

Alexander Street and University Place Transit Task Force
August 7, 2013
Meeting Minutes

In Attendance:

Committee Members: Appelget, Bottigheimer, Jackson, Liverman, Simon, Wilkes

Staff: Solow, West, Kiser

Also in attendance: Crider, Fiske, Sturges, Reed, Cherry, Widner

Minutes:

Meeting minutes from the July 10 meeting were discussed and amended.

Motion to approve by K. Wilkes, second by K. Jackson. Approved unanimously with correction.

Discussion:

Committee had discussion about a draft document presented by committee chair K. Wilkes (attached) that is intended to provide guidance to the team from URS regarding the next steps in their work for the task force.

Transfer Points

M. Reed noted that in draft document all alternatives would terminate at Nassau Street, He noted that Nassau Street is not the final destination for most travelers. The document should address how to incorporate in the study "seat changes" to get to a final destination. Seat changes to other transportation services to connect to final destinations might include TigerTransit, FreeB, automobile, NJTransit, walk, bike. Committee mentioned that multimodal stops could include Princeton Shopping Center, Nassau Street, and new Princeton Station.

S. Sturges notes that the Coach bus stop on Nassau Street should be noted as an additional transfer option and that it currently only stops at the palmer Square location.

N Bottigheimer suggested that the document should identify that we want to also include in the study some measurements that are more qualitative. The URS work should also include information about how it impacts upon ancillary services.

DECISION: Add to document review of potential for modal transfer at Nassau Street and/or at new Princeton Station

Transit options to be studied

Committee reviewed the two transit options in the draft document, Extend Rail Service to Nassau Street and Bus Rapid Transit. P. Simon noted that BRT had been previously discussed in Princeton and had been “resoundingly defeated”. There was additional discussion about BRT operations in dedicated lanes and on regular streets noting that the efficacy of BRT was improved with dedicated lanes. It was also discussed that it would be possible in a system that connects Nassau Street and Princeton Junction, routes can be changed at high volume times of the day to offer “express service” from Nassau Street to Princeton Junction. The majority of committee felt that BRT should be included in the guidelines for the study so that URS could evaluate where rights of way provided potential for dedicated lanes.

Committee decided that they wanted to direct URS to pursue three options

1. LRT and Streetcar (assumes replacement of current heavy rail).
2. BRT only.
3. Dinky plus BRT.

Based on the community concern in the past about buses replacing the train, the committee confirmed that the study is intended to model future options to provide information to the public and to decision makers. The study was not intended to design a final solution.

Additional Stops

Committee discussed how to incorporate review of additional potential transit stops in the URS guidelines documents. There was discussion of whether or not to include evaluating the potential for transit stops in West Windsor and additional transit stops in Princeton (example, at Lakeside/Lawrence Apartments).

S. Sturges asked if transit connections to Plainsboro should be part of study.

DECISION: Study should focus on Princeton, potentially look at West Windsor.

DECISION: L. Solow to reach out to Pat Ward to ask if WW has any studies that would impact or supplement the committee work

Comments Section (page 2)

Committee noted that there is a need to have URS review peak vs. non-peak hours and how a system is designed that meets need of riders. R. Fiske noted that the current Dinky operates with approximately 80 riders in the peak with an average of 12 riders.

N. Bottigheimer noted that we don't simply want URS to do a straight forecast and compare rail to other modes. We also want qualitative analysis that would show where there are opportunities to improve performance and ridership (i.e. if bike share is available, does that provide additional access?).

PRT

C. Crider asked if it was possible to ask URS what the cost would be to add PRT back in as a third option. He also stated that he thinks that the evaluation criteria need to be redone.

DECISION: K. Wilkes to ask URS what the cost will be to add a third option to the study.

Specific edits to draft document

- In the first paragraph, wording should be changed to “rail transit, bus transit or a combination of the two”.
- Under the section labeled “BUS RAPID TRANSIT”, option c should say “Arts and transit to Nassau Street and beyond”.
- On point number 4 on page two the first sentence should be modified to say “car and bike share”.

Summary of Decisions and Next Steps:

DECISION: Incorporate request to review potential for modal transfer at Nassau Street and/or at new Princeton Station to the document.

DECISION: Study should focus on Princeton, potentially look at West Windsor.

DECISION: L. Solow to reach out to Pat Ward to ask if WW has any studies that would impact or supplement the committee work

DECISION: K. Wilkes to ask URS what the cost will be to add a third option to the study.

NEXT STEPS: K. Wilkes to rework redraft study recommendations and then circulate to committee. Goal is to finalize at next committee meeting.

Next Meeting:

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, August 26th.

Submitted by:

Kristin Appelget

We want to focus on two transit options and eliminate the Personal Rapid Transit option from further study. After consideration of your initial ranking, we accept the recommendation that some version of rail transit or some version of bus transit could meet future needs to move people between Princeton and the NEC and possibly between additional stops to be imagined. Now we wish to study these two alternatives in greater detail and with more specific forecasting analysis.

Personal Rapid Transit exists today in the form of automobiles and taxis and we seek to find mass transit solutions not personal transit solutions.

Therefore, for both remaining transit options suggested to us, we would like to understand what the solution would look like extending from Princeton Junction to Nassau St in two alternative scenarios; as a single seat routing option, and separately, as a two seat option, assuming that the Dinky remains, requiring a transfer at the new Dinky Station for transit to/from Nassau St.

EXTEND RAIL SERVICE TO NASSAU STREET

Please examine strategies using the same rail track gauge as the existing Dinky line with an extension to Nassau Street. Imagine as a one seat ride, using either Light Rail technology or Streetcar technology (for the time being lets treat them as non-differentiated, but we understand that there are speed and turning radii differences) but assume that the heavy rail Arrow Car is at the end of its shelf life and could be replaced, keeping as much of existing NJ Transit infrastructure in place as practical.

BUS RAPID TRANSIT

Please examine BRT strategies in the context of existing studies; consider an end to end one seat ride using the present Dinky alignment and then diverting to Alexander and an end to end one seat ride using some other parallel alignment that leaves the existing ROW untouched. In other words, assume the BRT route extends to Princeton Junction, stopping at the new Dinky Station but not running along the current Dinky rail route. We are interested in this option because presumably it allows more flexible route / stop options for the BRT, it could possibly be implemented incrementally and at a lower overall cost, and it also permits the possibility that the Dinky train service could continue as well.

Performance (ridership, travel time, operating cost, capital cost, etc.) to be measured in three ways for each alternative:

- a) NEC to Nassau
- b) NEC to A+T
- c) A+T to Nassau

SEE REVERSE SIDE:

Consideration for the Task Force:

1) Do we mean that the performance of each transit alternative should be evaluated both WITH dinky service and as a REPLACEMENT to Dinky service?

OR

1) Dinky service is the baseline against which all future alternatives should be compared, and everything we're considering should be thought of as a replacement to the Dinky, not a supplement.

2) For what year(s) are we asking URS to produce ridership forecasts?

Are we going to ask them to lay out NEC assumptions that are included? For example, addition of a second crossing of the Hudson for the northeast corridor could greatly expand corridor capacity and lead to higher service levels on both Amtrak and NJT. This makes a difference to the out year forecasts prepared.

3) URS should comment qualitatively on the potential of land use changes along the alignment to generate future ridership. And, as a consequence, URS should recommend stops at locations between Princeton Junction and the A+T station, as well as between A+T and Nassau St.

YES or NO?

4) URS should comment qualitatively on the potential for things like bike share programs to supplement access to the A+T station along with the transit service from A+T to downtown. Potential transit ridership that could be accessed by bike share from points around Princeton that might not be well served by the transit service to downtown that is being designed (for example, the IAS, Seminary, Butler graduate housing, etc.), but that could be attracted to A+T if transit service from there to Princeton Junction were more frequent and convenient.

YES or NO?

Comment from Nat:

Also, a point to be aware of regarding transit ridership forecasting: it's MUCH better at peak period forecasting for home - work trips. It's pretty bad at forecasting off-peak ridership that's "quality of life" related. The fastest growing portion of ridership for DC for the last few years, for example, has been off-peak ridership. It's still roughly a third of peak-period ridership, but travel models don't forecast that well. We need to remember that a line that connects Princeton town and University to a Princeton Junction that is both an NEC link and also, hopefully fingers crossed, a transit village, will inevitably have a large component of non-peak period demand. URS should qualitatively comment on how this dynamic would/could affect its forecasts.