PUBLIC WORKSHOP ON TRANSPORTATION

Purpose: To hold a public workshop with the purpose of better understanding transportation in Acton by inviting "resource people" to contribute their experience and expertise to help the Acton 2020 Committee gain perspective of the issues and ways of addressing them. The public was also invited to contribute to the discussion. The workshop was held on Saturday, Wednesday, March 9, 2011at 7:00 p.m. at Acton's Town Hall.

Process: In order to be more interesting and engaging, a hypothetical scenario was developed and purposely exaggerated, in order to better illuminate the issues and tradeoffs. Acton 2020 Committee members performed a role-play of the different points of view (derived from master planning goals) to help to dramatize these tradeoffs as well as think through mitigating factors. The attendees (comprised both of the general public and resource people) participated by asking and/or answering questions. The role-play resulted in a list of pros and cons as well as mitigating measures agreeable to most. This then led to a more general discussion of the issues.

Prior to the discussion, the Consultants presented a PowerPoint slide show summarizing some of the main findings of their research regarding existing conditions and future trends in Acton. A Highlights Handout was distributed in order to provide participants with relevant facts and figures to help inform the discussion.

The discussion was followed by smaller break out groups, where among other things, attendees were invited to participate in a mapping exercise to begin to try to locate desirable types of activities and facilities. They were then asked to suggest action items and to prioritize these.

Following the small group discussions the group reconvened to share priorities and to outline next steps. The forum was well attended and was characterized by a high energy level and productive dialogue. Approximately forty (40) people were in attendance.

Key Themes:

The following are some key themes that emerged from the discussion with the "large group" of participants as well as in the small group discussions (See appendices for detailed notes).

UNDERLYING THEME: Strong interest expressed in reducing auto travel by providing alternatives including walking facilities (sidewalks), bike lanes/paths, town shuttle, and by reducing driving to the schools.

- **Much interest in extending sidewalk system**
  - Recognition that "connectivity is central to sense of community"
  - Walking for exercise, independence for seniors and children
  - Work with Sidewalk Committee criteria to prioritize (currently Sidewalk Committee has plan, design guidelines and much responsibility for assisting DPW in obtaining easements from private property owners)
  - Sidewalks don't necessarily have to follow the road. Using direct routes for sidewalks may reduce distance and be safer
  - Examples of pleasing sidewalks: new sidewalk on Main St. from Post Office to 2A/27, fits in with town character, avoids trees, stone walls
  - Winter sidewalk conditions are hazardous
  - Sidewalks lacking in many neighborhoods – unsafe for kids, can't walk to school
  - Prioritize provision of sidewalks to destinations such as village centers and schools and transit
  - Connect apartments, e.g. on 2A, to key destinations (use social equity as a criterion when determining priority sidewalks)

- **Bike travel**
  - Interest in extending biking facilities and making it safer throughout the town.
  - Recognition that some roads are much narrower than others and would require other treatment to maintain safety
  - Bike lanes on some narrow streets may alter trees, walls, and historic character. May also be more costly.

- **Town shuttle**
  - Would like there to be fixed route
  - Would like to find more permanent funding (current funding runs out after 3 yrs)

- **Reduce driving to schools**
  - Teens driving to school (other communities limit)
  - Parents dropping off and picking children up at schools create traffic issues
  - Provide bus option for after school activities (e.g. late bus)

- **Other ways of reducing auto travel**
  - Provide disincentive to auto travel by providing less parking
  - Address cut through traffic by implementing calming measures in the neighborhoods (thus discouraging cut through drivers)
  - Bay Area example of working together with employers to survey their employees and to promote ride sharing, biking/walking incentives

- **Main concerns** regarding making changes to transportation system include cost and impact on town character.

Priority Action Steps

If you could do one thing to address transportation issues in Acton what would it be?

Action	*Comments*	*# of groups*[1]	*# of dots*[2]
More sidewalks	*Speed up construction $10 million for sidewalks*	*3*	*19*
Fixed route bus	*Permanently funded*	*3*	*19*
Finish Bruce Freeman Rail Trail		*1*	*10*
Kelley's Corner redesign		*1*	*9*
Create bike lanes and paths		*1*	*9*
Sidewalks on my street		*1*	*8*
Safe Routes to School		*1*	*8*
More on-demand transit	*Including help w/packages*	*1*	*8*
Reconstruct Rt. 2 Rotary	*In Concord*	*1*	*7*
Regional shuttle		*1*	*6*
Buses to surrounding towns	*Lexington, Framingham, Lowell*	*1*	*4*
Link rail trails		*1*	*4*
Cost of existing transit	*the MinuteVan dial-a-ride cost is too high for some*	*1*	*4*
Finish sidewalks on High Street		*1*	*3*
Sidewalks to NARA		*1*	*3*
Extend bus service at schools	*To later in the evening*	*1*	*3*
Impose a per-mile tax on car travel		*1*	*2*
Commuter rail stop at Alewife	*In Cambridge*	*1*	*1*
Limit school kids driving to school	*Teenagers*	*1*	*2*
Hayward Rd. 1-way	*During school start/pick up hours*	*1*	*1*
Policy to reduce vehicle use		*1*	*-*

Main ideas regarding implementation:

PROVIDE ALTERNATIVES TO DRIVING AND LIMIT AUTOMOBILE USE

The main theme seems to be to reduce driving by providing alternatives to the car as well as by creating some policies to encourage/discourage specific modes of transportation. The main ways proposed to reduce travel by car are by:

- Extending sidewalks
- Extending transit service
- Creating bike lanes and paths
- Limit driving to schools

Additional ideas include:

- Commuter rail stop at Alewife
- More on-demand transit
- Management policy to reduce car travel, e.g. Impose a per-mile tax on car travel

[1] Out of a total of four (4).

[2] After all participants added their thoughts to a list, each was given five (5) dots with which to prioritize. They were instructed to use all five (5), but no more than three (3) on any one item.

- **EXTEND SIDEWALKS (33)** includes:
  - Sidewalks on my street (8)
  - More sidewalks (19)
  - Finish sidewalks on High Street (3)
  - Sidewalks to NARA (3)

- **EXTEND TRANSIT SERVICE (27)** includes:
  - To surrounding towns (4)
  - Fixed route bus (19)
  - Reduce cost of transit (4)

- **CREATE BIKE LANES AND PATHS (23) includes:**
  - **Finish Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (10)**
  - **Create bike lanes and paths (9)**
  - **Link rail trails (4)**

- **LIMIT DRIVING TO SCHOOLS (14)** includes:
  - Safe Routes to Schools (8)
  - Extend bus service at schools (3)
  - Limit school kids (teens) driving to school (2)
  - Hayward Rd. 1-way during school start/pick up hours (1)

Small Group Exercise: Summary

In addition to the action steps that participants were asked to suggest and prioritize (summarized on the previous page), participants were asked a couple of questions and invited to participate in a mapping exercise.

Questions

How often do you walk, bike or car pool around Town?

There was a range of behavior with regard to walking, biking and car-pooling ranging from very frequent (several times a day, every day) to never.

Where do you go?

Where people walked:

- Recreational trails
- To shop in West Acton
- To the train
- To the farmer's market
- To school with children

Suggestions for increasing walking and biking:

- Increase safety
- Connect Nagog to 2A
- Connect shops on 2A with a connection between the Bruce Freeman and Assabet River Rail trails.
- Increase density (reducing the distance between destinations)

What are reasons that you choose not to walk or bike?

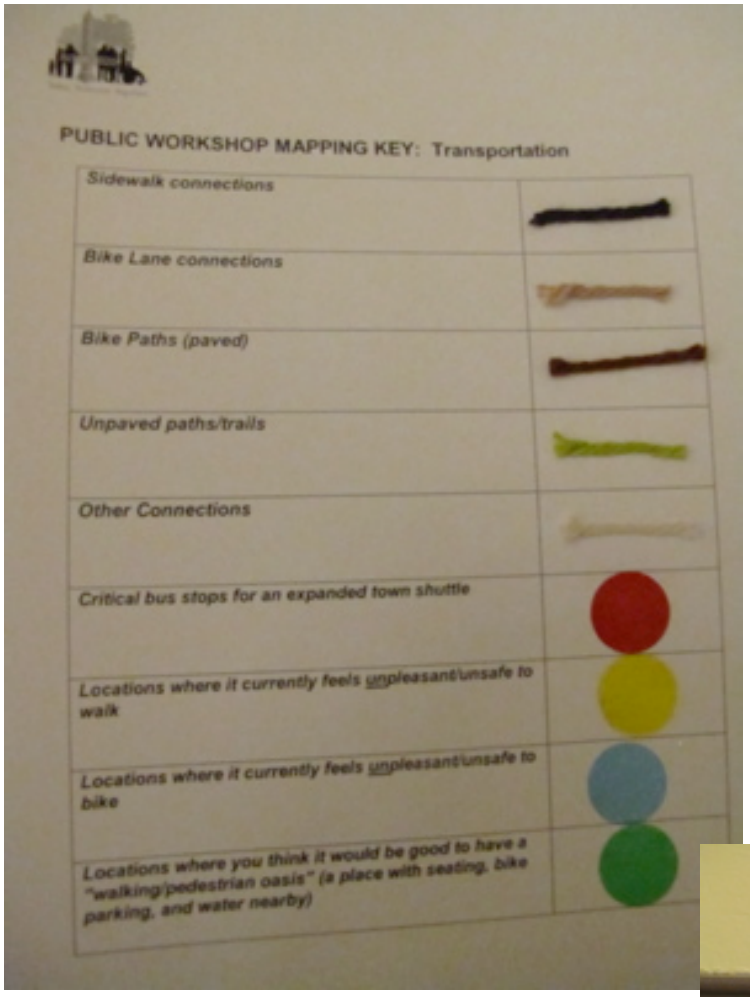
- Weather
- Not safe
- Lack of time
- Distance

The main reasons people walked: Scenic values, e.g., on Strawberry Hill Road (even if not safe), exercise, walking the dog, to deal with car problems

The main reason for car-pooling: Children's activities, e.g., soccer practice and games

Mapping Participants were asked: ***"Which activities/locations would you like to be better connected?"*** Participants were instructed to use color-coded yarn to indicate in which way they would like these locales to be connected (choices included sidewalks, bike lanes, bike paths, unpaved paths/trails, other __). Post-it notes were available for making comments on the map. Additionally colored dots were available to indicate desired locations for bus stops to an expanded town shuttle and locations where participants felt it was unpleasant or unsafe to walk and bike.

- All groups chose many similar locations for bus/shuttle stops including all of the village centers, Kelley's Corner, the traffic signal in North Acton on Great Rd at Route 27, and at Nagog Woods.
- Most groups wanted some form of path or trail along at least part of the rail tracks from Concord and extending from South Acton to West Acton Village.
- Most groups put sidewalks around or connecting the villages.
- Two of the four groups wanted some sort of trail or path through the Nagog Hill area, one connecting to Nara Park and the other leading to Acton Center. One group wanted a trail connecting the Bruce Freeman and Assabet River Rail Trails.
- Areas considered unsafe varied from group to group though Great Rd and Route 27 in North Acton (particularly at intersections) was a frequent choice, and at least one group identified Arlington Street, Newtown Road, and Nagog Hill Road; Hosmer, Piper, Taylor, Valley, and Stow Roads; Mohawk Drive; High Street and Main Street in South Acton; and Main Street and Mass Ave at Kelley's Corner. The groups tended to propose sidewalks at the locations they felt were unsafe.
- One group identified critical traffic signals for adding auditory signalization for the visually impaired.


PUBLIC WORKSHOP MAPPING KEY: Transportation
Sidewalk connections
Bike Lane connections
Bike Paths (paved)
Unpaved paths/trails
Other Connections
Critical bus stops for an expanded town shuttle
Locations where it currently feels unpleasant/unsafe to walk
Locations where it currently feels unpleasant/unsafe to bike
Locations where you think it would be good to have a "walking/pedestrian oasis" (a place with seating, bike parking, and water nearby)

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: NOTES FROM LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION

- Review selected locations, beauty → adds to already high cost
- No eminent domain
- Stormwater mitigation – can we use pervious pavement?
- Will people use the sidewalks? Yes, if properly located and designed (i.e. benches along trails)
- Transit – "chicken-and-egg" situation - invest in serious system
- Sidewalks next to road are scary! Lincoln example.
- Distances are shorter than people realize – don't stick to road, use direct route
- Rail trails – yes people use them! Safe interaction among users, positive effect on value of property near trail
- New sidewalk on Main St – Post office to 2A/27 – *does* fit into town character, avoids trees, stone walls
- Nothing like this would happen without painstaking planning
- Traffic calming can transform a community – repaint the edge line to narrow lanes and widen area for bikes and pedestrians on all roads
- A couple people should not be able to stop a good project, need for selective eminent domain
- We will *never* see a tax increase of this magnitude
- Walking/biking are good, but be selective (sidewalk committee)
- Acton needs a center for shopping, a community center – connect that
- Winter conditions are hazardous for walkers and bikers
- Sidewalks lacking in many neighborhoods – unsafe for kids
- Priorities needed – distance, neighborhoods,
- Half Moon Hill paid for the sidewalk to W. Acton – a major part of her life
- Sidewalks promote development of the centers, e.g. North Acton
- Connectivity is central to community
- Are there examples of economic development resulting from these connections? Placemaking – viable walking opportunities can support this
- High level of intention in Acton

- Provide incentive of *less* parking
- Transit and sidewalks to transit (not necessarily sidewalks along transit routes)
- Transit *frequency* is critical
- Issue of cut-through traffic, avoiding bottle necks
- Need to identify demand corridors to serve with pedestrian/bike routes
- Great Road sidewalks – issue of state hierarchy, ROW, etc – anticipate constraint with design studies
- Rt 62 in Concord (improvements were made using local money, should explore further)
- Status of Rt 2A as state-owned highway
- Acton in catch-up mode – allowed development where no sidewalks existed, but developers didn't build them – need to require what's needed
- Totally support increase in walking portion of road, but rather not widen pavement
- prioritize sidewalks – people who have been here longer
- town is under-funding police, … service, schools → need $250 - $1000 per household to take care of current needs; could use override for these as well
- Kate – sidewalk committee building sidewalk on Great Rd now: Davis – Woodvale corridor
- Sidewalks and bike friendliness improve town character (in sense of community)
- Bruce Freeman and Assabet Rail Trails should connect
- In favor of sidewalks but not feasible to accommodate all modes so suggest piecemeal approach
- Assume schools are the key center to prioritize
- Many roads have specific issues. Need to go door to door to convince abutters to grant easements – sidewalk committee does this
- Bike lanes may not be fit on some narrow streets without altering trees, walls, historic character. Also cost issue.
- Way too many parents dropping and picking up school kids – need to increase bus transport, Minute Van does this 3:15 to 8:15
- Increase price of gas
- Frame the debate in terms of safety – lighting, road marking signage, maintenance, etc

- Nagog village is an example of good road design
- Increase tax to discourage more cars
- Don't allow parking lots in front of stores – could do this at Kelley's Corner and Great Road to make it more pedestrian friendly; don't force people to walk through parking lots to stores
- North Acton – no sidewalks on NARA, forces people to walk on roadway
- But don't raise taxes to over-burden people who can't afford necessities vs. luxuries
- Route 2A sidewalk important – connect many apartments, social justice
- solicit money from Quail Ridge, Lexian – High St, etc
- need man hours to design, survey, communicate, ROW acquisitions (would need to take off other staff priorities)
- Bay Area example – got companies to survey their employees, promote ride sharing, bike/walk incentives
- Need fixed route as well as on-demand – Minute Van is providing a pilot study of where fixed route would be needed
- What incentives work to reduce car use?

APPENDIX B: NOTES FROM SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Small Groups

Group 1 (Bill Schwartz):

Five people in the group bike regularly, while 3 people do not. Reasons for not biking were either not owning a bike or being afraid of traffic. Seven people walk regularly for exercise, walking the dog or to deal with car problems. Two people do not walk regularly. None carpool. Suggestions for improving biking and walking habits included connecting Nagog to 2A, and connecting shops on 2A with a connection between the Bruce Freeman and Assabet River Rail trails.
As priorities, the group chose "sidewalk on my street" and redesign Kelley's Corner with pedestrian friendliness and calmer traffic. Other ideas included $10 million for sidewalk construction, regional shuttle, buses to Lexington, Framingham, and Lowell, finish sidewalks on High St, commuter rail stop at Alewife, Hosmer St sidewalks and walk to West Acton, Willow St.

Votes:
Kelley's Corner Redesign = 9
Sidewalks on my street = 8
Regional shuttle = 6
Buses to Lexington, Framingham, Lowell = 4
$10 million for sidewalks = 4
finish sidewalks on High St = 3
Commuter Rail stop at Alewife = 1

Notes from Maps

No sticky notes.

Group 2 (Jim Purdy):
Of the seven people in the group (having lived in Acton for 6 to 35 years), 5 walk about once a week for exercise and enjoyment. One person bikes weekly and one monthly. A biker felt that Rt 27 has become too dangerous and so quit their biking group. Four people carpool weekly, one carpools monthly. Safety, time and distance were all reasons not to bike, walk or carpool. The group suggested grouping businesses on 2A with the possibility of creating an oasis. Density was seen as a necessary quality to encourage walking – with distances of no more than ¼ mile, but it was also noted that often people oppose density.
Safety seemed to be the main concern of the group. Safe routes to school and more sidewalks were the two main priorities by far. Other ideas included fixed route buses, Hayward Road becoming one way at school start and pickup hours, limit school kids driving to school (emphasis on teenagers), extend bus service at schools to later in the evening, provide sidewalks to NARA, and link rail trails.

Votes:
Safe Routes to school = 8
More sidewalks = 7
Link rail trails = 4
Sidewalks to NARA = 3
Extend bus service at schools = 3
Fixed Route bus with varieties = 2
Limit school kids (teenagers) driving to school = 2
Hayward Rd 1-way, school start/pick-up hours = 1

Notes from Maps

Location: along West Acton Rd (but in Stow – maybe got moved?)
Note: Add exercise areas along the path; put path along rail ROW

Location: along T between Nash Rd and Maple St
Note: Rail with Trail

Location: along Mass Ave, above Nadine Rd
Note: density Kelley's corner

Location: along Rt 2, by Hayward Rd and skateboard park
Note: have all the high school students take the bus to/from school instead of driving their family's cars

Location: Coolidge Dr
Note: Newton good for biking

Location: Great Rd near Ice House Pond
Note: ice cream on rail trail

Location: Fort Pond Rd
Note: Arlington pretty but unsafe

Group 3: Jim Snyder-Grant

walking
one for every day - 1
couple for every week - 2
one every month - 1
multiple times every day - 1

biking

Every month - 1

Car pooling

once a week - 2

Address traffic and circulation
1. Finish Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (10 dots)
2. Fixed bus route (8 dots)
3. More on-demand transit, including help with packages (8 dots)
4. Cost of the transit (4 dots)

Notes from Maps

Location: Near Assabet River Trail and Powder Mill Trail
Note: Map and education about path and trails

Location: Next to red dot on Puritan Rd and Parker St
Note: Collection Point

Location: Knox Trail near Concord border
Note: Avalon advertises a bus stop; they should pay for shuttle

Location: Right of Great Hill, near Piper Rd
Note: or something in housing (?) cluster

Location: Below red dot on Russell Rd and Hosmer St
Note: need auditory signal here

Location: intersection of Elm St and Azelea Rd, next to red and blue dots
Note: durn soccer gavel (?) in season

Location: Below Nagog pond, on Nagog water site
Note: we assume ARRT and BFRT are top priorities

Location: next to Kate Dr and Mildam Rd, on top of green area with Nashoba brook
Note: more accessible to students from high school

Location: on border with Carlisle, near Blueberry Path
Note: unsafe to bike, Carlisle border, Rt. 27 to intersection with 2A

Location: on the bottom of the map (off the mapped area)
Note: 3 notes said auditory signals key

Group 4
(Brian Barber, Facilitator and Roland Bartl, Scribe)

7 People in group
Years living in Acton: Didn't ask because they jumped right into first exercise on how frequently they walked, biked or car pooled.

	Every Day	Every Week	Every Month	Never
Walked	2	1	2	1
Biked	1	4	1	0
Car Pooled	0	1	1	4

The main reason for car pooling: Children's activities, e.g., soccer practice and games
Where people walked:

- Recreational trails

- To shop in West Acton
- To the train
- To the farmer's market
- To school with children

Reasons for not walking or biking
- Weather
- Not safe

Reasons for walking
- Scenic values, e.g., on Strawberry Hill Road (even if not safe)

One thing to improve transportation in Acton

- Create bike lanes and paths: 9 votes
- Permanently fund fixed route local bus (a shuttle now running on a 3-year grant): 9 votes
- Speed up the pace of sidewalk construction: 8 votes
- Reconstruct the Route 2 Rotary in Concord: 7 votes
- Impose a per-mile tax on automobile travel: 2 votes
- Other management to reduce vehicles miles of travel: 0 votes

Notes from Maps

Location: Audubon Hill Condos, near River St and Drummer Rd
Note: All major South Acton roads feel unsafe for biking. High, River, School Sts.

Location: where commuter rail tracks cross border with Concord
Note: Historic agreement with T to have bike/ped paved route sharing train corridor with access vehicles

Location: Intersection of Musket and Coolidge Drive
Note: sidewalks in Patriot's Hill!

Location: Nagog Hill Rd near Hammond St
Note: Sidewalk on Fort Pond Rd, Nagog Hill needs widening – sidewalk & bike lane; Newtown – sidewalk to access library