

Princeton

400 Witherspoon Street □ 1 Monument Drive
Princeton, NJ 08540

Public Transit Advisory Committee

MINUTES – May 15, 2014

The Public Transit Advisory Committee met at the East Conference Room of the Monument Municipal Building of Princeton, NJ at 9:30 a.m. on Thursday, May 15, 2014.

Attendance

Present were: Marvin Reed, chair, and Fay Reiter; Kristin Appelget, director of community and regional affairs, Princeton University; Cheryl Kasternakes and Joan Lockwood-Reck of the Greater Mercer Transportation Management Association; and Don Mayer-Brown of the Engineering staff.

Also present from the staff of NJ Transit were: Tom Morgan, Tom Marchwinski, Al Tillotson, Alan Maliman, and Mike Viscardi.

“Dinky” Ridership

Marvin opened the meeting underscoring the interest of the municipality in working cooperatively on improvements in service on the “Dinky” rail line running from Princeton to Princeton Junction and connecting to the Northeast Corridor mainline toward the north to New Brunswick, Newark and New York and toward the south to Trenton and Philadelphia. He noted the responsibility of New Jersey Transit for operating the train service, with a station and parking being provided by Princeton University.

In response to an inquiry, NJ Transit representatives indicated that occasionally requests could be made for ridership reports to determine ridership usage of the Dinky line.

The group noted errors in recent press reporting which ignored the alternative Tiger Transit bus service being provided during temporary station relocation and construction. Correcting newspaper headlines of “sharply diminished” Dinky ridership, the group noted that ridership including the train the train and the alternative TigerPaWWW remained at 1,200 a day or better.

Marvin indicated that the municipality would hope to see a boost when the newly constructed station opens in the Fall.

Missed Connections

NJ Transit representatives admitted that bad winter weather as well as extensive Amtrak high-speed track work on the Northeast Corridor was presenting some problems with connecting from the Northeast Corridor to the Dinky.

While experienced “Dinky” conductors generally show more leeway in holding for trains that experience delays, the “Dinky” still needs to deliver passengers and turn-around within a 20 to 30 minute time loop.

They indicated that schedules were in the process of being readjusted to absorb the construction delays when temporary access may apply to southbound Track 4 or at other times to northbound Track 1.

After a brief discussion, Committee members ask that a joint effort examine whether better “Dinky” connections could be assured to and from the Trenton-Philadelphia direction.

The NJ Transit representatives noted that the past winter produced a number of snowy days when trains on the Northeast Corridor were reduced to their weekend schedule. This affected morning commuters because on its weekend schedule the “Dinky” doesn’t run until after 9:30 am. It was indicated that more latitude is being allowed individual conductors and engineers and cut backs of service will not be ordered unless especially necessary.

Improving Connectivity

As the new station opens, more attention will be given to drop-offs and pick-ups by the “FreeB,” the #605 bus, the #655 bus, and the University’s Tiger Transit buses, all of which will drive into the Station area instead of dropping off and picking up on Alexander Road as is often the case now during construction.

It was noted that, as of June 21, the #655 bus will shift its route in Princeton to terminate at the Harrison St. Shopping Center by way of Witherspoon St. rather than Harrison St.

Encouraging Bicyclists

Better information will be assembled for bicyclists indicating under what conditions bicycles are welcomed or limited on the “Dinky,” as well as on the Northeast Corridor trains.

More rigorous policing of the station area will remove bicycles from racks which appear to be abandoned.

Kristin explained the extensive provisions that will be provided at the new station for securing bicycles, offering lockers, and inaugurating a limited rental bike-share program.

Parking

Marvin distributed a spreadsheet indicating the number of drivers paying each day for parking spaces at the “Dinky” parking lot which has been controlled by pay meters since March.

It showed that an average of 77 cars per day are paying to park. Highest day was Thursday, March 1 with 116 paying for spaces.

Kristin also noted that monthly permit spaces managed by the University are also being well used.

NJ Transit representatives reported that the West Windsor Parking Authority had recently opened an additional parking area at the Princeton Junction Station. While primarily for West Windsor residents, non-residents are permitted to buy permits at a higher price. This, it was noted, may accommodate users who have been on waiting lists for permits and parking in the daily lots. This may leave more spaces open in the metered lot. The Committee agreed to monitor the situation to see if it results in a reduction of users parking at the Princeton Station lot.

Further Marketing

Members of the committee and the representatives of NJ Transit and the University agreed to continue to plan together for the opening of the new Station and encourage more local ridership of the “Dinky” rail line.

April “FreeB” Ridership

Joan presented a report on April FreeB ridership and on-time service:

- * Ridership on the Commuter Route in April dropped to 898 passengers, an average of 40.8 daily riders, compared in March to 978 passengers, a daily average of 46.6 riders. The 2013 April average was 36.1.)
- The mid-day Neighborhood Mid-Day Route carried 1,615 passengers in April, an average of 62.1 daily riders, down from 1,714 in March, an average of 65.9 daily riders.
- The Mid-Day Neighborhood Route hit its highest number of April passengers (78) on Friday, April 4 and its lowest number (38) on Friday, April 18.
- * On-time service (96%) remained the same for the month, but there were many mechanical issues with the vehicles and some missed trips. Service was cancelled on 2 days, challenged by equipment problems on 7 other days, and disrupted by weather on 5 days.

Communiversity – April 27

It was noted that the Harrison St. Shopping Center underwrote the cost of two standard buses from First Transit, the University’s transportation provider. Continual looping by the two vehicles from the shopping center to downtown and back continued from noon to 6 p.m.

The Committee agreed that this remote parking arrangement is a better system than attempting to use the FreeB vehicles.

Memorial Day Parade – May 24

Don noted that on Saturday, May 24, morning service on the FreeB neighborhood route will be diverted off Nassau St. An additional bus will be ordered from Stout’s to transport older veterans from Monument Hall to Princeton Ave. (the originating point of the parade), with return following the post-parade ceremonies.

Promotion

Marvin reported that the two sandwich boards showing FreeB morning and evening service from the “Dinky” Station into town were now being displayed by the train ticket and parking ticket machines. He noted, however, that the plastic envelope displaying the departure times had come off and needed replacement.

The need for removing the old Borough e-mail web addresses from the FreeB vehicles was reemphasized.

Next Meeting – June 12

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, June 12 at 9:30 am at the East Conference Room of the Monument Municipal Building.