



MEMORANDUM

TO: Fiscal and Management Control Board

FROM: Jessica Casey
Chief, Operations Policy and Oversight Officer

CC: Luis Ramirez
General Manager & CEO

Jeffrey Gonneville
Deputy General Manager

DATE: April 4, 2018

RE: **The Better Bus Project – Update**

Since The Better Bus Project presentation, dated February 26, 2018, the team have advanced the plan in the following ways:

General

- Four Steering Committee Meetings have been held. An email update was provided to the Committee on March 21, 2018. The next Steering Committee is scheduled for April 18, 2018.
- Six Data/Technical Tool Subcommittee Meetings have been held.
- Six Outreach Subcommittee Meetings have been held.
- Working groups have met bi-weekly to discuss particular components of the plan in depth. Summaries and next steps are shared at the Subcommittee Meetings.
- FY19 Operations budget request for 55 operators (\$3.6M)

Data/Analytics & Technical Tools

- Developed, tested, and evaluated additional formulations of quality of service (QOS) indicators for speed and travel time variability.
- Prepared tables and prototypical verbal descriptions of speed and travel time reliability results, by direction for the AM and PM peaks, for a route profile prototype for routes 1, 77, 111, and 352.
- Developed and tested a combined QOS indicator for speed and travel time reliability in order to simplify map graphic presentations;
- Revised QOS indicators in coordination with MBTA and other team members
- Prepared revised QOS indicator information and underlying variables from APC data, for both peaks and both directions, for routes 59, 93, 111, 326, and 701.
- Met with OPMI to discuss coverage and comfort metrics

- Met with the team to discuss route ‘variants’
- Worked with MBTA staff and IBI to develop analytical methods to be used to conduct in-depth evaluations of each individual route (route evaluations).
- Began series of meetings with MBTA staff to brainstorm on potential service improvement opportunities for each route.
- Route 111 profile has been completed. Other key bus route profiles are being constructed and will be ready for review by end of April.
- Have begun to conduct the market analysis, which is examining the underlying demand for transit service throughout Greater Boston.
- Drafting “State of the Bus System” report, which will capture current service delivery compared to standards in a public facing document. This report will identify tools, in the toolkit, to address service delivery challenges. Anticipated completion date is May 15, 2018.
- Upcoming:
 - Developing revised QOS indicator information and underlying variables for all routes
 - Working with team on corridor level analysis

Outreach

- General
 - Outreach plan has been finalized.
 - Branding completed and website posted March 2, 2018.
- Garage Outreach
 - Finalized materials for the Operator Listening Sessions (Discussion Guide, FAQ, Flyers, Signs, etc.).
 - Service Planners have begun visiting all bus garages to gain feedback from front line staff.
 - Five listening sessions have been completed
 - Planners have scheduled dates for April for all other garages
- Elected Officials/Public Outreach
 - Finalized master draft presentation to be adapted/used at outreach events (including municipal and legislative).
 - Finalized strategy for upcoming meeting locations (for street teams and community meetings) to collect rider feedback/comments.
 - Developed draft takeaway postcard, based on project branding, to be used at all project events/meetings.
 - Drafted website feedback form to accept feedback/comments online in six languages. Translation currently taking place.
 - Upcoming work:
 - Finalize postcard – 4/13/2018
 - Website feedback form to be posted – 4/20/2018
 - Transit Talks – TARGET: April 2018 – Pending Legislative Meeting

- Street Teams – TARGET: April 2018 – Pending Legislative Meeting
- Community Meetings – TARGET: May 2018 – Pending Legislative Meeting

Partnerships

- City of Boston announces Transit Team proposed investment “to work with the MBTA to improve public transit, with a particular focus on bus service...”
 - STRENGTHENING BUS TRANSIT: <https://www.boston.gov/news/mayor-walsh-announces-transformative-investments-go-boston-2030-transportation-plan-part>
 - Through the recommended budget, the City will launch its first "Transit Team." This team will work with the MBTA to improve public transit, with a particular focus on bus service, which services 350,000 trips each day.

Through the Transit Team, the City will work with the MBTA to identify key bus corridors and implement strategies such as transit signal priority and dedicated bus lanes to improve the bus riding experience.

- Requesting \$1.5M from lockbox in support of dedicated bus lanes for 2018, 2019 and 2020 at the Lockbox meeting scheduled for April 6, 2018. Goal is to establish seed funding to partner with municipalities in the planning and implementation of dedicated bus lanes. Potential goal: At least five miles of dedicated bus lane (MBTA funding only); with potential for up to 15 miles of dedicated bus lane (dependent on cost sharing with municipalities).

Next Steps

- Continue advancing work plan
- Secure funding for dedicated bus lane work through Lockbox.
- Upcoming Board Presentations:
 - Structure of tier recommendations – discussion and direction
 - Current Service Delivery Metrics vs. Standard

To date, The Better Bus Project is on-time and on-budget. Please see the timeline and other materials, for your reference, attached.

March 2018

MBTA Service Planning – Guide to Listening Sessions

March 2018

MBTA Service Planning – Guide to Listening Sessions

How to Begin Discussions with Operators

What is a Listening Session?

A listening session is one of the best ways to get constructive feedback and share best practices. It can be a group of people in a room or one-on-one meetings. The first session you will be conducting is one in a series of sessions that MBTA Service Planners will be holding in the garages. Each session will focus on a specific topic and will provide opportunities for operators to share their thoughts about important issues they are seeing.

Goal of The First Listening Session

For this first session, introduce what the Service Planning department is (you will be identifying your role as a Service Planner), what a Service Plan is, and the ongoing plan to conduct these sessions on a regular basis. You will be there to listen to their feedback. You are trying to learn more about the following topics:

- Layover
- Running time
- Service requests
- Unserved/underserved destinations
- Ridership (overcrowding and/or underutilization)
- Bus stops (spacing, requests, amenities, accessibility, safety, etc.)
- Fare payment/policy
- Operational challenges

Getting Started:

Publicize the listening session through posted signs, flyers, and/or emails.

- Date
- Time (and approximate length of session)
- Location (break room)
- Goal of the session
- Who is encouraged to participate
- Contact information for questions about the session

What to Bring (and the Listening Session Toolkit)

- Moderator (yourself)
- Meeting place: Garage break room
- Participants (operators)
- Toolkit:
 - 20+ copies of Notetaking Sheets
 - Pens/Markers
 - Takeaway card about the project with link to website
 - 50+ copies of Feedback forms
 - Service Area Maps
 - Post-it notes
 - Sticker nametags
 - Flyers with information about what the conversation will be about
 - Poster with goals of the session, who the service planner is, the context of the conversation (layovers, places, etc.), and an explanation on how the plan will be implemented
 - Scotch tape
 - Incident forms

Role of the moderator(s):

- Set aside time right before each session to focus your mind on your goal and to look forward to the conversation — to interacting with operators, hearing their concerns, and responding to the questions and ideas that they bring to the discussion.
- Arrive early. Start on time. End on time. This will show respect for everyone's time.
- Clearly communicate the goal of the session to each participant.
- Establish the tone. Try to keep the conversation informal. Encourage participation that is constructive, empathetic, and honest.
- Introduce yourself and what you are trying to learn from the listening sessions (see topics above). Explain what this listening session is and what it is NOT:
 - “We're here to listen to your feedback and ideas. We're looking for candid feedback. Your front-line experience is very important. Your ideas will be taken seriously and incorporated into the recommendations.”
- Keep an open mind and be prepared to learn something you are not expecting.
- When responding to participants' questions and comments, use both verbal and non-verbal cues to show them that you are listening and engaged. Do not use this time to look down at your notes or remind yourself of the next topic.

- Don't pitch your own ideas. This is the time to listen to their comments and concerns. You can follow up and do a ride-along with the operator to discuss your ideas at a later time.
- Provide empathetic responses.
 - "That sounds awful! There's not much I can do, but I will take down the information and give it to [appropriate person]." Then shift the conversation back to operational issues and problems with the route as relates to the Service Plan
- Be mindful of power dynamics – they are the experts; tell them that you are here to listen and learn.
- Push participants to be specific. "Good" or "bad" is not helpful. What makes it "good?"
 - Ask more informed questions and establish credibility through specificity (routes, geography, etc.)
- When asking questions, do not be afraid of silence. Often, silence means that participants are thinking. Do not give in to the temptation to end the silence by answering your own questions. Wait 5-10 seconds for an answer. If, at that point, there is no response, rephrase your question.
- If you don't know how to answer someone's question, take down their contact information and follow-up.
- When participants come to you with a complaint, take the time to listen to what they have to say before responding. Practice "active listening" techniques. Keep the discussion calm and focused, defer judgment, and respond appropriately.
- If the discussion turns to unrelated topics, such as payroll, rostering, privatization, or AFC 2.0, refer to the FAQ (below) for information.
- Watch out for moments when a participant might get defensive or feel attacked. If that happens, gently steer the conversation in a new direction.
- De-escalation techniques – If an operator becomes angry or upset:
 - Do not respond to anger with anger. Though your natural impulse may be to lash out, take a deep breath and take a step back. (If your heart is pounding, you should wait until it quiets.)
 - Listen to what the person is saying – do not respond to the anger.
 - Acknowledge and show understanding of the point he or she is making – even if you do not agree with it.
 - Don't be condescending or a smart-aleck.
 - De-personalize what is being shared.
 - Take a break. Speak calmly. Bring up another issue.
 - Be prepared to respond when someone says "Why should I bother? I told someone else about this and nothing happened."

Discussion Questions

- Which intersections or roadway stretches don't work well and why? [Names of specific routes, roads/intersections, times of day]
 - Prompts: traffic congestion; intersections you get stuck at; who is affected by this/how,
 - Suggestions/ideas to address the problem?
 - Who is affected by the problems/issues you've observed? How are they affected?
- Which routes (and streets) have the fewest riders? Where do you often run early and have to wait?
- What is working well? [Names of specific routes, parts of route, times of day]
- Considering all of the questions we just asked, if you could do anything to improve this route, what would you do?
- Can you introduce me to any other operators who might have some useful feedback or good ideas?
- Which routes do operators pick? Which ones do they never pick? Why don't they pick them and what are the problems?

Note: The feedback form has different questions than these ones for discussion.

At the End of Each Session

- Let the participant know how the MBTA will use this feedback. Talk about how you are continually looking for ways to improve the service.
- Write up your notes and an overall summary as soon as possible after the listening session.
- Include any written notes (or photos of boards) that the participants shared.
- Please enter your notes from the Notetaking Sheets into the Google Form: <https://goo.gl/forms/RzZ26pWjg5JrjpyH2>

After-Action

- Think about what worked and what did not.
- Was there a point where the conversation veered off track?
- Consider the questions and perhaps adjust the approach for next time.
- Share this feedback with the Service Planning team and bus operations. Make a note to discuss what you heard at the Service Committee meeting.
- In consideration for future sessions:
 - Time future sessions with different shifts and seasons.

March 2018

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- Offer office hours – held the same day of the month and time of the day so it is a consistent time for operators to talk to service planners.

March 2018

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) for Other MBTA Issues/Projects

What is the MBTA Service Plan or “Better Bus Project?”

Nearly 450,000 people in 50 communities rely on MBTA bus service each weekday. Recent research has shown that despite efforts to meet the needs of bus riders, there are still significant gaps in service. To fill these gaps and provide the level of service our customers expect and deserve, we will be working within these communities over the next few years.

The Better Bus Project will compare the current bus service and network against the new Service Delivery Policy, which defines the quality and level of service we should be providing. The Better Bus Project team will be speaking with riders at bus stops as well as community meetings.

Learn more at: www.mbta.com/betterbus

What is the Service Planning department? What is a Service Plan? What does a service planner do?

The Service Planning department is part of the Planning and Schedule department at 45 High Street. We work with many different people to analyze and adjust service as needed.

Can you help me with my payroll issues?

Please speak with your Supervisor.

Can I talk to you about rostering/BID?

Please speak with your Supervisor.

Is this effort related to privatization?

No, we are hearing from you about your experiences out on the road and how to improve your run.

What’s the latest information on the next generation of fare payment/collection (Charlie/AFC 2.0)?

You can contact MBTA Customer Technology: charlie@mbta.com, or 857-308-AFC2

Can I talk to you about the Federal Labor Standards Act (FLSA)?

Please speak with your Supervisor.

Do you have information about the SL3 project opening?

April 21.

Better Bus Project

Let's make transit
better together

We Want to Hear from You!

[DATE] from [TIME]

Your Service Planner, [Name], will be here on to talk about the Better Bus Project and listen to your feedback.

These sessions are focused on listening to you. Come and share your thoughts and concerns about important issues you are seeing.

We are trying to learn more about the following topics:

- Layover
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Better Bus Project

Making transit
better together

Your Service Planner is:

Brian Francis

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Learn more at: mbta.com/projects/better-bus-project

Why We are Here

We are here to listen to your feedback. These sessions are focused on listening to you share your thoughts and concerns about important issues you are seeing. We are trying to learn more about the following topics:

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Better **Bus** Project



Let's make transit
better together



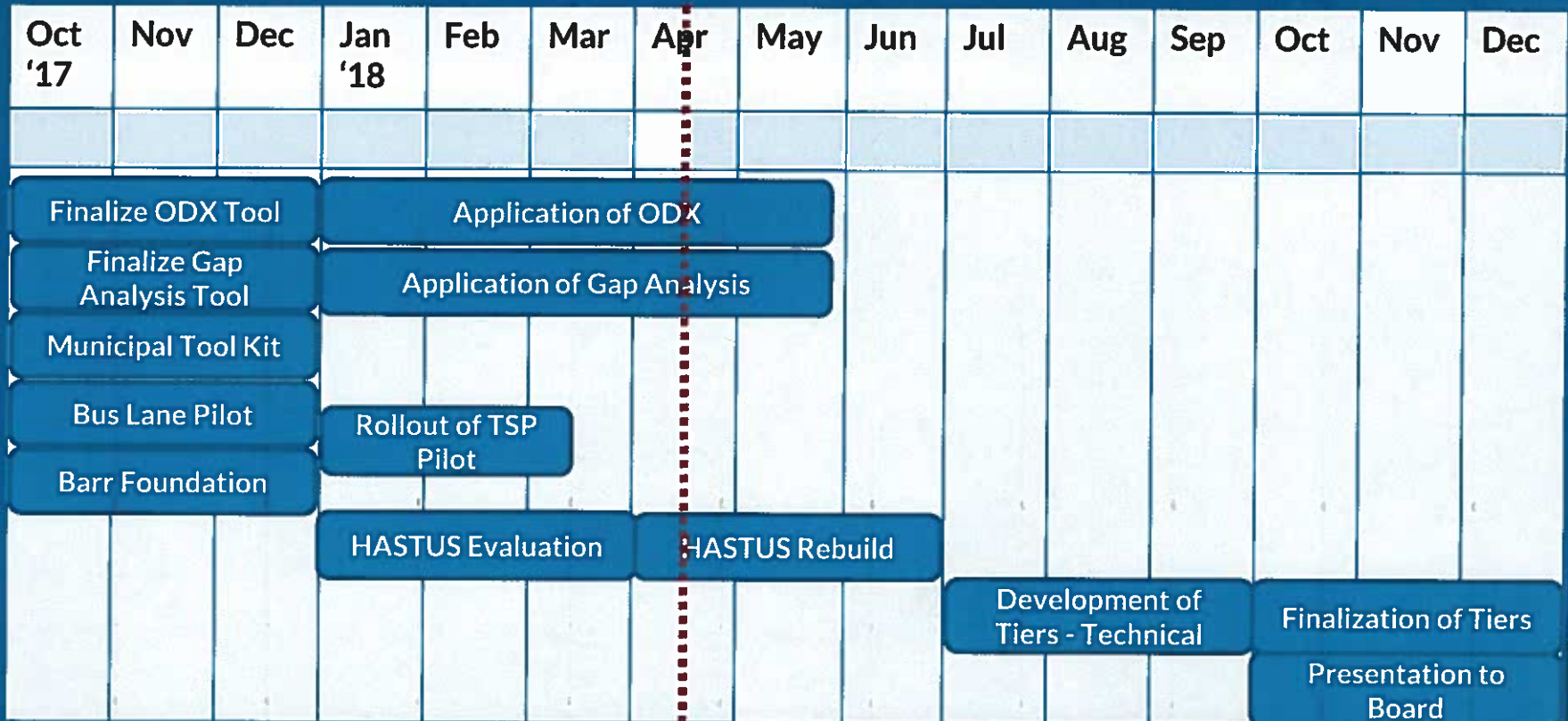
Timelines



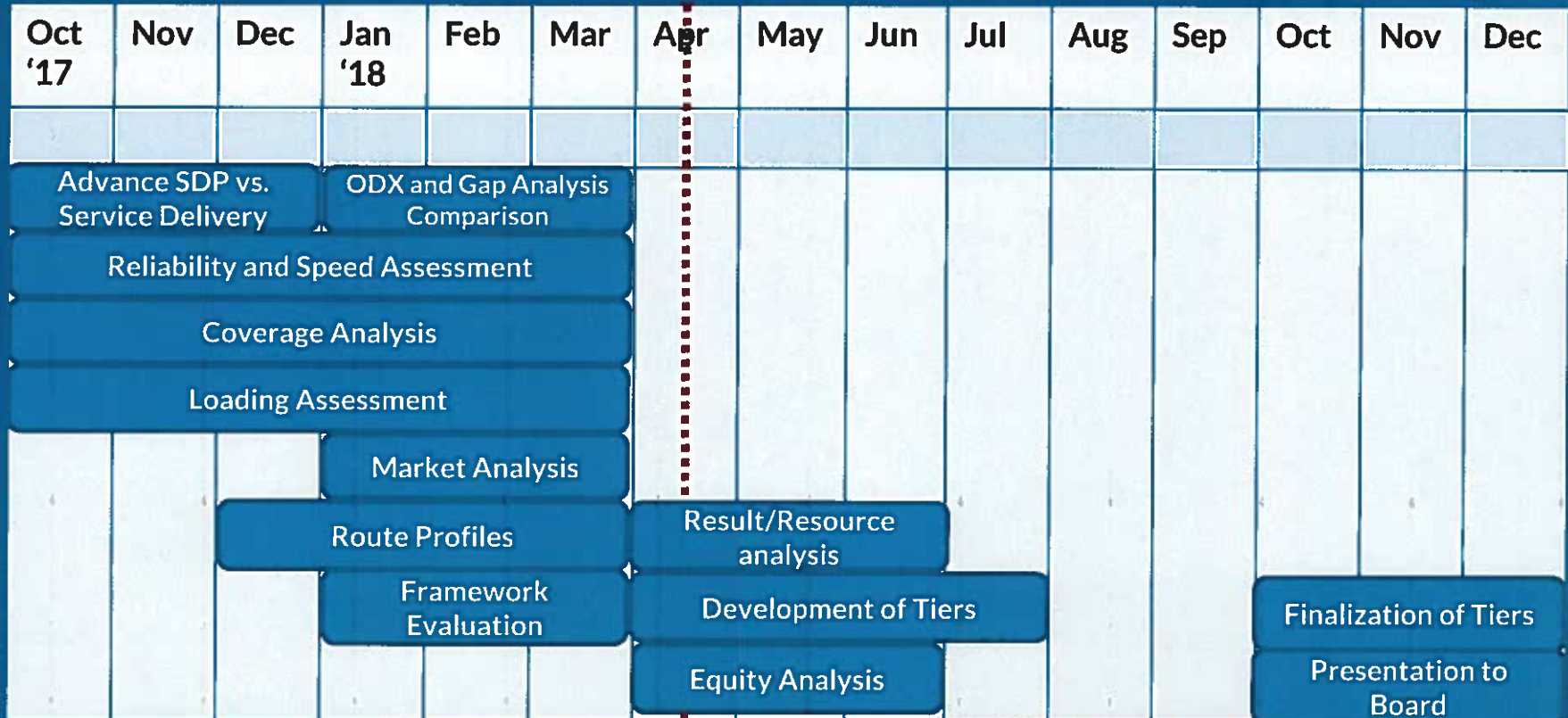
Tools, Technical, Tactical
Data Analysis
Outreach and Engagement



Tools, Technical, Tactical



Data Analysis



Outreach and Engagement

