July 29, 2022

Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority
ATTN: Steve Poftak
10 Park Plaza - Suite 3830
Boston, MA 02116

MelroseWakefield Hospital, Acadia HealthCare and Community Stakeholders Response to MBTA Bus Network Redesign Proposal

Dear General Manager Poftak:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written comments on behalf of MelroseWakefield Hospital, Acadia Healthcare, and Community Stakeholders regarding the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority ("MBTA") Bus Network Redesign Proposal. MelroseWakefield Hospital recently announced plans to develop a new behavioral health hospital at the former Malden Hospital location (Hospital Rd./Savin St.), in a joint venture with national behavioral health service provider Acadia Healthcare. We appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback to the MBTA on the proposed changes to the 99 bus route that is critical to providing convenient transportation for patients, families and staff.

These proposed changes are important to us because the 99 bus is the only public transit route to the future behavioral health hospital site. It provides direct access from the Malden train station. Access to public transportation is critical not only to patients and families needing to access services, but also to our ability to attract and hire top health care providers in the region. As the current proposal is written, it will require patients, families and staff to walk at least half a mile from Highland Avenue to the health care facilities. We request that the MBTA retain the current route that will stop on Savin Street and Hospital Road providing direct access to the current health center and future hospital site.

MelroseWakefield Hospital, in collaboration with community leaders, is committed to addressing the needs of the neighborhood and providing outstanding care locally. The goal is to bring much-needed behavioral health services to our region by creating a state-of-the-art hospital in collaboration with the community that provides sustainable benefits to the region. The behavioral health hospital will add 86 new behavioral health beds to the Commonwealth, including much-needed pediatric/adolescent beds, with a maximum capacity of 144 beds. The 99 bus is the only bus route that would serve the facility once it is opened; the proposed changes will eliminate direct public transit access to the behavioral health hospital.

The continuance of the 99 bus route onto Savin Street and Hospital Road is also critical to providing access for employees and patients to the existing services there, which includes the Malden Family Health Center at 178 Savin Street. The health center includes family medicine, primary care and other specialists from Tufts Medical Center Community Care, as well as Community Counseling services, and home visiting nurse offices. Malden is growing as a health care destination; public transit access is an essential part of the growth.
While we believe the overall MBTA bus network redesign will improve transportation access for patients and residents across the metro north area, we seek your partnership throughout the public comment period and request that we be made aware of changes to bus routes. We look forward to working together to ensure that access to the future behavioral hospital is not disrupted for patients or employees.

MelroseWakefield Hospital and Acadia Healthcare strive to address health disparities in our region. MelroseWakefield Hospital's most recent community health needs assessment shows that access to quality, affordable healthcare, and mental health are top concerns in our community. Elder and youth focus groups in particular identified mental health as a top concern. It is well established that at-risk populations rely on public transportation to access services, including accessing healthcare. Given the ongoing pandemic, we cannot reduce, remove, or limit access to necessary services for our patients and community. Discontinuing and altering transportation routes that will be relied on by patients would be a significant barrier to care.

Thank you for considering our comments regarding the proposed changes to the MBTA bus routes. Should you have any questions, concerns, or need further information, please do not hesitate to contact Esther Hering at esther.hering@tuftsmedicine.org or (857) 529-5627.

Sincerely,

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Executive Vice President, Tufts Medicine

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