Testimony submitted to the Massachusetts Department of Transportation Board and the MBTA Fiscal and Management Control Board

September 9, 2015

Thank you for the opportunity to offer these comments in support of The Green Line Extension (GLX). Transportation for Massachusetts is a coalition of 57 member organizations that work together to create safe, convenient, and affordable transportation for everyone. The coalition supports the Green Line Extension for its mobility, economic, climate, health and smart growth benefits.

While the recent news about increased cost estimates is unwelcome, it is important that the Commonwealth advance the Green Line Extension project, which is a critical transportation expansion for the entire Greater Boston region and a legal obligation under the Clean Air Act State Implementation Plan (SIP). If we do not build GLX, the Commonwealth will both lose nearly $1 billion in federal funds and still have to replace it with another major project in accordance with the SIP.

We applaud the FMCB for rolling up its sleeves and taking a problem-solving approach to this challenge, and thank the MassDOT Board for tackling this issue at today’s meeting. We would respectfully suggest that while you are in the information-gathering phase, one or both of the boards hold one or more hearings in the affected communities during a weekday evening to learn more directly from the people who live and work in the areas that will be served by GLX.

We think a combination of the options laid out at the August 24 meeting, when this news was first announced, could simultaneously reduce costs and identify new revenues.

First, we support rebidding the project. We understand and accept that this will result in a delay, but expect that the cost estimates will decrease if the contract is broken into competitively bid pieces.

Second, we believe that the designs of the stations could be scaled back to reduce costs, and you should explore the feasibility of scaling back the maintenance facility, as long as these assets are sufficient to serve the riders and the storage of trains.

We request that all the core components of the project remain: this includes all stations, the community path, and the anticipated extension to Route 16. These pieces of the project offer many economic and community benefits, and they should not be changed or scaled back.

Third, we support value capture mechanisms as part of GLX’s financing, as long as the municipalities are only expected to contribute modest amounts. This project is significant to the region and the Commonwealth, and the cost should not unduly burden localities. If a
combination of these three pieces is not enough to close the budget hole, other state funds should be allocated to the Green Line Extension.

In addition to being a legal requirement, the GLX would provide net benefits by strengthening our economy, lessening greenhouse gas emissions, improving air quality, and lowering automobile congestion by reducing more than 25,000 regional daily vehicle miles traveled.

GLX is an example of good planning. Somerville has strategically created density around the planned stations, which maximizes the return on the Commonwealth’s investment and ensures that the stations will be utilized to their full potential. There will be other community benefits to GLX, including plans for a Massachusetts Construction Career Development Program that will strengthen pre-apprenticeship programs in the construction trades in coordination with GLX, focusing on under-represented groups such as women and minorities.

We thank the FMCB for working to reform the MBTA management and practices, and have full faith that your work will result in more efficient use of taxpayer dollars. These reforms are necessary, and we are glad that you are meeting so frequently to ensure the agency serves customers better.

The estimated $7.3 billion state of good repair backlog at the MBTA, along with the funding needed to support many other important road, bridge, and transit projects across the state, is a daunting challenge. Along this line, we strongly urge you to reject two false choices: that between reform and revenue and that between state of good repair spending and strategic expansion. For Massachusetts to thrive, we need to reform our agencies and ensure there are adequate revenues for to build and operate the system our economy needs. In order to accommodate growth, we need to both repair the system we have while enhancing the capacity of the system to serve today’s and tomorrow’s riders.

As countless experts have documented, there has been historic underinvestment in transportation in Massachusetts, and we need to simultaneously pursue important projects like GLX and other regional priorities throughout the state, as well as address our repair backlog. The state will need new revenues to do this. If we do not invest adequately in our transportation system, we will not be able to keep up with the increasing demands of our modern economy, and we will not be able to keep up with other regions around the country that are expanding their public transportation networks.

Again, thank you for providing the opportunity for stakeholders to offer remarks this afternoon. Should you have any questions or require additional information from T4MA, please do not hesitate to contact Charlie Ticotsky, Policy Director, at cticotsky@t4ma.org or 781-354-5155.

Sincerely yours,

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Director