



# PUT THE FRONTLINE FIRST!

## Families Need Affordable Transit

Transit affordability is key to fulfilling the American Rescue Plan's mandate to "deliver immediate relief to working families bearing the brunt of this crisis" and supporting our state's COVID relief and recovery effort.

The Legislature can deliver transit affordability by designating **\$350 million** in ARPA funds at the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority and the Commonwealth's 15 Regional Transit Authorities (RTAs):

- **\$260 million** to fund two years of a means-tested, reduced-fare program at the MBTA
- **\$90 million** to replace lost fare revenue for two years of free-fare programs at all RTAs

### LOW-INCOME WORKERS, INCLUDING MANY FRONTLINE WORKERS, ARE STRUGGLING TO GET BY

The pandemic's health and economic impacts worsened already-dire conditions for working families and communities of color. Before the pandemic, the statewide poverty rate was 9.4%. In communities of color, which were hit hard by the pandemic, the poverty rate was even higher: 33.9% in Roxbury, 26.9% in Springfield, and 18.1% in Chelsea.<sup>[1]</sup>

#### Many of those struggling are frontline workers

- In Massachusetts, frontline workers were more likely to be low-income, with child care and social service workers, building cleaning workers, and grocery workers suffering the highest rates of poverty.<sup>[2]</sup>
- Low-paying frontline occupations such as care work and cleaning services are often held by women and people of color, increasing the burden on these groups.<sup>[3]</sup> The same groups also suffer high rates of unemployment.<sup>[4]</sup>

### LOW-WAGE FRONTLINE WORKERS ARE PAYING A HIGH COST FOR TRANSIT

- Frontline workers could not work from home and continued to depend on public transportation throughout the pandemic.<sup>[5]</sup>
- Transit ridership has remained highest among riders of color and low-income riders, who have borne the cost of public transit as they faced elevated COVID risk.<sup>[6]</sup>
- Fare costs have risen much faster than inflation, with subway fare increasing 140% since 2000.<sup>[7]</sup>



**PUBLIC TRANSIT  
PUBLIC GOOD**  
Riders, Workers and Communities  
United For Transit Justice

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### RECOMMENDED PROGRAMS AND COSTS

#### MBTA: Reduced-fare program for low-income riders

- The MBTA estimated a reduced-fare program for riders below 200% of the federal poverty level would cost up to \$112 million a year in lost revenue and operation costs, plus \$44 million in one-time implementation expenses.<sup>[8]</sup>
- We recommend the Legislature designate **\$260 million in ARPA** money to fund a reduced-fare program for MBTA riders, covering all modes including bus, rapid transit, commuter rails, ferry, and paratransit (The RIDE).

#### RTAs: Fare-free systems for all riders

- In 2019, total fare collections for all RTAs was \$44 million.<sup>[9]</sup> This included all modes of transit — fixed route, commuter buses, and paratransit.
- Free-fare programs may be more cost-effective than means-tested programs for most RTAs, given the costs of fare collection and high proportion of low-income riders.<sup>[10]</sup>
- We recommend the Legislature designate **\$90 million in ARPA** money to replace fare revenue for each RTA to create at least two years of fare-free programs.

#### Transit affordability is key to our state's recovery

Our state won't truly recover unless low-income families and communities have the opportunity to build back better. To get Massachusetts back to work, it's crucial that we ensure all people have access to the affordable transit they need to search for and commute to work. We must use ARPA money to fund transit affordability and support low-income and frontline workers.

[1] Quick Facts, Springfield city, Chelsea City, Massachusetts, US Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/springfieldcitymassachusetts,MA,chelseacitymassachusetts/IPE120219?>; Boston in Context: Neighborhoods, Boston Planning and Development Agency, January 2019, <http://www.bostonplans.org/getattachment/8349ada7-6cc4-4d0a-a5d8-d2fb966ea4fe>.

[2] Luc Schuster and Trevor Mattos, "A Profile of Frontline Workers in Massachusetts," Boston Indicator, April 13, 2020, [https://www.bostonindicators.org/article-pages/2020/april/frontline\\_workers](https://www.bostonindicators.org/article-pages/2020/april/frontline_workers)

[3] Luc Schuster and Trevor Mattos, "A Profile of Frontline Workers in Massachusetts," Boston Indicator, April 13, 2020, [https://www.bostonindicators.org/article-pages/2020/april/frontline\\_workers](https://www.bostonindicators.org/article-pages/2020/april/frontline_workers)

[4] Kathie Mainzer, Tonja Mettlach, and Anne Calef, Rapid ReEmployment for a Just and Equitable Recovery in Massachusetts, The Workforce Solutions Group, Mass Workforce Association and Boston Indicators, 2021, <https://www.massworkforce.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/RapidReEmployment-for-an-Equitable-Recovery.pdf>

[5] Mapping Route-By-Route Who's Riding Transit During the Pandemic, Transit Center, July 15, 2020, <https://transitcenter.org/mapping-route-by-route-whos-riding-transit-during-the-pandemic/>

[6] Mapping Route-By-Route Who's Riding Transit During the Pandemic; Chris Lisinski, State House News Service, February 18, 2021, "Mass. Survey Documents Disparate Impacts Of Pandemic For People Of Color, Low Income Residents", <https://www.wbur.org/news/2021/02/18/dph-survey-poc-lgbtq-disabilities-low-income-covid-impacts>

[7] <https://www.americaninno.com/boston/12-years-of-mbta-budget-woes-was-the-t-born-broke-for-1-in-2000>; <https://www.mbta.com/fares/subway-fares> for subway fare today (\$2.40). To calculate inflation rate since 2000, we took June 2000 and June 2021 as the reference months, and used the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Consumer Price Index calculator, [https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation\\_calculator.htm](https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm)

[8] Fare Policy Updates, May 24, 2021 Fiscal and Management Control Board Presentation, <https://cdn.mbtta.com/sites/default/files/2021-05/2021-05-24-fmcb-19-fare-policy-update.pdf>

[9] 2019 Annual Database Fare Revenues, Federal Transit Administration, <https://www.transit.dot.gov/ntd/data-product/2019-annual-database-fare-revenues>

[10] A survey of Pioneer Valley Regional Transit Authority riders found "a disproportionate number of riders (55 percent) are below the poverty level compared to the region as a whole (25 percent)." In a WRTA rider survey, 29% reported income under \$25,000, below the poverty level for a family of four, 55% had incomes under \$50,000 which is less than 200% of the Poverty level for a family of 4. Comprehensive Regional Transit Plan Update 2020. Pioneer Valley Regional Transit Authority, <http://www.pvta.com/documents/crtpu/CRTPU%203%20Mkt%20Eval-Performance-Trans%20Needs.pdf>, p. 115; Comprehensive Regional Transit Plan Update 2020; Worcester Regional Transit Authority, January 2021, MassDOT and AECOM, [https://www.thertia.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/WRTA\\_CRTPU\\_MASTER\\_02232021\\_508.pdf](https://www.thertia.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/WRTA_CRTPU_MASTER_02232021_508.pdf), page 112-113; On cost of fare collection, see Phineas Baxandall, "The Dollars and Sense of Free Buses," Mass Budget and Policy Center, March 24, 2021, [https://massbudget.org/2021/03/24/the-dollars-sense-of-free-buses/#\\_ednref5](https://massbudget.org/2021/03/24/the-dollars-sense-of-free-buses/#_ednref5)