



Charles D. Baker, Governor
Karyn E. Polito, Lieutenant Governor
Jamey Tesler, Acting MassDOT Secretary & CEO
Steve Poftak, General Manager



05/19/2021

John J. Long
City Clerk
City of Somerville – City Hall
93 Highland Ave.
Somerville, MA 02143

Subject: Response to Somerville City Council regarding GLX Project Tree Replacement.

Dear Mr. Long,

Thank you for your correspondence dated April 6, 2021. MBTA General Manager Steve Poftak has requested that the GLX Project review and respond to the Somerville City Council's Resolutions #211462 and #211463 (Native Planting Ordinance) entreating the MBTA to replace the trees removed during the Green Line Extension project, and to use native plantings consistent with the City of Somerville's new native planting ordinance.

We offer the following comment:

- The GLX Program Management Team understands and appreciates the City's desire to preserve and protect trees growing in an urban environment, however, the trees referred to in the City Council's resolutions were growing in an active commuter and freight rail corridor posing an unacceptable safety risk to the traveling public and rail operators alike. The MBTA's number-one priority is to minimize risk to public safety throughout all of our operations and therefore, we take our vegetation management responsibility very seriously.
- Trees growing on railway embankments pose extreme collision hazards when they fall onto the tracks or onto passing trains. As evidence of the seriousness of this hazard, please note the attached images of trees hitting MBTA vehicles in recent years. In addition to the collision hazard, leaves falling on rails also seriously reduce trains' braking capabilities in wet weather and untrimmed limbs cause visibility hazards for line of sight to signals which require views over long distances. Braking and site-line hazards cause devastating accidents and untold schedule delays each year in the United States.
- Another condition that could have tragic consequences, is a tree falling onto our LRV 600 DC Voltage Catenary Line Power System or on our third rail system on our rapid transit lines. A minor result is a service delay. A major incident can result in potential fatalities.
- Adding to the underlying problems associated with trees growing near tracks is the fact that GLX required a widening of the entire rail corridor along both the New Hampshire Main Line and Fitchburg branches. This widening left virtually no space for vegetation areas for trees along the alignment.
- To keep this local issue in perspective, the MBTA serves not only the City of Somerville but 200 other communities within the Commonwealth and has several initiatives underway to remove hazardous tree growth from our Transit System and Commuter Rail System corridors across the region. A replanting program to offset an initiative of this magnitude is infeasible, especially

considering the fact that the vast majority of MBTA property is within rail corridors or station areas and cannot sustain future tree growth.

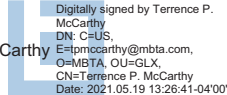
- Lastly, we feel it is important to keep in mind the MBTA is a Massachusetts State Authority which is granted certain autonomy to act without approval from local municipalities under Chapter 161A Section 3 - Power of the Authority. While we make every effort to accommodate the needs of the local communities we serve, we are bound by our responsibility to promote public safety and operate within fiscal constraints.

Despite limited opportunities to promote greenery along the rail corridor, we are working with City of Somerville officials to identify and take advantage of any areas that may support modest green space. For example, GLX issued a directive letter, to our contractor, that will allow certain embankment slopes to be covered with loam and hydroseeded with grass rather than adopting the original design which called for those embankments to be covered with crushed rock. At the City's request, we are also evaluating the possibility of accommodating low maintenance and low growth shrubberies after revenue service begins. Before any planting can take place on MBTA property, we will need to review and approve the location and type of plantings. Shrubberies and plantings will not be purchased, installed, or maintained by the MBTA and will need to be removed at the direction of the MBTA if an operational issue arises.

Please feel free to contact us if you have questions or would like additional information.

Sincerely,

Terrence P. McCarthy



Digitally signed by Terrence P. McCarthy
DN: C=US,
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Date: 2021.05.19 13:28:41-04'00'

Terrence P. McCarthy, P.E.
Deputy Program Manager, Stakeholder Engagement
Green Line Extension Project

Cc:

S. Poftak
A. Donahue - Rodriguez
J. Dalton
J. Curtatone – Mayor
B. Rawson
V. Augustin





