

Mass Ave Corridor in East Arlington: A Brief History of the Project as of July 2006

The wide portion of Mass Ave in East Arlington has been an issue for many years. The impetus behind the current effort was two pedestrian fatalities in the late 1990s, a subsequent vote by Town Meeting to "install appropriate lane markings and a parking lane on Massachusetts and Park Avenues, or take any action related thereto," and an indication from the 2002 Vision 2020 survey that residents were very concerned about pedestrian safety (it was the top item out of 17 transportation-related items, and was more of a concern than congestion).

Initial actions in 2001 - 2002 included a traffic study where five different lane configurations were studied, and an investigation of research on pedestrian safety. The traffic study concluded that in East Arlington one through lane in each direction would be sufficient to handle the traffic, with the exception of the eastbound approaches to Lake Street and Route 16, where two through lanes would be needed during the AM peak period.

The research on pedestrian safety revealed that marked uncontrolled crosswalks on multilane undivided roads present significant safety problems, and are associated with high pedestrian crash rates. (See, for example, <http://www.tfhrc.gov/safety/pubs/04100/index.htm>.)

In 2002, the TAC and the East Arlington Good Neighbor Committee sponsored a number of meetings in Fox Library. These meetings led to the following objectives for the corridor:

1. Improve safety for all users: motorists, pedestrians and cyclists
2. Reduce through traffic on neighborhood streets
3. Maintain mobility for all users along Mass Ave at an acceptable level-of-service, while not attracting new auto traffic.
4. Improve the environment for transit users by coordinating bus stops with crosswalks
5. Encourage a more orderly traffic flow
6. Enhance the streetscape of the area
7. Increase business patronage
8. Develop both a short term solution and long term plan

Since then, the following actions have been taken

- Working with Cambridge to improve traffic flow through the Mass Ave/Route 16 intersection to improve motorist mobility,
- Initiated the thermoplastic crosswalk program to improve pedestrian safety and mobility.
- An experiment with advance yield lines at the Town Hall crosswalk to give motorists better warning about an approaching crosswalk.
- A second traffic study by a different firm which came to conclusions similar to the first study, but recommended a single wide lane in each direction (with two lanes in each direction on the approaches to Lake Street and Route 16), rather than a center left turn lane. The conceptual designs from both studies left enough room to get around turning vehicles.
- Working with Congressman Markey to obtain an earmark for \$1.6 million of federal funds to initiate the first phase of the project (Route 16 to Pond Lane).
- Getting the project onto the state Transportation Improvement Program.

The next step is to obtain funding for design, so that design work and public outreach can continue. With luck this will occur in Federal FY 07.

A project like this is both complex and important, and involves tradeoffs among sometimes competing goals. It will require constructive community input. TAC's [decision criteria](#) provide a general statement of the objectives that we consider when making recommendations.