

ROXBURY

New city initiative aims to lessen congestion in Dudley Square

Posted by Patrick Rosso

October 31, 2012 09:43 AM

By Patrick D. Rosso, Town Correspondent

A new initiative in Roxbury aims to completely transform Dudley Square, improving access for all transit modes and addressing the gridlock often seen in the neighborhood.

The “Dudley Square Complete Streets Design Project”, which will be overseen by the Boston Transportation Department, held its kick-off community meeting Oct. 22 at the Yawkey Club of Roxbury, giving area residents a taste of what is to come for the dense, urban neighborhood.

Over the coming months the BTM along with its partners, which include state, city, and private groups, will work with residents and stakeholders to come up with a way to alleviate traffic congestion in the neighborhood and improve existing infrastructure.

The initiative will look at the area roughly designated as Dudley Square from Shawmut Avenue to Harrison Street, for ways to improve the transit experience, whether it be for people walking, taking the bus, riding bicycles, or driving.

At Monday’s meeting the presentation laid out the timeline approximating that a “conceptual” design would be completed by Jan. 2013 and a “detailed” design would be completed by fall 2013.

The process will also build off of existing studies including those completed by the development non-profits Nuestra Comunidad and Madison Park Development Corporation as well as MassDOT’s Roxbury/Dorchester/Mattapan Transit Needs Study.

“We want to revisit where we are at and outline the project from there...We have many planning initiatives to inform this project, but this design is for construction,” Pat Hoey, senior planner at BTM, told the crowd of residents Monday. “We don’t want to discard [those studies]. We want to take the planning to the next level.”

BTM, along with its partners, will work to address streetscape and roadway designs along with on-street parking issues. Signals at intersections will be evaluated along with curb lines and crosswalks.

“We will be giving a fair-share to other modes of transit, not just vehicular traffic,” Hoey said. “We don’t want to build anything people aren’t happy with or doesn’t work.”

As the project aims to tackle many of the existing transportation problems in the neighborhood, with the influx of new development especially the reconstruction of the Ferdinand Building, many on the design team said the conversations with local business owners and residents was important.

“This is a transitional time for Dudley Square and a chance for things to happen here,” Rachel Burckardt, senior project manager with the BTM consult Parsons Brinkerhoff, told the crowd. “This is the kind of project that’s weaving the parts [and projects in the neighborhood] together.”

Of the more than 50 residents who attended the community meeting Monday evening, many nodded in agreement when discussing the congestion in the intersection, but some were concerned that the project would help drivers pass through their neighborhood and not bring business in.

“Is there consideration for the people who live and work in square?” Ana Crowley a 39-year-old resident asked. “Right now it seems like the design is for people to go through the square.”

The congestion seen at the Dudley Square bus depot was also a major concern for residents, commuters, and designers.

“My concern is there are more people coming out of Dudley on buses than anything else,” said Sam Walter a 60 year-old area resident. “The bus circulation has to get fixed.”

Although the goals for the project are lofty, the conversations with local residents create an important foundation for the project.

With a number of design studies already completed, many haven't be implemented, the BTD has its work cut out for it as it looks for ways to balance the needs of all transit modes and create a gateway to the neighborhood.

Even though there was visible excitement and interest in the room from long-time resident, cyclists, public transit advocates, and newcomers, the BTD still has a lot of work ahead of it.

A second meeting will be scheduled in the winter to gather improvement ideas from residents and later in 2013 a third meeting will be held to present the concept design with construction slated to being in the fall of 2013.

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