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COLUMNIST, NOT MBTA, OFF TRACK

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CHARLES CHIEPPO'S views on MBTA expansion are short sighted. We need to make substantive investments in maintaining and improving existing transit infrastructure, but it is imperative that we balance maintenance with growth in a strategic way to anticipate future demand, support economic growth and development, realize transit's important environmental benefits, and improve our overall quality of life. Calling for a moratorium on future expansion is akin to throwing up our hands relative to the future economy of the Commonwealth, and a moratorium now would result in stagnant transit expansion for decades. Implicit in sound expansion is an increase in transit ridership. However, return on investment cannot simply be measured by farebox revenue. We should also look to the overall economic benefits realized.

Last, it is a chronic lack of funding, not expansion, that has hurt the MBTA's bottom line in recent years. A comprehensive finance strategy that balances maintenance with system expansion is warranted, and a policy approach to closing the MBTA's budget gap is needed.

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