



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts General Court

April 10, 2023

Phillip Eng, General Manager
Jeff Gonneville, Deputy General Manager
Jillian Linnell, Senior Director, Capital Program Planning
Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority
10 Park Plaza, Suite 3910
Boston, MA 02116

Dear General Manager Eng, Deputy General Manager Gonneville, and Director Linnell,

As members of Newton's State House delegation, we are writing about the inclusion of the Newton commuter rail project in the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority's (MBTA's) capital investment plan for fiscal years 2024 to 2028 (the CIP).

First off, we would like to thank you for including funding for "[d]esign of double-side, high-level, fully accessible platforms at Auburndale, West Newton, and Newtonville stations." We urge you to also include construction funding for the project in the CIP. Doing so will enable the Commonwealth to compete more effectively for matching federal funds.

The three Newton commuter rail stops—Auburndale, West Newton, and Newtonville—are the only stops on the Worcester/Framingham Line that have a single platform for travelers to board or disembark trains. What this means is that the MBTA cannot provide consistent service throughout the day in both the inbound and outbound directions—a constraint that seriously reduces the utility of commuter rail to Newton residents and undermines Newton's efforts to build transit-oriented, multi-family housing near the stations.

The operational limitations imposed by Newton's single platforms not only constrain the frequency and quality of service on the entire line, but they will also affect planned improvements to stations in Wellesley and Natick and the Commonwealth's ability to operate both West-East Rail and express service to and from Worcester. As a result, every resident who rides the Worcester/Framingham Line and every potential commuter west of Route 128 has a stake in constructing double-side platforms at the Newton commuter rail stops.

The project will bring additional benefits by making the three stations fully accessible to those with mobility challenges. Currently, reaching the platforms at all three stations requires passengers to traverse long staircases that offer no protection from the elements. Once on the platform, riders must climb up and down stairs to board and disembark trains. As a result, access to the commuter rail is limited for individuals with physical disabilities, the elderly, pregnant people, parents carrying infants or toddlers, and others.

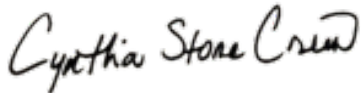
The most recent estimate pegged the cost of the project at approximately \$170 million. The MBTA applied for a federal All Stations Accessibility Program (ASAP) grant to help pay for construction, seeking the maximum award of 80 percent of construction phase costs, or \$123.38 million. Unfortunately, it did not succeed in winning that grant. We are grateful to the MBTA for seeking ASAP funds, but the Commonwealth must put more of its own money on the table to show the federal government that it is truly committed to the project.

We secured an \$85 million authorization for the project in last year's transportation bond bill (Chapter 176 of the Acts of 2022), and Congressman Jake Auchincloss has also secured \$7 million through a federal appropriation. As you revise the CIP, we ask that you allocate the authorized bond funding to construction. Committing state funds to construction would show the federal government, when it considers the next round of ASAP grant applications, that Massachusetts is fully committed to the Newton commuter rail project.

All who ride the Worcester/Framingham Line will benefit from the Newton commuter rail project in the form of faster, more frequent, and more accessible service. Better train service will draw more drivers off the roads, reducing greenhouse gas emissions while also making the roads less congested for those who, for whatever reason, cannot commute by rail. It will also enable Newton and other communities to deliver on the promise of transit-orient, multi-family housing.

Thank you for your consideration of this letter and for your hard work to develop the MBTA's capital investment plan for fiscal years 2024-2028. Please do not hesitate to reach out to our offices with any questions.

Sincerely,



Cynthia Stone Creem
State Senator
First Middlesex and Norfolk District



Ruth B. Balser
State Representative
12th Middlesex District



Kay Khan
State Representative
11th Middlesex District



John J. Lawn
State Representative
10th Middlesex District

Cc: Congressman Jake Auchincloss
Newton Mayor Ruthanne Fuller
Newton City Council President Susan Albright