

June 22, 2015

To: Southborough Planning Board  
Southborough Town Planner

From: Mark W. Davis  
13 Skylar Dr.  
Southborough

Re: Fitzgerald's Parking Lot Review

Years ago, I served on the Southborough MBTA Study Committee (chairman for a while) for a number of years after I left the Planning Board. I thought it might be helpful for you to have some information that came from our work when the station was originally proposed. I also have continued to be involved with MBTA real estate over the years, working on many station projects for the MBTA, including Southborough and Westboro..so I am familiar with the MBTA on many station issues and TOD projects.

As you know, originally the MBTA proposed to put parking at the Fitzgerald's side of the station, with one plan even showing Fitzgerald's moved closer to Rte 85. During our study of the Station, and the MBTA ridership projections, it became clear that the ridership in Southborough did not warrant the size lot that the MBTA proposed. While we accepted the fact that a high percentage of riders come from Hopkinton, Westboro, and Marlborough, the community did not want to see a higher concentration of traffic serving the station that came from other towns. So the plans were abandoned for the Fitzgerald's side of the tracks. (Financial costs were a great contributor to this decision as well). During our initial station negotiations, the MBTA also closed off the Tunnel that ran under the tracks. (that was a real surprise to us). That tunnel, would have simplified access to both sides of the tracks.

In order to take our traffic concerns a step further, we encouraged the Town of Southborough to make any off site parking the subject of a permitting process, along with not allowing for street parking within a walking radius of the station. We were concerned that any excess parking would be increased as it has in Ashland and Framingham, without suitable controls.

We should not forget, that overall, while difficult to deal with, the MBTA did live up to all of its mitigation when the station was opened, including building sidewalks, cleaning up the traffic movements at the lights, and donation of land at the Cordaville "triangle". Over the years, when Grafton, even after parking lot expansion, became full, Westboro became full. When Westboro became very congested, we saw Southborough become full. When Westborough was expanded, Southborough saw some lightening of parking. Ashland consistently has a high number of empty spaces. Today, Southborough is often full.

I personally commuted for years from this station, and commend Fitzgerald's on their efforts to keep commuters out of that lot. I am not opposed to having a lot on the Fitzgerald's side of the station, but I believe there are some simple conditions that may help.

1. The lot is convenient to commuters in the evening, as the train pulls into that side of the station....so those evening commuters who park in the MBTA side, need to walk down the platform, under the bridge and up the other side. While very convenient in the evening, the Fitzgerald

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side is not convenient in the morning, as they make that walk to the opposite side of the tracks. I suspect late arrivals will attempt to jump the fence to get to the proper side.

**The lot should be posted, reminding patrons to the Fitzgerald side, that it is unsafe to cross the tracks, and they must use the stairs. Unfortunately, commuters need to be constantly reminded of this.**

Over the years this has been a safety issue for the MBTA -with the fence being extended several times...and even grease being applied to the top of the fence, making it difficult to cross the tracks. It is extremely dangerous, as this rail line is shared with AmTrak and CSX, with train movements coming in both directions.

2. The revenues from parking are an important source of income to the MBTA. The existence of the additional parking on the Fitzgerald's side, should not be a financial burden to the MBTA by reducing their revenues. Furthermore, it is important to make sure commuters have only a choice which side they desire to park, but not a financial incentive. The evening rush hour is the most congested time for the MBTA lot. For those commuters going to Hopkinton in the evening, it is a simple right turn from the MBTA lot, for the rest, it is sometimes a long wait to take the left and flow through the lights. Fitzgerald's Parking should not exacerbate an already difficult commute for many of the MBTA riders, especially those that live in Southborough. If the Fitzgerald lot was used by all southbound commuters, their traffic movements would cause the MBTA lot to wait for their flow to end (they could take a right on red, and endlessly move south on 85.

**One way to help this would be to require the charge for parking on the Fitzgerald side not to be less than is currently being charged in the MBTA lot. To be honest, if I were commuting now, I would pay more to be on that side.**

That requirement alone would spread out the excess parking, and not have a potential drain on the MBTA (assuming there is a need for additional parking, which I believe there is). What you do not want is commuters that are going toward Hopkinton to park at the Fitzgerald side, as they would be the first to leave, (due to being on the right side of the tracks in the evening) and their direction of travel would put a burden on the exit drive on the MBTA side. It would be a preference to have commuters who are leaving to go anywhere but south on Rte 85, to use the Fitzgerald's side. One way to best insure that is to keep the parking rates identical, so the only incentive is evening convenience. (It is less convenient for the Hopkinton commuters to park on the Fitzgerald's side in the morning). Its not perfect, but over time, with the charge being at least equal, the traffic will be able to sort itself out.

I am not suggesting who parks in the Fitzgerald's lot, but making sure there is no downside to the MBTA, and potentially could improve a difficult current traffic pattern.

I commuted into Boston for years and if available, I would have wanted to park on the Fitzgerald's side. Getting out quickly in the evening, is a real convenience. We had a bunch of commuters who would run under the bridge when arriving in the evening, to avoid the traffic and leave quickly. One commuter did it to avoid higher day care rates because he could not be late, sitting in traffic. And being able to quickly stop in and get a cup of coffee for the morning walk under the bridge would be a benefit, especially in the winter. Because the inbound train was on the other side of the tracks, coffee at Fitzgerald's was not a convenience. Giving a preference

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to local riders parking at Fitzgerald's would work, but that burden would have to be a voluntary burden by Fitzgerald's.

3. One other helpful item could be included in the Fitzgerald's design. For those commuters who rely on being dropped off in the morning, and picked up in the evening (commonly called Drop and Kiss Riders), providing an area for this function on the Fitzgerald's side would be a real benefit. Currently evening pickups bring inbound traffic into the MBTA lot, right when the bulk of traffic wants to exit. By encouraging pickups on the Fitzgerald's side, eliminates a traffic conflict in the evening, and gets that traffic out quicker, as the riders have a direct access from that side of the tracks.

**Add a suitable area for drop and kiss pickups on the Fitzgerald's side of the lot, working with the Parking group at the MBTA for suitable breaks in the fence for convenience of the commuter.**

I hope this is helpful to the Board. While I would rather see a high density transit oriented development at the station, with housing and potential additional retail business on both sides and incorporating necessary parking with structures, while taking advantage of the old mill pond and wonderful resources that are hidden down there, an interim use lot with some good sense conditions is better than what is there.

I can certainly answer any questions you have on any of this.

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