



MASS. TRANSIT NEWS

Newsletter of the Association for Public Transportation
Fall 2006

Richard J. Arena, President

www.car-free.com

Ernest V. Loewenstein, Editor

APT Tour of Greenbush Line on October 29



Map
of the
Old
Colony
Lines

APT cordially invites one and all to a tour of the soon-to-be-completed Greenbush line to Hingham and Scituate. The tour will take place on Sunday, October 29. Early bird pricing is \$22 for APT members, \$25 for all other for tickets purchased by September 30

See the enclosed flyer for more details. Further information - contact Barry Steinberg at bmsteinberg@earthlink.net or 617.773.7495, or visit www.car-free.com.

APT Annual Meeting

The annual meeting of APT was held on May 24, 2006 at the Harvard Club of Boston. Election of the Board of Directors and officers was held; they are listed in this newsletter.

President Richard Arena summarized APT's positions on current transportation issues before yielding the podium to guest speaker, David Gunn former CEO of Amtrak. Gunn had been chief executive officer of Amtrak under Vice Chairman, Michael Dukakis, who introduced him.

Remarks by APT President Arena

APT is an advocacy organization for public transportation. We are a voting member of RTAC, the Regional Transportation Advisory Committee, and we regularly contribute to Move Mass meetings, for whom we provide meeting minutes. APT has developed a list of priorities which include completion of the Big Dig transit mitigation commitments and the building of a North-South Rail Link (NSRL) tunnel.

The mitigation commitments, from which the government appears to be backpedaling, include Green Line to Somerville, Red-Blue connector, and light rail in the Washington Street corridor. The Green Line extension is "under study," the Red-Blue connector has been abrogated as unnecessary in spite of the fact that Mass General Hospital and Partners Health Care have made significant investments based upon its completion. The Washington St. replacement service, which was understood to be light rail, has instead been bus service called the Silver Line Bus Rapid Transit

(BRT). APT's position is that a bus line on the street is not rapid transit and we continue to advocate for light rail.

Strategic priorities include

- *Comprehensive State and Regional Rail Plan*
- *Fine Tuning of State Transit Fund Proposals*
- *Preservation of Abandoned Railroad Rights of Way (ROW) for future passenger & freight routes*
- *Transit Oriented Development: Implicit with TOD is 24/7 operation. A good start - operation until 3:00 AM on weekends.*
- *Upgrade Fare and Management Systems. The T desperately needs to know how many people go from Point A to Point B.*

The most important and pressing priority for strategic planning is to preserve the right of way for the NSRL. Not only will the NSRL improve commuter rail operations and facilitate transit oriented development, it will also integrate New Hampshire and Maine into the northeast corridor (NEC) intercity rail system. Boston's position as a regional economic power depends in part upon efficient regional rail service.

Address by David Gunn



"America is based on mobility," said Gunn, "but we are losing that for both passengers and freight. The infrastructure is in poor condition, and there is insufficient money for maintenance, let alone expansion

U.S. DOT policy towards passenger rail," said Gunn, is "...totally ideological and driven primarily by the White House Office of Management and Budget, which has never liked rail." Gunn was fired recently by the Bush administration when he refused to acquiesce in their plans to disassemble Amtrak and parcel out its pieces.

The public understands better than politicians the need to make tough choices. "The states are ahead of the feds," he noted. "Tight money will force policy makers to make investments that get the biggest bang for the buck, regardless of mode." He pointed to the plan to spend billions on expansion of O'Hare Airport in Chicago to serve airlines with relatively short hauls that could well be served more efficiently by rail.

Gunn also touched on the Amtrak reform plan that he and other Amtrak management people developed last year, and which was getting under way just as Gunn was fired. These include:

- Work rule reform: "Railroad employees generally are not overpaid," said Gunn, but "work rules need to be more flexible to deploy employees efficiently."
- Railroad Retirement Act rules: must be discontinued for new employees. The railroad retirement system is far more costly than the comparable retirement plans available in other industries, he noted.
- Railway Labor Act: change it "...to force parties to negotiate effectively." The current Act allows contracts to go on forever, said Gunn, without resolution
- Federal matching funds: High speed rail corridors would be readily developed if the funding match were the same as for highways (80/20)

What's at stake with Amtrak's current situation, said Gunn is this: "Amtrak is the Alamo of high-speed rail in America; if we lose it, the operational expertise and vendor base will disappear. The media's interest has been very superficial, but high oil prices have made federal transport policy much more of an issue for the public."

Gunn is optimistic that, between high oil prices and the Bush's low and declining approval ratings, an Amtrak debacle, he said "...is not something that they want."

(Abstracted with permission from Destination Freedom, the newsletter of National Corridors Initiative, James RePass, President)

APT Reluctantly Supports T Fare Increase

(Richard Arena)

APT has reluctantly supported the MBTA's proposed fare increase but with significant reservations. No one likes the idea of a fare increase, especially in view of the rather marginal level of service on many of the bus and rail lines. The basic rationale as given in APT's statement is that the Authority is effectively bankrupt owing to a huge debt load and the accompanying debt service.

The path of least resistance would have been for APT to come out against the fare increase. Many other advocacy organizations as well as several gubernatorial candidates

have done just that. But it is simply unrealistic to assume that we transit users and advocates will get the desired outcome - better, timely service and greater transit coverage. There is virtually no prospect of additional subsidy from the Commonwealth in the near term. Fare box revenue is only 28% of the cost of service, the lowest ratio in the country.

The main points made by APT in our statement to the T are:

- The T is effectively bankrupt, with \$ 8 billion of debt. It is selling valuable real estate assets at distress prices to pay for operating expenses such as payroll and electricity. That is no way to run a railroad.
- Only 28% of T expenses is covered by the fare box. For fares to cover all expenses would necessitate a basic subway fare of nearly \$4.50 No one, least of all APT, is proposing anything even remotely close to that.
- It is important to look at fare comparatives of other major cities. Boston is now the most expensive metropolitan area in which to live in the entire US. But our base subway rate of \$1.25 is far below NYC and Chicago, which are both \$2.00
- The T must be strong financially -- a fare increase would be only one leg of that stool.
- APT agrees that more transit is far better than less transit. We are willing to work with the T and the Legislature on realistic and reasonable funding mechanisms.
- To reiterate, APT supports a fare increase in conjunction with cost controls, time & distance based pricing, debt repayment
- APT insists that Mass. assumes significant responsibility for the T's crushing debt load.

An important opposition argument is that the fare increase is regressive, falling most heavily on those with the lowest incomes. The alternatives to a fare increase, however, are equally regressive: reduce service or increase the assessments on the cities and towns. Reduction in service also falls most heavily on those with no alternative as they cannot choose to drive instead. Increase in assessment will result in increased property taxes which again constitutes a regressive tax.

APT takes the position that it is the job of the transit authority to be financially sound. If there is an economic need on the part of low income users that has to be addressed, the fare box is not the place to do that. Those who are judged in need of help should

receive subsidized fare cards *the subsidy to be paid by a social welfare agency* as is the case of Medicaid.

In summary, APT has taken a very pragmatic approach -- APT supports A fare increase, but in conjunction with operational cost reductions and restructuring. We remind the MBTA that it needs to set its house in order. Address the ongoing maintenance deficiencies. Reassess cash flow and generate revenue from its real estate holdings. Revise schedules to increase nighttime service, including all night on weekends.

CharlieCard and CharlieTicket



(John Hostage)

The MBTA is planning to introduce its CharlieCard to accompany its CharlieTicket in November. The CharlieCard will be a plastic smart card the size of a credit card. It will have a computer chip that will store cash value, or a pass, or both. It will be a contact-less card that the rider will simply wave close to the fare gate or fare box for entry. When used with cash value, the fare will automatically be deducted from the card; when used as a pass it will open the fare gate, etc. The CharlieCard can be replenished and the intent is to be able to use the CharlieCard at places besides the T. The CharlieCard will replace paper monthly passes for bus and rapid transit users, but will not be used for commuter rail until 2007. The paper CharlieTicket has been in use for a while, and is similar to the CharlieCard, except that it can have stored cash value or a pass but not both.

When the new fare structure goes into effect next year, users of the CharlieCard will pay the base fare, while users of the CharlieTicket and those who pay cash, will pay a surcharge. At this time, the surcharge is projected to be 40 cents for local buses and 55 cents for rapid transit. When the CharlieCard is used with stored value, it will provide discounted bus-to-rapid transit transfers, and no-charge bus-to-bus and rapid transit-to-bus transfers. The CharlieTicket will include free transfers between local buses but no discount for bus-to-rapid transit or rapid transit-to-bus transfers.

COGNET: Non-Fare Income for the T

Vincent Dixon

Proposals by the MBTA for substantial fare increases highlight the needs and opportunities for substantial expansion of non-fare revenues by the T.

COGNET is the acronym for "Communities Opportunities Growth Nurturing Enterprises In Transit." It is a comprehensive proposal for indoor retail commerce at, or directly connected to, transit stations, similar to the "Underground City" in Montreal, that now has over 9,500 jobs and millions of dollars of economic activity. Examples currently exist in the MBTA system: Filene's Basement in the Downtown Crossing/Washington Street area of Boston and Cambridge-Side Galleria in East Cambridge, which attract people, money, and commerce from throughout the area.

There is limited commerce, in the Harvard, and Davis Square locations, but there has not been recent commerce in Central or Kendall Square stations except for subway performers.

- Harvard Square Station could have one or more restaurants developed along the upper level of the trackless trolley area. It is a large, secured and mostly unused space. Potential underground connections include the Harvard Coop, Harvard's Holyoke Center, and Cambridge Savings Bank.
- Central Square Station could be home to one or more coffee shops along the platforms and perhaps a downstairs bakery outlet.
- Kendall Square Station could develop businesses along the walkways and tunnels across Broadway and into nearby buildings.
- Porter Square Station, with links to commuter rail, could have direct tunnel access into the Porter Square Shopping Area. There is a large amount of space for other businesses.

As neighborhoods feel increasing pressure from encroaching development, underground expansion offers several useful results: development that may benefit nearby neighbors while reducing street traffic pressures; revenue that provides much needed non-fare income for the T; a greater variety of urban texture with commercial, retail, and job creation as their effects. I urge readers to consider supporting reasonable development in existing T stations and properties, and will be pleased to provide reports to those interested in further details. Contact e-mail me at dixonenta16@yahoo.com.

Have you paid your APT 2006 Membership dues? Your tax deductible contribution helps us keep public transportation a priority. Thank you for your support.

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***Sign up NOW for APT's October 29th
Greenbush Commuter Rail Line Inspection Tour.***

Full Details Inside!!!!

Have you paid your 2006 APT Membership Dues?



Association for Public Transportation

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