



City of Cambridge

Executive Department

LOUIS A. DePASQUALE
City Manager

March 7, 2022

To the Honorable, the City Council:

I am writing to provide you with an update on the status of our planned implementation of cycling safety improvements in Porter Square along Massachusetts Avenue between Beech Street and Roseland Street. City staff held a community meeting on this project on January 25 and will be holding another community meeting on March 15. Based on the feedback received since the January meeting, we will be presenting a draft plan later this month, which will still be subject to significant review, comment, and change. Because of the significant work that has been generated and will be further generated by that process, I am advised by the department heads involved in the project that the project will not be implemented by May 1st, but that we will continue to move as expeditiously as possible, and we are confident that the project will be implemented by the end of this construction season. We remain committed to moving this project forward expeditiously and to creating improved conditions for all users traveling through Porter Square.

The Cycling Safety Ordinance requires quick-build separated bicycle lanes to be installed in this segment of Mass Ave by May 1, 2022. After reviewing the current status of this project with key staff, they have advised me that they do not believe that it will be feasible to implement this project by that deadline, given a number of key factors:

- In the policy order response that was submitted to the City Council on January 31 on the topic of community engagement, we committed to providing the community with three engagement opportunities prior to project implementation. Given that we are only holding our second engagement opportunity during the middle of this month, we do not expect to be able to complete the level of meaningful engagement we have committed to while still meeting the original deadline. City staff therefore need additional time and for the schedule to be extended, which will also allow more time for local stakeholders to gain comfort with the planned changes and make any operational changes that might be necessary (e.g., changing the hours when deliveries occur). We also hope that this additional time will help to mitigate the adversarial nature of some of the recent discussions, which should be beneficial to both City staff and local stakeholders.



- To make these types of quick-build improvements as successful as possible, it is important to include as many mitigation elements as possible, including installing parking meters and loading zones on side streets, improving pedestrian crossings, and identifying other changes to traffic regulations. These mitigation elements would take additional time to develop, based on detailed conversations with businesses, residents, and other stakeholders, and cannot be considered fully within the limited time provided by the original deadline.
- One of the concerns that has been raised about prior quick-build projects is that the various changes were not implemented in the most desirable sequence, with impactful changes being implemented prior to the relevant mitigation elements being addressed. This situation was generally caused by schedule pressures that required certain project improvements to be prioritized for implementation, even if it did not result in the improvements being choreographed as tightly as possible. By allowing more time for the implementation of this project, we can ensure that the project improvements are installed in the most beneficial sequence.
- One of the most critical elements of project implementation is the installation of pavement markings that define the travel lanes for all users. This work will be done by contractors, and those contractors are generally not available until late April or early May of any given construction season at the earliest. Given ongoing issues around both workforce availability and supply chain constraints, particularly because of impacts due to the COVID-19 pandemic, contractor availability is likely to be even more constrained, leading to the likelihood for even further delays.

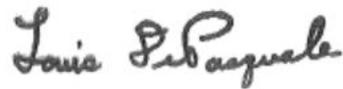
Based on all of these factors, we plan to move forward with a quick-build project to install separated bicycle lanes and other improvements in Porter Square as quickly as possible during this construction season, but staff have informed me that we will not be able to complete the installation by the original May 1 deadline. The delay will, however, allow for additional coordination with the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority regarding the overhead trackless trolley wires and for consideration of whether the proposed introduction of battery electric buses will create additional design flexibility in the short term.

When the Cycling Safety Ordinance was amended in 2020, we had noted that the complexity of the Porter Square area would make it very challenging to achieve the May 1, 2022 deadline. We recognize that the timeline was established in part due to the strong advocacy for further improvements in this location, and City staff have made a strong and committed effort to implement the project by that date. I assure the City Council that the extended schedule does not represent any lessening of the City's commitment to installing improved facilities for cyclists and all users in Porter Square or other locations in Cambridge.

Notwithstanding the schedule changes that will be required for this project, we remain fully committed to the Cycling Safety Ordinance and to all of the originally stated deadlines, although it is important to note that we are still evaluating whether we will need to take advantage of any of the options to seek extensions under the ordinance. The next major milestone will be reviewing the timeline for the segments of Massachusetts Avenue known collectively as the “MassAve4” with the City Council prior to May 1, 2022. We are on track to meet that milestone and expect to provide a recommended schedule to the City Council in early April to provide time for review prior to that deadline.

I look forward to continuing our work to make improvements for all those traveling in Cambridge.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Louis DePasquale". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Louis A. DePasquale
City Manager