

## May 2025 Meeting Minutes

### Somerville Pedestrian & Transit Advisory Committee (PTAC)

Mayor Katjana Ballantyne

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## Meeting Information

Thursday, May 15, 2025, 6:30-8:00 PM

This meeting will be hybrid:

- **In-person meeting location:** 101 South St, Somerville, MA 02143
- **Zoom info to join remotely via computers, tablets, and smartphones:**  
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89181225932?pwd=aWpoL2FtaUh3aGdVbHNRWUJmeDRNQOT09>  
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>

## Members

\* = present

1. Ted Alexander
2. Ginny Alverson
3. Caroline Bodager
4. Meredith Brown\*
5. Laura Evans\*
6. Christopher Ferry\*
7. Preston Gutelius\*
8. Satoko Hirai (Digital Communications Office)
9. Brenda Marvin (Secretary)
10. Steven Mulder

11. Barbara Myers\*
12. Bianca Norkunas
13. Vitor Pamplona (Vice Chair) \*
14. Zach Rosenberg \*
15. Alessandra Seiter (Chair) \*
16. Robert Stanzel
17. Carole Voulgaris
18. Will Mbah (Ex Officio, City Council - At Large)
19. Katherine White (Ex Officio, OSPCD Mobility)\*
20. Justin Schreiber (Ex Officio, OSPCD Mobility)\*

## Guests

1. Mackenzie Webb - Somerville resident
2. Joel Paul - Somerville resident
3. Art - Union Square community member
4. Logan Brill - Somerville resident
5. Melissa Dullea - MBTA, Senior Director of Service Planning
6. Miles Taylor - MBTA, Service Planner for Charlestown Garage
7. Tara Kamal Ahmadi - MBTA Service Planner

## Acting Secretary

Brenda Marvin

## Call to Order

6:30

## Agenda

### Procedural Business (5 Minutes)

- Roll call and guest introductions
- Vote on April draft minutes - approved

### Review Service Changes to the 90 Bus (10 Minutes)

- Miles Taylor, Transportation Planner at the MBTA, will present changes to the 90 bus route set to begin on June 15, 2025.
- [Find details on the changes to bus route 90.](#)
- Miles presented a summary of changes in East Somerville. Route 90 uses Tufts Street, which will be converted to neighborway. It won't be compatible with buses and large vehicles. There have been complaints about Cross Street. There is a school and parking is tough. The plan will reroute 90 onto Washington Street. We had an open house to discuss the changes. The route will go straight down Somerville Ave. and on to Assembly. There will be a future Route 85 that connects some of the stops. It will go through McGrath Highway. Eventually there will be one route from Highland to Assembly. Most riders are within ½ mile of the new stops. The schools along Cross Street are all within ¼ mile of stops. Most of the students are commuting to Winter Hill and will be

closer to Broadway. There is a better Green Line connection to East Somerville. Folks going to the Green Line can connect at East Somerville station. The bus will run every 20 minutes or less.

- Alessandra: To clarify, these changes will be interim until the bus redesign are implemented.
- Chris: There are other schools that are not marked on the map and they may be outside of the ¼ mile radius. This change will be happening now before 85 will go onto McGrath Boulevard. There is a bit of a hill. I can see why people are complaining about student commutes.
- Brenda: When will Tufts Street be converted to a neighborway?
- Kate: November 2026
- Meredith: The stop on School Street at Highland, seems at least as close to Gilman as the actual entrance to the Green Line.
- Melissa: That's a great observation, but we can't have it as an accessible connection because the grading isn't right.
- Meredith: I'm a member of the Winter Hill School community. There is a lot of disappointment and concern. Not everyone is as close to the 89 part. Many are closer to Highland. McGrath is also a factor. There have been a lot of challenges.
- Alessandra: it would be helpful if those families would be willing to email both MBTA and Mobility
- Meredith: the changes to the 89 bus plus this plan has been deflating.
- Miles: We are looking into updating the 89 schedule for the fall.
- Melissa: The buses shifted and it wasn't quite at the sweet spot for bringing kids to school. We are looking at the options we have for the fall. We are aware of the issue.

## Subcommittee Updates (10 Minutes)

- Community Events - held a walk audit of Union Square with 60 members of the community. We got a lot of amazing feedback. The next step is to synthesize it into a comment letter. We tabled at Bay State Aeronaut. The committee met last week, and is planning for Carnival on June 1. Everyone is welcome to join the table at Carnival..
- Design Review - did not meet
- Special Projects - did not meet
- Ad Hoc Working Group Meeting: There was a Municipal Road Safety Grant meeting scheduled with Sgt. McCarey. We invited him, but he was unable to make it. We sent recommendations to him.

## Review Draft Comment Letter on Latest McGrath Blvd Design (25 Minutes)

- Last month, PTAC voted to write a letter to [MassDOT's McGrath Boulevard project](#) team commenting on the [latest concept design](#).
- At this meeting, we'll review the [draft letter](#) and discuss whether to send it or make additional edits.
- Alessandra reviewed the draft letter. The letter thanked the team for taking a collaborative approach. We like the updates, but here are some areas for improvement. Design and plan for a 25 mph speed limit, keep the median at 10ft at intersections, but the rest could be a narrow divider. We want to save the space for the sides. The Otis Street intersection should have a 20mph speed limit. The light should cycle for 24 hours, but it would also be on call for pedestrians. We would like a raised sidewalk, and intersection at Broadway. People still have concerns about the safety of the crossing. We want to advocate for the MBTA to run bus service and have dedicated bus lanes and also shelters, benches, trash cans, Designs include a fence along Dana Street and residents would like it removed. It continues with the partition of the neighborhood.
- Logan: the part about keeping the pedestrian overpass was about not removing it before a good alternative was in place. The interim is important as well as the final state.

- Alessandra: Yes, we advocated for that.
- Voted to approve the letter.

## Review Western Pearl Street Concept Design (35 Minutes)

- We'll discuss the concept design for the [Western Pearl Street Reconstruction project](#). Design details will be available on the project website shortly before this meeting.
- Before this meeting, it may be helpful to review the materials from PTAC's November 2024 meeting where we reviewed the project's three potential design directions.
- Justin: We just had an open house on this topic on Tuesday. This is our currently under design streets project from McGrath to Gilman Square, including the intersection at Medford St. We are completely reconstructing the street. That includes resetting the curbs, sidewalks, signal changes, bus stop changes, and changes to lane width. There may be changes to parking and traffic calming. We are doing outreach now and hope to have an 80% plan in early fall. We anticipate the project will be at the end of 2026 or early 2027.
- Kate: There were a lot of comments on intersections. At Pearl and Medford we want to reduce frequent speeding and add safe crossings. Low visibility makes it unsafe for all users. At Pearl and Marshall, vehicles are not yielding for people in the crosswalk. Vehicles are sitting on the crosswalk so it is often blocked. We would like raised crosswalks. At Pearl Street and Walnut, the crosswalks are set back. Could there be a raised crossing? Parents like having a traffic signal because it is easier for kids.
- Kate: There were 3 options last fall. Options 1 and 3 had the most support. Each of the options all had more than 20% support in the survey. Each had advantages and drawbacks and the comments mirrored much of the discussion in earlier PTAC meetings. Some people were concerned that they would always need to use McGrath to access their homes. The feedback was really nuanced. People talked about weighing the benefits and drawbacks. so, how do we make the decision? There was no clear consensus or outcry. What is the safest option? We felt we wanted to eliminate option 1 because with no curb access it can be dangerous. We moved forward with some of option 1 and some of option 3.
- Justin: There are safer intersections and crosswalks, improved bus stops, one continuous direction of protected bike lanes with some sections of two directions and one side of on-street parking, which is similar to current conditions. Concept 1 would be similar to Gilman Square> There are some raised crosswalks that will be separate. At the bottom of the street there are two-way bikes lanes. It bends Medford Street to Pearl Street. The bus stop is in lane.
- Concept 2 squares off the intersection and there is a large bump out. There are separate raised sidewalks and the bike lane and parking are flipped. It bends Pearl Street to Medford Street.
  - Vitor: What are the connecting 2 way bike lanes to the area?
    - Justin: There will be some connections. If it is in the bike network plan, it will happen by 2030
  - Joel: Does this close off Aldridge?
    - Justin: I'm not sure.
  - Preston: For option 1, how do bikes turn? As it is laid out now it would be confusing. The crosswalks on the north side are more aligned with sidewalks.
    - Justin: There could be markings, we don't have space for a cutout.
  - Preston: Could it be a combination of the plans?
    - Justin: Yes.
- Justin: Continuing Option 1, Skilton Street to Jasper Street the two way bike lane has ended. There are raised crossings, two curb extensions on the north, one is a bus stop. It allows for some parking.

With Option 2 the parking is reversed. There are more side streets on the north side so there is some up and down on a bike. The changes from Jasper to McGrath for Option 1 could add some parking that isn't there today. For Option 2, this is the section where the bike route connects. There is no parking in this section. The sidewalks narrow about 50ft from McGrath. We extended that. There would be new tree locations. Option 1 has eastbound bike lane and Option 2 has westbound. There are bump out locations, Both have a single lane at McGrath. We can eliminate the right turn lane. We don't have control of signal at McGrath, which is at the state level.

- Preston: What are the prospects of making a pedestrian area?
  - Justin: Gilman Square stopped at 60%. Design is on hold. It is not in the plan.
- Vitor: When you mentioned Stillman Ave, does it extend into Gilman Square?
  - Justin: The plan is to use the neighborway.
- Vitor: Since bikes are going down, you have more bumpouts. There is a lot of speeding. Is the hope the bump outs will slow down the cars?
  - Justin: Regardless of the concept, it will feel narrower.
- Preston: Regardless of the plan, could we connect to Gilman? The Skilton piece could use more. It has the old style signs.
  - Miles: On Concept 1 there is not really a curb on Skilton.
- Preston: For the floating bus stops, are they big enough that there is room for benches or other facilities?
  - Justin: Benches or bike racks for sure. Blue bikes may be tight. Because of the uncertainty with buses we won't do shelters.
- Alessandra: I prefer Concept 1. A lot of the speeding we observed was from Medford. To me it makes more sense to have a curved end with a crosswalk they must stop at. There might be more visibility for people who are walking to see cars coming from Medford in Concept 2. Concept 1 minimizes conflict between people walking and biking on the north side.
  - Vitor: Are we sure the speeding happens on Medford and not Pearl? Concept 1 is great except for the intersection. Cars don't stop at the intersection. All of the cars speeding were on the west. Do we know where the speeding is happening?
    - Justin: We have done speed studies, Medford Street is faster so we added speed humps. It is much improved. Both directions will have raised crossings. You do need to slow down going around a corner
    - Miles: The angle of the ramp on the speed humps are too shallow. There is a raised intersection that people don't slow at all. Then one at Cedar Street is more abrupt.
    - Justin: This is one of the reasons we didn't have a large raised area.

## Other Business (5 Minutes)

- None.

## Meeting Ended

8:03