



## **Madison Drifting Backwards on Transportation**

In January, the Badger Bus Company announced plans to redevelop its bus station at West Washington and Bedford and close this key facility for intercity bus service. Since then the Madison Peak Oil Group and Madison Area Bus Advocates have been raising the alarm over the consequences of losing this facility before any planning has been done for intercity bus stops in Madison, not just for Badger, but also for Van Galder, Greyhound and other carriers in the future. As is revealed in Badger's redevelopment proposal and the many hearings we have attended, there is no plan other than a vague idea that all buses can pile unto Langdon Street in front of the Union and sell their tickets through its service desk. Or worse, service will be scattered around the Square at various bus stops, or relegated to peripheral locations such as Dutch Mill or freeway exits.

Equally important, this land is part of the best site for the central, intermodal transit hub envisioned in our pending public transportation plans—regional high speed rail, commuter rail or rapid bus, regional transit authority (RTA) or the Wisconsin Department of Transportation’s plan Connections 2030. A review of these plans clearly shows that a central facility is needed in or around the current station. Therefore, until these plans can be fleshed out and staffed—as they surely will as gas prices sharply rebound--this site should be preserved for transportation purposes (much as development rights are set aside for nature preserves).

An obvious solution would be for the public to acquire the station by eminent domain, require all bus companies to use it with appropriate usage fees, and, eventually, create a new comprehensive facility serving all bus and rail modes. Many would complain of this bold assertion of public authority and potential financial burden—although smaller cities such as Champaign, Illinois have managed to meet this challenge in exemplary fashion. A more voluntary solution might be found, but there is no good alternative to public action to ensure adequate intercity bus service in an energy constrained future.

We believe it is time for imaginative intervention to save existing intercity bus service from chaos and to pave the way for its future expansion. First, city and regional authorities should assume responsibility for both the availability of intercity bus service and its smooth operation in the city. Second, parking and traffic regulators and UW officials should wake up to the

difficulties of the Langdon Street curb and Union service desk as the city's bus and transfer hub, and either manage the process or refocus it elsewhere. (UW-Madison transportation officials have already testified that they would not want to see the Union become a bus station.) Third, the city transportation and parking authorities should convene Badger, Van Galder, and Greyhound to work with them on a plan for arrivals, departures and transfers in the next few years.

To make this work, the city should dust off its ordinances, police power and financial resources to constructively guide these solutions. And, in the long run, we the people need to move forward quickly to organize our Regional Transportation Authority with the power to plan and raise money for final solutions.

In short term, the Badger Company—as a public transportation provider now and in the future—should pause its problematic venture into the teeth of the worst real estate market since the Depression. The City Planning Commission should withhold any final judgment on the redevelopment plan until that the alternative have been work out. We believe there are ways to lessen the station's financial burden on Badger by increasing its role in handling all bus traffic and, perhaps, providing a subsidy short of full public acquisition.

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