



WestonPatch

GOVERNMENT, BUSINESS

Solution to Route 128 Traffic Could Be Transit Center

Elected officials today met in Weston to discuss plans for traffic along Route 128, and how it can be lessened in the stretch from Waltham to Burlington.

By **Meghan B. Kelly** November 19, 2010

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Better coordination of local buses and a proposed multi-use transit center on Route 128 in Weston and Waltham could bring serious relief to an already congested stretch of the highway, said officials today at a meeting in Weston.

Elected officials from the municipal, state and federal level met in Town Hall to discuss ideas and solutions for the stretch of Route 128 that runs 12.6 miles from Waltham, through Weston, Lexington, Lincoln and up to Burlington.

The 128 Central Corridor Coalition, made up of representatives from Weston, Waltham, Lexington, Lincoln and Burlington, has been meeting for several years and decided to bring its findings, suggestions and other ideas to elected officials at the state and federal level, said Michael Harrity of the Weston Board of Selectmen.

In addition to elected officials, business and development owners from the area were also in attendance, some representing the 128 Corporate Alliance.

The coalition formed several years ago in response to increased traffic on its segment of 128, said Harrity.

"Traffic is not free flowing and at times of any unusual circumstance — that is, an accident, weather or a holiday weekend — we have a virtual parking lot," he said.

According to a 2007 study, traffic on Route 128 is already, on average, at 125 percent volume to capacity, said Harrity.

The area is attractive to businesses, making the region one of the top "employment clusters" in the state, said Harrity.

Currently there are approximately 128,000 jobs in the area, with many people coming from as far away as New Hampshire and Maine to get to jobs at large firms like Biogen Idec and Adobe Systems.

"We have a lot of people traveling to these jobs," said Harrity.

In addition, if all plans for current and proposed expanded development on the 12.6 mile stretch of 128 come into fruition, it could increase total trips by 77 percent, said Harrity.

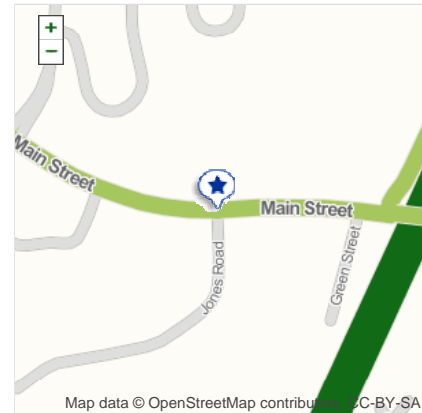
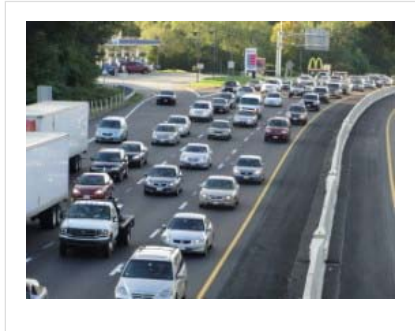
And many of those commuters — 94 percent of current commuters, according to a study done by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) — travel in one car by themselves. Nearly a third said they would take public transit if it were an option.

That's where the idea for the multi-use transit system would come in, or a multi modal transit center, as the coalition calls it.

USE FOR THE TRANSIT CENTER

The transit center's plans are not firm yet but could include options to expand bus coverage of the area and link up with the Fitchburg commuter rail.

The coalition calls for the center to be located in Weston and Waltham, nestled between Routes 117 and 20, by Route 128. The current area is owned by Boston Properties, said Marc Draisen of MAPC.



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Due to the size of such a project, Harrity said he hoped the elected officials on both the state and federal level could appoint among themselves a liaison the towns can turn to, as well as perhaps form a coalition themselves.

A representative for U.S. Rep. Edward Markey said the congressman would be the representative at the federal level, and a representative for state Sen. Kenneth Donnelly, whose district includes Woburn, Arlington, Burlington and Lexington, said the senator would be the liaison to Beacon Hill.

State Rep. Jay Kaufman, who represents Lexington, Arlington and Woburn, said he liked the idea of the multi-modal transit center, but wanted to know what effect it would have on traffic.

"Is this just a token fix, or a big fix?" he asked.

Even if a small percentage of commuters used it, the transit center could make a significant dent in overall traffic, said Eric Bourassa of MAPC.

In response to a question about cost from state Rep. Alice Hanlon Peisch, who represents Weston, Wellesley and Natick, Bourassa said the project could cost around \$10 million.

But building the transit center, if it proves to be feasible, is something that needs to be done sooner rather than later, said Draisen.

"It's something we need to take advantage of and encourage the economic development that will happen along this stretch," he said.

"We need something, and we need something relatively soon."

The next meeting of the 128 Central Corridor Coalition will be held on Friday, Dec. 10, at Weston Town Hall.



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