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**The Mattapan Trolley:
Public Transit Improvements amidst Displacement Concerns**

Allegra Amram DeNooyer
May 15, 2020

Senior Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Bachelor of Arts in Urban Studies

Adviser, Timothy Koechlin

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Note on Terms

A notable characteristic of my experience growing up in the Greater Boston area was realizing that local residents never refer to things by their actual names. In writing a thesis about my hometown, I realized that many Boston-specific terms might be confusing for readers not from the area. The following is an attempt to describe all the terms that I, and the people quoted in this thesis, use interchangeably.

The transit agency for the Greater Boston area is called the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, the MBTA, or, both affectionately and derisively, the T. The Mattapan Line is also called the Mattapan Trolley, the line, or the trolley. The physical vehicles that run on the line are called PCC cars, streetcars, trolley cars, service vehicles, vehicles, or cars. There is one important area of overlap: many local residents refer to both the line and the cars as the trolley. I distinguish between the two in some quotes when it seemed necessary for comprehension, but in the rest, I left the original language used. This overlap is most prevalent in chapter 2, when service to the entire line was threatened and there the “trolley” is used to advocate both for the cars and line.

Introduction

The PCC cars used on the Mattapan Line look like they belong to another era – because they do. The high-speed line, which opened in 1929, is named that because its route is intersected only twice by city streets. It is served by a fleet of ten 1940s PCC cars, which are orange-and-cream-colored and operate on electricity provided overhead. One is pictured below (Figure 1).

Figure 1. PCC car on the Mattapan Line (Yelp, 2018).¹



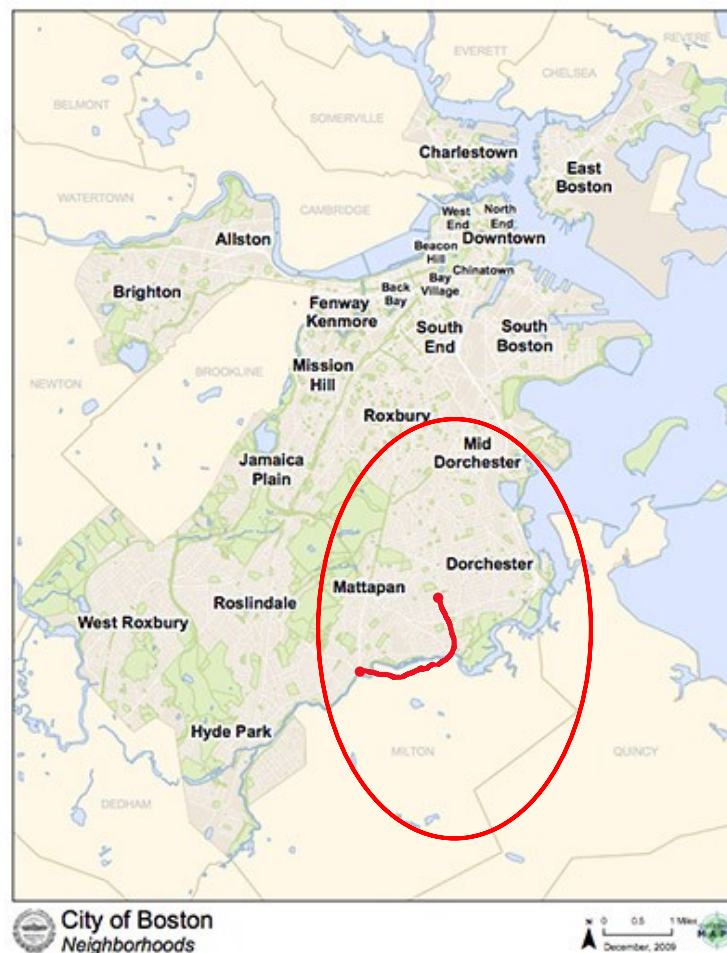
The line has about 6,600 average daily weekday boardings (3,200 inbound and 3,400 outbound).² It services three neighborhoods: Mattapan, Milton, and Dorchester. Mattapan and

¹ <https://s3-media0.fl.yelpcdn.com/bphoto/-5ZiUsWEokadShgyL1qJew/o.jpg>.

² Bruce Mohl, "T analysis: Time for long goodbye to Mattapan trolleys," *CommonWealth Magazine*, January 28, 2019, <https://commonwealthmagazine.org/transportation/t-analysis-time-for-long-goodbye-to-mattapan-trolleys/>.

Dorchester are both part of Boston, while Milton is a neighboring town. The three neighborhoods are shown below, relative to the rest of Greater Boston, with the route of the Mattapan Line drawn on (Figure 2). A closeup view of the neighborhoods is shown below (Figure 3).

Figure 2. Map of Greater Boston, with Mattapan, Dorchester, and Milton circled in red, and the Mattapan Line drawn in red (Official neighborhood map, City of Boston – circling and drawing mine).³



³ https://miro.medium.com/max/400/1*qNZz06fFvP0oHJyM5Q9opw.jpeg.

Figure 3: Closeup of Mattapan, Dorchester, and Milton (Boston Redevelopment Authority, 2006

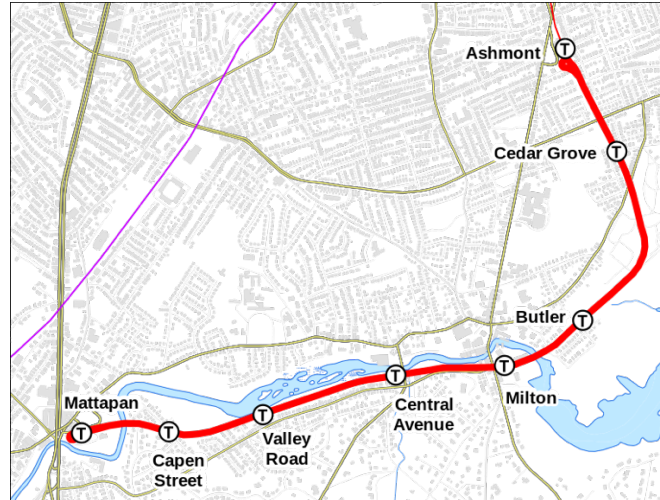
– cropping for emphasis mine).⁴



The 2.6-mile route begins and ends within Boston, dipping into Milton on the way. The Mattapan Line has one stop in Mattapan: Mattapan; four stops in Milton: Capen Street, Valley Road, Central Avenue, and Milton; and three stops in Dorchester: Butler, Cedar Grove, and Ashmont. Its northern terminus is at Ashmont Station, where there are connections to the Red Line and bus lines, and its southern terminus is at Mattapan Station, where there are connections to bus routes. The line's route and the station names are shown below (Figure 3).

⁴ <https://cdn1.sph.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/1912/2016/09/Boston-Neighborhood-Borders.jpg>

Figure 3: Route of the Mattapan Line (Wikipedia, ArcGIS, data from MassGIS, 2014).⁵



The age of the PCC cars gives them historic and aesthetic appeal but also makes them difficult and expensive to operate and maintain. Additionally, the vehicles have high steps and ramps, making them inaccessible, and can be unreliable. The idea of potentially replacing the PCC cars was first raised in the beginning of 2016 and they are currently being repaired so as to last for another decade. Although unconfirmed, it is highly likely that light rail vehicles currently at use on the Green Line will be the next service vehicles on the Mattapan Line. Meanwhile, the community, particularly Mattapan residents, has been calling for more reliable, accessible public transit for years.

This thesis will tell the story of how the transit agency that manages the Mattapan Line, the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), is addressing the problem of this piece of aging infrastructure. The trolley is an important link to economic opportunities for a disinvested community of color in Mattapan that has continually struggled with a lack of transit

⁵ https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/8/84/Ashmont_Mattapan_High_Speed_Line_map.svg/796px-Ashmont_Mattapan_High_Speed_Line_map.svg.png.

equity. In this way, the proposed changes to the Mattapan Trolley are important because of the impact it would have on the residents who depend on public transit. Currently residents are concerned that improvements to public transit and increasing development in the neighborhood will end up displacing them. Thus, the Mattapan Line serves as a case study for the tension around providing necessary transit improvements to an underserved neighborhood when development attracted by enhanced infrastructure could displace residents.

In order to show this, chapter one of this thesis will give a brief overview on the history of public transit in Boston, highlighting the Mattapan Line. It will then expose present-day concerns about the reliability and accessibility of the line and the system as a whole. The MBTA transit network has increasingly experienced delays and breakdowns, which culminated in several major problems on the Red Line and the Mattapan Line in the past few years. This led to widespread frustration among riders, mostly aimed at the MBTA. As a result of these issues, the MBTA commissioned a study to assess the longevity of the PCC cars, which determined that it would be impractical to continue using them. The MBTA then proposed several different options for replacing the vehicles and their preferred option is light rail vehicles, Type 9 LRVs, currently in use on the system's Green Line. The final decision about the replacement vehicles was supposed to be released in the summer of 2019, but has not yet been finalized. However, it seems most likely that the Type 9 LRVs will replace PCC cars within the next decade. Therefore, the history of the trolley will introduce the community's distrust of the MBTA and dissatisfaction with unreliable public transit.

Chapter two of this thesis will examine the community's opinions about changes to the Mattapan Line and how they have shifted over time. Specifically, it will discuss the mobilization to "save the trolley" when the future of the line was first called into question. Community

concerns around the cultural importance of the PCC cars quieted down once the MBTA committed to financially investing in the line. Many residents and elected officials have expressed support for the Type 9 LRVs because of their desire for more accessible and reliable public transit and infrastructure improvements. Although most people seem resigned to the idea of new vehicles, several people were troubled by the idea of receiving secondhand vehicles, because it symbolizes the consistent lack of prioritization of Mattapan's needs. Additionally, the community's persistent opposition to buses reveals how buses in Mattapan are synonymous with subpar public transit. Thus, the fight to save the PCC cars was driven less by nostalgia and more by a fear that the Mattapan Line would be replaced with inadequate bus service, therefore perpetuating transit inequity in the neighborhood.

Chapter three of this thesis will discuss the legacy of discriminatory practices that have created structural inequalities in both housing and transportation in Mattapan. Particularly, it will focus on a federal housing program, BBURG, that was corrupted by racist real estate practices and made Mattapan and Dorchester more racially segregated. These patterns of disinvestment created a community-wide distrust of public agencies and repeat themselves in current issues of transit inequity in Mattapan. Buses in the area are slow and unreliable, unfairly holding back a predominantly black, working-class population that is already more likely to depend on public transit as a result of their socioeconomic characteristics. There are programs designed to create more equitable transit in Mattapan, such as the MBTA Better Bus Project and the newly expanded commuter rail service. However, the neighborhood's disenfranchisement is so deeply embedded that even these programs have a long way to go before the community gets the public transit it needs and deserves.

Lastly, chapter four of this thesis will explain why transit improvements, even though they are necessary, put Mattapan at risk for gentrification and displacement. After defining gentrification and displacement, the chapter will especially focus on the ambivalence about infrastructure investment due to the neighborhood's vulnerability. As Boston's economy grows, even underinvested areas like Mattapan are beginning to experience more development. Residents are concerned about gentrification and have been organizing to make their voices heard in the development process. One specific form of investment, transit-oriented development (TOD), can provide the community with much-needed revitalization but can also raise home prices and displace residents. The Mattapan Station development is a TOD project that includes a significant amount of affordable housing, which is an encouraging step toward preventing gentrification. Ultimately, if transit-oriented development in Mattapan manages to avoid displacing residents, it could improve transit equity in the area.

Chapter 1: Public Transit in Boston: 1897 to Present Day

Boston boasts the oldest subway in the United States, which opened in 1897, and eventually turned into a sprawling transit network for the area, also encompassing ferryboats, heavy rail, light rail, commuter rail, and buses. The Mattapan Line, which opened in 1929, has used the current streetcars, known as PCC cars, since World War II. An aging transit system reliant on aging cars poses complications for the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA). In recent years, the MBTA has been heavily criticized for system-wide problems with reliability and for a low quality of service. Moreover, there are specific concerns, like breakdowns during snowy winters and difficulties repairing the PCC cars, that threaten the longevity of the Mattapan Line. In late 2018, the MBTA released a study that concluded that it would be impractical in the long run to continue using the PCC cars. In the summer of 2019, criticisms of the MBTA escalated when a Red Line derailment coincided with fare increases. That same summer, the agency allocated extra funding to the Mattapan Line Transformation. The presentation used in public meetings held in the three communities serviced by the trolley revealed that the MBTA is considering six options for replacing the PCC cars in the next decade. The most likely option is Type 9 LRV cars, currently in use on the system's Green Line, but the MBTA has not reported a final decision. The history of the trolley shows a repeated pattern of community dissatisfaction with the quality of their public transit and with the MBTA's communication.

Boston became the birthplace of public transit in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century. The city had a rapidly growing population that necessitated the construction of mass transit. The first "four-wheeled open-bench trolley car" headed from the trolley barn in Allston, a peripheral neighborhood of the city, to Park Street, in the heart of downtown, on

September 1, 1897.⁶ The Tremont Street Subway of 1898, which made use of underground tunnels and electric-powered rail cars, followed shortly and proved so successful that barely a decade later all horse-drawn streetcars had been withdrawn from service in the city.⁷ Originally private companies owned all of Boston's public transit, but as the lines grew rapidly, expanding beyond the city's downtown to its suburbs and beyond, the system needed to be consolidated and organized. Thus, in 1947, the operation of public transit in the Boston area became a public-sector responsibility, originally headed by the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA), which was later renamed to the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), known colloquially as "the T."⁸ The MBTA would eventually come to assume responsibility for a wide array of modes of public transit, such as the Mattapan Trolley.

As the Boston metropolitan area grew in the early part of the twentieth-century, public transit expanded along with population movements, creating the need for the Mattapan Line. In 1928, the subway, along what is now the Red Line, was extended by two additional stations to Ashmont, where a "high-speed trolley line" was built along a private right-of-way "to provide passengers with connecting service to Mattapan Square."⁹ The line, designed to run through Dorchester, Mattapan, and the neighboring town of Milton, was part of a series of new trolley cars in use on the city's Green Line as well. Named the PCC (Presidents' Conference Committee) cars, they were rolled out during the early 1930s in response to the increasingly popular motor bus, and featured a "single-ended streamlined body, a multinotch foot-operated controller, more rapid acceleration and braking rates than previous street-railway equipment, and

⁶ Brian J. Cudahy, "Change at Park Street Under," in *A Century of Subways: Celebrating 100 Years of New York's Underground Railways* (New York: Fordham University, 2003), 80.

⁷ Cudahy, "Change at Park Street Under," 75.

⁸ Cudahy 113.

⁹ Cudahy 105.

resilient wheels.”¹⁰ The MBTA made a few modifications to the design, including adding a single set of left-side doors since some of Boston’s stations were configured with left-side platforms and the original cars only had two sets of right-side doors.¹¹ This led to the current design of the cars, unmodified since their origin except for a paint change to orange in the early 2000s. They are now the oldest PCC cars still in revenue service.

While considered cutting edge technology in the 1930s, PCC cars were not to last long in most of the country, and the aging fleet in Boston has posed problems in recent years. By the end of the 1950s, bus service replaced all streetcar service in Boston, except for the Mattapan Line. This left the fifty unique “picture window” PCC cars ordered by the MTA in 1951 as some of the last streetcars built for any American transit system until the twenty-first century.¹² As a result of the construction of highways, increased suburbanization, and the demand for faster transportation, streetcars largely disappeared from American cities by the 1960s. Even though other systems began reintegrating streetcars in the 2000s, like Philadelphia’s SEPTA, the MBTA remains one of the few transit agencies in the country to use PCC cars for regular commuting use rather than as heritage stock for tourism. The combination of aging trolley cars and the aging T system results in increasing maintenance and repair costs, posing financial difficulties for an agency with long-term funding problems. The MBTA’s operational problems have caused delays and breakdowns, frustrating passengers.

In recent years, there have been some highly publicized incidents with MBTA service that brought capital maintenance problems to public attention. On June 11, 2019, the Red Line experienced a derailment so severe that a full recovery took months. To compound the

¹⁰ Cudahy 108.

¹¹ Cudahy 109.

¹² Cudahy 109.

discontent, less than a month after the derailment, fare increases took effect, under much criticism and protest from commuters and local officials. The MBTA raised costs by around six percent on average for riders – taking the subway with a CharlieCard, a reusable card that serves as the main payment method for the T, increased from \$2.25 to \$2.40 for a one-way trip.¹³ There were two rallies against the fare hikes, both organized by City Councilor Michelle Wu, who called for a bigger rider presence on the MBTA’s Fiscal Management and Control Board, which approved the increases.¹⁴ Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley, who represents Massachusetts’s 7th District, which includes part of Mattapan, tweeted that fare increases are “first and foremost an issue of civil rights” and called it “unconscionable” that residents “struggle to afford their commute” in the district with the worst rush hour traffic in the nation.¹⁵ To make matters worse, power problems stretching on for two hours required the use of shuttle buses to replace the Mattapan Line the same day as the fare hike.¹⁶ Riders expressed frustration and disappointment with the transit agency, and a dismal safety report largely corroborated their opinions on the quality of service of the MBTA.

In response to the derailment, the MBTA hired three outside safety experts to review the agency. In December 2019, the safety experts released a report stating that, in almost every area examined, “deficiencies in policies, application of safety standards or industry best practices, and accountability were apparent.”¹⁷ The report indicated that “in essence, safety is not the priority at the T” and blamed “management turnover, misplaced priorities, and a workplace that inhibits

¹³ Jennifer Smith, “Riders, elected protest #UnfairHikes across MBTA system,” *Dorchester Reporter*, July 1, 2019, <https://www.dotnews.com/2019/riders-electeds-protest-unfairhikes-across-mbta-system>.

¹⁴ Jennifer Smith, “Riders, elected protest #UnfairHikes across MBTA system.”

¹⁵ Jennifer Smith, “Riders, elected protest #UnfairHikes across MBTA system.”

¹⁶ Justin Dougherty, “First day of MBTA fare sees trolleys out of service, passengers claim lack of AC,” *7News WHDH Boston*, July 1, 2019, <https://whdh.com/news/first-day-of-mbta-fare-hike-sees-trolleys-out-of-service-lack-of-ac-on-red-line/>.

¹⁷ Bruce Mohl, “Safety culture lacking at the MBTA,” *CommonWealth Magazine*, December 9, 2019, <https://commonwealthmagazine.org/transportation/safety-culture-lacking-at-the-mbta>.

frank communications and analysis about operational problems.”¹⁸ It also specified that the current general manager, who has been with the MBTA since January 2019 and is the ninth GM in ten years, does not possess “in-depth transportation operations and safety knowledge,” namely the “core functions of the organization he is tasked with managing.”¹⁹ For many riders, the scathing report validated complaints about safety, communication, and accountability that they have put forth for years.

In addition to public discontent with the transit system as a whole, many Mattapan Trolley riders pointed to delays and shutdowns in recent years that raise questions about the line’s reliability. In particular, the PCC cars are vulnerable to severe weather conditions, such as the snowfall that is common during Boston winters. The winter of 2014-2015 was the snowiest winter on record for the Boston area, and the heavy snowfall disrupted MBTA service, resulting in several system-wide shutdowns. An article from February 12th, 2015 affirmed that the Mattapan Line was “faring the worst” of all the region’s troubled rail lines, as its passenger service had been suspended for almost two weeks.²⁰ The T’s spokesperson Joe Pesaturo stated that it was ““very difficult for MBTA crews to keep up with the snow” and that their ““limited number of snow removal crews cannot cover the entire system all at once.””²¹ The shutdown made it difficult for people to get to work and school and riders expressed widespread frustration about the situation.

During the Mattapan Line shutdown, commuters found the MBTA’s communication to be disappointing, adding on to the inconveniences and economic losses caused by the situation.

¹⁸ Mohl, “Safety culture lacking at the MBTA.”

¹⁹ Mohl, “Safety culture lacking at the MBTA.”

²⁰ Lauren Dezenski, “Continuing tale of woe for Mattapan trolley line: Buses replace line for weeks,” *Dorchester Reporter*, February 12, 2015, <https://www.dotnews.com/2015/continuing-tale-woe-mattapan-trolley-line-buses-replace-line-weeks>.

²¹ Dezenski, “Continuing tale of woe for Mattapan trolley line: Buses replace line for weeks.”

At the height of one of the storms, the MBTA asked Red Line commuters to use alternate forms of transportation, while public officials asked residents to stay off the roads and use public transit.²² These mixed messages confused and exasperated many community members, who have long criticized the MBTA for its lack of transparency. State Rep. Dan Cullinane, who represents the Massachusetts 12th Suffolk District, encompassing parts of Dorchester, Mattapan, and Milton, called for more investment in the MBTA. He said that Boston needs ““public transit that is consistent and dependable”” and ““that needs to work in the winter.””²³ The Mattapan Line shutdown also had a negative effect on several of the businesses in Mattapan Square, like Brothers Deli. An employee at the store, which estimated \$10,000 in losses, said that ““people usually take the trolley down and hang out in the square,”” which helps business but is impossible to do with the snow affecting service.²⁴ The Mattapan Trolley was ultimately out of service for three weeks that winter, signaling a need for increased investment in the line.

In late December 2017, two trolley cars crashed into each other in a rear-end collision, leaving only four cars operating as a result of the damage and further exposing problems with the Mattapan Line. The MBTA had to mix and match parts from the two vehicles damaged in the crash, as well as other cars currently not in use because of mechanical issues, and eventually brought two vehicles back to service in the summer of 2018.²⁵ The disruption resulted in longer waits for passengers between trips, disturbing rush hour, as what is normally a ten-car fleet was reduced to seven functioning cars. These problems coincided with discussions the MBTA had been having since 2016 about the difficulties and options with the Mattapan Line.²⁶ To evaluate

²² Dezenski, “Continuing tale of woe for Mattapan trolley line: Buses replace line for weeks.”

²³ Dezenski, “Continuing tale of woe for Mattapan trolley line: Buses replace line for weeks.”

²⁴ Dezenski, “Continuing tale of woe for Mattapan trolley line: Buses replace line for weeks.”

²⁵ Adam Vaccaro, “Boston drivers are spending more time in traffic,” *The Boston Globe*, February 9, 2018, https://www3.bostonglobe.com/metro/2018/02/09/boston-drivers-are-spending-more-time-traffic/bitrrvhpe7FcOHZOImlZKP/story.html?p1=AMP_Recirculation_Pos6&arc404=true.

²⁶ Herman and Mohl, “Is there room for nostalgia at the T?”

the reliability of the existing streetcars and consider possible solutions, the agency commissioned a study, which was released in December 2018 and which laid out multiple problems with the line.

Besides the age of the PCC cars themselves, the study indicated additional problems with the infrastructure of the Mattapan line. This includes a large portion of the infrastructure that does not comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which is especially problematic at Ashmont Station, the northern terminus of the line and a major terminal where passengers can transfer to the Red Line and buses.²⁷ Infrastructure components like tracks, stations, bridges, signals, switches, and the maintenance facility, were ranked marginal or poor 41 times; fair, moderate, or functional 48 times; good 47 times; and excellent only 5 times.²⁸ Additionally, the trolley cars do not work well with modern collision-avoidance technology, making future crashes more likely.²⁹ The study stated that the vehicles needed intensive repairs. The most recent major repair project on the PCC cars was in the early 2000s, but the cars are continuously sent to the MBTA repair shop for maintenance.

Working on the trolley cars is difficult, as they take many man hours to repair per vehicle and require near-constant maintenance because of their age. In the context of the sprawling MBTA system, the Mattapan Line is “an outsized problem for an agency stretched to its limits in terms of budget and manpower.”³⁰ On a per-vehicle basis, the agency spends about 40 percent more maintaining the PCC cars than it does other rail vehicles.³¹ The MBTA’s main repair shop

²⁷ Colman M. Herman, “Problems on Mattapan line extend beyond trolleys,” *CommonWealth Magazine*, December 30, 2018, <https://commonwealthmagazine.org/transportation/problems-on-mattapan-line-extend-beyond-trolleys/>.

²⁸ Herman, “Problems on Mattapan line extend beyond trolleys.”

²⁹ Adam Vaccaro, “Is the future of the Mattapan line more trolleys, or buses?” *The Boston Globe*, January 31, 2019, https://g-mnc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Is-the-future-of-the-Mattapan-line-more-trolleys-or-buses_-The-Boston-Globe.pdf.

³⁰ Bill Forry, “T workers keep Mattapan’s classic cars on the tracks,” *Dorchester Reporter*, January 28, 2016, <https://www.dotnews.com/2016/t-workers-keep-mattapan-s-classic-cars-tracks>.

³¹ Herman and Bruce Mohl, “Is there room for nostalgia at the T?”

receives on average one truck, which is the propulsion unit under the PCC car, to repair per month. Since every piece on the essential platform of the trolley car is obsolete, the tradesmen at the shop have to manufacture all the new pieces by hand.³² The last full round of restorations on the cars, between 1999 and 2002, utilized some new parts and some mildly used parts, but all the new inventory has been used up since then. This creates problems for parts like track brakes that wear out very frequently and thus have to be reverse engineered and recreated, which uses 75 hours of work-time per brake.³³ As a result of the age of the vehicles, any problem has to be fixed immediately since no new parts are available, putting into question whether continuing to run the PCC cars is realistic.

The MBTA's study eventually concluded that keeping the PCC cars running would be impractical, due to the problems with infrastructure and aging, unavailable parts. Specifically, the study stated that the cars' "outer shells are falling apart" and "maintenance costs are extremely high" and pointed to previously stated problems with snow and accessibility.³⁴ It also determined that the "limited and exposed maintenance area [at Mattapan Station, the southern terminus of the line and a major terminal for bus transfers] makes large-scale fleet improvement efforts and internal modification programs extremely difficult, costly, and inefficient."³⁵ In order to have time to plan for the next generation vehicle, the MBTA decided to fix the PCC cars to stay on the line for the next decade, requiring an increase in funding. The Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) and the MBTA Fiscal Management and Control Board voted on June 18th, 2019 to approve the five-year \$8 billion MassDOT and MBTA Capital

³² Forry, "T workers keep Mattapan's classic cars on the tracks."

³³ Forry, "T workers keep Mattapan's classic cars on the tracks."

³⁴ Herman, "Problems on Mattapan line extend beyond trolleys."

³⁵ Bill Forry, "Report outlines woes along Mattapan trolley line," *Dorchester Reporter*, January 9, 2019, <https://www.dotnews.com/2019/report-outlines-woes-along-mattapan-trolley-line>.

Investment Plan (CIP). The CIP, which covers fiscal years 2020-2024, includes \$118 million in new funding for the Mattapan Line Transformation, covering initial investments for “bridges, stations, track, and other infrastructure to modernize” the line.³⁶ The MBTA has thus committed to keeping the PCC cars for another decade and to making various improvements to the line, which will arrive in phases.

In the spring of 2019, the MBTA created a presentation discussing the results and implications of the 2018 study to be shown at three public meetings. At each meeting, the MBTA’s chief deputy operating officer, Erik Stoothoff, described the three phases of the potential transformation of the Mattapan Line. Phase 1, which is ongoing, encompasses a \$7.9 million investment to repair the current fleet of PCC cars and to replace obsolete parts in order to keep them running for another eight to ten years, as well as “assessment of investment and service needs, continued community feedback and evaluation of future vehicle options.”³⁷ The Brookville Equipment Corporation, which specializes in historic reproductions, provided new equipment for the trolley cars. The discovery of lead paint and asbestos in the old cars pushed the timeline of the work back, resulting in the completion of the first car in August 2019, with the others on track to completion in 2020.³⁸ At the time of writing, not all of the cars have been repaired yet.

While phases 2 and 3 of the Mattapan Line Transformation have not begun yet, the descriptions of the phases all but confirmed that new vehicles will replace the PCC cars. Phase 2, expected to cost \$90-115 million, consists of repairs and upgrades to infrastructure and stations

³⁶ Kyra Senese, “MassDOT, MBTA approve 5 year \$18B capital plan,” *RT&S*, June 19, 2019, <https://www.rtands.com/news/massdot-mbta-approve-5-year-capital-plan/>.

³⁷ Yukun Zhang, “T riders give their input on the line’s future at Mattapan meeting,” *Dorchester Reporter*, March 28, 2019, <https://www.dotnews.com/2019/t-riders-give-their-input-trolleys-future-mattapan-meeting>.

³⁸ Mohl, “T analysis: Time for long goodbye to Mattapan trolleys.”

to accommodate new vehicles, like repaired platforms, “bridges that support heavier vehicles, track, power system, new signal system at Central and Capen road crossings,” and improved station accessibility and paths of transit.³⁹ Phase 3 involves a likely replacement of the PCC cars, and lays out six options, listed below with their estimated costs^{40*}:

1. Continue heavy repair and upgrade of MBTA’s Existing PCC Fleet - \$190 million.
2. Procure new, replica PCC vehicles - \$220 million.
3. Repurpose existing MBTA Green Line Type 9 Light Rail Vehicles (LRVs) - \$190 million.
4. Procure new, modern LRVs - \$260 million.
5. Procure new 60-foot diesel-electric hybrid bus fleet - \$215 million.
6. Procure new 60-foot battery-electric bus fleet - \$215 million.⁴¹

Stoothoff then described benefits and concerns for each of the options. Both the existing PCC cars and replica PCC vehicles would retain the historic look and feel, but neither option solves the accessibility problems, and the existing cars are “far beyond expected useful life with deteriorating structure, and no room for growth.”⁴² New, modern LRVs are highly accessible and

³⁹ Zhang, “T riders give their input on the line’s future at Mattapan meeting.”

^{40*} See: Sky Rose, “Red Line Extension to Mattapan,” *Medium*, January 1, 2018, <https://medium.com/@skyqrose/red-line-extension-to-mattapan-b7351aa782e>.

There is another option that the MBTA did not consider: extending the Red Line to Mattapan, and thus eliminating all of the stops except for Ashmont, Milton, and Mattapan. This was proposed by an MBTA employee named Sky Rose, who works in an unrelated area, and who believes this would make the ride 8 minutes faster. They cite a ridership survey that says that most people ride end-to-end and that Mattapan and Ashmont account for 76% of boardings and alightings to argue that closing the four smallest stations would allow for improved capacity and service. However, standard Red Line subway cars cannot operate on the trolley line for several reasons, including the lack of an electrified third rail. Additionally, the MBTA has stated that there are major challenges that make extending the Red Line impossible as a viable option, including “finding sufficient space for a maintenance and storage yard along the corridor, right of way and bridge clearances, private property encroachment, and significant infrastructure changes to address road crossing.” Thus, although the proposal is interesting, the T did not see it as practical enough to seriously consider.

⁴¹ MBTA, “Transformation of the Mattapan High Speed Line,” (presentation, public meetings for the Mattapan Line Transformation, spring 2019), <https://cdn.mbta.com/sites/default/files/projects/mattapan-high-speed-line/mattapan-line-public-meetings-spring2019-accessible.pdf>.

⁴² MBTA, “Transformation of the Mattapan High Speed Line.”

present the possibility for future modern propulsion, but are the most expensive option and have unknown reliability and performance.⁴³ Both bus options are accessible, have improved snow operation, and could easily accommodate growth, but would provide the longest expected corridor shutdown for construction due to extensive infrastructure expansion such as widening bridges and the right-of-way.⁴⁴ Thus, the bus options do not reduce service interruption or incorporate community input, the PCC options do not meet accessibility standards or improve the level of service, and the new LRVs are the most expensive option by far. Furthermore, Stoothoff said that any of the new vehicles would need to be custom-made to fit the MBTA specifications and “it would be difficult to find a manufacturer willing to do so for a small run of cars.”⁴⁵ Therefore, none of these five options seem likely to occur based on significant concerns.

Although not expressly stated in the presentation, based on the data given, it is clear that the MBTA believes reusing existing Type 9 LRVs, currently at use on the Green Line, is the best option. Once the Green Line receives new Type 10 LRVs, the Type 9 LRVs would be repurposed on the Mattapan Line. The Type 9 LRVs are highly accessible, built by an established manufacturer, familiar to MBTA operations and design, and provide room for ridership and fleet growth because less than half of the fleet would be required for the Mattapan Line.⁴⁶ Moreover, they are the cheapest option aside from keeping the current PCC cars and they have an operating life of 25 to 30 years. The only concern for this option is slightly increased track maintenance and dependence on the procurement plan and schedule for the Green Line Type 10 LRVs.⁴⁷ The MBTA has not yet announced their decision on what type of vehicle

⁴³ MBTA, “Transformation of the Mattapan High Speed Line.”

⁴⁴ MBTA, “Transformation of the Mattapan High Speed Line.”

⁴⁵ Trea Lavery, “MBTA planning to upgrade Mattapan trolley line,” *The Bay State Banner*, February 7, 2019, <https://www.baystatebanner.com/2019/02/07/mbta-planning-to-upgrade-mattapan-trolley-line/>.

⁴⁶ MBTA, “Transformation of the Mattapan High Speed Line.”

⁴⁷ MBTA, “Transformation of the Mattapan High Speed Line.”

should run on the Mattapan Line, although it was supposed to be finalized in the summer of 2019. However, a January 2020 article stated that when the new Type 10 LRVs arrive for the Green Line, “the T plans to move the [Type 9] cars to the Mattapan trolley line.”⁴⁸ The press and many politicians and community members are treating the decision like a done deal even though it is unconfirmed.

Although not all of the MBTA leadership seemed fully sold on the Type 9 LRVs in interviews in January 2019, it still looks like the most likely option at the time of writing. Joseph Aiello, chairman of the MBTA’s board of directors, argued that the new Green Line trains will be “more expensive to maintain a decade from now, when they are nearing the midpoint of their useful life.”⁴⁹ Additionally, Transportation Secretary Stephanie Pollack advocated for buses, claiming that they are more reliable than trolley cars because the cars are “vulnerable to losing power if their overhead wiring is knocked out of service during storms.”⁵⁰ However, buses are so unpopular with the community that it is highly unlikely that they would be chosen as the replacement. Based on the agency’s financial concerns and issues with reliability, Type 9 LRVs appear to be the most practical and best solution.

Although the Mattapan Line is a charming, unique piece of local history, the community is frustrated with the MBTA’s current unreliable service. Many riders of the trolley see a need for increased accessibility and reliability as a result of problems with breakdowns and snow operation. Additionally, the MBTA’s lack of communication on a timeline for replacing the PCC cars and lack of confirmation that the Type 9 LRVs will be the next service vehicles on the line concerns many community members. Thus, the history of the trolley exposes a recurring pattern

⁴⁸ Adam Vaccaro, “Next on the MBTA spending spree: bigger Green Line cars,” *The Boston Globe*, January 31, 2020, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/01/31/metro/next-mbta-spending-spreed-bigger-green-line-cars/>.

⁴⁹ Vaccaro, “Is the future of the Mattapan line more trolleys, or buses?”

⁵⁰ Vaccaro, “Is the future of the Mattapan line more trolleys, or buses?”

of unreliable public transit and poor communication from the MBTA. Mattapan residents have historically not had a voice in decision-making processes about their neighborhood, which has denied them equal access to infrastructure. The community's reactions to changes to the trolley will reveal dissatisfaction with structural inequalities that caused current disinvestment in Mattapan.

Chapter 2

Community Reactions to the Mattapan Line Transformation

A group of community leaders, elected officials, transit activists, and riders have expressed opinions on the proposed changes to the Mattapan Line and these opinions have shifted over time. In 2016, when the future of the line was first called into question, many politicians and community members mobilized both in favor of keeping the PCC cars, because of their importance to the neighborhood, and against buses replacing the line. However, opposition to changes quieted down once the MBTA released the 2018 study and committed to more financial investment in the Mattapan Line, both to keep the PCC cars running for another decade and to improve service. Most people were resigned to the idea of getting new service vehicles once it was clear that the MBTA would not replace the line. Many politicians expressed support for the Type 9 LRVs as the best option, citing concerns of accessibility and reliability. Many community members echoed these concerns, arguing that these factors matter more than the nostalgia of the PCC cars. At the 2019 public meetings, some people expressed hesitations about replacing the streetcars, but most people were eager to have infrastructure improvements. However, several residents expressed unhappiness at the idea of receiving used vehicles. Combined with the community-wide dislike of buses, these criticisms point to widespread frustration with substandard public transit in the area and with a lack of prioritization of Mattapan's needs. Ultimately, the fight to keep the PCC cars was less about their charm and more about the fear that the line would be replaced with low-quality bus service, perpetuating transit inequity.

In 2016, the MBTA raised the possibility of eliminating the Mattapan Line, and there was immediate backlash from the communities of Mattapan, Dorchester, and Milton. In March 2016, ten local elected officials wrote a letter pressing MassDOT and the MBTA to approve a \$3

million appropriation to fund the continuation of the Mattapan Line. In the letter, they described the “vital” line as having both quality of life value and a “critical economic impact on residential property values, local businesses, and...attracting much needed economic development interest” along the corridor that it services.⁵¹ They advocated for keeping trolley cars, preferably the PCC cars, as the service vehicles, and stated that buses “could begin to have a significant adverse impact on residential property values for those living along the line.”⁵² Other politicians shared the sentiment that buses would have a negative effect on the community. A week later, Milton’s Board of Selectmen wrote a similar letter opposing buses as an option for the line and maintaining the importance of preserving access to public transit in order to continue attracting residents to Milton. They stated that buses would “increase traffic congestion in the area,” have an “adverse environmental and economic development impact,” and provide a lower quality of service that could “affect property values” by making Milton less livable.⁵³ They also expressed a preference for modern trolley cars over buses if it was “not economically feasible to preserve the historic trolleys.”⁵⁴ Both letters advocated for streetcars over buses to service the Mattapan Line for economic and quality of life reasons, which were echoed by the community.

Around the same time as the letters, riders created the Facebook group “Save the Mattapan Trolley,” and it became a community for people who see the trolley as a nostalgic link to history, both personally and for the city in general. A common opinion is that the “cars are historic, cool, and add a certain panache to the T.”⁵⁵ Many people see the classic, old-fashioned

⁵¹ Dan Cullinane, “Re: Mattapan High Speed Trolley Line Preservation & Investment,” <https://www.dotnews.com/files/Mattapan%20Trolley%20Preservation%20and%20Investment%20Support%20Letter%20from%20Rep.%20Cullinane%20and%209%20Boston%20Elected%20Officials%203.11.16.pdf>.

⁵² Cullinane, “Re: Mattapan High Speed Trolley Line Preservation & Investment.”

⁵³ Johanna Seltz, “Milton appeals to save Ashmont-Mattapan trolley,” *The Boston Globe*, April 1, 2016, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/regionals/south/2016/04/01/milton-appeals-save-ashmont-mattapan-trolley/CWa297nQBst4qK7Tt9Z7J/story.html>.

⁵⁴ Seltz, “Milton appeals to save Ashmont-Mattapan trolley.”

⁵⁵ Herman and Mohl, “Is there room for nostalgia at the T?”

look of the PCC cars as a charming, unique link to the city's past. Boston City Councilor Andrea Campbell, whose district includes part of Mattapan, stated that ““when folks see the trolley pulling up, it brings them back to memories of what Mattapan used to be and what Mattapan can be again.””⁵⁶ State Rep. Cullinane agreed that the trolley is a ““tangible connection to our community's history.””⁵⁷ Moreover, many Bostonians consider the trolley part of their personal history because they have positive place-based memories tied to riding the line. A community member described it as something that ““people consider...as a piece of history, of their identity.””⁵⁸ Additionally, a commuter said that riding on the Mattapan Line is ““like going back in time”” and a ““little treasure.””⁵⁹ In addition to seeing the trolley as a link to the past, many people also see it as a benefit to the city.

Numerous people see the trolley as an irreplaceable, iconic symbol of the city and as a vital aspect of the local economy. An MBTA employee said that people come from all over the country to ride the PCC cars, referring to the line as ““an ambassador for the T [that] creates a lot of good will.””⁶⁰ One local resident expressed that ““the Mattapan Line is the kind of thing that makes Boston Boston...they're part of [the city's] heritage,”” and the city's mayor Marty Walsh, who lives by a stop in Dorchester, expressed that ““the city would lose some of its character if the trolleys were to go.””⁶¹ Furthermore, Bill Forry, editor of the *Dorchester Reporter*, called the trolley a ““unique and cherished part of [the] neighborhood's daily life.””⁶² Politicians have also

⁵⁶ Herman and Mohl, “Is there room for nostalgia at the T?”

⁵⁷ Klark Jessen, “MBTA: \$7.9 Million Investment to Upgrade Mattapan Fleet,” *MassDOT Blog*, February 28, 2017, <https://blog.mass.gov/transportation/mbta/mbta-7-9-million-investment-to-upgrade-mattapan-fleet/>.

⁵⁸ Adam Vaccaro and Margeaux Sippell, “Future of old-time Mattapan trolleys up for debate,” *The Boston Globe*, June 21, 2018, <https://www3.bostonglobe.com/metro/2018/06/21/future-old-time-mattapan-trolleys-for-debate/4gbdjzZtyuQ6XqWudp0SqJ/story.html?arc404=true>.

⁵⁹ Saraya Wintersmith, “Riders Weigh the Future of the Mattapan Trolley,” *WGBH*, April 3, 2019, <https://www.wgbh.org/news/local-news/2019/04/03/riders-weigh-the-future-of-the-mattapan-trolley>.

⁶⁰ Herman and Mohl, “Is there room for nostalgia at the T?”

⁶¹ Herman and Mohl, “Is there room for nostalgia at the T?”

⁶² Herman and Mohl, “Is there room for nostalgia at the T?”

noted the economic importance of the line to their constituents. State Sen. Walter Timilty called it an ““economic and cultural lifeline to the area.””⁶³ Although there was an initial outpouring of support for the streetcars from the local community and their elected officials, organized opposition to changes to the vehicles has quieted down.

The community mobilized when the future of the Mattapan Line seemed to be in jeopardy, but once the MBTA committed to investing financially in the line, many people made peace with the likelihood of replacing the PCC cars. Indeed, the preferred option of the Type 9 LRVs for service between Mattapan and Ashmont gained support from most of the area’s elected officials. Many local politicians who had pushed continued use of the old PCC cars seemed to be changing their minds after the release of the analysis.⁶⁴ State Rep. Cullinane emphasized that riders deserve a ““line that is safe, is accessible to all, and is reliable in all weather conditions”” and said that ““it may be time for a newer fleet of trolleys that can”” accomplish this if the PCC cars cannot.⁶⁵ He also highlighted the fact that the cars are already procured so the money that would have had to go towards obtaining new vehicles could go ““towards improving the stations and improving the experience for the passengers that get on.””⁶⁶ In a statement, Mayor Walsh said that he ““consistently supported a rail option for the corridor that is reliable, accessible, and an icon for the community”” and pushed for ““enhancing the functionality of the line.””⁶⁷ Both Cullinane and Walsh threw their support behind the Type 9 LRVs as the best option if keeping the PCC cars is not viable.

⁶³ Joe DiFazio, “Milton T riders prefer function over charm of vintage trolleys,” *Wicked Local Milton*, April 5, 2019, <https://milton.wickedlocal.com/news/20190405/milton-t-riders-prefer-function-over-charm-of-vintage-trolleys>.

⁶⁴ Colman M. Herman, “Pols shifting stances on Mattapan line,” *CommonWealth Magazine*, January 30, 2019, <https://commonwealthmagazine.org/transportation/pols-shifting-stances-on-mattapan-line/>.

⁶⁵ Herman, “Pols shifting stances on Mattapan line.”

⁶⁶ Wintersmith, “Riders Weigh the Future of the Mattapan Line.”

⁶⁷ Herman, “Pols shifting stances on Mattapan line.”

Many elected officials and local figures also stated their support for Type 9 LRVs as the best and most practical replacement for the PCC cars, stressing that light rail is preferable to buses. Milton Select Board Chair Richard G. Wells Jr. affirmed that bringing in a “more efficient, larger, all-accessible [vehicle]” is “the smart way to go.”⁶⁸ Additionally, Milton Select Board member Kathleen Conlon said that “[the PCC cars] are out of date...there needs to be a more modern system” and that the community wants to preserve light rail.⁶⁹ Much of the support for the Type 9 LRVs comes from their improved accessibility and reliability. In an editorial, Bill Forry expressed that they are the best choice because they “can run on the existing Mattapan-Ashmont tracks and they can be more easily maintained” and the infrastructure upgrades were necessary under any circumstance.⁷⁰ However, he also acknowledged that parting with the PCC cars would be hard because they “are, undeniably, iconic” and suggested engagements on the line for special occasions.⁷¹ The politicians’ desire for vehicles that can provide a better quality of service on the line matches attitudes from the community.

Many commuters and community activists have argued that accessibility and improved service should take precedence over preserving historic charm. One commuter stated that the MBTA should “focus on transporting passengers instead of bowing to nostalgia.”⁷² Even though commuters may enjoy the charisma of the streetcars, many of them would still prefer to have more efficient, dependable vehicles. One rider said that even though the PCC cars are vintage and charming, ““functionality is better,”” while another rider agreed that ““there’s something to be said for the classic trains, but it’s important [that] it works well.””⁷³ Vivien Morris, a

⁶⁸ Wintersmith, “Riders Weigh the Future of the Mattapan Line.”

⁶⁹ Wintersmith, “Riders Weigh the Future of the Mattapan Line.”

⁷⁰ Bill Forry, “Editorial: The MBTA’s trolley plan is a reasonable compromise,” *Dorchester Reporter*, January 30, 2019, <https://www.dotnews.com/columns/2019/editorial-trolley-plan-fair-compromise>.

⁷¹ Forry, “Editorial: The MBTA’s trolley plan is a reasonable compromise.”

⁷² Herman and Mohl, “Is there room for nostalgia at the T?”

⁷³ DiFazio, “Milton T riders prefer function over charm of vintage trolleys.”

Mattapan neighborhood activist, argued that the appeal and history of the vehicles “has to become secondary to that form of transportation being reliable, and as up to date in terms of speed and safety as they can possibly be.”⁷⁴ These community members express a need not only for safer, more dependable vehicles on the Mattapan Line.

At the public meetings in the spring of 2019, many riders from Dorchester, Milton, and Mattapan requested improved infrastructure, emphasizing the urgent need for repairing stations. Moreover, multiple people commented that, whatever the outcome of the decision-making process, they would like as little disruption to the service as possible during construction. Matters raised by the public in the meetings include “an inaccessible and tumbledown station at Valley Road, a closed station at Milton, lack of stop sign at Central Avenue, and no coordination between the Red Line and the trolley leading to sometimes a 20-minute wait at Ashmont Station.”⁷⁵ Some riders noted that heating inside the vehicles is lacking and that rides are sometimes bumpy.⁷⁶ Commuters also said they had difficulty traversing the system as a result of inaccessible stations. Although most of the public reaction to the probable replacement of the PCC cars was in support if it meant better service and increased reliability and accessibility, some people had hesitations around the process of removing the current vehicles from service.

While most commuters seem resigned to the eventual replacement of the historic trolley cars, some people were apprehensive about the process of switching vehicles and a few others maintained that they would like to retain the PCC cars on the line. At the public meetings, numerous riders were concerned with the cultural losses that would accompany the potential disappearance of the PCC cars and asked for them to be preserved as heritage fleet. Several

⁷⁴ Vaccaro and Sippell, “Future of old-time Mattapan trolleys up for debate.”

⁷⁵ Zhang, “T riders give their input on trolley line’s future at Mattapan meeting.”

⁷⁶ Yukun Zhang, “Mattapan-Ashmont trolley riders react to MBTA plan,” *Dorchester Reporter*, January 29, 2019, <https://www.dotnews.com/2019/mattapan-ashmont-trolley-riders-react-mbta-plan>.

people asked for the new vehicle to “capture some of the unique design” of the trolley, to which the MBTA suggested a community engagement process to determine how to incorporate the PCC cars aesthetically into the new design.⁷⁷ Furthermore, there were some people who said they did not understand why the PCC cars had to be replaced as they had no problems with them. Boston City Councilor Campbell affirmed her support for keeping the “historic trolley line with the trolleys as the service vehicles.”⁷⁸ However, these voices were a minority compared with people who would prefer more dependable, accessible light rail vehicles.

One point in common between all community members is a rejection of the option of using buses on the Mattapan Line, an opinion which has remained steady since 2016. At the public meetings, anti-bus riders cited concerns of “pollution, speed, and comfort,” echoed by State Rep. Cullinane, who emphasized that there is no doubt “where the community stands” with not wanting buses.⁷⁹ Mattapan residents stated that the bus offers longer commutes than the Mattapan Trolley as a result of traffic. Rep. Cullinane added that “Mattapan residents already have one of the longest commutes in Boston, and they’re not interested in making it on newer shuttle buses,” calling the trolley an “institution in the community.”⁸⁰ Rafael Mares, an attorney, described Mattapan as a “densely populated community of color generally underserved for transit” and said that replacing trolley service with a bus would be “code for cheaper and not as good as the previous service.”⁸¹ Due to the persistent fierce community opposition to

⁷⁷ MBTA, “Mattapan Line Transformation – Public Comments,” (presentation), <https://cdn.mbta.com/sites/default/files/projects/mattapan-high-speed-line/spring2019-mattapan-transformation-public-comments-accessible.pdf>.

⁷⁸ Herman, “Pols shifting stances on Mattapan line.”

⁷⁹ Zhang, “Mattapan-Ashmont trolley riders react to MBTA plan.”

⁸⁰ Breana Pitts, “Pitts Stop: Are Mattapan Trolleys Worth It Anymore?” *CBS Boston*, April 3, 2017, <https://boston.cbslocal.com/2017/04/03/mattapan-trolleys-mbta-breana-pitts-stop-wbzl/>.

⁸¹ Chris Burrell, “Loyal riders of Mattapan trolley hope rail service can be saved,” *The Patriot Ledger*, February 2, 2016, <https://www.patriotledger.com/news/20160202/loyal-riders-of-mattapan-trolley-hope-rail-service-can-be-saved>.

buses, it is highly unlikely that the MBTA would move forward with that option. The resistance to buses also speaks to transit inequalities in Boston that negatively affect Mattapan residents.

Although many saw the probable choice of the Type 9 LRVs as positive, several people expressed a dislike for receiving trains secondhand from the Green Line because Mattapan is historically overlooked for receiving services and amenities. Notably, Donovan Birch Jr., a Mattapan native who lives in Dorchester, wrote a blog post criticizing the MBTA for waiting so long to give the community something new. Specifically, he disapproved of receiving “hand-me-down trains” that would continue “the second class treatment of constituents” in a district that has been “historically neglected.”⁸² He also said it was “symbolically disrespectful” that three generations of his family have seen the same train.⁸³ The unfair treatment of transit in Mattapan is a theme that is also present in a debate on a Universal Hub thread, which is a Boston-specific discussion website. In a thread about the PCC cars, someone asked “why is the MBTA sticking the minority community with these ancient, needlessly expensive old things rather than upgrading to modern vehicles?”⁸⁴ These comments point to a community-wide distrust of the MBTA and of its’ ability to follow through on important issues.

During the process of studying the future prospects for the Mattapan Line, many community members and State Rep. Cullinane criticized the MBTA for a lack of transparency and poor communication. The MBTA held several public meetings in the spring of 2017 and then did not provide any more updates until the release of the study, almost three years after the issue was first raised. In December 2018, shortly before the release of the MBTA study, State

⁸² Donovan Birch Jr., “Going Nowhere,” July 23, 2019, <https://donovanbirchjr.com/2019/07/23/going-nowhere/>.

⁸³ Wintersmith, “Riders Weigh the Future of the Mattapan Line.”

⁸⁴ Anon, “Ending Mattapan trolleys may only be a trial balloon, but fans taking no chances,” Universal Hub, January 13, 2016, <https://www.universalhub.com/2016/ending-mattapan-trolleys-may-only-be-trial-balloon#comment-498697>.

Rep. Cullinane wrote a letter expressing frustration and disappointment at the MBTA's lack of community meetings and communication. He cited a commuter and resident petition for constituents that he launched, which was signed by 2,000 local individuals to "save the Mattapan Trolley," and argued that it is "vital for this important conversation on transit equity to remain at the forefront."⁸⁵ He then called the follow up conversations and updates "long overdue" and criticized the delay of the findings, without any public explanation, for causing "uncertainty, skepticism and frustration" in the community.⁸⁶ These criticisms about the trustworthiness of the MBTA are shared by many local residents.

During the 2019 public meetings, many people expressed both doubts that the MBTA would keep its word about the process and concerns about the pace for the procurement of new vehicles. The slow pace for the engineering and design process – two to three years – and new stations – five to seven years – troubled multiple people. A Mattapan community activist said that "I'm hearing the same story I heard when [the T] renovated the Mattapan station...I have grandkids who since then have entered college...how much longer will we hear this over and over and over again?"⁸⁷ Other people commented on the absence of transit equity, namely the unequal distribution of public transit, in Mattapan. One resident pointed to a lack of transit access, saying "why is this community always last?" and "the Mattapan trolley has been ignored for so long."⁸⁸ Others echoed concerns that the MBTA is untrustworthy and has failed to appropriately prioritize the community. One person asked for the MBTA to "assure the...community that [their] preferred option will be the final choice," to which the T replied that

⁸⁵ Dan Cullinane, "Re: The Mattapan Trolley Line," <https://www.dotnews.com/files/Rep%20Cullinane%20Letter%20to%20Governor%20Baker%20RE%20MBTA%20Mattapan%20Trolley%20Study%20%26%20Public%20Dialogue%2012.18.18.pdf>.

⁸⁶ Cullinane, "Re The Mattapan Trolley Line."

⁸⁷ Zhang, "T riders give their input on trolley line's future at Mattapan meeting."

⁸⁸ MBTA, "Mattapan Line Transformation – Public Comments."

the agency “values the community input” and solicited feedback and comments via email.⁸⁹

These comments point to widespread community distrust of the MBTA and frustration with insufficient transit service in Mattapan.

The need for increased accessibility and reliability of the area’s public transit speaks to the problem of transit inequity in Boston. This is part of a history of structural inequalities and a lack of resources for Mattapan specifically. Poor communication and lack of transparency from the MBTA continues community distrust of governmental structures, which began with racist housing decisions that created a segregated, disadvantaged neighborhood. While some people love the PCC cars, the fight to keep them was motivated by fear that the line would be replaced outright with substandard bus service. Additionally, the reluctance of some community members to accept used vehicles for the line exposes frustration over how Mattapan’s needs are often met last. Therefore, the reactions from the community about the proposed changes to the Mattapan Line can be explained by the legacy of discriminatory practices that created unequal opportunities for Mattapan residents.

⁸⁹ MBTA, “Mattapan Line Transformation – Public Comments.”

Chapter 3

Transit Inequity: Structural Disinvestment in Mattapan

The Mattapan community remains distrustful of the MBTA because of a long history of structural inequalities in the neighborhood perpetuated by public agencies. Thus, a legacy of doubt and cynicism characterizes the relationships between Mattapan, as well as Dorchester, and governmental agencies. This began with a federal housing program, the Boston Banks Urban Renewal Group, BBURG, that was designed to provide loans for black homebuyers unable to find housing but ended up backfiring as a result of racist real estate processes. BBURG caused racial segregation, a high rate of foreclosures, and a period of economic decline, the effects of which can still be seen in Mattapan. These patterns of disinvestment have repeated themselves in current issues of transit equity in the neighborhood. Buses are frequently slow and unreliable in the area, posing problems for Mattapan and Dorchester residents, who are disproportionately more likely to need to use public transit for mobility due to their socioeconomic characteristics. Even steps in the right direction, like the MBTA Better Bus Project and the newly expanded commuter rail service in the form of the Blue Hill Avenue Station in Mattapan, have a long way to go to fix the area's subpar public transit. The disenfranchisement of Mattapan is deeply embedded and the area both needs and deserves better public transit options.

When massive suburbanization took place in the United States after World War II, white Bostonians moved out of the city while de facto racial segregation and employment discrimination spatially confined black Bostonians. The city's black residents were therefore limited to living in older urban neighborhoods and adjoining "spillover" areas.⁹⁰ Redlining, the "process of making it difficult or impossible for people in certain areas to access mortgage

⁹⁰ Marilynn S. Johnson, *The New Bostonians: How Immigrants Have Transformed the Metro Area since the 1960s* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2015), 87.

financing,” made it even harder for black Bostonians to buy homes in the city because many of them lived in neighborhoods that had received poor ratings.⁹¹ Federal programs also molded the settlement of Caribbean and African immigrants in Boston. Namely, most migrants from the Caribbean and Cape Verde Islands did not qualify for federal refugee programs, so they tended to settle in whatever neighborhoods were available to “black renters and home buyers in a racially segregated market.”⁹² Discriminatory housing policies thus controlled the settlement of black Bostonians.

One specific federal program, designed to aid black renters and home buyers, ended up backfiring considerably and completely changed the population of Mattapan in the span of several years. From 1968 to 1972, a federally backed home loan program, run by a group of local banks known as BBURG, expanded the extent of black settlement to an area that included part of Dorchester and all of Mattapan.⁹³ The city responded to complaints by civil rights groups of racial discrimination in mortgage lending by working with BBURG to make “low-interest” home loans available to black buyers who had “little access to conventional financing” because of discrimination and redlining.⁹⁴ The choice of Dorchester and Mattapan as being suitable locations for black residents who needed housing was deliberate. Agents of the federal government’s Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC) had assigned a “C” grade to Mattapan and Dorchester in 1940, stating that the neighborhoods were “definitely declining” as characterized by the “obsolescence [and] infiltration” of a “lower grade” Jewish population.⁹⁵ Indeed, Mattapan was chosen as the center of the BBURG program due to its “lack of political

⁹¹ Robert K. Nelson, LaDale Winling, Richard Marciano, Nathan Connolly, et al., “Mapping Inequality,” *American Panorama*, ed. Robert K. Nelson and Edward L. Ayers, accessed May 8, 2020, <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=5/39.1/-94.58&text=intro>.

⁹² Johnson, *The New Bostonians*, 81.

⁹³ Johnson 81.

⁹⁴ Johnson 81.

⁹⁵ Nelson, Winling, Marciano, Connolly, et al., “Mapping Inequality.”

clout;” its border with Roxbury, a predominantly black neighborhood; and its status as the heart of Boston’s Jewish community, as Jews were seen as being ““being more willing to accept the problems of minorities.””⁹⁶ Although founded on racist ideology, the program was in theory a suitable way of providing much needed housing to Boston’s growing black population, but it was corrupted by real estate agents looking to gain profit.

Real estate agents used the discriminatory practice of blockbusting to convince Jewish homeowners to leave Mattapan and flee to the suburbs. This encouraged “panic selling” by white homeowners who feared racial transition, heightening tensions between Jews and African Americans.⁹⁷ As a result, BBURG turned into a wave of blockbusting, in which real estate agents exploited racist sentiments to buy houses “relatively cheaply” and then resell them at a “considerable markup to black families, many of whom [were] desperate to own their first home.”⁹⁸ Thus, BBURG pitted two different minority groups against each other in the struggle to find housing in the Boston area. The program pushed out Jewish residents, who sold their homes to corrupt speculators for less than market value, while black homebuyers paid inflated prices for the same home.⁹⁹ Once black residents moved into their new neighborhood, however, there were further problems that made it hard for them to keep their houses.

BBURG proved to have additional problems besides the ways in which it enabled real estate agents to build on racist fears, which ultimately led to a high rate of foreclosures. One problem with the program was that the banks did not adequately screen the buyers, many of

⁹⁶ Jim Vrabel, “The Illusion of Inclusion and Assault by Acronyms,” in *A People's History of the New Boston* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2014), 97.

⁹⁷ Johnson 81.

⁹⁸ Neil Smith, “Toward a Theory of Gentrification A Back to the City Movement by Capital, not People,” *Journal of the American Planning Association* 45, no. 4 (1979): 544.

⁹⁹ Hillel Levine and Lawrence Harmon, *The Death of an American Jewish Community: a tragedy of good intentions* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), 7.

whom would not have qualified for conventional loans.¹⁰⁰ Adding to this, the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) frequently failed to make sure that necessary home repairs were made prior to the sales, which meant that once new owners moved in, the banks refused to give them home repair loans since they were not FHA guaranteed, unlike mortgages.¹⁰¹ This proved to be disastrous for the new owners who were the victims of bank-initiated “fast foreclosures” once they fell behind on their payments.¹⁰² Mattapan gained a disgraceful reputation as vacant lots pockmarked a formerly middle-class neighborhood. By 1974, half of the new families had lost their Mattapan homes through foreclosure, as homes “fell into disrepair, were abandoned, and torn down.”¹⁰³ When a U.S. Senate subcommittee came to the neighborhood to investigate what went wrong with BBURG, they termed it a “‘ghetto enlargement’ program.”¹⁰⁴ By the time the program ended, Mattapan was an almost entirely black community and became increasingly underserved.

BBURG caused a complete switch between population groups as black residents replaced an entire Jewish community and it created mounting deterioration and abandonment. In the early 1950s, more than 90,000 Jews had lived in a three-square-mile area including Dorchester and Mattapan, but by 1973, there were fewer than 2,500 Jewish residents in the same area.¹⁰⁵ The Jewish flight from Mattapan echoed a trend in Boston’s overall population: white Bostonians moved to the suburbs while southern black workers moved into the central city during the Great Migration. From 1950 to 1960, the city’s population dropped from 801,000 to 697,000 while the number of black residents almost doubled from 40,000 to 75,000.¹⁰⁶ Mattapan soon became the

¹⁰⁰ Vrabel, “The Illusion of Inclusion and Assault by Acronyms,” 98.

¹⁰¹ Vrabel 98.

¹⁰² Vrabel 98.

¹⁰³ Vrabel 99.

¹⁰⁴ Vrabel 99.

¹⁰⁵ Levine and Harmon, *The Death of an American Jewish Community*, 12.

¹⁰⁶ Levine and Harmon 75.

center of Boston's Haitian community, as it went from 99 percent white in 1960 to 85 percent black by 1975.¹⁰⁷ Cape Verdean and West Indian migrants settled in Dorchester and Mattapan, thus creating space for "distinctive Afro-Caribbean and Cape Verdean communities and businesses."¹⁰⁸ While these neighborhoods allowed for vibrant, tight-knit ethnic communities to come together, they are also historically disinvested. This population change meant that Boston began putting more money into linking itself to its suburbs, symbolized by the expansion of the commuter rail, and less money into the inner-city neighborhoods.

The eventual result of BBURG was that black Bostonians, while finding much-needed housing in Mattapan and Dorchester, also moved into extremely racially segregated and underserved communities. Subsequent surveys of black homeowners in Mattapan found that they experienced significant levels of dissatisfaction with their new neighborhood. Most residents who had arrived because of BBURG felt they had failed to get a fresh start, as they had no equity due to little or no down payment, and had instead taken on the same problems they experienced in the "urban renewal areas of Roxbury."¹⁰⁹ Many low-income BBURG buyers were torn between fixing their homes and not paying their mortgages, which led to foreclosure, or paying their mortgages and letting their homes fall into disrepair, which led to further neighborhood blight.¹¹⁰ Mattapan is still waiting for a program promoting home ownership to work, as it was one of the Boston communities that was hardest hit by the 2008 subprime mortgage loan scandal.¹¹¹ Thus, racist housing decisions had a large impact on the lives of many black residents in Mattapan and scarred the community.

¹⁰⁷ Johnson 82.

¹⁰⁸ Johnson 82.

¹⁰⁹ Levine and Harmon 276.

¹¹⁰ Levine and Harmon 323.

¹¹¹ Vrabell 223.

In addition to being left out of important housing decisions, Mattapan and Dorchester residents were also left out of transportation decisions, leaving them without adequate public transit. After “bearing the brunt of the prevailing top-down approach to urban renewal for two decades,” a coalition of Boston-area activists were key in stopping the expansion of the interstate highway system through Dorchester and other communities in the 1970s.¹¹² While the Southwest Expressway’s elimination was a significant success, it also “contributed to a lower level of access to regional opportunities” for residents, partly because the state decided to relocate the Orange Line into the land that was obtained and partially cleared for the Southwest Expressway.¹¹³ This left a huge gap with no public transit in between the Orange and Red Lines in Mattapan and parts of Dorchester. This area, in which many people live more than a half-mile from the nearest rapid transit station, coincides with the “location of the city’s highest concentration of minority, low-income, and transit-dependent residents.”¹¹⁴ The area also has the biggest gap in the city between demand and service and access to jobs is low because of the lack of rapid service. Although the MBTA provides bus service in Dorchester and Mattapan, “the majority of the service is very slow, and many routes are overcrowded and have poor reliability.”¹¹⁵ Black residents in Mattapan and Dorchester therefore have less access to reliable transportation, which continues the legacy of disenfranchisement.

The way public transit in Mattapan and Dorchester does not meet the needs of its riders is part of a citywide problem, as black workers in Boston have worse commutes than white workers. Using data collected between 2005 and 2009 by the U.S. Census, a 2012 study from

¹¹² MassDOT, “Roxbury-Dorchester-Mattapan Transit Needs Study,” September 2012, <https://archives.lib.state.ma.us/bitstream/handle/2452/783909/on1030586174.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

¹¹³ MassDOT, “Roxbury-Dorchester-Mattapan Transit Needs Study.”

¹¹⁴ MassDOT, “Roxbury-Dorchester-Mattapan Transit Needs Study

¹¹⁵ MBTA, “Better Bus Project: Market Analysis 2018,” <https://cdn.mbta.com/sites/default/files/projects/betterbus/documents/mbta-better-bus-project-market-analysis-2018.pdf>.

Northeastern University's Dukakis Center for Urban and Regional Policy found that black bus riders have the longest commute among Greater Boston workers, exceeding 46 minutes each way, while white commuters who drive have the shortest, averaging less than 27 minutes each way.¹¹⁶ Even among those who take the same mode of commuting, white workers have shorter trips, and black commuters spend an extra 66 hours a year, or 80 more minutes per week, “waiting, riding, and transferring” than white bus riders.¹¹⁷ This is partly because affordable housing, which is already scarce in Boston, is often far away from subway and rail stations, leaving low-income communities of color with long commutes. Moreover, Boston's transit system was designed to “funnel commuters toward downtown,” meaning that it is less convenient to connect to “the service and physical-labor jobs not concentrated downtown,” mostly requiring “longer, slower bus rides, often with transfers.”¹¹⁸ The disparity in commuting times represents a large amount of time that black workers could spend doing other things, like running errands, doing household finances, or spending time with family. Thus, black workers are left at a social, systemic disadvantage, made worse by the fact that they are more likely to be heavily dependent on public transit to get to work.

Residents of Mattapan and Dorchester are more likely to need to use public transit, due to their socio-economic characteristics, but the public transit available to them is not sufficient. Dorchester and Mattapan have high concentrations of low-income residents and minority, notably black residents, as well as some of the highest levels of population-based demand, including high shares of youth population.¹¹⁹ Residents of these neighborhoods already have a

¹¹⁶ Eric Moskowitz, “Wide racial gap exists on speed of Boston-area commutes,” *Boston.com*, November 23, 2012, <https://www.boston.com/news/local-news/2012/11/23/wide-racial-gap-exists-on-speed-of-boston-area-commutes>.

¹¹⁷ Moskowitz, “Wide racial gap exists on speed of Boston-area commutes.”

¹¹⁸ Moskowitz, “Wide racial gap exists on speed of Boston-area commutes.”

¹¹⁹ MBTA, “Better Bus Project: Market Analysis 2018.”

higher propensity to use public transit, and entry-level jobs are often inaccessible because of a lack of feasible transportation. Dorchester and Mattapan have the highest concentrations of residents in Boston who work non-traditional hours at food service or retail jobs.¹²⁰ Although these workers are more likely to need to use public transit, it is frequently unavailable to them at the times they need. For example, the MBTA has “few [bus] routes that operate frequently from at least 7:00 AM to 10:00 PM.”¹²¹ More than 50% of jobs within the T service area are “not accessible via a bus route offering all-day service,” which hurts low-income people, who make up 42% of bus users, “significantly higher than the subway’s rate of 26 percent and the commuter rails 7 percent.”¹²² The low-income, working-class population of color in Boston is reliant on public transit, but the service they receive is generally inadequate.

As a result of widespread disinvestment in the area and unreliable service, Mattapan residents have the worst commutes of any neighborhood in Boston. A 2016 report from the Boston Planning & Development Agency (BPDA) highlighted the long commutes that Mattapan’s resident workers face. The report stated that 24% of Mattapan workers “commute more than an hour each way; 40.9% commute between 30-59 minutes each way.”¹²³ Additionally, the neighborhood has the lowest ratio of jobs to worker of any Boston neighborhood, as only 1.4% of Mattapan resident workers work in Mattapan.¹²⁴ Consequently, Mattapan’s residents are more likely to endure incredibly long commutes just to get to their jobs outside of the neighborhood. Mattapan resident Gael Henville prefers to run from her home to

¹²⁰ MBTA, “Better Bus Project: Market Analysis 2018.”

¹²¹ MBTA, “Better Bus Project: Market Analysis 2018.”

¹²² George Barker, “MBTA’s Better Bus Project could boost low-income communities,” *The Huntington News*, February 27, 2019, <https://huntnewsnu.com/58193/city-pulse/mbtas-better-bus-project-could-boost-low-income-communities/>.

¹²³ BPDA, “Commuter flows: inequity in transportation and housing,” May 16, 2019, <https://g-mnc.org/2019/05/16/commuter-flows-inequity-in-transportation-and-housing/>.

¹²⁴ BPDA, “Commuter flows: inequity in transportation and housing.”

work in Back Bay, a neighborhood in downtown Boston, which underlines just how inefficient commuting from Mattapan is. Henville says that ““running takes [her] 55 minutes on a great day; if [she] was taking either a bus or the subway it would take an hour and a half to go a total of 6 miles.””¹²⁵ This anecdote is not unique – Mattapan’s inadequate public transit is a common problem for its commuters.

The lack of reliable public transit in Mattapan harms the community in many ways, including by preventing them from making long-term economic gains. Commuting times have a greater impact on intergenerational mobility than any other environmental factor, as explored in a 2014 study by researchers at Harvard and Berkeley.¹²⁶ Thus, the greater a resident’s commute is, the more likely they are to be unable to escape a cycle of poverty. The most effective way to make jobs more accessible would be to “make service faster, including measures such as transit priority, stop consolidation and more direct route alignments.”¹²⁷ Improving public transit access to jobs could increase economic opportunities in the neighborhoods where needs are greatest, such as Mattapan. Problems with transit inequity are not unique to Boston, as black communities all over the United States live in hyper segregated areas and are deprived of access to public transportation.

Cities like New York also experience unequal public transit access and commutes, and researchers have suggested that bus rapid transit (BRT) could help solve the nationwide problem of transit inequity. Research by New York City’s Pratt Center for Community Development found that “more than 750,000 workers living within the city limits commuted an hour or more

¹²⁵ BPDA, “Commuter flows: inequity in transportation and housing.”

¹²⁶ Raj Cherry, Nathaniel Hendren, Patrick Kline, and Emmanuel Saez, “Where is the Land of Opportunity? The Geography of Intergenerational Mobility in the United States,” June 2014, https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/hendren/files/mobility_geo.pdf.

¹²⁷ MBTA, “Better Bus Project: Market Analysis 2018.”

each way” and that “black people spent 22 more minutes per day commuting than whites.”¹²⁸

Since subways come with long construction times and often prohibitively high costs, Pratt researchers suggested bus rapid transit (BRT) as a cheaper solution to transit inequity. With bus rapid transit, buses “travel in dedicated lanes, have the power to turn traffic lights green, and do not linger at stops because customers pay before boarding.”¹²⁹ Currently, Boston does not have any BRT, but the MBTA is exploring options for improving the system’s buses in order to reduce the city’s notorious traffic. Boston’s Silver Line is sometimes described as bus rapid transit, but it does not have most of the “defining features needed to fit that category,” namely having riders pay before boarding.¹³⁰ Bus service all over the city is widely criticized for being slow.

There is a high demand in Mattapan for improved bus service and the heavily utilized Route 28 bus is a representation of inadequate transit and a historical lack of resources for the disinvested community. The Route 28 bus, which runs through the heart of Mattapan, has become a “slow-moving symbol of the lack of easy access to the rest of the city” for a “community with a struggling economic center.”¹³¹ Many Mattapan residents who do not live near a Mattapan Trolley stop rely on the bus as their only public transit or as a connection to the subway. Furthermore, even commuters who live near a trolley stop must sometimes use the bus on the weekends, when the Mattapan Line runs less frequent service. State Rep. Russell Holmes, who represents the Massachusetts 6th District, which includes part of Mattapan and Dorchester, criticized the insufficient bus service and called for a discussion of the fact that there are still

¹²⁸ Moskowitz, “Wide racial gap exists on speed of Boston-area commutes.”

¹²⁹ Moskowitz, “Wide racial gap exists on speed of Boston-area commutes.”

¹³⁰ Moskowitz, “Wide racial gap exists on speed of Boston-area commutes.”

¹³¹ Meghan E. Irons, “Underserved in transit, Mattapan wants a lift,” *The Boston Globe*, July 25, 2016, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2016/07/25/mattapan-transportation-island-can-fixed/TbVKEONzFvDxroVe21iC8K/story.html>.

“folks in the heart of the African-American community without a major transportation hub.”¹³²

He added that historically “residents in more affluent neighborhoods were given more and better options for public transit” and stated that now additional resources should be “devoted to Mattapan and other underserved communities.”¹³³ Although Mattapan residents want better bus service, tension between the MBTA and the community has prevented past proposals for changes to the bus system from implementation.

The MBTA proposed bus rapid transit in Mattapan in 2009, but the community, which remains distrustful of government projects in their neighborhood, opposed it. The 28X Proposal was a BRT line that would have replaced the existing Route 28 bus using funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). It was a “well-intentioned effort to target improvements where they were arguably most needed,” since the Route 28 bus has the highest ridership rates out of all MBTA bus routes but is one of the slowest.¹³⁴ However, the MBTA was unable to get enough public support to implement it. The proposal failed because of “residents’ unfamiliarity with the idea, the unfamiliarity with the communities on the part of some of the transportation planners, and the rapid pace required by ARRA,” which recalled for many “previous top-down government planning efforts.”¹³⁵ This is “indicative of the disconnect between Mattapan and the city, long criticized for poor outreach to its low-income communities.”¹³⁶ While the 28X Proposal did not succeed because of community skepticism about government planning, there are current efforts to improve the bus system that could fare better.

¹³² Irons, “Underserved in transit, Mattapan wants a lift.”

¹³³ Irons, “Underserved in transit, Mattapan wants a lift.”

¹³⁴ MassDOT, “Roxbury-Dorchester-Mattapan Transit Needs Study.”

¹³⁵ MassDOT, “Roxbury-Dorchester-Mattapan Transit Needs Study.”

¹³⁶ Irons, “Underserved in transit, Mattapan wants a lift.”

In September 2019, the MBTA began implementing the Better Bus Project (BBP), which involves multiple service changes to improve the area's sprawling bus network. The Better Bus Project has several components: "continuous improvement, research and analysis, route changes, investment strategy, and a network redesign."¹³⁷ The MBTA is working on "securing funding for future, long-term changes...like adding more operators to the busiest routes to increase off-peak service" and "resolving outdated and repetitive bus routes, hoping to consolidate routes to improve service."¹³⁸ Another aspect of the project is creating a new bus network that better meets the needs of the region, through methods like exploring dedicated bus lanes and traffic signal priority systems in nearby towns. Changing demographics, new employment districts, and increased traffic congestion have changed the region's traffic patterns in recent years, highlighting a need for more efficient buses. Service changes also include piloting more frequent service from 10 PM to midnight, more trips after 12:30 AM, and more early morning service, the latter of which became permanent in December 2019.¹³⁹ There has not been much analysis of how helpful the BBP changes have been since the program is still underway, but increased service late at night and in the early morning is a promising step toward more transit opportunities for working class communities of color.

Another initiative for increasing economic opportunities for working class and low-income people in the city is City Councilor Michelle Wu's proposal to make MBTA service completely free, starting with the Route 28 bus. In March 2019, she wrote an editorial calling for the agency to "adopt a pilot program making the 28 route fare-free" as part of "free resident fares

¹³⁷ MBTA, "Better Bus Project," <https://www.mbta.com/projects/better-bus-project>.

¹³⁸ Barker, "MBTA's Better Bus Project could boost low-income communities."

¹³⁹ MBTA, "Better Bus Project," <https://www.mbta.com/projects/better-bus-project>.

on bus routes where the majority of riders are low-income residents.”¹⁴⁰ She argued in favor of eliminating financial barriers to public transit because ““geographic mobility underlies economic mobility”” and because cities that have adopted free public transportation have ““benefited from a surge in transit equity, with more low-income residents, seniors, and youth using transit to access opportunities.”¹⁴¹ Wu also affirmed that removing the barrier of “cost and unreliability” of public transit would “unleash the full potential of [the] workforce and talent from every neighborhood” and “establish a right to mobility.”¹⁴² Wu’s ambitious proposal speaks directly to the issues that affect the lives of Mattapan and Dorchester residents, but thus far, it has unfortunately gone nowhere, likely due to current financial struggles at the MBTA. While the Route 28 bus is a powerful symbol of unreliable and slow bus service, most buses in the T system provide inadequate service.

Particularly when compared to other forms of public transit, the insufficiency of Boston’s bus service is striking, with widespread unreliability that hurts the city’s vulnerable populations. The reliability of buses lags far behind the commuter rail and subway lines, where “trains arrive on schedule at a rate approaching 90 percent.”¹⁴³ Buses meet the “T’s own reliability targets of 75 percent just 14 percent of that time, with ‘non-key’ routes meeting targets only 9 percent of the time.”¹⁴⁴ Part of the unreliability of the buses is caused by highly congested streets, since most of the city does not have dedicated bus lanes. In total, 86% of the MBTA’s bus routes have below standard reliability, and only 26 of the 176 bus routes provide frequent service, defined as

¹⁴⁰ Adrian Walker, “Riding the 28 bus – the line that connects Boston’s neighborhoods. Or should,” *The Boston Globe*, March 26, 2019, <https://g-mnc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Riding-the-28-bus-%E2%80%94-the-line-that-connects-Boston%E2%80%99s-neighborhoods.-Or-should-The-Boston-Globe.pdf>.

¹⁴¹ Michelle Wu, “Forget fare hikes – make the T free,” *The Boston Globe*, January 31, 2019, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/2019/01/31/opinion-michelle-forget-fare-hikes-make-free/vJpKVu6Rft2C4Esi50mB5M/story.html>.

¹⁴² Wu, “Forget fare hikes – make the T free.”

¹⁴³ Barker, “MBTA’s Better Bus Project could boost low-income communities.”

¹⁴⁴ Barker, “MBTA’s Better Bus Project could boost low-income communities.”

“every 15 minutes or better from early morning to mid-evening.”¹⁴⁵ Since the bus is the MBTA’s cheapest transit option, it is used regularly by people who do not have the means to use other forms of transportation. 39% of MBTA bus users do not have any cars in their household, “while another 21 percent have less than one car for every two people in a household,” so they do not have other viable methods of commuting.¹⁴⁶ In contrast, the subway and commuter rail are used more by suburbanites who likely have other means of getting to work. The commuter rail especially has long been largely absent from working class communities of color in Boston.

For years, trains on the Fairmount Line, one of the MBTA commuter rail routes, ran through Mattapan with no stops on their journey to downtown Boston. However, the settlement for a 2005 lawsuit against the MBTA and other state agencies for “failure to comply with a Big Dig agreement funding rail projects in Dorchester, Roxbury, and Mattapan” guaranteed improvements on the Fairmount Line.¹⁴⁷ The Big Dig was an enormous infrastructure project that redirected the Central Artery of Interstate 93 – the highway that runs through the middle of downtown Boston – into an underground tunnel. In the process, it increased air pollution, and to mitigate the effects, the state promised four additional stations on the Fairmount Line – the last of which was the Blue Hill Avenue stop in Mattapan.¹⁴⁸ The MBTA has faced criticism for canceled trains on the Fairmount Line, which serves a higher proportion of minority riders than the other commuter rail lines.¹⁴⁹ The Federal Transit Administration determined in May 2017 that, while the MBTA did not violate civil rights guidelines, it was “‘concerned’ with

¹⁴⁵ MBTA, “Better Bus Project: State of the Bus System, 2018.”

¹⁴⁶ Barker, “MBTA’s Better Bus Project could boost low-income communities.”

¹⁴⁷ Jennifer Smith, “Mattapan trolley, rail station clear key hurdle.”

¹⁴⁸ Jennifer Smith, “Mattapan trolley, rail station clear key hurdle.”

¹⁴⁹ Breanne Kovatch, “Commuters in Mattapan welcome new Blue Hill Avenue rail station,” *The Boston Globe*, February 28, 2019, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2019/02/28/new-commuter-rail-station-blue-hill-avenue-opens-makes-commute-shorter/bkvfhkp2hHppUnsbTZwK2L/story.html>.

cancellations on certain lines because the train cars were being used elsewhere.”¹⁵⁰ When the MBTA confirmed funding for the Blue Hill Avenue station, many community activists praised the decision as a way of righting the wrongs that have been done to Mattapan.

For many advocates, the Blue Hill Avenue Station, which opened in February 2019, symbolizes a step toward transit equity in underserved Mattapan. Mattapan residents, “disproportionately black and poor,” have long “perceived commuter rail as the domain of rich white suburbanites.”¹⁵¹ Thus, opening up access to the commuter rail for communities of color is significant. State Rep. Holmes, who is black and who grew up in Mattapan, said that as a child, he ““didn’t think that train was for [the community]”” because ““the only people on that train were white.””¹⁵² He sees the Blue Hill Avenue Station as a way to make Mattapan ““become a destination”” so that ““folks can arrive to the community as a place to go, not just a place to leave from.””¹⁵³ Community activists also praised the fact that the commuter rail would cut down on commuting times in Mattapan. Officials estimate that it takes about 45 minutes or longer to reach downtown Boston from Mattapan, “a conservative estimate that does not include wait time,” depending on bus or train, and the new station promised to cut that trip to about 23 minutes.¹⁵⁴ At the station’s inauguration, State Rep. Cullinane pointed out that ““access to opportunity is everything...if it takes too long to get there, then that opportunity is not real.””¹⁵⁵ Although the

¹⁵⁰ Kovatch, “Commuters in Mattapan welcome new Blue Hill Avenue rail station.”

¹⁵¹ Alon Levy, “Boston’s Fairmount Line Could Be a National Model for Commuter Rail, But It’s Not There Yet,” *Streetsblog USA*, July 31, 2017, <https://usa.streetsblog.org/2017/07/31/bostons-fairmount-line-could-be-a-national-model-for-commuter-rail-but-its-not-there-yet/>.

¹⁵² Kovatch, “Commuters in Mattapan welcome new Blue Hill Avenue rail station.”

¹⁵³ Kovatch, “Commuters in Mattapan welcome new Blue Hill Avenue rail station.”

¹⁵⁴ Jennifer Smith, “Blue Hill Ave. station and Mattapan trolley investment are cited in MassDOT capital planning presentation,” *Dorchester Reporter*, March 24, 2016, <https://www.dotnews.com/2016/blue-hill-ave-station-and-mattapan-trolley-investment-are-cited-massdo>.

¹⁵⁵ Jennifer Smith, “Blue Hill Ave. station and Mattapan trolley investment are cited in MassDOT capital planning presentation.”

Blue Hill Avenue Station has reduced commuting times from Mattapan to downtown Boston, the Fairmount Line has yet to deliver all the benefits of rapid transit.

The Fairmount Line is a step in the right direction for the MBTA, but its full potential has not been realized yet because of complications with the fare structure and an infrequent schedule. Even though the MBTA added weekday peak and off-peak trips and all-day weekend service, the trains still operate relatively infrequently.¹⁵⁶ On the Fairmount Line, trains run every 40-50 minutes during rush hour service and every hour during off-peak service.¹⁵⁷ Moreover, the fare structure for the line is complicated, including the fact that Charlie Cards are not accepted and, unlike subway fares, tickets for the commuter rail do not include a free transfer to another MBTA service. Student pass options are “confusing to understand and often do not provide discounts” for the Fairmount Line.”¹⁵⁸ However, there are aspects of the line that show significant improvements in providing access to underserved communities. Most of the stations on the Fairmount Line have the same fare prices as the MBTA subway lines, unlike the rest of the commuter rail, which is prohibitively expensive.¹⁵⁹ Additionally, there is a pilot program for accepting Charlie Cards on the line – originally scheduled for May 2020, but now pending as a result of COVID-19 – which would improve access.

When racist housing decisions caused white flight, it had a negative effect on investment in infrastructure, including transportation, by directing capital away from Mattapan. The ensuing racial segregation distributed resources unequally across the Greater Boston area and also preserved a cycle of poverty and disenfranchisement for a historically disadvantaged community.

¹⁵⁶ Nelson/Nygaard Consulting Associates, “Increasing Ridership on the Fairmount Line,” The Boston Foundation, April 2017, 1, <https://www.tbf.org/~media/TBFOrg/Files/Reports/Increasing%20Ridership%20on%20the%-Fairmount%20Line.pdf>.

¹⁵⁷ Nelson/Nygaard Consulting Associates, “Increasing Ridership on the Fairmount Line,” 7.

¹⁵⁸ Nelson/Nygaard Consulting Associates 18.

¹⁵⁹ Nelson/Nygaard Consulting Associates 18.

A continued lack of investment in transportation in Mattapan limits the residents' economic opportunities, which is especially unfair for a community whose socioeconomic characteristics mean that it relies more heavily on public transit. Although the residents are in need of more reliable public transit, transit improvements could also put the neighborhood at risk for displacement. In particular, transit-oriented development, attracted by enhanced infrastructure, could cause gentrification in Mattapan, which is a vulnerable community as a result of its historical and current inequities.

Chapter 4

Transit-Oriented Development: Gentrification and Displacement in Mattapan

The systemic disparity in access to reliable transit in Mattapan needs to be addressed, but proposed improvements to public transit could have the unintended consequence of pricing out residents, raising serious equity concerns. There is thus ambivalence about infrastructure investment in a transit-deficient neighborhood due to its potential for displacing residents. Feedback from public meetings shows that Mattapan residents are concerned about gentrification in their neighborhood and that they are organizing to attempt to resist developments that would price out the community. Boston's economy has experienced strong growth over the past few decades and even disinvested areas like Mattapan are starting to attract more attention from developers and real estate investors. In particular, one form of investment, transit-oriented development (TOD), can serve as a tool for community revitalization but also has the potential to increase land values. This would make it difficult for low-income and working-class residents to maintain their residential locations. Since transit access is a desirable amenity for urban neighborhoods, TOD can increase commercial activity, which could benefit the community if it is not accompanied by displacement. A new TOD project, the Mattapan Station development, is being built by two nonprofits who promise to bring more affordable housing to the area. The project's commitment to the neighborhood's needs is encouraging, and hopefully it will become an example of how to develop in Mattapan without displacing residents.

Although gentrification and displacement are often used interchangeably, they are two related but distinct patterns of neighborhood change. Gentrification occurs when a "previously low-income neighborhood experiences reinvestment and revitalization, accompanied by

increasing home values and/or rents.”¹⁶⁰ Displacement occurs when “current residents are involuntarily forced to move out because they cannot afford to stay in the gentrified neighborhood.”¹⁶¹ Thus, gentrification can lead to displacement. Theorist Neil Smith explains that gentrification is a “structural product of the land and housing markets” and occurs when “developers can purchase shells cheaply, can pay the builders’ costs and profit for rehabilitation, can pay interest on mortgage and construction loans, and can then sell the end product for a sale price that leaves a satisfactory return to the developer.”¹⁶² Mattapan is a vulnerable site because gentrification is “engaged with racial segregation, inequity and inequality,” all of which are issues in the neighborhood.¹⁶³ As more capital flows into the area, Mattapan is at risk for experiencing the gentrification that is prevalent in the rest of Boston.

As the state and private developers start to put more capital into Mattapan, the local community is increasingly fearful of displacement. This is evident in the public reaction to PLAN: Mattapan, which is part of a larger city-wide plan by the Boston Planning and Development Agency (BPDA). PLAN: Mattapan was created to produce a “holistic plan that encompasses the community’s goals and aspirations, while preserving the neighborhood’s existing character,” with goals like “[driving] inclusive economic growth” and “[investing] in infrastructure and transportation of all modes to support mobility within and to/from the neighborhood.”¹⁶⁴ Comments from brainstorming activities at public meetings about the plan

¹⁶⁰ Stephanie Pollack, Barry Bluestone, and Chase Billingham, “Maintaining Diversity in America’s Transit-Rich Neighborhoods: Tools for Equitable Neighborhood Change,” Dukakis Center for Urban and Regional Policy, 2010, 2, <http://housingtrustfundproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/TRNEquityFull.pdf>.

¹⁶¹ Pollack, Bluestone, and Billingham, “Maintaining Diversity in America’s Transit-Rich Neighborhoods: Tools for Equitable Neighborhood Change,” 2.

¹⁶² Neil Smith, “Toward a Theory of Gentrification A Back to the City Movement by Capital, not People,” 545.

¹⁶³ Shadi O. Tehrani, Shuling J. Wu, and Jennifer D. Roberts, “The Color of Health: Residential Segregation, Light Rail Transit Developments, and Gentrification in the United States,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 16, no. 19 (2019): 3683, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6801918/>.

¹⁶⁴ BPDA, “PLAN: Mattapan,” <http://www.bostonplans.org/getattachment/24ba70f0-57ef-424e-ad89-b71cfac30f0b>.

reveal that Mattapan residents are concerned about displacement because of improved transit. They listed gentrification as a threat to neighborhood identity and to affordable housing.¹⁶⁵ Therefore, there exists a tension between the need for improved public transit in the neighborhood and the potential of gentrification.

Public feedback on PLAN: Mattapan shows how the existence of the Mattapan Line and the commuter rail in the neighborhood are seen as strengths, but better-quality public transit is still a main priority of the community. In brainstorming activities, residents listed the Mattapan Trolley, described as “authentic” to the neighborhood, and the new Blue Hill Avenue Station on the Fairmount Line as strengths under Transportation and Mobility.¹⁶⁶ However, weaknesses in the same category include affordability, travel time to downtown, limited access, and limited frequency for the trolley and the commuter rail.¹⁶⁷ Opportunities that residents believe would enhance mobility included “increased frequency” of the commuter rail and better maintenance of the trolley.¹⁶⁸ Since so many Mattapan residents rely on public transit, it comes as no surprise that receiving improved service is a priority for them. During a goal setting exercise, the community listed “improve transit/mobility options and experience” as a primary goal for the neighborhood.¹⁶⁹ Furthermore, residents noted that there is unequal access and a lack of service to transit across and around Mattapan. While transit improvements are needed and desired in Mattapan, residents are vocal about wanting to prevent displacement in the face of investment in the area.

¹⁶⁵ BPDA, “PLAN: Mattapan.”

¹⁶⁶ BPDA, “PLAN: Mattapan – What We Heard,” <http://www.bostonplans.org/getattachment/6c50b3ad-4440-4b1a-81b7-af4c310e890c>.

¹⁶⁷ BPDA, “PLAN: Mattapan – What We Heard.”

¹⁶⁸ BPDA, “PLAN: Mattapan – What We Heard.”

¹⁶⁹ BPDA, “PLAN: Mattapan Goals Setting,” <http://www.bostonplans.org/getattachment/b606973b-bd3d-4f62-a11a-132a70989203>.

Mattapan residents also expressed alarm about outside development that does not benefit members of the community and activists have mobilized to have a say in the area's real estate development. Mattapan has long failed to benefit from Boston's booming economy and is one of the last neighborhoods to start to see rising housing costs. Home values in Mattapan are a third less than the rest of Boston, but now residents are beginning to receive calls from "people looking to buy homes in the neighborhood" and pressuring them to sell.¹⁷⁰ This led to the founding of groups such as the Greater Mattapan Neighborhood Council (GMNC), elected in February 2019, which has no legislative power, but serves as a way for community members to advise and provide feedback to the city in land development projects. The group's mission includes establishing "standards for developers looking to build in Mattapan" and working "with the city on its PLAN: Mattapan initiative to ensure that it includes an adequate transportation plan."¹⁷¹ The GMNC's meeting minutes reveal that the group is concerned that investment in transit, like the Blue Hill Avenue commuter rail station, will lead to gentrification and will price out residents. This fear is grounded in reality, since improved transportation can lead to rising home costs and potential displacement.

Increased investment in public transit in Boston speaks to the current popularity of transit-oriented development across the United States, as the market for housing near transit hubs grows. Transit-oriented development (TOD) "unites fixed-route mass transportation with mixed-use, walkable, moderate- to high-density neighborhoods."¹⁷² It can serve as a "mechanism for community revitalization," such as "increasing community access to jobs, services, and

¹⁷⁰ Simón Rios, "Advocates See Cote Development As A Sign Mattapan is Changing," WBUR, February 8, 2018, <https://www.wbur.org/bostonomix/2018/02/08/mattapan-cote-village>.

¹⁷¹ Trea Lavery, "Mattapan votes in new neighborhood council," *The Bay State Banner*, March 14, 2019, <https://www.baystatebanner.com/2019/03/14/mattapan-votes-in-new-neighborhood-council/>.

¹⁷² Rolf Pendall, Juliet Gainsborough, Kate Lowe, and Mai Nguyen, "Bringing Equity to Transit-Oriented Development: Stations, Systems, and Regional Resilience," in *Urban and Regional Policy and its Effects: Building Resilient Regions*, (Brookings Institution Press, 2012), 151.

amenities” and “attracting public investment into communities and spurring economic activity.”¹⁷³ However, it can also cause transit-induced gentrification in vulnerable neighborhoods. Because transit proximity offers “enhanced accessibility,” which is then “capitalized into land and housing prices,” TOD can result in the “displacement of the low-income populations likely to benefit most from transit access.”¹⁷⁴ This is especially true in cities that have limited numbers of low-cost neighborhoods, like Boston. Boston also attracts many college students, recent graduates, and white-collar professionals, creating a high demand for housing. This causes rents to rise, which transit-oriented development can exacerbate.

While TOD can provide a neighborhood with much-needed transit, it also makes the neighborhood more appealing, which can spur reinvestment and drive up home prices and rents. Multiple studies have demonstrated that properties located near transit have higher housing costs. A study by the Dukakis Center for Urban and Regional Policy found that new transit stations can cause “core transit users” to be priced out “in favor of higher-income, car-owning residents who are less likely to use public transit for commuting.”¹⁷⁵ Additionally, as previously described, numerous studies have shown that “people with low income, people of color, and renters are more likely” to use public transit and to live in households without cars.¹⁷⁶ Therefore, TOD, accompanied by increased commercial activity in the neighborhood, has the potential to raise rents and to price out low-income residents and communities of color. Mattapan is thus

¹⁷³ Public Counsel Community Development Project, “Community Development: Getting There Together: Tools to Advocate for Inclusive Development near Transit,” in *Journal of Affordable Housing & Community Development Law* 21, no. 1 (2012): 103.

¹⁷⁴ Casey Dawkins and Rolf Moeckel, “Transit-Induced Gentrification: Who Will Stay, and Who Will Go?” *Housing Policy Debate*, 26, no. 4-5 (2016): 801, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10511482.2016.1138986>.

¹⁷⁵ Public Counsel Community Development Project, “Community Development: Getting There Together: Tools to Advocate for Inclusive Development near Transit,” 104.

¹⁷⁶ Public Counsel Community Development Project 104.

vulnerable to displacement and TOD projects have generally been the subject of considerable controversy over who will reap the benefits.

One example of such a project in Boston is the Mattapan Station Development, which has been in the works since 2003. In recent years, newly opened amenities, such as the Blue Hill Avenue commuter rail station and a biking and pedestrian trail adjacent to the Mattapan Line, have brought new investment to the neighborhood. A 2.57-acre empty lot, owned by the MBTA, across the street from Mattapan Station began attracting attention from real estate investors and developers. In 2014, a nearby charter school attempted to buy it and use it as their new base, but there was too much public opposition, as residents requested that “the property be used for a development that would generate economic returns for the community, including jobs, housing, commercial/retail [spaces].”¹⁷⁷ State Rep. Cullinane opposed the sale to the charter school because “there was no community process and no community voice in the sale.”¹⁷⁸ He pointed to a burst of investment in Mattapan as a sign that “there is real interest in the community for development” and stated that his priority was “making sure the residents and stakeholders have access to a transparent process.”¹⁷⁹ Cullinane’s comments echoed assertions from Mattapan residents that they deserve to benefit from economic investment in the area, rather than be pushed out by it.

In public meetings for the Mattapan Station development, the community and their elected officials pushed for affordable housing, so as to prevent displacement while benefiting from Boston’s building boom. Mayor Walsh advocated for “creating affordable housing...connecting people in their neighborhood...making sure [they] have better transit

¹⁷⁷ Jennifer Smith, “MBTA opening up its Mattapan lot to development bids,” *Dorchester Reporter*, November 12, 2015, <https://www.dotnews.com/2015/mbta-opening-its-mattapan-lot-development-bids>.

¹⁷⁸ Jennifer Smith, “MBTA opening up its Mattapan lot to development bids.”

¹⁷⁹ Jennifer Smith, “MBTA opening up its Mattapan lot to development bids.”

connection,” while State Rep. Cullinane called investments in affordable housing “truly essential to retaining a thriving and diverse working-class community.”¹⁸⁰ Residents also emphasized their desire for involvement in decisions regarding development in their neighborhood. Lincoln Larmond, a local community organizer, emphasized that the final product must be “priced and marketed with a mind towards serving the people who live in Mattapan now” and said that the community was “very concerned that this building not become a catalyst for gentrification in Mattapan.”¹⁸¹ Another Mattapan resident said that development was a good thing as long as the community’s “long-time residents and the seniors are not displaced, and they...can reap the benefits of the good changes and development in the neighborhood.”¹⁸² Moreover, residents expressed both enthusiasm about TOD, as long as they can benefit from access to public transportation, and hope that the project would help increase profits for local Mattapan businesses. Ultimately, the project was awarded to nonprofit developers who promised affordable housing.

In 2016, the MBTA sold the lot to Nuestra Comunidad Development Corporation (Nuestra CDC) and Preservation of Affordable Housing (POAH), both of which have backgrounds in creating affordable housing developments. POAH, which “supports economic security and access to opportunity for all,” is a Boston-based nonprofit developer, owner and operator of more than 10,000 affordable homes across the US.¹⁸³ Nuestra CDC, based in Roxbury – a historically black neighborhood located next to Mattapan – since 1981, has developed nearly 800 affordable rental homes and 200 affordable homeownership opportunities

¹⁸⁰ Zhang, “Mattapan Station revamp gets \$1.8m boost.”

¹⁸¹ Bill Forry, “Residents outline their vision for Mattapan Square Development,” *Dorchester Reporter*, August 3, 2016, <https://www.dotnews.com/2016/residents-outline-their-vision-mattapan-square-development>.

¹⁸² Zhang, “Mattapan Station revamp gets \$1.8m boost.”

¹⁸³ <http://mattapanstation.org/>.

through a “community-driven process that promotes self-sufficiency and neighborhood revitalization.”¹⁸⁴ Both nonprofits have experience working with underserved populations, and their emphasis on affordable housing is clear in the Mattapan Station development. In April 2019, they announced their plans to convert the empty lot into a mix of affordable housing and retail space, funded by a \$1.8 million state grant.¹⁸⁵

Affordable housing advocates praised the Mattapan Station development for providing critically needed affordable housing in the neighborhood. The TOD project will provide 135 housing units, commercial/retail space, and a community room.¹⁸⁶ All of the units will stay affordable within the Area Median Income (AMI), which is about \$100,000 a year for a family of four in Boston, as rent cannot exceed 30% of a household’s gross income for the apartments to be considered affordable.¹⁸⁷ Half of the units are considered affordable at 50% Area Median Income (AMI) and below - 30% of the apartments will be deeply subsidized at 30% AMI and another 20% will be subsidized at 50% AMI.¹⁸⁸ The other half of the units will be at 60% and 80% AMI, which is considered close to market rate.¹⁸⁹ In addition to affordable housing, the other emphasis of the project is on public transportation. The developers called the Mattapan Line a “vital transportation link” and have also advertised the access to the nearby recently-opened biking path/walking trail.¹⁹⁰ Construction on the project was slated to start in the spring of 2020, but the timeline is uncertain as a result of COVID-19.

¹⁸⁴ <http://mattapanstation.org/>.

¹⁸⁵ Zhang, “Mattapan Station revamp gets \$1.8m boost.”

¹⁸⁶ Zhang, “Mattapan Station revamp gets \$1.8m boost.”

¹⁸⁷ Caleb Nelson, “Residents get closer look at updated Mattapan Station project,” *Dorchester Reporter*, August 15, 2019, <https://www.dotnews.com/2019/residents-get-closer-look-updated-mattapan-station-project>.

¹⁸⁸ Nelson, “Residents get closer look at updated Mattapan Station project.”

¹⁸⁹ Nelson, “Residents get closer look at updated Mattapan Station project.”

¹⁹⁰ Jennifer Smith, “Winter woes put spotlight on Mattapan trolleys’ fate,” *Dorchester Reporter*, January 17, 2018, <https://www.dotnews.com/2018/winter-woes-put-spotlight-mattapan-trolleys-fate>.

If the Mattapan Square development manages to avoid displacement, it could serve as a case study for creating effective transit-oriented development. Furthermore, the presence of a commercial space in the Mattapan Station development could also prove to be helpful in preventing gentrification if local small businesses can use it. Because “community-serving institutions and businesses” are needed to “stabilize existing low-income communities of color,” affordable commercial space should be available for “community and cultural centers, service providers, and culturally relevant businesses.”¹⁹¹ Existing literature about TOD emphasizes the importance of affordable housing in preventing pricing out communities. For TOD to provide necessary amenities to a neighborhood without displacing residents, affordable housing that can accommodate communities of color and low-income families needs to be present.¹⁹² Affordability restrictions on TOD buildings are “effective tools for promoting housing affordability and improving low-income households’ access to transit while simultaneously reducing the extent of transit-induced gentrification.”¹⁹³

There are several other policy-based strategies for TOD that Boston could implement to avoid displacement in Mattapan and other vulnerable neighborhoods. Because transit-oriented development can take years to plan and build, “land and property values often begin to rise” even before the project is complete, so to keep projects affordable, “developers must have access to financing before land and properties become too expensive.”¹⁹⁴ This both preserves existing affordable housing and allows for future affordable housing on the vacant land. One strategy is to create a housing protection district, which guarantees that no unit of affordable housing will be

¹⁹¹ Rebecca Saldaña and Margaret Wykowski, “Racial Equity: New Cornerstone of Transit-Oriented Development,” *Race, Poverty & the Environment* 19, no. 2 (2012): 15.

¹⁹² Saldaña and Wykowski, “Racial Equity: New Cornerstone of Transit-Oriented Development,” 15

¹⁹³ Dawkins and Moeckel, “Transit-Induced Gentrification: Who Will Stay, and Who Will Go?” 801.

¹⁹⁴ Pollack, Bluestone, and Billingham, “Maintaining Diversity in America’s Transit-Rich Neighborhoods: Tools for Equitable Neighborhood Change,” 42.

knocked down without another going up in its place.¹⁹⁵ Another strategy involves creating a transit-oriented development fund, which can earmark funds for affordable housing. The city of Denver and affordable housing developers worked together to create the Denver Regional Transit-Oriented Development Fund, which is designed to help developers finance land acquisition while requiring them to provide affordable housing developments within a half-mile of rail stations.¹⁹⁶ Lastly, displacement can be prevented by the involvement of local communities in neighborhood projects. For example, a legally binding community benefit agreement (CBA) is ““a project-specific, negotiated agreement between a developer and a broad community coalition that outlines the project’s contributions to the community and ensures community support for the project.””¹⁹⁷ The Longfellow Station CBA in Minneapolis included such benefits for the community as: “living wages, local hiring and training programs, environmental remediation and funds for community programs.”¹⁹⁸ Thus, governmental policies to promote affordable housing and the inclusion of community benefits in TOD could be effective for preventing displacement in Boston.

It remains to be seen whether the Mattapan Station project will lead to gentrification, but the focus on affordable housing is a promising start for the goal of not displacing residents. However, investments in Mattapan can be dangerous by improving amenities and potentially raising rents, running the risk of pricing out community members. TOD can produce a particularly unjust form of inequity by pushing low-income households, which are more likely to

¹⁹⁵ Michael Ryan, “Affordable housing and transit should go hand-in-hand,” Mobility Lab, April 28, 2016, <https://mobilitylab.org/2016/04/28/affordable-housing-and-transit/>.

¹⁹⁶ Ryan, “Affordable housing and transit should go hand-in-hand.”

¹⁹⁷ Pollack, Bluestone, and Billingham, “Maintaining Diversity in America’s Transit-Rich Neighborhoods: Tools for Equitable Neighborhood Change,” 38.

¹⁹⁸ Pollack, Bluestone, and Billingham, “Maintaining Diversity in America’s Transit-Rich Neighborhoods: Tools for Equitable Neighborhood Change,” 38.

be transit dependent, out of the places that are being improved by access to transit. This perpetuates transit inequity and deprives underserved residents, who most need high-quality, affordable public transit, of equal opportunities. Although affordable housing in transit-oriented development is a step in the right direction, it is often not enough to avoid gentrification unless all other development in the neighborhood also includes affordable housing. However, TOD in Mattapan has the potential to benefit everyone, if it respects the needs of the low-income community of color.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the Mattapan Trolley serves as a case study for other areas across the United States dealing with transit inequity. Because the line is situated in a transit-starved neighborhood, any changes to the service will have an enormous impact on the lives of the residents. As Mattapan residents are predominantly black and working-class, they are more likely, based on their socioeconomic characteristics, to rely on public transit. If the quality of service of the line were to improve with the new Type 9 LRVs, then transportation in the neighborhood would be more accessible to the people who need it the most. However, if the quality of service of the trolley were to decrease, then structural inequalities in Mattapan would become more pronounced as many residents would have difficulty going about their lives. As a result, the proposed changes to the Mattapan Line are meaningful because of their potential to significantly impact the lives of residents in an underserved neighborhood with few other mobility options.

Regardless of what happens to the trolley, the rest of the public transit in the area needs improvement. It remains to be seen whether planned programs, like the Better Bus Project and improvements to the Fairmount Line commuter rail, will substantially increase economic opportunities for the community. While the MBTA is not responsible for all of the racist planning decisions in Boston, the agency must now grapple with this legacy. This is a time-sensitive issue – the longer the MBTA waits to deal with the lack of public transit in low-income communities of color, the more they hold those communities back from economic mobility. However, transit improvements need to be planned and implemented carefully. Investing capital into Mattapan could lead to displacement if it does not benefit the community. The MBTA, the City of Boston, and the state government, need to enact policy-based strategies so as to prevent pricing out residents. This thesis suggests that approaches centered around providing affordable

housing and involving the local community, such as implementing a legally binding community benefit agreement, should be considered with new investment to the area.

As revealed by the history of the trolley, there is current dissatisfaction with unreliable, inaccessible public transit in Mattapan. The MBTA's failure to deal with these problems and to communicate openly with the local residents fits into a legacy of community distrust of governmental agencies. The fight to save the trolley was therefore driven by a fear that inadequate bus service would replace the Mattapan Line and continue perpetuating transit inequity in the area. Transit inequity is one aspect of the structural inequalities that exist in Mattapan as a result of the neighborhood's needs going unmet. Institutionalized racism created patterns of disinvestment that exist today and prevent Mattapan residents from gaining economic opportunities. And although the neighborhood both needs and deserves public transit improvements, those very improvements also have the potential to cause gentrification in Mattapan. Thus, while investments like transit-oriented development can provide a transit-starved area with increased public transit access, they also run the risk of displacing residents. Therefore, this thesis suggests that discussions of public transit need to pay attention to the ways in which transit improvements might, as an unintended consequence, encourage and facilitate gentrification and displacement.

Cities all over the United States are experiencing gentrification and there are no easy solutions to the crisis of hyper inequality. However, transit investment and expansion do not inevitably have to enable gentrification and displacement. All present and future developments in the neighborhood must center the voices and needs of the community in their planning process if Mattapan residents are to ever experience the benefits of TOD or any other kind of investment. If the Mattapan Station development succeeds in providing affordable housing for the community

and retaining the current predominately working-class and low-income black population, then it could serve as an example for how to successfully implement transit-oriented development while maximizing the benefits for the local community.

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