

Town of Sharon



Transportation Advisory Board Meeting Minutes of 5/10/23

Transportation Advisory Board (TAB) Members

Linda Hager Co Chair	Terri Rawding
Neil Coplan	Sam Liao
David Fixler Co Chair	

Other Attendees

Kevin Davis, DPW Representative, Katherine Hughes, Linda and Jim McSherry, Kevin Weber, Tree Warden, Kiana Pierre-Louis, SB, Pasqualino Pannone, PB

Administration

- The meeting of the Transportation Advisory Board was called to order at 7:00 PM via ZOOM.
- Future scheduled meeting(s): 5/10

Minutes

- Minutes of 4/12 were deferred.

Survey and Parking Discussion

- Chair Fixler asked Mr. Davis to provide the results of the survey to the Board.
- Chair Hager said we need the survey data and parking counts.
- Mr. Davis said he will send a PDF and excel spreadsheet with all of the information needed to create the report. In summary he said, there were 768 participants to the survey. 60% do park at Sharon. 40% do not park at Sharon.
- Mr. Davis said that the majority of the 768 respondent replied early on.
- Ms. Hager asked if the train station building was owned by Sharon or the MBTA. Mr. Davis said it is owned by the MBTA. Ms. Hager said as people are complaining there is no shelter perhaps the town can get access and open the building. A police officer may be needed.

- Mr. Davis said most responses were received within the first 2 days and then the replies dwindled with 1-2 each day.
- Mr. Coplan asked if you can tell if people dropped off of survey and Mr. Davis said he will look at that.
- Mr. Fixler said we need to look at the data to determine where do we go with this and what type of recommendations to make.
- Next TAB meeting to be scheduled for 5/17/23.
- Kiana Pierre-Louis said she will see if the SB can extend the time for the TAB report from 5/31 and have TAB attend the 6/20 SB meeting instead.
- Mr. Liao said the results look good. It is useful information. It speaks to how the TAB carefully created the questions. Thank you Kevin for your good presentation. Looking at the graph most people commute 2 or more days.
- Mr. Fixler said Mr. Liao is correct; people commute 2-3 days. The community is not going back to the way it was.
- Ms. Hager said Covid is over. Should we look into recommendations like using quarterly spaces for daily spaces? We need to think of other options.
- Mr. Fixler said let's discuss this next week after the data is reviewed. Kevin, you are a great asset to the TAB.

E-bike Pad

- Mr. Fixler said at the last TAB meeting we received a letter from the residents regarding E-bikes. TAB did not have any prior knowledge of this. The SB put the topic on their agenda.
- Ms. Hager showed the train station layout to the TAB. She said a letter was also received from Eric Hooper (see below).

MEMORANDUM

TO: Sharon Transportation Advisory Board
 Sharon Select Board, Hanna Switekowski, Chair
 Fred Turkington, Town Administrator
 FROM: Eric R. Hooper, P.E., Superintendent of Public Works
 DATE: April 28, 2023

SUBJECT: Bike Rack Design Requirements

One of the repeatedly stressed goals of past Town master plans was to "identify opportunities to implement and expand the recommendations in MAPC's 2014 Lake Massapoag Bicycle Network Plan, to connect on-street bicycle infrastructure to open space and recreation, as well as to commercial and residential areas in order to reduce vehicle dependence".

With this goal in mind, the Department of Public Works applied for and was awarded a grant for \$73,340 through the Shared Streets and Spaces Grant Program to implement a "bike share system" to include 20 electric bikes assigned to one of two bases to be located at the commuter rail station and at the Community Center. The intent of the program was to provide bicycle access at strategic locations in Town that could be used for transportation to the main recreation and open spaces in town: Lake Massapoag, Borderlands State Park, Moose Hill Audubon Sanctuary, Trustees of the Reservations Moose Hill Farm as well as recreation/commercial sites at Crescent Ridge and Wards Berry Farm.

The program would not result in cost to the Recreation Department; the grant funded purchase of bicycles, spare batteries and spare GPS units. The DPW would be responsible for any base construction and other ancillary costs although \$7,030 remains within the Grant amount although the rental fee structure would offset some if not all of these costs.

The Sharon Community Center was chosen as a base location due to an existing parking lot and easy access to Veterans Memorial beach at Lake Massapoag and Borderland State Park. The commuter rail station was chosen due to the link to a different mode of public transportation and easy access to the lake, and commercial sites such as Wards Berry Farm, Crescent Ridge and Moose Hill.

I am well aware and sensitive to the fact that the traffic patterns and mixing of bicycles, pedestrians and vehicles near any commuter rail station present safety concerns, especially during rush hours. I was able to raise two children a half block from a commuter rail station on a cut-thru street in Needham. There is no bicycle/vehicle accident history at the entrance to the station on the Boston side, meaning the intersection is considered as safe as any other intersection in Town.

The entrance to and exit from the lot on the Providence side is to a numbered state highway with the approach from the westerly side having a 50' elevation change within 775' linear feet. The lot approach on the Boston side is to a side street that has a 40' elevation change in 850' between the entrance and the stop sign at the Chestnut Street/Walnut Street intersection. This means the steep hill to the station entrance is actually worse on the Providence side. The Sharon Police Department used to post an officer at the exit of the railroad station to direct traffic exiting the parking lot during rush hours but stopped this practice due to danger. The DPW installed a dedicated street light and flashing signs instead.

Until the Sharon Transportation Advisory Board presents a siting recommendation to the Select Board based on their analysis starting with Mr. Liao's identification of 10 alternative sites, the DPW will not locate any E-Bikes at the railroad station. In the meantime, the E-Bikes will be located at the Community Center and a proposed fall back location next to Town Hall, roughly 2200' from the rail station. Existing bike rack placement will also be put on hold pending the Sharon Select Board siting determination, however, these will have to be moved eventually.

Design Constraints/Considerations:

For safety reasons (wind load caused by AMTRAK and Acela trains) per MBTA/Keolis, the present bike racks must be moved from the present location on the station platform.

Three commuter bike racks with the attached specifications are required to meet the current regular maximum demand for bicycle parking. The required area for a single location is roughly 20' x 50' or 1000 square feet.

Two of the three racks must be located on the Boston side of the railroad parking lot. The majority of cyclists approach the lot from the Main Street side of Town. A minority approach from the north side of Town and use the jug handle entrance from Depot Street, the remainder come from the South Main Street side and enter the parking lot from the Chestnut Street entrance.

One of the three can be located on the Providence side. However, only one to two cyclists use this side of the lot on a regular basis.

A forth area (no rack is required - virtual only by GPS) will be used to accommodate the E-Bikes.

The majority of local destinations are on the Main Street side (Wards Berry Farm, Crescent Ridge Dairy, Lake Massapoag (Veterans Memorial Beach), Border Land State Park, the Community Center, Mann's Pond, the high school, the middle school, East, Cottage and Heights Elementary schools, Deborah Sampson playing fields, Gavins Pond playing fields). Only the Moose Hill Audubon Sanctuary and the Trustees of the Reservation property are located on the Providence side.

The rack location must be relatively flat. The rack location must be on Town controlled property or permission to use MBTA property or MassDOT Right of Way must be obtained from Keolis/MBTA or MassDOT. (A plot showing property ownership is attached) Bike/pedestrian/vehicle conflict situations must be minimized. This means that the bike pad should be isolated from vehicles and bike routing through the parking lot to reach rack areas should be minimized.

The elevation change between the island house and the Providence side entrance is approximately 50' in a linear distance of approximately 775'. The elevation change between the Chestnut Street entrance and the stop sign on Chestnut at the intersection of Chestnut Street and Walnut Street is approximately 40' in a linear distance of approximately 850'.

Design Assumptions:

Exiting from the parking lot onto a side street (Chestnut Street) is inherently safer than exiting on to a marked state highway (Route 27, Upland Road).

Traffic and drop-off flow patterns will be maintained to the extent possible, i.e., the drop-off lane next to the station building implemented by DPW Engineering staff will remain unimpaired. This means one alternative described at the April 25, 2023 Select Board meeting would have been rejected during site assessment as disrupting the agreed upon drop-off lane.

Site Assessment:

Given the design constraints and assumptions outlined above, two possible options that are not located in travel ways of the existing lot, designated drop off areas or in the lots themselves, are possible. One on the Providence side; the grassy area on the Providence side between the former auto body shop and the daily spaces is on Town property that is relatively flat and approximately 1500 sf in total. However, the main electric feed is housed on telephone poles in the area. The other, on the Boston side, is located in the wooded area adjacent to the main entrance to the rail station off Chestnut Street.

The option on the Providence side has two significant problems:

1. Entrance to and exit from the lot is to a numbered state highway with the approach from the westerly side having a 50' elevation change within 775' linear feet (whereas the lot approach from Chestnut Street on the Boston side has a 40' elevation change in 850' between the entrance and the stop sign at the Chestnut Street/Walnut Street intersection), and
2. The area is dominated by utility poles that hold the main electric feed to the Providence site platform. Other criteria, proximity to the majority of Town attractions and use patterns already established by bicycle commuters and the island being located in the middle of two travel ways also negatively influenced this option.

The option on the Boston side is located at the entrance of the parking lot, thereby minimizing bicycle/vehicle interaction and isolated from traffic by a vertical granite curb and a sidewalk, consequently is the preferred location. The other design considerations: being on the same side as the majority of the Town attractions, isolated from the parking lot and entrance and on the same side as the majority of the established use patterns of commuting bicyclists, positively influences this option.

I have been advised that the Sharon Transportation Advisory Board has offered to identify other potential locations, (the 10 locations stated by Mr. Liao mentioned previously), and discuss these options at their next meeting on May 10. It would be helpful to use the same criteria that was used by DPW in implementing pad siting for the grant and outlined in this memo so that the decision process can have a common foundation. DPW staff would be happy to meet with Sharon Transportation Advisory Board members to discuss explored site options prior to the meeting.

DPW will again contact the MBTA and Keolis to ask about whether they will reconsider granting permission for the bike racks to be placed on any MBTA-controlled property, and if so, where within the train station and parking area and identify what revenue ramifications would be involved. Even in the unlikely event that permission to locate bicycle parking on MBTA property was obtained, any loss in revenue would be at the Town's expense according to the current revenue sharing agreement.

The grant was awarded partially on the strength of proposing an E-Bike base at the railroad station allowing for an easy link involving two modes of transportation and the obvious and numerous tourist destinations in the Town of Sharon. However, in the event there is no consensus, the DPW will pull the plug on locating any E-Bikes at the railroad station. In the meantime, the E-Bikes will be located at the Community Center and a proposed fallback location next to Town Hall, roughly 2200' from the rail station. Existing bike rack placement also will be put on hold pending Sharon Select Board siting determination. However, these racks must be moved at some time.

- At the meeting, residents from the area spoke. Ms. Hager said the proposed spot is dangerous. Mr. Hooper she said argued this location was not a safety issue.
- Linda and Jim McSherry, residents, said they were disappointed and suggested using green space for a pilot program. They said the town should not put down any more asphalt. Ms. McSherry said the tree warden indicated more trees would be planted where they were removed. They reiterated that the current proposed spot is dangerous, within a congested area, and has a steep decline. Mr. McSherry suggested putting bikes on either side of the track. This he said is a good option for a pilot program. Its logical and safe.

- Mr. Fixler said in looking at the map, we are just brainstorming, trying to come up with other options.
- Ms. Pierre-Louis said need to consider people using bikes and if they could maneuver the slope and hill. People should be able to see it and access it. Thinks long term safety needs to be a conversation.
- Mr. Davis said wetland is of concern in some spots. Cannot encroach on wetlands.
- Ms. Hager said this could trigger an environmental review by MEPA based on proposed locations of pads.
- Ms. Pierre - Louis said she walked around the station and is not against having a conversation with the MBTA regarding placing the pad near the station.
- Resident Katherine Hughes said she wanted to hear from Superintendent Hooper.
- Mr. Davis said Mr. Hooper spoke to the SB and Ms. Hager and Mr. Liao brought the information to the meeting. Mr. Liao said he did not speak with Mr. Hooper outside of the meeting.
- Chair Fixler said the next step is determining what the SB wants.
- Chair Hager said there is a 9/16 cutoff for spending the grant for this project. The situation needs to be resolved if spending the money. She said Mr. Turkington asked that this be resolved prior to the summer.
- Ms. Pierre - Louis said the DPW needs time to get it done.
- Mr. Liao said a number of sites were identified this evening. He would like to see the DPW rank and the residents rank of locations to see if we can come to a consensus. If it is placed on an already paved space, then this can be worked on next week.
- Chair Fixler said if it's close to the station and visible then it can be placed anywhere if it's a flat area on the resident parking lot.
- Chair Hager said Phil Eng, new head of the MBTA is not communicating with outside people. In order to meet the deadline, we cannot consider MBTA property as it would take too long to negotiate.
- Mr. Fixler said this is a pilot program. How long will it take to put up?
- Mr. Davis said the DPW does not support placing the pad in the parking lot.
- Mr. Fixler said we are struggling as the grant is expiring. Put in a paved place and we can get it up and running quickly.
- Chair Hager said if you put it on pavement need to secure racks. Could it be located on parking spaces? Always can negotiate different places if ridership increases. It is a pilot program and may not take off.

- Mr. Davis clarified that the DPW has one recommendation, TAB needs one recommendation and the Roadway Commissioners (SB) make the decision.
- Ms. Pierre Louis said yes, Kevin is correct. She said she hopes this works. She stated Pat Pannone is on the call and can provide background on the grant.
- Pasqualino Pannone of 7 Robin Road is the Chair of the Planning Board and Chair of the Master Plan Implementation Committee. He said the E-bike idea stems from the Master Plan and how can we leverage the natural resource of Sharon like the lake, Ward's, Moose Hill, Crescent Ridge etc. The grant was available and we went after it. It is a pilot program and he is upset people think it might fail. We should give it our best effort. The use of the bikes may need advertising to teach of their existence. The Planning Board and Implementation Committee were not privy to the location chosen by the DPW. He suggested MBTA lots be avoided and find space on Town property that is convenient within the lot. It should be visible and safe as it will be combined with community member's bicycles as well. Make it convenient. Wayfinding needs to be clear, safe and attractive to people. Do not make it difficult.
- Mr. Liao asked if Peter, Kevin and Eric can come up with different areas and rank according to preference. He said he agrees with Mr. Pannone. He has no hesitation taking over parking spaces for bikes. The lot is half full. There is no loss of parking availability at this time.
- Chair Hager said we need to also locate proposed locations and present to Peter, Kevin and Eric. We need to define locations.

Train Station Stairs

- Mr. Davis said 10 companies were contacted and 1 quote was received for \$100,000 which is just for a temporary fix. They are still hoping for other quotes.

Adjournment

Ms. Hager moved to adjourn at 8:45 PM and Mr. Liao seconded the motion. The Board voted 5-0-0 in favor of adjournment.

Submitted:
 Rachelle Levitts
 Transportation Advisory Board Administrative Assistant