

Transit Advisory Committee

July 2020

Abbreviated meeting summary

Attendance

Members	Present (14) John Attanucci, Kelly Brown, Devin Chausse, Mathew Coogan, Jim Gascoigne, Jackie Jones, Kristiana Lachiusa, Bill McAvinney, Margaret McKenna, Sylvia Parsons, Katherine Rafferty, Saul Tannenbaum, Robert Ricchi, Melissa Zampitella
	Absent (3) Joseph Beggan, Arthur Strang, Alexander Taylor
City staff (3)	Bill Deignan, Greg Hanafin, Susanne Rasmussen, Andrew Reker (CDD); Adam Shulman (TPT); Wallenstein Joseph (IT)
Others (8)	Kat Benesh (MBTA); 7 members of the public

Welcome and committee introductions

Andy Reker (AR) began the virtual meeting at 5:00 PM by welcoming members of the TAC, members of the public and presenters. AR gave a tour of the virtual space for people joining by application and telephone and shared some ground rules for virtual meeting participation. AR then turned the meeting facilitation over to John Attanucci, Chair (JA). JA welcomed the members of the Transit Advisory Committee (TAC) and public. TAC members introduced themselves.

Presentation: MBTA service levels in current phase of COVID-19 response

Kathryne Benesh (KB), MBTA, gave a presentation about the MBTA's initial response to COVID. KB talked about the following topics in the presentation:

- Service principles and staffing plan in place during the first months of the pandemic, responding to staffing shortages as a result of COVID-19.
- Service changes in response to reductions in ridership.
- Planning for service levels including buses nearing 50% ridership compared to last September.
- She also presented the top 20 bus routes and compared ridership to past baseline ridership levels prior to COVID-19.
- She stated that peak ridership is earlier in the day, 6-7 am, 3-4 pm, which reflects who is commuting and the data matches up with health care workers schedules.

Next, KB talked about Phase 2 recovery for the summer of 2020. KB made the following main points:

- Routes with most durable ridership had increased service, including #1, #57, #66, #70 bus.

- To allow for physical distancing, MBTA has reserved buses to allow two buses to run as a “bunch” in response to demand

During the presentation members of the TAC asked the following questions or made the following statements, a summary of the response is in italics.

- How many routes are still on Saturday schedules and how many are not running at all?
Roughly, from recall, we are operating about 80% of the routes that is about 30-40 routes. All routes are operating on a modified Saturday schedule.
- Is information on the MBTA web site current and up to date and what is the status of commuter rail lines?
Light rail and heavy rail will go back to weekday service soon. Commuter rail will go back to about 85% service, except Fairmont line which will have new trips added. Schedules should be on-line and up to date.
- How was service changed regarding adjusting service based on demand?
The MBTA is thinking about using the service they have to facilitate social distancing; looking ahead MBTA continues to assume social distancing. The MBTA will rebalance service levels to match demand, evaluate route restructuring and changes, and use incentives to shift travel patterns by mode and time of day, such as fare incentives. They also began working on real-time crowd information to help people make decisions for buses.
- Was there a shift in time of day patterns?
We are not sure yet, but we are seeing fascinating travel patterns. But haven't look at time of day yet in detail.
- Concerned about bus resources and limited availability, especially for the long-term?
MBTA- doesn't have answers yet about the long-term plans. Adding buses and operators takes time. MBTA like others are in a time of resource constrains, looking at pro forma and what the options are.
- Comment about ridership demand and supply and stated that demand will follow supply.
- How do you transition to get choice riders back, especially in areas like Kendall that won't work in long run without the resources?
For all modes, except bus, MBTA is providing about 75-100% of previous service. It's the buses that hasn't been brought back to 100% of service hours, but it's a fair point and we are in a challenging place. There are no perfect answers.
- Has the MBTA been able to keep the workforce safe from COVID and has moving riders to back door boarding helped?
Thanks for question. It's the #1 priority for safety of our employees. In early days everyone was struggling to get PPE, especially masks. The biggest thing we are doing is cleaning buses. And access to PPE, gloves, etc. There was one unfortunate fatality, which is one too many. We have evolved with best practices. The MBTA web site has a wealth of information too.
- Comment about flexibility and proud to hear about resources the MBTA has available. Surprised about 30-40 buses are not running now. When shifting trips from routes that need demand off another route and pulling buses, how do riders know about changes?
We are not pulling buses off routes; they are still following Saturday schedules. Many buses that are not operating have redundant options for routes. We still try to maintain schedule.
- Was the chart shown in the presentation running averages or weekdays?
Will find out and let you know.

- Will the MBTA go back to collecting fares because many people are not paying with back door boarding?

The intent is to go back to front door boarding as soon as it is possible. There is a check list for criteria that need to be met, such as barriers for the drivers.

Discussion: Cambridge updates

Andy Reker (AR) provided updates primarily focused on the proposed Amendment to cycling safety. (Note: Other updates were summarized in the PowerPoint slides posted on the TAC web page).

John Attanucci (JA) summarized the amendment to build new bike lane miles on the streets and a potential comment to the Council from the Transit Advisory Committee. JA discussed his concern about impacts on buses operating on Massachusetts Avenue and the lack of discussion about impacts on transit overall. In addition: JA noted great support for the cycling amendment at the hearing and only a few comments expressing caution related to transit.

JA proposes further consideration of shared bus/bike lanes on major streets, where a separate bus and bike facility are infeasible without losing a large amount of on-street parking. John posed the question if the Committee should comment on the Amendment and asked for TAC members' comments. This was followed by comments, questions and discussion.

During the discussion members of the TAC asked the following questions or made the following statements, a summary of the response is in italics.

- A comment was made that the obvious answer is to get rid of cars.
- A comment was made that what I hear from cyclists is a shared lane is a non-starter.
- A question was asked if the Community Development Department has a position on the ordinance? *Susanne Rasmussen (SR), CDD, stated that the Amendment was drafted by Cambridge Bike Safety. Staff was asked if it was something that can be achieved? There will be technical analysis and community engagement on every street. Staff commented on feasibility and won't be making any additional comments. Transit is a really important consideration and was mentioned in the presentation on the Amendment. The prioritization of streets has not been completed, and transit will be looked at for each street. Regarding parking, it's clear a very significant amount of on-street parking would be impacted, or it would not be achieved. If committee would like to send a letter it should be before July 27.*
- A comment was made that a shared bus/bike lane will not lead to the best bus operations because it will slow down the buses and make it feel unsafe for bicyclists. It may make sense for some certain sections and we should only do shared bus/bike lanes when very constrained. We should be doing things like transit signals and queue jump lanes.
- A comment was made that more people in the city are using transit than bicycles and there should be an amendment that buses should at least be equal to bicycle lane use. Another person agreed with that statement.
- A comment was made that residents that face poverty that use transit need to be represented in the conversation.

- A question was asked if red is the only color for bus lanes. Andy Reker said red is standard color for bus lanes.
- A comment was made that the way the ordinance is written, bike lanes are the priority, not transit and there will be nothing left for transit. One thing that we can ask for is if there is an impact on transit, then staff should slow down the process for putting lanes on Mass. Ave without an analysis. *SR reiterated that the TAC can write a letter to the council that an analysis should be done to demonstrate impacts on transit and bike lanes should not negatively impact transit.*
- A comment was made that we need to fix the problems that currently exist for transit first.
- A recommendation was made for one on one contact with city councils; we should do letter too, but we should not assume they thought through the issues as much as we have. However, the amendment is not coming out of left field because this is what happens when the City doesn't respond the way the community wants. But we have also been frustrated with the city for public transit. The Bike community has just been nimbler, and this is the result. I wish the City advocated more for public transit.

Gavin Lund, a member of the Cambridge Bicycle Committee, asked if there was any questions that he can speak too?

- A question was asked if he would support bus lanes, queue jump lanes, and how do you conflict for limited real estate play out?
Gavin said shared bus/bike lanes is not a good idea. We stick with not getting killed. We don't want to fight with people riding buses. Truth is too much space has been given to cars.
- A question was asked about options for bicyclists using other routes, since Massachusetts Ave is the most important route for buses. Isn't Green Street or other routes okay to use for bicyclists?
Gavin said he would love to work together on what streets look like.

AR reiterated the question in front of TAC is whether to submit a letter to the City Council?

- A comment was made that the feasibility and impacts should include an analysis on transit before the design is approved.
- John Attanucci offered to draft a letter by next week.

A vote was taken on the motion. 9 offered their support for the motion, zero opposed the motion, one voted present. JA will draft a comment letter to be sent to the City Council.

Public comment

A member of the public made the following comments:

- I was not notified of this meeting. When schedule public meeting at this time it puts the public in a not great position. I urge Chair, staff to respect public comments.
- Bike safety is not just infrastructure, it's how they behave. It is also important for pedestrians be part of this bicycle safety amendment discussion – like stopping at red lights, etc. On the bus side, I support something needs to be nailed down to certify a bike lane. Also, I was told that the Mass + Main project was bike lane was not to permanent and then became that.
- *A TAC member stated that the public should not feel like they are overlooked and not included.*

JA thanked attendees and closed the main part of the meeting.

AR made an announcement that currently there are no more regularly scheduled TAC meetings. But, that City staff are working toward a possible joint meeting for the Bicycle, Pedestrian, and Transit Advisory Committees on July 29th.

AR also noted there are a few large projects that are coming up for City review including Cambridgeside Galleria 2.0. and the TAC may need someone to write letters for large project review later this year.

Meeting was adjourned at 6:47 PM

Version Information

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