boston planning &
development agency

A Guide to South Boston's Transportation Planning and the Development Review Process

2023

Why This Guide?

South Boston is currently getting more attention towards transportation planning, and has many development proposals. This guide seeks to help the residents better participate in these initiatives and understand the process involved.

In this guide, you will learn the City of Boston's approach to:

Transportation planning, including why planning is happening now and how City priorities influence the process.

Street design, including the underlying issues you experience and solutions to fix them.

Development review, including how you can get involved.

Did you know that the South Boston Transportation Action Plan (SBTAP) will help guide future transportation projects and development proposals?

The SBTAP will produce a neighborhood plan with specific recommendations. These recommendations can include things like newer and wider sidewalks, safer intersections, more comfortable bus stops, street trees, and bike facilities.

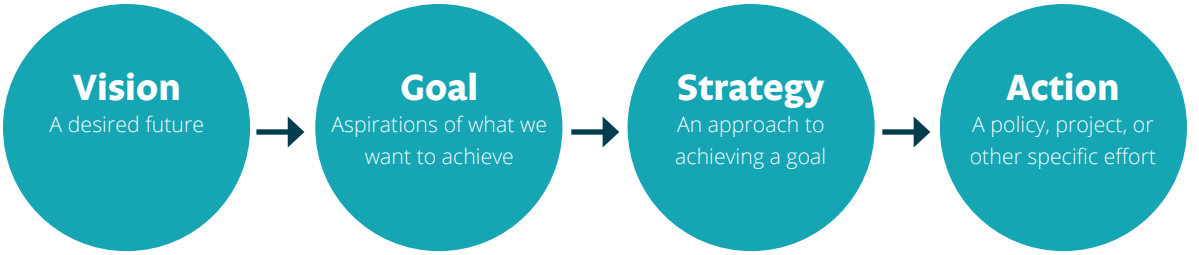
Who designs streets? It depends on who owns the street or who is paying for its improvement.

- The Boston Transportation (BTD) and Public Works Departments (BPWD) design and rebuild City-owned public streets.
- The Massachussetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) does the same for Commonwealth-owned public streets, like Pappas Way. In some situations, such as trucking routes like Cypher Street, MassDOT will improve a City street.
- The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) helps design and rebuild public streets to make buses more reliable.
- The Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) design and rebuilds their public streets, and has the DCR Parkways Master Plan. DCR owns Day Boulevard, and parts of Old Colony.
- Developers design new streets or make changes to existing streets using City-approved guidelines.
- Privately owned streets are the responsibility of abutting property owners, like K Street north of First Street.

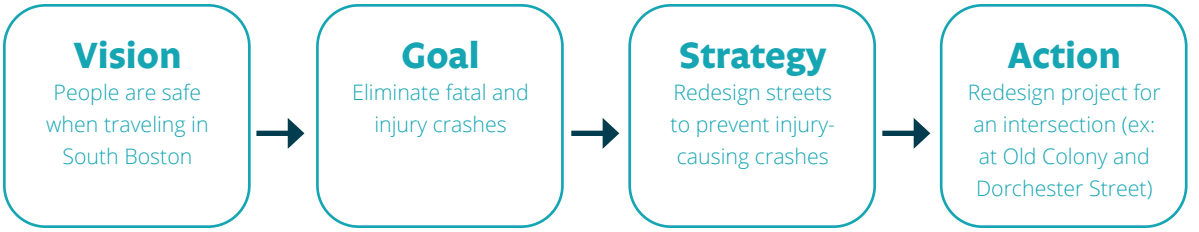
What Is Transportation Planning?

Transportation planning recommends changes to streets, intersections, and transit based on community priorities, a snapshot of today's conditions, and an estimate of tomorrow's needs.

Generally, planning creates a vision for the future and outlines steps to achieve the vision.



Here's an example of how that could look in a transportation plan.



What Are Today's Planning Priorities?

Go Boston 2030 defines priorities for the city's transportation system, which tell planners and designers where and how to focus attention.

Which priorities are most important?

Boston's main transportation priorities are to expand access to transportation options, improve safety, and ensure reliability. Each priority has a primary goal:

Access
Boston neighborhoods will be interconnected for walking, biking, taking transit, or driving

Safety
Boston will substantially reduce collisions on every street by prioritizing moving people safely rather than faster

Reliability
Boston will prioritize making travel predictable on the city's transit and street networks

Are there other priorities?

Go Boston 2030 defines other priorities that make travel more equitable, foster economic opportunity, and respond to a changing climate. Example goals include:

Environment
Boston will reduce greenhouse gas emissions and build for resilience to adverse weather and events

Health
Boston will promote active and healthy lifestyles by connecting and providing access to green corridors

Community
Boston will develop public spaces on streets and at transit stations that are welcoming, clean, and fun

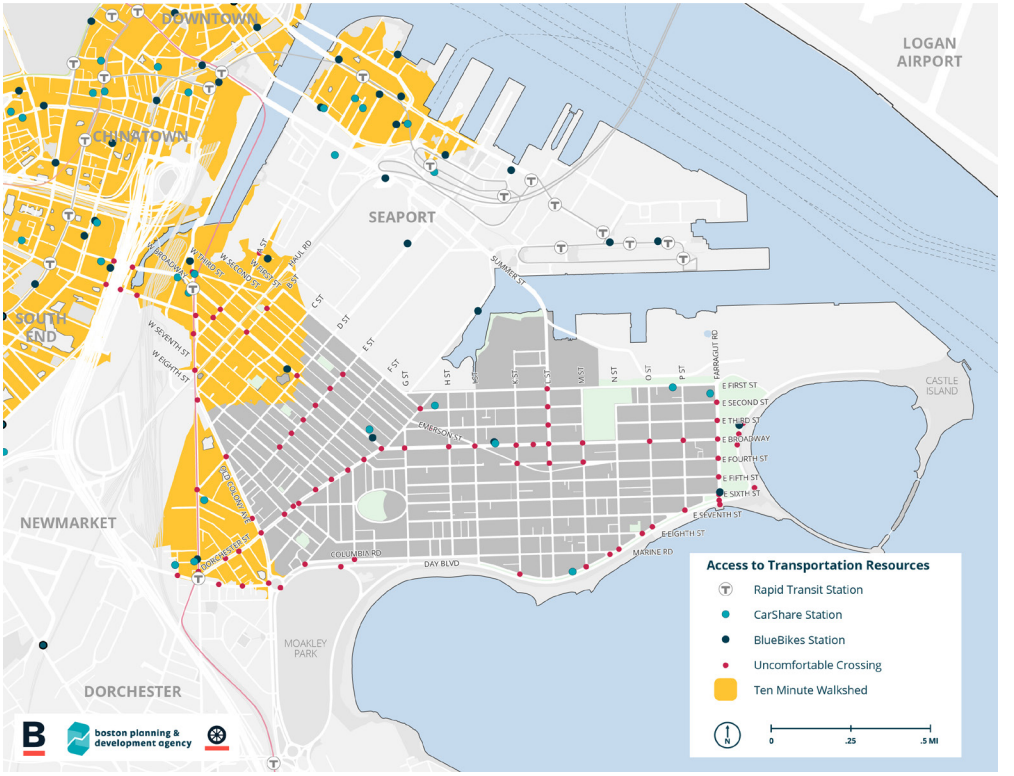
What Are The Issues For The Study Area?

Planners work to solve these known issues: not all residents have access to transportation options within a 10-minute walk, South Boston's streets experience speeding and many crashes, and all bus routes are unreliable.

SBTAP uses Go Boston 2030 priorities like a magnifying glass to discover opportunities to improve travel in the Study Area.

For example, when looking through the lens of transportation access, safety, and reliability, specific issues in the Study Area can be better understood:

- In the Study Area, **only 17 percent of residents** are within a comfortable 10-minute walk of a rail station or Key Bus route stop, bikeshare, and carshare.
- Despite the close proximity to Downtown, 48% of South Bostonians have a **commute that is 30+ minutes.**
- The most common cited concern from residents through the BTD website is **aggressive drivers.**



What Are The Goals For The Study Area?

The South Boston Transportation Action Plan developed these goals and priorities based on feedback through a variety of channels. We synthesized what we know from the community, and put them in the context of citywide goals established through previous planning initiatives.

Transportation planning is a partnership between the people of Boston, governments, and community organizations. In order to be successful, transportation plans should build consensus through broad participation in all steps of the planning process. For plans to equitably respond to a community's needs, participants must empathize with their neighbors' perspectives. A common set of goals can help ground conversations and remind us of the different interactions we have with the same place. We will discuss these goals more throughout the process.

These goals are meant to be broad - they are not meant to capture the detail of every recommendation, but provide the framework for recommendations. They are also a way to hold us accountable and focused. The goals can be found below:

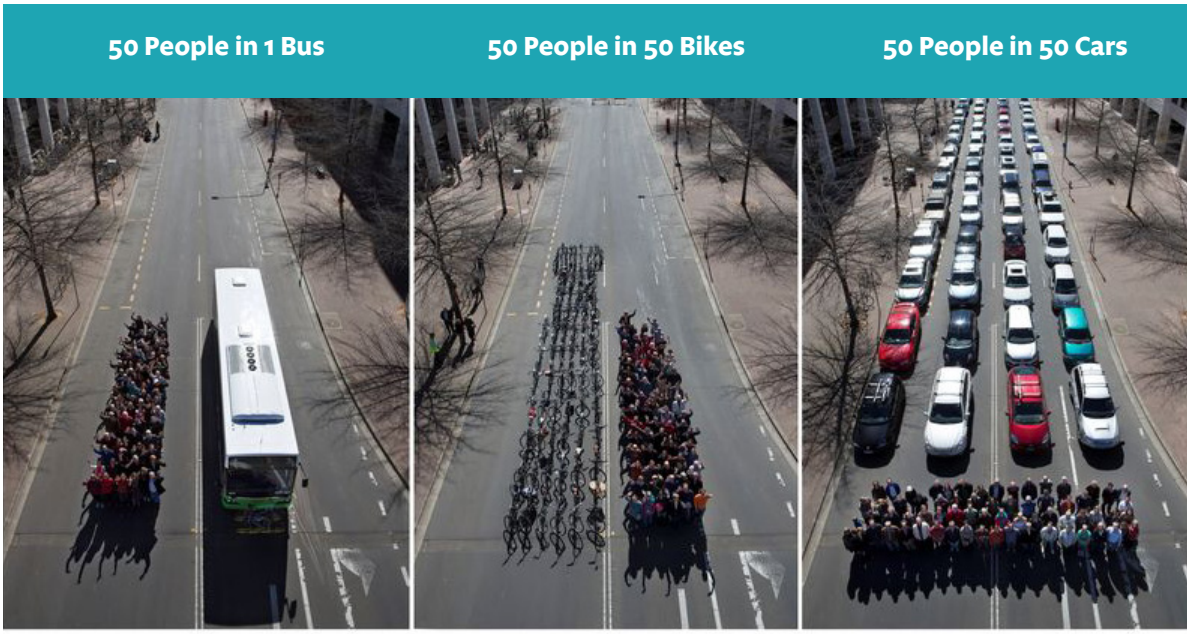
- Design for the safety of all users by reducing the ability to speed on streets, creating safer crossings, and safer turns
- Deepen access to travel choices that connect all parts of the neighborhood to one another, and to all parts of the city
- Upgrade the comfort and reliability of the multimodal transportation network to create a network where sustainable modes of transportation are feasible
- Equitably distribute the benefits, space and access of our transportation network to serve all persons (including all ages and abilities) and modes of transportation
- Proactively plan and implement a transportation system that not only is resilient but enables the resilience of our neighborhood
- Create accountability in implementation and create feedback loops to provide recommendation updates

How Are Streets Designed?

Boston's approach to street design is centered on people, whether they walk, bike, take transit, or drive. Designers use proven tools to address specific transportation needs identified during planning.

Boston uses a "Complete Streets" approach. Complete Streets is a design approach that considers walking, biking, and transit as options that are equally as important as driving. Complete Streets also considers the surrounding land use and context, so that design tools are tailored to their surroundings. To learn more about specific design tools and why they are used, see the *Boston Complete Streets Design Guidelines*.

A wide variety of land use contexts mean that street and sidewalk space may be allocated to several modes of transportation differently based on the primary mobility function of the street. Have you considered that different modes take up different amounts of space on the street? The comparison below shows the amount of space needed for 50 people to ride in a bus, ride bikes, or ride in cars. Simply put, Boston streets cannot fit all residents and visitors in a car, so we make space for alternative modes of transportation that serve all road users effectively and safely.



Source: Cycling Promotion Fund via Human Transit

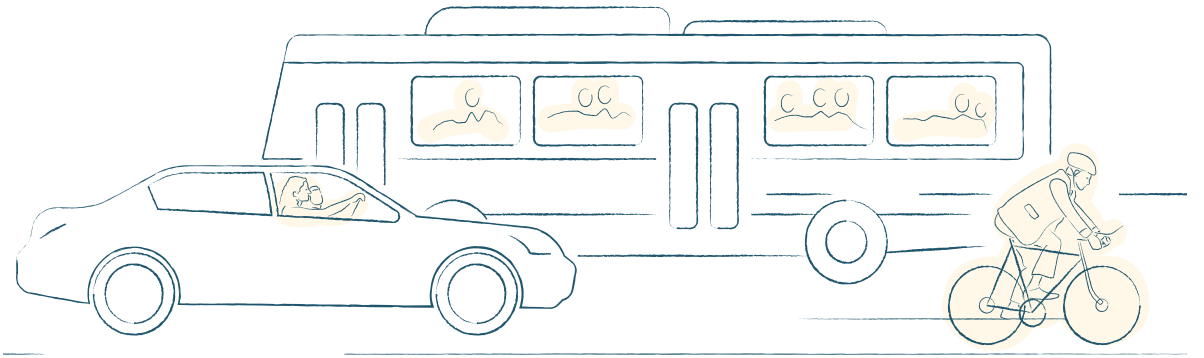
Who Are New Street Designs For?

Street projects are initiated to improve conditions for existing residents. Everyone in Boston deserves access to safe and reliable travel options.

A street best serves its community when it reflects how community members travel.
Not everyone drives, so incorporating diverse voices, perspectives, and lived experiences makes plans and designs better. The design process asks community members to empathize with their fellow community members' transportation needs and preferences. Sometimes, creating a design that works for everyone may mean changes to a street's driving environment so that the access, safety, and reliability of all travel options can be best balanced.

How do different perspectives impact a design? Boston considers different "design users" when recommending changes to streets.

Did you know that making walking and biking improvements to main streets may increase sales?
Studies show that people who walk or bike to main streets visit more frequently and spend more compared to people who drive. Providing safe and comfortable conditions for all travel modes may boost business activity.



How Can Streets Be Made Safer?

Boston uses many design tools to improve safety and comfort on City streets. They help enforce the City's 25 mph speed limit.

Design tools help create safer speeds, safer turns, or safer crossings, as seen below.
Some tools help target more than one safety outcome. The following pages explain what these tools are and where they can be applied.

Why make changes? The street feels safe to me. Safety and comfort can mean different things to different people. Crossing multiple lanes of traffic may be fine for an able-bodied person in their 30s, but unsafe and uncomfortable for a family with young children, elderly individuals, or those with disabilities.

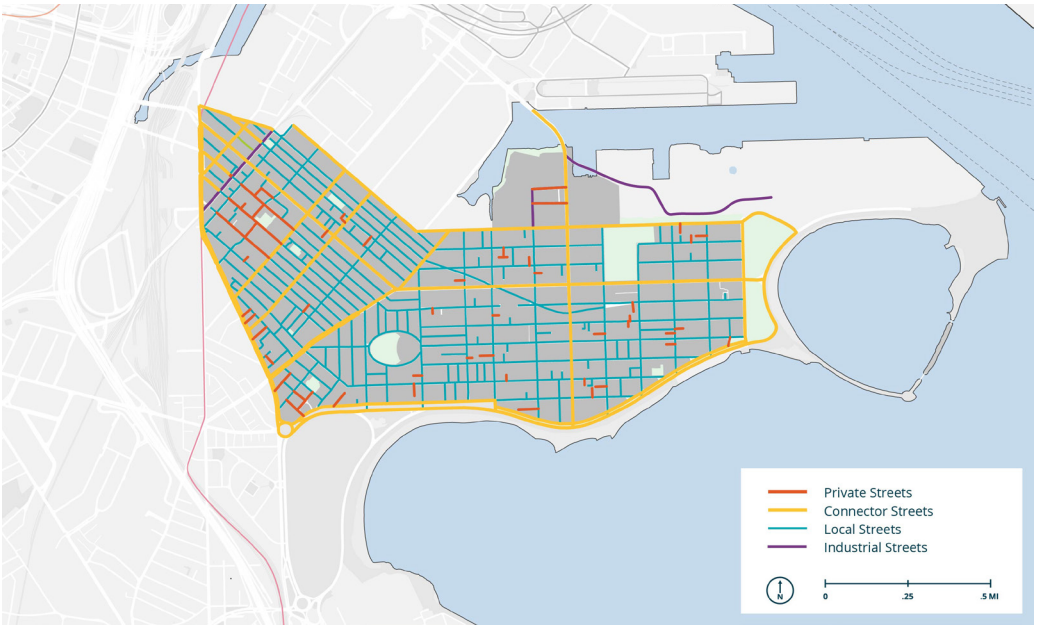
What Is The Design Tool? *See pages 11–13 for a description and visual for each design tool.*	How Does The Design Tool Change The Street? *Each design tool is known to result in one or more safety outcome.*			Where Can The Design Tool Go? *See page 10 for more detail on these streets.*	
	Safer Speeds	Safer Turns	Safer Crossings	Neighborhood Streets	Connector Streets
Chicane	■			■	
Speed hump	■			■	
Speed feedback sign	■			■	■
Roundabout	■	■		■	■
Crossing island	■	■	■		■
Raised crosswalk	■	■	■	■	
Raised intersection	■	■	■	■	
Road rightsizing	■	■	■		■
Separated bike lane	■	■	■		■
Signal improvement	■	■	■		■
Hardened centerline		■	■		■
T-ing intersection		■	■	■	■
Slow turn wedge		■	■	■	■
Curb extension		■	■	■	■
Clear corner		■	■	■	■
Stop sign		■	■	■	
Yield to pedestrian sign			■		■
High-visibility crosswalk			■	■	■
Pedestrian warning sign			■	■	■
Rapid flash beacon			■		■

Where Can Safety Design Tools Go?

Not every design tool works on every street. “Neighborhood streets” and “connector streets” have different roles, and those roles help identify where certain design tools are appropriate.

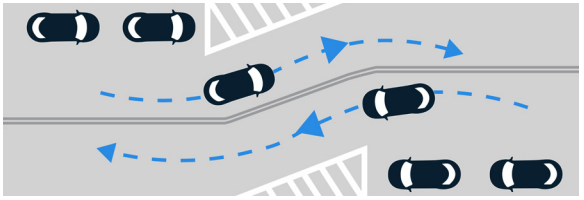
Neighborhood streets mostly provide access to homes, schools and parks, while connector streets mostly facilitate travel between places. Neighborhood streets tend to be narrow, lined with homes, and have less traffic. Connector streets tend to be wider, have more traffic, and have traffic signals and bus stops. Drivers of large vehicles, like buses, trucks, and emergency response vehicles, rely on connector streets, instead of neighborhood side streets, to move between neighborhoods and cities. The presence of large vehicles mean that tools like speed humps and raised crossings are only appropriate on neighborhood side streets.

Did you know that most streets in South Boston are local streets? However, most people tend to travel more on connector streets because they connect to other places. Connector streets also have bus routes and most bike lanes. Local neighborhood streets can also be used for connecting, which can lead to speeding and more vehicles on certain streets.



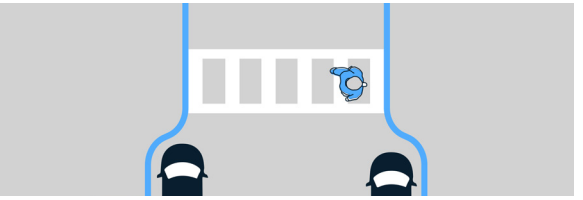
What Do Safety Design Tools Do?

Chicane (neighborhood street only)



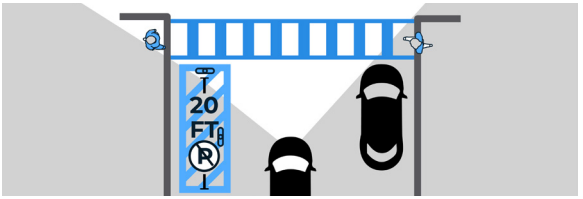
A chicane creates an "s" curve in an otherwise straight street. The curve encourages drivers to slow their speeds.

Curb extension (any street)



A curb extension extends the sidewalk out into the parking lane. This makes crosswalks shorter and improves visibility of people crossing.

Clear corner/parking restriction (any street)

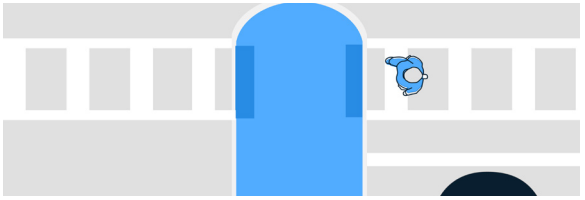


Drivers are more likely to see approaching vehicles or people crossing the street. This reduces the likelihood of crashes at intersections.

Hardened centerline (connector street only)

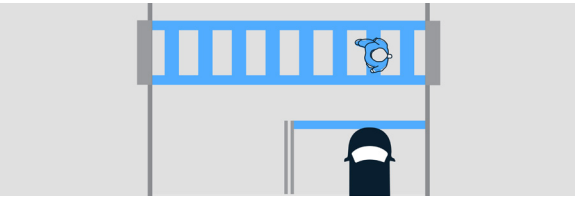
A row of bollards installed on the yellow centerline discourages drivers from cutting turns at higher speeds.

Crossing island (connector street only)



A crossing island gives space in the middle of a crosswalk for people to pause while crossing multi-lane streets.

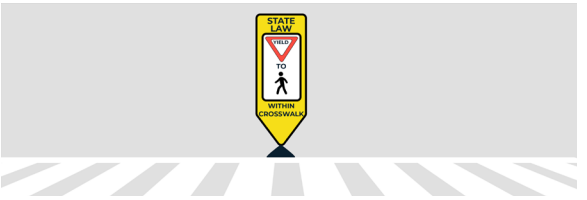
High-visibility crosswalk (any street)



"Ladder" style crosswalks, with thick white bars and parallel lines, are the most visible type of crosswalk marking. High-visibility crosswalks help improve pedestrian visibility and safety. They also help to clarify where pedestrians should cross the street, creating predictable patterns.

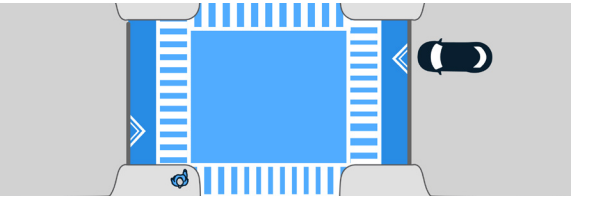
What Do Safety Design Tools Do?

In-street yield to pedestrian sign (connector street only)



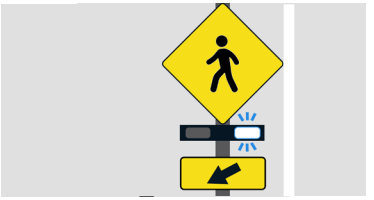
These signs are placed on the street at crosswalks without traffic signals. They remind drivers to yield to pedestrians.

Raised intersection (neighborhood street only)



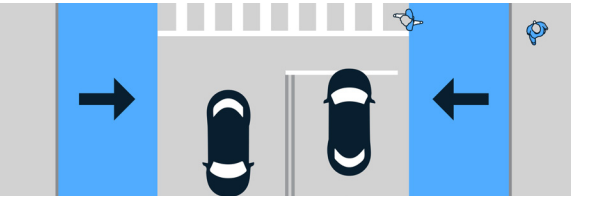
A raised intersection is flush with the sidewalk. They reinforce slow speeds and encourage drivers to yield to pedestrians.

Pedestrian warning sign/rapid flashing beacon (beacon for connector street only)



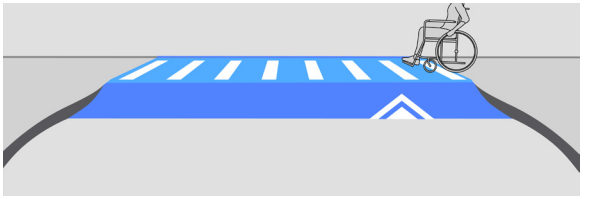
A yellow warning sign draws drivers' attention to an upcoming crosswalk. This tool can include a small, rectangular, bright flashing light that can be activated by a person who wants to cross the street.

Road rightsizing (connector street only)



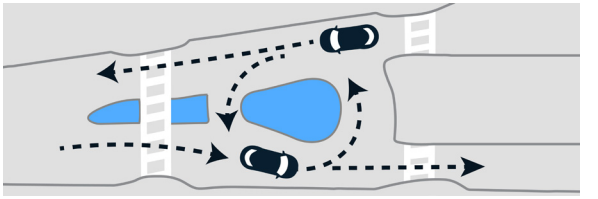
Thoughtful reallocation of space on our streets can calm traffic, create safer crossings, add bike lanes, or more.

Raised crosswalk (neighborhood street only)



A raised crosswalk is about six inches tall, the same height as the sidewalk. They slow drivers and improve yielding to pedestrians in crosswalks.

Roundabout (any street)



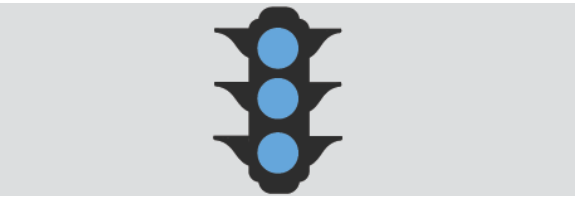
A roundabout has a center island, crossing islands, and curb extensions. They are designed to slow speeds and reduce serious crashes.

What Do Safety Design Tools Do?

Slow turn wedge (any street)

A slow turn wedge is a combination of pavement markings, flexible bollards, and rubber or plastic curbs or bumps. They slow turning drivers to safer speeds.

Signal improvement (connector street only)



There are many ways a signal can be improved to benefit pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists. Signal adjustments can slow speeds, enhance safety, and separate modes.

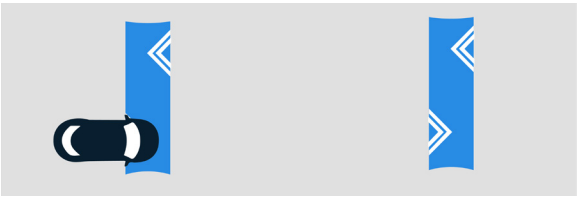
Speed feedback sign (any street)

A speed feedback sign is a speed limit sign combined with a digital sign that displays a driver's speed. If drivers are speeding, the digital sign flashes. Speed feedback signs can help reduce the number of drivers going very fast.

Stop sign (neighborhood street only)

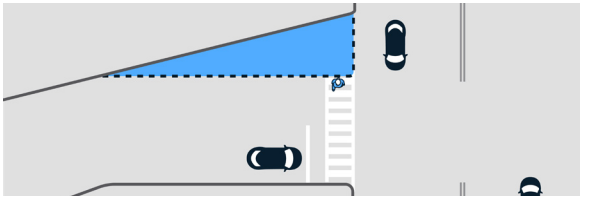
Stop signs are used to regulate flow of people through an intersection. They are not used for slowing traffic.

Speed hump (neighborhood street only)



A series of gradual humps on smaller neighborhood streets keep drivers at a steady, safe speed.

T-ing intersection (any street)



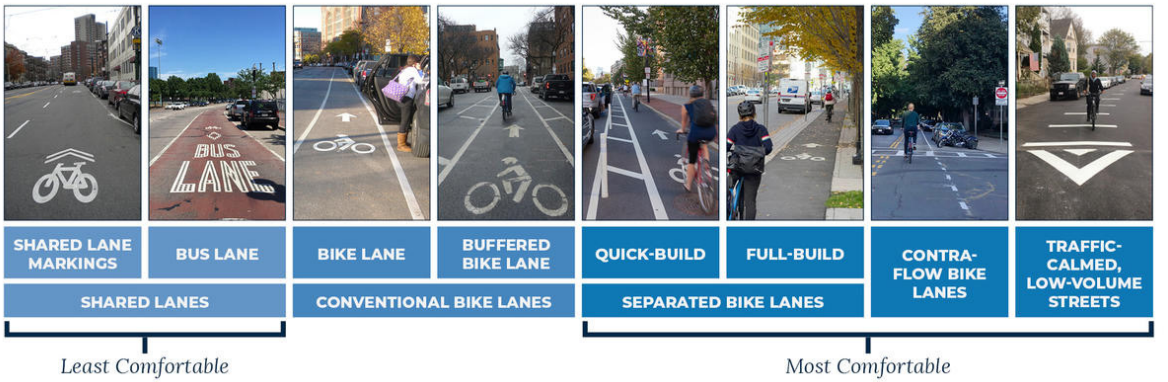
Reshaping wide or irregular intersections to look more like a "T" improves visibility and shortens crosswalks.

How Can Biking Be Made Safer?

Many Bostonians want to bike but don't feel comfortable in traffic. That's why the City is designing local streets that calm traffic and bike lanes that better separate drivers and bicyclists.

The City is providing comfortable, safe places for biking that make streets safer for all.
Through the *Go Boston 2030* process, City residents envisioned better bike facilities. Residents asked for safer, more comfortable bike lanes that connect to where you want to go, like jobs, schools, shops, and open space. Bike lane designs can vary depending on each street's unique conditions, but the City strives to provide the most comfortable conditions for each project. These designs are shown below.

A separated bike lane means that there is a dedicated space for people on bikes, separated from sidewalks and general travel lanes. It may seem strange, but separated bike lanes make streets safer for pedestrians and drivers, too. That's because everyone has their own space, which makes the street more predictable, and pedestrian crossings shorter, which means people crossing are less exposed to traffic.



How Can The Bus Be More Reliable?

Boston will improve bus reliability by reducing delays, speeding up trips, and making bus stops more comfortable. The MBTA has plans to increase frequencies of some buses in the Study Area through Bus Network Redesign.

Better bus service is possible when buses have their own lanes, well-designed and spaced bus stops, and priority at signals. These are typically areas that the City can control.

Sometimes signals are programmed to give buses a head start before the green light for other vehicles. Bus amenities can make riders more comfortable while they wait. These can include real-time arrival information, shelters, street trees, accessible crosswalks, and benches. Bus stops that are spaced correctly help move the bus efficiently. The location of the bus stop on the street intersections can help with bus movements, and create safer crossings. Bus lanes move buses out of most traffic, like on Washington Street in Roslindale.

Did you know that different neighborhood characteristics are known to produce different levels of demand for transit services? Most of South Boston has enough underlying demand to support frequencies as often as every 5 to 10 minutes due to factors such as population and employment density. Areas in South Boston with the highest demand for frequent service are focused along Dorchester Avenue, Broadway, Dorchester Street, and East 8th Street. The MBTA's Bus Network Redesign will provide 25% more bus service across the network, and redesigns the routes to optimize the network. South Boston will have increased bus frequencies on some routes.

Bus shelter at D Street and West Broadway

How Can Streets Be Places?

Movement of people and goods is the primary use for streets, but streets are fundamentally a public space. Boston is creating new public spaces on streets through experimental design approaches.

Streets can create more socially connected and economically resilient communities.
The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that streets should have a broader role than just transportation. Many restaurants may not have survived the pandemic without outdoor dining, an initiative to support businesses with curbside seating by reclaiming some parking spaces. Cities across the world, including Boston, are rethinking streets and seeking opportunities to add more public space, places for neighborly connections, trees, public art, and strategies to address a changing climate.

Did you know that impervious surfaces, like streets, sidewalks, and buildings cover 78% of the Study Area? Streets and off-street parking make up a lot of our neighborhood. Boston is experimenting with its streets, creating new plazas, mini-parks, and cafes with low-cost materials. Public space can be created by closing unneeded lanes, repurposing parking, or fixing irregular intersections. City streets can also be canvasses for public art.

Outdoor dining at Worden Hall on West Broadway

Why Do We Manage Our Curb Space?

Parking is a highly contentious issue especially in dense neighborhoods like South Boston where off-street parking supply is limited and competition for on-street spaces on weeknights is high.

Curb space is limited and has many competing needs.

There is a fixed amount of curb space. Curbs are the location for the interchange of many essential city functions: from trash pick-up, to bus stops, to loading, to short-term parking. Parking is one use for curb space, but must be balanced with other needs.

South Boston's population is growing faster than Residential Parking Permits.

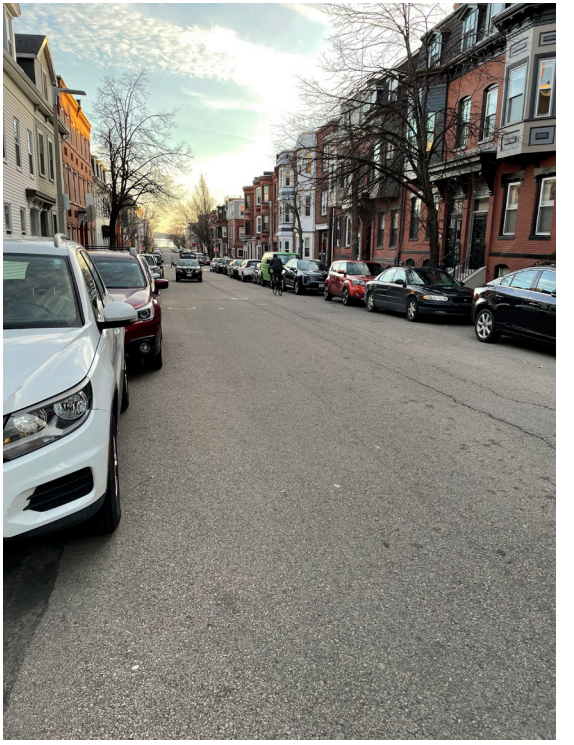
The streets in South Boston and their associated parking has been a relatively static supply of just over 10,600 parking spaces. There are about three Resident Parking Permits for every parking space. The demand for permits has not kept pace with the population growth. While the population has grown close to 22% in the last 10 years, the number of parking permits issued has only grown 12%.

A mismatch of parking regulations and needs leads to double parking.

Parking regulations that do not align with real-world needs can lead to frustration and safety concerns. The supply of time-restricted parking in South Boston comprises only 3% of the on-street parking spaces in the Study Area. Because on-street parking in front of many retail spaces allow people to park long-term, people wishing to make a quick trip often cannot find available on-street parking and instead double park. On larger streets like Broadway, double parking creates safety hazards by limiting visibility for other travelers on the street and creating an unpredictable flow of traffic. Even on smaller residential side streets, double parking temporarily transforms two-lane streets into a one-lane street resulting in unpredictable and unsafe driving behavior.

Did you know that the South Boston residential permit area has the most amount of Residential Parking Permits (RPP) compared to other neighborhoods within the City of Boston? South Boston has close to 20% of all residential vehicle permits throughout the city.

60% of South Boston households have more than one parking permit and 2,287 addresses (17%) have at least four vehicles permitted. This rate of vehicle ownership and permit demand contributes to the high ratio of permits per on-street parking space.



Resident Parking in South Boston, Photo by Brynn Leopold.

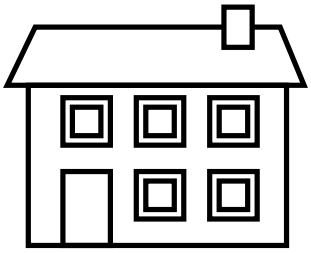
What Is Development Review?

With the help of the community, the Development Review process provides clear guidelines for the review of certain development projects and directs the resources that help implement planning objectives.

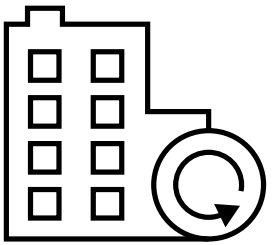
Does BPDA review all development projects?
Any proposed development that is at least 20,000 square feet in size or 15 residential units must go through the BPDA "Article 80" development review process.

Who reviews transportation impacts?
Planners in the BPDA's Transportation & Infrastructure Planning Department work closely City departments, State agencies, and developers to thoroughly evaluate a project's transportation impacts. The BPDA partners with BTD to review "large" projects, as exaplined below.

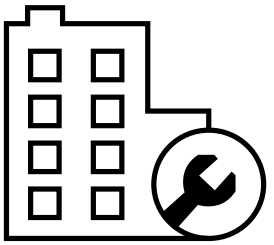
Did you know that large projects require a more detailed review process? A project must meet at least one of the definitions below to be considered "large." For large projects, BTD and the developer create a legal agreement, called the Transportation Access Plan Agreement (TAPA), that specifies commitments that will reduce a development's transportation impacts.



Any new construction that is at least 50,000 square feet is considered large.



Any change in use, for example from office to residential, that is at least 50,000 square feet (or 100,000 Downtown) is considered large.



Any rehabilitation of an existing building that is at least 100,000 square feet is considered large.

How Is Transportation Reviewed?

The goal of the transportation review is to prioritize safety, manage parking demand, and improve conditions for walking, biking, and taking public transit. Boston aspires to reduce drive-alone rates in half.

How does the transportation review work?

City planners propose plans to lessen the impact of development on the safety, access, and reliability of the transportation system. Developers then refine their proposed project. This can be a back-and-forth process.

Like the planning and design of City streets, City planners rely on *Go Boston 2030* and the *Boston Complete Streets Design Guidelines* to review:

- Building access for people walking, biking, or driving,
- Connections to nearby streets,
- Sidewalk width, curb ramps, and crosswalks,
- Bike route safety and comfort,
- Impacts to nearby intersections and transit, and
- Bike parking and vehicle parking spaces, including access to bikeshare, carshare, and electric vehicles.

How are transportation impacts reduced?

City planners use transportation demand management (TDM) strategies. TDM strategies, like subsidized transit passes or on-site child care, nudge people to walk, bike, or take transit, instead of drive. You can learn more about these and other TDM strategies by clicking here.

776 Summer Street Redevelopment, BPDA Board approved in January 2023.

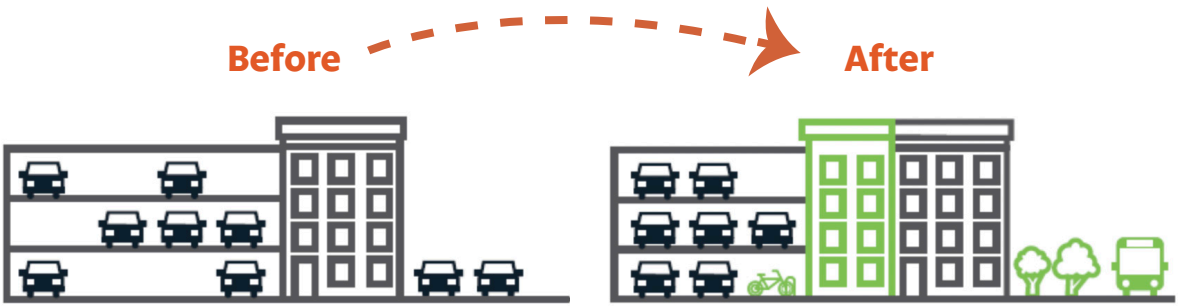
How Much Parking Is Needed?

Off-street parking can be convenient for some, but its availability is linked to more driving, higher housing costs, and more greenhouse gas emissions. More parking makes it harder to achieve citywide priorities.

The number of spaces a development can provide is defined by zoning or City policy.

- For all projects, the South Boston zoning code sets the **minimum** number of parking spaces required for each type of use, like residential or commercial.
- For large projects over 50,000 square feet, the BPDA and BTD set a **maximum** number of parking spaces, requiring fewer spaces near train stations, grocery stores, and walkable amenities. This also applies to projects with compact dwellings.

Did you know that the Boston region overbuilds residential parking spaces by about 30 percent? That space could instead be used for more affordable housing, open space, or other uses. New parking is also expensive. A single underground parking space in Boston costs up to $52,800 to build and maintain. The cost of a garage parking space for renters is about $1,700 per year, or an additional 17 percent of a housing unit's rent.

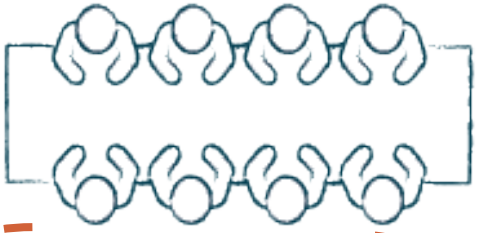


Source: Metro Boston Perfect Fit Parking Initiative, Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC).

How Does The Community Participate?

Community members are encouraged and able to give feedback in a variety of forums during the development review process.

You can participate in any of the three main steps of development review.
Community planning is the foundation for all conversations with developers. In this way, the SBTAP will help equip the community with the tools to shape development proposals.



1 Before Filing

Developers may reach out to community groups, neighborhood associations, and abutters before filing their proposed project with the BPDA. This may be one or several meetings, depending on project complexity.

2 Project Review

Community members may comment on proposed plans once they are submitted to the BPDA. For large projets, community members can join an Impact Advisory Group (IAG), which helps the BPDA identify impacts and determine mitigation. Stakeholders can also comment during a scoping session, a meeting where City departments and the public provide feedback to a developer.

3 Approval

Community members may provide final comments during the monthly public hearing of the BPDA Board, which approves or denies development projects. Community benefits negotiated during development review are finalized with BPDA Board approval. All the hearings are recorded and posted online.

How Does The Community Benefit?

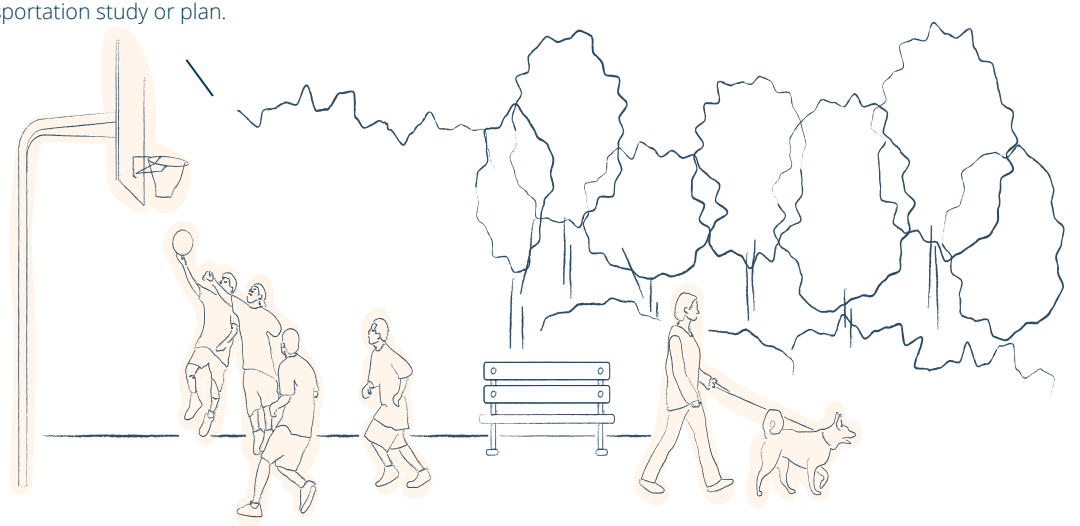
The BPDA works with developers to address the impacts of development projects by providing mitigation. Mitigation can include transportation-related improvements or other benefits.

What is mitigation?

Mitigation can include physical improvements that the developer will provide on-site or within the community, or it can be a monetary contribution to local organizations. For large projects, an Impact Advisory Group helps the BPDA identify impacts and determine the appropriate mitigation. Common examples of transportation-related mitigation include:

- Safety tools identified on previous pages,
- Wider sidewalks and new seating,
- New or upgraded crosswalks and curb ramps,
- New or relocated bus stops and shelters,
- New bike racks, bikeshare, or bike lanes,
- New trees, including their maintenance,
- Design services to advance infrastructure projects,
- New or modified traffic signals, or
- A transportation study or plan.

Did you know that transportation-related benefits are only one type of community benefit? Developers can also contribute to new or improved public spaces, affordable housing units, community retail spaces, and so on. Mitigation from new developments can advance recommended projects identified from community planning efforts, like the SBTAP.



Notes

Use these pages to take notes throughout the conversation. Jot down questions you might have so that we don't forget to address them during our discussion.

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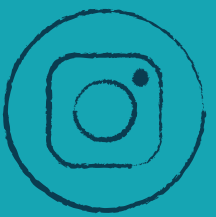
Contact us and stay involved:

- Visit our website by following this link.
- Email us at SouthBostonTAP@boston.gov
- Join our upcoming public meeting in May where we will review this content and offer opportunity for questions!

@BostonPlans

Visit Twitter!



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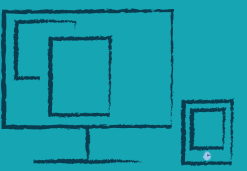

Visit our website

BostonPlans.org

You can also reach out to your local elected official on the City Council. The City Council serves as a link between the people of Boston and the municipal government. Councilors help constituents by connecting them to resources, services, and City departments. They serve as advocates for all Bostonians.

boston planning & development agency