



TRANSPORTATION & PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE MEETING

~ MINUTES ~

Tuesday, January 28, 2025

3:00 PM

Sullivan Chamber
795 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02139

The Transportation and Public Utilities Committee will hold a public hearing to discuss inter-jurisdictional projects that are in play that may impact mobility in Cambridge. This discussion will build on CDD's report of November 14, 2024 to the City Council (Awaiting Report 24-36)

Attendee Name	Present	Absent	Late	Arrived
Burhan Azeem	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Paul F. Toner	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Ayesha M. Wilson	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3:06 PM
Catherine Zusy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

A public meeting of the Cambridge City Council’s Transportation and Public Utilities Committee was held on Tuesday, January 28, 2025. The meeting was Called to Order at 3:00p.m. by the Chair, Councillor Zusy. Pursuant to Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2023 adopted by Massachusetts General Court and approved by the Governor, the City is authorized to use remote participation. This public meeting was hybrid, allowing participation in person, in the Sullivan Chamber, 2nd Floor, City Hall, 795 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA and by remote participation via Zoom.

At the request of the Chair, Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

- Councillor Azeem – Present/Remote
- Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
- Councillor Toner – Absent
- Councillor Wilson – Absent*
- Councillor Zusy – Present/In Sullivan Chamber

Present – 3, Absent – 2. Quorum established.

*Councillor Wilson was marked present and remote at 3:06p.m.

The Chair, Councillor Zusy noted that the Call of the meeting was to discuss inter-jurisdictional projects that are in play that may impact mobility in Cambridge. This discussion will build on the Community Development Department’s (CDD) report of November 14, 2024 to the City Council, Awaiting Report 24-36.

The Chair, Councillor Zusy offered opening remarks and read from the following statement (not verbatim).

Welcome to the meeting of the Transportation and Public Utilities Committee. Today's hearing will focus on inter-jurisdictional transportation projects that are in play that may impact mobility in Cambridge. This discussion will build on CDD’s report of November 14, 2014 to the City Council. It was a report requested by the late Councillor Joan Pickett.

We all need to be able to get around—by public transport, by bike, by foot and by car—to travel to work, school and shopping, and for many, to commute to Boston and other adjacent communities.

According to INRIX’s Global Traffic Scorecard, the Boston area has the second worst traffic congestion in the country. (Chicago has the worst.) According to regional planners, by 2035, there will be a 7% rise in the demand for our roads and 30% rise in the demand for transit. So it is absolutely essential that we pay attention

to these inter-jurisdictional projects that will promote mobility, especially as we strive to become an ever greener and a more climate resilient community.

Today our presenters from CDD will summarize some of the many projects happening and hone in on 5 that aren't so far away: Bus Network Redesign, I-90, Eversource's Greater Cambridge Energy Project, the Reid Overpass & BU rotary, and the MBTA Garage Redevelopment at Alewife and Commuter Rail Study.

All of these projects are being funded by the state or by federal monies and are being led by non-Cambridge agencies: the MBTA, MassDOT and Eversource. Their successful outcomes will depend, however, on Cambridge advocacy, data and partnership. Cambridge's economic vitality and livability, in turn, also depend on the success of these partnerships.

Our presenters today are Melissa Peters, Interim Assistant City Manager for Community Development, Andy Reker, Assistant Transit Planner, Jeff Parenti, Assistant Commissioner for Street Management and Traffic Direction, Jim Wilcox, City Engineer, Kathy Watkins, Commissioner of DPW, and Stephanie Groll, Parking and Transportation Demand Management Planning Officer.

The Chair, Councillor Zusy recognized City staff who gave a presentation titled "Status of State Transportation Projects in Cambridge". The presentation was provided in advance of the meeting and included in the Agenda Packet. The presentation provided information on agency rules, major state projects in Cambridge, bus network redesign, Allson/I90 multimodal project, greater Cambridge Energy Eversource, BU Bridge and rotary, and Alewife MBTA garage redevelopment and commuter rail study.

The Chair, Councillor Zusy opened public comment.

Clyve Lawrence, 26 Plympton Street, Cambridge, MA, offered comments of strong support for the transportation projects being done in Cambridge.

Heather Hoffman, 213 Hurley Street, Cambridge, MA, spoke on the importance of infrastructure needs as it relates to developments.

Christopher Cassa, 103 Gore Street, Cambridge, MA, offered comments on transportation projects and the position of the City's active role in state projects.

Robert Winters, Cambridge, MA, offered comments regarding past transportation project ideas and how they would be beneficial to Cambridge.

The Chair, Councillor Zusy recognized Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler who asked City staff what future bus lanes the City is thinking about with new street design layouts. Andy Reker responded by sharing information on the River Street construction project and the Massachusetts Avenue construction project and how updated bus lanes will play a vital role in the updates. Andy Reker pointed out that the City is still waiting to hear on interjurisdictional efforts with the MBTA, DCR, and MassDOT and how State agencies have ongoing work in various locations as part of their development programs. In addition, Andy Reker highlighted that the CDD website has locations of concerns that have been identified as it relates to bus delays. Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler asked if any information could be provided on the Grand Junction project. Andy Reker shared that it is currently in the process of state review. Kathy Watkins explained that information was not included in the presentation because it is a City project and the focus of this meeting was on State projects. Kathy Watkins provided additional information on where they are in the process of the Grand Junction.

Councillor Zusy recognized Councillor Wilson who shared her appreciation on the partnerships with the State agencies and moving forward with conversations and projects. Councillor Wilson asked staff what opportunities are available for the community to be involved with the various ongoing projects in Cambridge. Jeff Parenti explained how community engagement with the different agencies can come with challenges, due to some agencies having a very complex process. Jeff Parenti added that another challenge with State projects is that they usually include multiple communities, and that they are very different than a project initiated by the City which has more resources to reach groups within the community. Councillor Wilson asked for more information

on the road diet that Cambridge will be experiencing in the future. Jeff Parenti noted that Memorial Drive phase three is near completion and indicated which areas of Memorial Drive would be down to two lanes soon. In addition, Jeff Parenti provided a brief overview of other potential areas of the City that may potentially experience a road diet, but explained that there is more analysis that needs to be done first and what factors need to be considered during the planning process. Jeff Parenti stressed the importance of protecting neighborhoods from having additional traffic volume if road diets do occur.

Councillor Zusy recognized Councillor Siddiqui who shared that it is helpful to have information that provides project plans and updates to be able to respond to questions that are received from the public on project timelines. Councillor Siddiqui asked for information on the completion and timeline on the rotary at the BU Bridge. Jeff Parenti explained that MassDOT is currently focusing on updates on the BU Bridge, and once that is complete, other projects, such as the rotary, will follow. Jeff Parenti shared that it is unknown at this time how long this project will take to be completed due to the amount of work that is involved with the redevelopment. Councillor Siddiqui noted how important it is to keep the community updated.

Councillor Zusy highlighted the important role neighborhood associations can play in making the community aware of projects. Councillor Zusy shared that she had spoken with Dan Driscoll from DCR and he indicated that Memorial Drive phase three will go out to bid in February with the plan to start construction in the summer. Councillor Zusy pointed out that there has been a lot of community pushback regarding a road diet between Western Avenue and the BU Bridge, due to the amount of traffic congestion that already exists at the Bridge. Councillor Zusy asked if the State has done any studies in the area of Western Avenue. Jeff Parenti explained how the area of Western Avenue, River Street, and the Cambridge side of the River has confused traffic engineers in many agencies for many years, and that traffic congestion needs to be solved before there are any reducing of lanes. Jeff Parenti added that a feasibility study by DCR would be very helpful for that area to improve. Councillor Zusy asked if a Policy Order from the Council would help the City move forward with discussions with DCR regarding a study. Jeff Parenti shared it would not be required but would be a good step to take with DCR. Councillor Zusy asked for updates regarding federal funding for projects and noted the current freezing of federal funding. Kathy Watkins responded by sharing that there is a lot of effort being made to understand the impacts of funding decisions, and the City does not have a clear answer at this time. Councillor Zusy asked about bus improvements and if the analysis that was done during COVID will impact current bus settings. Andy Reker explained that the study that was done by the MBTA during COVID was based on travel demand and where people are traveling and provided a brief overview of the current bus network and changes that could be made in the future. Councillor Zusy stressed how important it is to have more buses running more regularly, and shared concerns that have been brought forward by the public in the North Cambridge area relating to the 77 bus. Andy Reker explained that in 2021 and 2022 the MBTA had to cut services to different bus routes due to the lack of bus operators and retaining bus operators. Andy Reker pointed out that the MBTA has made great strides to hire additional operators, which has helped the challenges that were faced with scheduled services and bunching issues, similar to the concerns that have been raised to the 77 bus route. Andy Reker noted that the MBTA is committed to making improvements. Councillor Zusy asked for more information regarding the Alewife Commuter Rail study and noted how important it is for the City to be actively engaging with the agencies that are involved. Melissa Peters and Andy Reker responded by providing a brief overview of what the current timeline is and noted that the City receives regular updates. Councillor Zusy pointed out the increase in the I90 project and questioned if work related to the Grand Junction bridge was still not included in the overall budget. Andy Reker shared that they do not know the specifics, but that is information that can be obtained and shared after the meeting. Councillor Zusy thanked everyone for their hard work and offered closing remarks.

The Chair, Councillor Zusy recognized Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler who made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll.

Councillor Azeem – Absent

Councillor Sobrinho – Wheeler – Yes

Councillor Toner – Absent

Councillor Wilson – Yes

Councillor Zusy – Yes

Yes – 3, No – 0, Absent – 2. Motion passed.

The Transportation and Public Utilities Committee adjourned at approximately 4:33p.m.

Clerk's Note: The City of Cambridge/22 City View records every City Council meeting and every City Council Committee meeting. The video for this meeting can be viewed at:

https://cambridgema.granicus.com/player/clip/946?view_id=1&redirect=true

A communication was received from Melissa Peters, Interim Assistant City Manager for Community Development, transmitting a presentation related to transportation projects in Cambridge.

A communication transmitted from Yi-An Huang, City Manager, relative to Awaiting Report Item Number 24-36, regarding coordinated and timely communication related to interjurisdictional transportation projects.