

November 3, 2014

Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization
State Transportation Building
10 Park Plaza, Suite 2150
Boston, MA 02116-3968

Dear Boston Region MPO,

Thank you for seeking input on the Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization's Draft Central Vision Statement, Goals and Objectives for transportation. The Fresh Pond Residents Alliance represents about 320 Cambridge residents, the majority in West and North Cambridge. Some of us have responded on-line, but we wanted to share our comments with you in more detail.

In "Charting Progress to 2040: The Boston Region's Next Long-Range Transportation Plan" the MPO recognized the severity of the Arterial Bottleneck at Route 16, Fresh Pond Parkway and Alewife Brook Parkway on its list of top bottlenecks. Transportation in general, and this bottleneck in particular, is a major concern in our area, severely affecting the quality of life in our neighborhoods. The Route 16/ Parkway/Route 2 interchange is also a conduit for people travelling between work, home, school, and other economic and recreational activities in metropolitan Boston and the western suburbs.

We suggest that the Vision Statement be written to state that as its central purpose, transportation, supports and is compatible with neighborhoods of work and the residential neighborhoods that make up the cities and towns in which we live. Specifically, the MPO envisions: "a transportation system that *supports the neighborhoods—work, residential and mixed—of the Boston region. Transportation must be safe, provide equitable access, excellent mobility, and varied transportation options—in support of sustainable, healthy, livable, and economically vibrant neighborhoods in the cities and towns of the region.*" We support the other elements of the Draft Central Vision Statement.

We will focus our comments on our priority goals: "Transportation Options/Healthy Modes" and "Congestion Reduction." This will also help meet the all the other goals, especially Equity and Greenhouse gas/environment.

Our neighborhood is bisected by major highways—Fresh Pond Parkway/Alewife Brook Parkway—and train tracks—Fitchburg Line commuter rail, and it also contains a major transit terminus—Alewife Red Line Station. The neighborhood is heavily impacted by regional transportation needs. In addition, some fifteen MBTA bus lines cross the congested parkways and Route 2 carrying riders to the Red line at Alewife or Harvard Square, to commercial districts, universities and residential neighborhoods and many other destinations. With the right investments, there is the opportunity to support the neighborhoods in Watertown, Belmont, Arlington, and Cambridge to facilitate the trend toward transit and to improve transit performance. Our comments regarding reliance on cars and the current inadequacy of transit follow. Our comments are in two categories: improving connectivity locally, and improving connectivity in the larger metropolitan system.

We ask, how can transportation better support all elements of neighborhood, and how is existing transportation limiting neighborhood? Transportation means all forms treated more equally: walking in an attractive and safe setting, biking on safe routes, having timely and sufficient mass transit (bus, Red Line, commuter rail), and efficient movement of cars and trucks.

Our basic comment for the vision and goals is that residential and work neighborhoods are the reason for transportation. Neighborhoods cannot exist without it. The vision and goals for transportation should reflect the fact that transportation supports neighborhood. Although the following examples come from our neighborhood which we know well, we think you will find that many neighborhoods in the metropolitan Boston region have similar concerns. Examples of support are good access to schools, groceries, other services, libraries, places of

worship, and jobs and homes in neighboring communities.

Examples of existing conditions that limit neighborhood:

1. Transportation from neighboring towns interrupted by the cross traffic of the parkways. Congestion of the parkways impedes at least fifteen MBTA bus lines from and to neighboring communities and within Cambridge. These bus lines connect us to homes, jobs, the Red Line, Harvard Square, MIT, Kendall Square, and many other destinations.
2. Inadequate capacity of the Alewife Station and Red line. Full parking and full trains force more people to drive, increasing congestion of the parkways.
3. Commuter/freight railroad tracks a barrier. Inadequate safe passage over or under the railroad tracks forces the City to bus children to the school they would normally walk or bike to, encourage use of cars for small local trips to the local shopping center, force low-income residents to take circuitous and unpleasant routes to work, shop and get to school athletics facilities, and block pedestrian and bike access to what would otherwise be transit-oriented development.
4. Hub and spokes transit system. Travelling north-south across the rapid current transit and bus system is nearly impossible (or extremely time-consuming) by any means other than a car, time-consuming in itself. People forced to drive between North Cambridge or Somerville and Watertown or Waltham increases congestion on Fresh Pond and Alewife Brook Parkways.

The following are our priority transportation projects.

Local Scale

1. Build a pedestrian/bicycle bridge over the Fitchburg Line tracks at the Alewife T station/Cambridge Park Drive. This will connect the two rapidly developing densely populated areas on either side of the tracks, enabling true transit-oriented development. This is also important infrastructure to maintain safe access when roads are flooded (Alewife is in a floodplain).
2. Make bicycle access to the Alewife station safer and complete, finishing linkages and bike paths. For example, connecting the Minuteman Bike Trail to Charles River trails and making the bike paths at Alewife Station safe and clearly defined.
3. Build a pedestrian/bicycle tunnel (or bridge) connecting Rindge Avenue and the Fresh Pond Shopping Center/Danehy Park to provide safe and efficient passage of children to Tobin School and the park and for adults working and shopping at the Shopping Center.
4. Build a new Fitchburg Line station at Alewife to capture commuters to/from the rapidly growing commercial and residential node at Alewife.
5. Make bus access to the Alewife station more efficient, such as a dedicated bus lane on Route 2.
6. Increase the capacity of the Alewife station garage and/or building satellite parking with an efficient bus connection.
7. Improve circumferential (cross-spokes) public transportation routes. A bus route could be added from Waltham Center to either Arlington Center or Medford Center to diffuse traffic through Cambridge, e.g., between Waltham/Watertown and North-West Cambridge/Somerville/Medford.
8. Traffic intersections: Improve signals, timing and lanes at Route 2/Rte 16, Huron/ Fresh Pond Parkway (particularly regarding pedestrian safety), and Mount Auburn/Fresh Pond Parkway (will improve bus passage between Cambridge and Watertown).
9. Traffic intersections: Improve pedestrian crossings, safety and location

10. Separate bicycles from vehicle traffic and pedestrians wherever possible.
11. Bus service improvements: timing of buses is inefficient, e.g., the #74 and 78 buses always leave Harvard Station and return together at exactly the same time, resulting in a half hour or longer for two buses to arrive.
12. All work on Fresh Pond and Alewife Brook Parkways must follow the DCR's Guiding Principles (2007) that "The Parkway is a park with a road in it." Our neighborhoods place tremendous value on the beauty and environmental quality of our parkways. They should not just be conduits for vehicles.

Large scale

13. Extend the \$10 youth T pass with no time or day restrictions (everyone age 12-21) to all communities. This directly addresses the Equity goal since many youth riders are currently stranded from school, work, extracurriculars, healthcare and safe transportation due to affordability.
14. Extend the Red Line toward Arlington and Lexington, the towns with the largest number of users.
15. Increase the efficiency of the Red Line by increasing the frequency of trains and look at adding more cars to the trains (from 6 cars to 8 cars and extending platforms).
16. Improve the Fitchburg Line service by increasing frequency of trains and increasing parking capacity at suburban stations.
17. Connect the Blue Line and Red Line to improve system access for Cambridge workers and residents.
18. Connect the North and South station rail lines to increase use and accessibility to the commuter lines.
19. With a bus route from Waltham Center to Arlington or Medford Center (as above), there could be more buses that cross Route 128 and give better connection between the MBTA's radial points north and west of the downtown core.
20. Keep a congestion tax on the table. It has worked in other cities.

In conclusion, we would like to emphasize that the Vision should reflect what transportation is ultimately for: to connect neighborhoods of residences and work with each other and with all the other destinations that people seek. It should allow and support activity along and at either end of transportation routes, while not degrading the neighborhoods in between. We hope that you can use our comments as an example of what many neighborhoods seek: urban highways and railroad tracks that connect, not divide us, multi-modal roads that serve us, not the single use that divides us (many urban highways and parkways are built for single use, to the exclusion of bikeways and attractive and safe places to walk), and efficient, affordable and pleasant transit options. When these issues have been addressed, neighborhoods will truly be able to see the benefits of transit-oriented development.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment. We would be happy to elaborate on these comments and discuss how they can be put into action. We can be reached at the addresses below.

Yours sincerely,

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For the Fresh Pond Residents Alliance