

Transit Advisory Committee

May 2026

Abbreviated meeting summary

Attendance

Members

Present (13)

In-person participation (3): Arthur Strang, Andrew Zhou, Matthew Kramer

Remote participation (10): Bill McAvinney, Ian Hatch, Jim Gascoigne, Miles Robinson, Sandhya Ramakrishnan, Jackson Moore-Otto, Matthew Mccomiskey (joined during first presentation), Patrick Delaney (joined during first presentation), Craig Tateronis (joined during first presentation)

Absent (7): Clyve Lawrence, Devin Chausse, Katherine Rafferty, Matt Martin, Melissa Zampitella, Nick Lessin, Pete Septoff

City staff (3)

Andrew Reker, Fernando Aguiluz, Marcella Cannatti

Others (10)

Aseem Deodhar, Becca Wolfson, Alex Cox, Tara Kamal Ahmadi (MBTA), 6 members of the public

Notes:

DOT = Department of Transportation

Welcome and Committee Introductions

Matthew Kramer (MK) opened the meeting at 6:02 PM by welcoming members and presenters to the meeting. MK went over the meeting etiquette, gave 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 - 10 were present, 10 were absent during roll call.

Since quorum was not met, the committee decided to begin informational presentations.

Presentation: Better Bus Network: Route 42/47/91

Members of the MBTA introduced themselves and went through an overview of the MBTA's presentation for the bus network redesign.

Aseem Deodhar (AD) begins the presentation by covering the purpose and background behind the Bus Network Redesign, describing its creation from the gathering of public outreach in 2022. AD then describes the impacts of the initial phases of the BNR implementation, including 25% increase to bus service across the network, 70% increase in weekend service, and increasing access to more residents.

AD explains the timeline of the Bus Network Redesign, including the initial research and public outreach in 2018, the creation of the draft initial design in 2022, and the second public outreach phase in 2022. Currently the MBTA is in the middle of the implementation phase of the BNR.

AD then goes over some of the overall changes performed as a result of the BNR, including focusing service to where there is a lot of demand and transit critical populations travel to and from. AD mentions various tradeoffs that the MBTA considered when designing the BNR, such as the straightening out of routes to make them more direct, simplifying routes so that they consistently ran the same way all day, consolidating overlapping bus routes, and turning some initial routes into transfers.

AD describes the current status of the BNR, noting 21 new 15-minute frequent routes were created, with a goal of 31, 35% of variant routes were simplified, and systemwide service is now back at pre-covid levels. 18 new stops have been added, 1100 new signs have been implemented. AD notes positive public reactions to the BNR changes, noting the 85/CT2 consolidation specifically. AD also noted increases in ridership, stating that ridership was up by 20% on the new frequent routes, with weekend gains being even larger, around 30-70%. AD states newer services are better aligned with passenger demand, such as thousands of new riders alongside Routes 104 and 52, and rider equity has increased.

AD then moves to the three routes that the presentation centers on, the 47, 91, and 42. AD shows a new 47 frequent bus route, travelling from Ruggles to East Somerville. AD notes that it adds a new frequent route between Central and Union Sq which didn't previously exist, and the improvements that the new route will serve for riders of color and transit justice initiatives. AD notes the loss of a one seat ride from Union Square to Nubian, but mentioning that multiple other services on the Boston end of the route will help serve that prior trip.

AD then goes over the additional adjustments to bus stops, noting that few changes exist on the Cambridge side, and that most of the adjustments exist on the Boston/Nubian end of the trip.

AD mentions the removal of the 91 will require transferring between the 47 and 109 frequent bus routes, noting Washington St as a potential one stop transfer, and that Somerville is already building a new stop there as an accessible station. AD then went over the impact that the transfer would cause, stating roughly half of all travel on the 91 was either between passengers on the half between Central & Union, or Union & Sullivan. Adding in potential future trips on the 109 and 85, the MBTA expects about 65% of current Route 91 riders will still have a one-seat ride to their destination. However, AD notes that about 12.6% of riders may now have a three seat trip – this would be passengers going to Sullivan and then transferring onto the OL or other bus line.

AD however, did note that with the new routing, transferring between the new 47 and 109 frequent buses may actually take a shorter time than the one-seat on the 91, due to the long wait time for the 91 route.

AD then opened to Q&A.

Arthur Strang: Is the improved 47/109 service running now?

- AD: No, it's expected to begin in Spring 2027.

- **AS:** With more individuals being asked to return to office and the upcoming World Cup, is there discussion about transit improvements in Cambridge and what may need to be done?
- **Alex Cox (AC):** Some more shuttles will be run to and from the airport, and more commuter rail lines will be run to the stadium, but unsure on changes coming to Cambridge specifically

Matthew Kramer: What is gained by not providing the one-seat connection to Sullivan?

- AD: Understandably losing a one-seat trip is annoying, but the transfer allows for both frequent routes to work from an operations point-of-view, as the operators on the removed 91 can be moved to support more frequent buses cross the network
- Becca Wolfson (BW): The East Somerville to Sullivan section is highly congested, and extending the 47 beyond East Somerville would add significant delay and unreliability to what is supposed to be a frequent route. An extended 47 round trip would end up being one of the longest round-trip journeys in the entire system
 - AS: Has Somerville done work on that route?
 - BW: Somerville has done some traffic management on that route, but not enough to handle the

How much do the time estimates presented represent the real-life conditions?

- AD: If considering the worst case, the wait time extensions to the combined 47 + 109 would still be shorter than the wait extension to the 91. 55 minutes (47+109) vs 95 minutes (91)

The 20 minute wait for the Route 91 seems unrealistic, since most people schedule when to leave for the bus route

- AD: Yes, but the time for the 91 includes waiting at someone's home or start of journey before heading to the bus station due to having to plan a journey around the schedule of the infrequent 91. With an frequent bus, less people have to actually plan their journey
- AR: People have noted that the public's expectations of what a wait time precludes may not match the chart
 - BW: True, the semantics might be confusing, but ultimately the point being made is that people don't have to "expect" when to catch the bus, and wait in their homes or start of journey locations before leaving to catch the bus – they can just leave to catch the bus.

Discussion: BNR Advocacy Letter

Since several members joined during the p the last presentation – quorum was met. Therefore, MK brought up discussion of a motion to approve the March and April meeting summaries.

Andrew Zhou performed a roll call to approve all pending meeting minutes, 13 members voted yes.

MK then began a group discussion on whether the TAC should write an advocacy letter with regards to the BNR, and what should be included in such a letter.

AR noted that there has been areas where the TAC had previously made comments on but the MBTA's BNR did not act upon it:

- The routing of the 47/91 consolidation
- Preventing a peak only classification for the 68
- The routing of the 86/109 consolidation
- Improving frequency on 69, 74, 75, 78, 83 routes

MK opens discussion to the committee. AR asks if the committee was satisfied with the MBTA's explanations for the BNR, especially the 47/91, and that if the committee was satisfied, the TAC would likely send a letter indicating the committee's support for existing changes.

Bill McAvinney: They seem committed to eliminating the one-seat ride between Central and Sullivan

- **Jackson Moore-Otto:** Agrees – unfortunately it may be better to spend political capital on other changes that the committee could advocate for
- **Andrew Zhou:** Agrees – it may be best to throw our committee's weight behind something that the city can also throw its weight behind

MK motions to draft a letter in support of the city's asks for the 68 to make it a regularly scheduled route rather than just peak-service.

AZ held a roll-call vote, all 13 members vote yes. MK volunteered to be the writer of the draft letter.

City, MBTA, and TAC Updates

MK opened the floor for Fernando Aguiluz to provide updates:

- FA states that new striping was added to JFK St and Mt. Auburn, a stop for the Harvard Shuttle on April 28th. This adds the indications for the bus stop from a former loading zone, the "BUS" letters are to be added shortly afterwards.

AR then asked if the committee had questions on city and state updates:

Arthur Strang: There was talk about federal funding for the Fitchburg crossing, any updates on that?

- **AR:** There has been some updates on that, but from what I can gather it's for accelerating design and not construction

Arthur Strang: Eversource seems to be doing underground construction for the electric work parallel to the rail route crossing the BU bridge, could the utility perform work in the rail right of way rather than the road?

- **AR:** This was discussed in prior city meetings.

AR noted that the new electric buses have begun to operate in the city, and that a future meeting may be incoming from the Central elevator construction effort.

Report on Health Peak Planning Board Meeting

MK reviewed the Health Peak planning board meeting, and asked if any members of the committee were able to attend.

AR states that the TAC's letter arrived to the planning board, and that city staff working with the planning board have received it. The Planning Board made the determination that the Health Peak development largely conforms with the city's existing planning requirements, but noted many items that would require follow up. AR notes the three things the committee brought up, the bike-ped bridge, the level of parking in the new development, and potential future developments from the MBTA. AR notes that the developer has not yet addressed comments but are likely working on it, and that the Health Peak developer still needs to finalize their Parking and Transportation Demand Management plan.

AR notes that at this point the timeline is largely determined by the developer, and city staff expects to hear back from Health Peak nearer to the end of the year. City staff is also working to schedule a joint meeting of the Bike/Pedestrian/Transit Advisory Committee with the developer.

Arthur Strang: Has Health Peak taken advantage of any of the new zoning laws?

- **AR:** Yes, they have, and it seems like much of the development's design has been made to maximize the use they can get from existing zoning.
- **AS:** During the original development of the Alewife Quad, it was originally oriented as transit-oriented, but in practicality it really has not turned out to be as pedestrian/transit friendly as intended.

Bill McAvinney: Have the new pedestrian and bike committees been set up?

- **AR:** Names have been selected; the members of those committees are in the process of being empaneled right now.

Discussion: Charles River Crossings

MK then drew the committee's attention to the Charles River Crossing letter – MK noted that the committee cannot vote on the letter since it was not in the agenda, but the draft letter will be sent out to all members for their review before the next month's meeting.

MK summarized the contents of the letter, stating that the TAC recommended relevant parties to consider adding bus priority infrastructure to routes connecting Cambridge to other communities across the Charles River. MK noted how these improvements would help alleviate blockers to providing faster and more reliable service across the network.

Jim Gascoigne: When the Green Line was closed, bus lanes were temporarily added to McGrath O'Brien highway and those worked really well. Including other examples of bus priority would go a long way to proving our point.

- **MK:** We do note existing projects that have shown the impact that new bus lanes.
- **JG:** Previously, the committee has considered transit improvements to the BU bridge
- **MK:** While the committee doesn't have to figure out the specifics, it is good to have these things

MK went over the dates of the next two TAC meetings, on June 4th and July 9th, noting that one potential topic could be a review of the TAC-endorsed Implementation Plan. MK states that the next planned joint meetings are on May 20th and June 17th, and both committees should be ready by those dates.

MK then opened the floor to public comment.

Public comment

Heather Hoffman: Regarding Cambridge St, the proposal moves all bus stops in East Cambridge and the opinions of the “small number of people” who looked at it is that the proposal is insane. Existing service on Cambridge St is bad, and the new proposal would make the service worse. I hope the committee will look at that.

- **Patrick Delaney:** The city is currently running a survey to gather feedback on Cambridge St, including feedback on bus stop locations.
- **Andrew Reker:** As mentioned, the committee will be evaluating Cambridge St as a part of a joint meeting in the future.

Lawrence: Going back to the Bus Network Redesign, the time to protest the change from Central to Sullivan would have been several years ago when the BNR was being created. For example, the 78 was preserved through public advocacy. The committee should keep attention to these points. Additionally, with relation to the BNR, my bus stop in the winter was not cleared for multiple days – would a person want to wait on a snow covered stop or out in the cold twice?

- **Bill McAvinney:** The TAC has in fact been advocating for the 91 to not be eliminated for years now.

Matthew Kramer ended the meeting at 7:23 PM.

Version Information

Draft:

Approval: _