

Dear Friends,

I hope that you are making it through our relatively mild New England winter and starting to think of spring!

This month, I want to highlight an issue that is of great concern at a local, regional, and national level – transportation. How we transport ourselves to work, school, shopping, and leisure activities has tremendous implications for all of us. Here are three key observations that guide my thinking on the City Council regarding Newton’s transportation issues:

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1. Transportation is not a local issue. The City Council spends a lot of time considering transportation issues - including the seemingly ever increasing congestion on our roads – particularly when we are discussing whether and how to add housing units and increase density in our city. How we address the issue of transportation is made much more difficult by the fact that we are basically a fully developed, built-out city. While we continue to grapple with these challenges internally, we need to work in partnership with other communities throughout the commonwealth as we think about our transportation needs. There are likely to be multiple, interrelated solutions, including far more robust local public transit and expanded rail service to other cities throughout the state and the region. Some of these initiatives, such as high-speed rail service to Worcester and Springfield, are likely to be significant and costly undertakings; however, we need to think boldly about these opportunities and not immediately reject them because of the price tag. While we in Newton justifiably love our city – and I think it is the best place to live in the state! – we are not the only community or area in Massachusetts. Linking Newton with other cities in the region will benefit not only Newton but all parts of our state, allowing other areas to grow and flourish as Newton receives the benefits of increased economic integration with the entire state. Our city needs to be a leader – working in partnership with other communities

throughout the state – to make better transportation throughout the state (and the region) a reality.

2. We want convenience and comfort. No matter how much we talk about alternative forms of transportation, the great majority of us want to be able to get from one place to another as quickly and comfortably as possible. Like it or not, many people will continue to use automobiles – whether as drivers, passengers, or in a self-driving vehicle - on a regular basis because they provide that convenience and comfort. We need to think and plan accordingly as we try to promote other forms of transit. We need to be open and honest about convenience and comfort and recognize that alternatives need to be speedy, reliable, safe, comfortable and cost-effective in order to encourage residents to use them.

3. Flexibility to deal with the future. At the end of the 1800s, horses were a source of congestion in major metropolitan areas as they clogged and dirtied our streets. Today, it is automobiles, including ride sharing and home delivery services, we struggle to handle. Twenty or thirty years from now, we are likely to have other, as yet unforeseen, sources of transportation to accommodate. What this means is that our planning, ordinances, and public construction work must be flexible and anticipate, as much as possible, the unexpected. Who knows what the future will bring!

As always, I welcome your thoughts, questions, comments and criticisms!

Thanks,

Marc