

THE ADVISOR

NEWSLETTER OF THE MASSACHUSETTS BAY TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY ADVISORY BOARD

June 1989 Vol.6 No.3

Holding pattern frustrates callers!

What has 15 lines, cost \$1.7 million to install, and causes @#\$\$%^&* frustration? Call 722-3200. If the line is busy, you've solved the riddle and failed to reach the MBTA's information line.

A busy signal is the most likely response a caller gets when dialing T information, according to an Advisory Board survey taken during the week of May 8th. Fifty-nine percent of the 54 calls made by the survey team resulted in busy signals; four percent in disconnects. The average wait for a live operator for those 20 calls that went through was five minutes and 12 seconds, well

above the Authority's stated standard of two minutes maximum acceptable wait.

In response to Advisory Board inquiry, the T's marketing department which has responsibility for the phone information system states, "Because of insufficient staff, we have not reached our target on a continuing basis."

According to the T's own records for the week of May 15th, 80% of the half-hour time blocks in the peak time between 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. recorded average waits greater than two minutes and 32% had average waits greater than five minutes. Thirty percent of weekday callers to T information hang up before reaching a

continued to page 5

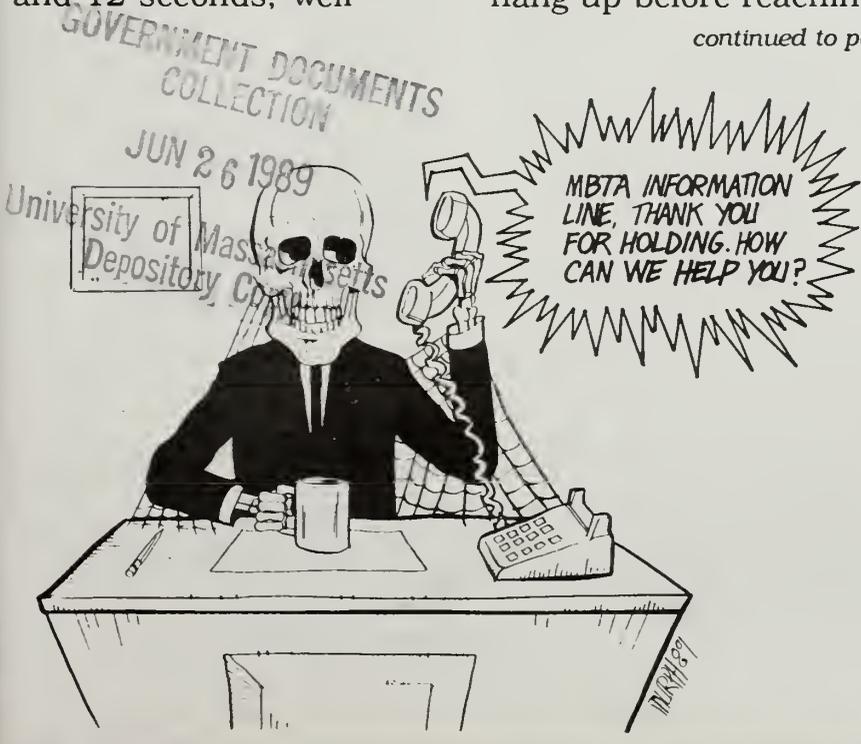
Fare collection impasse

Despite a significant increase in MBTA efforts to maintain turnstiles and passreaders, a recent survey of 65 of the MBTA's 220 passreader/turnstile units in 18 of the subway's busiest stations revealed that only 85% were functioning properly. This is consistent with other checks the Advisory Board has done in the past six years. The only improvement in performance noted was that no passreader accepted an invalid pass.

According to the MBTA, the number of fare collection equipment problems reported is growing, but the increase can be attributed to "stepped up monitoring." Report of broken passreaders or turnstiles depends on an employee noting a malfunction and calling it in. In addition, each morning a worker from Chauncy Street calls every station to ensure that controllers (which govern passreader performance) are functioning properly. When a controller is not working, any pass -- including expired passes -- will work.

The MBTA is proud that repair time for turnstiles is quicker than

continued to page 6



'Bikes on the T' primer

The Boston area offers a wealth of bicycling opportunities: leisurely trips along the Charles; long circuits around the many lakes and ponds that dot the area; and day trips through the outlying hills and wetlands. A sensible way for the leisurely rider to get to these destinations would seem to be the T. However, taking a bicycle on the MBTA is a complex process requiring an extensive "How-to" course for all but the most avid cyclists.

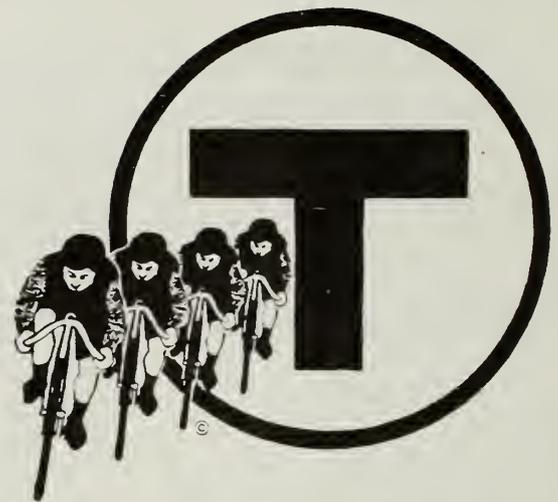
Potential bikers are severely time constrained. They may bring a bicycle on the T only during Sundays and holidays, excluding Sundays between Thanksgiving and Christmas and the holidays of Patriot's Day, Bunker Hill Day, Fourth of July and Columbus Day. It is all right to board with a bike on Veteran's Day (November) and President's Day (February). But bring a shovel. There is no Sunday service on the South Side (except usually between Thanksgiving and Christmas, when you're not allowed on anyway) so plan on visiting Boston's justifiably famous North Shore [cf. Summer Sizzler, page 4].

Bicycles are absolutely verboten on buses and the Green Line. The "Bikes on the T" brochure claims you cannot ever board commuter rail with a bicycle, but the "Bikes on Commuter Rail" brochure says you can. In reality, bikes have been accepted on commuter rail since July 1988. To bring along your bike on any part of the system you will need a permit. Permits carry the bearer's picture and "must be visibly attached to cyclist's clothing" -- like an employee security badge admitting you to the war room at the Pentagon. A permit costs \$5, is valid for two years, and can be picked up at the Senior Citizen Registration Office (?) in the Washington Street Concourse.

If a cyclist loses his/her permit, he must report the loss to the Pass Office (not the Senior Citizen Registration Office) within 48 hours. The urgency is not explained. The brochure warns ominously that "reissue of permits will be at the discretion of the MBTA." Travelers to Eastern Europe may find all of this familiar.

Even with a permit, a cyclist is not allowed to board just any T vehicle at will. To take a bike on commuter rail, one has to make a reservation "up to 6 days before the trip." To make a reservation go to North Station or call 227-5070 (1-800-392-6099). Cyclists who phone in must pick up their reservations at North Station at least 15 minutes before a trip.

Since driving and parking at North Station is horrific, you'll want to take the T there. (That's the whole point, isn't it? Otherwise it would be much simpler to just load the old Schwinn in the back seat and not bother with



this reservation/permit/Sunday only routine...). Although North Station is served by both the Green Line and the Orange Line, bike-wielding passengers are allowed only on the latter. On the subway you do not need reservations, but you do have to follow T-mandated rules of etiquette.

You can not use the escalators. Climb the stairs, or use an elevator -- if there is one and it's working. Pay the regular fare; your bike goes for free. Riding in the station

continued to page 9

THE ADVISOR

THE ADVISOR IS PRODUCED AND PUBLISHED BY THE STAFF OF THE MBTA ADVISORY BOARD WHICH REPRESENTS SEVENTY-EIGHT MAYORS AND BOARDS OF SELECTMEN.

Chairman:
Francis X. McCauley

Executive Director:
Anne M. Larner
120 Boylston Street
Boston, MA 02116-4604

(617) 426-6054

Passenger relations: preventing problems

It is morning rush hour and you are behind the wheel of a bus. Traffic is creeping. You are already ten minutes late. Passengers are grumbling. On top of everything else, you see an elderly women signalling with her cane at the next bus stop and you can't even nudge close to the curb to pick her up because of two cars illegally parked. If she makes it out to the bus, there are no seats left. What do you do?

Helping drivers deal with such situations is the heart of the Passenger Relations Training Program run by the MBTA. "There are no recipes for good relations with passengers, but there are common sense kinds of things that you can do to keep situations from turning into problems," says Ellin Reisner, Manager of Community and Passenger Relations who with her staff developed and runs the current program. The primary goal of the program is to "provide good communications skills and good problem solving skills" to the men and women who deliver service each day to Boston area patrons of public transit.

The program provides one-day training each year for the T's approximately 2300 bus and trolley operators as well as collectors at rapid transit stations. Subway operators and guards are

continued to page 7



Tom Glynn: a new beginning

"This is one of the smartest people I've met so far at the T," said Tom Glynn pointing out a uniformed figure standing against the wall in a photo of a gathering at the Reservoir carhouse. "He said to me, 'I got your letter'," referring to a letter Glynn sent to all MBTA employees in late March shortly after taking over as General Manager. "And I read your two priorities [customer service and employee morale]. You can't do anything about the first, only *we* can. All *you* can do is deal with the second.' I told him he was absolutely right," explained Glynn, clearly pleased that the operator had so succinctly laid the issues on the table.

Such candid exchanges are a new feature at the T. In his first weeks at the Authority, Tom Glynn has begun a series of Friday visits to different parts of the system. Sitting at a table with 10 to 12 front line workers, Glynn leads a discussion focusing on the biggest frustrations employees face at the T. To his surprise, Glynn has not received complaints about supervisors and rigid rules. Rather, he has gotten an earfull on the MBTA practices which irritate and frustrate passengers. In addition, he has heard the recurring theme of how tough it is to innovate, or change things at the T.

Listening to such feedback has been one the greatest sources of 'education' for the new general manager. A long transition was also important in introducing Glynn to transit and the Authority. "It was helpful to be able to meet with legislators, members of the Board of Directors and people in the transportation world like Bob Kiley and Dave Gunn before taking over."

Glynn uses words like "goal oriented," "numerical (measurable)", "incentive oriented," "informal," "high

continued to page 8



Summer sizzle special

A little publicized plan dubbed "summer sizzle" will allow an MBTA passholder to ride to any point on the MBTA system (including commuter rail) for no additional charge weekends during the months of July and August. On Sundays the passholder may take a lucky guest along free of charge. Given this incentive for weekend travelling, the Advisory Board has compiled a brief overview of warm weather day trips passholders might want to try on the T's commuter rail network.

Probably the most well subscribed run for non-commuters is the Eastern (Rockport/Ipswich) Route which regularly carries weekend visitors to popular North Shore sites. During weekends in the summer, Rockport trains leave North Station approximately every two hours. (On Saturdays trains as far as Ipswich are available every hour.) The seaside towns of Salem, Manchester, Gloucester and Rockport lie along this route. Salem is famous for its witch legacy; the museum is not far from the depot. The city is also home to Hawthorne's House of the Seven Gables, a custom house of historic interest, the newly developed Pickering Wharf area (similar to Boston's Quincy Market) and the world headquarters of Parker Brothers, the board game people who gave the world Monopoly.

Five stops to the north is Manchester, another

historic seaside community which once rivaled Bar Harbor and Newport in attracting the turn-of-the-century rich and famous. Its public beach, Singing Beach (named for the sound feet make when walking through the sand), is 1/4 mile from the train station. Signs to the beach are scanty, but you won't get lost if you follow the crowd.

Ten minutes to the north is Gloucester, a once great seaport. Gloucester and its harbor are easily accessible from the commuter rail station. The famous Gloucester fisherman and the Historical Museum are favorite attractions. At the end of the line lies Rockport itself, which boasts a picturesque harbor

continued to page 8

Holding (from page 1)

live operator. The average wait before abandoning a call is just over two minutes.

The MBTA's current information system was installed in the Spring of 1988 at a cost of \$1.7 million. It includes 15 incoming lines, a computerized information retrieval system, and a computerized monitoring system which tracks performance (in half hour segments) by recording data such as number of calls, average length of wait on hold, number of hangups, average wait before hanging up and longest wait before answer.

Currently four full-time and six part-time operators handle what the T estimates to be an average

"It is tough to get more people to use the system if potential riders cannot get information"

- Anne Larner,
MBTA Advisory Board
Executive Director

1500 calls per day (6:30 a.m. - 11:00 p.m. weekdays and 9:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m. weekends). An additional two operators are in training.

While the Authority is able to review on a daily basis the number of callers who hang up in frustration before reaching a live operator, the T does not

INFORMATION LINE WAIT TIME

Date	No. of Calls	% Answered	Maximum Wait (in minutes)	Average Wait (in minutes)
5/15/89	2,406	70.78%	11.4	2.8
5/16/89	2,180	58.58%	21.6	3.9
5/17/89	2,134	73.57%	15.4	2.7
5/18/89	2,167	72.54%	12.1	2.5
5/19/89	2,507	74.55%	12.7	2.2

Source: MBTA Split Reports

appear to test the system regularly to estimate what percentage of potential callers are able to enter the system. One-third of the attempts to reach 722-3200 as part of the Advisory Board survey resulted in three or more calls before successfully accessing the system. These attempts took place weekdays between 8:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. and were not concentrated in any one time period.

Anne Larner, MBTA Advisory Board Executive Director, labels the data "disturbing." "Based on the information we have, I estimate that during the week the number of people who try to get through is two to three times the number who actually get through," states Larner. "And even those who are successful often end up with an image of the T that is definitely not 'user friendly'."

"It is tough to get more people to use the system if potential riders cannot get information," she adds.

The one piece of

good news in the survey is once a live operator is reached, response to queries is quick, accurate and courteous. Surveyors did note that less detailed (but more accurate) information is currently available through the computer retrieval system than through the previous manual system. Ongoing adjustments to the software, though, should be able to correct this minor problem.

Advisory Board surveys of the T's previous information systems taken in 1984 and 1987 documented average waits of two minutes and one minute and forty-five seconds, respectively. In the Fall of 1987 the T employed five full-time and nine part-time operators to handle 11 telephone lines with lines open 14 fewer hours each week than currently.

Complete information was not available from the Authority on the total annual operating cost of the current system.

impasse (from page 1)

ever: most are now repaired within 24 hours of being reported. Though this is good news for the T rider, it also indicates that more resources are being channeled to turnstile maintenance to merely hold problems steady. In 1983 it was estimated that the system cost \$400,000 to maintain; currently over \$900,000 is spent on fare collection maintenance annually. Malfunctioning units may be reported and repaired more quickly than ever but the bottom line is a negligible (if any) improvement since 1983 in the percentage of passreaders functioning at any time.

The MBTA monitors fare collection equipment and tracks performance through its MCRS report. This report (and casual observation) cannot distinguish whether the cause of a passreader/turnstile unit malfunction is passreader related or turnstile related. It is instructive to trace the performance of a unit through the MCRS for a two week period (April 17 to 28, 1989).

Every day approximately 9400 passengers enter the Blue Line's Maverick station, according to MBTA ridership estimates. Turnstile P620 awaits them. According to the MCRS report, P620 went down on April 17 but was back in operation that same day. On April 18 it jammed but again was repaired the same day. The next day P620 went down again and was repaired the same day. Six days later P620 was kaput once more and was repaired the following day. Turnstile P620 had to be attended to six times in the twelve days covered by the report. The MBTA states that reported defects "may or may not affect passengers." Every defect, however, must be addressed and at a cost to the Authority.

The Maverick experience is not an isolated case. During the same time period Harvard Square station filed 26 reports of malfunctioning fare collection equipment with some reports listing multiple failures. Harvard noted 11 controller crashes, six from one particular controller. Malden station also noted six crashes from one controller (in addition to turnstile malfunctions) during the period.

The T's passreader equipment has historically proved troublesome. The system originally cost \$1.3 million including hardware and wiring for all stations. (Today there are 385 turnstiles in use - 220 are equipped with passreaders.) A report produced by Dynatrend in 1982 revealed that, during the first two months of passreader use, the "mean cycles {uscs} between failures" was 3730, far lower than the system specification of 50,000. Later that year, observers found that the mean cycles between failure rate had climbed to 6442, an improvement but still far below the desired specification. The Dynatrend report added that "the reported reliability is greater than that of the token-activated Perey turnstile." The electronic system has been modified 22 times, some of which had no effect on system reliability.

In the middle of 1983 the T began monitoring repair time and the timely reporting of out of service units. In that same year Dynatrend was again hired and paid \$40,000 to study the MBTA passreader system. Dynatrend made a total of seven recommendations: three were implemented with no noticeable improvement; three were followed and are still in effect to date. The seventh ("implement a preventive maintenance program") has not been done "because of the manpower effort to maintain the system."

Despite the moderately low number of out-of-service passreaders, broken equipment exacerbates riders' annoyance with the system. Passreaders which will not accept valid passes are particularly frustrating. Observations at Park Street and Government Center during rush hour found repeated waves of patrons bruising their thighs on turnstile bars which would not budge.

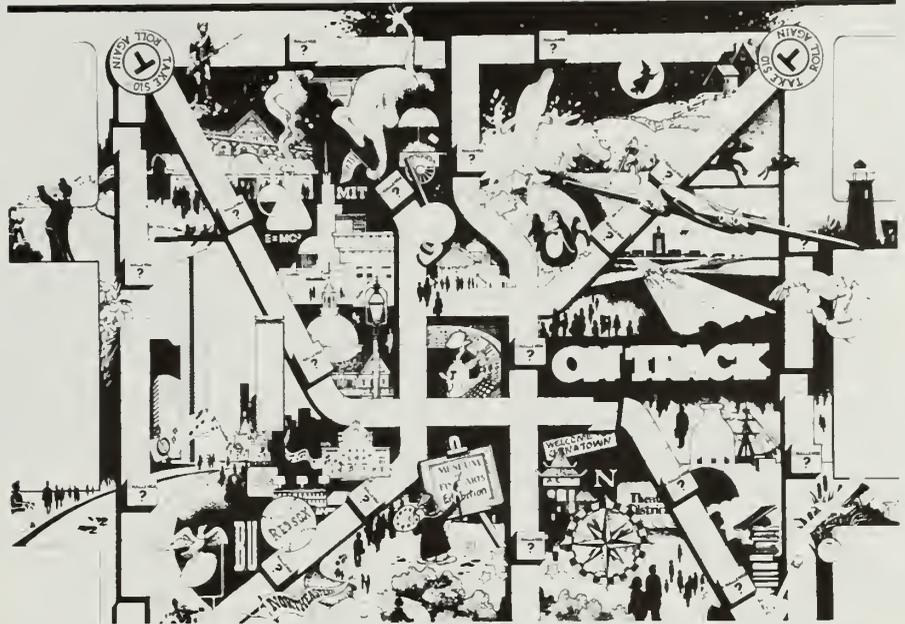
Current information indicates little improvement in the T's fare collection equipment can be expected unless there is a significant change in direction. The time is ripe for the MBTA to choose: either commit the resources necessary to implement a preventive maintenance program; or evaluate the entire fare collection system with an eye toward possible replacement.

relations (from page 3)

not currently included because of limited funds. Classes are kept small and attendance is mandatory.

Begun in 1986, the program was developed in response to the large percentage of customer complaints directed at T personnel and the increasing need (with the pending arrival of accessible buses) for operators to be comfortable interacting with riders with disabilities. The program relies on experienced operators as trainers. Content covers stress management as well as passenger relations. Videos, board games and role playing are the prime tools for learning.

When you are at the controls of a Green Line car which is boarding passengers and the message comes over your radio that there is a signal problem ahead (no specifics offered), what do you do? Should you announce to passengers possible delays ahead and give them the option while still in the station of disembarking? Or should you close the doors and move out chancing being stuck between stations where no one is allowed to leave the train? This is another of the situations explored in "Staying On Track", a T produced video used in concert with the "On Track" board game, to stimulate discussion during the



training session. Another video "Respecting Diversity" introduces T employees to a range of handicaps including "hidden" handicaps such as deafness and epilepsy and instructs on sensitive ways of interacting with disabled riders.

Passengers and traffic are not the only sources of stress for T operators. Sometimes the habits of fellow employees can cause considerable frustration. You specifically choose a run that ends early (2:15 p.m.) so you can pick your daughter up from school each day. However, the person scheduled to swing on after you has a habit of not showing up on time, forcing you to make the next trip and leaving your young child stranded. How do you handle this situation? The support, help and old fashioned common sense

pooled in training session discussions help drivers deal with this type of frustration without losing their cool.

This year a new training segment focusing on operator safety was introduced by T police. The purpose of this segment is to help operators understand the laws governing what they can and cannot do when accosted on the job. They are also advised on when to call for help and when such a call might actually provoke an attacker.

Each year the training program content changes in response to trainee feedback and new areas of concern. Based on course evaluations the program is well received by operators and collectors. Unfortunately, there is no easy way to measure the eventual impact on T riders. Hopefully, it is significant.

Glynn (from page 3)

priority on internal communications," "performance based," to describe his management style. "Listening" is his prime tool in making key decisions. In addition to expertise, Glynn gives high marks to team play and a sense of humor as traits he looks for in his top managers.

Acknowledging that it will take at least three years to have a major impact on the T, Glynn responds that he operates under the assumption if he does a good job, a new governor (expected in 19 months) will consider his performance in any decision to replace or not replace him. He is not conscious, he states, of pressure to act for the short run. Yet, he adds, "we have accomplished alot in just nine weeks."

His admitted weakness is that he has to try not to go too fast. Experience tells him an organization needs time to deal with change. But action is clearly what the new general manger is about. Asked to described how he would like to be remembered when his tenure at the T is over, "Effective in implementing my goals of customer service and employee morale," is shot back with "having a sense of humor" added a moment later. "Effective and funny, not a bad epitaph," Glynn muses.

Humor flavors Glynn's conversation -- from his answer to what surprises he found at the T: "Jim O'Leary never told me one of our escalators -- an active one -- is going to the Smithsonian." -- to his description of his daughters: "Kate Collins Glynn is five years old and thinks she's Grace Kelly; Jennifer Elizabeth Glynn is two and a half and thinks she's Ethel Merman."

Playing with his kids and playing tennis are the General Manager's admitted forms of relaxation from his new responsibilities. ("I play with my kids well; I play tennis poorly!") He also confesses to being a Robert Parker fan, but has not yet found time to read his latest.

Tom Glynn, the 'new kid on the block,' is making his presence felt in new ways. From Friday talks with front line employees; to conferences in his office around a row of finger smudged jars filled with T-colored (red, orange, blue, etc) jelly beans; to giving a 'dramatic reading' to the Board of Directors in lieu of a General Manager's report; a new tone has emerged. It is too soon to tell what Glynn's first report card will look like, but signs indicate there will be surprises. Bureaucratic and predictable are not the words for a T General Manager who answers quickly to a query about what historical figure he'd choose to be for a day, "James Michael Curley -- because he had fun and did a lot of good things."



sizzle (from page 4)

oft-painted by local artists, whose wares are shown in the many galleries in town.

The commuter rail stop in all four towns puts you near or in the middle of things, so aside from the attractions listed above there are plenty of shops and restaurants to explore.

The Lowell Route also begins at North Station with trains leaving every two hours on summer weekends. Lowell is an historic city on the Merrimack River once famous for its textile mills, most of which in the downtown area (near the depot) have been incorporated into the Lowell National Historic Park. The mill buildings house impressive exhibits dedicated to preserving life as it once was and charting the American Industrial Revolution which began in Lowell over 150 years ago. Lowell is also known as

the birthplace of Jack Kerouac, the writer who sent a generation On the Road. Now thousands hit the road every year to come to Lowell to visit the home town of the guru of the beat generation.

The Fitchburg Route, also on the North Side, brings the rider to the historic Massachusetts towns of Lincoln and Concord. Lincoln is home to hundreds of acres of conservation land which attracts many walkers and hikers each summer. The Concord stop brings you to Concord Center, a pleasant collection of small stores and colonial houses which are the essence of New England towns. In Concord the visitor can tour the houses of Louisa May Alcott and Ralph Waldo Emerson. If you are up for a healthy

walk, you could also reach Walden Pond. It is 1 1/2 miles from the station across Route 2.

All trips mentioned above are on the North Side of the commuter rail system, along the Rockport, Lowell and Fitchburg lines. Trains depart from North Station.

Commuter rail on the South Side tends to serve residential areas, although some stations themselves (e.g. Walpole) are historic sites. Where there are other attractions (i.e., Wellesley and Providence) there is currently no weekend service. Train departure and arrival times can be found by calling 227-5070 or 722-3200 (toll free 1-800-392-6100)

Happy summer travelling, compliments of the T.

and the crowds have thinned to allow your exit without "contact," you must still take care.

"Cyclists will be barred from entering or exiting the following stations due to safety considerations and congestion: Park Street ... Washington Street ... Government Center, Aquarium and Broadway during construction only. However, Cyclists may transfer lines within Washington and State."

If you planned ahead and were clever, you could have avoided all these hurdles because as the "Bikes on the T" brochure clearly states, "These Rules and Regulations do not apply to folding bicycles carried on trains *if enclosed in a carrying bag.*" [emphasis added]

If you have made it to North Station and you have permit and reservation form in hand, you're pretty much in the clear. On commuter rail up to four bicycles are allowed on each train. The conductor decides where to put you. So you can always appeal to her humanity. The one remaining drawback is that you may not be allowed on the train if it is too crowded (regardless of your reservation). This will probably not be a problem except on the Rockport line in beach weather. Again, you can always beg. And enjoy your trip. You certainly earned it!

Bikes (from page 2)

or on the train is strictly forbidden.

The tricky bit is what to do when the train comes. You may ride only in the last car of the train. No more than two bikes are allowed on a train. (What happens to a family of four is uncertain.) One bike goes at each end of the last car. If you are an adult accompanying a child between the ages of 12 and 15, the T will let you stand by your offspring. Children under 12 are not eligible to participate in the permit/reservations sweepstakes. Seated or standing, the

bike passenger must "hold bicycle firmly at all times with the kickstand up, and not allow the bicycle to lean against other riders." Just how long an Orange Line rider would allow a cyclist to lean a bike against him is not stated.

Once aboard, a cyclist may have a difficult time getting off. According to the brochure: "Trains may become crowded on route. Cyclists must remain on a train (to the last stop, if necessary) if the train is too crowded to exit without coming in contact with other passengers." If by some miracle you have reached the desired station

SHORT RUNS

User Friendly?...Public Affairs is thus far the only MBTA department with a combination lock on its door. It is also the only department where callers are regularly disconnected.

User Friendly?...Complaints from Advisory Board members and a quick check of files verify that MBTA correspondence never includes telephone numbers on its letterhead, even when responses are expected.

User Friendly?...A staff member called for a set of commuter rail schedules the last weekday before a schedule change. "What

schedule change?" she was asked by Public Affairs. A call to South Station information the day before the change (a Sunday) revealed that commuter rail information had not yet been supplied with new schedules.

User Friendly?...Two years ago the pass program moved to 120 Boylston St. Applicants for the T's Annual Pass are still instructed to mail checks to the old address. According to T personnel (at the old address), the checks get there "eventually."

User Friendly?...A recent caller to T information who

asked how to get her son who is in a wheelchair from Malden to the State House was instructed to take the Orange Line to North Station (no elevator) and then "take the Green Line" (no lifts).

User Friendly? (or Friendly Users?)...A regular commuter on her evening trek to South Station reports being offered cocaine by a passenger doing business from a slow moving T bus on Essex Street. A fellow worker adds she recently found an empty nip bottle on the seat of her morning express bus.

MBTA Advisory Board
120 Boylston Street
Boston, MA 02116-4604

Bulk Rate
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
BOSTON, MA
PERMIT NO. 59706

University of Massachusetts
Government Documents
University Library
Amherst, MA 01003

