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# 1 INTRODUCTION

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This report, funded by the Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), is a conceptual plan for the Route 28 corridor centering in the city of Somerville. It is a guide to transportation concerns along it and how to address them. The plan is conceptual, to provide flexibility in its possible application, for two reasons. The first is that specific plans for the vast majority of the potentially developable areas in Somerville either have not yet been fully executed, are themselves in the early, conceptual stages, or are still quite undefined. The second is that there are important preexisting transportation projects in the area for which the planning is not yet complete: for example, it would have been premature for the present study to develop detailed plans for the vicinity of the I-93/Route 28 interchange, given that certain details of that project have not yet been determined.

East Somerville and other areas adjacent to or near Route 28 are the location of a great deal of existing and future residential, commercial, and industrial development that is important in the development of the Boston metropolitan region. Major pockets of existing and potential development include Assembly Square, Brick Bottom, Inner Belt, North Point, and Union Square, all adjacent to or near Route 28. Many of these sites are environmentally sensitive areas, such as the banks of the Mystic and Malden rivers, and several contain brownfields, prime candidates for cleanup and redevelopment for recreation and mixed land uses. Accessibility to/from and between these sites, including access to open space and connections to the Boston core, is very important for the development of these sites and the quality of life of residents along the Route 28 corridor.

Accessibility was the City of Somerville's foremost concern when its officials wrote to the MPO to request funding for this study. Other major concerns included safe bicycle and pedestrian connections, physical and aesthetic characteristics, and ensuring that development along the corridor will have positive impacts on residents' quality of life.

The study was performed under the guidance of the Route 28 Corridor Advisory Committee, whose members represented the state, regional, and local points of view on economic development, transportation, urban design and architecture, air quality, and aesthetics. This report does not represent the point of view of any one individual or entity from the committee.

The body of this report comprises the following chapters: Chapter 2 - Concerns of the Stakeholders; Chapter 3 - Socioeconomic Profile; Chapter 4 - Route 28 Origin-Destination Travel Patterns; Chapter 5 - Roadway and Public Transportation; Chapter 6 - Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation, and Open Space; Chapter 7 - Future Roadway and Public Transportation Projects; Chapter 8 - Urban Design Visions; Chapter 9 - Summary, Findings, and Discussion; and Chapter 10 - Toward a Route 28 Corridor Transportation Plan: An Emerging Vision. Included in the appendices are: existing traffic volume and crash data, information on developments and mitigation, Urban Ring information, a technical memorandum presenting an Assembly Square access analysis, Route 28 Advisory Committee meeting agendas, and the study's scope of work.

## **1.1 STUDY AREA AND BRIEF PROFILE OF ROUTE 28 CORRIDOR**

Route 28 (McGrath/O'Brien Highway) runs from the MPO region's northern boundary at North Reading to the city of Boston. The portion of the Route 28 corridor included in the present study is the segment from the Mystic River (between Medford and Somerville) to Museum Way (across from the Museum of Science) in Cambridge.

Route 28 is a heavily traveled roadway, which is reflected by its classification as "other freeway," a higher classification<sup>1</sup> than urban principal arterial, and provides both regional mobility and land access to neighborhoods adjacent to the roadway. Route 28 in the study area is owned by the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR).

Most of Route 28 in Somerville is congested during peak hours, and motorists are experiencing low speeds and delays. Two segments are particularly congested during the AM and PM peak hours: from Highland Avenue to Broadway, and from the Assembly Square entrance to Wellington Circle.

As reflected in its designation as "other freeway," Route 28 is a major commuter corridor carrying traffic from the north of the region to a multitude of destinations, including points in and through the city of Boston. It also serves as an alternative to I-93 when traffic on I-93 is backed up due to traffic incidents (see analysis in Chapter 4). The main connections between Route 28 and I-93 include Interchanges 29 (I-93 at Route 28) and 30 (I-93 at Route 38, Mystic Avenue). Average daily traffic (ADT) varies by segment between 40,000 and 65,000 vehicles.<sup>2</sup>

The corridor has been under considerable redevelopment in recent years, and additional projects are anticipated. Examples of recent, ongoing, and anticipated developments impacting Route 28 are: in Medford, Telecom City; in Somerville, the redevelopment of Assembly Square, the Stop and Shop supermarket at the old Somerville Lumber site, Internet Center at Inner Belt Road, and Twin City Plaza expansion; in Cambridge, North Point development near the Gilmore Bridge and a proposed hotel near Water Street.

Mitigation from these developments and other transportation improvements planned or under study include access and traffic operational improvements, a new Orange Line station at Assembly Square, intersection improvements at Pearl Street, improvements along Broadway, the Community Path (bicycle and pedestrian path), and others. Other ongoing and potential studies related to this corridor that are considered in this study include the MBTA's Urban Ring project, the Green Line extension to Medford Hillside and Union Square, and the relocation of Lechmere Station.

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<sup>1</sup> MassHighway classifies roadways as interstate, other freeway, urban principal arterial, urban minor arterial, urban collector, or local. The classifications reflect the character of the service the roadways are intended to provide. Classification is a tool in the effort to ensure that the roadway system adequately provides for mobility and land access.

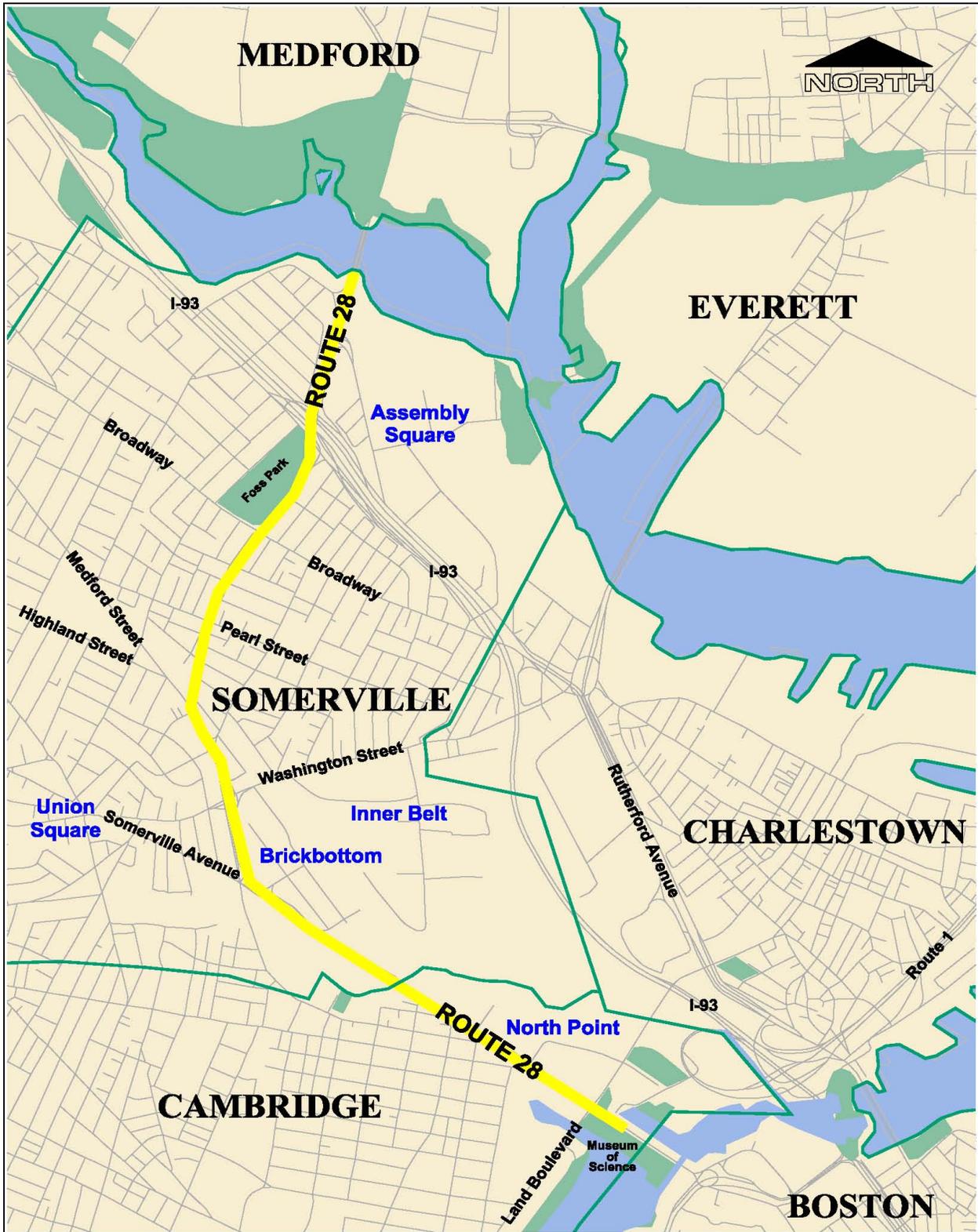
<sup>2</sup> MassHighway, *2001 Massachusetts Traffic Volumes*.

## 1.2 ROUTE 28 ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The study advisory committee was formed when the study began in mid-2002. Somerville, Medford, and Cambridge city planners, engineers, and community-development and economic-development officials, as well as DCR and MassHighway staff, were invited to participate. At the recommendation of city officials, appropriate state senators and representatives were notified of the study, as well as neighborhood, business, and advocacy groups. Eventually, a core group was formed that provided direction and feedback on the study's progress, findings and conclusions, and recommendations. Committee members provided important input related to key aspects of the study. These aspects included the location of observation points for the origin-destination travel survey, bicycle plan information, development and transportation project updates, the visions provided for the urban design workshop, the public meeting related to concerns for the corridor, and eventually, the findings, conclusions, and recommendations. The committee met eleven times, mostly in the City of Somerville planning offices.

The following individuals guided the study, either as part of their work or on a volunteer basis:

| <i>Name</i>          | <i>Affiliation</i>                   |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Susan Clippinger     | City of Cambridge                    |
| Jeff Parenti         | City of Cambridge                    |
| Susanne Rasmussen    | City of Cambridge                    |
| Monica Lamboy        | City of Somerville                   |
| Sergiu Luchian, P.E. | City of Somerville                   |
| Rob May              | City of Somerville                   |
| Julia O'Brien        | DCR                                  |
| Ken Kirwin           | DCR                                  |
| Bhupesh Patel        | Design Tank                          |
| Barbara Brouard      | East Cambridge Planning Team         |
| Ellin Reisner        | East Somerville Neighbors for Change |
| Adriel Edwards       | EOTPW                                |
| Ethan Britland       | EOTPW                                |
| Jim Gallagher        | Metropolitan Area Planning Council   |
| Wig Zamore           | Mystic View Task Force               |
| David Jordon         | Senator Patricia D. Jehlen's office  |
| Stephen Mackey       | Somerville Chamber of Commerce       |
| Natasha Perez        | The Sturtevant Partnership           |
| Lisa Lepore, P.E.    | Formerly with City of Somerville     |
| Stephen Post         | Formerly with City of Somerville     |
| Jeff Levine          | Formerly with City of Somerville     |
| Tuck O'Brien         | Formerly with City of Somerville     |
| Ron Farrar           | Formerly with City of Somerville     |
| Bill Lyons           | Formerly with City of Somerville     |
| Todd Blake           | Formerly with City of Somerville     |



**FIGURE 1.1**  
**Route 28 Segment**  
**Studied**

*Toward a Route 28 Corridor  
 Transportation Plan:  
 An Emerging Vision*