February 22, 2016

Dear Fiscal and Management Control Board Members:

Our organizations oppose both fare hike proposals that have been proposed, and strongly urge you to adopt a proposal that raises fares by no greater than an average of 5%. The two proposals raise fares by amounts that are neither modest nor predictable. Neither conforms to the fare cap that was widely understood by riders, organizations, many legislators, and the media to allow for fares to rise only 5% every two years, and which was respected in 2014.

Comments at public meetings and in other forums have been almost unanimously in opposition to these scenarios, and we ask that you take this public input, from riders, legislators, students, and those from the public health, businesses, environmental, and education communities into serious consideration.

Raising fares as proposed, will most hurt riders who have no other options, including seniors, people with disabilities, youth, and low-income riders. These proposals would mean that bus riders, who are on the whole of lower income than riders overall, would pay 16% to 20% more per month; students would pay 23% more per month; and commuters from a Gateway City like Brockton would pay up to $288 more per year. The fare increase would also cost the Boston school system $1.4 million.

Current riders who have the opportunity to drive may give up the MBTA, especially with gas prices so low. In fact, the MBTA’s own analysis shows that the proposed fare increases will result in a loss of ridership. This moves the state in the wrong direction. The MBTA should be seeking to increase ridership. A loss in ridership has negative consequences for everyone who lives in the 175 cities and towns in the MBTA service area: more congestion, more wear and tear on the roads, and more greenhouse gases. In addition, raising the fares for monthly passes will hurt businesses that pay for employees to commute on the MBTA.

The MBTA has said that fare increases above 5% are necessary to close the MBTA’s operating deficit for next year. However, combining a 5% fare increase ($23 million), proposed state budget assistance that is kept flat from last year ($187 million), and a low-estimate of cost savings identified through the hard work of the Control Board and MBTA management ($55 million) provide sufficient resources to wholly eliminate the operating deficit for FY2017. With the deficit closed and state assistance flat, why are we asking riders to put in more than their fair share?

Finally, MBTA management has said that fare increases will lead to better service. It is well known that the MBTA needs additional revenue to fund necessary repairs, maintenance, accessibility and safety improvements, and capacity enhancements. However, our understanding from officials is that the MBTA cannot spend more on capital investments next year, even if it had more money available. We would welcome a clearer explanation of how the MBTA would achieve service efficiencies and enhancements that would help to improve the rider experience and reduce the state of good repair backlog.

We urge you to put riders first and to honor the 5% fare cap, we thank you for your consideration of this letter, and we commend your hard work to improve the MBTA.

Sincerely,