



Elementary School Students Do a Street Audit in The Port

BY: JONATHAN ANJARIA, CAMBRIDGE BICYCLE COMMITTEE

Walking to school every day makes many Cambridge students experts on the city's sidewalks, streets, and intersections. This winter, 24 third, fourth, and fifth graders who are part of Qualls, a program for boys of color at Fletcher Maynard Academy, did a formal analysis, known as a "street audit," in The Port neighborhood. A street audit is an in-person exploration of an area to assess the condition of the public street environment - including sidewalks, intersections, and bicycle parking infrastructure - and then make suggestions for improvement.

To Qualls students, walking promotes community, independence, and active lifestyles. As students said in group discussions prior to the audit, walking is great because "you get to talk with friends and family," "I get to be by myself - there's no parents!" and "you get a good step count on Fitbit."

During three street audit sessions, students walked around The Port. They paid close attention to whether the streets were accessible for people of all ages and abilities, including people using canes, wheelchairs, or pushing strollers.

From the moment they stepped out of the school, students noted issues: Sidewalks that slanted toward the road, depressions where puddles frequently formed, inconsistent surfaces and loose bricks. "I tripped there this morning!" said one student, pointing to a missing brick along Harvard Street. They noted that small details matter for accessibility. "All of these bumps are

bad for people in wheelchairs and for people with disabilities," said multiple students. During an audit following a snowfall, students saw new problems emerge. Little indentations in the sidewalk that seemed insignificant in the fall become dangerous spots where ice collected in the winter. Pointing to snow left uncleared by property owners, a student observed, "People in wheelchairs don't have any space to cross because the path is so narrow" and "The uncleared snow covers the little bumps that indicate to blind people that there is a crossing."

Most Qualls students have access to bicycles and said they wanted more places and opportunities to use them. A student who bikes to school every day observed, "Sometimes people aren't considerate and push the snow from the road into the bicycle lanes." Problems related to bicycle parking, especially in Washington Elms, was a big concern. Not everyone has a space to keep their bike at home, students said, so they have to keep them outside. However, during the audit, students observed some racks buried under snow and ice, or inaccessible because of snow piles placed in front of them. "Build a shelter over them like a bus station. That would prevent rust too," suggested one student. "How come the trash cans have a cover but not those racks?" said another.

In 2020, Qualls students will continue their street audit by talking with family, friends, and neighbors, and presenting some of their findings to City staff.



WHAT IS MICRO-MOBILITY?

The term "micromobility" most commonly refers to small electric vehicles. If you're riding an e-scooter, e-skateboard, e-unicycle, e-bike, e-skates, or some other light, electric device, then you're part of this new trend in transportation. Around the world, more people are riding these vehicles, whether they own them or rent them through a shared service. The most common device for the shared service is a scooter.

Micromobility legislation is currently under discussion at the state level, and Cambridge, Boston, Somerville, Brookline, and Watertown are working together to develop program guidelines for potentially permitting a regionally coordinated, shared scooter service. Cambridge's New Mobility Blueprint study takes a close look at how the City can use policy and regulations to support new mobility options that advance our transportation, climate, and community goals. Look for recommendations when the study finishes in 2020!

Learn more:
[cambridgema.gov/
NewMobilityBlueprint](https://cambridgema.gov/new-mobility-blueprint)