

# Minutes

## Boylston Street Corridor Study Committee

September 27, 2021 12:00PM

Held remotely via Zoom

*Committee members (in attendance noted by Y/N):*

John VanScoyoc, Chair	Y	Wendy Friedman	Y	Tom Nally	Y
Rachna Balakrishna	Y	Joe Gaudino	Y	Carlos Ridruejo	Y
Deborah Brown	Y	Wendy Machmuller	Y	Mark Zarrillo	Y*

*\*Arrived late as noted below.*

*Staff & Town consultants present:* Kara Brewton, Sophie Robison, Rob King, Todd Kirrane, Karen Fitzgerald (Toole Design)

*Meeting materials included:* agenda; Lower Boylston Concepts & Estimates PDF (Toole Design, 9-24-21); draft cross section alternative for Boylston Street (Tom Nally, 7-14-21)

*Guests included:* Christine Lau, Jennifer Dopazo Gilbert, Ken Liss, Fred Perry, Anthony Flint, Paul Saner, Tad Campion

John VanScoyoc opened the meeting, noting that it was being held remotely on the Zoom platform due to COVID, and after checking that all participants' audio/video were working well, announced that the meeting was being recorded.

The Committee by roll call vote approved the minutes for the following meetings:

- July 13, 2021 (in favor: WF, JG, WM, TN, CR, JVS; abstain: RB, DB)
- July 19, 2021 (in favor: JVS, RB, DB, WF, JG, WM, TN, CR)
- July 27, 2021 (in favor: RB, DB, WF, JG, WM, TN, JVS; abstain: CR)
- August 9, 2021 with the amendment to reflect that Mr. Gaudino was not present (in favor: JVS, RB, DB, WF, WM, TN, CR)

John noted that today's agenda will include the Toole Design Group reviewing proposed scenarios developed for the Lower Boylston area.

[Mark Zarrillo joined the meeting.]

### **Toole Design**

Karen Fitzgerald introduced three concepts (A, B, C), presented from most to least ambitious. All concepts have an estimated cost of \$3.4 to 4 million. Cypress Street intersection is most pedestrian friendly in Concept A.

#### **Concept A: 2 Lanes**

- Most street tree plantings, preserve existing street trees
- Reduction from four to two lanes allows for 10-11' sidewalks, 5' bike lanes, tree planting zone and parallel parking with some flexible function built (i.e. outdoor dining)

- Sections shown at Homewood Suites, Old Lincoln School (increased pedestrian area, potentially raised crosswalks, opportunity for green infrastructure), and Cypress Street intersection (turn lanes, separated bike and pedestrian crossings)
- Confirmed that there is ample turning radii at intersection designs
- Possible pocket park near Cypress Street, preserved as many off right-of-way trees as possible

### **Concept B: 3 Lanes**

- Left pockets & medians periodically to facilitate turning at Camden, Leveret, & Cypress Street
- Pedestrian zone with raised crossings near Old Lincoln School, direct path access for bike lane
- Narrower sidewalks, bike lanes on each side with parking and/or flex zone and 11' travel lanes
- Only at the Old Lincoln School: bikeway is two-way on school side, one-way on far side

### **Concept C: 4 Lanes**

- Small number of added street trees near Homewood Streets, possibly keeping their valet parking configuration and some general parking, trees would live in small, engineered bump-outs
- Non-vehicular space narrowed: smallest number of total tree plantings, Cypress intersection is narrowed and has no bike crossings, and narrowest sidewalks (7.5-8' overall, 5' in some places)
- Tree-way configuration: trees have structural soil around the trees so you don't need a 3-5' opening around the trunk allowing pedestrian space and trees where viable, but trees would further narrow sidewalks in certain places

### **Conversation with the Committee Included:**

- Suggestion to change the area called "paved school zone" to "community area" as the intention is for the area to serve the greater community
- Discussion of the **bike path options**, and specifically the double bike path at the Old Lincoln School in Concept B.
  - The double bike path only occurs at Davis Path to handle crossing and the continuous bike path through to connect people on both sides. The school and the mid-block path mean that there will be a lot of crossing at this intersection and the double bike path on the School side tries to help keep bikers and pedestrians safe/protected, and keep traffic moving.
  - Details of how this would interplay with the intersections will be clarified in a later engineering design stage (ex. If the crosswalk would be push triggered, meaning a biker would have to dismount and push the button to cross regardless of the lanes).
  - Are there other locations considered for the bike crossing, such as off Walnut and through the park, instead of at the Davis footbridge? This was considered, but the grade change at the back of the park would require a ramp, significantly increasing cost. Note that the playground here will be undergoing renovation in coming years and this will be considered at that time.
- Several members of the Committee expressed **concern in dismissing Concept C prior until completion of more detailed traffic analysis** to understand impacts of lane reduction to nearby neighborhood streets. Discussion of if additional lanes can be preserved while also keeping sidewalk widths and bike lanes if we reduce the width of the driving lanes (maybe to 10' instead of 11'). Issue is that MBTA buses, private shuttles, ambulances, and trucks require 11' lanes. Further discussion of the possibility of one 11' lane to be designated for these vehicle types.
- Some Committee members discussed if there was a **staggered implementation approach** here where Concept C could be tried first and if traffic is manageable, then lanes could be reduced one at a time. Some concern that traffic implications might not be worth increase in trees and pedestrian safety, which can be more moderately achieved in Concept C.
  - Other Committee members felt that **maximizing sidewalk widths should be the highest priority** of this effort, and that even if we acknowledge a need for more than two lanes, a

five foot sidewalk at the Cypress Street intersection is not an improvement and isn't good enough. This is especially an issue as the current parking situation is too narrow and leads many cars to pull up onto the sidewalk when parking, further narrowing the sidewalk.

- What are the **high level differences between each Concept**? In addition to the summary on each page of the consultant's packet, the main differences are that in Concept B there is a median (which reduces the sidewalk widths). In Concept A, left turns happen at will unless otherwise prohibited. Concept A provides the most sidewalk and streetscape potential.
  - Regarding likelihood of MassDOT approving lane reduction, Consultant analysis shows that this portion of Boylston Street has traffic numbers that are on the edge of what qualifies for this type of significant road diet, and that there are examples of similar projects in other parts of the State. Modeling of traffic movements necessary.
  - There was some confusion about where the extra space for multimodal uses comes from on the street, and the Consultant clarified that sidewalk widths, etc., vary along the Corridor, but that removing a lane makes the biggest impact as the lanes are currently 12'.
- Discussion of the likely **timetable for MassDOT's from Committee recommendation to commencement of work on the Corridor**. Todd Kirrane, Town of Brookline DPW Transportation Administrator, noted that MassDOT typically does implementation as areas come up on the repaving schedule and that the Town is not currently aware of where Boylston Street is on the repaving list. About 1.5 years ago, the DOT asked Brookline if they should repave Boylston as is (i.e. no improvements), or wait until the Committee made suggestions, and that the Town of Brookline asked MassDOT to wait until a Complete Streets effort could be implemented. Because this Committee has already done community engagement, the DOT may fast track this project, but not guaranteed.
  - Should the Committee offer MassDOT more than one Concept, or not pick a final Concept? It is important that the Committee provides MassDOT with a preferred Concept and states that Brookline has a clear vision for the corridor with respect to Complete Streets goals (i.e. pedestrian, bicycle, micromobility), as well as stormwater and sustainability. The Committee can show MassDOT the other vetted Concepts with which they are also comfortable.
  - Can we say we're equally in favor of A and B, and that C is a fallback? Sure, but the Committee should comment on the differences between Concepts and how they impact ranking. MassDOT and Brookline Public Works have concern about medians as they are hard to maintain, and there are no left turns elsewhere on Boylston unless at signalized intersections (except one). So there are differences between Concepts and it would benefit the Committee to indicate preference.
  - Once we send MassDOT a preferred Concept, they will follow up with additional conversation, as well as their own engagement, traffic analysis, engineering design, etc.
  - Regarding a timeline estimate, while this varies widely, sometimes the time from when our Committee submits a preferred Concept to the release of a bid for construction can be as little as two years.
- General consensus that the Committee should write a cover letter to include with the Concept suggestions to MassDOT that clearly **communicates the high level goals** of the Committee, not specific to a specific lane width. The Committee discussed how MassDOT considers Complete Streets projects like this, and that eventually MassDOT will decide on the number of lanes and their widths, but that this Committee can communicate the highest priority community goals that must be accomplished by any street renovation (ex. Bike lanes, intermittent parking, plantings, tree canopy, medians, etc.)

Karen closed the discussion by stating that next steps for Toole Design are consensus from the Committee around a preferred plan and then assembling a technical memo for MassDOT.

**Closing**

Kara will reach out about scheduling future meetings, including one tentatively planning for 10/4/21. **The next steps are for the Committee to create a cover memo signed by the Committee to be included with the technical memo submission and to choose a preferred Concept.** Tom Nally volunteered to draft this cover memo and share it with the Committee. The cover memo and preferred Concept decided upon at the 10/4 meeting will inform Toole Design's "birds-eye perspective" technical memo.

Kara will share a Doodle poll to find time for an additional meeting in October.

\*\*Meeting adjourned at approximately 1:18 pm.