



Shared Use Path along University Ave.



Electric Car Station at Carby Municipal Offices

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TRANSPORTATION

BACKGROUND

Westwood enjoys excellent regional access by automobile, rail, and a bus line, but lacks an effective network of transportation within the town. Any travel across town involves driving on multiple roads using residential areas as cut throughs. The Town would benefit from alternative transportation methods such as shuttle buses along with pedestrian and bicycle improvements.

The distribution of places where people live, go to school, shop, and visit makes transportation dependents of a large share of the population either too young, too old, or otherwise unable to drive or safely walk or bike. Access to the high school, middle school, and senior center from Islington requires automobile travel along narrow, winding Clapboardtree Street or a circuitous route via East, Pine, Gay, and High Streets. Narrow roads without sidewalks or shoulders throughout the Town make biking or walking impractical and unsafe for vulnerable residents.

The only options for non-drivers, other than walking or bicycling, are ridesharing companies such as Uber and Lyft, taxicabs, limited van services from the Council on Aging by appointment only for seniors and disabled residents, MBTA bus 34E on Washington Street, THE RIDE program by the MBTA for those who qualify, and a few private shuttle buses for specific senior residences and businesses. There are no other bus lines, no taxi stands except at the Route 128 Railroad Station, and no public shuttle bus service.

The morning commute creates congestion for Westwood residents as commuters from outlying towns fill High Street, Washington Street, and Canton Street en route to Route 128. This makes it difficult for residents on side streets to enter the traffic, and for children to walk to school, pedestrians to cross, and bicycles to be safely used. Along these corridors, commuters utilize neighborhood side streets to bypass the congestion on the main streets, expanding and exacerbating the impacts of the through traffic. The evening commute is the same problem in reverse.

These conditions have worsened since the last revision of the comprehensive plan. Significant improvements to High and Washington Streets, including the addition of turn lanes and traffic signals, and traffic calming measures on some neighborhood streets, have been installed over past years to mitigate these problems. These improvements have avoided even greater problems, but they have not addressed the fundamental lack of a comprehensive system incorporating multiple modes of transportation.

In 2012-2014, the Town adopted mixed-use zoning allowing multi-unit dwellings to promote transit-oriented development at University Station and the two town centers. This combination of commercial, office, and living facilities located near public transportation reduces the need for automobile travel and encourages walking and bicycling.

At the 2015 Annual Town Meeting, Westwood adopted a Complete Streets Policy, which seeks to accommodate all road users by creating a transportation network that equitably meets the needs of drivers, pedestrians, bikers, transit riders, persons with disabilities, and people of all ages. This policy adoption led to certification of Westwood as a Complete Streets Community by the state, and to the Town receiving two funding grants from MassDOT for intersection improvements and accompanying sidewalks at North Street/High Street and Pond Street/High Street.

In considering approaches to improving mobility, it is important to recognize our long-established land use pattern and how fundamentally transportation has been structured around the automobile in Westwood. This is unlikely to change, and automobiles will remain the primary mode of transportation in and through the Town as long as there are few alternative modes of transportation. For example, the Islington MBTA commuter rail station is underutilized because of limited amount of service and lack of adequate parking and amenities. The Islington stop is not ideal for most commuters coming into Westwood since it is not near any major employment center and provides no access to the High Street side of town, being used mostly by nearby residents to commute to Boston and Xaverian Brothers High School students. The Route 128 station is used by many residents who overwhelmingly drive there in single occupancy vehicles.

Regional cooperation and collaborative effort with nearby communities could help improve Westwood's transportation problems. Several Westwood Planning Board members serve as representatives to the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), the Three Rivers Interlocal Council (TRIC), and the MBTA Advisory Board.

Biking and walking are currently a small share of the transportation mode for Westwood, but over time there has been growing interest in biking and walking, not only as a recreational pursuit, but as a general quality of life issue. In 2009, the Town created the Pedestrian and Bike Safety Committee as an advisory committee to the Planning Board to help make Westwood a more pedestrian and bicycle friendly community. Its purpose is to identifying needs and advocate for improvements related to walkability and pedestrian and bicycle safety. A Bicycle and Pedestrian Network Plan drafted by MAPC in consultation with the Committee was adopted by Town Meeting on May 5, 2014 and the Complete Streets Policy worked on and supported by the Committee was adopted the following year.

Interest in improving pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure remains high among Town residents. When asked to select improvements to the town, 60% of survey responders for this plan choose improving pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure. Additionally, 62% said they would like to see more sidewalks, 43% more walking trails, and 43% would like to see more bicycle paths. Over one third (36%) responding to the survey said that improving public transportation was a "very important" or "important" goal. Improving transportation safety, reducing reliance on the

automobile, and addressing traffic congestion were also major priorities discussed at the Community Visioning Session.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The Town's transportation goal is to develop a network of transportation options that allows all residents the opportunity to participate effectively in the community by having convenient access to community resources. This network should promote safety, minimize the negative effects of automobile traffic, and wherever possible promote an active and healthy lifestyle. The transportation network should connect all segments of our town.

The following objectives guide the policies and practices over the next decade:

Objective 1: Create a safe, equitable, and affordable transportation system for residents and visitors of all ages and abilities, unifying the Town using all modes of travel to provide economic, recreational, educational, and living opportunities consistent with the character of the Town.

Objective 2: Utilize the Town's Complete Streets Policy to guide the proposal, design, and implementation of all transportation projects. Progress should be measurable, specific, ongoing, and include evaluation and reporting.

Objective 3: Fund improvements through sources in addition to general tax revenue. Cost is always a limiting factor, but it cannot be the excuse for inaction. The Town should incorporate a methodical approach to identifying alternative funding mechanisms, pursuing grants, and exploring all possibilities for the funding needed to meet the goals.

STRATEGIC APPROACH

Transportation means more than simply allowing convenient travel from place to place. It can also be a component of a strong community. Over the past years, the conditions on High Street, Washington Street, and Canton Street have dominated planning and discussion, and significant improvements have been made. While these major roads must be maintained and any safety issues addressed, the Town must prioritize its transportation network using the Complete Streets Policy to utilize all modes available, with emphasis on biking, walking, and shuttle services. Incremental improvements should continue to be made to the transportation infrastructure. Biking and walking are not merely recreational activities to be accommodated, but components of a comprehensive approach to improving the quality of life in Westwood and the connectivity of the Town.

IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS

The following actions are not formerly prioritized but are organized under topic categories related to the above overarching goals and objectives, followed by an informal order of significance.

To support regional initiatives towards transportation improvement:

- T1. Continue leadership efforts under the Regional Working Group organized by the Neponset Valley Transportation Management Association and the Neponset River Regional Chamber to promote regional roadway, traffic, and public transportation improvements, and to strongly advocate for the completion of the MassDOT I-93/I-95 Interchange project.

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- T2. Seek consistent participation in the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) and the Three Rivers Interlocal Council (TRIC) by both Selectmen and Planning Board members.
- T3. Work through the MBTA Advisory Board and directly with MBTA management to advocate for improved bus service on both Route 1A and Route 109, better commuter rail service, late night rail service, improvements to the Islington Station, and regular maintenance of the Route 128 Station parking garage.

To develop a Complete Streets transportation network within the town:

- T4. Consistently follow and implement the Town's Complete Streets Policy. Use the Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Committee, the Police, and DPW to gather data as well as feedback from residents to create annual reports as specified in the Policy.
- T5. Use the Complete Streets map and project prioritization plan to implement an ongoing and continuous sidewalk development and replacement program, maintaining an inventory containing the condition and priority of all existing and missing sidewalks.
- T6. Provide an accessible and safe walking path or sidewalk on Gay Street to connect High Street and Washington Street.
- T7. Implement various items from the Town-meeting approved "Dedham and Westwood Bicycle and Pedestrian Network Plan" to create a contiguous network of bicycle lanes and paths.
- T8. Consider a bicycle-sharing system.
- T9. Pursue the planning and development of a contiguous trail network.
- T10. Pursue implementation of shuttle bus service along High Street/Pond Street to University Station and possibly Dedham Corp. Center/Legacy Place, according to a state study which found such a route to be viable.¹ Consider additional routes, including a cross-town connection between the High Street and Islington villages. Examine various modes for the shuttles such as fixed route, variable route, and on-demand.
- T11. Investigate the coordination of bus and shuttle services within the Town and with adjacent communities by working through MAPC, TRIC, and the Regional Working Group with emphasis on connecting the bus line along Route 1A with the jobs along Route 1.
- T12. Increase the number of bus stop shelters on existing and newly created routes.
- T13. Consider a cooperative program with ridesharing companies (Uber and Lyft) to provide reduced rate service for students, seniors, and the disabled.
- T14. Implement the recommendations of the recent Crosswalk Study conducted by the Town to identify safety concerns and ADA accessibility compliance at all pedestrian crossings.
- T15. Pursue funding for an adaptive signalization program on Route 109 to improve traffic flow.
- T16. Periodically review the traffic calming measures for Canton Street, Everett Street, and Forbes Road, as well as for High Rock Street, Dover Road, and Conant Road to determine their effectiveness and need for adjustments so that the desired levels of safety are achieved.

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- T17. Conduct a Town-wide traffic cut-through study to explore ways to deal with this problem.
- T18. Develop an App, dial 311, or other means for easily reporting potholes, signage, or other road related problems.
- T19. Encourage participation by all schools in programs like Safe Routes to School and actively work to decrease parental drop-off/pickup automobile trips, encourage walking and school bus use, and discourage high school students from driving to school.
- T20. Pursue additional streets and sections of streets for placing all utilities underground, as was done previously for sections of High Street, Washington Street, and University Avenue, and where possible, make use of the resulting space for sidewalks or walking paths.
- T21. Study the ability of the power grid to handle the future of more electric cars being recharged, and any improvements in capacity and equipment needed.
- T22. Use the Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Committee as a forum for residents to evaluate traffic problems, safety concerns, Complete Streets implementation, and plans for street redesign and new street development. Support the Committee by DPW, Police Department, and Traffic Engineering staff participation as needed.

To coordinate local transportation policy and action:

- T23. Assure that all development projects and subdivisions include pedestrian and bicycle accommodations by sidewalks, on-site or off-site paths or trails, or an equivalent contribution to the Town Sidewalk/Path Fund.
- T24. Establish consistent street design, reconstruction, repair, and street acceptance policies for the Select Board when acting as Road Commissioners, for DPW in its reconstruction and improvement programs, and for the Planning Board in its consideration of subdivision and special permit approvals.
- T25. Require appropriate mitigation measures for all developments that increase transportation demand.

To bring local zoning regulations into harmony with transportation objectives:

- T26. Review and update the Zoning Bylaw, Subdivision Rules and Regulations, and all other Planning Board regulations to be consistent with the Town's Complete Streets Policy and the latest environmental, stormwater, accessibility, and sustainability standards.
- T27. Continue to refine and implement context sensitive design standards that differentiate between village and industrial/commercial locations for such things as traveled way width, centerline radii, maximum grades, storm water system approaches, and pedestrian and bicycle accommodation.
- T28. Revise Subdivision Regulations to promote street and path connectivity. Decide whether cul-de-sacs should be more restricted or prohibited outright, or whether path connections should be required at their ends.
- T29. Continue to codify the use of Transportation Demand Management (TDM) measures for all projects under review and strongly encourage all existing commercial uses in Town to adopt TDM measures.

T30. Continue to review the parking regulations to consider:

- Maximum as well as minimum parking requirements, applying usual demand standards and overall limits.
- Reduced requirements for transit-oriented developments.
- Reduced requirements for developments containing affordable units.
- Parking space pricing unbundled from residential unit pricing.
- Transportation Demand Management rules, such as preferential parking locations for carpools.
- Electric recharging stations.
- Amount of bicycle parking.
- Pickup/Dropoff areas for shuttle buses, ride sharing, car sharing, and autonomous vehicles.

T31. Review and strengthen the traffic mitigation requirements of the Zoning Bylaw, by making those requirements applicable to more projects, not just those requiring a special permit.

T32. Simplify and expand the Planning Board's Earth Material Movement Environmental Impact Design Review by creating heavy truck routes for each section of Town, developing regulations for applying those routes, and referencing or including the relevant routes in all permits issued by the Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, and Building Department.

To use publicly funded projects for advancing the Town's mobility objectives:

T33. Assure that all public roadway projects include appropriate sidewalks, bike lanes, paths, grass and tree buffer strips between vehicles and pedestrians, and other traffic calming features.

T34. Consider traffic calming measures and devices where necessary to address speeding and safety issues.

T35. Apply the principle of the "5 E's" to achieve safety improvements, particularly for schools:

- Engineering – Design physical and operational infrastructure improvements that reduce speeds, prevent conflicts, and establish safer and accessible crossings, walkways, trails, and bikeways.
- Education – Teach about the broad range of transportation choices, offer training in bicycling and walking safety skills, and launch safety campaigns.
- Encouragement – Use events and activities to promote walking and bicycling.
- Enforcement – Partner with the police department to ensure that traffic laws are obeyed and utilize community enforcement such as crossing guards and student safety patrols.
- Evaluation – Monitor and review the results, from before to after.

To manage land use consistent with transportation objectives:

T36. Continue the implementation of the Village Zoning approach to encourage creative design and promote walking, bicycling, shared parking, and public transportation use for both the High Street and Islington villages in Land Use Element.

T37. Pursue mixed-use concepts for the Route 1 area in the Land Use Element and other parts of town to promote more compact development.

RESOURCES

Town of Westwood Policy on Complete Streets, Adopted by Select Board on September 29, 2015, Adopted by Town Meeting as Article 18 on November 9, 2015.

Regionwide Suburban Transit Opportunities Study - Phase II, Produced by Central Transportation Planning Staff for the Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization, December 2005.

Dedham and Westwood Bicycle and Pedestrian Network Plan, Prepared by MAPC under the Sustainable Communities program, April 2014.

Town Crosswalk Study and Evaluation, Prepared by BETA Group for the Department of Public Works.

Zoning Bylaw of the Town of Westwood, Revised through May 6, 2019.

Westwood Planning Board Subdivision Rules and Regulations, Revised through April 2015.

ENDNOTES

¹ Region wide Suburban Transit Opportunities Study - Phase II, by the Central Transportation Planning Staff for the Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization, December 2005.