

Transit Advisory Committee

May 2022

Abbreviated meeting summary

Attendance

Members

Present (11) John Attanucci (Chair), Kristiana Lachiusa (Vice Chair), Arthur Strang, Bill McAvinney, Carl Rothenhaus, Casey Berg, Devin Chausse, Jim Gascoigne, Saul Tannenbaum, Peter Septoff, Sylvia Parsons

Absent (4) Melissa Zampitella, Jackson Moore-Otto, Katherine Rafferty, Matthew Coogan

City staff

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

Others

Josh Weiland, Olivia Mobayed (MBTA); 3 members of the public

Note: CDD = Community Development Department; TPT = Traffic Parking and Transportation Department; MBTA = Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority; TOD = Transit Oriented Development; BNRD = Bus Network Redesign; RX = Rider Experience

Welcome and committee introductions

Andrew Reker (AR) began the virtual meeting at 5:30 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 (CR) then conducted a roll call of the members of the TAC – 11 members were present, 4 were absent. The committee conducted a roll call vote to approve the meeting minutes for the April 2022 meeting. The committee voted unanimously to approve the meeting minutes.

Presentation: Cambridge Bus Service Planning

AR introduced a high-level overview of bus service planning in Cambridge to prepare the TAC for the upcoming release of the MBTA's Bus Network Redesign (BNRD) proposal. The presentation consisted of:

- MBTA's key goals and policies for the BNRD
- Summary of previous public feedback on transit service
 - Service quality comments
 - Rider experience
 - Key destinations

AR highlighted the five goals that the MBTA laid out for the BNRD: equity, simplicity, more frequency, new connections, and all-day service. In addition, the MBTA also focused on transit priority and making sure the system was a cohesive regional system.

One member commented that he liked the focus on increased service in Cambridge but also believed that Cambridge should focus on intra-Cambridge transit as well as the connections between Cambridge and the larger metro area, and beyond. With increased service to far flung suburbs on services such as the commuter rail, he believed Cambridge could become a regional (i.e., New England and beyond) destination not just a local destination.

AR agreed that local versus regional is important discussion.

AR then provided a summary of the results of the City's survey on transit. The survey results included 500 discrete comments and feedback from the Cambridge community. Respondents expressed a need for reliability improvements such as increased frequency, especially in the rush hour, weekend, and weekday midday, as well as increased bus service to shopping and recreation destinations such as Daneyh Park. Respondents also expressed a need for improved ridership experience (RX) such as more stops with accurate real-time bus information, as well as improving the accuracy of transit monitoring mobile applications such as Transit and Google Maps. Respondents also said that they would like to see more focus on underserved neighborhoods, both historically and up-and-coming neighborhoods where adequate transit is not yet reflective of the new demand. AR then explained how the results of the survey have and have not been implemented by the MBTA. AR expressed that the respondent's desire to increase connections to retail and recreation areas have not yet been realized.

TAC members had the following comments and questions. City staff responses are below the question in italic text.

A member asked how or if the MBTA has updated rider preferences since the start of COVID-19. She stressed the importance of the MBTA is using post-pandemic data rather than old ridership data.

AR said that the MBTA is responding to these changes by focusing on "transit critical" areas, which are places that are lower income or still have high transit ridership post-pandemic.

Another member expressed approval of the Sullivan to Kendall and Assembly Square to Kendall routing as well as increased service on route 85. However, he would like to see better specifics on how the schedules would work as with minor schedule tweaking. EZRide could be the main transit carrier in this corridor. On the other hand, the MBTA could be the main carrier which would free EZRide to expand to other areas.

Another member agreed with this point. He hopes that the MBTA has looked at joint or collaborative services with EZRide as separate systems overlapping are less effective than an integrated system. He also hopes that the TAC emphasizes this.

One person added that the EZRide system is free, which is important in this conversation.

A member asked what the MBTA is doing to make bus driving a more attractive job?

A representative of the MBTA told the committee that one of the ways the job can be improved is by making the service less “peaky.” This is because drivers spend a large portion of their shift waiting around for peak service so that they can run their routes. Less peaky service would mean that drivers would spend more time driving their routes and less time waiting around. The MBTA is also taking steps to help drivers get through the door and feel safe on the job.

AR added this could be a topic for the MBTA subcommittee to address.

One member asked for a clarification of the green “6 route” on the map provided in the meeting slides.

Another member suggested that the TAC invite an MBTA bus driver to the meeting and ensure that they are properly compensated for their time.

This same member also expressed how new, clean, on schedule transit can attract riders and increase property values around new transit stations, such as Union Square, barring some possibility that Up-Zoning without the TOD factor would still raise prices.

AR concluded the discussion by summarizing current and previous bus priority projects in Cambridge. He also touched on outreach that the City is planning to do on bus priority as a standalone topic rather than in conjunction with other City projects.

A member stated that queues on the east side of Putnam Square, with return of traffic in Cambridge, are getting longer than the City had originally stated. The City should revisit traffic signal timings here.

Another member agreed that having a driver during the BNRD discussion would be very helpful and requested that there be a driver present.

Public Comment

There were no public comments during this comment period.

Subcommittee Breakout Groups

AR then divided the members into breakout groups based on the member’s interest in the different subcommittees: MBTA-Project subcommittee and City-Project subcommittee. The goals for this discussion were to designate a notetaker, delineate subcommittee topics, assign tasks, set meeting dates, and report back to the larger group.

City-Project Subcommittee:

The City-Project subcommittee decided that they would focus on the Central Square redesign and bus priority. The subcommittee decided that they would meet once a month, however the subcommittee did not choose specific dates to meet during this TAC meeting.

Another TAC member commented that Mount Auburn and Belmont Street are undergoing sewer reconstruction which will affect buses. This could be an important topic to address for the subcommittee.

MBTA-Project Subcommittee:

The MBTA-Project subcommittee decided to focus on the BNRD, especially the proposed levels of service and Central Square services. The subcommittee's tasks for the month are making sure that they are attending MBTA meetings on the redesign, as well as drafting a list of questions about levels of service in preparation for the upcoming BNRD presentation at the next TAC meeting. The subcommittee will not meet this month as the tasks for this month do not necessitate a meeting.

City, MBTA, + TAC Updates

Kelsey Tustin (KT) presented upcoming meetings for the TAC, including:

- BNRD upcoming public meetings
- Grand Junction working group meeting (TBA)

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

- Haymarket service resumed
- Weekend Red Line replacement bus shuttles
- Silver Line Extensions Alternatives analysis
- Inman Square reconstruction
- Porter Square improvements
- South Mass Ave transit priority

One member asked for a timeline of the harbor tunnel repairs.

Public comment

There were no public comments during this comment period.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:52 PM

Version Information

Draft: (5/31/2022, CFR)

Approved: 8 in favor, 1 present (6/2/2022)