



Renewable Communities

Massachusetts cities and towns leading the way to 100% renewable energy

Everett and Arlington: Bus-only lanes

Up to 5 million vehicles pass through Massachusetts each day, consuming roughly 3.2 billion gallons of gas on an annual basis.¹ Shifting more people from single-occupant cars into public transit would reduce fossil fuel consumption in the transportation sector while alleviating congestion and speeding up commutes.

With faster and more frequent service, public transit ridership could increase. One major obstacle to improving service, particularly for buses, is traffic. Because buses have to share the road with cars and trucks, bus service can be erratic and subject to frequent delays.

Some communities are taking steps to improve the performance of MBTA buses during peak commuting times by establishing bus-only lanes. In Everett, a bus-only lane on Broadway Street, a major thoroughfare, was introduced as a pilot project in December 2016.² City officials used traffic cones to transform a stretch of curbside parking spots into a bus corridor from 5–9 AM on weekday mornings. The program, which resulted in an estimated 20% decrease in travel times, was implemented on a permanent basis in September 2017.³

Other cities and towns have followed in Everett's footsteps. The town of Arlington ran its own month-long designated bus lane pilot in the fall of 2018. Town officials made other adjustments to speed up buses, including relocating one stop and providing traffic signal priority to buses at a key intersection.⁴ The average bus trip between Arlington Center and Porter Square in Cambridge decreased by six minutes during the pilot.⁵ After reviewing the data and

interviewing residents, the Arlington Select Board voted unanimously to make the bus lane permanent.⁶

Cambridge and Watertown ran a similar pilot program on Mt. Auburn Street, the results of which are currently under review.⁷ Boston recently installed bus-only lanes on Brighton Avenue in Allston and on Washington Street in Roslindale.⁸

1. "Transportation Facts," Massachusetts Department of Transportation, 14 August 2015, <https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2017/12/06/MassDOT_TransportationFacts2015.pdf>.

2. "The MBTA and the City of Everett are piloting a bus-only lane on Broadway between Ferry St and Route 16 this week, Monday-Friday, December 5-9," Klark Jessen, Massachusetts Department of Transportation, 8 December 2016, <<https://blog.mass.gov/transportation/uncategorized/city-of-everett-mbta-broadway-bus-lane-pilot-program/>>.

3. "Could bus-only lanes ease Everett's commute woes," Nicole Dungca, Boston Globe, 5 December 2017, <<https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2016/12/13/people-hate-taking-bus-could-bus-only-lanes-everett-change-that/XvUCBI0DXN3M6SfAtRifP/story.html>>. "Everett Bus Lane: The Little Pop-Up That Could," Rosalie Ray, TransitCenter, 2 January 2018, <<http://transitcenter.org/2018/01/02/everett-bus-lane-the-little-pop-up-that-could/>>.

4. "Arlington makes morning bus lane permanent," John Laidler, Boston Globe, 9 April 2019, <<https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/globelocal/2019/04/09/arlington-makes-morning-bus-lane-permanent/VcOM4qAgifRXHy4DJ1g7DK/story.html>>.

5. "Arlington pilots bus-only lane to reduce traffic," Daniel DeMaina, Massachusetts Municipal Association, 19 December 2018, <<https://www.mma.org/arlington-pilots-bus-only-lane-to-reduce-traffic/>>.

6. "Arlington Select Board Approves Bus Lane on Mass. Ave.," Alex Newman, Arlington, MA Patch, 1 March 2019, <<https://patch.com/massachusetts/arlington/arlington-select-board-approves-bus-lane-mass-ave>>.

7. "Mt. Auburn Street Bus Priority Pilot," City of Cambridge, <<https://www.cambridgema.gov/CDD/Projects/Transportation/mtauburnstreetbusprioritydemonstration>>.

8. "Brighton Avenue bus lane," City of Boston, 14 June 2019, <<https://www.boston.gov/departments/transportation/brighton-avenue-bus-lane>>. "Permanent bus lane to be established on Washington Street in Roslindale," 7 June 2018, <<https://www.boston.gov/news/permanent-bus-lane-be-established-washington-street-roslindale>>.