



**Massachusetts Bay  
Transportation Authority**

# Commuter Rail Zone Study

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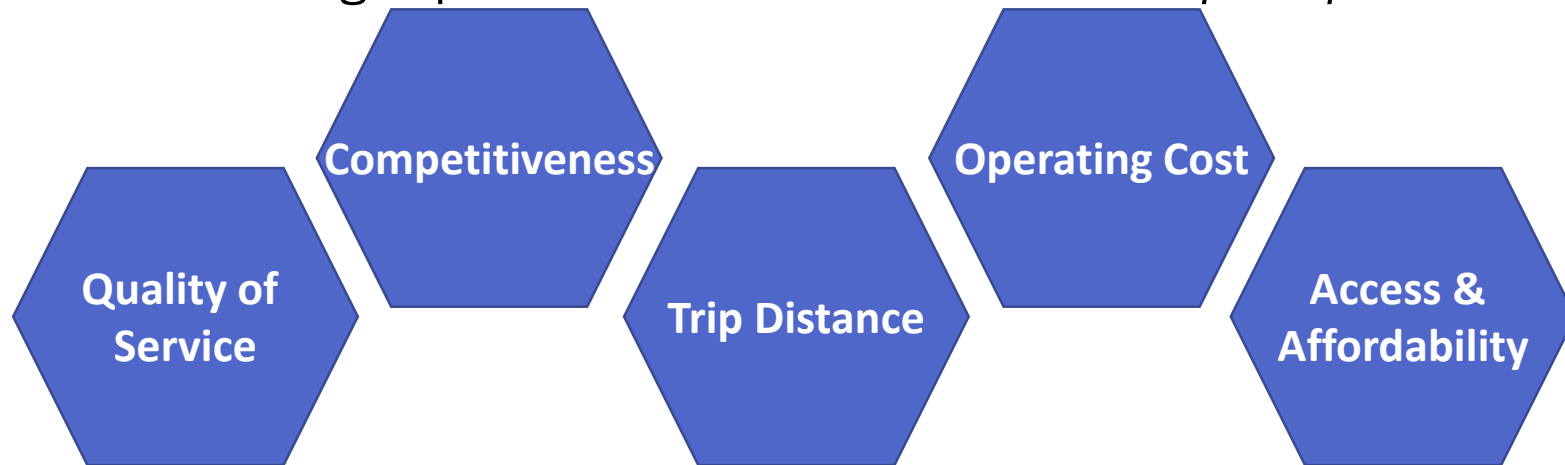
Fiscal and Management Control Board

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# Current Policy Principles for Commuter Rail Fares

- Commuter rail fares must be rational and follow Title VI guidance on equity
- Balance MBTA Fare policy objectives approved by FMCB (Dec 2015)
  - Raise revenue; improve service and customer experience; and advance social, equity, environmental, and regional economic goals
- Zone Study identifies five policy principles that connect objectives to current fares
  - Study focuses on finding improvements *consistent with these principles*



- There are many other *potential* principles for commuter rail fares
  - Changing organizing principles requires broader conversation and more details on future service



# Study Findings

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## **Commuter rail fares are generally consistent with policy principles**

- Zones and fares are generally consistent with track distance to terminal
- Commuter rail is competitive with driving for trips to/from downtown Boston

## **However, there are opportunities to improve within the existing framework**

- 1. *Affordability and Geography.*** There are low-income populations throughout the system who are ineligible for existing reduced fare programs and for whom affordability is an issue
- 2. *Zone 1A/Zone 1 Gap.*** There is a large gap in price between Zone 1A and Zone 1 fares (+\$4.10), which has created calls for the MBTA to move stations from Zone 1 into Zone 1A to address equity/affordability concerns
- 3. *Competitiveness Issues.*** Some trips to/from Zone 1A (e.g. those with low parking costs or lower-cost transit alternatives) are priced too high to be competitive



# Improving Commuter Rail Fare Equity

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**Place-based policies** like moving Zone 1 stations into Zone 1A do not address equity and affordability concerns

- Only helps low-income riders at specific Zone 1 stations – does not improve affordability for low-income riders who live *throughout* the system
- Disproportionately benefits upper-income and white riders (even if intent is to improve equity), requiring MBTA to seek alternatives under Title VI

**People-based policies** like means-testing *can* improve equity and affordability

- Helps low-income riders across the entire region, not only specific stations
- Targets lower fares to avoid favoring upper-income and white riders



# Study Recommendations

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Recommendations to address issues and opportunities:

- 1. *Affordability and Geography:* Complete feasibility study for means-tested fares**
  - *People-based* policies like means-testing avoid many downsides of *place-based*
  - Targets lower fares to those who need them, throughout the entire system
- 2. *Zone 1A/Zone 1 Gap:* Smooth the jump in fares between Zone 1A and Zone 1**
  - Addresses growing strain on rationality (adjacent stations with very different fares) while maintaining principle of trip distance
  - Could lower Zone 1 (and 2) fares, or hold Zone 1 fares constant as other fares rise – each with different implications for fare revenue, fare equity, and timing
- 3. *Competitiveness Issues:* Develop a pilot for reverse-commute and off-peak fares**
  - Reducing fares for off-peak and reverse-peak travel would improve competitiveness and grow ridership on underutilized trains
  - Impacts are uncertain, so pilot on certain lines could evaluate feasibility and impacts



# Next Steps

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- Study is a Legislature request to MassDOT and due March 15, 2020
- While the recommendations are made to the Legislature, the FMCB can decide whether, how and when to act on them
- Near-term opportunities
  - Finish means-testing feasibility study
  - Develop a pilot proposal for reverse-commute and off-peak fares
- Medium-term opportunities
  - Address Zone 1A/Zone 1 fare gap in next fare increase
  - Potential transfer policies and fare products as part of Fare Transformation
- Long-term opportunities
  - Future service model in Rail Vision creates possibility to rethink principles and fare structure

