



SOMERVILLE PEDESTRIAN AND TRANSIT ADVISORY COMMITTEE (PTAC) FEBRUARY 2023 MEETING MINUTES

MAYOR KATJANA BALLANTYNE

Thursday, February 16th, 2023, 6:30 – 8:00 PM

Virtual GoToMeeting <https://global.gotomeeting.com/join/539724445>

You can also dial in using your phone.

United States: +1 (872) 240-3212 **Access Code:** 539-724-445

Community Representatives:

Ted Alexander*
Ginny Alverson*
Caroline Bodager
Meredith Brown*
Thomas Coen*
Laura Evans*
Christopher Ferry*
Vitor Pamplona, *Vice-Chair**
Zach Rosenberg*
Alessandra Seiter, *Chair**
Carole Voulgaris, *Secretary**
Kirsten Walters*

Ex Officio:

Beatriz Gómez Mouakad, *City Council - Ward 5*
Lauren Craik, *OSPCD Mobility**
Justin Schreiber, *OSPCD Mobility**

*= present

Guests:

Viola Augustin, *OSPCD Mobility*
Karen Molloy, *Somerville Transit Equity Partnership (STEP)*
Jennifer Civitella, *Community member*
Jie, *Community member*

Acting Secretary: Zach Rosenberg

Call to order: 6:33

Procedural Business:

1. VOTE: Approve January Minutes
 - a. Motion: Alessandra
 - b. Second: Meredith
 - c. Result: Approved
2. At our March meeting, we will be joined by Jessica Bellow, the City of Somerville's Traffic Engineer. If you have questions or topics you'd like Jessica to talk about, email them to Alessandra.

Subcommittee Updates:

1. Policy and Enforcement
 - a. Discussed and expressed strong support for automated traffic enforcement
 - i. Pursuing coordination with local electeds to more effectively advocate for these policies at the state level.
 - b. MBTA Ambassadors at GLX stations
2. Engineering and Evaluation
 - a. Did not meet this month.
3. Education and Engagement
 - a. Planning to resume monthly meetings - 1st Tuesday at 7:30pm
 - b. Next meeting Kate White from the City will join to talk about PTAC membership/recruitment/equity, community walks, and tabling collaborations for 2023.
 - c. Goal to host at least one community walk this spring.
 - d. Organizing a social in-person meetup (not meeting) for PTAC members since most of us have never met in person! Maybe April timeframe, open to venue suggestions! Let Ted or Alessandra know.
 - i. Leaning toward outdoor social setting based on committee feedback.

Mobility Annual Planning Process (Lauren Craik & Justin Schreiber):

1. 2022 Key Performance Indicators
 - a. Part of Vision Zero program
2. Safety Trends
 - a. Severe crashes have been trending down, but Somerville has experienced fatal crashes for the past 4 years
 - b. Crashes in Somerville tend to be concentrated on a few streets, a mix of state roads and local streets
 - c. Based on state data, crashes have dropped 12%
3. Project and Program Trends
 - a. Transformed the traffic calming program, rapidly increased the number of traffic calming interventions since 2018
 - b. Speed hump program is improving safety. Data collected before/after speed humps at a number of locations show large drops in number of vehicles speeding
 - c. “Clear Corner” intersection daylighting was started in 2022, improved visibility at 32 intersections
 - d. Somerville is modifying traffic signals to prioritize pedestrians. Crossing times increased at 24 intersections in the City
 - e. Rolled out reduced posted speed limits - 20MPH is now the speed limit on most roads in Somerville
4. Questions
 - a. Meredith: Seems like many examples are from West Somerville, do we have data from East Somerville?
 - i. Lauren: Mobility hasn’t seen differences in the data across the city, but will keep in mind comparisons between city areas in the future

- b. Zach and Alessandra: Commending the city for the work and progress
- 5. Mobility 2023 Work Plan
 - a. Process
 - i. Review the previous year's plan
 - ii. New proposals
 - iii. Individual priorities
 - iv. Resourcing review
 - 1. Forecasting 12,000 staff hours across each season
 - 2. Program ~75% of time, 25% is budgeted for unexpected work
 - b. Mobility has 118 active projects
 - i. Breakdown of staff hours by category
 - ii. Also hours by goal - work in progress
 - c. Highlighted projects
 - i. Construction-based
 - 1. Streets: Western Washington, Pearl +6
 - 2. Intersections
 - 3. Speed humps
 - ii. Quick build projects
 - iii. Vision Zero programs
 - iv. Transit priority and bus lanes
 - d. Next Steps
 - i. Publish 2022 “indicators” presentation
 - ii. Update Vision Zero improvements map and post online
 - e. Questions
 - i. Karen: How will the map and KPI presentation be shared? It’s really valuable!
 - 1. Justin: [Map is available](#) on Mobility’s section of the City website
 - a. Linked from [Vision Zero page](#)
 - 2. KPI presentation
 - a. [Mobility & Safety in Somerville: 2022 Key Performance Indicators](#) (slide presentation)
 - b. [Narrative summary of KPI presentation from January 2023 newsletter](#)
 - ii. Alessandra: Re: daylighting efforts, why are flexposts included along with paint at some crossings but not others?
 - 1. Justin: That’s a good question for our March meeting with Jessica Bellow.

GLX Stations: Pedestrian Safety & Accessibility (Viola Augustin):

- 1. Context
 - a. Viola started in 2018 as the GLX project liaison.
 - b. At that time the T was finalizing design for various stations and areas
 - c. The original design had very fancy stations that were so expensive the project almost died, so we essentially got the minimum viable stations to meet the project requirements.

- d. The City has been assessing where we can make things safer. Some are GLX projects, some are City projects.
2. Ball Square
- a. Several pedestrian improvements were made around the station.
 - i. Crosswalk shortened and realigned at Boston Ave.
 - ii. Broadway bridge reconstructed, bike lane installed and parking removed. Flexposts to come this summer.
 - iii. Crosswalk across Broadway by the station.
 - iv. ADA sidewalk improvements on the south side of Broadway.
 - b. Slip lane removed going northbound on Boston Ave toward Broadway.
 - i. Removing the slip lane allowed for lower sidewalk grade but it's still pretty steep.
 - c. Further east down Broadway, crosswalk installed with pedestrian island.
 - d. Comments/Questions
 - i. Alessandra: Great that one sliplane is removed, but there is another going southbound on Boston Ave toward Broadway. Any plan for mitigating traffic through that slip lane? Pedestrian signal to get across the slip lane is also confusing - if you're walking from Ball Square toward the station, the closest pedestrian signal is all the way across Broadway.
 - ii. Viola: We don't have a timeline yet but Broadway will be coming up as a construction project and the slip lane you're identifying will be reconsidered. There is also a neighborhood plan in the works that will be looking more closely at this intersection.
3. Magoun Square (Lowell Street)
- a. Speed humps installed on Lowell around the stations, speeding behavior significantly reduced.
 - b. Accessibility improvements planned for Princeton St/Lowell St crosswalk.
 - c. Comments/Questions
 - i. Thomas: The closest crosswalks to the station across Lowell are at Princeton St (340 ft) to the south and all the way up at Medford St (almost 0.25 mi) to the north. Riders are currently crossing Lowell without protection, which is made a little easier from the speed humps but still far from ideal. Situation is complicated by cars making left turns from Vernon Street, which is at a sharp angle with low visibility. Are there any plans to add a crosswalk closer to the station, or to add a three-way stop at Vernon Street?
 - 1. Viola: City is sensitive to the situation and wants to make sure to handle it appropriately, which may take more time. It's a tricky area because of grades and sightlines. Timeline is most likely that we'll start the design phase in 2023.
 - ii. Karen: Neighborhood has been concerned about the lack of crosswalks re: GLX opening for years. Glad the City is actively thinking about it.
 - iii. Christopher: Regularly uses this station and is surprised the long bridge doesn't have any handrails, considering the grade. There is also a very narrow point on the sidewalk closest to the station heading south, which is

likely difficult for folks in wheelchairs and with strollers. People have been using the station area as a drop-off zone.

1. Viola: These are helpful comments and we always welcome observations about how the area is used, either through the 311 app or via email at transportation@somervillema.gov. Unfortunately improvements aren't as simple as just installing a handrail since it requires a lot of coordination with the MBTA, so we want to be really intentional before starting that intensive process.
 - iv. Ginny: Why wasn't ADA compliance built into the original GLX plans?
 1. Viola: The stations themselves are ADA-compliant but Somerville faces big challenges with existing sidewalks and bridges (grade, ownership, etc.).
 - v. Christopher: Can the City work with Maxwell's Green to add wayfinding signage around the station and Community Path?
 1. Viola and Justin: Great suggestion, we'll bring it up to the MBTA.
 - vi. Christopher: Very excited about the area, could see this growing into a new city square with more foot traffic and commercial activity.
4. Gilman Square
- a. Community Path Extension between the high school and station is closed due to ongoing high school construction. It will remain closed (safety considerations) for a while after the rest of the CPX is opened later this spring.
 - b. City is working on a two-way bike/pedestrian detour for the closed section of the CPX along School Street and Medford Street.
 - c. Gilman Square Streetscape design is at 60%. Waiting for new development on Medford Street parcel to progress. Development for the parcel is in the planning phase, but there may be some temporary programming in the nearer future.
 - d. Comments/Questions
 - i. Christopher: Development should include station and CPX access from the high school.
 1. Viola: This is definitely the plan. We're still working on making that access ADA-compliant since the elevation change from the station to the high school is pretty extreme. Elevator is planned.
 - ii. Alessandra: Across School Street from the station entrance, the curb cut isn't aligned with the CPX. Are there plans to fix this?
 1. Viola: This was a tough call. Because existing conditions on School Street are so steep, regulators made an allowance for a non-compliant crosswalk. There were better options in terms of accessibility, but it would have required significant re-grading that just wasn't feasible. A raised crosswalk might be possible.
5. East Somerville
- a. Station has one entrance from the street but is also just off of the CPX.
 - b. Floating bus islands and a new crosswalk are planned for Washington Street and New Washington Street this spring and summer.
 - c. New bus and bike lanes have already been completed on Washington Street.

- d. Sidewalks under the overpass are wide, and MassDOT considers them to be a shared path.
 - e. City is considering a two-way bike connection on Joy Street.
 - f. Comments/Questions
 - i. Laura: Found the station difficult to navigate and rather unwelcoming due to sparse wayfinding in a semi-industrial area.
 - ii. Meredith: Agreed, the path to the station is very long and feels like you're taking it to nowhere. Right now it's the only option since the CPX is blocked off, but it will probably be more confusing once the CPX opens.
 - 1. Viola: Will bring up wayfinding with the GLX folks.
 - iii. Christopher: Do the new bus stops take into account the possibility for the Silver Line to stop here, since those buses are longer? Some Silver Line Extension scenarios include a route down Washington Street.
 - 1. Justin: Nothing in these plans would preclude the Silver Line, if one of those scenarios is chosen. New Washington Street may get realigned as part of the Public Safety Building project, which might require the bus stops to get rebuilt.
 - iv. Meredith: Drivers often don't stop at the unsignalized crosswalks across Washington Street and it feels very unsafe. Capuano School parents are concerned about using the East Somerville station for this reason. Speed humps don't seem like a good candidate for Washington Street, but are there other appropriate traffic calming measures?
 - 1. Viola: I'm really hopeful the floating bus islands will narrow the right of way and slow down drivers. A few months after the bus stops are installed, another traffic analysis will be done to assess whether a traffic light is appropriate.
6. Union Square
- a. A lot going on in Union square!
 - b. Entrances at grade on Prospect Street, on the Prospect Street bridge, and at the other side of the station on Allen Street.
 - c. Union Square Streetscape Project is ongoing, design is at 25% complete. Project will include Prospect Street redesign.
 - d. Sidewalks were widened at the intersection of Webster Ave and Prospect Street.
 - e. Comments/Questions
 - i. Alessandra: Excited about the Streetscape project but are there any shorter term plans to improve the Prospect Street crosswalk to the station? It's very hostile to pedestrians right now – cars don't stop, it isn't well-lit, and the surrounding area is complicated with various driveways.
 - 1. Viola: The City is consistently monitoring and working with the developer on how they can improve the crosswalk. The good news is that the developer is trying to occupy the sidewalk this year so they should open up. Then the suggested path of travel to the station would be either to cross at Webster Ave or Somerville Ave instead of taking the mid-block crosswalk.

- ii. Ted: Once the sidewalk is open, is the plan to remove the mid-block crosswalk across Prospect Street? Even though it's not ideal I still prefer to take it over traversing the Somerville Ave intersection if I'm coming from the north.
 - iii. Viola: The temporary one will be taken away. We're considering a permanent crosswalk but it will take time and effort to do correctly.
- 7. Next month's meeting (March 16): Jessica Bellow, Traffic Engineer, City of Somerville.
 - a. Discussion topics include:
 - i. Turns on red (continued from December meeting)
 - ii. Traffic regulations
 - iii. Signal improvements
 - iv. Flex post use in daylighting efforts
 - v. Pedestrian detours during construction
 - b. Send other questions/topic suggestions to Justin, Lauren, or Alessandra.

Review Letter on Davis Square Accessibility Project:

- 1. Zach, Meredith, and Alessandra drafted a letter to send to higher-ups at the MBTA, because the project is so constrained in the existing design.
- 2. Goal: Identify how critical this station is to Somerville transit and infrastructure, advocate for a more comprehensive design, advocate for other accessibility improvements in the short-term.
- 3. Comments:
 - a. Christopher: Add info about Holland Street headhouse being right next to Seven Hills Park which is often used for community events (e.g., Honk) in the warmer months.
 - b. Carole: Letter looks good.
- 4. Motion to add Christopher's suggestion to the letter, work with Mobility to identify MBTA recipients, and send the letter.
 - a. Motion: Alessandra
 - b. Second: Vitor
 - c. Vote: Approved!

Meeting ended: 8:01pm