



## Town of Lexington, Massachusetts

### Transportation Advisory Committee

VINITA VERMA, CHAIR  
PAMELLA LYONS  
SALLY CASTLEMAN  
ELAINE DRATCH  
KUNAL BOTLA

To: Lexington School Committee & Select Board

Cc: James Malloy, Town Manager  
Dr. Julie Hackett, Superintendent of Schools  
Susan Barrett, Transportation Manager  
Bicycle Advisory Committee

Re: Proposed Change to Elementary School Start Time

October 14, 2022

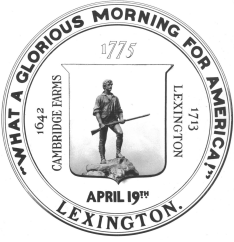
Dear School Committee and Select Board members,

We write to suggest an alternative strategy to the proposed change in start time for Lexington's elementary schools.

In our view, there is significant untapped potential in Lexington's existing public transit services. We urge the School Committee and Select Board to adopt a policy that actively encourages high school students to utilize the MBTA (routes 62 and 76) and Lexpress, especially after school and where service runs parallel to LPS school buses. This would minimize the usage of school buses and reduce pressure from the existing school bus system. Further, due to the low ridership of high school students in the afternoon, combining afternoon routes could be considered.

In addition, we strongly recommend encouraging safe biking and walking (Safe Routes to School) to all Lexington schools. Such a campaign would of course stress the complete flexibility in schedule that biking and walking afford, as well as health benefits and sustainability advantages.

To that end the Transportation Advisory Committee, Bicycle Advisory Committee, along with other stakeholders, over this winter, would develop an action plan to educate students and parents about the MBTA and Lexpress service availability, support a network to distribute the Student CharlieCards the schools currently have, identify a location in the Center for loading CharlieCards, along with other recommendations.



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The Town of Arlington and Belmont, and City of Cambridge, among others already encourage students to use public transit or bike and see high utilization and benefit for their students and communities.

Benefits to students and the Town, at a minimum, include:

- Potential for increased existing MBTA bus runs during rush hour provide frequent service to students participating in after school sports and other activities
- Reduced crowding on school buses in the mornings
- Potential consolidation of school bus routes after school which would free up some otherwise nearly empty buses for either cost savings or reallocation of buses to the middle or elementary schools
- Public transit offers more trip opportunities for busy families; biking and walking offer complete flexibility
- Reduced vehicular congestion at the schools, to everyone's benefit
- Offer increased independence to students
- Furthering the climate goals of the Town through reduced vehicle miles traveled

A campaign and actions encouraging the use of these alternative options would further make existing school buses available and prioritized to elementary schools and areas that can't access the schools by other means, while also reducing congestion from cars and school buses, as well as improving the public and sustainable transit utilization in Lexington. An additional benefit would be that more Lexpress service would be available to the community at large if ridership is high.

These strategies are supported by 128 Business Council's Tri Town Transit Study Peer Review (as attached below), as well as other partners and consultants.

Thank you for your time and attention.

## School-Municipal Transportation Collaboration Meeting: 2/26/2020

### Transportation Collaboration is Mutually Beneficial:

- **We all benefit with reduced congestion!**
  - School staff would likely rather work on lessons plans than directing traffic.
  - MBTA, Lexpress, and commuter shuttles get stuck in school traffic. An MBTA bus that is delayed in front of the high school, not only causes delay for Lexington riders, but for people waiting other places along the route.
- **When more kids walk or bike to school, they have improved physical and mental health.**
  - Addressing mental health is of great importance to the schools and Town. Physical activity and outdoor time is often cited as a means to enhance mental health.
  - Learning to get to/from school independently (and with friends), is a great skill that fosters independence and resiliency. For our older youth, learning to take transit is a great “adulthood” skill that will benefit them in the long-run.
- **When more kids walk, bike or take the transit options already available, it not only reduces congestion, but can reduce costs.**
  - We spend just over \$4 million on student transportation services each year in Lexington, with roughly half being for yellow school buses and the other half for special needs transportation. We spend about \$1.3 million annually for MBTA, Lexpress, and the public portion of the REV Alewife shuttle combined. These public services serve commuters, seniors, people with disabilities, and even students, yet all those groups request more frequency, routes, and hours of service.
  - Funds saved on school bus transportation could be re-invested to further improve walking, biking and transit options that benefit all.
- **Improvements to transit and infrastructure will enhance the schools ability to hire a diverse and talented workforce, furthering their Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion goals.**
  - Lexpress is currently the only transit option that can provide a connection from MBTA to the schools, yet the service is too infrequent for most school staff to rely on. Improving transit options will allow the schools to entice a broader array of applicants. Better transportation options would also allow the Town to recruit and retain employees, and allow both schools and Town to save money on parking and building out parking spaces.
- **As the Town/Schools seek electrification of fleets in the future, it only make sense to do so collaboratively. It would be inefficient not to.**
  - There is funding, infrastructure, training, contracts, and more that could be dealt with collaboratively that would provide greater benefit to all.
- **Viewing transportation holistically and collaborating together can help us to identify ways to possibly better utilize transportation funds to serve all, including students.**
  - We spend over \$5 million on transportation services each year in Lexington. Over \$4 million is just for student transportation. The other funds are spent on the MBTA, Lexpress, and the public portion of the REV Alewife shuttle. These public services serve commuters, seniors, people with disabilities, and even students, yet all those groups request more frequency, routes, and hours of service.

## Specific Asks:

- **Please add walking, biking and transit (MBTA & Lexpress) options to the LPS Transportation website & encourage use of these options when you do school bus mailings.**
  - The current website only discusses school bus transportation. Many schools promote walking, biking and transit.
  - The Town fields many calls about Student Charlie Cards, yet those can only be provided by middle and high schools. Please also include this on your website. We can assist with any language, if needed.
    - With Student Charlie Cards currently handled by your METCO staff only, it leaves an impression that the schools only promote MBTA use for METCO students. You should probably clarify this is for all students.
    - The schools can also promote the Youth Charlie Card for low-income young people who are no longer enrolled in school (i.e. as they graduate).
- **Please consider revising the school bus registration form so that it allows families to answer questions on why they are choosing the school bus and if it is for safety or convenience.**
  - Particularly for students who live within a half-mile of school, this would be critical information to have, but it is also of great use for those living 1-2 miles from school. If we better understand the barriers, we can work to rectify safety ones with the TSG.
- **Please work to promote walking and biking or other forms of active rolling/transportation amongst students, with Wellness staff and in collaboration with Town Health and Human Services departments.**
  - LPS could consider adopting the “Active Transportation” clause promoted by SRTS.
  - There are numerous resources from SRTS and other entities that help encourage active transportation from flyers that can be reproduced, to curriculum that can be incorporated into classrooms.
  - Promote walking school buses and bike trains. These will not only provide physical and mental health benefits for students, but they can build a stronger sense of community.
- **Please work with us to secure a bus shelter and improvements to the MBTA stop in front of the high school.**
  - Cars often park in this spot and it is dark and unsheltered for the students (often METCO students) who wait there.
- **Please help us inquire with METCO if there may be a way we can make use of deadhead trips between Boston/Lexington for commuters.**
  - If possible, this could also provide a revenue stream for METCO and may also allow for better service for METCO students, family, staff.
- **Please let’s find a time to share transportation contracts and review them to see how we may better work together. We have been asking for this for a long time.**
  - While working towards moving some dedicated school transit funds to public transit funds will take time, we need to start working together to better understand each other’s needs and specific contracts.



December 13, 2019

Superintendent Dr. Julie Hackett, Lexington Public Schools  
146 Maple Street, Lexington, MA 02420

James J. Malloy, Lexington Town Manager  
Town Office Building, 2nd Floor  
1625 Massachusetts Avenue  
Lexington, MA 02420

Lexington School Committee  
146 Maple Street, Lexington, MA 02420

Lexington Board of Selectman  
Town Office Building, 2nd Floor  
1625 Massachusetts Avenue  
Lexington, MA 02420

RE: Lexington Transportation Service Integration

Superintendent Dr. Hackett & Town Manager James J. Malloy,

My name is Monica G. Tibbits-Nutt, AICP, LEED AP BD+C, and I am the Executive Director of 128 Business Council. The Council is a transportation management association (TMA) and a non-profit regional transportation planning organization dedicated to alternative transportation and pro-sustainability solutions for the 128 West region. Our shuttles provide several hundreds of thousands of rides annually and connect major employers and communities to public regional transit locations, making commuting more productive and reducing congestion along Route 128 West and related roadways. This transportation solution enhances our region's economic vitality and attractiveness.

The Council has provided public transit options to the 128 Corridor for over 30 years. We were founded by employers and developers along Route 128 to connect better their tenants, residents, and

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employees to the employment and educational opportunities that these communities deserved. We have continued our mission of reducing congestion by partnering with these constituents and communities to fill the first/last mile gap that inhibits many residents of the Commonwealth from accessing the opportunities and services they need. Utilizing private sector investment, we have been able to continue to grow our shuttle programs and ridership in the face of declining national usage of public transit.

128 Business Council is invested in the Town of Lexington's transportation and sustainability future on a number of levels: The Town is a member of our transportation management association; we run one of our most successful shuttle programs (the REV Bus) within and through the Town of Lexington; and we have advised the Town on a range of transportation matters, both as part of its yearly TMA workplan and through discrete consulting contract. This past spring and summer, we completed an extensive Peer Review of the Tri-Town Efficiency & Regionalization Study completed by Foursquare. Then in September of this year, we brought a team (composed of myself, our Director of Operations, and another member of our Research & Development group) to complete a day-long, in-depth analysis of Lexington's current transportation options alongside Susan Barrett. Furthermore, we are currently undertaking an extensive, first-of-its-kind survey to collect specific point-to-point origin/destination data of a statistically-significant representation of the trips taken within Lexington, Waltham, and Bedford—the results of which will begin to be available in Spring 2020. Finally, 128 Business Council is invested in the Town's future simply as part of its long-term, non-profit mission to improve transportation options for everyone throughout the 128 Corridor.

As just mentioned, one of our more successful shuttle programs has been the REV Bus, which connects residents of the Town of Lexington to the MBTA Red Line service at Alewife Station. In addition to this essential community connection, we bring employees from the inner core out to the employment centers of Lexington and Bedford. It has been so successful that we have had to increase service hours to meet the demand.

The central mechanism that the Council has used over the last 30 plus years is partnerships. Partnerships between competing developers, competing companies, and competing Towns. These stakeholders are brought together by the Council to better understand the transportation issues, opportunities, and mechanisms for funding. Through our guidance, backed by quantitative and qualitative research, we have been able to pool the funds of these competing entities to create larger, more holistic systems that serve the residents, employees, and local businesses. These systems are

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frequent, predictable, and reliable bus services. Being a non-profit, we can leverage these funds to create world-class services that are entirely open to everyone.

*We strongly believe that these types of partnerships are the only opportunity the Commonwealth and its municipalities have for large-scale mode shift. And large-scale mode shift made possible through pooled interests is essential to easing the congestion on our roadways. Whether it is congestion on the way to work or school, it harms all of us.*

A concept that many regions have been testing, including Boston, is the idea of creating unified systems. So instead of parents commuting one way, students another, school staff another, all of these trips are pooled into a coordinated system. Larger-scale coordinated systems allow municipalities (and even entire regions) to create real public transit that is of a high enough quality to actually get commuters out of their single-occupancy vehicles. In turn, high-occupancy transportation options ease congestion on the roadways, give everyone more sustainable transportation options, and create a more sustainable funding mechanism for all involved.

The United States is one of the few countries in the world that segments its students from the rest of the public. The assumption that students need to be on a separate form of transportation—or even that their transportation needs to be *planned and paid for* separately—from their parents, teachers, administrators, and everyone living and working around them is finally beginning to be questioned by many planners across the United States. Let's just focus on teachers and administrators for a moment: Traditional American school bus systems exclude the teachers and administrators who need direct access to *the same destination* as their students. Many teachers and administrators actually lack access to any public transportation options—even as their school districts devote huge portions of their yearly budgets to transportation for their students, which is often underutilized. Better transportation options for teachers and administrators alone (without yet considering consolidation of transportation resources more generally) would create a much more equitable work environment.

Imagine a community where teachers didn't have to own cars, and where parents could commute *with* their children, rather than chauffeuring their children. Operating underutilized student-only transportation comes at a massive cost culturally, financially, environmentally, and equitably. In a time when many residents are struggling to afford to live, work, and educate their children, it is more important than ever for us as a community to work together to create transportation options for everyone.

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The Town of Lexington is currently rethinking much of its transportation system. As part of this re-envisioning, you have an opportunity to not just redraw lines on a map. You have an opportunity to create a public transit system that serves the community as a whole, at a financial cost significantly lower than what you are paying now.

Please accept our support for a more innovative and high-quality transportation solution. Let's build upon Lexington's preexisting history of a deep commitment to public transportation, while setting aside past assumptions about how transportation 'must' work and exploring all available options. Lexington can become a premier transportation community—a community that is better connected, more inclusive, and more innovative than any other town in the Commonwealth. Now is the time.

Please do not hesitate to let me know if I can be of any assistance. I appreciate your time and consideration in this matter.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Tibbits-Nutt', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Monica G. Tibbits-Nutt, AICP, LEED AP BD+C--Executive Director

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