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Metro

T wraps up hearings on cuts, vows to come up with plan

By **Matt Rocheleau** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT MARCH 13, 2012

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Autumn McManus was the last speaker Monday night during the final public hearing, held in Brighton, on proposed MBTA service cuts and fare hikes as the agency looks for ways to close a projected \$161 million budget gap by next month's deadline.

The 24-year-old said he is used to waiting. Using a mix of T subway and commuter rail trains from his home in Brighton, he travels a total of four hours to get to and from his eight-hour shifts working as a cook in West Concord. He said he pays \$210 a month for that commute.

Like many who spoke at the hearing at the Veronica B. Smith Senior Center in Brighton Center, McManus said proposals that call for not only lessening access to public transportation, but also making it more

expensive are absurd.

“I’ve noticed the people being impacted the most [by proposed cuts and fare increases]: it’s the commuter rail, the E Line, the Mattapan High Speed rail,” he said in an interview after the hearing.

“It’s the people from working-class neighborhoods who, due to the economic situation, are forced to travel long distances, rely on public transportation, and can barely afford that,” McManus added. “I’m sickened by this.”

About 6,000 people have attended the hearings that came after the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority released two different scenarios that would each raise fees and reduce services at different levels, but aim toward the same goal of filling the financial hole the agency faces in the coming fiscal year. More than 1,750 people have spoken at the hearings.

The T’s board has until April 15 to approve a budget for fiscal 2013. That budget, and any service cuts or fare increases that go with it, will take effect July 1.

Nearly all those who spoke Monday echoed the plea heard at hearing after hearing since the sessions began in mid-January - that the T choose not to implement either of the scenarios.

Instead, riders have asked MBTA officials to dig harder to find some way to avoid cutting service or increasing fares and especially avoid changes that would impact society’s most vulnerable, including the poor and disabled.

But MBTA general manager Jonathan Davis said Monday night that neither of the two previously released scenarios will be selected by the agency’s board.

Instead, the committee that drafted those two proposals will take testimony from all of the hearings’ speakers and feedback from more than 5,600 e-mails and draft new recommendations. Davis said he hopes those recommendations will be submitted by the MBTA board’s monthly meeting on April 4.

Covering costs of advertising, interpreters, transcribers, and the sporadic need to rent sound system equipment, the T spent about \$45,000 to hold the public hearings on the proposals, said Joe Pesaturo, a spokesman for the T.

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