



December 9, 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 the revised network map of the Bus Network Redesign. Since the initial bus network proposal was released in May 2022, we have engaged in many conversations with MBTA representatives, City of Somerville staff, and Somerville community members to understand how the initial proposal would affect current and would-be transit users in Somerville. Those conversations were critical in shaping [the recommendations we shared on the initial proposal in our July 2022 letter](#), and the comments that follow in this letter.

PTAC considers the revised network map to be a significant improvement over the initial proposal. At the regional level, the revised network map still increases bus service by 25%, doubles the number of high-frequency corridors, and focuses on providing service in communities that have been historically underserved by public transit. In Somerville, the MBTA has made impactful changes to the bus routes serving our city. It is clear the MBTA has meaningfully engaged with the over 6,400 public comments made since the summer about proposed route changes in the Somerville/Charlestown sub-area.<sup>1</sup> With the initial proposed network, we were concerned that while bus service from Somerville to other parts of the region was estimated to increase by 44%, bus service within our own city was estimated to increase by a mere 4%. The revised network map is estimated to increase service within Somerville by 32% above pre-COVID levels — a huge improvement from the initial proposed network. This investment in intra-city transit service is critical to achieving Somerville's mobility and climate goals, especially in addressing a key finding of the [Citywide Parking & Curb Use Study](#) that far more Somerville residents use personal vehicles for running errands than they do for commuting (p. 8). Ensuring adequate bus service between Somerville's commercial areas is vital in lessening car dependency and shifting to a more sustainable, equitable, and accessible model of transportation in our city. The revised network map gets us closer to that goal.

In our letter on the initial bus network proposal, PTAC made nine distinct recommendations. We are very happy to see the majority of these recommendations addressed in the revised network map. We do have additional recommendations on the revised network map, and look forward to continued engagement with the MBTA and the City of Somerville on solutions. Our top two recommendations on the revised network map are:

1. **Make the 90 a high-frequency route** (detailed in points 4 and 9 below).
2. **Use the MBTA's new last-mile gap program to break the isolation of Mystic Ave and provide additional north-south connections, including to the remaining two unconnected GLX stations at Magoun and Gilman Squares** (detailed in points 2 and 6 below).

All of our recommendations on the initial proposal are outlined below, along with commentary on how they are addressed in the revised network map. Concerns and suggestions for additional changes are **bolded**.

1. *Davis Square and Union Square should be connected via a one-seat ride, while also connecting Clarendon Hill and Union Square with at most a two-seat ride.*
  - a. With the restoration of the 87, Clarendon Hill is connected to Union Square via Davis Square with a one-seat ride. This restoration maintains the critical connection between the low-income and older residents of Clarendon Hill and important services like Market Basket and Twin City Plaza (the latter because the 87 continues from Union Square to Lechmere). It also maintains the connection between two of Somerville's most popular destinations. **PTAC is, however, eager to see this route operate at a**

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<sup>1</sup> Public comments on the Somerville/Charlestown sub-area comprise over one-third of the 20,000 total comments the MBTA received on the initial bus network proposal ([Sarah Betancourt on Twitter](#)).

**higher frequency in the long-term given its popularity and its service to an environmental justice community.**

2. *Connections to GLX stations should be prioritized, especially between Mystic Ave and Ball Square.*
  - a. The initial bus network proposal provided connections to two out of six of Somerville's new GLX stations: East Somerville and College Ave/Tufts. The revised network map maintains these station connections while adding connections at Ball Square and Union Square, leaving only the Gilman Square and Magoun Square stations without bus connections. **In the long-term, we encourage the MBTA and the City of Somerville to explore options for bus connections to these remaining stations, such as with the last-mile gap program discussed below.**
  - b. While PTAC appreciates other changes made to the 89 (discussed below), because the 89 is no longer proposed to serve Mystic Ave, residents of the Mystic River Development and surrounding neighborhood are left out of benefitting from the new connection with Ball Square station. The only direct connections Mystic Ave has in the revised network map are to Medford Center and Sullivan Square, leaving the neighborhood largely isolated from areas of Somerville that aren't located adjacent to major highways. **Given the neighborhood's proximity to some of the most dangerous corridors in Somerville, its status as an environmental justice community, and its historical isolation from the rest of the city, PTAC encourages the MBTA to better integrate Mystic Ave into the bus network.**
  - c. **PTAC encourages the MBTA to revisit the termination points of the T47 and T96**, currently located just west of the East Somerville station. Slightly extending these lines past McGrath Hwy down Washington St would provide a direct connection with the station, and prevent riders from having to navigate a challenging pedestrian situation at the underpass. PTAC also sees potential for the T47 to extend all the way to Assembly Square, providing a high-frequency route parallel to the 85. If it would allow for another route to be higher frequency, particularly the 90, PTAC would even support replacing the new 85 altogether with an extended T47.
3. *Winter Hill and Davis Square should be directly connected, ideally via the Ball Square GLX station.*
  - a. With the revised 89, Winter Hill and Davis Square are directly connected via Ball Square. This revised route adds a GLX station connection and, with its termination point at Sullivan Square, provides a direct connection between West Somerville and Sullivan Square (discussed below).
  - b. The revised 89 also restores bus service along the full length of Broadway, where the City of Somerville has installed bus-priority infrastructure. In our letter on the initial network proposal, PTAC expressed our hope that the MBTA would continue to foster a robust partnership with the City of Somerville by providing efficient, reliable bus service where the City has invested in street design projects that prioritize bus lanes, transit primacy, and pedestrian infrastructure. PTAC sees evidence of this partnership in the reutilization of the Broadway bus lane.
4. *The 90 should be a high-frequency route.*
  - a. PTAC appreciates the shortening of the 90 to run from Clarendon Hill to Assembly Square via Highland Ave, allowing for 20-minute headways between 6:00 am and 10:00 pm. However, we remain unconvinced that anything less than a high-frequency route will be able to adequately connect Somerville community members to such a critical corridor as Highland Ave. Community members in West and East Somerville alike depend on the 90 to reach key destinations like Somerville High School, City Hall, the Central branch of the Somerville Public Library, Somerville Hospital, and many storefronts. We have heard in particular from high school students and parents that it is already difficult to get to school on time or catch the bus after school to get home at a reasonable hour, even with both the 90 and 88 running with 20- to 30-minute headways. A large part of this difficulty seems to stem from the routes' inability to meet high levels of ridership along this corridor; for example, parents have shared anecdotes of their children waiting at their bus stops only to be passed by the 90 because it was too full. Clearly there is already high demand for frequent bus service along Highland Ave in order to meet the needs of Somerville community members. **PTAC urges the MBTA to make the 90 a high-frequency route, as we did in our letter on the initial network proposal.**
5. *More than one route should serve Assembly Square.*
  - a. In the revised network map, Assembly Square is served by three routes: the 85, the 90, and the 113. These routes provide direct connections between Assembly Square and Longwood Medical Area via Union Square, Clarendon Hill via Davis Square, and Chelsea — connections that open up myriad possibilities for employment and leisure alike.
6. *Additional north-south connections should be made within Somerville.*
  - a. The revised network map includes additional and more frequent routes that run north-south through Somerville, including on College Ave, Cross St, and Grand Union Blvd. However, these corridors were already leveraged in the initial network proposal, so the revised network map does not provide north-south service in any new areas. In fact, with the lost connection between Mystic Ave and Davis Square via College Ave, the revised network map has removed a meaningful north-south connection. The revised network map does include several routes that leverage McGrath Hwy and Alewife Brook Pkwy,

but the routes only run briefly on those roads and seem to leverage them primarily as turnaround points rather than as transitways. **PTAC encourages the MBTA to revisit the creation of new north-south connections in Somerville, leveraging such roads below 6% grade as Cedar St, Lowell St (between Medford St and Hudson St), Temple St, and Willow Ave, and/or providing meaningful service on McGrath Hwy and Alewife Brook Pkwy.** Providing service on McGrath Hwy and Alewife Brook Pkwy could be especially powerful within a Vision Zero framework, allowing for front-door pick-up and drop-off to popular destinations instead of requiring pedestrians to cross these dangerous roadways.

- b. If new north-south connections in Somerville are not possible within the MBTA's existing service model, **PTAC encourages the City of Somerville to consider submitting a proposal to the MBTA's new program to support areas in the region with last-mile gaps to transit by supplementing buses with smaller vehicles.** Because the grade and width of many of Somerville's streets have long been barriers to providing more north-south bus service, PTAC sees this program as a promising alternative. Any proposals should include additional direct connections with Mystic Ave, including down College Ave, McGrath Hwy, and/or Temple St. Such proposals should also prioritize connections with the GLX stations that remain disconnected from bus service in the revised network map, namely Gilman Square and Magoun Square.
7. *West Somerville and Lechmere should be directly connected.*
    - a. As discussed above, the restored 87 provides a direct connection between West Somerville (Clarendon Hill) and Lechmere via Davis Square and Union Square.
  8. *West Somerville and Sullivan Square should be directly connected.*
    - a. Also as discussed above, the revised 89 provides a direct connection between West Somerville (Davis Square) and Sullivan Square via Ball Square and Winter Hill.
  9. *Spring Hill and Kendall/MIT should be directly connected via Union Square.*
    - a. With the new 85, Union Square and Kendall/MIT are directly connected, with additional route connections to Assembly Square, East Somerville, Boston University, and the Longwood Medical Area. While this route does not immediately serve the Spring Hill neighborhood, Spring Hill residents can connect to the 85 via several lines for a two-seat ride. Making the 90 a high-frequency route, as discussed above, would make this transfer even more doable.

PTAC would like to reiterate our gratitude for the impactful changes the MBTA has made to the revised network map, the meaningful engagement they have had with the thousands of public comments submitted since the summer, and the huge amount of work they have put into the entire Bus Network Redesign project. We support the MBTA's continued efforts to hire additional bus operators to ensure this project comes to fruition. We are thankful for the continued collaboration between the PTAC, the City of Somerville, and the MBTA.

Sincerely,  
The Somerville Pedestrian & Transit Advisory Committee (PTAC)

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