



OFFICES OF BOSTON CITY COUNCILORS
Miniard Culpepper & Brian Worrell

MEMORANDUM

TO: Secretary Philip Eng, Massachusetts Department of Transportation

CC: Mayor Michelle Wu, City of Boston

FROM: City Councilor Miniard Culpepper; City Councilor Brian Worrell

DATE: May 15, 2026

RE: Why We Will Not Board the Blue Hill Avenue Bus Ride-Along — and Why This Community Deserves Rail, Not More Buses

Secretary Eng and Mayor Wu:

We are writing to explain, directly and on the record, why we will not be participating in today's ride-along on the Blue Hill Avenue bus corridor — and why **our absence is not a statement against transit investment, but rather a principled stand for a community that has been promised, and denied, world-class transit for nearly forty years.**

The Blue Hill Avenue corridor runs through Mattapan and western Dorchester — neighborhoods that are predominantly Black, predominantly working-class, and predominantly transit-dependent. Roughly half of peak-hour travelers on Blue Hill Avenue are bus riders. Thousands of young people rely on the bus to get to school. Many residents have no car at all. This community does not need to be convinced of the value of public transit. What it needs — what it has always needed, and what it has repeatedly been promised and denied — is transit that is safe, affordable, reliable and community oriented.

I. A History of Broken Promises

Before evaluating any new proposal, Secretary Eng and Mayor Wu, we ask you to reckon with the history. This is not the first time government officials have arrived in Mattapan and Roxbury bearing promises of better transit. It is, in fact, at least the fifth time in living memory.

1987 — The Orange Line Elevated Is Demolished. A Green Line Branch Is Promised.

When the MBTA relocated the Orange Line from Washington Street to the Southwest Corridor, it took rapid transit away from Dudley Square and Egleston Square —

neighborhoods that had been served since 1901. Local residents were promised that a branch of the Green Line would be built along Washington Street to replace the service they lost. That promise was never kept.

2002 — Light Rail Is Promised. The Silver Line Bus Is Delivered Instead.

After fifteen years of debate, the MBTA opened the Silver Line on Washington Street in 2002 — not as the light rail that had been promised, but as a bus. Residents of Roxbury and Dudley Square had waited a decade and a half for replacement rapid transit service and received a bus painted a different color. The 2003 Program for Mass Transportation acknowledged that light rail had been the original promise, considered converting the Silver Line, and again recommended buses instead.

2005–2019 — The Big Dig Mitigation Commitment and the Fairmount Line Delays.

As part of legally binding Big Dig mitigation commitments, the Commonwealth pledged improved Fairmount Line service and four new stations — including one at Blue Hill Avenue. The Blue Hill Avenue station was originally supposed to open alongside three others in 2013. Instead, it opened in February 2019, after years of false starts, missed deadlines, and design controversies. The community waited six additional years for a station they had already been promised.

2014 — Rapid Transit Frequency Is Promised. The Indigo Line Is Cancelled.

In 2014, Governor Deval Patrick's administration committed to purchasing Diesel Multiple Unit (DMU) vehicles to transform the Fairmount Line into a true rapid transit corridor — the long-sought Indigo Line — with frequent, subway-like service to South Station. By late 2015, the Baker administration had blocked all funding for the project and scrubbed every reference to it from the Capital Investment Plan. The Indigo Line was dead. State Representative Russell Holmes called it plainly what it was: promises not kept.

Today — A Bus Lane Is Offered. Rail Conversation Is Refused.

Now, in 2026, the City and the MBTA are offering center-running bus lanes on Blue Hill Avenue — funded by an \$80 million federal grant — as the next chapter in this corridor's transit story. We do not oppose investment in this corridor. We oppose the terms of this particular offer: take the bus lanes as designed, or take nothing. We oppose the framing that a community which has waited forty years for the rail it was promised should be grateful for bus lanes and stop asking questions.

II. Why We Cannot Board the Bus Today

We were invited on this ride-along in good faith, and we appreciate that. But participating would signal acceptance of a process that has failed this community, a plan with serious unresolved technical flaws, and a negotiating posture that treats community leaders as a public relations problem rather than a legitimate voice. Specifically:

Secretary Eng Has Not Met With Community Leaders As Promised.

Secretary Eng personally agreed to meet with community leaders who have alternative designs for Blue Hill Ave. That meeting never happened. Boarding a bus with Secretary Eng before that promised meeting takes place rewards the breach of commitment — exactly the pattern this community has endured for decades. We will not model that.

The Mayor Convened a Closed-Door Meeting, In Her Office, That Excluded Advocates and Councilors.

Mayor Wu held a meeting with elected officials to discuss Blue Hill Avenue. Neither Councilor Culpepper nor Councilor Worrell was invited. Neither were community advocates representing the neighborhoods most affected by this project. A ride-along cannot substitute for the inclusive dialogue that was denied.

The Plan Has Serious, Documented Technical Flaws That Have Not Been Addressed.

Northeastern University Professor Peter Furth, a nationally recognized transportation expert who conducted an independent volunteer analysis of the MBTA's concept design, has identified four systemic issues with the plan. Professor Furth's capacity analysis projects volume-to-capacity ratios as high as 187% — a recipe for gridlock — and turn lanes that are unrealistically short, which standard traffic software fails to flag but which would create severe backups in practice. The MBTA has released no traffic analysis of its own. It is asking this community to trust a plan it will not defend with data.

The Community Engagement Process Was Not Genuine. All Possible Transit Options Weren't Presented.

The MBTA and City report that more than 200 community meetings have been held without all the data. But all those meetings were bus-centric as a design. The MBTA and City missed the opportunity to look at a more ambitious and environmentally friendly option for transit. As Professor Furth's memo documents, once the plan was finalized behind closed doors, those meetings shifted from design participation to plan promotion. Community members feel — correctly — that their concerns have been heard but not incorporated. This is not the same as meaningful engagement.

Free Fares Have Been Taken Off the Table Without Explanation.

One of the most direct ways to improve transit equity along this corridor is to make the bus free for the communities it serves. The City and MBTA have refused to engage seriously with this conversation, even as federal dollars are being directed to capital infrastructure. A community that is predominantly low-income should not have to choose between paying for the bus or walking.

III. What This Community Has Earned and Deserves

We want to be clear: we are not anti-transit. We are pro-justice. And justice, after 40 years, looks like more than center-running bus lanes.

The Blue Hill Avenue corridor served center-running transit from 1903 to 1955 — a streetcar in a median that was purpose-built for transit. The wide concrete medians that stand there today are a direct inheritance of that design. The MBTA's own plan acknowledges this history in proposing to put transit back in the center. We agree with that logic. But the community is right to ask: if this corridor was built for rail, and was promised rail, and has the physical infrastructure to support rail, why are we only being offered a bus?

We call on Secretary Eng and Mayor Wu to commit, in writing, to the following:

- A genuine study of rail alternatives for the Blue Hill Avenue corridor — including light rail and heavy rail — before any final plan is approved.

- Exploration of non-bus options for rapid transit connectivity between the Blue Hill Avenue corridor and Nubian Square, the Seaport District, the Longwood Medical Area, and downtown — including the long-deferred Green Line extension to Nubian Square via the unused Tremont Street tunnel, which has been studied and shelved multiple times.
- An honest accounting of what the Fairmount Line electrification timeline actually means for this corridor. Battery Electric Multiple Unit (BEMU) service promised for 2028 must be delivered — not cancelled, not delayed, not replaced by another study.
- A commitment that if bus lanes are built on Blue Hill Avenue, they will be designed with an explicit, binding conversion pathway to rail — not as a permanent substitute for rail.
- Release of the full traffic capacity analysis behind the current design, including the turn-lane modeling. The community has a right to this data.
- A serious and public conversation about free fares on the Blue Hill Avenue corridor.

IV. Our Commitment

We want this project to succeed. We want Blue Hill Avenue to be greener, safer, and better served by transit. We want the community to thrive. None of that is in conflict with our opposition to this plan in its current form.

What we will not do is board a bus as a gesture of support for a process that has been closed to community voices, a plan that has not been defended with data, and an offer that tells a majority-Black community to accept bus service as the ceiling of their transit ambitions — again.

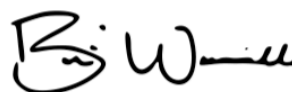
When Secretary Eng meets with the community leaders he promised to meet. When the design process reopens to genuine compromise, as Professor Furth has outlined, it is technically feasible. When the City and MBTA put rail alternatives on the table alongside bus options. When the full traffic analysis is made public. We will be at that table. We will be constructive partners. We will work toward a Blue Hill Avenue that this community can be proud of.

Until then, we must respectfully decline the free ride.

Respectfully submitted,



Councilor Miniard Culpepper
Boston City Council, District 7



Councilor Brian Worrell
Boston City Council, District 4

Appendix:

40 Years of Broken Transit Promises

Blue Hill Avenue & Dudley Square (Nubian Square) — Boston, MA

A timeline of transit commitments made to communities of color in Roxbury, Mattapan, and Dorchester — and what actually happened.

- Promise made
- Promise broken
- Partial delivery
- Still unresolved

Baseline service in place 1901–1987 | Background

The Orange Line elevated serves Dudley Square for 86 years

Since the city's first elevated rail line opened, Dudley Square (now Nubian Square) in Roxbury has had direct rapid transit service to downtown Boston. The Orange Line elevated on Washington Street connects Black and working-class neighborhoods to jobs, schools, and services. This is the baseline from which everything that follows must be measured.

Promise made 1987 | Promise #1

Orange Line is rerouted west. A Green Line branch to Dudley Square is promised.

The MBTA demolishes the Washington Street elevated rail line and reroutes the Orange Line several blocks west along the Southwest Corridor — away from Dudley Square, Egleston Square, Northampton and Dover. Residents lose their direct rapid transit connection to downtown. In exchange, the MBTA formally promises to build a Green Line light rail branch along Washington Street to restore equivalent service. Local residents were told they would receive "equal or better" replacement transit.

Promise broken — bus substituted for rail 1987–2002 | Broken Promise #1

15 years pass. No Green Line. The community gets a bus.

For fifteen years, the only replacement for the demolished elevated rail is bus route #49 — a regular bus running in mixed traffic on Washington Street. The promised Green Line branch is debated, studied, and deferred. No funding is committed. No shovels go in the ground. In 2002, the MBTA opens the Silver Line on Washington Street — but not as the light rail it promised. The Silver Line is a bus, painted silver, given a few transit-like amenities. It is not rail. The original promise is quietly abandoned.

Legally binding commitment made 1990–2005 | Promise #2

Big Dig mitigation: Fairmount Line improvements become a legal obligation

The Big Dig — Boston's massive highway reconstruction project — generates enormous air pollution in communities of color. As legally binding mitigation, the Commonwealth commits to substantially improving the Fairmount commuter rail line, which runs through Dorchester, Mattapan, Roxbury, and Hyde Park. This includes four brand-new stations. Blue Hill Avenue

is one of them. Community advocates push for the "Indigo Line" concept: frequent, subway-like service comparable to the Red, Orange, or Green lines. The commitment is legally enforceable — not optional.

Three of four stations built 2012–2013 | Partial delivery

Three of four promised Fairmount stations open — Blue Hill Avenue is left out

After years of delays, three new Fairmount Line stations open: Talbot Avenue (2012), Four Corners/Geneva, and Newmarket (2013). These are genuine improvements. But Blue Hill Avenue — the station in the heart of Mattapan, the neighborhood most dependent on transit — is not built. The MBTA repeatedly delays it, citing design disputes and neighborhood opposition to the station's exact placement. Missed opening deadlines: December 2016, June 2017. The community continues to wait for the station they were promised a decade earlier.

Promise made 2014 | Promise #3

Governor Patrick commits to the Indigo Line: rapid transit-frequency rail on the Fairmount corridor

Governor Deval Patrick's administration announces a plan to purchase Diesel Multiple Unit (DMU) trains — faster, more responsive rail vehicles — for the Fairmount Line. The promise: transform the Fairmount Line into a true rapid transit line, running every 10 to 20 minutes like a subway, with a single affordable fare. This is the Indigo Line vision the community has fought for since the late 1990s. A request for proposals for 30 DMU vehicles is issued. Weekend service begins as a pilot. The community's decades-long transit equity fight appears to be winning.

Promise broken — project cancelled entirely 2015–2016 | Broken Promise #3

New governor kills the Indigo Line. Every reference to it is erased from the state budget.

Governor Charlie Baker takes office in January 2015. By late 2015, his administration has blocked all funding for the Indigo Line and removed every mention of it from MassDOT's Capital Investment Plan. The DMU procurement is cancelled — officially because only one manufacturer responded to the bid, at a price deemed too high. The Indigo Line is dead. State Representative Russell Holmes calls it plainly what it is: "promises not kept." The corridor that runs through Boston's most transit-dependent communities of color will not get rapid transit service.

Station built — but service still inadequate 2019 | Partial delivery

Blue Hill Avenue station finally opens — 6 years late, but still only commuter rail

After years of delays and design controversies, Blue Hill Avenue commuter rail station opens on February 25, 2019 — six years after the other three promised stations. It provides a 23-minute ride to South Station, a genuine improvement over the 45–60 minute bus trip. But it runs on a commuter rail schedule: infrequent trains, gaps of 60–90 minutes between service, no trains late at night or early morning. It is not the rapid transit service that was

promised. A station exists, but the community still lacks frequent, reliable rail access to the rest of the city.

Improvement made — bigger promise pending 2024–2025 | Promise #4

30-minute Fairmount service begins. BEMU electric trains promised for 2028.

Fairmount Line frequency improves to 30-minute service in May 2024 — a meaningful step forward. The state and MBTA announce plans to electrify the line using Battery Electric Multiple Unit (BEMU) trains by 2028, which would allow 20-minute service headways. This is another promise that advocates are watching carefully, after the DMU promise of 2014 was cancelled by the next administration. The community has heard this kind of commitment before.

Unresolved — community opposition active 2026 | Still unresolved

The MBTA proposes center-running bus lanes on Blue Hill Avenue. The community says: not enough.

The City of Boston and MBTA propose a \$124+ million redesign of Blue Hill Avenue, with center-running bus lanes as the centerpiece. The community's response: after 40 years of broken promises about rail — the Green Line that never came, the Silver Line buses substituted for light rail, the Indigo Line cancelled before a single train ran, Blue Hill Avenue station opening six years late — why is "better buses" still the ceiling? Blue Hill Avenue was built for center-running transit in 1903. It had a streetcar median. The corridor's physical infrastructure has always pointed toward rail. The community is not asking for something new. It is asking for what was promised, taken away, and promised again — and never delivered.

The pattern, plainly stated

Every decade since 1987, the state has promised this corridor rapid rail transit — and either cancelled the plan, substituted buses, or delivered years late. The question being asked in 2026 is not whether the community wants transit investment. It is whether the City and MBTA are willing to live up to the promises deferred for more than 40 years.