

VILLAGE VIEW

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Don't you think it's about time the people of Barnstable called a halt to the b-bus boondoggle? According to an article in the local daily, 1-10-81, by the end of the fiscal year, next June 20th, the system will have cost us more than \$140,000 above its budget of \$236,500. And taxpayers of the Town of Barnstable are expected to make up the shortfall.

We've all been watching those big diesel-burning stink-pots (and if you've been caught behind one of them coming or going between Osterville and Centerville, you know they can't be described much differently) trundling through the villages since last spring. For the most part, empty, except for the driver.

The first few days they were on the road, it did seem as though they were being used. When there was no charge at all, youngsters did ride the bus into Hyannis a few times; but it wasn't long before the kids discovered they could actually make better time hitchhiking than they could on the bus.

I COULD take the bus to work on the days I go over to Barnstable. But I'd have to drive into the center of the village, park my car somewhere all day, and get aboard at 7:50 in the morning to arrive in Barnstable an hour later, in time to get to work. Not even the post office is open before 8 A.M., so I couldn't get my paper before leaving the village. And it would take me just as long to get back home, each evening. En route, I couldn't stop and do any errands, either; and I'd have paid 50 cents each way for this "convenience"(!)?

I drive 20 miles, round-trip, door-to-door, when I work in Barnstable. I get 30 MPG or better with my sub-compact car. Even at \$1.30 a gallon of gas, I'm not saving any dollars if I ride the bus, and I'm losing an hour and twenty minutes of time. Time is valuable to me. I have too little of it to waste it sitting on a bus that goes from Osterville to Barnstable via Centerville, Hyannis Main Street, Cape Cod Hospital, Cape Cod Mall, and finally gets to Barnstable an hour later. I can drive over there in about 18 minutes... 20 if I hit red lights at all intersections equipped with traffic lights.

By driving my own car I can pick up my mail, stop at the bank, and pay a bill on the way to work; on the way home again, I can swing into a West Main Street vegetable stand or supermarket and pick up a few groceries. Except in darkest December, I can be home before sunset, in plenty of time to put potatoes in the oven so that dinner will be ready by 6:30 at the latest.

What incentive is there to take the bus?

Obviously, I'm not the only person who feels this way. If the buses were being used by a lot of people, people who don't have private transportation, people who need public transit to go to work, to the doctor's or to market, I wouldn't be critical because the system would probably not be costing us more than \$140,000 ABOVE its approved budget figure of \$236,500 a year.

Not that I think there is truly a good reason why you and I should substitute a public transportation system to the annual tune of close to a quarter of a million dollars... I don't see any reason in the world why we should be doing that, to tell the truth... but I'd be willing to pay my share if the system were being utilized by a lot of people who, otherwise, are solated and without any other method of getting around.

But day after day, week after week, I see those buses on the road, with practically NOBODY in the passenger seats. Now and then there are a couple of heads visible. Sometimes, on rare occasions, I've seen as many as three passengers in a bus. But most of the time, there's not a soul riding them.

And, believe me, I've been paying attention!

By their own admission, the people who administrate the Cape Cod Regional Transit Authority, (a 15-member advisory board), the buses purchased for \$10,000 each, were in such poor repair that another \$10,000 had to be spent to put them in operating condition. The buses were purchased, I understand, from the City of Brockton. I bet Brockton was overjoyed to unload them onto Barnstable!

In the opinion of the CCRTA's administrator, these buses could now be sold for "the price invested in them" and, if it were up to ME, I'd insist they be sold as fast as humanly possible to cover the losses the system has experienced, and call the whole thing an interesting experiment.. and also call it quits. The administrator is quoted as having advised his advisory board "not to judge the success or failure of the transit system on the ridership" and that the "two-year project, now seven months old, is not necessarily a failure if it shows there is no need for a public transportation system in Barnstable."

For how long must taxpayers of the Town of Barnstable support a system for which there is no demonstrable need, and which costs \$377,300 a year -- 59.5 per cent more than the approved budget figure? Even though the project was originally approved for a two-year period, MUST we continue to pack our money down a rat-hole when it's obvious to anyone who has paid the slightest attention to the utilization of the service that it's of little value to the citizenry?

The administrator clearly states that the system is facing a serious problem, but he's off the hook; "Barnstable is ultimately responsible for the tab," he announces. Well, Barnstable may choose, then, to call a halt to the project, before the figure of \$140,000 is entirely spent, this year. And nothing yet has been said about the costs, over and above the budget, for NEXT year! Are we taxpayers to stand still and be shorn for next year, as well?

How long does it take to prove there's no need for a public transportation system in Barnstable? Twenty-four months? Or is seven or eight or nine enough? Do we really need two years to convince us this demonstration project is a total waste of our money and of precious energy resources (those buses don't run on thin air, you know), and that the buses add considerably to the air pollution of our community?

The project, it seems to me, achieved its objective in less than a year. It tested from June, 1980 to the present, the need for public transportation. By their own admission, the Authority concedes that the ridership is "considerably less than we projected." Now the Authority wants a chance to "prune its tree to make it healthier" and recommends cutting some routes altogether and making it more efficient. Busing standards of efficiency on state-wide efficiency scales, 32 per cent efficiency would make it competitive with other similar systems in this state.

I'm all for pruning the tree. Right down to a stump. And should any "suckers" shoot up, come spring, I hope they aren't the taxpayers of the Town of Barnstable.

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