

**2017-12-14**

**Alewife Working Group  
Meeting #13**

Committee Attendees

Eric Grunebaum, Margaret Drury, James Butler, Jennifer Gilbert, Doug Brown, Catherine Connolly, Karen Dumaine, Margaret Gadon

Staff / Consultant Present

Staff: Melissa Peters, Stuart Dash, Gary Chan, Stephanie Groll, Joe Barr

Utile: Tim Love, Kennan Lagrèze, Jessica Robertson

McMahon: Natalie Raffol

Stantec: Jason Schrieber, Liza Cohen

Committee Members Absent

William Ahern, Geoff Wood, Mark DiOrio, John DiGiovanni, Tom Ragno, Sam Stern

Approximately twenty-four members from the public, including three city councilors and one city councilor-elect.

Meeting Overview

- Presentation on district-wide transportation impacts, including critical sums analysis, and overview of a range of mobility recommendations for Alewife.
- The critical sums analysis shows that under proposed zoning, employee trips increase resulting in five intersections to exceed the critical sums threshold (compared to only 2 intersections under the existing zoning).
- Efforts to decrease the auto trips are necessary and can be accomplished through:
  - Improved infrastructure and more aggressive TDM measures to improve mode share in the Quad; or
  - Reduced allowed commercial square footage in the Quad to a level that results in no new intersections exceeding the critical sums threshold.
- The City will work with the consultants to recommend realistic implementation strategies to avoid any new intersections from exceeding the threshold.
- Recommendations will be brought back to the working group and the public in early 2018.

Committee Comments

- A working group member stated that the city needs to provide increased access to high quality transit.
  - A bike/ped bridge from the Quad to Triangle would increase access to transit from 21% to 30%. Improvements on Concord Avenue are needed as well.
- A working group member is concerned that a lot of the solutions are still reliant on automobiles, such as group shuttles and does not consider this a mode shift.
  - Bus frequency on Concord Avenue is very productive when combined with a more direct way to get from the T station to the Quad.
  - It's important to remember that the development mix produces a net positive fiscal revenue which is important if there are associated infrastructure costs.
- A working group member wants to look at the long term and thinks that if we advocate for a commuter rail station today it will likely not be implemented for another 5–20 years, therefore, the time to add this to a long-term plan is now. Three subdistricts, the Triangle, the Shopping Center, and the Quadrangle, are adjacent to a commuter rail line but can't

access it; and two subdistricts don't have good access to the MBTA red line station. This is the time for the City to begin lobbying the State. This planning process only happens once every 10–20 years.

- Historically, city-wide plans occur every 17 years and area plans occur more frequently.
- The City spoke to the MBTA during the 2005 Concord Alewife study. At that time there was no one living or working in the Quad or Triangle and the MBTA thought they would lose customers by introducing a new stop and increasing travel time. The City also discussed air rights over the track. Today we are finally getting up to a high enough density to bring the conversation back to the MBTA.
- A working group member stated that we've been talking about an enhanced street grid, a bike/ped bridge, and a commuter rail station since the Alewife Fish Book in the 70s, which represents the residents' frustration. The City should start down a path to implement these things. The game of approving developments based on a bridge landing has not led to a bridge. What we're now living with is more traffic with no clear way forward.
- A working group member thinks the plan should have a goal that every resident and worker needs access to real high-quality transit.
- A working group member noted that traveling 10 minutes or more to reach high comfort transit is a deterrent to its use.
- A working group member stated that it is remarkable that historic plans all look the same. There's plenty of evidence that all of this has been planned and has not been implemented.
  - What's different about the Alewife Fish Book is that it was envisioned as all commercial. Over time we shifted to try to incentivize housing to balance this and residential development happened more rapidly than we expected.
- A working group member wants to know what it would take to increase bus service and have bus-only lanes. Perhaps this is a closer range and more feasible, but she's having a hard time visualizing how the bus only lanes would work.
  - Today there's space available to make a bus only lane with the existing streets around Alewife to the parkway. The intention is to shift modes of suburban commuters to reduce traffic.
  - Increasing frequency on Concord Ave is challenged by the MBTA operating costs not the equipment cost. To increase frequency, we either need a change to federal policy, the MBTA to either change how they operate, or additional contributions.
  - The MBTA is about to do a system wide service plan. We should make the case that this development will occur in the future.
- A working group member stated that she is a cyclist. More Hubways are great but the problem we have here is the difficulty of riding across the Alewife Brook Parkway bridge. It is an awful experience and some improvements needs to be made to add more comfort.
- A working group member said it is important to note that there's no shortage of desire from CDD and the consultants for bus only lanes to happen. We really need to lobby for a regional approach.
  - There is not an issue with the street width on Concord Ave. It's more about having enough service on this corridor and keeping the buses moving at key intersections. The City can tie the traffic lights to the buses to keep them from getting stuck.
- A working group member thinks Concord Avenue from New Street to Huron Avenue is very narrow. She doesn't see how there is space to fit a bus lane and is concerned that slow traffic will keep the buses from moving.
- A working group member thinks that a bridge won't happen through incremental planning. The only way this is going to happen is to get enough community and political support to pressure this to happen. We need think regional and about federal money.

- There's been a big shift in priority and policy for the entire region. The State is considering system improvements such as DMUs (Diesel Multiple Units) that run on existing commuter rail tracks. DMUs can make the entire system more efficient, especially for inner communities. If this plan is firm with solutions and has metrics to back it up this can build momentum for an additional stop.
- A working group member thinks it is backwards to approve a new zoning plan because "someday" these transportation solutions may exist.
  - Zoning can limit development until infrastructure is built or mode share is reduced.
- A working group member asked for covered bus stops.
- A working group member noted that we have two or three new mini-cities being built here that are completely isolated except through a few roadways and that we're missing the cross connections. He likes the discussion of better buses, but stressed the need for a connection to cross the tracks. We want to see a way to get on or off the Fitchburg Line so that we don't add more automobile trips for workers coming to Alewife from the suburbs.
  - The commercial residential mix should be important to all residents in the city because this is the last place in the city where balance at this scale is possible. It might be useful for the committee to think about how that use mix captures value for a citywide goal, not just an Alewife-specific goal. The argument should be made in relation to a city-wide benefit.
- A working group member stated that this plan should not go forward without traffic solutions. There needs to be a real tangible path going forward.
- A working group member stated that his frustration is that buildings go up without infrastructure and then we are told the infrastructure can't go in because there's a new building there.
- A working group member wants more confidence that this will go forward.

### **Public Comments**

- A member of the public asks why the analysis does not project 100% build-out. Kendall Square and North Point will be fully build out. Why is this area different?
  - Through past studies the City determined that 60% build-out is an appropriate estimate. It is likely regulations will change in the future and we do not want to predict how new technology would affect mode share in the future.
  - Twenty years is the furthest any transportation model can project. Projecting further can lead to overbuilding of infrastructure.
  - Even if we project full build-out, it's difficult to predict how people will travel in the future. It's likely that mode shares will change, and we've seen this happen over time in the past. We've seen more quick changes and shifts towards pedestrian traffic than traditional transportation models would have predicted.
  - It's important to note that the baseline comparison also projects the use mix that is currently being built. Therefore, existing zoning in 2030 may produce more trips than we are showing because there could be more commercial built that our numbers indicate.
- A member of the public stated that she is here tonight because a friend gave her a packet showing what was proposed on 55 Wheeler Street. Each of us has a mental map of how to access the Quad by foot but one by one these informal paths are being replaced with new development. It's harder to get in and out of the Quad because of these developments. We need strategies to measure the qualitative aspects of commuting to and from Alewife.
- A member of the public asked everyone to think about how they got here. She usually bikes, but didn't because it's difficult to cross Fresh Pond Parkway. She didn't take the bus because it is unreliable. She drove because there is no way to cross the Parkway as

a pedestrian. Adding a Hubway station is not enough. The City should consider 3-wheeled electric vehicles instead.

- A member of the public said we need to stop talking about a commuter station or bridge and instead find ways to make them happen.
- A member of the public is curious if the City compared the 2005 traffic counts at the exact same day of the week and season to today. They are also unsure if the analysis includes Rindge Avenue and the east side of Concord Ave. There should be a bus from Alewife station to Concord Ave with local service.
  - The two analyses are comparable because both the 2005 and 2016 counts were seasonally adjusted from PM peak hour.
- A member of the public wants to know how critical sum analysis consider intersections that are completely gridlocked. There are intersections listed as acceptable that are not acceptable.
  - The counts are based on actual vehicles that can make the movement within an hour. And then we're adding the new trips generated. The critical sum expresses magnitude.
- Councilor Carlone heard people say that this is a political decision. Three councilors are present tonight, and every councilor said there should be a bridge at our last meeting. He personally thinks it should be a shuttle bridge. He has worked with the MBTA and they have a 25-year plan. Adding the bridge to the MBTA's plan adds incredible value for private landowners and the City. The funding needs to be generated through private development value capture as a special criteria condition in the special permit. The City could do this through a tax increment financing approach. All taxes in the Quad would be dedicated to this area's roads and transit. Everybody in Cambridge avoids this area during peak traffic so the whole city would understand about focusing on transportation in this area. The City needs to draw alternatives with and without the bridge to show the impacts on the urban design and the expected level of build-out with and without the bridge. He encourages everyone present to come to the City Council Roundtable because the Council agrees with much of what was said tonight.
- Councilor Devereux of the public fully supports getting started on a commuter rail station implementation. We either need a transportation task force like Kendall and/or a Citywide Transit Plan. She attended the Mt. Auburn Corridor Study meeting last night. They were looking at the AM peak because modes of transit are less flexible in the mornings compared to the PM peak. She thinks that's why we're seeing improvements in PM peak numbers since 2005. PM peak is extended over a longer period, and we've diverted local traffic to Sherman and Walden Streets. It's a fallacy to think that we've been successful. We must get people out of cars with buses, but the buses need to go somewhere meaningful. A citywide plan would address the difficulty of accessing Porter from Alewife, and the regional role of Concord Avenue.
- A member of the public stated that we need to make sure we're looking at who is driving. Some people are disabled, older or averse to winter biking. People might drive because they can't afford to take the commuter rail. I'm wary of putting more expenses (parking fees, tolls) on these folks. When we're talking about financing, we must understand who is driving and what their needs and incomes are. A qualitative study on local traffic is needed.
- Councilor Kelley does not think Hubway offers any meaningful impact.
- A member of the public noted that we're seeing incredible projections in some places and driverless cars seems to be coming faster than some of us think. This is the most dramatic thing that will impact on traffic. The analysis should consider the probability of the impact of new technology on car traffic.

- We did not consider driverless vehicles because there is no measurable projection. We agree that it's likely to have a major positive impact.
- A member of the public stated that as a resident of the Quad she thinks there needs to be adjustment to regulate trash pickup and deliveries. The combination of residential next to active loading docks is an issue.
- A member of the public lives in Cambridge Highlands and wants to make sure the traffic signals work correctly. If someone presses the button to walk, traffic backs up the Parkway causing all sorts of accidents on Blanchard Road. Someone from the City needs to go in person to see what's happening because the lights are causing more problems.
- A member of the public said that when they travel internationally, they notice efficient comfortable public transportation in places like Sydney. So many places have comfortable trains and a lot of people are unhappy in cars and would take transit if it was reliable. We need an efficient train system that connects the suburbs.
- A member of the public noted that traffic impact is not linear and has a failure threshold. Below your design threshold there are no delay. As soon as you hit a threshold there's proportional backup above the threshold. If we're going to have more intersections above capacity, we need to lower the baseline, so we don't reach the threshold. This is what he likes about the light rail with more local stops. By preferring light rail, we can get away from putting a commuter rail station that's local.
- A member of the public is in an inclusionary zoning unit and feels stuck in her unit because to move means going to the bottom of the inclusionary zoning list. It's hard to find resident parking and it's extremely expensive to have a car but the buses are not reliable enough, so she must keep a car. She is grateful to have a place to live but feels cut off and doesn't feel like she's a part of Cambridge anymore. She's also frustrated with the construction quality. The Quad is the sacrifice zone and the City is benefitting from our taxes, and we have no voice.

#### Next Steps

- You've given us a good charge and a challenge. This area has been a challenge and we appreciate all your comments.
- The next working group meeting and a public meeting will be scheduled in early 2018.