

Dear Council President Murphy and Malden City Council:

I am writing requesting that my letter to be read into the public record, in regard to the four non-binding ballot questions being proposed on the Agenda of the September 5, 2023 meeting. Specifically papers 307-23, 308-23, 309-23 and 310-23, in that order respectively.

First on the non-binding question in 307-23, "Should the City of Malden remove all bus and bike lanes from Route 60, return any funds required, and prohibit any future bus lanes or bike lanes from being approved that would cause an elimination of motor vehicle traffic lanes or inhibit parking in the City" I am in favor of it being placed on the ballot for the citizens to weigh in for the following reasons:

1. The negative impact on traffic on Route 60 is beyond deniable and is having a cascading citywide impact and its design with a Bike Lane in the middle of the Street is something I doubt anybody on the City Council would have approved had they known, as it is a tragedy waiting to happen. Turning back the money no matter how much is better than sacrificing all the gridlock and the inevitable accident to come.
2. The MBTA bus ridership continues its steady decline. Bus ridership on the MBTA is 67% of what it was ten years ago through the first six months of 2023. This is why the MBTA, in its recently voted on reconfiguration, will be eliminating four of the six buses that were traveling on Route 60 going west. The 430 and the 411, which currently travel Salem Street from Broadway are being eliminated entirely and the 131 and 136 will be consolidated and instead coming out of Melrose will turn up the Florence Street Bike/Bus Lane, never reaching Rte. 60 West.
3. Only 50% of the buses travelling the Route 60 corridor, when the Council approved the bike/bus lanes, will continue to operate and it seems unlikely that the City Council, had they known the cuts were coming, would have ever approved the bike/bus lane, given that the bus lane will lie empty even during peak rush hour for more than 45 minutes each and every hour. During non-peak hours school dismissal etc. it will be empty for over 50 minutes of every hour. The Council in March/April 2021 was deceived by the MBTA in an effort to save themselves. It has not mattered, cuts have been voted on and the future does not look any better. The world of commuting has changed.
4. Traffic on Urban Roads in Massachusetts is once again growing and is already back to 97% of what it was in 2019, pre pandemic, according to the most recent Federal Transit Administration NTD Reports. With bus cuts and many people working remotely this trend is unlikely to change, because even when people stay home they tend to go out in the community they live more often to run quick errands, which they are not prone to do in either buses or via bicycles.

I wish to make it clear as a former Councilor and the original sponsor of the half million dollars, which seed funded the initial start of the Bike Trail in Malden, through the meals tax, I am not anti-bike simply common sense bike and common sense streets that move motor vehicles with the least congestion possible across our city. I am in favor because this question, as constituted, does not prohibit bike or bus lanes on streets in the future, it simply says they should not be implemented if they remove traffic lanes from streets and roads and if they eliminate parking.

In all likelihood this will eliminate the future adoption of bus lanes, but as a former two decade user of the MBTA buses it makes no sense that anybody travelling in a bus should believe they should go faster

than their neighbor who has chosen a car to get to work or to take their children to school etc., most often because they simply must, whether they do not work in the same place or work in a place that is not conducive to taking the T in a reasonable time, or have multiple child events all over the place. Is it a City Council's job to value one commuter's time over another's? Shouldn't the City Council attempt to cater to the mode that the vast majority use the majority of the time to get around instead of a tiny group?

In the most recent survey conducted by the City of Malden for the "Future of Maplewood Square" Committee of the over three hundred Malden residents who took the survey 80% cited motor vehicle use as their method of getting around the City, 7% said by bus and only 3% stated it was by motor scooter or bicycle. The combining of the last two seems odd but the data suggest what we know that certainly half of any streetscape, given current trends and what appear to be future trends, should not take away half a streetscape from motor vehicles whether they be car, truck, motorcycle etc. Of particular note was this is the first post pandemic survey done of strictly Malden residents. It solidifies what we know on a national level that is fewer people are using public transportation, few people use bikes to get around and more people are driving. Shouldn't the Council be asking how can we make the latter easier not harder?

Given all the current data known today and the fact that far more people have participated recently than in the shot gunned Covid approval of the Route 60 mistake, I ask that you please allow the people of Malden to weigh in on this issue in the best manner ever devised and that is by allowing voter direct participation on an issue that impacts all in the city whether they drive a motor vehicle, take a bus or bike or are simply a passenger.

On item 308-23 the second question on bike lanes, I am fully in favor of letting this question be placed on the ballot, because anybody who has driven west on Willow Street knows that such a design should never have occurred and should never occur again, with a lane all of a sudden jutting out for parking because of a want of a bike lane. It is simply beyond unsafe and should be removed and if needed redesigned.

On Item 309-23 Order: That the following non-binding question be included on the November 7th ballot... "Should the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education revoke or not renew the charter of Mystic Valley Regional Charter School?"

I am opposed and view it as nothing more than grandstanding move, as certainly Councilor O'Malley, a current law school student, must realize that Charter Schools are governed by criteria set forth in State Law and evaluated periodically by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and thus an individual city or town has no ability to determine whether a Charter School continues to operate based upon a voter ballot question outcome and a City Council, if such a ballot question were passed would do what after? Further, the fact a Councilor would attempt to place such a measure on the ballot, knowing just this past week Mystic Valley was ranked in the top 2% of High Schools in both Massachusetts and Nationally, seems beyond calculated and simply a personal PR stunt. I can only hope the City Council rejects this request without much debate. Having a School of the academic caliber of Mystic Valley in Malden, despite no school being perfect, certainly is a plus for the Community.

Finally on paper 310-23 regarding the installation of turf on Roosevelt Park, I am opposed to a question being put on the ballot, as it is not an issue, which impacts the entire city, but is a Ward issue no different than South Broadway Park, Devir Park, Linden Park, Coytemore Lea when they were renovated etc. etc. Are we going to put redesigns of parks, that most in the Community couldn't even identify the location of, unless they lived in the neighborhood or lived here most of their life, be a matter of public voting? Unlike the question on Bus/Bike lanes, it does not impact the majority of the Citizens of Malden on a day to day basis or week to week.

Thank you for your consideration on all these items.

Sincerely,

Neil Kinnon

11 Spruce Street

Malden, MA