



A Call to Action to Make Roslindale the Most Walkable Neighborhood in Boston

BY ELECTRONIC MAIL AND IN PERSON TESTIMONY

May 16, 2016

Committee on Parks, Recreation, and Transportation
Boston City Council
Boston City Hall, 5th Floor
Boston, MA 02201
Email: ccc.prt@boston.gov

RE: Testimony for Hearing on Traffic Calming Measures and Vision Zero Boston

Chairman LaMattina and members of the Committee:

Good afternoon. My name is Matt Lawlor, I'm a Roslindale resident, and I'd like to thank you for giving the public this opportunity to weigh in on the city's progress on implementing this very important policy. I'm offering my comments here on my own and also on behalf of WalkUP Roslindale, a collaborative community group with hundreds of supporters founded last May that takes its name from the growing movement to foster "Walkable Urban Places." Our goal is to make Roslindale the most walkable neighborhood in Boston.

Last year's adoption of Vision Zero by Mayor Walsh and his administration was a huge step forward in the ongoing and intensifying effort to make our streets safer for all users. This afternoon, I'd like to focus on two aspects of Vision Zero that, at least as of now, seem to affect us most directly:

First, the Council and BTB should know that there is widespread, intense interest and support among our neighbors in Roslindale for reducing vehicle speeds in order to improve safety on our streets. We are especially grateful that all of our city councilors have been active on this issue:

- District Councilors O'Malley and Campbell co-sponsored the order that led to this hearing.
- District Councilor McCarthy has spoken persuasively for some time about the need to slow traffic in our community.
- Although Council President Wu represents the city at large, she has been a Roslindale resident for the last year and has also been active on these issues.

Put simply, the default citywide speed limit of 30 mph is too fast for safety on neighborhood streets. The research on this is clear and well-known – your chances of surviving being hit by a car are about 82% if the car is going 20 mph, only 50% if the car is going 30 mph, and just 23%

if the car is going 40 mph. So, we applaud the City recent resolution seeking state authority to lower the default speed limit citywide to 20 mph, which goes beyond what was done last year in New York when they went to 25 mph citywide. We hope the legislature votes to give Boston this authority as soon as possible.

And we also applaud the concept of Slow Speed Zones outlined in BTB's December 2015 *Vision Zero Boston Action Plan*. These zones would combine a lower speed limit in defined areas with the physical interventions needed to really make a difference – curb extensions, refuge islands and medians, raised crosswalks, special crosswalk signals, vehicle speed monitors, narrower vehicle travel lanes, street diets, and separated bicycle lanes/tracks. We are eagerly awaiting the initial roll out of Slow Speed Zones in the Norfolk-Talbot Triangle in Dorchester and the Stonybrook Area in Jamaica Plain this year. That said, we are surprised that there has been so little information shared or made available broadly about the progress on those areas and we have heard nothing definitive to date about the expansion of the Slow Speed Zones to other neighborhoods once the first two have been implemented. This is desperately needed, it should happen as fast as possible once the essential combination of interventions has been decided, and BTB should be planning for this expansion right now – I can safely say that my own neighborhood of Peters Hill will be among those areas seeking designation as soon as the expansion process is made public. Slowing speeds in our neighborhoods will save lives. While we understand capacity constraints, there is no need to wait or take this part of the Vision Zero effort slow. Everyone in Boston deserves to live on a street on which vehicle speeds are safe.

Second, a word of deep concern about “Rapid Response Site Visits” under the *Vision Zero Boston Action Plan*. These are the interagency team visits to those sites where fatalities have happened on our streets to identify the causes for the fatalities, develop a plan for interventions to address those causes, and then implement those interventions quickly and aggressively. I have direct experience of this process as it has applied to Silvia Acosta, a resident of Roslindale who was struck and killed by a hit-and-run driver in a crosswalk at the intersection of Washington Street and Blue Ledge Avenue. This crash occurred in mid-January. On January 22, I participated along with representatives from BTB, BTB's consultant from Toole Design, the Boston Public Health Commission, the Boston Police Department, and WalkBoston in the post-crash site visit. At that visit, a range of potential interventions were discussed, including installing curb extensions to shorten the crossing distance, a center pedestrian refuge island, a pedestrian crossing signal, and an additional crosswalk, and eliminating a parking space on the southbound side of Washington Street to improve visibility of pedestrians in the existing crosswalk.

Since the initial site visit, I understand further interventions have been considered, including a vehicle speed monitor and reducing the number of northbound lanes on Washington Street from 2 to 1 (in order to avoid the “double-threat” inherent in such a configuration, which we understand was the immediate cause of Ms. Acosta's death) and adding a protected bike lane segment. Beyond the pedestrian crossing signal, none of these measures are costly or time-

consuming to initially implement using well-known “quick-build” measures like temporary bollards, pylons and paint. Yet, it is now May 16th, and other than a single vehicle speed monitoring sign in the northbound direction on Washington Street, which went up a couple of weeks ago, nothing has happened at this location. No curb extensions, no reducing the number of northbound lanes, no pedestrian refuge island. Nothing. We have been shown a proposed plan for what seem to be meaningful improvements and told that they are coming soon, but we are now almost 4 months beyond the site visit and a proposed plan frankly isn’t enough. We need to know specifically what plan has been approved and when it will start happening – and that needs to be very soon – as in a matter of weeks and certainly not months. While we recognize that Vision Zero necessarily entails a significant change in the way that BTD has done business and so will take time to implement effectively, we also have concerns about the slow pace of dealing with even the most urgent and clearly needed improvements. From what we understand, this slow pace of improvements has been the case at all of the other rapid response visit locations. More must be done to respond to fatal crashes and it has to be done much more quickly. Continued inaction runs the risk of eroding the considerable trust that was built up with the administration’s adoption of the policy and the *Vision Zero Boston Action Plan* last year. We need to see action now.

In closing, thank you again for the opportunity to share our comments on this critically important policy.

Sincerely yours,



Matthew J. Lawlor
Resident @ 15 Basto Terrace, Roslindale, on behalf of WalkUP Roslindale