

MEETING NOTES  
PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE (PTAC)  
THURSDAY, MARCH 31, 2016 @ 7:00 PM  
BROOKLINE TOWN HALL, ROOM 408  
333 WASHINGTON STREET, BROOKLINE MA 02446

PTAC members present: Abby Swaine (Chair), Deborah Dong, Linda Jason, Sherry Flashman, and Jane Gould (note taker), Scott Englander (Transportation Board liaison)  
Also present: Shalini Sen (MBTA), Frank Caro & Guus Driessen

7:00 CALL MEETING TO ORDER, APPOINT NOTE TAKER AND APPROVE MINUTES FROM FEBRUARY 22, 2016 MEETING.

Minutes approved.

7:05 TAKE PUBLIC COMMENT ON ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA.

Frank Caro, with Brookline CAN, spoke about the benefits of starting a new pedestrian/walking committee. An item to establish the walking committee will be on the agenda for the April meeting of the Transportation Board. He imagined this group would be structured like the bicycle advisory committee.

Frank said he recognized the committee overlap with PTAC, since transit trips begin and end with walking. Scott Englander noted Frank served on the Complete Streets Committee and many of the issues had been identified. PTAC members and Frank discussed public transportation overlaps that might be of priority: these include pedestrian crossings and routes to transit, shoveling platforms and crosswalks at the T, parking in curb cuts, bikes on sidewalks, right turn priority, and street tree incursion on sidewalks. There was mention of the need to involve public works.

7:10 **I-90 ALLSTON INTERCHANGE IMPROVEMENT PROJECT**: DISCUSS RECENT TASK FORCE MEETINGS AND CONVERSATIONS WITH TASK FORCE MEMBERS; BROOKLINE REPRESENTATION TO TASK FORCE; NEXT STEPS.

Guus Driessen, from the Transportation Board, has been attending the Task Force meetings for the Allston Project, and will occupy Brookline's seat on the TF once MassDOT accedes to Brookline's request. He updated the board on a site trip he took with MassDOT on March 30. There are four access levels they will model for traffic impacts: these are (1) no build (2) ped/bike (3) bus only and (4) all vehicles. There are three possible access points to model: Malvern St., Babcock Street, and Agganis Way.

Guus detailed the limitations at each of these sites. Boston University owns some of the property and is not currently supporting the use of Agganis Way. Babcock Street may not be able to accommodate the additional traffic, estimated at 17,000 and 20,000 vehicles p/day if all-vehicle access is allowed. Malvern Street is limited by a 24 foot curb-to-curb width. A bus-only access road is part of the planning process.

Yet none of the plans currently incorporate a transit route, per se, as the MBTA has not submitted a plan for new routes. Scott described it as something of a Catch-22. Deb noted that a new service route may not be needed yet through the area, but the Rte 66 is overloaded and delayed in traffic, so tweaking or supplementing it may be desirable. Jane suggested that public transit might look quite different, and have different types of vehicles, 20 years hence.

Shalini said West Station is unlikely to be a main commuter rail terminal, as it is situated closely between the New Balance Stop and Yawkey. The MBTA is doubtful that West Station will be that much in demand, so they are not currently planning to provide a lot of bus connections to it. Scott said that the MBTA is hamstrung in planning for future service since the development will not be complete for nearly 20 years. Scott and Linda made the point that MassDOT should be thinking about intramodal connections as the MBTA focus is shorter term and more limited to service planning.

Abby then observed that West Station must also be examined in terms of future transit trips to/from the Longwood medical center. At the March 9 meeting of the Boston MPO she spoke with Paul Nelson, who is a planner at MASCO and their representative on the Allston project Task Force. MASCO is interested in developing bus service from LMA to West Station, probably via Park Drive. There is also interest on the part of Harvard Medical School for bus service from LMA to Harvard Square. Shalini said the MBTA looks to employers to develop these shuttle routes.

Guus said that MassDOT is working towards a Dec. 2016 DEIR-- this would be an environmental impact report, not a design. Brookline should be prepared to submit comments on the DEIR. Linda asked Guus how the group can get updates from the Task Force, and he said that was a good question. The official minutes will be one source, and Guus will communicate with the Transportation Board, Scott & Abby.

#### *Additional Meetings and Discussions on I-90 Interchange Planning Improvements:*

##### Allston Interchange Task Force

Before Guus was appointed to serve as Brookline's representative, Linda Jason attended an earlier Task Force meeting in March. Commenters were particularly concerned with access to the Charles River by bikes and peds. At this point, it is not clear how design alternatives like those of the "Amateur Planner" (Ari Ofsevit) will be incorporated.

##### Walk Boston:

Abby provided detail from a meeting that she and Jane attended with Walk Boston, on March 10.

Walk Boston is suggesting a North-south bus connection through the site between Cambridge Street in Allston and Commonwealth Avenue, and points farther north and south. This route would be routed very close to North Brookline neighborhoods and would provide new access between Harvard Square and the Longwood Medical Area.

Walk Boston's general thinking about Bus Rapid Transit so far has been only on the Commonwealth Ave. right-of-way and not on any of the streets leading into Brookline.

When Walk Boston studied the West Station plan they observed that the project team's thinking to date has been on the connection between Cambridge and West Station only on the north side of West Station. There, bus services would connect to Harvard Square and reach into West Station via a set of ramps to serve the buses and to provide drop-off/kiss-and-ride services.

But on the south side of West Station (the Brookline side) the plan provides NO bus access of any kind. Vehicles approaching from the Brookline side would have to drop off passengers on roadways near the pedestrian access points, allowing the passengers to proceed on foot to the station. In the current plan, NO vehicles - not even emergency vehicles - are permitted to reach West Station from the south.

Abby mentioned some MassDOT statements at Brookline's Feb 29 public meeting on this project:

- 3 bus routes might deviate to West station if the MBTA agrees. The project modeling is for year 2035, so they anticipate greater demand for bus and commuter rail by then.
- (Todd Kirrane, Brookline Transportation Administrator says that currently, Bridj is compensating for an oversubscribed route 66.)
- The project would rely on signage & enforcement to keep other vehicles off a bus-only access road.
- All-vehicle access would probably draw 20K vehicles/day.
- Babcock and Pleasant streets would become shortest route to Cambridge. MassDOT will be assessing this.
- Transit routes might terminate at the south side of station. If so, riders would have to transfer to a different bus to complete their journey.

#### 7:45 DISCUSS MISC (MBTA) TOPICS:

The MBTA approved fare increases, which will become effective July 1. Although it was not a perfect process, a sense of fairness underpinned it. The MBTA planning staff made a sincere effort to minimize the impact of fare increases on their less affluent riders. They increased the fare more for pass users (to bring the per-ride "multiple" into line with other systems') than single-ride fares. Looking simply at percentage increases is misleading if the current fare is low. The largest opposition to date has come from student users and groups representing them. Shalini said that students must get their student passes only at their school or the CharlieCard store. The new fares allow for a \$30.00 monthly student pass that can be used year-round, 24/7. MBTA will pilot a new way of administering the student pass wherein there will be no home-school distance requirement (for Boston schools), students will be able to get a Charlie card outside school system, and will be able to buy monthly passes at vending machines. PTAC members asked how these cards sunset (expire) and how they'll be replaced if lost.

#### 8:15 MEMBERS REPORT ON EXTERNAL MEETINGS, WORK AND FINDINGS SINCE JANUARY MEETING:

Deb and Abby reported on educational field visits hosted by the MBTA Advisory Board: Abby visited the MBTA light rail maintenance shop in Everett, and Deb reported on her visit to the MBTA Operations Control Center.

Abby reported on a presentation to the Boston MPO Regional Transportation Advisory Council (RTAC) made on the FOCUS40 LONG TERM INVESTMENT PLAN by Jennifer Schlesinger, MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning. Briefly, items noted were:

- They are moving to package investments by line or other ways that make sense to the public
- A launch event will be held in early May: will be asking for public feedback. Barr Foundation is helping to fund this initiative.
- Trends in Boston-area passenger mobility show a need to add capacity, provide access in areas with aging populations, protect or abandon assets in face of sea level rise, cope with extreme heat, connect with or cede space to bike routes (bikes on roads leaves less room for transit), partner with TNCs like Uber, Bridge, Lyft & Zipcar.
- A Focus40 long-term CIP is intended to be issued mid-2017.
- A Service Plan update (last draft, 2010?) will happen within the next year or so. It will focus on cost-neutral changes like relocating low-use bus lines to serve locations with more demand.

Tegin Bennett (Cambridge, RTAC Chair) mentioned that Cambridge has a strategic plan for transit, especially bus.

## BROOKLINE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT TRANSIT NEEDS

PTAC continues to follow up on transit issues for Brookline High School (BHS) students. A newspaper article in the Sagamore (student paper) reported that the service on the #51 bus route was inconsistent. A BHS student who lives in South Brookline, by the name of Neel Sharma, has come forward as a willing spokesperson. One PTAC suggestion was to survey students riding the #51 bus on its 3:15 run, as well as study the MBTA's records on the bus performance. Scott volunteered that the Safe Routes to Schools program provides assistance for doing surveys. Jane asked how many riders use the bus, and what is the BHS mode share. Currently, it may be difficult to get accurate rider counts because drivers, allegedly, do not always insist on use of the fare box.

The group learned from Shalini that the #51 route currently has 3 different school route variations and Brookline's route variant is scheduled to leave BHS at 3:05pm.

PTAC member Sherry spoke with Neel, who lives in Hancock Village. Student complaints include the inconsistency of service with different drivers, variation in the bus schedule, crowded buses, and occasional no shows and bus breakdowns. Shalini noted there is no official bus layover stop for the #51. Shalini said the bus cannot linger because it would block the right of way at Tappan and Greenough.

In academic year 2016-17, ridership levels are expected to grow because of the large incoming class from the Baker School. This led to a more general discussion of the requirements to provide bus service to schools. Scott noted that it was vital for PTAC to interact with the Brookline School Committee, and help them anticipate future needs for transit and parking at all schools- and for both students and teachers.

In the past, the MBTA has added buses to serve the Boston Latin school. Shalini agreed to study FTA guidelines and see if grandfathered routes could be expanded. Generally speaking, extra buses and drivers are more available in the middle of day. Deb added her concern about bus breakdowns on the #51 line. Shalini said extra #51 buses & drivers are dispatched from Watertown, leading to long lead-times and drivers unfamiliar with the route.

### Other Items:

- Abby said that she will be speaking on transit during the upcoming Climate Week panel on April 2<sup>nd</sup>. The event will be held at the library and she offered to distribute her slides.
- Abby will send a link to Sherry, and other PTAC members who need to search the PTAC minutes and archives by keyword.
- For bus stop census planning, Shalini and Deb will confer on spreadsheets or databases that enumerate Brookline transit lines, bus stops, stop numbers, and other route information.

8:45 SET DATE & AGENDA TOPICS FOR APRIL MEETING, AND NEAR-TERM WORK, POTENTIALLY INCLUDING:

- BEACONSFIELD D LINE STOP ACCESS
- NEW BRIDJ ROUTES
- "WINTER READINESS" FOLLOWUP
- PARKING & TRANSIT DEMAND MANAGEMENT POLICY / TRANSIT IN DEVELOPMENT

Abby will send out a Doodle poll to find a good date.

9:00 ADJOURNED.