

Transit Advisory Committee

July 2022

Abbreviated meeting summary

Attendance

Members **Present** (10) Carl Rothenhaus (Secretary), Casey Berg, Devin Chausse, Matthew Coogan, Bill McAvinney, Jackson Moore-Otto, Katherine Rafferty, Sylvia Parsons, Peter Septoff, Saul Tannenbaum

Absent (4) John Attanucci (Chair), Arthur Strang, Melissa Zampitella, Jim Gascoigne,

City staff (1) Andrew Reker (CDD)

Others (7) Olivia Mobayed, Josh Weiland (MBTA); 5 members of the public

Note: CDD = Community Development Department; MBTA = Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, BNRD = Bus Network Redesign, GLX = Green Line Extension.

Welcome and committee introductions

Andy Reker (AR) began the virtual meeting at 5:34 PM by welcoming members of the Transit Advisory Committee (TAC), members of the public and presenters. AR gave a tour of the virtual space for people joining by application and telephone and shared ground rules for virtual meeting participation.

Carl Rothenhaus (CR) then conducted a roll call of the members of the TAC – 10 members were present, 5 were absent. The committee conducted a roll call vote to approve the meeting minutes for the April 2022 meeting. The committee voted 8 in favor and 2 present to approve the meeting minutes.

Discussion: Transit Advisory Committee Comment Letter on the MBTA BNRD

Carl Rothenhaus and Peter Septoff from the MBTA Project Subcommittee shared a brief introduction to the outline that the subcommittee proposes as the foundation for the TAC's comment letter. This included the following points:

TAC members asked the following questions and had the following suggestions for changes or additions. This included:

One member was concerned about the lack of bus connection between Central Square, Union Square and Sullivan square. The member advocated for T39 bus service to include stops to Sullivan Sq and E. Somerville as a preferable alternative routing.

Another member asked a question about the completion timeline of West Station

- *The city responded that the West Station completion timeline is longer than the timeline for the BNRD. MBTA timelines overlap awkwardly. The BNRD has an implementation timeline of 5 years whilst it is expected for the completion of West Station to take 10 years.*

Two members noted the medical workforce that relies on the 74 and 78 every day of the week – including Sancta Maria, Neville Manor, Neville Place and 725 Concord Ave Medical Office Building. They noted that frequent bus services are vital for not only patients at these facilities but workers and visitors as well.

Another member noted that elementary and middle school children also rely on these bus services.

- *City staff indicated that they are paying attention to service proposals in this area and are concerned about what the MBTA is proposing for this transit corridor, especially in the Finch area. The city noted that the proposed service not only does not meet what service levels are needed now but also does not meet the noticeably clear future demand for transit in this corridor.*

One member wanted to make sure that the “big picture framework” of equity is put front and center as a major theme of the BNRD. He noted that a 25% increase is not fair or equitable if you cut service anywhere. Additionally, he believes that the MBTA should be asking for more funding if they want to get back to pre-COVID ridership numbers. Another member echoed the above comment.

Public Comment

AR opened a short comment period for members of the public.

The first commenter appreciated the fliers that the city put around advertising the BNRD, additionally he asked that those who do not have access to the internet be given a phone number to voice concerns about bus route changes. He also asked for the MBTA to consider having the 83 bus connect to Fresh Pond Mall.

The second commenter was disappointed that East Cambridge had been left out of the transit discussion, especially given the number of elderly and disabled living in that community. She also noted that the Brown colored lines on the BNRD can serve as feeder connections to T-bus-lines and rail lines, but this possibility is hampered by their proposed infrequency.

Member comments after public comment period

One member stressed that they liked the idea of brown levels of service being feeders to T routes and rail service. Cutting service on brown lines could “domino-cut” ridership of high frequency lines.

Another member proposed having the T77 bus run from Arlington to Lechmere via union square and east Cambridge

- *The city responded that they did not think that the MBTA would agree to this as the member’s proposed route would be paralleled by the GLX.*

Another member wanted to stress the concerning loss of service to low-income areas in Cambridge, and that the overall effect of changes significantly impact areas of low-income housing and senior citizens.

Advisory committee vote to select a letter writer

The committee voted unanimously to have the advisory committee chair write a comment letter on behalf of the committee. The committee also voted to send an outline of the comments and discussion to the chair.

Discussion: City Project Subcommittees Update

Andy Reker shared a brief update of the workings of the city project subcommittee. This included the following points:

- A study to prioritize where the city should do bus priority, i.e., the study would answer the question of where it makes the most sense to put in bus lanes, signal priority, etc. first. A formal name for this study is currently pending. This study would be in addition to current Commonwealth wide efforts.

City, MBTA, + TAC Updates

AR presented upcoming meetings for the TAC, including:

- The Next TAC meeting is August 5 at 5:30 p.m. (Note: The City and TAC cancelled this meeting.)
- Next joint TAC, BICYCLE, PED is July 20. (Note: The city cancelled this meeting since there was no relevant topic for this joint meeting.)

AR went on to review other updates for the TAC, including:

- Updating TAC webpage this summer.
 - Looking for header images and other photos to put on the page.
 - The site will be Mobile friendly
 - The new site will be plain language
 - The new site will also focus on FAQ.
- City Project Updates
 - South mass Ave substantially complete
 - Inman substantially complete by end of summer
 - Porter square cycling improvements.
 - Concord Ave signal priority
 - Mass Ave 4.
- MBTA updates
 - Subway service reductions since June 1 due to insufficient staffing at operations center. MBTA will run this schedule through the summer. Does not include busses or green line. Riders should expect 7–8-minute waits on the red line in Cambridge.

Public comment

AR opened a short comment period for members of the public.

- One commenter wanted to see the data we are using to discuss bus redesign. He would also like to see the 83 specifically included in the letter to the MBTA.
 - *The city responded that neither the TAC nor the City has the Data that the commenter asked for. The MBTA has unfortunately been reticent to share the data.*

After the close of the public comment period, AR thanked people for attending the Committee meeting. The TAC adjourned at 6:56 PM.

Version Information

Draft: CR 07/14/2022

Approval: 9/15/2022 - 11 in favor – 1 present