

**CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
TRANSIT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEETING NOTES**

Date, Time & Place: March 4, 2015, 5:30-7:30 PM
Cambridge Citywide Senior Center

Attendance

Committee Members

John Attanucci, John DiGiovanni, Charles Fineman, Robert Fitzgerald, Jim Gascoigne, Susan Pacheco, Katherine Rafferty, Simon Shapiro, Saul Tannenbaum, Ritesh Warade, Jeremy Mendelson (for Livable Streets)

City of Cambridge

Tegin Bennett (Community Development Department); Adam Shulman (Traffic, Parking and Transportation)

5 members of the public were present. Greg Strangeways and Philip Groth (MBTA) and Matt Ciborowski (MassDOT) were present.

Committee Introductions and Approve Notes

Attachments: Draft November, December, and February notes

Notes from November, December, and February were approved by the Committee.

Committee Updates

The Committee was formed about two years ago, and all current members were asked to serve two-year terms. In the next month, the City will start the process of confirming second terms for members who wish to remain part of the Committee and reaching out to others in the community who might be interested in joining.

Late-Night MBTA Service

The late-night MBTA service pilot has been extended through June 19, 2015, and the MBTA is hosting a series of informational meetings to gather public input about the service. One of these meetings will be held on March 9 in Harvard Square. Public comments are accepted through March 11, 2015. The Committee was asked to consider whether they would like to provide input as a group to this process. Initial MBTA surveys indicate that although people are using the service (about 10,000 per weekend night), this is not a high number compared to other off-peak usage and it may not justify the cost to operate. A lengthy discussion ensued relative to ridership vs. cost and ended with the question, "Are other critical needs not being funded because the late-night program is funded?" Other comments were expressed about the importance of the late-night transit service for retail and health care workers. MBTA representatives encouraged Committee members to think about and suggest other ways to fund the program.

MBTA Recovery

Recent snow storms have highlighted problems with MBTA service and maintenance. The Committee was asked to discuss how the storm had affected residents and local businesses. Committee members noted that employees who rely on the T to get to work were unable to do so, and some had to use vacation time. Some businesses ended up closing when employees could not come in. Hospitals were adversely impacted when employees could not get to work, and some employees had to stay over at the hospital to ensure it could run at normal capacity. Home health workers could not get to their clients during the travel and parking bans and T closure. Members note that the health and welfare of our sick and elderly was jeopardized and that, in general, the situation was a wake-up call as to how vital the T is to businesses and operations in the region.

MBTA Service Delivery and Governance Input to Gov. Baker's MBTA Review Panel

The City has been asked to provide input regarding MBTA operations and governance to the MBTA Special Panel recently established by Governor Baker. Committee members were asked to consider the challenges already discussed, as well as the strategic planning process that the Committee has undertaken, and discuss possible input to the panel. The Committee's discussed the following issues:

- The MBTA should be fully funded, with a clear explanation to the public of what "fully funded" means. Funding should cover both state of good repair and system improvement and expansion.

- While every city in the Commonwealth benefits from the T (since Metro Boston is the economic engine that drives the state), it is important that the cities within the core of the Boston region continue to make annual payments (in the form of assessments and otherwise) to the T to help finance maintenance and growth. Cities that benefit more directly from the T should pay more than they currently do and more than cities that benefit less directly from the T do.
- There should be a plan in place so that when the T experiences an emergency, cities within the core of the Boston region step in to help by providing shuttles and other kinds of services to assist the public in getting around. The consensus was that it is irresponsible for those cities that directly benefit from the T not to assist, particularly after living through this past month where the economic impact was so clear.
- A program of using smart cards to provide different categories of fares (e.g. lower fare for lower income) should be implemented.
- The T should look at its procurement process and streamline it.
- Overall, the T does an amazing job; they should be touting their success and letting the public know how important they are to the economic health of the region and the vibrancy of our community, as well as the overall benefits the T brings to our entire area. The T is vital to our ability to grow sustainably.
- The T should use a communication-based signaling system on subway lines.
- The governor should be able to appoint members of the MBTA Board, but there should also be representatives from cities and towns based on how much they use and contribute to the T.
- The T should re-examine how it uses and profits from the real estate it owns.
- The T could use more support from the business community.
- The Committee agreed that the funding the T does have should be spent wisely, but that there is currently not enough funding to build and operate the system that is needed.
- MBTA debt should be taken off the books.
- The full capabilities of the fare system are not being utilized.
- Customers may be willing to pay higher fares for more reliable service.
- MBTA and MassDOT need to be more systematic about how different needs are prioritized and funded.
- More MBTA staff at stations are needed to answer customers' questions.

Central Square Bus Study

Tegin Bennett presented the draft recommendations for the Central Square Bus Access and Circulation study. She summarized two options, which are packages of long term recommendations related to circulation, stop locations, and layover locations in Central Square. These recommendations are preliminary, and there are various challenges to implementing them. Further work would likely be required before any significant changes could be made. Draft options were reviewed. The Committee members and guests discussed the values of Option 1 and Option 2 and challenges associated with moving more bus operations onto Massachusetts Avenue. It was stressed that this is a preliminary study and needs further work. Ultimately, certain attributes of Option 1 and Option 2 may be implemented individually or together and do not need to be packaged the way they have been organized for the report. The MBTA advised that travel times should be analyzed in more detail before any circulation changes be implemented.

Public Comment

Members of the public made comments and presented other ideas and recommendations. These included:

- Using third rail heaters or “alcohol trains” to help keep the third rail open by spraying it with a solution.
- All new Red and Orange Line trains should be electric to avoid issues in cold weather.
- SEPTA has implemented all night service on several lines with success.
- Improve leadership at the top for transit.
- Include bus bunching and measured headways in transit analyses.
- There are issues with MBTA data and calculations of available capacity on the Red Line.
- In the blizzard of 1978, the Commuter Rail was the quickest service to recover. In that blizzard, streets were filled with snow while the MBTA services continued. This winter, the streets were cleared but MBTA services collapsed.

Final Remarks

The Committee spent the closing minutes expressing their sadness and condolences on the passing of Brian Murphy.

Adjourned at 7:30pm