October 16, 2020

General Manager Steve Poftak
FMCB Chairperson Joseph Aiello
Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority
10 Park Plaza
Boston, MA 02116

Sent by email to: spoftak@mbta.com and okane@mbta.com (for J. Aiello)

Re: MBTA Budget Concerns

Dear General Manager Poftak and FMCB Chairperson Aiello:

We are writing regarding the MBTA budget and the need to consider alterations to services, capital projects, staffing, and other elements of the authority because of steep revenue declines stemming from reduced ridership during the COVID-19 pandemic. We respect and understand that you are faced with challenging decisions.

It is our belief that no harm should be done to persons who are transit dependent, which includes maintaining services and routes used by significant numbers of people of color, people with disabilities, seniors, low-income persons, and no-to-low-vehicle households. We strongly support the MBTA prioritizing services to these populations, as well as not enacting any fare increases. We also encourage the following specific steps.

**Preserving RIDE Premium Service**

We know you are fully aware of the vital importance of this service and we ask not only that it remain as is, but that RIDE service that is currently not considered premium retain that status even if transit routes in outlying communities are eliminated. People now using the RIDE during the pandemic may be doing so for critical reasons, often connected to health care appointments, so adding costs or barriers would be problematic. And undoubtedly there are users who may have some ability to use fixed route service but take the RIDE because it provides much lower risk of contracting COVID, a profound concern for people with disabilities and seniors.

**Moving Forward with Major Capital Projects**

Some projects long envisioned by riders with disabilities and advocates and which also are part of the ADA settlement agreement should not be delayed—they may be fifteen long years in process and some were even overdue when finally conceived, coming only after the lawsuit. Among projects are much needed accessibility improvements at Downtown Crossing and
Symphony stations, elevator replacements at a number of stations, and street-level access improvements along the Green Line and Mattapan Line.

**Supporting Access Improvements on Key Bus Routes, Notably in Roxbury, Mattapan, and Dorchester**

There were plans to support bus shelters and benches along key bus routes in these neighborhoods, where bus use is high. Moving forward with this comparatively small initiative would support bus use by people who find it difficult to wait outside in bad weather or who can’t stand for prolonged periods.

**Supporting the Transit Ambassador Program**

Riders with disabilities indicate that these staff, which include high numbers of people of color, are often instrumental in assisting people to use fixed-route services. Navigating complex stations such as Downtown Crossing or crossing over platform gaps to board subways are challenges for which transit ambassadors are part of the solution.

**Identifying and Assessing Critical Routes with Information from System Wide Accessibility**

The Department of System Wide Accessibility’s Plan for Accessible Infrastructure (PATI) included the completion of an extensive study, based on important demographic criteria (prevalence of disability in a neighborhood, proximity of senior housing, etc.), to determine which bus stops should be prioritized for access improvements. This information should be utilized to help determine key routes.

We welcome further discussion and in fact urge that all deliberations around the mentioned matters and any others directly impacting people with disabilities and seniors include community members. Much progress has been made in the past fifteen years and want to be sure that none is undone.

Thank you for consideration of these concerns.

Sincerely,

Dianna Hu, Chairperson
Boston Center for Independent Living

Taramattie Doucette, Senior Attorney
Greater Boston Legal Services

Edna Pruce, President
Massachusetts Senior Action Council
Brian Charlson, President
Baystate Council of the Blind

Colin Killick, Executive Director
Disability Policy Consortium

Carolyn Barret and Rick Morin, Co-Chairs
Riders Transportation Advocacy Group