



July 27, 2022

MBTA General Manager
10 Park Plaza
Boston, MA 02116

Dear MBTA General Manager,

The Somerville Pedestrian & Transit Advisory Committee (PTAC) is pleased to provide comment on and suggestions for the proposed Bus Network Redesign (BNR). The Committee is excited about and supportive of the goal to modernize the MBTA bus network. We appreciate the focus on providing higher frequency routes, on increasing connections across the region, and on equity. We also believe members of the Somerville community will benefit from increased connections to the Longwood Medical Area, South Boston, and more.

However, we have noted some areas for improvement in the draft BNR. Members of the Somerville community rely on MBTA bus service not only to transit across the region, but within our own city. We believe with some changes, the proposed network could better serve the residents of Somerville.

1. The proposed BNR provides a 3-seat ride between Clarendon Hill Towers and Union Square, and a 2-seat ride between Davis Square and Union Square. **We believe that Davis and Union, being two of Somerville's most popular destinations, should be connected with a 1-seat ride.** This would also give riders from Clarendon Hill a 2-seat ride to Union Square¹. Moving both endpoints of lines T39 and T96 to Davis rather than Porter would achieve this goal. We believe that this shift would better align with the BNR's focus on equity, given that Clarendon Hill Towers is one of Somerville's public housing complexes.
2. The proposed BNR has surprisingly few connections between Somerville neighborhoods and the new GLX stops. While we are aware that street grade is an important constraint on bus route design, we are also confident that the GLX will fundamentally reshape travel patterns in Somerville. Thus **we strongly encourage the MBTA to prioritize exploring ways to improve connections to the GLX.**
 - a. Per the proposed BNR redesign, the E-line branch provides bus connections only at the East Somerville and Tufts GLX stations. A small (but potentially high-impact) improvement could be to route the new 87 to stop at the Ball Square station. This would not only give Mystic River Development residents direct bus access to the GLX (a goal in line with the BNR's focus on equity), but would also increase access between Davis/Clarendon and Ball Square, a growing Somerville neighborhood.

¹ For members of the public reading this letter: An "[x]-seat ride" indicates the number of buses a rider would need to take to get from Point A to Point B on a certain route. So, having a 1-seat ride from Davis to Union means that riders would not need to change buses between those destinations.

- b. Another missing GLX connection that our existing network currently provides is from Winter Hill to Ball Square, then Davis. The proposed BNR map does provide a 2-seat ride from these areas to Davis, if one were to take the T101 to Medford St, and connect to the T96. While the walk from Medford St/Broadway to a GLX station is only around 10 minutes, the BNR should strive to make connections to GLX stations as easy as possible.
3. The proposed BNR slates the 90 bus to run at medium frequency (every 30 minutes or less). **We believe that the proposed 90 should instead be the T90, with high-frequency service of 15 minutes or less.** Considering the proposed removal of the 88 bus, making the 90 a high-frequency route would maintain the level of service currently provided along this critical corridor. Many Somerville residents depend upon bus service on Highland Ave, including Somerville Public High School students (who do not have City-provided school buses to rely on), and employees and patrons of City Hall, Somerville Public Library, and the plethora of businesses along the avenue. The 90 also serves the Capuano Early Childhood Center, which offers over 75% of pre-kindergarten spots in Somerville. Under the proposed BNR, Capuano would see a 20% decrease in bus service per hour; by making the 90 a high-frequency route, it would see the same level of service. Additionally, making the 90 a high-frequency route would provide increased service to Assembly Row, a fast-growing job center that is currently only slated to have one bus connection in the proposed BNR.
4. Somerville community members have long expressed desire for **better North/South connections within the City**, such as to facilitate safer travel near and through the “Corridor of Death” along Mystic Avenue and McGrath Highway. We are happy to see College Ave and Cross Street being used in the proposed BNR. While we recognize the difficulty posed by the slope of Somerville’s streets, the proposed BNR could take better advantage of the streets below 6% grade that would provide such connections. Additional streets include²:
 - a. Alewife Brook Parkway
 - b. Cedar Street
 - c. Lowell Street (between Medford Street and Hudson Street)
 - d. McGrath Highway
 - e. Temple Street
 - f. Willow Ave
5. Finally, **we would like to express concern about four current routes that are not included in the proposed BNR.** These routes provide critical service for riders that we feel may not be adequately accounted for in the proposed BNR.
 - a. 85 - currently provides service between Kendall/MIT and Spring Hill via Union Square, thus linking a job center with a growing commercial area and a dense residential area. In the proposed BNR, this 1-seat ride would become at least a two-seat ride with double the travel time.
 - b. 87 & 88 - both currently provide service between Lechmere and West Somerville via Somerville Ave and Highland Ave respectively. These routes are particularly important to older members of the Somerville community, such as those who live in West Somerville and need to access the elder services near Twin City Plaza. Under the proposed BNR, these community members would likely have a difficult time either taking the 90 down

² Cedar Street, McGrath Highway, and Temple Street are all also included in the Somerville Transit Equity Partnership (STEP)’s proposed “North/South Connector” concept route.

Highland Ave and traversing the steep hills to a GLX station, or taking the 4-seat trip to Lechmere.

- c. 89 - currently provides service from West Somerville and Davis Square to Sullivan Square via Broadway. We have already expressed our reasoning behind our concern with losing this bus, as well as some suggestions for remedy.

Along with these improvements, we hope that the MBTA will continue to **provide support for infrastructure upgrades** to improve the efficiency and usability of buses on Somerville streets. We also encourage the MBTA to continue its efforts towards investing in more flexible vehicles that can handle the steep and narrow terrain of many of Somerville's streets. Over the last couple of years, Somerville has invested significantly in street design projects that consistently prioritize bus lanes, transit primacy, and pedestrian infrastructure. The excellent progress that Somerville has made in these areas demonstrates how important transit access and quality are to our city and its residents. We look forward to continuing this work, and we hope the MBTA will support us with improved bus stops, signage, TSP equipment, and increased service on our vital routes.

We would like to thank the MBTA team for their commendable work on the BNR project. We look forward to continuing to work together.

Sincerely,

The Somerville Pedestrian and Transit Advisory Committee (PTAC)

Chair: Alessandra Seiter

Vice-Chair: Vitor Pamplona

Secretary: Carole Voulgaris

Ted Alexander

Ginny Alverson

Caroline Bodager

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