



May 8, 2014

Richard A. Davey
Secretary and Chief Executive Officer
Massachusetts Department of Transportation
10 Park Plaza, Suite 4160
Boston, MA 02116

Dear Secretary Davey,

On behalf of the 20 organizations that are part of the Youth Affordability Coalition (YAC), we are writing to request a Youth Pass pilot for 2,500 youth starting this fall.

Seven years ago this month, young people from Boston and Cambridge launched our campaign for a Youth Pass. Since then, hundreds of youth have carried this work, passing the torch from one group of leaders to another. We have held dozens of public demonstrations and spoken with DOT and MBTA officials in many meetings. Today, more and more people understand that the T is a lifeline for young people, and that we—like all transit riders—are worthy of access, dignity and respect. We have come from every corner of your service area, from Boston, Cambridge and Somerville, Chelsea and Revere, Brookline, Milton and Quincy, united in a vision of affordable public transit.

During these seven years, thousands upon thousands of us—our peers, friends and classmates—have missed school, work, essential services, and many other opportunities for enrichment, community, and culture, because we cannot afford the price of the MBTA.

As you know, the answer to the youth affordability crisis is the Youth Pass. The Youth Pass should be available for all young people, ages 12 to 21, with no restrictions on day or time, and cost no more than \$10 per month. This innovation opens the door to opportunity for youth riders. The benefits extend beyond ourselves and our families, growing our entire region's economy and wellbeing.

In 2011, we released our *Opportuni(T) Report* on youth riders, the affordability crisis, and the Youth Pass solution, revealing that nearly one-third of youth have missed school and work due to the high price of buses and trains. That year we held the first-ever Youth Riders Banquet, where you, as our guest of honor and the General Manager of the MBTA, agreed that something needed to be done to solve this crisis. You applauded our efforts and told us that the MBTA's financial situation would need to improve before implementing a Youth Pass. You also agreed to begin a research pilot of the Youth Pass if we worked together to make the pilot revenue neutral.

Several months later, as you were appointed the Secretary of Transportation, the MBTA issued its most drastic proposal for fare hikes and service cuts in recent memory. This was a direct attack on the MBTA's most vulnerable riders, with increases of 100 percent or greater proposed for students,

seniors and disabled riders. Still, we recognized that massive budget gaps were caused by short-sighted decisions and lack of investment from the Legislature.

Over 1,000 youth marched to the State House in 2012, demanding new funding for public transit and relief for the MBTA's Big Dig debt. We helped secure a commitment from State House leadership that transportation funding would be the first priority of the 2013 legislative session. Then we amped up the pressure, holding call-ins, marches and lobby days to increase public transit funding. When transportation finance legislation finally passed, we celebrated the additional \$150 million per year that would help the MBTA get out of debt while maintaining service and ending drastic fare hikes.

Since 2011, we have also identified the creation of a University Pass as a major revenue generator that can fully fund the Youth Pass. As a member of the Public Transit-Public Good campaign and through partnerships with students at multiple colleges, we have made significant progress—including the MBTA's recent commitment to pilot the program in 2015. Our region could be known as the first in the nation to combine University and Youth Passes, bringing an entire generation onto public transportation—the *Transit Generation*.

Despite your past commitments and our work in good faith to support the T and find a revenue source for the Youth Pass, we have now been sent to the back of the bus. When we met with new General Manager Dr. Beverly Scott in February 2013, we were told that a Youth Pass could be one of several major policy reforms after transportation finance legislation took effect. At the third annual Youth Riders Banquet in July 2013, Dr. Scott invited us to participate in a roundtable of MBTA representatives, with assurances that fare policies like the Youth Pass pilot would be discussed. We participated, meeting all four times, but the MBTA refused to take the Youth Pass or the youth affordability crisis seriously. Instead, the table was used to propose a five percent increase in fares, including the fifth increase in student fares in the past 12 years, a total increase of 160 percent. Now, MBTA leadership says we can discuss the Youth Pass as part of a 2015 fare review—the same statement one year later. These empty promises delay the Youth Pass, but will not exhaust us.

We will not allow seven years of work on behalf of youth in our region to be turned into a game of attrition. **In line with your 2011 commitment, we reiterate our demand for a pilot of the Youth Pass with 2,500 participants, beginning this year.**

Opportuni(T) delayed is opportunity denied. Opportuni(T) is our vision of an MBTA that all young people can afford to ride. Each day that you defer on past commitments, each day the T stalls us from one conversation to the next, thousands of opportunities are lost. There are lost school days and lost students, lost work shifts and lost jobs, lost medical and service appointments, lost to a crisis you've left to worsen while sitting on a clear solution.

We have done our part. We are asking you now to do yours.

Sincerely,

Luis Navarro and Kenisha Allen, YAC Leadership Team
Youth Affordabili(T) Coalition

cc:

Governor Deval Patrick, Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Board of Directors, Massachusetts Department of Transportation
Dr. Beverly Scott, General Manager, MBTA