



Our Vision and Priorities for Improved Commuter Rail Service in 495/MetroWest

Adopted by the Board of Directors October 4th, 2023

In accordance with the organization's 2022-2027 Strategic Plan, the 495/MetroWest Partnership's Transportation Committee convened a working group in 2023 to review and update our regional vision and priorities for improved commuter rail service in our region.

The 495/MetroWest Partnership's 36-community service area is served by three MBTA Commuter Rail Lines:

- Fitchburg
 - Stations: South Acton and Littleton/ Route 495
- Franklin
 - Stations: Foxborough, Norfolk, Franklin, and Forge Park/ 495
- Framingham/ Worcester
 - Stations: Natick Center, West Natick, Framingham, Ashland, Southborough, Westborough, and Grafton

The Partnership's vision for Improved Commuter Rail service: The 495/MetroWest Partnership works towards robust Commuter Rail service along the Fitchburg, Framingham/ Worcester, and Franklin lines, which includes but is not limited to:

- Safe, reliable rail service that includes all-day bidirectional service (supporting traditional commuting patterns, "reverse commute," and non-traditional schedules)
- Fares that are competitive with driving, to provide an attractive and affordable alternative to single-occupancy vehicle commuting
- Enhanced opportunities for employers to support employees utilizing Commuter Rail
- Improved experiences at rail stations throughout 495/MetroWest, including adequate parking, ADA compliance, and level boarding platform heights to reduce dwell times
- Well-maintained and up-to-date railway infrastructure
- Full, permanent Commuter Rail service to and from Foxborough
- Expanded transit options linking to rail service, to connect commuters from their points of origin to their final destinations
- Rail stations as centers of opportunity

Our priorities to achieve robust commuter rail service throughout the 495/MetroWest region include:

- **Fares that are competitive with driving:** The cost of Commuter Rail trips must be competitive with, and ideally more affordable than, the cost of commuting utilizing a single-occupancy vehicle.
- **Station improvements, including addressing parking constraints at commuter rail stations:** The installation of high-level platforms at every station across our three commuter rail lines remains one of the Partnership's most critical priorities for targeted station improvements. High-level platforms increase passenger safety and accessibility while reducing dwell times by enabling level boarding at stations. Prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, parking was insufficient at railway stations on each of our service region's Commuter Rail lines. With ridership increasing, this issue has the potential to reassert itself as a barrier to rail access. Solutions to add shuttle service to parking facilities or improved parking facilities are necessary in multiple locations in order to meet pre-pandemic demand. Parking rates should be affordable and stable across stations.

- **Proper maintenance of railway infrastructure:** Since 2018, significant investment has been leveraged to improve and modernize the Commuter Rail network. Focus40, the MBTA's system-wide long-term capital investment plan through 2040, established several near- and mid-term capital spending commitments seeking to improve safety and operations, track infrastructure, and capacity constraints, many of which are under construction or complete. Needed upgrades to signal and switching infrastructure across the system had frequently been a cause for cascading delays; mechanical failures and resulting delays erode confidence in riders.
- **Permanent Commuter Rail Service to Foxborough:** The 495/MetroWest Partnership strongly supports full Commuter Rail service to and from Foxborough. Following the completion of the year-long pilot program, the MBTA announced in September 2023 that weekday commuter rail service at Foxboro station will be made permanent.
- **Expanded First and Last Mile Initiatives:** The Partnership continues to support innovative First and Last Mile solutions designed to connect transit riders from the rider's point of origin to a transit station, and then from another station to their final destination. First and Last mile solutions should be carefully coordinated and foster collaboration amongst Transportation Management Associations (TMAs), RTAs, municipalities, and regional employers.
- **Framingham/ Worcester Line Track and Station Accessibility Improvements (Triple Tracking):** The Worcester Line Track and Stations Accessibility Improvements (PO261) Project will greatly improve operations on the Framingham/Worcester Line by installing a 10-mile express track between Framingham and Weston. The express track will allow for a greater mix of services, accommodate ridership growth, and strengthen economic ties between New England's two largest cities.
- **Commuter Rail needs Pertaining to Allston Multimodal Project:** The Partnership supports maintaining rail service along the Framingham/ Worcester line to the greatest extent possible during construction. In addition, the planned West Station should preserve the potential for a future connection to Kendall Square via the Grand Junction railroad. West Station should be more than another stop that will potentially increase rail travel times.
- **Regional Equity in Electrification Discussions:** The Partnership supports prioritizing the electrification of the Framingham/Worcester line; given that this line connects the Commonwealth's two largest cities, it should not be left out of the first tier of electrification.
- **Support for Transit-Oriented Development:** The Partnership supports expanded opportunities in the immediate vicinity of rail stations that include housing and retail, as well as educational and employment opportunities. Enhancing opportunities and amenities within walking distance of stations creates options to live in 495/MetroWest with reduced vehicle dependency, and has the potential to increase access and affordability.