

Spring 2020 Report of the Traffic and Transportation Advisory Committee

There is broad consensus across committees and departments that the Town has **opportunities to improve everyone's experience** of getting around Town by reducing motorcar speeds while improving flow, encouraging use of public transportation, and making pedestrian and bicycling use of our public ways safer, and more practical year-round. The Traffic and Transportation Advisory Committee, which **advises the Town Manager and Select Board** on their execution of the Town's **Interdepartmental Transportation Program**, is developing new recommendations to help:

- **Improve coordination** of our transportation program with important stakeholders such as health, public safety, and school departments
- Properly **balance our expenditures** to better protect and enhance pedestrian and bicycle modes of travel, thereby relieving constrained capacities for motorcar passage and parking
- Improve **long term planning** to integrate all projects with the long term goals of our town's Complete Streets policies, using the Flood Mitigation and School Master Planning processes as models

Capital projects are required to realize the Complete Streets vision of a safe, healthy town enhanced by progressive public way design. Some critical projects that have been approved by Town Meeting include traffic calming alterations to the intersections at Main and Washington, Waterfield and Mystic Valley, Main and Highland, and Johnson and Ridge, as well as state-funded improvements to our Center Train Station.

Policies serving the Complete Streets vision include the town-wide 25 MPH speed limit which applies to roads not otherwise posted, new sidewalk bylaw enforcement, transportation reviews for any bonded town construction project, and a uniform striping policy designed to reduce the width of the primary travel lane encouraging lower speeds and greater safety for other users of the public ways.

A Comparison: Flood Mitigation vs. Traffic Mitigation

Post-pandemic, the **flood of motor vehicles** will return to our region and town. Our flood of cars is a result of close to 100 years of motorcar centric infrastructure investment dedicated to moving people in personal cars, often in direct conflict with movement on foot, bicycle, rail or bus or cab. Ironically the same infrastructure that has caused our watershed to flood with water causes our public ways to fill with cars.

TTAC sees important similarities (and differences) between our decade-long flood mitigation effort and what we have to do now to regain the full use of our public ways for everyone's

benefit. Like flood mitigation, traffic mitigation will require **long-range capital planning**, dealing with a complicated **jigsaw puzzle of existing conditions**, negotiating for **multi-jurisdictional** change, and making difficult decisions that involve **value trade-offs** such as our flood mitigation decisions at Ginn field and along the Mystic Valley Parkway behind McCall.

Traffic problems however are more complicated than water drainage. Water runs downhill while people want to go in every direction, by every available mode of travel. A comprehensive program of change is required to address these issues. The redevelopment of the Kraft site in Woburn on our northern border for example, will alone result in over 17,000 vehicles per day pouring into the area's "streetshed." Our major intersections are like the various choke points of our drainage system and our arterial roads like the brooks and river.

We cannot however simply expand road capacity. Instead, we are asking for dedicated action to **improve our public ways in more practical ways, serving all users**. Our system includes 100's of sidewalk ramps and crosswalks and miles of sidewalk but many gaps still exist. The Tri-community Bikeway is a tremendous new transportation and recreation asset for our town yet many important bicycle routes for commuters and school children are deficient; our greenspaces are jewels of the Town yet unsafe crossings imperil pedestrian access to Wright-Locke Farm and the Middlesex Fells Reservation across Highland. We are **saturated with opportunities** for improvement.

The Transportation Program Needs Your Support and Participation

Changing our **approach to transportation** will not be easy or cheap. Town meeting will be asked to fund further **capital expenditures** and modified allocations of **operating expenses**. The Transportation Program also needs your **attention and input**. The Program needs your observations about issues and problems from every precinct and your questions about how every infrastructure project may effect transportation. Finally the program needs your **insistence that we get the maximum done for every dollar** by fully considering all users of our public ways and applying **our complete streets policies thoroughly** at every opportunity big or small, in public projects and in the regulation of private developments.

The Traffic and Transportation Advisory Committee endeavors to increase **your confidence in the Transportation Program** through our advice to the Select Board and the Town Manager.

Ben Keeler

Roger Wilson

Cochairs, The Traffic and Transportation Advisory Committee

5/29/20