

Notes from June 14th walk down Belchertown Rd (Route 9), Gatehouse Road, Heatherstone and Pelham Road.

Transportation Advisory Committee subcommittee walk in South Amherst, Thursday, June 14, 2018. Subcommittee members Eve Vogel, Justin Italiano, and Bruce Carson were joined in Echo Hill by neighborhood residents Elizabeth Lingo, Susie McCrea and Jessica Moore, and their dogs.

Route Traveled: Started at the Fort River Elementary School parking lot and walked to South East Street and then went left on Belchertown Road. Followed Belchertown Rd to Gatehouse Road. We then traveled up Gatehouse Road to Stony Hill Road and then to Heatherstone Road. Leaving Heatherstone Road we walked down Pelham Rd back to South East Street and the Fort River Parking lot.

TOP RECOMMENDATION PRIORITIES:

1. Clear sidewalks on Belchertown and Pelham Rd of obstructions (including mailboxes on Pelham Rd). Maintain (removing debris, vegetation, etc.) at least annually.
2. Next time Belchertown or Pelham Rd roadway is resurfaced, re-construct sidewalks so they are high quality and 5 or preferably 6 ft throughout. This width is essential to provide viable riding space for inexperienced to moderate cyclists as well as pedestrians. Include grassy strips where possible.
3. Construct traffic calming in Gatehouse/Stony Hill/Heatherstone Rds to bring traffic to 25 MPH.

See individual street recommendations for more detail and other recommendations.

BELCHERTOWN ROAD:

Observations:

- **Roadway & motorized traffic:**
 - ▶ Very busy road. Traffic all seemed to be moving about 40-50 MPH.
 - ▶ There are many sections of the road that may be in need of repair in the near future. It would be advisable to make sidewalk improvements when these repairs take place.
- **Location of existing sidewalks / sidewalk gaps.**
 - ▶ There are sidewalks on both sides of the road up until the Maplewood Farm parking lot. From this point to Gatehouse Rd there is a sidewalk only on the north side of the Street.
- **Sidewalk condition:**
 - ▶ The sidewalk on the south side of the street between the Cumberland Farms and Maplewood Farm has more space than the northern sidewalk. There is a small grassy strip which buffers the road from the walking path.
 - ▶ The north side (we stayed exclusively on the north side during this walk) does not have any buffer with the roadway. The road has a very small shoulder on almost the entire

length of the road. The road gets wider just before the Gatehouse Road intersection and the sidewalk is more comfortable and enjoyable to use when traffic is not so close.

- ▶ In general the sidewalk is not in bad shape. Several hundred feet before the Gatehouse Road intersection the condition of the sidewalk is significantly worse.
 - ▶ Sidewalk is too narrow especially without a buffer to the road.
 - ▶ There is a lot of debris in the sidewalk. Chunks of asphalt, sand, gravel and other debris make the already narrow sidewalk much more difficult to use.
 - ▶ There is a lot of plant growth encroaching into the sidewalk area that needs to be trimmed back. This is a particular problem because it makes 2-way traffic on the sidewalk nearly impossible and forces pedestrians to walk even closer to the road.
- **Bike lanes/infrastructure.**
 - ▶ No bike lanes on this route. The roadway is too narrow to add. For all but the most strong, experienced bicyclists, the road is too fast and busy for cyclists. We saw one cyclist on the road and one on the sidewalk. We also had a bike with us and walked it on the sidewalk. For a cyclist of low to medium ability, the sidewalk is the only option. It is largely passable, but the debris on the sidewalk makes it impossible to move consistently. The narrowness of the sidewalk makes passing pedestrians difficult.
- **Bus routes and infrastructure.**
 - ▶ Buses stop in Colonial Village and then not again until Rolling Green. The westbound bus stop at Rolling Green is fine and allows the buses to pull completely off the road and is large enough for multiple buses. The eastbound bus stop could use improvements. Better lighting and a more clearly marked pull off would improve safety. Buses currently stop directly after the intersection, more or less in the middle of the road, because they only have a few feet on the right.
- **Lighting:**
 - ▶ Lighting near the Gatehouse Road intersection is adequate, but from just past the intersection to around the entrance of Colonial Village lighting is limited. There are only a few street lights along this stretch.
- **Crosswalks and intersections:**
 - ▶ There are signalized pedestrian crossing phases at the Gatehouse Rd intersection but along the rest of Route 9 there are no crosswalks. The most important place this is a problem is at Colonial Village. More light at the entrance to Colonial Village along with a crosswalk could be a good improvement.
- **Potential usage of improved pedestrian or bicycle infrastructure:**
 - ▶ There are housing complexes along this route, e.g. Rolling Green and Colonial Village. This is a major commuter route for students and low-income residents. An improved sidewalk could provide more comfortable walking and a more viable bicycle route into and out of town.
- **Possibilities for sidewalk / bike lane widening**

- ▶ There appears to be little room for widening.

- **Data Needed**

- ▶ How many people use this route for school or work commuting during the academic year?
- ▶ How many might use it if the sidewalk were improved and maintained?
- ▶ A survey or assessment of the possibility of widening the sidewalk to 6 ft consistently on this route.

Recommendations, Belchertown Rd:

- Make sidewalk improvements when road is repaired: fix damaged areas, ensure sidewalk is 5 or preferably 6 ft, and wherever possible add grassy strip buffer.
- Maintain sidewalk annually to remove debris and plant growth. This may mean more communication/notices/enforcement with property owners.
- More light at the entrance to Colonial Village and add a crosswalk.
- Improve the eastbound bus stop at Rolling Green. Better lighting and a more clearly marked pull off would improve safety and traffic flow.
- Add lighting from Colonial Village to Gatehouse Rd to improve walking and biking safety at night and rainy/snowy weather.

GATEHOUSE ROAD/STONY HILL AND HEATHERSTONE ROAD:

Observations

- **Roadway & motorized traffic:**

- ▶ The speed limit on all of these roads is posted at 30 MPH. However, residents have stated that on multiple occasions they have witnessed vehicles well in excess of 50 MPH.
- ▶ The road is quite wide and there are no lines of any type to indicate travel or bike lanes.
- ▶ There is adequate space to walk in the road. The general condition of the road is adequate for walking, except for the speed.
- ▶ Many neighborhood residents, including children, walk in the road. Except for the speed, this is a very pedestrian-friendly neighborhood. It has a strong community feel.
- ▶ Traffic speed makes walking potentially unsafe, especially for children and the elderly, and bicycling unsafe for inexperienced, smaller or less-visible riders. Neighbors expressed ongoing concerns/problems with speed through the neighborhood. This seems to be mainly an issue on Heatherstone Road (although cars do speed on Stony Hill and Gatehouse as well) because this is where residential driveways are located and where kids are likely to be playing.
- ▶ Stony Hill road has no driveways on it and was designed as a road that looped around the development to provide access to other neighborhoods.
- ▶ The route is used as a through route between Pelham and Belchertown Rd, significantly increasing speed and traffic.

- **Location of existing sidewalks / sidewalk gaps.**

- ▶ There are no sidewalks beyond the sidewalk at the start of Gatehouse Road.

- **Sidewalk condition:**
 - ▶ Good (where sidewalk exists).
- **Bike lanes/infrastructure.**
 - ▶ None.
 - ▶ Road is wide enough, and, where there is a sidewalk, sidewalk is wide enough, for bikes. Strong, large, and visible bicyclists could bike fairly safely here, but not smaller, less experienced or less visible bicyclists, because of the traffic speeds.
 - ▶ Roadway is wide enough to add bike lanes.
- **Bus routes and infrastructure.**
 - ▶ There are several bus stops in Echo Hill that are served only a handful of times every day in each direction
 - ▶ There are no pull offs for the buses. This is not a big concern because traffic is generally light.
 - ▶ Some of the bus stops are not well lit and could benefit from having a designated area that is cleared for passengers to wait.
- **Lighting:**
 - ▶ Limited lighting
- **Crosswalks and intersections:**
 - ▶ No or very few crosswalks in Echo Hill.
- **Potential usage of improved pedestrian or bicycle infrastructure:**
 - ▶ There are many families here who would like to walk and bike more, if it were safer for kids.
- **Possibilities for sidewalk / bike lane widening**
 - ▶ There is adequate space for a bike lane, and quite likely for a sidewalk. However, this is a long route so adding a sidewalk the whole route would be very expensive.
- **Data Needed:**
 - ▶ Speeds and traffic volume at different parts of the route
 - ▶ Numbers of children, families; how many people would walk if it were safer
 - ▶ Are there particular locations where children or other vulnerable users commonly cross the street? What kinds of infrastructure needs are there in these locations, and what would be possible?

Recommendations, Gatehouse /Stony Hill / Heatherstone Road

1. Speeds need to be reduced.
2. There needs to be physical separation between motor vehicle traffic and pedestrians and inexperienced cyclists

- The target of 25 MPH, or 30 MPH after a buffer is added between foot traffic/ inexperienced bicyclists and motorized vehicles (e.g. a curb or painted buffer).
- Simply changing the speed limit sign is inadequate, and could have inadvertent negative consequences. Not only do many people do what they want regardless of the posted sign, but if the sign were changed, some people would slow down and others would not, and this could actually lead to decreased safety (rear end collisions, reckless passing maneuvers, etc.).
- Engineering measures need to be taken to reduce speeds through these neighborhoods. Some measures could also offer separation for vulnerable walkers and cyclists from cars. Possible options:
 - ▶ Place several 3-way stop signs along the road at the various intersections.
 - ▶ Paint lines indicating vehicles, bike and pedestrian lanes to narrow travel lanes. Include a buffer if traffic is not otherwise slowed.
 - ▶ Prevent vehicles from using this neighborhood as a cut through from Pelham Road to Route 9, e.g. by blocking access from one direction except for pedestrians, buses and bikes.
 - ▶ Use islands or mini-traffic circles at the intersections to force people to slow down. This would fit well with the character of the neighborhood, and the neighborhood residents could plant and maintain flowers or shrubs. They have an existing practice of maintaining roadway circles with gardening (e.g. in existing cul-de-sacs).

PELHAM ROAD

General Observations

- **Roadway & motorized traffic:**
 - ▶ Very busy road.
 - ▶ Roadway is narrow. Little shoulder so there is minimal buffer between motor traffic and sidewalk, and no bike lanes.
 - ▶ Traffic appeared to be moving at 40-50 MPH.
- **Location of existing sidewalks / sidewalk gaps.**
 - ▶ There is a sidewalk on the south side of the road, none on the north side.
- **Sidewalk condition:**
 - ▶ The sidewalk is very narrow and has a number of mailboxes and other obstructions in the path.
 - ▶ At times the distinction between the road and the sidewalk is almost non-existent and at one particular location a tree forces people toward the street to get around it.
 - ▶ As a result, this sidewalk feels particularly unsafe. This is a walking route for children from the Echo Hill neighborhood to walk to Fort River School, but Echo Hill residents expressed concern that this sidewalk is not safe enough.
 - ▶ In many places it is also in poor repair.
- **Bike lanes/infrastructure.**

- ▶ No bike lanes on this route. The roadway is too narrow to add. For all but the most strong, experienced bicyclists, the road is too fast and busy for cyclists – maybe even worse than Belchertown Rd. For a cyclist of low to medium ability, the sidewalk is the only option. It is largely passable, but the obstructions on the sidewalk makes it impossible to move consistently. The narrowness of the sidewalk makes passing pedestrians or other bicyclists difficult to impossible.
- **Crosswalks and intersections:**
 - ▶ At sidestreet intersections the handicap accessible ramps are awkward and are not connected in a straight line with the rest of the sidewalk resulting in uncomfortable crossings.
 - ▶ There are no painted crosswalk boxes at any of these locations, with the exception of a single crosswalk from the sidewalk to the Amethyst Brook conservation land).
- **Bus routes and infrastructure.**
 - ▶ The only bus stop along this road is at the Amethyst Brook parking area on either side of the road.
 - ▶ These bus stops are less than ideal (worse going westbound) because buses stop in the road and there is little space for waiting passengers to stand.
 - ▶ Bus ridership is low relative to other routes.
- **Potential usage of improved pedestrian or bicycle infrastructure:**
 - ▶ There is a fairly dense residential neighborhood along this road, and this is also a walking/ biking route for residents from the Echo Hill neighborhood to walk to Fort River School.
- **Possibilities for sidewalk / bike lane widening**
 - ▶ There is very little room.
 - ▶ Moving mailboxes and other obstructions out of the sidewalk would make the existing sidewalk width fully available.
- **Data Needed**
 - ▶ Current and potential use of this route for pedestrians and cyclists.
 - ▶ A survey or assessment of the possibility of widening the sidewalk to 6 ft.
 - ▶ We did not assess lighting. Additional lighting may be necessary to make this a viable walking/biking route at night or in rainy/snowy weather.

Recommendations, Pelham Rd

- This route needs a wider sidewalk without mailboxes and other obstructions, and safer crossings.