



GETTING ON BOARD FOR A BETTER MBTA: PRINCIPLES TO FIX OUR PUBLIC TRANSIT

The MBTA is in crisis. Decades of underinvestment and deferred maintenance have resulted in dire safety problems. These include the death of a rider, multiple runaway trains, train fires, a bus fire, an escalator malfunction, and daily risks to the workers and riders who operate, maintain, and use the system. There have been countless train accidents, and riders and workers are afraid they will be next in the news. And the MBTA has taken the extreme step of shutting down the entire Orange Line for a full month to make long-overdue repairs, while also closing off a significant portion of the Green Line.

Under Republican Governor Charlie Baker, MBTA management has slashed the workforce and failed to maintain enough staff for safety-critical and operating positions, resulting in a dangerous workplace, increased risk to riders, widespread delays, and unprecedented rapid transit shutdowns. The MBTA has failed to achieve its equity goals, refusing to implement a low-income fare program and ignoring public testimony around fare enforcement penalties. Communities of color, environmental justice communities, and elders continue to fight for adequate service, including staving off proposed changes to bus service that would limit their mobility. At the same time, the Authority is spending nearly a billion dollars on a misguided fare collection privatization contract that is already years late and hundreds of millions over the original budget. Confidence in the MBTA management is at a low, among riders and workers alike.

The answer to the crisis is not to turn away from public transit. Massachusetts residents deserve safe and reliable public transportation. The Commonwealth's leaders must listen to riders and workers, and re-invest in the MBTA, putting safety, equity, affordability, and accessibility at the forefront. The moment to act is now — the need for change is clear, transit workers and riders are ready to help build a new system, a new Governor will take office in

January, and federal revenues from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act can provide a once-in-a-lifetime infusion to help rebuild the system.

Together, we can ensure everyone in the MBTA region has the service they need and can afford to use. Robust improvements will aid our climate goals, reduce notoriously bad traffic, ensure cleaner air in environmental justice communities and elsewhere, and boost our regional prosperity by making our region a good place to live and an easy place to get around.

While this is not an easy task, it is an achievable one. Today in Massachusetts, we have both the ability and resources to do what is necessary to fix the MBTA.

Because of our lived experience and expertise, members of the Public Transit Public Good coalition know the system. We ride, operate, and maintain the MBTA's buses, trains, and trolleys. We build and fix the infrastructure that makes up this large and complex system. We know the MBTA can and must be fixed, for the good of us all. Here are some guiding principles and next steps for how this can be done:

- **Support workers and riders during the Orange and Green Line shutdowns.** The MBTA and municipalities must work with riders and workers to ensure adequate and accessible alternatives to usual service.
 - › Maintaining ridership, reducing traffic congestion, and avoiding inequitable impacts during the closure are essential aspects of these safety-related repairs.
 - » To achieve these goals, fares should be suspended throughout the MBTA system, with the estimated \$35 million lost revenue replaced from the \$266.3 million appropriated by the legislature to address safety-related costs in FY23.
 - › The MBTA must ensure disabled and elderly riders have full access to alternatives to usual service.
 - › For the duration of the shut down, the region's employers, including the MBTA and municipalities, should waive penalties for tardiness. Municipalities should explore executive orders on tardiness to ensure their local public and private workforces do not face workplace penalties caused by transit delays.
 - › For the duration of the shut down, the region's schools should not penalize students for tardiness.
 - › The MBTA must improve communication around any future shutdowns and changes or extensions of the current closures, including using signage in multiple languages at stations and on board vehicles.

- **Maintain local control.** The Federal Transit Administration’s (FTA) investigation was triggered by serious problems, and has prompted MBTA action to solve safety problems arising under Governor Baker’s authority. But the true fixes for the MBTA’s problems must come from the people of our Commonwealth, not from Federal Authorities. Our elected and appointed officials should do all they can to prevent FTA receivership of the MBTA while swiftly and robustly addressing the problems identified by the FTA.
- **Let transit workers and riders lead.** Mismanagement from the top down has created today’s multiple crises. Rider and worker input has too often been ignored in final policy setting and MBTA operations. To fix the MBTA, elected and appointed officials, including the Governor, the MBTA Board, and top executives must look to the leadership of the people who rely on the system and those who keep it running.
 - › Environmental justice (EJ) communities are home to riders of color and low-income riders who face high levels of pollution and environmental disease. Many people in EJ communities have no alternative and must use the MBTA to get to work, school, and elsewhere. They may have less access to service or spend significantly more time in travel than riders in other communities. An equitable response to the MBTA’s crisis will implement the recommendations of EJ riders.
 - › Rank-and-file MBTA workers — operators, mechanics, custodians, and more — must also be at the center of our solutions to the current crises. MBTA workers have an expert understanding of the systems they run and maintain, and have offered real solutions to the safety and service challenges the MBTA faces today. The MBTA must implement the recommendations of workers who keep the system running.
- **Invest in operating and capital budgets.** As a public good, the MBTA needs public revenues to ensure it runs safely and smoothly every day, as well as to expand service and to help solve our climate crisis. For a successful MBTA, we need sufficient funding for both everyday operation and infrastructure upgrade and expansion.
 - › A robust operating budget will ensure the MBTA can maintain regular on-time service and fund the salaries and benefits needed to hire and retain workers, especially those in safety-critical positions in operations and repair and maintenance. Adequate operation funding will ensure the MBTA can pursue equitable fare policies like the low-income fare.
 - › A well-funded capital budget will allow for new trains and buses, and the upgrades needed to reduce the risk of injury and ensure people get safely to their destination. An expanded system can serve more people more equitably, and transitions to electric vehicles will reduce pollution in EJ communities and throughout the region.

- › When the MBTA faces shortfalls, the Massachusetts Legislature should regularly provide sufficient funds. Commonwealth support of public transit is not a “subsidy,” it is an investment in our shared public good.
- › The Commonwealth should ensure that federal funds are used to fix safety issues at the MBTA, and to expand the system to reduce pollution, traffic, and inequitable access.
- **Ensure funding is fair and sustainable.** We need to move away from the MBTA’s heavy reliance on regressive revenues like fares and sales tax that cost more, as a proportion of total income, for low-income riders. We must generate new progressive sources of funding. The MBTA should not rely so heavily on riders to foot the bill since we all benefit from the MBTA’s contributions to our regional economy, as well as its traffic and pollution reductions (whether we ride or not!).
 - › In November, Massachusetts should vote yes on Question 1, the Fair Share Amendment, which would create a 4% tax on the portion of a person’s annual income above \$1 million and dedicate the funds raised to transportation and public education.
- **Make riding affordable system-wide.** All people should be able to access public transportation, but many riders struggle to pay the fare. Structural racism and economic exploitation have created deep inequalities in Massachusetts as elsewhere, leaving working families and communities of color struggling to make ends meet. COVID-19 and inflation have thrown even more of us into economic insecurity. A low-income fare could provide immediate relief to working families, returning about \$50 million a year to the pockets of those who need it most. A low-income fare has the support of 83% of those surveyed, with strong support in all types of communities and all parts of the Commonwealth. We need a low-income fare now.
- **Ensure critical bus routes keep running and new routes make sense.** The bus network redesign should increase, not limit, our ability to get around. We are concerned that in some places, proposed route changes will increase walk time and the number of transfers, harming EJ communities and seniors who heavily depend on certain routes and already face inequities in travel times or access to rapid transit. These changes may create barriers to accessing healthcare, education and places of employment.
 - › The MBTA must respect riders’ priorities in any bus route changes, and maintain accessible service for all, including seniors, riders with disabilities, and students.
 - › Where planned service changes would create unsustainable burdens on operators or other staff, the MBTA must listen to workers and adjust plans accordingly.

- **Stop privatization and corporate profiteering.** Privatization projects, including so-called “public private partnerships” (P3s), threaten the public with a whole host of problems like lowered job standards, diminished wages, corner cutting, and higher fees, as well as decreased transparency and increased inequality.
 - › The MBTA should exit the wasteful and delayed Fare Transformation P3 privatization contract with Cubic, and redirect any savings from fare collection and verification programs into reliable service and safety needs.
 - › The MBTA should adopt robust protections to prevent wasteful privatization and P3 deals in the future.

About Public Transit Public Good Coalition:

Public Transit Public Good is a partnership of transit workers and riders throughout Massachusetts fighting for the future of public transit. Community Labor United convenes PTPG. Visit publictransitpublicgood.org to learn more.