



495/METROWEST

PARTNERSHIP

Leaders for Regional Prosperity

January 30, 2017

Chairman Joseph Aiello & Board members
Fiscal Control and Oversight Board
Massachusetts Department of Transportation
Ten Park Plaza, Suite 3910
Boston, MA 02116
c/o Owen Kane, MassDOT Senior Counsel at okane@mbta.com

Re: Potential Policy on Pilot Transit Services

Dear Chairman Aiello and Members of the Board:

Thank you very much for your leadership and hard work on behalf of the Commonwealth and improving our transportation system. As a supporter of the legislation establishing the Fiscal Control and Oversight Board, we appreciate your time and service in this important role.

The 495/MetroWest Partnership is a non-profit advocacy organization serving thirty-five communities, over half a million residents, and an employment base of over \$22.5 billion per year. The Partnership seeks to address regional needs through public-private collaboration by working to enhance economic vitality, improve quality of life and sustain natural resources. The Partnership focuses on helping alleviate regional constraints and limitations, and since our founding in 2003, we have advocated for additional transit services and state infrastructure investment in our region, whether through the MBTA Commuter Rail, Regional Transit Authorities or Transportation Management Associations. Some highlights of our transportation initiatives include founding the MetroWest Regional Transit Authority, working with MassDOT on improvements to interchanges such as I-495/I-90, supporting commuter rail services on three lines - Fitchburg, Franklin, and Framingham/Worcester, participating in MassDOT's Project Selection Stakeholder Advisory Committee, and collaborating with the MBTA on commuter rail scheduling.

As a result, the Partnership has followed and engaged in the discussion on potential commuter rail service to Foxborough since the 2010 MBTA study on the service's feasibility, while also providing regional perspective and outreach on the subsequent study conducted by VHB. We provided background on these issues to Foxborough's Board of Selectmen during the consideration of potential service in the fall of 2014, and testified at their meeting last week in support of their working with MassDOT and the MBTA on potentially expanding their commuter rail service.

Accordingly, we have been following the Board's discussions of potential transit service pilots, and are providing this commentary based on our experiences working with municipal governments, employers, and other key constituencies on transit issues; our work on the potential Foxborough expansion for the last seven years; and our review of the presentation at your Board meeting in November. We applaud the Board's willingness to consider such pilots

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considering the potential benefits for the economy, environment, and our transportation system, and welcome your commitment to utilizing objective and transparent criteria in such pilot services' establishment and evaluation.

We feel the MassDOT staff proposal from November was admirably comprehensive and thoughtful, particularly given the range of potential pilots under consideration - not just in Foxborough, but also in Bourne, GE/Riverworks in Lynn, ferry service, and overnight bus service in Boston. The suggestion that such potential expansions are first considered as pilots seems appropriate given financial constraints, as does setting criteria for implementing such services, with a framework for evaluating results before making new services permanent. Having a municipal sponsor reinforces the importance of host community partnerships with the MBTA, and the proposed criteria of ridership, operating cost effectiveness, operational impacts, and capital costs are all very relevant to such an evaluation.

Potential other elements included a projection of ridership, use of a metric to track ridership growth, and requiring that the pilot demonstrate a ridership increase to approximate similar services. While we realize such elements are only in the discussion phase, they should be implemented in collaboration with the municipal partner, since most communities lack the expertise and resources to estimate such projections. Short term pilots should have achievable rates of growth, given the long term nature of building transit ridership, largely through a commitment to stability of service.

Obviously, the potential of private sponsors for such pilots would be hugely valuable to not only the financial elements of the service, but also their long term ridership success. Such public/private collaborations are innovative and hold great promise, but given the limited precedents in Massachusetts transit, P3's need to be developed, managed, and evaluated appropriately. Similar to ridership projections and growth, operating subsidies must be developed and maintained in a realistic fashion and reflect the potential value of long term collaboration and growth.

The proposal also refers to the possibility of incorporating assessments of economic development, reductions of GHG emissions, and provision of service to underserved populations. These measures are absolutely critical to incorporate into the framework for pilot services, and there are clear precedents to use in other transportation planning processes, such as the development of the CIP.

Beyond these elements reflected in the staff proposal, there are some additional factors we'd like to suggest be incorporated into this process -

- **Strengthening existing services:** Whenever possible, opportunities to strengthen existing services should be taken and the evaluation should be conducted comprehensively. In the case of the potential Foxborough service, it would strengthen ridership on the MBTA's underutilized Fairmount Line, address parking constraints at surrounding stations, and the resulting schedule could be developed in coordination with the Franklin line to strengthen their services as well.
- **Improving utilization of existing infrastructure:** Likewise, the potential Foxborough service would utilize the Framingham Secondary Line that MassDOT purchased in 2015 and has been improving during the last two years of the CIP.
- **Expanding ridership options:** Whenever possible, such pilots should address unmet needs or underserved areas, and in a versatile fashion; for instance, the potential Foxborough

service could improve commuting options both into Boston for employment and for those commuting to the Foxborough area for work.

- **Terms of pilots:** Such pilot services should have a clear term of operation, reflecting appropriate timing for the services based on MassDOT recommendations, rather than one set approach to every pilot.
- **Role of municipal sponsor:** Given the importance of a municipal sponsor to such pilots, they should be granted a formal role in the evaluation of such services and an opportunity to provide input. In the case of Foxborough's potential service, the town asked to convene a Pilot Program Oversight Committee to conduct local outreach and evaluation, as well as oversight meetings in the community.
- **Structure of Pilots' Evaluations:** Each pilot should have a tailored evaluative process, not only one with a formal role for the municipal sponsor, but also one for any private sponsor and other key stakeholders involved in the pilot, such as regional planning agencies, other regional entities with relevant expertise, interested employers, and appropriate bodies such as the MBTA Advisory Board. To the degree possible, pilot evaluations should be conducted in an ongoing and transparent fashion, so the public, users, municipal partners, and any private partners can be aware of performance and any ongoing concerns. Such an approach would allow ongoing attention from interested stakeholders, rather than their being notified at the end of the pilot that such issues were impacting the results.

We hope that this commentary is helpful; the Partnership feels that the Board's commitment to an objective, transparent, and clear policy on pilot transit services is vitally important. While we recognize that the Board needs to act prudently on any potential expansion of transit service, particularly given the financial implications, we also know the importance of thoughtful improvements to our transportation system when opportunities arise for public/private investments that result in strengthening our system, improving utilization of infrastructure, addressing needs, and expanding economic activity.

If there are any questions or concerns on this commentary, the Partnership's transportation initiatives, or our work with Foxborough relative to potential expansion of their rail service, please do not hesitate to contact our office.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our concerns, and again, thank you for your service to the Commonwealth on the Fiscal Control and Oversight Board.

Sincerely,



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