

February 4, 2003

Tim Doggett's Plan for Traffic Changes in the North River Corridor Area

Salem like other cities and towns in the commonwealth, as well as the commonwealth itself, is finding itself facing an uncertain financial future. Salem is especially vulnerable at this time with not only the loss of state aid but in addition the loss of tax income from the power plant.

Salem suffers traffic problems both within the city as well as connectivity to the highway system. This transportation lack hinders our ability to develop a strong and sustainable local economy.

In the past several proposals have been made to solve this connectivity problem by increasing the lanes of traffic on Boston and North Street. Residents have responded with skepticism, fearing the loss of personal freedom, curb side parking and to safely exit their driveways and neighborhood side streets, are only for the benefit of other's shorter commute.

While recently there has been an increase in development in Salem that will over time help in the recovery; true development will not happen until we solve our transportation problem.

Increased traffic in the residential neighborhoods reduces their desirability and lowers property values. Conversely increasing traffic in the commercial districts not only increases property values but also creates private development and jobs. This has long been the argument for re-opening up of the Essex Street pedestrian mall to traffic.

At present there is the connector / by-pass traffic improvement project in Salem. The intent of this project is to provide a solution to the connectivity and the inter-city traffic issue. But in its present configuration will it?

There are two phases remaining to be built for the completion of project. One phase will connect the Veterans Memorial Bridge to the downtown. The second will connect the downtown by following along Bridge Street and meeting up with the already completed section of the roadway at Flint Street.

It is to the North River Canal Corridor in total and to the proposed building of this second phase of the by-pass / connector that I would like to address my thoughts.

The Salem Planning Department recently invited members of the surrounding neighborhood groups to participate in the formation of an ad hoc committee to propose ideas for the development of the North River Canal Corridor.

In my opinion the challenge of the North River Canal Corridor is to improve transportation and initiate controlled development. By channeling traffic out of the neighborhoods and directing it into areas likely for development we can make the neighborhoods more livable and still create an environment that will increase the potential for development in the commercial areas. Success here will increase housing values in the neighborhoods and the probability of new jobs and private investment in the central corridor.

This is one man's vision of how the area should be developed:

Traffic and Transportation

Any new traffic proposal must link with the current plan to complete the by-pass road from the Veterans Memorial Bridge to Boston Street. This Mass Highway plan, as promoted, includes building four traffic lanes, two in each direction, between North and Flint Streets. This road layout, by itself, will accomplish very little in the redevelopment of the North River Canal Corridor. And it will do little to improve traffic on North, Boston, Mason or Tremont Streets.

What will make a big difference to the North River Canal Corridor is to create a new road layout that will offer an alternative traffic pattern.

We must:

- Adopt a plan to meet our objectives.
- Rally support, individual, business and political.
- Use our political influence at this critical time to influence Mass Highway to alter and improve its road plan.

I offer the following proposal:

Commercial Street



- The current by-pass plan contains two westbound lanes between North Street and Flint Street. The funding for these two lanes would be used to widen Commercial Street to three lanes and extended Commercial Street to Flint Street. Two lanes westbound and one lane eastbound.
- Extend the westbound lanes on Commercial Street along the path of the existing railroad tracks to Grove Street and then to Harmony Grove Road.



A two lane traffic pattern would be developed that would unload traffic from the existing roads. This new pattern would utilize the mostly unused Harmony Grove Road, provide a new road for traffic out of Salem to Peabody, and make an easier connection to the

highway system. This road layout would increase the possibility that property along Commercial Street would be developed to its highest economic potential.

Goodhue Street

For a successful roadway you need to move traffic in both directions and Goodhue Street is the key element in providing a complementary route for East bound traffic.

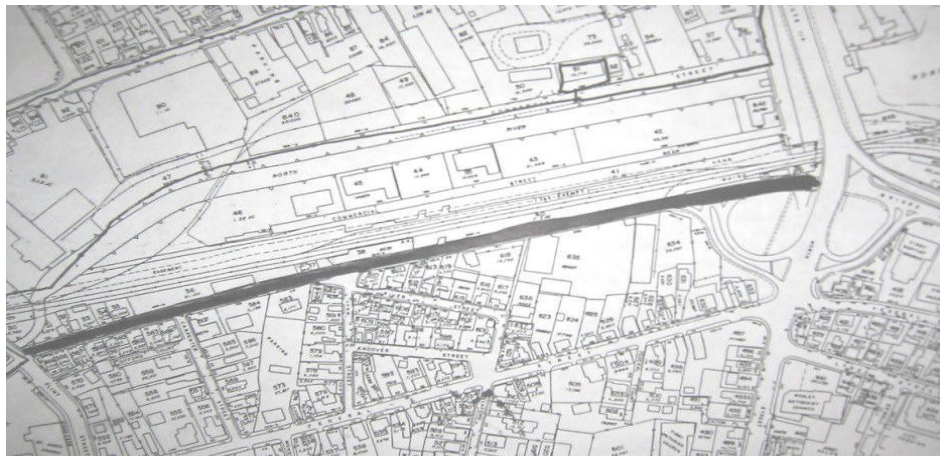


Goodhue Street as it is presently laid out runs from nearly the intersection of Boston and Bridge Streets to where it blends into Beaver and Grove Streets. Imagine if you will, moving the intersection of Bridge and Goodhue Street to the East along Bridge Street toward Flint Street, so that Goodhue Street intersects with Bridge Street at a right angle. Then widen Goodhue Street and Grove Street to three lanes, two running Easterly toward

Bridge Street, and one lane running Westerly intersecting with the new Commercial Street extension and then toward Harmony Grove Road.

Traffic could then flow Westerly along the new Commercial Street and Commercial Street extension; and Easterly along Grove to the newly aligned Goodhue Street to the existing section of Bridge Street. Not to be missed is that moving Goodhue Street creates more desirable property for development between Goodhue and Boston Street.

Bridge Street



The section of Bridge Street from Flint to North could be redesigned from four lanes to three, two eastbound lanes and one lane west bound. This reduction of road width would provide additional buffer between the by-pass road and the nearby neighborhood, assuming that the edge of the road is maintained along the train tracks as presently planned.

I doubt that anyone misses the advantage of this new traffic pattern, splitting traffic to both side of the canal and opening areas up for development, but this road plan cannot work, for obvious reasons, with the present North Street overpass in place.

North Street Overpass

When the North Street overpass was laid out it was positioned Easterly of the then existing North Street. The existing North Street was left as a dead end spur ending at the railroad tracks.

For the overpass itself valuable fully developed property was eliminated from the tax rolls while a dirt and concrete bunker was built surrounding what was then a railroad repair facility.

The repair facility complete with roundhouse is gone replaced with a parking lot and an open-air railroad stop. The pile of dirt and concrete that we affectionately call the overpass remains. It does not help traffic, it does not add to the tax rolls, it does not provide an environment for development; it does help us to cross the river and the now seldom used train tracks.

I propose that the overpass be removed and replaced with an at ground level intersection. This intersection with sufficient through and turn lanes to allow controlled passage of traffic would be laid out along the path of North Street that existed prior to the construction of the overpass.



We would now have a totally new transportation layout in the canal corridor; allowing traffic a shorter route to the highway system, reduced traffic in the neighborhoods while passing traffic through commercially developable areas.



Development

There are three major areas for economic development within the Canal Corridor. In no particular order they are:

- Commercial Street,



The area between Commercial and Mason Streets will see an increase in development and value with the extension of Commercial Street to Flint even if only two lanes. Commercial Street with its unobstructed vista across the canal and park will be of interest to destination businesses, national and local chains that rely on their identity to attract clients. Mason Street will be the buffer between the residential neighborhood and the business district.



Careful zoning and or historic neighborhood designation should be in place to protect the upper Flint Street area.

- Blubber Hollow, the confluence of Grove, Goodhue and Beaver Streets.



The Blubber Hollow development area with its open square, large enough to make a small European town envious, could be seen as several parcels, each with its own

characteristics to be developed for the benefit of the entire area. There should be an overlaying theme to tie them together.

I like to think of this theme as in the “Salem style”, buildings on the sidewalk with parking in the rear, construction mostly brick with granite lintels. I see the square surrounded by buildings with retail on the lower floors, commercial office space on the second and residential on the upper floors. Areas behind the street side buildings are relegated to parking and more commercial activities. The open-air square is either a plaza with public art or a green oasis. It is interesting to note that this area is essentially the same size as the downtown Essex Street mall. If Salem were to have a second shopping district it should be here.

The surrounding area should also be developed in a manner complementary to the treatment of the square, creating a neighborhood. This would include the Osram and the Flynntan properties, each being unique but fitting into the whole. Remember that with the relocation of Goodhue Street the entire block bordered by Boston, Goodhue and upper Grove Street has been enlarged and is open for development.

- The intersection of North and Bridge Streets.



With the removal of the overpass, the property now lying under the overpass would be made available for development. In addition the space now occupied by the down ramps to Bridge Street having no further use would also provide prime property for development as will those parcels along Bridge Street toward Flint.

- Parking Garage – Transportation Center

There has been talk of building a parking garage next to the railroad station on the property behind the overpass and new court construction between Bridge and Federal Streets. Lets explore how we can combine these proposed projects.

With the present road layout only Bridge Street provides access to the train station. There is an interesting thing about commuter trains and parking, everybody wants to arrive and leave at the same time. Bridge Street alone cannot handle the existing volume let alone any increase. Removing the overpass will allow access from both North and Bridge Streets. This would help to alleviate some of the traffic congestion that occurs with each arrival and departure of the trains.

But why build a parking garage? Why not build a transportation center?

We can build a facility that will incorporate tour busses for up-county visitors, trolleys and tour busses for Salem, Peabody, Beverly and Danvers; belt connections to the Peabody and Danvers malls, trains, commuter busses as well as the commuter parking that has been proposed. It is reasonable to assume that tourists would be directed to park here before beginning their Salem experience. Street level retail activities could be accommodated along North Street and for some length along Bridge, bringing life back into the area. The upper floors, street side, would provide office space for support of the growing court industry. The space behind and over the existing parking lot would be used to build the parking garage while the airspace immediately fronting on Bridge Street across from the end of Washington would become a prime development spot. Construction in the airspace would provide needed protection for the train commuters. A pedestrian bridge at the second level of this facility near the North Bridge intersection would connect to the downtown through the court facility being planned on Federal Street.

Conclusion

I started out with several basic goals,

- Improve transportation
- Provide a structure for development

I believe that what I have proposed is a workable plan that if implemented, would provide the structure necessary to improve the neighborhoods by reducing cut-through traffic, increase economic development and reduce the taxes. There is no time like the present to leverage the money that has been appropriated for the by-pass road to make significant

infrastructure changes that will revitalize Salem's economy and provide a new entrance to the city.