

May 18, 2020

Chair Joseph A Boncore
Vice Chair Eric P Lesser
Joint Committee on Transportation
24 Beacon St.
Room 112
Boston, MA 02133

Chair William M Straus
Vice Chair Adrian C Madaro
Joint Committee on Transportation
24 Beacon St.
Room 134
Boston, MA 02133

Re: Recommendations on Structure of Successor Fiscal and Management Control Board

Dear Senator Boncore, Representative Straus, Senator Lesser and Representative Madaro,

The undersigned members of the Zero Emission Vehicle (ZEV) coalition and additional organizations respectfully submit these comments in response to the proposal in the Governor's budget for a new seven-member oversight board (Board) to permanently replace the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority's (MBTA) Fiscal and Management Control Board (FMCB) which sunsets on June 30, 2020.

We appreciate the focus and stability the board has brought in monitoring the T's finances, management, and operations over the past five years. Through their regular meetings that are live streamed, the FMCB has provided the opportunity for members of the public, elected officials and advocates—including many signatories of this letter—to participate in transit policy discussions through written and in-person public comments at Board meetings. Despite the initial skepticism about the Board's role when it was created in July 2015, we believe that the FMCB has played a significant, positive role in increasing transparency at the MBTA. And while we do not agree with every decision the FMCB has taken, we strongly support its continuation.

The FMCB has established oversight, advocated for greater funding, backed the formation of a rail and bus transformation office, and voted for much needed expenditures—including green line extension (GLX), upgrades and expansion of the Red and Orange line fleets, electrifying and increasing the frequency of the commuter rail service, and strongly advocating for critical improvements in bus service across the Boston region. It has repeatedly nudged, urged, or insisted that projects be well designed and implemented and made numerous requests for information from MBTA staff. It has insisted, for example, that T staff buy into the timelines for the new Red and Orange line cars, tracks, and signals, so that capacity will be greatly expanded by shorter headways with more reliable equipment.

We commend both current and past FMCB members for their dedicated service and providing the Commonwealth with a model of civic responsibility. With the term of the current FMCB set

to expire on June 30, 2020, we offer the following recommendations on the successor board for your consideration.

These recommendations build on the successes of the Control Board and are focused on establishing a permanent and independent governing and oversight authority committed to building a transportation system that is accessible, reliable, equitable, and sustainable. These recommendations reinforce those made in the [21st Century Transportation: MBTA Governance and Transformation report](#) released today. The authors of the report are co-signers of this letter.

- Ensure continuity between the current FMCB and the future Board. The recent safety report emphasized how harmful frequent changes in leadership have been to the MBTA. With several projects in the critical planning and execution stage and the steep learning curve associated for new members, we encourage the current FMCB to provide guidance to new Board members for at least six months. Especially at this time during the public health emergency, continuity in the FMCB, as well as in MBTA management, would better serve the public.
- We welcome increasing the size of the Board to include seven members including one or more community representatives and members with experience in safety, transportation operations, and finance. We recommend that the proposed 4-year term structure facilitate rotating membership so that the Board always has two veteran members who can share knowledge with new members.
- The independent and volunteer nature of the FMCB has played an important role in winning the trust of the public and advocates. To retain the independent nature of the Board, we recommend that the Board exclude employees of the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) and MBTA.
- We welcome that the new Board will include representation from one or more communities that provide revenue to the T. With over 176 municipalities and one million riders served by the T daily, we urge that the Board have municipal representation by allowing municipalities from both the MBTA's inner core service areas as well as outer communities to recommend for appointment potential Board members.
- The safety report and the Board in its 2019 annual report recommended that the frequency of meetings be reduced from 36 per year to 15. The current proposal calls for at least 12 meetings annually. Although Board meetings are time intensive, the large in person turnouts and online participation at these meetings indicate that they serve as an important tool for the public to learn about and provide input on key projects and decisions. We urge the Board to consider two meetings every month and pilot alternative avenues to disseminate information and receive input from the public

between meetings. We recommend that the Board meet informally with a group made up of frequent public commenters to discuss how this might be piloted.

We applaud the work of the FMCB and the engagement and commitment of its members to improve the finances, management, and operations of the MBTA. The oversight responsibilities of the Board are scheduled to transfer to the MassDOT Board after June 30th unless new legislation is enacted. We urge the legislature to take into consideration these recommendations to create a permanent, accountable, and independent successor governing body for the MBTA. It is critical that we continue to build and invest in a safe, equitable, and transformative public transit system during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input.

Sincerely,

Alternatives for Community and Environment

Conservation Law Foundation

Green Energy Consumers Alliance

GreenRoots

MassPIRG

MBTA Advisory Board

Sierra Club

Transportation for Massachusetts

Transportation Working Group of 350MA

Cc: Secretary Stephanie Pollack, Department of Transportation

Members of the Fiscal and Management Control Board (FMCB)

Steve Poftak, General Manager, MBTA