

Route 138 Corridor Study

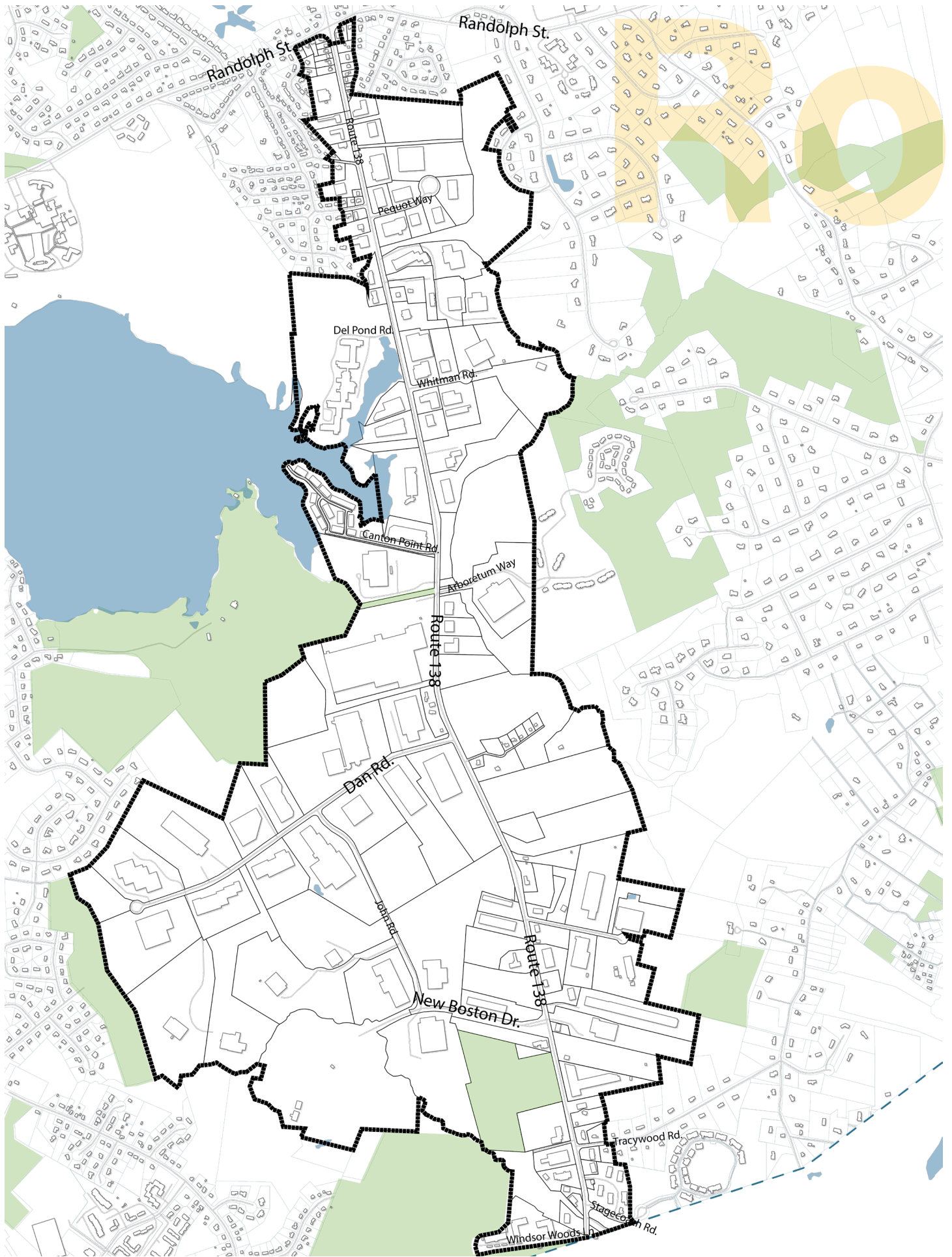
CANTON, MA

Jan 2020

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

RKG ASSOCIATES
with MassDevelopment





The Route 138 Corridor Study Area

Route 138

Executive Summary & Key Recommendations

Canton's unsung economic engine

Canton's Route 138 corridor is home to dozens of businesses, hundreds of residents, and thousands of jobs. Helping this unique community to attract and retain businesses and provide a high quality of life for residents and workers alike will be key to its long-term viability as an employment center.

The Route 138 corridor is a key piece of what makes Canton unique. Unlike many communities of Canton's size and location, the town is home to a significant business community that provides thousands of jobs and accompanying tax benefits. Canton Center and the town's other employment clusters have critical roles to play – but Route 138's mix of large firms, small businesses, and retail and service providers makes it an area of local and regional importance. Combined with the corridor's many residents and visitors, these make Route 138 one of the "MetroSouth" region's most dynamic economic areas, and a key driver of Canton's tax base.

Despite its importance as a corridor, the stretch of Route 138 in Canton faces a number of challenges. In its present state, the corridor mostly functions as a linear strand of loosely connected uses. It lacks a unifying aesthetic and spaces for gathering, and forces a reliance on a personal automobile to get around. The resulting traffic congestion, a lack of safe pedestrian and bicycle amenities, and lack of visual connectivity can make distances between activity centers feel even further



Vision Statement:

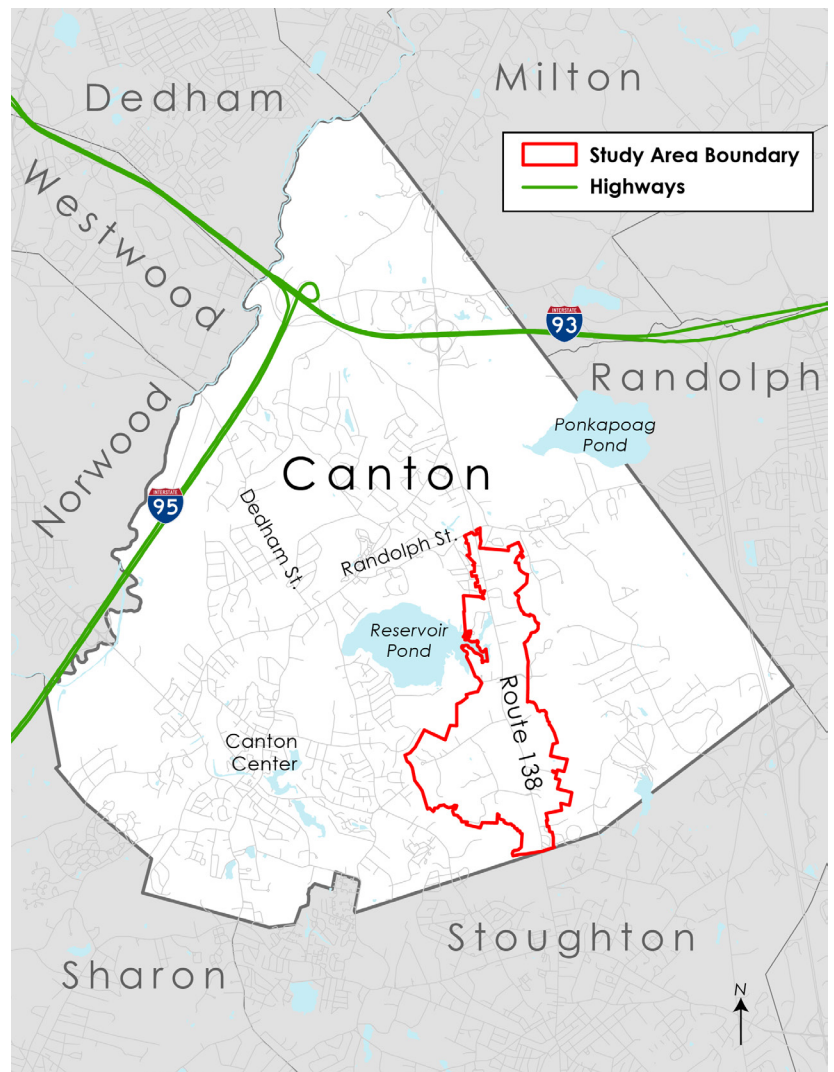
The Route 138 corridor in Canton will continue to thrive and grow as a significant contributor to the town's commercial and industrial tax base, serving as a regional employment hub.

Strategic partnerships in transportation, open space, zoning changes, and a variety of development types will ensure that the corridor offers a safe, vibrant, and appealing environment for all users.

apart than they actually are. This Corridor Study identifies ways that Route 138 in Canton can be improved and enhanced, informed by conversations with the local business community, residents, and Town staff. In addition to improving the quality of life of the area’s workers and residents, making the corridor a more pleasant place to be will help Canton retain existing jobs and compete for additional employment in the face of changing worker preferences.

While Route 138 runs from Canton’s southern border with Stoughton to its northern border with Milton, this study focuses upon its most commercially-oriented stretch: from Randolph Street south to the Stoughton line. The study area is comprised of residential, business, and several different industrial zoning districts.

The Route 138 Study Corridor extends from Randolph Street south to Canton’s border with Stoughton, and includes parcels on adjacent streets like Dan Road.



The Route 138 Corridor Study Area highlighted within Canton

Public Feedback: Opportunities

Increase the desirability of the corridor by improving the mix of retail, restaurant, entertainment, and housing choices.

Reduce congestion by improving general traffic flow, curb-cut management, and signalization.

Increase transportation access by adding sidewalks, crosswalks, and/or bike facilities.

Reduce congestion by widening Route 138 to four lanes.

Improve corridor aesthetics through landscape treatments, building and façade improvements, and the screening of storage areas.

Improve turning movements and safety by constructing a center turn lane on Route 138.

Increase transportation options and connectivity by extending public transit to the corridor.

Public Feedback: Challenges

Vehicle congestion during morning and evening rush hours is a deterrent.

Variety of retail offerings and restaurants is less than ideal.

Lack of sidewalks, crosswalks, and bike facilities make it challenging to get around.

Corridor has an inconsistent look and feel and is less aesthetically pleasing than other sections of Route 138.

Lack of public transportation limits travel options and connections from the MBTA Commuter Rail.

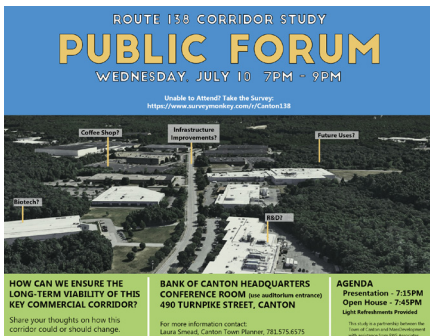
Public Outreach

Nearly 200 local residents, workers, business owners, and other stakeholders took part in a robust public process that identified the community's goals and perceived challenges for the Route 138 corridor. Two interactive public forums and an online survey were used to gather feedback on the Corridor Vision Statement, community priorities, and the types of development the public is interested in seeing in specific locations.

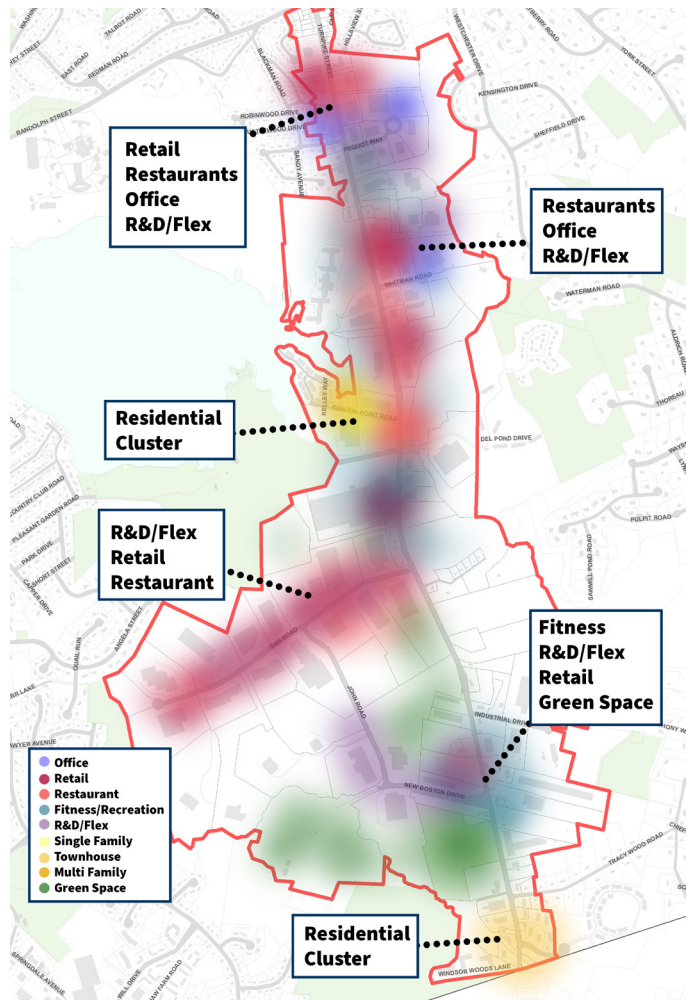
While opinions and priorities varied, general consensus around a series of opportunities and challenges emerged (see previous page). Clear patterns also emerged within participants' locational preferences for different types of land uses. Interest in retail, restaurants, and offices was concentrated at the northern gateway to the corridor, while desire for additional research and development facilities was concentrated in areas near existing industry clusters on Dan Road and New Boston Drive. Some respondents voiced concerns about new housing (or, in some cases, new development of any type), while other stakeholders emphasized a need for a mix of uses capable of accommodating more local workers and residents and supporting the corridor's retailers.



Attendees of the first public forum participated in several interactive mapping exercises to indicate opportunities and where they would like to see different land uses in the future.



The first of two public forums was held at the Bank of Canton on July 10, 2019. The second, also at the Bank of Canton, took place on October 23, 2019.



Respondents' preferences for locations of different land uses in the future.



DXL Group, a men's clothing company, is one of the corridor's largest employers

Route 138 Today

Route 138 is largely defined by the small retail, service, and office structures that line the street itself, with a number of residential structures scattered throughout. Most commercial structures are older, many having been built in the 1960s and 1970s and not having seen substantial reinvestment since. The corridor's largest employers - including those in high-tech industries like biomedical research and building technologies - are concentrated in industrial park settings on side streets like Dan Road and Pequot Way. The corridor's office and industrial inventory is mainly comprised of three types of space: traditional suburban office structures, large industrial/distribution/warehousing facilities, and "flex space," which constitutes a mix of office, industrial, and warehouse space. These flex spaces, which are leasing at rates similar to traditional office spaces despite far fewer finishes, are valued for their ability to accommodate front-office work, light manufacturing, distribution, and other activities all under one roof.

The corridor's walkability is limited, and local workers reported a lack of nearby options for dining and retail, often requiring employees to drive to other areas for food and shopping. The vast majority of workers in the corridor commute alone by private car. In addition to a lack of transportation alternatives, this is also a product of Canton's limited and highly competitive housing supply.

The corridor contributes 57% of Canton's total commercial tax roll.

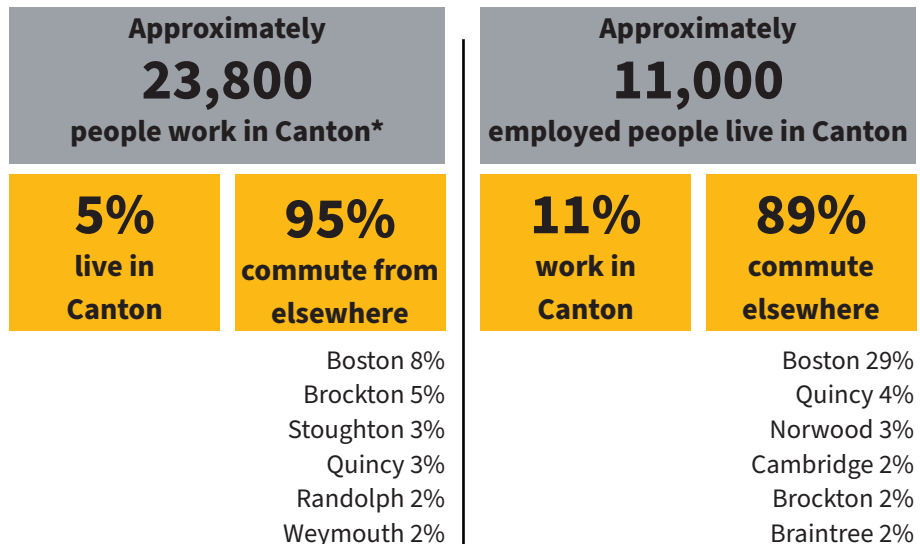
Estimated Annual Tax Impact of Corridor Properties

| | |
|-------------|---------|
| Industrial | \$5.02m |
| Office | \$2.08m |
| Residential | \$0.94m |
| Retail | \$0.58m |
| All Other | \$0.48m |

Canton Assessor, 2019.

Employees' Wide Search for Housing

Canton's relatively expensive housing prices and low vacancy rate create a situation where most of the corridor's workers cannot find attainable housing in Canton. This leaves employees searching for suitable housing choices further from their job - in turn, creating more vehicle traffic, foregoing potential economic benefits for the town, and in some cases requiring employers to bus employees in from other communities. These are important location factors for most firms; unaddressed, these issues may curtail the corridor's ability to attract and retain jobs in the future.



US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015
*Includes public employees

Canton's Economic Engine

Despite a number of high-visibility commercial vacancies along Route 138, the corridor's occupancy rate has been consistently above 90 percent in recent years – strong for the region. Despite its challenges, businesses see Route 138 in Canton as a great place to do business, whether they are small retail shops, locally-owned contractor companies, or international firms. The corridor is unique among many suburban commercial clusters for its concentration of high-tech, innovative firms. International businesses like Siemens, Johnson Controls, and Organogenesis are opening new frontiers in their respective fields with work done in facilities along Route 138. These firms offer high-paying, sought-after jobs, and compete for talent against renowned technology centers like Cambridge's Kendall Square and Boston's Seaport District. Competing with these more walkable, mixed-use, transit-connected clusters - increasingly the preference of today's younger workforce - will be key to retaining these businesses in the long-term, and attracting other successful firms to the area.



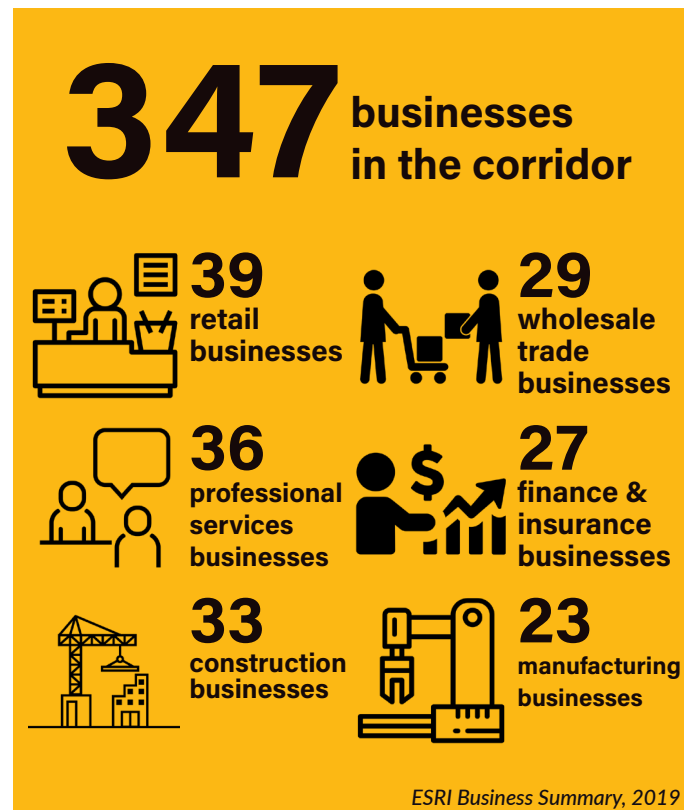
These and other Route 138 firms compete for talent with Greater Boston's most in-demand tech clusters.

Canton's Largest Employment Sectors

2-Digit NAICS Codes, Private Primary Jobs

| | 2017 Jobs | '10-'17 Change |
|------------------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Canton Total | 22,735 | + 11% |
| Construction & Building Tech | 3,010 | + 43% |
| Wholesale Trade | 2,890 | + 1% |
| Management of Companies | 2,460 | + 28% |
| Manufacturing | 1,930 | 0% |
| Finance & Insurance | 1,840 | + 1% |
| Health Care | 1,820 | + 19% |
| Prof., Scientific, & Tech Services | 1,770 | + 53% |
| Administrative Services | 1,170 | + 4% |
| Educational Services | 1,020 | (1%) |

Massachusetts Executive Office of Workforce & Labor Development



ESRI Business Summary, 2019

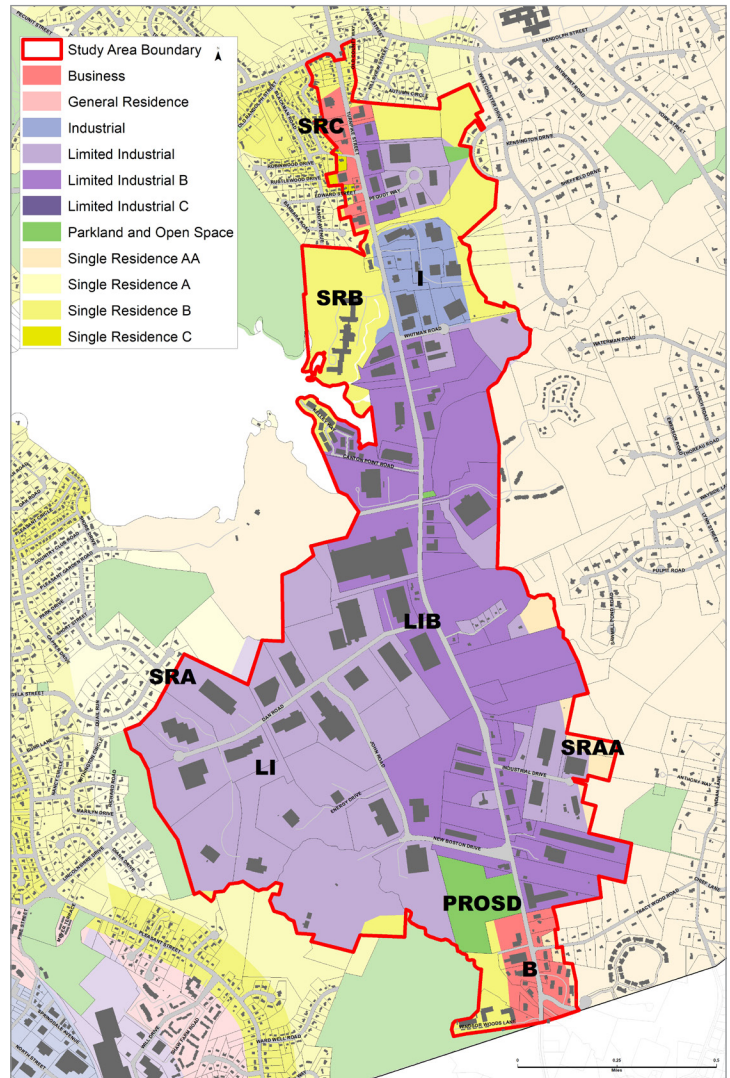
Zoning & Regulatory Challenges

As one of the town's primary commercial and industrial activity centers, the Route 138 corridor is largely zoned for business uses. Eighty percent of the land area within the study area is zoned as either Industrial, Limited Industrial, or Limited Industrial B. The remaining 20 percent is comprised of a Business zoning district and several different residential districts mostly situated at the corridor's northern and southern ends.

The corridor's current land use patterns mostly reflect its zoning districts, with relatively little mixing of uses. In several cases, the requirement of special permits for certain uses may be deterring the addition of amenities that residents, businesses, and workers have said they desire. For example, restaurants are not allowed by-right in any of the corridor's zoning districts, including its Business zones. While the corridor's thousands of employees and visitors would likely provide a strong market for eating establishments, prospective businesses may be discouraged from opening in the corridor due to the additional effort and uncertainty that comes with a special permit process.

Typically, a community's Limited Industrial district is more tightly regulated than those in its traditional Industrial district. This is currently not the case in Canton, where the town's Limited Industrial districts are less restrictive than its Industrial district when it comes to allowing commercial uses like office and retail. Similarly, Canton's Light Industrial areas allow warehouses by-right, but its Industrial areas require that warehouses receive a special permit.

The corridor's physical layout closely reflects the historic dimensional regulations controlling where buildings are placed and how they relate to the area's streets. Canton's Business district has the most flexible regulations, with no minimum lot size, width, or frontage requirements, and structures can cover up to 90 percent of their parcel - dimensions more typical of a downtown setting like in Canton Center. However, much of the Business districts' dimensional flexibility is diminished by a requirement that all properties fronting Route 138 must have a 60-foot setback. Large setbacks



Existing Zoning along Route 138.

can induce higher-speed driving, less walking, and generally diminish an area's perceived character or "sense of place."

The Limited Industrial district that comprises 41 percent of the corridor has a minimum lot size of 1.5 acres, and allows for just 40 percent of each lot to be covered. While this style of industrial zoning is reflective of more traditional industrial businesses and uses, the changing nature of American industrial businesses has led many communities to reconsider these dimensional regulations. Even as many of Canton's firms and employees express a desire for restaurants, coffee shops, and services nearer their facilities, these dimensional regulations can make it challenging or impossible to build additional "outbuildings" on large industrial parcels.



Lack of landscaping

No sidewalks

Lack of branding

Parking against the road

Above-ground utilities

Buildings set back far from street

Route 138 in Canton today is generally defined by large setbacks, parking near the street, a lack of sidewalks, and other factors that can reduce walkability and diminish the area's character or "sense of place."



Landscaped pedestrian refuge

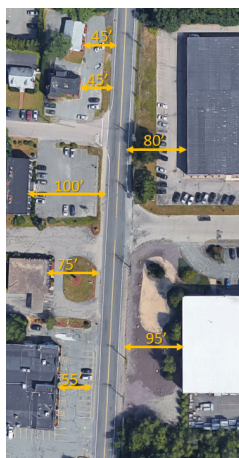
Clearly-marked crosswalks

Buildings closer to the street

Signage design standards

Landscaped frontage

Current best practices, seen here on the similarly-scaled Middlesex Turnpike in Burlington, MA, focus on aesthetics and safety, with smaller setbacks and parking hidden away from main roads as a means of establishing a "sense of place."



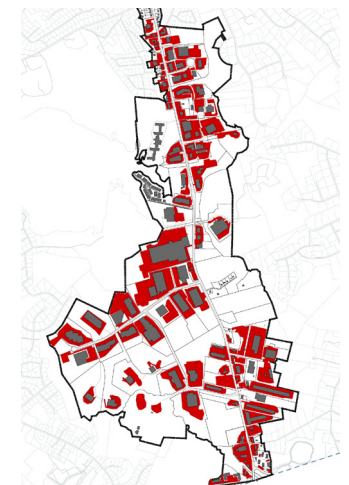
large setbacks



and acres of surface parking



define much of the corridor's physical landscape



The corridor's surface parking, in red.

L: setbacks on Dan Road.

R: setbacks at Route 138 and Pequot Way.

Simplify and clarify the corridor's industrial zoning districts by rezoning those parcels to MU or LI.

Goal: make development of appropriate uses less difficult, and allow infill with uses that can improve workers' and residents' quality of life.

- Eliminate the base Industrial (I) zoning district, which very closely resembles the LI and LIB zones.
- Limit heavy manufacturing to the LI district, and allow light manufacturing by-right in both the LI and LIB districts.
- Limit fast food with a drive-thru in the LIB district. Encourage fast casual and sit-down restaurants.
- Consider allowing restaurants by special permit in the LI district, but allow them by-right in the LIB zone up to a size threshold.
- Allow professional and medical office uses in the LIB district; keep them as a special permit use in the LI zone.
- Allow assisted living/independent living facilities only in the LIB district. Save parcels in the LI zones for industrial and commercial uses, reducing the risk of use conflicts over time.

Light manufacturing today is typically very different than it was when Canton's industrial zoning regulations were enacted. Allowing for light industrial uses by-right in the corridor's designated industrial areas may make it easier for a variety of manufacturing businesses to locate in Canton.



Couple zoning district changes with adjustments to dimensional regulations.

Goal: encourage a more cohesive and visually inviting development pattern for the corridor, while improving walkability and establishing gathering places in the corridor's northern and southern gateway areas.

Proposed Dimensional Regulations

| Requirement | Existing LI | MU | LIB | LI |
|------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Minimum Lot Size | 1.5 acres | 10,000 sf | 20,000 sf | 65,000 sf |
| Lot Width | 200' | 150' | 200' | 200' |
| Frontage | 100' | 100' | 100' | 100' |
| Lot Coverage | 40% | 70% | 50% | 40% |
| Front Setback | 60' | 25' | 60' | 30' |
| Rear Setback | 25' | 15' | 25' | 25' |
| Side Setback | 25' | 10' | 25' | 25' |
| Height* | 40'/4 story | 35'/3 story | 40'/3 story | 52'/4 story |

*Increase height in the MU district when parcels are aggregated to an acre or more

Consider revising parking requirements to match today's mobility patterns.

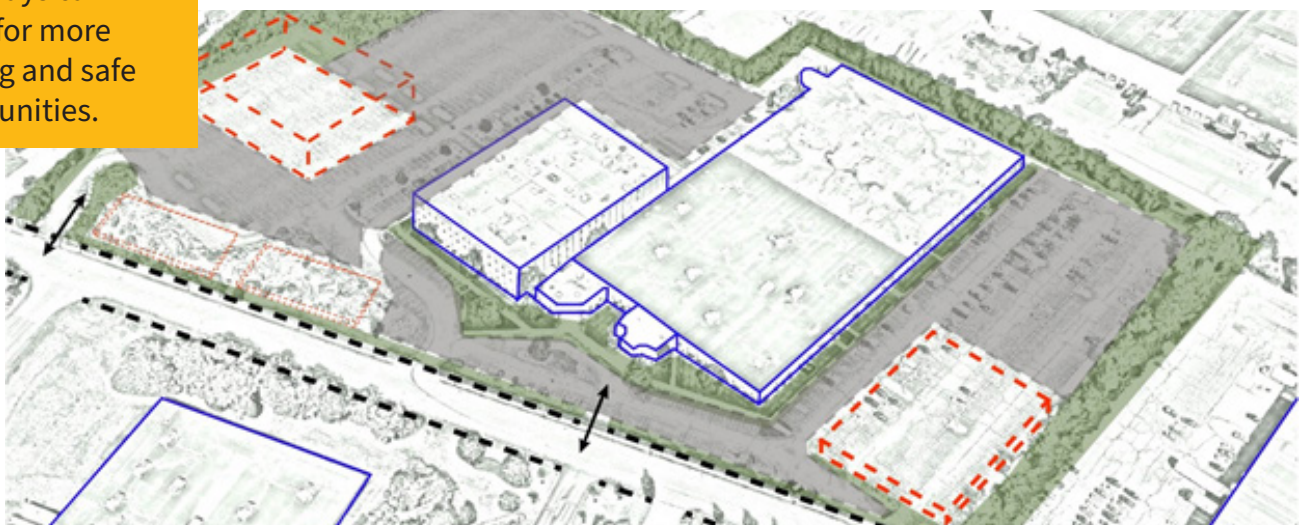
Goal: dedicate less of the corridor's valuable land to surface parking, which spreads out uses, diminishes walkability, and limits business owners' ability to expand or develop outbuildings.

Existing & Proposed Parking Requirements

| Principle Use | Current Requirement | Proposed Requirement |
|-----------------------|---|-------------------------------------|
| Detached Dwelling | 2 spaces per unit | 2 spaces per unit |
| Multi-family Dwelling | 2 spaces per unit | 1 space per bedroom |
| Hotel/Motel | 1 space per room | 1 space per room |
| Sit-Down Restaurant | 1 space per seat | 1 space per 3 seats |
| Fast Food | Determined by BoA | 1 space per 4 seats |
| Retail | 1 space per 250 sf of ground floor, + 1 space per 500 sf of upper story space | 4 spaces per 1,000 sf |
| Office | 1 space per 250 sf of ground floor, + 1 space per 500 sf of upper story space | 3 spaces per 1,000 sf |
| Auto/Gas | Determined by BoA | Determined by BoA |
| Industrial | 1 space per 250 sf or 1 per 3 employees | 1 space per 1,000 sf |
| Mixed-Use | Sum of all uses | Create a shared parking calculation |

Reducing unused parking can leave space for infill office, retail, and flex space.

Improved sidewalks and consolidated driveways can make for more inviting and safe communities.





Examples of signage along the Route 138 corridor.

Revise sign bylaws to incorporate design standards for free-standing and building signage.

Goal: create a consistent look for signage along the Route 138 corridor that still allows businesses to advertise, but creates more structured wayfinding in a more visually appealing manner.

Today, the Route 138 corridor is dominated by private vehicles and trucks, with a development pattern that reinforces the necessity to drive. The lack of multimodal transportation options severely limits residents, employees, and visitors from arriving or getting around by any means other than an automobile. Throughout the planning process, participants emphasized the importance of reducing congestion, improving safety, and ensuring that people can get around without having to rely on a car or truck. Integrating a series of transportation improvements that provide enhanced mobility options would recognize and better support the different ways that people move through the corridor and throughout Canton.

Both residents and businesses noted the impact that vehicular traffic congestion has upon the corridor and the ability to get employees, customers, and goods to the area. This congestion and lack of access management creates safety challenges for entering and exiting vehicles, as well as vehicles attempting to make left turns along Route 138.

Fortunately, the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) is currently working on conceptual plans for the stretch of Route 138 from Milton to Stoughton, including the entirety of this study area. At this stage in the design process, MassDOT has identified conceptual improvements that include a center turn lane to ease conflicts with left-turning vehicles, a new signal at New Boston Drive, and pedestrian and bicycle improvements throughout the corridor.



The corridor's lack of transportation alternatives presents serious safety issues.

Engage with and support ongoing MassDOT initiatives that aim to improve the corridor's effectiveness for drivers, pedestrians, and bicyclists.

Goal: make Route 138 a safer, more pleasant place to walk and bike, while adding infrastructure that relieves pain points like left turns for drivers.



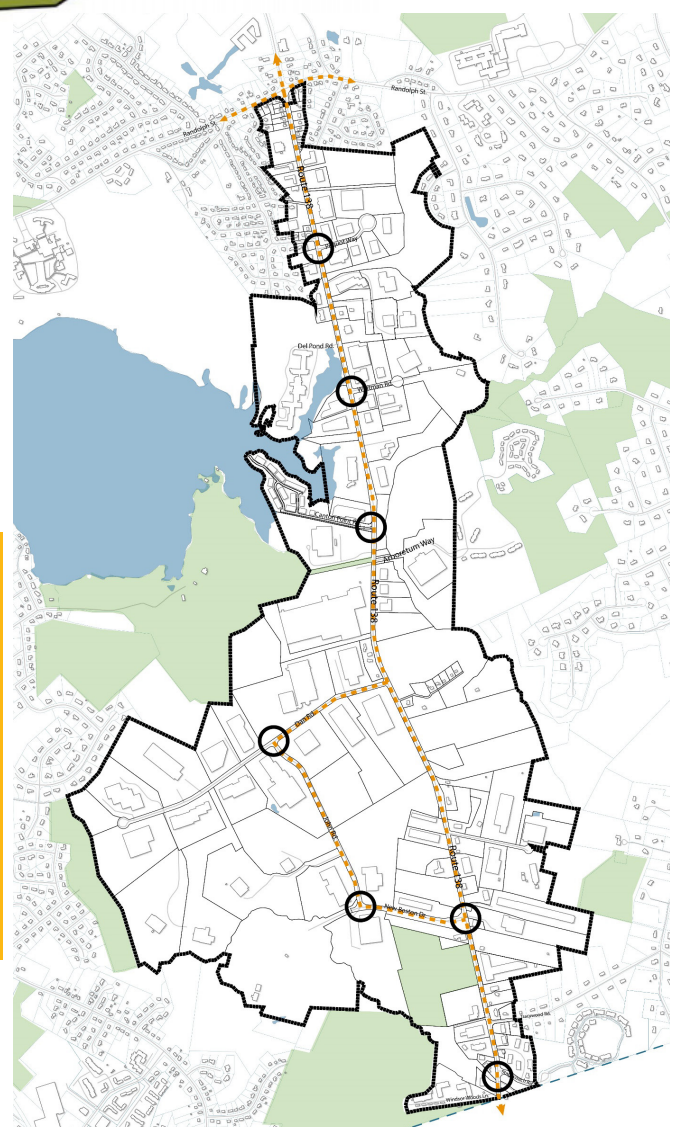
Above: Early design studies by MassDOT have included shared-use, separated paths for bicycles and pedestrians along Route 138.

Below: On secondary and feeder streets, on-street bike lanes or shared lane markings help bicyclists to feel more comfortable and to encourage bicycle commuting.



Partner with the MBTA and/or corridor businesses to examine transit connectivity solutions - especially to Canton's two MBTA Commuter Rail stations.

Goal: provide realistic and competitive commute alternatives to driving alone.



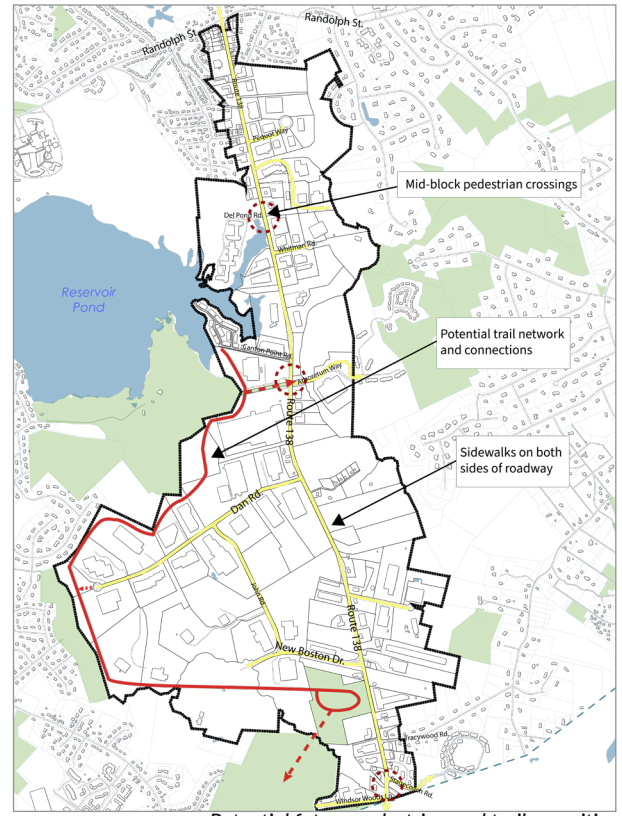
Potential long-term locations for expanded MBTA bus service and/or public/private shuttle service

Examine opportunities for a potential trail network that links greenspaces and offers east-west connectivity.

Goal: give workers and residents pleasant places to walk, enjoy the area's natural amenities, and connect to Canton's western half - potentially expanding commuting options.

Identity & Business Recruitment

One of the largest challenges for the corridor and for Canton overall is that it lacks an entity tasked with economic development and promoting the Route 138 corridor to prospective businesses. The Canton Association of Business and Industry (CABI) and the town-sanctioned Economic Development Committee (EDC) do a commendable job of filling in some of these gaps and serving as conveners of the local business community. The dedication of the volunteers who make CABI and the EDC successful organizations cannot be understated - but they remain member-driven, volunteer organizations, responsible for fulfilling a wide range of economic development, networking, and recruiting tasks. The Town would benefit greatly from having an internally-staffed position or organization to both market Canton and promote its unique identity to prospective businesses, and to make sure existing businesses feel heard and supported by Town staff.



Potential future pedestrian and trail amenities

Consider expanding the Town's capacity to take on economic development and marketing tasks.

Goal: grow the Town's ability to represent and advocate for its business community beyond the Economic Development Committee (EDC) and the critical yet volunteer-led Canton Association of Business and Industry (CABI).

Build relationships that connect the corridor's existing businesses, and work with regional partners to ensure that Route 138 in Canton is known as a great place to do business.

- Work with CABI to develop a comprehensive list of businesses and company points of contact. This list could be used for outreach, marketing, or to invite business leaders to events in town.
- Convene recurring industry roundtables to better understand the needs that different types of businesses have, where they may be experiencing challenges, and ways the Town could strengthen efforts to partner with the business community.
- Ensure that relationships with existing economic development organizations like the Neponset River Regional Chamber or the Massachusetts Office of Business Development are active, and that opportunities in Canton are being promoted to prospective businesses.
- Boost Canton's regional and national presence by joining a trade organization, attending trade shows, or advertising in trade publications.