

What If Streetcars Again Tracked Along Thames?

By Robert C. Keith
Task Force Transit Specialist

State Red Line planners are refocusing their thoughts on public transit in Southeast after a public meeting Nov. 15 where breakout groups at three separate tables questioned the suitability of Fell's Point and Canton streets for a light rail line or other rapid transit. Similar sentiments were expressed by some participants at a Red Line presentation to the Homeowners on Jan. 4.

When the Red Line concept was introduced by the Glendening administration in 2002, it was part of a regional rail plan, implying a subway for Fell's Point. The Ehrlich administration introduced a truncated version of the plan, but ruled out a heavy-rail subway. Faced with this restriction, Maryland Transportation Administration planners have looked to sandwich dedicated (auto-free) transit lanes into existing four-lane streets without sacrificing precious parking. They proposed to convert either Eastern and Fleet, or Aliceanna and Fleet, into one-way couplets to create the necessary combination of lanes.

The idea of one-way traffic pairs may be a hard sell. MTA sources say the City has nixed the idea of making Eastern one-way in Highlandtown, undermining the idea of an Eastern-Fleet pairing. Historically, Fell's Pointers have fought off proposals for one-way coupling of traffic on Fleet and



Aliceanna since their victory in the great "Road Fight" of the late 1970s. The fear has been that expedited one-way traffic on these friendly streets would unknit the neighborhood.

The community sought and received a letter of assurance on this point in 1993 from Public Works Director George Balog, in connection with the reconstruction of Boston Street:

"The City does not plan to eliminate the parking on Fleet or Aliceanna Streets. The City's position has been and remains that Fleet and Aliceanna Streets as well as Eastern Avenue will remain in two-way operation." If the streets remain two way, with 24-hour parking on both sides,

Continued on page 2

The Promenaders Stroll Around the Harbor Has Its Ups and Downs

The Waterfront Promenade Partnership that has operated under Living Classrooms to help maintain and enhance the Promenade around the harbor's edge has come up with new leaders of the board to reinvigorate its efforts. Carolyn Boitnott, longtime leader of the Waterfront Coalition, and architect David Benn have accepted co-chair roles to bring the Partnership's experience to bear on a newly formed, mixed city-commercial group—the similarly named Partnership for Baltimore's Waterfront—under Andy Frank of the Baltimore Development Corp.

The new group is charged initially with improving the appearance of the walkway around the Inner Harbor, whereas the Promenade Partnership, formerly led by Ted Rouse of Struever Bros., Eccles & Rouse, has attempted to watch over the more than seven miles of Promenade arcing from Clinton Street in Canton to Locust Point. Boitnott and Benn led board members on an inspection of the portion from Canton to the Living Classrooms site on Caroline Street recently and found a photo album of probable violations of city maintenance rules or of the very easements that created the strung-out park. This coincided with a Sun newspaper article that also pointed out frailties. Still, the group found much to applaud, as do such walkers as The Fell's Pointer's columnist, The Promenader.

The Living Classrooms Partnership will have a seat on the board of the new downtown group and members are looking to make at least short-term fixes in the Promenade in time for a spring celebration of what is widely considered a unique attraction for visitors and residents alike. One suggested occasion to gather on the bricks and boards is to witness the arrival of the sailboats in the transoceanic Volvo race in March or April.

Happenings

T-Shirt War Beside the 'Point

Fell's Pointers, rarely neutral about anything, are sitting out a great T-shirt conflagration that pits Canton against Federal Hill—and benefits Living Classrooms Foundation on Caroline Street in greater Fell's Point. With the three-month contest neck and neck, Canton is winning 1,030 shirt sales to 840 for Federal Hill.

The competition was hatched by Round2Communications at the Can Factory in Canton to support the educational efforts for at-risk children at Living Classrooms. A spokeswoman said various neighborhoods, including Fell's Point, were considered for inclusion but this first contest narrowed to two—leaving Pointers shirtless. A website, wearing its heart on its sleeve, has extended the warfare to votes on suggestions, for instance, that Canton's bar-life intellectuals can out-talk those across the harbor. There is talk of a grand-prize conclave in the winning neighborhood next month but The Fell's Pointer suggests a celebratory dinner at any eatery here in middle ground. To order a T-shirt, or to see who's winning, consult www.cantonvs-federalhill.com.

Franchising Limits for Fell's?

City Council member Mary Pat Clark plans to sponsor legislation limiting retail franchises in Hampden that could be a boon, or tribulation, for Fell's Point as well. She was quoted in The Sun as saying, "It's all about trying to maintain a balance which favors the local nature of the Hampden business district."

Under her approach, chain merchandizers wouldn't automatically be excluded but would have to meet criteria set by the Council. While several franchisers operate in Fell's Point, the concern most frequently voiced at meetings of residents and merchants is of the "big box" variety—which have yet to appear. The Sun article pointed out that several communities elsewhere have enacted strictures on chain stores but challenges arise, with demands for equal access.

St. Stans Demolition Dispute

Preservationist Robert Eney, long active in Fell's Point, has challenged the decision to allow demolition of properties on the Ann-Aliceanne Streets campus of St. Stanislaus Church. The vacant church itself would be redone to house the Mother Seton Academy, now next door. That building along with the several along Aliceanna would give way to new townhouses. Eney calls for creative redevelopment of those properties. He is particularly concerned about loss of "the VERY LAST of the four-bay mansions in Fell's Point," he said in a letter to the Task Force and others. That mansion most recently housed the St. Stans School.

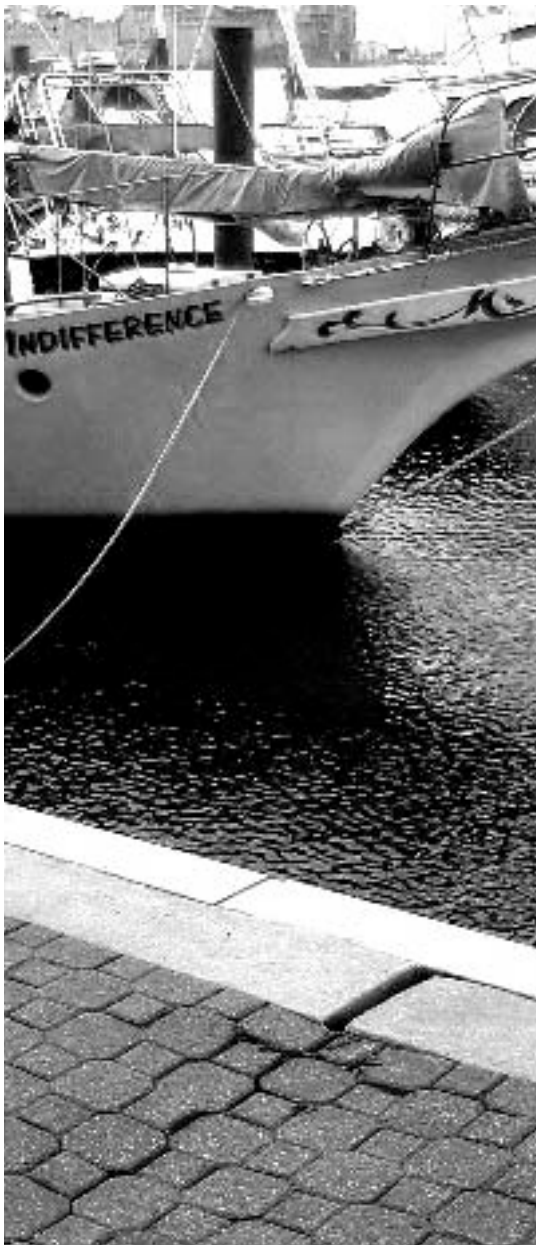


Photo By Lew Diuguid

Battered bricks draw floating commentary.

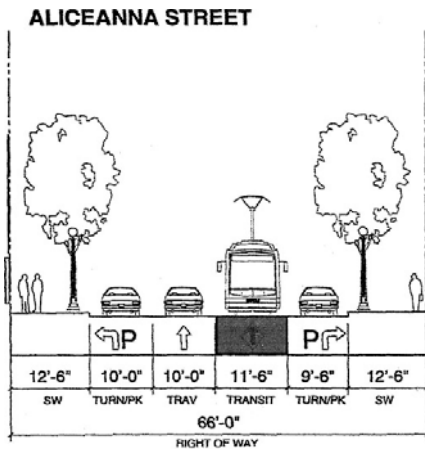
Light Rail Prospects Brighter

Continued from page 1

two parallel streets would likely be used to accommodate the eastbound and westbound transit vehicles, but the vehicles would need to run in the traffic lanes, joining the backups for stop lights and beer trucks. They would behave more like neighborhood streetcars, as contrasted to light rail trains operating in dedicated lanes.

The only promising mode for traffic-free transit in the corridor would be ferries and water taxis in the harbor.

The community will have further opportunities to influence Red Line decisions in future MTA work shops. Another alternative, which the MTA has promised to study and present to the community as an option, is to use Aliceanna and Thames Streets for the pairing of the transit lanes. This would bring the



MTA
One-way proposal conserves parking lanes

service closer to the Fell's Point waterfront, where it would serve future development on Harbor Point as well as the Douglass-Myers Maritime Park, Bond Street Wharf, and the burgeoning condo population of Fell Street. It would also pass by the Maritime Museum that was a car barn in the era of horse-drawn trolleys.

The line would complement the new No. 11 bus service that MTA is expected to introduce this fall on Fleet Street, providing direct service to downtown, Mount Vernon, Penn Station, Baltimore Museum of Art, Johns Hopkins University, Loyola and north to Towson.

MTA hopes to hold a public meeting on this line in Canton this month.

Trolly Known as Skoda Draws MTA's Attention

Whatever streets are chosen for the Red Line, MTA planners are zeroing in on the specs of the popular Portland, Oregon, Czech-built Skoda trolley for their recommended vehicle, either operating alone or hooked together as a light-rail train.

This three-segment low-floored streetcar has piqued the desires of top city and state planners as well as members of the community who have ridden it. The floor of the mid-section meets the sidewalk, making it easy to roll a wheelchair or bike on and off. The vehicle is quiet and slender, the capacity is large, and the single-wire overhead power line is so unobtrusive as to be hardly noticeable. In Portland, these streetcars operate in traffic on two parallel one-way streets.



Photo by Robert C. Keith
Czech-built cars prove popular in Portland.

**'Point's Prime Characters-V
By Request, The Human Jukebox**

By Mark Walker
Marketing Analyst, Puppeteer, Conjuror

My brothers, a friend and I meet in Fell's Point each month or so for a bite to eat, a few drinks, and to take in the sights and sounds. We'd done this for 25 years, what you could call "semi-regulars," and we thought we'd seen everything—until the summer of 1998. While walking at Broadway and Thames, near the ice cream stand that now is Maggie Moo's, we heard a jaunty flute but saw no musician. My brother Rick said, "Hey, the music is coming from that cardboard box." We wandered over to the refrigerator-sized carton, painted in crude letters with the words, "The Human Jukebox."

We thought someone was setting us up for a practical joke, so we looked around for hidden TV cameras. A list of titles was penciled on the box with the admonition, "Deposit money in slot and pick a song." Rick winked at us and slid a dollar into the slit. The music stopped, a makeshift window opened and a black man said, "What song do you want to hear?" He was sitting on one of the stools for the granite chess board, with the box covering him and the seat. My brother checked the 30-odd listings and responded, "How about old 'Danny Boy?'"

"Okay," the man said, as he closed the window and played the Irish classic while his customers savored the surreal happening.

The flautist stayed there about three months and we looked forward to seeing him every time we got

together. We certainly didn't mind giving him money because he earned it entertaining us. He must have impressed others too, as I recall he appeared on local television news.

Although one day he just vanished, we still walk that way with hopes—and laugh when we do. And we marvel over his original idea, offering a service with a song along a street more known for unadorned pan-handling.

Many people who have experienced crazy things in this neighborhood say, "It could only happen in Fell's Point." After we met up with The Human Jukebox, I seconded the notion.



Photo by Lew Diuguid
Chess stand was the stage for the Human Jukebox.

Schedules

Trash

Place trash outside in cans or, after 6AM on collection day, in plastic bags. Mondays and Thursdays but no holidays.

Recycling

Place outside by 7AM on collection day. Glass, metal and plastic in blue plastic bags.

Paper and cardboard in paper bags, cardboard boxes or tied with string. Fridays

Neighborhood Meetings

Douglass Place: Third Wednesday of every other month at the Polish National Alliance, 1637 Eastern Avenue, 410.563.1297.

Fell's Point Antique Dealers' Association: Call 410.675.4776.

Fell's Point Community Organization: Second Mondays, 7PM, Fell's Point Visitor Center, 410.276.5471.

Fell's Point Development Corp.: 9AM every Tuesday, Max's on Broadway. Open to all. 410.675.8900.

Fell's Point Homeowners' Association: First Wednesdays, 7PM, Bertha's 2nd Floor.

Greenspace Action Partnership: Second Tuesdays, 6PM, Visitor Center, 410.675.6750 ext 10.

Society for the Preservation of Fell's Point and Federal Hill: Call 410.675.6750.

The Fell's Pointer is published monthly by volunteers of Fell's Point Citizens on Patrol, Inc. Questions, input and participation in patrols and this newsletter are welcome.

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