

Allston Multimodal Project

Layover Response

April 30, 2025



Topic: South Side Layover

- Q. Why aren't other sites being considered to provide additional layover on the South Side, including: South Station, Springfield, Middleboro (maintain existing layover), the BTB Tow Lot adjacent to Widett Circle,, I-90/Rt. 128 Interchange, and expansion of layover in Readville as part of the Southside Maintenance Facility Project?*
- Q. How are south side overnight layover needs balanced between the urban core and the outer ends of the lines?*
- A. Given the projected shortfall of layover relative to projected needs, as described in the South Side Layover Need Analysis White Paper dated March 5, 2025, there is continued emphasis on identifying additional locations in Boston beyond Widett Circle and Beacon Park Yard to provide additional layover which support current and future service plans. Three specific sites that Task Force members asked about are described below.

South Station

South Station is not a long-term feasible location to meet the passenger rail layover needs in Boston. While trains can be stored at South Station on a short-term basis, it is not a layover facility that would enable the necessary daily inspections and service checks needed to support operations. In addition, due to public access at South Station during all hours, safety and security concerns limit the MBTA's ability to leave train equipment unattended overnight. As part of fleet transition plans, Amtrak is evaluating the potential for use of the South Station platforms, in conjunction with servicing and provisioning at the Southampton Street facility and overnight security, to meet the needs of the growing services. This use would be for staging trains only and would not involve any maintenance activities taking place at the platforms.

Springfield

Space for passenger rail layover in Springfield is currently under design as part of the Compass Rail Program. The planned facility will accommodate the existing MassDOT-supported Amtrak Hartford Line/Valley Flyer service and future Inland Route service between Boston and New Haven. As discussed during the April Task Force meeting, MassDOT purchased a Commercial Driver's License training site in Springfield with an eye for potential future rail yard use in support of an expanded Valley Flyer service. Due to constraints of the freight owned-operated corridor between Springfield and Worcester, such as the over 30 miles of single-track railroad that hosts 14 to 16 daily through-freight trains and five or more daily local switching trains that serve local customers and the constrained capacity east of Worcester to operate additional non-revenue trains, it is not a reasonable alternative to sites in the Boston area.

Middleboro

The service plan developed for the South Coast Rail service depends on rail starts to occur in either Boston or the outlying terminals. Use of Middleboro Yard for layover would introduce added service costs for the resulting non-revenue service moves. In addition, the capacity of the Old Colony lines are limited by significant single-tracked segments. Adding non-revenue "deadhead" moves to and from Middleborough Yard would further strain the overburdened line.

Other sites in Boston could be explored for their feasibility by updating the South Station Expansion 2013 Layover Facility Alternatives Analysis. Specifically, for MBTA all day bi-directional service, plans for layover balance the needs between the urban core and the outer ends of the lines, with some additional layover space required in close proximity to maintenance facilities at the hub of the MBTA's system. For Compass Rail and Amtrak services, due to limited space in the Boston area, opportunities for layover in other communities (Springfield, New Haven, CT, Albany, NY, New York City and Washington DC) have also been incorporated into system planning. Priority is given to locations currently owned by Amtrak or the Commonwealth or properties owned by others that are adjacent to existing layover tracks and/or maintenance facilities. However, other properties will also be considered, particularly in the urban core, in collaboration with the City of Boston. The work to activate more layover through the system will continue in parallel with the advancement of the Allston Multimodal Project.

Layover growth in Boston outpaces outlying points primarily because the MBTA system is currently heavily weighted to outlying points with 71% of layover need accommodated outside of the Boston core. In the future the system will be more evenly weighted to both inbound and outbound ends with 48% of the layover need being accommodated outside the Boston core.

Topic: Existing Layover Shortfalls

- Q. What are MBTA's plans to address the projected 12 train shortage of layover anticipated in 2030 (72 spots vs. a need of 84)?*
- Q. How is Amtrak handling current layover capacity issues at Southampton (overnight layover is listed as 14 spots while the layover capacity is listed as 8 spots) resulting in 6 trains currently without an available spot at this yard?*
- A. When there are shortages of space in Boston, the MBTA and Amtrak shuffle trains between stations, maintenance facilities, and layover facilities to juggle and adapt to the system constraints. In real terms, this equipment shuffling introduces operational inefficiencies and increases the need for non-revenue "deadhead" moves, which ultimately imposes additional operational costs. Currently Amtrak is constructing and modifying maintenance facilities on the Southampton Street Site to accommodate NextGen Acela and Airo fleets being delivered. Capacity at the facility has been impacted by the construction phase of these improvements.

Topic: MBTA and Amtrak co-location

- Q. Can MBTA and Amtrak overnight layover and services be co-located?*
- A. Due to operational differences between Amtrak intercity services and MBTA Commuter/ Regional Rail services, co-locating layover (mid-day or overnight) and maintenance is not feasible. Differences in the train fleets, equipment needs, facility geometric requirements and union issues require separate facilities. It is possible to locate the separate facilities on the same parcel if space allows.

For example, due to existing MBTA layover space shortage, MBTA currently uses a portion of Amtrak's Southampton Street Facility, known as the Front Yard. Current Amtrak plans anticipate their own use of the Front Yard portion of the site as they transition from the current fleet and operations to a larger Boston-based fleet needed to operate the increased level of service. However, as Amtrak fleet and facility plans evolve, continued use of the Front Yard by MBTA will be evaluated.

Although it has been commonly stated that Amtrak has used the MBTA's Commuter Rail Maintenance Facility in Somerville during a previous outage of the Grand Junction, the Amtrak trains were just stored at that location while waiting to be coupled with MBTA trains enroute to Boston via Ayer and Worcester.