

## Transportation Advisory Group (TAG) Monthly Meeting

Wednesday, July 13, 2022, 4-6 p.m.

Meeting held via Zoom due to COVID-19

### **Attendees**

Mike Halle  
David Clark  
Damien Croteau-Chonka  
John Pelletier  
Jenn Martin  
Councilor Andreae Downs  
Lucia Dolan (left early)  
Leo Hannenberg (left early)  
Jeremy Freudberg (left early)  
Terry Altherr (joined late)  
Councilor Julia Malakie (joined late)

### **Agenda**

4:00 Welcome and introductions  
4:05 Agenda additions and announcements  
4:10 Updates  
4:30 Better Bus Discussion.  
The MBTA has created a comprehensive plan for bus service in the Boston metro area, including in Newton. We will review these plans based on work done by a sub-group of TAG and on feedback from residents, staff, and lawmakers. This conversation will continue beyond this meeting, with the goal of informing Newton and the MBTA about potential improvements to the plan.  
5:55 Next meeting planning and adjourn

### **Meeting Minutes**

#### **Introduction and Updates**

The Transportation Advisory Group (TAG) provides ideas and advice to the Mayor, discusses transportation issues with City Staff, and provides input to City Council. Our strength is in our ideas and knowledge.

New attendees are David Clark (Larkin Road, pre-pandemic commuted to Assembly Square, relies on power wheelchair so needs accessible public transportation), Damien Croteau-Chonka (West Newton resident commutes to Kendall Square), and Terry Altherr (West Newton).

- Councilor Downs will provide an update to the Waban Area Council on 7/14 about the **Chestnut St. (Beacon to Commonwealth Ave) project** and the **Quinobequin Rd.**

**DCR project.** The House version of a recent bond bill includes \$1 million for “implementation of the preferred concept design of the Quinobequin Road portion of the Charles River greenway vision project to improve safety and accessibility for all reservation visitors, including a one-way layout to accommodate a pedestrian sidewalk on the residential side and a one-way travel lane with a shared use trail on the river side” and \$500,000 for sidewalk installation and repairs along Quinobequin Rd.

- John Pelletier updates that the Bike/Ped Plan RFQ is out for bid:  
<https://www.newtonma.gov/Home/Components/RFP/RFP/535/669>
- John Pelletier updates that a consultant to design the Washington St. pilot has been selected. The project will stretch from West Newton to Newtonville.
- Mike Halle updates that construction is underway on the Walnut St. approach to Crafts St. to make it more perpendicular. Driveways are being extended and storm water retention improved. John P reports that crosswalks are also being added across Crafts St. on either side of Walnut St. There is some chatter on social media about adding delay to vehicle travel.

### **MBTA Discussion**

Background of proposal, look at MBTA goals are, look at specific changes. Everyone’s goal is to get the best of all worlds - how do we help those who have existing service and improve transit for those those who are currently underserved by the MBTA. TAG has a working group looking at the proposed changes and sent a letter to the Mayor and City Council highlighting the positives.

- MBTA Bus project page:  
<https://www.mbta.com/projects/bus-network-redesign/update/bus-network-redesign-proposal>
- MBTA's Newton Proposal PDF:  
[https://d2o8eokdkim9o8.cloudfront.net/sites/default/files/Bus%20Network%20Redesign/29\\_Newton.pdf](https://d2o8eokdkim9o8.cloudfront.net/sites/default/files/Bus%20Network%20Redesign/29_Newton.pdf)
- Interactive Map:  
<https://platform.remix.com/map/8a739faa?latlng=42.34897,-71.23445,12.827>

The draft map of the redesign John Pelletier is working with is here (note this is his own design with input from a number of folks):

[https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1ioP\\_I2hnxmMBhgxYDi\\_SoRhq5Ab1I0&ll=42.35278192583727%2C-71.2320346119083&z=14](https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1ioP_I2hnxmMBhgxYDi_SoRhq5Ab1I0&ll=42.35278192583727%2C-71.2320346119083&z=14)

Comments from John Pelletier -

In terms of comments, I will start with the fully positive:

- Love the expanded Route 60 to Newton Center, this is a huge win

- Newton needs to work with the Mall at Chestnut Hill to improve accessibility to any bus stops on Beacon for the 60 inbound at the Towers
- Love the expanded weekend and evening hours on the 59 and 52 bus. More consistent and frequent service on these routes are critical for a number of transit-dependent populations.
  - The move of the 59 onto Needham St. fully makes sense as the population and jobs along this route are only set to grow and the road improvements should make traveling along this route far better than now.
    - There is a loss on Elliot St. of some access, Newton should work to create and improve access across the Upper Falls Greenway to the Needham St. stops. It would be ~5 min walk from the Elliot route to Needham St. using the Greenway.
- The new 54 bus is very exciting, allowing seamless connections between the Greenline, Worcester Line, and Fitchburg Line as well as service to Belmont and Arlington. New service to Lasell and the Villages as well as the bio labs up the road from Riverside and Riverside development itself.
- Route 61 provides service along existing routes for the most part, super useful for the jobs in North Waltham, provides frequent 7-day service along Washington St. and also provides a new connection along Galen St. and direct connections to the frequent and express bus services
  - It provides new service along Waltham and connection to West Newton's village center.
  - It mitigates the loss of express bus service along Washington and mirrors the 554/553 route for the most part.
- No Changes to the 57/501 except love that the 57 is running later on weekends and more frequent later at night

Now let's look at tweaks and changes our working group proposes:

- Route 53 is a great new route, super useful for Brandeis, super useful for Lasell, and an additional useful connection between Waltham, Auburndale, and the Greenline.
  - However, it would provide better service by servicing Woodlawn station
  - This would provide direct service for the hospital, maintain access to the greenline, provide a connection to the Wellesley shuttle, and restore service on Comm Ave between Washington St and Auburndale
    - Depending on bus turning radius, it might need to terminate at Newton Wellesley Hospital but either way is fine
- Route 505 provides that peak service with one-seat rides inbound. My changes are below
  - Follow the existing route down Lexington into Auburndale and onto Comm Ave, make the left onto Washington but instead of going express at West Newton, go local along Washington street and express at Newton corner.
  - Instead of going to Copley Square, have it go directly to the financial district.
  - Provide off-peak hourly service to make up for lack of commuter rail access for reverse commutes and better mirror the pre-pandemic 553 service

- This mitigates the loss of express service on Comm/Washington/Lexington
- It improves service on Washington, providing pre-pandemic express routing and complementing the new 61 service
- Riders can transfer to 504/501 service to Copley Square at Newton Corner.
- It still provides one-seat rides inbound, with a slightly longer trip by running local on Washington
- No weekend service, weekend service would be provided by the 53/54/61, with inbound transfers at Newton Corner
- My newly proposed route 55/506, goes from Waltham to Newton Corner via Watertown St. and Adams St. It would be hourly 7 days a week as proposed or could be hourly 5 days and 90 minutes weekend etc.
  - It provides service back on River St., mimicking the 553/554, and could provide new weekend service on Sunday potentially
  - It provides new service on Watertown St. serving the Boys and Girls Club, the new Newton Early Childhood Program (NECP), F.A. Day Middle School, & the Albemarle playing fields/ Gath Pool.
  - It provides better service on Adams St. than the 558 provided pre-pandemic, giving them on-seat connections to Newton Corner and West Newton
  - It could be run as a weekday only express bus service or just local.
- 504 bus service should be peak hour, but ~45-60min off peak, preferably closer to 30min. Timing connections is key, especially in off-peak/weekend times
  - It should also still loop around Newton Corner for drop off outbound (it would still loop inbound)
  - Still service Copley, transfers at Newton Corner for express to the Financial District

These changes allow a whole ton of brand new all-day service for many more people than have it now, with only a slight loss on a section of Crafts and a section of Chapel.

### **Additions from TAG Discussion**

- The MBTA is working on replacing the diesel buses and old fixed seat hybrid buses, and moving towards new hybrids with pop up seats, which will allow for up to five riders with wheelchairs. The MBTA is also moving to electrification and needing to upgrade all the bus yards to allow for more capacity to store buses. There hasn't been movement to a Watertown bus yard option.
- Opportunities for more buses along Washington St., which are especially important until the commuter rail stops are upgraded to be accessible and Newton has more frequent commuter rail service. Note that the D Green Line accessibility project is moving faster than the commuter rail accessibility project.
- Newton and TAG should be thinking about which changes people in Waltham will be pushing back on.
- Discussion in the chat about bus fees and commuter rail fees.
- Newton should be looking for opportunities to make transit more efficient, light upgraded the traffic signal on Watertown at Albemarle to prioritize buses.

- Development-funded shuttles connect higher density areas locally, such as the Pleasant St. shuttle to Watertown Square. Discussion that the shuttles should be published more widely and maybe with a number like 700 series to let MBTA riders know about them. Also discussion about whether the shuttles are accessible and work for people who use wheelchairs.
- Discussion about whether the 59 will duplicate the Northland shuttle; that shuttle will only take riders from the Northland Development to the Newton Highlands T stop and not make additional stops. Northland is required to put money towards bike share and something like NewMo.

**Next steps:**

1. John has discussed with David Koses, Nicole Freedman. John would like to get this in front of more councilors that have concerns. Councilor Albright has brought up some concerns on the north side.
2. TAG - collection of suggestions and coherent plan on top of the T's plan. If TAG can agree on this, then it can be a TAG plan rather than simply a John plan.
3. Once TAG agrees on the plan, then reach out to individual councilors, go ward by ward, focus on the north side, and schedule an informational session. We first need the blessing of the Mayor. On the south side, more opportunities are being added than being removed.
4. Bring in the business community. Greg Reibman is open to having a conversation.
5. Terry - TAG or John reach out to Auburndale online groups

**Upcoming meetings tonight:**

NewCal meeting at 7:00 p.m.

128/I-95 Land Use at 6:00 p.m.