

T notebook: Another privatization initiative

IXP hired to run police dispatch at fixed price for 5 years



BRUCE MOHL Sep 11, 2017

THE MBTA's OVERSIGHT BOARD on Monday approved another privatization initiative – outsourcing police dispatch services at the transit authority.

The Fiscal and Management Control Board voted 3-0 to hire IXP Corp. of Princeton, New Jersey, to run police dispatch services at a cost of \$970,000 a year for three years with an option to renew for an additional two years at the same price.

T officials said they currently spend \$1.39 million just on wages using police officers to handle dispatch, a figure that rises to \$2.4 million once all other benefits are included. Despite the much lower cost with the private contractor, T officials said any savings from the new contract will likely come from reduced use of overtime for existing police officers.

The biggest benefit of the new contract, officials said, is that 14 police officers can be moved out of the dispatch center and into active duty throughout the transit system.

An MBTA presentation on the contract said IXP offers a competitive benefits package, including medical and dental coverage and paid time off. The presentation didn't mention how much IXP pays its employees, but websites that track pay levels say the average salary of IXP workers is \$37,333 a year.

Green Line Ext. staffing up

The MBTA official managing the extension of the Green Line into Somerville and Medford said the number of employees in oversight roles is up sharply compared to the personnel in place when the project's cost spiraled from \$2 billion to \$3 billion and had to be put on hold.

In 2015, when the project was put on hold, the T had about 10 employees overseeing the project. John Dalton, who is managing the project now, said on Monday that 45 full-time-equivalent employees are playing support roles now, including MBTA staffers, design officials, and outside resources. He said workers are being interviewed for nine other positions and job postings are up for another five.

Despite previous overruns, contractor hired again

State transportation officials on Monday awarded a \$51.6 million contract to rehabilitate the Tobin Bridge to a contractor who has encountered significant overruns in erecting the new Fore

River Bridge in Quincy and overhauling the Longfellow Bridge connecting Boston and Cambridge.

JF White was the low bidder by nearly \$3 million on the contract, which has the potential to disrupt traffic on the north side of Boston over a period of three years. The contract calls for repaving and other roadwork to be done on both the southbound and northbound portions of the bridge from spring through fall in 2018, 2019, and 2020.

One member of the board of the Massachusetts Department of Transportation raised concerns about giving the business to a firm that has had difficulty completing previous projects on time and on budget.

“This contractor should be on a short leash,” said Joseph Sullivan, the mayor of Braintree.

GPS upgrade in Boston tunnels

Drivers operating in Boston’s tunnels should finally be able to get a GPS signal thanks to a partnership with Waze.

State transportation officials reported on Monday that Waze installed Chapstick-sized repeaters during July in the 19 miles of tunnels in Boston along I-90 and the O’Neill Tunnel. The officials said the service will be helpful to drivers, particularly those from out of town, who use mapping services to find their way.

The big shift

Luis Manuel Rivera takes over as the MBTA’s new general manager on Tuesday, which will trigger two other moves at the authority.

Steve Poftak, who has filled in as the interim general manager for the last 10 weeks, will return to his post as a member of the Fiscal and Management Control Board. Lisa Calise, a current board member, will leave to focus on her job at the University of Massachusetts

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Calise told her fellow board members that she believes the T has succeeded over the last 2.5 years in building financial accountability at the agency and is on a path to improvement. “Stay the course,” she said.

Poftak, who gave his last report as interim general manager on Monday, said the MBTA’s best days are ahead of it. He also showed a poster of a Soviet-style official with a statement in Cyrillic script underneath. His translation: “I am ready for winter operations. Are you?”