

Transit Advisory Committee

December 2023

Abbreviated meeting summary

Attendance

Members	Present (6) Arthur Strang, Jackson Moore-Otto, Jim Gascoigne, Peter Septoff, Carl Rothenhaus, Devin Chausse
	Absent (4) Katherine Rafferty, Melissa Zampitella, Bill McAvinney, Makayla Comas
City staff (1)	Andrew Reker (CDD)
Others (10)	Jeff Lowenberg, Zach Miller, Keir Evans (Boston Properties); Tom Evans, Cecelia Cobb, Joel Smith (CRA); Tara Kamal Ahmadi (MBTA); 3 members of the public

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

Welcome and Meeting Summary Approval

Andy Reker (AR) began the virtual meeting at 5:35 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, 6 members were present, 4 were absent. The committee conducted a roll call vote to approve the meeting minutes for the October and November Committee Meetings. The committee voted all in favor of approving the meeting minutes.

Presentation: Kendall Headhouse

AR then turned the presentation over to presenters from Boston Properties and the CRA that oversee the redesign of the Kendall headhouse. The presenters introduced themselves to the committee in turn.

The presenters began by laying out the context of the project:

- The Kendall Headhouse is the main entrance to Kendall Square Station and was last redesigned in 1987 as part of an urban renewal project.
- When the old building at 325 Main Street was constructed in 1987, the headhouse was attached to the adjacent building. The construction of the new 325 Main Street has necessitated the construction of a new headhouse.

- The project has been in review and planning since 2018 and has had to undergo review by both the Cambridge Government and the MBTA.
- The project is being completed in two phases:
 - o Phase 1: 325 Main Street, the porch of 325 Main Street, and the up-park above the station.
 - o Phase 2: the headhouse (due to the longer planning process) which is under construction as of December 2023.
- The designer realized that the new up-park and pathways created a great connection between the parks on the other side of Main Street.
- Turner Construction is building the headhouse – the same company that built the headhouse across the street.

The presenters then displayed a number of architectural drawings of the planned headhouse and the temporary station access tunnel. The excavation of the temporary station access tunnel is ongoing.

The project team aims to have the new headhouse open in June of 2025.

The city then turned it to members of the TAC for Questions and Comments. The responses from the presenters are bolded, responses from the city are in italics.

- One member asked why the temporary access tunnel was not being made permanent as a secondary entrance.
 - o **The temporary route is in a section of the building that is being leased by the MIT COOP. Once the station is open, the COOP will re-take control of the space.**
- One member asked who is paying for the project.
 - o **Boston Properties. The cost is 17 mil dollars.**
- The member also asked if any part of the project involves any upgrades or changes to the station beyond the fare gates.
 - o **Boston Properties is renovating the elevators, planters, pavers, and earthwork, but nothing at platform level is being renovated. The platform area is the jurisdiction of the MBTA.**
- One member asked about what lies underneath the station headhouse.
 - o **Underneath the station on the north side is the loading area for the adjacent building**
- One member asked a question related to the Main Street streetscape
 - o **The plan is for enhanced shelters for shuttle busses and other transit. The presenters stated their vision for the area surrounding the headhouse to act as a transit plaza. This vision is evolving as they learn about the MBTA's plan for the area.**
- One member asked what level of flow was planned for.
 - o **The same as before the renovation except:**
 - **Riders will be able to come up steps/escalator and turn left and walk through the building complex to Ames Street and the garage. This will hopefully reduce the number of people who commute through the lobby of the Marriott.**
- One member asked about real time transit information:

- **The project includes the installation of real time transit information in the plaza so that people can sit in the plaza on nice days and walk down the steps to the station when their train is about to arrive.**
- One member asked about the seating areas:
 - **The seating area redesign will mimic what is already there, as well as added seating along the side of the headhouse.**

The presenters concluded by saying to the committee that they believe that it is a great accomplishment that they will be able to complete the reconstruction of the headhouse without having to close the station.

City and MBTA Updates

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

- The city presented the road diet proposal for Massachusetts Ave between Linnean and Waterhouse streets.
 - One member asked about feedback in terms of parking
 - *The metaphorical temperature was lower than in previous events*
 - One member noted that 80 to 90% of current parking spaces will be conserved in this section.
 - The city asked the members of the TAC to provide thoughts on having only one bus lane on side of the street.
 - One member commented that for them it was not as much of a concern in this section, but a big deal in other sections of Mass Ave.
- The curbing to the entrance of the Russell field/Jerry's Pond area on Rindge Ave has been modified to ensure that busses do not tip over upon entering the lot.
- The reconfiguration of Mt. Auburn at Aberdeen intersection will begin in spring. Project updates for the TAC to come in May 2024.
- Huron Work ongoing. The city will begin striping the new surface in the spring.

The city then presented on updates to the Belmont Street reconstruction.

- The city provided an image of the new bus stop design which includes an older design concept for a sidewalk & boarding space.
 - The city plans to put crosswalk markings across the bike lane which match up to where the front and back doors of the bus are going to be when boarding.
- The city hopes to have the MBTA announce to passengers to "watch for bikes" when they disembark.
- One member asked about installing yield markings on the ground in the bike lane.
 - *The city explained that they will not be installing any sort of yield markings because there is no good, universally understood sign that would tell bikers who to yield too. Crossing markings, rather than yield signs, are better understood by cyclists as a place for pedestrians to cross a bike lane.*
 - *The city explained that they also do not use green paint in these scenarios as it makes cyclists think that they have right of way.*

One member proposed other options to keep pedestrians and bike riders safe such as a triangle that would narrow the bike path, or a sign on the back of buses that tells pedestrians to yield to bicyclists.

- *The city may place an a-frame sign at the bus stop to explain the new bus stop to riders.*

One member asked if this stop design was being implemented at other locations in Cambridge.

- *No. There will only be one other stop that looks like this one, and it will be the stop a couple hundred yards away in Belmont.*

One member began a discussion of enforcement of new traffic patterns.

- *New enforcement is usually carried out by CPD in September when there are an elevated number of new-to-the-area individuals using the streets of Cambridge. Legally only the CPD can enforce traffic laws/ hand out citations.*
- *A TAC Discussion with the CPD could occur.*

MBTA Track Improvements

- *A number of sections of subway will be closed in 2024 to enable timely and reliable service.*
- *Updates to this can be found at www.mbta.com/trackprogram*
- *Bus replacements will occur for lengths of time between 4 and 21 days*
- *Shut downs will occur 7 times on the Red Line and 7 times on the Green Line*

Closures affecting Cambridge:

- *Alewife to Harvard – February 5 to 13*
- *Alewife to Kendall – July 8 to 23*
- *Kendall/MIT to Broadway – October 15 to 20*
- *Harvard to Park – December 14 to 19*

City staff are working with the MBTA to plan for shuttle operations and evaluate mitigations.

- *On street mitigations – dedicated shuttle stops, etc.*
- *Off street – free or reduced fares for alternative services*
- *Communications to constituents*

One member asked about temporary bus lanes as a red-line closure mitigation.

- *The number of buses needed to carry even 50% of the Red-Line's post covid ridership numbers is immense.*

One member mentioned that during the orange line shutdown, Boston went all in on bus lanes and the traffic fall-out was significantly reduced. The member also mentioned transit signal priority as a helpful traffic mitigation tool.

The city is also looking at commuter rail as an alternative mode of transit.

One member asked if a temporary commuter rail station at alewife would be possible?

- *Not feasible for the February timeline, but the city has proposed this to the MBTA.*

One member stated that more-than-hourly service on the commuter rail would be super impactful and gave the Fairmount line as an example.

One member asked about the possibility of express busses and gave possible examples of express routes.

- *T is more open to it than they were historically. The challenge is that the road bottlenecks are where the stations are (Harvard being the prime example).*

One member recommended the free ferry service that the MBTA provided to alleviate traffic to Logan Airport and travel on the Blue Line

One member told the group that hiring efforts at the MBTA are ongoing to alleviate the staffing shortage, but the MBTA still has a long road ahead.

Upcoming TAC Meetings and Joint Committee Meetings

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

- Next TAC Meeting is January 4th.
- The next joint meeting is Wednesday December 13th
- One member suggested that the MBTA subcommittee do a site visit to the new Kendall Square Headhouse in June 2025 when it opens.

AR proposed in person meetings in the upcoming year at the senior center or 344 Broadway using technology that the city has newly adopted.

The city is working on having the MBTA present to the members of the TAC on the electrification work at the North Cambridge Carhouse.

Public comment

There were no members of the public who gave comments.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:50 PM

Version Information

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Approval: