



To: Town of Needham Select Board
Mayor Ruthanne Fuller, City of Newton
From: Needham/Newton Community Way Working Group
Date: September 22, 2023
Re: Recommendations and Next Steps for the Community Way

Thank you for the opportunity to serve on the Working Group for the Community Way Feasibility Study. As a companion to the final report of the Working Group, we offer the following recommendations to the Needham Select Board and to Mayor Fuller.

The abandoned railroad corridor has substantial potential for transportation and recreation and traverses a region that is subject to substantial redevelopment. With that noted, the Working Group acknowledges that the improvement of the corridor is a long-term interest and that both communities have other more immediate strategic priorities for transportation capital investments and operations.

The Working Group recommendations are as follows:

1. Of the two options assessed, a bicycle/pedestrian facility using the former railroad right of way is our recommended option. A bike/ped path is a proven concept that is readily achievable and has the most public support. The transit shuttle option is not supported by a demonstrated need, poses significant operational, logistical, and financial challenges, and has shown limited public support.
2. To promote the Community Way project, the Town of Needham, with Newton's support, should:
 - a. The Town of Needham, with Newton's support, should consider requesting that the MBTA (as both the regional transit provider and the primary property owner) be asked to assert or declaim its interest in improved higher-tier transit over the right of way and/or along the Needham Street/Highland Avenue corridor.
 - b. Initiate a process with MassDOT to assess its support for a shared use path, and request that MassDOT (as owner of the right of way over I-95) participate as a proponent for that portion of the project that is on its property.
3. Once a preferred outcome has been determined, Needham and Newton should establish an advisory committee with a clear charge to help advance the Community Way project and ensure visibility and public participation.

The final Feasibility Study report will be posted as of September 22, 2023 at NeedhamMA.gov/communityway and NewtonMA.gov/communityway, along with a link to a public comment form that will be active for 30 days. The report and public feedback will be available as resources to inform decision making and to advance future work.

The Working Group thanks GPI for its work, the MA Legislature for supporting the study, and all members of the public in both communities who have participated in this process.

Thank you for this opportunity to be of service.