

MAYOR WU ANNOUNCES LAUNCH OF TWO-YEAR, FARE-FREE PROGRAM FOR MBTA BUS ROUTES 23, 28 AND 29 ON MARCH 1, 2022

BOSTON - Wednesday, February 9, 2022 - Mayor Michelle Wu today announced that the City of Boston is launching the two-year fare-free program on MBTA bus Routes 23, 28, and 29 on March 1, 2022. This program extends the highly successful fare-free Route 28 pilot program and eliminates fares on two other crucial bus routes. Fare-free buses enable all-door boarding, which eases congestion and speeds up bus service. Riders will still have to pay for transfers to other MBTA routes and services. The Mayor made the announcement at Grove Hall and visited neighborhood businesses to share information about the new program with Chief of Streets Jascha Franklin-Hodge and MBTA General Manager Steve Poftak.

“Expanding fare-free transit to Routes 23, 28, 29 will better connect our communities, increase ridership, and ease congestion for all our residents,” said Mayor Michelle Wu. “As we work to ensure every resident knows about the program, we hope this is just the beginning of access to fare-free public transit in Boston. I’m thrilled to partner with the MBTA to expand this successful ongoing program and look forward to working with our partners across the Commonwealth to build a sustainable, reliable, accessible, and affordable transportation system that truly serves our residents and our local economy.”

“Today’s announcement is really exciting,” said Chief of Streets Jascha Franklin-Hodge. “We plan to use these two years to learn how making transit free can affect peoples’ travel decisions, improve the performance of the bus itself, and bring additional benefits to riders and the communities along these routes.”

“We were pleased to collaborate with the City on the Route 28 pilot and now to expand the program to include these additional routes for the next two years,” said MBTA General Manager Steve Poftak. “The benefits experienced by customers on the 28 are being expanded to a broader group of riders, and we appreciate the City of Boston’s willingness to make this happen by providing funding.”

“February is Transit Equity Month in Boston. For the past 7+ years, we as transit advocates have been developing a vision of fare free transit,” said Mela Bush Miles, Director of Transit Oriented Development at Alternatives for Community and Environment (ACE). “This is a vision whose time has come. Three free bus routes is just the beginning, we are so excited about this pilot. Public transportation needs to be free for all and should be funded in the same way as other public services. Greener, cleaner, faster and affordable buses is a win for everybody whether they use public transit or not. Free the T!”

“Fare-free bus service has been successful across the Commonwealth and in the City of Boston, helping to ease financial burdens, increase bus ridership, and speed up bus service,” said Stacy Thompson, Executive Director of LivableStreets Alliance. “This expansion will create further momentum toward our shared goal of providing fare-free bus service across the MBTA.”

The 23 Bus route (Ashmont to Dorchester Center, Grove Hall & Ruggles), the 28 Bus route (Mattapan Square, up Blue Hill Ave. to Nubian Square & Ruggles) and the 29 Bus route (Mattapan Square, up Blue Hill Ave. to Jackson Square) each serve a diverse ridership, and all three travel through and along Blue Hill Avenue, an important corridor connecting riders who are underserved by the existing transit network. Blue Hill Avenue has been identified by Livable Streets Alliance as one of the corridors that should be prioritized for improvements to increase reliability and boost ridership, which the City is working to address through the Blue Hill Ave Redesign Plan.

These three routes are some of the routes with the highest ridership throughout the City of Boston. Route 23 serves over 100,000 monthly riders, runs past Madison Park Technical Vocational High School, the Grove Hall Branch of the Boston Public Library and various places of worship. The route also intersects with Columbus Avenue, home to the first center-running bus lane in New England, demonstrating the potential to combine fare-free transit with modern transit infrastructure to reduce local air pollution, ease congestion and speed up service. After fares were eliminated in August 2021, Route 28 saw ridership increase to over 90 percent of pre-pandemic levels with over 12,000 riders every day, making it the most popular route in the system. Route 29 intersects with Route 28 and runs past Egleston Square Branch of the Boston Public Library, and several Boston Housing Authority developments, including the Franklin Field Apartments and the Doris Bunté Apartments.

“The fare-free 28 bus has been a blessing to myself and my community,” said Peggy James, MBTA 28 bus rider and Boston resident. “All of my daily activities, including going grocery shopping, heading to the laundry, and picking up my medicine, have been made easier due to this program. Since the fare-free program was implemented, my commutes have been a lot more enjoyable, with less hiccups and stalling at bus stops along the route.”

“It’s a huge convenience to know that I don’t have to worry about some of the financial burden that this pandemic has brought,” said Brittany Appleberry, MBTA 28 bus rider and Boston resident. “It feels good to know that I am able to ride for free and continue to get the same service. I would like to thank Mayor Wu and everyone who had a part in this pilot.”

The Boston Transportation Department has been working with the MBTA to manage the 28 bus pilot program that was first launched in August last year, including partnering on a comprehensive evaluation of the Route 28 bus pilot. The evaluation includes analysis of ridership and service reliability data as well as interviews with bus riders to get their views on the benefits of the pilot. The analysis suggests that by enabling all-door boarding, fare-free service reduced dwell time – the amount of time the bus stopped to allow passengers to board – decreased by more than 20 percent. A full evaluation of the Route 28 Bus pilot program will be available later this month at boston.gov

The City of Boston and MBTA have been meeting regularly and partnering to work out specifics of the program and deliver the benefits of fare-free service to riders. The program will be funded through the \$8 million ARPA allocation. Cities across the Commonwealth and the United States

are already delivering the benefits of fare-free service to riders and some cities are following Boston's lead and working out how to deliver the benefits of fare-free service to their residents.

The expansion of this program will provide the City of Boston, MBTA and other transit partners the opportunity to measure the benefits of fare-free bus service, such as increased ridership, faster buses, less traffic, and business development, over a longer period of time. The duration of the program will also allow the City to make sure every resident knows about the fare-free service and provides an opportunity for residents to integrate riding the bus into their day-to-day routines.

The two-year expanded fare free program for the 23, 28, and 29 MBTA bus routes builds on Mayor Wu's work to make public transit a public good, starting with bus service. In December, the Boston City Council voted to approve Mayor Wu's appropriation order for \$8 million in federal funds to eliminate fares on the 23, 28 and 29 MBTA bus routes for a two-year period. The City of Boston, in partnership with the MBTA, extended the free Route 28 bus through January and February using the funds from the \$8 million allocation from ARPA.

For more information on the fare-free bus program, visit www.boston.gov/free-bus