



JOINT MEETING

COMMUTER RAIL COMMITTEE

+

CLIMATE & CLEAN ENERGY COMMITTEE

Minutes **DRAFT**

Monday, October 16, 2023

10:00 AM – 11:00 AM

- A.** Chair Rob Scherer (Ashland) called the Commuter Rail Committee to order at 10:02AM and Chair Susan Barrett (Lexington) called the Climate & Clean Energy Committee to order also at 10:02 AM via Microsoft Teams.
- B.** Alistair Sawers, MBTA Director of Rail Transformation (RRT) provided an update on the regional rail transformation.
- The Fairmount line will be the first to transition to regional rail, followed by the Providence/Stoughton line and then the Economic Justice (EJ) corridor (Rockport/Newburyport Line between Boston and Beverly).
  - RRT is also a state of good repair project, given that a major percentage of the locomotive fleet is well over 40 years old and are rapidly approaching the end of their useful lives. RRT will bring about massive improvements in reliability.
  - There are steps taking place to advance RRT- like improved frequency with existing fleet, and moves to decarbonize yards. Ultimately, a battery electric fleet is the goal.
  - CalTrain is using battery electric multiple units (BEMUs) along segments both with and without catenary wires. Alstom is manufacturing a version,



and Stadler is already manufacturing BEMUs like the ones in use in California. The Stadler BEMUs meets Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) standards, and the Alstom versions are expected to. The MBTA wants to procure an off-the-shelf technology that is a tested and vetted technology.

- The current plan is to start operating BEMUs at 20-minute headways on the Fairmount line by 2032. Additional track work will be needed to reduce headways to 15 minutes.
- Battery range on existing fleets are 2 megawatt hours, allowing for vehicles to run for much longer periods of time than even just a few years ago. At this rate, trains can operate over very long distances.
- On the EJ corridor, interim steps will be put in place to reduce carbon via cleaner diesel, infrastructure improvements to increase speeds, and reduced headways.
- There are also plans to add turn tracks on most existing lines to provide shorter headways across the system
- Initial discussions have started to solve the Old Colony single-track issue.
- There are also projects under consideration to improve frequencies on the Worcester line.
- Brian Kane (Executive Director) thanked Mr. Sawers for the presentation, and suggested that comments he's received from municipal officials suggests that stringing overhead catenary system (OCS) wire across the system, and especially in historic downtowns may pose challenges, and that the plan to use BEMUs, which do not require OCS, seems wise.



- Alan Castaline (Brockton) asked about hydrogen trains. A. Sawers noted that the T has completed a technology study considering hydrogen, batteries, and others. Battery was the most efficient and cost effective according to his study. A. Castaline also suggested that in the recent past there were 30-minute headways on all Old Colony lines, and now there are plans for 60 min. headways. He suggested that this seems confusing. A. Sawers commented that the plan is to implement hourly, clockface, bi-directional, and all-day service on all Old Colony lines, and that this requires additional fleet and facilities. Mike Muller, MBTA Executive Director of Commuter Rail and Ferry agreed that bi-directional, hourly service is the goal, which requires almost all of the current rail fleet to be in operation.
- Josh Ostroff (Natick) asked about the comparison of OCS versus battery propulsion and asked if this decision had been presented to the Board of Directors? A. Sawers mentioned that the Board had received such a presentation, and that this decision was also presented to the Advisory Board's Commuter Rail Committee in the past.
- Roy Epstein (Belmont) mentioned that battery compared to OCS makes sense to him and would be better for the Fitchburg line in Belmont due to bridges. He also asked about late-night service and its cost effectiveness? His third question is around double tracking and if the T has the ROW to do so, and finally what the ultimate cost of the program may be. Mr. Sawers answered that the T does a cost benefit analysis for all federally funded projects, as they are required. Forecasting ridership

is a challenge. In terms of late night, this has been a strong source of ridership growth. In terms of double tracking, the T almost owns all of the double tracking property it needs. Battery electric should reduce the overall cost of the program because less wire will be needed. Every train operating is 1000 car trips less. Total budget is in the billions.

- David Martin (Acton) asked about shorter headways implying shorter train consists, the cost of maintenance of battery versus diesel, and the charging needs of batteries on BEMUs/ Mr. Sawyers answered that generally BEMUs are shorter because they are more frequent. Battery is generally cheaper to maintain compared to diesel because there are fewer moving parts. The intent is recharging under wire and not necessarily at terminals.
- Colette Aufranc (Wellesley) asked about recent schedule changes that generated some frustration in Wellesley. She suggested that in the future, more communication not just about what is happening but also why these are happening. It would be helpful to all. She also asked about targeted improvements on the Worcester Line and its schedule. Finally, she mentioned that there is significant debris along the Worcester Line ROW and wonders when it may be cleaned. Mr. Sawers agreed that communications can always improve. On the Worcester line, there are designs planned for 2 projects to improve headways on the WOR line, but these are not funded and are about 3 years out. M. Muller answered that there are plans to rethink how the T noted schedule changes and that improvements can be made.

- S Barrett asked about the roll out of improvements to other lines in general. Mr. Sawyers noted that there is funding in place for the Haverhill line to bring improved headways in 1-3 years. Old Colony is 2-3 years once funded. Most should be in place before 2030.
  - Steve Olanoff (Westwood) asked about the current diesel fleet and the plans to move to renewable diesel. Mr. Sawers noted that the switch to bio-diesel is a straight switch.
- C. On the topic of recent changes to the Framingham/Worcester Line, M. Muller noted that there are 2 changes on train schedules in May and October based on collective bargaining. Schedule changes are based on lots of data that comes in, and adjustments are made to improve service across the system and to reduce conflicts on the system. Qualitative changes are also made based on feedback at all levels. The schedules try to optimize service across the system and improve it as much as possible. Recently, big changes have included adding more service emerging from the pandemic, and less peak service and more all-day service. Generally, people like shorter gaps in the midday, more peak service, more late-night service, and more all-day service. ON the Worcester Line, it was impossible to solve for all of these needs at once. The Heart to Hub express train made it harder to meet other needs and of the decision was made to eliminate this train to provide de better service across the line.
- A. **Old/New Business**- There was none.
- B. **Adjourn** Corey Evans moved to adjourn the Climate & Clean Energy Committee. Lila Mekias seconded. The motion was approved unanimously



and the meeting adjourned at 11:02. Bruce Leicher moved to adjourn the Commuter Rail Committee, a motion which Josh Osftoff seconded. This motion was also approved unanimously and the meeting adjourned at 11:02

Committee Members Present:

**Climate & Clean Energy Committee**

Cambridge	Leila Mekias
Cohasset	Corey Evans
Lexington	Susan Barrett
Marblehead	Dan Albert
Wellesley	Colette Aufranc
Westwood	Steve Olanoff

**Commuter Rail Committee**

Ashland	Robert Scherer
Belmont	Roy Epstein
Bridgewater	Robert Rulli
Brockton	Alan Castaline
Duxbury	Brian Glennon
&	Catherine Burns
Harvard	Bruce Leicher
Lakeville	Lia Fabian
Marblehead	Dan Albert
Marshfield	Greg Guimond
Maynard	Chet Osborne
Wellesley	Colette Aufranc
Westwood	Steve Olanoff
Worcester	Todd Kirrane

Other Members present:

Littleton	Mark Rambacher
Mansfield	Brendan Roche
Natick	Morgan Griffiths
&	Josh Ostroff

MBTA Advisory Board

Brian Kane	MBTA AB
Amira Patterson	MBTA AB

Others

Jack O'Neill  
 Charles Rooney  
 Christine Van Arsdalen  
 Lisa King  
 Kristine Gorman

MBTA

Mike Muller	MBTA
Alistair Sawers	MBTA
Bradford Woodworth	MBTA