

Madalyn Letellier

From: Alessandra Seiter [REDACTED] >
Sent: Friday, May 16, 2025 9:10 AM
To: [REDACTED]
Cc: Transportation; Mayor; Public Comments; Judy Pineda Neufeld; Lance Davis; Willie Burnley, Jr.; Wilfred Mbah; strezoatlarge@gmail.com; Jake Wilson; Matthew McLaughlin; JT Scott; Ben Ewen-Campen; [REDACTED]; Naima Sait; Jehlen, Patricia (SEN); [REDACTED]; [REDACTED]
Subject: Letter on McGrath Blvd updated concept design from the Somerville Pedestrian & Transit Advisory Committee (PTAC)
Attachments: PTAC_McGrathLetter_5-16-25.pdf

Dear McGrath Boulevard Project Team,

(As well as the Somerville Mobility team, Mayor Ballantyne, Somerville City Councilors, State Congresspeople, and Somerville PTAs.)

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on the updated concept design for McGrath Boulevard, presented to the public on March 25, 2025. We remain grateful for the time, energy, and dedication you continue to invest in this once-in-a-generation project that will transform our city for the better for decades to come. We also recognize the seriousness with which you've treated community feedback, as demonstrated in the meaningful improvements made to the concept design from February 2024.

Please see attached for our second comment letter on this project, which outlines five recommendations to further enhance the safety, comfort, walkability, and livability of a future McGrath Boulevard.

Thank you again for your commitment to this critical project. We look forward to continuing to engage with you.

Sincerely,
Alessandra Seiter
on behalf of the [Somerville Pedestrian & Transit Advisory Committee \(PTAC\)](#)



May 16, 2025

McGrath Boulevard Project Team
10 Park Plaza
Boston, MA 02116

Dear McGrath Boulevard Project Team,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on the updated concept design for McGrath Boulevard, presented to the public on March 25, 2025¹. We remain grateful for the time, energy, and dedication you continue to invest in this once-in-a-generation project that will transform our city for the better for decades to come. Turning McGrath Highway into a human-scale boulevard that is safe and comfortable for people of all ages and abilities using all modes will prevent countless deaths, reconnect surrounding neighborhoods with the rest of Somerville and its services, improve health outcomes for those who live next to the corridor, and represent a huge leap forward in achieving municipal and statewide climate goals.

We also remain impressed with the project team for the proactive vision and collaborative approach you've brought to this project. We recognize the seriousness with which you've treated community feedback, as demonstrated in the meaningful improvements made to the concept design from February 2024. We are particularly happy to see the reduction to four lanes total of motor vehicle traffic, especially if two of them can become dedicated bus lanes. We are also happy to see the careful treatment of the intersection at Otis Street, including the minimized crossing lengths and full signalization. And, we are excited about the opportunity to install amenity-rich bus stops along the corridor, helping to fill a widespread need across Somerville. These elements were all raised in our June 2024 letter to the project team in alignment with local advocacy groups and residents, and we thank you for integrating them into the updated concept design².

There are still a few elements we would like to see changed or improved in the 25% design. We believe these elements will further enhance the safety, comfort, walkability, and livability of a future McGrath Boulevard:

1. **Adopt a 25 mph design and target speed, including through reduction in lane width:** We think a key goal of the McGrath Boulevard project is to reintegrate McGrath with the rest of Somerville's streetscape, helping to restore the community fabric torn apart with the highway's original construction. With this goal in mind we urge the project team to adopt a 25 mph design and target speed, as has been Somerville's citywide speed limit since 2016³. (The exception would be at Otis Street, which we think should have a 20 mph safety zone designation. See details below in Point 3.) We think an important contribution to this goal would be narrowing two of the motor vehicle lanes to 10', ideally

¹ MassDOT. "Somerville and Cambridge - Roadway Reconstruction Project on McGrath Hwy." March 25, 2025. <https://www.mass.gov/event/somerville-and-cambridge-roadway-reconstruction-project-on-mcgrath-hwy-03-25-2025>.

² Somerville Pedestrian & Transit Advisory Committee (PTAC). "Letter Commenting on the McGrath Boulevard Concept Design," June 21, 2024. https://s3.amazonaws.com/somervillema-live/s3fs-public/PTAC_McGrathBlvd_June2024.pdf.

³ Mobility Division. "Somerville Speed Limits and Safety Zones." City of Somerville, 2023. <https://www.somervillema.gov/content/somerville-speed-limits-and-safety-zones>.

along the entire corridor but especially approaching sensitive intersections like Otis Street. We remain enthusiastic about the possibility of dedicated bus lanes on McGrath (see Point 4 below), and recognize the need to maintain an 11'-width on two of the four lanes in order to support such infrastructure.

2. **Keep the median 10'-wide at intersections but narrow to a single concrete strip along the rest of the corridor:** We recognize and appreciate the role the median plays in serving as a pedestrian refuge, preventing unsafe left turns, providing flexibility for future bus lanes, and accommodating grade differences. However, we remain convinced that a landscaped median along the entire corridor is an inappropriate use of space. Any trees planted will not provide usable shade and – as with other green medians in Massachusetts – the space runs the risk of collecting garbage and creating other maintenance issues. Instead, we would like to see a 10' median maintained *only* at intersections to serve as a pedestrian refuge wide enough to accommodate multiple people simultaneously and people with mobility devices or strollers. Otherwise, we urge the project team to narrow the median as much as possible into a single concrete-only strip, and reallocate the remaining space to the edges of the corridor for use by people walking, biking, and waiting for the bus. Doing so will provide pedestrians and cyclists even more protection from the roadway, including through trees and plantings that will help to shield them from pollutants and vehicle particulate matter.
3. **Implement additional safety improvements at Otis Street:** We thank the project team for the consideration paid to the Otis Street intersection, and think the design can be further refined to provide the safest possible passage for children and parents.
 - a. First, we recommend that the project team adopt a 20 mph design and target speed approaching Otis Street, essentially designating the area as a Safety Zone along with many other areas in Somerville close to schools and parks.
 - b. Second, we recommend that the RYG signal be on recall 24/7 while allowing pedestrians to request an immediate pedestrian phase. We think the 24/7 recall is important to consistently communicate to drivers the sensitivity of this area, while the immediate responsiveness to pedestrian requests is important to discourage people from crossing off-signal.
 - c. Third, we urge the project team to revisit the possibility of a raised crosswalk or intersection at Otis Street. We have seen this infrastructure implemented throughout Somerville with impressive safety outcomes, and think it would offer significant benefit at Otis Street. We would appreciate clarity on which federal guidelines prevent the installation of such infrastructure, as was mentioned in the March 2025 public meeting.
 - d. Finally, we realize that the project team is still working on an updated design for the Broadway intersection, and we urge you to consider that area in conjunction with the Otis Street crossing. In the previous design from February 2024, there was much less protection and traffic calming infrastructure at Broadway than at other key intersections along McGrath. We think it is critical that the Broadway intersection be designed for a similar level of safety as the Otis Street crossing, so as to slow motor vehicles traveling southbound before they arrive at a crossing in heavy use by children and families. In other words, we do not want Otis Street to be the first indication to southbound vehicles that McGrath Boulevard is designed for people rather than fast-moving automobiles.

Apart from these recommended improvements, we again urge the project team to ensure the pedestrian bridge is maintained throughout McGrath's reconstruction to provide safe passage for families before a high-quality, at-grade intersection is in place. We do want to acknowledge that several families living near Otis Street continue to have concerns about the safety of this crossing – even with the updated design – and prefer the construction of an ADA-compliant pedestrian overpass despite the land it would require reallocating from the Deanna Cremin Playground. A pedestrian underpass has

also been suggested. We think these continued concerns underscore the need for additional safety interventions at Otis Street, including the ones described above.

4. **Improve bus operations and rider experience:** As mentioned above, we remain enthusiastic about the possibility of dedicated bus lanes along the full length of McGrath. Such infrastructure and commensurate service would further reduce vehicle dependence in Somerville and traffic on McGrath while providing a sorely needed north-south transit route through this underserved area of Somerville. We remain convinced that a modified 85 would be an ideal candidate to serve McGrath, along with potential extensions to the T47, 100, and 108. To support this increased service, we would love to see transit signal priority installed at select intersections including Medford Street and Washington Street. Finally, we recommend the following amenities be installed at every bus stop on McGrath: shelters, benches, trash and recycling bins, e-ink signs with live status updates, and elevated boarding platforms to improve accessibility. Additional bus stop amenities to consider include Blue Bikes stations, USB chargers built into benches, and emergency signal buttons in sensitive areas like Otis Street.
5. **Remove the fence along Dana Street:** Our neighbors in Gilman Square have alerted us to the fence planned along the entire length of Dana Street. Since one of this project's key goals is to reconnect neighborhoods, we agree with their assessment that such a partition is inappropriate – especially given the planting strip planned to separate the adjacent sidewalk from McGrath. If the project team is not confident that the new sidewalk will be a safe and pleasant place to walk, we would rather see it removed and reallocated for other uses while pedestrians continue to use the existing sidewalk on the west side of Dana Street. Adding a thoughtfully designed crosswalk at Bonair Street would help to discourage pedestrians from crossing mid-block without creating an additional barrier in this neighborhood.

Thank you again for your commitment to this critical project. We know this work will support a livable, healthy, environmentally friendly community for generations to come. As ever, we look forward to engaging further on this critical corridor. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

The Somerville Pedestrian & Transit Advisory Committee (PTAC)

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Meredith Brown
Laura Evans
Christopher Ferry
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Satoko Hirai, *Digital Comms. Officer*
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CC: OSPCD Mobility, City of Somerville
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