walkBoston™

Downtown Peabody Walk Assessment
Peabody, MA

September 10, 2018

Sponsored by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety and Security's Pedestrian Safety Planning Initiative for High-Fatality Communities

MAKING MASSACHUSETTS MORE WALKABLE

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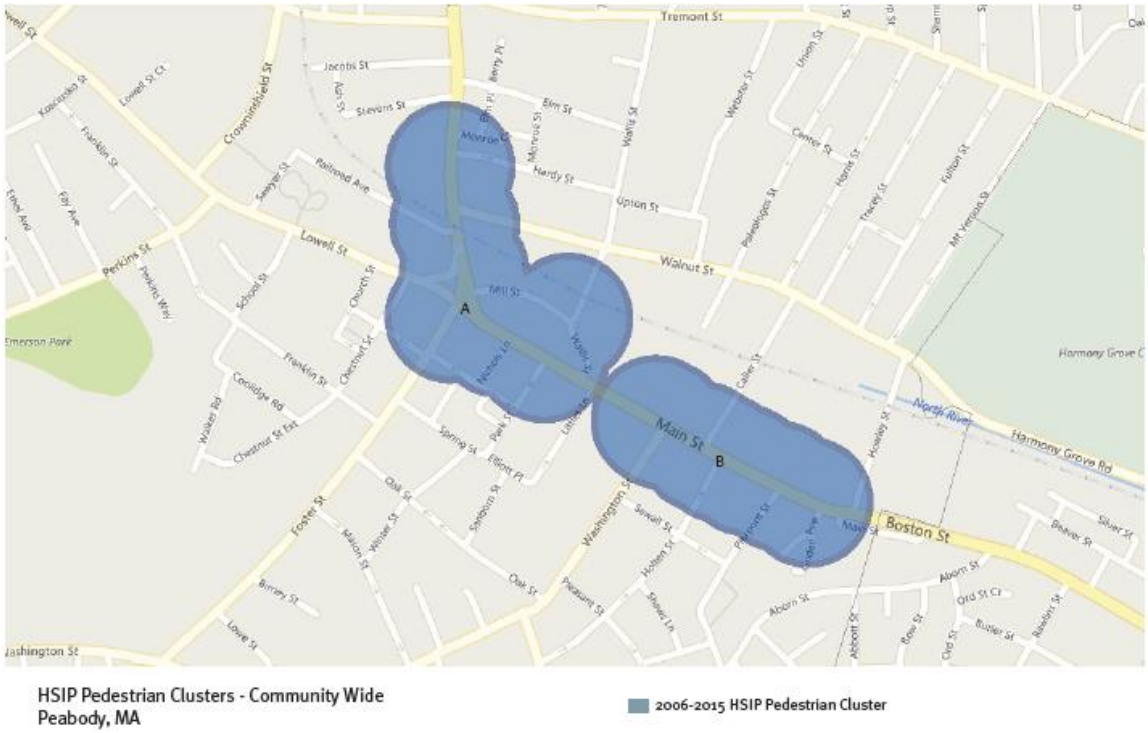
Walk Assessment Overview

On September 10, 2018, WalkBoston conducted a walk assessment in downtown Peabody, with support from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety and Security (EOPSS). The goal of the walk assessment was to recommend improvements to the local built environment that improve pedestrian safety. Participants included Peabody residents, WalkBoston staff, and representatives from the Peabody City Council, Department of Community Development, Department of Public Services, and Commission on Disability.

WalkBoston consulted MassDOT's Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) crash portal to determine potential locations for the walk assessment. As shown below, the data through 2015 show two pedestrian crash clusters, centered on Main Street and Central Street in downtown Peabody, that indicate potentially dangerous locations for people walking. Since 2015 both of these areas have received major infrastructure upgrades through MassWorks-funded projects. Two right-turning slip lanes at the intersection of Main Street and Central Street have been removed and filled in to create an expanded pedestrian realm. In addition, Main Street in the heart of downtown has received a road diet (reduction from two vehicular travel lanes in each direction to one) and the installation of pedestrian medians.



Pedestrian crash clusters in downtown Peabody have historically centered on the Main Street and Central Street corridors.

Given these upgrades, WalkBoston and City of Peabody staff decided to focus the walk assessment on areas of downtown adjacent to the Main Street and Central Street corridors (see route below). Several of the locations participants examined are also listed in the City's Complete Streets prioritization plan, so many of the recommendations in this report can help inform future Complete Streets projects. As the City explores opportunities for housing and economic development in and around downtown, including a vision for a future RiverWalk, ensuring pedestrian safety, accessibility and connectivity is critical.

The walking route for the downtown Peabody walk assessment, which started and ended at City Hall.

Walk assessment participants discussed a number of general recommendations to improve walkability throughout downtown Peabody, as well as more specific recommendations at targeted intersections and locations. **The report sections that follow discuss these "Overall Recommendations" and "Specific Improvements" in more detail. "Overall Recommendations" include the following:**

- **Develop a uniform crosswalk standard that prioritizes visibility and accessibility.**
- **Improve conditions of sidewalks, curbs and curb ramps throughout downtown for accessibility.**
- **Use fog lines, bike lanes, curb extensions/bumpouts, and pedestrian refuge islands to calm traffic, reduce long crossing distances, and improve pedestrian visibility.**

Overall Recommendations

- **Develop a uniform crosswalk standard that prioritizes visibility and accessibility.** There is currently no uniform standard for crosswalks in Peabody. Some crosswalks in and around downtown are solid red with a brick/stamped design, others are painted solid blue or yellow, and still others have only two parallel lines. While the solid colored crosswalks are more visible than the crosswalks that only utilize two parallel lines, their differing colors and high utilization of paint can create challenges for ongoing maintenance.

  WalkBoston encourages the City of Peabody to consider adopting and implementing a ladder or continental crosswalk design with perpendicular white lines as a uniform standard. This design is much more visible than the minimum of two parallel lines, yet does not require as much paint as solid coloration. Using only one paint color (white) will also help streamline maintenance efforts in the future. Crosswalk paint upgrades should be installed in conjunction with high-visibility pedestrian signage, including the usage of in-street pedestrian delineators at unsignalized or midblock locations.

- **Improve conditions of sidewalks, curbs and curb ramps throughout downtown for accessibility.** Many sidewalks in and around downtown are in poor condition. In some areas along Oak Street and Spring Street in particular, long curb cuts predominate and clearly delineated sidewalk facilities are almost non-existent. In other areas such as Caller Street, the sidewalk is almost level with the street and the lack of clearly defined or sufficiently elevated curbs leads vehicles to park on the sidewalk, blocking pedestrians. In addition many crosswalks in and around downtown lack curb ramps. In other instances the ramps are in poor condition, have steep angles or slopes, or lack tactile warning panels, creating ADA compliance issues. A

comprehensive strategy to improve the sidewalk and crosswalk network is necessary to address these concerns.

- **Use fog lines, bike lanes, curb extensions/bumpouts, and pedestrian refuge islands to calm traffic, reduce long crossing distances, and improve pedestrian visibility.** Wide travel lanes induce motor vehicles to travel at high speeds and long pedestrian crossing distances leave pedestrians exposed to this fast-moving traffic, creating safety hazards throughout downtown Peabody. Fog lines and bike lanes can narrow vehicular travel lanes to help slow traffic down. Curb extensions/bumpouts and pedestrian refuge islands reduce crossing distances and improve pedestrian visibility while also helping to calm traffic. All the aforementioned measures can be installed at low cost in the near term using paint, planters and/or plastic flex posts.

Specific Improvements

Main Street/Foster Street at Central Street/Lowell Street

Long crossing distances, fast-moving traffic, and long waits for WALK signals pose challenges for pedestrians at the intersection of Main Street/Foster Street and Central Street/Lowell Street.

As mentioned earlier, two right-turning slip lanes at the intersection of Main Street and Central Street have been removed and filled in to create a more attractive and expanded public realm. While this improvement is certainly welcome from a pedestrian standpoint, several walking safety challenges remain. Even without the slip lanes the intersection remains very wide, with pedestrians having to cross up to five vehicular travel lanes just to get across a single crosswalk. The current pedestrian signal timing also does not prioritize people walking, as only 28 seconds of WALK time is provided in an exclusive WALK signal cycle with traffic stopped in all directions. This is not enough time to cross both legs of the intersection and pedestrians face very long waits in between WALK signal cycles.

Walk assessment participants noted that traffic speed is another challenge at this intersection, where wide travel lanes and turning radii contribute to the problem. The City of Peabody's Complete Streets prioritization plan calls for bike accommodations on Lowell Street and Main Street. Bike lanes not only provide safer accommodations for cyclists; they also calm traffic by narrowing wide vehicular travel lanes. **Strategies to improve walking safety include the following:**

- **Paint bike lanes and fog lines along all intersection approaches and exits to narrow vehicle travel lanes and calm traffic.**

- **Update the overall traffic signal cycle so that people walking get more frequent pedestrian crossings.**

- **Make the WALK signal cycle automatic so that pedestrians do not need to press a button.**

- **Consider updating the pedestrian signals to be concurrent with traffic and provide a six-second leading pedestrian interval (LPI).** This will enable pedestrians to get a WALK signal in the same direction as moving traffic with a green light and thus allow them to cross the entire intersection in consecutive signal phases. Providing the LPI will further enable pedestrians to get a headstart into the crosswalk in advance of turning traffic, increasing their visibility and reducing the likelihood of crashes.

- **Consider a road diet to reduce the number of travel lanes through the intersection.** As mentioned earlier, Main Street in downtown has received a road diet from two vehicular travel lanes in each direction to one. However Main Street is four lanes wide at the intersection, as is Lowell Street, and Central Street and Foster Street are both five lanes wide. Strategies to reduce the number of travel and turning lanes through the intersection should be explored to create safer pedestrian crossings and calm traffic.

- **Consider the installation of curb extensions/bumpouts and pedestrian refuge islands to reduce long pedestrian crossing distances and calm traffic by narrowing wide turning radii and travel lanes.** These measures can be added at low cost in the near term using paint, planters and/or plastic flex posts and can complement a potential road diet. Installing such measures might require revisiting agreements made with the state as part of the MassWorks-funded upgrades installed at the intersection.

Central Street

The Central Street corridor is listed in the City of Peabody's Complete Streets prioritization plan for several safety improvements, including "addition of dedicated bike lanes, enhanced pedestrian crossings, new ADA compliant sidewalks and ramps, and signal upgrades." These upgrades include adding a marked pedestrian crossing across the parking lot entrance/exit at Bill & Bob's Roast Beef. **Walk assessment participants agreed that these proposed changes will improve walking safety. Other strategies include the following:**

The Central Street corridor is targeted for safety improvements in the City of Peabody's Complete Streets prioritization plan.

- **Use curb extensions/bumpouts to reduce crossing distances, calm traffic and increase pedestrian visibility.** Bumpouts can be added at low cost in the near term using paint, planters and/or plastic flex posts.

Walnut Street

Pedestrian safety improvements on Walnut Street, including the installation of ADA ramps as needed, is listed in the City of Peabody's Complete Streets prioritization plan. Walk assessment participants agreed that the lack of ADA compliance is a significant issue along Walnut Street. Many crosswalks lack curb ramps and even when curb ramps are present, they often lack tactile warning panels. In other instances, curb ramps with panels are not properly aligned with crosswalks. As noted earlier in this report, a comprehensive strategy is needed to address these issues. **Additional strategies to improve walking safety include the following:**

Crosswalks that lack ADA compliance and highly visible ladder designs are prevalent throughout Walnut Street.

- **Upgrade crosswalks along Walnut Street with highly visible ladder design and signage.** This directly relates to the idea of a uniform crosswalk standard described earlier in this report. Adding in-street pedestrian delineators will also help improve safety and visibility at a number of unsignalized/midblock crosswalks along Walnut Street.

- **Upgrade pedestrian signal equipment and WALK signal cycles at the intersection of Walnut Street and Wallis Street.** The current signals at this location are outdated, dim and difficult to see and do not provide pedestrian countdowns, which are a proven measure to reduce crash rates. New signal equipment at the intersection should provide clearly visible pedestrian countdowns. The WALK signal cycle should also be revisited to ensure that it provides pedestrians with enough time to cross the street. Concurrent signalization with a leading pedestrian interval should be considered to replace the current exclusive WALK signal cycle.

Caller Street

Poorly defined sidewalks and long curb cuts present walking safety challenges along Caller Street. In some instances the curb is barely elevated relative to the street, and as a result motor vehicles often hop the curb to park on the sidewalk, blocking pedestrians. Walk assessment participants noted that people often walk on Caller Street to access a bottle redemption center. The number of people walking in this area will only increase in the future, given the City's exploration of feasibility for local smart growth, as well as the vision for the future RiverWalk (which would cross Caller Street next to the bottle redemption center). **Strategies to improve walking safety include the following:**

- **Explore near-term strategies to better manage parking on Caller Street and prevent sidewalk obstructions.** This may include installing pavement markings to delineate parking spaces on the west side of the street (similar to the markings that currently exist on the east side of the street) or creating parking restrictions. Such restrictions may be accompanied by the installation of "No Parking" signs, increased police enforcement, yellow paint on curbs, and physical measures on the street to block parking, such as paint, planters and/or plastic flex posts.

Poorly defined sidewalks and improperly parked vehicles present challenges for people walking on Caller Street.

- **Explore medium- to long-term strategies to improve sidewalk conditions, including more clearly defining and elevating curbs.**

- **Explore designs for a safe crosswalk across Caller Street as part of the future RiverWalk vision.**

Main Street at Washington Street

Wide turning radii for motor vehicles and long pedestrian crossing distances at the intersection of Main Street and Washington Street present challenges for people walking. **Strategies to improve walking safety include the following:**

- **Consider the installation of curb extensions/bumpouts and pedestrian refuge islands to reduce long pedestrian crossing distances and calm traffic by narrowing wide turning radii and travel lanes.** These measures can be added at low cost in the near term using paint, planters and/or plastic flex posts. Installing such measures might require revisiting agreements made with the state as part of the MassWorks-funded upgrades installed along Main Street. The previous Main Street improvements can provide a model for a potential median in the crosswalk across the eastern leg of the intersection and bumpouts to reduce the crossing distance across the southern leg of the intersection.

Bumpouts and refuge islands can help reduce long crossing distances at Main Street and Washington Street.

Washington Street

Excessively wide vehicular travel lanes lead to high traffic speeds on Washington Street.

Washington Street has very wide travel lanes and few pavement markings, leading traffic to move at high speeds. Even though the City of Peabody has reduced its default speed limit to 25 miles per hour, the posted speed limit on parts of Washington Street is 30 miles per hour, creating a complicated regulatory issue.

Visibility at pedestrian crossings is also a challenge, as walk assessment participants observed motor vehicles parked right next to the crosswalk across Washington Street at Sewall Street. This prevents people walking and people driving from seeing each other. MBTA busses travel on Washington Street, so ensuring that walkers and transit users have safe crossings is critical. **Strategies to improve walking safety include the following:**

- **Paint fog lines and/or bike lanes on Washington Street to narrow the vehicular travel lanes and calm traffic.**

- **Restrict parking next to the crosswalk at Sewall Street.** The installation of "No Parking" signs next to the crosswalk may be accompanied by increased police enforcement, yellow paint on curbs, and physical measures on the street to block parking, such as paint, planters and/or plastic flex posts.

- **Use curb extensions/bumpouts to reduce crossing distances, calm traffic and increase pedestrian visibility.** Bumpouts can be added at low cost in the near term using paint, planters and/or plastic flex posts.

Washington Street at Oak Street/Aborn Street

A safety improvement project at Washington Street and Oak Street, including the "installation of new ADA compliant curb ramps, addition of curb extensions, and addition of bike lane[s] where applicable," is listed in the City of Peabody's Complete Streets prioritization plan. Such upgrades will make a positive difference at a wide intersection that has poor sightlines due to road curvature. In addition to providing safer accommodations for cyclists, bike lanes can also calm traffic and improve pedestrian safety by narrowing wide vehicular travel lanes.

Walk audit participants noted that the convergence of Washington Street, Aborn Street and Oak Street presents challenges related to broader vehicular circulation in Peabody. Traffic coming off Aborn Street often turns right onto Washington Street before making an immediate left onto Oak Street as a cut-through to avoid the heart of downtown Peabody. These turning vehicles often move at high speeds without slowing down, creating hazards for people walking. There are pedestrian ramps across Oak Street at Washington Street, but no tactile warning panels or crosswalk, and Oak Street itself is inhospitable for people walking, as sidewalks are often non-existent, poorly defined or in poor condition and many extended curb cuts are present. **<u>Strategies to improve walking safety include the following:</u>**

Poor sidewalk conditions, improperly parked vehicles, and high levels of cut-through traffic create challenges for pedestrians on Oak Street.

- **Use bike lanes and fog lines to narrow vehicular travel lanes and calm traffic on Washington Street.**

- **Upgrade the crosswalk across Washington Street with a highly visible ladder design and signage (including in-street pedestrian delineators), ADA-compliant ramps, and curb extensions/bumpouts to reduce the crossing distance, calm traffic and increase pedestrian visibility.** Bumpouts can be added at low cost in the near term using paint, planters and/or plastic flex posts.

- **Consider the installation of a raised crosswalk across Aborn Street at Washington Street to force turning traffic to slow down.**

- **Add a marked crosswalk with ADA-compliant ramps across Oak Street at Washington Street.** A raised crosswalk should be considered at this location as well to force turning traffic to slow down.

- **Use fog lines to narrow vehicular travel lanes and calm traffic on Oak Street.**

- **Pursue a comprehensive strategy for sidewalk improvements on Oak Street, including the creation of safe, continuous and accessible sidewalks, curb cuts and ramps.**

Foster Street

Foster Street has very wide vehicular travel lanes and few pavement markings, leading traffic to move at high speeds. **Strategies to improve walking safety include the following:**

- **Use fog lines and/or bike lanes to narrow vehicular travel lanes and calm traffic.**

- **Use curb extensions/bumpouts to reduce crossing distances, calm traffic and increase pedestrian visibility.** Bumpouts can be added at low cost in the near term using paint, planters and/or plastic flex posts.

Excessively wide vehicular travel lanes lead to high traffic speeds on Foster Street.

Spring Street

Spring Street just off of Foster Street has no sidewalks, leaving pedestrians with the unenviable choice of traversing very long curb cuts and dodging parked cars, or walking in the middle of the street. **This area should be prioritized for pedestrian accommodations as part of a broader sidewalk strategy in Peabody**. Parking on Spring Street should be reconfigured as part of this effort as well.

A complete lack of sidewalks on Spring Street creates an inhospitable environment for pedestrians.