



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
CLERK OF COMMITTEES

April 12, 2021
REPORT OF THE TRAFFIC AND PARKING COMMITTEE

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Mark Niedergang	Chair	Present	
Jesse Clingan	Vice Chair	Present	
Katjana Ballantyne	Ward Seven City Councilor	Present	

The meeting was held via GoToWebinar and was called to order by Chair Niedergang at 6:01pm and adjourned at 8:10pm.

Others present: Brad Rawson - OSPCD; Adam Polinski - OSPCD; Ali Kleyman - OSPCD; Justin Schreiber - OSPCD; Suzanne Rinfret - Traffic & Parking; Lieutenant James Polito - Police; Melissa Dullea - MBTA; Caroline Vanasse - MA DOT; Tom Lamar - SBAC; Lena Webb - SBAC; Zachary Rosenberg - PTAC

Approval of the March 15, 2021 Minutes

RESULT:	ACCEPTED
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MBTA Bus Routes and Related Issues

211426: That the Director of SPCD discuss with this Council the changes that are being considered, or could be considered, in MBTA bus routes to better serve bus riders following the opening of 5 new Green Line stations this year.

Chair Niedergang introduced this item, along with items 209606 and 207502, and Mr. Rawson began with a presentation about bus network planning. He noted that the slides are intended to build capacity and provide access to further information. The challenges of bus mobility have been discussed in the City for many years, with the lack of north-south routes a particularly notable issue. Mr. Rawson added that there are examples of regional efforts for redesigned bus networks as well, and regional policy plans have called for more transit service, including modifications to existing bus routes. The MBTA strategic plan also calls for bus network redesign and a formal redesign process was launched, with key decision points expected in 2021.

Phase 1 of the Better Bus Project began testing of new route and service options, including five in Somerville. Bus network redesign is currently focused on high-priority corridors. Pre-pandemic, the MBTA had proposed a more than \$1M investment in Somerville's Broadway corridor to leverage the all-day bus lane. Currently, budget cuts proposed have led to the creation of a regional coalition advocating to maximize available transit and decrease cuts. Next steps include community outreach and fact-finding

to develop recommendations for priorities in Somerville. There are also five bus lane projects underway for Spring.

Chair Niedergang invited Melissa Dullea, Senior Director of Service Planning for the MBTA to speak, and she shared that the MBTA was in a dire place in terms of its budget, and there were many austerity measures proposed. CARES Act funding has helped reverse some of the changes and enable service restoration. Chair Niedergang also invited Caroline Vanasse from the Department of Transportation (DOT) to speak. Ms. Vanasse added that this is a global once in a lifetime moment for change and the bus network has not caught up with those changes and needs to adapt to meet the needs of travel in the region. Travel by transit-critical populations is a priority, and is an important component to regional economic recovery. The goal is to create a shared vision for the region and a better bus network. Extensive public outreach is planned for May, and engagement in the Summer will include leveraging community-based organizations to assist with outreach in different communities. A draft map is anticipated in late-Fall or early-Winter, with the goal of a Summer or Fall 2022 implementation of a new network. This implementation will then be phased over the course of three to five years.

Chair Niedergang asked about the possibility for a north-south bus route in the City, and asked what the process is for making decisions about modifications to the bus routes based on the new Green Line Extension (GLX) stations. Ms. Dullea shared that there is also a Silver Line Extension (SLX) planning process, to connect Chelsea and Everett to the Orange Line. A better connection from the Orange Line to Kendall Square is considered as part of this process, as well as Orange Line to Boston service. She added that of the new GLX stations, only Lechmere has an explicit busway. There are no specific plans to make changes, but ridership changes will be monitored and further studied. Ms. Vanasse added that understanding how demand has changed is important. There are also studies of the gradient in the City, to determine which streets are "busable". Mr. Rawson emphasized that a Silver Line solution can provide some of the north-south access but is not the only solution. There is also a process underway to redesign the McGrath corridor to support bus rapid transit.

Chair Niedergang invited Zachary Rosenberg, Chair of the Pedestrian and Transit Advisory Committee (PTAC) to speak and he highlighted that Somerville has one of the highest transit mode shares in the region. Ms. Vanasse added that identifying the high frequency corridors to identify both feasibility and willingness for additional treatments is important, and the data should be available for late-Spring and will lead to further conversation with municipal partners.

Councilor Ballantyne emphasized that Alewife Brook Parkway access from east to west is also critical, and access to schools, seniors, and public housing needs to be prioritized. Ms. Dullea elaborated that the data being studied is largely the pre-COVID ridership data based on cellular phone locations. Chair Niedergang also stressed the need for access to the Mystic Avenue area, and also asked if there were any discussions in progress about the idea of making transit free. Ms. Dullea noted that fare policy is handled by a different group, and Ms. Vanasse added that a lot of research indicates that improved service quality is a bigger issue than fares. Councilor Clingan highlighted the need for improvements to the Route 95 bus and its long distances between stops in order to allow for safe stops, and also the need for north-south service.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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209606: That the Director of SPCD provide this Council with an update on efforts to implement North/South public transportation services.

See 211426.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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207502: That the Director of SPCD discuss the plans and process to advocate for Somerville transit priorities as part of the MBTA Better Bus Project, including advocacy for a North/South bus route and reduced fares for income-eligible riders, and against fare hikes.

See 211426.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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Powderhouse Blvd. Bike Lanes and Powderhouse Circle

207997: 10 residents submitting comments re: #204323, a proposal for Powderhouse Blvd. safe bicycling.

See 210900.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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208110: 6 residents submitting comments re: #204323, a proposal for Powderhouse Blvd. safe bicycling.

See 210900.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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208227: 3 residents submitting comments re: #204323, a proposal for Powderhouse Blvd. safe bicycling.

See 210900.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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208313: 3 residents submitting comments re: #204323, a proposal for Powderhouse Blvd. safe bicycling.

See 210900.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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208448: 2 residents submitting comments re: #204323, a proposal for Powderhouse Blvd. safe bicycling.

See 210900.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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209045: Rachel Turek submitting comments re: #204323, a proposal for Powderhouse

Blvd. safe bicycling.

See 210900.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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210900: That the Director of SPCD update the Ward 6 Councilor on previously discussed plans to reconfigure the Powder House Traffic Circle.

Mr. Rawson, Ms. Kleyman, and Mr. Polinski shared an update on the creation of safer intersections at both ends of Powderhouse Boulevard. On the intersection with Alewife Brook Parkway/Rt. 16, Ms. Kleyman noted that there were several scenarios developed last Fall for the reconstruction of the intersection, including a signalized T and a roundabout. There was a strong preference for a signalized T intersection at a public meeting, and the Mobility Division agrees with this assessment. There will be further outreach as design progresses. Chair Niedergang asked for confirmation that there will be a protected bicycle lane but only to North Street and Ms. Kleyman confirmed that the scope of the project stops at North Street. Councilor Ballantyne asked if Alewife Brook Parkway/Rt. 16 could be reduced to one lane in each direction, particularly since roads are being used differently now. Mr. Rawson agreed that this would be safer and noted that the Corridor Study underway is through the DCR and the City will work with its counterparts there.

Chair Niedergang invited Tom Lamar, Chair of the Somerville Bicycle Advisory Committee (SBAC) to speak and he vehemently agreed that one lane would be much safer. He added that the T intersection is consistent with what the SBAC has asked for, and reinforced that they would like to extend the protected bicycle lanes as far as possible. Mr. Rawson acknowledged that more work would be done to address the Boulevard. There will be fully protected bicycle lanes around the entirety of Powderhouse Circle.

Mr. Polinski shared that the Powderhouse Rotary quick-build safety improvements were put on hold because of COVID, but the additional time may have allowed for more adjustments to get things right. The timeline will begin in July and will include: single circulating travel lane; traffic signals turned off; continuous protected bike lanes around circle; and shorter pedestrian crossings. There will also be changes made to the bus stops within the circle. Mr. Lamar asked if the lane width could be decreased, and also whether more durable physical separators than flex posts could be used for the bicycle lanes. Mr. Polinski clarified that a turn-analysis using a bus demonstrated that the width is as narrow as it can be, and two right-turns within the circle will be restricted for further bicyclist protection. The flex posts are more durable, with a wider and longer base and thicker post than what has previously been utilized. They will also be used at more frequent intervals, depending on the location.

Councilor Ballantyne asked if other lanes could be narrowed, particularly entry points to the City. Chair Niedergang asked a question from a member of the public, if the width of the College Avenue entrance could be decreased. Mr. Polinski noted that there was an exercise to make the widths as tight as possible, but he would revisit the plans. Mr. Rawson elaborated that the City is working on addressing gateways, and there is additional work underway to address the resurfacing of College Avenue from the Rotary to Davis Square. Mr. Schreiber summarized that the work will include: narrowed travel lanes, a continuous outbound bicycle facility, median refuge islands, and speed humps.

Chair Niedergang read a comment from a member of the public who was critical of the Administration for not deploying protected bike lanes on both sides of Powderhouse Blvd. asked

about the middle part of Powderhouse Blvd, and specifically the protected bike lanes that had been discussed extensively with the community two years ago and were a source of great controversy at that time. Mr. Rawson said that due to Covid, that project had been delayed, and that it is his hope to get back to working with the community on planning for it in 2021.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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Bike Lanes on East Broadway

209808: That the Director of SPCD develop a plan to create parking-separated bike lanes on East Broadway.

Mr. Rawson shared that the Mobility Division is preparing designs for the section from Cross Street to McGrath Highway that would create new shared bus and bicycle lanes. The section from Cross Street to Mt. Vernon/Lombardi is a candidate for reconfiguring existing bicycle lanes and parking to create parking-protected bicycle lanes. This will not take place within the 2021 construction season, but the opportunity for input on preliminary design could begin in 2021. The shared bus/bicycle lanes have been shown to increase safety for all motorists.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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Parking Issues

210985: That the Director of Parking discuss with the appropriate committee, implementing income-based parking ticket fines for residents, as well as "day-fine" scales to set ticket penalties according to an individual's daily income.

Ms. Rinfret shared that the Parking Study is intended to provide additional information to better address this concern.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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210624: That the Director of Finance, the Director of Parking and the Director of SPCD discuss scaling parking permit fees with automobile size and efficiency.

Chair Niedergang noted that the vehicle mix has gotten larger and heavier, and incentives and rewards for smaller vehicles would seem appropriate. Ms. Rinfret acknowledged that a goal of the Parking Study is to help address this question.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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208575: That the Director of SPCD and the Director of Parking provide a quarterly update regarding implementation of deed-based parking permit restrictions.

Ms. Rinfret shared that the Traffic Commission changed the regulation to allocate parking by building permit rather than building occupancy. The addresses that will become restricted have been removed from the parking system, and thus the policy should be able to be implemented immediately.

Councilor Ballantyne suggested that data on accident rate by vehicle type be considered in the Parking Study, and asked whether the study would redefine transit hubs, or TOD districts, noting that there are 400+ new housing units anticipated between Teele Square and Clarendon Hill. She asked further for a general status of the Parking Study. Ms. Rinfret clarified that the Parking Study is currently in the process of collecting a curb inventory, and Phase 2 will include more policy considerations, and an RFP for that is expected to be released soon. Mr. Rawson suggested that the Planning and Zoning team could assist with work on defining transit areas. Councilor Ballantyne emphasized the need to prioritize the dedicated bus lane from Clarendon Hill to Davis Square.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

210932: That the Director of SPCD replace the NO BICYCLES ON SIDEWALK decals in the city's business districts and work with the Pedestrian and Transit Advocacy Committee to reduce conflicts between cyclists and pedestrians on sidewalks.

Chair Niedergang shared that there have been several cyclist/pedestrian accidents in the City and Ms. Rinfret noted that replacing the decals is a priority of the Traffic and Parking Department every Spring. It is spray paint, so it does wear out. Chair Niedergang asked if another type of sign or notification might be more effective and Ms. Rinfret commented that there are a lot of signs already and thus the efficacy may be an issue. Mr. Rawson added that the Parking Study will include a sign inventory, to identify gaps in signage. He noted that an increase in protected bicycle lanes will also help address the riding on sidewalks in central business districts. Mr. Rosenberg agreed that the root cause is demand for biking in pedestrian areas and the right-of-way design for a safer area to bike would be a better long-term solution.

Councilor Clingan sponsored Greg Hill to speak. Mr. Hill, a member of the Somerville-Cambridge Chapter of the MA Senior Action Council, expressed that this is a long-standing issue and a public safety issue for senior pedestrians. He encouraged public education, noting that enforcement is difficult.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Referenced Material:

- 4-12-2021 T&P Presentation (with 207502, 209606, 209808, 210900, 211426)