

Minutes – Draft
Brookline Commission on Disability
Wednesday, April 14, 2021; 5:30 PM – 7:15 PM
Held via Zoom due to COVID-19

Members in Attendance (Virtually): Saralynn Allaire, Chair; Rob Heist; Henry Winkelman; Elaine Ober; Joan Mahon, Ann Kamensky; Nancy Moore, Transportation Board Liaison

Members not in attendance: Jim Miczek, Deputy Chair; Heather Hamilton, Select Board Member

Member attendee: Jim Lee listened by phone, but could not communicate

Note taker: Sarah Kaplan, ADA Coordinator – Ex. Officio (not present, minutes from recording)

Members of the public in attendance: Ben Frison – Senior Director, GLT (MBTA); Zahra Moghaddam - Project Manager of GTL (MBTA); Mark Shamon – Design Manager, GLT (MBTA); Marion DeCaillet – Accessibility Consultant, GLT (MBTA); Laura Brelsford -- MBTA System-Wide Accessibility (MBTA); Abby Swaine; Darcy Devney (Arlington COD); Emily Jacobsen; Sharon Wingate; Desiree Patrice; Jim Buck

Meeting commenced at 5:33 PM.

Introduction/Public Comments: Members of the Green Line Transformation (GLT) Team of the MBTA introduced themselves – list above. Members of the Commission in attendance introduced themselves – list above.

Presentation by GLT Team: Presentation titled: “D Line Station Accessibility Improvements (Waban, Eliot, Chestnut Hill, Beaconsfield)” Mr. Frison began by talking about the long-term vision and goals of the GLT Project. The D-Line will become the first fully accessible branch of the Green Line. The goal is to take a holistic view of the Green Line, and to improve the quality of service by increasing capacity, and enhanced accessibility, through fleet modernization and infrastructure/facility upgrades, and state-of-the-art technology. There are four levels of Transformation: safety and state of good repair (SGR), accessibility, replacement of legacy fleet, and increased capacity. The design concepts shared with the Commission focus on Accessibility Improvements. Repairs in 2019 and 2020 focused primarily on safety and SGR. Upcoming repairs will focus on accessibility improvements – including raising and upgrading Platforms,

Barrier-Free Pathways; adding detectable warning panels; improving way-finding and signage; improving communication systems and upgrading station amenities (benches and lighting). This will ultimately improve the experience for all riders.

Ms. Moghaddam then spoke about the scope of the project. The preliminary design work is completed and the construction of the design should start in Summer 2021 and be completed by the Fall/Winter 2022. Upgrades to all for stations include: raising the platform to 8-inches above the top of the rail; extending the raised length to 225 feet; adding accessible pathways and a second egress path to each platform; and adding more lighting to increase safety. These improvements will facilitate boarding and exiting trains for all customers and improve the waiting experience. Customers using mobility devices can use a bridge plate at low-floor cars. Other stations on the D-Line are also being improved, including Interim Accessibility at Newton Highlands as of 2019 (full accessibility anticipated by Winter of 2024) and Brookline Hills, which will achieve full access by Fall 2021 – neither station was discussed at length during the presentation. Once completed, along with the stations being discussed tonight, the entire D Branch will be accessible. Currently Type 7 and Type 8 vehicles require a rider to rise 14 inches to enter the train car and possibly descend more when exiting; they also have doors that fold out, which make it impossible to raise the platform due to overhang. Type 9 and Type 10 cars (aka Super Cars) have sliding doors, which will eliminate the fold-out/over-hang problem.

Shown in an animation: The plan is to raise the platforms 8 inches, add detectable warning strips and add railing to prevent falling off the platform and to direct people where to safely cross. This will minimize delays and create clearer, safer paths of travel. With the raised platform, the step up will be 6 inches or less. The upgraded trains will deploy an automatic bridge ramp for roll-on access. The ultimate goal is level boarding of 14 inches. They are also considering a “rub rail” to minimize the gap between the platform and the car. The sliding doors of the Super Cars will open wider than the current doors. All door boarding will be available under the future fare system in development should also minimize boarding times and improve service.

Marion DeCaillet spoke about accessibility and design goals. She began by saying that 25% of adults in the MBTA service area have a disability. The GLT’s primary focus is the customer of all ages abilities and culture and they go beyond relevant code compliance and anticipate the needs of today and tomorrow for welcoming, seamless, and consistent transit experience. They are planning to declutter pathways, upgrade benches and lighting, add call boxes, resurface platforms and access paths, and use consistent design principles for all stations based on customer feedback from the 2018 Accessibility Report.

Ben then spoke about improvements to Beaconsfield Station specifically. They plan to rebuild the platforms as noted above. Ramps will be added to each platform that connect to the lower walkway, and work will include rebuilding the track crossings at each end using rubber panel construction. Mobile lifts will be maintained as backup. There will be new signage and they will restripe the parking area and add a van accessible space to the parking lot. There will be two accessible entrances/exits. Improved lighting is also planned for the platform and the access path. An emergency call box will be added to the platform. The heated shelter will be relocated to make it easier to access. They will also be providing better guidance to train drivers about where to stop the train. The plan is to use a phased approach so the station remains operational during construction – a handful of weekend diversions may be needed.

Construction timing for all four stations is mid 2022 through mid 2023. The plan is to work on them sequentially, not all at once. There is a Brookline Shared Mobility Meeting on April 27 and a Virtual Meeting on April 29. They met with the Newton Commission on Disability on April 12. Continued engagement with the community is planned. You can also reach them at <https://www.mbta.com/projects/green-line-transformation> or email GLT@mbta.com with feedback.

Henry asked about curb height – if you raise the platform 8 inches, does that mean the curb is also going to be 8 inches high. Mark says yes, but they are adding a ramp to make that transition from curb to platform accessible. The ramp will be under 4.5 degrees to provide a smooth transition. There will also be a ramp from the parking lot to the curb. Ramps will be at either end and at the midpoint of the platform.

Saralynn asked about the ticketing booth being only on one side. Mark said a fare system is being developed to make it easier to add fares at multiple kiosks. All door boarding is planned and the rider will be able to pay using a card – the new fare system is still under development and the GLT does not work directly on this issue.

Laura Brelsford spoke about the fare collection system. Currently, the driver can either take your fare and complete the transaction for you if you are unable to access the fare box or let you ride without collecting a fare, which they are trained to do. This is monitored. Fare validators will be added to the rear doors in the coming year or so.

Rob asked about retiring Type 7 & 8 and if they are buying more Type 9s (train cars). Ben said they bought a small fleet of Type 9, but the MBTA will not be purchasing any more and will be buying the Type 10 (Super Cars) going forward. Exact retirements are up in the air, but the MBTA is looking forward to having a unified fleet eventually. Joan

asked how people will reach the button to deploy the automatic ramp – answers were not provided. Rob talked about how he communicates his needs to the operators.

Saralynn asked about accessible benches. Marion spoke about her work investigating accessible benches. New benches will have back support and a handrail to increase access. It is the plan to update all benches at all stations so they are the same.

The Commission Members thanked the GTL team for consulting with BCOD on this.

Review March 2021 Minutes: Saralynn added her name to the attendees of the CDBG Meeting and made a few minor edits for clarity.

- **Vote:** Henry motioned to accept the minutes as amended. Rob seconded. A roll call vote was taken of all members present. Five members voted in favor of publishing the minutes; Joan abstained due to her absence from the March meeting. Motion carries.

Variances:

NEW: Park Street School Variance: The Park School is doing some renovation to increase their classroom space due to COVID. The school has four floors. They are adding an accessible elevator to provide access to all floors. Asked for a temporary variance to allow the first floor to remain inaccessible while the elevator is being constructed during the upcoming school year. Currently no student or teacher at the school on the first floor needs accessibility. The plan for mitigation if that changes is to move the classroom or the office to an accessible floor temporarily. The sub-committee found this request to be reasonable and voted to grant the temporary variance during construction of the new elevator.

- **Vote:** Saralynn made a motion to accept the subcommittee's recommendation that the temporary variance be granted. Elaine seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken of all members present. Ann abstains. Saralynn, Joan, Henry, and Rob, and Elaine voted in favor. Motion carries.

The Chair has received word that the Architectural Access Board (AAB) has accepted the variance request.

Coolidge Corner Theatre (CCT) Variance Update: The AAB asked the architects to return to AAB with a plan for the lack of an accessible bathroom on the second floor and for an accessible ramp on the right-hand-side of the main theatre on the first floor.

The architects sent a reapplication for those two issues. The solution proposed is as follows: Re: the bathroom – they will take out the men’s room on the second floor and replace it with an accessible unisex bathroom (single stall). The subcommittee agreed with the new solution.

Re: the ramp in the main theatre. The original application said the uneven slope was due to these changes are due to wear and tear. The subcommittee originally suggested that the ramp be redone so that the issue does not get worse over time. The construction consultant for the CCT determined that since the ramp was made of steel and concrete there is no guarantee that if the ramp was renovated, that it would not settle unevenly. The subcommittee now supports leaving the ramp as is as long as they mitigate the issue by adding a handrail and adding lighting about a foot up from the ramp so that the ramp is illuminated when people walk on it; the subcommittee also suggested adding tactile pads. Saralynn reported that Jim Lee said he would rather use the steps than the ramp and he felt many people with vision loss would likely feel the same.

- **Vote:** Saralynn made a motion to accept the subcommittee’s recommendations to address these issues at CCT. Rob seconded. A roll call vote was taken of all members present. The vote was unanimously in favor. Motion carries.

Saralynn has not received any update from AAB regarding this variance request yet.

No vote was taken on the Variance Subcommittee’s minutes because two out of three members were not present.

Old Business

Update from the Webpage Improvement Subcommittee: Report from Henry. Changes to the Commission’s webpage are coming and will be noticeable and welcome. The ADA Coordinator will be working with Ben Vivante from the Town’s IT Department to make changes. Ben made suggestions about the page flow. The Chair will be developing a mock-up of the webpage. Once the mock-up is completed it will be passed on to the ADA Coordinator and Ben.

Update from the Communications Subcommittee: Report from Elaine. Decided to publish a column in the Tab and the Patch, once a month to increase information about disability to all interested, including the general public. Elaine and Abby will take turns writing the column. Commission members and the ADA Coordinator can submit things

to Elaine and Abby. Abby is going to look into how the Recycling Center column came to be. Elaine is going to do a mock-up of a column. Abby says that John Dempsey is talking with Ed Gilbert about giving the Commission the Recycling Center column space once a month.

Warrant Articles for May 2021 Town Meeting: Most warrant articles discussed last month have been tabled. Still under consideration include:

- **Warrant Articles regarding Outdoor Restaurant Seating:** While accessible seating is not mentioned in the article directly, it is a matter of policy for Community Planning & Development, the Public Health Department, and DPW. Meredith Mooney attended a training with MOD on this issue.
- **Parking Limits for New Micro-units in the Emerald Isle District:** Area near Route 9 in Brookline. In 2016, as part of the creation of this district, micro-units and age-restricted residences have no minimum parking limits. The purpose of the Warrant Article is to limit this to just the EID.
- **Warrant Article re the Babcock Street Lot:** Changed to a resolution to study the possibility of turning into low-income housing in the future. If that ever becomes an issue the Commission may have to ask that the three accessible parking spaces in that lot be relocated.

Multi-Unit Housing with Limited or No Parking:

Henry took a straw poll regarding people's opinion on this issue. Many talked about how cars allow them to live independently and get assistance when needed. Elaine pointed to the fact that we want parking for cars for people who need them. The desire to do away with cars makes it hard for people with disabilities to get their voices and concerns heard. 40B units are the newest focus. 100s of units with only tens of spaces. See last month's minutes for a detailed write up of the issue. What happens if a person with a disability is not in a Dwelling Type 2 unit? They may not have access to needed accessible parking.

The Chair has proposed the following: Where there's less than one unit for less one parking space per unit, that people (either residents or owners) that have HP plates or placards should be given the highest priority for assignment available parking spaces and that may include giving someone two spots to make the spot fully accessible.

Rob asked if this could be a Town policy. Saralynn was not sure, she wants to advocate for this policy but was advised not to come out with a "hard policy statement." Abby suggested that maybe developers could get extra credit for providing HP dedicated parking spots in exchange for permission to reduce the total number of spaces. Abby suggested that this could be a Planning Board or Transportation Board Policy. Final policy is set by the Zoning Board with Transportation Board recommendations. Nancy suggested reaching out to the Transportation Board to be included in the planning early on. Henry suggested before going to the ZBA that the Commission work with the Housing Advisory Board – he feels this is where the deals are made.

Darcy Devney from Arlington's Commission on Disability spoke and she said that the COD in Arlington was working on a Warrant Article to address this issue. They have gotten pushback from their Planning Board who has voted 'no action' on it. In Arlington's Warrant Article said that when you do parking reductions, you still have to determine the number of accessible spaces on the original number of spaces. Otherwise, the number of accessible spaces are cut down by cutting down the number of total spots, and thus getting around the ADA. MOD has a chart regarding this. A study group is now being convened to come up with a compromise Warrant Article for Arlington's Fall 2021 Town Meeting. Even deeded parking spaces in condominiums is overridden by the Fair Housing Act if someone needs an accessible spot (if someone asks for reasonable accommodations).

Abby suggested to Building a Better Brookline as allies and Nancy mentioned working with a new organization: Brookline By Design, which is focused on long-term planning and growth in Brookline by looking at design holistically.

Emily Jacobsen suggested that the Commission on Disability develop a Warrant Article that requires the Planning Board to consult with the Disability commission before approving reduction in parking.

ADA Update: The ADA Coordinator was absent but sent the following to the Chair:

- **Person-First Language on the HP Parking Application Form:** The ADA Coordinator reached out to Todd K. He sent back samples of the signs which just have the universal wheelchair symbol and the word Reserved. The ADA Coordinator said he seems willing to update the form to reflect Person-First language.

Transportation Board Update: No update.

New Business: None

Announcements:

CDBG Funding for Audible Pedestrian Signals: DPW requested \$460,000 to do all needed APS in Town. Was awarded \$150,000. All projects that requested funding were awarded the same percentage of funding (~28%)

Brookline Housing Authority: Was awarded money for renovations. Going to keep 20% of units for people with disabilities, 80% without disabilities. Entering new voucher program for people with disabilities, begin by reaching out to residents in BHA properties.

Next Meeting: Wednesday, May 12, 2021 @ 5:30 PM. Meeting adjourned at 7:15 pm.