



TOWN OF ARLINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING and
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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MEMORANDUM

To: Sandy Pooler, Town Manager

CC: Kelly Lynema, Acting Director, Department of Planning and Community Development
Michael Rademacher, Director, Department of Public Works

From: Daniel Amstutz, Senior Transportation Planner, Department of Planning and Community Development

Date: June 21, 2022

RE: MBTA Bus Stop Proposed Changes and Accessibility Improvements on Park Ave and Wachusett Ave

On December 22, 2020, the MBTA submitted a memo to the Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD) and Department of Public Works (DPW) about projects planned for Arlington as part of the MBTA Bus Stop Accessibility and Safety Improvement Program (BSASI).¹ The memo and package included 30% design plans for bus stop improvements along Pleasant Street as well as concept drawings for proposed accessibility improvements and stop changes along Park Ave and Wachusett Ave. Since the Pleasant Street plans were further along, Town staff initially reviewed and gathered feedback on this set of improvements, which led to Select Board action to approve the stop improvements and relocations on Pleasant Street at its June 9, 2021 meeting. Town staff have since reviewed the proposed accessibility improvements and changes to the bus stop network on Park Ave and Wachusett Ave, including conducting an engagement process with the community.

Based on staff and community feedback, the MBTA has revised its original proposal for changes to Park Ave and Wachusett Ave. Tables 1 & 2 present the MBTA's proposed stop changes and accessibility improvements along Park Ave and Wachusett Ave for Routes 62/76 and 78, respectively. The tables are color-coded to help the Board understand the changes:

- Green Highlight – stop to be improved for accessibility
- Yellow Highlight – stop to be removed and consolidated to a new stop
- Blue Highlight – proposed new stop
- Orange Highlight – stop proposed for elimination
- No Highlight – no change to this stop

In total, the MBTA proposes making the following changes:

- Improve accessibility at seven (7) bus stops

¹ <https://www.mbta.com/projects/bus-stop-accessibility-improvements>

- Remove six (6) bus stops, four along Park Ave/Park Circle and two along Wachusett Ave
- Consolidate and relocate three (3) bus stops into two (2) new locations
- No change to ten (10) existing bus stops

A map is provided as an attachment showing the proposed changes to the bus stop network on Park Ave and Wachusett Ave.

Table 1 - Bus stops along Route 62/76. Bus stops with an * are bus stops shared between routes 62/76 and 78.

Route 62/76	
Northbound/Outbound to Bedford VA	
Stop Location	Proposed Change
West Service Rd @ Bellington Street*	No Change
West Service Rd @ Park Ave*	Remove stop, consolidate to new stop
Park Ave @ Glenburn*	New Stop
Park Ave @ Cedar Ave*	Remove stop, consolidate to new stop
Park Ave @ Opposite Wachusett Ave*	Remove stop
Park Ave @ Park Circle	Improve stop accessibility
Park Ave @ Oakland Ave	No Change
Park Ave @ Florence Ave	Improve stop accessibility
116 Park Ave	Improve stop accessibility
Southbound/Inbound to Alewife Station	
Stop Location	Proposed Change
Park Ave @ Wollaston Ave	Improve stop accessibility
Park Ave @ Appleton Street	Remove stop
Park Ave @ Florence Ave	Improve stop accessibility
Park Ave @ Oakland Ave	No Change
Park Ave @ Prospect Ave	Remove stop, relocate to new stop
Park Ave @ Park Circle*	New Stop
Park Ave @ Wachusett Ave*	Remove stop
Park Ave @ Cedar Ave*	Improve stop accessibility
East Service Road @ Park Ave Shelter*	Improve stop accessibility

Table 2 - Bus stops along Route 78. Bus stops with an * are shared between routes 62/76 and 78.

Route 78	
Northbound/Outbound to Arlmont	
Stop Location	Proposed Change
West Service Rd @ Bellington Street*	No Change
West Service Rd @ Park Ave*	Remove stop, consolidate to new stop
Park Ave @ Glenburn*	New Stop
Park Ave @ Cedar Ave*	Remove stop, consolidate to new stop
Park Ave @ Opposite Wachusett Ave*	Remove stop

Park Circle @ Eastern Ave (same stop inbound/outbound)	No Change
Park Circle @ Park Ave (same stop inbound/outbound)	Remove stop
Park Ave @ Park Circle (same stop inbound/outbound)*	New Stop
Wachusett Ave @ Hillside Ave	Remove Stop
Wachusett Ave @ Oakland Ave	No Change
Wachusett Ave @ Florence Ave	No Change
Wachusett Ave @ Appleton Street	No Change
Southbound/Inbound to Harvard Station	
Stop Location	Proposed Change
Wachusett Ave @ Dow Ave	No Change
Wachusett Ave @ Florence Ave	No Change
Wachusett Ave @ Prospect Ave	No Change
Wachusett Ave @ Hillside Ave	Remove stop
Park Circle @ Eastern Ave (same stop inbound/outbound)	No Change
Park Circle @ Park Ave (same stop inbound/outbound)	Remove stop
Park Ave @ Park Circle (same stop inbound/outbound)*	New Stop
Park Ave @ Wachusett Ave*	Remove stop
Park Ave @ Cedar Ave*	Improve stop accessibility
East Service Road @ Park Ave Shelter*	Improve stop accessibility

After reviewing the proposed changes, public feedback received through a public meeting and survey, and comments from the Transportation Advisory Committee, the staff recommendation is for the Select Board to approve these bus stop changes as proposed. The remainder of this memo explains the purpose and goals of the changes, public outreach conducted, and comments received.

Background and Purpose of Bus Stop Changes

The MBTA has prioritized bus stops along Routes 62/76 and 78 for improvements due to one or more major access barriers identified through their Plan for Accessible Transit Infrastructure (PATI) program. The seven stops proposed for improvement in the MBTA’s proposal all have significant accessibility barriers based on the MBTA’s analysis. Accessibility improvements include but are not limited to sidewalk repair and replacement, installation of a concrete landing area between the sidewalk and curb, and curb ramp installation. In certain limited cases improvements can include pedestrian crossing upgrades and roadway geometry modifications.

At the same time the MBTA seeks to improve accessibility at the bus stops in their system, they also analyzed whether bus stops should be relocated or eliminated to improve service and safety. The MBTA and their consultant (McMahon Associates) performed an analysis based on

the following data to make their recommendations for eliminating stops:

- The number of boardings/alightings at the stop
- Distance between stops compared to their standard stop distance guidance
- Engineering or technical difficulty of upgrading a stop for accessibility
- Relative service improvement of routes by eliminating redundant or proximate stops
- Safety of transit users to be able to access a stop on foot

Three stops proposed for elimination will be replaced by two new stops. The consolidation and relocation of these stops is considered in relation to the above data. Any on-street parking spaces displaced by the relocated bus stops will be relocated to the locations of the current bus stops if there are no other restrictions in place (e.g., parking restriction because of a fire hydrant). In general, because several bus stops are proposed for elimination, it is expected that on-street parking capacity will not be affected or supply will be increased.

Public Outreach and Comments

DPCD worked with the MBTA and their consultants to conduct a virtual public community meeting on December 13, 2021, at 7:00 pm. A public survey was also circulated to the community at that time. Notification of the meeting and survey included abutter notification letters mailed in early December to more than 200 properties and emails were distributed to relevant committees and advocates. The letters and emails included details on the proposed changes on a map and in list form.

Eighteen people attended the December 13 public meeting, which was hosted by the Town and included presentations of the proposed bus stop network from the MBTA and McMahon Associates. Attendees at the meeting were generally opposed to the MBTA's proposal and raised several concerns, including:

- The steep topography on Park Ave makes it difficult for people to walk farther to a different bus stop
- The challenge of pedestrian crossings on Park Ave to get to a different bus stop due to high traffic speeds and volumes
- The inconvenience of eliminating bus stops and potential for pushing residents to drive more
- While lauding the MBTA's goals for greater accessibility, attendees argued that removing bus stops will undermine those goals

In addition, two residents with mobility and/or vision impairments noted that they regularly used one of the stops proposed for elimination, Park Circle @ Eastern Ave, and its elimination would create a hardship for them.

The public survey received 87 responses. The survey asked where respondents lived, their frequency of bus use, level of support for the MBTA's proposal, and any concerns they had about the proposal. While a small majority lived on Park Ave and Wachusett Ave, people responding to the survey lived in many parts of Arlington Heights including Appleton Street, Florence Ave, Fountain Road, George Street, and Renfrew Street. Forty-four percent of

responders ride bus routes 62/76 or 78 at least weekly, with another third ride these routes a few times a month. Support for the MBTA's proposal was mixed, with almost half (47%) opposed to the proposal, and only 41% supportive. The largest concern was the loss of a nearby bus stop (65%) followed by service or bus routing impacts (41%). Other concerns raised included pedestrian safety and ADA access to stops that would remain; increased distance between stops; sidewalk and bus stop snow clearance; potential loss of service frequency; and traffic impacts from bus stop relocations. A summary of the survey data is provided as an attachment to this memo.

Based on the public comments and concerns from Town staff, the MBTA has agreed to retain three stops initially proposed for elimination:

- Park Ave @ Oakland Ave (Inbound)
- Park Ave @ Oakland Ave (Outbound)
- Park Circle @ Eastern Ave (Inbound/Outbound)

In addition to retaining the Park Circle @ Eastern Ave bus stop, Route 78 will continue to traverse Park Circle before turning onto Wachusett Ave, a diversion which was originally proposed for elimination along with the Park Circle bus stops. The above stops will not be changed as part of this project, but in a future project there are plans to make accessibility improvements to them.

Tables 1 & 2 at the beginning of the memo indicate the final proposed list of stops to be removed, added, and improved.

Staff Recommendation & Next Steps

The staff recommendation is that the Board approve the bus stop network for Park Ave and Wachusett Ave as presented in this memo. Town staff have worked with the MBTA to modify their initial proposal to retain some bus stops in response to concerns from staff and Arlington Heights residents. The project will improve accessibility for many of these stops, which are considered high priority.

If the Select Board approves these changes the MBTA will develop construction designs for these changes with further input from Town staff and will work with DPW on the construction management of the MBTA's contractor once construction is ready to begin.

I would be glad to discuss this further, should you have any questions about this proposal.

Attachments:

- MBTA/McMahon Associates Select Board Presentation for June 27, 2022
- Maps of Proposed and Future Bus Stop Network on Park Ave and Wachusett Ave
- Overview of Proposed Stop Changes on Park Ave and Wachusett Ave
- Park Ave and Wachusett Bus Stop Changes Community Survey
- DPCD Notification Letter of Park Ave-Wachusett Ave Bus Stop Changes