

Transit Advisory Committee

November 2025

Abbreviated meeting summary

Attendance

Members **Present** (13)

In-person participation (3): Bill McAvinney, Andrew Zhou, Jackson Moore-Otto

Remote participation (10): Arthur Strang, Craig Tateronis, Ian Hatch, Katherine Rafferty, Matt Martin, Matthew Mccominskey, Miles Robinson, Patrick Delaney, Pete Septoff, Sandhya Ramakrishnan

Absent (8): Annalisa Bhatia, Clyve Lawrence, David Rangaviz, Devin Chausse, Jim Gascoigne, Matthew Kramer, Melissa Zampitella, Nick Lessin

City staff (1) Andrew Reker (DOT-Transportation Planning)

Others (2) Kyle Vangel (CRA), Cecelia Cobb (CRA), Members of the public (3)

Note: DOT = Department of Transportation, CRA = Cambridge Redevelopment Authority

Welcome and Committee Introductions

Jackson Moore-Otto (JMO) opened the meeting at 6:04 PM by welcoming members and presenters to the meeting. JMO went over meeting etiquette, ran through an overview of the physical room and space, and went over instructions for members of the public joining remotely and in-person. JMO reviewed the purpose of the TAC, the code of conduct, and the agenda for the meeting.

Andrew Zhou (AZ) took roll – 13 members were present, 8 were absent.

JMO asked the committee to approve the last meeting's minutes: 13 votes yes, 0 abstains.

Presentation – Grand Junction Transit Feasibility Study

Andrew Reker (AR) introduced the Cambridge Redevelopment Authority (CRA). AR explained that the material in the study builds upon existing transit-related work in Kendall Square. AR said that the MBTA will start their long-term planning process soon. This process will be led by MBTA staff instead of MassDOT. AR turned it back over to JMO to introduce Cecelia Cobb (CC), Kyle Vangel (KV), and the CRA to the committee.

KV introduced the study. The study was conducted over an 18-month period and was conducted from a "Cambridge point of view." He noted that prior studies have been more comprehensive but did not focus on the potential impact on the Cambridge community.

KV introduced the CRA, an independent entity that works closely with the city to advance projects within Cambridge.

The CRA wanted to conduct a study related to Grand Junction because they wanted to investigate the impact that the Grand Junction would have on Cambridge specifically. The study was funded via developer mitigation by BXP. Although it was funded by BXP, the study was operated and run by the CRA.

KV explained the current utility of the Grand Junction route. It is the major connector between the north and south sections of the commuter rail network. Prior to the pandemic, the MBTA identified Grand Junction as a potential resource to alleviate congestion among parts of the transit network. This study looked at the feasibility of multiple transit stops on the Grand Junction line. KV passed it to Cecelia Cobb (CC) to explain the details of the study itself.

CC explained that the study began with a literature review of all prior studies of uses for Grand Junction. Prior studies have looked at how Grand Junction could be used at a very high level. After the literature review, the CRA explored the full range of transit modes and equipment that could be used on Grand Junction, what potential routes and terminus locations could be, trip frequency, and potential station locations within Cambridge. The CRA did a demand analysis which estimated potential peak hours and what future ridership would look like. The CRA then explored infrastructure and high-level needs that would be required to make Grand Junction useable for transit.

CC explained that the primary transit mode the CRA explored was “urban rail,” which would use vehicles and equipment that looks similar to the Green Line light rail vehicles, but could operate on Commuter Rail tracks. The study found that urban rail could meet the needs of the community; the community expressed concern about full commuter rail service in this area, but urban rail would create less noise and vibration than full commuter rail vehicles. The study also looked at electrification for the corridor, with both battery-electric and full electric vehicles.

The CRA explored all possible route options. The “core” route starts at North Station, crosses the Charles, turns south by passing through East Cambridge and follows the Grand Junction right-of-way past the BU bridge before turning west to the I-90 interchange and the proposed future West Station. The CRA also explored a route that goes further north by following the commuter rail line up to Lynn.

The study indicated that a 20-minute frequency was seen as insufficient, so the CRA suggested a frequency closer to every 15 minutes on the core route, and every 30 minutes on the extended route.

The CRA study also explored what potential ridership could be for the line. They did this by analyzing existing transit markets of riders transferring from the commuter rail to North Station, riders on the Worcester Line, and Allston/Brighton travelers.

CC showed a ridership projection from 2022: if the line existed today and 50% of potential riders used it, the line would be relatively competitive. The core route would be less well-used than the extended route with about 5,000 weekday passengers. If 100% of potential riders used the line, the core route would have around 10,000 weekday passengers, with a total of 12,000 weekday riders between the core and extended routes.

CC explained the track renewal engineering that would be needed. Grand Junction rails would need to be replaced with Continuous Welded Rail, new ties and ballast would need to be installed, and improvements would need to be made for multiple at-grade crossings in Cambridge.

CC explained the benefits of battery-based over full-electric with catenary. The CRA recommends double-tracking the corridor to help achieve the recommended frequency. Because of the physical restrictions of the corridor, they want to limit the total amount of new equipment, so battery-based infrastructure is probably the best option.

CC talked about the feasibility of different station locations on the Grand Junction line in 5 general areas. The CRA analysis accounted for adjacent buildings, physical space constraints, and impacts to grade-crossings

CC turned it back to KV to talk about implementation and cost estimates. KV explains that the CRA looked at different funding possibilities including funding through MBTA directly, funding through local sources/public-private partnerships, or including the project as part of other transit megaprojects in Allston (West Station) and North Station (North Station drawbridge). Cost estimates for the core route, both with fully-electric or battery-electric start in the millions rather than the billions. Given the potential growth in ridership, this project is financially competitive.

CC closed out the presentation by showing a link to the project website and contact information.

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

One member asked if the CRA looked at the secondary impacts of maintaining battery-electric trains on infrastructure?

The study had its limitations in the cost estimates, and battery-electric trains are relatively new technology, so it was challenging to put together an estimate. The CRA has not looked into that, but the study wanted to move away from diesel powered vehicles; if diesel was chosen it would have its own maintenance overhead well into the future

Another member noted that in 20 years the battery solution will be better. They also asked if the CRA study looked at the impact of the Grand Junction line on other transit lines? Will users outside of the scope of Grand Junction choose to use transit because Grand Junction is now usable?

CC stated that the study didn't look into specific behaviors of commuters, but instead gave a general overview based on current ridership on other lines.

KV said that although this study did not specifically look at numbers for ridership on other lines, other studies indicate that in general, increased timesaving will increase ridership.

A member asked if there is an existing MBTA trainset that the Grand Junction line could use?

The current MBTA electric train set for the Fairmount line is exactly what the CRA suggested should be used. JMO said that the RFP for those trainsets has already been put out.

One member asked if the feasibility plan addresses how useful the existing Grand Junction line between North Station and the future West Station would be?

CC said that the core route itself proved to be quite strong in terms of ridership and financial viability and introduces new trip possibilities for riders in Allston/Brighton.

AR notes that any time Grand Junction has been included in long-term MBTA planning, Grand Junction was always seen as a West Station-North Station connector. The MBTA was interested in the value of using Grand Junction as a net positive for the network. There is a lot of alignment between the CRA and MBTA on the usability of Grand Junction.

KV noted that Grand Junction's length is comfortable for battery-electric technology.

Regarding the destabilization of the West Station/Allston Multimodal Project – if the project is held up for an indeterminate amount of time, if the Grand Junction project stops before the Charles, what would the impact be on the ridership and financial forecasts?

The CRA doesn't have such a detailed breakdown in costs. While that Allston/Brighton ridership would be lost, there is still the possibility for the line to be used for other purposes, like a connection to Boston Landing.

One member asked if the study considered future development in Kendall or Allston?

The study was based purely on existing development, but new development along the corridor would favorably assist the ridership/financial prospects for the project.

The same members asked what follow ups to the study the is CRA considering?

KV said that the city and CRA need to better understand the safety considerations of the coexistence of the multi-use path and existing at-grade road crossings. Big picture, the next question is how the project can coordinate with the state and other major partners. KV encouraged the committee to advocate for the project.

Right now, Grand Junction is the North-South Rail Link (NSRL). CC says that for those interested, advocating for advancing the Grand Junction project is a natural fit.

If fully segregated use could be achieved, would it be better to use traditional light rail vehicles? How difficult would it be, and what is the impact on the cost of the project?

This could be studied in the future. It's been explored as a concept in some prior studies, but right now light rail does not fit the corridor as it exists today. The study's recommendations were made on the assumption that full grade separation was not feasible, but if it was feasible, it is worth future study.

KV also mentioned that even if full separation was possible, the engineering study might run into difficulty connecting it to the rest of the Green Line's network.

CC said that light rail would also change the safety considerations; the Green Line currently runs alongside roads with less formal grade crossings. There are federal regulations on what vehicles could be used on which kinds of lines.

One member said it would be neat if the line had control over the traffic signaling at intersections.

CC said that is something to look into in the future, and KV said the consultant team advocated for that in the potential construction.

JMO thanked the CRA for the presentation and suggested that the project could be tied into future transit-oriented housing development.

Discussion – Proposed Meeting Calendar for 2025

JMO goes over the potential meeting calendar for 2026, opening the floor for members to discuss the proposed meetings.

AR mentioned that the 2026 proposed calendar follows the same cadence of meetings in 2025, while also trying to avoid religious and federal holidays, as well as potential school holidays for families. AR also showed the proposed Joint Committee Meetings, noting that February and April fall on school holidays, and that a November joint meeting was added and there still is no December joint meeting due to the difficulty of gathering people together. AR asked if committee members could give a general feel on whether or not the proposed meeting calendar would work for committee members.

JMO asked the committee members for comments and questions. Nobody had any comments at the time.

Discussion – Future Walk Site Brainstorming

JMO said that the meeting is behind schedule and suggested that this topic could be delayed to a future meeting. AR said that slides will be sent so members could see what locations were considered.

City, MBTA, and TAC Updates

AR asked the committee members if they had any questions on city and state projects.

A member asked how the city is doing on Mass Ave Partial Construction?

AR said the city is planning on having a public meeting sometime early in the new year to give updates on the project. Open space and sewer infrastructure projects have been advancing in the meanwhile.

Current work is mainly water work, right?

Current work has mostly been on median removal and sewer upgrades.

One member said they were glad to see the Fitchburg Crossing project listed on the map.

AR then moved to the city-wide shuttle and transit gap study. The city has funding for a citywide study of shuttles and transit service gaps and will be looking into obtaining a consultant partner for the study, with a focus on looking at existing shuttle operations, understanding community knowledge of shuttles, service gaps in schedule and coverage, and recommending improvements. The city is currently trying to procure a consulting partner.

A member asked if the study will also explore making transit data for shuttles publicly accessible? University shuttles are difficult to find on Google Maps and transit apps.

AR said the city can use the study to engage with shuttle operators, and that is an easy recommendation that can be made to them

Another member asked if there is a map of planned future development? That could be helpful in preventing future transit gaps.

AR said the city has heard there are plenty of existing gaps, and we can explore what existing shuttle providers can service new developments

AA member asked about the 91 bus - could a shuttle service that too?

The MBTA will be part of the study as well.

AR then went over state projects, stating that future project updates will be obtained for the North Cambridge car house, Alewife Commuter Rail ridership assessment, and Central Square accessibility improvements.

A member asked what the status of the Alewife Commuter Rail ridership assessment is?

It's being finalized right now.

AR also mentioned that the city is also hoping to provide an update on the state of Red Line vehicle procurement.

AR said that with the oncoming of a new year, it may be worth looking over the implementation plan again.

Public comment

JMO opened the meeting to public comment.

A member passed on a comment they saw online about the intersection of Cardinal Medeiros, Cambridge St, and Warren St. Public. The sentiment seems to be that the intersection is dangerous and from personal experience that seems to be true.

JMO asked if there are any main points that the TAC could look into?

The member responded that the main problem with the intersection is that it isn't signalized, which leads to a lot of confusion because multiple roads and modes of transit all intersect at that point.

AR said that that intersection is part of the study/work on the Grand Junction shared-use path.

A member agreed that the intersection is bad.

Another member said they have gone through the intersection while driving, walking, and biking, and agreed that the intersection is bad. There's a lot of bad design with turning vehicles. They said it might also be looked at with the redesign of Cambridge St.

A member said they live at similar offset intersection and asked state law indicates whether cars should be turning instead of going straight?

AR said he doesn't think that state law has a stance on this but agreed that the safety of offset intersections is a problem. He suggested bringing up concerns at joint meetings.

JMO closes the meeting at 7:31 PM.

Version Information

Draft: 2025-11-06 AZ

Approval: 2026-01-08