



2025

System-Wide Passenger Survey Report *Executive Summary*

Report prepared by The Office of Performance
Management and Innovation in Spring 2026

OPMI

Executive Summary

The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) regularly surveys our riders to understand who rides the subway or light rail, bus, Commuter Rail, and ferry. The MBTA's rolling System-Wide Passenger Survey, often referred to as the "Rider Census," reflects self-reported information that helps the MBTA understand who our riders are and how they travel around the system. Since 2022, the Rider Census has run on a rolling basis, with surveyors in the field every year from spring through fall. The Rider Census enables the MBTA to meet Federal Transit Administration (FTA) requirements to evaluate any changes to our service or fare policy to measure whether some people are affected more than others. In addition to supporting equity in transit, the MBTA uses survey results to understand how people travel throughout the system to better plan improvements. This report marks the fourth year of annual surveying and offers data from the last four years as a single, pooled dataset with more station- and route-level disaggregation than previous releases. Each new dataset will typically be available mid-spring of the following year. The documentation included in this summary represents the most current data publication and provides context and guidance to understand and use the rolling Rider Census data. More detailed technical documentation may assist those who are looking to more deeply understand the data calculation and aggregation process. The data is available for download and interactive viewing at mbta.com/rider-census.

Survey Background

Pursuant to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and in line with guidance from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) circular FTA C 4702.1B, the MBTA must conduct regular evaluations of our system to ensure equity across income levels and race and ethnicity demographics. Additionally, major changes in service or fares must be evaluated to ensure they do not disproportionately impact populations protected on the basis of race or ethnicity, or disparately burden lower income riders (see the [MBTA Service and Fare Change Equity Policy](#) for details).

Previous versions of the Rider Census reflected point-in-time snapshots of rider demographics; these were conducted in 1978, 1993-1995, 2008-2009, and 2015-2017. As of 2022, the MBTA conducts an ongoing Rider Census, which collects data annually from around 15,000 MBTA riders. This "rolling" structure allows for a nimbler, more accurate understanding of who travels on rail, bus, and ferry services. For example, a rolling survey format allows riders of new services to be counted sooner, which enables the MBTA to include riders of new or revamped services – like the Green Line Extension or Bus Network Redesign routes – in planning and analysis, rather than waiting up to five years to survey those riders. In addition to Title VI equity analyses, the results of the Rider Census are used across the MBTA in capital planning, service planning, fare policy, and public outreach planning. Among other benefits, this survey model means that pilot programs may be evaluated using demographic data collected through a methodologically consistent effort.

Data Collection and Processing

To ensure that the MBTA surveyors talk to a sample of transit riders who accurately reflect the people riding specific services and traveling between specific stops or stations, the rolling Rider Census research team developed a sampling plan that allows for accurate representation of the system every five years. This means that, during the first five years of the new rolling Rider Census, data may be summarized at a more aggregate level than that of previous system-wide surveys. With each additional year of data collection, the MBTA will be able to share more granular data, specific to individual routes and stations.

Detailed information about the rolling Rider Census sampling plan and response weighting may be found in the Data Collection section beginning on page 2 of the technical documentation. The rolling Rider Census sampling plan was constructed to allow reporting at a similar level of aggregation to 2015-17 by the end of the first five years of data collection. This means that the collection of rolling Rider Census data collected through calendar year 2026 will provide data aggregated at a similar level as the 2016 Rider Census data release. Prior to the 2026 data release, survey data will be publicly available at a higher level of aggregation than in years past. Specific aggregation by service mode is as follows:

- Heavy Rail (Blue, Orange, and Red lines) will generally be reported by station
- Light Rail (Green and Mattapan lines) will generally be reported by station or small group of stations for the Green Line, and the Mattapan Trolley will be reported for the whole branch
- Bus will be reported individually or in small groups for high-ridership routes and in larger geographic groups for moderate and low-ridership routes
- Commuter Rail reporting is aggregated to the individual line
- Ferry data will be reported in one group, consisting of all routes

Responses to the rolling Rider Census survey are weighted by both ridership (how many people ride that particular service) and transfer rate (how many people make similar transfers as reported in the survey). This ensures that conclusions drawn from survey data are as representative as possible of overall MBTA ridership. It is important to note that all survey research and data collection is exposed to some level of bias and error. The MBTA acknowledges that sampling bias may have been introduced by a series of factors, including but not limited to:

- Primarily weekday-only surveying, between 6:00AM and 8:00PM
- The need to prioritize high- and medium-ridership locations in order to meet minimum response requirements for statistical validity of reporting
- Limited range of languages available (12)
- Survey respondents' potential lack of awareness of available languages

Findings

Findings remain relatively stable over time; see Summary Tables beginning on page 9 for detailed presentation of findings. The four-year pooled dataset indicates that 53% of riders system-wide self-identified as women, with women comprising the majority of riders for the majority of service modes as well. Women ranged from 47% of riders on Silver Line BRT service to 55% of riders on Green Line service. At the system level, 56% of riders surveyed self-identified as being part of a class protected on the basis of race or ethnicity, consistent with findings from previous years.

Starting this year, the public Rider Census dataset includes information on those who didn't answer a given question in an effort to more accurately report questions where a small but occasionally significant percentage of individuals did not select a response. Instead of calculating each measure as a percentage of "all those who answered" a question, the percentages now reflect all those who encountered the question on their survey.

Detailed information about rider demographics may be found in the technical documentation or the [interactive web tool](#).

Next Steps

We expect to repeat this data collection and release cycle on an annual basis. Rider surveying for calendar year 2026 will result in a public data release in spring 2027. If you have any questions or comments, please reach out at opmi@mbta.com.