



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

IRAM FAROOQ
Assistant City Manager for
Community Development

SANDRA CLARKE
Deputy Director
Chief of Administration

To: Yi-An Huang, City Manager
From: Iram Farooq, Assistant City Manager, Community Development
Brooke McKenna, Transportation Commissioner
Date: Wednesday, June 12, 2024
Re: MBTA Track Improvement Program work in June and July 2024

We are writing with a third update on the City's efforts to support the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) Track Improvement Program in 2024. As you may recall, the Track Improvement Program is focused on making much-needed and long-deferred track repairs and improvements to the subway system. In Cambridge, this work means a number of closures of the Red Line this year.

The MBTA will be closing the Red Line two times between now and the end of July and two additional closures in the latter half of this year to continue this major work. Below, we provide a preview of MBTA plans for the upcoming June and July Red Line closures, MBTA shuttle operations and mitigations, city plans to support shuttle operations, city plans to support walking and biking, and planned communications.

Upcoming Red Line closure June 28 to June 30

There will be a weekend closure at the end of June that will begin on Friday June 28 and continue to Sunday, June 30. This closure will have two parts.

First, beginning on Friday June 28 at 8:45 p.m. until end of day on Sunday, June 30, Kendall/MIT station's outbound platform (Boston into Cambridge) will be closed. The station's inbound platform (Cambridge to Boston) will be open. MBTA will direct passengers to travel past the outbound platform at Kendall/MIT station, reverse direction at another station, and enter and exit from the open inbound platform.

- Riders travelling to Kendall/MIT station from Boston will pass Kendall/MIT station, exit the station at Central Square, and take an inbound train to Kendall/MIT station. The transfer at Central Square will be free.
- Riders travelling from Kendall/MIT station to Cambridge and Somerville will take an inbound train to Charles/MGH station, exit the train, and board an outbound Red Line train. This transfer will be free.

In addition, beginning on Saturday, June 29 until end of day on Sunday, June 30, there will be no Red Line trains between Harvard and Alewife stations. Riders will take free shuttle buses instead of trains. The MBTA will make the Commuter Rail free from Porter to North Station and make bus route 77 free in Cambridge.

Red Line closure July 13 to July 28

The MBTA will close the Red Line for 16 days, from Saturday, July 13 to Sunday, July 28. The Red Line closure will have two parts:

- On weekdays
 - from beginning of service to 8:30 p.m., there will be no Red Line trains between Alewife and Kendall/MIT stations.
 - after 8:30 p.m., there will be no Red Line trains between Alewife and Park Street stations.
- On weekends, there will be no Red Line trains from Alewife station to Park Street station.

The MBTA will provide free shuttle buses instead of trains and shuttle buses will stop at all stations.

MBTA shuttle operations and mitigations in July

As we shared in a memo on April 1, this closure will last almost twice as long as the February closure and affect up to 43,000 Red Line riders. With careful advanced planning and identification of mitigations, the MBTA has been able to reduce the expected number of buses needed to less than 150 buses to reduce impact on non-transit roadway users.

The MBTA has developed enhanced shuttle operations and mitigation plans for the 16-day Red Line closure. City staff are happy to report that the MBTA has hired many more staff to manage the planning for these shuttle operations and mitigations. With these new positions, the MBTA has the capacity to more effectively coordinate with municipalities. We meet weekly with staff from the MBTA and City of Somerville. These frequent meetings have opened a line of communication that was not previously there. The MBTA has provided new mitigations or modified previous mitigations for the upcoming Red Line closure because of feedback that we've shared.

During the July closure, the MBTA will provide:

- Several weekday daytime shuttle routes
 - local route that stops at each station
 - express route that stops only at specific stations
 - loop route that stops only at Harvard, Central, and Kendall/MIT stations
- A single shuttle route on weekday evenings and weekends with an all-stop local shuttle route
- Shuttle bus staging yard in Charlestown
- Fare free service on
 - Commuter rail between Porter and North Station
 - Bus route 77 in Cambridge
- Additional service with a train every 30 minutes on the commuter rail between Porter and North Station
- Pedestrian and cycling wayfinding on the Alewife Linear and Somerville Community Paths

We want to note that because of the shuttle bus staging yard in Charlestown, many parts of Cambridge will experience traffic impacts, even on weekends. In addition, because of the temporary express and loop shuttle routes, we expect to see more than typical amounts of buses and coaches on streets in the eastern part of the city during the day on weekdays.

City shuttle support in July

In late April, we reconvened the city staff working group to continue planning for the Red Line closure in July. This includes city staff from the Executive, Traffic, Parking, and Transportation, Community Development, Public Works, Human Service Programs, the Communications Office, and Police Departments. This group has primarily worked to identify ways that the City can provide support for the July Red Line closures.

For on-street mitigations during the July Red Line closure, the City is planning to provide to the MBTA shuttles:

- Temporary bus stop zones for shuttles—relocating or expanding existing bus stops.
- Dedicated shuttle lanes on Mass Ave between Porter and Harvard Square.
- Modifications to traffic signals to prioritize bus movements along the shuttle route – including on Mass Ave in Porter Square and Mount Auburn Street near Harvard Square.
- Temporary sidewalk patches to improve paths of travel for people walking between stations and shuttle stops.

Police Department staff plan to assist by coordinating police details and enforcing temporary curb restrictions and dedicated shuttle lanes. Staff at the Traffic, Parking, and Transportation Department and Department of Public Works are planning to post electronic, variable message boards around the City in advance of the July closure.

City bicycle and walking support in July

With July weather, we hope that Cambridge residents, workers, students, and visitors will try walking and biking for more of their trips while the MBTA completes construction work on the Red Line. The City will mitigate the Red Line closure with temporary Bluebikes valets, offering five free “unlocks”, and providing information on biking and walking around Cambridge.

To ensure that Bluebikes stations are available for use, we will add a temporary bike valet on Brattle Street at Eliot Street in Harvard Square. The regular valet on Ames Street at Main Street in Kendall Square will continue operation throughout the summer. Bike valets allow Bluebikes riders to park bikes even after a station has reached its docking capacity. Bluebikes can play a crucial transportation alternative to the subway in Cambridge. In July 2023, Bluebikes stations adjacent to Red Line stations saw more than 26,000 trips. We expect that many people will try Bluebikes, and the valets should reduce the number of unavailable docks.

In addition, Bluebikes will offer five free unlocks for the duration of the closure. The unlocks are available to non-members of Bluebikes and can be redeemed for both traditional pedal bikes and the electric bikes. A single unlock is typically \$2.95 each and includes up to 30 minutes of riding on a traditional pedal bike. This fare will be waved for five trips. Regular fees apply on all trips; this includes the per-minute electric bike, per-minute extended trip, and lost bike fees. The unlocks are available for use only during the closure and while supplies last. Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts is sponsoring this mitigation initiative as title sponsor of Bluebikes.

In addition, City staff will produce maps with routes for bicyclists and pedestrians to get around Cambridge. For cyclists, we will identify routes that maximize the use of new separated bike lanes. City staff are asking the Cambridge Bicycle Committee to support a weekday commuter ride to help guide and marshal newer riders along these routes. For pedestrians, we will identify walking distances, average times, and points of interest for routes that travel along the closed Red Line stations.

City communication plan updates for July

The team overseeing communications includes personnel from CDD, TPT, and the Communications Office. This group meets weekly in addition to the larger weekly operations and logistics meeting.

Our communications strategy for the upcoming summer closures expands on our efforts earlier this year, incorporating valuable feedback from two meetings with the DHSP and CDD Community Engagement Team (CET) outreach workers, in addition to other learnings and community feedback. We have made several improvements to our strategy that should enhance the efficacy of our communications. In our April memo we identified areas for improvement. Below is a recap of these areas and the actions we have taken or will take to improve our communications strategy.

1) Deeper collaboration on messaging and outreach strategies with the CET.

The communications team has worked closely with CET to refine and simplify our messaging and outreach materials, making sure information is clear and accessible. Based on our meetings with the CET team, we have restructured our messaging into primary and secondary information. The primary information includes dates and locations of closure, directly states that there will be no Red Line trains, and clearly presents the alternative transit options. Here is an example of our primary messaging for the July closure:

- The MBTA Red Line will be closed Saturday, July 13 to Sunday, July 28
 - Weekdays from 5am – 8:45pm.
 - There will be no Red Line trains between Alewife (Cambridge) – Kendall/MIT (Cambridge)
 - Riders will take FREE shuttle buses instead of trains at all closed Red Line stations.
 - Shuttle buses will stop at: Alewife (Cambridge), Davis (Somerville), Porter (Cambridge), Harvard (Cambridge), Central (Cambridge), Kendall/MIT (Cambridge)
 - Weekdays after 8:45 p.m. AND all day on weekends.
 - There will be no Red Line trains between Alewife (Cambridge) – Park Street (Boston)
 - Riders will take FREE shuttle buses instead of trains at all closed Red Line stations.
 - Shuttle buses will stop at: Alewife (Cambridge), Davis (Somerville), Porter (Cambridge), Harvard (Cambridge), Central (Cambridge), Kendall/MIT (Cambridge), Charles/MGH (Boston), and Park Street (Boston)

- A free Commuter Rail will provide additional service about every 30 minutes from Porter Square (Cambridge) to North Station (Boston).
- Regular MBTA buses will continue to operate.

In addition to this messaging, we will also be providing the following communications pieces, developed with input from CET:

- Translated flyers
- Detailed shuttle route map: One map showing both express and local shuttle routes and stops will be printed on the back of flyers and posted on our website. This map will be completed as soon as the MBTA has finalized their shuttle routes.
- Maps of recommended bicycle and pedestrian routes

2) Reaching out to additional stakeholders that we may have missed last time, including companies catering to visitors, like those running tour buses.

We have curated a list of target outreach audiences that includes nearly 70 groups, organizations, locations, and/or communications channels to ensure we are reaching as many community members as possible. This list includes local businesses, large employers, school networks such as the backpacks program, inclusionary and public housing managers and message boards, libraries, places of worship, food pantries, on-street message boards (VMS boards), the Chamber of Commerce, and much more.

3) Earlier outreach to all stakeholders, with MBTA providing confirmation of closure dates and extents as soon as possible.

We began communicating about the closures scheduled for the end of June and late July during the last week of May. We feel that the benefit of giving people more time to plan for future closures outweighs the risks of potential changes in dates of the closures. In our messaging we have reminded people to continue checking the MBTA and City (camb.ma/redline) websites for updated information. Because we began communications efforts earlier, we are also able to perform multiple rounds of outreach, which will allow us to reach more people.

4) Additional opportunities to communicate and collaborate with employers, such as providing them with materials and suggested templates to share with their employees.

We have begun outreach to large employers to inform them of the closures. Our next round of outreach will occur the week of June 17th and will include an email template for communicating organization-specific information (such as offering

additional remote work accommodations) with their employees and a flyer for them to post or distribute electronically.

5) More messaging encouraging people to bike and walk, with additional materials and other supports for new cyclists and to help pedestrians and cyclists navigate the city.

The sustainable transportation team is finalizing maps showing information for people trying new trips by walking and biking. Community Development staff are also engaging with pedestrian advocacy groups on outreach and messaging to encourage walking.

We have also worked with Bluebikes on messaging around the promo code that will provide five free Bluebikes rides during the July closure. We plan to share general information about this promotion in early July and will publicize the promo code and instructions a week before the July closure. We will also use our digital platforms to direct cyclists to the online Bluebikes station map.

City communications goals and outcomes

The five areas of improvement above are in addition to our previously existing communications plan, the goals of which remain to ensure that:

- Residents and workers know that the Red Line is closing
- People understand that the closure could mean more traffic and longer travel times for all travelers on all modes.
- People know about travel options and accessibility accommodations.
- People can access information about shuttle stops, routes, and access.
- The information reaches underserved communities and people who do not speak English.
- The information reaches all travelers: people who take the subway, take the bus, drive, bike, or walk.

Our communications plan continues to specify messages for different groups of Cambridge constituents, including:

- For residents: consider alternatives to driving alone, especially walking and biking, and consider keeping trips local.
- For workers: consider teleworking, walking, biking, shuttle buses, and MBTA local bus routes.
- For large employers: give your employees options, when possible, including telework or schedule flexibility.

We will continue to utilize the following communications channels used during the previous Red Line closure:

- Cambridge-specific website and news story on City homepage
- Local media (Cambridge Day, The Crimson, Boston.com, Boston Globe, etc.)
- City Daily Update email
- City social media platforms including Facebook, X, Instagram, LinkedIn, NextDoor, Tip411
- Departmental social media platforms
- Departmental newsletters (for example: CDD's monthly newsletter that goes to over 2,000 local business contacts)
- Printed and pdf flyers
- CET outreach workers
- Collaboration with partner organizations such as business associations, emergency services, transportation management associations, universities, neighborhood associations, CCTV/22-CityView
- City internal communications