

# Transit Advisory Committee

## November 2021

### Abbreviated meeting summary

#### Attendance

##### Members

**Present** (7) John Attanucci (Chair), Arthur Strang, Katherine Rafferty, Sylvia Parsons, Saul Tannenbaum, Kelley Brown, Bill McAvinney

**Absent** (5) Matthew Coogan, Kristiana Lachiusa, Devin Chausse, Melissa Zampitella, Jim Gascoigne

##### City staff (3)

Andrew Reker, Kelsey Tustin (CDD); Adam Shulman (TPT)

##### Others (6)

Olivia Mobayed, Josh Weiland, Melissa Dullea (MBTA); 3 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 5:35 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. Kelsey Tustin (KT) then conducted a roll call of the members of the Transit Advisory Committee – 7 members were present, 5 were absent.

#### Presentation: Follow-up on Route 47 TAC Proposal

AR introduced Josh Weiland (JW) from the MBTA. JW gave a follow-up presentation on route 47 analysis. The presentation included the following information on the project:

- JW incorporated a weighted analysis based on feedback from the TAC which pointed out that the analysis only included transfers to and from transit
- Analysis determined similar results. MBTA will pursue the Green Street alternative
- Mass Ave alternative created time savings only for those alighting/boarding at Central Square (the model is built to favor this option). Green Street alternative created larger time savings when all riders are considered
- JW then presented a potential bus network redesign routing concept, where a route runs through Central Square along the path of Route 47 and Route 83 or 91

Members of the Transit Advisory Committees had the following comments and questions:

- Interest in seeing a sensitivity analysis
- Concern that the TAC and public still disagree with MBTA

- Suggestion to allow left turn for buses only for buses going southbound on Prospect Street
- Continued interest in seeing an analysis of the changes in the context of the whole route
- Suggestion to have the route run on Brookline Street, Mass Ave., and Pearl Street

MBTA staff responded:

- *Most people who ride this route do not travel to Central Square and the MBTA wants to analyze the option that best considers equity in the entire system*
- *Traffic still hasn't returned to 2019 level, which means that the MBTA are wary about running a route that will be a benefit only in the short term*

## Presentation: Winter Service and Schedule Changes

AR introduced Olivia Mobayed (OM) from the MBTA. OM presented on service changes planned to begin on December 19. The MBTA:

- Added service in fall but has had difficulties in running the planned schedule because of MBTA operator shortages
- Dropped a significant number of trips with operator shortages
- Has a goal for dropped trips to be less than 0.5% of trips
- Evaluated strategies to respond to the labor shortage, i.e. create more full-time positions, improve working hours, etc.
- Has a goal for winter: adjust and reduce service so that headways can be even while minimizing risk of overcrowding

Members of the Transit Advisory Committees had the following comments and questions:

- Could you tell us the number of buses assigned for this group for peak and off peak?
- Request for more detailed data – trips by service period
- Understanding that the worker shortage is a major issue that will be difficult to solve

## Discussion: MBTA Bus Network Redesign

AR transitioned to a review of the MBTA's Bus Network Redesign. AR discussed the process over recent years and the current status. AR presented the following information:

- Review of public engagement during 2018-2019 Better Bus Project service changes
  - Main priorities during Cambridge's public outreach were: reliability, frequency, speed, directness, and better service outside of rush hour
  - TAC proposals that were further developed and incorporated in recommended service changes
  - Cambridge reached 3000 people and received 480+ ideas
  - Some ideas did not fit the scope of the Better Bus Project, as well as a map where respondents shared they would like more high frequency service.
  - Feedback submitted to the MBTA based on these ideas.
- MBTA Bus Network Redesign project staff stated that new network will meet the following principals: Simpler and easier to understand, more high frequency corridors, better connections, focus on all-day service

AR asked TAC members to respond using a virtual polling tool to some of the tradeoffs that have been discussed by Bus Network Redesign. Members were asked to elaborate based on the strength of their support or disagreement:

- City should support a bus network that has more frequent routes but longer walks to access frequent routes (Ex. Routes 1, 68, 69)
  - Strongly disagree = 25%; Disagree = 38%; Agree = 38%; Strongly agree = 0%

TAC members:

- Emphasized that people with disabilities have a much harder time where a longer walk to a bus stop
  - Suggested that multiple routes remain in parallel to the more frequent route so that people can choose walking (faster) or getting closer to their stop
  - Asked to look at routes where fewer stops could be made
- The City should support a bus network which has routes that stay only the most direct routing (Ex. CT2 on Ames St.)
    - Strongly disagree = 0%; Disagree = 0%; Agree = 100%; Strongly agree = 0%
  - The City should support a bus network which has fewer one seat rides but connecting routes will be more frequent.
    - Strongly disagree = 0%; Disagree = 0%; Agree = 100%; Strongly agree = 0%

TAC members had the following concerns:

- This could be promised, but not implemented
  - Accessibility for people with disabilities at the connection locations, i.e. bus shelter, snow, etc.
- The City should support a bus network that has fewer suburban express routes in favor of local routes to suburban areas (Ex Route 351)
    - Strongly disagree = 20%; Disagree = 80%; Agree = 0%; Strongly agree = 0%

TAC members emphasized the importance of prioritizing the choice that results in less VMT rather than service

Members of the Transit Advisory Committees had the following follow-up comments and questions:

- How many buses will become available as a result of the GLX and SLX projects?
  - *AR responded that there are no known changes in relation to GLX. SLX won't pull from existing buses on local routes, as far as we know.*
- Why have a major redesign if there are no changes in resources available?
- Concern that the city and TAC are talking about shuffling resources rather than discussing how to build a transit system that meets the City's needs

## City Updates

AR presented a brief summary of updates for the City, including:

- South Mass Ave: Implementation expected Thursday-Sunday and implementation depends on weather and temperature
- North Mass Ave: Experiencing constraints similar to the South Mass Ave project and implementation is dependent on weather and temperature
- First/Second Street Corridor: Community feedback period has closed. City received 60 comments based on the two options that were presented. Staff are evaluating and processing feedback

## Public comment

A member of the public made the following comments:

- Concern that there is no bus service between Jefferson Park and Fresh Pond Mall. Walking over the bridge between these sites is an unpleasant experience. Suggested introducing free shuttles every hour.
- Concern around the North Mass Ave project and the TAC's responsibility

Meeting was adjourned at 7:15 PM

## Version Information

Draft: 11/04/2021 KT

Approval: 12/01/2021 Unanimously with 8 votes