

What's in Mayor Walsh's 2021 Streets Budget?

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A City of Boston rendering illustrates the center-running bus lane concept for Blue Hill Avenue near Walk Hill Street. Under the plan, bus lanes and dedicated stations would run in the middle of the street, away from double-parked cars and turning vehicles. Pedestrian crossings would also be significantly shorter. Courtesy of the City of Boston.

On Wednesday, Boston Mayor Marty Walsh released [his budget proposal for fiscal year 2021](#), which will begin on July 1.

We may be in the midst of a historic public health emergency, but the Mayor's budget proposal is a reminder that municipal officials across the Commonwealth are still attending to the quotidian affairs of government. The budget reflects an apparent expectation that projects such as [a bus-focused redesign of Blue Hill Avenue](#) (pictured above) and the city's [Connect Downtown project](#) are still going still move forward in the coming months.

The city's [GoBoston 2030 report](#), adopted in 2017, set a goal of cutting car traffic in half by 2030, and [the Mayor recently reaffirmed that goal as a key part of the city's climate action plan](#). However, there has been [no progress on that benchmark to date](#) and the amount of traffic in the city has actually increased over the past decade. When the next fiscal year is over, the city will have just eight more years to meet that goal.

Here are some of the highlights from the mayor's budget for transportation projects and programs (you can download the complete Public Works Department and Boston Transportation Department budget documents [here](#)):

- Mayor Walsh has proposed an increased budget for the Boston Transportation Department's planning staff, who oversee major initiatives like the city's bus transit priority efforts, street redesigns, and active transportation projects. Under Walsh's proposal, the Department's Policy and Planning Division payroll would grow from \$1.4 million in the current fiscal year to \$1.6 million next year.
- The budget authorizes \$1 million for future Bluebikes station expansions. The proposed funding would add "11 new stations and 440 new bikes, mostly across Hyde Park, Mattapan, and Dorchester," according to budget documents.
- \$3 million has been budgeted for the construction of new dedicated bus lanes in the coming year, including "Summer Street, Columbus Avenue and [Warren Street](#)." Another \$260,000 has been earmarked for "an action plan and implementation program for [rapid bus transit between North Station and the Seaport](#)," a concept that could utilize new bus lanes on Summer Street through the Seaport.
- Several other items in the capital budget could advance the city's ambitious plans for bus rapid transit on [Warren Street](#) and [Blue Hill Avenue](#) (pictured above), including funds for the reconstruction of "Warren Street and Blue Hill Avenue from Nubian Square to Talbot Avenue," plus funding for additional planning and outreach work. The Department of Public Works has also budgeted \$5.5 million in the proposed five-year capital plan to "repave and restripe the entire Blue Hill Avenue corridor from Mattapan to Roxbury."



A rendering of a proposed public plaza and cycletrack on Commonwealth Avenue near Harvard St. in Allston. Courtesy of the City of Boston.

The city expects to spend \$1 million in the coming year for advanced design of the [Commonwealth Avenue Phase 3B project](#), which would reconfigure the Avenue near Harvard Ave. in Allston. An earlier conceptual design (pictured at right) proposed replacing the “carriage road” parking area at this intersection with a generous new public plaza, plus new cycle tracks that would eventually connect to [the facilities built through the Boston University campus](#) last year. A total of \$10 million is being budgeted for the project in the city’s five-year capital plan.

Another \$1.7 million is budgeted in the five-year capital plan for ongoing design work on other segments of Commonwealth Avenue west of Packard’s Corner.

- A \$400,000 spending authorization is proposed for the [Arboretum Gateway Path](#), which would connect Forest Hills to Roslindale Village via a new off-street path. Work has already started on [a new entrance to the park from Arboretum Road](#).
- The Walsh administration plans to spend \$10.6 million in the coming year to repair and upgrade sidewalk ramps citywide to ADA standards. The budget document says that the goal is to “make all City sidewalk ramps ADA-compliant by 2030.” The budget would also authorize an additional \$21.2 million for this program for subsequent years.
- The city expects to spend \$200,000 next year to “design and implement pedestrian and bicycle safety improvements on [Centre Street in West Roxbury](#).”

- Design work to extend the protected bike lanes on [Summer Street in the Seaport](#) will also advance in 2021, with \$300,000 for a “phase 2” project targeting the segment running south of the convention center towards South Boston.
- The budget proposes spending \$300,000 in the coming year to start developing “a master plan to create an active, green transportation corridor along Columbia Road that connects Franklin Park and the waterfront, via the historic Emerald Necklace.” A Columbia Road greenway was one of the “top projects” from [the city’s GoBoston 2030 plan](#), and one of the projects that was called out for being “off track” in [a progress report from the LivableStreets Alliance last month](#). A total of \$11 million has been budgeted for this project over the next five years, using funds from the city’s sale of the city’s [Winthrop Square parking garage](#).
- The city plans to spend \$2.5 million next year to [reconstruct Harrison, Washington, and Traveller Streets through the Ink Block development](#). The projects will add parking-protected bike lanes on Harrison Street (pictured below) and refresh Washington Street’s bus lanes.



A 2016 sketch plan of the proposed new layout for Harrison Street between Herald and East Berkeley Streets in the South End. Courtesy of the BPDA.

- Walsh’s budget authorizes no new funding for “strategic bicycle network projects,” but of \$5.9 million authorized to date, the city will have spent less than \$1 million by the end of fiscal year 2020. Work should pick up in the coming year: the city expects to spend \$2.6 million of those funds in fiscal year 2021. An overview of the capital budget mentions “the addition of protected bicycling lanes on [Cambridge Street \(Allston\)](#), Beacon Street (Fenway), and other corridors.”
- The budget also includes separate line items for two other major bike routes: \$200,000 would be spent in the next fiscal year for the “[Connect Downtown](#)” project, and \$300,000 on projects to create [a high-quality bike route along Massachusetts Ave.](#) from the Boston Medical Center to Everett Square in Dorchester.
- The budget authorizes \$12 million for construction of a redesigned Tremont Street in the South End, with \$5 million budgeted to be spent next year. [Conceptual designs for the project](#) would reduce the number of car lanes from four to two and install parking-protected bike lanes from Massachusetts Ave. to Herald St.
- Finally, one of the biggest new spending items in the streets budget is the an authorization for an additional \$54 million for [a new Northern Avenue Bridge across Fort Point Channel](#). This would be on top of \$31 million in city funds previously authorized, plus \$15 million from federal funds and neighborhood developers. If this line-item is

approved, the project would have \$100 million in pledged funds. Design work for the new bridge is ongoing, but budget documents say that the city could begin construction within the next year.

In spite of widespread unemployment, the Walsh administration is not expecting any major impacts to its tax collections or city spending for the next year.

“In Boston, we have built our budget to be prepared for this uncertainty,” said Mayor Walsh [in a statement accompanying his proposal](#). The majority of the city’s tax revenue comes from property taxes, which are relatively stable through recessions; the city also expects to get a modest boost in property tax collections from dozens of new construction projects that are still in progress.