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City official plans hearing to discuss ways to slow down Boston drivers

Posted by Matt Rocheleau January 28, 2012 09:33 AM

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This story was updated on Thurs. Feb. 16 to add the announcement of the scheduled date of the public hearing:

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

A variety of ideas that aim to slow down Boston drivers – including speed humps, illuminated crosswalks, better signage and increased enforcement – will be considered at an upcoming public hearing.

Traffic and law enforcement agencies from the state and city, as well as local organizations and residents are expected to attend a hearing in the coming weeks to discuss “traffic calming measures.” The meeting was called for by City Councilor Matt O’Malley, and unanimously backed by his fellow councilors, this week.

“We have a reputation for being aggressive and fast drivers,” O’Malley said Friday afternoon, talking by phone using a hands-free Bluetooth setup as he drove. “I want the term ‘Boston Driver’ to become synonymous with safety and civility.”

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“The reputation that Boston drivers have is an ill-deserved one,” he said, and [some national surveys have found the same](#).

“Ninety-eight percent are good drivers,” he added. “There are a couple of bad apples that ruin every bunch as there are in every city.”

The hearing is scheduled for Feb. 21 at 11 a.m. in the City Council Chamber on the fifth floor of City Hall.

He said studies done in other major urban areas have explored mechanisms to calm traffic “that balance and protect the safety of livability of residential neighborhoods with emergency service needs.”

In a statement from his office, O’Malley listed ideas for slowing drivers down including: classifying streets as primary or secondary emergency response arteries; speed cushions; speed humps; median islands; speed slots; radar speed signs and increased traffic enforcement.

By phone he also said he hopes state leaders at the hearing will consider looking into filing legislation that would allow city leaders to set and change speed limits on Boston’s streets, rather than current laws that dictate the state leaders decide.

He suggested other ideas including: public awareness campaigns to remind drivers of traffic laws and “something as simple as signage” like signs posted at intersections that say: “Don’t block the box.”

When asked, O’Malley said he’s open to the idea of installing red-light and speed cameras in the city.

“I’m really open to every idea,” so long as the idea does not interfere with emergency response vehicles, the councilor added.

Citing [a hearing he held this past fall](#) where a host of local officials and residents met to talk about ways to improve snow removal in Boston, O’Malley said he hopes the meeting will bring about similar collaboration between various public agencies, organizations and residents and foster new and better relationships between those parties.

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“The purpose of this hearing is to bring together all of the stakeholders to discuss what can be done,” the councilor said.

He noted the recent death of a 17-year-old from West Roxbury who, while crossing the street, was [struck and killed by an allegedly speeding and negligently-driven vehicle](#).

The councilor said implementing better traffic safety measures could save lives.

“Speeding and distracted drivers are not a new issue in Boston’s neighborhood, but that doesn’t mean we can’t try and find new solutions to these problems,” O’Malley said in a statement from his office. “I believe it’s time to take a fresh look at the traffic calming measures that are available to municipalities around the country and see if some of them might work here at home.”

And, he added by phone that: “There are ways we can deliver better and more enforcement without breaking the bank or spending a lot of money.”

O’Malley said that he would invite representatives of the city’s transportation and public works departments to attend the hearing as well as the state’s conservation department, which owns a large amount of roadway in his district, which consists of Jamaica Plain, West Roxbury, and parts of Mission Hill and Roslindale.

In addition to concerned residents and drivers, other parties that may be represented at the hearing include, the city’s police department, the state’s transportation department and neighborhood organizations that advocate for improved traffic, bike and pedestrian safety.

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