



## SOMERVILLE PEDESTRIAN AND TRANSIT ADVISORY COMMITTEE (PTAC) JANUARY 2024 MEETING MINUTES

MAYOR KATJANA BALLANTYNE

**Thursday, January 18, 2024, 6:30 – 8:00 PM**

**This meeting will be hybrid:**

- **In-person meeting location:** Somerville Public Library, Central Library, 79 Highland Ave
- **Zoom info to join remotely via computers, tablets, and smartphones:**  
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89181225932?pwd=aWpoL2FtaUh3aGdVbHNRRWUJmeDRNQOT09>  
Passcode: 152274  
Or join by phone:  
Dial (for higher quality, dial a number based on your current location):  
US: +1 646 558 8656  
Webinar ID: 891 8122 5932  
Passcode: 152274  
International numbers available: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/kcVy69ROJG>

**Community Representatives:**

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

**Ex Officio:**

Will Mbah, *City Council - At Large*  
\*Lauren Craik, *OSPCD Mobility*  
\*Justin Schreiber, *OSPCD Mobility*

\*= present

**Guests:**

Brad Rawson, *Director of Mobility, City of Somerville*  
Preston Gutelius, *Somerville resident, Ward 5*  
Susann Wilkinson, *Somerville Alliance for Safe Streets; Route 16 Traffic Calming Coalition*  
Cole, *Somerville resident, Ward 1*

**Acting Secretary:** Carole Voulgaris  
**Call to order:** 6:30

**Procedural Business (10 Minutes)**

- Intros & roll call
- VOTE: Approve December minutes
  - Motion to approve: Alessandra Seiter
  - Second: Ted Alexander
  - Approved unanimously

**Subcommittee Updates (10 Minutes)**

- None have met since last meeting

**City Update: Mobility's Work in 2023 and Priorities for 2024 (25 Minutes)**

- Including updated insights on the [Transit Benefits Program](#).
- Slides will be posted to website
- We want to honor our commitment to being a data-driven community
- We have put a lot of effort into assembling data for a diverse audience
- We want civics to be fun. This is a motivator for data-driven storytelling
- Lauren and Justin have served as core team to this work.
- Look-back on 2023
  - Community path extension has opened (see slide)
    - Highest use during porchfest
  - Crash reports (see slide)
    - No fatal crashes for the first time since 2018
    - KPI deck with this data will be released next week or the following week
    - Crashes are concentrated on high-volume streets and state highways (see slide)
  - Traffic calming program is expanding (see slide)
    - Neighborhood traffic circles
    - Crossing islands
    - Raised intersections
    - Raised crosswalks
    - Curb extensions
    - Speed humps
    - Link to traffic calming webpage on slide.
  - Transit priority lanes expended on Broadway (about 0.3 miles)
    - Waiting for data from MBTA on the impact of transit priority lanes
  - Reporting on progress allows us to address concerns in the community
    - Illuminating performance data may help address some of those concerns in a constructive way.
- Looking ahead to 2024
  - Transit pass benefits (see slide)
    - Free passes for SPS students in grades 7-12
    - Free passes for parents of SPS students of any age.

- Eligibility is need-based
- Low-income pilot
- Workforce pilot (ran Jan - June 2023)
  - Purpose was to test transportation demand management measures
  - Transit passes for city staff
  - Now has been added to city budget for more permanent funding
- Low-income pilots are funded by ARPA, hope is to connect with efforts by MBTA to evaluate low-income fares.
- We want to continue to provide these benefits, whatever the ultimate funding source may be.
- Surveys and focus groups have indicate some of the benefits (see slide)
- Somerville has joined the MBTA's "pay-per-use" pilot. Free transit pass to all employees, but the employer only pays for the rides employees take.
  - Entire evaluation is online under "Somerville Transit Benefits"
    - Most transit trips in Somerville use both bus and rail.
- Question from Ted: Can the cards only be used for commute trips
  - Lauren: They can be used for any trip.
  - Brad: This is a way of getting people to try transit. SPS students can use it to get to a part-time job, employees can use it to get to Sox game.
- Next steps for low-income pilot (see slides)
  - MBTA has a robust reduced fare program for youth, seniors, students
  - Proposal to introduce an income-based low-income fare program
  - Proposal still needs to go through board approval
- Brad: One new key performance indicator this year is regarding outreach.
  - Thanks to PTAC for raising awareness of free/discounted pass programs at tabling.
- Alessandra: Question on means testing - will the MBTA program have a low barrier to entry so it isn't hard to demonstrate need.
  - Lauren: There is an intake meeting in-person to pick up a reduced fare card, but they otherwise will try to make it seamless, likely by partnering with community organizations (CAAS - Community Action Agency of Somerville).
  - Once you come in for this program, at the in-person meeting you could learn about other programs.
  - MBTA does not have the administrative structure to manage low-income fare eligibility, so partnering with existing community organizations would be good.
- See timeline on slides
  - There has been quite a lot of evaluation, including focus groups and surveys
- Slide on 2024 Look Ahead: Highlights
  - Note that this is just the tip of iceberg, the city will be coming back with more projects

- Please pay attention to upcoming public meetings
  - Mystic/Maffa (January 31 - here in this same room)
- Zach: Question on bus stop improvements: Which bus stops might it be
  - For Ad programs, the MBTA has a lot of control, but it looks like it will be 4 locations
    - One is along the new East Broadway Bus lane
  - Hoping to get 4 more from participatory budgeting funds. Depends on:
    - Existing ridership
    - Bus network redesign
- Work plan will be finalized and published in the coming months.
- Excited to work with Will Mbah as new Ex Officio member as well as new city councilors.
- 2024/2025 Intersection program
  - See slide and [somerville.gov/intersectionimprovements](https://www.somerville.gov/intersectionimprovements)
  - Would like PTAC committee feedback by February 1
    - Might present at a subcommittee meeting
  - Intersections are:
    - Cameron Ave/Tannery Brook Row/Seven Pines
      - Add raised crosswalks
      - No crosswalks exist today
      - High volumes of cut-through traffic
      - There will also be speed humps along Cameron Ave
      - Construction in 2024
    - Boston Ave/ Broadway (Ball Square)
      - Remove the other slip lane to reduce traffic speeds and open up space for bike racks or something
      - Add curb ramp to serve Green Line station
        - This is an example of the city doing work that the MBTA should have done as part of the green line extension
      - Construction in 2024
    - Washington St/Merriam St/Washington Terr
      - Construction in 2025
      - This is one of the more commonly-requested crosswalk locations
      - Raise the intersection (through the entire offset)
      - This corridor is on the bus network redesign high-priority network
      - Washington is also part of a high-crash corridor
    - Somerville Ave/Central
      - Add two floating bus stops (bring bike lane behind)
      - Bike lanes moved to sidewalk level
      - Refuge island to slow vehicle traffic
      - Also an important corridor in the bus network redesign
    - Bow Street/Walnut Street
      - Maybe highest-requested location in the city
      - Curb extensions and raised crosswalks

- This is more of an inform campaign than a consult campaign.
  - There could be some controversy to the extent that parking spaces may be lost.
- Alessandra: Is the hope to continue the intersection program beyond 2024/2025
  - Yes. Each streets package should include an intersection package
  - Brad: It is hard to overstate the level of creativity staff brings to the table to get all the improvements delivered.
    - A puzzle to solve is how to include signal upgrades into intersection projects
- Alessandra: Curious about Somerville and Beacon, where cars turn through ped signal. Is that on the radar?
  - It's on the work plan. Probably not a quick-build
- Alessandra: Does Zach's (engineering subcommittee) want to take a look?
  - Zach: Yes.
- Zach: Intersection package is really cool because it is several small projects

### **McGrath Hwy (Route 28) Reconstruction (25 Minutes)**

- Preparing for [MassDOT public meeting on February 13](#).
- Mobility presentation on the project's history and current conditions, and committee discussion of goals.
- Will go from Somerville Broadway to Cambridge 3rd Street
- Project is fully-funded through MPO's 5-year TIP -funding begins in FY 2027
- YouTube video: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K\\_ukzM8v254](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K_ukzM8v254) (watched through about 5:56)
  - It is 10 years later, we need another injection of advocacy to keep this project from stalling
  - Public meeting is coming up: Feb 13, 6:30-8pm (online - registration link on slide)
- Current road diet project is is a temporary measure, but reducing lanes provides evidence that a reduction from 6 lanes to 4 would be okay.
- The upcoming meeting will be important because they aren't a 25% design yet, so this is an important chance to influence it.
- Current questions:
  - Could there be dedicated transit facilities (a queue jump lane if not a full bus-only lane)
  - Goal is to minimize cross section.
  - Avoid unnecessary roads
  - Various neighborhood plans relate to McGrath (Union Square and Brickbottom)
- Alessandra: Great to see this in the context of other freeway protests in Boston
- Cole: Question - since this is state right-of-way, how much influence does the city have.
  - It is state land, but MassDOT has generally been quite responsive to local requests, such as
    - Linear parks,
    - Full-separated shared-use paths
  - Similar project in Jamaica Plain converted reclaimed highway into parks

- Cole: It will be important for the city to push for better connectivity
  - Brad: Grades from East Somerville to Prospect Hill might limit potential for an accessible path.
- Brad: Wildcards:
  - A lot of bridges (truss bridge near Medford/Highland has structural problems).
    - This might limit the potential for a continuous busway
    - Also a bridge over the train tracks will not be removed.
  - Point for advocacy - connection between Winter Hill and Somerville, especially with the Winter Hill School closure.
- Alessandra: Question about timing: Is it realistic that we will get from 25% to 100% design in two years?
  - Brad: That's a good point. We are not at the point where we would like to be
  - The funding that has been allocated will not go away, but it could be deferred.
  - Hopefully greater community involvement may mitigate risk of delays
- Lynn Weissman (guest): Future connection of community path via Route 28 next to the hotel. The Somerbridge Hotel at 1 McGrath is planning to build a ramp from Rte 28 to the Community Path. The MBTA has not precluded the land needed for that to happen. We've been working with developers there to create a scenario where there is safe walking and biking though all this. Wanted to mention how critical the Rufo Road intersection is. It would be good to have a public meeting about that intersection in particular. The developers have come up with a plan they're presenting to MassDOT. Good to have a public meeting while the Rufo Road intersection is at the conceptual design stage. We're grateful to the hotel and labs for stepping up to make this a more bike friendly place. The community path is 85-95 percent pedestrians. How can we make sure a public meeting happens around this intersection with public input.
  - Brad: McGrath Boulevard meeting will be an opportunity to talk about how short-term investments fit into the long-term vision
  - Mobility Staff can work with PTAC to get the Rufo Road intersection on a future PTAC agenda.
- Alessandra: If a public meeting isn't feasible about Rufo Road, PTAC could work with residents on drafting a public letter from PTAC to the city or state agencies
- Susann Wilkinson: Somerville Alliance for Safe Streets is interested in this issue and would like to be involved in advocacy about McGrath
- Lauren: slides will be available, along with a recording of this meeting if people who weren't able to attend would like to catch up on this discussion.

**Meeting ended: 8:05**