

Transit Advisory Committee

July 2025

Abbreviated meeting summary

Attendance

Members **Present** (16)

In-person participation (6): Bill McAvinney, Clyve Lawrence, Craig Tateronis, Matt Martin, Secretary Andrew Zhou, Vice Chair Matthew Kramer

Remote participation (10): Annalisa Bhatia, Devin Chausse, Ian Hatch, Jim Gascoigne, Matthew Mccomiskey, Melissa Zampitella, Nick Lessin, Patrick Delaney, Sandhya Ramakrishnan, Chair Jackson Moore-Otto

Absent (7) Arthur Strang, David Rangaviz, Katherine Rafferty, Keisha Greaves, Miles Robinson, Omriqui Thomas, Pete Septoff

City staff (2) Andrew Reker, Marcella Cannatti (DOT-Transportation Planning)

Others (5) Members of the public (5)

Note: DOT = Department of Transportation

Welcome and Committee Introductions

AR opened the meeting at 6:03 PM and began by welcoming members of the Transit Advisory Committee (TAC), members of the public and presenters. AR gave a quick tour of the virtual space for members and people joining by Zoom and shared details of the physical space.

The Secretary then conducted a roll call – 15 members were present, 8 were absent.

The committee then approved the meeting minutes for the May 2025 meeting, with 9 members voting yes and 6 abstentions.

Discussion - TAC-Endorsed Implementation Plan

AR introduced the TAC-Endorsed Implementation Plan, giving a brief review of the timeline for updating the document, then turned the meeting to Jackson Moore-Otto (JMO) to facilitate a discussion regarding the implementation plan.

No members had any discussion points for the implementation plan

JMO motions to adopt, Bill McAvinney seconds. The Implementation plan was accepted with all 16 members voting yes.

Presentation – Bus Network Redesign

AR discussed the Bus Network Redesign (BNR). Before beginning the presentation, AR introduced the DOT Transportation Planning Sustainable Transportation Planning intern, Marcella Cannatti (MC), then gave her the floor to present.

MC introduced the goals and commitments of the BNR project. MC discussed the history of the BNR and the MBTA's related engagement with the Cambridge TAC, starting with an initial presentation in Sep 2019, and noting that the MBTA has presented about the BNR to the TAC 7 times.

MC showed a map of Cambridge showing where MBTA analysis indicated what the most common destinations are for trips beginning in Cambridge (MIT, Harvard East, Kendall Square, Harvard West, Area Four) – and also indicated that these locations were the same for all demographics, except for Harvard West which placed lower among people of color and unhoused individuals.

MC then showed a map of Cambridge where MBTA analysis indicated what the most common destinations are for trips ending in Cambridge (MIT, Harvard East, Kendall Square, Lechmere, Harvard West).

MC then showed a map of the most common destinations for trips starting in Cambridge and going to surrounding communities (Boston Beacon hill, Somerville Union Square, Boston Back Bay, Lower Allston West, Allston Beach Yards).

MC then showed a map of common destinations for trips starting in Cambridge's surrounding communities and ending in Cambridge (Lechmere, Harvard East, Kendall Square, Inman Square, Charles River).

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

A member asked what the difference is between Central Square and Area Four, because the areas intersect with each other.

MC stated that these designations are from the MBTA's data and may not align with the designations of the City of Cambridge. AR visualized this on a map, showing how Central Square is broken up somewhat oddly in comparison to Cambridge's own neighborhood designations.

A member asked if the MBTA considered journeys that people would want to take but could not due to lack of transit connectivity.

MC indicated that this kind of tracking would be difficult to do using existing methods. AR reminded the committee that the data is reflective of what people did in 2019, and while there may be some differences in specific numbers, the general trends most likely still hold.

One member asked why Central Square did not show up more often.

MC noted that Central Square was just below the top five cut off used for this presentation. AR indicated that while Central Square probably is a very common destination, it's likely job centers and other localities rated higher than that.

One member indicated that if we adjusted the borders of the study areas Central probably would show up more.

AR then presented on how the MBTA used this data to develop the BNR network proposal and what the bus network looked like before the redesign. Prior to the BNR, the main bus “hub” in Cambridge was in Harvard, but after the implementation of the BNR, there will be hubs in Harvard, Central, and Kendall.

AR presented the TAC’s feedback to the original May 2022 proposed bus network map, including asking the MBTA to provide ways to travel east-west across Cambridge without a transfer in Harvard.

AR summarized the MBTA’s response to TAC feedback, indicating that incorporation of TAC feedback was mixed. TAC requests for the proposed T39 and 55 were partially adopted, the T96 and 87 TAC proposals were fully adopted, and there were no changes in response to feedback about the 68, T77, T109. For the T101, the MBTA adopted TAC suggestions but not as part of Phase 1. AR also mentioned that the “T” designates frequent bus routes.

AR then presented feedback that Cambridge city staff provided and the MBTA’s responses. One of the most significant responses was to ignore city feedback on Route 68 that the MBTA plans to reduce in frequency. AR noted that city staff also suggested that service should be added between Chelsea and Kendall using the Tobin Bridge, stating that ridership on that route would be a good indication of how the future Red-Blue connector could impact the system. This suggestion was not accepted by the MBTA.

The MBTA approved a finalized version of the BNR network proposal at the end of 2022, which the MBTA indicated was final, but AR stated hope that there may be some wiggle room for changes to the map going forward, especially given that the current plan was adopted 3 years ago.

AR then described which changes were adopted as part of Phase 1. He discussed Phase 2, reminding the committee that for Phase 2 and all phases afterwards, the BNR will be “rolling”, where new routes will be rolled out on a quarterly basis in comparison to Phase 1, which was all implemented in one day.

AR presented the Phase 2 changes that will affect Cambridge:

- Route 1 will become more frequent during off-peak hour
- Route 42/47/91 will be converted into a new frequent bus route (under the new routing of 47)
- Route 62/76 will offer new Sunday service
- Increased frequency for Route 71/73/66/77
- Consolidating route 85/CT2 due to significant overlap between the two

AR then turned the meeting over to JMO to facilitate discussion about the BNR in general. TAC members had the following comments and questions. Presenter responses are below the question in italic text.

A member asked if there is anywhere where bus frequency will decrease.

AR said that the 68 is proposed to decrease to rush-hour only service. There may also be decreases in service on Concord, and East Cambridge will see consolidation of multiple routes into one, but it's unclear what phase that will be.

A member asked if the city has tried or been successful in modifying the streetscape in order to influence the MBTA's decision-making.

AR said that the city performed a study on the Kendall-Lechmere corridor, which noted a demand for north-south journeys, and the MBTA's proposed T101 for First St reflects that. The MBTA has suggested that adding bus lanes may quicken the introduction of the T101 route. Other than that, conversations have not begun for other corridors.

The same member asked if, given the political challenges especially related to parking removal in favor of bus lanes, it's worth trying to build new bus lanes to entice the MBTA to improve service.

AR explained that, as seen with the fight over the Cycling Safety Ordinance, navigating this political conversation is hard. AR mentioned existing plans to modify roads on Route 70 as a potential "easy" corridor to improve streetscape, as well as already in-progress plans on Mass Ave.

One member asked if the city has engaged with the MBTA about upzoning on transit corridors, and to what extent the city would be involved with upzoning. They also asked about transit signal priority (TSP).

AR reported that the MBTA has said that the BNR is a "now" redesign, and that the MBTA tends to be a "reactive" organization, only reacting to service issues as they come up. This would include crowding on buses resulting from additional development in place of planning for the circumstances of the future, which upzoning would fall under. AR noted that transit signal priority is difficult; it is part of the plan, but it is harder to do than a dedicated bus lane, and it is not an existing priority.

A member asked if private shuttles were considered during data gathering.

AR said yes, and that the MBTA has maybe depended too much on the existence of those services. For example, the new 101 may be delayed because the MBTA assumes that private shuttle routes already exist to cover that journey.

A member asked how the City Council's transit gap study will integrate with BNR.

AR said that citizen and community feedback helped the MBTA to implement ideas they had never considered, and that the transit gap study may have a similar effect in adjusting the BNR or may give us information for a future bus network redesign.

One member noted that the city seems to be losing direct bus service between Central and the Green Line Extension and the Orange Line North, and that riders may need to transfer more often.

AR stated that that the MBTA has said, with the 109 and T47, there is "more service" to the north. He said that the MBTA does not necessarily view more transfers as a bad thing, but TAC feedback can help reprioritize what metrics are important.

A member asked if the MBTA will end the lower frequency subway service on weekends.

AR said that for the MBTA, subway and bus planning are entirely separate, but that the TAC has indicated that there should be more communication between the two branches.

A member mentioned that for the 77 route, the issues they have experienced are more about service quality (buses not showing up/passing stations) and not frequency and asked if this plan will address that.

AR said that the MBTA has acknowledged bus bunching as an issue and will work on that in a separate initiative. Regarding dropped trips, in 2022 the significant issue was staffing, which the MBTA is working on by hiring aggressively.

A member said that the 68 should be kept as is or improved and asked if the MBTA is considering a bus-based North Station-South Station connection.

AR said that the MBTA considers a new upgraded T7 as a connector for North Station and South Station. City staff in Boston have also been pushing for this too.

City, MBTA, + TAC Updates

AR then moved to city and state project updates, highlighting the main changes

- Aberdeen Avenue construction has been delayed due to delayed paving, potentially will happen in fall and with no planned modification to bus stops.
- Massachusetts Avenue is in very early construction, with small and early action items beginning (utility repair, median removal)
- Mass Ave Planning Study published its final report in May 2025, AR suggested the TAC could get a full presentation about the study if requested
- Real Time Transit Screens is currently working out a new procurement strategy
- New bus shelter in Ames/Main Street to begin later this month, procurement complete, and contractor selected
- River Street is still under construction, mainly due to having to redo sub-surface work and street foundation; work continues, with part of the plaza to be opened in the Fall
- No updates to the Alewife Station Access Road
- MBTA has begun to study the potential ridership for a infill commuter rail station on the Fitchburg Line in Alewife
- No major updates from the North Cambridge House and North Station Drawbridge
- Central Station accessibility improvements are delayed, unsure when construction to begin, AR may check for more updates
- Fitchburg Capital Improvement Plan projects funded
- Red Line weekend closures begin “in an hour”; Cambridge will still have service but users will have to transfer at Kendall to JFK/UMass
 - o Unlike last year’s closure, this is to do heavy reconstruction that couldn’t be done overnight
 - o AR mentioned that these closures will impact all modes of travel across the Kendall area especially

AR presented upcoming meetings:

- Next TAC meeting on August 7th and September 4th

- Potential meeting topics are shuttles and transit gap study, as well as a transit study for Grand Junction
- Next joint meeting on July 31st (on hold)

AR discussed updates to committee communications, indicating that the city staff did not want to overwhelm committee members, and as a result will be consolidating methods of communication with the committee to one email a month, sent a week before the next committee meeting, rather than weekly emails.

AR also mentioned that they plan to include the city/state project update slides on the monthly email so that part of the agenda during committee meetings can be used for questions and feedback on updates instead of just a review of information.

AR then opened to public comment.

Public comment

AR provided instructions on how to participate in public comment for individuals participating remotely

One commenter reacted positively to the reversal of changes to the 83 and noted that the 83 serves a large low-income community. They emphasized how important maintaining the current 83 service is and indicated that continuing service on the 68 at least until the library closes would be an improvement. He also commented on floating bus stops and mentioned that in some cases, the railing for users is too close to the bike lane which introduces a point of conflict with cyclists.

AR concluded the meeting at 7:28 PM.

Version Information

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