



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS CLERK OF COMMITTEES

May 17, 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	

Others present: Robert Antico - MA-DOT, Michael O'Dowd - MA-DOT, Ali Tali - TranSystems, Paul Stedman - MA-DOT, Frank Suszynski - MA-DOT, State Representatives Mike Connolly and Christine Barber, Brad Rawson - OSPCD, Adam Polinski - OSPCD, Ali Kleyman - OSPCD, Lt. James Polito - SPD, Khushbu Webber - Director of Legislative Affairs, Peter Forcellese - Legislative Clerk.

The meeting took place virtually via GoToWebinar and was called to order at 6:00 PM by Chair Niedergang and adjourned at 8:02 PM on a roll call vote of 3 in favor (Councilors Ballantyne, Clingan and Niedergang), 0 against and 0 absent.

Approval of the April 12, 2021 Minutes

The minutes were accepted on a roll call vote of 3 in favor (Councilors Ballantyne, Clingan and Niedergang), 0 against and 0 absent.

RESULT:

ACCEPTED

Mystic Ave. & McGrath Hwy. pedestrian safety projects

211798: That the Mayor, the Director of SPCD, the Chief of Police and this Council collaborate with the State Delegation and community advocates to pressure the MA Department of Transportation to implement traffic safety improvements to McGrath Highway and Mystic Avenue to prevent more pedestrian deaths.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

208844: That the Director of SPCD report to this Council on actions, communications and collaboration with State agencies to improve pedestrian safety in the Mystic Avenue area by I-93, following the death of two pedestrians hit by motor vehicles there.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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208901: That the Director of SPCD and the Chief of Police update this Council on what is being done in the wake of the two deaths in two different hit and run incidents on Mystic Avenue.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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203004: That the Mayor work with the State Delegation on an agreement with the State to permit City crossing guards at the crosswalks at Highland Avenue and McGrath Highway, and to permit the Police Department to enforce traffic laws there.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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211823: Sharing with the Council, the Administration and the public a 6-page blogpost from State Representative Mike Connolly.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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MassDOT I-93 Viaduct Steel Rehabilitation project

211893: TranSystems conveying a notice of an I-93 Bridge Rehabilitation project.

Mr. Antico and Mr. Tali gave a presentation on the I-93 rehabilitation project being undertaken to extend the useful life of the viaduct. The project will not include pedestrian improvements. Construction impact mitigation will be provided. Detours will be in effect and street traffic will be redirected as needed. Most of the detours are short and may last for several months. Detours will not begin before 9:00 PM and will end no later than 5:00 AM

The area of the project extends 2,000 feet and runs from Temple Street to the Home Depot. The elevated structure will be worked on and the bridge over Shore Drive will not be part of project. Repairs to the viaduct's deck were made about 5 years ago and this project will focus on repairing the steel superstructure and concrete substructure, and replacement of bridge joints.

Sound measurements will be taken pre-construction and construction curtains will be used to dampen any sound over the permitted levels. The Committee discussed the noise being generated by the work and Mr. O'Dowd explained when and where sound tests would be taken and said that 64 decibels is the standard and that the State would attempt to reduce that level by 3 decibels. Lead paint would be contained, and dust will be minimized by keeping it wet. Mr. O'Dowd, speaking about mitigation, said that the plan is to maximize as much work as possible on I-93, adding that the state is in the process of developing a contract to determine how much of an impact there will be to the local streets. Councilor Ballantyne expressed concern for people and drivers in the area and suggested restricting traffic to those who live in the area.

The work is projected to take 3 years to complete and will not impact work planned for Rt 28 and Rt 38. This project was originally planned to preserve the deck of the viaduct, but upon inspection, it was determined that work was needed on the steel.

There was a discussion about sound barriers and Chair Niedergang stated that the city had repeatedly been told by the DOT that sound barriers couldn't be installed unless there was another large project going on in the area, and now that there is, it appears that installing sound barriers wasn't even considered. Mr. O'Dowd noted that the city's state delegation made a request to incorporate sound walls in this project, however, he said the structure isn't strong enough to withstand the elements, e.g., winds, collisions, etc., so he suggested that a snow wall be installed during a future project for deck preservation. He noted that the cost of the viaduct project is \$37 million and that projects are being done in smaller increments due to budget constraints.

Representative Connolly said that any project to extend the life of highways should include things to protect the people affected by the project and if no effort is made to preserve those lives, then it's a wasted opportunity. He said that the city's state delegation will be advocating for sound barriers and he would really like to know how the sound and air pollution might be mitigated. He also said that storing road salt under the viaduct doesn't seem like a good idea and he'd like to open that area to pedestrians.

Representative Barber spoke about the timing of projects noting that the Routes 28 and 38 projects went from 2022 to 2023. She asked how can these pedestrian projects get back on track and how the 3-year viaduct project would impact them. Mr. Stedman explained that projects are coordinated all across the state and these projects will be, as well, adding that the viaduct project cannot be deferred due to having received a 'red cover' rating requiring that it be repaired as soon as possible. Chair Niedergang commented that the viaduct project was prioritized, and the others weren't - all while people were getting killed. He suggested going back to the 2020 schedule and performing those projects immediately.

Mr. Stedman explained that although the viaduct project is expensive and has a long duration, the details of the steel contract are fairly easy to put together, whereas, the need for right of ways, some with DCR, is an issue on the 28/38 projects, and that takes longer to organize also because of the details involved. He contended that the 28/38 project was not delayed but was shifted and went from a projected cost of \$2 million to \$6 million.

Representative Connolly said the community was told in Dec 2020 that the 28/38 work would start in August 2022. Residents are eager to provide input on the project but the meeting promised by the state for April 2021 was never held. Mr. Stedman said that the meeting for the project at 25% design is being planned for August 2021. Rep. Connolly urged MassDOT to do it this spring.

Mr. Stedman said there are some things that can be done, and he noted that after the fatalities, the state worked with the city to implement some improvements, e.g., installing speed reader board, pedestrian markings, LED pedestrian warning signs, pavement markings to narrow travel lanes to reduce speeds, crosswalk added at Shore Drive, upgraded countdown timers on traffic signals and modified them to current standards. He said that the state is working with local contractors to relocate a section of the fencing at Kensington Avenue to increase pedestrian visibility and working with the City to find ways to extend the island crosswalk area on McGrath Highway to make pedestrian visibility better and to provide safe refuge. Additionally, efforts are being made to avoid creating unintended consequences for deliveries to Stop and Shop.

As for communications, Mr. Stedman stated that there is a strong public outreach specification in the contract and he noted that contractors usually employ companies to handle their communications. Additionally, MA-DOT's Communication Department will also put out communications and will keep the delegation in the loop. Mr. Rawson said that the city's Communications Department will handle web updates. Once construction begins, weekly coordination meetings will be held with city staff to facilitate reaction to problems and keep all parties informed.

Chair Niedergang noted that the Somerville Alliance for Safe Streets asked him to announce that they are planning a rally for next week and to invite representatives from MassDOT to attend.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

211821: That the Director of SPCD report to this Council on the proposed MassDOT I-93 viaduct project to replace worn steel, which will divert traffic into Mystic Avenue and East Somerville neighborhoods at night starting in 2022.

See item 211893.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

211919: Calling on the Mass. Department of Transportation to prioritize and enhance roadway safety improvements on Mystic Avenue and McGrath Highway, and to install sound walls as part of the I-93 viaduct steel rehabilitation project.

See item 211893.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Dangerous Intersections and Roadways

211819: That the Director of SPCD install flashing STOP signs on Lowell Street at its intersection with Albion Street to prevent accidents caused by speeding or incautious motor vehicles.

Chair Niedergang read an email from a constituent concerning a crash at this location. The person wanted to know where he could find accident data for this location and how he could get involved in planning to make this area safer. Chair Niedergang said that he would share that information with the constituent, but that this was just the latest in a long series of crashes at this spot. Chair Niedergang commented that the installation of flex posts have made a difference, but haven't solved the problem. The neighborhood, he said, is united in advocating for the installation of STOP signs in both directions on Lowell Street at Albion Street.

Mr. Rawson noted that Mobility staff has been monitoring this site for the last several years and said that curb side regulation changes were made. Mr. Polinski reported that an analysis was performed in March 2020 to determine why right angle collisions were occurring. Flex posts and restricted parking was added, but crashes have continued. A STOP sign analysis was also recently conducted, and Mr. Polinski explained the guidelines for installing STOP signs. He pointed out that there has been an increase in collisions in 2019, although he doesn't know why, but recently, crashes have decreased. There appears to be a lot of vehicle, bike and foot traffic coming off of Albion Street and after all is said and done, the data indicates that a STOP sign is not the best solution.

Chair Niedergang stated that he's not convinced with the argument and is afraid that there may be a fatality at this location, adding that he would rather prevent an incident rather than responding to one. He and the neighbors believe that STOP signs would be effective, however, if they can't be justified by mobility, he hopes that something else would be done to minimize the danger in that area.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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211820: That the Director of SPCD use the \$220,000 in traffic mitigation funds paid by Maxwell's Green in 2011 to improve the traffic-calming infrastructure around the Magoun/Lowell GLX station.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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Traffic Calming around coming GLX Stations and CPX

211135: That the Director of SPCD report to this Council on traffic management and calming plans for the streets and neighborhoods around the five Green Line Extension stations expected to open before the end of this year.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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211814: That the Director of Engineering install raised crosswalks rather than standard crosswalks for each at-grade crossing of the Community Path Extension, including Central, Sycamore, and Walnut Streets.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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210968: That the Director of SPCD brief the Traffic and Parking Committee on the work that will be done on our streets and Community Path pursuant to the Memorandum of Agreement with the MBTA and MassDOT, which will provide the city with a \$1,400,000 payment.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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FY 2022 Budget for Mobility Division of OSPCD

211256: That the Mayor direct department heads to prioritize the rapid construction of physical infrastructure to slow traffic, protect our most vulnerable residents, and bring our streets into compliance with the ADA, to address the killing of four pedestrians by motor vehicles in the last two years and prevent further traffic fatalities.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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210893: That the Mayor submit a supplemental budget request to immediately add staff and funding to the Mobility Division for traffic calming, and increase its staff and funding by at least 50% in FY22.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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Referenced Material:

- Somerville Public Outreach (with 211821, 211893, 211919)