

# MBTA ACCESSIBILITY LAWSUIT UPDATE

Greater Boston Residents Working Together for ADA Compliance by the MBTA

Daniels-Finegold Et Al. v. MBTA

Fall 2008

Federal Court: Civil Action No. 02 CV 11504 MEL

Issue XVI

## How is the MBTA increasing access?

Whether the topic was crowded buses or stop announcements, the questions at the most recent public meeting held by the settlement's Independent Monitor, Judge Patrick King, revolved around one theme: how is the MBTA improving service for passengers with disabilities? The August 4<sup>th</sup> meeting was an open forum for passengers to communicate their concerns to King and ask for updates on the MBTA's latest efforts from Gary Talbot, the assistant general manager of System-Wide Accessibility (SWA). King released the results of his baseline bus study, which was conducted last fall before 1,500 bus drivers completed a new accessibility training. The next bus study, scheduled to start in late fall of 2008, will measure how effective the training program has been in improving bus service. The MBTA's SWA office has also started a program to internally monitor bus service quality. King supported the concerns of plaintiffs by highlighting some key areas where more progress is needed: platform gaps, emergency planning, wayfinding and automated fare collection improvements.

### Q & A from the meeting:

- **How is the T addressing the problem of not always being able to find customer service agents (CSA's) in subway stations to request a bridgeplate for platform gaps?**

King noted that the settlement calls for customer service being available to assist passengers. According to Talbot, the first step for addressing the problem is the upcoming accessibility training for CSA's. If difficulties finding CSA's continue, the T might consider storing bridgeplates on trains instead of platforms so that a train operator would be available to offer immediate assistance.

- **What happens to bus drivers who are rude or not following accessibility procedures?**

The SWA office recently hired Rob Sampson from the Customer Service department to oversee its internal monitoring program. Undercover testers and observers will help identify which drivers need further training or disciplinary action. Passengers can also report poor service to the MBTA's customer service line (617-222-3200) and the SWA office (617-222-1666).

- **How is the T responding to the issue of automated stop announcements sometimes being inaccurate or absent on subway trains?**

After focusing first on bus driver training, Talbot reported that the SWA office will soon be looking at training for the light and heavy rail personnel, including what procedures exist for checking automated announcement equipment at the start of a train operator's shift.

- **What's happening with enforcing parking bans and ensuring snow removal at bus stops?**

The MBTA proposed a statewide bill to increase the fine for parking in bus stops and to streamline how MBTA police issue parking tickets. The bill did not come up for a vote in the most recent session and would need to be introduced again. The SWA office is also working on a directory of the 8,000 MBTA bus stops so that customer service will be able to direct passengers to the party responsible for snow removal (such as the local town or city) at each stop.

- **Does the MBTA train employees on the etiquette of assisting people with disabilities?**

The recent bus driver accessibility training included instruction on customer service and how to properly assist passengers with disabilities. The upcoming CSA training will cover similar topics, like how to provide guidance to a person with a visual impairment if needed.



Pictured: Laura Brelsford

## On the job at the MBTA: Laura Brelsford

When Laura Brelsford moved to the Boston area in 2004, she started using the T every day. As a wheelchair user, Laura says she “struggled with a lot of the same issues that the plaintiffs did.” Between finding an elevator or a bus with a working lift, she would leave a 45 minute cushion to be able to arrive at her destination on time.

Last fall, Laura saw the posting for System-Wide Accessibility coordinator at the newly created SWA office. Based on the press coverage of the settlement, the hiring of Gary Talbot as assistant general manager and how much general manager Dan Grabauskas prioritized accessibility, Laura knew it was a unique time to be at the T. She wanted to be a part of it.

Now that she has an inside look at the MBTA, Laura has a new appreciation for its employees and found out “that there are so many staff here committed to providing excellent service.” Her boss, Gary Talbot, has emphasized that accessibility

problems should be fixed not just to fulfill the settlement but because of an appreciation of the basic rights of people with disabilities.

For someone who never expected to work in transportation, Laura is fast becoming an expert. After she graduated from Mount Holyoke College, she first worked as an investigator for the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination. Now her responsibilities at the MBTA include figuring out where the MBTA is in achieving compliance with the settlement and where the MBTA should focus its efforts. Over the past four months, she worked on setting up the MBTA’s new internal monitoring program. More major projects are coming up, including a new CSA training program, planning for wayfinding and making progress on platform gaps.

### MBTA seeks feedback from customers with visual impairments

As part of the MBTA’s ongoing work to ensure accessibility for customers with disabilities, the MBTA is seeking feedback from individuals with visual impairments on how the MBTA can continue to improve the accessibility of its equipment and services. If you have a suggestion, please contact Larry Haile by calling 617-835-2904 or by emailing HaileLarry1@aol.com. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated as the MBTA continues its efforts to make the system accessible.

#### Barriers to accessing health care?

- Hospitals refusing accommodation requests
- Not being weighed at doctor’s appointments
- Crowded or narrow hallways in hospitals

#### Finding problems on the MBTA?

- Trouble using CharlieCard fare system
- Difficult to navigate stations
- Problems riding the Green Line

GBLS and BCIL are working together to improve accessibility at health care facilities and the MBTA for individuals with disabilities. To share your experiences, please contact:

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