

## **Brookline Bicycle Advisory Committee (BAC)**

Meeting Minutes for November 1, 2017, Town Hall Room 103, 7:00 PM

Submitted by Kristin Schreiber

**Members Present:** John Bowman, Bryan Decker, Jacob Meunier, Kristin Schreiber, Cynthia Snow, Tommy Vitolo, Jonathan Kapust (Transportation Board liaison), Brian Sutherland (police liaison)

**Member Absent:** Mark Lowenstein

**Public:** D.M Goldstein, John Harris, Dave Pantalone, Lucy Mack, Frank Caro, Ellen Perrin, Susan Regan, Jane Ross, Mitch Heineman, Chris Leone, Jules Milner-Brage, Jeremy Hutner, Anne Lusk, Don Weitzman, Rudy Breteler

**Minutes** of the October 2017 meeting were approved as circulated.

## **BABCOCK STREET DESIGNS**

### **Introduction: BAC Chair John Bowman**

- Nov 20<sup>th</sup> --Transportation Board hearing, a forum for public comment on the four design options most recently developed by Transportation Division staff for Babcock Street.
- The purpose of the current meeting is for the BAC to understand the four design options and agree on advice to give to the Transportation Board.
- Public comments at this meeting are to help the BAC form its opinion
- Procedures for meeting outlined

### **Presentation: Todd Kirrane, Transportation Administrator**

This is round 2 of Babcock St. planning; the plan approved by the Transportation Board last spring had many raised elements on the street that the Fire Department considered unacceptable. The Board of Selectmen asked the Transportation Board and staff to develop new plans with no raised elements on Babcock and retention of two existing handicapped parking places in their current locations.

With input from DPW and other Town departments, staff prepared designs to keep street width unchanged to limit project costs and to avoid damaging mature trees. The funds for rebuilding the street come from state Chapter 90 money, so state guidelines must be followed, including requirements for specific widths for cycle tracks, bike lanes, parking lanes and buffers.

In creating the design options staff considered—as should those commenting on the plans—complete streets guidelines which must take into account all users, and for cycling, particularly the 60% of residents who are interested in cycling, but worried about riding in traffic (the ‘interested but concerned’).

Mr. Kirrane reviewed the four design options, the plans for which are available on the Transportation Department web site (<http://brooklinema.gov/140/Transportation-Division-of-DPW>).

**Option 1:** *Two-way motor vehicle traffic, shared lane markings for bicycles, new pedestrian crosswalks (one nearest Devotion with rapid flash beacon and two pedestrian refuge islands).*

The section from Harvard to the Fire Station is similar to the previously Transportation Board approved plan but without the raised elements. It includes right and left turn lanes from Babcock to Harvard, with a bike lane between them and a bike box in front of traffic. This section is the same for all options except #3. The rest of the street has shared vehicle-bicycle travel lanes with sharrows and chicaned parking (alternating parking from one side of the street to the other to slow traffic).

At Commonwealth Avenue (where protected bike lanes are under construction), there will be bike boxes for through and turning movements by cyclists. The exact nature and timing of the traffic signals is not yet known.

**Option 2:** *Two-way street level cycle track with delineator posts and most parking removed*

Green bike crossover from east side of street to two-way cycle track on west side after the fire station. Dotted lane cycle crossing from cycle track to Freeman St. Two handicapped spaces are preserved on the east side of the street carved out of tree lawn between trees to keep them in their present locations. Parking is reduced near the Commonwealth Avenue intersection. At Commonwealth Avenue, bicycles approach the intersection from cycle track on the left instead of from the right.

**Option 3:** *Partial one-way vehicle traffic, two-way raised cycle track; most parking retained*

From Harvard Street to Fire Station, two-way traffic to allow fire trucks to travel in both directions. There is less southbound traffic because most of the street is one-way in the direction of Commonwealth Avenue; this allows the southbound bike lane to continue all the way to Harvard Street. Proceeding north from the Fire Station, the street becomes one-way for vehicles with the two-way raised cycle track on the west side. Two-way vehicle traffic is shown for Manchester-Freeman and Winslow-Osborne to allow traffic to move within the neighborhoods without exiting to Commonwealth Avenue. Changing to one-way near Comm Ave intersection would require approval from Boston. As with option 2, bicycles approach the Commonwealth Ave intersection from cycle track on the left instead of from the right.

**Option 4:** *Two-way motor vehicle traffic, street level bike lanes on each side, much of parking removed*

**Comments/Questions from BAC and public (with responses, as available):**

- How can cyclists turn between cycle tracks and Dwight St? (There are crosswalks cyclists can use.)
- Would like to see cycle tracks can go all the way to Harvard St., even if it means removing parking near Harvard.
- Could option 2 and 3 cycle tracks be raised to sidewalk level to avoid the need for a buffer between the track and the curb? (This would require approval from DOT, which could be requested.)
- Provide more parking spaces carved out of tree lawn where possible (like handicapped spaces).
- How will cleaning and snow removal be handled with bollards or raised elements? (DPW is adapting to these changes at other locations in Brookline already.)
- Concern about safety given the number of driveways and side streets crossing the two-way cycle track, an unfamiliar street feature. (Cycle tracks have been shown to be safer than bike lanes or sharrows; two-way cycle tracks have been in use in Montreal for many years.)
- Make the two legs of Freeman Street at Babcock two-way or remove one of the two legs and enlarge the triangular park.
- Keep as much parking as possible; could parking lane be less than 7 feet? (No, minimum is 7 feet.)
- Are both left and right turning lanes needed at Harvard St? (Yes, except for option 3. Queue analysis showed this.)
- Could we have permit-only parking/better enforcement of the two-hour rule to ease parking demand? (Better enforcement is outside of purview of Transportation. Contractor parking will have to be in driveways or side streets.)

**BAC Discussion of Options:**

Comments from Mark Lowenstein, absent BAC member: strongly favors option 2 as the safest.

**Option 1:** Not acceptable as is. Adjustments could improve it, but not enough to enable it to satisfy Complete Streets guidelines and make Babcock attractive to the ‘interested but concerned’ cyclists.

Problems include:

1. Increased vehicle-bicycle conflicts with chicaning, and lack of chicaning during periods of few parked cars, such as overnight and on weekends;
2. At least one study shows that while sharrows increased cycling use, they did not demonstrate any increased safety along that route (<https://usa.streetsblog.org/2016/01/14/study-sharrows-dont-make-streets-safer-for-cycling/>);
3. Motorists will get impatient with cyclists taking the whole lane;
4. Untrained cyclists will ride too close to the curb or parked cars; and
5. The ‘interested but concerned’ cyclists may ride on the sidewalk or not at all.

**Option 4:** Possibly acceptable, but only with major improvements that would enable it to satisfy the Complete Streets guidelines and make it attractive to the ‘interested but concerned’ cyclists.

Problems include:

1. Bike lanes are unprotected from moving motor vehicles;
2. Double parking/blocking of bike lanes likely;
3. No traffic calming elements, so vehicle speeding likely;
4. The ‘interested but concerned’ who cycle may ride on the sidewalk or not at all;
5. Taking all the parking may not lead to the most complete street; and
6. Limited pedestrian accommodations.

Needed improvements include:

1. Use curb-separated bike lanes to protect against moving motor vehicles and discourage motor vehicles from stopping in bike lane;
2. Extend northbound bike lane to Harvard Street;
3. Add parking here and there where possible (traffic calming);
4. Add pedestrian stanchions in the middle of crosswalks; and
5. Provide cut-through of bulb-outs for bike lane or shift bulb outs to median islands.

**Option 2:** Better option for cyclists than options 1 and 4, but it has problems that need to be fixed.

Problems include:

1. Northbound bike crossing from east side of street to cycle track after Fire Station appears to be VERY dangerous;
2. Bike lane does not extend all the way to Harvard Street;
3. Flex posts are unappealing aesthetically in residential area, offer less effective protection against moving vehicles and bike lane violations than curb-separated cycle tracks, and offer no protection during winter months if they are removed;
4. Double parking in this scenario would be extremely dangerous;
5. Doesn’t work for people who are only going a short distance because of the difficulty of crossing from cycle track to Dwight Street and Freeman Street;
6. No curb extensions for crossing pedestrians;
7. Cars pulling out of driveways/side streets must cross (unfamiliar) two-way cycle track;
8. Connection with Commonwealth Avenue problematic because of approach from the left side of the street; and
9. Problem with turns from and to Freeman Street (a popular turn).

Needed improvements include:

1. Move the crossing needed for northbound access to the cycle track from near the Fire Station to John Street to allow safer access to the cycle track at a recognized intersection. Extending it the entire way to Harvard Street to eliminate the northbound crossing from east side of street to cycle track would provide bicycle accommodations that are even safer for cyclists and less stressful for motorists;
2. Use curb-separated cycle track for safety, perceived safety, and aesthetics on residential street;
3. If curb-separation is impossible, use improved design and keep stanchions or physical separation in place year-round.
4. Maximize safety and convenience of maneuvers at Commonwealth Avenue, in cooperation with Commonwealth Avenue project;
5. Use “No stopping/tow zone” signs along cycle track;
6. Signage to guide difficult maneuvers, including at side-street stop signs indicating the crossing of a 2-way cycle track;
7. Raise crosswalks and cycle tracks at side streets and/or use different material/color of the lane across side streets to be more permanent than paint; and

8. Consider changing the side of the street that the two-way cycle track is on to reduce the number of turning conflicts.

Public comment regarding Parking: Tracking suggests that most of the parking is not residents. Additional carved out spaces could ease problem. Explore resident stickers to allow parking on side streets that might be negatively impacted. Allow short-term loading and unloading in parking spots.

**Option 3:** Better option for cyclists than options 1 and 4, but it also has problems that need to be fixed.

Problems include:

1. Northbound bike crossing from east side of street to cycle track after Fire Station is VERY dangerous;
2. Bike lane does not extend all the way to Harvard Street;
3. Double parking in this scenario would be extremely dangerous;
4. Doesn't work for people who are only going a short distance because of the difficulty of crossing from cycle track to Dwight Street and Freeman Street;
5. No curb extensions for crossing pedestrians;
6. Cars pulling out of driveways/side streets must cross (unfamiliar) two-way cycle track;
7. Connection with Commonwealth Avenue problematic because of approach from the left side of the street;
8. Problem with turns from and to Freeman Street (a popular turn);
9. Going back and forth between one-way and two-way traffic for motorists could create confusion, and thus is potentially less safe for all road users;
10. The one-way option is likely to increase traffic on nearby streets, such as Pleasant Street, Naples Road, and St Paul Street, potentially having a negative impact on biking and motor travel on those streets; and
11. Requires many signs and a great deal of paint to direct traffic.

Needed improvements include:

1. Move the crossing needed for northbound access to the cycle track from near the fire station to John Street to allow safer access to the cycle track at a recognized intersection. Extending it the entire way to Harvard Street to eliminate the northbound crossing from east side of street to cycle track would provide bicycle accommodations that are even safer for cyclists and less stressful for motorists;
2. Maximize safety and convenience of maneuvers at Commonwealth Avenue, in cooperation with the Commonwealth Avenue project;
3. Use "No stopping/tow zone" signs along cycle track;
4. Signage to guide difficult maneuvers, including at side-street stop signs indicating the crossing of a 2-way cycle track;
5. Raise crosswalks and cycle tracks at side streets and/or use different material/color of the lane across side streets to be more permanent than paint;
6. Consider changing the side of the street that the two-way cycle track is on to reduce the number of turning conflicts; and
7. Include elements that force motorists to be safe and follow the correct directionality (engineering solutions).

### **Comparison of Options 2 and 3, from a bicycling perspective**

Option 2 has two substantial advantages over Option 3:

1. The motor traffic patterns are less confusing, potentially increasing safety; and
2. Neighboring streets are less impacted by traffic diversion, preserving their current levels of bicycle accommodation.

Option 3 has three main advantages over Option 2:

1. Raised (protected) cycle tracks provide more effective protection from both moving vehicles and parking violations, increasing safety;
2. One-way segments reduce the amount of traffic and provide traffic calming; and

3. The Harvard-to-Fire Station segment has a bike lane in both directions.

**Recommendation, agreed by consensus:**

The Bicycle Advisory Committee recommends an improved version of one of the cycle track options, either Option 2 or Option 3, whichever can best meet the following three criteria, in priority order:

1. Move the crossing needed for northbound access to the cycle track from near the fire station to John Street to allow safer access to the cycle track at a recognized intersection
2. Use curb-separated raised cycle tracks for safety, perceived safety, and aesthetics.
3. Rather than starting the cycle track at the fire station or John Street, extend it the entire way to Harvard Street to eliminate the northbound crossing from east side of street to cycle track.

If the three criteria can be equally satisfied by both Options 2 and 3, then we would support the neighborhood preference in deciding between one-way motor vehicle travel with more parking and two-way motor vehicle travel with less parking.

Given Option 2 or 3, we recommend implementing as many of the identified improvements as possible.