



Providence Green and Complete Streets Advisory Council

Jorge O. Elorza, Mayor

Staff Report: Washington Street and East Approach Conceptual Review (For Action)

Presented at 9/19/2022 GCSC meeting

Project Background

The City of Providence has hired the BETA Group to provide engineering, and pre-construction work for investments on Washington Street and East Approach in Greater Kennedy Plaza.

In 2020, the City worked with ARUP to develop a cohesive, community-driven plan for the future of the Greater Kennedy Plaza area, including Kennedy Plaza, the Rink, Waterplace Park, and the Riverwalk to make these spaces more inclusive, safe, sustainable, and well-connected to one another.

The city is now moving forward with interim improvements as part of this project by creating “woonerfs” (Dutch, meaning “living street”), designed to slow traffic and prioritize pedestrians on Washington Street between Dorrance and Exchange streets and East Approach between Washington Street and Exchange Terrace. Washington Street and East Approach will be raised up to provide a surface flush with the sidewalks and plazas on either side of the street. The street will remain open to buses and cars. The improvements will be built in a way that does not preclude future phases of the vision for Greater Kennedy Plaza (Imagine Downtown Providence project) from moving forward in the future.



This change will:

- Slow vehicle speeds through Washington Street by narrowing the roadway from two lanes of traffic to one, installing bollards and planters.
- Close East Approach to all traffic and remove the bus stops to create a unified park space between Burnside and Biltmore parks.
- Raise portions of Washington Street and the entirety of East Approach flush with the sidewalks to create a shared space that allows freer movement of pedestrians through Kennedy Plaza.
- Maintain the existing bus berths on Washington Street as an interim condition while RIPTA plans and constructs the new downtown hub.
- Increase existing pedestrian-only space and create a “program-ready” Kennedy Plaza with retractable bollards at Washington Street/ Dorrance, East Approach/ Exchange Terrace, East

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Approach/ Washington Street and Washington Street/ Exchange Street – to allow this space to be easily programmed for special events and activities.



Responses to Questions from GCSC

1. Was the potential to have vehicles use the existing bus lane next to the bus pull outs/stops instead of keeping a separate lane for them considered? I realize this would mean additional traffic signal changes, but it would free up a lot more space.
 - **No. The goal is to keep that bus-only space and prepare Washington Street to be carfree once that becomes feasible.**
2. Was consideration for additional plantings or impervious materials rather than concrete for the east approach considered?
 - **This is likely not possible due to cost, but we will look further into it.**
3. Given the additional space gained due to the elimination of a driving lane, why isn't a bike lane included on Washington Street?
 - **We will look into it. The Great Streets Plan calls for the bike route through Greater Kennedy Plaza to be along Exchange Terrace, as the Dorrance frontage of Biltmore Park especially around the Rink buildings is too narrow for an urban trail, but there could be value in using some of the reclaimed space adjacent to Washington Street for a bike connection.**
4. How will traffic be calmed ahead of the crosswalks?



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- **The entire raised portion of Washington Street will have calmed traffic with a goal of 10-15 mph speeds for cars. Traffic will be slowed by means of bollards placed close to the roadway creating a narrow width as well as textured surface material in advance of crosswalks.**
5. How will the lost bus berths on East Approach be accounted for elsewhere in the Plaza?
- **The City has been coordinating with RIPTA on this plan, and they have confirmed that they will be able to integrate the bus service from East Approach into existing berths in Kennedy Plaza.**
6. Is it correct that we would be losing the crosswalk from the corner of east approach to the center of the plaza where the new median island is proposed? That leaves a pretty big gap between crosswalks on Washington Street
- **Two crosswalks that currently exist, at Dorrance and at East Approach, are not shown in the current plans. The thinking is that the slowed traffic will allow for crossing the street safely without crosswalks. The crosswalks that remain are due to those crosswalks continuing across the bus area. Based on input from the Governor's Commission on Disabilities there will be appropriate Detectable Warning Panels for the length of the block.**

Respectfully submitted by Alex Ellis.