

Somerville Community Path (1990's --)

During the Red Line Extension from Harvard to Porter and Davis Squares, completed in 1984, the MBTA built the tunnel from Davis Square to Alewife under the abandoned right-of-



way of the Central Massachusetts Railroad. While there were calls to gift the land above the tunnel to adjacent property owners, many residents fought for (and eventually won) the construction of a public path on this land. The resulting Alewife Linear Park connects Davis Station with the Minute Man Bikeway (the busiest rail-trail in the United States). In the 1990s, activists led by the Friends of the Community Path converted a stretch of the same right-of-way that extended east to Cedar Street into a rail trail, forming the Somerville Community Path. While their advocacy has since expanded the Path to Lowell Street, plans are in the works to extend it even further -- along the Lowell Commuter Rail Tracks as part of the GLX Project. If completed, the path extension would reach residents in the eastern portion of the City, connecting them to Davis Square and way beyond, to the leafier suburbs terminating at Bedford.

DAVIS SQUARE

Similar to many other Somerville neighborhoods, transit access in Davis Square developed in the mid-1800s. In 1856-57 horse car railway lines were extended along Mass. Ave. from Harvard Square to Arlington. In 1863, the Somerville Horse Railroad Company connected Union Square with West Somerville via extended tracks along Somerville Ave. and Elm St. In 1871



the Lexington & Arlington Branch of the Boston & Maine Railroad extended steam rail service to a Davis Square station named **West Somerville**. This explosion of public transit options stimulated rapid residential and commercial development in the late 1800s. However, the re-routing of the rail line and post-WWII exodus to the suburbs, as well as disinvestment in urban

centers caused this Station to close and the area to slide into decline. This was not to last. Built with funds redirected from the abandoned Inner Belt Project (a proposed highway looping through Cambridge and Fenway), the MBTA Red Line Extension from Harvard to Alewife in the early 1980s included a stop in Davis Square, Somerville's first on the MBTA rapid transit system. This spurred a renewed investment in the area, and helped create the vibrant Davis Square of today.

UNION SQUARE

Future Union Square GLX Stop

Union Square developed into a major commercial district due to its location at an important crossroad in Eastern Somerville with three prime



thoroughfares based upon 17th and 18th century trade routes -- Washington Street, Bow Street and Somerville Avenue (formerly Charlestown Lane and Milk Row). The first railroad lines were introduced in the mid-1800's (Boston and Lowell in 1835, and the Fitchburg in 1836), with stations on Webster Street (near Prospect Street) and Kent Street. Then in 1845, horse car service was established between Union and Harvard Squares. Each addition offered fast, efficient, and dependable public transit and spurred rapid growth in the population, commercial businesses and industry. However, as noted earlier, changing transportation and consumer trends caused train stations to close by the mid-1900s, and an associated decline in the local economy. The Fitchburg railway eventually became an MBTA Commuter Rail Line. Despite many proposals to restore a Union Square stop, they have been nixed by anticipated unpopularity with other riders on the line.

The MBTA, however, finally identified a stop for a station on the GLX, to be built next to the



current Fitchburg Commuter Rail Tracks pass under Prospect Street, near the center of the Square. Unlike other stops on the

GLX, it will be served by the E versus D Branch, and will serve as the branch's northern terminus.

Tracking the T: Restoring Public Transit in Somerville

Sunday, October 6th, 2019



Sponsored by the Somerville Historic Preservation Commission (SHPC) and the Somerville Bicycle Committee (SBC).

More info, visit www.somervillema.gov/historicpreservation and www.somervillebikes.org

Credits: Somerville Police Dept. for enthusiastically escorting us; Brochure: Brandon Wilson (Director SHPC) and Morgan Griffiths (intern); Route Map and Cue Sheet: Michael Weber (SBC); Speakers: Justin Moeling; Ellin Reisner, Brad Rawson, and Wig Zamore. Post Ride Reception: El Potro in Union Square. A full map and turn-by-turn cue sheet are printed on a separate sheet.

Mayor Joseph A. Curtatone

Welcome to our 18th Annual Historic Bike Ride!

This year the theme is "transit," and its past, present, and future in Somerville. While it may not seem like it today, this City was once rich in public transportation. In 1900 alone, street cars stopped 88 times daily in Union Square, and by 1910, passenger trains made 9 different stops in Somerville! By the mid-1900s, however, social and economic changes, including the rising popularity of the automobile, creation of the Federal Highway System, declining investment in urban areas, and the migration of many residents to the outer suburbs caused the number of street car lines and railway stops in the City to dwindle, while allowing the development of McGrath Highway to cut a swath through Somerville's urban fabric. This led to a new, auto-centric era in the City's history.

The first rapid transit line to re-enter the City after its mid-century transit blues was the Red Line, with the construction of the Davis Square station in 1984. This was followed by the Orange Line, with completion of the Assembly Square Station in 2014, the first new stop in Greater Boston in over three decades!

In 1990, the State agreed to extend the Green Line into Somerville to offset the high increase in air pollution brought to

the City by the "Big Dig" project burying the Central Artery. Despite this, inaction at the state level caused the City of Somerville with others to file a lawsuit against the State, legally binding it to extend the Green Line by 2006. While the extension has been plagued by delays and budgetary problems, the Dept. of Transportation (DOT) expects to complete it by December 2021. When opened, the Green Line Extension (GLX) combined with the existing Davis Square (Red Line) and Assembly Square (Orange Line) stations, will help usher in a return to the connected, transit rich urban fabric that Somerville once knew. ONWARD!

CENTRAL HILL

START: City Hall, 93 Highland Ave. (1852)

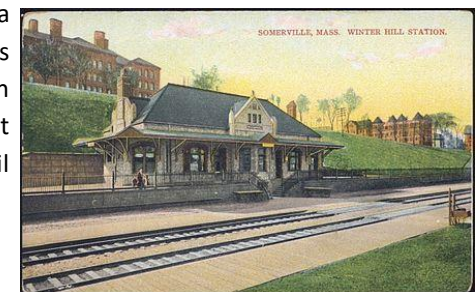
City Hall first served as the community's high school until town offices were relocated from Union Square to the 2nd floor in 1867. Somerville incorporated as a City in 1872 and various additions were made in 1896 and 1902. A more substantial enlargement in 1923-24 led to its present configuration. Now housing a mix of municipal departments on 4 levels, this is where many great ideas begin to percolate and are executed wherever possible. (www.somervillema.gov)



GILMAN SQUARE/MAGOUN SQUARE

Future Green Line Station at Gilman Square

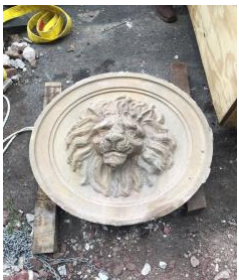
The historic development of Gilman Square was in large part due to transit. In 1850, the Boston and Lowell Railroad opened the **Winter Hill Station** in the area, which had two successive buildings. The first, a wooden structure, was located on the north side of the B & L's right of way. It served until



the late 1880s, when a stone depot was built on the south side of the line. The Winter Hill Station stimulated a wave of property subdivision, causing the surrounding area to grow. However, passenger service to the station declined as the 20th century progressed, due to the increasing popularity of the automobile and a shrinking urban population. In 2008, the MBTA announced that the GLX Project through Medford and Somerville would include a stop at Gilman Square, close to the former site of the Winter Hill Station. As with each new transit station, it is expected to stimulate a host of new development in the area, which the City is working with the neighbors to help shape. ([The Gilman Square Station Area Plan](#))

The Homans Building (358 Medford Street)

This art deco building was completed in 1929. It originally housed Monarch's Finer Foods, a grocery company whose logo featured the head of a lion. So central was this lion to Monarch's identity that a stone replica of its likeness was attached to the building façade. Monarch's went out of business in the 1960s, and in 1999, the City of Somerville acquired the building for a possible Annex, with storage use in the interim. Determined, however, to be structurally unsound, the building was demolished in 2018 as part of the GLX construction. The SHPC required as a condition that the stone lion's head be saved and a backup cast made of it. Tentative plans are to place the head in a new park next to the Gilman T stop and near to the former site. ([Boston.com](#))



Future Magoun Square Station near Somerville Junction Park

Opened close to Central Street, Somerville Junction was one of several Boston and Lowell Railroad stations within the City. It marked the spot where, in 1871, a railway extension to Arlington and Lexington split from the main Boston and Lowell Line. This extension would also be used by the Central Massachusetts Railroad, which became part of the B & L RR in 1886.



During its peak, Somerville Junction saw close to 50 trains a day! The station, however, closed in 1927 when passenger rail service to Davis Square (now the Somerville Community Path) ended. The main station building remained standing until 1930.

With the creation of the Somerville Community Path in the late 1990s and early 2000s, there was renewed interest in this abandoned right-of-way. In 2008, the former location of the station at Woodbine and Centre Streets became Somerville Junction Park. It is not too far from the planned location of the future **Magoun Square GLX stop**, to be built just a few blocks to the west, by the Lowell Street Bridge and close to major new residential developments. ([2008 Bike Tour brochure](#) , [OSPDCD Parks and Open Space](#) , [Community Path History](#), [Lowell Station Plan](#))

ASSEMBLY SQUARE

Assembly Square Orange Line Station

In 2014, the MBTA opened Assembly Square as the first new rail transit station in their system since 1987. It resulted from a Conservation Law Foundation lawsuit against the State, and years of negotiation between the City, activist citizens involved with an organization known as the Mystic View Task Force, and several state agencies. Developers with major land holdings in the area contributed significant funding as part of the legal settlement for the \$29 million station, as well as for bike facilities and expanded open space. As a central component of the area's redevelopment, the stop further effectively connects Somerville to Boston, enhances public access to the site, and notably decreases automobile usage and air pollution.



MEDFORD

The Cradock Bridge

While not directly related to rail transit, the Cradock Bridge has served as key transportation infrastructure in the region. Built as a wooden toll bridge in 1637, it attracted many travelers going on

foot between Salem and Boston because until 1787, it was the only way to cross the Mystic River, except to ford it. Paul Revere used the Mystic Bridge during his famous ride on April 18, 1775 to cross into Medford and warn Captain Isaac Hall of the British. In 1857, it was renamed the Cradock Bridge, after Matthew Cradock, a London businessman and first Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Company. While the current bridge has been rebuilt and rehabilitated several times (as recently as 2018), it still stands in much the same location as close to 400 years ago, and provides a key access point to Medford Square. ([Medfordhistorical.org](#))



Proposed Route 16/Mystic Valley Parkway GLX Station and Terminus

In 2008, the state of Massachusetts considered creating a terminus for the GLX in the Medford Hillside neighborhood, where the Lowell Commuter Rail tracks cross Route 16 (Mystic Valley Parkway). This plan, however, was soon abandoned due in part to major overruns of time and money for the whole GLX Project, and the terminus was scaled back to College Avenue, near Tufts University. While this drew criticism from many others in Medford and Somerville, the State held firm. In 2011, however, the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) allocated funds to create the stop once the rest of the line was created. Budget shortfalls, however, soon caused the MPO to reallocate this funding to the main project. While the Route 16 station currently remains unfunded, it is still in the state plan and will undergo environmental review. If built, the station would be within a 10 minute walk from the homes of over 10,000 people. ([Cambridgeday](#), [wikipedia](#) [STEP](#))



BALL SQUARE

Future Ball Square Green Line Station

Similar to Gilman Square, Ball Square was also once a stop along the Boston and Lowell Railroad where a



freight line ran in 1835. The first of these stations opened on Broadway in the mid-1800's. Old maps show that the station changed names twice: once to **Willow Bridge** by 1875; and then to **North Somerville** by the late 1890s. With the closure of the Tufts Brickyards in the 1880's, and the explosion of street car lines in the City, the Ball Square area began to develop more rapidly. The increasing prevalence, however, of the first streetcar lines in Somerville in the late 19th century, followed by a significant increase in automobile ownership during the post-WWII era, led to a decline in passenger rail traffic. In 1958, the Public Utilities Commission eliminated service to the North Somerville, as well as to the Tufts College and Medford Hillside stations.

Rail connection will return to Ball Square upon completion of the GLX, which includes a new light rail station in the heart of the Square, providing a direct link between this neighborhood and other parts of Somerville, as well as Greater Boston. Planning for more transit-oriented development in the Square has already begun with input from the neighbors, and local businesses who are especially looking forward to the re-opening of the Broadway bridge closed for a full year of GLX construction. ([wikipedia](#), [Map 1](#), [map 2](#), [Ball Square NBHD Plan](#))

Thank you for participating in this 2019 Bike Ride!

We welcome your feedback and ideas for future tours and themes!

