



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Traffic and Parking Committee

Meeting Minutes

Monday, January 27, 2025

6:00 PM

The meeting took place remotely via Zoom and was called to order at 6:05 PM by Chair Sait and adjourned at 7:53 PM on a roll call vote of 3 in favor (Councilors Sait, Burnley and Wilson), none against and none absent.

Others present:

Brad Rawson – Director of Mobility, Brian Postlewaite - Director of Engineering, Suzanne Rinfret – Director of Parking, Peter Forcellese – Legislative Clerk.

Roll Call

Present: Ward Five City Councilor Naima Sait, City Councilor At Large Willie Burnley Jr. and City Councilor At Large Jake Wilson

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [24-1764](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the Traffic and Parking Committee Meeting of December 2, 2024.

RESULT: **ACCEPTED**

AYE: Ward Five City Councilor Sait, City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr. and City Councilor At Large Wilson

2. Order (ID # [24-1736](#)) By Councilor Scott, Councilor Ewen-Campen and Councilor Mbah That the Director of Mobility and the Director of Engineering appear before this Council to discuss the preparation of a change order to revert to the design of the bike lane entrance at Washington Street and Webster Avenue to the original 100% plans.

Chair Sait sponsored Councilor Scott, Tadhg Pearson and Roberto Fischer to discuss the item. Councilor Scott provided a summary, noting that the redesign process has been ongoing for seven years. A particular concern is the bike entrance on the westbound side, which was originally designed with a direct entrance but later amended. This amendment has made the entrance difficult to navigate and may reduce the number of people using the bike lane. Furthermore, the final amendments were never made public. Mr. Pearson highlighted the dangers of the current entrance, stating that cyclists must merge with cars and stop in a traffic lane to make the turn, which deviates from the original proposal. Mr. Fischer identified a lack of rigorous design principles as the root cause, mentioning other sharp turns along the route and stressing the urgency of addressing these issues.

Director Postlewaite explained that this project was one of the first to feature

separated, dedicated, and protected bike lanes under the protected streets reconstruction projects. It is an annual project with goals to incorporate best practices and complete construction within the designated timeframe. While acknowledging that the connection location may not have been optimally designed, he emphasized the importance of balancing safety and comfort for all groups, including pedestrians and transit riders. The goal was to create more space for pedestrians and slow vehicle traffic. Although the project is not yet completed, there is potential for a shared travel lane to alleviate the issue. He gave assurances that any resulting safety threats would be addressed but said that changes are not made merely for convenience; they must consider the impact on other projects. Councilor Wilson underscored the importance of listening to users' experiences on the path. Mr. Fischer expressed frustration over the lack of space to make angle turns, questioning why he must leave a protected bike lane and compromise his safety and Mr. Pearson voiced concerns about using the lane with his children due to insufficient space caused by the curb, deeming the situation unsafe. Councilor Burnley noted the need to address potential hazards proactively rather than reactively.

Director Postlewaite acknowledged differing opinions on the design's imperfection and committed to reassessing the area if a safety issue is clearly determined. He outlined two approaches for making changes: redesigning for contractor reconstruction if the contract is still open or incorporating adjustments into a new contract if it is closed. Professional evaluation is required to determine the level of danger. Councilor Scott inquired about gathering evidence to which Director Postlewaite responded with two major criteria: assessing the project's completion impact and considering modest, reasonable design changes. Councilor Scott suggested counting cyclists who bypass the entrance as a safety measure and questioned whether the curb could be moved to the paint line.

Director Postlewaite confirmed that mobility post-construction follow-ups would inform entrance assessment and mentioned that further observation of traffic in the area is planned. Proposed design changes will be evaluated based on their safety improvements and cost-effectiveness relative to other projects. Councilor Wilson discussed the use of small islands for pedestrian safety while maintaining bike traffic flow. Mr. Pearson noted the difficulty of navigating paint markings with a bike trailer and inquired about the assessment process. Director Rawson indicated that staff would review the location for possible safety stick installations and explore a range of solutions for next steps.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

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3. Order
(ID # [24-1735](#))
- By Councilor Clingan and Councilor Wilson
- That the Director of Mobility and the Director of Engineering create an on-demand, dedicated pedestrian phase for the traffic signals at the intersection of Broadway and School Street, with NO TURN ON RED signage for both eastbound Broadway traffic and northbound School Street traffic.
- Director Rawson stated that in 2019, signal changes were made to minimize wait times for pedestrians and buses, including a 7-second head start for pedestrians. Staff will continue to review for potential improvements. Councilor Wilson is hoping for new signalization equipment and a dedicated pedestrian cycle, with "NO TURN ON RED" signs added. Director Rawson will prioritize this and provide updates.
- RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED**
4. Order
(ID # [24-1732](#))
- By Councilor Ewen-Campen, Councilor Clingan, Councilor Davis, Councilor Scott, Councilor Wilson, Councilor Strezo, Councilor Burnley Jr. and Councilor Pineda Neufeld
- That the Director of Parking develop a comprehensive plan to streamline the process for parking permits for in-home elder care and health providers, including Meals on Wheels.
- Director Rinfret mentioned that permits are available and can be easily obtained either at the window or online. Other communities have duplicated Somerville's process in this regard. Councilor Wilson noted that the removal of parking minimums has raised these concerns, particularly regarding in-home caregivers and suggested that the concern might center around having dedicated parking spots available.
- Director Rinfret explained that any changes would need to be presented to the Traffic Commission for approval. Councilor Wilson suggested that people might benefit from education on how to secure the necessary permits and Director Rinfret noted that she is available for any further inquiries. Councilor Burnley recommended obtaining more direct information on this matter from Councilor Ewen-Campen.
- RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE**
5. Resolution
(ID # [24-1685](#))
- By Councilor Burnley Jr. and Councilor Davis
- That the Administration update this Council on the feasibility of pedestrianizing Elm Street for select hours, including identified obstacles and a potential timeline for implementation.
- Director Rawson mentioned that staff are aligning with feedback and councilor requests. During special events, buses are diverted and general traffic is a major consideration. The last few blocks of Highland Ave might need to be converted to 2-way traffic, with signalized intersections being
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part of the equation. Mobility staff is working with small businesses and residents regarding logistics for deliveries. Over the next couple of months, Mobility staff will prepare a feasibility plan. Councilor Wilson asked for the term related to a particular one-way traffic safety issue and Director Rawson explained it is called a “double threat crash”, where one vehicle stops for a pedestrian and another does not. He noted that the city has removed surplus traffic lanes to mitigate this risk.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

6. Order
(ID # [25-0061](#))

By Councilor Clingan

That the Director of Mobility install DRIVE SLOW - CHILDREN AT PLAY signs on Heath Street, between Edgar Avenue and Fenwick Street.

Director Rawson reported that 8 speed humps are planned for this season between Moreland Street and Temple Street and explained that staff does not recommend signage for use as a traffic calming measure, as better tools are available. Councilor Wilson noted that this area is dangerous during the morning rush hour and after school and he suggested that targeted police enforcement might be appropriate for this area. Councilor Clingan was allowed to speak on the item and he asked if School Zone signs would still be used in school zones and if this street falls into a school safety zone, to which Director Rawson replied in the affirmative.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

7. Order
(ID # [25-0034](#))

By Councilor Strezo, Councilor Wilson, Councilor Mbah, Councilor Clingan and Councilor Sait

That the Chief of Police, the Director of Parking and the Director of Mobility discuss the consistent running of red lights during the weekday rush hour and repeated driver misuse of the Broadway bus lanes, including near the Temple Street and Broadway intersection.

Director Rawson indicated that staff will review this location and conduct a video study to determine frequency, with a follow-up report to be provided. He mentioned that the Police Department has been active at this site and noted that Massachusetts might have the opportunity to use traffic cameras, which could be beneficial in such situations.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

Referenced Documents:

- T&P - 2025-01-27 Medical Care Parking Permit Application (with 24-1732)
- T&P - 2025-01-27 Home Healthcare Professional Application (with 24-1732)