

The summary report from the October 2010 visioning sessions had some common themes from all the working groups. One theme that seemed to concern many is Acton's traffic situation. Traffic was also a top concern from the town survey.

There have been many suggestions on how to reduce traffic in Acton – a number of them were mentioned in the email announcing this meeting.

While these suggestions are well meaning, they are “Acton-centric” or simply not effective in addressing the main cause of Acton's traffic woes – **traffic that originates and terminates outside of Acton.**

There have been repeated studies of Acton's road traffic and the results continue to have the same answers:

1. “80% of commuter traffic originates and terminates outside of Acton.” This means that Acton can have all the local bus service and bike paths it wants but they will do nothing to alleviate auto trips that do not originate or terminate in Acton.
2. “Commuter traffic has been steadily rising since 1990”. When asked several years ago by my daughter, “what has changed most during the time you have lived in Acton?” Jamie Eldridge immediately said “Traffic”. It is clear that Acton traffic has continued to rise and will continue to do so unless practical alternatives are available to the region's commuters.

What is a practical alternative to the single occupant auto commuter? **Regional Mass transit with local “Last mile” connections to destinations.**

A critical analysis of the traffic situation in Acton reveals that Acton cannot solve this problem by itself – all of the surrounding communities are suffering from the same chronic traffic conditions that Acton is. A **regional mass transit solution** that serves all of the affected communities is the most practical, town-character-preserving solution available.

How can this be accomplished? By (re)using transportation corridors we already have (see proposed transit map).

By expanding to include a railcar or light-rail-based transit line with the proposed Freeman Trail (turning it into the “Freeman Transportation Corridor”), we get all the benefits of a recreational trail and the benefits of a non-road based, environmentally friendly, year-round regional transportation corridor that gives commuters a real alternative to driving and the businesses the opportunity to increase worker productivity.

Note that this corridor is consistent with Transit Oriented Development which is favored by the Boston MPO as part of the Smart Growth initiative. The corridor is in close

proximity to many residential and commercial areas as seen on page 3 and 4 of the attached document.

To answer some of the points proposed in the email announcing this meeting:

1. **“Are Actonians willing to use more public transportation if it were offered?”**
From the forum and meetings I have attended, it appears to me that they are but only if it gets them to where they need to go quickly and reliably and the public transportation system has enough connectivity. To wit – The Fitchburg line only provide East-West connectivity between Boston and Fitchburg. The circumferential line proposed intersects with nearly all the commuter lines enabling transfers between lines outside of Boston.
2. **And what about those who are unable to drive?** The local Acton bus service can provide the “First Mile” connection to transit to destinations outside of Acton.
3. **Are there enough people clustered in the right places to make a public transportation system viable?** This question does not capture the full questions about what makes a public transportation system “viable” or “needed.” If this question was asked in teh 1950’s to justify the construction of Interstate 495, it would never have been built. Yet look at the usage now of Interstate 495. It was built and the drivers came – so much now that it is over capacity. Remember that the appeal of the Interstates was that it vastly improved road interconnectivity..until the interstates themselves became overloaded. Population density is not playing a role in interstate congestion – commuters are! Regional non-road based transit will provide a choice for commuters...as well as local residents near transit like the interstates once did.
4. **Will investment in bike paths and sidewalks help alleviate traffic?** This solution is highly unlikely to alleviate traffic in out region:

It is unrealistic to expect the vast majority of commuters to:

- a. ride bikes to work over distances greater than a few miles;
- b. ride bikes to work and arrive sweaty (hot weather), soaked (rainy weather) or frostbitten (cold weather);
- c. attempt to ride a bike during winter months when ice can be encountered at any time
- d. take further time away from their families since commuting by bike over any significant distance will require earlier departures and later arrivals from and to home.
- e. Take a job simply because it is easy to walk to or bike to.

However, investments in this infrastructure combined with building a long distance transit system will encourage people to use the transit system – especially if the transit system has accommodations for bicycles.

How can we pay for this system? By creating tax incentives for relocating and existing companies to directly support construction and operation of transit infrastructure, it is a win-win. Companies get their employees to work less-stressed and on time. The region gets significant financial assistance in building and operating a transportation infrastructure that benefits its citizens and businesses.

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