



City of Newton, Massachusetts

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General Manager Poftak,

The MBTA recently revised the Commuter Rail schedule for service along the Worcester Line leaving serious holes in the scheduled stops at the three Newton stations, severely limiting the ability of Newton residents to get into Boston during the day and precluding any Boston morning commuters from arriving in Newton until after noon. I am calling on the MBTA to either restore or augment the schedule times for trains stopping in Newton or alternatively, to re-instate Express Buses from these station areas as a work around while accelerating permanent improvements to platforms in Newton to provide regular commuter rail service to Newton.

The revised Commuter Rail Service schedule for the Worcester Line came as a surprise to us as there was no public input or communication. The City of Newton recognized immediately that much of our region will experience improved Commuter Rail service, but not Newton. Commuters will now enjoy consistent train service to and from Worcester, Grafton, Westborough, Southborough, Ashland, Framingham, Natick, Wellesley, and Boston, with trains stopping consistently throughout the day, from early in the morning until late at night. Here in Newton, however, we do not receive that same frequent, regular service with the revised Worcester Line schedule.

We have found that Newton is the only community along the Worcester Line that the planned schedule changes would have less service starting on April 5th than we had earlier in the pandemic. Newton is also the only community along the rail line that the revised schedule leaves with long service gaps. When the revised Commuter Rail Schedule came out on March 22, Newton was set to receive no inbound weekday Commuter Rail service into Boston to Newton for a six-and-a-half hour period after 1:11 p.m., and no outbound service from Boston in the morning at all, with the first Newton bound train not departing Boston until 12:11 p.m. Again, ALL other communities along the Worcester Line are set to receive frequent and consistent weekday commuter rail service, inbound and outbound, throughout the day.

The operational difficulty, as explained to us by the MBTA, is that the platforms at the three stations in Newton are all only one-sided, meaning that trains must all switch onto a single track before and after the three Newton Stations, in order to stop here. We are well aware of this ongoing problem of one-sided platforms in Newton. To stop in Newton, an outbound train toward Worcester must switch onto the southerly track before arriving at Newtonville Station, and then must switch back to the northerly track after stopping at the Auburndale Station. If there is an inbound train traveling toward Boston at the same time, one or the other train must wait while the other serves the Newton stations.

With this serious ongoing “one-sided platform” issue, and with the state transportation goal being to provide train service throughout the day, another issue has arisen: the MBTA has decided to move toward “clockface” schedules across the region, meaning that MBTA planners are working to create simpler schedules, with the goal being to provide service at particular stations at the same time, every hour, all day. We understand the appeal of clockface schedules. However, because trains need to switch tracks in order to serve Newton, it appears that the MBTA had two choices: (1) Create a schedule with clockface headways, but this would require not stopping in Newton during long stretches of the day; or (2) Create a schedule that stops in Newton throughout the day,

but this would not allow for clockface headways. The MBTA chose option (1), leaving service gaps, but only for the three Newton stations.

These are not new problems. But Newton has historically been served by Express Buses, that complement our Commuter Rail service, particularly for access into and out of Boston. Our Commuter Rail concerns are significantly exacerbated by the recent service cuts and modifications to the Express Buses which serve Newton. Until recently, Routes 558, 552, 554 and 556 ran throughout the day, and riders relied on these routes to travel between Newton and Boston, especially during the hours when the Commuter Rail trains didn't stop in Newton. However, as part of the recent "Forging Ahead" process, the MBTA Control Board voted (along with the elimination of 2 bus routes in Newton) to terminate these four Express Bus routes at Newton Corner, where riders must transfer to another Express Bus to continue on to Boston or from Boston to points west (including to Newtonville, West Newton and Auburndale).

I reached out to Steve Poftak on March 24 about Newton's concerns. The MBTA immediately looked at our concerns. We asked for either the trains to stop in Newton during the "holes" or that the MBTA restore and expand our Express Bus route service, so that Newton would have, at least, service that is consistent with other communities further to the west. We want travelers to be able to board a vehicle that has direct service between Newton and Boston. If it can't be a train, it should be an Express Bus into Boston.

In an emergency meeting with MBTA staff on March 30, the MBTA instead described to us revised plans to add some inbound night-time stops and a new, and free, "Commuter Rail Circulator" bus which would connect Newton's three Commuter Rail stations with the Green Line station at Newton Highlands, Riverside and the Wellesley Farms Commuter Rail Station. While we have not seen a schedule or map of the MBTA's proposed Commuter Rail Circulator service, it does not replace the lost one-seat ride between Boston and the Newtonville/West Newton/Auburndale area. A Newton Circulator vehicle may be a useful public transportation option, but it doesn't solve the public transit needs of people on the north side of our city along the Commuter Rail line. Residents would have to get on a bus south to the Highlands then take the slower Green Line into Boston, which could add 40-60 minutes each way to a simple commute along the Pike (either on the train or an Express Bus) from the north side of Newton to Boston and visa-versa. The re-instated inbound night stops are appreciated, but do not help deal with the long afternoon inbound and the outbound morning service holes.

The interim solution to the commuter rail schedule holes resulting from the revised MBTA plan is either for the trains to stop in Newton or for the re-instatement of Express Buses from these station areas into and out of downtown Boston. Newton would then have service that is consistent with other communities along the Worcester rail line. Again, if it can't be a train, it should be an Express Bus.

The ultimate solution, of course, is to rebuild the three new Commuter Rail stations in Newton – at Auburndale, West Newton and Newtonville – so that both tracks could be used, such that the MBTA would operate service through Newton, without the need to switch tracks or avoid stopping in Newton.

We understand that this permanent solution could take years, but the current, unequal service that the MBTA is proposing to operate through Newton, when compared to ALL other communities along the Worcester Line, is unacceptable. We do ask that the MBTA accelerate the rebuilding of the three stations. While we wait for the renovation of these stations to be funded, designed, and constructed, we cannot accept inferior public transportation service. We cannot expect our residents to continue to rely on the MBTA for their commuting and other travel needs when they suddenly find that the time and effort required to take public transportation between Newton and Boston has become so much less convenient and efficient. We have deep concerns that

businesses will have difficulty finding employees, and that people moving and working along the Washington Street corridor will become more auto-reliant.

This revised commuter rail schedule for Newton is the opposite of our stated City and regional goals. We need the MBTA to take these concerns seriously and take action to reinstate our Express Bus service or train service in the short-term, while working vigorously toward the complete and timely reconstruction of the three Newton Commuter Rail stations in Auburndale, West Newton and Newtonville.

Sincerely,



Ruthanne Fuller
Mayor, City of Newton