



September 20, 2022

Traffic Commission
133 Holland St
Somerville, MA 02143

Dear Traffic Commission members,

The Somerville Pedestrian and Transit Advisory Committee (PTAC) is writing to express support for the “Updated Holland Street Plan with Protected Bike Lanes” (hereafter referred to as the Updated Holland St. Plan). We support the updated plan as a response to the crash that killed Stephen Conley. We commend the Mayor and the staff of OSPCD Mobility for acting on the immediate opportunity to install infrastructure that would have saved Stephen’s life on a key corridor adjacent to the crash.

On August 12, Somerville resident Stephen Conley was killed while biking westbound and uphill on Broadway between Powder House Circle and Teele Square. A motorist opened their door into the unprotected bike lane, striking Stephen and resulting in fatal injuries. In the wake of this tragedy, the Mayor and Mobility identified nearby Holland Street as an ideal candidate for near-term safety improvements that would prevent future dooring crashes. Most notably, these improvements include installing protected bike lanes on both sides of the street. PTAC sees this decision as:

- *An appropriate response:* The original Holland Street plan included the same type of unprotected bike lanes that facilitated Stephen’s death. PTAC supports the Mayor and Mobility’s current efforts to focus on installing infrastructure that improves transit safety on a highly traversed street adjacent to the crash.
- *Data-driven:* Holland Street sees a higher annual rate of crashes – fatal and non-fatal – than does the stretch of Broadway between Powder House Circle and Teele Square.¹ Implementing protected bike lanes on Holland Street will greatly improve street safety in West Somerville, and on a critical corridor connecting the two cultural, commercial, and residential centers of Davis and Teele Squares.
- *Timely:* Holland Street improvements are already set to begin this fall, under a current construction contract. This means that we can implement life-saving improvements in the immediate term, rather than push them off to another project with an unspecified timeline.
- *Aligned with City priorities:* Somerville is a Vision Zero City, meaning that we as a City have committed to reducing and eliminating transportation injuries and fatalities. One of the key categories of activity specified in our Vision Zero Action Plan² is prioritizing safe street design. Additionally, Somerville’s governance is guided by the community-driven SomerVision2040 plan,³ which includes such implementation priorities as encouraging sustainable behavior (including around transportation choices), and reducing vehicle miles traveled in order to achieve a multimodal and more environmentally-friendly transportation system.

PTAC further supports the Updated Holland St. Plan for its expansion of high-quality pedestrian safety improvements, as were included in the original plan. These improvements include curb extensions, raised crosswalks, a refuge island at the busy intersection at Cameron Avenue, and multiple vertical traffic calming treatments.

¹ Somerville Vision Zero Data Dashboard: <https://www.somervillema.gov/departments/programs/vision-zero-somerville>

² Somerville Vision Zero Action Plan (2020): <https://s3.amazonaws.com/somervillema.gov-if-us-east-1/s3fs-public/vision-zero-action-plan.pdf>

³ SomerVision2040 Plan (2021): <https://www.somervision2040.com/plan/>

PTAC also supports the Updated Holland St. Plan for its inclusion of a bus/bike-only lane from Buena Vista Road to Davis Square. Especially as the MBTA's Bus Network Redesign is ongoing, we are eager to see improvements that will make it as easy as possible to travel to and from Davis Square via public transit. We urge the Mayor to continue pushing the MBTA to act as a responsible partner and take advantage of Somerville's investments in transit-priority infrastructure by increasing high-frequency bus lines between heavily trafficked city sectors.

PTAC would like to acknowledge and express respect for the concerns raised by small business owners along Holland Street about the impacts the updated plans could have on their businesses, and the changes these updated plans represent from the public process originally undertaken as part of the Holland Street/College Avenue project. We support the Mayor and Mobility's continued engagement with these business owners and all stakeholders affected by these changes.

PTAC would, however, like to offer some comments on parking along Holland Street. The first is that we agree with the preliminary findings of the Citywide Parking & Curb Use Study⁴ that "front-door on-street parking at all destinations cannot be guaranteed if we want to achieve [the] vision" of "a more sustainable, equitable, and accessible transportation network."⁵ In August 2022, PTAC voted to endorse a set of policy priorities in light of the draft recommendations from the study.⁶ Our endorsement included support for reallocating curb space to increase and improve pedestrian, bus, and bike infrastructure, while prioritizing parking for users with accessibility needs and low-income users. The study's preliminary findings and our endorsements were released before PTAC had engaged in any discussions about the crash that killed Stephen Conley or potential changes to the Holland Street plan. PTAC sees the Updated Holland St. Plan as being aligned with the study's preliminary findings and our endorsements, including in its inclusion of accessible and ADA-compliant metered parking along Holland Street, additional metered parking on side streets adjacent to Holland Street, and a loading "megazone" near Buena Vista Road that will include live parking availability.

PTAC disagrees with the assumption that removing ~45 parking spaces to accommodate protected bike lanes will detract from the enthusiastic patronage that Somerville residents and visitors provide to the top-tier establishments along Holland Street. On the contrary, data-based analyses in cities worldwide have found that "bike lanes have a neutral or even positive effect on business sales, even when there is some parking loss."⁷ Recent data collected in our own city suggests there is more parking than is needed to meet demand along Holland Street and in the surrounding area. The Curb Profile⁸ conducted as part of the Citywide Parking & Curb Use Study found that in the Davis/Powder House/Ball Squares subarea, commercial parking is only 30% full on weekdays and 50% full on weekends. Further, the Curb Profile found that the metered portion of Holland Street (concentrated closest to Davis Square) is less than 50% full during the morning commercial hours and does not exceed the 50-70% full range throughout the day. PTAC believes there are more creative ways to ensure easy access to local businesses while allowing people using all modes of transportation to travel safely through Somerville - indeed, we see the Updated Holland St. Plan as an ideal example of such creativity.

Finally, though it does not have immediate bearing on the Updated Holland St. Plan, PTAC would like to express support for the longer-term goals the Mayor and Mobility are pursuing to improve bike and pedestrian infrastructure on Broadway west of Powder House Circle where the crash that killed Stephen Conley took place. We are thankful that the next draft of the Bicycle Network Plan⁹ will include bidirectional protected bike lanes on Broadway between Powder House Circle and Teele Square, instead

⁴ <https://voice.somervillema.gov/parking-study>

⁵ Citywide Curb-Use and Parking Public Meeting #2 Presentation Slides (June 2022): <https://voice.somervillema.gov/13396/widgets/40230/documents/32664>

⁶ Draft Somerville Curb and Parking Recommendations (June 2022): <https://voice.somervillema.gov/13396/widgets/40230/documents/32665>

⁷ <https://www.cambridgebikesafety.org/2021/09/22/bike-lanes-and-local-business-the-economic-impact/>

⁸ Curb Profile (February 2022): <https://voice.somervillema.gov/13396/widgets/40230/documents/31604>

⁹ <https://voice.somervillema.gov/somerville-bicycle-network-plan>

of the one-way protected bike lane included in the original draft.¹⁰ We are also excited about the City's application for USDOT's Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) Implementation Grant, which proposes the reconstruction of Broadway from Clarendon Hill to Ball Square under a five-year phased implementation plan. Designs and engineering would be funded through the award. The SS4A Implementation Grant is only available to municipalities with a Vision Zero Action Plan.

In sum, PTAC supports the Updated Holland St. Plan as an appropriate, data-driven, and timely response to the crash that killed Stephen Conley. PTAC sees the updated plan as being aligned with the guiding principles expressed in our Vision Zero Action Plan and SomerVision2040, and with the creative planning called for in the preliminary findings of the Citywide Parking and Curb Use Study. PTAC is enthusiastic about efforts toward safer multimodal travel in West Somerville, and everywhere in our city.

Sincerely,
The Somerville Pedestrian and Transit Advisory Committee (PTAC)

Chair: Alessandra Seiter
Vice-Chair: Vitor Pamplona
Secretary: Carole Voulgaris

Ted Alexander
Ginny Alverson
Caroline Bodager
Meredith Brown
Thomas Coen
Laura Evans
Christopher Ferry
Zach Rosenberg
Kirsten Walters

CC: Mayor Katjana Ballantyne, City of Somerville
Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development - Mobility Division, City of Somerville
City Clerk, City of Somerville

¹⁰ <https://voice.somervillema.gov/somerville-bicycle-network-plan/maps/draft-network-vision>