

State Street Advisory Group Meeting Notes

Meeting held May 6, 2020 @ 5:30 PM

GPI Project #: MAX-2017041.05

DATE PREPARED: May 11, 2020

LOCATION: Videoconference via Google Hangouts

ATTENDEES: Brendan Kearney, Walk Boston
Thomas Nally, A Better City
Ruth Raphael, National Park Service
Ed Reynolds, Custom House Resident
Nathaniel Sheidley, Revolutionary Spaces
Suzanne Taylor, Freedom Trail Foundation
Stephanie Upson, Boston Cyclists Union

STAFF: Ashley Biggins, Public Works Department
Jim Fitzgerald, BPDA
Rachel Graham, Public Works Department Intern
William Moose, Boston Transportation Department
Kennan Rhyne, BPDA
Al Vilar, Boston Transportation Department
Zach Wassmouth, Public Works Department
Joe Johnson, GPI
Carolyn Radisch, GPI

PURPOSE: Advisory Group Meeting

This meeting was held via video-conference due to the social distancing guidelines set by the CDC in response to the Corona Virus -19 emergency. Ashley Biggins welcomed the group and provided introductions. Carolyn Radisch provided an overview of the agenda which would consist of two primary topics: an overview of existing challenges and design opportunities for State Street and a discussion of public outreach and moving the project forward. State Street is a part of the original concept for the Connect Historic Boston Bike Network and the street plays an important role not only in distributing traffic but has very significant historic and cultural value as well. The street was broken into segments and the challenges and opportunities discussed included:

Segment A: State / JFF Surface Road

- Challenges:
 - excess pavement width
 - undefined travel lanes west of the Surface Road
 - three lanes east of the Surface Road
 - a conflict between the heavy southbound (SB) right turn movement onto State Street with SB through bicyclists and pedestrians crossing State Street
- Design opportunities
 - Define one through travel lane on State Street, use additional space for pedestrian and bicycle improvements
 - Drop one WB through lane east of the Surface Road and repurpose space for other uses

- Protected WB bike lane
- Protected intersection and signal timing changes (LPI/LBI) to address vehicle right turn vs bicycle through conflict (Example of Staniford /Cambridge Street)

Segment B: State Street between Surface Road and the Pinch Point

- Challenges:
 - Excess road width / undefined travel lanes
 - Sidewalk on south side fragmented by MBTA headhouse
 - Pedestrian crossings obscured by parked vehicles (no curb extensions)
 - Narrow sidewalks in front of Black Rose and Custom House
 - No bicycle accommodations
 - Patchwork of parking regulations on both sides of the street (loading, tour bus parking, cab stand, valet spaces, accessible space)
- Design opportunities
 - Definition of one through travel lane and repurpose extra space for pedestrians and bicyclists
 - Protected WB bike lane
 - Improved / wider sidewalks
 - Improved pedestrian crossings with curb extensions
 - Evaluate the elimination of loading along the northerly curb line

Segment C: Pinch Point

- Challenges:
 - Narrow width
 - Narrow sidewalks
 - Wide undefined travel lane
 - No bicycle accommodations
- Design opportunities
 - Define one through travel lane
 - Protected WB bike lane
 - Wider sidewalks
 - No loading

Segment D: Pinch Point to Kilby Street

- Challenges:
 - Wide undefined travel lane
 - Loading on the north side of the street
 - Pedestrian crossings obscured by parked vehicles (no curb extensions)
 - Narrow sidewalks
 - No bicycle accommodations
 - Pedestrian crossing conflict with NB left turn from Broad Street to State Street
- Design Opportunities
 - Define one through travel lane and repurpose space for pedestrians and bicyclists
 - Protected WB bike lane
 - Wider sidewalks – the geometry provides an opportunity for a focus area opposite Broad Street
 - Improved pedestrian crossings
 - Evaluate the relocation of loading to another location in close proximity

Segment E: Congress Street Approach

- Challenges
 - Three travel lanes plus cab stand on north side of State Street
 - Heavy pedestrian crossing volumes
 - Design opportunities
 - Define one through/right and one through/left lane – repurpose space for pedestrians and bicyclists
 - Introduce cab stand with protected WB bicycle lane (example from Mass. Ave.)
 - Include bike box for the signal
- General Design Opportunity for State St
- Flush Street for portion of the street or raised intersection(s)

The meeting was then opened up to a general discussion.

The following notes summarize the main points of the discussion as initiated by Advisory Group members.

Discussion:

Brendan Kearney:

- Brendan asked for clarification about the western limit of the project area. The project limit is at the eastern approach to Congress Street

Nat Sheidley

- Nat supports the design opportunities particularly on the opportunity for wider sidewalks on the north side of State Street.
- He expressed a concern about the State Congress intersection with the new lane configuration: as a pedestrian it is difficult to tell if cars are going to take a hard left onto Congress Street or a shallower left onto Devonshire Street.
- He is interested in the flush street idea since it sends a strong message to drivers that this is a unique area.

Ruth Raphael:

- Ruth felt the design opportunities were moving in a good direction.
- She also liked the shared street idea.

Stephanie Upson:

- Stephanie like the protected intersection configuration at State / Surface Road.

Carolyn noted that the desire is to move the project forward and the need to find new ways to engage with the general public given the social distancing requirements. Some ideas include a video presentation coupled with an online survey, online meeting and social media outreach. The City is also planning to install a pilot on the State Street – it is a good time with traffic volumes down and the need for more space for pedestrians. This would be used to gather feedback from the public.

Ashley open the meeting to a discussion for these topics.

The following notes summarize the main points of the discussion as initiated by Advisory Group members.

Discussion:

Brendan Kearney:

- Brendan noted that there was a successful use of a narrated video presentation and online survey done for a project related to the Somerville Community Path. The taped video presentation and online survey were advertised through social media and the response was quite strong partially because people could view the presentation at a time that worked for them.
- Brendan supported a pilot for the street. He said that the City is developing a list of streets of critical concern for social distancing and State Street should be on it.

Nat Sheidley

- Nat felt it is important to do a pilot – it is not possible to observe social distancing on the existing sidewalks and it would be a good vehicle for gathering input.
- He offered to allow the use of the old State House for focus group discussions if/when it is possible regarding social distancing.

Ruth Raphael:

- Ruth felt that people are getting more used to going online for meetings and we may actually generate more participation using this format.
- She felt the pilot was a good idea particularly because it could be eased in while traffic is down.

Stephanie Upton:

- Stephanie also supported the idea of a pilot. Her concern was if it went up too soon we won't know how it would work in more normal traffic conditions. Zach said that he anticipated that the pilot would be up for several months to get a feel for operations as travel patterns start to normalize.

Ashley noted that the presentation would be made available to the Advisory Group, and members are welcome to send further comments/thoughts via email.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:30.