

POLIS25
ANNUAL CONFERENCE

26-27 November 2025
Royal Jaarbeurs | Utrecht, Netherlands

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Boston Delivers: A pilot for more equitable last-mile e-bike deliveries

 **Wednesday, 26 November 2025**

 **16:45 - 18:15**

SESSION 3F

Green Freight, Bright Future

SPEAKER

Ben Rosenblatt, AICP, CFA

Expert Consultant, Urban Freight Lab at University of Washington

Green Freight, Bright Future for Boston (?)

Can we brighten Boston when it's so bleak to begin with??

- Minimal cycling-for-delivery culture
- Most delivery accomplished by car or truck



[Source: Toby McGuire](#)

Changing landscape

On-demand + e-commerce explosion

“I want it that way”

Between January 2019 to July 2020, increase of packages by 65% to avg. of 5.3 packages per household/week (US)

More people, more stuff

A numbers game:

Boston growing by projected 20% by 2030 (to 724k)

Changing landscape

A Variety of Commercial Demand

One size does not fit all:

Parcel delivery, on-demand, app-based gig workers, food and bev. resupply, large commercial...

The (post) COVID Life

60% say behavior has changed forever:

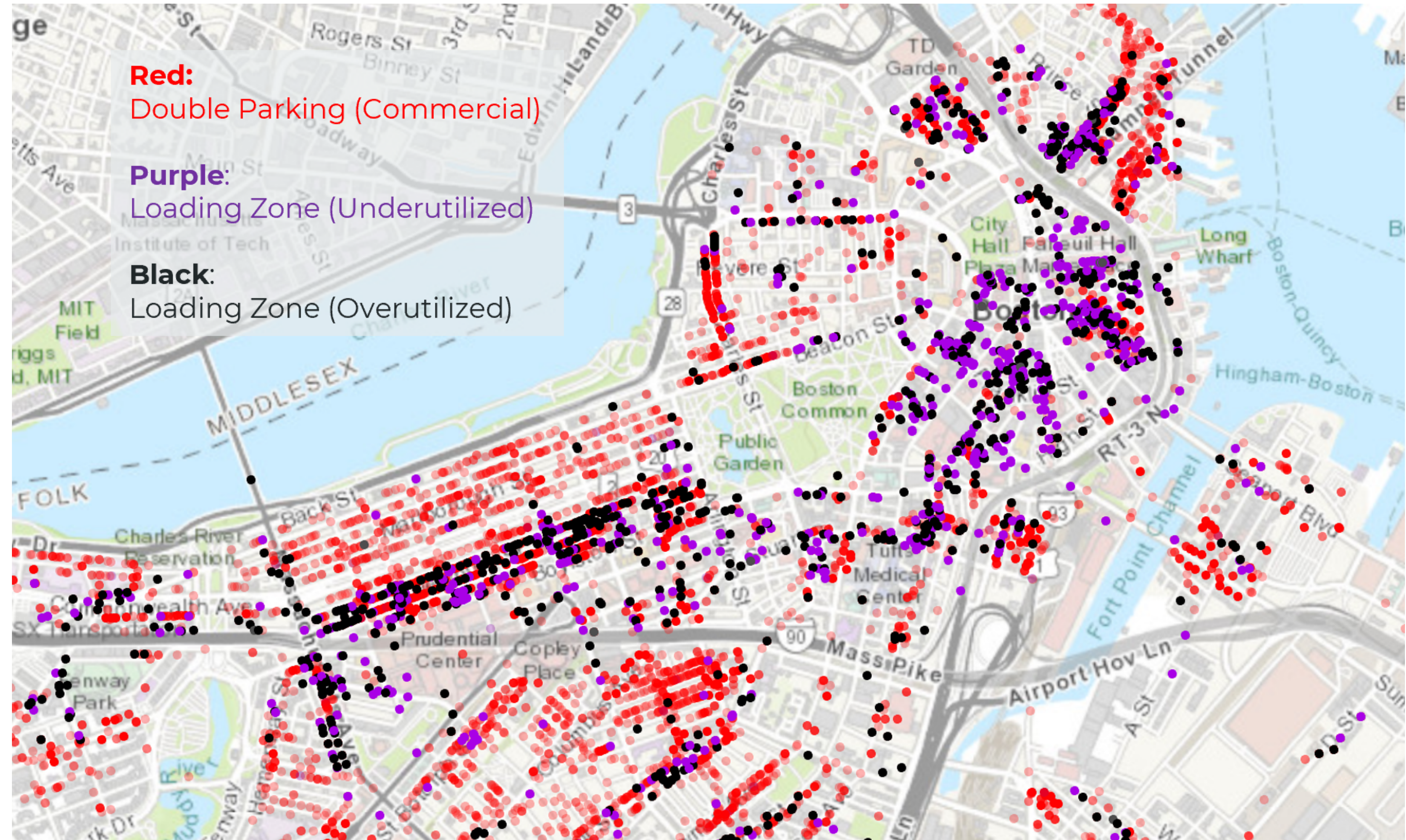
More...takeout, “click and collect” pickup, on-demand deliveries, grocery delivery...

Curb appeal

Without policy intervention,

of delivery vehicles
projected to increase +36%
from 2019 to 2030

...and +32% CO2e...



Source: City of Boston

The e-cargo bike has entered the intercontinental chat



[Source: Le Parisien](#)



[Source: Curbed NYC](#)

Boston Delivers pilot program

“Promote an e-cargo bike delivery service for businesses in Boston”

Goals for the pilot:



Reduce Urban
Congestion



Reduce Carbon
Emissions



Improve Safety



Support Local
Businesses



Source: City of Boston

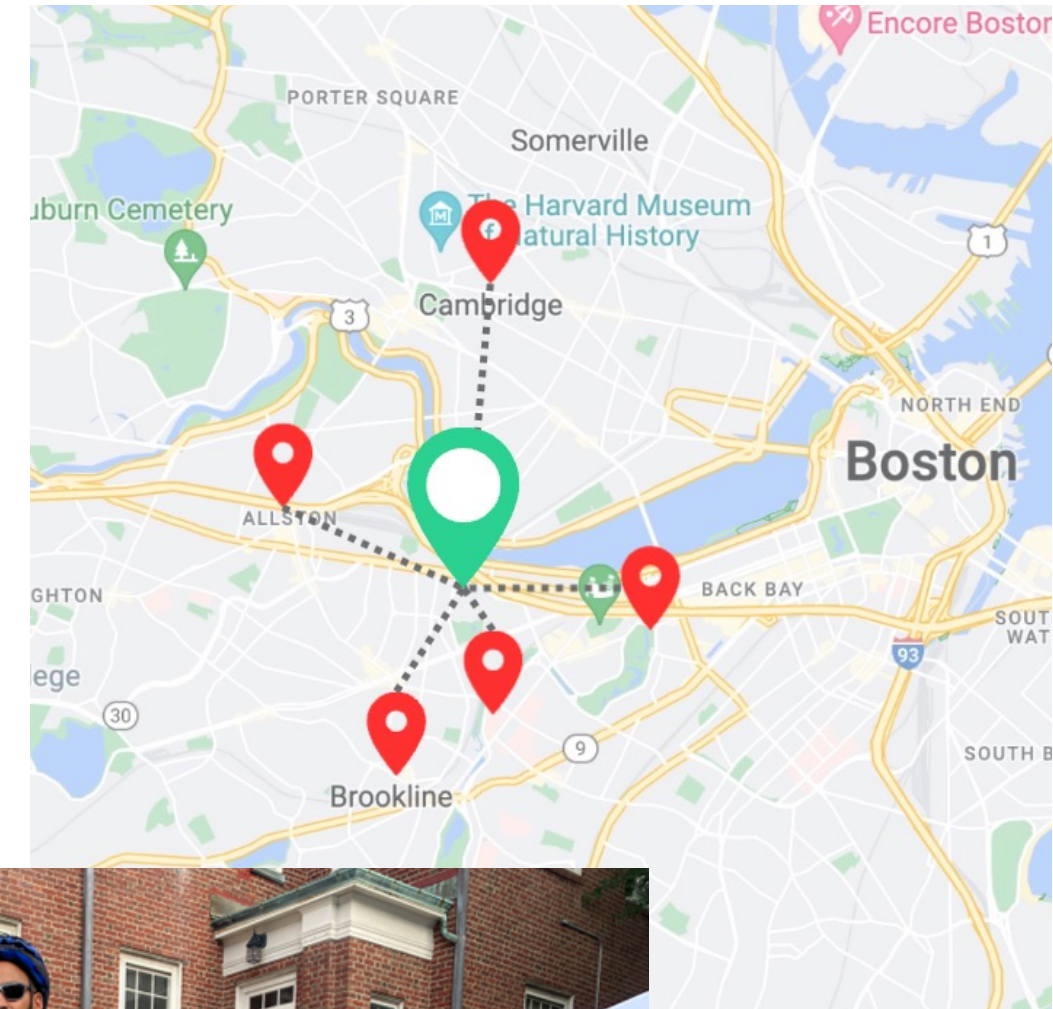
Neighborhood + vendor choices

Neighborhood: focus on equitable benefits

Subsidies to small and minority-owned businesses in Allston and Brighton neighborhoods, but low-density + car/truck oriented

Vendor: turnkey operator but new to market

Net Zero Logistics (NZL) provided electric cargo bikes, made the deliveries, and coordinated logistics



Source: Net Zero Logistics

Funding approach

Only through a City-sponsored program and subsidy could Boston test the market for e-cargo bike delivery

- \$500,000 usd budgeted for pilot
- Rent and space build out more costly than expected
- Heavy subsidy to draw NZL to participate
- 18,000+ deliveries (\$6 subsidy per delivery)

SUMMARY OF ACTUAL GRANT EXPENDITURES	
Cost Category	Grant Expenditure
Build out/improvements	\$31,000
Rent	\$110,000
Equipment	\$28,000
Delivery subsidies	\$110,500
Outreach/marketing	\$57,000
Additional staff time	\$28,500
TOTAL Subcontractor	\$365,000
Pilot evaluation	\$125,000
<u>Overall Grant Total</u>	\$490,000

Source: City of Boston

Types of tours

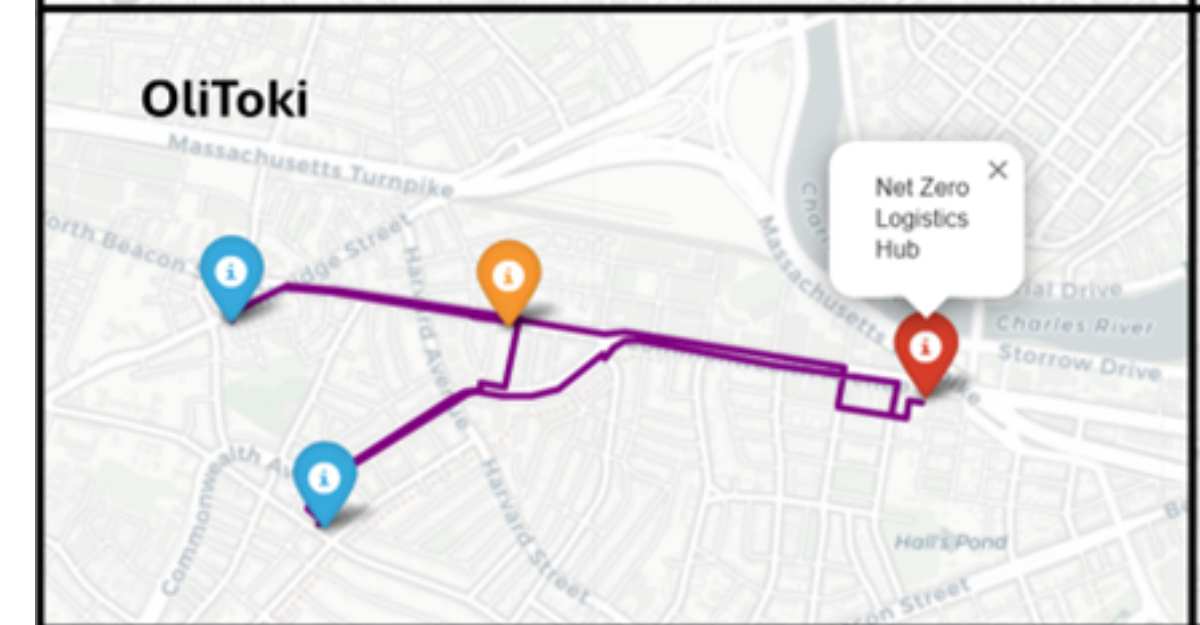
- Focus on catering + meal delivery for low-income households

Catered meals:
pretty good use case

- Only found one participating local restaurant (OliToki)

Direct one-to-one
deliveries:
bad use case

One-to-many (tour)



Source: City of Boston

One-to-one deliveries

Hard infrastructure needs



Physical investment was mostly obvious

- Indoor hub location
- “Small Vehicle Delivery Zone”
curbside designation
- Battery storage requirements not well
defined by City code



*Indoor hub, before launch of pilot.
Source: Net Zero Logistics*

“Soft” infrastructure needs



Technological investment was a major gap

- Food delivery apps not integrated with 3rd party logistics operator
- Restaurants had to set up new ordering systems



How did it go?

The stats:

- 18-month pilot from Sept. 2023 to Feb. 2025
- 18,375 deliveries made
 - Most to underserved, food-insecure populations

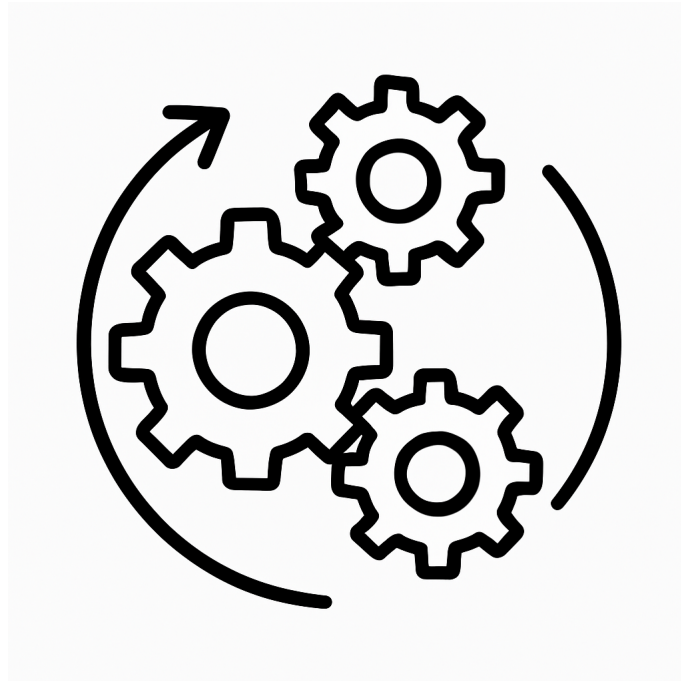
An uphill climb:

- Secured 4 clients **despite significant outreach**
- Estimate of almost 10,000 cargo bike km's for 3,000 kg CO2e avoided
 - Still, **only ~0.005% of Boston's annual emissions**



Cargo Bike Pilot

Recommendations: 1 of 6



Pilots Require Maximum Flexibility

Pilots are experiments: cities should be creative and flexible to improve the odds of success

Cargo Bike Pilot

Recommendations: 2 of 6



Get Ahead on Stakeholder Outreach

It is never too early to understand the market and your stakeholders

Cargo Bike Pilot

Recommendations: 3 of 6



Consider your Staging Plan

Cargo bikes need the right location and facilities to perform.

Cargo Bike Pilot

Recommendations: 4 of 6



Define the Use Case

Cities and partners must find the “sweet spot” for what can and should be delivered by e-cargo bike

Cargo Bike Pilot

Recommendations: 5 of 6

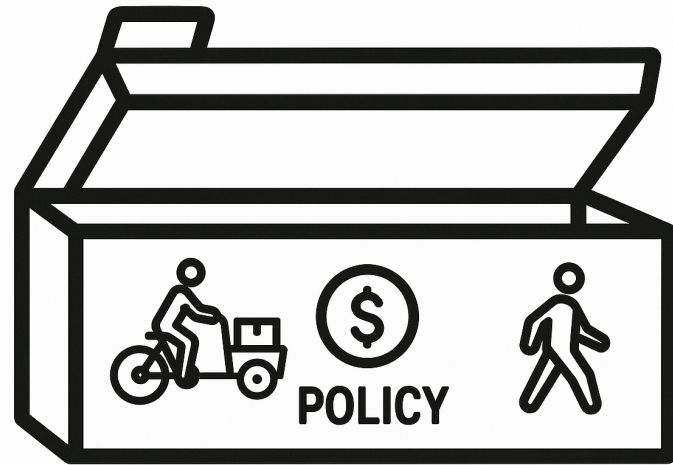


Anticipate and Budget the Costs

Cities and partners need to overcome high start-up costs and thin margins that can be barriers to success in sustainable delivery pilots

Cargo Bike Pilot

Recommendations: 6 of 6



Find the Policy Angle

Cities should see e-cargo bikes as one tool in a toolbox to advance policies for equity, safety, and sustainability

Beyond the pilot

- Boston Sulp will operationalize several of these 6 recommendations
- City can simplify the regulatory environment and provide clear pathways to grow clean, green freight solutions



CITY *of* BOSTON

SUSTAINABLE URBAN LOGISTICS PLAN

The City of Boston, acting by the Transportation Department, 1 City Hall Square, Room 721, Boston, MA 02201, hereinafter referred to as the Awarding Authority, hereby invites written sealed proposals for the project listed above.

Source: City of Boston

Green Freight, Bright Future

The pilot was certainly **green freight!**

For a **bright future, we must acknowledge the realities and be intentional in our solutions to achieve green freight at scale.**

The lesson is true for any city, from Boston to Bologna...





**Thank you for
your attention!**

For more information:

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*Boston Delivers:
Cargo Bike Pilot Evaluation*

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CITIES AND REGIONS FOR TRANSPORT INNOVATION



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