

Mount Auburn Street Bus Priority Pilot Q&A for Strawberry Hill Residents

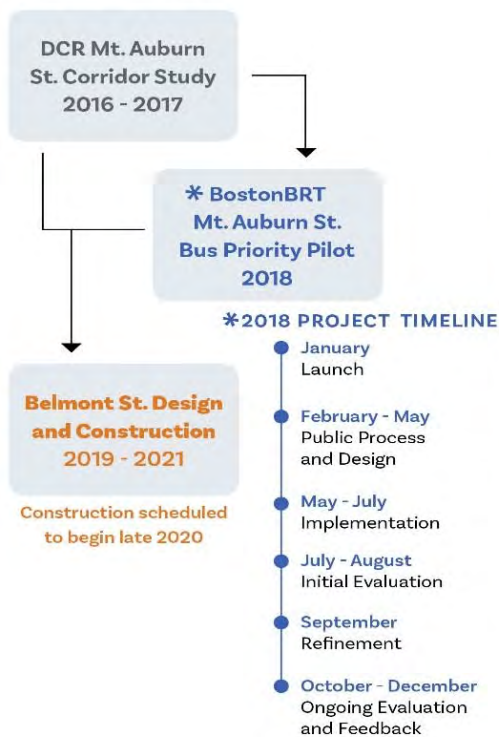
What is the Mount Auburn Street bus priority pilot?

The bus priority pilot on Mt. Auburn Street¹, funded by a grant from the Barr Foundation, will allow the City of Cambridge (City), partnering with the MBTA and the Town of Watertown, to make bus travel more efficient and reliable with lanes dedicated to buses and bus signal priority at intersections. The pilot will coincide with the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) changes to intersections at Coolidge Ave. and Fresh Pond Parkway that will give more green signal time to people driving on Mt. Auburn Street. As a result, even after designating a lane to buses to significantly improve every bus and shuttle rider's trip towards Harvard Square, there will be very little change to everyone else's travel time during the peak commuting time. In addition, in the off-peak hours, every driver and rider on Mt. Auburn Street should get through the Fresh Pond Parkway intersection more quickly and easily.

There are several projects going on in this area – how do these projects relate to the bus priority pilot?

The timeline below shows the relationship between three separate processes: DCR-led Mt. Auburn Street Corridor improvements, as well as the City-led the bus priority pilot on Mt. Auburn Street, and the City-led Belmont Street reconstruction:

PROJECTS



¹ Please see our bus priority pilot Fact Sheet as well as more information and resources at <http://www.cambridgema.gov/CDD/Projects/Transportation/mtauburnstreetbusprioritydemonstration>

The **DCR-led Mt. Auburn Street Corridor Study**² was an extensive stakeholder and public process which concluded in 2017 with short-term and long-term conceptual recommendations. The short-term concept, which will be implemented in summer of 2018, includes low cost changes to the Mt. Auburn Street/Fresh Pond Parkway intersection to improve crossings for pedestrians and cyclists and reduce delay and congestion on Mt. Auburn Street. The future, long-term concept includes more transformative ideas for the roadway, intersection, and plaza space along the corridor, which are not yet planned or funded. While the City participated in the DCR process, recommendations pertaining to City-owned streets will go through a separate City-led process before design decisions are made.

The City's **BostonBRT bus priority pilot on Mt. Auburn Street** will encompass some of the short-term recommendations of the DCR study to improve access and decrease congestion on Mt. Auburn Street west of Fresh Pond Parkway by providing a bus-only lane, signal retiming, signal priority for buses, and bicycle lanes where feasible. It is expected to begin in early summer 2018.

The City's **Belmont Street reconstruction**, scheduled to begin in 2021, will build on the bus priority pilot and could incorporate elements of the DCR long-term recommendations. This reconstruction project will have its own City-led public design process, expected to start in the fall of 2018.

Why dedicate a lane of traffic to buses?

In the morning rush hour, half or more of the people traveling along this corridor are on buses or shuttles. Dedicating one of the lanes to transit, shuttles, buses, and emergency vehicles improves travel time and reliability and encourages even more people to rely on buses. This re-allocation tries to use space most efficiently. In the long term, encouraging more people to use buses should reduce congestion and improve the experience for everyone on the roadway.

What are the expected changes in travel time with the bus priority pilot for people driving on Mount Auburn Street?

The DCR study has estimated that the travel time will be improved overall for **all users on average** of Mt. Auburn Street with the implementation of a dedicated bus lane **along with** the DCR improvements and signal timing changes to the intersections at Fresh Pond Parkway and Coolidge Ave. The Fresh Pond Parkway intersection changes include shrinking the empty space in the center of the intersection and giving more green time to Mt. Auburn Street traffic. It may feel different as you drive through the corridor – for example, it could look like you are in a longer line of cars than you remember -- BUT, you should get from Star Market to the far side of Fresh Pond Parkway in around the same amount of time as before, or quicker.

For automobile drivers specifically, the DCR process estimated that travel times will likely be better eastbound in the morning rush hour and slightly worse (about a minute) in both directions in the evening rush hour. During midday, when there is little traffic, travel times should improve.³

² <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/mount-auburn-street-corridor-study>

³ Page 43 in the DCR final report provides more detail. See

https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2017/11/20/FR_Mt_Auburn_Report_0817_DRAFT%20Long%20term%20Design%20Concept%20R_0.pdf

Will converting a lane to bus-only make it harder for me to drive?

Mt. Auburn Street is typically two lanes in each direction. In some cases, drivers stop in the through lane to make a left (for example, onto Homer or Brattle Street), but at Aberdeen eastbound, the left lane becomes a left turn only lane. The buses also frequently stop in the right-most lane. A common complaint is that drivers change lanes because they are confused, to jump lines of traffic, or to maneuver around buses. This behavior causes disruptions and delays on the road and makes it harder to turn onto Mt. Auburn Street from side streets. The pilot should help with safety and predictability by establishing one through lane of traffic that moves more efficiently through the intersections.

Why make travel lanes narrower?

Narrower lanes encourage people to drive more slowly, supporting our Vision Zero initiative to eliminate all traffic fatalities and severe injuries, while increasing safe, healthy, equitable mobility for all. The speed limit is 25mph and narrower lane widths will encourage these lower travel speeds.

Who will benefit from the pilot and the longer-term changes? Commuters or residents?

Changes typically impact both commuters or residents sometimes in similar ways, and sometimes not. For example, if it becomes easier to get in and out of a side street, that can increase cut-through traffic by commuters or people following wayfinding applications on their phones. We want to learn as much as possible about neighbors' concerns and work on effective solutions to address them in the context of the broader City goals related to safety, environmental sustainability, and streets that are friendly to users of all ages and abilities.

Will access to Star Market change in the pilot?

The pilot will consider the challenges associated with access to the Start Market driveway. Because there are currently two points at which drivers can choose to turn left (either into the Star Market driveway or through Homer Street), we have more disruption to traffic than if there was only one access point. We will explore this concept further during the design process.

How am I going to turn from Belmont onto Holworthy and from Cushing onto Belmont when the bus priority pilot is in place?

The pilot will include signal retiming that will change how traffic queues. We will work with the consultant team to better understand the implications of the new signal timing for breaks in traffic, and through the pilot we can explore the impact on access to side streets. In the pilot design, we are exploring the idea of incorporating a small left turn pocket onto Holworthy to make this turn easier.

Can the bus lane double as HOV lanes?

The bus lanes are proposed to be shared with other shuttles, buses, and emergency vehicles. In the rush hours, this likely means a vehicle every few minutes at a minimum. One possible drawback to allowing HOVs in the dedicated lane is that it could deteriorate the value of the lane for the buses, which carry many more people per vehicle and currently carry the majority of the people on the roadway. Another drawback is that HOV lanes are challenging to monitor and enforce.