

Joint Committees Meeting February 2022 Abbreviated meeting summary

Attendance

Members

Transit Advisory Committee:

Present (5) Bill McAvinney, Carl Rothenhaus, Saul Tannenbaum, Casey Berg, Peter Septoff

Absent (11) Kelley Brown, Jim Gascoigne, Sylvia Parsons, Arthur Strang, Katherine Rafferty, Matthew Coogan, Melissa Zampitella, John Attanucci, Kristiana Lachiusa, Devin Chausse, Jackson Moore-Otto

Pedestrian Committee:

Present (9) Arnav Murulidhar, Brooke Williams, Raymond Hayhurst, Jenny Turner-Trauring, Elizabeth Paden, Jeannine Powers, Debby Galef, Sandy Goldberg, Robin Bonner

Absent (4) Emily Gruber, Morgan Pinney, Sarah Willis, Sean Peirce

Bicycle Committee:

Present (9) Mark Boswell, Alison Harris, Carola Voelker, Pamela Yang, Amy Flax, Guido Cuperus, Anna L Frebel, Eitan Normand, Scott Kilcoyne

Absent (10) Brennan Biemann, Conor Henrie, Diane Gray, John Ellersick, Julia Somerdin, Rahi Patel, Randy Stern, Silvia Del Carmen Castanos, Thomas Randall, Todd Robinson

City staff (9) Andrew Reker, Cara Seiderman, Kelsey Tustin, Evan Killion (CDD); Patrick Baxter, Adam Shulman, Andreas Wolfe, Stephen Meuse (TPT); Diane Stokes (DPW)

Others (88) Olivia Mobayed (MBTA); Rosie Jaswal (Toole Design); Chris Balerna (Kleinfelder); Christi Apicella (McMahon Associates); 84 members of the public

Note: CDD = Community Development Department; TPT = Traffic Parking and Transportation Department; DPW = Department of Public Works; MBTA = Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority

Welcome and committee introductions

Andy Reker (AR) began the virtual meeting at 5:34 PM by welcoming members of the Transit Advisory Committee (TAC), Bicycle Committee (BC), and Pedestrian Committee (PC), members of the public and presenters. AR gave a tour of the virtual space for people joining by application and telephone and shared some ground rules for virtual meeting participation. Evan Killion (EK) then conducted a roll call of the members of the TAC, BC, and PC.

Presentation: Overview of the Porter Square Safety Improvement Project

AR introduced Andreas Wolfe (AW) who is the Project Manager for the Porter Square Safety Improvement Project. AW shared a condensed version of what was presented at the first community meeting on January 25. AW provided an overview of this project, reviewing the following information:

- Project background
 - Section of Mass Ave: Roseland St to Beech Street
 - This project will build on the safety improvements that were completed in 2018
- Roadway configuration
 - The center median and overhead wires are important aspects that must be considered in the design
 - The changes will be made without changes to the existing street infrastructure
- Project constraints
 - The project is a quick-build implementation rather than a full construction project.
 - This project will not make changes to the state-owned bridge.
- Two possible roadway configurations
 - The following two design approaches may be mixed and matched with different configurations by block
 - One configuration is two travel lanes with separated bike lanes
 - This doesn't allow for loading or parking of any kind
 - Allows enough width to deploy emergency vehicle
 - Another configuration is one travel lane with a part-time bus lane with part-time loading
 - Acts as a bus lane for part of the day, and loading for part of the day
 - Purpose would switch depending on the time of day
 - The fire department is open to this, as it hasn't been a problem on North Mass Ave where it was first introduced
- Some specific consideration is required at the signalized intersections in the project area
 - Mass Ave at Beech St has a couple of design concepts
 - One design has a dedicated right turn lane with dedicated right-turn signal time separating people driving from people walking and biking
 - Separating out right turns increases the level of comfort for people walking and biking
 - More time would be required to travel through this section of Mass Ave because there would be one less through lane, and everyone would

- have to wait longer to accommodate the additional signal including bus riders
- Another design would keep things the same
 - There would be less delay, and buses can use both lanes
 - This would not improve safety for people walking or biking nor bus reliability
- Mass Ave at Upland Rd has several design concepts
 - One design has vehicle traffic allowed on Upland only one-way toward Mass Ave
 - Allows for more simplified signal timing at Upland and Somerville Ave
 - Removes the left turn for northbound Mass Ave, which improves safety and comfort for people walking and biking along Mass Ave
 - Reduces access to Upland Rd
 - Allows for more parking on Upland Rd
 - Another design has vehicle traffic allowed on Upland only one-way away from Mass Ave
 - Allows for more simplified signal timing at Upland and Somerville Ave
 - Allows for more parking on Upland Rd
 - Reduces access to Upland Rd from the opposite direction
 - Allowing the left turn for northbound Mass Ave does not improve safety and comfort for people walking and biking along Mass Ave
 - Another design has no changes
 - Does not address the complex signal timing on Mass Ave at Upland and Somerville Ave
 - Does not add parking
 - Does not address safety and comfort for people walking and biking
 - Access is maintained, unaltered to Upland Rd

After AW concluded the presentation, AR then opened the discussion for questions and comments from transit, pedestrian, and bicycle committee members. The following comments and questions were raised

- Is the one-way section of Upland Rd just the one block from Richdale to Mass Ave?
 - *AW: We have not come to a determination if we will make Upland Rd one-way. We have heard from the public the importance of the two-way travel. If we were to make Upland Rd one-way only, it would only be right at the intersection and one block down Upland.*
- Have you thought of making the section of Somerville Ave from White St to Mass Ave one lane instead of two?
 - *AW: We are looking at this. It wouldn't have much of a capacity impact, but we're trying to make sure any design we do provides the clearance for a larger vehicle, so that they won't impact the path of the cyclist. Moving to one lane would improve that. We will likely discuss this at the next community meeting.*
- What does "loading zone" mean does it refer to people, goods, or both?
 - *AW: The loading allows 15 mins for all passenger vehicles and 30 mins for commercial vehicles. On North Mass Ave, we added temporary signs with the time limits and would do the same here if we have this design.*

- Why is the median important?
 - *AW: Given the time constraints of this project and Cycling Safety Ordinance, we can't remove the median while installing the project on time. In the future, we can consider removing it.*
- Has the MBTA weighed in on the tradeoffs for bus lane times?
 - *The city will decide on the times since these streets are city-owned. We will coordinate with the MBTA, and AR will support by providing data analysis to inform the decision. We do know that current delay analysis shows that the northbound experiences the most delay.*
- If you keep the intersection at Beech Street as-is, could you add a leading interval?
 - *AW we have considered this. Depending on the length of the leading interval, you could add to the delay. It's probably not something we can do, but we will look into it.*
- A comment was made regarding Upland Rd by a daily user of the street. If it were one-way, they would have difficulty getting to Porter Square, and also difficulty returning home. They expect more people would end up using Vernon St. Requests no change to Upland Rd.
- On areas of Mass Ave where there is no median, and given that the overhead trolley wires will be de-electrified, would it be possible to make parking protected bike lanes?
 - *AW: We have considered this, and plan to present the design at the next community meeting. Right now, the MBTA has not provided a timeline for removing the overhead wires, so we are planning this design assuming the wires are in place. This means that parking will not be allowed. We can allow loading in the current project. When the wires come down, we may then change to parking in places where there is no median*
- Upland is a busy road for vehicles, pedestrians, and cyclists. Will there be any improvements for traffic calming measures? For pedestrians and cyclists, what are the improvements?
 - *AW: This project would target a short section of Upland Road. Most of it would still be two-way. The city does have a traffic calming program where traffic calming measures could be considered separate from this project. There would be some traffic calming benefits in this project if Upland were one-way only.*
- One advisory committee member noted their concern with lack of comfort for people walking and biking across Upland Road on Mass Ave. They stated that their preference to make drivers travel a short distance out of the way for safer conditions for people walking and biking.
- The unsignalized pedestrian crossings on North Mass Ave have been made safer with the rectangular rapid-flashing beacons (RRFB). Can you speak to the possibility of RRFBs at pedestrian crossings like at Davenport and Mass Ave or other changes to make it easier to cross the street?
 - *AW: We don't have a design for that specific crossing right now. We have not yet figured out if we would reduce lanes. We'll have more information at the community meeting in a month.*

AR summarized some of the themes that emerged from the Q+A, including requests for where to find more information. AW share the website information for the project to help direct people to more information. The website includes meeting materials from the previous community meeting.

AR then transitioned to share information on upcoming community meetings relevant to tonight's topics.

Presentation: Overview of the MassAve4 Projects

AR then introduced Diane Stokes (DS) who is the project manager for the MassAve4 Projects

DS discussed her role and introduced the consultants working on the project. They were Rosie Jaswal (RJ) from Toole Design, Chris Balerna from Kleinfelder, and Christi Apicella from McMahon Associates. RJ presented the following:

- Study area includes Dudley St to Beech St and Roseland St to Waterhouse St
- Purpose of the presentation
- Project background
- Status of MBTA's overhead wires
- Design opportunities - includes evaluating 3 different levels of construction
 - Quick-Build – install new paint and flex posts
 - Partial Construction – median removal and minor changes to sidewalks
 - Full Construction – median removal, street/sidewalk reconstruction, major underground utility work
- Public engagement
 - Pop up events were held in two locations (on both ends of the study corridor)
 - Online survey with over 200 respondents
 - Reviewed design feasibility to help reduce the number of design options, with some important considerations being a design that had:
 - No conflict with emergency vehicles
 - Minimal impacts to business access
 - Improved safety for all street users
- Reviewed feasible options for quick build, partial construction, and full construction, and discussed the potential features for each. Some of these options are dependent on removal of the overhead wires.
- Draft recommendation: partial construction to remove median and maintain existing sidewalks. This meets the goals of the CSO, maintains a lot of the existing parking, and allows improvements for people walking, biking, and taking the bus.
- Next steps
 - We want your feedback on the draft recommendation
 - Create a summary and report for city council to approve the partial construction by April 30, 2022
 - If approved, there will be additional public engagement opportunities for the detailed final design
 - If it is not approved, it must be implemented as quick-build by April 2024

AR then opened the discussion to committee members for comments and questions:

- Can concrete barriers for bike lane separation be considered for quick-build? *DS: Flex posts are easier to manage. Concrete barriers need more careful consideration of what's underneath the road, so they are in the partial construction category.*

- Will the City remove overhead wires for other street projects that have them? Could the MBTA or a City contractor remove the overhead wires at the same time as the street construction? If so, could the city do the same or similar on Mass Ave?
 - *DS - MBTA plans to de-energize overhead wires to facilitate municipal construction. They don't have a timeline for removing the overhead wires. If the wires are in place, City staff must design to accommodate them. While the City can advocate for their removal, the wires are owned by the MBTA, so the MBTA will need to remove them.*
- A member commented that they had a conversation with a business owner on Mass Ave near Porter Square. The owner stated that they want street parking. Thus, the member would prefer the option of partial construction. Is there often a snowball effect of utility upgrades when upgrades to the utilities are needed for these types of projects?
 - *DS: Yes. Utilities are very complex and old, so if one starts getting replaced, something else may need to be replaced. It can spiral into a significant amount of utility upgrades.*
- Full construction may not meet the CSO's timeframe, but would it be better to do the project as full construction instead of abiding by the CSO?
 - *DS: It would take a long time for full reconstruction. With partial, you can make important changes. Full construction takes a lot of time with numerous different players involved in the underground infrastructure. However, the city has long-term plans that will be considered in the partial construction or quick build.*
- With partial construction, would it be possible to move the protected bike lane onto the curb without rebuilding the curb?
 - *DS: There are areas along the corridor where we will consider doing things like this. If we can do this, it would be considered after this feasibility stage. We will need to consider features like drainage, locations of catch basins, elevation, etc.*
- Does Mass Ave need a full reconstruction in these areas? What would be the timeframe of partial and full reconstruction?
 - *DS: There are old utilities under Mass Ave. All of Mass Ave will need to be reconstructed at some point, but we don't need it right now while things are still working. Partial construction will meet the current needs. Full reconstruction can take over 10 years and partial construction would be less than 10 years. It will depend on an assessment of the utilities.*
- A comment was made that it would be helpful to survey how people get to these businesses along this corridor.
- The crosswalks on Mass Ave are far apart from each other, so many people cross the road without using the crosswalk. Does this plan include more crosswalks?
 - *Cara Seiderman: We will consider this as it's an issue that we are aware of. With quick-build implementation it is difficult to add crosswalks, but, certainly, it is possible with partial construction.*
- A member suggested that the survey should ask the distance that people are travelling in addition to how they travel to Mass Ave. If they are close by and driving, the city could provide less parking.
- A comment was made advocating for as many of the desired changes as possible without triggering issues with the utilities.
- Has the city considered incentivizing the MBTA to get rid of the wires quickly and completely?

- *DS: We will be discussing options with the MBTA moving forward. There's also underground infrastructure associated with the wires that must be considered.*

AR concluded the comment section, and once again shared the slide showing upcoming relevant community meetings. AR restated that the purpose of this meeting was to gather feedback from committee members.

Public Q+A

AR transitioned to presenting some of the most common questions or comment from the Q+A box. City staff addressed many of the main comments including questions about the median strip and pedestrian comfort. CS noted that a few questions were asked about outreach. She explained that staff are speaking with business owners about their loading needs and gathering feedback.

AW addressed a question about disability parking in Porter Square. He noted that there is a caveat for disability parking in the CSO, and this project would either keep or add to the existing disability parking.

City staff ended the meeting at 7:32 PM

Version Information

Draft: 2/17/2022 KT + AR

Approval: _