

Refined Proposed Alternatives to the MBTA's Reading Turnback Track

Reasons For This Document

1. Before any increased train service is implemented, it is **essential** that the Towns of Reading, Wakefield and Melrose conduct a grade-level crossing study. This study must assess whether emergency response times for fire and police services are adversely affected. The number of grade-level road crossings in this area is unparalleled within the MBTA system.
2. We must protect our families, friends, neighbors and the \$5mil Maillet, Sommes, & Morgan MVP Project (ribbon cutting Fall 2024). As Governor Healey stated in the Commonwealth Address on January 16, 2025: "To protect and strengthen the things we love."
3. The MBTA has proposed installing 4,500ft of Turnback Track from North of Woburn Street to just South of Willow Street. The proposed slow-moving trains would operate within residential areas, with idling locomotives positioned inside designated conservation land.
4. The stated purpose of the turnback track is to allow more frequent train service (targeting 30-minute intervals, with a goal of 15 – 20 minutes) in and out of Reading Station. The turnback track will result in an increased number of diesel locomotives idling in conservation land near homes for up to 30 minutes per layover, from 5 AM to 7 PM each weekday.

5. *United States of America v. MBTA* (Civil Action No. 10-11311 filed in 2010) addressed concerns about excessive diesel idling. The Town of Reading remains concerned that MBTA's self-regulation is insufficient to address these issues.
6. While Reading supports **responsible** expansion of commuter rail service, the current turnback track proposal does not meet that standard.

Goals

1. Provide **responsible** alternatives that protect Reading citizens' health and safeguard the \$5million Maillet, Sommes, and Morgan MVP Project, including the wildlife habitat on both sides of the track.
2. Provide **responsible** alternatives that advocate for train modernization and frequency while minimizing environmental and community impact.

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1. Alternative 1: Revert to Pre-COVID Train Schedule (Page 4) - Revert to the pre-COVID (~2019) train schedule with more commuter trains during the peak AM/PM hours. This approach will allow the MBTA to demonstrate ridership growth before implementing 30-minute off-peak service. There is no added infrastructural cost to this alternative other than the added operational costs of more trains/operators.
2. Alternative 2: Turnback Track at Current Reading Station (Page 5 – 11) - Install double track northwest just beyond Main Street (Rt. 28) through Reading Station up to Woburn Street (does not cross Woburn Street). Allowing the Train Turnback functions to be performed at Reading Station. This would keep the Reading Station at the current location, requiring the station's pedestrian platforms to be ADA compliant Mini-High Platforms.
3. Alternative 3: Move Turnback Track Further from Residents to Industrial Area (Page 12 – 14) - Relocate the proposed turnback track approximately 5,000 feet further north, beyond Lowell Street, just short of the Wilmington/Reading border. This increases the distance between the idling locomotive and Reading residences to about 1,200 feet. Additionally, the noise from the idling locomotive will be reduced by the existing Interstate-93 noise pollution.

Alternative 1: Increase Reading train service at minimal cost by reverting to the pre-COVID schedule

1. MBTA would revert to the pre-COVID (circa 2019) train schedule with more commuter trains during the peak AM and PM hours.
 - 1.1. The MBTA can demonstrate increased ridership, helping to justify the addition of the 30-minute during non-peak hours.
2. There is no added infrastructural cost to this alternative aside from operations costs of additional trains and operators
3. This alternative would reduce the number of Woburn Street road crossings compared to the proposed MBTA Turnback Track location.

Alternative 2: Install the Turnback Track within the current Reading Station

1. Install double track northwest just beyond Main Street (Rt. 28) through Reading Station up to Woburn Street (does not cross Woburn Street).
2. This alternative allows the train Turnback functions to be performed at Reading Station.



Figure 1: Satellite view showing proposed location of a train (railroad) switch just northwest of Main Street (Rt. 28).



Figure 2: Satellite view showing ~1,600ft of double track between Main Street (Rt. 28) and Woburn Street.

3. The estimated 1,600 feet, compared to the MBTA's proposed 4,500 feet, represents a potential cost savings that could help offset the cost of double tracking Washington Street.

4. In this option, passengers would be able to board, use the restroom, and wait comfortably during inclement weather, eliminating the need to wait outside while the train idles 4,500 feet away in the ~\$5 million MVP conservation land.
5. This would remove two additional road crossings of Woburn Street per train.



Figure 3: Current Reading Station looking northwest. Ample space is available for a second track on the northeast side of the existing track.

6. The Reading Station could have two ADA-compliant Mini-High Platforms installed on both sides for approximately \$3 million.
- 6.1. One example is the reconstructed Wellesley Square Station opened 2/17/2025, where two Mini-High Platforms were installed. “Thanks to the advocacy of local **residents** and **leadership** like Congresswoman Katherine Clark, \$500,000 in grant funding was secured and earmarked for the \$3 million project in the Town of Wellesley.”
- 6.2. A second more applicable example is the Beverly Depot, where two Mini-High Platforms were installed in 2024.
- 6.2.1.**Trying to obtain detailed cost analysis of this Beverly Depot project.**



Figure 5: An example of raised platform that provides pedestrians with easier access to the train at entrance level, compared to ground level.

7. [The Swellesley Report](#) states, “the mini-high platforms on the inbound and outbound sides of the Wellesley Square commuter rail station will make it feasible for more people with disabilities to use the train. The platforms should also come in handy for those with carriages and others.”
8. The proposed MBTA Reading Turnback Track is estimated to cost \$10.9 million. Table 1 below justifies using the same \$3 million allocated for the Wellesley Square project to add two new ADA-compliant mini-high platforms at the current Reading Station.
 - 8.1. The MBTA’s claim that it will cost approximately \$40 million to build an ADA-compliant Reading Station should be investigated. The Beverly Depot renovation calls into question the accuracy of the quote provided.

Table 1: Estimated cost analysis for installing the Turnback Track in Reading Station, including two Mini-High Platforms, based on the MBTA proposed \$10.9mil, along with other available MBTA figures and external estimates.

Item #	Description	Cost
1	MBTA Proposed Cost for 4,500ft Turnback Track	\$ 10,900,000.00
2	Cost per Foot for Turnback Track (Track, Switch with Heater...)	\$ 2,422.22
3	Cost for 1,600ft of Turnback Track between Main St. & Woburn St.	\$ 3,875,555.56
4	"AI" Estimated Cost to add a track across Washington St.	\$ 250,000.00
5	Estimated Cost to do Turnback Track between Main St. & Woburn St. (3+4)	\$ 4,125,555.56
6	Estimated Cost Difference (1-5) (Savings for Other Projects at Reading)	\$ 6,774,444.44
7	Wellesley 2 Mini-High Platforms Accessibility Project	\$ 3,000,000.00
8	Remaining Cost Savings for Reading Station Improvements (6-7)	\$ 3,774,444.44



Figure 6: Images of two new ADA-compliant Mini-High Platforms at Wellesley Square Station. The entire project, including other upgrades, cost \$3 million.

- 8.2. The figures in Table 1 above require further analysis, but by estimate, installing the turnback track at the current Reading Station is more cost-effective than the proposed MBTA Turnback Track. The estimated savings of approximately \$3.8 million could be used to fund additional improvements at the current Reading Station.
- 8.3. The MBTA article, “*MBTA Wellesley Square Station to Open as Wellesley’s First Commuter Rail Stop with Accessible Platforms*” posted on 2/14/2025 states, “\$500,000 in grant funding was secured and earmarked for the \$3 million project in the Town of Wellesley.”

“To achieve stair-free, level boarding, the MBTA pursued an **innovative solution** by designing and installing freestanding mini-high platforms **on top of the existing inaccessible inbound and outbound platforms**. In addition, a number of other accessibility upgrades were made including improvements to various paths of travel and the installation of new signage.”

Alternative 3: North of Willow Street beyond Lowell Street (Rt. 129) just before the Reading and Wilmington border.

1. Install the Turnback Track just north of Willow Street, positioning the locomotive to idle approximately 450ft east of Interstate 93, near the Reading and Wilmington border.



Figure 7: View of the Town of Reading's proposed location north of Lowell Street, just before the Wilmington border, doubling the distance from the nearest Reading residence (~1,200 ft vs. ~600 ft).

2. With the locomotive idling at this location, the closest Reading and Wilmington residence is approximately 1,200ft away.
 - 2.1. This doubles the current MBTA proposed distance of approximately 600ft from the closest residence on Willow Street, Vine Street and Hancock Street.
3. The idling locomotive noise in this location is expected to blend with the consistent noise produced from I-93, resulting in minimal impact on the overall noise pollution.
 - 3.1. The elevated I-93 highway will shield Wilmington residences from any added noise pollution.
4. There is approximately 4,000ft of track available just north of Willow Street in Reading to perform the turnback function.
 - 4.1. The 500 feet reduction in track could result in potential cost savings of approximately \$1.2 million.
 - 4.2. Alternatively, the full 4,500 feet of track could be installed, extending the turnback track just short of I-93, but within Wilmington.
 - 4.2.1. It is recommended that the locomotive stop within Reading, rather than Wilmington as it is assumed this would not trigger a NOI with Wilmington or require only one streamlined NOI.

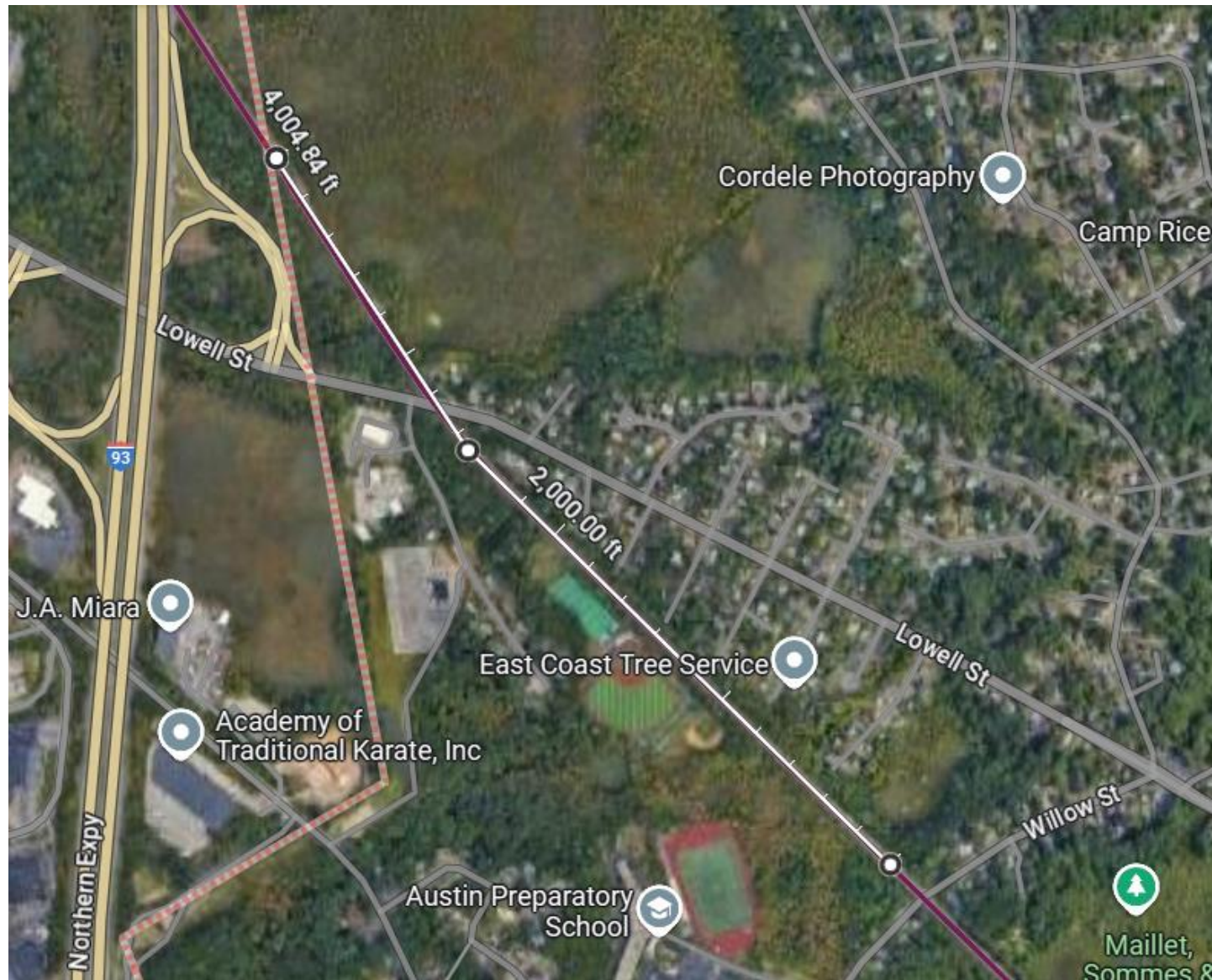


Figure 8: View showing approximately 4,000ft of available track north of Willow Street.

Help Protect Conservation Land & Your Reading Constituents!



This document was produced by Lucas Prato (85 Hancock Street) and the Reading Turnback Committee.

Lucas Prato

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lucas Prato', with a stylized, cursive script.

3/6/2025