



CONNECT DOWNTOWN: CAMBRIDGE STREET

Responses to Common Questions

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We summarize and answer your questions from fall 2021 about [Connect Downtown: Cambridge Street](#). This was the first phase of community conversations about the project. You shared your questions with us during a series of in-person outdoor pop-up events, in one-on-one virtual appointments, and through emails and letters.

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General

Why are you considering bike lanes on Cambridge Street?

Cambridge Street is a critical link in our citywide bicycle network. It connects you to jobs, schools, and civic resources in and around Downtown. Several busy bicycle routes—including the Longfellow Bridge, the Paul Dudley White Bike Path, and Charles Street—connect with Cambridge Street. But, Cambridge Street is not as safe as it could be for people bicycling and there are few alternative routes.

Recent transportation plans identified Cambridge Street as a priority corridor for better bike facilities. These include [Go Boston 2030](#) and [North Station Area Mobility Action Plan \(NSAMAP\)](#). Your input helped in shaping these plans.

Since we launched our [Connect Downtown](#) project in fall 2019, we have heard from hundreds of people to date. Many of you told us about your experiences on Cambridge Street.

Do enough people bike on Cambridge Street to make it worthwhile to add bike lanes?

Many people already bike on Cambridge Street throughout all seasons despite less-than-ideal conditions. Our bicycle count data shows that Cambridge Street is an important corridor for people who bike even during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many hospital staff and other essential workers use bicycles to travel to and from work.

- During warmer months, bicyclists make up about **12 percent of peak direction traffic** during peak hours.
- In colder months, bicyclists comprise up to **7 percent of peak direction traffic** during peak hours.¹

Cambridge Street is in [the top 3% of streets citywide for injury-causing crashes involving people riding bikes](#). **We need to provide safe, everyday accommodation for people on bikes.**

Safe, comfortable bicycle facilities can help us meet our citywide transportation and sustainability goals. You will have more options for getting to jobs, schools, and civic resources in and around downtown Boston.

What is the timeline for this project?

In Fall 2021, we started exploring design options and are continuing our work in 2022. We are having conversations with you and listening to your goals for Cambridge Street. We hope to have a near-term concept design to share with you in 2022.

We aim to use “quick-build” materials like flexible bollards, precast concrete curbing, roadway striping, signage, and changes to signal timing. This will allow us to design and build the project on a shorter timeline.

¹ Based on data collected during [quarterly bicycle counts](#) in March, June, September, and December 2020-2021.

How are you letting people know about this project?

We mailed postcards to 11,275 addresses in the West End and Beacon Hill, posted & distributed flyers along the street, and sent email notices to our list of 420 contacts. We also shared information with neighborhood associations and building management organizations.

We hosted a series of in-person “pop-up” events on Cambridge Street during August, September, and October of 2021. The events occurred during weekday mornings and afternoons and on a Saturday afternoon. We told people about the events via a postcard mailing, emails, social media posts, and flyers.

We offered, and continue to offer, virtual one-on-one meetings or phone calls for members of the public to speak with a member of the project team. You can [book an appointment](#) with us.

When we have major updates to share, we use the listed channels to contact residents.

How will you be using feedback from the public?

Your feedback is helping to guide us as we make design decisions. When we have a preferred concept design to share, we will continue to fine-tune the design based on your feedback. We will continue to answer your questions throughout the project. This document itself is a compilation of your most frequently asked questions to date.

Driving and Curb Use

How will this project impact traffic?

Our goal is to be sure everyone can keep moving, *safely*. Right now, we don't have a design concept. But, when we do, we'll share information about how the design might impact traffic.

As with any project, we use traffic data to model how our proposed changes might impact traffic. We have a model of pre-pandemic traffic that will inform our design. We are also looking at data from November 2021 to understand how current traffic uses the corridor.

What will happen to parking?

We do not have a design concept yet. As we move forward, we may propose changes to curb regulations to help achieve project goals. We will share, discuss, and fine-tune any proposed changes with you. We have detailed information about current curb regulations and outdoor dining.

Will outdoor dining be affected?

We will work with all businesses on Cambridge Street to understand and accommodate their needs to the greatest extent possible, including outdoor dining areas.

How will your project impact deliveries to businesses?

Cambridge Street is host to a vibrant small business community. We know that many small businesses on the Beacon Hill side of Cambridge Street rely on curb access for deliveries and other uses. They do not have a way to receive goods and supplies other than from Cambridge Street. We will prioritize curb access for small businesses to the greatest extent possible in our design.

Can you limit deliveries to certain hours (e.g., early morning) to reduce double parking on Cambridge Street?

Overnight deliveries could be very disruptive to residents who live above shops on Cambridge Street. Small businesses make up the majority of stores on the Beacon Hill side of Cambridge Street. They often have little control over what time of day their deliveries arrive.

Potential Design Options

What will this project do for people walking on and across Cambridge Street?

Many of you have shared your thoughts about walking on Cambridge Street with us. Our design will prioritize pedestrians at signalized intersections to the greatest extent possible. We don't have a design concept yet, but changes for people walking are likely to include signal timing changes and increasing sightlines.

We know from research that bike facilities can improve the experience for people walking too. Residents who live on streets where protected bike lanes were added

have reported fewer bicyclists on the sidewalks, increased satisfaction with the experience of walking, and an increased sense of safety crossing the street.²

Will you put protected bike lanes on Cambridge Street?

We're evaluating a wide range of design options for Cambridge Street. One of our goals is to provide dedicated, safe space for biking.

Our bicycle count data shows that bicyclists comprise up to 12 percent of peak direction traffic on Cambridge Street during peak hours, even during the COVID-19 pandemic.³ And, Cambridge Street is in the [top 3% of streets citywide for injury-causing crashes involving people riding bikes](#). We need to provide safe, everyday accommodation for people on bikes.

Some design options we would consider include one-way bike lanes on either side and two-way bike lanes in a variety of configurations. We are aiming to design the highest-comfort bicycle facility we can, while also considering the needs of all users. We also have some design constraints to consider:

- Cambridge Street has several sections where the curb-to-curb width is very constrained. In those sections, major construction would be needed to make space for protected bike lanes. While we may have an opportunity in the future to take on major construction, we are also looking for what can be done in the near-term.
- We are carefully considering other needs on Cambridge Street, including comfort and safety for people walking. We also need to keep in mind the needs of our fire department and getting patients to MGH.

Can you put the bike lane in the middle of Cambridge Street?

We're considering a wide range of options, including this one. However, center-running bike lanes are not the best idea for Cambridge Street because there are a lot of turning vehicles at multiple intersections. To make this idea work, we'd have to make major changes to the median and traffic signals. Changes of that scale would significantly extend the project timeline.

² Monsere, C., Dill, J., McNeil, N., Clifton, K., Foster, N., Goddard, T., Berkow, M., Gilpin, J., Voros, K., van Hengel, D., & Parks, J. (2014, June). *Lessons From The Green Lanes: Evaluating Protected Bike Lanes In The U.S.* (NITC-RR-583). National Institute for Transportation and Communities (NITC).

³ Based on data collected during [quarterly bicycle counts](#) in March, June, September, and December 2020-2021.

How will you maintain protected bike lanes?

We are committed to maintaining separated bike lanes in Boston throughout all seasons. We own smaller street sweepers and plows that we use in our bike lanes. We work carefully to ensure our designs match the requirements of our Public Works teams and their equipment. If we use flex posts, we monitor flex post damage and make replacements at least once per quarter. We purchase extra flex posts to replace those that are damaged. We are also exploring more durable materials.

Will you consider a bike lane on Charles Street?

We have heard many people ask for a bike lane on Charles Street. We also know that bicyclists make up as much as 25% of all vehicles on Charles Street during peak hours.⁴

Charles Street is one of the many streets within the Connect Downtown study area. We are approaching Connect Downtown in phases. In 2020, we made [a major expansion of the downtown bicycle network and improved signals for walking](#). In 2021 and 2022, we are looking at both Cambridge Street as well as [further changes to intersections near the Public Garden](#). We do not have a timeline for Charles Street yet, but we have heard your requests and understand its importance within the downtown street network.

Is Charles Circle part of the project area?

Our project is looking at Cambridge Street between Court Street (Government Center) and West Cedar Street (where the Red Line viaduct passes over Cambridge Street). This section of Cambridge Street is under the City of Boston's jurisdiction.

Many of you have shared your desire for Charles Circle to be better for biking. Most of Charles Circle is controlled by the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), a state agency. DCR's jurisdiction starts near West Cedar Street and extends westward from there. **Changes to Charles Circle cannot be made without close coordination with DCR.** We meet regularly with DCR, and they are aware of the project. We plan to continue conversations in 2022. However, we don't want to delay any changes we can make on the City-owned portion of Cambridge Street while our conversations with DCR move forward.

⁴ Based on data collected during [quarterly bicycle counts](#) in 2019-2021.

Will your project add a crosswalk to the back side of the Charles/MGH station?

We're aware that some T passengers exit the Charles/MGH station from the back and cross Cambridge Street from there. Through the [North Station Area Mobility Action Plan](#), we explored options for a crosswalk here. And, we've heard you ask if we can add crosswalks here with this project. It is out of scope for our near-term project because:

- Adding a crosswalk would require significantly more design and construction work than we could do in the near term.
- This location crosses jurisdictional boundaries into state-owned property. So, we can't make changes on our own on the near-term timeline we plan for this project.
- There are some unique design challenges in this area. We expect that a high level of attention would be needed to design a crosswalk that meets our safety standards.

As we continue conversations with DCR and other state agencies, the opportunity to improve the pedestrian experience at Charles/MGH will be a priority.

Related Projects

How will [the Red-Blue Connector project](#) affect the project?

The MBTA is studying an extension of the Blue Line to Charles/MGH. While the study is currently funded, the construction itself is not yet funded and programmed. Projects of that scale can take a long time to complete. While we plan ahead for that future project, we are looking for ways to make Cambridge Street better for walking and biking in the near term.

How will the proposed Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) Clinical Building development affect the project?

The MGH development may happen over the course of five to ten years. We are working with MGH to create a public realm plan that is compatible with our goals for Cambridge Street. We will continue to work with MGH to ensure that bicycle and pedestrian access is fully maintained during construction activities.

What is the City doing to mitigate the possibility for more vehicle traffic resulting from the proposed MGH Clinical Building?

The City of Boston, through the BPDA and BTM, is working directly with the community to understand areas of concern and address them with MGH. Issues related to traffic circulation, signal timing, and public realm changes that are subject to ongoing conversations between City of Boston agencies, the community, and MGH.

All large, new projects in Boston must reduce the number of new vehicle trips. [We developed a tool to help them do that](#). The transportation demand management (TDM) point system tool allows developers to choose from a wide variety of strategies to help manage people's travel choices. These strategies incentivize people to drive less, ride transit and bike more, carpool, and use carshare. The tool applies to large new developments over 50,000 gross square feet. Developers submit a TDM plan as part of the transportation development review process.

Other Topics

Will you plant more trees as part of this project?

We understand the importance of a healthy urban tree canopy. Adding trees requires a thorough process to determine species and site suitability, create detailed drainage and construction plans, and identify a long-term maintenance plan. Changes of this scale are out of scope for our near-term project. This work fits best with a potential reconstruction of Cambridge Street.

The City of Boston is currently working on an [Urban Forest Plan](#), which will help inform opportunities to protect and add trees within the City.

How will this project impact emergency vehicle access?

We know that Cambridge Street is an important connection to MGH and from the firehouse. Any changes to traffic patterns and capacity will be reviewed in consideration of those needs.

Cambridge Street is in [the top 3% of streets citywide for injury-causing crashes involving people riding bikes](#). We need to provide safe, everyday accommodation for people on bikes to reduce the number of emergency response trips to this corridor.

How will you keep bicyclists from startling pedestrians?

You have shared your experiences of being startled by bicyclists while walking. You have expressed your concern that this project could make things worse. Giving people on bikes their own dedicated space can actually make traffic more predictable for everyone. It makes it easier for people walking and people biking to see each other. People on bikes are less likely to be weaving between vehicles. And, as we build more protected bike lanes around Boston, we expect to see fewer people choosing to bike on the sidewalk.

Residents who live on streets where protected bike lanes were added have reported fewer bicyclists on the sidewalks, increased satisfaction with the experience of walking, and an increased sense of safety crossing the street.⁵

One option we have to encourage more predictable behavior is to use [bicycle signals](#). They are specifically designed to be used by people biking. Often, they have a special bicycle-shaped lens instead of a circle or arrow. Intersections with bicycle signals have shown higher levels of compliance by bicyclists.⁶ We can use them on Cambridge Street where appropriate based on engineering guidelines.

We know that some of you have had negative experiences with people biking on sidewalks. You've asked us about the laws related to bicycling on the sidewalk. Bicycling on the sidewalk is permitted in the City of Boston in instances where people do not feel safe riding in the street. You can learn more about [laws related to bicycling](#), which are established by the State legislature.

What materials will you use to construct this project, and are they compatible with the historic aesthetic of Beacon Hill?

When we have a design concept, we will meet with the Beacon Hill Architectural District Commission to confirm materials and application as appropriate.

⁵ Monsere, C., Dill, J., McNeil, N., Clifton, K., Foster, N., Goddard, T., Berkow, M., Gilpin, J., Voros, K., van Hengel, D., & Parks, J. (2014, June). *Lessons From The Green Lanes: Evaluating Protected Bike Lanes In The U.S.* (NITC-RR-583). National Institute for Transportation and Communities (NITC).

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