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Is Public Transit a Priority for the Weld Administration?

Guest speaker at A.P.T.'s annual meeting on May 15 was Laura Brown, transportation reporter for the Boston Herald. Following are excerpts from her talk, which was titled "Is Public Transit a Priority for the Weld Administration?":

"During the campaign I asked Bill Weld whether transit funding was a high priority, and he sidestepped the question, saying 'services can be provided at current levels without the need for additional funding,' and noted the notorious 'budget-buster' label.

"Paradoxically, he went on to say: 'I am committed to our public transportation system and believe that we must move to expedite improvements and expansion.... I believe that making capital improvements in our public transportation system is a must, and bonding is the most effective way to provide the funds necessary.'

"The only project he referred to specifically was the restoration of the Old Colony rail line.

"After he was elected governor, Weld submitted a transportation bond bill nearly identical to the one submitted by the Dukakis administration, except for one major difference: he had slashed funding for MBTA capital projects in half, axing roughly \$500 million in bonding authorization from the bill.

"Under heavy pressure to cut anything possible, the governor suddenly argued the only MBTA capital project the state could afford was Old Colony....

"Over the next few weeks, the legislature put the transit funding back into the bond bill, with little comment from the administration. In fact there was almost no discussion about the money that had been axed until last week. Then, as I understand it, the governor was still strongly considering vetoing \$300 to \$600 million of the transit funding in the bond bill last Thursday, just one day before he finally signed the whole package without a veto.

"There's clearly still a lot of contro-

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MBTA Seeks Fare Increase

The MBTA wants to raise its fares by 21%, effective July 29.

For subway fares, the T is proposing two options. Under one option, the basic fare will rise from 75c to 85c, with no discount for buying tokens in quantity. In the second option, a single token will cost \$1.00, but 10 tokens would sell for \$7.50. Presently, riders can get 11 rides for \$7.50.

Under both options, local bus fares would go up from 50c to 60c, and senior citizen/disability fares would be raised from 10c to 25c. Express bus, commuter rail, The Ride, and monthly pass prices would also increase.

Public hearings on the proposed fare hike were held in May, and a decision is expected by the middle of July.

Earlier this year, Governor Weld asked for an increase in T fares, at the same time that he exempted motor vehicle fees from his (otherwise) across the board increases in state fees. The governor has also said he is opposed to an increased gas tax.

[See page 2 for A.P.T.'s opinion.]

T Money Restored in Bond Bill

The 1991 Transportation Bond Bill, also called "An Act Providing for an Accelerated Transportation Development and Improvement Program for the Commonwealth", was signed into law by Gov. William Weld on May 10. This new law authorizes the MBTA to borrow \$1,087,900,000 for capital improvements.

As reported in the winter Mass. Transit, Gov. Weld originally proposed to cut MBTA capital spending 58%, to just \$460,200,000. But all of the money that the governor removed from the bill was restored by the legislature, and the final version actually includes \$3,000,000 more than Gov. Dukakis had proposed last year.

Sources indicate, however, that as late as May 9 the governor was planning to veto \$294,000,000 of MBTA funding from the bill.

The new law contains money for purchase

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Editorial: The MBTA Fare Increase Is a Tax Increase

The proposed MBTA fare increase is a tax on riders for not polluting the environment.

The \$21 million that will be raised by the fare increase -- an arbitrary number that was picked out of the air by the governor's office -- will be used to pay part of the deficit in the state's general fund.

The MBTA's own figures indicate that the fare increase will cause as many as 43,000 daily riders to leave the transit system. Most of these trips will be taken by car instead, resulting in an increase of 231,700 vehicle miles travelled per day.

This additional auto use will make it more difficult for Boston to comply with the

reduction in air pollution that is mandated by the new federal Clean Air Act. Under this law, the increased auto exhaust will have to be matched by reductions in emissions from industries, power plants, and other sources.

The use of fare box revenues to pay for the state deficit is also a dangerous precedent. If this year, then why not next year, and next? Each time funds are scooped, there will be higher fares and fewer riders. This spiral of raising fares, losing riders, and cutting service will cause damage that takes many years to repair.

The issue at hand is how to price MBTA services to bring riders into the system. How can marketing "membership", through the use of monthly passes and ten-ride tickets, be used to increase ridership? How can a discount program encourage the occasional rider to become a regular one? The quality and level of services must be attractive, which they are now, but the price must also be attractive.

The use of a fare increase as a tax on MBTA riders, to bail out the state, is not acceptable. It is more appropriate to tax those who contribute to air pollution, and to use these funds to support bus, trolley, subway, and train services. Those who pollute the air we all breathe should be paying more.

Anna Discovers the T

In February, the MBTA distributed 2,000 copies of "Anna Discovers the T" -- A.P.T.'s new children's guide to public transit -- to 6 local schools which had participated in the T's children's safety program.

This booklet tells the story of 10-year-old Anna as she learns to use buses, subway, and commuter rail. It introduces children and their parents to public transportation, explains the MBTA system and how to use it, and develops skills in reading maps and schedules.

Also in the package was a poster contest, to which 178 entries were received. The winner was Lauren Brackett, a 4th-grade student at St. Brendan's School in Dorchester, whose brightly colored drawing was captioned "T is for Transportation, Not Traffic." Lauren's poster, showing Red Line trains moving under congested streets, was reprinted on signs throughout the MBTA system.

During Transportation Week in May, Lauren and her classmates, along with 2nd-place winner Jennifer Bailey of St. Theresa's School in West Roxbury, were given a tour of South Station and a trip to the World of Dinosaurs exhibit. Needless to say, all transportation was provided by the MBTA.

A.P.T. staff member Bob Gentile revised the text for the book, which was originally prepared in 1981, and developed the teacher's guide and poster contest; Joe Ulatowski did the illustrations. A.P.T. also thanks Howard Waddell, Ann O'Connor, and David Dance of the MBTA's Marketing and Ridership office. The book has been so popular that the T plans to repeat the program next year.

Because of the demand, we regret that we have exhausted our supply of the booklets.

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of 300 new buses and 120 The Ride vans, rehab of 59 commuter rail coaches, Blue Line station modernization and platform lengthening, accessibility modifications on all 4 rapid transit lines, maintenance facility upgrades, and track, bridge, signal, power, and vent shaft improvements throughout the T system. Also included are funds to complete the South Station Transportation Center (with a bus terminal over the tracks), the North Station Transportation Center (with an underground Green Line station), and the Old Colony commuter rail project; and design money for the Washington St. Replacement Service and the South Boston Piers Transitway.

The law also provides \$15,000,000 for the 14 Regional Transit Authorities across the state, down from \$25,000,000 proposed by Gov. Dukakis. Other provisions are \$10,000,000 for railroads, including passenger station improvements in Hyannis, Buzzards Bay, Wareham, and Taunton; \$1,900,000 for commuter boat facilities in Hingham; \$9,500,000 for intercity buses; \$1,403,780,000 for highway construction, including Boston's Central Artery project; and \$8,600,000 for airports.

A.P.T. News

A.P.T. has a new "volunteer line" phone. If you would like to help us work for better transit, call (617) 243-4102. Please leave your name and number on the machine, with the best time for us to call you back.

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A.P.T. members, and others who are interested in public transit, are encouraged to attend our monthly board meetings, which are usually held in Kendall Sq., Cambridge, on a Wednesday at 5:30. Please call 547-3332 or write to us for dates and location.

Weld Priorities ...continued from page 1

versy within the administration about the importance of authorizing money for the T's ambitious capital program....

"There are some signs the T may not survive the transition between the two administrations with much of its professional staff -- and experience -- intact.

"The former general manager, Tom Glynn, stepped down last month to let the governor and secretary of transportation choose their own leader for the T, and long-time T manager Jim Rooney was chosen to serve as acting GM.

"But it's clear that some of the staffing decisions at the T -- most notably the recent selection of a new police chief -- are being directed right from the governor's office, which hasn't finished its promised purge of Dukakis administration managers.

"Although the Weld administration hasn't touched many departments in state government, transportation seems to be a symbolic target for shuffling staff and replacing managers.

Update on Proposed Projects

Following is an update on the status of several proposed MBTA projects:

Arborway Line: Work begins this summer on the reconstruction of South St., including laying of new track, financed by the city of Boston. The T is also developing plans for a new, wheelchair-accessible streetcar that will be used on the line. Plans are to have the route reopened by the mid 1990s.

Washington St. replacement service: Last fall the MBTA submitted an Environmental Notification Form (ENF) for its proposed trackless trolley route serving Washington St. between Dudley Sq. and Chinatown. The proposal was criticized by neighborhood residents and organizations, and by the city of Boston. An environmental impact review will be required. Many transit advocates are disappointed that this review will not study a streetcar line (Green Line branch) as an alternative.

Old Colony commuter rail: Engineering and design work is underway on the Middleboro and Plymouth branches, and on the route from Braintree to South Station; but the proposed site for the Kingston station has received criticism. Since this site is 1/2 mile off the main line, trains to the station will be unable to stop in Plymouth; it will also cost more to build. Meanwhile, the Greenbush line is undergoing a more stringent environmental review since it passes through historic sections of Hingham.

"It's still unclear how much effect a major shakeup in the T management staff would have on operations, but the agency is clearly facing some of the toughest challenges in its history."

Join Us!

Mass. Transit is published by the Association for Public Transportation, Inc. (A.P.T.), a non-profit tax-exempt organization founded in 1973 to encourage the use and improvement of public transit in Boston. We support transit because it is ecologically sound, because it is less disruptive of neighborhoods, and because it is the only transportation available for many people.

We also publish "Car-Free in Boston," the guidebook to public transit in greater Boston and New England.

A.P.T. depends on donations from its members and friends to continue its activities. Membership is \$15 a year, or \$5 for students and persons on fixed incomes. Members receive Mass. Transit and Car-Free Updates, as well as a copy of the next edition of "Car-Free" when it is published. Contributions in excess of \$5 per person per year are tax-deductible.

We welcome your ideas, comments, letters, and articles on transit issues. Please send them to Mass. Transit, c/o A.P.T., P. O. Box 192, Cambridge, MA 02238.

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Short Items...

The MBTA has installed new signs in the Green Line's Hynes Convention Ctr./I.C.A. station, showing the station's former name, "Auditorium." The signs were erected shortly after the fall issue of A.P.T.'s newsletter, which noted that riders unfamiliar with the subway system were becoming confused. A.P.T. thanks the T for putting up the signs.

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Congratulations go to the MBTA for new printed schedules which have been issued for over half of the T's 162 bus routes. The new schedules are easier to read, and each one has an accurate map of the route. The T hopes to convert all of its routes to the new schedule format by the end of the year.

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New schedule racks, containing all of the T's bus schedules, have been put in several T stations including Downtown Crossing, Government Center, and Park Street. The racks are in addition to other amenities, such as pay phones, clocks, and bank machines, that were recently installed throughout the system.

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One provision in the Transportation Bond Act increases the penalties for playing loud radios and "boom boxes" on MBTA trains and buses. Police can seize boom boxes as evidence, which can be sold to pay a violator's court costs and fines. The amendment was sponsored by Sen. Bill Owens of Roxbury.

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Another section of the Bond Act lets the MBTA buy electricity wholesale from the New England Power Pool, rather than paying retail rates to Boston Edison. The T estimates this may save up to \$3 million a year.

Restoration work has begun on historic Dudley station, which was used until 1987 by the T's elevated Orange Line. As a result, the station's ground level bus terminal was closed on June 22. MBTA buses now stop nearby on Dudley and Warren Sts.

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The MBTA is attracting nationwide attention as a good example of transit-based development. California Rail News recently noted that "Boston's continuing heavy investment in rail transportation is paying big dividends. The dense, compact city center has been reinforced, and rail transit is an aesthetic experience rather than the drab, even hostile encounter found in many other American cities."

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Amtrak has released a study of potential rail service from Boston to Portland, Maine. Based on 3 trains daily from North Station, the railroad estimates annual ridership of 223,000; and a direct rail connection between North Station and South Station would significantly improve this figure. North Station service would require \$49 million in capital costs and up to \$3.4 million a year in operating subsidy, most of which would need to be paid by Maine and New Hampshire.

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The Boston Globe has reduced its coverage of MBTA and other transportation issues this year. The weekly "Starts and Stops" column and the occasional "Three for the Road" editorials have both been dropped, and fewer transportation news articles have appeared in the paper. Meanwhile, the Boston Herald and the Patriot Ledger continue to cover transportation stories in detail.

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