

Transit Advisory Committee

November 2022

Abbreviated meeting summary

Attendance

Members **Present** (9) Arthur Strang, Jackson Moore-Otto, Bill McAvinney, Peter Septoff, Carl Rothenhaus, Sylvia Parsons, Devin Chausse, Matthew Coogan, Casey Berg

Absent (3), Melissa Zampitella, Katherine Rafferty, Jim Gascoigne

City staff (1) Andrew Reker (CDD);

Others (13) Doug Johnson (MassDOT), Melissa Dullea (MBTA), 11 members of the public

Note: CDD = Community Development Department; MBTA = Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, BNRD = Bus Network Redesign

Welcome and committee introductions

Andy Reker (AR) began the virtual meeting at 5:31 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 (RA) then conducted a roll call of the members of the TAC – 9 members were present, 3 were absent. The committee conducted a roll call vote to approve the meeting minutes for the September 2022 meeting. The committee voted 6 in favor and 2 present to approve the meeting minutes.

Presentation: Bus Network Redesign Update

AR then introduced Doug Johnson (DJ) of the MBTA who presented on the changes the MBTA had made since the first draft of the proposed redesigned bus network map.

These changes were made to:

- improve access to destinations
- reduce walking distances to bus stops from senior centers and other locations, and to reduce the number of stops with challenging adjacent topography.
- preserve existing one-seat rides
- balance resources with the goal of increasing bus service to 25% more than pre-pandemic levels.
- Respond to public feedback

DJ shared a summary of changes to the proposal to bus routes in Cambridge and adjacent communities:

- Route 74 – restored
- Route 87 – restored as currently routed
- Routes 62 and 76 – modified to use Acorn Park Drive
- Route 83 – restored Central Square terminal
- Route T39 – restored to Copley Square terminal, thus, no longer serve Cambridge
- Route T47 – In place of the T39, this route will run from Ruggles to Union Square via Central Square
- Route 85 – a new, low-frequency route, from Ruggles to Assembly Square via The Fens, across the BU bridge, and then onto Vassar Street and Hampshire Street.
- Route T96 – modified to travel along Elm Street in Porter Square instead of using Porter Square as a terminal
- Route 80 – modified to operate from Davis Square to the Burlington Mall
- Other routes – slightly amended to better serve current and future facilities and reduce the amount of challenging topography for riders

TAC members asked the following questions. City staff, and MBTA responses are below the question in italic text.

- Since the 39 will no longer go to union square, one member asked how this new route will connect to the GLX.
There will be a T47 stop a few blocks from the East Somerville GLX station
- One member commented on how the change of having the T96 meet other routes in Union Square instead of Porter as previously proposed means that there is no direct connection between Porter and Union Squares, instead of close connections at the stations
The MBTA did hear requests to replace this functionality and connect those places. They also noted that although it does not go directly into the square the T96 does go very close to the square along Elm Street on the backside of the Porter Square Star Market.
- One member asked about the change to having the T70 terminate in Waltham Center instead of continuing to the Waltham Market Basket as previously proposed.
The MBTA responded that the change was the result of flaws in the first proposal. The long route with overlapping service destinations and intervals made it incredibly hard to schedule without bus bunching. This was the result of the route's uneven length inbound vs. outbound. For the MBTA, they believe it is easier from a wayfinding, legibility, and scheduling perspective to have just one, high-frequency route, that does the same thing all the time.
- The MBTA then gave further examples of how routes were slightly changed to make connections to other services such as the GLX less treacherous, especially in the wintertime.
- The City stated its objection to the MBTA not restoring the 68 to all day service.

The MBTA stated that 68 ridership is very peaked during the morning school rush. The peak service will serve children going to and from school.

- One member stated that they liked the restoration, routing amendments and service changes to the 64 route.
- One member stated that the T109 could be an even more useful route if it connected the Baldwin-Agassiz neighborhood to the southern side of the river, possibly the Lower Allston, Boston Landing area.
- The City and one member asked about the MBTA's plans for service to West Station. *MBTA will most likely re-route service to serve West Station when the station is complete, most likely 64, but nothing is for sure at this moment.*
- One member asked what the schedules mean by hour "25:00"
MBTA stated that this meant 1 a.m.
- One member asked if the MBTA has a timeline for updating the bus network after the BNRD?
Yes, the BNRD is a special, exceptionally large, redesign undertaking, but the MBTA is constantly looking for ways to improve network design and react to changes in demand and facilities. The BNRD has also provided the MBTA new tools and methodology that they can use in the future to better plan service. Outside of the BNRD the MBTA has an ability to modify service plans on a rolling basis. For example, when West Station is complete, the network will be modified accordingly.
- One member asked why the MBTA will roll out new phases of implementation every summer – why specifically summer?
It is possible that the MBTA could roll out changes every season, however the cadence of changes lines up best with summer and the MBTA's fiscal year.
- One member asked if shared bus lane/turning lanes have affected busses?
Possibly, but the more pressing issue delaying busses is the conflict between Busses and Uber Eats delivery vehicles.
- One member asked for clarification on how routes were being overlapped in certain stretches to form high frequency routes.
This is the MBTA's plan for the 220 and 222 in the South Shore and the 455 and 442 in the North Shore.
- One member asked if this was the MBTA's plan for the trifecta of the 74, 75, and 78 along Concord Avenue.
No

The MBTA then discussed the challenges of hiring and maintaining staffing levels:

- The MBTA stated that the BNRD may help with staffing shortages due to the increased number of straight shifts – as opposed to split shifts where a driver’s workday is split into two sub-shifts, one in the morning peak and one in the evening peak. Drivers do not like these shifts and discourage becoming a bus driver in the first place.
- The MBTA is looking to pay people more and get people through the door with hiring bonuses.
- In response to the MBTA stating that they are now helping new hires get CDLs instead of just hiring those who already have a CDL, a member asked for further clarification on what “helping new hires to get CDLs” means.
Training for passing the test, how to apply to get a CDL, etc. The MBTA will follow up with the TAC with more specifics.
- The MBTA is looking to pay people more and get people through the door with hiring bonuses

The MBTA then discussed next steps

- The MBTA will bring this draft map to the board for approval. This process will incorporate an analysis of operator head count.
- The MBTA will then enter the pre-implementation phase of planning capital construction projects such as transit priority projects, increased accessibility projects, and weaving those construction projects into already the existing construction projects of other state agencies, cities, and towns.
- The MBTA then explained how the amount of transit service, and transit infrastructure that the MBTA can implement along a given road is based on the roadway’s conditions and typology. For example, a narrow road may not have enough space for a bus lane, a car travel lane, a bike lane, and parking. In places where traffic is free flowing you do not necessarily need a bus lane unless you are trying to future-proof congestion. Bus lanes better serve places that are currently congested or are expected to become congested.
The city added that there are other benefits not just for the bus, for implementing a bus lane. From a purely transit perspective there are reasons to implement bus lanes in non-congested areas, but outside of transit reasons there are many more reasons to implement them.
- The MBTA reviewed with the TAC the method they used to draw the new T-Routes

Public Comment

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

- One commenter asked why the 96 went to Union Square rather than Harvard.
The MBTA stated that this was done to compliment the network and provide a web of service. Instead of focusing on just one area for high frequency service, such as Harvard, other squares like Union Square and Lynn’s Central Square receive high frequency service.

City, MBTA, + TAC Updates

AR presented on updates for the advisory committee, including, that meetings will be using Zoom until at least March 2023.

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

- Several city projects with updates:
 - Inman square is Almost done!
 - CSO projects have been implemented
 - Mass ave 4 harvard square bus stop plans are in the works.

Public comment

There were no public comments during this comment period.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:07 PM

Version Information

Draft: (11/14 CFR)

Approval: _