

February 4, 2009

Mark A. Olinger, Director
Department of Planning & Development
City of Madison
215 Martin Luther King Boulevard
Madison Wisconsin 53703

Transmitted by e-mail and regular mail

Dear Mr. Olinger

This letter is to express concern about the implications for the City of the Badger Bus Company's plans to redevelop their bus station site at Bedford and West Washington, and effectively abandoning fixed bus boarding and transfer services in central Madison. I am writing this letter as a resident of the Bassett Neighborhood, a strong supporter of mass transit, and a concerned observer of our advancing energy crisis. Concerned citizens are requesting that your department actively engage in the review of this project as it comes for approval to the City Planning Committee and Common Council. I am attaching a public statement that discusses this problem in some detail, which has been endorsed by my colleagues in the Madison Peak Oil Group, an organization dedicated to educating the public on the need to prepare for impending high energy prices and supply disruptions.

It is important to prevent a near term deterioration of intercity bus service, but also the loss of the most promising site for the central focus for an expanded public transportation system. As the agency responsible for much of the actual work, you well know that such a facility is envisioned in many components of our ongoing transportation planning process including the Wisconsin Connection 2030 Plan, Transport 2020 Plan, and the Midwest Regional Rail System, and even our Bassett Neighborhood Plan.

Unfortunately, at this time, these plans are in the various stages of formulation, and need legislation and financing to put them in concrete form. Serious planning is also inhibited by the financial crisis and the abatement of last summer's high energy prices. Nevertheless, these same forces may also bring large Federal resources from pending economic stimulus appropriations. In addition, we should be ready for an emergency expansion of transportation alternatives when high energy prices return with a vengeance as the world economy recovers. This makes a pro-active intervention by City essential to the protection of the public interest--despite the current lack of a specific public plan to use the Bus Station facility and site.

Therefore, we urge the City Planning Department to immediately and vigorously:

- Hold the Badger Bus Company accountable for a viable plan for intercity bus boarding and transfers for the near term—two to three years—as a part of their plans for conversion of this site to non-transportation use.

- Obtain information from UW planners specifying what intercity bus boarding and transfer activities can be accommodated at the Union South facility, including the construction period through 2011, for both Badger and Greyhound bus service and transfers.
- In consultation with the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, provide the Planning Commission and the public with projected plans for intercity transportation terminal facilities and intermodal transfers in the downtown area—both near and long term--before recommending approval of the Planned Unit Development required for the implementation of this project.
- As part of a final recommendation, consider staying the abandonment of transportation services at the Bus Station, and consider the purchase of this site for public transportation purposes aided with State or Federal funds.

The bus company owners appear bent on rapidly pushing their redevelopment plans through the city process while shamelessly neglecting plans for future intercity bus service. They feel they can operate profitably with poorer service and no provision for rider accommodations and transfers, but the city has broader responsibilities to the public which can not be neglected.

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CC: Alderman Michael Verveer
David Trowbridge, Transportation Planner
Tim Parks, Neighborhood Planner

NOT SO FAST!
LET'S THINK TWICE BEFORE LOSING OUR BUS STATION

Madison's Transportation Future is at Stake

THE BADGER BUS STATION TODAY

While the buses make some noise and transients occasionally congregate there, the Badger Bus Station provides valuable passenger service for Badger, Greyhound and other bus companies. Moreover, it offers the potential to be an invaluable focus for future public transportation development. Each week hundreds of passengers pour through the station—returning students, out of town visitors, businessmen, Badger fans, high school tournament attendees, and Madison citizens.

However, next summer, if the proposed redevelopment proceeds on schedule, intercity bus arrivals and transfers will be spread around the city in a disorganized fashion without regard to passenger convenience and access to major destinations. In the next five years, as our nation responds to the return of very high energy prices and institutes measures to control global warming, planned expansions of bus, train, and rapid transit will be urgently needed. Madison will then search for a central hub for these facilities and find the current bus station site has been preempted by an ill-timed commercial development.

Madison has no better place for a central transit focus than the bus station site. Accessible to nearly all the major bus lines, it is equidistant between east and west Madison, and close to much of University housing. It is the natural linking point for new services using existing rail lines. It provides ready access to nearly all of the public attractions of Madison. Its is only two blocks from the Kohl Center, an easy walk to Camp Randall, the State Capitol, City offices, Monona Terrace, Overture Center, Farmers Market, and Capitol Concerts, among others. The existing bus and train stations provide a core for a transit hub, and the surrounding low intensity uses would pose very minimal obstacles for parking and other facilities (as opposed to the hypothetical alternatives at Monona Terrace or west of the Kohl Center).

The Bus Company claims that a new transit hub might be established at the reconstructed South Union at West Johnson and Randall, but this raises a host of unanswered questions. First, this destination is not in the heart of Madison's attractions. Second, construction there is just beginning and will not be completed until the spring of 2011. Third, UW planners have no plans for a transit hub, and have provided only for Metro bus stops and an eventual commuter rail stop. Badger and Greyhound have not asked them to accommodate intercity buses and intermodal transfers and they have not done so. Furthermore, bus access through the narrow surrounding streets and traffic-clogged Campus Drive is likely to be problematic at best. The connecting block of Johnson east of Randall will be closed. And imagine buses in the midst of football game traffic at Camp Randall two blocks away.

THE STATION SITE IS THE BEST FOCUS FOR MADISON'S TRANSPORTATION FUTURE

Greatly expanded mass transportation plans are on the drawing board for implementation in the next few years. Madison is likely to have an intercity rail connection to Milwaukee and Minneapolis, a statewide publicly-supported intercity bus system supplementing today's commercial bus system, strengthened Metro bus service, and eventually an east-west commuter rail system. These systems would all pass through downtown Madison and all require some downtown focus for passenger service and transfers.

- The Madison "corridor" Plan (Connections 2030 Transportation Plan) prepared by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation and Madison Metropolitan Planning Organization specifies a central bus-rail terminal and transfer facility on or near the site of the current bus terminal (roughly from the Kohl Center to Monona Terrace).
- The Connections 2030 Plan also calls for an expanded intercity bus transportation network to be supported in part with state funds. As mapped in the plan, current intercity bus services would be supplemented by additional routes converging on Madison from the north and southwest. The system would provide "intermodal connections to intercity passenger rail, airports, and public transit" with some state assistance for transfer facilities adjacent to other modes.
- WisDOT's is nearing implementation of the Milwaukee-Madison link of the Midwest Regional Rail System eventually extending from Chicago to Minneapolis. A stop is currently planned at the airport, but the city hopes to eventually bring the service to a downtown terminal. Federal Stimulus funds may accelerate this project.
- The Transport 2020 planning process has adopted a plan for a metro-wide commuter rail system that runs on existing rail lines from Middleton to Sun Prairie in an arc through central Madison. Stations are anticipated near the Kohl Center and the Union. The required Regional Transportation Authority is nearing authorization by the Legislature before it is submitted to voters for approval.

CONCERN FOR THE PUBLIC INTEREST IS NEEDED

Indeed, a pause in the Badger Bus Company's redevelopment plan seems in order until these matters are adequately addressed. The Badger Bus Company is a private company that owns the station and the land; however, the company has profited from public infrastructure and patronage for decades, and its owners owe the city some consideration for future transportation needs. . Instead, the owners have been rapidly moving forward with their plan with a stated target to begin construction next summer (and presumably end service at the station). Their plans were quietly surfaced in December and were public only in late January to get preliminary readings from the Urban Design Commission and Bassett Neighborhood. The owners apparently hope for Planning Commission approval in February. They have worked hard to produce creditable building designs (which appear to be an acceptable starting point for review), but the owners showed no hurry to consider the impact of their action on the city's transportation needs.

So far the Badger Bus owners have failed to offer any viable plan for future service. They claim that bus stations are "passé" and they can effectively run their service off almost any street corner

or truck stop, but would be willing to participate in a "transit hub" at the South Union. This may be a formula for profitable but limited operation for their company. It is also likely to provide poor service especially for the elderly, infirm and poor; create chaotic transfers to Greyhound and other intercity bus connections; provide no basis for expanded intercity services; and result in generally declining bus ridership at a time when rapid expansion is needed.

The transportation plans above emphasize just the opposite—more intercity routes, organized intermodal transfers, and improved facilities. Finally, the supposed plan to "shift services to the South Union" seems to have no foundation in reality as discussed above. It is not surprising that the owners have refused to discuss their plans with the press.

WHAT SHOULD THE PUBLIC EXPECT AT THIS TIME?

- At a minimum, the Badger Bus Company should be accountable for a viable plan for intercity bus boarding and transfers for the near term—two to three years—as a part of their plans for conversion of the station site to non-transportation use. The Madison Planning Department should review this plan its adequacy in meeting public transportation needs.
- Before City Planning review, the owners should obtain an agreement with UW planners specifying what boarding and transfer activities can be accommodated at the Union South facility. This should cover the construction period through 2011 and after completion. It should include provision for Greyhound bus service and transfers. This should be made available to the City Planning Commission for review prior to redevelopment project approval.
- The City Planning Department, Metropolitan Planning Organization, and Wisconsin Department of Transportation should provide the public with projected plans for intercity transportation terminal facilities and intermodal transfers--both near and long term--in the downtown area before review by the City Planning Commission and Common Council. The City should not approve the Planned Unit Development required for the implementation of this project until these arrangements are considered.
- Prior to a final approval of this project, the Mayor and Common Council should consider the purchase of this site for public transportation purposes, if necessary under eminent domain, and apply for State and Federal funding. The Badger Bus Company should accept its civic obligation to play a constructive role in Madison's future transportation planning, and delay its redevelopment project until these questions are resolved.

If Madison is to have the central focal point anticipated in practically all its public transportation plans, where is it to be? If not this optimal site, where?

When should Madison prepare for a world of scarcer, more expensive oil, with controlled carbon emissions, if not now?

**David Knuti and Barbara Smith, Madison Peak Oil Group
February 3, 2009**

