

Alewife Working Group, Meeting 4
10/20/2016
Cambridge Water Department

Committee Attendees

Karen Dumaine, Jennifer Gilbert, Eric Grunebaum, Mark DiOrio, Margaret Drury, James Butler, Catherine Connolly, Margaret Gadon

Staff/Consultant Present

Staff: Melissa Peters, Susanne Rasmussen, Stephanie Groll, Tegin Teich Bennet

Utile: John McCartin

Nelson\Nygaard: Jason Schieber, Cynthia Lin

Committee Members Absent

Geoff Wood, Doug Brown, Sam Stern, John DiGiovanni, Tom Rango

Meeting Overview

Presentation by Nelson\Nygaard consultants on transportation trends and options for improving sustainable transportation mobility both within and connecting to Alewife. Discussion of strategies to improve mobility followed.

Discussion Comments

- The Alewife transportation network includes major regional traffic corridors including Fresh Pond and Alewife Brook parkways which has experienced high traffic volumes for many decades, creating peak period congestion and affecting the look and feel of the neighborhood. The vast majority of trips on the parkways have neither an origin or destination in Cambridge.
- While traffic levels are high, development activity in Alewife and elsewhere has, perhaps surprisingly, not translated to an increase in daily traffic in the area, with the exception of local streets such as Cambridgepark Drive. This is a result of both city efforts to shift to more sustainable modes transportation and larger societal trends, where especially younger people prefer to live, work and play in the same area and eschew auto ownership in favor of walking, biking, transit use and carsharing.
- Does capacity of road matter – would congestion lesson with more roadway capacity for cars? Would reducing the parkway to one lane in each direction for general traffic change things?
 - Without increasing viable sustainable transportation options, the traffic congestion problem will continue to exist. If roadway capacity were increased (which is not the goal because it may induce more traffic), the congestion may just move to another bottleneck.
- Working group members were interested in redesigning the parkways to prioritize sustainable modes It was noted that the parkway system is owned by the Department of Conservation and Recreation, a state agency, and changes to the roads would require their cooperation.
- Traffic in Alewife is a regional issue that requires regional solutions. Improved transit service in the region would have the greatest potential to reduce vehicle traffic. Cambridge will continue to work with regional partners to improve transit service to/from the area.
- The plan needs to address mobility within the neighborhood and mobility to and from Alewife.
- How many neighborhoods are represented by Alewife? Are the Triangle, Quadrangle, and Shopping Center separate neighborhoods, or are they part of a larger whole? This is important because if they are multiple neighborhoods, then each must stand on its own and provide separate opportunities for live, work, shop, and play. If they are a single neighborhood, then the focus should instead be on connecting them all together, to better access existing opportunities in neighboring areas.
- Bike/ped bridge: To-date, the City has collected \$669,000 to be spent on the feasibility study and conceptual design for the bicycle-pedestrian bridge. Another \$1.5m is needed for final design.

Construction is estimated to cost approximately \$25-30m for the bridge, and an additional \$25-30m for a future commuter rail station. Funding has not yet been identified by the City for the final design and construction of the project. The City is working to advance design to a point where we are able to compete for federal and state construction funding opportunities.

- Working group members would like to see the Red Line extended to Lexington. The City has been a strong proponent of the extension but it has not received priority in the state's long range transportation plan and is unlikely to be prioritized in the near term, due to expected ridership versus cost and other more cost-effective projects in the region.
- Some working group members would like to see a commuter rail stop on the Fitchburg Line at Alewife to encourage shift from vehicle to transit. The Commuter rail currently stops at Porter Square but is seen as not as attractive for Alewife commuters because they have to switch to the Red Line and "backtrack" to Alewife.
- A working group member mentioned the MBTA's Urban Ring project, a proposed major new bus rapid transit (BRT) system that would run in a roughly circular corridor serving Cambridge and other communities. The City has been promoting this project since the mid-90s but planning for the project was terminated by the state about 5 years ago due to cost concerns.
- A working group member suggested a high speed bus service (BRT) on the Rt. 2 right-of-way.
- The working group discussed the need to create a street grid in the Quadrangle to improve mobility within the neighborhood.
- Summary on traffic counts: Traffic counts are available on Open Data in [spreadsheet](#) and [map form](#). Recent counts around Sozio rotary area were likely done by the developer for the 55 Wheeler Street project and have not yet been submitted to the city.
- Update on any current right-of-way negotiations, either with public agencies or private landowners: During the Special Permit process, the Planning Board asks for easements on private property for the bridge landing locations and access paths. A condition of the Special Permits for 88, 130, and 160 Cambridgepark Drive ([Recent Special Permits](#)) was that each development provide an easement if needed for the bridge landing. In early conversations with 55 Wheeler Street, the City has communicated its interest in requiring an easement for a potential bridge landing. The City is also having preliminary conversations with the MBTA for property it owns connecting to Fawcett Street.
- Ongoing conversations that have been conducted with landowners and developers as they relate to new projects not yet submitted for approval: The City had an early conversation with 55 Wheeler about their development plans for the site. During this meeting, the City communicated its priorities for the area as outlined in the Concord Alewife plan and other plans that include an easement for a potential bridge landing. A recent change in Planning Board rules requires a community engagement process and a public meeting before a Special Permit application is submitted.
- Strategies that currently incent landowners and developers to contribute land and/or funding for the purposes of enhancing connectivity and mobility in the area: Through the incentive of a Special Permit, the City is able to negotiate improved mobility enhancements. As part of the traffic study for each special permit project, transportation impacts of each project are evaluated. The Planning Board considers these impacts during its review of projects and requests mitigation for project impacts that could and often result in desired public amenities that could include enhancements to connectivity (i.e. 70 Fawcett Street road connection constructed) and mobility (i.e. Hubway station required for 88 Cambridgepark Drive Discovery Park developments).
- Working group members would like to see active uses on the ground floor of buildings. This would include retail, but not is not necessarily limited to retail. Perhaps active uses could be defined in the Table of Uses in the zoning code.

The Working Group asked the City for a list of mobility projects currently in progress and a status report:

<u>Project</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Lead (city, state, MPO)</u>	<u>Status</u>
Alewife Station bus priority	At the request of Cambridge and Arlington, Boston Metropolitan Planning Organization, as part of it "first-mile/ last-mile" program, is studying the feasibility of transit/bus priority into and out of Alewife Station.	City of Cambridge, Arlington & CTPS	on-going
Encouraging and in some cases employers to charge for parking.	Done through the Special Permit and PTDM process, and through Alewife TMA member efforts	City of Cambridge and Alewife TMA	on-going
Pathway system from Danehy Park to Huron Ave to Watertown	In July 2016 Cambridge acquired the section of the Watertown Branch line from Concord Ave to the Fitchburg main line (behind the shopping center) for use as a multi-use path.	City of Cambridge	Planning/design funds must be requested to review options for path designs and connections.
Right-of-way from projects on railway path (very long-term)	In the long term, a path along the Fitchburg line connecting the Alewife area to Porter Square may be feasible. This location of the path and needed connections to destinations like Danehy Park, Watertown Branch paths and Alewife Station would need to be reviewed.	City of Cambridge	Reviewing developments along the right of way and asking for path easements as deemed necessary to maintain space for a future path.
Studying Rerouting buses along Acorn Park Drive	The MBTA and City of Cambridge have agreed to re-route buses travelling on Route 2 inbound to Acorn Park Drive to shorten bus trips.	City of Cambridge, MBTA and Discovery Park	The developer of Discovery Park is in the process of building a new bus stop
Bike/ped bridge	A bicycle and pedestrian bridge over the MBTA tracks to connect the Alewife Triangle and Quadrangle.	City of Cambridge	To date, the City has collected \$669,000 to be spent on the feasibility study and conceptual design for the bicycle-pedestrian bridge. Another \$1.5m is needed for final design. Construction is estimated to cost approximately \$25-30m

			for the bridge, and an additional \$25-30m for a future commuter rail station. Funding has not yet been identified by the City for the final design or construction of the project. The City is working to advance design to a point where we are able to compete for federal and state construction funding opportunities.
128 Business Council shuttle improvements	The 128 Business council runs five routes between Alewife T Station and employment centers in the western suburbs, plus two additional shuttle between the T Station and residential buildings.	Route 128 Business Council	Ongoing
Watertown-Cambridge Greenway	Cambridge and DCR teamed up to buy this former rail right of way to build a greenway with a 14' wide multi use path that would run from the Cambridge Water Treatment Plant, into Watertown.	DCR	The project is at 90% design. Cambridge is reviewing the feasibility and cost of adding low level safety lighting to the project. DCR is looking for construction funds in the amount of just over \$2m. Construction could begin as soon as fall 2017 if funds are identified.
New Street construction	This project involves reconstructing New Street with a new and more generous sidewalk connection from Concord Avenue to Danehy Park along with bicycle connections and street trees.	City of Cambridge	Construction is on-going
Cycle tracks on Concord Ave.	Protected bike lanes constructed on Concord Avenue	City of Cambridge	Complete
Bike/pedestrian path to Belmont	Connects Alewife T Station with the Brighton path in Belmont	City of Cambridge	Complete
Installation of Hubway station at Alewife T	Two Hubway stations have been installed at Alewife Station, one at the head house, and one along Steel Place.	City of Cambridge	Complete
Alewife TMA	Alewife Transportation Management Association	Alewife TMA	Launched in 2013.

	is a partnership between businesses, developers, and residential buildings who join together to reduce traffic congestion and air pollution, as well as improve transportation options in the Alewife area.		
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Comments from Public

- Route 74 needs mobility improvement, especially on Sundays
- Need to continually focus and reframe issues around climate change, since it poses significant risks especially to low-income populations.
- New residential development is of poor quality
- There is a significant amount of development happening in Alewife. There was concern that planning is happening too late.