

Inman Square Neighborhood Association--ISNA

Recommendation of the Intersection Committee to ISNA

This recommendation is the outcome of the Intersection Committee meeting 2/1/17. Present: Janet Slemenda, Kelli Foster, Jessie Saacke, Richard Krushnic, Mark Jensen, Susan Markowitz

We discussed the four traffic reconfiguration options that were presented at the public meeting January 24th, and discussed our overall concerns, questions, and thoughts on the proposals. We then examined criteria for optimizing the intersection configuration, then weighted the criteria. The group came up with 8 categories to assess each of the city's proposals: people, bicycles, cars, buses, pedestrian opportunities, trucks, fire station, and enhanced retail district. We assigned points to each category and to the criteria within each category. Everyone then ranked each of these categories according to how well each was addressed by the city's four proposals. Top possible score is 100. We will send you a copy of the ranking matrix as soon as it is revised.

Overall Concerns

We thought all options had problems with at least one **bus stop**, with the bus stopping in and blocking the traffic lane. If possible, we think it is important that all bus stops do not block traffic lanes. This problem arises because the dedicated bike lanes have to come from somewhere; in the current plans, traffic and/or parking and bus stop lanes are sacrificed to create the bike lanes. Some committee members asked if dedicated bike lanes are needed on every street, or at least weigh the value against parking spaces and bus stops. Others thought that bike lanes, at least on Cambridge Street and Hampshire Street, should have priority. Floating bus stops seem dangerous and take up space that needs to be concentrated along the retail edge for public use.

We thought **Springfield St. should remain two way**, because it is a vital conduit between Cambridge and Somerville, and it provides access to the municipal parking lot. Many people use it as a cutoff to avoid Prospect Street. If it becomes a one way street, Somerville residents are concerned about heavy traffic on adjoining narrow residential streets. We would like to find a way to keep the left turn option.

The organized voices of **Antrim St.** residents should be heard on the left-turn issue as well, especially since the current prohibition of left turns is prompting unsafe alternatives like U-turns on Cambridge beyond the intersection (at or near Fayette Street).

The following are some of the other items noted:

- Vehicles moving through the Square are a major concern whether they are passenger cars, trucks, or buses
- Provide appropriate right hand and left hand turns everywhere if it is at all possible
- Make sure changes enhance both pedestrian and commercial use of the square
- Retain as much parking as possible
- Provide protected bike lanes
- Sidewalks are generally wide enough and should not take away from bus pull-offs, parking or bike paths
- Provide ample bicycle parking

Bend Cambridge

The “Bend Cambridge” Option is rejected largely because it creates no appreciable open space contiguous to the restaurants and retail, and creates useless open space in front of Urgent Care.

Roundabout

The Roundabout (or Peanut) is partially rejected because the only open space it creates is in the middle of the street which is not easily accessible. The Committee also thought the Roundabout was deficient regarding bike and pedestrian safety. Our understanding is that bikes and pedestrians in bike and pedestrian crosswalks have the right of way vs cars, but we question how safe this is, since pedestrians often do not have the right of way at rotaries. It seems to us the intersection is better off with signals to ensure safety for everyone and simply relying on drivers to respect bike and pedestrian right of is not realistic. Persons with special needs, families with children in strollers, and elderly rely on required stops and starts. The absence of traffic lights is also a problem for the safe passage of fire trucks exiting and entering the station.

Bend Hampshire

The “Bend Hampshire” option is not preferred, primarily because it includes a busway between the Plaza and the restaurants. This unnecessarily diminishes the plaza and separates it from the restaurants and retail—defeating the purpose.

Bend Northside

“Bend Northside” was the preferred option of our committee. It creates ample open space for social gathering in front of Punjabi Dhaba and Moona and keeps Springfield as a two-way street. Pedestrian pathways, signalized intersections, and safety for bicyclists seem to be addressed. Question: If the buses are moved away from the Cambridge/Springfield Street corner going towards Harvard Square, does this hurt the commercial heart of the Square?

If possible, some people argue that in order to create a more vibrant square, ground floor retail with affordable housing above, should be built in the remnant of Vellucci Plaza left behind. They recommend that enough land be left to make this feasible. A new social gathering place in front of Punjabi Dhaba is not enough. The retail immediately surrounding this end of the intersection consists of two restaurants, the Cambridge St. convenience store and the Antrim St. pharmacy. The current non-retail buildings: Urgent Care, Fire House, architectural offices, Cambridge Savings Bank, Cambridge Health Alliance and NAVEO credit union contribute extremely little to activation of the square. With the recent replacement of Stellabella with architectural offices, the remaining retail is so thin and scattered that the relocated plaza alone will not succeed in activating the square. More retail connectivity is absolutely essential. The combination of the new social gathering space and the new retail will incentivize more retail to come in as property uses gradually turn over in the non-retail buildings.

