

Transit Advisory Committee

February 2026

Abbreviated meeting summary

Attendance

Members **Present** (16)

In-person participation (3): Bill McAvinney, Andrew Zhou, Matthew Kramer

Remote participation (13): Annalisa Bhatia, Clyve Lawrence, Craig Tateronis, Ian Hatch, Jim Gascoigne, Katherine Rafferty, Matt Martin, Matthew Mccominskey, Melissa Zampitella, Miles Robinson, Patrick Delaney, Pete Septoff, Jackson Moore-Otto

Absent (4): Arthur Strang, Devin Chausse, Nick Lessin, Sandhya Ramakrishnan

City staff (4) Andrew Reker, Bill Deignan, Fernando Aguiluz, Marcella Cannatti, Andreas Wolfe, Petru Sofio

Others (58) Bill Wolfgang, Greg McNally, David Drobni, Jennifer Mecca, Joe Blankenship, Adam Kamoune (MBTA); Liza Cohen (Stantec), 51 members of the public

Notes: DOT = Department of Transportation

Welcome and Committee Introductions

Matthew Kramer (MK) opened the meeting at 5:58 PM by welcoming members and presenters to the meeting. MK went over meeting etiquette, an overview of the physical room and space, and gave instructions for members of the public joining remotely and in-person. MK reviewed the purpose of the meeting, the code of conduct, and read through the agenda for the meeting.

Andrew Zhou (AZ) took roll - 12 members were present, 8 were absent during roll call.

AR stated that State Representative Steve Owens (29th Middlesex), City Councilor Catherine Zusy, and a member of staff from State Senator Brownsberger (Suffolk & Middlesex) were in attendance.

MK asked the committee to approve the last meeting's minutes: 13 voted yes.

MK gave the floor for Fernando Aguiluz (DOT) to introduce himself.

Presentation – North Cambridge Carhouse Updates

MK introduced Greg McNally (GM) and Bill Wolfgang (BW) from the MBTA.

GM began the presentation by explaining the importance of the new Carhouse. He showed a rendering of the new Carhouse and described the project location. GM showed a before and after of the site and listed the contractor (J.F. White) and project engineer (W.S.P) for project.

GM reviewed the scope of the project. The project included installing an overhead gantry pantograph, plug-in chargers for 32 battery-electric buses, 11 charging units, and 2 pad-mounted transformers. The project included infrastructure changes like underground foundation construction, pavement resurfacing, and installation of on-site generators. The project also included safety mechanisms installed like sprinklers, heat and smoke detection system, etc.

GM briefly discussed the different budgets and contracts that went into the project. GM reviewed the project schedule: bus charging testing happened in November 2025, and the project reached “substantial completion” in December 2025. The T expects the project to be completed in Spring 2026.

GM mentioned some of challenges encountered as part of the project. They included congested yard conditions and the requirement for a separate contract for early procurement. Upgrades to the existing building and handling brand new technologies not yet used by the MBTA or other transit agencies also presented challenges. Significant effort went into testing the charging equipment for the buses.

GM showed a plan view of the project which illustrated the limited space that the facility had to work with.

GM showed pictures from throughout the construction process. GM showed a video of the first time the pantograph was tested connecting to a bus. GM also showed pictures of the fire pump house and protection equipment, as well as a video of the sprinkler system being activated.

GM then handed it off to Bill Wolfgang (BW) to discuss the procurement of battery electric buses (BEBs) for the MBTA.

BW mentions the MBTA is purchasing 120 BEBs for the new facilities in North Cambridge and Quincy. 32 will be dispatched to North Cambridge – 20 have been accepted (including 5 pilot BEBs). 5 pilot BEBs have been accepted in Quincy. 40 additional buses will be delivered later this year and will continue arriving until fall of next year.

BW mentions the BEBs have an advanced energy storage and management system, and that the MBTA is working hard to detect any potential issues through testing. The buses have an operational range of 175+ miles. They are fully ADA-compliant and include an enhanced operator security barrier, new passenger information screens, and the Advanced Driver Assistance System (ADAS) which helps prevent crashes and incidents while driving the bus. BW mentions June Pellegrino is present to help answer questions.

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

Is the 175-mile operational range impacting layover times or other operational adjustments to routes?

No, electric buses have been kept to shorter routes, and the 5 test buses are on very specific routes right now. The MBTA does not anticipate any issues because the buses have

large battery packs and are supplemented with an in-unit heating system to prevent issues in the cold.

In Seattle, there was an incident with electric buses catching fire that led to a recall – will this impact the procurement of MBTA buses?

No, they have a different battery pack (Exalt vs. ABS)

Members of the public had the following comments and questions. Presenter responses are below the question in italic text

What will happen with the catenary wires and poles on Mass Ave?

Those will be removed as part of the Mass Ave Partial Construction project.

What routes will the buses be used on?

They will be used for the same routes that have historically been dispatched out of the North Cambridge facility.

Will the electric buses be replacing the current diesel buses that exist, or will they be used in addition?

Electric buses will be replacing all bus routes dispatched out of the North Cambridge facility. Buses have 3 doors, which will help offloading capacity in the Harvard bus tunnel.

AR: Is the new passenger information system going to become a new standard?

Yes. I'm not sure if older buses will be retrofitted, but all buses in the future will have the new passenger information system.

MK thanked the presenters for their time.

Presentation – Alewife Commuter Rail Station Feasibility Study

AR noted that many members of the public were present for this committee meeting. He explained the basis for considering a commuter rail station in Alewife: the idea has been part of the future neighborhood planning for a long time, elected officials have shown interest in the project, and the community has shown interest in the idea.

MK introduced David Drobnis (MBTA), Joe Blankenship (MBTA), Jennifer Mecca (MBTA), and Liza Cohen (Stantec). The presenters also introduced Laura Gilmore (MBTA), Senior Director of Long-Term Planning, who will assist with questions. Adam Kamoune (MBTA), Intergovernmental Affairs in the General Manager's office, also attended the meeting.

Liza Cohen (LC) introduced herself and Stantec before reviewing the agenda. The purpose of the study was to forecast potential ridership and demand at an Alewife commuter rail station. The State legislature awarded the city of Cambridge a grant for this study. LC explained how the study and analysis was conducted. First, the team assessed what the future of the Alewife neighborhood will look like in terms of development, then estimated demand using an FTA approved Simplified Trips on Project Software (STOPS) model.

Stantec noted that the population of Alewife will increase significantly. LC explained the STOPS model that was used to predict future ridership to a future Alewife station. The study team made

some assumptions for the project, like putting the Alewife commuter rail station in Fare Zone 1A. They estimated that a scheduling plan with a new station would increase total travel time by 3 minutes. The model showed where demand would come from, as well as the destinations of trips for people boarding at Alewife. Much of the demand for this station came from near the Fitchburg line.

The final estimated ridership range was 800-1200 daily boardings at a potential Alewife commuter rail station. LC mentioned that the team also modeled other possibilities, like higher frequency, or lower fares. The projections for an Alewife commuter rail would place it in the top 10 commuter rail stations in terms of ridership.

LC noted other considerations for the transit impact of adding an infill station to Alewife, like impacts to the Alewife Red Line stop ridership, schedule adjustments along the Fitchburg Line, and operating costs.

LC turned over to Jennifer Mecca (JM), who noted that the station proposal in Alewife should consider the impact to the Alewife neighborhood in general. JM said that the MBTA also considers service and economic viability. For example, will the station help the MBTA's goals for underserved communities? Will the station help the agency's investments into system modernization and sustainability? Will the station help the MBTA's reach its environmental goals? And will the station fit into the MBTA's financial goals and budgetary constraints?

JM said that the study considered new and upcoming developments in the Alewife area, including HealthPeak.

MK opens the floor to questions.

Elected Officials in attendance had the following comments and questions. Presenter responses are below the question in italic text

State Rep. Steve Owens: With regards to the HealthPeak development, we know they are committed to a pedestrian crossing over the commuter rail tracks. Is there collaboration with the HealthPeak development and its construction commitments, given that the crossing could be integrated as a part of the station design?

JM: Yes, the MBTA is working with HealthPeak, and meeting with them as they continue planning. The MBTA still needs to do more research on their own individual needs; HealthPeak is very early in the development process, but the MBTA is actively working with them to find the best location to support the long-term needs of both parties.

State Rep. Steve Owens: In some commuter rail discussions, such as in Belmont and Waverly, there was concern over the stopping and starting of commuter rail trains in very frequent and close stops. Is that concern still a consideration?

Laura Gilmore (LG): This will continue to be studied and the MBTA will be in conversation with the surrounding neighborhoods.

Adam Kamoune (AK): The BMU pilot on the Fairmount line, if proven successful, could mitigate the issue with frequent starts and stops. If the state were to help support the BMU pilot, that would help.

Councilor Catherine Zusy: Is this the complete feasibility study?

LC: This study is completed, but it is just the first step in assessing the viability of the project.

Councilor Catherine Zusy: You mentioned that you looked at doubling the frequency, what is that current frequency?

LC: I don't have exact numbers off the top of my head, but we studied double what current capacity is. Building a new commuter rail station could also be an investment in the community – helping the city, the MBTA, and the HealthPeak development altogether.

AK: It is important to get started early before the HealthPeak development, as costs of development may get higher as Alewife becomes more developed.

Councilor Catherine Zusy: Will the MBTA be proceeding with building a commuter rail station in Alewife?

JM: We still need to explore what a commuter rail station in Alewife means in the context of the region and the Fitchburg Line in general, but once again it's important to get the ball rolling now.

Committee members had the following comments and questions. Presenter responses are in italics.

What are the next steps? Is future analysis planned? What can we do to help with that?

Joe Blankenship (JB): The MBTA will review new plans for the Alewife area. We will ask HealthPeak for data that can help inform how a new commuter rail station would impact their development. The MBTA is already working with MassDOT and HealthPeak on how to do this analysis as part of their submissions for environmental impact review under the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA).

So to clarify, you are currently working with HealthPeak on obtaining that future information?

JB: Yes.

AK: The next part of the conversation is why should we build a commuter rail station in Alewife, and then after that – what will it take to build a station? After that, the question is identifying the financial resources - how will we obtain the resources to build this station?

Do you know what the daily boarding are for the Fitchburg Line at Porter?

LC: I'm not sure but Porter isn't in the top 10 commuter rail stations chart in the presentation.

Is there potential synergy with the reconstruction of Alewife's Red Line station and garage? Could they be built closer together and share facilities?

JM: The MBTA is considering impacts to Alewife as a region. It is cost prohibitive to change the right of way of the Red Line or the Fitchburg Line to make the two lines meet here. They may be separate facilities, but both serve the Alewife neighborhood.

There is also the Alewife shuttle service, are they part of this conversations?

JM: That is good to bring up, we will consider.

You've mentioned boardings at Alewife, have you considered alightings?

LC: Yes, there is information on the report on where passengers would be coming from to get off at Alewife.

Members of the public had the following comments and questions. Presenter responses are below the question in italic text

Will the new commuter rail “replace” regular Red Line?

LC: The model we used did not remove the Red Line Alewife station. The model said that some commuter rail ridership would be taken from the Red Line Alewife and Porter stations, but not a ton.

AK: A commuter rail station in Alewife provides redundancy, especially if any issues were to occur on the Red Line – if there was an issue to the Red Line, the commuter rail could take up the slack.

Which HealthPeak data did the study consider?

JB: The study considered the Envision Alewife District Plan, the HealthPeak MEPA filing from 2025, and the city and planned unit development plans to predict and quantify additional future development to the neighborhood. The MBTA worked closely with city planners to predict future growth in Alewife and how that would impact the model.

Where exactly would the station be located? Did you assess the impact to vehicle traffic?

LC: No, we did not consider impact to vehicle traffic in the are. However, traffic was considered in making judgements on whether individuals would choose to take the commuter rail.

Are projected riders new riders or existing riders?

LC: These are riders at a “new station,” but they’re not necessarily “new riders.” The model demonstrated that some ridership for the new commuter rail station would come from the Red Line and Porter Square commuter rail station.

Have you considered a specific location for the commuter rail station?

JM: Not yet, the study was to study the general impact of a hypothetical commuter rail station on the neighborhood and the region.

How does this relate to the Alewife garage and Red Line station redevelopment? Do changes at the Alewife garage impact the commuter rail station?

JM: No designs have been considered for the Alewife garage, right now the focus is on stabilization to extend the life of the Alewife station garage. The potential for adjusting the infrastructure is there but will come later.

AK: Since the theoretical potential of a commuter rail station in Alewife would take ridership from the west, it could potentially justify a smaller garage at Alewife due to more people choosing to take the commuter rail than drive to Alewife.

There have been a lot of delays on the Fitchburg line, why is there a focus on adding a new station rather than increasing the reliability of the Fitchburg line?

AR: An infill station in Alewife has been a part of the city's long-term development plan for the Alewife neighborhood

AK: Right now, yes – the focus of the commuter rail is on improving reliability, but that doesn't mean we can't consider plans in the future. If we start considering it now, by the time the Fitchburg line is fully reliable, we will already be ready to start work on an Alewife commuter rail line. We can do both.

I would love to see an estimate for how ride-time along the Fitchburg Line impacts how individuals choose to travel.

LG: Mode shift is one of the goals of a commuter rail station in Alewife. The research on that has not been done, but it is a focus going into the future.

I would be interested in seeing if there is impact for Porter station, and transfers with the Red Line.

LG: Yes, we are interested in looking into transfers in future studies.

Bill Deignan (Cambridge DoT): We are very excited to see what future development holds and are appreciative of MBTA's partnership and the State elected officials support of funding this study. Bill Deignan (DOT): We are very excited to see what future development holds.

City, MBTA, and TAC Updates

AR asked if any TAC member had questions about the update to city and state projects.

AR announced that a pre-application conference will be hosted for the HealthPeak development on February 24th at 6:30 PM. The event is intended to help identify possible concerns before their planning board meeting. AR said this meeting might be a good opportunity for the TAC to get familiar with the project and potentially draft a letter to the Cambridge Planning Board.

AR turns it over to MK to discuss the Reid Overpass

MK explained that in order to vote to send a letter of advocacy, the committee needs to vote to schedule a meeting. Bill McAvinney said that the idea came out of a joint transportation meeting. A joint subgroup wrote a letter, but it will take a quorum of members from each Transportation committee to approve the letter.

AR said that the meeting could be a short special meeting, or members could vote to approve the letter during the upcoming Joint Meeting.

MK motioned to hold a meeting on Thursday, January 12th at 5:30 PM. 15 members voted yes.

MK went over upcoming meetings, dates, and topics.

Public comment

A member of the public noted that during presentations, it would be nice to have time for public questions during earlier presentations. They wanted to ask about fire risk and hazard around the North Cambridge Carhouse but there was no time. They added that the road was very bumpy during the construction and requested that the city pay more attention to potholes that affect the buses.

AR: I will ask Public Works and Street Management about the road surface.

A member of the public expressed the opinion that the city's outreach isn't effective, especially regarding commuter rail development in Alewife and asked if there is a proposal for getting the word out?

A member of the public asked if there is a projected ridership number that the MBTA is looking for to justify construction of a commuter rail station in Alewife?

AK: There isn't necessarily a number to aim for, what is more important is getting information and providing more data to decision makers in the city and state.

The same member of the public asked if the study results were good or bad news for a commuter rail station?

AK: It's good or bad news, it's news. It's more information that the MBTA can use to build a case for those who do make the decision on whether or not to build the station.

LG: It's not about a number; it's about the bigger picture. More research is needed, but this is one part of the whole that is already started. This will help the MBTA guide its long-term plans.

One member of the public said that they hope the TAC will hold public works officials more accountable, especially with multiple actors working on North Cambridge Mass Ave

Councilor Catherine Zusy: Development of a commuter rail station in Alewife is a critical part of Cambridge's future development. Adding another way for people to get in and out of the city, especially because of the difficulties with housing, would help contribute to the city's long-term goals.

A member of the public commented on the IQHQ Alewife Bus Lane project: with regards to the widening of the bus access road, it seems like a sidewalk will be removed and would impact a lot of trees – is there a way that people can get their voices heard with regards to this?

AR: IQHQ has already committed to this project as a part of its mitigation to traffic. Right now the proposed plans are conceptual, and the public can potentially have the chance to have input when IQHQ presents updates on their mitigation proposals here.

It doesn't make sense to have the public input wait for the end of the design process, are you sure there is no way to affect this?

AR: IQHQ is still in early stages of the design process, ask that you send an e-mail to me with your concerns to connect with IQHQ.

Matthew Kramer (MK) ended the meeting at 7:53 PM.

Version Information

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Approval: _