

On The Move (OTM)
The Greater Boston Transportation Justice Coalition
367 Washington St; Dorchester, MA 02124
www.bostononthemove.org

TO: Board of Directors of the MBTA

FROM: On the Move (OTM)

DATE: April 4, 2012

Re: MBTA Proposals to Raise Fares and Cut Service, "Scenario 3"

Thank you for the opportunity comment today. On the Move (OTM) is a coalition of nine community based organizations in greater Boston that came together in 2002 to advocate for transportation justice. Our core constituency is Greater Boston's low income communities and communities of color, with a focus on regional transportation and smart growth. We want to express our opposition to the MBTA's proposal and urge the board not to approve it.

Prior to and since the MBTA released its two proposals to close the FY 13 budget gap, OTM coalition members and partners have worked effectively at both the grassroots and policy levels to offer community and rider-driven proposals as healthier, more sustainable, and more responsible alternatives. We have seen and been moved by the testimony of thousands of riders who expressed their deep opposition to the T's proposals, and we have been grateful for the opportunity to engage in the public process and are inspired by those who took action. Working with our member groups and our core constituency, we have proposed ideas that raise critical short-term revenues for fiscal 2013. From the Fast Five superheroes headquartered at the T Riders Union, to the drafting of pioneering bills like the Transportation Economic Development and Recovery Act (TEDRA) by MASSPIRG and others, to the active transportation organizing of members including LivableStreets Alliance, Greater Four Corners Action Coalition and Bikes Not Bombs, On The Move has offered a community-based point of view that challenges our elected officials and holds the MBTA board and administration accountable to think outside the box.

Our advocacy has not gone unnoticed. Just last week the General Manager wrote a letter to the Fast Five, explaining why the Board could not implement their super proposals, but also offering comments in favor of the UPass program and a renegotiation of a future MBCR contract. While OTM appreciates the letter, the coalition members urge the MBTA board and administration to go further in their efforts. For example, the letter ignored the interest rate swaps and only briefly mentioned the idea that MassPort take over Blue and Silver Bus service. OTM feels that the MBTA should take responsibility for negotiating the MBCR contract and failing to hold the company accountable to tax payers. The current proposal still goes too far in balancing the MBTA's books on the backs of riders, and that is why On the Move is urging the MBTA Board to vote NO on Scenario 3. The MBTA proposal would implement bad public policy that continues to undermine and burden communities and riders.

Our goal is an environmentally sustainable and socially just transportation system that is integral to the preservation and creation of livable communities. OTM Coalition Members include T Riders Union of ACE; Bikes Not Bombs; LivableStreets Alliance; MASSPIRG; The Greater Four Corners Action Coalition; Sierra Club; Washington Street Corridor Coalition; Action For Regional Equity; and the Arborway Committee.

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A 23% percent fare increase will ultimately decrease ridership, when increasing ridership is a goal that the MBTA strives for each and every year. This fare increase falls especially hard on disabled riders, who will see a 100% increase in the cost of the RIDE and the implementation of a premium service area – effectively the same as a cut in service. While Scenario 3 relies on a one-time infusion of cash from the legislature, service cuts are still on the table. Without that cash infusion, more service cuts might be necessary. But even the service cuts proposed in scenario 3 will eliminate crucial service for seniors and youth that consider the T a “lifeline.” It is important to understand that any service cuts could potentially lead to job loss and cutbacks, another serious setback for working families during our continued economic downturn.

Balancing the MBTA Books on the Backs of Riders without sharing the costs across the board with businesses, non-profit institutions, and drivers is unacceptable and speaks to the issue of transportation equity for transit-dependent riders. The permanence of a fare hike is unreasonable, especially when other funding options and revenue sources are speculative and will need legislative cooperation.

Our entire statewide public transportation system relies on unreliable funding sources and must be fixed. The MBTA and Regional Transit Authorities share the burden of underfunding while the legislature has sat idly by and taken little or no responsibility, offering band-aid solutions that have contributed to the current deficit. Some of these issues include the following:

- Maintenance Backlog-- The current overall maintenance backlog is around 1.3 billion dollars. The T should be spending at least \$750 million annually to fix the system and buy new equipment, but it can only afford \$580 million per year. This is an issue of rider and worker safety that should concern all of us.
- Health Care Costs jumped 73% rather than zero percent. And while healthcare costs skyrocketed, the legislature delayed putting T employees in the state's health plan, which would have saved about \$30 million per year.
- Fuel Costs jumped 122% while the legislature estimated only a 22% increase.
- Unsustainable debt -- This year nearly 30% of its total budget, or \$444 million, will be dedicated to paying down that debt. That's as much money as the T generates in fares from riders!
- Big Dig Debt is burdening the MBTA and crushing the riders, resulting in a regressive and backwards way to fund public transit; 33 cents on every dollar goes to servicing debt payments.
- The Overall state budget for FY2013 is 35 BILLION DOLLARS! Just .5% (NOT EVEN 1%) could address the short-term MBTA funding crisis.

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- Statewide public transportation service cuts and fare increases – Across the state, the regional transportation authorities are being forced to raise fares and cut service. The RTAs provide public transportation to some of the most transit-dependent riders in the commonwealth.

For all of these reasons, On the Move urges the MBTA Board to vote NO on Scenario 3. Fare hikes and service cuts cannot be the only options considered as a short-term solution because they are not a solution.

By the Secretary's own estimations, implementing this so-called solution will leave us with \$140 million in debt as early as next fiscal year.

On the Move proposes that the Board instead adopt the following solutions:

1. Re-evaluate and implement the FAST FIVE solutions!
2. Use state funding to stave off fare hikes and service cuts and then work with our elected decision-makers to create a long-term, comprehensive and statewide transportation funding system that is regionally and economically equitable.
3. Meet with riders, advocacy groups from On The Move and state elected officials to address both short-term and long-term scenario equity impacts on youth, seniors, and transit-dependent communities for FY2013 and beyond.
4. Vote NO to Scenario 3!

T Riders, the youth, seniors, persons with disabilities, workers, commuters, students, and many more are the engine that fuels the MBTA and the commonwealth and we need you to stand with us. Thank you for the opportunity to submit these comments on behalf of OTM constituencies. We look forward to working with you on making our transportation system safe, affordable, and first class for all MBTA riders.

Sincerely,

Kevin Raymond Odell

On The Move Coalition Coordinator

kevin@bostononthemove.org

@otmboston (twitter handle)

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