
CRA OPPORTUNITIES

1 message

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Wed, May 15, 2024 at 8:59 AM

To: Planning@cambridgeredevelopment.org

To : The Board of the Cambridge Redevelopment Authority**From : Stephen Henry Kaiser, Citizen Engineer and Historian**

Thank you for initiating and continuing the practice of hybrid meetings, allowing for attendance both in person and on Zoom. As is fairly well known, I have encountered great difficulties with Zoom when attempting to speak before the Board, most notably several months ago when I stayed on-line for over an hour -- unable to unmute myself. At that point I determined never to try to speak through Zoom again.

Zoom has several deficiencies. It is not self-explanatory, and there are no help screens. Worst of all, if a person learns the trick of unmuting reliably, Zoom like other companies will seek to "upgrade" their system, with the common result of a loss in familiarity. New tricks must be learned to replace the old ones.

At one point I had some ideas for improvements, so I attempted to communicate with Zoom. I found them on permanent mute except for sales pitches. When I had a question, they offered me videos to watch. I felt I was trapped by the computer nerds, and the only thing to do was to refuse to participate in the Zoom game.

The hybrid meeting allows freedom for conscientious objectors to Zoom, while allowing access for people who may prefer Zoom. I have not taken advantage of this opportunity because the agendas of recent months have not included issues of transportation, especially Grand Junction. To no avail I have sought a status report on planning for Grand Junction transit. In the future, Board agendas should include an item for monthly updates on planning.

I wish we could find a solution to the uses and abuses of PowerPoint, but that is an argument for another day. It is my understanding that the U.S. Army has banished PowerPoint presentations.

The recent good news is that the MBTA General Manager Eng has announced an agreement with the commuter rail contractor to provide battery-powered trains on the Fairmount line, with headways of 20 minutes. This goal compares well with current 10-minute headways on the Red Line. For the first time in many years, imaginative, indeed inventive ideas are coming out of the MBTA.

Provision of such trains would mean battery-powered trains could also make the shuttle move between South and North Stations along Grand Junction using cleaner and quieter equipment. East Cambridge has historically opposed commuter rail service along Grand Junction, because of noise and air pollution concerns. Battery-powered trains would give an example of how clean and quiet transit service can be operated in the corridor.

Meanwhile, plans for I-90 in Allston have reached a difficult stage. The current design has twelve-lanes of travel on the Boston shoreline of the Charles River, plus four railroad tracks. This design has the potential for creating another Scheme Z river uglification, when in 1990 state road plans encountered extensive public and agency opposition. Current plans do not have practical designs for transit and path connections along the Grand Junction corridor.

The Board should consider alternatives to current plans to continue diesel train operations along Grand Junction, including the possibility for electric bus operations that could connect into bus lane systems in Cambridge and Allston. The Allston neighborhood is today transit- deficient, and no quality transit plan has been developed to handle the heavy commuter load from expected Harvard-related development and other new development in Allston. A focus of attention on Grand Junction will help improve transportation planning in Allston, and could extend into Kendall Square, North Point and Charlestown for important circumferential service.

I note with some regret the resignation of Chris Bator. I well remember a discussion before the Board several years ago upon the death of former MBTA General Manager Robert Kiley at age 80. Chris was familiar with Bob Kiley and his fascinating career experience of working for the C.I.A. in the 1960s seeking to have national student groups become more patriotic and supportive of the war in Vietnam. An upstart radical magazine called Ramparts did an expose on the C.I.A activities and blew Bob's cover. So he encamped to Boston working in Kevin White's mayoral office at City Hall. His reputation as a superb administrator spread quickly. In 1975 newly elected Governor Michael Dukakis called in Kiley and offered him the job of MBTA General Manager. Kiley cautioned that he knew nothing about mass transit. Dukakis repeated that he wanted Kiley as MBTA General Manager, more of a demand than a suggestion.

Kiley accepted and helped the MBTA survive the great blizzard of 1978, when over two feet of snow blocked in hundred of cars on Route 128. The Governor declared an emergency and announced a ban on all use of private cars. (My street in Cambridgeport, Hamilton Street, had snow drifts four feet deep). People were walking from Kenmore Square to Harvard Square and were skiing along Charles River ice.

After a week of a static city, the Governor announced the City would be back to business on Monday morning. Roads were still not fully cleared and parking was difficult, but the message went to the MBTA to be ready to move masses of people. That day the MBTA carried a record number of passengers, but in the process burned out its commuter rail Buddliners. Service changed dramatically, as new diesel locomotives were purchased with long passenger cars -- similar to Amtrak service. That basic service is still in operation today, almost 50 years later.

I wish Chris Bator well in the future, and encourage the Board to become as focused on transportation planning as it can possibly be. I urge Chris to prepare an oral or written history of his memories about Bob Kiley and what he was able to achieve, before our memories fade.

**Stephen Henry Kaiser
Hamilton Street**

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