

- [Town Online Home](#)
- [TOL Sports](#)
- [TOL Entertainment](#)
- [News & Opinion](#)
- [Local News](#)
- [Opinion](#)
- [Obituaries](#)
- [Police / Fire Log](#)
- [Sports](#)
- [Arts & Lifestyle](#)
- [Town Resources](#)
- [Home Delivery](#)

LOCAL NEWS

City had long romance with trains

By Brock Parker / Journal Staff

Thursday, April 8, 2004

If the Green Line extension is done right, public transportation in Somerville might be as good as 100 years ago. But that might be asking a lot.

Today, Somerville has eight rail lines that run through the city, yet the only place any train stops is at the Red Line subway station in Davis Square.

Go back 100 years, however, and train stops for commuters in Somerville were so prevalent that almost everyone was within a 10-minute walk to catch a train and within a five-minute walk to catching a streetcar or trolley, according to Steve Mackey, a Somerville history buff and Chamber of Commerce president.

"Hey, just give us what we had 100 years ago," Mackey said.

So why has Somerville been bringing up the caboose of train service ever since the early 20th century?

One reason, Mackey said, is that Somerville was so far ahead of its time 100 years ago in terms of rail and streetcar service that when the MBTA started building MBTA stops, it figured Somerville didn't even need them.

Around the time Somerville officially separated from Charlestown in 1842, railroads supplanted the now-defunct Middlesex Canal that cut through Somerville and smaller roadways as the best way to move goods into Boston, according to "Beyond the Neck: The Architecture and Development of Somerville, Massachusetts," a book by Landscape Research of Minnesota in 1990.

Construction of a rail line now known as the Lowell Line began in 1835, and six years later the Fitchburg Line was run through Somerville and into Cambridge, according to the book. In 1854, the Eastern Railway was run through Assembly Square and in 1870, a branch was added to the Lowell line that forked (near the Lowell Street bridge) and ran into Arlington and Lexington.

Rail lines along all of these paths still exist today, except for the Lowell Line's Arlington branch, which is now the Bike Path.

Mackey said by 1910, trains along these tracks stopped at nine different places in Somerville, including Winter Hill and Union Square.

Train service was supplemented first with horse-car lines in 1858, then horse-powered streetcars in 1864 and then electric streetcar service into Davis, Teele, Union and Gilman squares in 1889, according to "Beyond the Neck."

Residents could easily use public transit to move around Somerville as well as travel into Boston, Mackey said.

LOCAL REGIONAL

-- RELATED ARTICLES --

-  [Which Green Line?](#)
-  [Chamber CEO attacks 'archaic' health board at smoke ban meeting](#)
-  [Good Time: Taint after stabbing unfair](#)
-  [Suicides spark talks](#)

-- RELATED SITES --

-  [Find a Job in SOMERVILLE](#)
-  [Find a Home in SOMERVILLE](#)
-  [Find an Apartment in SOMERVILLE](#)
-  [Yard Sales around SOMERVILLE](#)
-  [MCAS Rankings for SOMERVILLE](#)

-- HERALD INTERACTIVE TOOLS --

-  [Email this Article to a Friend](#)
-  [Email the Online Staff](#)
-  [Email the Newspaper](#)
-  [Printer Friendly Version](#)
-  [Subscribe to the Somerville Journal](#)



Special Sections



Latest news about the 108th Boston Marathon

Classifieds

- [carfind.com](#)
- [homefind.com](#)
- [jobfind.com](#)
- [merchandise](#)
- [services](#)
- [personals](#)
- [Place an Ad](#)

Features

- [Photo Reprints](#)
- [Parents & Kids](#)
- [Shop TownOnline](#)
- [Tunes a Brewing](#)
- [weather](#)
- [horoscope](#)
- [crossword](#)
- [lottery results](#)



"People has options on where to go; it was just a fabulous network," Mackey said.

In the 1920s, buses began replacing trolley lines in Somerville, according to "Boston's Red Line," a book tracking the development of the MBTA's Red Line authored by Frank Cheney.

So Somerville, then home to about 100,000 residents, Mackey said, was well served by public transportation.

The MBTA "looked at Somerville and it had streetcars and nine commuter stops," Mackey said. "They looked and said 'we don't have to bring the subway there.'"

So they didn't.

The Orange Line actually passes through Somerville, but doesn't stop. So do five commuter lines, including the Lowell Line, the Fitchburg Line, and the Haverhill, Newburyport and Rockport lines that travel through Assembly Square. The Green Line comes close to reaching Somerville, but stops short at the Lechmere stop in Cambridge. Mackey said Amtrak also passes through Somerville along the Lowell railroad line which runs through the city along Innerbelt Road up to Ball Square, but doesn't stop.

Red Line stops at Central and Porter squares seem to mock Somerville by sitting just over the city line in Cambridge.

The Red Line does stop in Somerville, but only because North Cambridge didn't want a train station, Mackey said. The Davis Square Red Line stop opened in December 1984. Originally, Mackey said, the MBTA wanted to extend the Red Line to North Cambridge, but when residents there said they didn't want a subway stop, the late Congressman Tip O'Neil, who lived on the Cambridge/Somerville line, stepped in and helped bring the Red Line to Davis Square.

Since then, the Red Line stop has been the only train stop in the city.

advertisement ▼

[[contact us](#)] :: [[print advertising](#)] :: [[online advertising](#)] :: [[Browser Upgrade](#)] :: [Click here for home delivery](#) or call **1.800.882.1211**

© Copyright of CNC and Herald Interactive Advertising Systems, Inc.

No portion of townonline.com or its content may be reproduced without the owner's written permission. [Privacy Commitment](#)