

Lowell Connector & Gorham Street

On Wednesday, May 8, 6:30 pm, the City of Lowell Department of Planning & Development invited the public to discuss two alternatives presented by MassDOT for improving the junction between the Lowell Connector and Gorham Street. The meeting was advertised via social media on the City of Lowell and Economic Development Facebook pages, direct emails to neighborhood groups and area organizations, mailed hard copy letters to project abutters, and flyers distributed to neighboring businesses.

After a presentation and question & answer session by MassDOT, the more than 30 attendees broke into three groups to have a facilitated discussion with prompts similar to the following questions:

- Are there project goals that are being missed?
- What concerns or questions do you have about the roundabout alternative?
- What concerns or questions do you have about the T-intersection alternative?
- Are there particular modes of traffic you are concerned about?

This report details the comments recorded on tear pads and written notes verbatim. These notes, in addition to emails received at lowellconnectorproject@lowellma.gov prior to May 15, 2019, were forwarded to the MassDOT Project Manager. In addition, the City developed a spreadsheet of 65 questions to be answered by MassDOT and/or the City as part of alternative analysis and design development. Those questions are based on the meeting notes, emails, and internal review by the Department of Planning and Development and the Department of Public Works Engineering Office.

Group #1 (Facilitated by Chris Hayes)

- What is curb-to-curb width of Gorham?
- Concerns with roundabout:
 - Jam up traffic (traffic exiting connector blocks southbound Gorham traffic)
 - Vehicles not understanding the roundabout
 - Merging in roundabout
 - Back up from Elm Street
 - Bringing the congestion from Connector to Elm Street signal
- Can there be a roundabout at Elm?
- Can the Elm Street traffic signal be re-timed now (to give more priority to Gorham)
- What are trade-offs with construction time/expense?
 - Frank: Generally, the roundabout would be faster build
 - Frank: T-intersection may be cheaper, not sure yet
- Will the work happen at day or night?
 - Frank: Most work will happen during day
 - Frank: Some work at night, will work with City on preference among neighbors
- Can the landscaping in the existing cloverleaf be improved (Inside the Connector off-ramp to Thorndike northbound)?

- What is diameter of roundabout?
- Will cars going southbound on Gorham “battle” too much traffic in the roundabout?
- What is the phasing at the Elm Street light? I.e., will there be a green left arrow?
- Can the crosswalk at Bishop Markham be improved? People don’t cross at it, they cross various places.
- Can we have a longer right turn lane from Connector onto Gorham southbound?
 - Frank: No
- Can there be a longer right turn lane in the new “T” concept if this alternative is pursued?
- Would the proposed crosswalk at Keene Street be safe?
 - Could there be a flashing beacon or other safety elements at crosswalk?
- Can there be a new crosswalk at Walnut?
 - If it’s not safe now, can it be made safe? This is already often used at a crosswalk and is used to access the school and South Common.
- Please explain how trucks/buses can navigate through the radius of the roundabout.

General consensus was that the roundabout was somewhat preferred to slow speeding cars, if above questions could be answered/addressed.

Group #2 (Facilitated by Natasha Vance)

- Bike infrastructure – Shared use path with signage
- Parking – Add spots in Green space on Roundabout
- Boyhood home of Paul Tsongas at Gorham and Highland – Protect
- Any takings?
- Change to Sidewalk Width?
 - School children in street?
- How will pedestrians safely get through roundabout? Tee?
 - Rectangular Rapid-Flashing Beacons?
- What signage/notice (Traffic calming) will there be on the Connector before the roundabout or the tee? To slow traffic?
- How will signals be coordinating with downtown?
- Can the center of the rounabout be vegetated?
- Mid block crosswalk near Walnut street – lots of ped traffic
- Model the traffic flow from the tee/roundabout to the signal at Highland Street/Gorham

Group #3 (Facilitated by Claire Ricker)

- Parking?
 - How many street spaces will be made or eliminated?
- Fire Department? Are they OK with a roundabout?
- MassDOT likes roundabout—do you?
 - Safety 90% down fatality, etc.
 - Less conflict for vehicles
 - No signal to maintain

- Slower speeds
- Can make left onto Connector from Gorham Northbound
- Reduce vehicle delay
- Cons?
 - Bike/ped safer but longer or could stay in traffic “take the lane”
 - “Shared Use” sidewalk/bike
- Proposed signage? Bike/ped, etc?
- Takings?
- Oversized vehicles—how will they navigate?
- Some driveways aren’t “legal” but are still driveways.
- Capacity?
 - Have you accounted for future growth?
 - How does roundabout work if 5% growth? 10%?!
- Roundabout is “good” for connector, traffic not good Gorham Street—southbound especially
- How were “areas of conflict” –crashes prioritized during concept development?
- Walnut and South better ped signal safer route to school?!
- What other methods could/will be employed to slow connector speed when approaching intersection?
 - Blinking lights?
 - In-street flashers?
 - More speed control needed
- Please provide summary traffic/level of service analysis for each alternative
- Busses? How do they maneuver?
- Cross street intersections S. Highland/Walnut/Auburb and Gorahm, Etc, constantly blocked
- Replace “No left turn” sign from gas station onto Elm
 - Also study how to get back on Gorham Southbound
- Ped crossing signs replaced at Hosford Square?
 - Can we do this?
- Who owns signal Thorndike/Gorham/Central!?
- South Highland intersection traffic control? Left turns?

Written Notes Received at Session

- Light sequence at Elm changed?
- Left turn onto Connector from Gorham Good
 - Takes pressure off off Thorndike
- Overlay of existing with new?
- High crash at what points?
 - End of Connector vs. other streets
- Expected queues in peaks?
- Provide summary of goals/benefits/issues by option