February 2026

massDOT AECOM

Comprehensive Regional Transit Plan 2025

MetroWest Regional Transit Authority

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Acronyms

ACS	American Community Survey
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
APC	Automatic Passenger Counter
ARPA	American Rescue Plan Act
AVL	Automatic Vehicle Location
BESST	Blandin Energy and Sustainable Storage Technology
CAD	Computer Aided Dispatch
CARES	Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security
CNG	Compressed Natural Gas
COA	Council on Aging
CRRSA	Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations
CRTP	Comprehensive Regional Transit Plan
DOT	Department of Transportation
FSU	Framingham State University
FTA	Federal Transit Administration
FTE	Full-Time Equivalent
GATRA	Greater Attleboro Taunton Regional Transit Authority
IIJA	Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act
LEHD	Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics
MAPC	Metropolitan Area Planning Council
MART	Montachusett Regional Transit Authority
MassDOT	Massachusetts Department of Transportation
MBC	MassBay Campus
MBTA	Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPO	Metropolitan Planning Organization
MWRTA	MetroWest Regional Transit Authority
NTD	National Transit Database
PTASP	Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan
RTA	Regional Transit Authority
RTD	Rail & Transit Division
SMART	Strengthening Mobility and Revolutionizing Transportation
TAM	Transit Asset Management
TERM	Transit Economic Requirements Model

UMass	University of Massachusetts
WRTA	Worcester Regional Transit Authority

Glossary

Access: The opportunity to reach a given destination within a certain timeframe or without significant physical, social, or economic barriers.

Accessible Vehicle: A public transportation vehicle that does not restrict access, is usable, and provides allocated space and/or priority seating for individuals who use mobility devices.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA): Passed in July 1991, gave direction to local transit agencies to ensure full access to transportation for persons with disabilities

Boarding: The total number of passengers getting on a transit vehicle during a specified period of time.

Capital Cost: The cost of equipment and facilities required to support transportation systems, including vehicles, radios, shelters, software, etc.

Central Transfer Point: A central meeting place where routes or zonal demand response buses intersect so that passengers may transfer. Routes are often timed to facilitate transferring and depart once passengers have had time to transfer. Strategic placement of the transfer point can attract riders to the system and may provide an opportunity for joint marketing promotions with local merchants.

Commuter Bus Service: Transportation designed for daily, round-trip service, which accommodates a typical 8-hour, daytime work shift (e.g., an outbound trip arriving at an employment center by 8 AM, with the return trip departing after 5 PM).

Computer Aided Dispatch/ Automatic Vehicle Location: A computer technology with advanced dispatching capabilities combined with automatic vehicle location, ensuring that vehicles are where they need to be when required.

Coordination: Pooling the transportation resources and activities of several agencies. The owners of transportation assets talk to each other to find ways to mutually benefit their agencies and their customers. Coordination models can range in scope from sharing information, to sharing equipment and facilities, to integrated scheduling and dispatching of services, to the provision of services by only one transportation provider (with other former providers now purchasing services). Coordination may involve human service agencies working with each other or with public transit operations.

Cost per Boarding: The total operating expenditures of a route or service divided by the number of total boardings. Boardings are often presented as unlinked passenger trips.

Cost per Revenue Mile or Hour: The total operating expenditures of a route or service divided by the number of revenue miles or revenue hours.

Cutaway Vehicle: A smaller bus built on a modified van or truck chassis with the rear section removed, allowing a bus shell to be added by a second manufacturer, creating a customizable mini-bus or shuttle for services like parantransit, local routes, or demand response.

Demand Response Service: Service to individuals that is activated based on passenger requests. Usually involves curb-to-curb or door-to-door service. Trips may be scheduled on an advance reservation basis or in "real-time." Usually smaller vehicles are used to provide demand response service. This type of service usually provides the highest level of service to the passenger but is the most expensive for the transit system to operate in terms of cost per trip. In rural areas with relatively high populations of elderly persons and persons with disabilities, demand response service is sometimes the most appropriate type of service.

Dial-a-Ride Service: A name that is commonly used for demand response service. It is helpful in marketing the service to the community, as the meaning of "dial-a-ride" may be more self-explanatory than "demand response" to someone unfamiliar with transportation terms.

Express Bus Service: Direct service from a limited number of origins to a limited number of destinations with no intermediate stops. Typically, express bus service is fixed route/fixed schedule and is used for longer distance commuter trips. The term may also refer to a bus that makes a limited number of stops, while a local bus makes many stops along the same route but as a result takes much longer.

Fair Share Amendment: A 4 percent Massachusetts surtax on income above $1 million annually approved by Massachusetts voters in 2022. The revenue generated by the surtax is constitutionally dedicated to funding public education and transportation.

Fare: Revenue from cash, tickets, and pass receipts given by passengers as payment for public transit rides.

Fare-Free Transit: Any transit service that does not require a passenger fare to ride.

Farebox Recovery Ratio: The percentage of operating costs covered by revenue from fares and contract revenue (total fare revenue and total contract revenue divided by the total operating cost).

Fixed Route: Transportation service operated over a set route or network of routes on a regular time schedule.

Headway: The length of time between vehicles moving in the same direction on a route. Headways are called short if the time between vehicles is short and long if the time between them is long. When headways are short, the service is said to be operating at a high frequency; if headways are long, service is operating at a low frequency.

Intercity Bus Service: Regularly scheduled bus service for the public that operates with limited stops over fixed routes connecting two or more urban areas not near, that has the capacity for transporting baggage carried by passengers, and that makes meaningful connections with scheduled intercity bus service to more distant points, if such service is available. Intercity bus service may include local and regional feeder services, if those services are designed expressly to connect to the broader intercity bus network.

Memorandum of Understanding: A formal, non-binding document that outlines the framework for cooperation, roles, responsibilities, and objectives between multiple agencies or jurisdictions involved in providing transit services.

Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO): The policy board of an organization created and designated to carry out the metropolitan transportation planning process. MPOs are required to represent localities in all urbanized areas with populations over 50,000.

Microtransit: A form of demand response service, open to the general public, that requires some type of "reservation," typically made via an app-based system. Typically, microtransit uses software algorithms to completely automate the scheduling of the trip, the fare collection (if any), and the route the driver will utilize (communicating with the driver via some type of mobile data terminals).

National Transit Database (NTD): The United States government's main repository of data about the financial, operating, and asset conditions of American transit systems.

Non-Revenue Vehicle: Any vehicle used by a public transit organization that is not used for passenger service but is essential to support transit operations and safety, such as service trucks, supervisor cars, and utility vehicles.

Operating Expenditure: The recurring cost of providing transit service (wages, salaries, fuel, oil, taxes, maintenance, insurance, marketing, etc.).

Operating Revenue: The total revenue earned by a transit agency through its transit operations. It includes passenger fares, advertising, and other revenues.

Paratransit Service: The transportation of passengers by motor vehicle or other means of conveyance by persons operating on a regular and continuing basis and the transportation or delivery of packages in conjunction with an operation having the transportation of passengers as its primary and predominant purpose and activity but excluding regular route transit. Paratransit includes transportation by carpool and commuter van, point deviation and route deviation services, shared-ride taxi service, dial-a-ride service, and other similar services.

Passengers per Mile or Hour: Productivity measure that takes the total passengers and divides by the miles and/or hours operated. The passengers may be presented as unlinked passenger trips and hours and/or miles may be presented as either total vehicle miles or hours or as revenue miles or hours.

Performance Indicator: A metric that provides meaningful information about the condition or performance of the transportation system but is neither managed nor used to evaluate the effectiveness of policies, strategies, or investments.

Performance Measure: A metric that measures progress toward a goal, outcome, or objective. This definition covers metrics used to make decisions or evaluate the effectiveness or adequacy of a policy, strategy, or investment.

Performance Target: A specific performance level representing the achievement of a goal, outcome, or objective.

Public Transportation: Transportation service that is available to any person upon payment of the fare either directly, subsidized by public policy, or through some contractual arrangement, and that cannot be reserved for the private or exclusive use of one individual or group. "Public" in this sense refers to the access to the service, not to the ownership of the system that provides the service.

Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan (PTASP): A plan published by a public transit agency containing processes and procedures that define a comprehensive, collaborative, and systematic approach to managing safety. All public transportation systems that receive federal funds under the FTA Urbanized Area Formula grants are required to have a Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan.

Revenue Hour: The number of transit vehicle hours when passengers are being transported. Calculated by taking the total time when a vehicle is available to the public with the expectation of carrying passengers. Excludes deadhead hours, when buses are positioning but not carrying passengers, but includes recovery/layover time.

Revenue Mile: The number of transit vehicle miles when passengers are being transported. Calculated by taking the total mileage operated when a vehicle is available to the public with the expectation of carrying passengers. Excludes deadhead mileage, when buses are moving but not carrying passengers.

Revenue Vehicle: Any vehicle, such as a bus, train, or railcar, used to actively carry passengers or operating on a scheduled route to pick up or drop off passengers.

Ridership: The total of all unlinked passenger trips, including transfers. One trip that includes a transfer would be counted as two unlinked passenger trips.

Ridesharing: A form of transportation, other than public transit, in which more than one person shares the use of a vehicle, such as a van or car, to make a trip. Variations include carpooling or vanpooling.

Service Area: The geographic area that coincides with a transit system's legal operating limits (city limits, county boundary, etc.).

Service Gap: When certain geographic segments cannot be covered by transportation services. This term can also refer to instances where service delivery is not available to a certain group of riders, or at a specific time.

Service Span: The duration of time that service is made available or operated during the service day (e.g., 6 AM to 10 PM on weekdays).

Spare Ratio: The percentage/number of vehicles that an operator purchases in excess of the number of vehicles required to provide the maximum level of service. The spares are required so that some vehicles may cycle through a preventive maintenance regimen while the full level of planned service can still be provided.

Standard: A recommendation that leads or directs a course of action to achieve a certain goal. A standard is the expected outcome for the measure that will allow a service to be evaluated. There are two sets of transit standards.

- Service design and operating standards: Guidelines for the design of new and improved services and the operation of the transit system.
- Service performance standards: The evaluation of the performance of the existing transit system and of alternative service improvements using performance measures.

State Contract Assistance: The program through which the RTAs receive state operating funding for transit at the discretion of the Massachusetts Legislature via the state budget process annually. The total amount of state contract assistance funding provided in the state budget is allocated to the RTAs via a formula developed with RTA input.

State of Good Repair: The condition of physical assets used in public transit, such as vehicles, stations, and signals, that permits their full designed performance level, ensuring safe, reliable, and efficient use through regular maintenance and timely replacement.

Title VI: Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which requires that "No person in the United States shall, on the grounds of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance."

Total Operating Cost: The total of all operating costs incurred during the transit system calendar year, excluding expenses associated with capital grants.

Transfer: Passengers arrive on one bus and leave on another (totally separate) bus to continue their trip. The boarding of the second vehicle is counted as an unlinked passenger trip.

Transit Asset Management Plan: A strategic document that helps transit agencies systematically manage their capital assets, such as vehicles, facilities, and other equipment, over their entire lifecycle and to ensure they are safe, reliable, and cost-effective. Transit agencies that own, operate, and manage capital assets and receive funding from FTA are required to adopt a Transit Asset Management Plan.

Transit Dependent: A population or person who does not have immediate access to a private vehicle, or because of age or health reasons cannot drive and must rely on others for transportation.

Transit Economic Requirements Model: A computer application published by FTA that is designed to estimate transit capital investment needs over an extended time horizon, helping transit agencies assess current asset conditions and adopt an asset management strategy that achieves state of good repair.

Transit Subsidy: The operating costs not covered by revenue from fares or contracts.

Transportation Network Company: Private sector companies that provide software routing, scheduling, and payment services to independent contractor drivers for a fee; these drivers then utilize their own vehicles to provide a (typically) curb-to-curb transportation service, sometimes to sole riders and sometimes to pooled groups.

Trip Denial: Occurs when a trip is requested by a passenger, but the transportation provider cannot provide the service. Trip denial may happen because capacity is not available at the requested time. For ADA paratransit, a capacity denial is specifically defined as occurring if a trip cannot be accommodated within the negotiated pick-up window. Even if a trip is provided, if it is scheduled outside the pick-up window, it is considered a denial. If the passenger refused to accept a trip offered within the pick-up window, it is considered a refusal, not a capacity denial.

Unlinked Passenger Trip: Typically, one passenger trip recorded any time a passenger boards a transportation vehicle or other conveyance used to provide transportation. "Unlinked" means that one trip is recorded each time a passenger boards a vehicle, no matter how many vehicles that passenger uses to travel from their origin to their destination.

Useful Life Benchmark: The expected service life for a capital asset, like a bus or utility vehicle, before major overhaul or replacement. Standards for useful life benchmarks for different vehicle classes are defined by FTA.

Zero Emission Vehicle: A vehicle that produces no tailpipe pollutants or greenhouse gases during operation, primarly through electric power from batteries.

1 Executive Summary

This 2025 update of the Comprehensive Regional Transit Plan (CRTP) for MetroWest Regional Transit Authority (MWRTA) will shape and guide the region's transit priorities and improvements over the next five years. The recommendations in this plan emerged from a data-informed process that incorporated historical operational data, stakeholder feedback, industry standards, local policy, statewide objectives, and MWRTA priorities. They establish a framework for advancing strategic service adjustments, capital improvements, and policy initiatives, and make significant progress toward improving mobility for residents across the region.

Figure 1. MWRTA Compressed National Gas Facility at Blandin Hub

Source: AECOM (2025)

1.1 Changes Since the 2020 Comprehensive Regional Transit Plan

The 2020 CRTP featured a range of recommendations including service enhancements and capital investments. In the last five years there has been a significant infusion of state and federal funding supporting expanded transit service. Some of the investments that MWRTA has made over the past five years include:

- Implemented fare-free transit service
- Introduced later evening service on weekdays throughout several routes.
- Launched fixed route service on Sundays for the first time, mirroring Saturday service levels and establishing a standard weekend/holiday schedule.
- Expanded service spans and frequency, launch of the 495 Connector route, as well as expansion of Catch Connect MicroTransit service to Sudbury, Hopedale, Milford, and Berlin (a Worcester Regional Transit Authority [WRTA] community)

- Deployed real-time vehicle tracking technology for fixed route and demand response buses
- Procured nine full-sized buses (Gilligs) running on cleaner compressed natural gas (CNG)
- Acquired four trolleys to improve MWRTA marketing and brand
- Procured public transportation bus simulator for operator driver training
- Initated and continued ongoing work to complete a comprehensive fixed route network redesign, as well as a bus stop infrastructure assessment

1.2 Planning Process

The planning process for the CRTP was a collaborative effort in which MWRTA engaged with members of the public and MWRTA operators. Input from these groups, along with guidance from statewide and regional transportation plans, was used to establish goals and objectives for this plan.

MWRTA used both quantitative and qualitative input when developing recommendations. An evaluation of MWRTA's current transit operations, including existing service levels, ridership patterns, and overall system performance, helped to identify baseline efficiencies and opportunities. It should be noted that the data in this plan was largely gathered between April and October 2025 to analyze existing conditions and provide a foundation for later elements. Therefore, the data referenced are largely from FY 2020 to FY 2024—the plan's five-year reporting period. Service enhancements and ridership changes beyond this timeframe, while sometimes discussed in the narrative, are largely not fully captured in the data represented.

Additionally, a market analysis was carried out to contextualize the region's demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. The analysis included factors such as population trends, job locations, and transit demand to pinpoint areas with the most critical needs.

In parallel, a robust outreach campaign was conducted, utilizing both in-person gatherings and survey distribution, to ensure input from a diverse group of stakeholders. Key outreach activities included two in-person pop-up events, an operator survey, and a public survey targeting both riders and non-riders.

1.3 Recommendations

MWRTA has developed 45 recommendations that address the needs identified through the CRTP planning process (Table 1). These recommendations will guide efforts over the next five years and provide a flexible approach to pursuing strategic improvements in mobility depending on how the future unfolds. For instance, significant changes in ridership demand or propulsion technology could change how certain recommendations are prioritized.

The recommendations are grouped into seven primary categories: service, public-facing resources and customer service, technology, asset and capital, training and operations, data and performance, and partnerships and funding. Some recommendations incorporate elements that connect to other recommendations, either in the same or in different categories, such that pursuing one recommendation may consist of applying strategies or achieving related goals that are also applicable to another recommendation. Table 1 highlights these instances of overlap.

Table 1. Recommendations

ID	Recommendation	Recommendation Overlap
Service		
S1	Explore opportunities to extend service spans on high ridership fixed routes (i.e., earlier mornings or later evenings).	N/A
S2	Explore opportunities to increase frequency on high ridership fixed routes (i.e., 15-minute clock-face schedule).	N/A
S3	Leverage the ongoing comprehensive fixed route network redesign and bus stop study to identify opportunities for and implement improved or expanded weekend service on high ridership fixed routes.	PC1, DP5, PF2
S4	Utilize existing Catch Connect performance data to identify opportunities for future fixed route expansion. Consider implementing fixed route service in high ridership and high utilization areas.	DP4, PF2
S5	Create and maintain a MWRTA Fixed Route Continuous Improvement Plan.	DP4, DP5, DP6
S6	Explore opportunities for first mile/last mile improvements such as bike and pedestrian infrastructure.	PF2
S7	Continue working with communities looking to add Catch Connect service to identify appropriate expansion points.	PF4
Public-Facing Resources and Customer Service		
PC1	Develop a marketing plan, either internally or through a request for proposal, to boost awareness and attract new riders, especially with the fixed route redesign.	S3, PC2, PC3, AC6
PC2	Conduct an internal holistic review of schedules and maps for improved clarity following the network redesign. Utilize a small focus group consisting of riders and non-riders to gather feedback on the new materials prior to publishing.	S3, PC1, PC3
PC3	Following the network redesign, update the MWRTA website to improve information access and clarity. Focus on providing clear fixed route information (i.e., schedules and route maps), adding a Catch Connect service area map, and simplifying information on the "Senior and Disabled" home page (i.e., by organizing key information at the top of the page and providing additional resources at the bottom).	S3, PC1, PC2

ID	Recommendation	Recommendation Overlap
PC4	Complete a review of the MWRTA Rider Policy and add clarity to the following: • Update "No Smoking" to clarify "No smoking / vaping / illegal drug use onboard or at stops and stations, including e-cigarettes. You must leave the bus shelter or platform areas to smoke." • Update policy number 6 “Mobility Devices” to clarify the policy for bus driver and passenger responsibilities by separating out mobility devices (i.e., wheelchairs to be secured) from passenger property (luggage, strollers, shopping carts).	PC5
PC5	Post MWRTA rider policy signage and updated fixed route maps at the Banana Lot, which is the Framingham MBTA Commuter Rail Station Northside Parking Lot, and other high ridership locations.	PC1, PC2, PC4
PC6	Increase promotion efforts for travel training programs to boost public awareness and comfort using services by conducting target outreach with COAs and high schools and by adding this information on the MWRTA website.	PF4, TO4
Technology		
T1	Implement Catch Connect vehicle arrival notifications within the MWRTA Catch app.	N/A
T2	Implement real-time trip planning technology in the app and at MWRTA facilities.	AC3, PF2
T3	Implement a rider location pin feature in the MWRTA Catch app.	N/A
T4	Update software platform mapping base to match services and mitigate data presentation issues for public clarity.	N/A
T5	Continually assess performance of CAD/AVL system for data collection and data accuracy.	N/A
T6	Continue to implement customer-facing smart signage with information such as real-time arrival at facilities to provide a comparable alternative to using the app.	PF2
Asset and Capital		
AC1	Design and construct new no/low maintenance facility and additional infrastructure improvements to help support larger vehicle types being introduced into MWRTA fleet.	PF2
AC2	Increase vehicle resources for weekend Catch Connect service.	PF2
AC3	Deploy bus stop infrastructure and amenity improvements, prioritizing high ridership stops.	T2, DP1, PF2, PF5
AC4	Maintain state of good repair for vehicles.	AC5

ID	Recommendation	Recommendation Overlap
AC5	Continue the strategic replacement of light and medium duty buses with heavy duty fixed route buses to increase capacity on high-demand routes.	AC4, PF2
AC6	Invest in MWRTA branded vehicle wrapping across the fleet.	PC1, PF2
AC7	Integrate environmentally conscious upgrades into vehicle and facility asset improvements.	AC8, AC9, AC11
AC8	Complete feasibility study of hydrogen powered fleet, infrastructure, and production. If hydrogen is identified as feasible for the MWRTA system, move forward toward infrastructure planning and implementation.	AC7, AC10, PF2
AC9	Continue to advance Blandin Hub improvements utilizing best practices and implementing accessible design and employee input throughout the design process and construction.	AC7, AC11
AC10	Invest in fleet maintenance upgrades to accommodate different fuel types and heavy-duty vehicles.	AC8, PF2
AC11	Invest in administrative facility updates.	AC7, AC9, PF2
Training and Operations		
TO1	Support ongoing hiring and retention efforts for operators and prioritize an open hiring approach.	N/A
TO2	Continue to invest in driver training focused on safety and customer service best practices.	N/A
TO3	Identify and implement strategies to enhance communication between operators and dispatch around Catch Connect service and what passenger information is available to drivers.	N/A
TO4	Continue to ensure the MWRTA Travel Trainer has the latest in training and best practices information to perform effectively.	PC6
Data and Performance		
DP1	Streamline data collection and synthesize processes to support performance dashboard development and data-driven decision making.	AC3
DP2	Adjust MWRTA's definition of on-time performance to monitor performance throughout the day by route.	N/A
DP3	Determine refined performance metrics by mode and geography.	N/A
DP4	Comprehensively assess the impact of MWRTA services on service area transit needs in an ongoing capacity for continuous improvement.	S4, S5
DP5	Establish a robust customer satisfaction performance metric to measure satisfaction with the large-scale network redesign.	S3, S5

ID	Recommendation	Recommendation Overlap
DP6	Monitor data and publish operating outcomes of the network redesign.	S5
Partnerships and Funding		
PF1	Continuously explore and pursue additional funding opportunities through partnerships and local, state, and federal resources.	N/A
PF2	Leverage existing partnerships with MBTA, Boston Region MPO, MassDOT, etc., to support capital, service efficiency/expansion, and interconnectivity improvements.	S3, S4, S6, T2, T6, AC1, AC2, AC3, AC5, AC6, AC8, AC10, AC11
PF3	Pursue and leverage enhanced partnerships with neighboring RTAs for best practices knowledge sharing and to promote increased regional transit connections.	N/A
PF4	Continue to maintain robust coordination efforts with communities and COAs and identify opportunities for continuous improvement.	S7, PC6
PF5	Leverage partnership with Framingham, Natick, Marlborough, and other member communities for facility and infrastructure upgrades such as bus stops, hubs, and other capital upgrades.	AC3

N/A = Not Applicable

2 Background and Context

MWRTA, alongside the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' 14 other Regional Transit Authorities (RTAs), plays a crucial role in providing essential mobility options and lifeline services to millions of residents across the Commonwealth. Demonstrating its commitment to continuous improvement, MWRTA updates its CRTP every five years. This document represents the 2025 update of the MWRTA CRTP, intended to support planning efforts over the next five years, through 2030.

The chapters of the plan include:

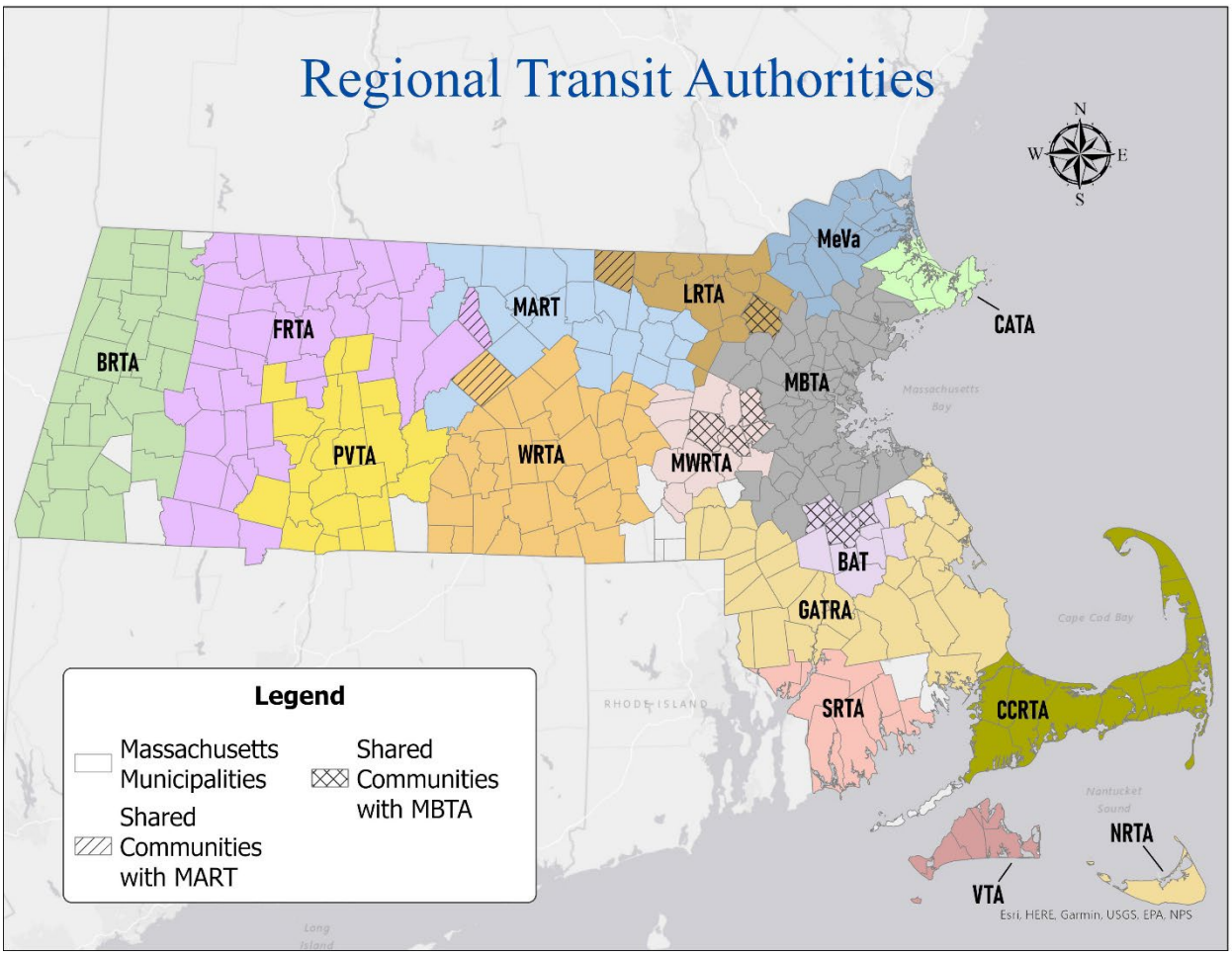
- Needs and Goals: Overview of identified needs and goals of MWRTA that provide the foundation for recommendations over the next five years.
- Existing Conditions: Review of MWRTA performance information.
- Market Evaluation: Assessment of transit demand through demographic analysis and engagement feedback results.
- Performance Measures: Review of performance measures used by MWRTA to assess service.
- Trends and Uncertainties: Assessment of key uncertainties facing MWRTA over the next five years and how those may impact implementation of recommendations.
- Recommendations: Listing of specific recommendations to guide MWRTA priorities over the next five years.

Additionally, the CRTP contains appendices reviewing fare and environmental considerations based on the broader statewide and national context, as well as an appendix providing complete lists of open-ended survey comments. Fare-free service described in Appendix A in particular has been attributed as a key strategy supporting the ongoing recovery in transit ridership after the COVID pandemic. More information, including the history, context, and funding approach for fare-free service, can be found in that appendix.

2.1 Overview of MWRTA Services

MWRTA is headquartered in Framingham and is one of the 15 RTAs that, along with the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), operates public transportation in the Commonwealth (Figure 2). MWRTA provides fixed route service across 14 year-round fixed routes, predominantly sharing a common terminus of the Blandin Hub in Framingham, and five additional fixed route commuter shuttles. In compliance with Federal Transit Administration (FTA) regulations, MWRTA offers the MetroWest RIDE Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) paratransit service. MWRTA also offers non-ADA Dial-A-Ride service for older adult and/or disabled residents of Ashland, Hopkinton, Marlborough, Milford, Sherborn, Southborough, and Wayland. Eligible passengers may access destinations in the MWRTA service area as well as medical facilities beyond the service area during designated hours. Additional services include Council on Aging (COA) transportation in Framingham, Holliston, Natick, Sudbury, and Wellesley; two on-demand shuttles to Boston area hospitals; and Catch Connect on-demand MicroTransit service in Wellesley, Sudbury, Hudson/Berlin, Framingham/Natick, Milford, and Hopedale. Service within the community of Berlin was introduced in 2025 via an innovative partnership with WRTA, enhancing multimodal connectivity through a first-of-its-kind inter-RTA zone.

Figure 2. Massachusetts Transit Providers



Source: Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT)

Since the 2020 CRTP, MWRTA has made new investments both in capital procurements as well as day-to-day operations. Additional information on those investments, as well as an overview of 2020 recommendations implementation, can be found in Chapter 8.

2.2 Purpose

The CRTP serves as a policy-level document outlining MWRTA's vision and priorities for the next five years and a roadmap for future action. Supported by the Commonwealth as part of a statewide effort, it complements other statewide and regional plans such as the *Beyond Mobility Massachusetts 2050 Transportation Plan* and *Report of the Task Force on RTA Performance and Funding* (refer to Chapter 3 for complete list of relevant plans).

The *Task Force* report, in particular, recommends that "[a]ll state contract assistance will be connected to performance targets via a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). MOUs will be bilaterally negotiated between MassDOT Rail & Transit Division (RTD) and each RTA and will identify performance targets in the following categories: ridership; customer service and satisfaction; asset management; and financial performance (incorporating a number of factors including farebox recovery ratio)." Based on this recommendation, the Massachusetts State Legislature has included language in the annual state budget since FY 2020 on the collection of performance data and the distribution of state funding in accordance with the most recently established MOU. As such, MassDOT RTD and the RTAs undergo a biennial bilateral negotiation process to establish an agreed upon MOU that includes performance targets in

the above-mentioned categories. Also included in the MOU is a commitment by the RTA to conduct a long-range CRTP as a mechanism to inform and support data-driven decisions, to work with local partners, and to communicate and discuss with MassDOT RTD on unmet needs or priorities and the potential for additional resources or support, if available.

Developed alongside these other plans, the CRTP provides guidance for MWRTA's state and local partners as they develop their own plans. The CRTP can also serve as a valuable tool for helping the public gain a clearer understanding of how MWRTA operates, the value it provides, and opportunities for improvements in the future.

Over the next five years, this document will serve as a resource, offering strategic guidance to inform policy decisions that shape the region's transportation future. Acting as a roadmap for data-driven decision-making that can inform more detailed capital and operational planning, the CRTP plays a dual role: it is both a product of ongoing discussions on public transportation in the state and region and a catalyst for future dialogue and action.

3 Needs and Goals

MWRTA operates according to its stated mission to "further expand public transportation for everyone by providing outstanding community-wide dependable and convenient public transportation services that enhance mobility, environmental quality, and economic vitality in the MetroWest Region."

3.1 Statewide Policies and Goals

Over the last six years, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts has developed the following statewide planning and policy documents that are relevant to MWRTA's CRTP update and goal setting:

- *Beyond Mobility Massachusetts 2050 Transportation Plan* (2024)
- *Regional Bus Network Assessment* (2024)
- *Benefits of Regional Mobility Managers Plan* (2023)
- *Clean Energy and Climate Plan for 2050* (2022)
- *Massachusetts State Plan on Aging* (2021)
- *Massachusetts 2050 Decarbonization Roadmap* (2020)
- *Report of the Task Force on RTA Performance and Funding* (2019)

CRTP development has also been guided by long-range planning documents published by the Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), including Destination 2050 (Boston Region MPO 2023b) and the Coordinated Human Services Transportation Plan (Boston Region MPO 2023a). Together, these documents highlight a number of robust goals and action steps that are relevant for all Commonwealth RTAs. Common goal themes as noted in the statewide and regional documents that help inform the development of MWRTA-specific needs and goals for the 2025 CRTP include:

- Implementing zero emission fleets and pursuing opportunities for fleet transition and agency sustainability
- Promoting cross-RTA coordination and interconnectivity across services, where feasible
- Exploring fare-free transit
- Supporting and growing transit ridership
- Exploring and maximizing innovative funding sources
- Ensuring COA services prioritize access for older adults and persons with disabilities

As detailed further in this chapter, the overarching goals for the MWRTA CRTP update include fleet transition, safety, system performance monitoring, bus network redesign implementation, Catch Connect service development, customer experience, and interconnectivity, which are in alignment with these statewide goals. State goals to convert public transit fleets to be zero emission supports broader sustainability goals of providing all people access to a clean and healthy environment. MWRTA has identified fleet transition goals to continue to implement, operate, and maintain zero emission technologies.

3.2 Identified Needs

Through review and discussion of existing transportation challenges, past community feedback, findings from the 2020 CRTP, and regional, state, and federal priorities, MWRTA

identified a list of needs to target in their 2025 CRTP. The current list of needs includes the following, in no particular order of priority:

- Continue to increase capacity and enhance transit services.
- Align fleet passenger capacity with growing ridership.
- Retain existing riders and attract new riders.
- Continue to improve system accessibility and ease of use.
- Expand access across the MWRTA service area and to neighboring RTAs.
- Continue to create a strong culture of safety.
- Continue to assess and improve system performance.
- Pursue additional funding, ensuring strategic alignment with stakeholders.
- Fund, design, and construct the Blandin Hub Expansion Project, enlarging operator training and administrative space.
- Fund, design, and construct new multi-purpose vehicle maintenance and fueling facility capable of servicing and fueling a range of propulsion types along with additional infrastructure to support large vehicle types in revenue service.
- Identify additional opportunities to incorporate low and no-emissions technology throughout MWRTA operations, including electric vehicles (EVs) and hydrogen fuel cell infrastructure.
- Acquire available properties to expand the Blandin Hub.
- Install a permanent gasoline fueling facility (MWRTA installed a temporary facility in 2025).

3.3 Goals and Objectives

As part of MWRTA's CRTP, goals and objectives were identified for the next five years in alignment with the agency mission.

Starting with the 2020 CRTP, an evaluation was conducted of the previous goals, objectives, needs, and recommendations. This information served as the basis for MWRTA staff to identify priorities, opportunities, and any potential barriers for the 2025 CRTP. To identify goals and objectives, the evaluation focused on priorities of MWRTA and the community and stakeholders. Additional consideration was given to regional goals, such as those of the Boston Region MPO and of major regional partners in areas such as housing and economic development. The evaluation also focused on the broader context, including Commonwealth policies and goals and federal considerations.

The overarching goals identified for MWRTA's 2025 CRTP include fleet transition, safety, system performance monitoring, bus network redesign implementation, transit innovation including enhancing existing MicroTransit services, customer experience, and interconnectivity, which are reflective of the agency's needs and opportunities. The objectives associated with each of these seven goals are as follows, in no particular order of priority:

- Goal 1. Prioritize Client/Rider Experience
    - Objective 1: Continue to focus on delivering high-quality service and implementing customer service improvement strategies.

  - Objective 2: Continue assessing bus stop infrastructure and identifying opportunities for improvement, such as new or upgraded bus stop infrastructure.
  - Objective 3: Explore opportunities for implementing or enhancing passenger amenities, focusing on accessibility and inclusivity.
  - Objective 4: Strengthen opportunities for targeted outreach and marketing efforts to promote the system and attract new riders.
- Goal 2. Cultivate a Safety-Centered Philosophy
  - Objective 1: Take actionable steps to reduce accidents and prevent injuries for passengers and staff.
  - Objective 2: Continue to ensure workforce has the tools necessary to report any safety concerns without retribution.
  - Objective 3: Enhance training and equipment to protect MWRTA's workforce and passengers.
- Goal 3. Develop and Implement the MWRTA Bus Network Redesign
  - Objective 1: Provide ample public outreach events to incorporate rider and non-rider feedback.
  - Objective 2: Identify strategies to collect customer satisfaction data on the implemented redesign.
  - Objective 3: Create an MWRTA Fixed Route Continuous Improvement Plan.
  - Objective 4: Monitor and publish operating outcomes of the MWRTA bus network redesign.
- Goal 4. Refine and Broadcast Performance Metrics
  - Objective 1: Determine performance metrics most relevant to riders by mode and geography.
  - Objective 2: Create innovative interactive tools to display important performance metrics.
- Goal 5. Reduce Fleet Emissions and Overall Carbon Footprint
  - Objective 1: Focus on replacing light and medium duty buses with heavy duty buses, where appropriate, to increase fixed route service capacity and improve per passenger mile emissions.
  - Objective 2: Continue purchasing, piloting, and appraising low emission vehicles for MWRTA's demand response fleet.
  - Objective 3: Integrate environmentally friendly design and green technology into MWRTA's infrastructure improvements/additions.
  - Objective 4: Complete feasibility study of hydrogen-powered fleet, infrastructure, and production.
- Goal 6 Continue to Adopt Innovative Public Transit Solutions
  - Objective 1: Continue to improve existing Catch Connect (MicroTransit) service, including expansion and optimization.
  - Objective 2: Continue to improve the MWRTA Catch App and customer-facing technology.

  - Objective 3: Integrate additional safety automation into MWRTA's fleet.
  - Objective 4: Identify innovative funding opportunities such as partnerships, subsidies, or grants for long-term operation, if feasible.
  - Objective 5: Explore potential of Boston Bluebike Network Expansion into MWRTA's service area.
- Goal 7. Emphasize Frontline Employees' Ongoing Needs
  - Objective 1: Construct operations contractor facility utilizing best practices, accessible design, and employee input throughout the design process.
  - Objective 2: Consider the needs and feedback of maintenance employees in current areas as well as new maintenance facility.
  - Objective 3: Consider the needs and feedback of call center employees in administration building refresh.

These highlighted intentions, along with a detailed data assessment of MWRTA's system from the last five years, provided a framework for the analysis and specific recommendations in this CRTP.

4 Existing Conditions

This chapter provides a comprehensive assessment of MWRTA's existing conditions regarding transit services provided, ridership, and performance evaluation from FY 2020 to FY 2024.

4.1 Transit Service Overview (FY 2020-FY 2024)

MWRTA was established in 2006 by Chapter 161B of the Massachusetts State Legislature to provide transportation services to the western part of the Boston metropolitan area, in portions of southern Middlesex County, northern Norfolk County, and eastern Worcester County. Today, MWRTA provides connections within its 16 member communities of Ashland, Dover, Framingham, Holliston, Hopedale, Hopkinton, Hudson, Marlborough, Milford, Natick, Sherborn, Southborough, Sudbury, Wayland, Wellesley, and Weston. On an annual basis MWRTA carries nearly 530,000 passengers, traveling approximately 2.1 million miles and operating 159,000 revenue hours (Table 2), with an operating budget of over $14.9 million.

Table 2. Statistics by Service Mode (FY 2024)

FY 2024 Data	Fixed Route	Percentage of Total	Demand Response	Percentage of Total	Total
Ridership	370,558	70.0%	159,185	30.0%	529,473
Revenue Miles	1,102,876	52.4%	1,001,711	47.6%	2,104,587
Revenue Hours	79,971	50.3%	79,164	49.7%	159,135
Operating Cost	$7,350,911	49.2%	$7,577,725	50.8%	$14,928,636

Source: MassDOT

MWRTA operates 14 year-round fixed routes, the majority of which have a common terminus of the Blandin Hub in Framingham (Figure 3). There are five additional fixed route commuter shuttles. Two of these (MassBay Campus [MBC] Shuttle and MassBay Riverside) act as weekday student shuttles that operate only during the school year. Two others connect the Lakeside and Apple Hill MathWorks campuses with MBTA Commuter Rail stations in Natick. A fifth commuter route, the new 495 Connector, was launched in May 2025 to provide a north-south route parallel to I-495 and to connect several MBTA stations, RTA services, and employment centers. This new route is not shown on Figure 3 or included in the FY 2020-2024 operational data in this plan.

Additionally, MWRTA operates MetroWest RIDE ADA paratransit service within ¾ mile from fixed route service at concurrent service times. Dial-A-Ride service is offered to older adult and/or disabled residents of Ashland, Hopkinton, Marlborough, Milford, Sherborn, Southborough, and Wayland to provide access to destinations anywhere within the MWRTA service area. Dial-A-Ride also provides medical transportation beyond the service area during designated hours. MWRTA also partners with several COAs in its service area to provide older adult and disabled transportation in the towns of Framingham, Holliston, Natick, Sudbury, and Wellesley. MWRTA also provides two shuttles to Boston area hospitals—one from Sudbury and Wayland and one from Framingham, Natick, and Wellesley.

Finally, MWRTA offers Catch Connect on-demand MicroTransit service in five unique zones: Wellesley, Sudbury, Hudson/Berlin, Framingham/Natick, and Milford/Hopedale, which was most recently added at the end of May 2025 (Figure 4). This curb-to-curb system provides MicroTransit service to customers within these communities and to select destinations outside the communities without needing an advance reservation. MWRTA reports Catch Connect service data as demand response service.

Figure 3. Fixed Route Service Area

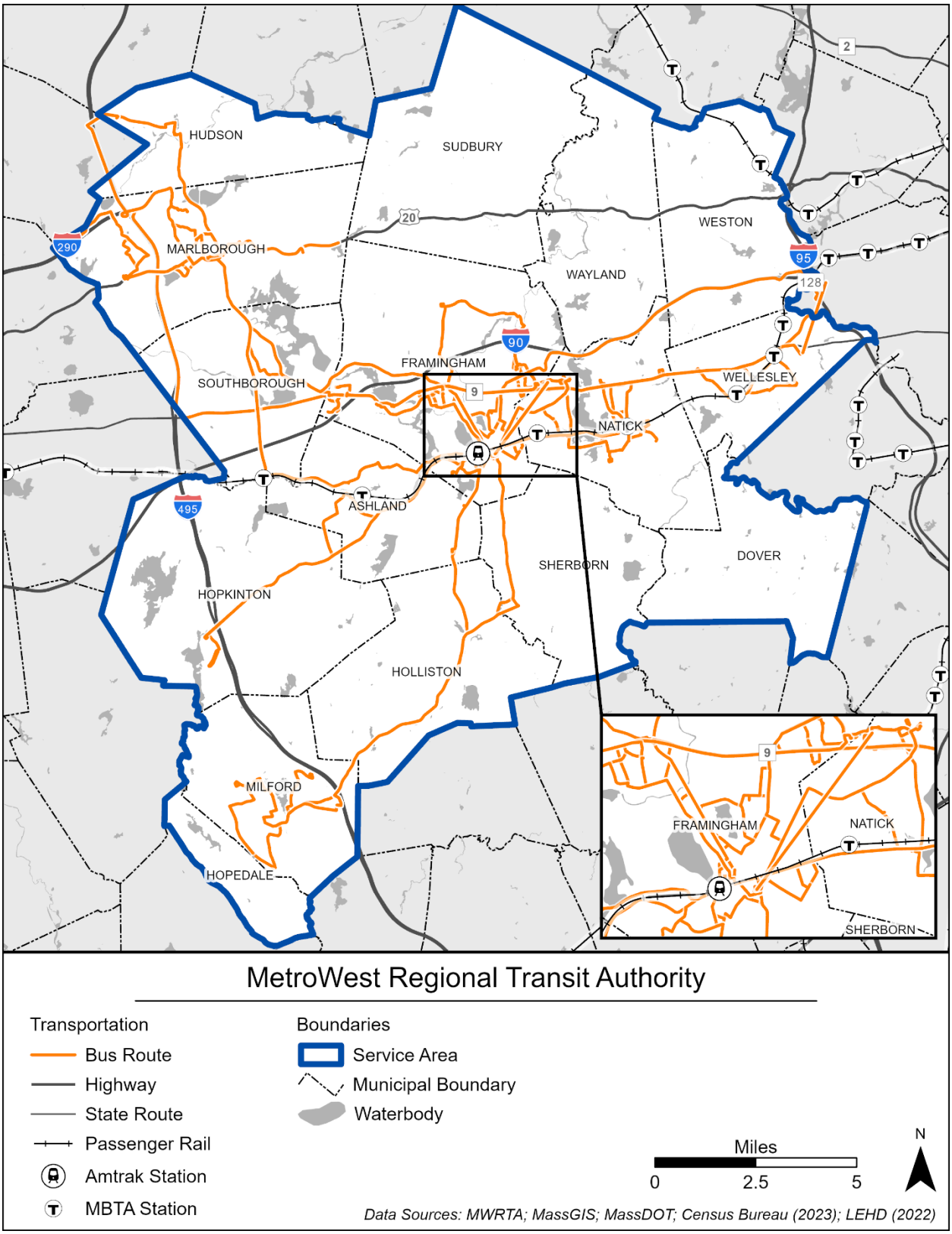
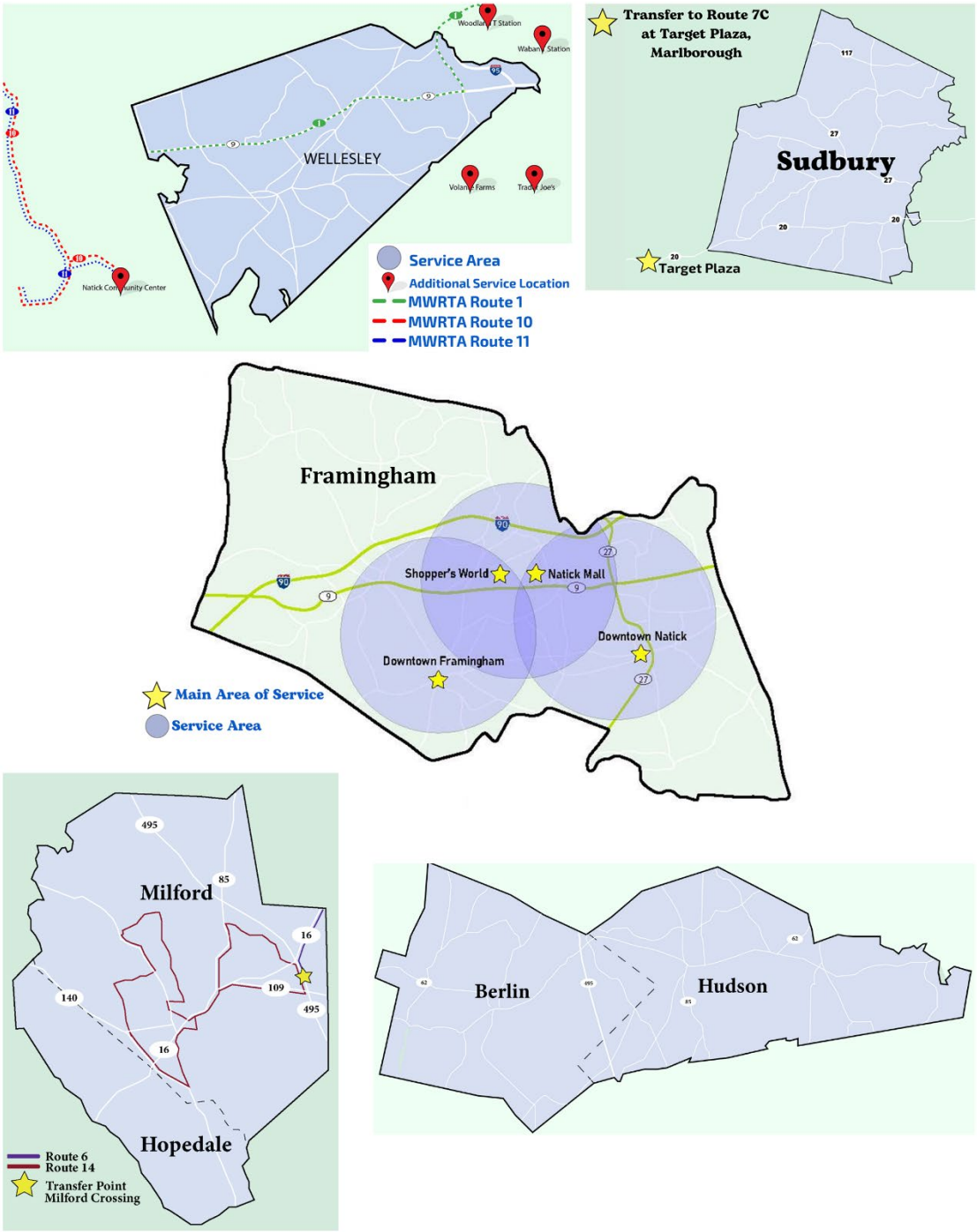


Figure 4. Catch Connect MicroTransit Zones



Source: MWRTA, AECOM

4.1.1 Service Descriptions

An overview of MWRTA fixed routes (including the new 495 Connector), demand response services, and on-demand service is provided in Table 3.

Table 3. MWRTA Services

Route	Service Type	Route Description
1	Fixed Route	Services MA Route 9 from the Natick Mall to Woodland MBTA Station, including MathWorks Apple Hill & Lakeside, and MassBay Wellesley
2	Fixed Route	Clockwise Framingham route servicing downtown Framingham, MetroWest Medical Center, and major shopping destinations
3	Fixed Route	Counterclockwise Framingham route servicing downtown Framingham, MetroWest Medical Center, and major shopping destinations
4N	Fixed Route	North Framingham route servicing Golden Triangle retail, MathWorks Lakeside, MetroWest Medical Center, and Framingham Commuter Rail Station (Banana Lot)
4S	Fixed Route	South Framingham route servicing Beaver and Second Streets, Ashland Market Basket, and Ashland Shaws
5	Fixed Route	Hopkinton route servicing MA Route 135
6	Fixed Route	Holliston to Milford route servicing MA Route 126. Connects with Route 14 at Milford Crossing
7	Fixed Route	Framingham to Marlborough route from MA Route 9 to downtown Marlborough via MA Routes 30 and 85
7C	Fixed Route	Marlborough connector route from Solomon Pond Mall to the Wayside Inn
9	Fixed Route	Servicing MA Route 9 from the Natick Mall to Staples Corporate Offices
10	Fixed Route	Natick counterclockwise route servicing downtown Natick, Leonard Morse Hospital, Natick MBTA Station, and the Natick Mall
11	Fixed Route	Natick clockwise route servicing downtown Natick, Leonard Morse Hospital, Natick MBTA Station, and the Natick Mall
14	Fixed Route	Milford route servicing downtown Milford. Connects with Route 6 at Milford Crossing.
15	Fixed Route	Hudson route servicing Bolton Street and MA Route 62
MBC Shuttle	Fixed Route – Student Shuttle	Weekday service between MassBay Framingham, MassBay Wellesley, and FSU

Route	Service Type	Route Description
MassBay Riverside	Fixed Route – Student Shuttle	Weekday service between MassBay Wellesley and the Riverside Green Line Station
MathWorks Natick Shuttle	Fixed Route – Commuter Shuttle	Weekday service between Blandin Hub, West Natick MBTA Station, Natick Center MBTA Station, US Army Natick Labs, and MathWorks campuses
MathWorks Framingham Shuttle	Fixed Route – Commuter Shuttle	Weekday service along MA Route 9 between Blandin Hub, MathWorks campuses, and Natick Center MBTA Station
495 Connector	Fixed Route – Commuter Shuttle	New service launched in 2025. Weekday service along MA Route 85 (parallelling I-495) between South Acton, Hudson, Newton, Southborough, Hopkinton, Milford, and Forge Park. Operational data not included in this analysis.
RIDE ADA Paratransit	Demand Response	Paratransit service running parallel to fixed routes (within ¾ mile from each route)
RIDE Dial-A-Ride	Demand Response	Senior (65+ years of age) and/or disabled residents demand response operating from Ashland, Hopkinton, Marlborough, Milford, Sherborn, Southborough, and Wayland
COA Demand Response	Demand Response	Partner service for COAs within the MWRTA service area. Service provided in Framingham, Holliston, Natick, Sudbury, and Wellesley.
Boston Hospital Shuttle	Demand Response	On-demand shuttle service to Boston-area hospitals from Framingham, Natick, Wellesley, Sudbury, and Wayland. Those not residing in these communities must either be dropped off at the Blandin Hub or at the Natick VFW Post 1274.
Catch Connect – Wellesley	On-Demand MicroTransit	Curb-to-curb on-demand service in the Town of Wellesley, with additional service destinations including Newton Wellesley Hospital, Natick Community Center, Woodland MBTA Station, and Waban MBTA Station.
Catch Connect – Sudbury	On-Demand MicroTransit	Curb-to-curb on-demand service in the Town of Sudbury, with transfers to Route 7C available at Target Plaza in Marlborough.
Catch Connect – Hudson/Berlin	On-Demand MicroTransit	Curb-to-curb on-demand service in the Towns of Hudson and Berlin, downtown Marlborough, Marlborough Hospital, Boston Scientific, Solomon Pond Mall, and Apex Center in Marlborough.
Catch Connect – Framingham/Natick	On-Demand MicroTransit	Curb-to-curb on-demand service in the City of Framingham and the Town of Natick, concentrated around the downtown areas, Shopper's World, and Natick Mall.

Route	Service Type	Route Description
Catch Connect – Milford/Hopedale	On-Demand MicroTransit	Curb-to-curb on-demand service in the Towns of Milford and Hopedale.

Source: MWRTA

4.1.2 Provided Service

MWRTA fixed route service times and headways are detailed in Table 4. All fixed routes and RIDE services operate every weekday, as do Dial-A-Ride services except for Sudbury Dial-A-Ride, which is limited to Tuesdays and Thursdays. Dial-A-Ride hours of service are 6:30 AM to 6:30 PM in all communities except in Sudbury, where service is provided between 4:30 PM and 6:30 PM. Boston Hospital Shuttles operate Tuesdays through Thursdays. Most non-commuter fixed routes and RIDE ADA also offer reduced service on both Saturdays and Sundays, with the same service spans and fixed route headways operated on both weekend days. Weekday fixed route headways range from 30 to 90 minutes, and weekend headways are 60 minutes or longer, except on Routes 1, 3, and 4S. Catch Connect on-demand operates on weekdays and weekends in Framingham/Natick, Wellesley, and Hudson/Berlin, and on weekdays only in all other communities served (Table 5).

Table 4. Fixed Route Span of Service and Frequency

Route	Weekday Service Hours	Saturday Service Hours	Sunday Service Hours	Weekday Headway (Minutes)	Saturday Headway (Minutes)	Sunday Headway (Minutes)	Days Operated
1	5:22 AM – 9:24 PM	8:15 AM – 5:15 PM	8:15 AM – 5:15 PM	45	45	45	7
2	6:30 AM – 8:00 PM	9:00 AM – 4:50 PM	9:00 AM – 4:50 PM	Morning: 60 Afternoon: 30	65	65	7
3	6:15 AM – 8:15 PM	8:25 AM – 5:10 PM	8:25 AM – 5:10 PM	30-40	30-40	30-40	7
4N	7:05 AM – 10:57 PM	9:05 AM – 5:05 PM	9:05 AM – 5:05 PM	30	60	60	7
4S	6:10 AM – 10:25 PM	9:00 AM – 5:20 PM	9:00 AM – 5:20 PM	45	45	45	7
5	5:30 AM – 7:54 PM	8:30 AM – 5:15 PM	8:30 AM – 5:15 PM	75	75	75	7
6	5:50 AM – 10:57 PM	N/A	N/A	60-90	N/A	N/A	5

Route	Weekday Service Hours	Saturday Service Hours	Sunday Service Hours	Weekday Headway (Minutes)	Saturday Headway (Minutes)	Sunday Headway (Minutes)	Days Operated
7	5:10 AM – 11:05 PM	8:30 AM – 5:30 PM	8:30 AM – 5:30 PM	30-45	130	130	7
7C	5:35 AM – 10:04 PM	8:00 AM – 5:45 PM	8:00 AM – 5:45 PM	45	90	90	7
9	5:45 AM – 8:15 PM	7:45 AM – 5:15 PM	7:45 AM – 5:15 PM	60	60	60	7
10	6:25 AM – 8:30 PM	N/A	N/A	90	N/A	N/A	5
11	6:30 AM – 8:35 PM	8:00 AM – 5:25 PM	8:00 AM – 5:25 PM	45	90	90	7
14	6:30 AM – 10:57 PM	8:42 AM – 6:06 PM	8:42 AM – 6:06 PM	75	60	60	7
15	9:45 AM – 4:10 PM	N/A	N/A	45-60	N/A	N/A	5
MBC Shuttle	6:45 AM – 6:15 PM	N/A	N/A	70	N/A	N/A	5
MassBay Riverside	6:30 AM – 7:00 PM	N/A	N/A	30	N/A	N/A	5
MathWorks Natick Shuttle	6:30 AM – 6:30 PM	N/A	N/A	10	N/A	N/A	5
MathWorks Framingham Shuttle	6:45 AM – 7:00 PM	N/A	N/A	10	N/A	N/A	5
495 Connector	5:35 AM – 9:55 PM	N/A	N/A	60	N/A	N/A	5

Source: MWRTA
N/A = Not Applicable

Table 5. Catch Connect Service Spans by Zone

Service and Zone	Weekday Service Hours	Saturday Service Hours	Sunday Service Hours	Days Operated
Catch Connect – Wellesley	6:45 AM – 8:45 PM	8:00 AM – 6:00 PM	8:00 AM – 6:00 PM	7

Service and Zone	Weekday Service Hours	Saturday Service Hours	Sunday Service Hours	Days Operated
Catch Connect – Sudbury	8:00 AM – 6:00 PM	N/A	N/A	5
Catch Connect – Hudson/Berlin	6:45 AM – 6:45 PM	8:00 AM – 6:00 PM	8:00 AM – 6:00 PM	7
Catch Connect – Framingham/Natick	7:30 PM – 10:00 PM	8:00 AM – 6:00 PM	8:00 AM – 6:00 PM	7
Catch Connect – Milford/Hopedale	10:00 AM – 6:00 PM	N/A	N/A	5

Source: MWRTA
N/A = Not Applicable

4.1.3 Transit Service Performance

This section provides information on MWRTA's systemwide performance trends for fixed route and demand response services from FY 2020 to FY 2024. Transit service performance is evaluated in two categories: service effectiveness and financial performance. A comparison with transit systems across Massachusetts and the nation is also provided.

MWRTA's annual fixed route operating statistics are broken down in Table 6. After a significant drop in ridership between FY 2020 and FY 2021, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, ridership increased year to year through FY 2024. Revenue hours and miles operated were lowest in FY 2022 but increased year to year through FY 2024 to approach FY 2020 levels. Operating costs for fixed route operations increased to a period high in FY 2024 due to service expansion for nights and weekends after dropping to a period low in FY 2022.

Table 6. Fixed Route Operating Statistics (FY 2020-FY 2024)

Statistic	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024
Ridership	478,258	191,412	209,304	326,235	370,558
Revenue Hours	85,877	72,067	70,684	72,409	79,971
Revenue Miles	1,205,197	1,010,446	992,540	1,033,742	1,102,876
Operating Costs	$5,988,696	$6,130,915	$5,477,213	$5,898,992	$7,350,911

Source: MassDOT

MWRTA's annual operating statistics for demand response service are broken down in Table 7. Revenue hours, revenue miles, and operating costs all dipped from FY 2020 to FY 2021 in parallel with ridership trends but have increased annually since that year.

Table 7. Demand Response Operating Statistics (FY 2020-FY 2024)

Statistic	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024
Ridership	143,998	64,199	116,387	146,796	159,185
Revenue Hours	53,823	35,911	60,934	69,676	79,164
Revenue Miles	772,047	535,882	777,163	780,202	1,001,711

Statistic	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024
Operating Costs	$4,473,841	$3,613,371	$5,377,504	$6,323,386	$7,577,725

Source: MWRTA, MassDOT

4.1.3.1 Service Effectiveness

Service effectiveness describes the amount of transit service utilized per unit amount of transit service that is provided. Service effectiveness is measured using two indicators: passengers per mile and passengers per hour.

- Passengers per mile measures the average number of unlinked passenger trips taken for every vehicle revenue mile provided. Though passengers per mile indicator is a strong measure of system efficiency, it is also influenced by the length of passenger trips. Smaller values likely represent either longer trips where passengers are travelling greater distances or a poorly performing system. Larger values likely represent either shorter trips where passengers are traveling smaller distances or a high-performing system.
- Passengers per hour measures the average number of unlinked passenger trips taken for every vehicle revenue hour provided. Passengers per hour is influenced by the geographic area and the average operating speed of a route. Higher values indicate a more efficient system.

Service effectiveness for MWRTA's fixed route service (inclusive of commuter routes) and demand response service (inclusive of RIDE ADA, Dial-A-Ride, COA demand response, and Catch Connect) from 2020 to 2024 are illustrated in Table 8. MWRTA's fixed routes perform below the state and national averages for passengers per mile and passengers per hour. However, MWRTA has increased its fixed route productivity since FY 2021, indicating an increase in efficiency in operations. For demand response, MWRTA exceeds the state and national averages for passengers per mile and passengers per hour, which indicates higher-than-average productive service.

Table 8. Service Effectiveness (FY 2020-FY 2024)

Fiscal Year	Fixed Route Passengers/Mile	Fixed Route Passengers/Hour	Demand Response Passengers/Mile	Demand Response Passengers/Hour
FY 2020	0.40	5.57	0.19	2.68
FY 2021	0.19	2.66	0.12	1.79
FY 2022	0.21	2.96	0.15	1.91
FY 2023	0.32	4.51	0.19	2.11
FY 2024	0.34	4.63	0.16	2.01
FY 2024 Massachusetts Average [a]	1.25	17.87	0.12	1.95
National Average	1.92	23.06	0.13	1.92

Source: MassDOT

[a] Massachusetts average excludes MBTA.

4.1.3.2 Financial Performance

Cost effectiveness is a measure of a transit system's performance in financial terms, indicating how efficiently funds are used to deliver the service. Many variables influence the financial efficiency of a transit agency, including the geographic area, ridership, cost of labor, and more. Cost effectiveness indicators are cost per mile, cost per hour, and cost per passenger.

- Cost per mile measures the overall expense of providing a transit service divided by the number of vehicle revenue miles provided by the service. A smaller value indicates more financially efficient system and/or faster operating speeds.
- Cost per hour measures the overall expense of providing a service divided by the number of vehicle revenue hours provided by the service. A smaller value indicates more financially efficient system and/or faster operating speeds.
- Cost per passenger measures the overall expenses required to operate the transit service divided by the number of unlinked passenger trips that were taken on the service. A smaller value indicates a financially efficient system and/or a mode with high ridership.

Fixed Route Financial Performance

Table 9 illustrates the cost effectiveness of MWRTA's fixed route services from FY 2020 to FY 2024. In FY 2024, MWRTA was more financially efficient compared to both state and national averages for cost per mile and cost per hour, although MWRTA exceeded both averages for cost per passenger. Cost effectiveness has decreased overall across the three efficiency measures since FY 2020.

Table 9. Fixed Route Financial Efficiency (FY 2020-FY 2024)

Fiscal Year	Cost/Mile	Cost/Hour	Cost/Passenger
FY 2020	$4.97	$69.74	$12.52
FY 2021	$6.07	$85.07	$32.03
FY 2022	$5.52	$77.49	$26.17
FY 2023	$5.71	$81.47	$18.08
FY 2024	$6.67	$91.92	$19.84
FY 2024 Massachusetts Average [a]	$9.88	$141.70	$7.93
FY 2024 National Average	$15.80	$189.95	$8.24

Source: MassDOT and NTD
[a] Massachusetts average excludes MBTA.

Demand Response Financial Performance

Table 10 illustrates the cost effectiveness of MWRTA's demand response services from FY 2020 to FY 2024. MWRTA's demand response financial efficiency is greater than state averages for all measures and only falls below national averages in costs per mile. MWRTA's demand response ridership has grown since FY 2021.

Table 10. Demand Response Financial Efficiency (FY 2020-FY 2024)

Fiscal Year	Cost/Mile	Cost/Hour	Cost/Passenger
FY 2020	$5.79	$83.12	$31.07

Fiscal Year	Cost/Mile	Cost/Hour	Cost/Passenger
FY 2021	$6.74	$100.62	$56.28
FY 2022	$6.92	$88.25	$46.20
FY 2023	$8.10	$90.75	$43.08
FY 2024	$7.56	$95.72	$47.60
FY 2024 Massachusetts Average [a]	$5.43	$87.07	$44.76
FY 2024 National Average	$6.32	$97.27	$50.57

Source: MWRTA, MassDOT
[a] Massachusetts average excludes MBTA.

4.1.4 Funding

In FY 2024, MWRTA's capital expenses were provided predominantly by both federal and state funds, with a fairly even split between the two sources. The share of state funds used for capital expenses increased nearly threefold from the previous two years, when state funding made up less than 16 percent. Overall, total capital funds expended decreased from $6.2 million in FY 2022 to $2.2 million in FY 2024 (Table 11).

Table 11. Funding Sources Expended on Capital (FY 2022-FY 2024)

Funding Source	FY 2022	Percentage of FY 2022 Total	FY 2023	Percentage of FY 2023 Total	FY 2024	Percentage of FY 2024 Total
Federal	$4,640,768	74.93%	$2,022,098	80.00%	$1,073,361	48.95%
State	$964,403	15.57%	$400,309	15.84%	$910,810	41.53%
Local	$679	0.01%	$0	0.00%	$0	0.00%
Farebox	$12,850	0.21%	$0	0.00%	$0	0.00%
Other	$574,775	9.28%	$105,215	4.16%	$208,799	9.52%
TOTAL	$6,193,475	100.00%	$2,527,622	100.00%	$2,192,970	100.00%

Source: NTD

The largest source of MWRTA's operating funds in FY 2024 came from state funding (59 percent), which represents a significant increase in the share of state funding compared to previous years (Table 12). This increase in state funding has enabled MWRTA to rely less heavily on federal funds (e.g., FTA Section 5307), which can generally be used as capital funds but have been utilized heavily as operating funds in the past by MWRTA.

MWRTA also receives funding in the form of local assessments from the member communities, which increases no more than 2.5 percent annually, unless there is an increase in service, in accordance with state law. The increase in local funding in FY 2024 can be attributed to service increases MWRTA implemented in FY 2022, such as through restoring service to pre-COVID levels and expanding Catch Connect in Hudson. Farebox funding is generated by Catch Connect fares. Additionally, MWRTA has partnerships with educational institutions including MassBay Community College and Framingham State University (FSU), and major employers MathWorks and Boston Scientific for the provision of service. Overall, total funding increased from $12.4 million in FY 2022 to $16.4 million FY 2024.

MWRTA also previously received COVID-era federal funding in the form of Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act (which had to be obligated by May 11, 2023), Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) (obligated by September 30, 2023), and American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding (which had to be obligated by September 30, 2024). These fund sources could be used by MWRTA for both capital and operating expenses. In FY 2020, MWRTA received $6.7 million in CARES funding, which was then supplemented in FY 2021 by funding through ARPA and CRRSA, for a total of $14.2 million in relief funds. As of FY 2024, MWRTA had approximately $5.1 million in remaining COVID-era relief funds.

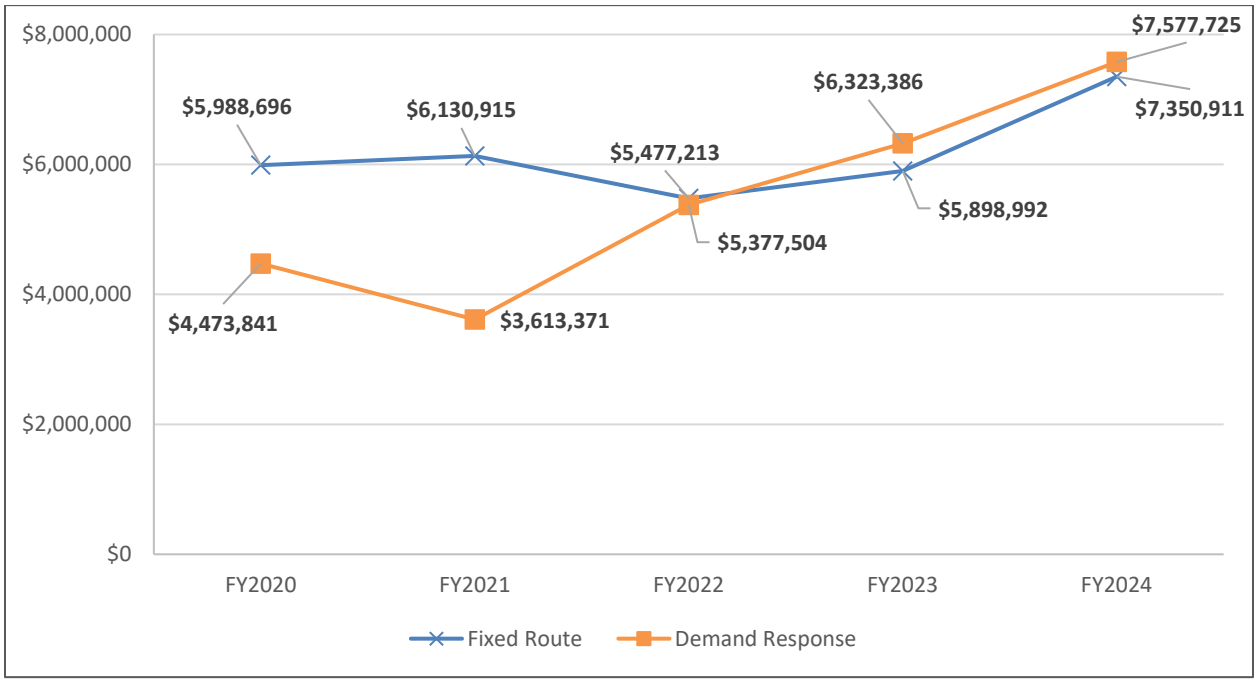
Table 12. Funding Sources Expended on Operations (FY 2022-FY 2024)

Funding Source	FY 2022	Percentage of FY 2022 Total	FY 2023	Percentage of FY 2023 Total	FY 2024	Percentage of FY 2024 Total
Federal	$3,169,109	29%	$4,589,901	37%	$885,189	5%
State	$3,645,369	33%	$3,347,110	27%	$9,618,385	59%
Local	$3,673,178	33%	$3,765,010	30%	$4,664,410	28%
Farebox	$116,902	1%	$238,457	2%	$595,252	4%
Partnerships and Contracts	$449,930	4%	$476,866	4%	$629,055	4%
TOTAL	$11,054,488	100%	$12,417,344	100%	$16,392,291	100%

Source: MWRTA

The annual operating cost for fixed route service stayed relatively steady, with a moderate increase between FY 2020 and FY 2024, at an average annual rate of just under 5 percent (Figure 5). Demand response operating costs showed a steeper increase of 17 percent annually since FY 2020 and is likely representative of growth in Catch Connect service.

Figure 5. Annual Operating Cost by Mode (FY 2020-FY 2024)

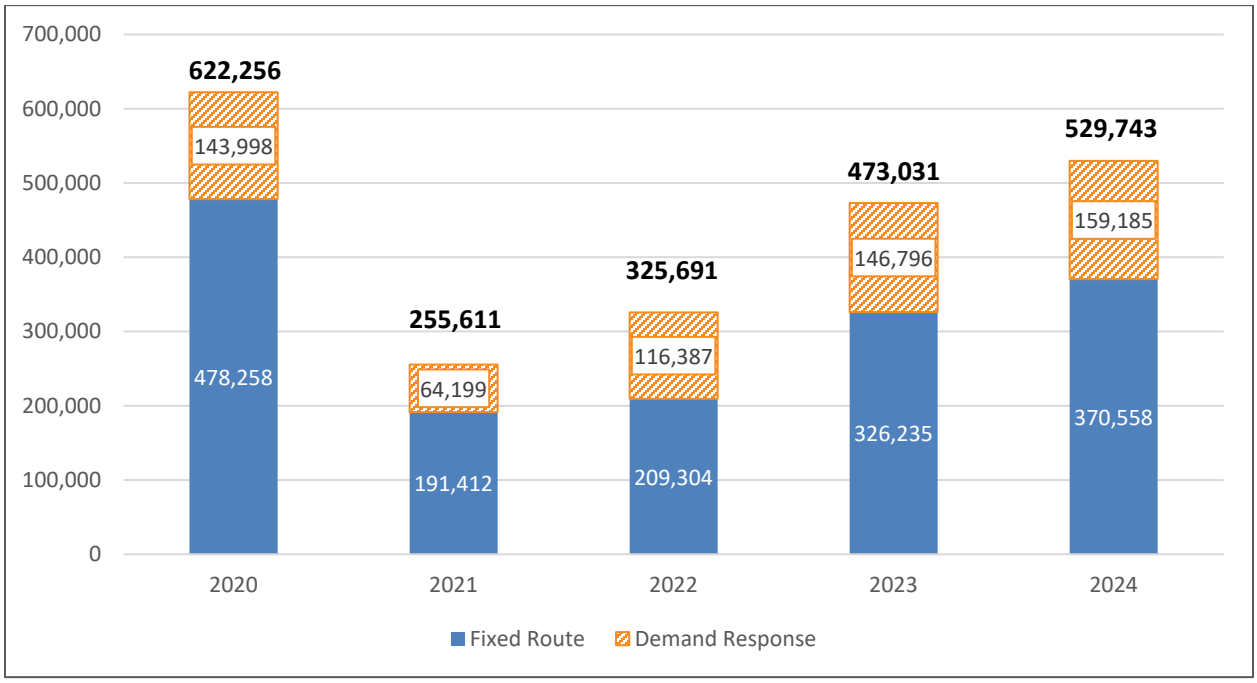


Source: MassDOT

4.2 Ridership and Service Operations

MWRTA's overall system ridership, inclusive of all modes, experienced a decrease between FY 2020 and FY 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to travel restrictions within the Commonwealth and work-from-home policies for schools and employment, all commuter shuttles and college transportation were suspended, along with major temporary route changes. MWRTA ridership has steadily increased year by year since FY 2021 (Figure 6). Previously, ridership had been growing between FY 2016 and FY 2018, dropping slightly to just over 800,000 trips in FY 2019 (MWRTA 2021), followed by a further decline in FY 2020. MWRTA's ridership growth since FY 2021 has occurred at an unprecedented rate for the agency, increasing by an annual average of 35 percent. This growth is largely attributed to MWRTA ridership steadily rebounding through the pandemic recovery period and responding to MWRTA service improvements and increases, such as the expansion of service spans and frequency and the expansion of Catch Connect MicroTransit service zones.

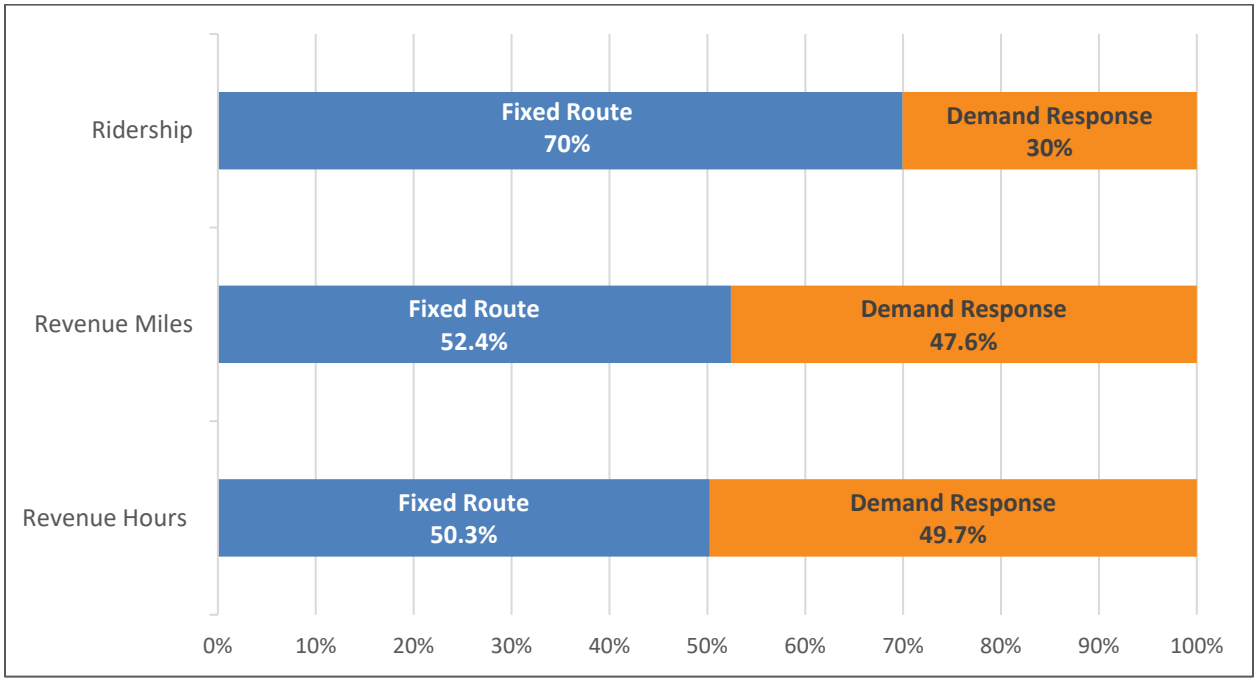
Figure 6. Annual System Ridership (FY 2020-FY 2024)



Source: MassDOT

In FY 2024, MWRTA provided the majority of trips on its fixed bus routes, with 30 percent of trips taken on demand response services (Figure 7). When measuring service by revenue miles or hours, fixed route remains the majority, but demand response makes up just under half of MWRTA's operations by revenue miles and revenue hours.

Figure 7. Service Metrics by Mode (FY 2024)

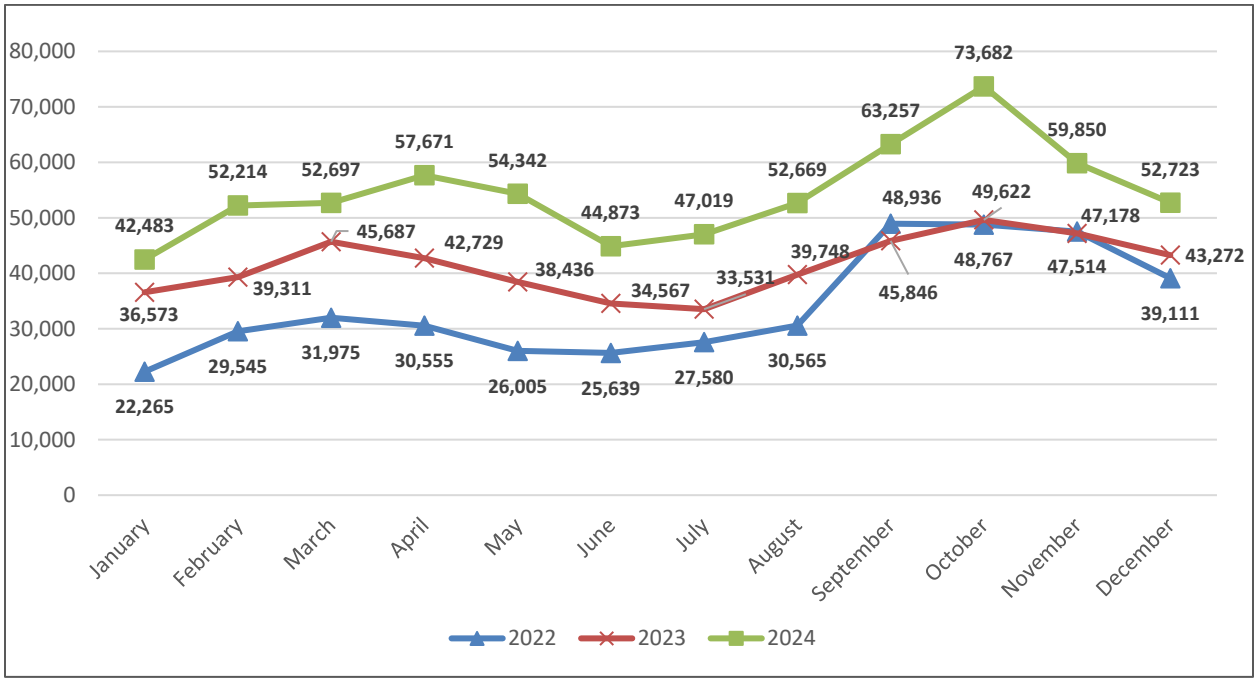


Source: MassDOT

System-wide monthly ridership across all modes from 2022 to 2024 indicates that ridership trends upward from the start of the calendar year, with a lull in the summer months until

increasing again in August and September. Ridership tends to peak in the fall, coinciding with the start of the academic year and the return of students to area campuses. This upward trend is followed by a dip in November through the end of the year (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Monthly Ridership Trends, All Modes (Calendar Year 2022-2024)

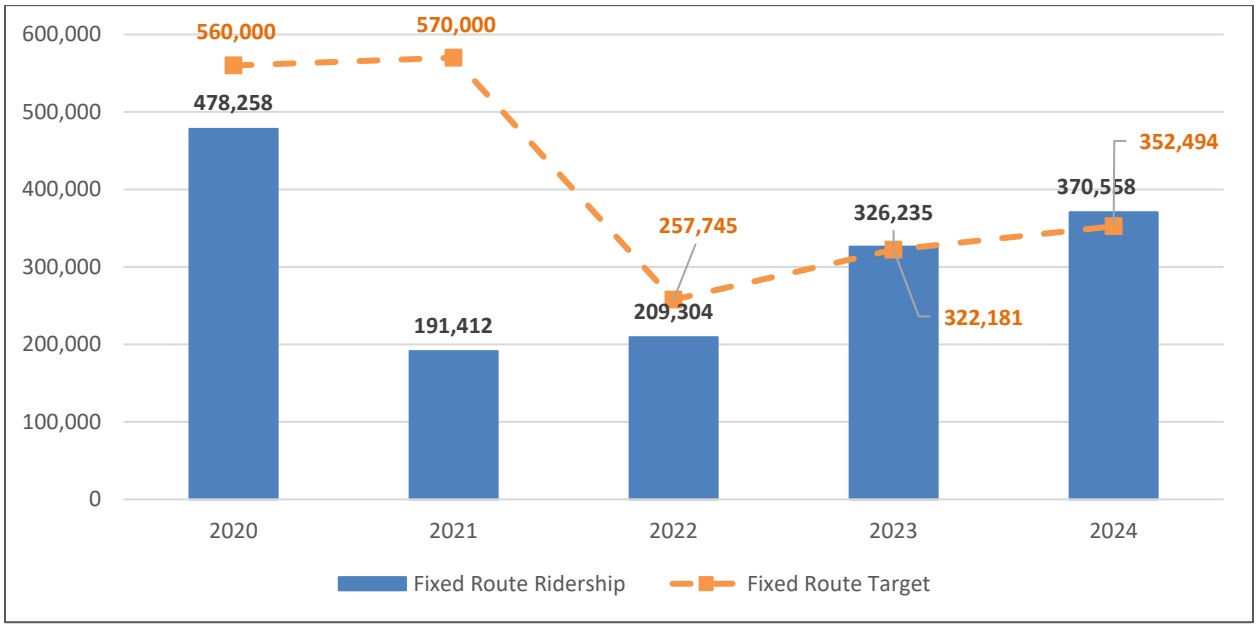


Source: MassDOT

4.2.1 Fixed Route Ridership

MWRTA's fixed route ridership closely resembles the overall system ridership trends, as illustrated in Figure 9. Ridership decreased between FY 2020 and FY 2021 by more than half. Since then, MWRTA has steadily gained riders year by year, reaching over 77 percent of FY 2020 levels in FY 2024.

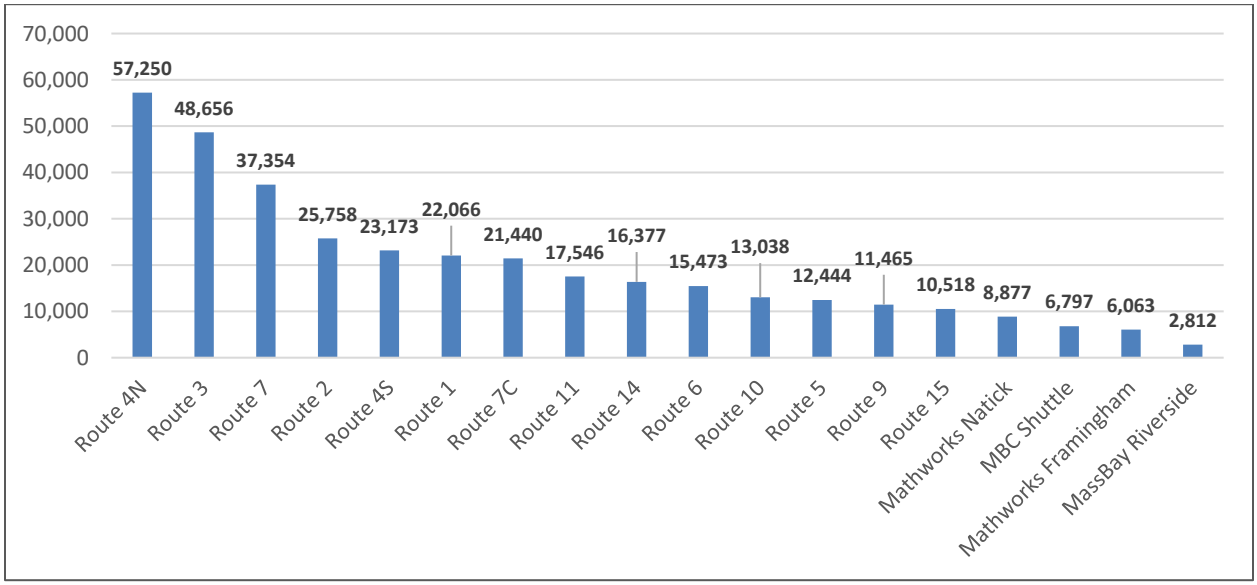
Figure 9. Annual Fixed Route Ridership (FY 2020-FY 2024)



Source: MassDOT

Figure 10 breaks down MWRTA's fixed route ridership for FY 2024 by route. Route 4N, connecting Golden Triangle retail, MetroWest Medical Center, and the Framingham MBTA Commuter Rail Station, is MWRTA's strongest performing route by ridership. Routes 3 and 7 are also popular routes, with the former exceeding 48,000 trips and the latter exceeding 37,000 trips in FY 2024.

Figure 10. Annual Ridership by Fixed Route (FY 2024)

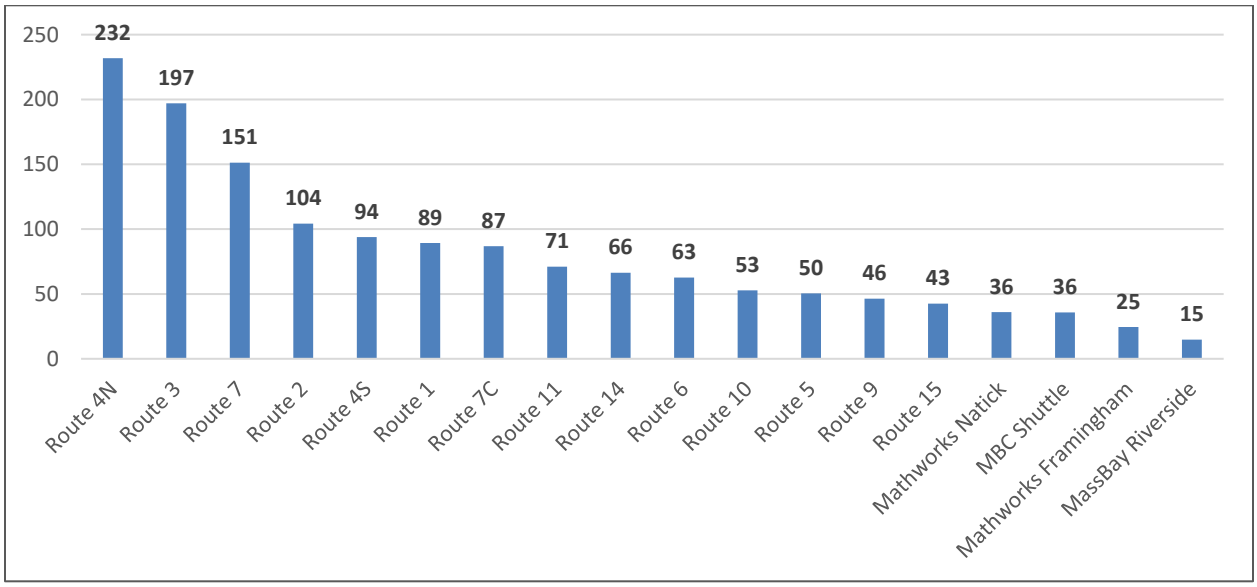


Source: MWRTA

Figure 11 through Figure 13 highlight annual average weekday, Saturday, and Sunday ridership, respectively, as applicable. Routes 6, 10, 15, the MBC and MassBay Riverside Shuttles, and both MathWorks shuttles only operate during weekdays and are not included in Figure 12 and Figure 13. Route 4N and Route 3 exhibit the highest ridership on weekdays and Saturdays, while Route 3 has the highest ridership of all routes operating on Sundays. Routes 3 and 7 have relatively lower ridership shares on Saturdays and Sundays than during weekdays.

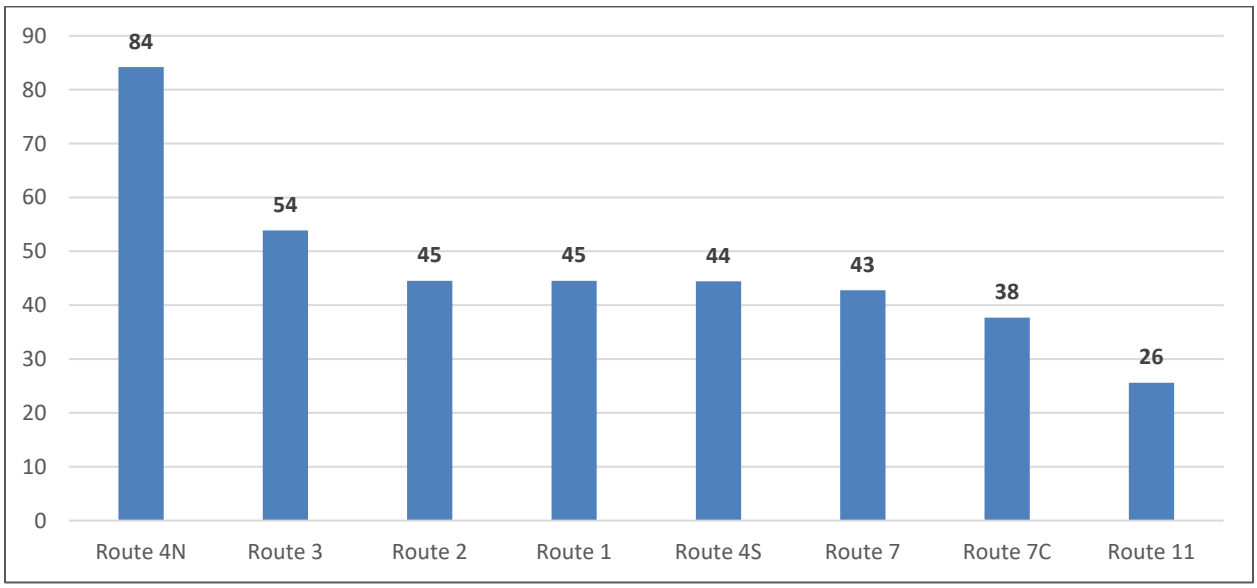
This may be a result of low weekend frequencies (Route 7) or reduced demand from locations with high weekday trips such as high schools (Route 3).

Figure 11. Annual Weekday Ridership by Fixed Route (FY 2024)



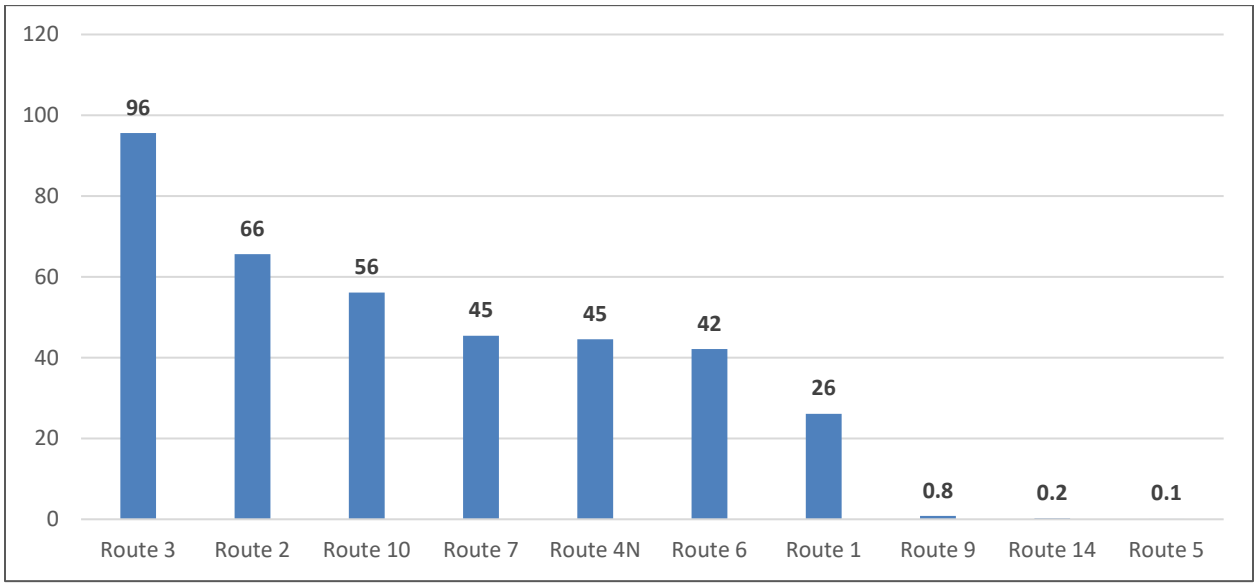
Source: MWRTA

Figure 12. Annual Saturday Ridership by Fixed Route (FY 2024)



Source: MWRTA

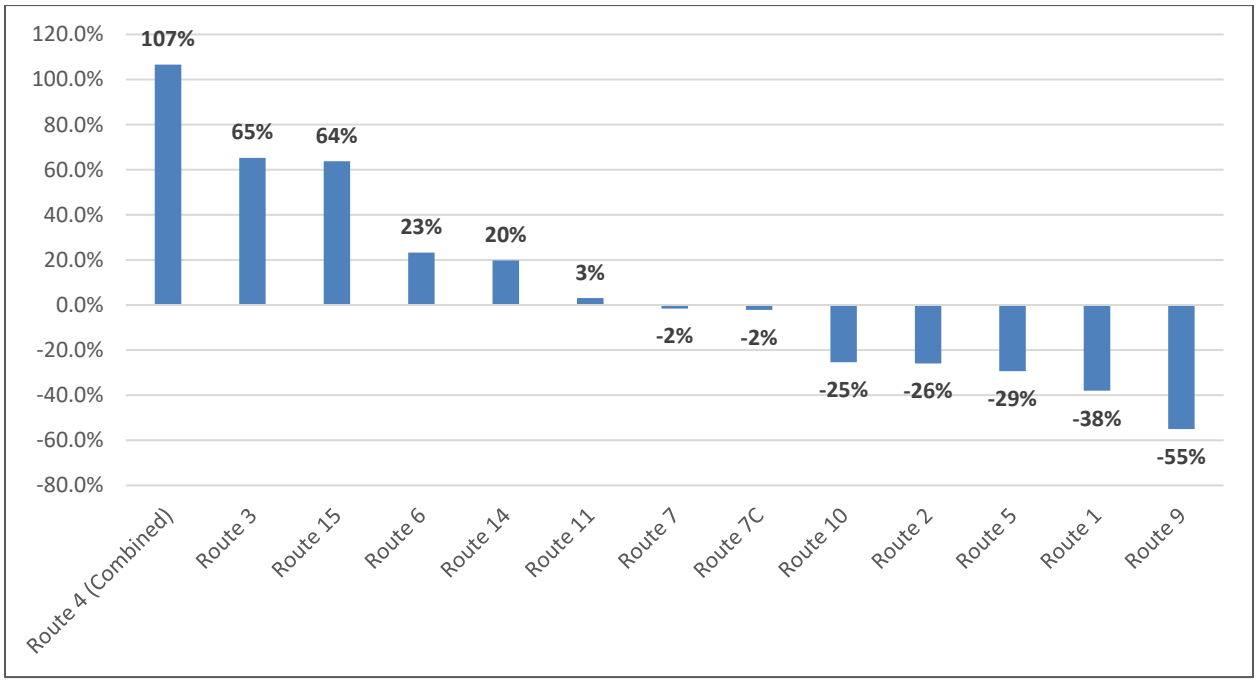
Figure 13. Annual Sunday Ridership by Fixed Route (FY 2024)



Source: MWRTA

Several routes have seen significant ridership changes since FY 2019. Figure 14 compares FY 2024 and FY 2019 service, illustrating the annual ridership gains or losses by route. Note that ridership for Routes 4N and 4S was combined in a similar manner as FY 2019 for direct comparison. Three routes have seen at least a 50 percent increase in ridership compared with FY 2019. Since that time, MWRTA has introduced Sunday service, increased span of service throughout the week, and increased frequencies. Routes 4N and 4S, for instance, expanded service times to after 10 PM on weekdays and now operate on Sundays. Other routes, such as Routes 3 and 15, have had similar service improvements. Following the rise of hybrid work policies, Route 9, which serves the Staples headquarters and nearby office parks at its western termini, had a reduction in annual ridership.

Figure 14. Annual Ridership Percent Change from FY 2019 to FY 2024 by Fixed Route



Source: MWRTA

4.2.2 Fixed Route Operations

MWRTA's operating statistics for fixed routes in FY 2024 are broken down by route in Table 13. As identified previously, Routes 4N, 3, and 7 were the highest ridership routes. When considering passengers per hour and passengers per mile metrics, Route 3 stands out as the highest performing route by a significant margin. Route 4N and the MathWorks Natick Shuttle are the next highest performing routes based on both passenger trips per hour and per mile, with Route 4N surpassing the commuter shuttle in trips per hour and vice versa for trips per mile. Of the regular fixed routes, Routes 15, 9, and 5 had the lowest overall ridership in FY 2024. Those that performed the lowest in passenger trips per hour were Routes 9, 1, and 11, and those that performed the lowest in passenger trips per mile were Routes 5, 6, and 1.

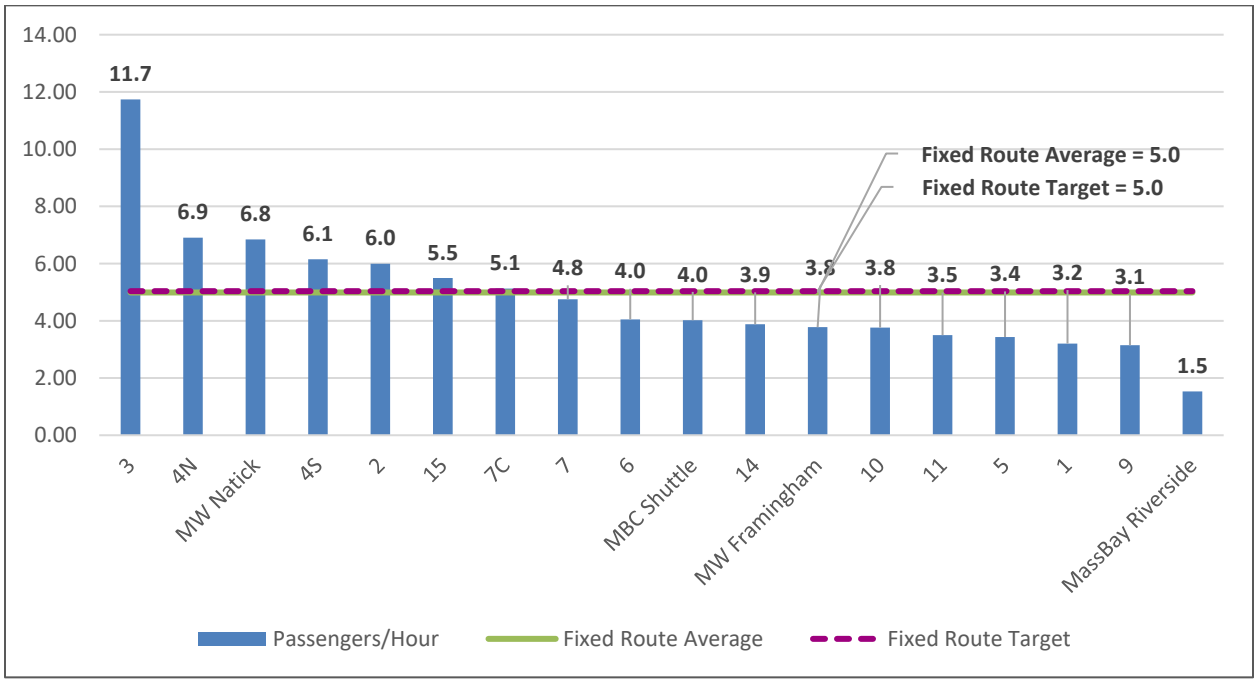
Table 13. Fixed Route Operating Statistics by Route (FY 2024)

Route	Ridership	Revenue Hours	Passenger Trips/Hour	Revenue Miles	Passenger Trips/Mile
1	22,066	6,886	3.20	105,635	0.21
2	25,758	4,297	5.99	52,559	0.49
3	48,656	4,146	11.74	53,463	0.91
4N	57,250	8,291	6.91	110,274	0.52
4S	23,173	3,768	6.15	81,441	0.28
5	12,444	3,623	3.43	79,634	0.16
6	15,473	3,821	4.05	79,281	0.20
7	37,354	7,862	4.75	113,941	0.33
7C	21,440	4,184	5.12	70,719	0.30
9	11,465	3,643	3.15	45,821	0.25
10	13,038	3,465	3.76	55,087	0.24
11	17,546	5,014	3.50	55,069	0.32
14	16,377	4,223	3.88	53,148	0.31
15	10,518	1,913	5.50	29,204	0.36
MBC Shuttle	6,797	1,690	4.02	26,488	0.26
MassBay Riverside	2,812	1,837	1.53	16,154	0.17
MathWorks Natick Shuttle	8,877	1,297	6.84	11,527	0.77
MathWorks Framingham Shuttle	6,063	1,605	3.78	17,715	0.34

Source: MWRTA
Note: Sums in this table may not equal FY 2024 totals in Table 6 due to variations in data provided by MWRTA versus MassDOT sources, as well as variations between reported total ridership, vehicle revenue hours, and vehicle revenue miles versus the sums of route-level ridership, vehicle revenue hours, and vehicle revenue miles values.

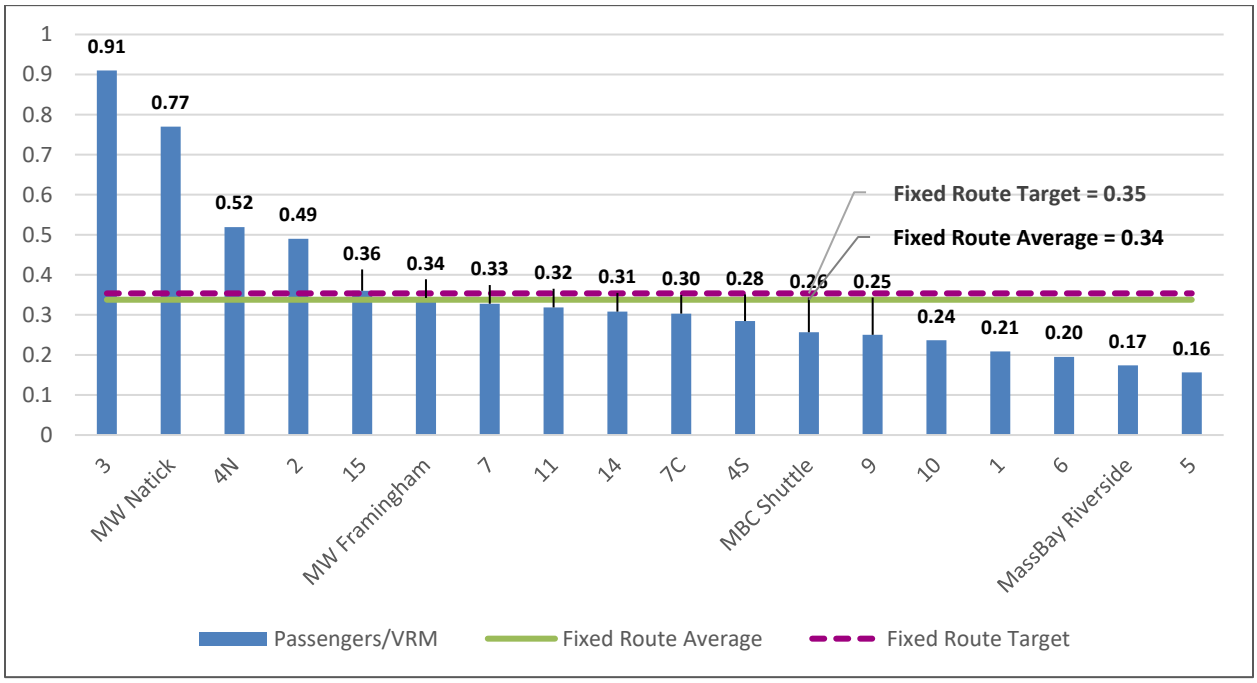
As discussed previously, MWRTA's fixed route ridership has grown year by year since FY 2021. At the same time, revenue hours and miles have remained somewhat steady, leading to increasing ridership per hour or per mile. FY 2024 ridership per revenue hour by route is illustrated in Figure 15, while FY 2024 ridership per vehicle revenue miles is shown in Figure 16. MWRTA's system average for fixed routes is 5 passengers per hour and 0.34 passengers per mile, both of which meet or nearly meet MWRTA's targets. About half of the routes met or exceeded the targets for both metrics, with Routes 2, 3, 4N, and the MathWorks Natick Shuttle within the top five routes for both. Each of these serves the Blandin Hub, downtown Framingham, and relatively densely populated neighborhoods.

Figure 15. Passengers per Revenue Hour by Fixed Route (FY 2024)



Source: MWRTA

Figure 16. Passengers per Vehicle Revenue Mile by Fixed Route (FY 2024)



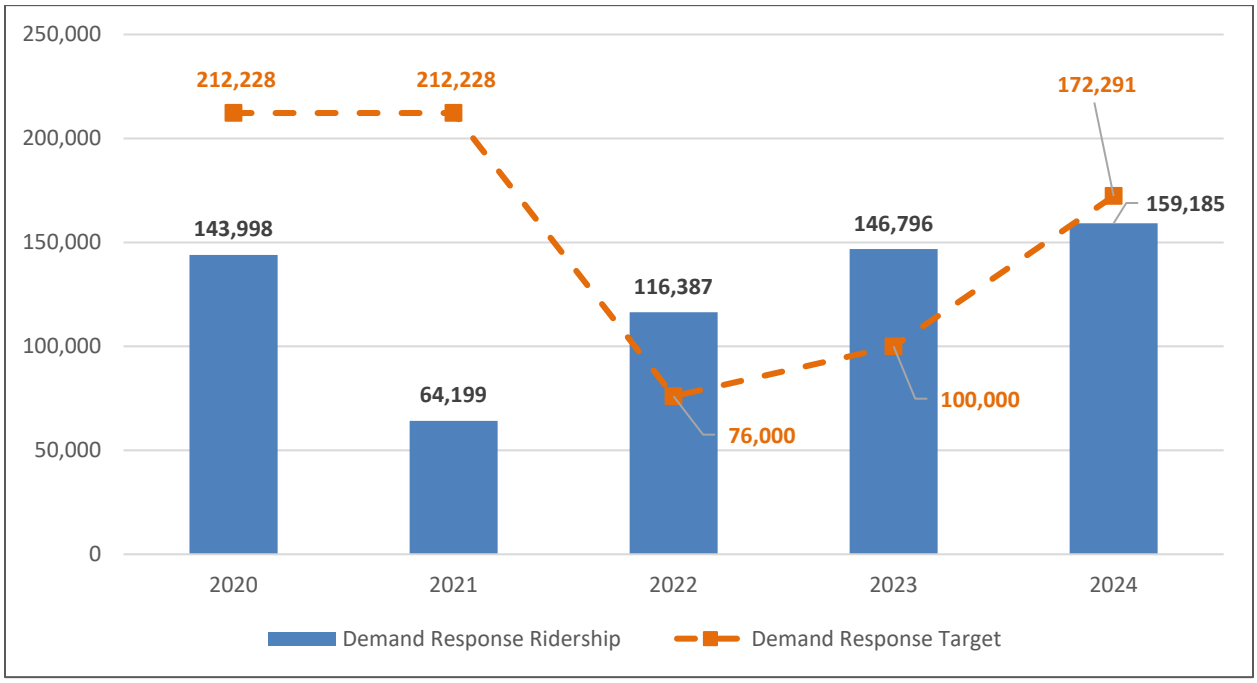
Source: MWRTA

4.2.3 Demand Response Ridership and Operations

MWRTA's demand response ridership, inclusive of complementary ADA paratransit, non-ADA demand response, and Catch Connect on-demand services, represents 30 percent of the overall system ridership.

As with its fixed route service, MWRTA's demand response operations have been steadily rising between FY 2022 and FY 2024, though ridership during the COVID-19 pandemic in FY 2021 led to a noticeable decrease in riders from the previous year. Figure 17 illustrates this, with demand response ridership reaching nearly 160,000 trips in FY 2024.

Figure 17. Annual Demand Response Ridership (FY 2020-FY 2024)



Source: MassDOT

MWRTA's demand response service tracks the number of denied trips, missed trips, no-shows, and late cancellations. MWRTA uses the following definitions for each of these cases:

- Denied trips: When a trip is not booked or declined.
- Missed trips: When the vehicle arrives outside of the pickup window and the customer declines the trip.
- No-show: When the vehicle arrives within the time window and the passenger is not present within 5 minutes.
- Late cancellation: A cancellation placed within 1 hour of the scheduled pick-up window for ADA trips and within 3 hours of the scheduled pick-up window for Dial-A-Ride trips.

MWRTA's annual demand response trip metrics between FY 2020 and FY 2024 are broken down in Table 14. The average annual number of trips per demand response customer has increased year to year, with customers in FY 2024 each taking an average of over 61 demand response trips in a year. The proportions of no-shows and late cancellations peaked in FY 2022 and have decreased annually since, and the proportion of missed trips increased to a period high of 0.05 percent in FY 2024.

Table 14. Demand Response Trip Metrics (FY 2020-FY 2024)

Metric	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024
Average Trips/Passenger	52.00	52.27	57.87	60.70	61.26
% Denied Trips	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
% Missed Trips	0.03%	0.01%	0.04%	0.04%	0.05%
% No-show	1.97%	1.87%	2.25%	2.12%	1.99%

Metric	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024
% Late Cancellation	2.47%	2.52%	3.24%	3.02%	2.83%

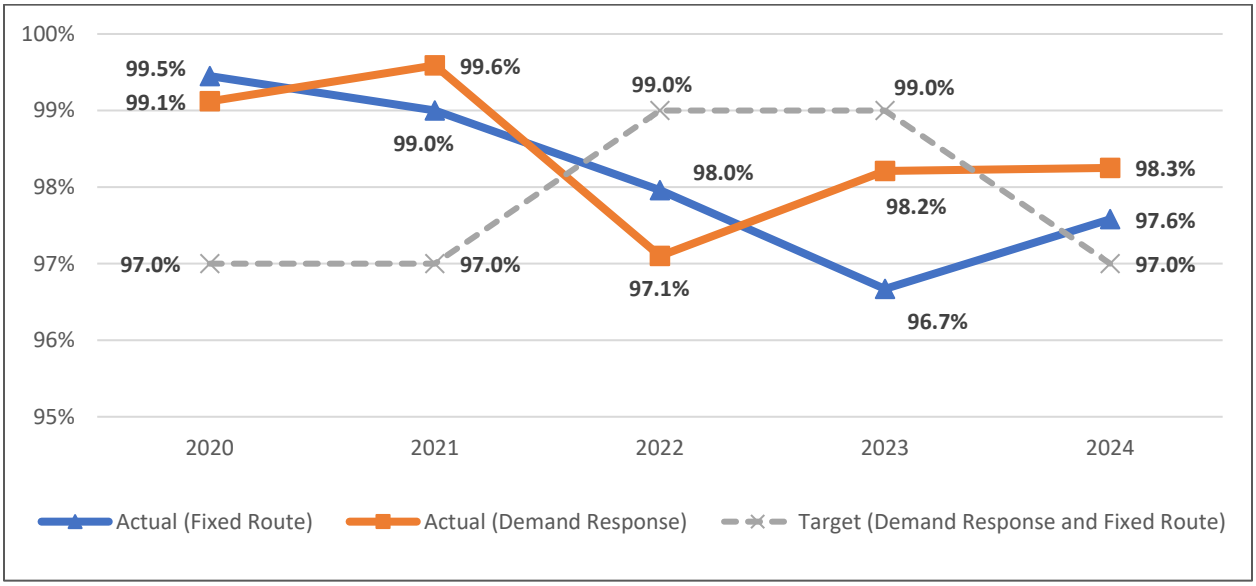
Source: MWRTA

4.2.4 On-Time Performance

MWRTA tracks on-time performance annually by mode (Figure 18). On-time for fixed route service is defined by MWRTA as vehicles leaving the first time point of the first trip between 2 minutes before or 5 minutes after the posted time. Demand response vehicles are considered on time if they arrive within 15 minutes of the promised pick-up window.

MWRTA met or exceeded MassDOT's fixed route on-time performance targets in FY 2020 (99.5 percent), FY 2021 (99.0 percent), and FY 2024 (97.6 percent). FY 2022 and FY 2023 were below the target on-time performance by 1.0 percent and 2.3 percent, respectively. Likewise, demand response on-time performance was above the established targets for FY 2020 (99.1 percent), FY 2021 (99.6 percent), and FY 2024 (98.3 percent) and also narrowly missed the targets in FY 2022 and FY 2023.

Figure 18. On-Time Performance by Mode (FY 2020-FY 2024)

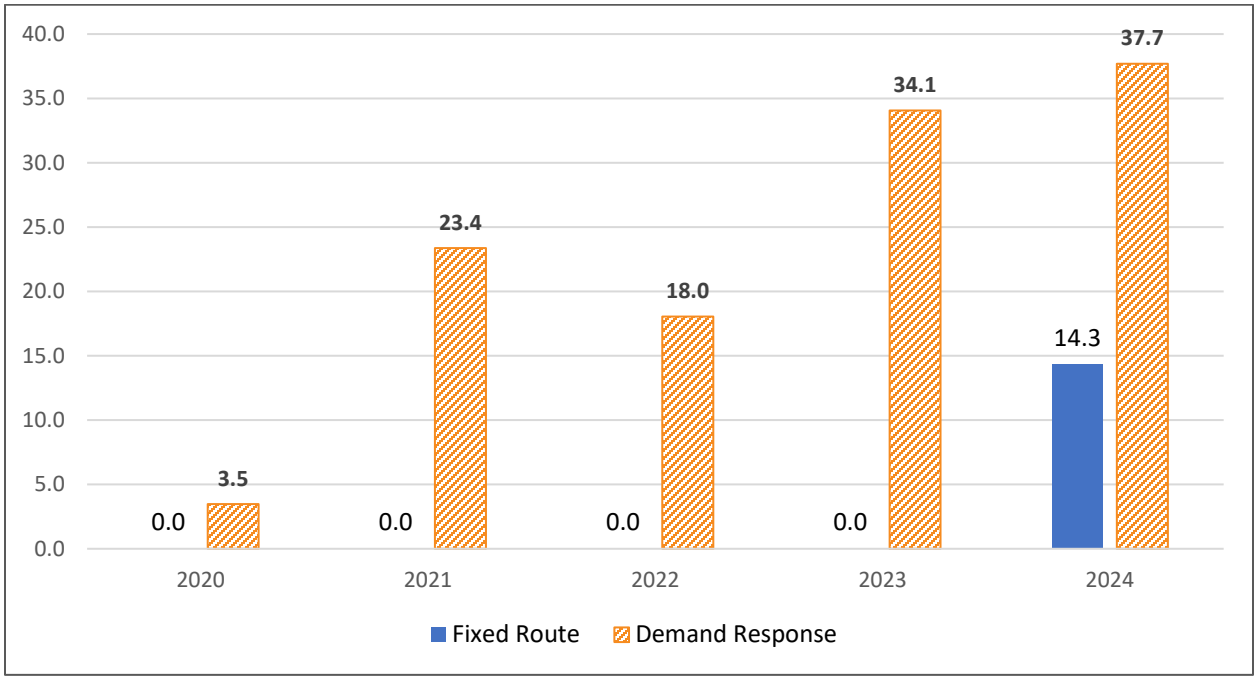


Source: MassDOT

4.2.5 Customer Service

Between FY 2020 and FY 2024, MWRTA recorded 53 valid customer complaints for fixed route service and 151 for demand response. MWRTA normalizes the number of complaints for every 100,000 passenger trips to account for fluctuating ridership each year (Figure 19). There was a peak in the rate of valid complaints (14.3) for fixed route services in FY 2024, although MWRTA did not note any valid complaints in prior years. FY 2024 had the highest rate (37.7) of valid complaints for demand response, which saw a similar rate (34.1) in FY 2024.

Figure 19. Number of Valid Complaints per 100,000 Passenger Trips by Mode (FY 2020-FY 2024)



Source: MWRTA

4.3 Regional Connections and Partnerships

MWRTA provides fixed route and commuter shuttle connections to the MBTA system at the Green Line Woodland "T" Station (Route 1), Green Line Riverside "T" Station (MassBay Riverside Shuttle), and Framingham/Worcester Line that travels between Boston South Station to Worcester Union Station via the following stations:

- Natick Center (Routes 10, 11, Mathworks Natick Shuttle, Mathworks Framingham Shuttle)
- West Natick (Routes 10, 11, Mathworks Natick Shuttle)
- Framingham (Routes 2, 3, 4N, 4S, 5, 6, 7, 9)
- Ashland (Route 5)
- Southborough (495 Connector)

The 495 Connector also provides transfers to MBTA's Fitchburg Line at South Acton and to the Franklin/Foxboro Line at Forge Park/495.

Additionally, riders can access the Greyhound intercity bus from downtown Framingham near the MBTA station, accessible to Routes 2, 3, 4N, 4S, 5, 6, 7, 9. This station also serves Amtrak's *Lake Shore Limited*, which travels from Chicago to New York and Boston. Riders can also access Logan Express in Framingham and the Flixbus and Peter Pan service at Shopper's World in Framingham.

MWRTA partners with several educational facilities and employment centers to provide more direct service for students, staff, and other commuting employees. Two shuttles connect MBTA stations in Natick, residential areas, and both MathWorks' Lakeside and Apple Hill campuses. MWRTA also provides enhanced service to MassBay Community College's Framingham, Wellesley, and Riverside campuses.

FSU has contracted with MWRTA for more than a decade to provide vehicles, maintenance, and training for the FSU transit system. FSU provides student drivers, and FSU Transportation Services maintains direct oversight of operations.

MWRTA service also connects to the MBTA, Montachusett Regional Transit Authority (MART), and Greater Attleboro Taunton Regional Transit Authority (GATRA).

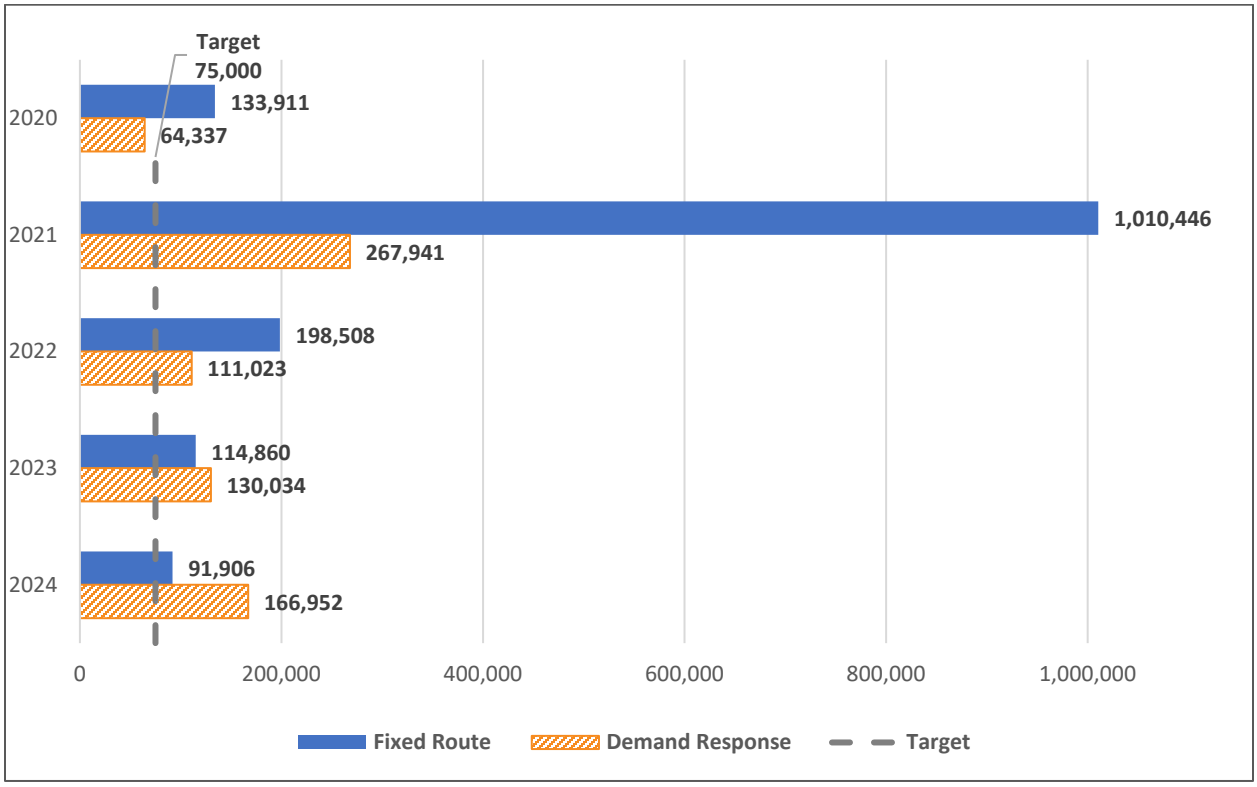
4.4 Asset Management

MWRTA manages transit operations out of its facility in Framingham and operates dedicated fleets for its various services, with a total of 109 active revenue vehicles. This section highlights the data MWRTA tracks and the targets it sets related to the condition, maintenance, and performance of its assets, as well as any implemented or planned technology upgrades to support operations.

4.4.1 Maintenance

MWRTA records the mean miles traveled between major mechanical failures of vehicles in service (Figure 20). Excluding FY 2021, MWRTA averaged just over 135,000 miles between failures, though this number has steadily decreased year to year since FY 2021. Only one major mechanical failure was recorded in FY 2021, resulting in a historically high mean number of miles between failures in that year. Major mechanical failures on demand response vehicles typically occurred at similar frequencies in each year, with a period average of one failure every 177,377 miles, and the rate increasing since FY 2022. MWRTA met the target 75,000 mean miles between major mechanical failures only in FY 2020 for demand response service.

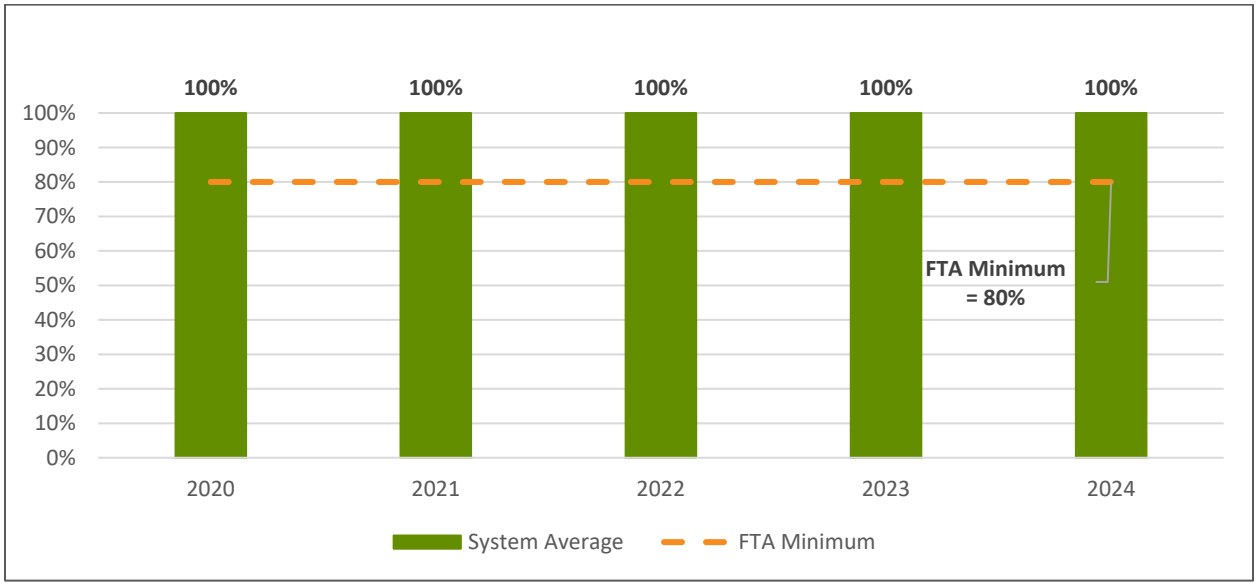
Figure 20. Mean Number of Miles Between Major Mechanical Failures by Service Type (FY 2020-FY 2024)



Source: MWRTA

The FTA standard for preventive maintenance is that revenue vehicles undergo regular maintenance service according to a schedule based on vehicle miles. The minimum percentage of preventive maintenance completed on time is 80 percent, meaning 80 percent of vehicles have received preventive maintenance service within the scheduled mileage. In the FY 2020 to FY 2024 period, MWRTA continued to exceed this minimum for all modes, reporting 100 percent completion in each year since FY 2020 (Figure 21).

Figure 21. Preventive Maintenance On-Time Service, All Modes (FY 2020-FY 2024)



Source: MassDOT

4.4.2 Vehicles

As of the end of FY 2024, MWRTA's fleet consisted of 109 active revenue vehicles, with cutaway buses making up the majority of its rolling stock (Table 15). Per the vehicle replacement standards defined in MWRTA's Transit Asset Management (TAM) Plan, 27 percent of the agency's cutaway buses, 0 percent of vans, and 100 percent of automobiles are at or past their useful life benchmark. In FY 2024, MWRTA introduced electric vehicle vans as a pilot on its Catch Connect service. Also in FY 2024, MWRTA procured its first heavy-duty buses, with nine CNG Gillig vehicles deployed in FY 2025. The agency intends to transition to a larger share of heavy-duty vehicles with its capital replacement and expansion planning to meet current and anticipated growing passenger demand.

MWRTA operates 106 revenue vehicles in maximum service—42 for fixed and 64 for demand response. The spare ratio for MWRTA's fixed route service is 4.8 percent and the spare ratio for demand response service is 10.9 percent. The spare ratios are calculated based on the FTA definition, where spare ratio is equivalent to the difference between vehicles available in maximum service and vehicles operated in maximum service, divided by vehicles operated in maximum service. MWRTA has 44 vehicles available in maximum service for fixed route service and 71 vehicles available in maximum service for demand response service, for a total of 115 vehicles available in maximum service. Vehicles available in maximum service refers to the maximum number of revenue vehicles at any given point in the reporting year, while active vehicles refer to the vehicles available for service on the last day of the fiscal year.

Table 15. Vehicle Inventory (FY 2024)

Vehicle Type	Total Number	Average Age (years)	Average Mileage	Useful Life Benchmark (years)	Percentage at or past Useful Life Benchmark	Target Maximum Percentage at or past Useful Life Benchmark
Cutaway Bus	101	6	84,591	7	27%	21%
Van	6	4	65,432	7	0%	0%
Automobile	2	10	59,748	5	100%	100%
Truck or other rubber tire vehicle (non-revenue)	10	N/A	N/A	N/A	41%	50%

Source: MWRTA, NTD
N/A = Not Applicable

4.4.3 Facilities

MWRTA's administrative offices, main hub, and maintenance facility are co-located at the Blandin Hub at 15 Blandin Avenue in Framingham (Table 16). MWRTA's TAM Plan identified a Transit Economic Requirements Model (TERM) Scale condition rating of 4 for this facility, which means the building is in a state of good repair. This standard of reporting is required by FTA.

This facility supports MWRTA's administration (6.5 full-time equivalent [FTE]), customer service (2 FTE), operations (10.5 FTE), and maintenance (12 FTE) departments. Bus operations were supported by a contract with Kiessling Transit through the end of FY 2025. In FY 2025, MWRTA selected a new vendor, Keolis Transit Services, LLC, to assume operations starting in FY 2026.

Table 16. Facilities (FY 2024)

Facility Name	Type	Location	Landowner the Facility is on	Direct Capital Responsibility	TERM Rating
Blandin Hub	Administrative Office / Sales Office, Bus Transfer Station, Maintenance Facility	15 Blandin Avenue, Framingham, MA 01702	MWRTA	Yes	4

Source: MWRTA

4.4.4 Technology

MWRTA maintains the following IT assets:

- Website trip planner with real-time bus tracking
- Trapeze Street computer-aided dispatch (CAD)/automatic vehicle location (AVL) and mobile data terminals
- Automatic passenger counters (APCs) by UTA

- Vehicles equipped with Vivotek, Inc. and Seon on-board cameras
- In-house automated next-stop announcement system
- BearCom, Inc. radio systems
- Lytx DriveCam vehicle-mounted collision warning/tracking system
- CharlieCard smart card payment system
- Axis Communications facility video systems
- TripSpark Technologies and StrateGen Systems, Inc. scheduling and dispatching software
- Service alert system
- In-house software to track parts and maintenance
- In-house software to monitor accidents and incidents
- QuickBooks accounting software
- In-house mobile payment system
- Remix planning software by Via Transportation, Inc.

The Catch Connect MicroTransit service is accessed through MWRTA's Catch App, a mobile application developed in-house that is similar to point-to-point transportation network company interfaces. The app consolidated fare and pass purchases when fares were previously collected, and it continues to provide contact information for customer service, schedules, fleet tracking, and alerts. Riders can also schedule trips through the app. MWRTA maintains this system and has made it available to other RTAs to customize for use in their service areas.

4.5 Policies and Procedures

4.5.1 Rider Policies and Procedures

MWRTA provides the policies and procedures in Table 17 to dictate rider behavior. These are outlined on MWRTA's website under the policies menu.„ Failure to comply with the Code of Conduct and Rules for Riding the Bus Policy may result in disciplinary action up to and including suspension and/or termination of rider privileges.

Table 17. MWRTA Policies and Procedures

Policy	Description
Rules for Riding the Bus	• Riders must follow the bus driver's instructions. • Be courteous and respectful to the passengers and the bus driver at all times. • All passengers are required to pay the appropriate fare. • Children under the age of 12 must be accompanied by an adult at all times. The adult will be held responsible for the child's actions. • Any child weighing less than 40 lbs., brought on board, must be held securely and remain in the lap of the accompanying adult (unless secured in a child safety seat). • Mobility devices (strollers, walkers, wheel chairs, scooters, shopping carts, luggage, etc.) must be collapsed (if applicable), placed in the back of the bus and secured by the driver so as to not block the aisle. • No lewd or lascivious behavior. • No consumption of food or drink of any kind. Open containers of alcohol are strictly prohibited. • No smoking. • No profanity, fighting, hazing, boisterous behavior or harassment toward the bus driver or fellow passengers. • Electronic music devices that could disturb the bus driver or other passengers, such as video games, radios, CD or MP3 players must be used with headphones. • Talking on cellphones must be kept to a minimum. Riders who must use his/her cellphone to make or receive a call on the bus may do so quietly to avoid disruption to other passengers and particularly the bus driver. • Do not leave any trash on the bus. • By law, all riders must remain behind the yellow safety line and cannot block exits while the bus is in service. • No vandalism. In the case of vandalism by a minor, parents will be held financially liable. • Windows should only be opened at the discretion of the bus driver. • Bulky items which might interfere with the operation of the bus or with the movement or comfort of other passengers are prohibited. No items may be left in the aisle at any time. • Shirt and shoes are required while riding on the bus. • Hazardous materials (i.e. containers of fuel, batteries, etc.) are not permitted on bus.
Reasonable Accommodation Policy	• Reasonable accommodations for passengers who request them may be applied unless MWRTA demonstrates that the utilization of the modification would fundamentally alter the nature of the service, program, or activity.

Policy	Description
Service Animal Policy	• Persons with disabilities who use service animals may board with the service animals regardless of fare category. • Operators may ask any passenger if their animal is a service animal and/or if the animal assists them with their disability, but cannot require certification or identification for service animals. Passengers using service animals must keep them under their control at all times while on an MWRTA vehicle. • The animals must not pose a threat to the driver or other passengers. Failure to do so may result in the passenger not being permitted to include their animal on a trip, unless the passenger resolves the issue to the satisfaction of the MWRTA.
Privacy Policy	• MWRTA does NOT sell, trade, or rent personal information to others. Information MWRTA collects is to improve services and to address concerns of commuters. The only time we would release personal information outside the provisions of MWRTA's privacy policy is if its concluded, in good faith, that it is necessary to comply with legal requirements, to enforce our rights or to protect https://www.mwrta.com/, and yourself
MWRTA Catch App Privacy Policy	• This privacy policy governs the use of the software application MWRTA Catch ("Application") for mobile devices that was created by MWRTA. The Application is a public transportation vehicle tracking and information application, along with allowing customers to book demand based trips and provide feedback on our services. • The policy includes information about user provided information, automactialy collected information, third-party usage, opt-out rights, data retention, access for children, security, user consent, and changes to the policy.
Title VI Program	• MWRTA complies with the Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and an adopted a Title VI document to indicate MWRTA's adherence to non-discrimination policies in its operation.

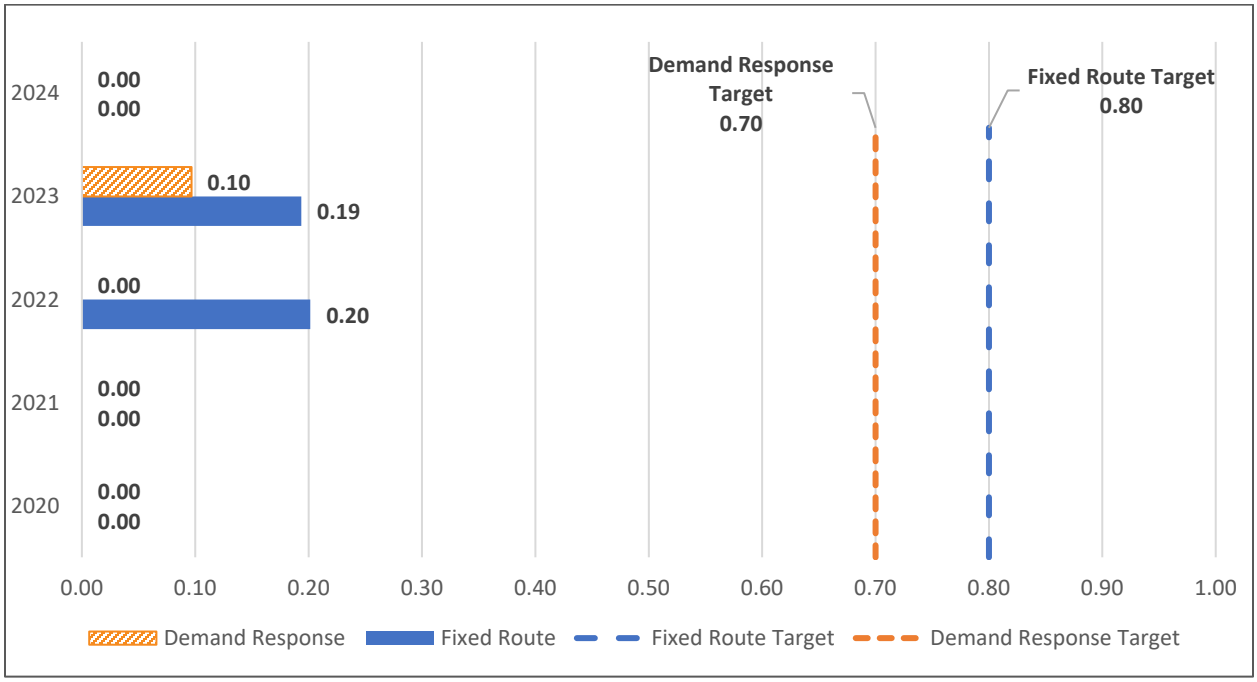
In addition, MWRTA complies with Massachusetts Public Records Law, federal Title VI guidelines, and the ADA regarding paratransit eligibility and fares. These policies can be found on MWRTA's website (https://mwrta.com/).

4.5.2 Safety and Security

MWRTA sets target limits for safety events per 100,000 miles for both demand response and fixed route services. A safety event is defined by FTA as "all safety events meeting an NTD major event threshold (events reported on the S&S-40 form)" (FTA 2020). MWRTA targets 0.7 safety events per 100,000 miles for demand response and a limit of 0.8 safety events per 100,000 miles for fixed route as outlined by the MWRTA Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan (PTASP) (Figure 22).

The frequency of safety events for fixed route has remained low, with only FY 2022 and FY 2023 having recorded safety events (two each year). In all years, MWRTA remained below the target limit for fixed route safety events (0.8 per 100,000 miles). Likewise, demand response has consistently remained at no recorded events except FY 2023, with one record (0.1 events per 100,000 vehicle revenue miles), well below the target maximum of 0.7 events per 100,000 miles.

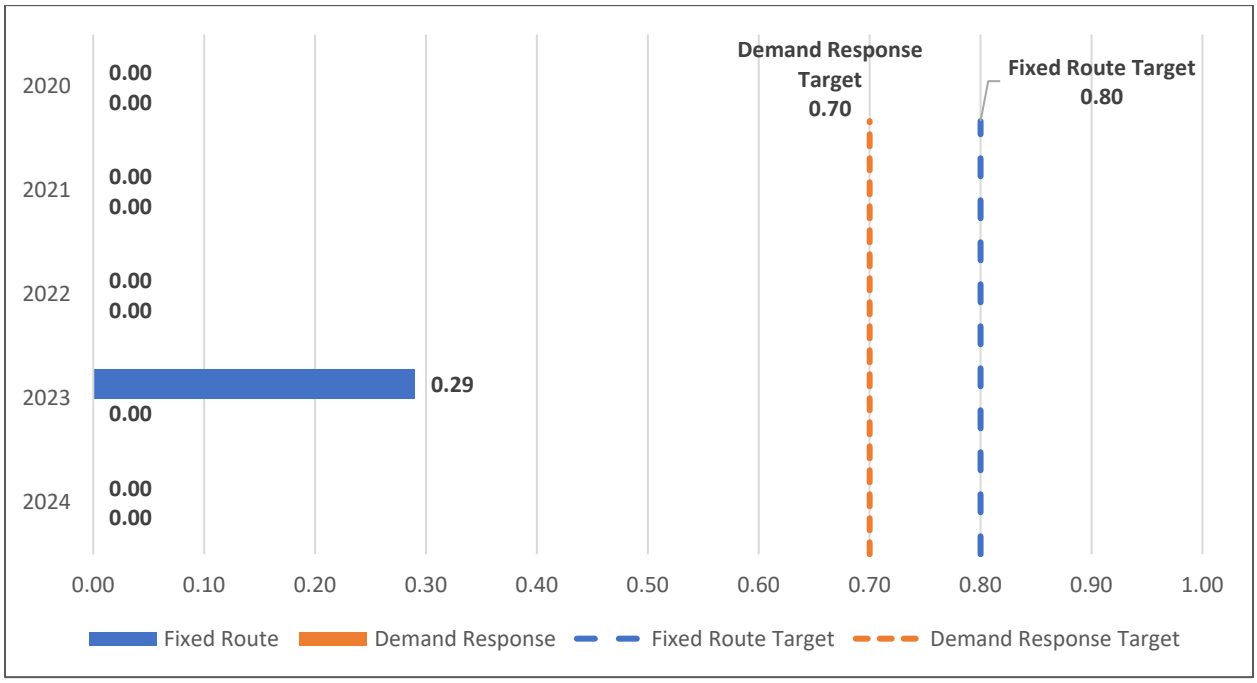
Figure 22. Number of Safey Events by Mode per 100,000 Miles (FY 2020-FY 2024)



Source: MassDOT

MWRTA has a target of zero fatalities per 100,000 miles for both demand response and fixed route, a target that it has been met each year in the last five years. MWRTA also aims to limit injuries to 0.7 per 100,000 miles on demand response services, and 0.8 injuries per 100,000 miles on fixed route services (Figure 23). Injuries occurring on fixed routes have occurred once in the last five fiscal years (FY 2023), well below the target of 0.8 per 100,000 miles. No injuries were recorded on demand response in the last five years.

Figure 23. Number of Injuries by Mode per 100,000 Miles (FY 2020-FY 2024)



Source: MassDOT

4.6 Peer Agency Analysis

A peer agency analysis assesses transit agency peers relative to MWRTA that operate in a similar service environment. Although each transit system is unique, the general similarities and differences provide useful insight into comparative transit statistics. Peers were chosen based on the American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates (2019-2023) and the Integrated National Transit Database (NTD). The analysis reflects similarities in service area size, service area population density, as well as transit operating characteristics including ridership, operating budget, revenue hours and revenue miles, and farebox revenue.

Table 18 highlights demographic data for the five peer agencies in comparison to MWRTA. MWRTA has the third lowest service area population and the second lowest population density, but MWRTA's population growth is second highest compared to the other systems. MWRTA's poverty rate is second lowest.

Table 18. Peer Agency Demographics (FY 2023)

System	Town	State	Service Area Population	Population Density (per square mile)	Population Growth Rate	Percent Poverty
Jefferson Parish Transit	Gretna	LA	440,781	4,689	2.3%	17.0%
Loudoun County Transit	Leesburg	VA	373,694	719	0.0%	5.0%
Greater Bridgeport Transit	Bridgeport	CT	362,408	3,553	2.4%	8.9%
County of Lackawanna Transit System	Scranton	PA	214,437	1,479	0.0%	15.8%
Ride Gwinnett	Lawrenceville	GA	1,055,240	5,025	14.7%	10.7%
Franklin Regional Transit Authority	Greenfield	MA	102,811 [a]	84	−1.0%	9.1%
Peer Average	-	-	*419,580*	*2,594*	*3.1%*	*11.0%*
MetroWest Regional Transit Authority	Framingham	MA	355,287	811	9.6%	7.9%

Source: NTD (2023) and US Census Bureau

[a] Population taken from the US Census Bureau ACS (2018-2023) for Franklin County.

The operating data by peer are shown in Table 19. MWRTA's annual ridership is second lowest, and the proportion of passenger trips operated for demand response is second highest among the peer systems. Meanwhile, MWRTA's operated revenue miles ranks third lowest but just above the peer average of 1,914,781 miles. Revenue hours are the fourth highest and above the peer average of 131,234 hours. MWRTA has the second lowest operating budget compared to the peer systems but had the second lowest farebox revenue among its peers.

Table 19. Peer Agency Service Metrics (FY 2023)

System	Ridership (Unlinked Passenger Trips)	Percentage of Passenger Trips Demand Response	Operating Budget	Revenue Miles Operated	Revenue Hours Operated	Farebox Revenue
Jefferson Parish Transit	1,421,253	4.3%	$21,178,703	2,019,548	152,949	$2,127,779
Loudoun County Transit	526,819	2.8%	$18,301,044	2,090,842	108,246	$1,897,282
Greater Bridgeport Transit	5,266,649	1.3%	$26,254,142	2,188,077	195,374	$1,158,124
County of Lackawanna Transit System	798,042	14.6%	$14,882,599	1,870,066	139,293	$1,172,776
Ride Gwinnett	1,177,163	2.5%	$24,279,961	2,621,613	156,634	$2,271,145
Franklin Regional Transit Authority	134,445	33.6%	$4,679,001[a]	698,539	34,905	$0[b]
Peer Average	*1,554,062*	*9.9%*	*$18,262,575*	*1,914,781*	*131,234*	*$1,437,851*
MetroWest Regional Transit Authority	**479,776**	**31.6%**	**$12,195,301**	**2,000,348**	**142,819**	**$238,457**

Source: NTD (2023)

[a] Operating budget was provided by Franklin Regional Transit Authority for FY 2024.

[b] Farebox revenue was provided by Franklin Regional Transit Authority for FY 2024.

Table 20 highlights how MWRTA compares with its five peer agencies when considering metrics related to ridership, operating costs, subsidies, and farebox recovery. MWRTA is below its peer average in terms of passengers transported per revenue mile and revenue hour. However, its operating cost per revenue hour is the lowest. MWRTA has a higher-than-average operating cost per passenger and the third highest subsidy per passenger. Its farebox recovery is low due to the transition to fare-free operations supported through recent increases in state funding.

Table 20. Peer Agency Performance Metrics (FY 2023)

System	Passengers / Revenue Mile	Passengers / Revenue Hour	Cost/ Revenue Hour	Cost/ Passenger	Subsidy/ Passenger	Farebox Recovery
Jefferson Parish Transit	0.70	9.3	$138.5	$14.90	$13.40	10%
Loudoun County Transit	0.25	4.9	$169.07	$34.74	$31.14	10%
Greater Bridgeport Transit	2.41	27.0	$134.40	$4.98	$4.77	4%
County of Lackawanna Transit System	0.43	5.7	$106.84	$18.64	$17.17	8%
Ride Gwinnett	0.45	7.5	$155.01	$20.63	$18.70	9%
Franklin Regional Transit Authority	0.19	3.9	$134.05	$34.80	$34.80	0%
Peer Average	*0.74*	*9.70*	*$139.65*	*$21.45*	*$20.00*	*7%*
MetroWest Regional Transit Authority	0.24	3.4	$85.4	$25.42	$24.92	2%

Source: NTD (2023)

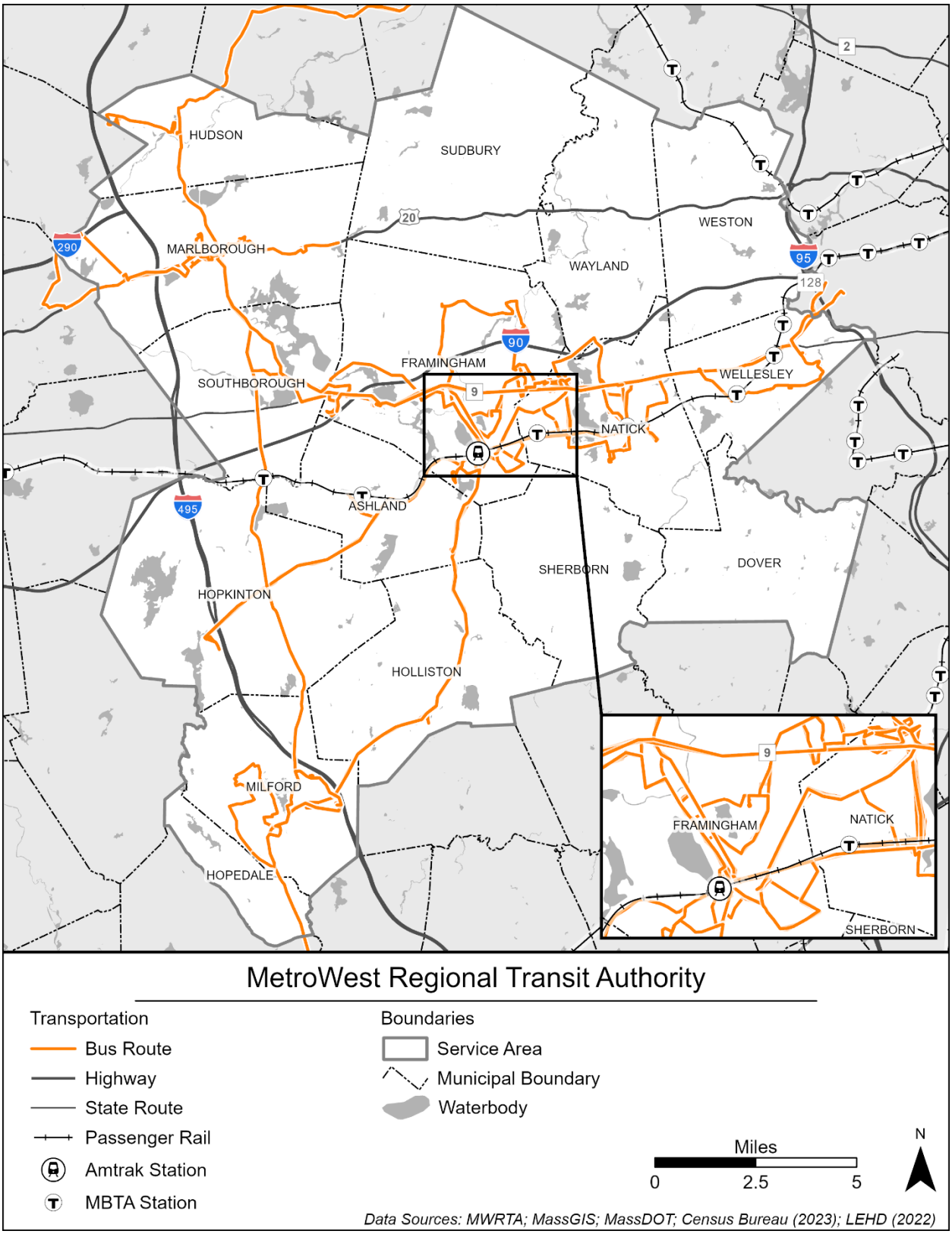
5 Market Evaluation

This chapter includes an overview of the existing demographic and socioeconomic characteristics for the MWRTA service area as shown in Figure 24. A market assessment can identify areas for existing and future connectivity based on population, job, and transit demand factors. This market assessment utilizes US Census Bureau's 2018-2022 ACS 5-year estimates released in 2023 (the latest data available), the Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) 2022 data set (US Census Bureau 2025b) for the demographic data, and Replica data (Replica 2024) for the number of transit trips taken in this market assessment analysis.

This chapter also summarizes the findings from the stakeholder and public engagement activities undertaken as a part of the planning process. MWRTA conducted a public survey for both riders and non-riders, an operator survey, as well as multiple pop-up events to better understand regional mobility needs. High-level findings from those activities are presented in this chapter, and the full list of public comments is included in Appendix C. Together, the demographic analysis and engagement results directly inform the needs and recommendations presented in Chapter 8.

As shown in Figure 24, MWRTA has 16 communities in its service area. MWRTA MicroTransit service spans outside of the service area to Berlin, which is a member of the WRTA service area. MWRTA service also connects to MBTA, MART, and GATRA.

Figure 24. Overview of MWRTA Service Area



Source: AECOM (2025)

5.1 Demographic Analysis

The demographic analysis considers several key population indicators of transit use and demand to guide MWRTA's transit service planning.

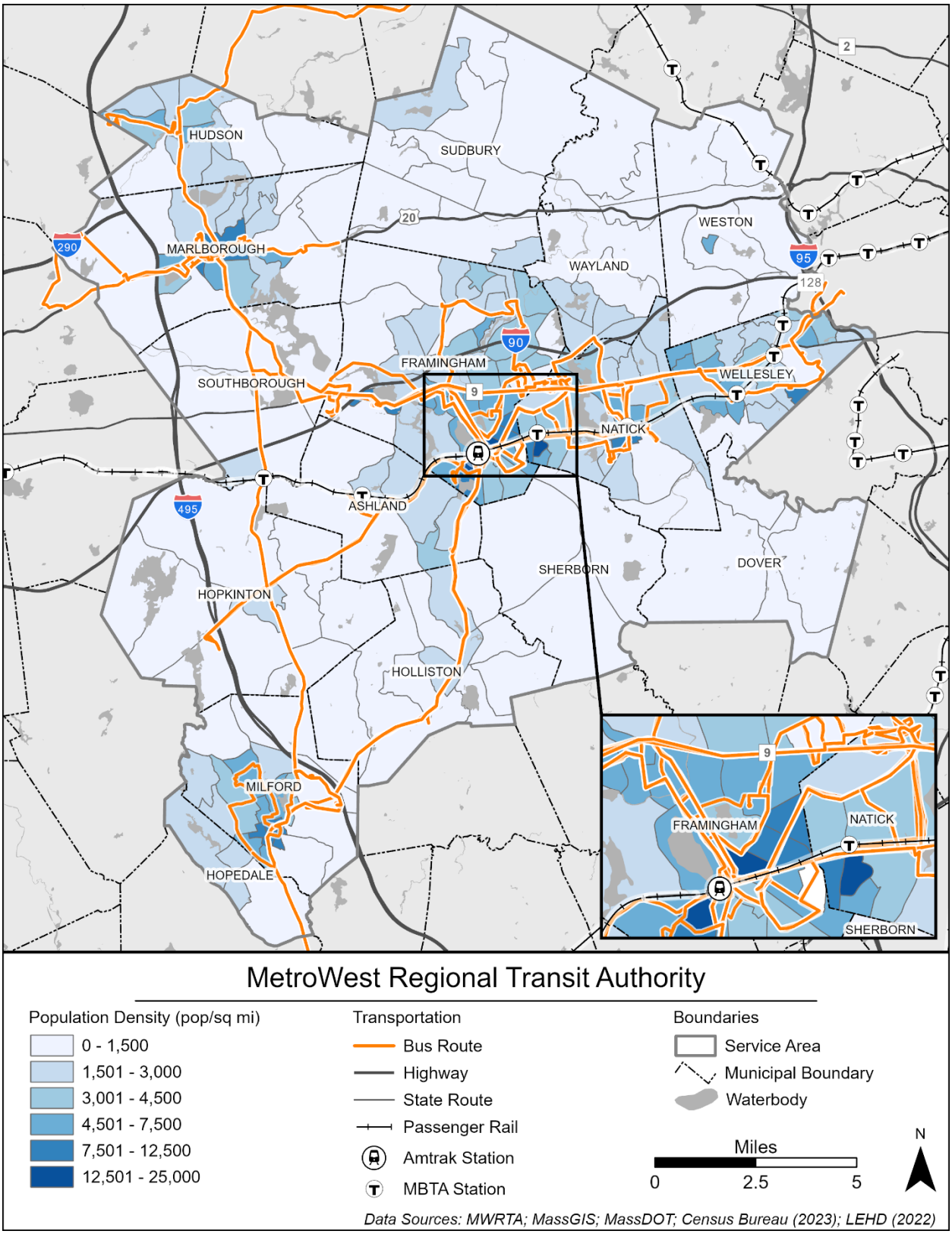
- Population density is often a key determinant of transit use, with transit offering a more efficient way to move many people in a constrained area than personal vehicles. Knowing the population density can help transit agencies identify and plan for the most suitable types of transit to offer people in areas of different density.
- Older adult population includes those residents 65 years of age or older. As people age, their ability to safely operate a personal vehicle often becomes limited, making transit or other shared transportation a vital part of maintaining mobility and accessing shops, medical resources, and entertainment.
- Youth population includes people under the age of 18 years old. Many children and teenagers rely on transit to reach school, activities, sports, etc., often at times when their caregivers or school-sponsored transportation is unavailable.
- Median household income and low-income population are important measures to understand the potential for transit demand, as low-income individuals and households tend to rely on transit.
- Zero-vehicle households are likely to rely on transit service as a reliable source of transportation to meet their mobility needs.
- Populations other than non-Hispanic white is an important metric to comply with federal regulations and agency goals to ensure service for majority-minority communities.
- Population with disabilities shows the concentration of people who, by some measure of physical or mental disability, cannot readily operate a personal vehicle and often rely on transit use, especially paratransit services.
- Title VI indicators include low-income and population other than non-Hispanic white (as previously described) and are used to guide Title VI planning efforts.
- Job density, like population density, indicates a concentration of trip generators that may be well-served by transit, especially at shift changes that may result in many people commuting to or from work at the same time.

Together, these metrics enable MWRTA to better contextualize their existing service and best meet the unmet needs of different segments of the community. Sections 5.1.1 through 5.1.10 illustrate the distribution of each demographic indicator throughout MWRTA's service area.

5.1.1 Population Density

The population density, or population per square mile in the MWRTA service area is 811, which is also shown in Figure 25. Population density is highest in the City of Framingham, which is the heart of the MWRTA service area and the central hub for fixed route transit, the Framingham Amtrak/ Framingham Commuter Rail Station, and the West Natick MBTA Commuter Rail Station. Outside of Framingham, high concentrations of population density are seen in Wellesley, Milford, and Marlborough. Fixed routes are currently available in areas with greater population density.

Figure 25. Population Density



Source: AECOM (2025)

5.1.2 Older Adult Population

Older adults, defined as people equal or greater than 65 years of age, are likely to be transit dependent and/or prefer utilizing transit to maintain their independence to access medical appointments, grocery stores, and recreation. As shown in Figure 26, the population over 65 is distributed more evenly than other age groups across the MWRTA service area. The towns of Weston, Hopedale, Dover, and Natick have higher concentrations of older adults compared to the City of Framingham. For older adults who may no longer be able to access fixed route transit, MWRTA offers ADA Paratransit service, MetroWest RIDE, and Dial-A-Ride services. For those older adults who live outside of the fixed route service area, MWRTA also partners with local COAs to provide more connections.

5.1.3 Youth Population

The youth population, defined as the percentage of the population under the age of 18, is shown in Figure 27. Youth are more likely to utilize transit as a reliable and convenient form of transit, in lieu of car ownership. The youth population is generally evenly distributed between the urban and rural parts of the service area with the highest concentrations in the City of Framingham and the Towns of Sherborn, Weston, Wellesley, and Hopkinton.

5.1.4 Median Household Income

Median household income is based on household size and reported income. As shown in Figure 28, households with median incomes below $35,000 are predominantly located in pockets within the City of Framingham, as well as a few areas in Natick, south of the MBTA Commuter Rail line in Wellesley, and in central Weston. The entire communities of Dover and Sherborn are characterized by high median household income, and large areas of Hopkinton, Wayland, Wellesley, Weston, Southborough, and Sudbury.

5.1.5 Low-Income Population

MWRTA defines low-income population as households at or below the federal poverty level, which is approximately 6.3 percent of all households in MWRTA's service area. Figure 29 shows the low-income population by Census block groups, illustrated as the proportion of all households that are at or below the federal poverty level. While low-income households are dispersed throughout MWRTA's service area, portions of Framingham and Southborough show the highest concentrations.

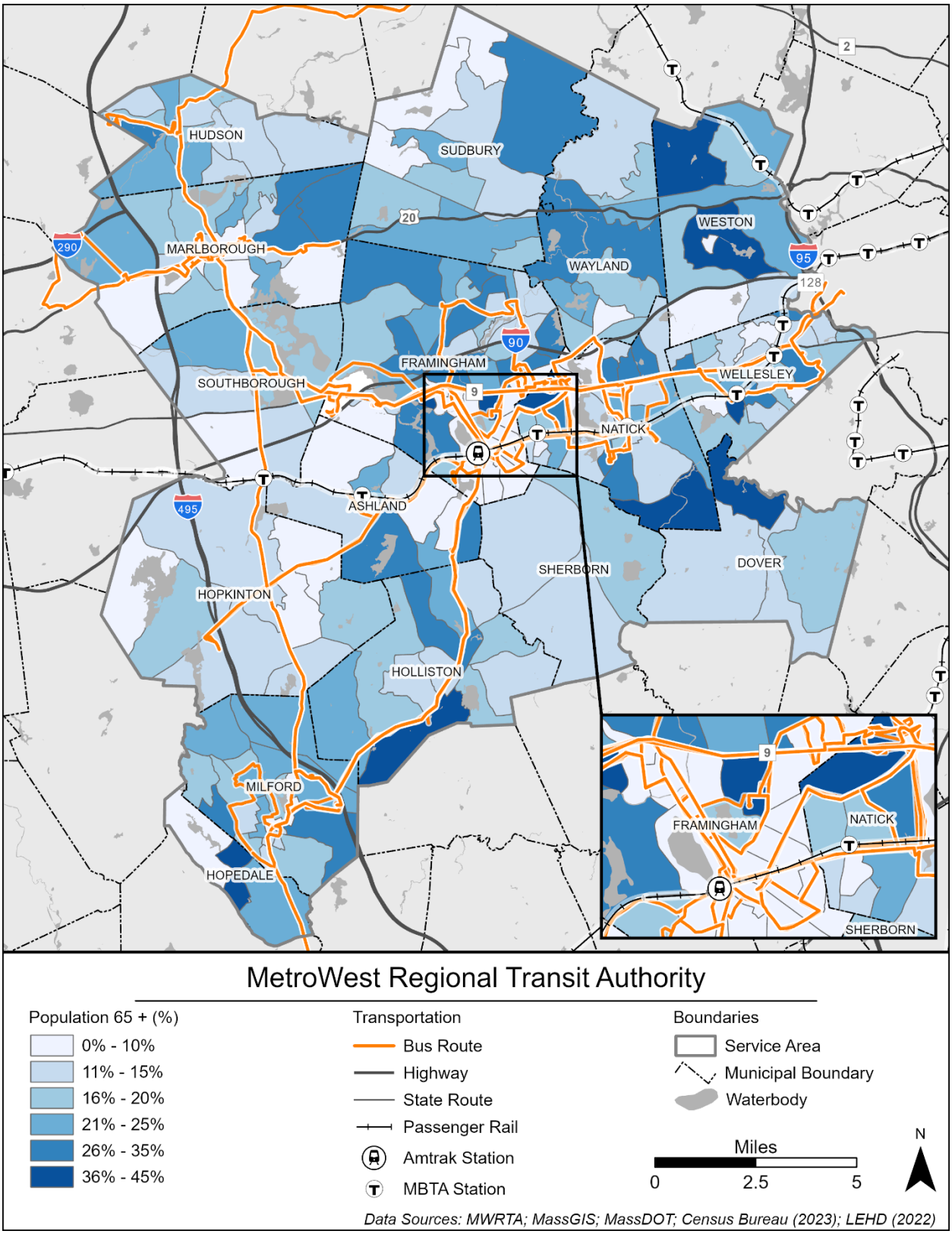
5.1.6 Zero-Vehicle Households

The highest concentration of households without access to a personal vehicle are in Framingham and Natick, as shown in Figure 30. Outside of those areas, pockets of areas with high rates of zero-vehicle households can be found in the Towns of Marlborough and Milford, which may indicate areas for potential fixed route expansion and increased transit connectivity.

5.1.7 Population Other Than Non-Hispanic White

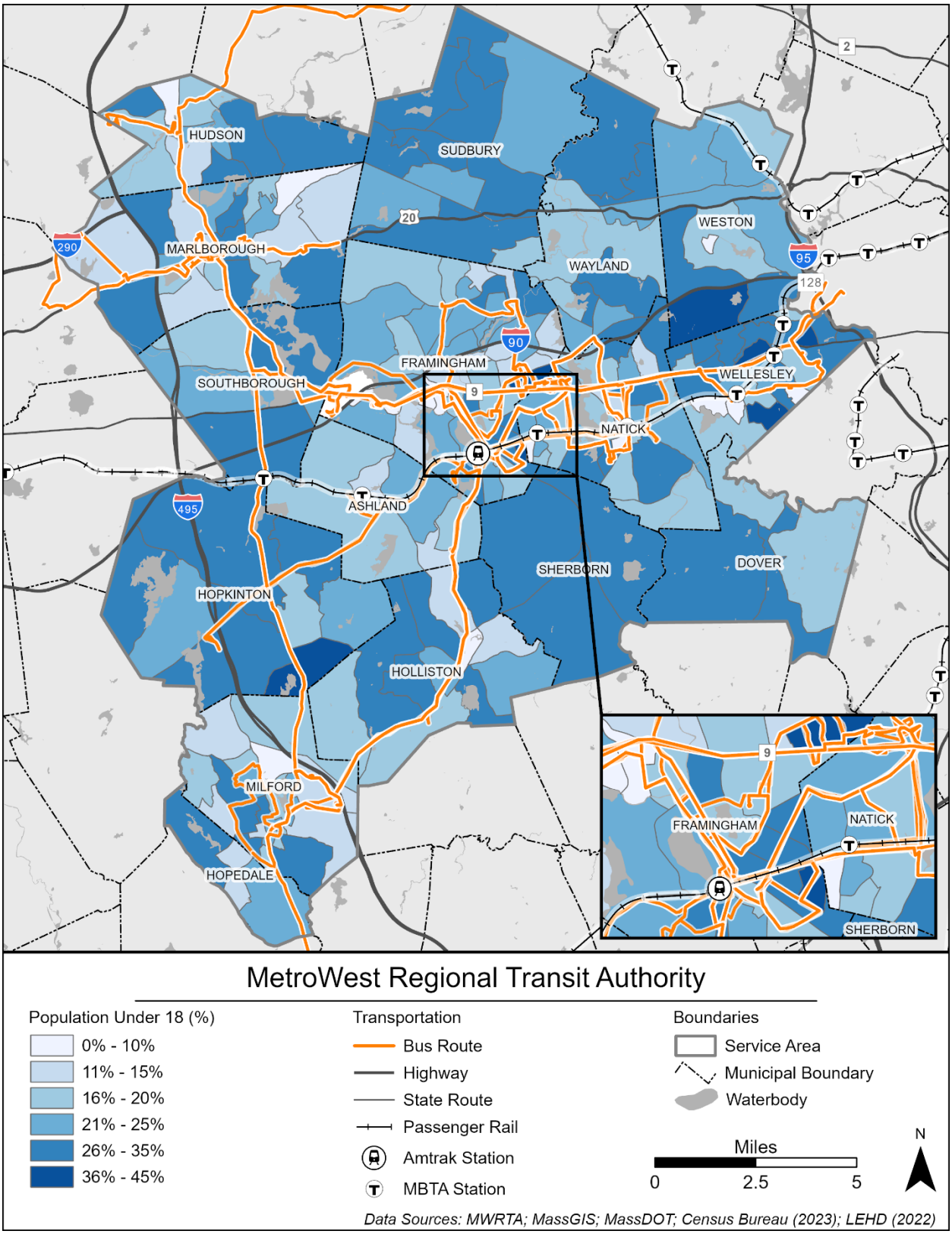
Figure 31 shows the concentration of populations other than non-Hispanic white. These communities are concentrated in Framingham, Natick, Marlborough, Milford, and Hopkinton.

Figure 26. Older Adult Population



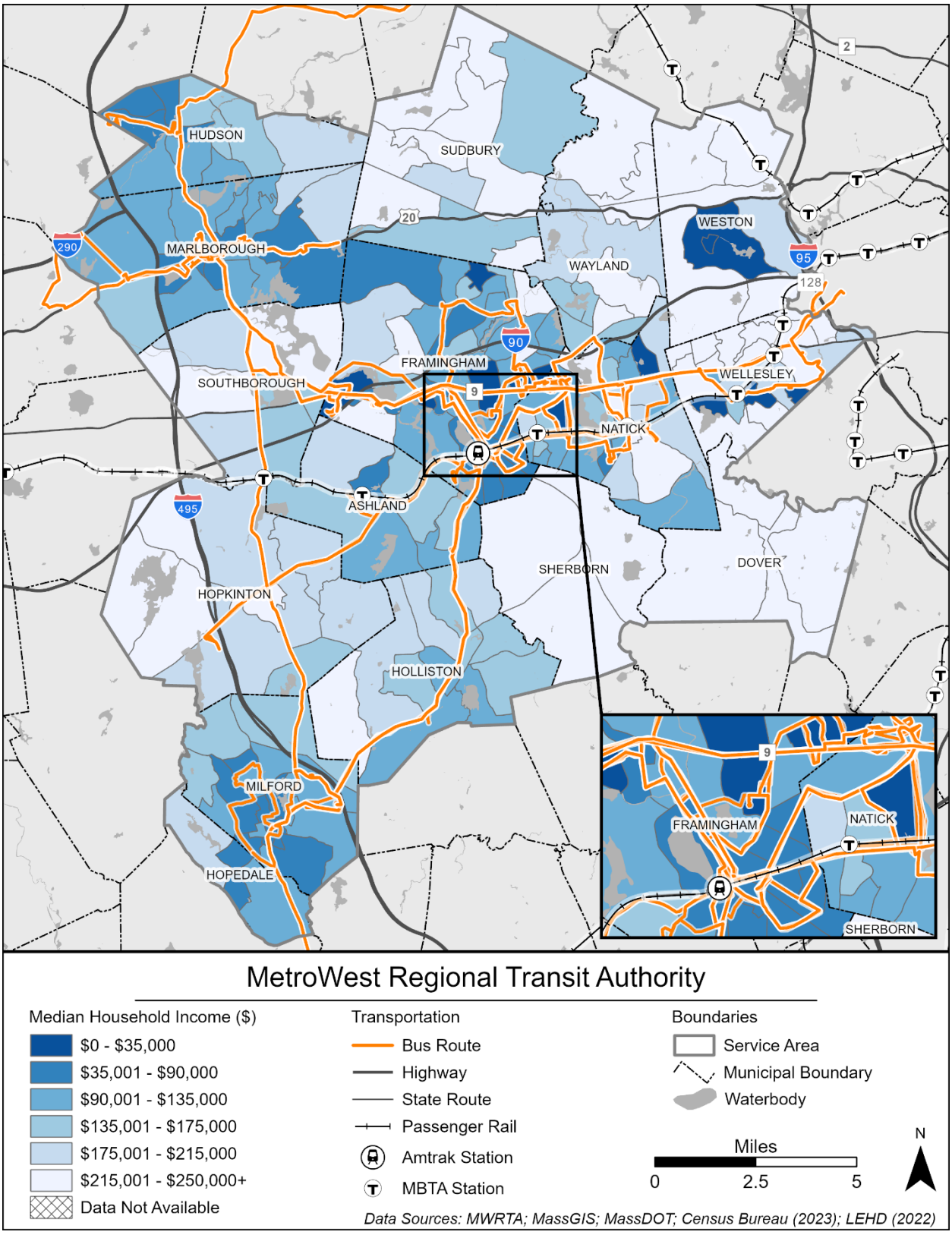
Source: AECOM (2025)

Figure 27. Youth Population



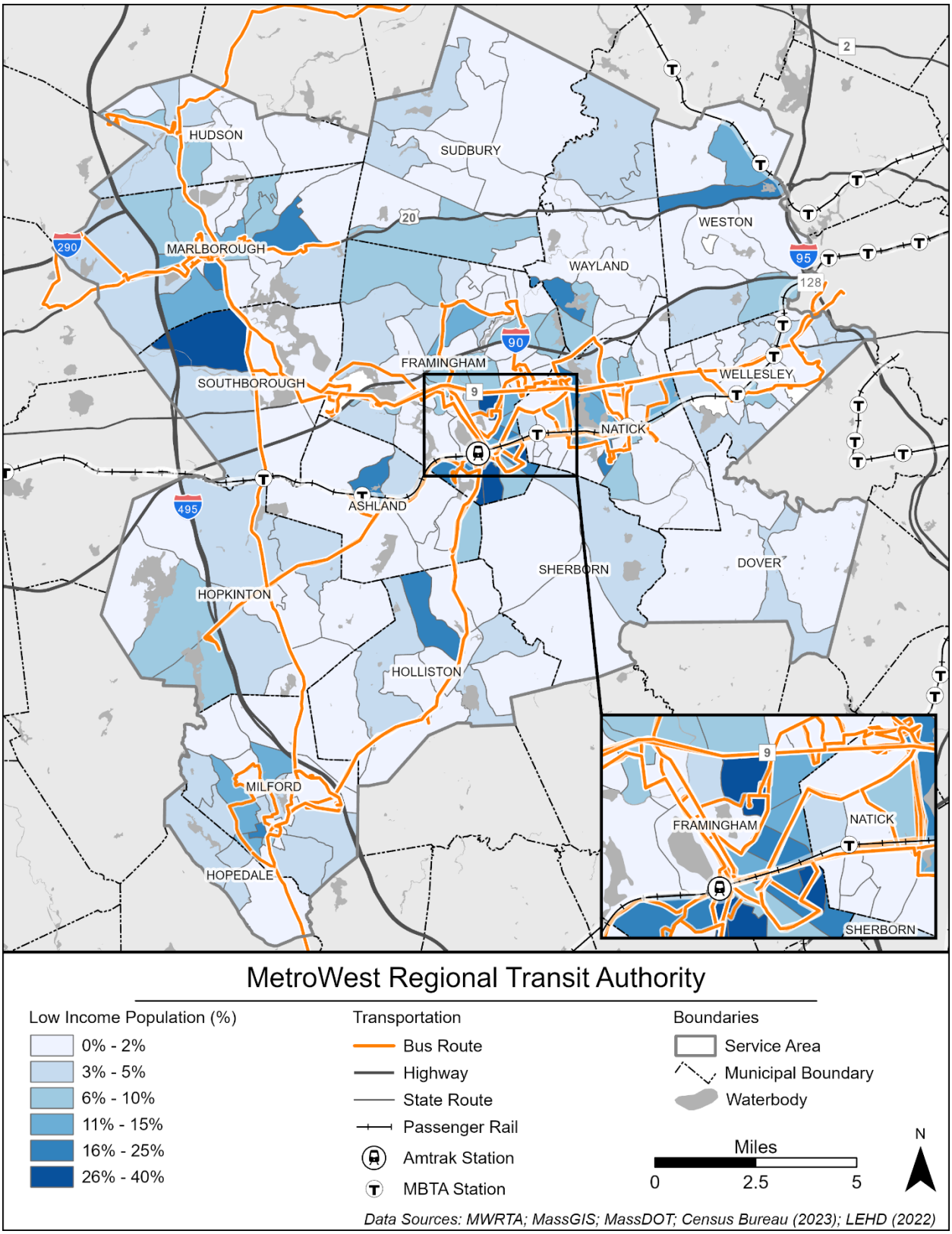
Source: AECOM (2025)

Figure 28. Median Household Income



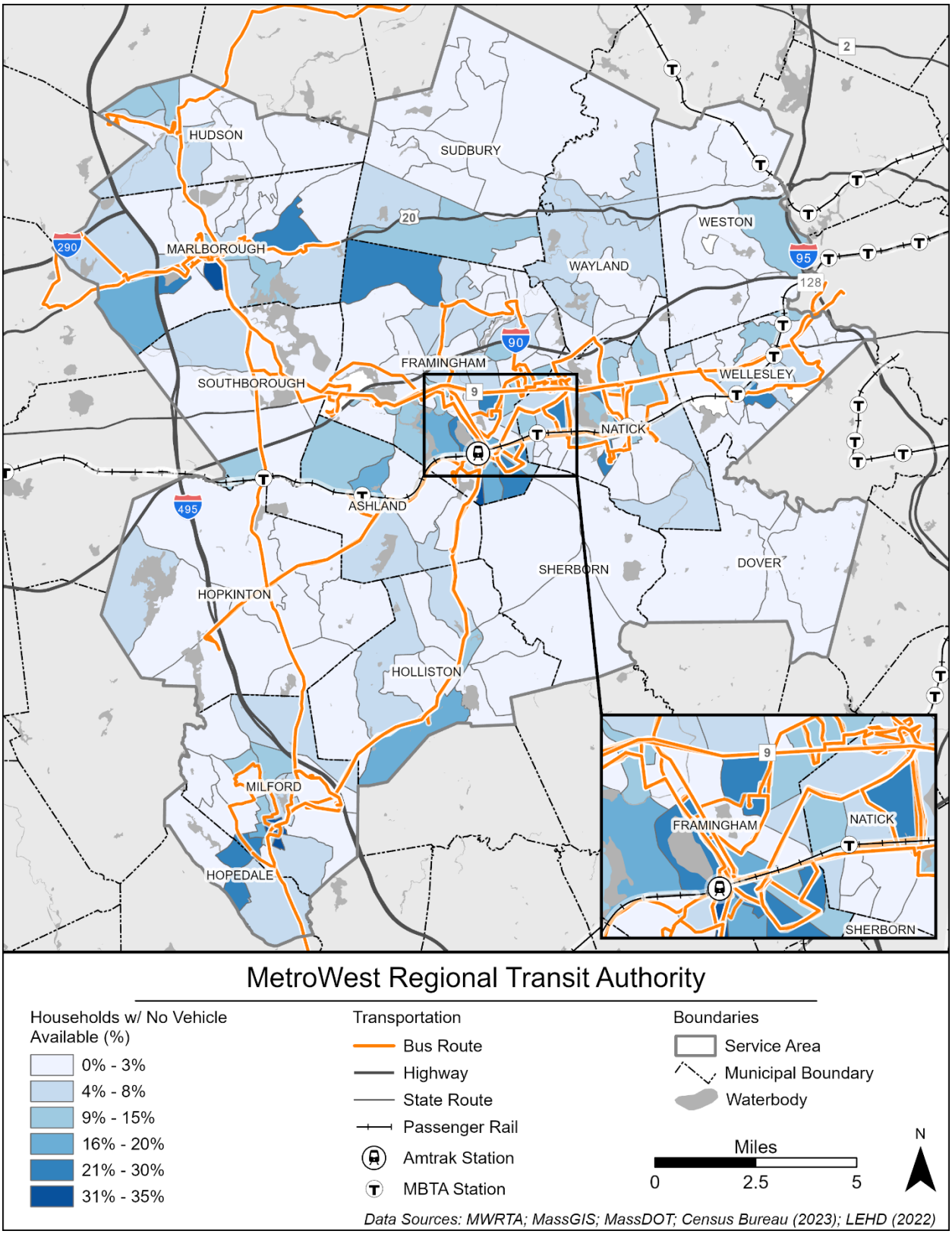
Source: AECOM (2025)

Figure 29. Low-Income Population



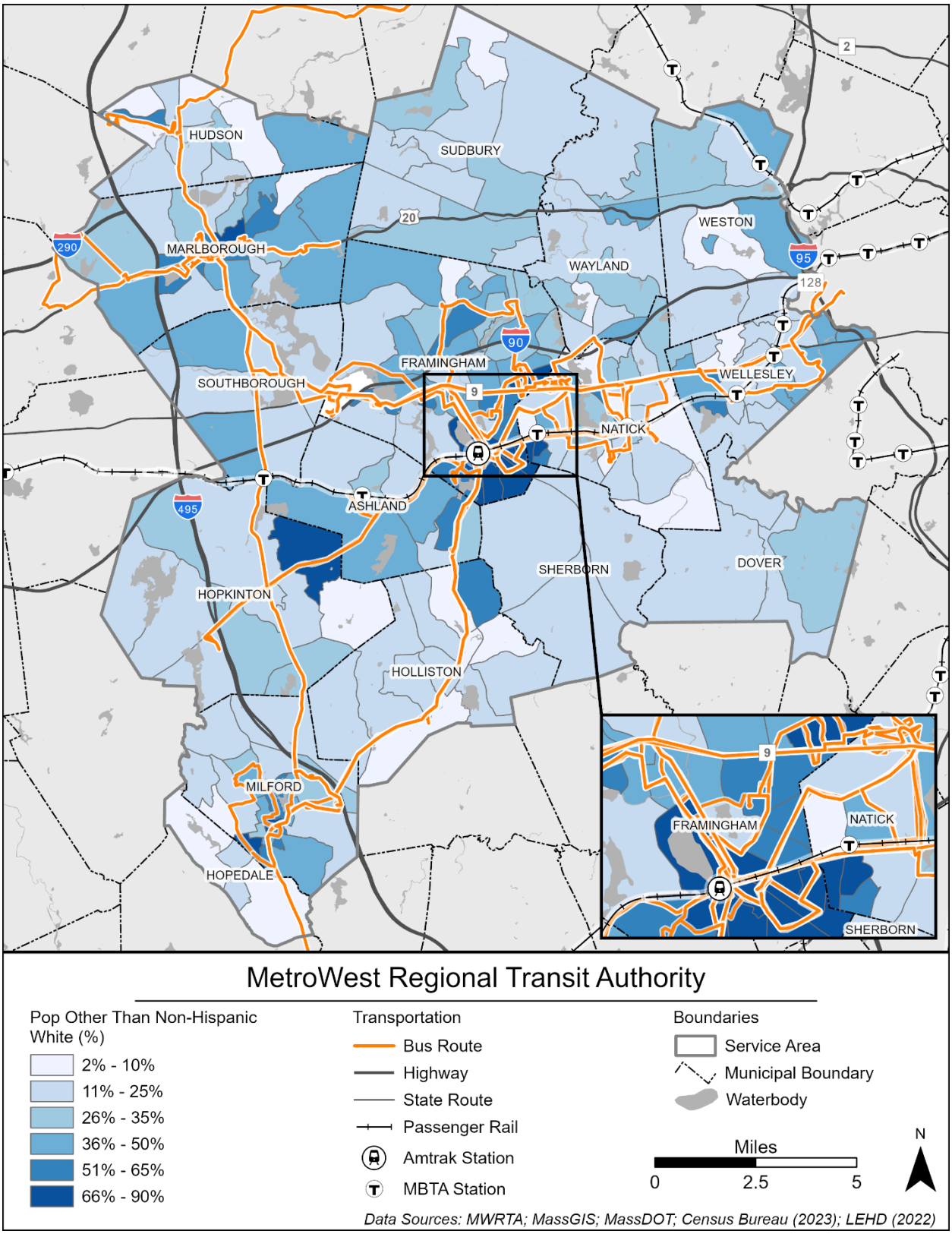
Source: AECOM (2025)

Figure 30. Zero-Vehicle Households



Source: AECOM (2025)

Figure 31. Population Other Than Non-Hispanic White



Source: AECOM (2025)

5.1.8 Adult Disabled Population

MassDOT and MWRTA utilize data on persons with disabilities to identify opportunities to improve mobility across the service area. The adult disabled population is shown in Figure 32. The ACS qualifies a person with a disability as someone who has one or more of the following conditions: hearing difficulty, vision difficulty, cognitive difficulty, ambulatory difficulty, self-care difficulty, and independent living difficulty. High concentrations of adults with disabilities are in the City of Framingham and Towns of Natick, Hopedale, and Marlborough.

5.1.9 Title VI Population

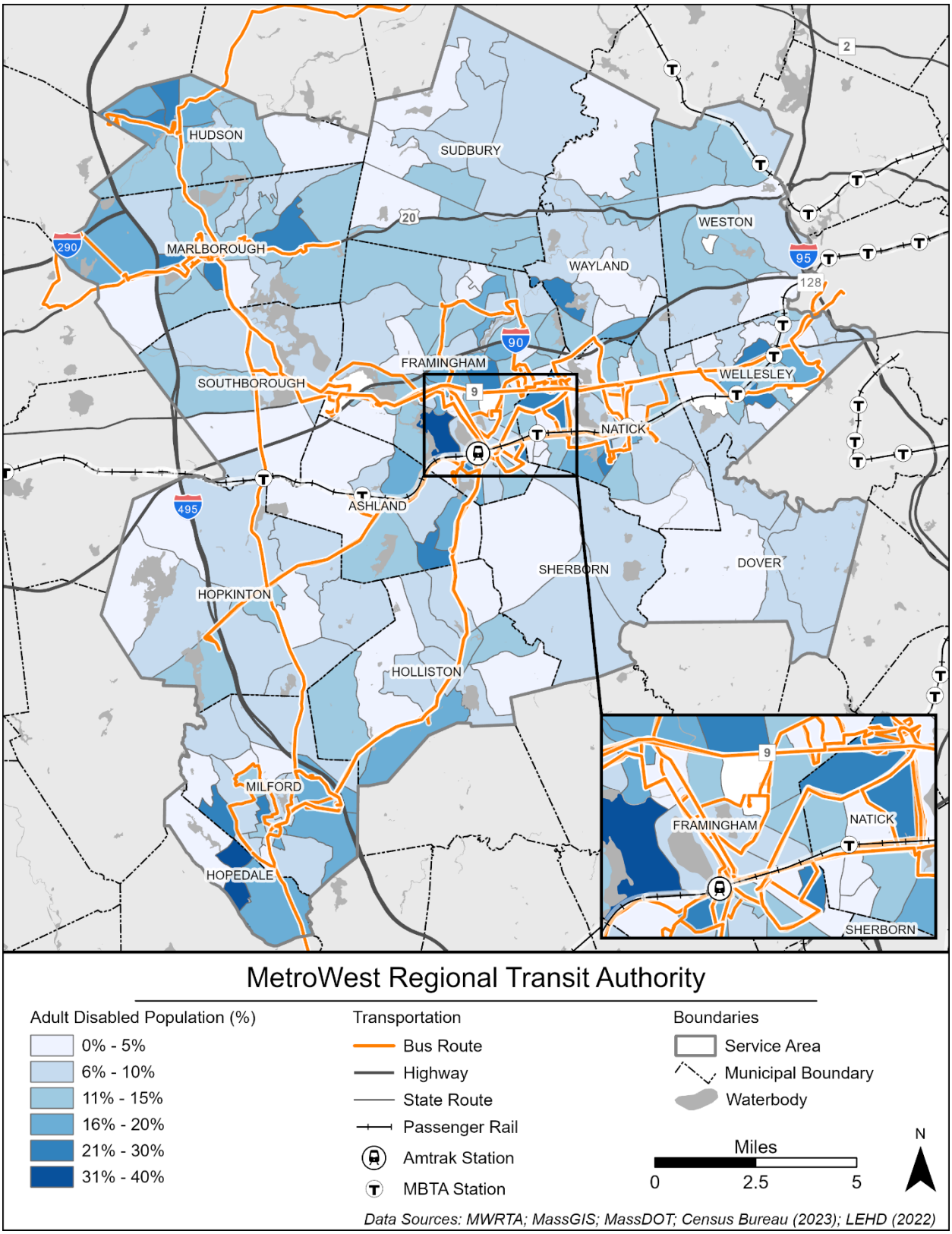
Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination based on race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability in federally assisted programs. As a transit authority, MWRTA is required to comply with Title VI requirements as a recipient of federal funds.

Title VI indicators include two factors: low income and populations other than non-Hispanic white. For Title VI reporting, MWRTA defines minority as a block group with a larger than average minority threshold, which is approximately 32 percent. Figure 33 highlights communities where the population is both low income and has greater than 32 percent populations other than non-Hispanic white. Low-income communities include Marlborough, Milford, Sudbury, Wayland, and Weston and communities other than non-Hispanic white include portions of Ashland, Marlborough, Hopkinton, Milford, Southborough, Sudbury, Hudson, Holliston, Weston, and Wellesley. Areas that are low income and have a large portion of people other than non-Hispanic white are concentrated in Framingham, Marlborough, Southborough, and Natick. As MWRTA modifies any fixed route service or introduces new fixed route service, the Title VI market analysis can help inform program modifications and long-term engagement strategies.

5.1.10 Job Density

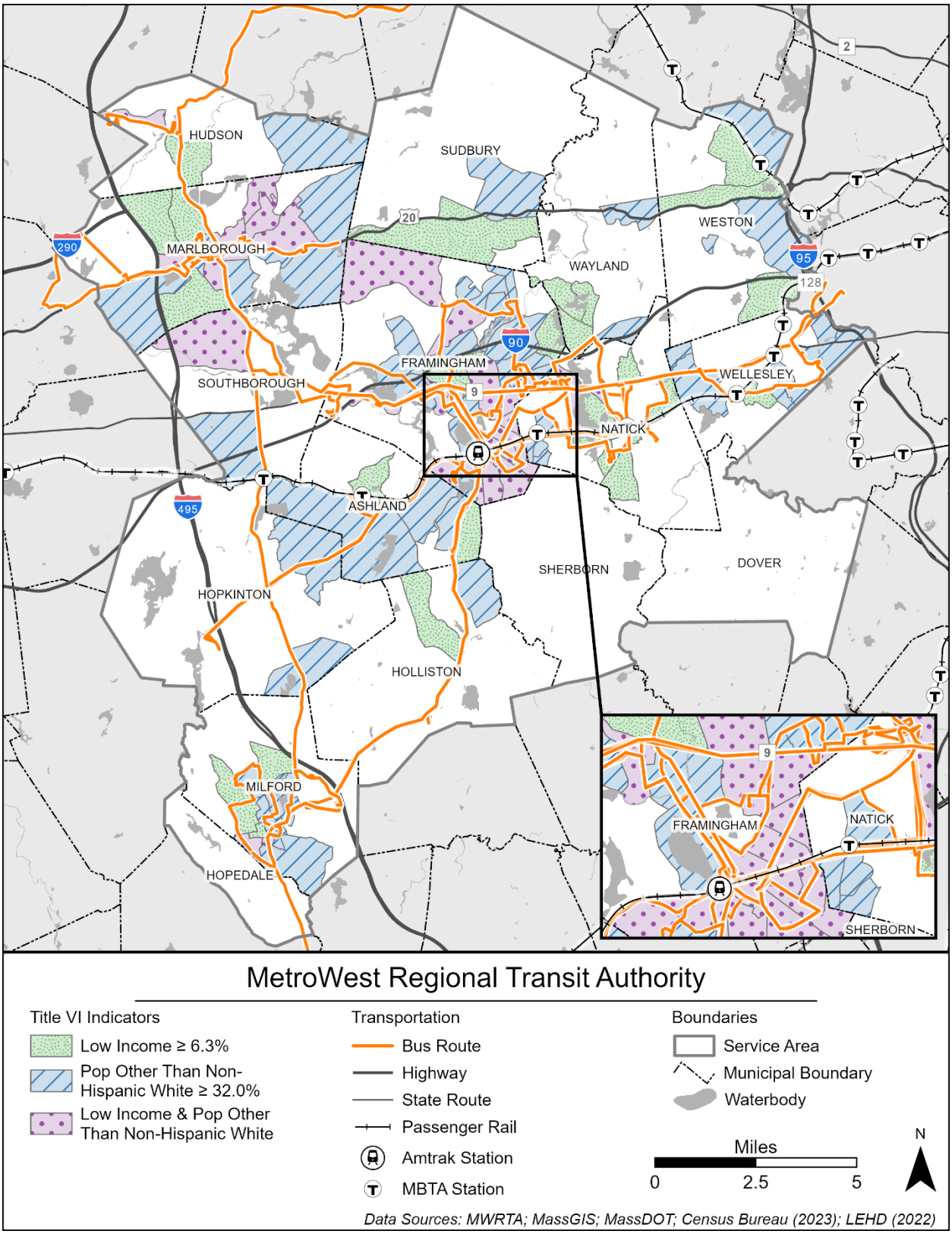
Job density is highest in Framingham with other pockets of jobs appearing along MWRTA bus routes in Marlborough, Hopkinton, Framingham, Natick, and Wellesley, as shown in Figure 34. Major industries in the service area include military, education, and healthcare.

Figure 32. Adult Disabled Population



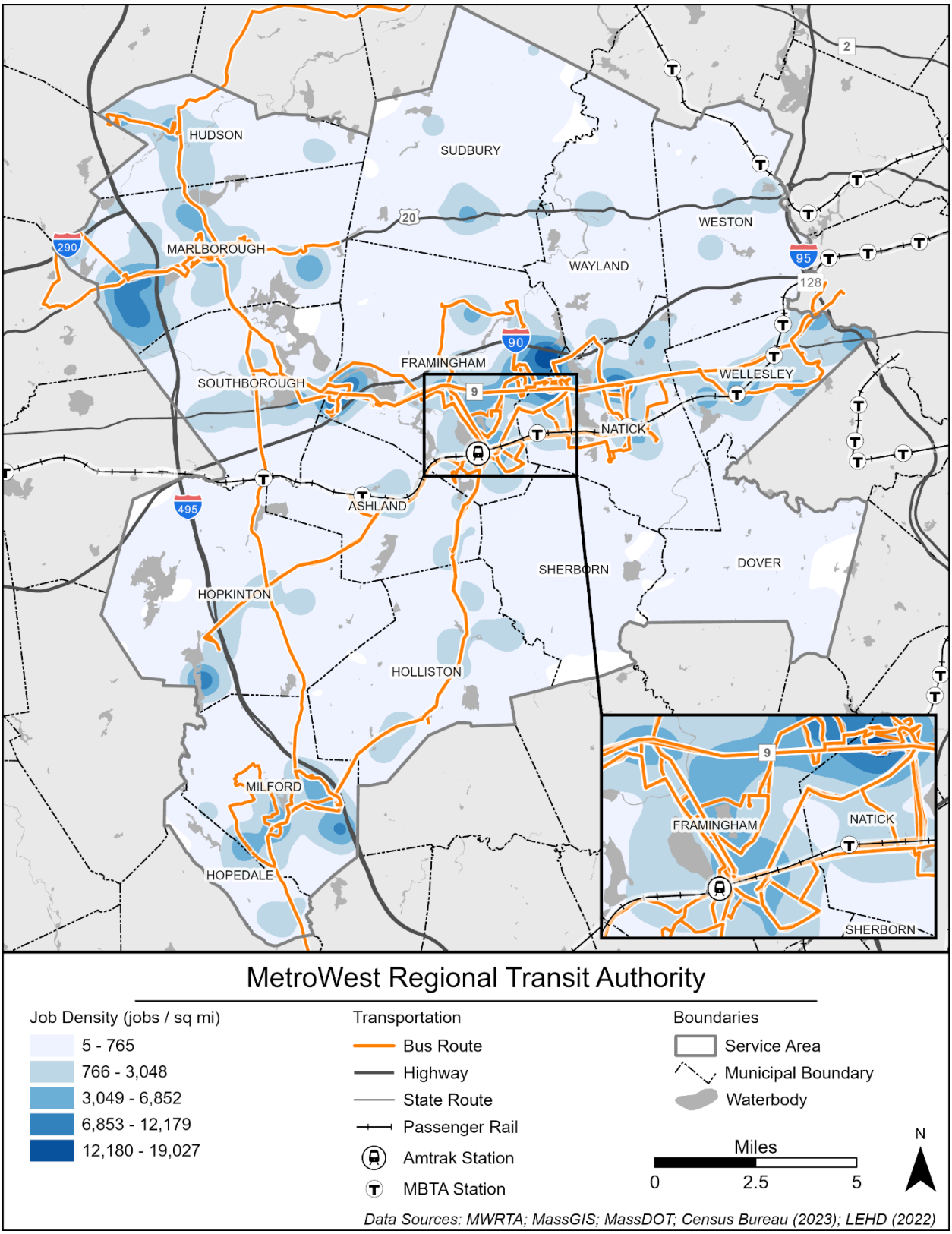
Source: AECOM (2025)

Figure 33. Title VI Population



Source: AECOM (2025)

Figure 34. Job Density



Source: AECOM (2025)

5.2 Transit Score

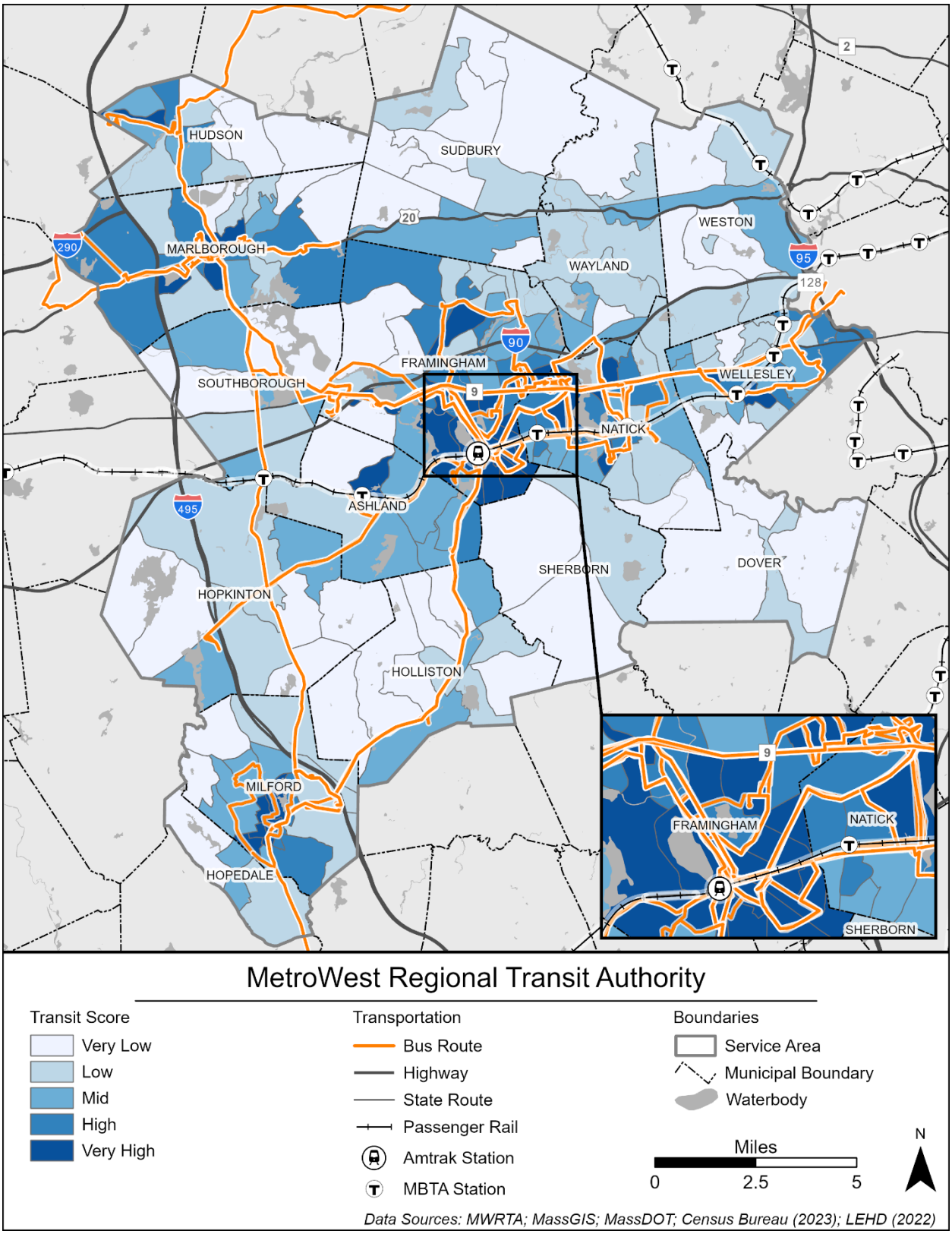
The transit score map is created to spatially analyze several transit-oriented demographic and socioeconomic characteristics at the same time (the characteristics discussed individually in this chapter so far). The transit score is a relative measure of how successful a fixed route transit system is expected to be in a particular region. Used in conjunction with a congruency analysis of major transit generators, the transit score can be used to evaluate existing service and to identify areas of potential demand.

Demographic and socioeconomic information is collected from the US Census Bureau for a region divided into smaller geographic units such as tracts, block groups, or blocks. Block groups and census tracts were used for this analysis. Transit-oriented variables used for the analysis include:

- Overall population density
- Overall job density
- Density of the population under the age of 18
- Density of the population over the age of 65
- Median household income
- Percentage of the population living below the poverty level
- Percentage of zero-car households
- Percentage of the population other than non-Hispanic White
- Percentage of the population with disabilities
- Number of transit trips taken

Figure 35 illustrates the transit score in the MWRTA service area. Transit scores are very high in the communities that are served by many MWRTA bus routes and MBTA and Amtrak rail stations. The communities with very high transit scores include Framingham, Marlborough, Ashland, Milford, and Wellesley. More rural areas not currently served by MWRTA bus routes have very low transit scores.

Figure 35. Transit Score in MWRTA Service Area



Source: AECOM (2025)

5.3 Public and Stakeholder Engagement

Outreach and engagement for MWRTA's CRTP was undertaken through an operator survey and a public survey. Additional outreach activities included pop-up events and social media promotion of survey links. The activities were carried out in 2025, and a diverse range of voices and perspectives were captured to support CRTP development.

Key takeaways from these combined efforts include support for the following:

- Improved service reliability and coordination. Operators and riders alike flagged issues with delays, dispatcher communication, and unclear stop locations. Riders also noted inconsistent on-time performance and requested better real-time tracking and driver attentiveness, especially during flag-down situations.
- Closing coverage and frequency gaps. There's strong interest in expanding Catch Connect's reach, increasing frequency on key routes like Route 4N, and adding more trips between MassBay Community College campuses and the Blandin Hub. Non-riders also cited inflexible schedules and distant stops as barriers to use.
- Increasing weekend services. Riders consistently requested later and more comprehensive weekend service.
- Infrastructure and rider experience enhancement. Overall, feedback emphasized the need for cleaner buses, better seating, improved shelters, and clearer signage. Riders also asked for Wi-Fi, charging ports, and more accessible stops, especially in underserved neighborhoods.

Subsequent sections detail feedback collected during all of MWRTA's engagement efforts.

5.3.1 Pop-Up Events

MWRTA held in-person pop-up events to distribute information, advertise its survey, and seek public feedback. More than 15 riders were engaged, and they were invited to share their thoughts on current transit services, future improvements, priorities for regional mobility, or anything on their mind. Materials, including paper surveys and flyers, as well as informational materials outlining MWRTA's proposed CRTP goals, were shared, and feedback was collected on a range of topics.

5.3.1.1 Pop-Up Event 1

- Location: Central Hub in Framingham
- Date and time: September 10, 2025, 10 AM to 12 PM

5.3.1.2 Key Takeaways

Feedback highlighted appreciation for regional transit services and a desire for improvements in reliability, coverage, and accessibility.

- Service reliability and coordination: Riders reported delays, and a driver cited confusion around stop locations and dispatcher communication.
- Coverage and frequency gaps: There's interest in expanding Catch Connect's reach (e.g., to Ashland at night), increasing MassBay campus-to-Hub trips, and improving overall route frequency (Route 4N).
- Weekend and ADA service needs: Riders want later and more comprehensive weekend service, and one commenter flagged inadequate assistance from ADA drivers during home pickups.

5.3.1.3 Pop-Up Event 2

- Location: Milford Library, Milford, MA
- Date and time: September 10, 2025, 1 PM to 3 PM

5.3.1.4 Key Takeaways

Community input reflects strong appreciation for MWRTA services and a desire for expanded regional connectivity.

- Valued and anticipated service: Riders and families, including library staff and children, expressed satisfaction with the service and see it as a vital community resource—especially for those who may soon rely on it due to aging or mobility changes.
- Interest in expanded coverage: Suggestions included adding stops in Holliston, creating a Framingham to Milford route, and clarifying Dial-A-Ride access to destinations like Beth Israel in Boston, indicating demand for broader geographic reach.

5.3.2 Operator Survey Effort

MWRTA distributed a survey to its operators to gather their perspectives on service effectiveness, rider behavior, and operational needs, to capture both strategic priorities and on-the-ground realities. The survey was sent to operators and was accessible via paper or digitally. The survey was open from Thursday, October 2, to Thursday, October 23, 2025.

5.3.2.1 Operator Responses

Question 1: Are there frequent flag down locations that we should consider as an official bus stop? If yes, please include details on where.

Responses included:

- No
- Revisit flag down question
- Not frequent, but occasionally

Question 2: What challenges do you most often experience when passengers board or exit the bus? (Select all that apply)

- Other (71 percent)
- Accessibility issues (ramps, mobility devices) (14 percent)
- Stops not clearly marked or visible (43 percent)
- Difficulty pulling into/out of stop safely (29 percent)
- Passengers not ready to board (57 percent)
- Crowding at certain stops (14 percent)

Other feedback included:

- Signage takes the guesswork out of safely knowing where to stop and board—for driver and rider. If a stop is publicized with scheduled times and location—a corresponding "bus stop" sign should be present. Signs tell the driver where to stop and the public where to board—safely. In addition, bus signage is a "branding" tool for MWRTA.
- People scheduling a pickup and not being there when you arrive.

- No ramp at Framingham MBTA waiting area.

Question 3: Which areas of your daily work could benefit from improvement? (Select up to three)

- Route timing/scheduling (43 percent)
- Communication with dispatch (71 percent)
- Passenger behavior/support (29 percent)
- Vehicle condition/maintenance (14 percent)
- Breaks and rest time (29 percent)
- Other (14 percent)

Other answers included:

- Software system for Catch Connect is horrible - frequently crashes, dispatches work poorly at night on Framingham/Natick, often assigning pickups at the Southborough end of Framingham and the Wellesley end of Natick at the same time.
- Wellesley afternoon service is dominated by Babson College students that frequently no show without penalty.
- Every Econoline bus I have driven has absolutely no on center feel and poor directional stability. The caster adjustment of these front ends are severely out of specification. I am a retired Ford Master technician. When these cutaway chassis are sent to the customizer, they are shipped with neutral caster. I guarantee this is not addressed by the up fitter and should be checked and adjusted by MWRTA maintenance. Driving these requires constant steering correction and makes for an exhausting drive. The Transit based vehicles do not suffer this issue.

Question 4: What would most improve the passenger experience on board the bus? (Select one)

- Cleaner buses (22 percent)
- Better temperature control (heating/cooling) (22 percent)
- More comfortable seating (11 percent)
- Improved signage or announcements (0 percent)
- On-time performance (11 percent)
- Friendlier or more helpful service (0 percent)
- Other (34 percent)

Other responses included:

- Wi-Fi
- Visual Communication: Putting the MWRTA System Map in/on the bus. A visible systemwide map highlights the breadth and interconnectivity of the system. It graphically helps explain the route(s) to those unfamiliar with the system and allows the driver to point to a route/place of interest for those that don't speak English.
- Charging outlets

Question 5: What service improvement would most benefit passengers? (Select one)

- More weekend service (14 percent)
- Later evening service (0 percent)
- More frequent buses (14 percent)
- Better connections to other transit (29 percent)
- More reliable on-time service (29 percent)
- Other (14 percent)

Other responses included:

- Solar light at stop
- Single seat benches at stops

Question 6: What route changes should MWRTA consider? (Select one)

- Add new routes (14 percent)
- Extend existing routes (0 percent)
- Shorten or simplify routes (14 percent)
- Adjust timing/schedules (29 percent)
- Improve connections to other services (29 percent)
- Specific route change (14 percent)
- Other (0 percent)

Question 7: What specific route changes would you suggest?

- More Route RTY Babson and Mass Bay buses during peak times.

Question 8: What other ideas or feedback would you like to share?

- When changing buses. A passenger who is on a bus and has to get off to get an other bus. Find a better way to switched buses
- I like to drive a clean vehicle. I am working for more than three years, and every single day I have been reported each different vehicle that I've received every day is too dirty. I reported to the managers. I already talked with the union. The union already talked with the the managers, but they continue giving us dirty buses. I did clean up the vehicle, and I requested them let me keep the same vehicle because I keep clean and I like to take care of the vehicle that I drive. I am an excellent driver, excellent customer service, and excellent co-worker, that's why I request the same vehicle to keep going doing better every every day. That is requested as a gift.
- Walmart Framingham stop: This is a busy stop with a diverse group of riders. I believe it needs a proper bus shelter reflecting its popularity. It needs to be clean, well lit, safe, and free from the weather (as best as possible). Maybe work with Walmart on a sponsorship deal? Are there other bus stop locations where sponsorship deals can be realized?
- Dispatch frequently ignores calls from drivers.
- Change the radio/communication setup between dispach and buses.
- Paint lines in the overflows lot.

- Improve lighting against the East Street fence/wall.

5.3.2.2 Key Takeaways

The following are key takeaways from the operator survey.

- A significant portion of operators identified communication with dispatch as an area that needs improvement. Comments highlighted issues with ignored calls, radio setups, and software, especially for Catch Connect.
- Operators reported challenges with unclear stop signage, vehicle maintenance issues, and lack of cleanliness. Specific feedback included steering on certain buses, inadequate lighting at stops, and issues with dirty vehicles.
- Operators suggested improvements like Wi-Fi, charging outlets, and onboard system maps to help riders navigate and feel more comfortable. There's also a call for better bus shelters at high-traffic stops like the Framingham Walmart.

5.3.3 Public Survey Effort

As a primary tool to gather feedback from current riders and non-riders, MWRTA staff developed an online survey. The purpose of the survey was to get a better understanding of stakeholder preferences regarding current services and gather feedback about the desire for potential improvements or changes. MWRTA offered a giveaway of two $25 gift cards as a promotional effort.

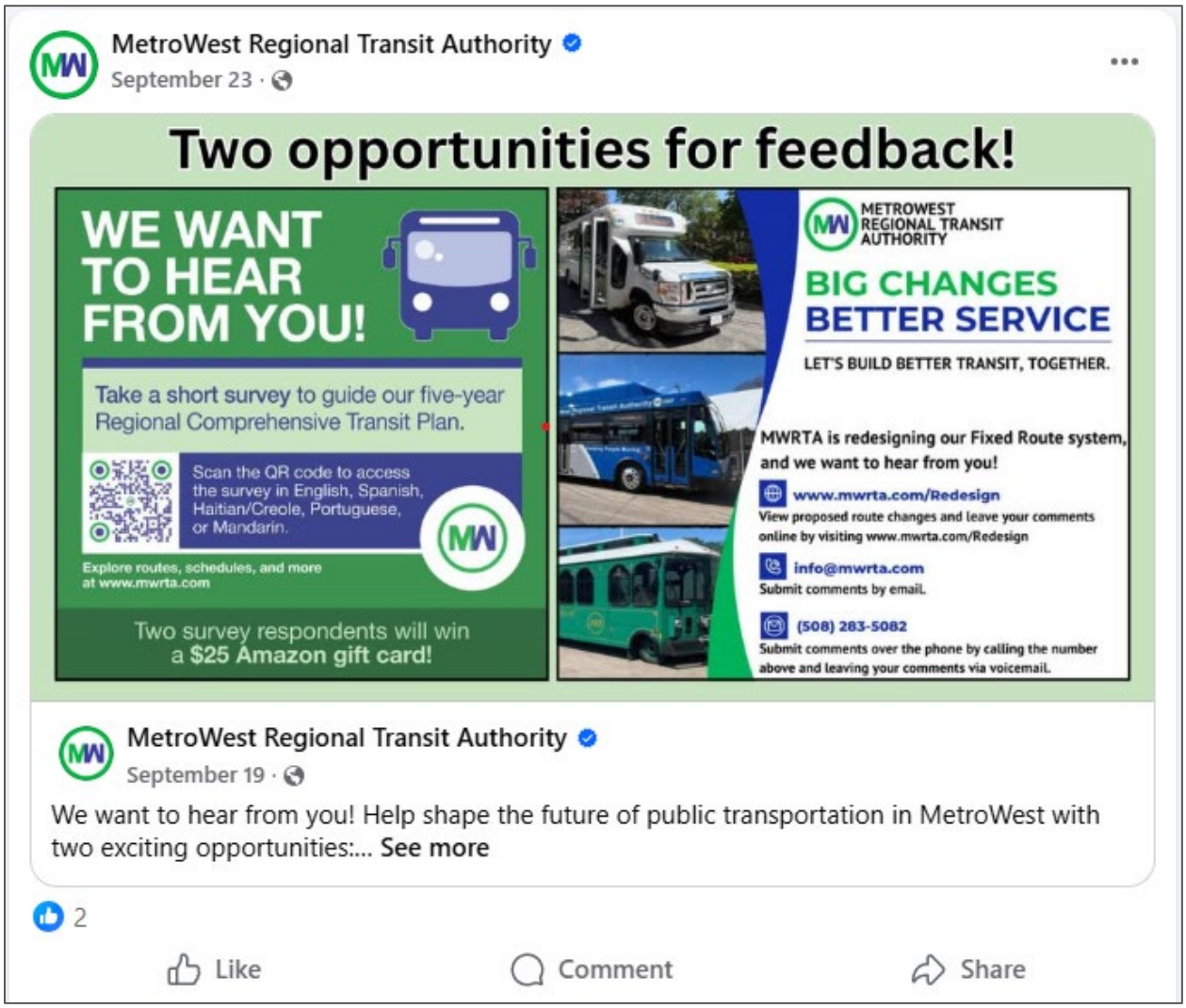
5.3.3.1 Survey Outreach

To promote participation in the online survey, MWRTA shared it through multiple channels:

- The survey link was posted on MWRTA's website and promoted through multiple social media posts (Figure 36).
- At its pop-up events, MWRTA staff distributed flyers featuring the survey link and QR code, and paper copies of the survey were also available.
- MWRTA advertised the survey on bus monitors and screens at the Central Hub in Framingham.
- MWRTA included survey promotion in its monthly newsletters in September and October.

The survey was designed to be mobile-friendly. The survey link was accompanied by a QR code to enable a quick scan using a smart phone to direct immediately to the survey.

Figure 36. MWRTA Social Media Post



5.3.3.2 Survey Results Summary

MWRTA's online survey opened to the public September 2, 2025, and closed October 13, 2025. The survey, which was hosted on Microsoft Forms, was available online in English, Spanish, Mandarin, Haitian/Creole, and Portuguese.

Of the 148 responses collected using online and paper surveys, 135 people (91 percent of survey respondents) responded in English, 9 people (6 percent) responded in Spanish, 3 people (2 percent) responded in Mandarin, and 1 person (1 percent) responded in Haitian/Creole. There were no responses in Portuguese.

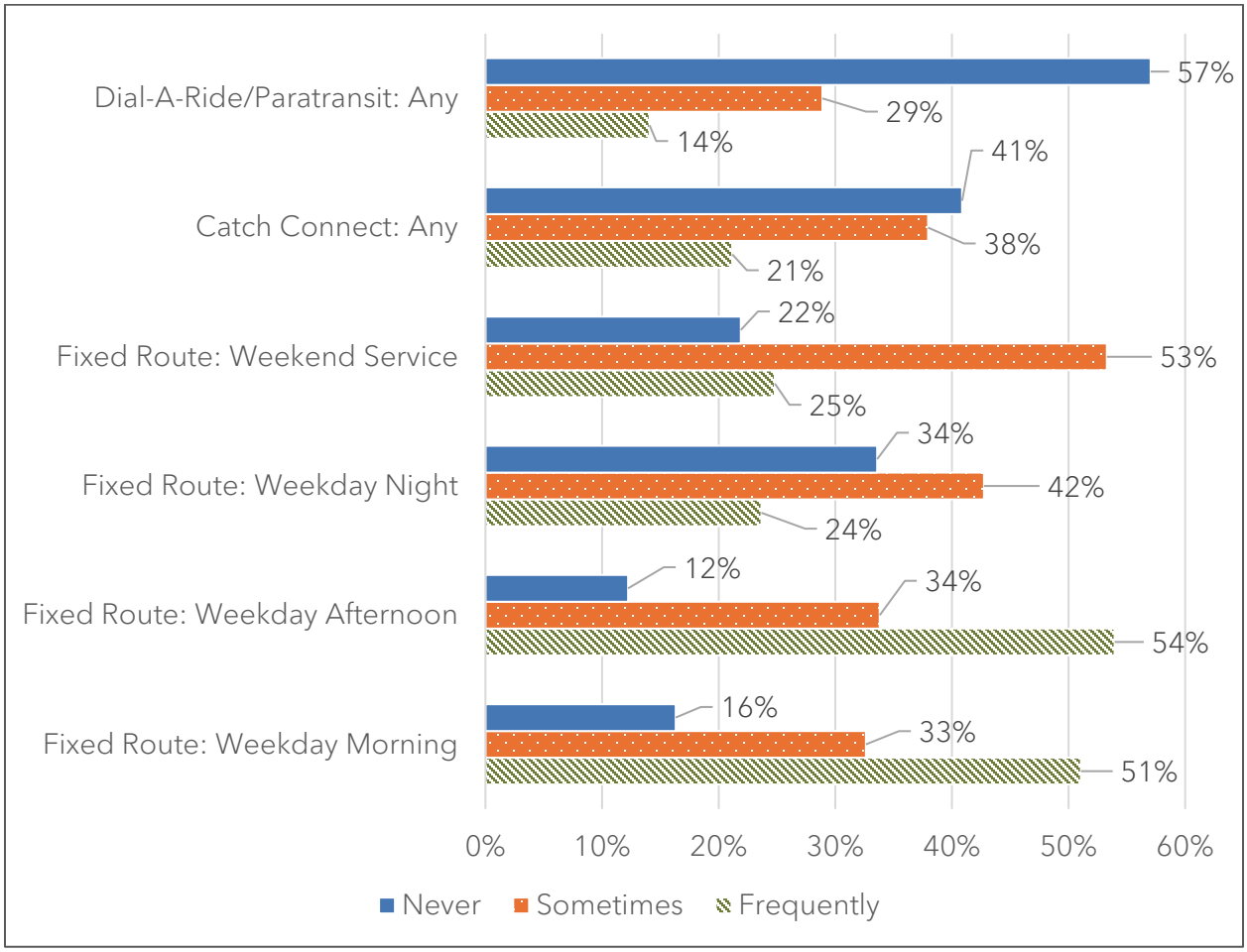
Respondents were asked what city or town they live in, and the most popular responses were:

- Framingham (50 people)
- Boston (8 people)
- Wellesley (8 people)
- Milford (6 people)
- Natick (5 people)
- Marlborough (4 people)

Survey responses for how often respondents use MWRTA services (Figure 37) reflected large uses of fixed route weekday and afternoon service, as well as weekend service and Dial-A-Ride.

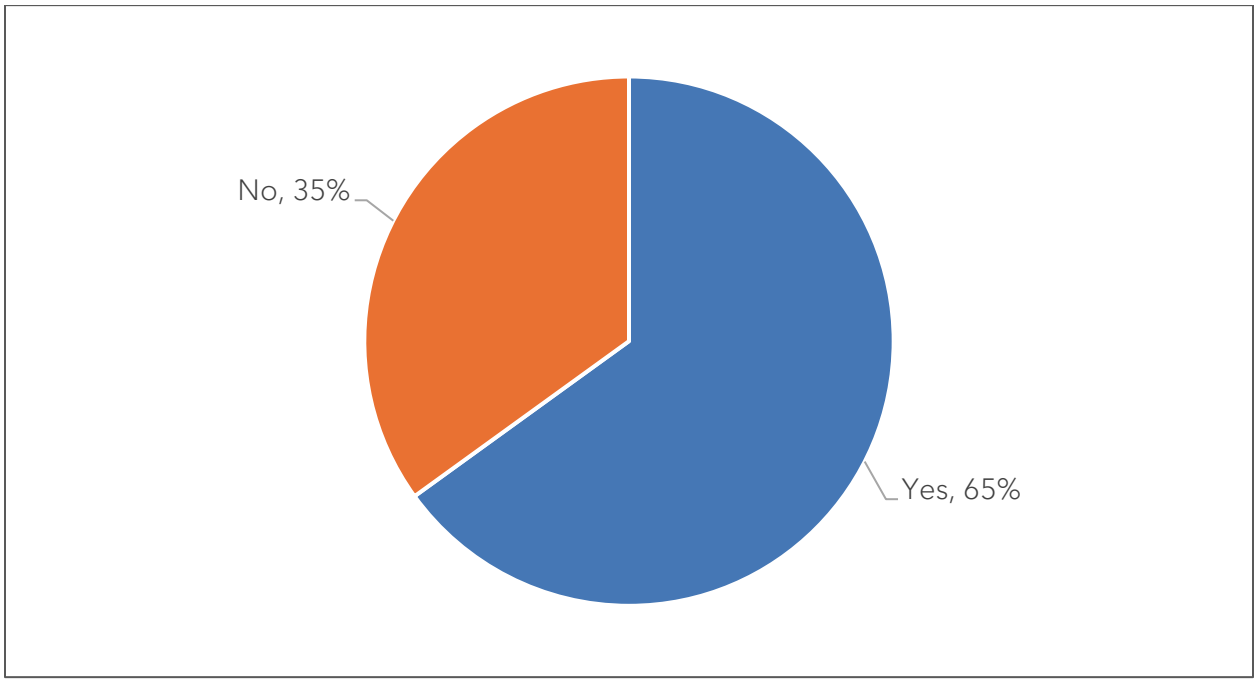
- Dial-A-Ride/Paratransit
  - 57 percent never use this service, making it the least utilized option overall.
  - 29 percent sometimes use it, and 14 percent frequently use it.
- Catch Connect
  - 41 percent never use it.
  - 38 percent sometimes use it, and 21 percent frequently use it, showing moderate engagement.
- Fixed Route: Weekend Service
  - 22 percent never use it.
  - 53 percent sometimes use it, the highest "sometimes" rate across all categories.
  - 25 percent frequently use it.
- Fixed Route: Weekday Night
  - 25 percent never use it.
  - 42 percent sometimes use it, and 34 percent frequently use it.
- Fixed Route: Weekday Afternoon
  - 12 percent never use it, the lowest "never" percentage.
  - 34 percent sometimes use it, and 54 percent frequently use it, making this the most frequently used service overall.
- Fixed Route: Weekday Morning
  - 16 percent never use it.
  - 33 percent sometimes use it, and 51 percent frequently use it - also very high usage.

Figure 37. How often do you use the following MWRTA services? Select one for each service type



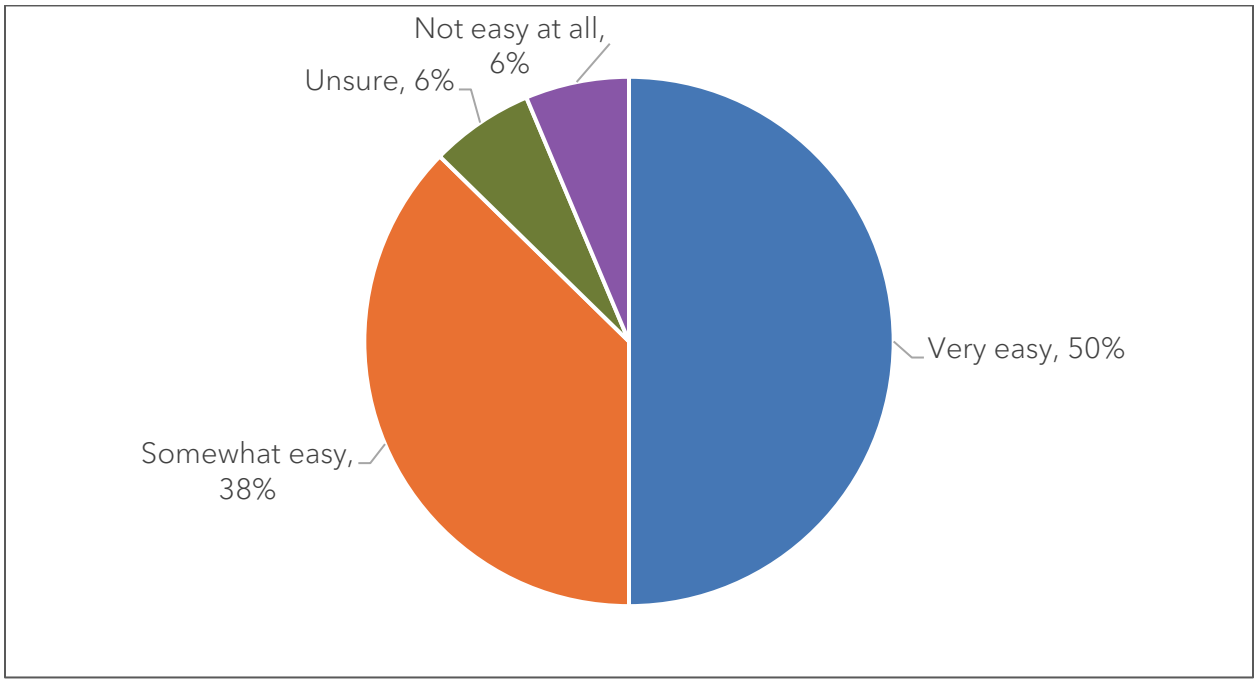
Survey responses on whether existing MWRTA service times meet transportation needs (Figure 38) reflected that 65 percent of respondents answered yes and 35 percent answered no.

Figure 38. Do the existing MWRTA service times meet your transportation needs?



Survey responses on ease of finding MWRTA service information (Figure 39) reflected that 50 percent of respondents find it very easy, 38 percent find it somewhat easy, 6 percent were unsure, and 6 percent answered not easy at all.

Figure 39. How easy is it for you to find information about MWRTA service?

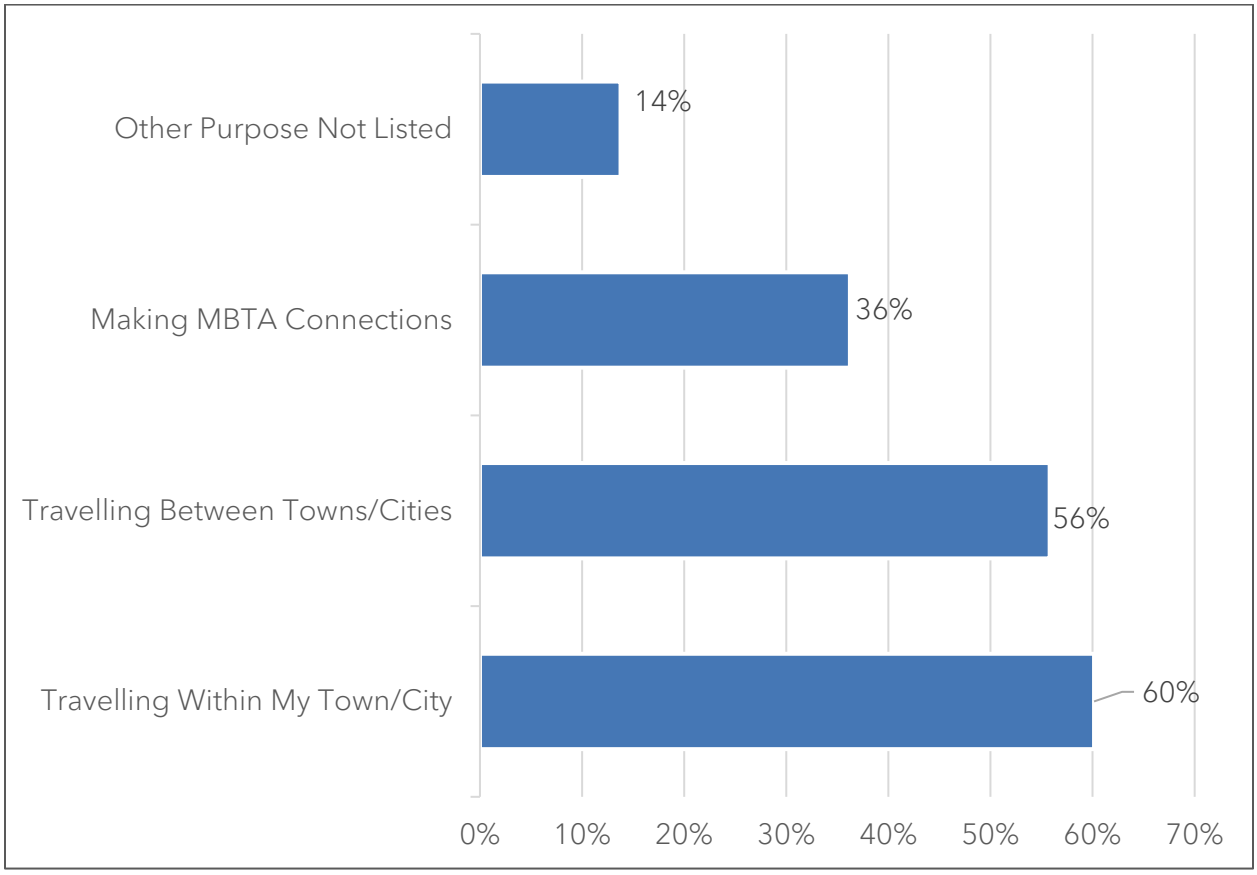


Survey responses for the most common connection purpose of MWRTA travel (Figure 40) reflected the following:

- Traveling within my town/city (60 percent)
- Traveling between towns/cities (56 percent)
- Making MBTA connections (36 percent)

- Other purpose not listed (14 percent)

Figure 40. What is the most common connection purpose(s) for your MWRTA travel? Select All Applicable Boxes

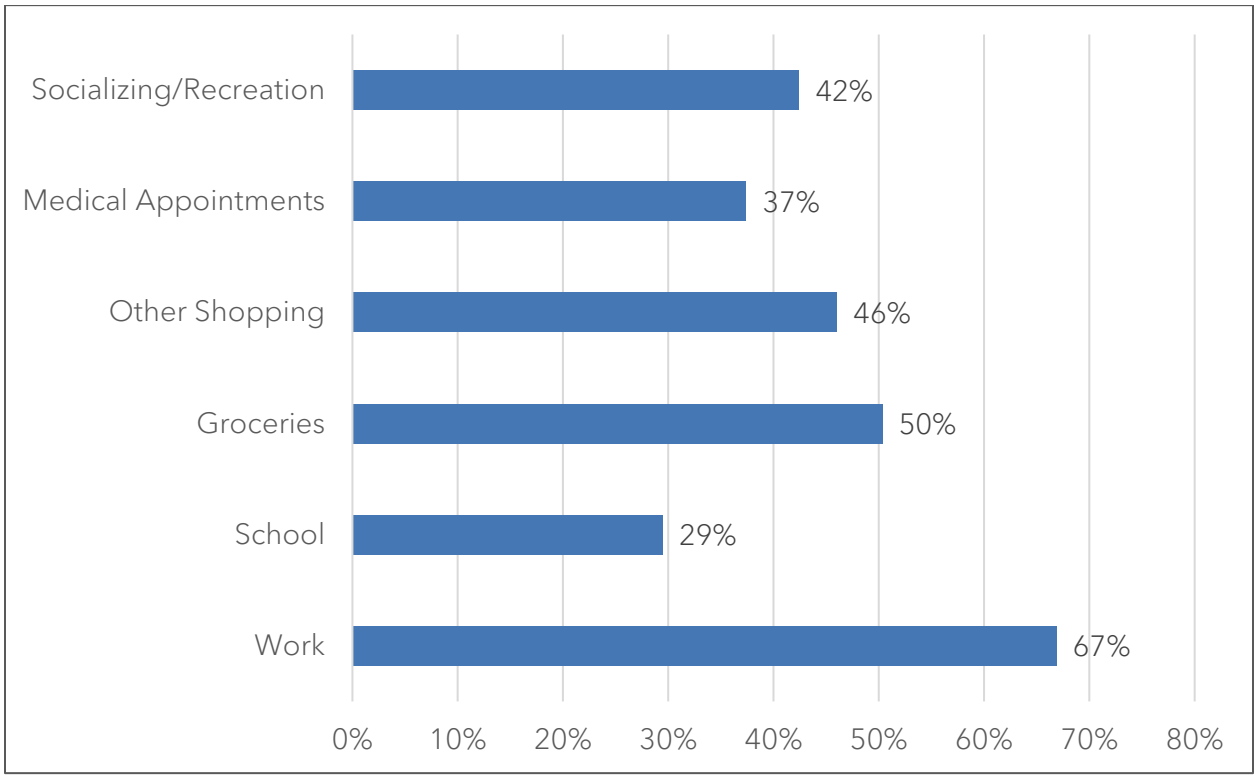


Survey responses for primary travel purpose of MWRTA trips (Figure 41) reflected the following:

- Socializing/recreation (42 percent)
- Medical appointments (37 percent)
- Other shopping (46 percent)
- Groceries (50 percent)
- School (29 percent)
- Work (67 percent)

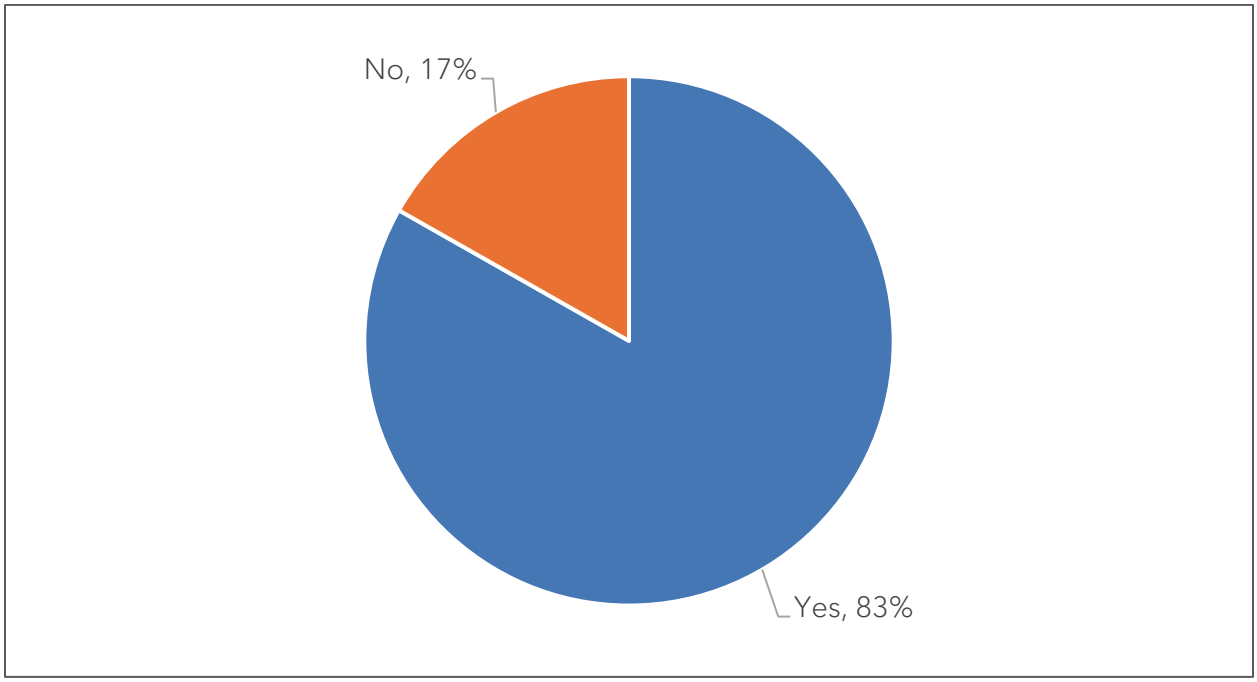
Respondents could select all answers that applied to them.

Figure 41. What is the primary purpose(s) of your MWRTA trip? (Select all that apply)



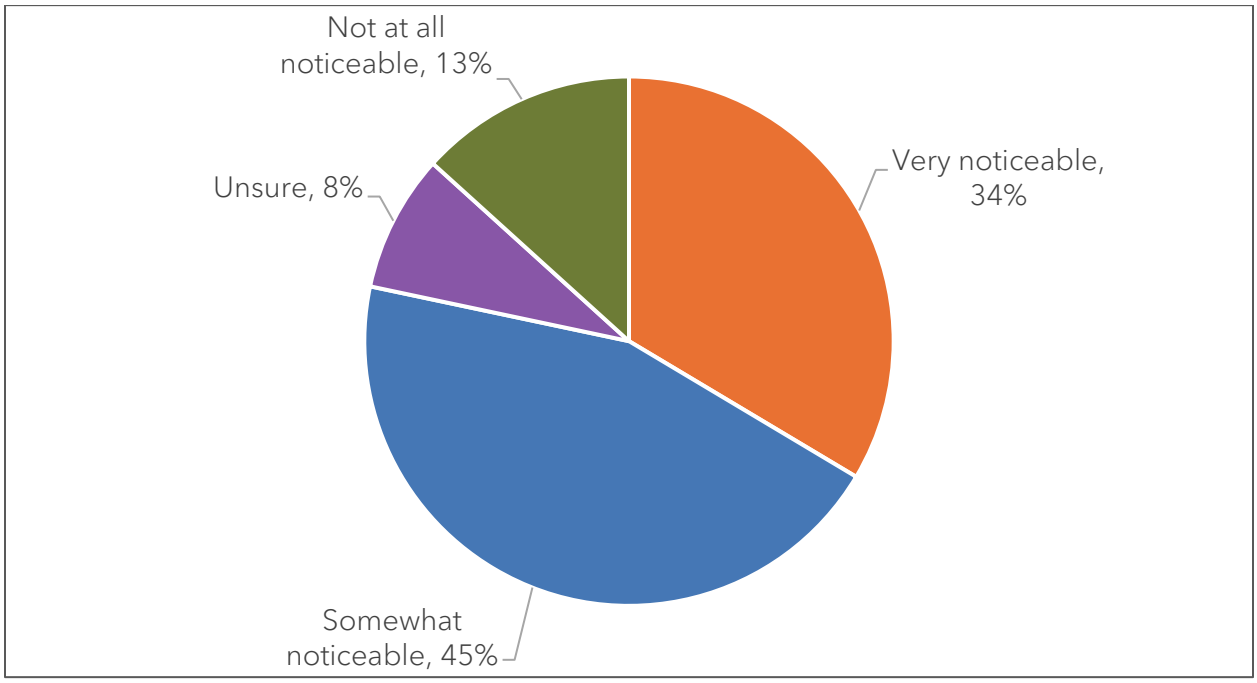
Survey responses for whether respondents have seen a MWRTA bus stop in their community reflected that 83 percent responded yes, and 17 percent responded no (Figure 42).

Figure 42. Have you seen a MWRTA bus stop in your community?



Survey responses for how noticeable public transit bus stops are in communities (Figure 43) reflected that 45 percent of respondents responded that they are somewhat noticeable, 34 percent responded they are very noticeable, 13 percent responded not at all noticeable, and 8 percent responded unsure.

Figure 43. How noticeable are public transit bus stops in your community?

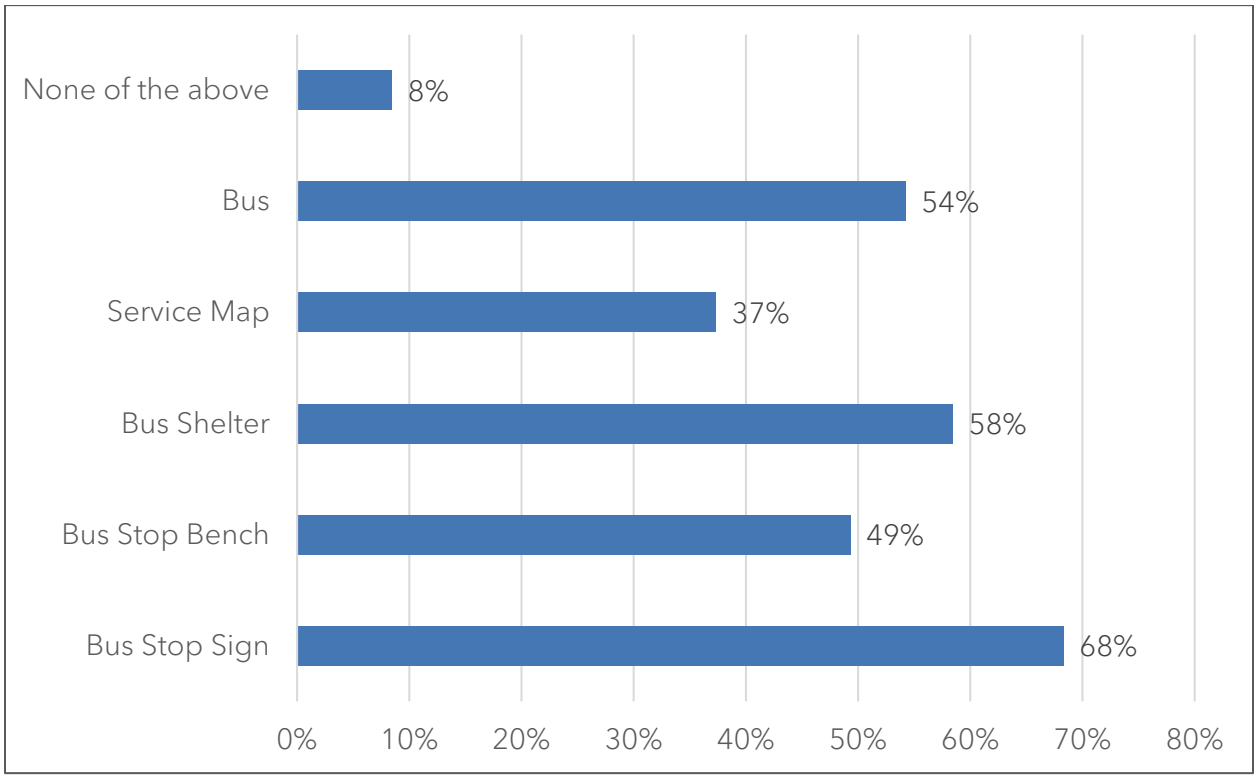


Survey responses for what respondents have seen in their community (Figure 44) reflect the following:

- Bus stop sign (68 percent)
- Bus shelter (58 percent)
- Bus (54 percent)
- Bus stop bench (49 percent)
- Service map (37 percent)
- None of the above (8 percent)

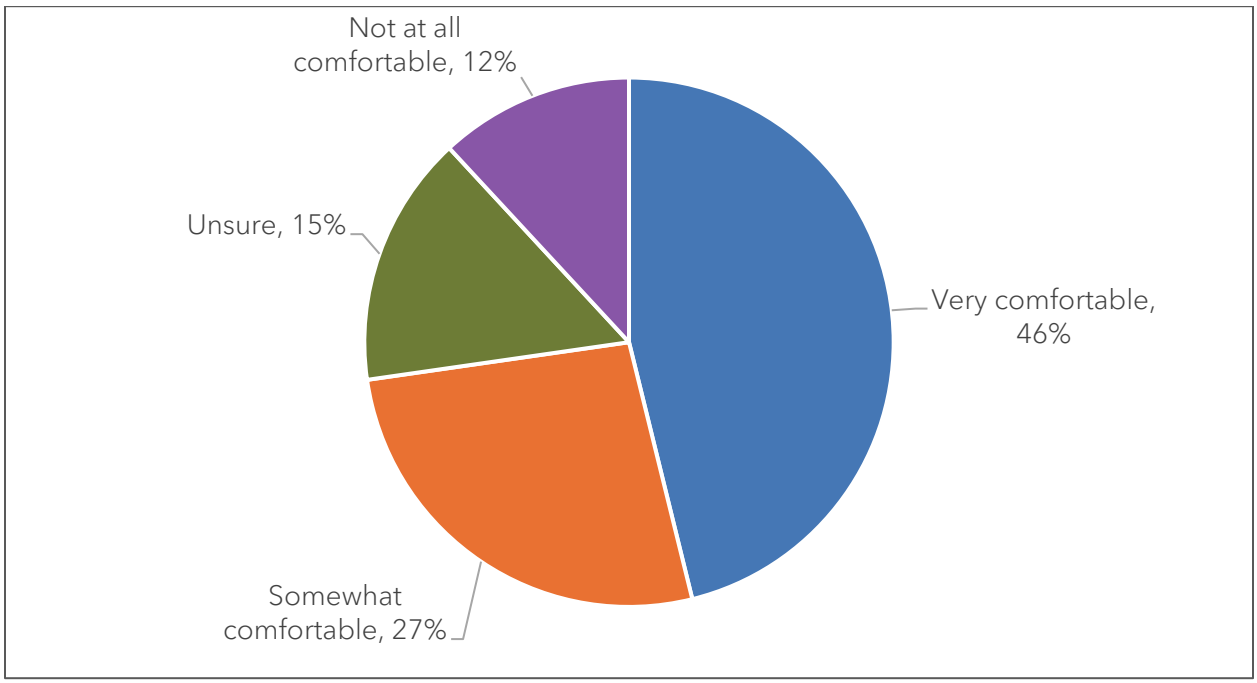
Respondents could select all answers that applied to them.

Figure 44. Which of the following have you seen in your community? Select all that apply



Survey responses on whether riders are comfortable flagging down an MWRTA bus at a location not on the stop schedule (Figure 45) reflected that 46 percent of respondents are very comfortable, 27 percent are somewhat comfortable, 15 percent are unsure, and 12 percent are not at all comfortable.

Figure 45. MWRTA allows riders to wave the bus down along the route where it is safe to do so. How comfortable are you flagging down a MWRTA bus at a location that is not a stop on the schedule?



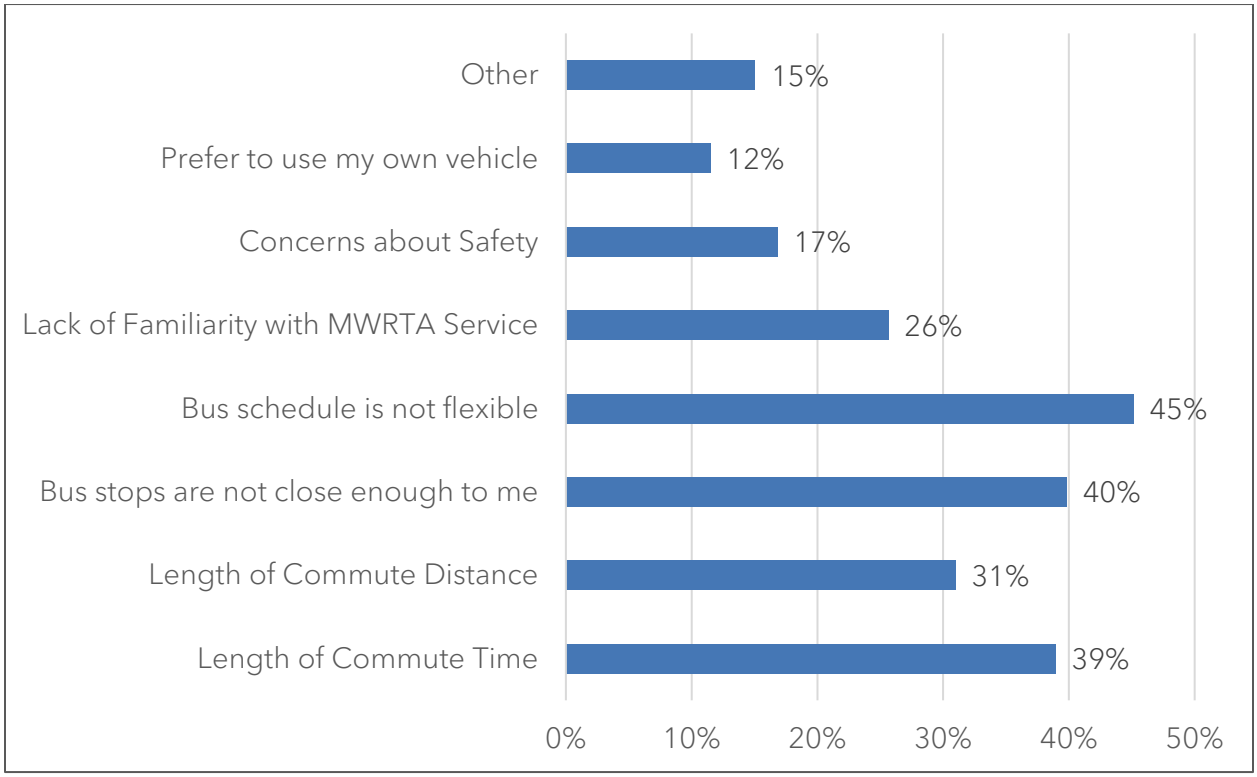
Non-Rider Survey

Survey responses for the main reason non-riders don't use MWRTA (Figure 46) reflected the following:

- Bus schedule is not flexible (51 percent)
- Bus stops are not close enough to me (45 percent)
- Length of commute time (44 percent)
- Length of commute distance (35 percent)
- Lack of familiarity with MWRTA service (29 percent)
- Concerns about safety (19 percent)
- Other (17 percent)
- Prefer to use my own vehicle (13 percent)

Respondents could select all answers that applied.

Figure 46. What is the main reason you do not use MWRTA? Select all that apply



Survey Demographics

Respondents were given the option to answer demographic questions at the end of the survey. Responses are below.

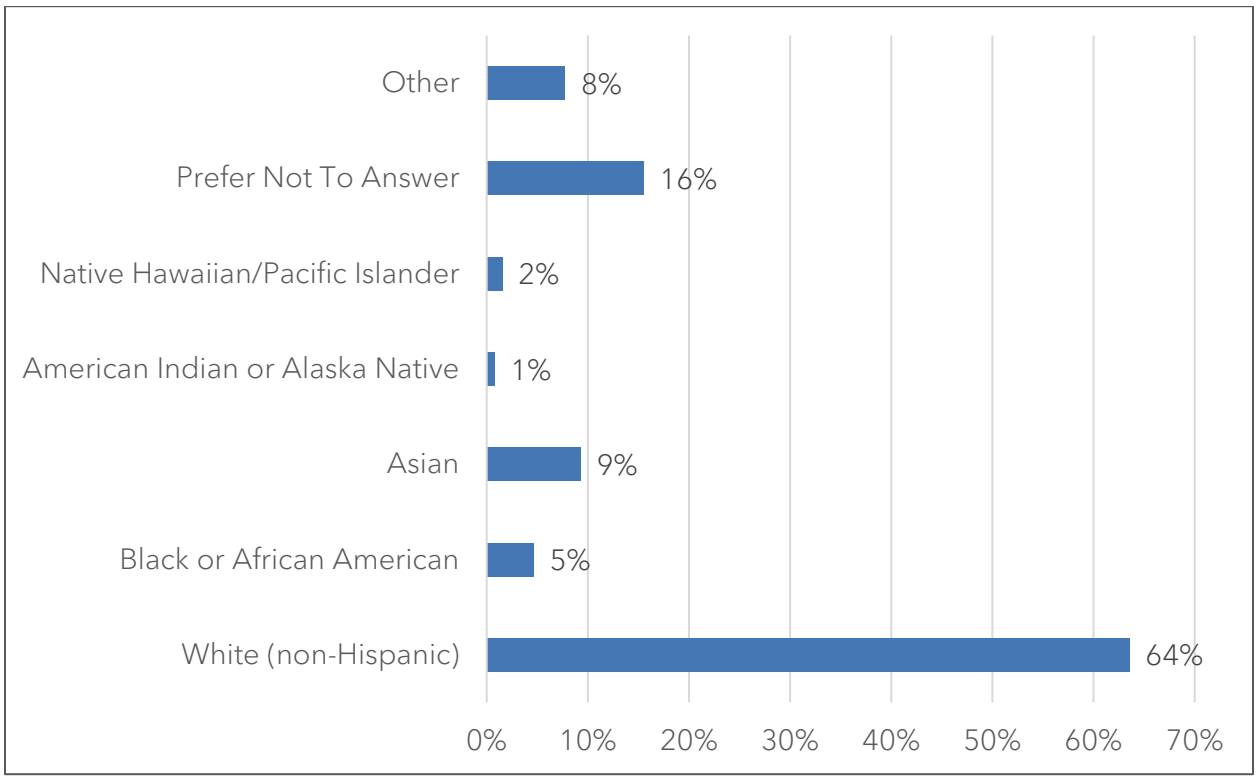
Survey responses for race/ethnicity (Figure 47) reflected the following:

- White (non-Hispanic) (64 percent)
- Prefer not to answer (16 percent)
- Asian (9 percent)
- Other (8 percent)

- Black or African American (5 percent)
- Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (2 percent)
- American Indian Or Alaska Native (1 percent)

Respondents could select all that applied.

Figure 47. What is your race/ethnicity? (Select all that apply)

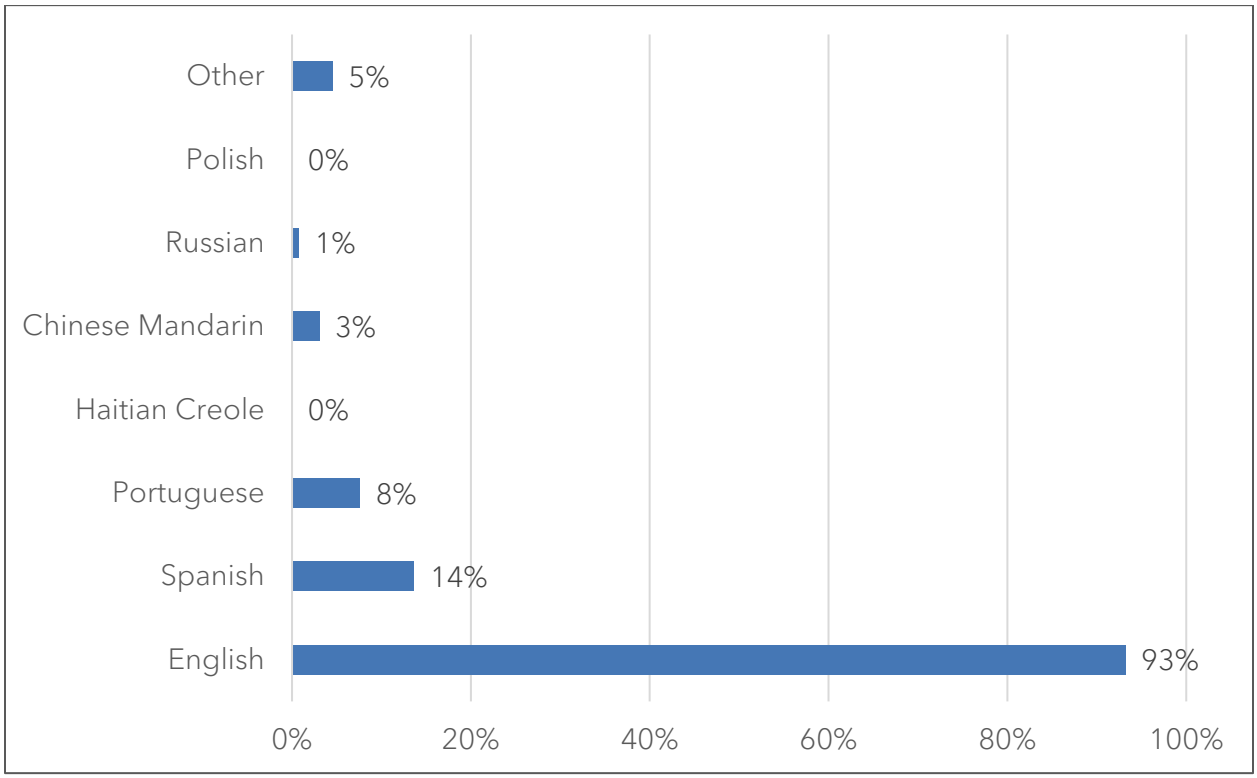


Survey responses for languages spoken in respondent homes (Figure 48) reflected the following:

- English (93 percent)
- Spanish (14 percent)
- Portuguese (8 percent)
- Other (5 percent)
- Chinese Mandarin (3 percent)
- Russian (1 percent)
- Haitian Creole (0 percent)
- Polish (0 percent)

Respondents could select all that applied.

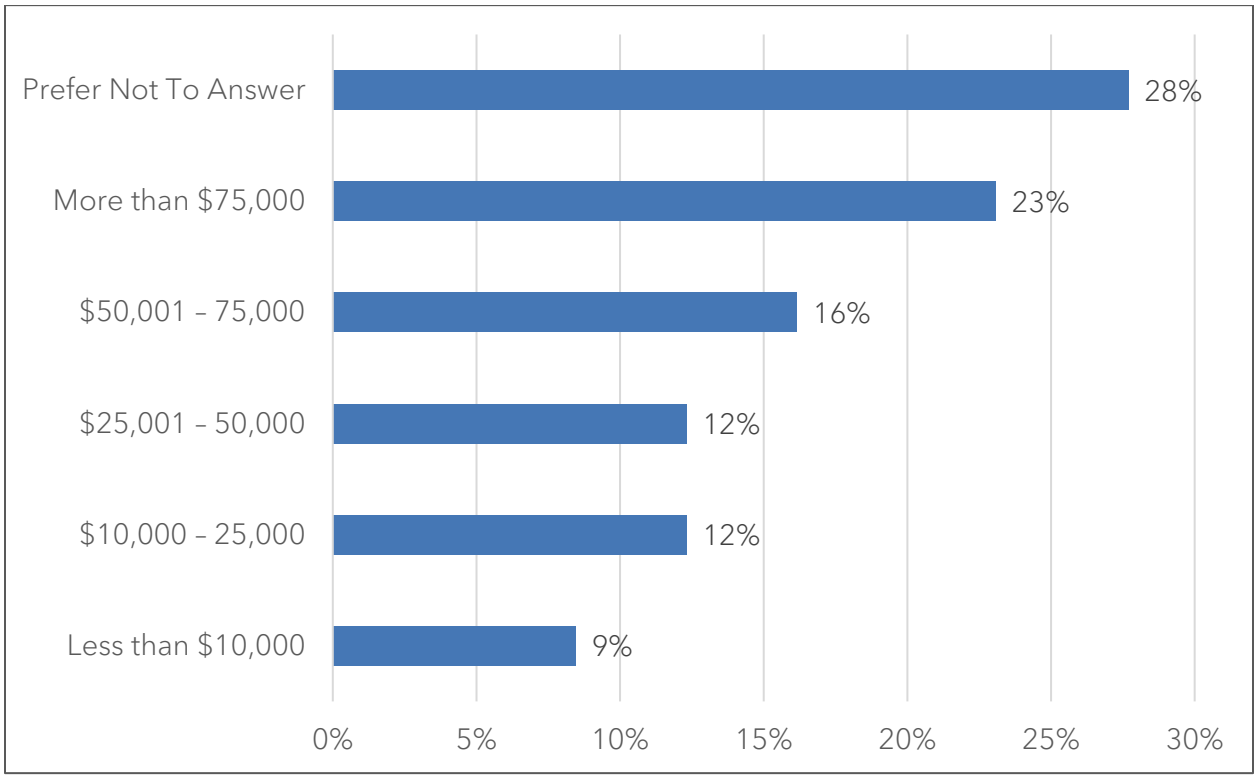
Figure 48. What languages are spoken in your home? (Select all that apply)



Survey responses for annual household income (Figure 49) reflected the following:

- Prefer not to answer (28 percent)
- More than $75,000 (23 percent)
- $50,001 to $75,000 (16 percent)
- $25,001 to $50,000 (12 percent)
- $10,000 to $25,000 (12 percent)
- Less than $10,000 (9 percent)

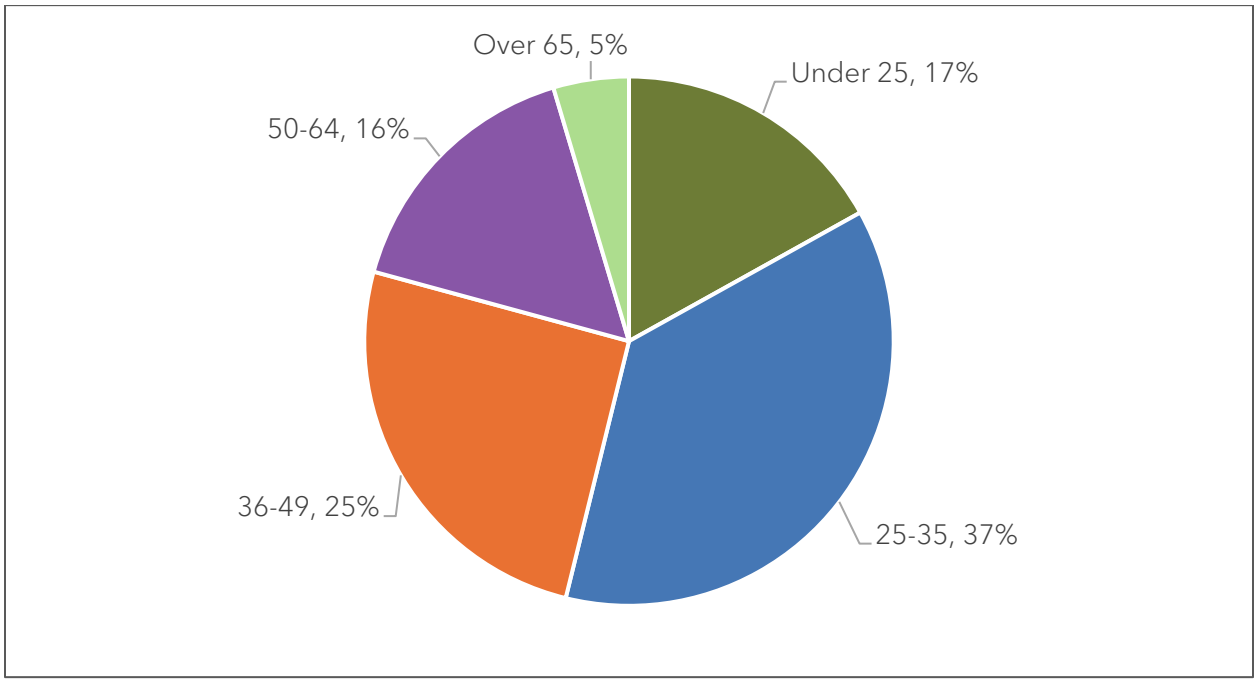
Figure 49. What is your annual household income?



Survey responses on respondent age (Figure 50) reflect the following:

- 25 to 35 (37 percent)
- 36 to 49 (25 percent)
- Under 25 (17 percent)
- 50 to 64 (16 percent)
- Over 65 (5 percent)

Figure 50. What is your age?



5.3.3.3 Key Takeaways

The following are key takeaways from the public survey effort.

- Respondents consistently requested more frequent buses, especially during peak commuting times, weekends, and evenings. Many cited long wait times and early service cutoffs as barriers to use.
- Late buses and inconsistent schedules were frequently mentioned. Riders emphasized the need for better real-time tracking, more reliable service, and clearer communication during delays.
- Many stops lack benches, shelters, lighting, or ramps, making them uncomfortable or inaccessible—especially for older adults and people with disabilities. Riders also asked for cleaner buses and better seating.
- While half of respondents found it easy to get service info, many others cited issues with the MWRTA website and mobile app, requesting simpler navigation, clearer maps, and more accurate tracking features.
- Riders expressed discomfort and uncertainty around flagging down buses. Suggestions included designated flag-down zones, driver training, and better public education on how and where it's allowed.

In the non-rider survey specifically, the top reasons provided for not using MWRTA included inflexible schedules, stops not being close enough, and lack of familiarity with the system. Expanded outreach and new service areas could help convert non-riders.

6 Performance Measures

Performance measurement is a foundational component of enhancing operational efficiency, improving the customer experience, ensuring safety, and meeting the numerous other goals that a transit agency may have by supporting and driving data-based decision-making. This chapter outlines the performance measures and targets selected and defined by MWRTA. Data examining performance from FY 2020 through FY 2024 can be found in Chapter 4.

MWRTA reports performance data on a quarterly basis across a variety of metrics as described in this chapter. The targets are updated annually as mutually agreed upon by MWRTA and MassDOT for the FY 2026 through FY 2027 time period. Where an RTA is performing well, there is an opportunity to share best practices with other RTAs in the Commonwealth. Where an RTA is not meeting targets, this is an opportunity to assess avenues for potential improvements.

6.1 Ridership

Ridership is reported as unlinked passenger trips. Each boarding is counted and summed toward the overall unlinked passenger trips metric. This metric is also normalized to vehicle revenue miles and vehicle revenue hours to better understand how ridership compares to the level of service provided. MWRTA ridership metrics and targets are shown in Table 21. Monthly data are submitted quarterly and compared to the annual target set by MWRTA.

Table 21. Ridership Metrics and Targets (FY 2026)

Metric	Fixed Route	Demand Response
Unlinked passenger trips	650,000	200,000
Unlinked passenger trips per vehicle revenue mile	0.43	0.20
Unlinked passenger trips per vehicle revenue hour	5.65	2.20

Source: MassDOT

6.2 Financial

Each RTA differs in the level of service, geographic area, modes operated, and other aspects of its operation, and as such financial metrics are reported normalized by revenue miles, revenue hours, and unlinked passenger trips. As discussed in Chapter 4, these financial metrics measure the expense rate for providing a transit service based on revenue miles, revenue hours, and trips. A smaller value indicates a more financially efficient system, faster operating speeds, and/or a high ridership. Farebox recovery ratio is a measure of revenue collected through fares as a ratio to operating expenses. As of FY 2026, all RTAs will operate fare-free fixed route service and ADA demand response. As such, the farebox recovery ratio target for both fixed route and demand response services is zero percent. MWRTA financial targets are displayed in Table 22.

Typically, each RTA verifies its financial data annually through an end-of-year audit. Therefore, annual data are submitted for comparison against performance targets.

Table 22. Financial Metrics and Targets (FY 2026)

Metric	Fixed Route	Demand Response
Operating expenses per vehicle revenue mile	$7.33	$9.20
Operating expenses per vehicle revenue hour	$91.66	$102.22

Metric	Fixed Route	Demand Response
Operating expenses per unlinked passenger trip	$16.92	$46.00
Farebox recovery ratio	0.00%	0.00%

Source: MassDOT

6.3 Customer Service and Satisfaction

Reliability of service is an important element to providing transit that meets customer needs. Therefore, customer service and satisfaction are measured through on-time performance of fixed route and demand response modes. The definitions of on-time performance for each mode are:

- Fixed Route: Vehicle departs the first run within 5 minutes of the scheduled departure time.
- Demand Response: Vehicle arrives within 15 minutes of the promised pickup time provided to customer.

Scheduled trips operated also measures service reliability, as "dropped" trips may suggest labor capacity limitations, equipment failure, or other operational constraints. From the customer's perspective, they are waiting for a vehicle that does not arrive. For fixed route service, this is especially challenging for routes with less frequent service.

Monthly data are submitted quarterly and compared against the annual target. Table 23 shows MWRTA's customer service targets for fixed route and demand response service.

Table 23. Customer Service and Satisfaction Metrics and Targets (FY 2026)

Metric	Fixed Route	Demand Response
On-time performance	95%	95%
Scheduled trips operated	98%	98%

Source: MassDOT

6.4 Asset Management

The state of good repair for capital assets is a priority of MassDOT, FTA, and MWRTA. Equipment in poor condition can result in reliability issues, safety risks, poor customer perceptions, and other problems that impede a successful transit operation. Each RTA has a TAM Plan that lays out the condition of assets and priorities for capital improvements. The TAM Plan must be submitted every four years or whenever the RTA updates its targets, whichever comes first. Targets are reviewed annually and any updates are submitted to NTD. Table 24 breaks down MWRTA targets for the percentage of vehicles exceeding their useful life, by vehicle type, and Table 25 shows the target for the percentage of facilities exceeding their useful life.

Table 24. Vehicle Asset Management Metrics and Targets (FY 2025)

Metric	Target
Automobiles	100%
Cutaways	29%
Vans	0%

Metric	Target
Trucks and other rubber tire vehicles (Non-revenue)	44%

Source: MassDOT

Table 25. Facility Asset Management Metrics and Targets (FY 2025)

Metric	Target
Administrative/maintenance facilities	0%

Source: MassDOT

6.5 Safety

Safety is the number-one priority when delivering transit service. As an urban system, MWRTA develops a PTASP that defines specific safety goals for the authority. These are reviewed annually and updated as part of a PTASP update in coordination with Boston Region MPO and MassDOT. Performance data are submitted annually in NTD then provided to MassDOT. Safety targets for calendar year 2025 are shown in Table 26.

Table 26. Safety Metrics and Targets (Calendar Year 2026)

Metric	Fixed Route	Demand Response
Fatalities	0	0
Fatalities Rate (per 100,000 vehicle revenue miles)	0	0
Injuries	9	7
Injuries Rate (per 100,000 vehicle revenue miles)	0.8	0.7
Safety Events	9	7
Safety Events Rate (per 100,000 vehicle revenue miles)	0.8	0.7
System Reliability (miles between failures)	75,000	75,000

Source: MassDOT

6.6 Annual Performance

Two annual performance metrics reported to MassDOT are unique metrics chosen by the RTA. As part of the bilateral MOU negotiation process, each RTA identifies and reports a metric and target of their choosing, and a second metric is chosen based on prioritized recommendations included in the CRTP. For the FY 2026 MOU period, the metric is tied to the 2020 CRTP. The two metrics for MWRTA are detailed in Table 27.

Table 27. Annual Performance Metrics and Targets (FY 2026)

Metric	Description	Target
RTA-Choice Metric: Entrepreneurship revenue collected	Entrepreneurship revenue collected, chosen to track the growth of community and educational partnerships within the region.	$400,000

Metric	Description	Target
RTA-Choice Metric Tied to CRTP: Catch Connect (MicroTransit) ridership	Ridership associated with MWRTA's On-Demand MicroTransit service.	85,000

Source: MassDOT

Other annual performance metrics are external partnerships and fleet composition by fuel type, as shown in Table 28. Both are reported annually and are not compared with an annual target.

Table 28. Fleet Composition by Fuel Type and External Partnership Annual Performance Metrics and Targets (FY 2026)

Metric	Fixed Route	Demand Response
Percent Electric Fleet	0%	5%
Percent Hybrid Fleet	0%	0%
Percent CNG Fleet	73%	0%
Percent Diesel Fleet	0%	0%
Percent Gasoline Fleet	27%	95%
Number of External Partnerships	19	N/A

Source: MassDOT
N/A = Not Applicable

7 Trends and Uncertainties

MWRTA held an alternatives scenario workshop on October 6, 2025, to explore future uncertainties and market trends that could potentially impact transit over the next 5 years. During this exercise, MWRTA examined how these trends might influence ridership levels and identified how it may respond to each scenario. In developing this CRTP, it was essential that the final recommendations align with operational, policy, and financial realities over time. The recommendations are informed by ridership scenarios, enabling MWRTA to identify which recommendations are most applicable based on current conditions. Key topics and solutions that arose during the scenario discussions for MWRTA to consider in the future are presented below.

7.1 Future Uncertainties

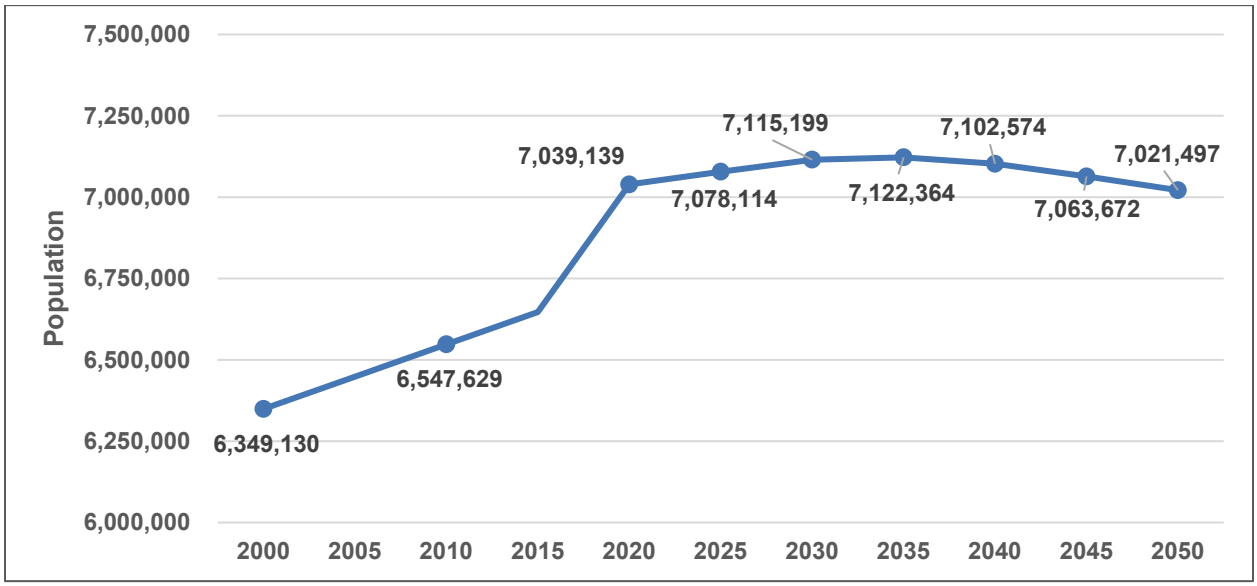
As MWRTA prepares for the next five years, it is important to recognize and plan for trends that are both highly impactful and deeply uncertain. These uncertainties may define the operating circumstances of MWRTA possibly influencing factors such as public expectations of transit, service models, funding sources, transit technologies and infrastructure, and ultimately ridership demand. The following section outlines critical uncertainties that were explored during the workshop due to their potential to plausibly shape the future of MWRTA's operation.

7.1.1 Population and Demographics

7.1.1.1 General Population Trends

Massachusetts has experienced consistent population growth throughout the twenty-first century and at a pace that exceeds neighboring New England states. This is particularly true in recent years, as Massachusetts recorded the largest annual percentage increase in population in over a decade from 2023 to 2024 (University of Massachusetts [UMass] Donahue Institute 2025). However, as seen in Figure 51, the population of Massachusetts is projected to plateau with little to no growth from 2025 to 2035 and then decline from 2035 to 2050 (Renski 2015; UMass Donahue Institute 2025). A slow down and eventual decline in population is largely attributed to two factors: domestic out-migration and international migration uncertainty. First, multiple migration measures, such as the U-Haul Growth Index, indicate very large rates of domestic migration out of the state (U-Haul 2025). In 2022, Massachusetts lost an estimated 24,000 working-age adults and 54,000 residents total through migration to other states. Second, international migration—one of the largest and most consistent sources of new residents to the Commonwealth—is highly uncertain and subject to significant changes in the future.

Figure 51. Long-term Population Projections for Massachusetts (2000-2050)



Source: UMass Donahue Institute 2025

Population and demographic trends hold a defining influence on transportation needs, the quality of transit service, and the cultural expectations around transit. A stagnant or declining population may manifest in a variety of ways for MWRTA, including:

- A reduced labor supply could present significant challenges to future workforce recruitment efforts.
- A small ridership base may reduce demand for transit and present the need for MWRTA to make service changes.
- Changing demographics may shift public expectations about the function, frequency, and quality of regional transit service.

All of these present uncertainties that are integral to determining MWRTA's operations over the next five years.

7.1.1.2 Aging Constituency

Massachusetts' population is both older and aging at a rate that exceeds the national average. In 2025, 20.4 percent of the state is 65 years or older compared to 18 percent of the US population (UMass Donahue Institute 2025; US Census Bureau 2025a). Individuals aged 65 years or older are projected to increase to 22.3 percent of the state's population by 2030. Meanwhile, the national population for this same age group is projected to increase to 21 percent of the population (Vespa 2018). Coincidingly, the proportion of Massachusetts residents aged 21 years or younger is projected to decline through 2030 (Point32 Health Foundation 2025). Not only does the rate of aging in Massachusetts outpace national averages, but it also exceeds earlier state-level estimates (Renski 2015).

In 2025, 24.9 percent of Middlesex County residents, which make up MWRTA's ridership base, are above the age of 60 in 2025 and that percentage is projected to continue to grow through 2050, which will create a more pronounced effect on transit service compared to statewide estimates. Massachusetts' increasingly older population places more pressure on demand response transportation services. Given the cost-intensiveness of demand response compared to fixed route transit, accommodating increased demand response activity imposes larger workforce needs and potentially higher operating costs on MWRTA. Meanwhile, workforce

recruitment challenges may be exacerbated as a large proportion of the population ages out of their working years. The impact of aging among Massachusetts residents therefore presents uncertainty that should be considered in MWRTA's future operations.

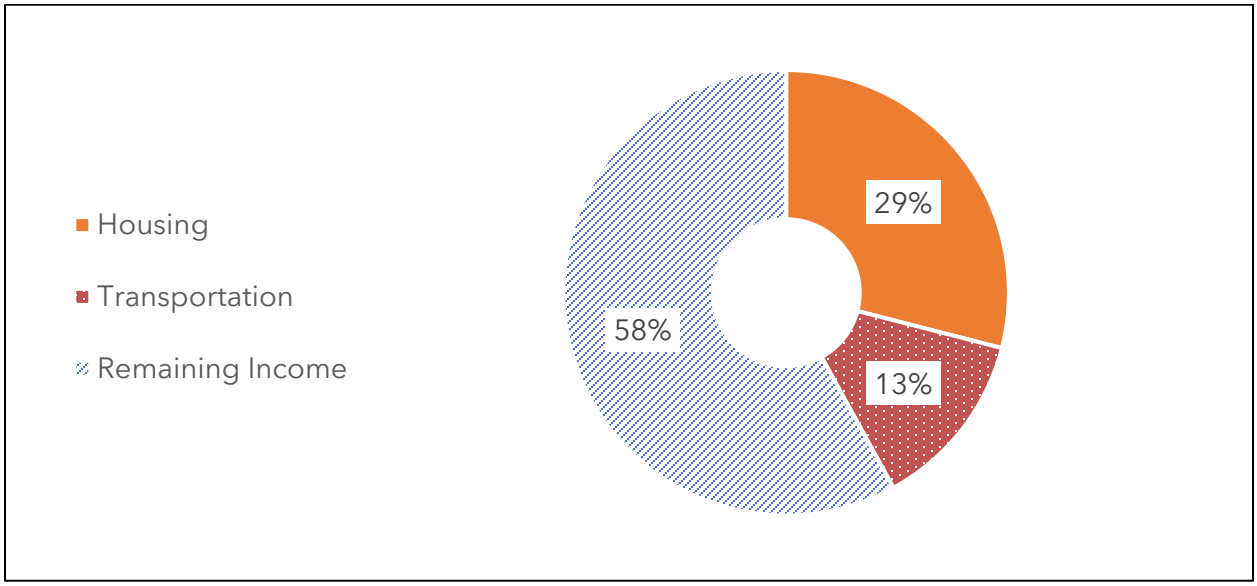
7.1.2 Affordability

The cost of living has increased considerably in Massachusetts, representing some of the highest rates across the United States. High and rapidly growing housing prices are at the center of the Commonwealth's affordability dilemma. Soaring housing costs are largely attributed to an insufficient supply of units. The Massachusetts Comprehensive Housing Plan estimates 222,000 homes need to be produced from 2025 to 2035 to adequately meet the needs of all residents (Commonwealth of Massachusetts 2025a). Production rates in recent years have fallen below the annual rate required to meet this goal, thus signaling continued shortages and rising housing prices into the future.

In tandem with housing costs, transportation expenses have also imposed an outsized burden on Massachusetts residents in recent years. According to Transportation for Massachusetts' 2024 survey, 71 percent of Massachusetts residents report housing cost burden, while 57 percent are burdened by transportation costs (Transportation for Massachusetts 2024). Among the cost-burdened, 53 percent of these residents foresee themselves moving within or out of Massachusetts due to issues of affordability, further fueling rates of out-migration and geographic disparities. Among MWRTA's ridership base, residents spend an estimated 42 percent of their income on housing and transportation expenses as seen in Figure 52 (Center for Neighborhood Technology 2025).

Affordability is one of the single-most influential factors in determining an individual's place of residence and transportation needs. Issues of affordability widen disparities around transportation access within communities and induce sprawling development and migration patterns that strain the transportation system between communities. As the basic expenses of shelter and getting around continue to rise, individual commuting distances and demand for less expensive transportation options will likely increase. This poses a unique challenge to MWRTA to appropriately balance more extensive transportation needs of the individual while accommodating a potentially increased ridership demand at the community level.

Figure 52. Middlesex County Housing and Transportation Costs as a Percentage of Residents' Income



Source: Center for Neighborhood Technology 2025

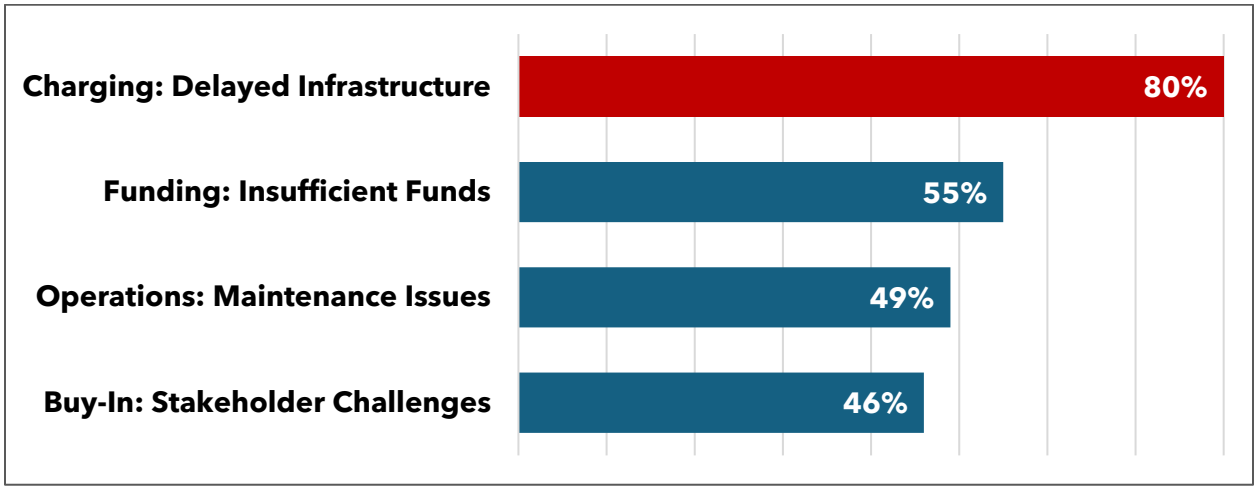
7.1.3 Technology

Transit agencies across Massachusetts and the United States have employed a variety of approaches and levels of initiative towards fleet modernization. Fleet modernization within regional transit agencies has also become highly contingent upon available funding streams at both the federal and state levels. At the federal level, the FTA Section 5339(c) Low or No Emission "Low-No" Grant Program, a program that historically prioritized zero emissions vehicle procurements, is shifting toward a trend of funding a more diverse array of vehicle procurements outside of "no-emissions" procurements (Ekbatani 2025).

Despite federal policy changes, Massachusetts has maintained fleet modernization goals. However, inadequate energy infrastructure has consistently presented a significant challenge to adoption of zero emissions vehicle. As seen in Figure 53, in a 2025 survey, 80 percent of transit agencies reported infrastructure delays as the largest challenge to adopting zero-emission vehicles (Optibus 2025). Insufficient electrical capacity, complex negotiations, and long lead times with utility providers can delay charging infrastructure.

MWRTA has also worked to change its fleet composition to include more high-capacity vehicles. As ridership grows, larger vehicles are needed to accommodate the increased demand. The Boston Region MPO has played a pivotal role in assisting MWRTA with funding these fleet enhancements. Overall, the larger vehicles provide a more efficient per passenger mile emission.

Figure 53. Inadequate Charging Infrastructure is the Leading Obstacle to Fleet Modernization



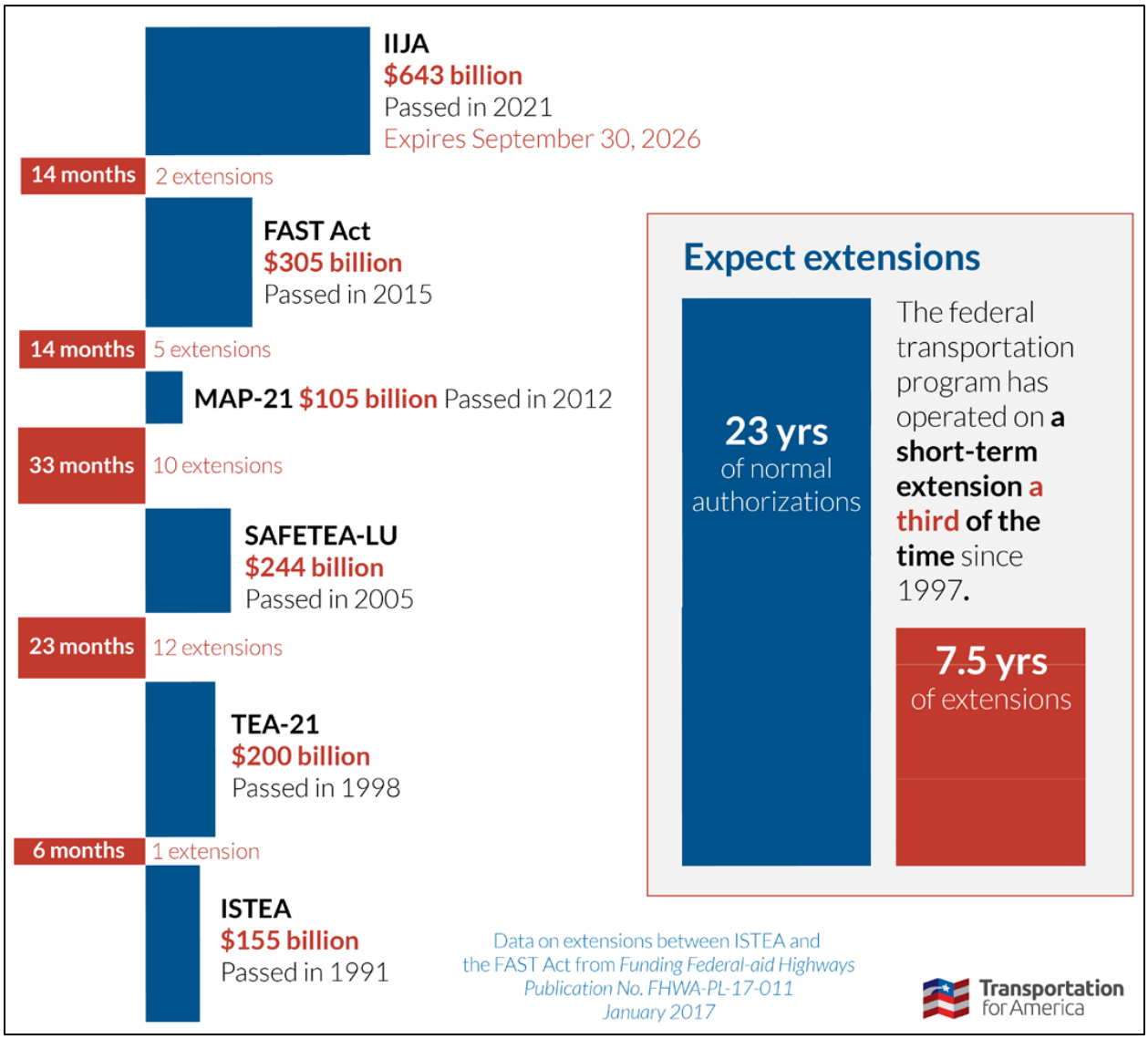
Source: Optibus 2025 State of Public Transportation Industry Survey

Over the past five years, remote work and virtual connectivity have significantly altered the commuting patterns of MWRTA's general population. Now, five years since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, remote work has been more permanently cemented as a long-term fixture of the job landscape in Massachusetts and the United States in general. Additionally, the transition of other routine daily functions towards remote services, such as telemedicine and online delivery platforms, has further lessened individual travel needs. As remote work and virtual services evolve, MWRTA could experience substantially different impacts on ridership and transit demand. For example, a widespread return to in-person work could increase transit demand. Continued expansion of telemedicine services may lessen need for demand response services. Increased adoption of remote work and long-term normalization of the remote lifestyle could disrupt the public's perceived function of public transit.

7.1.4 Funding for Transit

The stability and size of funding streams is paramount to determining MWRTA's level of service and operational success. At the federal level, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) has provided over $550 billion in funding towards transportation programs across the United States and is expected to provide $660 billion across its total five-year lifespan. Funding in the amount of $116 billion in IIJA funds is allocated towards transit programs, which represents a 40 percent expansion in federal transit funding compared to past levels (Bureau of Transportation Statistics 2025). However, the IIJA is scheduled to expire at the end of FY 2026. Despite the unprecedented levels of transit funding and investment the act has facilitated, an immediate funding replacement is not guaranteed. Intermediate funding extensions have occurred between each of the last five federal transportation funding laws, comprising 7.5 years of the last three decades, as shown in Figure 54 (Davis 2025). Given this historical record, the level of federal transit funding is uncertain over the next five years.

Figure 54. Record of Extensions for the Last Six Federal Transportation Funding Laws

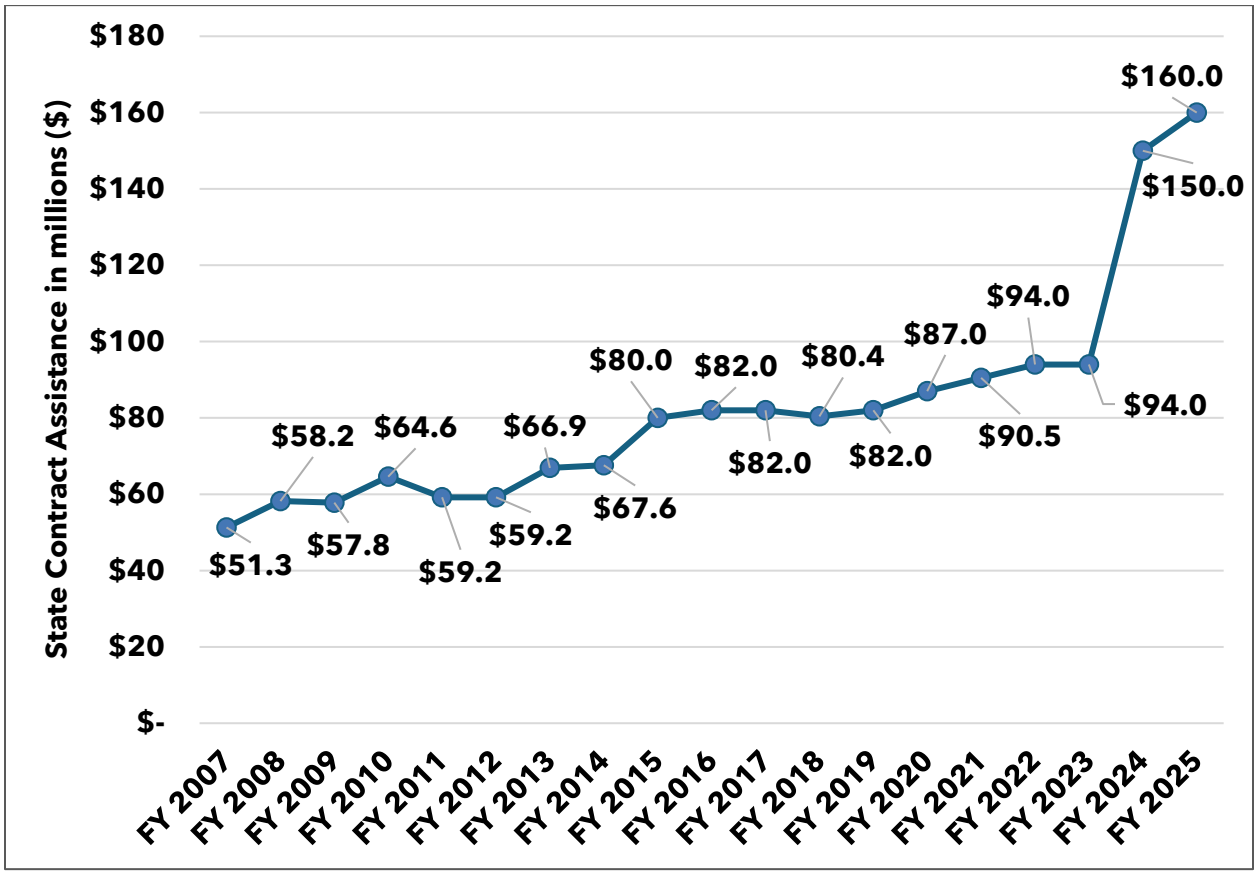


Source: Davis 2025

State funding for Massachusetts' RTAs has consistently grown in recent years. Since 2020, total funding provided to all RTAs through state contract assistance has nearly doubled from $87 million to $160 million, as shown in Figure 55 (MassDOT 2025). In addition to general operating funds, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts has implemented additional funding through initiative-based channels, such as discretionary grant programs and fare-free pilots.

Fare-free transit at MWRTA is on a trajectory to become long term as a product of state funding. $35 million was appropriated in FY 2026 for the implementation or continuation of fare-free transit at all RTAs. Additionally, a statutory amendment to Chapter 161B of Massachusetts General Laws prohibited all RTAs from charging a fare for transit services but still maintains that fare-free transit be subject to annual funding appropriation. (For more information on fare-free transit and MWRTA's fare policy, see Appendix A.) Fare-free transit has demonstrated the potential to positively impact ridership at MWRTA. However, the dependency on the Commonwealth's appropriation of future fare-free transit funding introduces uncertainty and could influence MWRTA's operations.

Figure 55. State Funding for Massachusetts' RTAs from FY 2007 to FY 2025



Source: MassDOT 2025

7.2 2020 Alternative Scenarios

MWRTA last updated its CRTP in 2020, at the peak of the pandemic, when MWRTA was facing many uncertainties across the transportation landscape that were largely outside of its control. The entire transportation industry was grappling with unknowns about the long-term impact of the pandemic on overall ridership, and whether remote work would encourage people to move outside of the immediate area. Like all transit agencies, MWRTA was unsure which routes and services would recover ridership first and which would see a slower recovery. Forces beyond the pandemic such as national economic policy, unemployment rates, education policy, availability of funding for capital investments, and municipal land use plans were all outside of its control. However, MWRTA could plan for the resulting impacts to demand for its services.

In order to address this uncertainty, MWRTA defined three qualitative ridership scenarios to map out the future of transit demand through 2025. The three scenarios were:

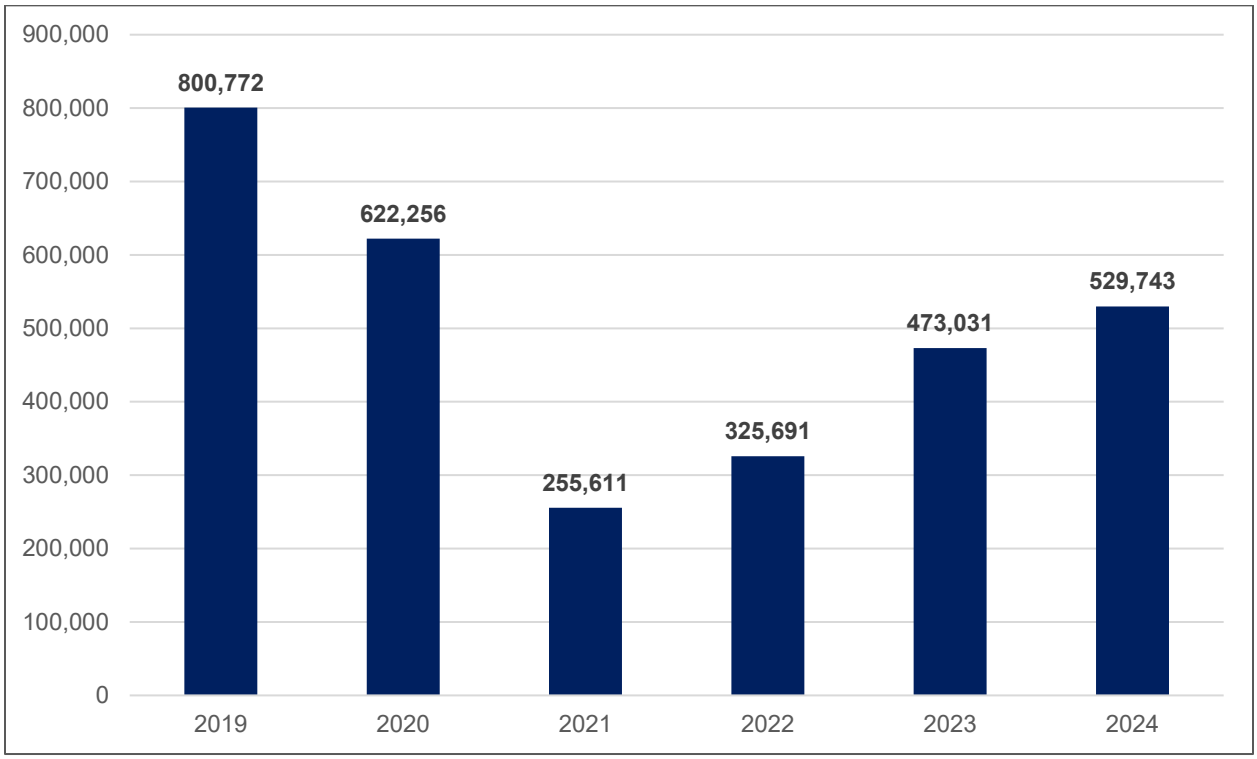
- Low Ridership: Ridership that remains below 60 percent of 2019 levels.
- Medium Ridership: Stable ridership between 60 and 85 percent of 2019 levels.
- High Ridership: Ridership that returns to 86 percent or more of 2019 levels.

Today, looking at ridership levels from FY 2020 to FY 2024, MWRTA's ridership aligned with the medium ridership scenario.

MWRTA's foresight in planning for three potential scenarios ensured it was well-prepared for the continued rebound growth in ridership from 2021 to 2024, as shown in Figure 56. This

enabled the organization to effectively utilize the 2020 CRTP recommendations that aligned with the medium ridership scenario for informed decision making and MWRTA priority action items. MWRTA implemented recommendations addressing core needs, such as the procurement of nine full-size CNG buses to support fleet modernization and the deployment of real-time vehicle tracking technology for fixed route and demand response buses to enhance MWRTA's performance management system and improve public-facing tools. MWRTA also implemented recommendations addressing medium- and high-ridership scenario needs, such as increasing frequencies on its routes and implementing fare-free transit service.

Figure 56. MWRTA Annual System Ridership (2019-2024)



Source: MassDOT 2025

7.3 Looking Ahead: 2025 to 2030 Scenario Planning

In light of the varied and numerous uncertainties affecting the United States, Massachusetts, and MWRTA's region, key questions emerge: "What comes next?" and "What can be done?" While many of these trends lie beyond MWRTA's control, how they unfold will likely have a significant impact on ridership. MWRTA can proactively respond by planning for different ridership levels over the next five years. As part of this process, MWRTA conducted a workshop that explored three different ridership growth scenarios: low ridership, medium ridership, and high ridership.

The scenarios were determined to be as follows and further detailed in the following sections:

- Low Ridership: Ridership that is 100 to 150 percent of 2025 levels.
- Medium Ridership: Ridership between 150 and 200 percent of 2025 levels.
- High Ridership: Ridership that is 201 to 300 percent of 2025 levels.

7.3.1 Low Ridership

Low ridership growth for MWRTA is characterized by ridership numbers across services 100 to 150 percent of 2025 levels over the next five years (2025 to 2030).

Several market trend factors could potentially contribute to this scenario:

- Economic downturn and widespread unemployment could significantly reduce work commutes.
- Continued prevalence of remote work could further suppress demand for commuting services.
- Demographic shifts, such as an aging population, might lead to a decline in school-based ridership.

These potential market trends, as discussed previously, could collectively shape MWRTA's ridership patterns in a low-ridership scenario. As a relatively young agency, however, MWRTA is optimistic about the growth potential of the system, and that effects of these market trends such as these may be muted compared with other, more mature systems and patterns of travel.

In addition to these potential impacts, MWRTA considered other external market trends, asking what other factors may cause stunted ridership growth over the next five years? Based on this question, MWRTA determined that the driving factor for a low-ridership potential scenario would be the reduction in anticipated state funding assistance. If state funding was reduced, MWRTA may have to reduce service, which would have a direct impact on ridership.

7.3.2 Medium Ridership

Medium ridership for MWRTA is characterized by ridership numbers across services between 150 and 200 percent of 2025 levels.

Several market trend factors could potentially contribute to this scenario:

- Stagnant household incomes or high inflation might make personal vehicle ownership less feasible, leading more people to rely on public transit.
- A shift toward more consistent in-office work could increase the volume of work-related commutes.
- Localized developments—such as new transit-oriented housing developments—could further contribute to ridership growth in this scenario.

These potential market trends, as discussed previously, could collectively shape MWRTA's ridership patterns in a medium ridership growth scenario. In response to these potential impacts, MWRTA considered, in addition to external market trends, why might ridership continue to increase at a steady pace?

Based on this question, MWRTA determined that the driving factors for a medium ridership potential scenario would be the following:

- Continued federal and state funding to keep up service enhancements and fare-free service year to year.
- A successful network redesign could drive higher demand by attracting riders to a network that prioritizes high frequency transit corridors.
    - However, there was discussion of the potential for a negative public response to the redesign, which could limit the anticipated level of ridership increase. Alternatively,

slow rider adjustment to the redesign and usability of the system — particularly with the growth of the retired and older adult populations — could similarly curb the anticipated level of ridership increase.

- Due to MWRTA's high proportion of college-based riders, changes in the structure and operations within higher education and in the travel behaviors of student riders could contribute to a limited degree of ridership increase.

7.3.3 High Ridership

High ridership for MWRTA is characterized by a substantial increase in ridership numbers across services, reaching 200 to 300 percent of 2025 levels over the next five years.

This scenario could be driven by several potential factors:

- A sharp rise in gas prices may encourage more people to choose public transit over personal vehicles.
- An aging population could lead to a significant increase in demand response ride requests.
- The expansion of service-based industries and tourism economies might create a sustained spike in ridership.

These potential market trends, as discussed previously, could position MWRTA to experience considerable growth in transit utilization. In response to these potential impacts, MWRTA considered, in addition to the external market trends, why might ridership increase substantially?

Based on this question, MWRTA determined that the driving factors for a high ridership potential scenario would be the following:

- Continued successful investment in rolling stock to maintain vehicles in a state of good repair, as well as investment in fixed assets such as bus stop infrastructure to improve the rider experience.
- Continued federal and state funding to keep up service enhancements and fare-free service year to year.
- Successful implementation of the network redesign, combined with a positive response from communities.
- Increased marketing and public outreach to maximize public awareness of services. Communities in MWRTA's service area have been accustomed to the lack of public transit access over generations, and MWRTA must combat this norm to maximize ridership. Investing in marketing, such as vehicle wrapping upgrades, to increase the agency's visibility throughout its communities would further support awareness and increased ridership.
- The network redesign is designed to complement transit-oriented development planned within MWRTA's service area. Relocation to these areas would facilitate access to transit services and contribute to a high-ridership scenario.

7.4 Future Opportunities

Table 29 summarizes the opportunities and corresponding scenarios that arose during the scenario discussions. Depending on ridership levels over the next five years, MWRTA can

determine which strategic opportunities may be applicable to pursue. For items that are applicable regardless of ridership level, "all scenarios" is indicated.

Table 29. Opportunities by Ridership Scenario

Ridership Scenario	Description of Opportunity
All Scenarios	Identify sustainable alternative funding sources to ensure any unanticipated state or federal funding cuts would not adversely impact the continuation of MWRTA service operations or planned service improvements and operations/capital investments.
Medium	Plan for a robust outreach effort to promote the launch of the network redesign and prepare riders and the broader MWRTA community for the service changes. This would help minimize rider frustration and confusion around using the redesigned service.
Medium	Increase public and private partnerships to foster ridership growth through synergy.
High	Invest in MWRTA branded wrapping of vehicles to increase service visibility and MWRTA name recognition throughout the service area.
High	Increase promotion efforts for travel training programs to help overcome public awareness challenges and boost the level of comfort using MWRTA services, particularly with the upcoming network redesign.

Source: MWRTA Alternative Workshop on October 6, 2025.

8 Recommendations

The recommendations in this five-year plan emerged from a data-informed process that incorporated historical operational data, stakeholder feedback, industry standards, local policy, statewide objectives, and MWRTA priorities. These recommendations establish a framework for advancing strategic service adjustments, capital improvements, and policy initiatives based on data-driven analysis, and make meaningful progress toward better mobility for residents across the region.

8.1 Changes Since the 2020 Comprehensive Regional Transit Plan

The 2020 CRTP included numerous recommendations across a variety of categories, such as service and capital investments. Since that plan was produced, there has been a significant infusion of state and federal funding supporting expanded transit service. Recommendations that MWRTA has implemented over the past five years, as well as additional investments made, include:

- Procurement of nine full-sized buses running on cleaner CNG in 2025, with a plan to increase the share of full-size buses to 30 to 50 percent by the end of FY 2027 or FY 2028. This aligns with MWRTA's past recommendation to continue modernizing its fleet for better efficiency and capacity.
- Implementation of real-time vehicle tracking technology for fixed route and demand response buses, both for public-facing purposes and internal performance management, which addresses MWRTA's need to enhance its performance management system.
- Expansion of service spans and frequency, in alignment with MWRTA's goal to implement service enhancements.
- Expansion of Catch Connect MicroTransit service to Sudbury, Hopedale, Milford, and Berlin, which enhances service and establishes a cross-jurisdictional connection to the WRTA service area.
- Launch of the 495 Connector route funded by MassDOT, connecting to three commuter rail lines and to GATRA's microtransit service area. This establishes additional regional connections, as recommended in the 2020 CRTP.
- Completion of a bus stop infrastructure assessment to support future design and implementation of new shelters and additional signage along routes, which aligns with MWRTA's goal to leverage bus stop signage and infrastructure for improved rider safety.
- Implementation of fare-free transit service.
- Ongoing comprehensive fixed route network redesign, planned for a fall 2026 launch.
- Successful procurement of a new operations contractor (Keolis Transit Services, LLC) for the upcoming five-year period beginning in FY 2026.
- Completion of rider and non-rider perception surveys of different types of transit vehicles to gain insight on public preferences and perceptions of safety and comfort on different vehicle types.

- Approval by the Boston Region MPO advisory board for a permanent shared rotating seat on the board, alternating between MWRTA and Cape Ann Transportation Authority every two years.

8.2 Planning for an Uncertain Future

As described in Chapter 7, the Commonwealth may face key uncertainties in the next five years, including ridership. The five-year vision accounts for these variables, particularly the level of ridership in the MWRTA service area. Refer to Chapter 7 for ridership scenarios and their impact on the plan.

Depending on how the future unfolds, different uncertainties may impact the listed recommendations differently. For the purposes of the five-year plan, level of ridership demand was identified as one of the key uncertainties driving MWRTA actions, including:

- Low Ridership: If the level of ridership demand over the next five years increases to a maximum of 150 percent of 2025 levels, a focus on recommendations that are not contingent on sustained or increased ridership levels would be most judicious. Thus, in a low ridership scenario, pursuing the list of core recommendations would be warranted.
- Medium Ridership: If the level of ridership demand over the next five years increases to a maximum of 200 percent of 2025 levels, more robust service and capital expansions may be warranted. Some of those might include increasing vehicle resources for weekend Catch Connect service, deploying bus stop infrastructure improvements, and considering high-ridership Catch Connect areas for potential fixed route expansion.
- Higher Ridership: If the level of ridership demand over the next five years increases substantially to a maximum of 300 percent of 2025 levels, then the most enhanced service and capital investments may be warranted. Some of those might include exploring opportunities to increase frequencies and spans of service on high ridership fixed routes, investing in MWRTA branded vehicle wrapping across the fleet, and identifying opportunities to improve or expand weekend service.
- Core: Many recommendations are included regardless of ridership level and are considered core needs, which also correspond to the recommendations of interest under a low ridership scenario. Example recommendations include developing a Fixed Route Continuous Improvement Plan, developing a marketing plan and generally boosting promotion and education efforts, deploying new or upgraded technologies, and streamlining data collection and analysis processes to support performance dashboard development.

The next section presents the recommendations for MWRTA to use as a roadmap for the next five years across a variety of topic areas.

8.3 Identified Needs

The needs identified in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 served as the foundation for the recommendations detailed in the subsequent sections. The quantitative data analysis in the existing conditions section and market assessment, in combination with the qualitative feedback from the public and stakeholder outreach, provided the basis for these recommendations. They were further augmented by staff review to confirm applicability to operational realities and ensure alignment with other planning documents (e.g., regional long-range transportation plan).

The recommendations in this plan directly respond to needs identified through the MWRTA data analysis, market assessment, public and stakeholder input, and needs articulated in other regional and statewide plans. Needs identified through this planning process, as well as the element of the process that identified those needs, are shown in Table 30.

Table 30. Identified Needs

Need	Identified Through…
Create and maintain a fixed route continuous improvement plan	Needs and Goals, Existing Conditions Analysis, Public and Stakeholder Engagement
Enhance service (spans, frequencies), particularly on high-ridership fixed routes and to improve on-time performance	Needs and Goals, Existing Conditions Analysis, Public and Stakeholder Engagement
Improve first mile/last mile connections	Needs and Goals
Improve marketing, visibility, and attractiveness of MWRTA services	Needs and Goals, Alternatives Scenarios, Public and Stakeholder Engagement
Enhance promotion of targeted travel training opportunities	Alternatives Scenarios, Public and Stakeholder Engagement
Improve rider-facing tools and technology, such as through Catch App enhancements and real-time trip planning tools	Needs and Goals, Existing Conditions Analysis, Alternatives Scenarios, Public and Stakeholder Engagement
Update website and redesign maps and schedules, particularly to promote the network redesign and simplify service information and resources	Existing Conditions Analysis, Alternatives Scenarios, Public and Stakeholder Engagement
Clarify rider policies, specifically around baggage and smoking	Public and Stakeholder Engagement
Update bus stop infrastructure, amenities, and trip planning technology, particularly at high ridership stops	Needs and Goals, Public and Stakeholder Engagement
Maintain state of good repair for vehicles	Existing Conditions Analysis, Alternatives Scenarios
Increase vehicle capacity, particularly on high-demand routes	Needs and Goals, Existing Conditions Analysis, Environmental Policy
Integrate environmentally conscious upgrades in vehicle and facility improvements as feasible, such as with the hydrogen feasibility study, the procurement of heavy-duty CNG vehicles, and the exploration of battery energy storage technology installation at Blandin Hub.	Needs and Goals, Existing Conditions Analysis, Environmental Policy
Update Blandin Hub facility for rider, administrative, and maintenance improvements	Needs and Goals
Upgrade fleet maintenance infrastructure	Needs and Goals

Need	Identified Through…
Improve data quality and collection and refine performance metrics to support data-driven decision-making	Needs and Goals, Existing Conditions Analysis
Maintain efforts to train and retain drivers, and to support day-to-day needs	Needs and Goals, Public and Stakeholder Engagement
Increase ridership systemwide	Needs and Goals, Existing Conditions Analysis, Alternatives Scenarios, Environmental Policy
Conduct consistent targeted rider engagement, particularly to collect feedback on the network redesign when implemented	Needs and Goals, Existing Conditions Analysis
Increase data and operations transparency	Needs and Goals, Existing Conditions Analysis, Performance Monitoring
Identify alternative revenue sources for capital projects, service improvements, and interconnectivity	Needs and Goals, Existing Conditions Analysis, Alternatives Scenarios
Identify funding to sustain fare-free service, particularly demand response operations and the greater resource needs	Needs and Goals, Existing Conditions Analysis, Alternatives Scenarios, Fares, Environmental Policy

8.4 Recommendations

These identified needs drove the development of the recommendations found in this section. MWRTA discussed these needs during multiple workshops to identify the suite of recommendations presented below, taking into consideration the potential positive impact, risks, the level of effort to implement, feasibility, uncertainties, and other relevant factors.

The recommendations are organized into categories, including service, public-facing resources and customer service, technology, asset and capital, training and operations, data and performance, and partnerships and funding (Table 31). For recommendations that fall under multiple categories, a note in the final column highlights their cross-listing.

Table 31. Recommendations Categories

Category	Description
Service	Service recommendations deal with specific modes, routes, or other operational considerations of day-to-day provision of service.
Public-Facing Resources and Customer Service	Public-facing resources and customer service recommendations deal with marketing, engagement and education efforts and agency policies.
Technology	Technology recommendations deal with the procurement of transit technologies and functionality upgrades.
Asset and Capital	Asset and capital recommendations deal with the purchase or management of equipment, rolling stock, facilities, or other assets.

Category	Description
Training and Operations	Training and operations recommendations deal with staff hiring and retention practices.
Data and Performance	Data and performance recommendations deal with the systems and protocols for monitoring agency operations.
Partnerships and Funding	Partnerships and funding recommendations deal with coordination between the RTA and other regional and statewide partners, particularly to leverage funding opportunities.

8.4.1 Service Recommendations

Service recommendations for MWRTA focus on continuously monitoring services and service performance and identifying and planning for service improvement and expansion opportunities (Table 32). MWRTA is advancing its network redesign focused on the fixed route bus network. The public comment period was open through December 31, 2025, and any route-specific feedback provided by the public through the CRTP engagement effort will be considered in the fixed route network planning process. In January 2026, MWRTA began its review of all comments and initiated planning for final service changes. In spring 2026, the final route selection will be made available to the public, and the full redesign implementation is planned for fall 2026. Coordination with the network redesign, as well as additional funding and vehicle and staff resources, are critical to the responsible and successful implementation of these recommendations, and robust promotional efforts must be incorporated to support public awareness. MWRTA also intends to develop and follow a Fixed Route Continuous Improvement Plan to inform decisions regarding service changes and expansion, a strategy that is incorporated into the service recommendations as a core need.

Table 32. Service Recommendations

ID	Recommendation	Ridership Scenario	Category Overlap
S1	Explore opportunities to extend service spans on high ridership fixed routes (i.e., earlier mornings or later evenings).	High	N/A
S2	Explore opportunities to increase frequency on high ridership fixed routes (i.e., 15-minute clock-face schedule).	High	N/A
S3	Leverage the network redesign and bus stop study to identify opportunities for and implement improved or expanded weekend service on high ridership fixed routes	High	Public-Facing Resources and Customer Service, Data and Performance, Partnerships and Funding
S4	Utilize existing Catch Connect performance data to identify opportunities for future fixed route expansion. Consider implementing fixed route service in high ridership and high utilization areas	Medium / High	Data and Performance, Partnerships and Funding

ID	Recommendation	Ridership Scenario	Category Overlap
S5	Create and maintain a MWRTA Fixed Route Continuous Improvement Plan	Core	Data and Performance
S6	Explore opportunities for first mile/last mile improvements such as bike and pedestrian infrastructure.	Core	Partnerships and Funding
S7	Continue working with communities looking to add Catch Connect service to identify appropriate expansion points	Medium	Partnerships and Funding

N/A = Not Applicable

8.4.2 Public-Facing Resources and Customer Service Recommendations

MWRTA has made important progress in recent years in improving its marketing efforts and public-facing resources to boost awareness and ridership. Over the next five years, regardless of ridership levels, MWRTA is committed to continuing this work and to effectively advertising new or modified services, such as through targeted outreach, website updates, redesigned route maps for improved clarity, and increased resource and signage distribution. MWRTA also intends to revise certain rider policies to improve clarity and mitigate conflict risks (Table 33).

Table 33. Public-Facing Resources and Customer Service Recommendations

ID	Recommendation	Ridership Scenario	Category Overlap
PC1	Develop a marketing plan, either internally or through a request for proposal, to boost awareness and attract new riders, especially with the fixed route redesign.	Core	Service, Asset and Capital
PC2	Conduct an internal holistic review of schedules and maps for improved clarity following the network redesign. Utilize a small focus group consisting of riders and non-riders to gather feedback on the new materials prior to publishing.	Core	Service
PC3	Following the network redesign, update the MWRTA website to improve information access and clarity. Focus on providing clear fixed route information (i.e., schedules and route maps), adding a Catch Connect service area map, and simplifying information on the Senior and Disabled home page (i.e., by organizing key information at the top of the page and providing additional resources at the bottom).	Core	Service

ID	Recommendation	Ridership Scenario	Category Overlap
PC4	Complete a review of the MWRTA Rider Policy and add clarity to the following: • Update "No Smoking" to clarify "No smoking / vaping/ illegal drug use onboard or at stops and stations, including e-cigarettes. You must leave the bus shelter or platform areas to smoke" • Update policy number 6, Mobility Devices, to clarify the policy for bus driver and passenger responsibilities by separating out mobility devices (i.e., wheelchairs to be secured) from passenger property (i.e., luggage, strollers, shopping carts)	Core	N/A
PC5	Post MWRTA rider policy signage and updated fixed route maps at the Banana Lot, which is the Framingham MBTA Commuter Rail Station Northside Parking Lot and other high ridership locations.	Core	N/A
PC6	Increase promotion efforts for travel training programs to boost public awareness and comfort using services by conducting targeted outreach with COAs and high schools, and by adding information on the MWRTA website.	Core	Training and Operations, Partnerships and Funding

N/A = Not Applicable

8.4.3 Technology Recommendations

MWRTA has demonstrated a motivation to update or implement new technologies both to support internal operational efficiencies and to offer public-facing tools for enhanced accessibility, comfort, and ease of use when riding MWRTA services. Each technology recommendation is a core recommendation, whether because initial steps have already been taken or because it offers critical value to MWRTA's system regardless of ridership levels (Table 34).

Table 34. Technology Recommendations

ID	Recommendation	Ridership Scenario	Category Overlap
T1	Implement Catch Connect vehicle arrival notifications within the MWRTA Catch app.	Core	N/A
T2	Implement real-time trip planning technology in the app and at MWRTA facilities	Core	Asset and Capital, Partnerships and Funding
T3	Implement a rider location pin feature in the MWRTA Catch app	Core	N/A

ID	Recommendation	Ridership Scenario	Category Overlap
T4	Update software platform mapping base to match services and mitigate data presentation issues for public clarity.	Core	N/A
T5	Continually assess performance of CAD/AVL system for data collection and data accuracy.	Core	N/A
T6	Continue to implement customer-facing smart signage with information such as real-time arrival at facilities, to provide a comparable alternative to using the app.	Core	Partnerships and Funding

N/A = Not Applicable

8.4.4 Asset and Capital Recommendations

MWRTA continues to prioritize maintaining state of good repair for both its fleet and its facility. The agency has deployed three bus replacements in FY 2025, is expecting an upcoming bid for additional Catch Connect vehicles, and is anticipating increasing its share of heavy-duty vehicles to between 30 and 50 percent of its fleet by the end of FY 2027 or FY 2028. These fleet expansion and upgrade efforts are also aligned with MWRTA's recommendations to upgrade fleet maintenance capabilities, determine the feasibility of a future hydrogen-powered fleet, and improve system visibility by introducing branded vehicle wrapping across the fleet. Facility updates are also included in these recommendations, as are capital improvements focusing on bus stop infrastructure and signage along routes (Table 35). Funding is necessary for each of these recommendations to be achieved.

Table 35. Asset and Capital Recommendations

ID	Recommendation	Ridership Scenario	Category Overlap
AC1	Design and construct new no/low maintenance facility and additional infrastructure improvements to help support larger vehicle types being introduced into MWRTA fleet.	Core	Partnerships and Funding
AC2	Increase vehicle resources for weekend Catch Connect service	Medium / High	Partnerships and Funding
AC3	Deploy bus stop infrastructure improvements, prioritizing high ridership stops	Medium / High	Technology, Data and Performance, Partnerships and Funding
AC4	Maintain state of good repair for vehicles	Core	N/A
AC5	Continue the strategic replacements of light and medium duty buses with heavy duty fixed route buses to increase capacity on high-demand routes	Core	Partnerships and Funding

ID	Recommendation	Ridership Scenario	Category Overlap
AC6	Invest in MWRTA branded vehicle wrapping across the fleet	High	Public-Facing Resources and Customer Service, Partnerships and Funding
AC7	Integrate environmentally conscious upgrades into vehicle and facility asset improvements	Core	N/A
AC8	Complete feasibility study of hydrogen powered fleet, infrastructure, and production. If hydrogen is identified as feasible for the MWRTA system, move forward toward infrastructure planning and implementation.	Core	Partnerships and Funding
AC9	Continue to advance Blandin Hub improvements utilizing best practices and implementing accessible design and employee input throughout the design process and construction	Medium / High	N/A
AC10	Invest in fleet maintenance upgrades to accommodate different fuel types and heavy-duty vehicles.	Core	Partnerships and Funding
AC11	Invest in administrative facility updates	Core	Partnerships and Funding

N/A = Not Applicable

8.4.5 Training and Operations Recommendations

With hiring and retaining staff continuing to present challenges across most RTAs, MWRTA is motivated to explore and leverage strategic and creative solutions, regardless of its ridership levels, including enhanced training and internal communication practices (Table 36).

Table 36. Training and Operations Recommendations

ID	Recommendation	Ridership Scenario	Category Overlap
TO1	Support ongoing hiring and retention efforts for operators, and prioritize an open hiring approach.	Core	N/A
TO2	Continue to invest in driver training focused on safety and customer service best practices	Core	N/A
TO3	Identify and implement strategies to enhance communication between operators and dispatch around Catch Connect service and what passenger information is available to drivers	Core	N/A

ID	Recommendation	Ridership Scenario	Category Overlap
TO4	Continue to ensure the MWRTA Travel Trainer has the latest in training and best practices information to perform effectively	Core	Public-Facing Resources and Customer Service

N/A = Not Applicable

8.4.6 Data and Performance Recommendations

MWRTA continues to pursue opportunities to improve data quality and leverage collected data for enhanced performance monitoring and data-driven decision making. MWRTA already has the support of an IT consultant and is motivated to enhance data visualization practices and performance dashboard resources over time, particularly to provide greater data transparency to the public. MWRTA is also committed to assessing the impact of its network redesign on customer satisfaction. Access to accurate data will support decision-making, greater clarity and transparency around operations, and expanded opportunities to leverage performance assessments under any ridership scenario (Table 37).

Table 37. Data and Performance Recommendations

ID	Recommendation	Ridership Scenario	Category Overlap
DP1	Streamline data collection and synthesis processes to support performance dashboard development and data-driven decision making.	Core	Asset and Capital
DP2	Adjust MWRTA's definition of on-time performance to monitor performance throughout the day at the route level	Core	Technology
DP3	Determine refined performance metrics by mode and geography	Core	N/A
DP4	Comprehensively assess the impact of MWRTA services on service area transit needs in an ongoing capacity for continuous improvement.	Core	Service
DP5	Establish a robust customer satisfaction performance metric to measure satisfaction with the large-scale network redesign	Core	Service
DP6	Monitor data and publish operating outcomes of the network redesign	Core	Service

N/A = Not Applicable

8.4.7 Partnerships and Funding Recommendations

MWRTA intends to continue efforts to maintain its strong partnerships with statewide, regional, and local leaders and organizations. Past coordination has led to partnerships for expanded service (i.e., the current pilot connector route supported by MassDOT), cross-jurisdictional

service connections (i.e., Catch Connect service in Berlin, a WRTA community), and various funding opportunities. MWRTA recognizes the critical value of ongoing coordination and strategic and creative fund-seeking approaches to ensure its services continue to improve and meet transit needs (Table 38).

Table 38. Partnerships and Funding Recommendations

ID	Recommendation	Ridership Scenario	Category Overlap
PF1	Continuously explore and pursue additional funding opportunities through partnerships and local, state, and federal resources.	Core	N/A
PF2	Leverage existing partnerships with MBTA, Boston Region MPO, MassDOT, etc., to support capital, service efficiency/expansion, and interconnectivity improvements	Core	Service, Technology, Asset and Capital
PF3	Pursue and leverage enhanced partnerships with neighboring RTAs for best practices knowledge sharing and to promote increased regional transit connections	Core	Service
PF4	Continue to maintain robust coordination efforts with COAs and identify opportunities for continuous improvement	Core	Public-Facing Resources and Customer Service
PF5	Leverage partnerships with Framingham, Natick, Marlborough, and other member communities for facility and infrastructure upgrades such as bus stops, hubs, and other capital upgrades	Core	Asset and Capital

N/A = Not Applicable

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Appendix A Fares

Fare policy is part of a broader set of RTA and Commonwealth policies that affect public access to transit, RTA revenue, transit system operations, and many other facets of transit service in Massachusetts.

This appendix explores fare policy for MWRTA and fare replacement programs funded by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. It also examines the industry's best practices for fare-free transit operations and provides an outlook for the future of fare collection.

Fare Collection and Revenue Replacement Program

MWRTA's fixed route and demand response services have been fare-free since January 2024. MWRTA continues to charge a fare ($2.00) for its Catch Connect MicroTransit service. The following subsections describe the evolution of fare collection and revenue replacement—from fare suspension during the COVID-19 pandemic to the approval of funds for fare-free operations in the Commonwealth's FY 2026 budget—and MWRTA's fare policy.

Fare-free Regional Transit – Statewide Background

COVID-19 Fare Suspension

In March 2020 the Commonwealth, along with the rest of the United States, was grappling with a global pandemic. To slow the spread of COVID-19, measures were put in place to encourage social distancing and minimize contact between front line service workers and the public. Several RTAs responded by suspending fare collection as part of their COVID mitigation measures. Fare suspension durations varied across the Commonwealth, and many RTAs reinstated fare collection once protective measures were in place to protect bus operators from exposure to COVID-19.

Try Transit Program

Beginning on November 25, 2022, and through the end of 2022, MWRTA received $103,230 to suspend fare collection. The fare suspension was funded by a $2.5 million appropriation available to RTAs in the FY 2023 Massachusetts State Budget and restricted to fare-free operations. This was the first program funded with an appropriation in the state budget. The limited duration of the program makes it challenging to measure changes in ridership trends. However, anecdotally, it was popular among riders.

Fare-free funding was extended to RTAs again in the FY 2024 Massachusetts State Budget with a $15 million appropriation restricted to fare suspension programs. The funding allowed for longer duration fare suspension, but it remained a pilot program since it provided funds for a partial fiscal year. MWRTA received $190,828 and suspended fares for eight months (January through August 2024).

On balance, RTA customers, staff, and stakeholders across the Commonwealth considered the FY 2024 program successful and funding was again appropriated in the FY 2025 State Budget with $30 million. The FY 2025 appropriation provided for a full year of fare-free operations and went beyond revenue replacement and extended funding to address the increased costs associated with additional ridership. MWRTA received a grant of $812,331 to support fare-free operation.

Fair Share Act

In November 2022, voters approved an amendment to the Massachusetts Constitution that assesses a 4 percent surtax on incomes over $1 million that would be restricted to education and transportation. The Commonwealth began tax collection on January 1, 2023, and used the revenue collected during the remainder of the FY 2023 budget year to create a trust fund from which funds would be distributed in future years.

The FY 2024 budget was the first year funds were appropriated, and $1 billion was included in the budget; $510 million was appropriated to education and $490 million was appropriated to transportation. The RTAs were appropriated $25 million, and $15 million was used to support the FY 2024 Try Transit program. For FY 2025, the Fair Share Amendment was expected to generate $1.3 billion, $605 of which was appropriated to transportation. The RTA share increased to $90 million; $30 million was used to support the FY 2025 Try Transit program.

State Fiscal Year 2026 Fare-Free Budget and Legislation

The FY 2026 budget for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts was signed into law on July 4, 2025. In FY 2026, $35 million was appropriated for the implementation of year-round fare-free transit service across the Commonwealth's RTAs. This funding accompanies a statutory amendment to Chapter 161B of Massachusetts General Laws, which now prohibits RTAs from charging passenger fares for all fixed route services and paratransit services, subject to appropriation of funding to replace fare revenue. MassDOT is responsible for reimbursing RTAs for lost fare revenue attributable to the fare-free service mandate. MWRTA is required to collect and report ridership data to MassDOT in a format and frequency prescribed by MassDOT.

RTA Fare Policy

Prior to fare-free service, MWRTA charged the rates shown in Table 39 and Table 40 for fares. The MWRTA Advisory Board approved a fare policy on January 25, 2021. Fare rate changes were approved in the June 28, 2021 Advisory Board meeting. The fare policy outlined fares for fixed route service and for ADA and senior van service. MWRTA suspended its fare policy upon the introduction of fare-free service.

Prior to fare-free operations, MWRTA suspended payments through MBTA CharlieCards and accepted fare payment through the MWRTA CatchCard, which could be obtained through the MWRTA Central Hub or directly from drivers on fixed route vehicles. Riders could load value through the MWRTA branded and developed Catch App. For older adults (65+) and individuals with disabilities, Reduced CatchCards were available for those who qualified via application.

MWRTA Catch Connect service fares were paid directly through the Catch App at a flat rate and could be loaded by either the app or calling a support telephone number.

Dial-A-Ride and MetroWest RIDE riders paid fare through a dedicated customer fare account that could be loaded through an online account or support telephone number.

Table 39. Fixed Route Fare Policy

Fare Product	Cash	Catch Card	Monthly Pass
Adult	$1.50	$1.25	$20.00
Student (under 18 Years Old)	$1.00	N/A	N/A

Fare Product	Cash	Catch Card	Monthly Pass
Child (under 6 Years Old with an Adult)	FREE	N/A	N/A
Active-Duty Members (in Uniform)	FREE	N/A	N/A
Seniors (65 or Older with valid photo ID or MWRTA/MBTA Senior Pass)	$0.75	$0.70	$10.00
Individuals with a Valid Transportation Access Pass or Medicare Card	$0.75	$0.70	$10.00
Individuals with Commission for the Blind Card	FREE	N/A	N/A

Source: MWRTA Fare Policy, 2021
N/A = Not Applicable

Table 40. ADA and Senior Van Service Fare Policy

Fare Product	Fare Price
Catch Connect (Via App)	$2.00
MetroWest RIDE trip	$2.00
MetroWest RIDE trip (Personal Care Attendant)	FREE
Dial-A-Ride trip within or between designated towns	$2.00
Dial-A-Ride trip to extended areas (medical only)	$3.00
Dial-A-Ride trip to extended areas (medical only; Boston, Brighton, Brookline, Jamaica Plain, Worcester)	$5.00

Source: MWRTA Fare Policy, 2021

Fare-free Program

Appropriations in the Massachusetts State Budget between FY 2023 and FY 2025 for fare-free transit operations provided the following annual funding amounts for MWRTA:

- FY 2023 – Try Transit holiday promotion: $103,230
- FY 2024 – Fare-free Implementation: $190,828
- FY 2025 – Fare-free Implementation: $812,331

RTA Fare-Free Experience and Lessons

By operating fare-free, MWRTA has seen an increase in transit ridership and operational efficiencies through the reduction of cash-handling. Prior to fare-free operations, MWRTA utilized a half-time staff equivalent person for collecting, securing, and processing cash gathered from transit operations. This has also led to a decrease in maintenance costs associated with maintaining fare infrastructure.

The agency has also continued to receive positive feedback from MWRTA customers and transit operators who have indicated that boarding is more efficient.

Fare Collection Infrastructure

Fare collection equipment serves two main purposes: (1) collect, count, and securely store money deposited by riders upon boarding and (2) count passenger boardings. The amendment to Massachusetts General Law Chapter 161B in the FY 2026 state budget, which mandates fare-free service, changes considerations around the maintenance and use of fare collection equipment today and in the future.

On-board Equipment and Ticket Vending Machines

Prior to its fare-free operations, MWRTA had been using Scheidt & Bachmann fareboxes on their fixed route buses since 2008. These fareboxes accepted cash, transfers, and MBTA CharlieCards to enable interconnectivity with the MBTA system. In 2022, MWRTA transitioned to an in-house fare collection platform, the Catch App and CatchCard, to facilitate payments, transfers, and passes across all transit modes. Customers could pay fares through the app, utilize the new CatchCard or pay with cash, but MWRTA no longer accepts payments through MBTA CharlieCards. Fares would be deducted from riders' personal Catch accounts, and riders were responsible for maintaining a positive balance of funds in their account to book a trip. Funds could be uploaded via credit/debit cards, pre-paid credit cards, mailed checks or money orders, or cash transactions at the MWRTA Central Hub. MWRTA also introduced an unlimited fixed route monthly pass, aimed at making fixed route services more affordable.

With the new fare collection system, maintenance expenses on the fare collection system dropped, along with the monthly pass increasing the use of cashless fares. Expenses were primarily surrounding cash collection and counting.

Retail Sales

MWRTA primarily sold passes either through the Catch App, which accepted credit and debit cards, or at the Blandin Hub.

Cash Control and Management

MWRTA's Diamond fare collection system accepted cash, which required the agency to develop a process for cash control and management. Reports were run against total cash received versus cash counted. There was a dedicated 0.5 FTE staff member whose responsibility was to count cash and deposit to the bank. MWRTA then checked reported values against actual deposits.

Fare-free Transit Best Practices

Transit Access and Efficiency

Ridership

Fare-free transit almost always is associated with a significant increase in ridership. Fare-free transit has repeatedly shown to increase ridership by 20 percent to 60 percent for transit agencies in the United States. Agencies that went fully fare-free before the COVID-19 pandemic experienced 20 percent to 100 percent increases in ridership within the first two years of the policy change. Paratransit services have seen similar growth, with increases up to 60 percent after implementation of fare-free service. Studies suggest that 5 percent to 30 percent of new trips resulting from fare-free policy come from those who previously took other motorized modes of travel (Volinski 2012).

Operational Efficiency

Fare-free transit simplifies both the ride experience for passengers and the workload of operators. Without fare collection, dwell time per passenger during boarding and alighting is reduced without the queues at the farebox; it also enables more efficient all-door boarding. Shorter dwell time improves on-time performance and service reliability. Fare-free transit has been acknowledged to have significantly improved on-time performance at RTAs in Massachusetts (Baxandall 2025).

Free fares may encourage more frequent shorter rides by passengers who may have otherwise walked. Despite the reduced dwell time per passenger resulting from elimination of farebox queues, more stops and larger boarding and alighting volumes may negatively impact absolute dwell time. This is most acute where stops are located in close proximity to each other and can be mitigated with increased spacing that balances operational efficiency with passenger access.

Financial Health

Revenue Sources

Identifying and acquiring alternative revenue sources to replace fare revenue is a significant barrier to implementing and maintaining fare-free transit. Securing a funding source for Massachusetts RTAs is important to the maintenance of fare-free transit. Small to mid-sized agencies, like Massachusetts' RTAs, where fare revenue is a small portion of operating revenue, face less financial difficulty in implementing and maintaining fare-free transit.

Revenue Collection Costs

The loss of revenue by eliminating fare collection is a concern for RTAs. However, fare-free transit also provides an opportunity for cost savings. Fare-free transit eliminates costs associated with the administration, enforcement, and equipment maintenance of fare collection. Fare administration, collection, and enforcement has been documented as consuming over 25 percent of fare revenue at Massachusetts RTAs (Worcester Regional Research Bureau 2019).

Increased ridership resulting from fare-free transit often creates the need for increased capacity. RTAs may need to act to effectively handle the increased demand, such as expanding fleets, hiring more staff, or expanding service. Agencies should anticipate or acknowledge the potential for high costs associated with providing high capacity service to accommodate increased ridership.

A bigger challenge for MWRTA may be the complementary paratransit service provided for older adults and people with disabilities. Paratransit services do not scale the same as fixed route services. The personalized nature of the service means that as more riders book more trips, both vehicle and staff productivity tends to fall and capacity to provide trips becomes strained. Funding is needed to not only replace revenue lost to fare suspension but also provide resources to hire and train additional staff needed to meet the growing demand for paratransit service.

MicroTransit services present another challenge, as riders are less incentivized to keep trips or properly notify the authority of cancellation of a trip when there is no fare associated with the trip. No fares also help to improve the popularity of the service, which, in the case of MicroTransit where there is limited resources available, can strain the system.

Operator and Passenger Experience

Farebox disputes are the most likely incident that results in transit operator assaults. FTA reports operator assaults per unlinked passenger increased fourfold from 2009 to 2020 (Van Eyken 2022). Fare-free transit programs improve operator safety by eliminating conflict over fare collection, and have generally received positive feedback from operators. Many prominent transit organizations are in support of fare-free transit for its positive implications towards ensuring operation safety. Fare-free transit also reduces barriers to operator recruitment by reducing the need of operators to hold technical knowledge regarding farebox technologies (Transit Workforce Center 2025).

Fare-free transit can increase the number of non-destination riders (i.e., people who use the transit system for shelter or as a pastime). Fare-free transit is an attractive option for someone without shelter to find respite from weather. Because transit is a public service, it is a challenge to provide equitable access for all members of the community while discouraging non-destination riding that may be disruptive to other passengers.

Riding policies, like having all passengers exit the bus at the end of the line, can dissuade non-destination riding. Agencies can collaborate with social service providers to extend outreach and intervention opportunities (GoTriangle 2025). Loitering rules can be better enforced at terminals and bus stops, and rules of conduct can be imposed and enforced when customers act unruly or disturb other passengers on board.

Future of Fare-free Regional Transit

Risks

State Funding

Starting in the FY 2024 state budget, fare-free service was funded with a discretionary grant program appropriated annually and funded with Fair Share Amendment revenue. The FY 2026 state budget amended Massachusetts General Law Chapter 161B with a mandate for fare-free transit service. The transition from a discretionary program to a statutory funding requirement provides a greater degree of certainty to MWRTA that the funds will be available each year; however, "subject to appropriation" in the amendment suggests that the funding could be at risk from prolonged budgetary constraints.

Fare Equipment State of Good Repair

The Diamond fare collection system is now 3 years old. Fare collection equipment has a usable life benchmark of 10 years set by MWRTA. Maintaining equipment that is no longer needed for fare collection and only is used to count passengers is costly and does not produce the same precision passenger counts of an APC system.

The amendment to Massachusetts General Law provides certainty that lost fare revenue will be reimbursed. The risk, however, is that if the state budget is constrained and funds are not appropriated to reimburse lost fare revenue, MWRTA will not have the capacity to collect fares once fare collection equipment has been phased out. The longer that fare collection is paused, the more expensive it will be for MWRTA to resume collection. New vehicles have not had fare collection equipment installed. Tablets that run the collection software on other vehicles will most likely need to be replaced in the event of a multi-year pause of collection, as batteries fail in the devices and operating system software becomes outdated.

Opportunities

Opportunities for revenue enhancements to replace farebox collections are limited. High ridership may make advertising space inside the bus, at terminals, and stops more attractive as it is visible to more people. Additional vehicles in service to meet the demands of high ridership may present more opportunities for vehicle exterior advertising space.

Future of Fare-Free Policy

With the passage of the FY 2026 state budget and the changes to Chapter 161B, there is increased certainty in the state policy environment with regard to fare-free regional transit. RTAs around the Commonwealth may choose to make policy and operational decisions that assume future funding replacement for fare revenue. If fare-free funding was to no longer be available, the MWRTA Advisory Board would reassess the long-term feasibility of operating fare-free.

Appendix B Environmental Policy

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has set ambitious statewide goals regarding environmental quality, as have many of its regions and municipalities. With transportation emissions contributing significantly to statewide greenhouse gas emissions and poor air quality, efforts to reduce those emissions through technology or encouraging transit ridership are described in this appendix. This appendix highlights how those environmental policies or programs may intersect with, inform, or drive MWRTA actions.

Overview of Environmental Policies that May Intersect with Regional Transit Authority Activities

The following sections identify RTA activities and the associated supportive policies:

- Commonwealth policies are statewide policies or goals that support specific RTA activities.
- Regional policies are any climate action plans established by Regional Planning Agencies if those plans include transportation goals, targets, or actions.

RTA-specific goals and studies are another important source of information supporting specific RTA actions regarding environmental quality. Together, the statewide and regional policy context should help to inform decision making and goals contained within these five-year RTA plans.

Foundational Commonwealth Environmental Policies

There are several foundational Commonwealth policies that set the stage for greenhouse gas emissions reductions from the transportation sector. These policies may support numerous RTA activities as they relate to greenhouse gas emissions reductions, given the alignment between emissions reductions and maximizing transit ridership, serving transit-oriented places, and installing green energy infrastructure.

- Global Warming Solutions Act: Signed into law in August 2008, this act required the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs to set economy-wide greenhouse gas emissions reduction goals, including for transportation, that achieve a 10-25 percent reduction below statewide 1990 levels by 2020 and at least 80 percent reduction below statewide 1990 levels by 2050 (Commonwealth of Massachusetts 2008b).
- Commission of the Future of Transportation in the Commonwealth: Established by Executive Order 579 (Baker 2018), this commission developed multiple recommendations related to reducing GHG emissions and promoting energy efficiency (Governor's Press Office 2018).
- 2050 Decarbonization Roadmap: Published in December 2020, the Roadmap is a result of a Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs planning process to identify cost-effective and equitable strategies for Massachusetts to reach its goal of 85 percent greenhouse gas emissions reductions by 2050 and achieving net zero emissions (Commonwealth of Massachusetts 2020).
- Clean Energy and Climate Plan for 2050: Released in 2022, this plan represents Commonwealth policies and strategies to reach Net Zero in 2050 (Commonwealth of Massachusetts 2022).

- Green Communities Act: Signed in 2008, this act expanded energy efficiency, supported the development of renewable energy resources, created a greener state building code, and created the green communities program (Commonwealth of Massachusetts 2008a).
- Beyond Mobility: The statewide long-range transportation plan, published in 2024, lays out a number of actions to be undertaken by MassDOT, several of which focus on reducing greenhouse gas emissions from the transportation sector (Commonwealth of Massachusetts 2024a).

Maximizing Transit Ridership

Commonwealth Efforts

A key method of reducing environmental impact of the transportation sector is increasing ridership on transit, particularly if it shifts people from single-occupancy vehicles into a comparatively efficient transit bus. There have been multiple efforts undertaken at the statewide level to increase RTA ridership:

- Funding for Fare-Free Service: After a $15 million pilot for fare-free RTA transit in FY 2024, Massachusetts approved funding in its FY 2025 budget granting $30 million to 13 RTAs to provide year-round, fare free service (MassDOT 2024b).
- Coordination of Service Providers: MassDOT provides a toolkit on coordinating service providers to maximize mobility, increase ridership, and serve riders more efficiently. The toolkit includes case studies, ways to get involved, and Coordinated Human Service Transportation Plans developed by Regional Planning Agencies (Commonwealth of Massachusetts 2025d).
- Mobility Management: MassMobility is a MassDOT initiative that aims to increase mobility for those who lack transportation access, including oldera adults, people with disabilities, veterans, and low-income commuters (Commonwealth of Massachusetts 2025e).
- Regional Transit Innovation Grant: MassDOT has provided grants that provide funding to transit providers for innovative projects. Eligible projects enhance or expand existing service, provide innovative transit service, improve connectivity of rural areas and between regional transit service areas, or support electrification (Commonwealth of Massachusetts 2024b).
- 310 Code of Massachusetts Regulations 60.05, Global Warming Solutions Act Requirements for Transportation: Includes requirements that support maximizing transit ridership and may be an effective tool for RTAs who are working to increase ridership in communities that they serve.

Regional Efforts

The following regional policies are supportive of maximizing transit ridership.

- Boston Region MPO/*Destination 2050*: *Long Range Transportation Plan* (Boston Region MPO 2023b)
    - Modernize transit facilities to improve reliability of travel on the transit network including with MWRTA.
    - Improve bus reliability and mobility by focusing on routes with high minority ridership.

- Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC)/*Greater Boston Priority Climate Action Plan* (MAPC 2024b)*:*
    - Improve public transit service

Serving Transit-Oriented and Transit-Dependent Places

Commonwealth Efforts

There are several statewide initiatives to support the development of transit-oriented places and to focus transit service on those places that are dependent on public transportation.

- Massachusetts Chapter 40R, or The Smart Growth Zoning Overlay District Act, Chapter 249 of the Acts of 2004: Encourages dense residential and mixed-use development through "smart growth" zoning districts. The goal is to increase housing supply by increasing the amount of land zoned for dense housing, including a high percentage of affordable housing units to be located near transit stations. Communities are eligible for Chapter 40R payments and other financial incentives upon state review and approval of a local overlay district (Commonwealth of Massachusetts 2025b).
- Section 3A of Massachusetts General Laws c.40A, also known as the MBTA Communities Law: The goal of this law is to create zoning that encourages the development of housing in areas served by MBTA rapid transit (Commonwealth of Massachusetts 2025f). Given the overlap between RTA and MBTA rapid transit-served areas, as housing developments come to those areas targeted by the law, RTAs may consider enhancing complementary fixed route service depending on the context and need.

Regional Efforts

The following regional policies are supportive of serving transit-oriented or transit-dependent places.

- MAPC/Greater Boston Priority Climate Action Plan (MAPC 2024b)
    - Build, improve, and expand infrastructure to support multimodal transportation.
    - Connect infrastructure to public or shared modes of transportation.
- Boston Region MPO/*Destination 2050*: *Long Range Transportation Plan* (Boston Region MPO 2023b)
    - Complete streets, infrastructure, intersection, and bike network improvements to support transportation in the area
- Boston Region MPO/*Transportation Improvement Program* (Boston Region MPO 2024)
    - Support state of good repair, modernize transportation systems, and promote transportation access

Vehicle Emission Reductions

Commonwealth Efforts

The Commonwealth has provided policy and funding support for the transition of public transportation vehicles to zero-emission forms of propulsion. This complements RTA efforts to incorporate low- and zero-emission vehicles into their fleet.

- H.5060 An Act Driving Clean Energy and Offshore Wind, the Clean Energy and Climate Plan for 2050: This act contains numerous transportation-related actions. This policy can be supportive of those efforts in that it calls for the MBTA bus fleet to be all electric by 2040; RTAs could potentially leverage that electrification effort to support procurement of their own electric vehicles. Additionally, it requires MassDOT to provide technical and funding assistance to RTAs to help electrify their fleets and to provide RTAs with assistance to create an electric bus rollout plan. MassDOT is also directed to consult with RTAs on developing and issuing recommendations for a program of incentives for authorities to develop and maintain buses and other zero emissions vehicles (Bill H.5060). The directives to MassDOT could be a significant source of support for RTAs in this work.
- Beyond Mobility: This statewide plan contains a specific action to support electrification of public transportation vehicles, including RTA vehicles (Commonwealth of Massachusetts 2024a).

Regional Efforts

The following regional policies are supportive of electrification.

- MAPC/*Environment* (MAPC 2025)
  - Implement clean energy and clean vehicle technologies.
- Boston Region MPO/*Destination 2050*: *Long Range Transportation Plan* (Boston Region MPO 2023b)
  - Net zero emissions by 2050
- MAPC/Greater Boston Priority Climate Action Plan (MAPC 2024b)
  - Decarbonize and electrify bus transit
  - Create and support electric vehicle car share programs
  - Expand technical and financial assistance programs for residents and small businesses to purchase electric vehicles.
  - Explore group purchasing opportunities for municipalities and residents to purchase electric vehicles at lower negotiated prices.
  - Develop a regional electric vehicle charging network strategy.
  - Explore electric vehicle charging incentives and cost reduction programs.

Supportive Local Efforts

Table 41 demonstrates where MWRTA's transportation planning efforts may coordinate with or support existing plan and policy goals for cities within the MWRTA planning area. For cities that do not have climate plans or whose climate plans do not contain transportation-related actions, the transportation planning work of MWRTA may help to fill the gap.

Table 41. Cities in the MWRTA Service Area with Climate Action Plan Transportation Goals

City Name	Climate Action Plan
Framingham	Climate Action Plan (in progress)
Marlborough	Hazard Mitigation Plan Update (City of Marlborough 2023)
Ashland	The NetZero Plan for Ashland (Town of Ashland 2022)

City Name	Climate Action Plan
Sudbury	Climate Mobilization Action Plan (Town of Sudbury 2023)
Wellesley	Climate Action Plan (Town of Wellesley 2022)
Hopkinton	Hopkinton Climate Action Plan (Town of Hopkinton 2023)
Wayland	Wayland Climate Action Mobilization Plan (Town of Wayland 2022)
Holliston	Holliston Climate Action Plan (in progress)
Sherborn	Sustainable Sherborn (Town of Sherborn 2023)
Natick	Natick's Net Zero Action Plan (Town of Natick 2021)

While transportation actions varied across communities, general themes emerged around mobility, access, affordability, greenhouse gas emissions reductions including electrification, and protecting transportation infrastructure (e.g., roads, bridges, culverts) from the effects of climate change to maintain continuity of operations and evacuation routes.

Challenges and Opportunities

In alignment with Commonwealth and regional plans, MWRTA has continued to explore environmental investments to encourage people to shift from single-occupancy vehicles to transit. All vehicles utilized for MWRTA fixed route service operate on CNG. MWRTA also maintains a CNG fueling station at its Blandin Hub facility, which is available for public use and for partner agencies such as MassDOT Highway. MWRTA also maintains a 228 kW solar canopy to fully offset facility energy needs. Within the last year, MWRTA introduced its first heavy duty CNG vehicles, which are more efficient than gasoline and diesel. MWRTA anticipates continuing to procure up to 20 additional CNG heavy-duty transit buses, with expanded capacity for riders, and deploy them for fixed route operations. The purchase and deployment of these CNG buses aligns with Commonwealth goals for emissions reductions and congestion mitigation.

Additionally, MWRTA continues to explore the feasibility of a zero-emission demand response fleet, including piloting Ford Transit electric vans for its Catch Connect MicroTransit service in FY 2024. MWRTA conducted a small-scale pilot of battery-electric vans to assess preliminary operations and to monitor range capabilities. Early piloting indicated that the electric van range was impacted by variability in temperature especially in the cold weather months, a common industry-wide challenge with electric vehicles. Due to this degradation, it was determined that the vehicles had too low of a range to be operationally available for demand response shift lengths. MWRTA continues to assess the long-term operation of battery-electric vehicles for its ADA paratransit, Dial-A-Ride, and MicroTransit service and monitor the availability of electric vans with a longer range.

In FY 2022, MWRTA was awarded funding $985,000 through the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) Strengthening Mobility and Revolutionizing Transportation (SMART)-Stage 1 discretionary Grant Program for the Blandin Energy and Sustainable Storage Technology (BESST) project. The BESST project aimed to install solar power and battery banks on-site energy and to power MWRTA's fleet at the Blandin Hub. The goal of the project was to complete the planning and design of a comprehensive energy generation and battery storage system to promote clean energy and resilience to climate change through innovative energy generation solutions.

Long-term, MWRTA is monitoring the maturation of low- and zero-emission propulsion technologies to understand the long-term feasibility and implementation of the technology. MWRTA is also specifically exploring the implementation of hydrogen vehicles as part of its fleet. The agency is exploring funding sources to determine feasibility and launch a pilot. This assessment is ongoing and will continue to be developed through agency driven initiatives and efforts such as MassDOT's Battery Electric Bus Phase II Study, which will inform the development of a zero-emission fleet transition plan and outline implementation strategies, including workforce development and training needs. MWRTA continues to engage with RTA peers who are implementing zero-emission technologies to exchange knowledge, understand lessons learned, and disseminate best practices across the state.

Appendix C Public Survey Comments

Respondents provided supplemental feedback in an open-ended format for certain questions in the public survey.

Rider Questions

Question 3: Do the existing MWRTA service times meet your transportation needs?

Respondents who selected "no" provided the following feedback:

- Weekends
- Expand hours beyond those for kids. What is the point of working people relying on the MWRTA if it doesn't operate during adult hours? And an imposed weekend curfew of 4:00 PM is embarrassing. How about treating this service as apropos to a city and not a pre-school?
- I think the Route 1 buses need to be way more frequent. The connection between the Natick Mall, central Wellesley, MassBay and Woodland MBTA station are already useful, but the infrequency can make connections between bus lines like Routes 2 and 3, and also from the Green Line onto Route 1, difficult.
- Should run later and more frequently.
- Extend the service hours on weekdays, especially in the evening, to better match my work schedule.
- Adjust the weekend service times to better align with typical weekend activities like shopping and leisure.
- Add more frequent buses during the early morning hours for those who start work very early.
- Extend the service hours on weekdays, especially in the evening when I get off work late.
- Increase the frequency of buses during peak commuting periods to avoid overcrowding.
- Extend the service hours on weekdays, especially in the evening when I finish work.
- Have later-running buses on Fridays and Saturdays for social plans.
- Adjust the weekend service schedule to better match typical weekend activity times.
- Add more buses during the early morning rush hour to reduce waiting time.
- It would be great to have more weekend service, especially having buses run later on Saturday and Sunday.
- Night paratransit service on weekends! Including for transfers to and from Boston. Disabled people like nightlife too!
- More frequency. These do not meet the general commuter needs.
- Better frequency and legit buses.
- I've just learned about the Route 10 bus and would truly love to take it from my home in Wayland to my office in Natick, rather than driving. Unfortunately, the only stop in Wayland is on-demand at Bent and would require a phone call each time we need to use it. However, if that were a standard stop or if the bus could stop when it already

naturally passes the intersection of Routes 30 and 27, I'd be able to use it. Also, the bus seems to come through the Wayland area at around 7:15 AM and 8:45 AM, leaving a gap. Ideally, an early 8 AM hour bus would get Waylanders to Natick (and the commuter rail stop) at a better time for the workday. As referenced there, I'd also love to be able to take the bus conveniently to the Natick commuter rail stops and not have to deal with parking in Natick. Thank you for doing this survey! Exciting to have input and start participating in the next chapter of MWRTA.

- By minimizing the transport price
- Better frequency during weekends
- We need longer weekend service.
- Frequently late, nothing available on weekends, and the timing ends too early on weekends, and no buses run to Ashland on weekends. Need a longer bus route on weekends instead of it ending at 6 PM.
- It meets my needs greatly, but it would be great if at least one bus could run until 10 PM for Route 4N as well so that we could do grocery shopping. And although MWRTA has helped a lot, it would be great if there would be more addition of Catch Connect buses since it is very hard to get and will be queued most of the times. However the service is great, Thank you!
- Fifteen minute max headways. Current service is so infrequent it is unusable.
- Running the line 6 more often
- The last trip of the MathWorks Framingham Shuttle in the evening (6:15 PM) doesn't help us employees who live at Chapel Hill and Waterview Apartments as it ends the ride at the green at 9 and 90. I request you to please add the housing apartments Chapel Hill and Waterview Village in the last trip of evening schedule.
- Look into subsidizing ride share for weekends and lower ridership times.
- More weekend service
- Maybe run more frequently, have further destinations, or more bus routes near me.
- The routes take a long time and are sometimes crowded.
- Last mile connectivity
- More frequent availability would be better.
- The 7 is a long ride.
- I wont say it doesn’t, but it could be better if there were more buses rather that one every half hour.
- Coordination with MBTA
- I think it should be more frequent. Wait time between the shuttles are too long.
- You guys need to work on almost everything before; you guys lack behind the rest of the RTAs in Massachusetts.
- There aren't any routes to Wayland or Sudbury.
- Route 1 weekend: needs a better service! It’s imperative that the service will start the latest at 8:00 AM out of Woodland and back out of Natick around 6:00 PM or so. Further, the Route 1 is way way too long during the week.

- Expanded hours on weekends, both start and end times, particularly on major routes (4N/S, 2/3, 10/11, etc.) would be beneficial for a lot of riders.
- It would be helpful if the 10 bus operated during the weekends.
- Go more places, like around Bellingham Regal Cinema for example.
- Route 7 needs to come more frequently, both earlier and later for morning and evening commutes. The one in the morning, specifically the one that comes at 7:10 AM at the Banana Lot arrives at the same time as the train. Either make the bus wait inside the MBTA station, or make it wait till 7:15 AM or something. I never make it on time, so I have to take the train that gets to the station at 6:10 AM and wait AN HOUR for the bus. This is not great. Many of my bose colleagues stopped taking public transport for this exact same route.
- More frequency
- Later 6 bus schedule times, service on the weekend
- Fixed route service does not go near my house (Route 30 West) and Catch Connect hours are very limited.
- Transportation from Homer Street in Ashland to Market Basket and Shaws is non-existent. There should be direct routes in Ashland which don't require you to travel to Framingham. The weekend schedule is also very limited.
- I've tried several times to take Catch Connect (the one you order), and the wait time was too long and often jumped around as I waited. I ended up canceling each time do to the wait.
- Drivers need to be nicer.
- Lots of routes are not reliable, you have to wait an hour for the next bus but also some buses like the 7 have stops that are not productive. For example going to Staples and Carlifonia Street. I have never seen people getting on the 7 bus in these places.
- I'm usually traveling to and from the Banana Lot, and I'm either there super early or super late.
- Longer Route 3, and the bus is always late.
- The closest stop is too far for me to walk to. One-hour headways take too much planning.

Question 4: How easy is it for you to find information about MWRTA service?

Respondents who said they did not find it easy to find information were asked what would be helpful for them. Reponses included:

- Posted at the stops and disseminated in town somehow
- Posted schedules. Drivers who can actually answer transit questions. Not denying facts when you do call for information.
- The website can be better.
- Having a more user-friendly mobile app with clear and updated service information.
- A redesigned website that is more user friendly. Up to date instructional videos.
- Improved service area map for the Ride.
- Easy to use, each community has a sign and location. Apps too.

- More accurate tracking
- It is easy.
- The flyer
- MWRTA website/Facebook/live map are great! It would be great if estimated time could be shown in live map as well.
- Running the Blandin hub service information screens more often.
- The maps on the bus routes are confusing, also the stops should be more clearly marked with trip information.
- I really enjoyed having a representative from MWRTA explain some services. Maybe occasionally sending someone out on the fixed routes would help.
- Honestly it's not the website's or the app's fault, it's just some places have terrible service connection, so it's hard to load the site.
- Estimated delay times, especially in the evening
- Clearer schedule, better interface
- Update app
- Easy. Look up MWRTA, smart phones are everywhere lol.
- Better online page
- Fix the app. It crashes every time you open it and is extremely slow and glitchy.
- Cleaner, easier to navigate site and app. It's very challenging for elderly and folks who are not tech savvy. I find people at bus stops regularly that don't know information that is available to them because the site confuses them and a lot of people don't even know about the bus tracker which would cut down on excessive phone calls to the hub.
- The app is buggy and constantly crashes. Definitely needs an update.
- I see the buses, but I am unsure of the route.
- Found out about the app through word of mouth.
- Sign at the fixed stop for those that don't have phone
- The bus schedules are not consistently updated.
- The website could use a more user-friendly interface.
- The buses are not on time most of the time the time stated especially in the afternoon and evening please fix that; your service is amazing otherwise.
- Mail

Question 10: MWRTA allows riders to wave the bus down along the route where it is safe to do so. How comfortable are you flagging down a MWRTA bus at a location that is not a stop on the schedule?

Respondents were asked what MWRTA could do to make flagging down a bus more comfortable. Responses included:

- I have tried to flag it down three times, and it has never once stopped for me. This was along Weston Road and along Wellesley Ave/Route 135.
- Consistency. Drivers make individual choices. A great deal of bias is at work.

- Not having to flag down service but actual designated bus stops instead.
- Clearly mark more safe flagging-down spots along routes and inform riders about them through app notifications or route signs.
- Improve bus stop shelters.
- Install real-time arrival displays.
- Add more seating at stops.
- Provide better lighting at night.
- Add shade structures.
- Put up clear route maps.
- Improve pavement near stops.
- Offer USB charging ports.
- Keep stops clean regularly.
- Create a mobile app feature to request a bus stop at a non-designated spot.
- Clearly mark more safe flagging-down spots along routes and inform riders about them via the app or signs.
- Provide real-time information on bus locations so riders know when to flag down.
- Install bright, visible indicators at potential flagging locations to help drivers notice where to stop.
- Increase bus frequency so riders don't feel pressured when flagging down.
- Put up signs explaining the flagging-down process clearly for new riders.
- Clearly mark more safe flagging-down spots along routes and inform riders about them via the app or signs.
- Plant more trees around stops.
- Provide real-time service alerts.
- Upgrade bench materials.
- Offer free Wi-Fi at stops.
- Add accessible ramps.
- Put up signs explaining the flagging-down process clearly for new riders.
- Clearly mark more safe flagging-down spots along routes and inform riders via the app or signs.
- Train bus drivers to be more attentive to passengers trying to flag down buses.
- Ensure buses slow down sufficiently near areas where flagging is common.
- Have a uniform and clear flagging signal that both drivers and riders understand.
- Provide real-time bus location information so riders know when to flag down.
- Install bright, visible indicators at potential flagging locations so drivers can easily spot where to stop.
- Drivers could inform passengers of good locations to flag down buses.

- I saw some buses have a roll sign that says “flag me down!” That really helps.
- They need competition.
- Well, I didn't know that you could do that. While that could just be my own knowledge gap, spreading the word more widely that this is an acceptable way to get on the bus could be helpful.
- Maybe they breakdown.
- Better awareness on flagging.
- I have no suggestions.
- Convenience
- Attractive bus color
- Platform area clean
- It’s completely perfect.
- It’s great now as well!
- Increase its drivers’ wages
- For me everthing is good.
- Maybe maintain the right most lane around possible stops so that it is easy to notice the riders.
- Have a digital flag-down system, people could mark they are being picked up on certain locations on routes at certain times.
- I just am afraid to cause an accident or miss the bus.
- I don't like to inconvenience people. So adding more stops/routes so that it isn't as necessary.
- If they actually stopped
- Have the route map be actual maps with roads. The routes and stops are not clear.
- I mean its more my anxiety then the bus driver or bus.
- I did not know this was an option. I think posters with an example in the bus explaining how to flag would be helpful.
- Knowing where it is possible, friendlier drivers
- Be specific on schedule where not allowed, i.e. Route 9 or even some areas of Holliston drivers won’t stop.
- Where the bus can detect a person flagging it down
- It’s pretty good for now, but adding up maps in the major bus stops is pretty good enough for the MWRTA.
- An alert pin, letting the company know a rider with the MWRTA app, is near a location to stop within route!
- Put up bus stops.
- The drivers aren't always attentive on certain routes.
- Stay on the right lane for the driver to notice.

- There are locations that are NOT safe, there is no shoulder/breakdown lane such as in front of Walgreens at Prospect Street and Route 9. Along High Street near Framingham State.
- It works if you are seen and in a safe location.
- I would guess with today's technology there would be a way to set up a way for riders to "flag" themselves on a map via GPS that would then alert the next on coming bus.
- Tell the drivers you are allowed to, and that they have to respect it.
- Nothing
- I think a better understanding of "safe to do so" would help. If there is no breakdown lane or shoulder on a busy street will they pull over?
- Tell drivers to be nice.
- Make clear where to flag. Last time I tried, the driver pointed a couple hundred feet down the road for a better spot.
- More visible signage and places to safely sit.
- Not sure there is anything. I wouldn't know what to look for because there are different kinds of MWRTA buses, right? There's Catch Connect that you order and then the kind that just drives fixed routes. But I think they look the same, right?
- Drivers need to be nicer.
- Providing driver awareness and training could help ensure drivers are attentive to potential riders along routes, especially in low-visibility conditions, and could make the system feel more welcoming and dependable. And community education that provides clear information (online, in brochures, and at stops) about how and where to flag down a bus would help new riders feel more comfortable using the service.
- I think it's unreliable. As passengers, we would be confident in knowing specific places that a bus will definitely stop as opposed to asking the drivers where they feel it's safe because that can be subjective.
- I'm not sure.
- Make clear no flag zones along the route where drivers should not stop and retrain drivers on flagged down.
- It is fairly normal.
- Have a little list on the website showing where's a good place to stop a bus like where there's a side of the road or a bad place like Worcester Street.
- Create a mobile app feature to request a bus stop at a non-designated spot.
- Poner mas rotulos
    - *Put up more signs*
- Esta bien asi
    - *It's okay as it is*
- Ampliación de horarios los fines de semana
    - *Extended weekend hours*
- Un poco más creciste en algunas rutas

  - *You grew [ridership] a little more on some routes*
- Extender la Ruta 9 hasta el final del mall y retornar en "U" en la Speen Street, así cubriría hasta Town Fair Tire
  - *Extend Route 9 to the end of the mall and make a U-turn on Speen Street; that way it would cover up to Town Fair Tire*.

Question 11: Respondents were asked if there was any additional comments or feedback for MWRTA.

Respondents indicated the following:

- New drivers need more training on customer relations. I have not been impressed with their interaction with riders.
- Establish actual bus stops at locations in Wellesley OTHER THAN the colleges. Make them obvious and post the schedules. The flag down is ridiculous and no one knows about it. So just make stops and make them obviously marked along the route—maybe 3 on Weston Road, the Wellesley Library, 1 to 2 on Wellesley Ave/135, and so on. People do not care if it is free or not. What would make them use it is if it is useful.
- Chronic tardiness impairs the wider use of the ride. Safety issues are rampant but ignored or denied.
- Put up designated stops. Make ALL or most of the bus routes actual CDL B buses. Bigger and more space equals comfort and convenience.
- Overall, the MWRTA service is quite convenient. It would be great if there could be more frequent buses during peak hours to reduce waiting time.
- Buses should run more punctually.
- Larger buses for crowded routes
- Better communication during delays
- More frequent service on peak hours
- Better accessibility for disabled
- Cleaner interiors of buses
- More transparent fare policies
- More stops in residential areas
- Improve driver-passenger interaction.
- Train bus drivers to be more attentive to passengers trying to flag down buses.
- Reward programs for regular riders.
- Better air-conditioning
- Clearer audio announcements
- Eco-friendly bus options
- More legroom on buses
- The bus drivers are always friendly and helpful, which is great! Maybe consider adding more routes to connect with neighboring towns.

- Overall, the service is good, but sometimes buses run behind schedule. Better real-time tracking would be appreciated.
- I've noticed some buses are quite old and uncomfortable. Upgrading the fleet would enhance the riding experience.
- The app for tracking buses is a bit glitchy at times. Improving its reliability would make using the service easier.
- It would be nice to have more frequent service on weekends, especially for those of us who work or run errands then.
- The bus stops could use more maintenance, like fixing broken benches or repainting faded signs.
- Bus stops should have more information on them including schedules.
- The MWRTA should continue to serve Solomon Pond Mall and provide regional connections with other RTAs. It should serve communities not currently served by transit and provide better connections to surrounding towns, such as Needham, Wayland, and Maynard.
- Additional effort to teach young people to use public transportation as well as an effort to move toward AV.
- Please add benches and shade to as many stops as possible! And evaluate stops for pedestrians safety
- They are doing great cause they made mobility more affordable.
- Overall the MWRTA feels like a glorified corporate shuttle. I would love to have better interconnection through neighborhoods and a multimodal focus with the MBTA.
- Give out scholarships.
- Thank you for doing this survey! Exciting to have input and start participating in the next chapter of MWRTA. I do believe that Wayland's workforce would take advantage of the bus to the commuter rail stop if the peak hours had more frequency as well as regularly scheduled stops in our town.
- About them, they are unique and they serve you and me better.
- Nice bus
- None
- Great service for Milford!
- No
- Please address the bus shelter situation. There are still people smoking inside and loitering at bus shelters.
- Regularly maintain the bus stops.
- Wished for 20 minutes routine instead of waiting an hour to potentially make it on time if that bus isn't already late.
- Need bigger buses.
- Thank you for providing great service!

- About your baggage policy - it seems to me that there's conflicting information about bring on baggage. I'm not going to try to explain it in this form it's too long to explain but if somebody wants to call me and ask me I'll be glad to tell them what happened on one of their buses that nobody seems to care about except me. I'm not going to try to explain it in this forum.
- Please address bus shelter safety: Even though it is posted that there is no smoking allowed at Banana Lot, I still see people abusing the space to smoke, especially between 7:30 AM to 10:30 AM and 5:30 PM to 7:00 PM on weekdays. I am getting sick and tired of it!
- An extension of fixed routes into the Sherborn-Millis area would be swell, if there's space in the budget for it.
- I don't know.
- I request you to add Chapel Hill and Waterview Village as stops in the last evening trip of MathWorks Framingham shuttle. Some drivers don't agree to go to these apartments and say that they're done with the trip at the green at 9 and 90. It will be very difficult in winters to walk from the green at 9 and 90, and also, that stop is not serviceable in winters. There is no way to cross the Route 9 in front of these apartments, so it's not even possible to drop riders on the other side of the road when going towards the green at 9 and 90.
- I think the shelters need to be more clearly highlighted. If the bus is not widely known.
- Definitely more weekend service and weeknight on the 2 or 3
- Please increase the quality of bus stops. There are so many that are just a sign or not even that. Every stop should at least have a place to sit for elderly or disabled people. Shelters are always a plus but please at least a bench.
- There should be express buses on the fixed routes. I take the Route 1 to the mall. If there were like one or two express buses in the morning and night that skipped the college that would be amazing.
- Love the service, although some teens refuse to stand up for elderly or children who are very young getting on and its aggravating.
- I hope Milford users would love being connected with the rest of the bus network on weekends!
- Bus shelter and stops having place to sit
- I think it's pretty good for now as it's very helpful for the small community who travels just to visit around.
- An alert pin point for app users will make it easy for drivers to spot if they have some type alert system to be on lookout for a rider along the route.
- Well, let me start off by saying you guys are in a bit of an incoming issue. See the WRTA recently upped their wage to $28 an hour also they pay WEEKLY. I know this because the WRTA and the MWRTA have the same union. The MWRTA doesn't pay weekly, the starting rate is $25.45 for a CDL B operator which is crazy because school buses pay almost $30. This will be an imminent problem that the WRTA had to deal with that people would get their CDL class B and move to somewhere else that pays more, i.e. school buses, and or other transit authorities. It's going to be very difficult these next three years as the lack of CDL B operators will continue to increase due to lack of willingness of employees wanting a commercial drivers license.

- The service is good. Sometimes the buses are late, which is fine, due to traffic, but I have witnessed sometimes the buses skip their fixed time as mentioned on the time table.
- Route 1 is too long. Almost never on time. Needs a better design and frequency, both weekdays and weekends. Operating Route 1 for only 8 hours during the weekend is a joke. It's a shame and a disrespect to your customers.
- If the app would notify you when your Catch Connect bus has arrived or is arriving that would help greatly.
- I love the new larger buses, they are a great addition to the fleet. I appreciate the nighttime service expansion that has occurred over the past year, it has really made a huge difference. I'm excited for continued growth and expansion from the MWRTA in the coming years.
- More accessible bus stops in low income neighborhoods, other than just 10 and 11. Also a bus stop in downtown Framingham.
- Tell drivers to wait for passengers to sit down and settle before driving, also please make sure they stop at stops and at the correct times.
- Please, for the love of God I have been asking for you to fix this route for over a year and a half, I always miss the morning bus, and I always miss the evening train at 4:40 PM. EVERY TIME I HAVE TO WAIT AN HOUR FOR THE NEXT BUS/TRAIN. I even had my employer send you a message about it.
- The maps are difficult to read. Not all the roads that the bus rides appear to be labelled, and some cross street name would help orient.
- Thank you!
- This system has a kernel of a great idea. But it just doesn't seem to work as well as the vision.
- Drivers need to be nicer.
- I've had a positive experience riding the MWRTA.
- The time issue is my major concern with the Route 1. It is not following the stipulated time in the afternoon and night, you can wait for a bus for 20 to 30 minutes. That is not good at all.
- I think you can improve the Catch service. The app is so not user friendly, hard to get some things done like canceling a trip. Generally it's very unreliable. I have been on the Catch Connect vehicle, and a passenger had not included their pick up address, the driver contacted dispatch, and the lady on the radio told the driver to look for a pin on the map so he can locate the passenger's location. How can a driver rely on such technology? You could clearly sense the frustration on both the driver and the dispatcher. I am not telling you how to run your business, but i think you could benefit from having another company build the Catch app for you and remove all the glitches.
- Bus is always late, AC/heat doesn't work, needs a larger service area, drivers need to be more friendly, and more out of town buses and connections.
- I don't really understand how to transfer or have a real sense of where I can get to.
- I love riding the MWRTA since I love public transit. Making one closer means I could ride it more often in Dover/Glenridge neighborhood.

- More information about service changes during holidays or special events would be helpful, maybe through email notifications.
- Mejorar las rutas en natick
  - *Improve the routes in Natick.*
- Que al venir de framing Hig school. Hagan una parada en carlson road
  - *That when coming from Framingham High School, they make a stop at Carlson Road.*
- Ampliación de horario los fines de semana
  - *Extended hours on weekends.*
- Mayor capacitación para algunos miembros del personal
  - *More training for some staff members.*
- Que los choferes sean mucho más amable y cuando no le diga buenos días o buenas tardes Le contesten
  - *That the drivers be much more polite, and when someone says good morning or good afternoon to them, they respond.*
- Deberían llegar hasta Newton y Wellesley directamente.
  - *They should go directly to Newton and Wellesley.*
- I like to take the bus from MWRTA.
- It would be nice to have a restroom facility.

Non-Rider Questions

Question 2: Respondents were asked what locations or areas MWRTA could provide service to that would increase their transit usage.

Responses included the following:

- Northborough
- You have to have stops along the route. And in Wellesley, not one bus stop near a grocery store. That is a big problem. It needs to travel on Linden Street and Washington Street. Then MANY more people would use it. And make it cost something—not free. People have no respect for it when it is free.
- What about an eastbound stop in Shopper's World, as was scheduled before the 9 and 1 became two routes? Also the 1 needs to stop at 9/27.
- Shopping locations in Sudbury and bus stops shared with neighboring transit agencies
- Change Milford route. I think it's Route 4 or something that literally is the worst route need a to stop going thru a maze and actually do a proper route.
- More flexible weekend bus schedule
- The downtown shopping district
- Downtown business district
- Industrial parks
- Major shopping malls

- University campuses
- Sports stadiums/arenas
- Train stations/transit hubs
- Tourist attractions
- Hospital complexes
- Residential neighborhoods with no transit
- The hospital complex in the central district
- The industrial park on the east side of the city
- The residential neighborhood in the northern suburbs
- The university campus on the west side
- The business district with many offices
- The sports stadium near the riverfront
- The new shopping mall in the downtown area
- Parks and recreation areas
- Libraries
- Senior living communities
- Community centers
- Airports
- Make buses more easily recognizable from a distance to facilitate flagging
- The industrial park on the east side of the city
- The new shopping mall in the downtown area
- The hospital complex in the central district
- The residential neighborhood in the northern suburbs
- Having more frequent buses during peak hours would be a big help.
- The university campus on the west side
- Florida
- Northborough, Maynard, Needham
- Route 9 from Worcester to and from Boston
- Rural areas should experience this level of comfort too, they deserve to enjoy such facilities too.
- I think a more comprehensive access web from places like Bob's or and Saxonville to other town centers like Marlborough or Natick.
- Bellingham
- Farm road
- Weston MA, Wayland Sudbury

- Boston
- Wayland. I live on West Plain Street, so it'd be easy to walk to Bent Park to catch the bus, but the lack of a regular stop makes it awkward to plan to call and hope that dispatch connects with the driver in time. Even adding a regular stop at 30/27 in Wayland, while keeping the as-needed Bent Park stop, would help invite Waylanders into the MWRTA system and let folks know that this is available. I could also see Wayland teens starting to use the bus from 30/27 in order to go to the Natick Mall, which would also help that next generation learn to use public transit.
- Ohio
- A bus route dedicated to MBTA stations like Natick to Ashland
- Virginia Village
- More frequent service
- Boston
- Los Angeles
- Mansfield Lake Ridge
- Dollartree
- It would be great if there could be MWRTA service to stop in Hudson Walmart so that we could go for grocery since there is no vegetables/fruits in Framingham Walmart because it is not a supercenter. So it would be great if we could run buses from Banana Lot to Hudson supermarket on weekends (at least in evening time from 2 PM to 10 PM, preferably).
- Many high school students did not get selected for school bus they need info on the MWRTA routes.
- Wilson Street in Framingham
- Needham center
- There are some dead zones where traveling by foot is brutal. Like around shopping center parking lots. Stops should be within 5 to 10 minutes of each other by foot.
- Needham and Waltham
- Wellesley College
- Between Milford and Ashland/Framingham on weekends
- Return to and from Marlbrough
- Location is perfectly fine, and I just wish the bus comes more frequently.
- I like how it runs just wish there was a weekend to Sunday schedule other than "Catch Connect."
- Woodland-Babson
- Newton
- One stop on Route 9 near Walmart while going toward Natick Mall
- Service from Framingham to Newton Wellesley hospital, 2000 Washington Street
- Boston

- Downtown Framingham, more routes near Pelham apartments
- Again, if it went to Bellingham Regal Cinema area that would be great. Could the Catch Connect maybe go to Bellingham? That might be another option.
- Route 7, New York Ave
- Barton Road Wellesley. I think Natick's route is good. I am just unsure of how to ride it - It feels intimidating.
- Northwest Framingham (Route 30 west)
- Direct trips in Ashland and extended time for weekend travel.
- I'm not sure
- Worcester Ashland Northboro Walmart and all the shopping up and down Route 9
- Potter Road
- Either in Dover, MA, or it would help so much if you added one to South Natick! I also have friends who think the same thing.
- The business district with many offices.
- Natick solo tiene 2 rutas necesitamos una que solo transite natick
- Carlson Road
- To more train stations and times
- Cerca de distintas escuelas
    - *Near different schools*

Question 3: Respondents were asked if there were improvements that would allow them to utilize MWRTA services more often.

Responses included:

- Drivers need to stop longer at Marlborough Hospital to allow riders time to walk out to bus, especially in cold or inclement weather.
- Expanded hours at least to midnight especially from Woodland to Route 9. Why is Boston inaccessible?
- Larger buses and better bus stops (Nobscot fire station and Framingham center don't have bus shelters, benches, or a proper stopping place for the bus) would make the service feel much better to use.
- Bring new and bigger buses into the system.
- Lowering fares and providing more detailed real - time bus tracking would make me use the services more often.
- Lower fares
- More frequent buses
- More frequent buses
- More frequent buses
- USB charging ports
- Free Wi-Fi on buses

- Improved bus stop shelters
- Cleaner buses
- More comfortable seating
- The sports stadium near the riverfront
- The industrial park on the east side of the city
- The residential neighborhood in the northern suburbs
- The university campus on the west side
- The senior living community on the outskirts
- The arts and culture center in the southern part
- The new shopping mall in the downtown area
- More direct routes
- Discounts for regular riders
- Better accessibility for disabled
- Eco-friendly, quiet buses
- Simplified route maps
- More information about service changes during holidays or special events would be helpful, maybe through email notifications
- Having more frequent buses during peak hours would be a big help
- Extending the service hours into the late evening would allow me to utilize the services more.
- Making the bus stops more accessible, such as adding ramps for wheelchairs, would be an important improvement.
- Providing real-time tracking of buses through an app would make the service more convenient and increase my usage.
- The sports stadium near the riverfront.
- Improving the comfort of the buses, like adding more comfortable seats, would encourage me to use them more.
- Provide better connections between routes, especially between the 7 and 7c. Buses should be more reliable and not get too far behind schedule.
- AV
- Improved communications and tracking for the Ride regarding pickups, improved timeliness for the Ride, improved scheduling (sometimes the routes and pick up times do not make sense to either me or the driver)
- Just seats at stations
- Better bus tracking!
- No
- I look forward to trying the bus out and really appreciate your consideration of my feedback.

- Yes
- More buses! I love those big blue buses.
- None
- Yes
- Please enforce no smoking policies at bus shelters.
- Add more stops.
- More buses on the weekend
- Thanks for making Wi-Fi as well available! Everything is great! I think timing should be accurate.
- A bench and shelter at the stop across from Walmart near Lord Chesterfield
- Please enforce no smoking policies at bus shelters!
- Make service more frequent.
- For me it is excellent service and the staff are excellent people.
- More bus shelters/maps. Work with cities to make stops and routes more clearly marked.
- Is said, break up bigger routes or create more bidirectional routes. This guarantees people are always only a few stops away. (Bidirectional means they do the stops in reverse, similar to clockwise/counterclockwise.) Specifically 4N, 7, or other high demand routes.
- Yes. Catch connect in Hopedale/Milford Line doesn't connect to Ashland MBTA or Southborough MBTA station.
- Earlier start time and end time on the weekends
- In being redundant, weekend service through Holliston.
- No, but as customers increase changing the bus will be pretty massive improvement lagrer in coming days.
- Get those alert location pin points in to locate drivers embarrassed to wave the bus down.
- Everything is good.
- The heavy volume bus stop along Caldor Road/ Walmart Way near Lord Chesterfield really needs a bench and a shelter.
- Update the app.
- Certain bus stops are just on the side of a random road with no benches or sidewalks such as the Walmart stop and Stop and Shop
- I don’t know how you would do it, but if you had a stop closer to Yale Drive in Milford than the high school I’d probably use it more.
- See rest of the survey, more buses and time adjustments. It wouldn’t be an issue if I didn’t have to wait an hour every time the bus is late/early by one minute or two
- Holliston Catch Connect

- Run later on weekends like the mall don't close until 9 so have busses run till 9:30 PM just a thought.
- Longer service hours
- Some drivers are not people-friendly.
- Yes, I believe enhancing the accuracy of real-time bus tracking through the MWRTA app or text updates would give riders confidence about when the next bus will arrive.
- Larger buses more frequent loops during peak busy hours
- I grew up in Brockton, and the pulse system the BAT used was very easy. Generally, there was a bus every 20 minutes, and you could go from any route to any other route with one transfer.
- Make the buses a little less bumpy.
- Offering discounted monthly passes for regular riders would make me more likely to use the services frequently.
- Poner mas rutas que pasen por los puntos mas impotantes de Natick ejemplo escuelas super market, mall, target
    - *Add more routes that go through the most important points in Natick, such as schools, supermarkets, the mall, and Target.*
- No
- More scheduled times
- Support for service to Beth Israel in Boston