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Boston, Newton, Weston consider bicycle improvements along Route 30

By [John Hilliard](#) Globe Staff, Updated May 13, 2020, 8:42 p.m.



Bicyclists, runners and walkers share the road in the Commonwealth Avenue Carriage Lane. JIM DAVIS/GLOBE STAFF

Officials in Boston, Newton, and Weston are considering projects that feature improved bicycle access along stretches of Route 30 — measures that advocates say are critical for encouraging people to use bicycles instead of automobiles for their commutes and help ease the region's traffic woes when the coronavirus shutdown

ends.

While the proposals are separate, supporters said these projects would bring new transportation infrastructure along Commonwealth Avenue in Boston and Newton, and South Avenue in Weston, which form a vital commuting link tying the western suburbs to the region's urban core.

"We have a climate mandate on our hands, and we have to find ways to move people other than private automobiles," said Andreae Downs, a councilor-at-large from Newton's Ward 5. "One of the ways to move people efficiently is the bicycle."

In Newton, Downs is among a group of city councilors calling on the city to legalize two-way bicycle traffic along a roughly 5-mile stretch of Commonwealth Avenue's carriage lane, from Woodbine Street in Auburndale to Mt. Alvernia Road in Chestnut Hill.

The proposal, which is early in discussions, could include new signage, traffic signals, and physical barriers in some locations to limit access by vehicles, Downs said. Other projects that would [increase bicycle access are being considered in Newton](#), along with a state project to upgrade Needham Street.

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In Weston, officials are considering a proposed reconstruction of Route 30 through the entire town, from its western border with Natick to Route 128, which is a physical barrier between the town and its eastern neighbor, Newton. The project would include dedicated bike and pedestrian paths along the road.

“It’s critically important we get it right,” said Laurie Bent, a member of Weston’s Select Board. “We need to hear all the voices, both locally and regionally ... if we can find a way to reduce traffic, I think it would be better for people who live on the road as well.”

In Boston, officials are redesigning the stretch of Commonwealth Avenue from the intersection of Warren and Kelton streets to Packard’s Corner.

That project would include improvements such as a one-way buffered cycle track within the carriage roads on both sides of the street, a Public Works Department spokesman said in a statement. The city is seeking public input on that project [through an online survey](#).

“The City is always looking for opportunities to expand our bicycle network in the future to improve connectivity,” the spokesman said.

In Newton, the carriage lane is a holdover from when Commonwealth Avenue was laid out in the late 1800s, according to Historic Newton’s Clara Silverstein.

Originally, trolley service along the road could carry passengers from Boston all the way to an amusement park on the banks of the Charles River, where the present Boston Marriott Newton now stands, she said. The trolley service ended in 1930, after Newton neighbors complained about the noise and impact on property values, she said.

“The boulevard was designed to open up this part of Newton,” Silverstein said. “And

now we are going back to the idea of thinking about transportation more broadly, and how the city's infrastructure best services people.”

Brendan Keegan, president of Bike Newton, said the group has advocated for legalizing two-way bicycle traffic on Commonwealth Avenue's carriage lane. He uses the lane regularly, and thinks it is the safest bike route the city has, he said.

“Leaders need to start thinking regionally, and that is what we have been advocating for — a network of safe bike routes that take you where you need to go,” Keegan said. “It's about building safe infrastructure on main routes.”

The separate projects along Route 30 are included as part of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council's proposed LandLine initiative, which incorporates about 1,400 miles of connected trails and greenways in the Boston area.

Work along Route 30 to integrate bicycle lanes is a “key link” in the network, according to David Loutzenheiser, a senior transportation planner with the agency.

While the region's traffic has temporarily evaporated in the wake of COVID-19, the state cannot continue to focus the bulk of its transportation infrastructure to serve personal automobiles, he said.

“We have to have a good road network” for bicycles, Loutzenheiser said. “Being on a bike is good for space, environmental health, all those reasons ... You cannot sustain a regional transportation system with a single-occupancy car.”

The bicycle projects being considered come as leaders across the region look for ways to promote greater cooperation among communities in building a bicycle and trail network across Greater Boston.

Bent, the Weston Select Board member, said she would like to see greater cooperation

among local communities to improve bicycle and pedestrian access from the western suburbs and across Route 128. She would like to make it easier for people to reach the banks of the Charles River, as well as the MBTA's Riverside station.

"If you try biking through that area, you are taking your life into your hands," Bent said. "One of the reasons we think this is a key connection is that the Riverside T station is close geographically, but there is a huge obstacle course to get there by foot or by bike."

Herb Nolan, the executive director of the Solomon Foundation, which advocates for parks and greenways in the Boston area and is supporting Newton's Commonwealth Avenue proposal, said many municipal leaders coming up today support these infrastructure improvements.

"The advocates of 10 years ago are now the city councilors of today," Nolan said. "They have moved into positions of power."

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