

# ON THE MOVE: *Greater Boston Transportation Justice Coalition*

## PLATFORM FOR JUST TRANSPORTATION AND LIVABLE COMMUNITIES

**Whereas:** Clean, affordable transportation, including public transit, bicycle and pedestrian systems, is a vital service for urban communities, connecting residents to friends and family, goods and services, and economic opportunities. Clean, affordable transportation is the key to ensuring mobility, clean air and health, livable communities, economic health and jobs, and to decreasing our dependency on oil.

**Whereas:** The transit needs of the most transit-dependent neighborhoods in Greater Boston, particularly lower income neighborhoods and communities of color, have been systematically neglected by the state's transportation decision-makers, prioritizing road-building over transit spending. With its meager transit budget, the MBTA invests four times as much in commuter rail as buses -- even though there are four times as many bus riders. Commuter rail stations have new electronic signs telling riders when trains will come, while urban bus riders wait at stops without shelters and without posted route schedules.

**Whereas:** City, Regional and State transportation officials have for decades tried to meet Greater Boston's transportation needs by prioritizing local and Federal resources for the use of the private automobile. They have neglected the development of transit, bicycle and pedestrian alternatives and fostered the use of less affordable, more polluting and space-consuming private car. While Massachusetts is spending more than \$14 billion on the Central Artery "Big Dig," a highway expansion project in the heart of Boston, there are no serious plans for expanding urban light rail in low-income neighborhoods. The City and State rarely apply for Federal transportation funds available to improve conditions for bicycling and walking. As our city streets become increasingly clogged with traffic jams and fatal crashes become more common, reliance on private cars can no longer be considered a workable transportation solution for the city.

**Whereas:** In order to change this pattern of transit racism and disinvestment, groups around the region and the state must work together. We, **On the Move: Greater Boston Transportation Justice Coalition** have come together to create a common agenda and action plan to achieve transportation justice -- an environmentally sustainable and socially just transportation program that is integral to the preservation and creation of livable communities. Our transportation justice agenda includes the following:

- Fix Our Transit System So It Works for Everyone
- Clean Our Transportation System so We can Breathe
- Give Us Our Fair Share Of Transportation Funds for Inner-City Transit, and for Safe Bicycle and Pedestrian Spaces on All of our Streets
- Give Us A Seat At The Table For Transportation Decision-Making
- Link Transportation Improvements to the Creation of Diverse, Livable Communities with Dense, Mixed-Use Development, Including Housing Affordable to All Income Levels

## **FIX OUR TRANSIT SYSTEM SO IT WORKS FOR EVERYONE !**

### ***The Problem:***

**The current transit system relies on automobiles...** Except in the very center of the city, many residents of Boston's neighborhoods depend on automobiles because the public transit system is unreliable. Transit lines – buses and subway – are often too sparsely distributed or schedules are inadequate for dependable, timely travel at all times. Lower income residents are forced to spend money on maintaining an automobile or paying for poor service. All residents bear the burden of increasing car use: air and noise pollution, pedestrian and bicycle hazards, and waste of urban land for parking, usually for non-residents.

**Lower income communities and communities of color depend on buses...** Communities of color and low income communities in the Greater Boston area depend largely on buses as the primary form of public transit. Maps of the rapid transit system show huge gaps in service in these communities. The quality and dependability of service on the commuter rail, subway and buses is very different.

- **Buses are often late....** While trains are unaffected by traffic patterns, buses must navigate busy streets and intersections. Buses are often late and off-schedule. The schedules that are available are outdated and unrealistic and do not take changes such as traffic and weather into account. The standard the MBTA uses to measure “on-time” bus service is different from the standards the MBTA uses for the subway and commuter rail. As a result, their reporting does not reflect the real situation for bus riders who can not depend on on-time service like subway and commuter rail riders.
- **We have no shelter...** The MBTA bus system has 162 routes, **9000 stops and only 300 bus shelters**. Some bus stops without shelters serve more than 1,000 riders daily – more than some train stations. This leaves the children and the elderly waiting in the cold, or the hot sun, without shelter for late buses.
- **Buses are overcrowded....** The Load Factor on buses (the number of passengers on board as compared to the number of seats) is well over 100% on low income and minority bus routes as compared to less than 90% on average for commuter rail lines.
- **Basic amenities don't work...** Basic amenities like heat, air conditioning, kneeling function and wheel chair lifts are often broken. Buses are often too hot or too cold. During a heat wave this past summer, the temperature on crowded buses often became dangerous, particularly for elderly riders. Wheel chair bound riders are often left waiting for 2 – 3 buses before a bus with an operating lift arrives. The kneeling function on buses is also often broken leaving elderly riders to climb up steep stairs to enter the bus from the curb.

**Links between buses and other modes don't work...** There are no free transfers between buses and subway, forcing people changing from one mode to another to pay twice. Bike racks at MBTA stations are located in out-of-the-way spots, inviting vandalism and theft. Bus stops are often on streets with heavy traffic that have no safe, convenient crossing points for pedestrians trying to get to a bus. Boston's few bike routes near T stations are unlabeled and hard to find, and the hours that bikes can be taken on the MBTA are limited and unpublicized.

**Time of service does not accommodate the needs of riders....** On many train and bus routes, the MBTA does not provide night and weekend service. Transit dependent riders use the system for far more than commuting. They use the system to visit family, get to church, go

grocery-shopping, health care, recreation and much more. Without night and weekend service, many riders are left stranded. Many workers who have weekend and night shifts are forced to take cabs or walk home after a long work shift.

### ***What we need for a workable transit system:***

- ⇒ The MBTA must develop and implement **service quality standards** that can be measured across modes. These standards should be developed through a public process that includes real input from riders. Standards should address on-time services, frequency, crowding, shelter and basic amenities. Once developed, the MBTA must create an action plan to meet these standards which may involve expanding the transit fleet and other capital improvements as well as larger expenditures on operation and maintenance.
- ⇒ The MBTA must provide **on-time service** and provide **expanded frequency** where ridership dictates across modes.
- ⇒ The MBTA must make **Night Owl service permanent** and include more bus routes and service on weekdays to accommodate late shift workers.
- ⇒ The MBTA must **expand weekend service** on many bus routes.
- ⇒ The MBTA must do **systematic ride checks and data gathering** for every route (bus, subway and commuter rail) regularly and use this data to improve and expand service where necessary.
- ⇒ The MBTA must evaluate heavily traveled bus corridors regularly to determine appropriate mode. Heavily traveled routes should be **upgraded to rail**.
- ⇒ The MBTA must provide **safe bike parking** at all MBTA stations.
- ⇒ The MBTA must **broaden the times that bikes are allowed on subway lines** and have clear signs explaining how and when to take bikes on the MBTA at all subway stops.
- ⇒ The MBTA must use **smart bus technology** – including Geographic Information Systems – on buses that allow for traffic light coordination to ensure on-time bus service.
- ⇒ The MBTA must **maintain its public spaces** so that they are clean, safe and inviting.
- ⇒ The MBTA must work with local city governments and the State Highway department to design and build traffic calming mechanisms wherever necessary to allow pedestrians **safe and pleasant walking access to bus stops and MBTA stations**.
- ⇒ The MBTA must **develop and maintain bike trails along all commuter rail routes**.

## **CLEAN OUR TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM SO WE CAN BREATHE!**

### ***The Problem:***

- The MBTA operates an aging fleet of **980 full-size diesel-powered buses** that spew deadly diesel exhaust into the air we breathe. More than half are over 12 years old. A little more than one-third of these (358) will be replaced with cleaner, Compressed Natural Gas buses over the next 2 years. The MBTA has no current plan for the replacement of the remainder of the fleet and is trying to back out of a commitment to retrofit these buses with particulate traps and other technology which would make their exhaust cleaner in the interim.
- The MBTA's entire **commuter rail fleet are diesel vehicles** despite the recent electrification of at least one corridor.
- Diesel vehicles are the dirtiest polluters on the road. They emit **large quantities of particulate matter** (called PM) and nitrogen oxides, which develop into particulates and smog.
- Particulates aggravate respiratory problems including **asthma** and irritate the eyes and nose. Asthma rates in Boston's urban neighborhoods are well above average. In one diesel bus dependent community, Roxbury, asthma hospitalization rates are **six times the state average**.
- More than half (558) of the MBTA's buses are housed at garages (Albany, Bartlett, Cabot, and Lynn) located in lower-income neighborhoods and neighborhoods of color. Three of the four are within a mile of Dudley Square in Roxbury. Buses housed at these garages "dead head" through our neighborhoods, traveling "Out of Service" but still adding to air pollution and traffic problems. According to data from a new air monitor, **levels of PM are 30 - 50% higher in Dudley Square** than they are just a mile or two away at the Harvard School of Public Health, largely due to diesel pollution.

### ***What we need for clean transportation and clean air:***

- ⇒ The MBTA must develop a **standard age for bus retirement** and develop a plan and timeline for replacing its entire dirty diesel fleet with clean fuel alternatives based on that standard.
- ⇒ The MBTA must develop a **timeline and a plan to replace its diesel fuel trains** with clean, electric trains.
- ⇒ Communities which house bus garage and maintenance facilities and bus routes must have **control over the technology** used on those routes and in those facilities.
- ⇒ The MBTA must **retrofit the close to 600 buses that will not be replaced by the first order of 358 CNG buses** with particulate filters immediately.
- ⇒ The MBTA must **prioritize use of clean-fuel buses in neighborhoods most affected by the negative impacts of diesel exhaust**, especially those with higher-than-average asthma hospitalization rates.
- ⇒ The MBTA must develop **an equitable bus storage and maintenance facility plan** that does not disproportionately affect any one neighborhood and that minimizes "dead-heading" system-wide.
- ⇒ The Boston School Department, and other municipalities in the Greater Boston area, must **replace diesel school buses with clean-fuel alternatives**.

# **GIVE US OUR FAIR SHARE OF TRANSPORTATION FUNDS FOR INNER CITY TRANSIT, AND FOR SAFE BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN SPACES ON ALL OF OUR STREETS!**

## ***The Problem:***

**Transit spending at the federal, state and local level over the past 80 years shows a pattern of transit racism and disinvestment.** Out of the small money “pie” allocated for transit, suburban riders are getting much bigger pieces than inner-city and lower-income riders.

- In the last five years, the MBTA invested four times as much in the commuter rail as in the bus system, even though there are four times as many bus riders.
- In 1985 the T shut down the Arborway branch of the Green Line running through Jamaica Plain.
- In 1987, the T shut down the elevated Orange Line, running through the heart of Roxbury in the Washington Street corridor even though one out every four people in Boston lives within walking distance to the corridor.
- A commuter rail line runs through the heart of Dorchester, but does not stop in Dorchester to pick up passengers.
- Where street cars once whisked people to their destinations before World War II in Roxbury, Dorchester, Revere and Chelsea, buses now clog the streets and pollute the air.
- The MBTA’s fare structure is not fair. Riders who must use a bus and a train to get to their destination (which is the case in many of Greater Boston’s lower income neighborhoods and communities of color) must pay for both modes without a discount. Fares are virtually the same whether you are traveling from one-side of the system to another or just a few stops.

**Spending on transit and other alternatives to the private car at the federal, state and local levels is much lower than spending on highways and other subsidies for the automobile.** Urban riders have to fight with suburban riders over pieces of a very small transit “pie” when everyone in fact deserves access to good public transit and other less polluting, affordable ways to get around.

- Massachusetts consistently spends 3- 4 times as much of its federal transportation dollars on highways as on public transit. While the state finds a way to fund a \$2 billion overrun on the Central Artery Project, transit riders continue to ride aging buses, some more than 15 years old.
- Funds for public transit projects are often diverted to expand roadways. The Urban Ring, for example was designed as a project to create a new rail transit line connecting Boston, Brookline, Cambridge, Somerville, Everett and Chelsea in three phases. Phase 1 includes basic improvements to the existing system; Phase 2 includes implementation of bus rapid transit operations; Phase 3 includes addition of rail. Funds from Phase 2 are now being used to expand roadway capacity, which will serve to foster highway-oriented land use instead of transit-oriented development. Bus rapid transit may actually preclude development of the rail phase of the project.
- While MassHighway does has some 90 bicycle projects worth more that \$60 million in the design, development or construction stage, they have spent over **\$4.2 billion** in the last seven years on road and bridge construction projects, not even counting their biggest highway expansion, the Central Artery/Ted Williams Tunnel Project.

- MassHighway took three years to release to the City of Boston money that had been appropriated to build 350 bike racks, because Big Dig expenses were prioritized.
- While a larger percentage of traffic fatalities in the greater Boston area are pedestrians and cyclists, only a small amount of the Transportation Enhancement & Safety Program dollars were spent on safety improvements for pedestrians and cyclists – the rest were spent to improve safety for motorists.

***Fair funding of a just transportation system, workable for all, must include:***

- ⇒ The transit **projects that are the largest priority for our communities** receive full funding as soon as possible. These include:
  - \* Light rail replacement service on Washington Street
  - \* Light rail replacement service on the Arborway
  - \* Implementation of the Indigo Line
  - \* Upgrade of the Maverick and Orient Heights Blue Line stations
  - \* Design of a rail (not bus) Urban Ring which serves the residential communities in the Ring corridor, not only suburban residents coming in to use the ring as a final leg of their commute.
  - \* Renovation of Red Line Stations
  - \* Upgrades to the bus system including immediate retrofit of older buses, long-term replacement of the entire fleet with clean fuel alternatives, bus shelters, posted schedules, etc.
- ⇒ The Metropolitan Planning Organization must **assess where people live to determine service needs**.
- ⇒ The State must designate **50% of its total transportation money for public transit, bike and pedestrian uses**.
- ⇒ The City of Boston and other local municipalities must **apply for and make greater use of Federal Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) money** to improve transit, bicycle and pedestrian facilities.
- ⇒ The Boston Transportation Department (and those of the other local municipalities) must adopt **standards for all street re-build projects** that clearly and fairly balance the competing needs for mobility of all street users, including motorists, cyclists, pedestrians and residents. These standards would include clear procedures to allow neighborhoods to request specific improvements such as Traffic Calming measures or marked bike lanes, and requirements for coordination of street re-builds amongst city departments.
- ⇒ The MBTA must **develop a fare structure that is fair (doe not subsidize urban riders less than suburban riders)**, factors in the distance traveled and that includes discounted bus-to-train transfers and free train-to-bus transfers.
- ⇒ We demand that the MBTA implement **automated fare collection** as soon as possible.

## **GIVE US A SEAT AT THE TABLE FOR TRANSPORTATION DECISION-MAKING !**

### ***The Problem:***

State decision-making and planning processes are complicated and confusing. It is unclear if public participation has any impact on the outcome of the processes.

- The **MBTA** has its own planning process, the **Program for Mass Transportation**, which must be completed every five years. The last one was done in 1993, and before that, 1978. Every year, the MBTA also completes a Capital Investment Program (CIP) to outline the capital improvements slated for the next five years. The CIP is supposed to adhere to PMT. Both of these have their own public processes that include public comment periods and public hearings.
- The State has its own transportation planning processes, which are guided by the **Metropolitan Planning Organization**, or MPO which is made up of representatives from state transportation agencies and several cities and towns in the Boston region. The MPO just completed the **Regional Transportation Plan 2000 – 2025 (RTP)**, with recommendations for highway and mass transit projects (it has a twenty five-year planning horizon and is updated every three years). It is the plan used by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to determine if the long-term transportation plans in the region meet Clean Air Act requirements. It also dictates which projects federal funds will receive federal funds. The draft RTP was completed in summer 2001 but it must be certified by the federal government before any federal transportation dollars can be allocated. To maintain its certification, the MPO must meet certain environmental justice requirements. An Ad Hoc committee on environmental justice was convened to develop environmental justice criteria to review projects to analyze whether the MPO provides equally for all communities. The committee completed that analysis and recommended projects to include in the MPO. Two projects prioritized by the committee (light rail replacement service on Washington Street and 100 additional clean fuel buses) were not included in the final MPO.
- The MPO also completes the **Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and the Unified Working Plan (UWP)**. Both have a 3-year planning horizon. The TIP, based on the RTP, lists projects which will receive federal funding over the next three years. The UWP is a list of projects which will receive further study over the next three years. Projects listed in the TIP must be well-planned, having already received substantial attention from transportation agencies.
- Several **regulatory and legal processes** also play a role in shaping our public transit system. For instance, the Executive Office of Transportation and Construction signed an Administrative Consent Order with the Department of Environmental Protection that dictates mitigation for the Central Artery Project, including a schedule for the purchase of 358 clean fuel buses and for replacement service on Washington Street.

### ***What we need to create a community-driven transportation planning process:***

⇒ Transportation decision-making at all levels must be **fair, democratic, accessible, and accountable to public transit riders.**

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- ⇒ The **Metropolitan Planning Organization** must add **seats for community residents** to allow for effective participation in transportation infrastructure decisions.
- ⇒ The **MBTA Board of Directors** must designate a **majority of seats to represent public transit riders**.
- ⇒ The MPO must complete an environmental justice analysis of all proposed transit projects as soon as possible. Once the analysis is done, the RTP should be revised to better provide for communities whose needs have historically been ignored.
- ⇒ The MPO and the MBTA must **streamline their planning processes** to better allow for public participation.
- ⇒ Transportation planning agencies must provide **longer public comment periods**. Mandatory **responses to public comments** to be provided no later than 90 days after the close of public comment.

## LINK TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENTS TO THE CREATION OF DIVERSE, LIVABLE COMMUNITIES WITH DENSE, MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING HOUSING AFFORDABLE TO ALL INCOME LEVELS

### ***The Problem:***

Who will benefit from improvements in public transit? From new bicycle and pedestrian facilities? Unless we demand that sustainable transportation investments be linked to investments in neighborhood affordability, our biggest transit victories may become environmental justice disasters. If we succeed in securing massive new investment in transit infrastructure, without doing something to control the price of housing that surrounds those improvements, one result might be more gentrification and displacement of existing residents. There may be better air quality and fewer cars in the city, but environmental justice cannot be achieved if residents in lower income areas are forced out and do not benefit from improvements.

For example, in the 1960s and 1970s, Somerville's Davis Square was a working class neighborhood with poor access to public transit. The positive and negative consequences of extending the Red Line to Davis Square could have been anticipated years before the station opened in 1984. Though land in Davis Square remained relatively cheap, little or nothing was done to control housing costs or build new affordable housing in the neighborhood. Davis Square is a vibrant transit hub. However, housing prices in or near the Square have skyrocketed. Long-time family-owned businesses have been largely forced out.

As advocates for environmental justice, we cannot afford to ignore such obviously predictable consequences. Nor can we allow our transportation agencies to deny the consequences of their actions on future land uses. Our streets are already clogged with traffic, are unsafe to cross, and are unfriendly to bicyclists. We need solutions that ensure that transit, bicycle and pedestrian improvements make communities more livable and benefit current residents in existing neighborhoods.

### ***What we need for livable communities with dense, mixed-use development including housing affordable to all incomes:***

- Regional transportation planning must be **directly linked to land use planning**, with particular attention to how transit improvements impact housing costs, pedestrian safety and bike safety.
- Transit, bicycle and pedestrian improvements must be accompanied **by adequate resources to increase and maintain affordable housing**. The social investment of taxpayer's money must not be used to drive out low and moderate income people who worked for these improvements.
- Guidelines for Transit Oriented Development, which currently include proposed land use changes like reduced parking at subway stops and denser development overall, must also **include guidelines to ensure affordability**.
- Specific **guidelines for "affordability" must be developed that are relevant to existing Boston renters, who have a median income of only \$27,700**. In particular, we support the campaign of the Boston Tenant Coalition for 10,000 permanently affordable homes by the year 2005. The campaign defines "affordable" as available to those below 80% of the median income, with large set asides for those below 30% and those between 30% and 60% of the median income. *Permanently* affordable refers to housing that is deed restricted outside the market, whether rental or home ownership. Such a program targets those threatened with displacement and provides protection against the market side effects of transit improvements.

- We demand that the city and town **zoning codes be updated to reflect Transit Oriented Development priorities**. Specifically, zoning codes that require minimum parking ratios and low density development must be reevaluated based on these priorities.
- Increased **regulatory rent and eviction protections** for tenants must be created in order to prevent displacement of low and moderate income people as a result of transit improvements.
- **Public transportation infrastructure must remain publicly funded, publicly planned, and publicly accountable**. The budgeting process must not be designed to foster dependence on private developers and corporate donors for services that belong in the public domain. Privatization of transportation funding will lead to privatization of planning, and to redirection of services to meet the needs of private, for-profit entities rather than the entire community. State funding meet the expanding transit needs of a growing region to foster both community development and economic growth.