Transit Advisory Committee Orientation | January 2022 Abbreviated meeting summary

Attendance

Members	***Present*** (12) John Attanucci (Chair), Saul Tannenbaum, Bill McAvinney, Matthew Coogan, Melissa Zampitella, Peter Septoff, Jackson Moore-Otto, Casey Berg, Carl Rothenhaus, Katherine Rafferty, Sylvia Parsons, Devin Chausse
	Absent (4) Kelley Brown, Jim Gascoigne, Arthur Strang, Kristiana Lachiusa
City staff (4)	Kelsey Tustin, Andrew Reker (CDD); Adam Shulman (TPT); Carole Sousa (DHSP)
Others (0)	0 members of the public

Note: CDD = Community Development Department; TPT = Traffic Parking and Transportation Department; DHSP = Department of Human Service Programs; MBTA = Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority

Welcome and committee introductions

Andy Reker (AR) began the virtual meeting at 5:30 PM by welcoming members of the TAC, members of the public and presenters. AR gave a tour of the virtual space for people joining by application and telephone and shared some ground rules for virtual meeting participation. Kelsey Tustin (KT) then conducted a roll call of the members of the Transit Advisory Committee – 12 members were present, 4 were absent.

AR then introduced two city staff members. Adam Shulman (AS) is a transportation planner for TPT and Carole Sousa (CS) works for DHSP focusing on outreach and engagement to underserved areas throughout the city.

Discussion: Communication and Group Agreements

AR then introduced the topic of Communication and Group Agreements. The purpose of this topic was to ensure the committee understands the structure and resources in place so that everyone in the group feels respected and welcome. This is a topic that the Community Development Department is currently working on to encourage new voices and diverse perspectives, while also discouraging hate and stereotyping.

TAC Members had the following comments and questions. City staff responses are found below the question, in italic text.

- It is important to consider that these meetings exclude people who don't have internet, even though virtual meetings have the potential to expand the audience.

The city acknowledges that we should not rely on meeting virtually since the portion of residents without internet may not be able to participate. For broader feedback, the city has done community engagement in person by meeting transit riders where they are – at bus stops and stations or at community events.

- Does the city have a plan for holding hybrid public meetings soon?
  There is no plan in place for this at the present time, we are evaluating the resources required to do hybrid meetings. This evaluation is ongoing because other municipalities and departments report that hybrid meetings require a lot of staffing and resources.

AR presented the Communications Agreement, which ensures that all members of the group show respect, embrace diversity, actively listen, limit strong forms of reaction, not debate, and not tolerate hateful or stereotypical comments. This agreement should be signed by all members of the group.

AR opened the discussion to the group for questions or comments:

- Why is the TAC the first committee to go through this process?
  It is an appropriate time having new members in the group. It's also a new process that CDD is working to expand.

- How should members submit the agreement to city staff?
  The Communications Agreement can be signed electronically and emailed, or printed, signed, and emailed or mailed to the city.

AR then introduced the Code of Conduct, which defines rules that the group will utilize to express the intention of the communication agreements. The discussion was opened to the group for suggestions. Some of the discussion is summarized below:

- Is the Code of Conduct and Communications Agreement entirely necessary? This space is already very open and inclusive.
- There may be challenges for the public to participate in the public comment period. Some TAC members must leave the meeting before the comment period, which is not fair to the public.
- Should there be a public comment period added during the middle of the meetings in addition to the period at the end of the meetings?
- The public should not be allowed to say the same comment in both periods, as there have been issues with this in the past.
- The comment period in the middle of the meeting should be restricted to topics in the first half of the meeting, as with the later comment period in the second half of the meeting.
- Oftentimes the public comments are not related to the agenda, so comments should not be restricted in that way.
- We should avoid restrictions that discourage people to speak.
- Public comments should be restricted to 3 minutes per person. This should be made clear to members of the public.
- The comment period could take place at the beginning of each meeting.

- We should make a log of public comments, along with a progress report from the city addressing those comments. Sometimes members of the public don't feel that their comments are addressed, so this would create accountability.
  City staff noted that public comments are captured in the meeting summary. Even though public comments aren't tracked, they are often addressed.
- Tracking public comments is a time-consuming task. Who would take this on?
- The public comment period should take place at the beginning of the meeting. However, we should ensure that the meetings begin no later than 5:30 PM.
- Public comments at the beginning of the meeting may be irrelevant to the discussion. It's better to have the comment period at the end.
- The timing is irrelevant, but the public deserves predictable comment periods. Other members agreed with this comment.

AR then shifted the discussion to the Code of Conduct for advisory committee members, asking members for further input in addition to the public comment period.

- The purpose of the Code of Conduct is understandable, but more effort should be made to bring underrepresented voices in the room.
  City staff noted that there has been negative non-verbal feedback at other virtual public meetings, for example, eye-rolling. This can cause people to feel unwelcome, especially minority groups.
- Person-focused language can help reduce stereotyping.
- We need to think more about outreach and community engagement strategies, especially to make people aware of the existence of the committee. Is there a way for people to submit comments, for example, via email, if they cannot attend the committee meeting?
- It is important to be able to express positive reactions, which seems to be discouraged in the Communications Agreement.
  City staff responded that showing positive body language and reactions are encouraged. The reference in the Communications Agreement refers to reactions that silence or dismiss others.
- The TAC plays an important role within transit advocacy, which may involve providing critical feedback to presenters during meetings. The TAC should have the ability to provide honest opinions and feedback.
- Personal attacks should be avoided. Though it may have been encouraged in the past, this type of communication is wrong. While some reactions are involuntary, TAC members should show respectful and civil disagreement when necessary.
  The agreements can be modified the next time the group meets in person. City staff often use the oops-ouch-educate model, which we can introduce in future meetings if conflicts arise.

Review: TAC Role in City Government

AR then addressed the laws that TAC members are subject to as part of City Government. First he reviewed the Open Meeting Law, which states that any public deliberation must be notified to the public. It's also important that members refrain from sharing opinions and asking group-based questions over email, as this method of communication should only be used for informational purposes.

The next law that AR addressed was Conflict of Interest, which TAC members are also subject to. If members see a topic on the agenda that they will not be able to participate in during the discussion due to a conflict of interest, they should let Andy know in advance.

Review: City's plans and other materials

AR then transitioned to discussing the city's policies and plans that are most relevant to the TAC, including:

- Cambridge Growth Policy
- Vehicle Trip Reduction Ordinance
- Complete Streets
- Transit Strategic Plan
- Cycling Safety Ordinance
- Envision Cambridge

AR summarized that the city's street design is driven by the idea that streets should be safe and slow to accommodate people of all ages and abilities. The city focuses on moving people and goods rather than cars.

TAC Actions and Work Plan

AR then addressed the ways in which TAC members can interact with city staff and state agencies. For city staff, TAC members can request presentations on city projects and review materials presented to city bodies. For state agencies, the TAC can request presentation on state agency projects (MBTA, DOT, DCR), review materials from public meetings, and send comment letters to state agencies. AR then listed some examples of previous TAC recommendations and proposals to the city and state, as well as the process to receive feedback.

AR then opened the discussion to the TAC for comments and questions:

- Can the TAC send a letter to city staff? This may have been done in the past, especially when there is a consensus amongst the TAC for a specific project.
  AR responded that typically this is not done, since, city staff take back the feedback from the TAC to staff meetings and thus report to the City Manager and other departmental leadership.
- One of the most productive actions that one member had experienced in the past was when a few TAC members went to a City Council subcommittee meeting. Their agenda was to discuss subsidized MBTA passes, but the meeting resulted in discussing minimizing vehicle transportation.
- Is there is a tool that the city can use to gather input about projects from the public, similar to SeeClickFix, which can then be redirected to the project manager or committee? This would be helpful for people to provide public comment who cannot attend the TAC meetings.
  The city's engagement process can be a topic of discussion in a future meeting.
- Regulations.gov is a portal for the public to comment on any federal government project. The city could consider modeling a comment portal based off of this.
- AS previously gave regular updates on the status of projects. Could this be reinstated?

There hasn't been a lot to comment on lately, but we can bring it back if it's helpful.

- The city must deal with digital inequity, suggesting that online engagement may be more of a problem than a solution. The City Council is looking at the co-organize platform as an option.
  Agreement that online engagement is one tool that can be useful, but should not be relied upon.

Public comment

No public comments were made during this meeting.

Meeting was adjourned at 7:01 PM

Version Information

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