

City of Cambridge Net Zero Transportation Plan Advisory Group

Meeting 3 Notes – Wednesday, April 26, 2023

The Advisory Group held its third meeting on Wednesday, April 26, 2023, at the Cambridge City Hall Annex and via Zoom. The objectives of the meeting were to –

- Continue to get to know each other and learn how to work together;
- Improve our understanding about how transportation is working for people in Cambridge and what matters to them;
- Begin to discuss what we need to prioritize in developing our Plan; and
- Check in on information Advisory Group members are interested in.

Below are key takeaways and action items, followed by a summary of discussions.

Key takeaways and action items

- Advisory Group members reviewed the guiding principles for working together and learned and shared about:
 - Proposed themes for future Advisory Group meetings; and
 - Input from Cambridge residents related to transportation.
 - Members shared the following insights (See below for more detail on these points.):
 - A key goal of the plan needs to be making transportation options more accessible
 - We should consider the equity and sustainability impacts of our actions beyond Cambridge.
 - Though Cambridge's actions alone won't solve climate change, we have a critical role to play.
- Poor transportation has unequal impacts. When the system breaks down, it hits those who are already struggling the most. CBI will re-share the points raised at the previous meeting on how to define "consensus" to ensure that Advisory Group members are all on the same page.

Welcome and introductions

Stephanie Groll (Community Development Department) welcomed Advisory Group members. Afterward, participants introduced themselves and shared about how their transportation habits have changed over the years.

Confirming guiding principles for working together

Advisory Group members also reviewed the following guiding principles for working together, which they developed at the last meeting:

- Respect each other's opinions and thoughts.

- There are no “stupid” questions.
- One person should speak at a time.
- Step up and step back.
- Strive to make decisions by consensus. If consensus cannot be reached, then be sure to document the opinions of those who are in the minority.
- Be mindful of how power shows up in conversations and be responsive to everyone’s views and needs.
- Be as inclusive as possible and aim to include voices from beyond traditional power structures.
- Be specific about what the Plan will need to address in the short term vs. the long term.

Overview of themes for future Advisory Group meetings

Afterward, the Advisory Group reviewed proposed topics for the Advisory Group’s remaining meetings.

So far, the Advisory Group has focused on **setting up and learning** from one another about transportation in Cambridge. Beginning with the next meeting, the focus will shift to **brainstorming and evaluating** possible strategies for reducing transportation emissions. This phase will also include understanding how to center equity in the Plan and how to share ideas with and learn from the broader community.

The third phase will focus on **deliberating and building agreement** on the strategies and actions that should be part of the Plan. Then, the Advisory Group will work on **forming recommendations for the Plan** itself, sharing it with the community, and documenting lessons learned from this process.

Advisory Group members thought that this was a good approach, given that it can continue to be flexible as needs come up.

What matters to people about transportation in Cambridge? What has the City heard?

Next, Advisory Group members heard about and discussed input that the City of Cambridge has heard related to transportation. This input came from four studies of views in Cambridge about several issues related to transportation and/or climate change. This information is not all the input that the City has received but includes feedback on issues of key relevance to the NZTP process and questions Advisory Group members have raised.

2022 Net Zero Transportation Plan interviews

Last year, CBI conducted qualitative interviews with 17 community organizations and individuals in Cambridge in order to learn more about their experiences with transportation in Cambridge and their thoughts on how the City should undertake a NZTP process. Some of the themes from the interviews were:

- **Different communities in Cambridge use transportation modes and infrastructure differently.** For example, there is the view that more BIPOC folks use buses, while more

white folks tend to use subways. Additionally, unhoused people often rely on transportation infrastructure for shelter.

- **Historic and current policies have excluded communities and have had negative effects on transportation access.** Several policies related to housing have shaped Cambridge’s demographics – these policies include redlining, loss of rent control, and insufficient affordable housing. These policies have caused some people to have better and worse transportation options than others.
- **Responsibilities and burdens for addressing climate change often fall inequitably.** There were concerns that marginalized people will be most negatively affected by policies to address climate change. “Saving the planet is everyone’s duty, but poor folks haven’t been using resources the way the wealthy have.”

Advisory Group members added that necessary state services (such as courthouses and the MA Department of Transitional Assistance) are moving away from transit centers, which makes it harder for individuals to access these services.

[2022 Parking Study focus groups and interviews](#)

CDD conducted focus group conversations on issues related to parking with underheard, underserved, and historically excluded communities. While people’s views on parking, transportation, and other issues varied, the following common values emerged regardless of their particular views:

- **Community:** “I need to be able to easily receive friends and family in my home. I want to feel closer to my community.”
- **Consensus building:** “I want to be involved in decisions the City makes, even if it’s a difficult conversation, and even if we disagree.”
- **Respect:** “I want people to treat me kindly, even if we choose different transportation options.”
- **Accountability:** “I want everybody to be held accountable for their behavior on our streets, no matter how they get around.”
- **Safety:** “I need to feel safe, no matter how I get around.”
- **Access:** “I need to know that I can easily and predictably get around to participate in all areas of life.”

[2020 Bicycle Plan Update comment summary](#)

These were interviews, focus groups, and listening sessions across demographic groups on cycling in Cambridge. People shared that some of the reasons why they bike in Cambridge are because biking is:

- Convenient and fun,
- Affordable,
- Easy to park a bike,
- Speedy,
- A good form of exercise,
- A good option for commuters, and
- A nice way to spend time with family.

Barriers to biking include:

- Dangerous driving,
- Lack of secure bike parking,
- Access to age-appropriate bikes,
- Concerns about biking being perceived as “inferior” to other options, and
- Connections with systemic inequities (affordable housing, gentrification, policing, etc.)

[2021 survey of residents’ views on climate change](#)

The City conducted a survey of residents’ views on climate change. The survey collected feedback from a sample of people in Cambridge who reflect the racial, income, gender, and age demographics in the City, and was conducted in several languages.

In terms of the impacts of climate change, Cambridge residents are most concerned about more hot days and nights, more powerful storms, and more flooding. There is slight variation among white vs. non-white respondents and respondents who do or do not have kids in their household.

Advisory Group members took note of the variations, especially between people with and without kids in their household.

[Advisory Group reflections](#)

After reviewing insights from the studies, Advisory Group members shared reflections, summarized as follows:

- **Make transportation options more accessible:** Several aspects of the transportation system are already difficult. For example, transit service is increasingly unreliable, especially after Covid. There are also challenges that come with having a car in Cambridge (e.g., finding parking), which is particularly significant for people coming from places that are not served by transit or for people with disabilities or other mobility limitations. This project should avoid placing more burden on people who are already struggling. Instead, the Plan should focus on making other options more accessible. One example could be electrical vehicle (EV) charging spots – older buildings typically do not have EV charging spots, which makes it harder for tenants to switch to EVs. The City could put in place a requirement about the number of charging spots that buildings must provide for their residents.
- **Equity and sustainability go beyond Cambridge:** It is important to fully understand how decisions in Cambridge interact with conditions outside of the city. Key questions to understand are 1) where Cambridge’s energy comes from, and 2) what mining and resource extraction is required to produce electric vehicles and their batteries. The Plan should take a “globalist” view and evaluate how equitable its effects are beyond Cambridge’s borders.
- **Cambridge has a role in addressing climate change:** Some of the largest greenhouse gas emitters globally are large corporations. While the city has a role to play, Cambridge’s influence on pollution is limited. Nonetheless, it is important to outline what Cambridge is willing and able to do while making it clear that corporations and other emitters will also need to play a role.

- **Poor transportation has unequal impacts:** Having predictable and reliable transportation options is a privilege, and the impacts and penalties of poor transportation are unequal. For some people, having to wait an extra 20 minutes for a bus could cause them to be fired from their jobs, whereas for others it is merely an inconvenience. Predictable transportation should be the standard and should be a focus of the Plan. Everyone stands to benefit from reliable and predictable transportation.

Information and resources requested

Next, Advisory Group members touched on resources shared after the last meeting:

- Net Zero Action Plan for building emissions;
- MassDOT Vehicle Miles Traveled tool; and
- Cambridge Green Fleet Policy.

Members are welcome to continue to share ideas and requests for resources, and CDD or the consultant team are happy to set up offline conversations.

Final reflections and conclusion

Advisory Group members closed the meeting by sharing what they learned during the meeting, with key insights as follows:

- Many people share the same values regardless of where they stand on specific transportation issues.
- Concerns about climate change seem to translate across different levels and social factors. People are experiencing real effects of climate change.
- The survey on views related to climate change might help inform strategies going forward.

The next meeting will take place on Wednesday, May 31, at 8:45 AM.

Attendance List

Advisory Group members

- Pastor Farris Blount (Western Avenue Baptist Church / Cambridge Black Pastors Alliance)
- Elizabeth Brusie (De Novo Center for Justice and Healing)
- Ali Sorrels (Cambridge Women's Center)
- Omriqui Thomas (Cambridge High School Extension Program student)
- Yao Wu (Chinese American Association of Cambridge)

Community Development Department staff

- Stephanie Groll (Mobility Strategy Manager)
- Susanne Rasmussen (Director of Environmental and Transportation Planning)

Consultant team

- Michael Bangert-Drowns (Arup)
- Brandon Chambers (Consensus Building Institute)
- Elizabeth Cooper (Consensus Building Institute)
- Kate Fichter (Arup)

Appendix A: Key points from off-line conversations

After the meeting, CBI met with Rachel Tanenhaus, James Pierre, Ibrahim Omar, and Karim El-Razzaz who were unable to attend the meeting, to catch them up on the information shared and hear their perspectives. Key points from these conversations are as follows:

- **Ensuring residents are part of the change-making process:** Cambridge residents often feel as if policy and infrastructure changes take place without their involvement and awareness. Although there will always be instances of information not reaching people, it is still important to build in the time to ensure that people are educated and informed about decisions that will affect them. This is especially important for individuals who are dealing with other more immediate problems and who do not have the time to engage in conversations about the environment and climate change. Nonetheless, it is important that people know about the work going on related to this Plan and the other studies.
- **Engaging in conversations about the environment:** Not everyone “believes in climate change,” and so it is often useful to focus instead on the tangible effects that people experience (which the survey on climate attitudes did well). There may also be organizations who have experience in bringing people together to have conversations about the environment and climate change. This is especially important given that many conversations around the built and natural environment in Cambridge (e.g., around cycling) are dominated by white voices. Another issue is that public servants are often threatened or attacked verbally or otherwise when engaging with the public on difficult issues which in turn limits public dialogue.
- **Avoiding a “zero-sum” situation:** Systems of oppression emphasize that resources are scarce. However, how these systems distribute resources is inequitable. Rather than encouraging people to fight over resources, it is important to recognize that people are complex and sometimes have conflicting needs. It is also important to understand which communities have benefited from this inequity and address the needs of communities that have been affected.
- **Difficulties with using transportation:** Some aspects of the transportation system are unusable for communities in Cambridge. Buses take much more time than trains and are near-impossible to take in some cases. For example, the City organizes soccer games for kids in elementary school, but several families are unable to participate because of the poor transportation options.
- **Intersections with housing & other factors:** Biking can be especially difficult for individuals in subsidized/Section 8 housing due to bike thefts or insufficient space. Additionally, whether someone rents or owns their home is often related to income. Culture and work requirements can also influence people to bike or not to bike.

- **City Green Fleet policy:** It is good thing that there is a policy for transitioning City-owned vehicles to electric power. However, the policy builds in exceptions for various reasons. This makes it seem like electrical vehicles are still inaccessible, even for the City. We need to “practice what we preach”.

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