

Update to Mass Ave Corridor FAQ's
11-01-10

Note: There are two links on the Town's webpage showing the plan. These views may be expanded so you can zoom in and scroll to see detail of any block of the Massachusetts Avenue Corridor Plan. The Plan can be viewed at arlingtonma.gov/massave.

Why does the Mass Ave Corridor Plan have three travel lanes and two five foot wide bike lanes?

Bicycles, vehicles, and pedestrians already use Massachusetts Avenue for travel. The plan takes an unorganized roadway and organizes use for all travelers whether on wheels or on foot. In addition to dedicated turning lanes, the plan has one vehicle lane westbound and two eastbound except between Pond Lane and Wyman Terrace, where the plan has one eastbound and one westbound lane. This arrangement of lanes is based on traffic counts projected through 2028.

The overwhelming majority of residents drive today, but that is changing. MassDOT's Highway Manual instructs Towns to accommodate bicyclists, pedestrians and transit users to encourage non-vehicle trips as a means to decrease congestion. Since the 1950's, public policy has been to make it easier to drive, but now we can no longer build our way out of traffic jams. State transportation policy now leans toward encouraging people to drive less, when possible, in order to better use our current resources. This is not just happening in Arlington. It is part of the redesign of Trapelo Road in Belmont, and even the Longfellow Bridge in Boston.

With the Minuteman Bikeway nearby, will cyclists leave the Minuteman Bikeway to cycle on Mass Ave in East Arlington if there are bike lanes?

As was illustrated by the Town's consultant at a meeting of the Mass Ave Review Committee in July 2010, the Minuteman Bikepath and Mass Ave diverge in Arlington center. At the Cambridge line, they are about ½ mile apart. One leads to Alewife T-Station, or connects to Somerville, the other leads to Cambridge.

There is no reason to assume that scores of cyclists will be added to Mass Ave. simply because the Minuteman Bikeway is nearby. Cycling on roadway bike lanes is different than on a bike path where vehicles are prohibited. Route choice depends in large part on destination; the routes of Mass Ave and the Bikeway diverge.

Are four vehicle lanes, including shared bicycle/vehicle lanes possible on Mass Ave?

No. In order to meet the state's design guidelines on lane width, four vehicle lanes and "Share the Road" lanes for bicycles and vehicles- would not fit in the curb-to-curb roadway of Mass Ave. Additionally, existing sidewalk width would

have to be narrowed, in direct conflict with the pedestrian safety goals of the project. Even if it were desirable, narrowing the sidewalks to accommodate four vehicle lanes with shared lanes would be cost prohibitive because all hydrants, utility poles, street lights, and traffic lights at the sidewalk edge would have to be relocated, significantly increasing the cost and construction period. Studies show that four vehicle lanes are not needed based on volume projected twenty years on.

Why is a traffic light planned for Mass Ave at Bates Road?

A new traffic signal at the intersection of Mass Ave and Bates Road is called for in the Mass Ave Corridor Plan because traffic counts and crash data are high enough to qualify for installing a light for safety.

Is the Mass Ave Corridor Plan safe for pedestrians?

The Mass. Ave. plan improves safety for pedestrians in a number of ways.

- The Mass Ave Corridor Plan will add three new marked crosswalks near Bates Road, Harlow Street, and Milton Street, for a total of 15 crosswalks. The crosswalks at Harlow and Milton Streets serve bus stops that currently have no crosswalks. These crosswalks serve Hardy School families, who walk their children to school.
- Sidewalk extensions (aka bump-outs) will be installed at many crosswalks. Sidewalk extensions shorten the crossing distance for pedestrians, and provide better visibility of oncoming traffic, and are therefore safer. They also prevent cars from parking illegally too close to the intersection, which impairs visibility for pedestrians and for drivers entering Mass. Ave. from side streets.
- Fixed 11' travel lanes will decrease speeding on Mass. Ave., making crossing the Avenue safer.
- Eliminating a second lane in some places will make crossing the Avenue safer by eliminating the situation where one car stops for a pedestrian and a car passes the stopped car without seeing the pedestrian. A single lane provides a safer condition for pedestrians and better visibility for drivers.

Will the changes to Mass Ave have an impact on side streets?

The Town's consultant, Fay Spofford and Thorndike did additional counts beyond what is typically required by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) for a project like this. By organizing traffic on Mass Ave, the project is designed and engineered to improve flow at all intersections, reducing incentive for motorists to leave Mass Ave for narrower, one-way side streets. MassDOT has verbally acknowledged this improved flow as the Town's 25% design plans were being revised.

Will additional residents at the anticipated Brigham's and Symmes developments generate substantial traffic growth onto nearby Mass. Avenue?

The additional daily vehicle trips projected to come from the Symmes and Brigham's developments are accounted for in the capacity of the Mass Ave Corridor Project. The plan is designed to accommodate traffic projections through the year 2028, including the additional trips projected from the Symmes and Brigham's developments.

Are dedicated bike lanes required? Can Arlington use a "Share the Road" approach instead?

Bike lanes are the preferred alternative by both MassDOT Highway Division and the bike community. Bike lanes are the safest option because they provide predictability for drivers on where to find bikes, and also provide the most distance for bike riders from parked and moving cars. As stated above, there is insufficient width on Mass Ave to meet dimensional regulations for four vehicle lanes if two (one in each direction) must meet the required 15 feet for a Share the Road bicycle/vehicle lane.

Does a dedicated bike lane seem like a "One mile bike lane leading to nowhere"?

The fact that bike lanes aren't present yet at either end of this mile of Mass Ave is not a good reason to abandon the opportunity to add bike lanes now. Increasing safety and predictability for travelers on this important one-mile stretch is reason enough. This is supported by MassDOT guidelines, which favor dedicated bike lanes where there is sufficient width. Bicyclists are already on the road throughout Massachusetts and have a legal right to use the road instead of using a motorized vehicle. Bike lanes are added because they signal to all travelers where bikes are expected to travel. Future plans for Mass. Ave. into Arlington Center will consider including bike lanes. Bill Deignan, a Transportation official with the City of Cambridge, stated that the City of Cambridge will attempt to include bike lanes on any part of Massachusetts Avenue in Cambridge as it is upgraded or improved, including at the Arlington line.

Does the Plan negatively impact response time for emergency vehicles or snow removal operations?

No. Arlington Police and Fire chiefs have reviewed the Plan and indicated response times are preserved. The Chief of Police applauds the plan for implementing pedestrian safety measures that are long overdue. The Public Works director supports bump-outs in business districts and reports no issue with snow removal with the new Plan.