



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

IRAM FAROOQ

Assistant City Manager for
Community Development

To: Richard C. Rossi, City Manager
From: Iram Farooq, Assistant City Manager for Community Development
Date: December 15, 2015
Re: Council Order #9 dated 10/19/15 (Awaiting Report 15-120), regarding the Alewife bridge/platform project

As part of the 2005 Concord-Alewife Plan, a bicycle/pedestrian bridge was identified as a way to better connect the Alewife Triangle, Alewife MBTA station and Cambridgepark Drive with the Alewife Quadrangle and Cambridge Highlands neighborhood. The plan gave particular attention to increasing connectivity between these areas to make biking and walking trips more convenient, and thereby encouraging the growth in sustainable trips, including transit trips, to avoid adding to the existing traffic congestion on the surrounding roadways.

The Alewife area is home to many uses including the Alewife Station, which is a terminus of the MBTA Red Line subway. Owing to its location at the northern edge of the city, this area is a major point of entry into Cambridge. Alewife Station is heavily used by riders, with approximately 3 million people departing the station per year, and approximately the same number of people arriving. It also serves several bus routes that travel to the area's adjacent western and northern suburbs. Alewife Station is a transit anchor for this critical transportation network.

While the Triangle area is accessible to the station, the Quadrangle, a 130-acre area south of the station and across the Fitchburg railroad line tracks, is perceived to be too far to walk or bike because of the busy, indirect route currently available along Alewife Brook Parkway. With current connections, the Quadrangle is just outside of a ½ mile walking distance of Alewife Station, the standard for measuring attractiveness of transit. With a bridge connection, a majority of the Quadrangle would be within ½ mile radius of the station, making it convenient to walk, and even quicker to bike. The addition of the bridge would save almost ¼ of a mile for each trip from Alewife Station to the Quadrangle.

To date, a total of \$695k for design has been identified in special permits for development projects in both the Triangle and Quadrangle with \$475k received to date. In 2013, \$375k was appropriated to complete a feasibility study of the bridge. A contract with a consultant team was signed to complete the work and later amended to include a review of the feasibility of a commuter rail station to be incorporated into the bridge project. The idea of building a commuter rail station in Alewife has been looked at in the past but the density of development was not enough to support a station. The feasibility study reviews current development and likely commuter rail trips, and favorably compares this to similar commuter rail stations in the Boston area. The City is initiating conversation with state officials to begin discussions on this topic.

Feasibility and preliminary design of the bridge has also progressed. The design team has studied and mapped pedestrian and bicycle destinations and connections through the area, and compared those to possible bridge landing sites and access points. On the north side of the railroad, several landing sites and access points were reserved as part of the special permit process for new developments. On the south side in the Quadrangle, the only access point that appears to be currently available in the shorter term is MBTA land that was a former rail spur. Some developments along this side of the tracks have been discussed, but to date, none have been formally proposed.

Given these opportunities and constraints, the consultants have developed an initial draft bridge concept which will be shared with the state. A sketch of this concept is shown below showing the bridge and ramps leading up to it in dark and lighter red, stairs in blue/green, commuter rail platforms in purple and at-grade paths to platforms in orange:



The City will continue to pursue federal, state, and other funding sources. Funds for the construction of these projects are not in the City's long-range financial plan. To date, there has been extensive coordination with affected private property owners as well as other interested parties nearby. In October, a project presentation was given to the Alewife Business Association showing preliminary design sketches. This feasibility study does not include looking at potential air-rights development but this is something that the MBTA could explore on its property as part of the planning and design process.