



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Traffic and Parking Committee

Meeting Minutes

Monday, April 29, 2024

6:00 PM

This meeting was held via Zoom and was called to order by Chair Sait at 6:02pm and adjourned at 6:52pm with a roll call vote of three in favor (Councilors Wilson, Pineda Neufeld, Sait), none opposed, and none absent.

Others present: Brad Rawson – Director of Mobility, OSPCD, Suzanne Rinfret – Director of Traffic, Natasha Frazier – Assistant Clerk of Committees.

Roll Call

Present: Ward Five City Councilor Naima Sait, Ward Seven City Councilor Judy Pineda Neufeld and City Councilor At Large Jake Wilson

- 1. Committee Minutes (ID # [24-0251](#))

Approval of the Minutes of the Traffic and Parking Committee Meeting of February 26, 2024.

RESULT: ACCEPTED

- 2. Order (ID # [24-0544](#))

By Councilor Burnley Jr., Councilor Mbah, Councilor Wilson and Councilor Davis

That the Director of Parking update this Council on the timeline for citywide rollout of Safety Sticks, including which areas will be prioritized for enforcement.

Director Rinfret stated that the citywide rollout of Safety Sticks will be up and running in the next 3 weeks. She stated that she was on the phone today with the Safety Stick company and that signage will be posted this week and next week. Additionally, the City will be doing dry runs next week so that enforcement can review tickets.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

- 3. Order (ID # [24-0470](#))

By Councilor Wilson and Councilor Clingan

That the Director of Mobility update this Council on plans to address increased cut-through commuter traffic on Temple Street and Fellsway West on weekday mornings, including any plans to prohibit right turns onto Temple Street and Fellsway West from 7 AM to 9 AM on weekdays.

Councilor Wilson provided background about this issue. He described issues of cut-through commuter traffic from McGrath, in which commuters cut-through by turning right onto Temple Street and Fellsway West from Mystic. Councilor Wilson expressed his support for limiting commuter traffic by banning right turns at this location from 7am-9am on weekdays. While he anticipates the City might

discuss enforcement issues, he suggested that the sign alone will result in fewer right turns among some drivers. Additionally, navigation apps will stop routing drivers through these streets if a sign prohibiting right turns is installed.

Director Rawson stated that Staff are constantly monitoring conditions in the field, and that reports from councilors and constituents are helpful. He stated that people try to find alternative routes during closures, and that the City has not yet collected quantitative data indicating a 10-20% increase of Temple Street or Fellsway West. However, one outcome from this meeting is that staff can collect additional data to understand what is changing. He stated that controlling volume and speed of traffic is fundamental, and that previous improvements have been made to these streets. Additionally, Director Rawson stated that signage tends to have less impact than changes to the built environment. His office emphasizes physical traffic calming, such as curb extensions, elevated cross walks, and installing speed humps, and that his office needs to work with traffic engineers at MassDOT due to jurisdiction. He is optimistic that speedhumps on Fellsway West will be completed this year, and a safety project was previously completed along Temple Street.

Additionally, Director Rawson stated that MassDOT is doing lane reduction work through constructing large curb extensions and bike lanes along Mystic. The Mystic and Fellsway curb extension will reduce the speed of turning vehicles entering Fellsway West.

Councilor Wilson stated that he is glad to hear about this update about Mystic and Fellsway, but said he is concerned that it might result in more people turning down Temple Street instead. Councilor Wilson stated that he will follow up with Director Rawson, and that he would like to get out ahead of this and bring relief to impacted residents.

Chair Sait asked if there is an estimate for when the City will be constructing speed humps and the MassDOT construction timeline. Director Rawson stated that speed hump construction along Fellsway West is scheduled to be completed during the 2024 construction season. The MassDOT construction is scheduled to start late 2024, and is scheduled to be complete in late 2025 in the best case scenario. It is a \$10 million to \$11 million construction job, and MassDOT is preparing to bid construction in late summer 2024. Chair Sait asked if this construction work will increase cut-through in the affected neighborhoods while construction is in progress. Director Rawson stated that construction projects require construction management plans, detour plans, and signage plans. City staff will monitor traffic in the field to understand whether problems need to be addressed and mitigated. He stated that if Temple Street experiences a surge in cut-through traffic, his office will work with MassDOT to deploy City resources to mitigate the impacts.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

4. Order
(ID # [24-0468](#))

By Councilor McLaughlin

That the Director of Mobility return the TEMPORARY PARKING sign, that serves local businesses, to the corner of Washington and Myrtle Streets.

AMENDMENT: Replace "Myrtle Street" with "Florence Street".

Director Rawson stated that according to this office's investigations there have been no changes to Myrtle Street in recent years. Director Rinfret stated that one side of parking on Florence Street is resident permit parking from 12am-8am, and one side of the street is resident permit parking. Washington Street parking is 2 hours except by permit, and it has been this way for many years. Director Rinfret stated that she does not know what sign Councilor McLaughlin is referring to. Director Rawson stated that he will check with Councilor McLaughlin to understand the intent of this order and also to ensure that no damage has been done.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

5. Order
(ID # [24-0467](#))

By Councilor McLaughlin, Councilor Strezo and Councilor Clingan
That the Director of Mobility work with the Massachusetts Department of Transportation to preserve the pedestrian footbridge on McGrath Highway as part of the grounding McGrath project.

Director Rawson stated that the City has been working to improve the safety of McGrath Highway for 15 years. He stated that McGrath does not belong in the community; it is too wide and unsafe, overbuilt, and an inhumane freeway. He stated safety needs that the community has articulated: shrink the road, eliminate excessive and unnecessary auto capacity, and create a street that serves local people who walk, bike, catch the bus, and cross McGrath and to connect to local neighborhoods. He stated community use of McGrath by pedestrians is currently impossible due to its outdated design. Director Rawson stated that the McGrath project is a priority in the community in the Boston-metro area more broadly. He stated that as a result of community advocacy, the MassDOT is allocating \$90 million to the McGrath project. It is a five-to-ten-year project that will become available for construction in calendar year 2028. The next step is the design process, and MassDOT is preparing to issue a construction bid.

Director Rawson stated that one challenge to preserving the pedestrian footbridge on Otis Street is that the footbridge is not compliant with federal ADA law; the slopes are too severe for people with mobility assistance devices. In order to bring the bridge into compliance with accessibility law, it would need to be widened and lengthened, which would impact a local playground/green space.

Councilor Wilson asked if the footbridge needs to be taken down because of the lack of ADA compliance or because it is a physical barrier to the McGrath project construction. Director Rawson stated that both issues pose challenges to the bridge's viability in the future and provided examples identified by MassDOT.

Councilor Wilson stated that all efforts should be made to try to keep the footbridge. However, if it is not possible, he suggests that at a bare minimum to consider the phasing of construction and extending the use of the bridge for as long as possible during the McGrath project construction. He stated that construction of a new school Edgerley school building in Winter Hill needs to be constructed as soon as possible, and Winter School families depend on this footbridge. If the footbridge is prematurely discontinued, this could introduce chaos for Winter Hill school families.

Director Rawson stated that it will take four construction seasons - or four years - to transform the McGrath highway into McGrath Boulevard. Regarding phasing, he said it is reasonable to imagine that there will be at least several years of construction during which construction will not approach the Otis Street footbridge. Chair Sait asked if it's possible to request that the bridge is the last thing to come down, stating that hopefully the new school will be ready by then as well. Director Rawson stated this ask can be submitted as part of public comments, and that MassDOT will determine the feasibility of this request.

Chair Sait asked what can be done to ensure student safety during construction. Director Rawson stated that the McGrath project, like any development project, requires developers to provide a construction phase detour, pedestrian safety plans, and bike safety plans. MassDOT will require the project consultant to produce drawings early in the design process. The community will have the opportunity to look at these drawings and evaluate them. Chair Sait asked when the drawings will be available. Director Rawson stated that the drawings will be made public at many stages of the process. At present, MassDOT has a 10% design drawing that has been available to the public online since February. One year from now, MassDOT will have a 25% design, and one year after that they will have a 75% design. These design drawings are shared with the public at each phase. Chair Sait asked if the designs have bus lanes, and Director Rawson stated they do not include North/South bus lanes which the community especially needs more of. He said this is important so that buses are not stuck in traffic. He stated that bus lanes are something the community can ask for. Councilor Wilson summarized this timeline to ensure public understanding, which Director Rawson confirmed: the design process for the McGrath project is now through 2027, and construction will begin in 2028.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

6. Order
(ID # [24-0450](#))

By Councilor Burnley Jr.

That the Director of Parking update this Council on efforts to ticket vehicles with illegal license covers, including how many tickets have been issued for this reason in the last year.

Director Rinfret stated that Somerville Police Department (SPD) tickets for this. She stated that City parking does not ticket for this violation. Chair Sait asked if the question in this agenda item should be directed to SPD or a different committee. Director Rinfret said that ticketing vehicles with illegal license covers is not a violation that the City's Parking Department tickets, and offered to reach out to SPD with this inquiry and Cc Councilor Burnley. Councilor Wilson stated that he would be interested in obtaining this information as well, and suggested inviting SPD to the Traffic and Parking committee so that the information obtained can become part of the record.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

7. Order
(ID # [24-0339](#))

By Councilor Wilson and Councilor Scott

That the Director of Engineering update this Council on any plans to refresh worn and missing pedestrian crosswalk pavement markings on South Street, between Medford Street and Windsor Street.

Director Rawson stated that the work to refresh the worn and missing pedestrian crosswalk pavement markings on South Street, between Medford Street and Windsor Street is underway and will be included in developers' springtime effort to repave streets, finish sidewalks, and reinstall crosswalk markings and other pavement markings in that area. Developers expect this will be complete in the next month or two. This work is a result of conditions recommended by City staff and issued by the planning board as part of the developers' permits. Councilor Wilson stated that as a co-sponsor of this item, he saw the area with a resident who was concerned about safety, and that the 1-2 month timeline is satisfactory and addresses the concerns.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED