



Jun 10, 2025

OSPCD Mobility
City of Somerville
93 Highland Ave
Somerville, MA 02143

Dear Mobility Team,

We would like to express our appreciation for the recent presentation of the Western Pearl Street Reconstruction project and the opportunity to provide our input. We found both options satisfactory, with Design Option 1 as our preferred approach for the West Pearl project. We believe this option provides the best foundation for addressing the neighborhood's needs, and we have a few key comments and suggestions to enhance its effectiveness.

We reviewed the Western Pearl Street Community Engagement report and would like to highlight the following concerns that must take top priority when refining Design 1 further:

- **Traffic, Speeding, and Cut-Throughs:** Many community members expressed concerns about speeding and aggressive driving on Pearl Street. Over 50% of survey respondents said decreasing speeding was very important to them. Some residents described feeling unsafe using crossings or pulling out from side streets due to speed. There are complaints that cut-through traffic has increased on Pearl Street since the McGrath Highway road diet. There are concerns about the street being quite congested today, making it difficult to exit a side street. Experience during the temporary Medford Street bridge closure, which reportedly forced more traffic down Pearl Street, led to increased congestion, more air pollution, and aggressive driving.
- **Safety at Intersections and Crossings:** A significant number of concerns were raised about safety at specific intersections and crosswalks. Poor visibility at many intersections, often due to vehicles parking too close to corners, was highlighted as making it unsafe for all users. Over 50% of survey respondents felt that improving safety at crosswalks was very important.
 - **The Pearl Street at Medford Street intersection** was frequently described as particularly dangerous. Issues include drivers not looking at pedestrians, treating the stop sign more as a slip lane, vehicles approaching at high speeds, and the lack of safe crossing options across Medford Street itself.
 - **Concerns at Pearl Street at Marshall Street** include frequent speeding through the crosswalk, vehicles sitting on the crosswalk because it's set back too far, and poor visibility for turning out of Marshall Street or onto the contraflow lane. The safety here is critical due to high school students using the crossing.
 - **At Pearl Street at Walnut Street**, issues include aggressive driving and red light running. There are also concerns about visibility and curb extensions potentially causing issues for larger vehicles.

- **Sidewalk Condition:** The sidewalks are in very poor condition, with some witnessing people fall. Other issues include missing tactile warning pads (difficult for the visually impaired), narrowness, obstructions (trees, ramps), and missing curb ramps. There were also requests for lighting improvements and audible signals at crosswalks.
- **Environmental and Aesthetic Issues:** Complaints include the lack of trees for shade, damaged or obstructing trees, subpar air quality, insufficient trash cans leading to litter, and the street being dark at night with a need for more lighting. There was also disappointment about the lack of focus on green infrastructure.

We believe option 1 better addresses the concerns raised by our residents, and it ensures continuous sidewalks where the pedestrian path remains straight and level. This means pedestrians should not need to step down or up at crossings, allowing for a smooth and uninterrupted journey. However:

- **More Traffic Calming needs:** The plan doesn't provide much support for reducing speeds at the Pearl and Medford Street intersection and the red light running at Pearl and Walnut Street intersections. We request that additional speed calming features be added to better answer the concerns of our residents.
- **Raised Intersection at Bradley Street:** To further enhance safety and connectivity for cyclists, we recommend implementing another raised intersection at Bradley Street. This would provide a clearer and safer crossing point for bikes, integrating them more seamlessly into the neighborhood's active transportation network.
- **Separate bikes and pedestrian routes in the park:** The plan to improve Edward L. Leathers Community Park must include either wide or separate lanes for bikes and pedestrians when traveling through the park.
- **Bus Stop Obsolescence Planning:** Given the MBTA's proposal to remove the Route 80 bus service from Pearl Street on the Bus Network Redesign, we would like the city to anticipate a plan of action that makes the redesigned bus stops aesthetically pleasing and functional for other purposes.

Additionally:

- **Gilman Street Pedestrian and Bicycle Priority:** We strongly suggest exploring the possibility of establishing Skilton and Gilman Street as a primary artery for pedestrians and cyclists, specifically creating a main connection between School Street and Cross Street for kids and teens going to Edgerly Education Center, Winter Hill Community Innovation School, East Somerville Community School, and Capuano Early Childhood Center. This would be invaluable as a **designated safe route for children walking to and from school**. A redesign of Gilman Street can be the missing link between East Somerville and Center Somerville.
- **South Bike Lane vs. Sidewalk Priority:** We request the addition of wayfinding signs leading pedestrians and bikers to prefer the safer, less air-polluted neighborhood route through Skilton/Gilman Streets in both directions. It's worth noting that the current plan incentivizes cyclists to stay on Pearl St going east from a relatively safe part of town to the border of McGrath, which, at the current state, is not safe at all. Clear signage should have the goal of warning bikers that the street leads to a highway with minimal bike infrastructure.

We are confident that incorporating these suggestions will further improve Design Option 1, making the West Pearl project a greater asset to our community. We are available to discuss these points further and collaborate on refining the plans.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

The Somerville Pedestrian & Transit Advisory Committee (PTAC)

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