



## COMMUTER RAIL COMMITTEE

### MINUTES

November 11, 2024, 2:00 PM

- A. Call to order:** Chair Rob Scherer (Ashland) called the meeting to order at 2:05 p.m.
- B. Presentation from MBTA/Keolis staff (Mike Mueller, Mike Rooks):**  
MBTA and Keolis staff gave a presentation on Commuter Rail ridership, performance, and scheduling. The Keolis and MBTA staff spoke about the greatest challenges to the Commuter Rail in autumn—changing temperatures, wet leaves on tracks, and Halloween crowds headed to Salem—and ridership recovery which is over 95% of pre-pandemic levels on the Commuter Rail. The officials took questions from membership following their presentation.
- a. R. Scherer asked the staff to address the union contract talks and their potential impacts on operations as well as the implementation of the fare reduction program. A. Chajai answered that the negotiations with the unions between Keolis and their 14 unions are ongoing and will not disrupt operations. A. Chajai reported that of the 14 unions, 9 of them are united in a coalition, three others are in active negotiation with Keolis and the remaining two have filed for



mediation. One agreement has already been signed. R. Scherer also asked about Keolis' contract and M. Rooks answered that that contract ends in 2027, so their operations will continue for at least 2.5 more years. Decisions on the structure and RFP strategy for the successor contract bidding will be decided at the state level by the end of the calendar year. The release of the RFP is aimed to be released in summer 2025. He said once the decisions have been presented to the board, he would be happy to give the Commuter Rail committee a high-level update. In regards to the question about the fare-reduction program, M. Rooks answered that they did not have the exact data, but was aware that around 60,000 seniors were auto-enrolled.

- b. Chet Osborne (Maynard) asked how the ridership data is collected. A. Chajai answered that the ridership is counted by the conductors on board. C. Osborne clarified that these numbers are independent of fare collection trends. C. Osborne also asked if, in regards to the schedule change, RTAs had been notified to coordinate last-mile travel. M. Rooks answered that they had.
- c. Colette Aufranc (Wellesley) asked when commuter rail riders were going to be notified about the changes to the Worcester line schedule. M. Muller said that they would have liked to get the schedules out sooner but there were some last-minute hiccups, he anticipated that they would be coming out in the next few days but



noted that it should have been earlier. C. Aufranc asked if there was a press release or any kind of alert. Alana Westwater (MBTA) and M. Muller clarified where the changes were posted and how they were publicized. C. Aufranc also clarified that the construction schedule for the Worcester line was just in November and December, which Mike Rooks confirmed. C. Aufranc asked if the construction work was going to impact work currently being done in Natick, as the platform changes are challenging at the Wellesley stations. M. Muller answered that the two projects are independent of each other and the completion of the Natick work is scheduled for next year. C. Aufranc remarked that they receive complaints from residents about the Commuter Rail's horn blowing and asked if there was any official policy around the use of the horn that she can direct residents to. M. Muller said he would send the regulatory language.

- d. Bruce Leicher (Harvard) mentioned that he was struggling to locate the schedule change information on the website and wondered if the changes could be publicized more visibly with some kind of alert or banner. M. Muller agreed and emphasized that riders should be looking at the schedule for the actual date they plan to ride. B. Leicher also commented that he had struggled to link his senior pass and it took him and the T help desk 20 minutes to sort it out, which was ultimately unsuccessful. M. Muller thanked him for the feedback.



- e. A. Chajai provided an update on fare collection. Keolis has implemented supervision tactics to promote fare collection and the month of October has seen a 300% increase in ticket checks from the same month last year. He added that the ultimate solution for fare collection is the fare gates that will soon be installed in Back Bay and South Station and have seen success in North Station.
- f. Brian Kane (Executive Director) clarified that the electronic doors can be opened automatically. M. Muller answered that the only lines where doors can be opened automatically are on lines where all platforms are high level. They are used on the Old Colony Lines and could be used on the Fairmont Line as well, but do not. All other lines have a number of inaccessible platforms. B. Kane asked if the long-term vision is for full high-level platforms and M. Muller answered yes. M. Rooks added that the train also needs to be uniform with its coaches and the authority is considering that in all future purchases in order to move towards automatic door opening.
- g. Steve Olanoff (Westwood) commented that in his experience, most conductors are collecting tickets now. S. Olanoff also commented that he is happy about the Fairmont Line electrification announcement. He added that in the media's publicity of the project, the electronics had been poorly explained to riders. M. Muller thanked S. Olanoff for the observation.



- h. C. Aufranc said that in Wellesley, the right of way abuts the Town Hall property and it is not fenced, despite being a cut through used by residents. She asked if the area could be considered for the installation of fencing.
  - i. R. Scherer thanked the MBTA and Keolis staff for their presentations and confirmed that the quarterly meetings work well for them, which they said they did.
- C. Minutes:** C. Aufranc moved to approve the minutes of the 09/12/24 meeting. Greg Guimond (Marshfield) seconded this motion which was approved without objection with an edit that S. Olanoff should be added to the attendee list. S. Olanoff moved to approve the minutes of the 07/11/24 meeting. C. Aufranc seconded this motion which was approved without objection. B. Leicher moved to approve the minutes of the 06/13/24 meeting. S. Olanoff seconded this motion which was approved without objection.
- D. Upcoming Committee Meetings:** The Committee will not meet again until January. B. Kane commented that the only subject that the Committee was unable to cover with the T was the South Coast Rail project. B. Kane said that in 2025 the quarterly updates will continue, as will South Coast Rail discussions and discussions about schedule changes, and the committee will continue to emphasize the importance of funding the capital budget. B. Kane added that the Committee might



be interested in a comparative study of the Toronto Commuter Rail which runs a similar system and is run by former T staff.

- a. Regarding potential topics for upcoming meetings, R. Scherer recalled interest in a name change to the Regional Rail Committee. B. Kane expressed concerns that calling the committee a different name to the existing system would be confusing. R. Scherer suggested that it be considered for a future Agenda item.
  - b. C. Aufranc asked that the committee reaffirm its members and their voting status to ensure that it has sufficient attendance for a quorum going forward.
  - c. R. Scherer suggested that the committee consider the Keolis contract renewal in 2027 and a future agenda item to keep the Committee up to date on the process. B. Kane agreed that there needs to be a role for the Advisory Board in that process.
  - d. B. Leicher thanked B. Kane for the Advisory Board's advocacy surrounding the Fiscal Cliff and asked for a future Agenda item discussing what Committee members can do to help spread the message. S. Olanoff added that the Committee should also be vocal about the deficits in the capital budget.
- E. Adjourn:** With all business transacted, G. Guimond moved to adjourn, a motion which Bruce Leicher (Harvard) seconded. This motion was approved unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at 3:07 PM.



*Note: These minutes were approved by vote of the Committee at its 2/19/25 meeting.*

### **Attendees**

#### **Committee**

Rob Scherer	Ashland
Roy Epstein	Belmont
Brian Glennon	Duxbury
Bruce Leicher	Harvard
Greg Guimond	Marshfield
Chet Osborne	Maynard
Colette Aufranc	Wellesley
Steve Olanoff	Westwood

#### **Other**

Mike Rooks	MBTA
Alana Westwater	MBTA
Abdellah Chajai	MBTA
Sheri Warrington	MBTA
Mike Muller	MBTA

#### **MBTA AB**

Brian Kane	Executive Director
Hanna Switekowski	Deputy Director
Isabella MacKinnon	Budget & Policy Analyst