

**\*\*ACTION ALERT\*\***

***Hearing on Community Connector Bus Hub***

***Monday, Feb 13, 5:30pm***

***Bangor City Council Chambers, 73 Harlow St, Third Floor***

All Residents of Community Connector Service Area (Bangor, Brewer, Hampden, Veazie, Orono, Old Town, UMaine) encouraged to attend and to **email the Bangor City Council**.

***\*\*Please contact [transportationforall@foodandmedicine.org](mailto:transportationforall@foodandmedicine.org) or 989-5850 to let us know if you plan to attend, and if you need a ride or child care\*\****

***\*\*See below for talking points\*\****

One of the great stories of positive change that Faith Linking in Action and Food AND Medicine supporters like you have created is the improvements to the Community Connector, Greater Bangor's bus system, that our Transportation for All team has achieved. Now, the Connector is under threat--a group of wealthy property owners want to get rid of the current bus hub in Pickering Square and move it to an inferior location that would disrupt bus routes and tax the resources of the system. **Please join us on Monday, Feb. 13 at 5:30 pm** to speak out for keeping the integrity of our bus system, and **[write to the Bangor City Council expressing the importance of keeping the bus hub in Pickering Square.](#)**

**\*\*Please read below for more background on the Community Connector bus hub!\*\***

- **The proposal to move the bus hub is an expensive fix to a system that isn't broken!** A 2014 study by a transit consultant recommended keeping the hub in Pickering Square.
- Proponents of the move want to convert Pickering Square to a parking lot to address parking shortages. This would be better addressed by conducting a parking study and considering less costly alternatives.
- The Community Connector is our region's public transit system. Almost 3,000 people--low-income workers, professionals, families with children, students, elders and people with disabilities--ride the bus almost 900,000 times a year.
- A well-operating system is essential to support economic development and maintain strong neighborhoods in Greater Bangor.
- The Bangor City Council has been very supportive of improving the Community Connector. Over the past two years, Transportation for All members surveyed bus passengers, compiled the results, and worked with the City Council to identify improvements. The result was an additional appropriation of \$528,000 to cover repairs, additional cleaning, upgraded software, and the like. An additional federal grant means that additional repairs and reconditioned buses are on the way. These steps are appreciated and bring us much closer to our goal of expanded evening service. Moving the bus hub is an unnecessary expense that will delay this goal.
- **Moving the bus hub will disrupt routes and traffic patterns.** The Community Connector is a pulse system with a hub-and-spoke layout. To work properly, all routes must take either a half-hour or an hour on a regular basis to complete. Right now, tolerances are tight on

many routes at certain times of day. If routes are lengthened or traffic pressures delay completion, the whole system will be disrupted.

- **City staff have put forward a strong proposal for keeping and revamping the Pickering Square bus hub**, that would improve the experience for bus riders, pedestrians, drivers, and those seeking to enjoy public space. This proposal was generated through a public process and is recommended by staff.

There are two locations being considered, in addition to Pickering Square. **Please see below for Transportation for All's analysis** on how each location would affect bus riders, the bus system, and the general public.

Thank you for all of your work to build a just community,  
Martin Chartrand, Faith & Economic Justice Organizer

P.S. Please [write to the members of the Bangor City Council](#) and tell them why it is important to you to keep the bus hub in the heart of downtown!

## Abbott Square

*On Harlow St. across from Bangor Public Library*

- This site has the biggest potential for traffic conflicts. Buses entering and exiting the hub are likely to back traffic up on already congested Harlow Street. Harlow Street will also become even less pedestrian friendly, though pedestrian use is likely to increase if the bus hub is relocated here.
- Because only right turns are allowed on Franklin Street, most buses operating on any one cycle will have to exit via Central Street, a curving one-way street, into the heart of downtown. Traffic back-ups are likely.
- We could speed up traffic by eliminating parking on Central Street—a significant loss of on-street parking in a convenient part of downtown. We would, of course, also lose a significant amount of parking in the current Abbott Square municipal lot.
- Displacement of the bus hub to the west side of Kenduskeag Stream will most adversely affect buses headed to the West Side of Bangor. These are the heavily used Capehart and Hammond Street routes. Community Connector staff estimate that a third bus on the Capehart route, now operating only at peak times, would become standard, adding to increased operating costs for the system as a whole.
- It will not be possible for the Hammond Street bus continue to serve the 1<sup>st</sup>-4<sup>th</sup>/Cedar/Hammond/Union Streets neighborhood, where use is heavy, and continue to meet a half-hour timetable.

## Washington Street

*Between Washington St. and Hancock St. behind Career Center*

- Compared to Abbott Square, the Washington Square site seems to present little likelihood of major traffic back-ups or loss on on-street parking downtown. On the other hand, this site seems likely to cause major disruptions of the efficiency of the route system and may put bus users at risk.
- The site under consideration formerly housed an auto dealership. A large, empty L-shaped brick building cuts the site off from its only near neighbor, the Career Center. On the open side, the site overlooks busy Washington Street (which has no sidewalks here), railroad tracks, and the river.
- The site has been marketed as having real potential as a multi-modal transportation hub, should passenger rail service return to Bangor. Rail service was discontinued in 1960, more than 55 years ago. Resuming it would require, among other things, extensive work on the rail line. The Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority estimates costs of such work “well in excess of

\$100 million” (BDN 1-25-2015). It seems safe to assume that any return of passenger rail service is in the distant future at best.

- Meanwhile bus passengers would be stuck in an inconvenient, out-of-the-way location where there is almost no foot traffic and no “eyes on the street.” These passengers include the elderly, the physically or intellectually challenged, and many mothers with small children. The potential for crime is so obvious that the bus hub would have to be fully staffed and patrolled by security guards during all hours of operation, adding considerably to the bus system’s operating expenses.
- Even more than the Abbott Square location, displacement of the hub to Washington Street would adversely affect the Capehart and Hammond Street routes. According to Google maps, moving the hub to Washington Street would add a mile from the start of the current Hammond Street route to the stop at the corner of Union and 2<sup>nd</sup> Street that serves both the Together Place and the Bangor Y. A mile in downtown traffic, factoring in the extra downtown stops necessitated by moving the bus hub away from downtown, would make the current route structure definitely unsustainable.

## Pickering Square Renovation

- It has been argued that the Pickering Square “brand” has been so fatally damaged by stereotyping and controversy that moving the bus hub is the only way to give the Bus system a boost. It is at least worth considering the counter-argument: that redesigning the Community Connector hub as proposed in the most recent plan gives Bangor to re-brand an area in search of an identity as a vital connector between downtown and a rapidly revitalizing waterfront.
- The most recent plan has six very real strengths: (1) by moving the entrance to the parking garage, it reduces potential conflicts between bus traffic and garage traffic (2) by giving the bus system its own loop, it reduces potential conflicts between bus traffic and general traffic (3) by moving the bus waiting room out from under the garage, it improves waiting room visibility and provides more “eyes on the street” (4) it delineates a safe pedestrian corridor from downtown to the waterfront (5) it puts an open space buffer across from the Children’s Discovery Museum, away from bus traffic (6) by reducing the amount of available open space, it makes the area less attractive for aimless hanging out or less savory behaviors.
- According to retired City engineer John Frawley (BDN 6-27-13), Pickering Square was picked as the bus hub location over other city-center alternatives considered because of its “minimal effect on downtown traffic patterns.” This remains true. Most buses can get in and out of Pickering Square without backing up ordinary traffic, and can go off in multiple directions quite easily. This is an advantage not to be thrown away lightly.
- It has been argued against the Pickering Square plan that the waiting room would be only an inch above the flood plain. We could, however, elevate the waiting room and make it ramp-accessible.
- It has also been argued against this plan that it would prevent movies and concerts from being shown in Pickering Square. However, only a 5-minute walk away is the natural amphitheater used by the American Folk Festival for their Two Rivers Stage. Perhaps the City of Bangor could work with the folk festival and the area’s arts community to improve this site for use for movies, concerts, and open-air theater. This would enable us to market the parking garage for safe, convenient parking for family-friendly events on the waterfront during weekend and evening off-peak hours.