



Public Safety & Transportation Committee Report

City of Newton **In City Council**

Wednesday, April 7, 2021

Present: Councilors Downs (Chair), Markiewicz, Bowman, Grossman, Lipof, Oliver, Lucas and Malakie

Also Present: New TV

City Staff: Nicole Freedman, Director of Transportation Planning, Planning & Development Department and Jonathan Yeo, Chief Operating Officer

#107-21 **Resolution for the Council to send to General Court the matter of MBTA service cuts**
COUNCILOR DOWNS, LIPOF, HUMPHREY, KALIS, KELLEY, BOWMAN, KRINTZMAN,
DANBERG, NOEL AND RYAN submitting a resolution for the Council to send to the
General Court on the matter of MBTA service cuts.

Action: **Public Safety & Transportation Approved 7-0, Councilor Malakie not voting**

Note: Chair Downs stated this item was docketed after speaking with Senator Creem regarding the cuts to the MBTA service and the elimination of buses #52 and #505. Senator Creem recommended creating a City Council resolution as it would be helpful to her and her colleagues at the State House. The City of Newton is one of ten communities working on similar resolutions to send to legislative delegations. Cambridge, Somerville and Reading have already passed resolutions.

Committee members were provided with a revised resolution and agreed to the revised changes, attached.

Without discussion, Councilor Lipof made a motion to approve the resolution as drafted. Committee members agreed 7-0, Councilor Malakie not voting.

Referred to Public Safety & Transportation and Finance Committees

#119-21 **Acceptance of grants funds from MassDOT's Shared Winter Streets and Spaces**
HER HONOR THE MAYOR requesting authorization to accept and expend the sum of one
hundred ninety-nine thousand, nine hundred and nineteen dollars and ninety-two cents
(\$199,919.92) in grant funding from MassDOT's Shared Winter Streets and Spaces grant
to purchase and install four Blue Bikes Stations with bicycles.

Action: **Public Safety & Transportation Approved 8-0**

Note: Nicole Freedman, Director of Transportation Planning, Planning & Development Department joined the Committee for discussion on this item.

Ms. Freedman stated that Blue Bikes launched in the fall of 2020. This docket item is the second of two Shared Streets grants received from MassDOT which will allow the City to install four stations and relocate a fifth station. The first grant allowed the City to add two stations and received additional grant funding for six stations which have been installed. The City anticipates receiving a Community Connections Grant for an additional three stations. The Developer Trio is also adding a station. These grants will provide the City with a total of sixteen stations.

With sixteen stations, the City will begin to see a useful bike network with higher usage. The City anticipates expanding the Blue Bike Stations and bicycles further south in the City including Walnut and Beacon Streets, Newton Highlands near the MBTA station, Needham Street, Boston College MBTA stop and somewhere on Needham St. The City will relocate the Washington Street Armory bike station because it is not used, and relocate the bike station instead to California Street bridge or Forte Park.

The City will not be responsible for funding or operating costs, the grants cover all costs for the project. The grant requires implementation of the four bike stations by May 31, 2021. The City has a contract with the operator, Motivate, which will provide free operations. The City will renegotiate with Motivate in September 2022. Ward Councilors and abutters will be notified of potential locations.

Committee members questions, answers and comments:

Questions and Answers:

Do you feel riders will return the bike to the originating station? Ms. Freedman answered that most trips are one-way.

Are bike stations expensive due to technology?

What experience does the City anticipate with Blue Bikes compared to the Lime Bike experience? How will Blue Bikes operate versus Lime Bikes? What is the City and residents prospective? Ms. Freedman answered that the equipment design is superior. The Blue Bike operations team is better than the Lime Bike team. Blue Bikes are well maintained, the equipment is more expensive than Lime Bikes which had flaws and were unsafe. In Ms. Freedman's opinion, the Hybrid system would work well in the City allowing bike station flexibility due to lack of density. It is very expensive to have bike stations everywhere in the City to make the program functional.

Please describe ridership utilization. Ms. Freedman answered that Blue Bikes launched at the end of bike season 2020. Typically, trips during the winter months are approximately 10-20% lower than the peak season. Ms. Freedman stated at this time, she cannot estimate ridership utilization. She anticipates ridership will increase with additional stations.

Is the City able to track who is using the Blue Bikes and their destination? Ms. Freedman answered that she has access to aggregated data, station data and demographics. Currently, Nonantum and West Newton are the two highest used stations, Newton Centre is third.

Regarding ridership data, does the City know the origination outside of the City? Ms. Freedman answered that she could request ridership data information.

It is important to increase the number of bike stations, bike infrastructure and bike lanes. Does the City have a timeline of when we may expect the installation of bike lanes on Washington Street? Ms. Freedman answered that she is hopeful bike lanes will be installed on Washington Street this season. The intersection of Washington Street and Lowell Avenue will require additional traffic analysis, time and money.

Has Motivate provided data on stops where bikes deplete? Ms. Freedman answered that part of Motivate's contract is to rebalance the bikes (move from full to empty stations).

What is the useful life cycle of the bikes? Ms. Freedman answered that the useful life is five-years on the bike. The bikes are constantly being maintained and replacing parts. The useful life of a station is ten-years. In 2011, Boston launched Blue Bikes, good data is available on their useful life.

What is the parking stall and bike ratio? Ms. Freedman answered that the ratio is 1.8 to 1 on parking stalls to bikes.

Comments:

It is unfortunate, bike stations are expensive. Ms. Freedman stated that the approximate cost of a bike station with bikes is approximately \$40,000 to \$50,000 per station with approximately fifteen stations holding ten bikes.

Without further discussion, Councilor Lipof made a motion to approve the acceptance of grant funds. Committee members agreed 8-0.

Referred to Public Safety & Transportation and Finance Committees

#296-20 **Discussion regarding MGL Chapter 150E**
COUNCILORS NORTON, ALBRIGHT, BOWMAN, DOWNS, KRINTZMAN, LEARY, LIPOF, MARKIEWICZ, NOEL, WRIGHT and KALIS requesting a discussion regarding MGL Chapter 150E and the limitations it places on the City of Newton to unilaterally make changes to the Newton Police Department functions without having to negotiate them with the police unions.

Action: **Public Safety & Transportation No Action Necessary 7-0-1, Councilor Malakie abstaining**

#280-20 **Discussion with Police regarding department policies**
COUNCILORS ALBRIGHT, BOWMAN, DOWNS, GREENBERG, LEARY, KELLEY, WRIGHT, KALIS, HUMPHREY, MALAKIE, GROSSMAN, DANBERG, NOEL, LIPOF requesting a discussion with Chief MacDonald and appropriate members of the Police Department regarding policies and procedures around the use of force and measures to combat racism. One possible outcome to augment departmental community policing might be a citizens' oversight body that reflects the demographics and values of Newton.

Action: **Public Safety & Transportation Held 8-0 on 06/17/20**
Public Safety & Transportation No Action Necessary 7-0-1, Councilor Malakie abstaining

#279-20 Resolution on Newton Police Policy and Training
COUNCILORS NOEL, ALBRIGHT, BOWMAN, NORTON, DOWNS, LEARY, LIPOF, WRIGHT, KALIS, KRINTZMAN, HUMPHREY, CROSSLEY, GROSSMAN, GREENBERG, RYAN, DANBERG, AUCHINCLOSS AND MARKIEWICZ submit a resolution to ensure Newton Police policy and training reflects the values and commitment of our community, reducing police violence, facilitating citizens' First Amendment Right to peacefully protest, and actively engaging in non-biased community policing.
Public Safety & Transportation Held 8-0 on 06/17/20
Action: **Public Safety & Transportation No Action Necessary 7-0-1, Councilor Malakie abstaining**

#275-20 Discussion with the Police and Human Resources about Newton practices
COUNCILORS NORTON, DOWNS, GROSSMAN, LAREDO, MALAKIE, AUCHINCLOSS, NOEL AND BOWMAN requesting a discussion with the Newton Police Chief and Human Resources Director about Newton practices regarding recruitment, screening, training, advancement, and removal of police officers, including plans to increase the number of black and minority officers.
Public Safety & Transportation Held 8-0 on 06/17/20
Action: **Public Safety & Transportation No Action Necessary 7-0-1, Councilor Malakie abstaining**

Note: Docket items #296-20, #280-20, #279-20 and #275-20 were discussed together.

Chair Downs stated that it is her intention to entertain a motion to vote no action necessary on docket items #296-20, #280-20, #279-20 and #275-20. These docket items were filed in May and June of 2020. All docketers and co-docketers have agreed to voting no action necessary on these items. New items will be docketed when a new Police Chief is hired. It is desirable for the Police Department to start with a clean slate and allow the new Police Chief to request actions from City Council once they have had a chance to review the department. She then stated that she has docketed a new item as follows: PUBLIC SAFETY & TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE requesting a discussion with the Administration on the Newton Police Reform Task Force recommendations and matters pertaining which will cover these topics.

Jonathan Yeo, Chief Operating Officer joined the Committee for discussion on these items.

Committee members questions, answers and comments:

Questions and Answers:

Please explain the process on what the Committee will be discussing in the coming months. How will the Committee approach the budget? Chair Downs answered that it depends on the Administration and the hiring of a new Police Chief and stated that she intends to follow the Newton Police Reform Task Force recommendations to work with the Police Department and the new Police Chief. Mr. Yeo agreed and said that Mayor Fuller will discuss her thoughts and task force issues at a future meeting. Mayor Fuller is hopeful the new Police Chief will attend that meeting and hear from Councilors their concerns. Chair Downs then stated that the budget process will be unaffected because of the time the new Chief will need to acquaint themselves with the department and challenges. However, Mr.

Yeo noted that the budget will be impacted by the Administration's response to the Newton Police Reform Task Force recommendations.

When do you anticipate the Committee discussing this new docket item? Chair Downs answered that she anticipates discussing the new item with the announcement of the new Police Chief and Mayor Fuller's thoughts and reactions to the Newton Police Reform Task Force. Chair Downs stated that she anticipates discussing the new docket item before budget discussions with a joint meeting with the Programs and Services and the Public Facilities Committees or in a Committee of the Whole.

Regarding docket item #296-20, it appears to be a different type of docket item as it provides a discussion on what is in bounds and what is out of bounds. Should this docket item be handled differently? Chair Downs answered that one reason this was not discussed was because we could not determine who could answer.

Comments:

It is important to discuss the use of force, racism and hiring practices.

Regarding docket item #275-20, "including plans to increase the number of black and minority officers". It will be interesting to hear what the new Police Chief or Administration goal is. If there is a goal or what the goal is, it should be judged slowly.

Councilor Malakie stated that she is uncomfortable with voting no action necessary on these four items and would prefer to keep them until a new item is docketed and for history purposes. Chair Downs answered that the new docket item is a discussion item and understands hiring a new chief is imminent.

Without further discussion, Councilor Bowman made a motion for no action necessary on docket items #296-20, #280-20, #279-20 and #275-20. Committee members agreed 7-0-1, Councilor Malakie abstaining.

At approximately 8:00 p.m., Councilor Markiewicz made a motion to adjourn. Committee members agreed 8-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Andreae Downs, Chair

Resolution

To our Members of the Massachusetts General Court,
Governor Baker

RE: MBTA service cuts, aka “Forging Ahead”

Whereas...

- The MBTA has cut service frequency temporarily for many bus and rail routes, citing low ridership during the pandemic;
- The MBTA simultaneously suspended service on at least nine bus routes, leaving some underserved areas without good transit alternatives;
- The MBTA has a history of never reinstating suspended routes;
- Expected savings from MBTA service cuts made during the pandemic total only about \$21M in the current fiscal year
- Federal pandemic assistance for the MBTA totals nearly \$2 billion within the last twelve months;
- To date, the MBTA has put most of its federal pandemic-related funds into its capital budget or held funds for post-pandemic operating costs
- Members of the Massachusetts congressional delegation have expressed significant concern that federal funding has not been allocated to reversing these cuts¹
- ~~Commuter rail conductors are subject to permanent furloughs in a precarious economy exacerbating same;~~
- Overcrowding on some extant routes has already been documented since the service reductions, which as it continues will discourage ridership worried about COVID transmission;
- These cuts affect thousands of lower-income residents, who depend on public transit, including a disproportionate number of people of color, non-English speakers, and people with disabilities—precisely those most impacted by the pandemic and resulting recession
- Unreliable or infrequent transit pushes users to seek alternatives, many of which have greater impacts on our environment, on our public budgets, and on household expenses;
- The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) noted in its comments to the MBTA that these cuts have a direct impact on the Commonwealth’s need to produce more housing, and without transit, new housing will increase sprawl;
- Congestion is already increasing on highways into Boston as the region slowly returns to work;
- To fight climate change and recover from the pandemic, access to public transit must be increased, not decreased;
- The MBTA Fiscal and Management Control Board has voted to restore service as soon as possible, although the MBTA is constrained in its capacity to do so;

Therefore:

¹ https://edition.pagesuite.com/popovers/dynamic_article_popover.aspx?artguid=8f3389e6-147c-4c7f-b0af-2704dca774ae&appid=1165

We ask our representatives and senators in the General Court to join us in demanding the MBTA reverse the “Forging Ahead” cuts and restore service to pre-pandemic levels as soon as possible, and to enact legislation to fund MBTA operations and capital investment to support public transportation service that is critical to economic recovery.