



Media Contact:

Leo Ruiz, lruiz@denterlein.com, 305-987-8437

Assessing the MBTA's Workforce Development, Service, and Safety Strategies

New Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation Report Evaluates Progress Being Made by the MBTA in Addressing Staffing Shortages Amidst Budgetary Pressures and Other Ongoing Challenges

BOSTON, MA - April 02, 2024 - The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) is making strides in solving staffing shortages that lay at the heart of ongoing safety and reliability concerns, according to a new report from the Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation: [*Ticket to Transformation? Evaluating the MBTA's Efforts to Bolster its Workforce*](#). From bus and rail operators to dispatchers and maintenance technicians, the report assesses progress made in specific areas of need for safety and operational roles, and identifies the areas for improvement that remain. MTF's report explores how the shortage developed, how the MBTA is acting to stem the shortage, and what is at stake should it not be resolved.

Staffing shortages posed, and continue to pose, threats to MBTA safety and operational reliability as highlighted by a safety management inspection by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) in 2022. Spurred by the FTA's report, the MBTA has achieved progress in recent months. With a net increase of 1,061 staff as of February 2024, the agency is on track to meet its FY 2024 budgeted headcount target of 7,643 by the end of the calendar year. If the MBTA's hiring results continue at this pace (averaging 91 net new hires per month), it could achieve its FY 2024 budgeted headcount of 7,643 by the end of calendar year 2024. However, challenges persist, including budgetary pressures exacerbated by the need for additional staff and ongoing retirements.

While the FTA's findings joined a chorus of other stakeholders noting the impact of staffing shortfalls, it alone has the authority to oversee and enforce public safety for all transit systems that receive federal funds under the Urban Area Formula Grants. Failing to address the FTA's directives will stymie a recovery at the T, diminish the rationale for substantial new resources, and put Boston's economy at risk.

The report also poses three pressing questions for policymakers and riders alike:

- *Can the MBTA add and train another 1,000 personnel to its operations and will it result in the elimination of slow zones and a return to full, reliable service by the end of 2024?*
- *If the MBTA falls short of its hiring needs as reflected in the upcoming workforce analysis, what actions could the FTA take?*

- *If the workforce assessment plan's net headcount exceeds the current 2,000 estimate, does it materially affect the MBTA's hiring goals, its repair and maintenance schedule, or its FY 2026 operating budget?*

"The MBTA has made strides in bolstering its workforce and subsequently improving service as part of its recovery from decades of neglect, but continued focus is critical to achieve staffing goals," said Doug Howgate, President of the Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation. "Workforce shortages persist in key areas and the more progress we make on staffing; the wider the T's FY 2026 budget gap will grow. This means that now is the time to maintain focus on staffing, while looking ahead to solve upcoming fiscal shortfalls. If we don't solve for these dual, and related, challenges, we will not have a T with the safe, reliable service that's vital for our economic success."

Despite clear progress to date, the Authority confronts several obstacles to maintaining, let alone expanding, employment levels. Financial incentives used by the MBTA to recruit, train, and retain personnel have driven up long-term operating costs. The MBTA is expected to release its workforce analysis this summer. Mandated by the FTA, the analysis will detail the staffing levels required to meet the MBTA's service and safety goals, which could be even higher and more costly than the MBTA's original 2,000 estimated increases in personnel.

About the Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation

Founded in 1932, the [Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation](#) (MTF) is widely recognized as the state's premier public policy organization dealing with state and local fiscal, tax, and economic policies. MTF's record of high-quality research and non-partisan analysis has earned the organization broad credibility on Beacon Hill and across the Commonwealth. Our mission is to provide accurate, unbiased research with balanced, thoughtful recommendations that strengthen the state's finances and economy to foster the long-term well-being of the Commonwealth. Over the course of nine decades, MTF has played an instrumental role in achieving major reforms and promoting sound public policy in state government. In the past ten years, MTF has won sixteen prestigious national awards from the Governmental Research Association for our work on a wide array of topics. Our unique credibility has allowed us to have a significant impact on a wide range of issues - from health care, business costs and transportation funding to tax competitiveness, capital investments and state and local finances.