

City of Cambridge Net Zero Transportation Plan Advisory Group

Meeting 2 Notes – Wednesday, March 29, 2023

The Advisory Group held its second meeting on Wednesday, March 29, 2023, at the Cambridge City Hall Annex and via Zoom. The objectives of the meeting were to –

- Continue getting to know each other;
- Agree on how we will work together in this process; and
- Learn from each other about:
 - How people in Cambridge move around; and
 - Where Cambridge’s transportation greenhouse gas emissions come from.

Below are key takeaways and action items, followed by a brief summary of discussions.

Key takeaways and action items

- Advisory Group members continued revising the draft charter, and learned and shared about:
 - How people get around in Cambridge; and
 - Where Cambridge’s transportation-related greenhouse gas emissions are coming from
- CDD will look into whether the following information requested from Advisory Group members is available:
 - Survey on people who bike to work in Cambridge;
 - Methodology for the US Census and American Community Survey;
 - “Geo-mapping” of emissions to understand which intersections have the highest volume;
 - Data on business-owned vehicles to understand the capacity of businesses and non-profits to electrify their fleets;
 - Daily breakdowns of traffic and transit, particularly on weekends;
 - Information about how residents are responding to the push toward sustainable transportation and additional education needs.

Welcome and introductions

Stephanie Groll (Community Development Department) welcomed Advisory Group members. Afterward, participants introduced themselves and shared their favorite springtime activities.

Advisory Group members tabled finalizing the notes from meeting 1 to allow members additional time to review after the meeting.

Advisory Group charter

Group members reviewed and edited the sections of the draft charter not addressed at the previous meeting. Members’ suggestions are summarized below.

Making decisions and sharing power

Participants discussed the Advisory Group's role and responsibility in developing the Net Zero Transportation Plan. The Advisory Group will generate the content of the Plan with the support of the Community Development Department (CDD). CDD staff will support Advisory Group members with information and other support they may need with developing the Plan. Additionally, CDD staff are willing to have additional conversations with members who are interested in deeper discussions about any element of the plan.

Guiding principles for working together

Advisory Group members suggested the following guiding principles for working together:

- Respect each other's opinions and thoughts.
- There are no "stupid" questions.
- One person should speak at a time.
- Step up and step back.
- Strive to make decisions by consensus. If consensus cannot be reached, then be sure to document the opinions of those who are in the minority. (Members discussed definitions of what consensus might mean for the Advisory Group.)
- Be mindful of how power shows up in conversations and be responsive to everyone's views and needs.
- Be as inclusive as possible and aim to include voices from beyond traditional power structures.
- Be specific about what the Plan will need to address in the short term vs. the long term.

Overview of transportation in Cambridge

How do people get around in Cambridge?

Stephanie shared an overview of various data regarding transportation in Cambridge. Key points to note are:

- Generally, over time a smaller portion of residents are driving alone, using transit, or walking to get to work. Similarly, a smaller portion of people who work in Cambridge (and live anywhere) are driving alone to get to work. Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic increased the number of people working from home.
- Traffic volume is back to where it was before the pandemic.
- Over time, the proportion of households in Cambridge that have 0 cars has grown, and a smaller proportion have 1 or 2 cars. This means that the number of cars per household has been declining. However, the number of housing units has increased over the past several decades, so the overall number of cars has increased.
- Based on data that the City currently has available, employee parking is the largest category of parking spaces in Cambridge. (The City does not have data for residential permit spaces, residential off-street spaces, and loading zones.)
- Since 2003, bike ridership in Cambridge has quadrupled.

Where are Cambridge's transportation-related greenhouse gas emissions coming from? Stephanie shared an overview of transportation-related greenhouse gas emissions. This data comes from the 2019 Greenhouse Gas Inventory report, which estimates how much different sectors contribute to the city's overall emissions.

Key points are as follows:

- In 2019, roughly 10 percent of the city's total emissions came from transportation. 94 percent of transportation-related emissions came from on-road private vehicles.
- Between 2012 and 2019, overall transportation emissions decreased roughly 13 percent. This reduction is largely due to a 13 percent reduction in emissions from on-road private vehicles and an 84 percent reduction from MBTA buses (which replaced diesel fuels with biodiesel).

Insights from Advisory Group members

Throughout the discussions, Advisory Group members shared their insights, questions, and ideas about what else needs to be included, summarized as follows:

- *How people get around:* New devices, such as electric skateboards, skates, and other small things are legitimate ways for some people to get around.
- *Trends and sub-trends within the data:* One more recent trend is that more and more employees are being asked to return to in-person work. Another sub-trend within the data is that paratransit often operates differently from the larger data categories of which it is a part. For example, The RIDE trip routes are more dependent on the journeys of individual users than conventional public transit options. This means that it might look different when parsed out from the broader category of public transit.
- *Issues with the US Census and ACS:* Advisory Group members raised several questions about the US Census and American Community Survey data on which several of the data shared were based. There were questions about whether the data is representative of all the communities in Cambridge (or whether folks from wealthier backgrounds or different levels of comfort answering a government survey are overrepresented). Census tracts are also larger than individual neighborhoods, so the data may not be able to explain the impacts of individual neighborhoods.
- *Scope for the Plan:* In response to a question from a member, CDD confirmed that the Plan can include recommendations on development patterns and parking spaces.
- *Issues with parking:* Members noted the low availability of accessible parking (150 on-street disability spaces), which is an example of the broader issue of accessibility in transportation. Additionally, workplace parking might be reserved for employees who might not be coming in to work (as they are now working from home post-pandemic).
- *Bike-related issues:* Members noted that many people who do not live in Cambridge ride bikes in and through Cambridge. These groups of people might be part of the increase in bike ridership over the past couple decades. At the same time, some Cambridge residents and communities have felt left out of recent advocacy efforts around bike lanes. The Advisory Group might be able to use data from the Strava app to get a sense of how many bike trips in Cambridge start elsewhere and/or are "pass-through" trips.

- *Electrifying MBTA modes:* The MBTA is planning to shift to battery-powered buses. The MBTA recently stopped using trackless trolleys, which were more efficient than the diesel/biodiesel-powered buses that replaced them. Therefore, there might be a slight increase in contributions to emissions from MBTA buses since 2019. Additionally, there has been a push to electrify commuter rail lines, which would reduce emissions from that mode.

Additional data and information that would be helpful

Advisory Group members highlighted the following additional pieces of data and information that would be helpful:

- “Geo-mapping” of emissions to understand which intersections have the highest volume;
- Data on business-owned vehicles to understand the capacity of businesses and non-profits to electrify their fleets;
- Daily breakdowns of traffic and transit, particularly on weekends;
- Information about how residents are responding to the push toward sustainable transportation and additional education needs.

Public comment

The Advisory Group heard a comment from Jason Alves, who is the Executive Director of the East Cambridge Business Association. Mr. Alves highlighted the reduction in the number of people commuting into the city daily, which affects businesses. He noted that the City had been conducting a study of Kendall Square shuttle traffic and ridership and encouraged the Advisory Group to keep these issues in mind to support businesses.

Final reflections and conclusion

Advisory Group members appreciated the data shared during the meeting and the ability to examine it in depth. There was curiosity around building and waste emissions and how they contribute to the larger picture. While the data is a helpful part of the story, it will be important to hear from individuals who might be affected by the Plan. Addressing these emissions will require creative solutions to ensure that already overburdened individuals do not bear all of the costs of the transition.

The next meeting will take place on Wednesday, April 26, at 9 AM.

Attendance List

Advisory Group members

- Pastor Farris Blount (Western Avenue Baptist Church / Cambridge Black Pastors Alliance)
- Elizabeth Brusie (De Novo Center for Justice and Healing)
- Ben Engle (Food for Free)
- James Pierre (Soul on Wheels)
- Ali Sorrels (Cambridge Women’s Center)
- Rachel Tannenhau (Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities)
- Omriqui Thomas (Cambridge High School Extension Program student)
- Yao Wu (Chinese American Association of Cambridge)

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)
- Kate Fichter (Arup)
- Katie Wholey (Arup)

Members of the public

Jason Alves (East Cambridge Business Association)

Patrick Magee