



Wellington Circle Study Working Group Meeting #3 Tuesday, August 31, 2021 2:00-3:30 PM Held Virtually Via Zoom

Meeting Summary

On August 31, 2021, MassDOT conducted the third Working Group meeting for the Wellington Circle Study. At this meeting, the Study team provided an overview of the concept development process and solicited feedback on the proposed concepts. 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)*

All attendees are welcomed to the meeting and are 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 Erica Blonde (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 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 the short-, medium-, and long-term solutions will be based on the analysis 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:

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

This meeting will cover #3: alternatives development. This Study will consider trends as they continue to change as a result of the pandemic.

3. *Public Meeting Recap by Makaela Niles, MassDOT (Project Manager)*

Makaela Niles (MassDOT) reviews the Virtual Public Information Meeting held on June 24th and discusses public feedback provided at that meeting. Makaela addresses themes in public feedback and discusses how the Study could address those concerns.

4. *Future No-Build Conditions by Gary McNaughton, McMahon Associates*

Gary McNaughton (McMahon Associates) discusses the Growth Projection Methodology. Traffic projection data was disrupted by COVID. The study team needs to determine what the correct long-term traffic values are to move this study forward and will monitor future changes. Existing volumes are being used for early concept development and will be used through fatal flaw screening. Multiple traffic scenarios will be examined further down the line.

5. *Concept Development Process by Gary McNaughton, McMahon Associates*

Gary McNaughton (McMahon Associates) then presents the Concept Development Process. The concepts aim to simplify the intersection, create space for multimodal accommodations, and improve efficiency to reduce vehicle lanes by ruling out concepts with fatal flaws and determining viable alternatives that will be subjected to comprehensive analysis. He notes that vehicles are not the main area of concern in this study. Preliminary analysis is focused on peak afternoon traffic, which has the highest volumes and most diverse movements. Some early concepts include:

- Basic: conventional 5-leg signalized intersection, roundabouts
- Advanced: restricted crossing U-turn intersection, jughandles, continuous flow intersection, quadrant roadway intersection

6. *Proposed Basic Concepts by Emil Gruber, McMahon Associates*

Emil Gruber (McMahon Associates) presents proposed basic concepts for the study. These concepts include:

- 5-leg intersection or a separation of Middlesex Ave at Fellsway – this would increase the number of travel lanes and will negatively impact pedestrians and bicycles.
- The creation of a roundabout – this would not improve conditions because volumes exceed the threshold for basic roundabout concepts.

7. *Proposed Advanced Concepts by Maureen Chlebek, McMahon Associates*

Maureen Chlebek (McMahon Associates) presents proposed advanced concepts that have been determined to have fatal flaws. These advanced concepts include non-traditional design elements, so they may involve more construction or larger overall footprints. One of the advanced concepts developed, the jughandles, when utilized alone, would shift the conflicts but would not improve efficiency. Additionally, restricted crossing U-turns would not improve conditions because U-turn volumes would be too high.

Maureen Chlebek (McMahon Associates) then discusses proposed advanced concepts that have not been determined to have fatal flaws. A continuous flow intersection requires further consideration and could have significant benefits for the westbound approach to the intersection. Creation of a quadrant roadway intersection results in a large intersection, but still warrants further consideration. Two primary grade separations are being considered: east-west through connection, and south-east. East-west connection would construct a bridge or tunnel and remaining at-grade intersection would still be large; this warrants further consideration. South-east connection would also construct a bridge or tunnel and would require more complex construction with a curved structure. However, the fatal flaw of south-east connection is that there are no advantages over the simpler east-west grade separation. North south grade separation has been removed from consideration.

Key takeaways from this section include:

- Basic concepts
 - Separating Middlesex/Fellsway intersection offers improvements that warrant further consideration.
- Advanced concepts
 - Continuous flow and quadrant roadway warrant further development.
- Grade separation
 - East-west warrants further consideration.

8. *Closing Comments by Gary McNaughton, McMahon Associates*

Gary McNaughton (McMahon Associates) gives closing comments regarding the proposed concepts. He points out that concepts are still undergoing consideration and will continue to be developed. He requests feedback from the Working Group regarding the proposed concepts.

9. *Preliminary Concept Working Group Discussion*

- Amanda Belles (Malden Disability Coalition): How are you defining pedestrians? You mentioned walkers, buses, bikers, vehicles, and pedestrians. Does your definition of pedestrians include only walkers, or also people who are disabled and use wheelchairs?
 - Gary McNaughton (McMahon Associates): We certainly look at all varying ability levels and the project will meet all accessibility guidelines. When we look at crossing times and speeds, we want to look at a wide range and make sure that we are not making it difficult for folks.
- Doug Carr (NAACP, Mystic Valley Branch): I'm intrigued by idea that Middlesex Ave could be pushed back and I think this would be a very positive thing because it would simply so much. How far back could you push it? Could there be a fire lane so that Middlesex Ave could simply not connect at that point. It seems like this would be better for traffic flow and management.

- Gary McNaughton (McMahon Associates): Without being too impactful, swinging Middlesex Ave after 9th and changing the alignment of Fellsway could be positive. We wanted to run ideas like this by this Group before any decisions are made.
- Jeff Buxbaum (WalkMedford): I appreciate the difficulty of this project. Are you anticipating that, for example, if you made the capacity of the intersection less, there would be opportunities for traffic to redistribute to other routes?
 - Gary McNaughton (McMahon Associates): At this point, we're using existing volumes but we're only ruling out alternatives where you would have to drop the capacity by forty or fifty percent for them to work. If alternatives are close in terms of capacity, there are being carried over for further analysis.
- Jeff Buxbaum (WalkMedford): Follow-up – are there other intersections around the Boston area that have this much volume that are not grade separated?
 - Gary McNaughton (McMahon Associates): I'm not sure if there are. There may be some, but they might not be ones that we want to emulate.
- Jeff Parenti (Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation): There is not an at-grade option that excites me. I haven't seen anything that's better than the existing condition. Should we consider the existing condition to be analyzed alongside alternatives? Are there ways to improve the existing? Once you start considering buses, bicycles, and pedestrians, it will only become more complicated.
 - Gary McNaughton (McMahon Associates): We aren't done with our effort. We felt this was a good point to check in and get feedback, and there is always the "do-nothing" option and we are considering if it would be possible to modify the existing structure to prevent dramatic changes. Maybe we could simplify the connections at the Circle. Perhaps those suggestions could exist as short-term improvements until we are able to get to a bigger build.
- Brad Rawson (City of Somerville): Working Group members should remember to look back at data from previous meetings. Do Maureen and the team have adequate input to make sure that no stone is left unturned, and all existing data is being utilized between different agencies on the Program team and past projects? We also should make sure to remember buses in this area to prevent forgetting about environmental justice populations. It is very important to serve the regional motoring public to achieve mode shift.
 - Gary McNaughton (McMahon Associates): There is certainly collaboration of data happening between teams and projects. They are all currently in different stages.
- Alicia Hunt (City of Medford): Grade separation can cause community separation, and we need to ensure that social impacts are considered so that it is not unsafe for people to walk below grade separations. These areas can be scary, and we do not want the public to be afraid of this structure.
 - Gary McNaughton (McMahon Associates): Under-bridge experiences are important to examine to prevent lack of access for pedestrians and bicyclists. These will be considered in the next rounds of analysis.
- Todd Blake (City of Medford): How do volumes compare to 16 at 99 and Everett? Which is a nearby intersection that has some grade separation. How do volumes compare to Sullivan Square as well?
 - Gary McNaughton (McMahon Associates): We can pull that information and share it with the group, and we can look at a number of other locations as well.
- Jeff Buxbaum (WalkMedford): We should be looking at taking a lane for the buses and getting people to Wellington Station, because this will take steps towards the mode shift

that we need to address climate resiliency that the Commonwealth should be working towards.

- Gary McNaughton (McMahon Associates): Thanks.
- Amanda Belles (Malden Disability Coalition): Are there case studies of cities that have similar amounts of volume but have changed those intersections to resemble some of the options we are considering? We don't know if any of these options will work, so it could be better to leave it as is unless we can look at other case studies. Additionally, have we considered reaching out to communities that could be disproportionately affected by any changes that may be made to get representation from other communities?
 - Gary McNaughton (McMahon Associates): As far as examples, yes, we will absolutely look at real-world examples to visualize what this will look like. We will also be doing quite a bit of modeling that will demonstrate how alternatives will work.
 - Erica Blonde (HNTB): This is a comment we got in the last public meeting, so we are identifying stakeholder groups that serve typically underserved communities. We very much appreciate your perspective. Perhaps we could discuss after this meeting to make sure that we are not missing any groups.

10. *Further Considerations for Discussion by Gary McNaughton, McMahon Associates*

- Gary McNaughton (McMahon Associates) provides further considerations such as a one-way northbound for Middlesex Avenue, prohibited eastbound left turns, 9th Street one-way eastbound, reduced volume scenarios, and multiple-roundabout concepts. Gary asks for input from the Working Group regarding these further considerations.

11. *Further Considerations Working Group Discussion*

- Alicia Hunt (City of Medford): We would want to figure out how to do some intense outreach to community members and local residents in the areas near 9th Street and Middlesex where there are lots of apartments. We hear less from the residents in these buildings than the surround area in general. It would be very helpful for the City and the study team to discuss how to communicate with residents to discuss how this will affect their day-to-day lives.
- Todd Blake (City of Medford): Alicia is correct, the residents at 9th Street experience a lot of challenges. We definitely want to have a conversation with residents on anything involving this area. We need to take a holistic approach to look at this intersection.
 - Makaela Niles (MassDOT): Thank you.
- Susan Bibbins (Medford Commission for Persons with Disabilities): When thinking about designing things for disabilities, it is important to remember that we are all different and some people who have mobility challenges may tend to not want to walk. Multiple roundabout concepts increase the amount of walking as a pedestrian and this is not ideal for those with disabilities. Please think about people with disabilities in your decision-making.
 - Makaela Niles (MassDOT): We certainly will. Thank you.
- Brad Rawson (City of Somerville): We are focusing very specifically on this intersection, but last time's study materials had a slightly wider lens. Do we think that the recommendations coming out of this study can translate to real action and on-the-ground change?
 - Makaela Niles (MassDOT): This study is part of the Section 61 finding for the Encore Casino. There have been some intermediate improvements as well. This study is not

happening in a vacuum and we are making sure that all the puzzle pieces are fitting together for this project and with other existing projects.

- Todd Blake (City of Medford): It is my understanding that we are trying to make access shorter for pedestrians which will help everyone trying to cross that's not in a vehicle. Grade separation for pedestrians has pros and cons as well, and I'd be interested to hear what other people think. In terms of safety, it is safer as a pedestrian with grade separation because you don't need to rely on the driver obeying the rules. However, it might result in greater height or distance to travel.
 - Gary McNaughton (McMahon Associates): Grade separation works well when you can work within the existing topography to minimize the impact, or when you have a barrier that's physically impossible to cross. If it's a relatively flat area, the process of getting up using stairs or switchback ramps, the distance is increased and people don't really use these structures where they should be. We need to look at whether people will use these structures to prevent people from unsafely crossing at-grade.
- Sam Silverman: I live at 12 9th St. in Medford and I've been here for 30 years. If you made 9th Street one way east our only exit would be at Brainard Ave. directly onto Revere Beach Parkway. That would be a nightmare!
 - Gary McNaughton (McMahon Associates): This is the kind of feedback we want as we start to throw out these ideas.

12. Public Discussion

Makaela Niles (MassDOT) opens the discussion to the public.

- Joan Cyr: Are bicycle lights being considered in any of the concepts? Cambridge has several intersections where green lights allow for safe passage of bicycles.
 - Maureen Chlebek (McMahon Associates): As we move into the next level of concept development, we will be looking at pedestrian and bike amenities. We will be using all the tools in the toolbox, including bicycle lights.
- Betty Lo: Thank you for this meeting. I was at the June meeting and suggested the quadrant roadway intersection. I would be excited to see traffic pulled of this intersection. Speaking of cross-pollination of data from different studies, I know the MBTA is also in the middle of its Better Bus Project and its Bus Network Redesign. I was at their last meeting as well and heard from a number of their experts on their different areas in improving bus service. I am wondering if Jeff from Walk Medford is aware of this effort as he mentioned discouraging driving in favor of bus service. It would be helpful to connect with them if that's not already happening.
 - Makaela Niles (MassDOT): We are coordinating with the Bus Network Redesign team. There are multiple efforts happening simultaneously and we are talking with them to include bus infrastructure options.
- Joan Cyr: I like the idea of the bicycle/ped being grade separated above the vehicular traffic....a nice view too....but would have to be accessible by the differently abled people.
 - Gary McNaughton (McMahon Associates): They absolutely would be. That can be one of the challenges because usually ramps are what make them accessible and the ramps can become quite long at times. This is one of the impediments to doing grade separation, but we will certainly look at this option.

- Todd Blake (City of Medford): If we look at the concept of pedestrian grade separation, we should look at where the start and endpoints are where people are crossing, in line at 9th Street and the parking lot, starting these systems a block back could prevent the need for switchbacks and provide a more pleasant experience if the origin is back there anyways. Everyone that is coming from further away may not need to travel any extra distance.
 - Gary McNaughton (McMahon Associates): I'll have to look at the plan outlines for those grades, but we will look at that. Thank you.
- Jeff: On the question of grade separation for pedestrians, I prefer pedestrians at-grade. It takes six to seven minutes to get through the intersection as is. Going up and down would make that worse I think, and a discouragement to crossing.
 - Gary McNaughton (McMahon Associates): The idea that Todd was saying is to make that length more gradual, so you don't have to do the switchbacks that people think of when doing this in a condensed format.

13. Next Steps by Makaela Niles, MassDOT (Project Manager)

Makaela Niles (MassDOT) thanks the Working Group and the members of the public, then discusses Next Steps for the study. She shows the anticipated meeting schedule. The next Working Group Meeting and Public Information Meeting will take place in fall 2021. She thanks attendees again and ends the meeting.

Wellington Circle Planning Study Working Group Meeting #3 Attendees

MassDOT/Study Team:

- Makaela Niles – MassDOT
- Gary McNaughton – McMahon Associates
- Natalie Raffol – McMahon Associates
- Emil Gruber – McMahon Associates
- Maureen Chlebek – McMahon Associates
- Erica Blonde – HNTB
- Lauren Dvonch – HNTB

Working Group Members & Alternates:

- Alicia Hunt – City of Medford
- Amanda Belles – Malden Disability Commission
- Amanda Linehan – City of Malden
- Bill Carlson – Resident Association 9th Street Coalition
- Brad Rawson – City of Somerville
- Doug Carr – NAACP, Mystic Valley Branch
- Fangyun Xi – MassDOT
- Jeff Buxbaum – WalkMedford
- Jeff Parenti – DCR
- Melissa Dullea – MBTA
- Susan Bibbins – Medford Commission for Persons with Disabilities
- Todd Blake – City of Medford

Public Attendees:

- Kinga Borondy
- Christopher Cameron
- Michaela Boneva
- Charlene Job
- Bob Frey
- Kristen Pennucci
- Zoe Temco
- Mary Rogers
- Joan Cyr
- Michael McNutt
- David Haynes
- Betty Lo
- Peter Calves
- Sam Silverman
- Matt Hartman
- Joseph Delaney