



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
MASSACHUSETTS SENATE

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JOINT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SERVICE

JOINT COMMITTEE ON LABOR AND
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
JOINT COMMITTEE ON MENTAL HEALTH,
SUBSTANCE USE AND RECOVERY

February 28, 2019

MBTA Fiscal and Management Control Board
State Transportation Building, 2nd Floor
10 Park Plaza
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Members of the Fiscal and Management Control Board,

I am writing today to express my strong opposition to the recent proposal to impose a 6.3 percent fare hike as a means of generating revenue for the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA). It's no surprise that the MBTA needs to generate more revenue in order to make significant improvements to our transportation infrastructure so that it works better for everyone, but raising fares at the expense of our commuters is not the solution.

A new study confirmed that Boston experiences the worst traffic in the country – a fact many of us were not surprised to hear. Public transit ridership has decreased in recent years because of unreliable and inaccessible transit service options. This is unacceptable for the approximately 500,000 individuals who need to travel to and from the greater Boston area each day to get to their jobs – imposing fare hikes will only exacerbate this problem by encouraging more people to drive to work. More commuters will be forced to drive to and from work, further congesting traffic, polluting the air and stressing our roads and bridges. We should focus our efforts on fixing the T and commuter rail system so that it is more appealing to riders, rather than implementing unnecessary fare hikes that will ultimately discourage ridership further.

We also need to consider the fact that a large portion of people who ride the T or commuter rail have no other means of transportation. Imposing fare hikes will place an unnecessary burden on working families who rely solely on the T or commuter rail to get to their jobs. Transportation is a public good and it should not only be available to those who can afford it.

In a perfect world, public transportation would be free, but a free transit service is probably unattainable in the near future. There are, however, a number of proposals that would help generate more revenue to support the T and commuter rail without negatively impacting riders.

Included in the 2016 Transit Network Companies (TNC) law is a twenty cent per ride fee on TNCs to provide support for state and local infrastructure, assistance with new technology, and service improvements for small businesses in the taxi, livery or hackney industries. This fee, however, is set to sunset in 2026. At the start of this session, I filed legislation that would extend this fee indefinitely. Ensuring that this fee on TNC rides continues is critical, especially given the ongoing contribution of TNCs to traffic congestion. If continued, this tax could generate over \$13 million per year – a substantial revenue source for our state and municipalities.


Another revenue-generating proposal would be increasing the gas tax. In 2013, the state gas tax was raised from 21 cents per gallon to 24 cents per gallon. However, it has not kept pace with inflation since then. If the state gas tax had been tied to inflation, it would have raised nearly \$1 billion over 10 years. A gas tax indexed to inflation would benefit everyone – not just T and commuter rail riders. Not only would it provide more revenue needed to improve transit service – it would also provide more funds to improve roads, bridges, and highways in all 351 cities and towns in the Commonwealth, benefiting those residents who do not regularly use the T or commuter rail.

Finally, we could also consider congestion pricing, which experts say is one of the most effective ways to reduce traffic congestion and encourage public transit ridership. In 2017, drivers in Boston spent 14 percent of their time in congestion traffic according to a study released last year. The study showed that those drivers lost \$2,086 each in combined direct (i.e., wasted fuel and time) and indirect (i.e., reduced business productivity) costs while sitting in traffic. Implementing a congestion pricing fee in high-traffic areas would incentivize drivers to get off the road and choose to use public transportation instead.

These are just a few of many revenue-generating proposals that have been suggested in recent years that would encourage more commuters to use public transportation without burdening riders with yet another fare increase. We need to focus our energy on these types of proposals so that we can ensure safe, reliable and efficient transit service for all and make it easier for commuters to get to and from work each day.

I strongly urge the MBTA Fiscal and Management Control Board to immediately rescind the proposal to impose a 6 percent fare increase and consider alternative revenue-generating options.

Sincerely,



Cindy F. Friedman

CC: MassDOT Secretary Pollack and Governor Charles D. Baker