Referenda Information

Short Title: Should Northeastern join the U-Pass program, in which Northeastern would purchase MBTA passes for every student in exchange for a 50% discount from the MBTA?

WHEREAS: Northeastern University, the City of Boston, and the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority should all seek innovative solutions to generate revenue to support the MBTA’s system, programs, and operations that serve the current student body and future generations and support Northeastern’s broader commitment to sustainability; and,

WHEREAS: The U-Pass would be a partnership between the MBTA and Northeastern. Northeastern would buy semester transit passes for every student that allow unlimited subway and bus rides, with no opt-out clause. In return for the bulk purchases, the MBTA would provide a 50% discount on passes; and,

WHEREAS: U-Pass programs have been successfully implemented in many other cities including Seattle, San Francisco, Chicago, and Milwaukee. 137 educational institutions in the United States offer U-Pass programs, though not a single institution in Boston has yet to develop such a partnership with the MBTA; and,

WHEREAS: The Massachusetts Department of Transportation Board approved the creation of a pilot program for the UPASS on December 11th, 2014; and,

WHEREAS: Northeastern’s participation in a U-Pass program would create a fixed revenue stream and ridership metadata for the MBTA, enabling more precise planning of services that would benefit our student population; and,

WHEREAS: Northeastern’s participation in a U-Pass program would enable the MBTA to explore new programs that advance our institutional goals, including permanent expansion of late-night service, a Youth Pass program to promote transit equity, and planning for disruptive weather events; and,

WHEREAS: The fare to access the MBTA’s T subway system is currently $2.65 and the MBTA T bus system fare is $2.10 without a Charlie Card and $2.10 for the subway and $1.60 for the bus with a Charlie Card. The MBTA Monthly LinkPass currently costs $75; and,

WHEREAS: These costs are either already born by the student body in the form of purchased fares, expenditures on alternative means of transportation, or missed chances due to the high opportunity costs attached to mobility; and,

WHEREAS: Northeastern has an incentive and an obligation to encourage the use of public transit and to offer the City of Boston as resource for both current students and prospective students, so that they may increase the ability of students to access the internships, jobs, culture, volunteer programs, and nightlife of Boston; and,

WHEREAS: Northeastern has an obligation to increase equity in our community by making transit accessible for every student, regardless of financial background; and,
WHEREAS: Northeastern is uniquely situated to utilize public transit, with direct access to the Green & Orange Lines, as well as multiple bus routes; and,

WHEREAS: Northeastern’s commitment towards expanding the use of public transit has been demonstrated through its role in securing a $20 million Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery Discretionary Grant to upgrade MBTA Ruggles Station; and,

WHEREAS: The Student Government Association administered Budget Priority Survey for FY14 found the U-Pass Public Transportation Program to have received substantial student support. This includes ‘86% interested or very interested in 50% discount with unlimited use’ and ‘71% - 50% discount with unlimited use’; and,

WHEREAS: Off-campus respondents to the Budget Priority Survey indicated an increase of 31 points, from 21% to 52%, in the number of students who would utilize the MBTA to commute to campus with a U-Pass program versus as of now; and,

WHEREAS: Respondents to the Budget Priority Survey currently on a co-op cycle indicated an increase in 12 points, from 71% to 83%, in the number of students who would utilize the MBTA to commute to co-op with a U-Pass program versus as of now. Respondents further indicated a decrease of 7 points, from 12% to 5%, in how many would utilize driving an automobile to commute to co-op in the presence of a U-Pass program; and,

WHEREAS: Northeastern has received recognition for current efforts to promote sustainability, and has been cited as “America’s Greenest College” by the Green Metric Ranking of World Universities; and,

WHEREAS: Northeastern President Joseph E. Aoun has stated, “Environmental sustainability is an issue of local, national, and global significance. The consequences of inaction would be shared by all humanity. Therefore, all individuals and institutions share responsibility for taking action to create a sustainable environment. The leadership of Northeastern University is fully committed to this effort.”; and,

WHEREAS: Embarking on a path that incentivizes and familiarizes the use of public transit would be fully consistent with Northeastern’s current record of commitment towards experiential learning and sustainability, and would cement its place as a local leader in this area;

Operative Clauses

THEREFORE BE IT
That it is the Resolution of the Student Body that Northeastern University, in keeping with its commitment to leadership in experiential learning and sustainability, should opt into the University Pass program under the MBTA’s development, and as such the Undergraduate Student Body calls upon the Northeastern University administration to take the following actions:

RESOLVED, that we work alongside MBTA officials officials and student stakeholders to participate in the U-Pass pilot program in FY17, and to develop a detailed and permanent framework for Northeastern’s participation in the U-Pass program; and
RESOLVED, that we ensure that incoming students are provided with full knowledge of their transportation options within Boston so as to develop a new transit generation; and

RESOLVED, that we explore options for price splitting between Northeastern and the Undergraduate Student Body to prevent the full cost of the program from being shifted onto the Undergraduate Student Body through student fees.