



September 20, 2021

Secretary Jamey Tesler
10 Park Plaza
Boston, MA 02116

General Manager Steve Poftak
10 Park Plaza
Boston, MA 02116

Dear Secretary Tesler and General Manager Poftak

I am writing to convey two concerns raised by our members as they prepare for the return to physical offices. At a recent meeting of the Chamber's Transportation & Infrastructure Leadership Council, members cited the lack of fare products and mask enforcement as hurdles to their employees riding public transit when they return to the office.

Member companies point out the current fare pass options are limited and employees do not believe they will meet their needs in a hybrid world. In a recent survey, 84 percent of the Chamber's Board of Directors indicated their organization will return to the office less than five days per week. However, the MBTA primarily offers weekly and monthly passes that are designed for daily commuters. The future of work – which has already arrived for some – is rooted in flexibility. Riders should have options to purchase different fare products, such as bundles of discounted trips to be used at the rider's discretion or passes limited to mid-week (Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday) rides.

Flexible passes are already successful on the commuter rail, including the \$10 weekend pass and five-day flex pass. The MBTA was wise to extend the five-day flex pass pilot until March 2022 and we urge it to be renewed. The MBTA should go further and broaden the appeal of flexible products by making them available through the Perq program which enables employees to purchase taxes on a pre-tax basis and to apply any employer subsidies.

Importantly, commuters on bus, heavy rail, light rail, and ferry services deserve similar options to the commuter rail. AFC 2.0, which is designed to allow flexible MBTA fares, is three years behind schedule and \$200 million over budget. As a result, the MBTA is unable to deliver riders the fare options they deserve. This is not an acceptable reason to limit customer's option and the MBTA should explore alternatives to provide flexible passes on its core system until AFC 2.0 is delivered.

Absent flexible passes that allow savings for riders, many workers will choose to commute by car on the days they go into the office. This trend is already underway, with traffic at pre-pandemic levels despite some major employers operating in hybrid models or remotely. High parking costs at MBTA stations, which are based on pre-pandemic demand and have not been reassessed, risks exacerbating the shifts away from public transit.

In addition to fares, Chamber members conveyed that some employees fear returning to the MBTA because of inconsistent compliance with the federal mask mandate on public transportation. We urge the MBTA to do more to educate the public about masking requirements and consider stronger enforcement of the federal mask mandate.

I look forward to continuing to work with the MBTA to ensure that our system meets the needs of the region's employees and employers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'James E. Rooney'.

James E. Rooney
President and CEO