

Cars are not so important to local shoppers

I read with great interest your article about parking and traffic on Centre/South Streets. While I applaud the Jamaica Plain Business and Professional Association's (BAPA) efforts to work with the BTD commissioner, I believe there is much else—not related to cars—that we could undertake to enhance our street's vibrancy and commercial activity.

A 2003 shopper study conducted by JP Centre/South Main Streets (JPCSMS) found that cars are not a primary means of access for those who make purchases on the street. Our study surveyed 400 shoppers—a statistically valid sample—at all times of the day and night, on weekends and weekdays, and at eight different locations—from Petal & Leaf to the Jeannie Johnston Pub. We found that over three-quarters of shoppers walk,

take public transit or bike. [See graphic.]

Another analysis—this one of the 2000 U.S. Census—reinforces the relative unimportance of cars for many in JP. Twenty-four percent of our residents (compared to 10 percent nationally) do not own a car; 49 percent of households have just one car. In contrast, over 54 percent nationally own two or more cars. Of course, this is not to say that JP residents—including me—don't complain about traffic and parking. And, it is worth noting that the census also found an increase in the number of cars while the population remained stable.

All combined, the data argue that traffic and parking don't impede shopping in our district. In fact, urban planners consider slow traffic to benefit a shopping dis-

trict. One need only look at Davis Square, Coolidge Corner or Harvard Square where stores are thriving and traffic and parking are a source of constant complaint. These districts, however, include diverse independent retail businesses, great restaurants and superior public transportation. It therefore suggests that we:

- Analyze how much of the congestion is caused by people passing through the district, delivery trucks and people who use their cars, vans and trucks for work—such as the many contractors, real estate agents and employees—and use this analysis to develop a comprehensive view of traffic volume and mitigation options.

- Work to significantly improve public transit.

- Enhance the desirability of walking and biking in our downtown—as well as the retail density of the street.

We at JPCSMS invite all of you interested in such efforts to join with us.

Let's ensure our streets better support residents' needs and uses. Making Centre and South more car-friendly should not be the focus.

Martin H. Tannenbaum
 Chair, Economic Resources
 Committee
 JP Centre/South Main
 Streets

How Shoppers Get to Centre/South

Walk	213	61%
Drive/Ride with Others	72	21%
Bus/Subway	39	11%
Bike	24	7%

Notes: 84% of those surveyed live in ZIP code 02130—so most shoppers live nearby. Given the length of the survey, 52 (13%) did not respond to this question.

From a Survey by Centre/South Main Streets

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