

# Transit Advisory Committee

## July 2024

### Abbreviated meeting summary

#### Attendance

- Members**                    **Present** (8) Arthur Strang, Bill McAvinney, Carl Rothenhaus, Devin Chausse, Jackson Moore-Otto, Jim Gascoigne, Melissa Zampitella, Peter Septoff
- Absent** (3) Katherine Rafferty, Makayla Comas, Maha Aslam
- City staff** (3)                Andrew Reker, Nika Lea Tomicic (CDD), Adam Schulman (TPT)
- Others** (6)                    Karti Subramanian, Adam Kamoune, Tara Kamal Ahmadi (MBTA), 3 members of the public

**Note:** CDD = Community Development Department; TPT = Traffic Parking and Transportation Department; MBTA = Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority; TSP = Transit Signal Priority; BNR = Bus Network Redesign

#### Welcome and Committee Introductions

Andy Reker (AR) began the hybrid meeting at 6:06PM 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 and in-person meeting participation.

Carl Rothenhaus then conducted a roll call of the members of the TAC – 8 members were present, 3 were absent. He then conducted a roll call of the meeting notes for May 2024. The committee unanimously approved the May meeting notes.

#### Presentation: MBTA Realtime Signage Program

AR turned the meeting over to personnel from the MBTA Technology Innovation Department who presented the MBTA's real-time signage program.

The presentation began with a quick overview of answers to questions TAC members and the city had requested answers to. These were:

How does the MBTA decide what info to put on signs?

- Research

Are there new types of screens for bus riders?

- Yes

Are more E-ink Screens coming?

- Yes, but not many more

The presenter from the MBTA overviewed the current state of MBTA real time signage:

- The MBTA is moving towards implementing over one thousand real time signs for riders.
- The current dot-matrix displays the MBTA uses, also known as “countdown clocks” at stations are out of date, and very limiting in displaying information to riders. For example, they can only show either bus departures or train departures but not both.
- The MBTA believes the best solution to replacing these countdown clocks is to replace them with LED screens that not only can provide information about departures but also full color information about changes in service when they occur.
- The goal is to have all the information on these screens and any other information that the MBTA provides to all come from the same source. Screens in station lobbies, on station platforms, the app on your phone, and the information operators have, should all be the same, and all come from the same source of data.
- At the same time, the MBTA has the goal of being judicious about what info riders get as they move through the system. Riders do not always want or need all the information. For example, on platforms, riders only want to know when the next bus, train or streetcar is coming.
- Signs will be installed at various decision points along a rider’s journey, such as entering a station, standing on a platform, or riding a service vehicle. Most times these screens will not have ads, as the MBTA does not want to clutter information riders want with advertisements, however screens outside stations may have them, such as the screen currently installed at the bus platform at Airport on the Blue Line.
- These LED screens will go beyond ADA letter of the law requirements and have accessible-first design.
- The LCD screens will be added to all center running busways in Boston as well as the Silver Line.
- These LCD screens will replace bus birth maps that are out of date. These new screens will hopefully be implemented by the completion of Phase 2 of the BNR.
- The MBTA also wants to place LCD screens next to elevators so that passengers know in real time what elevators are out of service across the system. These screens will also display what trips are not possible due to these outages and what alternative service is available.

E-ink Screens:

- The MBTA plans to roll out 34 more E-ink signs at bus stops.
- The MBTA believes that the E-ink signs are not as good as the LCD screens as they are impossible to maintain remotely and are unable to show full color.
- The E-ink signs are effective in the job they are meant for – they show when the next bus is coming, which is what people want at bus stops.

Looking forward:

- The MBTA plans to pilot an SMS alternative to real time signage starting in the next three to four months
- The MBTA wants to have screens on vehicles that display what the estimated arrival time for that vehicle is at stops down the line.
  - o The MBTA laid out two big challenges to this goal:

- Terminus stations – the length of bathroom breaks, crew swaps, and the speed an operator turns around a vehicle for the next trip is highly variable and not entered digitally.
- The MBTA Operations Control Center holding a vehicle for an indefinite amount of time
  - A member of the TAC stressed that the language “stopped X stops away” which is the phrase the MBTA uses when the MBTA cannot make a proper estimate, is not sufficient and the language should be improved.
- The MBTA would also like these estimates to adjust based upon real time traffic information

## Presentation: Red Line Closure

AR turned the meeting to Adam Kamoune (AK) from the MBTA who presented on the upcoming Red Line closure, Track Improvement Program, and shuttle program.

- The MBTA’s goal is to remove all speed restrictions by December 31<sup>st</sup> of 2024. As of this TAC meeting, there is about a half a year of work to be done.

AK described the alternate Service:

- 77 Bus will be free
- The MBTA will run regular shuttles as well as express shuttles
- The commuter rail will be free from Porter Square

How can riders find out about maintenance after December 31st, 2024?

- The speed restrictions dashboard will continue to be updated even after January 1, 2025

What is next after December 31?

- The next big work to be done is fixing signals
  - The goal with signal work is shorter headways
  - With how track circuit relay logic work, the MBTA can only replace signals or track, not at the same time. This work will have to be completed in 2025 once all the tracks are replaced.
  - Full depth inspections will occur at any affected station during a diversion
  - The MBTA has beefed up its station teams

One member of the TAC stated that he has noticed that glass elevators are consistently more damaged than elevators that are not glass.

- The MBTA wants to invest in standardization of parts (such as elevator glass) to keep costs down. Currently there are too many custom parts across all aspects of the network which hinders things like elevators from being repaired on time.

Charlie Card Store

- Member of the public asked about the Charlie card store
  - A full-fledged Charlie Card store (rebranded as the Charlie Service Center) is being built downtown by State Street station

## Presentation: City and TAC project updates

Nika Lea Tomicic (NLT) presented upcoming meetings for the TAC, including:

- Next meeting: Thursday August 8
- The next TAC meetings will be about: Alewife Bridges and AFC 2.0

NLT presented updates to several projects in the city including:

- Aberdeen Ave
- A new bus stop bench on Windsor Street
- A new bus shelter being installed at Ames & Main Street – will be completed by the fall
- Concord Ave TSP – work is currently in progress
- Real time transit screens (the city funded screens not the MBTA ones talked about in the earlier presentation)

EZRide began a new, higher frequency schedule for weekday peak-hour service

- 8 busses with built in layover time

One TAC member commented about recent comments he saw on Reddit about the EZRide service

- People are saying that the new drivers are speeding and driving dangerously
- It was raining in the bus – due to an AC failure

The member of the TAC who works for EZRide said that he will investigate the comment and the AC problem.

MBTA Contactless payment starts 8/1. People with specialized cards and benefits will be able to link their cards to the MBTA system

## Public comment

- One member of the public commented about the 83 bus. He believes that the 83 should also be fare free due to its proximity to the Red Line. He also stressed that with the opening of the Charlie Card store downtown, that the MBTA should reopen the one at Harvard Square Station. He also said that he would like better located real time screens at Harvard station so that riders do not have to walk all the way up or down the ramp to the busway to know bus times and train times.

Meeting was adjourned at 7:46PM

## Version Information

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Approval: