

Brookline Bicycle Advisory Committee (BAC)

Meeting Minutes for Wednesday, August 5, 2020, on-line, 7 PM

Members present: Elena Huisman, Alicia Lai, Neal Lerner, Mark Lowenstein, Jacob Meunier, Cynthia Snow, Len Wholey

Members absent: Brian Sutherland (Police liaison), Ali Tali (Transportation Board liaison)

Others present: Emily Jacobsen (member-elect), Jan Preheim, Jules Milner-Brage, David Kroop, John Harris, Amy Ingles, David Trevvett, John Bowman, Galen Mook (MassBike), Dan Martin (Brookline Transportation Division)

I-90 Project

Galen Mook, Executive Director of MassBike, reviewed the history and status of the I-90 project, which involves replacing the dangerously aged and eroded viaduct for I-90 from Cambridge Street in Allston to the BU Bridge. It currently has a dangerous S-curve as it crosses the rail yards underneath (now owned by Harvard University which plans to develop the area).

This project is of importance to Brookline since access to the Charles River (and Cambridge) along this section has been cut off by the highway since its construction.

The project anticipates straightening the highway with only a gentle curve rather than an S-curve, freeing more land along the River and for the Harvard development. A new multi-modal transit station for the Worcester commuter line as well as buses is planned.

Various iterations of the design have been considered, the most problematic of which is the narrow “throat” area where it will be difficult to fit in the highway, Soldiers Field Road, train tracks, and the Paul Dudley White bike path along the River.

Advocates and groups, including the People’s Pike, Livable Streets, MassBike, Walk Boston, and the Charles River Conservancy have been working hard for many years seeking a design that will meet the needs of the community for access to the new West Station, the Charles River and beyond to Cambridge for cyclists, pedestrians and buses and that will include improvements to the river’s edge and a 21st century sustainable transit services.

This is a MassDOT project, but it also requires an environmental impact statement and permits from the EPA and Federal Highway Administration. The current anticipated timeline is final determination of the form of the project by the end of this year, with permits and funding in place by the end of 2021, and an expected 10-year construction period. Throughout this period, there will continue to be opportunities for public input via the Task Force that has been working on the project as well as state and federal public proceedings. Mr. Mook encouraged the BAC, Transportation Board and individuals to pay close attention.

In response to questions, Mr. Mook said that there is no current plan for improvement to the Grand Junction rail bridge (underneath the BU Bridge—the only north-south rail connection east of Worcester) or for adding bike and pedestrian connections there, although are all highly desirable.

Possible FY 22 Capital Improvement Project Bike Requests

Mr. Martin presented three possible options for two of the streets that the BAC has indicated as priorities for improvements: Brookline Avenue and Longwood Avenue. These are preliminary plans, and Mr. Martin is seeking preferences and suggestions for both projects, which will continue to be reviewed by the BAC and other committees before the Transportation Board takes action.

Brookline Avenue (between Washington Street and Boston border near the LMA):

- Option 1—Dedicated bus-bike lane northbound with parking protected bike lane southbound; with 2-way cycle track between Aspinwall and Parkway.
- Option 2—Bus-bike lane on both sides of the street with the 2-way cycle track between Aspinwall and Parkway.
- Option 3—Buffered bike lanes on both sides (no reduction of vehicle travel lanes; no parking, no 2-way cycle track)

The BAC raised the following concerns/suggestions: improvements to access between Brookline Avenue and the cycle path that runs parallel to the street on the south side; more information needed on the functioning/safety of combined bus/bike lanes; safety of crossing Parkway to access the contraflow along Parkway (for the 2-way cycle track); use of the public way directly across from Pearl St/Brookline intersection that connects the River St. path and the intersection.

Longwood Avenue (Harvard Street-Boston border at the Muddy River bridge):

- Option 1—2-way cycle track with one-way vehicle lane eastbound
- Option 2—parking protected bike lane west bound/buffered lane eastbound with one-way vehicle lane eastbound
- Option 3—Buffered bike lanes in both directions with 2-way vehicle traffic and no parking

Concerns raised: diversion of traffic from the LMA onto Chapel St—already narrow and busy; emergency vehicle access to LMA with only one lane in one direction; Boston permission would probably be required to make street one way; the Longwood-Kent intersection is dangerous for pedestrians, so curb extensions there would be valuable; the reconstructed Carlton St footbridge over the D-line tracks might affect bike traffic in the area; getting rid of parking might be very difficult; removal of all parking would make deliveries, pick up and drop off more difficult; snow is likely to block bike lanes.

Ms. Huisman thanked Mr. Martin for his work on the plans and presentation and said that these items will be on the agenda for the September BAC meeting.

Bike Counts: Ms. Snow suggested the week of September 14th for the annual fall bike counts, with the week of the 21st as a back-up in case of bad weather. During the discussion it was acknowledged that this will be an anomalous year for the counts--but following discussion of an early trial count at one location--it was decided to proceed. Ms. Lai asked about the feasibility of using cameras, which might be worth exploring for future years (Boston uses cameras for bike counts). Ms. Snow will proceed with plans for this year's counts.

Minutes: The July 2020 meeting minutes were approved as circulated by roll call (unanimous)

Follow-Up and Open Items: Ms. Jacobsen volunteered to take meeting notes once Ms. Snow leaves the BAC after the September meeting.

The pilot lanes established for distancing during the pandemic have not been maintained. Mr. Martin said there were no funds for materials at present.

Adjournment: 9:02 PM