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Arts and Transit: NJ Transit Weighs In

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New Jersey Transit (NJT) had a chance to weigh in on the Dinky controversy at last night's Borough Council meeting. But when NJT representative Thomas Clark ventured the opinion that Princeton University's proposed Arts and Transit neighborhood would help

Dinky ridership, not hurt it, he was met with boos and hisses from the audience.

Clark, who is in charge of government and community relations for NJ Transit, came to field questions and concerns from Council members regarding the pending move of the Dinky for Princeton University's Arts and Transit neighborhood.

Clark said Dinky ridership remained flat from 2001 to 2010, with an annual average of 1,061 riders a day. He said such a project would serve the public interest by increasing ridership, as the more active an area becomes, the more people would ride the Dinky.

Borough Councilman David Goldfarb expressed concern that because of flat ridership, the Dinky might be on NJT's "hit list". Clark responded that there are no plans to terminate the Dinky service and that a 464-foot move does not harm the Dinky. He did say the Dinky is "unique" in being the only shuttle service operated by NJT in New Jersey, and is perhaps the shortest shuttle service in the United States.

Attending officials from NJ Transit were Thomas Clark, John Leone, Steve Santoro, Paul Wycoff and Kevin O'Connor.

Borough Council Member Barbara Trelstad asked Clark if NJT plans to increase and support mass transit. Thomas Clark ascertained that it was their mission statement. If that is the case, Trelstad continued, why would they support a move of the Dinky station? Clark countered that upon review of the 1984 contract with Princeton University, the Attorney General determined that it is within Princeton University's legal rights to move the station, and that it is not specified within the contract what the limits are.

Other Council members expressed concern that Governor Chris Christie, who approves of the project, also serves on Princeton University's Board of Trustees, and that it would appear to be a conflict of interest. Councilman Roger Martindell said that the fate of Dinky is caught up in the politics of the governor's office. Clark and his colleagues had no response to this observation.

Clark maintained that a slight percentage of riders would be inconvenienced by the Dinky move, but that Princeton University would run a shuttle for those individuals who require it. Martindell pointed out that if NJT wants to increase ridership, then this would be an opportunity to increase parking. Clark said there are no plans to increase the number of parking spaces.

Councilwoman Jo Butler expressed surprise at the lack of analysis regarding the move. She said it could be the death of the Dinky, with the need to make a left-hand turn into the station and the increased traffic on Alexander Road. Princeton University could leave the Dinky where it is, she said, and they are choosing not to do so.

When it was suggested that a grade crossing be added instead of the move, Kevin O'Connor, general manager of grade crossings, firmly disagreed. When you increase the number of grade crossings, he said, you increase the number of fatalities, and he would eliminate all grade crossings if he could.

Councilman Kevin Wilkes asked if there was a timetable to move the Dinky, to which Clark responded that there wasn't.

The rest of the meeting was focused on Ordinance 2011-04, Arts, Education and Transit (AET) changes as proposed by Princeton University to be approved by the Borough. This ordinance is to create a new zone for the district to be known as the arts district.

Councilwoman Jenny Crumiller stated that signage indicating that the area

is open to the public would be a good addition, stating “All Welcome.” She compared it to the visitor’s hesitation about proceeding through the university gates, not aware that the campus is open to the public.

Borough Administrator Robert Bruschi said he wants the area to have as many wide open spaces as possible, to make it appealing to the public.

A University spokesman said the plan includes parking garages as per Borough request during the last meeting. Childcare facilities are included as an option to leave children and go into New York City. He stated also that Princeton University has worked with the community for two hundred years and does not plan to “run wild” with the ordinance. When someone objected to a “pub” being a possibility in the retail space for the AET plans, he explained that it does not mean a “bar” but a restaurant along the lines of Triumph Brewery.

Other suggestions included adding windows to the requirement that “All building facades visible from the common areas and the public way shall include architectural elements and landscaping so as to avoid monotony and enhance their visual appeal.”

A Borough resident expressed her wish to make the region easier for commuters. She does not like the current location for the Wawa convenience store. She wants to see a promotion plan from NJT for more riders and justification for this project. If there were a major improvement in parking, she felt that it would improve the plan greatly. She added that there is not enough attention to the parking issue, and she would like to see a written argument from the Attorney General as to why this project should go through, especially in the current economy.

In other business, the meeting ended with an ordinance on burglar and fire alarms. Instead of penalizing homeowners with fines for false alarms, Borough Council plans to pass an ordinance requiring a registration fee for each homeowner: \$50 for a burglar alarm, \$100 for both burglar and fire alarm.

Resolutions such as supporting legislation requiring voter approval for the establishment of a charter school were tabled for the next meeting.

[Princeton Borough Municipal Meeting, June 8, 2011](#) from [Princeton Community Television](#) on [Vimeo](#).

About the Author »



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Bonnie Schultz has worked as a technology and marketing writer in the Boston area. She moved here in 1997 and is the mother of two boys. Since 2007, Bonnie has been blogging about food and community happenings in the Princeton area, through her blog "[The Blog That Ate New Jersey](#)".

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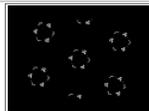
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