



April 18, 2023

Phillip Eng, General Manager  
Jillian Linnell, Senior Director, Capital Program Planning  
Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority  
10 Park Plaza, Suite 3910  
Boston, MA 02116

cc: Governor Maura Healey, Lt. Governor Kim Driscoll, Undersecretary Monica Tibbets-Nutt, Senator Cynthia Creem, Representative Kay Khan, Representative John Lawn, Representative Ruth Balsler, Mayor Ruthanne Fuller

RE: Comments on MBTA 2024-2028 Capital Investment Plan

Dear General Manager Eng and Senior Director Linnell:

We, the undersigned Newton City Councilors, welcome the opportunity to provide comments on the MBTA FY 2024-2028 Capital Investment Plan.

We recognize the effort required to develop the CIP and appreciate the time dedicated to making the CIP comprehensive and program oriented. We also recognize the need to set priorities. But most importantly, we recognize that a well-functioning MBTA is necessary for our city and the region to meet **critical goals including housing, transportation, climate action, and economic development**. We look to the MBTA and the Healey/Driscoll Administration as partners in supporting these goals.

As a City Council, we are looking to the CIP to ensure sufficient funding and project priority to support the needs of the many people who live, work, study and visit in Newton and who depend on the MBTA for transit, many more who would take public transportation if they felt they could depend on the T. **We need public transportation that is dependable but also safe, accessible, frequent, and reasonably convenient to where people need to travel.**

We are also looking to the CIP for projects that will support Newton as it helps to address the region's ongoing housing crisis and build housing that more climate friendly. The City Council is currently undertaking a two-pronged zoning redesign process, revising zoning in our village centers to enable more housing and establishing zoning to comply with the Housing Choice Law. **But without a well-functioning MBTA, we hear significant constituent concerns about traffic. This significantly hampers our efforts to build more housing, thus impacting our ability to increase affordability in Newton and address a major source of GHG in the region.**

Mirroring Mayor Fuller (date of letter), our top priority is the long overdue reconstruction of the three Newton Commuter rail stations. This project will make the stations in Newton finally accessible, an important goal for the MBTA and the City of Newton. The three Newton Commuter Rail stations (Auburndale, West Newton and Newtonville) have been inaccessible since before the ADA was signed more than 30 years ago. The stations are decrepit, with long, steep stairs, open to the

elements, and without a single elevator. In addition, these stations only have a platform on the inbound tracks, requiring outbound trains to switch tracks to serve Newton. This configuration not only reduces service in Newton, but it also slows all Worcester line service in both directions, and limits any future expansion of rail service along this very important corridor. This improvement in service will be especially important during the many years of reconstruction of the Mass Pike at the Allston interchange by providing transit service that could reduce vehicles on the Mass Pike. This year's CIP lists the design of the three stations as fully funded, and hopefully this will be completed this year. We strongly urge the MBTA to seek to fully fund the reconstruction of these stations, applying for Federal grant money in the next round and looking to the legislature to increase capital funding. **Full reconstruction of the Newton commuter rail stations should be a priority for the region as having these stations fully functional provides the best chance of removing vehicles from the Mass Pike and other nearby roadways, benefiting everyone who travels along this corridor.**

We also fully support the projects upgrading service, accessibility, and reliability of the Green Line. **Specifically, we were pleased to see full funding the Newton Highland Accessibility Project.** Thank you. This is an important station as we have many residents with physical disabilities living close to this station. We hope that the MBTA will quickly move forward with accessibility improvements at the remaining non-accessible Green Line stations along the D line (Waban, Eliot, Chestnut Hill, and Beaconsfield).

Newton residents, City Councilors and other city officials have been engaged in the ongoing Better Bus project efforts. **The vision of a bus network with more frequent, reliable bus service that better connects the region, and provides expanded hours of operation is laudable, and would likely greatly increase the number of people who would use the bus. At the same time, we are concerned about the reduction in bus service, most especially the Express Bus Service.** The Express Buses are critical to reducing vehicle traffic on the Mass Pike and as a supplement to our substandard commuter rail service. We recognize the MBTA faces issues related to driver availability, buses, and facilities to house the buses. We support Mayor Fuller's offer to "work with the MBTA and other communities west of Boston on facility and service planning as a way to support better public transportation options."

Lastly, we remind the MBTA that we can no longer afford to put off addressing climate change and reducing the health impacts on communities from transit operations, especially environmental justice communities. **We agree with Transit Matters on the importance of investing in electrifying commuter rail operations and buses.**

We also agree with Mayor Fuller that **funding** is the biggest obstacle to the MBTA improving its service. The funding level in this CIP is insufficient to deliver the dependable, safe, accessible, frequent, and convenient public transportation the region needs. **The MBTA has been historically underfunded and we call on the MBTA, the Healey/Driscoll Administration and the General Court to increase funding to allow increased investment. Massachusetts needs a world class transit system.**

Sincerely,

Susan Albright, President  
Rick Lipof, Vice President  
R. Lisle Baker, President Emeritus

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