

# When Street Parking Becomes a Pop-Up Bus Lane

An experiment in Everett, Massachusetts, has meant shorter rides for both transit users and drivers.

STEPHEN MILLER | February, 22, 2017



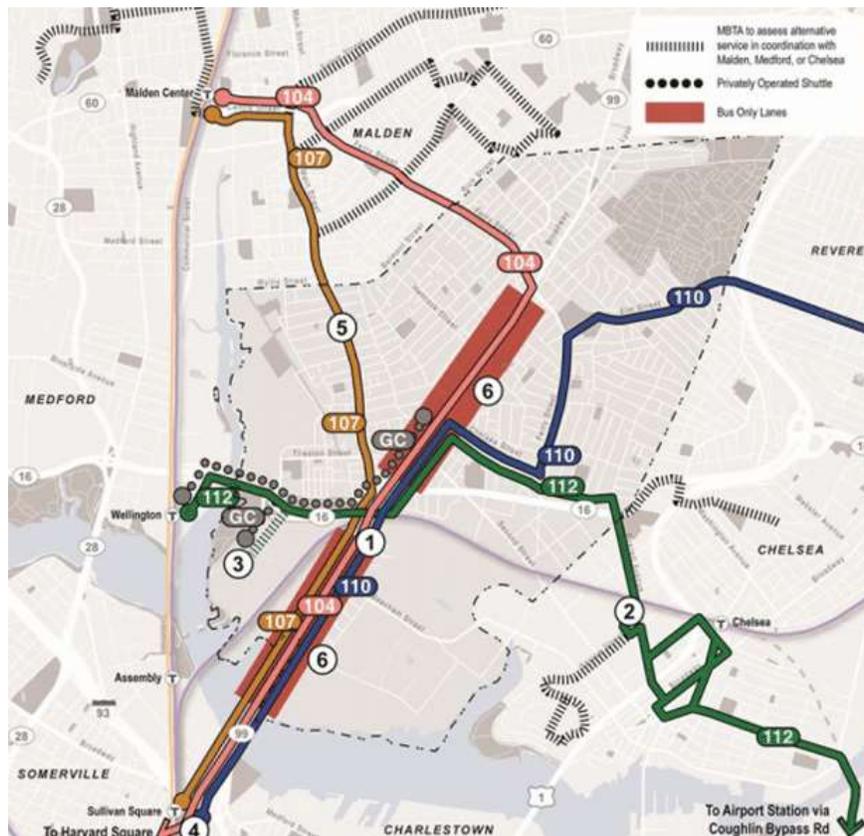
One morning last December, cones and small signs popped up along Broadway, the main drag in working-class Everett, Massachusetts. The modest change, replacing a mile of curbside parking with a temporary bus lane, had big implications. After a week, city officials said riders were saving so much time on their morning commutes that the bus lane would become permanent. Now other cities, including neighboring Boston, are paying attention to Everett's bold experiment.

Everett is increasingly home to people squeezed out of ever-pricier areas like Somerville and East Boston. Yet it lacks direct subway or bus service, with riders forced to transfer on their way downtown.

"We're located only two miles from downtown," says Everett city planner Jay Monty. "But we're the only city that borders Boston that doesn't have a rapid transit connection."

Everett Mayor Carlo DeMaria saw [the Silver Line](#), a [bus rapid transit extension](#) from Logan Airport to neighboring Chelsea, as a possible solution. Preparing for a [massive casino along the Mystic River waterfront](#) and wanting what Monty called a “game-changer” to improve transit access, DeMaria imagined his city as the next stop on the busway.

But the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, known as the T, is under the watchful eye of a [fiscal control board](#), and there simply wasn’t the appetite to take on another big expansion project. “We suggested that instead of just looking at one concept, of extending the Silver Line to the casino, we would look at the transit needs of the whole city,” says Scott Hamwey, manager of long range planning at the state Department of Transportation.



Bus service in Everett. (Everett Transit Action Plan)

The city was interested, and the [Everett Transit Action Plan](#) was born. Over the course of a year, the city surveyed parking usage and hosted meetings while the state checked bus performance stats and interviewed riders.

“Transit riders, particularly bus riders, don’t tend to come out to public meetings,” says MassDOT project manager Jennifer Slesinger, who worked with [La Comunidad](#), an Everett-based Latino service organization, for translation. “We spent several days going to bus stops and speaking to riders,” she says. “They wanted more frequent buses, particularly in the off-peak.”

Last November, the city and state revealed a set of recommendations, covering everything from adding direct service to downtown Boston to building new bicycle and pedestrian paths and, ultimately, a Silver Line extension.

Backed by his mayor, Monty was determined to keep the report from gathering dust on a shelf. The next month, the city had a brand-new bus lane, enforced by a two-person crew from 4 to 9 a.m. “We were like, ‘Let’s just throw up some cones and see what happens for a week,’” Monty says. “It definitely took some courage on the mayor’s part to just do it.”

While there was [some grumbling](#) from a local restaurant and a city councilor, Monty says opposition was the exception, not the rule. “Honestly, I was surprised how little negative feedback we got,” he says. “People really adjusted very quickly.”

Only about a quarter of the parking that was removed had been used during the morning rush, according to city observations, and there are plenty of places to park on the other side of the street or in nearby parking lots. Trips are now shorter by four to eight minutes for Broadway’s 10,000 daily bus riders, and Monty says car drivers have saved time, too, since buses no longer block traffic while they weave in and out of bus stops.

Monty is preparing to replace the cones on Broadway with painted bus lanes this spring, turning a temporary experiment into something a little more permanent.

“We were like, ‘Let’s just throw up some cones and see what happens for a week.’”

The city is also looking to extend the bus lane south through Sweetser Circle, a choke point that’s slated to be rebuilt by MassDOT, and along the rest of Broadway, past the casino on the way to Boston.

Everett’s pop-up bus lane has highlighted the Boston area’s lack of dedicated space for buses.

The Silver Line and Everett’s new experiment are the only bus lanes in the entire state. It isn’t for lack of trying: a [2009 effort](#) by the city and state to install BRT on Boston’s Blue Hill Avenue, using Obama administration stimulus funds, collapsed after it [failed to gain support from local officials](#).

Years later, it seems Greater Boston is ripe for another pass at bus lanes. In 2015, a report funded by the local Barr Foundation [laid out a vision for top-flight BRT](#) in Boston and Cambridge, including on Blue Hill Avenue.

There are signs of progress: In October, a bus lane was [added to a bridge replacement project](#) across the Charles River. Now, advocates have set their sights on adding bus lanes to Massachusetts Avenue, which carries the MBTA’s busiest bus route across Boston and Cambridge.

“We see this stuff happening in Everett, and we’re talking to our partners in City Hall in Boston, saying, ‘Why can’t you guys do this?’” says Andrew McFarland, community engagement manager for the LivableStreets Alliance and its Better Buses initiative.

Boston officials are reluctant to promise bus lanes anytime soon for Massachusetts Avenue, a crosstown path crowded not only with buses, but also cars, trucks and bicycles. But other streets are in line for quick-fix bus lanes: Washington Street, for example, carries buses from the southern end of the Orange Line subway at Forest Hills to Roslindale Square, over a mile away. Buses move more people on this section of Washington Street than cars do, says Vineet Gupta, the Boston Transportation Department’s director of planning.

“You can’t have your cake and eat it too. You have to give up something to have this. In our case, we gave up parking.”

“We want to work hand-in-hand with the community to see if we could implement an Everett-style exclusive bus lane during peak times,” Gupta says. “We’re definitely looking for a pilot, much like Everett did, which we hope will give us the ability to evaluate.”

For now, Everett has, to the surprise of many, joined the list of cities installing fast, flexible tweaks to improve the lives of bus riders. The state’s transportation commissioner has even [cited it as a model](#) for other cities to emulate.

“Most of the transit advocacy is centered in Boston, Cambridge, and Somerville,” says Charlie Ticotsky, policy director at Transportation for Massachusetts. “It’s refreshing to see something like this coming from Everett.”

“Looking around the region, looking at neighborhoods that have blossomed, the mayor saw that it didn’t come from parking. It came from accessibility and mobility,” Everett’s Monty says. “You can’t have your cake and eat it too. You have to give up something to have this. In our case, we gave up parking.”