



Town of Lexington

Town Manager's Office

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June 15, 2022

MBTA

ATTN: Victoria Ireton, Deputy Director of Community Engagement
10 Park Plaza – Suite 3830
Boston, MA 02116

RE: Bus Network Redesign Feedback from Town of Lexington

Dear Ms. Ireton,

As an MBTA member community receiving bus service and also contributing revenue to the MBTA through our annual assessment, we have been following the Bus Network Redesign process very closely.

We applaud the efforts of the MBTA for undertaking this redesign and working to create an updated, focused system, with more all-day service, more 7-day/week service, improved cross-town connections, and a clear outline on bus frequencies. We also agree with the “equity first” strategy to focus on those most dependent on transit. We understand that without increased revenues, enhancing service in some areas, means reducing service in others. There are painful trade-offs to be made, particularly in outer core communities. Other regions that have successfully completed bus redesign efforts, when faced with similar, painful trade-offs, voted to increase their transit operating budgets (i.e. Houston, Richmond, Columbus, and Indianapolis). We recommend the State examine all options so that MBTA services can be bolstered in order to meet state and local goals on sustainability, housing, economic development, congestion reduction, and mobility & Age Friendly goals.

As an outer core community, the proposed Bus Network Redesign leaves Lexington with less than desirable service, and we recommend the MBTA consider our following suggestions:

- **Run the #76 run all day, as it used to pre-COVID**
- **Run the #76 route somewhat similar to the current #62/76 on Hartwell**
- **Extend the #77 to Lexington Center**

Run the #76 run all day, as it used to pre-COVID

While we appreciate that the #62 is now proposed to be 7 days/week, this proposal overall leaves Lexington with less service than we had pre-COVID. Pre-COVID, we had two buses that operated independently of each other all day, Monday-Friday: the #62 and the #76. With each of these bus routes operating at low-frequencies, one advantage of having the two routes was that the core of our Town, from Pleasant St to Lexington Center, had more frequent service with many riders able to take

which- ever bus came first to get to/from Alewife. With the loss of the #76, other than at peak travel time, and no increase in frequency on the #62, the core of our community will have worse service than before COVID. Additionally, without all day service on the #76, that leaves more of Lexington without transit service - a gap that will have to be filled somehow. While the Town has provided some level of transportation services since 1979 to fill gaps left by the MBTA, there is limited funding for us to expand these services. For us to enhance our services, more funding is needed. So, regardless of who operates the service, funding is needed, and if funding were to be secured, it is preferable to have the service operated by the MBTA as switching between service providers with different operating systems, fares, etc., is not ideal for riders.

Run the #76 route somewhat similar to the current #62/76 on Hartwell

While we understand the logic for the new proposed routing of the #76 is to make it straighter and easier to understand, we think the draft route could be improved. The proposed route #76 skips the core of our Town, skips our high school, and misses Hartwell Avenue. Here are our suggestions to improve this route:

Keep the #76 through Town Center: While we understand more coverage can be gained by not duplicating service, given that frequency of the #62 is still proposed to be low, and data shows the core of our Town as an important place for transit, we recommend that both routes run through the Town Center as currently is done. The Town has added housing to this area over the years, and there are a number of businesses in this corridor that depend on employees to have access to good transit ranging from a farm, to education facilities, restaurants, drug & grocery stores, and more.

Keep the #76 running past Lexington High School: Lexington High School employs over 400 staff and has more than 2,200 students, and a minority population of about 56%. Lexington is also home to one of the longest running and large METCO programs with over 60 high school students needing access to transit to Boston. While we have an expansive school bus program for both METCO and non-METCO students, the school buses cannot provide the level of flexibility that students and families need, particularly if students participate in before or after school activities. Additionally, school buses will never serve the staff, and as a key employment center with limited parking, and severe congestion, we would like to do more as a municipality to urge staff and students to consider public transit. To do this, they need access to convenient and frequent transit.

Have the #76 run on Hartwell: Hartwell Ave is a key business district in Lexington. Bordered by Hanscom Air Force Base and home to MIT Lincoln Labs, this district is one of the most prominent defense and life science hubs in the Boston area. This district is also Lexington's largest business district with over 17 million square feet of land area and is home to major employers ranging from life sciences to a major medical facility, to numerous social services, plus new restaurants and a couple of educational institutions. As our growing region strives to meet climate, housing and economic development goals, it is imperative that the MBTA directly serve the Hartwell Avenue corridor. Peak hour only service on Wood Street does not meet the needs of all the people and purposes in this corridor. Additionally, residential areas near Hartwell on Bedford and near Eldred, are quite dense, and having a second option to Alewife for these residents would make transit a more viable option. We understand the MBTA has not seen significant growth in ridership on Hartwell, but as the service has traditionally run on Saturdays only, and then during COVID ran only at off-peak times, we think that if the service runs consistently, it will build substantial ridership. We understand that diverting the bus up Hartwell will mean taking service away from the Hanscom Civil Air Terminal. However, the current

route to Hanscom and then back-tracking to get to Lincoln Lab, is not in keeping with the MBTA's goal of having easier to understand routes. We would be happy to discuss with the MBTA and Hanscom other options for getting the riders who do board/alight at the Civil Air Terminal alternate service. The number of riders served on Hartwell, should be far greater than those at the Air Terminal if service was consistently offered on Hartwell.

Turn-Around from Hartwell for #76: We understand that if the #76 were to continue up Hartwell, it would need a convenient and safe place to turn around and head back inbound to Alewife. Here are some possible options:

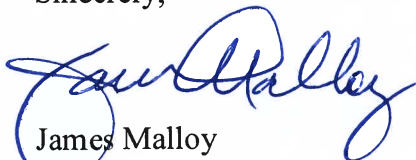
- The bus could extend to Burlington Rd/Crosby Drive to further enhance cross-town connections and enhance the network effect. This area has significant development and is currently only served by the #351 & LRTA #14. We understand that many people commute from communities up north, so this could add a viable network connection allowing people to travel farther south by transit.
- Transit data has shown significant trips between Lexington and Great Road in Bedford, so having a turn-around in this area, which would provide some duplicate service to the low-frequency #62 seems warranted, and there are multiple feasible turn-around options in this Great Rd area of Bedford.
- Lexington's Engineering and Planning teams could investigate improvements needed to be made to allow MBTA buses to turn around on Westview to Maguire Rd back to Hartwell.

Extend the #77 to Lexington Center

In the 1970's and 1980's, the MBTA saw value in extending high frequency service to Lexington with its proposal to extend the Red Line to Lexington Center. Lexington's population and industry has grown considerably since then. We understand a Red Line extension to Lexington will not be considered again, but the intent of that proposal remains valid. Now, more than ever, we need to get people out of cars and that requires frequent, reliable transit. Additionally, Depot Square in Lexington Center is a local transit hub where people can make connections between the MBTA and Lexpress (a municipally run public bus service), which offers the only connections north and south to other MBTA lines and the LRTA. As it is difficult to provide transfers for riders between two bus systems that have low-frequency, it is better if at least one of the systems can be high frequency to reduce the wait time between connections. It is also challenging for people using demand services for their 1st/last mile to make connections to a low-frequency service.

Thank you for your consideration of our suggestions. We are happy to discuss these with the Bus Network Redesign team. If you have questions, please reach out to our Transportation Manager, Susan Barrett at sbarrett@lexingtonma.gov or 781-698-4821. She can also arrange meetings between the MBTA and our Planning, Economic Development, and Engineering teams.

Sincerely,



James Malloy
Town Manager