



MARTHA'S VINEYARD
REGIONAL TRANSIT AUTHORITY

MEMORANDUM

To: Martha's Vineyard Commission
From: Angela E. Grant, VTA Administrator
Date: September 20, 2011
Re: Response to Bus Stop Proposals at Proposed Roundabout Intersection

For the project public record, I am writing in response to the proposal by the MVC staff to relocate all VTA bus transfers away from the Blinker intersection if the proposed roundabout is constructed. The VTA is opposed to the elimination of any bus stops at the proposed roundabout, while maintaining no position either for or against the roundabout itself. VTA has worked with MassDOT engineers and consultants to identify the sixteen potential passenger transfers at the intersection between VTA Routes #1, #7 and #9. These routes directly serve Vineyard Haven, Edgartown, Oak Bluffs, MV Airport and via transfers serve West Tisbury, Chilmark and Aquinnah.

The MVC staff alternative is surprising and was made without any prior consultation with the VTA. As the local professionals with the sole mandate to operate and advocate for a safe and efficient transit system for our region, our opinion is that the transfer relocation proposal is without merit. Our supporting arguments are specified below.

The VTA stretches rural transit dollars to provide bus service to 1.1 million passengers annually. As the Island's only viable and truly effective traffic mitigation measure, VTA buses are now a part of the regional roadscape, reducing traffic congestion and improving accessibility. The level of activity on Martha's Vineyard continues to grow, and building safe and attractive bus stops in a few select locations should be part of any infrastructure improvements aimed at managing the growing human activity.

It is hard to comprehend how not providing modest infrastructure for public buses to safely stop at the Island's busiest intersection would offer any benefit. Passengers cannot be realistically asked to travel unnecessarily a half mile out of their way, only to be returned to the same point on the same or a different bus. They will simply ask to be let off, and walk to their next pick-up point at the intersection, as they do now. Transfers that make sense to occur at the MVRHS or Skate Park stops do so already.

The strength and efficiencies of the VTA system are keyed on the many timed transfers that are built into the schedules. Operationally, Route #7 and Route #9 have what are known as "smooth" headways of 60 minutes, so that the bus can be expected at intermediate stops at the same

minutes past each hour. These routes simply do not have the time for the unnecessary side trips to the MVRHS with a turn around at the Y. This would clearly be an imposition on through-travelers.

Another strength of the VTA transit system are the allowance for flag stops, allowing buses to stop anywhere along the routes as long as it is safe for the bus to stop. As a rural transit operator, the VTA extends the Vineyard's friendly atmosphere by accommodating flag stops and making sure individual passengers make their transfer connections as smoothly as possible. Restrictions on where the buses can stop, particularly at the Island's busiest intersection, would be wholly contradictory to our attitude toward public service.

In summary, the benefit of the proposed bus stop relocation is questionable but there are multiple potential detriments:

- Routes #1, #7 and #9 lose combined effectiveness, as the timing of the timed transfers would no longer work. In theory, access to the more rural places on the island would increase by an hour (the next bus). In reality, passengers will choose not to make a much less convenient trip.
- More turning movements for the buses increases travel time.
- The M.V. High School intersection is not a good candidate for transfer relocation, as it does not have the proper infrastructure for a substantial number of additional transfers. Its layout, amenities and lighting are all sub-standard. Without improvement, that stop itself is at capacity with heavy use by students. The alignment of the two stops (MVRHS and Skate Park) are not aligned, which is not ideal.
- Non-transfer related pedestrian traffic will still occur at the intersection, particularly from the adjacent Youth Tennis Center. These potential bus passengers will continue to flag buses at the intersection, but will be deprived of a well-established set of bus stops.

In conclusion, the opposition to formal bus stops at the Blinker / Roundabout is unwarranted. It opposes extra hardscape at a location that hardly ranks among the Island's most scenic locations, at the convenience and time expense of actual travelers. The well worn roadsides near the Blinker are evidence of their frequent use by VTA passengers, who do not have to wait there particularly long, due to the close coordination of our vehicle operators. The transit system has been carefully planned over the last several years, and adjustments are made thoughtfully.

The precedent for eliminating bus stops because they are deemed inconvenient to the folks in the passing cars is alarming, and should be dismissed for having too singular a focus on aesthetics. The engineers' plan views of the intersection, with the starkly color-contrasted and bulging areas for buses to safely pull over, will not look nearly as imposing when viewed from a human angle at street level. Well designed bus stops would actually improve the appearance of the roadsides in this area, as compared to the existing conditions.

Thank you for your consideration. It is important that care be taken so that the potential benefits of the roundabout not be negated by an irresponsible detrimental impact to the Island's public transit system.