

# City of Cambridge Net Zero Transportation Plan Advisory Group

Meeting #11 notes – Wednesday, April 24, 2024

The Net Zero Transportation Plan (NZTP) Advisory Group held its eleventh meeting on Wednesday, April 24, 2024, at the Cambridge City Hall Annex and via Zoom. The objective of the meetings was to:

- Discuss, improve, and seek agreement on “Reducing Car Trips” and “Buses, Trains, and Shuttles” actions to include in 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.
- The Advisory Group reviewed proposed actions for the NZTP under the categories of “Reducing Car Trips” and “Buses, Trains, and Shuttles.” Members shared feedback and generally supported the actions proposed.

## 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 ways that the project has changed how they think about getting around Cambridge.

### Community outreach update

Advisory Group members were reminded to reach out to Brandon Chambers (CBI) if they would be interested in hosting a small group meeting or info session with members of their community or organization.

### Potential actions for the NZTP

Afterward, members reviewed two categories of actions for the NZTP: 1) Reducing Car Trips and 2) Buses, Trains, and Shuttles. Members were asked:

- Which actions do you support as they are today?
- What improvements or alternatives can you suggest for other actions to be able to support them?

Overall, Advisory Group members were supportive of the six actions discussed.

### Reducing Car Trips

These actions reduce greenhouse gas emissions by giving people more travel choices.

**RCT-1. Make the Parking and Transportation Demand Management Ordinance apply to more people. Increase the emphasis on parking cash-out options.** This action is estimated to account for a 5-7% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

Feedback from the Advisory Group was as follows:

- It is important to consider unintended consequences like not allowing cleaning staff to park on-site. Some people need to drive to work no matter what. The draft NZTP should include some “intentionality” to give people more benefits to have them be able to not drive a car, not to cost low-income people more money to be at their jobs. It shouldn't be a plan that just allows people who can afford it to pay their way out of behavior change.

**RCT-2. Dedicate City funding to support community-led initiatives that improve multimodal or low-carbon transportation options and support deepening relationships between the City, residents, employers, and property owners.** This action would be a supportive policy.

Feedback from the Advisory Group was as follows:

- There should be a system in place where community members can easily share their opinions and ideas with city staff.
- This needs to be clarified in the drafting of the plan to get more specific and provide some “for instance” examples, especially considering that it addresses directing City funding.

**RCT-3. Expand existing coordination with neighboring municipalities to shift commute trips out of cars.** The emission reduction from this action is unknown.

Feedback from the Advisory Group was as follows:

- Note that Cambridge is often on the leading edge of these topics and so consider that could have resource or effort implications for the City in advancing these topics in regional groups.

#### Buses, Trains, and Shuttles

These actions reduce greenhouse gas emissions by improving bus, subway, and paratransit options.

**BT-1. Enable better bus frequency and reliability by installing bus priority projects on important routes (signal priority, queue jumps, or bus lanes), and collaborate regionally to improve MBTA bus service.** This action is estimated to account for a 3.6% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>1</sup>

Feedback from the Advisory Group was as follows:

- It will be important to educate, campaign, and advertise this NZTP plan. The campaigns should also assess whether a bus lane translates into people using this bus more. It would also be good to advertise the MBTA’s upcoming new schedules and explain that

---

<sup>1</sup> Currently the MBTA is changing bus frequency and distribution over time so that there will be more service during peak hours and on weekends.

the T is prioritizing better bus service in municipalities that make changes to roadways that improve frequency and reliability, such as installing bus lanes.

**BT-2. Collaborate regionally to improve service on the Door2Door service and expand eligibility.** This action is estimated to lead to a 0.2% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

Feedback from the Advisory Group was as follows:

- It is important to ensure that, if we are expanding eligibility, the service is not impaired and should be improved. The vehicles should be electric.
- Do some due diligence to understand whether this is a program that can really scale up effectively. Consider the lessons from how paratransit has been expanded and has suffered efficiency and functionality as it has scaled up.

**BT-3. Offer discounted transit fares for residents who don't own cars.** This action is estimated to lead to a 0.7% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

Feedback from the Advisory Group was as follows:

- Some Advisory Group members recommended that the benefit should be prioritized for residents who have lower incomes rather than anyone who does not own a car in order to cover people based on need.
- Some members would rather have the qualifying line for low-income raised and ask Cambridge to pay for a higher percentage than the State program offers. People who are just over the poverty line are in a tough position because they don't have high incomes and also do not qualify for many social programs. It's also important to make it easier for people to get qualified for the discount and not make them jump through too many hoops to qualify.
- Currently, municipalities are barred from using public money for "private betterments" (under the Anti-Aid Amendment). It may be possible to find a workaround with the MBTA.
- It seems like there is a heavy price tag for a small effect that is uncertain.
- This would fit better in the Reducing Car Trips category since this action isn't about improving bus, train, or shuttle service

### [Other matters and closing thoughts](#)

Advisory Group members reflected on what they like or would change about this process. Some members noted that it is enjoyable to have a place to talk about transportation issues with new perspectives of the people outside their friends and family. It's nice to have an open place where it's ok to share their opinions and hear what other people think. In addition, members noted that City staff have so much knowledge, and wondered how we can get more of that knowledge out into the community. Some members wondered whether being in this group leads to other City planning involvement?

The Advisory Group adjourned and will meet next on Wednesday, May 29, 2024, at 9 AM at the City Hall Annex.

## Attendance list

### Advisory Group members present on April 24

- Nora Sears (De Novo Center for Justice and Healing)
- Ibrahim Omar (Islamic Society of Boston Cambridge)
- Angela Vierling-Claassen (Cambridge resident)
- Yao Wu (Chinese American Association of Cambridge)

### Advisory Group members who attended catch-up calls

- Dosa Chidandali (Cambridge Women's Center)
- James Pierre (Adius Arts Initiative)
- Rachel Tanenhaus (Commission for Persons with Disabilities)
- Lonnell Wells (Cambridge Bike Give Back)

### Community Development Department staff

- Stephanie Groll (Mobility Strategy Manager)

### Consultant team

- Elizabeth Cooper (Consensus Building Institute)
- Julia Clarke (Arup)
- Amy Liu-Pathak (Arup)