



MassDOT Newton Corner Long-Term Planning Study
Working Group Meeting #1
Wednesday, May 22, 2024 at 10:30 a.m.
Newton Free Library
330 Homer Street Newton, MA 02459

Summary:

On Wednesday, May 22, 2024 MassDOT held the first Working Group meeting for the Newton Corner Long-Term Planning Study. At this meeting, the Study Team presented the study background, reviewed the study area, draft goals and objectives, and the evaluation criteria for the alternatives to be developed later in this study. Members of the Working Group and members of the public who attended provided feedback.

Attendees:

Name	Title	Affiliation
Jonathan Yeo	Chief Operating Officer	City of Newton Mayor's Office
Jenn Martin	Director of Transportation Planning	City of Newton Department of Planning and Development
Ned Codd	Director of Transportation	City of Newton Department of Public Works
Isaac Prizant	Transportation Engineer	City of Newton Department of Public Works
David Koses	Transportation Coordinator	City of Newton Department of Public Works
Pam Wright	Councilor at Large Ward 3	Newton City Council
Julia Malakie	Ward Councilor (for Ward 3)	Newton City Council
Rena Getz	Councilor at Large Ward 5	Newton City Council
Marc Laredo	Councilor at Large, President	Newton City Council
Wenzheng Wang	Transportation Program Planner	Boston Transportation Department on behalf of City of Boston Mayor's Office

Matt Costas	Chief of Staff to City Councilor Liz Breadon	Boston City Council
Zeke Mermell	Transportation Planner	City of Watertown / Watertown TMA
Steve Owens	State Representative	State Representative Steven Owens (29 th Middlesex – Watertown)
Dann Hanson	District Director	Office of MA-04 Jake Auchincloss
Anne Mazzola	District Director	Office of Senator Will Brownsberger

Name	Title	Affiliation
Sandy Johnston	Deputy Director of Regional Transit Planning	Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA)
Benjamin Muller	District Planner	MassDOT District 6
Mike Halle	Chair	Newton Transportation Advisory Group
Joan Belle Isle	Chair	Newton Council on Aging
Jini Fairley	ADA Coordinator	Newton Commission on Disability
Ed Olhava	President	Bike Newton
Robin Boger	President	Newton Corner Neighborhood Association
Madelyn Sorensen	Member	Newton Corner Neighborhood Association
Richard Belkin	Resident	Past Neighborhood Association President and Neighbor
Amy Sangiolo	Resident / Candidate for State Representative	Resident/Candidate for State Representative
Srdjan S. Nedeljkovic	Resident	Newton Highlands Neighborhood Area Council / FigCityNews.com
Bruce Henderson	Editor	FigCityNews.com
Patrick Snyder	Study Project Manager	MassDOT
Ethan Britland	Study Team Member	MassDOT
Rachel Kelly	Study Team Member	MassDOT
Christine Trearchis	Study Team Member	VHB
Niki Hastings	Study Team Member	VHB
Matt Duranleau	Study Team Member	VHB
Toni Marie Pignatelli	Study Team Member	FHI Studio

Opening

Agenda

1. Welcome and Introductions
 - Role of Working Group
1. Study Overview
 - Study Process
 - Public Involvement Plan
 - Study Area
2. Goals and Objectives
3. Schedule and Next Steps
4. Open Discussion
 - Working Group Discussion
 - Public Comment Period
 - Scheduling Future Meetings

Welcome and Introductions

Role of Working Group

- ▶ Working Group Purpose
 - Provide local knowledge, perspective, and expertise.
 - Share information with communities and organizations represented.
 - Review information and find feedback.
- ▶ Working Group Logistics
 - Meetings are to review approach, analysis, findings, share resources and information, and give feedback.
 - Documents and resources will be periodically posted on the study website and email notifications of meetings and document postings will be sent out.

Working Group Ground Rules

- ▶ All participants are requested to listen to the opinions of others to ensure a constructive and productive discussion.
- ▶ Members of the Working Group are asked to make every possible effort to attend the meetings consistently. However, if members are unable to attend, they should let the study team know if an alternate representative will participate on their behalf.
- ▶ All participants are asked to turn their computer notifications off and mute their cell phones and other electronic devices during meetings.
- ▶ For virtual meetings, Working Group members are allowed to show video and may keep their video on or off during the meeting. Meeting staff may mute you or turn off your video if the audio/video

becomes distracting. All virtual Working Group meetings will be recorded.

Study Overview

- ▶ The Newton Corner Long-Term Planning Study will develop **long-term multimodal transportation solutions and safety improvements** to the Newton Corner I-90 Exit 127 interchange. The planning horizon is 2050 for purposes of traffic analysis, in line with the Central Transportation Planning Staff (CTPS) Travel Demand Model.
- ▶ The study will develop and analyze alternatives, present recommendations, and develop recommended next steps.
- ▶ Up to 6 long-term alternatives will be identified.

Study Area (Local and Regional)

- ▶ The study areas include the Newton Corner, West Newton, and DCR Roadway areas in Newton, Brighton, and Watertown.
- ▶ The study area map follows census tract boundaries. The study team will develop and evaluate alternatives that address challenges throughout the study area.

Study Process

- ▶ The Study Team will analyze existing conditions, account for future conditions, and develop possible alternatives. The list of alternatives will be screened and culled down to 6 discrete long-term alternatives. The Study Team will document the effects of each of the alternatives. Throughout the study, the Working Group and members of the public will be engaged throughout the entire process. A final public meeting and delivery of the final report is expected in Summer 2025.

Public Involvement Plan

- ▶ Outreach team will use various methods to connect with stakeholders and the public, including:
 - Working Group meetings (6)
 - Public Information Meetings (4)
 - Online Engagement in form of Virtual Meeting Room
 - Study Website/Contact Information: <https://www.mass.gov/newton-corner-long-term-planning-study>

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Massachusetts Department of Transportation
10 Park Plaza, Suite 4150, Boston, MA 02116

Patrick Snyder, Project Manager patrick.l.snyder@dot.state.ma.us

Other Newton Corner Efforts

- ▶ Study Team will leverage previous studies that have occurred, including:
 - Newton Corner Road Safety Audit (2020)
 - CTPS Newton Corner Studies (2006 / 2009)
 - Local and state planning documents
- ▶ Study Team will also leverage ongoing projects/studies including the MassDOT Short- to Mid-term Improvements project (DOT #609288)
 - Focused on operational / safety improvements on a 10-year horizon
 - Final Public Informational Meeting will be on June 6, 2024
 - Publication of Final Report expected in Summer 2024

Previous Themes

Themes from Newton Corner Short/Mid-Term Improvements Project Public Information Meeting #1 (September 2022)

- ▶ Biggest Transportation Concern
 - Safety (51%)
 - Vehicular Traffic/Congestion (25%)
 - Pedestrian Infrastructure (8%)
 - Public Transit Access (7%)
 - Speeding (5%)
 - Bicycle Infrastructure (4%)
- ▶ Modes of Travel through Newton Corner
 - Driving (57%)
 - Walking/Running (18%)
 - MBTA Bus (15%)
 - Bicycling (10%)

General Comments on Mobility

- ▶ Vehicles
 - Backups and queue lengths are an issue.
 - Traffic and congestion should be improved.
- ▶ Transit
 - Need for increased reliability and access to transit.
 - Bus stops should be more efficiently organized to improve transfers between routes.
- ▶ Walking/Bicycling
 - Newton Corner is unfriendly to walking and biking.

- Current layout is inclined toward automobile use.

Mapping Exercise

Participants were given maps of the study area and asked to mark them up with comments and ideas for the area, while considering the following:

- ▶ What are the challenges to travelling in the areas?
- ▶ What opportunities exist to improve mobility and safety?

Draft Goals and Objectives

- ▶ Improve Access, Safety, and Mobility for All
- ▶ Reconnect Newton's Neighborhoods
- ▶ Enhance Quality of Life
- ▶ Promote Sustainable Transportation Solutions
- ▶ Develop Actionable Recommendations

Ranking Exercise

Participants were provided handouts that listed the draft goals and asked to rank the goals in order of importance to them using a scale of 1-5.

Schedule and Next Steps

Our Next Steps

- ▶ Incorporate Working Group input on Goals and Objectives
- ▶ Finalize Goals and Objectives
- ▶ Draft Evaluation Criteria
- ▶ Continue Existing Conditions Analysis and Documentation
- ▶ Working Group Meeting #2: Existing Conditions (Summer 2024)
- ▶ Public Meeting #1 (Summer / Fall 2024)

Evaluation Criteria

- ▶ Evaluation criteria are the standards by which the goals and objectives will be measured and evaluated.
- ▶ Criteria for each goal and objective are currently being developed and will be used to facilitate evaluating the different alternatives.
- ▶ Draft evaluation criteria will be posted on study website prior to next Working Group Meeting.

Existing Conditions (For Next Meeting)

- ▶ Study Team is actively working on Existing Conditions analysis.

- ▶ Traffic counts have been conducted and modeling is kicking-off.
- ▶ Next Working Group Meeting will present summary of existing conditions, including:
 - Mobility
 - Safety
 - Land Use
 - Environmental

Working Group Questions, Comments, and Discussion

- ▶ Who formed the Working Group and how are they chosen?

MassDOT formed the working group and invited participation from organizations and elected and municipal officials that represent stakeholders and constituents in the study area.

- ▶ This is the third time that stakeholders have been asked for input on the area. How has the feedback changed?
- ▶ Objectives listed under the goals mostly say the same thing as the goals.
- ▶ There is a need for policy change that supports implementation of good ideas and not another study.
- ▶ There is a desire for access to data from this study and previous studies to understand how things have changed because of things like Covid and MBTA service cuts.

MassDOT will include data such as traffic counts in the final report that will be publicly shared.

- ▶ When considering future conditions, be aware that Watertown is evaluating redeveloping Watertown Square and development in Newton and Brighton development will soon come online.

The study team is aware of these ongoing efforts and incorporating them in existing conditions work.

- ▶ Issues/Needs include:

- Traffic calming near the YMCA [on Church Street].
- Cars going through the red light at the intersection near Bigelow School and the Presbyterian Church [the intersection of Tremont Street at Park Street].

- ▶ Desire to consider the realignment of the “Mass Pike” (I-90/Massachusetts Turnpike) in Allston. The anticipated planning deadline for that effort is September 2026. Lane closures are planned that will impact Newton Corner. There must be consideration of that project and how to accelerate and borrow from that plan. How does the Newton Corner work align with the Allston I-90 project?

Borrowing from the CTPS Travel Demand Model will allow the study team to access data that will inform the future conditions identified as part of this study, including the Allston I-90 project.

- ▶ There is a need to make changes to roads in Newton Corner, DCR roads, and those in West Newton. Encouraged the study team to consider how much time should be spent considering solutions in each of the different areas. Each of these areas could be their own study.

Study Team noted that the aim of this effort is to consider a variety of solutions and travel in the surrounding area.

- ▶ How does jurisdiction affect the study?

At the close of the study, MassDOT will note the entities that own the roads and infrastructure. Coordination will occur between MassDOT, City of Newton, DCR, and MBTA. All these entities are

members of the working group and in attendance at the first working group meeting for the study.

- ▶ Many of the roadways and interchanges are used by members of the Working Group. The Watertown Square Area Improvement Plan is a long-term treatment similar to this study. If there is overlapping geography such as Galen Street or shared opportunities and challenges across the two efforts, consider incorporating findings into this study or borrowing data that could inform future conditions.
- ▶ Suggestion of six options to consider:
 - Bridge reconnecting Centre Street across Newton Corner.
 - Make Washington Street bidirectional [on north side of Newton Corner].
 - Make bridge over I-90 bidirectional [current westbound bridge].
 - Keep one-way on the south side.
 - Establish MBTA station in Newton Corner.
 - Create a rotary [in northeast quadrant of Newton Corner].
- ▶ Request to not focus only on data (e.g., traffic volumes, modeling) and include consideration of qualitative input.
- ▶ Request to consider alternatives in which I-90 is not necessarily permanent, as some express a desire to reimagine it as a Boulevard.
- ▶ Desire for more trains and buses to travel through Newton, particularly to support the Allston Multimodal Project that is coming online. Increased frequency of service will reduce traffic congestion. Need all day, bidirectional service on the Commuter Rail in Newton.

MBTA representative noted upcoming service changes, such as with Bus Network Redesign.

- ▶ How will any future projects be funded?

The study will identify potential funding sources for improvements.

- ▶ Express buses originate in West Newton and require a transfer in Newton Corner. Can express buses continue to Downtown Boston? Service drops very quickly in the afternoon hours.
- ▶ Desire to enhance bicycle/pedestrian connections between Newton Corner and the Charles River.
- ▶ Desire for separated bicycle lanes and exploration of other opportunities to increase connectivity. Encouraged exploration of scenarios that account for mode shift to train, bus, or other modes.

Transportation mode split will be modeled.

- ▶ MBTA will maintain two-way communication with the study team. Encourages study team to align the goals and objectives with the MassDOT Beyond Mobility report and future mobility goals.
- ▶ The system will accept as much traffic as we will allow. Consider what the collective want roads to support in terms of drivers as opposed to travelers on other modes.
- ▶ Washington Street looks and feels like a highway frontage road, and it is one of Newton's most important commercial streets. The City of Newton is working on a pilot road diet in the western portion of Washington Street between West Newton and Lowell Avenue. It will use temporary materials, but the long-term vision is to make the improvements permanent. Keep that study in mind.

The study team is including this in existing conditions work.

- ▶ Were city councilors invited to participate in the Working Group?

Yes. An invitation was extended to the Newton City Council.

- ▶ It is frustrating to many residents that Newton Corner did not always operate as it does today. Study Team was encouraged to consider what the area looked like prior to I-90.
- ▶ Look at what the area could offer in the future, including air rights developments.
- ▶ Consider ceding some of the land back to the neighborhoods. Look at historical photographs of what the area used to look like.

Public Comment Period

No members of the public opted to speak during this period.

Future Meeting Timing / Schedule

Patrick Snyder, MassDOT Project Manager, invited input on the preferred meeting time of future virtual workshops. There was a preference for afternoon meetings that would run no later than 4:30 p.m.

Meeting adjourned at noon.