

Transit Advisory Committee

September 2023

Abbreviated meeting summary

Attendance

Members

Present (9) Arthur Strang, Melissa Zampitella, Jackson Moore-Otto, Jim Gascoigne, Peter Septoff, Carl Rothenhaus, Katherine Rafferty, Devin Chausse, Makayla Comas

Absent (1) Bill McAvinney

City staff (2)

Andrew Reker (CDD); Adam Shulman (TPT)

Others (5)

Tara Ahmadi (MBTA); Four members of the public.

Note: CDD = Community Development Department; TPT = Traffic Parking and Transportation Department; MBTA = Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority

Welcome and committee introductions

Andy Reker (AR) began the virtual meeting at 5:32 PM by welcoming members of the Transit Advisory Committee (TAC), members of the public and presenters. AR gave a tour of the virtual space for people joining by application and telephone and shared ground rules for virtual meeting participation.

Carl Rothenhaus (RA) then conducted a roll call of the members of the TAC – 9 members were present and 1 was absent. The committee conducted a roll call vote to approve the meeting minutes for the May 2023 committee meeting and the June 2023 Committee Meeting. The committee voted six in favor and one recorded as absent to approve the meeting minutes for both meetings.

City, MBTA, + TAC Updates

AR presented several ongoing projects taking place throughout the city to the TAC. During the presentation, AR emphasized the key features of these projects and provided information about their progress towards completion. Answers to member's questions are in italics.

Inman Square:

- In Inman square the city has installed a queue jump lane and has painted it in the standard bus lane red.
- The city has also installed dedicated transit signals.

River Street

- On River Street utility work is ongoing & detours and temporary alternate bus stops are beginning to be implemented.

- The River Street reconstruction has three more years until completion.

Mt Auburn St. @ Aberdeen Ave

- In a prior meeting TAC was presented with an earlier draft of the proposed intersection reconstruction. During this meeting the City brought an updated draft of the intersection reconstruction for the TAC to consider. The changes are highlighted below:
 - o The city will be installing new overhead signals.
 - o The bus lane extension on the inbound side of Mt Auburn street remains.
 - o The bike lane changed from one-way on each side to a two-way facility on north side.
- One member of the TAC asked why the City made these modifications
 - o *The city said that this was a result of feedback from the open house, feedback from comment forms, and direct feedback from bicyclists saying that there was a significant volume of people that bike to the Star Market and greenway access in the Star Market parking lot. The feedback was that having the two-way facility makes it easier to travel to that area.*

Harvard Square

- In Harvard square the city is looking at constructing bus boarding islands with separated bike lanes
- The city is still looking for final bus lane placements through Harvard Square
- The city also wants to make sure there are accessible paths and better pathing for cyclists through the square.
 - o One member was pleased to hear about the study of current obstacles in getting to transit in Harvard Square. The member also mentioned that there are still obstacles in getting to transit at Alewife.

O'Brien Highway

- At the Obrien Hwy near Lechmere the new vehicle circulation pathing is complete. There is also a new garden that is under construction.
- A member of the TAC stated that these new items will be a benefit to EZRide.

Belmont Street

- Belmont street work is ongoing
 - o The new design will have buffered bike lanes on each side of the street as well as raised side street crossings.
 - o The redesign will feature a new bus stop design with a shared cycle track and bus boarding area.
 - o Chicaning will be used to help slow the speed of traffic
 - o No other narrowing will occur i.e., no bump-outs will be constructed, unlike in Belmont.

Huron Avenue

- The Huron Ave reconstruction is underway. It will add sidewalks and a two-way bike lane
- Several stops will be moved during reconstruction.

- Multiple members had concerns about accessibility with moving the 700 Huron stop up the steep hill towards the golf course.
 - *The current bus stop in front of 700 is not accessible due to the sidewalk being incredibly narrow.*
- Fountain Terrace will get an added westbound stop.

Kendall Headhouse

- A developer is renovating the Alewife-direction headhouse at Kendall/MIT station.
- This project will extend Kendall Garden, a “porch” space above the headhouse.
 - *Kendall Garden is a publicly-accessible private open space that residents should visit.*
- This project will also renovate the underground lobby but not the platform.
- One member suggested having someone from the project present it to the TAC.

Massachusetts Avenue Partial Construction

- City staff appointed a working group and held the first meeting in May.
- The project team is developing designs for sewer, storm water, drainage, bus and bike lanes as well as a construction phasing schedule.
- One member asked if the project entailed laying and additional conduit to accommodate municipal fiber.
 - *Unsure – the city will check back with the member on this.*

Concord Avenue

- Concord Avenue is slated for transit signal priority.
- So far, procurement is almost complete.
 - The MBTA is going to award the contract shortly.
- The objective is to upgrade signals at an estimated 12 signals with transit signal priority
- One member brought up the possibility of adding the TMA shuttles into the signal priority infrastructure.

CRA Grand Junction Transit

- The planners are currently finishing their final proposal
- One member stressed that he would like to see the CRA team present this proposal to the TAC.

AR went on to review other updates for the TAC, including:

MBTA Updates

Squires Bridge Transit Diversion

- Mass DOT highway and bridge project
 - The Mass DOT is holding an open house on Sept 12th at 6:30pm
 - The MBTA has put out information on how to plan their trips during the disruption.

Silver Line Extension Alternatives Analysis

- MBTA so far does not have a preferred alternative to the Silver Line alternatives.
 - This includes both extensions of the SL3 and adding the SL6 as a new line.
 - One member asked about performance of these alternatives through Cambridge.

- *The full answer to this question is only known by the MBTA, but there are varying ways to judge performance, some alternatives are faster but would carry less people, while other alternatives would go slower but carry more people.*

MBTA central square accessibility improvements

- The MBTA will be upgrading the restroom.
- There will be 2 new elevators and 1 renewed elevator.
- One member mentioned that at one entrance to the station one of the fare gates has not been updated to the new system and thus is out of order.

The North Station Drawbridge is being redone.

There are upcoming **subway diversions**.

- One member mentioned how service has continually deteriorated in service within the last two weeks.
- One member thought of inviting labor at the T to come to the meeting.
- Members have had issues getting to work. We cannot pay people when they are not at work. It is cutting into people's lives. It also hurts employers who do not have their workers at work working.
- The TAC will discuss having a subcommittee meeting on the MBTA to draft a letter that covers these issues.

Presentation: Regional Rail in the CIP

AR then introduced Jackson Moore-Otto (JM) TAC member who works at TransitMatters. JM focuses on Regional Rail and presented on the MBTA Capital Improvement Plan and regional rail concepts. Some main points were:

- The Capital Improvement Plan looks to increase frequencies on the Fitchburg line.
- The Fitchburg line currently has relatively lower ridership compared to other Commuter Rail lines, which the member attributes to its infrequent service. However, this lower ridership is seen as latent potential, as it is believed that increasing the frequency of service would lead to higher ridership. This is because the line runs through Porter, Belmont and Waltham and connects jobs and population dense areas.

JM went on to explain the ways this latent potential could become reality by electrifying the line, installing high-level platforms, and run trains every 15 minutes, acting essentially as a second subway system

JM then reviewed how many of these things were laid out by the MBTA in 2019 and are already being done on other lines.

- Several lines are already undergoing preliminary electrification work.

To achieve 15-minute frequencies JM noted that a turn track would be needed – which would be a section of additional track to accommodate additional service so that the trains could reverse back towards North Station. This track would be best cited inside of I-95.

- This added frequency would increase demand at Porter Square, which is already a high ridership stop on the commuter rail system.

Many stations are not fully accessible, making these stops accessible will increase demand, and be more equitable.

JM then took questions and comments from the rest of the TAC:

- One member agreed to the idea of Fitchburg line having latent potential.
- One member mentioned having Waltham as a possible turn-track site given it has only a single track but has space for two.

Public comment

AR then opened the meeting to public comment.

- One member of the public stated that given that TAC should write a letter to the MBTA about the closing of Green Line services that affect Cambridge residents. The commenter also referenced the medical office at 625 Mt Auburn Street which treats low and no-vision patients. She asked the city to designing the new bus & bike lane layout as designs develop for Mount Auburn Street at Aberdeen Avenue.
- One member of the public mentioned the 83 bus having difficulty entering and exiting the stop by Jerry's Pond, and that the Charlie Card Store has not reopened at Downtown Crossing – despite months of air-conditioning repair. The member also suggested reopening the Mezzanine of Harvard Square to sell Charlie Cards.

Members of the public made the following comments and questions in the Q&A for the meeting:

- Concern that O'Brien Highway project has conflicting signage for construction detours
- Question about how many attendees are in the virtual meeting room. (*At the time, there were 14 attendees.*)
- Question asking if the TAC had submitted questions or comments on the MassDOT closure of the MBTA Green Line for 25 days
- Question asking for a definition of a "chicane" (*A chicane is a street design element that adds a pair of offset curb extensions to a street. This results in motorists needing to navigate a slight curve on the street. A chicane can affect traffic speeds considerably. [Click here for more information from the NACTO Urban Street Design Guide.](#)*)
- Concerns about the design of Lechmere station's bus loop and the faulty hardware and location of fare validation machines
- Comment on the Kendall Square rooftop garden and lack of service on the Red Line

The meeting adjourned at 7:00 PM

Version Information

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Approval: _