



TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Arlington Planning Department, 730 Mass Ave,
Arlington MA, c/o Laura Wiener

To: Board of Selectmen, Arlington, MA
From: Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC)
Subject: Proposed MBTA Bus Route 77 Improvements
Date: November 21, 2011

The Board of Selectmen requested TAC review and make recommendations regarding the MBTA's Route 77 proposed bus line improvements. Route 77 operates on Massachusetts Avenue between Harvard Square and the Arlington Heights Bus Depot. The TAC Working Group (WG) recommendations pertain only to proposed changes in the Arlington portion of the route.

Recommendations

The Board of Selectmen should endorse the Route 77 Plan proposed by the MBTA with the following revisions and additions.

- Retain the Lockeland Avenue inbound stop in its current location and install a shelter to better serve Stop & Shop customers and other users.
- Retain the inbound stop across from CVS west of Newman Way in its current location and install a shelter.
- Reconfigure the relocated inbound stop at Academy Street to retain the existing handicap parking space before the Town Hall crosswalk, possibly by moving the space closer to the crosswalk.
- Investigate installing one or two bus shelters at the proposed inbound Quincy Street stop, and possibly rebuilding the wall separating the gas station property from the back of the sidewalk.
- Investigate straightening out both crosswalks across Mass Ave at Park Avenue to reduce the number of lost parking spaces. In addition, use the minimum bus stop length needed for a nearside bus stop.
- Review operating procedures for the entire route to determine what steps can be taken to reduce bus bunching. At the public meetings held by the MBTA in Arlington, bunching was viewed as the most critical issue by many riders.
- Identify locations where the placement of shelters is physically feasible and the shelter is warranted because of ridership. Shelters should not be rejected automatically because of abutter objections.

Transportation Advisory Committee Members:

Elisabeth Carr-Jones, Wayne Chouinard, Jean Clark, Steve Kurland, Jeffrey Maxtutis, Howard Muise, Officer Corey Rateau, Scott Smith, Edward Starr, Richard Turcotte, and Laura Wiener

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- Investigate more extensive signal improvements to enhance bus operations in conjunction with the planned Mass Ave corridor improvements.
- Use the MBTA's new GPS tracking system to provide real time information to passengers at stops with the largest number of boardings.
- Where feasible, provide shelters at outbound stops with large numbers of boardings, such as opposite Lake Street, at Medford Street, and at 905 Mass Ave.

A description of the MBTA's Key Bus Routes Program and major features of the Route 77 Plan are presented on the attached pages.

Respectfully submitted,

Howard Muise,
Working Group Lead and TAC Co-Chair

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Proposed MBTA Bus Route 77 Improvements Background Material

MBTA Key Bus Routes Program Description

The MBTA has designated 15 of its busiest bus routes as “Key Bus Routes”. The goal of the Key Bus Route Improvement Program is to improve the overall quality of service by reducing trip times; enhancing customer comfort, convenience and safety; and making the bus service more reliable and cost-effective. Utilizing \$10 million in grant funding through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), the MBTA intends to improve service quality on the 15 key routes by implementing a combination of the following measures (according to the MBTA’s website):

- Eliminating stops to reduce bus travel time
- Relocating stops to the far side of intersections or crosswalks for pedestrian safety and to reduce bus stop length
- Extending bus stop lengths to 60 to 80 feet for far side stops and 90 to 100 feet for near side stops to improve handicap accessibility
- Providing bus stop amenities such as shelters or benches, and trash cans (the MBTA does not recommend shelters when there are abutter objections)
- Providing transit signal priority and designated queue jump lanes, curb extensions and pavement markings

Route 77 Plan

The following are the key features of the proposed improvements for Route 77 in Arlington:

- Only two stops are eliminated. The inbound (eastbound) stops at Pine Court and Robbins Road will be replaced by a new stop at Quincy Street. The MBTA recommends elimination of several stops in Cambridge, which will improve travel time between Arlington and Harvard Square.
- Six inbound (eastbound) stops and seven outbound (westbound) stops will be relocated. One stop is relocated from the far side to the near side of an intersection and all the others are relocated from the near side to the far side.
- Twelve stops will be lengthened to meet standards for handicap accessibility. Longer bus stops allow the bus to pull all the way into the curb, enabling use of the wheelchair lift. As a result, up to 12 parking spaces will be lost throughout the length of the route, including five spaces in Arlington Heights near Park Avenue, two in front of the Capitol Theater and one or two near Town Hall
- One shelter is recommended for Appleton Street and five stops are recommended for investigation for installation of a shelter with abutter permission. Two shelters originally proposed were withdrawn because of abutter objections. All shelters are proposed for the inbound route
- Benches, trash cans and pavement marking are recommended for most locations.

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Major Issues with the Route 77 Plan

A public meeting was held on September 27 in Town Hall (meeting notes are attached). The most consistent comments were complaints about bus bunching. Laura Wiener, Elisabeth Carr-Jones, Scott Smith, Howard Muise and Wayne Chouinard attended the meeting. On Saturday October 17, the Working Group (WG) visited the corridor to obtain more information about some of the more critical and problematic locations. The following are the major issues identified in the public meeting and by the WG:

1. The two nearside stops at **Park Avenue in Arlington Heights** would be lengthened to provide better handicap accessibility. The inbound lengthening (south side of street) would eliminate three parking spaces (including one handicap space) and the outbound lengthening (north side of street) would eliminate two parking spaces. The elimination of five parking spaces is a significant reduction in the already limited parking for the Arlington Heights business area. Some ideas from the Working Group site visit were to consider:
 - a. Reducing the proposed length of the inbound bus stop to retain the handicap parking space, which when empty would still provide the extra bus stop length
 - b. Relocating Mass Ave crosswalks closer to the corner to allow buses more space to pull forward, possibly eliminating the need to remove one space on each side
 - c. Investigating relocating one or both designated taxi spaces located in front of the bus turnaround to inside the bus turnaround on MBTA property.
2. The inbound Pine Court and Robbins Road stops would be consolidated into a single stop at the near side of Quincy Street to make it more accessible to Ottoson Middle School. Some concern was expressed about the proposed location in front of a busy gas station between the gas station driveway and the Quincy Street intersection. Based on the site visit, the WG concluded the proposed location is preferred because it is directly down the street from the Middle School, the sidewalk is wide enough for a bench or bus shelter, and removal of parking for the stop would improve visibility and operations at the busy intersection in front of Jimmy's Steakhouse. The WG also thought the wall between the station and the sidewalk should be rebuilt to separate the station drive area more clearly from the sidewalk. One or two bus shelters could also provide separation from the gas station property.
3. There was some discussion about relocating the inbound stop from the near side of **Lockeland Avenue** to the far side, in front of TD Bank. However, installing a shelter at that location requires about one foot of TD Bank property. If the stop remains in its current location, which has adequate sidewalk width for a bus shelter, it will need to be lengthened, resulting in the loss of two parking spaces. This location is closer to Stop & Shop than the proposed location.
4. The MBTA proposed moving the inbound stop across from the new CVS to in front of Johnny's Foodmaster (the far side of Bartlett Avenue). Although the location would be closer to the supermarket, the sidewalk is not wide enough for a shelter. The existing stop serves CVS and a shelter could be easily installed on the existing wide sidewalk.

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5. The relocation of the inbound stop at Town Hall to the far side of **Academy Street** (right in front of Town Hall) would result in the net loss of one to two parking spaces but would place the stop closer to the Town Hall entrance, and on a wider sidewalk with room for a bench or two. Removal of the defunct firebox might allow adjustment to the stop location and retention of the handicap space between the stop and the crosswalk in front of Town Hall. The relocation of the outbound stop to the far side of **Central Street** would put it beyond the crosswalk and slightly farther from Town Hall. The new location would require the removal of one parking space but retaining the existing location would require lengthening the stop and losing one parking space.
6. The relocation of stops near **Milton Street** (inbound) to Melrose Street (farside) allows retention of parking in front of businesses. Mass. Ave. Corridor plans will be revised to accommodate moving this stop. The outbound stop at **Windsor Street** will also require some adjustment.
7. Except for a recommendation to investigate **traffic signal improvements** at the Lockland Street intersection, there are no recommendations for more advanced signal technology to improve bus operations.

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