

## Summary of Community Input

Washington Avenue Re-Paving & Improvement Project

Last updated: February 4, 2022

### Introduction

In 2021, the City of Philadelphia conducted additional community engagement about plans to re-pave Washington Avenue and improve safety along the corridor. As the City prepares for the repaving of Washington Avenue in 2022, the community engagement process is nearing an end. City decisionmakers will be moving forward with the roadway layout that has the greatest likelihood of meeting the most City, community, and local business objectives. Unfortunately, there is no single plan that will meet the desires of all stakeholders.

This memo lists the themes of the community input from 2021-2022 listed as “what we heard” and “how we responded”. See page 2 for a list of meetings.

Visit our website for additional project materials <https://www.phila.gov/documents/washington-avenue-repaving-and-improvement-project/>

### Theme: Community Engagement Process

#### ***What we heard***

***“The goals of the working group are unclear and the City is not being transparent about the process.”***

#### **How we responded**

A main purpose of the working group is to bring together stakeholders with differing opinions about the future of Washington Avenue. The process serves to engage in dialogue with each other and the City. A goal has been to generate greater understanding among stakeholders and to reach greater consensus about the future of Washington Avenue. The ad hoc group has had approximately 20 – 30 people attending any one meeting and has not excluded any individual who sought to attend a meeting or request information. In late 2021, it has become relatively clear that the working group is not leading towards broad consensus. However, the working group did succeed in helping all stakeholders learn about and understand the different interests of various stakeholders, and the input it has provided has helped the City adjust the project proposal and consider additional elements for this project or for a future project on Washington Avenue. The City is moving closer to a decision and will present draft elements of a decision-making framework to the working group for input.

## ***What we heard***

***“Neighbors in Point Breeze and Grays Ferry never heard about the online survey in 2020 and didn’t participate.”***

### **How we responded**

In January 2020, the City entered a new phase of outreach for Washington Avenue to gather input on options for improving safety on the roadway when it is repaved. (See below for details on 2020 process.)

### **Engagement 2021**

In response to requests for more engagement and, in particular in-person engagement, the City underwent additional engagement and outreach for Washington Avenue in 2021.

- Held a meeting by Zoom in March 2021. Goal of the meeting was to share information about the outreach conducted in 2020 and to get input from people who were just hearing about the project. The online meeting was Zoom bombed with hate speech and ended early.
- Held an in-person site walk on Washington Avenue in May 2021 to get input, observe existing conditions, and talk about the project’s proposed solutions.
- Held two in-person meetings at Wharton Square in summer 2021
- Held one in-person meeting with Point Breeze and Grays Ferry neighbors in summer 2021
- Created a working group and held six meetings between September 2021 and February 2022 to generate dialogue between people with a range of opinions about the future of Washington Avenue.

### **Engagement 2020**

The City held three in-person meetings in early 2020, one with the South Philadelphia Homes Incorporated, one with Bella Vista Neighbors Association, and one with North of Washington Avenue Coalition.

### **Shifting to COVID**

In March 2020, The City followed guidelines of the City of Philadelphia’s Department of Public Health preventing large gatherings under COVID-19. OTIS found other ways to hear from residents and businesses on plans to repave Washington Avenue in 2021.

In addition to the online survey, OTIS continued to track the **number of meetings** held with stakeholders, the **number of people** attending these meetings, and the number of

people providing input by **other methods besides the online survey (text/phone/email).**

### **Engagement May - July 2020**

Individual outreach to RCO's & Business Organizations

- *Held **37 meetings with 26 RCOs, civic associations and business associations, reaching 215+ people***

Mailed Postcard

- *Postcards mailed to **5,400+ households/businesses** (Carpenter St. - Ellsworth St.)*

Phone Number

- *Text conversations with **7 people***

Input Survey

- *Input received from 5,458 people total, far exceeding the goal of 400 responses.*
- *Of the total, approximately 1,700 people reported living or working in 19147 & 19148 zip codes (east of Broad); and approximately 1,400 people reported living or working in 19145 & 19146 zip codes (west of Broad)*

Videos

- ***12,049 unique video views** across videos in 4 languages*

Email

- *During May – July 2020, **34 people emailed** with input about the project.*

Social Media

- *During May – July 2020, approximately 68,400 impressions on social media. On Facebook alone 693 likes/shares and 12 mentions.*

Local Press Outreach

- ***15 media mentions and news articles** published about the public process and how to give input*

### ***What we heard***

***“Did the City purposefully publish the survey online only to exclude racialized communities?”***

How we responded

No. Excluding racialized communities is against the law and is against the values of the City and OTIS. Before COVID, the City held three in-person meetings in early 2020, one with the South Philadelphia Homes Incorporated, one with Bella Vista Neighbors Association, and one with North of Washington Avenue Coalition. At the outset of COVID in March 2020, the City implemented a stay-at-home order and all in-person gatherings were temporarily banned. **The City initiated meetings via phone, virtual methods, and outreach by mail in order to comply with the health and safety requirements.** The City also recognizes the disparate impacts of COVID on racialized communities. Finally, the City is committed to actively reversing the historic tendency of planning processes that exclude marginalized communities. In 2021, when the City learned that some communities had not participated in the 2020 engagement, the project design process was put on hold in order to have more discussion. In 2021, the City initiated

additional meetings and a working group to hear and address the concerns that arose regarding the Washington Avenue public process.

## **Theme: Roadway Pavement Condition**

### ***What we heard***

***“Washington Avenue needs to be repaved. It’s in poor condition now!”***

#### **How we responded**

The current paving condition on Washington Avenue does not meet City goals for high-quality roadway paving surface. The street was last repaved in 2003, and the existing pavement is past its useful lifetime. The City has identified a federal funding source, FAM (Federal Aid to Municipalities), and included Washington Avenue in a paving package that will be installed in 2022.

## **Theme: Additional Project Elements \***

*\*A group of residents representing Point Breeze submitted a list of ideas for project elements to the City in September 2021. Many of these elements are listed directly below in the body of this document. In addition, see the full list of suggested additional project elements and responses from the City in the appendix at the end of this document.*

### ***What we heard***

***“This project should include green stormwater infrastructure.”***

#### **How we responded**

The scope of the current project is primarily limited to what is possible with a repaving project, which does not typically include green stormwater infrastructure (GSI). GSI could be part of a longer-term project with the Philadelphia Water Department, but more analysis would need to occur to determine water catchment potential and would probably be limited to certain locations along Washington Avenue. If there is a future phase of street improvements planned for Washington Avenue, GSI could be considered for a future project.

### ***What we heard***

***“This project should include concrete mountable curb grass medians.”***

#### **How we responded**

This could be possible but would need to be discussed with emergency responders like Fire and Police. The medians would make this space less accessible to emergency vehicles along the corridor. In addition, grass medians would require a maintenance plan and dedicated resources for the long-term. Because of the priority of emergency access and due to the limit of the paving scope, the City is not pursuing currently.

### ***What we heard***

***"This project should include dynamic speed feedback "speed minder" signs."***

#### ***How we responded***

This could be included at intervals along the corridor with the paving project. These signs could reduce speeding by giving people driving a visual cue of their speed. The team is currently researching whether this is appropriate and possible to include in the project.

### ***What we heard***

***"This project should include lighting."***

#### ***How we responded***

The City is upgrading all streetlight fixtures to brighter LED fixtures. This work is planned for Washington Avenue in the next 5 years.

### ***What we heard***

***"This project should have additional funding from the federal IIJA infrastructure bill."***

#### ***How we responded***

The City is currently waiting for information from federal and state government about potential IIJA infrastructure funding, which is not yet available. The City is committed to improving the safety of Washington Avenue when it is repaved in 2022 with funding that is already available and allocated. However, there are potential options for a larger, more comprehensive project for Washington Avenue that would necessitate additional community process and applying for grant funds. A source for this potential longer-term project could be IIJA funding.

## **Theme: Emergency Vehicle Access**

### ***What we heard***

***"Emergency response vehicles need to travel fast on Washington Avenue."***

#### ***How we responded***

The City is pursuing funding for signal preemption for emergency vehicles. We submitted a grant request in 2021 and gave the request a high priority.

The City met with the Fire Department as part of standard project review process, and all the proposed options "3-lane", "mixed", and "4-lane", were approved by the Fire Department. This approval of all the options is significant because the trucks and apparatus that are used by the Fire Department are the largest emergency response vehicles and are often the most challenging to maneuver in the street.

In meeting with Fire Department officials, it was noted that emergency response vehicles will benefit from the ability to use the center turn lane on Washington Avenue, which is maintained in all three options proposed.

## Theme: Impacts on neighborhoods

### *What we heard*

***"There will be parking impacts on side streets from residents who park/store vehicles on Washington Avenue."***

### *How we responded*

One potential solution is for residential blocks to opt into the Residential Parking Permit (RPP) program. A draw back to this is that residents would need to pay PPA rate (currently \$35/year) to prevent long term parking of non-residents.

### *What we heard*

***"This project will increase traffic on the side streets."***

### *How we responded*

It is possible that some drivers will respond to changes on Washington Avenue by traveling on parallel side streets. In response to community concerns, we studied these impacts and found that it is very unlikely that increased traffic on side streets would be noticeable on a vast majority of days and times of day. At most, we expect that no more than 10% of traffic on Washington Avenue at peak hours would move to side streets. This number of 10% was determined as an accurate prediction based on the review of similar roadway projects around the county, which were studied before and after changes to the street.

We reviewed 12 different comparison case studies from similar projects around the country. In those places, the reduction in average daily traffic on the street *could* mean that some vehicles moved from the main street to driving on nearby streets. It could also mean that people decided to take a different form of transportation, carpooled, made their trip a different day, or didn't take the trip at all.

However, in response to community concerns, we took a conservative approach in our analysis. We looked at what would happen if 10% of all the cars on Washington Avenue during rush hour decided to use Christian Street on the same day at the same time. We ran the same test for Ellsworth Street. This is a conservative approach because it's unlikely that this scenario of all the diverted traffic going to one street would occur in real life. Because Philadelphia's street grid provides multiple route options, it is very unlikely that diverted traffic will bottleneck one particular street. For example, someone

may choose to take Christian Street or they could choose Bainbridge Street, Reed Street, Snyder Avenue, South Street, or Lombard Street.

Because the City heard concern about any additional congestion on parallel streets in 2015 regarding potential changes to Washington Avenue, we undertook a study of the existing volumes on Christian and Ellsworth Streets. These streets were selected because they are the closest and most continuous streets adjacent to Washington Avenue. For a full result of this analysis [see pages 93-135 of this report.](#)

**Further Study Detail:** We found that Ellsworth Street is only using about 44% of its capacity and Christian Street is using between 58% and 76% of its capacity at the busiest times of day. That means that both roadways can handle additional traffic without becoming gridlocked. When we take 10% of Washington Avenue's peak hour traffic and moved it to Christian and Ellsworth Streets, Ellsworth ends up using 54% of its available capacity, and Christian ends up using between 71% and 93%. So, even in the worst-case scenario - imagining that 10% of Washington Avenue's peak-hour traffic moved to only Christian or Ellsworth Streets on the same day at the same time - there should be minimal impacts on those parallel routes. The only intersection that had much congestion/delay was Christian Street & Grays Ferry Avenue, and even there,. This means the intersection was performing well and was not at capacity.

### ***What we heard***

***"There will be speeding behaviors on parallel streets and perpendicular side streets."***

#### **How we responded**

The City is currently evaluating the possibility of installing speed cushions on nearby streets in order to reduce any speeding behavior.

In addition, in response to concerns we heard from the community, the City looked at the likelihood of cars moving from Washington Avenue to side streets and the likelihood that those cars would speed. The City evaluated worse case scenarios to make sure that even those scenarios would be acceptable and not cause speeding or traffic congestion.

**We found that the side streets would have sufficient capacity to take the additional traffic.** We found it is unlikely that this traffic would have speeding because of the frequency of intersections, which are all controlled by stop signs. In addition, the streets near Washington Avenue are narrower than Washington, which makes traffic naturally go slower.

## Theme: Traffic and Congestion

### What we heard

***“Bike lanes should be placed on smaller streets where there are fewer people driving and fewer delivery trucks.”***

### How we responded

The City supports different types of bicycle lanes for different streets. The context of a street is very important when considering what type of bike lane is best. On a street like Washington Avenue, which serves traffic moving through, residents in neighborhoods, and businesses, having a parking protected bike lane is a way to serve people biking as well as make the street safer for everyone. Because of the high level of traffic and the number of intersections, it is important for the bike lane to be separated from moving vehicles. On different streets with fewer businesses and less traffic, a bike lane that has less protection may be more appropriate.

## Theme: Business Operations

### What we heard

***“This plan has to work for businesses, especially those loading larger vehicles frequently.”***

### How we responded

The City conducted in-depth analysis including interviewing businesses on Washington Avenue in 2016 and 2018. The full results are published on our website ([www.bit.ly/improvewashington](http://www.bit.ly/improvewashington)). The proposed plan includes new parking and loading regulations for the entire Washington Avenue corridor that respond to what we heard from businesses and what we observed.

In 2021 and 2022, there have been additional meetings, including 16 in-person meetings with businesses November 2021 – January 2022. Additional meetings with businesses are ongoing to ensure parking and loading can be optimized as much as possible.

### What we heard

***“Businesses need even more loading zones than are shown in the proposed plan.”***

### How we responded

The City is actively in conversation with businesses about the block-by-block parking and loading regulations proposed.

### What we heard

***“Employees need to park all day without 2- or 4-hour time restrictions.”***



### How we responded

Allowing people to park with no time restrictions encourages people to use Washington Avenue parking for long-term car storage, making spaces less available to everyone, especially customers and delivery vehicles. In an area as densely built as the area around Washington Avenue, it is not possible to have free long-term parking for everyone. Time restrictions will allow Washington Avenue parking to best serve the needs of the most stakeholders, although we understand that some specific stakeholders experience a negative impact from this change.

The City understands that some businesses rely on parking on employees parking during their shift on Washington Avenue. It is unrealistic that businesses or employees would be able to move their vehicles during their shift.

Solutions could relieve this strain of employee parking.

- The proposed project could include some 8-hour spaces on Washington Avenue, although it is unlikely these would only be used by employees of Washington Avenue businesses.
- Employees who drive to work could pay to park at the paid lots on Washington Avenue.
- The employer could provide this parking as a benefit to employees.

In all cases, streets near Washington that are not part of restricted parking programs can continue to provide some day-long parking options for employees as they do now.

### What we heard

***"I would frequent businesses on Washington Avenue more frequently if I felt safe walking along or across the street."***

### How we responded

The City has not done a study or survey of customers on Washington Avenue; however, other locations have done studies in the past and found that a calmer and safer street environment may lead to increased customer frequency<sup>1</sup> and/or increased spending<sup>2</sup>. However, the comparison between those studies and Washington Avenue is unclear.

### What we heard

***"I would not frequent businesses on Washington Avenue if I cannot park easily."***

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<sup>1</sup> <https://walkboston.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/WalkBostonGoodWalkingIsGoodBusiness.pdf?8621dc&8621dc>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.cleanairpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/BikeLanes\\_ParkingandBusiness\\_Year1Report\\_Feb2009\\_Final\\_NewCover.pdf](https://www.cleanairpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/BikeLanes_ParkingandBusiness_Year1Report_Feb2009_Final_NewCover.pdf)

### How we responded

Finding parking when you want it and where you want it is frustrating, especially in a city location near downtown like Washington Avenue. To better understand how parking and loading operations work on Washington Avenue, the City undertook comprehensive studies in 2016 and 2018. These studies found that parking is not serving businesses/customers well in some places because there are insufficient loading and inefficient parking turnover. On some blocks for example, the City observed vehicles were parked for an average of 12 hours, meaning no customers could use those spaces and businesses could not use the spaces for loading. The City also surveyed businesses and found that businesses often wanted both additional loading zones and free unregulated parking in front of their businesses. These findings reveal the challenge of improving parking and business access for people driving on Washington Avenue. There is no feasible solution that will completely alleviate parking and loading challenges. Instead, the City aims to meet the needs of individual businesses to load and park, while also balancing the need to improve the overall corridor functionality. Part of the solution is to create new loading zones during times businesses need them, create time limits to how long people can park so there is increased turn over, and make it safer for people to visit businesses by walking, taking transit, or driving.

Although the number of total parking spaces will decrease, parking capacity will increase with timed parking. Also, deliveries will have dedicated space to load and unload, and neighbors will be able to park overnight in spaces that currently see little or no turnover on an average day. The parking and loading proposed balances the stated desires of businesses to maintain free

## Theme: Enforcement

### What we heard

***"People should be required to have a license when they ride a bike, just like is required for driving a car."***

### How we responded

City or State law does not currently require people riding bicycles to purchase insurance or to be licensed. The City is not moving this comment forward for two reasons: one, any benefit arising from such requirements would not outweigh the additional burden that this would place on people riding bicycles, particularly racial minorities and low-income populations. In addition, the City does not have capacity for enforcement of new licensing or insurance requirements.

## Theme: Safety

### What we heard

***“There isn’t a traffic safety problem on Washington Avenue. Leave the roadway exactly the way it is today.”***

#### How we responded

In response to continued community skepticism about crashes on Washington Avenue, the City undertook additional crash analysis in 2022. We found there is a demonstrated traffic safety problem on Washington Avenue. The street is on the City’s High Injury Network. Recent crashes include two high profile crashes in 2021.

Washington Avenue experiences 13% more pedestrian crashes and 13% more bicycle crashes than Philadelphia as a whole. This discrepancy indicates a problem specific to Washington Avenue and highlights the need to examine these types of crashes carefully.

We looked closely at all 169 crashes from 2016-2020 and we found:

- People walking and people biking are overrepresented in crashes on Washington Ave. compared to the rest of Philly.
- Left turns onto Washington from side streets account for a lot of crashes that hit pedestrians.
- Red light running caused 25% of all crashes at intersections.
- 22% of bike crashes had shared roadway conflicts. And 22% had conflicts with turning vehicles. Another 33% showed bicyclists were not adhering roadway regulations.
- 33% of bicyclist crashes happened when a bicyclist was not adhering to traffic controls or regulations.
- U-turns account for 38% of midblock crashes.

The layout changes proposed by the City including the reduction of vehicle lanes, reduction of effective pedestrian crossing distance, separation of bicycle space from vehicle space, and adding in better loading options are responses to the crash analysis. These improvements are designed to prevent the types of crashes currently happening on Washington Avenue. For more information, see the crash analysis completed in 2022 here (<https://www.phila.gov/documents/washington-avenue-repaving-and-improvement-project/>) and in [2020 here](#) (pdf pages 105-118).

### What we heard

***“People should not be allowed to ride bikes on Washington Avenue because it isn’t safe.”***

#### How we responded

Currently, there are bike lanes running east and west on Washington Avenue. These existing bike lanes have a non-protected design where people riding bikes ride right

next to moving traffic. Crash data for Washington Avenue shows there is a higher than usual number of crashes involving people biking and people walking when compared to other streets. In response to the crash data, the City presented three options for a new roadway layout for Washington Avenue as part of the re-paving project. These three options differ from each other, but all included common safety elements: a reduction in the number of vehicle travel lanes and adding protection for the bike lanes using the parking lane. These safety improvements are among several “proven safety countermeasures” according to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).<sup>3</sup>

### ***What we heard***

***“Children and families walk across Washington Avenue today and are exposed to dangerous conditions. It should be made safer.”***

#### **How we responded**

The City agrees that Washington Avenue should be made safer for people walking. Crash data for Washington Avenue shows there are a higher than usual number of crashes involving people walking when compared to other streets. One of the challenges for people walking across Washington Avenue today is the long distance from curb-to-curb, which ranges between 78’ and 72’ today. On most parts of the corridor today pedestrians can step off the curb and are protected by parked cars, so they are exposed to traffic between 62’ and 58’. However, this is still a relatively long distance to cross. The options that the City presented in 2020 for Washington Avenue propose to pull the parking lane away from the curb, which would have an effect of reducing the amount of distance that people walking across Washington are exposed to moving vehicles to between 40’ and 32’.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/provencountermeasures/>

**\*Submitted to the City in September 2021 by Point Breeze CDC\***

Washington Avenue

Improvement Measures

*City responses are in blue*

Potential Traffic & Roadway Enhancements:

**Installation of a Passive Pedestrian Detection System**

- *Pedestrians currently receive an automatic walk signal with every signal cycle on Washington Avenue, similar to most corridors in the city (without passive pedestrian detection)*
- *This creates a reliable system for pedestrian crossings where pedestrians know they will have a chance to cross every cycle*
- *Detection can create distrust that the signal is working if the detection system does not detect the pedestrian or does not detect the pedestrian in time to add them in to the current signal cycle. Pedestrians may then unsafely cross without the signal due to long wait times.*

**Pavement Markings and Road Signs**

- *Already included in project for all options ("3 lane", "mixed", or "4 lane" layout)*
- *Would be installed with 'no change' existing condition layout*

**Traffic Signals Upgrades**

- *Signal equipment is already upgraded on this corridor*
- *Signal phasing (i.e. timing) upgrades are already included in project for all options ("3 lane", "mixed", or "4 lane" layout)*
- *Signal phasing would **not** be installed with 'no change' existing condition layout as it would retain existing signal timing*

**ADA Ramp Installation**

- *Already included in project for all options ("3 lane", "mixed", or "4 lane" layout)*

**Five Second Lead Intervals for Pedestrians at Crosswalks**

- *This isn't costly but it could be challenging. We need to balance traffic operations.*

- *With layout options (3, mixed, or 4 lane), we would maintain the amount of time for a walk signal, while reducing the distance of exposure to vehicle travel lanes. So, in effect people would feel more time to cross a shorter distance*

#### Solar Operating Flashing Beacons

- *Need definition on where there is desire to use this treatment. Can only be used at mid-block crossings, which would be inadvisable along Washington Avenue in any scenario due to the traffic volume and close proximity of signalized crosswalks*
- *Flashing beacons indicate a yield condition, but all intersections along the corridor are signalized. This would violate the MUTCD and give conflicting instructions to the driver to both yield and stop.*

#### Installation of Dynamic Speed Feedback “Speed Minder” Signs

- *Could be included at intervals along the corridor. The project team will look into the cost and the anticipated safety impact of this.*

#### Storm Water Collection and Drainage Improvements

- *This could be part of a longer-term project with the Philadelphia Water Department (PWD), but more analysis from PWD Green Storm Water team would need to occur to determine the potential for water catchment, which may be limited to only certain locations along the corridor.*

#### Enhanced Pedestrian Lighting

- *Need greater definition on what is being requested: 1) LED upgrades or 2) pedestrian scale lighting*
- *For LED upgrades, these are coming to the corridor in the near future as part of the citywide ESCO contract to upgrade all light fixtures citywide to LEDs*
- *If there is an existing street light outage (i.e. light is not in working), this should be reported to 311 and a ticket number will be issued, and the light will be fixed by the City*

#### Concrete Mountable Curb Grass Medians

- *Concrete mountable medians are not advisable because they would restrict the ability for emergency vehicles to use the center turn lane for emergency access. If,*

*upon conversations with Police and Fire there was an interest, the City would need to identify an additional funding source.*

- *Grass in the medians would make the medians inaccessible to emergency vehicles and would require maintenance along the corridor*

### **Increased Connectivity to Public Transit**

- *Need greater definition on what is being requested*
- *The City submitted a request for grant funding for concrete bus boarding islands for Washington Avenue*
- *SEPTA is currently underway on the Bus Revolution project that could provide better transit connections in the area and improve operations on Washington Avenue*