

# Somerville



Pedestrian & Transit Advisory Committee

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## June 2025 Meeting Minutes

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

Mayor Katjana Ballantyne

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## Meeting Information

Thursday, June 12, 2025, 6:30-8:00 PM

This meeting will be on Zoom only:

- **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

- Karen Molloy, Somerville Alliance for Safe Streets (SASS)
- Mackenzie Webb, Somerville resident
- Joel Paul, Somerville resident

## Acting Secretary

Ted Alexander

## Call to Order

6:31 p.m.

## Agenda

### Procedural Business

- Roll call and guest introductions.

### Subcommittee Updates

- Community Events
  - Discussed draft letter presenting the results of the Union Square walk audit. Will circulate to participants for comments, then bring back to PTAC.
  - Discussed plans for a community walk on Somerville Avenue in July related to the proposed quick-build project between Wilson Square and Bow Street.
- Design Review
  - Met to discuss Pearl Street design
- Special Projects
  - No meeting; subcommittee is on hold for now

### Discuss Potential Letter on Changes to Bus Route 90

- Alessandra described the changes to the 90 bus route, planned for implementation June 15, which had been discussed at the May PTAC meeting with a brief presentation by the MBTA, and introduced a draft letter opposing the service changes and providing recommendations for alternatives.
- Meredith, who drafted the letter, explained that it asks that the MBTA at least delay the change until the fall of 2025. Meredith said she frequently rides the 90 and understands the operational

difficulties with the route. However, as a parent, it's also challenging to drive in this area, and taking away the 90 will make this worse, because families currently using the bus will use cars instead. It's not clear what alternatives there are for high school students who currently use the 90.

- Meredith summarized other key points in the draft letter:
  - The Tufts St. plans were designed in collaboration with the MBTA, but now the MBTA is saying that the Tufts St. neighborway will make it difficult to use Tufts St. for buses.
  - Some of the changes that the MBTA has cited as part of the bus network redesign, like rerouting the 85 down McGrath, are not likely to happen soon. They might help but are not imminent.
  - The area served by the current route is a vulnerable community that has a lot of minorities, low-income families, and people who don't speak English; this is a community that is reliant on bus service.
  - Rerouting the 90 onto Washington St., as the MBTA is proposing, is not ideal because there are already a lot of buses on Washington St., and the stop at the end of Tufts St. is difficult because there is no crosswalk.
- Alessandra: It would be operationally easier to run the bus down Cross St if some parking regulations were changed. Cross St is already scheduled for parking changes as a part of the bike network rollout.
- Meredith: Cross and Broadway is where the bus tends to get stuck – changes could be made there.
- Vitor: The interactive map of bus network redesign has changed. The 85 is now shown running on McGrath. That means they are now planning to have service on McGrath. So maybe we should push McGrath as a location for the 90, because the MBTA seems to have no intention of having bus service on Cross St.
- Meredith: That's after the McGrath boulevard implementation, which is years away.
- Vitor: I agree that this doesn't solve the short-term problem.
- Alessandra: The new 85 wouldn't provide a similar alternative for Winter Hill school families.
- Christopher: Could they just revert the 90 to the hairpin turn, not going down Tufts St? This would make it less convenient for commuters but better for students and families of the three schools in the area.
- Brenda: I agree with the letter. I also agree with Christopher's suggestion of going back to the original routing and then considering changes down the road.
- Barbara: I agree with the letter and think we should go ahead with it.
- Vitor: It's important to highlight the dangers to children from the Washington St. route.
- Alessandra made a motion to edit the draft letter, incorporating this discussion (including the suggestion to revert to the original routing), and send it to the MBTA.
  - Vitor: second
  - Motion passed by voice vote.
- Meredith will draft the letter, and Alessandra will edit and send it.
- Justin noted that the changes are scheduled to happen on Sunday, June 15, in any case.

## Follow-Up Discussion on Western Pearl Street Concept Design

- Vitor summarized the two alternative options presented by Mobility and the design review subcommittee's assessment of them. There are differences between the two options in the placement of the bike lanes. The subcommittee reviewed the plans and all the feedback Mobility received from the public, about 60 pages of comments in total. Most of the comments were about speeding and the need for traffic calming, and fewer comments were about bike lanes.

- The design review subcommittee recommends option 1 over option 2 and drafted a comment letter for PTAC's review. Key points in the draft letter:
  - Option 1 looks better from a traffic calming perspective, but the subcommittee thinks the city can do more, for example adding a raised intersection at Bradley Street.
  - The city should plan for the possibility that the MBTA is going to remove the 80 bus from Pearl Street and design the bus stops accordingly, so they could be used for other purposes if there is no bus on the street.
  - Gilman Street is a safe route under McGrath, but it could be made more pleasant and safer. The bike lane on Pearl Street should be designed with the goal of routing cyclists toward this safer crossing. Specifically, the city could consider removing the bike lane from the south side of Pearl Street near the intersection with McGrath, replacing it with a wider sidewalk and routing cyclists onto the safer Gilman St crossing.
- Christopher expressed agreement with the comments in the letter about wayfinding and better use of the Gilman Street tunnel for crossing McGrath.
- Justin explained that Gilman Street is considered to be a Neighborway. It has some of the design features of the newer Neighborways (contraflow bike lanes at Cross and Walnut), but doesn't have other features like the purple signs, purple sharrows, or speed humps. Improvements could be made in the future.
- Alessandra agreed with the recommendation of Option 1 over Option 2 and asked about what additional traffic calming beyond the current speed hump is needed at the Medford/Pearl intersection.
- Vitor said the subcommittee didn't talk about Medford St., but on Pearl St., it's still a straight shot with minimal chicanes. The proposed design doesn't answer the question of whether the changes are enough to solve the problems identified in the surveys. Pearl Street from Skilton to McGrath is still a straight shot without chicanes in the Option 1 plan. In response to a question from Justin, Vitor said that a raised intersection at Bradley St would be to enable bikes to access Skilton Ave more safely. The raised area could extend across Bradley St. and include markings to explain to drivers and pedestrians that this could be an area with a lot of bike traffic crossing.
- Preston and Vitor explained that moving the bike lane to Skilton and Gilman instead of the southern side of Pearl would avoid a situation where cyclists are routed from a safe route (redesigned Pearl St) to an unsafe route (the McGrath crossing and the eastern side of Pearl St., which will not have a bike lane).
- Justin explained the reasoning behind having the bike lane on Pearl Street: The city committed to providing a bike connection to McGrath. The neighborway provides a connection to the Community Path and under McGrath, but doesn't provide a connection to McGrath. There is a separated bike lane on McGrath now. This is also long-term thinking - this project will not be redesigned any time soon. Both of these options are not consistent with the bike network plan, so we have to explain why this is the best option. There are also mileage requirements in the plan, so if we're losing mileage here, we'd have to make it up somewhere else. We have an annual report that will be issued in March and will have to explain this to the city council in the report.
- Alessandra, Preston, Brenda, and Vitor discussed the idea of a wider sidewalk instead of a bike lane, and agreed that the PTAC letter should not advocate for removing the bike lane, but rather should recommend clear wayfinding, including to direct cyclists to Gilman Street as an alternative way of crossing McGrath.
- Christopher raised a concern he has heard about routing bicycles through Ed Leathers Park, because the path there is narrow and it is not currently used by a lot of cyclists. Vitor and Alessandra agreed that it would make sense to add this issue to the letter and recommend separating bikes and pedestrians in the park

- Alessandra made a motion to send the letter to Mobility with the changes discussed at this meeting, Christopher second, and the motion passed by voice vote.

## Final Items

- Christopher mentioned that a resident added a mirror to the School Street crossing of the Community Path. Kate explained that the city is aware of residents' concerns about safety at this crossing and hopes to be able to make some changes. The current design is the best that it was possible to do at the time working with the MBTA and accommodating the bridge and retaining wall. She explained that the Somerville Department of Public Works generally does not remove things like mirrors that people add, but also doesn't repair them. Sometimes residents request repairs or replacements to such items, and that is tricky because they are not part of the city's infrastructure.

## Action Items from Meeting

1. Revise and send draft letter (Vitor/Alessandra)

## Meeting Ended

7:52 p.m.