

CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
TRANSIT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEETING NOTES

Date, Time & Place:
April 6, 2016, 5:30-7:30
MIT building 32, Room 144, Vassar Street

Attendance

Committee Members

John Attanucci, Devin Chausse, Karen Dumaine, Charlie Fineman, Doug Manz, Jeremy Mendelson, Simon Shapiro, Arthur Strang, Saul Tannenbaum, Alexander Taylor, Ritesh Warade

City of Cambridge

Tegin Bennett, Jennifer Lawrence, and Cleo Stoughton (Community Development); Joseph Barr, Dana Benjamin, and Adam Shulman (Traffic, Parking, and Transportation)

Presenters, official entities, and members of the public

Eight members of the public were present. Philip Groth (MBTA) was present.

Committee Introductions, Administrative Business, and Updates

March 2016 notes were not yet approved because quorum was not met. Arthur Strang suggested clarifying in the notes (“Mt Auburn Street Bus Priority” section) that Routes 71 and 73 share a common routing along Mt Auburn Street through this part of Cambridge, and that both routes experience significant delay in the identified segment. Updated notes will be brought to the next meeting.

Committee members highlighted two upcoming events: Transportation Camp, an “unconference” on April 9, and Solving Transit and Traffic Problems in the Cambridge Corridor, a series of presentations on April 30.

Public Comment

There were no public comments at this time.

Transit Signal Priority (TSP)

Joe Barr, Director of Traffic, Parking & Transportation for the City of Cambridge, described what TSP is and some of the challenges and opportunities associated with implementing it in Cambridge. He then gave an update on efforts to explore implementing TSP at particular intersections along Massachusetts Avenue.

Information and discussion:

- Certain intersections are more or less appropriate for implementing TSP, depending on the volumes and types of vehicles on the intersecting streets. Giving priority to buses along one street may mean delaying buses on the perpendicular street. Implementation of TSP must also take into account the fact that Cambridge uses concurrent pedestrian signals to create a pedestrian friendly environment (i.e., pedestrians are given the walk along with traffic flow in the same direction).
- The City is exploring a communication system between signals that could be administered from a central location (i.e., 344 Broadway). The MBTA, receiving location information from individual buses, could then communicate directly with the City’s system to send out TSP-related requests for the particular signals those buses are approaching.
- The City hopes to pilot TSP at a few locations along Massachusetts Avenue (e.g., at Hancock Street and Brookline Street) and then, once the system is running smoothly, expand the project to more intersections along Massachusetts Avenue and throughout the city.
- Joe Barr and the Committee discussed the reasoning for choosing the two pilot locations—these are relatively simple intersections that will allow the City to test the communications technology as well as the parameters for requesting and granting priority—and discussed other possible future locations.
- It was noted that metrics need to be used to convey the benefits (or costs) of implementing TSP. TSP ideally decreases travel time and improves reliability. The travel time savings may be only a few seconds, but multiplied over the number of riders and combined with reliability improvements, the benefits of TSP can be significant.
- Other communications methods were discussed, including fiber. There is a City Broadband Task Force focusing on the possibility of implementing broadband service and expanding fiber assets in Cambridge.

- The importance of pairing TSP with other bus priority treatments (such as queue jumps, bus only lanes, etc.) was noted. TSP alone may not result in the time savings we would like to see.

TransitScreen Intercept Survey Results and Next Steps

Jennifer Lawrence, Sustainability Planner for the Community Development Department, discussed the results of the TransitScreen surveys and gathered feedback from Committee members on future real-time transit information displays and surveys. TransitScreens are now in the following City buildings: Main Library, City Hall, Citywide Senior Center (Central Square), City Hall Annex, Cambridge Rindge and Latin School, the Department of Public Works, and Cambridge Hospital. Feedback about TransitScreens (e.g., malfunctioning screens) can be reported through [Commonwealth Connect](#) or emailed directly to Jen Lawrence (jlawrence@cambridgema.gov).

Information and discussion:

- In addition to the types of screens that have recently been installed, TransitScreen and other companies have various products that could also be of use in Cambridge. These other technologies include projection systems, E Ink-based displays, and traditional LED displays, like those seen in MBTA stations. Each technology has pros and cons; for example, only some are weather-hardened.
- The Committee brought up examples from other cities, including solar powered bus shelters in Los Angeles that serve as WiFi hotspots; San Francisco, where there are small real-time displays at most bus stops; and a pilot to place TransitScreens on Bigbelly solar-powered trash receptacles.
- It was noted that one size doesn't fit all. Larger displays may be appropriate in squares or transportation hubs, while smaller displays could be used at more remote bus stops.
- The Committee discussed the ways these displays are useful in a world where many people have smartphones and can access the same information. There is still a significant population without smartphones. Additionally, these displays often package together information from multiple sources (e.g., subway, more than one bus route, Hubway, Uber/Lyft), which would take an individual a while to obtain otherwise, even with a smartphone.

Announcements, Events, and Updates

- *Envision Cambridge:* Committee member Karen Dumaine is participating in the Alewife working group. It is important that the Transit Advisory Committee be formally involved in the process.
- *Green Line Extension:* Updated plans, stripped of features deemed unnecessary for the project, will be presented to the MPO and FMCB later in April.
- *MIT NoMa/SoMa project:* The Planning Board meeting has not yet been scheduled. Staff will keep the Committee updated.
- The Committee should email staff with any ideas about topics for upcoming meetings. Additionally, at the May meeting, the Committee will decide whether to meet and what kind of meeting to have in July and August.

Final Public Comment

- Ken Terrell expressed his appreciation for how the new Government Center station turned out.
- Jeremy Mendelson made note of a [late-night service proposal](#) that he and other transportation advocates put together. It was decided that he would present this proposal at the May Transit Committee meeting.

Adjourned at 7:30 pm