

TRANSIT IS ESSENTIAL.

It's Time Our Leaders Understand That.

FALL 2026

ALLIANCE FOR A JUST SOCIETY

National Campaign for Transit Justice



INTRODUCTION

"...the effectiveness of public transportation is shaped not only by its presence within a community, but by how well it enables individuals to complete the activities that travel is intended to support"

"Environmental Scan of Transit Needs in Massachusetts." — Mass.gov

The numerous benefits of a robust public transit system cannot be overestimated. It provides a cost-effective way to get to daily tasks. Transit connects communities across the state, with rural towns, suburban communities, and urban centers using buses, light rail, and van pools. It reduces congestion and pollution, and it supports economic activity and growth.

Transportation is the *second-most-expensive item* on the average household's budget, after housing.[1] Many people live in communities that require them to drive long distances to get to work, school, the doctor, and more, *increasing their transportation costs*.[2] This places working- and middle-class people in Massachusetts and across the country between a rock and a hard place: either pay *more than $10,000 per year* to own and drive a car or pay the time tax of having to rely on low-quality public transit, walking, or biking to get around (if public transit service, sidewalks, and safe bike infrastructure even exist where they live).[3] This has been called the *"impossible paradox of car ownership."*[4] Quality, reliable public transit can help households avoid this choice and save *thousands of dollars* per year, whether they can replace just a few car trips with public transit or have the freedom to make all their trips without a personal vehicle.[5]

For Massachusetts residents who can't rely on a car for their transportation needs, who make up over *38 percent* of the state's population, transit is a lifeline.[6] Nondrivers include seniors, students, low-income families, immigrants, people with disabilities, and people who choose not to drive. A study commissioned by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) *described* how nondriving status often means that people can't reach the destinations they need to, including work, medical appointments, and social engagements.[7] According to the research, this stems from limitations across the various modes of travel that nondrivers use, centering on public transit. *The report states* that "Limited evening and weekend operations, infrequent service, indirect routing, and long transfer times often reduced the practicality of fixed-route transit for employment, healthcare access, grocery shopping, and caregiving responsibilities."[8]

1. https://data.bts.gov/stories/s/Transportation-Economic-Trends-Transportation-Spen/ida7-k95k/
2. https://usa.streetsblog.org/2011/08/05/cnt-busts-drive-till-you-qualify-myth-in-the-d-c-region
3. https://www.aaa.com/autorepair/articles/breaking-down-the-cost-of-car-ownership
4. https://www.vox.com/23753949/cars-cost-ownership-economy-repossession
5. https://www.vox.com/23753949/cars-cost-ownership-economy-repossession
6. https://www.nrdc.org/resources/who-doesnt-have-car
7. https://www.mass.gov/doc/environmental-scan-of-community-transit-needs-in-massachusetts-final-report/download#page=11
8. https://www.mass.gov/doc/environmental-scan-of-community-transit-needs-in-massachusetts-final-report/download#page=13



INTRODUCTION

And beyond the *availability of transit* and types of trips served by transit, the ability to get to transit is cited as the *second most common concern* for fixed-route transit riders.[9,10] This demonstrates how public transit cannot be improved in a vacuum; it must be accompanied by a network of infrastructure for walking and biking that makes it possible to safely reach the transit stop.

Public transportation is crucial for more than those with no other option. Every day, people take hundreds of thousands of trips on buses, trains, streetcars, and paratransit vehicles, and that number is growing every year. According to MassDOT's *2025 Annual Performance Report*,[11] public transit agencies across the state provided over 264 million passenger trips in FY 2025. This was an increase of over 10 percent from FY 2024 ridership, thanks to a 12 percent increase in transit ridership for the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), as well as more than 20 percent ridership growth across the state's fifteen regional transit authorities (RTAs). The overwhelming majority of these agencies have either surpassed their pre-pandemic ridership or are close to doing so. These trips get people to work and school, to the doctor's office and social engagements, and to buy the food and goods that keep them and their households running. Without public transportation, many of these trips simply wouldn't happen—and the needs of the people who take them would go unmet—and every other trip would become much more difficult. **Public transportation keeps streets clearer so that the many trips people currently need to take by car aren't mired in congestion. Whether someone is a bus rider or only sees the bus through their windshield, they benefit from its presence.**

In the following pages, we share stories of people from Massachusetts who experience the benefits and limitations of public transit every day. They are workers, seniors, people with disabilities, and students who use existing public transportation to live their lives. They are public transportation riders whose everyday lives would improve if public transportation received more operations funding to increase frequency, improve dependability, and expand access

9. https://www.mass.gov/doc/environmental-scan-of-community-transit-needs-in-massachusetts-final-report/download#page=38
10. https://www.mass.gov/doc/environmental-scan-of-community-transit-needs-in-massachusetts-final-report/download#page=38
11. https://www.massdottracker.com/



Jane LaPointe – Winchendon, MA

"...we need transit service that works, is available when we need it, and is reliable"

"When I grew up, I could take a train or bus to visit relatives in Vermont or New Hampshire. My parents actually took the train into Boston for their honeymoon. My dad worked locally, and we could shop locally so we didn't need a car."

I was born in Winchendon, MA, but moved away for college and lived in Virginia, Maine, New Hampshire, and Boston before moving back here 13 years ago. Initially, I worked as a school librarian. Still, because of my interest in history, I started doing research, eventually earned an MBA, and now work with businesses and organizations on strategic planning.

When I grew up, I could take a train or bus to visit relatives in Vermont or New Hampshire. My parents actually took the train into Boston for their honeymoon. My dad worked locally, and we could shop locally so we didn't need a car.

Now I don't even know how I could get around and deal with the essentials of life without a car. I need to go into Brigham & Women's Hospital for tests every 6 months, and I'm grateful that I can drive. But I'll be 77 years old in a couple of months, and there may be a time when I won't be able to drive.

I don't think a train and the T would get me into Boston in time for my early morning appointments, so I might have to take a train the night before and stay in an expensive hotel. More than likely, I'd have to ask family or friends to take me in, but I've been independent all these years and really don't feel comfortable asking for help.

I remember how hard it was for my uncle to give up his car. That sense of independence and adventure was so much a part of his life (as it is mine). Other people I know have found out quite suddenly that they have cancer, need extra medical care, and aren't able to drive. How do they suddenly get to medical care or meet their daily needs?

People need to be able to get to where they need to go. We can live better, healthier lives if we can get to medical facilities, access food, and take a walk in a park, go to the library, or visit family and friends.

Jane LaPointe – Winchendon, MA (continued)

"In our rural, under-resourced area of North Central Massachusetts, we need transit service that works, is available when we need it and is reliable."

I know elected officials are dealing with critical funding issues, but when you look at the key drivers of health and wellbeing, the biggest determinant of health is social connection. A critical factor in the wellbeing of our towns is a sense of community and working together, which comes from connections.

It's really important to put the infrastructure in place for reliable public transit so that people can get to where they need to go, in state, regionally and locally, and people like me can age in place for as long as possible. In our rural, under-resourced area of North Central Massachusetts, we need transit service that works, is available when we need it, and is reliable. Too often people think of Boston and the Berkshires and skip over Central Massachusetts. I know our State officials are aware of this and partnering with local organizations to bring more equitable services, like transportation/mobility, to rural Massachusetts.

Our elected officials need to understand the importance of transportation for the viability of our entire community as well as in people's lives and fund transit operations as well as infrastructure.



Jess Nahigian – Cambridge, MA

"There is credence to giving money for maintenance and improving service for the benefit of longer term system enhancement."

"I've been taking transit ever since I was a kid. My friends and I didn't get driver's licenses until our twenties. We had all the freedom we wanted in high school to explore the city and connect with other friends who lived all over the area."

My name is Jess Nahigian. I live near where I grew up in Cambridge. I've been taking transit ever since I was a kid. My friends and I didn't get driver's licenses until our twenties. We had all the freedom we wanted in high school to explore the city and connect with other friends who lived all over the area. I feel grateful when I hear stories about people's isolating experiences as teenagers in the suburbs without cars.

I'm the Democratic State Committee representative from Suffolk and Middlesex and I interned on Sen. Elizabeth Warren's 2012 campaign. Currently, I'm a grad student studying conflict resolution, so I use the bus and the train to get to UMass Boston. My bus connects directly to the Red Line. All things considered, it's relatively direct because there is a stop right near my campus. Still, it probably takes 45 minutes to an hour by transit. Even during rush hour, it can be up to 10 minutes between trains. Pre pandemic, the headways were shorter.

On weekends, transit is much less frequent. Our system is really built for 9-5 weekday commuters heading into central Boston. As someone who likes to go out and do things in the evening and on weekends, traveling around is difficult.

The commuter rail is especially awful. I have a professor with a commuter rail stop in her town who has to drive an hour each way to campus because the commuter rail train only comes once an hour when she is leaving her weekday evening class. Every time I've heard about service cuts, it always feels like a "chicken and egg" problem - people don't take the commuter rail because it doesn't run frequently, so they don't run many trains because people don't take it.

Sometimes I drive, and sometimes I take the T, depending on the day and where I'm coming from. Speed is the number one determining factor. Driving from home only takes 30-35 minutes, even during rush hour.

Jess Nahigian – Cambridge, MA (continued)

"Every time I've heard about service cuts, it always feels like a "chicken and egg" problem — people don't take the commuter rail because it doesn't run frequently, so they don't run many trains because people don't take it."

We need to get transit to a place where people see it as a reliable, fast, and convenient way to travel. I think that will increase the appetite for larger investments in the system that are so badly needed. Improvements have begun under General Manager Eng, but the state's budget only stretches so far. There is credence to giving money for maintenance and improving service for the benefit of longer term system enhancement. That means investing public dollars in public transit.



Ralph Walton – Jamaica Plains, MA

“...in the big blizzard of 1978...People had a real alternative to driving.”

"What we really need is a transit system that allows us to travel across Boston just as easily as travelling in and out of the city center."

My name is Ralph Walton. I’m 74 years old and live in the Jamaica Plains section of Roxbury.

I was a bicycle mechanic for many years. I moved into a condo right across from the southwest corridor bike path so I would be able to get around easily. There is also a Rapid Transit train station a couple blocks in either direction along the bike path. So, 20 years ago, I gave up my car.

But it hasn’t been the perfect solution because the transit system still mainly goes in and out of the city. That means I can’t go across town to Dorchester or Brookline without spending way too much time trying to get there. What we really need is a transit system that allows us to travel across Boston just as easily as travelling in and out of the city center.

My favorite memory of transit was in the big blizzard of 1978. The Mayor and Governor decided to give priority to transit. That meant that buses were able to just fly down the street since there was no traffic. People had a real alternative to driving.



Amelia Koch – Dartmouth, MA

“I want our buses to be greener and cleaner so they aren’t spewing fumes but I also want transit to be frequent, efficient and reliable”

"I‘ve had both good and bad times with the T and still use it in the Newton area."

My name is Amelia Koch. I was born and brought up in Brookline (and Newton) for most of my life and have used transit since my father let me. I started out as an accountant, worked at 4 higher education institutions in financial management and in the U Mass system on their bond funding. Recently, I retired and live with my mother and husband in Dartmouth.

I‘ve had both good and bad times with the T and still use it in the Newton area. I haven’t tackled the new south coast rail line that goes to New Bedford. It’s not far from me but it doesn’t run all that frequently and it’s still a ways from my house. So, I drive to the T in Newton, go downtown and back on the T, and then back in my car to Dartmouth.

When I was a young mother I could have taken the train more but I had small children and there was no way I was going to be at the whim and mercy of mass transit. And when I was living in Newton and going into Boston for work at the RI School of Design, I ended up driving because it was a reverse commute and much faster and more reliable by car than transit.

Over my life of commuting I’ve had plenty of delays on public transit though, lately, it’s been pretty terrific for the most part.

I want our buses to be greener and cleaner so they aren’t spewing fumes but I also want transit to be frequent, efficient and reliable here in Dartmouth and throughout the state.



Linda Freeman – Roxbury, MA

"Transit can be very difficult for people with hidden disabilities."

"I have learned that when it says that it's going to be 15 minutes late, it often turns into 30 minutes and that means he is late for work. Sometimes I have to change my schedule to pick him up because it causes him to panic."

My name is Linda Freeman and I have lived in the Roxbury, Woburn, Boston, Brookline area for the majority of my life. Transit can be very difficult for people with hidden disabilities. When transit is late, it is really anxiety provoking.

I'm a mom whose youngest family member is high functioning but has a disability and relies on transit. Transit can be very difficult, especially for people with hidden disabilities. Thank goodness there are Transit Ambassadors out there to help him navigate to the shuttle buses when there is a change. But, even with that help, he has sometimes had to wait for 4 different shuttle buses because he can't get on one that is jampacked. He gets very frustrated waiting and waiting and waiting,

When transit is late, it is really anxiety provoking for him. I have learned that when it says that it's going to be 15 minutes late, it often turns into 30 minutes and that means he is late for work. Sometimes I have to change my schedule to pick him up because it causes him to panic.

We need to increase transit service for the benefit of all your constituents. There may come a time for all of us, that we have to rely on the public transit system. We probably need double the service that we're getting now to achieve a true balance between operations and infrastructure.

THANK YOU for fighting for better transit service.



Hanna van Belle – West Somerville, MA

"Transit is really important me – it's the lifeblood of my existence."

"Good transit is so important to any city. There are a billion reasons - it's more efficient, it's fairer to low-income people, it allows people to get around and to see other people, social interactions increase people's happiness, and it just makes the whole city function."

My name is Hanna van Belle, and I work in the Development Department at the Massachusetts Historical Society planning events. I've lived in Boston since I came here for University in 2016 and became passionate about Art and Art history. I love to walk, and my neighborhood is really walkable, whether I'm going to the grocery store, a coffee shop, or the park.

I grew up in Rhode Island but didn't really take RIPTA as a kid. Now I take transit almost everywhere I go. The nearest T station is a 5-minute walk, and I can take the Red Line directly to work, get off at the Hynes stop, and walk 5 minutes to the office.

I also take the train to my dance group, which usually practices near a Red Line stop, or to my boyfriend's, which is near the Orange Line. Transit is really important to me - it's the lifeblood of my existence.

I prefer the train over the bus whenever possible, but sometimes I need to go to Watertown or East Somerville. I can take the train partway there, but for the last little bit of the trip I have to take a slower bus. The whole trip would be 20 minutes by car but is almost or sometimes over an hour by train and bus because there isn't any service that goes across town. Instead, I have to go all the way into downtown Boston to go back out. That's true even when I just go from West Somerville to where I live in East Somerville. It's discouraging to spend so much time for a trip that should take 20 minutes. I'd like to see 3 concentric circles of crosstown routes so we could get across town quickly.

Good transit is so important to any city. There are a billion reasons - it's more efficient, it's fairer to low-income people, it allows people to get around and to see other people, social interactions increase people's happiness, and it just makes the whole city function.

Without good service, none of us can function well! We need every level of government to step up and chip in to support transit operations funding that lets us get where we need to go efficiently.

Evan Foss – Newton, MA

"We need dedicated funding specifically to improve transit frequency... I could usually walk that 30-40 minutes before I would even see a bus."

"I'm an engineer and started looking at how unreliable the system is. It turns out that it is entirely because of an operations budget problem. Sure, there were capital projects that got postponed, but the legacy of understaffing for the last 20 years was the biggest problem."

I'm Evan Foss and live in Newton with my wife and our 2 cats. I grew up in the suburb of Holliston and briefly lived in Chestnut Hill. I've been at nearly every MBTA Board meeting since 2018 and even scheduled my honeymoon so I would only miss one board meeting, much to my wife's chagrin!

I don't own a car so I use transit a lot. From 2009 to 2022, I took transit to work when I was working as a research engineer in one of the research labs at Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary. For the earlier years (2009-2016) I was commuting from Holliston and that ended up being a nightmare. I was dependent on the Red line to get to the Commuter train but when it was running late, I'd miss my train and have to wait 45 minutes for the next one. Then I moved to Newton, near the Carroll School for the Blind and Boston College. I thought the 52 bus would run pretty good bus service to the Green line. Unfortunately, I could usually walk that 30-40 minutes before I would even see a bus.

Now I'm a consultant and use transit for a few local clients (a few biotech's and a university), to run errands, and visit people. The Green line is frequent but not as reliable as it should be. I'm an engineer and started looking at how unreliable the system is. It turns out that it is entirely because of an operations budget problem. Sure, there were capital projects that got postponed, but the legacy of understaffing for the last 20 years was the biggest problem. When I started there were a little over 6,000 staff and now they have about 7,500. That's a major change to how the MBTA is run but it's still not enough for frequent, reliable, efficient service.

Recently, I tried to go from a Flea Market in Cambridge to Quincy to visit friends. The Red Line was doing pretty well that day so I took it and then made a connection with a bus off the Red Line. The problem was that I ended up missing my stop. To turn around and get back, it would have been either a 40 minute walk or waiting 2 hours for a bus back the other way. We need dedicated funding specifically to improve transit service.



Wendy Brathwaite – Dorchester, MA

“We’d be waiting and waiting outside, freezing, and the bus would never show up.”

"Transit service needs to be much better, more frequent, more reliable, more efficient and more accessible for seniors."

My name is Wendy Brathwaite. I’ve lived on Humboldt Ave in Dorchester for over 20 years but grew up in Roxbury. My sweetheart for almost 30 years was a retired professor of law at UMass and founding member and first president of the Massachusetts Black Lawyers Association.

He and I used the MBTA to go to doctors appointments and to go here and there. We would usually take the 44 bus going inbound from Jackson to the T at Ruggles but that bus is really unreliable and hardly ever on time. It misses runs and just doesn’t come. I would have an appointment, my husband would check the app and then we'd go out to the bus stop. We’d be waiting and waiting outside, freezing, and the bus would never show up. Numerous times I’ve called to complain about it.

Then one day, I woke up and the bus stop was completely gone with no notice whatsoever. For 20 some years, I had a bus stop right across the street and it was gone. I walk with a cane and what that means is that, senior citizens like me, have to walk down to Townsend or up to Waumbeck, to get a bus.

I discovered the hard way that Bus drivers won’t even let me off here. One hot summer day, I was coming home from the grocery store, bags of groceries in my arms. I got dropped off at Waumbeck even though I insisted I had to get off at the William Monroe Charter School, and ended up having to walk all that way, dripping with sweat and feeling like I was not going to make it. I cried all the way home. I’ll never forget that as long as I live.

I’ve barely been on a bus since 2023 when my husband passed away. Now I get around with the LIFT program. You can call the day before and schedule a ride to the T. The only thing is that they might pick me up at 7am for a 9am appointment when it is only a 15 minute drive. Transit service needs to be much better, more frequent, more reliable, more efficient and more accessible for seniors. Please fund it.



Vanessa Pogue – Lexington, MA

"Frequent buses and more hours of service means ... investing in transit operations."

"This past winter I noticed the buses around town and decided I wanted to reduce reliance on my vehicle and use public transit like I did when I lived abroad."

I am a mechanical engineer living and working in eastern Massachusetts outside Boston. I grew up in Western Massachusetts but lived for short periods abroad in other countries including Sweden and Singapore where I was able to completely rely on public transit for getting around. In the US I spent a number of years in Georgia and Arizona where these options weren't available to me.

About 18 months ago, I got a new job in Massachusetts and moved to Lexington, Ma., the same town where my new job is. This past winter I noticed the buses around town and decided I wanted to reduce reliance on my vehicle and use public transit like I did when I lived abroad. I've been commuting to work Monday through Friday 9-5 using two buses, both the Lexpress Lexington town bus, and the Boston MBTA. The trip is 1 hour door to door each way but is only about 15 minutes by personal vehicle (just 5 miles). There is a 20 minute wait between buses which could be solved with more frequent buses. A commute this long makes riding public transit for commuting to work time prohibitive and illogical if you have access to a private vehicle.

I really enjoy taking the bus and it has allowed me to discover places I wouldn't have otherwise visited along the route. I have also met people on the bus and I feel it's very important to have this offering for everyone and to help improve our communities in a nation that is fighting a loneliness epidemic. Being able to connect from Lexington to the MBTA helps solve the last mile problem - a problem across America - but Lexpress doesn't run frequently enough to make it realistic for Americans to actually use it for things like commuting to work or grocery shopping.

I would really like to see more frequent buses and more hours of service but that means investing in transit operations. Transit agencies need money to pay bus and train operators, mechanics, support staff and fuel. Help all of us in Massachusetts and throughout the entire country get around efficiently by funding reliable frequent public transit service. It will be better for our individuals, communities, and for our planet.



John Petell – Great Barrington, MA

"Our transit system needs ongoing, stable operations funding."

"I couldn't get a car without selling my house, and I couldn't sell my house without a place to live. I was cash-poor and asset-rich."

My name is John Petell, and I live in Great Barrington, MA. I worked until I was 66 and a half, and then my wife and I retired together on the same day.

I've always been in Management in Boston, at a School District and Nursing Home. My wife had dozens of clients, so we created our own cleaning service combining her client list with my management skills.

Then, 11 or 12 years after my wife miraculously beat cancer, it came back and threw our household into financial and transportation turmoil. My wife died not long after, and I had to choose between keeping a roof over my head or keeping my car. I tried to sell the house and get a one-bedroom apartment, but I couldn't get an affordable apartment because of the influx of people after COVID, and people who were homeless were getting priority. And I found out I wasn't progressing on housing lists because I owned a home. I was stuck. I couldn't get a car without selling my house, and I couldn't sell my house without a place to live. I was cash-poor and asset-rich.

I got rid of my car. But finding someone to give me a ride to appointments was difficult, especially during the daytime on weekdays when many people were working. Fortunately, I learned about the South County Connector, an on-demand transit program in this area. I cannot speak more highly of them. They are vital and highly regarded. They have even been able to expand despite challenges. There is nothing else like it in the whole area – not even with Uber or LYFT. And the drivers have always been exceptional.

I use the South County Connector to get groceries, go to food pantries, the hardware store, the bank, and medical appointments. They can provide transportation to Pittsfield for medical appointments. I've met people who take it to get to and from work. It's especially important because our area is aging and we have a big population of the elderly or disabled.

John Petell – Great Barrington, MA (continued)

"I would love to impress on you how more and more people need transportation in all forms. This is such a high priority."

This service is in everybody's best interest.

I would love to impress on you how more and more people need transportation in all forms. This is such a high priority.

But the service would benefit from dependable operations funding year to year so riders could count on the service, so handicap-accessible vans could be repaired as soon as they break down, and so the service could expand to more communities.

Our transit system needs ongoing, stable operations funding.



Carolyn Sellars – Ashburnham, MA

"We need to dramatically increase funding for transit services in our region – we know we need more frequent service, longer hours including nights and weekends..."

"There was no other way for them to get from Lowell to Worcester and back. One reason they now live out of state is our current lack of mobility options."

I'm Carolyn Sellars. I have long ties to North Central Massachusetts. My mother was five when her mother died, and she moved to Winchendon to live with her grandparents. Her father worked during the week in Cambridge and took the train out on weekends to visit his children. I myself was raised in Stoneham just outside of Boston. As a teenager, I could take a nearby train or bus to get into Boston.

In 1978, when I got married, regional bus lines still existed. In fact, some people coming to my wedding got off the bus in Winchendon. When we decided to raise a family, we moved out to this area permanently. Youth in our region don't have the same type of access to transit connections I had growing up. My offspring relied on getting rides until they were old enough to get their license and borrow a family car.

My daughter, who had their driver's license, developed a seizure disorder in their first year at Tulane University. They moved back and enrolled at UMass Lowell while they addressed their health. They could no longer drive, so each week I'd drive 40 minutes to pick them up, drive them to their doctors at UMASS Medical, and then drive back. There was no other way for them to get from Lowell to Worcester and back. One reason they now live out of state is our current lack of mobility options.

While founding and working at Sizer, a North Central Charter Essential School in Fitchburg, I became aware of mobility problems. The school serves a regional population, many of whom have their own challenges. Many times, a family's car broke down, and the child had no way to get to school or the parent to get to work. Some statistics indicate this region has a strong car culture. Some people may even have 3 vehicles – a car, a truck and a sports car – but that doesn't mean that any of them work.

People don't drive for a lot of reasons – they break a leg or their car breaks down. A former neighbor had a seizure but kept it a secret because they had no other option - there was no way for them to get to and from work to support their family without driving.

Carolyn Sellars – Ashburnham, MA (continued)

"I'm beginning to age and I want to stay in my home."

Now I volunteer with the Health Equity Partnership of North Central MA. While updating our Community Health Improvement Plan, we found that access to transportation was a key driver of health inequity. Mobility is a basic need that connects people to food, housing, jobs, and other people. It's one of the systems that needs improvement.

The state has recognized that rural areas like mine need increased mobility within our region, as well as to and from our area, to support economic development. Like me, many people are choosing to age in place. At some point, I'll need to stop driving and rely on the very limited senior vans. The same vans are used to get seniors to and from food banks and doctor's appointments as well as to activities at local senior centers. The closure of local hospitals has put even more pressure on these vans.

It's hard to even think about giving up my car without frequent, reliable, and affordable options that are attractive to people like me and my neighbors.

For the 28 communities in this region, there won't be one solution, but better regional transit is one critical piece. We need to dramatically increase funding for transit services in our region - we know we need more frequent service, longer hours including nights and weekends, and transit service to more places.

I'm beginning to age and I want to stay in my home.

Every community needs vitality. We need families moving into our community, buying homes, and sending their kids to school. These families pay taxes and support local businesses, and this is how we keep the community alive. If we have a weak transit system, we're making it less attractive to live here.

Politicians need to understand what it's like to be dependent on this service before they make major life-changing decisions for us. If you represent people who ride the bus, like me, you have a responsibility to look after our interests.



Jarred Johnson – Boston, MA

"The federal government needs to step up and fund transit operations and infrastructure so we can have the reliable, efficient, affordable transit we need."

"At the time, I was working for AmeriCorps and couldn't have afforded gas, insurance, and maintenance, so transit gave me the space and freedom to try this new field and figure out what I wanted to do."

My name is Jarred Johnson, and I am a Transit Advocate working for a design and engineering firm in Boston.

I didn't start out on this path. I grew up in Oklahoma and pretty much never took transit. There was one time when I must have done something I shouldn't have because my mom, who usually drove me to school, drove me a mile and a half to the nearest bus stop and made me take the public bus. It took over an hour, while my usual car trip took only 20 minutes.

Eventually, in high school, I took a bus to the library after school and waited to be picked up. But when I went to Washington, DC, I loved taking the Metro. I could go out with friends and not worry about where to park or who would drive home.

After that, I knew I wanted to move to a city with transit, so I chose Boston for that freedom and flexibility. I didn't even bring my car.

At the time, I was working for AmeriCorps and couldn't have afforded gas, insurance, and maintenance, so transit gave me the space and freedom to try this new field and figure out what I wanted to do.

The frequency and reliability have improved, but there are still issues with the bus, especially on the Green Line. Luckily, I am able-bodied and confident, so I often bike to another MBTA station when there are problems at the one closest to me. But bus-reliant parts of the city really struggle.

The bus has dropped me off late in the evening, and then I have to wait 10 or 15 minutes for the next train. One time, on my way to a Doctor's appointment, I had to wait so long that, when I finally got there, they had given away my appointment slot.

Jarred Johnson – Boston, MA (continued)

"If people have affordable, reliable transit, they go to more job interviews and are more likely to get a good-paying job."

Transit is not a cost — it's an essential for a better economy.

Too many people refrain from going to the doctor because they don't have transit, and end up going to the ER, which comes at a much higher cost. If people have affordable, reliable transit, they go to more job interviews and are more likely to get a good-paying job.

I wonder why we are the only developed country with such poor transit. The federal government needs to step up and fund transit operations and infrastructure so we can have the reliable, efficient, affordable transit we need.



Sofia Rose Moreno – Somerville, MA

"I use public transport nearly every single day."

"...my expected 30-minute commute took nearly an hour, and I was late to work"

My name is Sofia Moreno. I'm originally from Los Angeles but moved here when I was 18. I've lived in the Boston area for about a year and a half and just moved to Somerville 2 weeks ago while I study in the pre-law pathway at Oregon State online! I always wanted to be on the East Coast, so I'm very happy to be here.

In LA, I used public transit nearly all the time, but LA doesn't prioritize public transport as much as Boston does.

In Boston, I use public transport nearly every single day and have taken about half the buses and nearly all the different lines. I get the Charlie Card weekly pass because I use it so often. I use it for everything - commuting to work, going to the gym, and getting groceries. In fact, I wouldn't live in Boston if public transport wasn't as good or as extensive as it is.

But it's not as consistent as working people need it to be.

Right now the Green Line is down, but it's always something. In the summer of 2024, the Orange Line was down. At that time I was a dog walker in Charlestown, and it made it really difficult to get to that area. I could have taken a bus, but then I'd have a very long walk.

When a line is down, it overcrowds the buses, and then the MBTA has to send out shuttles, but it takes much, much longer.

The Red Line always has problems. Just the other day I was trying to go to work. All I needed was the Red Line because it's a straight shot from Davis to Downtown Crossing - just a 30-minute commute. But both the inbound and outbound trains were running only on the outbound track, so my train stopped at Harvard, and we had to transfer. There was no prior warning on Google Maps or the MBTA app, so my expected 30-minute commute took nearly an hour, and I was late to work.

Sofia Rose Moreno – Somerville, MA (continued)

"As a student, I don't have the money or means to have my own personal transportation, and I wouldn't be able to live in Boston without public transport."

I would not be able to be a working-class citizen or take care of my personal needs like buying groceries, going to the gym, or spending time with friends if it wasn't for public transport. As a student, I don't have the money or means to have my own personal transportation, and I wouldn't be able to live in Boston without public transport. I've stayed in Boston so long because of the abundance of public transport. But it needs to be better and more reliable, and that requires consistent, stable operations funding.



Cheif Kenny Black Elk — Brockton, MA

“We need to make transit comfortable and frequent for us seniors as we get older.”

"I travel a lot as a musician. It is always a challenge navigating transit with my wheelie bag and suitcase, especially at Downtown Crossing. Either the elevator or escalators aren’t working or I have to wait a long time, especially on the Red line."

My name is Chief Kenny Black Elk. I’m part Cherokee, part Crow and a musician. I live in Brockton but I’ve lived all over Massachusetts and ridden every transit line in the state. My nickname was Choochoo Train Charlie as a little kid because one day when I was about 5 years old, I slipped away and spent 5 hours riding back and forth on the Red Line looking for my mother who had gone to work.

In Brockton there was no service on weekend, so I had to walk a long ways to get the MBTA bus. I remember when my mother was in the hospital. I only had Sundays off from work to visit her and had to walk 5 miles to get to Boston.

I travel a lot as a musician. It is always a challenge navigating transit with my wheelie bag and suitcase, especially at Downtown Crossing. Either the elevator or escalators aren’t working or I have to wait a long time, especially on the Red line. When the train finally comes, it’s packed. Either I squeeze on or I wait again.

We need to make transit comfortable and frequent for us seniors as we get older and need it more. We especially need more transit ambassadors and more lights, not more machines.



Roberta “Robby” Armenti – Westhampton, MA

“Transit is really important for all of us who are beginning to age and have disabilities because we want to stay in our homes.”

"The FRTA makes forays into our area maybe once a day through to Route 9 and the Council on the Aging has some volunteers who help set up transportation. But that’s about it."

My name is Roberta Armenti. My friends call me Robby, I live in Westhampton, MA, and I’m on the Hampshire County Food Policy Council.

Transportation is scarce unless you drive your own car. On either side of us we have the FRTA (Franklin County Public Transit) and the PVTA (Pioneer Valley Transit Authority in Hampshire County). The FRTA makes forays into our area maybe once a day through to Route 9 and the Council on the Aging has some volunteers who help set up transportation. But that’s about it.

If you are an elderly person or have a disability, you have to depend on volunteer services or family members. I have epilepsy and a very severe chronic pain problem. There have been various times in my life that I have had to give up driving.

There is a very good possibility that I will lose my license shortly. I can’t drive very fast or very far. When I have to go to doctor's appointments (which is a lot) my husband has to drive me.

I have many friends in the hill towns and there is no transportation. My best friend since we were 11 lives up Rte. 91, not quite an hour away, but she has to come visit me.

Transit is really important for all of us who are beginning to age and have disabilities because we want to stay in our homes. Money gets scarcer and without transit, we can’t even get to the big supermarkets. Having access to public transit is what will allow us to live our lives.



Alison v. – Newton, MA

"We need dedicated funding specifically to improve transit service."

"There was no public transportation to get to any of the school districts I worked in, so I had to get a car."

My name is Alison and I live with my wife in Newton, MA. We've been married for a couple of years, and have a cat who has lots of anxiety. The ability to get to places is super important. I grew up in suburbia and there was nothing to do.

My first career was as a middle school teacher. I worked all through COVID, but I got a case of long COVID and decided I just couldn't do it anymore. There was no public transportation to get to any of the school districts I worked in, so I had to get a car.

Now I am in the E-Learning industry. I work for an internal development team at a regional insurance company working in Boston. My job is to help make my colleague's jobs easier and I really love what I do. It's only been the last 7 months that I can take the commuter rail into South Station 3 days a week to work. It's great because my office is right across the street.

When the commuter rail runs on time, it's great. When it doesn't, I miss a work meeting. When you show up to work late because the commuter rail is late, no one has a problem with it because they've all been there. It's just so common. Ironically, the commuter rail is the most reliable form of public transit in Boston.

It runs on schedule as predicted about 60% of the time. About 20% of the time the trains are within 10 minutes of time. In the fall when it rained a lot, the trains were an hour and a half late because the leaves on the track are slippery and it's dangerous.

I've lived in Europe multiple times and have taken transit there. In Germany, if a train is 1 minute late, they would apologize!

I'm thankful I commute during regular commuting hours because there are trains at that time. If I had to commute during off hours, my options would be much fewer.



Tate Coleman – Great Barrington, MA

"We need way more service than we can provide, and we need Operations Funding to provide the service that is really needed."

"I don't even rent a car when I travel, and enjoy experiencing transit in different parts of the country and world."

My name is Tate Coleman, and I grew up, and lived, and worked and volunteered for the Town of Great Barrington for nearly a decade. I spent the first 9 years of my life in New York City, and my parents tell me my favorite outing was riding multiple kinds of transit to go to Coney Island or someplace else.

I will always use transit whenever feasible, and in the Berkshires that means either the regular bus or the BRTA express bus. I don't even rent a car when I travel, and enjoy experiencing transit in different parts of the country and world.

In Great Barrington, we started the South County Connector, an On-Demand transit program for everyone that operates 7 days a week within the towns of Egremont, Great Barrington, Monterey, Stockbridge, West Stockbridge, and Sheffield, with limited service to Canaan, CT, and, for seniors and persons with disabilities only, to New Marlborough.

While working as the Transit Program Director, I filled in for driving shifts sometimes and have heard so many interesting stories. One woman even says she owes her life to the South County Connector. She was in an accident, so she can't drive, and moved to Great Barrington because she can use the South County Connector to do her shopping and keep her job.

The South County Connector and BRTA fixed route service are meeting a big need, but it's not enough.

It was not uncommon to overhear dispatchers apologizing to people who needed to get to work or had to wait an extra hour after a medical appointment because we didn't have availability. We just don't have capacity. We need way more service than we can provide, and we need Operations Funding to provide the service that is really needed.



Mela Bush – Roxbury, MA

"We need more operations funding to meet the needs of our families and communities."

"She was so amazed by the public transit system that we so often take for granted and complain about when it fails us. We do our best to make it better for these, our generations to come."

My name is Mela Bush, and I live in the Roxbury section of Boston, M.A. near Nubian Station. My great-grandparents brought my grandmother here in 1901, migrating from South Florida to open a hardware store in Boston's South End. My mom was born here. I have a daughter who has a daughter who has 2 daughters. Until 3 years ago, 5 generations of my family lived in or around Boston. Members of my family have lived in Boston since the MBTA's inception. It has been our lifeline. The following are a few of my experiences with public transport:

I recently took my six-and-a-half-year-old great-granddaughter, Essence, on the bus and the train to go downtown. I convinced her that if she would go to a legislative briefing on transportation electrification with me at the State House, we would hang out and have fun afterward. She was so excited. She was more excited about riding the bus and subway than she was about the legislative briefing. After a fun day, we took the subway and bus back home. She was especially excited when I showed her that she had the power to stop a 40-foot bus full of people by pressing a button. She pushed the button and look! "Stop Requested!" A deep voice sounded over the PA system. She applauded, and the people on the bus joined in. "Yay! I did it, I stopped the bus!!" she exclaimed. She was so amazed by the public transit system that we so often take for granted and complain about when it fails us. We do our best to make it better for these, our generations to come.

On the other end of the age spectrum is my Transit Story. Earlier this year, I was traveling to work in the freezing cold Boston winter. I walked about ½ mile to the bus stop. The bus was scheduled to arrive within 3-4 minutes of my arrival at the bus stop. 10 minutes later, no bus. I checked the website, and there was good news - a notification that my bus would run every 15 minutes all day long going forward, instead of the old peak and off-peak system that had slow-running service midday.

Mela Bush – Roxbury, MA (continued)

"Continuing to fund fare free bus service in low income transit dependent communities is another reason why we need more operations funding."

But underneath it was the bad news: an alert that my bus, the # 23 bus, the one I was waiting for in 20-degree weather, would be running at 20 minutes or more delays due to a subway train breakdown. That meant they pulled buses off my line to provide shuttles to subway riders because their train broke down. So my bus was not going to be coming. I'm freezing, standing there waiting to go to work, and realized I couldn't walk back home because I had sustained an injury to my knee a few days earlier. I'm in my 60's so I'd have to wait.

I sent the agency a message that this was unconscionable and unacceptable, sent a screenshot showing there weren't any buses going back to Ruggles station, and asked, "Why is the bus taken away from us when the subway breaks down?" I got an apology, and the service was restored eventually. The bus came 20 minutes late. I was frozen and upset. This is why we need more operations money. One community of riders mustn't suffer to accommodate another.

If there were extra buses, if the Red Line subway service was well maintained, if there was proper operations funding, we would have enough service so that passengers like me wouldn't be left stranded. Instead, we have runaway trains, fires, broken rails, or even train cars just rolling out of the yard and through the stations. We even had a train catch fire in the middle of the Charles River, and people jumped in the river to escape.

The other day I went to drop off unused medicines but had to go to 3 different pharmacies and a firehouse until I found a place that could take them. I rode the free 23 bus, 4 times in the process (this fare free bus service saved me around $8.00). Continuing to fund fare free bus service in low income transit dependent communities is another reason why we need more operations funding as well as so that people like me can do the right thing and keep medicines from going into landfills or getting into our water supply ... so that we can get to work and back home comfortably and so that we can share the joy of riding public transit with our little ones.

We need more operations funding to meet the needs of our families and communities.



Kirk Sevier – Lexington, MA

“If there was federal funding for more transit service, it would help people like me who depend on it every day.”

"Almost everything I need is in downtown Lexington - my work, my pharmacy, my bank. I don’t drive so I take the Lexpress public transit bus to get there."

My name is Kirk Sevier and I’m 57 years old. I grew up in Woburn, MA where I worked in IT at a Pharmaceutical company. I moved to Lexington, MA about 6 years ago and work part-time at the Stop and Shop in downtown Lexington.

Almost everything I need is in downtown Lexington - my work, my pharmacy, my bank. I don’t drive so I take the Lexpress public transit bus to get there. I wouldn’t be able to live in Lexington without it. I can even take it to get to my hospital in Burlington.

Things are tough financially since I’m on disability so I really appreciate the fact that the price for Lexpress is unbeatable. Not only is it an important tool that I use all the time but I enjoy it.

The only downside is that it doesn’t run on the weekends when I need to visit my elderly mother in Winchester. She needs help with little things sometimes and it seems like my weekdays are filled with doctors appointments when I’m not at work. I would love to be able to do errands on weekends and take Lexpress to a bus or train so I could get up to Winchester.

During the week, service ends at 6 on my route from downtown Lexington. That is OK for me since my work finishes at 5 pm.

If there was federal funding for more transit service, it would help people like me who depend on it every day. I might even be able to help out my mother more often.



Lori Krikorian - Arlington, MA

“We’re not just trying to get funding so trains can keep running. We need to increase standards to catch up with the rest of the world.”

"So much maintenance was deferred in the 80’s and 90’s that there is a lot of catching up just to get to a base standard of service."

My name is Lori Krikorian and I live in Arlington, MA. I’m 19 years old and taking a gap year off of high school. I’ve been struggling with my health but am starting to get back on my feet and looking for my first part time job. Getting a first job is daunting but it adds a layer when I have to make sure I can get there by the T.

When I went to Arlington High, I always took the 77 bus to school. It got me there late a couple of times so I started leaving early to make up for it. Both my parents work so I had no other way to get there. Fortunately, all 3 years, my first period teachers were very forgiving.

Now I go into the city a lot. I spend most of my time looking for grocery stores to apply to. I always ride the 77 to Porter and then get on the Red Line into town to Park St. or Downtown Crossing or Charles/ MGH.

I’ve had times when I had to wait outside for a half hour for the next bus to come.

So much maintenance was deferred in the 80’s and 90’s that there is a lot of catching up just to get to a base standard of service. To some extent, every single transit agency in this country is desperately trying to achieve a base level of service that is standard in the rest of the world.

We need to increase funding to create frequency, reliability, coverage - all of the things that the rest of the world takes for granted. We’re not just trying to get funding so trains can keep running. We need to increase standards to catch up with the rest of the world.



Jacy Armenti – Northampton, MA

"We need transit service that doesn't waste our time, waste our lives."

"Many people who use paratransit need to go to the doctor more often than people without disabilities."

My name is Jacy Armenti, and I live in Northampton, MA. I teach at a Special Education Preschool in Amherst and have multiple college degrees in order to do that work. Transportation and mobility can sound like boring topics, but they aren't boring for me. I have epilepsy and have been taking paratransit 6-7 days a week for nearly 16 years. Transit is absolutely fundamental to my life; however, the service is incredibly inadequate. It's painful to know that this is what the children I work with will have to go through in the future.

Locally in Northampton, I have good access to transit. But, if I need to take a class in Springfield that ends at 9 pm, I'd have to leave at 7 pm and miss most of the class. Many people who use paratransit need to go to the doctor more often than people without disabilities. Last week, for example, I had a doctor's appointment at 7:10 am in Springfield, about 20-30 minutes away by car. They aren't supposed to pick me up more than an hour before the appointment as per their own policy. They picked me up at 5:52 am. It might not seem like a lot – it feels like they are taking away my life – minutes of my life at a time.

Then, I still needed to get back to work and asked for a 7:45 am ride. Instead, they scheduled me for 7:19, giving me only 9 minutes for my doctor's appointment. I called and got it changed to a later time, 7:58, and was then not brought back to my work until 9 AM, almost an hour later. This is one example of a ride; however, every day can have delays or messed-up times, and it is exhausting.

Today I had a dentist appointment at 8 am. They picked me up and got me there on time. But, though I asked to be picked up at 9, they picked me up at 9:37 (so about a half an hour after the appointment), and then I spent another half hour in the van when I was only 5 minutes away from work. The transit system is just not designed for people who work. I live 15 minutes from my mom, but I can't get to her at all because there is no transit where she lives. Transit has such a stigma, leaving those of us who use it feeling discriminated against and marginalized. We need a transit service that doesn't waste our time, waste our lives.



Brendan Kearney – Framingham, MA

"Right now, the staff just can't accommodate the number of people and it makes the trip longer than it needs to be."

"When it works, it's great. When there are reliability issues, it can be a real challenge."

My name is Brendan Kearney. My wife and I had been living in Watertown closer to Boston, but moved to Framingham during Covid. She works in the Metro West and my job went mostly remote. One of our requirements for choosing a place to live was that we'd be within 3-4 miles of a commuter rail station.

I will either drive, or in fair weather, bike to take the train from downtown Framingham. When it works, it's great. When there are reliability issues, it can be a real challenge. Previously I had options. When I lived in Watertown, there were 2 different buses I could take. In Somerville, I had 3 buses I could take to connect to the subway. Now, living in Framingham, I don't have the options - I'm at the whim of the Framingham/Worcester line commuter rail.

The other day I rushed from my office to South Station to catch the 4:45 express that would get me back to Framingham by 5:30. I had the unfortunate experience of getting there and seeing 'Delayed' all across the big board. The 4:10 hadn't even left yet. I lucked out and "only" got home 45 minutes late.

We need more trains, and they need to be able to keep good operations people to maintain the trains. There also needs to be enough staff so that all the doors can open at every station and we're not standing by for 5-10 minutes at a stop because everyone is trying to squeeze out the front or back doors of the train for the high accessible platform. Right now, the staff just can't accommodate the number of people and it makes the trip longer than it needs to be.

I fully support great transit.



CONCLUSION

Every day, all across Massachusetts, hundreds of thousands of people choose the benefits of traveling by buses, trains, paratransit vehicles, biking, and walking. Many rely on transit because car ownership is so expensive or because they have a condition that doesn't allow them to get behind a wheel. The people in the stories above, whether they are a senior citizen trying to meet their needs while they age in place, a young person working one of their first jobs, a mom whose youngest family member is high-functioning but disabled, or a grandmother trying to drop off unused medications, all face formidable challenges getting where they need to go without wasting hours walking to the nearest transit station or waiting for the next bus or train. In some cases, they have to spend an exorbitant amount of money and/or time to accomplish their daily tasks. In other cases, they just can't get where they need to go at all.

More frequent service lets more people rely on public transit for more trips, relieving pressure on family budgets while making public transit systems more stable with larger ridership bases. Running additional public transit service has immediate benefits for communities: more freedom for existing riders and options for drivers, fewer injuries and deaths from car crashes, and more customers for local businesses.

However, for agencies in metropolitan areas with more than 200,000 people, federal funding can be used only for capital projects, such as building new infrastructure, renovating existing facilities, and purchasing new vehicles. To help agencies run more service by hiring more operators or staff to maintain vehicles and other public transit infrastructure, we need a more balanced approach that includes local, state, and federal funding sources. Congress must provide transit agencies with funds to operate frequent, reliable service.

If transit is not improved, people in Massachusetts will continue to have restricted access to everything, from health care to the ability to work at a job that can support a family to civic participation. By expanding federal funding to increase transit agencies' operating budgets, riders will experience life-changing benefits in service hours, geographic reach, frequency, and reliability of transit trips.

The stories above have demonstrated why public transportation is essential to the lives of Massachusetts families, and limited operational capacity limits how much this core service can improve people's lives. With rising gas prices making driving less affordable for working families, investing in public transit creates a necessary, affordable option for them to get around.



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ABOUT ALLIANCE FOR A JUST SOCIETY

Alliance for a Just Society (AJS) is a national center for innovative organizing and strategy based in Seattle, Washington. We build powerful organizations and communities. We fight for racial, social, and economic justice.

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