Wellington Circle Study Public Information Meeting #3

Wednesday, April 26, 2023, 6:00 PM

Held Virtually via Zoom

Meeting Summary

On April 26, 2023, MassDOT conducted the third public information meeting for the Wellington Circle Study. At this meeting, the Study team reviewed the draft study recommendations based on the results of the alternatives evaluation process. The Study team also solicited feedback from members of the public.

Meeting Notes

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

Attendees are welcomed to the meeting and are informed that the meeting is being recorded. Makaela explains the Ground Rules for the meeting, including how the public can participate. Members of the public are made aware they can contact Sara Stoja (HNTB) if they require technical assistance. Makaela reviews the agenda for the public information meeting.

2. *Study Overview, Project Goals, and Objectives & Study Process by Makaela Niles, MassDOT Project Manager*

Makaela provides a background of the study, its goals, and the process. She describes that this conceptual planning study was initiated as part of the Section 61 Finding for the Encore Boston Harbor casino and will be used to evaluate existing and future multimodal transportation conditions. The study aims to redesign Wellington Circle to provide better connectivity and multimodal mobility through the City of Medford and the surrounding region. A draft report with the short-, medium-, and long-term recommendations will be developed and shared for public comment before being finalized in a final report.

- Study Goals: Makaela reviews the Study goals which include the following:
    - Improve safety, mobility/access, and connectivity for all transportation modes and users in the Wellington Circle area
    - Improve quality of life for residents in the Wellington Circle area
    - Improve local and regional connectivity to support businesses and future development
- Study Process: Makaela reviews the steps of the Study process, which build upon each other. This meeting will cover #5 recommendations. The steps of the Study process include:

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

3. *Draft Study Findings by Gary McNaughton, McMahon Associates (Project Consultant)*

Gary provides an overview of the Short/Medium-Term Alternatives and Long-Term Alternatives.

- Short/Medium-Term Alternative (Option A):
  - Cost: $6.2M
  - This option eliminates right turn channelization, relocates the Middlesex Avenue connection to open the area north of the parkway, and prohibits eastbound left turns, relocating these to occur in the U-turn to the south.
  - Impacts:
    - Minor improvements to bicycle and pedestrian access and connectivity
    - Increases open space
    - Degrades right turn operations – the elimination of separated right turns results in less flexibility when operating the signals
- Short/Medium-Term Alternative (Option B):
  - Cost: $6.2M
  - This option maintains channelized eastbound and westbound turns to accommodate right turn volumes. Further, this option signalizes right turn lane crosswalks.
  - Impacts:
    - Small improvements to bicycle and pedestrian access and connectivity
    - Increases open space
- Long-Term At-Grade Alternative: Dual Quadrant – Square Concept
  - Cost: $36.7M
  - Features dual quadrant roadways allowing connections to and from the east. To connect between Fellsway south of the Parkway and Middlesex Avenue, vehicles would need to use the connector roadway in line with 9th Street. As part of this alternative, eastbound left turns are prohibited, and could occur at Commercial Street to access Fellsway north of the Parkway. This concept lacks a crosswalk on the east side of the quadrant roadway & Revere Beach Parkway intersection due to vehicle volumes.
  - Benefits:
    - Simplifies overall intersection geometry
    - Creates open spaces for multimodal facilities and greenery
    - Provides mostly protected, single-phase crossings for pedestrians
    - Enables future separated bicycle connections throughout Circle, to Fellsway and Route 16

    - Drawbacks:
        - Overall geometry maintains high number of vehicle lanes
        - Requires additional signalized intersection at Middlesex Avenue at 9th Street
        - Concurrent or multiple-phase pedestrian crossings at a few locations
- Long-Term At-Grade Alternative: Dual Quadrant – Triangle Concept
    - Cost: $36.7M
    - Features dual quadrant roadway allowing connections to and from the east. The north south connection is focused on connecting Fellsway north to Revere Beach Parkway. Fellsway through traffic would need to turn at the intersection on the northern point of the triangle. Eastbound left turns are still prohibited in this alternative and could occur at Commercial Street to access Fellsway north of the parkway. This concept also lacks a crosswalk on the east side of the quadrant roadway and Revere Beach Parkway intersection due to vehicle volumes.
    - Benefits:
        - Able to handle existing vehicle volumes
        - Creates open spaces for multimodal facilities and greenery
        - Enables future separated bicycle connections throughout Circle, to Fellsway and Route 16
        - Provides mostly protected, single-phase crossings for pedestrians
    - Drawbacks:
        - Overall geometry is slightly atypical and maintains high number of vehicle lanes
        - Concurrent or multiple-phase pedestrian crossings at a few locations
- Long-Term At-Grade Alternative: Dual Quadrant – Transit Enhanced Concept
    - Cost: $38.3M
    - Built upon the Triangle concept to accommodate the primary bus routes in the study area, which travel along Fellsway, north of the Parkway
    - Features new, dedicated transit lanes in both directions north of the Circle with slightly wider sidewalks
    - Maintains and improves the bus stops that exists today up to the northern part of the triangle
    - Benefits:
        - The northbound transit lanes could be extended along Fellsway, if desirable
        - Prioritizes and best serves bus routes along Fellsway to/from Wellington Station with dedicated bus lanes
        - Improved bicycle and pedestrian access
    - Drawback:
        - Not practical to create an eastbound transit lane on Revere Beach Parkway due to number of turning conflicts
        - Larger roadway cross section to accommodate transit lanes, compared to the Square and Triangle concepts
        - Infeasible to include a street-level pedestrian crossing at Revere Beach Parkway
- Long-Term At-Grade Alternative Add-On Option: Pedestrian Bridge
    - Cost: $35.7M

    - The evaluation of this bridge addresses the lack of a crosswalk to the east of the quadrant roadway/across Revere Beach Parkway.
        - It requires a long span and lengthy ramps to meet accessibility requirements and include stairs near the intersection.
        - The pedestrian bridge could be added to any of the Long-Term At-Grade Alternatives but requires an independent assessment.

      The current design is preliminary and needs further evaluation and design development if it were to advance into project development.
- Long-Term Grade-Separated Single Quadrant
    - Cost: $176.9M
    - Separates the east-west roadway connection, as these were higher volumes than the north-south volumes.
        - While the south to east connection serves the heaviest volume, it does not offer an advantage over the east-west connection for grade-separation as it would have a more complex geometry and structural design.
        - An underpass option did not advance due to significant construction costs, utility impacts, and future flooding risk and operations.
    - Benefits:
        - Removes major movements from surface roadways, limiting the number of lanes required to handle existing volumes
        - Does not serve the south to east connection but simplifies the at-grade roadway
    - Drawbacks:
        - Surface roadways still require high number of lanes in some locations
        - Bridge acts as a visual barrier, bisecting transit station from nearby residents and businesses
        - Long overpass structure and complex connections

4. *Evaluation & Recommendation by Natalie Press, McMahon Associates (Project Consultant)*

Natalie explains the evaluation criteria framework. The criteria are based on the study goals presented previously. The framework is based on three questions:

1) Does this area benefit from the proposed changes?

2) Is the change neutral?

3) Is this area impacted?

A summary of the alternatives analysis for each alternative is given and the Long-Term At-Grade Transit Enhanced alternative is selected as the recommended alternative. The Transit Enhanced alternative provides benefits to all the evaluation criteria, except for vehicle operations, which are slightly impacted due to the trade-offs for improved safety and multimodal access and mobility. This option has the same benefits as the other Long-Term At-Grade alternatives, but it is the only one with a measurable benefit to transit operations and access.

- Recommendation Summary – Key Elements
    - Dedicated transit lanes to accommodate Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) bus routes 100, 108, and 134 (under the Bus Network Redesign [BNRD])
    - Dedicated bus phase signals
    - Floating bus stops provide additional space for waiting pedestrians and reduce conflicts between buses and bikes due to separated bicycle lanes
- Recommendation Summary – Next Steps
    - As project development is initiated, additional elements for advancing this alternative may include:
        - Completing a survey of the study area
        - Evaluating the feasibility of a crossing or pedestrian bridge option across Revere Beach Parkway
        - Integrating bus lanes on Mystic Valley Parkway

Natalie Press (McMahon Associates) reviews the transit enhanced and other benefits and how they will impact connectivity.

- Transit Enhanced Benefits
    - Key benefits include:
        - Substantial transit travel time savings compared to other alternatives.
        - Better transit travel time quality of service (QOS) compared to other alternatives.
    - Affected Bus Routes
        - Placement of transit lanes in the alternative is based on existing routing, serving MBTA routes 100 and 108 on the Fellsway and Revere Beach Parkway
        - The alternative capitalizes on future proposed routing through MBTA's BNRD with relocation of Route 134 to Mystic Valley Parkway
- MBTA Bus Network Redesign
    - A map of the proposed BNRD routes on the triangle roadway configuration shows optimized transit routing with more direct routing to Wellington Station for Routes 100 and 108 between the Fellsway and Revere Beach Parkway.
- Transit Enhanced Benefits – Transit Travel Time
    - Total bus travel time is reduced by approximately 25% compared to the Future No-Build 2040
        - Long-Term Transit-Enhanced Alternative results in transit travel time savings
        - Estimated savings in round trip transit time to and from Wellington Station is 171 seconds
        - There are no expected transit travel time savings for other alternatives
- Pedestrian Connectivity
    - Fewer number of pedestrian crossings than existing conditions for all alternatives (reduced from six crossings to three crossings for long-term at-grade alternatives)
- Pedestrian Travel Time Savings

    - Faster pedestrian crossing time from northwest to southeast corner of Circle for all alternatives compared to existing and future no-build conditions
        - 1 minute and 34 seconds to cross Circle in long-term at-grade alternatives compared to existing and future no-build conditions
- Pedestrian Experience
    - Shorter length of pedestrian crossings for all alternatives compared to existing
- Bicycle Experience
    - Increased ability to provide high-comfort bicycle facilities for all alternatives, notably the long-term alternatives, compared to existing and future no-build conditions

5. *Draft Implementation Plan by Makaela Niles, MassDOT Project Manager*

Makaela reviews the MassDOT project development process and explains the steps needed to start the design process and potential funding options. At the conclusion of the Wellington Circle Study, this effort is between the planning and project initiation phases.

The MassDOT project development process includes the following elements:

- Project Need Identification
    - Need identified by MassDOT and community
    - Complex issues require planning study
- Planning
    - Define context
    - Public outreach
    - Project definition and refinement
    - Recommendations
- Project Initiation
    - Define project scope, costs, timeline, impacts, and responsibilities
    - Score assigned based on eight evaluation criteria
    - Approval by MassDOT Project Review Committee
    - Project manager assigned
- Design, Environmental, and Right-of-Way
    - Design Process Starts
        - Includes 25% design, 75% design, and 100% design
        - Public outreach occurs throughout this process
- Programming
    - Identify funding sources
    - Program in regional and state transportation improvement programs
- Procurement
    - Procure consultant to construct project
- Construction

Potential funding sources include the following:

- Encore Section 61 Finding
    - Funding for concept design

- Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)
    - Managed by the Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)
- Federal Discretionary Funds (note: project eligibility and funding are subject to change)
    - Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) Grant Program
    - Carbon Reduction Program
    - Reconnecting Communities Program
    - Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) Grant Program

6. *Public Comment*

- Kristin Scalisi - Not having a direct crossing from 9th Street is unreasonable. Our one block must have the densest population in the neighborhood. What are we, 500 condo units and 200 rental units? So maybe 1400 residents in one block. We need that pedestrian bridge.
    - Makaela Niles (MassDOT Program Manager) – As part of the next steps in the design process, the feasibility of adding a crossing or pedestrian bridge in that area can be looked at further.
- Nancy Edmunds - I've heard that Kappy's is being replaced by a large apartment building. Does the study include the impact of additional car traffic from that? What are your thoughts?
    - Gary McNaughton (Project Manager, McMahon Associates) – We looked at future volumes and future growth and several properties in and around the area, including Kappy's and even prospective developments of properties that could be more intensely used. A project like that fits well with the design if Kappy's were to be more of a residential-oriented use. That is what we're trying to accommodate with increased mobility, like more walking and biking connectivity to the station and increased ability to walk to the parks and bike through the area connecting to some of the other biking infrastructure. The ability to continually increase the overall network capacity relying on single occupancy vehicle travel is not feasible, in Massachusetts, or the Northeast in general. We need to think of better ways to use our infrastructure to improve mobility. The goal of this project is to not make more capacity for single-occupancy vehicles. You can't build your way out of traffic congestion; you just induce more of that single-occupant user. We're really trying to shift modes, accommodate those other modes, increase capacity with transit, and increase walking and biking to Wellington and other stations with that improved network.
- Kaitlin Robinson - Is MassDOT working with MA legislators to allow for automated enforcement of bus lane violations so that transit won't be delayed by drivers who use the bus lanes to try to beat traffic?
    - Gary McNaughton (Project Manager, McMahon Associates) – There's been several bus lanes that have been implemented and they're growing continually. It is a recurring conversation.
- Alexander Frieden - What is the plan to make it from Fellsway south to Mystic Valley Parkway to get to Wegmans and others? It seems like the current crossings are going to be the crosswalks which have unreasonably long wait times today.

    - Gary McNaughton (Project Manager, McMahon Associates) – Natalie spoke about the improvements on wait times over existing conditions. It is still a complicated network, but there would be median refuge areas to provide more flexibility and comfort in the crossings. Each of these crossings is going to be designed from a signal perspective so you will have sufficient time to complete that crossing, assuming you started at the beginning of it. We've done this to minimize the delays that are inherit with at-grade crossings and give pedestrians more priority at these crossings than in the past. Overall, the result will be significantly shorter crossing times than under existing conditions through improved crossing signal phasing and reduced number of crossings to reduce that wait time.
- Scot Keay - Are there any plans for any short-term improvements? As someone who bikes through here, I am really excited about the potential of this project, but I assume it is also several years away and the last update did very little to improve biking.
    - Gary McNaughton (Project Manager, McMahon Associates) – We did look at short-term alternatives, which might take a couple of years to be implemented. They would not significantly enhance conditions for bicycling. The plan is to advance the recommended long-term alternative in its entirety. Timing is subject to funding and the ability to move that forward as quickly as possible.
- Sam Silverman - What will happen to the traffic while construction is going on?
    - Gary McNaughton (Project Manager, McMahon Associates) – Construction staging is not something we dive into in detail as part of a planning study, but as is done with most projects, there are requirements to make sure lane access is maintained in peak periods. There will be impacts as there always are, but the goal is to minimize impacts. Construction staging and sequence is imbedded in project development and the next level of design.
- Alexander Frieden - What are the goals of the project?
    - Makaela Niles (MassDOT Project Manager) – The primary goals of this effort are to improve safety and mobility for all transportation modes and users in the Wellington Circle area, to improve quality of life for residents, and to improve local and regional activity. All the alternatives developed through this process aim to support and fulfill these goals and objectives that were established at the onset of the Study process.
- Nancy Edmunds - This is beyond your purview, but until the MBTA becomes more reliable, car traffic through Wellington will continue to be heavy. I've taken to driving to work after having been a dedicated T rider.
- Daniel Bao - Good work everyone who worked on this! I really hope the long term at-grade improvements with transit lanes will be implemented! Thank you!

7. *Next Steps by Makaela Niles, MassDOT Project Manager*

Makaela reviews the next steps for the Wellington Circle Study and shares the timeline through the end of the study process. The Study team will release a draft final report for a 30-day public comment period. The feedback received will be included in the final report that is anticipated to be released in June 2023. Information is shared on how to sign up for Study updates and access the Study's comment form and meeting materials.

Wellington Circle Planning Study Public Information Meeting #3 Attendees

MassDOT/Study Team:

- Makaela Niles - MassDOT Program Manager
- Gary McNaughton – McMahon Associates
- Joanne Haracz – McMahon Associates
- Natalie Press – McMahon Associates
- Emily Wood – HNTB
- Sara Stoja – HNTB

Public Attendees:

- Al Donatelli
- Alexander Frieden
- Daniel Bao
- Gavin Lund
- Georgia Roman
- Jared Powell - Medford Bicycle Advisory Commission
- Jason Cluggish
- Joe Zissman
- Josh Levin
- Kaitlin Robinson
- Kathy Schaeffer
- Kristin Scalisi
- Lillian Worth
- Nancy Edmunds
- Rebekah Wright
- Sam Silverman
- Scot Keay
- Todd Blake - City of Medford