

Route 39 Transit Priority Corridor Virtual Public Meeting

DATE: Thursday, October 26 at 6:30 PM via Zoom

Project Team and Presenters

Name	Affiliation
Maya Mudgal	Boston Transportation Department (BTD)
Suzie Birdsell	Nelson\Nygaard
Laura Lopez	Nelson\Nygaard
Sam Huffman	Nelson\Nygaard
Andrew McFarland	Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA)
Regan Checchio	Regina Villa Associates (RVA)
Matt Costas	Regina Villa Associates (RVA)
Sandra Cleary	McMahon Associates
Michael McManus	McMahon Associates

Purpose

The purpose of the public meeting was to present an overview of the Route 39 Transit Priority Corridor project, share early design concepts for Route 39 improvements, and collect public feedback.

Materials (available on the project website)

- [Powerpoint Presentation](#)
- [Meeting Recording](#)
- [Speed, Reliability, Access Needs Report](#)
- [Bus Priority Toolkit](#)

Introduction

Maya Mudgal, BTD, opened the meeting by welcoming attendees and explaining the format of the Zoom meeting. She then outlined the agenda of the meeting, introduced the project team, and provided a brief overview of the project. During the introduction, participants were asked two poll questions via the Zoom platform.

Project Overview

M. Mudgal then provided a high-level overview of the project and its impetus. The Route 39 bus was chosen to be one of the first routes in BTD's Transit Priority Corridor (TPC) Program. The goal of the program is to improve bus service on high-ridership routes by improving speed, reliability, and access to transit. Transit priority, via dedicated lanes, traffic signal programming, and transit-specific signals, is a major tool in this program. The MBTA and City of Boston worked collaboratively to coordinate with adjacent agencies and projects, specifically the Green Line Transformation Program. The project is also aligned with the wider MBTA Bus Network Redesign and the Go Boston2030 shared goals.

M. Mudgal next explained the Route 39 TPC Project goals, reiterating that the project will improve speed, reliability, and access to transit on Route 39 and other routes that use the same corridor. The Route 39 bus is the fourth highest-ridership route in the MBTA system, and faces challenges due to slow speeds, unreliable service, inadequate accessibility (especially for people with mobility challenges), and conditions unfavorable to operators (cars parked in bus zones, double-parked cars, tight turning radii).

Public Outreach

Laura Lopez, Nelson/Nygaard, then presented on the public outreach efforts made so far. The project team has hosted multiple informational pop-ups along the corridor, held briefings with community stakeholders, and interviewed bus operators. Additionally, a public survey was conducted to learn more about bus riders' experiences accessing, waiting for, and boarding the Route 39 bus. The survey was open for two months in the summer and received 292 responses. Finally, a project website has been available via the City of Boston for the duration of the project, with information and materials posted frequently.

Design Concepts

Suzie Birdsell, Nelson/Nygaard, then spoke to the design concepts the project team was exploring. While a full design of the corridor had not been finalized, there were several Transit Priority Corridor (TPC) concepts being explored by the City. These were high-impact, quick-build improvements that could be implemented by the City in the short- to medium-term. These concepts were developed from the Speed, Reliability, and Access Needs Report, which analyzed existing service, access to transit, and speed and reliability conditions to identify issues and needs along the corridor. A copy of the Needs Report [can be found here](#).

The transit-priority treatment and access toolkit encompasses many of the changes that could be made to the corridor as part of the design concept. These include new bus lanes, transit signal priority (TSP), queue jumps, better stop amenities, bus stop consolidation and/or relocation, bus stop bulbs, daylighting, and curb extensions. A copy of the Bus Priority Toolkit [can be found here](#).

S. Birdsell then explained that the project team has divided the corridor into five segments: Segment 1 (Forest Hills to Heath Street), Segment 2 (Heath Street to Brigham Circle), Segment 3 (Brigham Circle to Gainsborough Street), Segment 4 (Gainsborough Street to Ring Road), and Segment 5 (Back Bay One-Way Streets).

S. Birdsell then went through each segment and explained which transit-priority treatment was being considered, and what the intended benefits are.

Question and Answer Summary

Michael Epp mentioned that some acknowledgement should have been made based on the 2008 MBTA bus corridor improvements, as many improvements discussed by the Rt 39 TPC team were highlighted in the 2008 plan. He also mentioned that there was no coordination with the Center South Street Master plan which was postponed due to COVID and staffing availability, and he would love to have in-person neighborhood meetings just like the 2008 project. He continued by sharing his work experience with the MBTA and his love for buses.

Maya Mudgal emphasized that the Rt 39 TPC project team is aware of the past work that has been done on the corridor and has been in contact with the people who drafted and worked on the 2008 Bus Corridor project. She knows that a lot has changed since Covid and that is why they have decided to work on the bus for this portion of the project but that does not mean that future work in other areas will not happen. She agreed with him and is rooting for in-person meetings and highlighted the various pop ups that occurred

and the previous in-person meetings that she attended. She assured him that there will be more in-person gatherings as the project progresses.

Nick Varga asked how the traffic signal priority without a bus lane works if the bus is behind traffic and there are cars blocking it when it gets to the intersection, will the TSP signal activate?

Suzie Birdsell mentioned that it depends on the technology, but a lot of TSP can be triggered about a block back and that is the reason they are trying to pair TSP with bus and queue jumps as often as possible to get more effective results.

Nick Varga stated that there are a few Centre Street intersections where there is TSP but no bus lane treatments, he asked how that would work operationally in times of heavy traffic.

Suzie Birdsell responded that the project team is looking at a combination of TSP and signal retiming to optimize signalization along this stretch of the corridor. The goal is to put more signals along the corridor because TSP is most impactful when applied to large areas and multiple intersections. More study will be done on that subject when they are installing the technology.

Nick Varga then asked if the Green Line will also be able to tap into the benefits of TSP in the shared segments, specifically Huntington Avenue? Suzie Birdsell replied that specifics cannot be shared at this time, but the idea is being studied for applications outside of buses. The city is doing studies that will make this system benefit all transit modes.

Anne McKinnon asked what the dimensions of the bus bumps are, expressing concern that they force everyone to queue up behind the bus. She also shared her worries for the cyclist on the route.

Sam Huffman responded in the chat that the length of a bus bump out is typically 40-60' and the width is 8-10'. Maya Mudgal then explained that the goal of a bus bump out is to allow the bus to enter a stop without pulling out of the travel lane. The project team is working very carefully in the areas where they believe that the bumps out may pose a challenge for cyclists. Additionally, the project team is in communication with the City's active transportation team, and will use their knowledge to prioritize the concerns of cyclists.

Anne McKinnon wondered how the project team is evaluating the benefits and drawbacks of these improvements, expressing concern that the bus lanes may be too small to make an impact.

Andrew McFarland, MBTA, replied that the benefits are being considered but they are also thinking about accessibility and improving comfort for passengers getting on and off the buses. Although there might be disadvantages to having the bus stops in the lane but that can ensure the likelihood of the buses not being blocked by other vehicles which is a concern from many. Maya Mudgal then shared an evaluation of Huntington Ave, showing that 125 hours per week was saved per passenger. She then reiterated that any additional data on the benefits or drawbacks of the design will be shared with the public

Alison Pultinas shared concerns about moving and removing stops and wanted to make sure that the bus and train will stay active. Maya Mudgal replied that the Huntington and the South Huntington study is at an early stage. E branch/green light is not very accessible and will be rebuilt to follow guidelines for FDA Accessibility. There will be a study to determine the best alignment of the road. Any additional information gained from these studies will be shared with the public.

Michael Reiskind shared that he believes most of the plan will be accepted and implemented by the community. He then asked if the slide deck and meeting notes will be available after the conclusion of the meeting. He then mentioned that there were typos in the presentation (specifically the spelling of Sedgwick Street) and he does not believe that there is an intersection between South Street and Myrtle Street. He also asked if there is any transit signal priority on the corridor for buses or green lines currently.

Maya Mudgal replied that the slides and meeting recording will be posted on the project website, as well as sent to the email. She assured him that any existing typos or errors will be corrected before the materials are posted. She then explained that, currently, transit signal priority is not widespread in the City of Boston because the City's existing infrastructure is not compatible with TSP requirements. There is a pilot happening on Brighton Avenue with the MBTA and there is going to be an additional round of pilot and the intersection mentioned in the meeting will be recommended. Andrew made sure to say that the pilot was active.

Michael Reiskind spoke to the project history that can be used to improve the Rt 39 TAP project, as he has been in groups with the Route 39 project improvement for over 30 years. The priority traffic signal promise has been lingering and has not been implemented since the 1990s and he does not know why. He vocalized a need for a study focusing on the extension of the green line from Heath Street to Canary Square. He mentioned that there should be a permanent advisory committee to coordinate and help implement in the community.

Maya Mudgal replied that the City has a new mandated group that focuses on the implementation of projects and they are confident that they can get the project done in the season

Andrew McFarland empathized with Michael and assured him that there is a team and staff in place for the project and is working on delivering results for everyone at the earliest. He mentioned that he will share with his colleagues to see how they can have more bus inspectors in the future.

Lynn McSweeney commented that, as someone who uses canes, she is often unable to board the bus during winter due to snow and the high steps. She shared her concern and shared that she would like to see the sidewalk cleared for people with disabilities to get onto the bus. She asked if the T could take the responsibility of clearing out the sidewalk.

Maya Mudgal shared L. McSweeney's concerns, adding that current accessibility challenges are unacceptable and are a major focus of the project. She explained that the MBTA is responsible for clearing out the sidewalk, there is a contract that is in place to clear the key bus routes, including Rt39. She invited the public to send reports when they experienced issues with snow and accessibility.

Lynn McSweeney also asked how many parking spaces are projected to be lost by bump outs, adding that a loss of parking might impact businesses.

Maya Mudgal replied that the exact number of parking spots projected to be lost is not known yet but the mobility team focusing on the curbs use and curbs regulation is working delicately on the matter. The regulations will be changed to better answer the businesses' needs. One of the solutions that the project team is looking at is to cut down on hours for the parking spots. The team is also working with businesses to facilitate their loading needs.