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NAMES		GLOBE NORTH		
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Metro

# MBTA says both service cuts, fee hikes will be needed

As agency faces \$159m shortfall, riders frustrated

By **Matt Rocheleau** | GLOBE STAFF MARCH 14, 2012

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The MBTA said Tuesday that both service cuts and fare increases will be necessary to close a \$159 million budget shortfall for the coming fiscal year.

At it gets closer to finalizing its plan, the transit agency pledged to use feedback from a series of charged public hearings on the T's future over the past two months. At the 31 meetings, which ended Monday night in Brighton, nearly all riders opposed the proposals. Many voiced anger, frustration, and fear about the impact that rate hikes and reductions in service would bring, particularly to low-income, elderly, and

disabled customers.

“The choices before us are difficult, to be sure,” Transportation Secretary Richard A. Davey and MBTA Acting General Manager Jonathan R. Davis said in a letter to T customers. “Hearing your individual stories only makes them more so.”

In January, the T presented two scenarios that would raise most fares and monthly passes an average of 35 to 43 percent, while cutting numerous bus routes and scrapping ferry and weekend and late-night commuter rail service.

But Davis said the board of the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority would not select either of the previously released scenarios. Instead, the committee that drafted the two initial proposals will take the feedback from the public hearings and draft new recommendations.

Officials said the agency will continue to work toward “identifying prudent one-time revenues that will allow us to stave off some of the proposed service cuts for one year,” the letter said. But a final proposal will include changes that will reduce service and increase rider costs.

The T expects to release the new plans before the agency’s monthly board meeting April 4. The board has until April 15 to approve the next fiscal year’s budget, which, along with its cuts and fare increases, will take effect July 1.

In December, the T’s estimated the budget gap at \$185 million. But it has since been reduced to a projected \$159 million after some money-saving steps were taken, including reducing energy costs, planned introduction of single-person Red Line train operation, and an increase in T employee enrollment in a new, lower-cost health care plan.



In the letter, Davey and Davis warned anew that more service cuts or fare increases may be needed one year from now.

“The system we have today we cannot afford, and the system we want is well beyond reach,” the letter said. “Unfortunately, without a new dedicated revenue source, we know we will be back in this very place next year.”

*Matt Rocheleau can be reached at [mjrochele@gmail.com](mailto:mjrochele@gmail.com).*



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