



MBTA Safety, Service, and Staffing

Snapshot

AUGUST 2023

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

The MBTA is making slow progress addressing safety, service, and staffing issues that face the system.

- **MBTA Safety:** Since May 2023, the MBTA has made marginal progress implementing Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Corrective Action Plans (CAPs). While there has been some forward movement, the Authority has also taken steps backward; the T was required to resubmit all CAPs for Special Directive (SD) 22-10 Safety Information & Safety Management System. The MBTA has also made little progress eliminating speed restrictions across all subway lines. As of August 29, 2023, the MBTA Speed Restriction Dashboard shows an increase in the number of speed restrictions with a higher percentage of each line affected than in May 2023.
- **MBTA Service:** Since May 2023, the MBTA continues to struggle with the provision of reliable, frequent service across subway lines. Improvements were made to the Blue Line to accommodate riders during the July-August Summer Tunnel Closure, but service on the other lines remains slow and infrequent.
- **MBTA Staffing:** Since May 2023, the MBTA has made some progress addressing bus operator shortages and deserves significant credit for negotiations with the Carmen's Union to increase the starting salary to \$30/hour. This action has resulted in more bus operator applicants. The T is still struggling to staff its Operation Control Center with dispatchers. This impacts the Authority's ability to restore full pre-pandemic service.



MBTA Safety

The MBTA continues to address safety challenges across the system responding to the August 2022 Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Special Directives and other safety issues that require attention such as the placement of speed restrictions to address critical track work. Since the last report, the MBTA has made some progress addressing the FTA Corrective Action Plans (CAPs) but was required to rework all CAPs under Special Directive 22-10: Safety Information & SMS. Further, the number of speed restrictions on all subway lines has increased since the last report.

MBTA Federal Transit Administration Corrective Action Plans¹

To track progress on implementation, the MBTA launched a [publicly facing dashboard](#) that is updated monthly. Table 1 below provides the status of MBTA FTA CAP implementation as of August 29, 2023. The T updated the dashboard's format. The table below reflects these changes. The FTA also updates any new CAPs on its website and tracks MBTA and DPU progress on its [website](#).

The MBTA has made some progress addressing the FTA Special Directives with a limited number of findings closed, including related to Special Directive 22-6: Operations Control Center; however more remains to address FTA CAPs with all CAPs under Special Directive 22-10: Safety Information & SMS requiring a complete re-work in collaboration with the FTA.²

Table 1: Update on Status of MBTA FTA CAPs

MBTA FTA CAPs	% Submitted	Accepted by FTA	Under FTA Review	Resubmission in Progress	Not yet Submitted	Completion Timeline (%)
Overall progress	57%	169	168	4	257	37%
SD 22-04: Track Maintenance & PPE	71%	17	32	0	20	52%
SD 22-05: Vehicle Securement	74%	35	75	0	30	67%
SD 22-06: Operations Control Center	85%	12	11	0	4	59%
SD 22-07: Lapsed Certifications	53%	4	4	0	7	52%
SD 22-09: Workforce	61%	22	6	0	18	45%
SD 22-10: Safety Information & SMS	33%	26	6	1	68	49%
SD 22-11: Safety Communication	57%	11	11	2	18	61%
SD 22-12: Policies, Procedures, & Training	42%	42	23	1	92	37%

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

Note: The MBTA will pause the SD 22-10 CAP submissions to the FTA as we revise these CAPs, which are due to the FTA on August 10, 2023.

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

MBTA Speed Restrictions³

MBTA progress lifting speed restrictions is slow. In fact, all subway lines, except the Blue Line, have more speed restrictions in place as of August 29, 2023, than reported in the last Snapshot. Table 2 shows the actual speed restrictions across all subway lines. The percentage of each line with speed restrictions grew by several percentage points since May 2023.

At the last [MBTA Board of Directors meeting \(8/24/2023\)](#) General Manager Eng announced [September service changes](#) that will focus on eliminating slow zones on the portions of the Red Line most significantly impacted by speed restrictions. Work on select Commuter Rail routes and on the demolition of the Government Center Garage will also take place affecting service on the Kingston, Middleborough, and Greenbush Commuter Rail lines and the Green and Orange Lines.

Table 2: MBTA Subway Speed Restrictions by Line

Mode	Speed Restriction	Distance	% of Line	% of Line (5/24/2023)
Blue Line	14	4.2	33%	32%
Orange Line	39	5.0	22%	17%
Red Line	112	14.8	31%	22%
Green Line	65	12.0	22%	18%

Source: <https://www.mbta.com/performance-metrics/speed-restrictions> (Accessed 8/29/2023)



MBTA Service

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

MBTA Service Levels

Given the safety issues and workforce challenges the MBTA faces, including a shortage of operations control center (OCC) dispatchers and bus operators, as well as the speed restrictions in place, the MBTA has not restored pre-pandemic service. This impacts the quality of service the T provides the region in terms of frequency, reliability, and travel times.

Table 3 shows that service delivery on the subway compared to pre-pandemic service as well as the percentage of service delivered compared to scheduled. Of note, all subway lines are running reduced service due to shortages in OCC dispatchers.

³ 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.

Table 3: MBTA Service Delivered Compared to Pre-Pandemic and Actual Scheduled Trips (May-June 2023)

Subway Line	% Service Delivered Compared to Scheduled (May 2023)	% Pre-pandemic (May 2023)	% Service Delivered Compared to Scheduled (June 2023)	% Pre-pandemic (June 2023)
Blue Line	80%	67%	83%	70%
Green Line	75%	78%	72%	74%
Orange Line	96%	58%	97%	59%
Red Line	96%	53%	91%	51%

Source: <https://dashboard.transitmatters.org/> accessed 7/24/2023

Note: Data for May (4/30/2023-5/27/2023) and June (5/28/2023-7/01/2023)

MBTA Reliability and Performance Standards

The MBTA has reliability standards and performance targets for all modes, which provide an indication of the quality of MBTA service. The metrics shown on the MBTA website represent reliability based on the schedules being used at the time, i.e., not necessarily published schedules. As a result, the performance data does not provide a true indication of the service riders are experiencing. For this reason, A Better City will no longer track reliability until a more accurate accounting is put in place by the MBTA.

MBTA Ridership

The MBTA updates subway and Commuter Rail ridership at different intervals. For consistency and better analysis, this report will use monthly data going forward.

Subway Ridership

Tables 4 shows average monthly ridership for May 2023 and June 2023 respectively as well average ridership levels as compared to the same timeframes in 2019 (pre-pandemic). Ridership in May and June was steady except for the Green and Orange Line that both saw decreases of 13% and 5% respectively.

Table 4: Average Monthly MBTA Subway Ridership Levels (May & June 2023)

Mode	May 2023	June 2023	% Difference June & May 2023	% of Pre-pandemic*
Blue Line	1,037,338	1,034,106	0%	76%
Green Line	1,339,146	1,183,318	-13%	59%
Orange Line	2,021,817	1,919,491	-5%	49%
Red Line	2,377,503	2,367,517	0%	49%

Source: <https://massdot.app.box.com/s/21j0q5di9ewzl0abt6kdh5x8j8ok9964?sortColumn=date&sortDirection=DESC>

Note: % of pre-pandemic ridership is calculated using the average ridership for May 2023 and June 2023 and the average ridership for May 2019 and June 2019.

Commuter Rail Ridership by Line

Table 5 shows average daily ridership for May and June 2023. Ridership was steady except for on the Haverhill Line where ridership increased by 11 percent. Compared to pre-pandemic ridership, ridership in May and June show a 63% recovery rate. The recovery rate in April was about 10% higher.

Table 5: Average Daily MBTA Commuter Rail Ridership by Line (May and June 2023)

Line	May 2023	June 2023	% Change (June & May 2023)	% Pre-Pandemic Ridership
Fairmount	2,274	2,246	-1%	2%
Fitchburg	4,264	4,387	3%	4%
Framingham/Worcester	10,824	11,564	6%	9%
Franklin/Foxboro	6,847	6,409	7%	6%
Greenbush	3,473	3,463	0%	3%
Haverhill	4,358	4,899	11%	4%
Kingston	4,237	4,278	1%	4%
Lowell	5,249	5,318	1%	4%
Middleborough/Lakeville	5,176	5,106	-1%	4%
Needham	4,346	4,538	4%	4%
Newburyport/Rockport	8,230	8,599	4%	7%
Providence/Stoughton	15,498	15,466	0%	13%
Total	74,775	76,274	2%	63%

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

Note: Keolis reported average weekday daily ridership pre-pandemic at [119,354](#).

Ridership Recovery Trends Nationally and Peer Agencies

According to the American Public Transportation Association (APTA), nationwide ridership recovery in May 2023 was 71.25% and 70% in June 2023 (Table 6). NY MTA shows the strongest recovery with an average recovery rate for May and June of 79.2%, followed by LA Metro (71.45%), MBTA (66.5%), WMATA (64.4%), SEPTA (60%), and CTA (57%). The MBTA ranks third out of the five peer agencies reviewed, which is consistent with the last report. Table 6 shows how the other peer agencies compare to the MBTA in terms of ridership recovery.

Table 6: Ridership Recovery: Nationally and Peer Agencies

Agency	May 2023 (%)	June 2023 (%)	Average May & June 2023	Difference from MBTA (%)
National (US)	71.25%	70%	70.6%	6%
NY MTA	79.25%	79.2%	79.25%	16%
LA Metro	74.5%	68.4%	71.45%	7%
MBTA	67%	66%	66.5%	n/a
WMATA	66%	62.8%	64.4%	-3%
SEPTA	61.75%	58.2%	60%	-11%
CTA	58.25%	55%	57%	-18%

Source: <https://transitapp.com/apta> (Accessed 7/24/2023 for May and June 2023)

MBTA Workforce Challenges

The MBTA is facing severe workforce challenges that are impacting safety and service delivery.

Bus Operators

The Authority is struggling to fill bus operator vacancies to provide minimum service delivery. This summer, the T announced a new bus schedule that would reflect the actual number of bus operators the T employs to reduce dropped trips and spread out the impact across routes.⁴ In August 2023, the MBTA reached an agreement with the Local 589 Union to increase the starting hourly rate for bus drivers to \$30 from \$22.21.⁵ This is in addition to the \$7,500 sign-on bonus the T is offering. According to General Manager Eng, the MBTA has seen an increase in bus driver applicants since the wage hike, which put the MBTA ahead of its peer agencies for starting wage.⁶

Operation Control Center

The Authority is also having a difficult time filling Operation Control Center (OCC) supervisor and dispatcher positions and cut service in June 2022 on three lines (Red, Orange, and Blue lines) to Saturday service (approximately 20% reduction) after safety incidents in April 2022.⁷ [Note: The T added service to the Blue Line this summer to mitigate the Sumner Tunnel Closure and intends to increase service this Fall on the Orange Line).

As an incentive, the MBTA offers a \$10,000 sign-on bonus to OCC dispatchers, but the requirements are more stringent to meeting the minimum requirements to quality, despite changes in April 2023 to reduce the time required to work at the MBTA from 4 to 3 years and the number of years of heavy rail service experience from 2 years to 1 year. Despite these changes, hiring challenges persist.

Table 8 provides an overview of staffing requirements, actual headcounts, and vacancies for bus operator and OCC positions. For bus operators, the budget amount shows headcounts for FY24 and not FY23 as in the previous report; therefore, the numbers cannot be compared to the previous report. The OCC levels show a slow trend in hiring with an increase in two actual OCC dispatchers from 23 to 25 [Note: only 18 are long term dispatchers and the remainder are either in training or will start training] and that decreased to 7 from 9.

Table 7: MBTA Bus Operator and OCC Dispatcher Hire Level Updates (August 2023)

Position	Budgeted (FY24)/FTA Required	Actual	Delta
Bus Operator	1,916	1,548	368
OCC Dispatcher	32	25	7

Source: <https://cdn.mbta.com/sites/default/files/2023-08/2023-08-10-workforce-attraction-retention.pdf>

Note: To be fully staffed, the OCC needs 32 fully trained dispatchers (27 RTL dispatchers and 5 spare dispatchers). There are currently 25 dispatchers (18 long term dispatchers, 6 long term dispatchers in training, and 1 dispatcher pending training start date 8/28/23). To meet staffing requirements, the MBTA must hire 2 additional full-time dispatchers and 5 spare dispatchers. For bus operators, the FY24 budgeted headcount does not include bus operators in training and the actual headcount reported includes both active and inactive employees.

⁴ <https://cdn.mbta.com/sites/default/files/2023-05/2023-05-25-item-11-summer-2023-bus-service-strategy.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2023/08/02/metro/mbta-contract-calls-for-18-percent-pay-hike-over-4-years/>

⁶ <https://www.boston.com/news/local-news/2023/08/14/mbta-sees-bump-in-bus-driver-applications-following-new-contract/>

⁷ <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2023/08/12/metro/more-than-year-after-t-cut-service-because-overworked-dispatchers-mbta-remains-short-hiring-goals-operations-control-center/>