

# Transit Advisory Committee

## January 2023

### Abbreviated meeting summary

#### Attendance

**Members**                    **Present** (7) Arthur Strang, Bill McAvinney, Carl Rothenhaus, Casey Berg, Devin Chausse, Katherine Rafferty, Peter Septoff.

**Absent** (5), Melissa Zampitella, Jackson Moore-Otto, Jim Gascoigne, Sylvia Parsons, Matthew Coogan,

**City staff** (1)                Andrew Reker (CDD)

**Others** (5)                    Josh Weiland (MBTA); Makayla Comas; 3 members of the public

**Note:** CDD = Community Development Department; TPT = Traffic Parking and Transportation 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 – 7 members were present, 5 were absent. The committee conducted a roll call vote to approve the meeting minutes for the November 2022 meeting. The committee voted 6 in favor and 1 absent to approve the meeting minutes. The committee conducted a roll call vote to approve the meeting minutes for the December 2022 meeting. The committee voted 4 in favor with two present and 1 absent to approve the meeting minutes.

#### Review: Silver Line Extension Alternatives Analysis

AR then introduced the Silver Line Extension alternatives analysis study. He introduced the metrics and goals that the MBTA used to evaluate each silver line route. The study consists of two groups of alternatives, three that start by the Chelsea Market Basket and run to different destinations – Sullivan Square, Medford, and Malden -- 4 that start in Kendall or Haymarket and end in Everett or Chelsea via Everett. AR then presented on the key findings of the analysis study, finding that all options provide excellent access to jobs, could lead to more signal priority, improve safety, and have more people shift from cars to busses. It is only the degree to which each option does so that differentiates them. AR then explained more in-depth information on each SL6 alternative.

One member asked about how the BNRD will effect the MBTA's decision-making in choosing a final SL6 routing. The same member also asked how many alternatives that the MBTA could choose from the bunch presented.

*The MBTA will choose a routing that extends from the Chelsea Market Basket AND one route from the second set of alternatives.*

One member asked about the frequency of the alternative routes

*The frequency for the SL6 will be that of the other Silver Line routes, which have the same frequency as the light rail and metro lines that the MBTA operates.*

One member commented that of the three options branching out from Chelsea they liked the Malden branch more than the Wellington branch choice.

One member remarked that the MBTA stated in their presentation to the public before the meeting that the turnaround for the proposed silver line alternative running to Kendall would be slow at this end. They asked why this was, given that the SL6 will enter service after the Volpe project is completed.

*The turnaround will approach the station on Main and return on Ames, Main, Binney and first streets, however the MBTA have multiple ways to route the bus in this area.*

*The MBTA cited 4 to 18 minutes of added delay, to which the higher echelons of the estimates seem unrealistically excessive.*

One member stated that Cambridge is aggressive in turning parking into bike lanes and bus lanes, he suggested that to help this that Cambridge should be more active in encouraging ridership to reduce car traffic in Kendal. This would be in addition to changes in road design policy.

One member asked if Silver Line busses are maintained at the same places as other MBTA busses or if they have a special shop.

*The MBTA operates non-Silver Line articulated ("bendy") busses, this shop is where they will continue to maintain the Silver Line busses.*

One member believed that the MBTA should pair alternative 7 with alternative 3.

Multiple members agreed that they liked alternative 7.

One member who preferred alternative 7 also stated that he would be in support of alternative 4 if option 7 was too expensive.

*On reason for expense is the busses themselves - busses are expensive.*

*The MBTA's analysis did not include the cost of implementing transit priority for all options.*

## Public Comment

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

- One commenter pointed out that the MBTA did not specify what kinds of jobs each route option would serve. Specifically, the MBTA did not show what income level these jobs are, simply saying that there would be “jobs” for riders to ride to.
- One commenter asked if the data supporting the analysis is publicly available.  
*The city stated that the city will have to ask the people working on the project to get an answer to this question.*
- One commenter asked about the EWG  
*The EWG is the External Working Group – includes city staff from Somerville, Cambridge, Medford, Boston, Everett, and Chelsea, in addition to employees of NGOs working on transportation topics.*  
*Susana Rasmussen has represented Cambridge at EWG meetings*

## City, MBTA, + TAC Updates

AR presented upcoming meetings for the TAC, updates to the TAC endorsed implementation plan, and potential next steps for the TAC subcommittees.

AR reviewed other updates, including, the following city projects

Review of transportation impacts on the Mass Ave Dudley Street to Alewife Brook Parkway project.

- Bus riders had faster more reliable service with the new bus lanes: a 31% faster inbound service and 40% faster outbound service.
  - Travel times between Cameron to Churchill streets prior to the redesign averaged 4-5 mins in 2019. In the average ride time today is 45 seconds.
- Motorists experience some but relatively minimal negative travel time impacts
  - One member commented that he has driven this section of Mass Ave multiple times after the redesign and feels that today’s road is faster for cars than before.
- There is no data on changes in retail due to the redesign.

Updates to changes at Inman Square

- There is a new transit signal on Cambridge Street that provides the bus a head start.
- The 69 bus has been improved as a result of the Inman Square redesign
- One member reflected that this may also be better for cars which can hurt city life.

Updates on MBTA projects

- Harvard Bridge now has a short section of bus lane on the Cambridge end of the bridge and longer sections of new bus lane on the Boston end of the bridge
- The GLX is fully open and operational.
- One member mentioned that you can always tap your fare on the trolley itself instead of using the validation machines
- One member asked when the GLX Somerville community path will open.  
*In late January, most likely.*

## Public comment

One commenter stated that priority should be given to getting low income workers to where they need to go with the SLX alternatives analysis. This could include Alternative 7 which is slower

but has more people on it and, the commenter believed, will benefit low income individuals the most.

The commenter also stated that MBTA needs to work on safety and service. The commenter stated that to aid in better bus stop design members of the TAC should do field trips in the cold as well as the warm, to know what it's like for the average rider, especially since travel time on the bus can sometimes be longer simply because you have to wait for the bus longer.

The commenter concluded that raising the retirement age for MBTA bus drivers to 65 is not the way to go about keeping drivers driving.

The TAC adjourned at 7:05 PM

## Version Information

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Approval: