

Chabot: MBTA's self-review claims management off track



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TAKE THE BLAME: An audit by the MBTA shows problems were caused by mismanagement rather than by finances.

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By: Hillary Chabot

The embattled MBTA's own self-review confirms it is plagued by chronic mismanagement and lax oversight, according to internal audits newly unearthed as Beacon Hill lawmakers meet to discuss the troubled agency this week.

"These audits confirm what I've been saying all along, and that is that the MBTA doesn't have a revenue problem, but a management problem," said State Rep. Geoff Diehl (R-Whitman).

The audits, which show MBTA police patrolmen signing off on their own overtime and loose oversight of high-priced T parts and inventory, have surfaced as Senate and House leaders on Beacon Hill plan to meet Wednesday with Harry Markopolos — the whistleblower in the Bernie Madoff ponzi scheme — about the T's troubled pension system.

The audits, which Diehl requested after the brutal winter, were conducted between 2012 and 2014 and detail several management concerns:

- Management misreported at least \$175,000 worth of MBTA inventory — with parts on hand not matching records at several facilities — according to an internal audit and a private follow-up conducted by Ernst & Young LLC in 2014 that found, "There is a lack of inventory accountability; on-hand inventory is not consistently accurate due to unrestricted employee access to inventory storerooms."
- MBTA officials also failed to keep an updated inventory of the agency's 1,120 non-revenue vehicles, worth \$53 million in 2014. The agency had only verified half of those as of April 9 of this year.
- Eleven percent of MBTA patrolmen and supervisors approved of their own overtime schedules, according to a 2012 audit.

This week's pension powwow is one of many attempts on Beacon Hill to fix the ailing public transportation agency, which ground to a halt several times over the last winter thanks to poor maintenance.

"Before a critical agency like the T asks taxpayers for more money to fix the major shortcomings that have led to a major collapse in service, they need to prove that they can comply with a basic audit that outlines the need for actual management and accountability," said Deihl.

"And these are their own in-house audits — no one is making this problem up out of thin air."

MBTA spokesman Joe Pesaturo pointed to fixes within Gov. Charlie Baker's legislation that will address the ongoing management oversights.

"MBTA leadership always looks for opportunities to increase efficiencies, and believes the governor's legislation to fix the T will greatly improve efforts to provide the world class transportation system that the people of Massachusetts deserve," said Pesaturo in a statement.

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