Thank you to Chairman Straus & Crighton and members of the Committee. I am happy to be speaking with you today on supporting new ways to modernize and improve the MBTA.

I also want to thank the Committee for your hearings on the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Safety Inspection that raised awareness of the Department of Public Utilities (DPU) and MBTA’s poor performance with safety in recent years. The legislature also showed real leadership by appropriating funding for the initial costs of the FTA Safety Management Inspection, even though the Baker Administration didn’t ask for this money.

There is much more to do this year, and I am here today to testify on three bills:

1. [HB 3315](https://malegislature.gov/Bills/193/H3315): **Improving Rail Service on the Fairmount Commuter Rail Line**
2. [HB 3452](https://malegislature.gov/Bills/193/H3452): **An Act Relative to Transportation Safety Reform within the MBTA**
3. [SB 2199](https://malegislature.gov/Bills/193/S2199): **Amending the Statutory Responsibilities of the Department of Public Utilities**

All three of these bills relate to larger governance questions as we look to create a 21st Century transit system. The MBTA needs to change, both to overcome the current crisis, but also to solve new challenges facing the Commonwealth. But it is important to recognize that General Manager Phil Eng cannot fix the transit system by himself.

General Manager Eng is inheriting an agency that is in worse shape than the system that failed during the winter storms of 2015. Which should tell us that this is a time for a new approach. The MBTA needs to change, State Laws governing the T need to change, and our expectations of what we want the MBTA to do will need to change.

The commuter rail system must evolve, so that it provides more frequent service while reducing pollution. We want to see improvements to the Fairmount Line and Phase 1 of Regional Rail. This should be considered more than just a transportation infrastructure project. It is also justified for equity and environmental reasons.

One of the most impactful ways to reduce carbon emissions from the transportation sector is through an electrification of the commuter rail system and implementation of more reliable and frequent regional rail like service to promote mode shift out of cars. While the Phase 1 improvements were not funded in the current MBTA capital plans, the timeline in HB 3315 and SB2271 would help to push the MBTA to deliver on this work.

In terms of Chairman Straus’s bill, HB 3452, that proposes moving oversight of the commuter rail contract from the MBTA to the MassDOT Rail and Transit Division: A Better City continues to believe the biggest opportunity for change is through the next procurement contract for the operator of commuter rail.

The contract with Keolis runs through 2026. Both MassDOT and the MBTA should be thinking about the best way to prepare the procurement documents, as this could be very complicated. This committee and the Administration should be evaluating at the benefits of a longer-term contract for the next commuter rail operator, so that there can be incentives for the next operator to pay for capital investments in the rolling stock and electrification of the system. With the discussion of East-West Rail and expanded Regional Rail, it will make sense to examine the different models for the Commonwealth’s passenger rail service.

Finally, with changes to the DPU oversight role that is proposed in SB2199: Last summer when the FTA’s report came out, we were outraged at the condition of the MBTA and shared in the concerns that DPU may not be the right agency for this work. A Better City immediately called for the Governor to hire an experienced Safety Directorate to oversee all safety issues. This role was just recently filled. Also, over the last four months there is some clear evidence that the Healey Administration’s DPU can hold the MTBA accountable for the poor subway track conditions.

It seems that we should hear from the administration on what else they need, what types of law changes are necessary to make the MBTA safe before the legislature moves forward with this type of major overhaul.

I’ll close with a few things this committee should do to make the MBTA safe:

1. Work with the Administration on a long-term commuter rail contract.
2. Expand capital delivery options for the MBTA – specifically with Public-Private Partnerships that are carefully authorized to fix MBTA facilities, but also allow for new housing and joint project developments. We should also hear what they need related to procurement challenges, so we can to fix all the station escalators and elevators. Is it law changes or is it money? Either way, we need these infrastructure issues addressed as soon as possible.
3. Hold hearing on the MBTA’s looming fiscal cliff. The MBTA is facing a long-term funding deficit that could begin in 2025 and jeopardizes our economic, envi­ronmental and transit equity goals. Building a new MBTA is not only about new money, so the process for finding solutions for the budget should be the right time to consider new ways to deliver projects and services that benefit the people of the Commonwealth. But in terms of money, the legislature should allow for the Commonwealth to take out new debt against Fair Share funds, especially the surplus amounts projected to be in reserve. This new borrowing option could be a big help in leveraging federal grants in our upcoming applications for Cape Cod Bridge, I-90 Allston, and East-West.

Thank you again for your time today and hearing A Better City’s perspective. I look forward to working with you this session.