



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

TRAFFIC, PARKING, + TRANSPORTATION

MEMORANDUM

To: Yi-An Huang, City Manager

From: Brooke McKenna
Transportation Commissioner, Traffic, Parking, + Transportation Department

Date: June 13, 2024

Subject: Awaiting Report 24-021: Traffic Concerns on Appleton Street

In response to Awaiting Report 24-021 requesting that the City Manager direct the Traffic, Parking, and Transportation Department to hold a community meeting with residents of Appleton and surrounding streets in the Huron and Brattle Street neighborhoods to review their findings and discuss options for addressing the traffic concerns on Appleton Street, we report the following:

Background

Beginning in Summer 2023, several community members reached out to the Traffic, Parking, + Transportation Department (TPT) to report a noticeable increase in northbound vehicle volumes on Appleton Street, specifically between Brattle Street and Huron Avenue. Residents also raised concerns about speeding on the street.

We initially collected data on Appleton Street in September 2023 and found that vehicle volumes were significantly higher than in the past, and significantly higher than we would expect to see on a relatively narrow neighborhood street such as Appleton Street. In late March of this year, we did a second round of data collection, this time collecting volume and speed data across the neighborhood of streets that run between Brattle Street and Huron Avenue. This data collection confirmed that Appleton Street is carrying a disproportionately high number of vehicles when compared to similar nearby streets. Conversely, most nearby streets are seeing lower volumes than previously. We also looked at crash data for Appleton Street since 2021, including both the Brattle Street and Huron Avenue intersections. There were 6 crashes during that time, most of which included only property damage to parked vehicles.

May 23, 2024 Community Meeting

City Staff met with residents of Appleton St and the surrounding neighborhood on May 23, 2024 to discuss the findings of the data collection and to discuss potential next steps. During that meeting, we heard similar concerns about volumes and speeds on Appleton Street as well as specific concerns about the Brattle Street and Appleton Street intersection, general concerns about bike lanes, as well as other comments and concerns.

Interventions Under Consideration

The key intervention discussed at the meeting was the potential to restrict left turns from Brattle Street onto Appleton Street. This restriction, which would prohibit access from eastbound Brattle Street, would substantially reduce what appears to be the most common cut-through pattern of vehicles traveling from Mt. Auburn Street to Lowell Street and then right on Brattle Street and left on Appleton Street. By disrupting this cut through maneuver, the hope is that more through vehicles will remain on major roadways, and remaining traffic will be balanced more evenly across the streets that run between Brattle Street and Huron Avenue.

There are a number of challenges to restricting turns, and we are still in the process of evaluating the proposed restriction and collecting additional feedback from the larger neighborhood. The issues we are looking at include:

- 1) Part-time turn restrictions are not recognized by some of the traffic routing applications that are widely used and widely believed to be driving traffic to routes that have not been popular in the past. For this reason, Appleton Street neighbors have expressed significant support for a full-time left turn restriction.
- 2) While our goal is to ensure Appleton Street is not carrying an inappropriate load of traffic, it is not possible to accurately predict where traffic will re-route, and we will need to monitor any changes closely. As mentioned above, nearly all abutting streets that could be seen as alternatives saw decreased volumes in recent years.
- 3) Unfortunately, some drivers choose to ignore turn restrictions, and we need to be realistic that we will not have 100% compliance with any turn restrictions.

Next Steps

As mentioned above, we continue to evaluate the full-time and part-time turn restriction options and to collect feedback from the community.

City Staff will also take a number of preliminary steps to address resident concerns while we evaluate larger interventions:

- The Cambridge Police Department has deployed a speed feedback trailer on Appleton Street.
- We will install permanent speed feedback signs in the new fiscal year.
- We will add a short section of yellow centerline at the crest of the hill on Appleton Street to better direct drivers to stay on the correct side of the road. This will require the removal of some parking at the top of the hill.
- We will repaint the yellow centerline at each end of Appleton Street (Huron Avenue and Brattle Street) to further emphasize that the street is two-way.
- We will add "stop" text in the Brattle Street bicycle lanes to further emphasize that people biking need to stop at the Appleton Street intersection.