
APPENDIX A Response to Comments

The following memorandum was produced to respond to the comments received on the June 2007 draft of this report.

MEMORANDUM

TO: Route 28 Advisory Committee **September 24, 2008**

FROM: Mark S. Abbott, PE
Efi Pagitsas

RE: Response to comments for “Toward a Route 28 Corridor Transportation Plan: An Emerging Vision” Draft Report, June 2007

On July 19, 2007 staff presented the draft report “Toward a Route 28 Corridor Transportation Plan: An Emerging Vision” dated June 2007 to the Transportation Planning and Programming Committee (TPPC) for review and comments. The City of Somerville also submitted comments via a letter from Mayor Joseph Curtatone on July 25, 2007. A copy of the City’s letter and notes from the TPPC meeting minutes are attached to this memorandum.

The purpose of this memo is for staff to respond to the comments of the TPPC and the City of Somerville and update the draft report accordingly. Responses to comments will be discussed at the last meeting of the Route 28 Corridor Study Task Force, which is scheduled for September 24, 2008 in the Planning Offices of the City of Somerville. The next step after the meeting would be to submit the final draft to the TPPC in one of its future meetings for review and approval. Responses to comments are presented in ascending page-number order for easy reference to their place in the draft report.

RESPONSES TO COMMENTS

- **“intersection improvements at Pearl Street and Broadway” (Page 2)**
Sentence should have stated “improvements along Broadway”. Correction will be made in final draft report.
- **Where are the benefits of the Urban Ring spelled out specific to relieving Route 28? (Page 7)**
The Urban Ring project is currently in Phase 2 of a DEIR/DEIS, which will determine impacts and benefits of the chosen improvements.
- **There is deep pink (60,000) from I-93 to Broadway and Broadway to Medford. East Somerville is an EJ community as well. The 2000 census data is old would you consider updating with new MAPC data for TAZ. (Page 11)**
Figure 3.1 shows population density by block group, based on the 2000 Census. The same or latest information can be easily mapped for TAZs but not within the work program of the present study.

- **Table values need to be verified (Page 13, Table 3.1)**
The contents of Table 3.1 were verified and updated.
- **Is the Somerville employment number correct? Hence, revisit Figure 3.2. (Page 13, Table 3.2)**
- The employment data is correct based upon information gathered from the Massachusetts Division of Employment and Training in 2001. Figure 3.2 shows employment densities, not total employment.
- **Figure 3.3 Land-Use (Page 16)**
Figure was not updated; no new data for land-use is available at this time.
- **Figure 3.4 Zoning (Page 17)**
Figure was updated with new data provided by the City of Somerville.
- **Is data from O/D survey out of date since the CA/T opened after the survey was taken? (Page 19)**
No, the data is not outdated since the primary focus of the survey was to determine if Route 28 was being used as a diversion route for I-93 traffic. As the survey results indicate, out of the 3,645 vehicles recorded at the Museum of Science station, only 520 vehicles had in fact traveled the length of the corridor through both survey stations. This indicates that the primary use of Route 28 is to locations along Route 28 in Somerville and to East Cambridge that are not easily accessible from I-93.
- **Vehicle origins should not be shown. (Page 21, Table 4.2)**
This table provides the origin information for the 520 vehicles which passed-by both survey locations. The breakdown by community was determined using Registry of Motor Vehicle data.
- **Figure 5.1 does not show Route 28 viaduct as MassHighway (red), it is shown as DCR (green). (Page 30)**
The Route 28 viaducts are owned and maintained by the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR).
- **Figure 5.4 – shows relatively good LOS (LOS D and above for peak hours) at I-93 Interchange with Route 28 yet on Page 33 it mentions severe delays at this location – severe delays would result in poor LOS. (Page 35)**
The severe delays mentioned on this page refer to the roadway speeds, mainly southbound, away from Mystic Avenue and at Leveret Circle, and northbound at the Broadway approach. Figures 5.5 and 5.6 show this data in a color-coded scheme to show levels of severity. The level of service “D” designation for the intersection of Route 28 and Mystic Avenue is consistent with the colors associated with speed levels at the approaches to the intersection. In addition, the intersection delay, which associated with the level of service at an intersection, is the overall delay based on all the approaches to the intersection, some of which have higher travel speeds and are less congested.

- **Updates to the TIP, RTP, and PMT in the vicinity of Route 28. (Page 44)**
Tables 7.1 and 7.2 were updated to include all projects in the 2007-2010 TIP, and latest RTP and PMT.
- **Update DCR inspection findings in the report section “Route 28 at Washington Street” (Page 61)**
The second and third paragraph of this section will be updated as follows: “One safety-related issue of concern for the City of Somerville at this location is the structural condition of the bridge over Washington Street, which is part of the elevated Route 28 structure, built in 1925. A 2008 bridge condition assessment by DCR designated its overall condition “fair” with a rating of “5”, which indicates that repair or reconstruction of this bridge is not required immediately. The thinking of the Advisory Committee, the City, and many citizens is that when the bridge deteriorates to the point that it needs reconstruction, it should be demolished and the roadway reconstructed at grade instead. This thinking is in line with the City’s urban design vision for the corridor and the conversion of the midsection of the study area highway into a boulevard. Citizens and the City are concerned that the elevated structure deters access, obstructs visibility and economic development, and is an obstacle to neighborhood integration, and that the ramp termini are dangerous for pedestrians.”
- **Remove “possible” from the statement “with a possible spur to Union Square”. (Page 65)**
We verified with EOT that the spur to Union Square is part of the Green Line Extension to Medford Hillside project. The sentence has been corrected in the report.
- **Verify the TIP information concerning the Orange Line Station at Assembly Square. (Page 66)**
Based on information provided in the current TIP for Fiscal Years 2007–2010, the project has a discretionary **authorization of \$6,259,219 (\$5,007,375 – Federal, \$1,251,844 – State) for fiscal year 2009.**
- **Clarify the statement “pressures to develop this area are not high”. (Page 66)**
The statement was made to show that even though the potential of a major development/redevelopment of this area exists, currently there are no definitive plans **except for the current phase of the North Point project.** To date, Somerville has begun the planning process with a series of minor studies of the area, but, to our knowledge, there have been no initiatives for land-use master plans that would determine the development future of this area.
- **Update the text to reflect that development is occurring at North Point. (Page 66)**
Text has been updated stating that the North Point development is currently in its **early stages of construction.**

- **Verify Phase 1 of the Somerville Community Path. (Page 73)**
Page 73 in the report now states “Phase 1 of the Community Path between Cedar Street and Central Street”, not “between the Minuteman Path and Cedar Street”.
- **Change the reference to the Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan to indicate that the projects mentioned are two separate projects. (Page 73)**
The change has been made to the text.
- **Change the recommendations to show that the Community Path project is in Segment 3 of the roadway rather than Segment 1. (Page 74)**
The recommendation has been moved to Segment 3.
- **The second to last recommendation on Page 75 will be updated as follows:**
“The Route 28 viaduct section over Washington Street will eventually need rehabilitation or reconstruction. It has been suggested that an alternative is to remove the viaduct section and return Route 28 to an at-grade intersection with Washington Street. Currently, a 2008 bridge condition assessment by DCR designated its overall condition “fair” with a rating of “5”, which indicates that repair or reconstruction of this bridge is not required immediately.

The thinking of the Advisory Committee, the City, and many citizens is that when the bridge deteriorates to the point that it needs reconstruction, it should be demolished and the roadway reconstructed at grade instead. This thinking is in line with the City’s urban design vision for the corridor and the conversion of the midsection of the study area highway into a boulevard. Citizens and the City are concerned that the elevated structure deters access, obstructs visibility and economic development, is an obstacle to neighborhood integration, and that the ramp termini are dangerous for pedestrians.

If the City of Somerville pursues the option to remove the viaduct section, a detailed traffic, land use, and access study is recommended. This study would need to not only examine the local operations of the traffic at Route 28 and Washington Street, but also include Somerville Avenue and examine regional traffic impacts and future development of the Inner Belt, Lower Brickbottom, and Union Square, including improved access to I-93 and Route 28, and connections to the Green Line extension.”

- **Somerville developments (Appendix B, Table B1)**
Table B1 was updated to include the new development projects in Somerville that were provided by the City of Somerville.
- **What is the impetus for this study, UPWP?**
From the Scope of Work: “A request for this study from the City of Somerville came to the attention of the Transportation Planning and Programming Committee during the preparation of the Boston MPO Fiscal Year 2002 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP). In that letter, Somerville officials identified a number of reasons for the MPO to fund a study, including to:

- Improve vehicular, pedestrian, and bicycle safety
- Assess projected travel demand resulting from future growth
- Identify transportation issues and make improvement recommendations
- Ensure that economic development in the corridor has positive impacts on quality of life
- Evaluate potential bicycle and pedestrian connections,
- Improve accessibility across the corridor”

- **What are the goals and objectives?**

The primary objective of the study was to create a Route 28 Corridor Transportation Management Plan. The plan was to coordinate current and planned roadway improvement projects to accommodate expected development and traffic growth, and also to evaluate and recommend improvements for pedestrian and bicycle facilities and for public transportation.

However, after the study began, it became apparent that it was not possible to develop a true corridor transportation management plan as is normally done. This is because much of the background information related to land development or transportation projects in the area that would impact travel along Route 28 was, and still is, largely unavailable. Specifically, along the southern/eastern segments of the Route 28 corridor that was studied, large areas are being discussed for redevelopment. Assembly Square plans changed twice during the study and the proposed redevelopment of approximately 145 acres of land in Lower Brickbottom and Innerbelt will dramatically affect the transportation landscape. In addition, the impacts of the Green Line and the Urban Ring are still being determined through detailed studies with budgets that far exceed the resources allocated for this study. No definitive recommendations or plans could or should be developed without further study of these development projects, particularly in the Brickbottom area, and traffic impact results from the ongoing transportation studies for the Assembly Square Orange Line station, the Green Line extension, and the Urban Ring.

- **What are the next steps?**

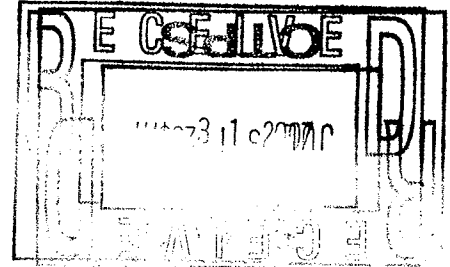
The next steps are:

- To ensure that the proposed interchange study incorporates the impacts from the redevelopment of the Assembly Square and Brickbottom/Innerbelt projects, and also takes into account the impacts from the Assembly Square Orange Line station, Green Line Extension, and the Urban Ring.
- Also, once the above transportation project impacts are known, for the City of Somerville to oversee the development of a detailed Land-Use/Transportation Master Plan that would include impacts from the redevelopment of the Brickbottom/Innerbelt land area, considerations for regional access to the site, and associated impacts/redesign of Route 28 in Somerville.



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS

JOSEPH A. CURTATONE
MAYOR



July 25, 2007

Efi Pagitsas, Project Principal
Boston Region MPO, CTPS
10 Park Plaza, Suite 2150
Boston, MA 02116-3968

Re: Comments on Draft report entitled "*Toward a Route 28 Corridor Transportation Plan: An Emerging Vision*", Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization, June 28, 2007

Dear Ms. Pagitsas:

Thank you for allowing us to review the Draft report entitled, "*Toward a Route 28 Corridor Transportation Plan: An Emerging Vision*". We recognize a great deal of time and effort went into the preparation of this document, and there are multiple issues to be addressed along this roadway. Route 28 is a high priority roadway for the City of Somerville given its location near Union Square, Inner Belt, Brickbottom, and other areas with significant economic development potential in the future. The purpose of this letter is to provide commentary from the City of Somerville on the draft document.

Overall, we would like to acknowledge the thorough documentation of issues surrounding the Route 28, McGrath Highway corridor. However, it does not appear from the document that a broad vision or plan regarding the future of the corridor has been generated. It is important that the City, Executive Office of Transportation (EOT), and the Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization, together with other affected stakeholders, develop a unified vision of this corridor. It will take all combined efforts to realize and implement a vision for this corridor. This is especially true given the complexity of issues that exist in this location and the limited resources presently available for transportation improvements. We hope to work with your office to advance the efforts of this study in order to ensure that a comprehensive vision can be developed.

Our comments are as follows:

- Timeliness of data (overall) – it appears the majority of the traffic is dated. Collection efforts documented in the report are from 2002 and 2003, prior to the completion and opening of the Central Artery. It is likely the traffic demand on Route 28 has changed since then.



- Recommendations (overall) – the document does not make recommendations regarding what type of roadway Route 28 should be. As acknowledged in the report, it is currently classified as “other freeway”. Determining the level of roadway is elemental to setting a framework for the specific improvements recommended in subsequent analyses.
- Segment 1 (Mystic River to Mystic Avenue) Recommendations (page 74) – the funding that is presently available through the TIP is for a study of the I-93 / Mystic Avenue ramps which are adjacent to the I-93 / Route 28 interchange referenced in the report. The City is in the process of preparing the scope of work in coordination with EOT for I-93/Mystic Avenue only. The adjacent and larger interchange of I-93/Route 28 remains to be studied and improved. As noted in the report, this interchange is one of the State’s highest accident rate locations and is in need of safety and capacity improvements. It is our recommendation the I-93/Mystic Avenue study be the first phase in analyzing and designing improvements for the entire interchange, which includes Route 28. We are in agreement a major investment of funds will be required to improve this interchange. Hence, it is of tantamount importance that all agencies work together to pursue all avenues of resources.
- Segment 2 (Mystic Avenue to Medford Street) Recommendations (page 74) – we agree that a pedestrian crossing is needed at Blakeley Street to allow access to Foss Park and Super Stop and Shop, but given that this is the most residential stretch of the study area, additional discussions need to be held regarding how to knit the East Somerville neighborhood back into the fabric of the city. Right now Route 28 is a major dividing factor through this primarily residential area.
- Segment 3 (Medford Street to Museum Way) Recommendations (page 74-75) – we are open to discussion regarding whether to remove or rehabilitate the Washington Street viaduct and acknowledge there are multiple opinions regarding the merits of a viaduct versus an at-grade roadway. We are moving forward with land use planning throughout this area and would like to work expeditiously with the EOT to finalize a plan for this area. Regarding an at-grade roadway, we do want to note that the recommended 5 lanes in each direction at this location seems excessive (page 75).
- Significant maintenance issues exist (page 61) - Despite the fact that the report gives the viaduct a “satisfactory” rating, we believe serious maintenance issues exist and some immediate attention is needed. Not only does the Washington Street viaduct need attention, but also pieces of metal and concrete can be found on the sidewalks below, along the Perkins Street underpass, which is part of Segment 2 for this report. Spalling concrete and other materials cause a safety hazard to vehicles, pedestrians, and bicycles traveling underneath the viaduct. We understand some work is being completed presently; we encourage MassHighway on behalf of DCR to reach out to the City to discuss the repairs occurring and how they will satisfactorily ensure safety to the traveling public.



- (Page 2, Paragraph 6) – this page references “intersection improvements at Pearl Street and Broadway”. Please clarify what improvements this references.
- (Page 3, Route 28 Advisory Committee) – Please correct the spelling of Lisa E. Lepore, P.E.
- (Page 4, Paragraph 1) - Remove second comma after “news media”.
- (Page 4, Paragraph 2) – No reference is made to concerns about noise.
- (Page 7, Paragraph 2) – The stakeholders reference the potential, benefits of the Urban Ring in this section, the study does not analyze how it could relieve vehicle traffic on Route 28 which it should. What about consideration of the impacts of a transit way?
- (Page 7, Paragraph 3) - The project in the TIP is only I-93 / Mystic Avenue. I-93 and Route 28 is neither on the TIP nor RTP but should be part of the Journey 2030 planning efforts of the MPO.
- (Page 11, Paragraph 5) – There is also deep pink (“over 60,000”) from I-93 to Broadway and Broadway to Medford. It is noted East Somerville is an EJ community as well.
- (Page 13, Table 3.2) – this employment data is from 2001. It should be updated.
- (Page 16, Figure 3.3) - Land Use in Assembly Square is mixed use residential, commercial, office and open space, not just industrial.
- (Page 30, Figure 5.1) - Route 28 viaduct should be shown as MassHighway (red). Instead, it is shown as DCR (green).
- (Page 35, Figure 5.4) – This figure shows relatively good LOS (LOS D and above for peak hours) at I-93 Interchange with Route 28, yet on page 33, the report mentions severe delays at this location. Severe delays would result in poor LOS.
- (Page 44, Table 7.1) – Delete reference to Route 28 in first row under Description.
- (Appendix, Table B.2) - IKEA and Assembly Square have the same mitigation; they should be merged together. There is not a commitment to mitigate Lombardi Street / Mount Vernon / Broadway at this time, although we are still in discussions with the developer. Delete reference to “600 ft” in Foley Street bullet. In the bullet referencing the MBTA Orange Line, the developer’s commitment should be noted as \$15 million.

The City of Somerville encourages an open dialogue with all stakeholders to advance a work plan utilizing the evidentiary material presented in the report and that it be updated as required. A realistic work plan and phased improvement program for the area should be developed and planned for implementation in the near future.

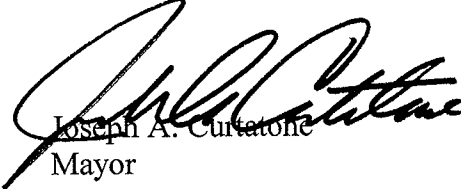


E. Pagitsas
July 25, 2007
Page 4

We would like to meet with you or a representative of your office within the next few weeks to discuss how to proceed with the next steps regarding completing the vision for Route 28. Please contact Monica Lamboy, Executive Director of the Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development at 617-625-6600 x 2510 or mlamboy@somervillema.gov to set up such a meeting.

I thank you in advance for your consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,



Joseph A. Curtatone
Mayor



Studies – Karl Quackenbush and Efi Pagitsas, MPO Staff

Toward a Route 28 Corridor Transportation Plan: An Emerging Vision

Central Transportation Planning Staff (CTPS) conducted the Route 28 study at the request of the City of Somerville. The City was interested in having the study as a planning tool at a time when infrastructure improvements and developments were being planned in the corridor. The study focused on the heavily traveled section of Route 28 that flows through Somerville and East Cambridge. Most of the roadway is controlled by DCR.

The primary source of public input on the study came from a task force, which met eleven times, and a public meeting. Members of the public expressed concern that when incidents occur on I-93, Route 28 functions as a “release valve” and I-93 traffic flows onto Route 28. CTPS conducted a license plate survey that showed that on a typical day (when no incidents were occurring on Route 93) only a small portion of Route 28 traffic was that which could have been on I-93. This finding in no way contradicts the observation that, on bad traffic days, Route 28 does function as a release valve for I-93.

During the course of the study, CTPS also conducted an urban design workshop, and an analysis of the potential impacts of the then-proposed Assembly Square redevelopment plans at the request of the Office for Commonwealth Development (OCD).

Most of the recommendations that came out of the study were general and strategic in nature given that development projects in the corridor were not far enough advanced for staff to provide specific recommendations. There were, however, a couple of specific recommendations; the study recommended that a crosswalk should be provided across Route 28 near Foss Park and the viaduct section over Washington Street should not be removed without first conducting traffic, land use, and access studies.

During a discussion period, members recommended several edits to the study:

- Correct the figures on page 13
- Remove Table 4.2 or summarize the information contained in it
- Update the text on page 65 regarding the Green Line spur to Union Square
- Update the text on page 66 to reflect that development is occurring at North Point
- Change the reference to the Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan on page 73 to indicate that the projects mentioned are two separate projects
- Change the recommendations on page 74 to show that the Community Path project is in Segment 3 of the roadway rather than Segment 1
- Add an appendix that includes the analysis used to develop the recommendation regarding the viaduct over Washington Street and returning that section of Route 28 to an at-grade roadway

Concern was expressed that the study is outdated since most of the work was done before new transportation facilities became operational. The question was raised about whether different conclusions might have been reached if such changes to the transportation system were factored into the study.

Thomas Bent, City of Somerville, thanked the MPO and CTPS for the study and stated that improvements to the Route 28 corridor are a priority for the City of Somerville. The city is preparing written comments that will be submitted to the MPO. T. Bent summarized the comments focusing on each segment of the roadway that was studied:

- Segment 1: The city has funds for an I-93/Mystic Avenue study and is preparing a scope of work for the study. Major investment is needed in the area.
- Segment 2: The city agrees that a pedestrian crossing is needed near Stop & Shop and Foss Park. Since this segment of the roadway is the most residential part of the corridor, more discussion is needed to develop ways to reconnect East Somerville to the rest of the city.
- Segment 3: Mayor Curtatone is open to discussion about removing or rehabilitating the viaduct over Washington Street. However, the city believes that CTPS's assessment, that an at-grade roadway replacing the viaduct would need to be five lanes wide, is excessive. The viaduct needs significant maintenance; pieces of concrete have been falling from it. The city is currently conducting land use planning in that section of the city.

M. Pratt emphasized that developers should be urged to supply mitigation funds for transportation projects. (The City of Somerville has received mitigation funds for the redevelopment of Assembly Square.)

Michael Chong, FHWA, asked whether costs and prioritization had been considered for the proposed mitigation measures listed in Table B-2. K. Quackenbush stated that the information in the table is derived from developer's reports submitted as part of the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) review process, and that, therefore, it did not represent anyone's priorities

It was noted that the study cost \$200,000 and is over-budget. It was paid for with MassHighway State Planning and Research (SPR) funds. D. Mohler directed CTPS to not spend any more MassHighway SPR funds on the study without MassHighway approval.

Members discussed whether the study should be released as an MPO study or as an EOT or MassHighway study. The MPO is the current client for the study, but the client can be changed. The draft study is being distributed to a limited number of people (City of Somerville planners, for example). Members expressed interest in seeing revisions to the study before a final copy is released, however D. Mohler noted that the draft is a public document and that he is releasing it to certain entities that have expressed interest.

Staff was advised to coordinate with the City of Somerville on recommendations that can be implemented. D. Mohler noted that if high-cost recommendations requiring federal funding are developed out of this process, the MPO will need to discuss the proposed recommendations and consider whether they can be funded. G. Feltman stated that the MPO should not change recommendations based on the MPO's financial bounds. B. Lucas stated that the MPO should develop a list of projects (with full cost estimates) that

would not currently be financially feasible; it is important that the MPO has this information available to convey to the Transportation Finance Commission as it works to address the state's transportation funding crisis. Members agreed that staff should make appropriate recommendations regardless of funding constraints.

G. Feltman noted that he would like information on the implementation status of the recommendations from MPO studies. K. Quackenbush said that staff is preparing a report to the MPO on this topic.

W. Zamore stressed the importance of addressing Route 28 as it has some of the largest traffic volumes in the state (25,000 vehicles per day) and significant amounts of diesel-fueled vehicle traffic. He commented that Somerville residents appreciate the work that CTPS has done focusing on the Green and Orange Lines, but that this focus has meant that the Route 28 study is now dated. He noted that the land use map and costs in the study are out of date, and that, since the study was done, more vehicles have been added to the roads as a result of developments in the area. Congestion on Route 28 is now at level F, worse than represented in this study, he added. He asked that staff emphasize the need for improved transit for Somerville in the revised study. He also noted that the MEPA review for the Assembly Square IKEA development has been waived and that massive traffic back-ups can be expected on I-93 when the store opens if an MBTA subway stop is not incorporated into the development.

Route 2/Route 16 (Alewife Brook Parkway) Eastbound: Traffic Patterns and Alewife Station Parking Garage Survey

The results of the Route 2/Route 16 (Alewife Brook Parkway) Eastbound: Traffic Patterns and Alewife Station Parking Garage Survey were distributed. This study is raised for discussion only at this time; action would not be proposed until the August 16 meeting, at the earliest.

Work on this study began in February 2006. At the time, the City of Cambridge was concerned about cut-through traffic from Route 2 going onto local streets, particularly morning in-bound traffic. The objectives of the study were to identify AM peak period origin and destination travel patterns at key locations on the roadways near Alewife Station, and to identify the town of origin of vehicles that park at the station. The study produced data that could be used for further planning work in the Alewife area.

CTPS conducted an origin/destination study of vehicles. Data retrieved from a license plate survey was matched with Registry of Motor Vehicle (RMV) files to determine where vehicles traveling through the area were garaged. The survey data was also matched with model data to approximate where those vehicles were bound. The study revealed that most Boston-bound vehicles traveled on the Alewife Brook Parkway rather than along local roads. Three markets of travelers were identified: cross-town, Cambridge-bound, and Boston-bound travelers. Recognition of these markets will aid in planning for transit strategies.

