



MassCommute

MASSACHUSETTS TRANSPORTATION MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION COUNCIL

February 22, 2016

Frank DePaola, General Manager & CEO
Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, Massachusetts Department of Transportation
10 Park Plaza
Boston, MA

Re: Proposed MBTA Commuter Rail Schedule Changes

Dear Mr. DePaola,

On behalf of the twelve Transportation Management Associations (TMAs) of MassCommute, and the 300+ businesses and 300,000+ employees we serve, we would like to thank you for this opportunity to provide feedback on the recently proposed 2016 schedule changes to the MBTA Commuter Rail. As you know, the Commuter Rail provides critical connections to jobs and services and acts as both a driver of our economic engine and a determinant of our quality of life here in the Commonwealth. Our TMAs have reviewed the proposed schedule changes in detail and have engaged with commuters in their service areas extensively to generate feedback. The following comments are a collection of that feedback as well as of the analyses of MassCommute TMA staff:

* Key Concerns for Cambridge/Boston Commuters

North Station Lines

Newburyport/Rockport:

- No inbound service from inner stops (Swampscott-Chelsea) between 8:20 and 9:00 am. This could be addressed by adding stops to train 160 (though at the expense of Newburyport branch riders).
- 1:30 outbound gap between 1:50 and 3:20 PM, longer than any gap on current schedules.
- Branches cause uneven evening outbound spacing: Two outbounds close together (7:15 Rockport and 7:35 PM Newburyport) from North Station, and then no train until 8:45 PM.
- Newburyport gets one express train in each direction (5:50 AM Inbound, 4:30 PM outbound).

Haverhill:

- Current 3:00 PM Haverhill local via Reading now runs express via Lowell Line at 3:30 PM. Creates large outbound gap between 2:02 & 3:45 PM for Malden to Reading stops.
- Early evening spacing uneven: There are two trains between 7 & 8 PM (7:20 PM Reading local, 7:40 PM Haverhill local), then no outbound trains until 9:20 PM. Afternoon/evening frequencies largely same or better than current up until this point.
- All off-peak trains run to/from Haverhill; as a result, less off-peak service for Reading/Wakefield/Melrose stops due to loss of Reading locals. Andover-Haverhill stops get more off-peak service.

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Lowell:

- **Commuters should be aware that selected Haverhill Line trains (except for the 6:55 PM outbound, train #221) which operate via the Lowell Line to/from Boston will no longer make stops on the Lowell Line.**
- Mid-morning gap for inner stations (Winchester/Medford) from approximately 7:45-8:30 AM.

Fitchburg:

- Overall better service due to faster speeds.
- Concord/Lincoln lose any morning inbound express service, but they do have one evening outbound service.
- Better outbound spacing from 5:35-7:15 PM; large gap from 7:15 to 8:45 PM for outbound service.

South Station Lines

Worcester/Framingham:

- New super express (non-stop) for Worcester, though outbound trip occurs well after rush hour (after 7:30 PM), a challenge for reverse commuters
- AM Inbound: Grafton, Westborough, Southborough and Ashland each lose one departure. Framingham, West Newton and Newtownville each gain one departure.

Needham:

- **Less AM Peak service to Ruggles- a major connector to Longwood Medical Area jobs.**
- Added mid-afternoon outbound train (skips Ruggles and Forest Hills).

Franklin:

- More morning inbound trains stop at Ruggles, a positive for LMA commuters
- Several stations lose one evening outbound train due to consolidations.

Providence/Worcester:

- **Most Providence line trains no longer stop at Ruggles. This requires all passengers from the line to either transfer at Back Bay and ride the Orange Line outbound, or transfer at Route 128 to a Stoughton Train (this only really works for the 812/906 pair at 8:31 and 8:36). This may be justifiable if it does save 7 minutes of travel time (compared to the current schedule) but Ruggles is a major traffic generator to MASCO and for connecting buses and shuttles.**
- Loss of 7:26 AM inbound originating in Mansfield may cause overcrowding on mid-morning inbound Providence trains. Replacement train originates in Providence.
- Evening outbound sees more trains stopping at Route 128 (all Providence trains).
- No midday or evening rush hour outbound Providence line trains stop at Ruggles - a gap from 10:38 AM to 6:38 PM! Ruggles is an important bus and shuttle transfer point.

Providence/Stoughton:

- **Cuts six outbound PM trains from both South Station and Ruggles Station. These cuts, all but one during evening rush hour, will have dramatic negative effects on commuters to and from the city center during the evening commute and pose a social equity problem.** While adding outbound trains in the morning is a positive improvement, subtracting them in the evening seems to assume that more people reverse commute from Boston to other locations than vice versa. The people who drive our economy would benefit from a more balanced schedule where equal attention is paid to inbound commuters and reverse commuters. Many

- people who work in Boston cannot afford to live in Boston and must commute into the city. The new schedule's afternoon cuts to these stations will hurt the very people who need and use transit most by forcing them onto fewer and less frequent trains.
- **The proposed changes will have a negative impact on people who work a 9-5 schedule in the Seaport District and commute from South Boston to certain stations, such as Canton Junction.** Under the current schedule, there are trains departing South Station at 5:15 and 5:45 to Canton Junction. Under the proposed new schedule the trains will depart at 5:05 and 5:51. A person who works until 5:00 can catch the 5:15 train under the current schedule; however, under the proposed new schedule, the 5:05 train leaves too early from South Station for a person working in the Seaport District to catch. As such, a person who works until 5:00 will not be able to catch a train until 5:51, 36 minutes later than the old schedule. This is a big issue for people who work in the Seaport District and commute to Canton Junction.

* Key Concerns for Suburban/Reverse Commuters

Newburyport/Rockport:

- Overall good reverse commute from Salem/Beverly, with one 1:11 gap between 4:00 and 5:11.
- Good outbound AM reverse commute service (hourly) on Newburyport branch (serves North Beverly/Cummings as well as Ipswich where Ebsco has many commuter rail riders), but PM issues: **current schedule has trains at Ipswich/NBev at 4:55/5:05 and then 6:31/6:45, which is more than an hour and a half at peak commuting times. This gap is hard to address due to single track (there is a passing siding at Ipswich) and the Salem tunnel. But it should be looked into; as there are probably 100+ reverse commuters along the line.** The rest of the evening schedule is a lot better; right now if a commuter there misses the 6 o'clock train, there isn't another for three hours.
- The outbound train at Lynn that currently stops at 5:04PM is now scheduled for 5PM, which is challenging for Eastern Bank employees who leave work at 5PM. The next train leaving Lynn and going outbound is not until 5:35PM.
- In the proposed schedule, the outbound train from North Station will change from departing at 7:35AM to departing at 7:20, which is very early for people commuting to the north shore. The next outbound train doesn't depart until 7:50AM, which is too late.
- The end on day Inbound train proposed changes have a significant negative impact. The 4:45PM or 5:18PM trains provide relatively good options for a standard 5pm workday. The proposed changes push both of these timetables further away from the 5pm mark, which negatively affect work schedule and connecting train schedule.
- By canceling the 8:35AM train from North Station outbound to Lynn, it becomes difficult or impossible for a commuter from the South Shore to make the connection.
- By canceling the 4:45PM train, a commuter would have to leave work half hour earlier or take a later train at 5:27PM, which could cause a missed connection to South Shore trains and ensure very late home arrivals.
- In creating more express trains, Lynn is bypassed more often. Direct trains from Lynn to Ipswich now leave Lynn at 3:42PM or 5:35PM. The 4:42PM, which many take home to Ipswich is now a 4:37 to Rockport, forcing these commuters to get off in Beverly and wait for the next train, which is an express that skips Lynn.

Haverhill:

- No major changes, but difficult to fit a full work day in Lawrence or Haverhill using reverse-commute service. This is something TMAs will likely advocate for once the double-track and bridge repair allows for more two-way service.
- Some inbound via Wildcat trains could make local stops on Lowell line - most do now and probably have capacity to do so.

- **MassCommute TMAs and members are very interested in updates regarding double-tracking and the Merrimack River bridge project.**

Lowell:

- No major changes. Thank you for fixing several of the issues from earlier proposed schedules.

Fitchburg:

- Overall better service due to faster speeds.
- Good reverse-commute service outbound to Littleton, 1:15 gap (4:30-5:45) inbound.
- No before-9 a.m. service to Fitchburg (I believe 8 a.m. was promised at some point), issues for reverse commuters there and to Ayer/Shirley/Devens area.

Worcester:

- Good reverse-commute service to Framingham and to Worcester. Could swap 524 and 590 to have the Worcester train run express. Could remove local stops on 503 for faster service outbound in the early AM.

Needham: No major issues.

Franklin: No major issues. A bit of new express service is good.

Providence:

- **Few or no Providence trains stop at Ruggles at key times of the day (impacting both inbound and outbound service). This requires all passengers from the line to either transfer at Back Bay and ride the Orange Line outbound, or transfer at Route 128 to a Stoughton Train (this only really works for the 812/906 pair at 8:31 and 8:36). This may be justifiable if it does save 7 minutes of travel time (compared to the current schedule) but Ruggles is a major traffic generator to MASCO and surrounding areas and should be served if at all possible.**
- Is stopping nearly every Providence train at Route 128 necessary? Especially AM train 808 which operates 10 minutes behind 904 and PM trains 817, 821 and 827 which operate within 10 minutes of other stopping trains.
- Train 831 could run express from Ruggles to Sharon; there's a Stoughton train 10 minutes behind.
- 2 hour midday service gap to Providence midday could be addressed.

The above comments reflect a general consensus among MassCommute TMAs and represent a cross section of TMA members. We recognize the enormity of this task and commend you for your efforts to solicit widespread public feedback on the changes that have been proposed (and for integrating much of the feedback that was received last year after the first round of changes were proposed). We look forward to continuing our strong partnership with MassDOT and welcome any questions about these comments.

Thank you for consideration.

Respectfully,



Julia Prange Wallerice, Executive Director



Patrick Sullivan, Managing Director