

Transit Advisory Committee

October 2023

Abbreviated meeting summary

Attendance

Members

Present (9) Bill McAvinney, Arthur Strang, Jackson Moore-Otto, Jim Gascoigne, Peter Septoff, Carl Rothenhaus, Katherine Rafferty, Devin Chausse, Makayla Comas

Absent (1) Melissa Zampitella.

City staff (3)

Andrew Reker, Charlie Creagh (CDD); Adam Shulman (TPT)

Others (18)

Tara Kamal Ahmadi (MBTA); 19 members of the public (total viewers and phone-in listeners)

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

Welcome and Meeting Summary Approval

Andy Reker (AR) began the virtual meeting at 5:32 PM by welcoming members of the Transit Advisory Committee (TAC), members of the public and presenters. AR gave a tour of the virtual space for people joining by application and telephone and shared ground rules for virtual meeting participation.

Carl Rothenhaus (RA) then conducted a roll call of the members of the TAC – 9 members were present, 1 were absent. The committee conducted a roll call vote to approve the meeting minutes for the September 2023 Committee Meeting. The committee voted 5 in favor, with 1 voting present, and 2 as absent. The committee approved the meeting summary.

Presentation: North Cambridge Pedestrian and Bicycle Crossing Feasibility Study

AR introduced Charlie Creagh who presented on the North Cambridge Pedestrian and Bicycle Crossing Feasibility Study. The study focused on planning for a ped/bike crossing of the Fitchburg Main Line near Danahy Park and Fresh Pond Mall.

The process of the feasibility study began in 2022 when the city developed several crossing options including bridge and tunnel options. The city then ramped up engagement and began to confirm their design direction. The goal is to have the project completed by the end of 2024. The city wants to have a convenient, safe, and accessible crossing between Ridge Avenue and Danahy Park and beyond. The city aims to improve resident connections to popular destinations and other important close paths. The city will pay for this project using 2million allocated dollars, plus 600k in ARPA funds.

The city then presented the design challenges of such a crossing. The city noted that they had acquired property next to the Fitchburg Line to accommodate such a crossing. The city also acquired a number of easements – an opportunity for the city to use another property, usually private, for a specific purpose – from neighboring landowners to enable the Fitchburg line crossing. The city also acquired air rights – a type of easement – to build a bridge over the Fitchburg line. Finding these easements was a significant step in the feasibility study.

The city then showed a number of proposed options for a tunnel under the Fitchburg Line. These options proved unfeasible for a number of reasons. Some options were not wide enough to be adequately accessible in the view of the city. Other options provided tunnels that were too short or had entrances that were too steep. The city and local stakeholders also raised sanitary and safety concerns. The MBTA preferred a bridge rather than a tunnel as they were concerned that a tunnel might hinder further development of the Fitchburg Line in years to come. The city decided that a bridge over the tracks would be the most feasible option.

The city then explained their grant application process and discussed their partners in this project including MassDOT, the MBTA, and the Cambridge Redevelopment Authority.

The city then turned it to members of the TAC for Questions and Comments. The city's responses are in italics.

- One member expressed that he was supportive of the city's commitment to accessibility and the proposed connections to Danehy Park.
- One member was supportive of the city's choice of a bridge over the tracks rather than a tunnel. The member also stressed that longer ramps over the crossing were not a bad thing as a less steep slope would be more accessible to those in wheelchairs. The member also explained that he preferred an at grade connection to Danehy park rather than a staircase to the park from the bridge as it would be more accessible.
- One member of the TAC asked if this project was an MPO project.
 - o *Not yet, but the city would like it to be and is taking steps for it to be.*
 - o *The Boston MPO oversees a transportation fund from the federal government. All the cities inside of I-495 can apply for funds from the Boston MPO.*
- One member of the public was concerned about snow and ice clearing during the winter months.
 - o *The city is looking to learn from other government agencies in the region that maintain similar crossings. The aim is to the crossing safe and accessible during the colder months.*
- One member of the public was concerned about safety and vandalism on this bridge.
 - o *This is something that the city will have to work through as the project moves along.*

During the presentation and discussion with TAC members, members of the public submitted the following questions in the text Q&A. Responses are in italics.

- Could you have a round of public comment after the first presentation, for those who may not be able to or want to stay for second hour please?
 - o If there is time after the TAC discussion, we may be able to do so. You may also submit any comments on this project to Charlie (today's presenter) by sending an e-mail to ccreagh@cambridgema.gov.
- How does one get a copy of the grant application?

- You may contact the presenter by sending an e-mail to ccreagh@cambridgema.gov.
- Is this being studied and will the city pay Brickworks for extra clean up, snow removal, security patrols, etc. that would result from a path through the Brickworks' property?
 - Answered during the verbal presentation
- What reasons did the T give for declining to make the additional space needed for one of the tunnel options feasible?
 - Answered during the verbal presentation
- How will the path be fenced? I am a disabled resident in the easement area & rely on the narrow accessible-route walkways, (ex. ~ 3' wide walkways with 90-degree zero-visibility turns). It concerns me that CDD timeline is not to "work with stakeholders on design" until after funding is secured ~ not until 2024 or 2025.
 - Thanks for your comment. We will work with stakeholders on design. Design work would be limited until we identify additional funding.
- Can you comment on electric scooters/electric bicycles and proposed easements, if those easements accommodate those transportation modalities?
 - I don't have that legal language in front of me, and would need to check with law department.

City and MBTA Updates

Andy Reker (AR) presented upcoming meetings for the TAC, including:

- Thursday, November 2nd
 - CRA Grand Junction Transit Study
 - MBTA Central Square Accessibility Improvements Project
- Thursday, December 7th

Next scheduled joint meeting of the Transit/Bike/Pedestrian committees:

- Wednesday, October 18th
- Wednesday, November 15th – Which will discuss Massachusetts Ave

AR then provided an update on City and MBTA projects affecting Cambridge, including:

- City Projects with updates:
 - Concord Transit Signal Priority
 - Preparatory work is beginning this month once the contracts are awarded.
 - One member of the TAC suggested the city should share its data from the Concord Ave TSP once it is implemented, just like they did for North Massachusetts Ave redesign.
 - Aberdeen Avenue @ Mt. Auburn Street intersection
 - The city is looking to install new signal equipment and to change the traffic pattern at this location.
 - Work is scheduled to begin late this month or early November.
 - One member asked about the project timeline.
 - *This project is measured in weeks rather than months.*
 - Massachusetts Avenue
 - Design for Massachusetts Avenue between Linnean St. and Waterhouse St.

- Belmont Street.
 - Construction on this stretch has resumed and is fully underway, including the installation of the raised side street crossings.
- Real time transit screens
- MBTA Projects With Updates
 - Squires Bridge Transit Diversion – will conclude by October 12th.
 - There are a number of upcoming subway diversions.
 - The Red Line from JFK to Mattapan will be completely replaced with busses during the mid-month.
 - Service will be disrupted on the Haverhill commuter rail line until 11/5.

AR then presented data on how the MBTA has changed since the beginning of the pandemic, through the implementation of the slow zones.

- Historical Ridership
- Travel Times:
- Scheduled bus trips
 - One member of the TAC commented that this is an abject failure of the MBTA to supply service to the city. The city and the TAC should encourage the MBTA to explain their plan to fix it.
 - *The city agreed and said that the city is also constantly asking for updates from the MBTA.*
- The City stated that the MBTA showed extreme resistance to making the 1, 68, and 69 bus free to ride, despite the city's offer to pay for the implementation of fare free service using ARPA money. For the MBTA, fare-free transit in Cambridge was not viable, despite fare-free services currently existing in Boston.
- One member of the TAC stated that they want the MBTA to explain why. What is the difference between Cambridge and Boston.
- One member of the TAC asked if there were good places unfiltered data on transit.
 - AR and members of the TAC proceeded with a quick discussion of sources: [TransitMatters](#) and the MBTA themselves (where available) are the best sources for interested individuals.

Discussion: Subcommittee Actions

City staff facilitated a discussion on next actions for the City and MBTA Subcommittees including:

- MBTA Subcommittee: Will meet to write a letter to the MBTA about failures to provide service. The subcommittee will schedule this letter writing session via email.
- City Subcommittee – Will meet in Porter Square on October 19th at 4:30pm to look at blocked bus stops and any delays in travel times.

Public comment

AR then opened the meeting to public comment.

- One member of the public had multiple concerns around the easement including that there is no direct connection from the proposed bridge to Rindge Avenue. Those wishing to go from the proposed bridge to Rindge Ave would have to navigate a very circuitous

route with up to 30 utility grates present. The member of the public also said that they were concerned about the ADA compliance of this route and of the ADA compliance of routes to nearby buildings.

- One member of the public was concerned about the city not having any plans for real-time transit screens east of Inman Square.
 - o *The city replied that it is looking to find additional funding from developers and money from the capital budget to install additional real time signage in bus shelters with advertising panels – including shelters along Cambridge Street in East Cambridge.*

The meeting was adjourned at 7:01 PM

Version Information

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Approval: _