



Roslindale Village walk assessment report

Introduction

On Saturday, December 5, 2015, the recently formed WalkUP Roslindale community advocacy group conducted a walk audit in Roslindale Square in order to assess walking conditions and to develop a list of recommendations to present to group members, supporters and ultimately the Boston Transportation Department.

Who Is WalkUP Roslindale?

WalkUP Roslindale (WUR) began with the vision of bringing neighbors together in order to make Roslindale the most walkable neighborhood in the City. The founding members saw the area's potential and were determined to begin the process of reshaping Roslindale into "a safe, pleasant and beautiful place to walk, gather and interact, for the young, old, and everyone in between."

Along with WalkUP Roslindale's initial focus on walking comes a related commitment to making Roslindale safer and more convenient for both bicycling and public transit.

The Walk Audit

WalkBoston joined twenty-five WalkUP Roslindale supporters to conduct the walk audit. (The route is presented in Figures 1 and 2.) Evidence of the Square's revitalization in the past two decades was obvious to the participants, who are listed in Appendix A. They noted an active street life with many folks walking or bicycling on their way to visit shops, restaurants, bakeries and markets. The area residents' commitment to supporting locally owned shops and businesses has contributed to a vibrant local economy and is indicative of the neighborhood's strong local identity.



Dorothea Hass of WalkBoston briefs members of WUR before the walk audit.

Walking in Roslindale Square

Because of the lively street life, walkers are drawn to Roslindale Square and find it walkable and inviting, mainly because the area’s initial development period was prior to the Second World War and so it has “good bones.” Despite those “good bones,” the WUR audit group identified several areas for improvement. The overriding design issue is the one-way street configuration that causes cars to circle through the Square and creates unnecessarily high vehicle volumes. Participants also pointed out many locations where crosswalks were needed or walkers had to wait for an extended period of time to get a WALK signal.

Most of the streets in the Square are two lane streets with parking. On the plus side, this configuration leads vehicle drivers to proceed relatively slowly. However, the confusing roadway pattern (especially where South Street veers off from Washington and at the five-way Washington/Poplar/Corinth intersection) means drivers are busy jockeying for position or trying to figure out where they should go and may be too distracted to observe pedestrian movement.

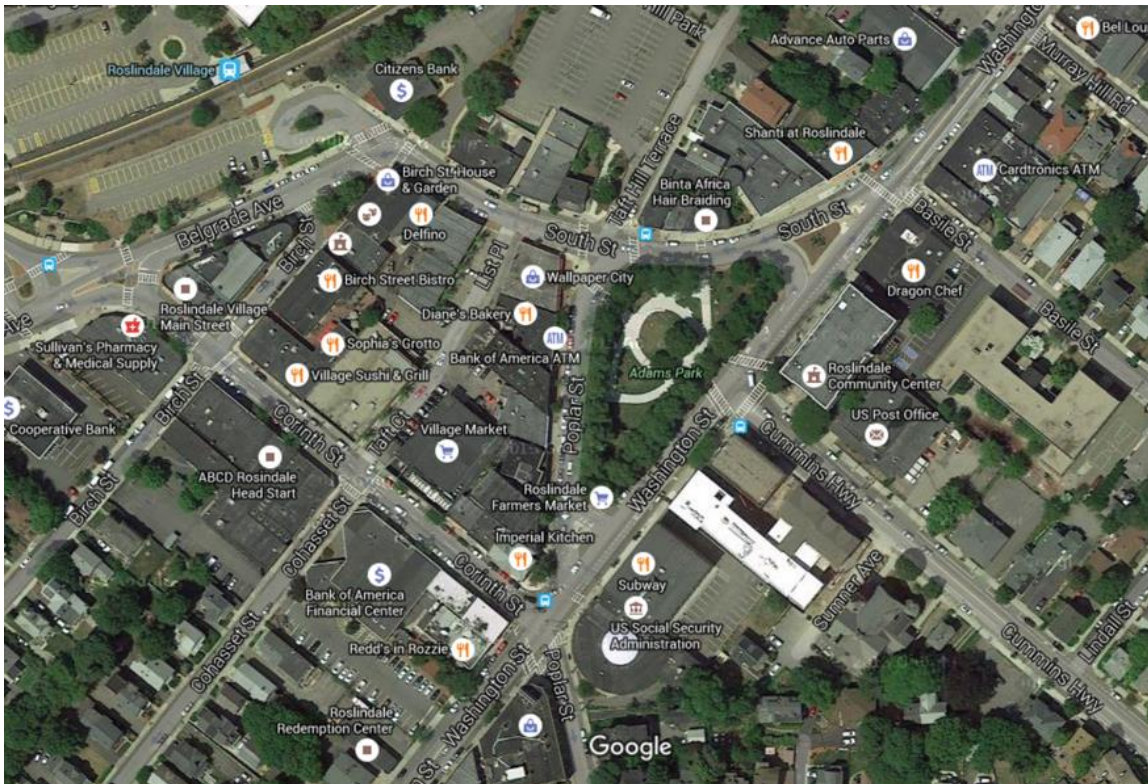
Bicycling

The audit did not focus on bicycle transportation, but some WUR participants indicated that they regularly bicycle to and within the Square. They observed that existing bicycle lane markings are very faded and that drivers routinely drive their cars in these lanes. On balance, the bicyclists in the audit group found that the Square could be unsafe and unsettling for riders who are less than confident in their cycling skills. One idea that has come up is separating bike lanes from automobile traffic. Although this practice is still uncommon in the U.S., some cities have begun placing bicycle lanes between parked cars and sidewalks. See further discussion in Appendix B.

Figure 1: December 5, 2015 walk audit route



Figure 2: Aerial view of walk audit route



Overall Recommendations

1. Consider converting one-way streets to two-way.

The one-way configuration of streets in Roslindale Square may contribute to some traffic safety problems for pedestrians and others. The one-way traffic pattern requires drivers to circle through the Square, increasing vehicle volumes and causing driver frustration. In addition, on the segment of Washington Street that borders Adams Park, cars are moving faster than they would if the street were two-way. We recommend that WalkUP Roslindale work with the Boston Transportation Department to assess whether any streets in the Square – Washington, South/Belgrade, Corinth and Poplar – should be converted to two-way.

2. Increase the number and safety of street crossings and improve WALK signal timings.

Many of the street crossings are not located in desire line paths. As a result, pedestrians are crossing streets where it is convenient, but without a crosswalk. Furthermore, there are an insufficient number of crossings (particularly on Washington Street between Washington/South/Basile and Washington/South/Firth), and pedestrians at several signalized crossings need to wait for a prolonged period of time before getting a WALK signal. Recommendations for improving specific street crossings and signal timings are presented in the report sections that follow.

3. Remove selected in-street parking spaces to improve pedestrian visibility in the immediate vicinity of crosswalks.

Cars often park and double-park right next to and even in crosswalks in Roslindale Square, creating hazards and obstructions for pedestrians as they and the drivers of oncoming traffic are unable to see each other around the parked cars. Walk audit participants suggested that removing a small number of selected parking spaces that are immediately adjacent to crosswalks around the square would greatly enhance pedestrian visibility and safety. In addition, the City should consider using flex posts and plastic bollards at some locations to prevent cars from double-parking in crosswalks.

4. Consider safer placement of bicycle lanes.

Many European cities site bicycle lanes between sidewalks and parked cars to increase bicyclist safety and to provide an additional buffer between cars and pedestrians on the sidewalk. On South and maybe Washington Streets especially, the audit results suggest that the City should consider placing bicycle lanes between the sidewalk and the parking lane, as is being done, for example, in the redesign of Commonwealth Avenue between the BU Bridge and Packard's Corner. See further discussion of this in Appendix B.

Specific Recommendations

The audit revealed localized problems that should be addressed to improve pedestrian safety and convenience and to promote the Square's overall walkability. Specific problem areas identified through the audit include the following sites.

Belgrade Avenue Path to Commuter Rail Station

There is a strong pedestrian desire line (preferred path of travel) across Belgrade Avenue, mid-block, to and from the commuter rail station. However, as shown in the photo there is no crosswalk to the Station.

A safe crossing to the steps needs to be developed and installed. Because vehicle volumes on this stretch of Belgrade were quite low all three times the WalkBoston team assessed this area, we think that a raised crosswalk from Belgrade to the commuter rail stairs would provide a safe crossing. Installing a pedestrian-actuated WALK signal here that would be coordinated with the signal at South Street/Citizen's Bank would further enhance safety.



The steps at the Commuter Rail Station do not connect to a pedestrian crossing on Belgrade Avenue.

South Street at Citizen's Bank

This is a major pedestrian crossing, especially on Saturdays when the Square draws many shoppers to the Farmers Market. There is a crosswalk at this location, but often cars do not stop for pedestrians. And twice when WalkBoston visited the Square cars were parked in the crosswalk. Other times cars were parked right up to the crosswalk, not observing the rule that cars be parked 20 feet from the crosswalk. We recommend NO PARKING be painted in bold letters on the street and that perhaps flex post bollards should be placed on both sides of the crosswalk to keep parked cars away from the intersection to improve visibility. These would be short-term measures. A longer-term solution would be a raised crosswalk and curb extensions so walkers would be more visible to drivers.

This intersection's signals for cars were also judged to be small and antiquated. For example, they are dim much of the time. They should be replaced with larger and more visible signals. In addition this signal could be coordinated with a new mid-block crossing on Belgrade to the commuter rail station.



Cars parked in the crosswalk at South Street and Belgrade Avenue obstruct pedestrians.

The traffic signals are placed off to the side of the street here so that many drivers seem to be unaware of these signals. Walk audit participants suggested that the traffic signal could be shifted to the currently empty concrete island at the entrance to the commuter rail parking lot to enhance its visibility (see photo below).



The traffic signal at the corner of South Street and Belgrade Avenue (top left of picture) is difficult for oncoming drivers to see and might be shifted to the concrete island (top center of picture) to enhance its visibility.

Arched Gate on South Street across from List Place

The graciously designed arched gate is the entry point to the Taft Hill neighborhood, as well as to a large parking lot and a potential development site. However there is no crosswalk here. This crossing is only half a block east from the Citizen's Bank and another raised crossing at this location would slow traffic on this block of South Street considerably. To explore this alternative, WalkUP Roslindale can consult with the city's traffic engineers as to whether moving the existing Citizen's Bank crosswalk to or nearer to this point would be helpful.

When a crosswalk is installed at this location, parking in front of the arched gate would be prohibited. To enhance the visibility of pedestrians waiting to cross the street, curb extensions could be added upon which bicycle parking and maps could be placed.



There is no crosswalk across South Street to connect the Taft Hill parking area and community to Roslindale Square.

Private Parking Lot Adjacent to Taft Court/List Place

There is a large private parking lot on Taft Court/List Place. While there is a sidewalk on the west edge of the lot, it is very narrow; most people walk down the center of the parking lot. Either a broader sidewalk or a clearly marked pedestrian path would be a big safety boost. The parking lot is privately owned so improved pedestrian circulation measures would need to be accepted by the property owner. Given the strong community spirit in the neighborhood and the active Main Street Program, we suggest approaching the owner and making the case for cost-effective pedestrian safety improvements.

The most critical safety improvement should be ensuring the one-way vehicle circulation through design elements. Vehicles are supposed to enter on Corinth Street and exit on South Street. However, an overly wide opening at South Street invites cars to enter there, creating conflicts with exiting vehicles. Occasionally, the entering/exiting vehicles create so much congestion that cars back up onto the Corinth Street sidewalk, endangering walkers.

WUR members recommend the following additional enhancements and improvements:

- a. Improve the entrance to Sophia's Grotto restaurant from the parking lot by adding sidewalks and/or relocating the dumpsters.
- b. Make the sidewalk at the South Street driveway the same material as the adjacent sidewalk to send a visual signal to drivers that pedestrians have the right of way along the sidewalk. (The adjacent sidewalk is brick and the sidewalk at the driveway entrance is concrete.)
- c. Paint murals along the buildings facing the parking area and access lane.



The private parking lot between South and Corinth Streets (Taft Court/List Place) lacks adequate pedestrian accommodations.

South Street/Taft Hill Terrace/Poplar Street

This intersection creates a difficult crossing to Adams Park, as the current crosswalk across South Street ends in the curb to the right of the existing curb ramp. In addition, the unnecessarily large amount of pavement and wide turning radius at Poplar Street encourage drivers to speed up, and the breadth of the roadway requires crossing pedestrians to cover an unnecessarily long distance during brief breaks in vehicle traffic.

Our recommendation is that, eventually, the intersection should be re-designed once a decision is made whether to convert the streets around Adams Park from one-way to two-way. In the interim, the curb on the southwest corner (adjacent to Wallpaper City) should be extended into the street using paint, flex posts and plantings in heavy containers to narrow the turning radius and lower the pedestrian crossing distance from Poplar Street to Adams Park. The crosswalk across South Street should also be re-routed to the left to end in the existing curb ramp at Adams Park.

In addition, we think the bus stop at this location is not well sited. We observed that buses seldom pull into this stop probably because it is too short for buses to easily pull in and out. We recommend moving the bus stop west of Taft Hill Terrace to prevent potential conflicts with pedestrians.



The intersection of South Street and Poplar Street has more pavement than needed and a wide turning radius, which both contribute to high traffic speeds.

Landscaped Triangle at Washington/South Streets

At the northeast corner of Roslindale Square across from Adams Park, there is a small triangular open space island bordered by South Street, Washington Street, and a left-turn slip lane from Washington Street onto South Street. This island has sidewalks around its edge and pedestrians use it to cross South and

Washington Streets despite the lack of crosswalks leading to it. Regardless of whether or not this open space is ultimately retained, the City needs to create a safe crossing at this location that either utilizes or circumvents the existing island.



The triangular park at South and Washington Streets lacks safe pedestrian crossings despite having sidewalks around its border.

South Street/Washington Street/Basile Street

The Charles Sumner Elementary School is located half a block east of this intersection and there is a very heavy flow of walkers crossing at this unsignalized intersection. Overall, the crossing does not feel safe. Cars move quickly along the street not even stopping for the crossing guard stationed there during school opening and closing. Installing a flashing beacon or signage at this intersection to slow northbound traffic on Washington Street would create a safer pedestrian environment.

Pedestrians seeking to cross here are difficult for drivers to see. Pushing back the parking right next to the crosswalk will make pedestrians more readily visible. It is important that drivers be reminded that cars park at least 20 feet from the crosswalk as per city regulations. Moreover, the crosswalks lack handicap accessible curb cuts, creating further obstacles for those with mobility challenges. This would be an excellent location for curb extensions that would help drivers observe walkers and wheelchair users as they begin to cross.



Cars encroach on the crosswalk at Washington/South/Basile Streets, which also lacks a curb cut.

Additional Crossings on Washington Street

Northeast of Roslindale Square, there are no crosswalks across Washington Street between Basile Street and Firth Road/South Street. We recommend creating a new crosswalk across Washington Street at Murray Hill Road with curb ramps to provide another safe crossing for pedestrians along this high-volume traffic corridor.

Washington Street/Cummins Highway

The walk audit participants noted that Washington Street has high pedestrian volumes related to the Community Center, Post Office, and Public Library nearby. An additional 43 units of housing has been developed at the former T Substation, Parkside on Adams, adding to the number of pedestrians. The crossing is signalized but it is not automatic and walkers have an extended wait to get a WALK signal. Also the curb radius for right-turning traffic from Cummins Highway onto Washington Street is very large. All this makes the intersection difficult for pedestrians. The intersection requires better signal timing and a reduction in curb radius on the northeastern corner of the intersection to ease pedestrian waiting time and improve safety.

Washington Street/Poplar Street/Corinth Street

This five-way intersection is very confusing for drivers, perhaps even more than for pedestrians. Drivers headed south on Poplar are unsure if they are, in fact, permitted to turn when the left signal arrow appears. The confusion is exacerbated by the offset layout of the intersection. The overall geometry of this intersection should be assessed as apart of an overall assessment of converting the one-way streets to two-way. On a short-term basis, the lanes should be striped and the southbound bus stop provided with more space for the buses to pull into the curb so they do not block traffic.

Corinth Street

This is a narrow street along which drivers move slowly. The primary pedestrian impediment on this street is Family Dollar, a chain grocery/convenience store that often blocks the sidewalk with a delivery truck conveyor belt on which boxes are placed. Roslindale Village Main Street has tried to limit the store's delivery hours to periods when pedestrian activity is low. To date, the effort has been unsuccessful but we recommend that the effort should continue.

Belgrade Avenue/Corinth Street/Robert Street

This is a confusing intersection. Eastbound traffic on Belgrade approaches Corinth at fairly high speeds because drivers are coming down a small hill. There is also a very wide right turning radius from Belgrade onto Robert Street. We recommend painting a fog line on the eastbound side of Belgrade Street to narrow the travel lane and slow traffic. We also suggest using paint and flex posts to narrow the right-turning radius at Robert Street.



The intersection of Belgrade Avenue at Corinth and Roberts Streets is confusing to navigate, with wide travel lanes and turning radii encouraging high traffic speeds.

Appendix A: Roslindale Walk Audit Attendees December 5, 2015

Attendees:

Lisa Beatman
Deborah Galiga
Liz Graham-Meredith
Dee Johnson
Adam Kessel
Chris Kollett
Matthew Lawlor
Robert Orthman
Dennis Patch
Rebecca Phillips
Eric Smalley
Gradon Tripp
Paula Tucchi
Greg Tobin
Rick Yoder

WalkBoston

Dorothea Hass
Adi Nochur

Appendix B: Bicycle Lane Design

Locating bicycle lanes between parked cars and sidewalks has been shown to provide increased protection for cyclists. The diagram below, taken from the City of Boston's design for Commonwealth Avenue, illustrates the intersection layout. Bicyclists must yield to pedestrians at designated crossings. The prohibition of parking within 20 feet of the intersection and the creation of large raised platforms increase the visibility for all roadway users.

Similar designs for bicycle lanes between the sidewalk and parked cars have been installed on Ames Street between Main and Broadway in Kendall Square, Cambridge and near Prospect Park in Brooklyn, as well as several of the north-south avenues in Manhattan.

