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MBTA to bar alcohol ads on all property, including trains, buses

Posted by Matt Rocheleau January 24, 2012 06:38 PM

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By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

The MBTA will no longer allow alcohol advertisement on its property, including in subway cars, trains and buses, starting July 1, a spokesman for the transit agency said today.

The move comes as proposed legislation to ban alcohol advertising on state property gains momentum and follows a presentation made last month by high schoolers from an Allston-Brighton-based substance abuse youth coalition before state Transportation Secretary Richard A. Davey and the board of directors for the department that oversees the MBTA.

In subsequent discussions, Davey, the T's former general manager, and the current GM, Jonathan R. Davis, talked about the issue and agreed with the points raised by the youth group, T spokesman Joe Pesaturo said.

Pesaturo said the T's advertising contractor, Titan, has told the debt holder

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esaturo said the T's advertising contractor, Titan, has told the debt-laden transit agency it expects ad revenue to decline by approximately \$1.5 million in the first full year of the alcohol ad ban.

"The company, however, says it will work diligently to find other advertisers for the available space on MBTA property," Pestauro said via e-mail.

The only other major public transit systems in the country that allow alcohol ads are those in New York City and Chicago, according to Michael Scippa, spokesman for California-based watchdog organization Alcohol Justice, which until last July was known as "The Marin Institute."

Scippa called the T's alcohol ad ban a "major victory" and said he believes the financially struggling transit agency could recoup the lost revenue from other advertising sources.

"That space is easily rented to another company, another product," Scippa said by phone today. "The space is valuable. It's valuable to any advertiser."

Alcohol ads are currently allowed to run, and in the past have appeared, on all MBTA property, including at transit stations and stops as well as inside and on the exterior of subway cars, trains and buses. The MBTA already prohibits tobacco, firearms, violence, and nudity from advertisements on its property.

The agency has said previously it had no plans to bar alcohol ads. But the T has been subjected to scrutiny from lawmakers and advocacy groups, including the [Allston-Brighton Substance Abuse Task Force](#) and Supporting an Alcohol Ad-Free Environment in Massachusetts, or [SAFE MA](#).

This past summer, youths from SAFE MA presented the transportation secretary with postcards and petitions of support from over 300 Bay State residents, officials said.

Earlier this year, when [the MBTA began selling ads on its website](#), the agency said it would not allow on-line alcohol advertisement.

Meanwhile, a bill aimed at banning alcohol advertising on all state property moved favorably forward in the legislative process last month for the first time since it was originally introduced in 2009.

State Rep. Martin Walsh, a Dorchester democrat, is the lead sponsor of the bill and said he hopes it will pass the House and Senate by the July 31 deadline, and go into effect between six months to one year after that.

He said he originally proposed legislation to ban alcohol ads on MBTA property, before broadening it to include all state property so it would include marketing space like billboards that sit on state-owned land.

Walsh commended MBTA leaders in an interview today, calling the agency's decision to ban alcohol ads a "big win."

In an effort to raise more support for the bill to ban alcohol ads on all state property, Walsh and other advocates of the proposed law plan to hold a press conference Thursday afternoon outside the Park Street station.

The event will include speeches from Walsh; Dr. Michael Siegel, a physician and public professor at Boston University; high school students from the Allston-Brighton-based substance abuse youth coalition; and representing SAFE MA, Stacy Carruth, a community health specialist at the Regional Center for Healthy Communities (Metrowest).

According to a press release announcing Thursday's press conference, Giovanni Colon, a junior at Brighton High School, said: "I am disappointed when I see alcohol advertisements on state property. It's like Massachusetts wants young kids to start drinking ... People would never dream of putting alcohol ads on yellow school buses, so why should they be allowed to put them on our school buses?"

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