



495/METROWEST

PARTNERSHIP

Leaders for Regional Prosperity

January 5, 2011

Mr. Richard Davey
General Manager
Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority
10 Park Plaza
Boston, MA 02116

RE: Draft Capital Investment Program for Fiscal Year 2012 to Fiscal Year 2016

Dear Mr. Davey:

On behalf of the 495/MetroWest Partnership, please accept the following as our official comments regarding the draft Capital Investment Program (CIP) for Fiscal Year 2012 to Fiscal Year 2016.

The 495/MetroWest Partnership is a non-profit advocacy organization serving thirty-two communities, over half a million residents, and an employment base of \$17.7 billion, by addressing regional needs through public-private collaboration, and by enhancing economic vitality and quality of life while sustaining natural resources. The Partnership is concerned about regional constraints and limitations, and conducts numerous initiatives on transportation, workforce housing, brownfields, and water resources.

The past few years have raised the public's awareness of the financial challenges faced by MassDOT and particularly by the MBTA. The FY11-FY15 CIP reflected those challenges by highlighting the Authority's debt burden. While some of the financial concerns raised in the last CIP were addressed by Transportation Reform funds, as well as ARRA funding and refinancing opportunities, the Partnership recognizes the extremely constrained financial realities at the MBTA. We are, nevertheless, encouraged by the increase in authorized funding from approximately \$3.84 Billion in FY11-FY15, to \$4.5 Billion in this draft CIP.

The CIP has proven to be a crucial document for guiding the limited resources of the MBTA to where they are needed most. We recognize the importance of maintenance and reinvestment, particularly for the MBTA's subway system. However, we urge that an appropriate balance be struck with enhancing commuter rail, particularly in the 495/MetroWest region which includes the Fitchburg, Franklin, and Framingham/Worcester lines. The Partnership appreciates the renewed attention to commuter rail, specifically the time and resources that went into the CSX deal for the Framingham/Worcester Line as well as the ongoing Fitchburg Line Double-tracking and Improvement Project, both of which will no doubt result in increased revenue and ridership for the MBTA system. While these investments are welcomed, they create new challenges at our region's infamous at-grade crossings in Ashland and Framingham which will need to be addressed. Additionally, the Fitchburg Line improvements present the MBTA with an opportunity to meet the increasing demand for reverse commute options. Finally, the Franklin Line offers opportunities for the MBTA to invest in existing infrastructure while dramatically increasing commuter rail options, ridership, and parking through expansion of service to Foxborough.

The benefits of commuter rail enhancements are not confined to fare revenue; they would assist in addressing workforce housing needs, ridership demand for more service options, congestion on some of the Commonwealth's busiest roadways (I-90, I-495, and Route 2), not to mention fulfilling some of MassDOT's GreenDOT Policy. From a broader perspective, several of the Patrick Administration's sustainable development principles are directly or indirectly linked to public transportation including:

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providing transportation choice, redeveloping first, concentrating development, and planning regionally.

Concerning this year's CIP, the Partnership is pleased to see an increase from \$628 million in last year's CIP to \$648 million in the current CIP for commuter rail rolling stock, locomotive overhaul, and procurement of new coaches and locomotives. New locomotives will help reduce emissions and new coach procurement and overhaul will assist in ensuring that any increased expansion will not burden the system. The Partnership commends the MBTA for their commitment to preventative maintenance on all revenue vehicles, ensuring a greater return on investment for the current fleet and all new locomotives and coaches. Regarding procurement, it would be helpful to know the timeline for purchasing the 28 locomotives and 75 bi-level coaches, as well as how the new fleet will be distributed to the various commuter rail lines.

There are many projects associated with commuter rail maintenance, station improvements, right of way, vehicles, signal improvements, etc., that are listed as anticipated future needs. What is the impetus or trigger mechanism that places such projects onto the anticipated future needs list? Is it public input or through targeted planning documents or through some other avenue? What is the amount of estimated funding required for each project and what will be the impact of these projects? All of this information is important to the intended transparency of this process. One such project for the 495/MetroWest region is commuter rail service in Foxborough.

In September 2010, the MBTA, in coordination with the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development (EOHED), completed the "Foxborough Commuter Rail Feasibility Analysis", yet there is no mention of this study in the FY12-FY16 CIP. Surely, the time and effort put into a two-hundred plus page study warrants further action. While we understand that the MBTA's current financial outlook is extremely limited, a second phase of this study might be the appropriate course of action to advance progress on this much-needed service. Offering commuter rail service to an existing station on an existing line is a prudent investment for the MBTA and would satisfy much of the MBTA's criteria for project priority, namely, State of Good Repair, Legal Commitments to update the current station to be ADA compliant, and we would argue a positive Cost/Benefit analysis. Further, commuter service in Foxborough falls under three of the four programmatic areas of funding for the CIP - reinvestment in the existing infrastructure, accessibility improvements, and enhancement to existing services. Foxborough commuter rail service would also address existing deficiencies on the Franklin Line, namely parking, rolling stock storage and maintenance, and a lack of flexibility options for problems on the Northeast Corridor. As suggested in the study, additional analysis should allow for stakeholder input and exploration of more favorable operating economics, such as a ramp-up service alternative.

The Partnership urges the MBTA to capitalize on their commuter rail investments by expanding service on existing lines, such as commuter service in Foxborough, and offering more reverse commute options on all three regional lines - Fitchburg, Framingham/Worcester, and Franklin - to maximize returns from these public investments and to meet ever-growing demand for enhanced commuter rail services.

In addition to the above comments, the Partnership has long advocated for the Framingham/Worcester and Fitchburg line improvements, as well as overall commuter rail service quality and success. To that end, we would urge the following action.

- **Framingham/Worcester Line** - The Partnership lauds both the Patrick-Murray Administration and the MBTA for the time and effort that went into finalizing a deal with CSX to ensure greater and more reliable service on the Framingham/Worcester Line. We realize extensive work is ongoing to ensure the successful completion of this agreement, allowing for 20 additional trains by the fall of 2012. The Partnership is eager to provide input on how the new schedule will affect 495/MetroWest stations and on ways to address ridership demand in our region. Particularly, the Partnership is interested in whether the additional trains will be limited to express service from Worcester to Boston, or will 495/MetroWest communities benefit from increased service. We urge the MBTA to be cognizant of the sensitive issues that surround the expansion of service on this line, and encourage continued engagement with our communities as the process moves forward.

One such issue that affects Framingham is the Rt. 126/135 grade crossing, which has been widely recognized as a major traffic bottleneck because it incorporates two rotaries, three traffic signals, and two railroad track crossings in active use by both the MBTA and freight trains. We appreciate MassDOT's commitment to improving this grade crossing, most recently demonstrated with \$300,000 in state funding to conduct an environmental review following a feasibility report, both by BETA Group Inc. There are major traffic congestion and safety issues at this intersection, which will only be compounded by the increase in service on the Line. A permanent engineering solution to this intersection is needed, and as such, we ask that the intersection be named in the CIP under Anticipated Future Needs, possibly under the System Expansion section.

While much emphasis has been made on the affects of expanded service to Framingham, the MBTA is no doubt aware that Ashland also has significant grade crossing issues associated with the Framingham/Worcester Line. As highlighted in a recent study on the grade crossings in Ashland, it is clear that the community has identified solutions to address both their short-term and long-term needs, but will need assistance in the form of mitigation and financial resources to minimize the impact of rail expansion.

While planning continues for the expansion of service on the Line, details should be provided on the impact to other communities such as Southborough, Westborough, and Grafton.

Additionally, the Partnership urges the MBTA to resolve the spending issues associated with the Worcester/Framingham line signaling improvements in this year's CIP. This need has been listed in several Plans as a funded project or as an anticipated future need with no explanation. The other "Anticipated Future Need" the Partnership would like to see addressed on the Framingham/Worcester Line is Layover Fan/Vent Installation.

- **Fitchburg Line** - The Partnership appreciates the ongoing work and attention to the Fitchburg Commuter Rail Line. The long-awaited Fitchburg Line Improvement Project is well underway and additional funding through the American Recovery & Reinvestment Act (ARRA) has allowed for much needed double-tracking from South Acton to Ayer as well as station improvements in South Acton and Littleton, some of which have long been listed as "Anticipated Future Needs" in the CIP. The planned and ongoing improvements to the Line create additional challenges and opportunities for the MBTA.

South Acton Station has proven a challenge in terms of a station design that is acceptable to the town and to the MBTA. We would like to recognize that a redesign has been patiently and graciously addressed by the MBTA to the town's satisfaction. Other challenges are ongoing such as addressing the parking needs in Littleton in light of the double-tracking consuming current MBTA parking spaces. We have advocated for an expeditious solution to this quandary, specifically for the state to purchase available land near the current and soon-to-be improved station and we are hopeful a resolution is near. Parking continues to be a challenge at many stations on all three of our region's commuter lines.

An opportunity which we urge the MBTA to seize involves expanding the reverse commute schedule to Littleton once the double-tracking is complete. Littleton and surrounding communities like Boxborough and Westford have seen tremendous economic growth in recent years, changing ridership demand and needs. It is time for the MBTA to address the growing need for reverse commute options on various lines, including the Fitchburg Line. We also understand that some planned signal improvements to the Line were not within the current budget of the project and we would urge the MBTA to address that and other Anticipated Future Needs on the Line, such as Layover Facility Power, as soon as possible.

- **System-wide Surveys and Planning** - The Partnership urges the MBTA to update ridership projections. Ridership demand and needs have changed along the region's commuter rail lines and updated studies are necessary for appropriate planning by the MBTA. No longer are the commuter rail lines only a means to commute to Boston; large employers in various industries are eager to

attract talent from the Metropolitan Boston area to their locations along the 495/MetroWest corridor. However, the schedules often do not allow for Boston residents to take public transportation to areas beyond Route 128. Beyond the reverse commute need, over the last several years a number of residential and mixed-use projects at regional commuter rail stations have moved forward and secured significant municipal and state support; it seems obvious that commuter rail ridership projections need to be updated to reflect this rapidly changing reality of residential developments dependent upon commuter rail services. The MBTA needs to plan its infrastructure improvements accordingly, so that the commuter rail system will accommodate increased service demands.

In addition to the above comments, the Partnership would like to highlight a few other points of note. We were pleased by the equity between Subway Revenue Vehicles Projects and Commuter Rail Revenue Vehicles Projects. The Partnership supports the progress being made in the Station Management Program (SMP) and are particularly encouraged by the Automated Fare Collection (AFC) projects which most recently resulted in an MOU with the MetroWest Regional Transit Authority for use of the CharlieCard system on their fixed bus routes. The MBTA has demonstrated a commitment to innovative technologies and increased efficiencies, allowing for greater customer service and reliability. The MBTA should be proud of its advances in internet technologies and its public outreach efforts such as your "Meet the GM" series. Despite the many accomplishments and advances made by the MBTA in recent years, many challenges lie ahead, particularly in the area of finances. We strongly urge the MBTA to maintain its commitment to the "State of Good Repair" while balancing the need for prudent expansion of service.

If there are any questions or concerns regarding our commentary, contact Jessica, Deputy Director of Public Policy & Public Affairs, at Jessica@495partnership.org or 774.760.0495. Thank you for your time and consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,



Paul Matthews
Executive Director



Jessica Strunkin
Deputy Director of Public Policy & Public Affairs

cc: Secretary Jeff Mullan
495/MetroWest Delegation