riverside Neighborhood Park
Rain date: Wednesday, June 29


Come chat with us! Stop by for refreshments and the chance to talk about Memorial Drive closures and other transportation issues in your neighborhood.

A section of Memorial Drive is currently closed on Saturdays and Sundays so that people can use the road for recreation. Stop by our tables any time between 5 p.m. and 7 p.m. to give your feedback on the project and to discuss broader traffic and transportation issues in your neighborhood.

We'll have lemonade, snacks, and City staff on hand to answer your questions. Afterwards, we'll share your feedback about Memorial Drive with the Department of Conservation and Recreation, which controls the road. Come chat with us!

In the case of rain or extreme heat, we will reschedule this event for Wednesday, June 29. Check for event updates and find a link to give feedback online at www.cambridgema.gov/riversidetransportation.

City of Cambridge
Traffic, Parking, + Transportation



Can't make it?
Give feedback online:



Event
webpage:



Figure 1: Poster advertising the Riverside Transportation Conversation



Memorial Saturday and overnight closures; general transportation concerns in the area; and upcoming changes to River Street, the I-90 interchange, and MBTA bus routes.

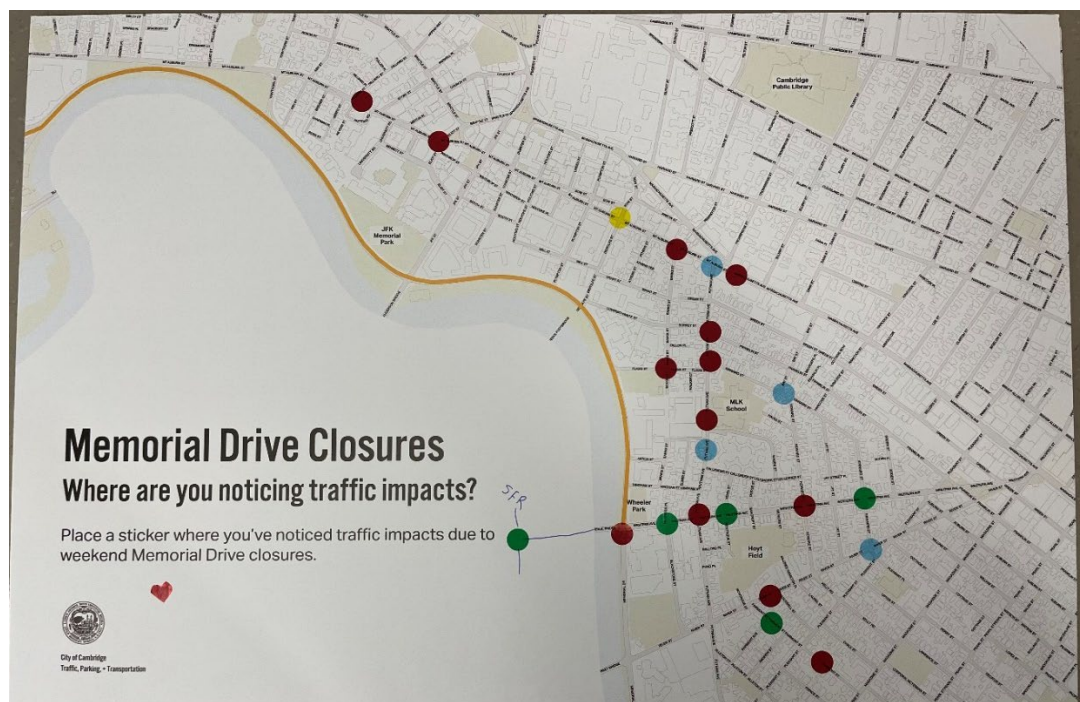
Posters included:

- A Frequently Asked Questions board on Memorial Drive closures
- A map showing the areas Memorial Drive closes on weekends, and the opportunity to place stickers where there were traffic impacts
- A map of the Riverside neighborhood, with the opportunity to place stickers on areas where there are transportation and traffic concerns
- A board on MBTA bus route changes
- A board on the MassDOT Allston I-90 Interchange project
- A board on the DPW River Street reconstruction project

In addition to talking to staff and placing stickers on posters, attendees were invited to fill out the online survey and to write their thoughts about Memorial Drive on large flip-pads.

STICKERS ON POSTERS

We asked people to identify traffic impacts from Memorial Drive closures. Most stickers (and associated comments) centered on additional traffic on Western Avenue, Putnam Avenue, and Mount Auburn Street, as well as intersections in the area.



We also asked attendees to identify transportation and traffic issues not related to weekend Memorial Drive closures. These comments centered on the intersections of Western Avenue, Memorial Drive, Blackstone Street, and Putnam Avenue, with many concerns on pedestrian and bicycle safety at crossings and intersections. Others commented on intersections on Putnam Avenue and on the intersection of Western Avenue, River Street, and Green Street near Central Square.



WRITTEN FEEDBACK

At the event, we solicited written feedback from attendees on large notepads. Forty-nine people wrote messages on these notepads. For the purposes of this report, we've sorted them into four categories:

- Comments generally about the negative impacts of Saturday/overnight Memorial Drive closures (15)
- Comments generally about the benefits of Memorial Drive closures (28)
- General suggestions (4)
- Comments on the MBTA Bus Network Redesign (2)

The [poster comments](#) are included in an Appendix at the end of this document

Survey

In addition to the in-person event, the TP+T created an online survey and advertised it on event posters and online listings. Survey results are not a representative sample since survey respondents were self-selected. The City put up posters advertising the Riverside Transportation Conversation and linking to the survey in the Riverside neighborhood.

The survey received **1,057** responses between June 16 and July 8. The survey asked the following questions:

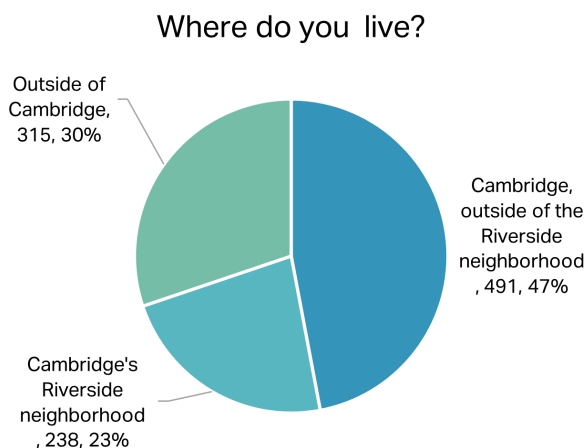
- Where do you live? (Multiple choice) [This map](#) was provided to show the limits of the Riverside neighborhood.
- How do you usually get around the Riverside neighborhood? (Multiple choice)
- Have you ever used the park created by closing Memorial Drive on the weekend? (Multiple choice)
- Have you noticed an increase in traffic where parts of Memorial Drive are closed? (Multiple choice)
- If you have noticed traffic delays, where are they? Please provide specific locations, street names, or intersections. (Open-ended)
- Please tell us what you think about closing Memorial Drive on weekends to create Riverbend Park. (Open-ended)
- Do you have other concerns about transportation in Riverside? (Open-ended)

The survey responses are summarized below:

WHERE DO YOU LIVE?

- 23% of respondents live in Cambridge's [Riverside neighborhood](#)
- 47% of respondents live in Cambridge outside of the Riverside neighborhood
- 30% of respondents live outside of Cambridge

For the rest of the questions, the responses are broken down to show responses from Riverside residents along with responses from all survey-takers.



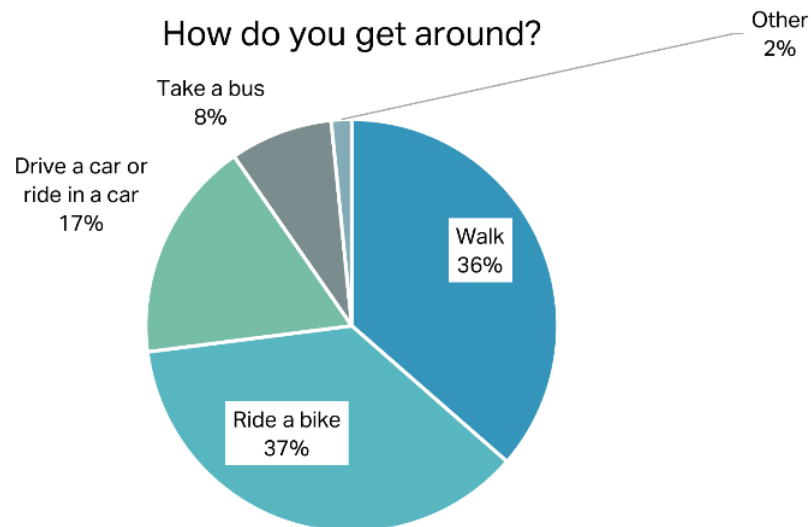
HOW DO YOU USUALLY GET AROUND THE RIVERSIDE NEIGHBORHOOD? (SELECT ALL)

General:

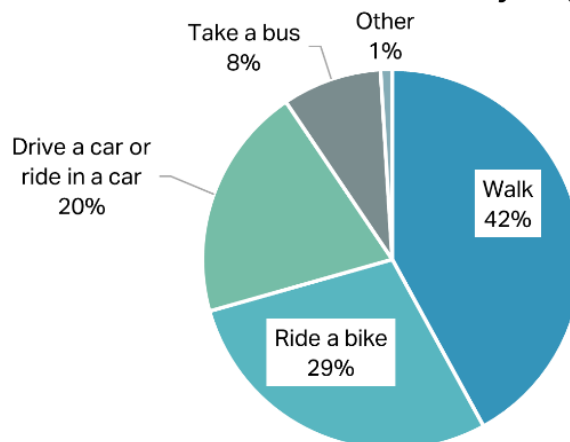
- 36% walk
- 37% ride a bike
- 17% drive a car or ride in a car
- 8% take the bus
- 2% other

Riverside Residents:

- 42% walk
- 29% ride a bike
- 20% drive a car or ride in a car
- 8% take a bus
- 1% other



Riverside Residents: How do you get around?



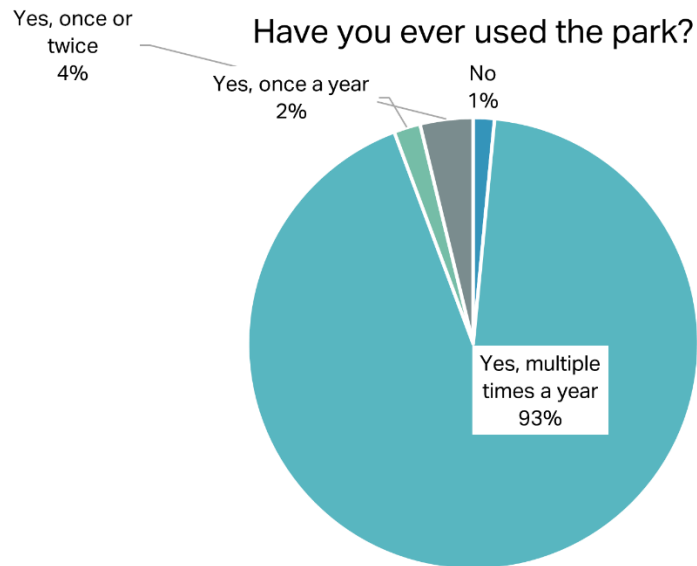
HAVE YOU EVER USED THE PARK CREATED BY CLOSING MEMORIAL DRIVE ON THE WEEKEND?

General:

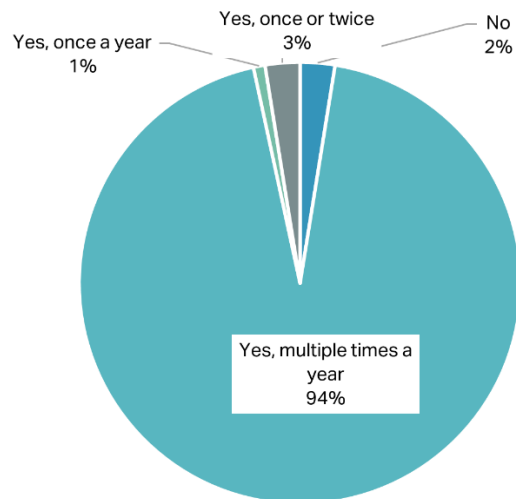
- 93% multiple times a year
- 2% once a year
- 4% once or twice
- 1% never

Riverside Residents:

- 94% multiple times a year
- 1% once a year
- 3% once or twice
- 2% never



Riverside residents: Have you ever used the park?



HAVE YOU NOTICED AN INCREASE IN TRAFFIC WHEN PARTS OF MEMORIAL DRIVE ARE CLOSED?

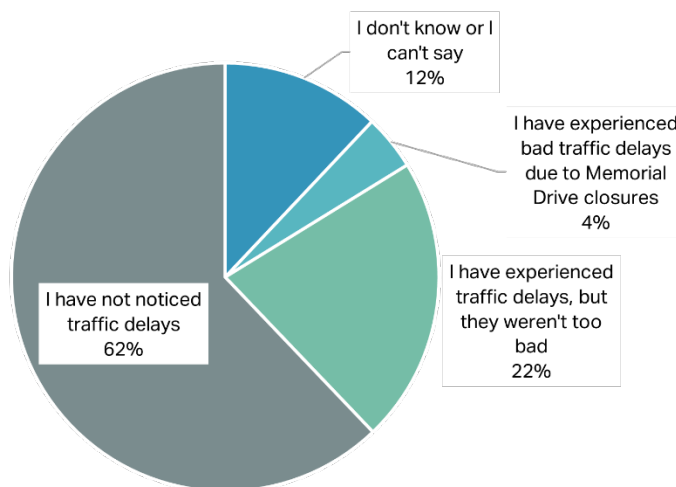
General

- 62% have not noticed traffic delays
- 22% have experienced traffic delays, but they weren't too bad
- 4% have experienced bad traffic delays due to Memorial Drive closures
- 12% don't know or can't say

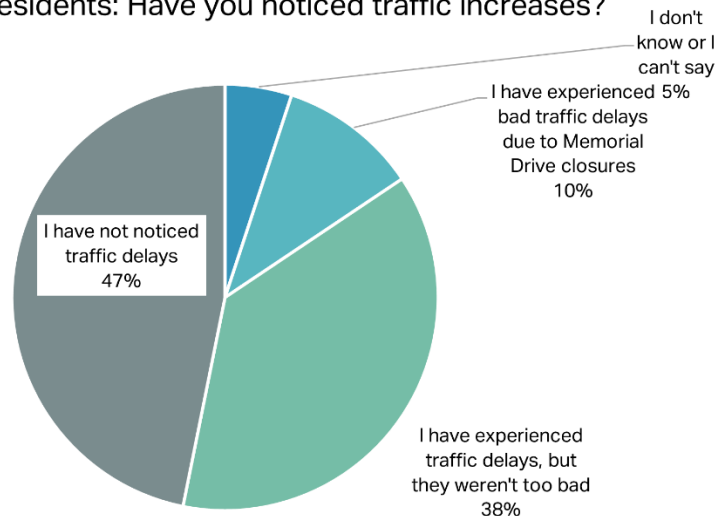
Riverside Residents:

- 42% have not noticed traffic delays
- 28% have experienced traffic delays, but they weren't too bad
- 10% have experienced bad traffic delays due to Memorial Drive closures
- 5% don't know or can't say

Have you noticed traffic increases?



Riverside Residents: Have you noticed traffic increases?



OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

Three open-ended questions resulted in 1,583 comments. TP+T staff reviewed comments, and have summarized key phrases and points below.

If you have noticed traffic delays, where are they? Please provide specific locations, street names, or intersections.

279 people responded to this question. Roads and phrases mentioned multiple times included:

- Western Avenue: 148 times
- Putnam Avenue: 95 times
- River Street: 37 times
- "intersection": 24 times
- Mt. Auburn/Mount Auburn Street: 17 times
- Soldier's Field Road: 15 times
- JFK Street: 11 times
- Fresh Pond Parkway: 6 times
- DeWolfe Street: 4 times
- Flagg Street: 4 times
- Gerry's Landing Road: 3 times
- Prospect Street: 2 times

Please tell us what you think about closing Memorial Drive on weekends to create Riverbend Park.

954 people responded to this question. Comments were largely in favor of Memorial Drive closures. Common words include:

- Love: 238 times
- Great: 224 times
- Traffic: 200 times
- Enjoy/enjoying: 142 times
- Wonderful: 104 times
- Safe: 78 times
- Keep: 57 times
- Support: 56 times
- Nice: 47 times
- Amazing: 43 times
- Child/Children: 42 times
- Fantastic: 38 times
- Benefit/Benefits: 36 times
- Good: 31 times
- Noise: 30 times
- Fun: 27 times
- Expanded: 23 times
- Pollution: 23 times
- Appreciate: 22 times
- Stop: 22 times
- Favor: 21 times
- Favorite: 20 times
- Permanent: 20 times
- Safer: 17 times
- Excellent: 17 times
- Awesome: 16 times
- Accessible: 15 times
- Terrible: 7 times
- Bad: 6 times
- Worse: 6 times
- Backup (or variation): 6 times
- Idling: 2 times
- Threatening: 2 times
- Negative: 2 times
- Unfair: 2 times
- Honk/Honking: 2 times

**Common phrases such as "Riverside" or "road" that didn't express a point of view weren't included in the list above.*

There were multiple comments on keeping Memorial Drive closed overnight from Saturday to Sunday. Of about 16 comments specifically related to overnight closures, nine asked for Memorial Drive to reopen from Saturday night to Sunday morning, and six asked for it to stay closed.

There were multiple comments (over 50) about expanding closures to more days of the week or along more of Memorial Drive.

Do you have other concerns about transportation in Riverside?

350 people responded to this question. Common phrases included:

- Bike lanes (~53)
 - River Street, Putnam Street mentioned
- Intersection improvements (17)
 - Putnam Avenue and Western Avenue mentioned multiple times
- Sidewalk (25)
 - Specific comments about tree roots
- Speeding/People driving fast (~35)
 - Putnam Avenue, Memorial Drive, Franklin Street, Western Avenue, River Street, Flagg Street mentioned
- Crosswalk improvements (13):
 - Specific mentions of Putnam Avenue/Kinnaird Street; Memorial Drive and Flagg Street; Putnam Avenue and Green Street: mostly cars not slowing down
 - Requests for new crosswalks at Callender Street/Putnam Avenue; Franklin Street/Surrey Street/Putnam Avenue

Emails

Two people emailed the event contact after the survey closed, asking to express their strong support for weekend Memorial Drive closures.

Appendix: Poster comments

At the “Riverside Transportation Conversation” event, we solicited written feedback from attendees on large notepads. Forty-nine people wrote messages on these notepads. For the purposes of this report, we’ve sorted them into four categories.

Comments were transcribed as closely to the original wording, grammar, and spelling as possible. In some cases, people drew pictures – those are represented by emojis in the transcriptions below.

Comments on the negative impacts of additional closures:

*(If a comment is generally about negative impacts, but includes a note about a benefit of additional closures, that is indicated in **green**.)*

Western Ave vehicles block the Putnam Ave intersection. Concurrent phasing at Western/Memorial makes it difficult to turn left.

Because Memorial Drive is closed, smaller streets like Kinnaird, Fairmont, Howard, and Jay become through ways to Western Ave. This makes these streets widely unsafe for residents who are use to a quieter street.

I think its *[undecipherable]* to have the road closed all weekend. Traffic is to much on Western and Putnam and other streets. Fire and police have a hard time as it is.

Closing Memorial Drive on Saturday's and Sunday's creates too much gridlock on the surrounding streets. There must be a better way for cyclists + pedestrians to enjoy the Charles River! Please stop the closures of Memorial Drive on the weekends to help keep the local streets safe!

Closing Mem Drive Sunday 10-7 was fine. Closing all weekend is impossible. Traffic on Putnam is gridlocked. We are basically trapped all weekend.

I am a lifelong resident and enjoy the closing on Sundays ONLY! It is very unsafe & loud when cars back up on Putnam Ave. - My grandkids cannot play on the sidewalk safely because bikes are now riding on the sidewalk so as not to have to wait in the gridlock traffic. I cannot sit on my stairs quietly due to the noise & pollution from cars idling by. Being on Putnam Ave., we have gotten used to Sunday closing but Saturdays put undue stress on residents. Emergency vehicles have a problem navigating the gridlock traffic. When I leave, to run errands I may have to park blocks from my house & now that Mem. Drive is open overnight, the noise at 1 – 2 AM is very loud & unbearable (people coming home from the clubs) with loud music & engine noise. Please limit Mem. Dr. Opening to Sundays ONLY!

Sunday Only!! Greed is not nice to the people who live in the affected area pilot is over. This should be done the right way a COVID program should not be permanent...

I live right next to Memorial Drive on a dead end Street. I am a Senior the cars speed onto my street which has no side walks. It is extremely dangerous. The cars idle all day. The cars block up Western Ave also difficult to cross the street. The cars just want to get to the bridge. I support Saturday only. Also bikers speed down the side walk to get to the river. It's hard and difficult to cross the street (*indecipherable*) the COVID is going down.

It certainly is great having both Sat. and Sun. Closed to cars – HOWEVER, I do think the 8 am straight thru to 7 pm on Sundays is unnecessary + unfair to those who actually LIVE in Riverside, etc. Especially considering it will get darker come Sept/Oct -- please do not extend this beyond mid-October – not mid-November as some here have said. No reason – if DCR doesn't want to open the streets on Sat. - then the city should pay to do this.

Closing Mem Dr. for the weekend is a great inconvenience to the people who live in the surrounding neighborhoods! In the street in and around the neighboring areas becomes grid locked, as well as people who are non resident parking in residential parking spots. Sunday was acceptable, but all weekend is totally unacceptable.

Closing Mem Drive all weekend seems designed as much to annoy drivers as help provide exercise.

- Try 11-6/dusk or dark both days – before/after 7 little enough usage but no access for vehicles.
- Working people have errands to do on weekends & many of use work on the weekends & have places to go
- Plans to close the road all the way to Longfellow need to be studied carefully before closing off all exit and access points to folks from outside Cambridge.
- Backup often runs Putnam Ave from Western Ave back past Flagg St, effectively trapping me in my house.

Closing Memorial Drive all weekend (overnight) poses a hindrance for emergency vehicles to travel quickly to surrounding neighborhoods.

There are so many open spaces in Cambridge like Danehy, Fresh Pond and many large fields in the East Cambridge area.

Hello, If you don't want a car then choose not to have one. This [unclear] of foreign [unclear] maintain to work, not in America. There is no country in the world which make use of vehicles. If you are going to use apples to apples; not just to suit your path. Return Memorial Drive on Saturday.

Reopen the drive on Saturday and allow a community conversation on [unclear] -- the residents & abutters – need to be heard.

Comments about the benefits of additional closures:

(If a comment is generally supportive of closures, but includes a note about a negative impact, that is indicated in red.)

Having a car-free Memorial Drive on weekends is so great for pedestrians, cyclists, and especially kids learning to ride a bike. Please keep it car-free on Saturday as well!

I live just over the river in Allston—most of my community is in Camberville. The closure of Mem Drive on Saturdays has allowed me to safely and without worry be a part of my community.

I like the full weekend closures because it makes being along the river far more pleasant + less noisy – early mornings (before 11AM) are lovely! Keep Saturdays please 😊

I like Memorial Drive closed both days on the weekend; great asset to the community and neighborhoods...

I love having the road closed all weekend, it's the only time to enjoy the river w/o cars, noise, exhaust. I go every weekend I'm in town. The city should explore more permanent ways to free up the river from cars. It's so much safer and more pleasant w/o them, and also brings out skaters and [indecipherable] who need more space than a bike lane. (Those bike lanes could also use some maintenance.)

I don't feel comfortable accessing the Charles River parks except for during Mem Drive closures. Being able to safely bike to the river really helps my mental health!

We feel that having both Saturday and Sunday options to have Memorial Drive reserved for bikes + pedestrians is really helpful for our family to use safely. And if we need to go somewhere by car, we do not feel that we have hit much traffic, we simply use Soldier Field Rd. We love our bikes most of the time 😊 🚲

Memorial Drive used to be a park and cars took it over. We ride on this often, when closed and when not (I ride on the river path). But when it is closed, it brings joy + peace + families out. Ideally, we would reduce the car lanes by half all the time. Why do we want a highway through our community? The river is one of our best assets. Let's make it more welcoming by reducing car volumes.

We live on River + Jay Sts. The 2nd day makes such a huge difference – it's more than 2x the access – it adds a later eve + 2 earlier mornings. We come every Sat + Sun multiple times w/ our dogs. Otherwise we have to drive (often to Fresh Pond) to be in nature away from cars. **Please fix the traffic flow, but keep the road closed for 2 days. (We do hit traffic sometimes, but def. worth it.)** Thanks.

I haven't experienced terrible traffic on Sat/Sun -- certainly it isn't as bad as rush hour on weekdays when I avoid Western Ave.

Love the current system. I haven't noticed much more traffic on the weekends.

We love to walk + bike on Saturdays + Sundays + love that the park is open earlier in the day. The best thing to happen during the pandemic. It makes it safe + fun for our kids + we connect with our neighbors.

- "I love to bike" -- [name], 3.
- Drawing by [name], 5

Riverbend park is great and should be expanded, both in length along the River and duration of opening. Long term, Mem Drive shouldn't be more than 1 general/car lane in each direction. We shouldn't soil our wonderful waterfront w/a high speed freeway!

Memorial Drive should be closed its whole length all weekend and reduced to one lane in each direction during week. This precious Riverfront property should not be a highway. (+2) (+3)

(^*separate comment with arrow to the above*) I want to echo this point. Memorial drive is largely redundant to Storrow/Soldiers Field. The riverfront would be much improved if there were lanes dedicated to bikes and to pedestrians and to expand the green space along the river. Sat + Sun forever



I have loved Riverbend Park since coming to Cambridge years ago. Even as a motorist it's quite feasible to get around the park on weekends with the network of streets in the surrounding areas. **Maybe a little increase in traffic, but to cut down on Memorial Drive hours to reduce this is not worth it.** I've made new friends and met neighbors through the park and its one of my favorite things about the neighborhood.

Having MD open on the weekends provides an important opportunity for residents to enjoy open space. Some of us work on the weekends sometimes, so only having Sundays might mean no days for me. Please keep both days!

I love having Memorial Dr. closed both Sat. + Sun. The multiuse path is much too narrow for cyclists + walkers so the whole road really helps. It's a lovely, relaxing place to spend time, + several hours on Sundays aren't enough.

3800 people signed a petition to keep Riverbend open all weekend.

Opening Memorial Drive to people all weekend provides great benefits for public health and safety. To maximize these benefits for those who visit the park and those who live near it, there should be a multi-pronged approach to traffic that includes traffic calming, encouraging bike lanes, and more.

Hi! I live at the corner of Flagg & Putnam, and see the effect of the Memorial Dr changes firsthand every weekend. **While the traffic on Putnam does increase due to displacement,** opening up Memorial Dr to pedestrians, cyclists and other recreators is the absolute BEST part of living in this neighborhood. Seeing the richness and diversity of folks enjoying the open space is a joy. If it costs me 5 minutes more to drive to I-90 or Boston, that is great tradeoff to give people greater access to their city. Cycling on Putnam Ave is currently dangerous – cars tail cyclists very closely, and pass with dangerous distances, all in front of an elementary school. Giving people a safer way to travel away from cars has saved lives. Finally, if Cambridge is serious about reducing our carbon emissions, we need to find ways to further open streets to human-powered transit, not close them to cars. Thank you.

(^ *comment with arrow to the above*) I have lived in the neighborhood for 12 years and never owned a car during that time; I second everything the person wrote above this comment! (Flagg and Putnam

comment) The problem is too many cars! The solution is human connection, health, & mental well-being. 🚲

Make Cambridge more livable walking and biking city, not just another car city/parking lot. **Solve the congestion issues** but keep Mem Dr. Closed to cars on Sat. And Sundays.

I love the Mem Drive closures. I try to pass by every weekend and it never fails to put a smile on my face.

The Charles River doesn't live up to its full potential, It could be so much nicer of a place to relax without hazardous car traffic. Why stop at weekends?

Some people have complained about the 24/7 closure since the Drive isn't used much on Saturday nights. So why not activate the space? I'm thinking a "Night Market" like you see in many East Asian cities: food stalls, small vendors, not-too-loud entertainment. This would also give small businesses access to the Harvard Sq. customers without forcing them to pay Harvard Sq. Rents!

I love to have more public space that is human-friendly. It's a place to hand out outside without worrying about cars/noise. I support Saturday & Sunday closures.

Keep it open, make it longer. Great way to get people comfortable biking on roads in a safe way before moving into traffic.

General suggestions

I, too, love the park, but the road should be closed at 10, not 8 am, and re-opened in the evenings. The broad lawns and sidewalks are sufficient for evening use.

We should move the closure sign on Flagg St. up from Banks to Putnam. Cars turn down Flagg intending to go to Mem Drive, only to then be turned around, creating more Putnam traffic. Long term, do we need both Memorial Drive and Storrow to have high-speed cars? All of our best, riverfront green space has speeding cars and feels unsafe with walkers, children biking, runners, and commuters all squeezed onto a single narrow sidewalk.

- Flag St Circulation due to closure
- Cut-thrus from Magazine to Western Ave

Yes to more bike lanes, eg. On River St. 🚲

Focus on enforcing traffic issues + keep it open all weekend – make traffic lights better.

Bus network suggestions

Please leave 87 & 88 as is. A lot of dead zones in Greenline Extension.

More bus network in E.C. (+2)