



## MINUTES

### Meeting of the Fiscal and Management Control Board

September 14, 2020 AT 12:00 P.M.

10 PARK PLAZA, BOSTON, MA

***This meeting was held virtually in accordance with the Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law issued by Governor Baker on March 12, 2020. Board members participated remotely and had materials provided to them prior to the meeting. Public participation and comment occurred via written communication, voice message and live public comment through conference call.***

***This meeting was live streamed.***

#### BOARD MEMBERS

#### PARTICIPATING REMOTELY:

Chairman Joseph Aiello, Vice-Chair Monica Tibbitts-Nutt, Director Brian Lang, and Director Chrystal Kornegay (arrived at 12:20 pm)

#### Others Present and/or Participating for Various Portions of the Meeting:

General Manager Steve Poftak, Secretary Stephanie Pollack, Deputy General Manager Jeff Gonnevillle, Deputy Director of Stakeholder Engagement Hope Patterson, Chief Safety Officer Ron Ester, Chief Financial Officer Mary Ann O'Hara, Director of Strategic Research Anna Gartsman, Statistical Research Analyst Monisha Reginald, Assistance General Manager for Policy Laurel Paget-Seekins, Chief of Operations Strategy, Policy & Oversight Kat Benesh, Chief Engineer Erik Stoothoff, Director of Vehicle Engineering William Wolfgang, Assistant Director of Policy Daniel Sullivan, General Counsel Marie Breen, Chief Counsel Michelle Kalowski, and Senior Counsel Amy Nash

#### A. Call to order by the Chair

Chair Aiello called the meeting of the Fiscal and Management Control Board to order

at 12:03 P.M.

Senior Counsel Amy Nash called the roll of the Members participating remotely, being a quorum of the Fiscal and Management Control Board:

<b>Chair Aiello</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Vice-Chair Tibbitts-Nutt</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Director Lang</b>	<b>Yes</b>

## **B. Opening and Public Comment**

In accordance with current public health emergency, public comment was taken by mail, email, voice message, and by live comment through telephone conference call. Chair Aiello asked for the voice mail messages to be played. Written public comments received were distributed to the board and summaries were displayed for the board and public during the meeting. The board listened to public comments left via voicemail:

Kenzie Bok, Boston City Councilor for District 8 stated that service levels should be maintained, as it is important for residents to be able to plan their lives.

Mark Liu, Director of Operations for the Chinese Progressive Association, commented that budget levels should put equity at the forefront.

Louise Baxter of the T Riders Union stated that the MBTA needs to have service to support the economy and front-line workers. She also advocated making it easier for people with disabilities to get off benches.

Veena Dharmaraj of the Sierra Club thanked the FMCB for prioritizing bus service in needed hours. She also stated that advocacy groups need to have input and that the T is too focused on diesel instead of electrification.

Staci Rubin of the Conservation Law Foundation favors a 100% transition to electrification and called for safe and frequent transportation options.

Jarred Johnson of Transit Matters called for more buses, engagement with stakeholders, and information. He stated that fast-charge technology is nearly ready and requested that slide decks be posted earlier.

Jay Flynn, also of Transit Matters, stated that he is concerned with the amount and type of electric bus charging, claiming that in-route or in-motion chargers are preferable to overnight chargers, and could be implemented in the rehabilitation of the Quincy Garage.

There were no real time commenters.

Vice Chair Tibbitts-Nutt discussed an architectural access meeting that she attended with MBTA staff, walking through current projects, accessibility and budget, commenting that the FMCB was happy with the MBTA's progress.

**C. Approval of Minutes**

The next item on the agenda was the approval of the minutes of the June 15, 2020 meeting.

**On motion duly made and seconded, it was by roll call:**

**VOTED: To approve the minutes of the Fiscal Management and Control Board**

**Meeting held on June 15, 2020.**

<b>Chair Aiello</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Vice-Chair Tibbitts-Nutt</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Director Lang</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Director Kornegay</b>	<b>Yes</b>

**D. Report from the General Manager**

Chair Aiello introduced MBTA General Manager, Steve Poftak and his update, Agenda Item D, the Report from the General Manager.

Mr. Poftak provided an update on ridership, which has seen modest increases across multiple lines. He noted that low ridership gave staff an opportunity to reconfigure lane closures for maintenance and allowed them to complete accelerated “E” Branch work, removing 3000 feet of slow zones. Workers also began upgrading Green Line signals from 25hz to 100hz, replacing obsolete equipment from 1908.

Mr. Poftak discussed the MBTA’s virtual hurricane tabletop exercise which allowed them to identify potential challenges. He gave an update on fare transformation; fare gates at Charles/MGH have been upgraded.

Director Kornegay noted that the “E” line has gotten quieter thanks to recent work.

Chair Aiello thanked Mr. Poftak for a good turnaround on safety work and stated that the Board would be helped by seeing disaggregated service levels.

#### **E. Report from the Deputy General Manager**

Deputy General Manager Jeff Gonneville presented an update on the Rapid Response Bus Lane Program, which is a partnership between the MBTA and communities. He explained that the team is working on a dashboard to evaluate bus lane results, which they hope to make public over the next few months.

Chair Aiello thanked Mr. Gonneville for his work on this project and stated that transit advocates speaking to elected officials is crucial.

Vice Chair Tibbitts-Nutt echoed Chair Aiello’s comments and thanked staff for going above and beyond. She also noted that bus lane paint is a more complicated issue than many think.

Secretary Pollack noted that Capital Planning also needs to be involved to ensure the MBTA can pay for this item and noted that the Staff has had to use creative thinking to get to this point. She emphasized the need for a reliable bus system in transit corridors.

Chair Aiello noted that bus lanes are complicated to develop since the MBTA does not own the real estate.

#### **F. FMCB Public Schedule**

Chair Aiello introduced Deputy Director of Stakeholder Engagement Hope Patterson for discussion of Agenda Item F, the FMCB Public Schedule. The public schedule has been updated though November 2.

Chair Aiello noted that the FMCB needs to have a refresher discussion on diversity. Mr. Poftak scheduled a discussion for October 19 and promised to reach out to directors before the discussion.

Chair Aiello stated that a Green Line Transformation discussion is scheduled for November 2 and expressed his opinion that the FMCB needs to grapple more with climate change and work towards decarbonization. He said that the website should have a climate change tab outlining the MBTA's efforts.

Mr. Poftak mentioned that one of the tropical storms currently in the Atlantic had been upgraded to a hurricane.

Secretary Pollack agreed with Chair Aiello on the need to work towards decarbonization.

#### **G. Safety Update**

Ron Ester, the MBTA's new Chief Safety Officer, provided an update on safety goals, including implementing the Safety Management System (SMS), providing 24/7 coverage and improving safety reporting and the T's safety culture. The Transit Safety plan has been underway since mid-2018, focusing on safety performance and system reliability. Mr. Ester

reported that the MBTA has exceeded injury goals while slightly behind on system reliability and safety events.

#### **H. FY21/22 Budget Update**

Mary Ann O'Hara, the MBTA's Chief Financial Officer, presented the Budget Update for Fiscal Years 2021 and 2022. Ms. O'Hara presented a revenue summary, noting that revenue collections are slightly above projections thus far. She promised to come to the Board every month to adjust according to trends. Ms. O'Hara noted that hiring is on track and separations have been somewhat lower than budgeted.

Ms. O'Hara explained that a Working Group is in place to develop ideas to close the projected \$400 million budget gap and presented a timeline for future updates.

Chair Aiello discussed factors that could impact the budget and expressed hope that the Board will have more clarity next month.

Secretary Pollack addressed additional factors that can affect T ridership.

#### **I. Customer and Employee Survey Results**

Director of Strategic Research Anna Gartsman and Statistical Research Analyst Monisha Reginald presented the results of the customer and employee results survey, noting that the employee panel is new and customer elements have been in place since 2015. The survey is designed to help the MBTA understand demographics of ridership, leading indicators and identify new ceilings. Surveys suggest that riders of color are more likely to continue using the MBTA during the pandemic, while higher-income riders are showing larger changes in behavior. Ms. Gartsman noted that large employers are affecting commute patterns and that a second increase in travel is expected once medical advancements develop.

Chair Aiello expressed the hope that staff can get closer to real-time numbers.

Director Kornegay commented on the schedule and echoed Chair Aiello's hope.

Mr. Poftak stated that the staff intentionally set overly high targets to prepare for any unexpected changes.

Secretary Pollack stated that abrupt service changes are unlikely.

Assistant General Manager for Policy Laurel Paget-Seekins stated that staff are keeping a close watch on leading indicators.

Chair Aiello expressed the need to be cognizant of all services.

## **J. Forging Ahead**

Assistance General Manager for Policy Laurel Paget-Seekins and Chief of Operations Strategy, Policy & Oversight Kat Benesh presented the "Forging Ahead" update. They explained that they are focusing resources on customers who rely the most on transit, which requires the MBTA to assess how its network serves the region. The plan is to identify essential services at route and line levels and develop options based on fare revenues. The goal is to make permanent changes that result in a simpler, less redundant system.

Vice Chair Tibbitts-Nutt asked how terms in the presentation are being defined.

Chair Aiello stated that there must be a commitment to transforming the MBTA as well, even if it cannot do so immediately.

Secretary Pollack agreed with the Vice Chair, stating that it is the staff's responsibility to generate the definitions. She noted that the "Forging Ahead" process is a radical departure from the MBTA's approach to previous service cuts, focusing on what cannot be cut.

Ms. Benesh laid out a framework for defining essential services, those that have high ridership and those that serve high transit-critical populations. She presented an overview of potential service outcomes.

Chair Aiello inquired about the commuter rail, where ridership is not rebounding, noting that fare levels may not be affordable for people living in communities that might want to use the commuter rail to come to Boston. He asked if the MBTA might be able to experiment with different offerings.

GM Poftak responded that the MBTA is adding more regular service to Lynn and Brockton and shifting Lynn from Zone 2 to Zone 1A.

Secretary Pollack stated that the T has dozens of products, because different commuter rail lines are different products. She added that we need a more granular view of the system.

Director Kornegay stated that when thinking about principles and what kind of system we want to deliver to our customers, we need to remember that the system includes employees, who will be there long-term. Director Kornegay also stated that she needs more definitions and examples, plus a reminder of principles that the MBTA adopted regarding past transformations.

Vice Chair Tibbitts-Nutt expressed concern over some of the potential service outcomes, noting that requiring some riders to walk further and/or transfer more and pay more gives rise to a significant equity issue. She stated that “Forging Ahead” cannot just be an academic exercise.

Ms. Benesh addressed the directors’ comments by discussing the example of potential service outcomes for express bus routes and stated that it is important to understand the goals of the process.

Chair Aiello agreed with the Vice Chair and said that asking riders to pay more for a degraded trip seems unlikely to be successful.

Ms. Benesh promised to bring more examples to the September 21 meeting.

Director Kornegay stated that she read the outcomes in relation to the previously presented quadrants.

Secretary Pollack pointed out that the top left quadrant should be retained, while the lower right quadrant is the biggest political liability. She stated that the MBTA cannot afford to keep running its old network and that it needs equitable, reliable service going forward.

Ms. Benesh promised more details at the September 21 joint board meeting and again at the FMCB meeting on October 5.

#### **K. Fall Commuter Rail Schedules**

Commuter Rail Executive Director Rob DiAdamo began by providing an update on ridership, which remains low, at approximately 7-11% of capacity. He noted that service levels were increased to 85% of normal in June. Fall schedule changes are being designed as a cost neutral approach to retain existing ridership while becoming a new option for others. Service has been spread out over the day and service on pilot lines, namely Middleboro and Eastern, has been increased. Rising fuel costs can be offset by discontinuing older pilot programs. Mr. DiAdamo stated that providing 60-minute headways all day provides better commute options. He also mentioned that the "Heart to Hub Express" is adding a Framingham stop. The commuter rail is also trying to use its existing crews more efficiently.

Director Kornegay asked about slippery rail season.

Mr. DiAdamo said that leaves falling on the tracks can cause slippage. He explained that there is a track-washing program in place to minimize the amount of delays, along with slight schedule adjustments.

Director Kornegay brought up the Brockton line change, which is aimed at attracting BAT riders, and asked how commuter rail fare will compare with what those BAT riders are currently paying.

Ms. Paget-Seekins said that they are talking to Brockton Area Transit (BAT) regarding bus-riding access to commuter rail and are trying to create the best product for those riders while aligning BAT rides and trains.

Secretary Pollack stated that this process is to determine whether the MBTA can lighten crowding on BAT and the Ashmont line by providing more options.

Chair Aiello said that there is some great thinking here and asked if the MBTA is still using 8-car trains. Ms. Paget-Seekins replied that the MBTA generally is using 8-car trains, though it also is trying to determine what the right size train is.

Chair Aiello said the approach to scheduling is right and that cutting operating costs would be good. Citing the 7% ridership figure for morning trains, he asked about late evening and weekend runs. Ms. Paget-Seekins explained that the MBTA does not want to cut off rides for essential workers.

Mr. DiAdamo stated that some costs are fixed and that stopping one or two trains is not as effective as one might hope.

Secretary Pollack said that part of this is in advance of service planning for FY22. Some schedules for traditional riders are ineffective in getting riders to return. She said that staff will learn more about demand over time.

Ms. Paget-Seekins continued with details on the Fairmount Line Pilot, including the installation of platform validators. She then provided an update on fare pilots, including the Lynn 1A pilot, the 5-day flex pass, and youth extended passes. Staff have observed some

increases at Lynn station, but not on the line overall. For health reasons, in-person surveys are not currently feasible. The staff also are hoping to roll out a Brockton pilot.

Chair Aiello thanked the team for their work.

#### **L. Bus Electrification**

Chief Engineer Erik Stoothoff presented the final agenda item, Bus Electrification, explaining that the 5 bus pilot program has been in place for 12 months. Mr. Stoothoff stated that the pilot has shown the technology is not mature enough for full bus service, because the electric buses do not have enough range or battery power, and their charging time is too long. He recommended a measured roll out and pledged to go over near-term and long-term strategies at the next board meeting. According to Mr. Stoothoff, the 60-foot battery electric buses (BEBs) have a range of 60 to 110 miles and were top of the line when purchased. They are utilizing charging infrastructure based in Southampton. Mr. Stoothoff assured the board that the MBTA is actively learning from the latest BEB technology. He noted that the current BEBs perform at higher efficiency as temperatures approach 70 degrees Fahrenheit. He also mentioned that zero-emission buses will need additional heating.

Director Lang noted that the main obstacle to implementation of electrified buses is the limited mileage on batteries and asked how the technology has advanced. Mr. Stoothoff answered that battery capacity has increased from approximately 400 kilowatt hours to 520 kilowatt hours over an 18-month period.

Chair Aiello asked what differences would be expected between 40-foot and 60-foot buses. Mr. Stoothoff noted that the MBTA system currently has over 900 40-foot buses and over 120 60-foot buses and that the operating range should be similar for both.

Director of Vehicle Engineering William Wolfgang discussed battery capacity and reviewed the considerations for the MBTA's BEB approach. He noted that the MBTA does not want to adopt the technology before it is perfected, stating that 9 bus facilities will have to be upgraded, and stressing the need for infrastructure redundancy plans and improved organization around charging.

Chair Aiello asked if the estimated cost includes facility maintenance and Mr. Stoothoff replied that it does. The Chair stated that it would be helpful to know how much of the money is attributable to electrification versus baseline spending and to know if the MBTA is programming in the money needed to buy real estate.

Director Lang asked what the plan is for eventual electric buses at the Quincy garage.

Mr. Stoothoff said that staff are planning to make conversion relatively easy once the full electric fleet is acquired, noting that the commercial power grid will need to be improved.

Chair Aiello stated that he wants an accounting of what other agencies are doing in this regard and asked for information about who the players are in this industry and further context.

Secretary Pollack asked about the differences in purchase and maintenance costs between electronic buses and hybrid buses. The Secretary stated that the MBTA must meet buy American standards to obtain federal funding dollars. She asked what the MBTA's recourse would be if the vehicles do not meet their listed specifications and stated that buses that are not able to cover a 120 mile range every time will not cut it.

Mr. Stoothoff said that staff is in lockstep with the Secretary on those concerns and is trying to make sure the MBTA scales up at the right time.

Chair Aiello raised the example of Winthrop and suggested outsourcing a pilot to BEBs.

Mr. Stoothoff said that next steps are to reduce carbon emissions, speed up learning on BEBs, expand the BEB fleet and develop a long-term purchase plan. He said that the MBTA will also need to integrate charging into the bus facilities plan.

Chair Aiello asked if there were any further questions. Upon hearing none, he asked for a motion to adjourn.

**On motion duly made and seconded, it was by roll call:**

**VOTED: to adjourn at 3:53 p.m.**

<b>Chair Aiello</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Vice Chair Tibbitts-Nutt</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Director Lang</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Director Kornegay</b>	<b>Yes</b>

Documents relied upon for this meeting:

- September 14, 2020 Agenda
- General Manager Update
- Safety Update
- FMCB Public Schedule
- FY 21/22 Budget Update
- Customer and Employee Survey Results
- Forging Ahead
- Fall Commuter Rail Schedules
- Bus Electrification