

**THE EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF ELDER AFFAIRS
& THE MASSACHUSETTS OFFICE ON DISABILITY**

**THE MBTA FARE INCREASE STUDY: EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF THE JULY 2012
FARE INCREASE ON SENIORS AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

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Committees on Ways, and Means and
the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority**

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 132, Section 15 of the Acts of 2012 charged the Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs (EOEA) and the Massachusetts Office on Disability (MOD) with studying the impact of the July 1, 2012 Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) system-wide fare increases on seniors and persons with disabilities. The legislation directed EOEA and MOD to specifically focus on the impact of the fare increase in the following areas: personal finances, employment, and the overall quality of life of seniors and persons with disabilities living in MBTA transit areas.¹In addition, the Legislature directed the MBTA “to provide all information necessary to prepare the report.”

BACKGROUND

The MBTA has demonstrated its commitment to Community First principles that allow seniors and people with disabilities to live and thrive in their communities, close to their families and support systems. In recent years, the MBTA has been working on improving access to public transportation for people across the Commonwealth, including paratransit consumers, and investing in new infrastructure to better serve people with disabilities. The MBTA currently deploys over 375,000 person hours per year of Customer Service Ambassadors at stations to assist all customers including people with disabilities. In addition, the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) Rail & Transit Division hired a Statewide Mobility Management Coordinator to evaluate and work on strategies to continuously improve access to all services for persons with disabilities.

This commitment to improving services is especially significant considering the fiscal challenges facing the MBTA. In preparing the Fiscal Year (FY) 2013 budget, the MBTA faced a \$185 million operating deficit. Three primary fiscal factors contributed to the deficit, including: debt service, increased operating costs, and underperformance of the state sales tax.²The MBTA is statutorily required to balance its budget. In order to determine how to achieve a balanced budget, the MBTA engaged in extensive outreach to the public, sharing various proposals that would enable the agency to manage within its appropriation.

In response to extensive public comment received not only through the public hearings, but also through written letters, petitions, and policy papers, the MBTA prepared the final fare and service proposal. This recommendation included fare increases for all transit services to alleviate the ongoing financial issues. The fare increases took effect on July 1, 2012. The package included increased rider costs that averaged 23% for bus services, the fixed route system transit, and commuter rail services, and increased the rider costs for the paratransit service, known as THE RIDE, by 100%.³

¹Mass. Gen. Laws ch. 132, §15 (2012).

²*MBTA Fare and Service Changes: Join The Discussion*. Retrieved March 19, 2013 from MBTA.com.http://www.mbta.com/uploadedfiles/About_the_T/Fare_Proposals_2012/MC12149%20Fare%20Increase%20Booklet_v7.pdf

³ For the purposes of this Report, ‘THE RIDE’ and ‘RIDE’ are used interchangeably to refer to the MBTA’s paratransit program.

OVERVIEW OF THE RIDE

According to regulations implementing the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, providers of fixed-route services must also provide comparable and complementary paratransit to those members of the public whose disability renders them unable to use the fixed route service.⁴ In order to comply with this requirement, the MBTA offers THE RIDE, a paratransit service which “provides door-to door, shared-ride transportation to eligible people who cannot use general public transportation all or some of the time, because of a physical, cognitive or mental disability.”⁵ Eligible riders use THE RIDE for essential transportation services. In FY12, 31,247 unique users utilized THE RIDE, a growth of approximately 12,000 customers in just over five years.⁶ In the first year after the July 1, 2012 fare increase, 1,838,759 trips were taken on THE RIDE service.

To help support the long-term sustainability of THE RIDE, the MBTA increased the cost of paratransit trips from \$2.00 per one-way trip to \$4.00 per one-way trip as part of the 2012 fare increase package.⁷ Additionally, the MBTA implemented a premium fare of \$5.00 in October 2012 for any one-way RIDE trips either scheduled or changed after 5:00 pm the night before the trip. Under the premium fare program, riders also paid a \$5.00 fare if traveling to or from a designated premium service area. Prior to 2012, the last time the RIDE fares were increased was in 2007 when fares went from \$1.50 to \$2.00 per trip.

OVERVIEW OF FIXED ROUTE SERVICES FOR SENIORS AND INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

Seniors and individuals with disabilities may use the accessible features of the fixed route system of the MBTA. To incentivize the accessibility of these services, the MBTA offers several voluntary programs targeted specifically to seniors and individuals with disabilities. A senior over the age of 65 may purchase a discounted single fare on all fixed route modes of MBTA transportation. Discounted monthly passes are also available for bus and subway services. Individuals with disabilities may apply for a Transportation Access Pass (TAP), which provides the same fare discount as the Senior Charlie Card. Customers who are blind or visually impaired and possess an identification card from the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind may ride all fixed route services for free.⁸⁹ From July 1, 2012 to June 30, 2013, 23,324,332 trips

⁴ Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, §12143, 42 U.S.C. §126 (1990).

⁵ MBTA website: Riding the T “Accessibility at the T: The RIDE”
http://www.mbta.com/riding_the_t/accessible_services/default.asp?id=7108

⁶ Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority. *Unique Users By Year, THE RIDE*. Retrieved March 14, 2013 from the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority.

⁷ Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority. (2013). *New Fares-Effective July 1, 2012*. Retrieved March 18, 2013, from http://www.mbta.com/fares_and_passes/charlie/?id=24359#TheRide

⁸ The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, *Reduced Fares*: http://mbta.com/fares_and_passes/reduced_fare_programs/ Retrieved April 30, 2013.

⁹ Customers that purchase a Senior Charlie Card, TAP, or blind/visually impaired access pass register their address with the MBTA at the time of purchase but the MBTA does not actively maintain their contact information once

were taken by seniors and persons with disabilities on the MBTA's fixed route services utilizing these discounted fares. Thus, for every trip taken on THE RIDE, approximately 12 trips were taken by seniors and persons with disabilities on the MBTA's fixed route services.¹⁰

Additionally, there are approximately 1,600 RIDE CharlieCards in circulation, which provide unlimited free travel on the fixed route system for those RIDE customers who received the card before its discontinuation in 2012 to allow for an evaluation of the program. These cards remain valid for travel for current cardholders and usage of the fixed route system by this group increased to 352,298 trips, or by 13% in FY13. Finally, to further enhance the accessibility of the fixed route system for seniors and individuals with disabilities, the MBTA also offers monthly in-person training sessions, which attempt to orient customers to the accessibility features of the fixed route system.¹¹

STUDY METHODOLOGY

In order to deliver a comprehensive report to the Legislature, EOEA and MOD conducted a statistically significant survey of customers with disabilities who used THE RIDE in the last year.

The final survey consisted of 36 questions that address and reflect the areas of focus specified by the statute. In an effort to develop questions reflecting the concerns and inquiries of community advocates, EOEA and MOD staff incorporated a number of the suggested questions provided by community advocates that address and reflect the areas of focus specified by the legislative statute.

Many questions asked respondents to compare both their use of MBTA services and general experience with those services before and after the July fare increase. The content of the questions focused on the respondent's general use of MBTA services, general use of The RIDE (if applicable), the impact of the fare increase on the respondent's finances, employment, and overall quality of life.

To establish the survey population, EOEA and MOD requested from the MBTA a statistically significant, random sample of 5,000 riders based on internal data of active RIDE users. Flyers were posted on all RIDE vehicles during the week of December 3, 2012, in order to inform the public about the survey. In addition, EOEA and MOD mailed postcards to members of the survey sample group during the week of December 17, 2012. EOEA and MOD welcomed participation from anyone wishing to participate, even if they did not receive the postcard sent to members of the survey sample group.

eligibility is determined. As such, it was determined that pass holders could not reliably be contacted to participate in this study.

¹⁰ The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, *FY13 fare increase impacts for seniors and persons with disabilities*, Retrieved March 3, 2013 from the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority.

¹¹ The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, *MBTA System Orientation*
http://mbta.com/riding_the_t/accessible_services/default.asp?id=25947/ Retrieved April 30, 2013.

All participants had the option of completing the survey online, by phone, or by calling to request a paper survey via mail. Participants could complete the survey from December 14, 2012 through January 7, 2013. In total, 858 participants completed surveys, with 665 surveys completed by respondents in the randomized sample group. In addition to the sample population of 5,000 RIDE users, EOE and MOD selected two nursing facilities to visit during the week of January 7, 2013 to gather information on how the fare increase may be affecting those that reside in long-term care facilities and to act as an oversample population for the survey.

SURVEY FINDINGS

A. Overview of Respondents

The following data describes the survey respondents.

RESPONDENTS

Male	27.3%
Female	70.7%
Under 65 years of age	35.9%
Over 65 years of age	64.1%
Monthly income under \$2,000	76.2%
Monthly income over \$2,000	23.8%
Cannot get to or use fixed route services	67.6%
Can get to or use fixed route services (at least some of the time)	27.0%
Employed (full and part-time)	11.4%

B. Summary of Findings

This section provides the aggregated results of the survey comparing customer activity before and after the fare increase.

OVERVIEW OF RESPONSES

Make fewer transit trips	60.2%
Use The RIDE less than before	40.7%
Spend less on food and groceries	44.5%
Cut back on filling medications or prescriptions	17.6%
Spend less on personal grooming costs (e.g. haircuts)	46.1%
Spend less on social, leisure, or entertainment activities	46.0%
Have less spending money	71.5%
Skipped/make partial payments for home utility or TV/internet/phone bills	22.3%

Go to place of worship less than before	19.8%
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C. Finances

Respondents' answers regarding the impact of the fare increase on finances were consolidated into two categories: those individuals who indicated that their income exceeds \$2,000 per month and those who indicated that their income does not exceed \$2,000 per month.¹²

FINANCES (Monthly Income)

	Under \$2,000	Over \$2,000
Spend less on food and groceries	52.8%	21.2%
Cut back on filling medications or prescriptions	22.4%	8.1%
Spend less on personal grooming costs (e.g. haircuts)	54.2%	42.7%
Spend less on social, leisure, or entertainment activities	71.0%	42.7%
Have less spending money	79.3%	47.2%
Skipped/make partial payments for home utility or TV/internet/phone bills	28.2%	7.4%
Make fewer transit trips	66.4%	39.3%

D. Employment

Only 11.4% of the respondents indicated that they were employed (full and part-time). The respondents answers related to the fare increase on employment are below.

EMPLOYMENT

No impact on employment	64.0%
Change in work hours	23.6%
Sometimes worry about tardiness to work	24.4%

¹² The 2013 Federal Poverty Guidelines for a Household of 1 at 200% is an income of 22,980 a year, or \$1,915 on a monthly basis. For the purpose of this report, EOE and MOD rounded this number up to \$2,000; the guidelines can be found at <http://www.masslegalhelp.org/housing/poverty-guidelines>.

E. Quality of Life

Respondents' answers were grouped into two categories: those individuals who indicated that they were over the age of 65, and those individuals who indicated that they were under the age of 65.

OVERALL QUALITY OF LIFE(By age)

	Under 65	Over 65
Make personal grooming appointments less than before the fare increase	64.7%	48.8%
Go grocery/food shopping less than before the fare increase	56.7%	44.5%
Go to doctor/medical appointments less than before the fare increase	33.3%	18.6%
Go to the drug store/pick-up prescriptions less than before the fare increase	44.8%	27.7%
Leave the house less than before the fare increase	58.1%	47.1%
See family and friends less than before the fare increase	55.6%	34.6%
Go to social activities (e.g. movies, eating out, cultural events) less than before the fare increase	72.5%	56.0%

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the recommendations based on the survey results:

1. Accessibility of the fixed route system
 - a. Continue to review THE RIDE CharlieCard pilot program and report on findings.
 - b. Continue to examine a model of THE RIDE CharlieCard program as a permanent option for registered paratransit users.
 - c. Continue to improve the MBTA's mobility training program for willing and able registered RIDE users and work to better advertise the availability of this program.
 - d. Staff each MBTA subway station with a customer service agent to assist passengers, including passengers with disabilities as they board and disembark from the trains.
 - e. Continue to provide training for the MBTA operators of fixed route vehicles regarding ways to accommodate passengers with disabilities.

- f. Increase the public awareness and foster a general understanding of the availability and protocol of accessible features at subway and bus stops.
2. Fare structure for paratransit users
 - a. ELD and MOD will work with stakeholders to explore the development of a tiered fare structure based on income levels.
 - b. Explore ways to implement a system in which the fare for certain trips can be supplemented by other state programs for which the rider otherwise qualifies.
3. Medical transportation options
 - a. Increase the utilization of other services to transport paratransit users to medical appointments, enabling paratransit users to rely on THE RIDE for their other, non-medical trips. This includes encouraging hospitals, medical providers, and/or insurers to fund paratransit transportation to-and-from essential medical appointments for their patients.
4. Paratransit transfer trips
 - a. Review the utilization of THE RIDE transfer system to determine if there are efficiencies to be achieved that would reduce the frequency or necessity of transfers.
5. Paratransit services to lower cost vehicle options
 - a. Explore ways to shift paratransit services to lower cost vehicle options and invest in new hybrid or electric car models to reduce the MBTA's costs in the long term.
 - b. Continue to develop a pilot accessible taxi subsidy program to encourage paratransit users to utilize accessible taxis instead of RIDE vans. By partnering with private taxi companies, the MBTA may reduce operating costs for paratransit because it would likely cost less for an accessible taxi trip than a RIDE van trip.
6. Technology of paratransit service
 - a. Examine investing in tracking software and technology to enhance efficiency and utilization of resources.
7. Revenue sources to fund THE RIDE system
 - a. Explore alternative sources of funding, such as corporate sponsorships and private donations.