

Meeting Minutes

Salem Bicycling Advisory Committee

Wednesday, November 6, 2019 6:30 p.m.

City Hall Annex, 98 Washington Street
First Floor Conference Room

Members Present: Eric Papetti (Chair), Michael Williamson, Ray Swartz, Jayne O’Leary, Josh Gillis, John Wathne, Matt Caruso, Alexandra Maranto

Members Absent: Michael Jaros, Joe O’Neil, Kylie Sullivan

Also Present: Tom Devine, Senior Planner

Call Meeting to Order

Papetti opens the meeting.

Bike and Scooter Share: Karl Alexander and Walter Christiansen of Zagster to Present

Document referenced: Salem Bike Share Annual Report, 9.1.2018 through 8.31.2019, Zagster.

Papetti introduces Walter Christiansen, Zagster’s operations manager for the City of Salem, to speak briefly before leaving for another commitment. Christiansen states that he manages the movement of bikes and scooters day to day. Any complaint or concern results in an action by his staff. They have come up with a plan to address concerns they have heard. He assures the group that bikes have not fallen by the wayside since the launch of the scooter share, despite the higher visibility of the scooters. The scooter staff will grab any stray bikes they see and they are currently implementing a plan to address rebalancing issues.

Karl Alexander of Zagster introduces himself. Papetti asks if there is one team with one van doing all bike and scooter rebalancing. Christiansen says morning deployment and evening pickup crews are primarily focuses on the scooters. The daytime scooter rebalancer also rebalances bikes and grabs bikes in need of repair. Evening crew will put out repaired bikes. Alexander says this is in addition to the bike mechanic’s daily work.

Papetti asks what technology Zagster uses internally to track the bikes. Christiansen says it is the same data as in the rider app. Zagster staff face the same issues riders do when the data is not correct. They are constantly looking for software and hardware upgrades to better serve the system. Christiansen leaves for his other commitment.

Alexander had previously provided a one-year overview of Zagster data to the committee. He provides an overview of Zagster and the micromobility industry. He says Zagster plans to provide about 30 bikes at 7 stations throughout the winter for the first time. They will be eliminating the no-cost off-station parking option. Caruso asks how many bikes they had last winter. Alexander says the system was offline. Wathne asks how off-station parking will be prevented. Alexander

says there are a number of ways that can be done. They have discussed a user fee, but will not go that route at this time. It will just be instructions and warnings. Currently 70% of rides are ended off station and the goal is to bring that number down substantially.

Devine states that Zagster's contract is for a fully docked system. As part of Zagster's overall flexibility and adaptiveness, they implemented the off-station option as a pilot in 2018. They had no contractual obligation to do this and have the full right to end the pilot at any time. Zagster, Salem State University, and the City are working to get on the same page about how to stop the unrestricted off-station parking. It is an easy transition to restrict the system to docked only when offering a limited winter system for the first time. But we will have to decide how to make it work come spring when we return to full operation.

Papetti asks what the number of trips per bike per day has been year over year. Alexander says they were around .8 through August. Papetti asks how many bikes are in the system. Alexander says there are 80 contracted, with about 65 currently on the road. Papetti asks how this number works. Alexander says there are spares and bikes being repaired. Devine reports that October 2018 had 42 rides per day and October 2019 had 45. That is with 50 bikes in 2018 to 80 in 2019. Papetti sees that as a substantial decline in per bike per day ridership.

Papetti explains that the app has been unreliable. It does not accurately show where bikes are. It often shows something around 25 bikes in the system. Alexander states that the problem occurs because the last location isn't recorded properly. Each time a bike has its ride ended off station, it is less likely to be tracked in the system. When a rider opens the app at a dock, it scans all the bikes at that dock. But off-station bikes are not tracked this way.

Papetti asks if the software will be upgraded to handle off-station parking. Alexander says a bike that the system loses can be brought back in if another rider rides it. Papetti says he used the system regularly, but the system has become unusable and one time resulted in him missing his ferry to work. Wathne asks if it is expensive to add a transponder to the bikes? Alexander says the off-station option went well last year, but this year it has not worked as well. Ending of off-station option has solved these problems in other markets. Papetti says the goal is for a functional system and if the Zagster technology won't work, Zagster should take a hard look at their hardware and software. Alexander says the scooters are cell-enabled, but this requires at least weekly charging, which happens anyway with the scooters. The bikes have no major electric component. Wathne suggests a small solar panel. Wathne suggests guidelines that allow off-station parking at priority areas to make it a little more centralized and manageable.

Williamson asks if bike will be pulled ahead of major storms and Alexander replies affirmatively. Gillis suggests that a transponder could be charged just like the lights are powered by the turning of the wheels. O'Leary suggests having power at the docks to charge transponders.

Katherine Klein of 43 Bayview Ave. says she is concerned about kids joyriding. Alexander says they require an ID to be scanned to verify their age, but they are unable to stop parents or other adults from setting up a minor's account. He says they are doing education and outreach, including attending a block party and the farmers market. Devine says all police have a factsheet

about enforcement. Police had found a particular individual setting up accounts for minors and that can be addressed. In addition, scooters now have larger 3-digit ID numbers. If someone sees someone riding recklessly or breaking any rules, they can report the location, time, and scooter number and Zagster, who has the ability to suspend the account.

Papetti says he has seen scooter programs in other countries where people as young as 14 can ride. Alexander says they generally defer to the local policy for rider age minimum and in this case he thinks the 18+ decision was the right one.

Alexander says they completed a user survey and have prepared information for the City to disseminate. Gillis asks if there was a downtick in ridership when the scooters came online. Alexander says there was a decrease in bike availability as the scooters came online and this can be a hard time of year for maintenance. There has been a dip in September and October in bike rides, but ridership was high previously. Devine states that while bike ridership flattened out when the scooter system launched, the preliminary survey results shows only 4% of scooter rides replacing bike rides.

Pop-Up Bike Lanes

Document referenced: Memorandum Re: Weekend Pop-Up Separated Bike Lane Evaluation, from Lydia Hausle of Toole Design to Tom Devine, David Kucharsky, and Nick Downing, 10/16/2019.

Devine provides an overview of the summary memo. Devine adds that the City received additional public feedback, some supportive and some critical. The critical comments were primarily about the reduction in street parking. Some were concerned about the lack of safe pedestrian crossings when people were expected to park across the street from their destination. One business owner was worried that the pop-up lanes looked like a construction site and that dissuaded some potential customers from stopping. Devine reports that City staff had many constructive conversations with bike skeptics who were not reached throughout the Bike Master Plan's engagement process.

Klein wonders whether it was worth giving up so much parking for this.

Rinus Oosthoek of the Salem Chamber of Commerce suggests informing his organization of these projects and the rationale behind them before they are implemented.

Devine states that there are limitations to the network of bike infrastructure that the North Street pop-up lanes connect to. There are ways to connect to downtown, but none of them are great. This may have been a barrier to ridership. Devine believes that if there is a better connection to downtown, ridership of temporary or permanent lanes would likely be higher and better justify some loss of parking. Until that connection is made, it may be appropriate to substantially maintain existing street parking with any bike lanes. When the downtown connection is made, a longer term bike facility on North Street might involve some consolidation of parking, but it would be a balance.

Bicycle Benefits Rollout

Devine reports that he had been in touch with Notch Brewery and they expressed interest and took a starter pack. Front Street Coffeehouse also expressed interest in participating. Williamson has been in touch with Mercy Tavern, Gulu Gulu, Mr. Crepe, and the Lobster Shanty. O’Leary had spoken with staff at the Waterfront Hotel.

Collective Procurement for North Shore Micromobility Program

Devine reports that the City has been working with MAPC and North Shore municipalities to look at how to procure a bike and scooter share operator for a regional program. They have released a Request for Information that welcomes operators to respond with details about the service they would like to provide. The Committee will be welcome to review the responses.

Fort Avenue Two-Way Protected Bike Lane

A resident asks why the neighborhoods were not notified before the bike lanes went into effect. Devine provides background and rationale on the project. He acknowledges the City’s failure to conduct the robust outreach it usually does. He apologizes for this and notes that the conversations with the neighborhood that should have taken place before are taking place after. There is an upcoming neighborhood meeting where the Director of Traffic & Parking will continue the discussion with neighbors. Devine also notes that some of the pavement markings are incorrect and will be fixed.

Williamson states that his running group is ecstatic about the new lanes because they decrease speeds and increase safety. Caruso says he sees that it is a change that forces people to drive slower with the narrower road.

Papetti states that the project is new and will be tweaked and that the City will continue to want to hear from anyone with comments or questions about how it can be improved. He says he is highly supportive of the project. Caruso asked what the City could have done better for outreach. Devine says many tools could have been used, such as direct mailing, public presentations, social media posts, or communication through the Ward Councilor. Gillis asked if this was due to the rush to get the job done. Devine says, yes, there was a time-sensitive opportunity to do this, but it doesn’t excuse the City. Papetti says this has been on the Bike Committee agendas, and these meetings are public.

Oosthoek says outreach is essential for any specific project because the Bike Master Plan’s outreach was not for specific projects.

Washington Street (Mill Street to Bridge Street) Preliminary Design and Cost Estimate

Document referenced: Memorandum Re: Response to Comments Received on Preliminary Design Assessments, from Lydia Hausle to Tom Devine, Toole Design, 11/5/2019.

Devine presents Toole Design's memo documenting its response to comments on the Washington Street concept plans. Next steps include Toole's completion of the concept for the segment from New Derby to Bridge Street that the Committee will have the opportunity to review. Toole has very roughly sketched out possibilities for that segment to see what can be done within the existing width. Parking protected lanes can be added with only very limited loss of parking. Papetti stressed the need to have that draft concept completed by the next meeting. Toole will refine its concepts and cost estimates based on the Committee's comments, but the Washington/Mill/Canal Street intersection may be a quicker build project for the next year. The Committee agrees to provide any further comments by the end of the following week.

North Street

Devine reports that the City is looking to have Toole Design Group create a design through restriping to create conventional bikes lanes and additional crosswalks. This would maintain almost all of the existing legal parking. Papetti notes that during the pop-up bike lane, there was always adequate parking capacity and thinks protected lanes should be put in. Devine suggests that it is hard to justify substantial loss of parking before creation of a better bike connection to downtown that results in higher bike utilization. Wathne asks what the thinking is for the North River Crossing. Devine says the Bike Master Plan makes general recommendations, but there is no specific project currently in the works.

Meg Riccardi of 23 Orchard Street says she is excited about providing new bike infrastructure. She adds that the crosswalks will be a big benefit.

Oosthoek states that early outreach to businesses is essential.

Papetti says it doesn't have to be all or nothing. There may be segments that could be implemented now. Adding protected lanes never gets easier. Maranto says she wouldn't ride with her child without a good connection into downtown. Wathne remarks that there must be space to create a connection into downtown.

A resident asks why bikes are being added when traffic is so congested and parking is limited. Members discuss the benefits of biking.

Bridge Street MassWorks Project

Devine says he will have detailed responses from Stantec for the Committee's comments. Papetti says that David Knowlton committed to holding a public meeting when the project reaches 25%. Devine will follow up with Knowlton.

Canal Street Path, Phase II

Devine reports that the project may have a 22-month schedule. Some vegetation removal has occurred and there is potential for work to begin in the part of the path not immediately adjacent to the rail line.

Harmony Grove Road

Devine reports that the Solomon Foundation has committed to providing a portion of the funding for a feasibility study for a path through this area. Salem and Peabody have identified funding to cover the remaining cost. They will issue an RFP shortly to select a design and engineering firm. The scope will be a review of the possibilities for an alignment of a separated path where it may interface with private properties or the active freight rail line.

Downtown Bike Lane Striping

Devine reports that the project is substantially complete with some final state route and bus stop markings remaining.

Harbor Connector (Szetela Lane) Path

Devine states that the project is going out to bid in the coming weeks. Papetti stressed the need to review this project further prior to bidding.

Miscellaneous

Williamson asks about the path along the river at Riverview Place development at Flint and Mason Streets. Devine says there was an option the City once held to extend Commercial Street all the way through to Flint Street. The development project includes a path along its own river frontage. The neighboring property includes a piece of land between Riverview Place and the river. That private property will be required to construct a path segment when that property undergoes an expansion or change in use that triggers Chapter 91.

O'Leary says she continues to try to get New England Mountain Bike Association's North Shore chapter to get volunteers to help clean up Salem Woods and its paths. The group has agreed to tour the area. She will need to follow up with Friends of Salem Woods and Salem Parks & Recreation.

Update on Salem State University South Campus Reuse Study

Devine reports that Salem State is selling its 22-acre South Campus property and the City and Salem State are holding a visioning process to develop a vision for the site. Papetti is on the working group to highlight the multimodal transportation possibilities for the site. There will soon be a second public forum and an online survey.

Galen Mook of MassBike to attend December 4 Meeting

Devine states that Galen will attend to discuss opportunities for coordination with MassBike.

Meeting minutes

Caruso motions and Wathne seconds to approve the July 17, 2019 minutes.

Adjourn

Williamson motions and O'Leary seconds to adjourn at 8:15pm.

Approved by the Salem Bicycling Advisory Committee on March 3, 2020.