



June 15, 2025

MBTA Better Bus Project & Service Planning Teams
10 Park Plaza
Boston, MA 02116

Dear MBTA Better Bus Project and Service Planning Teams,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the changes to bus route 90 in East Somerville, scheduled to go into effect today. These changes will eliminate bus service along Broadway, Cross St, and Tufts St, routing the 90 instead down Washington St. This change, which has been confusingly attributed to the [Tufts St Reconstruction](#) and less confusingly to operational difficulties on Cross St, will negatively affect East Somerville residents and school communities. The latter of these groups has already endured significant hardship with the closure of the Winter Hill Community Innovation School in 2023, which has displaced students to the Edgerly Education Center until at least 2031. Given these hardships, PTAC recommends that the MBTA bring the 90 back to Cross St and Broadway in the next schedule update in order to restore vital service to these portions of East Somerville in time for the 2025-26 school year.

Relationship between Bus Route 90, Tufts St, and Cross St

The MBTA has attributed the rerouting of the 90 bus to the design of planned enhancements on Tufts St, in keeping with the designation of Tufts St as a Neighborway in the Priority Network of the [Somerville Bicycle Network Plan](#). The Tufts St design process began in 2023 and construction will begin later this summer. In contrast to the MBTA's claims, the City of Somerville explicitly designed the Tufts St Neighborway plans for compatibility with large vehicles. Further, the City collaborated with the MBTA as well as Somerville DPW and emergency services to ensure that buses, emergency vehicles, and other large vehicles would be able to use the redesigned Neighborway safely. Given this collaborative design and testing process, it is unclear why the 90 bus would be unable to use Tufts St after the redesign or why these claimed impacts were not communicated sooner.

Regardless, the portion of the 90 route on Broadway and Cross St is not dependent on the use of Tufts St. The 90 bus route only recently started using Tufts St (in the past three or so years) while still using Cross St. The MBTA originally rerouted the 90 down Tufts St for closer proximity to the East Somerville Green Line station, replacing Cross St at Alston St on the outbound route (0.4 mi to the station entrance) with McGrath at Alston St (0.3 mi to the station entrance). If Tufts St will be truly unusable by the 90, it is PTAC's position that the needs of East Somerville transit users on Broadway and Cross St should supersede marginally closer Green Line proximity, and that the 90 bus should take its previous route with the outbound bus taking a right turn onto McGrath from Cross St.

In addition to the Tufts St Neighborway design, the [MBTA indicated in a recent presentation to PTAC](#) that operational difficulties on Cross St are another factor in the changes to bus route 90. Notably, operational

difficulties on Cross St do not seem to be sufficient to merit near-term rerouting of the [80 bus](#) which runs on Cross St between McGrath and Pearl St. The 80 bus route will change significantly in some later stage of the [Bus Network Redesign](#), but with no set timeline of which we are currently aware.

Based on our experiences, we expect that two factors in the operational difficulties encountered by route 90 drivers on Cross St are (1) the high volume of personal vehicles during school dropoff and pickup at the East Somerville Community School and Winter Hill Community Innovation School, and (2) residential car parking narrowing the effective width of Cross St, particularly near the intersection at Broadway where the 90 bus needs to turn.

Regarding personal vehicle congestion at school dropoff and pickup times, we acknowledge and appreciate these challenging circumstances intrinsic to the size and proximity of these two schools. However, we note that elimination of the 90 bus route on Cross St will exacerbate this problem for the school communities and neighborhood by further increasing reliance on personal vehicles. This shift will make Cross St even more congested and dangerous overall for students walking and biking, counter to the MBTA's stated goals.

To address the contributing factor of parked cars on either side of Cross St, we recommend that the City of Somerville implement additional targeted parking restrictions to make Cross St more busable in the near term. Cross St between McGrath Hwy and Broadway is slated for priority implementation (i.e., by 2030) of a one-way protected bike lane in the Somerville Bicycle Network Plan. Given the narrow width of Cross St, this implementation will almost certainly require removing existing parking spots anyway in the next five years. We urge the City to move up this timeline to ease the operational challenges the 90 bus faces on Cross St.

Impacts to Under-Resourced School Communities

The 90 bus route stops on Cross St serve two of Somerville's most vulnerable public school communities: the East Somerville Community School (ESCS) at 50 Cross St and the Winter Hill Community Innovation School (WHCIS), which has been relocated from Sycamore St to the Edgerly Education Center at 33 Cross St until at least 2031. These [Title I](#) school communities together enroll over 1100 students and are some of the most diverse in the city. In addition, the 90 bus route stops on Broadway serve the Upper Elementary Campus of Prospect Hill Academy (PHA), a charter school enrolling over 200 students in grades 4-6. Across these three schools, 77% of students are racial/ethnic minorities, 69% have a first language other than English, 57% are low income, and 73% meet the Massachusetts definition of high needs students.

The WHCIS "catchment" (i.e. the portion of the city for which WHCIS is considered a "neighborhood school") includes a significant portion of Spring Hill near the Highland Ave segment of bus route 90. Many WHCIS families live in this neighborhood. In addition, over half of WHCIS and ESCS enrollment comes from outside the neighborhood school catchments, due in part to specific programming offered by these schools. Families with school placements outside their neighborhood catchments tend to rely more heavily on bus transportation. For example, Somerville Mayor Katjana Ballantyne has noted that her family relied on the 90 bus for years when her children commuted from West Somerville to ESCS.

Many middle school students at ESCS and WHCIS participate in after-school activities at Somerville High School (SHS), such as middle school musical theater and all-city robotics and music programming. On its current route, the 90 bus directly connects ESCS and WHCIS with the high school at 81 Highland Ave. This provides a viable transit option for high school students residing in East Somerville and middle school ESCS and WHCIS students participating in after-school programming at SHS.

In a [recent presentation to PTAC](#), representatives from the MBTA noted that WHCIS, ESCS, and PHA will still be within a quarter mile of a bus stop following the rerouting of the 90. We note that the existence of bus stops providing service on other routes does not substantially alleviate the negative consequences of the rerouting for families that live near the 90 route. Reducing connectivity between Cross St and specific areas within Somerville served by the 90 bus makes bus transportation a less viable option for school commutes regardless of other nearby routes that may serve families living in other locations.

In addition to ESCS and WHCIS, the 90 bus route on Cross St until today served the Michael E. Capuano Early Education Center, another Somerville public school. As a dedicated early education center, the majority of pre-kindergarten students across all neighborhood catchments are placed at Capuano. Many families thus rely on bus routes for their school commute. With the 90 route changes, the bus stop closest to Capuano will shift from Cross St to Washington St. The inbound Washington St stop at New Washington St ([stop #2776](#)) is a particularly perilous crossing point for families with young children because there is no crosswalk to Franklin St – the crosswalk at Tufts St is about 200 feet away. Regardless of whether the 90 continues to use Washington St or is restored to Cross St, we recommend that the City immediately prioritize creating a crosswalk at this intersection, since this bus stop serves three routes used by families including the new high-frequency route 109 (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Bus Stop at Washington St and New Washington St (#2776)

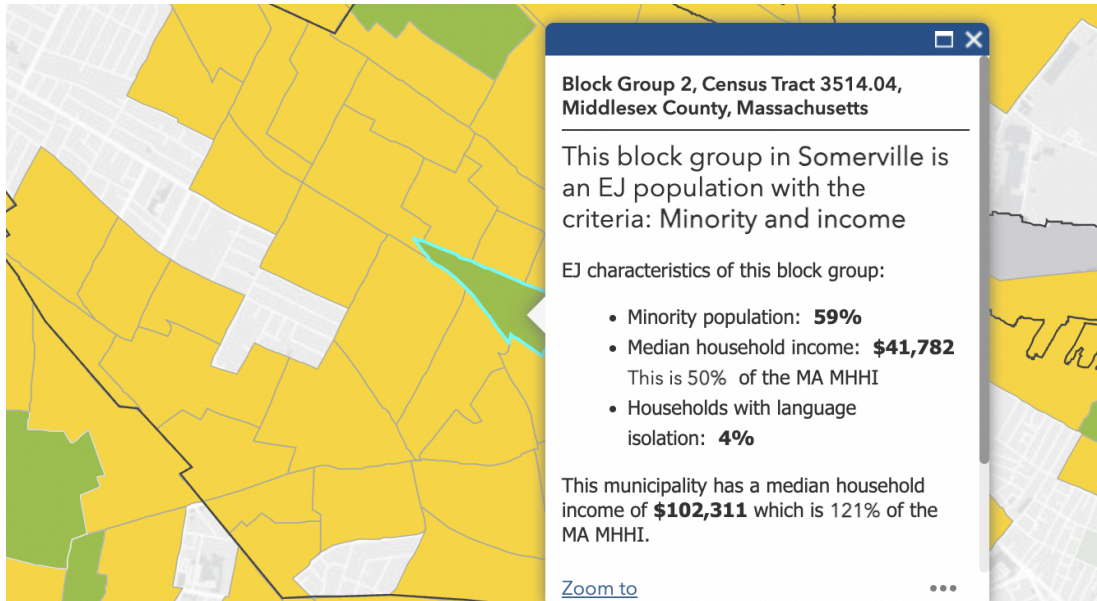


Removing Bus Service from Environmental Justice Community

In addition to the underserved school communities described above, the residents of East Somerville served by the portion of the 90 route on Broadway and Cross St constitute an [Environmental Justice Community](#) per [Massachusetts' 2022 Environmental Justice Map](#) (Figure 2). In Massachusetts, an Environmental Justice Community is an area with a median household income equal to or less than 65% of the statewide median, an area with over 25% of residents identifying as a race other than white, an area with over 25% of households having no one over the age of 14 who speaks English very well, or some combination of the three. The entire portion of the 90 route along Broadway and Cross St qualifies as an Environmental Justice Community by the minority population criterion, and a significant portion of the route near the WHCIS and ESCS schools (the portion least served by other bus routes) also qualifies per the household income criterion. Removing a key

route from this Environmental Justice Community contradicts a stated goal of the Bus Network Redesign project: “to bring bus service to the transit-critical riders who depend the most on bus service – low-income riders and riders of color, plus those without easy access to a vehicle, seniors, and riders with a disability” (per the [MBTA’s Title VI Equity Analysis of the Bus Network Redesign](#)).

Figure 2: Massachusetts 2022 Environmental Justice Map of East Somerville



The portion of Washington St that will be served by the 90 bus following the rerouting is also an Environmental Justice Community. However, Washington St already has strong bus coverage across three routes including the high-frequency 109 bus recently implemented in [Phase 1 of the Bus Network Redesign](#). Consolidating routes along the same corridor reduces service to the community as a whole.

In conclusion, PTAC maintains that the changes to the 90 bus route are misaligned with the needs of the East Somerville community. We recommend that the MBTA and City of Somerville collaborate to alleviate operational difficulties on Cross St via targeted removal of residential parking spots. We also urge the MBTA to consider Tufts St separately from Broadway and Cross St, and – if the Tufts St Reconstruction truly requires avoidance – to eliminate only the Tufts St portion of the outbound route.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

The Somerville Pedestrian & Transit Advisory Committee (PTAC)

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