



THE CAMBRIDGE
TRANSPORTATION
FORUM

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CAMBRIDGE, MASS.
Northwest Corridor Service Study

Public Meeting -- January 29, 1985

COMMENTS

The Cambridge Transportation Forum wishes to congratulate all those who have worked on the Northwest Corridor Service Study for their excellent work. With one major exception, we generally agree with the recommendations of the Final Report. We would like to offer the following specific comments:

Arlington Heights/Massachusetts Avenue service (present Routes 77 & 77A)

Although it is not mentioned in the Final Report, we understand that a proposal is still under consideration to reroute Arlington Heights service to Alewife station (via Massachusetts Avenue and Alewife Brook Parkway), and to provide local service from Arlington Center to Harvard as well as from North Cambridge to Harvard.

We disagree with the Final Report's recommendation to continue service basically as is, and we support the alternative of rerouting Arlington Heights buses to Alewife.

We have these objections to the Final Report recommendation:

--1. Massachusetts Avenue traffic, including bus layovers at Fennett Street: We in Cambridge have had to endure over six years of subway construction and disruption. Now that it is over, we would like to see the promised benefit, namely diversion of buses to Alewife. These buses primarily serve Arlington residents. Service adequate for North Cambridge residents can be achieved with far fewer buses than currently operate, especially during peak hours.

--2. Overcrowding: North Cambridge residents (between Alewife Brook Parkway and Cameron Avenue) indicate there has long been an overcrowding problem on this route. During the morning rush, sometimes 3 or 4 buses will pass by before one that has room to receive new passengers. This already-existing overcrowding will negate any advantages of the proposed "open door" policy in Cambridge, since buses which are full at the Cambridge line will still be full at Rindge Avenue or Linnaean Street.

If MBTA officials decide to keep the present route, we trust that they will monitor this situation and take corrective action as necessary. Possible solutions include adding more trips at certain times, improving supervision of schedule performance, and perhaps adding Arlington Center-to-Harvard short turn trips in the morning peak.

--3. Cost vs. benefit to Cambridge: The Final Report recommendations will cost Cambridge taxpayers an additional \$132,000 in MBTA assessments. This high cost is in no way justified by benefits to Cambridge residents or businesses. This is particularly true considering the overcrowding problem mentioned above. Buses which operate "open door" are of little benefit to the city if there is no room for city residents. Furthermore, the consultants have already noted that

the subway opening will cause a decrease in surface ridership in North Cambridge. There can be no justification for paying for increased bus service.

For these reasons, we find the Final Report recommendation unacceptable. We strongly support the alternative of diverting Arlington Heights buses to Alewife. However, we do have some concerns about the implementation of this alternative:

--1. Adequacy of service -- peak hour crowding: Care must be taken that Arlington Center to Harvard buses run frequently enough that they have ample room for Cambridge riders. This is especially of concern during the morning rush. It is also of some concern at Matignon High School's dismissal time.

--2. Adequacy of service -- off-peak hours: Due to the high level of service on this line in the past, we recommend a minimum service level of every 20 minutes, even on Sundays and late at night. This is especially of concern to residents between Alewife Brook Parkway and Cameron Avenue, who may find it too far to walk to any of the new subway stations, and for whom these buses will be the only form of public transport available. It is also of some concern, during midday hours and Saturdays, to elderly residents in the areas near Rindge Avenue and near Linnaean Street. However, the combined scheduling of Arlington Center buses and North Cambridge tracklesses should meet these riders' needs.

--3. Arlington Heights to Harvard Square commuters: Diverting Arlington Heights buses to Alewife will admittedly inconvenience this group of riders. We suggest one possible way to mitigate this inconvenience is to offer some Arlington Heights-Harvard buses as a peak hour route variation. Only a few trips should be necessary, perhaps every 10-15 minutes. These buses could even run limited stops, "closed door" from Arlington Center to Harvard.

We note by the way that Arlington Heights to downtown riders will greatly benefit from diversion to Alewife, since the heaviest traffic delays are on the Cambridge portion of the route.

Huron Tower

We reiterate our strong support for this proposed new route.

However, we are somewhat concerned that ridership may not justify a dedicated bus service. If this proves to be the case, we urge the MBTA to have a contingency plan which will maintain Huron Tower service at less cost. The easiest alternative appears to be a rerouting of selected route 74 trips, south from the corner of Grove Street and Blanchard Road to Huron Tower.

Route 96 layover point in Harvard Square

From an operations point of view, the Cambridge Common terminus for route 96 offers some advantages, such as a shorter trip length. However, we must oppose the continued use of the Common for two reasons:

--1. The Cambridge Common is a public park, not a bus terminal. Its "temporary" use as a bus terminal has had many negative impacts. We hope that it can be restored to its pre-construction condition.

--2. The Common is remote from other centers of activity in Harvard Square. Particularly after dark, this presents a high crime risk. Also, the unsignalled pedestrian crossing at Garden Street presents a safety hazard. With only one

route operating from the Common, there will be fewer passengers waiting at any one time, and these dangers will increase. (For example, it will be impossible to justify a police guard at the crosswalk.) The combination of these factors may well dissuade potential riders.

If Arlington Heights buses are diverted to Alewife then there should be ample space in the bus tunnel and on Bennett Street for Medford Square buses and it should be unnecessary to load and layover at the Common.

If Arlington Heights buses continue as at present, then we recommend the Johnston Gate as a layover point for route 96. This will be a far better location than the Common. In particular, the Gate is closer to stores, employment, and other bus transfers; the crime risk is lower due to high pedestrian traffic into Harvard Yard; and all crosswalks are signalled. A turnout for buses already exists at the Johnston Gate.

Alewife circulator.

At the beginning of this study, it was our understanding that the consultants would investigate alternative (i.e. non-MBTA vans or minibuses) transit between the Alewife MBTA station and nearby employers.

We are disappointed that this part of the study has not been followed through.

Belmont Center (route 74) Saturday night service

This is a relatively minor point, but now is the appropriate time to consider it. At present service on route 74 ends at 10:00PM on Saturday while weekday and Sunday service extends until after midnight (12:40AM weekdays, 1:04AM Sunday). We hope this inequity can be eliminated when new schedules are drawn up.

Follow-up studies

While the MBTA and their consultants have done an excellent job, it is never possible to know with certainty what will happen in the future. The opening of Alewife station will have a profound impact on bus and trackless trolley ridership as well as on traffic patterns. Whatever recommendations are followed, we urge MBTA officials to adequately monitor the effect of all of these changes, keeping in mind that even the best of predictions do not always pan out. It may be necessary to add service on certain runs; it may be possible to reduce it on others.

It would be highly desirable to call back the outside consultants after a year or so to have a "mini-follow-up" study, and to ensure that the desired effects have indeed occurred. We strongly urge the MBTA to consider funding such a study before the books are closed on the present study.

Finally, the reconstruction of the Alewife Brook Parkway bridge several years hence will open up the possibility of bus service to Alewife station from Concord Avenue. We hope the MBTA will investigate those options at that time as thoroughly as they have investigated the present options.

Again, we would like to congratulate MBTA officials and their consultants for a job well done, and to thank them for the many opportunities they have given Cambridge residents to voice their opinions.



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CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

IMPORTANT NOTICE TO ALL CITY COUNCILLORS

Re: Northwest Corridor Service Study
Massachusetts Avenue buses (Arlington Heights/North Cambridge)

The MBTA's consultants have recommended that all Arlington Heights buses continue to run through to Harvard Square after the opening of the new Alewife station.

However, the consultants now indicate that they are still considering a proposal to reroute most (about 75%) of these buses to Alewife station. This appears to be a considerable softening of their position.

Diverting these buses to Alewife will remove more than 200 buses a day -- about 30 an hour in the peak hours -- from Cambridge streets. It will also save the city about \$100,000 per year in MBTA assessments compared to the consultant's current recommendations.

Adequate service for Cambridge residents can be maintained by using local buses from Harvard to Arlington Center and trackless trolleys from Harvard to North Cambridge.

If you agree with us that these buses carrying Arlington residents should go to Alewife instead of to Harvard, then please attend one or both of the meetings scheduled for tomorrow (Porter Square Masonic Hall, 1:00 PM and 7:30 PM).

We also still need support for the proposed Huron Tower bus service.

The Cambridge Transportation Forum has been actively participating in the MBTA's meetings and workshops to discuss bus and trackless trolley service. A copy of our comments on their Final Report are attached.

If you have any questions about these issues, please contact me, Charles Bahne, at 354-0539 anytime.

Respectfully submitted,

Charles Bahne
Secretary
Cambridge Transportation Forum

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S-88

Comm. from Charles Bahne, Secretary, Cambridge Transportation Forum Re: Northwest Corridor Service Study regarding Mass. Ave. buses (Arlington Heights/North Cambridge).

In City Council,

January 28, 1985

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