

# MBTA Plans to Increase Capacity Based on Ridership

By [James Sanna](#) | May 12, 2020 | [Reprints](#) | [Print](#)



The MBTA plans to carefully watch ridership data and increase service accordingly as the state reopens its economy in the coming months.

Transportation Secretary Stephanie Pollack said Monday travel is generally down 50 to 70 percent in Massachusetts and said the Department of Transportation and the governor's reopening advisory board are using a new data set – a county-by-county estimate of vehicle miles traveled — to track travel and understand how it is being affected by the pandemic. MBTA General Manager Steve Poftak said an average of about 42,000 people tapped into gated stations last week, up about 7 percent over the previous week. Last week was also the first time since late March that the T hit an average of at least 40,000 riders on the subway each day of the week, he said. On the MBTA's bus system, Poftak said ridership averaged about 96,000 passengers last week.

"We do seem to see the beginning of travel. We will obviously get the data for all of last week soon and we'll see if that continues," Pollack said. "There is a phenomenon that has been dubbed 'quarantine fatigue' in which people are sort of getting tired of being home. This may indicate that we are seeing some quarantine fatigue,

because we are seeing an uptick in travel even though we have not begun to open the Massachusetts economy."

Pollack, who serves on the reopening advisory board that's due to file its complete report next Monday, said the group has heard from dozens of industry associations, employer organizations and others that having safe and reliable transportation will be critical to a smooth restart of economic activity.

"Rather than the T announcing some schedule, it's going to be a much more iterative process of monitoring where ridership is going and adding to the schedules to the point where we build back up to the full schedule," she told a Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce webinar on Thursday. "I would hazard a guess that the t will need to be back up to its full schedule by the time the schools open back up in the fall but we have the financial wherewithal to do that sooner if the ridership justifies that"

By trying to limit bus capacity to 20 people instead of the roughly 50 a normal bus can carry, along with other social distancing measures, the agency hopes to provide safer service. To do so, it's asking municipalities to help with steps like installing bus lanes to help prevent buses from bunching up, which can lead to crowding. Pollack told the GBCC webinar that she sees telecommuting as a crucial step to reducing pressure on the MBTA's capacity to carry riders during the recovery.

"Pretty much every poll done – this is one that was done by Suffolk University and published in the Boston Globe – indicates that we have a lot of work to do to re-establish trust with the transit-riding public that the MBTA is safe," Pollack said at a Monday Fiscal and Management Control Board meeting, referring to a recent survey that showed nearly 80 percent of respondents would not be comfortable riding subways, buses and commuter trains.

*State House News Service contributed to this report.*