

April 30, 2015

Dear Legislator:

This winter's historic snowfall exposed the fragility of the MBTA, as well as the importance of the T to the state economy. In the absence of reliable transit service, businesses lost productivity and hourly workers lost wages. This winter gave us a glimpse of what commuting into Boston would look like without the MBTA. It is not something any of us want to see again.

We thank Governor Baker and Transportation Secretary Pollack for acting quickly to assemble the Special Panel of experts to review the financial and management challenges at the MBTA. We also thank the legislature for its tremendous work over the previous years to reform the state's transportation agencies and to put our transit agencies, including the MBTA, on more solid financial ground.

To regain the public's trust, the MBTA must operate more efficiently and be accountable to the Governor, the taxpayers and the communities it serves. We hope the administration acts quickly to implement the reforms it has the power to make right now, and that the legislature gives the reforms that require legislative action careful consideration.

We caution, however, that there are provisions of the Governor's proposed bill that would roll back critical safeguards that the legislature put in place in the 2013 Transportation Finance Act. The legislation would limit the state's contract assistance to the MBTA to paying off the T's so-called "Big Dig debt" and moving employees off its capital budget. This would result in a \$220 million cut to anticipated MBTA funding over the next three years. The proposal would also eliminate transfers from the State's General Fund to the Commonwealth Transportation Fund, as laid out in the 2013 Act, which could reduce transportation funding by over half a billion dollars over five years to roads, bridges, and other infrastructure. Finally, it would remove the cap on MBTA fare increases set in place in the 2013 Act.

These proposals assume that the MBTA can balance its operating budget without the financial assistance anticipated in the 2013 Act. The Special Panel report, and many reports before it, predicts the MBTA's operating deficit will continue to grow, due to rising energy, materials, and health care costs. The net effect of losing this funding is that the T will have to cut costs, but will not be able to cover the deficit just through cost-savings and other revenue sources. The likely outcome is both service cuts and steep fare hikes – in effect, balancing its budget by burdening riders who have just endured the MBTA's meltdown, and who are no strangers to unreliable and crowded service year-round.

It is premature to legislate funding cuts to the MBTA and to eliminate transfers to the Commonwealth Transportation Fund, which will impact all transportation. Every previous expert report shows that the MBTA does not have enough funding to meet its operating budget today, let alone enough to make needed repairs or meet the demand from anticipated new customers in the future. The Special Panel clearly stated that the MBTA needs both reforms and new revenues, but the Governor's bill would cut the very funding the 2013 Act anticipated for the MBTA. As the administration implements the Panel's recommendations for agency reform, the administration should report the cost savings to the legislature and the Joint Committee on Transportation. This will provide valuable data to determine whether a change in the 2013 funding levels is feasible and warranted.

As the legislature considers the Governor's proposal, it should not lose sight of the vital role the MBTA plays in our state economy. We all know that the MBTA is not just a cost center. It is an essential part of our transportation network that we must maintain and enhance to keep our region and the entire Commonwealth economically competitive.

We urge the legislature to keep focusing on solutions that improve the quality and reliability of MBTA service, not just on reducing the T's reliance on support from the Commonwealth. Thank you for your work to improve transportation in Massachusetts and for considering these comments.

Sincerely,



Monica Tibbits-Nutt



Jack Spence



Joan Tighe



Alexandra Lee



Lew Finfer



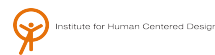
Elena Letona



George Bachrach



Joe Kriesberg



Valerie Fletcher



Barry Bluestone



Jackie Douglas



Bob Van Meter



Andre Leroux



Wendy Landman



Janet Domenitz



Mark Lebel



Berl Hartman



Julia Prange
Wallerce

WalkBike Worcester
Karen Valentine
Goins

SOMERVILLE
TRANSPORTATION EQUITY
PARTNERSHIP
Ellen Reisner



National
Multiple Sclerosis
Society
Lori Espino



Pete Stidman



Maddie Ribble



Rafael Mares

MA
Transportation
for Massachusetts
Kristina Egan



Danny LeBlanc



Dennis DiZoglio