Wellington Circle Study Working Group Meeting #2

Thursday, May 27, 2021 2:00 – 3:30 PM

Held Virtually via Zoom

Meeting Summary

On May 27th, 2021, MassDOT conducted the second Working Group meeting for the Wellington Circle Study. At this meeting, the Study team provided an overview of the multimodal transportation network and solicited feedback on issues and opportunities in and around Wellington Circle from Working Group members through poll questions and a discussion. An interactive map was shared with the Working Group prior to providing them the opportunity to submit specific feedback on the multimodal transportation network in and around Wellington Circle. The meeting was also open to members of the public where they were given the chance to share comments and questions.

Meeting Notes

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

All 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 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 reviews the agenda for the Working Group meeting.

2. *Study Overview, Background & 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 will be used to evaluate existing and future multimodal conditions. 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. A final report with recommendations for both the short- and long-term solutions will be based on the analysis of this study.

- Study Goals: Makaela 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 reviews the steps of study process, which build upon each other:
  1. Public involvement plan, study area, goals and objectives, evaluation criteria
  2. Existing conditions, future no-build conditions, evaluation of issues and opportunities (this is the main step being discussed during the meeting)
  3. Alternative developments
  4. Alternative analysis
  5. Recommendations
  6. Final report

  This meeting will cover existing conditions and current issues and opportunities. This study will consider trends as they continue to change as a result of the pandemic.

3. *Existing Conditions: Planning Context by Natalie Raffol, McMahon Associates (Project Consultant)*

Natalie gives an overview of existing conditions and the Study's planning context.

- Existing Population Density: Natalie reviews the existing population density which is lower around the area of the Wellington Circle than in the study area at large. The study area has a density of about 8,872 people per square mile. There is more opportunity for more transit-oriented development given the proximity to the MBTA Wellington Orange Line Station. This study provides an opportunity to identify areas for development and expand multimodal transportation in the region.
- Who makes up the study area?: Natalie reviews who makes up the local study area. The study team assessed demographic data including race, language, income, and car-free households:
  - 36% of residents identify as non-white (28% of the city needs to identify as non-white to meet the minority criteria for Environmental Justice)
  - 12% of the population has an income below the federal poverty level
  - 42% speak a language other than English as their primary language
  - 14% of households do not have a car
  - Diversity in the study areas goes beyond the environmental justice qualifiers. Both Malden and Everett have large minority populations and strong linguistic diversity.
- Environmental justice & Car-free Households: Environmental Justice communities and car-free households were mapped within the study area. Improving multimodal connections to Wellington Circle may benefit car-free, minority, and low-income households.
- Population Change: The years 2020-2040 projected some population growth in the study area. In 2020, the study area had a population of 36,534 and in 2040 it is projected to have a population of 43,197, signifying an estimated population increase of roughly 6,700. It is important to note that Assembly Square is accounting for much of the population growth in the region. As population demands change, increasing the use of multimodal transport options could provide opportunities to minimize vehicular congestion on roadways as well as their emissions.

- Employment Change: Employment growth is driven by large-scale projects in Assembly Square, the Silver Lane Extension Project, and the Encore Casino. There is an estimated 30% increase in study area employment: 23,300 in 2020 and 30,254 in 2040.
- Existing Land Use: There are diverse land uses throughout the study area, but it is mainly characterized by single- and multi-family residential with areas of low-density commercial development. This creates opportunities to densify both commercial and residential uses through mixed-use development, which may increase the potential for walking and biking trips.
- Zoning: There is a range of different zones in study area and abutting Wellington Circle including commercial, open space, mixed use, residential, and industrial zones. There is a need to accommodate local and regional trips in the area through a variety of modes.
- Planned Development: Natalie reviews a map of proposed and active residential and commercial construction projects in the study area. The largest residential projects are in the areas where existing land use is not primarily residential or zoned for residential. This can contribute to the future shift in population and employment as activity is likely to increase in the areas; therefore, providing multimodal facilities is important.
- Questions: An opportunity for clarifying questions is presented, no questions are asked, and Natalie continues.

4. *Existing Conditions: Multimodal Transportation Network – Bicycle & Pedestrian Facilities by Natalie Raffol, McMahon Associates (Project Consultant)*

Natalie provides an overview of the multimodal transportation network.

- Regional Mode Share: The majority of people are driving alone to work for their commute. 48% of residents choose sustainable transportation modes. Data demonstrates that driving alone was the most common mode of transport in all five municipalities. Multimodal improvements in the Wellington Circle can serve to increase sustainable trips in the region by providing more comfortable facilities connecting to and from transit, green space, residences, and commercial areas.
- Walking Conditions: It is important to consider walkability throughout the study area. Sidewalks alone are not enough to create a walkable environment. Many walkable areas can be improved through means of sidewalks, pedestrian signals, and curb ramps to make streets safer.
- Pedestrian Facilities: The current configuration of the Circle, which requires five to six individual crossings to get from Wellington Circle plaza to Station Landing and Wellington Station, does not promote a walkable environment as there are no safe/comfortable options for direct crossings.
- Bicycle Facilities: There are existing bicycle facilities surrounding Wellington Circle but the Circle itself is a gap in the regional bike network. Providing bicycle facilities through Wellington Circle lends the opportunity to connect these important bike networks.
- Walking and Biking Demand: The Local Access Score was determined by evaluating a roadway's potential to serve walking and biking trips based off proximity to schools, businesses, transit. etc. Roadways comprising Wellington Circle show very high demand for walking and biking.
- Walking and Biking – State Goals: It is important for the Study to be consistent with the MassDOT Pedestrian and Bicycle Plans, which include the following goals:
    - Goal 1: to eliminate pedestrian and bicyclist fatalities and serious injuries
    - Goal 2: Increase the percentage of short trips made by walking and biking

- MassDOT Bicycle Plan – Network Gaps and Demand: Wellington Circle was identified as a high potential demand for everyday biking trips and as a gap in the state's high comfort bike network
- Working Group Discussion: Natalie releases the following two polls to identify priorities for walking and biking connections and to gauge where Working Group members would like to walk or bike to within the Study area but are currently unable to do so due to lack of facilities, physical barriers, or feeling uncomfortable.
    - Question: What areas would you most like to walk between, regardless of their existing pedestrian conditions?
        - See poll results in Appendix A
    - Question: What areas would you most like to bike between, regardless of their existing bicycling conditions?
        - See poll results in Appendix A
- Natalie informs the Group that the study team will look at polling results to understand where connections are desired throughout the Study area.

5. *Existing Conditions: Multimodal Transportation Network - Bus Service and Wellington Station Access by Gary McNaughton, McMahon Associates (Project Consultant)*

   Gary discusses vehicle modes starting with bus service and passenger experience. Travel Time – Quality of Service (QOS), Travel Time Variability QOS and Excess Passenger Time were used to assess bus operations throughout the study area.

   - Bus Service in Local Study Area: All buses operate in the same lanes as general traffic, which makes bus speed and reliability dependent on quality flow of general traffic. Almost 70% of bus riders in the study area board or alight at Wellington Station which shows the potential for improving multimodal connectivity to the station.
   - Access Modes to Orange Line at Wellington: Gary reviews access to Wellington Station by each mode:
       - Walked or bicycled (changed -1.5% from 2009 to 2017)
       - MBTA Bus (changed +30.5% from 2009 to 2017)
       - Drive and Park (alone or carpool) (changed -29.1% from 2009 to 2017)
       - Dropped off by personal vehicle (changed -4.1% from 2009 to 2017)
       - Dropped off by other vehicles (changed +4.2% from 2009 to 2017)

     Bus ridership has increased significantly while driving and parking has dropped off significantly. There has been a shift from auto-based access to bus access.

   - Inbound and Outbound Travel Time and Travel Time Variability QOS Grades: In both AM and PM peaks, buses travel slowest from Wellington Circle and from Sweetser Circle heading toward Wellington Station.
   - Excess Passenger Time (XPT): The most passengers experience the most delay on buses between Wellington and Sweetser Circles. There is opportunity to make improvements to reduce this excess passenger time.
   - Working Group Discussion: Gary releases the following two polls to the Group. The first poll asks the Group's thoughts on accessing Wellington Station and their preferred mode. The

second poll asks how easy/comfortable it is to access Wellington Station by their mode of choice today.

- Question: If accessing Wellington station, what would be your preferred mode?
  - See poll results in Appendix A
- Question: How easy/comfortable is it for you to access Wellington Station by your mode of choice today?
  - See poll results in Appendix A

6. *Existing Conditions: Multimodal Transportation Network - Vehicle Operations by Gary McNaughton, McMahon Associates (Project Consultant)*

- Local Traffic Intersections: There are 13 total intersections within Wellington Circle:
  - Five have signals
  - Eight do not have signals, one of which has signals on flash
- Establishing Vehicle Volumes: COVID-19 has impacted vehicle volumes, but data has been compiled from prior studies and efforts. Long-term, lasting effects to vehicle volumes may be seen as a result of the pandemic. For this study, volumes have been adjusted to reflect traffic conditions before COVID-19.
- Vehicle, Bike, and Pedestrian Weekday Peak Hour Volumes: Gary presents the weekday AM and PM peak hour volumes by mode. There is not a high number of bicycles traveling through the area due to the lack of facilities.
- Vehicle Volumes: Gary reviews and compares peak hour volumes. The following results are presented:
  - Weekday Morning:
    - High directional distribution in north to south directions
    - Heaviest entering move is westbound
    - Majority of northbound traffic makes right turn
    - Low number of left turns except for west to southbound
  - Weekday Afternoon:
    - High northbound and westbound volumes
    - Heavy northbound and eastbound right turn
    - Heavy westbound and southbound left turn
    - Higher overall left turn volumes
  - Peak hours comparison:
    - Dominant patterns between south and east
    - Highest overall volume on Revere Beach Parkway east of Circle
    - Typical commuter patterns not seen on east/west roadways
- Crash History: Gary reviews crash history by type of crash and number for each intersection. Between 2015 and 2017, there were 278 total crashes over the 3-year period, including 1 fatality. There was a low number of bike crashes, which correlates with low bike volumes in the area. There was a high number of angle and side swipe crashes and a low number of rear end crashes.
- Vehicle Operations: Vehicle operations vary across the study area intersections and peak hours. The vehicle delay through Wellington Circle may exceed reported delay due to multiple closely spaced intersections.

- Vehicle Queuing: Gary reviews vehicle queuing for the weekday AM and PM. The following results are presented:
    - Weekday AM:
        - Long vehicle queues in westbound and southbound directions
        - Queues at signals in the center of the Circle extend beyond adjacent intersections, increasing delays
        - Actual queuing and delay longer than reported from analysis
    - Weekday PM:
        - Queues at signals extend beyond adjacent intersections in the eastbound and westbound directions
        - Actual queuing and delay longer than reported from analysis
- Origin-Destination Analysis: Gary reviews the origin-destination analysis that was conducted. The following results are presented:
    - AM Findings:
        - 60% of the trips around the Circle originate locally (i.e., in Medford, Malden, Everett, Somerville and Melrose)
        - 32% of the trips are from outside the local area and Boston/Cambridge
    - PM Findings:
        - 64% of the trips through the Circle have local destinations
        - 25% of the trips are from outside the local area and Boston/Cambridge
- Geofence Analysis: Gary reviews the assessment of trips to Wellington station and the Encore Casino. Wellington station is primarily served by Medford, Everett and some of Chelsea and Revere. The highest volumes of trips to the station occur at the AM and PM peaks, with some midday volume. The Encore Casino draws from areas with easy access.
- Working Group Discussion: Gary releases two polls to capture if the analysis matches the Group's experiences with vehicle operations and safety for pre-pandemic versus today. The final poll asks how well the presented origin-destination patterns reflect the Group's local knowledge. See poll results in Appendix A.

7. *Issues, Constraints & Opportunities – Working Group Discussion by Joanne Haracz, McMahon Associates (Project Consultant)*
    - Issues: Joanne reviews the study area issues which include safety, multimodal connectivity and accommodations, and vehicular congestion.
    - Constraints and Considerations: The roadways comprising Wellington Circle are parkways under historic designation. The alternatives development process will need to consider impacts to natural elements such as trees and waterways in and around Wellington Circle.
    - Conceptual Design Considerations and Opportunities: There is an opportunity to allocate space to other uses due to wide roadways. The study team will consider the multimodal connections to existing trails. There are also opportunities for mixed-use redevelopment as population density increases. This can improve public health outcomes and better connect neighborhoods on each side of the Circle.
    - Encore Casino Mitigation Commitments: This study is part of a larger package of mitigation commitments by the Encore Casino. Other Encore Casino commitments are

already underway, including improvements at Santilli Circle and Sweetser Circle, and other infrastructure and travel demand management services.

- Project Goals & Objectives Inform Alternatives Development: Joanne reviews the goals and objectives that will help inform the development of alternatives, including:
    - Mobility/Access
    - Safety
    - Quality of Life; and
    - Connectivity
- Key Take-Aways: Joanne summarizes the primary takeaways of the issues, constraints, and opportunities presented. As the long-term effects of COVID-19 on travel patterns are still to be determined, scenarios as part of this study will be consider its potential impacts. Safety, multimodal connectivity, and congestion were identified as key issues in the study area. Existing constraints will be considered such as historic designations of parkways and other natural elements. Opportunities have been identified such as wide roadways, that may help address key issues at the Circle.

8. *Interactive Map, Working Group Members feedback on issues and opportunities by Makaela Niles, MassDOT Project Manager*
    - Working Group Discussion: Makaela reviews the comments submitted prior to the meeting on the interactive map. These comments serve as a primer to the following Working Group discussion.

9. *Working Group Members Feedback on Issues and Opportunities and Public Comment by Makaela Niles, MassDOT Project Manager*
    - Jeff Buxbaum, WalkMedford – on the polls. This is a pretty small sample. Hard to take too much away from this. This isn't really "bike between" but rather origins and destinations.
        - Natalie McMahon Associates - We recognize this is a small sample size in this meeting. We are looking at the results from the poll with the interactive map and other comments collected on Study website. We will look at all feedback collected to see the trends that emerge.
    - Wendy Landman - NACTO recommends using a walking speed of 2.5 - 3.5 feet/second for signal timing. The analysis that you showed used a speed of 4 feet/second. With a slower speed it would actually take even longer to get across the intersection. Can you please discuss what timing you will use to do the analysis of the design options? Thank you.
        - Gary McNaughton, Project Manager, McMahon Associates - We used the four seconds for that graphic to give an illustration, did not want to overstate that. At most we will be using 3.5 seconds, we may go a little bit lower. We will start to look at that as we go through the alternatives.
    - Wendy Landman - Have you considered how many trips may switch to walking, transit and biking if the other worked better/more safely for those modes. Wondering whether those shifts could offset some possible road diets.
        - Gary McNaughton, Project Manager, McMahon Associates - That's exactly where we are going. That is why we gathered all that data about who's traveling through the area and how far are they traveling. As we start to develop alternatives, we

want to know how many trips could potentially to be converted over to walking, biking or transit. That is something, in the next stages, that we will be considering.

- Peter Calves, Public Attendee – Question about Closed Captions for the meeting
    - Erica Blonde, HNTB - We will be providing an accessible document for the meeting on the study website.
- Bill Carlson, Resident Association 9th Street Coalition - Discourages the use of 9th Street and Brainard Avenue as a way to by-pass the circle. Those two streets are local roads.
    - Gary McNaughton, Project Manager, McMahon Associates - We have heard that a lot. Ideally, we can solve some of the problems, so people do not need to bypass into the local streets. This is something we will be considering and sensitive to as we look at options.
- Alicia Hunt, Director of Planning and Sustainability, City of Medford - One of the things we have seen raised is around dedicated bus lanes and taking from traffic lanes. Taking dedicated traffic lanes on busy roads can be very problematic, is that being considered here? There is an obvious problem with bus service, it is also a problem for people in cars too.
    - Gary McNaughton, Project Manager, McMahon Associates – Dedicated bus lanes are being considered but not in a vacuum. We are not looking to take the existing roadway configuration and remove a lane. As we look at alternatives and concepts for this area, we will consider opportunities for improving bus service, but do not envision putting a bus lane on the existing roadway network.

- Jeff Buxbaum, WalkMedford - Can you give a sense of the historic designations' constraints?
    - Joanna Haracz, McMahon Associates – We will have to go through a review process with the consulting parties on this issue. However, this space has been used as transportation infrastructure historically. We will have to consider the historic designation, but it does not preclude us from moving forward with alternatives.
- Amber Christofferson, Mystic River Watershed Association - How is this area is going to be flipped from being dominated by cars to being good for people walking and biking. Have you seen an example of similar projects that have made this transformation?
    - Gary McNaughton, Project Manager, McMahon Associates - I don't think there is another intersection in the world quite like this. We are looking at ways to increase the efficiency. We will be looking at ways to make various modes coexist in a more efficient manner.
- Todd Blake, Traffic Engineer, City of Medford - The opportunity I see here, unlike many major intersections, the intersection itself has a lot of right-of-way to work with. May provide sections of opportunities of short queue jumps for buses. I would also like to keep the grade separation option open, as it could provide a direct connection across the intersection.
    - Gary McNaughton, Project Manager, McMahon Associates – We are hoping to improve on that.
- Jeff Buxbaum - Are grade separations for vehicle traffic being considered? Is there a budget constraint on this planning exercise?
    - Gary McNaughton, Project Manager, McMahon Associates - Our scope does include looking at grade separation alternatives. Budget becomes a consideration in correlation to the benefits of them. If we were to separate vehicles it would be most

likely to connect Route 16 straight through. We try to stay away from developing concepts until we are past this stage and have heard from everybody.
    - Todd Blake, Traffic Engineer, City of Medford - Another opportunity considering the right-of-way in the center is a through southbound versus a straight left.
- Bill Carlson, Resident Association 9th Street Coalition, - Boston Central Artery and Worcester I-290 are two examples of why it is a bad idea to separate halves of a neighborhood with an elevated road.
    - Gary McNaughton, Project Manager, McMahon Associates – There are probably some other examples as well. We made a lot of that argument in the Casey Arborway project. When considering grade separation, we want to make sure that any elevated road would be comfortable to travel under.
- Alicia Hunt, Director of Planning and Sustainability, City of Medford - There is still a lot of pain in the City of Medford related to I-93 coming through. There is a section of Route 16 that is elevated south of Medford Square that I frequently hear people talk about the benefits of bringing it to grade level. People don't like underpasses; they don't like walking under them, and it may be helpful for the study team to know that we continue to hear from people about it.
    - Gary McNaughton, Project Manager, McMahon Associates –The under-bridge environment can be an uncomfortable experience. These factors will come into play in the development of alternatives.

10. Public Comment Period

- Betty Lo, Public Attendee – Are there any densification plans?
    - Joseph Zissman, Cambridge Systematics - We are looking at densification and potential changes in the neighborhood in a couple of different ways. One of them is looking at the developments that have already been proposed or are under construction. There is a list of about 20 of those that are being updated. As we evaluate alternatives, we will be looking how well they function under a set of development scenarios.
- Betty Lo, Public Attendee - Hello, thank you for this meeting. I signed up through the Medford city website and have two questions. 1: Will there be further opportunity for public input, besides the end of this meeting? Can we reach out to working group members for further discussion, since some are public officials and community group leaders? 2: Dense mixed-use developments are often touted as solutions to congestion, but much of what's being developed is at lux price points. What is being done to preserve income/class diversity?
    - Erica Blonde, HNTB – There is a study comment form that is available through the public website. You can submit a comment and get a response from a member of the Study team.
    - Alicia Hunt, Director of Planning and Sustainability, City of Medford – On dense mixed-use developments. The City is launching our comprehensive planning process. Our first big public meeting is on June 9th, we will be talking about what will be involved in that process. We are also finishing a housing production plan, where we are looking at affordable housing. You can view this information at http://www.medfordma.org/departments/planning-development-sustainability/. We would be happy to receive feedback on this plan. Our email is OCD@Medford.MA.Gov and our phone number is (781) 393 2480.

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

Makaela reviews next steps for the Wellington Circle Study and shares the anticipated timeline for future Working Group and public meetings. The first public meeting and the third Working Group meeting will take place this summer. Information is shared on how to sign up for study updates and access the study's comment form.

Makaela thanks everyone for attending and adjourns the meeting.

Wellington Circle Planning Study Working Group Meeting #1 Attendees

MassDOT/Study Team:

- Makaela Niles - MassDOT
- Ethan Britland - MassDOT
- Gary McNaughton – McMahon Associates
- Joanne Haracz – McMahon Associates
- Natalie Raffol – McMahon Associates
- Jorden van Emmerik – McMahon Associates
- Joseph Zissman – Cambridge Systematics
- Erica Blonde - HNTB
- Leah Epstein – HNTB
- Luke McInnis – HNTB

Working Group Members & Alternates:

- Amanda Linehan – City of Malden
- Amber Christofferson – Mystic River Watershed Association
- Bill Carlson – Resident Association 9th Street Coalition
- Brad Rawson – City of Somerville
- Christine P. Barber – State House of Representatives
- Constance Raphael – MassDOT
- Doug Carr – NAACP, Mystic Valley Branch
- Fangyun Xi – MassDOT
- Jay Monty – City of Everett
- Jeff Buxbaum – WalkMedford
- Jeff Parenti – DCR
- Melissa Dullea – MBTA
- Paul Donato – State House of Representatives
- Todd Blake – City of Medford

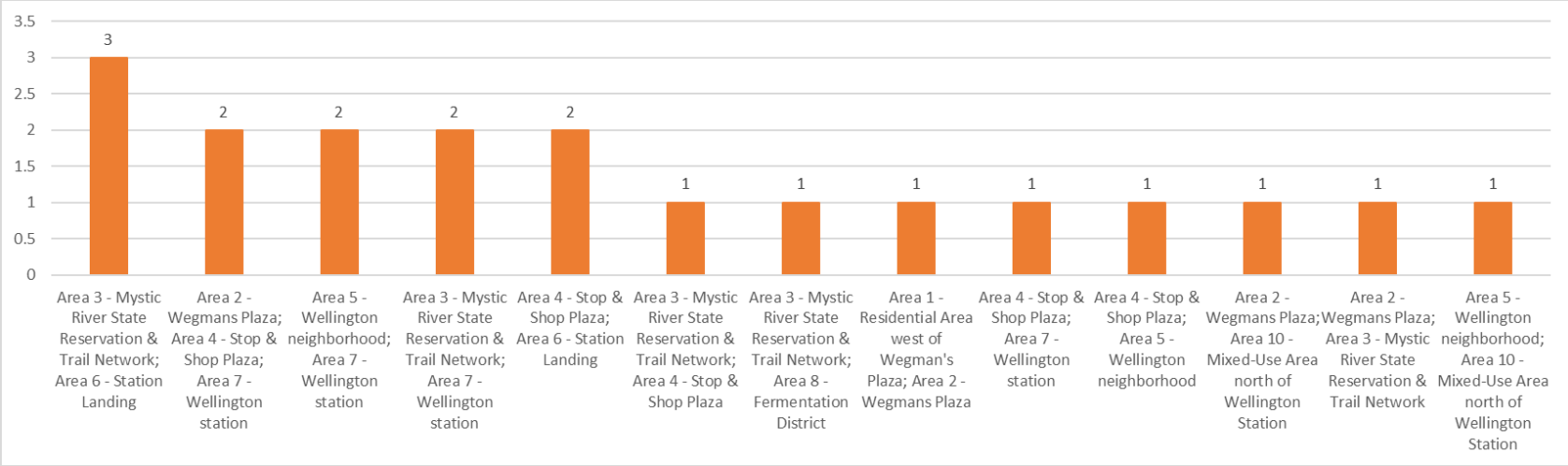
Attendees:

- Alicia Hunt, City of Medford

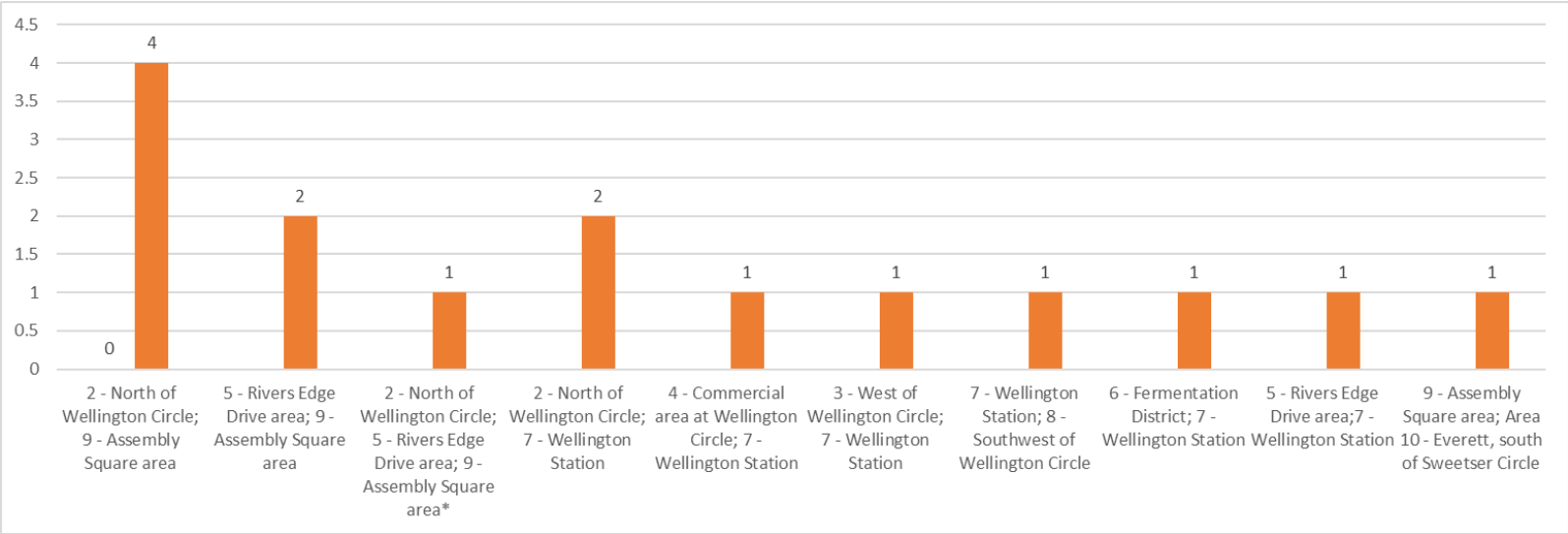
- Betty Lo
- David Read
- David Walker
- Douglas Johnson, MassDOT
- Duncan Allen, IBI Group
- Emil Gruber, McMahon Associates
- Frank Taliaferro
- Jacquelyn Goddard, MassDOT
- Kristen Pennucci, MassDOT
- Kristin Scalisi
- M. Page- Lieberman
- Marco Crognale
- Matthew Grew, MassDOT
- Maureen Chlebek, McMahon Associates
- Peter Calves
- Tim McGivern, City of Medford
- Wendy Landman

Appendix A: Poll Results

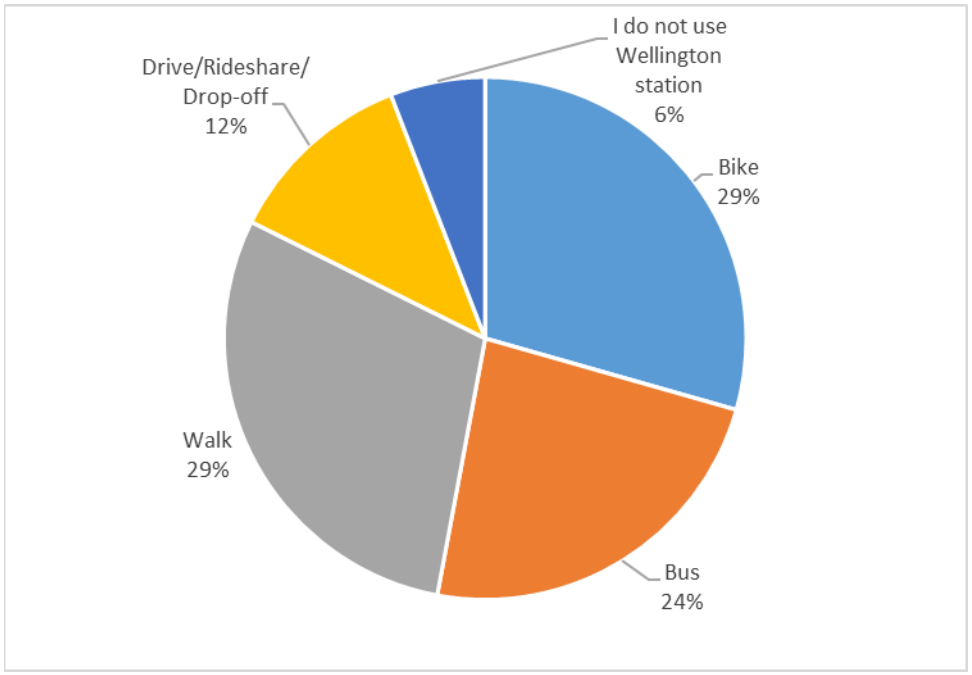
1. Question: What areas would you most like to walk between, regardless of their existing pedestrian conditions?



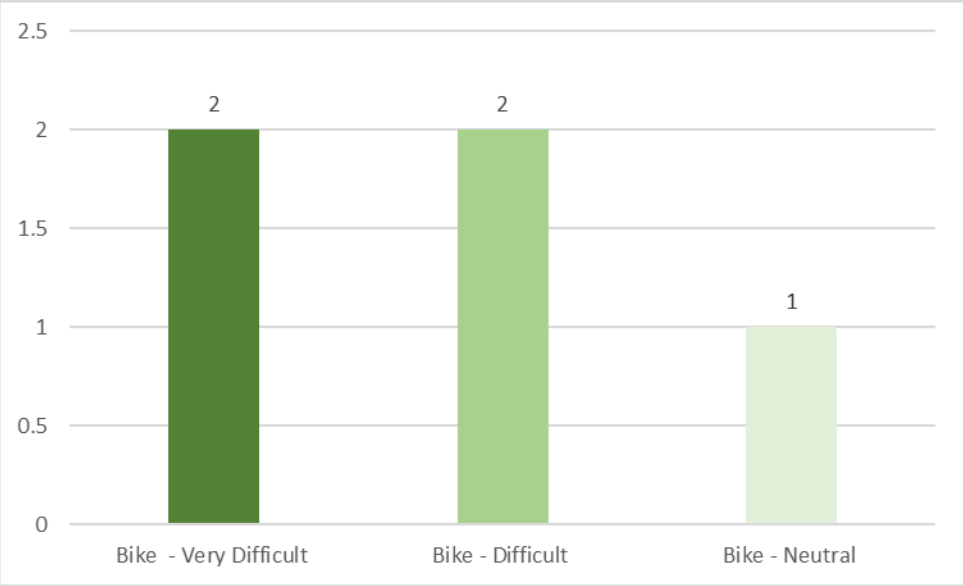
2. Question: What areas would you most like to bike between, regardless of their existing bicycling conditions?



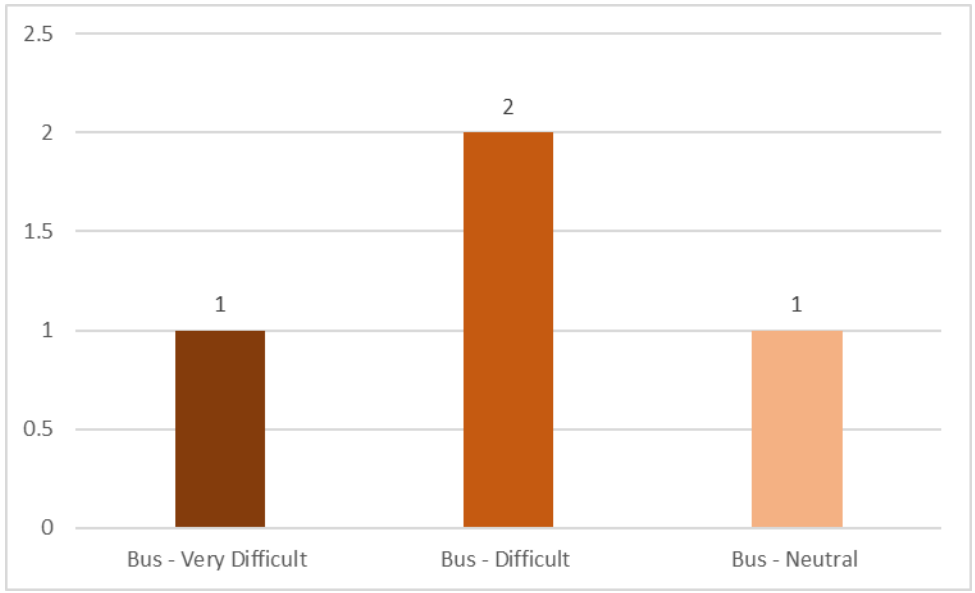
3. Question: If accessing Wellington station, what would be your preferred mode?



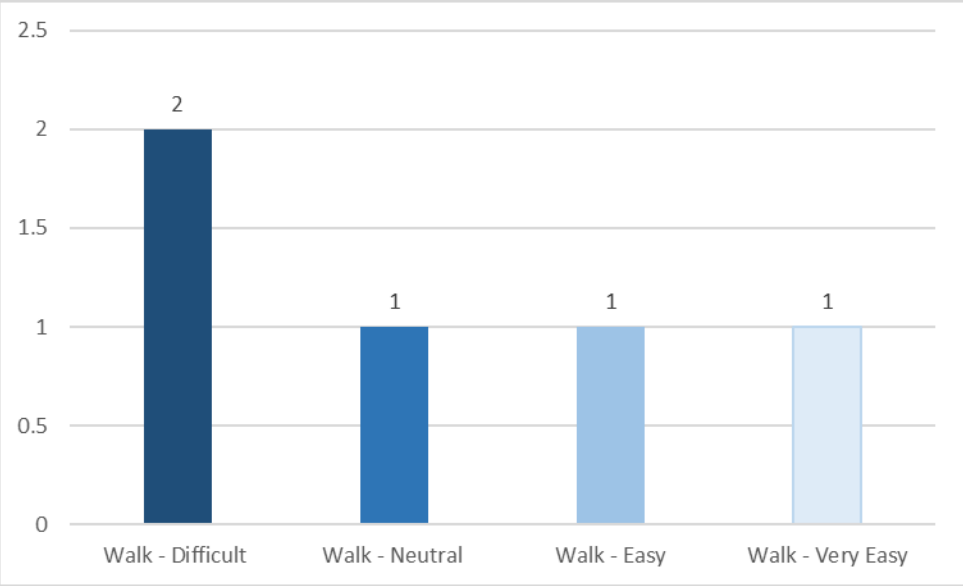
4. Question: How easy/comfortable is it for you to access Wellington Station by your mode of choice today?
   - Bike:



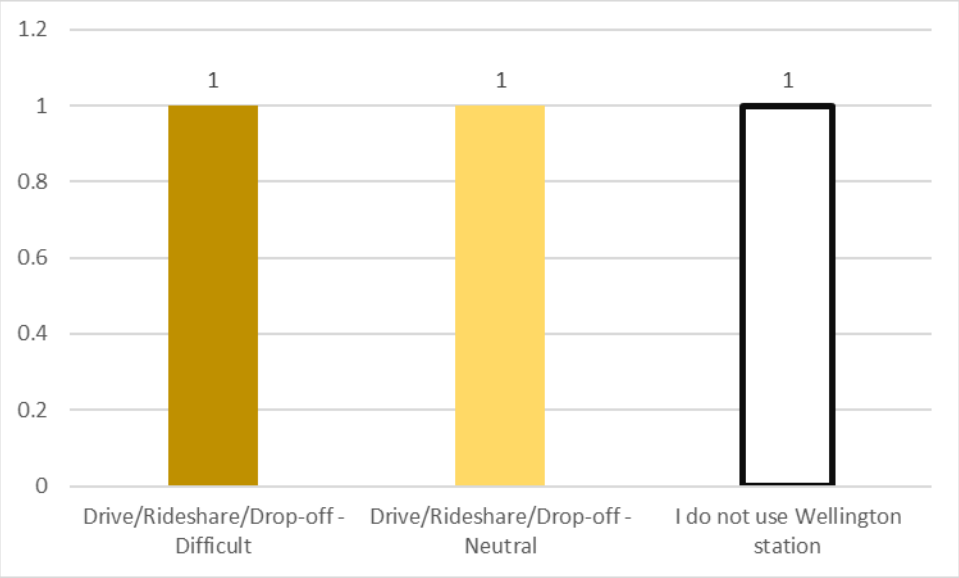
- Bus:


2.5
2
1.5
1
0.5
0
1
2
1
Bus - Very Difficult
Bus - Difficult
Bus - Neutral

- Walk:


2.5
2
1.5
1
0.5
0
2
1
1
1
Walk - Difficult
Walk - Neutral
Walk - Easy
Walk - Very Easy

- Rideshare/Do not use Wellington Station:



5. Question: How does our analysis match your experience with vehicle operations and safety (pre-pandemic)?
6. Question: How well do the presented origin destination patterns reflect your local knowledge?