



Issue Briefs

Assessing Community Access to Transportation
MassDOT Environmental, Social, and Governance



Transportation Access for People with Disabilities in Massachusetts

May 2026

Nicole Bilbo, Massachusetts Department of Transportation
Tiandra Ray, Massachusetts Department of Transportation

Environmental, Social, and Governance Issue Brief Series

The Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) group in the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT)'s Office of Transportation Planning (OTP) develops a series of issue briefs that explore various issues related to transportation insecurity, destination accessibility, and transportation + land use. These reports are researched, written, and formatted solely by MassDOT staff and are used to inform a range of transportation planning activities. We make these issue briefs available to the public as resources and reference documents. For more information, please email planning@dot.state.ma.us.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank the following individuals for giving their time and expertise for this issue brief: Dr. Lisa Iezzoni (Massachusetts Department of Transportation Board of Directors; Harvard Medical School), Michael Baker (Massachusetts Department of Transportation), Lee Biernbaum (Massachusetts Department of Transportation), Laura Brelsford (MBTA), Jonathan Bryant (MBTA), George Farrington (MassAbility Disability Inclusion Leader), Rachel Fichtenbaum (Massachusetts Department of Transportation), Maria Foster (Massachusetts Department of Transportation), Nancy Garr-Colzie (Massachusetts Statewide Independent Living Council), Aliza Levine (Massachusetts Statewide Independent Living Council), Alice Molari (MBTA), Jennifer Ross (MBTA), Nicole Tirone (MBTA), and Katarina Torres Radisic (Riders' Transportation Access Group).

Introduction

Accessing safe, reliable, and accessible transportation is vital for freedom of movement, agency, and dignity. Studies have found that individuals who face barriers to accessing transportation are often socially, politically, and societally excluded.¹ A lack of reliable transportation options can limit individuals' ability to play an active role in their community and support organizations that work to improve transportation access, furthering the cycle of exclusion. People with disabilities consistently face a number of mobility barriers, including poor infrastructure that does not allow for safe or comfortable travel; non-existent or inaccessible signage and wayfinding information that impacts trip-planning; and high costs associated with accessible vehicles and paratransit trips. The combination of any or all of these issues creates a complicated and often negative travel experience.

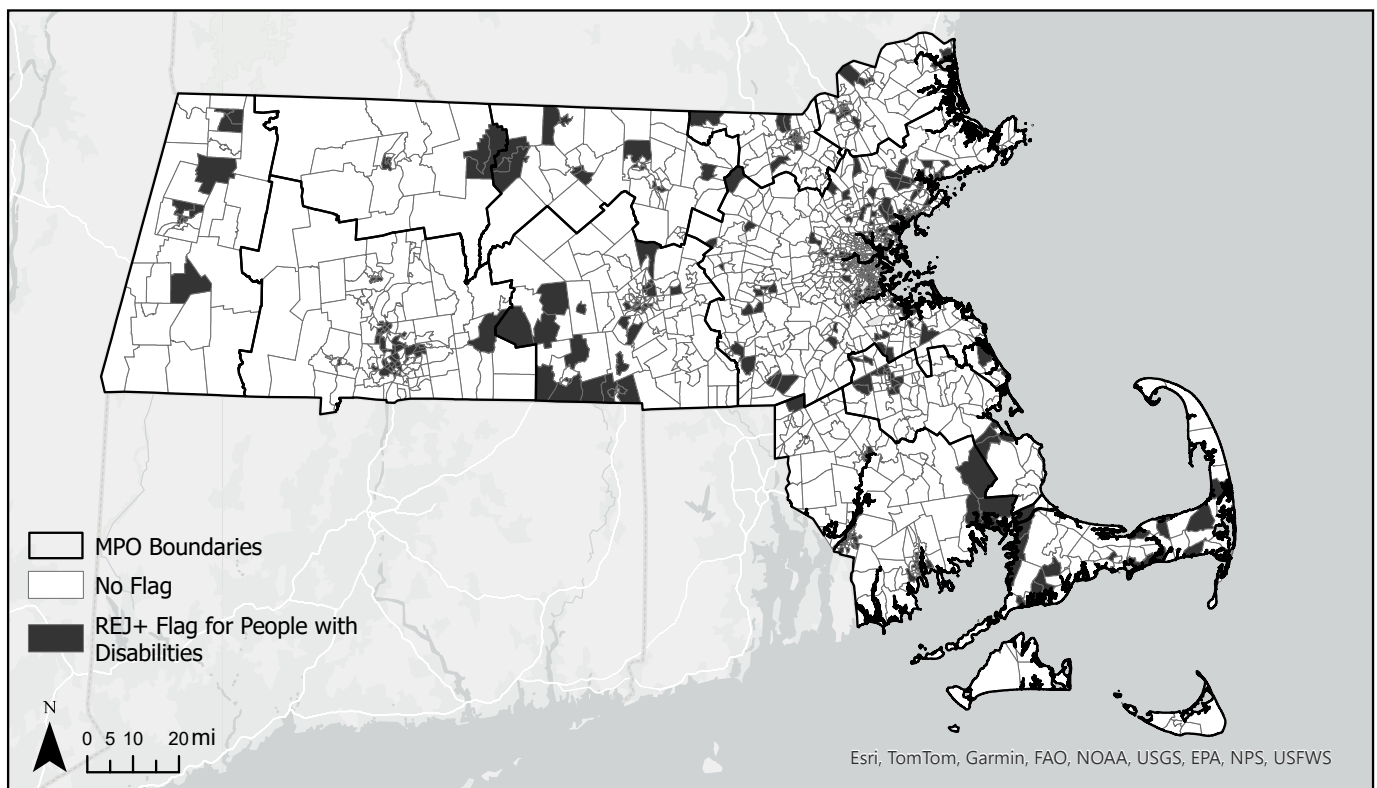
Providing safe, reliable, and accessible transportation is at the core of the Massachusetts Department of Transportation's (MassDOT) work, and MassDOT is committed to improving the transportation experiences of people with disabilities. MassDOT's long-range transportation plan, [*Beyond Mobility*](#), details MassDOT's priority to advance concerns identified by people with disabilities and to take action to create equitable and accessible transportation systems. This issue brief will outline some of the most critical concerns regarding transportation access as raised by people with and advocates for people with disabilities in Massachusetts; describe existing gaps and needs identified within MassDOT's transportation plans and projects; and point out efforts that have been made towards addressing these gaps by agencies and organizations throughout the state.

1. Bascom, Graydon W. and Keith M. Christensen. "The impacts of limited transportation access on persons with disabilities' social participation." *Journal of Transport & Health*, volume 7, part B, December 2017, pp. 227-234.

Existing Conditions

According to data from the U.S. Census's 2024 American Community Survey, more than 850,000 people of Massachusetts's population of 6.98 million—over 12% of the population—report having a disability.² This means that even if a person does not have a disability, it is likely that one of their relatives, friends, coworkers, or neighbors does.

Although our state's transportation networks are designed to accommodate users of varying physical and other abilities, people both with and without disabilities face barriers to accessing a safe, reliable, and pleasant travel experience. It is critical that MassDOT is aware of where traditional transportation design specifications limit mobility and access, and that the agency takes proactive steps to identify where those gaps are and correct any limitations.



Pictured Above: A map illustrating census tracts that are flagged as having a high proportion of people with disabilities relative to their MPO, based on MassDOT REJ+ data.

2. U.S. Census Bureau. "B18101: Sex by Age by Disability Status." 2024: ACS 5-Year Estimates Detailed Tables, <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDT5Y2024.B18101?q=B18101&g=040XX00US25>. Accessed 24 April 2026.



Identifying the geographic distribution of individuals with disabilities throughout the state can help ensure that services and enhancements reach those who might benefit from them. While individuals with disabilities live throughout Massachusetts, there are pockets of the state where higher concentrations of this population reside than others. By Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) region, the Franklin MPO has the greatest share of the population with a disability (17.5%), followed by Berkshire and Pioneer Valley (~16%), Southeastern Massachusetts (~15%), and Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard, and Nantucket combined (~14%). The Boston Region (10.5%) reports the lowest percentages of people with disabilities in its population.

MassDOT's Regional Environmental Justice Plus (REJ+) data layer identifies communities that are vulnerable to changes in the transportation network due to socioeconomic and demographic factors like income, limited English proficiency, and disability status, taking regional context into account. Communities (consistent with census tract boundaries) that are determined to have a 'high' share of the population that is transportation-vulnerable because of disability status are those within the top quartile (75th percentile) of the percent of the population with a disability. Based on the REJ+ data normalized by MPO, ~26% of census tracts in the Franklin, Montachusett, Northern Middlesex, and combined Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard, and Nantucket MPO regions are flagged for disability status, while all other MPOs hover around 25% of census tracts flagged for disability status.³

3. "REJ+ Communities by Census Tracts 2026." *Massachusetts geoDOT: MassDOT*, <https://geodot.mass.gov/pages/open-data-portal>. Accessed 24 April 2026.

Issues Identified in Accessing Transportation

A number of individuals, both members of the disability community and those who work alongside the disability community in Massachusetts, were interviewed as part of the data gathering for this issue brief. During these interviews, conversations revolved around transportation access to desired destinations via various modes, such as walking and rolling, regional transit, paratransit, microtransit and community transportation, and private transportation services, which operate as taxis, shuttles, and ride shares. The following summarizes some of the most prominent barriers faced by people with disabilities as described by the stakeholders spoken with, including poor infrastructure, inadequate wayfinding information, limited connectivity to services, and cost.

Poor Infrastructure

Lack of sidewalk continuity, curb ramps, and elevators to access transit and destinations

Wayfinding Information

Nonexistent, inaccessible, or confusing wayfinding and signage at crosswalks, transit stops, and transit stations

Connectivity to Services

Limited options for reliable and accessible transportation services

Cost

Cost of vehicle ownership, transit, and transportation services

MassDOT's Efforts Toward a More Accessible Transit System

There are several gaps and oversights in the Massachusetts transportation network that are disproportionate and unduly burdensome for the traveling public, especially for people with disabilities. Many of these concerns are documented in the following pages, and there are certainly others that are site-specific or otherwise especially nuanced. While imperfect, many stakeholders and interviewees pointed to the strategies MassDOT and the MBTA employ to respond to these concerns and noted the work being done by social service and advocacy groups to enhance the ability of the network to meet the needs of all users. Some of these strategies and programs are documented under each key issue.

Poor Infrastructure

Individuals with disabilities face issues of poor infrastructure, such as sidewalk gaps, missing curb ramps, and a lack of elevators at stations.⁴ According to the [*Massachusetts Pedestrian Transportation Plan*](#), “approximately 72 percent of locally-owned roads and 57 percent of the MassDOT-owned roads where walking is allowed currently do not have sidewalks.”⁵ Issues of poor infrastructure are particularly prevalent in rural areas where public transportation options are already limited. For those with disabilities, non-continuous sidewalks and missing curb ramps can prevent people from reaching their destination in the most direct way as well as present serious safety concerns. Individuals using mobility aids, such as wheelchairs, canes, walkers, and crutches, often cannot use steps or mount curbs safely. Even without the use of a mobility aid, individuals may have a disability that makes it difficult to use steps or to walk on surfaces that are not smooth, such as grass, dirt, or poorly maintained sidewalks. Missing or deficient curb ramps introduce dangerous opportunities for falling, and people may find themselves navigating onto busy streets or into otherwise unsafe and uncomfortable spaces without the proper accommodation to complete their trip.⁶

In addition, the conditions of sidewalks in the winter are of specific concern. Inconsistent snow-clearing and icy surfaces can prohibit people with disabilities from being able to safely and reliably access sidewalks and roll or walk to their destination. Even when people reach their destinations, they can encounter obstacles such as a lack of or total disrepair of ramps and elevators, which can leave them stranded. These issues compound to make a trip unnecessarily difficult, dangerous, and time consuming.

“

Approximately 72 percent of locally-owned roads and 57 percent of the MassDOT-owned roads where walking is allowed currently do not have sidewalks.

”

4. Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Transportation. *Beyond Mobility: Massachusetts 2050 Transportation Plan – Final Plan*. MassDOT, 2024, pp. 88-9.

5. Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Transportation. *Beyond Mobility: Massachusetts 2050 Transportation Plan – Final Plan*. MassDOT, 2024, p. 88.

6. Farrington, George. Personal Interview. 9 June 2025.



Addressing the Gaps

There are many stakeholders and ‘owners’ of different pieces of the statewide transportation network, and these public agencies are universally committed to maintaining and upgrading these segments to, at the very least, minimum Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) accessibility standards. For its part, MassDOT continues to address instances of poor or substandard infrastructure through both policy and operations, by constructing new or improving sidewalks, curb ramps, and bike paths, as well as by funding accessibility projects and further considering access as part of the project prioritization process. The [Massachusetts Pedestrian Transportation Plan](#) identifies addressing active transportation deficiencies, such as sidewalk gaps, missing crosswalks, and inefficient snow and ice removal, as a principal priority for planning,⁷ and MassDOT’s [ADA Transition Plan](#) describes how MassDOT plans to update all of its services and infrastructure to be ADA-compliant.⁸ As part of the creation of the *ADA Transition Plan*, MassDOT completed a curb ramp assessment, inventorying all of the existing and/or missing MassDOT-owned curb ramps to address all of the deficient or nonexistent curb ramps, and then established a remediation process.⁹ The original *ADA Transition Plan* was written in 2017, but *Beyond Mobility* directs the Office of Diversity and Civil Rights to update the plan by 2025; updates are currently underway.¹⁰

MassDOT is also pursuing and providing additional options for funding opportunities to address a myriad of transportation issues, particularly ones commonly faced by people with disabilities. The [Complete Streets Program](#) gives municipalities funding and tools to address gaps in transportation networks in the hope that streets and all modes of travel become more accessible and safer for people of all ages and

7. “Massachusetts Pedestrian Transportation Plan.” *MassDOT*, 2019, p. 11, <https://massdot.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Map-Journal/index.html?appid=96339eb442f94ac7a5a7396a337e60c0>. Accessed 22 May 2025.

8. Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Transportation. *Transition Plan for the Public Rights of Way: Americans with Disabilities Act/Section 504*. MassDOT Office of Diversity and Civil Rights, Oct. 2017.

9. Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Transportation. *Transition Plan for the Public Rights of Way: Americans with Disabilities Act/Section 504*. MassDOT Office of Diversity and Civil Rights, Oct. 2017, pp. 25-44.

10. Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Transportation. DCAI2.4 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Transition Plan Update, *Beyond Mobility: Massachusetts 2050 Transportation Plan – Final Plan*. MassDOT, 2024, p. 113.



abilities. As part of the grants announced for Round 2 of Fiscal Year 2025, many communities are spearheading projects to increase sidewalk and bike access. For example, Merrimac was awarded \$447,429.17 to construct new sidewalks on Locust Street alongside a new signalized crosswalk, new signage, and a Shared Use Path, and Bellingham is using the \$100,000 it was awarded to reconstruct a sidewalk on Blackstone Street, adding ADA-compliant ramps and detectable warning panels to increase accessibility and safety.¹¹

There are also resources available to support accessibility improvements at specific sites and locations. The [Safe Routes to Schools Program](#) provides resources, including events, educational materials and guides, and infrastructure funding options to increase safe walking, biking, and rolling among students. The program offers resources on inclusion and accessibility strategies to support students with disabilities, such as the [Inclusion & Abilities Guide](#).¹² In a similar vein, the [Shared Streets and Spaces Grant Program](#) is focused on funding projects that can be quickly implemented by municipalities and public transit authorities to improve public spaces, such as sidewalks, curbs, bus stops, and streets. As of December 2024, “the program has given \$55.3 million dollars to 227 municipalities and seven transit authorities to implement 521 projects across Massachusetts, of which 56% are in Environmental Justice communities.”¹³ Through this program, the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTa) was awarded \$250,000 in 2024 to improve infrastructure and access to transportation in Springfield, Holyoke, and Palmer by installing new ADA-compliant ramps, extending sidewalks, putting in advanced warning symbols and signage, and more.¹⁴ These programs help advance the Commonwealth’s climate efforts through promoting walking, biking, and rolling and allow communities to be more accessible for public utilization.

11. Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Transportation. *Complete Streets Funding Program Tier 3 Grant Recipients: Fiscal Year 2025 Round 2*. MassDOT Highway Division, 2025.

12. Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Transportation. *Massachusetts Safe Routes to School: Inclusion & Abilities Guide*. MassDOT Safe Routes to School, 2020.

13. “MassDOT Celebrates 15 Miles of New Shared Use Paths Opened in 2024.” MassDOT, 30 Dec. 2024, <https://www.mass.gov/news/massdot-celebrates-15-miles-of-new-shared-use-paths-opened-in-2024>. Press Release.

14. “MassDOT Announces \$6.5 Million Shared Streets & Spaces Program Awards.” MassDOT, 5 Aug. 2024, <https://www.mass.gov/news/massdot-announces-65-million-shared-streets-spaces-program-awards>. Press Release.

With respect to public transit services, in 2019 the MBTA created a [*Plan for Accessible Transit Infrastructure*](#),¹⁵ a roadmap for addressing inaccessible infrastructure in the MBTA service system, which it has continued to work on advancing, producing an updated [*Accessibility Initiatives*](#) report in May 2025.¹⁶ These reports detail specific station improvements, as well as general efforts to improve accessibility, including the construction of interim free-standing mini-high platforms at commuter rail stations until permanent full-level platforms can be constructed and replacement or new installation of elevators at a number of MBTA stations.¹⁷



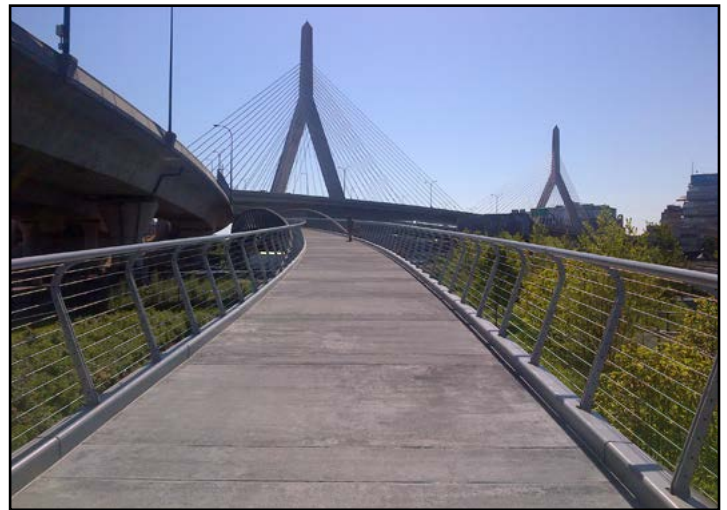
Pictured Above: Example of a mini-high platform at an MBTA Commuter Rail Station.

15. "Accessibility Improvements." MBTA, <https://www.mbta.com/projects/accessibility-improvements>. Accessed 23 May 2025.

16. Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority. *Accessibility Initiatives—May 2025*. MBTA Department of System-Wide Accessibility, 29 May 2025.

17. Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority. *Accessibility Initiatives—December 2024*. MBTA Department of System-Wide Accessibility, 6 Dec. 2024, pp. 9 and 12.

The MBTA's Department of System-Wide Accessibility (SWA) leads the efforts to keep track of these infrastructure issues and to address them. SWA and the MBTA reinforce their commitment to people with disabilities through their community outreach at events and through stakeholder groups, namely the Riders' Transportation Access Group (RTAG). RTAG is an independent, community-based group that advocates on behalf of older adults and people with disabilities regarding MBTA transportation matters. Their meetings are open to the public to allow for community participation and feedback.¹⁸ Although the group primarily advises the MBTA, they have worked with MassDOT on a number of issues, including pushing MassDOT to update its bike lane planning and design guidelines to address accessibility concerns found in the current guidelines.¹⁹



Pictured Above: Examples of efforts toward accessible infrastructure in MassDOT projects.

18. "Riders' Transportation Access Group (RTAG)." *MBTA*, <https://www.mbta.com/accessibility/get-involved/rtag>. Accessed 31 July 2025.

19. Torres Radisic, Katarina, Riders' Transportation Access Group. Personal Interview. 22 July 2025.

Wayfinding Information

Difficulty moving around because of an inability to understand wayfinding information or a lack of information altogether severely limits an individual's ability to navigate transit systems. Wayfinding information throughout the state is often non-existent or inaccessible, especially at crosswalks, transit stops, and transit stations. Insufficient physical wayfinding signage includes those that are confusing and lack contextual information, such as a legend or navigational aid; those that share outdated or partial information; and/or those that display information in a way that is visually difficult to comprehend, such as with a small font size or beneath inadequate overhead lighting.

Adequate and instructive information is critical for navigating pedestrian, bicycle, and motorized trips and access or connection points, but it is especially critical on public transit systems that feature designated points of access and egress, often for multiple routes and services in close proximity of each other. Information in transit stations and on trains and buses is also shared via audio announcements, which are crucial for individuals with visual impairments. However, these audio cues can be difficult to hear or not working at all.²⁰ In a survey conducted for *Beyond Mobility*, low-income individuals, individuals with a disability, and individuals with limited English proficiency all ranked projects related to wayfinding and traveler assistance as a top priority with respect to how MassDOT should focus improvement efforts.²¹

“

Audio cues are often treated as an afterthought, and can be difficult to hear, if they are working at all.

”

20. Garr-Colzie, Nancy and Aliza Levine, The Massachusetts Statewide Independent Living Council. Personal Interview. 3 June 2025.

21. Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Transportation. *Beyond Mobility: Massachusetts 2050 Transportation Plan – Final Plan*. MassDOT, 2024, pp. 53-4.



Addressing the Gaps

MassDOT is focused on improving wayfinding throughout the transportation network for people with disabilities, as demonstrated through *Beyond Mobility*. *Beyond Mobility* specifies action items assigned to MassDOT Divisions that seek to address various transportation issues. A number of these action items are geared specifically towards people with disabilities and are related to wayfinding information, including directing the Office of Transportation Planning to help provide guidance and technical assistance to municipalities and partner agencies,²² as well as to spearhead developing an inventory of bus stops and stations that have insufficient wayfinding signage and language translations.²³ The inventory will be created with regional planning partners, municipalities, the MBTA, and Regional Transit Authorities, and alongside an analysis of bus stop and transit station usage by different demographic groups. These analyses will help shed light on the specific needs of the affected communities and advise a capital funding program that will help improve wayfinding for vital locations and populations. Similarly, MassDOT's Rail and Transit Division have also been tasked with looking “for new opportunities to offer funding to RTAs to expand signage and real-time customer information-sharing systems, with a particular focus on translating materials into languages other than English.”²⁴

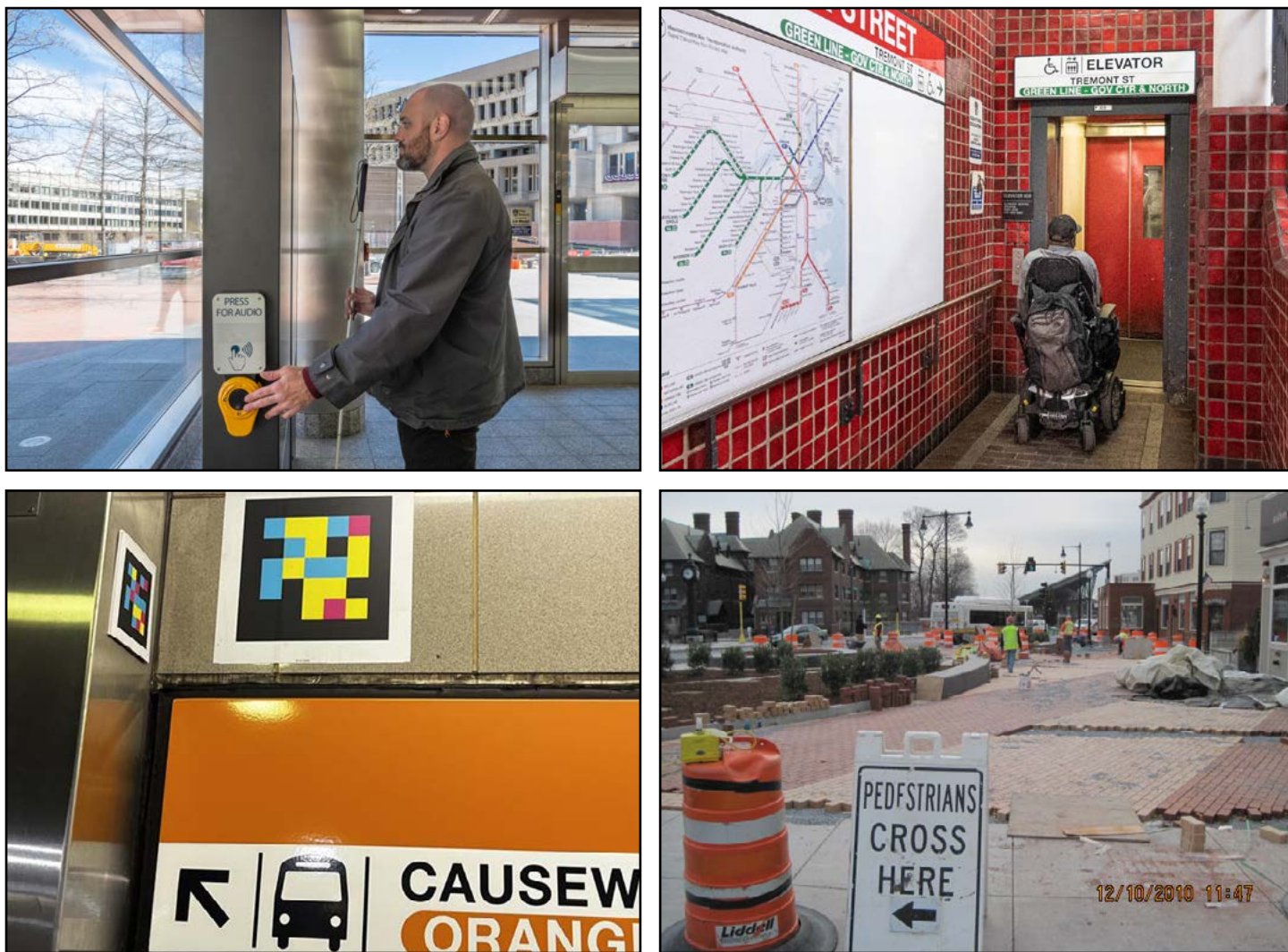
The MBTA is further addressing wayfinding information issues through their initiatives to improve wayfinding at stations, including bringing signage into compliance with current regulations and standards at six key stations: Park Street, Haymarket, North Station, Downtown Crossing, Chinatown, and State Street. Another initiative being deployed through the MBTA's [Bus Network Redesign](#) program is improving signage at bus stops to increase the size of the signs and the font for better visibility, readability,

22. Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Transportation. TEAI4.1: Guidance on wayfinding and signage, *Beyond Mobility: Massachusetts 2050 Transportation Plan – Final Plan*. MassDOT, 2024, p. 124.

23. Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Transportation. TEAI3.3: Inventory of wayfinding gaps, *Beyond Mobility: Massachusetts 2050 Transportation Plan – Final Plan*. MassDOT, 2024, p. 124.

24. Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Transportation. TEAI3.2 Signage and customer information, *Beyond Mobility: Massachusetts 2050 Transportation Plan – Final Plan*. MassDOT, 2024, p. 123.

and accessibility.²⁵ The MBTA is also piloting the use of an accessible wayfinding technology called NaviLens at several stations and bus stops. NaviLens is a phone app that scans QR codes placed around an area to help those who are blind or have low vision navigate the space.^{26 27}



Pictured Above: Examples of wayfinding information, some accessible, and some illustrating gaps in accessibility.

25. "Improved Bus Stop Signs." MBTA, <https://www.mbta.com/projects/bus-network-redesign>. Accessed 14 Oct. 2025.

26. Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority. *Accessibility Initiatives—December 2024*. MBTA Department of System-Wide Accessibility, 6 Dec. 2024, p. 6.

27. NaviLens. Neosistec, 2021, <https://www.navilens.com/en/>. Accessed 11 June 2025.

Connectivity to Services

Limited options for reliable and accessible transportation services can prevent individuals from reaching their destinations on time or at all. The 2022 National Household Travel Survey revealed that people with disabilities aged 18-64 “made fewer trips per day on average than people without disabilities in 2022,”²⁸ and in a 2023 *Beyond Mobility* survey regarding connectivity to services, individuals who have a disability were one of the top three groups that reported the highest levels of dissatisfaction with their ability to access the destinations offered in the survey, such as parks and open spaces, food retailers, jobs, and health care services.²⁹

Many interviewees for this issue brief acknowledged that while ADA accessible paratransit and microtransit services do exist in the region, it does not always operate at hours that allow for reliable and flexible use, particularly in rural areas. While there are on-demand transportation options beyond these services, such as taxis and rideshares, these options are not reliably accessible and may not be available often or at all in the more rural parts of the state.

The impacts of unreliable transportation are more than just inconvenient: limited mobility can tangibly affect a person’s health and well-being. Time-consuming transportation journeys might lead individuals to be late for or altogether miss their healthcare appointments, while healthcare providers are already strapped for time and might not be able to accommodate someone who is late or misses their appointment; should this happen multiple times, a provider is likely to drop the patient completely. The stress of navigating an unreliable transit system or trying to

“

Individuals who have a disability were one of the top three groups that reported the highest levels of dissatisfaction with being connected to all services.

”

28. United States, Department of Transportation. *Travel Patterns of Adults with Travel-Limiting Disabilities*. Bureau of Transportation Statistics, April 2024, p. 10.

29. Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Transportation. *Beyond Mobility: Massachusetts 2050 Transportation Plan – Final Plan*. MassDOT, 2024, p. 41.

guarantee a ride to the doctor is a burden on people with disabilities, and enduring this stress on a daily basis has a negative impact on a person's health.³⁰ Residents of areas outside of the MBTA service area have additional stressors in accessing healthcare, as many healthcare providers—especially specialty providers—tend to be in and around Boston, which is particularly difficult to get to quickly via any type of accessible transportation.^{31 32}



Pictured Above: Example of a person with a mobility aid utilizing an accessible vehicle.

30. Iezzoni, Lisa, M.D. Personal Interview. 10 July 2025.

31. Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Transportation and MassINC Polling Group. *The Cost of Getting Around: The Transportation Burdens of Lower-Income Residents in Western Massachusetts*. MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning, June 2025, pp. 9, 43.

32. Farrington, George. Personal Interview. 9 June 2025.



Addressing the Gaps

MassDOT's funding grants have increased the resources that municipalities and service providers can offer to help individuals better connect to services. The [Community Transit Grant Program](#) (CTGP) "awards funds to help meet the transportation and mobility needs of older adults and people with disabilities."³³ For example, [Ride Match](#), a searchable directory of accessible transportation options in the state created by the Greater Attleboro Taunton Regional Transit Authority (GATRA), was able to expand its reach to all of Massachusetts because of a CTGP award.³⁴ Ride Match allows users to search for transportation providers by their city/town and to search for transportation options based on a start and end point, the time of day, and the purpose of the trip, filtered through additional needs options like having a disability and/or being a senior citizen. After the initial statewide expansion from the CTGP award, GATRA and MassDOT partnered to update the platform with funding outside of the Program, and MassDOT has recently agreed to continue funding the updates to the platform due to its importance as a community tool. Ride Match gives people the ability to easily find accessible transportation options, allowing the process to be less time-consuming.

MassDOT's coordination with other state agencies as well as service providers, such as Regional Transit Authorities and Councils on Aging, is paramount to increasing access for people with disabilities. In addition, organizations that provide community transportation³⁵ services for people with disabilities are crucial for filling transportation gaps based on community need. MassDOT is looking to continue to increase access to human services transportation, such as paratransit and non-emergency medical transportation, through greater collaboration between and partnership with the

33. "Community Transit Grant Program." *Commonwealth of Massachusetts: Massachusetts Department of Transportation*, <https://www.mass.gov/community-transit-grant-program>. Accessed 20 Dec. 2024.

34. *Ride Match*. The Greater Attleboro Taunton Regional Transit Authority, <https://massridematch.org/>. Accessed 27 Dec. 2024.

35. More information about different types of Community Transportation can be found here: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/community-transportation-terminology>



agencies involved in providing these services.³⁶ MassDOT's Rail and Transit Division has convened an Access and Mobility Working Group made up of a wide range of aging, disability, and transportation partners to help develop an implementation plan for a statewide system of Regional Mobility Managers. Regional Mobility Managers will be able to assist anyone in Massachusetts with learning about and accessing their transportation options, and they will help organizations come together and collaborate to fill gaps in the transportation network.³⁷ This is a model in use by other states, and a 2023 study reinforced that Massachusetts practitioners thought it would be beneficial to institute here.³⁸ Additionally, *Beyond Mobility* tasked MassDOT's Office of Transportation Planning with working with the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development to explore "opportunities to use discretionary funds to support expanding employment transportation to low-income individuals and people with disabilities."³⁹

i

South Shore Community Action Council (Plymouth) and Helping Our Women (Provincetown, Wellfleet, Truro, and Eastham) are examples of community organizations that provide crucial door-to-door transportation for individuals with disabilities and those who need to access medical care.

36. Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Transportation. TEA1.4 Enhance coordination of services involved in human services transportation (HST), *Beyond Mobility: Massachusetts 2050 Transportation Plan – Final Plan*. MassDOT, 2024, p. 122.

37. "Mobility management." *MassDOT: Rail and Transit Division*, <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/mobility-management>. Accessed 30 July 2025.

38. Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Transportation. *Would a System of Regional Mobility Managers Benefit Massachusetts?* MassDOT Rail and Transit Division, Aug. 2023.

39. Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Transportation. DCA1.3 Options for people who are low income or who have disabilities, *Beyond Mobility: Massachusetts 2050 Transportation Plan – Final Plan*. MassDOT, 2024, p. 111.

For those who live in the Greater Boston area, the MBTA offers public transportation and other resources tailored to people with disabilities. The [MBTA Mobility Center](https://www.mbta.com/accessibility/mbta-mobility-center) provides services to individuals needing assistance and information on transportation options, such as help with planning trips on the MBTA's fixed route or paratransit services, using cell phones and computers to access resources, or scheduling an eligibility appointment for [The RIDE](https://www.mbta.com/accessibility/the-ride).⁴⁰ The RIDE is a door-to-door paratransit service for individuals who have a permanent or temporary disability and cannot use the MBTA's subway, bus, and trolley services. The RIDE operates in 58 cities and towns in the Greater Boston area.⁴¹ Many RTAs across the state offer travel training similar to the MBTA Mobility Center through Travel Trainers they have on staff. Individuals can work with a Travel Trainer to learn how to use transit to access destinations, such as work, school, or a community center. Travel Training programs are important services that allow people to gain confidence and independence when using the transit systems in any region of Massachusetts.



Pictured Above: Example of travel instruction services provided by the MBTA.

40. "MBTA Mobility Center." MBTA, <https://www.mbta.com/accessibility/mbta-mobility-center>. Accessed 27 Dec. 2024.

41. "The Ride." MBTA, <https://www.mbta.com/accessibility/the-ride>. Accessed 27 Dec. 2024.

Cost

A throughline of the conversations conducted for this brief was the cost of transportation generally. Even if a transit system runs well and is ADA-compliant, it is still inaccessible if people are unable to afford it. Some individuals we spoke with indicated that it is easier to access cost-effective options in urban areas, particularly those within the MBTA service area, because of the different offerings and discounts for people with disabilities. However, even if programs and discounts exist, the cost might still be too high for some individuals, especially as the cost of living in Massachusetts increases. Rural areas can be particularly cost prohibitive, especially places that have unreliable access to transit service or require people to own a car or use a private car service, like a taxi or rideshare. Individuals interviewed as part of MassDOT's People and Transportation Project, a study that looked at transportation challenges faced by lower-income residents in Western MA, indicated their strong support for fare-free transit service. Systems that offer fare-free service have yielded positive responses statewide, particularly in terms of increased ridership.^{42 43}

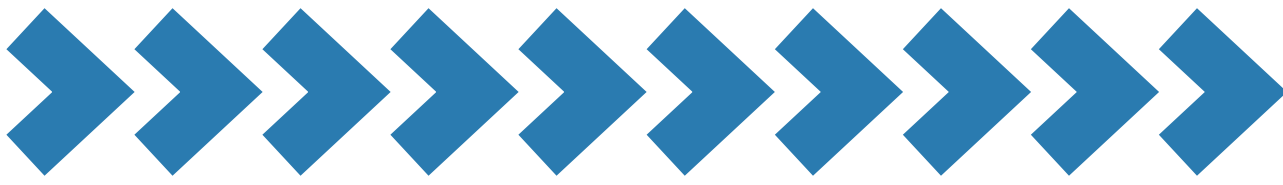
“

Even if programs and discounts exist, the cost might still be too high for some individuals, especially as the cost of living in Massachusetts increases.

”

42. Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Transportation and MassINC Polling Group. *The Cost of Getting Around: The Transportation Burdens of Lower-Income Residents in Western Massachusetts*. MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning, June 2025, p. 8.

43. Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Transportation. Fare Free Pilot Program for RTAs. MassDOT Rail and Transit Division, March 2025, pp. 14-15.



Addressing the Gaps

A high cost of transportation prevents access to transportation. To ensure that the most people possible can use their systems, transit providers have implemented reduced fare or fare-free programs for people with disabilities and, in some cases, for all riders. The Commonwealth's Fiscal Year 2026 budget requires all RTAs to permanently provide year-round fare-free service and allocates \$35 million in funding to assist this effort.⁴⁴ ⁴⁵ Many RTAs have already been running fare-free service, which has increased ridership and access across the board, not just for people with disabilities. Additionally, the MBTA offers free fares to people who are legally blind and reduced fares to people with disabilities, people over the age of 65, and those enrolled in a state assistance program.⁴⁶ The MBTA is continuing to explore expanding access to reduced fares and, alongside the RTAs,⁴⁷ to fare-free programs.⁴⁸ Addressing issues related to the cost of transportation, infrastructure, and the navigational and connectivity aspects of transit systems improves the travel experience for people with disabilities.

44. "Fact Sheet and Highlights: Legislature's Fiscal Year 2026 Budget." *Commonwealth of Massachusetts: Senate Press Room*, 29 June 2025, <https://malegislature.gov/PressRoom/Detail?pressReleaseld=218>. Press Release.

45. Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Office of the Governor and Massachusetts Legislature. *Commonwealth of Massachusetts FY2026 General Appropriations Act: 1595-6370 Commonwealth Transportation Fund*. Acts of 2025: Chapter 9, Secretary of the Commonwealth, 4 July 2025.

46. "Reduced Fares." *MBTA*, <https://www.mbta.com/fares/reduced>. Accessed 27 Dec. 2024.

47. Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Transportation. TEA11.2 Fare-free transit options, *Beyond Mobility: Massachusetts 2050 Transportation Plan – Final Plan*. MassDOT, 2024, p. 121.

48. Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Transportation. TEA11.1 Fare program results, *Beyond Mobility: Massachusetts 2050 Transportation Plan – Final Plan*. MassDOT, 2024, p. 121.

Conclusion

The issues of poor infrastructure, insufficient wayfinding information, connectivity to services, and cost discourage people from feeling confident in using transit systems, and, ultimately, prevent people from being able to access transportation options. When people with disabilities are unable to utilize the transit system, it affects their ability to have and keep a job, attend appointments, participate in activities, and engage in social events. Their experience using transportation is challenging, and accessing the system requires unnecessary time and energy. Advocates and members of the disability community continue to share their experiences with MassDOT, as well as the MBTA, which has helped transportation in Massachusetts become more accessible. MassDOT provides resources and funding opportunities to assist municipalities, Regional Transit Authorities, and other service providers, like Councils on Aging, in expanding their transportation options and infrastructure. Within MassDOT, Divisions manage projects and planning studies and support programs aimed at advancing infrastructure and transit systems around Massachusetts. Through its policies and projects, MassDOT seeks to improve travel experiences for people with disabilities in the hope that they can navigate its systems comfortably, accessing any destination in an equitable manner.

Image Sources

Title Page: [May – June 2025 Accessibility Initiatives Report and Public Meeting | Updates | MBTA](#)

Page 10: [Commuter Rail Access Guide | Accessibility on the MBTA | MBTA](#)

Page 11: [MassDOT | Flickr](#) 1, 2

Page 14: (Top Row) [December 2022 Accessibility Initiatives Report and Public Meeting | Updates | MBTA](#) , [May 2021 Accessibility Initiatives Report | Updates | MBTA](#)

(Bottom Row) Liz Williams, [MassDOT | Flickr](#)

Page 16: [History of Accessibility and the Impact of Daniels-Finegold Settlement Agreement | Accessibility on the MBTA | MBTA](#)

Page 19: [Travel Instruction Services and Tools | Accessibility on the MBTA | MBTA](#)

Title Page, Icons: [The Noun Project](#)

1. “Wheelchair by Saeful Muslim CC BY-3.0
2. “Blind” by Fran Couto CC BY-3.0
3. “Dog” by Vectorstall CC BY-3.0