



An Accountability Agenda for the MBTA

By Chris Dempsey, former Massachusetts Assistant Secretary of Transportation, former Director of Transportation for Massachusetts, and Candidate for State Auditor

Summary:

The MBTA is an essential institution but it is failing the hundreds of thousands of residents, institutions, and employers who depend on it every day. To meet our goals on housing, climate, and economic development -- and to be respectful of taxpayers -- we must make it a world-class system that serves people across eastern Massachusetts safely and efficiently. As the next State Auditor and the only candidate with a track record of making the MBTA work better, I will be an experienced watchdog over the MBTA. My four-point plan includes:

A graphic with a light blue border. On the left is a photo of Chris Dempsey, a man with dark hair, wearing a white shirt and a light blue tie. To the right of the photo is the text of his four-point plan. Above the photo is the "CHRIS Dempsey STATE AUDITOR" logo. The plan is titled "MBTA Oversight Four Point Plan:" and contains four numbered points. At the bottom right of the graphic is the text "Learn more at: www.dempseyforauditor.com/mbta".

CHRIS Dempsey
STATE AUDITOR

MBTA Oversight Four Point Plan:

- 1. On Day 1 I will launch an audit of the MBTA, using the Federal Transit Administration's report as a roadmap.**
- 2. I will conduct an audit of the Department of Public Utilities to assess its ability to oversee and regulate safety functions at the MBTA.**
- 3. I will submit a budget request to create an Auditor's Office of MBTA Accountability and request \$2 million annually to appropriately staff the office with transit and engineering experts.**
- 4. I will be the first statewide elected official to commute to Beacon Hill by transit in over thirty years. My own experiences as a daily rider will shape my perspective.**

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A System in Crisis:

The MBTA is in crisis. On April 10th, Robinson Lalin, 39, of Boston, was killed when an inbound Red Line train's door closed on his arm and dragged him into the Broadway station tunnel. On July 21st, an Orange Line train crossing a bridge over the Mystic River caught fire, forcing some



passengers to evacuate from the windows of the train. One passenger, scared for her safety, chose to jump off the bridge into the river. This most recent incident occurred while the MBTA was already under investigation by the Federal Transit Administration, which took the nearly unprecedented step of launching an independent review of the MBTA in April, 2022, after the death of Mr. Lalin. The MBTA is only the second transit agency in the entire country to be subject to this intense federal investigation in recent decades.

Safety on the MBTA is personal for me, because I am a rider and have been my entire life. This is the first time I have questioned my welfare when getting on an MBTA vehicle, and I think about the safety of the system each time my wife Anna leaves for her daily commute on the Green Line. Transit is an important part of our lives, and it shouldn't provoke anxiety or caution.

The MBTA's challenges start with day-to-day safety, but they don't end there. The agency has struggled to successfully implement large capital projects. Two big \$1+ billion contracts that are essential to the T – one for new Red and Orange Line cars and the other for a new automated fare system – keep falling further and further behind schedule and over budget. As Auditor, I will dig in to find out what has gone wrong with these and other contracts to assure that they meet all operational, financial, and other commitments. Riders and taxpayers deserve nothing less.

The performance of the MBTA doesn't just matter to those of us who ride it, or even those who live in communities in the MBTA service area. All Massachusetts taxpayers contribute to the MBTA, and we all want to make sure our tax dollars are spent effectively. The MBTA is an essential transportation option for hundreds of thousands of Massachusetts residents, and a critical tool for addressing our related crises in housing, economic mobility, climate, environmental justice, and more.

Experienced Leadership:

I have proven that with proper leadership the MBTA can perform better for those who count on it. As Assistant Secretary of Transportation, I co-founded the MassDOT Open Data Program, which made the MBTA the first transit agency on the East Coast to make real-time transit data open and available to anyone who wanted it. This program led to the creation of smartphone apps that inform transit riders about the location of their bus or train in real-time. By partnering with companies, entrepreneurs, and non-profits large and small, we made this information available faster and at lower-cost than if the MBTA had tried to do the work entirely itself. In doing so we didn't just improve transit service, we also saved taxpayers money.

I have experience holding the T accountable and pushing it to be better. As the Director of the Transportation for Massachusetts advocacy coalition between 2017 and 2021, I guided the



state's leading movement to make our transportation system more sustainable, effective, and efficient. In that role I have regularly called on the MBTA to do better, and called on the Legislature to properly fund the MBTA and transit statewide.

I have also served as an appointed Member and Chair of the Brookline Transportation Board, overseeing hundreds of hours of public meetings about how to improve transportation in my own community as a volunteer. I know that it will take municipal partnership to make the MBTA a world-class system, including by installing bus lanes on municipally-owned roads, and zoning and developing around MBTA stations in ways that promote transit access and use.

As State Auditor, I will be the elected official on Beacon Hill with the most experience working to advance improved, sustainable, effective transportation.

An Accountability Agenda for the MBTA:

I am running for State Auditor to bring accountability and transparency to state government, and the MBTA is one place I will start. The Office of the State Auditor has a team of about 200 auditors and analysts who specialize in understanding how state agencies are working and whether they are operating according to our laws. The office can help agencies perform better and be more responsible with our taxpayer dollars.

As Auditor, here is how I will help hold the agency accountable to taxpayers and farepayers:

1. **On Day 1, my team will launch an audit of the MBTA based on the findings of the Federal Transit Administration.** As structured today, the Auditor's Office does not have the expertise to perform a "safety audit" of the MBTA. But the office is skilled at assessing how agencies are performing against published laws, regulations, and reports. The report by the FTA, which brings an expertise in transit operations and safety that doesn't exist anywhere in state government, provides the exact roadmap that we need. **As Auditor, my office will hold the agency accountable to the recommendations of the FTA so their valuable work gets implemented instead of sitting on a shelf.** Duplicating the FTA's work is a waste of taxpayer dollars. The best thing we can do is make sure the FTA's recommendations are followed.
2. Today, the Department of Public Utilities has an oversight role of the MBTA, but is not properly staffed and resourced to provide that oversight. The FTA has already raised concerns about the DPU's ability to properly investigate the MBTA's safety functions. **I will audit the DPU and other regulatory agencies to assure they fully meet their responsibilities in ensuring a safe MBTA.** Based on that audit, I will file legislation to



clarify the accountability and oversight bodies of the MBTA, which could include enhancing the DPU's oversight or moving that function to a different part of state government.

3. I will submit a \$2 million budget request to increase the resources available to the Auditor's Office with the explicit goal of enhancing the office's MBTA accountability and oversight functions. When this request is approved, **I will create an Auditor's Office of MBTA Accountability dedicated to MBTA oversight and reform**. I will hire professionals with experience in transit safety, operations, engineering, and investigations to staff this unit. This team will develop and submit findings on at least a quarterly basis.
4. **I will be the first statewide elected official to commute to Beacon Hill by transit in over thirty years**. This isn't a campaign gimmick, it's how I get around. My wife, Anna, also commutes by MBTA. We need more elected leaders on Beacon Hill who understand the frustrations of transit riders but also who appreciate how transformational transit can be when it works well. I have been riding the MBTA my entire life, and will continue to do so as a statewide elected official. **The work of my office will be informed by these first-hand experiences**.

As the only candidate for any statewide office who is both a regular rider and a former transportation official and advocate, I understand the importance of a safe, reliable, and efficient MBTA to the economy and people of the Commonwealth, especially those who rely on the T every day.

As your next State Auditor, I will roll up my sleeves and get to work as we build a transit system that the people of Massachusetts deserve.