



PROVIDENCE PRESERVATION SOCIETY

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Mr. Peter Alviti, Jr.
Director
RIDOT
via email

Director Alviti:

The Providence Preservation Society (PPS) is aware of RIDOT's recently released transit proposal, including a new major hub located in the Innovation District. PPS Executive Director Brent Runyon was present for a presentation of this plan by Director Alviti, Scott Avidesian, and Nicole Verdi on July 22. Subsequently, PPS' Planning and Architectural Review (PAR) Committee had the opportunity to review the RIDOT plan's using the slide deck and an alternative proposal by a group of civic leaders, represented and presented by Buff Chace and Donald Powers.

Before commenting on ideas from both proposals, allow us to comment on the process and our concern about the State's lack of engagement with diverse and deeply invested stakeholders.

We know that over many years, numerous local stakeholders have been involved in conversations with RIDOT, RIPTA, the State, and the City about improvements to public transit and public space, primarily Kennedy Plaza and Burnside Park. Various plans have been produced, most without full implementation and some without considering preceding research. We also recognize that the current pandemic affects planning along with financing and design in real time. We are living, working, and moving around the city differently.

As such, PPS joins fellow organizations and concerned citizens who are baffled and frustrated by RIDOT's unexpected introduction of a new transit proposal. Is this a *fait accompli*? We hope not, and respectfully request that RIDOT immediately pause the rollout and planning of this bus hub proposal at Dyer Street and meet with city leaders and stakeholders before moving forward.

PPS believes that there are major considerations such as connectivity, circulation, location, and improvement of rider experience that must be addressed prior to this significant generational change to the capital's public transportation infrastructure. This project and its goals are too important to have an opaque and truncated process. We find "July 2020 Stakeholder Outreach" to be insufficient.

As to the RIDOT multi-hub proposal, we believe it ignores some beneficial principles and recommendations. RIDOT's bus system goals, as presented, are wise and generally acceptable: unification of transit investment; enhancement of intermodal access and connectivity; and support of economic development. The plan for changes to the hub at

Providence Station are very sound and should be implemented, though changes to Providence Station (SOM, 1986) must be carefully considered in order to preserve its design integrity. However, we feel that the Kennedy Plaza hub is too broad in scope and should be significantly reduced. We agree that Kennedy Plaza will always need a transit component, but it should be minimized in favor of the fulfillment of a true, grand public square in the center of downtown. We are opposed to the creation of a hub in the Innovation District at the former National Grid building, as proposed, believing a bus stop is all that should be considered there.

We would like to point out some of the positive attributes of the alternative plan presented by Chace and Powers, what we will call the Dorrance Plan. Please note that this alternative plan is simply one concept of what could be possible if we step back and look at a new transportation hub in a more comprehensive way. PPS is open to other concepts and locations in order to achieve the best possible solution. We appreciate the Dorrance Plan for offering the example of a viable location and a broader program of uses.

The location identified for a transit hub was given deep consideration. The parcel, bounded by Clifford, Dorrance, and Dyer Streets, has street access on all sides. It is ideally situated at the edge of both downtown and the Innovation District, abutting existing green space. The Dorrance Plan would provide 12 on-site, fully covered bus berths, becoming the keystone transit hub for Providence, something we understand RIPTA is particularly pleased with. The Plan would provide real amenities for riders, including a ticketing and information center, rest rooms, and food service. The present unsightly surface parking would be replaced with higher-capacity structured parking. The liner buildings created would become an important gateway to downtown from the Innovation District, something that does not now exist.

We recognize that the development process for the Dorrance Plan would be complex and the financial investment considerable, but PPS believes it is a project that would substantially improve Providence, having far-reaching benefits to residents, commuters, and the economy. A major subsidiary benefit to the Dorrance Plan is its effect on Kennedy Plaza. The Plaza could finally become the vital people-focused public square described above, while improving vehicular and pedestrian connection between the West and East Sides.

On this point, a new transit hub and system configuration provides opportunity, and a responsibility, to improve east/west connections for commuters from the West End, Federal Hill, Lower South Providence, Elmwood, etc., who continue to bear the consequences of detachment borne by previous urban planning and interstate highway decisions.

We support further comprehensive consideration of all modes of transportation, including connection to the urban greenway for pedestrians and cyclists, as well as rideshare users, and how they relate to the new transit hub. With proximity to the Providence urban trail and the Pedestrian Bridge, the Dorrance Plan is positioned to be linked into the existing and future Great Streets network to the advantage of many.

We urge RIDOT not to consider this transit project in isolation, but rather as a macro urban planning and transportation planning opportunity. We implore the State to consider the interests of riders and urban planning and place-making advocates that call for feasibility studies and transparency in order that the transit improvements will be substantive and long lasting.

Sincerely,



Brent Runyon

cc: Governor Gina Raimondo; Mayor Jorge O. Elorza; Providence City Council; Bonnie Nickerson, Nicole Verdi; RIPTA; Scott Wolf; RI Transit Riders Alliance; Jewelry District Association; Downtown Neighborhood Association; Providence Foundation