

Commuter Rail Communities Coalition

Coordinated Municipal Advocacy for Transformed Commuter Rail

December 14, 2020

Fiscal and Management Control Board
Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority
10 Park Plaza, Boston, MA 02116

Dear Fiscal and Management Control Board members,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the proposed MBTA service cuts presented at the November 9th Fiscal and Management Control Board meeting. As members of the Commuter Rail Communities Coalition, we know how important robust, reliable, and affordable transit service is for a strong economy, a cleaner transportation system, and more equitable public health outcomes. Additionally, as municipal officials, we appreciate the budgetary difficulties the MBTA faces and the many factors that are weighed when making long-term decisions in a time of uncertainty. However, in the midst of dual public health and economic crises, **we are writing to express our strong opposition to the Commuter Rail service reductions and eliminations proposed.**

The mission of the Commuter Rail Communities Coalition is to coordinate advocacy for all communities that are served by commuter rail, and to support planning efforts to transform the rail network to be a critical part of a modernized transit system for Massachusetts. We know that transportation is the backbone of a thriving economy. Our residents rely on public transit to get to work, go to school, and access needed services. Today, our public transportation system is enabling essential workers to get to their jobs and helping to keep our economy afloat. While ridership is lower than it was pre-pandemic, the people riding Commuter Rail right now are those that depend on it most. Our most vulnerable communities have been bearing the brunt the public health crisis and its economic consequences. We cannot add further burdens by reducing or eliminating transit service now.

Furthermore, our Coalition is firmly committed to reducing transportation emissions and building a resilient Commuter Rail system, and we are very worried about how these services cuts will set us back from our climate goals. If transit service becomes unreliable or unavailable and more people turn to driving, we will lose progress toward reducing greenhouse gas emissions from transportation. These behaviors will be challenging to reverse once it is safe for the Commonwealth to proceed through additional stages of reopening. Furthermore, more driving will also risk worsening air quality, exacerbating public health disparities already deeply evident during this time.

Additionally, we have been working tirelessly to promote housing development near our Commuter Rail stations. Our Coalition has particularly focused on prioritizing the development and preservation of affordable housing near transit. Our efforts to advance equitable transit-oriented development were devised in part on the promise of robust transit service. To reduce or eliminate service could have serious impacts on the housing market in transit-oriented areas, as well as reduce access to jobs in transit-oriented locations. We cannot afford to reduce transit service and potentially undermine a robust and equitable economic recovery.

We are also concerned that the duration of these service reductions will have long-term impacts on our communities. While the MBTA has emphasized these changes are not intended to be permanent, we fear the MBTA will not be able to restore service quickly enough when ridership returns. In light of positive news surrounding the efficacy of several COVID-19 vaccines and the prospects of further short-term relief from

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the federal government, ridership is increasingly likely to return in 2021. A vote to reduce service now would be ill-timed, particularly as the Commonwealth remains poised to move through additional stages of reopening by next year.

Finally, the Commuter Rail Communities Coalition has been advocating to Legislature for additional revenue for transportation since the Coalition's inception. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated an already precarious financial situation at the MBTA. We encourage you to join us in calling on the Legislature to raise broad-base transportation revenues so that the MBTA can begin to address structural capital and operating deficits and achieve greater financial stability.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments, and we would welcome the opportunity to speak further about these concerns.

Sincerely,

Thomas M. McGee
Mayor of Lynn, Commuter Rail Communities Co-
Chair

Anthony M. Ansaldi, Jr.
Town Administrator of Littleton

Ruthanne Fuller
Mayor of Newton

Kassandra Gove
Mayor of Amesbury

Scott J Lambiase
Town Manager of Abington

Stephen P. Maio
Town Administrator of Wakefield

Lisa Wong
Town Manager of Winchester

John Allen
Economic Development Specialist, Grafton

Jarred Johnson
Executive Director, Transit Matters

Beverly Woods
Executive Director, Northern Middlesex Council of
Governments

Sarah Stanton
Town Manager of Bedford, Commuter Rail
Communities Co-Chair

Stephen Crane
Town Manager of Concord

David A. Genereux
Town Administrator of Leicester

Timothy Higgins
Town Administrator of Lincoln

Philip E. Lemnios
Town Manager of Hull

Dr. Yvonne M. Spicer
Mayor of Framingham

Jamie Errickson
Deputy Town Administration (Operations) of
Natick

Dr. Tracy Corley
Transit-Oriented Development Fellow, MassINC

Jason Palitsch
Executive Director, 495/MetroWest Partnership