

TO: Mike Wildgen, City Manager
FROM: Karin Rexroad, Public Transit Administrator
Robert Tabor, PTAC Chairperson
CC: City Commission, PTAC Members
SUBJECT: Downtown Transfer Station
DATE: June 7, 2001

Prior to the start up of the Lawrence Transit System, the Public Transit Advisory Committee (PTAC) recommended 9th and Massachusetts as the best location for our downtown transfer site. This site required no changes to the infrastructure of the location as would have been required by all other proposals. It was already utilized by KU on Wheels, provided prime access to the hub of downtown, had an existing shelter and sidewalks, high visibility to the public, had traffic lights for passenger crossings and traffic flow. Concerns centered around traffic congestion, delays in arrivals, transfers and departures of the system. Those concerns have not developed – we are able to maintain the transit schedules and have not experienced major concerns with traffic congestion.

Since the start-up, we have received two concerns from adjacent merchants about the need for a pay phone, change machine and restroom facilities for passengers. We also have a concern about restroom facilities for the drivers of the system. In addition, we have received Weavers' concern about the inability of their senior and disabled customers to utilize the parking spots beside their handicapped accessible entrance. It is important to note that the presence of the Lawrence Transit System does not block the accessibility of that entrance. Individuals could still be dropped off and picked up at that entrance except for our transfer time. In addition, if they were served by the fixed route individuals could ride the T directly to Weavers.

After Weavers' presentation to the Public Transit Advisory Committee, a subcommittee was formed to look at other alternatives to the current location. The subcommittee was comprised of Jessie Ann Lusher, DCSS, Jeremy Douglas, Downtown Lawrence, Danny Kaiser, KU, Mike Sweeten and myself. We reviewed numerous options, including previously considered sites, in the downtown area, such as moving the south transfer site to the East side of Massachusetts by the bank or moving the south transfer site to the East side of Vermont Street beside the parking lot. These locations were not seriously considered because the timing would not work with the recently approved changes in routes which tightened the schedule to allow for better transfers and enhanced service and the downtown flow would have to be realigned. The south side move to beside the bank could not be utilized because the entrance into the bank's parking lot, combined with the significant increase in traffic expected with completion of the parking garage (north entrance access), will lead to serious safety concerns. If we were to change the location of the transfer site and alter the alignment of the routes, the proposed enhancements that staff and PTAC have worked on for over three months would be significantly delayed, to say nothing of the credibility issues related to holding public hearings and not following through with the recommended enhancements of the system.

The following alternative was offered to the full PTAC – mid-block on both sides of New Hampshire between 8th and 9th Streets. The biggest benefit seen was that the buses would mostly be parked in front of parking lots rather than in front of existing businesses. In addition, the approach would be from both directions and work within the current route changes approved. However, this location would result in the loss of thirteen (13) parking spots. We would gain back six (6) spots at 9th and Massachusetts for a net loss of seven (7) spots. The drawbacks were related to traffic flow since the buses would be pulling in and departing mid-block; lack of traffic controls to assist passengers from one side of the street to the other; sidewalk improvements would be required; mature trees would need to be trimmed back to allow for buses and the site was further removed from any locations that might allow the use of restroom facilities. At this time, we have not visited with adjacent businesses to determine their feelings about public transit in their block.

PTAC discussed the issue of moving our transfer site in great detail. While PTAC does feel that we need to find a long term transfer site solution that is located off street, they do not recommend making a temporary move that would transfer the existing issues to a different site or bring new issues, e.g., no traffic controls. While it may appear to be a simple move – perhaps only one block, we must consider the traffic flow, route flow, timing issues and the need to serve the 9th and Massachusetts area. PTAC strongly feels that we must retain the consistency of our transit system and not move a critical piece – the transfer site – on a regular basis. At the June PTAC meeting, Robert Tabor, Chairperson, plans to appoint an ongoing committee to study the long-term issue and work with staff. We should receive notice about the Great American Station Foundation planning grant by June 11th. Please remember even if we receive this grant, it is only for studying the feasibility of the Santa Fe Depot as a transfer station and minimal planning efforts. We should hear about the federal earmark targeted at a long term transfer site sometime in September or October. There is no guarantee that we will receive this earmark, how much it will actually bring to the City of Lawrence, or if an agreement with Santa Fe RR can be worked out for use of the facility.

PTAC still feels that the 9th and Massachusetts Street location is the best alternative for our system and is recommending that we remain at that site. This site is a prime destination for many of our riders. The site has the infrastructure in place to provide safe and efficient transfers. PTAC has recommended that staff work with those businesses affected by the Lawrence Transit System to provide transit amenities that would make our co-location workable and acceptable. The City of Lawrence is in the process of adding two accessible stalls per block on Massachusetts Street, one on each side of the street. They will be generally located north of the mid-block crossings on the west side, and south of the mid-block crossings on the east side. Construction is likely to start next week.

As you are aware, the City of Lawrence is processing a federal grant that will allow us to address the need for amenities throughout the transit system including the downtown transfer location. It was the strong feeling of PTAC that we should provide as many resources as necessary to make the 9th and Massachusetts location work for the

Lawrence Transit System. Jeremy Douglas, Downtown Lawrence, agreed to contact affected businesses and find out what amenities they felt were necessary. The key issues identified are the provision of a public phone, a change machine and restroom facilities for both passengers and drivers. A meeting was then held between Jeremy, Mike Sweeten and myself to formulate a recommendation. At that time, we also looked at 10th Street between Massachusetts and Vermont which had been suggested by several passengers. Again, this site was not feasible due to timing issues, lack of controlled turns at Vermont Street, and problems in traffic flow associated with downtown construction. We studied the 9th and Massachusetts site to see if it would be feasible to locate amenities at that site – it appears that the corner of the parking lot behind Reuters could handle a small building that could house a restroom, change machine and pay phone. Obviously, we have not studied the details of such a proposal since we did not have the direction of the City Commission in regard to the transfer site. Jeremy Douglas visited with surrounding businesses who felt this location would be suitable. All businesses approached were happy to see that the City and Downtown Lawrence were working together on this issue.

If the Lawrence Transit System can develop and maintain working relationships with the downtown merchants, we will be able to provide a positive impact on parking, congestion and bringing shoppers to this vital retail area. We are currently working with the Downtown Lawrence association in regard to their July sidewalk sale. This date is included in our Free Thursday promotion. PTAC feels that a partnership could be built that benefits both the downtown area and the transit system and obviously those individuals who utilize public transportation.

PTAC Study of Downtown Transfer Location

July 25, 2000 meeting – general discussion of the transfer location was held.

August 15, 2000 meeting – general discussion continued. Routes that had been shared with the public during the public hearing process had utilized the 9th and Mass location as the hub. This was promoted by earlier consultants and continued with the revisions made by KA Associates. A sub-committee was appointed to study options for the downtown transfer location – Jerry Bottenfield, Holly Krebs and Mary Michener.

September 19, 2000 meeting – Holly Krebs provided the Downtown Transfer Committee report. Options discussed: 9th Street transfer between Mass & Vermont; 9th Street transfer between New Hampshire & Rhode Island (two options); New Hampshire transfer between 7th and 8th; 11th Street transfer between Vermont and Mass; The major difficulty in locating the transfer site was finding enough unbroken curb space to allow parking for 7 buses at one time. Options included parking on both sides of the street as long as safety concerns such as signals and street width were addressed. Discussion started on the staggering of buses to decrease number of vehicles at the site at any given transfer. Discussion held about availability of federal funds to assist with purchasing location for a bus transfer. Decision reached for staff to explore financing and transfer options and meet with the subcommittee prior to next month's meeting.

October 17, 2000 meeting – After sub-committee meeting, two options were provided to the full board – 9th Street between Mass and Vermont and 9th Street between New Hampshire and Rhode Island. PTAC voted to recommend a staggered transfer time which would not have all seven buses arriving at the same time. PTAC also voted to recommend 9th Street between Mass and Vermont .

March 20, 2001 meeting – Joe Flannery spoke on behalf of Weavers in regard to downtown transfer site as part of the public comment section.

May 15, 2001 meeting – Joe Flannery spoke on behalf of Weavers as a regular agenda item. Decision reached that a sub-committee would be appointed to study the issue and make a recommendation by next meeting if not sooner in order to facilitate the start-up of our route changes. Committee members were Jeremy Douglas, Jessie Ann Lusher and Danny Kaiser.

May 22, 2001 meeting – Minutes are included in the City Commission agenda packet. Discussion held about a site on New Hampshire Street between 8th and 9th Streets and remaining at 9th and Mass site. After considerable discussion, PTAC voted to retain the transfer location at 9th and Mass. The motion passed unanimously with only one board member not in attendance – Jessie Ann Lusher.