

Boston

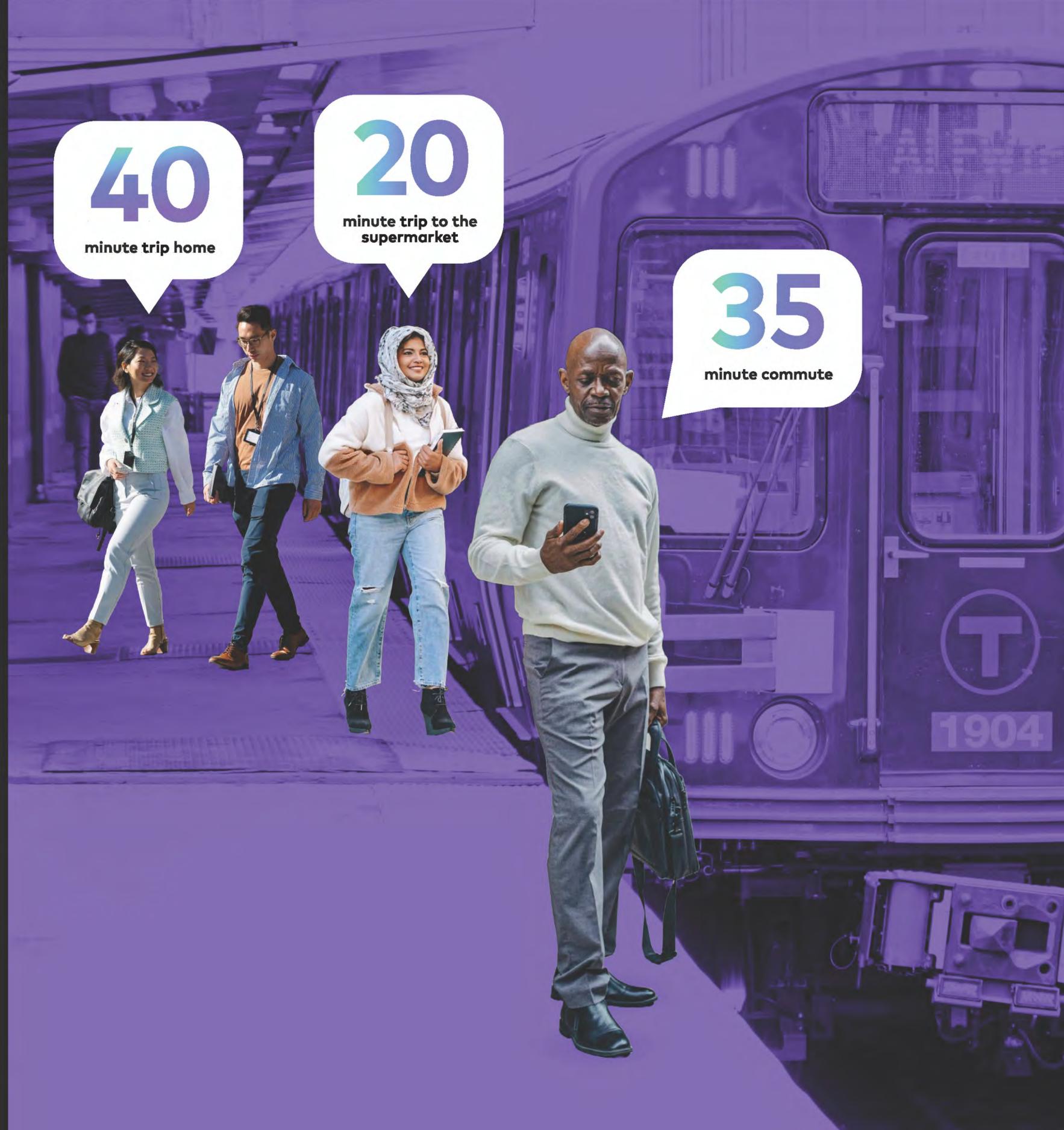


From Roxbury to Back Bay to Chelsea, all residents of Eastern Massachusetts deserve reliable, affordable access to the places they need to go.

Public transit has the potential to provide this access. Anchored by the MBTA, transit agencies provide local bus, subway, and commuter rail service radiating from Boston's historic center.

Despite the MBTA's good bones, transit service quality has slipped substantially over the past few years.

Transportation and elected officials have underfunded the MBTA's capital and operational needs for years, and COVID-19 further strained the agency's resources to operate service.



40
minute trip home

20
minute trip to the supermarket

35
minute commute

Years of deferred maintenance have hit the MBTA's subway system hard. Beginning in 2021, a wave of catastrophes has included fires, collisions, derailments, and passenger casualties.

The MBTA slowed subways to operate trains safely until it could make repairs to damaged infrastructure.

These slow zones significantly reduce subway speed and reliability, meaning that travel times are less consistent and longer for riders.

Train diversions and shutdowns have also been common, periodically disrupting riders' regular journeys.

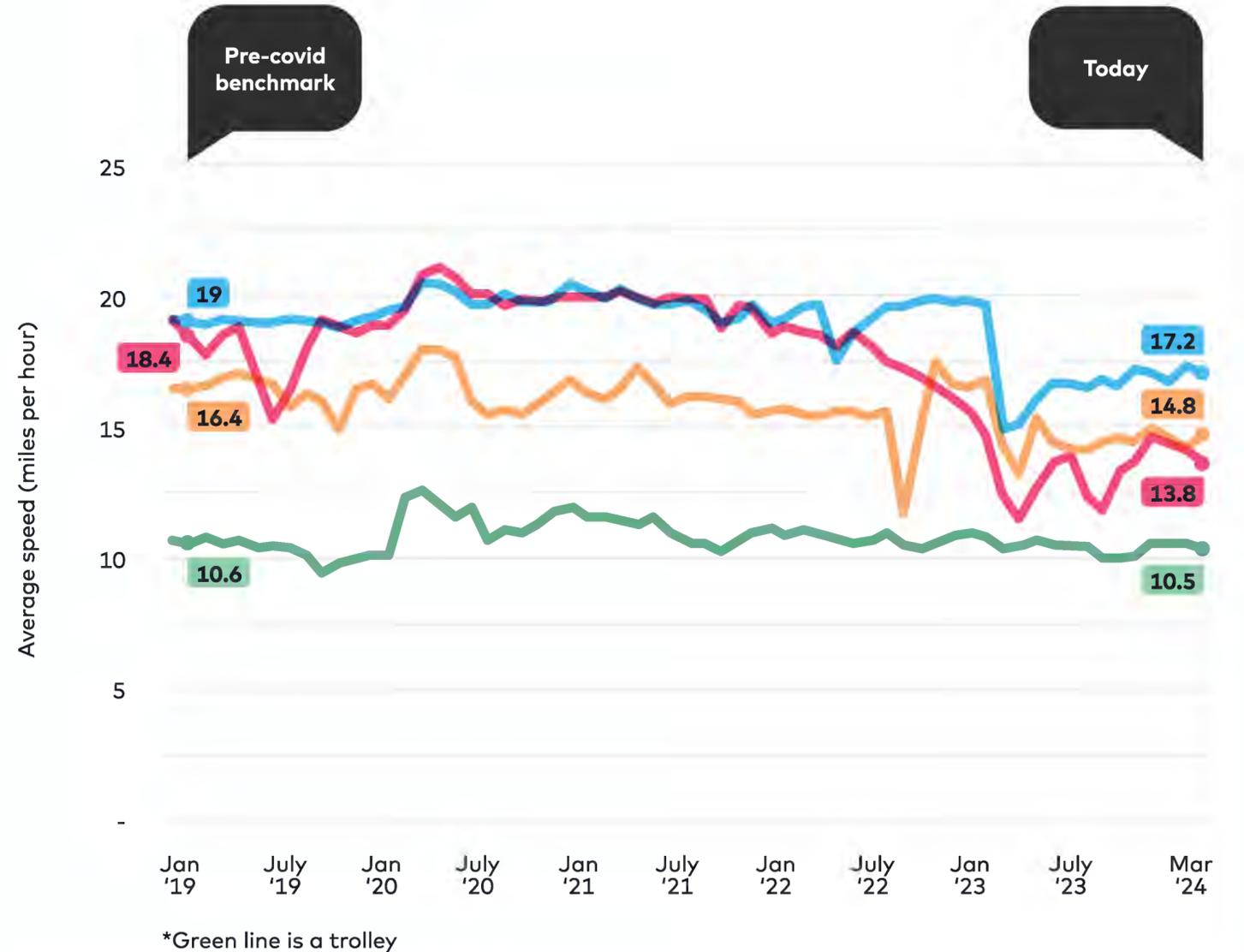


Average Speed of MBTA Subway Lines

★ Chart Insight

The average speed of subway service was 17 miles per hour in 2020 but fell to 14 miles per hour in 2023.

- Chart Key
- Blue line
 - Green line*
 - Orange line
 - Red line





"Today, the train left 3 minutes after I arrived. Last week, I had to wait 12 minutes, and there were no signs warning about the upcoming shutdown."

Anonymous
Boston public transit rider



Simultaneously, the MBTA's workforce shrank because COVID-19 made transit jobs more difficult and wages less competitive against rising costs—particularly in bus operations.

The worker shortfall caused more frequent bus delays and cancellations. There weren't enough drivers to fill in for absences and too few dispatchers to ensure that trips were delivered on schedule.

To compensate for its smaller workforce, the MBTA substantially reduced bus service, but it struggled to deliver fewer trips reliably. However, the MBTA has struggled to reliably deliver fewer trips.

Riders now face a double whammy: less service, delivered less reliably.

In late 2023, the MBTA raised the starting wages for bus operators. It has begun rebuilding its operator force, but the agency is still facing a shortfall of dispatchers. Reduced and unreliable service persists.

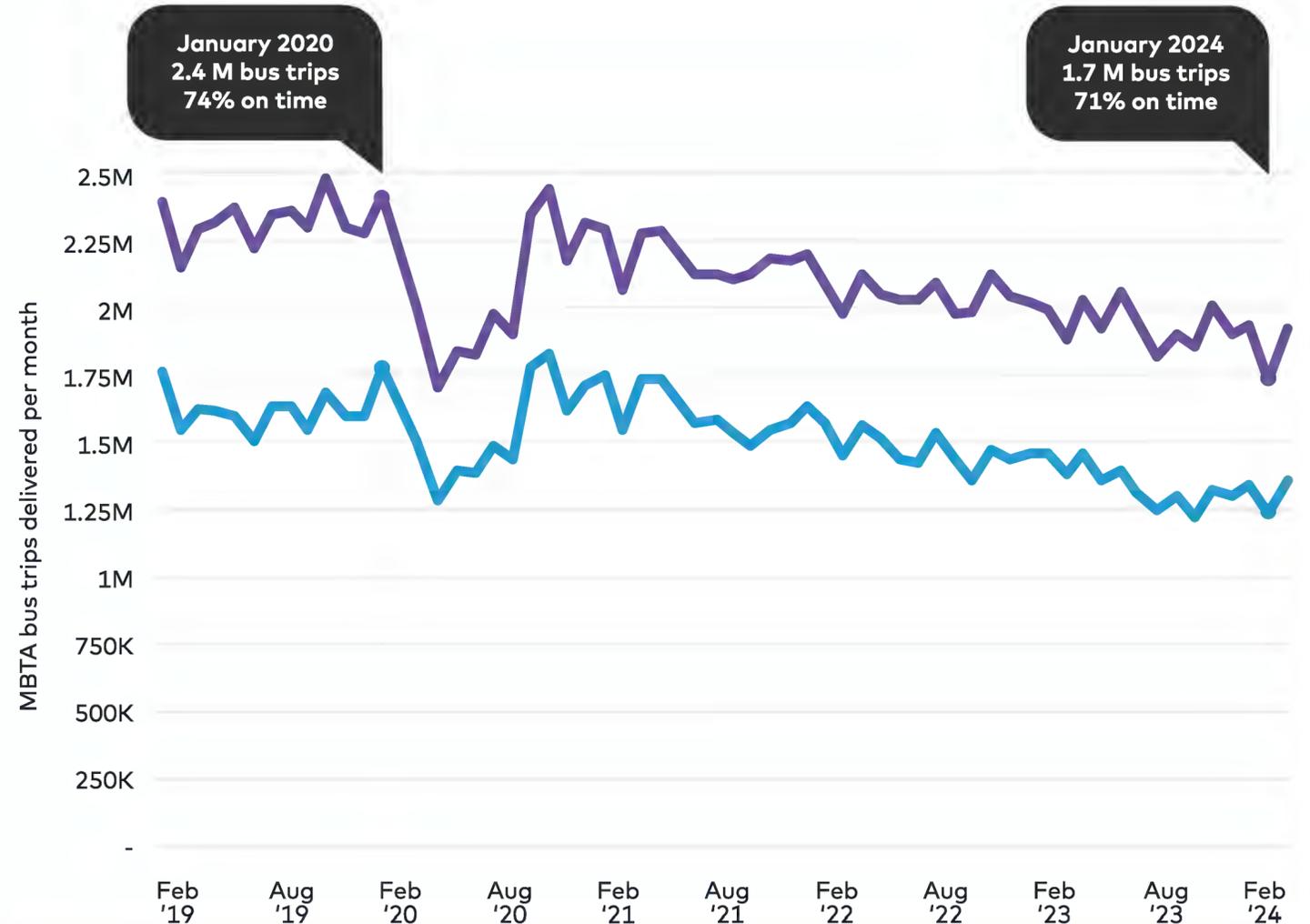


MBTA bus trips delivered vs. bus trips delivered on time

★ Chart Insight

According to MBTA data, it delivered 40% fewer bus trips in January 2024 than in January 2020. Over this period, about 7 in 10 bus trips were delivered on time.

Chart Key
— Bus trips
— Trips delivered on time



MBTA schedule cuts reduce what Boston residents can access by public transit.

Access for everyone has decreased since 2021. But public transit riders who travel off-peak or who can only afford local subway and bus fares have even less access than white-collar commuters—many of whom now work remotely.

To its credit, the MBTA's recent service changes impacted the weekday morning commute more than weekday evening or Saturday travel, shrinking the gap in access between morning travelers and others.

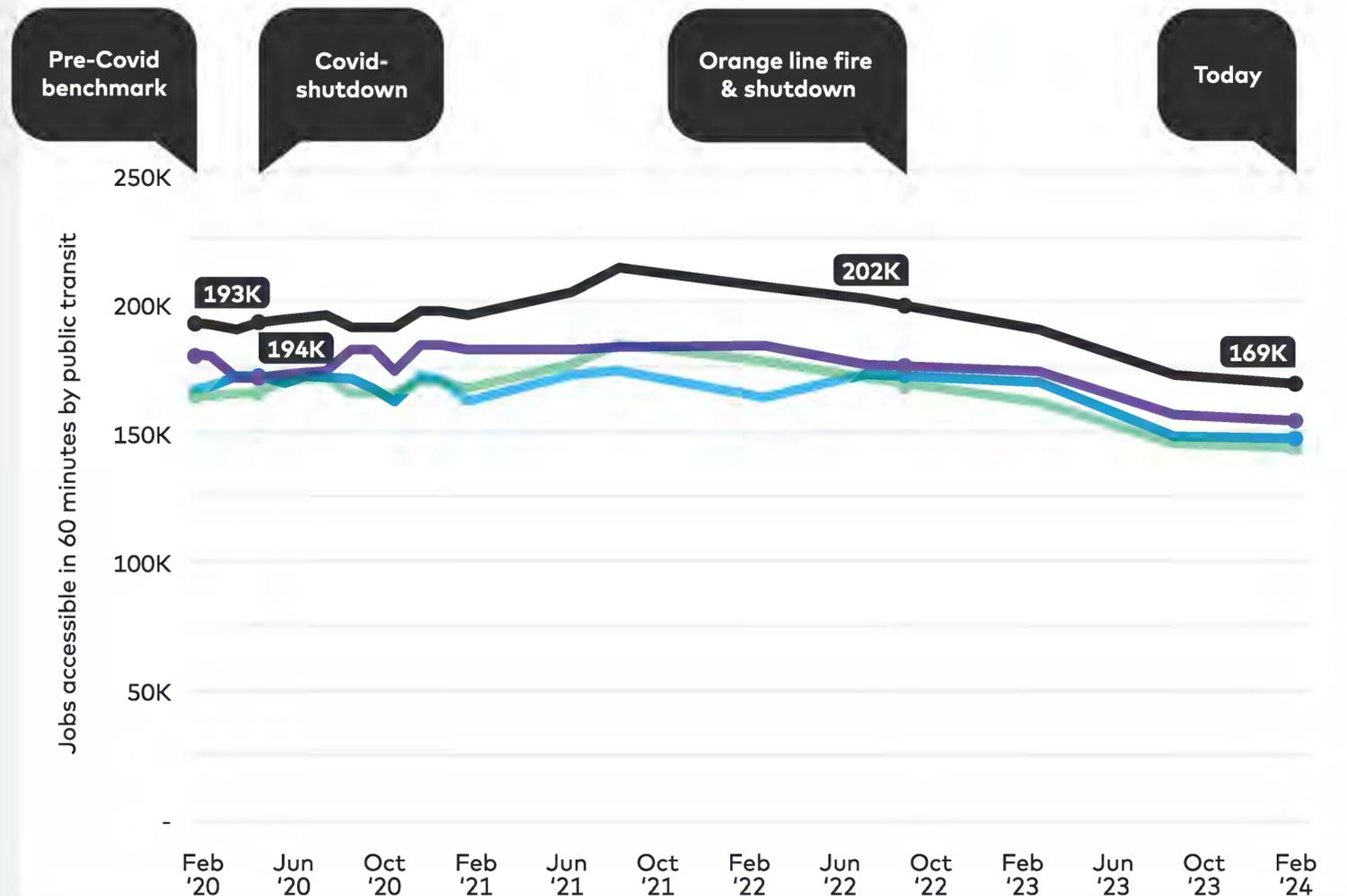


Jobs accessible in 60 minutes by public transit for Boston region residents

★ Chart Insight

In March 2024, the average Boston region resident could reach about 170,000 potential jobs by public transit in 60 minutes on a weekday morning. This level of access is 20% lower than what an average rider could reach in September 2021.

- Chart Key**
- Weekday AM, all trips
 - Weekday evening, all trips
 - Saturday AM, all trips
 - Weekday AM, trips <\$5



From 2021 to 2024, Boston transit riders lost access to 20% of potential jobs within an hour by public transit because the MBTA cut service in response to infrastructure and workforce challenges.



People who don't own cars have borne the brunt of the MBTA's decline in service quality while they endure another transportation inequity: access by driving utterly swamps access by public transit.

For decades, local and state officials have disinvested in the MBTA and smaller regional transit providers, while maintaining and expanding car infrastructure.

In Boston's suburbs and satellite cities, public transit is a very limited lifeline for non-drivers.

For the average Boston region resident, it takes 40 minutes to get to the third-nearest supermarket by transit (in other words, a variety of food options) or 5 minutes driving. The nearest hospital is more than 50 minutes away by transit, or less than 9 minutes by car.

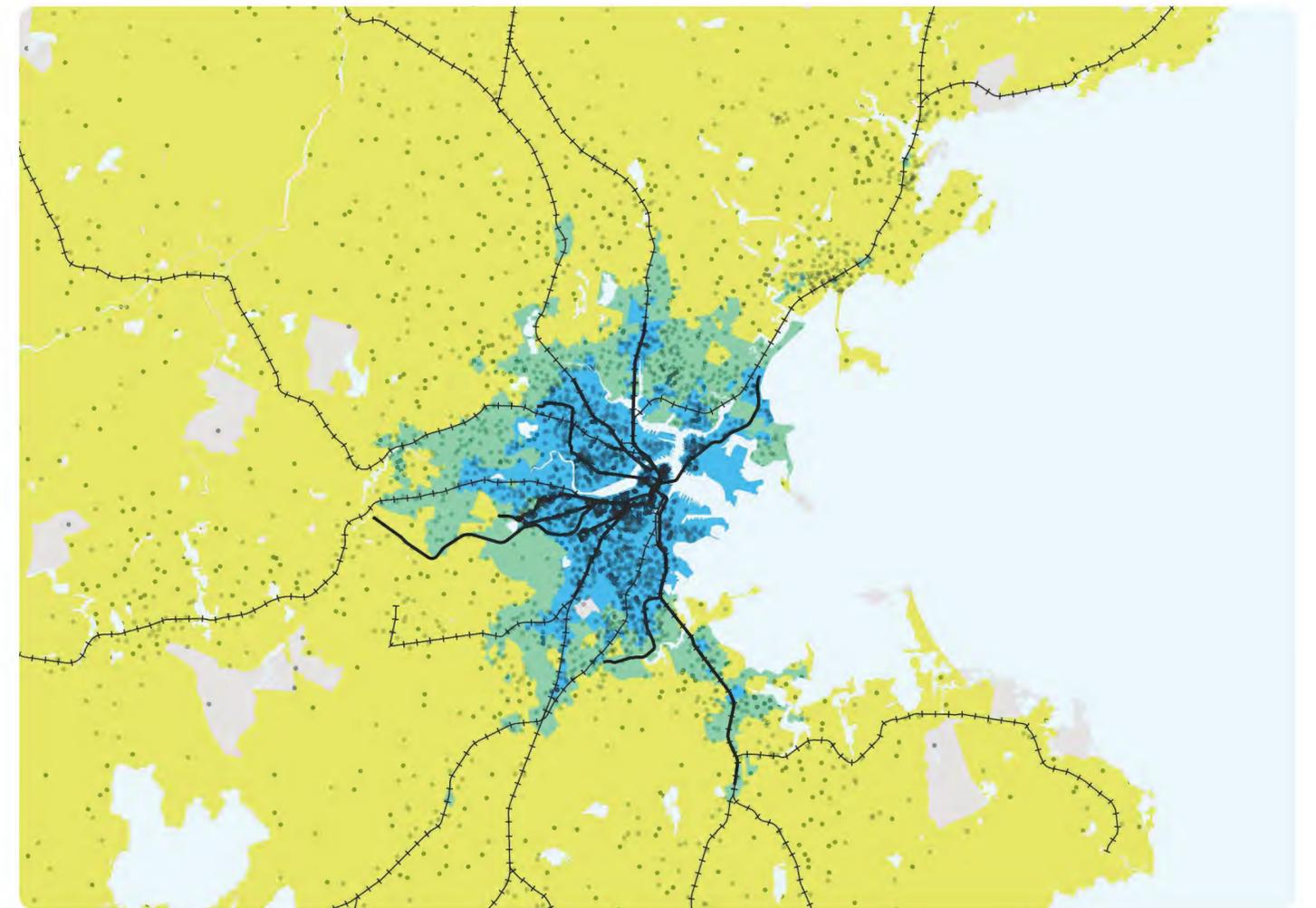


Jobs accessible in 60 minutes by car vs. public transit for Boston region residents

★ Map Insight

From downtown Boston, someone can reach twice as many potential jobs in an hour if they drive rather than take transit. In much of the region, over 25 times more jobs are accessible by driving than by transit. In no part of the region is transit access as high as car access.

- Map Key**
- more job access by transit than car
 - 1-2x more job access car/transit
 - 2-5x more job access car/transit
 - 5-25x more job access car/transit
 - 25x or more job access car/transit
 - No transit access data
- 1 dot = 100 zero-car households



While most of the region recently lost access to public transit, there are a few positive changes.

The MBTA extended the Green Line in 2022, bringing subway service to Somerville, Medford, and Cambridge. It also increased the frequency of commuter rail service and added a few stations to the network, expanding transit access in certain suburbs.

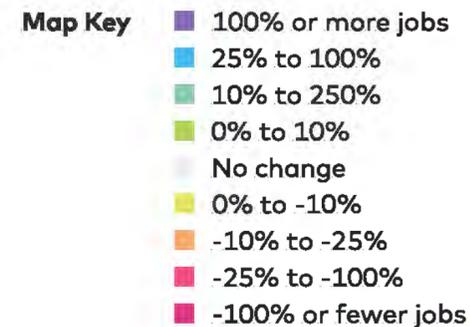
But the MBTA faces an operational fiscal cliff and a capital funding crunch that may force service cuts, slow capital repairs, and rule out any service expansions.

Massachusetts transportation and elected officials must secure dedicated funding for the MBTA...

...to close its budget gap, achieve a state of good repair, stabilize its workforce, and grow the system beyond its COVID-19 baseline. Boston transit riders deserve reliable, frequent public transit service and consistent, competitive access to where they need to go.



Change in jobs accessible in 60 minutes by public transit for Boston region residents, Feb. 2020-March 2024



Access data from TransitCenter based on transit schedules for weekday mornings

About this analysis

The access to opportunity data used in this analysis comes from TransitCenter's Transportation Equity Dashboard (TED). Data are based on changes to transit agency schedules and fare policy, where people live (data from 2017-2021 American Community Survey), where jobs are (data from 2021 LEHD), and where other essential places are (based on open-source geospatial data).

Because the TED access to opportunity data is based on transit schedules, it does not factor in reliability issues or on-time performance. Time periods are: weekday mornings from 7-9am; weekday evenings from 9-11pm; and Saturday mornings from 10-12am. The "region" described in this analysis is the Census-defined urbanized area.

Visit

To explore more access to opportunity data, visit the Transportation Equity Dashboard at www.dashboard.transitcenter.org. For more information on the methods used to generate the access to opportunity data, visit the TED About page.

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TransitCenter

TransitCenter is a foundation that works to secure a more just and sustainable future with abundant public transportation options. We recognize that our current transportation system is contributing to climate change, that transit systems poorly serve many of their riders, and that access to opportunity in the U.S. is deeply inequitable because of unjust, historical barriers based on race, gender, culture, and identity.

We believe that targeted research and effective grassroots advocacy can persuade leaders to make better choices that center both climate and justice outcomes in transportation. We make grants, conduct research, and coordinate a national network of local advocates to build a successful movement pushing for bold shifts in transportation funding and strategy.

For more information, please visit www.TransitCenter.org.

Acknowledgments

This report was written by Mary Buchanan with contributions from Hayley Richardson, Chris Van Eyken, Kapish Singla, and Eric Lundy. The author wishes to thank TransitMatters for their report storyboarding and review, riders who shared their transit stories, and Klumpentown Consulting, which built TransitCenter's Transportation Equity Dashboard. Any errors are TransitCenter's alone.

Publication Date: June 2024

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Design

L&L Design (landl.us)

