Community Involvement in Commuter Rail Improvements:  
The Case of the Fairmount Line in Boston

by

Andrew Lai

Bachelor of Arts in Linguistics  
Yale University
New Haven, Connecticut (2010)

Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master in City Planning

at the  
MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

June 2015

© 2015 Andrew Lai. All Rights Reserved.

The author hereby grants to MIT permission to reproduce and to distribute  
publicly paper and electronic copies of this thesis document in whole or in part in  
any medium now known or hereafter created.

Signature of Author

Department of Urban Studies and Planning  
May 21, 2015

Certified by

Professor Jinhua Zhao  
Department of Urban Studies and Planning  
Thesis Supervisor

Accepted by

Professor Dennis Frenchman  
Chair, MCP Committee  
Department of Urban Studies and Planning
Community Involvement in Commuter Rail Improvements: The Case of the Fairmount Line in Boston

by

Andrew Lai

Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning on May 21, 2015 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master in City Planning

Abstract

This thesis examines a successful community-led initiative to improve service on commuter rail and examines whether this initiative's focus on commuter rail in particular – as opposed to a focus on other modes of transit – affected the strategies of community members’ participation and actions. It finds that despite the project’s focus on commuter rail and significant community involvement, the focus on commuter rail was largely incidental to the strategies used.

The case study used is the Fairmount Line, a 9.2-mile Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority commuter rail line that passes through largely low-income, minority neighborhoods entirely within Boston. For most of its history it has seen low levels of service. Starting in the early 2000s, community pressure began to build for more stops and more frequent service. This eventually culminated in the construction of three new stations in city neighborhoods, the lowering of fares to equivalent to subway fares, more frequent service and eventually – by 2020 – a plan for operation of diesel multiple units on the line.

Community action was crucial and significant to moving the project forward. The Fairmount Coalition – an alliance of nonprofits, advocacy organizations, community development corporation and others – played four major roles in the initiative: they drove the effort, employed legal tactics and strategies, maintained pressure and publicity on government agencies, and broadened the scope of the project from its initial narrow focus on transportation.

To justify these major actions, however, community actors largely appealed to social justice, environmental justice and transit equity grounds, reasons that were not specific to commuter rail. The fact that it focused on commuter rail was most relevant when community actors claimed that residents had negative perceptions of commuter rail, bolstering the justice- and equity-based narrative of the effort. Otherwise, the fact that this project focused on commuter rail did not appear to have a significant impact on the project’s strategies or success.

Thesis Supervisor: Jinhua Zhao
Title: Edward H. and Joyce Linde Assistant Professor of Urban Planning
Acknowledgments

The last two years at MIT, and the writing of this thesis, have been an intensely challenging but rewarding experience. It is impossible for me to thank everyone who helped me get to this point, but I would like to acknowledge and thank the following people in particular:

My advising team, Jinhua and Fred, for their valuable feedback, opinions, criticism, motivation and ultimately thoughtfulness, all of which were crucial to making this thesis what it is.

My interviewees, for being so generous with their time – without you, this thesis would not have been possible.

My parents, for being so supportive of me, in so many different ways – 千恩萬謝。

Teresa, for always being there for me, keeping me grounded and reminding me of the humor in life.

Greg Newmark, for introducing me to urban planning in Chicago and for being so friendly and approachable.

The Eisenhower Graduate Fellowship in Transportation, for funding two years of my graduate studies and travel to TRB.

Alison, Elizabeth, Karuna and Melissa for all our thesis work sessions in the spring. Without you all and those writing days at Forge I’m not sure this would ever have been started.

And finally, all my friends who got me through this difficult semester. It was a rocky journey, but with your love and support I was able to get through it. A very heartfelt thank you to you all.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.3 Employing legal strategies</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4 Maintaining pressure and publicity</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.5 Broadening the scope: strength of a coalition</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.6 Perceptions of a grassroots project</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.7 Importance of leadership</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.8 Conclusion</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Fairmount Line: Perceptions and Attitudes</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1 Reasons for joining</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2 Perceptions of commuter rail and transit</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3 &quot;Fairmount Corridor&quot;: real or imagined?</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4 Grassroots participation</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5 Conclusion</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Discussion</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1 Actions</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2 Perceptions and attitudes</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3 Evaluation of hypothesis</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4 Looking forward</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Conclusion</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.1 Summary of context</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.2 Research question</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.3 Assessment of findings</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.4 Difficulties in research and future research</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.5 An ending</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Appendices</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.1 List of MaxQDA codes</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.2 Interview protocols</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 References</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Figures

Figure 1. Rail transit comparison ................................................................. 19
Figure 2. List of interviewees ..................................................................... 50
Figure 3. Example of quotes selected together ......................................... 51
Figure 4. MBTA subway map .................................................................. 53
Figure 5. MBTA commuter rail map ......................................................... 54
Figure 6. Commuter rail zone map ............................................................. 55
Figure 7. Fairmount Line map ................................................................. 57
Figure 8. Fairmount ridership ................................................................. 59
Figure 9. Fairmount ridership by station ................................................. 59
Figure 10. Block groups within Fairmount Corridor ............................... 62
Figure 11. Race in the Fairmount Corridor ............................................ 63
Figure 12. Means of transport to work in the Fairmount Corridor .......... 63
Figure 13. Commute time in the Fairmount Corridor ............................. 63
Executive Summary

This thesis investigates a successful community-led initiative to improve service on commuter rail and examines whether the initiative's focus on commuter rail in particular – as opposed to a focus on other modes of transportation – affected the strategies of community members' participation and actions.

Commuter rail is one of the main modes of rail transportation within the United States. It has traditionally been operated for the benefit of the suburban commuter, with service largely provided in the peak direction at peak periods. Changes in the operations of commuter rail have been hampered by Federal Railroad Administration crashworthiness regulations and other operational rules that have made it difficult to impossible for transit agencies to creatively run different forms of service. In recent years, however, with the introduction of the lighter diesel multiple unit (DMU) and resurgence of popularity of urban living, interest in the improvement of commuter rail service, particularly in dense urban areas, has grown.

This thesis examines the research question: In the context of a community-led effort to improve service on commuter rail, does the focus on commuter rail – as opposed to other modes – have an effect on community actors' strategies and actions?

This thesis aims to isolate the role of commuter rail in this project, attempting to fill a gap in the public participation literature. This literature has extensively examined general participation in planning and how particular modes of
transportation have become politicized. However, relatively little work has been done on community participation in commuter rail improvements, and especially how community strategies to effect change on this mode are affected by working on this mode in particular.

This thesis employs the case study method. Primary source material for these interviews consists chiefly of interviews with 20 individuals, conducted in March and April 2015, who were chosen to represent a broad variety of involved community members. Historical documents and other primary source materials make up the remainder of sources.

The subject of the case study is the Fairmount Line, a 9.2-mile commuter rail line operated by the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) entirely within the city of Boston. Within a half-mile walk of the stations lives approximately 13.5 percent of the population (84,329 persons). The corridor is populated densely, at 14,000 persons per square mile, is 82 percent non-white, has nearly two times the citywide percentage of residents with a commute time over one hour, and has lower average and median incomes than the city as a whole.

The line was originally built in 1855, with privately-run passenger service ceasing in 1944. In 1979, construction began on the Southwest Corridor project, which involved the rerouting of many trains running along that corridor. The Fairmount Line was purchased by the MBTA in order to reroute all trains during construction.

The MBTA proposed closing the Fairmount Line in 1987, once construction on the Southwest Corridor ceased. However, due to community opposition, the line remained open. For approximately the next 15 years, the line limped along with both low ridership and very few improvements to service. Starting in the early 2000s, led by activists such as Marvin Martin of the Greater Four Corners Action Coalition, community actors living along the Fairmount Line began to press for better service along the line. Their vision for the corridor was branded the “Indigo Line,” a plan that included the construction of four new stations and improvements in the quality of service on the line.

In 2004, four CDCs (the Dorchester Bay EDC, Codman Square NDC, Mattapan CDC and the Southwest Boston CDC) joined the effort, forming what they termed the Fairmount CDC Collaborative within a larger Fairmount Coalition. In 2005-2006, this coalition joined with the Conservation Law
Foundation in a lawsuit filed against the state of Massachusetts regarding Big Dig mitigation measures. This ultimately culminated in the inclusion of the construction of four new stations on the Fairmount Line in a legally mandated settlement. Three of these stations opened in 2012 and 2013; the remaining station is expected to open in 2017. After years of pressure, fares were lowered to equivalent to subway fares in late 2013. In late 2014 the MBTA announced an RFP for DMUs to be placed on the Fairmount Line as part of a wider “Indigo Line” network by 2020.

In order to answer the research question, I first examine the actions that Fairmount Coalition actors took along the line, finding that the community actors played key roles to drive progress of the project. Community actors drove major parts of this effort – advocating for the construction of new stations, for the line’s fares to be brought down to subway-level fares and for the adoption of DMUs on the line. They were instrumental in branding the line with its “Indigo Line” moniker. The Coalition also worked to maintain pressure and publicity on government agencies, through the adoption of an incremental strategy and the staging of rallies and public-relations activities to maintain awareness of the cause. Finally, when the various CDCs joined the project, this had the effect of broadening the scope of the project. At its inception, the Fairmount community actors were narrowly focusing on transit-related improvements, but the scope broadened to include initiatives such as a Fairmount Greenway, economic development, and arts and culture. This resulted in a widening of the base to include nonprofits and other community institutions who lent support to the initiative.

After establishing that the Fairmount community actors played major roles in the Fairmount initiative, I examine reasons, perceptions and attitudes in an attempt to understand commuter rail’s impact on this strategy. I find that the fact that this was a commuter rail project was largely incidental to the actions taken by, and the success of, the coalition. The narrative employed by the coalition was largely one of social justice, environmental justice and transit equity. Where commuter rail perhaps had the biggest impact was when community actors made claims about how residents perceived commuter rail: that residents believed commuter rail was for suburbanites, that they thought it had bad service or that they did not know of its existence at all. These perceptions were used by project proponents to support the inequity and social-justice narrative that they were
using to advocate for improvement of the service. On the other hand, the
“Fairmount Corridor,” an idea that is frequently cited by many of the proponents
of the line, was found not to be significantly present in the minds of residents,
indicating that commuter rail has a relatively small consciousness among residents
of the line.

I assess that in totality, the fact that this project focused on commuter rail
specifically played only a minor role on community actors’ actions. Where
commuter rail came in the most importantly in this project was in the cited
perceptions of commuter rail, which were used to undergird the inequity and
social-justice narrative. The line does not appear to have a major level of
consciousness among residents, and in many ways, this project could have been
carried out in a substantively similar way even if it had focused on light rail, heavy
rail or some other mode. I conclude with a look to the future, arguing that the
Fairmount Coalition and community actors will likely have to play major roles in
encouraging ridership and the construction of affordable housing once the line
receives DMUs and higher-quality service in 2020.
ONE
Introduction

1.1 A beginning
Sometime in my first year of graduate studies, I decided to take the train to run some errands at a store in the South Bay Center, just south of downtown Boston. After looking the directions up online, I duly took the Red Line to the Andrew Square MBTA station and took a very long walk from the station to the store, which turned out be a significantly unpleasant stroll on Southampton Street over a number of rail tracks, the Southeast Expressway and then through a big-box shopping center parking lot to the store, which was located all the way at the edge of the complex. Much of that walk did not include sidewalks or any sort of marked crosswalk, and it soon became clear to me that very few people actually made the walk from the Andrew T station.

After completing my errands, I realized that there were several buses that I could take from the grocery store back to the Andrew T. After hopping on one of these buses, I watched as we passed by an MBTA commuter rail station – the Newmarket station. It was significantly closer to the South Bay shopping center and the walk from the station appeared to be much more pedestrian-friendly. I thought, Why haven’t I heard of this station? Where has it been this whole time? I’m definitely taking the train to Newmarket the next time I come here!

Then I got home, looked up the station, learned that it was part of the Fairmount Line, and that the service frequency was abysmal – no service on
weekends or evenings, and barely a train per hour. It definitely would not meet my needs.

That was the end of my consideration for the Fairmount Line for that particular trip – but only the beginning of my knowledge of and interaction with the Fairmount Line, which would ultimately end in the writing of this thesis, which focuses on the community role in the improvement of service on commuter rail services.

1.2 Commuter rail
Commuter rail is something that I used regularly as a commuter for just over a month when I lived in Chicago, prior to coming to MIT – but this pales in comparison to the nearly half a million trips that were made in 2014 on commuter rail (“Public Transportation Ridership Report” 2015). Millions of riders every year board the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority's purple-colored commuter rail trains, New York’s Metro-North or Long Island Rail Road trains, or Chicago’s Metra trains, largely making trips from the suburbs inbound in the morning and back out from the central business district in the evening.

Yet these ridership figures are dwarfed by the nearly four million trips – eight times as many – that were made on heavy rail in 2014 (American Public Transportation Association 2015). In many ways, even with the advent of new train technology, computing, mobile devices, demographic shifts and a general revival of transit in the past several decades, there have not been many changes in the way that commuter rail has operated, particularly in the United States. Commuter rail in most major cities still operates largely during peak hours, in the peak direction, catering toward largely a crowd of commuting suburban residents.

However, this is gradually changing. With new technology and innovations such as diesel multiple units and mobile ticketing becoming increasingly popular, and inspired by the example of cities such as London and Toronto that have taken steps to improve their traditional commuter/regional rail services, transit agencies within the United States are finally taking a look at their commuter rail services and re-examining how they could be better run or provide better-quality service.

1.3 Fairmount Line
One of these lines is the Fairmount Line in Boston. A long-neglected line that operates exclusively within the city of Boston, it has long been one of the “under-
performers" of the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority system. Its paltry ridership and non-useful schedule belie its origin as a shuttle service put in place by the MBTA during the Southwest Corridor construction in the 1980s. Not only has the service been weakly patronized, for much of the line's history it made very few stops in the low-income, minority Boston neighborhoods through which it ran.

However, starting in the early 2000s calls began to arise from the community for better service on the line. Community leaders and activists such as Marvin Martin of the Greater Four Corners Action Coalition began to call for more stations, better frequencies, and lower fares on the Fairmount Line in order to more appropriately serve the communities along the line. Consulting firms conducted studies of the appropriateness of this idea and the MBTA determined that a project to bring the line into a "state of good repair" was needed, with the construction of four new stations deemed worthy of study.

As advocates continued to press for these stations, the Boston area's Big Dig project, previously unconnected to the Fairmount Line, suddenly loomed relevant. The 2006 settlement from a lawsuit filed by the Conservation Law Foundation over required mitigation measures included the construction of four new stations in a legally mandated mitigation package. Three of these stations have opened, with the fourth "new station" slated for arrival in late 2017. Fares on the Fairmount Line have been brought down to equivalent to those on the subway, and in late 2014 the Deval Patrick administration announced that the MBTA would be purchasing a fleet of diesel multiple units to run on the Fairmount Line by 2020, which would allow the line to run significantly more frequent service at a lower cost, as part of the agency's "Indigo Line" plan.

1.4 Motivation
The motivation for writing this thesis originated from my interest in commuter rail specifically. I felt that much of the way that commuter rail operated in the United States was inefficient. In particular, in older cities in which commuter rail was spaced at inefficiently short distances in dense urban neighborhoods (such as the Fairmount Line), it seemed that understanding how commuter rail projects that promised to bring better service could occur was important.

In terms of the framing around public participation and community activism, I felt that in the literature there was a significant amount of work that focused on
public participation and analyses of how best and most effectively this public
participation could be incorporated into the planning process. At the same time,
within the planning literature, there were also significant examinations of the
relationship between different modes of transit and transit justice and how
particular modes of transit became politically charged. However, I found that
there was a dearth of literature examining how engagement around particular
modes of transit occurred and the impact, if any, of specific modes of
transportation on community activism.
Therefore it seemed natural to combine my interests in commuter rail with
what I perceived to be a gap in the literature.

1.5 Research question and hypothesis
This thesis examines the following research question:

In the context of a community-led effort to improve service on
commuter rail, does the focus on commuter rail – as opposed to other
modes – have an effect on community actors’ strategies and actions?

In order to answer this main research question, I pose several sub-questions:

What actions did community actors take to drive forth change on commuter rail?
Were these actions necessary for each step to move forward?

• What reasons did community actors cite for becoming involved with the
  Fairmount initiative?
• Are there significant differences in how commuter rail and rapid rail transit
  are perceived by corridor residents? If so, did these differences in perception
  impact the project?
• Do residents living along the corridor conceptualize of themselves living in a
  corridor? If so, did this perception contribute to the success of the project?

These questions are separated into two sets, treated separately into two
different chapters (chapters 6 and 7). The first set of questions consists solely of
the first one, which aims to understand the roles that community actors had
played in the initiative to bring better service to the line. The second set of
questions are the remaining three questions; these aim to capture the role of and
impact of commuter rail specifically in the Fairmount initiative. Combined, these two sets of questions help to answer the research question: the first question in isolation merely details how the community became involved in a project without any specific understanding of the role of mode of transportation; while the second set of questions without the first question merely examines opinions and perceptions of commuter rail. Only together do these four sub-questions work to provide a view of how the focus on commuter rail impacted this project.

1.6 Organization of this thesis
Chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis provide context and background for the rest of the study. Chapter 2 focuses on transportation, examining different modes of rail transportation and focusing in particular on the difference between commuter rail and heavy rail. It then examines current efforts to improve service on commuter rail, including the current efforts to introduce DMUs as a low-cost solution for the improvement of service.

Chapter 3 focuses on the “community” aspect of the thesis, examining formal and informal public participation procedures. It then looks at the literature surrounding citizen and public participation in planning as well as subjective perceptions of transit ridership. Chapter 4 examines the research question, methodology and framework of the thesis.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 then examine the Fairmount Line case study in detail. Chapter 5 provides the history and context for the Fairmount Line, including a detailed chronology of the various steps of the initiative. Chapter 6 examines the first set of research questions, while chapter 7 examines the second set of research questions, including an analysis of perceptions, opinions, attitudes, and roles.

Chapters 8 and 9 make up the closing material for this thesis. Chapter 8 discusses the ramifications of the Fairmount case in other commuter rail lines and chapter 9 concludes the entire thesis.
Within this chapter, I present the current status of transportation, public transportation, and commuter rail in particular.

2.1 Modes of rail transportation
Rail transit is a form of public transportation. In general, rail transit within the United States can fall into several categories: streetcars, light rail, rapid transit, and commuter or regional rail (Vuchic 2007). Vuchic divides the rail transit mode into four categories: streetcars, light rail, rail rapid transit, and regional rail. The American Public Transportation Association uses a similar classification but groups light rail and streetcars into one group (“Public Transportation Ridership Report” 2015, 4).

Under Vuchic’s classification, streetcars are light vehicle trains that tend to operate in mixed traffic, although separate right-of-way is possible. Light rail vehicles are “electrically powered, high-capacity” vehicles that typically run on individual rights-of-way, with the highest-quality form of light rail transit, “light rail rapid transit,” running completely on reserved rights-of-way. The busiest system, by number of unlinked passenger trips, in 2014 was the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority’s (MBTA) light rail system – in other words, the Green Line – with 69.4 million rides.
“Rail rapid transit,” which is also termed metro, heavy rail, or subway, is a rail service that runs on fully exclusive right-of-way, with the number of cars ranging up to 10 cars. Passenger capacity on heavy rail trains can range from three to five times those of light rail transit. The New York City Subway dwarfs all other heavy rail systems in the United States in terms of unlinked passenger trips, with 2.8 billion trips in 2014; the heavy rail lines of the MBTA – the Red, Orange and Blue lines – saw 174 million trips in the same time period. Heavy rail systems typically see the highest frequency service throughout the day of any transit service (Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority 2014a).

Finally, “regional,” suburban or commuter rail, the latter of which is the most typical name for these services in the United States, are typically radial services originating in the central business district with “long average trip lengths…long station spacing, high speed, and reliability.” Traditionally geared towards suburban commuters working in the central city, regional/commuter rail typically has high frequencies only in the peak direction during the peak period. In the United States, the three New York area commuter rail systems see the heaviest ridership, with a combined number of 269 million unlinked passenger trips. The MBTA’s system saw 36.1 million unlinked passenger trips in the same year.

Most commuter rail systems in the United States and North America as a whole operate on diesel power. The only exceptions lie in the New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago metropolitan areas. All of Philadelphia’s system is electrified; the majority of Metro-North Railroad, Long Island Rail Road and New Jersey Transit are electrified; and the Metra Electric line in Chicago is the only electrified line in that system. All other commuter rail lines, including all MBTA lines, run on traditional diesel equipment. Some of these current diesel lines, including lines in the San Francisco and Portland areas, were in fact formerly electrified lines that are now not so. (J. Allen and Levinson 2012)

The United States has typically seen a fairly sharp disparity between heavy rail and commuter rail in terms of operations. Figure 1 discusses the difference between heavy rail and commuter rail, using Boston as an example; some characteristics may differ across various American systems, but the MBTA system may be taken as broadly representative of the transit network in this country. As can be seen from Figure 1, while light rail and heavy rail do show some marked differences, they share many more characteristics in common with each other than with commuter rail.
Even of the names of particular modes serve to demonstrate differences in mode. In many places, particularly Western Europe, commuter rail is instead

**Figure 1. Rail transit comparison**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Light Rail (the Green Line)</th>
<th>Heavy Rail (the Red, Orange and Blue Lines)</th>
<th>Commuter Rail</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Extent of service</strong></td>
<td>Longer, throughout the day, in all directions; more pronounced peak service, but off-peak service may be provided; weekend and late night service</td>
<td>At the most limited, only during peak hours; many lines do not have weekend or late night service</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frequency of service</strong></td>
<td>Ranges from every four to six minutes during the peak hour to every 15 minutes during the off-peak hours</td>
<td>At the most frequent, every 15 minutes during the peak; off-peak service is often only at one-hour intervals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Geography</strong></td>
<td>Serves more urban/walkable areas</td>
<td>Significantly more far-flung, through to exurban areas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Form of access</strong></td>
<td>Largely walking and feeder bus service; outlying stations such as Alewife or Wonderland may have park-and-rides but this is not typical for these modes</td>
<td>Largely by automobile, extensive use of park-and-ride except at CBD/inner core stations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fares</strong></td>
<td>Flat fare/not distance-based (although many newer systems such as Washington’s may have distance-based fares)</td>
<td>Distance-based fares</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fare operations</strong></td>
<td>Boarding before payment in Central Subway stations (roughly Lechmere through Kenmore) and on-vehicle automated payment elsewhere</td>
<td>Boarding before payment at all stations</td>
<td>Fares verified by conductor on-board train</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fare media</strong></td>
<td>Charlie Card as preferred medium of payment</td>
<td>Paper tickets or monthly passes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Power</strong></td>
<td>Electric (overhead pantograph)</td>
<td>Electric (third rail)</td>
<td>Diesel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Author*
termed “regional rail” – for example, the commuter rail network of Paris is termed the Réseau Express Régional (RER), which emphasizes the “regional” feature of the service over the fact that it is aimed as commuters.

Other key differences include fares. In many ways, fare collection on commuter rail has not measurably changed with technological innovations. Conductors continue to collect fares, and in fact, some innovations such as the implementation of fare gates have actually been rolled back with time – the Illinois Central, which was the preceding operator of Chicago’s Metra Electric line before Metra, used to have more flexible fare payment procedures and had fare gates at stations from 1966 to 2003, but it has subsequently reverted to collecting fares on trains with conductors in common with the remainder of Chicago’s commuter rail lines. (J. Allen and Levinson 2012)

2.2 Improved service on commuter rail

Commuter and heavy rail show some significant differences in operational characteristics. However, both historically and in recent years, examples of various cases of re-use of commuter and regional rail infrastructure for higher-capacity, higher-frequency forms of rail rapid transit exist. Abandoned infrastructure can become re-used as conventional commuter or heavy rail infrastructure, or former commuter/regional rail services can themselves be converted to heavy rail, light rail or streetcar-type service.

The reuse of infrastructure of this type of construction is generally an attractive proposition. As Allen states, “railroad alignments leverage the most mileage from limited capital budgets” – the fiscal difficulties and frequent cost overruns of major construction projects, most notably those such as Boston’s Big Dig, have made many transit agencies extremely wary of taking on large capital construction projects (J. G. Allen 2001). Limited federal funding and a political environment in which major rail investment has become a highly politicized issue – the rise of “Agenda 21” type controversies and government theories has also served to discourage investment in major new rail lines, or at the very least made it difficult to justify new investment (Kaufman and Zernike 2012).

However, the reuse of this type of infrastructure is not necessarily easy. One of the biggest impediments to re-using commuter rail infrastructure in this way are the relatively very stringent standards for rail vehicles set by the US government and railways, explored in the following section.
2.2.1 US crashworthiness standards

The safety policy and philosophy within the United States and Canada is generally one of collision protection or crashworthiness, in comparison to the European philosophy on collision avoidance (Phraner et al. 1999). Broadly speaking, the philosophy behind collision protection is that collisions between locomotives or vehicles are inevitable, and so vehicles should be built to physical standards that will permit them to avoid the maximum amount of physical harm if they are involved in a crash, particularly in those that involve freight vehicles. On the other hand, the philosophy of collision avoidance is a different one altogether, which permits the construction of lighter vehicles, but with a concomitant stronger emphasis on preventing accidents.

Furthermore, all railroads are “part of a common standard, regulated, interconnected national system of tracks, interchangeable rolling stock, and operating rules,” whereas the different rapid rail transit systems throughout the country are non-standardized in terms of operating vehicles and gauge – indeed, none of Boston’s light or heavy rail lines have identical gauge or interchangeable vehicles. However, commuter rail lines are considered part of the national rail system administered by the Federal Railroad Administration and in many cases commuter rail trains run in the same right-of-way as mainline trains; the MBTA’s Providence/Stoughton Line and Metro-North Railroad’s New Haven Line also host Amtrak’s Northeast Regional and Acela trains, for example.

Because of these FRA crashworthiness regulations, this creates several impediments in the way of more creative rail operations. This has a variety of impacts. From the point of view of rapid transit operations, these heavier trains are not well suited to the rapid acceleration and deceleration that is the hallmark of urban-style rapid transit. Furthermore, these prevailing American standards for rail vehicles do not match standards currently in place in Europe and Japan, which hinders American transit and rail systems from benefiting from economies of cost (in that they are required to generally place individualized, custom procurement orders for their vehicles and cannot benefit from potentially cheaper European vehicles). It has been noted that vehicles that operate on the US’ only high-speed rail system, the Acela, would likely be banned from European railroads for excessive weight – Acela vehicles are nearly twice as heavy as those operating on comparable European high-speed rail lines (McCaughrin 2007).
However, this situation looks likely to change. It is expected that in 2015 that the FRA will likely adopt changes to crashworthiness standards that would permit modern European railcar designs to operate on the same lines (S. J. Smith 2013). In the meantime, the provision of various FRA-compliant diesel multiple units (DMUs) has the possibility to reform commuter rail service.

2.2.2 Diesel multiple units

At the same time that FRA regulations may be undergoing reform and change, new technology is also springing up that may permit more “creative” patterns of service to be offered on traditional commuter rail lines. Central among these new technologies is the diesel multiple unit (DMU). A DMU is a train locomotive that has an on-board diesel engine, so it does not require a separate locomotive to pull it. In comparison, traditional rail vehicles consist of coaches pulled by a locomotive, while typical heavy and light rail operations are powered by electric third-rail or electric overhead pantograph. These self-propelled cars offer advantages in initial setup, fuel, operations costs and maintenance costs; the average cost of a DMU vehicle is approximately $4 million, with $10 million for a full locomotive train. As they do not require the usage of a full locomotive, DMUs also use less fuel and are more suitable for lines with lighter traffic (Phraner et al. 1999).

Diesel multiple units may be divided into three types: (1) the “heaviest” DMUs, or DMUs that comply with FRA crashworthiness regulations for joint operations with other rail vehicles; (2) DMUs that can run on individual, isolated lines, but that cannot run jointly with other types of vehicles; and finally (3) “diesel light rail vehicles” that actually run on streetcar and light rail tracks, instead of solely on normal railroad tracks (Phraner et al. 1999). For operations such as the Fairmount Line, in which regular train operations are expected to continue operating even if DMUs are added, the only permissible form of DMU is the first type of vehicle.

DMUs are not new to US railways – the Budd Company of Philadelphia built nearly 400 “Rail Diesel Cars” between 1949 and 1962 (Duke and Keilty 1990). These railway cars ran on numerous American and Canadian railroads, largely on lesser-used branch lines that merited less frequent service. However, due in part to FRA rail safety standards that became increasingly strict, DMUs saw less frequent service. However, DMUs have made a bit of a resurgence.
Jersey, Sprinter service in San Diego, and the Red Line in Austin are all operated with forms of DMU equipment.

DMUs therefore offer an effective option for commuter rail lines that could benefit from more frequent service, and indeed, are currently slated for installtion on the Fairmount Line by 2020.

2.2.3 Conversion of commuter rail lines

The conversion of commuter rail lines, or the improvement of commuter rail service to more rapid transit-like levels of service is not new. In fact, the New York and Boston metropolitan areas furnish successful examples of conversions from commuter rail to heavy and light rail, respectively.

In New York, the portion of the A train running from Howard Beach to the Rockaways was a former branch of the Long Island Rail Road. Due to a fire in 1956, a portion of the Long Island Rail Road's Rockaway Beach Branch was converted to a New York City Subway service. Initially, the LIRR had hoped to close this branch, but the City of New York felt that this branch offered an opportunity for increased service, and it worked to reopen this line as a subway line (Freeman 1956).

In Boston, the Riverside (D) branch of the Green Line now operates fully as an electrified part of the light rail line. Before 1958, this was the Highland Branch, a full mainline passenger rail line of the New York Central. In the 1950s, the New York Central sought to abandon the branch, but instead of abandonment the legislature instead purchased the train for conversion to light rail. This conversion to light rail was largely successful – after five years, passenger boardings increased 14-fold; the trip to South Station was 5 minutes shorter; and network connectivity downtown was significantly improved (J. G. Allen 1999).

Boston's Blue Line, now a fully operational heavy rail line and part of the "subway," also serves as an example of this – built as a steam railroad, it was converted to full rapid transit-style operation in several phases from 1925 to 1954 and now operates as a fully functional part of the MBTA's subway system (J. G. Allen 2001). There is no indication to the rider that this rail line was once part of an entirely separate passenger rail line.

Furthermore, Boston is not the only city that has seen efforts to convert currently functioning commuter rail to different forms of rail. Examples exist in Toronto and London.
Within Toronto, the Metrolinx provincial government service is currently working on an effort to increase headways on Toronto's GO Transit commuter rail lines. Currently, the Lakeshore East and West lines, which are the busiest on the corridor, see all-day 30-minute service. The project is entitled the “Regional Express Rail,” which is likely to be a conscious effort to draw parallels with and hearken to Paris’ RER system. Paris’ system combines rail lines with a far geographical reach and high-frequency, all-day service within the city center; Toronto’s plan envisions “electrified service with 15-minute frequencies in core areas” with off-peak and both-directional service (Percy 2014).

Similarly, the London Overground system is the result of Transport for London’s taking over several commuter rail lines that ran wholly within inner London. Fare levels on the London Overground are identical to the zone-based fare structure on the Underground, and the Overground is integrated and shown, along with the Docklands Light Railway, on the main Underground map (J. Allen and Lu 2010). Philadelphia's Regional Rail also offers an opportunity to increase service frequency; historically, ridership on the suburban lines ran significantly more frequently, before the takeover of the line by the Southeastern Pennsylvania Regional Transit Authority (Blumgart 2015).

2.3 Conclusion
Rail transportation in the US largely consists of heavy rail, light rail and commuter rail. Unlike in some European and Asian cities, there has traditionally been a significant difference in the way that commuter rail and heavy rail have been operated within the United States, with commuter rail typically geared toward peak period consumers in the peak direction. The ridership of heavy rail has been considered to be urban consumers making a variety of trips, while the ridership of commuter rail has traditionally been considered to be largely suburban, often white-collar commuters, making trips into major cities’ central business districts. To this end, the way in which transit agencies have operated their services has not seen significant changes up to the present day.

The United States and the Federal Railroad Administration also have very stringent crashworthiness and equipment standards for vehicles running on mainline railroads, which are distinct from urban rail lines. This also has the impact of impeding innovation in the types of equipment that run along these lines. However, with the advent of innovative equipment such as diesel multiple
units (DMUs), the conversion of commuter rail lines has started to pick up steam. Various metropolitan areas, such as Toronto and London, provide examples of commuter rail lines that have either been fully converted to higher-quality rail lines or at the very least improved frequencies.
In this chapter, I examine the formal and informal procedures set in place for urban and transportation planning and examine the different roles of transit and transportation within the literature.

3.1 Public and citizen participation
Public participation within urban planning is of major importance, especially since the period of urban renewal and major interstate highway construction in the 1960s. At this time, public planning was largely "technocratic" and top-down: planners, especially transportation planners, used a large quantity of numbers and other figures to generally justify their actions and often to override community desires. A "rational planning model" was developed by which planners believed that they should depend largely/solely on "factual considerations...analytical techniques" and "technical rationality" (Khisty 2000).

However, as some of the excesses of the urban renewal, mass highway construction and top-down planning era became clear, members of the public and citizens began to assert themselves. In Boston, for example, various community groups, organized under the umbrella of the Greater Boston Committee on the Transportation Crisis, worked to oppose pro-highway interests and highway construction in the mid-1970s (Gakenheimer 1976), an effort that would
eventually result in a moratorium on highway construction in the inner part of the Boston metropolitan area in the early 1970s.

Subsequently, a tradition of seeking public involvement has developed. Public participation is often viewed as a “cornerstone of democracy” and “part of the philosophic tradition of the United States” (Day 1997). At least on a nominal level, formal procedures for public involvement and participation in both planning as a whole and in transportation in particular are widespread in the United States.

Federal and state regulations require that transit agencies develop participation plans that encourage community participation, the goal of which is to provide opportunities for participation to the public. One form is transportation advisory groups, which go under a variety of names, including citizens’ advisory committees or local or regional coordinating council. The relevant group in the Boston metropolitan area is the MBTA Advisory Board, which would prove to be instrumental in the beginning of the Fairmount Corridor project (see section 6.2.1).

Local/regional coordinating councils provide another forum for public participation. The means by which participation occurs can also vary significantly; to this point, the MBTA offers three different forms of public participation, including public meetings, open houses and workshops. For example, the MBTA’s public participation policy has formalized procedures by which they take in community input; and a policy that dictates that public improvement is particularly necessary for fare changes, service planning and operations, and capital project development and design (Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, n.d.).

However, many authors in the literature believe that, despite the provision of regulations formalizing public participation, that public participation is done or performed largely because it is seen as something that simply “legitimizes” actions that a public authority has already decided to take and that it is not effective.

In some cases, this is because the participation process has become “routinized” through long use, with little aptitude or expectation for change in the participation process (Bickerstaff and Walker 2001; Khisty 2000; Sen 2008; Howard, Lipsky, and Marshall 1994). Khisty finds that some planners believe that citizen participation is a waste of time and that “no concerted effort” is made by planning agencies to aid community groups. Private consulting groups are not any
better from this perspective: Bickerstaff and Walker find those who actually do engage in public participation in their work are largely doing so because they are required to do this by the public bodies for which they are doing work. Innes and Booher declared flatly that the “legally required methods of public participation in government decision-making” did not work, and that they did not achieve genuine participation in planning or decisions (Innes and Booher 2004); and Green, who examined economic development meetings and found that public participation in these efforts typically had very little impact on this process (Green 2003).

Citizen “participation” outside of formal procedures can also take place. Jane Jacobs is well known for mobilizing opposition to Robert Moses’ program of highway construction through Washington Square Park and Greenwich Village in New York City (Flint 2011). On the other hand, informal forms of transportation advocacy on the part of the community can also take the form of support for transportation projects that are not necessarily supported by the government. As an example, both the High Line in New York City and the 606 Trail/Bloomingdale Trail in Chicago are “linear parks” in which older infrastructure has been re-used to provide parkland for the community.

In both situations, the reuse of these older rail lines for parkland was not considered the preferred option in the mainstream. However, with the support of community groups such as Friends of the High Line and Friends of the Bloomingdale Trail, eventually both the cities of New York and Chicago, along with the associated parks and recreation departments, etc., came together and worked to build these linear parks (Thompson 2015).

3.2 Forms of participation
Within the literature, authors have also worked to distinguish different forms of public participation.

The most classic statement of this participation is Arnstein’s “ladder of citizen participation.” She categorizes the various forms of participation along a linear scale into three large categories: nonparticipation, in which communities do not participate; tokenism, in which participation takes place but the substance of the participation is not real; and citizen power, in which participants truly control their actions (Arnstein 1969). In an effort to assess the reality of this within transportation, Bailey and Grossardt found that there was a significant
discrepancy, which they term the “Arnstein gap,” between the reality of participation and the desired level of participation – with the actual level of participation falling between nonparticipation and tokenism and the desired level between citizen power and tokenism. It is worth noting that the desired level is not at the absolute top level of citizen control of the hierarchy, implying that perhaps total citizen control is not desirable (Bailey and Grossardt 2006).

Other classifications of participation are not quite so hierarchical and involve several different cuts. One method distinguishes instrumental and grassroots participation: instrumental participation is “participation that is driven by community-based organizations that are administering specific projects and programs,” while grassroots participation is the type of participation that may “emerge in response to neighborhood threats” (Silverman 2003). Another method involves a tripartite distinction. These are informational participation, in which the public is merely informed about impending meetings or projects; review, in which the public “receives information” and has the opportunity to comment on particular details of the project; and interactive, in which stakeholders participate in analysis, have control over local decisions. The first two types of participation here may be perceived as less “legitimate,” while the last one is often seen as the aspirational goal (Hunt 2007; Gaunt 1998; Sullivan 2004). This system of classification can be seen as somewhat similar to Arnstein’s “ladder of participation,” although fewer normative judgments are assigned to these different forms of participation.

The literature has also presented several different models of participation. The “conflict model” argues that citizens should “rub raw the sores of discontent”; the “cop-opt” model was one in which public officials worked to foment discontent among community residents while they proceeded with “business as usual,” to negate public participation; and the “coalition model” called for planners and citizens to work together (France 1971; Khisty 2000). A similar model to the coalition model is the “advocacy model,” which calls for planners to essentially serve as facilitators among a group of individual citizens, in opposition to the “single agency plan” that results in only token participation from the public (Davidoff 1965). (The effectiveness of this form of participation and the degree to which it is realistic in civic society is questionable.) In general, however, there has been a move of public authorities “away” from static and reactive processes toward
more dynamic and deliberative processes of public participation (King, Feltey, and Susel 1998).

3.3 Who is participating
Regardless of the form of participation, authors have also found that citizen participation can also often suffer from a problem of representativeness. Citizen-participation committees and advocacy groups are often “over-populated” with high-ranking and top-members of top socioeconomic groups, such as graduates of “the nations’ elite law and graduate programs” (Weber 2000). In the environmental protection literature, there is often an elite group that dominates this planning (Mitchell, Mertig, and Dunlap 1991). Ironically, those citizens for whom public participation in planning processes might be the most important – in other words, those citizens for whom better civic amenities or government programs would be a direct benefit – are often unable to participate in public processes (Sen 2008; Young 2000).

3.4 Community development corporations
Because the Fairmount CDC Collaborative, as explored in section 6.5, became such an important and major player along the line and in the media in the effort to bring better transit service to the line, the role of community development corporations (CDCs) is examined here.

CDCs are nonprofit, community-based organizations that are typically located in low-income, often heavily-minority neighborhoods. The work that they do is typically focused on developing affordable housing units, but they can often be involved in other types of work, such as economic development more broadly, sanitation, street- and landscaping, neighborhood planning and even providing technical and financial assistance to small business owners (“Overview: Community Development Corporations (CDCs)” 2015). This variety of jobs and contradictions inherent in their roles “as developers, landlords, and business owners,” along with their limited capital resources, can often impede their effectiveness (Gittell and Wilder 1999).

CDCs are generally quite positively perceived; because of their nonprofit, non-governmental nature, they are typically thought of as “more responsive to grassroots constituencies than institutions traditionally involved in the formulation and implementation of local public policy” (Silverman 2005). Hunt
found that in the Mississippi Delta area of Arkansas, CDCs did indeed serve as an intermediary between local political institutions and the citizenry (Hunt 2007), and Steinbach agrees that CDCs have been very entrepreneurial and successful, producing a number of homes in that area (Steinbach, n.d.). Gittell and Wilder found that CDCs that were successful generally had successful markers in four areas: mission, organizational competency, political capital and funding (Gittell and Wilder 1999).

Community development corporations generally emerged as a response to the successes and failures of the civil rights movement. CDCs “evolved” in response to the community action agencies and were “intended to include a broad representation of the spectrum of leadership, ranks, and class in the neighborhood.” The 1970s was the period during which the growth of CDCs really exploded (Perry 1971; Gittell and Wilder 1999).

The literature also broadly examines various forms of organizations in their typology of voluntary associations, Gordon and Babchuk distinguished between so-called “instrumental” and “expressive” associations (Gordon and Babchuk 1959). “Instrumental” associations were those, such as the NAACP or the League of Women Voters, in which the association is nominally open to anyone, with the purpose of the organization being the central organizing principle; versus “expressive” associations such as the Daughters of the American Revolution, whose purpose is simply to “express” their shared identity as descendants of American soldiers. CDCs fall in the middle of this continuum – they have some characteristics of “instrumental” associations in that they have the explicit goal of providing affordable housing within communities; on the other hand, CDCs also contain some “expressive” characteristics in that they serve as a form of expression of the internal power and agency of the community they serve.

3.5 Transit’s roles and perceptions
Apart from the public participation literature, there is also a body of literature that focuses on the roles and perceptions of transit. Not simply just a social service, transit has also become infused with a variety of race and class judgments.

3.5.1 Perceptions of transit
Within the United States, many have argued that there are differences in perceptions of various modes, and in particular a perception that rail is superior to
buses. Some argue that this is a natural perception in that rail is inherently indeed superior to buses, while other transit experts such as Jarrett Walker have argued that this in fact a culturally determined preference. Walker contends that technology or mode is often conflated with actual characteristics of high-quality transit service, such as reserved right-of-way, prepayment or a proof-of-payment system, or higher-frequency service (Walker 2011; Blumgart 2013).

There is significant evidence for a preference for rail among transit riders. Studies from the Scottish government, for example, have found that rail is generally preferred to buses (Blumgart 2013). Scherer and Dziekan found evidence for the existence of a “rail factor,” a perception that “rail-based public transport often is considered superior to bus systems, even in cases where quantitative hard factors are equal” (Scherer and Dziekan 2012). In a study of an attempt to introduce “neighborhood circulators” to Tempe, Arizona, Weitz found familiar NIMBY-like perceptions of transit and found that the “essentialization of automobile,” an anti-urbanism in the US context, contributed to the opposition to transit (Weitz 2008). However, these perceptions are not universal: Widell and Olsson found that in Sweden, subway passengers actually tended to prefer bus services to subway services because subway trains were perceived as very noisy and that daylight was preferred for cultural reasons (Widell and Olsson 2002).

Different modes of transit also tend to have different impacts on real estate, development and land use. Rail investment is often seen as signaling a more permanent investment in real estate than bus service, as the relative permanence of rail transit compared to bus transit offers developers confidence that the convenience and travel options offered by rail will remain relatively stable (Vuchic 2007). Different forms of rail can often be perceived to have different impacts on land development and use. For example, many cities offer zoning bonuses or reduced parking requirements for transit-oriented, mixed-use zoning around rail stations. However, in 2012 in suburban Washington, a zoning amendment was put forth that development around Maryland Area Regional Commuter (MARC) commuter rail stations should not be treated identically to development around Metrorail (heavy rail) stations because the “system does not have anywhere near the volume nor the trip reduction benefit that the Metro lines offer” (Goldreich 2012). Through this, we can see that there is certainly a perception that commuter rail does not have as strong an impact on development as rapid rail transit.
3.5.2 Transit riders: choice vs. captive, and goals

As transit is a publicly-provided service, the "goal" of providing transit and what it is for is going to differ from privately-provided services. In comparison to a private business, the goal in that situation is almost always to maximize profits and efficiency; in other words, the provision of the maximum product for the minimum amount of space. However, because transit is a service that is provided by the government to a wide variety of different constituents with very different goals, marking the successes/goals of transit, and correspondingly what is reasonable for the government to expect from its riders, is often challenging.

One often-cited distinction is between choice and captive riders. Choice riders are typically riders who have alternatives to public transit, typically those who own automobiles and are higher-income. Prevailing knowledge dictates that to successfully appeal to this group of individuals, public transportation has to be competitive with the private automobile in terms of costs, travel time and convenience. On the other hand, captive riders are typically those who are considered to be "captive" to transit, who typically lack access to an automobile due to their financial situation and are forced to rely on transit as a "last-means" resort of getting around.

Statistical studies have shown that there is generally a negative correlation between income and transit ridership, and there is certainly often an observed difference in incomes across modes. In particular, commuter rail riders, who often hail from wealthier suburban jurisdictions, often show higher incomes on average. For example, in Philadelphia's public transportation system, 56.1 percent of all riders have incomes that are above $35,000, but 79.4 percent of all Regional Rail riders have incomes above $35,000 (Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority 2013). It has been established that "the difficulty and expense of driving and parking in highly-built up downtown areas" is one of the most effective motivations to motivate drivers to switch to transit, which accords with the literature showing that appropriate parking pricing has a strong influence on mode choice decisions (Shoup 2011; Keefer 1962).

Walker discusses how transit has two different goals: ridership versus coverage, the distinction between which is often not made clear (Walker 2011). If the goal of transit is high ridership, then this implies that transit services which produce the highest ridership per dollar spent – or some other metric of productivity – are the best and most desirable services. This is a more market-driven conception of the
value of transit. From this perspective, empty buses that run in largely suburban or rural areas should not be provided, as the ridership per mile on these lines is typically very low and the subsidy per passenger very high. On the other hand, the goal of transit may in fact be high coverage in other words, this is an assessment of transit that prioritizes the provision of routes throughout an area, with geographic and economic equity being an essential part of this. Under this classification, “empty” buses or buses with light ridership may be justified because transit is viewed as a social service.

Regardless of the goal of transit, transit may be evaluated through a number of performance measures or performance standards. However, due to the difficulty in determining who the transit is for or its quality, disputes will constantly arise over the proper method of evaluation. The Pioneer Institute and the Frontier Group, two partisan groups, have disagreed over how to properly evaluate the “operational efficiency” of the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority. The Frontier Group believes that costs per unlinked passenger trips is appropriate, while the Pioneer Institute believes that the appropriate cost is cost per vehicle-revenue hours and total passenger-miles traveled (Stergios 2015).

Some authors have argued that the current focus on cost-efficiency and opportunity-cost analysis in transit has removed it from what they perceive to be the appropriate social goals of this sort of service. For example, Grengs argued that in the neoliberal city, that the mission of public transit has fallen by the wayside, arguing that federal support for transit has had explicit social goals; that the social goals of public transportation are being supplanted by calls for efficiency and competitiveness; and that neoliberal political agendas have influenced transportation policy (Grengs 2005). Bullard argues that transportation is a basic right and “is basic to many other quality of life indicators such as health, education, employment, economic development, access to municipal services, residential mobility, and environmental quality” (Bullard 2003).

Even within the Boston area, the debate over the appropriate goals of transit continues. For example, in early-mid 2015, Massachusetts Secretary of Transportation Stephanie Pollack argued that the MBTA should raise fares to a much higher level that would be sufficient to cover costs and other transit, and then offer a lower fare to low-income riders, as she argues that the T’s fares are set “artificially low” as a social service (Leung 2015).
3.5.3 Modes of transit and relation to rights

Transportation and transit in particular are imbued with a particular significance about equity, civil rights and justice issues. Because transit has been simultaneously perceived as a public service, a competitor to the automobile, an economic lifeline and many other things, it has often been connected to greater societal forces. In particular, race, class and mode of transportation have often become inextricably linked together.

Before World War II, during which transit ridership peaked in many American cities, the construction of expensive heavy rail systems – often funded privately through what would effectively be “public-private partnerships” – was not charged, or was only minimally charged, with racial or economic issues, since transit was a public service used by many. However, in the second half of the twentieth century, suburbanization, white flight and the mass adoption of the automobile have caused transit riders to be largely low-income and often heavily minority. As Bullard notes, “if you look at the demographics of commuter rail vs. the demographics of who rides the bus, you’ll find a higher concentration of people of color and lower income persons on the bus than you don the trains. All transit is not created equal” (Bullard, Johnson, and Torres 2004).

Some authors in the literature have argued that transit operators have not invested resources appropriately in view of this shift in ridership and often for political reasons. Garrett and Taylor argued that public transit agencies have largely ignored the fact that the bulk of transit ridership outside of old, dense outlier cases such as New York, is poor, and that transit subsidy policies have favored investment in expensive suburban transit. They directly term this discrepancy socially justice and inequitable (Garrett and Taylor 1999). Similarly, Taylor and Morris argue that in recent decades, transit agencies have focused unduly on goals that benefit affluent travelers and have focused significantly on these types of transit operations, such as heavy rail (Taylor and Morris 2014).

Rail transit in particular has become somewhat controversial; because of the heavy cost of its construction, the propensity to attract money from other transit causes and the “sexiness” of new rail routes as opposed to bus routes, it often attracts a great deal of attention from activists who claim that transit agencies have placed an excessive amount of attention to this form of transit.

The case of the Bus Riders’ Union lawsuit against the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority offers an example of the differences
between rail and bus modes of transit, and community organizing that brought about change in the agency due to a lawsuit. In the late 1980s to early 1990s, the Los Angeles MTA had proposed a major program of rail construction, which would eventually lead to today's heavy rail lines such as the Red Line. However, in 1994, the Bus Riders Union filed a lawsuit to force the MTA to improve the existing bus service before proceeding with the construction of the rail system (Grengs 2002). The Bus Riders Union charged that LACMTA was racist in its promotion of Metro heavy rail, because investment in heavy rail, which largely targeted middle- and upper-class white commuters, was significantly higher than the ridership on buses, which formed the majority of LACMTA's ridership at the time (Elkind 2014). Criticism has also been levied against the LACMTA for what is argued to be an excessive impact on commuter rail (Metrolink), with claims that over a majority of LACMTA's subsidies were provided for this form of commuter rail.

Grengs' work identifies six factors through which the Bus Riders' Union was able to succeed in their work: the fact that they built a network of organizational ties; that they focused on the MTA in their campaign; that the BRU was able to successfully organize a coalition of mass transit riders and reach out to them; that they forged alliances with both influential activists and experts and compromised with "philosophically divergent" allies, and finally that they framed the issue around the civil rights movement.

A similar example can be found in the opposition encountered by the construction of the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) system. In Oakland, the extension of the Bay Area Rapid Transit system was met with opposition by African-American residents, activists, and community leaders within West Oakland. Advocates argued that BART would move jobs to the suburbs and that it was a symbol of "elite bias," and furthermore that largely because of the fact that BART would thus have a negative impact on the West Oakland community, BART should especially reserve jobs for the West Oakland community (Rodriguez 1999). In Atlanta, the construction of the MARTA (Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority) heavy rail system was opposed by many largely white suburban communities due to an association of mass transit with poverty and unsafe areas (Henderson 2006).

It is clear within the literature that different modes of transit can certainly become politicized or charged with undertones of class and/or race.
what has been relatively lacking from the literature is a discussion of how an
individual mode, and in particular, commuter rail – the subject of this thesis – has
impacted community efforts, or in other words an examination of how the
participation literature has come together with the literature looking at modes of
transportation. Furthermore, relatively little work has been done examining how
the community has become involved in commuter rail projects. Most of the
literature that examines community and grassroots participation has examined
community groups that have opposed projects, and in particular, large highway
construction projects.

3.6 Conclusion

The literature has established that on an institutional level, public participation in
both city planning as a whole and transportation planning specifically has been
mandated by both a variety of laws and a significant amount of public policy
consensus. With first the passage of the Urban Mass Transportation Act, and then
subsequently laws such as ISTEA, TEA-21 and SAFETEA-LU, public
participation became more formalized. Alongside this formalization of
participation, an understanding of the importance of seeking public involvement
in the planning decision-making process developed, and at least on a nominal
level lip-service was paid to the concept of the importance of public participation
in planning.

The literature identifies problems with these levels of participation, however.
Much of this public participation was seen as efforts to simply “legitimize”
already-decided actions of public authorities or as necessary, token steps to take.
The effectiveness and methods by which citizens participated in planning was also
seen as questionable. Furthermore, the representativeness of those who participate
in planning has also been seen as questionable, with many authors suggesting that
a particular class of individuals is over-represented in the planning process.

Beyond examining citizen participation in general, authors have also examined
the relationships between race, class, equity and transit. This body of literature has
largely focused on how heavy rail and other “expensive” forms of transportation
have been overly subsidized by transit authorities and other public agencies, since,
as has been alleged, these services are more heavily patronized by wealthier, whiter
constituencies. However, in large part due to the fact that commute rail has not
seen a significant number of changes or improvements, the literature has been
largely silent on how community participation and activism have been present in
commuter rail projects. The literature has also not seriously examined how the
choice of mode has particularly impacted community activism strategies.
FOUR
Research Question and Methodology

4.1 Motivation
The literature on public participation, environmental justice, transit equity and commuter rail/improvements on rail is extensive, as seen in chapters 2 and 3. Authors have extensively explored public participation, its forms, its effectiveness and alternate models. In addition, authors have explored how communities have used the rationales/reasons of transit justice and equity to push for transportation projects. However, there has been a dearth of research that examines the impact of advocating for a commuter rail project by the community, as well as a shortage of literature that examines how working on a particular mode affects the strategies adopted by a community.

4.2 Research question
The research question that I attempted to answer in this thesis is as follows:

In the context of a community-led effort to improve service on commuter rail, does the focus on commuter rail— as opposed to other modes— have an effect on community actors' strategies and actions?
In order to answer this main research question, I posed several sub-questions, explored in the following sections.

4.2.1 Sub-questions

I asked four sub-questions to answer the research question, which were:

- What actions did community actors take to drive forth change on commuter rail? Were these actions necessary for each step to move forward?
- What reasons did community actors cite for becoming involved with the Fairmount initiative?
- Are there significant differences in how commuter rail and rapid rail transit are perceived by corridor residents? If so, did these differences in perception impact the project?
- Do residents living along the corridor conceptualize of themselves living in a corridor? If so, did this perception contribute to the success of the project?

I separate these questions into two categories. The first consists of simply the first question regarding the roles of the community actors; while the second set consists of the remaining three questions. This set of questions was posed in order to understand how the fact that this project revolved around commuter rail influenced the project. Both “sets” of sub-questions are necessary to answer the main research question.

- If asked in isolation, the first set would simply result in an accounting of how community groups successfully brought a transportation-related project to fruition. While this would be illustrative of a particular situation, this would not address the commuter rail portion of the research question and of the thesis.
- If asked in isolation, the second set of questions would simply assess how corridor residents and community actors felt about commuter rail, their self-identification with their neighborhood, and motivating reasons for this thesis. But without an accounting of the actions that community actors took, these questions would fail to address any actionable items.
4.2.2 Actions
- What actions did community actors take to drive forth change on commuter rail? Were these actions necessary for each step to move forward?

The goal of this sub-question is to understand what steps community actors took and the roles they played in the process, as without an understanding of what these actions actually were, it becomes impossible to understand if they were necessary. Although it is impossible to deal with counterfactuals, the second part of this sub-question attempts to determine if these steps were necessary for the project to move forward, in order to assess the significance of the project from another perspective.

4.2.3 Commuter rail attitudes, perceptions and reasoning
The next three sub-questions attempt to address the gap in the literature looking at commuter rail, through asking the following questions. They attempt to get at the relevant part of commuter rail from a number of different (and necessarily incomplete) perspectives.

- What reasons did community actors cite for supporting the project?
- Are there significant differences in how commuter rail and rapid rail transit are perceived by corridor residents? If so, did these differences in perception impact the project?
- Do residents living along the corridor conceptualize of themselves living in a corridor? If so, did this perception contribute to the success of the project?

Through asking what reasons community actors cited for supporting the project, I want to understand how much they were motivated by the fact that this was a commuter rail line, and to understand the efficiency of the line, as compared to other motivating factors (such as the ability to receive funding, perceptions of inequity, racism or injustice, etc.).

The second question (on the perception of commuter rail and rapid rail transit) is posed as a corollary to the first question about reasons. I want to explicitly understand if residents perceive commuter rail as different from other forms of transportation, since I suspect that a perception of it as different from, or inferior to, rapid transit would spur residents to become involved with the project.
Finally, the third question is asked because of the particular nature of commuter rail. As compared to a rapid transit or a bus line, commuter rail typically runs through a variety of jurisdictions. Since typical users of commuter rail lines are more likely to use that form of transit for exclusively work-related trips and not for everyday trips (such as shopping or running errands), it may not be as central to the average rider’s consciousness. By understanding the reach of the “Fairmount Corridor,” I want to understand if the consciousness of a commuter rail line would extend to creating a sense of community. This is particularly important to understand because community actors and community representatives are, in theory, representing a community of some sort – the degree to which the “community” they are representing is tied to the commuter rail line helps shed light on the relative importance of commuter rail in this project.

Unfortunately, due to the limitations of this research, I was not really able to answer the last two questions (about the perception of commuter rail and rapid rail transit) and the research sub-questions that I ended up answering were the “proxy questions” below, with the differences marked in bold. The principal issue at play here was that interviewing residents on a broad scale within the corridor would not have been feasible within the scope of the research.

- **Do community actors believe that there are significant differences in how commuter rail and rapid rail transit are perceived by corridor residents?** If so, did these differences in perception impact the project?

- **Do community actors believe that residents living along the corridor conceptualize of themselves living in a corridor?** If so, did this perception contribute to the success of the project?

With this, these three questions all end up centering around the “narrative” that community actors present around their involvement on the Fairmount Line.

### 4.3 Hypothesis

I propose the following hypothesis:

Yes, a focus on commuter rail has a major impact on community actors’ participation and strategies.
For the sub-questions, I did not necessarily create hypotheses, but examined them through the lens of my sub-questions.

4.3.1 Roles and actions
From the public participation literature, there are a number of roles and actions that community actors could play and take in line:

- They could be the chief leaders of the project, following the “citizen participation” role set out by Arnstein. In this capacity, community actors would be completely in charge of directing the project.
- Going a step down in the Arnstein ladder, community actors could also play “tokenism” roles, in which their participation is nominally asked for and received, but in actuality is not seriously considered and is used largely by the government in order to prove that it has “done its due diligence” in terms of participation.
- Community members could play the “manipulation” role, in which case their participation would simply serve to be manipulated by the government for other ends, or their participation would not be taken into account at all whatsoever (Arnstein 1969).

4.3.2 Reasons
For the second sub-question, I worked to understand what reasons community actors might have for supporting the Fairmount project. Drawing on literature and past examples of why individuals have supported particular changes in commuter rail, the group of reasons for better transportation could be grouped as follows:

- Transit efficiency or financial reasons: This includes arguments that would argue for better commuter service along the lines of more efficient use of vehicles, sufficient density, origin-destination matrices that indicate strong demand for transit along those lines, etc. These arguments are those that are most similar to the technocratic arguments used to justify the construction of highways in the peak of the interstate-highway construction era. Financial reasons are similar and could include the fact:
that it would be cheaper to run a particular type of service along a line, etc.

- Environmental justice: These include environmental justice arguments such as the ones made in Los Angeles, Oakland and elsewhere that improved transportation will result in fewer emissions, less pollution, fewer fumes, etc.

- Social justice/equity: These include appeals on the grounds of good transit being a basic human or societal right. This group of arguments also includes those that make comparisons to other modes of transportation and find the commuter rail mode lacking.

- Economic reasons: These arguments are those focusing around the idea that improved transportation will bring improved jobs, increase housing and/or economic development around the stations, etc.

4.3.3 Corridor

The purpose of this question is to understand how individuals perceive the Fairmount Corridor and what effect this perception has on the actual likelihood of change and innovation along the commuter rail line. The impact that transportation lines can have on the perception of the existence of a corridor will vary widely. While the continuum here is fluid, three different “points” that represent the main archetypes of this continuum can be identified:

- A transportation service that is simply a transportation line for example, the MBTA’s 1 bus that runs on Massachusetts Avenue. This is a frequent service, but it is likely that nearly everyone who lives along the Massachusetts Avenue corridor would not state that they live along the “1 bus corridor.”

- Something that is a transportation corridor but that has a fairly strong concept as a unified service, though perhaps not as strong as the idea of a “corridor”: for example, the Red Line within Cambridge, or possibly the Braintree Extension branch of the MBTA Red Line

- A unified corridor that has a cultural identity that may actually transcend the individual: for example, the Northeast Corridor, which is connected by Interstate 95 and the Northeast Corridor rail line, but is definitely
perceived as a corridor beyond simply the existence of these transportation services.

It seems likely that if a corridor were a unified idea and if residents believed that they lived in a corridor, that they would be more likely to support the idea of a “Fairmount Corridor” and support for the initiative would be easier to drum up. If the Fairmount Corridor were considered to be more of a “corridor” by the individuals who lived there, the “community” that nonprofits and other community organizations claim to represent would be a stronger, more cohesive entity. Finally, as mentioned in section 4.2.3, commuter rail is a particularly unique mode and if the “Fairmount Corridor” turned out to be a substantively powerful classifier, then it would seem reasonable to argue that commuter rail did have a particular role to play in this initiative.

4.4 Methodology
In this section, I discuss the methodology that I used to conduct the research for this thesis. Research was conducted using the case study method. Primary source research for this thesis consisted of interviews with stakeholders and other involved individuals; primary plans that were authored by consulting firms and by newspaper articles (largely Boston Globe ones) from historical archives. Secondary source research for this thesis were largely previous scholarly articles.

4.4.1 Case study method
After determining that commuter rail and the improvement of commuter rail was my area of interest, I decided to employ the case study method. Because my question was not a technical question involving a significant proportion of data analysis (such as a thesis focusing on automated passenger data), I decided to use the case study method to analyze the data and answer my research question.

According to Yin, case studies are appropriate for answering “why” and “how” questions, because simple review of historical document or prior reports do not easily address these forms of questions (Yin 2013). Another strength of the case study is that it may be applied to contemporary events. The weakness of a case study is, of course, that the applicability of the case study may be limited.

I chose the Fairmount Line as the key case study for this thesis. Advantages of choosing this line as my key case study included:
• First, the Fairmount Line is located entirely within the city of Boston, with stop spacing that is relatively akin to an urban corridor. It therefore presents a realistic example of how such a project of improvement of commuter rail might proceed.

• Because this project has seen involvement by a high number of agencies, it gave me the opportunity to examine the research question and examine the relative role of the community within its implementation.

• The project is relatively recent, with major progress occurring after 2000. For research purposes, this makes it simpler to find information as well as contact major players and actors.

• The project is ongoing, which means that a fair degree of attention is being paid to the line and it is relatively easier to locate news coverage and other media attention paid to the project.

• The project is located in Boston, which already enjoys a robust passenger rail network. In many ways, the construction of a new commuter rail line or the conversion of a commuter rail line in an area with a paucity of exiting rail transport will feel significantly different, as regional commuters will not have the level of familiarity with rail transit. This location in Boston was also advantageous in consideration of the researcher’s personal familiarity and knowledge of the Boston metropolitan area.

However, the choice of the Fairmount Line as a case study also presented some disadvantages:

• The project is ongoing, which is also a disadvantage in that it can be difficult to assess its ultimate success or relative causes and effects. Currently, the line is projected to have DMUs arrive by 2020, but the arrival of these DMUs is certainly not guaranteed and could be impacted by political realities or impediments.

• Every case study is going to be distinctive. This is obviously not a fact that is not unique to the Fairmount Line, but it means that a determination of which aspects are unique to this line is necessary.

• The majority of the neighborhoods along the Fairmount Line are socioeconomically disadvantaged. The reason that this is a disadvantage is not the fact of being a lower-income area in and of itself. Rather, what is the issue is that transportation is typically very bound up with
socioeconomic indicators and so this may impact how applicable this case study will be to other situations.

4.4.2 Historical/document research
As a part of the research process for this thesis, I examined a number of historical documents, scholarly literature and other documents. There were several categories that were of importance.

First were previous plans for the Fairmount Line, Fairmount Corridor, Fairmount Greenway and other related geographies. While focusing on these plans was not the key goal of this thesis, they gave me an understanding of historical context on the line. Documents from the Boston Globe, in particular, were also of key importance to setting the chronology straight and for confirming accounts of historic events from interviewees, especially events that happened prior to approximately 2010 or so.

Scholarly literature was also of key importance in being able to situate the Fairmount Line within its academic background, especially the literature that focused on community participation and the role of community organizations.

4.4.3 Interview process
For this thesis, I employed semi-structured interviewers. I spoke to 20 individuals (see Figure 2), representing a mix. Interviews generally lasted an hour, although the range of interview times was from 45 minutes to 90 minutes. Interviews were conducted in March and April 2015 in the Boston metropolitan area.

I can break up the interview process into two main goals:

- The first goal of my interview process was to gain an understanding of the factual narrative that occurred along the Fairmount Line, or the first set of research sub-questions I posed. While I was able to glean a basic understanding of what had happened along the Fairmount Line from newspaper and magazine articles available to the general public, as well as personal background knowledge, developing a deeper understanding required having this narrative confirmed through interviewees personally involved with the project.

- The second goal of my interview process was to answer my research question, and in particular the sub-questions (the second set of questions)
that focused specifically on how the fact that this project was specifically about commuter rail impacted the community’s actions and strategies.

However, regardless of the substantive subject of the interview, every interview was framed identically at the beginning and the end: all interviews began with an introduction of the researcher and the project, as well as the opportunity for the interview subject to ask the researcher questions about the project. The interview process was a gradual and continual process of learning. At the beginning of the interview process, a larger proportion of questions were dedicated to the first goal of the interview process – in other words, ensuring that I understood the chronology of the Fairmount initiative. After each interview, or each collection of interviews as some interviews occurred in short succession, I went back to the interview protocol and revised the list of questions for each category.

For a small proportion of interviews where I knew that the interviewee had a very specific level of knowledge – most notably Barbara Fields, who is an abutter/resident close to one of the proposed stations – I had to customize the interview protocol to a higher degree, as many of the particular questions that I had asked other interviewees were not applicable in this situation. Since some early interviewers made claims about other interview subjects and organizations, when I had the opportunity I asked later interviewees to respond to these claims; however, this was not systematic as I did not have the opportunity follow up with all interviewees.

The interview list was devised with the following groups of individuals in mind and with the following questions for each category. All interviewees were asked the second “set” of sub-questions (whether they felt that residents considered the Fairmount Corridor to be an actual corridor, the reasons that they/their organization became involved in the Fairmount Line effort, and what their perception of residents’ attitudes toward commuter rail and rapid rail transit was).

- ‘Activists’ that worked directly on Fairmount Corridor efforts from organizations such as the Greater Four Corners Action Coalition
Questions for these interviewees focused on their involvement with the Fairmount Corridor and the degree of interaction with other groups involved with the effort.

- Fairmount CDC Collaborative: Dorchester Bay EDC, Codman Square NDC, Southwest Boston CDC and the Mattapan CDC before it filed for bankruptcy.
  - Questions for these interviewees focused on how the Fairmount CDCs joined the effort to bring better transportation to the Fairmount Line, how involved these CDCs were with non-transportation related initiatives and the level of cooperation with other organizations.

- Other nonprofits and organizations, such as the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, Hyde Park and Mattapan United.

  - Questions for these interviewees focused on their involvement with the Fairmount Corridor and the degree of interaction with other groups involved with the effort, in particular making an effort to distinguish between CDCs and other organizations.

- Corridor residents who are not formally involved in transportation or activism efforts, what I will term “grassroots residents,” to distinguish them from the other groups in these categorizations.

A list of interviewees contacted for this thesis is as provided in Figure 2. (See Appendix 10.2 for the interview protocols used.) In addition to these individuals, efforts were also made to speak to:

- A current MBTA employee with knowledge of the Fairmount Line.
- A member of ACE (alternatives for community and environment, a nonprofit group).
- A representative of the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative.
- A representative of the Newmarket Business Association.
- A representative at the Boston Transportation Department.
- A representative of Project Right.
Figure 2. List of interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewees</th>
<th>Connection to Fairmount Project</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>Subject matter expert on commuter rail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>Activist, Greater Four Corners Action Coalition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noah Berger</td>
<td>MBTA Advisory Board (former); currently at US DOT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Chavez</td>
<td>Enterprise Rose Fellow, Codman Square NDC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe Cosgrove</td>
<td>MBTA (former)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeanne DuBois</td>
<td>Dorchester Bay EDC (former) and Fairmount CDC Collaborative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Feloney</td>
<td>Southwest Boston CDC (former)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara Fields</td>
<td>Abutter, Blue Hill Avenue station</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott Hamwey</td>
<td>MassDOT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeremy Levine</td>
<td>Doctoral student, Harvard University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rafael Mares</td>
<td>Conservation Law Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marvin Martin</td>
<td>Greater Four Corners Action Coalition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ines Soto Palmarin</td>
<td>BRA (former)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geeta Pradhan</td>
<td>Boston Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeremy Rosenberger</td>
<td>BRA (former)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frederick Salvucci</td>
<td>Massachusetts Secretary of Transportation (former)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ted Schwarzberg</td>
<td>BRA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mat Thall</td>
<td>Southwest Boston CDC (former)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joan Tighe</td>
<td>Fairmount CDC Collaborative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joanne Weinstock</td>
<td>US DOT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author

- A representative of one of the Fairmount Collaborative CDCs (aside from those mentioned above)
- A resident of the Fairmount Corridor, not associated with any formal group/organization working on the line

These individuals are not named, since their failure to respond may have been due to political or otherwise sensitive considerations. After three separate attempts were made to contact these interview subjects, attempts to contact was dropped to respect the interviewees' privacy.

Contact with interviewees was initially made via email. Interviews conducted in person were recorded and transcribed. Interviews conducted over the phone were transcribed on a computer during the interview itself. In initial communications, interviewees were offered the choice of meeting in person or over the phone; this choice was followed for all but one interviewee, whose significant distance from the interviewer made travel impractical. Eight interviewees were met in person while the other 12 interviewees were spoke to over the phone.
The participant recruitment, interview design, data collection and analysis were approved by the local institutional review board (COUHES), which approved the exemption policy for this paper.

After transcription of the interviews, I then began the process of coding and classifying the interviews. The “first pass” through the interview was to collect basic chronological facts to create an outline and narrative that would eventually inform Chapter 5, especially at the beginning of the interview/thesis process when my level of understanding of the case study was not as high. After this, I then went through the interviews and pulled out notes, information and quotes that directly addressed my research questions. After this process, I completed a “third pass” through the interview transcriptions and identified common themes and grouped facts, quotes and information under these common theme headings.

Subsequent to this, a “fourth pass” was made through the interviews using MaxQDA software; this allowed me to code the various interviews by code. Eighty-nine separate codes were identified in 11 separate categories (see Appendix 10.1). This process allowed me to identify missing themes; most prominently, two themes that I identified that I had not covered in previous go-throughs of the interview material included the role of leadership (discussed in section 6.7) and discussions of development and design (added to section 8.4.) In addition, this thematic coding process also served as a simpler way for me to look up relevant quotes during the writing of this paper.

Figure 3. Example of quotes selected together

**Safety concerns about stations**

- [JR] We have these great new stations, plopping those stations down where the sidewalks are abysmal, there’s no lighting. There might be a station but people don’t even know it’s there. We need to make it from a public realm perspective, more desirable, and more opportunity to complement these stations.

- [JT] I personally think the Uphams Corner Fairmount station is unsafe on the inbound side. Actually when I worked downtown, I took the Fairmount Line all the time, and this was before they redid the station, and it was just a flight of stairs up to the platform. Now it’s this ramp that does this switchback turn..

- [JDB] That has turned out to be an important part of awareness. People in some stations are legitimately frightened. They don’t feel safe, they’ve had a dead body there, there’s a lot of drug activity.
In this chapter, I present the history and context behind the Fairmount Line. This chapter also provides a brief introduction to MBTA rail services as well for those who are relatively unfamiliar with the Boston area.

5.1 Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority rail services

The Massachusetts Transportation Bay Authority (MBTA) is the operator of public transportation in the metropolitan Boston area. It is one of only two public transit agencies in the United States to operate all five forms of terrestrial transit vehicles: commuter rail trains, heavy rail trains, light rail trains, electric trolleybuses and diesel-powered motor buses, in addition to ferries. (The other agency is the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority.) However, the MBTA’s passenger rail lines are generally marketed into two different categories: the “subway,” which consists of the Orange, Red and Blue heavy rail lines, along with the Green Line, a light rail line; and the commuter rail.

The two types of rail services that are perceived by the consumer – the “subway” and the “commuter rail” – are operated in a fairly distinct fashion.

The four subway lines share a flat fare, with entry to all stations guarded by automatic fare gates accepting Charlie Cards, which are the MBTA’s contactless, stored-value smartcards that have been in use since 2006 (similar to London’s Oyster Card or Washington’s Smartrip). Service is frequent on these lines.
frequent service operates during peak hours but at minimum there are generally trains at least every 10-12 minutes. These services operate in the close-in municipalities of Boston, Braintree, Brookline, Cambridge, Malden, Medford, Malden, Newton, Quincy, Revere and Somerville.

On the other hand, the commuter rail services of the MBTA are operated in a substantively different way. Since July 1, 2014, these services have been operated under contract with Keolis; prior to that date, the Massachusetts Bay Commuter Railroad Company and Amtrak were among the operators. However, to the consumer, this generally only has a minor impact on operations as all these rail operations are marketed under the MBTA brand. Eight lines (from the
Framingham/Worcester line in the west to the Greenbush line in the east, including the Fairmount Line) operate into South Station, while four lines (from the Fitchburg line in the west to the Rockport/Newburyport line in the east) operate into North Station in Boston. There is no direct connection between the two terminal lines, although they are connected by a subway trip requiring a transfer. Commuter rail service extends through much of eastern Massachusetts and even into Rhode Island.

Service patterns and frequency on commuter rail vary significantly on the commuter rail lines. The line that sees the most frequent service, the Providence/Stoughton line, sees 36 inbound trips to Boston a day as of May
2015, with more frequent service during the peak hours and a measurable
difference in frequency during off-peak periods. The stored-value Charlie Cards
are not accepted on the commuter rail system. Commuter rail fare is reckoned in
terms of zones, of which there are 11 zones determined by distance (see Figure 6).

On the map, the commuter rail lines are all shaded in purple (see Figure 4),
and there is no free interchange between the subway and the commuter rail even
at shared stations, such as Porter Square, Quincy Center, Braintree, Malden or
Forest Hills. MBTA passengers wishing to transfer at these stations from rapid
transit to commuter rail must exit the system and pay a separate fare (or at the
very least have their pass checked).

Figure 6. Commuter rail zone map

Source: Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority
5.2 Fairmount Line overview

The Fairmount Line is by far the shortest commuter rail line in the system, at 9.2 miles long, and is the only commuter rail line that has service solely within the city of Boston. The Fairmount Line currently consists of eight stops (excluding South Station) from north to south: Newmarket, Uphams Corner, Four Corners/Geneva Avenue, Talbot Avenue, Morton Street, Fairmount and Readville (see Figure 7). While Readville station is the terminus of the Fairmount Line, it is also a station stop on the Franklin Line, albeit on separate platforms. A small number of trains from the adjoining Franklin Line run onto the Fairmount right-of-way, instead of the Northeast Corridor trackage that those trains usually use. Additionally, because there is a large train yard near Readville station, the Fairmount Line is often frequently used to move locomotives during off-peak hours as it sees less traffic.

One additional station, the Blue Hill Avenue station in Mattapan, is slated to begin construction in November 2015 and to begin operation in December 2017. This station ran into considerable opposition from local abutters (see section 7.3.3) explaining its delay.

Currently, the Fairmount Line also sees by far the lowest number of total boardings of any commuter rail line, even when adjusted for the relatively short length of the line. In fiscal year 2013, the line had 1,038 average boardings on weekdays, which translates to approximately 109 boardings/track mile (see Figure 8). The next “least productive” line was the Kingston/Plymouth Line at 184 boardings/track mile; the most “productive” line was the Needham Line, which had 509 boardings/track mile. The latter is actually the second-shortest line within the MBTA commuter rail system, demonstrating that shorter lines do not necessarily imply a smaller number of boardings. (The longest line, to Providence, is in the “middle of the pack” with 312 boardings/track mile.) (Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority 2014b, 2014)

As can be seen in Figure 8, ridership on the Fairmount Line has varied significantly year-over-year (Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority 2010, 2010; Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority 2014b, 2014). Total ridership on the line seems to have been declining since FY 2005, although it is worth noting that construction of the new stations took place in 2012 and 2013, so ridership was likely depressed due to negative externalities resulting from the
Figure 7. Fairmount Line map

Map by author. Data source Massachusetts Office of Geographic Information
construction. Only weekday ridership figures are shown, as weekend service on the Fairmount Line did not begin until late November 2014.

Figure 9 shows the inbound boardings on the Fairmount Line at approximately annual intervals on a typical weekday by station. To set these figures in context, ridership can be considerably higher on other lines—Providence, for example, saw an average of 2,325 inbound travelers on an average weekday in April 2013, and a considerable number of stations, including nearly all stations on the Providence/Stoughton line, saw over 1,000 inbound passengers on an average weekday.

As of April 2015, the Fairmount Line ran 22 inbound and 21 outbound trips Monday through Friday and 17 trips in both directions on weekends. All stations on the line between South Station and Fairmount are in zone 1A (see Figure 6), which enjoys identical individual and monthly fares as subway fares ($2.10 and $7.5 for a monthly pass at the time of writing.) By way of comparison, while Porter Square Station, which is on both the commuter rail and Red Line, is in zone 1A, Quincy Center and Braintree are not. The Readville Station is in zone 2, which has a full commuter rail fare of $6.00.

Travel time from Readville to South Station is 25 minutes, which is about the same travel time as driving in uncongested conditions from Readville to South Station; travel time on buses in these conditions can be considerably longer. During peak hours, trains make all scheduled stops at the station, while during all non-peak hours the intermediate stops between Readville and South Station are flag stops, requiring individuals on the platform to signal the conductor if they wish to board the train.

5.3 Operational and financial analysis

The fare recovery ratio (the portion of operating expenses that are covered by riders' fares) varies significantly along different modes. The MBTA’s commuter rail system had a fare recovery ratio of 48 percent in 2013, compared to 61 percent for the MBTA’s heavy rail ridership and 59 percent for light rail (National Transit Database 2013). On average, for commuter rail, this means that the average revenue per unlinked passenger trip was $4.80, while the average expense per unlinked passenger trip was $9.97, though this of course disguises extremely wide variation in actual revenue and cost per unlinked passenger trips, since fares vary based on distance in the commuter rail system.
Currently, the MBTA operates 503 commuter rail vehicles, including coaches/cab cars and passenger train locomotives, compared to the 647 vehicles that are in service for the “subway” (heavy and light rail lines) together (Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority 2014b, 2014). The MBTA does not currently dedicate any rolling stock to the Fairmount Line, and therefore rolling stock for this line is also used on other commuter rail lines such as the Needham or Franklin lines. Because this rolling stock is sized for peak loads on other
commuter rail lines, it generally means that this rolling stock is oversized for use on the Fairmount Line.

The current plan for the Fairmount Line is to add diesel multiple unit (DMU) service along this line by 2020, pursuant to the response to an RFP issued by the MBTA and MassDOT in 2014. According to ridership projections performed in 2007, at a 15-minute headway, the addition of DMUs along the line would result in 4,250 riders and a 25-minute running time from Readville to South Station; a “modified push-pull trainset” would result in 3,700 riders with a 28-minute running time; and the continued use of traditional push-pull equipment would result in only 3,340 riders with a 30-minute running time.

A 2008 report by Jacobs Edward Kelcey examining the use of DMUs on the Fairmount Line found that “the operation of DMUs without increasing service frequency on the line is forecast to be a very poor investment” (Jacobs Edwards and Kelcey 2008b). Capital costs and operating costs showed somewhat different characteristics. Capital costs for the procurement of DMUs at all levels of service up to and including 15-minute headways prove to be higher than for other forms of rolling stock. Jacobs Edward Kelcey found that even at 15 minute headways, the incremental capital costs of DMUs would be $25 million higher than the use of conventional, current push-pull equipment, and $10 million higher than the use of “modified push-pull trainsets,” which are trainsets modified to have center doors. However, on an incremental capital cost per incremental rider basis, DMUs turn out to be the best investment as the better quality of service is forecast to attract more passengers – the incremental cost per incremental passenger is $29,000 for DMUs, $31,000 for conventional rolling stock and $33,000 for push-pull train sets.

At high levels of service, the operating costs of DMUs become almost similar to both conventional and modified push-pull equipment. At 15-minute headways (which is the level of service that the Fairmount Coalition is advocating), the annual operating costs for DMUs would be $1.498 million, compared to a slightly lower $1.455 million for modified push-pull equipment and $1.546 million for conventional equipment. Similar to the situation with capital costs, incremental costs per incremental passenger trips are lowest for DMUs at the highest levels of service: $2.73 for DMUs, $4.17 for modified push-pull train sets, and $5.07 for existing rolling stock (Jacobs Edwards and Kelcey 2008b).
What is therefore clear is that any investment in DMUs along the Fairmount Line becomes most effective at a high level of service, with a high level of frequency. Given the low passenger numbers that the line currently sees and the fact that full-length trainsets are run along the Fairmount Line, the current operating subsidy for passengers is likely very high.

5.4 Demographics
Unless noted otherwise, the following demographics are for the custom definition of the “Fairmount Corridor” as I have defined it for sole use in this section. Census block groups (the intermediate level between census tracts and census blocks) that had their centroid within a half-mile radius from each Fairmount Line station, excluding South Station, were included in this definition of “Fairmount Corridor”. A half-mile was chosen because the half mile is the commonly accepted reasonable walkshed for rail transit stations (Guerra, Cervero, and Tischler 2012). All data in this section is from 2008-2013 American Community Survey five-year estimates unless otherwise specified.

Requiring census block groups to have their centroid present within the half-mile radius to be eligible for this analysis, instead of permitting block groups that had any portion within a half-mile radius, was done to avoid including block groups of which only a very small sliver was included in the half-mile radius. Admittedly, this errs on being overly restrictive; however, given that the half-mile radius is as the crow flies and disregards actual walking paths which are almost always slightly longer than as-the-crow-flies distances, this may be considered to be relatively accurate. See Figure 10 for the census block groups that were included in this analysis.

5.4.1 Total population and race
The Fairmount Corridor had a total population of 84,329, or 13.5 percent of the total population of the city of Boston (629,182), in an area of approximately six square miles. The density of the corridor is 14,092 persons per square mile, denser than the city of Boston at 13,340 per square mile, although less dense than either Cambridge (16,686 per square mile) or Somerville (19,221 per square mile).

The corridor is 82 percent non-white, compared to only 46.3 percent of the city of Boston. In particular, the corridor is significantly more African-American
Figure 10. Block groups within Fairmount Corridor

Source: 2008-2013 American Community Source five-year estimate
Figure 1. Race in the Fairmount Corridor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Boston</th>
<th>Fairmount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White only</td>
<td>53.7%</td>
<td>18.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black only</td>
<td>25.1%</td>
<td>63.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian / Native American only</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian only</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaiian / Pacific Islander only</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other single race</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more races</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2008-2013 American Community Source five-year estimate

Figure 2. Means of transport to work in the Fairmount Corridor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Boston</th>
<th>Fairmount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drive to work alone</td>
<td>38.3%</td>
<td>46.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transit</td>
<td>33.6%</td>
<td>36.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walk</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpool</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work from home</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bicycle</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motorcycle</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2008-2013 American Community Source five-year estimate

Figure 3. Commute time in the Fairmount Corridor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Boston</th>
<th>Fairmount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 10 minutes</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 to 19 minutes</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 29 minutes</td>
<td>20.2%</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 to 39 minutes</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>22.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 to 59 minutes</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 to 89 minutes</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90 or more minutes</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worked at home</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2008-2013 American Community Source five-year estimate

than the population of Boston as a whole (63.3 percent vs. 25.1 percent). As for the Hispanic population (considered by the Census to be an ethnicity, separate from race), the Fairmount Corridor is slightly more Hispanic than the city of Boston as a whole: 21.2 percent vs. 18.0 percent. Almost exactly a third of Boston’s black population lives within the Fairmount Corridor. See Figure 1 for full details.
5.4.2 Commute and travel

The Fairmount Corridor contains 11.1 percent of workers above age 16 in Boston, which is slightly lower than the percentage of the total Fairmount population (13.5 percent) within Boston. Compared to Boston, the Fairmount Corridor demonstrates a higher rate of workers driving to work alone, carpooling, transit and working from home (both individually and in aggregate): 93 percent of all Fairmount Corridor residents employ one of these three modes to get to work, compared to 79 percent citywide. Most of this difference is made up by the dramatically lower rate of walking to work within the Fairmount Corridor; as there are very few large employment centers along the corridor, it makes sense that walking to work would be a less-frequently chosen option within the corridor.

A comparison of the average commute time within the Fairmount Corridor compared to the city of Boston as a whole reveals that commute times do skew longer in the corridor compared to Boston. Just under half (49.1 percent) of Boston residents have commute times under 30 minutes, while only 40 percent of Fairmount Corridor residents fall within this category. While only 9.3 percent of Boston residents had commute times that were longer than 60 minutes, 16.1 percent of Fairmount residents had commute times of this length. While the data available did not permit me to calculate an average or median commute time for the corridor, it is clear that the distribution of commute times falls higher within the Fairmount Corridor than otherwise.

5.4.3 Income and poverty

Both the median and average incomes per household within the Fairmount Corridor are lower than city-wide. City-wide median household income is $53,601, compared to the Fairmount Corridor median household income of $45,236. On an average-income basis, income within the Fairmount Corridor is also significantly lower than citywide: $55,679 compared to $80,593 in Boston. In terms of poverty, 23.7 percent of the Fairmount Corridor has a ratio of income-to-poverty ratio below 1 (which would make them considered to be in poverty), compared to 21.5 percent for Boston as a whole. While not desperately poor, the Fairmount Corridor is clearly one of the less affluent portions of the city and certainly of the metropolitan area.
5.5 Fairmount Line history

Although the most recent iteration of the Fairmount Line stems only from 1979, the Fairmount Line shares a history with many other Boston-area commuter rail lines in that its longer history dates back to the first flourishing of passenger rail in the United States.

5.5.1 Early history

As one of the oldest cities in the United States, and a city whose settlement patterns were largely fixed in the pre-automobile era, Boston has had a long history of public transportation and transit. After the development of the horse car and the cable car, the first electrified streetcar entered service in Boston in 1889 ("Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority," n.d.). Boston was also host to North America’s first subway in 1897, the Tremont Street Subway, which eventually became a part of what is today the Central Subway of the Green Line. In 1894, the Boston Elevated Railway Company (BERY) was incorporated and over the period of the next 40 years it built a great deal of rail infrastructure, including the precursor to many of today’s MBTA heavy rail lines (Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority 2015a).

Similar to the other commuter rail lines in the Boston area, the Fairmount Line came about as a privately owned passenger rail line. A large number of private railroad companies, which would eventually become consolidated as the Boston & Maine Railroad, the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad and the New York Central Railroad just prior to takeover by the MBTA, operated passenger service within the Boston area. Of these lines, the “Midland Railroad” of the Boston and New York Central Railroad would eventually become the Fairmount Line. It opened in 1855, but subsequent to disputes about trains running at-grade, the line re-opened in 1856. Private passenger service then continued to run on this line until 1944, at which point service on the line ceased due to competition from other modes of transportation (Boston Redevelopment Authority 2014; Nelson, Duse-Anthony, and Firemann 2005). In 1926, peak headways on the line, operated by the New Haven Railroad, were at approximately 15 minutes (Jacob Edwards and Kelcey 2008a).

In early 1945, the Massachusetts state legislature created a commission headed by Senator Arthur W. Coolidge, later to be called the Coolidge Commission, which produced two reports in 1945 and 1947 on the status of transit in the
Boston region. Concluding that the urban core areas would experience population declines in sight of rapid suburban growth, the commission recommended that the rapid transit network be extended 10 to 12 miles out of Boston in all directions, proposing an aggressive program of transit extensions (Central Transportation Planning Staff 1993).

Simultaneously, in the 1940s and 1950s, the Roxbury neighborhood – through which the Fairmount Line makes a major run – saw large shifts in its population demographics from Irish and Jewish to African-American. In the 1950s to 1980s, “white flight” also took place in Dorchester, with the similarly Irish and Jewish populations replaced by African-American, Asian-American and Caribbean populations.

In 1947, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), precursor to today’s MBTA, purchased the subway, elevated railway, streetcar and bus operations from the Boston Elevated Railway as it began to falter in the post-World War II move to the automobile. A year later, the Master Highway Plan for Metropolitan Boston was passed, in 1948: several decades later, this would have an impact on the Fairmount Line as it would eventually serve as an indirect impetus for the MBTA to re-introduce passenger service on this line.

During this period, the commuter rail lines continued to run private service; by 1964, commuter rail services were provided in metropolitan Boston by private operators with no state subsidies: the Boston & Maine Railroad; the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad; and the New York Central Railroad. Passenger railroads began to petition the Interstate Commerce Commission to abandon passenger rail service in view of increasing unprofitability and competition with the automobile.

The abandonment of the Old Colony Railroad in 1959 – since partially restored to service along a number of MBTA commuter rail branches – spurred the public to advocate for a government subsidy or at least takeover of the existing commuter rail lines in order to guarantee service. Beginning in 1964, the MTA signed contracts with these rail operators and began to subsidize commuter rail operations in the service area (Belcher 2014).

Plans to reform this system were legion. In 1972, the “Plan for Acquisition and Use of Railroad Rights of Way,” prepared by Thomas K. Dyer on behalf of the MBTA, proposed that the commuter rail lines within Boston be electrified...
and that extensions of rapid transit within Boston be connected to these external rail lines (Thomas K Dyer 1972).

5.5.2 Southwest Expressway and initial steps

The unbuilt Southwest Expressway would eventually exert a large influence on the development on the Fairmount Line. The Southwest Expressway was intended to come into the city near the Readville station and parallel what is today the Northeast Corridor rail line, through the neighborhoods of Roslindale, Forest Hills and Jamaica Plain, at which point it would have joined the also unbuilt Inner Belt Expressway. After clearing for this route in these neighborhoods began in 1966, in 1970 Governor Francis Sargent declared a moratorium on expressway construction within Route 128 (with the exception of Interstate 93 through to Somerville), including the Southwest Expressway. In 1972, the expressway was canceled (R. G. Smith 1990).

At this time, the southern branch of the Orange Line was an elevated line that had long been an eyesore in the community along Washington Avenue since 1901. With the expressway canceled, the right-of-way already largely present and dedicated to transportation uses, and a desire to see the Orange Line moved from its elevated alignment, the decision was made to place the Orange Line into this corridor; the sunken transportation corridor would also play host to a linear park (the Southwest Corridor Park) as well as a reconstructed three-track alignment for Amtrak and commuter rail service (Elder and Fox 2013).

In preparation for this construction the MBTA purchased the Midland Railroad right-of-way in 1976, in order to serve as a “reserve right-of-way” for trains to run on during construction. In early 1979, Providence/Attleboro, Stoughton and Franklin line trains, which had previously run along the Southwest Corridor rail line, were all rerouted to the Midland/Fairmount right-of-way in anticipation of the construction. At this time that service on the Fairmount Line began, the Fairmount shuttle service ran from South Station to Fairmount Station only, with no weekend service. However, a mere two years later in 1981, the Uphams Corner and Morton Street stations closed due to budget cuts and a lack of riders.

Simultaneously, there were three proposals for the Washington Street corridor that would now lose rapid transit service, which all directly and indirectly involved the Fairmount Line. The first, proposed by-to-be Massachusetts Secretary
of Transportation Frederick Salvucci, was a proposal for electrified light rail along the Midland/Fairmount branch, which would have turned northward along Melnea Cass Blvd and eventually joined the Green Line on its subway into Boston. Further plans would have had the line eventually form part of a circumferential light rail ring around Boston. Two other proposals for the area included a light rail replacement along Washington Street/the old alignment of the Orange Line, or a full subway under Washington Street. Marvin Martin, who was to play a pivotal role in the construction of the Fairmount Line, led the Washington Street Corridor Coalition, which supported the trolley line down to Dudley Square in Roxbury (Salvucci 2015). One of the lasting results of this fight was that the relationships between these neighborhoods and the transportation agency was often negatively impacted.

5.5.3 1987 onward

In 1987, the newly aligned Orange Line opened and all other trains aside from Franklin Line trains were rerouted back onto the mainline corridor. At this time, the MBTA planned to abandon the Fairmount Line completely, but due to community opposition to removal the line stayed in service (Howe 1988). At this time, the MBTA actually doubled the frequency on the Fairmount branch, with service only at Fairmount Station, Morton Street, Uphams Corner and South Station, and there was service seven days a week (Boston Globe staff 1987). In late November 1987, the Fairmount Shuttle was extended from Fairmount to Readville. By the end of the year, the Fairmount Line had carried 60,402 riders.

At this time, the Boston Globe noted that the MBTA had done a poor job of publicizing the line once it reopened. In its editorial “The T’s Hush Hush Line,” the newspaper concluded that “the Fairmount Line could encourage a similar renewal of the impoverished neighborhoods through which it passes,” that the T was doing a poor job of advertising the potential of the line to serve as an alternative to the other rapid transit lines, in addition to offering comfortable, rapid service downtown. The Globe also criticized the stations as needlessly simple and prone to vandalism – a complaint that would be echoed decades later by residents opposed to the construction of the Fairmount Line. Instead, the Globe advocated for the MBTA to “intensively publicize the new line, install shelters that are bigger and harder to destroy, patrol the stations adequately, guard against graffiti, and make sure the stations are well lighted” (Boston Globe Editorial...
Board 1987). The Fairmount Line then remained relatively quiet for several years, with no pattern or service changes.

In the early 2000s, community activist Marvin Martin had been involved with environmental justice for some time, especially in the Clean Buses for Boston effort. He was involved with the Greater Four Corners Action Coalition, the aforementioned Washington Street Corridor Coalition and a number of other community groups. At this time, Martin worked together with Noah Berger, a transit policy analyst for the MBTA Advisory Board, and they began to advocate for an “Indigo Line” plan, which called for revamping the line to provide higher-quality service. Martin, Berger and other activists such as Mela Bush advocated for the construction of six stations, at the South Bay shopping center (later Newmarket), Columbia Road, Mount Bowdoin, Talbot Avenue, Blue Hill Avenue and River Street (Preer 2001). This team of activists also advocated for the electrification on the line, calling for “better signs and improved conditions at the Uphams Corner and Morton Street stations” and a “simpler fare structure and free transfers to the Red Line at South Station.”

While the MBTA was initially reluctant to apply funds toward this effort, it finally did fund a $60,000 study, the Fairmount Line Feasibility Study, which was published in early October 2002, prepared by KKO and Associates with HNTB Companies on behalf of the planning department of the MBTA.

Key findings within this study at the time included the fact that commuter rail was the fastest and most direct transit route to downtown Boston from Readville; that while 19 separate MBTA bus routes served the study corridor with links to Red and Orange Line stations, that no single bus service ran to Boston; that a relatively large proportion of riders used the service for off-peak services but there was no weekend service on the line; and that rail freight service was relatively light on the line. At the time of this study, 57 MBTA trains were operated on the line 12 trains did not serve the stations along the line. The study consisted of three major tasks: a review of existing conditions, the identification of improvement options, and the evaluation of improvement options (KKO and Associates and HNTB Companies 2002).

The study also found that improvements on the Fairmount Line would only replace 700 daily automobile trips, and that it would account for 60 to 70 percent of new commuter rail users. Finally, the study recommended that the MBTA rebuild Uphams Corner and Morton Street stations, and that stations at Four
Corners and Talbot Square be considered. The MBTA’s General Manager Mike Mulhern was attracted to the idea and decided to push forward with this initiative. As the Globe states, Mulhern stated that his “attitude has changed remarkably as a result of this [the Fairmount Line Feasibility] study” (Preer 2001).

The following year in 2002, the MBTA announced they would build the four new stations – Four Corners, Talbot Avenue, Blue Hill Avenue/Cummins Highway and Columbia Road (later Newmarket). In addition, the MBTA would bring the line into a “State of Good Repair.” This would be a $70 million project with the MBTA covering half of the costs, assuming they could find the funding to cover the remaining $35 million of the project. However, discontent remained, as there were no commitments to add additional service at this time, and funding remained a serious issue.

In June 2004, Edwards and Kelcey conducted the Fairmount Corridor Improvements Needs Assessment study, which examined the commuter rail line’s existing conditions and proposed an improvement plan for the corridor. The plan took a particularly close look at existing rail operations and the conditions of the bridges along the line. At this time, the MBTA had committed $35 million in capital funding for the first phase of “State of Good Repair,” which included upgrades to existing stations, a new interlocking and signal system, repairs and aesthetic improvements to neighborhood bridges and three bridge replacements. The report placed a high emphasis on additional infrastructure upgrades and estimated that the total cost of the four new stations would be $34.5 million (Edwards Kelcey 2004).

In the same year (2004), four community-development corporations (CDCs), the Mattapan CDC, Dorchester Bay EDC, Southwest Boston CDC and the Codman Square NDC, came together to form what they termed “the Fairmount CDC Collaborative.” Their stated goal was to bring the skills in community and economic development to the fight that Marvin Martin, the Greater Four Corners Action Coalition, and the other organizations that were already advocating for better transit service were waging. The structure of the coalition is further explored in section 6.5 of this thesis, but broadly speaking the “Fairmount Coalition” was now the umbrella term that was used to describe the various groups working on the improvement of the line. This included the CDC Collaborative, the “transit coalition” groups such as GFCAC that had already
been working on the efforts to improve the transit since the early 2000s, and later on other groups such as the Boston Foundation that would join the effort.

The goal of the CDC Collaborative was to “strongly support the Coalition[’s] transit campaign while promoting new mixed-use transit-oriented-development to take advantage of the planned transit upgrades.” The CDCs also decided to pursue a targeted strategy of property development within a half-mile of Fairmount Line stops for mixed-use development. The Fairmount CDC Collaborative would eventually come to play a major role in the fight for improved service on the Fairmount Line, but in the immediate future, a seemingly unrelated project would come to the forefront to become a major part of the Fairmount effort.

5.5.4 Fairmount and the Big Dig mitigation
The “Big Dig” project, officially the “Central Artery/Tunnel Project,” was a major transportation project within the Commonwealth of Massachusetts that would ultimately serve as a huge point of leverage in the construction of the new stations.

The Big Dig project centered on the Central Artery, which was an above-ground highway going through downtown Boston that was constructed in the 1950s, and harbor tunnels to East Boston and Logan Airport. As the highway became extremely congested and public opinion turned against its disruptive effect on sunlight and public life in the center city, the Boston Transportation Planning Review conceived a plan to replace the decaying artery. The project became tied in with business leaders' call for another harbor crossing to Logan Airport. Eventually, the Big Dig ultimately came to include the depression of the Central Artery into the Thomas P. O’Neill Jr. Tunnel, the construction of the Ted Williams Tunnel and Bunker Hill Memorial Bridge, and the construction of the Rose Kennedy Greenway.

Planning for the project began in 1982 and construction lasted from 1991 to 2006. By the end of the Big Dig, the project, which soared to over $14 billion in total costs, was notoriously plagued by cost overruns, allegations of corruption, shoddy craftsmanship, poor construction, failure to stick to schedule and a variety of other major problems (Gelinas 2007).

Due to the immense scale of the project and the fact that it was centered on increasing automobile capacity, a number of public transportation environmental
mitigation projects were proposed. In 1991, the Conservation Law Foundation, a nonprofit environmental advocacy organization based in New England, filed a lawsuit against the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to require them to comply with the Clean Air Amendment and to include these mitigation projects in the State Implementation Plan (J. R. Levine 2013; Mares 2015).

A list of projects, some of which did not make it past the planning stage, included the construction of the Silver Line (a hybrid ‘Bus Rapid Transit’ line connecting South Station to Logan Airport); the Green Line extension to Lechmere; a connection between the Red and Blue subway lines downtown; a rail connection between North and South stations; and the re-extension of Green Line service to Arborway in Jamaica Plain. The principle behind these transit improvements as part of the Big Dig mitigation project was that while the Big Dig would decrease highway congestion by creating more capacity, these transit projects would serve to attract drivers away and thus alleviate the air pollution caused by induced driving.

However, perhaps unsurprisingly, the state dragged its feet on these promised improvements, and many of the promised transit projects started to run seriously behind schedule, and the CLF threatened to file a lawsuit (Flint 2004). With this “stick” pushing the state, the government – especially Douglas Foy, the “super secretary” of development at the time, began to re-examine the projects that were part of the mitigation package (J. R. Levine 2013). In mid-2005, it was announced that the Green Line extension through Somerville, the construction of four new stations on the Fairmount Line, new parking at commuter rail stations and additional service on the Worcester line were all part of the mitigation package. The Red/Blue connector and Arborway extension were left off this list (Daniel 2005).

It is important to note that the Fairmount Line was not initially associated with the Big Dig mitigation process at all and was initially unconnected. However, because the Fairmount project was perceived to be a grassroots, locally-supported project with strong backing from the community and a strong social equity/transit justice component that made it a supportable and likeable project on these grounds, and because the Fairmount project met the necessary requirements for emissions reductions (though just barely), it became included in this mitigation package.
In 2006, the CLF did end up filing a lawsuit against then-governor Mitt Romney and state agencies, alleging that they were in violation of the Clean Air Act in failing to make the necessary improvements in time. The lawsuit was finally settled in 2006, at which point the Commonwealth formalized the fact that the Fairmount Line would be included as part of the package. At the same time, the state also lessened or dropped the commitment to the Arborway restoration and the Red/Blue connector. The importance of the Big Dig to the Fairmount project was that for the first time, the state attached a timeline and a commitment to the project.

5.5.5 Mid-2000s onward
While the CLF lawsuit against the state was proceeding, the various groups that made up the Fairmount Coalition continued to pursue further steps. In 2005, Goody Clancy completed a plan on behalf of the Fairmount CDC Collaborative entitled Boston's Newest Smart Growth Corridor, which presented “a vision for improved transit service and related transit-oriented development.” The plan included a vision for “four new urban villages” around transit stations, including cleanup of brownfield sites and new open space amenities, and station area plans (Goody Clancy, KKO Associates, and Byrne McKinney 2005).

At this time, diesel multiple units were made part of the Fairmount Line effort for the first time. In 2008, two different studies were conducted on behalf of different units of the MBTA by Jacobs Edward and Kelcey. One study examined the different service improvement options available along the Fairmount Line while the other study was conducted for the Executive Office of Transportation and focused closely on how DMUs might “enhance service delivery on the upgraded Fairmount Line” (Jacobs Edwards and Kelcey 2008a).

In the first study, the Fairmount Line Service Enhancement Study, this consulting firm was instructed to evaluate a number of service options on the line, which included weekend service, increased frequencies during peak service, longer hours of service, and even the relocation of stations. The consulting firm developed a baseline scenario, a package of off-peak service improvements, and a package of peak and off-peak service improvements, that were all tested against a variety of operating assumptions. This study stopped short of recommending a particular package, but reported detailed information on possible schedules and
operations, within particular constraints identified at South Station (Jacobs Edwards and Kelcey 2008a).

The second study, the Potential Use of DMUs, examined more closely the possibilities of introducing DMUs on the Fairmount Line, including the necessary maintenance and storage requirements to have these vehicles. Importantly, the study found “that DMU implementation at current [2008] service levels would prove to be a very poor investment (due to high capital costs and the need for higher levels of service in order to effectively leverage the benefit of DMUs)” (Jacobs Edwards and Kelcey 2008b). After examining the use of DMUs within other rail systems in the United States, JEK concluded that DMUs would have faster running times on all service levels, which would result in increases in ridership; that they would reduce fuel consumption and emissions; that this investment would represent a major capital investment that would only be justified at frequent (15-minute) headways, which would also lead to lower incremental operating costs. (See section 5.3 for more details.)

DMUs made their first appearance in the Boston Globe in 2009, along with a note that for the past five years that the city of Boston had been advocating the use of DMUs for Allston, Brighton and Dorchester. The Fairmount Coalition continued to advocate for DMUs on the Fairmount Line, although as discussed earlier in the crashworthiness section, the requirement for dual-running on the Fairmount Line – in other words, the fact that the Fairmount Line would be required to host full-size trains and the relative paucity of DMUs able to run on American rail lines – meant that DMUs still remained a relatively untested technology.

However, as DMU technology advanced and the various government departments and individuals became more open to the idea, on October 22, 2014, the state of Massachusetts announced that DMUs would be added to the Fairmount Line as part of the “Indigo Line” plan, which would see DMUs operating on a number of lines, including lines in Allston/Brighton and in the Seaport/Innovation District, by the end of 2020. An RFP was subsequently issued by the MBTA in order to procure up to 30 DMUs, with a combined cost of approximately $2.40 million. Trains are currently scheduled for delivery in 2018 with an estimated service date of 2020 (Bowen 2014).

As for the four new stations, the Talbot Avenue station opened on November 12, 2012; the Four Corners/Geneva Avenue station and the Newmarket station
opened on July 1, 2013. At that time, midday service levels were restored to a completely full schedule, which was similar to the schedule that had been operated before February 2009. After continued pressure from community groups, weekend service, which had gone away at some point after 1987, was re-initiated on the Fairmount Line in November 2014. The remaining mitigation station, the Blue Hill Avenue station, is currently slated to open in December 2017 (see section 7.3.3).

In 2013, the T moved the four stations along the Fairmount Corridor into Zone 1A (a fare category that is equivalent to the MBTA’s subway fares) in large part due to pressure from community activists. In effect, this meant that the one-way fare from Hyde Park to downtown Boston went from $5.50 to $2.00 in one fell swoop. Fares at Readville remained consistent, in no small part because the Readville station was also a stop on the Franklin Line (albeit with separate platforms) and having two different fares for travel from the same station was viewed as undesirable. This was not a new idea as “repricing” the fares for Fairmount Line service had been mooted as early as 1999 in the Globe, but the MBTA had been reluctant to change the fares on this line due to the fact that this would make the Fairmount Line’s fare policy somewhat inconsistent with that of the rest of the commuter rail system (Kay 1999).

5.5.6: Other Fairmount Corridor projects

In addition to improvements that were made strictly to transit, a number of other planning projects have been undertaken along the Fairmount Corridor that do not directly relate to transportation. These include the Fairmount Greenway Plan; the Boston Redevelopment Authority’s Fairmount Indigo Planning Initiative; the Boston Foundation’s Fairmount Cultural Corridor Plan; and the involvement of various federal agencies as part of a Partnership for Sustainable Communities program.

In 2008, the various CDCs and the relevant community organizations worked together to create the “Fairmount Greenway Task Force.” This task force was dedicated to creating the “Fairmount Greenway.” While the name implies a greenway that might run parallel to the path of the Fairmount rail line in a manner similar to the Southwest Corridor Park and Orange Line, for example, there is actually very little right-of-way along the Fairmount Line that is suitable for this project. Instead, the Greenway is intended to be part of the network of
parks, but if built will likely not form a continuous network (Crosby | Schlessinger | Smallridge and Bryant Associates 2011). As of 2015, the Greenway is still in the planning stages.

The Boston Redevelopment Authority’s Fairmount Indigo Planning Initiative was a two-year study that began on February 21, 2012. The study aimed to examine “strategies for improving capital investment and job access” along the Fairmount Line. The “two-tiered” planning initiative has two different parts: a corridor-wide community plan that examines the Fairmount Corridor as a whole and its metropolitan and regional identities; and a crossroad/station area improvement plan that has examined land disposition and economic development at three different station areas: Four Corners Station Area, Blue Hill Ave/Cummins Highway Station Area and Uphams Corner Station Area (Boston Redevelopment Authority, n.d.).

During this time, the Fairmount Corridor was designated one of five “pilot corridors” of the Partnership for Sustainable Communities program. This is a partnership between the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Environmental Protection Agency and the US Department of Transportation. This is a multi-pronged effort between the agencies to improve conditions along the Fairmount Line in many ways. The Federal Transit Agency (a part of US DOT) has provided funding for renovations of stations; the EPA has “provided funding to clean up more than 30 brownfield sites” close to or adjacent to the new stations, and HUD has worked to provide funding for the housing units that will be built close to the corridor.

5.6 Conclusion
As one of only two agencies to run all major terrestrial forms of public transportation, the MBTA operates one of the most heavily patronized systems of rail transportation in the country, including a “subway” system that contains heavy and light rail, and a major commuter rail system, that are operated and marketed in a distinct manner.

The Fairmount Line is one of these commuter rail lines. The shortest line within the MBTA system at 9.2 miles long, it sees by far the lowest ridership of any commuter rail line, even when adjusted for the short length of the line. The line provides service at roughly hourly intervals between Readville station in Boston’s Hyde Park neighborhood to Boston’s South Station, one of the two
major termini of the commuter rail system. The neighborhoods along the Fairmount Line are all largely low-income and minority, with a relatively high rate of transit ridership.

Similar to the other lines within the Boston area, the Fairmount Line originated as a private passenger line, the Midland Railroad. In the mid-1960s, the various forms of public transportation in the Massachusetts Bay area were consolidated under the aegis of a state agency, the MBTA. After ceasing service in 1944, the Fairmount Line was revived as a railroad shuttle in 1979 while Amtrak, the state of Massachusetts and other organizations did extensive work on the Northeast Corridor/Southwest Corridor mainline. After this construction was completed, the MBTA intended to remove the Fairmount railroad shuttle from service but did not do so after community opposition to this proposal.

In the late 1990s, activists from the surrounding neighborhoods began to press for better service on the Fairmount Line, which had essentially had stagnant levels of poor service since 1987. The MBTA agreed to re-study service on the line, eventually culminating in a recommendation, but no binding commitment, to build four new stations.

In 2004, four local CDCs joined the effort to build new stations along the Fairmount Line, forming the Fairmount CDC Collaborative as part of a larger Fairmount Coalition. In the mid-2000s, the construction of four new stations on the Fairmount Line was incorporated into a settlement of a lawsuit filed over mitigation strategies for the Big Dig.

With the four new stations added as part of the legally required mitigation strategy and the creation of the Fairmount Coalition, the Fairmount initiative began to gain steam. The prospect of DMUs along the line were first studied by consulting firms in the late 2000s, and were included in the governor’s budget in 2014 for eventual inclusion by 2020 on the line. Other organizations and government agencies, such as the Boston Foundation, the US DOT, US EPA, and HUD, have subsequently also joined the effort, with initiatives such as the Fairmount Greenway and the Fairmount Cultural Corridor. As of 2015, weekend service is now provided on the Fairmount Line and DMUs are slated for installation in 2020, pending a successful RFP for the MBTA.
Fairmount Line: Actions

This chapter explores the first major sub-question below: it examines the roles that the various members of the Fairmount Coalition played, in order to provide appropriate context for the discussions of perspectives, attitudes and reasoning that follows in Chapter 7.

- What actions did community actors take to drive forth change on commuter rail? Were these actions necessary for each step to move forward?

This section first identifies and classifies the relevant community actors that will be discussed in this and the next chapter. It then classifies these community roles into four major buckets:

- **Driving the effort.**
  - The Fairmount Coalition drove the effort to build the new stations, to advocate for DMUs, to lower fares to subway levels, and to give the line its “Indigo Line” branding that is in use today.

- **Employing legal strategies.**
  - Aside from advocating in the court of public opinion, the members of the Fairmount Coalition also used the Conservation
Law Foundation-filed lawsuit, which eventually concluded in the construction of the four new stations becoming legally mandated.

- **Maintaining pressure and publicity.**
  - The members of the Fairmount Coalition worked to maintain pressure and publicity through the use of an incremental strategy as well as acts of public relations.

- **Broadening the scope**
  - The Fairmount project was initially a narrowly-defined transportation-related commuter rail project. However, especially after the various Fairmount CDCs joined together to form the Collaborative and the Coalition, it expanded to become a project that also looked at economic development, housing development and arts and culture, among other priorities.

This chapter also discusses two separate reasons about why this project was so successful with the help of the community: the fact that it was widely perceived as a completely grassroots, community-led project, and the fact that the community actors were fortunate enough to work with a wide variety of competent and interested leaders within government.

### 6.1 List of actors

As has been established in chapter 5, there were numerous actors within the decades-long history of the Fairmount Line. This is a list of the actors who worked on the project:

- **Government players:**
  - Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority
  - Massachusetts Department of Transportation
  - Commonwealth of Massachusetts (and governor’s administration)
  - Boston Redevelopment Authority
  - City of Boston
  - US Department of Transportation, Environmental Protection Agency, Housing and Urban Development

- **‘Activists’:** Marvin Martin, Noah Berger, Mela Bush, Greater Four Corners Action Coalition
A number of these groups would later come to be termed the “Transit Coalition,” due to their initial, pre-Collaborative involvement with this effort.

- **Fairmount CDC Collaborative:**
  - Dorchester Bay EDC
  - Codman Square NDC
  - Southwest Boston CDC
  - Mattapan CDC prior to filing for bankruptcy

- **Institutional and other nonprofit partners:**
  - Boston Foundation
  - Conservation Law Foundation
  - Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative
  - Quincy/Geneva Housing Corporation

- **Consulting firms**

- **Corridor residents who are not formally involved in transportation or activism efforts, or “grassroots residents,” to distinguish them from the other groups in these categorizations**

This thesis focuses on “community groups: activists, the CDC Collaborative, institutional and other nonprofit partners, and grassroots residents.”

A potentially confusing distinction – and a distinction that is not consistently made by community actors themselves – is that between the Fairmount Coalition and the Fairmount Collaborative. The former is an umbrella term that is used to refer to all the various community members that came together, while the latter is a term that is specifically used to refer to the CDCs that joined the effort in 2004.

### 6.2 Driving the effort

Primarily, community actors within the Fairmount Coalition drove the effort to bring change to the commuter rail line. They took the following actions:

- Created the concept
- Branded/marketed the line
- Worked to bring down fares
- Advocated for DMUs
6.2.1 Creating a concept

Members of the Fairmount Coalition were responsible for originating the concept of improved service along the Fairmount Line.

It is impossible to determine that an idea originated from one person exclusively — as Scott Hamwey says, "the concept has been around for decades to do something with [the Fairmount] right-of-way" (Hamwey 2015) — but what can be established is that particular individuals in the community were the ones who took the initiative to actually create the concept of improved service along the line. In this case, and as confirmed by many interviewees, Marvin Martin, a key activist in the Greater Four Corners Action Coalition, along with Noah Berger, a member of the MBTA Advisory Board, was responsible. Marvin initially observed that:

If you ride the 23 bus, it's always jam-packed and it takes 45 minutes to an hour at a time. I'd catch the bus downtown often. There's a train track that runs through your neighborhood, and you could go to the overpass and look down... The train would come by, you'd look at folks. They'd just be relaxed going downtown, and then you'd turn around and look at the 23, everyone's standing up and jam-packed. There's something wrong with this picture. (Marvin 2015)

Prior to Marvin and GFCAC's activism for the station, the Fairmount Line had not had significant changes in service patterns for a long period of time. It is likely that based on the line's very low ridership and the MBTA's perennially financial difficult situation, that it would have continued in this manner for quite some time.

Berger describes how he became involved in the project:

I ran into a fellow named Marvin Martin, who was looking at the time at Four Corners and said, there was a train buzzing through my neighborhood without stopping, and we're looking at developments in Mt. Bowdoin, and wouldn't it be great if the train just stopped there? He and I talked, and so maybe it's not just about adding another station in Four Corners, but repackaging the line. (Berger 2015)
As described in chapter 3, Berger, Marvin and other activists then began to lobby the MBTA and MassDOT in their role as members of the community to institute more service improvements on the Fairmount Line. The initial call/plan that they put together for the line was to bring the line into a state of good repair and for the construction of the four new stations, which would bring station stops to communities along the Fairmount Line for the first time.

It would be because of the pressure applied by these communities, and their appeals to the MBTA and state government on the grounds of necessary improved service, that the MBTA would eventually choose to perform the Feasibility Study that it completed in 2002. The improvements would then gain momentum after Mike Mulhern, then General Manager of the MBTA, reacted positively to the study, and would eventually lead to the construction of the four new stations along the line.

Without these activities that Marvin, Berger and other activists engaged in, the Fairmount project as we know it would not have happened.

6.2.2 Branding the line

Fairmount Coalition members began the process of branding the line “the Indigo Line”; through branding, the Fairmount Coalition individuals were able to start differentiating this commuter rail line from other rail lines.

Marketing, marketing, marketing: you got to get people to ride to break down these perceptions...[We did a] woeful job of marketing these stations. We just spent $200 million, but there's no one talking about them. (Rosenberger 2015)

As Mat Thall explains, this “Indigo Line” branding came as part of an effort to try to re-conceptualize the line as something different from the existing Fairmount Line. In naming the line indigo, according to Thall, the aim was to reflect a “hybrid service between rapid transit and commuter rail,” and reflecting this desire for a hybrid service they chose indigo as a shade halfway between violet, which is the shade that is used by the MBTA for its commuter rail lines, and blue, which is one of the shades of the MBTA’s rapid transit lines. (DuBois and Thall 2015)
As initially envisioned by Marvin and Berger, the aim of the hybrid line was to have:

- Closely spaced stations that served urban neighborhoods
- Fares that were “fair and affordable,” compatible with and the same as subway fares
- More frequent service, to push the line as close as possible to a bona fide rapid transit service (Berger 2002)

It could be argued that branding is, perhaps, simply a marketing effort to “paper over” the actual quality of the service underneath. This is not unprecedented – for example, realtors in neighborhoods are notorious for rebranding gentrifying neighborhoods with a new name simply to improve their marketing. However, branding is important: As Berger wrote, “the MBTA have avoided using the word ‘Indigo Line’ in describing what they term ‘improvements to the Fairmount Branch, arguing that they are afraid of raising expectations” (Berger 2002). In his interactions with the author, Berger was also quite picky about terming the line “the Indigo Line.”

However, because commuter rail is particularly inflexible in the United States, that the role of branding is doubly important. Despite the prevalence of changes in technology, mobile ticketing, etc., commuter rail has been largely operated in a similar manner for many decades (see chapter 2), and so breaking out this traditional service with another term that explicitly calls out the difference between this service and traditional commuter rail is useful. This is particularly important due to the word “commuter,” which implies that the rail service is solely for peak-period commuters. Berger points out the importance of branding and of naming:

> People in these neighborhoods, they don’t care if you call it commuter rail, hydrofoil, whatever – what they’re used to is buses and trains. Let’s call it the Indigo Line. (Berger 2015)

While the MBTA initially opposed the rebranding of the line as mentioned above, it eventually made a 180-degree turn. This “rebranding” has now been successful to the point that MassDOT’s Capital Investment Plan for 2014
through 2018 has actually adopted the use of the term “Indigo Line” for an entire network of rail lines that could be operated by DMUs. The “Indigo Line” network could include as many lines as Fort Point, Back Bay, the Grand Junction Line, the Lowell and the Rockport Lines – a far cry from simply a service along the Fairmount Line (Annear 2014)!

Even outside of the transportation field, individuals are cognizant of the importance of branding, as Jeremy Rosenberger explains in his work on the Fairmount Corridor, as part of the BRA’s Fairmount Indigo Planning Initiative:

Some kind of branding strategy for the corridor, more jobs, more activities [is important]. A lot of folks said they want these neighborhood jobs, to come up with a branding strategy for the corridor, to sell, and to bring more attention and then we wanted to do what we typically do. (Rosenberger 2015)

6.2.3 “Fight for fair fares”
As seen in section 5.4, the Fairmount Corridor is not an affluent area of the city. It is heavily minority and low-income, with a slightly higher rate of poverty than Boston as a whole. One of the key talking points of the Fairmount Coalition was the fact that fares along the line were simply too high for the community. As mentioned in chapter 5, the Fairmount Coalition eventually saw success in that the MBTA brought down the fares on the line, except at the final Readville station, to fares that were equal to MBTA subway fares. This was done when the MBTA agreed to move all stations within the line into zone 1A, in which commuter rail fares are equal to subway fares. As of 2015, this remains the largest re-adjustment of fares that has been effected within the MBTA system. To advocate and justify these changes, community actors largely called to reasons of transit justice and social equity.

You can’t charge commuter rail rates when you’re really in an urban community that’s close to the downtown and should really be like the subway. (Mares 2015)

Michael Feloney described the fare situation as a “structural inequity,” and Jeremy Rosenberger described the Fairmount fare situation as “the big elephant in
the room" (Feloney 2015; Rosenberger 2015). Clearly, fares were of great importance to the Fairmount Coalition, especially due to the low-income nature of most of the neighborhoods around the line. Fares became the next goal of the Coalition once the fight for the new stations had come through. Much of the line's lack of success and relatively low ridership can be attributed, according to community actors, to the relatively high fares; they argue that no one is going to pay $6.00 to ride a train from Readville when the equivalent fare on MBTA subways or buses is only a third of that, despite the significantly longer on-vehicle travel time.

The MBTA was certainly not initially open to the idea of rethinking fares, as this would mean that the Fairmount Line's fare structure was inconsistent with the rest of the system's fares, but this was met initially with a significant degree of reluctance:

_The T gets a lot of pressure on it to adjust fares based on commuting groups, but it's very rigorous in maintaining a process._ (Cosgrove 2015)

_The way commuter rail zones are set today, or at least until this recent change [i.e., the Fairmount fare change] was that the zones were set on the track mileage from the downtown terminal._ (Hamwey 2015)

The MBTA was initially particularly opposed to this fare change because this would open a can of worms: if they were to lower the fares for the Fairmount Line, then what would they do with the other lines that have close-in stations, and in particular the Needham line, which has no stations beyond zone 2 (see Figure 6). In response, DuBois suggests that perhaps in fact, the MBTA should not be charging higher fares for the Needham line – i.e., instead of sticking to the current fare structure as it is, that the MBTA should overhaul it more comprehensively. Michael Feloney argues that the Fairmount Line is different because of its status as the only commuter rail line to operate solely within Boston (see section 7.2.3 for more on this theme). The coalition argued that the particular and unique economic conditions of the line, which is poorer than most other MBTA commuter rail corridors, meant that it was reasonable to consider the Fairmount Line a special case for this purpose.
However, unlike the branding and the advocacy for the four stations, the degree to which the Fairmount Coalition was ultimately responsible for bringing down fares can be brought a bit into question. The evidence for the first two actions is clear – no one in the MBTA was arguing for the agency or the state to spend massive amounts of money on the Fairmount Line prior to the beginning of Marvin’s activism, and the “Indigo Line” branding definitively did not originate with the state.

But fares, on the other hand, are part of an existing structure. Levine argues that the coalition and community activists may have over-exaggerated their role in bringing lower fares to the line, arguing that the T may have lowered the fares as part of a pilot program anyway, in an effort to boost the anemic ridership on the line. However, it is credible to argue that community activists and the coalition that these activists made up were largely responsible for this.

First, the MBTA was clearly reluctant to effect change on this line for consistency’s sake, and as mentioned above fares on all other lines remain consistent with the MBTA’s pricing structure. Second, this is what individuals and interviewees believe, as Joe Cosgrove, formerly of the MBTA, said:

I don’t think it [the reduction in fares] would have happened [without pressure from community actors]…. The status quo would have held without the public getting involved and calling for some change. (Cosgrove 2015)

The “status quo” should not be underestimated. After all, one of the underpinnings of this thesis is that commuter rail has not seen many changes for a long time precisely because of the inertia of the status quo. In this case, especially given the budgetary woes faced by the MBTA, it seems likely that without the activism of the Fairmount Coalition that fares would not have been reduced along the line. The fact that fares fit into a social-justice and equity narrative only made the argument stronger.

6.2.4 Procuring DMUs
As mentioned previously, DMUs have been slated for introduction on the Fairmount Line, under the banner of MassDOT’s “Indigo Line” plan. DMUs would permit trains to run more frequently on the Fairmount Line due to their
lower cost, bringing it closer to the “rapid transit” service that community advocates are pushing for. As one of MBTA’s major rail yards is located at Readville station and because of the varying levels of service that the MBTA runs (necessitating equipment to rest at certain termini or depots) the agency occasionally needs to have “dead-head” moves of rail equipment to Readville through the Fairmount Line.

Because of this, even if DMUs on the Fairmount Line were to completely supplant conventional current push-pull equipment, any DMUs running on the line would still be required to adhere to the FRA’s crashworthiness standards (see section 2.2.1). Therefore, up until recently when FRA-compliant DMUs became more widespread, DMUs on the Fairmount Line would not have been feasible.

DMUs are not completely new to the MBTA; the agency had run DMUs in the past, according to Joe Cosgrove, but “basically outgrew them.” (Cosgrove 2015) Hamwey also agrees that the idea of DMUs was not completely new, that the idea of using “a different power source that could be a bit more nimble on the line...has been out there for a while” (Hamwey 2015).

The community actors interviewed represented themselves as having pushed for the DMUs since the beginning, and are generally very thrilled with the success of the effort to bring these vehicles to the Fairmount Line:

We love “our DMUs.” We’ve always been pushing for rapid transit services on these lines. We’ve always had an affinity for these DMUs and we kept raising it and raising it and raising it with the T, and they finally decided back in the end of last year [2014] that they were going to initiate a purchase of DMUs for the Fairmount Line. That was a big victory. (Tighe 2015)

Martin says that community groups were involved with the effort to bring DMUs from the start and that the relevant community groups had brought up the prospect of getting DMUs on the line in 2000. At the time, a wholesale implementation of DMUs was not feasible for the technical reasons mentioned above. However, since Martin was interested in working with the MBTA from an environmental-justice perspective, he worked with the agency to make some changes to the locomotives that were currently running through the area in the
form of adding new filters to the train. However, they always knew that this was a bit of a “stopgap solution” and wanted new technological solutions on the line.

It is clear that activists have wanted DMUs on this line for quite some time, since the beginning of the effort to bring better service to the line. Individuals like Martin and Bush and other activists were advocating fairly early on for DMUs. Due to the aforementioned technological and policy regulations, however, DMUs have not been a feasible option up until recently. By the time that they became a realistic option, in the early 2010s with the increasing availability of DMUs, the community that formed part of the Fairmount Coalition had already gained quite a bit of headway – the four new stations had already been constructed and the fares had already been brought down.

The actual role that the community has played therefore seems somewhat questionable – while they certainly pushed for it and advocated for the adoption of these vehicles, it is also clear that technological regulations were a limiting factor for quite some time, and teasing out the relative contributions to success of these factors is difficult. It seems best to say that in this case the momentum of the Coalition, which had had several “wins,” was what was responsible for really pushing forth the success of the search for DMUs.

6.3 Employing legal strategies
Another role that the community played within the process to bring better transportation to the Fairmount Line was to employ legal strategies. This refers to the construction of the new stations, which were added to the Big Dig mitigation package as part of the CLF lawsuit against the state of Massachusetts.

This was not an initial strategy that met with uniform support among community actors, and as mentioned above the Big Dig mitigation did not initially involve the Fairmount Line whatsoever. In fact, Martin notes that he was initially concerned about the inclusion of service changes along the Fairmount Line in the mitigation packages for the Big Dig. The timeline that was finalized within the settlement called for the new stations to be built by the end of 2011, which was a longer timeframe than Martin and other GFCAC activists had been hoping for:

I was kind of upset. The timeline was longer than our initial agreement to have this thing move forward. At a public meeting, we
said, why should we support this? Their response was that this makes it a legal requirement and that this process is going to take longer, but that way you have more protection in case the governor changes their mind. (Marvin 2015)

However, as became evident, this would end up being a successful strategy as the stations were clearly built. The conventional narrative thus holds that it was a combination of factors that brought the Fairmount Line together – Levine argues it was a combination of the “social policy,” or the efforts put forward by the various CDCs and transit coalitions active in the project to fight for improved service on the Fairmount Line for social-justice reasons, and “environmental policy,” the legally-mandated mitigation efforts, that led to the success of the effort for the four new stations (J. Levine 2015).

6.3.1 Ultimate necessity/effectiveness
If it were not for the lawsuit filed by the Conservation Law Foundation, would the effort to build the four new stations (Talbot Avenue, Newmarket, Four Corners/Geneva and Blue Hill Avenue) have succeeded? Would these stations have eventually been built? Beyond that, it is worth asking if the rest of the improvements on the Fairmount Line, such as the increase in weekend and night service, the “fight for fair fares” and the dropping of fares down to subway levels, and the prospect for DMUs, have occurred if these four stations had not been constructed.

While counterfactual questions are intrinsically impossible to answer accurately, it seems reasonable to argue that progress on the Fairmount Line and improvement of the service would, at the very least, be significantly slower without the construction of the four new stations. The construction of the new stations represented a significant investment on the part of the MBTA and the state ($135 million in 2005 dollars) and the construction of new stations without any associated increase in service would have been “bad optics” for the MBTA.

As Michael Feloney, former director of the Southwest Boston CDC, argues:

The [mitigation plan] brought the force of law! I think it’s very much understood and accepted that that was an agreement that was part of the overall mitigation measures associated with the Big Dig, and it has
The force of law, consequences if the state tried to back away from those commitments... Without there being an obvious demand for it, I think that's a tough sell, a really tough sell. (Feloney 2015)

The Fairmount Line has long had the lowest absolute ridership and the lowest ridership per track mile of all Boston lines, so from a quantitative perspective it is unsurprising that the MBTA would be unlikely to support a line that had such low ridership. Even advocates such as Jeanne DuBois and Matt Hall all know that ridership on the line is a crucial factor for getting help from the MBTA:

It's worrisome, because if ridership doesn't eventually double or triple, they [the MBTA/MassDOT] may never give us the number of trips. (DuBois and Hall 2015)

Rafael Mares, a staff attorney at the Conservation Law Foundation, also agrees in that he believes that the four new stations would not have been built without the legal commitment.

It's been difficult in general to get the transit improvements that our region needs. Without the enforcement of the Clean Air Act, you wouldn't see any of these transit improvements (Mares 2015)

On the other hand, Noah Berger argues that the role of the CLF lawsuit in the success of the station construction was actually oversold:

I really think the Big Dig was not that significant... It wasn't because it was a SIP commitment that it got built. It is a good thing, but I don't think that it was the driving force (Berger 2015)

Instead, Berger argues, the "continual community pressure" was the force that was responsible for the continuing pressure placed on the MBTA and other governmental agencies to continue building the line. In his view, the activists who have made efforts to support the line were there at the right place at the right time, and ensured that the project kept moving even when the response from the
government and the other bodies such as the MBTA and MassDOT was not entirely positive.

The likely answer to this question remains somewhere in the middle. It seems fairly reasonable to assert that the construction of the four new stations would not have proceeded with such alacrity in the absence of a legal commitment: prior to the lawsuit filed by the CLF and settled by the state in 2005, very little progress and very few changes had actually been made on the Fairmount Line prior to then. On the other hand, the activists and organizers had certainly been successful in drawing attention to the line since the early 2000s, and perhaps in time, and if the finances had been successful, community actors would have succeeded in achieving this goal.

6.4 Maintaining pressure and publicity

They certainly were instrumental in keeping it on the radar screen, in terms of interest and in terms of generating the political will to get money from the state. (Cosgrove 2015)

Another role that community activists and other members of the Fairmount Coalition played in the role was to stage “publicity,” or to keep the idea of the corridor in the public perception. At the beginning of the effort to publicize the project of the Fairmount Line, Marvin Martin brought out a number of public officials to the project:

When we brought the General Manager, David Prince, and the Secretary of Transportation, Dan Grabauskas…we came out and arranged some trips for them. We made sure they came on the 23 bus, and so they came from Ashmont and it was so funny, we were saying – it’s the middle of the day, we know how the 23 is, and sure enough, the bus pulls up and lets them off and it’s standing room only!...

We’re standing there talking [at a commuter rail bridge] and it wasn’t long, five minutes, that a commuter rail train comes down and they look at it, there’s a lot of space on it… and we say look! The racial disparity was pretty graphic, and you look into the windows and most
of the folks there [on the commuter rail] were white and most of the folkson the bus were black or brown. The secretary looked at us and turned around and said this was a no brainer! (Marvin 2015)

Keeping the “flame lit” under the MBTA and keeping the pressure on in a public sense was a vital part of the effort, even in situations in which there may actually have been a significant degree of cooperation between the two parties. Having the community rally and demonstrate their level of support for the project was vital. Even in a pre-social media (but post-Internet) age, having this kind of visuals keeps a potentially lower-visibility project alive.

Some of the members of the Collaborative, such as DuBois, are community organizers by training, and part of what they bring to the table is the ability to turn out residents. In 2005, the Fairmount Coalition organized a rally, even though there was significant support from the then-Romney administration and his “super-secretary” Doug Foy, DuBois and the other members of the coalition knew that the optics of hosting a ready-for-media rally would be important to keep the Fairmount initiative alive.

I was getting calls from [then-Governor] Romney’s PR guy, asking, ‘Why are you having this rally? We’re on your side!’ [I said] ‘the people are upset! They need stations! They need trains!’ (DuBois and Thall 2015)

By all indications, both the Fairmount Coalition and the governor’s administration were in support of this line, even if it might not have necessarily been for the same reason; and so the confusion faced by the government administration is understandable. But in this case, the Fairmount Coalition and organizers understood that there was value in showing that they were able to stage publicity events even when the actual level of opposition may not have been so high. In this case, it is particularly evident because a rally of this sort was likely not a spontaneous occurrence - in other words, residents did not personally join together in outrage at the poor level of service on the line. Instead, it was a carefully planned act of publicity to ensure that the project remained salient.
6.4.1 Incremental strategy
As part of the process of maintaining “pressure and publicity,” several interviewees mentioned that a key point was to invoke an explicitly incremental strategy. As we have seen in this section, members of the Fairmount Line pushed for a number of different innovations – new stations, lower fares, better service and new vehicles.

However, the members of the Fairmount Coalition did not fight for all of these steps to happen at once – Joe Cosgrove described the process of construction for the Fairmount Line as “an incremental process of layered investment” (Cosgrove 2015). In order, the community advocates first fought for a commitment for the four new stations, then a fight for increased service, then a fight to bring DMUs to the line. Other interviewees agreed that the Fairmount Coalition’s strategy has always been to focus on one step at a time. Jeremy Levine noted that the logic of the project was that it would be “incremental,” and as Michael Feloney says:

> If you set the goal too far out, shooting for DMUs as the first goal, and you don’t have sort of wins along the way, it gets to be an exhausting grind. (Feloney 2015)

Through working at a measured pace to bring initiatives, the members of the coalition ensured that there would always be an immediate “next task” to focus on. This also contributes to the task of the coalition in maintaining pressure and publicity. As Jeanne DuBois of Dorchester Bay EDC said, “There’s plenty to do – local, specific, short-term, winnable, immediate issues” (DuBois and Thall 2015). As her background is that of a community organizer, trained at the Saul Alinsky Institute in Chicago, it is only natural that DuBois would adopt this approach, which worked to maintain both momentum and a manageable pace in the project. Avoiding the negative drawbacks of inertia was important.

6.5 Broadening the scope: strength of a coalition
As mentioned above, four CDCs joined the Fairmount efforts and came together as the Fairmount CDC Collaborative in 2004, well after Marvin, Berger and other initial activists had come together to advocate for the line and subsequent to the first feasibility study that the MBTA conducted. The CDCs joined the effort because they were already investing in development around the potential new
station areas and because they realized that the efforts of Martin Marvin, the Greater Four Corners Action Coalition, and other members of the transit coalition to push for better transit along the line aligned well with the CDCs' goals within the neighborhoods that they served.

The eventual organization of the Fairmount Coalition eventually became as follows:

- Fairmount CDC Collaborative: Dorchester Bay, Codman Square, Southwest Boston, and pre-bankruptcy Mattapan CDC
- The "transit coalition," most notably made up of GFCAC, ACE, as well as other activists who were at the effort to bring better transit at the beginning
- Groups dedicated to creating a "Fairmount Greenway"

Through joining the effort and forming a coalition, the CDCs were able to broaden the scope of the Fairmount project beyond simply transportation to encompass a wider range of concerns, such as economic development, open space, arts work and community engagement. The presence of the coalition brought more individuals under the umbrella, expanded the project scope and was ultimately able to attract more partner organizations to the Fairmount effort.

The larger coalition simply brought more individuals and organizations with a greater amount of skills and capacity to the effort. Interviewees spoke positively about the strength of partnerships and of coalitions in general, starting from the very beginning of the process:

Marvin didn't have the transit bona fides, but he had the community, the street cred. I didn't have the street cred, but it sounded like I knew what I was talking about on the transit stuff. (Berger 2002)

We all care about the Fairmount Line and we play different roles... Our collaboration has made this possible. When you have groups that organize together with a group like CLF that provides a legal and policy angle, then you're much stronger than when you provide that individual angle (Mares 2015)
You need people with different interests—motivations. You need people with different roles or skills that they can bring to the table (Mares 2015)

Berger’s quote points to an acknowledgment that having a number of different individuals on a team with different complementary skills can help a project reach its goals better, or “strength in numbers” to quote a general theme.

Second, the coalition broadened the goals of the project from simply better transit to a wide variety of goals. As we can see from the website of the coalition, there are now five goals:

- Promote transit equity: transform the Fairmount/Indigo Line
- Foster sustainable development: create and preserve housing and commercial space
- Increase economic opportunities: strong businesses and good jobs
- Create a Fairmount Greenway: open space, walking, bicycling
- Empower our communities: engage residents and youth (Fairmount/Indigo Corridor Collaborative 2015)

We can see here that only one of these goals, the first, directly addresses transportation (the goal of transforming the Fairmount/Indigo Line and to promote transit equity). The other four goals, while certainly laudable, are not directly related to transit improvements, although they certainly would contribute to the success of any modified transportation service. This expanded “project scope,” and the expanded Coalition including the CDCs, were then responsible for drawing a significant amount of attention, funding, and eventually external partners to the line. For example, the Fairmount/Indigo CDC Collaborative was the recipient of the Partnership for Sustainable Communities program grant for technical assistance, for “provid[ing] structure and support for community based efforts within the Fairmount/Indigo Commuter Rail Line corridor” (SRA and Goody Clancy 2010). This program has a much broader scope than simply improvement of a commuter rail line and it seems unlikely that it would have happened without the broader coalition brought about by the formation of the Coalition.
The involvement of the CDCs also brought in partners such as the Boston Foundation, a very large philanthropic foundation in the Boston area, which has offered grants to other organizations, thereby also bringing them under the Fairmount umbrella. Examples include grants to the Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership and to the Family Independence Initiative. The Boston Foundation, awarded a grant in July 2013 to the Fairmount/Indigo CDC Collaborative for “a range of coordinated community development activities along the 9-mile Corridor, specifically targeting housing production and economic development” (Boston Foundation 2013).

6.5.1 Criticism of the coalition

The presence/creation of the coalition has not been without criticism, which has largely circled around various facts.

First, there is a perception that the CDC Collaborative has become the dominant party credited with the success of the Fairmount Corridor project, due to advantages in visibility and publicity:

I witnessed and experienced to a degree [that] organizations like GFCAC [Greater Four Corners Action Coalition], who had been fighting the good fight on transportation issues for decades, did definitely feel like the Fairmount CDC Collaborative was somewhat of a latecomer and then ended up getting a lot of attention. (Feloney 2015)

The CDCs have definitely had the bulk of the credit assigned to them, and it is very possible that this form of credit, assigned to the CDCs when they were not necessarily the first individuals to arrive “on the scene,” could rankle other members of the coalition.

Second, Martin has argued that the operations of the coalition are not necessarily efficient, and then perhaps the joining of so many distinct groups has had a negative effect on its operations.

Having seen from experience how coalitions work... you got a coalition on making decisions on their own about how they are doing something, and they try to bring that view into another coalition.
What you need is everyone sitting around that table making that decision together. It doesn’t matter, and in some ways, it would be still more efficient if it was just one group. *That’s just the thing,* [the] CDCs.. come in and then they’re like, OK, we have this point of view that they [developed] on their own and they want to put it on you! (Marvin 2015)

6.6 Perceptions of a grassroots project

Through the course of interviews, it became clear that the Fairmount project served the MBTA, MassDOT and other government agencies’ purpose as a “bottoms-up,” community-driven project. The positive perception of the project as community-driven, focused on ensuring equity and equality, a quest for social justice on the part of the community actors, served the MBTA, especially as a way to mend testy relationships with the community:

*There was somewhat of a kumbaya feeling about the Fairmount Line. It was an opportunity to work with neighborhood groups and improve relationships with the community... It was a way to build goodwill from the MBTA Advisory Board [since] there was a sense of a destructive fight over the Washington Street corridor. The T could solve some of its problem by incrementally doing improvements along the Fairmount Corridor, and sort of build better relations with the community.* (Cosgrove 2015)

*There was continual community pressure – a great example of a bottoms-up project that works.* (Berger 2015)

While the MBTA has not suffered in recent years from criticisms strongly suffused with class and race like other transit agencies such as LACMTA, it did suffer lingering problems from the construction of the Silver Line in Roxbury and Dorchester amid charges that this line was racist and discriminatory. The Fairmount project would be a good salve for the agency’s reputation. Certainly, however, the MBTA has not always been so uniformly positive on the project:
From a strict cost per passenger standpoint, it was not a typical transportation project. It would not have been a priority for the agency. (Cosgrove 2015)

It was very clear that the study [the Feasibility Study published in 2002] was intended to make it go away. (Berger 2015)

Legislatures are famous for this. If you don’t want to do something, you set up a study committee. (Cosgrove 2015)

On a quantitative basis, the Fairmount project did not necessarily “win” on its own merits, and it is reasonable that the initial feasibility study conducted in 2002 was intended to reflect this fact.

The MBTA is not the only body that focused on the community-friendly aesthetics of the project. Joanne Weinstock, a representative of the partnership between HUD, EPA and the US DOT, described the Fairmount project as one of their star example projects. She discusses how the agencies had a strong feeling that community involvement and community participation were of supreme importance, and they were very careful to maintain this:

When we started focusing on this as a pilot, we didn’t want to just swoop in and say, Hey community! We’re here to give you lots of attention and money and then OK, see you! There was a conscious effort to keep everyone involved, and to keep voices loud, and to make sure that’s what they wanted in the first place. (Weinstock 2015)

6.7 Importance of leadership
While the coalition has largely been discussed in terms of groups, the importance of the strength of leadership, both within the Fairmount Coalition and outside of it in the government, should not be underestimated. Within the Coalition, Feloney cites the stable leadership of individuals such as Jeane DuBois and Gail Latimore, longtime heads of two of the Fairmount CDCs, as well as of M arvin Martin at the Greater Four Corners Action Coalition, for ensuring the success of the project even when it hit roadblocks or other obstacles.
I think in part it [the success of the Fairmount effort] is due to stability of leadership among core players. The more partners, the better, in terms of martailing forces, [but] it also creates more proverbial mouths to feed, in terms of accessing resources. (Feloney 2015)

Interviewees also made it clear that the Fairmount project benefited from substantially good cooperation and leadership within the government agencies. Chief among these individuals who played major roles in supporting the government were former general managers of the MBTA Mike Mulhern and Beverly Scott (who resigned in 2014), and the former governor Deval Patrick, who was responsible for successfully including DMUs within the budget in late 2014. Interviewees specifically identified these interviewees for their contributions to the project:

We had the advantage of having a very passionate supporter of Fairmount in our former general manager, Dr. Scott, and also the former Secretary of Transportation Rich Davey, and the governor [Deval Patrick]. (Tighe 2015)

[I credit] Mike Mulhern at one end, who got it out the starting block. And I credit Beverly Scott with making this a priority at her very short tenure here. (Berger 2015)

I think when Beverly Scott came in, she really got it and was committed to the project and met with the community... She was showing up to meetings that General Managers don't show up at. (Berger 2015)

Beverly Scott understand that transit planning and transit investment have to go hand in hand with economic development. She got it, she totally got it. The other people haven't totally gotten it. (DuBois and Thall 2015)
Especially because the Fairmount project did not follow any specific pre-set path to completion, the initiative and ingenuity shown by individual leaders was essential to moving the project forward, especially those leaders who could provide some thought leadership or conceptual strength to the project.

6.8 Conclusion
In this chapter, I explored the question of the roles that various members of the Fairmount Coalition and community actors played.

I first explored how the community actors effectively drove the effort to improve service along the Fairmount Line, including how they created the concept of improved service along the heretofore lightly used line; began the branding and marketing of the line as the “Indigo Line”; worked to suppress and bring down fares; and played a moderate role in advocating for better rolling stock on the line, an effort that would eventually culminate in placing DMUs on the line. I then explored how the community actors latched onto the previously unrelated topic of the Big Dig mitigation, concluding that the impact of this strategy was to attach legal relevance and mandatory action to the Fairmount Line initiative and construction of stations.

I then explored how the community actors worked to maintain pressure and publicity, especially through the use of an incremental strategy with targeted smaller actionable items. Finally, I examined how the inclusion of different actors, and in particular the entry of the various CDCs into this battle, broadened the scope of the project beyond a narrowly-focused transportation initiative and ultimately aided in attracting a larger variety of outside funders and organizations that worked on different Fairmount Corridor-related items. Throughout this process, the Fairmount initiative benefited from the successful involvement of strong supporters within the MBTA and MassDOT leadership.

It is clear that the Fairmount community actors played a major role in the initiative. The next chapter builds on this foundation and attempts to hone in on the role that commuter rail specifically played in this battle.
SEVEN

Fairmount Line: Perceptions and Attitudes

In the previous chapter, I established that community actors played important and major roles in the effort to bring improved service to commuter rail and the Fairmount Line, especially at the beginning of the project. This chapter builds on that foundation, examining reasons, perceptions and attitudes among community actors, to understand if the project was distinctive, and to what degree if so, because of its focus on commuter rail.

This chapter attempts to answer the following sub-questions:

- What reasons did community actors cite for supporting the project?
- Are there significant differences in how commuter rail and rapid rail transit are perceived by corridor residents? If so, did these differences in perception impact the project?
- Do residents living along the corridor conceptualize of themselves living in a corridor? If so, did this perception contribute to the success of the project?

7.1 Reasons for joining

It becomes clear that the overriding narrative cited by communities for improvement along this line was centered along environmental justice and transit equity/transit justice. Very few activists or community actors cited economic-development reasons, transit efficiency or financial reasons for supporting the
Fairmount Corridor project, such as rationales centering around the fact that the areas were dense or walkable or financial reasons that DMUs at a high frequency of service would draw more riders.

7.1.1 Environmental justice

"Environmental justice" was one of the major two reasons for becoming involved in the Fairmount Line effort.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, environmental justice is defined as the “fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of all laws, regulations, and policies.” Furthermore, the EPA asserts that “it will be achieved when everyone “enjoys the same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards and equal access to the decision-making process to have a healthy environment in which to live, learn, and work” (US Environmental Protection Agency 2015). Fairmount Coalition members built on this definition by arguing that the neighborhoods through which the line ran suffered disproportionately from negative externalities caused by poor transportation options.

Joe Cosgrove notes that “environmental” reasons were perceived as one of the key drivers behind the project; Marvin Martin also cites environmental reasons as one of the key reasons that he became involved in the Fairmount/Indigo project. First, according to Martin, Dorchester – one of the city neighborhoods through which the Fairmount Line passes – was one of the regions of the entire state that had the highest rate of asthma at the time that he and other activists were beginning to get involved with the Fairmount project. They were then discussing how to get rid of pollutants that triggered respiratory illnesses and how to get cars off the road to reduce traffic.

When it came to the Fairmount Line, Martin and other activists saw a commuter rail line that was spewing diesel pollution, but not stopping, in a community that was already choked with pollution and afflicted with high rates of asthma and diesel emissions. Furthermore, the community was served only with inefficient and slow buses that ran through it; because of inadequate levels of service on transit, they were forced to either resort to that transit or to drive. They perceived that their community was burdened without any corresponding benefits, as Noah Berger says:
Environmental justice was all the rage, but this is quintessential: the residents have all the burdens of a transit facility and none of the benefits (Berger 2015).

The narrative of having a major burden, but none of the benefits, is the key one underlining this environmental justice rationale.

7.1.2 Equity and justice
Aside from environmental reasons, the majority of interviewees cited reasons involving civil rights, social justice and transit equity as reasons that they were involved in the Fairmount initiative.

This is a civil rights movement, not just a transportation movement. It’s more than how you move people from point A to point B, how you connect people. History is usually a story – whoever wins the war tells the story, and so you’ll get a different version depending on the person to whom you speak. (Anonymous 2015)

While this interviewee was the only one who explicitly called on “civil rights” as a justification for efforts to improve the Fairmount Line, many of the other interviewees cited reasons such as “transit equity,” “transit justice,” or “transit racism” as one of their key reasons for supporting the development along the Fairmount Line. The group within the Fairmount Coalition that advocated for the specific transportation-related portions along the Fairmount Line was called the “Transit Equity Coalition.” Individuals pointed out that it would be natural for Fairmount Corridor residents to feel as if they were being short-changed on the transportation service provided in their area.

A lot of the areas that the train goes through have a history of feeling marginalized and viewing things as part of a grand conspiracy. But certainly it’s undeniable that if you look at the swath of Boston that [the Fairmount Line] goes through, it’s not served [by rapid transit]. (Berger 2015)
They built this Greenbush line all the way out to the suburbs for ridership of a couple thousand people, yet here there are a couple hundred thousand people that live within a half mile of an area that has no stops. (Rosenberger 2015)

The Greenbush line that Rosenberger is referring to is one of the old lines of the Old Colony Railroad. After the closure of passenger service in 1959, it was reactivated for passenger service in late 2007 for service through wealthy South Shore suburban communities such as Hingham and Cohasset. However, the line engendered controversy and ridership has been quite low, to the point that weekend service was canceled for some time – Rosenberger is therefore pointing out here what appears to be a contradiction between the fact that the MBTA pushed so hard for a project in a wealthy area that had significant community opposition, while lagging on the Fairmount Line in an area that saw significant support.

Individuals specifically said that “transit justice” and transit inequity was a motivating factor for becoming involved in the Fairmount project:

We saw that... the initial impetus was definitely about “transit justice.” (Rosenberger 2015)

We saw that this was an opportunity for the Foundation to make a unique contribution in an area with a string of low-income neighborhoods, transit inequities, no access to transit. (Pradhan 2015)

More specifically, within this realm of reasons that interviewees cited for their and their organizations’ support for the Fairmount Line, I was able to identify two large themes revolving around these interrelated themes of justice, equity and fairness.

- First, an appeal to equity and fairness based on the fact that the rail line went through the community, but did not stop.
- Second, an appeal to equity on the grounds that service on the Fairmount Line was not equivalent to service on the subway lines that ran through equally dense urban fabric.
Interviewees cited this phenomenon of a train line passing through the community without stopping in the community as one of the most egregious and strongest reasons for reform of the Fairmount Line:

*The train is already running through and then it's not stopping and it's not serving you. What this project was about - if the train's already running through there, you want the service to be available.* (Mares 2015)

*These undeserved communities have basically been receiving the detritus of the limited service, literally passing by them, haven't had service for decades.* (Feloney 2015)

*[There is] a public amenity going through this neighborhood, yet they didn't have access to it.* (Rosenberger 2015)

*There was a train buzzing right through [the] neighborhood without stopping.* (Berger 2015)

Within the community, there was something offensive about the idea of a train line running through the community but without making any stops. There are echoes here of the anti-highway movement of the second half of the 20th century; in that situation, protesters charged that interstate highways that were slated to be built through low-income, largely minority neighborhoods were in reality “a white man’s road through black men’s bedrooms” (Lewis 2013). The example of “white man’s road[s]” also serves to point out that this particular theme of equity could be applied equally to any form of transportation, and not just commuter rail. This complaint could be equally applied to a highway passing through a neighborhood without entries or exits, a passenger rail line that had no station stops in a community, or a light rail or bus line running express through a poor community. The fact that the Fairmount project focuses on commuter rail here was merely secondary.

Second, many other interviewees cited the fact that Fairmount Line is neither equitable nor fair when one compares it to its “sister” lines—why should the “colored” subway lines (Red, Orange, Blue, Green) have better service when they
functionally cover the same sort of dense, urban fabric that the Fairmount Line does? These interviewees explicitly drew a link between rapid transit, equity, and the Fairmount Line:

Equity is when the service on this line will be equal to service on the other MBTA lines (Pradhan 2015).

Equity will be rapid service—every 15 minutes (DuBois and Thall 2015).

It is clear that rapid transit service is seen as the only acceptable alternative for service. In this respect, this call to equity more explicitly relies on the fact that this project focuses on commuter rail. Interviewees are explicitly drawing a connection from the fact that this is not a rapid transit service to the fact that this makes it inequitable. Here we can therefore establish that this is a strategy that does rely on the fact that this is a commuter rail line—interviewees are drawing attention to the fact that the commuter rail line should act more like rapid transit, and therefore underlining that rapid transit it is not.

7.1.3 Gentrification

While I did not focus specifically on gentrification in interviews and in the questioning process, some interviewees mentioned that they were aware of the possibility of gentrification and they knew that residents were also afraid of this prospect.

Given the steep demand for housing in the Boston area, the low pace of construction of new housing and the demand for transit-oriented development, the construction of new transit—most notoriously the extension of the Red Line from Harvard to Alewife in the 1980s—has been accompanied by major increases in property value and population displacement. Those who are involved with the project recognize that there have been significant concerns about gentrification and displacement thanks to the project:

I always mention that, when the stations come in, the areas are going to be more desirable. If we increase level of service, people are going to
get pushed out. [They] are worried about gentrification and displacement. (Rosenberg 2015)

The big fear is displacement, it’s what everyone talks about all the time. (Chavez 2015)

We knew that bringing in a massive investment in public transit usually sparks gentrification. And so before we even shot our opening salvo, that first rally, we talked about that: how can we mitigate that damage? (Marvin 2015)

This [gentrification] is a big concern in the community, [but] I don’t think there has been a pushback to the development. (Pradhan 2015)

Displacement and gentrification were clearly on people’s minds. However, none of the interviewees mentioned that groups opposed the construction of the line due to worries of gentrification, and as Geeta Pradhan says, there has been very little pushback to the line. Berger perhaps has the best final word on this subject:

I think you should never use a fear of gentrification as an excuse not to invest in low-income communities because that seems to perpetuate an injustice: we’re not going to develop in your community so that you can keep your home, but also, stay poor! (Berger 2015)

Gentrification is a concern across a variety of different modes and is also not a concern that is specifically related to transportation. However, after service on the Fairmount Line is improved through the provision of DMUs, property values are likely to rise concomitant with an increased demand to live in this corridor. See section 8.4 for a brief discussion of how the Fairmount Coalition may need to move forward in an effort to prevent this displacement and gentrification.

7.1.4 A good project
Levine and Berger believe that organizations, and in particular the community development corporations, may have become involved in the Fairmount effort
because it served as a vehicle to attract greater investment in the community. As Levine said:

> You had a lot of unrelated concurrent things that happened, and they came together in a somewhat unrelated way. I don’t think much of the community organizations know anything about, or care about transit, other than it gets them a lot of money and it gets them grants. What they care about is the community development stuff. (J. R. Levine 2013)

In other words, CDCs and other organizations perceived at the time that the Fairmount project offered an opportunity to take on a project that worked well within their narrative. This viewpoint should not be taken to argue that the CDCs have in any way misrepresented themselves or their mission, of course. Community development is self-evidently a positive goal and if transportation is the “vehicle” by which community development actors can achieve these goals of bringing economic development, more housing and better jobs to the community, then more power to them.

Transportation is simply not one of the traditional goals that CDCs involve themselves in, however, and it is reasonable to argue that the Fairmount Line offered a ready-made opportunity with a good story to achieve these goals. With a narrative incorporating social justice, transit justice, social equity and environmental justice that the Fairmount Coalition has been careful to continue telling, the Fairmount Line would have a wide appeal to a variety of organizations.

Ultimately, Berger suggests that regardless of why different organizations became involved, ultimately the cooperation of so many different groups had a beneficial effect on the passage of the line:

> The key to anything is to have everyone think they are the force behind it and that’s their project and if you have enough people thinking that, then hopefully it gets advanced and everyone thinks it’s because of them! (Berger 2015)

7.1.5 Conclusion

Answers revolving around equity, equality and justice were the main ones cited by interviewees in support of the project. The most explicit way in which “commuter
rail” was invoked when unfavorable comparisons to rapid transit were drawn by interviewees. Otherwise, the majority of the rhetoric and narrative that surrounded this project were couched in a language of equity, equality and justice.

7.2 Perceptions of commuter rail and transit

I established in the previous section that interviewees cited justice and equity as the major reasons for becoming involved in this project. In this section, I explore how community actors shaped the narrative about perceptions of commuter rail. I had initially hoped to understand if a negative or, at the very least, distinctive perception of commuter rail would spur residents to become involved in this process. However, I ended up answering the proxy question of what community actors asserted that residents believed about rail. While I was unable to pass judgment on whether residents became involved in rail, I was able to determine that community actors asserted negative perceptions of commuter rail by residents in order to support their arguments for better service and especially as part of the equity-based arguments for change. On the other hand, from my analysis of interviews, I did detect that nearly all interviewees held the belief that a commuter rail service operating solely within Boston seemed unnatural, a belief that did turn out to be something that spurred them to action and one of the few ways in which this project was specifically marked by its focus on commuter rail.

7.2.1 Claimed perceptions

Interviewees made several different, but overlapping claims about resident perceptions of the Fairmount Line and of commuter rail in Boston in general. First, many interviewees claimed that Fairmount Corridor residents believed that the commuter rail was a service to be devoted exclusively to suburbanites:

Commuter rail was seen as more of a suburban, you know, commuter service (Cosgrove 2015)

I really do think that there is a perception in lower-income minority neighborhoods in Boston that the commuter rail is suburban, that it just takes people to the suburbs (Tighe 2015)
After organizing events for residents to ride the current line, they said, “It’s not for us. It’s for those people [suburbanites].” It’s horrifying! (DuBois and Thall 2015)

You would ask people about it, [and they’d say], “It’s for suburban commuters, not for me!” You’d be surprised. It’s sad. I would say that you have this amenity that people think [is] not for them. (Rosenberger 2015)

The big issue is, you open these new lines, [and residents] have this perception that’s it not for them. (Rosenberger 2015)

As an article said, “The entire [Fairmount] line was omitted from widely-used T subway maps because it is a separate commuter rail line; during a recent Boston Redevelopment Authority meeting to discuss development in Uphams Corner, Berger said long-time residents – some of whom have lived there for up to 50 years – didn’t know the T’s trains stopped there’’ (Mac 2002). This narrative about residents’ believing that the Fairmount Line is a line dedicated only to suburbanites is clearly a strong narrative, not solely in play during this interview. Second, interviewees claimed that residents believed that the Fairmount Line did not offer a good-quality service.

About two years ago, I was at a meeting in Uphams Corner and I had to be downtown for another meeting. My meeting in Uphams Corner ended at 3:00 and I had to be downtown for a 4:00 meeting. I could not find a cab. No buses came by. By the time I got there it was 5:00. With the Fairmount train it takes less than 10 minutes. I had to walk, then I found a bus to Dudley Square, and then from Dudley Square I took the Silver Line to Washington Street...I had missed my meeting. For me it was just one meeting, but when can you imagine when people have to drop off their kids? It’s a nightmare. (Pradhan 2015)

Some new neighbors moved in next door to me, and I gave them a Fairmount Line schedule, in my little effort to promote it. It turns out
that it doesn’t work for them... [The Fairmount Line] doesn’t go
directly to where she needs to go...It’s not that useful, and so people
do spend an hour and a half riding a bus to a rapid transit station.
(Tighe2015)

Commuter rail service isn’t going to get people by droves to the area
[until you have something] that is subway like. (Rosenberger 2015)

These three different claims vary slightly and illustrate slightly different
attitudes toward transit and transit modes. Pradhan’s quote illustrates the idea
that current bus service is inadequate and implies that current Fairmount Line
service is inadequate as well; Tighe’s anecdote points to the fact that current
Fairmount Line service is not good, but that existing transit service is adequate to
meet (some) individuals’ needs; and Rosenberger’s statement simply privileges
rapid transit over “commuter rail” service in general.

Third, interviewees claimed that residents of the corridor simply were not
aware of the Fairmount Line.

I just interviewed this woman; she lives in Codman Square in an affordable
housing unit....She was taking three buses to get to her training at the New
England Culinary Arts program in Newmarket, 1.5 hours. And halfway
through the program she realizes she’s only two minutes from the stop and she
can get there in 15 minutes. (Palmarin 2015)

The train simply doesn’t enter residents’ thinking. (Tighe2015)

Taken together, the narrative that is being presented by community actors is
clear: residents think commuter rail – and, by extension, the Fairmount Line – is
not for them; that as it currently stands, Fairmount Line service is inadequate; and
this is assuming that people even know about the Fairmount Line, which does not
even seem to be the case.

7.2.2 Truth of claimed perceptions
How true are these perceptions? A degree of bias in the representation of
residents’ attitudes about commuter rail is to be expected. Exaggerating the
negative perception of the Fairmount Line, the negative quality of current service and the degree to which residents are unaware of this service certainly helps the Coalition advocate for improvements on the line as well as support the narrative. The first perception, that residents believe that the line is solely for suburbanites, ties in particularly well with the social-justice and environmental-justice narrative that the Coalition is offering as justification for improvement on the line. This is similar to cases explored in the literature review of race- and particularly class-charged opposition to transit, with transit critics in the San Francisco Bay Area and Los Angeles charging that too much investment had been placed on commuter rail lines that served white suburbanites (Rodriguez 1999; Grengs 2002).

For one, Scott Hamwey expressed moderate doubt about the first perception, although he did support the third perception that commuter rail was perceived as not useful by many people:

I don't know whether that's a real sentiment by real people on the ground [that residents believe that commuter rail is for suburbanites]. It's not an option that's on people's mental maps. (Hamwey 2015)

Instead, he argues that while most people who rely on the buses in the corridor would certainly benefit from improvements:

The buses cover so much ground and the commuter rail stations are only in certain places...If your destination is not within South Station, you'd have to transfer downtown anyway. (Hamwey 2015)

In other words, it is not so much the fact that the Fairmount Line, and commuter rail by extension, is charged negatively, that bus service is instead simply more useful within the Fairmount Line's service area.

In terms of what has been the impact of this attitude, it is difficult to argue that there is a direct impact of general resident attitudes on improvement for commuter rail. After all, if residents were actually truly unaware of the commuter rail's existence in the first place, this implies that they could not advocate for improvement on the line.
However, what I would argue is that the perception of the perception is important – what the Collaborative, the CDCs and other members of the coalition perceive to be resident attitudes toward transit, has been used as a rhetorical and persuasive tool for commuter rail improvements. Especially given that the socioeconomic demographics of the neighborhood are low-income and largely minority (see section 5.4), associating the diesel pollution, smoke-spewing line through poorer, minority neighborhoods is certainly a strong image.

The cited reasons of transit equity and environmental justice invoke a dissonance between the service running through the community and the community bearing the brunt of the service’s negative externalities; the assertion that residents view the service as exclusionary and for suburban commuters and not for them serves to deepen the social-justice rationale for improvements on the line. In a similar manner, the idea that Fairmount residents were not aware of the service because it was a commuter rail service supports an argument for improvement of the service. If it were a rapid transit line, and not a commuter rail, then the residents of this heavily transit-dependent community would be better-served and might be more aware of the line's presence.

### 7.2.3 Commuter rail in the city

This was a perception that I picked up after the analysis of interviews. While describing the Fairmount Line as the only commuter rail line to run within Boston was a convenient rhetorical device to underline the relatively short length of the line, it became clear that community actors believed that the idea of a commuter rail line operating solely within central city limits was an unusual and strange idea.

*There's the fact that it [the Fairmount Line] just happened to be the only commuter line that serves solely the city of Boston.* (Feloney 2015)

*You're within the city of Boston and you're having to pay fares different from the MBTA.* (Pradhan 2015)

*Unlike the other commuter rail lines, the one distinction is that it's the only one that started and terminated within the limits of the city.* (Marvin 2015)
Known to some as the Indigo Line, Fairmount is technically a commuter rail line, though it runs almost entirely within the city of Boston. (Lepiarz 2014)

This last quote is not even a quote from an interview – but it is clear from the juxtaposition of “technically” and “though it runs almost entirely within the city of Boston” that the author assumed it surprising that a transit service that would run almost entirely within the city limits should be considered commuter rail at all. This type of perception perhaps does lend credence to the fact that “commuter rail” is typically perceived as a service that should be dedicated only to suburban commuters.

It should be noted that pointing out that the assertion that the Fairmount Line was the only commuter rail line that ran within the city limits of Boston is not identical to the assertion that the Fairmount Line is more suitable to rapid transit due to the intrinsic urban fabric or for reasons of density (in other words, the transit efficiency arguments mentioned in section 4.3.2); rather, this belief points to the simple incongruity of the line lying within city limits. In other words, this appeal to equity does not call to the fact that the Fairmount neighborhoods are dense and pedestrian-friendly (although they are), but rather simply the fact that the line is the only one within Boston city limits.

It is worth calling out that this distinction is not even that “clean,” and being within the city of Boston is not necessarily synonymous with high density. The MBTA’s “urban” subway serves many municipalities ranging from Cambridge and Somerville, the latter of which is actually the densest municipality in New England, to Medford and Malden, which are more quintessentially suburban in design and development. Furthermore, as Michael Feloney noted, the southern neighborhoods of Boston such as Hyde Park and Roslindale are in fact just as suburban in nature as some of the other parts of the Boston metropolitan area.

### 7.2.4 Concerns about station safety

While this was not a focus of the interview questions, it emerged from some interviewees that they were concerned about the safety of the stations on the Fairmount Line, and that there was a perception that some of these stations were not safe.
We have these great new stations, [but we're] plopping these stations down where the sidewalks are abysmal, there's no lighting... We need to make it from a public realm perspective more desirable. (Rosenberger 2015)

I personally think the Uphams Corner Fairmount station is unsafe on the inbound line. (Tighe 2015)

People in some stations are legitimately frightened. They don't feel safe, they've had a dead body there; there's a lot of drug activity. (DuBois and Thall 2015)

7.2.5 Conclusion
This section provided evidence underlying the assertion that community involvement and public participation projects involving commuter rail would be distinctive, though the fact that the project revolved around commuter rail was largely secondary. The stated negative perceptions of commuter rail were used in a secondary role, to support the main arguments that centered around equity. However, it did emerge that stakeholders held a belief that commuter rail lines that were wholly contained within a central city area were intrinsically a mismatch to the community, a perception they used to support this narrative.

7.3 “Fairmount Corridor”: real or imagined?
As we saw in the previous two sections, equity and justice were major themes surrounding the improvement of service on this line, arguments that were not intrinsically drawing upon the initiative's focus on commuter rail. In this section, I explore how deeply rooted the idea of the “Fairmount Corridor” is within the community.

7.3.1 Official use
As mentioned earlier, in official use, the use of the “Fairmount Corridor” is fairly widespread. The “Fairmount/Indigo Corridor Collaborative” uses the term in its title. The New England Sustainable Communities Partnership in Action, a partnership between the US Environmental Protection Agency, the US Department of Transportation, and the Department of Housing and Urban
Development, uses the “Fairmount/Indigo Corridor” terminology in its documents and publications as well (US Environmental Protection Agency, US Department of Transportation, and US Department of Housing and Urban Development 2010). In its work supporting the Fairmount Cultural Corridor, the Boston Foundation has also adopted this corridor. The term first appeared in the Boston Globe on June 5, 2005, in an article by Robert Preer (Preer 2005).

Terminology is important, and a “corridor” is not the same as a line or a service. The Northeast Corridor, for example, is the highly urbanized stretch of land between Boston and Washington; while it contains transportation services such as the Northeast Regional and Acela Amtrak services and Interstate 95, it is not synonymous with or identical to these transportation services. The use of “corridor” implies a greater degree of connectivity and networking between the different neighborhoods in the region.

That said, what is the Fairmount Corridor? The BRA’s definition of the corridor is a 0.5 mile-radius around each station, which is broadly concordant with the usual definition of a walk-shed, as a half-mile/10-minute walk is typically considered to be the reasonable outer-limit for pedestrian access to stations. Jeremy Levine has argued that the Boston Foundation’s usage of “corridor” is wider. Indeed, some of the Boston Foundation’s usages of the term Fairmount Corridor seems to blur the distinction between the corridor and the neighborhoods that it serves: “This initiative is designed to advance a vision for the Fairmount Corridor (Roxbury, Dorchester and Mattapan) as a cultural corridor” (Boston Foundation 2015). While Roxbury, Dorchester and Mattapan are certainly served by the Fairmount Line, they are by no means synonymous with the commuter rail service, which also serves the neighborhoods of Roslindale and Hyde Park at its southern end.

7.3.2 Actual use

However, the question then becomes if the usage of the “Fairmount Corridor” actually reflect reality. In other words, does the “Fairmount Corridor” actually exist outside of the marketing, publicity and other written material that has been made about the line? Do residents really consider themselves part of the corridor?

The answer appears to be that residents along the corridor really do not view themselves as part of a corridor. The majority of interviewees were clear in that
they did not believe that residents saw themselves to be part of the Corridor or even indeed that a “Fairmount Corridor” actually existed.

The Boston Foundation and other folks went ahead and kind of branded the Corridor as the “Fairmount Corridor.” There really hasn’t been buy in from the community on that. (Pradhan 2015)

People outside the corridor see it as a Fairmount Corridor; for-profit developers are referring to it as a Fairmount Corridor, but people in the neighborhoods still refer to them as their own neighborhoods, and [they] view the Fairmount Line as just a way to get there. (Chavez 2015)

Professional planners and those of us who know us [the Fairmount Collaborative] think of it as a corridor, but the general public doesn’t. (Tighe 2015)

Somewhat contrary to expectations, there was generally a consensus that the Fairmount Corridor was simply a branding device and that it was not truly a corridor. Geeta Pradhan pointed to the problem of gangs in the area:

There are fairly complex reasons why it is difficult to unite the neighborhoods. There are people who belong to gang territories that don’t cross boundaries. It’s still hard for people to think beyond their boundaries, particularly because of turf issues. (Pradhan 2015)

However, despite the lack of an actual corridor, interviewees did point to the fact that a corridor-like identity was desirable. Joe Cosgrove thought that maybe 25 years from the present, the Fairmount Corridor identity might truly exist (Cosgrove 2015). Michael Chavez drew a crosstown parallel about the desirability of having a corridor:

Something we’d like to compare ourselves to is the Red Line. Once you go across the river and head into Cambridge, you have one train line
that everyone knows about, but each station has its own identity linked to the Red Line. (Chavez 2015)

Feloney pointed to the difference in the southern neighborhoods that the Fairmount Line runs through of Hyde Park and Rolinsdale, arguing that these southern neighborhoods were quite different from those further north. As the southernmost neighborhood in Boston, Hyde Park was the last neighborhood to be annexed to the city and is highly suburban in development.

There's an almost visceral feel among especially the middle-class white population that remains that we are different from Boston, that we are the suburbs, we are suburban in nature....There's still an intensely kind of conservative middle-class ethnic white population that doesn't see a lot of changes of the positive. People who resist that notion don't like to be associated with places like Mattapan or Dorchester. (Feloney 2015)

In fact, it is very close to Mattapan that the most organized opposition to the Fairmount Corridor arose, at the Blue Hill Avenue/Cummins Highway station. An examination of this station will, by the principle of “exception that proves the point,” shed further light on this point.

7.3.3 Blue Hill Avenue station

The Blue Hill Avenue/Cummins Highway station will be situated between Readville and Morton Street stations, which is currently the longest gap along the line. Unlike the three other “new stations,” that were mandated under the mitigation decree, the Blue Hill Avenue station immediately ran into opposition. On one side were individuals such as the many members of the Fairmount Coalition and state representative Russell Holmes of the area, who supported the project. According to Holmes, in 2014, “I can say there have been loud voices outside of Woodhaven that they want a station in Mattapan... Loud and many.” (Dumcius 2014).

On the other hand, Barbara Fields, representative of the Woodhaven Residents’ Association, claims that the majority of residents in the Mattapan area, let alone the residents of Woodhaven Street (the street directly abutting the
station), did not support the construction of this station. Among the reasons offered for the opposition to this station were the following:

- The Woodhaven/Mattapan area residents were not informed about the station and only found out about it inadvertently and accidentally at an unrelated community meeting.
- The Blue Hill Avenue station would damage the foundation of the abutters’ homes and bring down their property values, due to vibration from trains and noise and air pollution.
- Parking that was proposed for the station would induce a significant amount of traffic at the station. Already within the neighborhood, excessive traffic was causing a large number of accidents.
- At Blue Hill Avenue, where the claim was made that residents did not want a station, the MBTA/MassDOT was constructing a station. Fields pointed out that instead, near River Avenue further along the corridor, the residents there wanted a station, but for technical reasons the MBTA claimed that they would not be able to build a station there.
- The station was not needed. The Blue Hill Avenue station is not very far from either the Morton Street stop or the Mattapan stop on the Red Line, which is the last stop on the Mattapan High-Speed Line that eventually connects to the Ashmont stop on the Red Line. (Fields 2015)

Interviewees have argued that the opposition represented by Fields and the rest of the Blue Hill stations do not adequately represent the actual demographics of this neighborhood:

These people on Woodhaven are retired, upper middle-class, connected, don’t use public transportation to go anywhere... Commuter rail and transit means nothing to them! (DuBois and Thall 2015)

Some fairly vocal folks felt it would reduce their property values, and I think they don’t speak for the community, certainly. (Berger 2015)

I wouldn’t say they are representative of the whole community in the area. (Mares 2015)
While Fields was not directly responding to these comments, she did take pains in an interview to assert that she was “not one of those NIMBY folks” – a clear awareness that legitimacy of residency and representation around this station can be contested.

Ultimately, the Blue Hill Avenue station has indeed moved forward, although the design of the station has been modified to meet residents’ concerns through the construction of one single center-island platform, with access from both Cummins Highway and Blue Hill Avenue (Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority 2015b). What is interesting about the substantive opposition to the Blue Hill Avenue station is the subject of the complaints and how “normal” they are for typical opposition to a transportation project: arguing that the station is unneeded, that residents were ignored, that the usage would be low are all highly typical of these types of statements. Especially in the modern day, major transportation projects are very rarely uncontroversial due to the added pollution, costs or externalities that generally accompany these projects.

What is remarkable, however, is that these Blue Hill Avenue station complaints did not emerge anywhere else along the line. This is likely due to the fact that the remainder of the corridor is much more similar and uniform in terms of demographics. As Schweitzer and Valenzuela have said, “Few want to live chockablock with a transportation facility—not even next to comparatively clean rail lines, and not even with extensive mitigation” (Schweitzer and Valenzuela 2004). Yet all the other stops along the corridor observed significant support for the Fairmount line; or at the very least, a lack of sustained opposition to these stations. Dorchester, Roxbury and the northern parts of Hyde Park are not identical, and the three CDCs that serve these locations do not have the same mission. However, in terms of some key socioeconomic indicators, these neighborhoods are similar: they all see high levels of transit usage, are relatively low-income and have high percentages of minorities, and all contain fairly dense urban fabric.

Furthermore, the CDC Collaborative, as described by Jeremy Levine, was careful in ensuring that grants and funding were evenly distributed between different areas – perhaps in recognition of the fact that the corridor was not a natural creation and that balance and equity had to be carefully considered. For example, if Codman Square got funding in one cycle, then the Collaborative ensured that another neighborhood or square received funding in another cycle of
funding. In a somewhat unwieldy coalition that already brought together a very large number of different individuals, it was important to maintain harmony (J. Levine 2015).

However, it is important to note that, much like the arguments around equity and equality that are the key rationales for organizations joining the Fairmount Coalition, the fact that this is a relatively demographically and socioeconomically uniform corridor could have occurred even if this were not a commuter rail initiative at all.

7.3.4 Other “corridors”
Research turned up other use of the “corridor” terminology, the most prominent of which being the Fairmount Cultural Corridor. A signature initiative of the Boston Foundation has been the Fairmount Cultural Corridor, a “creative placemaking initiative that combines collaborative efforts of residents, artists, community organizations and businesses to support vibrant, livable neighborhoods along the Fairmount Commuter Line” (“The Fairmount Cultural Corridor: Where Art Moves,” n.d.). The foundation also applied for a grant from Art Place America, a national consortium of grant funders that does a lot of creative placemaking. “Placemaking,” which is somewhat of a planning jargon, is defined by Geeta Pradhan of the Boston Foundation as:

Celebrating community through arts and culture, through creative ventures, creative activities... The introduction of the creative community; the artists, entrepreneurs bringing the arts and celebrating local culture and local arts (Pradhan 2015)

The Fairmount Cultural Corridor is a corridor that is even further abstractly removed away from the actual transportation line, and indeed could be equally well describing of arts and culture in Dorchester, Mattapan and Roxbury in general. It is clear that this is another effort on behalf of an organizing entity to bring some sense of a “corridor” to the area, playing on the “Fairmount” name.
A diversity of uses

While the corridor is relatively uniform from a demographic and socioeconomic perspective aside from the termini (South Station in particular), interviewees also noted that different stops along the Fairmount Line represented a variety of uses. As Jeremy Rosenberger of the BRA says:

> We do want to craft some kind of identity around these station areas. Each one of these neighborhood areas make up this engine around the Fairmount Line. Each station area was a piece of this engine, the heart equals Four Corners, job centers equals Newmarket and Readville. (Rosenberger 2015)

One reason that this would be mentioned, of course, is to underscore the fact that the Fairmount Line offers a number of trip generators and attractors. Ridership is currently quite low and an emphasis on producing amenities and a diversity of land uses would hopefully serve to attract more riders to the line. Tighe believes there is also a mental barrier:

> [Residents of the corridor] are so used to going to malls to go shopping and stuff, and it’s very hard to persuade them to hop on the train and go down to Hyde Park... [or] to the Fairmount Station to have a bite to eat at the grill or look at the cute dress shop near the station. (Tighe 2015)

In a more qualitative sense, emphasizing this diversity of uses also helps to underline the use of a “corridor,” in the sense that a cohesive corridor is going to offer a variety of different attractions. The Northeast Corridor offers a contrastive example. Certainly, a collection of major cities strung together by a passenger rail line that are geographically close to each other is going to generate a lot of ridership or a lot of trips between them. But the Northeast is more than simply a string of major cities linked by transportation infrastructure: because the corridor contains the financial (New York), political (Washington) and educational (Boston) centers of the entire country, this generates energy and cross-corridor travel and investment.
By working to ensure a similar diversity in investments across the different stops along the Fairmount Line, proponents can go a little way toward making these string of stations and neighborhoods more of a “corridor” than they currently are.

7.4 Grassroots participation
As mentioned earlier in Chapter 4, in attempts to answer my sub-questions about the perceptions of commuter rail and rapid transit, and about the degree to which the “Fairmount Corridor” was truly an actual concept among residents, I ended up answering the proxy questions of what community actors represented the opinion of the greater community of residents living along the Fairmount Line to be. This begs the question: so, how representative are these opinions? Are these community actors representative of the “community”?

As Jeremy Levine says:

We love to talk about the community as if it’s one group and speaks with one voice, but that’s rarely the case. (J. Levine 2015)

Certainly, the most reliable way to actually address this would be to conduct a statistically valid sampling of residents in the community. However, unfortunately, this was outside the scope of this study.

There are certainly organizations such as the T Riders’ Union in Boston and the Straphangers’ Coalition in New York City that represent themselves to be riders’ representatives, claiming to speak on behalf of transit riders. As a “constituency,” this would nominally be a quite large and significant one in the Fairmount service area. But as Matt Thall says:

Nobody has really figured out the real strategy for organizing transit users or transit non-users. I mean, we have the T Riders’ Union. I don’t know what they were a union of! (DuBois and Thall 2015)

Sometimes neighborhood groups are not really neighborhood groups, they are just a person. An organization called [redacted] turned out to be just one person. (J. Levine 2015)
It seems likely that these riders’ advocacy organizations may be in a similar position to the other organizations that were part of the coalition: made up of “professional” and specialist activists/organizers with likely a limited reach to actual transit riders. No one rides transit for a living, and very few individuals outside of the small cohort of transit fans rides transit as a hobby.

Some interviewees, noted in fact that transit was simply not the highest priority for the residents of the Fairmount Corridor, which is plagued by disinvestment and low levels of economic development:

Other issues take over. Displacement is huge and jobs are [second]. Transit becomes third... People have other things that are much more important to them. I can’t take that train if I don’t have a job. (Palmarin 2015)

People are busy! I just can’t fault someone for being able to make it [to a community/transit meeting. (Feloney 2015)

Rosenberger, on the other hand, has asserted that in public meetings for the BRA’s Fairmount Indigo Planning Initiative, which is largely focused on economic development and land disposal in the corridor, that residents continued to remain focused on transit:

I wanted to stay focused with community and economic development, [but] they kept coming back to us... what’s going on with the transit?... While we were trying to take this economic, regional approach, looking at job opportunities, we kept getting pushback: what are we doing about transit right now? (Rosenberger 2015)

So what is the actual truth? In other words, how much did the Fairmount project actually stem from grassroots residents? While Levine has declared flat out that “residents did not drive this effort, period” (J. Levine 2015), no other interviewee made such a strong claim; although it should be clear that community actors are obviously motivated to present the project in the most positive light possible. Instead, interviewees emphasized the role of education and outreach, and
also the theme of appropriately framing the conversation to reach out to community members:

Part of the partnership [between the MBTA and the community] was doing that community education, to kind of changing the perception of what the line was and what it could be. (Cosgrove 2015)

If you talk about saving the whales and hugging trees, you're not going to get anybody... When we talked about the Fairmount Line, we talked about the fact that it would take cars off the road, emissions... We had workshops on it [and] talked about the fact that now you can get downtown in eight minutes rather than the 45 minutes to an hour. You have better access to educational opportunities for shopping. (Marvin 2015)

7.5 Conclusion
This chapter attempted to answer the second half of the research question and determine if the fact that this project focused on “commuter rail” played a major role on the community’s actions, through the prism of reasons, attitudes and perceptions.

I found that environmental justice, transit equity and social justice — and not, for example, a focus on how improved commuter rail service was a better use of financial resources along the line, or was a better fit based on the community’s resources — were the main reasons that interviewees joined the Fairmount effort. While for the large part, these reasons could have been stated for other forms of transportation, commuter rail was specifically invoked in (unfavorable) comparisons to rapid transit.

In examining the perceptions of Fairmount Corridor residents, I found several claims made by community actors: first, that Fairmount residents believed that commuter rail was a service that was not for them, and instead a service exclusively for suburbanites and suburban commuters; that residents believed that the Fairmount Line did not provide an adequate level of service; and that residents simply were not at all aware of the Fairmount Line, even though it passed straight through their communities. I found that in this situation, these subjective (and definitively negative) claimed perceptions of commuter rail served
as supporting stories and part of the coalition's narrative; furthermore, the belief that commuter rail was intrinsically mismatched to a transit service that ran only within Boston's city limits also spurred community actors to action.

In examining how substantive the "Fairmount Corridor" concept was, I found that while the use of the "Fairmount Corridor" terminology was in heavy use officially, that nearly all community actors did not believe that this idea had trickled down to the masses. While I did find that on a relative basis, the corridor was relatively united in the support for this line— with Blue Hill Avenue functioning as one of the only station areas in opposition— this was not a function of commuter rail running through the community. Rather, this was because of similar demographics and socioeconomic levels throughout the corridor.

Overall, I found that while commuter rail was obviously mentioned in a wide variety of different contexts, that it really only played a secondary role in community activism. A transit line that does not seem to have a large presence in the community that it runs through, commuter rail in this initiative was most effectively used as a foil for the justice and equity concerns that pervaded the initiative and effort.
EIGHT

Discussion

In this chapter, I discuss the applicability of this case study to other questions, evaluate the hypothesis, and conclude with a look toward the future in light of the success that the Fairmount Coalition has had throughout this project.

8.1 Actions

In the first chapter of the thesis, I explored the roles that community actors played in the effort to bring change to the Fairmount Line. I concluded that:

- Community actors drove change along the line, which consisted of four major steps:
  - Originating the concept of the line, including advocacy for four new stations
  - Branding the line the “Indigo Line”
  - Working to lower fares to subway levels
  - Advocating for DMUs on the line
- Community actors employed the legal strategy of combining the Fairmount Line with a Big Dig mitigation lawsuit to ensure that the four new stations would get built.
- All members of the coalition worked together to keep this idea in the public view and to maintain pressure on the MBTA and MassDOT to continue to make improvements to the line.
• By joining the efforts, the CDCs and other foundations broadened the appeal from the narrowly-focused transportation and transit equity issues to include issues of economic justice and economic development, which correspondingly served to broaden the potential audience that they could appeal to.

How applicable are the roles presented in this case study to other cases of commuter rail? In this situation, the Fairmount Coalition activists played major roles. I would suspect that in other cases, the most likely common role that community actors would play would be to be the instigator or initial advocate for a particular concept. Similarly, many grassroots activists and organizers have been adept at continuously applying pressure on government agencies to keep particular projects or initiatives in the public eye. For better or for worse, despite being public entities, many transit entities already have somewhat rocky relationships with their communities, so community actors may already be accustomed to a relatively troubled relationship with their transit agencies.

However, some of the roles that community actors played in the Fairmount situation might be more difficult to apply to other cases. First, one of the key roles that CDCs and other community actors played was to draw attention and funding opportunities to this line; by broadening the appeal from simply a narrowly-focused transportation investment to an explicit inclusion of economic development, housing, development and other goals, the Collaborative was able to attract more funders and outside foundations to the project. However, much of this stemmed from the fact that the Fairmount Line is a community that is low-income and high-minority – Pradhan mentioned that the Boston Foundation was interested/attracted by the line because it was in a low-income neighborhood deserving of economic development efforts (Pradhan 2015).

Community members along other commuter-rail corridors who want to bring in a larger coalition for commuter rail changes are going to have to appeal on a number of different grounds – perhaps environmental justice, or economic development, instead of transit or social justice reasons. Broadening a narrowly-defined focus of transportation into a larger coalition requires a larger coalition, which may be difficult to ensure.

The applicability of the litigation strategy is clearly limited. Community actors also worked together to use the Big Dig litigation as a tool to ensure a guarantee
of the completion of the Fairmount Line. This strategy was very specifically a function of this situation and it is unlikely that in analogous cases that improvements would be made legally mandated. However, more broadly speaking, community actors aiming for improvement on their commuter rail line could look to employing creative legal strategies or working with organizations that offer this expertise.

Finally, the ability of the community to influence significant changes of technology is going to be limited. The Fairmount Line is also used to transport non-revenue locomotives to Readville and because of this, the requirements for infrastructure on the line are going to dictate that there is a need for heavier DMUs. Infrastructure is fixed, especially in older cities, such as Boston, that boast a significant concentration of rail service in the first place. It is only because US manufacturers have started to make DMUs that are approved for joint operation on freight lines that DMUs have become a realistic possibility along the Fairmount Line. Without this change in technology, the ability of the community to argue for innovative forms of technology may be limited.

I also concluded in this section that the perception that Fairmount Corridor residents really drove the project was a boon for the MBTA, for MassDOT and for other organizations that were involved, and that the Fairmount initiative benefited from strong government leadership. This will likely be similar in other communities.

8.2 Perceptions and attitudes

In chapter 7, using three different questions I found that the fact that this project was focused on commuter rail specifically, as opposed to other forms of transportation, played only a minor role in community efforts for better transportation and transit in the corridor. In particular:

• The rhetoric largely circles around issues of equity and justice, although an unfavorable comparison of commuter rail to rapid transit is implied in one of these appeals to equity.

• Community actors assert that residents believe that either the Fairmount service is exclusively for suburbanites, that they are unaware of the service, or that they believe that it is not good quality. These assertions are used to bolster the social-equity and social-justice underpinnings of the campaign for better service on the line.
Finally, the Fairmount Corridor appears to be largely a marketing tool or a convenient shorthand, with residents not really using this term as an actual descriptor. Overall, therefore, it seems that commuter rail does not have a significant presence in residents' minds. In other communities in which the narrative of social justice or equity is not as strong, the idea of a “corridor” that is marked by commuter rail may be even weaker. In addition, other projects that aim to improve commuter rail in other cities may also appeal on other grounds.

8.3 Evaluation of hypothesis

This was the research question I aimed to examine in this thesis:

In the context of a community-led effort to improve service on commuter rail, does the focus on commuter rail – as opposed to other modes – have an effect on community actors’ strategies and actions?

My hypothesis was as follows:

Yes, a focus on commuter rail has a major impact on community actors’ participation and strategies.

In light of the answers to my research sub-questions, I conclude that this hypothesis was not entirely substantiated, and that a focus on commuter rail did not play as major a role in the Fairmount effort as I had previously expected.

Framing this question in terms of the actions that the Fairmount Coalition took, it was certainly relevant that they were working on a commuter rail line. If they had been advocating for better bus service, or increased bicycle facilities, then obviously the coalition would have argued for different forms of improvements: better lane striping, for example, instead of the construction of new stations. But I do not want to conclude that simply because they were calling for changes on a commuter rail line that therefore commuter rail had a major impact on the Fairmount initiative, as that would be somewhat tautological. That was why I asked the second set of sub-questions, in order to isolate how important the fact that this was a commuter rail line was to the coalition.
In that respect, it is clear that the overwhelming theme employed by the Fairmount Coalition was one of equity and justice, and not a focus on commuter rail or transportation technology per se. Many of the arguments that they employed could have been made in almost identical fashion about a rapid transit line that provided subpar service or about a poorly integrated network of bus services that did not provide good access to the community. Certainly, perceptions of commuter rail were used to fit the inequitable narrative that the coalition prepared around the station, and in that respect the fact that this was a commuter rail project was significant. It was also clear that the fact that the Fairmount Line was a commuter rail line that was exclusively located within the boundaries of the major city was a major theme of this process.

8.4 Looking forward
Currently, the Fairmount Coalition has been in a largely antagonistic relationship with the government. As we observed in the previous chapters, the Fairmount Coalition was responsible for a large variety of tasks, including driving the effort, employing a legal strategy, maintaining pressure and publicity, and broadening the scope of the initiative.

It should be noted that, excepting this last task, these different tasks were all rather confrontational and adversarial in nature. The lawsuit against the government was explicitly adversarial, although that is of course how the court system is intended to function. This was necessary at the beginning of the Fairmount project, since the project was not a high priority for many of the relevant transportation or government agencies at hand. There had also been a history of distrust and friction between these communities and the MBTA, MassDOT and state of Massachusetts, stemming from events such as the realignment of the Orange Line and the subsequent installation of the Silver Line (Salvucci 2015). In view of this, it is neither surprising nor shocking that these largely confrontational strategies were adopted, and clearly, the Coalition has been successful in bringing about change in this manner.

Assuming that the delivery of DMUs is not derailed from current plans, by 2020 the Fairmount Line will be part of an “Indigo Line” network featuring high-frequency service, perhaps even up to 15-minute headways. However, at this point, the line will likely have to demonstrate significant ridership – after all, a new transportation or transit service does not necessarily universally result in more
significant ridership. The Greenbush lines suffered from this fate: service was initially restored in 2014 with night and weekend service, but after disappointing ridership forecasts, service was eventually curtailed on nights and weekends. The most “dangerous” period will be the period immediately subsequent to the addition of service along this line. Riders will not adjust immediately to the new service on the line and thus the line will be most vulnerable to charges of a waste of money and investment during this period.

Even if a rejuvenated Fairmount Line does successfully move beyond this immediate challenge, the Fairmount Coalition will likely have to move from its current confrontational strategy to a cooperative strategy. In particular, the Coalition will have to work with government agencies on both development issues and ridership issues.

When service on the Fairmount Line is added, a rise in property values is almost certain to occur, and the corresponding gentrification and displacement along the corridor may create a backlash against supporters of the improved Fairmount Line. With the corresponding increases in headway, properties that are close to the various stops along the line are likely to appreciate in value, and given the current high demand for transit-accessible property in Boston, if nothing at all is done the Fairmount Line is likely to see Davis Square-style gentrification and displacement. Since the Coalition, and CDCs, are already significant landowners, along the line, they will have to play a major role in building affordable housing.

In addition, the Fairmount Coalition will have to work to support some level of increased density and market-rate housing that is adjacent to the station, although this may run into resistance from the community. Many of the neighborhoods along the line are traditional Boston triple-decker neighborhoods, shading off into increasingly freestanding suburban houses at the southern end of the line. These neighborhoods are likely to be resistant to significantly denser housing, even if it is built in very close proximity to the stations. If improvements along the Fairmount Line are made and no additional building capacity in these largely built-out areas is permitted, it is almost guaranteed that rents will rise rapidly. Building 100% affordable housing is not realistic at all either. Permitting some market-rate housing will alleviate pressure on existing housing.

Another issue that the Fairmount Coalition will likely run into is generating ridership. The quality of service that is provided along the line will largely be a function of what is possible given the equipment that the MBTA and MassDOT
are able to source, and funding levels of course. Organizers and activists such as DuBois have recognized that a sufficient level of service is necessary for ridership:

It's going to be hard to increase ridership if you don't have a level of service that will attract people (DuBois and Thall 2015)

However, if we assume that they are able to do this, which seems likely, then it will be incumbent on the Fairmount neighborhoods to generate enough ridership to match this level of service, and the Fairmount Coalition should be at the forefront of this effort. I foresee that if ridership is disappointing, the Coalition may blame the MBTA for some fare policies – details are unclear here, since the fare structure that the MBTA will implement for the line is currently unknown and is challenging to predict, given the fact that the “Indigo Line” service will be in a model that is completely new to this mode. Furthermore, by 2020 the MBTA may have completely different fare media than it has now, so speculation on this front is not particularly fruitful.

Nevertheless, even with a very “good” fare structure – i.e., one that does not contain transfer penalties and effectively integrates the Fairmount Line with other subway and modes of transit – the Coalition will still have a role to play in encouraging higher ridership along the line. Interviewees cited tactics such as better education and a massive publicity campaign that focuses on the newly improved service brought by the Fairmount Line, which will likely be one of the best ways to reach out to potential riders. The CDCs will again be in a strong position here, as they have a strong inbuilt constituency of residents of housing – the same constituency that those such as DuBois and other CDC leaders were able to rally in 2005 – that they can mobilize. The “placemaking” efforts and projects such as the Fairmount Cultural Corridor may also aid in these efforts.

The Fairmount Line and the possible forthcoming Indigo Line network represent the possibility for an innovative form of improved transit service that the Boston area has not seen much of before. The delivery of DMUs in 2020 will mark the beginning of an experiment with this type of service. The possibilities brought about by this type of new service are grand – it will be important for the Coalition to take maximum advantage of this.
Conclusion

I initially approached this thesis with a technocratic focus on commuter rail improvements. I was driven by an interest in the idea that commuter rail could more efficiently serve dense urban neighborhoods if it were not saddled with old-fashioned technological structures and methods of operation. However, as this research project continued to move forward, it eventually transitioned into a more holistic examination of the community role within transportation planning.

9.1 Summary of context

Commuter rail is one of the major methods of rail transit within the United States. There has typically been a major distinction within the way that commuter rail has been run, especially when compared to heavy rail rapid transit: in most respects, commuter rail has been treated as a service for suburbanites with less frequent service in most dimensions. However, with changes in technology and policy, it looks increasingly likely that there may be momentum for significant changes in commuter rail. Furthermore, public participation within planning has been of major importance, especially after the era of highway revolts and top-down planning.

The Fairmount Line is the only line of the MBTA to run entirely within the city. Initially brought into service during construction along the Southwest Corridor, rail service on the line was initially intended only as a shuttle and to
cease after construction finished. However, due to community opposition, the Fairmount Corridor continued service even after the end of the Southwest Corridor construction. Starting in the early 2000s, efforts were made to bring improved service to this line. A “Fairmount Coalition” of groups came together, which was made up of transit activists and organizations such as the Greater Four Corners Action Coalition; the Fairmount CDC Collaborative (Dorchester Bay EDC, Codman Square NDC, Southwest Boston CDC and formerly the Mattapan CDC); and associated nonprofits and institutions.

Together, these different groups pursued an incremental strategy for improvement on the Fairmount Line and by the end of 2015, these community efforts had succeeded in bringing the construction of four new stations, improved service, the adoption of DMUs and the lowering of fares along the Fairmount Line.

9.2 Research question

The research question that I hoped to examine in this thesis was as follows:

In the context of a community-led effort to improve service on commuter rail, does the focus on commuter rail – as opposed to other modes – have an effect on community actors’ strategies and actions?

This question was asked in order to fill a gap in the literature and to understand specifically the impact that commuter rail had on this project. In order to answer this question, I posed four major sub-questions:

- What actions did community actors take to drive forth change on commuter rail? Were these actions necessary for each step to move forward?
- What reasons did community actors cite for supporting the project?
- Are there significant differences in how commuter rail and rapid rail transit are perceived by corridor residents? If so, did these differences in perception impact the project?
- Do residents living along the corridor conceptualize of themselves living in a corridor? If so, did this perception contribute to the success of the project?
These questions were separated into two sets, treated separately into two different chapters (6 and 7). The first set of questions consisted solely of the first sub-questions, which aimed to understand the roles that community actors had played in the initiative to bring better service to the line. The second set of questions consisted of the remaining three questions; these aimed to capture the role of commuter rail specifically in the Fairmount initiative. Together, these two sets of questions were a complementary set that served to completely address the research question.

9.3 Assessment of findings

Community actors did end up playing major roles in the Fairmount initiative. They essentially drove the action, particularly in the beginning of the process when the focus was on new stations, bringing the line into a state of good repair, and working to formalize a legal structure to assure the construction of the four new stations. These actors were also crucial in the efforts to reduce fares on the line for purposes of social equity as well as lobbying for diesel multiple units (DMUs) to be placed on the line. Especially after the Fairmount Coalition was formally organized in 2004 with the various CDCs and other groups joining, the appeal of the project was broadened from a narrow focus on transportation to encompass concerns such as economic development and housing development. In part because of the success in broadening the scope of the project, it came to be viewed as a heavily grassroots-driven project by governmental authorities. This broadening of scope also ensured that a larger variety of foundations and other groups were attracted to the effort.

Somewhat in contrast to the initial motives that brought me to this research, I found that the fact that this project focused on commuter rail played a relatively minor role in this project. This became most prominent when community actors would use claimed negative perceptions of this mode of transportation by corridor residents to support the narrative constructed around the line. However, the key themes and narratives instead revolved around transit justice, social equity and environmental justice, themes which were only tangentially related to commuter rail. With such low ridership on the Fairmount Line and relatively minor usage in the community, the “Fairmount Corridor” remained an idea more abstract than solidly based in reality.
In many ways it seems that the community actors surrounding the Fairmount Line could have advocated for better transportation in the community even if this had focused on a different form of transportation. Any form of under-utilized infrastructure, which did not have to specifically be commuter rail, could have become incorporated into this narrative of transportation injustice. A campaign for light rail in the community, for instance, could have easily taken place with very similar language and concepts – that the community was underserved by polluting, diesel-belching buses; that current transit systems were inadequate; and that a focus on investment in light rail infrastructure would benefit the community, for instance.

9.4 Difficulties in research and future research

I encountered a number of difficulties in doing this research.

A significant proportion of the difficulties surrounding this research related to the issues of trust of individuals. I had to always be cognizant of the fact that interviewees might not be entirely truthful, or at the very least might be incentivized to positively describe their role in this project. This might be especially likely because the Fairmount project is still going on – interviewees would not wish to jeopardize any future opportunities. In addition, because the Fairmount Line has received a significant amount of popular press, I got the sense that some interviewees had been interviewed so many times and by so many different individuals that their story was very “down pat,” and it could be difficult to tease out the truth from these somewhat rigid retellings.

Also, the Fairmount case was so suffused with issues of race, class, justice, and equity, so it was difficult to come in as an outsider. Especially as a researcher who is coming in from an “elite” institution like MIT, it was at times difficult to really break into the community into a position of trust.

In addition, there were some methodological limitations to this research. I was not able to talk to some individuals that I hoped to, either because they did not respond or because of ongoing political considerations. In particular, efforts to contact current individuals at the MBTA were largely unsuccessful despite repeated attempts. Much of this research took place during late winter and early spring 2015, a period during which Boston received an unprecedented amount of snowfall (it was the snowiest winter on record in Boston), which had a crippling effect on MBTA service (Abel and Emack-Bazelaïs 2015). With heavy snows...
beginning in February, M BTA service was not fully restored for nearly a month's period; commuter rail was in particular heavily affected. While this research did not examine the winter's effect on commuter rail at all, the disruptions in M BTA service became a highly politicized issue, and M BTA officials were likely very busy dealing with these issues and were likely also reluctant to speak to outside individuals.

One of the biggest flaws of my research was that I felt that I did not speak to any “grassroots” residents, or as I termed them earlier in this thesis, residents who were not professionally involved with the effort to bring better transit. Particularly in a thesis that purports to examine the community role in transportation, I think that this would have been a valuable part of research that unfortunately I did not do as it was out of the scope of my analysis. This should be a part of future research.

In addition, some more comparative case studies would likely have been effective as a part of this research. One of the strengths of a case study is that it allows the researcher to examine in great detail a particular situation and understand the motivating factors of the individuals involved. At the same time, however, this methodology can lend itself to some inaccurate conclusions: making “the leap” from the individual cases to the more applicable conclusions is difficult. The presence of comparative or alternative case studies would have gone a long way toward remedying this shortfall in this thesis.

9.5 An ending
The Fairmount Line represents a success story in community-driven planning and participation. If the current proposal to place diesel multiple units on the line by 2020 actually comes to fruition, the Fairmount Line will be a rare example of an American commuter rail line that has bucked the trend of so much transit in the twentieth century: instead of going from heavy passenger service to no passenger service, the Fairmount Line has instead gone from no passenger service prior to the 1970s to possibly rapid-transit-like service in the 2020s. However, it turns out in this case that the success of the project had only a small part to do with the fact that it focused on commuter rail – rather, the project was successful on social equity and environmental justice grounds. The project's centering on commuter rail turned out not to be the central defining focus in the end at all.
TEN

Appendices
10.1 List of MaxQDA codes

**Collaboration**
- Broadening the scope
- Difficulty of coordination
- Difficulty of coordination
- Fairmount Coalition
- Fairmount Collaborative
- Leadership
- Organizing

**Community**
- Community pressure
- Corridor – Red Line comparison
- Corridor and gangs
- Education/outreach
- Engagement
- Fairmount Corridor
- Gentrification
- Grassroots involvement
- Income inequality
- Lack of understanding
- Marvin Martin
- Neighborhood outreach
- Population/demographics
- Public opposition
- Roxbury | Dorchester | Mattapan
- Territorial/parochial

**Development and design**
- Architecture
- Design
- Development
- Economic development
- Shopping malls
- TOD

**Equity/justice**
- Civil rights
- Environmental justice
- Equitable development
- Equity
- Transit justice

**Fares**
- Fare zoning
- Fares
- Fares alternative
- Link Pass

**Foundations/grants**
- LISC
- Livability grants

**Framing**
- Framing of the line
- Inexpensive investment
- Marketing
- Olympic rings
- Public meetings
- Safety

**History**
- Big Dig
- Boston Foundation
- Conservation Law Foundation
- Feasibility study
- History
- Incremental strategy
- Jacobs Edwards Kelcey
- Northeast Corridor rebuilding
- Origin of concept

**Other**
- Arts and culture
- Eco-innovation
- Goat landscaping
- Individual/personal history
- Olympic Games
- Resiliency
- Rose Fellowship
### Stations
- Blue Hill outreach
- Blue Hill station
- Cambridge
- Location of stations

### Transportation
- Building ridership
- Bus improvement
- Bus-train comparison
- Commuter rail as suburban
- Commuter rail-bus comparison
- Commuter rail-rail comparison
- DMU
- Driving
- Engineering
- Fairmount as commuter line in city
- Fairmount schedule
- Heavy rail
- Infrastructure upgrade
- Layover
- Light rail
- Linking bus arrival times
- Parking
- Role of MassDOT
- Service quality
- Silver Line Gateway
- State of good repair
10.2 Interview protocols

10.2.1 Activists

1. [Introduction of researcher and thesis] My name is Andrew Lai and I am a master's student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, conducting research for a master's thesis on community involvement in the Fairmount Line in Boston.

2. Do you have any questions for me?

3. Can you tell me about yourself? How did you/your organization become involved with the Fairmount Line?

4. What are residents' perceptions of the Fairmount Line and commuter rail in general?

5. What has been your role in this project? How have the CDCs been involved with this project?

6. Why did you get involved with the Fairmount project?

7. Do residents conceive of this as a corridor?

8. Is there anything else you believe I should know?

9. Who else do you think I should talk to?
10.2.2 Government officials

1. [Introduction of researcher and thesis] My name is Andrew Lai and I am a master’s student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, conducting research for a master’s thesis on community involvement in the Fairmount Line in Boston.

2. Do you have any questions for me?

3. Can you tell me about yourself? How did you/your organization become involved with the Fairmount Line?

4. What are residents’ perceptions of the Fairmount Line and commuter rail in general?

5. What has been your role in this project? How have you worked with community groups on this project? Which community groups did you work with?

6. Would this project have succeeded if it were not for the community groups?

7. Why did you get involved with the Fairmount project?

8. Do residents conceive of this as a corridor?

9. Is there anything else you believe I should know?

10. Who else do you think I should talk to?
10.2.3 Institutional partners

1. [Introduction of researcher and thesis] My name is Andrew Lai and I am a master’s student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, conducting research for a master’s thesis on community involvement in the Fairmount Line in Boston.

2. Do you have any questions for me?

3. Can you tell me about yourself? How did you/your organization become involved with the Fairmount Line?

4. What are residents’ perceptions of the Fairmount Line and commuter rail in general?

5. What has been your role in this project? How have you worked with community groups on this project? Which community groups did you work with?

6. How involved were the CDCs in this process? How involved were other groups in this project?

7. Would this project have succeeded if it were not for the community groups?

8. Why did you get involved with the Fairmount project?

9. Do residents conceive of this as a corridor?

10. Is there anything else you believe I should know?

11. Who else do you think I should talk to?
ELEVEN

References


Boston Redevelopment Authority. 2014. “Fairmount Indigo Planning Initiative Corridor Plan.”


Chavez, Michael. 2015 Telephone.

Cosgrove, Joe. 2015 Telephone.


DuBois, Jeanne, and M. Thall. 2015 In person.


Feloney, Michael. 2015. In person.
Fields, Barbara. 2015. Telephone.
  Boston Globe, November 8.
  http://escholarship.org/uc/item/1mc9t108.

Hamwey, Scott. 2015. Telephone.


Mares, Rafael. 2015. Telephone.

Marvin, Martin. 2015. Telephone.


———. n.d. “Appendix A: M BTA Title VI Complaint Form in English, Spanish, Chinese, and Portuguese.”


National Transit Database. 2013. “Table 26: Fare per Passenger and Recovery Ratio.”


Pradhan, Geeta. 2015. Telephone.


Sávucci, Frederick. 2015. In person.


Silverman, Robert Mark. 2005. “Caught in the Middle: Community Development Corporations (CDCs) and the Conflict between Grassroots and Instrumental Forms of Citizen Participation.” Community Development 36 (2): 35–51.


Tighe, Joan. 2015. Telephone.

http://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice/.


Weinstock, Joanne. 2015. In person.


