



Wellington Circle Study Working Group Meeting #4 Wednesday, January 5, 2022, 1:00-2:30 PM Held Virtually Via Zoom

Meeting Summary

On January 5, 2022, MassDOT conducted the fourth Working Group meeting for the Wellington Circle Study. At this meeting, the Study team provided an update on the concept development process, reviewed the development of short/medium-term and long-term alternatives, and solicited feedback. The meeting was also open to members of the public, who were given the chance to share comments and questions at the end of the meeting after the Working Group discussion.

Meeting Notes

1. *Welcome and Ground Rules by Makaela Niles, MassDOT (Project Manager)*

Attendees are welcomed to the meeting and informed that the meeting is being recorded. Makaela Niles (MassDOT) explains the Ground Rules for the meeting, including how Working Group members and the public can participate. Members of the public are made aware they can contact Leah Epstein (HNTB) if they require technical assistance. Makaela Niles (MassDOT) reviews the agenda for the Working Group meeting.

2. *Study Overview, Background & Process by Makaela Niles, MassDOT (Project Manager)*

Makaela Niles (MassDOT) provides a background of the study, its goals and the process. She describes that this conceptual planning study will evaluate the existing and future multimodal conditions at Wellington Circle. She also explains how the Study would examine ways to redesign Wellington Circle to provide better connectivity and mobility through Medford and the surrounding areas, as these are goals of the study. A final report with recommendations for short-, medium-, and long-term solutions will be developed based on the feedback received and the analysis completed as part of this study.

Study Goals: Makaela Niles (MassDOT) reviews the study goals which include the following:

- Improve mobility and connectivity for all transportation modes and users in the Wellington Circle area
- Improve safety conditions for all transportation modes and users in the Wellington Circle area
- Improve quality of life for residents in the Wellington Circle
- Improve local and regional connectivity to support businesses and future development

Study Process: Makaela Niles (MassDOT) reviews the steps of the study process, which build upon each other. This meeting covers #3: alternatives development.

1. Public involvement plan, study area, goals and objectives, evaluation criteria
2. Existing conditions, future no-build conditions, evaluation of issues and opportunities
3. Alternatives development (this is the main step being discussed during the meeting)
4. Alternative analysis
5. Recommendations
6. Final report

3. *Concept Development Process Update by Gary McNaughton, McMahan Associates*

Gary McNaughton (McMahan Associates) provides an overview of the Concept Development Process. Since the last Working Group Meeting, topics that have been examined are:

- Comparable intersection volumes
 - Wellington Circle has the highest vehicle volumes of comparable complex urban intersections.
- Concept update and review
 - The Project is focusing on two “core” long-term concepts, including a grade separated concept. Short- and medium-term concepts are being developed. Other modes are being incorporated into alternatives – bicycle and pedestrian safety is being examined by using vehicle, pedestrian, and bike volume data. The one-way Middlesex concept has been eliminated from consideration.
- Quadrant roadway examples
 - A number of quadrant roadway examples have been identified.

4. *Short/Medium-Term Alternatives by Deanna Peabody, TraflInfo*

Deanna Peabody (TraflInfo) presents four short/medium-term alternatives for the project. These concepts include:

- Remove right turn channelization: Removal of sweeping right turn lanes at three approaches (eastbound right, westbound right, and southbound right) to the intersection to improve pedestrian safety and comfort. The northbound right channelization has high right turning volume and would remain.
- Prohibit eastbound left turns: Removes ability to turn directly from Route 16 (Mystic Valley Parkway) eastbound to Route 28 (Fellsway) northbound. Eastbound left turns are not a major movement through the Circle, and this would reduce delay for westbound movements, particularly westbound right turns. This requires removal of eastbound right turn channelization and includes localized eastbound bicycle enhancements and a shortened pedestrian crossing distance across Mystic Valley Parkway.
- Relocate Middlesex Avenue: Middlesex Avenue would terminate at 9th Street and 9th Street would be extended west to provide access to Route 28 (Fellsway). This would allow for simplified, reduced, and shortened pedestrian crossings, and reduced vehicle delays for

southbound and critical westbound left-turn movements. A phase would be taken out of the intersection, allowing for reallocated time at the signal. This minimizes the impact of removing eastbound right turn channelization. This concept provides a large opening of green space.

- Combination of concepts – Combines the above concepts and provides overall vehicle and pedestrian operational benefits.

5. *Long-Term Alternatives by Conor Murphy, McMahon Associates, and Nathan Richmond, HNTB*

Conor Murphy (McMahon Associates) introduces the development of long-term alternatives, which could include pedestrian considerations, green space, bicycle facilities, and transit components. Two at-grade concepts have been developed.

- The “Triangle” Concept can accommodate existing vehicle volumes and creates open space for multimodal transportation. However, the overall geometry is atypical, and it maintains a high number of vehicle lanes, particularly on the northern side of the intersection.
- The “Square” Concept has similar benefits to the “Triangle” Concept such as the creation of green space, the ability to accommodate existing vehicle volumes and the ability to provide mostly protected, single-phase crossings for pedestrians. However, the “Square” concept requires additional signalization at Middlesex Ave at 9th Street, the overall geometry maintains a high number of vehicle lanes, and it creates concurrent or multi-phase pedestrian crossings at a few locations.

Conor Murphy (McMahon Associates) then introduces the proposed grade-separated alternatives by discussing the at-grade level traffic operations.

Nathan Richmond (HNTB) continues to discuss the proposed grade-separated concept where Route 16 (Mystic Valley Parkway/Revere Beach Parkway) would be carried on a four-span structure over Route 28 (the Fellsway). Approach ramps from Route 16 would connect traffic with the at-grade roadways. Grade-separation would remove major movements from the intersection, limiting the number of lanes required and the overall footprint of the intersection. However, a large bridge would use significant at-grade space and a bridge could act as a visual barrier between residents and businesses in the community and public transportation facilities. Nathan also discussed potential challenges with an underpass option.

6. *Alternatives Refinement and Closing Comments by Gary McNaughton, McMahon Associates*

Gary McNaughton (McMahon Associates) discusses the refinement process of proposed alternatives. The short/medium-term alternatives will be advanced and there will be preliminary analysis of potential impacts. The two at-grade quadrant roadway concepts will be refined, and the grade-separated concept will be progressed.

7. *Working Group Discussion by Makaela Niles, MassDOT*

Makaela Niles (MassDOT) opens the Working Group discussion.

- Bill Carlson (Resident Association 9th Street Coalition): There are roughly 2,000-3,000 people in the area near 9th Street at Revere Parkway. 9th Street should only be used for local traffic since so many people live there and children play in the street. You can also expect very strong opposition for a raised roadway.
 - Gary McNaughton (McMahon Associates): We must include all options for completeness of the study. We haven't shown the driveways in the proposed plans, so we are making sure that these proposed concepts do not inhibit access to residences. We want to discourage travel that inhibits residents in the next degree of detail.
- Bill Carlson (Resident Association 9th Street Coalition): I am not talking about access to my driveway. I strongly request that you determine how you would travel in and out of the neighborhood if you lived here. If you have to look at a grade-separated concept, people will respond better to an underground roadway. Even though it's more expensive, you might get some support. We will stop you from building an elevated roadway.
 - Gary McNaughton (McMahon Associates): Thank you.
- Amanda Belles (Malden Disability Commission): The green space is great. I like the concept of the square quadrant with the paths going through. When we think about signals, please consider that it may take some people longer to cross those intersections and can be difficult for people to cross long paths.
 - Gary McNaughton (McMahon Associates): There are many considerations for where paths will go through those green spaces. Those are certainly important to think about.
- Jeff Buxbaum (WalkMedford): Good job, team. This is a tough project with lots of traffic. I agree with the previous comments that no one will support the bridge concept. If there is a grade separation, underground is the way to go. Also, any of these will be long walks across the intersection but I appreciate your consideration of pedestrians. I have to believe there is a climate change directive at MassDOT to limit cars or gas-fueled cars on the road. It feels like transit should be front and center of these concepts to support those directives.
 - Gary McNaughton (McMahon Associates): Thank you. The timing of other transit efforts will allow us to advance those concepts in the coming months.
- Doug Carr (NAACP, Mystic Valley Branch): I think there are some great ideas here in the short- and medium-term concepts. I am disappointed that there is not more information about transit, but my big comment is about the at-grade concepts. Those two concepts seem so complicated, and I was hoping for something simpler for pedestrians and drivers. The logic behind them is solid, but this looks like a very complicated plan for two perpendicular roads. I think simplicity is always the best for movement of vehicles and people. I do think the green space is great and these alternatives greatly improve pedestrian safety. Is there any indication that vehicle volumes will go down over time if pedestrian, bike, and transit conditions improve? I also agree that the bridge concept is a non-starter.
 - Gary McNaughton (McMahon Associates): In an earlier meeting we examined the simple four-way intersection alternative. The challenge is how many

movements need to be accommodated in one intersection because your signal needs to have six or seven phases. These other configurations allow for greater efficiency at the intersection. I think these movements look more complicated in these diagrams than they would feel. We may be able to refine these concepts and remove some lanes, but unfortunately a simple four-way intersection is not feasible for the volumes at this intersection. Volumes still are not back to pre-pandemic levels and we may see changes in modes that would affect traffic volumes. This will be a much easier place to walk and bike through that will increase those options for short trips.

- Amanda Belles (Malden Disability Commission): As we make more lanes, do we foresee the potential for increased wrecks if people do not understand the intersection? Do similar intersections have increased vehicle wrecks?
 - Gary McNaughton (McMahon Associates): I can't imagine something more confusing than the existing conditions, and the expectation is that this will decrease crashes. We will continue to look at similar areas to look at crash clusters in those areas.
- Amanda Belles (Malden Disability Commission): I'm sure you've had conversations with businesses in the area. If the intersection is more complicated, this can negatively affect the businesses. Have you talked to businesses about how this will affect them?
 - Gary McNaughton (McMahon Associates): We have some businesses represented on the Working Group and will continue to facilitate discussions as the study advances. The next step in the process is to examine driveway connectivity, and hopefully improved multimodal transportation will actually benefit those businesses.
- Amanda Belles (Malden Disability Commission): When you talk about alternatives, why even bring options to the table that you know are not feasible?
 - Gary McNaughton (McMahon Associates): Concepts get screened out throughout the process. It is just as important to document which alternatives were not chosen throughout studies so that if it is picked up years later, it can help the process down the line.
- Bill Carlson (Resident Association 9th Street Coalition): A circle concept was discussed at a past meeting. How thoroughly was that concept evaluated and why was it rejected?
 - Gary McNaughton (McMahon Associates): The volumes at this intersection would overwhelm a traditional circle.
- Brad Rawson (City of Somerville): Please reach out to me if we can provide any of our roadway data that will aid in this study. We want to ensure that you have access to everything we have learned in Somerville.
 - Gary McNaughton (McMahon Associates): Thank you, Brad.
- Alicia Hunt (City of Medford): Thank you for all the work you have done so far. I was disappointed to see the overpass idea because we are very unhappy with overpasses in general. I encourage you to talk with some of our climate experts about an underpass idea. We want to prevent devastating flooding from occurring so please speak to climate experts while examining alternatives.

- Gary McNaughton (McMahon Associates): Thank you.
- Nathan Richmond (HNTB): We can reach out about climate strategy to see how that will affect these alternatives.

8. *Public Discussion by Makaela Niles, MassDOT*

Makaela Niles opens the discussion to the public.

- Tom Lamar: On the Dual Quadrant Triangle concept, for somebody biking north on Fellsway, how many times would they have to cross the street? How long would that take in total?
 - Conor Murphy (McMahon Associates): With biking north along Fellsway in the Triangle Concept, we are looking at 4 intersection crossings based on this layout. The concept includes multiple locations where bikes and pedestrians can cross at these intersections. This will give bikes and pedestrians more crossing options and reduce delay throughout the entire area.
 - Gary McNaughton (McMahon Associates): The idea is to make these crossings comfortable, so even if you have to cross multiple times it will be comfortable to do so.
- Jared Powell: With the above/grade option, what happens to E/W bike traffic? Does that get moved onto the bridge, which will inevitably involve highway like speeds, or is that part of the at-grade movements?
 - Gary McNaughton (McMahon Associates): It will stay at-grade. You will have a fully accessible at-grade facility. We will develop some options for how to get these, which may be traveling through green areas. As we refine the surface network, we will examine these options.
- Christian MilNeil: I am curious about the municipal climate plans that some towns are implementing. Most of the traffic through this area is from Somerville and Boston. Does MassDOT think those targets are credible, and will those be used to guide studies such as this one?
 - Gary McNaughton (McMahon Associates): As we start to look at future volumes, we will look at factors that will decrease those volumes such as policies that we are seeing that will affect projects such as McGrath in Somerville.
- David Walker: Why is it considered an advantage to maintain such a high volume of vehicle traffic? Individual cars are dangerous, loud, dirty, and cut off the surrounding urban environments (especially station landing from the high-density housing north of Revere Beach Parkway on the east side of the intersection). Shouldn't we be trying to reduce the volume of vehicles passing through this intersection? I understand that we can only hope for mode shift, but in either case I don't think maintaining a large volume of vehicles passing through the intersection should be considered a benefit.
 - Gary McNaughton (McMahon Associates): We are trying to be progressive about looking at future volumes. We can certainly see the benefits of designing for fewer vehicles, so hopefully this is something that we can look at as we advance the study.
- Kristin Scalisi: Will we be able to get a copy of this presentation?
 - Makaela Niles (MassDOT): Yes, meeting materials will be available on the website.

- Tom Lamar: Thanks. To add some clarity, I think the lack of a crosswalk across Revere Beach Parkway is adding significant delay to people biking.
 - Gary McNaughton (McMahon Associates): We really want to find a way to put that crosswalk back in. We did not want to include it in case we are not able to include it.
- Miranda Briseño: Just want to echo concerns about pedestrian, transit, and cycling access — would love to see these crossings shortened for everyone moving through the area not in a car. Like Brad said, would love to plan for the future and mode shift we want instead of maintaining the status quo. Thank you for this presentation!
 - Makaela Niles (MassDOT): Thank you for your comment.
- David Walker: How much is this working group interacting with the Silver Line Extension group?
 - Gary McNaughton (McMahon Associates): I am also on that project, so these two projects are intimately involved. There is also significant overlap between the Working Groups.
- Bill Carlson (Resident Association 9th Street Coalition): Why not use the bridges for pedestrians and bikes as opposed to the cars?
 - Gary McNaughton (McMahon Associates): Getting people to go up is a challenge. We will show how shorter paths will work for this project. In my experience, if you build a ramp at an at-grade crossing, people will generally cross at-grade. This is a tricky design element unless there is a physical barrier. We will discuss this at a future meeting once we evaluate this alternative for this study.
- Ralph Decicco: There is definitely a need for shorter walk crossing paths for people with disabilities and seniors.
 - Makaela Niles (MassDOT): Thank you.
- Brad Rawson (City of Somerville): Just wanted to request that as you get ready for the Working Group's next meeting, we future proof any of the work that the team is doing knowing that we will have a much clearer understanding of the MBTA's bus network a few months from now. It's not just the Silver Line, and there are many other connections to be considered in the surrounding area.
 - Makaela Niles (MassDOT): Thank you.

9. *Next Steps and Closing Comments by Makaela Niles, MassDOT (Project Manager)*

Makaela Niles (MassDOT) discusses next steps. There will be a fifth Working Group Meeting in Winter 2022 and a second Public Information Meeting in Spring 2022. Those meetings will discuss alternatives analysis. Makaela then thanks participants and ends the meeting.

Wellington Circle Planning Study Working Group Meeting #4 Attendees

MassDOT/Study Team:

- Makaela Niles – MassDOT
- Gary McNaughton – McMahan Associates
- Conor Murphy – McMahan Associates
- Emil Gruber – McMahan Associates
- Joanne Haracz – McMahan Associates
- Maureen Chlebek – McMahan Associates
- Natalie Raffol – McMahan Associates
- Deanna Peabody – TrafInfo
- Lauren Dvonch – HNTB
- Leah Epstein – HNTB
- Nathan Richmond – HNTB

Working Group Members & Alternates:

- Alicia Hunt – City of Medford
- Amanda Belles – Malden Disability Commission
- Amanda Linehan – City of Malden
- Amber Christoffersen – Mystic River Watershed Association
- Bill Carlson – Resident Association 9th Street Coalition
- Brad Rawson – City of Somerville
- Doug Carr – NAACP, Mystic Valley Branch
- Jay Campbell – Medford Chamber of Commerce
- Jay Monty – City of Everett
- Jeff Buxbaum – WalkMedford
- Jeff Parenti - DCR
- Melissa Dullea – MBTA
- Susan Bibbins – Medford Commission for Persons with Disabilities
- Yem Lip – City of Malden

Public Attendees:

1. Amy Ingles
2. Christian MilNeil
3. David Walker
4. Jacque Goddard
5. Jared Powell
6. Jennifer Sullivan
7. Kinga Borondy
8. Kristin Scalisi
9. Laurel Siegel
10. Matthew Grew
11. Miranda Briseño
12. Ralph Decicco
13. Stefanos Boulas
14. Thomas Rozelle
15. Tom Lamar
16. Trevor Kafka