

Somerville



Pedestrian & Transit Advisory Committee

January 5, 2026

McGrath Boulevard Project Team
10 Park Plaza
Boston, MA 02116

Dear McGrath Boulevard Project Team,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on the 25% design for McGrath Boulevard, [presented to the public on December 4 and 9, 2025](#). We are happy to express our unequivocal support for this once-in-a-generation project. As we noted in our last letters in [June 2024](#) and [May 2025](#), transforming McGrath Highway from one of the deadliest corridors in Somerville into a human-scale boulevard that is safe and comfortable for people of all ages and abilities using all modes will bring innumerable benefits to our community for decades to come. This transformation will prevent countless deaths and injuries, reconnect East Somerville and Brickbottom with the rest of the city, improve health outcomes from those who live next to the corridor, and represent a huge leap forward in achieving municipal and statewide climate goals.

We are again eager to acknowledge the dedication, collaboration, and creativity the project team has brought to this immense effort. Through several design iterations, you have demonstrated a commitment to the people of Somerville through deliberate and pathbreaking changes based on community goals and concerns. In this most recent iteration, we are excited to see another round of travel lane removal – this time at Somerville Ave, Medford St, and Highland Ave – as well as the removal of slip lanes at Somerville Ave, Medford St, and Broadway. We are also thrilled the Broadway intersection has been fully integrated into the project with the same level of care and promise of safety as the other intersections along the corridor. Finally, we want to applaud the project team for proposing raised crossings at Otis St and Cross St. We recognize this is the first time such treatment has been proposed on a major arterial in Massachusetts, and think it represents the seriousness with which you've considered community concern at these important crossings.

While we have no doubt this project will vastly improve the safety and livability of McGrath, we do still have concerns about the Otis St intersection and the project's target speed. These points, along with a handful of other considerations, are described below as recommendations.

- 1. Reinstate the full signalization of Otis St:** In the March 2025 design, we were thrilled and relieved to see a fully signalized intersection proposed at Otis St. Full signalization was proposed in place of a HAWK beacon, which we felt was insufficient to protect the many children and families who cross Otis St daily to reach the Edgerly Education Center and the other three schools in East Somerville. We are now surprised and concerned that the full signalization has been reverted to Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons (RRFB) or HAWK beacons. We understand that the [Massachusetts Amendments to the MUTCD](#) adopted in November 2022 prohibit a fully signalized intersection at Otis St based on vehicle volume warrants. However, we are confused why an exception to this prohibition could be made in March 2025 but no longer. We would also value clarification on the specific language responsible for

this prohibition. Again, we are exceptionally grateful for the work you have done to propose a raised crossing at Otis St, but are concerned not to have the added layer of signal-based protection at such a vulnerable intersection. If reinstating full signalization at Otis St is impossible, we would encourage the project team to consider narrowing the corridor to a single lane approaching Otis St in both directions. This intervention would prevent the dangerous behavior where a driver in one lane stops for children crossing but the other does not.

2. **Reconsider the target speed:** In our May 2025 letter, we expressed hope that the McGrath Boulevard project would reintegrate the corridor with the rest of Somerville's streetscape. Since 2016 [Somerville's citywide speed limit has been 25 mph](#), so we advocated that the project should also adopt a 25 mph target speed. We were disappointed to recently learn that the target speed had been set to 30 mph, and would value a more detailed explanation of why this speed was selected.
3. **Continue working to shorten the distance between crossing segments at Cross St:** As with Otis St, we are excited to see raised crossings proposed at Cross St. We recognize that the crossing here must be divided into two segments to accommodate grade changes, and much prefer this option over the slip lanes that would be necessary to enable a single-segment crossing. We encourage the project team to continue working to minimize the distance between the north and south segments, making the crossing as convenient as possible for people walking. We are also happy to see that the walkway between segments will be fenced in to prevent people from crossing outside the designated areas.
4. **Consider further reductions in median width to support wider sidewalks:** We continue to appreciate the role the median plays in serving as a pedestrian refuge, preventing unsafe left turns, providing flexibility for future bus lanes, and accommodating grade differences. We also value the project team's efforts to keep the median as narrow as possible while still accomplishing these goals. We do think there are opportunities to narrow the median even further, especially to enable wider sidewalks. We encourage the project team to consider this option north of Bonair St, south of Washington St, south of Poplar St, and anywhere the sidewalk width dips below 8 ft.
5. **Ensure the design is flexible enough to support future north-south bus service:** Since June 2024, we have advocated for dedicated bus lanes along the full length of McGrath. We are happy to see some dedicated bus infrastructure in the 25% design, and to know the project team is carefully considering bus stop locations, amenities, and transit signal priority (TSP). We also recognize the MBTA is not currently interested in providing north-south bus service on most of the corridor. While we are disappointed by this assessment, we know there are opportunities for future reconsideration. As such, we encourage the project team to ensure the design is flexible enough to support dedicated bus lanes along McGrath at some future date.

Thank you again for your dedication to transforming McGrath into a livable street that will support Somervillians of all ages and abilities for decades to come. We look forward to continuing to engage on this critical project, as well as on the [Squires Bridge Replacement Project](#). Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
The Somerville Pedestrian & Transit Advisory Committee (PTAC)

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