

# BOSTON'S

## AMAZING TECHNICOLOR TRAINS

PART TWO



*(Editor's Note: Last month the author showed us the present-day operations of Boston's extensive rail network. This month, we examine plans for future rail development.)*

**R**estoration of rail service to the South Shore has long been a dream of many. Probably, even before the Red Line was extended from Savin Hill to Quincy in 1971 (and to Braintree in 1980) on the former Old Colony right-of-way, knowledgeable individuals were thinking that the 1959 abandonment was a terrible mistake. Sadly, such enlightened thinking was not part of MBTA planning until very recently.

The removal of the Red Line's Eliot Shops at Harvard Square to the former New Haven Dover Street Yard—with connecting tracks from Columbia Junction over the Midland Bridge—eliminated the Old Colony right-of-way to South Station. Further south, the line was four-tracked to Atlantic in 1913, with extra width added for transit expansion in 1927, when the Ashmont Rapid Transit Line was added to the right-of-way. Had it not been for the fortuitous provision of a single freight-track to the Neponset Bridge alongside the 1971 Red Line Quincy extension, there wouldn't be any possibility of Old Colony restoration today.

Seizing on this, the MBTA has negotiated a single-track main





Robert Willoughby Jones  
EDITOR, INTERURBAN PRESS BOOKS

OPPOSITE PAGE: Attleboro depot, as seen from the 6:14 p.m. headed for Boston, is in fine shape these days. Ahead, the low green signal indicates this train is about to cross over to the center track. MAIN PHOTO: In the author's opinion, F10 No. 1104 (a rebuilt F7) carried MBTA's most attractive scheme. Here, 1104 pulls an outbound midday train past the pond at Pickman Park, near Salem on the Ipswich line on an August day in 1988. RIGHT: In this July 1990 scene at North Station, a commuter train for Lowell, at left, awaits a green signal, while a Reading train passes through the drawbridge. Three photos, INTERURBAN PRESS: Robert Willoughby Jones





# BOSTON'S

## AMAZING TECHNICOLOR TRAINS

**RIGHT:** The first four double-decker Kawasaki-built commuter cars delivered to MBTA are seen on display at Attleboro on Sept. 8, 1990. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** A Franklin Branch outbound train pulls away from its Readville station stop on July 12, 1989, while the locomotive of a Readville shuttle train sits on the bridge spanning the main. Both photos, George A. Forero Jr.



line for the new service, with just as much passing siding as can possibly be squeezed in. Some 1½ miles of double track will be adjacent to the new Neponset Rail Bridge, with additional double-track segments at Braintree Station and at several points on the branches. The "T" proposes returning rail service on the three Old Colony lines to Middleboro, Plymouth, and Greenbush. Some minimal resistance to the first two projects has largely been overcome, but not on the Greenbush line. The most significant opposition comes from a highly vocal contingent in Hingham, which cites a possible threat to its historical district. This very small and intimate village might be overwhelmed by trains. Local merchants are dependent for parking on the railroad right-of-way, where packed dirt almost obscures the old rails.

At the behest of MBTA, the 1990 election carried a non-binding questionnaire for citizens of the affected communities. Except for Hingham, there was overwhelming support for the trains, which are indeed desperately needed because of traffic congestion on the South Shore. A bored tunnel (but not cut-and-cover) would probably alleviate most problems—it would certainly preserve the quiet of the historic district—but the cost would be a gigantic \$180 million. Still, it might be the only acceptable compromise.

A problem has developed at Kingston on the Plymouth line, where insufficient land for parking in the town center caused the proposal of an alternate alignment southwest from the former right-of-way. This would solve the parking situation but would take away service from the central business district. A compromise proposal, having service to both locations, seems highly impractical and unnecessarily expensive.

The Old Colony rebirth is a major triumph for transit advocates. Unfortunately, under current plans, it will be operationally compromised by so much single track in its corridor from South Station. Rationalization is imperative here, reducing the Red Line shop access to single iron, and establishing double track for start-up of Old Colony trains. (Ideally, Cabot Shops ought to be moved to either end of the Red Line for improved implementation. Now they are in the middle of the system, off on a branch.)

### Worcester

It is said that the Worcester extension got to the front burner ahead of Newburyport because of Governor William Weld's particular interest. He is thought to be the chief agent in moving the project to the top of the to-be-done list, ahead of anxious and slightly miffed Newburyport. For a long time Worcester powers—led by its city manager—protested they didn't need commuter trains to Boston (the city has a proud tradition of self-sufficiency), but the sagging economy has prompted rethinking, and the governor wanted to help. Since what's involved here is a well-maintained line under Conrail, the project would be much less costly than restoring a little-used line elsewhere. Some additional double track will be required, along with more rolling stock and locomotives and some new station platforms.

Worcester trains would run express between Boston and Framingham, leaving the interim local stops to the Framingham turns.

### Newburyport

From 1840 to 1976, Newburyport enjoyed regular train service, first on the Eastern Railroad, which built the line, then on its successor, Boston & Maine. Through-trains to Portland were dropped in 1951; by 1965 only one daily Boston round trip remained—a single Budd RDC—and it was cut back to Ipswich in 1976. In the 16 intervening years, rider interest has increased and MBTA sees a viable market in Newburyport service, a 9½-mile extension from the present Ipswich terminus. It is planned to run all trains to Newburyport for layover, and Rowley is expected to be a station stop once again.

It's expected that contractor crews will soon be pulling up the old rail, ties, and ballast between Ipswich and Newburyport. Bridge repairs, track installation and communication and signal work will follow, with trains expected to run by 1995 at the latest.





## Plaistow, N.H.

A 5.4-mile extension of Haverhill service is seen by the "T" as a cost-effective way of adding Boston riders from a densely populated area, at a location where it could develop major parking facilities. The Haverhill stop is in the middle of a busy downtown where there is no land for parking. Track upgrading is expected to be coming from Amtrak's anticipated Maine service.

## Nashua, N.H.

Nashua is only 39 miles from Boston, and it would be just 13.5 miles in extended track from Gallagher Terminal in Lowell. The "T" would like to go there and sees good ridership potential—1,000 riders a day from Nashua, plus a substantial number from the University of Lowell and, depending on its political mood, the State of New Hampshire may assist with funding. Charles P. O'Leary, New Hampshire's transportation commissioner, has expressed a strong preference for rural and urban bus systems, vans for the elderly, and light rail, specifically between Nashua and Lowell. He has indicated possible interest in assisting with commuter rail to Boston, though his tone is not one of great enthusiasm. His anti-rail bias is odd when public sentiment elsewhere in the U.S. is leaning strongly in its favor.

The discouraging results of the 1980 experimental service to Concord are sometimes used by opponents as a red flag. Nonetheless,

most observers today contend that service, which started with two weekday round trips, was not conveniently scheduled. A potential 1,000 riders a day is an impressive number and there is growing momentum for a Nashua extension.

## Taunton and Fall River

Another big "T" dream (it's so big that it's been called the Blue-Sky Scheme) is to reestablish service to New Bedford and, perhaps, Fall River as an extension of the Stoughton Line. The New Haven still operated trains to these two cities until 1958, when it began cutting back its Old Colony responsibilities, of which this was one. Trackage as far as Stoughton was old Boston & Providence rail, not subject to the same abandonment procedures as Old Colony, and thus it was saved.

Track would be re-laid over a preserved right-of-way the 17.1 miles between Stoughton and Taunton. Conrail presently operates the track from Taunton to Myricks (6.3 miles) and from Myricks to New Bedford (14 miles) and Myricks to Fall River (10.7 miles), so these sections would need only upgrading rather than complete replacement.

The original line to Stoughton opened April 7, 1845, and to North Easton on May 16, 1855. The branch was double-tracked to Stoughton in 1892. Today it is single track, but the wide right-of-way is intact (indeed there is a passing siding at the mouth of the branch at Canton Junction).



# BOSTON'S

AMAZING  
TECHNICOLOR  
TRAINS

One especially handsome depot in commuter territory is the former New Haven station in Stoughton, still standing today. When this photo was taken on Oct. 22, 1966, the station was host to a visit from the Railroad Enthusiasts of New England in a Budd RDC. Leon Onofri collection



Stoughton is one of the MBTA's heaviest patronized stations; in its favor is the parking relieving the pressure at Canton Junction.

## Saxonville

This interesting idea is to utilize the old Saxonville Branch north from Natick. It last saw a passenger train in 1936 and was bisected with the construction of the Massachusetts Turnpike. Its appeal is that it would provide a major parking area right at the Pike. One scenario sees this as a new alternate terminus for the present, frequent Framingham service. Framingham would then be served by the through-trains to Worcester. When this plan originated, there was virtually no station parking in Framingham. Since then the city has built a garage with several hundred spaces, helping to increase rail ridership. Worcester trains are expected to run express between Boston and Framingham, a practice that will no doubt improve ridership potential.

## Bellingham

Current "T" service to Forge Park is the result of an innovative idea to interchange with autos at Interstate 495. This is the former New Haven line to Franklin, with state-of-the-art track and signaling, extended 2.3 miles along another former New Haven branch to just beyond Unionville, now a new station, Forge Park.

An extension to Bellingham (2.3 miles) and perhaps even Milford (six miles) is seen as desirable to serve additional highly populated areas. (Boston & Albany ran a commuter train to Milford from its main line at Framingham until 1959.) For the present, service southwest of Franklin to Blackstone, or even into Rhode Island or Connecticut, is not being considered.

The famous *White Train* of the old New York & New England traversed these rails during the 1890s—its cars really were painted white. New Haven trains traveled here from Boston to Hartford and Waterbury until the Quinebaug River ravaged a bridge and part of the roadbed during a 1955 hurricane. Revenues were marginal and the New Haven had no money for repairs, so service was never restored.

## Rights-Of-Way For Future Options.

An inspection of the map on the opposite page reveals three important areas once served by rail where today none exists. There are no plans to develop service here, but the MBTA has acquired the rights-of-way for that day when population growth might influence the need for service:

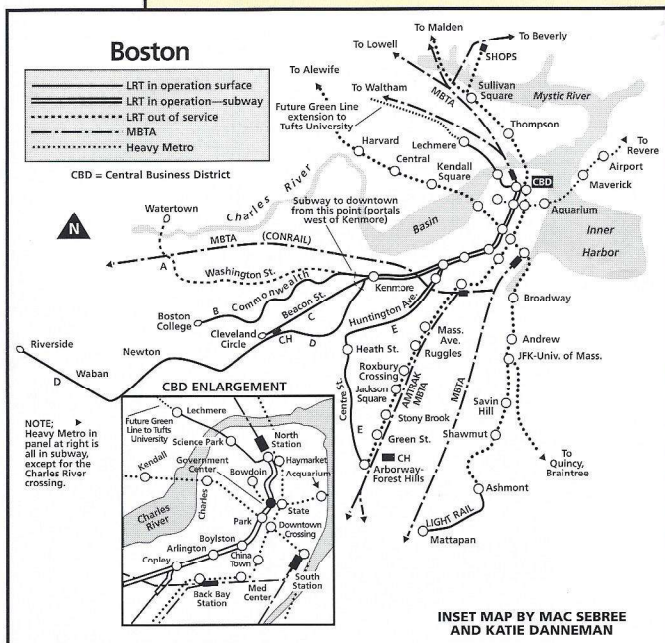
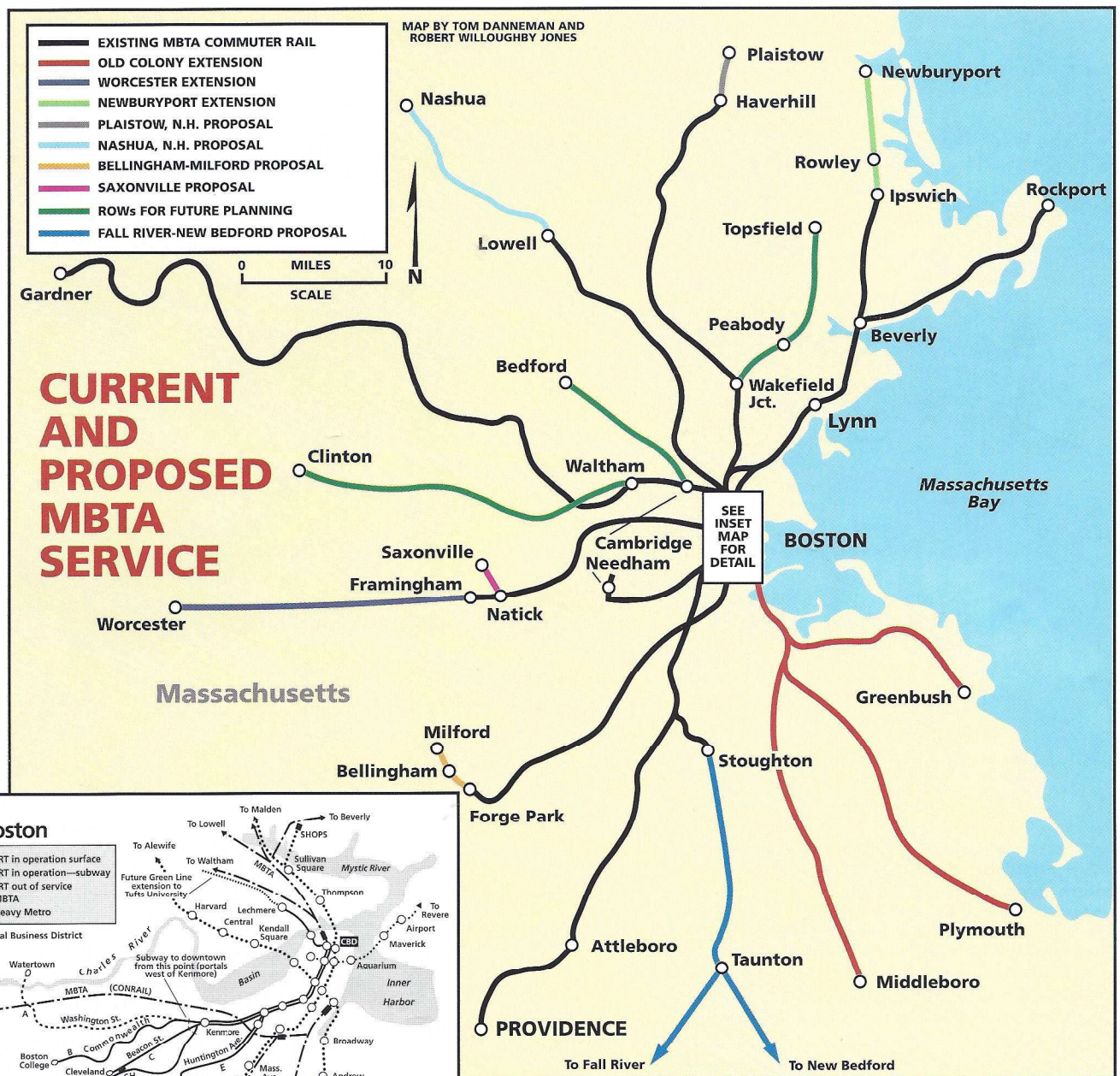
- An important residential area, centering around Danvers and Topsfield, was served until 1959 by B&M. The area lies halfway between the Ipswich and Haverhill lines. Ridership was once good here, but highway connections to Boston in the 1950s drained most of it away. A parking lot at Route 1 and I-95 could be sited easily in Peabody.

- Bedford had five weekday round trips after World War II, dwindling to a single round trip until 1977; ridership was not high by comparison to other lines, and the physical plant was in terrible shape at the end. And rail commuters could get frequent service on either the Fitchburg or New Hampshire lines. A bike path on its right-of-way was completed in spring 1992. The configuration of the Alewife Red Line station is such that restoring a commuter rail connection past it would be possible but complex, probably including the relocation of several roads.

- The Central Mass Branch was one of B&M's most interesting and picturesque lines, even if it was a little short on revenue. Trains ran to Lancaster until 1950, to Clinton until 1958, and to Hudson until 1965. A single round trip operated to South Sudbury until the end of service in 1971. MBTA owns the right-of-way as far as Berlin, plus a spur from Gleason Junction to Marlborough.

The "T" had to make difficult decisions concerning the abandonment of lines. The Bedford Branch and the Central Mass were moribund and capital-starved when they were closed. Fortunately the rights-of-way are intact. The Woburn Loop, on the other hand, is now only a memory. Once a busy, six-mile alternate route on the New Hampshire main line, it was reduced to a two-mile spur from Winchester in 1959. It was closed in 1981 because of badly deteriorating track even though it was one of the most active commuter locations, and the right-of-way has recently been liquidated.





The restoration of such routes would make North Station's 10 tracks too crowded to maintain on-time arrivals and departures. Additional terminal capacity would be imperative. Tragically, it is not being planned for.

## Trains to Maine

Once the pride of its post-war fleet of streamlined cars, B&M's Portland rail service reached an inglorious end on Jan. 4, 1965, when the last Budd Car departed a dumpy shack, a replacement for the magnificent Portland Union Station demolished in

1961, to make way for a shopping mall. As surely every railfan knows by now, Amtrak is hoping to inaugurate new service to Portland by late 1994, thanks to an astute and enlightened political coalition, notably spearheaded by Wayne Davis, chairman of TrainRiders/Northeast.

The most likely routing from Boston is over the New Hampshire Division to Wilmington, over the Wildcat to Wilmington Junction, then north to Portland on the Western Division. The Portland Division south of Wilmington Junction has 21 grade crossings, whereas only six will be encountered on the alternate routing. Four of these crossings are on the three-mile Wildcat; where the "T" is expected to seek raising the speed limit from 25 to 40 mph.

Amtrak is casting about for equipment, and may lease surplus cab-control cars from MBTA (which owns 134 of them). Potential stations announced are Woburn, Haverhill, Dover, Durham, Exeter, Wells, and Saco. The new Hampshire stops—Dover and Exeter—are being included despite New Hampshire's loud opposition to assisting with any funding for operational support. Amtrak, though, has committed \$20 million for equipment; \$30 million for track upgrading and stations will come from the 1991 Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act [ISTEA]; Massachusetts and Maine will share operating expenses.