
10 TOWARD A ROUTE 28 TRANSPORTATION PLAN: AN EMERGING VISION

Many initiatives are presently underway, most of them in their early stages that will contribute to redesigning and modernizing the Route 28 corridor, to making it a more pleasant and lively place to live, work, and play. Issues related to the rejuvenation of the corridor, not unlike in any other corridor, are complex and multifaceted, involve many players, and will span considerable time into the future. It will take strong leadership from the City of Somerville, considerable financial support from public and private sources, expert knowledge, and public support to coordinate the various components of the process.

In discussions with the Advisory Committee, with the public, and at the urban design workshop, two elements stood out as being critical for the successful redevelopment of the Route 28 corridor:

- Land use, zoning, urban design, and open space
- Transportation infrastructure

The text that follows makes mostly general recommendations in these areas to guide current and future public investment and private development projects along the corridor. In other words, the discussion in this section is meant to provide an overall picture of how the Advisory Committee views this corridor and how the various areas of focus relate to one another spatially and chronologically.

Following the format from the urban design workshop, this discussion is presented in four categories: general policy and strategy recommendations, segment 1 recommendations, segment 2 recommendations, and segment 3 recommendations. Figure 10.1 depicts the three segments of the study corridor.

10.1 POLICY AND STRATEGY RECOMMENDATIONS

Growth Management Policies To develop the Route 28 corridor in a responsible and sustainable way that protects neighborhoods and promotes economic development in evolving industrial areas, the City of Somerville must conduct careful planning, using strong growth-management policies. Policies are required to guide or enforce zoning and land use patterns, urban design standards and consistency, project review processes, protection and creation of open space, parking limits, transportation demand management, and traffic calming.

Phasing of Public Projects In long-range plans for the Route 28 corridor or nearby areas, the City should include short- or mid-range improvements that address immediate transportation concerns and provide a starting point for other, larger, long-term improvement projects. Often, when transportation concerns or problems are identified and solutions to them are developed, the



FIGURE 10.1
Segments of the
Study Corridor

solutions are embedded in large and expensive projects that are long-term. Short- and mid-range improvements should be implemented sooner, in areas that affect citizens every day, for example as bicyclists and pedestrians. These smaller-scale improvements can last through and past implementation of the long-range plan or can be grandfathered and rebuilt as part of the long-range plan. An example of an issue to which this concept can be applied is pedestrian and bicyclist access under the I-93 interchange, which is nonexistent, or unfriendly at best. It is the desire and recommendation of the Route 28 Advisory Committee that improvement of pedestrian and bicycle access under I-93 be carried out sooner than future I-93 ramp/local termini improvements.

Public Participation East Somerville residents are stakeholders in the planning and implementation of public and private projects along the Route 28 corridor. Their participation is very important and must be encouraged and respected, along with the participation of all other interested stakeholders.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan The City of Somerville, along with the City of Boston, should develop a vision toward a plan for a bicycle and pedestrian network. One component would seek to connect the Minuteman Bikeway, which ends at the MBTA's Alewife Station, to locations at the Charles River Basin. Another component would provide access along the Mystic River, through the communities of Cambridge, Somerville, and Charlestown. Already planned is Phase 1 of the Community Path between Cedar Street and Central Street in Somerville, which is programmed in the 2007, 2008, and 2009 components of the Transportation Improvement Program.

Neighborhood Integration Study Study how Route 28 inhibits neighborhood integration across it and how to promote vehicle, pedestrian, and bicycle movement in the many corridors that connect various activity centers and neighborhoods on either side of the corridor, such as Assembly Square, Sullivan Square, Union Square, Porter Square, and Harvard Square. An example of such a study is the one that will lead to the reconstruction of Somerville Avenue between Union Square and Porter Square.

Expand Scope of Rutherford Avenue Corridor Study The existing Rutherford Avenue study needs to be supplemented with a regional one that would examine local and regional impacts collectively in Charlestown and East Somerville. The Rutherford Avenue corridor, along with I-93 and Route 28, is one of the three main gateways into Boston from the north. Changes in any one of the three corridors would inevitably affect the other two. Therefore, East Somerville should be included in the planning process for improvements along Rutherford Avenue. A Regional study needs to be conducted to examine the impacts both locally and regionally on Charlestown and Somerville.

10.2 SEGMENT 1 RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is important that an Orange Line station at Assembly Square continue to be the focus of any plans for future large-scale development at Assembly Square.

- Ensure that development proponents at Assembly Square study and mitigate not only local traffic generated by the site, but also the impacts on regional traffic and transportation systems.
- Develop a staged improvement plan for the I-93/Route 28 interchange. Identify mid-range (3- to 8-year), smaller, individual projects for the interchange that can be implemented and are compatible with larger improvements to the interchange. This could include a phased implementation of a fully redesigned interchange and could bring about improvements more quickly. For the past 12 years, different interested parties have studied the interchange. Each study has indicated that major rebuilding is necessary and will require 10 to 15 years for implementation.

10.3 SEGMENT 2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- Ensure that Somerville’s urban design project for Broadway from Route 28 to Mystic Avenue is compatible with other Route 28 corridor projects. Also, consider whether the Broadway urban design features, such as improved pedestrian crossings and wider sidewalks, can be implemented along the Route 28 corridor or other adjacent corridors.
- Install a pedestrian crossing at the Route 28 and Blakeley Street intersection. This crossing would allow access to Foss Park and Stop and Shop. Currently, pedestrians have been crossing at this location by jumping the fence at Foss Park and crossing Route 28 without proper signal control, creating an unsafe crossing situation.

The proposed crossing would use the existing signal at Blakeley Street and its corresponding Route 28 median break. Access to Foss Park would be provided on the north side of the crossing. Additional pedestrian signal equipment would need to be installed, as well as curbs that provide accessibility.

- Although the Route 28 intersections at Medford Street, Pearl Street, and Broadway were recently reconstructed, some improvements could be implemented to make pedestrian travel easier and safer. Inclusion of “countdown” pedestrian signal heads would help alleviate pedestrians’ anxiety that they will be caught in the middle of Route 28.

A school crossing guard at Route 28 and Pearl Street is recommended during school hours to assist children and parents crossing Route 28 on their way to the Capuano Early Childhood Center.

10.4 SEGMENT 3 RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continue planning and implementation of the Community Path, along with improved bicycle and pedestrian accessibility to Assembly Square and in the I-93/Route 28 interchange area.

- Study the regional impacts of the redevelopment of the Inner Belt area. Since the area could be redeveloped into a site similar to North Point, local and regional access issues will need to be examined. This would include the study of transit options, site access from Route 28, and possible direct access from I-93 should be considered.
- The Route 28 Advisory Committee supports extending the Green Line to Union Square and Medford Hillside and recommends that the study of the extension continue and include the planned future development of Brickbottom and the Inner Belt area.
- The Route 28 viaduct section over Washington Street will eventually need rehabilitation or reconstruction. It has been suggested that an alternative is to remove the viaduct section and return Route 28 to an at-grade intersection with Washington Street. A 2008 bridge condition assessment by the Department of Conservation and Recreation designated its overall condition “fair,” with a rating of “5,” which indicates that repair or reconstruction is not required immediately. Some members of the Advisory Committee believe this assessment underestimates the deterioration of the viaduct.

The thinking of some members of the Advisory Committee, the City of Somerville, and many citizens is that when the viaduct deteriorates to the point that it needs reconstruction, it should be demolished and the roadway reconstructed at grade instead. This thinking is in line with the City’s urban design vision for the corridor and the conversion of the midsection of the study area highway into a boulevard. Citizens and the City are concerned that the elevated structure deters access, obstructs visibility and economic development, and is an obstacle to neighborhood integration, and that the ramp termini are dangerous for pedestrians.

If the City pursues the option to remove the viaduct section, a detailed traffic, land use, and access study is recommended. This study would need to not only examine the local operations of the traffic at Route 28 and Washington Street, but also include Somerville Avenue and examine regional traffic impacts and future development of the Inner Belt, Lower Brickbottom, and Union Square, including improved access to I-93 and Route 28, and connections to the Green Line extension.

- The MBTA, North Point developer, and all other relevant parties need to work cooperatively to redesign Lechmere Station to ensure that pedestrian access for East Cambridge residents and other commuters located to the west of Route 28 is maintained. Currently, a majority of the pedestrians accessing Lechmere Station do not need to cross Route 28. Moving the station to the east side of Route 28 will require that these pedestrians cross Route 28.

