



# Public Safety & Transportation Committee Report

## City of Newton In City Council

**Wednesday, March 20, 2019**

Present: Councilors Ciccone (Chair), Cote, Downs, Grossman, Lipof, Auchincloss and Markiewicz

Absent: Councilor Noel

City Staff: Barney Heath, Director of Planning and Development; Nicole Freedman, Director of Transportation Planning; Lily Canan Reynolds, Community Engagement Manager and Isaac Prizant, Traffic Engineer

**#59-19 Discussion on Washington Street Vision Plan's Impact on Transportation**

COUNCILORS GROSSMAN AND AUCHINCLOSS requesting a discussion with the Principle Group and city representatives from Planning & Development, Transportation Planning, and Transportation Operations regarding the "Hello Washington Street" vision for transportation on the corridor, specifically in regards to multi-modal mobility and the prospect of reducing lanes from four to three.

**ACTION: Public Safety & Transportation Committee No Action Necessary 6-0, Cote not voting**

**NOTE:** Barney Heath, Director of Planning and Development; Nicole Freedman, Director of Transportation Planning and Lily Canan Reynolds, Community Engagement Manager joined the Committee for discussion on this item.

Mr. Heath stated that in 2015 the MPO study recommended alternatives for the Washington Street corridor design. Tonight, alternatives will be presented of reducing lanes from four to three. The goal is for the City to be receive partial or full funding for this project from the state and federal government. The City must be at a 25% design level to get in the queue to receive this funding. Mr. Heath then stated that the Mayor is committed to move forward with this project. Two million dollars has been set aside to start with hiring the design transportation firm, concepts, alternative analysis to reach a 25% design stage.

Ms. Freedman described and explained in detail the PowerPoint presentation, attached to this report. This project is to create the loss of the village feeling, if you build it, they will come! Ms. Freedman stated that the public provided the following input for consideration including vibrant village centers, thriving local businesses, places to gather, meet and sit. Safe and convenient crossings, safe bicycling and manageable traffic. Washington Street is a wide right of way, a four-lane road with a parallel highway and commuter rail.

The 4 to 3 lane conversion provides an increase in safety, increase in pedestrian, bike and transit facilities, and increase in livability and an increase in property values/economic development.

The City envisions the following in a 4 to 3 lane conversion. Daily vehicle counts between 13,800 to 18,000 vehicles on the 3-lane road with a median. There would not be a dedicated bus lane. Five-year crash data proves that there have been 434 crashes, 37 pedestrian/bike crashes and 5 annual bike/pedestrian crashes.

Committee members questions and concerns:

Questions:

Are there alternatives if bike lanes are not installed? Ms. Freedman answered that information would be available when the full conceptual design is complete. The proposed includes a 5-foot protected bike lane on each side with a 2-foot buffer on each side, 7 feet is dedicated on each side for bike lanes. If bike lanes are not desired it could be a total of 14 foot for a one-way bike lane or for a wider sidewalk.

Does Washington Street or Watertown Street have more traffic? Ms. Freedman answered that a full traffic analysis will be completed.

Is it possible to enable angle parking? Ms. Freedman answered that the full traffic analysis will review this this.

It was stated that Council members received documentation from Mr. Bruce showing various road diets that did not go well. Why did these road diets fail? Ms. Freedman answered that she would review the material in more detail.

Has the Newton Police and Fire Departments expressed their opinions on the possible road diet? Mr. Heath answered no, not until the next phase when conversations will include traffic flows.

Is it possible to dig out under Washington Street? Ms. Freedman answered that this could be reviewed.

Has the Transportation Department and Inspectional Services discussed the possibility of going from 4-lanes to 3-lanes perhaps being aware that units cannot be built. Ms. Reynolds answered that special permits often require traffic studies and the impacts.

Concerns:

It is important to have accurate traffic studies completed.

It is important that traffic not be diverted through neighborhoods.

People need to be educated on a three-lane road.

Washington Street has the majority of crashes in the City. Safety is necessary! It is important to be able to walk and bike safely on Washington Street. Speeders belong on the Mass Turn Pike.

It is important to bring pedestrians and bikers to the City to benefit the businesses.

It is necessary to test traffic speed with a 3-road lane determining if drivers do slow down. Mr. Heath stated that drivers will be more aware of a 3-road lane.

Chair Ciccone opened the discussion to members of the public who were present. Residents expressed their concerns and suggestions.

#### Concerns:

When the MPO did their study, they looked at the corridor calculating 26,000 vehicles at Jewett Street. Since the MPO study, the Sunrise Development Project found that an increase of approximately 8% on the average daily trips on Washington Street between 2014 and 2017. During peak hours, traffic increased 25%. Waltham and Watertown are using Newton road connections. Perhaps the numbers have risen.

Average daily traffic counts do not matter. What matters is peak travel times.

Suggesting using the commuter trail as an alternative to reach the opposite side of the City, is not practical.

Washington Street provides parking for every business. If parking is eliminated, Washington Street will become another Needham Street.

It is concerning to consider using funding to install bike lanes, remove parking and slowing traffic on Washington Street.

The streets abutting Washington Street and Washington Street should be the route students are walking but safety is necessary.

Washington Street is not safe for vehicles, pedestrians and bicyclists. It is impossible to cross Washington Street with the four-lanes.

Bus transportation on Washington Street is necessary. Express buses are expensive.

#### Suggestions:

It is important to take the FHA advice if traffic volume is over 20,000 vehicles on road diets that did not go well.

It may be necessary to install a traffic signal at the location of Trader Joe's. Safety is necessary.

There are other alternatives to calm traffic.

Bus stop conditions on Washington Street are very poor.

Bus infrastructure must be improved providing better access for wheelchairs and strollers.

It is important to provide safe and comfortable waiting booths for bus passengers.

Request the MBTA bus service run later into the evening.

Commonwealth Avenue should be used for bicycling, not Washington Street.

Many bicyclists have reached out requesting bike lanes be installed on Washington Street.

Please consider the definition of accessibility rather than walkability.

The Planning Department should consider this project on the entire Washington Street corridor.

Council members thanked Ms. Freedman for her presentation.

Without further discussion, Councilor Auchincloss made a motion for no action necessary. Council members agreed 6-0, Councilor Cote not voting.

At approximately 8:45 p.m. the Committee adjourned.

**Respectfully submitted,**

**Allan Ciccone, Jr. Chair**

# Washington Street Transportation Vision

PS&T Docket #59-19

March 20, 2019

Planning Department





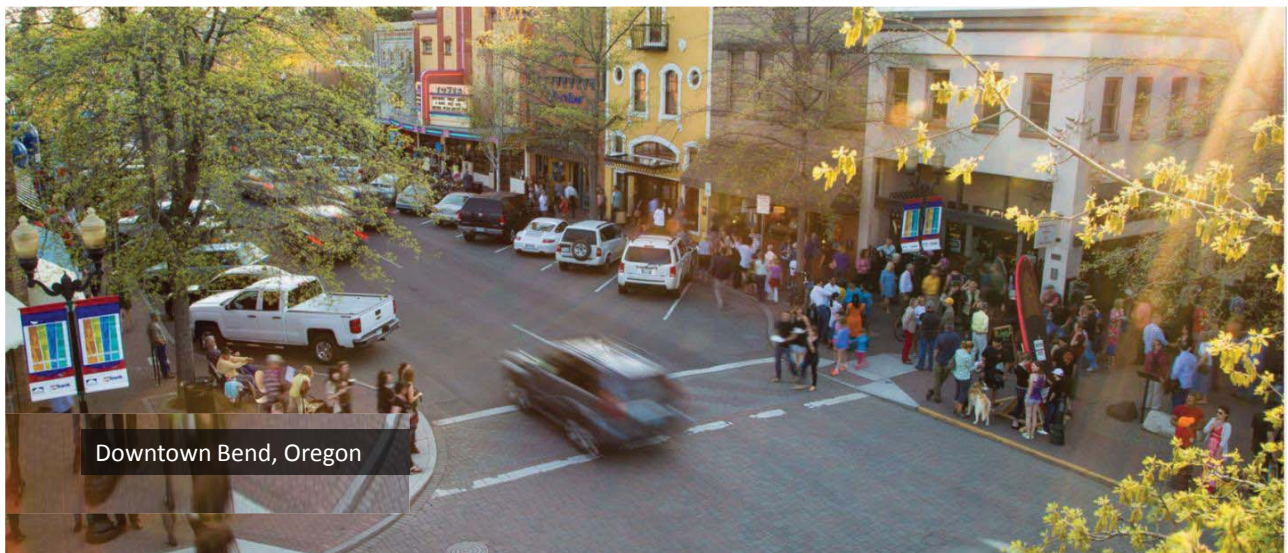
If you Build It  
They Will Come...



Design the Future  
You Want...

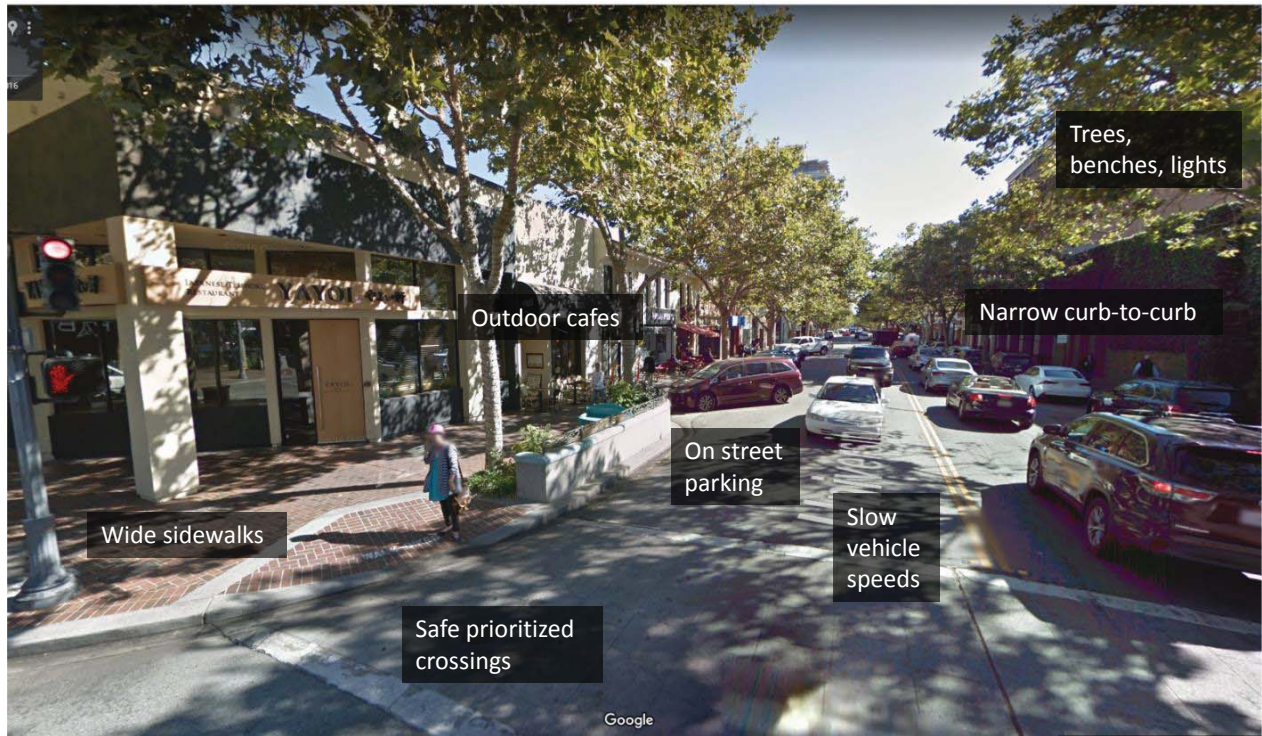


"New" Bend, .7 miles away



Downtown Bend, Oregon

# Supportive Design Elements

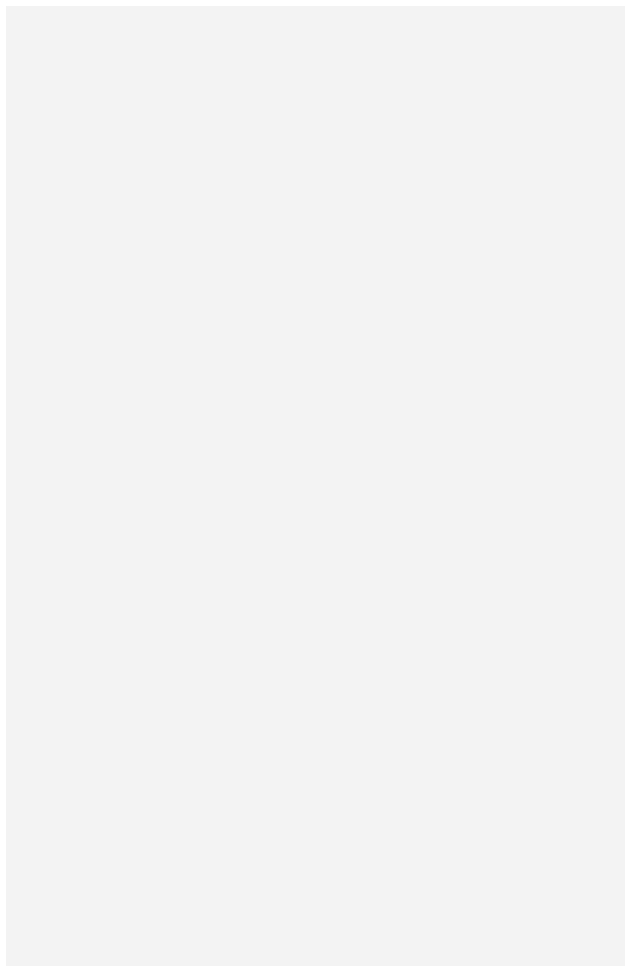
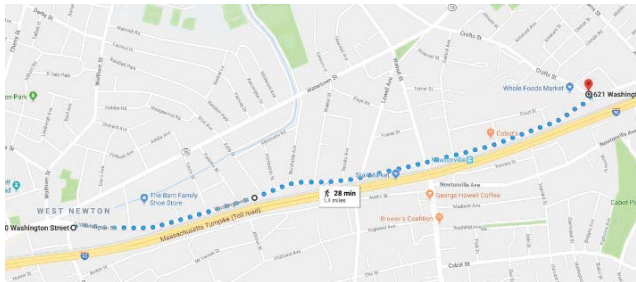


# Non-Supportive Design Elements

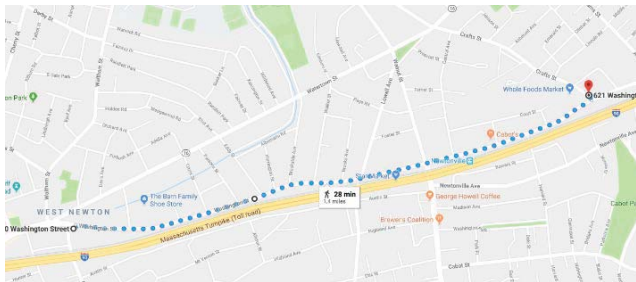




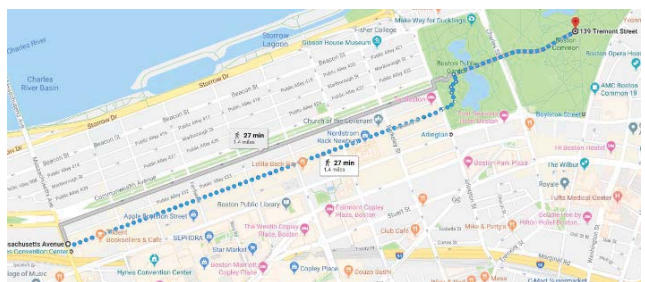
Washington Street  
West Newton to Crafts Street  
1.4. miles



Washington Street  
West Newton to Crafts Street  
1.4. miles



Newbury St  
Mass Ave to Boston Common  
1.4. miles



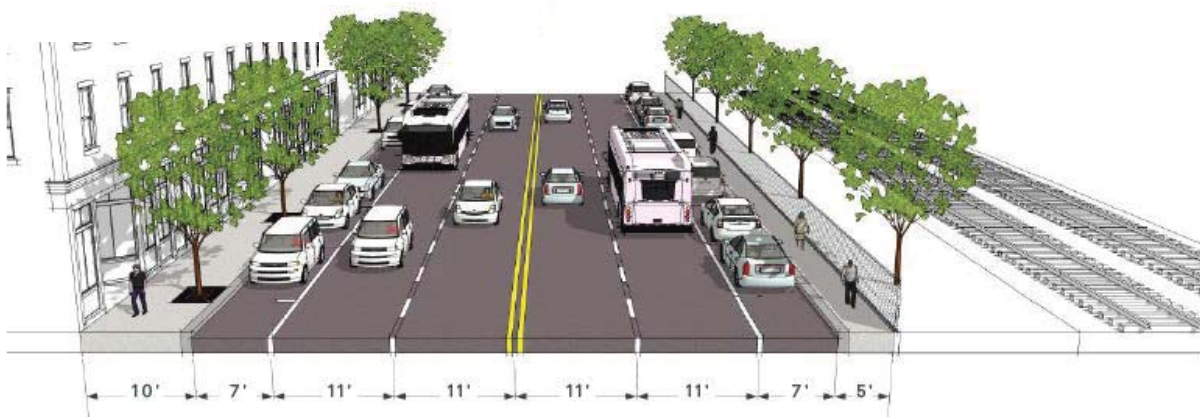


## Public Input

- Vibrant village centers
- Thriving local businesses
- Places to gather, meet, sit
- Safe, convenient crossings
- Safe bicycling
- Manageable traffic

## Unparalleled Opportunity

- Wide ROW
- Four Lane Road
- Parallel highway
- Parallel commuter rail



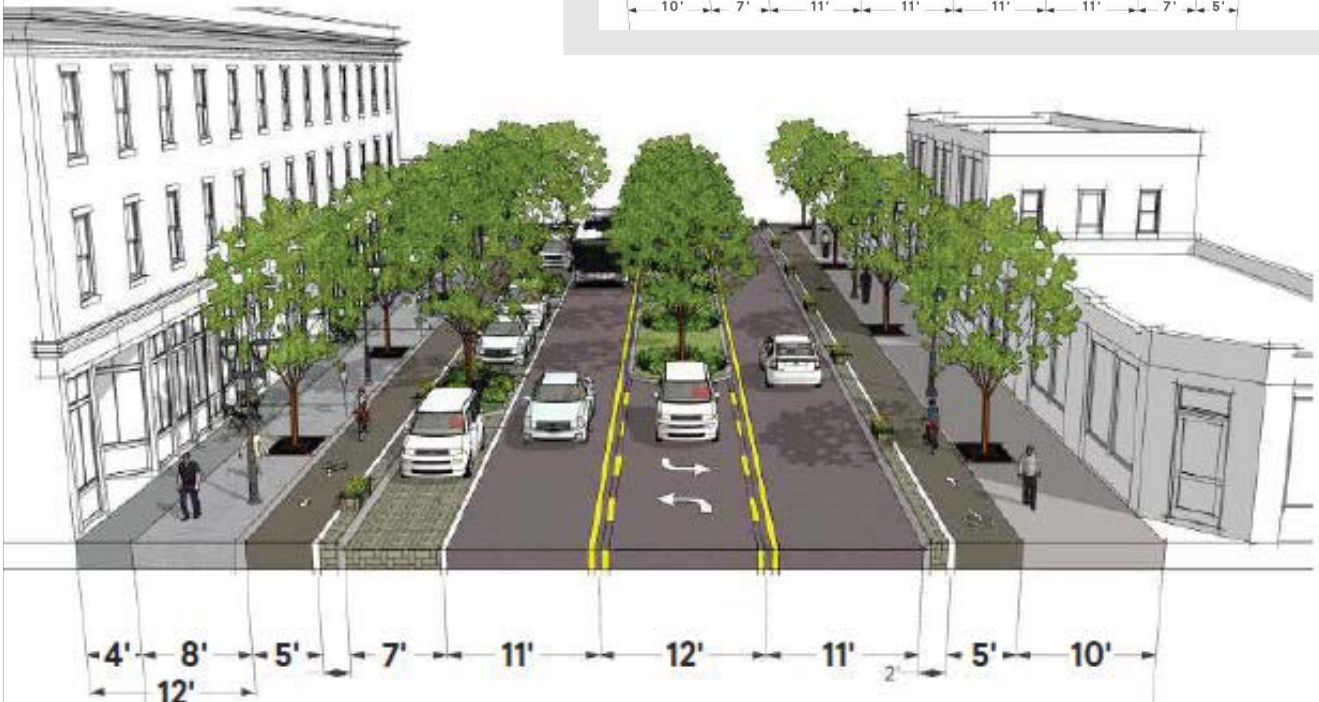
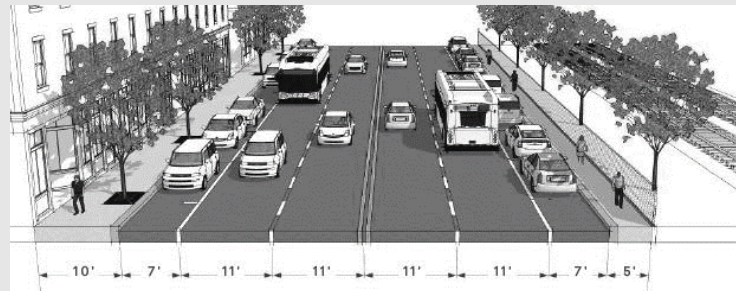
# 4: 3 Lane Conversion

- Maintains traffic flow (up to 20-26,000 ADT)
- ↑ Safety (up to 50% crash reduction)
- ↑ Ped, Bike, Transit Facilities
- ↑ Livability
- ↑ Property Values/Economic Dev

- FHWA, Road Diet Manual



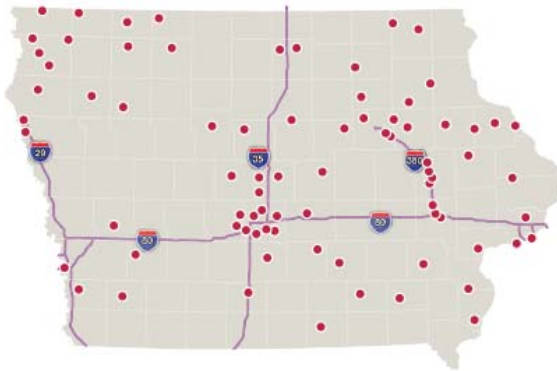
# 4: 3 Lane Conversion



Iowa? Yes, Iowa

Supersized, multilane roadways are fast-moving, unattractive and often impossible to cross. Learn how the streets near you can slim down, spruce up and become safer for all users

— AARP Road Diet Fact Sheet



And the AARP too!

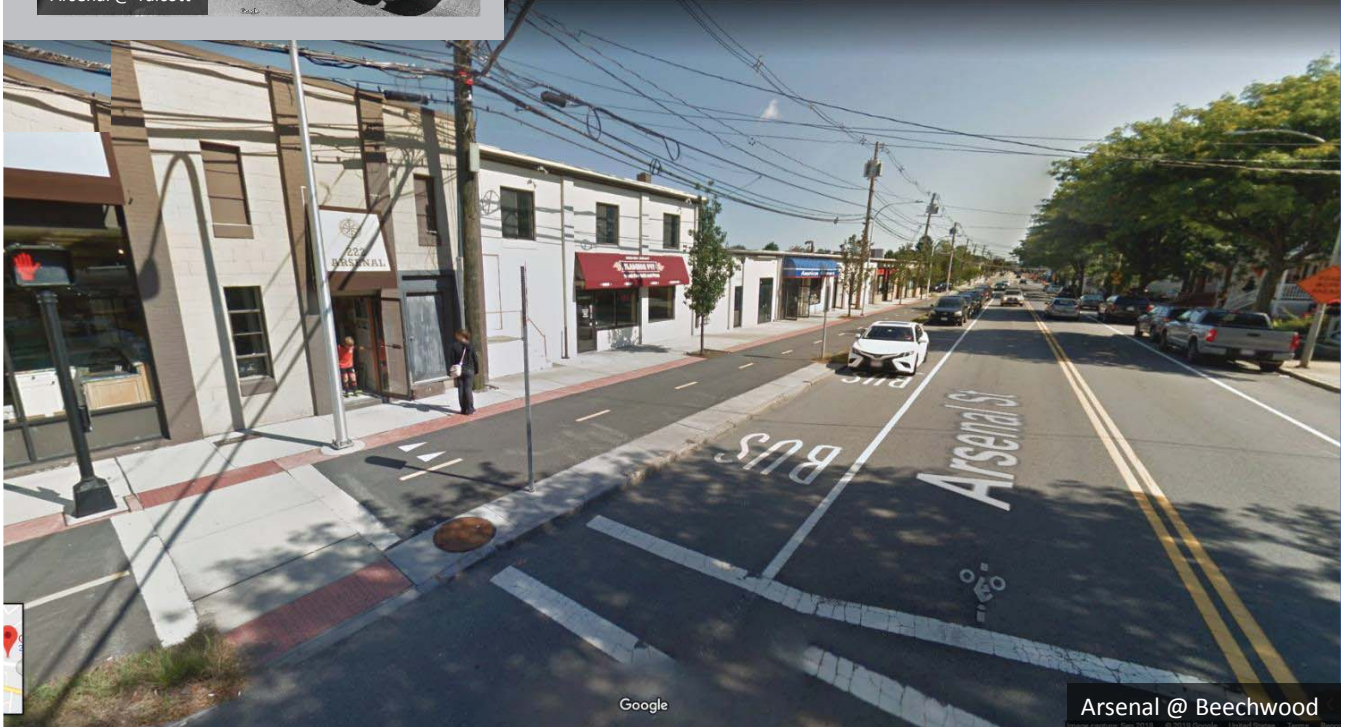


North St, Indianapolis, IN





# Arsenal Street, Watertown



# Main Street, Peabody, MA



Nonantum Rd, Newton



Nonantum Rd, Newton

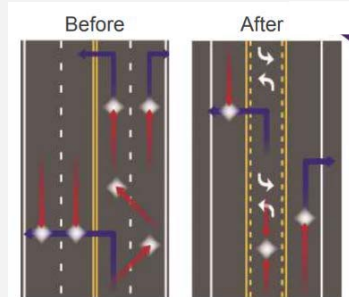
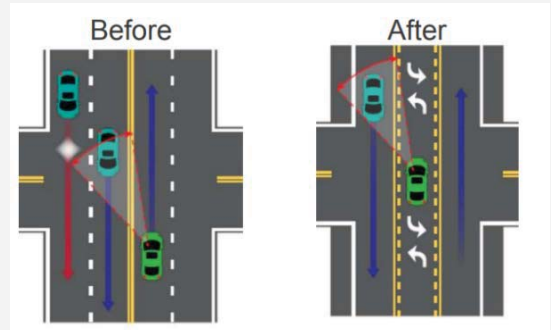
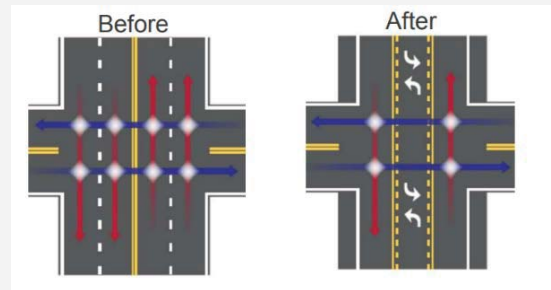
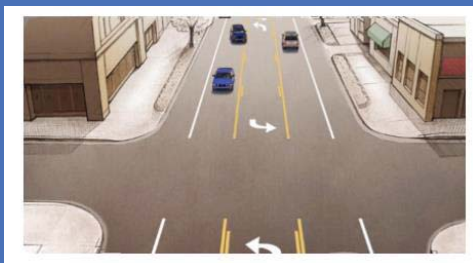




## Safety & Traffic Benefits

- Midblock
- Intersections
- Turning

Source: (right) FHWA Road Diet Presentation, 6/14/16; below Iowa DOT



# Commonwealth Ave

- 14,000-15,500 daily vehicles
- 1 lane. Turn lanes as needed

*Counts from various sources, 2010-2017, taken just east of College, Lowell and Lexington*



## Washington St (envisioned)

- Daily vehicles : 13,800-18,000
- 3 lane road. Median as appropriate

*Traffic volumes from Washington St Vision Plan, West of Cross Street to Harvard Street.*

## Washington Street 5-Year Crash Data

- 434 crashes
- 37 bike/ped crashes
- 5 annual bike/ped crashes

*Source: 2017-2021 MassDOT Crash Data*



# Myth Busters - Traffic

## MYTH: TRAFFIC WILL BACK UP

**False.** Studies have consistently shown that, for roads with less than 20,000 vehicles per day, 4- to 3-lane conversions will not worsen congestion. In fact, operations and safety improve on a 3-lane road because left turns are shifted into the center turn lane, allowing traffic to flow more freely in the thru lanes.

## MYTH: DRIVERS WILL BE DIVERTED FROM THE AREA

**False.** For the majority of 4- to 3-lane conversions, traffic volumes remain about the same through the corridor. In addition, 3-lane roads are generally more efficient than 4-lane roads because vehicles no longer need to stop in the thru lane to make left turns.

Source: <https://iowadot.gov/traffic/4-to-3-Lane-Conversion/4-to-3-lane-conversion-myths>

# Myth Busters - Other

## MYTH: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT WILL BE STIFLED

**False.** Converting to a 3-lane road can positively impact property values and businesses. When converting a 4-lane road to a 3-lane road, additional features can be added in the unused space, such as parking and/or bicycle lanes. These features can improve livability and transform the corridor into one people want to drive on versus drive through. Additional parking can provide a benefit to businesses and the center left turn lane improves access.

## MYTH: EMERGENCY RESPONSE TIMES WILL INCREASE

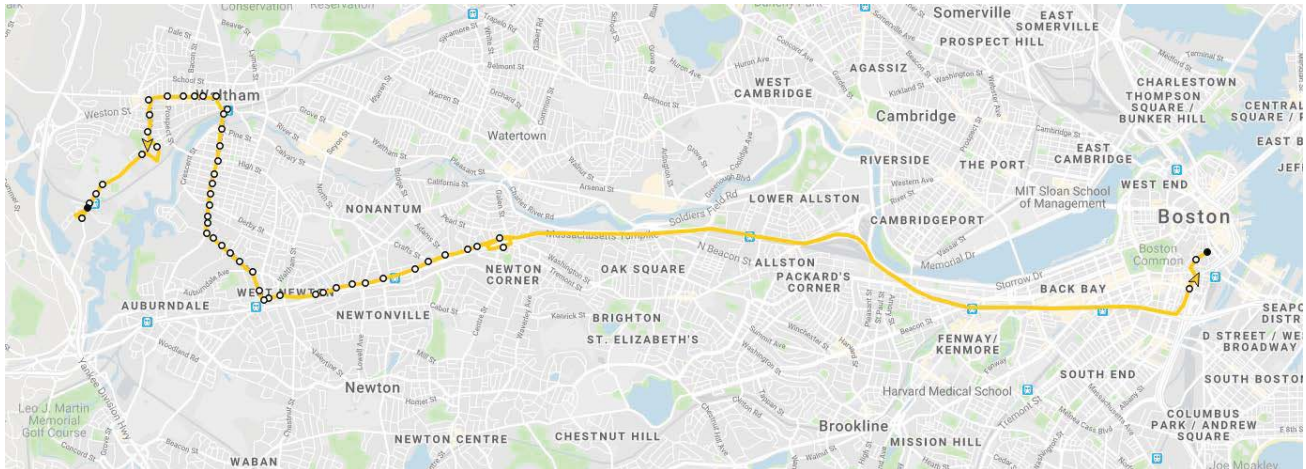
**False.** Contrary to beliefs, a 4- to 3-lane conversion does not increase emergency response times. In fact, response times usually improve because emergency vehicles can utilize the center turn lane when responding to an incident. This avoids bottlenecks that can occur on 4-lane roads when drivers in the middle lanes try to move over for the emergency vehicle, but can't.

Source: <https://iowadot.gov/traffic/4-to-3-Lane-Conversion/4-to-3-lane-conversion-myths>



# Dedicated Bus Lanes?

- Pickup for express buses 553,554
- Commuter Rail Vision
- Better Bus infrastructure (TSP, AFC 2.0, stop spacing)



## Process & Timeline

### Almost Complete

- ✓ CTPS Roadway Analysis and Study 2015
- ✓ Washington Street Vision Plan 2019

Hello  
Washington  
Street!

### Next Steps

- Conceptual Design, \$2M 2020
    - Traffic Study
    - Survey
    - Alternatives Analysis
  - 25% Design 2021
    - Functional Design Report
    - Apply, MassDOT TIP \$
  - Final Design & Construction TBD
- ↑  
New  
Public  
Process  
↓

The Electric Avenue road diet in Lewistown, Pa., was **opposed by 95 percent** of residents when it was first proposed;

after completion, nearly **95 percent of residents are supportive** of the changes

*-AARP, Road Diet Fact Sheet*

Thank you

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