

Transit Advisory Committee

February 2024

Abbreviated meeting summary

Attendance

Members **Present** (7) Jackson Moore-Otto, Carl Rothenhaus, Devin Chausse, Melissa Zampitella, Peter Septoff, Makayla Comas, Bill McAvinney

Absent (3) Arthur Strang, Jim Gascoigne, Katherine Rafferty

City staff (2) Andrew Reker (CDD); Adam Shulman (TPT)

Others (9) Tara Kamal Ahmadi, Adam Kamoune (MBTA); 7 members of the public

Note: CDD = Community Development Department; TPT = Traffic Parking and Transportation Department; MBTA = Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority

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 and shared ground rules for virtual meeting participation.

Carl Rothenhaus then conducted a roll call of the members of the TAC – 7 members were present, 3 were absent.

Presentation: Red Line Diversion

Staff from the MBTA presented on ongoing efforts to repair, maintain, and improve the Red Line. The MBTA calls this effort the Track Improvement Program.

The presenter gave a helpful analogy: MBTA has not brushed its teeth in 30 years – fixing the MBTA’s teeth is imperative but will take time and be painful.

The MBTA’s goal is that by the end of 2024 “as many if not all” track-related speed restrictions will be removed. The MBTA will also work to “facelift” current stations. Some of these shutdowns will just be to assess areas that have not been adequately assessed in 30 years.

The MBTA explained that the volume of work needing completion by the end of the year (including the replacement of 27000 rail ties) is not conducive to being completed only overnight. One reason is that there is little time between the last and first trains: only one to two hours on most nights.

The MBTA has seen a reduction in headways, that is, the trains are running more frequently, in the areas where tracks have been repaired. The biggest challenge will be during the Red Line shutdown in July, as the Red Line is the busiest line.

The February and March shutdowns will aim to tackle:

- Alewife section of the Red Line:
 - o 8 speed restrictions – Up to 6.5 minutes
 - o Alternative service will extend to Park Street starting at 8:45.
 - o All train replacement buses will be accessible
- Green Line:
 - o 11 speed restrictions

The MBTA then opened the meeting to members of the TAC. The TAC asked the following questions:

- One member appreciated the honesty and transparency from the MBTA. The member also asked about the seemingly unending floating slab work. He asked if the MBTA had a sense of when the floating slabs will be in a state of good repair.
 - o Floating slab work will be part of the shutdowns and will be ongoing – MBTA is taking a comprehensive look at slab work, however the MBTA will stick to floating slab technology and will not replace it with other forms of foundation.
- One member referred to the slide showing the delay in minutes of the Red Line, the member asked how the MBTA calculates the delay figure.
 - o The MBTA calculates delay by adding up all the delay time on all the segments of track along the line. For example: 5 Minutes of delay between Porter and Davis and 3 minutes of Delay between Davis and Alewife would mean 8 minutes of total delay for the northbound Red Line.
- One member asked what the MBTA’s plan is to prevent this from happening again. What is the maintenance plan post 2024?
 - o The MBTA used the dental analogy - It’s going back to brushing your teeth every day.
 - o The 2024 work will not be the end of closures - closures will become less dramatic: the Red Line may close on a Sunday here and there rather than close for weeks/months at a time.
 - o The MBTA is gutted as an agency in terms of workforce – the MBTA does not have the people to keep up. Having experts in the field makes things more efficient and cheaper. Preventative maintenance keeps things cheaper in the long run. The MBTA hopes to hire more people and do preventive maintenance to reduce costs in the long run.

The same member wants to see the MBTA share something with the public to say “look this is what we are doing” to prevent this from happening again.
- Another member asked questions about staffing.
 - o In the past couple of months, the MBTA has hired 1100 people and had to stop hiring because they did not have enough people to hire more people. The MBTA sees this as a good problem to have.
- One member asked a further question about staffing
 - o Due to this trainer/hirer shortfall what will new Red Line students be doing during the closure?
 - Classroom training at the heavy rail school at Cabbot Yard
 - Students learning to drive can help reduce the number of dropped trips where there is service running by filling in for the driver that was supposed to drive the vehicle. Moreso on bus side, but still a concern on

red line – folks who are in training may also cover those who go on break.
The result is less dropped trips overall

- The same member of the TAC asked if the facelifts of stations include repairing chronically out of service escalators/elevators w/ Bowdoin and Porter being noted examples
 - o Phil Eng has a vision of MBTA stations as welcoming centers into the transit system.
 - Many escalators are obsolete and need full replacement.
 - Many escalators need to be shut down to be replaced – the MBTA cannot just swap out an escalator or swap out parts as there are certain escalators that were made and installed by companies that no longer exist.
- Another member of the TAC asked if the MBTA has inserted any of the new hire operators into the schedules yet?
 - o Yes, the MBTA has seen a significant improvement in headways because of it
 - o Headway needs three things:
 - People – the MBTA is hiring more.
 - Trains/Buses – the MBTA is getting new trains (excluding blue line)
 - Tracks – Closures are improving speeds
- One member had a concern about the inbound platform on the commuter rail at Porter Square, they wanted more info as they believe it is an accessibility concern.
 - o MBTA will follow up
- Another member asked what happens if MBTA doesn't finish the closure work by the end of 2024.
 - o The MBTA is not completing all of the work during the early 2024 surge
 - o The MBTA has not been good at communicating shortcomings
 - o The goal still remains to finish by the end of the year.
- A final member asked about how the MBTA is splitting up the work between surges.
 - o Not all of the work being done is actually listed (usually smaller items) and some work is bifurcated between the two construction surges.

Public comment

- AR opened the meeting to comments from the public relating to the presentation on the Red Line Diversion
 - o No member of the public chose to make a comment

Discussion: TAC implementation plan

City staff to facilitate discussion on TAC implementation plan

The committee provided things that should be added to the transit implementation plan – a selection of those items brought up are as follows:

- Bridge from Alewife Triangle to Quadrangle – advocate for the bridge: already on there but needs more. The pair of bridges are of significant concern to multiple members of the TAC
- Bus priority at Alewife
- Keeping up on construction surges

- Cambridge Street – CSO – floating bus stops/reducing ped/bike/bus conflicts
- McGrath Highway – being informed on updates
- Fitchburg Line – modifications, modernizations, new stations & integrating planning & the TAC would like a presentation from the rail transformation office.

The committee provided things that should be changed in the transit implementation plan - a selection of those items brought up are as follows:

- Fare free bus – push MBTA to implement – get a presentation on general fare structure. Interaction between proposed fare-free routes/BNRD & low-income fare free program
- Consider modifying PTDM or development items to consolidate.
- Consider consolidating bus signal priority items into one item where possible.
- AFC 2.0/new fare system – request presentation from MBTA
- Participatory budgeting – consider ideas for this year.
- The TAC would like a presentation from the MBTA on the current status of the BNRD

The committee provided items that should be removed in the transit implementation plan

- Bus priority – Inman square (A9), River Street (A8), Huron Ave (A11)
- Consolidate and or remove Red Line items
- Ask for an update on item E5

Public comment

- AR opened a short comment period for members of the public.
 - o No member of the public chose to make a comment.

Meeting was adjourned at 6:58 PM

Version Information

Draft: (2/20/2024)

Approval: