

Transportation & Mobility Working Group #1 Notes | 8/18/2022

Attendees

Working Group Members:

Note: the list below shows all invitees and which were able to attend the meeting.

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Adam Thielker | Fare Free / Worcester Zero Fare Coalition |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Albert LaValley | Worcester Planning Board; Advisory Committee Member |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Alex Guardiola | Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Alex Salcedo | MassBike |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Alyssa Corazzini | Advisory Committee Member |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Amber Krasiski | Age Friendly Worcester |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Amie Shei | Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts; Advisory Committee Member |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Anne Bureau | Fare Free / Worcester Zero Fare Coalition |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Connie Mellis | Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Conor McCormack | Worcester Planning Board |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Dennis Lipka | Worcester Regional Transit Authority (WRTA) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Ed Moynihan | Worcester State University; Worcester Planning Board |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Ethan Belding | Age Friendly Worcester |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Faye Rault | CMRPC |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Germán Chiriboga | UMass Chan Medical School; Advisory Committee Member |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Joseph Frawley | MassDOT Highway District 3 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Joyce Mandell | Urban Planning Partnership; Advisory Committee Member |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Karin Valentine-Goins | Walk-Bike Worcester |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Kate Ota | |



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<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Liz Myska	Worcester Accessibility Advisory Commission
<input type="checkbox"/>	Lynn Cheney	Business Owner, Maker on Main; Advisory Committee Member
<input type="checkbox"/>	Mark Borenstein	Land Use Attorney at Bowditch & Dewey, LLP; Advisory Committee Member
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Mimi Sheller	Worcester Polytechnic Institute
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Peter Proulx	Worcester Housing Authority
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Sujatha Krishnan	CMRPC; Advisory Committee Member
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Suzanne Wood	UMass Chan Medical School; Advisory Committee Member
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ulysses Youngblood	Business Owner, Major Bloom; Advisory Committee Member
<input type="checkbox"/>	Yahaira Grazirena	CMRPC

Public Participants:

Note: the list below shows all registrants and which attended the meeting.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Alex Pichalski	<input type="checkbox"/>	Julia Clark
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Amy West	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Kim McCoy
<input type="checkbox"/>	Bob Bureau	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Michael Baker
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Brian Pigeon	<input type="checkbox"/>	Pam Farren
<input type="checkbox"/>	Collin Reuter	<input type="checkbox"/>	Pam H
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Denis Deti	<input type="checkbox"/>	Richard Foreman
<input type="checkbox"/>	Diane Sutter	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Shaun Bartone
<input type="checkbox"/>	Feanna Jattan-Singh	<input type="checkbox"/>	Tova Reiter
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Jenn Falcon	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Travis Tran
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Jessica Davis	<input type="checkbox"/>	Yenni Desroches
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	John Odell	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Jordan Berg Powers	<input type="checkbox"/>	



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City Staff (Worcester Planning & Regulatory Services Division):

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Stephen Rolle | <i>Commissioner of the Department of Transportation and Mobility</i> |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Michelle Smith | <i>Chief Planner</i> |

Consultant Team:

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Tim Love (Utile) | <i>Principal-in-Charge</i> |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Zoë Mueller (Utile) | <i>Project Manager & Urban Planner</i> |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Tien-Tien Chan (Nelson\Nygaard) | <i>Principal</i> |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Miranda Adams (Nelson\Nygaard) | <i>Associate</i> |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Guillermo Creamer, Jr. (Utile) | <i>Community Organizer</i> |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Rahi Patel (Utile) | <i>Urban Planner</i> |



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Agenda

1. **Introductions**
2. **Project Focus**
 - a. About the Plan
 - b. Project Timeline
 - c. Existing Conditions Overview
3. **Issues and Opportunities Discussion**
 - a. Public Comment Period #1
4. **Growth Framework Feedback**
 - a. Public Comment Period #2
5. **Next Steps & How to Get Involved**

Meeting Notes

I. Introductions

Zoë Mueller, Steven Rolle, and Michelle Smith introduced themselves and the larger project team and thanked the Working Group members for participating. Zoë then provided a description of the Transportation & Mobility Working Group's role within the larger Worcester Now | Next planning process.

After City and consultant team introductions, Working Group members introduced themselves and their affiliations.

II. Project Focus

Zoë introduced the Working Group members to the project, including guiding principles, past plans, core topic areas, a project timeline, and review of public engagement efforts made to date.

Some of the top transportation and mobility related themes heard in public engagement so far included:

- Redesigning streets for all users;
- Expanding bus services; and
- Expanding rail services.

IV. Issues & Opportunities Discussion

Zoë presented the top issues and patterns of note that arose from the planning process so far, along with corresponding prompts for discussion which included:

- **Worcester's streets are not safe for all users, especially in environmental justice communities and near schools:** how can Worcester increase safety and comfort on its streets for all users, especially near schools and in environmental justice communities?



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- **There is increasing need to incentivize equitable transit-oriented development:** how can Worcester encourage equitable transit oriented development in areas that are well-served by public transit?
- **Worcester is a regional destination as much as an origin for Boston-bound travelers:** how can Worcester's regional transportation network better serve Worcester as an increasingly popular destination for commuters and visitors?
- Based on your experience in Worcester, what else would you add to this list of issues and patterns?

A. Comments from Working Group Members:

A. Issue 1: Streets are not safe for all users

- **Karin Valentine-Goins:** I'm glad to see safety and comfort listed so high as a priority. But it's also about increasing the destinations and types of reasons people have to move without a car. So not decreasing the focus on safety, but adding to that. Making it more of a choice for people.
- **Sujatha Krishnan:** To add to the trash, the sloppiness around sidewalks around schools is an issue.
- **Fay Rhault:** In a lot of conversations with the city, there's a need for standardized formatting for keeping track of projects like resurfacing and crosswalk projects. There are a few schools involved with the MassDOT Safe Routes to School program. Reinvigorating that process citywide could help with school safety. There have also been issues identified (especially around Chandler St.) related to student safety.
- **Mimi Sheller:** as a newcomer, I'm struck by the sense of fragmentation. The city is fragmented by high-speed corridors that impinge upon residential and commercial areas. If there's a way to implement traffic calming in these places, it could help a lot.
- **Adam Thielker:** There are far too many roads that cut through Worcester in unlikely places. It encourages drivers to go very fast. I think we have the highest number of pedestrian collisions in New England. Many streets could be narrowed. Speed humps are also effective. I'd like to see a lot more speed humps around town.
- **Joyce Mandell:** I don't feel safe biking in this city. The streets Adam talked about - StrongTowns refers to streets like Park Avenue as stroads. They are very dangerous. When I go into Boston, I make a calculation. What is the cost of taking the train in terms of time financially and in time versus driving? I'd like to not have to drive to downtown Worcester. I would like the parking to be more expensive downtown to incentivize people to think about other options.
- **Joseph Frawley:** There are other efforts from MassDOT that could address some of these issues around speed. As part of the Strategic Highway Safety Plan, we're focusing on a safe systems approach. It's a method of trying to focus on lower speeds, reducing conflict points. The plan will specifically focus on non motorized users because they make up a disproportionate share of fatalities on roadways. Focusing on speed



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management techniques and putting out best practices for municipalities about traffic calming techniques. We're trying to get communities to focus on physical improvements- reducing operating speeds- as they key to improve safety.

- **Liz Myska:** Last week, a city councilor indulged me in walking blindfolded down Elm St., which is where I live. She encountered some trash buckets. She was incredulous about the situation. Trash collectors throw trash back onto the sidewalk and people just avoid citations. I'm a white cane user but it's too dangerous for me to travel in the winter. Crosswalks and sidewalks with unplowed snow are very dangerous and drivers act dangerously. There are audible pedestrian signals, but they're not all the same. When I do trainings, people are incredulous about this. Standardizing these elements is important. As a visually impaired person, I don't have the option of driving anymore. But I should have options like fixed route buses and paratransit. We want to encourage people to get out and participate, but the designs and the people who were consulted aren't adequate to meet that goal. I would love for the consultants to participate in one of my initiatives or a roundtable with the Accessibility Advisory Commission.

B. Issue 2: Equitable Transit-Oriented Development

- **Mimi Sheller:** Given the pressures on housing and the development that's happening between Worcester and Boston, any TOD will have significant displacement effects - driving up housing costs and rent. So that's something the city will need to mitigate.
- **Conor McCormack:** Zoning would be an important tool to addressing some of these issues. A lot of the time, developers need to request zoning amendments to get projects through. The city's well aware of the pitfalls in the current zoning so continuing to take a look at that and see where small adjustments can be made to allow different projects to come forward that are challenged by the current zoning.
- **Sujatha Krishnan:** The MBTA Communities legislation could be a starting point. Rather than only looking at the Union Station area, which would be covered by the law, they could expand those requirements to WRTA bus stops as a framework for zoning requirements.
- **Anne Bureau:** Zero fare makes sense for our city. Fares are a small part of the agency revenue. It's been a game changer for families like ours. It's saved us a lot of money and it's put Worcester on the map. Keeping fare-free should be a priority.
- **Karin Valentine-Goins:** Working with the development community is also important. Not just rule change but changing the expectation when it comes to projects.

C. Issue 3: Regional transportation

- **Mimi Sheller:** The T is a huge asset to this region. But again, thinking carefully about which directions people are going in. The development happening around Route 9 and out in Grafton means that more jobs are



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developing outside the city. So thinking about bringing people to jobs outside the city as well as bringing visitors into the city is important. They're increasingly coming into the city centers for entertainment and traveling outside the city for work.

- **Dennis Lipka:** The WRTA has realized that, for many of our riders, it's a 7 day a week economy. Monday to Friday isn't a good timeframe for them. Through the pandemic, our Saturday ridership only sank to about 60% of normal. Now it's back to being above that level and Sunday ridership doubled. But it's an interesting trend- what things came back first and where they came back. We rolled a couple of services during the pandemic. One line provided a one dollar ride from their home to the MBTA train station. The other service in Southbridge, Westborough, and Dudley. We have to look at the region. There's growing demand for transportation outside Worcester. We have lines that connect to Webster and Southbridge that are virtually express routes. As we exit the pandemic, one of the things we'll have to do is talk about modified fare on the commuter rail to go from Worcester to Westborough or Southborough. We had candid discussions with MassPort about promoting Worcester airport with a direct connection from the airport to Union Station. Going forward, there's an exciting opportunity for new services. When we talk about TOD, I have two examples. Polar Park is the best form of TOD, but if you look at ridership during games, there's no impact. People still drive in even though we're 800 ft. from the entrance. Of course, there's time for the ridership to develop, but that's interesting. The Market Basket that's going to open in Shrewsbury on Route 20. That service will be extended to the Market Basket. We serviced the southwest plaza because there are other important services located there. So we've been proactive about working with the community rate for new services.

- **Public Comments**

- **Jenn Falcon:** I am also currently unable to drive due to epilepsy. Speed bumps would be great. I was told at a community meeting that we only have a budget for three this year, though. I used to live on Bell Hill. Route 9 is basically a highway and people don't want to slow down. We convinced someone in the city to put flashing lights. We need visible enforcement. The crosswalks are too far apart and often go in an inconvenient direction. Having to cross the street multiple times in a certain pattern is not effective. A lot of people in this group are not Worcester natives. It's great we have a lot of people from other countries. But biotech people from Boston are taking over. Missing signs are another issue. On Lincoln St. there used to be a sign there about the right on red, drivers are not even thinking about people walking. There are places where stop buttons are covered in dirt. At first I was excited because there are trains coming from Boston and then I



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realized it's bringing people from Boston who found lower rents. People who have been here for at least ten years should have priority. Developers shouldn't be able to take over. Not many people said they were interested in that train to Boston. It's great to be able to go to Boston but we need to be able to prioritize people who have been here. A lot of people work late and need buses that have reliable routes.

- **Shaun Bartone:** I live on the #2 bus route off Pleasant St. I also do not drive. I used to drive but my eyesight has deteriorated to the point that I can't drive safely. I want to focus on one particular issue. Parking and parking garages. What I see happening is the influx of venture capital into Central Mass. to build the biotech hub which will provide 40,000 new jobs. What that means is sprawl into the suburbs. The suburbs are going to grow around Worcester. That makes Worcester the playground for the suburbs. That means that people drive into Worcester after work and then leave. There are good things about that, but it has negative effects. Local businesses want parking right next to where they are. There should be a rule that parking garages are only located on the periphery of the city. So people can drive into town and then park on the periphery of the downtown core. Where they have to walk or bike or take the bus. Something that requires them not to drive into the center of the city. It keeps cars out of the downtown core which leaves more room for pedestrians. Parking is critical. Don't let it take up more space.
- **Jordan Berg Powers:** There's a problem with sequencing. We live off Pleasant St. by Elm Park. Buses don't run frequently enough to be an option for people who don't drive. The current lack of buses incentivizes driving and then that locks Worcester into a specific mentality around zoning. We're zoned like a town. We require lots of parking and prioritize cars. We're not zoned like a city and that makes sense because the public transportation is not reliable. Anytime you make improvements to the transit system, there are also going to be higher rents following. Affordable housing is important here because our current affordable housing system is not actually affordable at all. As someone on the zoning board, I'm always frustrated with how much we prioritize cars and this is a good time to rethink that.
- **Karin Valentine-Goins:** It's important we've heard today here that when residents join this conversation, there's a strong emotional register to what they have to share and the planner speak doesn't reflect that. So it's great that we've made space for that here and I hope this process continues to make space for that.



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V. Growth Framework Feedback

Zoë introduced the Place Types Map, which is an initial interpretation of current development patterns in Worcester (land use and urban form). This map will be used as a tool to think about ways to shape growth in Worcester using the zoning code and other policy and programmatic tools. There was not sufficient time for discussion of this as part of the meeting but Working Group Members were encouraged to share any input they have via email as a follow-up.

VI. Next Steps & How to Get Involved

The final two slides provided an overview of the next steps in the process for Working Group Members and for the planning process overall. Working Group members were encouraged to stay involved and support the Planning Team in reaching more members of the Worcester community.

