

Councilors,

A few weeks ago, I forwarded a copy of a note from the Transportation Working Group (TAG) to the Mayor regarding the MBTA's Better Bus proposals. In it, we discussed several of the positive aspects of the proposal. While we mentioned a few of the downsides of the proposed route changes, in retrospect we should have dedicated more attention to the impact on existing routes, particularly the express routes, and the riders that depend upon them.

Since then we have heard from you, from the City, and from residents with questions and comments about these changes, most specifically about express buses. After all, residents often build their lives around access to transit. Our current transportation system is quite fragile and lacks redundancy, so the loss of a particular bus route or transit line could be the difference between driving or not driving to work, or in some cases not being about to hold a specific job at all.

I believe it's important to acknowledge both the existing users of transit and potential riders who may currently not share the benefits of transit for those either living in or working in Newton. If TAG failed to acknowledge all constituencies and needs, we'll redouble our efforts to do so.

At this point in the process, the T is looking for feedback on making the plan better. TAG is committed to provide that feedback to the city to potentially inform ongoing discussions. That includes providing the public and the city with a deeper understanding of Better Bus and the current proposals, as well as looking for modifications and counter-proposals that may give us the best possible plan.

The T's financial, safety, and staffing situation is no secret. The possibility of service cuts, in Newton and outside of it, is unfortunately real, in particular compared to pre-pandemic service. Informed advocacy leaves us best prepared for the widest range of eventualities.

Thank you for your outreach to us and for your commitment to our shared goal of building convenient, accessible, and equitable transit for our city.

—Mike Halle
Chair, TAG