



Charles D. Baker, Governor
Karyn E. Polito, Lieutenant Governor
Stephanie Pollack, MassDOT Secretary & CEO
Steve Poftak, General Manager



A Letter to Our Riders from General Manager Steve Poftak,

I hope this letter finds you healthy and safe. I would like to take this opportunity to briefly update you on the MBTA's *Forging Ahead* initiative.

As we all navigate the many challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the MBTA is working harder than ever to fulfill our mandate: to deliver the essential services of public transportation so crucial to the families and communities of our region.

When the pandemic hit, ridership and fare revenue plummeted across our system as it did across America. Ridership dropped by over 80% in March and has been slow to recover. In 2019, 1.26 million trips were taken on the MBTA each day. In September 2020, we had 330,000 daily trips, or 26% of last year's ridership, but were still running high levels of service across all modes.

But averages do not tell the full story. Commuter Rail is at roughly 13% of normal ridership while bus ridership is about 41%, a reflection of the differing realities of people who can work from home and people who rely on public transit for their daily transportation needs.

The MBTA – as with other transit systems across the world – must adapt to changing ridership and lost revenue caused by COVID-19. Using limited resources to operate nearly empty trains, ferries and buses is not a responsible use of the funding provided by riders, communities, and taxpayers, and it does not help support the transportation needs of our region. Saving resources now will help the MBTA to bring back service when it is needed after the pandemic has faded.

We are not alone, as according to the American Public Transportation Association (APTA), nearly two-thirds of all cities are considering service adjustments, and eight in ten large cities are considering delaying or canceling some capital projects.

We need to reduce service where it is not being used and, more importantly, we need to focus our available resources on those who depend on us most for reliable service: equity demands that the MBTA protect the essential services that serve our most vulnerable customers and communities. We have worked hard to define a “basic” level of service but it is critical to hear from you, our customers and stakeholders, on whether we got it right and will still be providing the services you currently need.

Forging Ahead is our initiative for riders and the T to work together to define and protect core essential services for those who depend most critically on the MBTA for frequent and reliable service by reducing primarily non-essential services. As part of *Forging Ahead*, we have announced a proposal for which services will be prioritized and protected and which will have potential changes in service by spring or summer of 2021. This proposal will provide sufficient service for the current, reduced ridership on all modes except the ferry

system, which is proposed for temporary closure. The proposed “base service” levels are designed to ensure adequate capacity for all essential services, as well as a reduced level of non-essential service that supports most of those who are currently using the T.

It is important to note that this proposal is not finalized – and we want to hear from you.

Please join us at mbta.com/ForgingAhead. Here you can review this proposal and use our innovative new tool that allows you to see potential changes in your community, provide feedback, and learn how to participate in any of eleven virtual public meetings, including an Official Public Hearing, where you can provide testimony to MBTA officials.

I also want to reassure you that the vast majority of MBTA service will continue, these service changes are not permanent, and no changes in fares are being proposed at this time. The MBTA will also periodically realign service to match current and future ridership patterns, when durable revenue is available for pay for such service.

Additionally, these changes are not taking effect immediately. While some service changes on commuter rail and ferry could take place as early as January 2021, the changes to rapid transit would be made in the spring 2021 and to buses later in the summer. This will allow the MBTA to adjust the proposed basic service if warranted by changes in ridership and revenue.

Our comprehensive outreach process for *Forging Ahead* will benefit from our dedicated team of Community Liaisons who will be reaching out to communities directly impacted by proposed service changes. MBTA community liaisons will schedule in-person, phone, or on-line meetings with individuals, local municipalities, and neighborhood organizations to provide information and seek community feedback.

Following this period of individual comments from MBTA customers, as well as public engagement and ongoing discussions with the Fiscal and Management Control Board, final decisions on protecting essential services and making changes to underutilized services will be made in December and again implemented largely in the spring and summer of 2021.

Recent data projects ridership returning to pre-COVID levels starting in 2024. As riders return, we will review and adjust service to align with demand. Changes to modes or routes taking place in 2021 will be reconsidered on an ongoing basis given the status of the State of Emergency, commuting and travel trends, and ridership and fare revenue recovery in 2021 and beyond. The savings we get from reducing non-essential services in 2021 will help the MBTA afford the growing service we will need to provide our customers and communities in the future.

I want to close by assuring our riders that we continue to invest in system improvements. Despite the pandemic, the MBTA has continued to Build a Better T: from track and signal

upgrades to station improvements to new vehicles throughout the system. We know our riders deserve a system that is resilient, robust, and reliable – and that is why we are continuing to invest \$8 billion over the next five years.

We are proud to be your T. Please visit mbta.com/ForgingAhead. Together we will persevere.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Poftak', written in a cursive style.

Steve Poftak
General Manager