

The Commuter

The Role of the Commuter Parking Advisory Committee

The East Brunswick Commuter Parking Advisory Committee (CPAC) is an unofficial group of volunteer commuters that meet monthly to review and discuss issues related to commuting from East Brunswick. **Any interested commuter is welcome to become a member of this group by attending our open monthly meetings on the first Thursday of each month at 8:05 p.m. in the Municipal Building Conference Room. The CPAC has no official responsibilities or membership but serves as a convenient sounding board to the Parking Utility and Township Administration regarding the operation of the Parking Utility and supervision of the bus contract.** Currently planned meeting dates for 2005 are: June 2, July 7, Aug. 4, Sep.1, Oct. 6, Nov. 3 and Dec. 1. Any changes in a planned meeting date or location will be posted at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/EBCommuter/calendar>.

The title of the group has been Commuter Parking Advisory Committee since its inception. This is because the committee deals directly with and advises the Parking Utility. In reality, the committee spends the majority of its time discussing issues related to the quality of our bus service. Since the CPAC's inception in 1989, it has actively requested Suburban to improve the quality and level of service provided to our commuters. The CPAC also offers advice to the Township regarding issues that commuters believe are important in maintaining and further improving our commuter experience.

While not nearly as successful in all our efforts as we would like, we have contributed to some changes as listed below:

- Keeping our bus fares well below those Suburban charges commuters in neighboring municipalities.
- The design of a service contract containing specific service standards and penalties if these standards are not met.
- Monitoring the complaints of commuters and raising issues with Suburban at the monthly meetings.
- Advising on schedule adjustments based on bus load factor information from Suburban, our own observations and emails from other commuters.
- Providing for a ticket vending machine at each of the two East Brunswick terminals.
- Having Suburban adopt a policy requiring a constant temperature (72 degrees) on each bus year round and fighting for working HVAC systems.
- Fighting for working radios on every bus.
- The availability of dispatchers at each downtown stop and at 42nd Street and 5th Avenue.
- Regular monitoring of passenger related equipment such as seats, lights and luggage doors for repair or replacement.
- Pushing hard for better communications between Suburban and their commuters including e-mail notifications of major delays, driver announcements, and better notification of scheduling changes, etc.
- Debating the Township Council and Administration and achieving a reduction in the size of the last parking fee increase.

While the CPAC believes we have made progress on some fronts, we still believe that the existing level of service needs to be improved. In particular, the committee believes Suburban's service delivery is below the standard that has been promised under the service contract and that the Township needs to do more to enforce the contract terms.

The CPAC believes that a crucial part of this effort is the Township hiring an auditor to randomly inspect, on an unannounced basis, the service levels being supplied by Suburban Transit in the field to identify situations where Suburban is in violation of the contract. This position was contemplated when the contract was designed and the Parking Utility's budget was adopted. The CPAC believes that this position should be filled **AT ONCE**. Having an auditor inspecting Suburban's service levels should help us develop the high quality of service that we think we deserve.

Ticket Vending Machines

As required by the contract with Township, Suburban Transit has installed a ticket vending machine (TVM) in each of the two East Brunswick terminals. These machines sell a variety of tickets including 10 trip tickets and only take credit cards in payment. These machines can not take cash or TransitCheks as payment nor can they issue monthly passes. Please be aware that these machines may not issue receipts for purchases. If you are or have experienced any problems using the machines, please email Suburban and copy the committee.

The location of the machines was determined by the Township in an effort to minimize the likelihood of vandalism occurring. While they are not accessible 24/7 since they are in the terminal areas, they are available most of the time. The Neilson Plaza terminal area is open from 4:30 a.m. to 2:00 a.m. Monday to Friday and is also open weekends and holidays on a more limited basis. The TCC terminal area is open from 4:30 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. only during weekdays. While the CPAC had no hand in the selection of the vending machines, the mere existence of them is a service enhancement.

Recent Schedule Changes

Suburban Transit implemented certain schedule changes on April 18, 2005. Since that time, it has come to the CPAC's attention that Suburban Transit seems to have made certain official schedule changes that were not approved by the Township and may be contract violations. It has also come to the CPAC's attention through the assistance of many commuters that Suburban may also not be following their posted schedule. **The CPAC is making a concerted effort to better understand the actions that are taking place in the field and having the Township enforce the contract's terms.** The CPAC always appreciates the assistance of interested commuters in identifying problems of which we are not aware. Please send an e-mail to us at ebcommuter@yahoo.com with any service issues that you believe are not consistent with the contract terms, the posted schedule, or other results in an unsatisfactory level of customer service. We will pass these issues on to the Parking Utility and Suburban Transit and will discuss them at our monthly meetings with both of them. **Your support in our efforts to address these issues is also vital.**

TCC Redevelopment

The Township is continuing to negotiate with Toll Brothers regarding the proposed redevelopment of the TCC. A Council meeting discussed this proposal on Monday, May 23, 2005. The CPAC is still trying to get information on how this proposed redevelopment will affect commuters and the operation of the park and ride. One significant concern is the financing of the construction of the parking facility which is estimated to cost in the range of \$20,000,000 to construct. Other concerns include routes into and out of the facility for commuters and adequate parking and loading spaces for the buses. The CPAC will keep commuters informed if and when we receive any substantive information regarding any of these issues.

NJ Transit 68

The CPAC has had a continuing dialogue with NJ Transit management regarding service related issues on the #68 line to Jersey City. In response, NJ Transit has unofficially adjusted the timing of the later morning buses to alleviate overcapacity problems. We have been informed that the #68 schedule will be officially changed when the next NJ Transit timetable is released. The CPAC has also requested consideration of an additional stop on this run at Harborside Financial Center in Jersey City. The run currently passes this location, but the bus does not have a stop there. Lastly, Suburban Transit has informed NJ Transit that they are willing to sell NJ Transit commuter tickets at their TCC ticket windows. We have not yet heard of a response from NJ Transit on this offer, but we see little reason why they would not accept it. Please subscribe to our special listserv at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ebjc> if you would like to be kept up to date on developments on this route.

Crosstown Service

The CPAC has of late received numerous complaints regarding the operation of the crosstown service. These complaints relate to a variety of issues. One of the most frequent complaints is inadequate seating capacity during the peak morning period, especially at Neilson Plaza. **The CPAC has had an active dialogue with Suburban Transit on this issue, and to date we have been quite disappointed by Suburban Transit's response that we believe remains inadequate to appropriately address this issue. The CPAC will continue to pressure Suburban Transit and the Township on this issue until we believe it has been satisfactorily addressed.**

On a more positive vein, at the suggestion of the CPAC, Suburban Transit has added a Crosstown dispatcher during the afternoons at 5th Avenue in an effort to better manage the passenger flow on this route. The CPAC has requested that Suburban Transit give the CPAC the cell phone number of this dispatcher so the commuters can contact this dispatcher as necessary if the line is subject to an unexpected disruption. Once we have his cell phone number, we will promptly communicate it to our Topica commuter e-mail list.

Receive Newsletter and Commuter Service Information by E-mail

The CPAC delivers newsletters and other information by e-mail as it becomes available. Almost 600 commuters have already signed up for this service and are made aware of important commuting developments as they occur. To subscribe, please send an email to ebcnews-subscribe@topica.com. Then reply when you receive the sign up confirmation message. You may cancel your subscription at any time. The CPAC will not disseminate your email address or use it for any other purpose. Our normal e-mail address remains ebcommuter@yahoo.com.