

STAFF REPORT
TO THE MBTA ADVISORY BOARD

**REVIEW OF
MBTA PRELIMINARY 2006 SERVICE PLAN**

Proposed Bus and Rapid Transit Service Changes
&
Service Delivery Policy Modifications

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INTRODUCTION

The service plan is a document that evaluates how bus and subway services perform with regards to the MBTA's service standards and introduces proposals for service changes that make better use of the existing resources. The Authority prepares a new service plan every two years.

The MBTA develops a preliminary service plan based on ongoing data collection, service requests and feedback from a series of public workshops. The 2006 draft plan was made available for review on the MBTA website and presented at one public hearing and seven public meetings in Chelsea, Lynn, Boston, Roxbury and Cambridge. Public input was collected at those meetings in addition to comments received by phone, email or written correspondence. The comments are reviewed and influence the final plan, which will be presented to the MBTA board of directors for approval during the summer of 2006. Changes are expected to go into effect during the fall and winter of 2006. This is the first service plan that includes rapid transit in addition to bus service. It does not cover commuter rail. The service plan also includes proposed changes to the service delivery policy.

The service plan includes major, moderate and minor changes. While minor and moderate changes can be implemented with existing equipment and within the adopted budget, major changes affect resources and may have a significant affect on riders but in sum also have to be revenue neutral. Types of major changes include: major service restructuring, new routes or service, elimination of a route or service or part of a route and span of service changes greater than 1 hour. In addition to being categorized as major, moderate or minor in nature, all changes are evaluated based on a number of criteria. Those include:

- The rationale for the change
- Net cost per passenger
- Net cost per new passenger
- Existing and projected ridership
- The number of new transit riders
- The change in travel time for existing riders
- Added travel time for existing ridership per new passenger
- Existing and projected operating costs
- Existing and projected fare revenue
- Key characteristics and demographics of the market
- Contribution to the achievement of policy objectives
- Other factors, as appropriate

OVERVIEW OF THE 2006 PRELIMINARY PLAN

Summary of Changes

The 2006 draft service plan includes 15 network changes (adding, extending, changing or removing a route) and 46 schedule modifications (adding or removing trips, changing the span or frequency).

Major Changes - Highlights

Proposed service additions:

#111 – Revere to Haymarket: route change and improved headways/increased frequency
#113 – New cross-town service from Bellingham Square in Chelsea to Kendall Square, Cambridge

Proposed service cuts:

#94 – Medford – Davis Square: cuts last two round trips, 8 passengers affected who can use route 96 instead
#99 – Boston Regional Medical/Stoneham to Wellington Station: Cuts first roundtrip and last 3 outbound and 2 inbound trips
#100 – Medford to Wellington Station: Cuts last 3 roundtrips
#451- Beverly to Salem: Discontinue Saturday service, commuter rail alternative
#134 – North Woburn to Wellington Station: Cuts last 3 round trips

Proposed restructuring of routes:

#8 – Reroute outbound at Boston Medical Center & additional service to South Bay Center
#48 - Jamaica Plain: route change of loop
#170 – Dudley Station to Bedford: Replaced with 505A, allowing for better reverse commute from downtown to 128, no longer serves Dudley or office parks in Billerica or Burlington
#431 – Neptune Towers to Central Sq. Lynn: Discontinue, replace with extension of 434/435
#441, 442, 448/449 – Marblehead to Boston: consolidate service and cut 448/449
#455/59 – Salem to Downtown Crossing: decrease service and increase service on 455W Salem to Wonderland instead

Moderate Changes - Highlights

Proposed service additions:

429 – Lynn to Northgate shopping: one additional evening trip and additional early Sat/Sun am trips.
#503 - Brighton Center – Copley Square: extra bus during morning peak, improved headways

Proposed service cuts:

- #78 – Belmont to Alewife: cuts last three weekday trips on all days and the first Sunday round trip
- #91 – Sullivan Sq. to Central Square, Cambridge: cuts last round trip
- #92 – Assembly Square to downtown: cuts last round trip, passengers can use #93 instead
- #110 – Wonderland to Wellington Station: cuts last round trip, riders can use # 111
- #112 - Alternate AM outbound and PM inbound service between Admiral’s Hill & Quigley Hospital, shortened travel time for most passengers.

Proposed restructuring of routes:

- #501 – Reroute some outbound trips

Schedule Adherence

Most bus lines currently do not comply with the minimum requirements set forth in the MBTA’s service delivery policy. The Authority is working on implementing changes that will get many lines to greater schedule adherence. Current status:

- Bus lines adhering to schedule: weekdays: 85, 502,503, Sat: 65, 72/75, Sun: 17, 18, 34, 55, 442
- Proposed to bring within schedule adherence with new service standards (in addition): 468, Sat; 451, Sun.

Changes to Service Delivery Policy

- Redefine outer boundary of blue line core area from Aquarium to Maverick. This is relevant in the context of load standards as the core area allows for higher acceptable loads.
- Streamlined service planning process:
 - In the future moderate changes will be classified as minor changes.
 - The revised service policy also includes an updated list of criteria to replace the current evaluation criteria:
 - Performance measured against the service standards set in the MBTA’s service delivery policy, including service span, frequency, loading and schedule adherence
 - The rationale for the change
 - Net cost per new passenger and net savings per lost passenger
 - Changes in ridership
 - Changes in travel time for existing riders
 - Changes in operating costs
 - Changes in fare revenue
 - Key characteristics and demographics of the market
 - Contribution to the achievement of external mandates, such as Title VI of the Civil Rights Act.

SERVICE PLAN FEEDBACK

Advisory Board staff covered the public workshop in Cambridge and the public hearing in Boston. We noted and heard from MBTA staff attending and facilitating the other workshops that the following concerns were most often expressed:

Public Meeting Concerns

- #170: need service from Waltham to Burlington
- #78: several people spoke out against cut in evening service in Cambridge, Arlington and Belmont
- #112: concern about less frequent service to the hospitals
- #448/449 changes
- Calls for increased service (earlier hours and more frequency) on 22, 23 and 26 serving Academy of Public Service in Dorchester; more frequent service on #85, later weekend runs on #119, Sunday runs on #92.
- Several comments on service reliability and bus operations in general

The Advisory Board Service Planning Committee met on February 17, 2006 to discuss the proposed plan with MBTA staff. Below is a summary of issues raised by member communities:

Member Concerns

- Medford expressed concern about the reduction of bus service available to Medford residents who are dependent on public transit, particularly when alternatives are not available. The City is most concerned about the elimination of the last three late night service trips on Route #100 between Elm Street and Wellington Station and request that that MBTA consider maintaining at least one or two if these trips.
- Cambridge and Belmont are concerned about the proposed cuts in the evening service on the 78 route and urge the MBTA to maintain current service. The city of Cambridge would like to receive more detailed information about the new 113 route from Kendall Square to Chelsea. At present, the MBTA has not determined the exact route, stops and schedule.
- Lynn is mostly concerned about how the changes will be communicated and implemented, particularly on routes 431 and 435. As Lynn has a large foreign-born population with often limited English skills, the City would like to see the MBTA communicate changes in Spanish and some of the other more prevalent languages in addition to English.
- Somerville expressed general concerns regarding posting of bus schedules, service quality and routing of the many routes and location of bus stops in Union Square.
- Beverly believes that the Saturday service on the 451 route should be maintained as commuter rail does not provide the same low cost service and frequency as the bus does. They would also like the MBTA to consider holding future service plan meeting in Beverly.

General Concerns/Questions

The committee members had questions about the validity and accuracy of the data that inform proposed changes. In the past data on ridership, loads and service quality were largely measured manually and not available on a regular basis. A number of ongoing improvements and technology changes will facilitate data collection and analysis in the near future:

- GPS/AVL data: about half the bus fleet is now equipped with this technology. The MBTA has started to analyze the data and to make changes based on the results.
- Ridership: New fareboxes will provide better approximation of the number of riders, but little information on load, because they only count boardings, not alightings. The Authority is receiving ten buses that are equipped with automatic passenger counters (APC) for pilot testing. They will be run out of the Charlestown garage. If pilot testing is successful, the MBTA is planning on equipping more buses with APC.

Service Planning Committee members asked about the process of implementing the changes and following up to assess whether they had achieved the desired results. The MBTA outlined the following communication strategies:

- Seat drops on affected lines
- Press releases
- Providing information to cities and towns to distribute to their residents

With regards to assessing the effectiveness of a change, the MBTA receives several types of feedback that flow into the analysis: immediate feedback is received from bus drivers and customers as well as ride and point checks. The feedback is reviewed and discussed by an internal committee and follow-up checks are done if more information is needed. Longer term, the impact of changes is being assessed within 1 – 3 years. New routes or other types of additional service are generally given time to build ridership before they are fully evaluated. With new data gathering technology being implemented, such as APC and GPS, the Authority will be able to follow up more quickly in the future.

ADVISORY BOARD RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Advisory Board urges the MBTA to dedicate the resources needed to take full advantage of the new technologies available to collect and analyze data.
- The Advisory Board recommends adding a timeline to the service plan document explaining the process chronologically to help people understand it better.
- The Advisory Board offers to assist in communicating changes and information to the cities and towns, so that they in turn are able to communicate them to their residents, businesses and community organizations. For future service plan updates the cities and towns request better communication before the public meetings take place, so that they can let their constituents know about the opportunity to voice their opinion.