



Deval L. Patrick, Governor
Richard A. Davey, MassDOT Secretary & CEO
Beverly A. Scott, Ph.D., General Manager
and Rail & Transit Administrator



April 23rd, 2014

The Honorable William N. Brownsberger
Second Suffolk and Middlesex District
State House, Room 413C
Boston, MA 02133-1053

Dear Senator Brownsberger:

Thank you for your initial letter regarding service on MBTA Bus Route 73 and the temporary changeover from trolley buses to diesel buses that began in September 2013. My staff and I particularly appreciate the personal time that you took to meet with us and other local officials at Harvard Station not only to see conditions, but most importantly, to speak with customers. It was very helpful.

As you know, the use of diesel buses is necessitated by the long-planned reconstruction of Trapelo Road and Belmont Street. The roadway work is expected to continue until late 2015. Unfortunately, we know that the quality of bus service has declined during this construction period. There are some impacts from switching to diesel buses which cannot be avoided nor mitigated well. We have, however, put in place some service enhancements and will continue to make further improvements in our efforts to minimize the inconvenience to our customers.

Historically, Route 73 has experienced some overcrowding, particularly during the AM peak. In preparing the replacement service, all scheduled trips were replaced one-for-one with diesel buses, with some exceptions after 8 p.m. This replacement service was modeled after the temporary service provided in 2010 during the Belmont municipal water/sewer construction.

As you know, there are inherent challenges presented by the replacement services, including:

- At Harvard station, the current replacement route requires that the diesel buses board passengers in the Upper Busway, so that the right-hand doors are against a platform; this means that customers who can take either Route 71 or 73 must now choose where to wait, possibly leading to less balanced passenger loads.
- The Trackless Trolley vehicle routing permitted schedule recovery to occur between where passengers were dropped off on the upper level and when they were picked

up on the lower level. Because both drop off and pick up areas are now on the upper level, there is either no schedule recovery, or bus drivers must do a double loop to try to leave on time. Under this scenario, bus drivers drop off their customers and then proceed out of the tunnel without picking up customers to the recovery area at the Cambridge Common. Once they leave the Cambridge Common, they must make their way back to the Mt. Auburn Street entrance to the tunnel to get into a position to pick up customers. This can result in degraded service frequency.

- While the overall vehicle capacity is similar, the diesel buses have more seats and less standing room; under crowded conditions, this can mean more “friction” as passengers board and alight resulting in longer dwell times at stops.
- Some of the replacement vehicles are older than the trackless trolleys and at greater risk for mechanical and service disruptions.
- The diesel buses may have to be diverted to other areas in the MBTA system during emergencies including disruptions caused by train service outages.

Notwithstanding these challenges, as we discussed, the MBTA has engaged all relevant departments in order to improve Route 73 service as much as possible, and we are implementing the following:

- A supervisor has been assigned to the Waverly end of the Route 73 service to manage bus arrivals and departures, minimize crowding, and improve on time performance.
- Some service management for the PM peak will be implemented beginning June 23rd, which is also intended to improve on-time performance.
- Effective immediately, we are trying to minimize the use of Route 73 buses for emergencies elsewhere in the system; however, buses are shared among many routes so it is not possible to completely isolate Route 73 buses from such diversions.
- The City of Cambridge and the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) continue to investigate the traffic signals near Mount Auburn Street and Fresh Pond Parkway in order to optimize operations.
- Management continues to make changes intended to maximize the availability of both vehicles and bus operators.

- In the coming weeks, the Route 73 diesel buses on weekdays and Saturdays will begin using the same route as the trackless trolleys, which drop off passengers at Harvard Station in the upper busway and board passengers in the lower busway. This will improve operations from the current condition, since it will allow for the same turnaround route and opportunity for schedule recovery that is provided on the trackless routing. The change will also allow customers who can take either Route 71 or 73 to wait at a common platform for whichever trip comes first.

Needless to say, we wish that we had the fleet availability, maintenance facility capacity and funding to respond more effectively to this obvious need for additional service. Unfortunately, we do not; but, sincerely thank you for your longstanding legislative support for quality transit and increased funding for core services.

We will continue to monitor our Route 73 service to see if our corrective actions are working and will keep you updated as well. I am also looking forward to the community meeting being planned with your office concerning our overall MBTA plans in the coming year. Once again, thank you.

Sincerely,



Beverly A. Scott, Ph.D.
General Manager and
Rail & Transit Administrator