



March 28, 2012

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RE: **Third Community Meeting¹**
Meeting Notes of March 15, 2012

Executive Summary

On March 15, 2012, the Boston Transportation Department (BTD) team for the Melnea Cass Boulevard Design Project held the third in a series of community meetings associated with the project. The meeting was attended by approximately 50 people and included community residents, activists, stakeholders, consultants, and elected officials including Representatives Gloria Fox and Byron Rushing and City Councilor Tito Jackson. Present also were staff members from the offices of City Councilor Felix Arroyo and Senator Sonia Chang-Diaz.

The meeting began with a presentation that addressed key themes of the input provided by community members at the previous meeting, a discussion of the principles of Complete Streets, a review of potential locations for the bus rapid transit (BRT) corridor along Melnea Cass Boulevard and an overview of the different sections of the Boulevard and opportunities associated with each. The current planning effort takes place against a backdrop of increased development interest in the now mostly-vacant parcels along Melnea Cass Boulevard and represents an opportunity for the neighborhood to prepare transportation infrastructure and set the tone for this development. The consultant team under contract to BTD is headed by Howard/Stein-Hudson and includes Crosby | Schlessinger | Smallridge, LLC, Toole Design Group, Inc., GLC Development Resources, Charles River Watershed Association, and A-Plus Construction Services.

The meeting also included a group brainstorming exercise. Breakout groups were asked to address where they felt BRT should be placed along Melnea Cass Boulevard and to begin forming evaluation criteria for eventual use in assessing the merits of the potential solutions for the Boulevard developed by the project team based on community input.

With regard to the placement of BRT lanes, all four groups reported more or less in favor of center bus lanes. It was pointed out by several groups that the curbside bus lanes on Washington Street present challenges to safe parking during heavy snowfalls and that it took drivers a significant length of time to become accustomed to them. Center BRT would not present a conflict with parking, and as it would be delineated by curb, would be readily identifiable by motorists as marked off for use by transit vehicles only. A number of groups commented that they felt Beacon Street along the Green Line's C Branch was a good example of center median transit with attractive stations softened by trees and the median area providing a pedestrian

¹ Copies of the flipcharts taken at the meeting are listed in Appendix 1.

refuge. It was also noted that center median transit can make streets feel narrower, thereby slowing traffic, and that transit improvements can boost economic development opportunities.

Some concerns about both center BRT and BRT in general were raised by meeting participants. Several groups asked which approach was more expensive and would require more roadway width. Both options require approximately the same amount of pavement and will therefore cost the roughly the same amount. Another concern regarding BRT was the width it would contribute to the street regardless of which solution is picked and the added crossing time for pedestrians. Several groups stated that they would want pedestrians to cross Melnea Cass Boulevard in a single light cycle regardless of which configuration is chosen. Several members of the audience expressed skepticism regarding the need for BRT on Melnea Cass Boulevard and noted that expansion of bus services in the corridor may not be realistic given the MBTA's current financial challenges.

Additional questions and concerns about BRT included the following:

- How wide would new BRT transit vehicles be? If center lanes are selected, will they be in danger of colliding since buses will not be on fixed tracks like the Green Line?
- Bus service should be enhanced, but not at the expense of pedestrian safety. Pedestrians should not be trapped on the center bus lane median due to signal timing.
- Where will existing and future bus routes run under the proposed conditions?
- What kind of signals will be used for the BRT route?
- How will the BRT station at Melnea Cass Boulevard/Washington Street be configured?
- How will snow be removed from BRT lanes?

Ideas for evaluation criteria built from the ideas developed by community members during the December 14, 2011, meeting. Evaluation criteria are reported in detail in the following pages, but generally addressed the following areas of interest:

- **Early action steps:** there are certain elements that the community would like to see advanced as prior to completing the design for Melnea Cass Boulevard. According to community comments to date, improving street lighting, snow removal, and posting speed limit signs on the Boulevard are at the top of this list.
 - **Economic development:** the redesign of Melnea Cass Boulevard should drive economic development for Roxbury in general and Dudley Square in particular. The Boulevard should not just be a thoroughfare, but also a gateway to a revitalized Dudley Square. The corridor itself should become a destination for shopping and dining while providing connections to employment centers like the Longwood Medical Area. Buildings along the Boulevard should have active street fronts to encourage people to stop and explore the area. Developers who build in the area should take full responsibility for their parcels.
 - **All land accounted for:** all land within the corridor should be owned, cared for, and given a purpose.
 - **Landscaping and urban design upgraded:** The corridor should be clean, well-maintained, and welcoming with benches and public art. Greenery should soften the corridor and give it less of a highway feel. Trees should be balanced with public safety and not block street lights or give the corridor a sense of being in a tunnel. Manned kiosks, similar to the one at Downtown Crossing, could improve wayfinding and public safety. Sidewalks and crosswalks should also be improved to ensure pedestrian safety, especially for students walking to school.
 - **Transportation:** the corridor should work safely and equally well for all modes of transportation. No mode should be improved at the expense of other modes. Vehicle traffic should be calmed, but flow steadily and without undue delay. Transit should be reliable and effective. Bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure should be safe and welcoming to users at all levels of confidence.
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Breakout Session Reporting:

- **Group 1** spent a significant portion of its allotted time addressing the issue of center versus curbside BRT. The group noted that the curbside BRT on Washington Street can present safety and parking concerns especially during winter operation when there is significant snowfall. However, center BRT can make a road feel wider and more daunting to pedestrians. Beacon Street in Brookline was praised as a model of center transit because of trees that soften the edges of stations and crossing signals which are timed to allow pedestrians to cross the entire street in one movement. Additional topics addressed by the group included:
 - Doubts by one group member that BRT is appropriate for Melnea Cass Boulevard or even needed given the MBTA's financial condition.
 - The idea that if new trees are planted along the Boulevard, they should be native, low-maintenance species which do not produce significant allergens, such as pear and apple trees.
 - Concern over speeding on Melnea Cass Boulevard and that the speed limit should be posted prominently.
 - The need to improve street lighting along the corridor as an early action step prior to implementation of the larger project.
- **Group 2** began its report by praising the summary of community input from the previous meeting, saying that it was reflective of what was said and that it served as a strong basis for their discussion. Group 2 developed a list of suggestions for evaluation criteria that included the following:
 - Trees along Melnea Cass Boulevard should be maintained and if possible increased, but balanced with enhanced street lighting to ensure that the roadway does not feel like a tunnel at night.
 - Unclaimed land should be given a purpose to deter criminal activity; developers should take responsibility for the property they own.
 - Public art should be installed where appropriate.
 - Entering and using Melnea Cass Boulevard to make connections should be safe for all modes.
 - Bus service improvements should be realistic and have a positive impact on current bus service in addition to preparing for the Urban Ring.
 - Long-term economic development should be considered; the design should welcome people into the corridor and community and invite them to stop, eat, and shop.
 - The safety of young people should be considered especially with safe sidewalks and prominently posted speed limits.
 - Transit stops should be easily accessible.
 - Bicycle facilities should include not only riding amenities, but also parking.
 - Conflicts among modes should be reduced.
 - The edges of Melnea Cass Boulevard should be softened with greenery to reduce the road's highway feel.
 - Pedestrians should be able to cross the Boulevard in a single move without becoming stuck in the middle.

Group 2 also expressed a preference for off-street cycle facilities and suggested installation of manned kiosks, similar to the one at Downtown Crossing, for security and orientation. The group requested information regarding the relative costs of implementing center and side-running BRT.

- **Group 3** stated its preference for center BRT, indicating that it would likely "work best," but requested additional information including the dimensions of Huntington Avenue, which they felt was similar to Melnea Cass Boulevard, and proposed overhead dimensions of the Boulevard with center and curbside BRT. Group 3 also suggested separate bicycle and pedestrian pathways,

exclusive pedestrian phases, and prominently-posted speed limit signs. Ideas for evaluation criteria put forward by the group included:

- Traffic should be calmed on the Boulevard; speeds should be reduced by 30%, but only after determining what average speeds really are during the AM, PM, and midday peak periods.
 - Development along the Boulevard should bring in the edges of the roadway to make the road feel more like a city street in a community, similar to Washington Street. It was noted that vehicles travel much faster on Melnea Cass Boulevard than on Washington Street.
 - Landscaping should be improved.
- **Group 4** began its report by requesting that bus service along Melnea Cass Boulevard not be subject to cuts. Concern was expressed over creating excessively widening the Boulevard and the group also requested information about the relative costs of center and curbside BRT. Interviewing riders of routes using Melnea Cass Boulevard as a way of ensuring an unbiased decision regarding where to place the BRT was suggested. The group commented that both Washington Street and Beacon Street are models of what they feel is successful in a boulevard, but that neither street is connected to I-93 at one end. Suggested evaluation criteria included:
 - Ensuring that Melnea Cass Boulevard is pedestrian safe and friendly.
 - Developing a design that directs users of the corridor to Dudley Square.
 - Improving snow removal.
 - Lowering exhaust emissions.
 - Ensuring that the Boulevard works for all modes.
 - Coordinating signals to provide for calm, steadily flowing traffic.
 - Placing trees to reduce speed.

Individual Group Reports:

Report from Group 1

Discussion of BRT Placement:

- The cross-section for the proposed road will likely be 90-100 feet. If a pedestrian has 3.5 seconds per foot, the crossing time is around 25 seconds. The question is whether pedestrians can get across in a single move or whether they will wind up marooned in the middle. It is very important for pedestrians to be able to get across in one move. Pedestrians should not get stuck on the BRT right-of-way.
- The center refuge offered by a central BRT corridor seems attractive.
- Melnea Cass Boulevard is very wide today; a center BRT might help to make it feel narrower.
- Parking on Washington Street is challenging when it snows. Cars wind up in the BRT lane and exiting a parked vehicle safely becomes difficult. Washington Street can feel daunting to cross.
- *[In response to a question asking why BRT lanes are being discussed]* BRT lanes are being installed for today's buses and as an early action step for implementing the Urban Ring. Improved transit, such as faster running buses, may help keep people on the MBTA even if service cuts are implemented.
- Blue Hill Avenue, Commonwealth Avenue, and Huntington Avenue all have high crash rates for pedestrians; BRT should not create a wide street that is dangerous for pedestrians.
- *[In response to a question about physical separation of center BRT]* Curbing would be used to define center BRT.
- Center BRT seems safer.
- Center BRT takes up more room and makes a wider corridor because of the need for curbing and stations in the center of the road.
- Coolidge Corner is a nice precedent; that feels safe for pedestrians.
- BRT stations should be surrounded by trees, similar to Coolidge Corner.

Ideas for Evaluation Criteria:

- Reduce conflicts among modes.

- The Boulevard should be greener, softer, safer with slower traffic and well lit.
- Make the Boulevard absolutely no wider than it needs to be.
- Upgrade landscaping with trees and benches.
- Pedestrians should have leading phasing; avoid concurrent phasing that puts pedestrians in danger.
- Vehicle speeds should be reduced.
- Bus speeds should be increased, but not at the expense of pedestrian safety.
- Avoid non-native tree species that generate allergens.
- Improve street lighting.

Additional Items

- There should be a comfortable pedestrian refuge down the center of the Boulevard regardless of which solution is chosen.
- The group would like to know about bus dimensions. Would center BRT vehicles be in danger of hitting each other?
- The group would like to know about which bus routes are expected to travel where under the proposed conditions.

Report from Group 2

Discussion of BRT Placement:

- Ensure that the bus lanes are designed to keep pedestrians safe.
- BRT should serve the neighborhood helping the Boulevard feel less like the highway and more like a large urban street.

Ideas for Evaluation Criteria:

- Avoid impacts to mature trees, but maintain trees such that they are not overgrown or impacting sidewalks or blocking street lighting.
- Improve street lighting and ensure that it reflects the community character.
- Ensure that all areas of Melnea Cass Boulevard are equally well-maintained.
- Maintain buffer areas.
- Increase pedestrian safety.
- Ensure that there is no dead space along the corridor; program with public art where appropriate.
- Improve the entry to Melnea Cass Boulevard from Massachusetts Avenue, particularly across from Rudi's Café.
- Ensure that design takes into account future development.
- Ensure that design benefits current and future MBTA service.
- Improve traffic operations.
- Provide safe, wide sidewalks, particularly for school children.
- Cycling infrastructure should welcome cyclists at all levels of confidence. Secure bicycle parking should be available. Integrate improvements for cycling with an expansion of the Hubway program.
- Ensure that the design fosters economic development.
- Ideas from the Roxbury Master Plan should be incorporated to the greatest extent possible.
- Developers should take responsibility for safe access to their parcels under their control.
- Reduce conflict among all modes.

Additional Items

- Post speed limit prominently.
- The group would like to know about signals for BRT. What are the criteria for their operation and function?
- The group would like to know whether cyclists should be accommodated on-street, off-street or both.
- The group would like to know more about the placement of the BRT station at Melnea Cass Boulevard/Washington Street.
- Parcels 9 and 10 should be fused to allow economic development and create jobs.
- Provide a manned kiosk for security and wayfinding.

- Vassar Street in Cambridge is a good example of pavement treatment.
- The group would like to know more about the comparative width of the two BRT options, particularly with regard to how it impacts pedestrians.
- The group would like to know more about the comparative cost of the two BRT options.

Report from Group 3

Discussion of BRT Placement

- Center BRT provides better bus service reliability.
- Center BRT provides a pedestrian refuge.

Ideas for Evaluation Criteria:

- Separate pedestrian and bicycle paths should be provided in the green space.
- Bus service should be more efficient.
- Vehicle traffic should be slowed.
- Provide exclusive pedestrian phases.
- Ensure that all new commercial development fronts on Melnea Cass Boulevard – the direct opposite of the Goodwill Site.
- Ensure a quality streetscape.

Additional Items:

- The group would like to know whether center-running BRT will mean smaller sidewalks at the curb.
- Post speed limits.
- Consider public art, especially a memorial to Melnea Cass.
- One group member suggested the idea of a separate sidewalk, at the curb line, with separated cycling and walking paths in the green space behind the sidewalk.

Report from Group 4

Discussion of BRT Placement

- Center BRT provides better bus service reliability.
- Center BRT provides a pedestrian refuge.
- Center and side-running BRT will result in roughly the same amount of paved area and cost.
- Center BRT means fewer conflicts with general traffic and could give Dudley Square a unique identity.
- Curbside BRT is problematic on Washington Street in the South End. Curbside BRT has taken time and education to get drivers used to it and it can be confusing. Center BRT is better organized and easier to intuitively understand. It would be safer and faster.
- Riders of the current bus service should be interviewed to determine how they feel about bus lane placement.
- *[In response to a question regarding bus the number of bus lines in the corridor]* There are 5 bus lines that run along the Boulevard, plus the Silver Line crossing at Washington Street.

Ideas for Evaluation Criteria:

- New BRT buses should be cleaner, with lower emissions.
- The bicycle infrastructure should be positioned in such a way as to provide equal opportunities for business growth on both sides of the street.
- Ensure that the design does not penalize drivers, but instead makes the roadway work better for all modes.
- Position trees to slow traffic.

Additional Items:

- The group would like to know if any of the bus routes operating on Melnea Cass Boulevard are slated for cuts.
- Is a busway really needed? Will it be a tool for gentrification?

- Transit provides economic development opportunities and connections.
- The group would like to know how snow removal would be accomplished in center BRT lanes.
- Do not remove the slip lane from Tremont Street northbound to Melnea Cass Boulevard eastbound.²

Next Steps

While the next community meeting date has yet to be set, BTD will hold this meeting in late April or early May 2012. A commissioners' walk to address early action steps, such as street lighting, will be scheduled for this spring.

In the interim, the presentation given at the meeting summarized herein, a copy of these minutes, and a copy of the next meeting's presentation, when it is completed, will be posted to the project website. Where possible, answers to questions asked by community members in these meeting minutes will be provided prior to the next meeting.

² It was noted that slip lanes can encourage drivers to move faster.

Appendix 1: Meeting Flip-Charts

See following page

Reporting

(1)

① Discussed center or side buses, back + forth over it, safety concerns of side buses on Wash. Tough during snow, parking concerns, but middle can lengthen crossing, like Beacon St. in Brookline, like walk all the way in one go. Trees around the station to soften it, well lit, not any wider than it should be, one person not convinced on need for BRT, walk more native species to avoid allergies, pears + apples, concern over speeding, post the speed limit.

- Appreciated Summary, reflective, trees → maintain and don't create a tunnel effect, balance trees + lights, preserve/move trees, deal w/ unclaimed land w/ criminal activity, public art integration, give all spaces a purpose, short + long term to do's, implement low-hanging fruit, make existing + connecting safe for all modes, take long term view of business ~~strip~~, make bus expansions realistic, make BRT lanes useful for current buses — economic development, make people come, shop + eat, consider youth + children, post speeds, safe sidewalks for young people, pref. for off-street cycle facilities, subway expansion, bike parking, make transit stops easily accessible, make developers take responsibility, kiosks for security + orientation

① Safe access to transit, reduce
modal conflicts, soften edges, don't trap peds
in middle, cost of curb vs. edge BRT. ②

③ - Basically felt middle would work best,
want to see overhead dimensions for elements
Huntington Ave similar to MCB, ensure peds feel safe
traffic should be calmed, reduce speed by 30%.
have some measurements done AM, PM, midday,
traffic calming w/ development, bring in edges
to slow it down like Washington, have separate
bike + ped paths, improve landscaping, make it
community. Exclusive ped phases, post speed
limits.

④ - Don't cut MCB lanes, is busway needed, ped
safe, Dudley a place, ped friendly, signage
to send people to Dudley, concerns over width,
Dudley should be unique, which BRT costs more,
Wash a model, but MCB connected to 93,
Beacon Street a model, need good snow removal
lower exhaust emissions, interview MCB bus rider
Ensure bus trail isn't biased, give business opportunity
more light coordination, calm, steady traffic, ensure it
works for all, trees on the median for speed ↓

→ Spring walkthru, low hanging fruit.

Q) Cross-section is 90-100 feet if ped gets ①
3.5 seconds its 25 seconds, can you cross
on one walk signal - Want to be able to
cross whole thing in one go.

- Very important to be able to get across
in one go.
- Centu refuge is nice
- Melnea seems very wide today
- Centu busway better to making it feel narrower
- Parking on Washington is a challenge w/ sidewalk
busway especially in the winter - Issue of being cleared
- Washington can feel daunting

Q) Why central busways?

A) For MBTA buses both today's buses and the Circle
Line BRT.

- Central busway provides visual friction
- Blue Hill, Huntington, Commonwealth, all have high
accident rates

(2)
(can pedestrian)
Q) Are Centurline BRT Lanes physically separated w/ curb?

A) Yes, they would have some curbing

- Improving transit will keep people on the MBTA even if lanes go up or there are cuts

- BRT down the center seems safer.

→ Find out more about bus dimensions

- Centurline busway takes up more room because of the need for center stations and two barriers

- Comfortable refuge down the center regardless of solution

- Make it green, reduce conflict, make it feel like a BLVD

- Coolidge Corner as nice precedent → along C green line.

- Trees around bus stations, make it soft.

→ Greener, softer, safer, slower, well-lit, leaning center line, don't make it any wider than it needs to be. If in the center, include trees + benches

③

- Lead pedestrian phasing.
- * Discuss what buses are where.
- Trees as allergen generators, find native trees
Bartlett Trees
- Reduction in vehicle speeds
- Increase bus speeds, but not at expense of
pedestrian or cyclist safety
- Reduction in conflict between modes
- Avoid concurrent phasing that puts pedestrians
in jeopardy
- Improved Street lighting
- ~~Speeds not to exceed 45 mph for buses~~

Gr # 2

EVALUATION Criteria

- Impact to Trees. important
overgrowth, sidewalk conditions
- Trees can be issue with safety/lighting
during the evening → Better Lighting
- Make all areas nice (No scrub, etc)
- Buffer areas need to be able to maintained
- Lighting ^{should} reflect Community Character
increase Pedestrian Safety.
- Amount of Public Art / program the
public space to maintain
not dead
- Entering from Mass Ave space
needs treatment + improvement
on south side across from
Rudiz
- Design for future development:
- Design to benefit present + future
MBTA service.

Gr. #20

BRT

What's the best
for Melnea?

~~Notes~~

- Design to channel pedestrians + keep safe.
- All the modes should not conflict: Bikes, peds, cars
- Cross section / width
- Serve neighborhood
more street oriented
less highway!
- Crossing time / length.
- COST

- Question @ station placement at MCB at Washington
- Design should Foster Econ. Development
- Fuse parcels 9+10 with design to allow pro-economic development + jobs as well as the future development.
- Rsm poc ideas incorporated
- Developers take responsibility for parking and access.
- Kiosk for welcoming, information & public safety.
- Vassar St Example pavement treatment.

- Traffic operations! Need traffic evaluation - Service,
- post speed . slow speeders
- School kids need safe wide sidewalks.
- BRT + signals? - Criteria of operation + function
- Cyclists - off street or both?
Criteria? - work for all
Bike parking + secure available.
— integration w/ Hubway

Group #3

BRT Actions | Page 1

- Center BRT provides better Bus Service reliability
- Center BRT Provides Ped's Refuge @ Crossing
- Will Center BRT Mean smaller Sidewalks @ Curb?

Priorities — Criteria

Page 2

- Separated Ped. Path ~~at~~ within green-space
- More efficient Bus Service
- Slow speeding traffic
- Exclusive Ped. Phases
- All Commercial development should front on Cass — No Addresses now!! — Not like Goodwill's Orientation!
- Post Speed limits
- Design Quality Streetscape

- Public Art (Meha Cass Memorial?)

-

BRT

(P1)

Group (4)

Q: Is MBTA - ~~are~~ any of the
Melnea Cass bus lines proposed
for cuts.

- Street should be more ped.
friendly. Calm traffic.
- Heard concerns at last mtg
re centerline busway. Is
busway really needed. [?]
- Transit provides economic develop.
ment opportunities; connections.
- Fear that BRT will be a tool
for gentrification
- WANT destination, not
thoroughfare.

P. 2

Group 4

- Signage to heart of Roxbury.
- How does street width compare between centerline busway + side bus lanes?
About the same.
- Centerline bus lane means fewer conflicts with general traffic and could give Dudley unique identity.
- What will cost more, centerline busway or side bus lanes?
Paved area about the same, so costs about the same.

P 3

Group 4

- S. End, Washington Street:
Side bus lanes problematic, education for public needed to know when they ^{can} be in bus lanes. Confusing. On the other hand, transit in center median on Beacon organized, easier to understand. Centerline busway safer, faster.
 - Snow removal in bus lanes:
How will this be done?
-

P. 4

Group 4

Evaluation ~~of~~ Criteria / Design Objectives

- Buses: What about exhaust emissions from additional buses? New vehicles are cleaner, lower emissions.
- Should interview people who use existing bus service on Metra Ciss to find out feelings about centerline busway.
- How many bus lines on Metra Ciss?
5, plus Silverline. (south)
- With ~~bus~~^{bike} trail on one side, bias for development on that side.

p. 5

Group 4

- Don't get rid of slip lane ~~the~~ near Tremont - will slow movement. (Slip lane can encourage fast driving.)
- Trees ^{and activity} in median can make people want to drive slower.
- Plan/design should not make it harder for drivers. Should work for all modes.