



MEDICAL ACADEMIC AND SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION, INC.

PEOPLE | PLACES | PLANS | FUTURE

Member Institutions

December 4, 2020

- Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center
- Boston Children’s Hospital
- Brigham and Women’s Hospital
- Dana-Farber Cancer Institute
- Emmanuel College
- Harvard University
Harvard Medical School
Harvard School of Dental Medicine
Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health
- Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum
- Joslin Diabetes Center
- Judge Baker Children’s Center
- Massachusetts College of Art and Design
- Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences University
- Massachusetts Department of Mental Health
- Simmons University
- Temple Israel
- Wentworth Institute of Technology
- The Winsor School

Dear Secretary Pollack, General Manager Poftak, and members of the Fiscal Management and Control Board,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the service changes proposed by the MBTA as a result of decreased ridership during the COVID-19 pandemic. We appreciate the MBTA’s commitment to preserving its core services and the intent to support transit dependent populations and high ridership services. The following reflects our feedback and our overall concern at the timing of these service cuts in relation to supporting recovery and post-pandemic commuting needs.

There are approximately 48,000 employees that work in the Longwood Medical and Academic Area (LMA) and live within the MBTA service area and beyond. Many of these employees have continued to travel to the LMA throughout the pandemic due to the in-person needs of their responsibilities in medical and research settings. Commuting to hospitals remains high and, in fact, has steadily climbed upward. This trend is reflected in our monitoring of MASCO shuttle ridership, which has steadily increased month over month since March.

Further, it’s important to note that MASCO’s hospital members are operating near full capacity and do not expect a similar disruption in elective services and patient care during the second surge as was seen in the spring. Similarly, higher education institutions in the LMA have gone to great lengths to safely bring students to campus this fall, focusing on those courses that require hands-on and in-person learning. And, after successfully administering in-person or hybrid learning with smaller numbers of students and increased testing since September, our higher education members are planning for the return of hundreds of additional students to campus this spring, a demographic that we know is largely dependent on public transit.

Associate Members

- Boston University
- Wheelock College of Education & Human Development
- Fenway Community Health Center
- Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary
- Merck Research Laboratories

Public transit is critical not just to the employees of the LMA, but also to the people across the Commonwealth and beyond that are served by MASCO member institutions. Both before and during the pandemic, public transit has helped reduce the impacts of roadway congestion and preserve finite road space for those that due to medical needs, such as disability, compromised immunity or discharge requirements post-surgery or treatment, must arrive by personal or shared ride vehicle.

To ensure that access to the LMA is not compromised, we request the following adjustments to the MBTA's service proposal.

1. **E line service is continued between Brigham Circle and Heath Street.** While we understand that Route 39 bus service will provide substitute service and that this a section of the Green Line that runs in mixed traffic, the loss of streetcar service from Mission Hill to the LMA and connecting the rest of the system, represents a degradation in service. While Route 39 runs in mixed traffic north of Brigham Circle, the Green Line does not, resulting in Green Line riders originating in Mission Hill that will need to take a bus in mixed traffic for destinations north of Brigham Circle, including stops in the LMA, or transfer to the Green Line for access to the rest of the system. Almost a third of LMA employees reside in Boston, many living in Mission Hill, and cutting this section of Green Line service represents a modest cost savings compared to the impacts it will have on a transit-dependent population and access to the front door of our medical and teaching institutions.
2. **Weekday commuter rail services are continued after 9 pm, especially on the Needham, Forge Park/495 and Providence Stoughton lines, which serve over 40% of our commuter rail riders.** MASCO shuttle ridership has continued to be robust, steadily rising since the spring. This includes the Ruggles shuttle which is approaching 50% of capacity compared for this time of year. We expect demand to continue to rise both during this second surge and as vaccines become available. Hospitals in the LMA also anticipate future demand from soon-to-be-restored shifts that finish at 10:30 p.m. which if the commuter rail no longer runs after 9 p.m., this would force employees to find costly and lasting alternatives, such as driving.
3. **Weekend commuter rail service cuts are amended to include some weekend service.** With 25% of travelers using the commuter rail to access the LMA, we request the proposal be amended to include some commuter rail service on the weekends in order to support the hospital employees working weekend shifts. As traffic is expected to increase in the coming months, we expect more people will return to commuter rail as a reliable option for their commute.

Lastly, we feel the need to reiterate that summer MBTA service cuts may come at exactly the wrong time. Clarity is needed as to how MBTA will be able to restore service once cuts have been implemented with the flexibility and speed that will be required to match the expected return to work that we anticipate during 2021 as a vaccine becomes more widely available. Physicians and other essential staff in the LMA may receive a vaccine as early as this month. This means that by summer the LMA, not to mention other transit-dependent employment hubs, should be emerging from the pandemic at the same time as when the service cuts are proposed to go into effect. This will risk undoing years of progress in transit ridership growth and the associated benefits to health, safety and climate resulting from a reduction in roadway congestion. Without careful coordination, reductions in service will set a pre-determined outcome of more car travel and less commuting by transit.

With this in mind, we strongly urge the MBTA and FMCB members to carefully balance the need for short-term financial expediency against lasting impacts to the viability of transit as an alternative to driving. It will be critical to maintain robust transit services as we emerge from the pandemic and continue to depend on transit across the whole system to support access to the LMA. We remain thankful to the MBTA's attentiveness to ensuring access to the LMA for front line workers since the onset of the pandemic and we look forward to a continued partnership.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer our comments on behalf of the Longwood Medical and Academic Area and I encourage you to contact me at (617) 632-2776 if MASCO can be of further assistance throughout this process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tom Yardley".

Tom Yardley

Vice President of Area Planning and Development

MASCO