Better Bus Project
Making transit better together

HUNTINGTON AVE, BOSTON

February 2025

BACKGROUND

Description

The project is a 1.1 mile bidirectional side-running bus lane on Huntington Ave between Tremont St/Brigham Circle and Gainsborough Street.

The corridor is served by the Route 39 and the CT2. The Route 39 carries 8,830 weekday riders (Fall 2024) and consistently ranks among the top five highest ridership routes in the MBTA's service. Current peak service schedule sees a bus every six minutes, and frequencies are slated to increase to every four minutes by 2026 as part of Bus Network Redesign.

Design and implementation

The project was part of the 2022 Orange Line Surge mitigation where the City of Boston provided MBTA bus and shuttle service protected bus lanes on City streets. The first temporary markings were installed in summer 2022 and consisted of basic white thermoplastic markings designating the right-most lane as a "Bus/Bike Only Lane". The bus lanes were made permanent by Mayor Wu in September 2022. In November 2023, the temporary markings were replaced by the MBTA with permanent red lane markings. The total implementation costs for the project were $151,000 (City of Boston) in 2022, and $445,000 (MBTA) in 2024.

BUS OPERATIONS IMPACTS

Methodology

To evaluate the bus operations, we compared two time periods: Fall 2019 and Fall 2024. Fall 2019 represents the period prior to the pilot installation (summer 2022) which was not substantially impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Fall 2024 represents the performance of the permanent installation. The evaluation examined travel time by calculating the time spent in transit between stops and excludes dwell time (the period of time a bus spends at the curb allowing passengers to board/disembark.)

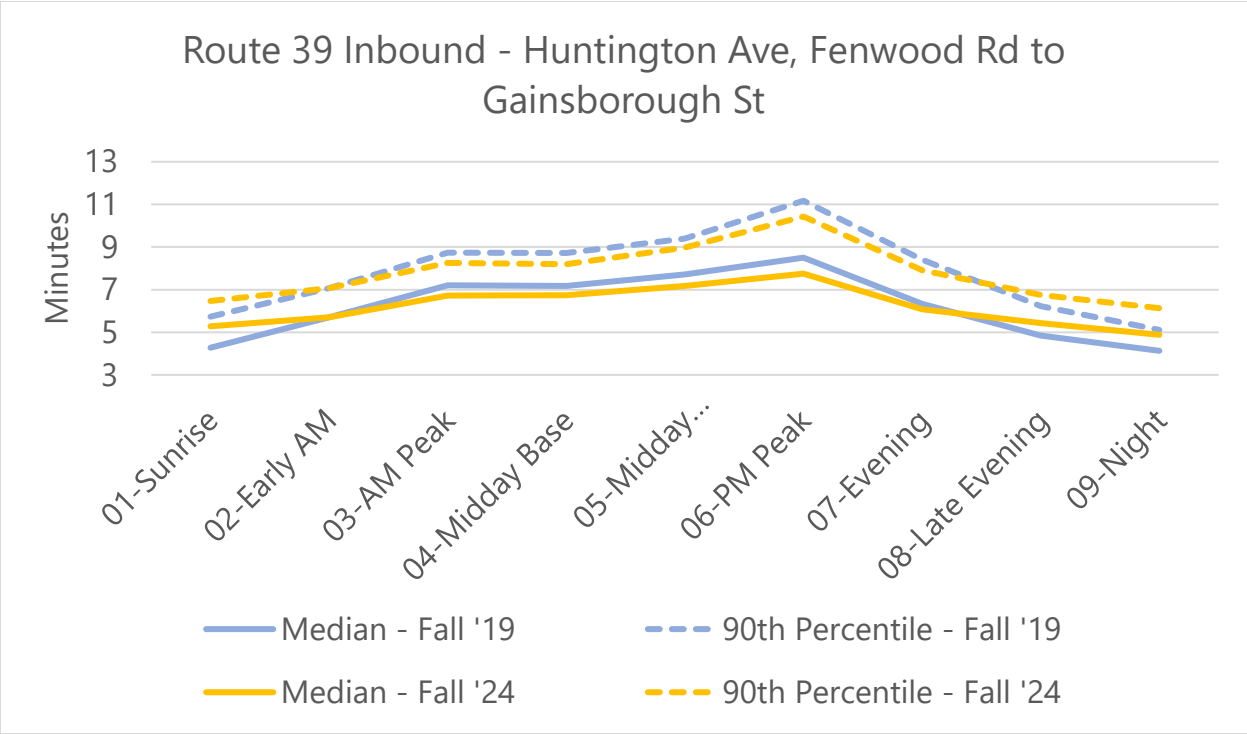
The two travel time figures shown are median and the 90th percentile. The 90th percentile is best understood as the "worst trip" a rider is likely to experience during regular weekly use. MBTA scheduling procedures uses the 90th percentile travel time to inform the schedules built for bus service to ensure operators can reliably complete their trips before beginning another. Improvements in the 90th percentile travel time can be directly translated into operational cost savings through a reduction in operator and vehicle demand to deliver the same level of service. We also know from transportation research that individuals schedule their travel based on their "worst trip" experience. For this reason, most riders will experience improvements in their "worst trip" as at least as impactful to their transit experience as reductions in median travel time.

Findings

Weely ridership for routes 39 and CT2 is 62,000 in each direction.

Inbound

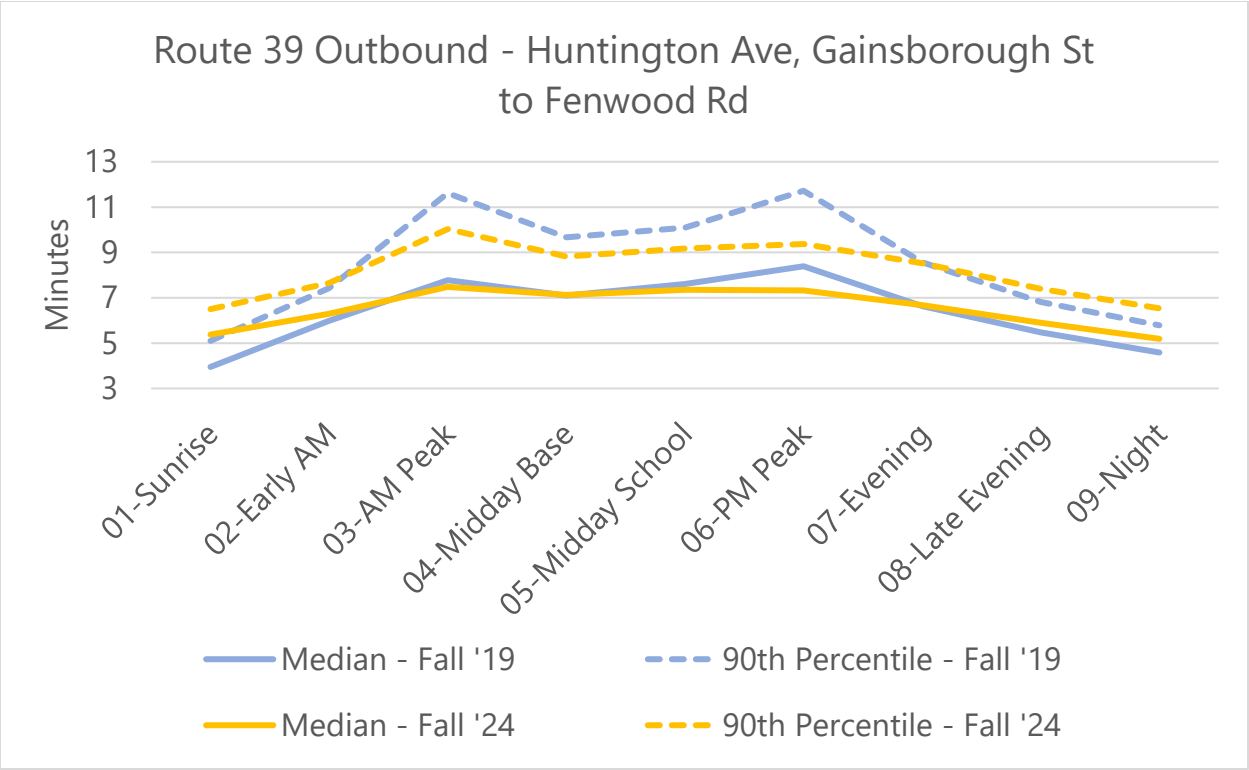
Relative to Fall 2019, Fall 2024 median run times are at least thirty seconds faster throughout most of the day and 45 seconds faster at PM peak. The improvements are similar for the "worst trip."



Outbound

Relative to Fall 2019, Fall 2024 median run times were 18 seconds faster during the AM peak and 64 seconds faster during the PM peak. “Worst trip” run times are 141 seconds faster during the PM peak.

These findings match the Phase 1 Evaluation from September 2023, which found these improvements adds up to a total time-savings of 125 hours for bus riders every work week along the approximately mile-long corridor, providing better mobility for nearly 5,000 daily trips



Future plans

Improved enforcement

Side-running bus lane designs like the one in use on Huntington are relatively quick to design and low-cost to deploy but suffer from blockages when drivers use the lane for loading, parking or standing. The Huntington Street project faces these challenges.

In January 2025, Governor Healy signed a bill into law that will permit the MBTA and the City of Boston to use automated camera enforcement to ticket people parking or standing in bus lanes and bus stops. Early bus lane enforcement testing conducted by the MBTA on Route 39 in 2022 found that over 1,000 vehicles per week obstruct the bus lane on Huntington Ave.

The Camera Enforcement program is expected to launch in late 2025/early 2026, with Huntington Ave as one of the facilities targeted by early deployment.

Transit Signal Priority

The MBTA is building on the success of a 2024 pilot project on Brighton Ave which deployed next-generation Transit Signal Priority (TSP) to boost the efficacy of existing bus lanes and support high frequency service slowed by a series of intersections. The Huntington St bus lane corridor is included

as a priority location for the planned expansion of this next-gen TSP system to up to 100 new intersections across the City of Boston.

Service expansion

Bus Network Redesign Phase II will be rolled out over calendar years 2025 and 2026. As part of this service change, new bus service will be introduced to Huntington Ave increasing peak service by 50%. The combined support of new automated camera enforcement, new Transit Signal Priority will further the impact of this bus lane and support these increased service levels ensuring they are not bogged down in ever increasing traffic.