

Libbytown Traffic and Circulation Study Public Advisory Committee Meeting

April, 22th 2013
Portland Expo Center

In attendance:

Committee Members: Maria MacDougal, Zachary Barowitz, Christian Milneil, Fred Dillon, Channing Capuchino, Jackie Thompson, Ruth Mlotek, Harlan Baker, Jamie Parker, Richard Buchanan, Caroline Partlow, Mary Didonato, Skip Woods

Staff: Carl Eppich, PACTS; Jeremiah Bartlett, Mike, Bobinsky, Kathi Earley, Bill Needelman, Caitlin Cameron, and Bruce Hyman, City of Portland; Lucy Gibson, DuBois & King; John Mahoney, Ransom Consultants; Tom Farmer, T.J. DeWan & Associates; Carol Morris and Scott Hastings, Morris Communications.

Councilor Ed Suslovic

Meeting started 4:06pm

Carol Morris opened the meeting and introductions were done. Carol gave an update on what has happened recently. The public meeting was moved to May 8th because of conflicts on the city's schedule but it is a good thing as it gives the project a little more time to complete more modeling before the meeting. Part of this move is due to a meeting that Councilor Suslovic would like to tell you about.

Councilor Suslovic announced a meeting on April 30th that will cover in one evening the variety of projects that are currently underway in Libbytown. It will be at the Italian Heritage center. Included in it will be this study, a traffic calming study, an update on the Thompsons Point development, and an update on St. Patrick's Church.

A question was asked about whether the city is concerned about the short notice.

Councilor Suslovic responded that people should have a week's notice and they are hoping that will be enough.

Lucy Gibson took over at this point to present the four alternatives that were worked out. These alternatives were informed by the PAC's input and the input from two meetings help more recently. The first was a business meeting with local businesses from the Libbytown area which had a decent turnout and garnered some good feedback. The second was a very productive meeting MDOT about how the alternatives will effect I-295 and if anything was a no-go with them.

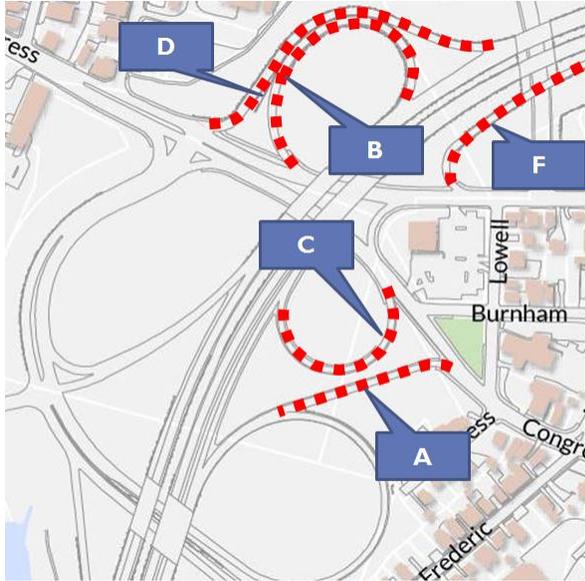


Figure 1: Ramp labels

The original eight alternatives were screened through traffic prediction models and the input from the meetings. MDOT was concerned about the costs of constructing new ramps so all alternatives including new ramps were removed. Ramp D (see Figure 1) was determined to have safety concerns and to be easily replaced by diverting traffic to Fore River Parkway exit so all alternatives that kept Ramp D were removed.

Lucy then reviewed the changes in travel distance and time caused by the removal of each ramp. See Table 1:

Ramp	Miles Existing	Miles Proposed	Min-Sec	
			at 15 mph	at 25 mph
A NB Exit to EB Congress	0.12	0.74	2:28	1:29
B SB Entry from WB Park	0.61	0.47	-0:34	-0:20
C NB Entry from EB Congress	0.28	0.77	1:57	1:11
D SB Exit to WB Congress	0.25	0.52	1:05	0:39
F NB Entry from Park	0.23	1.2	3:53	2:20

Table 1: Travel distance and time changes due to removal of ramps.

The current four alternatives were derived after taking all of this into consideration and are based on two different ramp configurations and whether inner congress is one way or two way. They were presented as follows in Table 2:

	Interchange Configuration	a) Park-2 way Congress 1-way	b) Park-2 way Congress 2-way
Alternative 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Close 5 ramps: A,B,C,D,F Directs all interstate traffic to Fore River Parkway Interchange 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Park is major route into downtown Congress is major bicycle route 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Both routes serve traffic Park is major bicycle route Congress provides on-street parking
Alternative 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Close 4 ramps: A,B,C,D Eastbound access to Ramp F Less traffic on Fore River Parkway Interchange 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Congress 2-way between Marston and St. John Congress provides on-street parking Park is traffic and bicycle route 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Equal emphasis for traffic, bicycles and parking on Congress and Park Larger signal at Congress/Park/I-295 NB

Table 2: The four alternatives

Figures 2-5 show the components of each of the four alternatives as they were presented.

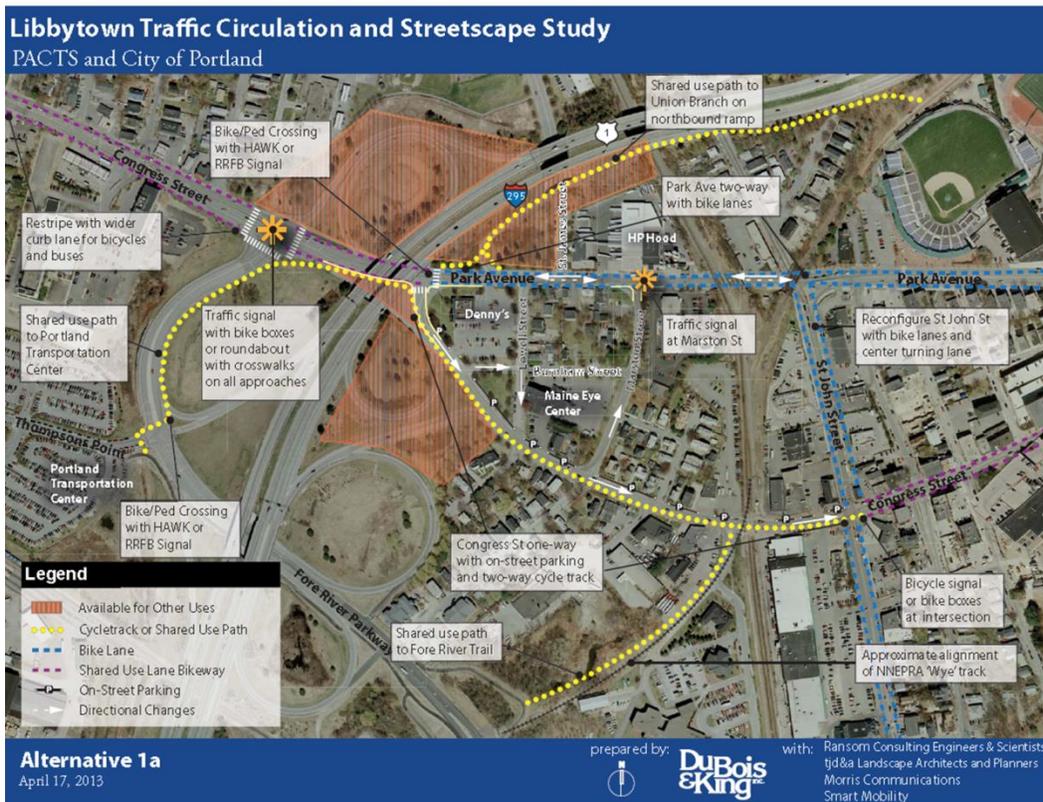


Figure 2: Alternative 1A

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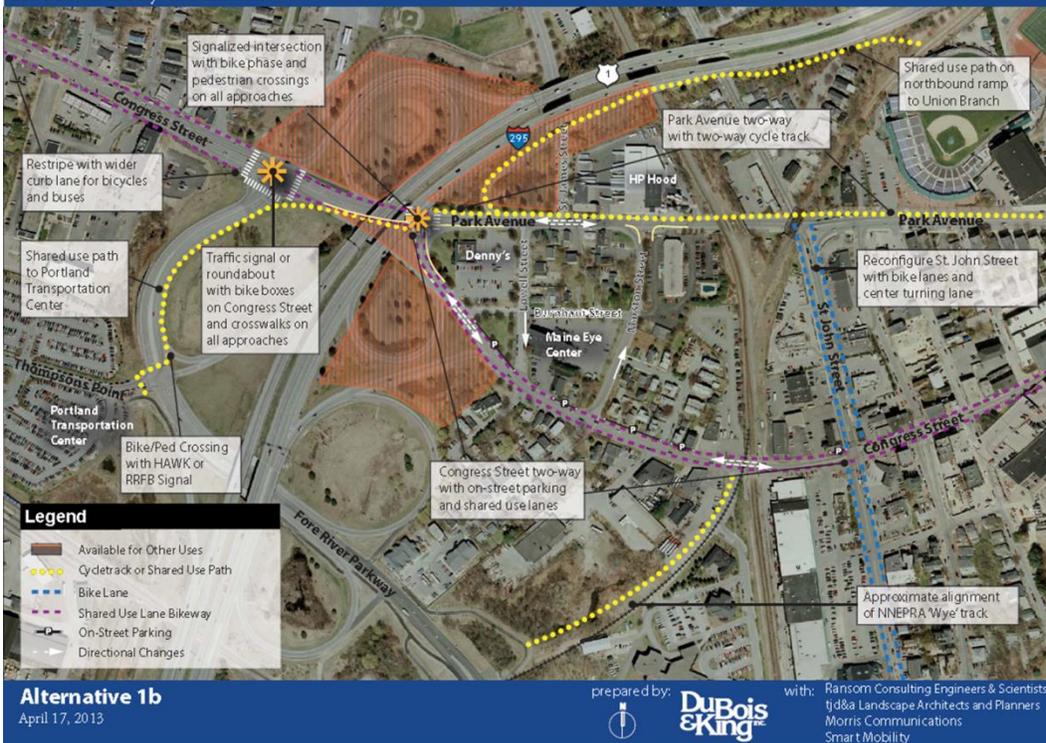


Figure 3: Alternative 1B

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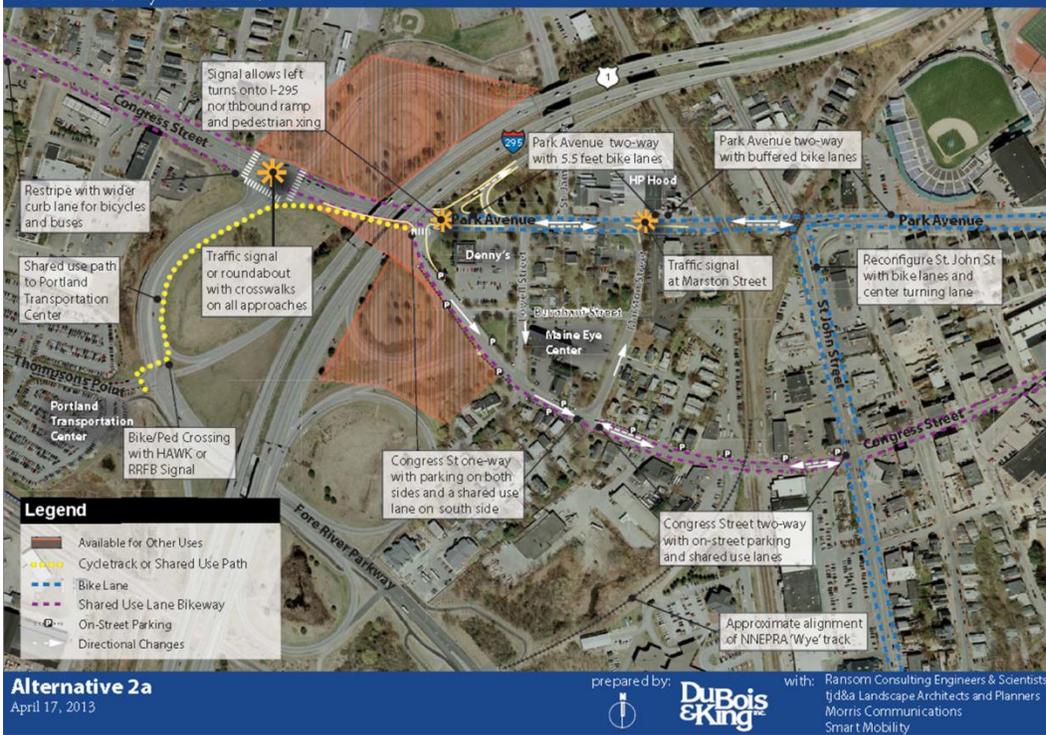


Figure 4: Alternative 2A

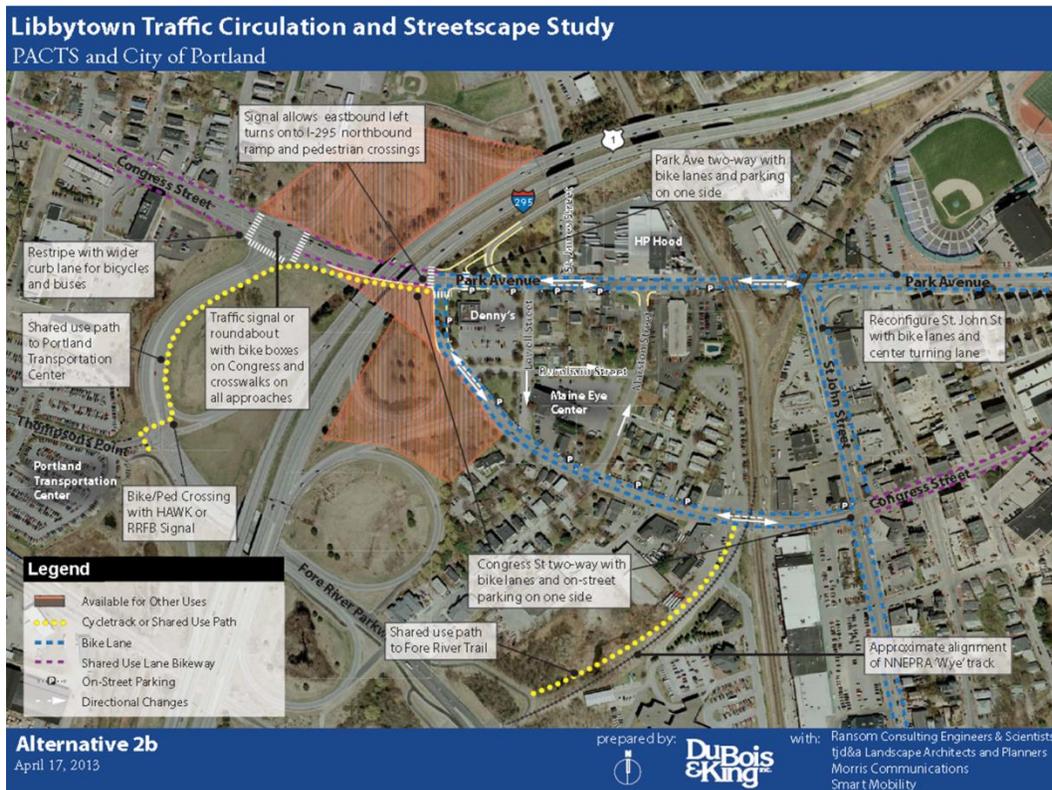


Figure 5: Alternative 2B

A committee member asked whether the cycle track buffer was paint or a physical barrier.

Lucy responded that it is a painted portion of the road.

A committee member asked if the buffers for the cycle tracks and for the bike lanes were required.

Lucy responded that they were not required but were recommended for safety.

A committee member asked if any of the alternatives would improve the pedestrian experience on outer Congress.

Lucy noted that it was mostly outside of the study area and a discussion ensued about the section of road. Councilor Suslovic noted the road diet down even farther out on Congress and its success. The hope has been to try and divert traffic from outer congress to the highway.

A committee member asked if the bike lanes and on street parking on inner congress (in all applicable alternatives) would just be from Lowell Road in to St. John Street or would it be from Park Ave. to St. John Street.

Lucy responded that it would be the whole length of Inner Congress, from Park Ave. to St. John Street.

Lucy presented the study teams findings on using roundabouts in the area. In terms of traffic load they were found to be able to adequately handle the projected traffic volumes for both the Congress Street / Fore River Parkway intersection and the Congress Street / Park Ave intersection (provided Park Ave and Congress Street were both two way). They would significantly increase the costs of improving the area. The Congress Street / Fore River Parkway roundabout would need to be two lanes which would be less friendly to bikes and pedestrians. If roundabouts are desirable they could be implemented as a phase two for an improvement plan and thus separate the costs slightly from the rest of the project.

A committee member asked how roundabouts would effect traffic on outer Congress Street.

Lucy responded that they would have a calming effect on the immediate area as people slow to navigate the roundabout. This would help to change the nature of traffic flow through the area.

A committee member asked if the signalized options were used would the plan be slowing traffic.

Lucy responded that yes the plans would slow traffic regardless. Lanes would be removed and narrowed which would force people to travel slower. Further the addition of on street parking and bike lanes would create more activity on the roads making it harder and less appealing to drive fast. The effects would mostly be on the intown side of I-295, with Outer Congress not being changed all that much.

There was some discussion about this and it was felt that between this and the road diet farther out on congress the overall experience of congress would be changed. By “bookending” the road with traffic calming measures it was felt the middle section would be somewhat improved as well.

There was concern about roundabouts being hard to navigate for pedestrians, particularly visually impaired pedestrians. Lucy noted that roundabouts can be made safe for pedestrians it just takes some work and some engineering.

A committee member noted that this area, with the highway exit ramps, will always be an area that has an influx of people that are not familiar with the roads. Roundabouts don't give people a chance to get their bearings and so might not be good for Libbytown.

Councilor Suslovic asked if any of the presented, signalized alternatives would not allow for roundabouts in the future if it was later determined that they would be desirable.

Lucy confirmed that yes all of the alternatives could have roundabouts as a second phase.

Bill Needleman from the City of Portland's planning department, noted that if roundabouts can be seen as a second phase that sound be mentioned in the study's final report so that the city could look at them and see what steps it could take to make that second step easier.

A committee member noted that they liked the roundabout at the Fore River Parkway intersection but wondered if it could be done as a one lane roundabout instead of a two lane. This would make it much better for bicycles.

Lucy felt that with the current traffic predictions one lane would not be sufficient to handle the traffic flows.

Lucy presented the study’s findings on the impacts of the four alternates on levels of service for all modes of transportation. Levels of service are ratings from A-F that reflect how good a road or intersection is at meeting the needs of the mode of transportation in question. Tables 3-5 show the existing levels of service for Pedestrians, Bicycles and Cars and the predicted levels of service for 2015 levels of traffic with the four alternatives implemented

Table 3: Existing and Predicted Pedestrian Levels of Service

	Existing	1A	1B	2A	2B
Outer Congress	E	C	C	C	C
Congress	E	B	C	B	C
Park	D	C	B	C	B

Pedestrian levels of service primarily reflect; exposure to traffic, crosswalk frequency and the pleasantness of the environment.

Table 4: Existing and Predicted Bicycle Levels of Service

	Existing	1A	1B	2A	2B
Outer Congress	F	E	E	E	E
Congress	F	B	C	D	C
Park	E	C	B	C	C

Bicycle levels of service reflect traffic speed and amount of separation between bikes and vehicular traffic.

Table 5: Existing and Predicted Vehicular Levels of Service

	Existing	1A	1B	2A	2B
FRP/Thompsons Point	B	D	D	C	C
Congress/FRP	C	C	C	C	C
Congress/ St John	A	B	B	B	B
Park/St John	A	C	B	C	B

Vehicular levels of service at intersections reflect time required to travel through the intersection at peak traffic times.

Lucy noted that bicycle and pedestrian levels of service went up across the board in all alternatives, though Outer Congress only sees a little improvement for bicycles. Vehicular levels of service went down in all cases but are still at or above MDOT’s target level of service of “D”. A vehicular level of service of “A”, while technically best for vehicles, is typically overdesigned and not the best use of space or resources.

A committee member asked if the traffic projections are taking into account recent trends showing the decline of vehicular traffic.

Lucy and Carl Eppich, from PACTS, explained that the traffic projects are mostly flat growth with the addition of the Thompsons point project. They are likely conservative in that they are predicting slightly more traffic than might happen. Bill Needleman pointed out that the location of this study area means that the trends leading to lower overall vehicular use could actually keep traffic in this area comparatively high as more of downtown Portland experiences infill development.

Lucy summarized the level of service findings saying that the bicycle and pedestrian improvements are largely due to design features that can be mixed and matched between alternatives. There was however a tradeoff between on street parking and bicycle level of service as less parking results in more space for bicycles.

A question was asked why there was such an emphasis on creating on street parking and the issue was discussed. It was felt on street parking would act as a traffic calming measure and support future retail and residential development. At the business meeting the team had heard from representatives of the Maine Eye Center that the current parking in the area is barely sufficient for current needs.

A committee member voiced the opinion that while increased parking is important too much would be a bad thing as we should be encouraging people to walk and bike. To that end they felt

that angled parking would be too much and take up a lot of space. When the spaces were not in use the road would seem very wide and the traffic calming effect would be lost. Parallel parking is better and does allow for some parking to support local businesses.

Another committee member agrees and adds that parallel parking provides a both a buffer between traffic and pedestrians and a buffer between bicycles and the road side debris field.

Lucy summed up her presentation and added that all the alternatives fit within current roads with possible small exceptions at the Fore River parkway / Congress Street intersection in the two “1” alternatives.

At this point Lucy opened up the floor for general comment.

A number of people voiced that they did not like the angled parking, particularly if it was back in angled parking.

A committee member voiced that they were against Congress being two way part of the way and that it should be entirely two way if it is at all. Similarly they felt that no portion of Park Ave should have a median. They also voiced skepticism about the two way cycle tracks and were concerned about how they would work.

Another person asked if making Park Ave. two way would adversely affect Hood and that if it did then it should not be done as Hood is a long standing and respected business in the area.

Skip Woods, a representative of Hood, responded that he appreciated their concern. Hood was working with the city and the study team on making sure that they could live with whatever was done. They are looking at changing some curb cuts to make turning out of the plant easier. He also mentioned that they liked the idea of a traffic light at Marston and Park Ave.

Councilor Suslovic noted that to him the biggest difference between the “1” and “2” alternatives was the “2” alternatives kept the northbound on ramp from Park Ave. He had originally thought that we should get rid of all the unnecessary ramps but after what he had heard that night felt it might be better to keep that ramp. He felt that there was little to gain in removing it and possibly some negative consequences. He also felt that changing Inner Congress to a two way road for its whole length would best serve the neighborhood.

Another committee member mentioned that the point about two way streets being better for busses by making routes into and out of the city consistent really struck home with them. That point tipped the scales in favor of a two way Inner Congress.

A committee member countered that they felt a one way Inner Congress would be more suitable for the primarily residential neighborhood. It would be safer and slower. They also felt that a two congress would run into issues with traffic backing up from the rail crossing in to the St. John Street intersection and beyond.

A committee member asked if MDOT was on board with these proposals.

Lucy and Jeremiah Bartlett from the City of Portland's Public Works department explained that while nothing was guaranteed at this point they had had some very productive meetings with MDOT. They felt that as long as the changes showed significant benefits in terms of safety and were seen to be able to handle the projected traffic flows MDOT would be willing to entertain the changes.

Another committee member noted some skepticism about the two way cycle tracks. They were uncertain how people traveling on the opposing side of the road would merge back into or out of traffic at the ends of the track. They also felt strongly that both Park Ave. and Inner Congress should be two way streets.

A committee member voiced the opinion that they liked both Park Ave. and Inner Congress as two way streets. They did not like the idea of keeping the Northbound on ramp for Park Ave. They felt that it was unnecessary with Park Ave. being a two way road and that it is bad for pedestrians.

It was asked if Lowell and Marston streets would be changed from one way to two way in any of the alternatives.

Lucy responded that they are not proposing any changes to them but that it could be done easily if people wanted to in the future.

A committee member noted that they liked alternative 1A but would like to see parking on both sides of Inner Congress instead of just on one. They also liked the two way cycle tracks having used them in other places. Cycle tracks would be particularly good on Inner Congress if it were one way to allow counter flow bike traffic. They felt that keeping the Ramp F would be unnecessary if Congress was two way.

It was pointed out that all the alternatives, including those that made Inner Congress two way, would be trying to make Inner Congress a neighborhood street and deemphasize it to through traffic.

A committee member agreed that two way cycle tracks were a good thing and pointed out that the Eastern Prom trail was a local example of one. If one was created on Park Ave they would like to see it extend to Deering Oaks Park. They also expressed concern that none of the "2" alternatives had separated bike facilities on the east side of the highway, something more substantial than a bike lane would be nice. They were also skeptical about keeping ramp F and felt that its maintenance costs outweighed any benefits it brought. Finally they said they would like to see sidewalks on both sides of the Fore River Parkway.

Lucy noted that Ramp F would see more use with Park being two way so the benefits might be there to keep it. She also agreed that sidewalks should be on both sides of the Fore River Parkway.

A committee member thanked the study team for their hard work.

Lucy wrapped up the meeting, reminding everyone about the public meeting and asking the committee members to pass on word of it to their friends and neighbors. After the meeting the study team will refine the alternatives and try and reduce them to one recommend approach. A final presentation will be given in late June. The next advisory committee meeting will be held in early June, possibly on the 10th.

Lucy thanked everyone for their work and the meeting was closed.