

Christina Street Rail Bridge Feasibility Study

Community Engagement Meeting – 5/26/21 5pm-7pm

Meeting Notes

Presentation

Claire Rundelli, City of Newton: Opened up the zoom meeting with subtitle instructions and Q&A details.

Jennifer Steel, City of Newton: Began introductions to project team and community partners, overviewed the project background, provided detail on the survey results, and transitioned into the VHB portion of the presentation.

Shanta Keller, VHB: Ran through the project scope in more detail, reviewed existing bridge conditions with drone photography, and reviewed the project goals.

Kaleigh Rowe-Stutz, VHB: Provided more detail on the potential scenarios 1 , 2, and 3.

Scott Brunner, VHB: Provided more detail on the approaches to the bridge on both the Needham and Newton side, along with providing context to reasoning for certain choices (i.e., why the path needs to curve away from the ROW alignment as it approaches Christina Street).

Q&A

Chat Questions

- Suggestion: buy a historic bridge to replace this bridge, they are cheap.
<https://historicbridgefoundation.com/links/bridges/>
- What are railroad sidelines?
 - o Right-of-way limits for the old rail corridor.
- Is there a risk of the bridge collapsing due to the pile damage? Is it feasible to use the existing structure at all?
 - o Three piles are not intact, but the majority of the piles are. The remaining piles are sufficient for the current status of the bridge and it is unlikely to imminently collapse. Future use would require repairs of some degree, but are usable?
- What is required to repair the broken piles if the rehab option is chosen?
 - o Potentially, jackets for the broken piles that would be filled with concrete.
- Signage?
 - o Yes, signage will be a part of the final product.
- Cost and implications of all three options?
 - o Don't know yet. That is coming from our team, but we wanted to get public comment early.
- What funding sources is the City considering?
 - o Too soon to tell. We will (and are preliminarily) looking into several options, but because we do not have a project estimate at this time.
- Will the design accommodate sunseekers/fishers/photographers, as well as cyclists?
 - o We hope to do so. Safety is a big concern, but we would like to create a connection that serves all users.

- Will the final project include improving the sidewalks along Christina Street leading up to this location?
 - o There are two potential paths for getting the sidewalk improved along Christina Street approaching this location: (1) getting it into the final design/construction scope or (2) coordinating with the Public Works Department to get this location on their “sidewalk improvement” schedule so that the improvements coincide with work on the bridge. Either way, we will ensure that there are accessible connections to the bridge.
- Has there been any consideration of a barrier at Christina St to prevent cyclists from rolling into the street?
 - o Not yet, but it is definitely something that would be considered in a final design.
- Who owns the rail right of way?
 - o We don’t know for sure, but we are operating under the assumption that the MBTA owns this bridge. We did have secure an access license from MBTA for access, and further details regarding ownership are being looked into.
- Why was this spur constructed/what was the historic rail use in the area?
 - o We do not know exactly why this spur was constructed but it was likely developed to transport goods from the Needham area north and east, connecting with larger rail lines like the one that used to occupy what is now the Upper Falls Greenway.
- Doesn’t the general public have rights to the see the bridge developed and/or opened?
 - o Unfortunately not, as the bridge can only be accessed across private property.
- How would this connection meet the Upper Falls Greenway?
 - o We have high hopes that there will be a connection. The thought currently is to continue along the rail corridor (across privately owned property) to connect to the spur line next to the Stop and Shop. This will require working with several different private property owners to ensure access.
- Is there pollution in the sediment in the Charles River? Would removal of the piles disturb pollution there?
 - o Further study would be needed to ensure that no adverse impact is had on the Charles River by construction
- Consideration of put-in/take-out area below the bridge for users?
 - o We need to avoid conflict between pedestrians and bikes on the path and boats being carried to be launched. Along with steep slopes leading down to the river in this area, it is unlikely that this will be part of the final design for the area.
- What are Newton’s and Needham’s role in this project as they are not landowners at either end of the bridge?
 - o As municipalities, there are certain funding options that are available to us that may not be available to a private landowner (The Price Center), and as the community leaders, the municipalities may have more of a vested interest than a larger state organization (such as DCR) in this connection. The municipalities hope to facilitate community desires to see this bridge open and could be easement holders to ensure public access to the bridge in the long term.
- How can we (the public) help with next steps?
 - o Reach out to councilors and state reps to show support for the project. Send us your feedback.

Live Comment

Lucie Chansky – expressed concerns that the considerations/safety needs of the Price Center clients are not being really taken enough into consideration, that the snow machinery access/snow storage will be greatly disrupted by this path, and that the Price Center will not have room to expand if necessary. She also stated that it was disappointing to hear considerations of a grassy area at the end of the parking lot being dismissed.

- The project team responded that any design developed will have to receive full sign-off from the Price Center, as the connection construction would require the granting of an easement to the City. Safety and accessibility are the two highest priorities, and all relevant codes/standards will be met. The team reassured Ms. Chansky that all design graphics presented tonight are very rough concepts and that no final design has been determined and that we are continuing to work with the Price Center to ensure the needs of their facility (and the abutting daycare facility) are met.

Susan Spitz – expressed great support for the reopening of the bridge as a local recreational connection, explaining that it was well used by the neighborhood prior to the Price Center occupancy at 25-27 Christina Street. It also serves as a vital connection point (eruv) for the local Jewish communities.

George Kirby – commended the project team for considering this connection, which could greatly benefit both communities. He explained that this connection would be a welcome relief from the craziness of Needham Street and much safer option for bikers and pedestrians. He hopes that there can be a connection one day to the Upper Falls Greenway to provide off-road access for bikers/pedestrians along the length of Needham Street.

Jane Hanser – echoed prior statements about the desire for this connection to be open and its benefit as an off-road bike/ped connection for both communities. With new, and large, developments coming to the area, the need for these connections will be even greater. She asked if the Price Center had provided requirements that they need met in order for the bridge to open and asked for greater clarity on how the community can see the bridge opened up quickly.

- The project team responded briefly to clarify that the purpose of this meeting was to hear more about what the communities interests were regarding this connection, but that as the landowner, the Price Center does have final say over when/if the bridge might be opened to the public. The project team assured participants that the Price Center does have a great interest in seeing the bridge open and has been very willing to work with the team to get things open but that we are in a very early stage of project development .

Andreae Downs – asked how community members can help get this project moving forward and asked that staff send out a survey to get more comments.

- The project team responded that community members should reach out to their state congress representatives to show community support in hopes to receive state funding for the next steps of the project.

Ted Chapman – stated that the City’s commitment to this connection is great, and noted that this project is especially complex due to the ownership challenges and the fact that multiple agencies have jurisdiction. He reminded the community about the Pony Truss trail completion and opening ceremony on June 17th.

George Kirby – asked if there was an anticipated timeline for the next stages of the project once the scope of the grant is completed. He also mentioned that perhaps the continuation of this connection down the rail ROW east of Needham Street could be conditioned as part of the upcoming development by Northland.

- The project team cautioned that there is no exact timeline for the rest of the project steps, but that the communities desire to see this connection open has been heard and locating/securing funding for next steps is a high priority. There is hope that some American Rescue Act funds following the COVID-19 pandemic may be funneled towards this project, especially with the amount of community support.

Jane Hanser – repeated her desire for this connection and thanked the City for kicking off this project. She stated that her preferred scenario is a new bridge in the existing location.

Lucie Chansky – repeated her concerns about the safety of the Price Center’s clientele and maintenance workers accessing the parking lot area to the east of where the bridge connection would be made. She noted that proposed landscaping along the sides of the pathway may create conflicts.

Jan Hoffman – brought up the recent experience with Iron Horse, contractor for the Upper Falls Greenway who abandoned the project and left a mess) and expressed her concern about this project moving through to completion without someone at City Hall going to bat for it.

Brittany Schwartz – a previous user of the connection before it was closed, echoed previous statements about hoping this connection is opened soon in a safe and accessible way.