



Access Advisory Committee

to the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority

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AACT Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, July 22, 2009

NOTABLES

- Chairman Haynes advised members to attend the upcoming public hearings concerning the proposed fare increases and service reductions and to make their position known by advocating on the record. Members are urged to let legislators know their feelings and that they are dependent on this service; comments can be submitted electronically at fareproposal@mbta.com and you can write your local politicians
- The AACT has a page on the Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organizations website at www.bostonmpo.org. Links can be found there for the following items: upcoming meetings, past meeting minutes, the Memorandum of Understanding between the MBTA and the AACT, and the AACT Bylaws, the AACT Brochure in accessible format, and ADA Regulations. There are also links to the MPO's *TRANSREPORT* newsletter, MBTA's Office for Transportation Access, and the AACT Coordinator
- Comments and questions concerning AACT should be directed to the Chairman
- Chairman Haynes recommends that AACT members needing information, or wanting to inquire about MBTA services, do so through the Customer Support Service Center at 617-222-3200 or the MBTA website at www.mbta.com/customer_support/feedback/
- Please sign in at all meetings
- Announcements are always welcome. Please be prepared to give as many details as possible: date, time, location, contact person, and phone number. A written notice would be appreciated

ATTENDANCE

Ben Haynes, Lillian Haynes, John Kane, Bill McCarthy, John Kneeland, Marilyn MacNab, Paul Barresi, Alice Fonseca, Crystal Jenkins, Cheryl Ravalli, Sears Cummings, Ellen Frith, Lloyd Caswell, Kathryn Piccard, John Cappuipico, and Karl Langner

MBTA Advisory Board

Paul Regan

MBTA Representatives

Michael Hulak, C. Joyce-Harrington, Frank Oglesby, Kathy Cox, Philip Balcom, Melissa Dullea, James Folk, Dorothy Winn, and Alex Murkinson

Vendor Representatives

Joint Venture of Thompson Transit Inc. and YCN – JoAnne Thompson and M. Claire Dipillo
Greater Lynn Senior Services, Inc. – Jackie Dunlop
Veterans Transportation LLC – Kevin MacDonald

Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization

Walter Bennett and Janie Guion

Chairman Haynes called the meeting to order at 1:03 PM

- He extended a welcome to everyone
- Members, friends and guests introduced themselves
- The June 24 meeting minutes were approved with one abstention

Chairman Haynes Update:

Mr. Haynes stated the following regarding the MBTA proposed service reduction and fare increase for both paratransit and fixed route services:

- He reported that an article in the Salem News acknowledges there are significant proposed service cuts for six North Shore communities.
- Millie Becker, the former AACT Chair who lives in the North service area, informed him that she is very upset.
- The news came as a surprise to him.
- The MBTA is federally mandated to provide paratransit services.
- He cited the Americans with Disabilities Act regarding “hardship conditions.”
- He stressed that the impact of the proposed service cuts and a fare increase will be widespread and serious, affecting both THE RIDE Program of regular users and fixed route services.

He then asked for questions and comments.

K. Piccard: I would hope that I am not the only person with additional information on the proposed fare increases. It is not just five communities in the North Service area that will be affected; there are 20 identified communities that could lose all services. There are 15 that could lose some or all paratransit services. There are alternatives that could be considered. Fares could go up and there could be service cuts. The 12-page booklet on the service cuts can be located at the MBTA website at www.mbta.com. It is possible that the legislature might step in and provide more relief, which might reduce the need for fare and service cuts. Another possibility –if bus routes are cut, that could mean paratransit service cuts in that bus route corridor. The ADA only requires that paratransit service be available within three quarters of a mile on either side of fixed bus routes and only on the days and hours the bus is running. All meetings are billed as workshops and there is one final hearing to make your comments. All the MBTA meetings are fully accessible to people with disabilities. The meetings are open to the public; I urge everyone to attend and speak for him-or herself. Submit your comments in writing to the MBTA by September 4. We of the disability community need to speak up for ourselves.

M. MacNab: These meetings are open to the public. I have personally informed people that they will be happening. Please attend

the workshops and make your comments. If you are too shy to speak, then please write your comments and mail them to the MBTA. The workshops will be held throughout the area. The MBTA representatives will be there to answer your questions and listen to your comments. There will be a public hearing after the workshops where testimony will be taken. I urge you to attend.

E. Frith: There are booklets on the table that discuss service changes. I encourage everyone to take a booklet on your way out. I do not see the fare increase in the new booklet for THE RIDE.

C. Langner: I took a fixed route to this meeting. That's my usual mode of travel. The public meeting locations are posted on buses, as is the notice on the proposed fare increases and service cuts.

M. MacNab: According to federal law, senior fares and transportation access fares are half the price of the regular fares.

Paul Regan, Executive Director, MBTA Advisory Board

The MBTA Advisory Board represents the 175 cities and towns that are served by the MBTA. The cities and towns pay almost 10 percent of the MBTA budget. The MBTA's main source of revenue is 20 percent of the state sales tax, which has not increased as originally projected. The MBTA is considering increasing fares and/or reducing transit service across all transit modes; the proposed fare increase would be above 19.5 percent. He stated that the Advisory Board is opposed to the fare increase.

He began with a detailed overview of the MBTA financial structure, providing a better understanding of the fiscal crisis that the MBTA is now facing. He addressed the current MBTA budget shortcomings. He urged members and friends to attend the MBTA public meetings, write to the MBTA, or call their state representatives and tell them their views on these potential fare increases or service cuts.

He then asked for questions.

K. Piccard: The proposed reductions in the service area will not only affect the people who want to travel socially, but also those who need to travel for basic needs. The reduction would leave a number of people trapped, virtually imprisoned, in their own homes with no way to travel to other areas. This will be socially devastating.

P. Regan: I worked with the late Bob Rizzo to help create a standard operating procedure and to facilitate smoother transfers from other Regional Transit Authority's to THE RIDE. People make decisions based on many factors. They decide where they live and work based on how they can move around. Users need dependability and reliability. The Advisory Board's position is that there should be no changes.

M. MacNab: I haven't heard the fear from users as others say they have. The attitude is that families will have to help out more.

P. Barresi: Is the Advisory Board a paid Board or are they volunteers like the AACT Board?

P. Regan: Members are all volunteers; membership on the MBTA Advisory Board consists of cities' and towns' chief elected officials or their designees. Not only are they not paid, they pay to get in. This year the combined income from assessments from these communities will be more than \$150 million. Mr. Regan is one of the Advisory Board's few paid staff.

D. Jackson: Why is the MBTA considering an increase in fares? These are hard times for people who are losing jobs.

P. Regan: The MBTA has a structural problem; it is not a question of a quick fix or just money; the structure of the MBTA is broken. The sources of revenue the MBTA receives are not sufficiently diversified, so when something happens, like the economy going soft, sales tax revenue declines. This affects the MBTA disproportionately more than any other state program. The sales tax revenue is the MBTA's largest single source of money. Fare increases are not going to go away until the legislature and the governor get serious and find a way to put the MBTA back on its feet.

E. Frith: Is there a way to democratically resolve this problem?

P. Regan: I would advise you to attend one of the 11 workshops and the hearing. Also write to the MBTA. The people who are making the

decisions will hear your comments. I know that they take this very seriously. I know that the comments are given to the MBTA Board of Directors. I have seen the package.

P. Barresi: If you were to run for political office what would you suggest in the interest of change?

P. Regan: My group and others tried to influence the process by talking to the chairs of the Transportation Committee, the Senate, and the House leadership. In retrospect that may have been a mistake. I think that more and more state representatives on the North Shore, the Boston delegation and some folks in the Route 128 area are having more meetings with their constituents. These meetings are addressing two issues: (1) the ongoing nuts-and-bolts of the problems with the MBTA and (2) they are having conversations about the overall MBTA financing structure and how service can be improved when they are lurching from crisis to crisis. The smart thing to do is to talk with your local state representatives. Make sure they understand. Many don't. Oftentimes they were elected because of their interest in other issues. It is incumbent on all of us who are interested in transportation to bring these issues to the rank and file members of the legislature. It's in their interest to pay attention to transit issues if they have an active group of constituents involved in this issue.

Chairman Haynes: Except for commuter rail, all forms of fixed route transportation require that paratransit services be provided within a corridor $\frac{3}{4}$ quarters of a mile on either side to accommodate persons who cannot use those fixed route services. In 1991, as a member of the committee who worked with the MBTA, with the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission, the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind, the Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and all state agencies to deal with paratransit services, the MBTA decided to expand the corridor to a mile and a half so that a greater area could be served for persons with disabilities. The MBTA agreed to serve communities that did not have MBTA fixed route services such as Framingham and Natick. Even before the Americans with Disabilities Act, the MBTA had agreed to serve 76 cities and towns with paratransit service.

John Kane, AACT Vice-Chair and Monitor for Fixed Route Services

Mr. Kane gave a brief report on the Route 128 station stop. He commented on the following:

- The lack of proper signage
- A dysfunctional audio announcement system

C. Joyce-Harrington: There is no signage for THE RIDE at the Route 128 stop. The signage is for MBTA commuters' pickup and drop-off (kiss-and-ride).

Kathy Cox, Manager for MBTA System-Wide Accessibility (SWA)

Ms. Cox distributed her report (attached) and gave an update on some questions raised by a few AACT members at last month's meeting:

- *Could the MBTA use the bus shelters to advertise the bus stop law?* Advertising of the bus stop law in bus shelters is a possibility; the funding will be a deciding factor.
- *Could the Route 34E buses from Forest Hills announce when they are not going to stop at the Dedham Mall?* I passed along your suggestion to Bus Operations. They say that this information could be programmed into the automated announcements.
- *Is it true that the transit master on the remaining, older Nova lift-equipped –buses fail more often than on the newer, ramped buses?* No. The “transit masters” on the Nova buses do not have a higher failure rate than those on the newer buses.

She then asked for questions.

E. Frith: Can you explain the “transit master button”? I have had operators say they don't know what it is.

K. Cox: The transit master boxes have two buttons. All operators are aware of the buttons. One button is used to record bus stops blocked

by illegally parked vehicles; the other button is to identify bus stops that are too short; or blocked with street furniture (benches, newspaper boxes and other items).

L. Caswell: I was instrumental in calling in a parked vehicle for a bus operator that was illegally blocking the bus stop. I called the police to have a vehicle removed from the bus stop.

K. Cox: Thank you for doing that. All operators have radios so there should not have been a problem unless the radio was malfunctioning.

Frank Oglesby, Deputy Director of Customer Service and the Interim Manager for the Office for Transportation Access (OTA) THE RIDE (reports attached)

Mr. Oglesby reported the following:

- Veteran Transportation LLC provided THE RIDE shuttle service during the annual Fourth of July concert on the Esplanade. The coordinator was Ms. Carol Frazier. Kudos for another great job.
- The MBTA will be utilizing federal stimulus money received to purchase 108 lift-equipped vans. They are scheduled for delivery in September 2009
- “Your Service, Your Choice,” the booklet regarding the MBTA workshops is currently available and also will be distributed at the workshops. The Braille version will be made available, as will foreign language versions.

He then asked for questions.

Chairman Haynes: Is the information regarding the workshops and this booklet available by way of audio CD or MP3 player?

C. Joyce-Harrington: We were able to get an advance copy and we have large print available. The Braille version is in process. I will check on the audio versions. The Budget office is producing this document.

Chairman Haynes: According to the ADA you do not have to stockpile alternative accessible copies of materials but you must have the means of producing the alternative formats when requested. My

work with the MBTA as part of the AACT Committee and THE RIDE Program is no secret. I have been receiving material on audiocassette, even though I have requested that material for me be put on audio CD. I have not received it. I would like my information in a timely fashion. When you pass out information in print please be prepared to give me the accessible audio format.

K. Piccard: The contracts the MBTA have with THE RIDE vendors –aren't they obliged to continue service to areas that will have fixed route service cuts?

Chairman Haynes: Once the MBTA scales back fixed route transportation in an area it can then scale back THE RIDE to that same area by conforming to the three quarter mile service area. If the MBTA eliminates bus or train service in an area, the MBTA is no longer obligated to operate THE RIDE in that area.

C. Joyce-Harrington: The contracts would need to be amended.

Chairman Haynes: According to the ADA service can be reduced or cut based on "hardship" if it can be substantiated to the Federal Transit Administration.

C. Joyce-Harrington: Yes, we would have to resubmit a new ADA plan to the Federal Transit Administration.

Open Discussion

K. Piccard: I have seen a pattern emerge when you call to book trips for a same-day request. Oftentimes the person will tell you they can't take your reservation. I have found that the staff at Veterans is happy to take your request. Staff at the other vendors pretend to take the information, and then when you call to confirm your same-day request you find there is no record. I would like the vendors to remind their evening staff about the policy of the same-day trip requests.

Chairman Haynes: It is not only a policy but also a contractual obligation; I would like for all vendors to give a response to your concerns.

K. MacDonald: At Veterans we are in compliance. It is our policy to take all same-day requests. If call takers are freelancing, we have call

recordings to let us know if what takes place on a call is inappropriate. I would encourage you to let us know. It is our policy to take same-day requests. When reservations are closed, the calls go to dispatch. The minimum response would be that we would call you back in an hour. It is our policy to enter same-day trip requests.

J. Thompson: I would agree with Veterans; that is also our policy. At Joint Venture, calls for THE RIDE made after 4 PM are booked to a wait list and treated as same-day requests.

Chairman Haynes: To VTS, Joint Venture, and GLSS –have any of you timed your automated message before it repeats itself?

J. Thompson: The message is on a loop and is monitored and reviewed by the supervisors for dispatch and reservations.

K. MacDonald: A lot of thought has gone into the design of the new phone system. We are addressing the issue of return calls for the same problem.

K. Piccard: Does your contract stipulate what percent of calls must be answered in a certain number of minutes?

K. MacDonald: The average is 2 1/2 minutes or less from the time the message picks up until a live person answers the call.

L. Caswell: I recently received very good customer service from the MBTA. Operator staff phoned ahead my arrival time at each station as I traveled from the Blue Line at Wonderland, to the Orange Line, to the Red Line at Alewife Station.

Announcements: Governor Patrick will be in Roxbury for a Town Hall meeting at the Reggie Lewis Center on Thursday, July 23 from 6 to 8 PM to talk to the community about their important issues.

Meeting was adjourned at 3:00 PM.

