



**Massachusetts Bay  
Transportation Authority**

## Winter Service Updates

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MBTA Board of Directors Meeting

November 20, 2025

Ryan Coholan, Chief Operating Officer

Deirdre Habershaw, Deputy Chief Operating Officer

Choose Transit: Full  Ahead

# Heavy Rail maintains frequent service and improves reliability with better scheduling and new operating procedures



## Improved service reliability due to

- Reducing terminus congestion with scheduled dropbacks (M-F peaks)
- Scheduling recovery train at Oak Grove (M-F)



## Improved service reliability

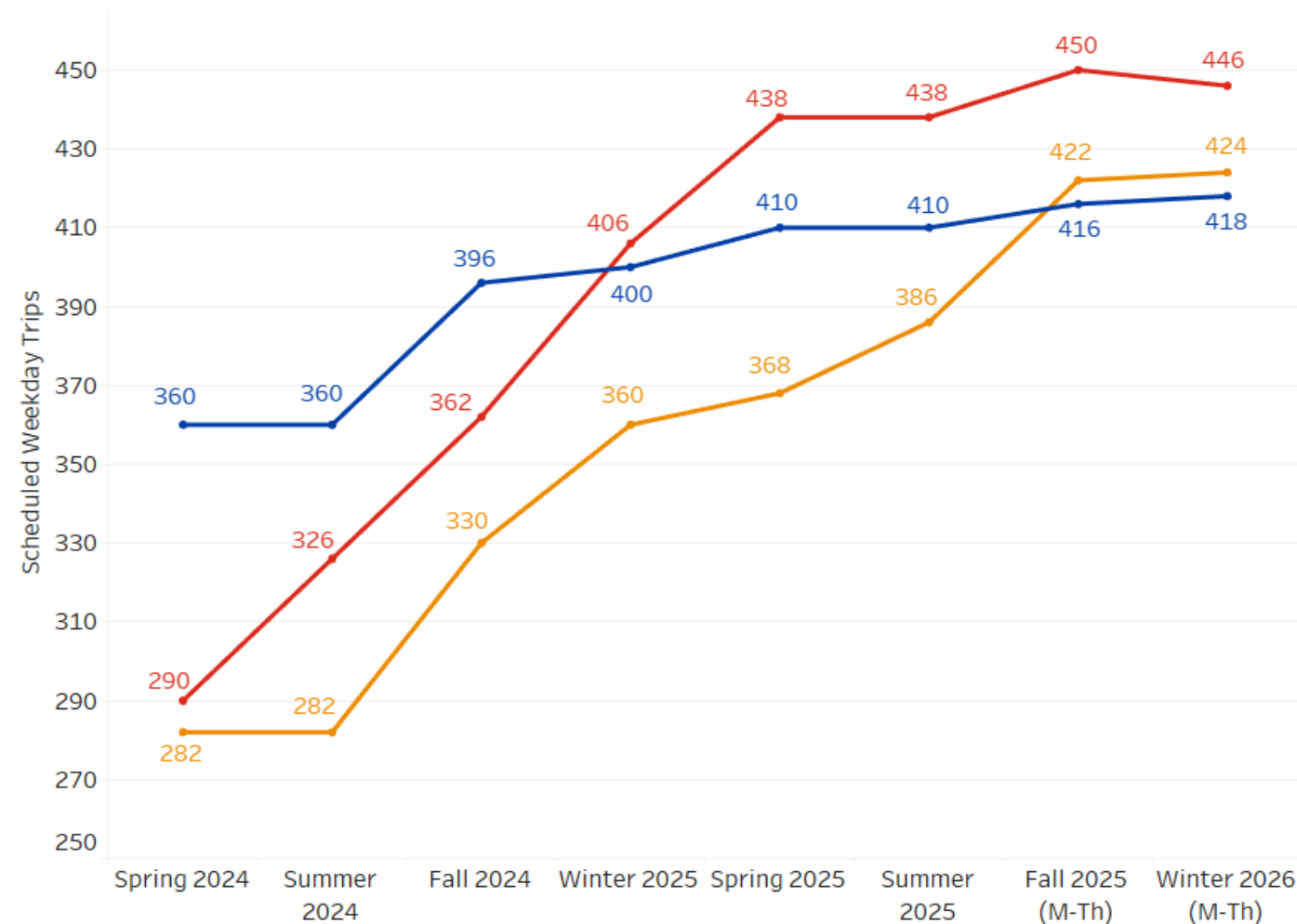
- 46 new CRRC cars in service
- Since July 1<sup>st</sup>, 16 speed restrictions removed in an average of less than 4 days



## Improved service reliability

- scheduling wire car movements in midday

Heavy Rail Scheduled Weekday Trips by Rating



*Note: No notable changes to Green Line and Mattapan Line schedules (slight adjustments to better reflect actual trip time).*

# Orange Line congestion and how we tackle it



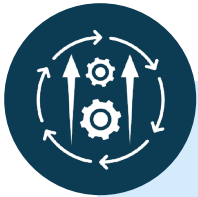
## Dramatic OL service improvements in the last two years with more to come

- Peak frequency increased 50% from Spring '24 (every 7.5 mins) to Fall 25 (every 5 mins) due to more trains and faster speeds. Peak frequency will further increase by 25% to every 4 minutes as new trains are delivered.



## Faster travel times caused congestion at terminus

- With only 2 platforms at Oak Grove and Forest Hills, the time it takes to turn a train around becomes the bottleneck. In Spring 2024, 10% of the time there were 8 minutes of delay into Oak Grove.



## Organizational response

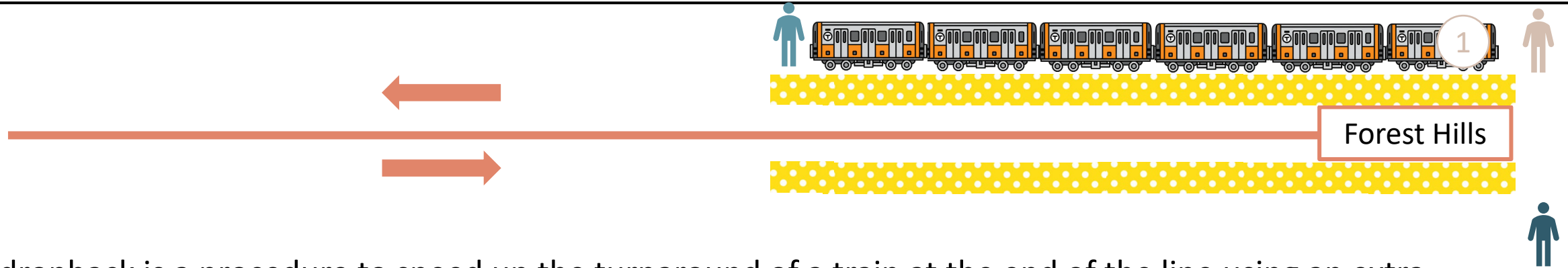
- Operations worked to update schedules to reflect run time, turnaround time, and layover time changes which reduced congestion 50-75% at each terminus by late summer of 2025.



## Continuous improvement: Introducing dropbacks

- Operational leaders from OCC, Orange Line, Planning & Scheduled and Ops Analytics worked together on a project in their Lean Six Sigma Green Belt class to analyze terminus congestion and identify a solution.
- Their proposed solution of adding **dropbacks** to OL terminus operations will be implemented in the Winter Rating after two successful pilots. These **dropbacks** introduces an industry best practice that decreases train turnaround time, reduces congestion, and maintains motorperson restroom access.

# What is a dropback?



A dropback is a procedure to speed up the turnaround of a train at the end of the line using an extra motorperson on the terminus platform. Each motorperson will “drop back” to the next train as follows:

1. The **motorperson** from **train #1** walks to the tail end of the platform which will be the lead end of the next train and takes their break. Doing so before the next train arrives reduces the turnaround time of the next train.
2. The arriving **motorperson's** **train #2** arrives at the terminal.
3. The arriving **motorperson** hands **train #2** off to the previous **motorperson**, and “drops back” to the next vehicle.
4. The arriving **motorperson** now has time to take a break before the next train arrives.

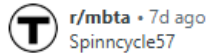
The practice is useful at terminals with limited capacity and high frequency, when vehicles are constrained, or when extra breaktime is desired.



*Thank you!*

Team at the Operations Control Center, 45 High Street

# Customer Feedback From Reddit:

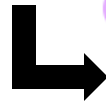


## The Progress is Unbelievable

Appreciation

I rode the Orange Line from Oak Grove for the first time since 2022. I'm almost in tears of joy with the 55 mph sections and all new trains. I remember bringing my friends who live out-of-state on that section shortly after the fire and them being legitimately uncomfortable stepping on the Hawker Siddeleys with huge rust holes in the exterior, as we crawled toward Back Bay at 20 mph tops. I know it's been like this for a while and I'm late to post. You have to stop and smell the roses every now and then. I want to shake the hands the folks that have been working so hard at The T to make this a reality.

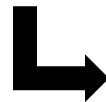
396 34 Share



tehBored1 • 7d ago

My commute went from 45-55 min to 27-30 min. I love waking up 20 min later, and still be reliably on time for work, unlike before.

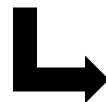
44 Reply Award Share ...



flanga • 7d ago

Headway is down, too; 5-7 min is normal. It's mostly reliable, rapid, transit now. The orange line is approaching excellent, and it's frickin amazing.

23 Reply Award Share ...



spicymayo996 • 5d ago

We moved back here (oak grove) after a few years away and the orange line performance is shocking.

I can get from the tranquility of Middlesex Fells to a Celtics game in like 15 minutes. That's what urbanism is about, baby.

2 Reply Award Share ...

# Heavy Rail Winter 2026 Weekday Schedule Changes



		Winter 2025	Winter 2026 (Mon-Thu)	YOY Change	
Scheduled Trips	Ashmont	204	224	↑	+20 (10%)
	Braintree	202	222	↑	+20 (10%)
Scheduled Headways	Peak – Trunk	5.2 min.	4.8 min.	↓	-0.4 min. (-8%)
	Peak – Branches	10.3 min.	9.5 min.	↓	-0.8 min. (-8%)
	Midday – Trunk	6 min.	5.3 min.	↓	-0.7 min. (-13%)
	Midday – Branches	12 min.	10.5 min.	↓	-1.5 min. (-13%)



Scheduled Trips	All Day	360	424	↑	+64 (18%)
Scheduled Headways	Peak	5.9 min.	4.8 min.	↓	-1.1 min. (-19%)
	Midday	6.5 min.	6.5 min.		0 min. (0%)



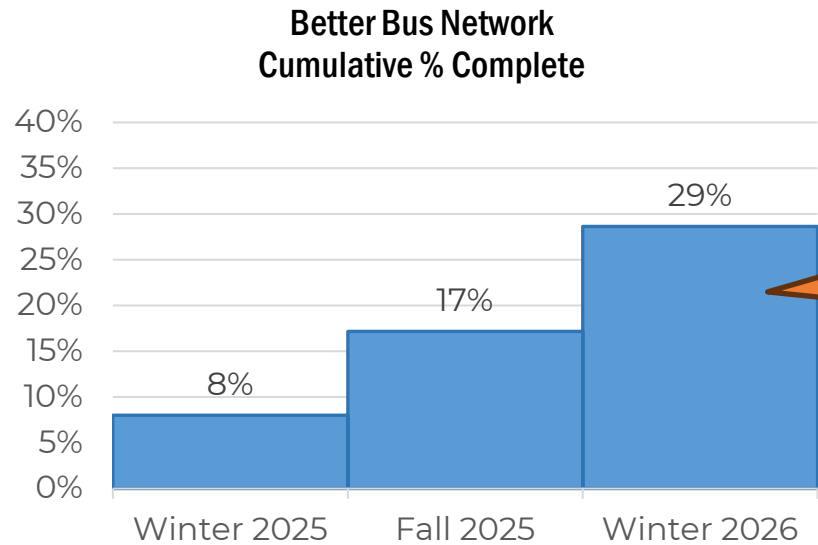
Scheduled Trips	All Day	400	418	↑	+18 (5%)
Scheduled Headways	Peak	4.5 min.	4.3 min.	↓	0.2 min. (4%)
	Midday	7 min.	7 min.		0 min. (0%)

# Bus Winter Service Changes: Implementing Better Bus Network

Continued Better Bus Network improvements, with increasing frequency on routes in Boston, Belmont, Brookline, Cambridge, Chelsea, and Watertown to meet Frequent Bus Route standards

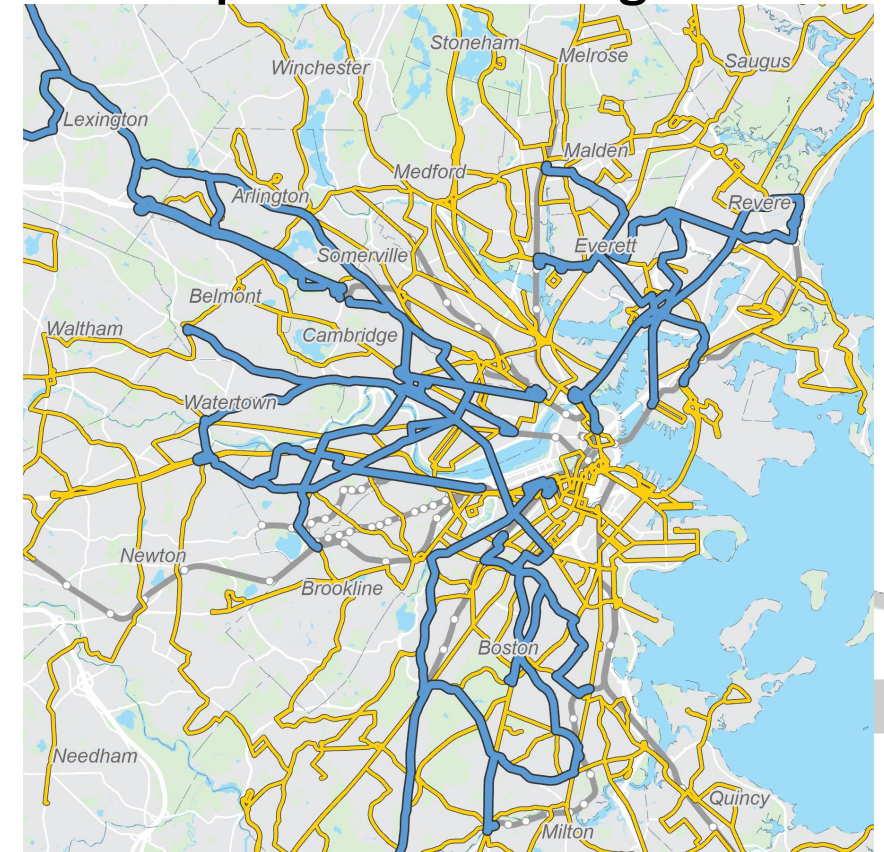
## Better Bus Network frequent bus route promotions

32, 39, 57, 66, 71, 73, 77, SL1, SL3, SL5 on all days; 9 on weekends only for now (partial promotion)



**21 of 31 Frequent  
Bus Routes** are now  
implemented

## Better Bus Network Implementation Progress



# Bus Winter Service Changes:

## Bus frequency and run time adjustments

Additional continuous improvements to increase transit network and community connectivity and adjustment to respond to roadway re-openings.



### Frequency increases

- 7 due to peak crowding
- 21, 26, 45, 64, 69, 83, 116, 215, 225, 245

### Runtime, reliability changes

- 4, 14, 17, 21, 31, 32, 34, 34E, 44, 45, 62, 76, 87, 88, 100, 112, 225, 238, 426, 429, 439, SL1, SL2, SL3, SLW run time updates for improved reliability



# Other Winter 2026 Bus Changes

Fall Changes, by type	Total
<b>Routing changes</b>	64 extends to Kendall on weekends to match weekday route; last 66 arrival omits Harvard Busway due to station lockup; 112, 114 change to serve new stop at Chelsea Market Basket; 106 late night trips loop via Forest & Sylvan to match pattern during day for simplicity; 134 West Medford trips extend to Woburn Square due to intersection changes; morning 439 extends to Wonderland to help with 442 crowding
<b>Trip shifts</b>	77, 89, 95, 101, 106, 108, 134, 430 changes due to school bell times; 34/34E Saturday for coordinated headways; 110, 116, 455 for load balancing/crowding; 240 to coordinate with first Red Line train; other 44, 230, 435, 714
<b>Late night wait notes</b>	Modified late night wait trips for better reliability of last rail-to-bus connections and removed low-utility waits





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# Appendix

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# Winter 2026 Bus Changes

## Upcoming Winter service improvement will focus on:

- Continued Better Bus Network improvements, such as increasing frequency on routes in Boston, Belmont, Brookline, Cambridge, Chelsea, and Watertown to meet Frequent Bus Route standards
- Other frequency increases to better meet crowding and service needs

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Run time, reliability changes	4, 14, 17, 21, 31, 32, 34, 34E, 44, 45, 62, 76, 87, 88, 100, 112, 225, 238, 426, 429, 439, SL1, SL2, SL3, SLW run time updates for improved reliability
Late night wait notes	Modified late night wait trips for better reliability of last rail-to-bus connections and removed low-utility waits
Internal-only changes	Eliminate OCC employee shuttle due to low ridership

# Winter 2026 Heavy Rail Changes

Line		Peak Headways	Trip count	Peak Car Count	Notes
Red	<b>Weekday</b> <i>(trunk)</i>	4.8mins (was 4.5 mins)	446/454 Fri (was 450/458)	128	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Slight weekday run time adjustments improve reliability.</li> <li>Two 4-car consist trains remain scheduled during AM &amp; PM weekday peaks (started in spring) but are based out of Ashmont and Braintree rather than Cabot.</li> </ul>
	<b>Saturday</b> <i>(trunk)</i>	6.75 mins	362	96	
	<b>Sunday</b> <i>(trunk)</i>	6.5 mins	342	96	
Orange	<b>Weekday</b>	4.8 mins (was 5 mins)	424/432 Fri (was 422/430)	102	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement dropbacks to reduce terminal congestion and maintain sufficient breaktime for operators.</li> <li>Frequency improves slightly from faster turnarounds.</li> <li>Continued vehicle deliveries allow adding a “protect train” at Oak Grove for better service reliability in the event of a disruption.</li> <li>Peak remains 17 revenue service trains.</li> </ul>
	<b>Saturday</b>	7.7 mins	320	66	
	<b>Sunday</b>	8.5 mins	272	60	
Blue	<b>Weekday</b>	4.3 mins	418/426 Fri (was 416/424)	72	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Schedule wire car movements in midday for better predictability and service reliability.</li> <li>Store trains overnight at Bowdoin.</li> </ul>
	<b>Saturday</b>	7.5	308	42	
	<b>Sunday</b>	7.5	290	42	



# Winter 2026 Light Rail Changes

Line		Peak Headways	Trip count	Peak Car Count
Green Overall	Weekday	2 mins in trunk	1140/1158 Fri (was 1148/1165)	122 cars
	Saturday	2.8 mins in trunk	936	102 cars
	Sunday	2.9 mins in trunk	852	94 cars
Branches	B Line	8.5 mins	270/274 Fri (was 272/276)	28 cars
	C Line	8.5 mins	276/280 Fri (was 278/282)	22 cars
	D Line	8.5 mins	280/286 Fri (was 286/290)	38 cars
	E Line	7.5 mins	294/298 Fri (was 296/300)	34 cars
Mattapan	Weekday	6.75 mins	262/266	4 cars
	Saturday	13 mins	188	2 cars
	Sunday	13 mins	178	2 cars

