



Boston Youth Transportation Project



BY LILY T. KO

Tufts University M.A. Student
Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning
Summer Graduate Policy Fellow

OFFICE OF MICHELLE WU

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Executive Summary

The Boston Youth Transportation Project (BYTP) examined the transportation experiences of Boston teenaged youth. BYTP researched whether Boston youth face any barriers to transportation and what attitudes they held toward different transportation modes. The project was motivated for two main reasons: 1) to examine whether transportation challenges are affecting the socioeconomic mobility potential of youth, and 2) to gauge youth's affinity toward biking and public transit in support of the City of Boston's climate change goals. In total, 264 youth took a survey and 240 of them also participated in one of 23 focus group sessions.

While the City of Boston and MBTA provide substantial transportation benefits to Boston youth, there are still thousands of young people locked out of these benefits and who may face financial barriers to transportation. Youth face inequities across the system as to who receives transportation benefits due to distance from school, participation in summer programs they join, employment, their individual school policies, and/or attending school outside of Boston through METCO. This results in missed opportunities related to education, employment, personal development, and social life that contribute to an ever widening education and social gap.

Beyond affordability, transit dependability is another vital enabler for Boston students to truly take full advantage of their opportunities. Youth travel all over and outside the city in order to attend higher quality schools not offered in their own neighborhoods due to historic and persistent racial segregation. Unfortunately, the unreliability of public transit service results in academic ramifications and adverse effects on youth's health, jobs, parent relationships, and most importantly—youth autonomy.

Safety is another key element. Most Boston youth reported feeling unsafe on public transit, especially around people under the influence of drugs and alcohol. This affects youth behavior and prevents them from getting where they need to go. At the same time, public transit helps youth feel safer in areas where they would otherwise have to walk. Unfortunately, transit unreliability meant that safety wasn't always guaranteed.

In regards to affinity for various transportation modes, the car dominated all ratings and the vast majority of teens strongly preferred to get around the city by car or transportation network company (i.e., Uber or Lyft). These preferences have dire implications for our environment, but there are indications that their preferences are malleable and that there are changes that would get increase youth biking or transit usage. Among their suggestions are a drastically safer bicycle network and more reliable service as well as better amenities that make public transit a more competitive mode. The suggestions in this report largely come directly from Boston youth and mark a clear path for improving the quality of life for young people in Boston today and removing impediments to their future success. Read on!

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INTRODUCTION



Introduction

Project Motivation

The Boston Youth Transportation Project examined the transportation experiences of Boston teenaged youth. The two main goals of the project were to look at whether Boston youth face any barriers to transportation and what attitudes Boston youth held toward different transportation modes.

The Boston Youth Transportation Project (BYTP) was motivated for two main reasons.

① Socioeconomic Mobility

First, geographic mobility has been shown to be strongly linked with economic mobility. More opportunities for jobs, higher income, education, reasonably-priced food and goods, quality housing and healthcare depends upon efficient and affordable transportation.^{1 2 3 4 5} Thus, for a socially-just society, it is vitally important that public transit services are reliable, efficient and accessible. Unfortunately, existing research demonstrates that people’s access to high-quality transportation options as well as the degree to which these options provide timely and convenient access to civic, social, educational, and recreational opportunities vary across race and income lines.⁶ Public transit is also disproportionately relied upon by communities of color and lower-income households⁷, and existing research demonstrates that their access to high-quality transportation options and reliable services are worse than for White, higher-income communities. Furthermore, transit policy has historically focused on expansion through suburban systems—serving White and wealthier constituents more reliably than those living in inner cities—and leaving comparatively fewer resources for improving transit service in low-income areas with a higher proportion of transit dependents.⁸ Bus service tends to be more relied upon by low-income, communities of color—but has suffered continual disinvestment.⁹ While it’s critical to look at adult commuters and their opportunities to access jobs and other resources, it is just as important to investigate youth experiences. The City of Boston has an abundance of economic and out-of-school enrichment opportunities for its young people,

¹ White, Gillian B. “Stranded: How America’s Failing Public Transportation Increases Inequality.” *The Atlantic*, 16 May 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/05/stranded-how-americas-failing-publictransportation-increases-inequality/393419/>

² Green, Jarrid. *Access to Public Transit is a Matter of Racial Equity*. Center for Social Inclusion, 9 April, 2015, <http://www.centerforsocialinclusion.org/access-to-public-transit-is-a-matter-of-racial-equity/>

³ Karner, Alex et al. “We Can Get There From Here: New Perspectives on Transportation Equity.” National Center for Sustainable Transportation, September 2016, https://ncst.ucdavis.edu/wpcontent/uploads/2016/12/NCST_EquityWhitePaper-FINAL.pdf

⁴ Henderson, Wade and Angela Glover Blackwell. “How better transportation can fight income inequality.” *The Hill*, 15 June 2015, <http://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/economybudget/244832-how-better-transportation-can-fight-income-inequality>

⁵ Bouchard, Mikayla. (May 7, 2015). “Transportation Emerges as Crucial to Escaping Poverty.” *New York Times*, 7 May 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/07/upshot/transportation-emerges-as-crucial-to-escaping-poverty.html>

⁶ Williams, Elizabeth. “Doors Opening: An analysis of equity and accessibility on public transportation services in the United”. December 2016, <https://repository.library.northeastern.edu/files/neu:cj82p859c/fulltext.pdf>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Garrett, Mark and Brian Taylor. (1999). “Reconsidering Social Equity in Public Transit”. *Berkeley Planning Journal*, 13, 1999, 6-27.

⁹ Ibid.

including the Mayor’s Summer Jobs Program; copious museums, libraries, and community centers; as well as numerous events and youth-centered programming sponsored by local universities and private organizations. However, Boston youth must be able to easily get around the city in order to access opportunities like these.

② Environment

Second, transportation is one of the top contributors to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The EPA reported that transportation accounted for the largest portion (28%) of total U.S. GHG emissions in 2016, with light-duty vehicles contributing to 60% of it.¹⁰ The City of Boston also reported that transportation emissions contribute significantly to pollution in Boston today and that transportation makes up somewhere between a quarter to a third of its GHG emissions.¹¹ Because of this, the City aims to reduce GHG emissions from transportation by 50% of 2005 levels by 2030.¹² Currently, the majority of teenaged youth are still captive transit riders and have relatively fewer transportation mode choices. However, they will soon be our next generation of potential daily drivers. Therefore, it’s crucial to understand how youth view different modes of transportation, whether they are inclined to use more sustainable modes of transportation (like public transit and biking), and what would make them more excited to use these modes of transportation.

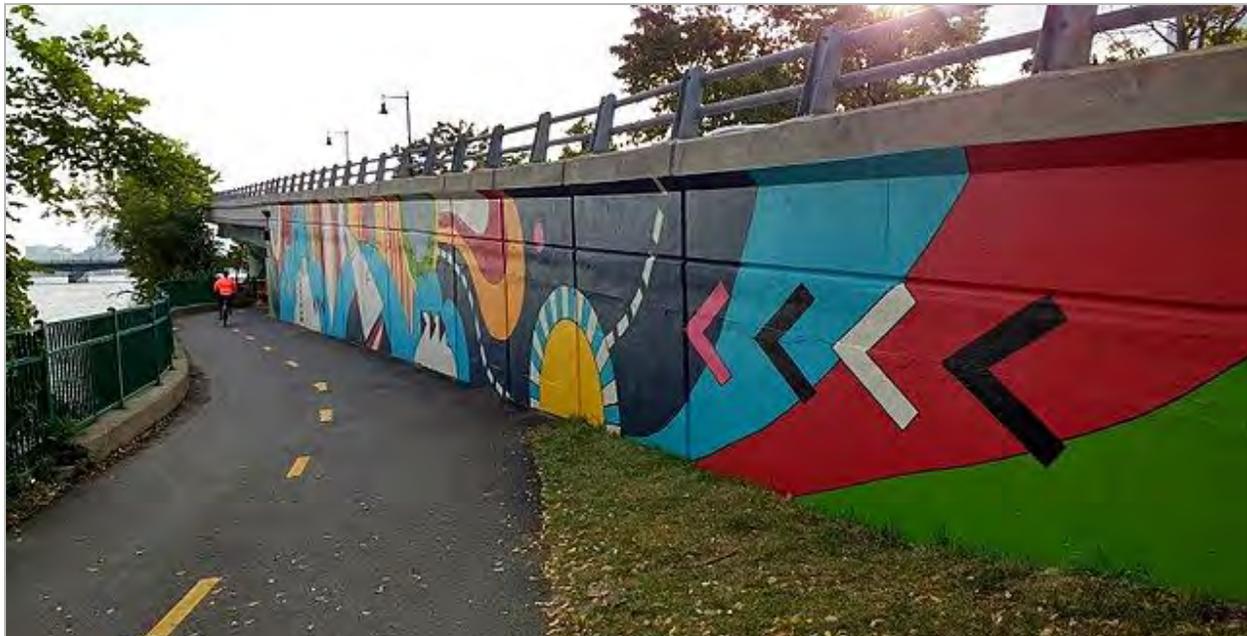


Photo: Whoisjohngalt

¹⁰ *Green Vehicle Guide: Fast Facts on Transportation Greenhouse Gas Emission*. EPA, July 2018, <https://www.epa.gov/greenvehicles/fast-facts-transportation-greenhouse-gas-emissions>

¹¹ Boston Transportation Department. *Go Boston 2030: Imagining Our Transportation Future: Vision and Action Plan*. Boston: March 2017. Retrieved from <http://goboston2030.org/en/>

¹² *Ibid.*

Introduction

Research Questions

① How are youth getting to school and other activities?

② What transportation challenges do youth face?

③ What are youth perceptions and attitudes toward different transportation modes, especially toward public transit and biking?

④ What would make youth excited or prefer to use public transit or a bike for transportation?

Introduction

Methods

The Boston Youth Transportation Project Youth gathered youth transportation experiences through in-person and online outreach throughout July and August, 2018.

In-Person

The in-person component consisted of sessions with youth where they were requested to take a 10-minute survey followed by a focus group that lasted between 20-60 minutes.

The survey captured information on how youth get to school, activities and other outings; asked them to rate different transportation modes based on comfort, safety, and fun; and collected a basic list of transportation challenges the youth may experience.

The focus groups were split into two main parts: transportation challenges and transportation attitudes. During the challenges portion, youth were asked an open-ended question about what challenges they faced, followed by general prompts about public transit barriers, safety issues, trips taking too long, affordability, and interactions with MBTA police. During the perceptions and attitudes portion, youth were questioned about their preferred transportation mode, and then about what would make public transit and biking exciting for them. At the end and throughout the focus groups, youth were asked to provide recommendations for the City.

Over 50 organizations with teen programming were contacted via phone and/or email. Youth organizations were found via googling “youth programs Boston” and “teen programs Boston” and snowballing results; searching for youth programs and resources under the City of Boston, Boston Public Libraries, and Boston Public Schools websites. Efforts were made to reach organizations located in areas underserved by transportation options, organizations serving low-income youth, as well as organizations serving youth of color. In the end, 23 sessions were conducted with 20 organizations that responded (see Table 1 on the next page). In-person data was collected between July 9 and August 7, 2018. All but one group (Curley Community Center) were observed to be serving majority or all students of color. The majority of the students surveyed were observed to be Black. There was one group with majority Asian American students (Asian Community Development Corporation) and one group with majority Latinx students (Sociedad Latina).

Online

The online component consisted of a page on Facebook where youth were asked to participate in two ways: 1) sharing a story through a written or video post on the page on Facebook, and 2) filling out an online survey. The online survey had essentially the same questions as the survey used for the in-person sessions, with two additional questions asking youth to share a short story about a transportation challenge and asking them for a recommendation for the City. The page was advertised through youth organizations, Boston Centers for Youth and Families (to their 200+ community partners), Boston Private Industry Council (to employers), and City Councilor Michelle Wu’s social media networks. Additionally, flyers about the page on Facebook was distributed to all organizations who participated through an in-person session to reach other youth, as well as to teens seeking a job through the Mayor’s Summer Jobs Program at the BCYF Youth Engagement & Employment office on one morning.

Table 1. List of Focus Group Organizations

Organization	Number of youth
Artists for Humanity	7
Asian Community Development Corporation (ACDC)	12
Boston Area Health Education Center (BAHEC) Youth Cycling Program	13
Bikes Not Bombs*	12
Curley Community Center (Boston Centers for Youth and Families)	11
Curtis Hall Community Center (Boston Centers for Youth and Families)	8
Dorchester YMCA	14
Inquilinos Boricuas de Acción (IBA)	14
Hyde Park Community Center (Boston Centers for Youth and Families)	7
Martin Pino Community Center (Boston Centers for Youth and Families)	4
Mattapan Food & Fitness Coalition Vigorous Youth Program	9
Mattapan Teen Center (Boys and Girls Club)**	22
Mildred Avenue Community Center (Boston Centers for Youth and Families)	16
Oak Square YMCA	15
Roslindale Community Center (Boston Centers for Youth and Families)**	19
Sociedad Latina	14
Tobin Community Center (Boston Centers for Youth and Families)	12
Wang YMCA of Chinatown	12
Yawkey Club (Boys and Girls Club)	16
Zumix	3

*This session was broken up over two days with largely the same kids.

**These centers organized multiple groups with different kids.

Focus groups were also attempted at the Grove Hall Library and during one of Boston Cyclists Union's Dudley Bike-to-Market events. No youth showed up during the scheduled hours.

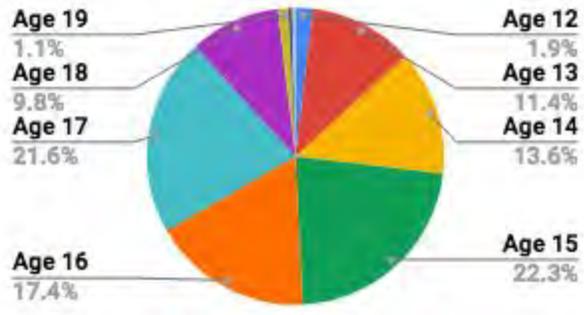
Introduction

Survey

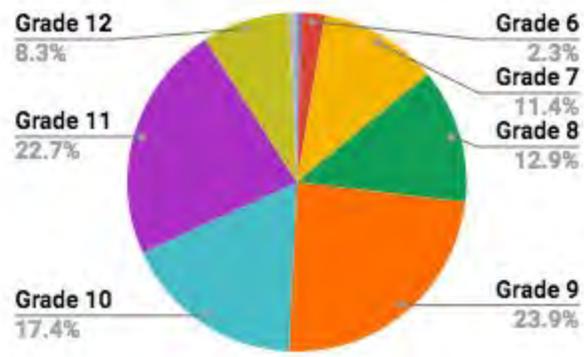
Demographics

In total, 264 youth took the BYTP survey (and 240 of them also participated in a BYTP focus group session). The number of youth living in Boston was 242. The number of youth living in and attending school in Boston was 211.

AGE
N = 264

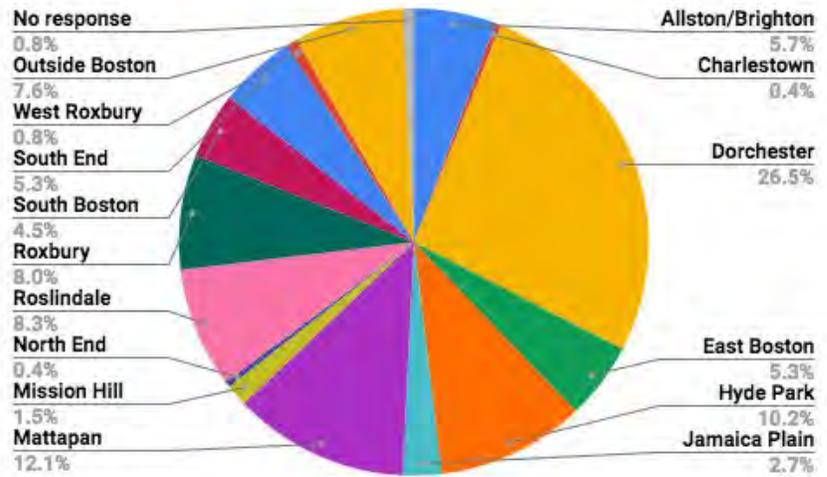


GRADE
Past School Year
N = 264



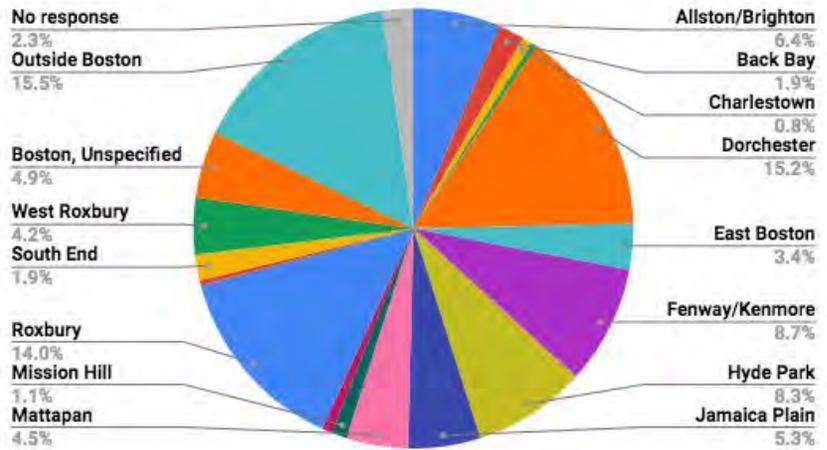
**NEIGHBORHOOD:
HOME**

N = 264



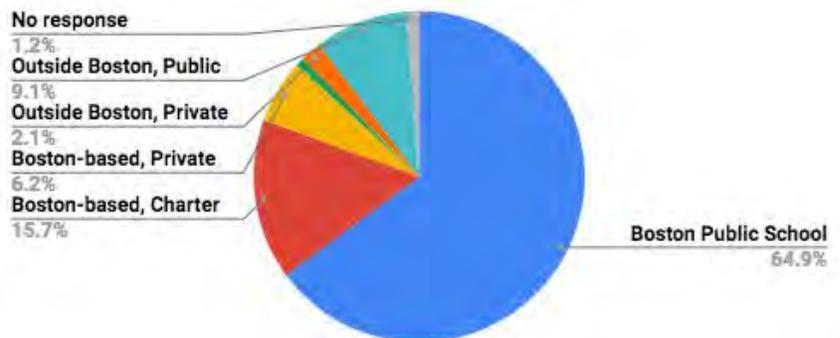
**NEIGHBORHOOD:
SCHOOL**

N = 264



TYPE OF SCHOOL
Students living in Boston

n = 242



TRANSPORTATION CHALLENGES



Transportation Challenges

Affordability

The City of Boston and MBTA provide substantial transportation benefits to over ten thousand youth living in and attending school in Boston. Yet, there are thousands of young people locked out of these benefits and who may face financial barriers to transportation and may not be able to afford to move around the city as they would like. This results in missed opportunities related to education, employment, personal development, and social life.

Youth Public Transportation Benefits

The MBTA offers three types of passes for youth, distributed through participating cities.

S-Card

Student passes are distributed through Boston Public Schools (BPS) and the Boston Centers for Youth and Families (BCYF) Administrative Office near Roxbury Crossing. Students receive 50% off individual local bus and subway fares, among other discounts. Monthly LinkPasses are discounted to \$30 from \$84.50.

M7

M7s are pre-loaded S-Cards that BPS pays for during the school year (September through June). BPS receives a discount on their bulk purchase, paying \$29 instead of \$30, per month per student. It is provided for free to students who live outside of a given walkzone from their school: 1.5 miles for 7th and 8th graders and 2 miles for 9th graders and up (road distance, not straight line distance). It functions as an S-Card during the summer (July and August).

All students living in Boston and attending school in Boston, grades 7-12, qualify for an M7 if they live outside the walkzone.¹³ This includes Boston Public Schools (BPS), non-BPS charter schools, parochial schools, Catholic schools, and private schools.

Youth Pass

Youth passes are distributed through the BCYF Administrative Office and are available to low-income young adults ages 18-25. Monthly LinkPasses are discounted to \$30. Young adults must meet specific program requirements, like being enrolled in an accepted GED or job training program, or a state or federal benefit program.

¹³ Personal communication with Will Eger, Strategic Project Manager in Finance, Boston Public Schools

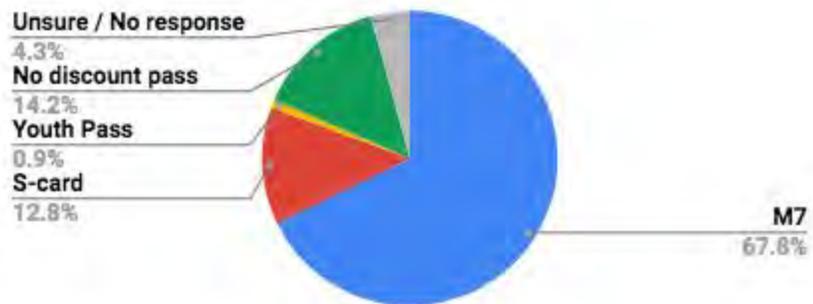
Impacts of M7 Walkzone Policy

The M7 walkzone policy creates a major equity issue among Boston’s students. It essentially creates two classes of students. One class of students is afforded not only more options to get to school, but also the ability to travel around the City for free during the school year. The other class of students may have to walk up to two miles to get to school and has to constantly consider public transit costs in all their activity choices. So, how exactly is the M7 walkzone policy affecting our students?

Last school year (2017-2018), at most, 66.3% of students living in and attending school in Boston received an M7. A total of 19,160¹⁴ M7s were given out and at least 9,700 students living in and attending school in Boston did not receive an M7 (7,700 BPS students lived within the walkzone and 2,000 M7 requests were denied from charter, private and parochial schools¹⁵)¹⁶. This is in line with the demographics of survey takers. Out of 211 surveyed students living in and attending school in Boston, 67.8% reported having an M7.

TYPE OF TRANSIT PASS Students living and attending school in Boston

n = 211



Youth in 11 out of 23 groups (47.8%) brought up how the walkzone policy is an issue.

Walk Is Too Long

Some students said that their walk to school is too long. Two miles is approximately 40 minutes of walking each way, or an hour and twenty minutes total. This creates a significant burden for students to walk that length every day, especially when they may have to carry heavy backpacks and trudge through inclement weather.

Imagine if it's a thunderstorm, snowing, or you have crutches.

— Teen from BAHEC Youth Cycling Program —

¹⁴ Includes 14,650 BPS students; 3,000 charter students; 970 Catholic school students; and 540 private school students. Numbers were approximate due to fluctuation in requests throughout the year.

¹⁵ Total number of students living within walkzone at non-BPS schools is unknown since BPS does not have full school rosters.

¹⁶ Personal communication with Will Eger, Strategic Project Manager in Finance, Boston Public Schools

It's interesting to note that the MBTA considers the walkable distance to reach a transit station for the average person to be a half-mile.¹⁷ This is a far cry from BPS' expectation that students will walk 2 miles to reach schools.

Safety Is An Issue

Some students who didn't have an M7 talked about how unsafe they felt walking home alone rather than taking the bus. In talking about safety generally, many students talked about feeling uneasy in "bad", "shifty" or "shady" areas or neighborhoods.

Putting Students at Risk for Discipline and Confrontation

Not surprisingly, some students said they take public transit to get to school without an M7 anyway. The problem is, as multiple students explained, having to pay for the ride was difficult since they frequently could not afford the full fare.

Getting through is a problem—especially if you don't got bread.

— Teen from Bikes Not Bombs —

Not providing all students with an M7 is asking many of them to sneak around and evade the fare—putting them at risk for discipline. The results of sneaking around is also very inconsistent. Numerous students told stories exhibiting how the fate of their trips were always in the hands of a bus driver or MBTA employee. MBTA personnel were also not only acting inconsistently compared to each other, but also from one instance to the next. Students said it depended on who they got and what mood the MBTA driver or employee were in. Drivers would give some people a hard time but not others. They would also argue over students paying only partial fare, kick students off buses, and not let students on even at night time. One teen director from the Mattapan Teen Center explained how students sometimes look too old (e.g., 6-foot tall 12-year-old) to get leniency from the bus driver too.

Students described MBTA employees as "too stringent," untrusting, and "giving mad attitudes." A few stories even involved potentially violent confrontation over being unable to pay the fare—with an employee threatening to fight a student who couldn't pay at a station, and another pulling back a student by his backpack when he entered a bus without paying.

Some people just don't have heart... Especially being a younger person, [I] could be trying to get home or anywhere.

— Teen from Mattapan Teen Center —

Because of the inconsistent actions by MBTA personnel, one group of students questioned what MBTA employees were supposed to do if confronted with a student trying to get to school

¹⁷MBTA Data Blog. *Introduction to the MBTA Walksheds Atlas*. MBTA, 7 October 2016, <http://www.mbtackontrack.com/blog/57-introduction-to-the-mbta-walksheds-atlas>

who cannot pay the full fare. While the “MBTA requires all passengers to pay fares when using the system,” there does not appear to be a formal protocol around what to do when employees are faced with youth asking to get on for free or evading fare (except that they are instructed to allow students to board without payment on the first few days of the school year¹⁸).



Photo: Pi.1415926535

Social Implications

It is a known stressor for bus drivers to have to consistently deal with youth asking them to get on-board for free, but youth were also conscious of the stress it put on driver-youth relations. One student from Dorchester YMCA said that having an M7 would help “build relationships with the bus driver” and a student in the BAHEC Youth Cycling Program explained how his mom gave him a transit pass in case he forgot his M7 because “it would just be really awkward” otherwise. Asking for free or reduced entry onto the bus produces social apprehension—and some youth have to deal with this each time they take public transit.

There are other social implications of some students not being given M7s. Students talked about the difficulty in meeting up with friends when some have M7s and others do not. Even getting an M7, a happy thing, can cause social anxiety. One student from the Yawkey Club, who lived 1.8 miles from school, said his mother made a case for him to have an M7. He ended up getting one but said it was “mad embarrassing” that his mom was “arguing with everyone at the school.” Other students quickly chimed in, agreeing that it’s highly embarrassing when their parents argue with school administrators. Teenagers are at an age with a lot of social pressures, and the M7 walkzone policy adds an unnecessary strain on friendships, provides a cause for social exclusion, and produces social anxiety among peers.

Reliance on Parents’ Ability to Advocate

While some parents are able to advocate for their children to receive an M7, the current system assumes that they will have the time, resources, and language skills to make the case for an M7 for their children where it is really needed. This puts student outcomes at the hands of parents’ ability—or inability—to advocate effectively for their children.

¹⁸ Personnel communication with Laurel Paget-Seekins, Director of Fare Policy and Analytics, MBTA

Missed Opportunities

The issue with the M7 walkzone policy is about the missed opportunities for youth. Students talked about activities that they or their peers have had trouble getting to previously, such as sports practice (some schools don't have fields), advanced placement classes, and seminars.

These are programs that school provides, but some students can't get there.

— Teen from Zumix —

Students with M7s also elucidated where they went with M7s. The most salient ones include doctor appointments, work and other responsibilities. Social uses should not be diminished too.

Table 2. Uses of M7s

EDUCATIONAL	EXTRACURRICULAR	HEALTH AND PERSONAL CARE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Library • Museum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sports practices and games • Choral concerts / Chorus practices • Music lessons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barber shop • Doctor appointments • Gym
PERSONAL RECREATION	RESPONSIBILITIES	SOCIAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore other neighborhoods and cities • Parks • Pools • Shopping 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check up on family members • Help parent in the city • Pick up sibling from school • Work / Jobs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community / Teen center • Game nights • Games at Fenway or TD Garden • Local events • Outings with friends • Visit friends / family

I have a lot of friends that go [to tabletop gaming nights in Central Square], so it's important to me.

— Teen from Bikes Not Bombs —

Most students use their M7 for other purposes besides getting to and from school.

— Teen from Mattapan Food and Fitness Coalition —

One of the most common responses youth provided about where they go with their M7s was simply "everywhere." One teen from the Dorchester YMCA summed up student sentiments quite well, stating that the M7 is a "basic necessity to go anywhere."

M7 benefits

“Make[s] everything easier. You don’t have to worry about running out of money.”

“Carefree living”

“Don’t have to think about it”

“Makes my life infinitely easier”

“It’s a quality of life thing”

“Don’t have to stress”

“M7 saves a lot.”

“Good for those that can’t afford it”

A Heartening Story of Solidarity

Students were extremely resourceful in helping each other out and demonstrated how united they were on the M7 walkzone issue.

Youth talked about how they helped friends pay to get home (e.g., scrounging together quarters) and how sharing M7s is the norm. Students lent out M7s when they knew they had a ride from a parent the next day, by tapping friends onto the bus going the other direction (and waiting until they could use their card again), and through tapping one M7 to get multiple friends through the gates.



***Sharing M7s is just the culture.
It's like a group M7.***

— Teens from Zumix —

It's obvious that a lot more students are affected than just the ones without M7s. Young people end up spending a lot of their time and effort to figure out transportation and negotiate with each other—when they have so many other things they could devote their energy to.

An Unfair Policy

Youth called the M7 walkzone policy “unfair” and “ridiculous.” Students astutely pointed out how the policy is based on one point of geography rather than need, and that students who have M7s and those that do not are treated unequally.

[The M7 distance policy is unfair] since it is based on where you live instead of need.

— Teen from Bikes Not Bombs —

Students with an M7 are able to go wherever they would like but S-card students are more limited to where they go because they still have to pay to take public transit [even if it is at a reduced price].

— Teen from Mildred Avenue Community Center —

Basing the policy on how far a student lives from school is short-sighted given the myriad of activities that teens go to that are not within walking distance from home and the inherent inequity issue of M7 access. When asked what students thought would be a fair policy, innumerable youth and teen directors expressed that all students should get an M7 (even though the majority of youth surveyed did have an M7). A few did suggest that the policy should be changed so that students living outside of 1 mile (instead of 1.5 or 2 miles) from their school should receive an M7. These students appeared to only be considering the policy in terms of geographic distance (not surprising, considering that is how the current policy is set up) and it was unclear whether they thought that there could be a completely different criteria, such as income-based need for an M7.

Summer Affordability

Both teens and program directors were quite vocal about the lack of an M7 during the summer months too. Youth in 15 out of the 23 groups (65.2%) expressed wanting M7s year-round and/or having difficulty with paying for summer fare.¹⁹ Young people asked questions about why the free fare they get with their M7s didn’t extend through the summer, expressed frustration at having to pay for fares during the summer, and recommended that free fares be provided through the summer. Several people noted that they use their M7s for everything “until June 30th,” when M7s expire.

All [my] plans stop after June 30th.

— Teen from Mattapan Food and Fitness Coalition —

¹⁹ This may have been less of an issue for some youth since several groups received free transit passes from their summer programs.

Being Stuck at Home

Youth expressed that the summer can be “difficult” and restrictive, explaining how not having an M7 prohibits them from doing the activities they would normally do during the school year, and that they are more likely to just stay home instead of pay the transit fare. One teen from Zumix said, “I feel like I’m home all the time.” Another teen from the Roslindale Community Center talked about how she wanted to go to Lawn on D with her friends just for fun before she started working for the summer, but she didn’t have money for the transit fare and so ended up not going. Many youth felt that transportation during summer is too expensive.

You can’t spend as much money [in the summer].

— Teen from Oak Square YMCA —

As multiple youth explained, the fares add up—especially with needing to go somewhere every day (as one would need to do if in a summer program or with a job). Some people had family situations that required moving from home to home, like having divorced parents, or needing to be looked after by another family member when parents cannot be home.

Student summer transportation issues are putting a large burden onto teen directors. A teen director from Mildred Ave Community Center felt that students often need to get to more places during the summer than during the school year and said he frequently has youth coming to him asking for money to get home or elsewhere. Another teen director from Mattapan Teen Center also explained that a summer transit pass is necessary for youth to get to their job interviews and use before they get their first paycheck. Her center had around 25 youth from various city and non-profit programs, such as Successlink, PIC, ABCD, MLK, and EPIC. She had a few students refuse a summer job there because they could not afford the bus fare. The lack of a summer M7 is costing students jobs.

Different Transit Benefits from Summer Programs

Programs also reported a wide variation on what summer transit benefits they provide to their youth. Programs either provided no benefits, benefits based on special circumstances, partial benefits to all, or benefits limited to a certain number of people. A couple of BCYF community centers used MBTA roll-on passes they got from the City for younger youth. The centers are likely not able to take advantage of the MBTA’s policy allowing children age 11 and under to ride for free as only up to 2 children are allowed per adult. If the MBTA allows all children age 11 and under to ride for free, then the City would be able to redistribute their transit passes for use among older youth.

Lacking Information

Exacerbating the summer affordability situation is that there were students in nearly every group that did not know about the S-Card \$30 monthly pass option, that their M7s turned into S-Cards during the summer, where to get an S-Card, and/or how to fill S-Cards with the monthly pass. One group of students said they threw away their M7s at the end of June because the cards state that they “expire” (but they turn into S-Cards). One person had to buy another M7 from an “underground plug” for \$20—not including the monthly pass expense. Schools should do more outreach to students and parents on transit benefits at the start of the school year, but also before summer. The MBTA should also regularly post information about the S-Card.

A Case for Fare Capping

When students were asked if they ever paid more than \$30 by the end of the month (the cost of a student monthly pass), some said they do but that they do not have \$30 to pay up front. Some youth also explained that they do not buy the monthly pass since they can sometimes get on board for free and end up paying less than \$30. Implementing fare capping would give youth freedom from having to gamble each month by putting a threshold onto their total monthly fares.

Funding M7s

Funding M7s for all students living in and attending schools in Boston during the school year would cost an additional approximately \$3 million. This was the figure BPS reported at the end of 2016²⁰ and is consistent with figures from last school year (2017-2018). Funding the 9,700 students that had an M7 request denied or were not given an M7 due to living within the walkzone in 2017-2018 would have cost \$2,813,000²¹.

Though groups were not explicitly asked about funding concerns regarding M7s, a few did arise. One student did not feel like every student should receive an M7 since that money could be put toward other resources for schools, which he believes are already underfunded, and a teen director expressed concerns about taxes being raised to pay for student transportation.

It is relevant to note that M7s are a minimal portion of the BPS budget. In FY2018, the transportation budget (\$105,784,920) made up 10% of Boston Public Schools’ total budget

²⁰ Boston City Council Hearing, “Free M7 MBTA Passes,” November 9, 2016

²¹ 9,700 x \$29 x 10 months

(\$1,060,932,783)²². M7s cost \$5,556,400²³, making up 5.3% of the transportation budget and 0.5% of the total BPS budget (the majority of the transportation budget goes toward yellow buses). **An additional \$3 million to fund M7 for all students living in and attending school in Boston would be a 2.8% increase to the transportation budget and 0.3% increase to the overall budget, based on 2017-2018 numbers.**

The current walkzone policy, based on geography, does not serve all students in need of a free transit pass. If it is not feasible to fund M7s for all students living and attending school in Boston, the City needs to consider a new policy that more equitably provides students with the ability to get around (e.g., income eligibility). In Go Boston 2030, the city recognized that “income inequality in Boston is significant and will continue to grow if not addressed... finding ways to reduce the transportation cost burden for families living in poverty will be needed.”²⁴

Funding M7s for all students living in and attending schools in Boston during the summer would approximately cost an additional \$1.7 million²⁵. That is less than 1.6% increase to the transportation budget and less than 0.2% increase to the total budget, based on 2017-2018 numbers. One student suggested an M7 application process for students to demonstrate need (e.g., for work or a summer program). This could be a mechanism to keep purchasing costs lower, however, the effort may be counteracted by the expenses of extra administrative steps. Additionally, it does not benefit our youth who cannot afford to get to a job interview or who do not have a summer activity lined up and could probably benefit the most from having a transit pass during the summer.

The total cost to provide M7s for all students living in and attending school in Boston, year-round, would be approximately \$4.7 million²⁶. That is a minor portion of the budget at 4.3% increase to the BPS transportation budget and a 0.4% increase to the overall BPS budget, based on 2017-2018 numbers. Regardless of the small portion of the BPS budget, the MBTA should provide a larger bulk discount for the M7s for BPS (more than the \$1 discount per month per student). Considering the MBTA has a goal to “provide increased access to low-income, minority, and other disadvantaged groups,”²⁷ they should work with the district in ensuring that all students have equitable access to its services. Additionally, it would be beneficial for BPS (and MBTA users at large) for the MBTA to implement fare capping. If BPS only pays the amount that is used on the M7s rather than for the full monthly pass, then there may be savings from students who do not take full advantage of the pass benefits.

²² BPS Communications Office. *BPS at a Glance 2017-2018*. BPS, November 2017, <https://www.bostonpublicschools.org/cms/lib/MA01906464/Centricity/Domain/187/BPS%20at%20a%20Glance%202017-2018.pdf>

²³ 19,160 students x \$29/month x 10 months

²⁴ Boston Transportation Department. *Go Boston 2030: Imagining Our Transportation Future: Vision and Action Plan*. Boston: March 2017. Retrieved from <http://goboston2030.org/en/>

²⁵ (19,160 + 9,700) x \$29/month x 2 months = \$1,673,880

²⁶ \$3,000,000 + \$1,673,880 = \$4,673,880

²⁷ Block-Schachter, David et al. *AFC 2.0: Systems Integrator Contract*. MBTA, 20 November 2017, <https://cdn.mbta.com/sites/default/files/fmcb-meeting-docs/2017/november/2017-11-20-fmcb-afc2.pdf>

Table 3. Estimated M7 Costs

Description	Estimated Cost	Percent of BPS Transportation Budget	Percent of Total BPS Budget
Students living in and attending school in Boston inside of walkzone, school-year	\$3 million	2.8%	0.3%
All students living in and attending school in Boston, summer	\$1.7 million	1.6%	0.2%
All students living in and attending school in Boston, year-round	\$4.7 million	4.3%	0.4%

M7 Replacement Costs

Students in 8 out of 23 groups (34.8%) talked about forgetting their M7s and students in 6 groups (26.0%) talked about losing their M7s. This leaves them in the position of having to pay full fare—for up to 3 weeks until the new card comes in if their card was lost. This caused some students to skip school. One teen director mentioned a student that missed 3 days of school on separate occasions because the student forgot his M7 at the center and his mom couldn't afford the transit fare.

Otherwise, some students ask MBTA employees to get on for free. Again, the results are inconsistent. One student talked about luckily having the same bus driver every day who knew she lost her card and would let her on, whereas another student mentioned getting kicked off the bus and having to walk 45 minutes to get home. Many students were frustrated at how they were not able to simply show student ID or some type of school document, or provide a school email address in order to get onboard. Students suggested that MBTA personnel let students on for free, keep “emergency M7s” to use for when a student forgets or loses their M7, or let students on with a smaller cash amount—whatever they can afford.

Additional Layers of M7 Inequity

While some M7 replacement cards for lost cards were free for students, some reported replacement charges for lost cards. Charges were inconsistent, ranging from \$5 to \$65. Additionally, some schools charged on an escalating scale each time. This creates yet another layer of inequity, this time among students who have an M7, as students pay different rates for the same product, just depending on the school they attend.

Several students also told stories of malfunctions with their M7s, such as the card not working or not being able to use it after a certain hour. Waiting for a new M7 card to come in means having to pay full fare for transit. One student also had to pay to replace her card, even though she hadn't lost it. The main issue is not in the technology issues, but in that students have accumulated expenses that they are responsible for, even though they are not at fault for the malfunctioning cards.

All schools should be required to remove their charges for replacement M7s and BPS should work to ensure that all schools comply with this rule. Replacements do carry an administrative expense for BPS and MBTA, so students could be given more incentive for not losing their M7s. One student said her school combined her school ID, library card, and transit pass into one card, which has been really convenient for her.

Inconsistent Pricing Across Boston

A few people questioned why bus, train and commuter rail fares aren't the same. The comments about the inconsistent prices across different public transit modes ultimately reveals the inequities that people from different Boston neighborhoods face. Some neighborhoods have more than one transit option, but taking the most efficient route may be inaccessible due to price. The higher cost of the subway or commuter rail compared to the bus is preventing youth from utilizing transportation that would make their lives easier and time more productive. The MBTA acknowledges that there are significant gaps in bus service.²⁸ Discussions with youth demonstrated how inefficient, unreliable and infrequent bus service can be (see Unreliable Public Transit Service section). Bus routes can also be indirect or circuitous between young people's start and end points. For example, one youth compared a 60-minute bus ride with 20-minute commuter rail ride to school. Taking the commuter rail saves her 80 minutes a day. Accordingly, some teens requested more consistent and accessible pricing across modes.

Herding Kids

The teen director at the Hyde Park Community Center explained how the Orange line is fine for his group generally, except for when they have to be somewhere in the morning shortly after youth arrive and it would be much more convenient to be able to take the commuter rail. The summer passes he had from the City did not allow them to board for free onto the commuter rail though. Having a large group of students to track and herd is already a tough job. His stress could be reduced by allowing youth to board at the most convenient stop when they are in a rush.



Photo: Das48

²⁸ *Better Bus Project*. MBTA, 13 September 2018, <https://www.mbta.com/projects/better-bus-project>

Transportation Challenges

Public Transit

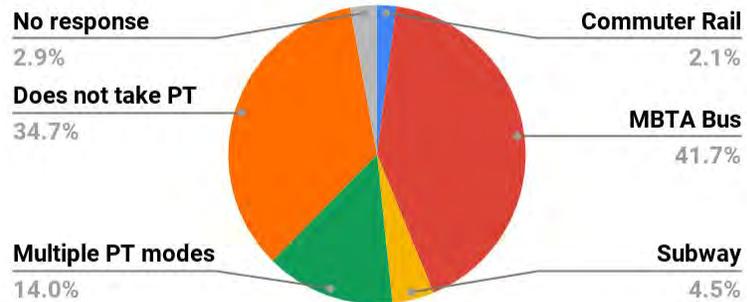
Boston youth, and especially teenaged students, are particularly dependent on public transit. Young people travel all over and outside the city in order to offset historic and persistent racial segregation, so that they may have opportunities to attend higher quality schools and access jobs that may not be offered in their own neighborhoods. For students to truly take full advantage of opportunities throughout Boston, a highly dependable public transit system is vital.

Dependence on Public Transit

Students in all groups brought up challenges with public transit. Out of 242 survey respondents who reported living in Boston, nearly two-thirds (62.4%) of teens used public transit traveling to school, and nearly three-quarters (71.1%) to get home.

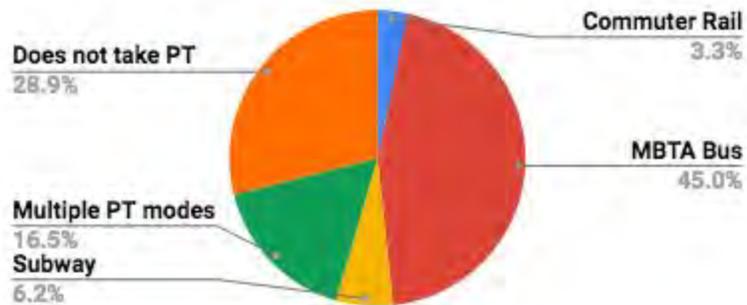
USE OF PUBLIC TRANSIT (PT) TRAVELING TO SCHOOL *Youth living in Boston*

n = 242



USE OF PUBLIC TRANSIT (PT) TRAVELING HOME *Youth living in Boston*

n = 242



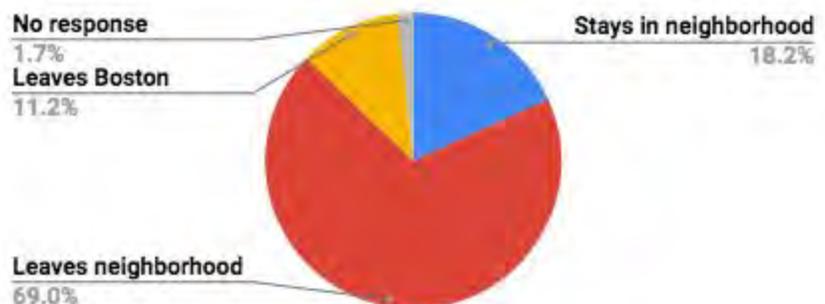
The only way I can get to school is public transportation.

— Teen from BAHEC Youth Cycling Program —

Additionally, nearly 70% of youth need to leave their neighborhoods in order to get to school.

TRAVELING TO SCHOOL *Youth living in Boston*

n = 242



Moreover, over half of surveyed youth living in Boston reported using public transit to get to school-related activities, summer programs, work, friends’ and family’s homes, and social outings. Over a third used public transit to get to athletic activities and afterschool programs.

Table 4. Percent of youth living in Boston using public transit

Activity or Place	Percent of youth (number of youth) n = 242
School-related activities	52.9% (128)
Athletic activities	38.4% (93)
Afterschool program	36.4% (88)
Summer program	54.5% (132)
Work	58.7% (142)
Friends’ or family’s home	54.5% (132)
Social outing	62.4% (151)

Some youth relayed that their parents, especially single parents, cannot drive them places because parents have errands to run or other siblings to attend to, and are just generally busy and have lives of their own. A few people also mentioned how their family did not have a car, previously did not have a car, or only recently got a car.

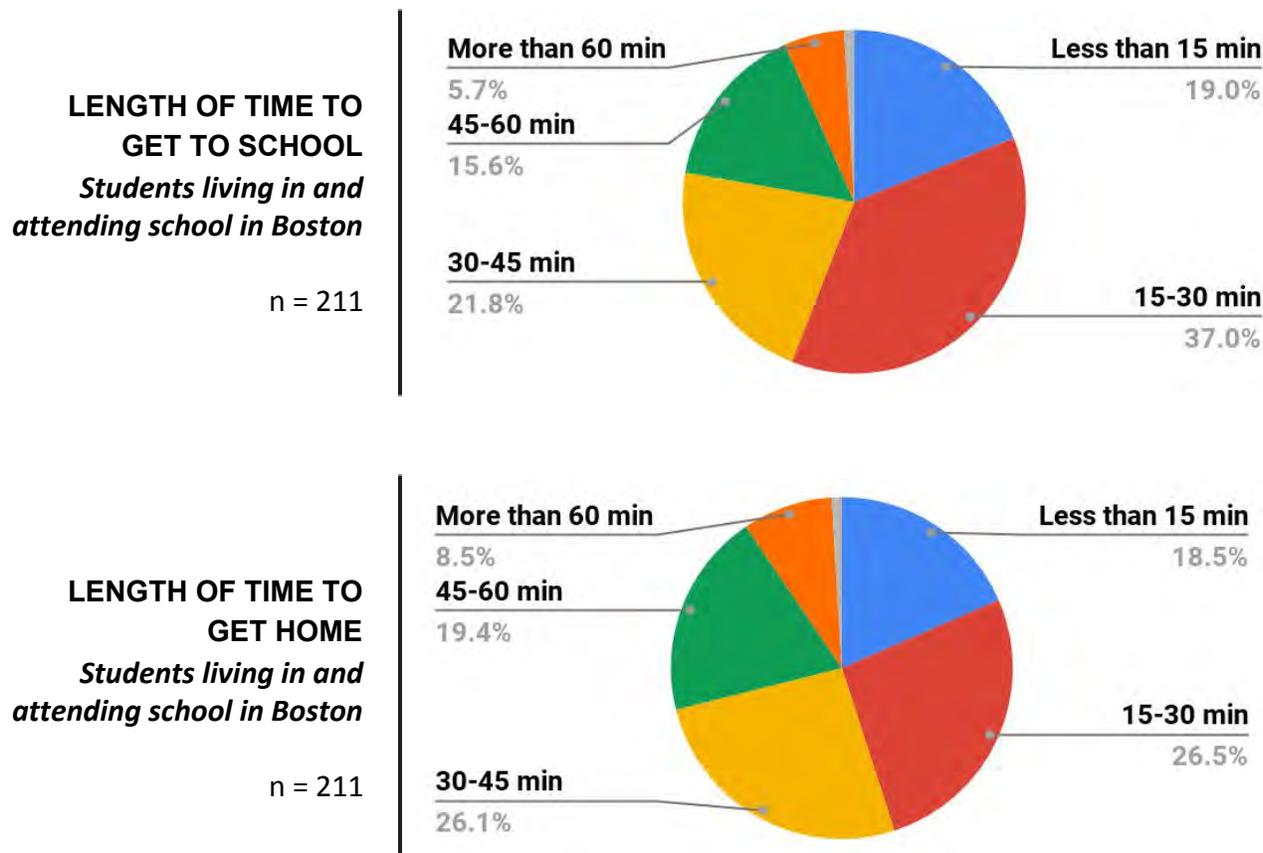
Common though the public transit challenges discussed below may be, there is urgency to the issues because of young Bostonians’ heavy reliance on public transit and how these issues are shaping their lives and opportunities.



Photo: Massachusetts Office of Travel & Tourism

Unreliable Public Transit Service

Youth in 19 out of 23 groups (82.6%) complained of inefficient trips, trips taking too long and unreliable MBTA service, indicating overall dissatisfaction of public transit service. Youth in 7 out of 23 groups (30.4%) said inclement and winter weather make service even more unreliable. Over 20% of students living in and attending school in Boston said their trips getting to school take more than 45 minutes. Generally, it took students longer to get home than to school too, as even more students reported trips taking 30 minutes or longer.



The youth noted overcrowding (leaving youth behind at stations), indirect routes, too few bus stops (in Dorchester), lack of options (in East Boston and Hyde Park), too many transfers (from East Boston and Hyde Park), and traffic congestion for buses as contributors to the problem.

East Boston youth found having to transfer 3 times to get from the Blue Line to Red Line “annoying.” Two groups really desired a Blue-Red line connection, suggesting connections between Bowdoin and Charles and between Government Center and Park Street. While transit advocates implore the state to consider more innovative and cost effective alternatives to boring an expensive pedestrian tunnel for a Blue-Red connector²⁹, an interim solution could be to allow free transfers between the two sets of Blue-Red stations that the youth requested. This

²⁹ Aloisi, James. “Blue Line needs urgent attention.” CommonWealth, 9 September 2018, <https://commonwealthmagazine.org/opinion/blue-line-needs-urgent-attention/>

wouldn't improve travel time, but may ease anxiety because some said that they would rather walk than have to transfer so many times.

Regarding traffic congestion, some youth said that sometimes the bus is just as bad as being in a car. For youth in East Boston, even though the SL3 is a new offering, they felt that the silver line is the least reliable service—a sentiment that came up for other non-East Boston youth as well. Solutions the youth put forward were dedicated bus lanes and using “HOV lanes.” There aren't any HOV lanes on city streets, but the idea is similar to dedicated bus lanes in that they both prioritize people who are sharing vehicles. There was also a suggestion to fix the traffic signals around Grove Hall to let buses through faster, which suggests that youth may be in favor of transit signal priority for buses.



Photo: STREETFILMS // Cut from A Street is a Terrible Thing to Waste: Boston's Newest Bus Lane video // June 7, 2018

A salient factor in service issues was delay frequency and length (e.g., 40 minutes to an hour). The red and orange lines were cited multiple times as having many delays. Though the red line was brought up as having delays more times than the orange line, teens in some groups expressed that they felt there is “disinvestment in the orange line.” Young people also criticized how long it takes for doors to close and to leave the station, even after everyone is already on.

You have to be somewhere in the morning. People are running for their life to catch the train when it's “boarding” but then it doesn't leave.

— Teen in BAHEC Youth Cycling Program —

Bus routes that youth mentioned as being frequently late (non-exhaustive)
19, 22, 28, 40, 45

The youth also brought up issues with construction and shuttle buses on the weekends. This necessarily increases travel time but can introduce additional inefficiency. One teen from the Hyde Park Community Center mentioned that sometimes the shuttle buses will “wait too long”

at the stops for more passengers to fill in rather than continuing on the route—causing them to be even more late. Youth requested shuttle buses to move on swiftly after each stop. There was also dissatisfaction reported with how alternative bus routes only get people partway when a bus route is temporarily out of service.

Overall, youth wanted more drivers and buses to be added to routes. Students asked for both predictability from the MBTA and flexibility for themselves. A teen from ACDC mentioned how punctual the trains are in Japan, and said he wanted to be able to leave his house and get to school every day at the same time. On the other hand, a teen from Artists for Humanity explained how if they missed a train, more trains and buses would mean they might still make it to school on time. A few students requested shuttle buses for just students. One person distinguished “shuttle” buses from yellow buses, though it wasn’t clear if there would essentially be any difference. This could be a significant additional cost for BPS, since the district made the decision in 2014 to put all 7th and 8th graders onto the MBTA and take them off of yellow buses, in order to reduce about \$8 million in expenses³⁰. At least, BPS should explore whether there are journeys from particular neighborhoods to schools that result in more tardy students than the average due to transportation delays, and work with students to come up with a transportation solution that would help them get to school on time more often. Additionally, more investment in the MBTA, and increased pressure for it to provide more frequent service consistently through all Boston neighborhoods would also help.

Moreover, bus drivers passing bus stops is a persistent issue. Youth in 6 out of 23 groups (26.1%) signaled their annoyance, with teens in several groups calling the operators “rude.” Other terms used to describe them include “careless” and “savage.” Interestingly, the youth said the buses pass them even when partially full or near empty. It happened a lot in the mornings, as well as at non-major bus stops. They said the buses do not always stop if there is no one getting off the bus, and that it occurred even with many passengers at the bus stop.

***The bus won’t even be full and they’ll skip me like I don’t got
nowhere to go.***

— Teen from BAHEC Youth Cycling Program —

Getting passed by a bus driver has resulted in having to walk a mile to the station, being rained on in heavy downpour, getting splashed by buses, and waiting a long time for the next bus. This issue can also be an embarrassing situation, as one person noted, “it makes me look weird” to have to yell at a bus driver to get them to stop when it looks like they’re passing.

³⁰ *Goodbye Yellow School Bus: BPS 7th And 8th Graders To Ride T Next Fall*. WBUR, 23 June 2014, <http://www.wbur.org/radioboston/2014/06/23/boston-school-bus>

Locations where bus drivers passed youth (non-exhaustive)
Bus: 19, 22, 32, 45, 66, SL4, SL5
Station: Dudley Square, Forest Hills
Train: Green Line B
Street: Malcom X Boulevard, near the O’Bryant school

Teens were also upset at unexplained and unannounced delays, detours, or changes in the schedule. With delays, youth talked about how it was stressful not to know when they would move from a station. People also took issue with bus drivers who appeared to take extended breaks. One teen commented that he didn’t know that drivers even had breaks. With detours, youth are unsure what stops they’re going to and where to get off when no announcements are made about the route. Lastly, with changes in train schedules, like with Green line E trains stopping at Brigham Circle instead of Heath Street, youth wanted to know in advance so they could choose to take the bus from the beginning instead.

Generally, better communication from the MBTA explaining driver behaviors and decisions, as well as changes in routes and schedules, could allay rider distress—even if nothing changes an inevitable delay. Of course bus drivers deserve breaks and there are reasons for passing stops, detours, or changes in schedule. This is an issue of managing expectations. Communicating with riders about when to expect a driver break or when they’ll be moving, as well as why something is happening allows people to understand and either accept the situation or make other plans.

Another pervasive communication issue was the inaccurate estimated time of arrival (ETA) information on phone applications and the MBTA boards, which have led teens to miss or nearly miss service. The issue was wide-ranging: buses and trains coming both earlier and later than stated, constant extension of an ETA, lack of any ETA, correct ETA but out-of-service bus, and mismatched ETA between phone application and MBTA board. Applications that youth mentioned using to find an ETA include Citymapper, MBTA Tracker, NextBus, ProximiT, and Transit. Youth requested accurate ETAs (so they could decide on the best route or mode to use), removing the ETA of buses that are too crowded to get on, and being able to see where the bus is rather than just the number of minutes it’s away (the NextBus app does this, but not all apps do and stations do not display this information).

Youth in 13 out of 23 groups (56.5%) also brought up that bus service is not frequent enough, and that the wait times between buses could be an hour long. They said this is especially a problem 1) on the weekends and especially on Sundays, 2) after the morning rush hour, 3) after school, and 4) in the winter. The weekend is particularly an issue, as teens mentioned particular buses and commuter rail lines not running at all, and wait times of up to 3 hours.

Once an hour is not enough. If you miss a bus, you have to wait a whole hour.

— Teen from Artists for Humanity —

Infrequent service / Long headways (non-exhaustive)
Bus routes: 8, 14, 16, 19, 23, 24, 29, 30, 33, 34E, 42, 45, 86
Neighborhoods: Brighton, Hyde Park

What is considered a reasonable headway differed from teen to teen, and was relative based on their current level of service and on weather. Youth who usually have to wait 30 to 45 minutes for the bus preferred 10-minute headways, whereas youth who usually have to wait an hour for the bus said 30-minute headways would be reasonable. Another teen explained that waiting 20 minutes can be hard when it's really hot or cold out. Increasing frequency is extremely resource-intensive and there's no agreed upon perfect headway even among transit experts. Increasing frequency to be better than the current situation, at least for the routes the youth brought up, would at least mitigate the issue.

The lack of leniency from MBTA operators exacerbates the issue of infrequent service. Several youth groups objected to operators—largely bus drivers, but also train conductors—closing doors on them when youth ran to catch the bus and even in their faces.

[Bus drivers] see you outside the door, but drive off anyway.

— Teen from Sociedad Latina —

Teens also took issue with drivers not letting them on even when the drivers have only pulled out slightly and are at a location where they could safely let people on. While not a solution to infrequent service, adjusting MBTA policy to allow passengers onboard when the bus is already stopped and it is safe could somewhat temper the issue.

Adding to these scheduling issues are inconvenient hours—specifically the lack of later service—reported by a few groups of youth. Some of the teens were unhappy with the hours in which services generally shut down for the night. However, one teen from the Hyde Park Community Center mentioned how some services end much earlier than the rest of the system. This youth often has to walk a mile home since the 33 bus service ends around 7pm—what he called “a major inconvenience.” The MBTA is currently expanding their bus service hours in a pilot project this Fall, however, the current list of changes does not include the 33 bus route.³¹

³¹ *Late Night Bus Routes and Schedules*. 20 August 2018. MBTA, <https://www.mbta.com/projects/late-night-bus-service/update/late-night-bus-routes-and-schedules>

Consequences of Unreliable Service

Long commute times are causing Boston Youth to sacrifice time that could be better spent elsewhere. When youth were asked how they would spend their time if they had a shorter commute, they mentioned activities related to personal care and responsibilities, social connections and personal diversions (see Table 5). These activities are either directly correlated with success in school or would help youth recharge in order to better concentrate in school.

Table 5. What would you do if your commute didn't take so long?

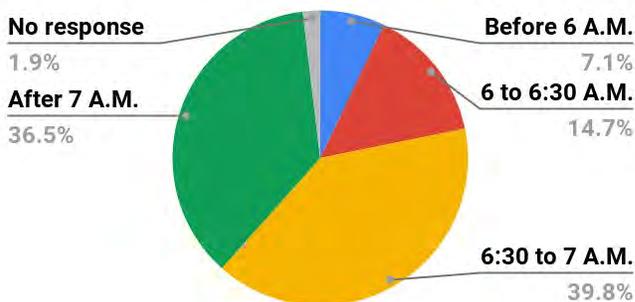
Personal Care and Responsibilities	Social Connections	Personal Diversions
Eat breakfast Homework Sleep Work	Talk with friends Visit friends and family	Listen to music Play video games Read Watch TV

17% of students in the focus groups skip breakfast because their commute takes so long.

“Sleep” was the most popular response, and one student from the Roslindale Community Center commented that she didn’t think any student should have to wake up at 4:30 to 5 A.M. in order to get to school, which some of her classmates did. One student from Mattapan Food and Fitness Coalition talked about having to wake up really early due to distance of his school from home and alignment of bus schedules. Nearly all students in his group felt that school start times were too early. Students also felt it was unfair to have to wake up so early after being up late to complete homework.

TIME STUDENTS LEAVE FOR SCHOOL
Students living in and attending school in Boston

n = 211



This lines up with recent similar findings from the City of Boston’s Economic Mobility Lab where 50% of interviewees said that they would spend time saved from more reliable transit with family and 60% of interviewees said they would spend the time on personal health.³²

³² Gilman, Scott. “Transit Improvements And Economic Mobility: Fairmount Line And Blue Hill Ave Corridor.” Economic Mobility Lab, August 2018, <https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/12TAKwsS1bs8gkrYGfS0BP-HWozhudaWDhvQZW7B2two/edit>

Domino Effect

By far, the most common consequence of poor MBTA service was tardiness to school. Students planned to leave early, or even chose to take a less convenient but more reliable route—yet, still end up being late at times. The students reported serious implications on student academics with frequent delays, as students miss classes, are not allowed to turn in homework until the next day (and then it is counted as late), and are counted as tardy—which puts them at risk of having to do summer school or not graduating with a certain number of tardies. There are other time and financial implications too. When late, some students have to prove to their school that it was due to transit issues by showing video evidence or having parents to call in. Some students end up having to take an Uber or Lyft to school to get there more quickly. Students often receive detention, even if it is because of unreliable transit service. Students said there is a compounding effect when service is delayed. Being late means detention. Detention means being late for work, job interviews, after school activities, health appointments or arriving home to take care of younger siblings which causes parents to be late to work.

A Look Outside Boston

Two youth who frequently commuted into Boston from other places had very serious concerns about the frequency of public transit service. One teen is forced to rely on rides or take an Uber or Lyft home because the bus lines in Saugus (426, 430) only run between 11 A.M. and 6 P.M. Another teen said that infrequent and late buses in Randolph “can make people lose their jobs.”

34E is the only bus that goes to Legacy place. It should run more frequently. People have to get to work.

— Teen from Roslindale Community Center —

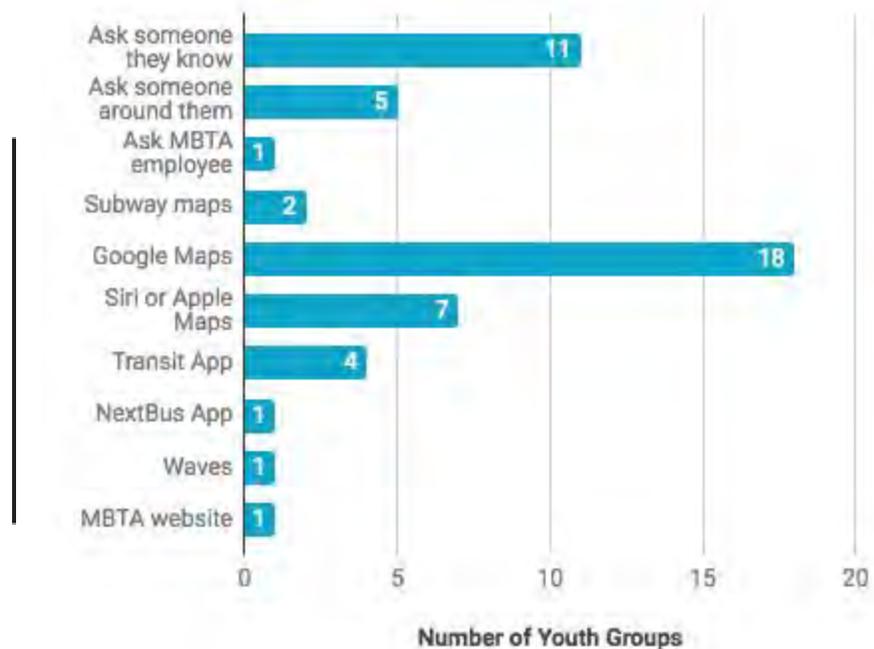
Infrequent service has even incited arguments with parents. Two teens had arguments with their mothers over continuing to participate in athletics because it takes them so long to get home at night that their moms worry about their safety. In summary, MBTA service issues have critical impacts on Bostonians. They have greatly affected youth health, livelihood, and autonomy; the livelihood of parents; and parent-child relationships. These results support recent findings from the Economic Mobility Lab about the “hidden costs” of unreliable transit as it affects work arrival times and childcare pickups for adults.³³ It is easy to understand why one youth from IBA noted how difficult it is to be independent when the MBTA is not reliable.

³³ Gilman, Scott. “Transit Improvements And Economic Mobility: Fairmount Line And Blue Hill Ave Corridor.” Economic Mobility Lab, August 2018, <https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/12TAKwsS1bs8gkrYGfS0BP-HWozhudaWDhvQZW7B2two/edit>

Figuring out how to get somewhere

The MBTA was interested in knowing how youth figured out how to get somewhere that they didn't know how to get to, partly to discern whether young people were aware that they might have multiple options. Youth answers indicated that a number of them are likely quite savvy with mapping and other apps although they also relied on asking other people. The top three applications that youth named (Google Maps, Siri / Apple Maps, and Transit) provide multiple transportation mode options too. Google Maps was brought up by the largest number of groups, by far.

FIGURING OUT HOW TO GET SOMEWHERE



Safety and the MBTA

Youth in 18 of the 23 groups (78.3%) reported feeling unsafe at times on public transit. Some things that made young people feel uncomfortable include people asking them for money, religious solicitations, witnessing verbal and physical confrontations, and seeing people that “just don’t like you” because of race or ethnicity. However, the most commonly reported thing that made them feel unsafe were coming across and/or being approached by people under the influence of drugs and alcohol (universally described as “crackheads” and “drunkies” by the youth). They were also uncomfortable around people that appeared mentally unstable (including people who were “screaming” or seemed suicidal), and those that appeared “creepy,” “scary,” or “sketchy” for one reason or another—especially when approached or asked for their names.

Youth strategies for avoiding people they felt unsafe around

- ▲ Ignoring them
- ▲ Wearing a mean face
- ▲ Sitting close to the bus driver
- ▲ Walking away faster
- ▲ Switching train cars
- ▲ Getting off the bus
- ▲ Waiting in a store for the next bus
- ▲ Calling a parent for a ride

A few students expressed helplessness at times when they are alone in a train car and the train is moving because they felt that no one is able to help them and they cannot get off. Students also expressed aggravation at bus drivers that let intoxicated people onto the bus. While the MBTA should not turn away anyone who simply looks “sketchy,” customers should be made to feel comfortable seeking help when they need it.

Young people usually said they felt unsafe “sometimes” or “at night.” Youth mentioned being out late for a range of reasons, including work, sports practice, and social. However, seeing people that made them feel unsafe was somewhat of a pervasive issue since some teens said these people were at some MBTA locations both day and night, as well as both at the stations and on-board buses and trains. Particular areas felt unsafe all the time.

Places that Youth Felt Unsafe (non-exhaustive)
Bus routes: 16, 28
Stations / Areas: Ashmont, Downtown Crossing, Dudley, Forest Hills, JFK, Mattapan

Dudley, Forest Hills, and Mattapan were mentioned several times by multiple groups of youth. Youth explained how they have to always be on guard at particular places, fearing getting jumped or robbed, and feared gang-related activity in addition to the aforementioned unease of being around people who are under the influence. While some areas felt unsafe to some youth all the time, other youth said there are times when they avoid particular places, such as Forest Hills at particular school release times. A few youth said they would take a longer route to avoid certain areas, or just stay at home. The safety issues youth face can severely affect their behavior and prevent them from getting where they need to go. This has the potential to affect their education, extracurricular activities, social activities, and jobs.

Story of Female Youth on Public Transit

An additional component of safety for female youth involved men and bus drivers, as reported by several females across a few different groups. Some said they are uncomfortably stared at by men on public transit. A few were harassed by men through being followed home or asked sexual questions. One student had to change her route home from school. Moreover, three groups of female youth disclosed that bus drivers catcalled or hit on them. In these cases, they were not able to utilize any of the normal avoidance strategies youth mentioned. Instead, the female teens smiled and acted nice so they could get onto the bus without any issue. It is unfortunate that these females could not depend on MBTA personnel to act professionally, leaving them in a position to choose acquiescence at the risk of having their schedules delayed or plans ruined, and/or their safety compromised.

At the same time, public transit helped youth feel safer in areas where they would otherwise have to walk. Youth across several groups reported feeling unsafe on the street, near school, around home and on their commutes. A few students mentioned shootings and homicides near their homes, which made them wary of leaving their homes or being out at night. One student said this type of incident “ruined” the safe feeling he used to feel outside at night. Transit helped mitigate some of these issues, especially for those getting home after athletic practices.



Photo: King TransitMA

One young football player from Mattapan Food and Fitness Coalition mentioned feeling “lucky” when the 32 bus came at a moment when he had walk near River St and Cummins Hwy, explaining that he would not feel safe with “those people who hang outside,” especially in the winter when it is dark early.

If you can take the bus, I'd rather take the bus, and you don't have to worry about [safety].

— Teen from Bikes Not bombs —

However, as previously explained, transit can be unreliable and infrequent, which translates into unsafe situations or hard decisions regarding safety.

Tough Decisions

One student from Roslindale who attends school in the South End regularly gets home late from basketball practice. Even so, she would rather wait a whole hour for the next bus at Forest Hills than walk 10 minutes in the dark. That is a huge time differential. It is not an easy decision to make and there are likely students who would decide otherwise. Improved service could make a huge difference in teen lives, saving them from having to make difficult choices between personal safety and extreme inconvenience.

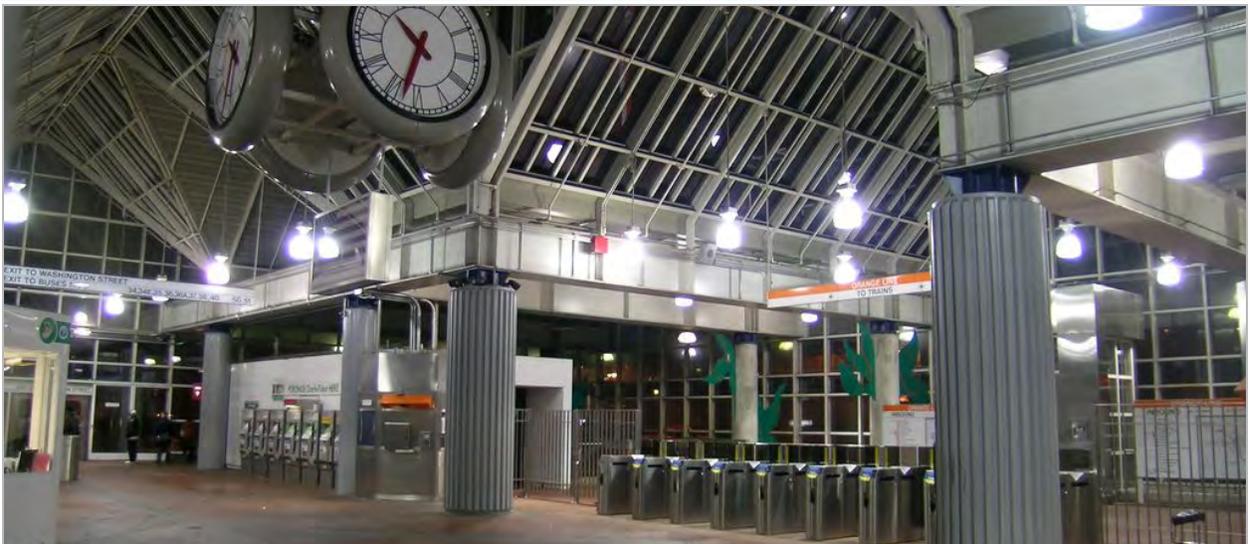


Photo: John Stephen Dwyer

Policing

Biased policing and over policing of people of color, and particularly Black men, are continuing national issues. Law enforcement practices across the country have been steadily denounced as unjust, unwarranted, overly violent and lethal. The Boston Police Department (BPD) instituted anti-bias policies in response to a report confirming that the BPD's street encounters have involved racially disparate treatment of people of color and that it had disproportionately observed, interrogated, or searched Black residents from 2007 through 2010³⁴. MBTA employees are required to attend Anti-Discrimination Harassment and Retaliation training and a diversity training workshop. However, the trainings were called out as inadequate in 2016 when a Black teenager was removed from a train because an inspector had incorrectly assumed he was part of an African American group that was being removed from the train—due only to

³⁴ Allen, Evan. "Boston police to step up antibias measures." 4 July 2015. Boston Globe, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2015/07/03/boston-police-institute-new-antibias-policies-after-critical-report-policing-minority-communities/7PxecpL5o5qCWDEQ5x0HzL/story.html>

his race.³⁵ Therefore, it felt important to examine whether any police actions have been negatively affecting transportation for Boston youth.

For the most part, negative interactions with police were not reported as a major problem across the groups surveyed. Interestingly, most of the young people from the focus groups indicated a lack of presence from the MBTA Police, as well as MBTA personnel that could help them. Youth in multiple groups expressed surprised when I mentioned “MBTA Police”—they didn’t know there was such a thing. Youth wondered what MBTA police were for, what the difference between MBTA police and “regular” police were, and whether MBTA police had guns. There were also several questions about what the role of the T ambassadors are. A number of youth were under the impression that they don’t do anything. An MBTA outreach campaign explaining the role of MBTA police and T ambassadors could clear up some of the confusion around these roles.

Young people who were aware of MBTA police said that they or MBTA personnel are usually focused on the wrong thing, like targeting people who can’t pay the fare, and being annoyingly insistent on questioning them and checking their cards even when youth have paid the fare (but the machine didn’t register the tap properly). Youth felt that MBTA police should be focused on people doing drugs, gang members and “sketchy” people, people carrying weapons—especially openly—and people with their pants off. Perhaps the MBTA could incorporate safety measures into their customer surveys, and ask for feedback on priorities for policing. If their survey members do not contain a sufficient youth population, special efforts should be made to contact youth regarding these issues.

When asked, many youth said they did not feel able or comfortable asking for help from MBTA police or personnel. There seemed to be an agreed upon sentiment across multiple groups that MBTA police don’t do anything and that MBTA personnel just sit in their booth, look unhappy to help with issues, or are too busy operating the train or bus. Several youth actually had stories about MBTA personnel—bus drivers—who ignored situations when youth felt they should have intervened or helped. Some clearly defined help mechanisms and protocol could make youth feel safer and more willing to ask for help if they need it.

Youth in 7 groups commented that they wanted more security and cameras. Teens suggested friendlier and more active police officers, undercover officers, officers that stand on the platforms or in the train cars, and officers that pay more attention to what is happening at the stations—especially regarding people under the influence. Teens generally didn’t want people they considered “crackheads” and “drunkies” on buses and trains, however, one group was conflicted about this since “those people also need to get places.” The discussions around security really highlights the unsafe feelings students sometimes had on public transit. Specific things teens suggested were more security cameras on the orange line (which is supposed to come with the new trains), and regular police patrol on Blue Hill Ave and at Dudley.

³⁵ Pattison-Gordon, Jule. “Calls for better MBTA bias training after inspector removes black teen.” The Bay State Banner, 1 September 2016, <https://www.baystatebanner.com/2016/09/01/calls-for-better-mbta-bias-training-after-inspector-removes-black-teen/>

Some teens did acknowledge though, that more security brings its own problems with potentially biased enforcement, and not everyone agreed with more security measures due to stories of police brutality. Obviously, more discussion would be needed with youth and the community overall to figure out the right balance of security without over policing.

Why would you want to be around cops when they make you feel unsafe now?

—Teen from Mildred Ave Community Center —

At the same time, there were a few stories from teens about biased and unwarranted policing too. One youth found police officers to be particularly aggressive in their questioning toward youth from the John D. O'Bryant School after a suicide on the Orange line, whereas the officers were much nicer to families on the platform—even though, the youth explained, it was pretty clear that the students from the O'Bryant School hadn't been involved. A few people mentioned stories where they were told they have to move or leave a station when they are just hanging out with friends and talking or laughing loudly. One youth illuminated how this is an issue since they are waiting for their bus, but are being asked to leave the bus stop area—yet their bus may not arrive for half an hour.

Locations where youth were asked to leave (non-exhaustive)

Station: Ashmont, Forest Hills

Markedly, one youth director, who works with teens ages 15-17, imparted that she knows teens that have been stopped by police more than 10 times. She explained that this issue is a huge burden for parents with kids of color and that it is extremely worrisome to send their children out on public transit.

MBTA police [should not] prejudg[e] people for the way they're dressed, or by race, or group... MBTA police need to provide guidance, not discipline... They should talk to you like a person, not like they're authority. They shouldn't manhandle you. They need to learn how to deal with teenagers, have some empathy toward teen behavior. Youth are still children. They need sensitivity training, and training to learn how to de-escalate problems. MBTA police shouldn't use their platform for harassment and abuse.

—IBA teen director and IBA youth—

A teen illuminated how a situation where a youth is stopped by the police could easily become humiliating—even when the youth is not at fault. She talked about how her parents' friends are always spotting her on the subway and telling her parents about it. She doesn't want one of her mom's friends, for instance, telling her mom that she got yelled at by the MBTA police. She

explained how interactions with the MBTA police can be embarrassing for the entire family. Other youth in the group agreed, stating that they are a representation of their family.

Furthermore, the majority of youth in one Mattapan group (5 out of 7) indicated that they had been stopped by police or security for no reason. Some youth had strategies for dealing with this, such as asking why they were stopped and reporting when this happens. It's clear that even though the majority of youth were asking for more surveillance, that surveillance must be appropriately targeted and police officers need to participate in regular anti-bias trainings.

System Navigation

Some youth groups brought up the issue of being confused by system navigation, and several students said they sometimes ended up on the opposite side they intended to be on. This was a problem for both younger and older teens. One frustrating aspect was being unable to tap their transit passes again to get on (the time limit on reentries with unlimited passes is 20 minutes)—and having to wait what they felt was an unreasonable amount of time to be able to tap back on again. One location where this was mentioned as a problem is Copley, where users have to exit and re-enter through a different entrance in order to switch sides.

Copley inbound



Photo: Pi.1415926535

Copley outbound

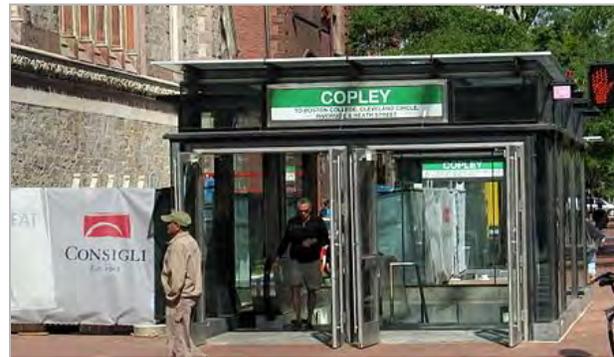


Photo: Pi.1415926535

There are other stations where people cannot switch sides without paying again (Kendall/MIT, Central, all of the Green line stops above ground). While this policy helps control passbacks between customers, it also delays customers making simple mistakes. There should be more warning signs at the stations where users cannot easily switch sides, and the MBTA should consider other policies and awareness strategies to help this issue.

Another navigation issue brought up was the confusion that occurs between Ashmont and Braintree trains (sometimes announcements are wrong). A youth suggested having different shades of red for the two lines. This may also be useful on the green line, however, the idea may not be possible if the trains are not always kept as the same line.

Regarding being able to navigate the system better, teens suggested clearer route information, including maps and transfer information on buses, and larger maps in stations.

Bikes on Public Transit

Young people in several groups brought up the convenience of being able to carry their bikes onto the bus or train. They found it beneficial for splitting up a long commute and having the option to hop onto the bus when caught in rainy weather. At the same time, multiple youth commented on the inconvenience of the hours that bikes were allowed on the trains³⁶, and how bikes are not allowed on the green lines at all.

[For] me to ride my bike to school... They should let you take your bike on the train. I'll need it when I get off... I can't ride everywhere. I need to be able to take my bike on the T.

— Teen from Zumix —

Additionally, public transit serves as a backup for youth who bike. When bikes aren't allowed on the train, youth are put in a hard situation. For instance, one youth told a story of a friend who biked all school year to save money. One day when it was raining hard, he brought his bike onto the train—but was told he had to take his bike out. So, he ended up having to bike in the rain, which multiple youth do not feel safe doing (see Barriers to Biking section).

Allowable hours for bikes on the trains vary depending on the train line, but they are generally the rush hours (7-10 A.M. and 4-7 P.M.)—which are largely the hours that youth would want to carry their bikes on the trains during the school year. Bikeshare memberships would allow youth to take the train and bike without having to carry bikes onto the trains, but bikeshare is limited to those age 16 and up, and youth expressed hesitation to using bikeshare (see “Bikeshare” section.)

Feedback on Automated Fare Collection 2.0

Automated Fare Collection (AFC) 2.0, the MBTA's new fare payment system, is aimed at making paying for transit easier and more convenient. With AFC 2.0, users will be able to tap and board at any door with a fare card, smartphone, or contactless credit card, among other several other benefits. However, users will no longer be able to pay on-board buses, Green line trains, and the Mattapan Trolley. Boston City Councilors and community advocates expressed concerns about the removal of cash payment onboard—and how it will affect transit-dependent populations that do not live near transit stations or stops with fare vending machines.³⁷ Thus, some questions regarding AFC 2.0 were included in the survey and focus group to gather preliminary data that the MBTA could follow up on with their own research.

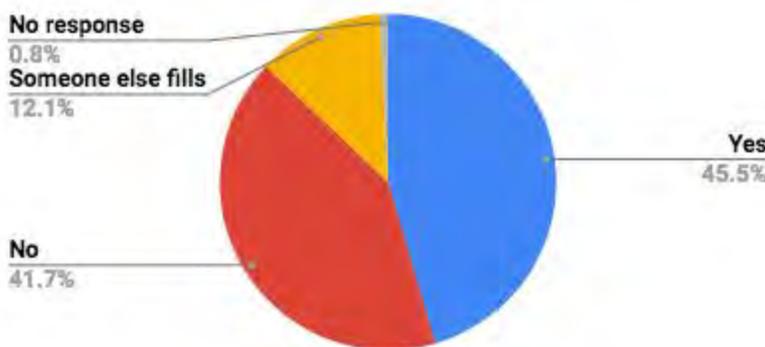
³⁶ Generally, not during rush hours .See: <https://www.mbta.com/bikes>

³⁷ Boston City Council Hearing, “Equitable access to public transportation with the cashless fare collection system,” June 22, 2018

Out of all survey respondents, 246 youth (93.2%) had not heard of AFC 2.0 (though this survey was conducted from July-August 2018). Nearly half of those respondents (45.5%) also reported that they refill their Charlie Cards with cash on their own.

FILL CHARLIE CARD WITH CASH

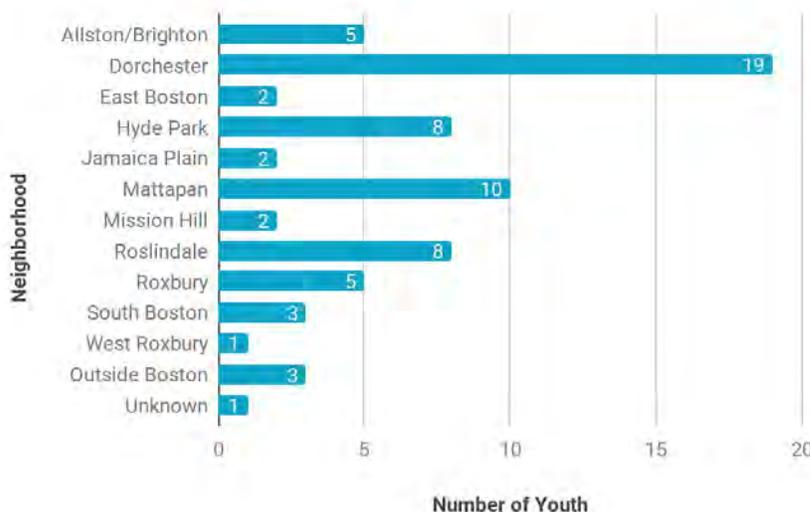
n = 264



Out of all respondents, the majority of youth (54.5%) said they refilled their Charlie Cards exclusively at fare vending machines, and several teens said they thought it was a good idea to take away onboard refilling. Still, some students admitted that they sometimes fill their card on the bus and that being able to pay on board can be useful. Some students also pay onboard when their M7 isn't working. More than a quarter of all survey respondents—69 youth (26.1%)—said they refill their Charlie Cards on-board the bus or train. These respondents were quite diverse—spanning 11 out of the 14 Boston neighborhoods where surveyed youth live.

NUMBER OF YOUTH BY NEIGHBORHOOD REFILLING TRANSIT CARDS ON-BOARD

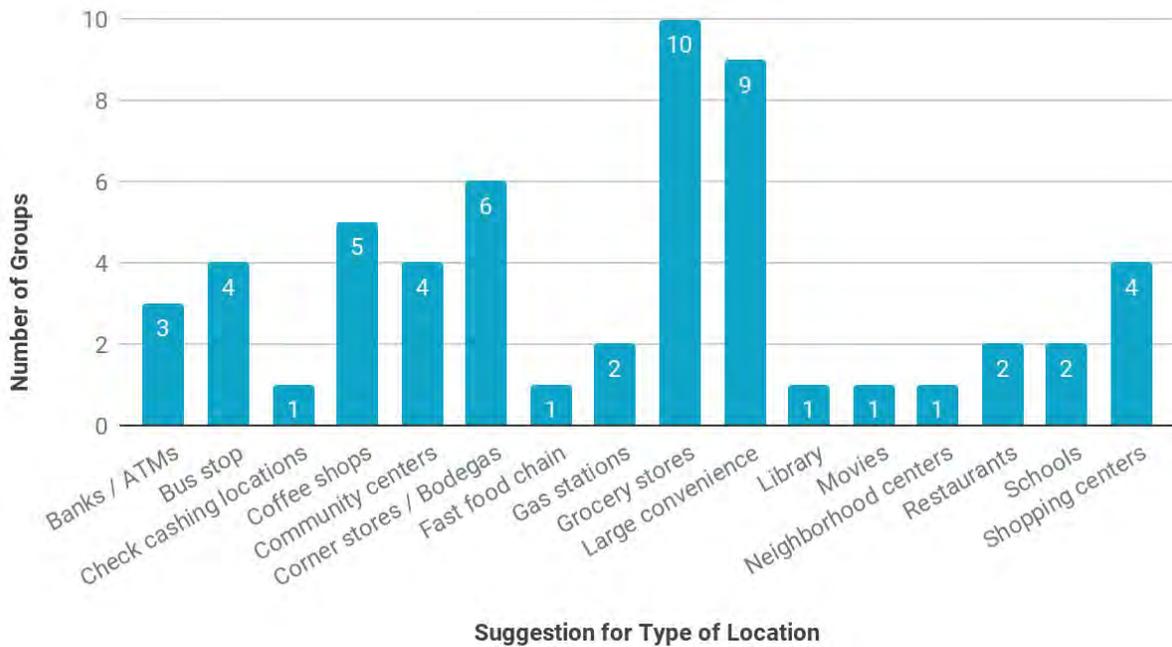
n = 69



Teens said it would be difficult to have to refill at a location different from boarding if they were running late and didn't have time to go somewhere else to refill their cards—they didn't want to miss the bus or train that was already there just because they realized they didn't have money on their card. Youth in four groups said they wanted to be able to refill their cards at bus stops, with suggestions for having them at larger bus stops or every 2-3 bus stops (though one person commented that some bus stops are really far apart). Having fare vending machines at as many bus stops and as close to bus stops as possible would reduce the impact of not being able to pay onboard.

Seventeen youth groups were asked to suggest types of locations where they would want to be able to refill their transit cards. They provided a large range of retail locations as well as civic spaces. The top types of locations were: grocery stores, large convenience stores, corner stores or bodegas, and coffee shops.

LOCATION SUGGESTIONS FOR TRANSIT CARD REFILL



Youth also gave examples of particular locations where they wanted to be able to refill their transit cards. The most popular ones were (number of groups in parentheses): CVS (8), Dunkin Donuts (5), 7-11 (4), Stop and Shop (4), and Walgreens (4). Other suggestions were: Tedeschi, Richdale Food Shops in East Boston, Starbucks, Burger King, TGI Friday’s, South Bay, CambridgeSide Galleria, South Shore Plaza, Assembly Row, Wrentham, Forever 21, Boys and Girls Clubs, Mattapan Library, Cleary Square, Morton Street, and Brighton Center.

Youth suggestions included many larger retailers. However, at the City Council hearing, Boston City Council noted that AFC 2.0 is an opportunity to empower locally-owned businesses, and community advocates would be eager to ensure there is balance in chosen businesses. One youth also expressed a concern that card refills at retail locations just wouldn’t work at all. He talked about how some places are a “retail desert” and was concerned that people in those areas would not end up with any card refill locations. The MBTA should ensure that all neighborhoods have easy access to card refill locations, regardless of how retail-dense they are.

Note that one group had suggested check cashing locations, but this is something that Allentza Michel from Fairmont Indigo Network advised against and said that they have been proven to

be detrimental to low-income residents³⁸. One person also broadly suggested locations where you typically travel with your family so they can help refill transit passes while everyone is out together. Having card refill locations in family spaces would probably be very useful for youth who depend on their parents to fill their cards for them.

Considering youth may have to take extra time to stop somewhere or possibly even go out of their way to fill up their cards, it's important to keep the fare machines in working order all the time, and to prioritize fare machine fixes in case of malfunctions. Some students requested better maintenance of the fare machines, and one teen talked about how her dad has to always refill her card for her since the machine closest to them only accepts credit cards.

What If You Can't Pay the Full Fare?

Several youth were concerned about what would happen if they couldn't pay the full fare after AFC 2.0 is implemented. This is a salient issue considering the large number of young people who talked about asking the bus driver to let them onboard without full fare. Enforcement policies are yet to be determined and the MBTA should ensure, beyond soliciting input from a diverse group of youth, that youth who often cannot afford the fare has a voice at the table. At the same time, the city holds a responsibility to address the systemic inequities that are causing some people to not be able to afford full fare.

Youth in multiple groups were excited about the ability to tap in with their phones and some had even suggested this as a change they wanted before the feature was even mentioned. Students also wanted to be able to link their M7s to their smartphones, which the MBTA confirmed would be possible. Many young people considered their phone an item they always had on them whereas they frequently forgot their transit passes. One teen did express a concern about people not having smartphones though. Youth were not surveyed on whether they had smartphones or not, but at least one person mentioned not having one.

³⁸ Boston City Council Hearing, "Equitable access to public transportation with the cashless fare collection system," June 22, 2018.

Transportation Challenge

METCO STUDENTS

The METCO program provides the opportunity for students from racially imbalanced schools (where more than 50% of the students are non-white) and isolated suburban schools (where 30% or less of students are non-white) to learn together in an integrated public school setting. METCO students in Boston travel to school by yellow bus, personal transportation, or public transit. METCO strives for their students to become full and equal members of the school community, but transportation barriers are preventing students from fully integrating.

The METCO Program is a voluntary program intended to expand educational opportunities, increase diversity, and reduce racial isolation.³⁹ However, its goals are not fully realized because transportation hurdles remain for students from Boston.

Transportation Hurdle	Student-reported impacts
Length of time to get to school Spend up to 2 hours commuting one way	Time that could be spent sleeping or eating breakfast
Missing the school bus	Do not attend school Have to ask a parent to drive them Miss their first class periods
No bus during snowstorms when Boston schools are shut down, but student’s school is not	End up a day behind their peers academically

All of these issues place an unfair burden on METCO students, putting them at an increasing disadvantage compared to their suburban peers with regards to their education.

Transportation issues have also made it difficult for Boston’s students to truly integrate into the social fabric of their schools and participate in extracurricular activities. For example, one student imparted that his friends mostly live outside of Boston but that he doesn’t visit them because it takes too long to get to their homes. METCO students that rely on the yellow bus are highly restrained in the hours they can be at school due to there generally being only one bus that takes them to school and one that takes them home. Some districts do provide late bus transportation to allow students to participate in afterschool academic and extracurricular activities⁴⁰, but the timing can still be restrictive and may not include weekends.

A Concord-Carlisle High Student

A student living in Roslindale and attending school in Concord discussed how the lack of affordable transit options is a major problem for doing extracurricular activities and having sports practices after school. Because the commuter rail costs \$11 one way, she has to take a much longer subway route requiring multiple transfers and catch a ride to the station from a teacher or call an Uber. There often isn’t a bus for her to get home after practice, so she ends up getting home quite late through public transit, which causes her mom to worry. Additionally, the cost of the commuter rail fare causes her to frequently miss weekend school events and athletic games, which results in her sports coach being mad at her.

³⁹ METCO. MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, <http://www.doe.mass.edu/metco/>
⁴⁰ About METCO. METCO, <https://metcoinc.org/>

Stories from students above demonstrates METCO goals are not fully reached when transportation is not fully supported. **METCO is a state-funded program, but it is the responsibility of the state, the City of Boston, and the partnering school communities to provide Boston students with all the same opportunities as the local students in the partnering schools.** Everyone is a stakeholder in this and should be contributing to the solution. METCO’s state funding remained the same for ten years between 2008-2017.⁴¹

"That's like buying a tank of gas with the same amount of money you used in 2008 and expecting to have the same amount of gas in 2018. Impossible."

—Kalise Wornum, Director of Wellesley METCO—⁴²

Because of this, the program was in danger of having to cut late buses in 2018, but ended up receiving enough of an increase in the budget to keep them⁴³. Regardless, the story of the Concord-Carlisle High student demonstrates how the current funding is still not enough. The state should update its funding to the METCO program to keep up with changing expenses.

A few groups of METCO students also stated that they deserved M7s too. Some suburban school districts do provide M7s to their students, but have different policies regarding which students are qualified. The City of Boston does not provide M7s to students who do not attend school in the city. METCO students argued that although they do not attend school in Boston, they are Boston residents and deserve the same opportunities. **For METCO’s approximate 3,300 students⁴⁴, it would cost less than \$1.2 million to fund M7s for the full year⁴⁵.** As a true demonstration of a partnership, the M7 costs could be shared between Boston and the partnering school community. This still leaves many students out of the equation though. Many participating schools in the METCO program are not accessible by public transit or are only accessible by commuter rail. The MBTA should work with METCO and municipalities to provide equitable fares for students needing to use the commuter rail to get to school.

⁴¹ Haynes, Crystal. “Local desegregation program needs more funding for after-school buses.” Boston 25 NEWS, 15, March 2018, <https://www.boston25news.com/news/local-desegregation-program-needs-more-funding-for-after-school-buses/716537639>

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Petroni, Susan. “UPDATED: Massachusetts Senate Passed \$41.49 Billion Budget.” Framingham Source, 25 May 2018, <https://framinghamsource.com/index.php/2018/05/25/updated-massachusetts-senate-passed-41-49-billion-budget/>

⁴⁴ METCO placed 3,216 students in 2017-2018.

⁴⁵ Less than \$1.2 million because some METCO students are from Springfield.

TRANSPORTATION ATTITUDES



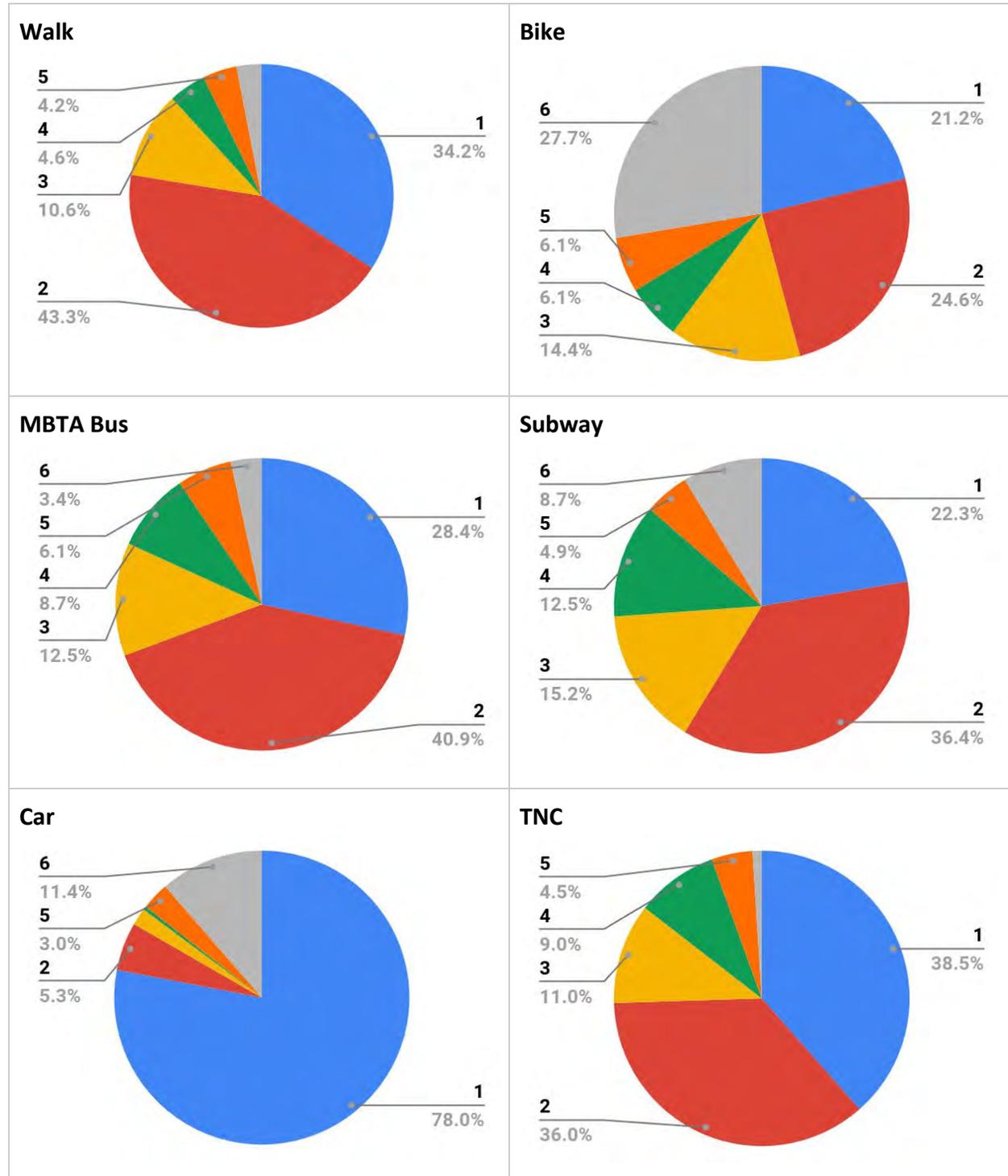
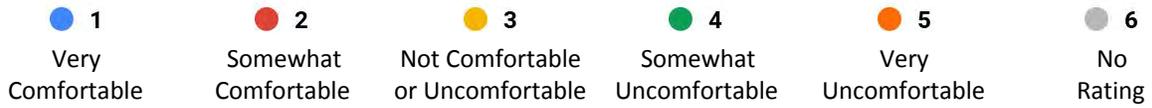
Transportation Attitudes

Comfort, Safety and Fun Ratings

Boston youth were asked to rate six transportation modes—walk, bike, MBTA bus, subway, car and TNC (i.e., Uber or Lyft)—in terms of comfort, safety and fun.

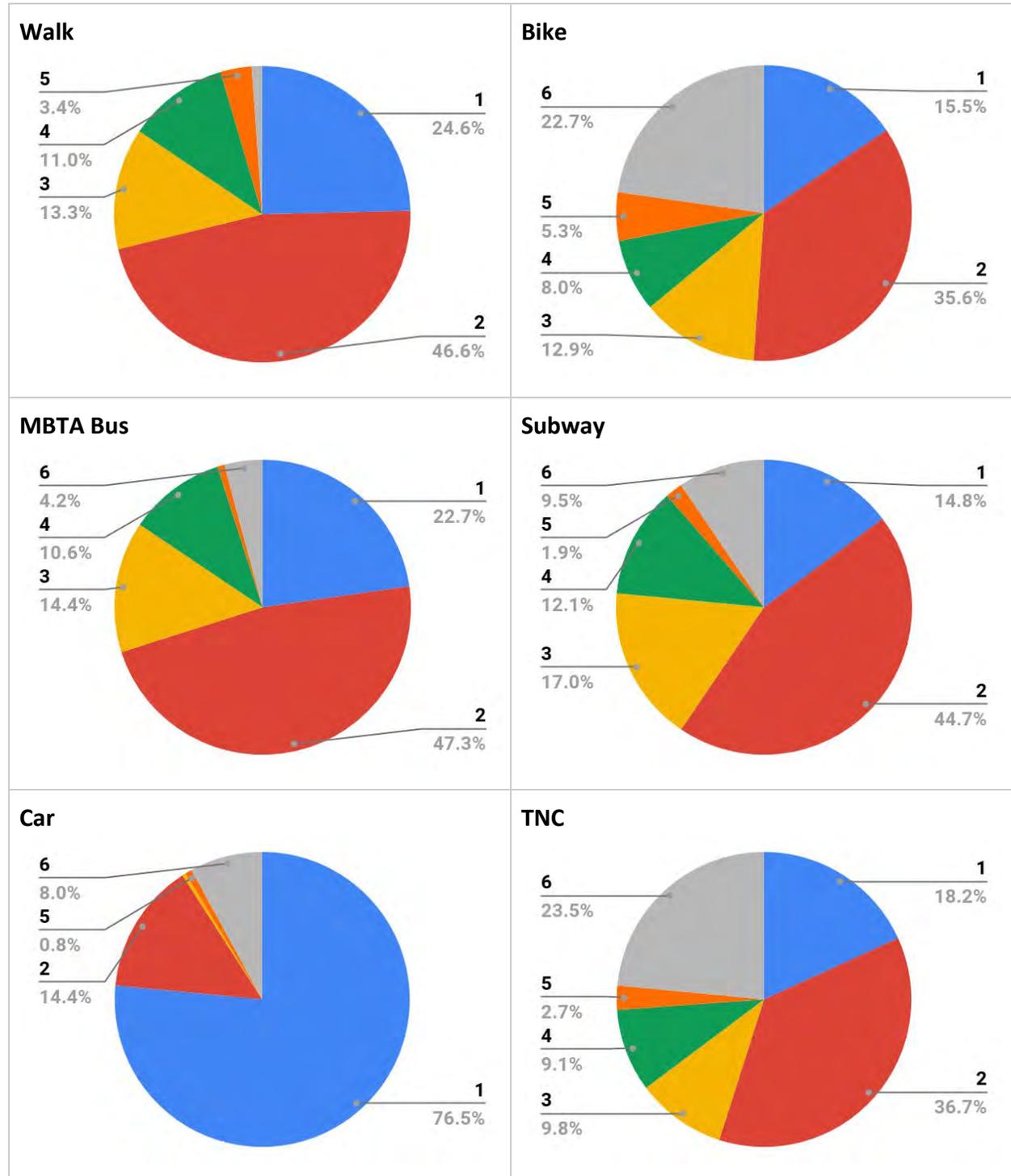
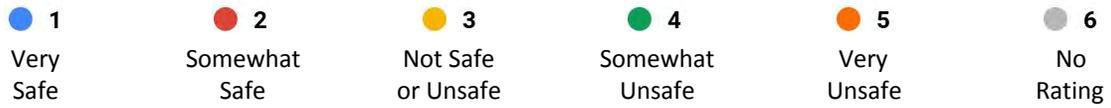
Comfort Rating

N = 264



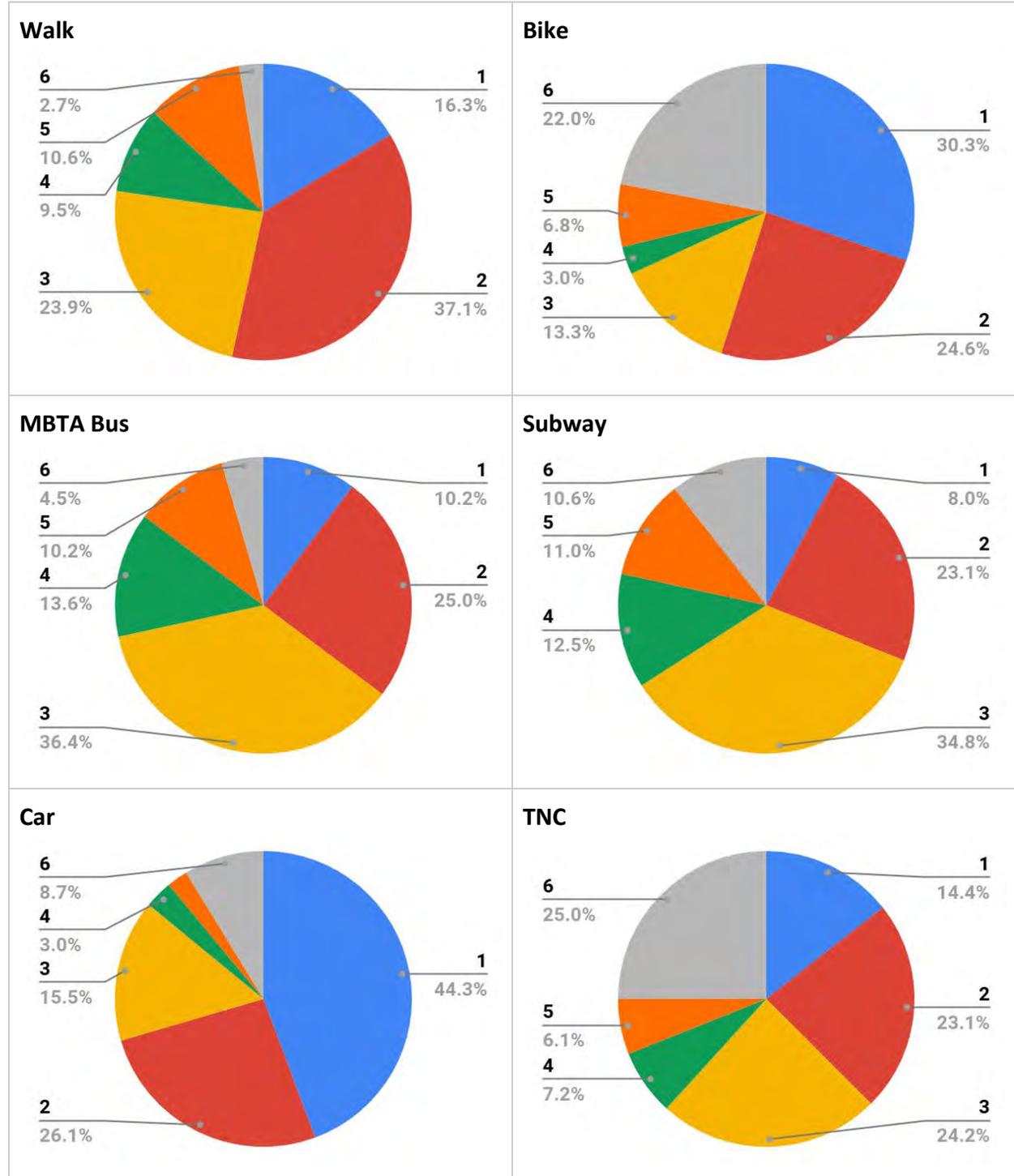
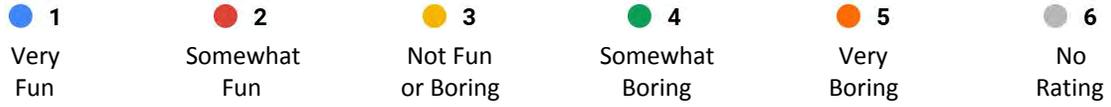
Safety Rating

N = 264



Fun Rating

N = 264



Takeaways from Comfort, Safety and Fun Ratings

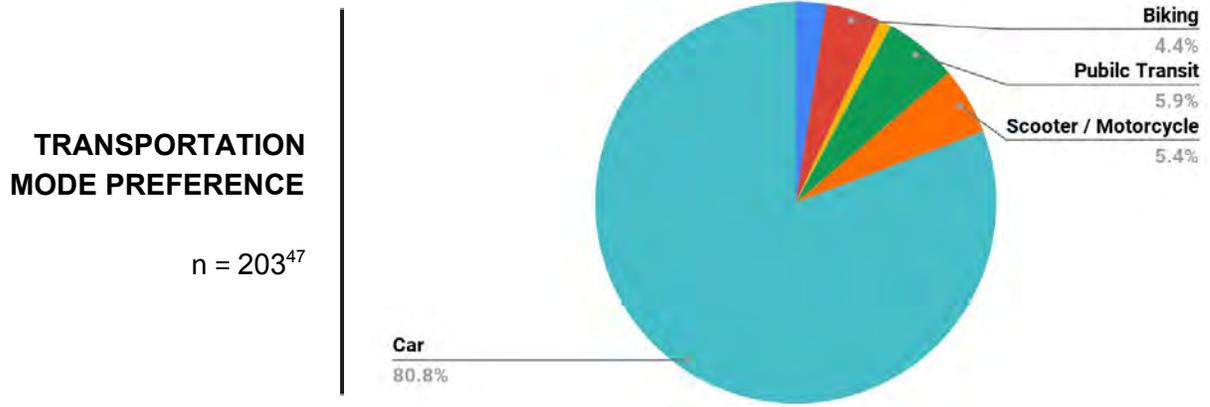
- ▲ The car mode dominated all ratings. Its comfort and safety ratings had over three-quarters of respondents rating the mode as “very comfortable” and “very safe”. Nearly three-quarters of respondents rated the car as “very fun” and “somewhat fun.”
- ▲ Walking and TNCs had relatively good ratings of comfort with three-quarters of respondents indicating they find the modes “very comfortable” or “somewhat comfortable”.
- ▲ Public transit modes were perceived to be comfortable by more than half of respondents, and over two-thirds of respondents for the buses alone.
- ▲ Over half of respondents rated all modes as “very safe” or “somewhat safe”.
- ▲ Nearly three-quarters of respondents rated walk and bus modes as safe. This is an interesting contrast to the previously mentioned comments on street safety and public transit safety.
- ▲ Over half of respondents rated the bike mode as “very safe” or “somewhat safe”. This is an interesting contrast to the safety issues brought up as major barriers to biking (see Barriers to Biking section below), though, out of all modes, this is the lowest percent of respondents who considered the mode safe.
- ▲ TNCs had the next lowest percent of respondents to rate the mode as safe. Youth find TNCs to be less safe than public transit, yet they still substitute transit rides with TNCs due to reliability and convenience (see Transportation Network Companies section below).
- ▲ Other than the car mode, walk and bike were the only modes that had over half of respondents rate it as “very fun” and “somewhat fun”.
- ▲ After the car, the bike mode had the largest percent of respondents rate it as “very fun”.
- ▲ TNCs had the lowest percent of respondents who rated the mode as fun.
- ▲ Between a quarter to a third of respondents found multiple modes (walk, bus, subway, TNC) to be neither fun nor boring.

Transportation Attitudes

Strong Preference for Cars

Students were asked about their preferred mode of transportation, to explain why, and whether their preferred mode would be the same or change in the future. Their answers have dire implications for our environment.

In line with the car mode outweighing the five other transportation modes in the ratings for comfort, safety, and fun, an overwhelming majority (80.8%) of youth counted in a hand tally during the focus groups said they preferred to get around by car (though here, car is inclusive of car and TNC modes⁴⁶).



Why Do You Prefer a Car?

When asked why youth preferred transportation by car, the mode was often compared to public transit. Teens said they felt that using a car is more comfortable, direct, reliable, and convenient. Moments where teens seem to especially want to be in a car include bad weather and when they need to get dressed up. This last point was important to one female youth because she said she does not want any unwanted attention on the train. This is not surprising given the harassment issues experienced in and around public transit by some female youth. For another young teen, the preference for a car may have been an issue of achievement and/or status, as no one in her family had a license and she expressed determination to be the first person in her family to drive. The majority of young people said the main reason they don't use a car now is due to cost (though many of them were not old enough to have a license yet).

Preferred Mode as an Adult

Nearly all teens who said they prefer a car kept their answer the same. Only a few students changed their answer to public transit as an adult, because gas is too expensive, it is too difficult to park in certain places, or they wanted to be more cost effective. As for the youth who preferred a transportation mode other than car, several said they would prefer to use a car instead when they are adults.

⁴⁶ One group also mentioned Zipcar.

⁴⁷ Some groups were not asked due to time restraints, and many youth did not respond with a preference.

Personal Car or TNC?

Most of the youth were split on whether a personal car or a TNC was preferred, while some did not care which. The youth who preferred a TNC said this was because they would not have to deal with traffic and parking issues, and parking expenses. The youth who preferred a personal car said it was because they were used to traveling that way, felt safer and more comfortable in their own car compared to someone else's, are in control of their own route, and could potentially save money compared to using TNCs. There was also a split among the youth about whether they preferred to drive themselves or have a parent drive them while in a personal car. The kids who preferred to drive themselves said it was because they would be more independent and have more freedom (be able to go on their own schedule, listen to their own music, take their own route, and generally be “in control of your own life”).

Mode Preferences are Malleable

Can we afford to have another generation of people with such a strong preference toward using cars? “To achieve the City’s goal of 80% reduction by 2050, the contribution of transportation sources to overall emissions will need to be reduced significantly in the coming decades.”⁴⁸ Additionally, income and wealth disparities would only be exacerbated in a future where every individual prefers to own a car.

Most of the youth were captive transit riders, though they will not be forever captive. It is critical to change youth perceptions of public transit before they are lost riders. One youth from the Mattapan Food and Fitness Coalition said he gave up public transit for driving to get to school due to unreliability. The final straw for him was when the train was stalled for 40 minutes between stations one day, causing him to miss three buses. Additionally, preference for using a car—even in the future—is negatively impacting youth attitudes toward transit improvements today. One teen in East Boston who complained of congestion issues for buses was asked what she thought of dedicated bus lanes as a way of alleviating the issue. Calling herself a future driver, she said she could see the lanes working only in some parts of the City, but that she would not be in support of it in East Boston since parking is so difficult—even though she’s currently dependent on transit. Fortunately, there are indications that youth transportation mode preferences are malleable. Some teens indicated they would take public transit if it were faster, more reliable and convenient, or service were more frequent.

Youth are also cognizant of the environmental impacts of driving. One youth from Bikes Not Bombs stated that public transit is better for the environment than driving. Interestingly, when asked if he felt bad about the environment when riding in a car, he said no since he wasn’t responsible for the cars being produced.

⁴⁸ Boston Transportation Department. Go Boston 2030: Imagining Our Transportation Future: Vision and Action Plan. Boston: March 2017. Retrieved from <http://goboston2030.org/en/>

I don't feel guilty. They made the cars.

— Teen from Bikes Not Bombs —

Furthermore, youth indicated that although they prefer a car, it depends on the purpose of their trip (e.g., prefer a car if shopping), length of their trip (the farther away, the more they want to take a car), whether there is parking, and how expensive gas is. One factor that may also be contributing to youth preference for cars is the lack of awareness about the full cost of keeping and using a car. One teen stated that a car is cheaper in the long run since the tank only has to be filled up once a week versus paying every single time to use the MBTA. There may be situations where a car could be more economical than transit, however, they did not mention the insurance, excise tax, or maintenance and repair costs that a car typically comes with. The full expenses of car ownership are also not typically taught in schools and may be something a person only realizes once they buy a car.

The comments about the environment, parking availability, gas prices, and car prices illustrate the crucial role of policy in guiding teen attitudes and behaviors toward mode choices.

Lastly, young people's comments about the independence and freedom a car provides demonstrate how other mode choices will need to meet those requirements, as well as rebrand themselves in that light, in order to be preferred.



Photo: Trey Ratcliff

Transportation Attitudes

Transportation Network Companies (TNCs)

Although TNCs have been part of Boston's transportation scene for a relatively short number of years (Uber since 2012 and Lyft since 2013), the disruptive technology is now providing millions of rides to Boston each year. Youth exposed how familiar the majority of them were with using TNCs, even at a young age, and the reasons why they use TNCs. They compared it frequently to public transit.

TNC Usage

Data shows that Uber and Lyft generate significantly more trips than taxis previously did and “have become a significant portion of the traffic that courses through Boston roads.”⁴⁹ Additionally, Uber trips in Mattapan, Roxbury, and Dorchester have increased 250 percent since 2014.⁵⁰ Mattapan and Dorchester are also neighborhoods underserved by public transit with a disproportionate number of residents with very long commutes.⁵¹ MAPC found that 12% of all ride-hailing trips are substituting a transit trip in a survey conducted of ride-hailing passengers in metro Boston in late 2017⁵². Youth are a part of this transportation change.

Most young people were familiar with using TNCs, though 47 out of all surveyed youth (17.8%) reported never using it before. Some teens, even ones 13 or 14 years of age, indicated that they had their own accounts, even though the companies require users be age 18 or older. Others said that they use a parent’s or family member’s account (ride is requested for them).

Reasons Youth Used TNCs

- ▲ Safety (especially at night)
- ▲ Bad weather
- ▲ Needing to get to work early
- ▲ Making last minute plans
- ▲ Not being able to get somewhere except by car
- ▲ To get somewhere faster (usually because of a tight schedule)
- ▲ For emergencies (e.g., getting to the emergency room to see family)

Transit Substitution

Boston teen experiences with public transit played a large role in their use of TNCs, as they talked about not having time to wait for the T or go through multiple transfers; the T being shut down for the night; and TNCs being easier or more convenient than transit. Teens also reported using TNCs over transit when the price was so low that it was comparable to transit. The findings here further prove that transit substitution is happening and how accustomed to on-demand mobility Boston riders—particularly young riders—are. Additionally, youth said they used both normal (single-passenger) rides and TNC carpooling depending on the situation and difference in pricing. The issue is that “[e]ven if future ride-hailing vehicles were fully

⁴⁹ Vaccaro, Adam. “There were nearly 100,000 Uber and Lyft rides per day in Boston last year.” Boston Globe. 1 May 2018, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/business/2018/05/01/there-were-nearly-uber-and-lyft-rides-day-boston-streets-last-year/yzOWJ9PdVg8KKQMQSKSF2K/story.html>

⁵⁰ DeCosta-Klipa, Nik. “The rise of Uber in Boston, by the numbers.” Boston.com, 27 October 2015, <https://www.boston.com/news/technology/2015/10/27/the-rise-of-uber-in-boston-by-the-numbers>

⁵¹ Boston Transportation Department. Go Boston 2030: Imagining Our Transportation Future: Vision and Action Plan. Boston: March 2017. Retrieved from <http://goboston2030.org/en/>

⁵² Gehrke, Steven R. et al. “Fare Choices: A Survey Of Ride-hailing Passengers In Metro Boston.” MAPC, February 2018, <https://www.mapc.org/farechoices/>

electric and autonomous, the region’s roadways could not accommodate unchecked growth in single-occupant vehicle travel”⁵³. As MAPC implored, we need to have a reliable and efficient transit system that riders find competitive with and complementary to on-demand mobility services⁵⁴. One teen suggested the MBTA and TNCs collaborate and provided an example of getting a discount for an Uber ride if you have an MBTA pass. A collaboration is perhaps a way to create a true complementary service between public transit and TNCs, but TNCs have to truly encourage users to take public transit in accessible and reliable places in what should be a two-way relationship.

Cap Surge Pricing?

One youth group asked for regulations to cap TNC surge pricing, which occurs during times when demand is higher than driver availability can satisfy. Massachusetts already has a mandate that ride-hailing services cannot increase fares during states of emergency and natural disasters⁵⁵. Honolulu is currently the only city that has passed a bill to cap surge prices⁵⁶. Opponents argued that it limits innovation, limits consumer choice, and will make it more difficult for customers to get a ride, whereas proponents said it prevents price gouging and holds TNC drivers to the same standards as Taxi drivers.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Lien, Tracey. “Honolulu lawmakers agree to cap surge pricing for Uber and Lyft.” Los Angeles Times, 7 June 2018, <http://www.latimes.com/business/technology/la-fi-tn-uber-lyft-price-cap-20180607-story.html>

⁵⁶ Kawamoto, Dawn. “Honolulu Passes Bill to Cap Uber, Lyft Surge Prices.” Government Technology, 7 June 2018, <http://www.govtech.com/policy/Honolulu-Passes-Bill-to-Cap-Uber-Lyft-Surge-Prices.html>

Transportation Attitudes

Walking

Youth had a relatively positive view on walking, but made suggestions to improve the pedestrian environment in specific areas.

Youth did not have many comments about walking, which received relatively high ratings for comfort, safety, and fun. A few youth who preferred walking as their mode choice commented on the health benefits of it. Other youth who said they prefer walking to other modes explained that it is because they are in full control, able to set their pace and not deal with other variables affecting their arrival times. They also commented that it feels safer than biking, which reflects what the safety ratings showed.

Specific Pedestrian Issues

Youth from Mattapan Food and Fitness Coalition said there is no crosswalk across Blue Hill Ave near Mattapan Station, and causes people to have to walk all the way around the intersection rather than crossing directly. Installing a crosswalk at this location will make walking more efficient. It would also be safer for pedestrians who are crossing there anyway.



Base Image: Google Maps

Youth from ACDC said all the intersections in Chinatown have a conflict between the walk signal and right turn signal for cars, and expressed that this practice is especially dangerous when there isn't a no-turn-on-red sign and drivers feel they have right-of-way. The BTDC should review these intersections and consider doing separate signal phasing for right-turning vehicles and walking. At minimum, a leading pedestrian interval should be installed to allow pedestrians to start crossing before drivers are allowed to turn.



CC0 pxhere

Transportation Attitudes

Biking

Biking is a low-cost form of transportation and emits no greenhouse gas emissions. Boston is small enough to be a highly bikeable city and youth who bike reported a wide range of reasons that they enjoy biking. Yet, the vast majority of young people still experience significant barriers to biking. Youth disclosed what would help them to bike more.

Biking Uses

Youth reported biking for recreation and utility. Some youth bike only to familiar places, whereas others bike “everywhere.”

Places Youth Biked To

- ▲ Baseball practice
- ▲ Community center
- ▲ Friends’ and family’s homes
- ▲ Grocery stores
- ▲ Gym
- ▲ Library
- ▲ Pharmacy to pick up medication for family
- ▲ School
- ▲ Stores

Specific Places Youth Biked To

- ▲ American Legion Highway
- ▲ Assembly Row
- ▲ Cambridge
- ▲ Cambridgeside Galleria
- ▲ Charles River
- ▲ Chinatown
- ▲ Copley
- ▲ Downtown
- ▲ East Boston
- ▲ Forest Hills
- ▲ South Bay
- ▲ Stoughton (one youth said it took him 3 hours!)

Biking Likes

Young people liked biking for a range of reasons including enjoyment, improving health, travel efficiency and reliability, being environmentally friendly, and the low/no cost of it.

“Fun”

“Enjoyable”

“Wind in your face”

“Experience nature”

“Explore different cracks of the city. See things up close, take pictures. When you’re in a car, you’re moving too fast.”

“It’s exercise”

“It’s a workout. My legs are getting big.”

“Good for taking shortcuts since some places are only big enough for a bike to get through”

“Fast getting around the City”

“Fun going fast down hills”

“Faster than walking and taking bus”

“Sometimes more reliable than bus”

“Too much traffic taking car”

“Good for places with no parking or that are too crowded”

“Not killing the environment”

“Free”

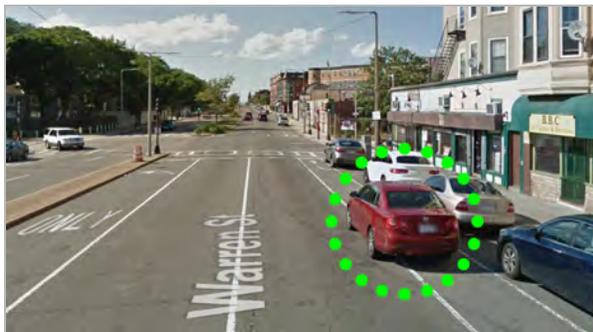
Barriers to Biking

Outside of the youth bike groups, the majority of the surveyed youth in each group did not bike. Only one or two teens from each group actually said they biked for recreation or utility. Young people—both people who bike and people who do not bike—discussed significant barriers to biking.

Road Safety

The dominant challenge with biking experienced across the board was road safety. Teens who did not bike described biking as “unsafe,” “scary,” “dangerous,” and “too risky.” Multiple teens had stories about family members, friends, and coworkers getting hit by vehicles. Some brought up stories they heard on the news of bicyclists getting killed in vehicle crashes. Not surprisingly, several reported not being allowed to bike by their parents due to safety reasons. One youth coordinator echoed this sentiment saying that he would worry if his younger siblings biked.

Contributing to the lack of safe feeling for youth is the insufficient infrastructure in Boston. Both youth who bike and don’t bike were put off by the lack of bike lanes, small width of existing bike lanes (one teen even called it “claustrophobic”), double parking in bike lanes, and bumpy roads. Youth who bike discussed the risky feeling they felt when coming into conflict with cars turning, needing to get into the car lane to make a turn, and going against traffic on one-way streets. Youth criticized the inconsistency of bike lanes and how they “just disappear on the road.”



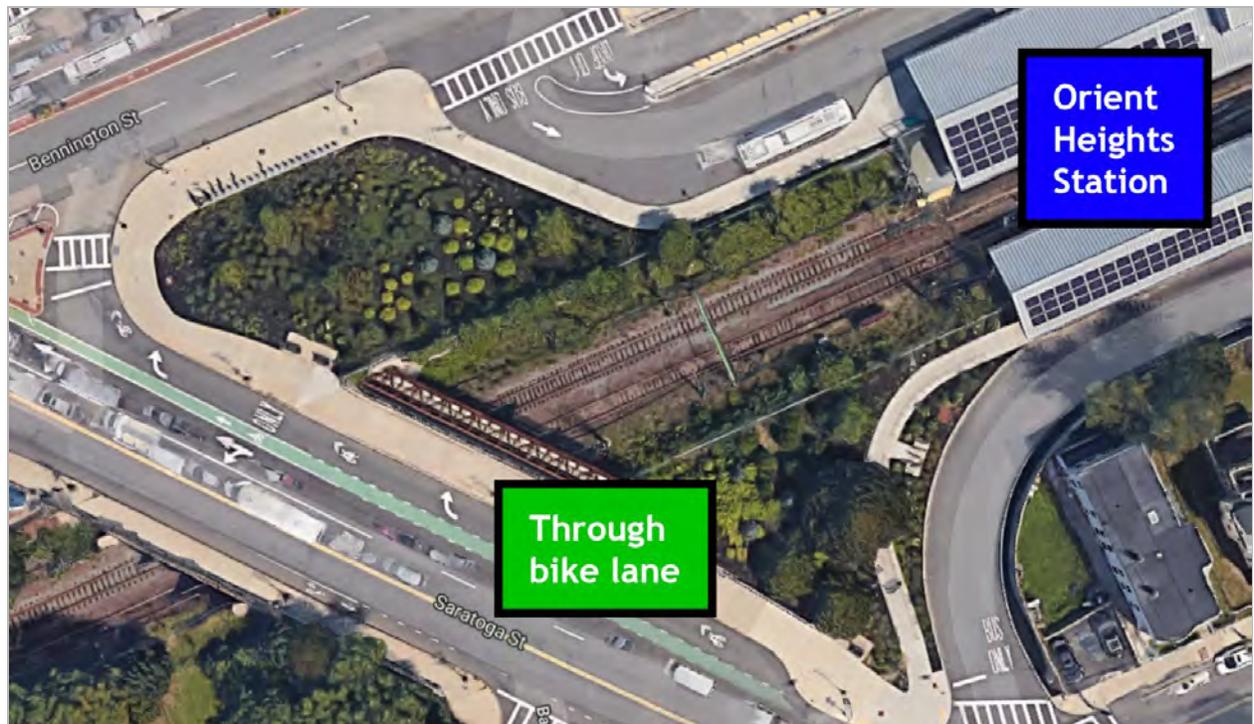
Base Image: Google Maps



Base Image: Google Maps

One teen director at Zumix lamented that Boston is small enough to be a bikeable city—if only there were more infrastructure—but unfortunately, many people find it too scary to bike in today’s conditions.

Particular locations that were mentioned as feeling unsafe was Washington Street in Downtown, and near the Orient Heights T station where a through bike lane is used with a right-turn lane on Saratoga Street.



Base image: Google Maps

A few young people actually explained how they used to bike but stopped due to getting hit by a car or getting run off the road by cars. One youth from Sociedad Latina who used to bike got into a crash with a car and then felt so unsafe that he ended up throwing his bike in the trash. This exposes how the lack of safe, separated spaces for bicyclists in Boston are reducing the number of people who actually bike.

Several students also mentioned rain, winter, cold and snow being issues for biking—with a few expressing that it is never safe to bike in bad weather. This was not just an issue of cold hardness, but also concerned snow clearance from bike lanes (particularly how snow is pushed into bike lanes instead of being shoveled) as well as physical barriers against drivers. While Blue Bikes, the City-owned bikeshare system, is available year-round, youth are apparently taking signals about the appropriateness of winter biking based on snow clearance from bike lanes and physical barriers against drivers in inclement weather.

The unsafe feeling was so strong for some youth that a few said they would never bike, or that their parents would never let them bike—no matter what. However, most youth actually said a more bike-friendly city would improve biking for them or make them want to bike more. In particular, they requested bike lanes “everywhere” and protected bike lanes.

Bike [lanes] should not be in the same lane as cars.

—Teen from Oak Square YMCA—

Many young people stressed that an unprotected bike lane is not enough as cars can easily drive into the lane. Youth also wanted curbs or big cement poles, instead of flex posts, between cars and the bike lane. Overall, teens wanted some type of hard, physical barrier from the cars as they feared how easily plastic posts can be knocked over. Youth from the Wang YMCA and BAHEC Youth Cycling Program brought up the curb-separated, sidewalk-level bike paths in the North End and near Forest Hills, respectively, as examples of paths where they felt safe.

Atlantic Ave, North End



Photo: STREETFILMS // Cut from Ride the New Connect Historic Boston Bike Trail video // June 1, 2018

Arborway, Jamaica Plain



Photo: MassDOT // Casey Arborway meeting presentation // December 6, 2017

Teens also requested parking-protected bike lanes, painted bike lanes, and reflective paint and street lights for night riding.

Biker-Driver Tension

Not only does it not feel safe to bike in Boston because the road isn't currently designed to keep bikers safe, but many young people also talked about how aggressive drivers contribute to the unsafe environment. This issue of tension and anger can cause distress. Youth did not like how drivers were mean and yelled at bikers. One teen stated that she "didn't need drivers saying mean things like that" to her, and another explained how she would find it embarrassing and intimidating to be yelled at by a driver to get off the road.

The tension between drivers and bicyclists was widely recognized. Youth described the tension occurring as a result of a lack of respect between drivers and bicyclists, the lack of desire to share the road with one another, and the breaking of road rules on both sides. Youth across multiple focus groups felt that Boston is not bike friendly.

When we were biking, that [vehicle] like, BAM, cuts you off. Even when we look like kids, young adults, they don't care.

— Teens from BAHEC Youth Cycling Program —

In Boston, the drivers be getting mad at the bikers and the bikers be getting mad at the drivers. It just doesn't work.

— Teen from Bikes Not Bombs —

A few students in one group even displayed this tension, airing several complaints about bicyclists, and one student concluding that “bikers are all bad” at the end of the discussion. At one point, one of the youth stated that that if bikers were in such a rush, “they should just get a car.” When asked about what they thought about someone not being able to afford a car, some of the youth responded that people should save and invest their money in a car. There is an opportunity here to help young people develop understanding and compassion for people choosing different modes of transportation or for people who may not have all the affordances some have in life.

Subsequently, youth were asked for their recommendations to lessen tension between people who bike and drive. Most youth suggested separated paths.

I feel like the only reason why drivers don't like the bikers is because they're in their way. So if the city organized it so bikers weren't in their way, there wouldn't be so much tension.

— Teen from BAHEC Youth Cycling Program —

Youth also wanted both people who bike and people who drive to follow the rules of the road more. Teens in three groups said there should be more signs—to alert drivers to existing bike lanes, about not parking in bike lanes, and yielding to people on bikes. Youth suggested stricter laws, lowering the speed limit, higher fines for illegal parking, use of speed radar signs, use of cameras (like at tolls), and more enforcement overall. On the bicyclist side, suggestions included enforcing helmet-wearing and having a required course about biking on the street. Young people also wanted road rule education, and one suggested including lessons on bicycle laws for people learning to drive as well as distributing fliers or emails to the entire city about road rules and consequences.

Biker-Pedestrian Tension

One place where youth felt safe riding was on the sidewalk. While some younger teens are able to get away with this, some older teens said this would be an issue. Teens have had pedestrians get upset with them or have perceived that pedestrians will be upset with them for riding on the sidewalk—even though they do that when there are no bike lanes and that is where they feel safest. Unfortunately, this leaves them with no safe space for biking.

I used to ride on the sidewalk when I was younger. But now if I ride on the sidewalk, people will look at me and wonder why a young adult is on the sidewalk. But I'm still a baby!

— Teen from Zumix —

A Bike is Valuable

By far, the lack of safe infrastructure and the aggressive attitudes and behaviors toward people who bike was the top concern, however, youth discussed other barriers to biking as well. One other safety-related problem concerns youth who don't ride their bikes due to the fear of getting jumped. As Jeff Rogers, Mentor Program Manager at The Flagship Clubhouse, explained, youth are afraid to ride because a bike is valuable, and it's not safe to be seen with valuable items. Youth also complained about the lack of bike racks, even outside stores. Even when they can lock up, some were worried about their bikes getting stolen. They were concerned about locks getting cut or tires getting stolen—and expressed a strong preference to take their bikes into places, rather than leaving them locked outside. One student said he actually had his bike stolen so he's no longer able to bike now. Students have reason to be fearful of their bikes getting stolen, but it may also help to reassure them through education on proper bike lock up and more bike racks and cages being installed around the city.

Comfort with Biking

There were also youth who simply did not have a bike—or they had one but it broke or they outgrew it. Several mentioned how they hadn't biked since they were a child. Several students also did not know how to bike, but said they would bike or consider biking if they knew how. Other youth were uncomfortable on a bike in certain settings. For instance, one teen from Zumix recounted a time when she took out a Hubway bike to ride from Downtown to the Esplanade. She used the bike path along the Charles River, but ironically felt like she was going to get run over by the other bicyclists because they were going so fast. Just as some adults now still need to be taught how to ride a bike or need to be reacquainted with biking to become comfortable again, teens may as well. While the Boston Transportation Department's Boston Bikes team offers the Youth Cycling Program for students, a teacher or administrator has to apply for the program to come to the school. Thus, a student's chance to learn to ride or become comfortable riding again depends on their teachers' or administrators' interest. There is an opportunity to conduct more outreach to youth and provide them with workshops as needed. Some youth also suggested biking lessons for those who do not know how to ride a bike.

I would like to have lessons in a park or somewhere safe. I can't ride on the sidewalk... Need a place to practice and get comfy.

— Teen from Zumix —

Familiarity with Navigation

Some students also said that they would bike more often if they knew where they were going. One group of youth said they felt biking is only accessible to people who have carefully planned routes or are experienced bikers. Students likely do not know any routes yet as they are more familiar with transit and largely did not drive, giving them a narrow view of above-ground routes. So, there is a perceived steep learning curve to get started biking.

Related, there are misconceptions about the length of time it takes to bike in the City, as some youth commented that they felt their destinations were too far for biking or that they would bike if everything were closer. This misperception may be preventing many teens from considering biking as a form of transportation. Youth education about Boston's bike paths and bike-friendly routes, as well as organized teen rides are potential solutions to these issues. Boston has a Safe Routes to School program, but it has largely been focused on grades K-8 and creating walking routes.⁵⁷

A Boston Community Leadership Academy (BCLA) Student

Sam Balto, a Physical Education Teacher at Ellis Elementary School and a Safe Routes to School champion, also found youth misperception about the length of time it takes to bike somewhere to exist. Sam talked with a 10th grade BPS student from Roxbury that attends school in Hyde Park. The student said, "To be honest, I [would] prefer riding my bike to school," but he also said that biking to school would take 1 hour and 45 minutes. In fact, according to Google Maps, it would take approximately 35 minutes. This was unfortunate, since the student's commute to and from school takes 2.5 hours total, requires getting to the bus stop at 6:33 A.M., and necessitates taking a train and two buses each way.

Bikeshare

Youth in four groups mentioned bikeshare (specifically, Hubway or Blue Bikes), but knew very little about it. Out of the 133 surveyed teens who were age 16 and up, very few had actually used bikeshare before.

Youth in three groups brought up how bikeshare is too expensive or should be cheaper. As it turned out though, none of those youth actually knew the pricing structure of Boston's bikeshare system. None of them were aware of the annual membership option or the income-eligible membership. Most suspected there would be a daily or one-time use rate, which there are. Youth from the Hyde Park Community Center suggested that a reasonable rate

⁵⁷ "Boston Safe Routes to School." Boston Public Schools, <https://www.bostonpublicschools.org/saferoutes>

would be \$0.50 per hour, which means that they would actually find Boston’s bikeshare too expensive since Blue Bikes cost \$2.50 for a single 30-minute ride and \$10 for a day pass with unlimited 2-hour rides. Single rides may serve well as a trial for youth unfamiliar with the Blue Bikes system, but rates would have to be lowered to be considered affordable. Cambridge is currently piloting discounted (\$25) Blue Bikes membership for students in one high school⁵⁸ which is even more affordable than the \$50 membership rate for income-eligible members. A pilot for high school students would be a great way for Boston to make bikeshare more accessible to youth. Youth from the Hyde Park Community Center also suggested that cash be accepted like MBTA fare machines. Cash payment is currently not an option for Blue Bike users. Bikeshare systems in other places (e.g., Indego in Philadelphia; MoGo in Detroit; Capital Bikeshare in Arlington County) have a cash payment option, though the payment options are not as simple as paying cash through an MBTA fare machine. They either require signing up online or through a smartphone, calling someone to unlock a bike, and/or going to a particular location to pay.

Even after learning about the pricing structure, most youth expressed confusion about the system and still generally felt that bikeshare is inaccessible. They stated concerns about how to dock the bike, running out of time with a bike, and being charged for doing things wrong or having the bike out too long. Overall, more awareness about the pricing structure of Blue Bikes and demonstrations of how Blue Bikes work would be valuable to youth. One group suggested a bike “dashboard” that displays the amount of time left for a ride to help youth dock in time.



Photo: Lily Ko

⁵⁸ *Blue Bikes Youth Discount*. Cambridge CDD, <http://www.cambridgema.gov/CDD/Transportation/gettingaroundcambridge/bikeshare/bluebikesyouthdiscount>

A Case for Dockless Bikes

One youth from ACDC explained that she felt docked bikes are not as convenient as dockless bikes. When she visited China, she biked a lot since the dockless bikes were easy to pick up and there were fences between the drivers and bikers. However, she said the docked bike locations in Boston are not close enough to her destination and she doesn't like the idea of having to find another dock if the dock is full. She would be more likely to bike if she could pick up bikes anywhere and drop them off anywhere.



Photo: Adam Fagen

Money for Your Miles

There were a few comments that pointed to youth's lack of interest in biking. One person suggested "money for your miles" to incentivize youth to bike. This is not unheard of as MassDOT already offers rewards (including restaurant coupons, retailer discounts, and tickets to shows and attractions) through their Bay State Commute program for "greener trips" that are logged by commuters⁵⁹. Perhaps a similarly-structured, but youth-focused campaign could succeed in getting more youth to bike.

⁵⁹ *Get Rewards for Greener Trips*. Bay State Commute, <https://baystatecommute.com/transcomm>

Transportation Attitudes

Public Transit

Public transit reduces our transportation carbon footprint and provides a democratic and equitable way of getting around that caters to people ranging from those with low to high incomes, young to old, and the fully enabled to disabled. Yet cities nationwide, including Boston, have reported overall declines in public transit ridership. Boston youth bring to light the factors they like and dislike about public transit and make suggestions as to what changes would make them excited to ride public transit.

Public Transit Likes

Young people in a few different groups acknowledged how great it is to have a public transit system at all. Moreover, despite all the aforementioned reliability and affordability issues, some youth felt the MBTA is a relatively consistent and convenient operation, as well as an affordable mode of transportation. Youth mentioned the convenience of not having to find parking, the occasional faster trip on transit compared to driving, and the importance of having transit as an option if someone did not have a car or had a broken car. Additionally, although youth reported that MBTA employees could be inconsistent about letting them onto the bus or train when they have forgotten/lost their M7s or could not pay full fare, they also expressed great appreciation for the personnel that have allowed them onboard.

Notably, teens recognized how independent public transit allowed them to be. Markedly, one youth from Roslindale described the hugely positive difference public transit made in her life—in terms of improved health, academics, as well as family and community relationships.

I moved to Roslindale... recently, and the experience of having public transport readily available is absolutely life-changing. I honestly think that being able to commute without relying on my parents improved my mental health, my GPA, and my relationship with my parents. ... Having the possibility of independence and to make plans and decisions based around your own needs and desires rather than around others' schedules is an absolute game changer. For people with working parents, it can also make a huge access difference. I definitely missed out on some opportunities earlier on because an activity started at 4:00 and nobody could drive me. Lastly, even for people with completely healthy relationships with their family, not having the opportunity to get out of the house can turn a home and a neighborhood into a cage.

— Teen in Roslindale (email) —

Moreover, youth liked the social nature of public transit, stating that they enjoyed seeing people, being with friends on the T, and running into friends on the T. These are benefits that cannot be realized through using a car. Other public transit benefits included: being able to see cute babies and dogs, enjoying the scenery through large bus windows, swinging on train poles, and being able to sit and relax rather than focus on the road. Lastly, several youth commented on the air conditioning being the highlight of the bus.

Negative Perceptions of Public Transit

All 23 youth groups (100%) brought up some form of negative perception about their MBTA experiences and there were significantly more negative perceptions than positive ones, but young people also provided many suggestions about things the MBTA could do to make them excited to ride public transit.

Too Expensive

Several groups of teens also said they would be more excited to use public transit if it were cheaper, more affordable, or free. Some youth discussed how transit fare is too expensive for adults and were in support of a low-income fare. One teen from the Curtis Hall Community Center wanted free fares for parents with young children who do not have a car, because she could remember a time when her mom did not have a car and had to take public transit everywhere to bring her children around places. The MBTA should consider an income-eligible fare, just as they have discounted fares for students, youth, and seniors, especially since AFC 2.0 could make it easier to use different fare structures.⁶⁰

Some people really can't afford the T.

— Teen from Artists for Humanity —

“With income inequality in this region, with people really struggling and the cost of housing increasing, what are the things our transit system can do to provide relief to workers, families, and others?”⁶¹

— Lee Matsueda, Political Director, Alternatives for Community & Environment —

Teens also mentioned needing more affordable fares for college students, either because they are going to college soon or currently have siblings in college that have trouble affording transit fare. The MBTA currently offers an 11% discount on a semester pass to participating colleges and universities.⁶² A few youth felt that employers should provide free transit passes to their employees too. Although public transit is relatively affordable compared to car ownership, these comments illustrate the extra mile transit must go in order to attract customers. The car dominated the youth's transportation mode preferences, but having reduced or free fares could sway them from driving to using public transit when they're no longer captive riders. The MBTA should expand its semester pass to more colleges and universities, and its corporate pass program to more employers. Both the MBTA and the City of Boston should consider how else institutions can be encouraged to help students afford public transit, as well as to contribute toward getting more commuters to choose public transit.

⁶⁰ Vaccaro, Adam. “Groups want the T to provide fare discounts for low-income riders.” Boston Globe, 6 July 2018, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2018/07/05/groups-want-provide-fare-discounts-for-low-income-riders/UR1Hd54lkSdJ7TLr9FAsvl/story.html>

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Personnel communication with Ian Thistle, Policy Analyst, MBTA

Customer Service

Some youth also talked about a mixed level of service from bus drivers. They described some drivers as nice, yet others as “mean,” “rude,” “not nice,” and even “hostile.” The bus drivers in the latter group were considered by some youth to “be in a bad mood” or to have a “negative attitude.” Teens requested MBTA workers and drivers with a friendlier and more positive demeanor. Drivers were described as going too fast and/or slamming on brakes suddenly, which jostled and toppled over riders. Employee training would help these issues.

MBTA Etiquette

The etiquette of other T customers also contributed toward a negative perception of the MBTA. Youth in 3 groups brought up this issue. They felt that some customers were rude for not giving up their seats for people with baby carriages, the elderly or people who are disabled. They also found it difficult to get around people on crowded trains without them being really upset. For example, one youth from ACDC described an incident where a woman started shoving back really hard into him when he accidentally knocked into her. Having less crowded trains would prevent these tense situations from happening.



Photo: Yonah Freemark

There was a request for more orderly boarding onto trains. One youth from ACDC said he liked how trains in Hong Kong always stop in the same place and there are arrows on the platform floor to direct people entering and exiting the train doors.

A few teens commented how much they enjoyed the MBTA etiquette videos that were recently produced by Emerson College students. A continuation of these satirical public service-type ads may be effective at reminding customers to be more considerate of other riders. At the least, they have proven to be enjoyable to watch for the MBTA’s young customers.



Photo: Emerson College // MBTA Etiquette video // September 18, 2018

Overcrowding

Overcrowding was commonly reported, with youth in 14 of the 23 groups (60.9%) bringing it up. Not only did it cause discomfort, but caused anxiety and restlessness. One youth explained how the length of time that buses are overcrowded can be too long, with bus drivers asking people to push back for up to 30 minutes—making the situation from bad to worse. The E line, and 16 and 32 bus routes were brought up by youth as being often or always overcrowded. The 32 bus was brought up by a few different groups, and one youth from Mattapan Food and Fitness Coalition said the 32 bus is always packed to the point where “you can barely breathe.”



Photo: Pi.1415926535

Youth wanted the longer (articulated) buses for both the 16 and 32 routes.



Photo: Pi.1415926535



Photo: DESIGN THAT MOVE YOU

Another youth recommendation was aligning bus times with subway times, since crowding on buses occur when train passengers arrive at a bus stop just after a bus has pulled out. This wouldn't be feasible with multiple bus routes at one station, but the MBTA should investigate aligning their most crowded bus route schedules with train schedules.

Youth made suggestions for things that would allow balancing on crowded trains better too, like a split-handle pole, more poles in the middle of the train, and more things to hang onto from the ceiling. However, they said they would be more excited to use public transit if it were less crowded and they could sit.

Lack of Amenities

Youth discussed two major categories of amenities they wanted from public transit: basic comfort and “nice to have.” Basic comfort amenities largely had to do with weather and safety. Youth in 5 of the 23 groups (21.7%) said it is too hot and that there is sometimes no air conditioning on board. Teens wanted cooler air and air conditioning on buses and in T stations. One youth said that bus drivers should be more attentive to the bus temperature and ask about the comfort of passengers. On the other end, cold and unheated stations were also an issue. One teen wanted bus drivers to let people onto the bus in the winter and just take the keys with them if they go on break. Youth wanted heated stations—particularly at Ruggles, Roxbury Crossing and Dudley (where there is heating, but not contained).

Other weather-related issues include unshoveled sidewalks at bus stops, and missing seats or shelters, which resulted in youth waiting in the rain. One young person said he sat on the steps of someone’s house waiting for the bus one time on Adams Street where the 15, 41, and 45 bus routes run—but was asked to move by the police. A lack of shelters—combined with unfair weather conditions and infrequent service—makes for undoubtedly uncomfortable, and sometimes unsafe, situations.



Image: Google Maps

The complete lack of stations at the end of the Green line E train also came up. However, way beyond an amenity issue, this is a safety problem. The train stops in the left lane of the two-lane road for four stops on Huntington Ave and S Huntington Ave. Youth expressed concern that boarding and exiting the train puts people at risk of getting hit by a car passing in the right lane. There is a Stop sign on the train door, but drivers are not guaranteed to stop.

Lastly, one youth from ACDC, who had a brother whom almost fell onto the train tracks once, suggested doors between the platform and train, which he saw in China.



Photo: Hat600

“Nice to have” amenities that youth want include: food and drinks, game consoles, music, padded seats, phone charging stations, televisions, and wi-fi.

**“NICE TO HAVE”
TRANSIT AMENITIES
THAT YOUTH WANT**

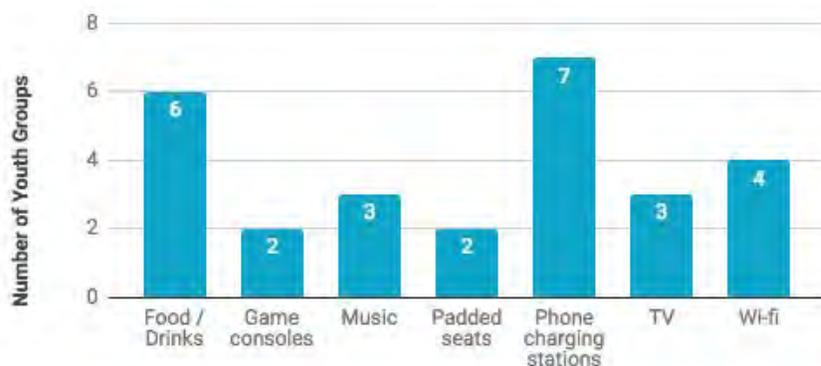


Photo: New York MTA

The phone-charging stations were the most popular—recommended by youth in 7 groups (30.4%). Students stated its benefits for safety and to assuage parent concerns when they aren’t home yet and their phone batteries run out of charge. The MTA in New York city provides free Wi-Fi in all subway stations as well as USB charging stations.

New MTA buses also rolled out in 2017 with Wi-Fi and USB charging ports.⁶³ However, it’s crucial that the MBTA prioritize reliability and frequency improvements, which will have a much more significant impact on riders’ lives than providing “nice to have” amenities.

“It’s not Wi-Fi that’s going to bring [bus] riders back.”⁶⁴

—Jon Orcutt, Director of Communications and Advocacy at TransitCenter and former Policy Director at NYCDOT—

⁶³ Barone, Vincent. “New MTA buses in Brooklyn, Manhattan feature Wi-Fi and charging ports.” amNEWYORK, 18 April 2017,

<https://www.amny.com/transit/new-mta-buses-in-brooklyn-manhattan-feature-wi-fi-and-charging-ports-1.134887>

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⁶⁴ Ibid.

Cleanliness

Youth in 7 of the 23 groups (30.4%) also brought up a large range of issues with cleanliness, including leaky buses and puddles in seats, “gross seats,” not wanting to touch the poles, seeing trash, smelliness (including cigarettes and weed), and unclean and unstocked bathrooms where youth reported sometimes seeing blood and drug users. Youth in 12 groups (52.2%) wanted cleaner buses or trains, as well as bathrooms. There was also a suggestion for brighter lighting in trains and stations, which may contribute to the feeling of cleanliness (and safety).

Old Trains

In addition to reducing delays and increasing frequency, young people also just wanted faster buses and trains. One youth from the Hyde Park Community Center questioned why it takes two minutes to get to each stop. Teens perceived trains to be “rusty,” and “looking too old,” and commented on how they “could be freshened up.” Young people wanted faster repair on trains when they are broken (as well as on escalators), but there were also requests for new trains and buses, especially Orange line trains (which the youth were told are coming), as well as quieter trains.

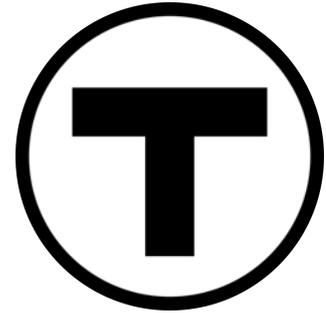


Photo: Adam E. Moreira, modifications by Pi.1415926535

Speaking to the MBTA’s priorities, one teen critiqued the plan for the Green line extension as being for “yuppies and college students.” She said that she feels the orange line is “really unsafe and unpredictable,” is really busy, has transit-dependent people on it, and needs more investment—while Somerville and Medford already have a lot of transportation options.

Aesthetics

Youth in 5 groups (21.7%) brought up the role aesthetics in increasing their excitement for public transit. They wanted nicer stations (like Assembly), “cooler”-looking trains, artwork on trains and buses (like the ads that wrap around trains), artwork inside T cars and buses (which “makes it more worthwhile”), and a revamped T logo (because “it’s so boring”). This is a great strategy for placemaking, strengthening the connection between young Bostonians and the MBTA by creating a modern identity, and specific neighborhood identities for the public transit system, as well as investing in a collaborative and community-driven project.



Youth from Artists for Humanity (AFH) recommended that the artwork come from the community. Both the MBTA and the City of Boston have commissioned work from AFH before.⁶⁵ In 2016, AFH displayed the rich history and culture of three of Boston’s neighborhoods—Roxbury, Dorchester and East Boston—through designed bike wraps on Hubway bikes. Recently this Fall, AFH designed bikes to represent Mattapan and Roslindale.



Photos: Artists for Humanity

⁶⁵ Project: *Bike Wraps And Bike Racks For National Bike Month*. Artists for Humanity, May 2017, <http://afhboston.org/bikes.html>

CONCLUSION



The Boston Youth Transportation Project (BYTP) took a close look at the transportation experiences of Boston teenaged youth to discover the barriers they face to accessing transportation. Some of the inequity brought forth in the Boston Youth Transportation Project may seem part of a larger systemic issue of having unequal access to high quality schools, but this project was motivated through a desire to investigate whether youth are fully able to utilize all of the opportunities available to them—beyond those in formal educational settings. The findings revealed that there are young people who cannot access opportunities available to them, and worse, that their transportation experiences put them at risk for discipline with educational and transit authorities, limit their learning and earning potential, produce social apprehension, affect relationships with their parents, and reduce their ability to meet basic needs. These issues were not only exacerbated by the city’s M7 walkzone policy, but also by the lack of reliable public transit service.

BYTP also examined the attitudes that young people in Boston held toward different transportation modes to understand what affinity they may have for more environmentally sustainable modes of transportation. Their strong preference for car use and increasing familiarity with TNCs indicate that much work still has to be done before future generations will shift away from the “car is king” mindset. At the same time, attitudes and desires around public transit indicate that youth transportation mode preferences can be quite malleable. With regards to biking, youth displayed significant barriers to higher rates of adoption. Many of these can be overcome with better infrastructure, improving the culture and reducing tension between people who bike and those who walk or drive, and increased outreach and programming. It is crucial for the city to prioritize these efforts to be able to reach climate goals and to provide youth with an alternative to public transit which is not currently meeting everyone’s needs.

This suggests that progress on improving this biking environment should be made more aggressively than in the 15-year plan proposed by Go Boston 2030. Otherwise, there is indication from our youth that Boston’s congestion issues will become exponentially worse. At the same time, public transit must become a more competitive option. While youth provided many recommendations to public transit, reliability and frequency improvements are key. Indeed, these were top motivators for transit substitution with TNCs.

Taken together, these findings mark a clear path for improving the quality of life for youth in Boston today and removing impediments to their future success. The steps on this path require collaboration and action from various government agencies and stakeholder groups—together they would create a more sustainable future that benefits the city as a whole.

The final pages are a summary list of the recommendations.

Summary List of Recommendations

City of Boston and Other Stakeholders

Funding

- Fund M7 MBTA passes for all students living in and attending school in Boston year-round (\$4.7 million additional cost)
- Work with State government and METCO partner schools to fund more transportation options for METCO students so they can truly integrate into their schools social fabric

Youth Outreach: engage youth in conversations regarding

- Transportation benefits
- Safety protocols for students taking transit
- Different transportation modes (expenses, choice of mode)
- Road rules for drivers and bicyclists through mailings and fliers
- Proper bike lock-up
- Blue Bikes system, including about the pricing structure, timing, check out and docking

Policy and Action

- Require all schools receiving M7 MBTA pass benefits for students to eliminate charges for replacement M7 MBTA passes and ensure that all schools comply
- Reserve more lanes for dedicated bus lanes
- Expand transit signal priority for buses, starting with signals in Grove Hall
- Investigate which schools see a large number of regularly tardy students and work with students to create transportation alternatives
- Create more walkable environments through signalized crosswalks where rights of way for people walking and driving do not conflict with one another. Start with Blue Hill Ave near Mattapan Station and intersections in Chinatown
- Swiftly increase the miles of physically-protected bike lanes. Increase visibility through paint and lighting. Ensure connectivity throughout the entire network
- Increase safety of bicycling through education and signage, including alerting drivers to existing bike lanes, enforcing no-parking in bike lanes and yielding to people on bikes
- Implement and enforce stricter laws for drivers, including reducing the speed limit, increased fines for illegal parking, use of speed radar signs, and use of cameras
- Implement and enforce stricter laws for bicyclists, including helmet-wearing
- Provide more bike racks and cages throughout the city
- Provide more opportunities for youth to learn how to ride a bike and become comfortable with street biking through workshops and lessons
- Educate youth about Boston's bike paths and bike-friendly routes. Organize teen rides to build familiarity with bike routes
- Provide a Blue Bikes youth rate at an even more reduced rate than the income-eligible rate. Launch a pilot of this youth rate to measure popularity
- Find an easy way to accept cash payment for using Blue Bikes
- Include a countdown on Blue Bikes for users to keep track of their remaining time

- Explore dockless bikes and regulations that would be necessary
- Provide monetary incentives for youth biking, similar to the Bay State Commute program that offers rewards through coupons, discounts, and tickets
- Continually advocate for better MBTA service as the list below outlines

MBTA

Policy and Fares

- Change the policy to allow all children age 11 and under onto the T for free, rather than restricting entry to two children per adult
- Implement fare capping so youth do not end up spending more than the cost of a pass each month
- Implement a policy that allow students who have forgotten or lost their transit passes to board transit after showing student ID, school document or providing a school email address
- Provide consistent and accessible pricing across transit modes in the City of Boston
- Revisit policy banning bikes on transit during rush hour, especially for students and while the bike share network is still not comprehensive across the system
- Work with METCO and municipalities to provide equitable fares for students needing to use the commuter rail to get to school
- Provide more affordable fares, including an income-eligible rate, and expand the semester and corporate pass programs
- Prioritize investment in the MBTA Orange Line, and generally for services for transit-dependent populations

Employee Training

- Implement sexual harassment prevention training for bus operators
- Instruct T personnel to allow youth to stay at stations where they are waiting for buses (particularly Ashmont and Forest Hills)
- Focus MBTA police on activities affecting people's safety rather than on fare evasion
- Require MBTA police to participate in regular (not one-time) anti-bias trainings
- Improve bus driver training to create a consistent level of friendly customer service and smooth bus riding for all customers

Improving service

- Investigate bus routes that are commonly late (19, 22, 28, 40, 45) and improve efficiency
- Provide alternative service that reaches all destinations for out-of-service bus routes
- Provide more frequent service throughout all Boston neighborhoods, including bus routes 8, 14, 16, 19, 23, 24, 29, 30, 33, 34E, 42, 45, 86; as well as the buses that run through Brighton and Hyde Park. At minimum, service should be more frequent than once an hour and service should be provided on weekends, including Sundays
- Increase span of service for all bus routes, including the 33, which ends at 7pm
- Increase frequency and span for buses in Saugus and Randolph
- Instruct all bus drivers to stop at every stop unless their bus is truly at capacity

- Allow passengers onboard at locations that are not officially stops when buses are stopped and it is safe
- Create an MBTA Blue-Red Line Connector. For the time being, allow free Blue-Red transfers between Bowdoin and Charles and Government Center and Park St
- See results in Feedback on Automated Fare Collection 2.0 section, but seek further youth input on the locations of fare vending machines for the new fare payment collection system, AFC 2.0
- Provide better maintenance of malfunctioning fare vending machines
- Provide a service that is competitive with and comparable to TNCs through increased frequency and coverage as well as more efficient routing
- Incorporate safety measures into customer surveys and ask for feedback on priorities for policing. If survey members do not contain a sufficient youth population, make special efforts to contact youth regarding safety issues
- Increase MBTA etiquette among customers through more signage and videos
- Investigate buses that are constantly overcrowded and consider articulated buses, increasing frequency, aligning the bus better with train schedules, and other solutions
- Provide more handles and poles for balancing on overcrowded trains
- Provide basic comfort through heating and air conditioning on buses and trains and at stations. Allow people to board buses when it is cold outside and take the keys if the bus driver needs to leave
- Provide bus shelter amenities, such as shoveled sidewalks and seating
- Create safer entries and exits for people at the end of the E line, where the train stops in the middle of the road
- Install safety instruments, such as doors, onto platforms to prevent people from falling onto train tracks
- Use amenities, e.g., phone charging stations and wi-fi, to attract and retain youth riders
- Install brighter lights at stations to increase perceptions of safety and cleanliness
- Ensure clean bathrooms and appearances in trains and buses and at stations

Outreach

- Post information about MBTA S-Cards at stations
- Communicate safety information and procedures
- Conduct outreach regarding roles of MBTA police and T ambassadors in red shirts

Communication about Service

- Increase communication from bus drivers and at stations regarding departure times, delays, detours, and break times
- Improve train and bus ETAs. Display real-time bus locations, rather than just the number of minutes until arrival
- Post warning signs at stations where inbound and outbound platforms do not connect. Consider policies and awareness strategies to help the issue of entering on the wrong side at these stations
- Provide more cues to distinguish between Ashmont and Braintree Red Line trains
- Create a modern T identity through a logo revamp, artwork on buses and trains, and artwork at stations. Consider commissioning youth from Artists for Humanity