



City of Cambridge

Committee Report #3

IN CITY COUNCIL

November 18, 1996

COUNCILLOR DAVIS

ORDERED: That the City Manager be and hereby is requested to confer with the officials of the MBTA to pull together a response to all the concerns addressed at this meeting.

In City Council November 18, 1996

Adopted by the affirmative vote of nine members.

Attest:- D. Margaret Drury, City Clerk.

A true copy;

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. Margaret Drury". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

ATTEST:-

D. Margaret Drury
City Clerk

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The Traffic and Transportation Committee held a public meeting on Wednesday, October 30, 1996 at 7:05 p.m. in the Sullivan Chamber.

Present at the meeting were Councillor Henrietta Davis, Chair of the committee; Vice Mayor Kathleen Born; Councillor Timothy Toomey; Councillor Michael Sullivan; Councillor Anthony Galluccio; Deputy City Clerk Donna P. Lopez; Sue Clippinger, Director of Traffic, Parking and Transportation; Lauren Preston, Deputy Director of Traffic, Parking and Transportation; Elizabeth Epstein, Deputy Director of Community Development; Dick Easler, Chief Transportation Planner, Community Development Department; Susanne Rasmussen, Director of Environmental and Transportation Planning, Community Development Department; Susan Goldwitz, Cambridge Hospital; David Flanagan, Community Affairs, MBTA; Alan Castaline, Chief Planning Officer, MBTA; and Lynn Ahlgren, Transit Planner, MBTA.

Councillor Davis opened the meeting and stated that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss bus service in the city of Cambridge. Councillor Davis stated that the city is trying to have residents reduce using their cars therefore, the use of buses, she said, was part of the vehicle trip reduction plan. Councillor Davis stated that this was the first of a number of discussions on transportation issues in an attempt to get people out of their cars and using other forms of transportation. The future of planning for transportation, she said, is the responsibility of the Community Development Department; and the Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department deals with operational matters.

The committee heard from Sue Clippinger, Director of Traffic, Parking and Transportation, who stated that the city is working to reduce automobile use. Cambridge has bicycle and pedestrian programs and encourages the use of transit. These are the three ways Cambridge is using to achieve this goal. Ms. Clippinger stated that 52 percent of people who live in the next town who work in Cambridge use public transportation. Of the number of people who live and work in Cambridge 46 percent walk. She further stated that the number of people who live and work in Cambridge has declined ten percent. She said that the city has limited control over what is happening with public transit, but does have a strong role in holding the T to its schedules, changes in routes and their decisions to make these changes. She said that her department needed feedback in areas of concern from the public so that the city could work with the T to resolve the areas of public concern.

The committee heard from Hedwig Pocus, 2 Mount Auburn Street, who stated she was involved with senior citizens. She said that seniors find it frustrating living on Massachusetts Avenue and then outlined the following issues:

1. The #1 bus route, Harvard/Holyoke Gate to Dudley Station, the scheduling was inconsistent. Tenants living in 929 Massachusetts Avenue used to use this bus but gave up. They bought a bike or car.

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2. Steps on the bus are usually inoperable. The #70 bus route, Cedarwood or Watertown Square to Central Square, and the #70A, North Waltham - Central Square, which go to Watertown and Arsenal Malls, are usually in the square at the same time and are usually jammed with older people.
3. The Arsenal Square Mall stop on the return route is in the middle of the Ann & Hope parking lot. The stop is never shoveled in the winter. She asked whose responsibility is the shoveling of this stop. The Mall and the MBTA both claim it is not their responsibility.
4. News boxes in Harvard Square are in a dangerous location.
5. The Ride is undependable and the seating is uncomfortable for persons with arthritis.
6. Harvard Square station is dirty and there are no T personnel to give information. This should be addressed, she said, because there are a lot of tourists and out of town visitors who use Harvard Station and need guidance.
7. The MBTA bus drivers are unfamiliar with the routes and the bus stops.

Ms. Pocius further stated that the seniors want their freedom but at some point they are unable to drive. She said that citizens had to leave one hour ahead of time to travel to North Cambridge. Ms. Pocius requested that the bus line be restored on Broadway. She requested that the bus stop in front of the Senior Center in North Cambridge be shoveled. She had contact etings on this issue with the MBTA and received no cooperation on this matter.

Councillor Davis concurred with Ms. Pocius regarding bus Route #1.

The committee heard from Noel Johnson, 139 Pine Street, who stated she was a single driver. She said she spent 80 percent of her time in her car because she refused to ride public transportation. Her job, she said, required a lot of travelling, and public transportation was not dependable or convenient. Ms. Johnson stated she would use public transportation if it were more efficient and if the Broadway bus were restored. She stated that the MBTA drivers were the worst drivers, they tailgate and they do not signal.

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The committee heard from Charles Bahne, 224 Concord Avenue, who stated he has been active in using, observing and advocating bus service in Cambridge for twenty years. Mr. Bahne stated public transportation was important to get people into the city who work here and for the visitors and tourists. He said that the MBTA cut service on the #1 bus route and cuts were also made on the number of buses on the route. There are fewer inspectors or starters or they are not as visible.

In 1980 the MBTA adopted a universal bus stop sign, he said. The MBTA bus stop sign has a round top. Sixty communities put up the universal signs, Cambridge, however, did not allow the MBTA to put the signs up.

Mr. Bahne stated that the office in the Harvard Square subway station has no personnel and the bus schedule stands are usually empty. Park Street Station, he said, no longer has bus schedules. You can call the MBTA and request a schedule and one will be mailed to you. The bus schedules are on the internet but there are not many people who are connected. He cited problems with cross town bus routes on the Medford and Malden routes, he said, people had to get off and transfer to another bus. Mr. Bahne questioned why the routes could not be linked up to make travelling more efficient and quicker. There was a lack of bus access on the I93 corridor, as well as no bus service from Winchester to Cambridge.

He cited problems with bus stop locations. The Porter Square bus stops were relocated and this should be done in Harvard Square also, he said. The bus stops for the #66 and #86 routes were moved because of the construction and now the stops were used by the private trolley service. He cited bus stop shovelling as a problem. The city encourages property owners to shovel their sidewalks and the City as property owners, does not shovel the bus stops on Concord Avenue on the Fresh Pond side by the Neville Manor. He stated that the bus schedules are irregular, the night routes are infrequent and they stop early.

The committee heard from George Despotes, Dunster/Winthrop Streets, who stated that the intersection of JFK and Mount Auburn Street is a good place to put a bus stop. He said there was no research and development in the MBTA for transit planning. He stated that it was the 40th Anniversary of the State Highway System. There was the possibility of developing an on time data base with the new GPS system, he said. He cited problems with the Harvard Square ventilation system which has been inoperable for three years and the drainage system. Mr. Despotes said that visitor passes are not sold at Harvard Square, which is the busiest station for visitors. He further stated that the intersection of Holyoke Street and Massachusetts Avenue in front of the Wadsworth House was not shovelled.

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The committee heard from Lynn Dunn, Porter Square, who stated that she went to school by the T. She stated that she was a concerned citizen about the privatization of all bus routes. She said that Quincy, Somerville and Boston are all against the privatization of the MBTA. She further stated that guards being cut was a serious problem. The guard, she stated, is the person who leads the public to safety were something to happen on the train.

Vice Mayor Born stated that the City Council was against privatization.

The committee heard from Brian Rodgers, a worker on the Red Line, who stated that the station is not cleaned. There is no supervision to oversee the Harvard Square Station. There is no inspector in Central or Kendall Square. The escalators do not work and there is no one to give information to tourists in Harvard Square. Privatization of all bus routes are up for bid and some bidders are from outside the state. The decision on these routes will be made by November 15th. Mr. Rodgers stated that federal funding will be lost when privatization occurs. He said fares would be increased. The MBTA could not set the fares, these buses will be privately owned. The senior citizen fare will be eliminated. Mr. Rodgers further stated that trains will go up for bid after the first of the year. Arlington, he said, passed a resolution against privatization.

The committee heard from Astrid Dodds, a member of Walk Boston and the Cambridge Pedestrian Committee, who stated that walking only works in conjunction with bus routes. She stated that route #69, Harvard/Holyoke Gate - Lechmere Square, should run more frequently. She supported the MBTA bus stop signs and circumferential transit route. Ms. Dodds stated that there are 100,000 drivers who come to or go through Cambridge daily and the Alewife garage is filled every day. We need to get fewer cars into Cambridge, she said. She further stated that wrapping the buses in advertisement was consumer hostile. Winter access to bus stops needs cooperation from all parties involved, she said. She supported putting #83 bus route back on Beacon Street.

The committee heard from Jim Gascoigne, Charles River TMA, who stated his group was comprised of ten businesses in Cambridge dedicated to finding ways to get buses, car pools and van pools to work together to reduce congestion in Cambridge. Mr. Gascoigne stated that the primary concern for people coming to Cambridge is time and convenience. He stated that links need to be made to Cambridge. The challenge, he said, was to make the links to businesses. Mr. Gascoigne stated that the CT2 bus route, Kendall Square to Longwood Medical area, was heavily used during the recent flooding situation. He stated that to get to Cambridge from North Station was difficult without making two or three changes. He further stated that there are 40,000 people coming to Cambridge along the Charles River every day. Mr. Gascoigne stated that boat service could be used 9 to 10 months a year to transport people to the Museum of Science and adjacent areas. He questioned how to make links so that a lot of transfer are not required.

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The committee heard from Michael Muehe, Director of the Persons with Disabilities Commission, who stated that he has received complaints from persons with disabilities who rely on public transportation. Their primary means of transportation, he stated, are buses. Some complaints were:

1. MBTA wheel chair lifts broken or not working. He stated the 00 series buses have manufacturers' defects in the lift systems.
2. The MBTA is not making routine announcements for the blind riders and they are not making these announcements even when requested by passengers.
3. CambridgeSide Shuttle bus not equipped with working wheel chair lifts per the ADA Regulations.
4. The #1 bus route is used heavily and terminates at Holyoke Gate and private buses park in the stop making this stop undesirable or unsafe.
5. Beginning in November there is a new bus operation policy that passengers will enter the front door and exit the rear door. Disabled persons access cannot be hampered, he said.

Mr. Muehe stated that the bus drivers are not lowering the kneelers. The kneelers, he said, are important pieces of equipment and the buses should not leave the garage if they are not working properly.

The committee heard from David Flanagan, Community Affairs, MBTA, who stated that the MBTA tries to provide fast and efficient service to the city of Cambridge. There are 950 residents who use The Ride, he said. Mr. Flanagan stated that he had twenty years experience in transportation planning. He said that his role was to reach out to the community in a proactive manner. The Customer Relations Department of the MBTA was located in the Marketing Department. Mr. Flanagan stated that there was no good reason there was a problem with bus drivers. Last April, he said, there was a Community Office established and he makes frequent appearances in the neighborhoods. The MBTA uses all types of media to publicize these neighborhood meetings. He felt many concerns could be handled in a telephone call format. The MBTA wants to know what types of service improvements the community wants.

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The committee heard from Alan Castaline, Chief Planning Officer, MBTA, who stated that the MBTA Board of Directors is looking at bus service and where improvements to the system need to be made. Traffic conditions, he said, are a concern. They hinder bus schedule reliability. Mr. Castaline stated the new bus operation policy mentioned by Mr. Muehe was made to develop the flow into the bus and out the back door. Disabled persons would not have their access hampered. This exemption from the policy for disabled persons would be passed onto the drivers. Mr. Castaline stated that the MBTA would work on reliability and bus route revaluation. The Transportation Planning Staff reports on bus routes. The MBTA will look at bus routes #1, #66 and #70 first, and will allocate resources to look at missing links, and will explore cross town bus service.

At this time, Councillor Davis asked Mr. Castaline what effect will privatization have on bus route changes. Mr. Castaline responded that he was not familiar with the plan but the MBTA will look into the service of the system as if it is running the routes. The planning, marketing and scheduling of service will be done as part of the MBTA contract, he said. The MBTA will set the routes and the changing of the routes and the fares will be done following the current process.

Councillor Davis questioned Mr. Castaline on how the complaint of the maintenance of the Harvard Square station will be addressed. Mr. Castaline responded that this issue will be taken back to the maintenance department for review. Mr. Flanagan responded that the MBTA tries to stay aware of these issues. There are 6,000 to 7,000 people who use the station daily.

The committee heard from Benjamin Barnes, License Commissioner, who stated that one van equipped for persons with disabilities has been added to the taxi fleet after approval from Mr. Muehe. Mr. Barnes stated that there was a meeting of the License Commission scheduled for November 6, 1996 at the Senior Center to discuss transportation service. Mr. Barnes stated that he, too, wanted the Broadway bus back in service. He felt that there was a large segment of the community which had no public transportation access to places such as the Cambridge Hospital.

Councillor Davis asked how are these concerns going to be addressed and followed up by the MBTA.

Ms. Clippinger, Director of Traffic, Parking and Transportation, responded that all transportation issues are cooperative efforts. The City, she said, will work with the MBTA to obtain answers to the issues raised tonight and provide follow up.

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Councillor Davis stated that the bus system should be streamlined to provide for smooth linkages with all the lines. These are not new issues, she stated. She stated that the conditions in Harvard Square should be addressed first. Snow removal also should be addressed. The challenge, she said, is for all agencies to make trade-offs so we can get snow removed at sites where more than one agency has responsibilities, such as Porter Square.

Vice Mayor Born stated the snow removal from the Porter Square T Station and the Lechmere Station should be addressed. If it is MBTA property, it is MBTA responsibility to shovel, she said. Mr. Castaline responded that he would check on this matter. It was the first he had heard about this, he said.

Councillor Davis submitted the following motion:

ORDERED: That the City Manager be and hereby is requested to coordinate snow removal with the MBTA in order to resolve this issue prior to the winter season of 1996.

The motion carried on a voice vote.

Mr. Bahne stated that it was the responsibility of the abutting property owner to shovel.

Councillor Toomey stated that he was opposed to the Broadway bus being eliminated. Councillor Toomey asked why the green line from Boston to Lechmere Station, Haymarket and Government Center did not go straight through. Mr. Castaline stated that there are four different lines, the B, C, D and E line, one to Canal Street, two to Government Center and one to Lechmere Square on this route. He stated that the ridership on the Lechmere route is lighter. There will be more equipment on the line and next year a new fleet of vehicles will be used. Councillor Toomey asked if the Lechmere Station was going to be moved. Mr. Castaline responded that he was unsure of the plans. Councillor Toomey stated that it would make more sense to have all the cars go to the Lechmere Station. Mr. Castaline responded it is an issue of limited service versus maximum useage. He informed the committee that there would be more cars going to Lechmere soon, but he could not tell the committee exactly when this would happen.

Councillor Davis asked why the City of Cambridge was not using the MBTA bus stop signs. Ms. Clippinger responded that Cambridge is moving toward using the MBTA signs.

At this time Councillor Davis made the following motion:

ORDERED: That the City Manager be and hereby is requested to confer with the officials of the MBTA to pull together a response to all the concerns addressed at this meeting.

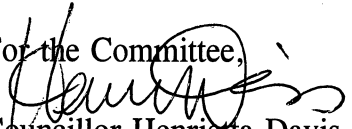
The motion carried.

Mr. Brian Rodgers stated that the MBTA should provide a report containing how and when stations are cleaned and also the availability of bus passes at stations.

Councillor Davis stated that tourism is a big business for Cambridge and it would be a friendlier place for tourists if information was available at the Harvard Square Station.

Mr. Castaline stated that schedules are printed. He encouraged the use of the Internet Site. He stated that the resources at Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology are used all the time. A current project, he stated, has installed a new operation control system for the subway system.

The meeting adjourned at nine o'clock and forty minutes p. m.

For the Committee,

Councillor Henrietta Davis,
Chair

A communication was received from Donna P. Lopez, Deputy City Clerk, transmitting a report from Councillor Davis, Chair of the Traffic and Transportation Committee, for a meeting held on October 30, 1996 for the purpose of discussing bus service within the city.

InCity Council November 18, 1996

Report Accepted.
Placed on file.
Order Adopted.