



# **Cummins Missing Middle Virtual Walk Assessment**

**Released 15 JUNE 2021**

## **1. Introduction**

Over the course of 5 weeks in December 2020 and January 2021, more than two dozen volunteer residents and friends of the Roslindale neighborhood took part in a virtual walk assessment process organized by WalkUP Roslindale to study the “Missing Middle” section of Cummins Highway, running from Rowe Street to the Wood/Harvard intersection and taking in additional portions of Canterbury, Seymour, and Rowe Streets. We are calling this section the “Missing Middle” because it constitutes the middle portion of Cummins Highway and it was missing the transportation advocacy work that had already been done on the ends of Cummins nearer to Roslindale Square and Mattapan Square. As with any walk assessment or audit, the purpose of this effort was to assess walking conditions, identify significant safety concerns, and develop initial targeted recommendations to present to group members, supporters, stakeholders, and ultimately the Boston Transportation and Public Works Departments.

## **2. Who is WalkUP Roslindale?**

WalkUP Roslindale or “**Walkable Urban Place Roslindale**” (WUR) is an all-volunteer community organization founded in 2015 by Roslindale residents dedicated to advocating for safer streets; expanded, more affordable housing opportunities; and neighborhood growth that benefits everyone. WUR supports changes to Roslindale that will create a more vibrant, walkable, bikeable, transit-accessible, livable neighborhood with just housing for all. WUR wants to welcome anyone who desires to live here and support all of our existing neighbors who want to stay in the place they call home.

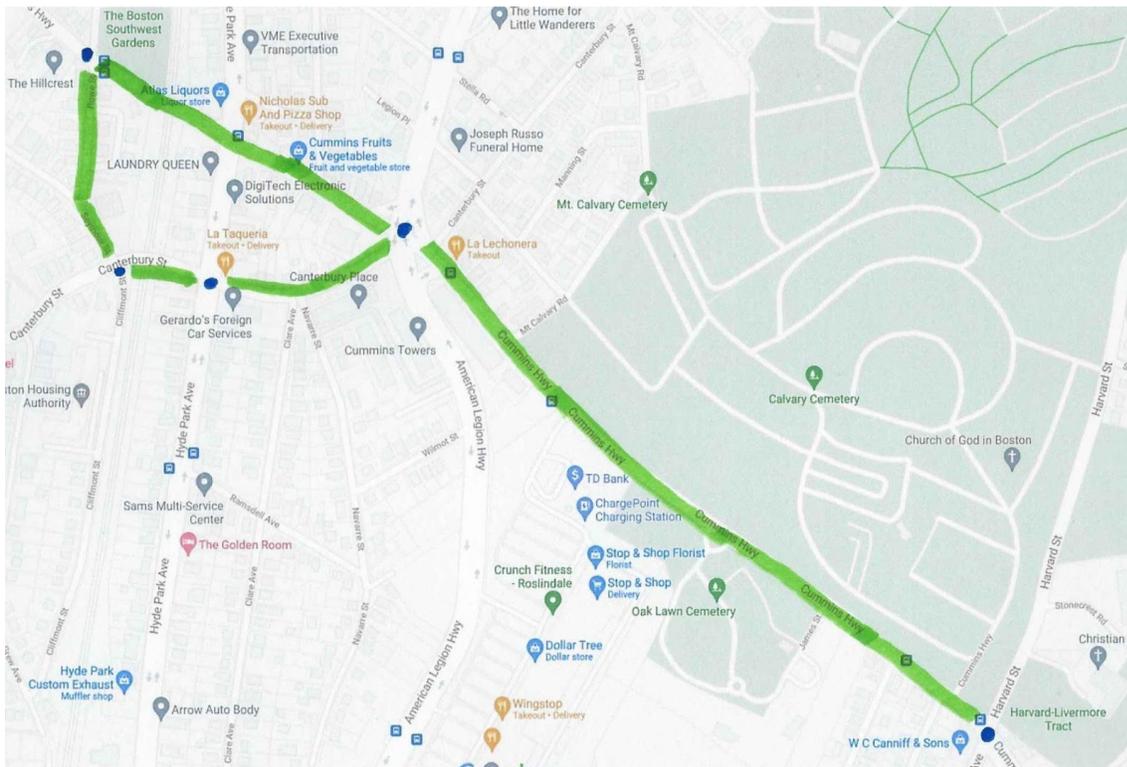
## **3. The Walk Audit – Cummins Missing Middle**

### **a. Process; Participants**

WUR, with the guidance and assistance of LeighAnne Taylor from WalkBoston, the Boston-based statewide pedestrian advocacy organization, organized the Walk Audit virtually rather than in-person as an accommodation to the reality of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The virtual process started with a gathering, information, and training session on December 14,

2020. After that opening session, audit participants went into the field to walk the selected route on their own to assess walking conditions and collect data. (See Figure 1 for the selected route). Participants were then able to upload their feedback onto a google-based platform or email their comments and any images to Matt Lawlor, who, along with Kathryn Ostrofsky, led the organizing for the walk assessment on behalf of WUR. Two feedback sessions to review the initial results of the audit were held on December 21, 2020, and January 14, 2021. Following the second feedback session, further information on walking conditions was accepted and this report was drafted by WUR volunteers including Rob Guptill, Teresa Lawlor, and Matt Lawlor.

**Figure 1 - Walk Assessment Route**



The following community members and municipal officials and elected official representatives participated in the walk audit:

Lisa Beatman (Mt. Hope Canterbury NA)

David Burd

Rick Yoder (Mt. Hope Ave Canterbury NA)

Joe Coppinger (Boston ONS)

Brendan Fogarty

Joanne Ruddy

Judnise Guillet (Councilor Arroyo's Office)

Molly McGovern

Dustin Gardner (Councilor Campbell's)

	Office)
Diane Carter Duggan	Rob Guptill
AM Grip	Alex Cesaro
Elizabeth Crowley	Daniel Merrow (Boston BTB)
Maeve Duggan	Daniela Sanchez Zamora (Boston BTB)
Matt Lawlor	Stefanie Seskin (Boston BTB)
Kathryn Ostrofsky	Frank O'Brien (Allandale Coalition)
Patricia Mendez, Boston Disabilities Commission	Adam Shutes
Emily Gomez, Boston Disabilities Commission	

Special thanks are also extended to Roslindale Village Main Streets for making \$10 Rozzie Bucks coupons available to walk audit participants upon request to compensate them for their time and effort.

**b. Next Steps**

Once this walk assessment is released, it is WUR's intention to post its contents to the WUR website and then distribute the report to neighborhood organizations and municipal elected and appointed officials with the goal of pushing for the development of near-term and long-term changes to the study area to improve the safety of walkers and all other users of the Cummins Missing Middle.

**4. Neighborhood Context<sup>1</sup>**

The "missing middle" of Cummins is at the cusp of eastern Roslindale, western Hyde Park, and northern Mattapan. There are 11 intersections along this portion of Cummins. There are several commercial areas: small businesses along Hyde Park Ave.; small businesses along Cummins; and the large Stop & Shop plaza with the most full-service supermarket in Roslindale and other essential stores: Walgreens, restaurants, Crunch Fitness, and TD Bank – the only bank in eastern Roslindale. Another large shopping plaza is located on American Legion 0.4 miles to the north of Cummins. The area also boasts three elementary schools, and the Boston Nature Center is located half a mile north of Cummins. An alternative route there from Mattapan could be up Cummins, then down Harvard St., but Harvard St. has no sidewalks!

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<sup>1</sup> Special thanks to Lisa Beatman for providing this neighborhood context description (lightly edited).

Mt. Calvary, Mount Hope and Oak Lawn cemeteries are open green spaces along this stretch of Cummins that provide passive recreation and contemplation opportunities. Tree canopy is one of the (diminishing) attractive features in this area, providing environmental and public health benefits. More street trees providing shade are also needed. There are no trash receptacles. There are no wayfaring signs.

About 2,000 residents live adjacent to the study area along Cummins, within half a mile, but few dare to walk or bike. The lack of safety and comfort forces most of them, who can, to drive. Although this is a relatively car-dependent area, due to its relatively late period of initial development, limited public transit options, and prior lack of active transportation infrastructure, there are many residents who don't own cars. Eastern Roslindale is a majority minority, low to moderate income area, and has among the highest transportation burden times in the city of Boston.

As noted, there is limited public transportation available in the study area. It lies about halfway between Roslindale Square (one mile away) and Mattapan Square (1.5 miles away). It is about 1.5 miles to Forest Hills. All those locations have the closest frequent rail transit service. There are only three bus routes that serve this area. MBTA Route 14 goes to Nubian Sq., running 4.5 days/wk., every 45 mins. until 7:00 pm. MBTA Route 30 winds from Forest Hills through Roslindale Square and runs past the Stop & Shop Plaza to Mattapan Square. MBTA Route 32, running straight down Hyde Park Avenue, is the most direct way to get to Forest Hills station and then downtown, so walking this "missing middle" stretch is the go-to way for most residents here to get to a commuter bus stop. On this stretch, the MBTA Route 30 that actually runs down Cummins has 5 bus stops southbound - with only one bench/shelter at the entrance to the Stop and Shop plaza. Northbound there are six bus stops, with only one shelter at Harvard St., located 325 feet away from the actual bus stop it serves.

## **5. Overall Recommendations**

### **a. Slow motor vehicle traffic and shorten pedestrian crossing distances by introducing curb extensions, widening pedestrian medians, and eliminating slip lanes.**

As is the case on so many streets in our neighborhood, most intersections are characterized by wide corners (including, in some cases, slip lanes) and long pedestrian crossing distances that encourage motor vehicle drivers to make turns at high speeds. Slip lane closure is especially something that we urge the City to consider given their obvious encouragement of speeding and disregard for pedestrian safety.

**b. Major intersections are inhospitable to pedestrians.**

The intersections of Cummins Highway with Hyde Park Avenue, the Stop & Shop Driveway, Harvard Street, and particularly American Legion Highway/Canterbury Street (i.e., the “5-Way” or the “Octopus”) require pedestrians to push “beg buttons” and then wait through lengthy signal cycles for limited and concurrent walk signal times, make dangerous crossings across long crosswalks and slip lanes, often with poor vehicle visibility. Non-accessible level changes were noted on some driveways and streets. Numerous streets are missing curb cuts, crosswalk markings, and detectable warning strips (DWS) that provide tactile guides for visually impaired people. Some of the DWS are grey, but the Boston standard requires DWS to be yellow. Accordingly, significant sidewalk and crosswalk upgrades are needed throughout the study area. We strongly suggest BTM/PWD consider level crosswalks on all side streets off of Cummins and Canterbury.

**c. Introduce protected bicycle lanes in the last piece of the Cummins Missing Middle.**

The stretch of Cummins Highway from Rowe St to just past American Legion Highway has no bicycle lanes and protected bicycle lane connections are missing from Cummins to the American Legion protected bicycle lane.

**6. Specific Recommendations****a. Cummins Highway at Rowe Street**

Three apartment buildings for elderly and disabled residents are located less than one block from this intersection. One leg of the crosswalk is missing on the western side of the intersection, across Cummins Highway. The curb cuts are far too wide, especially heading north on Rowe Street. Drivers consistently pulled into the intersection in order to view cars coming downhill from Roslindale due to limited visibility. Cars park illegally on Rowe Street, further decreasing visibility. The westbound bus stop is so close to the corner that the bus, when stopped, blocks Rowe Street. The bus stop sign is faded and unreadable; the bus schedule was placed such that people must stand in the street to read it. The placement of the crosswalk sign is similarly ineffective; it is obscured by the bus stop sign, and many drivers miss it. Drivers are currently traveling

too fast to stop for pedestrians at this intersection; this location is particularly dangerous due to speeding downhill vehicular traffic from both directions.

**Specific recommendations:**

- This intersection requires significant redesigning/re-engineering (e.g., converting it into a signalized intersection).
- The bike lane on Cummins Highway, which currently ends at Brown Avenue, should be extended to Hyde Park Avenue (especially as Cummins Highway is too wide after the intersection, encouraging speeding).
- In the near term, the missing crosswalk should be added and crosswalk visibility needs to be increased with flex posts and a center pedestrian landing.

**b. Cummins Highway at Hyde Park Avenue**

The gas station at the southwest corner of this intersection has an extremely large curb cut (one participant estimated 64 feet, against the current legal limit of 24 feet in width for a 2-way curb cut) on Cummins Highway, with cars entering and leaving by taking turns in either direction, which creates an extremely unsafe experience for pedestrians walking along the sidewalk. Vehicle travel lane lines were faded and confusing for drivers trying to determine whether the street has one or two lanes at this point, leading to awkward merges shortly after the intersection, and whether there is a bike lane. Another participant noted that one of her neighbors was recently hit and injured by a driver when getting out of the MBTA Route 32 bus at this intersection. The utility box in the sidewalk on the southwest corner also limited visibility for drivers.

**Specific recommendations:**

- Repaint the lane lines heading eastbound into the intersection (potentially adding a defined left-turn filter lane).
- Add curb extensions to slow traffic (particularly around the southwest corner across Hyde Park Avenue), pedestrian protection on medians on both crosswalks across Hyde Park Avenue, and narrow the gas station's curb cut to about 24' in order to create a 55' curb to the intersection where a new bus stop could be created.

**c. Cummins Highway between Hyde Park Avenue and the 5-Way/Octopus**

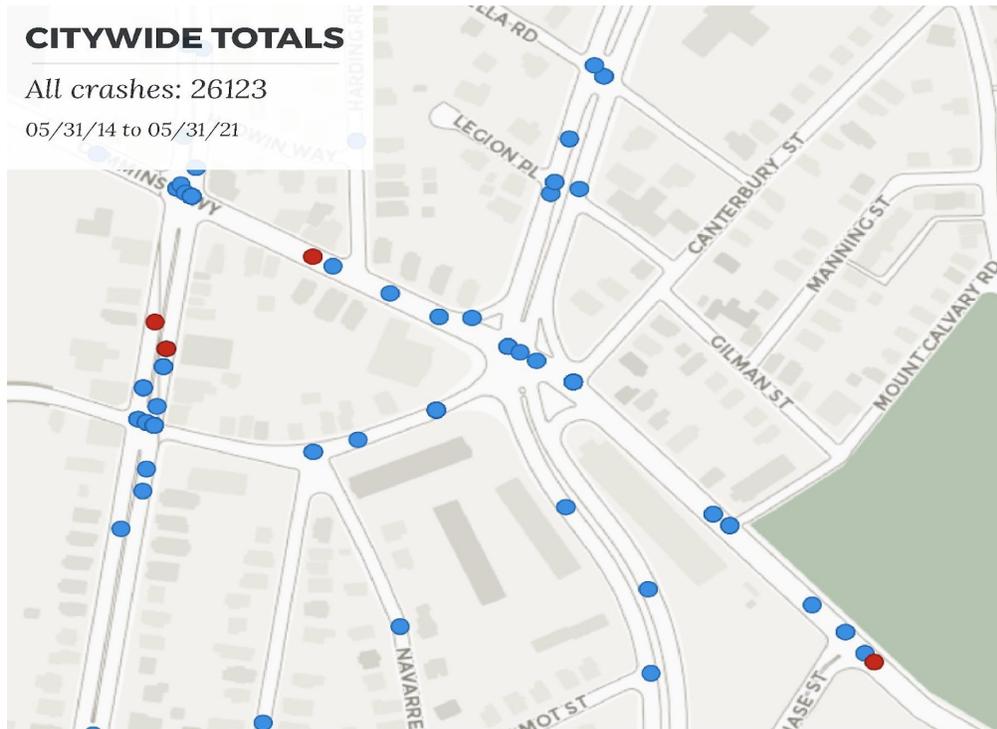
The placement of the ADA accessible ramp crossing Harding Road during this stretch seems difficult due to its distance from the intersection, and creates a potentially unsafe situation where drivers turning from Cummins Highway might not see someone in the crosswalk. Walk auditors did comment that the sidewalks were in good shape on Cummins Highway between Hyde Park Avenue and the 5-Way intersection.

**Specific recommendations:**

- Add curb extensions and painted crosswalks at the Harding Road intersection.
- Extend bike lanes onto Harding Road.

**d. Cummins Highway at American Legion Highway and Canterbury Street – the 5-Way or The Octopus**

The 5-Way/Octopus has finally been recognized as a connector of the Mattapan Cummins-to-Neponset corridor and the American Legion-to-Franklin Park-to-Forest Hills/SW corridor to downtown. There are currently pilot barrier-protected bike lanes on Cummins south of this intersection, and newly protected bike lanes ALH east of it, sharrows on ALH west of it, and no bike lanes on Cummins north of it. But this massive intersection itself has no markings at all, making it confusing and unsafe for cyclists to get from one corridor to a supposedly connected corridor.

**Figure 2 - Central Study Area Crash Map**

The Octopus is also a residential neighborhood connector, yet it is on the map of the top 3% of serious crash intersections in Boston. As stated above, about two thousand residents live within a short distance to this intersection, but few dare to walk or bike. The lack of safety and comfort forces most of us, who can, to drive, adding to the problem. Many seniors live in this area. They get very isolated, especially in the winter as they don't feel safe walking to stores or bus stops, there is insufficient plowing, and there are no bus shelters as windbreaks and to sit in.

Officially, the intersection includes Cummins/American Legion/Canterbury-to-Hyde Park Ave. But it also includes neighborhood access points at Harding Rd., at the mouth of the section of Canterbury St. that goes through to Paine St., and where Clare Ave. and Navarre St. intersect onto Canterbury between Hyde Park Avenue and American Legion Highway. So, this intersection has about nine connecting streets! Like so many streets in this neighborhood, it is treated as just a feeder for cars, primarily for people who do not live here commuting through the neighborhood. But in fact, it should be seen and treated as a feeder for people, which would include pedestrians and cyclists as well. It needs to be mitigated so that it functions as such, which will reduce the traffic congestion and pollution.

One study participant with no current mobility limitations found that it took 7 minutes to walk completely across the intersection coming southbound on American Legion and seeking to reach the Stop and Shop, crossing Canterbury, American Legion, Cummins, the Roslindale side of Canterbury, and then the Hyde Park side of American Legion going towards Stop & Shop. There is a shorter crossing that involves crossing Cummins to the large pedestrian island then across the American Legion Highway slip lane. There is currently no safe or legal way to make the shortest crossing, solely across Cummins, on the south side of the intersection. All pedestrian signals require people on foot to press beg buttons - there are no automatic pedestrian crossing periods on any of the legs of this intersection. Some of the crossing buttons/poles were placed in the middle of a brick path that may be hard to navigate using a wheelchair or with ambulatory aids.

There are six potential left-hand turns (four more if one counts Harding and Clare/Navarre). Two of them each have two possible turns - an acute angle turn and an approx. ninety-degree turn. Southbound from Cummins can turn left onto Canterbury St. or American Legion with waiting cars “blocking the box” in the middle of the big intersection. East-bound from ALH can turn left on Cummins or Canterbury. One participant has also reported seeing occasional drivers take a very risky left-turn from the Mt. Hope side of Canterbury at La Lechonera Restaurant onto Cummins. That might be or should be illegal but there is no signage to that effect there.

**Photo 1 - Typical slip lane at the Octopus.**



There are three slip lanes. Motor vehicle operators driving north on Cummins can avoid the traffic light and ramp on the right onto American Legion, without having to stop or barely slow down. Cars driving from Hyde Park east on American Legion can avoid the

traffic light and ramp to the right to get onto Cummins. And those driving west on American Legion can avoid the light and ramp onto Cummins going towards Roslindale Square. There are crosswalks across each slip lane but drivers never slow down for pedestrians - they are looking ahead and to the left to gauge when there will be a break in the traffic for them to accelerate onto the cross street. The slip lanes support the flow of motor vehicle traffic but are an obvious and avoidable hazard to pedestrians and cyclists. Like so many intersections around the city, the main American Legion/Cummins intersection used to have tight turning angles closer to 90 degrees, until the city "improved" it (for increased car volume) after the Second World War. It should be noted that those "improvements" privileged convenience over safety for drivers, too. Those plans also showed how they narrowed the previously ample sidewalks, in the intersection and also along American Legion Highway past the shopping centers east and west of the intersection.

There are four pedestrian refuges, one large and three small ones, between the main lanes and the slip lanes. They are essential, but inadequate - the small ones in particular still leave one feeling very exposed to the fast-moving traffic on both sides. Many participants noted that several days after a 12 in. snowstorm in early December, the city had still not plowed any of the pedestrian refuges. In fact, there were three-foot mounds of packed snow around each refuge from the plowing done to clear the vehicle lanes. None of the bus stops were plowed. Nearly all of the curb ramps had been plowed over and not cleared out.

**Photo 2 - Plowed in pedestrian refuge island at the Octopus.**



The triangular pedestrian island between American Legion and Cummins West is sizable; however it is also flat and exposed (sidewalk height curb around it). There is no bench, no trees, no shrubbery and one feels exposed to all the cars going around it on all three sides.

All the pedestrian signal intervals should be examined and modified. They are all concurrent, with drivers turning into the crosswalks while pedestrians are trying to cross. One participant, who uses a brightly colored cane, was in a crosswalk with the walk light when three cars nearly hit her. Minimally, these signals should have a leading pedestrian interval, if not exclusive. The car-centric configuration of the intersection, the mindset of the motor vehicle drivers, the distracted driver factor, and the many poor sightlines, do not make for workable concurrent timing.

Specific recommendations:

- Continue the protected cycling lanes on Cummins (coming over from Wood/Harvard) and American Legion (coming down from Walk Hill) through this intersection.
- Eliminate all slip lanes.
- Create extra protection and extensions around crosswalks and corners with concrete barriers and flexposts to daylight intersections, reduce the curb radius

wherever possible, and install yellow truncated dome pads at all ramp to assist pedestrians with visual and mobility impairments.

- Review signal timing for all pedestrian movements with focus on reducing overall time to get through the intersection for pedestrians.
- Provide for leading pedestrian indicator on all concurrent walk signal movements.

**e. Cummins Highway between the 5-Way/Octopus and Stop & Shop Plaza**

Participants noted that they felt much safer due to the presence of recently installed bike lanes and flex posts on either side of Cummins Highway, which require continued maintenance. However, participants were confused by the abrupt end of the bike lanes heading towards the 5-Way intersection, and they also reported that many of the flex posts were damaged or missing. Multiple participants noted significant speeding by drivers down the hill. One participant noted that the sidewalks on the Roslindale side of the road were uneven, filled with potholes, strewn with branches, and easy for a cane or a wheelchair tire to get caught on. The sidewalks were unplowed days after the December snowstorm.

There is a very small, unsignalized, unmarked T intersection at Mt. Calvary Road, one of the entrances to a pocket neighborhood of approx. 600 residents. Mt. Calvary is a narrow two-lane street with no sidewalks that is frequently used as a commuter cut-through to avoid the 5-Way/Octopus. Making this important access point safer and more comfortable would enable many more residents to walk or bike.

Specific recommendations:

- Replace the uneven sidewalk and improve sidewalk maintenance, including snow clearance.
- Install a crosswalk on Mt. Calvary at Cummins.
- Enhance flex post replacement/upkeep, with particular focus on connecting this access point to an improved crossing at the Stop & Shop plaza (see below).

**f. Cummins Highway at Stop & Shop Plaza**

This intersection is a main access point for hundreds of shoppers weekly who frequent the Stop & Shop, Walgreens, the local bank and the gym, among other businesses. Participants reported that drivers leaving the plaza and turning left onto Cummins Highway rarely stop for pedestrians walking across Cummins Highway (The walk signal is unfortunately concurrent with left-turning traffic. Drivers on Cummins northbound turning left to enter the plaza rarely stop for pedestrians crossing the entrance, drivers leaving the plaza turning left onto Cummins rarely stop for pedestrians crossing Cummins, and drivers turning right on red into the plaza often roll through the intersection without bothering to stop. Very few drivers pay attention to pedestrians in the crosswalks. There are no trash cans, including at the one bus shelter.

**Photo 3 - Cummins at the Stop & Shop Entrance**



Specific recommendations:

- Implement an exclusive pedestrian signal instead of concurrent signaling.
- Install yield signs and enhanced lighting at night.
- Require consistent snow removal (especially on the Hyde Park side towards the bus shelter).
- Continue bike infrastructure and sidewalks inside the plaza.
- Move the MBTA Route 30 bus stop from in front of the driveway to behind it to save pedestrians from having to cross the driveway.
- Install a bus shelter for the bus stop on the Mt. Calvary Cemetery side of Cummins.
- The right turn into the plaza needs to be “No Turn on Red.”

### **g. Cummins Highway at Wood Avenue/Harvard Street**

Harvard Street has extremely narrow or non-existent sidewalks. Participants noted drivers speeding east downhill on Cummins Highway. Due to a stone wall, cars on Harvard Street creep into the crosswalk in order to see traffic when preparing to turn. Participants reported that paving on bike lanes was dangerously uneven with new patches, and that cars turning right from eastbound Cummins Highway onto Wood Avenue southbound often block the bike lane because the lack of pavement marking allows them to mistake the space as a turning lane.

#### **Specific recommendations:**

- Add green paint to the bike lane at this intersection to reduce confusion.
- Increase visibility so that cars do not block crosswalks while waiting to turn.
- Install curb extensions to decrease lane size.
- Add a pedestrian refuge on the median on the Cummins Highway crosswalk on the east side of the intersection.
- One participant recommended making Harvard Street one-way to Walk Hill in order to add sidewalks and a bike lane.

### **h. Canterbury Street at Clare/Navarre**

This is a very small unsignalized, unmarked T intersection, one of the entrances to a pocket neighborhood. Half of the area is in Roslindale, half is in Hyde Park, and it includes several hundred lower-income residents in apartment towers and single-family homes beyond that.

Clare and Navarre are very narrow residential two-lane streets that intersect with Canterbury. There are no crosswalks there, across any of the three streets. That short stretch of Canterbury is between the busy Hyde Park Ave. and American Legion Highway traffic lights, and is generally very congested, so drivers turning left from any of these streets often block Canterbury there. Openings in Cummins traffic that allow this are infrequent and short, so drivers are focusing on the two-way traffic and are not paying attention to anyone walking near them. The dense traffic with very short breaks in it makes this a basically blind corner.

### **i. Canterbury Street at Hyde Park Avenue**

Participants noted that cars tend to accelerate through this intersection, paying attention to other cars rather than pedestrians. They also found the sidewalks to be

uncomfortably narrow and lacking tree coverage, as well as difficult to navigate due to inconsistent snow removal. Cars often park too close to corners or in crosswalks and crossing Hyde Park Avenue is daunting, especially considering the lack of protection at the center of the long crosswalks, where a protected pedestrian refuge is completely missing. One participant reported that walking across the large curb cut at the fire station felt “extremely exposed.”



**Specific recommendations:**

- Add additional signage for no parking zones.
- Repair and level sidewalks.
- Install pedestrian protection at medians at crosswalks.
- Install barriers/posts to help with daylighting, and tactile yellow truncated dome pads on curb cuts.

**j. Canterbury Street at Seymour Street**

Participants reported limited visibility around the corner at the crosswalk of this intersection.

**Specific recommendations:**

- Add signage for no parking at the corners of the intersection to dissuade drivers from parking too close to the crossing as well as curb extensions to reduce crossing distances.

**k. Seymour Street at Rowe Street**

Participants found that drivers sped through this intersection, encouraged by its wide lanes. There are no crosswalks and very limited visibility for pedestrians around the curve at curb cuts.

**Specific recommendations:**

- Install painted crosswalks and signage for no parking zones at the corners, and a major curb extension or median island to calm traffic. This intersection could host a parklet and a raised crosswalk/speed bump.