

## UNDERSTANDING THE FARE ACT

### *What is the FARE Act?*

The FARE Act, or “An Act to Establish Free Access to Ride to Elections in Massachusetts,” would make most public transit options free on election day. Specifically, it would make buses, subway, and trolley services fare-free on the day of state-wide primaries and elections. This would apply to the Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority (MBTA), as well as the state’s 15 regional transit authorities.

Riders would not need to provide any form of ID or proof of intent to vote: all bus, subway, or trolley riders would simply ride for free all day. The bill was filed by Sen. [Joe Boncore](#) in the Senate ([S.2261](#)), and Representatives [Frank Moran](#) and [Chynah Tyler](#) in the House ([H.3547](#)).



### *Why does the FARE Act matter?*

The FARE Act was introduced in light of the 2020 elections, which saw a stark gap in voter turnout between suburban, predominantly white, wealthy communities, and urban, more diverse, lower-income communities. While suburbs like Medfield, Dover, and Sudbury witnessed voter turnout rates of 90% or higher, cities including Springfield, Lawrence, and New Bedford achieved turnout rates of just above 50%. Furthermore, both Springfield and Lawrence are majority people of color. All three cities have a poverty rate of 20% or higher, yet the state’s average rate is 9%. Communities like these are underserved and deserve greater access to the polls.

The FARE Act would help provide this greater access. As of 2017, 9% of white households did not own a vehicle. But in households of color, that rate more than doubles. 25% of Black households did not own a car, nor did 27% of Hispanic households. Nationwide, many low-income individuals rely on public transit. 60% of those that depend on public transit, meanwhile, are people of color. As much as 25% of all public transit riders are Black.

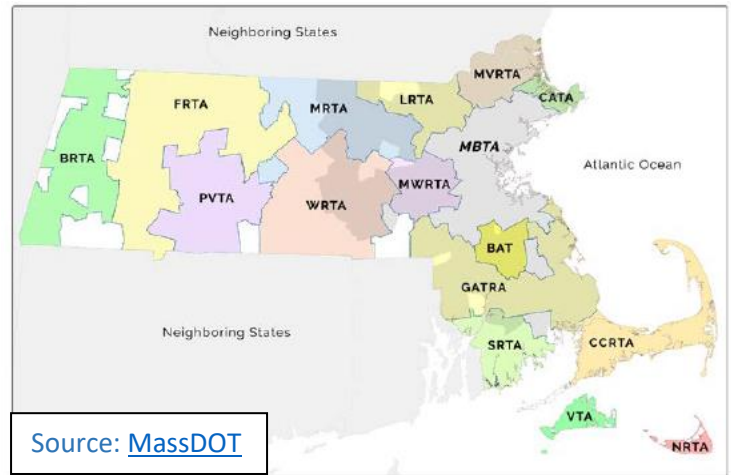


The FARE Act would directly benefit low voter turnout communities, as those that turn out to vote at low rates depend on public transit at high rates. By breaking down unjust financial barriers, the FARE Act would help create a more equitable voting system in Massachusetts.

## What are the public transit options across Massachusetts?

There are 16 transit authorities in Massachusetts:

1. Berkshire Regional Transit Authority (BRTA)
2. Brockton Area Transit Authority (BAT)
3. Cape Ann Transit Authority (CATA)
4. Cape Cod Regional Transit Authority (CCRTA)
5. Franklin Regional Transit Authority (FRTA)
6. Greater Attleboro Taunton Regional Transit Authority (GATRA)
7. Lowell Regional Transit Authority (LRTA)
8. Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority (MBTA)
9. Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority (MVRTA)
10. MetroWest Regional Transit Authority (MWRTA)
11. Montachusett Regional Transit Authority (MART)

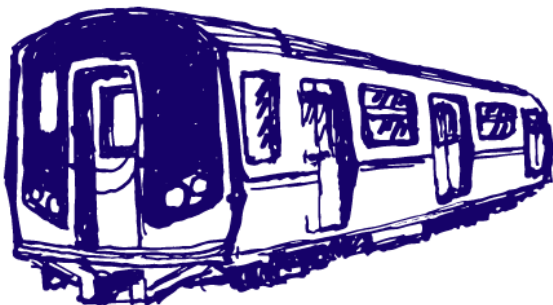


12. Nantucket Regional Transit Authority (NRTA)
13. Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA)
14. Southeastern Regional Transit Authority (SRTA)
15. Vineyard Transit Authority (VTA)
16. Worcester Regional Transit Authority (WRTA)

Together, these regional transit authorities serve virtually all of Massachusetts. Between bus and subway services, the MBTA reached a 2019 ridership of 265 million. As of 2018, the state's other regional transit authorities achieved an annual ridership of more than 30 million. A sizable chunk of those riders – 11 million – rode the PVTA, which serves Springfield. Of the PVTA's riders, approximately 70% depend on the service as their only mode of transit. Nearly 50% live below the poverty line.

## What does this policy look like nation-wide?

Dozens of communities across the country, including San Diego, Dallas, and Kansas City provide free public transit on election day. However, Los Angeles County is by far the largest community to do so. Home to more than 10 million residents and more than 5 million registered voters, LA County is larger than Massachusetts. LA County first moved to make key forms of public transit, like bus and subway systems, free for the 2018 Midterm



General Election. The County made these forms of transit free all day, and stationed employees at key locations to answer any questions voters may have had. Informational flyers also pointed voters in the direction of the nearby polling place. Ridership analysis after the election revealed that both bus and rail ridership increased by more than 5% on Election Day. **Results like these encouraged LA County to make public transit free for all statewide primary and general elections.**