

MBTA Diversion Service Standards for Subway, Regional Rail and Ferry

Effective January 1, 2026

Amended September 1, 2026

MBTA Subway, Regional Rail¹ and/or Ferry services may be disrupted from time to time as required to allow maintenance and construction activities on or near service infrastructure. Service disruptions may occur for varying lengths of time, may be continuous or intermittent, and may affect individual stations and terminals, portions of a line, or an entire line or route. These Diversion Service Standards for MBTA Subway, Regional Rail and Ferry service establish standards and considerations for providing substitute service during a pre-planned disruption of scheduled service.²

a. Overview

During a pre-planned disruption to subway, regional rail service or ferry service, the MBTA will consider anticipated ridership during the disruption and will provide alternative or substitute service commensurate with expected demand. When providing alternative service, the MBTA will match the span, capacity and frequency of scheduled service as closely as is reasonable, with a goal of reducing additional customer journey time and providing a trip that is as similar as possible to regularly scheduled service.

As a general matter, the MBTA does not guarantee 1:1 replacement service, but strives to provide reasonable alternatives during a planned service disruption, where what is reasonable varies based on the factors described in this policy. The MBTA will first evaluate the availability of existing, fixed route alternatives to accommodate affected passengers. Fixed route alternatives may include bus, subway, ferry or regional rail service, taking into account the availability of nearby stations on the same or another line. Where fixed route alternatives are insufficient, the MBTA will provide shuttle buses and/or vans to fill gaps in coverage. Individual stations or terminals with significantly low demand or stations that cannot be safely accessed by shuttle bus may not receive diversion service. The MBTA may make case-by-case adjustments when determining whether and how to offer replacement service based on the unique circumstances of a closure, including seasonality, special events, other projects, and local or regional considerations. This policy is not a guarantee of replacement service but a set of guidelines to shape decision-making.

¹ MBTA Regional Rail is also known as Commuter Rail. The shift in language reflects the MBTA's broader vision for more frequent, all-day service across its rail network.

² These Diversion Service Standards replace the Bus Diversion Policy for Weekend Regional Rail Service adopted by the MBTA Fiscal and Management Control Board on July 31, 2017, extend diversion service standards to Ferry, and also incorporate the Diversion Service Standards for pre-planned subway diversions adopted in November 2023.

The MBTA is committed to communicating in advance with customers concerning all planned service disruptions. The guidelines established in this policy may not apply during an emergency closure.

b. Substitute Service Standards

During a pre-planned service diversion, the MBTA strives to provide substitute service according to the following standards. The following may not apply in full during an emergency. Where regional rail or ferry standards deviate from subway service standards, the distinction is noted.

1. Service Availability

- Other, existing MBTA service (bus, subway, ferry, or regional rail) is the preferred substitute service option during a diversion.
- Pedestrian diversions are considered a substitute service option. The MBTA strives to keep pedestrian diversions to less than 0.25 miles distance whenever possible. Pedestrian diversions will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis and reviewed regularly for suitability and accessibility.
- Shuttle bus and/or van service will be provided if other MBTA services, including pedestrian diversions are insufficient. Individual rail stations or ferry terminals with significantly low demand or stations that cannot be accessed by shuttle bus or that do not allow for safe boarding of shuttles may not receive diversion service.

2. Frequency of Service

- The MBTA is committed to reducing additional customer journey time during diversions.
- Substitute service should operate frequencies as similar as possible to the service it is replacing and may be offered at even greater frequency when possible to reduce additional journey time.
- When appropriate and feasible, the MBTA may add additional service on an existing route to substitute for diverted service.
- Substitute service for regional rail should be scheduled to meet applicable train connections.

3. Span of Service

- Substitute service will approximate the same span of service as the service it is replacing whenever practicable. This may include adding or extending

service on another fixed route that has been designated as replacement service for the affected line.

- There may be instances where off-peak demand of a particular regional rail or ferry line or segment is insufficient to warrant substitute service across the full span of scheduled service.

4. Capacity

- Substitute service should provide capacity to support anticipated ridership during the disruption, based on analysis of historical demand on the corresponding segment, and understanding that based on historical data, fewer people will travel during a diversion.

5. Accessibility

- All substitute service vehicles are 100% ADA compliant and will include low-floor, ramp-equipped buses wherever possible. Accessible coach buses will also be used when low-floor buses are not available.
- All substitute service operators will be trained to provide accessible service to older adults and individuals with disabilities.
- When the MBTA designates a shuttle stop, and/or where other existing MBTA service is used as substitute service, all such stops and stations shall be accessible.
 - The MBTA will not direct riders to use a substitute inaccessible station during a pre-planned diversion unless the impacted station is also inaccessible, or circumstantial review indicates that use of the inaccessible station is absolutely necessary to maintain service. Any use of such a station shall require approval from SWA.
 - The MBTA will not establish shuttle bus stops at inaccessible locations.
 - Measures may be taken to make a shuttle bus stop location temporarily accessible, with approval from SWA.
 - If an accessible shuttle stop cannot be established for an associated station, the station may be skipped.
 - Skipped stations shall be evaluated on a case-by-case basis and reviewed regularly to determine whether continuing to skip a station is suitable or whether changes in station conditions allow the station the station to be served accessibly.

- Substitute service will not terminate at an inaccessible stop or station, including a station that is temporarily inaccessible due to a planned or unplanned elevator outage.
- At impacted stations, there will be a safe and accessible path between an accessible entrance and the substitute service.
- Supplemental, accessible vans may be provided when the pedestrian path of travel between the impacted station(s) and substitute service is complex or has significant accessibility deficiencies; when the pedestrian diversion exceeds 0.25 miles; when the number of low-floor buses provided is insufficient; or when riders are directed to use an inaccessible station.
- Accessible buses and high-capacity vans will be able to safely accommodate two wheeled mobility device users simultaneously. If a vehicle cannot accommodate two users, supplemental vehicles will be provided to ensure equivalent service.

6. Customer Information

- The MBTA will make information about an upcoming diversion public in multiple languages³ by mid-month the month prior to the diversion, and will issue a supplemental press release one week before the start of a surge⁴ event. Press releases are followed immediately by any applicable service alerts. Operational or emergency circumstances may occasionally limit the ability to meet these notice goals.
- For subway diversions, MBTA personnel will be posted at impacted stations wherever possible, including the start and end points of a diversion, to be proactively responsible for assisting customers.
- For regional rail and ferry diversions, the MBTA, through its regional rail operator and/or contracted ferry service providers, strives to make passenger assistance personnel available at critical locations along the diversion. The MBTA, through its contractors, will not staff every impacted station or terminal along a diversion.

³ Languages for translation are selected based on the populations affected as identified in the MBTA's Language Assistance Plan, and typically include one or more of Spanish, Chinese, Portuguese, Haitian Creole, and/or Vietnamese.

⁴ A surge consists of any full diversion of service of continuous time exceeding a weekend (Saturday and Sunday) plus one day, or two weekdays. For example, a Friday-Sunday diversion does not constitute a surge, nor does a Tuesday-Wednesday diversion; however, a Thursday-Sunday or Friday-Monday diversion would constitute a surge.

- Information about diversions will be made available through multiple communications channels, including the MBTA's website, T-Alerts, electronic displays, in-station announcements, station posters, banners, schedule distribution, shuttle directional signage, on-vehicle announcements, press releases and advisories, and other methods. The MBTA is continuously working to improve the availability of real-time information concerning diverted service and the availability of substitute service, and may make updates to customer communications practices over time.
- Diversions with short notice periods will have enhanced outreach to notify affected customers. Customers are encouraged to sign up for T-Alerts to receive updates as soon as they're available.

7. Fares

- Fares will not be higher for substitute service than for the same trip with regular service.