Better Bus Project
Making transit better together

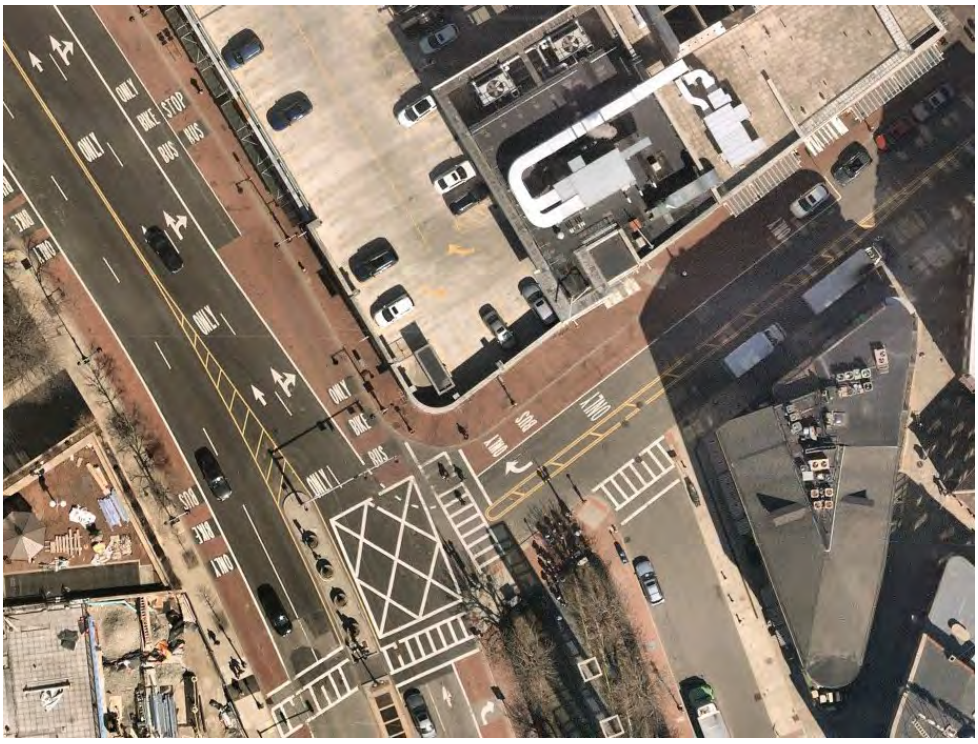
CONGRESS ST, BOSTON BUS LANE REVIEW

February 2025

BACKGROUND

Description

The project consists of a bi-directional, side-running bus lane along Congress St in Boston between North St and Sudbury St. The facility is 0.17 miles in length in the northbound direction and 0.09 miles in length in the southbound direction. The southbound direction is currently not in use due to construction impacts to bus routing. The bus lanes serve Routes 4, 426, 428, 450, 92, 93 impacting approximately 6,800 riders per day.



Design and implementation

Bus lanes

The Congress St bus lane project is a mitigation measure provided by HYM as part of the Government Center Garage redevelopment. That project closed the Haymarket busway during several years of construction impacting berthing and routing. The project was installed in fall 2021. In Spring 2022, the southbound direction of Congress St was closed due to construction.

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 installation (Fall 2021) which was not substantially impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Fall 2024 represents the performance of the permanent installation today. 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

This very short segment is saving riders significant time in the PM peak: 40 seconds saved on the average trip and 130 seconds saved off the worst trip. We expect impacts to be greater once Haymarket construction concludes and service returns to permanent routing.

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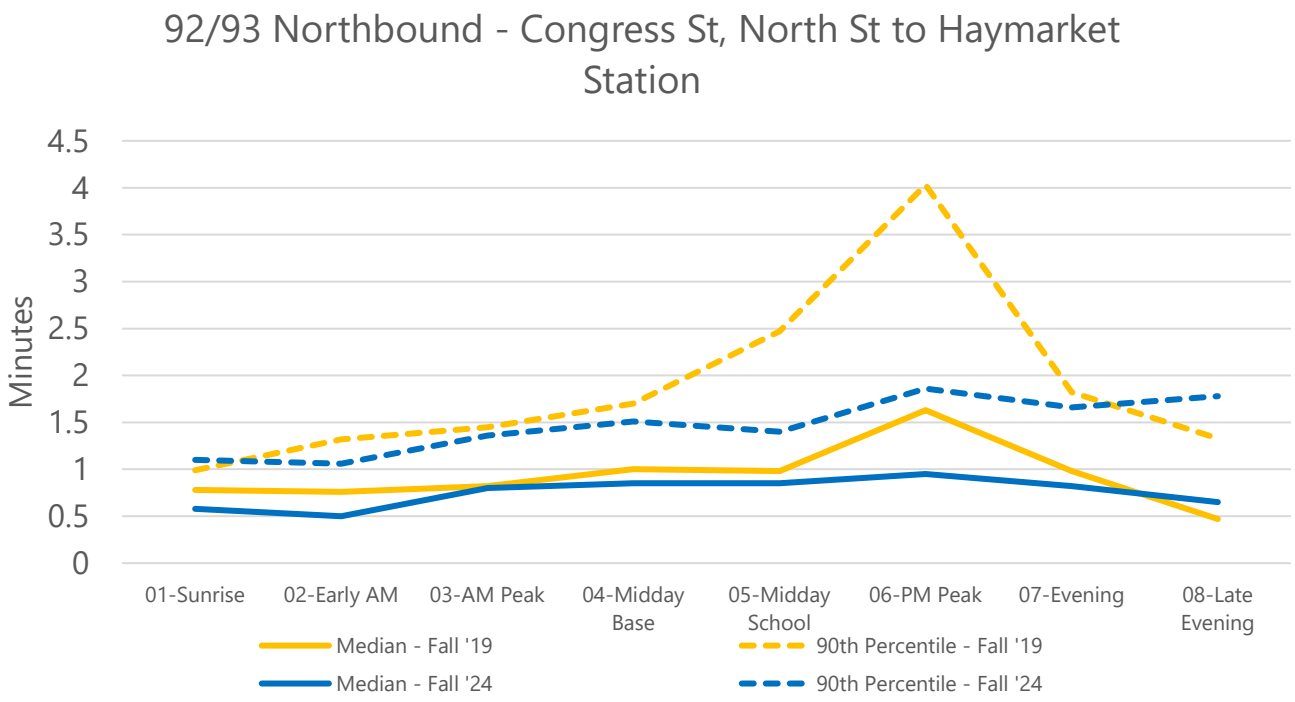
Northbound



Future plans

City of Boston is currently leading an effort called North Station to Seaport to redesign several bus routings through downtown, including the future Frequent version of the Route 7, which would serve Haymarket Station and extend to Sullivan Square. Design alternatives include concepts that could retain significant bus traffic on Congress St paired with an upgraded bus facility (including a concept for a center-running lane.) Other concepts under consideration reroute all bus traffic off Congress St.