

BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS



OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

MEMORANDUM

TO: Chairperson and Members
Boston School Committee

FROM: John P. McDonough
Interim Superintendent

DATE: March 26, 2014

SUBJECT: Proposed Transportation Policy Changes

At the February 26th School Committee meeting, Director of Transportation Carl Allen described the proposed savings from changes to transportation services within the district. These savings, projected to be approximately \$11 million in all, are a significant strategy to help address our \$107 million budget challenge.

As we continue finalizing our FY15 budget in preparation for tonight's vote, we also formally presented three transportation policy changes. Each change is outlined below, together with more detailed information about the rationale for the proposal, the projected cost savings, and the anticipated impact. The Appendix provides more general background information on our transportation services to offer context for these policy proposals.

1. Provide MBTA passes instead of yellow buses for 7th and 8th graders with corner-to-corner service

Currently, 1,862 students in 7th and 8th grade receive MBTA passes rather than riding yellow buses with corner pick-ups and drop-offs. This includes students at a number of BPS schools as well as some charter schools and all private and parochial schools served by BPS transportation (see the chart below for the full list of schools). Most of these schools have been serving 7th and 8th grade students with MBTA passes for many years; only the charter schools, the Dearborn, and UP Academy have been added in the last few years.

BPS		Charter
BLS	Quincy Upper	Academy of the Pacific Rim

BLA	Tech Boston	Boston Collegiate Upper
Dearborn	Umana	Excel Academy East Boston
Edison	UP Academy Boston	Neighborhood House Charter
McKinley		Private/Parochial
Middle School Academy		All (30 schools)

We propose to expand the use of MBTA passes to all 7th and 8th grade students on yellow buses with corner pick-ups and drop-offs starting in the 2014-15 school year. This means that an additional 4,586 students would receive MBTA monthly passes allowing them to ride the MBTA for free to and from school each day. Students who receive door-to-door yellow bus service as part of an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) would be unaffected by the change, as they would continue to receive yellow bus service.

Providing students in grades 7 and 8 with an MBTA monthly pass rather than yellow bus service will offer substantial transportation savings for the district, estimated at approximately \$8 million for the 2014-15 school year. The cost per student for an MBTA pass is approximately \$25/month, or \$225/year per student. This is significantly lower than the cost to transport BPS students from corner-to-corner stops on yellow buses, which was budgeted at \$1,503 per student in FY14.

At the same time, students will gain a valuable asset in their monthly MBTA passes. In addition, students will learn to navigate the city's transportation system, giving them the chance to develop greater maturity and independence and leaving students better prepared for the transition to 9th grade. More widespread use of MBTA passes is also likely to reduce discipline issues on yellow buses. In addition, students will be able to choose when they arrive at school in the morning, potentially giving them more time to eat breakfast.

Another key benefit of this proposal is that 7th and 8th grade students would have greater opportunities to participate in after-school programming. Late buses will not be required for a school to offer activities such as homework clubs, athletics events, and arts programs; such programs, and the opportunity for wider participation in them, can lead to improvements in school culture and academic success.

We also recognize the potential challenges of this proposal, particularly around student safety. This includes the safety of students on the MBTA and at MBTA hubs as well as the safety of students walking to and from MBTA stops. We plan to work closely with community agencies, the Office of Neighborhood Services, the MBTA, and other stakeholders to mitigate these safety concerns. For example, we will look at strategies like better coordination of security officers to ensure coverage at busy hubs and the greater involvement of school staff and volunteers through the StopWatch program. We may also provide shuttles for students at less accessible schools.

Another potential concern is the effect this proposal will have on student attendance. While we are still analyzing the data on schools that currently offer MBTA passes to middle school students, preliminary analysis does not suggest that MBTA passes negatively affect attendance or tardiness at the schools. Anecdotal evidence from schools that issue MBTA passes for students in the middle grades also indicates no negative effects on student punctuality over the course of the school year, although some students may be late at first as they transition to the

new system. As we implement this policy change across BPS in the upcoming school year, we plan to design a study that will allow us to monitor the effects of the move to MBTA transportation on attendance and tardiness.

While the main component of this proposal would affect 7th and 8th grade students, we also propose to offer MBTA passes to 6th graders on a pilot basis. We currently offer MBTA passes instead of yellow bus transportation to 195 6th graders at BPS and charter schools. We anticipate that some schools and families with 6th grade students will want to use MBTA passes because of the additional independence and opportunities for after-school programming. Any interested individual students will be able to sign up to participate, and we are already in conversations with several schools about potential participation in the pilot.

2. Reduce MBTA “shuttle” service to BPS high schools within 1 mile of a major MBTA hub

Several of our high schools offer “shuttle” service on yellow buses from nearby MBTA stops in the morning, afternoon, or both. The following table shows the schools that currently use shuttles and the number of shuttles in the morning and afternoon:

School	# AM Shuttles	# PM Shuttles
Boston Latin Academy	1	5
Boston Latin School	1	0
Charlestown High	8	10
East Boston	3	3
Excel High	6	9
West Roxbury Ed Complex	22	22
Middle School Academy	1	1
UP Academy Boston	0	1
Total	42	51

We currently code 2,889 students as “combo” riders in our transportation system, meaning that they are assigned to ride a shuttle bus at one of these schools. Actual levels of ridership are much lower than this number would indicate, although the exact number of students who ride shuttles is uncertain and may vary throughout the year. In fact, after Director of Transportation Carl Allen rode along on a number of shuttle trips in recent months to observe the level of use, the Transportation Department is proposing to consolidate or eliminate several shuttles this year due to low ridership. The shuttles currently proposed for consolidation are at the West Roxbury Educational Complex and Charlestown High School, although shuttles at other schools may also be reduced over the coming months.

Many of these shuttle buses began operating back in the late 1980s when high school students transitioned to MBTA passes from yellow bus service. At the time, part of the concern was that there may be tensions between the residents of some neighborhoods and the students walking through, particularly in neighborhoods where there had been strong opposition to busing students from outside the neighborhood. In the years since, some schools have had shuttles added due to requests from headmasters for additional transportation options. The shuttle at UP Academy

Boston, meanwhile, was added last year to smooth the transition to the use of MBTA passes for middle school students.

BPS policy currently provides that high school students receive a full MBTA monthly pass only if they live more than 2 miles away from their schools (for middle school students, the policy requires a distance of 1.5 miles). However, BPS provides regular shuttle service for students from MBTA stops even when the distance is less than a mile. Maintaining shuttle service, which also includes shuttles for athletics teams after games and practices, would cost the district between \$1.2 million and \$1.8 million in the 2014-15 school year alone. By eliminating shuttle service for schools within one mile of an MBTA hub, the district will save approximately \$1 million.

Under the proposed policy, shuttle service would be eliminated at most of the above-listed schools, although it would remain in effect for the West Roxbury Educational Complex because that building is not served by a nearby MBTA hub. For some schools, students will be able to access MBTA bus services in place of BPS shuttle service. In other cases, we expect that students will walk between the MBTA hub and the school.

We recognize that this proposal also poses a number of challenges, particularly the safety of students in neighborhoods and at MBTA hubs. Over the past few years, we have engaged with neighboring residents and businesses, along with the Boston Police Department and the MBTA police, to address the lack or removal of shuttle service at some schools, such as the Burke. These past practices demonstrate that community conversations can help ease concerns about students walking from public transportation hubs rather than riding shuttles. We will also work with the MBTA and Boston Police Department to ensure that any specific safety concerns are addressed and that preventative strategies are in place before changes take effect next year. Finally, where the MBTA is concerned about students potentially overcrowding their existing buses, they have promised a more detailed analysis and recommendations about how BPS can partner with the MBTA or maintain limited shuttle service.

3. Develop a more transparent structure on transportation by asking schools to budget and pay for certain “a la carte” services

Schools are provided service on official BPS calendar days and on schedules that align to the BPS official bell tiers and are approved by the Director of Transportation. Baseline service also includes early release days on the day before Thanksgiving and the last two days of instruction each year. Weekly early releases at 12:30 PM or earlier may also be accommodated as part of a school’s regular weekly schedule.

However, providing additional services on top of these basic services places significant costs on the district. In the future, we propose to move toward a more transparent and equitable system of transportation services by having schools budget and pay for such services. By moving to a pay-per-service system for “a la carte” services, BPS will also save approximately \$1 million in FY15.

For the 2014-15 school year, we plan to move to a pay-for-service model for the following services:

- Late buses during “off-peak” hours (after 4:00 pm)
- Early release transportation that is not weekly
- Home-to-school service on non-BPS-calendar days
- Field trips and athletics events (not already in the Athletics budget)

Schools may be able to mitigate some of the costs of these services. In particular, the expanded use of MBTA passes instead of yellow bus service for students in 7th and 8th grade will likely decrease the need for late bus service for middle school students. Schools can also schedule late buses or early release days in a more limited and strategic way to better align these services with available transportation options. Finally, schools will have the option to use grant funding or privately raised funding to pay for these services, which we anticipate will cost \$175 per bus trip in FY15.

APPENDIX: Background on BPS Transportation

Number of Students By Transportation Type (as of 11/14/13)

Transportation Type	BPS	Total (All Programs)
Corner Bus	22,668	27,431
Corner Bus/MBTA combo	2,889	2,889
MBTA	11,425	14,672
Door-to-door (SPED)	3,616	3,869
Door-to-door (Medical)	100	102
Door-to-door (Wheelchair)	159	175
Total	40,857	49,138

Sites and Programs Served

School Type	Sites	Students
Boston Public Schools	139	40,857
Private SPED	57	182
Charter	28	5,946
Private/parochial	42	2,153
Total	266	49,138

Students with MBTA Passes by Grade

Program Type	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Total
BPS MBTA Pass Only	31	432	525	2,664	2,657	2,496	2,620	11,425
BPS MBTA Pass Combo	0	181	207	647	624	654	576	2,889
Charter MBTA Pass Only	67	141	157	272	232	176	301	1,346
Private/Parochial MBTA Pass Only	92	94	101	284	252	259	483	1,565
Private SPED MBTA Pass Only	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	4
Total	190	848	990	3,867	3,766	3,586	3,982	17,229

Allocations by Type of Program

Program Type	Approximate FY14 Allocations
BPS Controlled Choice	43.6%
BPS SPED	38.0%
Private SPED	6.3%
Charter Schools	10.6%
Private/Parochial	1.6%

Estimated FY14 Program Allocation and Per-Pupil Budget

Program Type	Cost	Students	Cost Per Pupil
BPS Controlled Choice Bus	\$38,414,389	25,557	\$1,503.09
BPS Controlled Choice MBTA	\$3,060,218	14,314	\$213.79
BPS SPED Bus	\$39,945,478	3,875	\$10,308.51
BPS SPED MBTA	\$0	0	\$0.00
Private SPED Bus	\$6,786,030	178	\$38,123.76
Private SPED MBTA	\$855	4	\$213.79
Charter Schools Bus	\$9,620,598	4,600	\$2,091.43
Charter Schools MBTA	\$287,764	1,346	\$213.79
Private/Parochial Bus	\$1,422,572	256	\$5,556.92
Private/Parochial MBTA	\$405,563	1,897	\$213.79
Total	\$99,942,467	52,027*	\$1,946.66

* Note: Students who receive corner bus/MBTA combo services are counted twice in the student total

Students, Total Cost, and Per-Pupil Cost by Transportation Program

Program Type	Students*		Cost		Per-Pupil Cost	
	FY13	FY14	FY13	FY14	FY13	FY14
BPS Controlled Choice Bus	25,694	25,557	\$33,361,741	\$38,414,389	\$1,298	\$1,503
BPS Controlled Choice MBTA	14,240	14,314	\$3,092,915	\$3,060,218	\$217	\$214
BPS SPED Bus	3,906	3,875	\$35,312,564	\$39,945,478	\$9,041	\$10,309
BPS SPED MBTA	0	0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Private SPED Bus	189	178	\$6,161,278	\$6,786,030	\$32,599	\$38,124
Private SPED MBTA	4	4	\$869	\$855	\$217	\$214
Charter Schools Bus	3,847	4,600	\$7,130,223	\$9,620,598	\$1,853	\$2,091
Charter Schools MBTA	1,055	1,346	\$229,145	\$287,764	\$217	\$214
Private/Parochial Bus	245	256	\$1,266,553	\$1,422,572	\$5,170	\$5,557
Private/Parochial MBTA	1,373	1,897	\$298,214	\$405,563	\$217	\$214
Total	50,553	52,027	\$86,853,501	\$99,942,467	\$1,744	\$1,947

* Note: Students who receive corner bus/MBTA combo services are counted twice in the student total

Please note that these estimated budget allocations and costs were calculated using a different method than previous budget allocations and costs that have been presented to the City Council and School Committee; therefore, the estimates may differ from numbers that have been shared in the past. The old method was calculated partly by examining the proportion of students using each type of transportation service and partly by assuming a fixed proportion of services for charters and for private/parochial schools. This method of calculation, used for many years, assumed a fixed proportion of 5% of direct busing costs for charters, which is a very low assumption given the growth of charters in recent years.

To update these figures, we have adopted a new allocation method that more accurately represents the true proportion of funding going to each program. Under the new method, we have counted the total number of annual bus trips and calculated the percentage of trips for each program type. Counting trips represents true costs more accurately than counting students or

buses, because bus trips will have different numbers of students and different buses take different numbers of trips.

In making these calculations, we have also assumed that the cost will be higher for private SPED trips since these trips are more likely to be longer out-of-district trips. Longer trips drive up costs by allowing the bus to be used for fewer additional trips each day. In looking at bus utilization rates, we have determined that it is appropriate to apply a 22% “weighted utilization cost” to these private SPED trips; that is, each single trip to a private SPED placement is counted as 1.22 regular trips.

We believe that the new method of calculating transportation costs provides a much clearer and more accurate depiction of true costs than the old method. It also provides flexibility to build in additional assumptions as our understanding of transportation costs changes over time. We will continue to adapt this model in the future as we learn more about how various factors impact service delivery, bringing us closer to a true-to-life representation of our transportation costs. The charts below also follow the new method of calculating transportation services.