

# LivableStreets Rethinking urban transportation

e-bulletin #15

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## Greetings!

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Contact Jeff Rosenblum 617-939-3824,  
[jeff@livablestreets.info](mailto:jeff@livablestreets.info), for more information.

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"It was so much fun to hang out with others like me who are excited about rethinking transportation in our city. The atmosphere was relaxing and fun, with great food, beer, and cool people!" said Downing Lu, Physician, who attended our second Street Social last month.

Join us for our third Street Social fundraiser,  
**this THURSDAY August 31!** \$15

## street social

**Eat, drink, learn, play, support**

Thursday August 31, 5:30-8:30pm

Office/Exhibit space + Patio

70 Pacific Street @ Sydney, Cambridge

\$15 suggested donation

Come join us [outside!] for some great food [vegetarian], music, and a short video about the challenges of our urban streets. Mingle with us and others like you who are committed to improving urban transportation.

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*The Boston Globe*

## OPINION: PUT TRANSIT ON AGENDA

By Eileen McNamara  
 July 19, 2006

Maybe now we could begin talking seriously again about mass transit in Massachusetts.

If nothing else, the problems with the Big Dig tunnels should put state transportation policy, or the lack of it, back on the public agenda.

Drivers desperate to escape the traffic of the last week, who turned to the T and commuter rail, learned what regular riders already knew: The state's diminishing commitment to mass transit has left us with a fractured system plagued by dirt, delays, deferred maintenance, and declining ridership.

It was not supposed to be like this. The Big Dig was meant to be one part of a more comprehensive transportation scheme. In 1990, environmental groups extracted

## 1. BOSTON CREATES NEW CABINET-LEVEL TRANSPORTATION COMMISSIONER POSITION



### Will Cabinet Level Efficiency be a Jumping-Off Place for Transportation Vision?

by Amanda Patterson, *LivableStreets* Staff

Writer

The Boston Transportation Department is about to merge with the Department of Public Works, after years of working near -but not necessarily with- each other, according to Mike Galvin, the Chief of Basic City Services. The Denver Transportation Department's Dennis Royer will fill the new mayoral cabinet position, Chief of Public Works and Transportation.

The lack of coordination up until now wasted time and resources, according to Galvin. One crew might change a street light on the corner of Tremont and Beacon in the morning, and a crew from the other department might show up in the afternoon to fix a traffic light. Under the new system, Galvin hopes, one crew can be dispatched to an area to take care of it all.

"Now there will be one chief," Galvin said. "He'll be responsible to make sure that the lines of communications are open."

Galvin said he and others selected Royer because he has experience in both transportation and public works, and because Denver and Boston have many of the same issues, like snow removal and on-street parking among others.

"The other thing you have to look at is how a candidate will do with a seated mayor," Galvin added. "Boston is unique because you are under a microscope and practically every street is an association of some kind. I wanted someone who knew that it was a high pressure job and had the stamina for that."

Improving the coordination of city services is an important efficiency measure. But is making the system work enough to help Boston thrive in the 21st century?

Mayor Menino sees the merger as a way to bring Boston "into the 21st century" according to *The Boston Globe*. Boston area advocates have been envisioning the 21st century for a long time, and based on that quote it seemed that perhaps Mayor Menino was ready to lay out a long-term vision for dynamic and cutting-edge transportation in the city.

But that requires planning. And Mike Galvin, who will be

promises of expanded mass transit from state officials to counter the expected increase in air pollution caused by the Big Dig and to ensure that public expenditures on transportation did not begin and end with cars. To avoid a lawsuit, the Commonwealth agreed to restore dormant train and trolley lines in the city and to expand commuter rail service to outlying areas.

After interminable delays, the Greenbush commuter rail line to the South Shore is nearing completion. And the Silver Line is running between Washington Street and South Boston. The state has promised to add 1,000 parking spaces to commuter rail stations; to add stations to the Fairmount Line in Hyde Park, Dorchester, and Mattapan; and to extend the Green Line to Union Square in Somerville and to West Medford.

But instead of extending rail service to the economically depressed communities of New Bedford and Fall River or to Springfield, instead of expanding the Blue Line to Lynn or restoring trolley service in Jamaica Plain, the Romney administration is spending millions on a flyover at the Sagamore Bridge to ease traffic tie-ups for weekend beachgoers.

The state's failure to deliver on its promises

handing over a lot of his responsibilities to the new Chief, is busy with the day-to-day. As he described his hopes for the potential of the merger, he mostly spoke of efficiency and communication improvements, but vision and planning for the long-range future aren't really part of his job. The mayor's office was asked to define their vision of the move to the 21st century, and they deferred to Galvin.

So whose job is it? The planning division of the Transportation Department is responsible for long-range planning. In 2000 Boston's citywide transportation plan "Access Boston 2000 – 2010" was completed. Today, well over half of the recommendations have been implemented, requiring the cooperation of a number of divisions and agencies, according to Vineet Gupta, Director of Planning. But advocates are disappointed at the lack of attention given to recommendations that would change the way the use of streets are prioritized, such as the bicycle plan and the 1999 "Streetscape Guidelines for Boston Streets."

The new Chief of Public Works and Transportation will have a budget of \$1.5 million and a staff of nearly twenty people. Neither the mayor's office nor Galvin, offered reassurance that the new cabinet position will think about progressive transportation in the city as a key to Boston's future.

This year there has been buzz about Boston's competitiveness in the global economy. Massachusetts is the only state experiencing population loss, we have made a slow recovery from an economic slump and we have become aware that we are not guaranteed a permanent position as America's preeminent academic and research city. The legislature, the business community and think tanks like the Boston Foundation have been analyzing the situation and its possible solutions. As Boston Foundation's Charlotte Kahn said, "Transportation is a key sector. It's really the back bone of sustainability."

LivableStreets President Larry Slotnick would like the Mayor to take this opportunity to demonstrate greater leadership in planning for its transportation system, which affects quality of life issues in the city such as affordability, convenience, and public health.

Boston -and its newly re-elected Mayor- have the chance to become thought leaders in the field of urban transportation. Being a thought leader on a subject means becoming technically competent, and Slotnick asserts that officials need to look outside of their community to learn about systems, problems and solutions in other places.

"The Mayor should be expanding his universe of knowledge," Slotnick said.

Dennis Royer very well may be a man with vision and interest beyond potholes and street lights, and he will certainly be handed a big plate of everyday problems. But LivableStreets Alliance hopes he can set aside resources

has triggered the lawsuits that previous administrations had pledged to avoid. The Conservation Law Foundation and Partners Healthcare filed separate suits last year, the latter protesting the state's failure to build the promised subway connector between the Red and Blue lines at the Charles Street station, which serves Massachusetts General Hospital.

Skyrocketing gas prices and the collapse of ceiling panels in the Interstate 90 connector could give fresh political impetus to a plan floated last spring by mass transit advocates to invest \$2 billion in transportation construction and expansion projects. The money would come from existing tax revenue and new fees on everything from hotels to rental cars.

It sounded implausible in May. But the gridlock of the last week might have cooled the fevered antitax climate that has doomed so many initiatives for the communal good in the past 25 years, especially after Revenue Commissioner Alan LaBovidge reported on Monday that state revenue is running \$1 billion above administration estimates.

Massachusetts is going to need that money and more to fix what went fatally wrong in the

and invest in planning for a vital, forward-looking future for Boston.

**The Boston Globe** [Click here for the July 28, 2006 Globe article, "New chief of agency hails from Denver."](#)

## 2. CAMBRIDGE GETS NATIONAL ORGANIZATION ON DISABILITY'S "ACCESSIBLE AMERICA" AWARD.

This year, Cambridge, Massachusetts won the National Organization on Disability's "Accessible America" contest. The well-deserved award brings with it \$25,000 in cash. According to the contest criteria, the winner of the award must demonstrate exceptional commitment to offering people with disabilities full and equal opportunities to participate in the life of their community, including access to jobs, education, religious worship, voting, transportation, housing, and emergency preparedness planning.



Cambridge earned the 2006 award with its 27 year commitment to integrate disability issues into the everyday business of the City of Cambridge. In 1979, City Council adopted an ordinance stating that "Cambridge will continue to be a city that welcomes, values, and respects people of all abilities." It wasn't until 1990 that the Federal Government established the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), launching national accessibility standards and requirements.

The Commission for Persons with Disabilities leads the charge towards the 1979 goal, and the successes achieved to date are the result of the hard work of many people. Currently, Executive Director Michael Muehe, and Disability Project Coordinator Carolyn Thompson skillfully balance the urgent needs of residents with the essential and time-intensive process of collaborating with the many layers of city government.

[...Click here for a case study detailing Accessibility in Cambridge.](#)

*On behalf of Adaptive Environments, LivableStreets executive director Jeff Rosenblum wrote a case study of Accessibility in Cambridge published in July 2006.*

[Click here for more information](#)

## 3. BOSTON FOUNDATION SEEKS INPUT ON TRANSPORTATION INDICATORS



*by Amanda Patterson, LivableStreets Staff*

design and construction of the Big Dig. As the state's senior senator made clear on a visit to Beacon Hill this week, no one should expect any help from Washington, where the Big Dig is the Republicans' favorite symbol of pork.

Governor Mitt Romney has put on quite a performance at the easel in the past few days. Clearly a quick study, he has mastered the intricacies of undercut anchor bolts and hanger ties, translating engineering theory into plain English. But the alternate routes on Boston's surface arteries that he sketched at his easel are a temporary solution to an immediate crisis, not a permanent solution to a long-term problem.

Romney will not be around to propose, let alone implement, a comprehensive transportation plan that gives commuters an alternative to the automobile. Those candidates who would replace him in the corner office next January might want to add mass transit to their stump speech lists of pressing issues facing the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

*Eileen McNamara is a Globe columnist. She can be reached at [mcnamara@globe.com](mailto:mcnamara@globe.com).*

[Click here for the entire](#)



*Writer*

The Boston Foundation is taking the guess-work out of measuring Boston's ability to grow and remain a "world class" city. In 2000, they began The Boston Indicators Project, through which they track data in ten sectors of the state's public life. Transportation is one of the ten, and according to Charlotte Kahn of the Boston Foundation it is a critical and undervalued measure of an area's viability because it is "the back bone of sustainability."

In July, the Boston Foundation brought a cadre of local experts, including LivableStreets' executive director and engineer, Jeff Rosenblum, to a roundtable discussion about transportation in Massachusetts at the Transportation Sector Convening. Representatives from business, transportation planning, and local think tanks sat at the table.

Participants included Michael Dukakis, the governor of the state during the heyday of transit investment, Vineet Gupta Boston's transportation planner, Rick Dimino, the Director of A Better City representing the business community, long-time transportation advocacy guru, Stephanie Pollack, David Luberoff of the Rappaport Institute, Zipcar founder, Robin Chase, Michael Widmer of Mass Taxpayers Foundation, and Gene Benson, attorney for Alternatives for Community and Environment representing the underserved in Roxbury and Dorchester.

"The goal is to check in with experts and stake holders with in each of sectors," Kahn said. "To elicit their knowledge about the sector where they work most of the time, the major accomplishments, and the remaining challenges.

There are two components to the report, data gathered from outside sources and the Highlights section, which, according to Kahn, is a qualitative assessment based on the information gathered at the Transportation Convening.

The Boston Foundation aims to democratize access to information, according to Kahn, to promote informed public discourse. In addition to data collection, they maintain a civic agenda, a short list of important measures the region needs to take to drive change.

"Most people come to transportation through their own portal, some people are bike enthusiasts, others are public transit advocates. We try have people see the sector as a whole to make a better case for their part of it, and to see their part as a piece of a mosaic. We try to encourage people to think about the complexity of the sector."

Charlotte Kahn is the project manager for the Transportation Sector, and while she could not prioritize one finding over another, she recommends viewing the findings through the sustainable development crosscut

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filter option.

For the complete report visit the Boston Foundation website at:

<http://www.tbf.org/indicators>

## EXAMPLES OF TRENDS AND FINDINGS

Car ownership grew rapidly with the economic growth of the 1990s, especially in the City of Boston. Between 1996 and 2002, the number of cars registered rose by 42% in the City of Boston and by 26% in Metro Boston.

While public transit use remains high, ridership has declined or remained flat in recent years.

The Big Dig continues to influence Massachusetts' spending on highways, roads and bridges. The Artery will continue to limit Massachusetts' ability to make transportation investment decisions for years to come.

The MBTA is in financial trouble. The MBTA currently spends 29% of its budget on debt service.

[Click here for more information](#)

## 4. BROOKLINE ATTEMPTS TO CONNECT EMERALD NECKLACE



### Brookline attempts to Connect Emerald Necklace

*By Pete Stidman  
Jamaica Plain  
Gazette, 15  
August 2006*

The Town of Brookline's planning department is seeking to mend a few gaps in the bike path that runs along the Muddy River section of the Emerald Necklace. The path, leaving Olmsted Park at the northwest corner of Jamaica Plain, is a critical link to Longwood, Boston University, Cambridge and beyond for hundreds of JP cyclists and pedestrians who travel it every day.

One of the largest gaps in the path is the absence of any crosswalk or signal where the path crosses Route 9 coming out of JP. The situation has brought the ire of bicycle activists since the early '90s and seems to be a perennial local story.

Now Brookline's planners are hoping to procure the aid of

the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) in solving the riddles of the complicated intersection as part of a larger redesign of the streets in Brookline Village. Federal money is already earmarked for work in the area, according to Jeff Levine, director of Brookline's planning department, but the location, lying on the border between Boston and Brookline with the state-controlled Riverway and a historic park running through it, presents a complicated design challenge. "There's a lot of interest in making a better connection there," said Levine. "We've talked about a striped crosswalk, but we feel there is some more analysis to be done. And, since Boston's so integrally involved, we really feel it needs to be a regional design."...

... [Click here for the entire Gazette article.](#)

**Brookline's nod to a bygone era:  
Town hopes to re-create Village Square's bustling  
urban atmosphere**

*By Ron DePasquale  
Boston Globe , August 26, 2006*

As it heads out of Brookline Village, Washington Street morphs into a sterile stretch of Route 9 that bears little resemblance to the rest of the historic neighborhood, once a bustling urban crossroads known as Village Square.

But now Brookline is pushing to re-create some of the area's urban atmosphere obliterated during 1960s urban renewal. Town Meeting in May approved changes that would beautify the square and make it more walkable.

The plan is to add crosswalks, trees, old-fashioned streetlights, a bike path and wider sidewalks outlined with bricks. A footbridge over the road, now closed, will be torn down. Now known as Gateway East, the plan recommends that the drive-through-sounding name be dropped in favor of the more evocative "Village Square."

Yet this particular strip of Washington Street is also a wide roadway heavily used by suburban commuters, and lined by taller, colorless buildings. Town officials acknowledge it won't be easy to make such a forbidding crossing attractive to pedestrians.

"It's very harsh on the eyes, and it just needs something visually," said Rob Daves , a member of Town Meeting and the Gateway East citizen's advisory committee. "But it's a major thoroughfare, and it will be a huge challenge for a road that sees 35,000 cars day."

Even so, Brookline can still try to make this part of Washington Street look more like Beacon Street, another busy, wide road in town that manages to attract heavy foot traffic, and less like a dull suburban highway, said planning director Jeff Levine.

The Brookline Village MBTA station, which is hard to see from the street, will soon be redesigned, and new signs would better link it with Harvard Street and the Emerald Necklace, he said.

"This won't be 'Ye Olde Village Square,' because it will never be like it was," he said. "It will be contemporary and urban. We'll encourage building close to the street, walking along the street, cafes and anything that livens the street front."

The focus isn't just on walkers and bicyclists. Reconfiguring streets would make traffic flow more smoothly, and new or better crosswalks would mean drivers wouldn't have to dodge pedestrians crossing illegally, said Gretchen Von Grossmann, an urban designer who helped draft the plan...

... [Click here for the entire Globe article.](#)

## 5. UPCOMING EVENTS: 1-ALTWHEELS, 2-HUB ON WHEELS BIKE RIDE



### [Altwheels](#)

September 22-24, 2006

This year at Boston City Hall Plaza!

[Click here for more information...](#)





### [Hub On Wheels](#)

October 1, 2006

Second annual bike ride and festival includes riding on Storrow Drive!

[Click here for more information...](#)

 [Click here to hear a WBUR news story about the "Tour de Farms" \(August 21, 2006\).](#)

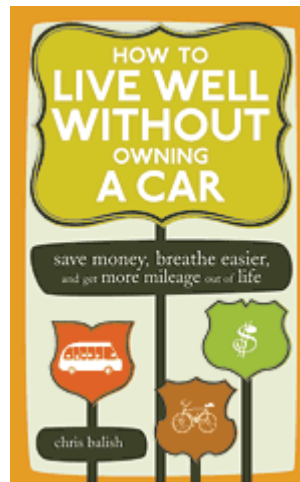
 [Click here to hear a recent WBUR news story on biking in Boston \(August 25, 2006\).](#)

 [Click here for a recent op-ed piece on biking in Boston in the Globe by Bicycling Magazine editor Steve Madden \(August 29, 2006\).](#)

## 6. NEW BOOK: HOW TO LIVE WELL WITHOUT OWNING A CAR

**Save money, breathe easier, and get more mileage out of life!**

"Despite what \$20 billion of automobile advertising every year would have us all believe, buying or leasing a car, truck, or SUV is the worst financial move most people make in their lifetime. And they make this mistake again and again, at a cost of literally hundreds of thousands of dollars. High gas prices, car payments, insurance, depreciation, parking, repairs, maintenance, and nearly one hundred other expenses add up so quickly and silently that most car owners don't even notice -- they just see how little money they have left at the end of the month and wonder why."



page 152: "Livable car-free means sometimes you have to plan! I know Americans want 24/7 access to everything, and that the concept of planning ahead is outrageous. But what people don't seem to understand is that not planning actually required them to spend so much more time, energy, and money on things that actually make them less free in other ways. So a big challenge is to personally come to terms with planning ahead, being flexible, and occasionally being inconvenienced-- in order to access the big picture of overall more life freedom" - - Jeffrey Rosenblum, LivableStreets Alliance

[Click here for more information about the book, and to read chapters 1 & 2 online.](#)

[Click for more information.](#)

email: [jeff@livablestreets.info](mailto:jeff@livablestreets.info)  
phone: 617-939-3824  
web: <http://www.livablestreets.info>