



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Traffic and Parking Committee

Meeting Minutes

Monday, March 27, 2023

6:00 PM

This meeting was held via GoToWebinar and was called to order by Chair Gomez Mouakad at 6:00 p.m. and adjourned at 7:27 p.m. on a Roll Call Vote: 3 in favor (Councilors Gomez Mouakad, Wilson, Ewen-Campen), 0 opposed, 0 absent.

Others present:

Michael Potere – Assistant Clerk of Committees; Brad Rawson – Director of Mobility (OSPCD); Brian Postlewaite – Director of Engineering (IAM).

Roll Call

Present: Chairperson Beatriz Gomez Mouakad , Vice Chair Jake Wilson and Ben Ewen-Campen

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [23-0336](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the Traffic and Parking Committee Meeting of February 27, 2023.

RESULT: ACCEPTED
AYE: Chairperson Gomez Mouakad and Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen
ABSENT: Vice Chair Wilson

Studies

2. Order (ID # [22-0300](#)) By Councilor Burnley Jr., Councilor Pineda Neufeld, Councilor Davis, Councilor Wilson, Councilor Kelly, Councilor Scott and Councilor Ewen-Campen

That the Director of Mobility conduct an equity study of bus routes to determine targets for fare-free buses.

Director Rawson shared data obtained from the MBTA for ridership in the city from 2015-2017 and explained that this data was being used to inform the city’s fare-free bus program.

Councilor Ewen-Campen asked if this was the most recent data, and Director Rawson responded that the MBTA has collected data from 2022 but they have not yet made it available in granular detail.

Councilor Ewen-Campen asked if the administration’s plan was to offer system-wide bus passes to residents as opposed to choosing specific routes that would be free. Director Rawson explained that the data is being studied, but that a system-wide free pass would likely be most useful to Somerville residents. Councilor Ewen-Campen responded that this program

should be widely publicized when it is implemented to maximize participation and encourage wider use of public transportation.

Chair Gomez Mouakad asked if the passes that were issued to students expire when the academic year ends, and Director Rawson responded that they do, but that the administration is working on ways to extend them through the summer.

Councilor Wilson expressed support for the administration's execution of the free pass program, and asked if it would be possible to issue free passes and also have certain free bus routes. Director Rawson responded that the administration will be looking into all options to maximize usage and the benefit to Somerville residents.

Chair Gomez Mouakad stated that, when asked, constituents in the Latino community resoundingly prefer free system-wide passes over specific free bus routes.

Chair Gomez Mouakad concluded with a request for a report from Director Rawson regarding the data on the free pass program at the end of the school year.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

Traffic Calming

3. Order
(ID # [23-0289](#))

By Councilor Gomez Mouakad, Councilor Wilson, Councilor Burnley Jr. and Councilor Ewen-Campen

That the Commissioner of Public Works install high visibility flexible bollards at all entrances to the Community Path from a vehicular road, to prevent the entry of non-authorized vehicles into the path.

Chair Gomez Mouakad stated that the purpose of this agenda item is to address the occasional entry of unauthorized vehicles on the Community Path.

Director Postlewaite explained that research was conducted regarding the issue and it was learned that unauthorized vehicles entering the Community Path was a rare occurrence, and that there are two notable negative consequences to installing bollards at these locations: first, that pedestrians and bicyclists have to navigate around them, which increases the risk of an accident and injury; and second, that the installation of bollards would make it more difficult for emergency response teams to enter the area. Director Postlewaite stated that the DPW therefore believes the safety concerns associated with installing the bollards outweighs the potential benefits.

Councilor Wilson asked if there are any possible non-bollard solutions to preventing unauthorized vehicles from entering the path that might not be as

disruptive. Director Postlewaite explained that alternatives were investigated and stated that the risk of collision between pedestrians and bicyclists associated with having to navigate around any structure still exist.

Councilor Ewen-Campen asked for clarification regarding the existence of bollards on other areas of the path, and emphasized the danger associated with vehicles entering the path. Director Postlewaite responded that the bollards that were on those areas of the path have been removed due because they obstructed the path, and added that the recommendation to not install bollards was based on the fact that vehicles entering the path was a rare event. Director Postlewaite added that the bicycling community also opposes the installation of bollards. Director Rawson added that the MBTA has installed bollards near the Green Line extension and the administration will be evaluating the efficacy of them to continue is analysis of this item.

Director Postlewaite noted that MassDOT will be installing bollards were installed near the high school, emergency responders and maintenance crews would be carrying the tools necessary to remove bollards if necessary whether or not they are installed on the path, and Director Postlewaite indicated that was correct.

Councilor Gomez Mouakad noted this item would be revisited once the Community Path Extension Opens to assess bollards being installed by MassDot and conclude if similar installation should happen at existing locations of Community Path.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

4. Order
(ID # [23-0295](#))

By Councilor McLaughlin

That the Director of Parking replace the missing No Left Turn sign at the intersection of Mt. Pleasant Street and Perkins Street.

Director Postlewaite stated that the sign has been reinstalled.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

5. Order
(ID # [23-0320](#))

By Councilor Clingan and Councilor Wilson

That the Director of Mobility install speed humps on Medford Street, between Sycamore and School Streets.

Chair Gomez Mouakad stated that constituents in her ward have expressed concern about speeding cars near the Winter Hill School, which forms the basis of this agenda item. Director Rawson stated that traffic calming measures have been implemented at the Winter Hill School, and that additional measures would be considered for Medford Street, but that work on those measures would not be part of the 2023 or 2024 plan.

Chair Gomez Mouakad and Councilor Wilson expressed support for traffic

calming measures near schools.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

6. Order
(ID # [23-0321](#))

By Councilor Clingan

That the Director of Mobility place in-street spring-loaded pedestrian crosswalk signs on Medford Street at Sycamore, Thurston, and Dartmouth Streets.

Director Rawson stated that the Parking Department handles the installation of these crosswalk signs, but that he was not able to communicate with them in advance of this meeting.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Other

7. Order
(ID # [22-2115](#))

By Councilor Ewen-Campen, Councilor Gomez Mouakad and Councilor Clingan

That the Director of Engineering install a protective guard over the expansion joint on the Medford Street bridge, as it poses a safety risk for bicyclists.

Director Postlewaite began by stating that the state has jurisdiction to make changes to bridge joints, not the city. Director Postlewaite continued that the state attempted to install new joints on the Medford Street bridge but installed them incorrectly, failing to remedy the safety hazard to bicyclists using the bridge. Director Postlewaite added that the state communicated that it intends to properly install the joints when the weather improves. Councilor Ewen-Campen expressed frustration that the state installed the joints incorrectly to begin with, and that the joints as currently installed pose a serious safety risk to residents who ride their bicycles over the bridge. Councilor Ewen-Campen asked if a piece of metal could be placed over the joints in the interim, and Director Postlewaite responded that steel covers do not provide a feasible solution because they do not provide sufficient traction for rubber tires. Chair Gomez Mouakad asked if there was a way to make metal covers more conducive to traction, and Director Postlewaite stated that although the metal could be treated, those treatments wear off over time, causing the traction concerns to resurface.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

8. Order
(ID # [22-2147](#))

By Councilor Scott

That the Director of Mobility update this Council regarding replacement of the HAWK signals on Beacon Street with RYG stoplights.

Director Postlewaite explained that the HAWK signals were installed around five or six years ago due to restrictions associated with the allocation of state and federal funds, but that residents have since raised concerns that they are not as effective in calming traffic for the purpose of pedestrian

crossing as was once believed. Director Postlewaite continued that the department was investigating alternatives that would be more effective and not expensive to implement, and analyzing data from other HAWK signals placed elsewhere in the city. In the meantime, Director Postlewaite stated that the HAWK signals were modified in two ways to improve their efficacy: first, the button pressed by pedestrians was altered to make it easier to press; and second, the duration of the red light on the HAWK signal was increased to provide more time for pedestrians to cross the street.

Chair Gomez Mouakad asked about the effectiveness of HAWK signals in other communities, and Director Postlewaite responded that although they have been successful elsewhere, they are not as effective in Somerville, although it is unclear why that is the case. Chair Gomez Mouakad noted that electric bicycles also present a safety issue for pedestrians, in addition to larger motor vehicles. Chair Gomez Mouakad then asked if there would be a benefit to having the HAWK signals having a continuous flashing light, and Director Postlewaite responded that there likely was not, and that doing so could desensitize motorists to the HAWK signals and actually make the crossing even less safe. Chair Gomez Mouakad asked if the department had considered installing flashing yellow pedestrian crosswalk signs to accompany the HAWK signals, and Director Postlewaite noted that the option would be considered.

Councilor Wilson stated that the signage near the HAWK signal also had the potential to confuse drivers due to its complexity. Director Rawson responded in agreement, and indicated that the signs can be long and difficult for motorists to read.

Chair Gomez Mouakad asked if this item was a priority fix for the department, and Director Postlewaite stated that it was being analyzed but that other projects were more urgent because they posed a higher safety hazard.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED