



wrrb.org The Research Bureau

Express for Whom? Ridership, Recovery, and the Importance of the Worcester/Framingham Line

Report 25-07, June 2025

October 14, 2025

RESEARCH IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST



The Research Bureau serves the public interest of Greater Worcester by conducting independent, non-partisan research and analysis of public-policy issues to promote informed public debate and decision-making

- **Collecting Objective & Credible Data**
- **Identifying & Analyzing Greater Worcester's Challenges & Opportunities**
- **Issuing Briefs, Reports, & Visualizations**
- **Conducting Briefings for Interested Stakeholders**
- **Convening Issue Based Forums & Programs**
- **Sharing Research Results via Professional & Social Media**
- **Collaborating With Appropriate Partners**

INTRODUCTION



wrrb.org The Research Bureau

Thank you all for coming today

Special thank you to the Barr Foundation, funding from which has enabled us to do this research

We relied heavily on MBTA, National Transit Database, and Census Sources. Thanks especially to the [MBTA's Open Data Portal](#), the data from which allowed so much of this report to happen

Overall, ridership is strong on the Worcester/Framingham Line, buoyed by weekend ridership

Moreover, onboardings between Worcester and Framingham were strong in Fall 2024

RESEARCH IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

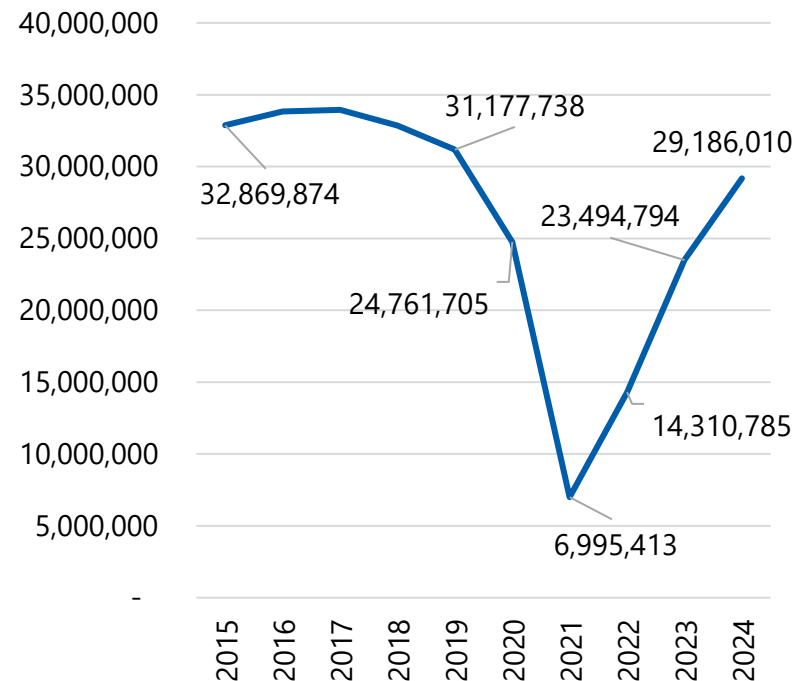
RIDERSHIP OVERALL



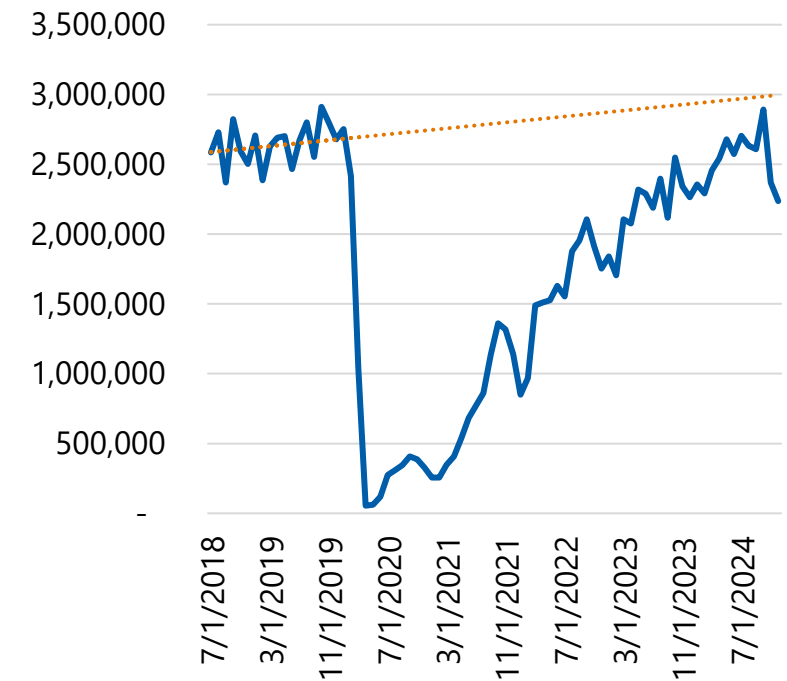
wrrb.org The Research Bureau

Precipitous drop in 2020, but overall the system is back to where it was in 2019

Somewhat below the trend from the 20 months before the pandemic, but getting there



Total Boardings Annually
National Transit Database, Agency Profiles (2015-2023) and Monthly Ridership (2024).



Total Monthly Ridership
MBTA Monthly Ridership by Mode and Line;

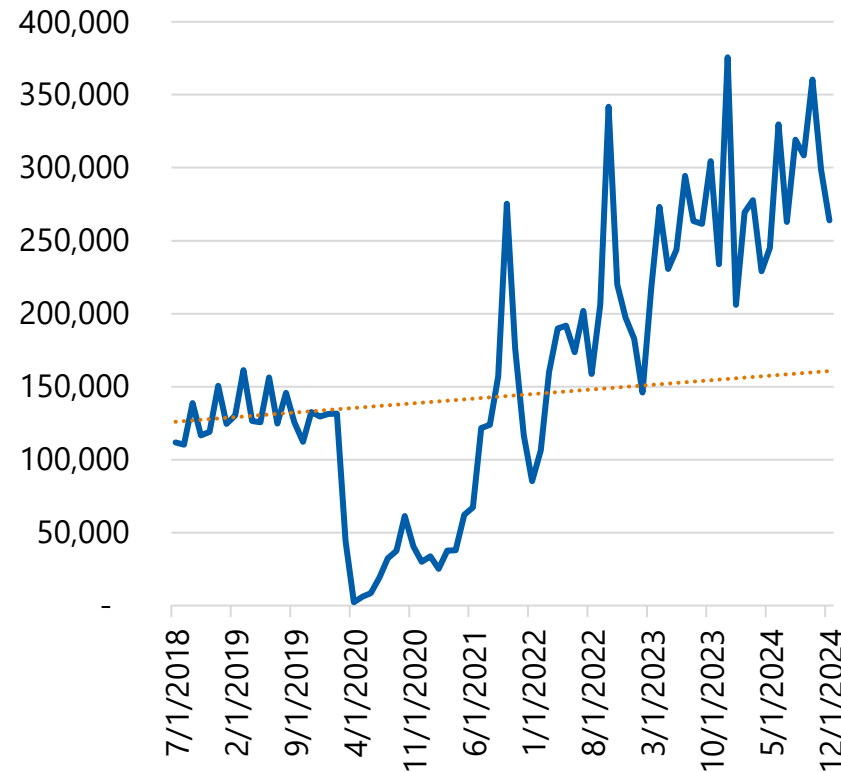
WEEKEND RIDERSHIP



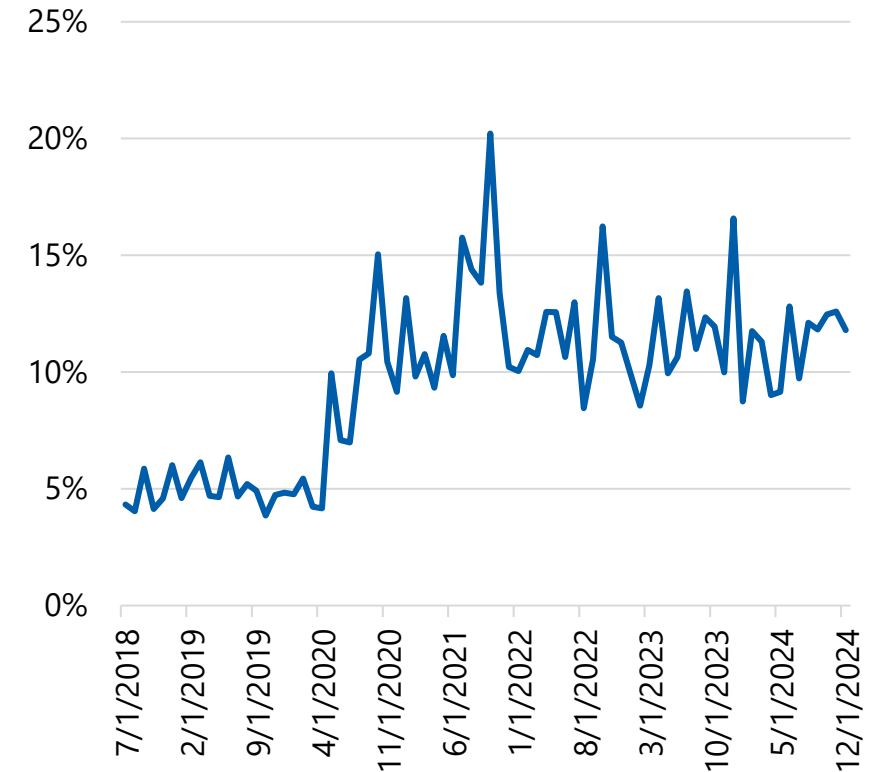
wrrb.org The Research Bureau

Weekend ridership in the system is way up, and way above pre-pandemic trend (note: \$10 pass began in 2018)

It consistently makes up a much larger proportion of total ridership



Weekend Ridership
MBTA Monthly Ridership by Mode and Line



Weekend Ridership as a % of Total Ridership
MBTA Monthly Ridership by Mode and Line;

WORCESTER LINE RIDERSHIP

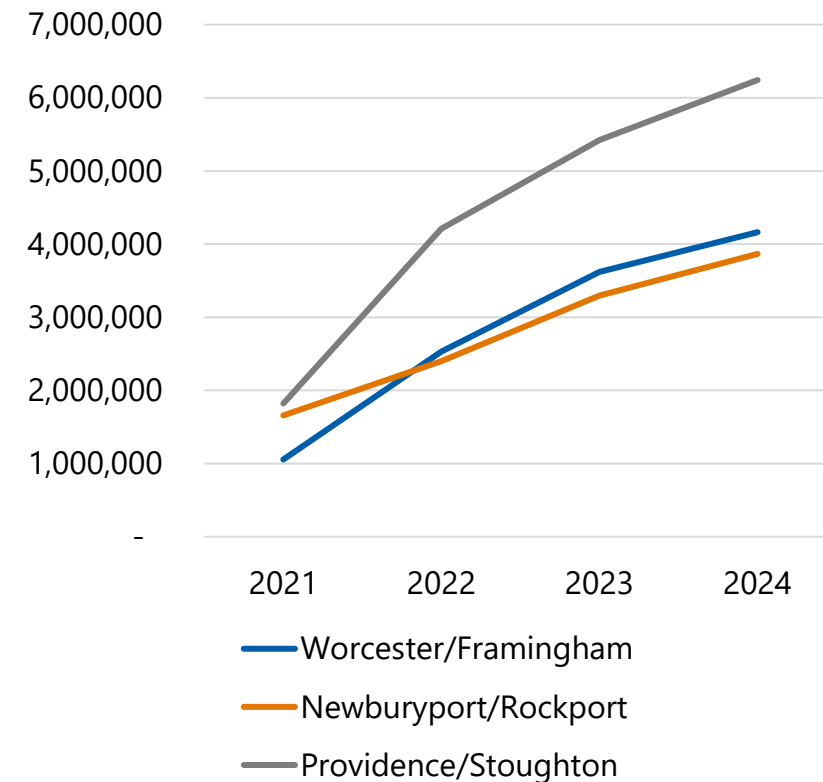


wrrb.org The Research Bureau

Worcester/Framingham is the second-most ridden line in the system, after Providence

Throughout 2024, the line averaged about 14,000 riders on weekdays

Nearly all ridership recovery is due to weekday riders, but weekend ridership is large portion of total.



Estimated Yearly Boardings, 2021-2024

MBTA Estimated Boardings, June 2020 through December 2024. Note: 2021 does not include weekend ridership until July.

WORCESTER LINE RIDERSHIP



wrrb.org The Research Bureau

Worth pointing out that since before the pandemic, frequency has increased on the line

Comparing May 2019 to May 2024 – one more additional weekend train, departing at a regular interval. On weekdays, only four trains had more than an hour wait until the next in Worcester, compared to eight in 2019

Table 1: Weekend Schedules on the Worcester/Framingham Line, May 2019 and May 2024

May 2019		May 2024	
Worcester (Departing)	South Station (Arriving)	Worcester (Departing)	South Station (Arriving)
-	-	5:10 AM	6:45 AM
7:00 AM	8:30 AM	7:10 AM	8:45 AM
8:50 AM	10:20 AM	9:10 AM	10:45 AM
10:50 AM	12:20 PM	11:10 AM	12:45 PM
12:50 PM	2:20 PM	1:10 PM	2:45 PM
2:30 PM	4:00 PM	3:10 PM	4:45 PM
4:30 PM	6:00 PM	5:10 PM	6:45 PM
6:30 PM	8:00 PM	6:55 PM	8:30 PM
8:30 PM	10:00 PM	9:10 PM	10:45 PM
11:00 PM	12:30 AM	11:25 PM	1:00 AM

Source: May 2019 and May 2024 schedules, via <https://www.dbperry.net/MBTA/#FraminghamWorcester>

Table 2: Waits Between Weekday Trains on the Worcester/Framingham Line, Worcester Departures Only, May 2019 and May 2024

May 2019		May 2024	
Worcester (Departing)	Time Until Next Train	Worcester (Departing)	Time Until Next Train
-	-	4:15 AM	0:45:00
4:45 AM	0:30:00	5:00 AM	0:45:00
5:15 AM	0:35:00	5:45 AM	0:45:00
5:50 AM	0:32:00	6:30 AM	0:37:00
6:22 AM	0:35:00	7:07 AM	0:33:00
6:57 AM	0:27:00	7:40 AM	0:33:00
7:24 AM	0:36:00	8:13 AM	0:52:00
8:00 AM	0:50:00	9:05 AM	0:55:00
8:50 AM	1:45:00	10:00 AM	1:00:00
10:35 AM	1:30:00	11:00 AM	1:00:00
12:05 PM	1:50:00	12:00 PM	1:05:00
1:55 PM	1:55:00	1:05 PM	0:55:00
3:50 PM	1:30:00	2:00 PM	1:00:00
5:20 PM	0:45:00	3:00 PM	0:47:00
6:05 PM	1:15:00	3:47 PM	0:43:00
7:20 PM	1:10:00	4:30 PM	1:15:00
8:30 PM	0:30:00	5:45 PM	0:50:00
9:00 PM	0:35:00	6:35 PM	1:20:00
9:35 PM	1:45:00	7:55 PM	1:00:00
11:20 PM	1:00:00	8:55 PM	1:55:00
12:20 AM	-	10:50 PM	-

Source: May 2019 and May 2024 schedules, via <https://www.dbperry.net/MBTA/#FraminghamWorcester>. Bold indicates a wait longer than an hour.

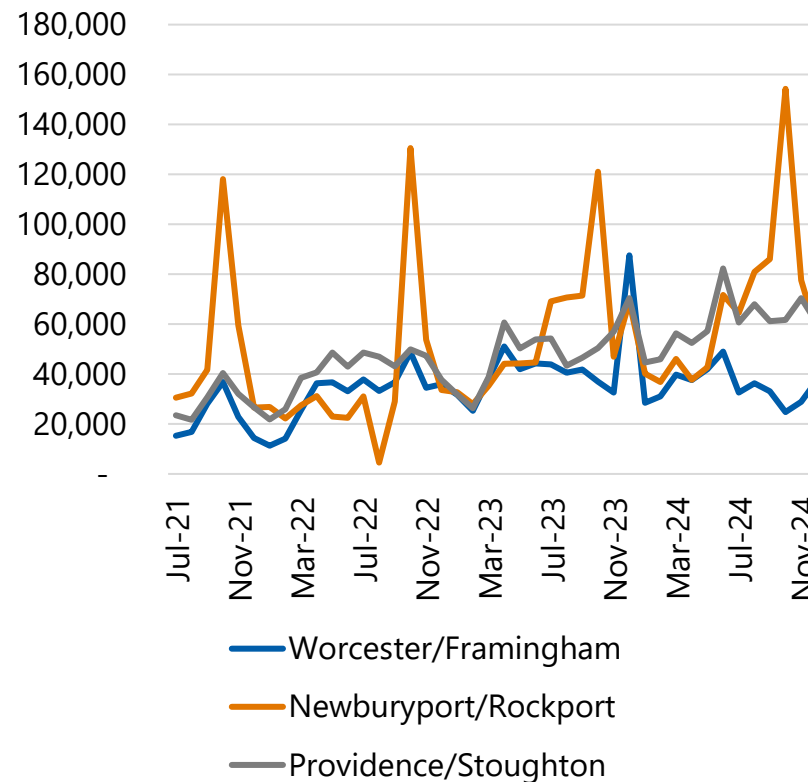
WORCESTER LINE RIDERSHIP



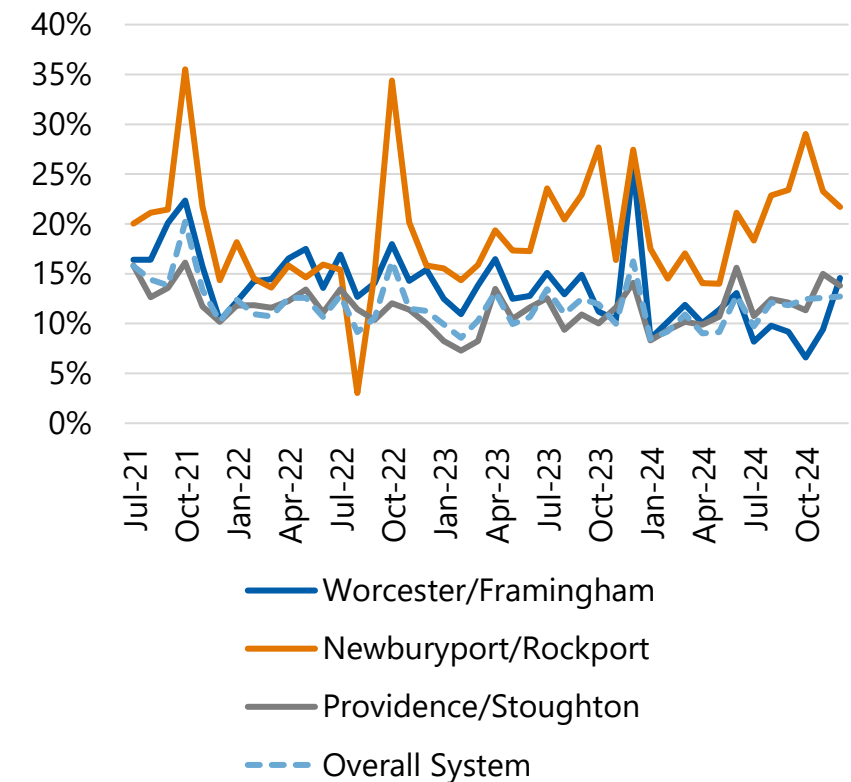
wrrb.org The Research Bureau

Weekend boardings are not as strong as the other two lines

But they make up a much larger percentage of total ridership than in Providence or in the system overall in most months



Weekend Ridership, July 2021 through December 2024
MBTA Estimated Line Boardings, June 2020 through December 2024.



Weekend Ridership as a % of Total Ridership
MBTA Estimated Line Boardings, June 2020 through December 2024

WORCESTER LINE RIDERSHIP

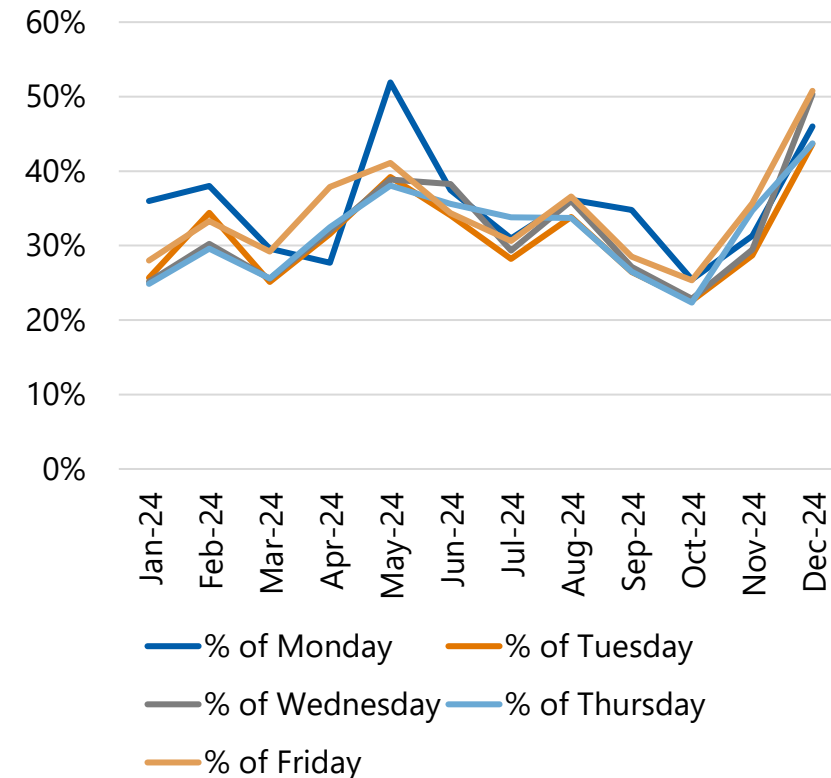


wrrb.org The Research Bureau

Average Saturday ridership in 2024 was often a large percentage of average weekday ridership (on the Worcester Line)

In some months, average Saturday ridership was more than 50% of a weekday

Really impressive considering ... there were only 20 trains all day, rather than 55!



Average Saturday Ridership as a % of Average Weekday Ridership MBTA Estimated Line Boardings, June 2020 through December 2024

WORCESTER LINE RELIABILITY



wrrb.org The Research Bureau

Whether on weekends or weekdays, reliability across the line (measured as arriving at a terminus within five minutes of scheduled time) between 2020 and 2024 has been much better than between 2016 and 2020

Chart 18: Worcester/Framingham Line Weekday On Time Performance, January 2016 through December 2024

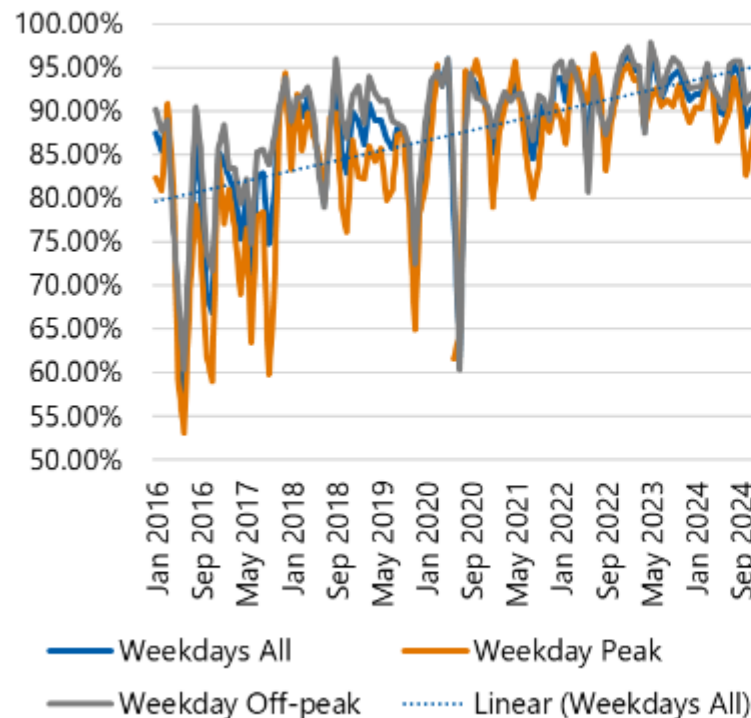
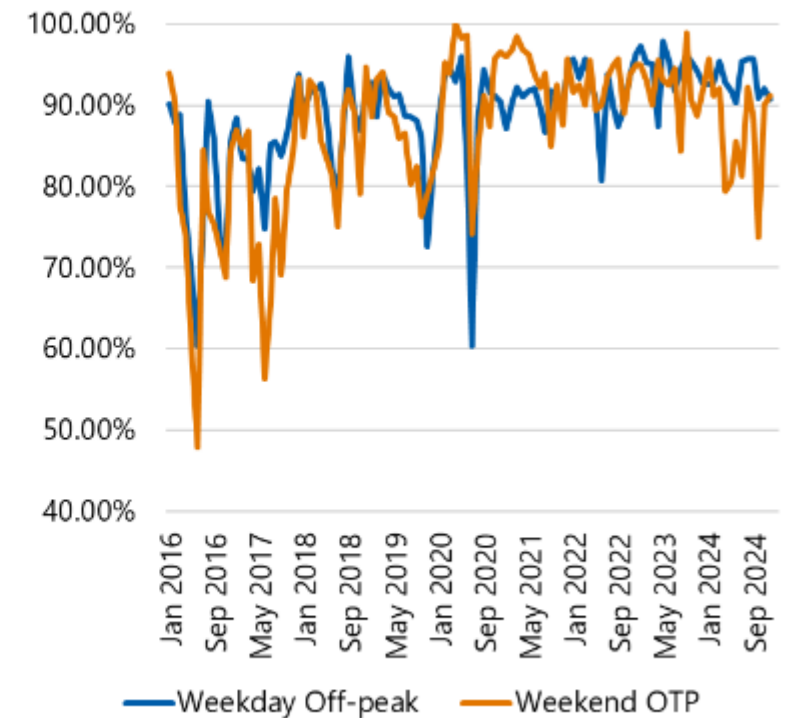


Chart 19: Worcester/Framingham Line Weekday Off-Peak and Weekend OTP, January 2016 through December 2024



Source: MBTA Bus, Commuter Rail, and Rapid Transit Reliability, January 2016 through Present

STATION BOARDING DATA



wrrb.org The Research Bureau

Station boarding data – via the MBTA and MassINC Polling – for Fall 2024 only became available in March.

This data has been extremely useful to our work, but it does have some drawbacks

Collected only on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays from September to November, and was likely only counted once. Individual trains may have been counted on different days, so our “heat map” is only an estimate of what a day might look like – so we should be careful not to take this data as “final”

STATION BOARDING DATA



wrrb.org The Research Bureau

Stop	500	502	504	582	506	584	508	552	586	510	512	514	516	518	520	522	524	526	592	528	594	530	598	532	534	536	538
Worcester	9	64	105	-	123	-	176	100	-	63	51	39	35	78	38	50	26	38	-	27	-	31	-	31	30	12	13
Grafton	4	45	44	-	49	-	71	-	-	46	11	11	9	4	4	5	3	3	-	17	-	6	-	5	0	0	0
Westborough	5	41	25	-	46	-	91	-	-	44	14	9	11	20	8	3	11	8	-	18	-	9	-	2	4	1	0
Southborough	6	48	36	-	46	-	126	-	-	49	11	15	5	8	9	4	3	9	-	18	-	6	-	3	1	1	0
Ashland	3	51	32	-	67	-	129	-	-	57	7	9	0	0	4	2	9	0	-	5	-	3	-	0	0	1	1
Framingham	9	72	59	16	64	46	69	151	34	53	11	20	17	30	14	13	18	11	8	21	7	8	8	5	8	7	1
West Natick	7	48	44	3	77	37	100	-	49	33	10	2	9	20	9	7	14	-	13	-	15	0	3	0	2	1	0
Natick Center	7	11	-	27	-	113	-	-	56	41	9	7	4	4	6	8	11	-	26	-	22	12	2	0	0	2	0
Wellesley Square	2	14	-	46	-	102	-	-	65	7	12	1	1	18	6	47	18	-	24	-	29	12	5	7	10	4	1
Wellesley Hills	2	2	-	28	-	78	-	-	43	8	0	4	6	26	7	7	14	-	12	-	3	9	9	9	5	0	0
Wellesley Farms	4	7	-	36	-	96	-	-	44	16	4	13	1	2	3	0	2	-	3	-	3	2	2	0	1	0	0
Auburndale	0	2	-	26	-	44	-	-	31	16	0	3	-	12	-	-	5	-	-	-	10	-	3	-	1	0	-
West Newton	3	9	-	30	-	78	-	-	43	12	4	2	-	12	-	-	5	-	-	-	12	-	2	-	0	1	-
Newtonville	4	28	-	55	-	122	-	-	78	8	10	7	-	18	-	-	17	-	-	-	6	-	3	-	1	0	-
Boston Landing	5	25	39	106	45	114	56	-	118	33	8	15	5	40	7	16	67	39	39	14	40	4	13	16	5	1	0
Lansdowne	0	13	7	20	16	72	16	22	0	11	10	0	4	12	8	21	27	23	21	9	10	6	0	5	2	2	0
Back Bay	0	4	0	7	7	11	6	1	1	1	14	0	8	8	2	3	14	18	20	4	27	15	0	0	1	0	0
South Station	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Train Departing	4:15	5:00	5:45	6:35	6:30	7:25	7:07	7:40	8:15	8:13	9:05	10:00	11:00	12:00	13:05	14:00	15:00	15:47	16:40	16:30	17:20	17:45	18:55	18:35	19:55	20:55	22:50
Train Arriving	5:50	6:36	7:10	7:33	7:56	8:23	8:33	8:45	9:11	9:49	10:43	11:38	12:33	13:38	14:38	15:33	16:39	17:07	17:29	17:50	18:13	19:13	19:48	20:03	21:30	22:30	0:18

Inbound Onboardings, Fall 2024

RESEARCH IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

STATION BOARDING DATA

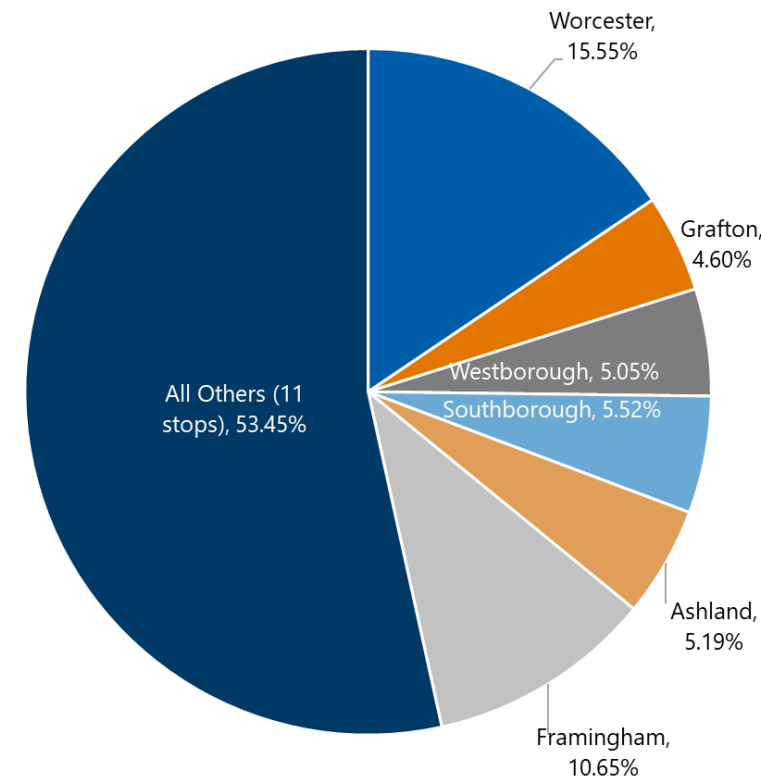


wrrb.org The Research Bureau

Worcester's Union Station had a remarkable number of onboardings in the Fall 2024 station boarding data

Counting all trains, all day, 15.55% of inbound onboardings occurred in Worcester, more than any other stop

Nearly 50% of onboardings occurred between Worcester and Framingham



Percent of Inbound Riders, Selected Stops (All Trains)

STATION BOARDING DATA

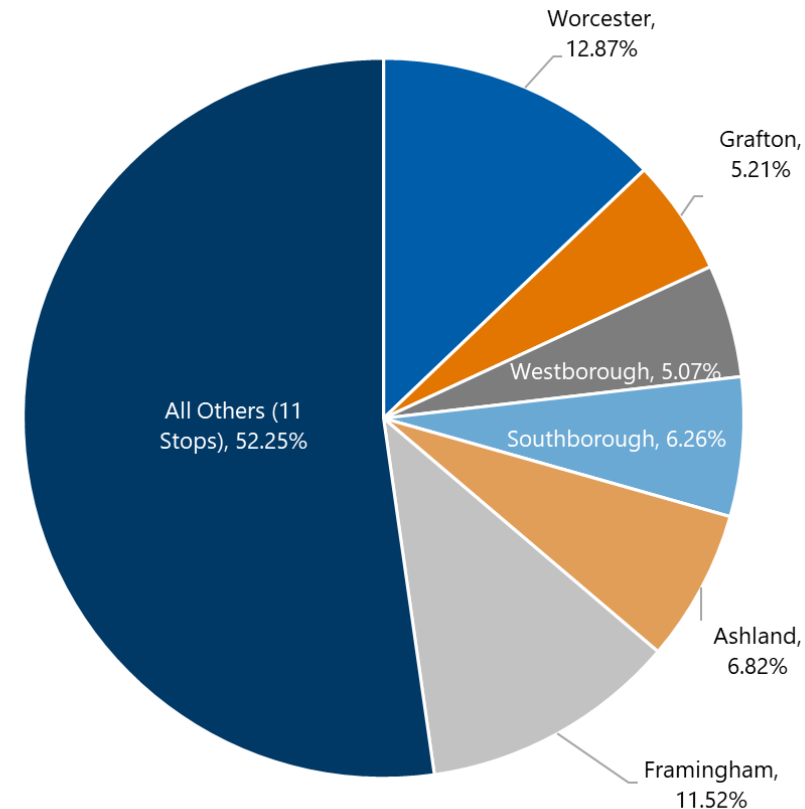


wrrb.org The Research Bureau

There were 10 inbound trains in Fall 2024 that departed between 4 and 9 AM, of which only 7 originated in Worcester (and 4 are zonal express)

Worcester saw more onboardings than any other stop during this period – 12.87%.

Framingham sat in second at (11.52%) and Boston Landing in third (10.88%)

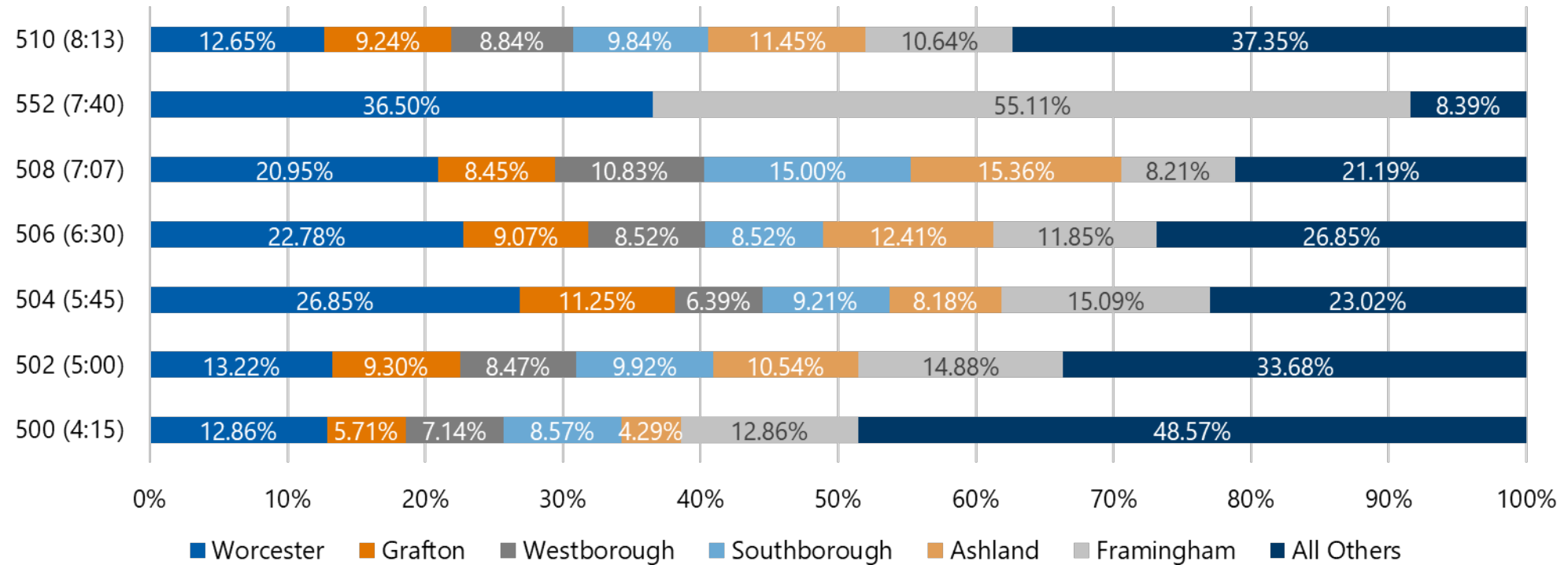


Percent of Inbound Riders, Selected Stops (Trains 4 AM to 9 AM) (10 trains)

STATION BOARDING DATA



wrrb.org The Research Bureau



Inbound Onboardings, Trains Originating in Worcester, 4 AM to 9 AM

Trains 504, 506, 508 skip Natick Center through Newtonville; Train 552 skips Grafton through Ashland, and West Natick through Boston Landing

RESEARCH IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

WHO IS RIDING?



wrrb.org The Research Bureau

According to the 2023 release of the MBTA Passenger Survey,

52.59% of riders are taking it from home to work (compared to 49.95% systemwide)

More than 50% report taking it three to five days per week, with more riders taking it five days than three to four

44.8% of riders report making 30 to 80% of AMI, and 11.73% make less than 30% of AMI

Final portion of report looks at Census Bureau data to try to map ridership and potential riders by community

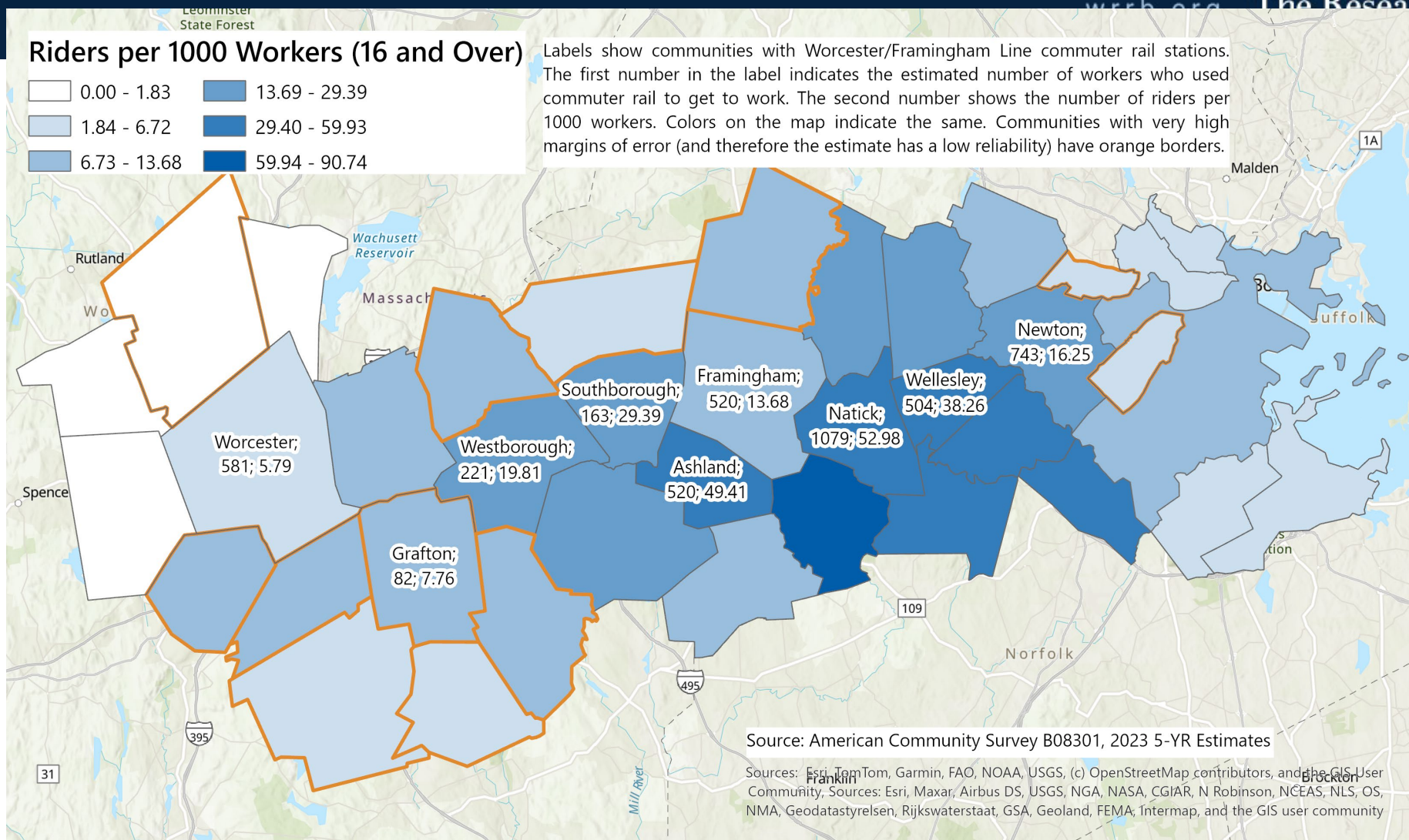
Important to recognize that Census data lags a bit, so latest data is from 5-YR estimates that cover 2019-2023

This first map shows riders per 1,000 workers (16 and over) across all communities with Worcester Line stops or are adjacent communities

MAPS



www.researchbureau.org The Research Bureau



The second set of maps is focused on transit-oriented development, considering that the potential for new riders on the rail depends on residential and job growth

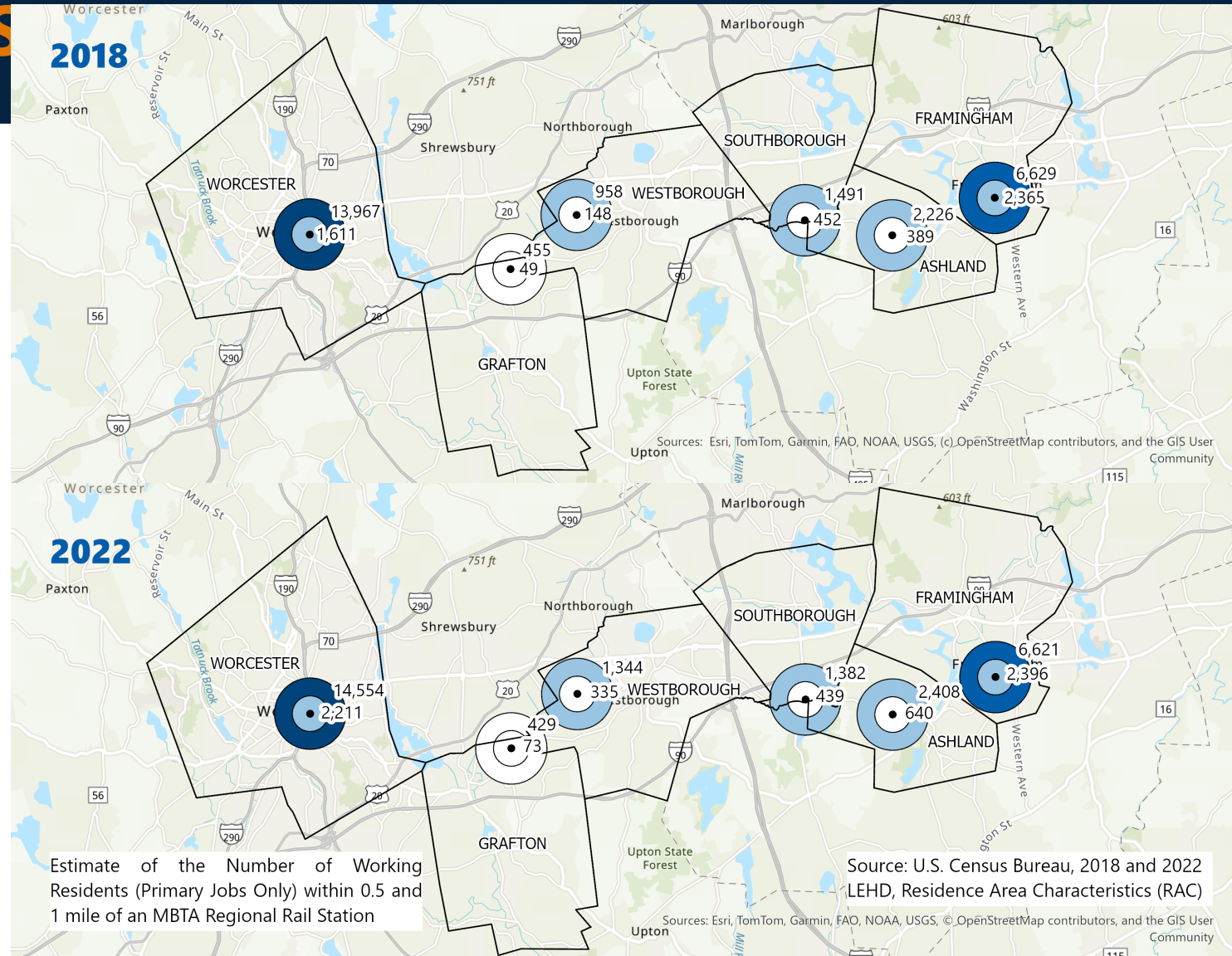
Between 2018 and 2022, the number of working residents within a half-mile of Worcester's Union Station grew by an estimated 37%

The number of jobs shrunk by 17%

MAPS



Research Bureau



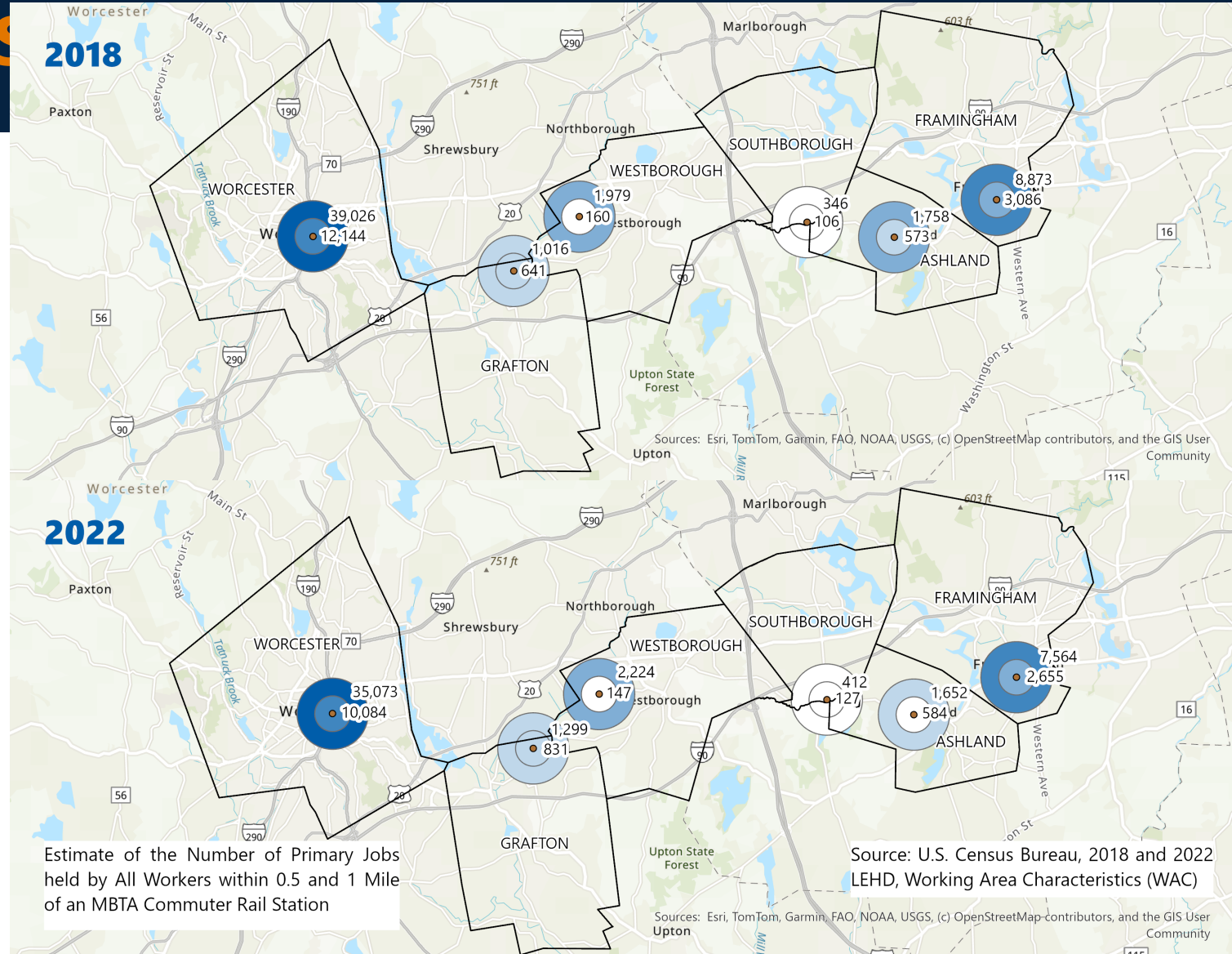
Working Residents (Primary Jobs Only)

RESEARCH IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

MAPS



Research Bureau



Primary Jobs

RESEARCH IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

CONCLUSIONS



wrrb.org The Research Bureau

There are a significant number of riders getting on at Worcester, with the potential for more

As a whole, though, the segment of rail between Worcester and Framingham sees a large number of riders daily – nearly 50% of weekday onboardings

Ensuring that these six stops have frequent, speedy, and adequate service is key to the success of the rail line

These six communities working together to advocate for fast-tracked infrastructure improvements – as well as limited and infrequent disruptions during Allston I-90 construction – is absolutely crucial for the nearly 350,000 people living in these communities, and the many tens of thousands more living nearby

THANK YOU TO OUR LEADERSHIP



wrrb.org The Research Bureau

- **Chair Paul Kelly**
- **Vice-Chair Eric Torkornoo**
- **Treasurer George W. Tetler III, Esq., Prince Lobel Tye**
- **Clerk Demitrios M. Moschos, Esq., SederLaw**

Appointed by the Board of Directors at the Annual Meeting to serve as the Operating Board, setting organizational goals and objectives by meeting monthly to provide staff with advice, recommendations, and feedback on its research, programs, and general operations.

- **Kola Akindele, JD, Worcester Polytechnic Institute**
- **Melanie Bonsu, Saint-Gobain Abrasives**
- **Roberta L. Brien, WBDC**
- **Kathryn Crockett**
- **John Erwin, UMass Chan Medical School**
- **Abraham Haddad, D.M.D, MBI Vice-Chair**
- **Francis W. Madigan III, F.W. Madigan**
- **Jochen Salfeld, Ph.D., AbbVie**
- **Joshua Lee Smith, Esq., Bowditch & Dewey**

RESEARCH IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

WRRB CONTACT & SOCIAL MEDIA



wrrb.org The Research Bureau

Executive Director & CEO Paul Matthews

pmatthews@wrrb.org

www.wrrb.org / (508) 799-7169

Facebook: **The Research Bureau**

Linked In: **Worcester Regional Research Bureau**

Instagram: **wrrbureau**

YouTube: **TheResearchBureau**

BlueSky: **wrrbureau.bsky.social**

Twitter/X: **@WRRBureau**

Tableau: **TheResearchBureau**

ArcGIS: **wrrb mapping**

Research Ideas: www.wrrb.org/submit-your-idea/

Director of Programs & Operations Eric Kneeland

*Senior Research Associate Josh Boucher
Research Associate Anthony Clough*

***Thanks to leadership and support
from our 13 member Executive
Committee and 112 member Board
of Directors***

RESEARCH IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST