A Better City Feedback from the Field

The following comments and recommendations are based on observations from the field noted by the A Better City Transportation & Infrastructure team from **August 22, 2022, to August 24, 2022**. The intent is to support the MBTA and City of Boston in implementing continuous improvement during the Orange Line (OL)/Green Line (GL) shutdown as well as to ensure collection of data and information to allow for data-based assessment, real-time changes, and lessons learned.

General

1.   Rider Counts – Bus Shuttles (North and South Side)

A Better City took the OL bus shuttle service on the North and South side on August 22nd and August 23rd. The team members inquired about rider counts and received conflicting messages from bus drivers and bus dispatchers. A member of the team inquired directly with the MBTA about rider counts on the bus shuttles and was told that they were not being done.

With no accounting of bus shuttle ridership it is impossible to assess if supply meets or exceeds demand. While there were a significant number of bus shuttles, many of the buses were empty. Express buses when ridership increases could be warranted and should be explored; however, without ridership data, it makes it more difficult to make informed decisions.

This type of information will be critically important post-Labor Day when MBTA ridership tends to increase with a return of Boston Public School, university/college students, and employees to the Greater Boston region. If the MBTA is not collecting ridership data, the following quote from the MBTA would be anecdotal at best.

According to the MBTA, ridership on the shuttle buses so far has been "moderate to heavy," and the number of shuttles has matched demand. – [Boston Globe](#)

2. Safety

A Better City team members witnessed some unsafe loading and unloading practices. Ensuring the safety of riders as they get on and off the shuttle buses is paramount. Double parking buses with riders exiting could be risky when more riders are on the system.

3. Bus Lane Enforcement

The team noted lack of enforcement of bus lane use with significant compliance issues from Oak Grove to Assembly Station. Cars on Dartmouth Street were also seen earlier in the week.

4. Temporary Shelter

The team noted on Monday (8/22) that the MBTA employees, bus shuttle dispatchers, and riders were in the rain at Government Center. Consideration for the installation of temporary shelters should be considered.

5. Disability Vans

A Better City team members were pleased to see disability vans at many of the stations they visited. The MBTA Ambassador at Back Bay knew where and how to access the disability vans; however the MBTA Ambassadors at Forest Hills did not.

6. Signage

A Better City teams saw predominately English and Chinese signs at stations with a sprinkling of signage in Spanish.

North Side

1. Commuter Rail – Oak Grove

A Better City team members clocked trips on the shuttle buses and Commuter. Commuter Rail travel time was three times faster than bus shuttle times (12 minutes vs. 64 minutes). Post-Labor Day the MBTA should increase service to reduce the headways on the Commuter Rail from/to Oak Grove, which currently run every 45 minutes, to further incentivize use during the shutdown, reduce congestion on the roadways, and promote future use of the Commuter Rail. The signage at Oak Grove for train times was specific to the diversions and while not electronic, it was easier to understand (as shown in photo).

2. North Station – Transit Desert

While the Commuter Rail provides a much shorter ride, the headways are further apart than the shuttle bus service, and once at North Station, riders hit a dead end where they either need to transfer to a shuttle bus or walk to their next destination. *At the very least*, improved signage is critical to help riders navigate the transfer, with more multilingual ambassadors, and indications of distance/time to Government Center.

South Side

1. Commuter Rail - Forest Hills

Enhance service and promote use of Commuter Rail (detailed recommendations forthcoming).

2. Signage

Catching the Commuter Rail from **Back Bay to Forest Hills** was confusing. The signage does not specify if the train will stop at Orange Line stops to Forest Hills. A Better City recommends creating signage with real time information on timing for trains that is specific to the diversion service. Catching the Commuter Rail from Forest Hills was less confusing than at Back Bay due to the signage.
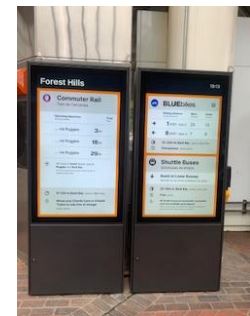
3. Accessibility

Escalators at **Back Bay** (at least Tracks 1-3) were out of service. Escalator at **Forest Hills** (entrance to station) was out of service. The elevator appeared to be working. Boylston St. station is only viable for riders without disability as it has not elevator or escalator. Lack of bus shuttle service and diversion to the Green Line puts riders with accessibility issues at risk.