

**DISABILITY COMMISSION
ADVISORY BOARD MEETING**

Meeting Link: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/81008934107>

Wednesday September 15th 2021
5:30-7:00p.m.

Meeting Agenda

- Meeting Called to Order
- Introductions
- Approval of August Minutes
- Project Presentation - MBTA Downtown Crossing – *Dina Salem*
- City Department – *Elections Commission*
- Chair’s Report – **Olivia Richard**
- Commissioner’s Report – **Kristen McCosh**
- Architectural Access Report – **Sarah Leung**
- Announcements
- Old Business
- New Business
- Public Input
- Adjournment

Meeting Minutes

Attending:

Carl Richardson
Elizabeth Dean-Clower
Dusya Lyubovskaya
Paul Caron
Wesley Ireland
Juan Carlos Ramirez-Tapia

Olivia Richard

Absent:

Zary Amirhosseini
Alice Fisher
Jerry Boyd
Kyle Robidoux
Yardley Sanchez

Meeting called to order:

5:34pm

August Meeting Minutes:

Motion to approve was made by Carl, seconded by Juan Carlos. The motion passed unanimously.

Votes Taken

Carl made a motion to approve the drafted letter to Secretary Walsh outlining requests and priorities for disability employment work. Paul seconded it. Elizabeth made a friendly amendment that the letter be reformatted. Dusya seconded the motion for amendment. The amendment and the motion both passed unanimously.

Other Decisions Made

Issues Discussed

Project Presentation: MBTA Downtown Crossing –

- Dina Salem introduced John McCormack, the MBTA's project manager, to conduct the presentation.
- John - He opened by introducing himself - has worked with the T for more than 16 years, grew up in South Boston and has been a regular user of the Red Line. The project is currently between the 30% and 75% design phases. He also introduced other members of the team. From MBTA Capital Delivery Department, John Swatz and Katie Sazara. Jennifer Ross who works for the System Wide Accessibility (SWA) department at MBTA.

- The primary design engineer consultant is Mott McDonald and the project manager is Admed Mahaba. Dina Salem as well. The Architect is Kleinfelder, represented by Eric Huffington. Nancy Farrell and Amanda Hoggenbuyrg from Regina Miller Associates.
Finally, the Municipal Liaison is Dino DeFronzo.
 - He opened his presentation with a history of the site - that the first station was built in 1908 for the Orange Line, with the Red Line opening in 1915. The first phase of the upgrades at Downtown Crossing has been completed, two new elevators opened in June of 2019. Phase II is what is being presented tonight, which incorporates 3 elevators - replacing an existing at Park Street, creating a brand new elevator at Macy's. The objectives are to achieve ADA compliance and to make passenger transfers much easier, as well as decreasing overall maintenance costs to the T.
1. Park Street Elevator - essentially the solution to provide a Red Line Northbound to Orange Line Southbound connection. The first site they identified implicated a high voltage Eversource utility, and so they instead identified a location that allows for that connection. This location does require passengers to disembark the Red Line at the Park Street station, using the center platform, and use the Winter Street concourse to access the Southbound Orange Line.
 - a. Basically at the end of Winter St where it connects to Tremont St. The doors at Orange Line level will face the concourse. The center platform is being extended, the elevator is being replaced, as is the stairwell that is currently in place.
 - b. John then displayed a 3D video rendering of the location that included cutting through walls and replacing them to demonstrate where the construction will occur, and where in the passageways the elevator will be present.

2. Winter Street Elevator - An existing elevator that goes to the street on Washington. Call it Winter because it is in Winter St building, although it opens onto Washington. It goes from street level to the unpaid level of the Orange Line, by the Forest Hills direction. Intend to dig the shaft deeper as well as wider in order to connect to the Red Line south passageway, providing access to the Southbound Red Line.
 - a. The Washington St entrance of this elevator is near the current AT&T store. Currently, you exit the elevator and are on the unpaid side of the lobby. You then have to go through the fare gate and will be at the Forest Hills platform or you have the option to go up the Winter St concourse to the Park St station. The slide presented included photos of existing conditions as well as renderings of where the elevator will open.
 - b. This elevator will have multiple doors. Starting from the street you will go down a floor to the unpaid side of the fare gates, pay your fare and pass through them, then if you wish to access the Red Line you would come around to the other side of that same elevator in order to go down to the South Passageway which will lead you to the Southbound Red Line.
 - c. There is an existing stairway which will be totally redone. The elevator will open into the South Passageway, which is at a bit of an elevation. And so they will install a small ramp in order to get from the elevator to the South Passageway path of travel.
 - d. John then showed the 3D rendering of this elevator area as well, showing the location of various tracks, the existing stairway, where the elevator will be located, and more.

3. Macy's Elevator - Call it that because it will take a bit of the Macy's building basement. This is not a street level elevator, just underground connections for the subway lines.
 - a. There is an existing U-shaped stairway connecting the Northbound Orange Line to the South passageway which then leads to the Southbound Red Line. The slide presented showed the passageway with several renderings of where the elevator will fit within this layout. The door will be 90 degree configured away from the South passageway rather than the door opening perpendicular to the passageway.
 - b. John displayed another 3D rendering of the site, showing where the elevator shaft will fit, as well as other attributes of the construction for example a large Boston Water and Sewer Commission pipe that is brick lined. The construction team will need to be very careful near that pipe in order to prevent accidental leaks.
- John then showed a slide with outreach, website, and contact information. The main website is www.mbta.com/dtx-accessibility for this project. There is also a project email that goes to several members of the team, which is DTX@MBTA.com. The slide also presented the outreach schedule for 2021 which so far has included the Downtown Crossing Business Improvement District, the Disabilities Commission, the R-TAG group with the T, this current meeting, and a planned public meeting to happen in the Fall, hopefully October.

Questions from the Board

- Member Lyubovskaya - Board Member Dusya Lyubovskaya asked whether, during construction, passengers will be required to use shuttle buses.

- McCormack - McCormack replied that neither the Orange or the Red Lines will be shut down, there will be no diversions. The south passageway will probably shut down for a while but that would be it, and we will work to divert travel.
- Member Ireland - Member Wesley Ireland noted that he had four questions or comments for you. First, he thanked the T for this presentation and commented that this project is very exciting. He noted that he has seen many improvements since he first came to Boston 20 years ago. It is a long connection between the Red Line and Orange Line at Downtown Crossing, a long walk for that. Any possibility of a solution like a moving walkway? This would be good for people with mobility disabilities and all pedestrians. There are a lot of people in those passageways, especially during rush hour.
- McCormack- That's a great idea, but it's not part of this project. He noted that the connection especially relating to the Park St elevator, for Northbound Red Line to Southbound Orange Line connection, it's really long - about 250 feet if you get off the Red Line at Downtown Crossing, go down the North passageway, and then have to climb stairs. The Winter St. concourse is 200 feet longer than that. He noted that the T did make some improvements to that concourse a few years ago - people may remember the plywood walls closing things off which are all gone now. He offered to bring the moving walkway idea to the project chief engineer for future consideration. For example, they had tried to put a fourth elevator near the North Passageway stairwell but didn't have the time and money to make it happen.
- Member Ireland - For his second question, Ireland asked whether the elevators will all be the same style and size? What will the capacity be? Also the lighting needs to be improved.

- McCormack - He replied that the project team knows that lighting is a concern, and that the design team is working to improve lighting everywhere. As much glazing (windows) as possible is being added for both the shaft and the cab of the elevator. He also commented that wayfinding is a big part of this project. In terms of size, the Park Street elevator will be fully compliant with room for a stretcher, the largest under T guidelines. At Winter St because the T is reusing the existing shaft it's harder, but it is being pushed out a bit to fit a stretcher length, but it won't be as wide as would be ideal. The Macy's interior elevator won't be stretcher length because of the existing structure and shaft. It will be 5ft by 5 ft inside. So 1 out of 3 will be full size, 1 out of 3 will be stretcher compliant, and 1 out of 3 will be code compliant, but at the smallest possible size in T guidelines.
- Member Ireland - The next question he asked was related to Dusya's - will the new areas be more visually friendly? He asked if there will be improved signage including whether the train is running.
- McCormack- He replied that yes, wayfinding will be a major component of the project. The team knows that even the most seasoned MBTA customer can have difficulty navigating Downtown Crossing. Improved lighting, security, and glazing, all along the MBTA elevator are all part of the project. We do not anticipate shutting down either subway line during construction.
- Member Ireland - His final question is about a nearby station - Haymarket. He asked if there are any plans for that station or any updates to that work. He said that he asked because it's near City Hall and very much related to the City Hall Plaza accessibility improvements.
- McCormack - Commented that that project is not in his domain and so he does not have any information, but offered to forward contact info for that team to the Board.

- Member Dean-Clower - She had a quick clarification question, asking if the Macy's elevator will face the escalator when the doors open. She also asked for the dimensions of that elevator.
- McCormack - John clarified that they will not open facing the escalator, but rather the Summer Street concourse and fare machines. The shaft will be across from the escalator though. He noted that this will be the smallest elevator in the project, at 5ft by 5 ft.
- Member Dean-Clower - She commented that it is a good design that the elevator isn't facing the escalator. When that happens there can be crowding.
- Chair Richard - Richard commented that scooters and other mobility device users may have trouble with the elevator that requires a 90 degree turn because it requires a turn in the elevator.
- McCormack - McCormack replied that the reason they had to include the 90 degree turn in the design is because of the egress code. The code required that those queuing for the elevator be moved outside the path of travel in the South Passageway.
- Chair Richard - She reiterated that she wanted to highlight folks with a poor turning radius might have trouble with that elevator.
- McCormack - Thanked her for highlighting that issue. He noted that the team has a scheduled survey of Macy's basement and if they find any more space they will expand that elevator.

Public Input

- David Viera - Viera noted that he has had multiple interactions with Laura Bresford of SWA over projects at Central, Wollaston, and the one upcoming at Symphony. He has advocated that the control panel in the elevator needs to be backlit so that people don't have to explore in all 4 corners to find the buttons. He has been told by Bresford that it cannot be done, but he argues

that it is necessary for accessibility that they be backlit for people who are blind or low vision. He notes that as an individual with low vision he has to explore all the corners, feel around, and often presses the wrong buttons. He asks that the team answer as well as other Board members.

- McCormack - Asked Viera to clarify if he meant the interior or exterior panel. Viera - Clarified that he meant the interior, He noted that if the panel were backlit, he would be able to see right away where the buttons are. He reiterates that his question is - if you are buying all new elevators, why can't the panels be backlit?
- McCormack - Offered to bring that question to the design team and chat with Brelsford, as this is the first time he's heard of that request.
- Commissioner Kristen McCosh - offered to follow up with Laura as well.
- Concetta Paul - Paul had several questions about passengers' path from Forest Hills to the Charlie Card store - as well as connections from the Northbound Red Line to the Southbound Orange Line.
- McCormack - He explained that passengers should stay on the Red Line until Park Street, use the Center Platform, and then take the new elevator to reach the Winter Street concourse.
- Paul - She reiterated her hope that the signage for that will be clear given the number of steps and the length of that trip for passengers.

Elections Update: Commissioner McCosh

- A representative from the Elections Commission was unable to attend at the last minute, and so Commissioner McCosh provided an update on municipal elections and accessible vote by mail.
- First, she provided background on accessible voting by mail. Prior to the pandemic, voters had to have a qualifying reason to vote by mail but under emergency orders all voters were allowed to vote by mail by choice - called

“no excuse” voting by mail. This had an accessibility component to allow voters with disabilities to fill out their ballot electronically, print it to sign it and then mail it back to their municipality.

- When the state of emergency ended, this system expired. The State Legislature passed new law allowing no excuse absentee voting through December 15 of this year for municipal elections, however it did not include provision for the accessible option of electronic completion or submission.
- The City of Boston entered into an agreement on September 8, 2021 with the Disability Law Center (DLC), the Boston Center for Independent Living (BCIL), the Bay State Council for the Blind (BSBC), and 5 Boston voters with disabilities to create an accessible vote by mail (AVBM) system for elections. Voters will be able to get an accessible electronic ballot, mark it, and send it to the City all electronically. The platform will be compliant with current World Wide Web Consortium’s Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.1).
- The City has committee to establishing this system, making it available beyond December 15, 2021, and to use this as an accommodation for voters who have disabilities such as blindness, low vision, and mobility/dexterity disabilities that make it difficult or impossible to effectively access standard print materials (referred to in the settlement as “print” disabilities”).
- With that update, a reminder about some upcoming dates: October 13th is the deadline to register to vote for the General Municipal Election. October 27th is the Deadline for Elections to receive your vote by mail application for the General Election - it is recommended that you submit that application ASAP to allow for mailing delays. And November 2nd is the General Election.

Questions from the Board

- Board Member Ireland - He inquired how this process would work for Deaf/Blind individuals.
- Commissioner McCosh - Clarified that voters use the device they have at home.
- Board Member Carl Richardson - Richardson added that so when it says WCAG 2.1 standard, that means it will work screen readers, so any blind individual with a screen reader, this would work for them.
- Commissioner McCosh - It's essentially a way to vote at your house. That said, all polling places are accessible and have the Aramark machine, but it's not always private or independent and the City is working to ensure that everyone can vote privately and independently.
- Board Member Ireland - In addition, wanted to raise the question of people who may not use equipment but a service provider to communicate and want to ensure accessibility for them.
- Commissioner McCosh - She clarified that the standard vote by mail process in which someone marks the ballot for you and assists with mailing it in is still available to everyone.

Questions from the Public

- Viera - Voters presumably have to sign up for this with the Elections department in order to get directions.
Commissioner McCosh: Voters do have to request an absentee ballot
- Andrea Patton - She added that when you submit your application for an absentee ballot you can email that to the Elections Commission and when you do so indicate that you are a person with disabilities requesting use of the AVBM system. At that point they will be in touch with voters about accessing it. The Elections Commission has communicated electronically

with voters before, for example with overseas active military individuals. The Commission will email out directions.

Chair's Report: Olivia Richard

- DAAR - Disability Advocates Advancing Health Care Rights is having a forum on 9/22 from 1-3pm online. ASL and CART are provided. If you want more information, you can contact Jessica Podesta at the Boston Center for Independent Living at jpodesva@bostoncil.org. That will be about proposed changes in One Care, hearing about how OneCare is going for those who are enrolled -- they want to hear about people's good and bad experiences so that they can make improvements.
- Reminder there is an in-home vaccination program if you can't get to a mobile clinic or to a provider. The phone number is 833-983-0485. You can call that from 9-5, Monday through Friday. They provide the J&J to people 17 years and older, and the Pfizer vaccine to those 12 and older.
- Last, the Chair noted she had wanted to remind people about the important election dates, which Commissioner McCosh addressed.

Commissioner's Report: Kristen McCosh

- The letters that were approved - welcoming Mayor Janey and advocating for vaccine program changes to Governor Baker - were sent out.
- The materials provided for this evening included a draft letter to Secretary of Labor Walsh for your consideration.
- The Commissioner provided an update on the planning for a captions ordinance - City Council is planning a hearing regarding the issue of captions on public televisions, which we have been working closely with them on to discuss the implementation and impact of a potential ordinance.

- The Commissioner provided the background that the issue here is discussing having public televisions for example in restaurants enable the closed captioning when TVs are on so that people who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing can access the information.
- The hearing is scheduled for the second week of November. Members of the public will be able to give comments. The Disabilities Commission as well as other City Departments such as Economic Development and the Human Rights Commission will provide testimony, and representatives of the business community will be invited as well. The hearing order was co-sponsored by Councilors Flynn, Mejia, and Breadon, and the hearing will be held by the City and Neighborhood Services Committee. The Commission will share the date and other information as soon as things are confirmed.
- Board Member Ireland - Requested that as soon as the date and time is confirmed for the captions hearing he be notified.
- Commissioner McCosh - Promised to notify him as soon as possible, and noted that advance notice is the Commission's goal as well so that ASL and CART can be confirmed.
- On a related note, the Commission is preparing to post the job opening for the full-time in-house ASL Interpreter position. The Commission will push that link to the Board to share widely when it goes live.
- Last, the Commissioner provided an update on the Outreach and Educational Videos that the Commission have been working on with the Boston Bikes team at the Boston Transportation Department and have a meeting next week. Have also been collaborating with the MBTA as they prepare to film videos to describe floating bus stops, which are being installed in many places most recently Columbus Ave. The Commission intends to continue to explore other topics to do educational videos on such as snow removal and outdoor dining. Let me know if you want to join the shoot.

- Viera - Asked to be a part of the meeting with BTB
- Commissioner McCosh - Clarified that it was an internal meeting to hash out the plan between departments that isn't meant as a public meeting, but the Commissioner offered to update Viera after the meeting.
- Viera - Suggested that a member of the BPD come to a future meeting to discuss enforcement of the kinds of things highlighted in the video. He argued that a video doesn't mean much if the enforcement teams don't take action.
- Commissioner McCosh - Thanked Viera for the suggested and said the Police will be looped in. She also noted that the outreach effort isn't going to be limited to videos, but rather will be a major campaign using grant money to reach, for example, Blue Bikes users, charity rides, colleges, bike repair shops, and more. While the campaign has taken longer to get off the ground than everyone had intended, once these public education materials have been produced they will be here for good.
- The Commissioner then provided an update on the summer's Financial Empowerment pilot program with the Boston Public Schools' Special Education Program and specifically transition age youth, which Board Member Jerry Boyd had requested more information about at the August meeting.
- Funding from Citi Bank allowed us to provide training to 2 BPS teachers regarding financial wellness on things like basics of money, banking, and protecting you identity. Students received \$100 in seed money to open an account, traveled to City Hall to meet with banks and credit unions and meet with Commission Staff. There was also a parents' night which introduced them to local resources and to ABLE Accounts.
- The Commission is now planning for a full year program that will reach 150 students with an expanded curriculum and more information about ABLE for

parents. The Commissioner noted that students can fall off a cliff when they leave high school if they lose services and supports. The Commission wants to ensure that they have the skills and tools they need to be prepared for the workforce.

- Next, the Commissioner highlighted plans for National Disability Employment Awareness Month, including the annual Mass Rehab Commission virtual internship program, hosting a panel called How to Get Hired with the City that will invited HR representatives from the agencies that run their own job portals to discuss employment opportunities with a crowd of clients from Mass Rehab, Mass Commission for the Blind, Deaf Inc., and Boston STRIVE program for students in special education programs.
- Next, the Commissioner updated the Board on the Community Access Monitor Training program that Patricia had mentioned. There are two dates - November 18th and November 30th. They will be online, with ASL and CART available, from 9:30am - 2:30pm. Interested Board members can follow up with us to register.
- Finally, the Commissioner mentioned an event the Commission is hosting on 9/17, a lunch-and-learn event through the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce. It will be in person at the Multicultural Arts Center, geared toward young professionals to introduce them to best practices for disability inclusion in the workplace. Board Member Juan Carlos will be on our panel, it will be livestreamed on Facebook or all are welcome to attend in person. The link will be emailed out to the Board for sharing with their networks.

Architectural Access Report – Sarah Leung

- Update was covered by the Commissioner.

Announcements

- Board Member Ireland - Announced that on Sunday there is a Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Deaf/Blind, and late deafened community day happening at Fenway Park. All are welcome, and Ireland offered to send around link so that folks can buy tickets. It is a fundraiser for a Deaf organization.
- David Viera - Noted that the citywide Friends of the Library booksale has returned to the Central Library in Copley Square, October 2nd from 10am-4pm on the lower level of the the McKim Building which can accessed from the street by the accessibility ramp outside and using elevators. All are welcome.

Old Business

- Approved letters were sent.
- The Chair has reached out to BCIL but hadn't heard back yet about a survey to the Mayor. Might have to be an initiative just for the Board.
- Patton - Noted that there is a disability community survey that was sent to mayoral candidates in Cincinnati, her hometown.
- Board Member Ireland - Suggested drafting and sending a similar letter as the one sent to Janey now to the two candidates, and then do a follow up after someone wins.
- Board Member Dean-Clower - As a member of the R-TAG group with the MBTA, offered an update on the RIDE Flex program that R-TAG received. The group learned that a major change was occurring.
 - People who were part of the Pilot were told levels wouldn't be diminished, if they were allocated 20 or 30 rides per month or whatever it was, they would not be decreased. So it was confusing when people received a bulletin that on October 1 RIDE Flex current level of usage would be determinative for future allocations. But riders' usage has been much diminished because of the pandemic.

Dean-Clower expressed that this was an unwelcome and unexpected major policy change.

- The R-TAGE group advocated for and got confirmation that no one's rides will be diminished from their pilot amount, and the same will be true for anyone who signs up between now and October 1. Still seeking more info on how this decision came about.
- Second, the Board's Executive Committee is interested in having the RIDE speak to the Board, but there have been changes in leadership from Ben Schutzman to Mahour Rahimi as the acting director of that office. Therefore, it seems that an update at this time would not be helpful, we want them to be able and prepared to field questions from the Board and the public.

New Business

- Walsh Letter - Board Member Dean-Clower asks that we do more bulleting out of key points to avoid the walls of text. This took the form of a friendly amendment to Carl's motion to approve sending the letter.
- Patton - Noted that while the draft letter was dated July, it would be updated before sending.

Public Input:

- Concetta Paul, attending her first meeting as someone interested in the open seat on the Board commented that she was very impressed with the meeting and how well it was run. Noted that her primary concerns are related to the MBTA and her questions were all answered. She was also interested in participating in the MBTA's video project and said she would email the Commission directly to follow up.

Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made by Carl, seconded by Elizabeth, and the motion was carried. The meeting was adjourned at 7:20pm.