

CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
TRANSIT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEETING NOTES

Date, Time & Place:
June 21, 2017, 5:30-7:30
MIT Stata Center, 32-124

Attendance

Committee Members

John Attanucci, Kelley Brown, Devin Chausse, Charlie Fineman, Robert Fitzgerald, Jim Gascoigne, Andrew McFarland, Katherine Rafferty, Simon Shapiro, Arthur Strang, and Saul Tannenbaum

City of Cambridge

Tegin Teich Bennett, Greg Hanafin, and Cleo Stoughton (Community Development); Adam Shulman (Traffic, Parking, and Transportation); Devon Bracher (Police Department)

Presenters, official entities, and members of the public

Phil Groth (MBTA) was present. Four members of the public were present.

Committee Introductions, Administrative Business, and Updates

Regarding the notes from the May Transit Committee meeting, John Hawkinson asked what “Hult” meant in the context of the EFIII project. Hult is the business school associated with Education First. Saul Tannenbaum asked, regarding the final item in the May notes, for clarification on when Transit Signal Priority would be implemented. TSP is up and running at the Mass. Ave. at Brookline St. intersection. Equipment has been installed at additional intersections, and the Traffic, Parking, and Transportation Department (TP&T) is working to acquire software to interface with it. These intersections will hopefully be active by the fall. Staff and the committee also discussed developing a monitoring plan for these projects. The notes were approved with these modifications. Saul Tannenbaum also called attention to a recent Cambridge City Council Order about greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles stopped at traffic lights. He advocated that TSP be considered in the order.

Public Comment

There were no comments at this time.

55 Wheeler Street Update

Adam Shulman (Traffic, Parking, and Transportation Department) gave an update on the 55 Wheeler Street project. The project has submitted materials in advance of a special permit application, and no Planning Board hearing date has been set yet.

Discussion:

- A committee member asked whether the city could set a lower (e.g., 0.6) parking space to unit ratio for this project since there is limited on street parking. He noted this would save the developer money. Adam clarified that TP&T uses data from similar, nearby projects to determine the appropriate amount of parking. Zoning requires one space per unit, and it is up to the applicant to ask for relief from zoning. A 0.75 ratio is the lowest recently approved as special permits in the Alewife area.
- It was noted that access to the Red Line from this location is poor. The area is in need of multiple bridges, including the Alewife bike/ped bridge and an additional bridge near Jefferson Park.
- The committee discussed how to influence parking policy in the city. It was noted that the Envision Cambridge Alewife group has been discussing parking in the area.

Update on Transit Initiatives

City staff provided updates and answered questions about ongoing initiatives, using the recent implementation plan product as a guide.

Discussion:

- Real-time transit displays: The committee asked whether the planned displays would be small or large format and reiterated that they would like to see at least one large format display in the city.
- Bus priority: Bus priority concepts at a couple locations are moving forward and will hopefully be implemented in the short term using temporary materials like paint. A committee member asked what “BRT” meant in this context. Here, we are discussing implementing various bus rapid transit elements like boarding islands, exclusive lanes and queue jump lanes, and all door boarding.

- Mt Auburn bus priority: The DCR Mt Auburn Street stakeholder group will have their final meeting once the near-term plans are at 100% design. The committee asked about enforcement of bus lanes. Staff noted there are some questions outstanding, including whether tickets can be issued to drivers driving in—rather than parking in—bus lanes.
- Alewife bus priority: The committee and staff discussed priority lanes on access roads to Alewife. Questions to be answered include ownership and any potential pinch points.
- The committee then discussed an MBTA plan to run additional buses on routes in South Boston. They wondered how this was arranged, since the MBTA has long had a zero-sum policy when it comes to increasing service. Phil Groth (MBTA) clarified that this plan was in part possible because the Cabot garage saw an overhaul of its entire fleet, freeing up more buses that were previously preserved as spares for routine service. It is unclear whether this increase in service will be sustainable in the long run.
- The committee discussed the MBTA's upcoming service planning process. The committee has developed proposals (e.g., for Routes 72/74/75/78) they would like to see implemented, perhaps even sooner than the full service plan. They wonder how to accomplish this. Phil Groth noted that the service planning process does seem to be moving ahead and that the service planning department has begun preparing for the process. Part of the process will include developing service delivery goals, simplifying routes, and creating high frequency corridors. A committee member noted that the Kendall Square Transit Enhancement Fund can be used to help bolster support for service changes (e.g., piloting new routes). The KSTEP working group will be established soon and the committee is interested in being represented on that group.
- Transit signal priority: The committee asked to know which intersections were being set up for TSP. Staff will send out an update with that information.
- Inman Square redesign: The committee wondered what the timeline is for the project. Construction is scheduled to begin in the fall.
- EZRide: Jim Gascoigne reported that EZRide is operating some new buses and contracts are in place.
- Alewife bike/ped bridge: Committee members wondered whether an at grade crossing should be evaluated. Another member noted that it took many years to get Grand Junction crossings added.
- Parking and Transportation Demand Management: The committee discussed transit subsidies for affordable units and the possibility of a parking cashout program becoming a requirement for relevant projects. Members drew attention to a new FHWA report coming out soon and the NYC Commuter Benefits law.
- The committee discussed and did not come to an agreement about whether the committee should focus more on reviewing individual projects or on creating policy change.

Final Public Comment

There were no further comments.

Announcements, Events, and Updates

There were no further announcements.

Adjourned at 7:30 pm