



Boston Cyclists Union

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In April, we conducted a survey, shared by other Massachusetts Vision Zero Coalition partners, about the impact of coronavirus on how people get around. The survey received nearly 400 responses from Metro Boston, of which 156 were from Boston residents. From the Boston responses, (which showed similar statistics to Metro Boston overall):

- 90% support opening up more space on streets for walking/biking right now
- 70% are walking as much or more often than they were before the pandemic
- 80% are walking to reach essential services
- 40% don't feel safe walking/biking now because of difficulty in doing so while maintaining social distance

We heard many stories from people who have been biking more often, or biking for the first time. We also heard from essential workers and healthcare workers about how important biking has been to them — and from those eager to start biking if there is safe infrastructure.

According to a 2019 MassDOT study, 78% of urban residents statewide are interested in commuting via bike to work. That was before the pandemic hit. Now, across the world and the U.S., cities are preparing for big surges in biking. Boston should join those cities in preparing the infrastructure needed to support a similar surge — or it will risk a future where people flee public transit for personal vehicles, further exacerbating the city's worst-in-the-nation traffic congestion.

In speaking with Boston bike shops, we have heard of universal increases in demand for both new bikes and repairs. That increase is largely from people who haven't biked in years or ridden regularly who are now opting to bike instead of taking transit. Landry's bike shop recently shared that throughout the shutdown they have struggled to keep up with demand, especially for bikes under \$800.

In addition, more people and small businesses will continue to depend on deliveries. If there are safe routes to ride on, there is a big potential for job creation in the bike delivery sector since Boston is small enough to bike to most neighborhoods.

We encourage the city to focus on interventions that can accomplish two things: 1) Have an immediate impact on creating safer roads and access to an affordable, socially distant mode of transportation (biking), and 2) Have a lasting impact on meeting Boston's goals around mode

shift, climate goals and Vision Zero. To do this, we suggest a focus on installing planned capital projects for the bike network (if possible this year once construction is allowed) in addition to temporary or quick-build bike lanes on key connectors in the city's bike network blueprint. This would allow people from all neighborhoods to reach job centers, while quickly improving roads that have high crash rates for all modes of travel, especially for people on bikes.

Other areas that should be considered for immediate improvements are:

- Roads leading to hospitals, which will continue to be essential
- Main streets districts, where people need to visit businesses via foot and bike
- Current gaps in the bike network, and roads that are in the high crash network for bikes and other modes.

Specifically we suggest:

- Streets already included in the Connect Downtown study area, such as continuation of protected lanes on Columbus Ave., Cambridge St. and Charles St., Tremont St. and other streets around Boston Common
- Summer St., for a South Boston to Downtown connection
- American Legion Highway, Blue Hill Ave., Cummins Highway and Hyde Park Ave., for Mattapan and Hyde Park Connections
- Centre St. in West Roxbury
- Mass Ave. from Harrison Ave. to Columbia Road, a section of road that is a high crash corridor for all modes of travel
- A Roxbury to LMA connector
- Completing Brookline Ave. and Boylston St. in the Fenway
- Malcolm X Blvd., to connect the Warren St. project to the Southwest Corridor
- Columbia Road and sections of Dorchester Ave.

Many of these streets have already had some level of public engagement and planning; a pilot or temporary bike lane here could serve as a valuable next step in the process.

I know that some businesses have expressed strong concerns about the impact new bike lanes would have on their business. However, study after study in San Francisco, NYC, Portland, LA, Vancouver, Toronto, Dublin and more have shown an increase in the number of customers, an increase in the number of visits to their businesses and an increase in sales. Food businesses specifically tend to see the greatest increases in business. The bottom line: Bikes boost business.

I also want to highlight a 2019 study showing that protected bike lanes make cities safer for everyone — not just people on bikes. This study found that protected bike lanes led to a 44% drop in fatal crashes for all road users (vs. citywide avg.) and a 50% drop in injuries for all road users (vs. citywide avg.) That means that taking action now to improve biking would benefit

everyone on our roads — an important consideration given that data shows speeding is out of control, and that even as driving is down 50% statewide, the rate of fatal crashes has doubled.

I want to thank the City Council for addressing this important issue. On behalf of everyone who bikes in Boston — and everyone who would be enticed to bike by investments in new infrastructure — I ask that you act urgently.

Testimony received from survey respondents

“I feel more unsafe in all regards while walking and biking now than I did before the coronavirus crisis. I live near Boston Common, and I cannot tell you the number of times I have seen cars ripping through the streets at an incredibly unsafe speed because of the reduction in traffic. I love living in Boston precisely because I have never felt the need to own a vehicle, which has been of incredible benefit for my physical, mental, and financial health. Now I feel like a second class citizen. Car owners around me are able to zip around the city without a problem to run errands or access outdoor amenities using uncontested space dedicated for cars, while I struggle to even have the room to take a socially distant mental walk to get to the groceries and medicines that I need.” — Kirstie, Beacon Hill / West End

“I am not commuting at this time, but as an East Boston resident, the reduced service on the blue line is concerning. It’s one of the only ways to leave East Boston if you do not own a car. I have now come to observe the large gaps in safe bike infrastructure within Eastie, as well as in the routes connecting East Boston to other cities. I would love to be able to safely bike but the bike infrastructure does not exist.” — Maggie, East Boston

“Since the coronavirus hit, I’ve been working at the COVID screening clinic, so I am still going into work. On my bike, I know that I’m far enough away from other people to keep us all safe. When I commute home on my bike, I know that I’m not at risk of exposing anyone else.” — Sarah, co-director of BMC’s Immigrant & Refugee Health Center