

**Massachusetts Bay  
Transportation Authority**

# Forging Ahead Update

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Fiscal and Management Control Board

November 23, 2020

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# Overview

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- Public Engagement Update
  - Virtual Public Meetings To Date
  - Community Liaison Meetings
  - Online Feedback
- Key Takeaways from Public Comment
- FMCB Questions and Answers



# Public Engagement Summary

- 6 Virtual Public Meetings to date:
  - Metro West – 11/10/20
  - Minuteman – 11/12/20
  - Boston & Milton – 11/14/20
  - Inner Core – 11/17/20
  - Mystic River – 11/18/20
  - Official Public Hearing – 11/19/20
- 5 more Virtual Public Meetings upcoming
- 23 Community Liaison meetings
- 1,000+ online comments submitted
- 700+ emails received

Virtual Public Meeting	No. of Participants
Metro West	167
Minuteman	236
Boston & Milton	135
Inner Core	197
Mystic River	88
Hearing	291
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,114</b>

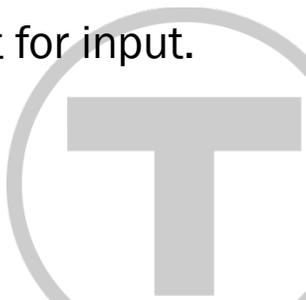


# Public Engagement Summary

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## Key Takeaways from Public Comment:

- Varying perceptions about the future in terms of COVID, the economic recovery, and ridership behavior are widespread, and there is a sense that the MBTA should wait and see what happens.
- Customers are concerned about social distancing and that reduced frequency on some services may lead to increased crowding on vehicles.
- Riders are skeptical about how the T can assess increased demand for services that are eliminated, i.e., ferry service, commuter rail weekend service and weekdays after 9pm, because there will be no ridership to monitor.
- Customers and stakeholders are concerned that temporary service cuts may actually become permanent.
- There is a sense that the MBTA will be implementing service cuts right when the pandemic is ending and ridership will be returning.
- General concern for the few riders who are still using the lower ridership services where service reductions are proposed, since they are likely transit critical riders without alternatives.
- People feel like the process is moving too quickly and are skeptical as to the sincerity of the T's request for input.
- Riders want specifics of changes, not just percentages.



# The RIDE

## What are the changes to the RIDE scheduling window?

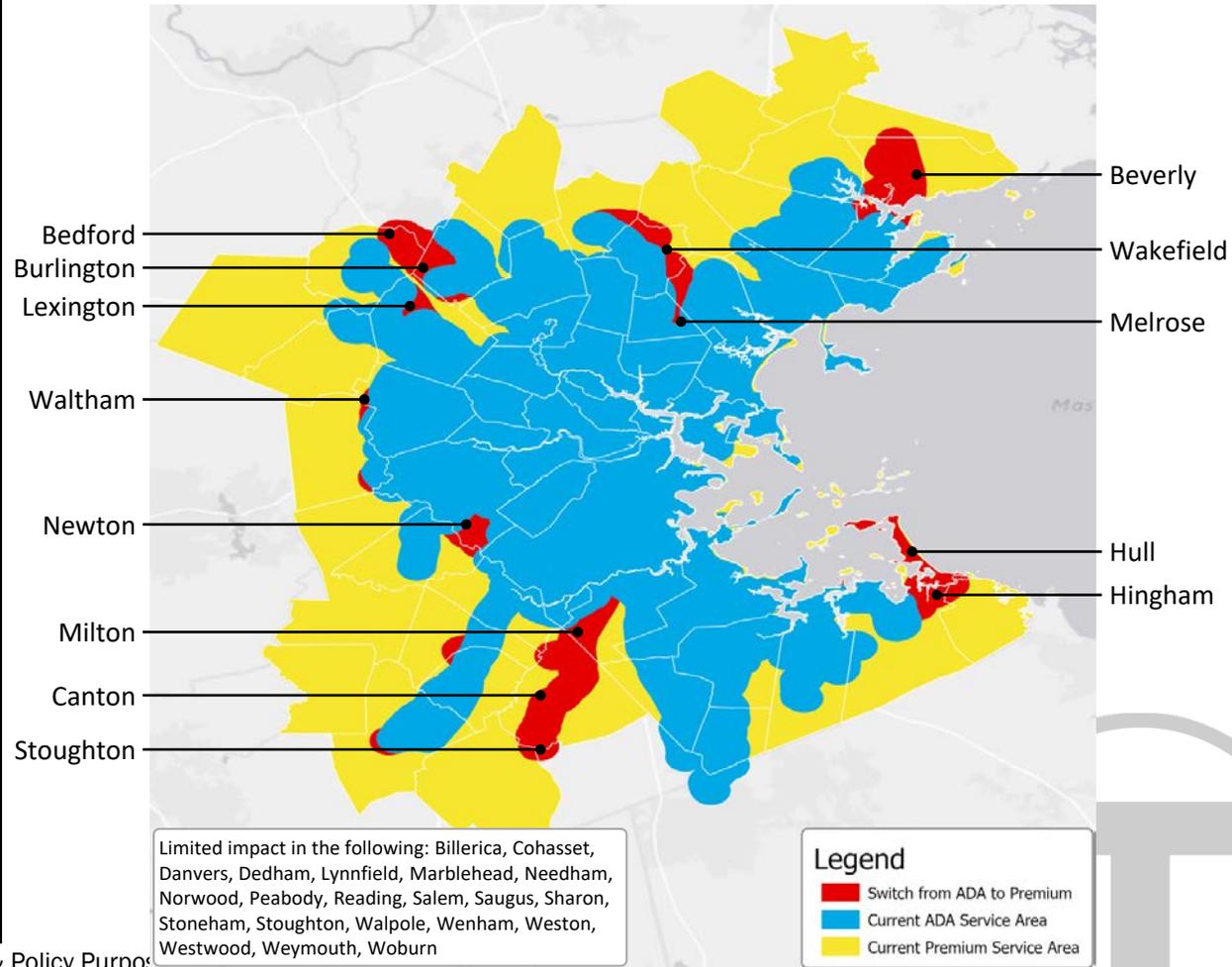
- The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) allows a 2-hour scheduling window (trip can move up to +/- 1 hour from the request time), but the **MBTA has traditionally used a 30-minute scheduling window** (in a single direction), as a benefit to customers.
- Increasing the scheduling window increases our ability to match trips together, thereby reducing the total number of driver hours needed to serve our customers.
- We have proposed **increasing the scheduling window by 10 minutes** (from 30 min to 40 min).
- For example, a requested 9am drop-off could be scheduled any time between 8:20am and 9am, and a requested 5pm pick-up could be scheduled any time between 5pm and 5:40pm.
- Customers would still be called the night prior and given an exact pick-up window, and they can still call back to “negotiate” to a window closer to the original request (Note: ability to move the window is not guaranteed and is based on available capacity).



# The RIDE

## What communities and service areas will change to premium rates?

- The ADA requires paratransit service within  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile of a fixed bus or subway route. The RIDE provides a premium service to some areas beyond that requirement.
- Due to changes in the fixed route bus schedule, parts of some communities will no longer be within  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile of a bus route.
- Instead of eliminating paratransit service in these areas, we propose converting it to premium service, which is defined as beyond  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile of a fixed bus or subway route.
- The start/end time for premium service will be based on when the first/last commuter rail trains enter/leave the premium service area (est. 5am-10pm).



# Accessibility – Commuter Rail

Is there any information on accessibility challenges at the stations we are diverting customers to along all modes?

- Commuter Rail station alternatives are fully accessible:
  - 5 of the 6 Commuter Rail stations proposed for closure (Plimptonville, Prides Crossing, Silver Hill, Hastings, Cedar Park) are inaccessible today.
  - The sixth Commuter Rail station proposed for closure, Plymouth, is accessible. However, the next closest stop is Kingston Station which is fully accessible via full high-level platforms.



# Accessibility – Ferry

Is there any information on accessibility challenges at the stations we are diverting customers to along all modes?

- Ferry terminal alternatives are fully accessible:
  - Charlestown ferry customers would be diverted to the route 93 bus.
  - Hingham ferry customers would be diverted to the Greenbush Commuter Rail line, which is fully accessible.



# Accessibility – Green Line E-Branch

Is there any information on accessibility challenges at the stations we are diverting customers to along all modes?

- 4 of the 5 Green Line E-Branch stops that would no longer be served are inaccessible today.
- E-Branch customers traveling beyond Brigham Circle will be diverted to the route 39 bus.
- All buses are accessible, and all bus stops are generally accessible.



# Accessibility – Bus Stops

Is there any information on accessibility challenges at the stations we are diverting customers to along all modes?

- Roughly 850 bus stops are proposed for closure.
  - 350 (41%) have an alternative stop nearby
  - 500 (59%) have no alternative stop nearby
- Service Planning is working with System-Wide Accessibility to compare the accessibility of each stop slated for closure relative to the accessibility of the closest alternative.
- Alternative bus stops deemed to be significantly less accessible than their closed counterpart will be addressed as part of high-priority bus stop upgrades.



# Accessibility – Wayfinding

How are the wayfinding projects being affected? Do we know for sure that there are no accessibility issues with this plan?

- The primary cost savings measure for scaling back the Wayfinding initiative will be to use vinyl overlays on existing signs rather than new porcelain/enamel signs at stations not currently in construction.
- All new vinyl signs will be compliant with MBTA accessibility standards.
- Plans to install new signs at strategic locations throughout the remaining stations, often drawing a distinction between the accessible and inaccessible paths, will be put on hold along with general signage upgrades and station brightening improvements.



# Commuter Rail

How do the parking rates at Commuter Rail lots correspond to the assumption that those riders will have the ability to drive to another station?

- 4 of the 6 stations proposed to close currently have little or no parking
- Alternative stations have available parking with prices ranging from free to \$4/day

Station to Close	Price	Availability	Alternative	Price	Availability
Plimptonville	n/a	No parking	Walpole	\$4/weekday	345 spaces (<15 cars/day)
Prides Crossing	n/a	No parking	Beverly Farms	free	25 spaces, City of Beverly
Silver Hill	n/a	No parking	Kendal Green	free	57 spaces, Town of Weston
Hastings	free	6 spaces, Town of Weston	Kendal Green	free	57 spaces, Town of Weston
Plymouth	\$2/weekday	96	Kingston	\$4/weekday	1,030 spaces
Cedar Park	\$3/weekday	82 spaces, City of Melrose	Wyoming Hill	\$3/weekday or free after 12pm	30 spaces



# Commuter Rail

**How do the parking rates at Commuter Rail lots correspond to the assumption that those riders will have the ability to drive to another station?**

- Based on recent observations, parking occupancy at these stations is zero to minimal. (3 of 6 have no parking; the 3 with parking have little to no occupancy.)
- However, parking occupancy at these stations is not necessarily indicative of ability to drive to another station, as riders can walk, bike, or be dropped off in lieu of parking.
- Car ownership rates in the service area are a better proxy for ability to drive.
- Customer survey data from 2015-2017 below shows percentage of households with zero to 0.5 vehicles per capita. (Note: the number of riders at these stations—and therefore the number of surveys—is so small that it's not a statistically significant sample.)

Line	Station	% with 0-0.5 vehicles per capita	Survey responses with zero cars
Franklin Line	Plimptonville	0% (n=3)	0
Newburyport/Rockport Line	Prides Crossing	44% (n=16)	0
Fitchburg Line	Silver Hill	0% (n=2)	0
Fitchburg Line	Hastings	0% (n=6)	0
Plymouth/Kingston Line	Plymouth	14% (n=7)	0
Haverhill/Reading Line	Melrose/Cedar Park	12% (n=34)	1

# Transformation

## How will the Transformation projects be changed?

- Next year, MassDOT/MBTA plan to issue a five-year FY22-26 CIP, reflecting updated funding sources and uses aligned with COVID scenario planning.
- Through the FY22-26 CIP development process, the MBTA expects to revisit scope, timeline and expectations for major transformation programs, including:
  - **Green Line Transformation:** Reassessing approach and timeline for full fleet replacement and capacity expansion given financial realities and uncertain ridership return.
  - **Rail Transformation:** Rail investments are proposed to focus on “no regrets” investments while Rail Vision is re-imagined to align with current service projections. Fleet investments proposed to scale back until customer demand and capacity needs are better understood, planning will continue for future fleet.
  - **Bus and Bus Facilities:** Plan to reassess fleet replacement plan to focus on high-impact investments (Silver Line Replacement, Battery Electric bus procurement), construction of Quincy Bus Garage, and upgrades to N. Cambridge Bus Garage to accommodate electric vehicles.
  - **Red Line/Orange Line Program:** The RL/OL program will continue to invest over \$1B in new vehicles, signals, and infrastructure, including nearly \$240M in signals and \$196M in infrastructure improvements. Funding to begin planning and design for the Orange Line SW Corridor Slab Replacement (P0675) remains in the CIP for \$7.5M (FY21-25).



# Rail Transformation

## How will the Transformation projects be changed?

- The FY21 CIP included \$20M for Rail Vision Early Action items. Through the Forging Ahead Capital Reallocation proposal, this project has been recommended to be scaled down to 50%.
- Rail Transformation Planning Studies (P0934) remains in the CIP with an authorized budget of \$2M.
- Rail Vision Early Action funds were programmed to fund 8 small turn track and platform projects to facilitate more urban- and regional-rail-style services, using existing diesel rolling stock.
- With the proposed reduction of funding, Early Actions will likely be reduced to 1 or 2 small projects.
- The hiring freeze has delayed staffing of the Rail Transformation office (6 FTEs planned; 1 currently filled), but we now have the ability now to use capital funding for planning staff.
- The plan is now to use the \$2M of Rail Transformation Planning Studies funding still programmed in the CIP, plus some of the Early Action funds, to support planning efforts, including hiring planning staff.



# Bus Transformation

## How will the Transformation projects be changed?

- Proposed changes affecting Bus Transformation initiatives:
  - Pause on hiring for Bus Transformation team will limit ability to coordinate and implement
  - Delay of \$50M Municipal Bus Lane Challenge fund
  - Elimination of Network Redesign Pilots, either cancelled or delayed indefinitely
  - Loss of additional funding to add peak service using recently purchased additional 60 buses
- However, a number of efforts continue:
  - Bus Priority program continuing, but reprioritized based on COVID impact on ridership (focusing on most durable ridership routes).
  - Network Redesign still underway
  - Silver Line bus replacement program for SL1, SL2 and SL3
  - \$20M of FHWA funds repurposed for bus priority
  - Development of transit priority dashboard



# Future Service

How is basing service realignment on “durable revenue” to match current and future ridership patterns consistent with preserving essential services?

- **Essential services** are the buses, trains, and trolleys that serve high transit critical populations AND have high ridership potential.
- The essential services are **covered by the statutory Base Revenue Amount (BRA)** and will **not be eliminated or reduced** to the point where they do not meet service standards.
- The MBTA is proposing a **"base service"** that represents quality service for **all essential services**, as well as a **reduced amount of non-essential service** that is still viable for many of those who depend on it.
- Any services we do bring back in response to increases in ridership and durable revenue will be **in addition to the essential services** we will continue providing.



# Future Service

How is basing service realignment on “durable revenue” to match current and future ridership patterns consistent with preserving essential services?

- We will add back some **non-essential services** in an iterative way in response to ridership and demand
- To monitor demand for **non-essential services** not being provided, the MBTA will use a combination of indicators like:
  - Ridership on existing services (e.g., for evening Commuter Rail after 9pm, ridership on the last train)
  - Community feedback
  - Customer and employer surveys
  - Vehicle traffic and congestion on nearby corridors
  - Changes in COVID-related travel restrictions
  - Key indicators of economic recovery
  - Resumption of downtown and late night events
  - General travel data (from MassDOT Highway or anonymized cell phone data)



# Future Service

## What is the cost of mothballing the fleet?

- Commuter Rail:
  - \$750K, dependent on how long vehicles would be out of commission; discussions will continue over the next few months
- Ferry:
  - \$650K for 12 months



# Future Service

## Specifically, what is the plan to monitor crowding?

- **Bus and Rapid Transit:**
  - Daily ridership reports for bus (via APCs) and rail (via fare gates), including % of passenger minutes in crowded conditions
  - Feedback from operators (full bus reports via TransitMaster, platform attendants, inspectors) and passengers (complaints, social media)
- **Commuter Rail:**
  - Continue regular passenger counts
  - Spot audits of trains to determine crowding
  - Feedback from conductors, operations staff, and passengers (e.g., complaints, social media)
  - Monitor ridership trends on other modes
- **Systemwide:**
  - Monitor reopening of schools (K-12 and universities)
  - Monitor roadway congestion
  - Monitor reopening of offices
  - Use the employer panel survey to monitor office reopening plans
  - Track reopening of major entertainment (e.g., sporting events, concerts)



# Outreach – Briefings & Community Meetings

## Which advocates have been briefed or will be briefed on service changes?

- United Spinal Greater Boston
- Fenway Civic Association
- Somerville Community Corporation
- Union Capital Boston
- 495/MetroWest Partnership
- Commuter Rail Communities Coalition
- Downtown Framingham, Inc.
- Cambridgeport Neighborhood Association
- Columbia-Savin Hill Civic Association
- Mt Bowdoin Betterment Association
- St. Marks Area Civic Association
- Jeffries Point Neighborhood Association
- North End/Waterfront Residents Association
- West Broadway Neighborhood Association
- Downtown North Association
- Shape Up Somerville
- Community Action Agency of Somerville
- Union Capital Boston Spanish Network Night
- Union Capital Boston English Network Night
- Charlestown Family Support Center
- Neighborhood Association of Back Bay
- Brookline Council on Aging
- QCAP - Head Start



# Outreach – Correspondence & Outreach

## Which advocates have been briefed or will be briefed on service changes?

- Brighton Allston Improvement Association
- Mattapan Food and Fitness Coalition
- Allston Brighton Health Collaborative
- Neighbor to Neighbor
- Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce
- Boston Disabilities Commission
- Youth on Board
- Alliance for Business Leadership
- Chinese American Heritage Foundation
- Chinatown Main Street Program
- Chinatown Residents Association
- Kendall Square Association
- Advocates Inc
- Concord-Carlisle Community Chest
- Foundation for MetroWest
- Nashoba Valley Chamber of Commerce
- La Alianza Hispana
- Chinatown Residents Association
- Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Council
- North End/Waterfront Neighborhood Council
- Blackstone/Franklin Square Neighborhood Association
- T4MA
- Indian Society of Worcester
- Mutual Aid Medford and Somerville
- Chinese Culture Connection
- Bay State Community Services - Blue Hill RCC
- Y2Y
- Age Strong Commission
- Charlestown Coalition
- Quincy Planning Department

