

Moving Malden Forward in the Future
The Report on Best Practices by the
Long-Term Transportation Planning Study Committee

Takeaways / Recommendations Based on Comparison to Neighboring Communities

June 2019 – Partial Report

Purpose

The Malden City Council and Mayor Christenson established the Long-Term Transportation Planning Study Committee in order to review current procedures, services, and projects related to transportation planning and research and recommend best practices that can improve mobility and neighborhood quality of life throughout the City.

The Committee was formed to respond to resident concerns about traffic as well as to identify ways to take better advantage of Malden’s access to transit and its historic street grid that allows for convenient walking and biking. Surveys and public outreach performed for the March 2017 Growth Management Study (aka Moratorium Study) showed that residents identified greater traffic volume as one of their top concerns with further development. They also identified Malden’s access to transit as top strength as well as the need for better pedestrian and bicycle safety.

From the March 2017 Study
Infrastructure

“While the city’s location – its proximity and access to regional transportation networks – was consistently rated one of its top strengths, the volume of vehicular traffic, deficiencies in bus service, limited and congested east-to-west access, and the need for better pedestrian and bicycle safety were frequently raised as high concerns.”

Committee Members

The Committee consists of six members, three City Councillors and three residents appointed by the Mayor’s Office, listed as follows:

- Peg Crowe, Ward 1 Councillor
- Craig Spadafora, Councillor at Large
- Stephen Winslow, Councillor at Large (Chair)
- Brendan Connor, Doctor of Physical Therapist
- Keri Pyke, P.E., PTOE, Principal Transportation Planner at Howard Stein Hudson
- David Senatillaka, Transit and Smart Growth Advocate

Barbara Kim a Malden resident with a degree in Urban and Environmental Planning from Tufts also attended many of the meetings and assisted the Committee with its work.

Committee Process

The Committee held publicly posted meetings on one or two Mondays a month from January 2019 to April 2019. First meeting talked about the Power Triangle model of change.

The Committee first developed then prioritized a list of questions to ask other communities. Categories of questions included:

- Basic Process of Transportation Decision-making in Each Community
- The Role of Elected / Appointed Officials in Transportation Planning
- Role of Municipal Staff
- The Role of the Public / Advocates in Transportation Planning
- Types of Plans and Community Process
- Data Systems, Studies and Inventories of Transportation Infrastructure
- Funding of Transportation Improvements and Maintenance
- Enforcement Staffing

The Committee then selected 8 communities to interview including the adjoining communities of Everett, Medford, Melrose and Revere as well as Arlington, Brookline, Cambridge and Somerville. Councillor Winslow met with various Malden Department Heads to complete the questions for Malden. Committee members volunteered to call a select community, interview a key staff person involved in transportation and then reported back to the Committee. Notes were forwarded to Councillor Winslow who developed a spreadsheet of responses and also supplemented the interview materials with on-line research.

- 1. Basic Transportation Decision-making:**
- 2. Role of Elected / Appointed Officials in Transportation Planning**

Malden's Current Practice: Reliance on Ward Councillors and the Traffic Commission

Goal: To Become More Strategic and Pro-Active.

Malden's process of making many basic transportation decisions funnels down to the Traffic Commission and/or actions pursued by Ward Councillors in response to resident concerns or crashes. The Planning Board reviews impacts of individual developments. The Mayor's Office with the support of the Malden Redevelopment Authority pursues federal and state funds for planning and larger transportation projects.

a. City Council

Residents frequently reach out directly to their Ward councillors for immediate transportation needs such as support for handicap or other parking issues or safety concerns in their neighborhood. Ward Councillors then reach out to the Traffic Commission

to address those issues. The Traffic Commission efficiently handles individual parking and less complex neighborhood safety issues that do not require resources. The Traffic Commission primarily relies on traffic studies by applicants, often developers, to guide its decisions on busier streets and intersections. When an issue requires resources to either implement an improvement or address the Traffic Commission's request for a traffic study, the burden falls on councillors or the Mayor to find those resources. Without any transportation or safety priority plans, transportation funding allocation many times favor those with the most effective ability to advocate rather than allocating resources by need and/or safety hazard.

Legislative oversight of transportation planning and infrastructure is scattered among several City Council committees. The City Council formed an Ad Hoc Committee that has taken on the responsibility to propose an expansion of the resident parking program with the support of the newly created Parking Department. The Public Works Committee has jurisdiction over streets and sidewalks and has only met in the past 3 years to discuss lowering the City speed limits to 25 MPH. The City Council has an Ad Hoc Committee Traffic Mitigation Committee that has met three times in the 3 years it has been established. That Committee discussed the intersection of the Fellsway and Highland Avenue which resulted in a major improvement project by the Commonwealth. Other discussions included adaptive signals and signal timing but no recommendations or plans were developed. The Rules Committee has responsibility to review and recommend zoning changes and has been active over the past several terms especially in terms of recommending increased parking requirements and building height restrictions as means address impacts from residential development.

Malden has taken action to increase the equitable use of limited parking spaces by adding parking meters downtown and increasing parking enforcement. The City built the Northern Strand Trail, formed a Walkability Committee, and embraced use of LimeBike thereby increasing opportunities to walk and bicycle to work and school.

b. The Traffic Commission

The City established the Traffic Commission in 1947 as the City's regulatory body for vehicular traffic. According to the City Charter, the Traffic Commission main focus is on:

“vehicular street traffic in the city, and to the movement, stopping or standing of vehicles on, and their exclusion from, all or any streets, municipal parking places...”

The commission shall have the power to erect, make and maintain, or cause to be erected, made or maintained, traffic signs, signals, markings or other devices for the control of traffic in the city...

City staff make up the majority of Malden's Traffic Commission (Police, Fire/Parking, Engineering/Planning) with and representatives from the Planning and DPW Commission. According to the City Charter, the City Council does not have authority to amend or set aside decisions of Malden's Traffic Commission.

Role & Make-up of Traffic Commissions / Transportation Boards

Community	Traffic/ Transportation Commission Role	Municipal Staff on Commission	Number of Residents / Councillors on Commission	Council Committee Focused on Transportation?
Arlington	Advisory	None	All	Town Meeting Regulates
Brookline	Regulatory Authority consistent with Selectmen's Policies, with Appeal to Selectmen	None	6 Residents	Selectmen
Cambridge	Veto Authority over Traffic Director	n/a	n/a	Transportation & Utilities Committee
Everett	Traffic and Parking Rules	Police	6 Residents	Ordinance Changes
Malden	Final Regulatory Authority	Police, Engineer, DPW Board, Planning Board	None	No
Medford	Final Regulatory Authority	Police, DPW Dir Com Dev Dir	2 Residents	-
Melrose	Approves Rules & Regulations according to Council Policies	Engineer, Police	1 Councillor 5 Residents	-
Revere	Final Regulatory Authority	DPW, Police, Fire, Com Dev, Engineer	None	-
Somerville	Regulatory Authority with Appeal to Council	DPW Director, Police, Fire	1 Councillor 1 Resident	Traffic and Parking Committee

The Traffic Commission's focus on vehicular traffic limits has become antiquated in the face of the 21st realities of mobility in Boston Area. As the number of motor vehicles have increased in Malden and the Greater Boston area after the completion of the Big Dig and other highway expansions, the Commonwealth and many surrounding communities have come to the realization that further major road expansions are both detrimental to quality of life and financially impractical. As a result, more and more communities and the Commonwealth have taken steps to promote transit, walking and bicycling and have adopted practices like variable parking rates to better use our roads and parking spaces. The Better Bus Project using GPS and other tracking data has helped identify ways to make bus routes flow more efficiently. MassDOT has been operating for over 10 years under "context sensitive" design guidelines that help balance the needs of uses adjacent to public ways rather than focusing on vehicular movement.

c. The Planning Board

The Planning Board has the dual role of making recommendations on zoning requirements for the City and reviewing major development projects. The City Planner and the Building Inspector provide substantial comments on major developments applications. Zoning ordinances require certain developments to prepare traffic studies so that the Planning Board can assess traffic and parking impacts and set development conditions designed to mitigate impacts. The Board can hire consultants to review traffic studies. Much of the work of the Planning Board reacts to what developers propose. Transportation issues tend to be discussed solely in the context of an individual development and can miss cumulative impacts and opportunities to create systematic improvements. As a public body with regulatory authority the Planning Board must deliberate through the open meeting law process which limits the ability of the Planning Board work with resident advocates on transportation policies, plans or demonstration pilots.

A Master Plan steering committee has been working towards updating Malden's Master Plan that will ultimately generate new ideas for zoning in Malden. That effort has not yet generated a transportation chapter that would help identify priorities for future major transportation improvements in Malden.

d. Challenges under Current Practices

The current process has lagged in:

- (1) meeting resident demands for expansion of resident-only parking areas,
- (2) responding to the MBTA's Better Bus Project efforts to improve bus stops and service,
- (3) regularly analyzing traffic crash data and proposing safety improvements,
- (4) reviewing the state of repair of traffic signal infrastructure,
- (5) pursuing resources to consider dedicated bus and bikes lanes such as Everett and Arlington successfully piloted, and,
- (6) creating a long-term vision / plan / policies for transportation improvements, both small and large, that has strong backing by residents.

e. Best Practice: Recommendations

i. Elected Officials Guide Major Policies, Plans Drive Infrastructure

Elected Municipal Officials take an active role in developing major transportation policies for their community while delegating the finer details to appointed boards and staff and advisory groups. Transportation policies should link closely with plans for community development in order to ensure that the mobility needs of both future residents and workers are met and those of current residents and workers improve.

Many of our surrounding communities have transitioned from reactive and piecemeal decision-making driven by crashes or the needs of development to where they make transportation decisions more strategically and proactively. This shift begins with elected officials including Mayors and City Councils. Our closest peer communities such as Everett and Melrose respectively developed transit and bicycle plans and then implemented infrastructure to implement major parts of those plans with modest investments in new staff and materials. Cambridge and Somerville use their master planning processes to establish commercial and residential development plans and then establish zoning and transportation requirements that help put in place the infrastructure needed to support new development.

Recommendation #1: The City Council during its next term create a permanent committee on Planning, Mobility and Public Works that will replace the Ad Hoc Traffic Mitigation and Public Works Committees while taking over the Rules & Ordinance Committees responsibility for review and oversight of city planning and zoning efforts.

ii. Transportation Decision-making Body: Broadening Input and Points of View

An appointed board that focuses more broadly on mobility rather than vehicular traffic and parking issues.

The make-up of lead transportation rules and policy-making committees in neighboring communities varies and many include residents.

- The Traffic Board for the Town of Brookline has only residents;
- Traffic Commissions / Boards in Arlington, Everett, Medford and Melrose include residents as well as staff,
- Decisions can be appealed to elected officials in Melrose, Somerville and Brookline.

Other Traffic Commissions / Boards include Department heads rather than representatives. This makes sense because Traffic Commissions need to balance safety and mobility concerns with resource constraints. For instance, in Somerville, the Director of the Somerville DPW heads the traffic commission, rather than a member of the DPW Commission. Malden should consider replacing the DPW Commission representative with the DPW Director. To create more direct political and fiscal accountability, consideration

should be given to including a City Council and Mayoral appointees rather than ex-officio members from appointed boards.

Recommendation 2: As part of the review of the City Charter the current Traffic Commission should be disbanded in favor of a new Transportation Board that will be established by city ordinance. The new Transportation Board should be made up of four Department Directors and three residents. The Department Directors should include the Directors of Engineering, Public Works and Parking and the Police Chief. The two residents would serve staggered four-year terms and be appointed by the Mayor. The Council representative would be appointed according to Council rules. One of the Mayor’s appointees should have a background in transportation and / or urban planning or engineering and the other should be a person who primarily relies on public transit as their primary means of mobility. The mission of the Transportation Board will be to ensure the safety and ease of travel in Malden, enhance quality of life in our neighborhoods, support active living and to encourage modes and practices that can increase the efficient use of our limited public spaces dedicated to travel and parking Further discussion should take place when the adopting the ordinance as to whether: (1) Department heads may name an appropriate designee to serve, (3) the Fire Chief will have an ex-officio, non-voting seat and (4) the public members will receive a stipend.

3. The Role of Department Staff

Malden’s Current Practice: Divided Responsibility for Transportation Planning

Goal: Hire Transportation Staff to Help Coordinate the City’s Transportation Planning Efforts

a. Multiple City Departments Staff have Roles

Malden currently has no one staff person dedicated to the broad transportation needs of Malden’s residents. The Department of Public Works maintains the cities roads by fixing potholes, repairing broken sidewalks, re-striping lines and contracting out signal maintenance. The City Engineer oversees curb to curb road paving projects and sidewalk replacement using State Chapter 90 funds and Federal CDBG funds. The Parking Department now has responsibility for maintaining street signs and meters. No one particularly focuses on access to transit including reviewing the impact of the layout of MBTA stations or bus stops. The Police Department’s Traffic Division provides input to the Traffic Commission on requests to change street parking or traffic rules. City Councillors and the Mayor’s Office oversee divided pools of development mitigation funds that can be dedicated to traffic improvements.

b. Malden Redevelopment Authority

The Malden Redevelopment Authority in its heyday had significant impact of the shape of Malden’s current transportation infrastructure. With the power of eminent domain and robust Federal and State urban renewal funding during the 1960’s and 1970’s MRA led the effort that re-shaped Downtown Malden by creating the Route 60 / Centre Street Corridor,

the Commercial Street / Florence Street corridor as well as the creation of the Pleasant Street pedestrian corridor. That work also involved building parking garages designed to attract shoppers to the Pleasant Street shopping area and the hoped for spillover shopping by commuters using the new Malden Center Orange line station.

The MRA continues to pay a significant role in transportation via its efforts to secure federal and state transportation funding for redesign of Pleasant and Exchange Streets as well as dedicating Community Development Block Grant Funds to public improvements such as street repaving in low and moderate income neighborhoods and improving ADA access along sidewalks anywhere in the City. As CDBG funding has decreased or remained static, the MRA’s ability to fund transportation planning has been constrained by federal limits on the amount of CDBG funds that can be spent on such activities.

c. Challenges Under Current Staffing Structure

With such divided responsibilities and resources the City can readily lose out on opportunities to secure more federal and state transportation resources as well as ways to best use city-controlled resources.

Most of our surrounding communities have transportation planners / engineers on staff focused on mobility and safety. Such staff are vital to developing and implementing innovative transportation practices. For instance, the transportation planner in Everett helped secure Barr Foundation funding for a Transit Study and then helped implement the recommendations of the study that included innovative rush hour bus and bike lanes that have sped up bus service through Downtown Everett. Transportation planners in Melrose and Somerville have helped oversee the implementation of bicycle lanes. Staff in Gloucester helped put together a sidewalk plan that helped secure funds to build add ADA ramps and complete missing stretches of sidewalk. Cambridge has a transportation unit dedicated to ensuring that new developments implement zoning mandates that increase transit use, walking and bicycling and limit increases in traffic volume. Transportation staff in Everett and Somerville interact regularly with state and regional transportation planners to help keep abreast of the latest funding opportunities and priorities.

Community	Transportation Planners or Engineers?	Number	Transportation Department	Location of Transportation Staff
Arlington	Yes	1	No	Com Dev
Brookline	Yes	5	Yes	Trans Dept
Cambridge	Yes	21	Yes	Trans Dept, DPW
Everett	Yes	1	No	Com Dev
Malden	No	0	No	N/A
Medford	Yes	1	No	Engineering
Melrose	Yes	1	No	Engineering
Revere	No	0	No	N/A
Somerville	Yes	3	No	Com Dev, Traffic & Parking, Engineering

Best Practice Recommendation #3: The City hire a Transportation Engineer / Planner so that the City has greater in-house capability to pro-actively research, plan and oversee transportation innovations.

The Transportation Staffer would:

- Work with the City of Malden staff, officials and residents to identify and implement expeditious and low cost actions that will allow Maldonians to travel more safely and easily through Malden and our region. Manage the City’s Complete Streets program, sidewalk improvements, Malden by Bike plan and other relevant city initiatives to increase the safety and use of active and sustainable modes of transportation.
- Work with City officials, residents, businesses and the MBTA’s Better Bus Project to help optimize travel for transit users, improve access to transit for people with disabilities and eliminate delays for all modes caused by bottle necks along bus routes and near bus stops.
- Help develop the vision and goals of the transportation section of Malden’s Master Plan that is currently underdevelopment so as to proactively support sustainable, equitable transportation choices that can support new places to work and live that are less reliant on cars while preserving ease of mobility, quality of life and affordability in Malden’s existing neighborhoods.
- Oversee efforts to assess the age and state of repair of Malden’s traffic signals and to identify signal equipment improvements that increase safety and ease of travels for motorists, bus riders, walkers and bicyclists.
- Provide multimodal transportation planning expertise and technical support to city departments, boards and transportation-related committees. Provide multimodal transportation systems analysis. Review all private development projects to ensure consistency with the City’s transportation policies and goals

4. Role of Public / Advocates in Transportation Planning

5. Types of Plans and Community Process

Malden’s Current Practice – Hope and Frustration

Goal: Broaden Community Involvement in Transportation Planning

The Mayor formed a Walkability Committee several years ago that worked effectively to develop a list of key pedestrian safety priorities for the City many which have been implemented. The Walkability Committee has recently been bolstered by a new group of members who will be working on new priorities and ideas. Bike to the Sea, Inc. has been a long-standing advocate for the creation of the Northern Strand Trail (aka Bike to the Sea). B2C has advocated for such things as more bicycle racks at stations and has supported the addition of bicycle lanes on Pleasant and Exchange Streets. B2C with the encouragement of

the Mayor created a “Malden by Bike Map” that laid out the most used on-road routes for local bicyclists in hopes that the City would begin to develop a network of bicycle lanes and other accommodations. The Friends of the Malden River and the Mystic River Watershed Association have developed plans for trails extending from Oak Grove down along the Malden River to Charlestown and Wellington.

As indicated above, resident advocates have had success with the Traffic Commission on minor proposals that require few resources to implement or study. However, many have raised serious safety concerns that require more study and resources that ultimately have not been acted upon resulting in frustration.

Little if any advocacy has occurred around specific transit improvements in Malden. Senior Action started decades ago as an advocate for transit improvements for seniors. The Chinese Progressive Alliance has done some recent outreach to transit-reliant residents particularly in Ward 7. Councillor O’Malley has spearheaded the effort to improve pedestrian and bicycle access to the Oak Grove Station and to protect bus service on Main Street. The demographics of bus and transit riders appear to be significantly different than those of the key decision-makers in Malden.

Of particular concern is the lack of advocacy and engagement of and for transit users of color. A casual observer riding a bus or the subway at any time of the day in Malden can readily observe many if not most transit users are people of color and/or non-English speakers. Outreach to transit-reliant residents has proven challenging, even efforts by the MBTA’s Better Bus Project to engage riders at the Malden Station during rush-hour proved challenging simply due to the fact of the large number of people leaving at any one time.

Best Practice *Preliminary* Recommendation:

- i. Create a Broader Based Transportation Advisory Committee

Many communities including Medford, Melrose, Somerville, Brookline and Cambridge have bicycle advisory committees. Brookline and Cambridge also have walking and transit advisory committees or advocacy groups formed around particular transportation issues.

Advisory / Advocacy Committees by Community

Community	Bicycle	Transit	Walking	Active Living / Mass in Motion	Sustainability/ Clean Energy
Arlington	Yes	-	Walk Arlington	-	Sustainable Arlington
Brookline	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	Climate Action Brookline
Cambridge	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Municipal Sustainability
Everett	No	-	-	Yes	-
Malden	B2C	-	Mayor's Walkability Committee	Yes	Clean Energy
Medford	Yes	-	-	Yes	Energy & Env't Committee
Melrose	Yes*	-	Yes*	Yes	Sustainable Melrose
Revere	-	-	-	Yes	-
Somerville	Yes**	STEP	-	Yes	SustainaVille Initiative

* Melrose – Has a combined Pedestrian / Bicycle Committee

**Somerville – Bicycle Committee may also advise on some walkability issues

Recommendation: That the City consider expand the role of the Walkability Committee to become the Sustainable Transportation Advisory Committee that would have residents and sub-committees representing the interest and needs of transit users, pedestrians and bicyclists. A special effort should be made to recruit and connect to the diverse population of transit users in the City.

To ensure a strong interaction between advocates and decision-makers, representatives of the newly formed Transportation Board would have a dual role in being ex officio members of the Sustainable Transportation subcommittees.

Sections being further reviewed:

5B. Master Planning

6. Data / Systems Inventory

7. Funding

8. Enforcement Resources