

**Emerald Necklace Bicycle and Pedestrian Crossings Committee Meeting
Town Hall, Selectmen's Hearing Room, 6th Floor
Thursday, November 3, 2011, 7 p.m.**

Committee Members Present: Jesse Mermell (Chair), Clara Batchelor, Kate Bowditch, Julie Crockford, Rob Daves, Guus Driessen, Linda Hamlin, Patrice Kish, Arlene Mattison, Tommy Vitolo

Committee Members Absent: Kathe Geist

Staff Present: Erin Chute Gallentine, Peter Ditto, Rob Kefalas, Todd Kirrane, Heather Charles Lis

Guests Present: see attached

Welcome/Call Meeting to Order

J. Mermell, Selectman and Committee Chair, called the meeting to order and briefly explained the project, the various stakeholders that are involved, and the history of the project.

Introduction of Committee Members

Committee members introduced themselves and gave their affiliations, and staff introduced themselves.

Project Description and Introduction of Design Team

E. Gallentine, Director of Parks and Open Space, explained the purpose and goals of the process, listed the crossings, and explained the budget and funding. She said the Town has hired Greenman-Pederson, Inc. (GPI) and their team for planning and design services.

Presentation of Project Area Crossings

John Diaz, Vice President/Project Director of GPI introduced himself and their team, including Alta Planning + Design (Alta), and Pressley Associates, and some of their past experience and projects. J. Diaz gave a presentation on the project, including a description of the project area crossings, the issues and difficulties in crossing, past design work and options, the process for this project including approvals and community involvement, and the goals of finalizing the conceptual designs for all five crossings and finalizing construction documents for the Route 9 crossing. Phil Goff, Senior Planner with Alta, discussed examples of potential solutions and ideas from other projects for the crossings. J. Diaz discussed additional examples of solutions for the Route 9 crossing specifically. He explained when the upcoming meetings will be and their process, which includes consideration of comments.

Emerald Necklace Bicycle and Pedestrian Crossings Committee Comment

J. Mermell asked for comments from the committee members.

- G. Driessen said there was a lot to review and he wants to focus on Route 9 crossing and explore a crossing on the Riverway overpass if possible, but not take away from the street level crossing. He suggested simplifying the routes north and south and widening the island.
- A. Mattison agreed with most of the earlier comments, said Brookline is proud of the work that was done in Olmsted Park in renovation and the pedestrian and bike system that

separated traffic, and she is excited that this project is moving ahead. She said there is a lot of potential with River Rd., and there is a need for a crossing at Netherlands Rd.

- L. Hamlin said that when the Juniper St. jughandle was being changed there was talk of reusing the extra land for a bike pump station or some other use and she suggested looking at any old documents on this and seeing if it can be combined with this project. She briefly discussed the CIP process and noted that the experts must provide information as to what the solutions cost and understand what is actually feasible given the limited money available. She also said some paths are now just mud paths.
- J. Crockford said to think of the needs of pedestrians, bikes, wheelchairs, etc. and to consider that there are different types of bicyclists, for example think of solutions for those with kids, those going slow, and those who are only comfortable with a separate bike path. She said to connect the crossing with the existing systems in Olmsted Park. She said she is glad the project will go with the pathway and crossings guidelines design study underway with DCR, and she is glad Marion Pressley is involved.
- R. Daves said he asked his neighborhood for input, and is including their comments too. He commented on the lack of adequate crossings at Brookline Ave., Parkway Rd., Netherlands Rd. and Aspinwall Ave., which does have a signal and may be a good place for improvements. He suggested consideration of beautification measures too and mentioned the tangled trees and cinderblock walls by the path in the Riverway. He asked if the southbound lanes of the Riverway going into River Rd. were necessary. He said lanes are not well-striped, especially on High St. and Walnut St. He noted that the Gateway East project may impact this. He said that inbound traffic on Route 9 has many signals so people slow down more, but outbound traffic, especially under the bridge and from River Rd. is too fast.
- T. Vitolo said he is also relaying comments from others including MassBike, Boston Cyclists' Union, Bicycle Advisory Committee, etc. He acknowledged all the advocates of the project and said everyone on the committee is interested in having safe and useful crossings and designs that accommodate all kinds of users. He suggested also talking about what is nearby and how people get around. He discussed the jughandle and suggested a cycle track as a way to get from the connector to the jughandle, and working with the Gateway East project to fit this in if possible. He said to consider better accommodation for people coming northbound on Route 9 and going to Washington St./Harvard St. He discussed the potential for paths on the overpass and thinking of how they would connect and grades. He suggested a raised crosswalk and bikes lanes at Netherlands Rd. He noted some areas where it's hard to get up stairs. He suggested a second paired traffic light at Parkway Rd. and Brookline Ave., and said it is important for people who aren't comfortable walking out in traffic. He agreed with R. Daves that an entrance/exit to Riverway at River Rd. may not be necessary and would be better for pedestrians and bikes and would look nicer. He said the area around River Rd. is in terrible condition and suggested addressing it in the future if not now. He commented that he is worried since vehicles on Route 9 don't stop at crosswalks during rush hour and there is an issue with vehicles not seeing pedestrians and even low speed collisions. He is not sure how to fix this, but mentioned using bumps.
- C. Batchelor noted this last issue is a universal problem, and will be interesting and useful to try and solve. She asked that the team have really clear graphics and options to look at with pros and cons for each, and various solutions for each crossing based on the different ideas.

- K. Bowditch discussed two issues, first the difficulties in general with maintenance costs. She asked the team to look at materials besides just paint, specifically materials that might last longer. She also said that for any major public project in the public way, we should look at what opportunities there are for the project, within its budget, to manage stormwater in the context of the landscape or paved areas. She said it is a big issue for the town and she doesn't want to miss the opportunity. She thanked the group for starting the process.
- J. Mermell discussed the overall lack of definition as one of the biggest issues, both in terms of where to cross and once you cross, where to go from there since it is not always intuitive. She said that consistency is also important since some parts are now stately and others are worn down so it doesn't feel like part of the same system, for example at Netherlands Rd. She wants this project to be consistent with Gateway East in terms of logistics and the feel of the outcome, and she asked that there be a clear and welcoming entrance to Brookline.
- P. Kish said that on behalf of the Department of Conservation and Recreation, she is excited to be a part of this process. She noted they are working with the Emerald Necklace Conservancy on a study looking at the crossings and pathways within the park and connectivity is a major goal to that study, so this project has great timing and complements their work. She said some of the slip ramps at the Route 9 crossing are not functioning well and said to think broadly and creatively about these, including maybe eliminating one especially at Riverway and the Jamaicaway entrance for cars.

Public Comment

J. Mermell asked for comments from the public, first from officials representing organizations, and then from all others. She asked for limited comments and encouraged everyone to submit more detailed comments in writing.

- Cynthia Snow said she is on the Bicycle Advisory Committee, but they have not voted yet on the project so she is not officially representing them. She briefly discussed their Green Routes Network Plan from 2008 and its relevance to this project. She suggested a second synchronized light in several locations. She said that the area at River Rd. is narrowed so the bike path is very close to the cars. She suggested a wider median at the grade crossing at Route 9 for safety. She said they should look at the overpass over Route 9 too.
- Peter Stidman, Executive Director of the Boston Cyclists Union, said he had wanted to get more representation of cyclists on the committee and thinks it could benefit from someone with a more regional perspective, but he is encouraged by what he heard tonight from the committee and the fact that Alta is part of the consulting team. He suggested bike boxes and two-stage queues in some locations. He said that anything more than a crosswalk is better especially where there is high traffic. He said to treat streets as well as paths for example at Netherlands Rd. and Aspinwall Ave. He suggested slowing people traveling on Route 9 who make fast right hand turns for safety. He encouraged the team to be creative and push the envelope, and said people of all ages would like to be able use this area more often.
- Bob Sloane, Brookline resident who works at WalkBoston, said not to leave out pedestrians or keep them waiting. He said the median is important since elderly people can't always get all the way across in one light cycle. He said a mixed-use trail over the bridge overpass may be difficult for pedestrians who are uncomfortable mingling with bikes, and an appropriate width is important for safety. He asked the team to think about wayfinding signs, which would be very useful, especially for the many people using the paths that don't live here.

- Jeffrey Ferris, Ferris Wheels Bike Shop, discussed his involvement with access issues and the Emerald Necklace, thanked the committee and Brookline for doing this project, and talked about the importance of regional support for funding. He discussed related prior work that has been done, including a 1999 report by Bruce Campbell & Associates, and work by DCR and their engineer, Dave Lenhart, looking at paths and the bridge. He said a grade-level crossing is important, and said he is a fan of a bridge crossing, but noted it is fairly steep, ground connections still need to work well, and the bridge doesn't allow turning motions. He agreed with the earlier slip ramp comments, and suggested the team look at the on ramp on Huntington Ave. south to Boston, and how people move off slip ramp on Leverett Pond side. He agreed with P. Kish that they should address the old bridal and pedestrian paths too. He discussed potential pedestrian crossings. He suggested shutting Netherlands Rd. off from the Riverway.
- Carice Pingenot Reddien, Livable Streets Alliance, said improving the hole in the connectivity of the region and interlocking the project with Gateway East is critical. She suggested more wayfinding and better signs for bicyclists and pedestrians throughout the area, and said it is really challenging especially in the dark. She said traffic calming is essential at the Brookline Ave. and Route 9 approaches. She said a more inviting welcome to Brookline and the neighborhood would be better than the current highway interchange feel. She said some intersections currently only have crosswalks on three sides. She said a longer crossing time is needed for people who are older, disabled, or have kids, and noted a high traffic crossing near Alewife that works well. She said the bridge crossing is intriguing but the transitions would be critical.
- E. Gallentine addressed comments about this project and Gateway East and noted that two of the committee members are also on the Gateway East Committee, the Director and Assistant Director of Planning and Community Development are involved at a staff level with both projects, and said the consultant team has the Gateway East plans.
- Jessica Mink, member of the Boston network planning committee, Mass Bikes Metro chapter vice president, co-founder of Rozzie Bikes, and first president of Mass Bikes 20 years ago, said it is important to not just include Route 9 but all the way to Netherlands Rd. She said it is important to seriously look at the overpass. She said she'd like to see cooperation with Boston, and working on the Boston side to get the bridle paths into the pedestrian path. She suggested closing the northern slip ramp on Netherlands Rd. She said the contra-flow lanes on Netherlands Rd. and the Parkway are not well marked for cars, especially mid-block, and she asked that this be done soon with two or three more symbols painted on each lane to prevent people on bikes from using the contra-flow lane in the wrong direction. She likes the idea of a single light cycle to cross at Parkway and Aspinwall Ave. She expressed some concerns about the Brookline Ave. traffic light and lack of safety.
- Bob Dizon, JP Bikes and member of Casey Overpass committee, said this area is important for Jamaica Plain residents, and he rides in this area every day while commuting from Jamaica Plain to Cambridge and it feels like the Emerald Necklace doesn't really exist in this area. He noted that River Rd. is muddy, narrow and heavily rutted, and there is a dirt and rocky downslope by Aspinwall Ave. He said he is thrilled the project is happening. He asked about the availability of crash data for cyclists and pedestrians, which tells a lot about safety. He said taking a left onto the Parkway is difficult even with bright clothing. He discussed the need for wayfinding and green space.

- Rebecca Albrecht, Brookline resident, said she bikes and does errands by bike throughout Brookline, Boston, Cambridge. She said it's not clear whether there will be a continuous path or if it will go along Brookline Ave. or cut across Route 9. She asked that the project support Olmsted's vision and legacy, and she read a prepared statement to this effect. She said it is impossible to take friends on what could be an easy bike ride to Franklin Park, and that there is a similar domino effect for families trying to enjoy the paths along the length of the Emerald Necklace. She said the incline on the bridge overpass would be difficult for kids on bikes, wheelchairs, etc. and said it would be nice to have a level crossing.
- Ann Lusk, resident of Whiskey Point, said she has used these crossings many times, including for commuting to Harvard School of Public Health, and she works on bicycle research. She said she attended earlier meetings for proposed cycle tracks in Brookline, and she explained that they are barrier-protected paths adjacent to sidewalks and provided additional details, including safety statistics. She suggested cycle tracks on the Pond Ave. side and traffic calming. She suggested delineator posts and paint could be used to make cycle tracks in some areas of the Riverway for example, and noted they could be removed in winter, or bike lanes with sharrows. She suggested removing slip ramps in certain areas too.
- Mr. Menkee (?), Brook House resident, says he walks in this area and said the sidewalks in the section near Route 9 are not being plowed, and discussed safety concerns.
- Tracy Gabridge, resident on Netherlands Rd., said she would like to see a redesign of the traffic light and timing at Aspinwall Ave. and Brookline Ave. She said it's hard for cyclists to make a left run here and for pedestrians as well.
- Tom Bertulis, Jamaica Plain resident, thanked everyone and said he is excited for the project and likes the greenways. He said he'd like to see more cycle tracks. He said there is economic development potential too, and discussed examples from Portland, Oregon and said bikeportland.org has a good model.
- Ron Beland, Roslindale resident, suggested also reconfiguring Route 9 from the Boston side to the overpass since it is now defined as a car space. He suggested raised areas to help and eliminating curb stones so the area looks like a pedestrian plaza, which would also be a message to cars. He said extra lights may not be necessary.
- J. Ferris discussed flood control elements along the Muddy River such as the concrete wall by Brookline Ice & Coal and the slope for the flood control berm, which may not always be attractive, but are necessary.
- C. Batchelor asked if the overpass path was also intended for pedestrians, and T. Vitolo said the intent was to squeeze the lanes and fit both bikes and pedestrians. C. Batchelor said it seems quite narrow and not inviting for pedestrians, and A. Lusk said pedestrians would feel comfortable if they were on the outside of the lane and the bikes were on the road side. A. Lusk said not to make it shared use, but to have painted lines with two directions.
- E. Gallentine said she wants to be sure the connections are really connecting the historic park, and discussed the importance of signals, signs, etc. She suggested using a similar language for furniture and signage throughout, and gave an example of the new Eliot Street Crossing at Jamaica Pond. She said to definitely look at all modes of travel, as well as historic and recreational use. She said this is not just a mode of passing through, but we want people to come to the park as a destination and use it.
- A. Mattison said the signage should further the project goals, enhance the park user experience, and maintain the historic integrity of the park. She hopes the signage is continuous and consistent. She said part of the problem is the park seems to end in some

places and it's not easy to get from one entrance to another and there are no signals showing where to continue. She agreed with the suggestions to have this area be more of an entrance to Brookline. She briefly discussed the One Brookline Place project, where this is also an issue. She said the livability and usability of the area is very important.

Conclusion

J. Mermell commented that this had been an incredibly useful meeting. She informed everyone that the next public meeting would be on 1/4/12, and she encouraged people to submit written comments, which should be submitted by 11/18/11. J. Mermell adjourned the meeting.

Documents Used at the Meeting:

- Meeting agenda
- Guide to making public comments and how to stay involved, prepared by E. Gallentine
- Project description, prepared by E. Gallentine and J. Mermell
- Charge of committee, prepared by E. Gallentine and J. Mermell
- Emerald Necklace Bicycle & Pedestrian Crossing, Intersections included in project area map
- Presentation prepared by GPI, 11/3/11

Submitted by H. Lis.