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Re: MBTA Better Bus Project

Dear General Manager Steve Poftak,

Thank you for the MBTA's laudable efforts on the Better Bus Project. Your plan to review, update and modernize existing bus routes with the goal of more frequent, direct and reliable service is important to ensuring the continued utility and improved connectivity of the MBTA's bus system. I want to reiterate our strong support of the MBTA system, especially buses, here in Newton. Supporting and championing a robust, thriving public transportation system is fundamental to my efforts to tackle some of Newton's most pressing challenges: affordable housing, equity, congestion, quality of life, safety, climate change and economic development.

I understand the MBTA's goal of improved bus frequency and reduced travel times; unfortunately, though, the MBTA proposal shifts service away from important existing routes, leaving users of those routes with unacceptably long or unsafe walks to access the bus.

Specifically, in response to your proposed route changes, I offer the following:

**Route 501-504**

- **My most serious reservations are focused on the proposed changes to bus routes 501-504.** The proposed changes would require hundreds of passengers to navigate the unsafe walk over the turnpike bridge (north to south side and vice versa) in Newton Corner. This proposal also dramatically reduces service by replacing higher frequency lines with lower frequency lines, resulting in a loss of frequency and loss of midday and weekend service. Our transportation staff has expressed our concerns to your MBTA staff directly.

**Route 52**

- **We support shifting all service currently on Dedham/Parker to Wheeler/Meadowbrook.** This will substantially improve service for the communities of the Oak Hill and Brown Middle Schools, two of our four middle schools. As discussed with MBTA staff, I hope the MBTA can revisit scheduling to ensure the buses are timed with the school dismissal times.
- **We encourage the MBTA to maintain service on Winchester/Nahanton while increasing service frequency on the Wheeler/Dedham route.** Eliminating the Winchester/Nahanton route requires users to walk up to an additional 18 minutes to Parker/Dedham, per Google Maps, significantly diminishing bus service for current users. Moreover, the Winchester/Nahanton route is the only public transportation serving two key, heavily populated sites:
  - Seniors living at the Jewish Community Center (JCC) and Nahanton Woods.
  - The more than 4,000 employees working at the Wells Ave Business Park and JCC. While currently no sidewalk exists on Nahanton Street to access the Nahanton Stop, the City is in the design phase for a \$1.875 million capital project to reconstruct Nahanton Street, including building sidewalks and bike lanes.

**Route 59**

- **We encourage the MBTA to maintain service on Lincoln/Eliot while increasing service frequency on Needham Street.** Eliminating the Lincoln/Eliot variant requires users to walk up to an additional 10 minutes to get to the nearest bus stops, thereby reducing access to the stop for many users. Additionally, MassDOT is embarking on a 3.5 year reconstruction project of Needham Street and Highland Ave, beginning in Fall 2019 or Spring 2020. The expected construction delays likely will make Lincoln/Eliot the preferred route.

**Route 60**

- **We support an amended proposal with a bus stop on the north and south side of Route 9, at the Mall and Chestnut Hill Square.** This proposal allows the MBTA to eliminate the time-consuming turnaround at Langley, and out-and-back to Bloomingdales, while ensuring the 174 daily users of the Chestnut Hill Mall stop can safely walk to and from the bus stop without crossing Route 9. Newton's staff has shared this amended proposal with MBTA staff who are looking into the feasibility of this change. I do not believe any alternative that requires Chestnut Hill Mall stop users to cross Route 9 would be appropriate.

Our transportation staff in the City of Newton is ready to work with you to provide input and/or brainstorm creative solutions that can help the MBTA meet its goals while improving service for all users.

Sincerely,

Mayor Ruthanne Fuller