

MEMORANDUM

DATE: February 3, 2019
FROM: Abby Swaine, Chair, Brookline Public Transportation Advisory Committee
TO: Chris Dempsey, Chair, Brookline Transportation Board
CC: Todd Kirrane, Brookline Transportation Administrator
RE: Findings & Request for Action regarding MBTA Bus Stops in Brookline

The following letter was approved for submittal to the Transportation Board by its Public Transportation Advisory Committee (PTAC) on January 16, 2019.

This letter is based upon a follow-up undertaking on the part of PTAC for field-level review of the Brookline bus routes and accompanying benches, shelters, and signage. PTAC conducted an initial survey in the summer of July 2017 to evaluate existing conditions of the bus system. That effort resulted in a detailed analysis and communication to the Brookline Transportation Board, and then to the MBTA for suggested improvements.

Two PTAC members and Todd Kirrane met with the MBTA in December 2017 to review the findings, and MBTA made some improvements to signage as a result. MBTA suggested populating the survey with ridership information to show which stops “qualify” for benches and shelters based on average weekday boardings. However, MBTA has indicated that it has scant funding for improvements beyond correcting dire accessibility issues, and will look to partner with municipalities to improve the rider experience.

In the fall of 2018, PTAC redoubled its efforts to review the need for such improvements to promote bus ridership. Included herein is a brief narrative summary of updated observations along the Brookline bus routes, in addition to detailed spreadsheets showing average Fall 2017 ridership levels at each bus stop, and opportunities for physical improvements where the ridership or extenuating circumstances support such improvements.

Once the Transportation Board has approved our submittal, we ask that it be transmitted to the Planning Department, Planning Board, and Department of Public Works with the request that benches and shelters be incorporated into development and streetscape projects, as well as to the MBTA. Relevant Town initiatives include the Planning Department & Board’s effort to set clear expectations for public realm improvements (including improving nearby bus stops) for developers of significant projects, and our Town’s Complete Streets program. We also ask for the Board’s assistance in obtaining the Select Board’s approval to allow the MBTA’s contractor to construct any shelters we request, to MBTA specs, at no cost to Brookline and with maintenance provided by the vendor, which requires accepting advertising on one panel. This would require the Select Board to revise its policy and allow for advertising on the shelters, in conformity with MBTA and Town standards.

Also, we observed several different styles of benches at bus stops, and some benches in need of repair. It is likely that some were installed by the MBTA, some by the Town, and some by adjacent property owners. Except in cases where benches are clearly located on private property, it is now the Town's responsibility to maintain them, so we recommend that DPW create an inventory and check on them periodically.

We kindly request that the Transportation Board review this material and help us work with all stakeholders this Spring towards the implementation of an approach to addressing the needs identified.

With any edits you recommend, we intend this letter to be sent as soon as possible, as follows:

FROM: Christopher Dempsey, Chair, Brookline Transportation Board

TO: Curley Champion, Manager of Bus Stops, MBTA Service Planning Department
Rob Guptill, MBTA Manager of Service Planning

CC: Heather Hamilton, Brookline Select Board
Shalini Sen, Senior Transportation Planner, MBTA
Nancy Moore, Transportation Board liaison to PTAC
Andrew M. Pappastergion, Commissioner of Public Works
Peter M. Ditto, Director, DPW – Engineering & Transportation Division
Todd M. Kirrane, Transportation Administrator
Alison Steinfeld, Director, Planning Department
Kara Brewton, Planner, Brookline Planning and Economic Development Department
Sarah Kaplan, Brookline ADA Coordinator
Brookline Planning Board
Brookline Public Transportation Advisory Committee
David Trevett, Chair, Brookline Pedestrian Advisory Committee

RE: Brookline Better Bus Stops—Findings and Request For Action

On behalf of Brookline's Transportation Board and its Public Transportation Advisory Committee (PTAC), I respectfully submit the following information to aid the MBTA in its ongoing oversight of Brookline bus stops for safety, accessibility and performance. With collaboration between the Town of Brookline and the MBTA, we are confident that we can improve conditions at bus stops in Brookline for all riders and increase ridership for this important transportation mode. We believe our recommendations are consistent with the MBTA's Better Bus Project, as discussed at your December 13, 2018 bus stops workshop.

PROCESS:

You will recall meeting with two members of Brookline's Public Transportation Advisory Committee (PTAC) and Todd Kirrane on December 14, 2017 to review our initial survey of Brookline bus stop conditions. At your recommendation, we updated our spreadsheets with stop numbers and the most recent ridership data available (Fall 2017), and re-surveyed all stops to observe existing conditions. This was done primarily with the goal of maximizing bus ridership for both local residents and visitors.

Planning originally commenced for this project in 2016 and individual members of PTAC undertook observations during the Spring of 2017. This effort was supplemented in the Fall of 2018 with additional field study by members of PTAC to review any on-going need for benches and shelters, as well as continuing deficiencies in signage. Street level detail was evaluated through a combination of riding buses, driving and walking each route.

Please note that these observations reflect the best information available to PTAC at the time, and may conflict with information and expertise held at the MBTA.

PTAC's goal remains to assist both the MBTA and Brookline's Department of Public Works in having a clear understanding of existing conditions to 1) be able to efficiently address routine maintenance needs and 2) develop a strategy for making more capital intensive enhancements to the bus stop system.

FRAMEWORK & ANALYSIS:

PTAC began the analysis by using the standards contained within the framework of the Draft v.3 October 2013 MBTA Bus Stop Planning and Design Guidelines and the ridership criteria for the installation of benches and shelters. According to these guidelines, bench installation should be considered if the bus stop has at least 50 daily boardings. The stops may be eligible for shelters based upon a score sheet, which includes points for 70+ average weekday boardings and factors related to qualitative need and convenience.

Our evaluation of each route and stop focused upon needs and opportunities based on average weekday boardings and available space at the stops. We also evaluated the bus stop signage.

RESULTS:

We have prioritized a number of bus stops for installation of benches and/or shelters, as well as noted signage deficiencies. Please see the attached route-specific priorities lists and spreadsheets for more detail on each of the following bus routes:

- Route 51

- Outbound: 1891 (Independence Dr @ Thornton Rd), 1892 (Independence Dr opp Gerry Rd), 1895 (Grove St @ South St).
- Route 60
 - Outbound: 1525* (Brookline Ave @ Pearl St).
 - Inbound: 1551 (Cypress St @ Franklin St), 1552 (High St @ Cypress St), 1984 (Boylston St @ Hammond St), 19661 (Mall@Chestnut Hill @ Bloomingdale's), 19821 (Boylston St @ Tully St).
- Route 65
 - Inbound: 1276 (Washington St @ Beacon St), 1555* (Washington St @ Walnut St).
 - Outbound: 1525* (Brookline Ave @ Pearl St), 1526* (Washington St @ Pearl St).
- Route 66
 - Inbound: 11302 (Harvard St @ Verndale), 1308 (Harvard St @ Beacon), 1313 (Harvard St @ Washington St), 1555* (Washington St @ Walnut St).
 - Outbound: 1372 (Harvard St @ Beacon St), 1373 (Harvard St @ Stedman St), 1376 (Harvard opposite Verndale), 1526* (Washington St @ Pearl St).

* Stop serving multiple routes.

We have also attached maps of all routes within Brookline, depicting relative magnitudes of boardings, both Inbound and Outbound.

DESIRED OUTCOME:

PTAC's priorities for improving bus stops include new and improved signage, installing benches and shelters where warranted, and performing maintenance necessary for basic access and safety. Ideally, this effort would integrate, and work in conjunction with, implementation of Brookline's Complete Streets policy and the MBTA's System-Wide Accessibility (SWA) Access and Better Bus Project initiatives.

PTAC is now also in a position to help Brookline Planning staff, who are developing a Parking and Transportation Demand Management policy, to use this information to develop a framework for making significant improvements to bus stops in the context of enhancing development.

PTAC acknowledges that much of Brookline's streetscape is dense, requiring careful planning and periodic review to prioritize features and reduce clutter. We offer our observations and recommendations as a starting point for discussion, in the spirit of collaboration.

NEXT STEPS:

Brookline would like to meet with the MBTA to compare our findings with any updated guidelines and bus rider experience enhancement initiatives to identify what bus stop amenities are merited by ridership and other criteria under MBTA policy. We hope to collaborate on prioritizing and funding amenities where they will do the most good.

We look forward to working with you to help enhance Brookline bus stops and routes, and to further the MBTA's mission to provide strong, safe and reliable public transportation.

Thank you. Please contact Town staff at tkirrane@brooklinema.gov or 617-730-2140.

[insert signature]

Christopher Dempsey
Chair, Transportation Board
Town of Brookline

Attachments:

Route-Specific Priorities Lists (5 – two for Route 66)
Route-Specific Survey Spreadsheets (4)
Inbound and Outbound Boardings Maps (2)