

Mass. Transit News

Newsletter of the Association for Public Transportation, Inc.

Spring 2001

ISSN 1087-5263

Number 33

Changes at the MBTA

Last year the funding mechanism for the MBTA was changed from a system where the authority would send a bill to the state to cover its deficit after the fiscal year was finished to one where the T is on a pay-as-you-go basis. It receives one penny of the state sales tax and must balance its books with fare revenue and federal grants. One of the first effects of this change was an across-the-board fare increase. The basic subway fare went up to \$1.00 and bus fare went to 75 cents. Commuter rail fares increased as well. The T promised these fare increases would lead to better and expanded service.

- When the basic bus fare increased to 75 cents, there were complaints from many who use two or more buses to get to their destinations that they were being overcharged. In response, effective December 1, the T instituted free transfers. Each bus garage has its own route numbers printed on their transfers. Each day has unique transfers, all the same buff color. They are good for a single use. The drivers cross out by pen the appropriate boxes on the transfers to validate them.

- A new weekly combo pass has been introduced in response to complaints that the monthly pass represents too large an outlay for some people. It costs \$12.50. It's not clear to us why the seven-day Visitor Pass, which covers similar services, costs \$22.00.

- The T has razed the Arborway carhouse and is going to replace it with a bus facility equipped to fuel and maintain buses powered by

compressed natural gas (CNG). New CNG buses are on order and will be used on inner city routes.

- Buses on the crosstown bus routes (CT1, CT2 and CT3) have been equipped with automatic stop announcements and front-mounted bicycle racks. Transfers are available for 25 cents to connect from bus to subway, but not the other way.

- The T has put an order for a fleet of completely new and larger Blue Line cars out to bid. There would be some more Orange Line cars as well. At this point, what form the additional Orange Line cars would take depends on the costs: either there would be some new cars ordered or some of the better Blue Line cars displaced by the new fleet would be rebuilt for use on the Orange Line to beef up its capacity.

- Following some bad publicity regarding calls to its customer service line, the T recently instituted a Customer Bill of Rights. The T promises to provide real-time information on delayed trains and buses and offers a free ride to customers whose bus or train is more than 30 minutes late. Details are on the T's website (www.mbta.com). Unfortunately, finding information there is not always as easy as it could be. To get current on-time information from the MBTA home page, you have to click on: News & Information, then What's New, then Transit Updates. At the time of this writing, it had been updated within the hour and reported all lines running on or near schedule. It also reported a couple of elevators and escalators out of service (a chronic problem on the T).

Bus Rapid Transit

On January 11, there was a symposium on "bus rapid transit". In a fast-paced presentation, the concept was introduced by Richard Doyle of the Federal Transit Administration. His definition was bus service with the characteristics of rapid transit: frequent, predictable service. Several speakers emphasized that there must be new concept buses, not to be confused with what speaker Anne Lusk of the University of Michigan termed the current "loser cruisers". They should look clearly different. Surveys show that riders feel the more glass used, the better. Clear, not tinted glass, and non-traditional seating arrangements. Lighting harking back to the old PCC trolleys: warm, not fluorescents that make the passengers look like ghouls. And a return to big windows in the back. More glass gives passengers a greater sense of security. James Kostaras of the Boston Redevelopment Authority spoke of the economic shot in the arm that would be the effect of the new Silver Line bus route on Washington St. in the South End and Roxbury. Public reaction at the symposium consisted of questions and answers on specifics, plus comments from the Sierra Club and the Washington Street Corridor Coalition. These groups brought the discussion from the theoretical to the street. They considered the Silver Line (which is under construction) an overpriced, over-hyped but semi-ordinary bus service. According to them, portions of this route would get stuck in Boston traffic and, despite the bells and whistles, would still be a bus.

Single Seat Rides

APT participated in an Independent Activities Period event at MIT on January. 10. The event was hosted by the Department of Planning and Urban Studies Computer Resources Lab. The activity explored "the value of single seat rides to or from work on public transit." Boston's Green Line and Stuttgart, Germany were used as case studies. Lines that bisect downtown, the

focus of the seminar, are seen as a means to increasing such rides. It was hoped that participants would "gain an appreciation of the value of such an approach to transport planning."

Such an appreciation seems to be a growing, judging from a review of comments received by the Central Transportation Planning Staff (CTPS) on the Boston Transportation Plan draft.

"Careful examination should be given to significantly extending the Orange, Red, Blue, and Green lines... The Orange Line should be extended ... to Route 128," wrote Gary Wilson. A Green Line extension beyond Lechmere to Medford Hillside "will provide much-needed transit service to portions of the City that have the density to support such a service," wrote Somerville Mayor, Dorothy A. Kelly Gay. Another letter recommends extending the Blue Line to the North Shore.

Boston Transportation Commissioner Andrea d'Amato wrote Kevin Sullivan, Secretary of Transportation and MBTA Chairman, "The congestion on the Green Line 'central section' east of Kenmore Station necessitates examining the future utilization of the Stuart Street tunnel as part of additional east-west connection alternatives".

Under one scenario, the existing Boylston Street/Tremont Street tunnel might serve the B, C, and E lines, while new tunnel capacity could be devoted to express service, over which D-Line trains, which run on dedicated and grade-separated right-of-way through Brookline and Newton to Riverside, might be routed.

Arborway Green Line

The Association for Public Transportation supports the restoration of Green Line "E" service to the former terminus at Arborway. We support restoration of service based on the following considerations:

- Electric streetcars are a proven and time-tested technology. They are zero-emission vehicles and relatively quiet.

- Steel wheel technology is more environmentally friendly than rubber tires. A worn out steel wheel is easily melted down to be re-forged into a new one, whereas rubber tires for the most part continue to be a disposal problem. Steel wheels have lower rolling friction, thus higher energy efficiency.

- Streetcars can and do function in many places as a mobile traffic calming device, making the streetscape more pedestrian friendly.

- Construction of a permanent way, such as a streetcar line, conveys a commitment to provide a high-quality service now and far into the future. The presence of such a permanent facility has a greater ability to act as a developmental "magnet" with more positive economic spin off effects. The sizable investment in constructing a street-railway demands service levels be maintained. A bus line can be too easily reduced in frequency, rerouted to another street, or eliminated altogether.

- The physical presence of a streetcar line conveys a sense of permanence and public commitment to the neighborhoods it serves.

- Light rail satisfies the need for compatibility with existing facilities, versatility under various operating conditions and expandability in order to prepare for the future. Light rail systems have been a success story time and again all over North America. Much of the bus substitution that occurred in the 20th century was strictly a cost-cutting measure that actually degraded service quality, and precipitated mass transit's subsequent hemorrhaging of ridership.

- The credibility of the rationale to not restore service to the line in question should also be considered. This as well as other bus substitutions on the Green Line system were always publicized as "temporary" and were always a downgrade of service. In cities all over the

globe, examples and precedents can be shown to debunk the assertions of any opponent of restoration, on the entire spectrum of issues, from public safety, to functionalism, to cost effectiveness over the long term.

Service changes

The Aquarium station on the Blue Line was closed in November for a year to work on renovating the station. The T is providing a shuttle bus from State station, but encouraging passengers to walk.

Commuter rail service to Worcester has been increased; the Grafton station is now open, and four trains a day in each direction now stop at Yawkey Station.

As we went to press, it was announced that the T is planning is planning to run late-night buses on weekends on some routes. However, it still claims it can't run the subways after 12:30 a.m. because it needs that time for maintenance of the system.

Join the discussion

APT has set up an e-mail discussion list called APT-list for discussion of the board's business as well as general issues concerning public transportation. To subscribe, send an e-mail message to: **majordomo@world.std.com** with the following text:

```
subscribe apt-list Firstname Lastname  
<your e-mail address>
```

for example:

```
subscribe apt-list Charlie Straphanger  
<charlie@car-free.com>
```

Visit our website at www.car-free.com

Save the Date

Annual Meeting
Wednesday, June 13, 2001

John Hancock Conference
Center
40 Trinity Place
Boston, MA

Room 201

5:30PM-7:30PM

Support APT

The Association for Public Transportation works to promote the use and improvement of public transportation. You can join APT by sending a check or money order for \$25 or more to the address below.

Your elected officers

The current officers and board of directors of APT are: Suzanne Heywood (president), John Businger (vice-president), John Hostage (treasurer), Fred Moore (clerk), Franziska Amacher, Gretchen Ashton, Deborah Black, Bill Bruins, Kristi Chase, Romin Koebel, Carolyn Mieth, Denise Provost, Peter Roudebush, and Barry Steinberg.

The board meets on the second Wednesday of each month. Meetings are usually held at 5:30 p.m. on the 7th floor of Boston City Hall. (You may need to use the after-hours entrance across the street from Faneuil Hall.)

All are welcome. Call Suzanne Heywood at 617-262-4295 for more details.

Contributors to this issue include: Barry Steinberg, Romin Koebel, Fred Moore, and John Hostage.

Association for Public Transportation, Inc.

P.O. Box 1029
Boston, MA 02205-1029