

# City of Cambridge Fare-Free Bus Working Group Final Report



JULY 2022

# Table of Contents

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<i>Introduction</i>	3
<i>Goals and Objectives of the Working Group</i>	4
<i>Working Group Members</i>	5
<i>Meeting Summaries</i>	6
<i>Meeting Discussions</i>	7
<i>Official Recommendation</i>	9

# Introduction

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Mayor Sumbul Siddiqui has convened a working group to discuss the details of a fare-free bus pilot and has appointed Councillor Burhan Azeem as Chair. The working group, in collaboration with the Community Development Department, held meetings over the course of 3 months to inform the City's strategy regarding a fare-free bus pilot in Cambridge.

- ◇ Fare free approaches have been proven to increase ridership
  - Boston released their Route 28 bus fare free pilot results in Spring 2022
    - » Route 28 ridership increased dramatically (38%) after the start of the pilot, experiencing up to 4,000 additional trips per weekday, compared to only a 15% increase in systemwide bus ridership.
    - » 5% modeshift → car to bus
- ◇ Though fares are not the biggest barrier to greater public transit usage, eliminating fares can ensure that those people adapting to higher costs of driving alone have lower barriers in shifting to public transportation.

# Goals and Objectives of the Working Group

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The recent fare-free bus pilots in Boston demonstrate that offering free bus service is an effective means of attracting riders back to the MBTA system. As Cambridge and the region look to emerge from the pandemic with an equitable and efficient transit system in place, fare-free pilots could serve as an effective first step.

The working group is tasked with better understanding what implementation of a fare-free bus pilot would entail and what possible impacts would occur. Utilizing ridership data trends and guided by fare-free programs already in existence, the working group will report on the feasibility and timeline of a pilot in Cambridge.

Fare free route would prioritize rider equity

- Transit dependent populations/households without access to a car

Fare free transit would help us reach other goals we have set as a City.

- Reducing SOV traffic
- Incentivizing modeshift to greener forms of transportation

# Working Group Members

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Sumbul Siddiqui, **Mayor**

John Attanucci, **Cambridge Transit Advisory Committee**

Burhan Azeem (Chair), **Cambridge City Councilor**

Joe Barr, **Director of Traffic and Parking**

Steven Beaucher, **Small Business Owner**

Iram Farooq, **Assistant City Manager, Community Development**

Sophie Goldman, **CRLS Student**

Matt Nelson, **City Manager's Office**

Susanne Rasmussen, **Director of Environmental and Transportation Planning**

Andy Reker, **Transit Planner, Community Development**

Carl Rothenhaus, **Community Member**

Michael Scarlett, **Chief of Staff, Office of Mayor Siddiqui**

Saul Tannenbaum, **Cambridge Transit Advisory Committee**

Stacy Thompson, **LivableStreets Alliance**

Elaine Wen, **CRLS Student**

# Meeting Summaries

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**Meeting 1** - *March 16th 4:00-6:00pm*

- ◇ Agenda: Introductions, Value of fare free transit, initial thoughts

**Meeting 2** - *March 30th 4:00-6:00pm*

- ◇ Agenda: Pilot Outline (Cost, # of Routes, Duration, Criteria for Selecting Routes)
- ◇ CDD presentation of route demographics

**Meeting 3** - *April 20th 4:00-6:00pm*

- ◇ Agenda: Reviewing Bus Routes & Selecting Routes I

**Meeting 4** - *May 4th 4:00-6:00pm*

- ◇ Agenda: Reviewing Bus Routes & Selecting Routes II

**Meeting 5** - *May 18th 4:00-6:00pm*

- ◇ Agenda: Metrics for Success

**Meeting 6** - *June 1st 4:00-6:00pm*

- ◇ Agenda: Final Details, recommendations

Video recordings of the meetings can be found at:

<https://www.cambridgema.gov/Departments/mayorsoffice/farefreeworkinggroup>



# Meeting Discussions

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## Introductions - March 16th

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- ◇ Go over the goals and objectives of the working group
- ◇ What is the value of fare free transit?
  - Talked through the optimal length of the pilot program (2 years) as well as how many routes we should target.
    - » 3-6 months is not long enough to achieve/measure these goals
    - » 2 years was a good enough length of time to be able to gauge effectiveness of the program
  - Why 2 years and not 5 years?
    - » ARPA funds have to be committed by the end of 2024 and spent by the end of 2026.

## Pilot Outline - March 30th

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Joined by Vineet Gupta of the Boston Transportation Department

- ◇ Went over Boston's experiences with their fare-free pilots as well as ways to calculate cost sharing for the fare reimbursements to the MBTA
  - What went into criteria for selecting bus routes? What was weighed most heavily?
    - » Reducing impact on transit critical populations' household budget
    - » Needing more reliable and faster service
    - » Very demographic based approach to selecting routes
  - Metrics of success for pilots?
    - » Delay was used as metric of success
    - » All door boarding, time to pay, etc.
    - » More people getting on, so the bus would have to stop longer
  - How much money are people saving?
    - » Costs of transferring
    - » 20-25% of all riders were saving money for trips where transfers were not needed

## **Reviewing Bus Routes & Selecting Routes One - April 20th**

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CDD Presentation on ridership demographics data

- ◇ Low income → household income is below \$43,500/yr.
  - This is 60% of median household income

Start of the route selection process

- ◇ Overview of bus network in Cambridge

### ***Bus hubs***

Alewife

- ◇ Route 62, 67, 76, 79, 84, 350, 351

Harvard Square - On street routes

- ◇ Routes 1, 66, 68, 69, 86
  - 68 (Kendall) and 69 (Lechmere) are fully within Cambridge

Harvard Square - Bus Tunnel routes

- ◇ Routes 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 77, 78
  - Route 77 (Arlington Heights) stands out re: low income ridership

Lechmere

- ◇ Routes 69, 80, 87, 88

Central Square

- ◇ Routes 1, 47, 64, 70 (and 70A), 83, 91
  - Routes 1, 70, 83, 91

Kendall Square

- ◇ Routes CT2, 64, 68, 85

## **Reviewing Bus Routes & Selecting Routes Two - May 4th**

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- ◇ The Working Group was joined by the Executive Director of the MBTA Advisory Board, Brian Kane, who discussed financial/cost-sharing details surrounding the pilot program.
- ◇ Continued discussion of bus routes



### **Metric for Success - May 18th**

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Andy Reker of CDD briefly discussed the recently announced MBTA bus network redesign in order to gauge potential impacts to the fare free pilot.

◇ <https://www.mbtta.com/projects/bus-network-redesign>

Reviewed metrics of success

- ◇ Modeshift
- ◇ Increased ridership
- ◇ Travel time and running time changes
  - Perhaps also some measure of crowding, suggests there should be more service on the routes
    - » Any metric of crowding? % of seats taken (more subtle one → how long passengers are standing, measure of uncomfortableness of riding → mbta uses this)
  - Double door boarding
  - Not waiting on time for tapping in for fare

### **Final Details, Official Recommendations - June 1st**

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Official recommendations for:

- ◇ Intercity fare free routes → deliberating with Boston/MBTA over 1 or 66 bus, with a strong preference for the 1 bus.
- ◇ Intracity fare free routes → 2 year pilot of fare free 68/69 buses

*The City of Cambridge will be allocating \$2 million of ARPA funding for the fare free bus pilot program*