



Public Safety & Transportation Committee Report

City of Newton

In City Council

Wednesday, May 20, 2020

Remote Participation:

Present: Councilors Auchincloss (Chair), Downs, Ciccone, Malakie, Grossman, Bowman and Markiewicz

Absent: Councilor Lipof

City Staff: Nicole Freedman, Director of Transportation Planning; Jason Sobel, Director of Transportation; Chief MacDonald, Captain Anastasia, Newton Police Department; Jonathan Yeo, Chief Operating Officer and Maura O'Keefe, Assistant City Solicitor

Referred to Public Safety & Transportation and Finance Committees

#260-20

Authorization to expend a MassDOT grant in the amount of \$80,000

HER HONOR THE MAYOR requesting authorization to accept and expend an eighty thousand dollar (\$80,000) grant from the MassDOT's Workforce Transportation Program with twenty thousand dollars (\$20,000) in match funding to expand the Bluebikes system.

Action:

Public Safety & Transportation Approved 6-0-1, Councilor Malakie abstaining

Note:

Nicole Freedman, Director of Transportation Planning joined the Committee for discussion on this item.

Ms. Freedman stated that if this item is approved, the City will receive an \$80,000 grant from MassDOT's Workforce Transportation Program with \$20,000 in match funding to expand the Bluebikes system. Total cost to the City of Newton is \$20,000. The City will contract with Motivate, the firm that manages the Bluebikes system in metro Boston. Currently Bluebikes are operating within the Brookline, Cambridge, Boston, Somerville and Everett areas. It is hopeful for Bluebikes to expand to Arlington, Chelsea, Newton and Watertown.

The Bike-Share system implementation program is in the amount of \$340,000. Each City would receive six small to medium size dock stations (approximately 43 Bluebikes at each location) that would be installed on public rights of way, in parking spaces and on large sidewalks. Bluebikes is a very useful contiguous system.

The full project cost for Newton is \$350,000, capital costs \$250,000 for two years and operating costs of \$100,000 for one year.

The contract would end after two years. The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) will review grants after two years and will look for future grant funding.

The City's Law Department is reviewing the contract. It is hopeful Bluebikes will be launched in Newton in summer or fall. Neighborhood associations, Ward Councilors, abutters, businesses and village associations will be notified on selected locations. Ideal locations include areas where there is the most pedestrian traffic in village centers.

Chair Auchincloss asked Ms. Freedman to share the contract with this Committee once it is reviewed. Ms. Freedman agreed.

Committee members questions.

Questions:

- Do the Bluebikes have electric assist mechanisms? Ms. Freedman answered no, they are pedal bikes. She then said that Boston, Cambridge, and Brookline also use pedal bikes.
- What is the size of a station dock? Ms. Freedman answered approximately two parking spaces.
- Do the Bluebikes have to be returned to the station docks? Ms. Freedman answered yes, if the Bluebikes are not returned to their designated station the rider is significantly charged.
- Are you aware of theft issues? Ms. Freedman answered that there has never been a reported theft in the US, except for Baltimore. She then stated that Newton would not be responsible of any thefts. The rider last using the bike is charged. She does not anticipate thefts happening in Newton.
- How are Bluebikes recycled? Ms. Freedman answered that Bluebikes are constantly being overhauled. The life expectancy for a bike frame is approximately five years.
- Please describe the ideal layout where stations would be placed. Ms. Freedman answered that station dock locations are unknown at this time; station density will not be the same as in Boston. Station docks will be placed approximately 1/3 mile between each station.
- What would happen to the station docks if they are not utilized? Ms. Freedman answered that station docks will be installed at preferred and safe locations. The cost to relocate a station dock is approximately \$800 to \$2,000 each.
- What if a rider tries to return to a station dock and that station is occupied?
- Will station docks be monitored?
- Is there a way for the City to place advertisements on station docks to recoup a portion of the \$20,000 cost? Ms. Freedman stated that she made her point very clear that advertising or sponsorships were not allowed at this time.
- Are there more bike slots than Bluebikes at one station? Ms. Freedman answered yes, but did not know the ratio for Newton. It may be similar to 1.8 slots per bike as it is in Boston.
- If businesses do not desire station docks in their location can they notify you? Ms. Freedman answered yes.

A Committee member stated that if Newton cannot afford to continue this service after two years, it is still advantageous to have the Bluebikes for two years. Ms. Freedman said that the Bluebike program may look differently in two years.

It was stated that allowing station docks into Newton is a great program. The Committee wants to encourage the Administration to think creatively on keeping the program at the end of the term by perhaps allowing sponsorships, advertisements or grants.

Without further discussion, Councilor Markiewicz made a motion to accept and expend this grant. Committee members agreed 6-0-1, Councilor Malakie abstaining.

Referred to Public Safety & Transportation and Finance Committees

#261-20 Accept six Bike Share Stations from MetroFutures Inc.

HER HONOR THE MAYOR requesting authorization to accept six bike share stations worth approximately two hundred twenty-four thousand two hundred fifty-seven dollars (\$224,257) in conjunction with the expansion of the Bluebikes system.

Action: Public Safety & Transportation Approved 6-0-1, Councilor Malakie abstaining

Note: Nicole Freedman, Director of Transportation Planning joined the Committee for discussion on this item.

Ms. Freedman stated that the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) has contracted with the City to accept six bike share stations from MetroFutures, Inc. If this item is approved, Newton would not have to do a thing, MAPC would be 100% responsible. At the end of the two-year contract, MAPC would purchase the stations in the amount of \$1.00 from the City.

A Committee member asked if the contract had any liability? Ms. Freedman answered that the City's Law Department is reviewing the contract.

Without further discussion, Councilor Downs made a motion to accept six bike share stations. Committee members agreed 6-0-1, Councilor Malakie abstaining.

#248-20 Request to allow legal two-way bicycle travel on a section of Comm. Ave. Carriage Lane

COUNCILORS DOWNS, AUCHINCLOSS, BOWMAN, KELLEY, LAREDO, MARKIEWICZ, NORTON, WRIGHT, DANBERG, GREENBERG, KRINTZMAN, LIPOF AND GROSSMAN requesting a discussion with the administration on allowing for legal two-way bicycle travel on the Commonwealth Avenue Carriage Lane, between Woodbine Street and Mt. Alvernia Road. (Wards 2, 3, 4 & 7)

Action: Public Safety & Transportation No Action Necessary 7-0

Note: Jason Sobel, Director of Transportation; Chief MacDonald, Captain Anastasia, Newton Police Department and Jonathan Yeo, Chief Operating Officer joined the Committee for discussion on this item.

Mr. Sobel stated that this is a discussion item to allow for legal two-way bicycle travel on Commonwealth Avenue Carriage Lane between Woodbine Street and Mt. Alvernia Road. This location is the entire length of Commonwealth Avenue except in Auburndale, where the Carriage Lane ends and to the east of Mt. Alvernia Road where there is no exit point on to the Carriage Lane.

Mr. Sobel stated that the goal is to improve safety for those interested in walking, running and biking heading in the east bound direction. He then stated for short-term safety measures the Carriage Lane could be striped with pavement markings and signs could be installed at critical intersections to help improve safety. There are many types of intersections and crossing locations on the Carriage Lane including unsignalized intersections, signalized intersections, gaps in the Carriage Lane and other intersections. Signage would be a short-term safety measure. It is not a great solution to have bicyclists to step off their bikes to use the pedestrian signal, but it is the best way to implement short-term safety measures. Moving forward, long-term safety measures for the Carriage Lane must be made safer. Infrastructure, construction projects and redesigns could make the situation better and safer.

Councilor Downs stated that she supports this item and that a similar item was discussed in this Committee in November 2019. She then said that tonight, Mr. Sobel is only providing a status update report. It is her intent to docket an item for Traffic Council's consideration.

Councilor Downs then stated that it will be difficult for the City to implement legal two-way bicycle travel on the Carriage Lane, if in fact it is illegal to travel in the east bound direction. Mr. Sobel agreed.

Mr. Yeo stated that the Administration is having discussions with the City's Law Department on how the City would be able to legally allow two-way bicycle travel on the Carriage Lane. Challenges and a state law exist. He then stated that the Police Department has concerns on how the department could enforce legal two-way bicycle travel. The Administration is working on issues and concerns with the Police Department and City's Law Department. It would be necessary to docket an item for Traffic Council's consideration to make any changes official in the Traffic and Parking Regulations (TPR). Mr. Sobel stated that Massachusetts communities have made this request through their Traffic Council body to change the official TPR.

Councilors concerns, suggestions and questions.

Concerns:

- It is necessary to utilize both directions of the Carriage Lane for biking, running, walking, etc. as Newton connects east bound travel directions from Natick to Boston.

- All will be safer, if made safer.
- Intersections should be redesigned to improve safety.
- This docket item request is long overdue, as it would provide value and benefit providing safe bike connectivity.
- Intersections have the most issues when biking on the Carriage Lane. Each intersection is different. It is necessary to make the Carriage Lane safer for bikers and pedestrians. Pavement markings are necessary at intersections and minimal pavement markings are necessary between intersections.

Suggestions:

- Please install 2-way bike route signs in every intersection. Mr. Sobel answered not every street from the south bound direction into the Carriage Lane will have these types of signs. The focus will be on the south bound direction to Commonwealth Avenue.

Questions:

- Please describe road designs, road markings and types of signs that could be implemented making drivers aware of pedestrians and bicyclists at the location of Irving Street. Mr. Sobel stated that angle-parking is allowed on the north side east of Irving Street. There are three to four parallel parking spaces (approximately 20 feet of space) on the south side of the Carriage Lane. Between the angled parking spaces and parallel parking spaces probably would be striped with contraflow bike markings with arrows closer to the parallel parking spaces allowing better back up visibility for vehicles.
- What is the education process to notify bicyclists, pedestrians and drivers? Mr. Sobel answered that signage and pavement marking treatments would be consistent. Some intersections may have additional striping in high conflict areas. Green pavement markings are standard markings for locations in high visibility areas. Additional warning signs would be installed warning bicyclists, pedestrians and drivers to look both ways, this would remind drivers that bicyclists and pedestrians are coming from both directions.
- Will drivers stop at south bound direction to Commonwealth Avenue? Mr. Sobel answered that it is necessary for a driver to stop at a "T" intersection.
- How can bicyclists and pedestrians be encouraged to stay to the right side of the Carriage Lane. Will there be intermittent road markings installed? Mr. Sobel answered that intermittent markings was discussed for east bound bikers. Every roadway user will need to look before proceeding.

Mr. Sobel stated that pavement markings would be conducted on the south side of the Carriage Lane, not the entire length on the median side. Travel on the east bound direction would be on the median side. Parking is allowed on the north side of the Carriage Lane (residents side) therefore, parking would not be removed.

Chief MacDonald stated that he heard of this docket request this week. He has concerns but will reserve commenting until he has had the opportunity to be better educated.

Captain Anastasia stated that he has concerns. The biggest concern is safety. He is working with the Administration and City's Law Department on how this request can be made legal. It is illegal for any person to travel in the wrong direction on the Carriage Lane.

Chair Auchincloss opened the discussion to members of the public who were present.

Phil Hanser, a resident provided a PowerPoint presentation, attached to this report. The PowerPoint suggests ideas on how to make eastbound travel on the Carriage Lane safer for cycling, running and walking. The PowerPoint includes suggestions to install signs including look both ways, bike route, stop signs, stop bars, end two-way signs, striping through the intersection at select locations, install signs to look both ways at 'T' intersections where signs currently say "right turn only" and in some areas install signs indicating 'except bikes' to make drivers aware and as ways to make the Carriage Lane safer. The PowerPoint is attached to this report.

Emails and correspondence received on this item are attached to this report.

Residents present agreed that the City should allow for legal two-way bicycle travel on the Commonwealth Avenue Carriage Lane, between Woodbine Street and Mt. Alvernia Road making the Carriage Lane safer for all. A resident asked if this item is approved, when would it be implemented?

Without further discussion, Councilor Downs stated that she would docket an item for Traffic Council's consideration, she then made a motion for no action necessary. Committee members agreed 7-0.

At approximately, 8:30 p.m., Councilor Downs made a motion to adjourn. Committee members agreed 7-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Jacob D. Auchincloss, Chair