



MBTA Safety, Service, and Staffing *Snapshot*

JANUARY 2024

Safe and reliable public transit service is essential to the economic vitality of the region—and to reaching our climate, equity, and mobility goals. To meet the current and future needs of our riders and our economy, the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) must address major safety, service, and staffing challenges. As the MBTA works to address these challenges, it is imperative to track key performance metrics and data trends. As such, this short report aims to provide a periodic, user-friendly snapshot of these metrics, using publicly available data. Please contact [Caitlin Allen-Connelly](#), Senior Advisor on Transportation, with questions or feedback.

Key Takeaways

- **MBTA Safety:** The [2024 Track Improvement Program](#) is well underway. The [Green Line](#) work in January was successful in eliminating 16 speed restrictions slow zones and fully correcting the gauge issues on the Green Line Extension. The MBTA removed eight speed restrictions on the [Red Line](#) between Alewife and Harvard stations from February 5-14, 2024. Work is now underway on the [Green Line](#) (sections of B, C, and D branches) from February 20-March 8.
- **MBTA Service:** Commuter Rail ridership continues to remain strong with all lines showing growth compared to 2022, ranging from a 31% to 87% increase on weekdays to a 1% to 55% increase on weekends. Subway ridership is affected by service closures and overall frequency and reliability issues. For example, average weekday ridership in January was down by 62% on the Green Line and 12% on the Red Line compared to last year.
- **MBTA Staffing:** In January 2024, the MBTA reported [record hiring numbers](#) ending 2023 with +730 employees. This is largely due to successful collective bargaining with unions to improve conditions and increase salaries. Bus operator vacancies persist (232 vacancies in January 2024) but are trending downward.

MBTA Safety

The MBTA continues to address safety challenges across the system, including responding to the August 2022 Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Special Directives, critical track work to remove speed restrictions, as well as other safety issues that require attention.

MBTA Federal Transit Administration Corrective Action Plans¹

The MBTA continues incremental progress toward completing the FTA Corrective Action Plans (CAPs). At the end of 2023, the MBTA had closed 8 of the 42 findings. Table 1 below shows the MBTA FTA CAP implementation status as of January 19, 2024. You can access the MBTA's publicly facing FTA dashboard [here](#).

Table 1: Update on Status of MBTA FTA CAPs (January 2024)

MBTA FTA CAPS	% Submitted	Accepted by FTA	Under FTA Review	Not yet Submitted	Completion Timeline (%)
Overall progress	62%	227	167	237	44%
SD 22-04: Track Maintenance & PPE	86%	29	30	10	59%
SD 22-05: Vehicle Securement	95%	56	77	7	90%
SD 22-06: Operations Control Center	93%	13	12	2	79%
SD 22-07: Lapsed Certifications	60%	4	5	6	65%
SD 22-09: Workforce	67%	25	6	15	62%
SD 22-10: Safety Information & SMS	43%	33	10	58	48%
SD 22-11: Safety Communication	83%	19	16	7	84%
SD 22-12: Policies, Procedures, & Training	30%	48	10	133	44%

Source: <https://cdn.mbta.com/sites/default/files/2023-08/2023-08-10-safety-management-inspection-update.pdf>

MBTA Speed Restrictions²

The MBTA [Track Improvement Program](#) is fully underway with successful closures and ongoing work on the Red, Orange, and Green Lines, including completion of re-gauging of Green Line Extension tracks. Since November 2023, the MBTA has removed 57 speed restrictions systemwide. The Green Line had the most significant wins eliminating 49 speed restrictions and reducing the percent of the line affected by 18 percentage points from 22% of the line in November 2023 to 4% of the line in February 2024. A Better City continues to work with MBTA leadership to minimize the impacts of track work and alternative service on riders and to maximize communications and transparency during this period of crucial rebuilding. Table 2 shows the status of speed restrictions as of February 20, 2024. Access the MBTA's publicly facing speed restriction dashboard [here](#).

¹ In May 2022, the FTA voiced concern about ongoing safety issues at the MBTA. It launched a Safety Management Inspection in June to review the T's processes, procedures, and resources for safety decision-making as well as the role of the DPU in overseeing the MBTA's safety performance. A final report was issued in August 2022 with eight Special Directives with required actions for the MBTA to address and resource appropriately.

² On March 6, 2023, the Department of Public Utilities (DPU), which provides safety oversight for the MBTA, conducted a visit on the Red Line between Ashmont and Savin Hill stations. On March 8, 2023, DPU requested documentation from the MBTA following geometry testing to check the condition of the tracks, which when provided by the MBTA had discrepancies. On March 9, 2023, global speed restrictions were put in place on all subway lines. In November 2023, General Manager Eng launched a year-long track improvement program to lift all speed restrictions by the end of 2024.

Table 2: MBTA Subway Speed Restrictions by Line (February 2024)

Mode	# Speed Restrictions		Distance (miles)		% of Line	
	February 2024	Change (Nov. '23 to Feb. '24)	February 2024	Change (Nov. '23 to Feb. '24)	February 2024	Change (% points) (Nov. '23 to Feb. '24)
Systemwide	130	-57	19.3	-11.3	14.1	-7.9
Blue Line	18	+4	4.8	+6	39	+6
Orange Line	39	-2	4.4	-2	20	+3
Red Line	53	-10	7.9	-1.8	17	-4
Green Line	20	-49	2.2	-9.9	4	-18

Source: <https://www.mbta.com/performance-metrics/speed-restrictions> (Accessed 2/20/2024).

MBTA Service

The MBTA continues to struggle to restore pre-pandemic service due to workforce challenges and safety issues. This section reports on the current service levels on the MBTA subway, ridership trends on subway and Commuter Rail, and national and peer agency ridership recovery trends.

MBTA Service Levels

Table 3 shows the percentage of service delivered on the subway compared to scheduled trips and the percentage of service delivered compared to historical maximum data. Service delivered compared to service scheduled on the Green Line in January was particularly low due to [track work](#) on sections of all branches. Service delivered compared to historical max remains below pre-pandemic levels on all lines, which is due to a combination of factors including rolling stock availability—especially on the Red Line—and workforce issues, e.g., Operations Control Center (OCC) staffing levels.

Table 3: MBTA Service Delivered Compared to Pre-Pandemic and Actual Scheduled Trips (January 2024)

Subway Line	% Service Delivered Compared to Scheduled January 2024	% Service Delivered Compared to Historical Max January 2024
Blue Line	88%	70%
Green Line	68%	69%
Orange Line	92%	69%
Red Line	89%	51%

Source: <https://dashboard.transitmatters.org/> accessed 2/20/2024.

MBTA Ridership

This section provides an update on monthly MBTA subway and Commuter Rail ridership.

Subway Ridership

Table 4 shows the average weekday ridership for January 2024 and compares it to January 2023 and pre-pandemic levels in January 2019. Ridership levels on the Green Line and the Red Line in January 2024 show the most significant change compared to January 2023. This can be explained by extended work on the Green Line in January 2024 to address slow zones and persistent challenges on the Red Line (frequency, travel times, etc.). The ridership recovery percentages are decreasing. This could indicate that riders are leaving the system due to poor performance. It may also be a result of ongoing track work and the use of alternative service modes to move riders, impacting passenger counts.

Table 4: Average Daily Weekday MBTA Subway Ridership Levels (January 2024)

Mode	January 2024	January 2023	% Change	% of Pre-pandemic
Blue Line	30,480	29,440	4%	65%
Green Line	17,431	45,428	-62%	28%
Orange Line	73,437	69,564	6%	53%
Red Line	74,321	84,734	-12%	43%

Source: <https://massdot.app.box.com/s/21j0q5di9ewzI0abt6kdh5x8j8ok9964?sortColumn=date&sortDirection=DESC>

Commuter Rail Ridership by Line

Table 5 shows average weekday ridership for December 2023 and January 2024. Ridership decreased marginally on the Fairmount and Fitchburg lines during that timeframe and increased on all other lines ranging from a 2% to 13% increase in ridership. Systemwide, ridership levels increased by 5% from December 2023 to January 2024.

Table 5: Average Weekday MBTA Commuter Rail Ridership by Line (Dec. 2023 & Jan. 2024)

Line	December 2023	January 2024	% Change
Fairmount	3,271	3,215	-2%
Fitchburg	6,474	6,123	-5%
Framingham/Worcester	11,948	13,369	12%
Franklin/Foxboro	8,640	9,455	9%
Greenbush	3,849	4,366	13%
Haverhill	5,090	5,185	2%
Kingston	4,810	5,219	9%
Lowell	7,778	7,944	2%
Middleborough/Lakeville	6,525	7,191	10%
Needham	4,657	5,356	15%
Newburyport/Rockport	8,682	8,245	26%
Providence/Stoughton	20,446	21,397	14%
Total (systemwide)	92,168	97,066	5%

Source: <https://mbta-massdot.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/MassDOT::mbta-commuter-rail-ridership-by-service-date-and-line/explore>

Ridership Recovery Trends Nationally and Peer Agencies

According to the American Public Transportation Association ([APTA](#)), nationwide ridership recovery in January (12/31/2023 to 2/3/2024), was 72.6% of pre-pandemic numbers (Table 6). Ridership levels across all peer agencies were higher in December 2023. The MBTA ranked 4th compared to peers in December 2023 and in January 2024 ranked 6th—coming in last.

Table 6: Ridership Recovery: Nationally and Peer Agencies (January 2024)

Agency	Average Jan. '24	% Change Dec. '23 to Jan. '24
National (US)	72.6%	-6%
NY MTA	75.8%	-5%
LA Metro	73%	-7%
WMATA	72.8%	-7%
SEPTA	75.2%	-3%
CTA	67.4%	-7%
MBTA	65.8%	-15%

Source: <https://transitapp.com/apta> (Accessed 2/20/2024).

MBTA Workforce Challenges

The MBTA is facing workforce challenges that are impacting safety and service delivery. The Authority has made considerable progress with [recruitment efforts](#) due to transformative pension agreements, key hiring and retention initiatives, and historic collective bargaining agreements. The MBTA ended 2023 with record results: 1,991 total hires, 750 separations, and positive headcount of 730 additional employees. Table 7 provides an overview of staffing requirements, actual headcounts, and vacancies for bus operator and Operation Control Center (OCC) positions.

Bus Operators

The Authority continues to make progress filling bus operator positions. As of the end of 2023, 225 vacancies remained to be filled. More information [here](#).

Operation Control Center

The Authority continues to have difficulties fully staffing the OCC. To be fully staffed, the OCC needs 32 fully trained dispatchers (27 RTL dispatchers and 5 spare dispatchers). It is unclear how much progress the MBTA has made with OCC hires. Table 7 reports previous estimates, requiring four additional full-time dispatchers and five spare dispatchers to fully staff the center. This impacts the Authority's ability to restore full pre-pandemic service.

Table 7: MBTA Bus Operator and OCC Dispatcher Hire Level Updates (As of 12/29/2023)

Position	Budgeted (FY24)/FTA Required	Actual	Delta
Bus Operator	1,916	1,684	232
OCC Dispatcher	32	23	9

Source: <https://cdn.mbta.com/sites/default/files/2024-01/Workforce%20PWDC%20January%202024%206.pdf>