The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STATE HOUSE, ROOM 167 BOSTON 02133-1054

REP. ALICE K. WOLF
REPRESENTING THE PEOPLE
OF CAMBRIDGE
STATE HOUSE, TEL. (617) 722-2810
STATE HOUSE, FAX (617) 722-2197
DISTRICT TEL. (617) 868-9653
E-Mail:Rep.AliceWolf@hou.state.ma.us

Chair
Committee on Elder Affairs

February 16, 2012

Cambridge City Council
City Hall, 2nd Floor
795 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02139

Dear City Council Members,

Thank you for your invitation to the Special Meeting of the City Council on February 22. Unfortunately, I am unable to attend. My Staff Director, Kathleen Hornby, will be present on my behalf. In addition, if Representative Marty Walz is able to attend, she has agreed to speak for both of us since we work together on the steering committee of the legislative MBTA Caucus.

My recommendations for City Council actions regarding the MBTA's proposed service cuts and fare increases are below. As a member of the T Caucus steering committee, I would appreciate the help.

The Council could contact the House and Senate leadership, the Patrick Administration, and the MBTA, and inform them of the following:

- The MBTA plays a vital role in the social and economic life of the City
- Cambridge residents and workers rely on the T for their daily travel needs
- City policies regarding parking and zoning are designed to reduce pollution and traffic congestion and require use of the T
- Service cuts in our area would be very harmful to riders and businesses
- Fare increases would be particularly harmful to low-income residents including students and elderly or disabled residents

Fundamentally, we need to move toward a state-wide consensus for the MBTA, Regional Transit Authorities, and other transportation modes. That consensus will need to involve the use of state coffers to meet most of the T's deficit for the next fiscal year and planning for much-needed revenue to meet future transportation needs. These actions are necessary to support our residents, the environment, and the Massachusetts economy.

Thank you for your interest in helping with this problem.

Sincerely yours,

Alice K. Wolf

Alice K. Wolf
State Representative

Op-Ed: No More Magical Thinking

The MBTA's proposed fare increases and service cuts will hurt riders, the environment and economic growth. Yet, imagine, this is only a one-year fix.

It is time for the Commonwealth to have a plan for putting the T on stable financial footing for the long term. No more magical thinking. There are no easy answers.

When we moved the MBTA to Forward Funding in 2000, we in the Legislature – along with the Governor – made a fundamental mistake by requiring the T to fund over $3.3 billion in state debt in addition to the debt already on the T's books. More than half of the state debt was for Big Dig-related projects. In addition, growth in the sales tax, the source of revenue tapped in the 2000 reform, has fallen short of projections. So since 2000, the T has struggled with a crushing debt burden, inadequate revenue and increased operating costs.

We, as a Commonwealth, must invest in our public transportation systems for the sake of our residents and the health of our economy. This can't just happen in the State House. We need consensus from the people of Massachusetts in order for the Legislature to act. When Representative Carl Sciortino (D-Medford) and I filed legislation in 2007 and 2009 that would have provided the T with additional revenue through a gas tax increase, opposition from the public undermined support in the Legislature and eventually killed the bill.

Through this debacle we learned that it is important for those of us in the Boston Metropolitan Area to work harder at public outreach and education across the Commonwealth. There are a lot of misconceptions out there based on inaccurate or outdated information.

Forward funding and the 2008 transportation reforms have had a positive impact on T operations. I just read that the T may have the most advanced automated customer systems in the country. Furthermore, many management and labor issues that were of concern a few years ago have been addressed to bring the T to the 21st century in this regard.

Everyone in Massachusetts benefits from public transportation, whether we rely on it for our daily commute, spend less time in traffic because there are fewer cars on the road, breathe a little easier due to reduced motor vehicle emissions, or recognize its economic benefits for business and tourism. Seniors, teens, disabled and low-income residents can get around because of the T. We have to look past our individual frustrations and regional disputes to focus on the common good.

It will take a dedicated revenue stream to address the T's unsustainable debt, maintain a state of good repair for T assets, improve overall MBTA service, and also meet the needs of residents in other regions. Two options that have been proposed are increasing the gas tax or tolling I-93, both with major detractors. How come the Middle East oil cartel can make decisions that increase gas prices a dollar or two and people buy it, but we can't raise the gas tax a much more modest amount without a public rebellion?

The era of magical thinking must end. Public transportation is essential for all of us around the state, and all of us have to pay for it.

Alice K. Wolf is the State Representative from the 25th Middlesex District in Cambridge. She is the House Chair of the Joint Committee on Elder Affairs.