

2019 Special Town Meeting Article 8

Funding request for 25% design of the Route 4/225 Bedford Street; Hartwell Avenue; Wood Street Transportation Improvement Project

Info sheet

Project Overview:

The goal of the Route 4/225 Bedford Street; Hartwell Avenue; Wood Street Transportation Improvement Project is to create a street that is safe for all using while improving traffic flow. While the state is expected to pay for construction, the Town needs to fund the 25% design in order to begin the process.

What does a “25% design” get us?

The 25% design is a required step in qualifying for state/federal construction funding for transportation improvements. The 25% design process includes detailed traffic, safety, and operational analyses. These analyses, along with public input create design alternatives that are then narrowed down to a proposed design that provides improved access for vehicles, bicycles and pedestrians.

The 25% design includes such things as preliminary design plans including cross sections and horizontal and vertical alignments, proposed easements, traffic signs and pavement markings and a preliminary construction estimate.

The Massachusetts Department of Transportation reviews and approves these plans which allows the project to move forward. It is expected that a subsequent request to Town Meeting would be needed to fund detailed plans, specifications and estimates for full construction.

What will the project do?

The project aims to create a complete street for vehicles, pedestrians, and cyclists by widening Route 4/225, adjusting the intersection, and adding pedestrian and transit facilities.

This project will:

- Improve traffic safety
- Fix choke points
- Providing safe pedestrian crossings and safe bus stops
- Expand our existing pedestrian and bicycle network and improve access to the Minute Man Bikeway.

The exact extent of the area to be improved as well as the specific improvements will be determined as part of the 25% design. The proposed project is envisioned to encompass at least Bedford Street, Hartwell Avenue, and part of Wood Street and includes: widening Route 4/225, adjusting the intersection of Bedford Street and I-95, and adding pedestrian and transit facilities.

This project may include, four travel lanes in most of the project corridor with three travel lanes in southern portion of Hartwell, a sidewalk or multi-modal path and bike lanes on both sides of the roadways; raised center medians; safe pedestrian accommodations and crossings; and reconstruction of major intersections: Bedford Street and Hartwell Avenue intersection as well the intersection of the on and off ramps to I-95 and minor improvements on Wood Street.

Why do we need it?

The project area

- Serves over 20,000 employees;
- Serves the Towns of Lexington and Bedford; Hanscom Air Force Base; Lincoln Labs; Hartwell Businesses and Interstate-95.; and
- Includes four HSIP (Highway Safety Improvement Program) crash clusters: meaning that this crash area ranks within the top 5% in our area.

Economic growth and residential quality of life are hindered by high congestion, driver confusion, and dangerous pedestrian crossings that inhibit both MBTA ridership and the use of alternate forms of transportation.

Traffic and transportation are vital concerns to the property owners in the Hartwell Ave, Bedford Street, and Wood Street area. Hartwell Avenue is a regional employment hub with the potential to be a vibrant place to work, live and thrive. Hartwell is recognized as a critical economic engine for the state, as well, considering the Air Force Base, Hanscom Field and Lincoln Labs. Bedford Street includes an established residential neighborhood.

What are the consequences of not funding 25% design?

This critical step of local funding for 25% design plans shows the state that the Town is intent on making progress, and importantly, positions the Town favorably in the competitive state transportation funding process to construct the project as envisioned in the 25% design phase and as completed in the 100% design phase. Lexington's place on the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) is safe for now, but would be removed in 2024 if we did not fund 25% design. As of now, the project is targeted for construction in the 2030-34 time band and the Town is seeking to move the project forward, which is not guaranteed to the 2024-29 time band. Regardless of whether the Town decides to self-fund the entire construction costs of a project or to pursue an alternative, the 25% design process is critical to moving any project forward since Bedford Street is a state road, any proposed improvements will be subject to Massachusetts Department of Transportation's (Mass DOT) standard design review process.

What about neighborhood input?

During the development of the 25% design plans, the commercial and residential neighbors to the project area will have multiple opportunities to offer input. This public engagement, along with input from the traffic consultants, and our boards, committees and commissions will determine the preferred alternative. In addition to the Town's anticipated public engagement, the MassDOT 25% design process also requires at least one formal public hearing prior to MassDOT's approval of a design.

What steps have we taken so far?

The Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) determines the transportation planning process which uses federal and state dollars. Thanks to efforts of our elected officials, the project remains on the MPO's Long Range Transportation Plan; the pipeline to obtain state/federal funding. At an estimated \$48 Million dollars the Town needs to demonstrate a commitment to the project to strengthen our position to obtain funding through the State/Federal governments for project construction. The town has taken several steps to

secure our position to be eligible for these funds: Through previous conceptual concepts and discussions we have garnered the support of the Massachusetts Department of Transportation.

The Town of Lexington has already invested almost \$9M in anticipation of this project:

- \$7M - Maguire/Hartwell Intersection and Bridge Replacement. The project is at 75% design stage with construction funding already approved by Town Meeting;
- \$1M - Hartwell Avenue water main replacement project is under construction.

Additional investments to achieve necessary pedestrian safety goals ahead of this project include landscaping, bus stop installation, a mixed-use path and improved pedestrian crossings at the jug handle as well as a HAWK (which allows pedestrians to control traffic to safely cross at Eldred Road).

Over the last several years our elected officials have worked to keep this project on the MPO's Major Infrastructure List known as the Long Range Transportation Plan.

Would Lexington Town Meeting be asked for additional funds?

Yes. A future request to fund through 100% design - plans, specifications, and estimates to final construction documents may follow at a later meeting. Once the 25% design is complete future funding will be needed to bring the project to 100% design and to ready the Town for federal construction funds estimated at \$48 million. Because a portion of the project is owned by the state, the additional design funds needed may be funded partially by MassDOT. The future design funding responsibilities will be worked out during the 25% design process.