

City Transportation Review

Contributed by

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MEMO

TO: Mayor Wu

FROM: Mike Brohel

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RE: Streets Project Review

Staff Involved in Project

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Introduction

During the past 30+ days, we reviewed Streets projects across the City and met with neighborhood groups and other local stakeholders, including residents and area business owners. In addition to seeking neighborhood feedback, to compile recommendations, we considered usage, material conditions, and the impact and fit of street changes on the neighborhood.

Recommendations to Improve Project Communications and Community Engagement:
During the 30-day review meetings, we heard consistent feedback that project communications and community engagement were inadequate, that decisions seemed predetermined, and that processes too often did not achieve consensus, contributing to a loss of community trust. Many felt that their feedback was given insufficient attention and that temporary measures were allowed to remain for too long without further analysis of impacts and outcomes. We heard feedback that the tone of some engagements was very heavy-handed and relevant information was not shared, questioning the veracity of the

process. Many believed neighborhood feedback was not weighed as heavily as others when decisions were made.

While acknowledging that neighbors may view the needs and challenges of a given street very differently, we are confident that the communication and community engagement process for Streets projects can be improved to build community trust and achieve better outcomes. We offer the following recommendations:

- Begin projects with engagements focused on achieving a shared understanding of the problems and goals, rather than starting with proposed solutions;
- Ensure that discussions of tradeoffs are balanced and respectful;
- Commit to clear timelines for pre- and post-project analysis of street changes;
- Prioritize consensus over speed;
- Overcommunicate about construction impacts and timelines;
- Ensure strong consideration of historic curb access and use, e.g. parking and loading in all projects;

To best ensure good process and communications in neighborhoods where multiple large scale projects are planned we recommend that working groups be formed. The goal of this is to ensure voices are heard from neighborhood residents and the local business community and should have appropriate representation from each. These working groups could be led by the Mayors Office and the Office of Neighborhood Services with senior staff from the Planning Department, City of Boston Disabilities Commission, Streets Cabinet and Inter Governmental Relations represented.

Project Specific Recommendations

Western Ave and North Beacon Street

- Short term: remove the existing flex posts and replace with alternative traffic separation devices and identify curbside parking for customers, loading and pick up/drop off where the loss of space has negatively impacted businesses.
- Long term: continue the Western Avenue Corridor Study and Rezoning effort that will serve as the planning process for permanent bike infrastructure in the area.

- Explore options for a sidewalk level dedicated bike lane on Lincoln Street in collaboration with MassDOT.

Massachusetts Avenue

- Short term:

- Extend replacement of flex posts with alternative materials on the Mass Avenue bike lane all the way to Edward Everett Square.
- Remove parking on the right side of Massachusetts Avenue from Peirson Street thru Rusfield Street to allow greater capacity for vehicles to cue for the right turn onto Magazine Street.

- Long term:

- Revisit centerline yellow flex post application on Massachusetts Avenue at entrance/exit to Stop and Shop to create a more permanent solution and condition.

Boylston Street and Back Bay

- Remove Boylston Street bus lane, i.e. remove regulatory signage, mill and resurface bus lane, install new pavement markings and curbside regulations (work in progress see construction advisory).
- Work with direct abutters on new curbside regulation and meters to promote parking turnover and allow for commercial loading and short term drop off and pickup (work in progress).
- Given drivers have had ample time to become familiar with the parking protected bike lane on Boylston, post Boston Marathon, replace flex posts and consider other applications only where needed at intersections.
- Consider narrowing the bike lane to reduce likelihood of conflicts between passengers exiting or entering parked vehicles along active traffic.
- Revisit pedestrian timing on left turns from Boylston onto Dartmouth as well as Boylston onto Berkeley. Ensure adequate timing is allowed for safe crossings.
- Move the St. James Ave bus stop (behind 500 Boylston), part of the Copley Square Bus Stop and Saint James Ave Bus Lane project, back to its original location so it does not cause sight line issues for garages.

- Revisit the Dartmouth Street Safety and Mobility and Berkeley Street project bike lanes to ensure they are operating as intended and follow up with triage or long term planning as necessary.

Bay Village

- Implement neighborhood curbside regulation changes as discussed during BTDPolicy and Planning community walks.

- The Arlington Street Bike Lane does not seem to be receiving ridership in its current state as riders are more often using the right lane thru Arlington to connect to the South End bike lane toward Massachusetts Avenue. Residents in Bay Village are concerned with blind spots created exiting the residential streets as they are now crossing the bike lane. This project should be revisited and the bike lane should be evaluated for relocation to the opposite (right) side of the street. This evaluation should also consider how the dedicated left on Arlington onto Stuart is operating. If found to be not working as intended this too should be addressed.

- Reengage the neighborhood and provide updates on the Charles Street South and Tremont Street plan that residents have been actively involved with. This project includes critical pedestrian safety improvements in and out of the neighborhood. State Street

- Further the State Street planning process and try to reach a design consensus that more aligns with the neighborhood groups priorities for this uniquely historic, residential and business street. This should include evaluating design alternatives that allow State Street to function safely and efficiently for all modes of transport while providing access to the curb for commercial loading and short term drop off and pickup.

- In the interim, complete temporary sidewalk and accessibility improvements as well as temporary curbing to address safety concerns at key corners, resurface the roadway and restore access to the curb for commercial loading, drop off and pickup. The Milk Street Better Bike Lane project can provide an interim and potentially long term bike network connection from the Wharf District to Downtown.

Centre Street (West Roxbury)

The Centre Street Design Project has achieved many intended safety improvements;

however some outcomes have created new challenges. Specifically:

- The lack of commercial loading areas has led to trucks using the middle of Centre Street at Hastings Street for commercial loading which creates significant blind spots.

- The loss of parking for customers has impacted businesses.

A post project evaluation is recommended that analyzes curbside usage and identifies opportunities for commercial loading and short term pickup and drop off. This should involve engagement with businesses along the Centre Street corridor. Short term:

- Where applicable, evaluate moving parking/loading access back to the curb in specific locations of recognized need.

- Dedicated pedestrian signals should be evaluated for key crossings on Centre Street.

- The MBTA bus stop on Belgrade Ave should be relocated from its current mid-block location back to the corner of Belgrade Ave at Centre Street. This would return some parking for businesses in the immediate area.

Long-term, planning and design of permanent bike infrastructure, possibly a grade separated bike lane should be evaluated.

Greater Mattapan

- Businesses need help ensuring that loading, delivery and customer needs will be incorporated in the proposed design.

- Improved traffic signage is critical once the Cummins Highway project is complete to educate and communicate the new roadway design to users. This can be achieved with use of Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) compliant signs that include commonly recognized symbols.

- Upon proper evaluation, narrow the bike lanes on American Legion Highway which have been in a temporary condition for over 5 years. Use alternative materials to replace the existing flex posts.

- Reevaluate loss of pick up/drop off areas lost to the American Legion Highway bike lane around both elementary schools as well as businesses.

Blue Hill Avenue

The future of Blue Hill Avenue was raised across multiple conventions throughout this review period. Given the timing and scope of this project is to assess projects already in

the ground our recommendations for this important corridor and neighborhood destination is as follows:

- For all of the engagement that has been done on the Blue Hill Ave Transportation Action Plan, there is still a feeling that much of the local community is still not aware of the project's scope. Reengage community on plans for Blue Hill Avenue, ensuring a focus on community residents and business owners.
- As the funding source for the current Blue Hill Ave Transportation Action Plan relies heavily on federal funds, multiple options for the future of Blue Hill Avenue from Mattapan Square to Dudley Street should be considered.
- The community expressed a strong want for compliant sidewalks, street lights, trees, litter baskets and general beautification. An effort should be made to audit the area for these needs.

Longwood Medical and Academic Area

The Longwood Collective offered comments and feedback about how the following projects have or will impact the Longwood Medical and Academic Area.

- The proposed Brookline Ave bus lane, part of the Fenway Transportation Action Plan, could negatively impact critical vehicular access to the Longwood Medical and Academic Area. They are not confident the current plan is adequate, and believe the final design needs to accommodate all roadway users.
- Concern that sufficient analysis about the potential traffic congestion associated with the Columbus/Tremont Avenue Phase II project which includes the addition of new dedicated bus lane has not occurred.
- The Huntington Avenue bus lanes, part of the Route 39 Transit Priority Project, is seemingly only working due to the lack of enforcement, and the implementation of automated bus lane enforcement will change the post project analysis.
- The reconfiguration of Prentiss Street to a one-way will not adequately consider the Longwood circulation needs and should be reevaluated.

It is recommended that a group is assembled from the City and the Longwood Collective to

go over all concerns above. The goal of this is to ensure this critically important medical area continues to successfully serve the region for years to come.

Tremont Street

- Following the Tremont Street Design Project, implement and evaluate new curbside regulations as part of the Parking Meter Modernization program to ensure residents and businesses have a sufficient mix of commercial loading, short term drop off and pickup, metered parking and Resident Permit Parking areas (work in progress, see Tremont Street Parking Design.)
- Ensure all future projects planned for the South End follow appropriate levels of engagement with civic groups, neighborhood organizations and businesses. These engagements should occur in open forums to allow all voices to be heard collectively. The original Southwest Corridor planning, design and construction model can be copied in this neighborhood as a “best practices” approach to delivering a successful product.
- Any current planning and design for Columbus Avenue should follow this model to ensure community feedback is taken and trust is built into the final product.

Quick Build Project Recommendations

Based on feedback from these external stakeholders as well as the internal work of the Streets Cabinet over the last month, the following changes to the quick build project planning and design approach are recommended:

- Establish a clear timeline for all future temporary projects with stages of review and projected schedules for when temporary improvements could be made permanent if deemed successful.
- Seek feedback for the proposed installation of new flexible delineators (flex posts) on all City-wide projects. Clearly communicate construction activities when such installations are approved.
- Identify alternative traffic separation devices and solutions to replace flex posts in existing applications and proposed designs. Examples include bollards, planters, signs, modular raised curb, pre-fabricated lane separators, precast concrete curbing, and surface level lane separators (e.g. Ziclas Zebras).

- Identify historic quick build and or pilot projects that were implemented with temporary materials for capital projects or programs to replace with permanent constructed materials if these projects have been deemed successful.
- Ensure all projects are brought to the attention of the City of Boston Disabilities Commission for review and approval.

Citywide Bike Network Recommendation

Through all meetings the consistent questions around how do all the “one off” projects fit into a larger city plan were raised. Repeated suggestions of creating a network of well built and traveled bike lanes were mentioned. It should also be known that every meeting had residents and business owners not just acknowledging their want for bike lanes in the city, but also ideas for streets where they would like to see them built. With that the following is strongly suggested:

- Create a Comprehensive Plan for Bike Lane infrastructure that builds out key corridors where bike infrastructure and connectivity is most needed and best served.
- Mandate that any future bike lane project only occur if it fits into this Comprehensive Bike Lane Plan and that each piece built connects to another piece of this blueprint.
- With the Comprehensive Bike Lane Plan in place, dedicate the appropriate amount of resources to plan, design and build the best bike network in the country serving the City of Boston for generations.

Project Review Recommendations

Based on the engagement feedback we received and the project specific comments referenced above, all projects that are currently under construction, in design or in the planning phase should be reviewed and evaluated with the above recommendations in mind. Examples include:

Under Construction

- Cummins Highway

- Fenway Multi-Use Path
- Nubian Square

In Design

- Albany Street Better Bike Lane
- Columbus/Tremont Phase 2
- Western Ave
- Blue Hill Ave
- 1 Kenmore Sq
- Commonwealth Ave (Boston University East and Kenmore Square)
- Congress Street, A Street and Sleeper Street
- Connect Downtown
- Public Garden Crossings
- Dartmouth Street Safety and Mobility Improvements
- Egleston Square Redesign
- Harrison Ave (Ink Block)
- Hemenway Street
- McBride Street
- Lower Roxbury Transportation Study
- Rutherford Ave and Sullivan Square
- Poplar Street

Planning Phase

- Bowdoin-Geneva Transportation Action Plan
- Columbia Road Transportation Action Plan
- MBTA E-Branch Accessibility and Multimodal Corridor Improvements
- PLAN Mattapan
- PLAN East Boston
- South Boston Transportation Action Plan

Speed Hump Program Feedback and Recommendation

Almost all meeting attendees applauded the Mayor for implementing this work into our street network to make our roads safer. We did hear feedback that spoke to the scope of this work and if every street which is receiving speed humps is actually needed. The most consistent examples given were dead ends and small side streets that do not see much volume and, anecdotally, do not see speeding issues.

It is recommended that this work continue, but at a speed that allows for appropriate feedback to be received in order to ensure adequate implementation.

Flex Post Review

For the past decade, flex posts have been used by the Boston Transportation Department as temporary installations to daylight intersections, enhance street safety, and calm traffic

In recent years, they have also been deployed to mark entire bike lanes, lane changes, and traffic islands. In many neighborhoods, residents have expressed concern that there are too many flex posts in the road, creating confusion and visual noise. The City has also struggled to properly maintain the increased number.

We recommend that Streets rightsize the number of flex posts to a manageable number that can be properly maintained and restore their primary use for temporary daylighting at intersections and similar uses.

More Dialogue Needed

Through this first round of meetings we were unable to get to all neighborhoods or address all Streets projects. While more meetings will occur in the near future, we hope that through this review and recommendations, the Streets Cabinet can establish better project communications and engagement moving forward, which will enable the City and committed neighborhood leaders to work effectively together as good stewards of Boston's 850 miles of roads and 1,400 miles of sidewalks.

Sincerely,

Mike Brohel
Superintendent of Basic City Services
City of Boston