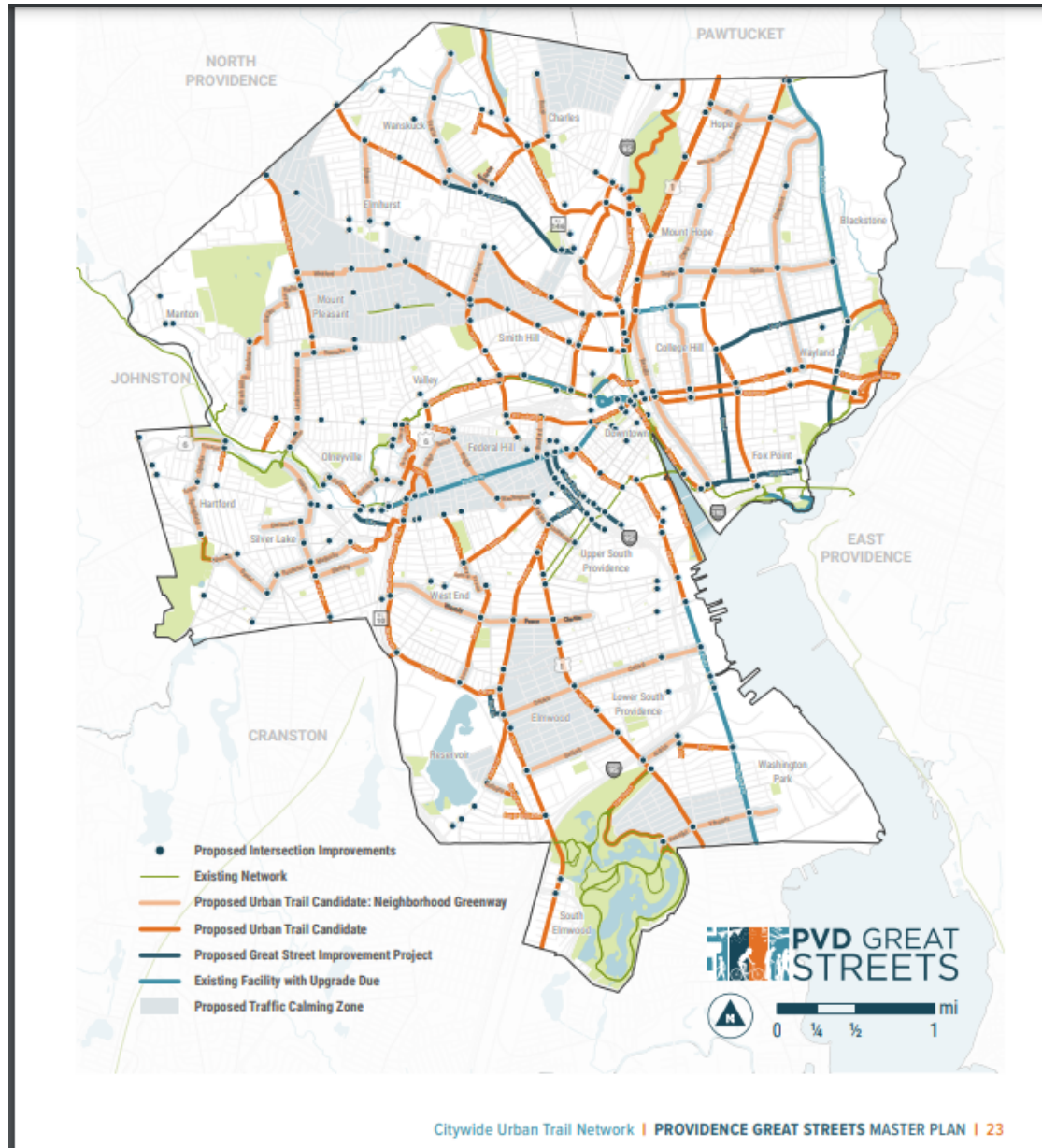


# Providence resumes ambitious 'urban trails' projects, fate of contested bike lane unclear

By **Nancy Lavin** - June 15, 2021 9:45 am



*PROVIDENCE IS FORGING AHEAD with a series of street and trail improvements across the city under its Great Streets Initiative, after experiencing delays due to the pandemic. / COURTESY CITY OF PROVIDENCE*

**PROVIDENCE** – The city is poised to hit the ground running on its ambitious Great Streets Initiative master plan, with 20 miles of city streets and trails slated for safety and transportation upgrades this year.

The final plan unveiled by Mayor Jorge O. Elorza in January 2020 centers around a network of connected paths – called “urban trails” – designed to make the city more accessible and safe for cyclists, pedestrians, skateboarders and others. It also includes streetscape and intersection improvements and traffic-calming measures across 25 neighborhoods.

While the [100-page plan](#) did not set a timeline, many initial projects were delayed due to the pandemic, according to Martina Hagerty, the associate

director of special projects for the city planning department.

That's not to say that no progress was made. The city has already finished some of the walk-scoot-cycle-related improvements along San Souci Drive in Olneyville, Clifford Street in Downtown and connecting the Blackstone Bike Path to India Point Park and the East Bay Bike Path in Fox Point. Bike lanes were also added to Pine and Friendship streets in south Providence, according to updates on the city website.

But now, activity is picking up again in earnest, with previously delayed improvements in downtown and along Broad Street under construction or in design stages, Hagerty said.

Improvements along Mount Pleasant Avenue are also slated to start this year, though whether [a contested two-way bike lane](#) is still part of the plan is unclear.

Residents voiced concern with the bike lane soon after the plan was unveiled in 2020, contending that narrowing car lanes on the high-traffic street created safety risks for drivers and cyclists alike. Councilwoman JoAnn Ryan, who represents the neighborhood, also got involved, criticizing the city for lack of public outreach and creating a petition to stop the bike lane.

Asked how the city had responded to these concerns, Hagerty referred details of the street improvements to the R.I. Department of Transportation, which is overseeing the project.

Charles St. Martin, a RIDOT spokesman, said in an email that while the state agency is overseeing a \$6.3 million project that includes safety improvements at the intersection of Mount Pleasant and North Main streets, the bike route is "additional work proposed by the city" about which "no decisions have been made."

Ryan did not respond to multiple messages for comment.

Despite these detractors, a majority of residents are interested in biking more, and having the infrastructure to accommodate that, according to a new survey by national nonprofit People for Bikes.

The survey also showed that while most of the 500 residents surveyed were still unfamiliar with the Great Streets plan, 86% expressed strong or moderate support when presented with information about it.

Indeed, a recent hearing before the Providence City Council's Ordinance Committee on an ordinance to make multi-modal, safe transit a requirement for future street projects and upgrades drew support from a number of community groups and residents, but no opponents.

Councilman Nicholas Narducci Jr. said it was the first public hearing in his memory with no objections.

"I think that sends a clear signal that this is something we can move forward with," Narducci said.

Liza Burkin, lead organizer of the Providence Streets Coalition, pointed to the pandemic's role in increasing interest in transportation alternatives. Nationwide, bicycle sales have surged.

A number of traffic-related injuries and deaths in Providence over the last year have also brought the safety problem close to home, she said.

"Everyone, including drivers, is understanding that when you provide a separate space for people riding and walking and scooting on the street, it makes the experience much safer," she said.

A full list and schedule for neighborhood projects included in the Great Streets Initiative, as well as upcoming virtual public meetings, is available at <https://www.providenceri.gov/planning/great-streets/>.

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