



Commonwealth Ave Bridge Replacement Project Community Meeting: Summary

June 2, 2016 – 6:00 PM

Boston University, Jacob Sleeper Auditorium, 871 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA

Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) and MBTA Staff

Kathy Barr

Anthony Christakis

Jim Kersten

Chuck Labbee

John McNerney

Ryan McNeill

Curtis Nikitas (MBTA)

Project Team

Steve DelGrosso, Brent Mawdsley and Saadet Nur Yilmaz, Walsh Construction; Cynthia Carleo and Roch Larochelle, HDR; Gary McNaughton, McMahon; Anurag Agrawal and Don Cooke, VHB; Tim Young, CME; Joseph Nolan, City Point Partners; Regan Checchio, Emily Christin and Nancy Farrell, Regina Villa Associates, RVA.

Present

(see Attendance)

Meeting Purpose

The purpose of the meeting was to introduce the Commonwealth Ave Bridge Replacement Project. The project team described the construction plans including the 2017 and 2018 shutdowns, associated detour routes, and the final condition. The presentation shown at this meeting is posted on the project website at: www.mass.gov/massdot/CommAveBridge

Meeting Summary

Jim Kersten, MassDOT Legislative Liaison, opened the meeting and introduced the elected officials' staff present at the meeting and the project team. Mr. Kersten also took the opportunity to note that some stakeholders have been interested in pursuing traffic improvements to Mountfort Street. Highway Administrator Tom Tinlin, MassDOT, had said that MassDOT would sit down with the City of Boston and Town of Brookline to discuss ideas associated with these potential improvements.

Mr. Kersten said that the project design is 75% complete, and that the project team has been collaborating with the Town of Brookline and Cities of Cambridge and Boston. He introduced Brent Mawdsley, Walsh Construction Project Manager.

Mr. Mawdsley explained that Walsh Construction was hired by MassDOT to lead the Design Build team for the project, and reviewed the meeting agenda. He described the poor condition of the Commonwealth Avenue Bridge's superstructure, and the need for replacement. The replacement involves three separate bridge elements: Commonwealth Avenue eastbound, the MBTA Green "B" Line, and Commonwealth Avenue westbound.

Mr. Mawdsley said that the project will use Accelerated Bridge Construction (ABC), which reduces the overall timeframe of construction. Much of the construction will occur offsite, with two intensive on-site construction windows: 18 ½ days in summer 2017 and 15 ½ days in summer 2018. He explained that summer was chosen for the two construction windows because of lower traffic volume, more people on vacation, and Boston University not in full session. He summarized the project team's efforts and recommendations to commuters to minimize traffic volume during this time.

Mr. Mawdsley listed the consultants on the Design Build Team, including HDR, the Design Lead; McMahon Associates, which is overseeing traffic management; and Regina Villa Associates, which is coordinating public outreach. He explained that MassDOT provided a 25% base design upon hiring Walsh and the project team has advanced the design to 75% up to this point, and the final design should be completed in several months. Mr. Mawdsley summarized the design elements that have been implemented from the 25% base concept to now.

Mr. Mawdsley outlined and described the five stages of construction:

- Stage 1: occurring now through the first shutdown/intensive construction window. It includes utility relocations and night work.
- Stage 2: the first shutdown/intensive construction window (July/August 2017). It includes the replacement of Commonwealth Avenue eastbound and the MBTA Green "B" Line. The exact dates should be announced in January 2017. Mr. Mawdsley noted that bicycle, pedestrian, and bus traffic will be maintained on Commonwealth Avenue westbound. He showed a video sequence of the construction, and described the process which will be completed in about ten days.
- Stage 3: occurring from the end of the 2017 shutdown to the 2018 shutdown. It includes signalization and road/utility work.
- Stage 4: the second shutdown/intensive construction window (July/August 2018). It includes the replacement of Commonwealth Avenue westbound and repaving I-90.
- Stage 5: occurring from the end of the 2018 shutdown to mid-2019. It includes final paving work on I-90 and the reconstruction of the I-90 median.

Mr. Mawdsley introduced Gary McNaughton, McMahon Associates, who described the traffic management of the project. Mr. McNaughton reviewed the traffic control schedule and detour routes that will occur during the shutdowns for Commonwealth Avenue, the BU Bridge, and I-90, which can be viewed on the presentation on the project website, listed above. He noted that the detours were chosen before the project was given to the Design Build Team. The detours close Commonwealth Avenue in the project area, with access only permitted for buses and emergency vehicles, direct abutters, pedestrians

and bicyclists. Car and truck detours will be available on the project website for downloading and will be shared widely.

Mr. McNaughton showed drawings of the final condition of the project area, and noted that boards of these drawings were placed around the room. The City of Boston has been working on a separate bicycle track project, and the final layout of the Commonwealth Ave Bridge Replacement Project was designed to be integrated with that project. The final condition includes an improved bike lane layout that increases safety and reduces interactions between bicycles and vehicles by removing turning conflicts. There is a floating bus island for the Route 57 bus at the Commonwealth Avenue westbound and University Road stop, in which the bike lane has been shifted behind the bus stop. This will also increase sidewalk widths behind the bus stop. A second right-turn only lane has been added for traffic turning onto the BU Bridge from Commonwealth Avenue westbound, and for traffic turning onto Essex Street from Commonwealth Avenue eastbound. Bike lanes will have their own signals, and pedestrian accessibility will also be improved.

Mr. McNaughton introduced Nancy Farrell, Regina Villa Associates. Ms. Farrell reviewed the extensive outreach and communication efforts of the project as well as the stakeholders the team has been coordinating with. She noted that attendees should sign up for the project email list to be notified of future meetings, which can be done on the project website, linked above. She said if any attendees have further recommendations for neighborhood groups the project team should be meeting with, to email their suggestions (commavebridge@dot.state.ma.us). Ms. Farrell explained the targeted outreach that will occur closer to the shutdown dates, including flyering all abutting businesses; public meetings before the shutdown; and daily briefings once the work begins.

Mr. Kersten introduced James Gillooly, Boston Transportation Department (BTD) Commissioner, and opened the floor for questions.

Question & Answer Session

Wendy Landman, WalkBoston, said she appreciates many of the changes that have been implemented since the 25% design meeting, and likes the ABC technique. She is concerned about the signal timing for pedestrians to cross Commonwealth Avenue at the BU Bridge, and feels it is not enough time to allow pedestrians to cross; she said the number of lanes should be reduced. She added that cars may ignore the “no turn on red” and drive straight into the bike lanes and pedestrian crossings. Mr. Kersten thanked Ms. Landman for her comments and asked her to email the project team with her suggestions.

A participant from Brookline commented about whether there is enough clearance on the BU Bridge for the new bike lanes and vehicle to safely fit. Mr. McNaughton and Mr. Mawdsley said that the outbound road will be widened to accommodate the needed space.

An attendee said he is concerned about the wide turn radii for vehicles, and suggested narrowing the turn radii to lessen their speed. Mr. McNaughton said the lane widths are 11 feet, and there will be pylons protecting bicycles from vehicles.

Charlie Denison, Livable Streets, said he is very pleased with the separated bike lanes, but is concerned for bicyclists coming from Brookline who are destined for the BU Bridge. He said those bicyclists may encounter turning conflicts with through traffic on Commonwealth Avenue, and asked if there is a way to address this. He suggested the “punch-through” from Mountfort Street would solve this issue, as it would allow traffic on Mountfort Street westbound to proceed directly onto the BU Bridge without

making a left turn on Commonwealth Avenue, then a right turn on the BU Bridge. He also expressed concern about the dual right-turn-only lanes on Commonwealth Avenue, and said drivers may be unclear whether or not to stay in their lane if they are turning right at the next intersection. Mr. McNaughton said there will be very clear signage and signal phasing will make it undesirable to try to drive straight through from those lanes.

Patrick Greenwell, Transit Matters, asked if the project team is considering rerouting the current CT2 bus route because the stop currently located between University Road and BU Bridge interferes with bicycles and is unsafe. Mr. Kersten said the project team will be coordinating with the MBTA regarding any changes to bus routes. Mr. McNaughton clarified that the green lines on the final condition drawings do not reflect that there will be green paint on all bike lanes. The green paint will only be used for emphasis in conflict areas.

A participant asked about the Mountfort Street cut-through. James Gillooly, BTD Commissioner, explained the concept of the Mountfort Street cut-through, which would address the problem of traffic traveling from Audubon Circle to the BU Bridge. This traffic currently must make an “S” turn on Commonwealth Avenue to get to the BU Bridge, and it causes heavy traffic. The Mountfort Street cut-through would allow that traffic to continue through to the BU Bridge without using Commonwealth Avenue.

An attendee from Brookline asked about the Green Line station elimination/reconfiguration project, and whether it can be done at the same time as the Commonwealth Ave Bridge Replacement, or if one has priority over the other. Curtis Nikitas, MBTA, said that the bridge project will take priority for now, but there will be a decision coming soon regarding whether or not the Green Line reconfiguration will have to wait until the Commonwealth Ave Bridge Replacement is complete.

Paul Nelson, MASCO, asked if the CT2 and Route 47 bus stop will be moved to another location since it interferes with the bike lanes currently. Mr. McNaughton said the MBTA will have the final decision on that, but it most likely will not be moved as the routing of the bus does not allow for it.

An attendee from BU asked about when the deck of the bridge at Carlton Street will be replaced. The project team said the scope of this project only covers the median and island being moved, but not replacing the deck.

Courtney Thraen, BU, asked where she could find documents on the environmental impact studies for this project. Mr. Kersten said he will take down her information and send them to her.

Nikhil from Cambridge said he supports the reduction of the number of lanes on Commonwealth Avenue to accommodate pedestrians crossing more safely, as well as narrowing the turn radii for vehicles. He is concerned about the length of time that the crossing signals would allow pedestrians to cross, and how long they have to wait to be able to cross. He added that currently the Green “B” Line has to stop at the traffic light at Carlton Street, and asked if there is discussion regarding the T being allowed to cross through this intersection without stopping at a red light. Mr. McNaughton said the project team is still finalizing the signal coordination, but it should minimize the number of stops for the Green Line.

Doug Johnson, Boston Cyclists Union, said this is a major improvement since the 25% design. He commented that the cars in the right-turn-only lane to Essex Street from Commonwealth Avenue will

most likely ignore that rule, and cut through bike lanes anyway. He said the Mountfort Street cut-through would be a big improvement to this problem of bicycle/vehicle conflicts. Mr. Kersten thanked him for his comment.

Ms. Landman added that the space for bicycles to wait on the southbound BU Bridge lane is too small, and will cause a backup. Mr. McNaughton said the bike lane is wide enough to accommodate two bicycles side-by-side. Ms. Landman also commented that the signal phasing needs to be improved, especially for senior citizens who are slower and for winter days when the street is dangerous. Mr. McNaughton said the signal phasing is not finalized yet, and is open to all suggestions.

Patrick Greenwell added that the CT2 and 47 bus stop between University Road and the BU Bridge is a huge conflict for bicyclists when a bus is stopped there. He suggested removing a lane and making a bus island at this stop instead. Mr. McNaughton said that the number of lanes in the final condition was already chosen before the Design Build Team received the project, and that it might not be possible to widen the lanes any more. Mr. Greenwell said it would be worth considering lessening the sidewalk widths to accommodate this, because the impact to pedestrians will not affect their safety as it does for bicyclists who interact with buses and vehicles. Mr. Kersten said the team will be having ongoing discussions about this, and thanked Mr. Greenwell for his comment.

Mr. Kersten encouraged everyone to sign up for email alerts on the project website. He thanked everyone for attending and providing comments, and closed the meeting.

Attendance

Rebecca Albrecht	Shara Greco
Shawn Bailey	Patrick Greenwell
Tjeerd Bruinsma	Doug Johnson
Patricia Cahill	Sam Kahn
Frank Caro	Stacey King
Matt Carty	Todd Kirrane, Transportation Administrator for Town of Brookline
Bill Conroy, BTD	Wendy Landman
Simon Corson	John Lentz
Mark Corvi	Jaye Lewis
Jim Curley	Jennifer Loewenstein
Tasha Davis	Ellen Millman
Matthew Demers	Anne Mos
Charlie Denison	Nikhil Nadkarni
Emily Derrig	Thomas Nally, A Better City
Jason Desrosier	Paul Nelson, MASCO
Yi Diy	John Pelletier
Guus Driesseu	Caroline Quan
Gail DuBois	Luis Quintanilla
Marc Ebuña	Nicole Rothenberg
James Franco	Victoria Rose
Can Gastler	Casper Round
James Gillooly, BTD Commissioner	Julia Shaw
D.M. Goldstein	

Mark Spengle
Jeannine Stever
Raymond Teoh
Courtney Thraen
Taylor Tsang
Mackenzie Ung
Bo Van Denzen
Matthys Van Tongeren
Gary Webster, Office of Councilor Michelle Wu
Katie Whewell
Bartholomew V. Zeyl