

February 4, 2021

MBTA General Manager and Fiscal Management Control Board
Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority
10 Park Plaza
Boston, MA 02110

Ref: Proposed Cambridge Service Reductions under MBTA Forging Ahead Plan

Dear GM Poftak and Board Members,

In our previous letter dated December 4, 2020, the City of Cambridge's appointed Transit Advisory Committee, advising the City Manager, expressed our strong opposition to the widespread service reductions proposed through the "Forging Ahead" plan. Since that time, the US Congress has passed another COVID-19 relief package that included additional public transit operations funding, bringing the MBTA's new COVID-related Federal funding last year to over \$1.1 billion, an amount that covers almost two years of reduced MBTA fare revenue *if* ridership remains at today's levels through all of 2021. In addition, this month the Biden administration is proposing even more Federal transit relief funding and it is likely to pass in some form.

At the time that we commented in December, the MBTA suggested that the cuts to most routes (other than those that were completely suspended!) were to be no more than 20 percent of pre-COVID service levels, but no specific route schedules were provided. In fact, based on recent briefings to our Committee and the City staff, the proposed bus service cuts to many City of Cambridge routes far exceed 20%, at least during peak periods, and we believe that the level of these cuts will directly and permanently maintain most of the large MBTA ridership reductions that we see today. Quoting from our previous letter:

"We would just observe that recapturing riders once the public health emergency has eased will be much more realistic with less crowded trains and buses and the current frequencies that are not degraded due to understandable temporary ridership losses. We do not see how the MBTA will determine if and when service levels will be restored and what criteria will be used to evaluate potential future demand (and not simply the then current counts of passengers on the degraded services), especially since it is not likely that the return to previous travel levels will happen all at once. Clearly, pre-COVID "choice" riders will surely be influenced more by reduced service levels and more crowded vehicles than any loyalty to the MBTA. Established travel demand theory shows that travelers often reconsider their choice of mode following major disruptions such as the pandemic, and across-the-board service reductions and elimination of route and path choices will clearly turn many previous MBTA riders into auto users as they gradually return to their prior travel destinations. We see these proposed reductions as the first big step towards the dismantling of a truly equitable system in the Boston region that all can reliably use on a daily basis."

While we understand that some temporary reductions to the MBTA's most frequent services may be justified right now for the MBTA's most frequent and uncrowded services this Spring, we urge that the MBTA commit now that all pre-COVID service levels be restored by mid-Summer in anticipation of a full return to schools and universities and a likely return to work sites for many more of the region's

employees. However, we must also point out that many of planned Spring and Summer bus service cuts simply go too far and are well beyond previous MBTA Forging Ahead guidance. These specific Cambridge bus service cuts just announced include:

- Route 47 (Central Square to the LMA and beyond): peak headways going from 7-8 minutes to 15-18 minutes (half as much service);
- Route 68 (Harvard to Kendall): fully suspended resulting in riders having to walk almost ½ mile to alternative service on narrow, bricked Cambridge sidewalks and cutting off direct access to the high school;
- Route 70 (Waltham to Central Square): peak headways going from 7-12 minutes to 12-17 minutes (an average of 6 trips per hour to only 4 trips per hour);
- Route 72 (West Cambridge to Harvard): fully suspended removing service completely to 3 stops along Aberdeen Ave. and reducing peak headways from 15 minutes to 30 minutes along Huron Ave. (half as much service);
- Route 85 (Union Square to Kendall): service fully suspended in the midday;
- A number of Arlington originating routes (e.g., 67, 77, 79, 84) with very large frequency reductions (in total much greater than the 20% previously announced) that carry many riders destined to work, schools and shops in Cambridge.
- Further potential cuts to Routes 64, 74, 75, 62/76 planned for Summer, 2021.

We are requesting that the MBTA staff be dispatched to work with the City staff and our Committee to plan an orderly and full restoration of these services to pre-COVID levels with a deadline of the Fall, 2021 schedule. Anything short of such action would be directly in conflict with the spirit of the substantial Federal assistance granted the MBTA and would, in our opinion, permanently delay ridership recovery as past riders discover more convenient and less sustainable modes.

Sincerely,

John P. Attanucci

John Attanucci, Chair
On behalf of the Cambridge Transit Advisory Committee