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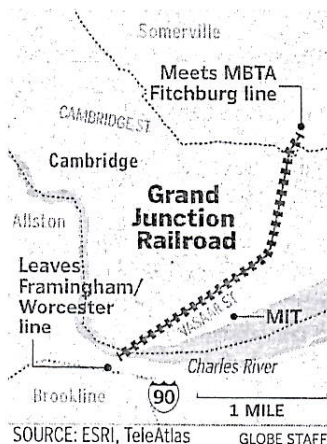
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MBTA should run trains from Worcester to North Station

LAST YEAR, the state purchased the Grand Junction railroad, a little-used but strategically located 3-mile rail line that connects Allston and Cambridge via a graffiti-covered trestle underneath the BU bridge. It's not every day that the state acquires a fully intact corridor through a bustling urban center, and the property has planners daydreaming of bike paths and streetcars. For now, though, the best — and most economical — use of the land is a proposal by Lieutenant Governor Tim Murray to run MBTA commuter rail trains on the existing tracks.

Under the proposal, which is being studied by the MBTA, a few trains on the Worcester commuter rail line would split off from the main route, cross into Cambridge, and then reconnect with the commuter rail routes into North Station. The idea offers two immediate benefits. It would provide an additional destination for commuters, and also relieve congestion at South Station, which is struggling to handle the growing number of MBTA and Amtrak trains on its 13 platforms. Expansion at South Station is

planned, but that could be years away. Even if South Station expands, running commuter trains into Cambridge may prove worthwhile anyway, since it creates an opportunity to open a station near the growing employment hub of Kendall Square.



Since the Grand Junction is already in use — a daily freight run carries fruit and vegetables, and the MBTA uses it to shuttle equipment between the northern and southern halves of its network — adding commuter trains to this mix should not be costly. The MBTA is still crunching the numbers as part of its feasibility study, but estimates new signalling and crossing gates needed for commuter rail operations could cost \$5 million to \$10 million.

Nobody would mistake the route, which crosses six city streets, as a perfect solution to the commuter rail system's capacity problems. Many Cantabrigians are wary, and have rightly insisted that the MBTA ensure any additional trains don't cause endless traffic tie-ups. But in a season of constrained budgets, officials are right to be looking for creative ways to make better use of what they already have.

Long-term solution needed for MBTA

RE "MBTA should run trains from Worcester to North Station" (Editorial, July 11): There are several issues that must be resolved before any passenger service could begin on the state-owned Grand Junction railroad in Cambridge. The 3-mile route threads through a congested neighborhood that has seen major development in recent decades. Of its six street grade crossings, four traverse major arteries which often back up with traffic. There are at least two good locations for station stops, at Kendall Square and Cambridge Street, but planners envision only one stop on the line, at an undetermined location. Finally, only a handful of passenger trains would use this route, further limiting its usefulness.

Using the Grand Junction is another Band-aid approach to relieving capacity issues at South Station — a problem that will continue to hobble Boston's rail infrastructure as long as North and South Stations remain stub-end terminals. Until the state gets serious again about the North-South Rail Link, "solutions" like the Grand Junction will prove illusory.

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The writer chairs the Transportation Committee of the Sierra Club Massachusetts chapter.