

Madalyn Letellier

From: Somerville Safe Streets [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, May 20, 2025 7:57 PM
To: [REDACTED]
Cc: [REDACTED]; [REDACTED] Mayor; Jehlen, Patricia (SEN); Transportation; Public Comments; [REDACTED] Lance Davis; Willie Burnley, Jr.; Wilfred Mbah; [REDACTED]; Matthew McLaughlin; JT Scott; Ben Ewen-Campen; [REDACTED]; Naima Sait; Jake Wilson; [REDACTED]
Subject: Somerville coalition letter re: McGrath Boulevard
Attachments: Somerville Coalition Letter McGrath_May 2025.pdf
Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

Dear McGrath Boulevard project team (and elected and city officials,)

Please see attached a letter expressing our general support for the most recent design for McGrath Boulevard. We appreciate that the project team took and responded to community feedback in its most recent design, incorporating many of the recommendations of this coalition and others.

However, we strongly urge MassDOT to design the road for a 24/7, 25mph target speed (20mph at the Otis St intersection) so that drivers of motor vehicles are cued to drive slowly at all times of the day and night. This is a core priority for our coalition, and we strongly encourage the team to use all potential interventions to ensure this.

We would welcome a meeting or conversation about this or about the specific recommendations in the letter, and we appreciate your attention.

Thank you
Somerville Alliance for Safe Streets (on behalf of the coalition)

May 20, 2025

McGrath Boulevard Project Team
10 Park Plaza
Boston, MA 02116

Dear McGrath Boulevard Project Team,

We are writing to thank you for your thoughtful presentation at the March 25th public information meeting and to share our feedback on the updated plan. We appreciate MassDOT's ongoing and meaningful engagement with the community on this project, and commitment to funding and completing this investment in the Somerville community. We continue to be encouraged by the evolution of the McGrath Boulevard project design and appreciate the team's reiteration of support for goals that our coalition also endorses: safety and accessibility for all modes of travel; reconnection of East Somerville and Brickbottom to adjacent neighborhoods; support for sustainable transit and accommodation for possible future expansion of public transit options; and incorporation of resilient infrastructure.

The design updates, notably Washington Street and Medford St/Highland Ave, clearly reflect the team's respect for, and inclusion of, community input. Similarly, we appreciate the thoughtful presentation of the alternative to the Otis Street footbridge, including a commitment to a fully signalized intersection, and we believe the design and commitment help address the community's serious concerns about safety.

Here are a few important themes that came up as attendees made comments and asked questions at the meeting, which our coalition embraces:

1. Speed control.
2. Light signal programming that prioritizes people over cars: no HAWK signals or pedestrian call buttons ("beg buttons.")
3. Safe crossing at Otis Street, including critical features such as a raised crossing.
4. Additional crosswalks on Washington Street on both sides of McGrath to allow safe access to bus stops.
5. Improved protection for people on bicycles on the Lowell Line bridge - flex posts are not adequate. Please consider using preformed concrete, [Seattle/Toronto-style barriers](#), or other solid barriers to protect cyclists from motor vehicles.
6. Ensuring the space made available by the road diet is situated and designed to provide beneficial use, especially for abutters.
7. A strong desire to further shrink the road footprint.

Our May 2024 letter requested that the McGrath be made narrower by shifting vehicle lanes to one side of the right-of-way. The primary purpose of this suggested shift was to signal that the new McGrath is an urban street and not a highway, with a secondary but important benefit of creating more useful space instead of an unusable median.

Given the team's explanation why the median will remain and understanding that the proposed intersection designs incorporate elements that explicitly address pedestrian safety, we request a **commitment from MassDOT to design McGrath Boulevard to a 25 MPH target speed**. The design should reinforce motorist behavior at times when the boulevard is lightly used (for example, on Sunday mornings) and especially in areas with heavy pedestrian use such as Otis Street and Prospect Hill. We urge the design team to incorporate appropriate elements, such as raised crosswalks, short signal cycles for motor vehicles, and automatic pedestrian recall traffic signals that will reinforce the 25 MPH design speed. MassDOT's design guides and NACTO's City Limits guide provide excellent recommendations.

We also applaud the increased green space in the current design. We encourage the project team to seek opportunities to situate as much continuous green space as possible on one side or other of the road, to make it more easily and safely accessible. Regarding the median and green spaces, we believe that the design could be strengthened by:

- **Keeping the median as small as possible:** sufficient to accommodate a single line of trees and future flexibility at intersections but preclude future conversion to a car travel lane.
- A reasonable density of trees (10 feet for the median trees seems excessive); more mature trees at intersections; bioswales or other green infrastructure in low lying areas; and **a realistic maintenance plan for the trees and greenery** in the created green spaces.

As you heard during the March 25th meeting, the removal of the Otis Street footbridge raises alarm bells for many – particularly Somerville parents whose children use it to get to and from school and the playground. We appreciate the project team's explanation why it is not feasible to keep the footbridge as well as the renderings used to illustrate current and proposed conditions (the presentation visuals were extremely well done). We would support the proposed crossing if it incorporates the speed control, automatic pedestrian recall traffic signals, and pedestrian safety interventions outlined above. At this crossing in particular, we would like to see a raised intersection, signals that are not only on recall but allow an immediate pedestrian phase on request to discourage crossing off-signal, and a reduced design speed of 20mph approaching the crossing. We believe these features are appropriate and necessary for safety given the location adjacent to parks and as a main school crossing. We will continue to advocate for a construction sequence that keeps the footbridge in place until a truly safe at-grade crossing is complete.

We are excited to watch the McGrath Boulevard project progress and thank everyone on the team for their continued hard work on a design that will do much to make Somerville a modern, connected, and resilient city.

With appreciation,

Somerville Alliance for Safe Streets
Climate Leadership and Resident Action/St. Polycarp

Gilman Square Neighborhood Council
Groundwork Somerville
Livable Streets Alliance
Somerville Transportation Equity Partnership (STEP)
TransitMatters
Somerville YIMBY
WalkMassachusetts
East Somerville Main Streets

CC:

Senator Pat Jehlen
Representative Michael Connolly
Representative Erika Uytterhoeven
Mayor Katjana Ballantyne
Somerville City Council
Director Brad Rawson
Somerville Urban Forestry Committee
Somerville Pedestrian & Transit Advisory Committee
Somerville Bicycle Advisory Committee
Somerville Commission for Persons with Disabilities
Somerville Commission for Women