

The Brookline Tab
February 16, 1993

The Missing Link

In 1972 the administration of then-Gov. Francis Sargent concluded in a master plan on transportation in Greater Boston that “building additional highway capacity to serve access requirements to the regional core at peak hours by private automobile is not the most appropriate means available.” Rather, the master plan concluded, workers’ access to the core should be provided “through an expanded public transportation system” and access by automobiles “should be discouraged.”

So here we are 20 years later, and the Greater Boston is on the verge of the Big Dig – one of the largest automobile-related infrastructure improvements ever undertaken in the history of the commonwealth. The advice of 20 years ago has been largely ignored.

The reason why it was ignored has largely to do with Dukakis administration transportation chief Fred Salvucci. He saw himself as on a mission from God to link the depression of the Central Artery with the digging of the third harbor tunnel, and he managed to successfully squash an initiative to link the Central Artery project with improved rail service. As a result, public transportation needs have been sacrificed in the interest of putting more cars on the roadways that are already congested and will continue to be congested no matter how many extra travel lanes are added to the Central Artery.

Until now, that is.

State Reps. John Businger (D-Brookline) and Hasty Evans (R-Wayland) are proposing to introduce and bill that, if passed, would add a new dimension to public transportation in Greater Boston.

Specifically, the bill mandates that rail lines be sunk along side the depressed artery. The depressed rail lines would in effect correct a mistake that has been allowed to exist for decades and would catapult Boston into the 21st century in terms of rail transit.

Few around Boston realize that the rail line that begins in Washington, D.C. comes to an abrupt end at South Station and that the line that begins in Portland, Maine, comes to an abrupt end at North Station. The Eastern Seaboard lacks a contiguous rail system for want of about a mile of track that does not run between North and South stations. Passengers -- and untold amounts of cargo – cannot get from Point A to Point B because the track to link them does not exist.

The measure proposed by Businger and Evans – called the Central Artery Rail Link or CARL – would remedy this decades-old problem and provide a sensible and environmentally sound alternative to choked highways and endless traffic jams.

Gov. Weld has indicated an initial interest in the plan, and a number of legislators have also indicated they support it. We urge speedy passage of CARL and look forward to sensible transportation around this town for a change.