



# Summary of Public Comment on the MBTA Fare Increase Proposal for Fiscal Year 2017



February 19, 2016

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# Fare Proposal Process

On January 4, 2016, the MBTA Fiscal Management and Control Board (FMCB) considered four options for changes to the MBTA fare structure. The Board voted to advance two options for public comment. Option 1 proposed a system-wide average fare increase of 6.71%, with a projected increase in revenue of \$33.2 million; Option 2 proposed a system-wide average fare increase of 9.77%, with a projected increase in revenue of \$49.4 million.

Both options further included the following changes: creation of a single express bus fare; creation of a single reduced-fare pass price for students, seniors, and people with disabilities; and elimination the 10-ride paper ticket for Commuter Rail.

The public comment period lasted from January 8, 2016 to February 12, 2016. The public had multiple ways to get information and provide feedback about the options.

- The MBTA held 10 public meetings throughout its service area, and one public hearing at the State Transportation Building in Boston.
- An online tool allowed MBTA riders to see how their fare would change under the two proposed options and provide comments.
- Dedicated mailing and e-mail addresses were created for members of the public to send letters and e-mails.
- All fare increase-related calls to the MBTA Call Center were also recorded.

This document summarizes all of the feedback the MBTA received within the comment period. The FMCB members will take the public comments into consideration before they vote on changes to the fares. Any fare changes the FMCB votes to adopt will take effect no earlier than July 1, 2016.

# Comments Received

**Table 1** provides the breakdown of comments received by source. Over 2,500 people provided individual written or verbal comments through participation in public meetings, an online comment tool, e-mail, mail, or phone. Approximately 350 people also sent in one of several form e-mails. An additional 350 people answered questions in the online tool but did not submit specific comments, and nearly 5,000 additional people used the fare comparison portion of the online tool without answering questions or submitting comments.

Table 1: Comments of Source

Source	Approximate Number of Responses
Online Comment Tool – Fare Comparison Only	4,850
Online Comment Tool – Question Responses, No Comments	350
Online Comment Tool – Responses with Text Comments	1,930
E-mail (unique)	325
E-mail (form)	350
Public Meeting	170
Phone	80
Letter (unique)	15
Letter (form)	35
<b>Total:</b>	<b>8,105</b>



## Descriptions of the Public Meetings

Table 2: Attendance at Public Meetings

Location	Date & Time	Number of Attendants	Number of Speakers
<u>Lynn</u> *	January 25 6-8pm	56	18
<u>Brockton</u>	January 26 6-8pm	19	3
<u>Malden</u> *	January 27 6-8pm	25	8
<u>Concord</u> *	January 28 6-8pm	50	38
<u>Boston</u>	February 1 10am- Noon	45	17
<u>Worcester</u> *	February 1 6:30- 8:30pm	30	25
<u>Boston (public hearing)</u>	February 2 5-7pm	110	35
<u>Newton</u>	February 4 6-8pm	11	11
<u>Chelsea</u>	February 9 6-8pm	16	12
<u>Roxbury</u>	February 10 6-8pm	95	29
<u>Weymouth</u>	February 11 6-8pm	18	4
<b>Total:</b>		<b>475</b>	<b>200</b>

\*Joint Commuter Rail Schedule and Fare Increase Meeting. Number of speakers includes people who spoke about commuter rail schedules at the joint meetings. Across all meetings, a total of 170 speakers spoke about fares.

Between January 25, 2016, and February 11, 2016, the MBTA held 10 public meetings and one public hearing in Boston and surrounding towns and cities to gather public input on the proposed fare increase (see **Table 2**). A total of 475 people attended these meetings, about 200 of whom made verbal comments, and one group performed a skit opposing any fare increase. Approximately 170 of these comments were fare-increase related (some of the meetings also covered proposed Commuter Rail schedule changes). Various elected officials also attended and provided comments at these meetings, which received media coverage.

Transcripts for each meeting are available by clicking through the meeting's location link and a list of all public officials who provided comments is available as an Appendix.

# Description of Online Comment Tool

The screenshot displays the MBTA website interface for fare comparison. At the top, the MBTA logo and name are visible, along with a language dropdown menu set to 'English'. Below this is a section titled 'Fare Comparison Results'. Underneath, there is a table for '7-Day LinkPass\*' showing current and proposed prices. The current price is \$19.00. Two proposed options are shown: Option 1 at \$20.75 and Option 2 at \$21.25. A note below the table states '\*Valid on Subway, Local Bus, Commuter Rail Zone 1A, and Inner Harbor Ferry'. At the bottom of the interface, there are two blue buttons: '<< Previous' on the left and 'Next >>' on the right.

7-Day LinkPass*		
Current price	\$19.00	
Proposed prices	Option 1	Option 2
	\$20.75	\$21.25

\*Valid on Subway, Local Bus, Commuter Rail Zone 1A, and Inner Harbor Ferry

The online comment tool allowed respondents to look up individual fare types for comparison under Option 1 and Option 2. It also allowed respondents to report their usual current fare product along with their preferences between the options. It also allowed for submission of open-ended comments.

More than 7,000 people used the online comment tool, with nearly 2,000 people submitting text comments regarding the proposals.

## Description of Emails, Letters, and Phone Calls



In addition to comments from the online comment tool and the public meetings, the MBTA also received about 325 unique e-mails, along with approximately 350 form e-mails; 80 phone calls; about 15 unique letters; and about 35 form letters.

The form e-mail from the largest number of senders has been reproduced below. The MBTA received approximately 315 instances of this e-mail, with some minor variations.

*Subject: Keep MA public transportation affordable*

*Dear Governor Baker and MBTA Control Board members,*

*As you develop recommendations to fix the MBTA, we ask you to keep the following front and center in your consideration: Massachusetts needs affordable and reliable public transportation.*

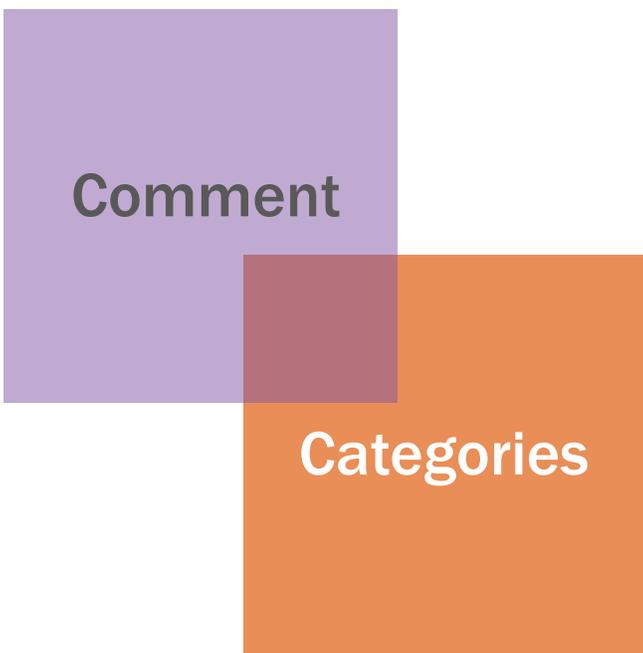
*With that in mind, please maintain the current levels of service on bus, subway, rail, and other lines, and limit fare increases to no more than 5% every two years.*

*When fares increase and service is cut, it's harder to get to school, work, recreation, family visits, and medical appointments. Further, we lose out on the many economic, environmental, and quality of life benefits that public transportation provides.*

*Our state lacks a 21st century public transportation system. As you decide how to move us towards that, don't leave the riders already committed to the system in the lurch.*

# Analysis of Comments

Regardless of how it was communicated, each received comment has been categorized into one or more topics which summarize areas of concerns or interest for the public, as well as the commenter’s sentiment of the issues described.



Comments were categorized into the eight most frequently raised topic areas:

- Service Quality
- MBTA Employee Compensation and Other Concerns
- Budget Management
- Other Revenue Alternatives
- Personal Affordability
- Low Income / Equity Concerns
- Fare Evasion
- Ridership, Economic Development & Environmental Impact

A comment can apply to more than one category. The following comment, for example, falls under service quality, fare evasion, and MBTA employee compensation and other concerns.

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**“...The service is not very good, and many days passes aren't even checked at all meaning that those of us with passes are footing the bill for everyone else. I also think that commuter rail costs, combined with parking fees, are just too high for the quality of the services provided. I think the T is poorly run, employees are overpaid and there needs to be accountability internally before the public pays more. Lastly, I do not agree with the pay scale, including hourly and overtime rates, for employees...”**

## Service Quality

This category includes statements about the MBTA's current and future service quality (on-time performance, frequency of service, maintenance and cleanliness, customer comfort, customer service, and safety).

- “It is ridiculous to expect riders to pay such increases in fares, particularly without seeing clear improvements in MBTA operations. Trains still break daily, commuter rail is still late often. I oppose any increase in fares at this time...”
- “Fix the system before you raise the prices! I can't believe you are considering raising rates when what is provided isn't worth it now because of the breakdowns!”
- “Based on the terrible service that we had to endure last winter and the continued problems on our line I don't think the MBTA is in a position to ask us to pay more money when they can't even keep our service going.”

## MBTA Employee Compensation and Other Concerns

This category includes statements about the level of compensation a MBTA employee receives, such as base salary, overtime pay, non-salary benefits (insurance, pension, etc.) as well as other concerns related to the behavior of MBTA employees.

- “Because I don't want to pay for the MBTA's bloated payroll, bloated retirement plans and outright abuse of overtime pay...”
- “From what I have heard, MBTA employees are already overpaid. Cut your costs before increasing the fare – start with the salaries and overtime.”

## Budget Management

This category includes statement about how the MBTA's budget is being managed, including capital investments, debt management, departmental spending, and allocation of funds.

- “Restructure the T's historic, excessive debt first. Once that's done, then come back to us. As I said, before assuming that fare increases are necessary, restructure the T's debt.”
- “The MBTA must show that it is able to be fiscally responsible and the recent mess involving the Green Line extension has been one of the biggest blunder I have seen to date. Raising rates does not make sense when the money isn't being handled properly.”

## Other Revenue Alternatives

This category indicates that a commenter has presented an alternative option for the MBTA to increase revenue without increasing fares.

- “Before we consider fare increases, we should take other reasonable measures like moving the Big Dig debt back to the highway department... inflation-adjusting the gas tax... and charging sales tax on Internet sales...”
- “Mass transit should be paid for through taxation. Mass transit reduces the number of vehicles on the streets, which saves a great variety of resources, including state funds. User fees, including T fares, are a regressive means of raising revenue.”

## Personal Affordability

This category covers customer comments about their ability to afford a fare increase.

- “My budget is as tight as I can possibly make it, and although an increase of \$26.50 might not seem like much, that’s a tank of gas or a few bags of groceries that I now can’t afford...”
- “Because pretty soon I will not be able to afford to work in Boston anymore...”

## Income / Equity Concerns

This category includes any statement customers have about the effect of a fare increase on persons with disabilities, seniors, students, minorities, and low-income riders.

- “This will disproportionately affect people of low-incomes - we should be making it easier, not more difficult to take the T.”
- “The poor, the elderly, and students should not have to pay more money for public transportation. Fix the problem another way.”

## Fare Evasion

This category includes any statement customers have about other riders not paying to utilize a MBTA service or fares not being collected.

- “Deficits can be corrected by more stringent fare collection procedures. Converting all fare payment transactions to tap method by way of Charlie Cards would help prevent fare evasion.”
- “For the second time and three weeks the gates at the riverside station were wide open with no fares being collected... It is ridiculous to discuss fare hikes when the fares are not being collected correctly...”

## Ridership, Economic Development and Environmental Impact

This category includes any statement about a fare increase's effect on ridership and on the state's economic development, as well as its effects on the environment due to an increase of personal vehicle usage.

- “If fares increase too much, it will spur people to get back in their cars, increasing congestion and pollution and decreasing ridership. Decreased ridership might negate a substantial amount of the fare increase.”
- “If fares increase, people might stop using the trains in higher numbers. More employers are allowing employees to work from home and with gas prices decreasing, it might be the same price/ not too much more to drive in to the city.”

# Comment Sentiment

Comment sentiment describes the perceived or displayed emotion of a comment received by the MBTA. Each comment can only have one sentiment, which is measured by the overall tone of the comment.

## Negative Sentiment

Comments that mostly use language that has negative connotations, such as words that describe irritation, anger, disgust, hate, dislike, and distress, are classified as negative comments.

*“The cost of living is just rising so much. **I can't live anymore!**”*

*“Because I believe that's all the T deserves for a fare hike You ask for more money, and are taking away some very important stops and can't/won't fix the problems like signal problems, always a signal problem, or switch problems. **TRY MAKING CHANGES BEFORE YOU TAKE MORE OF OUR MONEY!!!!**”*

## Neutral Sentiment

Comments that use minimal subjective language are classified as neutral. While neutral comments may contain words normally associated with positive and negative attributes, their overall tone does not lean to either positive or negative.

*“Increase the gas tax and tolls before increasing MBTA fares. “*

## Positive Sentiment

Comments that mostly use language that has positive connotations, such as words that describe encouragement, hope, and willingness, are classified as positive comments. Comments may include very minor criticism, but the overall tone should be positive.

*“The MBTA needs more money. Keep up the good work.”*

# Results of Analysis

**Figure 1** shows the eight established topics that customers raised in their comments. It is important to note that the total number of mentions is greater than the number of respondents as a comment can mention more than one topic. Service quality mentions were the most common, followed by personal affordability. Fifty percent of respondents were concerned about only one of the given categories, while the rest mentioned more than one concern within the eight categories, or their comment was too general to be categorized. The “Other” category captures these general comments, as well as commentary about the fare increase process (e.g. suggestions for potential locations for future meetings).

Comments that mentioned income and equity concerns (397 comments) were further sub-categorized (see **Table 3**). Of the 397 comments, 159 (40%) were concerned about the effect of the fare increase on low-income people. 77 (19%) were specifically concerned about the affordability of the student pass and student fares, and another 77 (19%) mentioned the effect on seniors and people with disabilities.

Table 3: Top Income and Equity Concerns

<b>Total Income and Equity Comments</b>	<b>397</b>	
Low-income	159	40%
Students	97	24%
Seniors or people with disabilities	77	19%

Figure 1: Mentions by Category

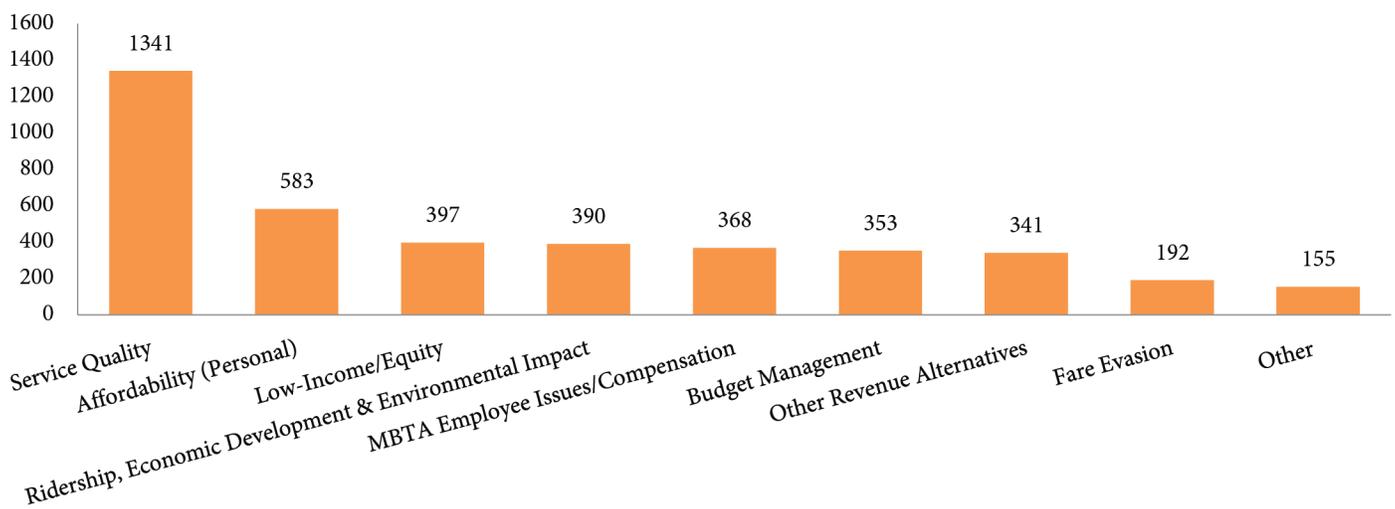
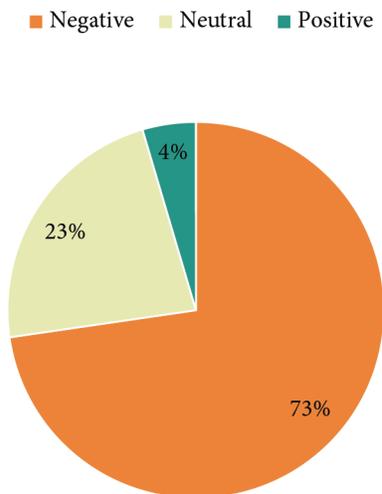


Figure 2: Comment Sentiment



The MBTA conducted a sentiment analysis in order to gauge customer feelings towards the proposed fare increase (see **Figure 2**). The majority of respondents (73%) expressed negative sentiments towards a proposed fare increase.

The breakdown of sentiment (positive, neutral, negative) varied by category (see **Figure 3**). Among the most “negative” categories was the MBTA Employee Compensation (90% of commenters expressed a negative sentiment, with only 10% neutral). One of the more diverse categories was Other Revenue Alternatives (65% negative, 31% neutral, 4% positive). The sentiment breakdown for each category is displayed in the chart below.

Figure 3: Sentiment by Category

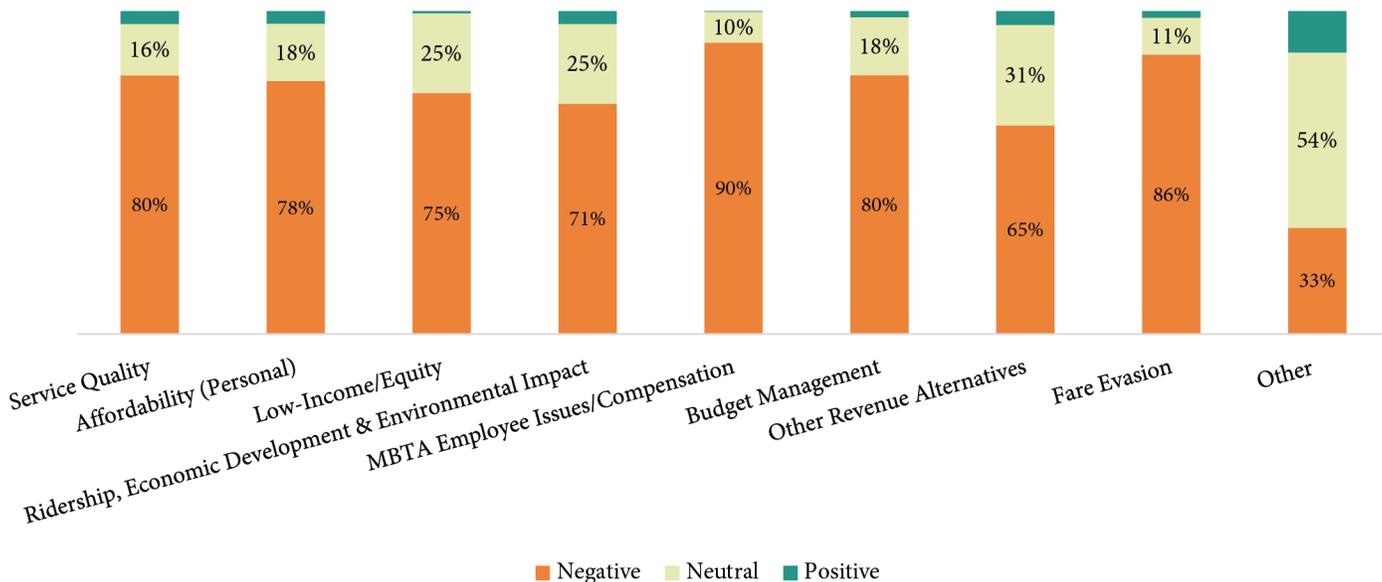
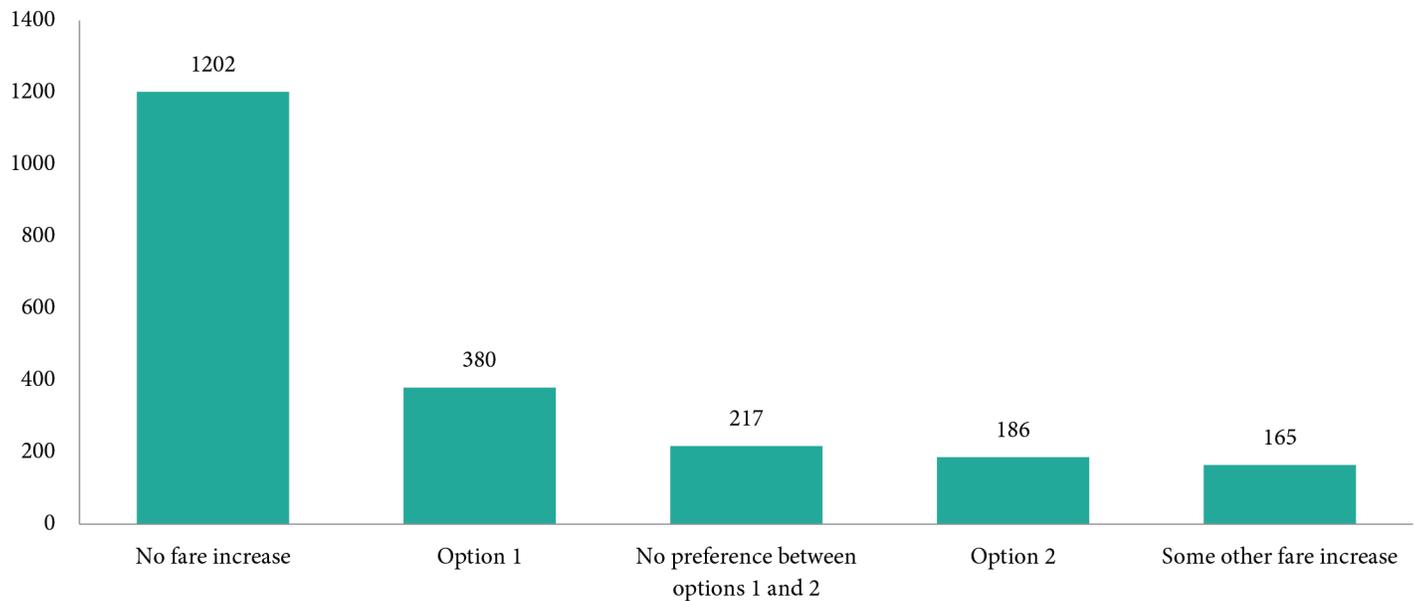


Figure 4: Preferred Fare Increase Option\* (online only)



\* Initially, only Option 1, Option 2, and No Preference choices were available; No Fare Increase and Some Other Fare Increase were added one day into the public comment process, after several dozen responses were recorded. Additionally, many commenters mentioned that there was no option to reflect transit dependence (i.e. that people would be forced to continue to ride the T even if it were unaffordable as they have no other choice).

The online comment tool also enabled customers to respond to some questions before providing commentary. Customers were asked what fare increase option they would prefer; the results are shown in **Figure 4**. The majority of respondents would prefer to not have a fare increase, followed by a preference for the option that would increase fares by a lower amount.

# Appendix: Elected Officials Offering Fare Proposal Comments

## Public Meetings

### Lynn

Sen. Thomas McGee  
Sen. Joan Lovely  
Rep. Brendan Crighton  
Councilor Dan Cahill  
Mayor's Aide Bill Bochnah

### Brockton

No elected officials spoke.

### Malden

Sen. Jason Lewis  
Rep. Paul Donato  
Rep. Paul Brodeur  
Rep. Steven Ultrino  
Councilor Ryan O'Malley

### Concord

Sen. Michael Barrett  
Rep. Cory Atkins

### Boston – 10 Park Plaza Feb. 1, 10am-Noon

No elected officials in attendance

### Worcester

Rep. Hannah Kane

### Boston – 10 Park Plaza Feb. 2, 5-7pm

Michael O'Neill – Boston School Committee

### Newton

Councilor Emily Norton  
Mayor Setti Warren

### Chelsea

Councilor Roy Avellaneda  
Councilor Judith Garcia  
Councilor Dan Cortell  
Councilor Enio Lopez

### Roxbury

Sen. Sonia Chang-Diaz  
Rep. Evandro Carvalho  
Councilor Tito Jackson

### Weymouth

No elected officials spoke. Sen. Keenan offered remarks to the Patriot Ledger

## Letters Received

Representative Liz Malia  
Bob Hedlund, Mayor of Weymouth  
Richard C. Rossi, City Manager of Cambridge