

# CAMBRIDGE/ WATERTOWN

## Implementing Bus Improvements Across Municipal Boundaries

All Day Shared Bus/Bike Lane

Pilot: October 2018

Permanent: Fall 2019

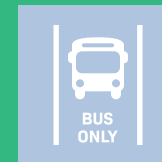
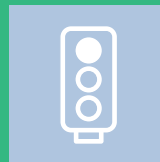


Cambridge-Watertown BRT Banner // Ad Hoc Industries

One of the three 2018 BostonBRT local pilots funded by the Barr Foundation, this multi-municipal project included not just the two municipalities the project would connect, but also the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), and the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) as well as private and non-profit partners.

From 2016-2018, DCR conducted the Mount Auburn Street Corridor Study to develop short- and long-term recommendations for Mount Auburn Street and portions of the adjoining roadways. This study identified bus improvements as one of the short-term recommendations to improve mobility on the corridor. In addition, a Cambridge funded study to identify corridors with the highest levels of delay and unreliability also found that Mount Auburn Street would benefit from bus priority. One of the most influential points that came out of these studies was that over half of the people traveling along this corridor during the morning rush hour were riding the bus, a point prominently featured in the project's communications materials.

Both municipalities were prepared for a project like this one. In Cambridge, staff had previously implemented a quick build project on Cambridge Street with cycling facilities, which gave them experience with rapid and low-cost interventions. It also served to prime internal staff and the general public to think about things differently. Watertown was in the process of redesigning Mt Auburn Street, which prepared them to think big and beyond what is currently there today.



## CASE STUDY / CAMBRIDGE/WATERTOWN

The multi-municipal project was intended to be a demonstration project that would become permanent after a testing period. It was driven by a non-binding MOU between the municipalities and the MBTA, signed by both the MBTA General Manager and the MassDOT Secretary of Transportation. The project went live on Mt. Auburn Street in October 2018 with inexpensive paint that was expected to last one to two years. The bus priority lane pilot started from Cottage Street in Watertown and extended to Fresh Pond Parkway in Cambridge, a corridor in which the 71 and 73 MBTA buses traveled.

To make the project even more appealing to the public, the cities decided to couple this project with other improvements, like pedestrian and bicyclist safety features, leading to many multi-modal benefits. The pilot repeated practices from other similar projects such as extensive public and neighborhood engagement, multi-stakeholder collaboration, messaging, and more.

The Barr Foundation provided financial support, as well as engineering and marketing support through its BostonBRT initiative. The Cambridge/Watertown pilot was characterized by creative graphics and branding that brought a particularly human element to the notion of BRT and bus lanes through large

scale banners and bus stop installations with taglines such as “Dedicated bus lanes; dedicated to you”. The graphic component, purple and yellow, was big, and very people-oriented. They used images showing that although the majority of vehicles were cars, the majority of people were riding the buses, which helped show how inefficiently the street space was being used.

Communications materials were designed to translate transportation lingo into regular language. They focused on words people already knew. Communicating to the public was key to the project’s success – it helped Cambridge and Watertown focus on what is important today, like reducing travel time and gaining predictability in a commute.

The project team responded to needed changes by focusing their time, money and effort on quick, inexpensive interventions. Some strategies they used included installing flexposts, putting down temporary paint, changing signals, putting up signs, enforcing the lanes, and educating the public on how to use them instead of going through a major reconstruction process. This shift in focus allowed the pilot to happen quickly and be flexible to changes in design, process, and operation.



Cambridge-Watertown Bike // Ad Hoc Industries

*“It’s important to note how valuable it was to talk to individuals in person. At a public meeting, one person who claimed to represent a medical building on the corridor said that the people in the building were against the project because “no one [in the building] rides the bus”. Because we had talked to people in the building, we were able to share that many people in the building had talked to staff about how excited they were to have the bus lane to help them get to work on time.”*

*– Tegin Teich, Executive Director of CTPS, and former Senior Transportation Planner at the City of Cambridge*

## CASE STUDY / CAMBRIDGE/WATERTOWN

The project took a lot of constant championing to keep it moving, as well as thorough coordination among all the stakeholders. City staff and elected officials instituted biweekly calls to facilitate coordination with all parties. Cambridge and Watertown hosted joint public meetings, with support from the MBTA. It also built on the public engagement process that was carried out before by DCR as part of the Mount Auburn Street Corridor Study, which was a crucial foundation for the project.

As the pilot took place, the project team evaluated traffic flow and worked with partners to get community feedback. Thanks to funding from the Barr Foundation, the project team was able to receive assistance from the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP) both prior to and during the pilot. Before the pilot, ITDP helped gather survey data from bus riders about how bus priority would help their commutes. During the pilot, ITDP managed a street team, trained by LivableStreets Alliance (LSA), to assist with data collection, which included capturing feedback from people who board the bus in the morning and therefore may get the most benefit from the improvements.

The municipalities repainted the lane at the end of 2019 to make it permanent. There were initial challenges coordinating with DCR to update the signal timing, as they were the owners of the traffic signals at Fresh Pond Parkway. Coordinating the signals was as important as the bus lane design for improving travel time and predictability.

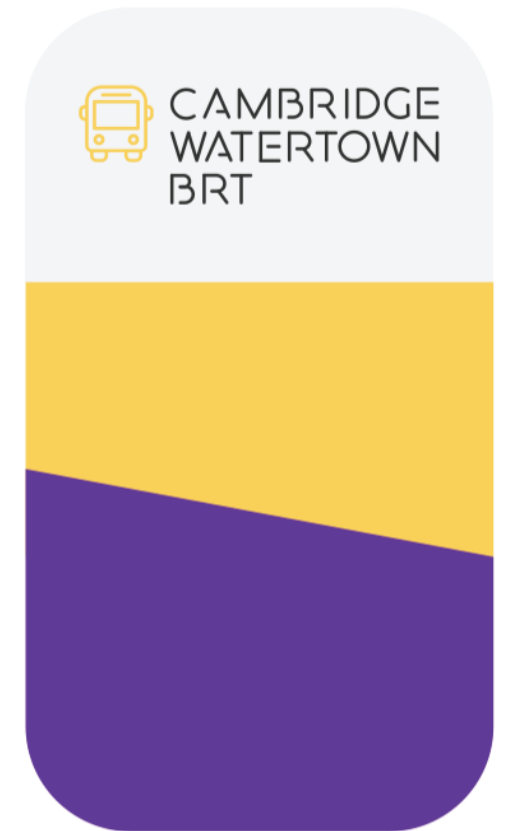
This was a group effort that involved many agencies and helped create new relationships between Cambridge, Watertown and the MBTA to get this project done and formed a basis for working together in the future.



Cambridge-Watertown Bus Stop // Ad Hoc Industries



Cambridge-Watertown Branding // Ad Hoc Industries



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BEFORE



AFTER



DATA

<b>Type of Improvement:</b>	All-day shared bus/bike lane
<b>Length of Improvement:</b>	0.8 miles
<b>Bus Routes Along Corridor:</b>	71, 73
<b>Exact Location:</b>	Mt Auburn St and Belmont St (multiple segments)
<b>Starting Intersection/Point:</b>	Segment 1: Eastbound on Mount Auburn Street from Belmont Street to Aberdeen Avenue Segment 2: Eastbound on Belmont Street from Sullivan Road to Mount Auburn Street
<b>Ending Intersection/Point:</b>	Segment 2: Eastbound on Belmont Street from Sullivan Road to Mount Auburn Street
<b>Weekday Ridership:</b>	12,000 bus riders
<b>Vehicles Allowed to Use Bus Lane:</b>	MBTA buses, emergency vehicles, school buses, bikes, shuttles
<b>Multimodal Improvements:</b>	Walking, biking, and transit
<b>Land Uses Along Corridor:</b>	Residential, commercial, and open space
<b>Pilot or Direct to Permanent:</b>	Pilot first, then permanent
<b>Dates of Pilot:</b>	October 2018
<b>Dates of Implementation:</b>	Fall 2019
<b>Parking Study:</b>	No parking was removed for the bus lane
<b>Planning Study:</b>	Mount Auburn Street Corridor Study
<b>Average bus rider time saved:</b>	4-5 minutes per day
<b>Post-implementation Survey Satisfaction:</b>	Bus Riders – 80% positive