

PASSENGER/REGIONAL RAIL COMMITTEE

Minutes

Wednesday, March 19, 2025

- A. **Call to Order:** Co-Chair Rob Scherer (Ashland) called the committee to order at 2:01 PM via Zoom.
- B. **February 19, 2025 meeting minutes:** The Co-Chair requested a motion to approve the minutes. Co-Chair Brian Glennon (Duxbury) moved to approve the minutes. Steve Olanoff (Westwood) seconded. The motion was approved without objection.
- C. MBTA Chief Railroad Officer, Mike Rooks, and Chief Executive Officer of Keolis Commuter Services, Abdellah Chajai, joined for a **South Coast Rail & Spring Schedule Updates**. They spoke to the committee about grade crossing issues, performance metrics, spring 2025 schedule changes, and South Coast Rail. They opened for questions following the update.
 - a R. Scherer asked if they could clarify the responsibilities of the T and municipalities in maintenance of grade crossings. A. Chajai answered that Keolis and the MBTA perform regular maintenance and communicate with towns and cities when there are problems. R. Scherer asked if they could provide metrics for how often issues occur with grade crossings, which A. Chajai said they could follow up with.

- b** S. Olanoff asked if they could further explain how salt interferes with grade crossings. A Chajai answered that the salt interferes with the current that runs through the rails by indicating to the crossing that there is something on the rail and triggering the gates to come down, requiring an intervention.
- c** Alan Castaline (Brockton) clarified if there was an increase in trip times on the Greenbush and Kingston Lines. Additionally, he emphasized the importance of Middleborough riders double checking Commuter Rail schedules as the times has changed.
- d** Matthew Petersen (Boston) asked if the MBTA could provide a heads up to the City of Boston in advance of the implementation of the fare gates at Back Bay and South Station. M. Petersen also asked for the timeline of when Fairmount Line service might be disrupted due to work. M. Rooks answered that the timeline for the project would likely run from June to late October and impacts will be limited to midday service, but the T will provide further specifics when they have them. M. Petersen commented that the city does see increased ridership during the middle of the day, but they understand why the work must be done then.
- e** Morgan Griffiths (Natick) asked if there was an estimate of when a new fare system might come to the Commuter Rail. Additionally, M. Griffiths asked what the threshold for “good” on-time performance is. M. Rooks answered that there are no imminent plans to introduce a new fare

system to the Commuter Rail, but the authority is considering its potential.

A. Chajai answered that the aim for “good” performance is a minimum of 90% of trains on-time.

f A. Castaline asked about the break-down of trips between Fall River & New Bedford on the new schedule. M. Rooks answered that there will be a shuttle service between Fall River and East Taunton as well as New Bedford and East Taunton to connect to through trips to and from Boston. The service on the rest of the line will not change as there is no capacity to add service due to constraints between Middleboro and Boston.

g Sheila Page (Wellesley) asked if there are any lines on the system that have lower than average on time performance that the committee can advocate for. A. Chajai answered that he did not have a line-by-line break-down of performance, but that the T is trying to tackle performance issues through coordination with committees on grade crossing maintenance.

h S. Olanoff reported that in his experience, recent trips have been delayed by catenary line breaks and the communications from train crews were poor. Additionally, he asked about the MBTA’s relationship with Amtrak regarding delays and infrastructure difficulties. M. Rooks responded that the MBTA and Amtrak talk monthly and the MBTA places an emphasis on infrastructure maintenance.

D. Audit: MBTA Executive Director of Commuter Rail Mike Muller joined to comment on the Official Audit Report Issued March 4, 2025, titled

“Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority—Keolis Contract.” He urged the committee to read the MBTA’s responses to the audit, published alongside the report, which he said serve as a rebuttal to the accusations made. He said the T cooperated throughout the audit, providing documents and guidance. He said they learned areas for improvement in processes, management, and systems. However, he said the MBTA largely disagree with the Auditor’s contract interpretations and penalty calculations. The MBTA has taken action to respond to the findings and remedy any situations where issues were found. He said the immense work that went into the audit was a collaborative effort, and, in the end, the Auditor’s office released a report that provided some takeaways and some findings that the MBTA has disputed.

- a** B. Kane agreed with M. Muller and referred to the audit as a “political hit job” that contains little substance.
- b** S. Page asked about the Inspector General’s letter. Mike Muller reiterated the MBTA and Keolis’ commitment to address fare collection and mentioned the incoming fare gates at Back Bay and South Station as one new method for combatting fare evasion as well as increased conductor activity on trains and in stations. Additionally, the topic of fare collection is an Agenda Item on all senior level discussions as it is important from a revenue standpoint, for passenger equity, and to demonstrate good stewardship of public funds. S. Page asked about outreach campaigns and M. Muller mentioned the “Fair is Fare” campaign instructing riders to activate tickets when on board. S. Page mentioned the lack of

announcements and messaging at the non-hub stations throughout the system.

c B. Kane noted the incident regarding a fatal passenger vehicle strike in Abington and the importance of safety work.

d H. Switekowski asked if committee members should participate in reporting when tickets are not collected on Commuter trips. M. Muller answered that credible reports require a date, a train number and coach number, and committee members are welcome to report to him or to the Keolis Customer Service line.

e R. Scherer thanked everyone for joining.

E. Other Business: R. Scherer asked for an update on the dashboard and B. Kane answered that a draft would be shared with the Chairs and could be discussed next meeting.

F. Adjourn: M. Petersen moved to adjourn the meeting, a motion which A. Castaline seconded. The motion was approved without objection and the meeting adjourned at 3:04 PM.

Note: These minutes were approved by vote of the committee at its 4/16/25 meeting.

Attendees:

Committee Members:

Ashland	Rob Scherer
Belmont	Roy Epstein
Brockton	Alan Castaline
Canton	Chris Podgurski
Duxbury	Brian Glennon
Harvard	Bruce Leicher
Marblehead	Dan Albert
Marshfield	Greg Guimond
Maynard	Chester Osborne
Natick	Morgan Griffiths
Wellesley	Sheila Page

MBTA Advisory Board Staff:

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

Other Attendees

Mike Muller	MBTA
Abdellah Chajai	Keolis
Paula Fallon	MBTA
Dierdre Habershaw	MBTA