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MEMORANDUM

TO: Thomas A. Golden, Jr., City Manager 

FROM: Yovani Baez-Rose, Assistant City Manager/DPD Director

CC: Elizabeth Oltman, PE, City Transportation Engineer

SUBJECT: MOTION RESPONSE: 4/4/2023– Councilor Robinson – Request City Manager Have The Proper Department Provide A Report On Why We Removed The LRTA Bus Hub From Downtown and Explore If It Would Be Feasible To Bring A Central Bus Hub Back

In 2000, A Brownfields Covenant helped the Lowell Regional Transit Authority (LRTA) redevelop an abandoned industrial site on 100 Hale Street in Lowell into a bus maintenance and operations center. This project was part of the LRTA's larger vision to upgrade the Gallagher Intermodal Transportation Center to a state-of-the-art facility expected to bring new jobs to Lowell. By using the Hale Street site to maintain and service its bus fleet, the LRTA then planned to move its fixed route bus service from the Paige Street area of downtown Lowell to the Gallagher Terminal area. The stated goal of the relocation was to provide the added benefit of fuel savings, reduce traffic congestion, improve air quality, and increase on-time performance for the transportation system.

In a May 3, 2000 public meeting held at the Lincoln Elementary School, Robert Kennedy, the LRTA Administrator at the time, outlined four capital improvement projects being undertaken by the LRTA: Construction of a parking garage at Gallagher Terminal over the railroad right-of-way, redevelopment of 100 Hale Street as a bus maintenance center, construction of a new bus transit center at Gallagher Terminal, and development of a new and expanded free downtown shuttle service. The new bus transit center would allow for more frequent bus service, more direct intermodal connections, increased customer amenities, and improve handicapped access. The presentation indicated that moving the bus transit center from downtown to the Gallagher Terminal would save time by eliminating the need for all buses to navigate the congested areas of the Downtown district and allow for more frequent service throughout Lowell.

The Robert B. Kennedy Bus Transfer Center at the Gallagher Terminal was opened on August 2, 2005 and the Downtown Transit Center on Paige Street was closed. The staging area for LRTA buses used by Lowell High School students was moved to Kirk Street. An August 3, 2005 article in the Lowell Sun stated that “some downtown merchants have long complained that their business is hurt by the dense gaggle of teens who hang around outside the transit center’s Merrimack Street entrance on weekday afternoons. LRTA officials said that closing the center will nudge Lowell High School Students into going home, rather than hanging around. But other businesses argue that the teenagers’

disposable income is being moved elsewhere.” An August 31, 2005 article in the Lowell Sun stated that “closing the Paige Street Transit Center will eliminate many of the problems created by large numbers of kids roaming the downtown streets after school, as well as thin out pedestrian and vehicle tie-ups.”

The free shuttle between Gallagher Terminal and Downtown was modified in 2006 to reinstate regular bus routes with stops Downtown to “serve the passenger without compromising the new system,” per a February, 16, 2006 Lowell Sun article. The no-cost service was eliminated.

The LRTA sold the Paige Street Transit Center property (15 Merrimack Street) in 2013 to a private owner. The LRTA does not currently own any property in the Downtown district.

DPD and the City of Lowell will continue to collaborate with the LRTA regarding improving bus service connecting the Downtown district and other Lowell neighborhoods. Transit improvements are a central element of the GoLowell Plan. Safety updates to the busiest Downtown bus stop along Merrimack Street at John Street are under consideration, including the addition of a bus shelter and sidewalk reconstruction. Funding for the design and construction of this portion of the GoLowell Plan will be possible through a federal grant received by the LRTA. Contract negotiations are progressing.

EMO

**LOWELL REGIONAL TRANSIT AUTHORITY
HALE STREET PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES
MAY 31, 2000**

Robert Kennedy, Administrator, welcomed everyone on behalf of LRTA.

Mr. Kennedy started by introducing members of his staff and others that were present:

Paula Good, Procurement Director
David Bradley, Finance Officer
Thel Sar, Interpreter
Ken Stevens, LRTA Consultant
Atty. Arthur Sullivan, LRTA Counsel
Suellen O'Neill, Access to Jobs Coordinator
Frank Trombly, LRTA General Manager
Ray Grady, Facility Manager
Beverly Woods and Chris Curry of the Northern Middlesex
Council of Governments (NMCOG)

We're also honored to have City Councilor, Rita Mercier here this evening, as well as Carol McCarthy and Norman Poirier, representing the neighborhood councils. Also present is Adam Bakey who is from the city's planning department. Thank you very much for coming.

Just a few opening remarks; the reason for the recorder is to have a record of the questions and answers in case needed for later use.

We're here this evening to describe our plans for improving 100 Hale Street into our bus maintenance and operations center and more importantly, to listen to your ideas and comments.

Before we begin, I would like to briefly describe how this project fits into our overall plans to improve and expand transit opportunities for the residents of Lowell.

The LRTA is in the process of implementing its 21st Century Transit Agenda which includes 4 major capital projects totaling 16 million dollars.

The first major project is the construction of a new 6.2 million dollar parking garage which will be built this summer over the existing railroad Right of Way.

Mr. Kennedy referred to a chart for his first initiative. Using the chart, Mr. Kennedy pointed to its location. Mr. Kennedy said that the new garage would be built over the railroad Right of Way with a new access road to enter and exit from Chelmsford/Westford Street.

Mr. Kennedy continued to say that NMCOG did studies that showed that 40% of the current traffic coming into Gallagher Terminal comes from the Chelmsford/Westford Street direction. Because of traffic jams at the Lord Overpass, many of the commuters use Hale Street to access the Gallagher terminal. We see this at night as well; there are a lot of cars that use Hale Street to access Gallagher Terminal.

This garage will add 450 new parking spaces to the Gallagher Center bringing the total parking to 1200 cars.

We believe that once the garage is completed, it will significantly decrease the amount of traffic that presently uses Hale Street.

The second major capital project is the LRTA's acquisition and renovation plans for 100 Hale Street.

The LRTA will use this site as our bus maintenance, storage and operations center. The facility will accommodate our administrative offices and space for the maintenance and storage of our fixed route buses.

We plan to spend approximately 1.3 million dollars making improvements to the site. These improvements will include the beautification of the site with significant landscape improvements.

We will be doing landscaping along Greendale Avenue and Hale Streets to improve the looks of the site.

Question: Is the building on the 100 Hale Street property staying or coming down?

Mr. Kennedy replied that the building would remain as it is a sound building. He said that there would be some improvements to the building and he was very excited about moving into the building.

Question: Is it a brick building?

Mr. Kennedy replied that it was a steel and cement block building. There is no brick.

The third major capital project is the construction of a new bus transit center at the Gallagher Intermodal Transportation Center.

This new center will allow us to relocate the existing downtown transit center to the Gallagher Terminal which will provide many benefits to the public such as:

- a. More frequent service on our bus routes (the time that is saved by eliminating the need to get in and out of the downtown will allow for more frequent service)
- b. Better and more direct intermodal connections (the LRTA continues to increase its existing Intermodal services. Presently there are buses that go north to Manchester Airport and Montreal and buses that go south to Boston, Worcester, New York City and Foxwoods Casino. These connections will be easier for the people of the Hale Street neighborhood. They won't be waiting for a shuttle downtown to get them to the Gallagher Terminal.)
- c. Increased customer amenities
- d. Improved handicapped access

And overall, a more user friendly transportation center, particularly for commuters and workers who use it everyday.

For those of you familiar with Gallagher Terminal and the LRTA, we now have 38 fixed route buses that use the entire downtown as their staging area.

What we propose to do is move all of those buses out of the downtown and to Gallagher Terminal where all of the buses will come into this new state of the art hub.

The fourth capital project is a new and expanded downtown shuttle service.

This new shuttle will operate every 5-7 minutes and stop at every key location in the downtown, including the hotel, the auditorium, Middlesex Community College, the high school, the arena, the ball park, University of Mass at Lowell, every city museum, every city garage, all tied through the Gallagher Intermodal Terminal. This new shuttle service, which we are proposing to operate "free of charge", will utilize state of the art, replica 18th Century trolleys.

The most important benefit of our new service for this neighborhood is its close proximity to the Gallagher Center and the easy access you will have to ride these new and exciting trolleys, free of charge, to every key location in the downtown.

These replicas of the turn of the century trolleys will be powered by compressed natural gas. They will kneel like our existing buses and they will take on wheel chairs like our existing buses. The interior is magnificent. We found by talking with other transit authorities in the country, that people are attracted to these trolleys and will bring their families just to ride them---particularly when they are free of charge. The routes will be down through the city, to the hotels, the auditorium, the Arena, LeLacheur Park, the museums and other major locations. These major locations will be serviced by the trolleys every 5 to 7 minutes.

Question: *How many seats are on the trolley, compared to the size buses we use today?*

Mr. Kennedy said the seat capacity was about the same with 36 seats.

Question: *Are we getting these buses real soon?*

Mr. Kennedy said that we would, in the very near future, have these look alike trolleys that are just getting off the assembly line now. We should have them in 2 - 3 months.

Question: *Do they look like the trolleys in San Francisco?*

Mr. Kennedy said they do and they are beautiful---people will love them.

I'd like to now focus our attention on the main purpose of this meeting, which is to hear your questions and comments on the LRTA's planned acquisition of 100 Hale Street.

First, I'd like to show you a map which depicts the direction that our buses will use to enter and leave 100 Hale Street.

Mr. Kennedy pointed out 100 Hale Street on the chart showing the end that was closest to the neighbors---where the administrative offices would be.

In the morning, the buses will exit the facility from a gate that is already there and take a right to head to Gallagher Terminal or directly to Thorndike Street. In the evening, the buses will return to the facility from Gallagher Terminal entering through a gate on Howard Street. The buses will not be left outside, they will all be parked inside the building.

Question: *What type of road leads to Gallagher Terminal from Hale Street?*

Mr. Kennedy replied that it is a paved road that is sufficient to allow two buses to pass.

Mr. Kennedy invited anyone who was interested to tour the facility with him.

Next, I'd like to show a rendering of some proposed landscape improvements along Greendale Avenue and Hale Street.

(Mr. Kennedy showed several posters with the proposed landscaping).

Mr. Kennedy said that he would welcome any suggestions regarding the landscaping.

Mr. Kennedy asked for any other questions.

Question: *Were all the neighbors notified?*

Mr. Kennedy replied that we went door to door with the public notice flyers. We also advertised the hearing in The Sun.

Question: *Is the neighborhood mostly homeowners or renters?*

Mr. Kennedy thought they were mostly homeowners with some renters.

Mr. Ralph Mercier said that it sounded like a good and sound plan and felt that Mr. Kennedy should proceed with his plans; knowing that whatever Mr. Kennedy did, it would be done right.

Mr. Kennedy replied that it would be done right and we would work in close conjunction with the neighborhood. Mr. Kennedy said there would be more transit service, more frequently, and to more locations. In general, the transit service would be improved.

Question: *What time do the buses start in the morning?*

Mr. Kennedy replied that the buses start at 6:30 am.

Question: *What are the taxes on the Hale Street property?*

Mr. Kennedy replied that the taxes are currently \$60,000 for the building. He continued to say that he is negotiating with the City Manager, Brian Martin, to come to some kind of agreement to make a payment in lieu of taxes. Mr. Kennedy told those in attendance that the Authority is prohibited to pay taxes under chapter 161B; however, we are reviewing what methods are available to make a payment in lieu of taxes.

Question: *Are there any hazardous waste materials generated from that building on Hale Street?*

Mr. Kennedy replied no. He said the building would be renovated and restored under the direction and guidance of the fire marshall and our environmental experts and consultants that we have retained.

Mr. Frank Trombly added that an example of concern could be the Bus Washer. He said that with the technology today, the water reclamation contains and cleans its own water and doesn't put it back out into the environment. This is the type of technology that will be instituted in the new building for all aspects of storage and maintenance.

Question: *Does this project need city council approval?*

Mr. Kennedy said that it doesn't because it is properly zoned and sized. However, Mr. Kennedy added that the people are important and that is why he wanted to bring this project before the public. Mr. Kennedy said that he would be continuing to inform other groups of this undertaking as well. He feels that the more people know of this, the better off everyone will be.

Question: *Will you be infringing on the brook that runs along side the property?*

Mr. Kennedy replied no. He said that the building wouldn't be enlarged and anticipated no construction anywhere else on the site.

Question: *How long before you are in the Hale Street building?*

Mr. Kennedy said that he hoped to be in the building by March or April of next year (2001).

Question: *How many buses are there?*

Mr. Trombly said that there are 38 buses.

Mr. Kennedy added that 58 buses could be parked inside the building on Hale Street.

Question: *Do you think the value of the property in the neighborhood will go down?*

Mr. Kennedy said he thought the property would increase in value.

Question: *Do you plan to keep the property maintained?*

Mr. Kennedy said absolutely. He invited anyone to come over to the Gallagher Terminal to see how well maintained that property is. He said we are constantly painting and making repairs as needed.

Question: *What time does the bus service end at the end of the day?*

Mr. Kennedy said that the buses presently stop at 6:30 pm. He said he is hoping to extend the hours and the days, including holidays.

Question: *Will there be advertising on the trolleys?*

Mr. Kennedy said we have no plans to advertise on the trolleys at this time.

Mr. Kennedy asked Councilor Mercier if she had any other questions from the neighborhood. Councilor Mercier said no.

Mr. Kennedy ended the public hearing by thanking each and everyone that was there. He also told them not to hesitate to call him with any other questions or concerns.

NEWS

'Lasting Tribute' to Robert Kennedy

Robert Kennedy, center, former longtime director of the Lowell Regional Transit Authority, is congratulated by well-wishers at the opening of the \$1.2 million Robert B. Kennedy Bus Transfer Center at Lowell's Gallagher Intermodal Terminal yesterday. Looking on are Mayor Armand Mercier, rear, and former Mayor Tarsy Poulos, right.
SUN/MICHAEL PIGEON

By **MICHAEL LAFLEUR** |

PUBLISHED: August 3, 2005 at 12:00 a.m. | UPDATED: July 13, 2019 at 12:00 a.m.

LOWELL — From Mr. City Councilor to Mr. Mayor to Mr. State Representative and, now, Mr. Transportation.

That's the latest title earned by Robert Kennedy, whose 10 years at the helm of the Lowell Regional Transit Authority saw it grow into one of the pre-eminent transit agencies in Massachusetts.

Kennedy was honored for that commitment yesterday during a ceremony at the Gallagher Intermodal Terminal on Thorndike Street with the unveiling of the new, \$1.2 million Robert B. Kennedy Bus Transfer Center.



Starting today, the Kennedy Transfer Center will be the hub for the LRTA's 17 fixed-route buses and the free downtown shuttle. The Downtown Transit Center on Paige Street and bus berths on Merrimack Street will close.

Lowell City Manager John Cox, an LRTA board member and yesterday's master of ceremonies, told Kennedy the transfer center will be a "lasting tribute for all you have done for the city of Lowell" and said the changes will improve the quality of life downtown and the overall transit service.

"For once, the buses will no longer be stacking up along Paige Street and Merrimack Street, causing problems for downtown businesses, visitors and shoppers," he said.

Some downtown merchants have long complained that their business is hurt by the dense gaggle of teens who hang around outside the transit center's Merrimack Street entrance on weekday afternoons. LRTA officials said closing the center will nudge Lowell High School students into going home, rather than hanging around.

But other businesses argue that the teenagers' disposable income is being moved elsewhere, said Jeanne Osborn, president of the Greater Lowell Chamber of Commerce.

Kennedy was honored by numerous officials, including state Transportation Secretary John Coglianò, Cox, Mayor Armand Mercier, Lowell state Sen. Steven Panagiotakos, state Sen. Susan Fargo of Lincoln, and Lowell state Reps. Tom Golden, Kevin Murphy and David Nangle.

"This new bus transfer center will make the LRTA more efficient and will modernize our routes to better serve our customers," Kennedy told the crowd of about 200. "Whether you're going to Billerica or Bangkok, you can start your trip at the new Kennedy Bus Transfer Center."

All rides on LRTA buses are free through Saturday, to introduce the new center and routes.

After that, regular fares will be \$1 for rides within Lowell or one of the 10 LRTA towns (Acton, Billerica, Chelmsford, Dracut, Dunstable, Groton, Pepperell, Tewksbury, Tyngsboro and Westford) and \$1.50 for rides from one community to another. The downtown Lowell express shuttles — which leave every eight to 10 minutes from the Kennedy Transfer Center along a limited, flag-stop route

Express service will be provided by Compressed Natural Gas trolley buses, as will the downtown circulator bus, which will depart every 40 minutes and serve virtually every stop in the downtown area, from Saints Memorial Medical Center to the Bishop Markham Village elderly housing complex.

For information, visit www.lrta.com or call (978) 452-6161.

Michael Lafleur's e-mail address is mlafleur@lowellsun.com.



Michael Lafleur

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NEWS

LRTA changes tested with high school start

By **JENNIFER AMY MYERS** |

PUBLISHED: August 31, 2005 at 12:00 a.m. | UPDATED: July 13, 2019 at 12:00 a.m.

LOWELL — The days of seeing hundreds of Lowell High School students flooding the downtown area when the last bell of the day rings are over, as the Lowell Regional Transit Authority puts its new busing plan into action this week.

Upon the Aug. 2 opening of the \$1.2 million Robert B. Kennedy Bus Transfer Center at the Gallagher Terminal on Thorndike Street, the Downtown Transit Center on Paige Street was closed. It was from this hub that between 1500 and 2000 LHS students caught a city bus back home every afternoon.

The Belvidere, Shaw-Stevens, Westford St./Drum Hill and Pawtucketville bus routes will transport students directly to LHS in the morning. Buses serving Christian Hill, Centralville, and Dracut/Tyngsboro will discharge students in close proximity to the school, and all other routes will service the Kennedy Center,



City buses will now transport students home from where Kirk Street intersects with Paige Street and where it meets Father Morrisette Boulevard, in close proximity to the school. Additionally, a shuttle will leave from the corner of John and Merrimack streets to the Kennedy Center for any student who misses the bus.

LHS Headmaster William Samaras said that students will be given bus schedules when they come to school this morning. English-as-a-second-language teachers will be on hand to assist students with limited English skills.

“Its a new concept and will take some getting used to,” Samaras said. “I understand why they want to clean up the downtown.”

“It will prevent large groups of kids from hanging out downtown, which was very intimidating to some people, especially the elderly,” he added. “They could just be out there singing, and it would be intimidating, based on the numbers.”

Sgt. Tim Crowley, supervisor of Lowell’s school resource officer program, agrees that closing the Paige Street Transit Center will eliminate many of the problems created by large numbers of kids roaming the downtown streets after school, as well as thin out pedestrian and vehicle traffic tie-ups.

“We will be re-routing traffic,” he said. “There will be no traffic allowed on Kirk Street beyond Lee Street from 2-3 p.m. and coming out of the garage at the Tsongas Arena, you will not be able to take a left onto French Street from 2-3 p.m.”

Students in grades 1-9 started school yesterday, and high schoolers in grades 10-12 get back to the books today.

“Today (Tuesday) was the first test and we had a few minor problems, but tomorrow is the big test,” Scanlan said. “In a week or so we hope to have a seamless transition, and if we can’t fix any problems by then we are not doing our job.”

Jennifer Amy Myers’ e-mail address is jmyers@lowellsun.com.



Jennifer Amy Myers

NEWS

Riders rejoice: Buses will roll downtown once again

By **HILLARY CHABOT** |

PUBLISHED: February 16, 2006 at 12:00 a.m. | UPDATED: July 13, 2019 at 12:00 a.m.

LOWELL — They're back.

Those rumbling Lowell Regional Transit Authority buses — banished from downtown just months ago — will be dropping passengers off outside Kennedy's Butter & Eggs store once again starting March 1.

The change, which is limited to four bus lines heading inbound, is in response to an outcry from riders and merchants after the buses were moved out of the downtown area, said LRTA Administrator James Scanlan.

"We're trying to work with our passengers in the city," Scanlan said. "Any time you make a major change, like moving all the buses out of downtown, you have to do a lot of thinking about how the changes are going. We've always said we will look at how we can make it better."

But the new stops come with a price. The downtown shuttle which takes

passengers from the Robert B. Kennedy Bus Transfer Center on Thorndike Street



The LRTA will charge a \$1 regular fare and 50 cents for seniors or disabled passengers who use the shuttle. Passengers who pay for the shuttle won't be charged if they transfer onto another bus, and monthly pass holders also won't be charged.

"We found there were a lot of people who were just riding the free shuttle but didn't use the buses," Scanlan said. "The intent of the free shuttle was that we didn't want people to pay again if they rode the bus, then took the shuttle from (the Kennedy Center) to downtown."

The LRTA will begin charging for the shuttle on March 1 as well.

The buses stopped circulating downtown last August as part of a plan created by former LRTA administrator Robert Kennedy to centralize the LRTA at the Kennedy Center. The change was meant to reduce traffic jams downtown and clear Lowell High School students out of the area after they are dismissed.

The move wasn't a mistake. It just needs a few tweaks, Scanlan said.

"This is the right place for having the center. That being said, nothing is permanent and we can make adjustments," Scanlan said. "The goal is to serve the passenger without compromising the new system."

The Christian Hill, Belvidere, Centralville, and the Dracut/Tyngsboro lines will all make one scheduled stop outside Kennedy's Butter & Egg Store when they are coming into downtown. The same lines will not make the same stop when they leave the Kennedy Center heading out to those neighborhoods.

"All these things I'm doing, they won't add to the timing of the schedule. They'll just be picking up and dropping off. They won't be idling downtown," Scanlan said.

The schedule change means about five buses will stop outside the downtown store per hour, Scanlan said, adding that he doesn't believe the stop will add any time to the route.

That's good news to Feby Colon, 19, of Lowell, a Market Basket worker who takes the bus to and from Centralville.

"That's great. Since they made the change, every time I went to get the bus I'd miss it and I'd have to wait an hour." Colon said last night.

“That’s good. Business should pick up a little bit,” Patel said yesterday after learning about the new routes.

The remaining 12 bus lines won’t go downtown, Scanlan said.

“It wasn’t a tough decision because the route was coming right near downtown on those lines anyway,” Scanlan said. “You couldn’t do that from the South Lowell line, but it was common sense with those bus lines.”

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Hillary Chabot

NEWS

Riders rejoice: Buses will roll downtown once again

