

Regional

Fair MBTA Fare Policy and Extended Service Hours

Coordination with the State to ensure access to transit for low-income residents, people with disabilities, and employees with off-hour shifts

Policy Score

- Access 1
- Access 2
- Safety 1
- Safety 2
- Reliability
- Affordability
- Sustainability/Resiliency 1
- Sustainability/Resiliency 2
- Governance

Identified on the ballot as an Early Action commitment

Policy Description

Public transit is a public good and the City of Boston will continue to advocate for a fare structure that preserves access to high-quality transit for low-income and disabled populations. Working with MassDOT’s program to revamp its automated fare collection system (also known as AFC 2.0), the City and State will provide opportunities for more equitable fares and subsidy programs. Discussions with MassDOT are already underway regarding discounts for lower-income riders and re-instating late-night bus service, which could include 24-hour service. The City also will continue to explore ways to extend the hours of the trains and communicate service hours clearly to the public so they can reliably use transit as a late-night and early-morning option. Other early actions might include making free subway and bus transfers to and from the Fairmount Line and increasing the availability of student and youth pass discounts.

Benefits and Issues Addressed

Providing a rapid transit or bus line does not directly correlate with regular access to transit if the service is too costly, infrequent, or unavailable during the time that you need it. Transit can close the opportunity gap in communities with limited access to employment options only when residents can afford to access it and it operates in ways that reflect a full spectrum of shift hours. Overnight service can provide transit to workers in the many sectors with late-night and early-morning shifts, including hospitals, restaurants, bars, and Logan Airport. Passing new transit costs along evenly to all riders is regressive to those with lower incomes, but equitable fare discounts can produce measurable improvements in access and mobility by making transit affordable to over 100,000 Bostonians.

Implementation

Approximate Cost: To be determined
Potential Funding Sources: MBTA and employers along with City of Boston and other municipalities
Who’s Responsible: MBTA with City of Boston and other municipalities
Time Frame: Ongoing

Best Practices

In Seattle, WA, the King County fare policy offers discounts up to 50% for most transit rides to low-income residents. For example, the discount threshold is a household income of \$48,600 for a family of four and is usually set as less than double the federal poverty level.
kingcounty.gov/elected/executive/constantine/News/release/2016/March/07-orca-lift-anniversary.aspx

Public Input

“Look at all fares and think about if they make sense. It costs a lot to move people at night regardless of mode. How much should late night cost? How much should rush hour service cost? How much should bus cost with a transfer? Question every pricing hierarchy and redevelop it based on what makes sense and implement a system to keep it up to date.”

—Roslindale roudtable



In 2015, the MBTA piloted a youth pass program for low-income young people, and in December 2016, the program was officially adopted by the MBTA’s Fiscal Management Control Board. Photo credit: Alternatives for Community and Environment