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Arboretum Gateway picking up steam

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WalkUP Roslindale, in conjunction with several other groups, has released a survey all this month to see what people think of the idea of a more direct pedestrian and bicycle path through the Arboretum. Courtesy Photo

The proposed pedestrian/cycling path through the Arnold Arboretum from Roslindale Square Commuter Station to the Forest Hills MBTA station has gained some community momentum this week.

According to members of WalkUP Roslindale, Rozzie Bikes, the Livable Streets Alliance and two Tufts students, the survey released last week has already gained some notice from area residents.

“We’ve had 413 participants since we started,” said Liz Pondratz, a Tufts graduate student working on the survey as part of the school’s Urban Environmental Planning Program. “That’s very encouraging. We think it demonstrates the community is very enthusiastic about the Gateway Project.”

The survey is intended to pinpoint more directly how the neighborhood feels about the project itself and determine the most agreeable route the path should take. The path is intended to provide an alternate route from the square to Forest Hills and allow a more scenic path for pedestrians and cyclists. The survey ends March 30, when the group will host a community meeting at the Roslindale Community Center on the same day at 6:30 p.m.

“One thing we were looking at with the survey was to get a sense of where people are traveling to and from and looking at helping with mobility for both commuting and recreation,” said Amber Christopherson of Livable Streets. “It’s designed for a dual function.”

Jaissa Feliz, also a Tufts student, said they wanted to look at the path as a way of bridging Roslindale Village/Roslindale Square with the rest of the city. Currently, the Parkway in general is considered cut off because only commuter and bus service provide the area’s public transportation. This more direct pedestrian/bike path could provide a connection to Roslindale from the Orange Line.

“I mean, there are a lot of benefits associated with biking and walking recreationally, in terms of health and exercise, but during community outreach we have come to realize the effect that having a path like this could have for the local businesses in terms of increasing foot traffic in the neighborhood, and particularly the core of the neighborhood, which is Roslindale Village,” Feliz said.

Alan Wright, a member of WalkUP Roslindale and Rozzie Bikes, said for cyclists, it also creates a connection coming from the other side as well.

“It creates a linkage between West Roxbury, Dedham and so on,” he said. “I have a friend in Dedham who bikes down Belgrade to get to work Downtown, so he gets on Washington to Forest Hills. He said he would switch and make his commute safer and more pleasant.”

WalkUP Roslindale founder Adam Rosi Kessel said the path would also increase safety for its users, as they would not be taking the congested and accident-prone Washington Street.

“Although we want to bring pedestrians and cyclists on this path, I want to point out that it’s not a substitute for fixing Washington for both modes,” he said. “A few people misinterpret what we’re saying, thinking we don’t want people walking on Washington – of course we do – but the bike lanes are horrendous and the crosswalks need improvements. We want to continue to work on this as well as improving Washington Street, and we have some ideas on that but that’s for another day.”

For more information on the project and to take the survey, go to <http://goo.gl/uzGkQi>.