



495/METROWEST PARTNERSHIP

Leaders for Regional Prosperity

February 12, 2016

Secretary & CEO Stephanie Pollack
Massachusetts Department of Transportation
10 Park Plaza, Suite 4160
Boston, MA 02116

RE: MBTA Commuter Rail Schedules Initiative

Dear Secretary Pollack:

On behalf of the 495/MetroWest Partnership, we would like to thank MassDOT and the MBTA for investing time and resources into updating the Commuter Rail Schedules. We would also like to note our appreciation for the transparent public process, particularly the time and expertise offered by MassDOT's Rail & Transit Administrator Astrid Glynn in addressing the Partnership's Transportation Committee on not only Commuter Rail schedule updates but on other transit and last mile efforts by MassDOT.

Expanding transit options and opportunities have been priorities of the 495/MetroWest Partnership since our founding as a non-profit regional advocacy organization over a decade ago. As a public/private organization focused on economic development, the Partnership serves thirty-five communities, over half a million residents, and an employment base of over \$21 billion per year. The Partnership focuses on helping to alleviate regional constraints and limitations, and conducts numerous initiatives on transportation, workforce housing, brownfields, and water resources.

The Partnership has long advocated for improved Commuter Rail schedules, with a particular focus on the need for more reverse commute options given the growing employment opportunities in the 495/MetroWest region. While working with the major Massachusetts employers located in our region, we have consistently heard about the lack of reverse commute options for their employees coming from the Boston area. Overall, the Partnership feels the proposed schedules for the three Commuter Rail Lines in our region, namely Fitchburg, Framingham/Worcester, and Franklin, goes a long way in addressing the reverse commute needs in the 495/MetroWest region.

On the Fitchburg Line, the Partnership is pleased to see that our recommendations were incorporated, resulting in two Outbound trains arriving in Littleton before 9:00 AM and greater Inbound options between 4:00 and 6:00 PM. This will no doubt allow employers like IBM, Cisco Systems, Red Hat and Juniper to attract and retain employees who rely upon public transit as their primary mode of travel to work. Additionally, we feel the more robust schedule in both Littleton and South Acton provides a greater return on investment for the MBTA relative to the \$300+ Million Fitchburg Line Improvement Project.

We have heard some concerns relative to the gap in the morning Outbound schedule at South Acton between 9:30 and 10:50 AM, but overall we are pleased with the proposed Fitchburg Line schedule and greatly appreciate the temporary winter schedule that was put in place which has already improved the reverse commute schedule.

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On the Framingham/Worcester Line, we have noted the enhanced reverse commute schedule with additional and earlier Outbound trains arriving in Westborough, Southborough, Ashland, Framingham, West Natick and Natick, as well as improvements to the gaps in the evening Inbound schedules for several of those stations. We are also pleased by the improved travel time on several trains. However, we have heard some concerns relative to the changes in the West Natick and Natick schedules, specifically the loss of two evening Inbound trains during peak hours. We recognize that such comprehensive changes to the Line's schedule results in benefits for some stations and losses for others. Nevertheless, we would be remiss if we did not raise the concerns of one of our communities.

Relative to the Framingham station, in addition to the proposed schedule improvements, we are hopeful for an agreement in the near future to allow the MetroWest RTA to manage Commuter Parking at the station, which we are confident will result in reinvestment and station enhancements.

The addition of stops, both Inbound and Outbound, at all of the Franklin Line stations in our region - Forge Park, Dean College and Norfolk - is welcome. This Line has seen little in the way of improvements to either stations or schedules in many years so the additional commuting options are greatly appreciated, in particular the reduced travel times on several trains and addressing afternoon scheduling gaps at all three stations on Outbound trains.

The MBTA should be commended for the public outreach materials created during this Initiative. The Comparison Sheets for the various Lines are extremely helpful in understanding the proposed schedule changes and exactly how each station on each Line will be affected. Many of our stakeholders have commented on the usefulness of this tool.

We appreciate the time and effort that went into not only the outreach materials but into updating so many schedules on all of the system's Commuter Rail lines. We understand that this, quite literally, involves a lot of moving parts and that any changes to one station's schedule have a cascading effect on the rest of the Line. We feel that, overall, the proposed schedules are an improvement, offering greater commuting options particularly for workers coming from Boston to the many jobs in the 495/MetroWest region. The Partnership is extremely pleased that after years of advocacy, additional reverse commute options have become a reality.

In order to ensure a smooth transition relative to existing and expanding RTA and TMA shuttle connections at the Commuter Rail stations in the 495/MetroWest region, we strongly encourage direct outreach and coordination by the MBTA with the MetroWest RTA, Worcester RTA, MART, and Lowell RTA as well as with the MetroWest/495, Neponset Valley, and CrossTown Connect TMAs. The first and last mile connections are a consistent concern among employers in our region for getting their transit dependent employees to work. It is imperative that the new schedules are coordinated with any existing shuttle connections to maintain the reliability of such services. Additionally, the Partnership would be happy to work with MassDOT on outreach when the schedules are finalized and go into effect in May.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments; we welcome any questions related to this letter, which should be directed to the Partnership's Deputy Director, Jessica Strunkin at 774-760-0495 x101 or jessica@495partnership.org.

Sincerely,



Paul F. Matthews
Executive Director



Jessica Strunkin
Deputy Director

Cc: MBTA General Manager Frank DePaola
MassDOT Rail & Transit Administrator Astrid Glynn