

Draft Memorandum for the Record Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization Transit Working Group Coffee Chat Summary: MBTA Engagement

June 13, 2022, Meeting

4:00 PM–5:00 PM, Zoom Video Conferencing Platform. Recording available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SxaRKMhLKY0>

Introductions

Sandy Johnston (Central Transportation Planning Staff [CTPS]) invited attendees to introduce themselves using the Zoom chat function.

Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) Community Engagement Team

Victoria Ireton, Deputy Director of Community Engagement with the MBTA, discussed the purpose and activities of the MBTA's Community Engagement Team. The Community Engagement Team helps to shape an inclusive relationship between the MBTA and its riders and encourages the public to provide input on MBTA projects and decisions. The team's goal is to shift from project-based outreach to relationship-based outreach by increasing language access and engagement opportunities.

Community outreach has been pursued in several different ways, including publishing notices in community newsletters, establishing a phone line,¹ creating flyers in several languages to hand out at public meetings, sharing information with municipalities from the MBTA's Human Resources department on job openings, and holding engagement-specific meetings in communities across the region.

The Community Engagement Team has created translated versions of the MBTA's standard Zoom slides in English, Chinese, and Spanish, and they have started providing translators during public meetings to encourage engagement. The team is also supporting engagement for Bus Network Redesign, participating in Mayor Wu's coffee hours, meeting with various community organizations and civic councils, and coordinating days of service in several communities including a community garden clean-up in Lynn.

¹ MBTA Community Engagement Team Phone Line: 617-222-3030

V. Ireton provided contact information for the MBTA's Community Engagement Team² and Customer Support.³

Discussion

S. Johnston posed four questions to help frame the discussion:

1. How can we act as “force multipliers” for each other in engagement and outreach?
2. How do you practice ongoing engagement and relationship building? What strategies have you found helpful or less so?
3. How do you measure engagement outcomes?
4. How can engagement prove its value to agency management, elected officials, planners, and the public?

The following is a largely paraphrased summary of the main points that attendees contributed to the conversation.

Judy Shanley (Easterseals): How do you know if community engagement is working?

Victoria Ireton (MBTA): Data is important, but you cannot force people to disclose information. We are considering incorporating an optional exit poll in meetings to assess how people are hearing about meetings and asking them to disclose demographic information. We recently had four participants in a Spanish-language breakout room that we had not seen before, which may be proof that the engagement is working.

Adi Nochur (Metropolitan Area Planning Council [MAPC]): How many staff do you have to support these efforts? Do you have a dedicated community engagement team or are you able to pull in other staff from across the agency?

Victoria Ireton (MBTA): The Community Engagement Team is still small, with just me and three liaisons generally attending community meetings. The MBTA has consultants to provide project-specific outreach, with support varying by project. We are hoping to have a bigger staff in the future.

² MBTA Community Engagement Team contact information: publicengagement@mbta.com

³ MBTA Customer Support contact information: www.mbta.com/customer-support or 617-222-3200

Lisa Weber (Human Services Transportation Office [HST]): How do you measure the role of community engagement when it comes to ridership trends in the short and long term?

Sandy Johnston (CTPS): I am interested in the assumption that better engagement and more outreach lead to projects that run more smoothly. Is your team thinking about ways to establish causation and to understand if what we are doing is working?

Victoria Ireton (MBTA): Utilizing multiple outreach mechanisms to reach people both inside and outside of MBTA facilities can help address ridership issues. Doing everything right may not make projects run smoothly, but compromising, listening to people's concerns, and explaining project constraints can help.

Susan Barrett (Town of Lexington): We have seen an improvement in the amount and quality of the MBTA's communication. How can we build stronger partnerships and get information to people in the outer core?

Victoria Ireton (MBTA): We have a listserv of all town and city clerks in the MBTA's service area that we use to communicate public meetings and updates. We are exploring advertising in newspapers, but this can be expensive. We hope to start meeting with various groups and organize outreach meetings in the outer core.

Matthew Dezii (Allston-Brighton Health Collaborative): What barriers do you face when expanding engagement?

Victoria Ireton (MBTA): One of the barriers is time. There is limited time to meet during the evening when people are free. More staff would help but it is important not to grow too fast and be unable to support existing engagement.

Collette Aufranc (Wellesley Select Board): Are you planning to integrate generalized community engagement with project specific outreach, or is it better to keep the two separated?

Victoria Ireton (MBTA): It depends on the circumstances. For example, there is an ongoing bridge project that is specific to one neighborhood, so I have helped to disseminate information but may not be able to help with the construction details. For projects with larger implications, such as the Blue Hills bus line near Mattapan Station, it is important to do project-based outreach and coordinate with the two communities.

Lisa Weber (HST): I am thrilled that the MBTA is increasing engagement. I have learned that what people think is true is just as important as what is actually true. If the goal of

the MBTA is to increase ridership, how do we use engagement to reach people where they are and address their perception concerns whether they are true or not?

Victoria Ireton (MBTA): A big problem is service reliability. We are trying to communicate that construction is an investment for future improvements. I deal with those conversations by humanizing the problem, sympathizing with people, and communicating solutions. Building trust with community leaders can help change the narrative through word-of-mouth.

Judy Shanley (Easterseals): The Health and Human Services administration has resources on inclusive planning. How do you engage with people with disabilities and older adults?

Victoria Ireton (MBTA): We have engaged with people with disabilities and seniors through the MBTA's system-wide accessibility office. We have had meetings with the Massachusetts Senior Action Council and with senior centers. We email disability commissions to engage with their connections as well.

Collette Aufranc (Wellesley Select Board): If we have suggestions on the best venues for outreach in our own communities should we send them to publicengagement@mbta.com?

Victoria Ireton (MBTA): Yes, especially considering our goal is to move to hybrid meetings in the future.

Sandy Johnston (CTPS): Does anyone have experience with practicing engagement and relationship-building?

Collette Aufranc (Wellesley Select Board): I have been working on a micro-transit service in our town and I am finding that people are not coming to public meetings. Now I try talking to people on the street about the service and hand out business cards to people in a more grassroots way. People seem more disengaged, and this process is difficult.

Kristine Gorman (Jacobs): How do you interact with other offices at the MBTA? What are your thoughts on using LinkedIn and other social media to engage with the public?

Victoria Ireton (MBTA): I interact with the Transformation Team, and we share their public meetings with our contacts. We are active on LinkedIn and Twitter and have a social team to push out notifications on social media. LinkedIn is a good platform for the Transformation Team's projects. Facebook is helpful to engage with certain age groups

in their late twenties and above, and TikTok is helpful to engage with younger groups. We get a lot of feedback from riders on Twitter.

Maria Foster (Brookline Council on Aging): I have found that disseminating information at all types of meetings and events has been helpful, whether they are directly related to transportation or not. I appreciate the MBTA's recent outreach, and we have used their fliers to engage with senior centers.

Lisa Weber (HST): Could you talk about ways the MBTA is taking advantage of external events such as concerts to promote the T?

Victoria Ireton (MBTA): For the US Open there was a push to advertise using the T.

Jennifer Ross (MBTA): We put out a monthly newsletter on system-wide accessibility and we have been trying to amplify different agencies through spotlights. We are focused on older adults and people with disabilities and would be happy to do a spotlight on anyone's agency or circulate meeting information. I gathered contact information for disability services at local colleges and we will be coordinating transportation services with these offices before back-to-school season. The MBTA will have a table at ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) Day on July 26.

Sandy Johnston (CTPS): I wanted to follow up on something Lisa mentioned about opportunities for engagement in moments of crisis and disruption. What opportunities do you see to use engagement during these moments of disruption?

Jennifer Ross (MTBA): We are working on the topic of safety at the MBTA. Talking about these issues and letting people know what we are doing would help people feel cared for.

Franny Osman (Town of Acton): Jennifer, what is your role at the MBTA?

Jennifer Ross (MTBA): I am the Customer Engagement Coordinator at the Department of System-Wide Accessibility. We are charged with ensuring that the MBTA is accessible to older adults and those with disabilities.

Franny Osman (Town of Acton): I am on the Acton Commission on Disabilities and am the Chair of the Transportation Advisory Committee and the Lowell Regional Transit Authority board. I want to piggyback on Susan's question about engagement with outer core communities. It is confusing that towns tend to communicate more with their regional transportation authorities (RTA) than with the MBTA. There are also gaps with access to long-distance travel.

Victoria Ireton (MBTA): The goal is to engage with the MBTA's entire service area including commuter rail service, and we are slowly building outwards to engage with outer core communities.

Franny Osman (Town of Acton): There are individuals who are eligible for The Ride, but it is difficult for them to get to areas served by The Ride, whether they have disabilities or not.

Jennifer Ross (MBTA): Everyone in Massachusetts is a potential stakeholder for the MBTA. I would like to work closer with RTAs to make connections seamless and improve outreach.

Sandy Johnston (CTPS): It can be difficult to be on the edge of multiple service providers and individuals can have trouble navigating these options.

Adi Nochur (MAPC): How have you been working with transportation advocacy organizations?

Victoria Ireton (MBTA): We work closely with them and have a policy development working group consisting of many people from advocacy organizations. They bring ideas for improvements and outreach based on feedback from their communities. I am still developing these connections, and Transit Matters has been a great resource.

Conclusion and Upcoming Events

S. Johnston thanked everyone for their participation and reported that there are no upcoming coffee chats planned but encouraged attendees to reach out with ideas on future topics. The next quarterly Transit Working Group meeting is likely to be held in August or September 2022.

Attendance

Attendee	Affiliation
Maria Foster	Brookline Council on Aging
Stephanie Cronin	Middlesex 3 Transportation Management Association (TMA)
Jennifer Ross	Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA)
Lisa Weber	Human Services Transportation Office (HST)
Tiffany Garcia	Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA)
Victoria Ireton	Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA)
Antron Watson	American Association of Retired Persons (AARP)
Adi Nochur	Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC)
Kristine Gorman	Jacobs
Judy Shanley	Easterseals National Center for Mobility Management
Kate White	City of Somerville
Franny Osman	Town of Acton
Caleb Kluchman	Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC)
Colette Aufranc	Wellesley Select Board
Susan Barrett	Town of Lexington
Matthew Dezii	Allston-Brighton Health Collaborative
Sheila Page	Town of Lexington
Zachary Agush	Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA)
Lauren O'Connell	Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP)
Sherry Welsh	rabbitcares
Perry Grossman	Brookline Bike Advisory Committee
Kira D.	N/A

MPO Staff/Central Transportation Planning Staff

Stella Jordan
Sandy Johnston
Logan Casey
Sean Rourke
Jonathan Belcher
Meghan O'Connor
Uday Schultz

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Title VI Specialist

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10 Park Plaza, Suite 2150
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civilrights@ctps.org

By Telephone:

857.702.3700 (voice)

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For more information, including numbers for Spanish speakers, visit <https://www.mass.gov/massrelay>.