

October 2016

Improving Walking Conditions in Egleston Square

Background

In the summer of 2016, Urban Edge and WalkBoston initiated a conversation about scheduling a walk assessment for the Egleston Square area to examine pedestrian infrastructure conditions in this highly trafficked Main Streets corridor. Concurrently, the Boston Planning and Development Agency (BPDA – formerly the Boston Redevelopment Authority) was pursuing (and continues to pursue) its PLAN: JP/Rox planning and development study for the Washington Street corridor. This area includes Egleston Square as well as Stonybrook, which has been designated a “Neighborhood Slow Streets” pilot as part of the City’s Vision Zero efforts to eliminate traffic fatalities and serious injuries. Urban Edge’s push for a walk assessment and BPDA staff’s interest in applying innovations from the Slow Streets pilot more broadly both highlight a strong desire for transportation infrastructure that accommodates all road users, whether they are walking, bicycling, driving or taking transit.



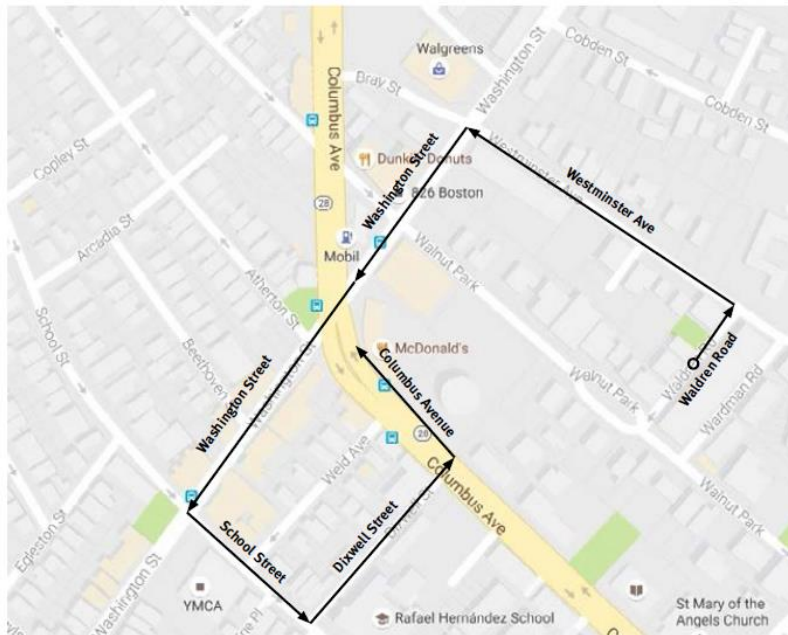
Egleston Square walk assessment participants, including neighborhood residents, City of Boston staff and representatives from WalkBoston and local community organizations, examine local pedestrian infrastructure conditions on September 14, 2016.

Given the opportunity to comment on the PLAN: JP/Rox study, WalkBoston and partner organizations Boston Cyclists Union and LivableStreets submitted a joint letter to the BPDA on August 26 (see Appendix A) outlining numerous recommendations for enhancing pedestrian and bicycling infrastructure in the study area. The Egleston Square walk assessment subsequently took place on September 14, providing diverse city and community stakeholders (listed in Appendix B) the chance to further examine the issues raised in the comment letter and to discuss more specific local walking and biking improvements. WalkBoston subsequently presented several of these recommendations (which are further described in the report sections that follow) to the Egleston Square Neighborhood Association (ESNA) on September 26. These recommended improvements, as follows, reflect a broad consensus between walk assessment participants and ESNA meeting attendees:

- Add a crosswalk across Washington Street at Bray Street/Westminster Avenue
- Enhance pedestrian infrastructure at the intersection of Washington Street and Columbus Avenue
- Add a crosswalk across Washington Street at Beethoven Street

Additional walking issues that merit further consideration are highlighted in this report as well. While this document is primarily focused on pedestrian improvements, the need to enhance bicycle infrastructure (as discussed in the aforementioned comment letter to the BPDA) remains critical too. It is WalkBoston's hope that this report helps lead to on-the-ground built environment changes in Egleston Square that enable active and sustainable transportation for all.

Egleston Square walk assessment route (September 14, 2016)



Egleston Square Walk Assessment Map
September 14, 2016

A map of the walking route for the September 14 Egleston Square walk assessment.

Egleston Square walk assessment participants (see Appendix B) met at 9 Waldren Road, one of Urban Edge's residential properties. They then walked along Westminster Avenue to Washington Street, then south on Washington Street to School Street. The group then walked east on School Street, then north on Dixwell Street to Columbus Avenue. Finally, the group returned to Waldren Road via Washington Street and Walnut Park for further discussion.

Summary of Priority Improvements

Walk assessment participants and ESNA meeting attendees broadly agreed upon three specific areas of improvement, as follows:

- Add a crosswalk across Washington Street at Bray Street/Westminster Avenue
- Enhance pedestrian infrastructure at the intersection of Washington Street and Columbus Avenue
- Add a crosswalk across Washington Street at Beethoven Street

Existing conditions and proposed improvements at the aforementioned locations, as well as additional walking issues that merit attention, are further detailed below.

Priority Improvement: Add a crosswalk across Washington Street at Bray Street/Westminster Avenue

The stretch of Washington Street north of Columbus Avenue has no crosswalks across it until Dimock Street – a distance of nearly a quarter-mile. As a result, pedestrians are forced to jaywalk across Washington Street, highlighting a clear need for additional pedestrian crossings along this major thoroughfare.

Walk assessment participants and ESNA meeting attendees broadly agreed that a crosswalk should be installed across Washington Street at Bray Street/Westminster Avenue, given the location of a bus stop at this corner and the high volume of pedestrians walking to the nearby Walgreen's. Walk assessment participants also noted that the adjacent crosswalk across Bray Street traverses a right-turning slip lane, which could be reclaimed for pedestrian use. This would not only calm traffic and shorten a lengthy crossing distance for pedestrians; it would also present opportunities to create a small plaza and/or enhance the public realm using the reclaimed street space. Given that Bray Street is a very short one-way street, removing the slip lane here should not adversely affect traffic flow in Egleston Square more broadly.

In addition to installing a crosswalk across Washington Street at Bray Street/Westminster Avenue adding additional crosswalks across Washington Street north of Egleston Square (whether at mid-block locations or side street corners) should be considered as well.



The crosswalk across Bray Street at Washington Street presents opportunities to reclaim a right-turning slip lane for pedestrian use.

Priority Improvement: Enhance pedestrian infrastructure at the intersection of Washington Street and Columbus Avenue

The wide and heavily trafficked intersection of Washington Street and Columbus Avenue at the heart of Egleston Square presents numerous challenges for people walking and biking. High traffic speeds, long crossing distances, inconsistent and confusing WALK signals, and conflicts between turning vehicles and pedestrians in the crosswalks all present serious potential hazards. Potential solutions to address these safety issues include the following:

- Use curb extensions to reduce crossing distances and calm traffic
- Reconfigure signal timings to create more predictable WALK signal cycle
 - Consider making WALK cycle automatic, thus eliminating the need for pedestrians to push a button
- Consider eliminating right-turn lanes (potentially in conjunction with curb extensions) and/or banning left turns
 - Consider gathering traffic counts to determine the implications of such changes and how traffic might be diverted to other streets
- Consider moving the crosswalk across Washington Street at Atherton Street from the south side of the intersection to the north side, thus enhancing visibility between

pedestrians in the crosswalk and drivers turning right onto Washington Street from Columbus Avenue

- Implement a road diet on Columbus Avenue (reduce from two travel lanes to one)



The intersection of Washington Street and Columbus Avenue presents numerous challenges for people walking and biking to and through Egleston Square.

In the long term, the intersection of Washington Street and Columbus Avenue may require a more comprehensive redesign, which may include scaling back the existing medians along Columbus Avenue (which would open up additional space for pedestrian and bicycling improvements). However, this should not preclude efforts to start implementing the solutions outlined above. Curb extensions can be done quickly and cheaply using paint, flex posts and/or planters, for example. Similarly, WALK signal timings can be re-evaluated based upon reduced crossing distances. Overall, short-term improvements should be tested here to lay the groundwork for longer-term solutions.

Priority Improvement: Add a crosswalk across Washington Street at Beethoven Street

The stretch of Washington Street between Columbus Avenue and School Street is Egleston Square's main commercial corridor, with numerous small businesses lining both sides of the street and generating a high volume of foot traffic. There are no crosswalks across Washington Street between these two ends of the corridor, and as a result people frequently jaywalk across

Washington Street. Parked cars, delivery vehicles and double-parking all contribute to the congestion here as well, blocking visibility between crossing pedestrians and people driving.

Walk assessment participants agreed that a crosswalk should be added across Washington Street at Beethoven Street (the midpoint of the commercial corridor) to enhance pedestrian safety. Since this crosswalk would likely be unsignalized, it should also incorporate high-visibility signage, including an in-street pedestrian crossing sign. Daylighting this crosswalk to improve visibility will be critical as well; this may include adding bumpouts/curb extensions, removing parking spaces, and/or better enforcement against double-parking.



Adding a crosswalk across Washington Street at Beethoven Street would enhance pedestrian safety in the heart of Egleston Square's main commercial corridor.

Additional Areas of Improvement

While the Egleston Square walk assessment on September 14 did not focus on Columbus Avenue as a corridor, follow-up observations by WalkBoston and discussions with local residents suggest a critical need to address high traffic speeds and pedestrian safety along this major thoroughfare.

The walk assessment did examine the crosswalk across Columbus Avenue between Weld Avenue and Dixwell Street (outside Walnut Park Apartments), which currently has a very long wait for the WALK signal, as well as heavy traffic congestion with an adjacent MBTA bus stop, parked vehicles, and double-parked delivery trucks. To address these issues, the WALK signal at this location

should be reconfigured to provide a shorter waiting time between WALK signal cycles and the crosswalk should be daylighted to improve visibility by adding bumpouts/curb extensions, removing parking spaces, and/or better enforcing double-parking restrictions.



Wide stretches of roadway and inconsistent crosswalks create an unpleasant and dangerous environment for pedestrians along Columbus Avenue.

As mentioned earlier in this report, a road diet on Columbus Avenue (reducing the number of travel lanes) can help calm traffic along this corridor – especially along the roadway stretch south of Washington Street up to Walnut Avenue, where traffic currently tends to move at much higher speeds compared to the roadway stretch north of Washington Street. While in the long term this may mean shorter pedestrian crossing distances and reconfiguring traffic medians accordingly, in the near term crosswalks can be added and enhanced at multiple locations along the Columbus Avenue corridor. At unsignalized locations, these crosswalks should provide ample pedestrian refuge islands in the medians that allow safe and unobstructed passage for seniors and people with disabilities. Further crosswalk improvements along Columbus Avenue could include the following:

- Enhance the mid-block crossing outside Egleston Branch Library by adding more visible pedestrian signage in the median and/or a flashing beacon
- Add a mid-block crossing with visible pedestrian signage and/or a flashing beacon across Columbus Avenue at the Rafael Hernandez School
- Add crosswalks across Columbus Avenue at Walnut Park
- Add a crosswalk across Columbus Avenue on the south side of Bray Street

- Add WALK signals to all sides of the crosswalks across Columbus Avenue at Bragdon Street and remove obstructions in the medians to facilitate access for seniors and people with disabilities

Finally, the walk assessment and discussions with residents surfaced several other issues around local pedestrian infrastructure and traffic congestion, as follows:

- Consider adding “Don’t Block the Box” at the intersection of Washington Street and School Street, as well as other heavily congested locations
- Consider changing traffic circulation patterns around Egleston Square (e.g. converting two-way segment on School Street between Washington Street and Weld Avenue to one-way, banning/blocking left turns from Columbus Avenue onto Weld Avenue)
 - Consider gathering traffic counts to determine the implications of such changes and how traffic might be diverted to other streets
- Address collision hazards at Westminster Avenue and Wardman Road, where Westminster Avenue bottlenecks due to parked cars
- Address curb drainage issues at Waldren Road and Westminster Avenue

Appendix A: Boston Cyclists Union, LivableStreets and WalkBoston joint comment letter on PLAN: JP/Rox

August 26, 2016

Marie Mercurio, Senior Planner
Boston Redevelopment Authority
1 City Hall Sq, 9th Floor
Boston, MA 02210

Re: Draft PLAN: JP/ROX

Dear Marie:

LivableStreets Alliance, Boston Cyclists Union and WalkBoston appreciate the work the BRA has done thus far to ensure that neighborhood development in Jamaica Plain and Roxbury aligns with residents' wishes and is done in a sustainable way that preserves neighborhood character. However, our organizations believe that the policies and recommendations outlined in the BRA's draft plan can be improved. Washington Street is a high-density, transit-accessible corridor, with low rates of automobile usage and a high share of residents traveling via transit, bicycle and walking. The policies and recommendations outlined in the BRA's report should further advance these aspects of the neighborhood. Please find comments from the LivableStreets Advocacy Committee, WalkBoston, Boston Cyclists Union, and local residents below. Many of these recommendations align with work WalkBoston is pursuing in partnership with the Elderly Commission's Age-Friendly Boston initiative and other city agencies to improve safety and comfort for seniors and other vulnerable populations.

First, we would like to recommend general improvements for the area in the following categories: Policy Initiatives, Pedestrian Safety and Infrastructure, Bicycle Infrastructure, Transit Improvements, Placemaking and the Public Realm, and Parking. In addition, we recommend a number of specific infrastructure improvements throughout the PLAN: JP/ROX study area, which are detailed later in this letter.

Policy Initiatives

- Commit to Complete Streets, Vision Zero, and other policies and standards that the City of Boston has adopted – don't just aspire. Roadway design should prioritize pedestrians, bicycles, transit, and personal motor vehicles, in that order. Vehicular capacity/level of service should not trump other needs.
 - Page 120 of the draft plan mentions that traffic calming, improved sidewalk and pedestrian crossings, and bike facilities should be created "where possible." This statement does not go far enough and the words "where possible" should be eliminated from the final plan. Boston has committed to implementing Vision Zero, which requires that streets be engineered in ways that prevent vulnerable road users from being killed by motor vehicles when motor vehicle operators make errors. The term "where possible" implies that nothing will change on a

street unless no parking spaces are lost and motor vehicle traffic speeds are not impacted.

- Implement fast and flexible programs for infrastructure that advance Complete Streets and Vision Zero goals. Use flex posts, paint and other inexpensive and temporary materials to demonstrate innovative roadway treatments such as physically separated bike lanes, curb extensions, and pedestrian plazas.

Pedestrian Safety and Infrastructure

- Improve pedestrian safety through appropriately configured WALK signals.
 - All WALK signals should be on automatic recall, unless there are streets with very low pedestrian volumes.
 - All WALK signals should be concurrent with traffic, unless there are high volumes of turning traffic or special circumstances (e.g. locations near schools or senior centers) that should be further reviewed.
 - All concurrent WALK signals should provide a leading pedestrian interval (LPI) of 6 seconds.
 - All WALK signals should provide countdowns that give sufficient time for pedestrians to cross the street. At major intersections the timing should be set to accommodate the MUTCD standard of a pedestrian walking 3.0 ft/sec. (MUTCD Section 4E.06, Paragraph 14)
- Establish an aggressive minimum standard for distance between crosswalks (signalized or not) and corresponding installation of new crosswalks at minor intersections and mid-block locations.
- Create landscaped pedestrian refuge areas where possible at unsignalized crosswalks.
- Install sidewalk bump-outs at all pedestrian crossings where appropriate for pedestrian safety.

Bicycle Safety and Infrastructure

- Determine feasibility of implementing separated bike lanes along all collector and arterial streets.
 - On page 133 of the draft plan, fig. 89 and fig. 90 depict two different conceptual drawings of bike infrastructure. We recommend the fig. 89 conceptual drawing of a separated bike lane.
- Create bike lanes/separated bike lanes, not sharrows, on major streets, and build as much as possible using paint on existing streets.

- Expand Hubway service and stations according to station density requirements and locations within a quarter mile radius of MBTA stations, including at transit hub Forest Hills MBTA Station.
- Bicycle and pedestrian access to the Southwest Corridor should remain as safe as it is today or be made safer.

Transit Improvements

- Study additional options for improving buses and expanding BRT. Options may include extending the Silver Line from Dudley through Forest Hills as an alternative to the BRT corridor planned for Columbus Ave.
- Use transit priority signals and far-side bus stops to provide better bus service, instead of queue jump lanes as currently recommended in the draft plan. Far-side stops are better for bus operations and also help to daylight crosswalks to oncoming traffic.
- Ensure that buses are accommodated if future development takes place at the Arborway Yard and either redesign or relocate bus operations. The memorandum of agreement between the City and the MBTA calls for building a permanent \$250 million facility to house 118 buses.

Placemaking and the Public Realm

- Install attractive, high-visibility, main-street-style, pedestrian-scale lighting to not only provide better illumination but to help visually narrow the street and signal to motorists that they are not on a high-speed arterial but in a village/neighborhood commercial center.
- Install attractive and coordinated benches/street furniture, parklets, public art and other placemaking features
- Minimize curb cuts through use of shared driveways and ensure that they have the tightest possible curb radii and level sidewalks.
- Create more robust incentives to encourage store owners to remove metal security covers for storefronts or to replace them with less visually obtrusive interior-mounted alternatives.
- Where appropriate, require setbacks for larger buildings to accommodate wider sidewalks and sidewalk cafes. Any residential or non-storefront, non-active ground-floor uses permitted to front on Washington St should require deeper, well landscaped setbacks, such as those along Marlborough St. in the Back Bay.

Parking

- Conduct a comprehensive neighborhood parking study to assess the proper regulations needed neighborhood wide.

- Regulate on-street parking in business districts for 15% vacancy using a combination of time limits and metering to encourage turnover.
- Assess residential streets, especially near transit stations, for viability of resident parking zones. Permits could be required during the day if people from outside the neighborhood are parking there during the day. Make residential permits required during the day and/or during the night if overnight parking by non-residents seems to be an issue.
- Institute recommended parking ratios ranging from 0 to .7, consistent with research suggesting parking ratios of .5 to .7 spaces per unit in neighborhoods with similar mode share and vehicle ownership rates as this section of Boston. “Decoupling” usage of private parking spaces from specific residential units and encouraging commercial shared parking can further extend the usefulness of existing and proposed spaces.
- Provide enough loading/drop-off/pick-up zones to reduce/eliminate double parking.
- Explore maximums for off-street parking.
- Reducing parking would save residents more than \$8,500/year, which will aid the BRA’s goal of affordable housing. (This is based on the estimate that car ownership costs an average of \$8,500/year.)

In addition to these general recommendations, the plan should also address and mention specific infrastructure improvements to existing deficiencies, including the following:

- Create a road diet for Columbus Ave between Egleston Sq. and Jackson Sq.
- Add bump outs/curb extensions to narrow crossing distances and increase turning radii for vehicles turning right onto Washington St from Columbus Ave.
- Add visual cues such as rapid flashing beacons and other high visibility signage to slow northbound traffic on Columbus Ave coming downhill through Egleston Square at Washington St.
- Add and improve crosswalks throughout the study area.
 - Add raised crosswalks on all side streets along Washington and Columbus.
 - Add a crosswalk, preferably raised, with an in-street pedestrian crossing sign across Washington St at Beethoven St and across Washington St at Kenton Rd.
 - Add crosswalks with in-street pedestrian crossing signs across Columbus Ave between Washington St and Seaver St, and across Washington St between Columbus Ave and Dimock St, to enhance pedestrian connections to and surrounding Egleston Square. (Currently there are very few crosswalks across the major arterials of Columbus Ave and Washington St along the

forementioned roadway segments. New crosswalks may be located at side streets or midblock, depending on the circumstances.)

- Fix the WALK signal across Columbus Ave outside Walnut Park Apartments (between Weld Ave and Dixwell St) to shorten wait time and provide regular pedestrian phase. Currently the wait for a WALK cycle is very long even when the button is pushed.
- Widen the sidewalks on Amory Street from the Brewery Complex to School Street to a minimum of 8’.
- Establish wayfinding and pedestrian/bicycle links connecting and directing people from the Southwest Corridor, T Stations and Washington St to Franklin Park.
 - Page 130 of the draft plan states that connections should be enhanced between the Southwest Corridor and Franklin Park. Maps and diagrams of proposed improvements should be updated to reflect this in the final plan.
 - Page 152 of the draft plan cites proposed improvements for Egleston Square, including “new bike lanes, crosswalks, and connections to the Southwest Corridor.” Ideally these bike facilities should be two-way and protected from vehicle traffic. As with connections between the SW Corridor and Franklin Park, such proposed improvements should be consistently mentioned throughout all maps presented in the final plan.
- Install parking meters with 12-or-more hour maximum time on all streets within 1000’ of a train station to better manage commuter parking.

Thank you again for presenting to our group in July and for this opportunity to comment on the draft plan. We appreciate your consideration of our recommendations.

Sincerely,

Boston Cyclists Union
LivableStreets Alliance
WalkBoston



LivableStreets

Rethinking urban transportation



Appendix B: Egleston Square walk assessment attendees

Al Andres, Boston Police Department (E-13)
Bill Jones, Boston Police Department (E-13)
Jim Fitzgerald, Boston Planning and Development Agency
Josh Weiland, Boston Transportation Department
Luis Cotto, Egleston Square Main Streets
Tim Reardon, Egleston Square Main Streets
Carolyn Royce, Egleston Square Neighborhood Association
Andrew Farnitano, LivableStreets Advocacy Committee
Arthur Natelle, Office of Representative Liz Malia
Bill Egan, Public Works Department
Sahar Lawrence, Urban Edge
Judith Lamb, Wardman/Walnut-Washington Community Working Group
Taylor Cain, local resident
Lori DeSantis, local resident
Ron Hafer, local resident
Ralph Walton, local resident
Dorothea Hass, WalkBoston
Adi Nochur, WalkBoston