

South Mass. Avenue Corridor Safety Improvements Project – FAQ

November 2018

Relevant Terms:

Vision Zero - Vision Zero is a strategy to eliminate all traffic fatalities and severe injuries, while increasing safe, healthy, and equitable mobility for all.

Quick Build Project – this type of project uses materials such as paint, signs, and flexible posts to change the way the street is used. It is less expensive and faster than a capital construction project.

Signal Phasing – the traffic light stages at an intersection.

Exclusive signal phasing – when one movement or direction exclusively has the “go,” which is a way to reduce possible conflicts with other movements.

Rectangular Rapid Flash Beacon (RRFB) – a signal placed on the sidewalk next to a crosswalk that flashes to alert drivers that a pedestrian is crossing the street.

Door Zone – the area of the street or bike lane where cyclists are vulnerable to being hit by car doors when people are exiting cars; this is relevant for both drivers and passengers, including those exiting taxis or other ride hail vehicles.

Near-miss – an event that has the potential to cause a crash, but does not.

1. What are the goals of the project?

The goals are:

- a. Address safety issues and reduce crashes (Vision Zero)
- b. Reduce transit delays
- c. Enable/encourage people of all ages and abilities to choose sustainable transportation

2. Why this section of Mass Ave?

This section of Mass Ave between Memorial Dr and Sydney St is one of the busiest in the city for car, bus, bicycle, and pedestrian traffic. The intersections with Vassar St and Albany St have been identified as high-crash locations. Consistent with Vision Zero and the City’s commitment to address safety issues, this “Quick Build” project allows us to make the corridor significantly safer much faster than a traditional capital reconstruction project.

3. How will this project make the corridor safer?

Signal changes at the Mass Ave/Vassar St and Mass Ave/Albany St intersections and the creation of separated bike lanes will reduce conflicts between pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers. A bus lane will separate buses from general traffic in some areas, resulting in less weaving conflicts. New turn lanes and exclusive timing in the signal phasing will separate some of the heaviest vehicle turns from conflicts with other vehicles and cyclists and pedestrians. A new crosswalk

with a Rectangular Rapid Flash Beacon (RRFB) will be installed across Mass Ave at Windsor St in the spring of 2019 to provide a new crossing opportunity for pedestrians.

4. Why are we moving the parking?

Parking will be moved away from the curb to create separated bike lanes and improve safety for people traveling by bicycle. Separated bike lanes have been shown to reduce crashes by separating riders from motor vehicle traffic and moving riders away from the “door zone” of parked cars. This helps us meet goals (a) and (c) of addressing safety issues and reducing crashes and enabling people of all ages and abilities to choose sustainable transportation.

5. How much parking will be removed?

In the retail area of the project, from Sidney St to Albany St, nine metered spaces are being removed or changed (51 spaces to 42 spaces) to install the new crosswalk, increase sight lines for safety, and convert some space to loading zones (which can also be used for safer drop-off/pick-up areas). In the section from Albany St to Memorial Dr, the 18 metered parking spaces on the western side (toward Boston) will be eliminated and curb uses will be changed on the eastern side (toward Central Square), with metered parking being converted to loading zones and ride hail pick-up/drop-off zones.

6. Why are we adding a bus lane?

This corridor has been identified as an area of significant delay and reliability challenges for MBTA buses. During rush hour, a significant percentage of people traveling on the corridor are riding in buses. The #1 bus that uses this corridor is one of the busiest buses in the MBTA system and is a key link between Cambridge and Boston. The bus lane will also be used by other buses including, but not limited to: additional MBTA vehicles (CT1 and the RIDE buses), EZRide, MASCO, other employee shuttles, and school buses. The bus lane helps us meet goals (b) and (c) of reducing transit delays and enabling/encouraging people to choose sustainable transportation.

7. How does the bus lane work?

Only buses and shuttles may drive in the bus lane. Car drivers may only enter the bus lane to access on-street parking spaces and at intersections when taking a right turn.

8. Will traffic get worse for people driving in cars?

Delays may increase slightly for people driving, however we also anticipate that traffic will flow through the corridor more safely and smoothly due to changes in signal timing and pavement markings that reduce conflicts. New designated left turn lanes in some locations will make turns more comfortable for drivers. The bus lane will also reduce delays due to buses pulling in and out of traffic.

9. Will the new configuration be permanent?

The quick build changes, including new pavement markings, flexible posts, and signage are anticipated to stay in place. The changes will be monitored during and after installation to see if adjustments need to be made to optimize safety and use of the corridor.

10. How will this be evaluated to see if its working?

An extensive evaluation of the project is planned in the spring following installation. New data will be collected to compare to “before” data that includes vehicle, bicycle, and pedestrian volumes, travel times, queuing, crashes, “near miss” data, and parking use. Feedback will be gathered from the public through online surveys. Observations will also be done to see how new facilities are working, including moving the tour bus stops and the new ride share drop off and pick up zones.

11. Will all of the work be completed this year?

The new crosswalk across Mass Ave at Windsor St will be installed in 2019, and the completion of all color markings is weather dependent. Additional work is being contemplated for the future, which may include:

- Removing some curb extensions at traffic signals
- Moving bus stops to the far side of intersections and installing floating bus stops
- Introducing additional bus priority at the Memorial Dr terminus of the project

12. What was the community process for this project?

The project has undergone an extensive community process including:

- Three community meetings
- Four stakeholder advisory committee meetings
- Tabling, presentations, and outreach at various community locations, including
 - The Cambridge Senior Center/senior housing
 - Public events, such as the Central Flea and Central Square Farmer’s Market
 - Intercept outreach and surveying along the corridor and in Central Square
- Individual outreach to corridor businesses and other stakeholders