

Transit Advisory Committee

May 2023

Abbreviated meeting summary

Attendance

Members **Present** (8) Arthur Strang, Melissa Zampitella, Peter Septoff, Carl Rothenhaus, Katherine Rafferty, Sylvia Parsons, Devin Chausse, Bill McAvinney

Absent (3) Jim Gascoigne, Matthew Coogan, Jackson Moore-Otto

City staff (2) Andrew Reker, Miguel Perez-Luna (CDD)

Others (4) Melissa Dullea, Ashley Armand (MBTA); Maha Aslam (Alt-Member); 1 member 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 5:30 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.

The Secretary then conducted a roll call of the members of the TAC – 8 members were present, 3 were absent. The committee conducted a roll call vote to approve the meeting minutes for the April 2023 meeting. The committee voted 5 in favor and 3 abstentions to approve the meeting minutes.

Discussion: “Cambridge Street Code” Updates

AR then introduced Miguel Perez-Luna who presented on the “Cambridge Street Code”. The Cambridge Street code is a guide that helps teach the “rules of the road” and road etiquette in Cambridge. It is mostly a visual guide. The previously published street code was written 5 years ago, and it is the opinion of the City Council that it needs an update. The City brought the 2021 and May 2023 draft revisions to the TAC for them to provide feedback.

- One member of the TAC said they would like to see instructions on Food Share services be included.
- One member would like to see instructions on electrical devices on city sidewalks.
- One member discussed adding language about the more background technical items of how busses move through the city instead of just the pedestrian interactions with busses.

- One member asked about the usage of streets by bikes in streets where there are bike lanes. – this was clarified by The City as bike users can use the full lane if necessary, even if there is a bike lane present.
- One member said that the dooring language needs to be side of the car neutral as there are now streets in Cambridge with bike lanes on both sides of parked cars.
- Two members of the TAC decided they would talk more deeply about this issue.

Presentation: MBTA Service Changes

AR then introduced Melissa Dullea and Ashley Armand who gave an update on bus services and planning around the MBTA summer schedule.

- The MBTA has a bus operator shortage. There has been a long-term decrease in bus operator numbers over the last 4 years. Shortages in operators are not just an MBTA thing. The MBTA blamed several societal factors and some issues related to pensions for the long-term decrease. The MBTA is short about 90-100 FTE (full time equivalent) operators for spring. The shortage of employees has also impacted the cover employees.
- Dropped trips have increased sharply since Q1 of 2020. Dropped trips are not supposed to go beyond .5% and have ballooned to 5%. Dropped trips impact the most frequent bus routes, such as the 1 and the 66. During the winter these key bus routes had upwards of 10% dropped trips. Once the dropped trips reach a certain level, service quality can be severely impacted: 40% dropped trips on key routes.
- Scheduled service reductions of 4-5% would be reinvested in 100 cover list positions to protect service in the event of operator absence. Goal is to spread the impact of the operator shortage to a broad cross-section of routes not just the KBRs.

The MBTA is taking steps to make the bus operator position more attractive:

- Improved hiring process – Helping new hires get their CDL
- Employment incentives such as a considerable sign on bonus
- Improved work quality
 - o Promote part-time operators to full-time.
 - o Make more straight work, fewer split shifts.
 - o Make part time schedules “true part-time” i.e. less frequent and more flexible shifts
- Future labor contract negotiations will occur.

One member asked why not hire everyone full time?

- Tradition
 - o People start at part time.
 - o Most people get full time from 0 to three months.
 - o Labor rules are currently going through to be able to hire full time and part time. – The MBTA projected that within the year the MBTA will begin advertising full time bus operator positions.
 - o The MBTA recognizes that in order to become a bus operator you must undertake full-time training then have your ours reduced to part-time when you are accepted onto the job. The MBTA recognizes that this “makes no sense”.

One member asked what prevents a bus operator candidate from getting their CDL with the MBTA then quitting to go work for a trucking company or other CDL needing job.

- The MBTA has a recovery mechanism for people who stop driving with the MBTA
- 70% of new hires start driving but some do leave to truck or just decide not to be a bus driver.

One member asked when employment benefits kick in?

- After 4 years drivers get top pay
- Spread pay – extra pay given when your first shift start time and last shift start time are spread out. More spread = more spread pay benefits. Part timers often have big spreads but do not get the spread pay.
- Promoting people to full-time jobs would allow the MBTA to pay people more for their work.

One member asked when an employee receives the sign-on bonus:

- \$4500 after 90 days of service on the job, and \$3000 after one year of employment.

One member asked what the base pay is?

- \$22.21/hr is starting base pay.
- Labor negotiations are ongoing.

One member asked if there is there a goal for when contract negotiations are supposed to be done.

- Will most likely be by end of summer.

One member asked about class size and rate of hiring:

- The MBTA Needs 750 drivers for the BNRD from where they currently are now after 5 years. This means the MBTA needs classes of 60 drivers for the next 5 years.

Classes are:

- 8 weeks of base training plus two additional weeks if the candidate needs to acquire their CDL.

Reports: Subcommittees

A member from the MBTA subcommittee gave a summary of the subcommittee's findings from their station condition survey of Central Square Station. The member noted the significant structural repair that may be needed, the dirtiness of the station, and the inconsistency in the quality of the station entrances.

One member proposed that the subcommittee on the MBTA draft a letter with their findings to the MBTA.

The TAC subcommittee on City Projects announced that they will have an update on their committee's work in June.

City, MBTA, + TAC Updates

AR presented upcoming meetings for the TAC, including:

- Next meeting will hopefully include a discussion on Grand Junction and hopefully members of the associated working group will join for this discussion.
- The next TAC meeting will be June 1st.
- The following TAC meeting will be July 6th – tentative
- DPW will have a presentation on streets with transit during the May 17th joint meeting of the Transit, Bicycle and Pedestrian advisory committees.
- TAC member requested additional information about the North Cambridge carhouse electrification

Public comment

There were no public comments during this comment period.

Meeting was adjourned at 6:59 PM

Version Information

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Approval: _