

NEEDHAM TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

Minutes of May 1, 2019 Meeting

(7:30pm – 9:00 pm in the Great Plain Room of Needham Town Hall)

Members in attendance: David Montgomery (Chair), Steve McKnight (Vice Chair), Duncan Allen, and Richard Creem.
Absent: Justin McCullen (Secretary). *(In J.McCullen's absence, D.Montgomery took the minutes of the meeting.)*

Recent Meeting with Select Board Chair and Chair. D.Montgomery shared with the committee the outcome of his March 28 meeting with Dan Matthews (Chair) and John Bulian (Vice Chair) of the Select Board (SB) and Town Manager Kate Fitzpatrick (TM). The Chairs and the TM indicated their appreciation for our March 6 memorandum addressing SB priorities relating to transportation matters (attached). They invited the committee to attend a meeting of the SB in the near future to present areas we think we could be of most use and/or of greatest need on town transportation matters. That presentation has been scheduled to occur on May 14. The Chairs and the TM indicated they had reviewed our February draft letter addressed to Sec. of MassDOT Stephanie Pollack and Keolis Commuter Services concerning several issues pertaining to commuter rail scheduling, reliability and on-time performance as well as station platform issues. Although they appreciated the information shared in that draft letter, they had decided that alternative communication paths already in process between the TM and the MBTA and Keolis might get confused were the letter to be sent. D.Montgomery indicated that going forward our committee would be inclined to draft memoranda to the SB and the TM only in the first instance and not draft letters to third parties unless and until asked to do so by the SB or the TM.

Planning for May 14 Presentation to the Select Board and Town Manager. We discussed which of the numerous points covered in our March 6 memorandum to the SB and the TM we should focus on during our upcoming presentation as potentially most useful for our committee's involvement in the year ahead. The areas we discussed included reviewing bus service (both existing and needed), public/private shuttle services, coordination with Newton, and alternative modes of transportation. D.Allen indicated that analytical tools already exist that can evaluate bus travel demands, travel time variability, propensity and connectivity. Looking at both workforce needs and community needs levels relating to possible changes to bus service was also discussed. We agreed the SB's goal for a commuter rail quiet zone continues to be an area we wish to support – notwithstanding concerns about related funding – and that we would request an update on the status of communications with the MBTA concerning the golf course crossing in particular.

Approval of Minutes of our January 29, 2019 Meeting. The draft minutes were reviewed and discussed. Two minor edits were made to the text. Upon motion duly seconded, the minutes were approved unanimously.

Commuter Rail Performance and Station Maintenance. R.Creem shared with the committee the following three observations:

1. At several commuter rail station platforms in town, where trees had previously been located but had not survived (which we had previously noted and sought to have addressed), the tree sites have recently been paved over completely. Furthermore, trees up and down the entire commuter rail line have recently been removed. The committee suspects these developments are related to the mandated installation of "positive train control" signaling systems designed to increase train safety (but which can suffer from transmission interference caused by trees in close proximity).
2. There has been some recent increase in number of bi-level coaches used in the trains sets (so-called "consists") serving Needham. This is a welcome improvement even though the total number of cars is typically still less than the six we would like to see deployed.
3. There has recently been some random pre-boarding checking of commuter rail passes at South Station suggesting that efforts at addressing fare collection and evasion have increased.

Following a motion duly seconded, the meeting was adjourned by unanimous consent.

Respectfully submitted,

David P. Montgomery

Attachment: March 6, 2019 Memorandum to Select Board

MEMORANDUM

To: Needham Select Board and
Kate Fitzpatrick, Needham Town Manager

From: Needham Transportation Committee
David Montgomery, Chair and Steve McKnight, Vice Chair

Date: March 6, 2019

RE: Transportation Committee and Select Board's FY2019-FY2020 Goals

Members of the Transportation Committee have recently reviewed with great interest the FY2019-FY2020 Select Board's goals (as updated 01/18/19), with particular attention to transportation matters mentioned therein. In the interest of jointly determining how our committee might best work cooperatively with and in support of the Select Board and the Town Manager in the coming year, we offer our comments on the specific goals identified below (addressed in the same order as they appear in the FY2019-FY2020 Select Board's goals document).

Under Board Goals, **Section 2, "Ensure appropriate Regulation and Assessment of, and Investment in Infrastructure,"** we note:

Both the first item (Highland Avenue/Needham Street reconstruction) and the second item (completion of the Add-a-Lane project), are significant public infrastructure projects that will have a substantial impact on Needham's commuter traffic patterns which in turn may have implications for public transportation options in the Town. We will continue to monitor those projects and may seek opportunities to share concerns about them in the future if and when they arise.

The fourth item (establishment of a working group concerning impacts of growth on town infrastructure) makes express reference to transportation among its list of potentially impacted areas. The Committee seeks opportunities to contribute to the efforts of this working group either by direct representation or by informed, timely input. To that end, we request to be included on the working group's distribution list and welcome additional discussion about how we can participate in this initiative.

The sixth item (participation in MassDOT's "Complete Streets" funding program) may also represent an opportunity for the Committee to advance Needham's transportation infrastructure development through access to new funding sources. Specifically, it is our understanding that the Town has yet to approve a Prioritization Plan (a necessary component to a town's eligibility for the Complete Streets funding mechanism). Should it be of interest to the Select Board, the committee stands willing to assist in the development of such a Prioritization Plan.

Under Board Goals, **Section 5**, “*Maintain and develop amenities that contribute to the desirability of Needham as a place to live and work,*” we note:

The fourth item (reduce train horn noise) echoes the Committee’s long-held interest and support of the Town taking necessary steps to adopt a quiet zone. We continue to stand ready and willing to cooperate with and support the Select Board in pursuit of this worthwhile goal.

The eleventh item (pursuing multi-modal transportation between Newton and Needham) is an area of significant interest to the Committee, and we would be happy to play whatever role we can that would be helpful to advance the issue and related public discussions. (See also “*Governing Principles*” below). We look forward to further strategizing with the Select Board and the Town Manager about useful next steps in this effort.

The thirteenth item addresses parking at Needham Center Post Office, Hillside Avenue, and other locations. The Committee is especially concerned about the decrease in the dedicated MBTA parking at Needham Junction (caused by the BID Hospital parking expansion), Needham Center (where MBTA parking was eliminated in favor of general town parking), and Needham Heights (where the Senior Center has replaced over half of the commuter rail parking). Both planned and unexpected reduction in parking capacity at those three stations has significantly reduced commuter rail parking and driven many commuters to seek parking in nearby residential areas. The Committee encourages the Town to continue seeking creative means to address the increasingly pressing shortage in commuter rail parking.

Under “*Future Initiatives*” on the last page of the goals document, the fifth bullet item references locating alternative transportation options in town. The Committee welcomes the opportunity to participate in further consideration of this matter whenever the Select Board deems appropriate.

Under “*Governing Principles*” (also on the last page of the goals document), the second bullet item references developing a consensus with Newton regarding transportation options on Highland Avenue/Needham Street. The Committee would be interested in exploring what role(s) it could play in helping to advance this principle.

It is our understanding that since Needham sought to have commuter rail service to the Town restored in the 1980’s, the Transportation Committee has diligently attended to commuter rail issues as its primary focus. Under Section 2.7.1.2 of the Town By-Laws, the Committee is formally charged with studying “the mass transportation needs of the Town, with particular emphasis upon commuter transportation.” Diverse transportation challenges currently facing Needham extend well beyond commuter rail, and we welcome the opportunity to engage in discussion with the Select Board and other relevant parties about how best to apply this charge going forward.

At our most recent meeting, the Committee discussed the implications of the Town deliberately embracing transit oriented development (TOD) principles, which we imagine could be substantial. Measures Needham might consider taking in support of TOD principles could include:

1. requiring transit options or other transportation related improvements as a condition for zoning height waivers by special permit;
2. installation of bike sharing and/or Zipcar facilities at commuter rail stations;
3. leveraging and expanding development of publicly accessible bus and/or shuttle connections between the Newton Highlands Green Line T station, Northland Development Corp.'s Needham Street development, Needham Crossing and Needham Heights commuter rail station (and perhaps other possible locations); and
4. monitoring and advocating for changes in the 59 and 52 bus routes to encourage reduction in vehicle traffic in and through Needham.

We would be happy to explore any of the above with the Select Board and the Town Manager (and such other persons as they may direct or desire) and look forward to our future discussions and cooperation.