



MBTA mulls fare hikes, concerning rider advocates

Watchdogs urge increased access over higher prices



John Happel/Boston Herald

An older green line rail car stops at North Station moments before the arrival of a new green line rail car that entered service on Dec. 21, 2018 in Boston, Massachusetts.

By [SEAN PHILIP COTTER](mailto:sean.cotter@bostonherald.com) | sean.cotter@bostonherald.com | Boston Herald

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Straphangers could be facing another fare hike to ride the T, a move that concerns rider advocates who want to see the agency focus more on expanding access.

The MBTA's Fiscal and Management Control Board is slated to hear a set of "fare proposals," according to its agenda, which doesn't elaborate or offer details of what's on the table.

Asked for more information, MBTA Director of Communications Joe Pesaturo said, "After the proposals are presented, there will be a lengthy public comment period during which T riders may offer their thoughts, comments and suggestions."

The T signaled for much of last year that a hike could come in 2019. Currently, a one-way subway trip runs \$2.75 with a paper ticket, and \$2.25 with a Charlie Card. A normal bus trip is either \$1.70 or \$2.

Any significant jump in prices could drive people to use a ride-sharing app instead, Joshua Fairchild of TransitMatters told the Herald.

"I am concerned that if fares crest, that as one-way fares get closer to the \$3 price point, we will see increasing drop-off in usage," Fairchild said. He added, "If such concerns bear out, the loss of ridership, additional congestion and emissions will far outweigh the benefit of any additional fare revenue."

Stacy Thompson of Livable Streets said the T should be focusing more on programs that help expand access, such as discounts for minors and low-income riders.

"The structure is the most important thing to be thinking about," Thompson said. "The relative amount of money the T might get for a minor increase isn't much compared to enabling more people to get on the T."

Boston city councilor Michele Wu, the city's Planning, Development and Transportation Committee chair, went a step further, tweeting on Sunday, "We should take every step to move towards fare-free transit, not increase burden on those who can least afford it & who do the most to reduce traffic/help air quality." Wu was not available for further comment.

"Small, regular fare hikes are a fiscal necessity," said transportation watcher Charles Chieppo of the Pioneer Institute. "The best thing the T can do is work to show customers that their investment will yield better service."