



Mass Ave Partial Reconstruction Project
Working Group Meeting 2
Thursday, June 22, 2023
3:00-5:00 PM
Zoom

ATTENDEES

Working Group Members	City Staff	Public*
Sukia Akiba	Jerry Friedman – DPW	Stephen Kaiser
Steven Beaucher	Andreas Wolfe – TPT	Gretchen Friesinger
Christopher Cassa	Pardis Saffari – CDD	Katherine Beaty
Makayla Comas-Race		Marc Levy
Gary Dmytryk	Consultants	James Williamson
Debby Galef	Christi Apicella – McMahon	Steven Adeff
Denise Jillson	Anna Sangree – McMahon	N. Trivedi
Timothy Keefe		Ethel Toner
Eitan Normand	Other Attendees*	Katharine London
Laurie Pessah	Brooke McKenna – TPT	Joseph Poirier
Ruth Ryals	Cara Seiderman – CDD	M. Gannon
Daniel Stubbs	Andrew Reker – CDD	Petru Sofio
	Karim-Ben Saunders – DPW	Sandy Durmaskin
Not in attendance:	Dana Benjamin – TPT	Ann McDonald
Darren Buck	Kristen Kelleher – DPW	1 anonymous attendee
Diane Gray	Michael Mantello – CDD	
	Maggie Cameron – KLF	
	Greg Avenia – KLF	
	Jim Wilcox – DPW	
	Michelle Danila – Toole	
	Nathan Klima – City	
	Adam Shulman – TPT	

Key:
DPW = Public Works
TP&T = Traffic Parking & Transportation
CDD = Community Development Department

*based on meeting registration



MEETING SUMMARY

The following is a summary of the second meeting of the City of Cambridge Mass Ave Partial Reconstruction Project Working Group.

For more information, see cambridgema.gov/massavepartialconstruction.

Welcome and Overview

Jerry Friedman, Department of Public Works, initiated the meeting and welcomed other City staff members, the consultant team, Working Group members, and the general public before handing the presentation to Christi Apicella, McMahon, of the consultant team. Christi reminded Working Group members and attendees of the remote participation instructions and explained that this meeting will aim to engage as much as possible with Working Group members by limiting the number of panelists and encouraging more conversations among Working Group members, City staff, and the consultant team.

Christi then explained the meeting agenda and goals, which included updates from the first Working Group meeting, a report back on the Working Group member's "homework," and discussions among Working Group members. Christi mentioned that the majority of the meeting will be focused on the approach to corridor design, and will also include a discussion on stakeholder engagement and next steps.

General Project Updates

Jerry mentioned that there had been some questions about the \$50 million budget for the project and what exactly the project will entail. Jerry described the "Summary of Costs" document that is available on the City's project website (cambridgema.gov/massavepartialconstruction). The document goes into detail on how the project budget is broken down.

Jerry also provided a recap of Working Group Meeting #1 (May 18, 2023), which focused on defining the Working Group's role, providing an overview of the project background, summarizing the basis for design, and introducing potential design options for consideration.

Homework Report Back

Christi reminded Working Group members of the "homework" assignment, which was to visit the corridor either in person or on Google Street view, and report back on observations. Christi also mentioned that today's meeting would discuss one key focus area, Rindge Avenue to Beech Street, so if any observations relate to that segment of Mass Ave, it would be especially helpful. The following Working Group members summarized their observations:

Debby Galef: I happened to be on the corridor today, in a car and on a bike. The Pedestrian Committee is going to walk the Rindge Ave to Beech Street segment. Key observations: (1) the bike lane is very narrow from Waterhouse Street to Porter Square. When restaurants have barriers for outdoor dining, it is tight to navigate on a bike; (2) traveling south from Alewife, there is parking available – almost no one is parked, and it's very unclear what is allowed. Signage needs to be improved; (3) There is a pinch point going north from Beech to Rindge at Walden Street, where the bike lane disappears; (4) when you enter Cambridge from Arlington, the speed limit sign says 25 MPH unless otherwise posted, and it seems people go much faster than 25 MPH.



Steven Beaucher: I did not notice anything new. I'm on the Avenue every day, mostly walking. Noticed consistent things – roadway not designed for safety or residential speed. Cars, bikes, and scooters will not yield to you in the crosswalks. More observations about parking and loading from a business owner standpoint. On my block alone, we have a gas station and a liquor store – I observe about 16-20 trucks on a daily basis. Sitting in my shop making observations, as we think about how to reallocate space, we need to remember that trucks will go where they want – we should try to encourage trucks to specific locations. At my shop, shoppers arrive to my store about 1/3 by car, 1/3 by bike, and 1/3 by T or walk – as we get into a new design, we should advocate that all of those user groups can access store. We need more bike parking, and need to maintain as much as possible where car can pick up something that's 100 pounds and 12 feet long. I talked to a lot of business owners along the Avenue and they make similar observations – we need all user groups to be able to access businesses safely, and do not want to shut out any user groups.

Gary Dmytryk: I walked the Avenue this week and spent time around the Walden Street intersection – there is a pinch point where bike lane disappears. Not sure how to handle that location, since the street is not wide enough. Second, coming south on Mass Ave toward Porter at Russell Street, people make a lot of left turns – we will need to pay attention to this. It has been mentioned that this project might remove the median strip, but from what I understand that was tried in the past, and cars would cut the corner to access Russell Street, and that is very dangerous. We need to figure out what to do with left hand turns, not just at Russell Street. Lastly, in Steven's area, the flashing beacons do not seem to be functioning.

Laurie Pessah: I walked, biked, and drove the Avenue and noticed so many pedestrians. Waiting areas and crossing distances are very difficult for pedestrians, including at the flashing beacon mentioned by Gary. Cars might stop on the far side, but you're so far from it they start going again while you're in the median. For cars that want to turn right on Beech Street, pedestrian and bike volumes create long wait times for drivers. Third, I noticed empty off-street parking lots off-hours – wondering what outreach we could do to businesses and churches to take advantage of unused surface parking.

Makayla Comas-Race: By the Russell Apartments, there is a lot going on by bus stops – buses, driving, Lyft/Uber – older adults are frustrated, especially when emergency vehicles are trying to access the building. Similarly, long crosswalk distances make it challenging. Additionally, the Walden bus stop does not have a shelter, making it an uncomfortable experience for bus riders. Lastly, Rindge is very scary to navigate as a cyclist, even for experienced cyclists, and also difficult to cross as a pedestrian.

Sukia Akiba: My family lives on Walden Street and my son goes to Benjamin Banneker, so I'm in that area every day and we often walk to Porter Square – the area is not safe to bike for anyone, especially for children. I agree with what Debby said about the bike lanes being so narrow, and I talked to a lot of business owners in that area as well. I have a unique perspective because I'm a small business owner, and I can really understand the frustration surrounding the lack of parking, but as a mom and an environmentalist, it just isn't safe for walking or biking.

Eitan Normand: My main takeaway is that the Avenue has only one through lane. When you have a left turn, there is usually not a dedicated lane. Cars are shifting from one lane to another. Also, for bike access to Porter Station if you are heading northbound on Mass Ave, you have to go past the bus stop and circle back to the station. Bike access is generally uncomfortable, and if you want to improve transfers between modes, this is something that should be looked at. Finally, all Bluebike stations are on



the east side of the Avenue – not a single station on the other side. Since this is a busy corridor, it could use more Bluebikes stations.

Chris Cassa: I want to echo the comments about fast speeds – it’s not just signage, we need to encourage lower speed through design. Lower speeds will help businesses. A few other comments: I wonder if there is a narrower divider or flex post that could be used when medians are removed to prevent dangerous turns, such as those at Russell Street; bus stops need to be more comfortable; Rindge needs a better configuration for biking – it is very stressful even for experienced cyclists; designing for family biking would allow everyone to bike, so we should aim for that design standard, which would make it a more enriching business environment.

Ruth Ryals: Loading and deliveries are a big problem, and we need to assign a spot on virtually every block that could be used for 15-minute loading. I am more concerned about commercial delivery trucks than Uber/Lyft. There also needs to be clear signage, which is a problem on the corridor as a whole. Another problem is the width and number of crosswalks. For example, for the crosswalk at Garfield, we need to think about the time needed to cross the street, and whether we need to have a refuge island. Overall, there is a need to add more crossing points, and fix the flashing beacons so they are visible to pedestrians while waiting. Coming north on Mass Ave, we need to tame right turns on Russell. I agree with others that have talked about calming speeds for cars and trucks – the point being that while this is a state road, it’s also a neighborhood, and we require cars to slow down for pedestrians, and hopefully stop and shop at businesses. I also hope we look at the Porter Square plaza – on a bright sunny day, it is very hot with no shelter. Same goes for intersection at Garfield/gas station – another hot, sunny spot. For parking, someone should be able to develop an app to track where parking is available. Lastly, do we have someone from the elderly community on the committee to look at some of their concerns?

Jerry: we will be engaging directly with members of the elderly community, at places such as the Russell Apartments

Approaching Corridor Design

Next, the meeting transitioned to talk about the approach to the corridor design. Jerry reminded Working Group members of the project limits and project goals. He described that while the roadway varies throughout the Avenue, the typical cross section is about 71 feet curb to curb.

Jerry described the potential cross section elements for the “partial construction” design approach, which includes floating curbside parking/loading, bus lanes where needed, the removal of the median, and vertical separation for bike lanes. Jerry also described the data that has been collected in recent months that is being analyzed behind the scenes to inform the design. This data includes traffic volumes, crash clusters, bus ridership, and bus day, which will help determine the locations of bus priority treatments, like dedicated bus lanes.

Jerry introduced the meeting’s “focus area” – Rindge Ave to Beech Street – which will demonstrate some of the design choices that will be faced as we try to meet project goals. There is an idealized cross section in mind – 71 feet reallocated without a median, with bus lanes, curbside activity, bike lanes, etc. – however, it gets complicated at key intersections, where additional elements are introduced such as turn lanes, pedestrian refuge islands, etc. – we quickly run out of space.



Jerry handed the presentation to Andreas Wolfe, TPT, who talked more about the focus area between Rindge Ave and Beech Street, which is a section of Mass Ave that has the most bus routes, and is considered a crash cluster. Andreas also described some of the specific considerations in more depth. These included:

Turn Lanes: When Mass Ave was last reconstructed, it was done before we had a full understanding of the importance of turn lanes. Turn lanes do not just help drivers, they make the street safer for everyone. With turn lanes, people tend to drive more carefully, while drivers often turn more quickly when turning from a standard “through lane.” A lot of considerations are needed for turn lanes, including turning volumes and “storage lengths” – which is how many cars in a queue can fit in a turn lane without blocking through traffic. If there is not enough storage space for turns, the queue of cars may spill into the through lane and block traffic, resulting in more dangerous maneuvers by cars that are trying to go straight through an intersection. Based on traffic volumes, we get a sense for where turn lanes would be beneficial – one example is Russell Street.

Pedestrian Crossings: It is ideal to provide a crossing where we know people want to cross, not where it is convenient for drivers. Mass Ave is a wide street and there are locations where a person will need to cross several lanes of traffic. For these long crossings, pedestrian refuge islands can help. Curb extensions also help reduce crossing distances and improve visibility. Signal phasing also plays a role in the pedestrian experience, with two types phasing: (1) exclusive, where only pedestrians cross, and (2) concurrent, where people cross along with parallel traffic – these phasing types are a tradeoff between the amount of time people wait to cross the street, and the number of potential conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles.

Questions/Comments:

Ruth Ryals: I want to clarify that it isn’t just a left turn onto Russell, but also a right.

Steven Beaucher: Does Cambridge have carte blanche to make all these changes, given it is a state road?

Andreas: It is a City Street. In Massachusetts, we can have roads that are assigned state route numbers, but in terms of jurisdiction, it is a City street. The only exception is the bridge over the Commuter Rail tracks near Porter Square, because MassDOT owns the bridge. We do have to comply with legal federal requirements, for things like lane widths and signal timing.

Jerry: Another complication is when we take state aid funding – there isn’t any state funding for this project, though.

James Williamson (public): What is/is not included in crash data? Understanding is that bike and pedestrian crashes are not included?

Andreas: Crash data is crash reported to Cambridge Police Department.

Bus Delay and Transit Priority: Bus riders face significant delays in both directions on Mass Ave. in the morning, most of the bus delay is heading south toward Porter Square and Harvard Square. In the evening, delays are in reverse – most delay is heading north. The northbound peak travel period tends to be longer, while the morning peak period is shorter, but with more acute delays. There are a number of



tools in the toolbox to improve bus travel times and increase transit ridership. Collectively, these tools are described as “transit priority.” There are several types of transit priority measures, including dedicated bus lanes and queue jump lanes. Queue jump lanes need to factor in vehicle queue lengths at intersections, to try to figure out how long the queue jump lane needs to be. Bus lanes can take many forms, including full-time, part-time, and bus lanes in only one direction. Bus lanes often align with segments with the most delay. Andreas explained the example cross sections for each bus lane type.

Questions/Comments:

Daniel Stubbs: Can you explain the bus delay maps in further detail? What exactly do the colors mean?

Andreas: Bus delay is measured in average seconds of delay between each stop.

Makayla Comas-Race: A comment not a question – I have talked to business on North Mass Ave, who indicate that delivery drivers often park in the bike lane. No specific solution to offer, but I have noticed that this makes it unsafe, especially in the winter. I also had the opportunity to talk to truck delivery drivers – they are frustrated over consistency -what does it take to have really clear communication on the street, so people know where they are allowed to go.

Discussion

The meeting transitioned to a Working Group discussion. Jerry stressed that we would like feedback on the design approach. The following topics were discussed:

Gary Dmtyryk: Agree to comments about clarity for drivers. It is very confusing for drivers where the quick build lanes were installed. I have seen more fender benders in the past 1.5 years than in the prior 12 years before they were installed. It is very confusing for drivers. There is a bus lane, but you can also park in the bus lane. We need to give some thought to clarity. Outreach will be important, because there was not much community outreach for the quick build project on North Mass Ave.

Chris Cassa: Consistency is important, such as when people can park in bus lanes. Also, customer intercept data could show how many people took transit, bike, etc. Focusing on the number of people on a bus would be helpful when describing benefits of bus lanes.

Debby Galef: We should make signs better now, and see if that helps. That would give us an idea of what works and what doesn't work. Also, we should find out who customers are and how they get to the store.

Timothy Keefe: My place of business is near Rindge Ave. It is very dangerous for bikes turning left, so that is obviously an issue. Going back to comments about amount of visitors – in the funeral industry, we are about 98% cars. It is a challenge block to block because of the diversity of businesses with different needs, and different hours of operation. It is important to go block by block, section by section, to figure out curb space needs.

Makayla Comas-Race: Being out on the street is very important for engagement. A lot of misinformation was spread around Porter Square businesses about what is happening with Mass Ave. It is important to share information directly with people on the street.



Ruth Ryals: Could we have surveys for each business about how people got there, to see if we can get some widespread data?

Jerry: Yes, this is a good suggestion. We will need to make sure people know *why* we're collecting the data.

Daniel Stubbs: I am wondering if a two-way bike lane was considered, and if there is any possibility to consider? They seem to work well in Montreal.

Andreas: With two-way bike facility, you are creating conflicts to a different side of the street – for example, drivers need to look both ways for bikes. We would need to reevaluate signals, turn lanes, etc. The blocks are configured differently in Cambridge than in Montreal and thus pose different challenges.

Chris Cassa: It would be nice to get two-way bike lane, but understand challenges. Related to business data and signage – I was hoping business associations would be able to get people to endorse the existing partial build plan. That would help position entire project more comfortably, maybe Denise could help, to ensure there is less misinformation about the project.

Stakeholder engagement

The discussion transitioned to talking about stakeholder engagement. The goal of the discussion is to talk about how can we have a constructive process, and ensure we have buy-in on the project. Discussion topics included:

Steven Beaucher: There are still many on the Avenue that are either not aware of project or its scope. I casually talk to people, but I feel that the City should have a clear message that they want to deliver to business owners. I meet business owners every day that don't know about it or are misinformed. That leads directly to folks who have in the past banded together against the project and don't want anything to change. The City should go door to door to make sure they talk to all businesses.

Denise Galef: I am really happy to do whatever I need to do to help with this effort. A lot of the angst was because people didn't really know what is happening, and didn't know the impact. If we can do as much outreach as possible so people know what is going to happen – where parking meters are removed, where loading zones are removed, how it affects specific locations – that will go a long way to making this a much smoother and more effective project. I am happy to go door to door if needed.

Jerry: Since we don't have a specific design concept yet, we need to explain trade offs. It's important to provide information on our process, and what we've discussed with these meetings.

Laurie Pessah: The more personal, in-person conversations we can have, the more two-way conversations we'll have. This is about tradeoffs – we can say that we're grappling with tradeoffs. There is opportunity to change things for the better, and we need your help to help determine the best possible project. Safety being a really big priority, maybe the highest priority. We have some hierarchy of decisions, driven in large part by safety. There is going to be delay and inconvenience, but if changes are in the cause of safety, people could buy in to the project.

Chris Cassa: I love the idea of going door to door, with City staff who know technical information.



Christi asked about the potential for a Site Walk, and whether Working Group members would be interested. Many of the Working Group members indicated that they would be interested and available for a Site Walk, perhaps sometime in August. Some specific comments related to the Site Walk.

Laurie Pessah: I am happy to do a site walk, but I acknowledge that it will take a lot of time for the details, given it is such a large corridor. We will need to think about the best way to approach the site walk.

Denise Galef: Whatever is needed for a site walk, I willing to do it. A lot of potential problems could be eliminated with a site walk.

Public comment

Finally, the meeting transitioned to public comment. There was one public comment:

James Williamson: What about putting bike lanes in the middle of the right of way? That would avoid conflicts with turns, and with bus lanes. Curious what people's thoughts are on that. Biggest concern – bus operations. Talk to bus drivers directly, not through MBTA. I take the 77 and 83 every day. Do something about the traffic signalization – hardly any traffic at night, and you sit and wait at the light at Beech Street. Traffic signals ought to be better managed. I am a big fan of bus lanes, but I never understood why there are dedicated bus lanes all day. I wonder if it is really necessary to have dedicated bus lanes all day long northbound.

Jerry: Signal efficiency is something we are studying. There will be signal upgrades. The location and hours of bus lanes is definitely something we are evaluating.

Andreas: For center running bike lanes, it is similar to having a two-way bike lane on one side of the street, in that are you introducing conflicts in new areas. Having it on the left, you are having people biking where drivers aren't used to seeing them. While you do get benefits from reducing conflicts between bikes and buses, you also introduce new conflicts.

Next Steps

The Working Group plans to convene again in July, with an optional site walk scheduled for some time in August.