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Reprieve eyed for 'Ride' cuts

Dozens of seniors protest

Bob McGovern Tuesday, March 28, 2017



Credit: Nicolaus Czarnecki

Carolyn Villers

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After hearing public testimony from the Massachusetts Senior Action Council and several handicapped Bay Staters, board member Brian Lang made a motion to take Ride cuts off the table for the next fiscal year.

"I will simply say that I have been very moved by the testimony over the last few meetings — it has been compelling," Lang said. "I think we have a lot of work to do to rein in the cost of the Ride. I would suggest that we work with the stakeholders at doing that."

MBTA leaders have said they could erase \$7.4 million off the T's deficit by scaling back the Ride service. The move could eliminate trips to homes more than three-quarters of a mile from transit routes — which are beyond the zone in which federal rules require service.

MBTA Control Board Chairman Joseph Aiello offered an amendment that would approve removing the Ride cuts so long as there is "a specific plan" for cost savings for

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fiscal 2018 by next month. The amended motion was unanimously approved by the board.

The vote came after a long public hearing during which many stepped up to fight against cuts.

“Mobility for seniors is an important issue, which is why I oppose any changes to the Ride service,” said state Rep. William Driscoll (D-Norfolk).

“This is a big part of their autonomy and life. This is their access to health care, shopping and their friends.”

Nearby, members from Massachusetts Senior Action Council stood with signs that said: “Don’t Cut Us, Work With Us.”

Carolyn Villers, executive director of the council, said, “Its existence as even being a consideration of last resort is instilling fear in thousands of people without other options.”

T board member Steve Poftak told the Herald the “public input” has been helpful because “it gives us a more tangible sense of the impact of some of our decisions.”

Also on hand were MBTA mechanics fighting against privatization. Representatives of IAM Local 264 and Carmen’s Union President James O’Brien took to the podium to argue against outsourcing MBTA bus maintenance services.

The T board also delved into its plans to suspend certain commuter rail weekend rides for rail safety upgrades. As it stands, suspensions are slated to begin July 8.

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