

From the Desk of State Senator Robert L. Hedlund

Plymouth and Norfolk District

January 5, 2012

Dear Constituent,

As you know, the MBTA proposed eliminating the operating subsidy for commuter ferry service in an effort to lessen the defects in its operating budget. I would like to take this opportunity to clarify some claims the MBTA has made about its budget troubles as well as pass along information regarding upcoming public hearings that the MBTA will hold on the proposed service cuts and fare hikes. Please know that I remain strongly opposed to any attempt by the MBTA to eliminate or weaken commuter ferry service from the South Shore.

The MBTA is distributing an informational pamphlet in which it outlines its argument for a fare hike and possible service cuts. Although the MBTA has seen overall ridership levels increase in recent months while reducing operating costs and increasing revenues from sales of property and advertising, it is still facing a projected \$161 million budget deficit in Fiscal Year 2013. The MBTA blames its fiscal troubles primarily on three points. First, the Authority points to the escalating costs of fuel, energy, health care, and maintenance of an aging fleet. Second, it blames the fact that sales tax revenues, which account for nearly one-third of its operating budget, have grown at an annual average rate of 1% -- significantly less than 3% annual growth rate projected by a 2000 MBTA Blue Ribbon Commission report when the sales tax subsidy was first implemented. Finally, the MBTA is currently more than \$8 billion in debt. Servicing this massive debt load consumes 30% of the T's yearly budget. This debt burden, however, is largely the MBTA's own fault.

That same 2000 report presciently warned that "in order to avoid saddling future generations of riders with overwhelming costs...the committee recommends a moratorium on all capital projects" unless they "result in measurable increases in productivity or revenues." Two years later, a Pioneer Institute study found that the MBTA was already straying from the recommendations of the 2000 report and again warned against unnecessary capital expansion. Unfortunately, these warnings went unheeded.

The MBTA knew twelve years ago that expansion projects like Greenbush were irresponsible and financially unviable, yet the MBTA pursued them anyway. Now the full impact of a decade of bad decisions is becoming apparent—Greenbush and other capital projects are coming home to roost!

I have stated many times that commuter boats are the most efficient mode of mass transit operated by the MBTA, and they are successful from an environmental, fiscal, and development standpoint. Yet once Greenbush became operational, commuter boat ridership dropped more than 24% within one year, according to 2010 study by Metropolitan Planning Organization. This cannibalization of public transportation customers illustrates exactly what I had predicted at the time: that the

Greenbush would prove to be a costly, and ultimately unnecessary, project that would reduce the effectiveness of more superior forms of public transportation such as the commuter boat.

As a long-serving member of the transportation committee, I have been vocal regarding the MBTA's repeated refusals to implement the recommendations of independent studies. The MBTA wasted hundreds of millions on a boondoggle and now wants to clean up the mess by eliminating the most efficiently run service they provide while saddling customers with an overwhelming burden which the MBTA knew all along was unavoidable. This is simply unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

Although I will be making my opposition clear, the MBTA still needs to hear directly from commuter boat riders. I encourage you to attend one of the MBTA's local upcoming public hearings:

Hingham

Town Hall
Central Meeting Room
210 Central Street
Wednesday, February 8; 6-8 PM

Quincy

Thomas Crane Public Library
Community Room
40 Washington Street
Wednesday, February 15; 6-8 PM

A full schedule of all hearings can be found on the MBTA's website, www.mbta.com. You may also submit written testimony to the MBTA via email or regular mail:

Fare Proposal
10 Park Plaza, Suite 3910
Boston, MA 02116.
fareproposal@mbta.com

Finally, I recommend that you join the Facebook page I have created called "Save the MBTA Commuter Boat" to receive the latest updates on these proposals.

Thank you for contacting me in regards to this important issue. Please let me know if you have any additional questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



Robert L. Hedlund
State Senator
Norfolk/Plymouth District