



## **ABC Testimony to MBTA**

### ***January 23, 2012***

My name is Richard Parr, and I am the Director of Policy for A Better City. We represent Greater Boston businesses and institutions on transportation, land development and the environment. We also operate a [Transportation Management Association](#) that provides commuter services to 80,000 employees in the Financial District and the Back Bay. Our member businesses are major purchasers of T passes on behalf of their employees, and the proposed fare hikes will impact their bottom lines as well as the wallets of individual commuters.

We wanted to take this opportunity to share the very real concerns of our members about the significant impact that the [T's two proposed scenarios](#) would have on the Massachusetts economy. Put simply, our members rely on the T to get their employees to work. Many, including hospitals, hotels and universities, have employees traveling during off-peak times and on weekends. These workers, as well as patients and students rely on the T to get to their jobs, appointments and classes. The proposed service cuts would adversely impact access and mobility for Greater Boston's workforce and, ultimately, hurt the entire state's economy.

Just to take one example, eliminating weekend service on the E Branch of the Green Line will cut off access to some of the institutions that make Boston the great city it is: the Prudential Center, Symphony Hall, Northeastern University, the Museum of Fine Arts and the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum (both of which have recently undertaken major and successful expansions), and the hospitals of the Longwood Medical Area. This cut would save less than \$1.5 million – less than 1% of the T's total [\\$161 million deficit](#). Every dollar is important, but we need to ask whether we're willing to cut this deeply into the heart of our capital city to save a relatively small amount.

The two scenarios the T has proposed present a stark choice: either we face the true cost of running the T near its current scope, or we cut back drastically and live with far less. As currently presented, neither option is acceptable to the business community, because neither addresses the underlying structural deficit the T has struggled under since Forward Funding legislation was enacted in 2000. At best, these two scenarios buy the T one year, maybe 18 months, after which we'll be back here again, discussing another major hike and more severe cuts.

What's needed is a [third option](#): an intervention by the administration or the legislature to lessen the impact of these fare hikes and service cuts. One option is to consider relieving some of the T's massive debt load. Shifting Big Dig-related debt from the T to the Commonwealth could save the T over \$100 million annually in debt service payments. MassDOT should also investigate whether there are ways for MassPort to help support transit service that benefits Logan Airport.

Ultimately, what is needed is additional investment – not only for the T, but for our entire transportation system. If anything, the problems of underinvestment and overreliance on debt are as acute or worse on the highway side of the ledger, where we're using borrowed money to pay operating salaries and to cut the grass.

A Better City has proposed some new models for transit finance, based on a study of other parts of the country. Other advocates have put forward their own ideas. There are no shortage of options. What is needed now is the will to enact a [comprehensive, sustainable funding plan](#) for transportation in Massachusetts. Hopefully, this crisis facing the T will spark that broader conversation and lead to a solution that will avert the continued erosion of the state's transportation system.