

# City of Cambridge Net Zero Transportation Plan Advisory Group

Meeting #10 notes – Wednesday, March 27, 2024

The Net Zero Transportation Plan (NZTP) Advisory Group held its tenth meeting on Wednesday, March 27, 2024, at the Cambridge City Hall Annex and via Zoom. The objectives of the meetings were to:

- Review the NZTP development timeline;
- Understand input from March community meetings and plan upcoming community engagement; and
- Continue discussing and refining potential actions for the NZTP.

Below are important points and action items, followed by a summary of discussions.

## Important points and action items

- The Advisory Group discussed community outreach plans. Action item: Let Brandon know if you would be interested in hosting a community event or meeting about the NZTP.
- CDD is extending the NZTP project timeline to the end of 2024.
- The Advisory Group reflected on feedback from March community meetings.
- The Advisory Group reviewed potential pricing actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, with discussions on feasibility and equity. The group agreed to further refine proposed actions to ensure effectiveness in achieving emission reduction goals and equity.

## Summary of discussions

### Welcome and introductions

Advisory Group members, staff, and consultants introduced themselves for members of the public and, in response to the check-in question, shared things that they were looking forward to in spring. Michael Bangert-Drowns (Arup) shared that he would be leaving Arup and said that Amy Liu-Pathak and Julia Clarke would be taking over from him on the technical consultant team.

### Project updates: Community outreach strategy & NZTP project timeline

Advisory Group members reviewed plans for community outreach as part of the plan. As a reminder, the Advisory Group's identified that an equitable community engagement process:

1. Is guided by community voices;
2. Is transparent;
3. Prioritizes underserved, underheard, and historically excluded groups of people;
4. Reduces harm;
5. Builds long-term relationships; and

6. Is accessible.

One component of that strategy is small community group events where Stephanie Groll (CDD) could share about the NZTP and receive input. As discussed previously, Advisory Group members could host these events with their communities and/or organizations. These could either be standing/existing meetings or special events focused specifically on the NZTP. Important points from discussion are as follows.

- The Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities and Margaret Fuller Neighborhood House could host a presentation at an upcoming meeting. It might be good to contact the Central Square Business Improvement District and share information at the Cambridge Dance Party as well.
- It would be good to get more youth involvement. One member wondered what the Advisory Group would look like if its members were all youth. A good next step might be to set up a small group event with youth involved in James Pierre's programming. Also, CDD is hiring a mobility engagement planner who would be focused on working with youth. CDD is also hosting students as part of the Mayor's Summer Youth Employment Program (MSYEP).

Advisory Group members reviewed updates to the NZTP project timeline. The Community Development Department (CDD) is seeking to extend the timeline until the end of calendar year 2024, with additional Advisory Group meetings. CDD is also working to secure additional stipend funding for members.

#### [Feedback from March community meetings](#)

Members reviewed feedback from recent community meetings. On March 6 and 7, CDD hosted two community meetings to introduce the broader community to the NZTP and gather initial reactions to potential actions. At the meetings, community members shared feedback on the 8 categories of proposed actions. CBI shared a summary of the community feedback and Advisory Group members shared the following reflections.

- Active transportation: One member observed that cyclists often do not follow the same rules as other road users, and that there are often near-collisions with cyclists who ride on sidewalks. Members also wondered whether there was any data to show what effect bike lanes were having on businesses.
- Parking: Significantly raising parking costs feels to some as "an attack on poor people." Members urged empathy and avoiding options that would make people's lives harder.
- Land use: In some parts of Cambridge, people are not close enough to necessities like grocery stores that carry the kind of food they need and can afford. It was noted that Cambridge's property tax rates are high for commercial properties, which keeps residential tax rates low for residential properties. Staff noted that residential properties generate much less traffic than commercial properties.
- Community engagement: Neighborhood associations could be good avenues for sharing information about the NZTP, given that most of the city is covered by an association. At the same time, not all associations are representative of their communities. Members also liked the idea of apps that could share info about transit times, such as the Transit

app and asked which one is best. However, the City's current policy is to not endorse one app over another because the apps are run by private entities.

- Vehicle ownership: It might be good to investigate how many cars there are in Cambridge per licensed driver. If that number is high, then those drivers might be using parking that others are unable to access. At the same time, it is important to note that having children or disabilities can oftentimes require people to have cars.
- Driving alone less: Traffic in certain areas, such as Alewife Brook Parkway, is painful. Most of this traffic comes from people commuting into and out of the city. Options to park at places like Alewife, where commuters can park and then take the T in would help with traffic.
- Buses, trains, and shuttles: Strategies that focus on buses might have greater impact than the subway, because they are able to go deeper into communities and are more flexible, and accessible.

### Review of potential NZTP actions

Members reviewed revisions to the potential NZTP actions. The group briefly recapped important points raised so far.

- The NZTP needs to reduce 100% of GHG emissions by 2050; the actions discussed so far don't reach 100% but start to get close.
- Emissions calculations are an *estimate* based on case studies in similar cities;
- Because this is a long-range high-level plan, some details about implementation will be determined in later studies;
- The NZTP needs to balance ambition with feasibility, and ensure actions are equitable; and
- This is dynamic—regulations and requirements are constantly shifting.
- There is a margin of error in estimates, but the data will become more robust over time.

To close the remaining gap in emissions reduction, there are generally 2 options:

- Add more actions
- Increase the impact of some actions already discussed.

Members reviewed 4 potential pricing actions that could reduce the remaining emissions.

- P-1. Increase the residential parking permit fee, with discounts for people who have low incomes;
- P-2. Increase parking meter prices;
- VO-2. Advocate for higher registration fees for private cars; and
- VO-3. Participate in State and regional discussions about congestion pricing.

Members shared the following feedback.

- "Means-testing" can be difficult procedurally: People often have to fill out several forms to prove that they qualify for income-based subsidies. It might be worth considering some kind of universal application or allowing people to claim subsidies based on MassHealth membership.

- Increasing parking: Given the scarcity of parking in Cambridge, it might make more sense to add more parking, then increase the fee. Residents sometimes choose to leave their cars sitting, rather than driving them, out of fear that they will not be able to find a parking spot when they return from their trips. The City is also currently looking at ways to change laws so that existing parking spaces (e.g., vacant lots) can be used in different ways (via the Parking Study).
- Making other modes better first: There are high-income people who do not feel the need to drive in Cambridge. It might be worth putting resources toward improving the public transit & walking experience first, then think about disincentives to drive a car afterwards. One member highlighted feeling unsafe walking home at night as a reason to choose to drive. At the same time, there is limited space in the city, so it is sometimes difficult to accommodate both parking and increased space for walking and biking.
- Bikers & pedestrians should share the street safely: Members expressed concern about interactions of pedestrians and bikers and highlighted issues with bikes on sidewalks and bikers not riding safely. There needs to be a safer way for bikers and pedestrians to share the street.
- Other difficulties with increasing prices: Increased parking meter prices might be difficult for direct service workers (e.g., healthcare providers). Increasing registration fees for more polluting cars might also benefit people with newer electric vehicles over people with older gas-powered vehicles (who often tend to have lower incomes or have a disability that needs a heavy-duty vehicle for wheelchair access).

Over the next several meetings, the Advisory Group will go back through the actions discussed to make sure there is clear understanding and then sign off on a proposed set of actions they support including in the DRAFT NZTP. The Advisory Group will need to make a recommendation for a set of actions that reach 100% emissions reduction by 2050.

### Other matters and closing thoughts

In closing, members shared ideas that they were taking with them from the meeting, including:

- Even though things are complicated, progress can happen; and
- It is important to show empathy for people using different modes.
- The group has discussed a lot of ideas over the past year and want to see the City do something to convince the community that they're trying to help them get around easier.

The Advisory Group adjourned and will meet next on Wednesday, April 24, 2024, at 9 AM at the City Hall Annex.

### Important points from catch-up call

In order to bring the members who were unable to attend up to speed, consultants hosted a catch-up call which one member attended. Below are additional important points raised during that call:

- It will be harder to reduce car ownership than to reduce trips. It might be worth considering “out-of-the-box” approaches to reduce reliance on car ownership (e.g., subsidizing access to Zipcar for people with low incomes).
- We should explore opportunities to raise costs for parking while allowing those with disability placard (or disability parking sticker) to pay a lower rate (or not at all).
- It is important to make “means-testing” easy for people, e.g., via a universal application.
- The benefits of shifting to electric vehicles seem less than the benefits of shifting to active transportation or public transit (electric vehicles still come with pollution from manufacturing, tire particles, and other forms).

## Attendance list

### Advisory Group members who attended on March 27

- Guerlancia “Gigi” Laurent (Margaret Fuller House)
- James Pierre (Adius Arts Initiative)
- Nora Sears (De Novo Center for Justice and Healing)
- Rachel Tanenhaus (Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities)
- Angela Vierling-Claassen (Cambridge resident)
- Yao Wu (Chinese American Association of Cambridge)

### Advisory Group members who attended the catch-up call on April 18

- Omriqui Thomas (Cambridge Public Schools student)

### 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)
- Julia Clarke (Arup)
- Amy Liu-Pathak (Arup)