River Street Reconstruction

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Working Group Meeting #6
Tuesday, September 24, 2019
6:00 PM – 8:00 PM
Manning Apartments 1st Floor
237 Franklin Street – Community Room

ATTENDEES

Working Group Members	City Staff	Public
Patrick Barrett	Bill Deignan - CDD	Alison Harris
Sienna Berry	Jerry Friedman - DPW	Michael Monestime
Matthew Ciborowski	Lillian Hsu – Cambridge Arts	F. Stone
Gabriel Cira	Susanne Rasmussen - CDD	Mark Boswell
Abby Duker	Rach Tannenhaus - CCPD	John Goodman
Sam Gebru	Tegin Teich - CDD	Jessica Landon-Taylor
Melissa Greene	Kathy Watkins - DPW	Margery Davies
Kai Long		Arthur McEwan
Oliver Turner	**Consultants**	Jared H. MacFarlane
Not here:	Christi Apicella	Joan Karp
Daniel Beaulieu	Arthur Bonney	Marisa Chiany
Sai Boddupalli	Rich Houghton	Carolyn Shipley
Valerie Bonds	Rosie Jaswal	Ann Cowan
Andrew Tarsy Founder	Rick Plenge	
Neil Rodriquez	Natalie Raffol	
Randy Stern	Cynthia Smith	
Christopher Tassone	Peter Stidman	
Annie Tuan		

Key:
CCPD = Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities
CPD = Cambridge Police Department
CDD = Community Development Department
DPW = Public Works
TP&T = Traffic Parking & Transportation

MEETING SUMMARY

The following is a meeting summary of the Working Group Meeting #6 for the City of Cambridge's River Street Reconstruction. For more information see Cambridgema.gov/riverstreet.

1. Welcome and Overview

The meeting was started by Tegin Teich, Transportation Planner with the City of Cambridge. Tegin will be leaving her position with the City in about three weeks, but other City staff including Jerry Friedman and Bill Deignan who have been engaged with the project will continue to lead the project. The recent summer and fall activities were reviewed, and it was noted that Phase II of the Carl Barron Plaza outreach was rescheduled from September to a potential November timeframe. It was also noted that the next Working Group meeting will focus on River Street from Auburn Street to Massachusetts Avenue, including Carl Barron Plaza. The project is now entering the iterative design process, which will last several months.

2. Review of Public Input

Pete Stidman, HDR, reviewed public input collected to date. At the start of the project, the project team reviewed the City's existing policies, planning documents, and history, particularly regarding the Carl Barron Plaza and Massachusetts Avenue area. Outreach has included:

- The first public meeting on March 26, 2019 with 81 attendees
- An online public input map with 93 commenters
- Five Working Group meetings
- Outreach to local businesses and at existing City events and festivals
- Corridor walks
- Carl Baron Plaza specific outreach including an open house and outdoor event in June

The project team created a summary map of location-specific comments and those related to shared design goals to provide guidance to designers. In particular, the street design exercise conducted at the fifth Working Group meeting provided the project team with an understanding of Working Group member concerns and ideas.

3. Conceptual Design Development

Tegin resumed the presentation by providing an introduction to the different elements of conceptual design development and reviewing potential design options on the. Comments and questions from Working Group members and the public were addressed throughout this section in place of a separate open discussion agenda item.

Givens and Constraints

A slide was used to list different fundamental givens for the project design, including addressing flooding and drainage, upgrading the infrastructure, including a separated

bicycle facility, and preserving healthy trees. An example showing where preserving existing healthy trees requires limiting the sidewalk to 4.5-feet occasionally was used to illustrate a design constraint. Another example is where the gas main runs under the edge of the street, which limits the use of above ground space for tree plantings; however, a bicycle lane would be feasible.

Jerry Friedman, Cambridge DPW, responded to a question regarding how frequently gas mains need to be serviced, by stating there is minimal routine maintenance required. The City will also investigate why the roadway/bike lane may be sinking in places, in response to another comment.

Idea Exploration

Tegin reviewed ideas previously discussed in Working Group meetings and why they do not fit into the conceptual design, including:

- Left-side cycle track: Creates more conflict points overall, especially as approaching Central Square, increases delay for cyclists based on additional street crossings, users are not used to this orientation, and this would put bicyclists adjacent to the general purpose lane, which would have higher vehicle volumes than a bus lane.
- Two-way cycle track: Although this can increase connectivity, address desire lines in both directions, and provide a wider buffer for pedestrians from the street, it means there will not be enough space for curbside uses like parking, loading, curb extensions, and seating, and also creates conflict points for the contraflow direction.
- One travel lane between Putnam Avenue and fire station: This would provide more space for buffers and curbside uses, but would require the raised cycle track to have a mountable curb for emergency vehicle access and to allow general maintenance operations such as trash pick-up. Mountable curbs are likely to exacerbate illegal parking/stopping/loading in the cycle track. An example of a mountable curb is the recently installed northbound cycle track on Beacon Street in Somerville.

Concept Walk Through

1. Memorial Drive to Putnam Avenue

The concept design illustrates two general purpose lanes beginning at Memorial Drive and transitioning into one general purpose lane with a bus lane on the approach to Blackstone Street. The bus lane option helps meet project goals for accessibility and equity and meets the City's mode share goals. The option also narrows the roadway to establish a gateway into Cambridge and reinforce the neighborhood context. Within this section there are potential design elements that can support this feeling including a BlueBikes station, new street trees, and landscaping at the entrance to the corridor.

The City and project team understand that Working Group members and the public have concerns about queuing and congestion that may be exacerbated with one travel lane. Christi Apicella, McMahon Associates, reviewed why reducing one lane for general travel is not likely to increase congestion and queueing. Changes to signal

timing and coordination between the signal at Putnam Avenue and the signal at Memorial Drive can make this feasible.

Today the signal at Putnam Avenue has three phases: River Street green, Putnam Avenue green, and an "all stop" allowing all pedestrians to cross. In the future this signal could change to two phases, having pedestrians cross concurrently with traffic in each direction, and overall allocating more time to the River Street approach. Pedestrians will also be given more green time, especially through use of a leading pedestrian interval. Buses and right turns will be combined into one lane, with throughs and left turns in the other lane, similar to how the intersection operates today.

2. Intersection with Putnam Avenue

In addition to the signal timing and coordination options discussed above, the concept at the intersection of River Street and Putnam Avenue also shortens the crossing distances for pedestrians, includes protected intersection elements for bikes, and a mountable truck apron to accommodate bus and truck turns.

Tegin continued the presentation by showing a picture of River Street today, and what the City thinks can be accomplished in terms of the look and feel of the corridor. The future vision includes a roadway cross-section that would include a cycle track, buffers, and plantings. The drawing also illustrates where the gas transmission lines are located.

An option has also been developed that maintains three travel lanes in the case the two are found to be needed.

Several comments were identified at this location:

- *Pedestrians cross whenever the light is green anyways*. Tegin responded that this may be true, but the proposed option with concurrent signal phasing reduces the time pedestrians will wait to cross and therefore should help reduce the instances of people crossing against the light. Currently if pedestrians choose to cross when the light is green this is illegal and not safe.
- *There is a back-up of vehicles on River Street from those trying to turn left onto Putnam Avenue to access Western Avenue. Drivers not making a left turn may use the bus lane to get around turning vehicles, so why have a bus lane?* Tegin responded that this occurrence may happen, but having a bus lane in place helps keep this lane generally free for buses, otherwise it would it may be full of other vehicles. The volume of left turning vehicles is fairly low, but this issue needs more detailed analysis to fully understand.
- *There will be backup on River Street from vehicles coming from Allston over the bridge.* Tegin responded that the level of back up depends on what happens with the signal at Memorial Drive.
- *Assuming River Street is shut down for several years during construction, new travel patterns are likely to be established when the road is reopened.* Tegin responded that this may happen to a degree. The corridor will always have bus passengers,

bikers, drivers, and trucks. It will continue to serve a major role in regional travel, but in the future the goal is to see more people choosing to take the bus because it is easier. The project team is making a future baseline condition to use as a basis for comparison.

3. Putnam Avenue to Kelly Road/Howard Street

It appears feasible that two general purpose lanes are not needed in this location which allows for the potential reconfiguration of the street to provide a single general purpose lane and one bus lane within the concept design. Although the corridor is still two lanes wide, the bus lane creates a different feeling. The bus lane is anticipated to be well used, as it will serves two significant routes – the MBTA 70/70A and 64, as well as school buses.

Removing the lightly used bus stop at Fairmont Street could also be an option to create more consistent bus stop spacing. Tegin explained that the proposed bus stops on the corridor are similar to those on Western Avenue; however, here they would be stopping in the bus lane, not in a general purpose lane. Bus stops would have 8-foot wide sidewalks to allow for accessibility, waiting space, space for a potential shelter/bench, and include markings where pedestrians are encouraged to cross the cycle track.

Pete called out the space designated for activation at the Kelly Road/Howard Street intersection, which was based on comments received at the last Working Group meeting. Jerry added that the slight horizontal alignment shift in the roadway geometry provides a traffic calming effect. Rich Plenge, HDR, also added that the horizontal shift in cycle track alignment in the vicinity of bus stops will slow down cyclists and promote better yielding behavior as well.

Several questions were raised at this location:

- *How are drivers supposed to interact with the bus lane in terms of turning and merging?* Drivers can turn across the bus lane and pavement markings and signs will be used to indicate that. **Tegin noted that the City has a graphic that explains driver behavior for bus lanes in the Cambridge Street Code, which she will share with the group.**
- *How will the bus lane be maintained? Other bus lanes have faded pavement markings.* Tegin explained that many other bus lanes in the area are pilots and do not have the long lasting bright red material that would be used for this project. Another Working Group member asked if the paint has been tested for red/green color blind drivers. Rick Plenge, HDR, noted that the red color treatment is consistent with federal guidelines.
- *The loading zone is needed right past Putnam Street in the vicinity of Riverside Pizza.* Tegin responded that the flex space is undefined at this point and the City will think through what is needed. For example, a loading zone may only be needed at specific hours. Outreach has started to local businesses to understand loading needs.

4. East of Putnam Avenue to Fairmont Street
   (Note the corresponding slide title is labeled as East of Putnam Avenue to Franklin Street)
   This location does not contain any signalization and is very constrained - the bus lane provides flexibility on the roadway for when there is construction, maintenance, or trash operations. The concept design is focused on flex space and the transit lane.

Several questions were raised at this location:

- *Could the bus lane be limited to rush hour only?* Tegin responded that this is possible, but in off-peak times there is less congestion, and so less need for two travel lanes. The transit lane could also serve as parking in off-peak times; however, if the use of the lane varies based on time of day there may be less compliance, and it has to be determined if that trade-off is worth it.
- *What will the sidewalk material be?* The sidewalks will be mainly concrete.
- *The area by Riverside Pizza is already loud with the few outdoor tables and this has been an issue with residents. Designating this as activation space may be a concern.*
- *Could bus lanes be designated to trucks in off-peak hours?* This depends on regulations, which the City will look into more. Pete noted that this would mean trucks are traveling adjacent to the cycle track.

5. Coast Café Area

The concept design shows moving the crosswalk to the opposite side of Rockwell Street so that aligns with proposed curb extensions on both sides and allows for more activation space on the east side of the intersection. There are many potential options for the flexible curb space in this area. This is also where the horizontal shift in the road starts. Before and after pictures were shown, with the after picture showing more plantings and built out curb extensions.

Several questions were raised at this location:

- *Keep the flex space by the Coast Café as short term parking. People are frequently seen illegally or double parking here to pick up food, including drivers from delivery app services.* Tegin responded that there might be an opportunity to work with the neighboring apartment building to provide more parking options, like flexible business parking. More thought needs to be given to what types of regulations will encourage the right kind of use.
- *Where would resident parking be provided?* The project team completed a parking turnover study, which showed that many cars stay on River Street for a long amount of time or even all day, using the space as vehicle storage. Bill Deignan,

Cambridge CDD, added that residents will continue to be able to get permits and use resident permit parking spaces.

6. Kelly Road/Howard Street Intersection

The existing signalized intersection does not meet signal warrants based on current traffic volume, but the signal serves several other purposes like providing a safe signalized pedestrian crossing to the Amigo's School, which participates in the state's Safe Routes to Schools Program, stops traffic for the fire department, and helps mitigate other implications of the design. Additionally, traffic volumes may increase with one of the two design options for Tubman Square (see #8). A Working Group member commented that the signal also provides traffic calming and creates gaps in traffic that facilitate safer pedestrian crossings downstream of the intersection. Tegin said this is a benefit of the signal and could be further improved, as right now there appear to be gaps followed by cars racing down the corridor.

7. Kelly Road/Howard Street to Auburn Street & "Flatiron" building area

With the location of the fire station in this segment a mountable curb area is proposed on the north side of River Street to allow fire truck movements. The segment also includes activation zones adjacent to businesses, tightened intersections where possible, curb extensions, and new crossings at Pleasant Street. There is opportunity at Pleasant Street for more placemaking and to create safer turning radii and a raised crossing. The intersection can be realigned to remove the skewed intersection approaches and reinforce slower turning maneuvers. The flat iron building is where the gas transmission lines transition from the south side of River Street and divert down Pleasant Street. This allow for greater flexibility of street trees and green infrastructure on the south side of River Street, east of Pleasant Street.

Several questions were raised at this location:

- *Can crosswalk protection like an RRFB be considered?* Tegin responded that these safety elements will be considered further as the design progresses.
- *It will be important to consider a safe way for cyclists to make a left at the Pleasant Street intersection on the route to Inman Square.* Making lefts for cyclists at intersections will be looked at.

8. At Pleasant Street/Tubman Square

Cynthia Smith, Halvorson Design Partnership, presented two options for consideration at the Pleasant Street Intersection/Tubman Square to alter traffic flow and enhance the currently underutilized space through placemaking.

1. *Pleasant Street as Local Access Only/Shared Street*. This option configures Pleasant Street as a shared street, serving as a pedestrian walkway. It would only be open to abutters, with seven parking spaces removed and one accessible space retained. The existing Tubman Square are would be expanded, with space

designated for active uses, art opportunities, short and long term staying, and a bus stop waiting area. Around Tubman Square circulation spaces for pedestrians and cyclists are provided where the roadway currently exists, expanding the overall multimodal space. At this point the space is not designated – there are many options for hard and softscapes and programmatic elements. The project team is interested in what type of activation the Working Group and public wants to see. This would be similar to the intersection at Pleasant Street, Auburn Street, and Western Avenue.

A Working Group member noted that school buses use this segment of Pleasant Street, which is something to consider moving forward as the diversion would create several turns for the buses.

2. *Close Kinnaird Street*. This option would fully close the segment of Kinnaird Street adjacent to Tubman Square to vehicles. This creates a larger traffic diversion and would require northbound vehicles on Pleasant Street to divert through the Kelly Road/Howard Street/ River Street intersection. As with the first option, Tubman Square would provide opportunity for more activated spaces, park space, plaza space, and the bus stop. General parking on Pleasant Street could be retained or not but would need to consider local business and residential needs.

Tegin stressed that there is a lot more detail to be determined as the team goes further into the design process. A slide summarizing the pedestrian safety and comfort features accomplished by the illustrated conceptual design was shown, as these have been fundamental elements of the project.

The City and project team expressed a need for feedback on how they are doing with meeting project goals and if they are on the right track with the design. The Working Group as a whole appeared to have a positive reaction to the reviewed conceptual design elements.

Options/Iterations

The conceptual designs developed thus far are a work in progress, with multiple options for consideration for each element and location. The City and project team are looking for Working Group members to provide input on what is missing and what needs to be discussed further. The project team will refine the concepts based on Working Group member input to bring to the larger public. Specifically, the project team is determining:

1. Where can better buffers be provided? Is parking the best use of flex space, or can parking be accommodated in other ways? The buffers could be plantings, additional sidewalk space, or seating space, etc.
2. The feasibility of providing an extra-wide (16-18-feet) single travel lane from Putnam Street to Auburn Street. This will be discussed further at the public meeting in November. The December Working Group meeting will help continue to refine and narrow down preferred alternatives.

4. Next Steps

Working Group members were asked to participate in and share the pre-construction online survey with friends and neighbors. The next Working Group meeting will be held on October 22, 2019 and focus on conceptual design from Auburn Street to Massachusetts Avenue, including the MBTA bus terminal area and Green Street. Working Group members are encouraged to review the conceptual design plans and provide detailed feedback to the City via email.

The second public meeting will be held on Tuesday, November 19, 2019. A new location is needed.

Several public comments were received prior to the conclusion of the meeting:

- *Most speakers were difficult to hear.* A microphone or other method of projecting voices was requested.
- *Question on if traffic studies were being completed in the area.* The project team is building a baseline model that projects traffic into the future based on existing volumes and anticipated trends. A high-level model has been developed and the team is now in the process of drilling down into a more micro-level of analysis.
- *Acknowledgement that River Street is both a regional street and neighborhood street and serves a different purpose than many if not all other streets in the city.* The street will continue to need to serve truck traffic and cars entering from Memorial Drive. All uses need to be considered in the design.
- *The first crosswalk at on River Street from Memorial Drive (at Whole Foods) is uncomfortable and dangerous for pedestrians and needs to be improved.*