

# 3.17 walk

MAKING MASSACHUSETTS MORE WALKABLE

BY JIM ALOISI

## Funding equity is the missing link to our transportation future

*Jim Aloisi is a former Massachusetts Secretary of Transportation. He is on the board of the advocacy group TransitMatters.*

There are many moving pieces to our transportation system, no pun intended. In order to develop and maintain a truly sustainable mobility system you need to understand and respond to how the pieces fit together. The utility and attractiveness of public transportation is directly related to the rider's ability to access a bus stop or train station. In most instances, that requires a safe and convenient pedestrian pathway connecting the rider and her transit destination.

We spend a lot of time talking about modal equity, but the reality is that modal equity will come only when we have funding equity and planning equity. Our approach to transportation funding and planning has shortchanged citizens who are drawn to walking and cycling. Two straightforward ideas that, if enacted into law, would go a long way toward ensuring modal funding equity and safe pedestrian pathways. Those ideas are what I call Transit Improvement Districts (TID) and Safety Impact Reviews (SIR).

The TID concept is simple: allow local communities meeting certain population or destination thresholds to impose a carbon impact parking assessment on nonresidential parking facilities with 10 or more spaces. This would operate in two ways: first, it would identify parking as a specific set-aside revenue source; second, it would enable the public and private sectors to leverage this dedicated fund to make important pedestrian and bicycle investments.

BY BRENDAN KEARNEY / AS PUBLISHED IN BOSTINNO ON JAN. 18, 2017

## Pricier Boston parking meters is a start

*Brendan Kearney is the Communications Manager at WalkBoston and a member of the Boston Vision Zero Task Force.*

The City of Boston recently rolled out a performance parking initiative that includes flexible parking meter pricing in the Seaport and Back Bay. Prices will be lower on streets that consistently have availability, while the meter price will be higher on streets that are often filled. You may be able to park a little farther away to save a few quarters, which frees up a spot closer for someone who needs it – or doesn't mind paying a little more.

Kudos to Mayor Marty Walsh. The city is on the right track with a pilot project like this one. Boston is home to an innovation economy. We should be pushing for more pilot projects to change how our streets and curbside spaces are allocated.

If modifying the price of parking can help change habits, all the better. People may realize that for many of their daily trips, it is cheaper and more convenient to walk, take the bus/train, or bike, leading to fewer cars on the road and endless searches for a spot curbside. Boston should also follow the lead of surrounding communities like Cambridge (\$25), Somerville (\$40), Brookline (\$25) and Quincy (\$20) offering annual residential parking permits to help pay for city services.



The SIR would require projects meeting a certain financial or scale threshold – such as public infrastructure and utilities – to demonstrate impacts on bike and pedestrian safety and accessibility, measured against set metrics. The outcomes can be reviewed and impacts mitigated to maximize safety. By establishing clear thresholds for an SIR, we can ensure that it will not add undue time or expense to implementing smaller scale improvements like pedestrian islands or bike lanes in discrete urban environments. The SIR would be structured to encourage safe multi-modal mobility, with a specific focus on three desired outcomes: reduced likelihood of crashes; greater access to, and increased use of, streets and open space; and maximized access to light, public open space, ventilation, and recreation opportunities.

For those who think this will add to costs and red tape, I would point to the unacceptably high costs of inaction – bodily injury and death, the costs of litigation, and the loss of economic growth (expressed as both private sector investment and housing values). Pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly neighborhoods are less burdened by all these factors.

If an SIR is part of transportation planning, we can ensure the kind of thoughtful public process that will improve safety and quality of life. History has proven that this issue will not take care of itself – the transportation planning and design system that exists today is not designed to produce outcomes that are friendly to today's changing mobility habits. We cannot rely on the status quo to change the paradigm it has lived with comfortably for decades. A truly multi-modal transportation system begins with funding equity. The time to act is now.

The Boston Globe's Dante Ramos makes the argument that the new meter price isn't nearly high enough, and it is hard to disagree with his logic: "Before Boston adopted the current rate in 2011, the city had charged curbside parkers \$1 an hour for the previous 30 years. By comparison, MBTA subway fares rose from 60 cents in 1982 to \$2.25 today. Had meters merely kept up with inflation since 1981, they'd cost \$2.66 an hour citywide."

While cities and towns don't control the MBTA, the cities and towns do control most of the streets and signals. The City of Everett debuted a bus-only lane in December during the morning rush hour, helping to speed the trips along a busy corridor. A similar pilot on Summer Street in South Boston would be well worth a try. Stacy Thompson at LivableStreets Alliance says "[buses] can be awesome, and they should be fun." More pilot projects for bus corridor improvements can help with that.

Transportation for Massachusetts (T4MA) released a report in October titled "Fast Forward" giving a snapshot of transformative changes in transportation and how they could play out in Massachusetts. One key takeaway of the report: "Walking – along with biking and transit use – allows vast numbers people to navigate tight urban spaces without contributing to congestion, continued

# Boston

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## Annual party

Wed. March 29, 2017, 5-8pm  
Microsoft NERD Center  
1 Memorial Drive, Cambridge  
Admission: \$25  
Join walkers from around the Commonwealth for our yearly celebration of mobility and walking advocacy!

RSVP: by March 23rd 617.367.9255  
www.WBMarch29th.eventbrite.com

### GOLDEN SHOE WINNERS:

- **Michelle Wu** Boston City Council President & active transportation champ
- **Alison Pultinas** Persistent, effective Mission Hill/Roxbury citizen activist
- **Sarah Bankert, Caitlin Marquis & Dillon Sussman** Rural walking advocates in Western Massachusetts

## Start planning a Jane’s Walk near you

*“No one can find what will work for our cities by looking at ... suburban garden cities, manipulating scale models, or inventing dream cities. You’ve got to get out and walk.”*

– JANE JACOBS

Every year on the first weekend in May, people all over the world take part in Jane’s Walk. Jane Jacobs (1916-2006) was a writer and activist best known for her writings about cities. Her first book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), upended the ideas of modernist city planning and offered a new vision of diverse cities made for and by the people who live in them.

Jane’s Walk is a movement of free, citizen-led walking tours inspired by Jane Jacobs. The walks get people to tell stories about their communities, explore their cities, and connect with neighbors. In 2016, over 1,000 Jane’s Walks took place in 212 cities around the world. This year, WalkBoston’s Brendan Kearney is acting as Massachusetts’ Organizer, helping people like you organize and lead a Jane’s Walk in Boston or anywhere in Massachusetts. For more information visit [www.JanesWalk.org](http://www.JanesWalk.org).

## pricier parking

continued supporting the vibrant mix of businesses, amenities and housing that make Massachusetts’ cities special. No innovative mobility solutions work for the urban core, therefore, unless they enable and foster walkability.”

Let’s not be afraid to try out new solutions on our streets, which may just be new to us, of course; many cities around the United States have been trying out pilot projects to improve transportation. The goal shouldn’t be innovation for innovation’s sake, but to find ways to make our cities a better place for more people to work, live, and play – no matter how they are getting around.

3.17 transit + walk

Renew or join today!

WalkBoston makes walking safer and easier in Massachusetts to encourage better health, a cleaner environment and vibrant communities.

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## Transit-Walkability Collaborative

Last month, America Walks [[www.americawalks.org](http://www.americawalks.org)] announced the formation of the Transit-Walkability Collaborative. Its purpose is to expand safe, healthy, equitable, and sustainable communities by harnessing the synergy between walkability and quality public transit service. WalkBoston is a member of the Collaborative, has signed the Statement of Purpose, and our Executive Director, Wendy Landman, sits on the group’s steering committee.

The Transit-Walkability Collaborative notes that integrating walkability and public transit helps to create safe, affordable, and enjoyable neighborhoods, whose residents complete their daily activities while owning fewer vehicles and driving less often. These communities experience significant public and private-sector cost savings, lower rates of traffic fatalities, reduced air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, higher levels of physical activity, and a better quality of life – especially for low-income families.

“Walkability and transit advocacy complement each other and accomplish common goals neither can achieve on its own,” said Ian Thomas, State and Local Program Director with America Walks and coordinator of the Collaborative. “By ensuring a high level of service for both walking and public transport, we stimulate mutually-reinforcing community benefits that help address a range of social problems – from health to economics to quality of life.”

Become a corporate supporter today! [www.walkboston.org](http://www.walkboston.org)