



Merrimack Valley Transit

Title VI Program



Updated March 2025



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Title VI Program Components

I. Public Notification of Protection under Title VI

The purpose of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 is to prevent the denial, reduction or delay of benefits and services to minority populations, provide participation by affected populations in transportation decisions, and to ensure that the policies and programs of public agencies avoid producing disproportionately negative effects on minority populations.

Merrimack Valley Transit (MeVa) fully complies with Title VI, and related statutes and regulations, in performing all services, programs and activities. MeVa operates without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, age, or disability. A "Notice of Public Protection Against Discrimination" has been made available to the general public in English, Spanish, Haitian Creole, Portuguese, and Simplified Chinese, as required under the Safe Harbor Thresholds for MeVa's LEP populations. A copy of the notice is contained within this document as Appendix A.

This notice is posted in the following locations:

- MeVa's website at <https://mevatransit.com/title-vi-policy/>
- MeVa Headquarters in the reception area and drivers' lounge (85 Railroad Avenue, Haverhill, MA)
- The McGovern Transportation Center in Lawrence (211 Merrimack St.)
- The Washington Square Bus Hub in Haverhill (Washington Sq.)
- The Costello Transportation Center in Amesbury (68 Elm Street)
- In all transit vehicles and bus shelters

II. Complaint Procedures

Any person who believes that they, individually or as a member of any specific class of persons, has been discriminated against on the basis of race, color, or national origin by Merrimack Valley Transit (hereinafter referred to as MeVa) may file a complaint with MeVa within 180 days of the date of the alleged discriminatory act.

To file a complaint, submit MeVa's Title VI complaint form. A complete copy of the Complaint Form and instructions are provided in Appendix B. This form, along with basic filing procedures, is also posted on our website at <https://mevatransit.com/title-vi-policy/> in all five languages mentioned above.

All complaints are processed in accordance with MeVa's Complaint's Procedures (attached for reference in Appendix B). Any Title VI Complaint Form received by email or thru the postal service, will be logged per usual and then forwarded to MeVa's Chief Compliance Officer. Once the complaint is received, the complainant will receive an acknowledgement, by their chosen contact method as noted on the form, informing them on whether or not the complaint will be investigated. If an investigation is conducted, MeVa will respond within 30 days of receipt of the complaint.



A. Investigation of Title VI Complaints:

Within seven (7) days, should the complaint have merit, MeVa shall commence an investigation of the allegation(s). The purpose of an investigation is to determine whether there is a reason to believe that a failure to comply with Title VI has occurred.

Investigations will follow the same process as ADA complaints, except that final decision on the findings of the investigation are the responsibility of MeVa's Chief Compliance Officer. MeVa's Deputy Administrator will act as backup in these duties.

If additional information is needed during the course of the investigation, the complainant may be contacted. The complainant will have no more than five (5) business days from the date of the request to respond with the needed information. If this information is not received, causing the investigation to become unresolvable, the complaint will be administratively closed. The complainant can also request that the complaint be administratively closed.

B. Resolution of Complaints:

If a probable cause of discriminatory practice based on race, color or national origin is found to exist, MeVa shall endeavor to eliminate said practice by means of a Remedial Action Plan. The Remedial Action Plan shall include: a list of corrective actions accepted by the agency; a description of how the corrective action will be implemented; and a written assurance that the agency and its operators will implement the accepted corrective action in the manner discussed in the plan. Incidents that are caused by the actions of a single staff person violating company policy shall be handled with the appropriate remedial or disciplinary action.

Within thirty (30) days, MeVa will notify the complainant in writing of the final decision reached, including any proposed resolution. A complaint may be resolved by administrative closure if the incident is found to not violate Title VI. The complainant will either receive a closure letter or a notice of findings and resolution.

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the final decision rendered, they have a right to file a complaint with the FTA directly. The decision letter will notify them of this right and how to proceed if necessary.

III. Title VI Investigations/Complaints/Lawsuits

MeVa has not had any transit-related complaints, lawsuits or investigations related to discrimination since the last Title VI submission. No complaint forms were received nor did any general complaints contain content that could be classified as violating Title VI. The complaint log is kept at the MeVa administrative offices at 85 Railroad Avenue, Haverhill, MA 01835.

IV. Promoting Inclusive Public Participation

MEVA seeks out and integrates the needs and views of its transit customers, especially those of minority, low-income and Limited English Proficiency (LEP) populations—people who may have comparatively fewer resources to present their concerns about transit.



A. Development of Projects

MEVA has adopted the Merrimack Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization's Public Participation Plan (PPP). The most updated plan can be downloaded by MVPC's website at: https://mvpc.org/wp-content/uploads/2025_01_22_2025_Approved_PPP.pdf. In doing so, notices about MeVa's Program of Projects (POP) for capital investments funded through the Federal Transit Administration are regularly communicated to a list of over 1,200 individuals and organizations, which include many organizations representing the interests of minorities, people with disabilities and LEP.

B. Locally Developed Process for Raising Fare or Major Reduction in Service

MEVA uses the PPP as a guide for its own outreach efforts to encourage public participation, but because of the nature of its service, it provides outreach opportunities that go beyond the PPP. The list below outlines the steps that the MEVA follows in its outreach process to engage transit riders in the decision-making process for major service and fare changes. A service change is used as an example:

1. A service change proposal is developed internally or as a result of public comment. This includes following procedures to determine whether or not a hearing is required;
2. The proposal is presented to the Fixed Route Services Sub-Committee;
3. A Title VI review of the proposal is conducted to determine whether or not a formal public engagement process is required (minor vs major change).
4. If it determined that public engagement is required, the following steps are taken:
 - Public outreach venues, dates and times are determined with consideration of the proposed changes and their impact on specific locations/populations within the service area;
 - Bilingual (English and Spanish) public outreach materials and program are developed. Materials may be translated in additional languages based on LEP populations that may be impacted by service change.
 - Public comment period opens and is advertised.
 - Notices and other information are disseminated.
 - Public comment period ends.
 - Fixed Route Services Sub-Committee to vote on the final plan, inclusive of public comment.
 - The Advisory Board is presented with the final service change based on public review and affirmative vote of the Fixed Route Services Sub-Committee.
5. Upon approval by the Advisory Board, outreach is conducted to inform the public of planned changes. Outreach includes:
 - Notices at all transit stations (English, Spanish, Haitian Creole, Portuguese, and Simplified Chinese languages);
 - Notices on all buses (English, Spanish, Haitian Creole, Portuguese, and Simplified Chinese languages);
 - Notice in Spanish and English newspapers;
 - Announcements on Facebook (English - translatable with AI tool)
 - Notices posted on website (translatable with tool)



- Posted internally in drivers' lounge so all operations staff are made aware of the service changes. They represent the face of MEVA and answer questions throughout the day. Because many staff members are bilingual, they are able to easily communicate with customers.

C. Scheduled Outreach Opportunities

A comprehensive table of MEVA's outreach activities between April 1, 2022 and March 1, 2025 is included in Appendix C.

V. Limited English Proficiency (LEP)

A key factor in meeting the goal of equal service for everyone is the ability of our consumers to understand all the services which MeVa has to offer. To accomplish this MeVa has established a comprehensive plan to provide understanding and access to those potential consumers who may have limited proficiency in the English language. A full copy of the plan is attached herein as Appendix D.

VI. Minority Representation on Planning and Advisory Bodies

MEVA has an Advisory Board, the membership of which is determined according to the requirements of Chapter 161B Massachusetts General Laws. Voting is determined according to the formula contained in Chapter 161B. Under Chapter 161B, the Chief Elected Official of each community is a member of the Advisory Board. Designees of the Chief Elected Official are often high-level staff or department heads who report to the Chief Elected Official. The Board is empowered to adopt an annual budget, approve changes in fares and approve substantial changes in service. In addition to voting members, one representative of the disabled community and a transit rider representative are chosen by member communities on an annual rotating basis to attend and participate at the board meetings as a voting member. Since MeVa's Advisory Board is the only decision-making body governing us, and is composed of elected officials; MeVa has not enclosed a table depicting the racial breakdown of the board membership.

VII. Title VI Equity Analyses for Construction of Facilities.

From 2022-2025, the MEVA did not construct any new vehicle storage, maintenance facilities or operation centers.

VIII. Title VI Program Approval

A presentation of the Updated Title VI Program was given to the Fixed Route Services sub-committee of the MeVa Advisory Board on March 31, 2025. MeVa's Administrator, who is empowered with policy making decisions by the Board, approved the updated program thereafter.



IX. Service Standards & Policies

Appendix C to 49 CFR part 21 provides in section (3)(iii) that “no person or group of persons shall be discriminated against with regard to the routing, scheduling, or quality of service of transportation service furnished as a part of the project on the basis of race, color, or national origin. Frequency of service, age and quality of vehicles assigned to routes, quality of stations serving different routes, and location of routes may not be determined on the basis of race, color, or national origin.”

FTA requires all transit providers, regardless of operating budget, to develop quantitative standards for the indicators listed below:

- Vehicle load
- Vehicle headway
- On-time performances
- Service availability

FTA requires transit providers, regardless of total annual operating budget, to develop a policy for each of the following service indicators:

- Distribution of Transit Amenities
- Vehicle assignment

A complete copy of MeVa’s Service Standard and Transit Policies are included in Appendix E.

X. Additional Requirements

Transit Providers that operate 50 or more fixed route vehicles in peak service and are located in an Urbanized Area (UZA) of 200,000 or more people must incorporate the following additional information in their Title VI Program.

- Demographic and service profile maps and charts
- Demographic ridership and travel patterns, collected by surveys
- Results of their monitoring program and report, including evidence that the board or other governing entity or official(s) considered, was aware of the results, and approved the analysis
- A description of the public engagement process for setting the “major service change policy,” disparate impact policy, and disproportionate burden policy
- Results of service and/or fare equity analyses conducted since the last Title VI Program submission, including evidence that the board or other governing entity or official(s) considered, was aware of, and approved the results of the analysis

MeVa is located in a large urban area but does not yet operate 50 or more fixed route vehicles in peak service. However future service changes planned for FY26 will likely increase our current peak load of 42 vehicles above to 50 or more. MeVa is aware of the above requirements and is in the process of creating the three policies and the monitoring program. Demographic and service profile maps have already been created and are attached to this program in Appendix F.



The last bulleted requirement above has already been completed. MeVa has been a fare free system since March 2022 and has spent the last 6 months conducting a service and fare equity analysis to evaluate our fare free system and present to our board these analyses in the hopes of their continued support of no fares. The fare-free study was conducted in conjunction with the local regional planning commission and a 3rd party consultant. The results proved the invaluable benefits of our system and the impacts that running fare-free have had over the Merrimack Valley as a whole. The study was presented to the Advisory Board on February 6, 2025 and the Board voted unanimously to make free fares a permanent part of MeVa's service. A complete copy of this study and the comprehensive analysis performed and the meeting minutes from the board meeting are included in Appendix G.



NOTICE OF MEETING

A virtual (Zoom) meeting of the MeVa Transit Fixed Route Service Committee is scheduled for ***Monday March 31, 2025 at 9:30 a.m.***

Records pertaining to this meeting are on file and can be obtained at the office of Merrimack Valley Transit, 85 Railroad Avenue, Haverhill, MA 01835.

This notice posted to MeVa website, www.mevatransit.com, on Monday March 24, 2025 at 12:00 noon.

To join the meeting, click the link below or paste it into your browser:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/84348419476>

Meeting ID: 843 4841 9476

One tap mobile: +13092053325,,84348419476# US

Dial: 309-205-3325 US

AGENDA

1. Introductions
2. Review of Updated MeVa Title 6 VI Plan
 - *Bonnie Mahoney, Chief Compliance Officer*
 - *Vote to approve and recommend to full MeVa Advisory Board required*
3. Review of planned 20-minute service starting in July for the #1 (Lawrence-Haverhill via the Loop) & #24 (Lowell-Lawrence) that will be paid for through MassDOT discretionary Connectivity grant
 - *Niorka Mendez, Deputy Administrator*
 - *Vote to recommend to full MeVa Advisory Board required*
4. New Business Unforeseen by the Chair
5. Adjournment



APPENDIX A Notice of Public Rights Against Discrimination

The Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority (MeVa Transit) operates its programs and services without regard to race, color, national origin and fully complies with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and related statutes and regulations. Any person who believes they have been subjected to an unlawful discriminatory practice under Title VI may file a complaint with MeVa.

For more information on MeVa's civil rights program and the procedures to file a complaint, contact MeVa at (978) 469-6878, email customerservice@MeVaTransit.com, or visit our office at 85 Railroad Avenue, Haverhill, MA 01835. Complaint forms and detailed instructions can be downloaded at <https://mevatransit.com/title-vi-policy/>.

A complainant may file a complaint directly with the Federal Transit Administration's Office of Civil Right, Attention: Title VI Program, East Building, 5th Floor-TCR, 1200 New Jersey Avenue SE, Washington, DC 20590

If information is needed in another language, call 978-469-6878 or speak with a Customer Service Representative at MeVa's transit centers in Haverhill (Washington Square) or Lawrence (McGovern at 211 Merrimack Street).

Si necesita información en otro idioma, llame al 978-469-6878 o hable con un representante de servicio al cliente en nuestros centros de tránsito de MeVa en Haverhill (Washington Square) o Lawrence (McGovern en 211 Merrimack Street).

Si w bezwen enfòmasyon nan yon lòt lang, rele 978-469-6878 oswa pale ak yon Reprezantan Sèvis Kliyan nan sant transpò MeVa yo nan Haverhill (Washington Square) oswa Lawrence (McGovern nan 211 Merrimack Street).

Se precisar de informações em outro idioma, ligue para 978-469-6878 ou fale com um representante de atendimento ao cliente nos centros de trânsito da MeVa em Haverhill (Washington Square) ou Lawrence (McGovern na 211 Merrimack Street).

如果需要其他语言的信息，请拨打 988-469-6878 或与位于哈弗希尔（华盛顿广场）或劳伦斯（麦戈文，梅里马克街 211 号）的 MeVa 交通中心的客户服务代表交谈



APPENDIX B Complaint Form & Instructions

Any person who believes that they, individually or as a member of any specific class of persons, has been discriminated against on the basis of race, color, or national origin by Merrimack Valley Transit (hereinafter referred to as MeVa) may file a complaint with MeVa within 180 days of the date of the alleged discriminatory act.

No one may intimidate, threaten, coerce or engage in other discriminatory conduct against anyone because they have filed a complaint to secure rights protected by the non-discrimination statutes that FTA enforces. Any individual alleging such harassment or intimidation may file a complaint directly with the Federal Transit Administration.

To file a complaint, submit MeVa's Title VI complaint form below. This form, along with basic filing procedures, is also posted on our website at <https://mevatransit.com/title-vi-policy/> in four different languages. A complainant may choose to have someone else fill out the form and act as a representative on their behalf.

For more information or for assistance on filing a complaint, you may call MeVa at (978) 469-6878, send an email to customerservice@mevatransit.com, or mail a letter to or visit our office at 85 Railroad Avenue, Haverhill, MA 01835.

A complainant may file a complaint directly with the Federal Transit Administration's Office of Civil Right, Attention: Title VI Program, East Building, 5th Floor-TCR, 1200 New Jersey Avenue SE, Washington, DC 20590

Once the complaint is received, the complainant will receive an acknowledgement, by their chosen contact method as noted on the form, that MeVa received the complaint and inform on whether or not the complaint will be investigated. If an investigation is conducted, MeVa will respond within 30 days of receipt of the complaint.



**DISCRIMINATION COMPLAINT (TITLE VI) AGAINST THE
MERRIMACK VALLEY REGIONAL TRANSIT AUTHORITY**

Name of Complainant:	Telephone (daytime):	
Address:	Email (if preferred method of contact):	
Name of Representative to the Complainant: (if applicable)	Representative's Preferred Contact Info:	
Do you have the permission of the complainant to file this complaint and respond on their behalf:	Yes	No
Name of MEVA related staff (if known), position (driver, etc.), or agency policy/practice that you believe to be discriminatory:		
Location of Alleged Incident:		
Date of Alleged Incident:		
The complainant was discriminated against on the basis of: <input type="checkbox"/> Race <input type="checkbox"/> Color <input type="checkbox"/> National Origin		
Explain as clearly as possible what happened and why you believe you were discriminated against. Describe all persons who were involved. Include all names and contact information that you know, including any witnesses to the incident. Please attach any written materials or other information that you believe are relevant to your complaint.		
Have you previously filed a Title VI Complaint with MeVa?	Yes	No
Have you filed this complaint with any other federal or state agency or court?	Name of agency/court:	

Signature

Date

Mail form to: Chief Compliance Officer, MeVa, 85 Railroad Avenue, Haverhill, MA 01835

Or email: bmahoney@mevatransit.com



APPENDIX C MeVa Outreach

The following is a complete list of Outreach events that took place between July 2022 (FY23) and March 2025. Most events were in English, but quite a few were either Bilingual or Spanish only. Those events are in 'MeVa Red' text.

2022

July

- Groveland New Service – Ribbon Cutting Event, Groveland MA
- Livable Streets Alliance-MVRTA: Fare-Free Bus Pilot Meeting
- CEDS Committee Kick-Off, Lawrence MA
- Podcast – Paul Comfort: Preventing Operator Assaults

August

- Presentation To Low Vision/Blind Support Group
- Know Your Community Event in Newburyport, Newburyport MA
- Andover Seniors' Transportation Options W/MVPC
- GLAC Community Resource Fair, Lawrence MA
- Lawrence Pa'Lante Climate Session, Lawrence MA
- MVRTA Boston Commuter Bus Options Meeting
- MVRTA-Merrimack Connection Meeting

September

- MVRTA – Newbury Connection, Newbury MA
- Andover Active Living & Health Fair, Andover MA
- Pa'Lante Strategy Meeting
- CEDS September Committee Meeting

October

- Merrimack Valley Interagency Transition Team Meeting
- Transportation Options North Reading Meeting
- Bennington Triangle Pop Up – Bilingual (Spanish)
- CEDS Committee Meeting
- Lawrence, Massachusetts Disability Awareness Month Celebration 2022 Event @ The Center – Bilingual (Spanish)
- Congressman Auchincloss' MA-4 Office Meeting
- Methuen Community Network Meeting
- HALWG Meeting
- LCW Annual Meeting and Celebration
- AHEPA Transportation Options Meeting



November

- Gateway Cities Innovation Institute Awards and Summit Award Ceremony
- Lawrence Community Access Television Annual Meeting
- Lawrence Seniors Transportation Options – Bilingual (Spanish)
- Telemundo With Luis Matute - Spanish
- Merrimack Valley Interagency Collaborative Meeting
- Employer Panel Meeting With LCW
- MHTF General Meeting

December

- West Newbury Transportation Options
- MEVA - Newburyport Bus Routes Changes Meeting

2023

January

- Haverhill Rotary Club
- Methuen Outreach Discussion
- CEDS Committee Meeting
- Opportunity Works Haverhill Presentation & Travel Training Session
- Anna Jacques & MassHire Event Discussion
- Newburyport Council on Aging Board Meeting
- Merrimack Valley Chamber of Commerce Mayors and Managers Breakfast
- Community Sharing Partnerships Meeting
- The Point After Club Meeting

February

- LCW Employer Panel Collaboration
- CEDS Committee Meeting
- Mass Hire Job Fair
- Methuen Community Network Meeting
- MV Chamber TV Show
- Newburyport COA Transportation Sub-Committee
- NILP – Meva Collaboration Opportunities Meeting
- Demonstration Tour of New Meva Service in Amesbury, Newburyport & Salisbury
- Veterans Northeast Outreach Center (VNEOC)

March

- Meeting With Lawrence Mayor De Peña
- Meeting With Coastal Trails Coalition, Newburyport, MA



- Community Sharing and Partnerships Meeting
- Presentation @ The Methuen Adult Learning Center
- Meva And Waystone Meeting
- Healthy Active Living Working Group Meeting
- Transportation Options @The Center, Lawrence - Spanish

April

- Transportation Options with Bethany Communities – Bilingual (Spanish)
- Travel Training Options with Waystone
- Methuen Adult Learning Center Presentation
- Transportation Options @ Valebrook - Spanish
- Transportation Options @ Arlington Park - Spanish
- MassHire Job Fair
- Haverhill Business Park Meva Bus Service Strategy
- Lawrence General Hospital + Meva Transportation Options
- Transportation Options @ 353 Elm St, Senior Housing - Spanish
- Transportation Options Presentation @ 315-345 Salem, St Housing - Spanish
- Transportation Options Presentation @ Brunswick House Housing - Spanish
- Transportation Options Presentation @ 65 Union St, Housing - Spanish

May

- Transportation Options @ Heritage House
- Newburyport COA Transportation Sub-Committee Meeting
- Salisbury COA Stuff A Bus
- Sen. Markey Event – GLFHC
- Heritage House Meeting

June

- S.A.L.S.A. Festival @ Pemberton Park – Bilingual (Spanish)
- Regional Food Partnership Meeting
- Bus Ride Rte. 14 With Jeff Grassie - Haverhill Farmer's Market
- North Andover Commission on Ability Assistance TV Show
- St. Andrews Episcopal Health Fair
- Fortaleciendo La Familia Radio Show - Spanish
- Lawrence Community Sharing and Partnerships
- Methuen Community Network Meeting
- Transportation Options Age Span
- Newburyport COA Stuff A Bus
- Methuen Senior Center
- Bus Trip with The Students at Gateway Academy



- Transportation Options Meeting with Rep. Dawne Shand and Newburyport Restaurant Owners
- Community Sharing and Partnership Meeting
- Salisbury Senior Field Day
- Lawrence Partnership Annual Meeting

July

- Rep. Kassner Meeting
- Meva + LCW

August

- North Andover National Night Out Event
- Lawrence National Night Out - Bus in The Motorcade – Bilingual (Spanish)
- Cedars Workforce Transportation
- Meva-MGB Salem Connection Meeting
- Meva + TMF + City of Lawrence Meeting
- AJH Community Benefits Advisory Meeting

September

- Transportation Options @ Diamond Springs Garden, Lawrence - Spanish
- Transportation Options @ Essex Towers, Lawrence - Spanish
- Transportation Options @ Arlington Park - Spanish
- Transportation Options @ St Alfio's Villa - Spanish
- Methuen Public Library Resource Sharing Meeting
- Andover Annual Active Living & Health Fair
- Transportation Options @ Valebrook Apartments - Spanish
- Transportation Options @ The Arlington School - Bilingual
- Community Sharing and Partnership Meeting
- Transportation Options @ Housing on Salem St - Spanish
- Methuen Public Schools Resource Sharing Meeting
- Transportation Options @ Rita Hall - Spanish
- North Andover Veterans Collaborative Meeting + Presentation
- Transportation Options @ 65 Union Street Housing - Spanish
- Bedford VA Coordination Meeting
- Mayor's Health Task Force General Meeting
- Methuen Health And Human Services/Senior Center Presentation

October

- Transportation Options Anna Jacques Hospital Public Meeting
- Senatour With Senate President, Sen. Payano And Other Members of MA Senate



- Transportation Options @ Housing on Salem Street - Spanish
- Meeting And Tour with Transportation for Massachusetts (T4MA
- Transportation Options @ Salem St. Housing Spanish
- Transportation Options @ Rita Hall - Spanish
- Haverhill Community Action Meeting
- Mayor Perry's Mayor's Minute On MCTV
- Transportation Options @ 65 Union Street Spanish
- Transportation Options @ Elm Towers Spanish
- Methuen Adult Learning Center Community Network Meeting
- Transportation Options @ Mary Immaculate Spanish
- Food Resource Fair at The Center in Lawrence
- Transportation Options @ Brunswick House - Spanish
- Lawrence Disability Awareness Outreach Event - Bilingual
- Greater Newburyport Chamber of Commerce Workforce Route Planning Session
- Haverhill Community Action Outreach
- Meva + Lawrence Community Development

November

- Regional Early Education Workforce Development Roundtable with House Education Chair Denise Garlick and Rep Andy Vargas
- Methuen Community Action Video on Mini Meva
- Community Sharing & Partnership
- Meet Up with Senator Markey's Team
- CEDS Launch
- Greater Newburyport Chamber of Commerce Workforce Route Planning Session
- Veterans Resource Fair
- Lawrence Disabled American Veterans
- River Valley Charter School Outreach Meeting
- Visit from Secretary Tibbits-Nutt
- Transportation Options + Spruce Environmental (Ward Hill)

December

- Jane Burns, Andover COA Regarding Bus Access for Seniors and People with Disabilities
- Transportation Options @ Springs Elderly Housing, Lawrence with Rep. Moran - Bilingual
- Eastern Essex District Dept of Veterans Services Regional Outreach for Bedford VA At
- Newbury COA
- Anna Jaques Hospital Community Benefits Advisory Committee Quarterly Meeting



2024

January

- Community Sharing and Partnership Meeting
- LPTE Consortium Meeting
- Healthy Active Living Working Group Meeting
- 5 Branch Street Service Meeting
- Merrimack College Transportation Options
- Transportation Roundtable with NECC, Haverhill PD, City of Haverhill, and Lakeview Home

February

- **Cambiando El Mundo De Personas Con Descapacidades – Presentation (Spanish)**
- Lawrence Community Partners Meeting
- Point After Club, Lawrence – McGovern Move
- VNEOC – Outreach Meeting/Coffee with Veterans
- Greater Newburyport Chamber – Workforce/Tourism Transportation in Newburyport
- Colonial Heights Neighborhood Assoc. Meeting
- **Cambiando El Mundo De Personas Con Descapacidades - Spanish**
- Browse, Borrow, Board Library Coordination Meeting
- Haverhill Promise and HPS Resource Center Outreach Meeting

March

- Lawrence Partnership/NECC Meeting Re: 427 Essex Street Project
- Meeting With Congressman Moulton's Office
- Bus Stop Planning Meeting With AJH
- Heritage House Presentation
- Anna Jaques Coordination Meeting
- AJH Community Benefits Meeting
- **Info Table @ The Age Span Mobile Market - Lawrence Boys and Girls Club - Spanish**
- Workforce Development Roundtable
- Transportation Ways and Means Hearing
- HALWG Meeting with Elecia Miller/MHTF
- Transportation Options @ The Essex County Sheriff's Department Star Program

April

- Transportation Options @ Kennedy Circle Outreach
- Transportation Options @ Merrimack Valley Veterans Collaborative
- Mayor Barrett Regarding Haverhill Service
- MeVa/STAR Collaboration



- Transportation Options @ Mary Immaculate, Lawrence - Bilingual
- Transportation Options @ Methuen Adult Learning Center – Group 1
- HALWG Meeting with Elecia Miller/MHTF
- Transportation Options @ Methuen Adult Learning Center – Group 2
- Community Sharing and Partnership Meeting
- Transportation Options @ Methuen Adult Learning Center – Group 3 & 4

May

- Children's Champion Breakfast
- Community Giving Tree Event
- Haverhill Resource Fair
- EMBRACE Program Presentation (Hosted By STAR)
- Transportation Options @ North Andover COA
- MV Transition Fair @ LHS - Bilingual
- CAI – ESOL Adult Learner Field Trip to NECC Haverhill
- Haverhill Promise Resource Fair
- GLCAC Citizenship Q & A Event
- Meva/Nettle School Collaboration
- The Point After Club

June

- S.A.L.S.A. Festival - Bilingual
- Haverhill Farmer's Market
- Newburyport Chamber Meeting
- Methuen Community Resource Group Meeting
Joan Kulash – Bus Route and CBO Collaboration Opportunities
- Andover Farmers Market Outreach
- Transportation Options @ Mary Immaculate - Bilingual
- Methuen Adult Education Outreach
- Merrimack Valley Welcome Center
- Anna Jaques Hospital Community Benefits Advisory Committee Quarterly Meeting
- Lawrence Partnership Annual Meeting

July

- Secretary Hao Visit to Lawrence – Small Business Round Table
- Secretary Tibbets-Nutt for Essex County Transportation Round Table
- Groveland Transportation Fair
- Radio Católica -Spanish
- Lawrence Partnership for Transition to Employment Consortium
- Kat Everett - Haverhill Ward 2 City Councilor



August

- ACF Deputy Assistant Secretary Visit – GLCAC Outreach Regarding Route Changes
- Annual Check-In with Barr Foundation Team
- Northeast Arc
- NETTTS Annual Meeting
- TDI Meeting – Lawrence
- West Newbury Select Board Meeting
- Amazon Outreach Meeting
- Let's Celebrate Event – Alley on Essex Street - Bilingual
- Merrimack Senior Center
- Annual Summer Health Fair – Lawrence (Bilingual)

September

- Entre Amigos Radio Show - Spanish
- Salisbury Senior Center Field Day/Office Hours
- Andover Senior Center Tabling Event
- Boxford Office Hours

October

- North Andover Senior Center Office Hours
- Methuen Arlington Neighborhood Tour
- Brothers In Arms, Michael Bastien
- Living Well in Our Community Fair at The Newbury Council on Aging
- Neighbors In Need
- Haverhill Heath Fair
- Lunch and Learn with Librarians
- North Andover Public Schools and ANA YMCA
- Senior Wellness Wonderland Extravaganza
- Amesbury Office Hours

November

- Transportation Options @ Nettle Middle School
- ANA-YMCA And North Andover Public Schools
- MassHire Outreach Event (Tabling)
- Haverhill Digital Equity Roundtable
- Merrimack Senior Center Office Hours
- Methuen Housing 36 Oakland Ave Office Hours

December

- LISC Tour Of Lawrence with TDI And MassDevelopment



- Transportation Options @ Methuen Village
- Transportation Options @ Andover Commons - Bilingual
- Merrimack Valley Veterans Collaborative
- Wellpoint Healthcare
- City Of Haverhill Workforce Development Group

2025

January

- Rotary Club of Greater Newburyport
- Merrimack College
- American Training
- Groundwork Lawrence

February

- Rita Hall Outreach with Rep Moran
- Makelt Haverhill
- Mary Connolly, Haverhill COA
- Anna Jaques Community Listening Session
- Transportation Roundtable Senator Markey's Office
- Lawrence Community Partners Meeting
- Healthy Active Living Monthly Meeting

March

- Jacki Byerly – Andover Routes Revisited
- Methuen Community Network
- Pentucket Lake School Resource Fair



APPENDIX D Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Access Plan

I. Legal Basis for Language Assistance Requirements

LEP legislation comes directly out of the civil rights movement:

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. 2000d et seq., and its implementing regulations provide that no person in the United States shall, on the grounds of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any program or activity that receives Federal financial assistance. The Supreme Court, in *Lau v. Nichols*, 414 U.S. 563 (1974), interpreted Title VI regulations promulgated by the former Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to hold that Title VI prohibits conduct that has a disproportionate effect on LEP persons because such conduct constitutes national origin discrimination.

Department of Transportation LEP Guidance:

The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) published revised LEP guidance for its recipients on December 15, 2005, which states that Title VI and its implementing regulations require that DOT recipients take reasonable steps to ensure meaningful access to their programs and activities by LEP persons. The Federal Transit Administration published its LEP Guidance in its Circular 4702.1B —Title VI Requirements and Guidelines for FTA Recipients on October 2, 2012, which requires recipients to develop an LEP implementation plan consistent with the provisions of Section VII of the DOT LEP guidance.

II. The Plan

To prepare a useful LEP Access Plan, MeVa conducted a LEP needs assessment. Key elements of the resulting plan are as follows:

A. LEP Population Identification

The Census definition of a Limited English Proficient (LEP) person is "...a person who speaks another language other than English at home and does not speak English well or not at all." The Census is their survey data lists the population into two categories: Speaks English Well or Speaks English Less Than Very Well. MeVa used the 2020 Census Data updated through the American Community Survey (ACS) 2019-2023 5-Year Estimates: Table C16001 Language Spoken at Home for the Population 5 Years and Over. (More information about the ACS can be found on their website at <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs.html>.) A table sub-set, limited by geographic boundaries, was able to be obtained where MeVa could select and limit the data to just our member communities.

The total population of our member communities, according to the 2020 Census results is 385,443. The ACS 2023 5 Year estimate is 384,330 (a loss of 1,113 individuals – which can be accounted for within the margin of error). Approximately 22,000 of those people are children under the age of 5. The total population that was used for the analysis was 363,003, of which 245,197 speak only English at home. 117,806 speak another language at



home, of which 49,699 are identified as LEP. The languages identified to meet or exceed the Safe Harbor threshold of 5% or 1000 people (whichever is less) were Spanish, Haitian Creole, Portuguese, and Simplified Chinese. Vietnamese, which was previously identified as a needed language, fell below the threshold and was removed from this program.

Analysis showed that most LEP populations are located along well-served transit corridors. Spanish-speakers were heavily concentrated throughout Lawrence, Methuen and Haverhill, but are spread out over nearly all fixed route communities. A GIS map was created that show concentrations of LEP populations by percentage range, as well as dotted for each language with an overlay of MeVa's fixed routes. This map is found in the attachments at the end of this appendix.

B. LEP Activities

- 1) Language Assistance: Provide free language assistance for verbal communication and non-vital yet important outreach documents and in-person interpreter services for events where public testimony is solicited.
- 2) Vital Documents: Determine which documents are vital for translation, and choose the format(s) to most effectively communicate the messages contained in those documents.
- 3) Training: Train all front-line and other staff to effectively engage and respond to LEP customers.
- 4) Customer Information: Provide timely, relevant information about MeVa programs and services to the LEP communities in the key LEP languages.
- 5) Outreach: Conduct culturally-competent outreach to LEP communities to increase awareness and use of MeVa services and programs.
- 6) Research and Administration: Develop a means to assess and monitor the effectiveness of MeVa's LEP Plan internally and externally on two levels:
 - a. Ongoing review to immediately address any critical issues and make changes to the LEP Access Plan as needed.
 - b. Annual review to include any changes in demographics, types of services, or other LEP community needs.

III. Four-Factor Analysis

The LEP needs assessment conducted was based on the Four-Factor Framework outlined in the DOT LEP Guidance.

A. Factor 1: The Number and Proportion of LEP Persons Served or Encountered in the Eligible Service Population

As mentioned in Section A above, the total population from the geographic subset of table C16001 is 363,003, of which 245,197 speak only English at home. 117,806 speak another language at home, of which 49,699 are identified as LEP. MeVa then evaluated the 5 member communities that have no fixed route service. Only 631 LEP persons, across all languages, live in these 5 communities with a total population of 45,104. Overall, the percentages for LEP concentration went up if the overall populations in these communities

were removed. Therefore, for the purposes of the graphs and tables below, the numbers reflect that decision.

Spanish is by far the second most spoken language behind English and the biggest LEP population with 41,410, which is 12.95% of the overall fixed route service population. Overall, there are 90,562 individuals, 5 years and older, who speak Spanish at home and 45.73% of them are LEP. (This number is only 111 in non-fixed route communities.)

Simplified Chinese has the second highest LEP population in our service area with 1215 individuals, with another 163 in non-fixed route communities. (Vietnamese had only 779). Haitian Creole is actually lumped together with French and Cajun in a single language category in the ACS table. This number was at just above the target at 1036 individuals.

The first pie chart below shows the total fixed route communities' population (5 years and older) of 319,713 broken down by language spoken at home. This chart doesn't reflect the ability to speak English.

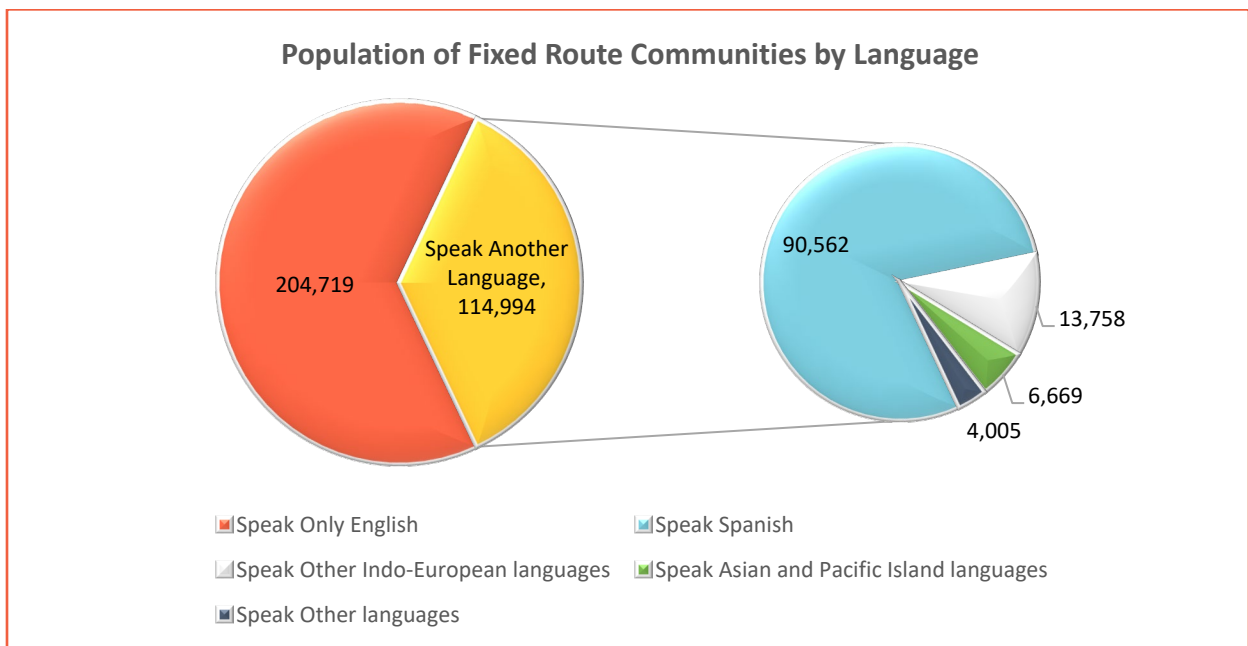


Chart 1: Languages spoken at home

Chart 2 below breaks down the ability to speak English of the identified population of 114,994 persons age 5 and up who speak another language at home. The bigger pie splits those who can speak English very well from other who cannot. The smaller pie breaks down the languages of the LEP population by classification in table C16001. Table 1 further breaks down the groupings of Other Indo-European, Asian and Pacific Island and Other languages into specific categories.

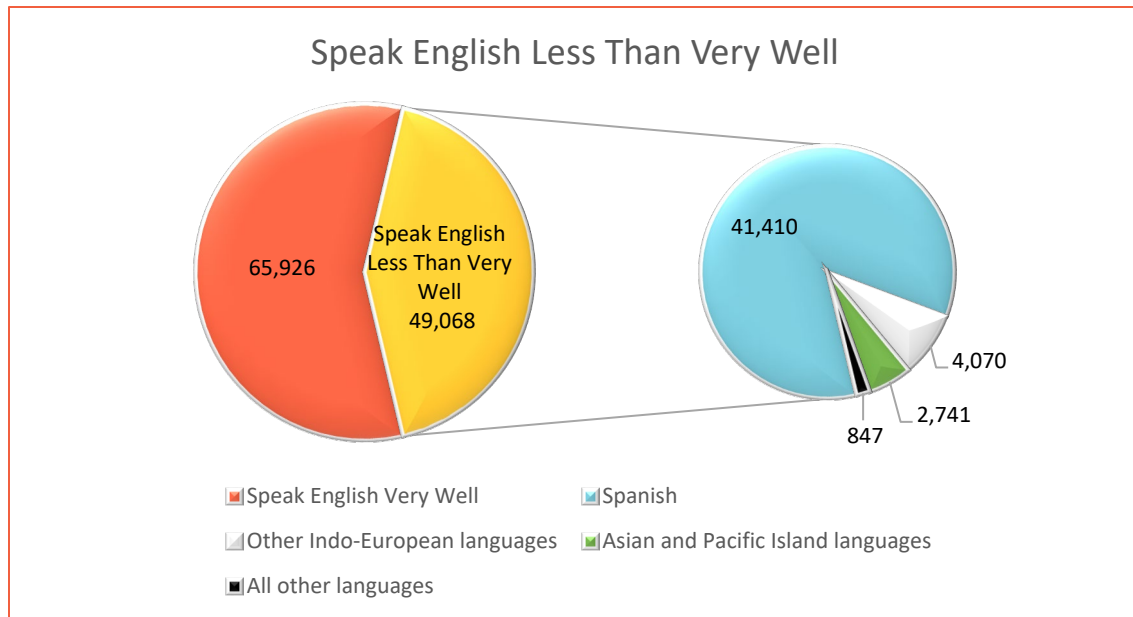


Chart 2: Languages breakout of LEP Population

Language Spoken at Home for the Population 5 Years and Over (2023 American Community Survey) Geographic Restrictions for MeVa's 11 Fixed Route Communities (County Subdivision)		
Population 5 years and over	319,713	100.00%
Speak only English	204,719	64.03%
Speak a language other than English	114,994	35.97%
Spanish	90,562	28.33%
Speak English "very well"	49,152	15.37%
Speak English less than very well	41,410	12.95%
Other Indo-European languages	13,758	4.30%
Speak English "very well"	9,688	3.03%
Speak English less than very well	4,070	1.27%
<i>LEP Language Breakdown</i>		
French, Haitian, or Cajun:	1,036	0.32%
German or other West Germanic	53	0.02%
Russian, Polish, or other Slavic	343	0.11%
All Other Indo-European languages	2,638	0.83%
Asian and Pacific Island languages	6,669	2.09%
Speak English "very well"	3,928	1.23%
Speak English less than very well	2,741	0.86%
<i>LEP Language Breakdown</i>		
Chinese (incl. Mandarin, Cantonese)	1,255	0.39%
Korean	181	0.06%
Vietnamese	779	0.24%

Tagalog (incl. Filipino)	36	0.01%
Other Asian and Pacific Island languages	490	0.15%
All other languages	4,005	1.25%
Speak English “very well”	3,158	0.99%
Speak English less than very well	847	0.26%
<i>LEP Language Breakdown</i>		
Arabic	644	0.20%
Other and unspecified	203	0.06%

Table 1: Breakdown of Languages in Dataset C16001

“All Other Indo-European Languages” was another category that was well above 1000 individuals (2,638). However, this category is made up of more than 12 languages that include Italian, Portuguese, Greek and over 7 different languages from the Indian subcontinent. The Census was searched to try and find a better breakdown of this big number, but the only table that showed each individual language only showed the population for the entire state and not our member communities. Dataset ACS DT1Y2023 showed that the Commonwealth overall has a Portuguese speaking population of 245,795 with 117,030 speaking English less than very well. This equates to 47.65%. However, data on our communities was needed, so other sites that use census data for their statistical purposes were searched.

A search on LEP census data in Essex County Massachusetts led to sites that use Public Use Microdata. Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs) are non-overlapping, statistical geographic areas that partition each state or equivalent entity into geographic areas containing no fewer than 100,000 people each¹. MeVa found the website <https://datausa.io/> (Figure 1) to have very useful data on the 3 PUMAs that make up MeVa’s service region. These 3 PUMAs are (1) Essex County West -- Lawrence & Andover PUMA, MA, Essex County Northwest -- Haverhill & Methuen PUMA, MA and Essex County North -- Newburyport, Amesbury & North Andover PUMA, MA. According to the map located on a site called <https://censusreporter.org/> all of MeVa’s member communities (with the exception of North Reading which is in Middlesex County) are included in these 3 PUMAs.

The data on the DataUSA site gave a detailed breakdown of languages spoken at home which included the graphic below (figure 2) as well as an exportable table of the data which supports this graphic. The data unfortunately was not broken down on the ability of the individuals to speak English very well.

¹ <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/geography/guidance/geo-areas/pumas.html#:~:text=Contact%20Information-,PUMA%20Overview,PUMS%20Data> page last revised September 7, 2023.

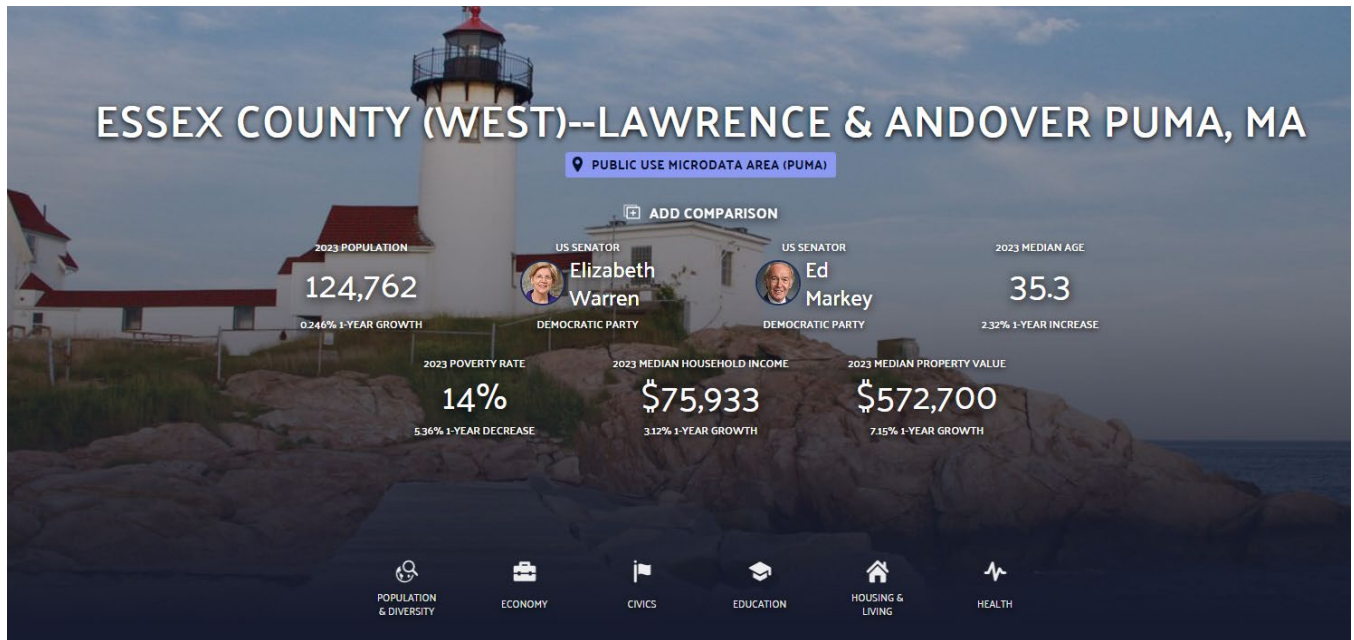


Figure 1: Screenshot of page on Essex County West from datausa.io²

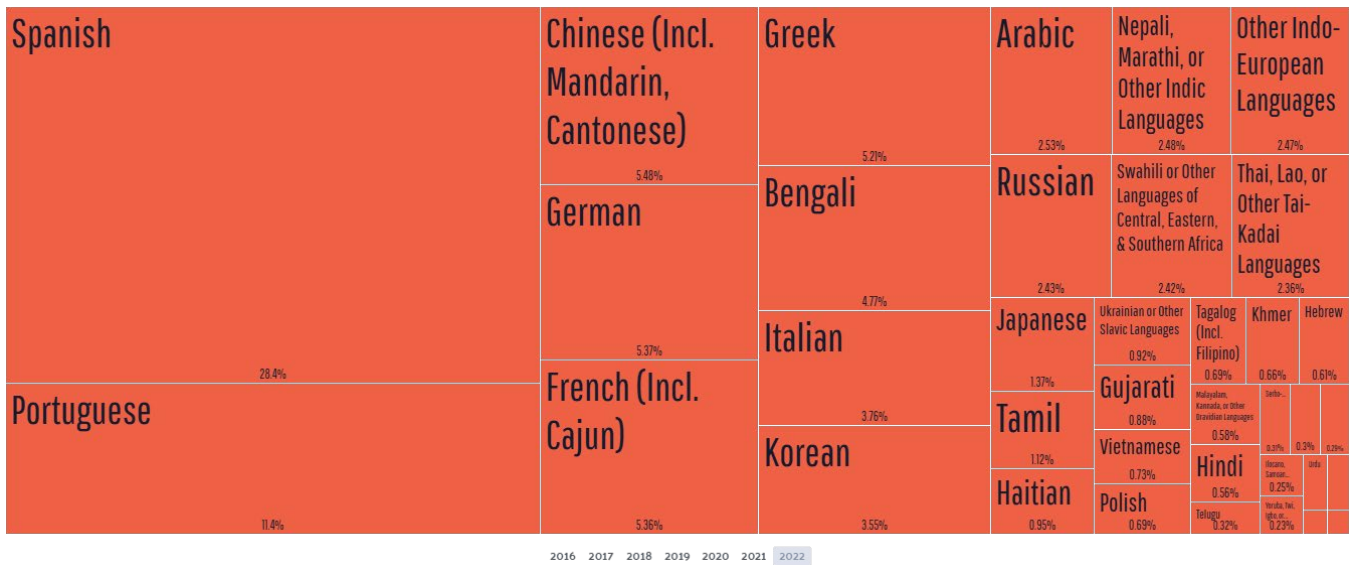


Figure 2: Image on language breakdown Essex County North from datausa.io

The data tables were downloaded from this website for each of the 3 PUMAs to obtain details on every language spoken. The data showed that Portuguese speakers add up to 2500 in all 3 PUMAs. If you calculate 47.65% statewide LEP average that equates to 1191 LEP individuals.

² <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/essex-county-west-lawrence-andover-puma-ma>



B. Factor 2: The frequency with which LEP individuals come into contact with your programs, activities, and services

MeVa has three types of service throughout the Merrimack Valley. There are currently 26 fixed bus routes with ADA complementary paratransit. Mini MeVa service includes both ADA and non-ADA demand response trips. Frontline workers come into contact with most consumers of MeVa services. However Call Reservationists engage daily with demand response riders, and Outreach staff engage with current and potential riders throughout the region on a frequent basis. To gauge the frequency with which LEP individuals come into contact with our services a survey of MeVa's frontline workers was conducted. Bus drivers, paratransit drivers, dispatchers, and customer service representatives (CSRs) were given a survey with the following questions in both English and Spanish:

- Question 1: In addition to English, what language(s) do you speak?
- Question 2: How often do you come in contact with customers who do not speak English well?
- Question 3: To the best of your knowledge/ experience, tell us which languages people are speaking.
- Question 4: Are you able to communicate with these people and help them? How?
- Question 5: How do you think the MEVA could improve its communication to non-English speakers?

The following is a summary of the results from the 87 respondents:

Customer Speaks Another Language			Frontline Worker Speaks Another Language		
Spanish	79	90.8%	Spanish	59	67.8%
Creole	20	23.0%	Creole	7	8.0%
French	4	4.6%	French	4	4.6%
Chinese	3	3.4%	Italian	2	2.3%
Vietnamese	2	2.3%	Chinese	1	1.1%
Arabic	1	1.1%	Vietnamese	1	1.1%
Portuguese	1	1.1%	Arabic	2	2.3%
Sign Language	1	1.1%	Some African languages	5	5.7%
			English Only	17	19.5%

Table 2: Frontline Worker Survey results

Only 6 respondents said that they encountered a rider who spoke another language less than 'somewhat frequently.' The majority chose frequently. Only 3 drivers chose rarely – MeVa is curious to know what routes or areas those drivers run to establish why this anomaly occurred. This question will be added to the survey next time. A compiled list of the survey answers is included in the LEP attachments at the end of this appendix. As you can see above Spanish and Creole are the most frequent answers, with Chinese a distance 4th place. Portuguese was only mentioned once.

In addition, there are many outreach events, as detailed in Appendix C. The majority of attendees speak Spanish. Some of these events are to inform riders about the Mini MeVa



(demand response) program, mostly held at Senior Centers. The documents about this service are currently translated into Spanish, Chinese and Vietnamese. The potential Asian riders who are interviewed are rarely interested in taking these translated materials and choose to take the English versions. They state an interest in improving their English as the reason. The Spanish riders always take the documents in Spanish. No other languages have been encountered at these type of events.

C. Factor 3: The Importance to LEP Persons of Your Program, Activities and Services

The services that MeVa provides are invaluable to the residents of its member communities. MeVa recently conducted a study³ of our fare-free system which was instituted in March 2022 to gauge its value. The study showed that the service is more important than we knew. Rider surveys and focus groups were conducted and results found that one third of its riders were born outside the U.S and 29% speak English less than very well. Most of its riders are also low-income and only 12% have access to a private vehicle. Riders most often use the bus to access healthcare services, providing better mental well-being and a sense of independence. Bus service is also used for shopping and other errands, employment, and educational access. Two-thirds of the riders use the bus for multiple trip purposes.

Schedules and information about MeVa's fixed route services and Mini MeVa program that are translated into Spanish are very important to the LEP population. Since Haitian Creole and Portuguese are newly identified languages, the necessity for these vital documents to be translated remains to be evaluated.

One item that came out of the frontline worker survey was to put the information about schedule changes onto the infotainment screens inside the buses and to put that information into the various languages. MeVa will institute this change immediately and translate into both Spanish and Haitian Creole, as these languages were identified in the survey as frequently contacted.

D. Factor 4: The Resources Available to the Recipient and Associated Costs

MeVa and its operator make a conscious effort to hire personnel, especially frontline workers who represent the culture of the region we serve. Bi-lingual staff is placed in key roles that come into frequent contact with LEP persons such as bus drivers, road supervisors and call reservationists. Our trainers and Outreach staff are also bi-lingual. This is essential, not only for better customer service, but for time and cost saving measures.

MeVa also utilizes Language Bank (A division of Ascentria Community Services) for Interpreter Services to assist LEP customers when internal resources are not available. A comparison of pricing for similar services was conducted and Language Bank was the

³ MeVa Fare-Free Evaluation and Business Case Final Report. Conducted by Stantec and MVPC. Included in Appendix G.



most cost effective. They are used on an as-needed basis. Current rates are \$1.40 per minute for interpreter services over the phone and \$47.25 per translated document.

While all fixed route bus time tables are available in other languages on the MEVA web site (using translator function), MEVA researched options for translating all brochures in 2019 as well. The estimated cost to translate and print all 22 brochures into Spanish, Chinese and Vietnamese was \$43,864 (initial cost which is absent the cost for on-going schedule printing). Inflation over the last 6 years, plus 4 more routes, would substantially increase that cost. MEVA chose not to translate and print the brochures for the following reasons:

1. The cost to translate and print the brochures is prohibitive.
2. The amount of information needing translation on each schedule is minimal.
3. Brochures are not widely used by the public anymore.
4. The MEVA website or the Transit App (which can be downloaded from our website) can provide translation.

MEVA will continue to take reasonable steps to meet LEP requirements. MEVA will continue to evaluate the customer service needs of its LEP community, and balance the costs associated with meeting those needs.

IV. LEP Access Plan

A. Language Assistance Measures

1. Staff:

Bi-lingual staff has been placed in positions that come into frequent contact with LEP individuals. 3 out of 4 reservationists and the receptionist are bi-lingual. 1 CSR can speak enough Spanish to help riders. Staff persons that only speak English can transfer to or call upon bi-lingual staff for assistance. A high percentage of bi-lingual drivers are employed by our operating company for our buses and Para-transit vehicles. Drivers that only speak English have protocols they can use to provide language assistance. All employees are/will be trained in MeVa's LEP procedures and policies which include:

- How staff can obtain language assistance
- How to respond to LEP callers
- How to respond to written communications from LEP persons
- How to respond to LEP individuals in-person
- How to ensure competency of interpreters and translation services

2. Vital Documents:

MEVA provides translations daily through its person-to-person interaction. However, at a minimum, it will provide translations of the following documents that it considers its 'vital documents':



Vital Document	Languages	Location
ADA Application	English, Spanish and Simplified Chinese	Main office, website, and available on request
Title VI Notice	English, Spanish, Simplified Chinese, Haitian Creole, and Portuguese	Transit Centers, all buses and vans, Main office, posted internally in bus and van operations, and website.
Title VI Complaint form and procedure	English, Spanish, Simplified Chinese, Haitian Creole, and Portuguese	Main office, website, and available upon request
Mini MeVa Information brochure	English and Spanish	Main office, website, and available upon request
Meeting Notices and announcements	English and Spanish	Main office and transit centers.

Table 3: Vital Documents

B. Training Staff

MeVa and its operators are committed to providing equitable access to all riders. As part of that commitment, all staff, including operators, customer service representatives, supervisors, receptionists, reservationists, and management, are required to:

- Participate in LEP training upon hire
- Complete ongoing training and refreshers as materials or requirements change
- Understand how to recognize when language assistance is needed
- Know how to access and use interpretation and translation services

Transit agencies like MeVa must not only avoid discrimination but also proactively provide meaningful access to ensure no rider is excluded or disadvantaged due to language barriers.

A copy of the LEP Training materials is included as an attachment at the end of this appendix.

C. LEP Notification

MeVa will provide notice to LEP persons in our service area through the following means:

- Language Assistance signs are posted in our vehicles, at MeVa's 3 transit centers, MeVa reception area at our headquarters, and in MeVa bus shelters.
- Policy Notices are posted in English, Spanish, Chinese, Haitian Creole and Portuguese. Pictograms are used where appropriate and available (no eating, no smoking etc.).
- Notice of translated vital documents and availability is posted on MeVa's website
- Customer service lines
- Information tables at outreach meetings and community events



A copy of the Notice of Language Assistance is included in the LEP attachments at the end of this appendix.

D. Monitoring and Updating the LEP Plan

The following areas are reviewed annually or as needed to ensure that there is no discrimination to the non-English speaking population. Updates to the LEP plan will be made as a result of findings.

Evaluation Task	Method
Monitor population and use of service	Census/ACS Data Analysis Rider surveys (every 3 years). (If a major service change is required, LEP groups will be identified for those purposes.)
Frequency of encounters with LEP groups	Employee surveys (1-3 years) On-demand language translation services (as needed) Collect data on what languages are being used in conjunction with iSpeak cards
Transit Needs of LEP groups	Outreach to LEP communities (ongoing).
Review of materials; website	Ongoing

Table 4: Monitoring Activities

V. LEP PLAN ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: LEP Statistical Map

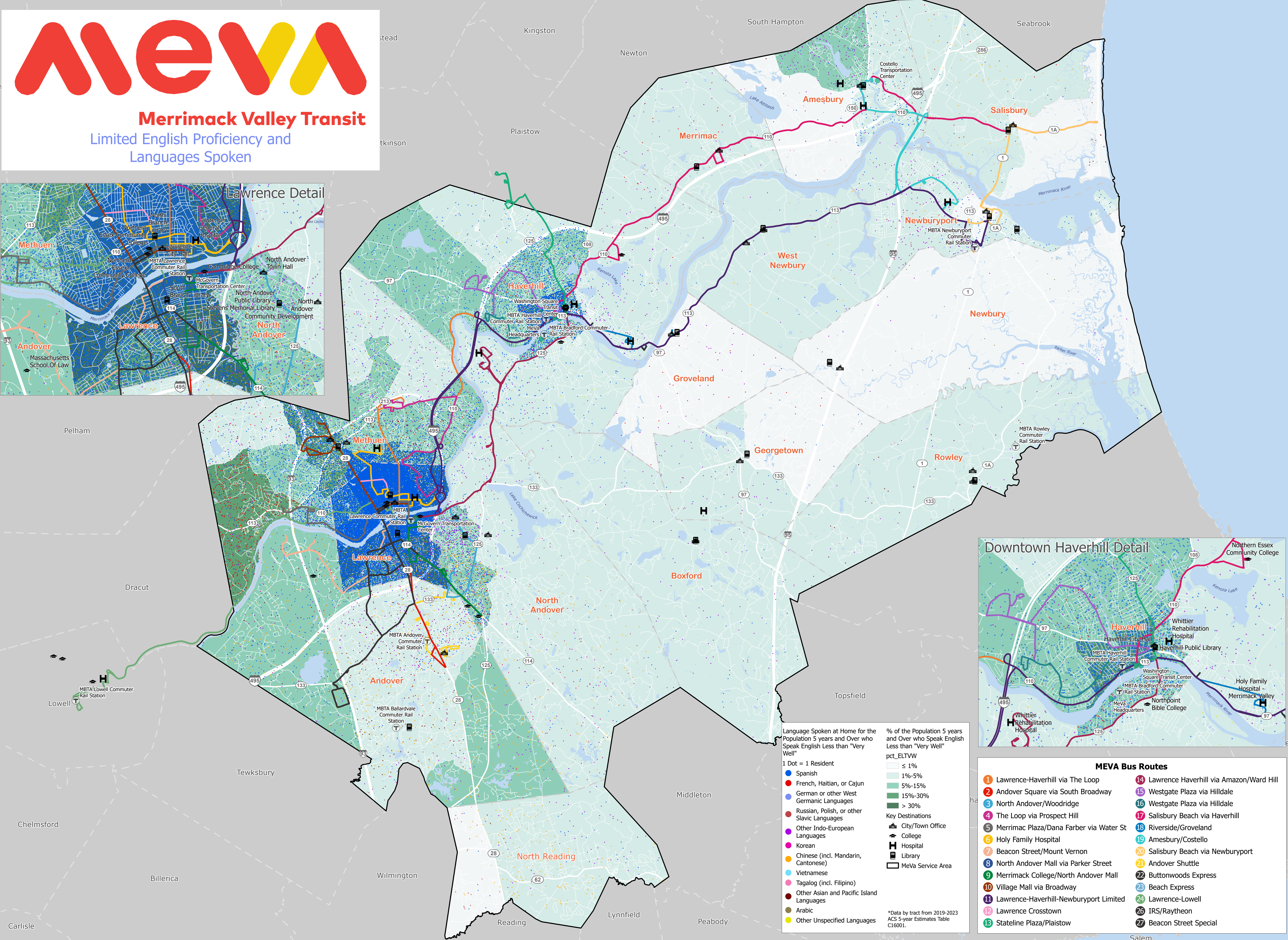
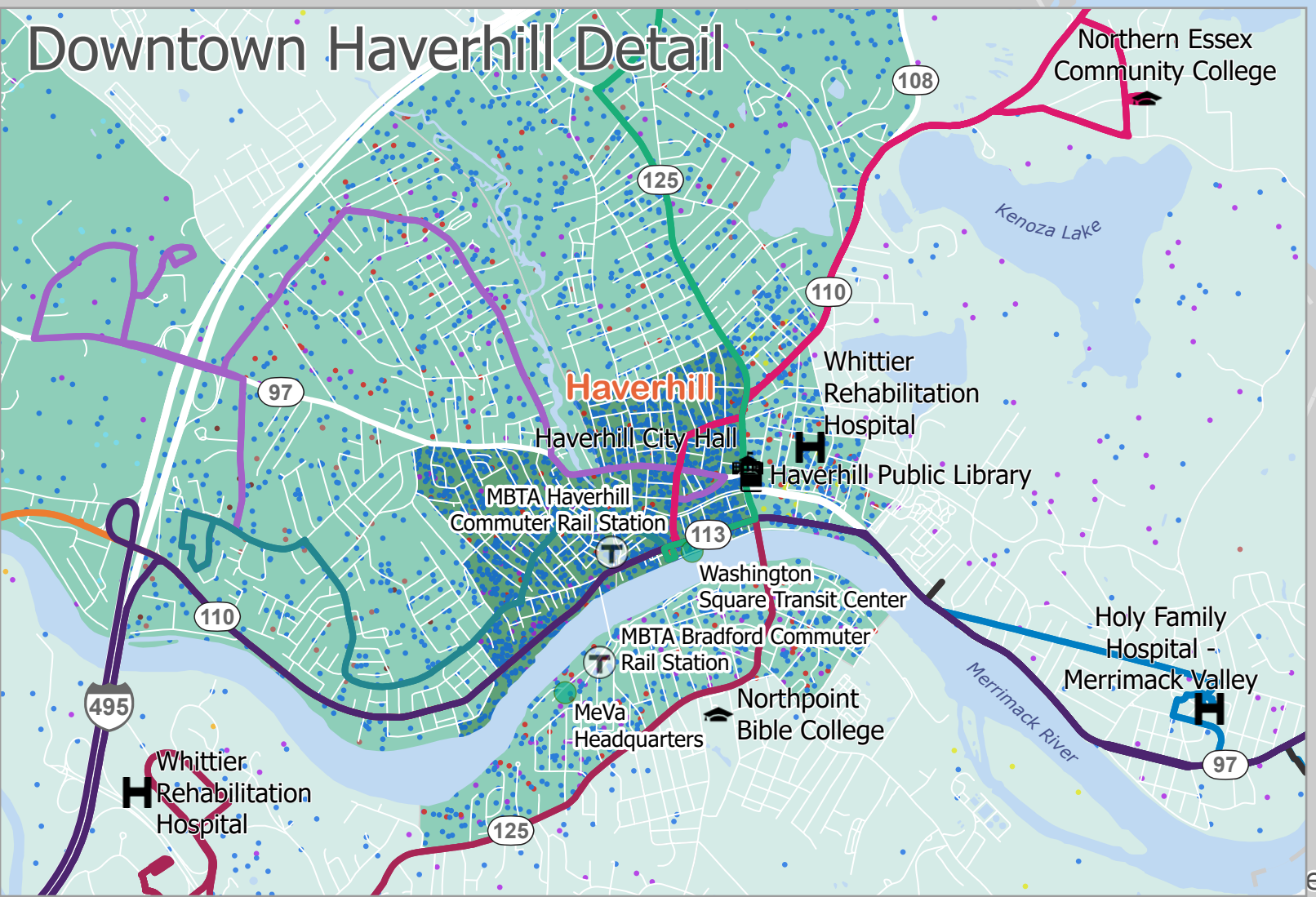
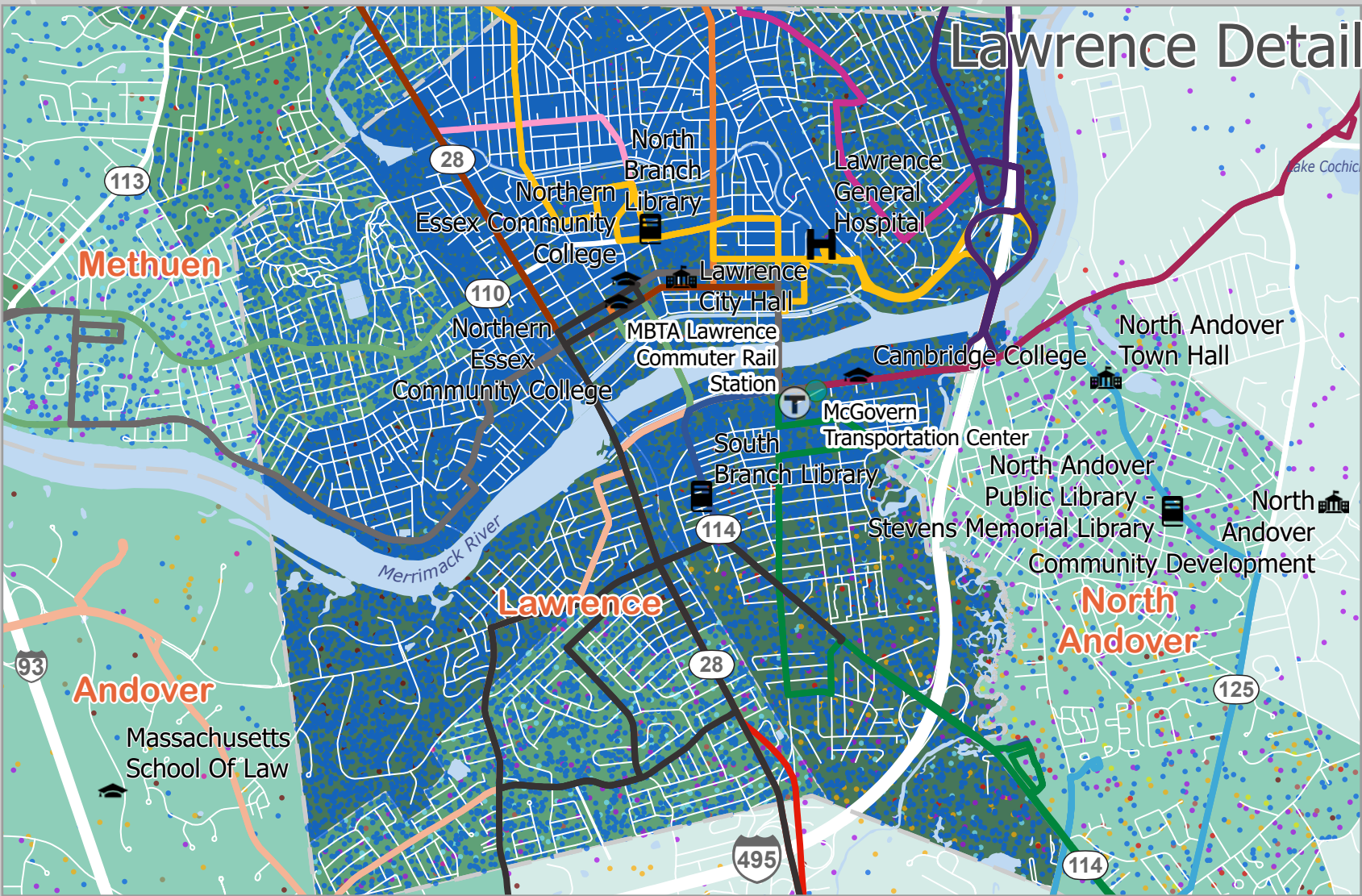
Attachment 2: 2025 Frontline Workers LEP Survey Results

Attachment 3: Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Training Overview

Attachment 4: Notice of Language Assistance



Merrimack Valley Transit
Limited English Proficiency and
Languages Spoken



Language Spoken at Home for the Population 5 years and Over who Speak English Less than "Very Well"

1 Dot = 1 Resident

- Spanish
- French, Haitian, or Cajun
- German or other West Germanic Languages
- Russian, Polish, or other Slavic Languages
- Other Indo-European Languages
- Korean
- Chinese (incl. Mandarin, Cantonese)
- Vietnamese
- Tagalog (incl. Filipino)
- Other Asian and Pacific Island Languages
- Arabic
- Other Unspecified Languages

% of the Population 5 years and Over who Speak English Less than "Very Well"

pct_ELTVW

- ≤ 1%
- 1%-5%
- 5%-15%
- 15%-30%
- > 30%

Key Destinations

- City/Town Office
- College
- Hospital
- Library
- MeVA Service Area

*Data by tract from 2019-2023 ACS 5-year Estimates Table C16001.

- MEVA Bus Routes**
- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 Lawrence-Haverhill via The Loop | 14 Lawrence Haverhill via Amazon/Ward Hill |
| 2 Andover Square via South Broadway | 15 Westgate Plaza via Hilldale |
| 3 North Andover/Woodridge | 16 Westgate Plaza via Hilldale |
| 4 The Loop via Prospect Hill | 17 Salisbury Beach via Haverhill |
| 5 Merrimac Plaza/Dana Farber via Water St | 18 Riverside/Groveland |
| 6 Holy Family Hospital | 19 Amesbury/Costello |
| 7 Beacon Street/Mount Vernon | 20 Salisbury Beach via Newburyport |
| 8 North Andover Mall via Parker Street | 21 Andover Shuttle |
| 9 Merrimack College/North Andover Mall | 22 Buttonwoods Express |
| 10 Village Mall via Broadway | 23 Beach Express |
| 11 Lawrence-Haverhill-Newburyport Limited | 24 Lawrence-Lowell |
| 12 Lawrence Crosstown | 26 IRS/Raytheon |
| 13 Stateline Plaza/Plaistow | 27 Beacon Street Special |

What is your position?	In addition to English, what languages do you speak?	How often do you come in contact with customers who do not speak English well?	To the best of your knowledge/experience, tell us which languages people are speaking.	Are you able to communicate with these people and help them? How?	How do you think MEVA could improve its communication to non-English speakers?
Bus operator	Spanish	Frequently	Most of our passengers from Lawrence are speaking Spanish, Creole, and English. But on the top is Spanish.	Yes, I'm able to communicate with our Spanish and English passengers. Most of the help I give is with direction, scheduled and route times. At times I tend to have conversations with them.	Well thanks to technology there are many devices on the market that could be implemented with each driver on their routes.
Customer Service Representative	Arabic, French, Benben, Amazigh	Frequently	Spanish, Arabic, French	In person Spanish - I try do my best using some words I know or get help from drivers or I use google. With Arabic and French I have no problem on the phone I forward the Spanish calls or get help from the drivers.	Provide translator equipment
Bus operator	English	Frequently	Spanish	Find Translators on bus	Translation notices
Bus operator	Spanish, Chinese/Vietnamese	Frequently	Spanish	Yes by talking in Spanish	By hiring more Spanish speaking people
Bus operator	Ndebele	Frequently	English/Spanish	English	Send drivers to school
Bus operator	None	Frequently	Spanish	I find another operator to help me find out what the passenger is trying to find out or where they are going to	Put up warning about walking in front of bus or placing strollers and shopping carts on bus tv and someone announcing around around station areas. Offer Courses for free to drivers that would want to learn basics online or group learners during the week at base.
Bus operator	Spanish	Frequently	Spanish 80% and Creole/French	Yes in Spanish and answer any question they may have about transportation	Yes
Bus operator	French	Somewhat frequently	None	None	None
Van operator	Spanish	Frequently	English and Spanish	Yes by translating on signs	Talking same languages on translate
Van operator	None	Frequently	People speak both	Effective communication	Use clear and simple language be patient and use visual aids.
Van operator	Spanish	Frequently	Spanish and Vietnamese	Somewhat	Have a basic language and communication class offered to drivers
Van operator	None	Somewhat frequently	Spanish and Chinese	Somewhat, gestures or google translate	I believe MeVa should invest in translation technology either it be on the tablets on vehicles or translation headphones
Van operator	Spanish	Rarely	Spanish and English	Help them with anything	Meva is doing a good job right now
Van operator	Spanish	Somewhat frequently	English and Spanish	None	None
Van operator	Spanish	Somewhat frequently	English and Spanish	Yes	None
Supervisor/Dispatcher	Spanish	Somewhat frequently	Spanish and English	None	None
Supervisor/Dispatcher	Swahili	Somewhat frequently	Spanish and English	Translate, direct, advise	Available translators
Van operator	Spanish	Somewhat frequently	English and Spanish	Somewhat, and gestures and pointing	Don't Know
Van operator	Spanish	Somewhat frequently	English and Spanish	None	None
Van operator	Spanish	Rarely	English and Spanish	None	With people that talk both languages
Van operator	Spanish	Frequently	Spanish	Yes, because I speak Spanish	Having translators
Van operator	Ghanian	Frequently	Spanish	Sometimes	None
Van operator	Spanish	Frequently	Spanish and English	Yes with any questions	Employing people who speak both languages
Van operator	Swahili	Frequently	Spanish	Use hand signals and little Spanish I can speak	Get gadgets that can translate
Van operator	Spanish	Frequently	English	Yes translating	More drivers that speak the language
Van operator	Spanish	Frequently	For the most part, we have a lot of Spanish speaking passengers. We also have a small amount who speak another foreign language	Since I also speak Spanish they are a little easier to communicate. The other few times I have to guess with hand signs and text.	Perhaps having a survey done with passengers to see the percentages of passengers languages and having someone on base who can translate for the most common languages.
Bus operator	Spanish	Frequently	English and Spanish	Yes	Post on MEVA app or bus screen
Bus operator	None	Frequently	Spanish and Vietnamese	Yes, for the most part I know a little Spanish or other passengers or drivers are around to help.	Not much, I think non-English speakers have ways to communicate if they need help either use phone to translate or other passengers.

What is your position?	In addition to English, what languages do you speak?	How often do you come in contact with customers who do not speak English well?	To the best of your knowledge/experience, tell us which languages people are speaking.	Are you able to communicate with these people and help them? How?	How do you think MEVA could improve its communication to non-English speakers?
Bus operator	Arabic	Frequently	English	Yes, connect and help them somehow	These people should speak English
Bus operator	None	Frequently	Haitian creole and Spanish	Be able to communicate and help somehow	I don't really know what to tell about it. Passengers lack of reading important info is crucial. Probably use the voice commanders to play messages in their respective languages would help
Bus operator	Spanish	Frequently	Most Spanish and English	Yes I speak Spanish	Have People Who speak serval languages in each station
Bus operator	Spanish	Frequently	None	Yes	No
Bus operator	Spanish	Frequently	English and Spanish	Yes, by talking destination or stop to get where they need to	Adding more workers at bus stops
Bus operator	Spanish	Frequently	English and Spanish	Yes verbally	By providing more messages through the voice commander
Bus operator	Spanish	Frequently	Spanish	Yes by speaking their language	Station advertised
Bus operator	Haitian/Creole	Frequently	Mostly Spanish some of them Hattian creole too.	Sometimes I get them someone who speaks their language.	I think Meva pretty much got it covered.
Bus operator	Spanish	Frequently	Spanish, Creole, French	None	None
Bus operator	Spanish	Somewhat frequently	Spanish	Yes	Speaker messages with different language
Bus operator	Spanish	Frequently	Mostly Spanish	Yes, I help with Spanish speaking passengers	I believe Meva does great communicating non English speakers
Bus operator	Haitian/Creole	Somewhat frequently	Spanish	Yes somewhat	Help communication
Bus operator	Spanish	Frequently	Spanish	I am bilingual	An app
Bus operator	Spanish	Frequently	Spanish	Yes slowing down the communication	Have a Spanish speaking rep at the station all day
Bus operator	Spanish	Rarely	English and Spanish	None	None
Bus operator	Italian	Frequently	Spanish	Not really	Don't Know
Bus operator	Spanish	Frequently	None	I speak Spanish	None
Bus operator	Spanish, Haitian/Creole	Frequently	English and Spanish	Speaking in their language	In their language
Bus operator	Spanish, Italian	Frequently	Spanish and Chinese	Somewhat	None
Bus operator	Spanish	Frequently	Spanish and English	Try and speak their language and try to explain to the best of my ability	Help the driver
Bus operator	Spanish, Haitian/Creole, French	Frequently	Spanish and Haitian creole	Yes by talking to them in their language to help them	By giving some bonus to the ones who speak that language
Bus operator	Spanish	Frequently	Spanish and Creole	Yes with signs and using google translator	Advertisement with different languages
Customer Service Representative	Spanish	Frequently	Of the people who came contact with me who don't speak English about 95% of them speak Spanish. About 3% of them speak what I believe to be Mandarin Chinese and the rest are other languages.	For most Spanish speakers, I am able to understand the gist of what they are saying and can respond giving them the information they need in my own Spanish. For the times I am unable to understand them I usually get another driver to help me. I do have the translator phone service for other languages But I rarely have to use it.	One thing which would include English speakers too is to have sort of messaging boards in multiple places in McGovern. That are able to stay in place updates can be put on without worrying about tape losing its stickiness quickly. Schedules for buses nearby can be posted too.
Bus operator	Spanish	Frequently	Spanish, Creole, English	Yes I can help them with figuring out what bus to use to get to there destination	Have more bilingual speakers
Bus operator	Spanish, Haitian/Creole	Frequently	Spanish and Creole	Yes I try to collect the basics in other cases I ask for help	Probably if we can take another basic class i would love to learn more creole
Bus operator	Spanish	Frequently	I personally think Spanish is the most spoken language when it comes to passengers using the service.	As a bilingual operator it is easier for me to communicate with customers and is faster for me to know where they want to go.	Making the app more accessible for people that don't speak English we should also have a big screen in McGovern. That can show the routes in different languages and each route goes.
Bus operator	Spanish	Frequently	Spanish	Yes I speak Spanish, English, and some sign language	Have the announcement in multiple languages with the route and destination.

What is your position?	In addition to English, what languages do you speak?	How often do you come in contact with customers who do not speak English well?	To the best of your knowledge/experience, tell us which languages people are speaking.	Are you able to communicate with these people and help them? How?	How do you think MEVA could improve its communication to non-English speakers?
Bus operator	Spanish	Frequently	Spanish	Yes if the people ask questions about the route and address	Do the information in different languages
Bus operator	Spanish	Frequently, Once a week	Spanish and English	Yes Spanish and English	Yes put Spanish schedules
Bus operator	Spanish	Frequently	Creole	Yes and google translate	Find people who speak more English
Bus operator	Spanish, Haitian/Creole	Frequently	Spanish and Creole	Transator app or other passengers	Translator App
Bus operator	Spanish	Frequently	Spanish	Usually through other passengers or drivers	Maybe download an app to translate to English to Spanish
Bus operator	Spanish	Frequently	Mostly Spanish	Yes I am able to communicate effectively in Spanish	I think Meva does a pretty good job already
Bus operator	Spanish	Frequently	English and Spanish	Yes	Spanish
Bus operator	Spanish, Haitian/Creole	Frequently	Spanish, French, Creole	Yes, understood their concern or where they want to go on the bus schedule or call dispatch for more information if I don't know	General Information should translate in the language who have more demand
Bus operator	Spanish	Frequently	Spanish, Haitian Creole, Portuguese	The best way I can	Meeting or workshop session for drivers where they can receive basic statements and questions translated from English to other languages.
Bus operator	Spanish	Frequently	Spanish and English	Yes I helped them	Look for someone who speaks Spanish
Bus operator	Spanish	Frequently	Spanish, English, Creole	Yes doing everything	Meva can try a program of different languages needed for everyone. like Spanish, English, Creole at least the basics
Bus operator	Spanish	Frequently	Spanish and Creole	Yes lots of the times I utilize translator	None
Supervisor/Dispatcher	Spanish	Frequently	Haitian Creole and Sign Language	Most Haitian people speak some level of Spanish	In other states some transportation authorities have interactive screens with some sort of q&a in different languages
Bus operator	Spanish	Frequently	Spanish and English	Yes - by answering the questions related to wants	Translator machine
Bus operator	Spanish	Frequently	Spanish	Yes	Hiring people that speak Spanish or bilingual on the information.
Bus operator	Spanish	Frequently	Spanish and English	Speak to them in their language	Though using a translator
Bus operator	Spanish	Frequently	Spanish, Haitian Creole, English	Only Spanish and English passengers	Machine translator on the bus
Bus operator	Spanish	Somewhat frequently	Spanish	Yes	So far I understand Meva is doing enough because we have messages in both languages
Unknown	None	Somewhat frequently	Spanish	Yes	Not sure
Bus operator	French	Frequently	Spanish	Coworkers	Bilingual person at the Bus Station
Unknown	None	Frequently	Spanish	Listen carefully and enlist help from other people	Use electronic communicators in the bus
Unknown	None	Once a week	#1 Spanish #2 Creole (Haitian)	Sometimes - a single word or two in English and they do understand	In the most frequent language other than English, placard/posters in prominent places that explain in native languages how person can seek assistance in their own language (via an automated service - available on phone only)
Unknown	None	Once a week	Spanish	There is always someone to help (passenger or other driver) - or google translate	
Unknown	None	Frequently	Spanish	Yes - ask other operators or passengers to help translate or have them show me destination on a map	I think communication is equal between English and Spanish speaking passengers. It would be nice if they all used the app/website more. Printed schedules can be a little confusing. Designated bus stops!!!
Unknown	None	Frequently	Spanish	Ask somebody to translate	Have no idea.
Unknown	None	A few times a month	Spanish	With their phone	No idea
Unknown	None	Frequently	Spanish	No	Interpreters

What is your position?	In addition to English, what languages do you speak?	How often do you come in contact with customers who do not speak English well?	To the best of your knowledge/experience, tell us which languages people are speaking.	Are you able to communicate with these people and help them? How?	How do you think MEVA could improve its communication to non-English speakers?
Unknown	None	Frequently	Spanish	Sometimes by listening to key words or street names	Have bus schedules available in multiple languages
Unknown	None	Frequently	Spanish, Creole		
Bus operator	Spanish	Frequently	Spanish, Creole		
Supervisor/Dispatcher	Spanish	Frequently			
Van operator	English	Frequently	Spanish	No	lot.

Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Training Overview

All employees are required to comply with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and are trained to assist individuals with Limited English Proficiency (LEP). This training ensures that staff understand their responsibilities in providing meaningful access to programs, services, and activities for LEP individuals, in accordance with federal requirements.

What is Title VI and LEP?

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 protects the rights of individuals in the United States by prohibiting discrimination based on race, color, or national origin in any program or activity that receives federal financial assistance. This protection includes individuals who have limited English proficiency.

In 2000, Executive Order 13166 directed federal agencies and recipients of federal funds—including transit systems like MeVa—to take reasonable steps to ensure meaningful access to their programs and services for LEP individuals. This includes providing access to information about all resources, activities, and services offered by MeVa.

MeVa's Commitment

MeVa is committed to providing equitable access to all riders. As part of that commitment, all staff—including operators, customer service representatives, supervisors, receptionists, reservationists, and management—are required to:

- Participate in LEP training upon hire
- Complete ongoing training and refreshers as materials or requirements change
- Understand how to recognize when language assistance is needed
- Know how to access and use interpretation and translation services

Transit agencies like MeVa must not only avoid discrimination but also proactively provide meaningful access to ensure no rider is excluded or disadvantaged due to language barriers.

Language Assistance Resources Provided

As part of this training, the following **handouts and tools** are provided to help employees respond effectively:

- “I Speak” Poster
 - A visual tool that allows individuals to point to their preferred language.
 - Staff should use this to quickly identify a rider’s language and connect them with interpretation services.
- Oral Interpretation Instructions
 - Step-by-step guidance for accessing Language Bank, MeVa’s contracted telephonic interpretation service.
 - Includes the phone number, client ID, and department code, and instructions on how to request a specific language.
 - Staff are expected to be familiar with and confident using this service in real-time interactions with LEP riders.

Both the “I Speak” poster and Oral Interpretation Instructions are included in the drivers’ packets, which are updated quarterly.

Guidance for Bus Operators

As a bus operator, you may at times need to communicate with passengers who do not speak English well. If you're having difficulty due to a language barrier, take the following steps:

- a. Contact a supervisor – Use your radio or speak to a supervisor in person if one is nearby. The supervisor may speak directly with the passenger or connect you with someone who speaks the passenger's language.
- b. Call the main office during a layover – Contact the office coordinator at the main office to assist.
- c. Ask another passenger for help – If appropriate, you may ask another passenger on the bus who speaks the same language to interpret. This should be a last resort and handled respectfully.

Reminder: Employees should never use children or family members of the rider as interpreters, except in an emergency.

Oral Interpretation Instructions

Merrimack Valley Transit has entered into an agreement with the **Language Bank** to provide on-demand over the phone **interpreters**. This translation service is designed to assist all MVATC & STS Inc. staff with removing communication barriers between him/her and customers with limited English proficiency (LEP). The following steps will assist you in using the service. If you have any questions, feel free to contact Niorka Mendez at (978) 469-6878 x116 or nmendez@mevatransit.com.

Step 1: Before putting the customer on the phone, or if on a three-way (conference*), before connecting the customer to the call, **Dial 1-888-898-1512**.

Step 2: Select the language you need

- Press 1 for Spanish
- Press 2 for all other languages and state the name of the language you need
- Press 0 for assistance if you do not know the language or the language is not listed

Step 3: Provide your **Department Code** and you will be connected to an interpreter

- Reception/ Payroll: **927174**
- Office of Special Services **927175**
- Haverhill Transit **927176**
- Lawrence Transit **927177**
- Bus/ Van Operations/ Other **927178**

*If asked by an agent, your client ID number is **224121***

Step 4: Briefly tell the interpreter the nature of the call.

Step 5: Add the limited English proficiency (LEP) customer onto the call.

Step 6: Say “End of Call” to the interpreter when your call is completed.

***Note:** If you need assistance placing a call to the LEP customer, please inform the interpreter or agent at the beginning of the call. If the LEP person is face-to-face with you, once the interpreter joins the line, brief him/her and place the phone on “Speaker” mode or pass the handset back-and-forth.

Communicating with the Interpreter

1. Introduce yourself to the interpreter and explain the purpose of the call.
2. The interpreter will provide his/her name and ID number

Communicating with the Customer

1. You are the one who will need to manage the call. The interpreter will only assist in translating the call.
2. Always use first person and talk to the LEP person directly (in other words, speak to the interpreter as if you are speaking to the customer).
3. Speak in short sentences and pause at the end of each thought.
4. Avoid idioms, jargon, slang, and complicated technical terminology.
5. Remember, everything you say will be interpreted. Avoid side conversations. Do not say anything you do not want interpreted.
6. Minimize use of speaker phones. This is because speaker phones can negatively impact sound quality, which affects the interpreter's ability to be accurate and complete.
7. Ensure proper positioning. If you must use a speaker phone, position all parties within three feet of the phone, and if possible do not use a wall-mounted phone.
8. Speak clearly and do not speak too fast or too loudly.
9. Use simple sentence structure and ask one question at a time.

Closing the conversation

1. Check with the customer for understanding
2. Make sure the customer has received the information needed.

Please note, to ensure accuracy, your interpreter may sometimes ask for clarification or repetition.



Please point to the language you speak and we will call an interpreter at no cost to you.

Albanian Shqip	Ju lutem tregoni se cilen gjuhe flisni dhe ne mund te telefonojme nje perkthyes per ju falas.
Arabic العربية	رجاءً أشر إلى اللغة التي تتكلمها ونحن سنقوم بالاتصال بمترجم لك مجاناً
Bosnian/Serbo-Croatian Bosanski/ Srpsko-Hrvatski	Molimo vas pokazite na jezik koji govorite. Mi ćemo pozvati prevodioca, koji je besplatan za vas.
Cantonese 廣東話	請指出您所使用的語言，我們將免費為您提供一名口譯員。
Farsi فارسی	لطفا اشاره کنید به زبانی که با آن صحبت میکنید وما بطور مجانی برای شما به یک مترجم رنگ میزنیم .
French Français	Veillez indiquer la langue que vous parlez et nous ferons appel à un interprète pour vous assister gratuitement.
Greek Ελληνικά	Σας παρακαλώ διξετε μου ποια γλώσσα ομιλιτε και εμείς θα σας βρούμε διερμηνεα χωρίς καμια χρηματική επιβάρυνση για σας.
Hindi हिन्दी	कृपया अंगुठीसे अपने बोलने वाली भाषा पर ईशारा करें, आपको बिना किसी कीमत पर हम एक दुभाशिया बुला देंगे।
Japanese 日本語	通訳者を派遣いたします。
Kirundi Ikirundi	Turagusavye utunge urutoki ku rurimi muvuga maze turahamagara umusobanuzi ku buntu.
Korean 한국어	귀하가 사용하시는 언어를 가리키시면 무료로 통역사를 호출해 드립니다.
Mandarin 國語	请指出您所使用的语言，我们将免费为您提供一名口译员。
Nepali नेपाली	कृपया आफूले बोल्ने भाषा औँल्याउनुहोस्, तपाईंलाई हामी निःशुल्क एक जना दोभाषे उपलब्ध गराउनेछौं।
Polish Język polski	Proszę wskazać na Pana/Pani język i dostarczymy tłumacza bezpłatnie.
Portuguese Português	Por favor assinale para a língua que você fala e lhe proporcionaremos um intérprete sem custo algum.
Romanian Română	Vă rugăm să indicați limba pe care o vorbiți și noi vom chema un interpret fără să vă coste nimic.
Russian Русский	Пожалуйста, укажите язык, на котором Вы говорите, и мы вызовем для Вас бесплатного переводчика.
Somali Af-Soomaali	Fadlan, gacanta ku taabo Afka aad ku hadashid, si aan kugu soo diyaarinno turjubaan lacag laa’ana.
Spanish Español	Por favor señale el idioma que usted habla y le proporcionaremos un intérprete gratuito.
Swahili Kiswahili	Tafadhali, onyesha lugha unayoongea na sisi tutamwita mtafsiri bila gharama yoyote kwako.
Turkish Türkçe	Lütfen konuştuğunuz lisani gösteriniz, size ücretsiz bir tercüman temin edilecektir.
Urdu اردو	مفت مترجم کے لیے اپنی زبان کی طرف اشارہ کریں
Vietnamese Tiếng Việt	Xin chỉ vào ngôn ngữ bạn nói và chúng tôi sẽ gọi một thông dịch viên miễn phí.

For phone interpretation call: **1.888.898.1512** (contact LanguageBank for User ID).
To request a face-to-face interpreter (current users) go to:
<https://request.thelanguagebank.org>
For more information about Language Bank visit: thelanguagebank.org
or call us at: 1.844.579.0610

Notice of Language Assistance Services

MeVa Transit ('MEVA') wishes to inform our consumers that if you do not speak or understand English very well, 'MeVa' has translation services available at no charge. Tell the person helping you that you need to identify your language and have the appropriate interpreter made available to you. Information about 'MeVa' policies and services can also be provided in accessible formats and are translated into Spanish, Simplified Chinese, Haitian Creole, and Portuguese.

Aviso sobre Servicios de Asistencia Lingüística

MeVa Transit («MEVA») desea informar a nuestros clientes que, si no hablan o no entienden bien el inglés, «MeVa» ofrece servicios de traducción gratuitos. Indique a la persona que le atienda que necesita identificar su idioma y que le proporcione un intérprete adecuado. La información sobre las políticas y servicios de «MeVa» también se puede proporcionar en formatos accesibles y se traduce al español, chino simplificado, criollo haitiano y portugués.

Avi Sèvis Asistans Lang

MeVa Transit ('MEVA') vle enfòmè konsomatè nou yo ke si ou pa pale oswa konprann angle trè byen, 'MeVa' gen sèvis tradiksyon ki disponib gratis. Di moun k ap ede w la ke ou bezwen idantifye lang ou epi fè entèprèt ki apwopriye a disponib pou ou. Enfòmasyon sou règleman ak sèvis 'MeVa' yo ka bay tou nan fòm aksèsib epi yo tradwi nan Panyòl, Chinwa Senplifye, Kreyòl Ayisyen, ak Pòtigè.

Aviso de Serviços de Assistência de Idioma

A MeVa Transit ('MEVA') deseja informar nossos consumidores que, se você não fala ou não entende inglês muito bem, a 'MeVa' tem serviços de tradução disponíveis sem custo. Diga à pessoa que está ajudando você que você precisa identificar seu idioma e ter o intérprete apropriado disponível para você. Informações sobre as políticas e serviços da 'MeVa' também podem ser fornecidas em formatos acessíveis e são traduzidas para espanhol, chinês simplificado, crioulo haitiano e português.

语言协助服务通知

MeVa Transit ("MEVA") 希望告知我们的消费者，如果您不太会说英语或不太懂英语，“MeVa”可以免费提供翻译服务。告诉帮助您的人，您需要确定您的语言，并让合适的口译员为您提供服务。有关“MeVa”政策和服务的信息也可以以可访问的格式提供，并翻译成西班牙语、简体中文、海地克里奥尔语和葡萄牙语。



Interpreter Services

Español:

Tiene derecho a un intérprete gratis. Por favor señale su idioma. Se llamará a un intérprete. Espere por favor.

中国:

您有权免费获得口译员服务。请指出您的语言。将呼叫口译员。请稍等。

Tiếng Việt:

Bạn có quyền có thông dịch viên miễn phí. Vui lòng chỉ vào ngôn ngữ của bạn. Một thông dịch viên sẽ được gọi. Vui lòng chờ.

Português:

Você tem direito a um intérprete sem nenhum custo para você. Por favor, indique seu idioma. Um intérprete será chamado. Por favor, aguarde.

Kreyòl ayisyen:

Ou gen dwa ak yon entèprèt gratis pou ou. Tanpri montre lang ou a. Y ap rele yon entèprèt. Tanpri tann.

Русский:

Вы имеете право на бесплатного переводчика. Пожалуйста, укажите свой язык. Будет вызван переводчик. Пожалуйста, подождите.

Italiano:

Hai diritto a un interprete senza alcun costo per te. Per favore indica la tua lingua. Verrà chiamato un interprete. Attendere prego.

American Sign Language:

You have a right to an interpreter at no cost to you. Please point to your language. An interpreter will be called. Please wait.





APPENDIX E Service Standards and Transit Policies

I. Service Objectives

A. MeVa's Mission Statement:

The MeVa Advisory Board's mission is to serve as ambassadors to ensure transit is the top choice as a viable, convenient, climate-friendly transportation option in the Merrimack Valley. We achieve this mission by:

- *Being present in and representative of the culturally and linguistically rich communities we serve;*
- *Respecting the value of our riders' time and putting the customer first;*
- *Working collaboratively with partners, including our legislators, neighboring municipalities, community leaders; and*
- *Adopting and implementing big, innovative ideas and tools that are based on sound data.*

MeVa's responsibility is to enthusiastically serve our member communities and implement service that embodies the vision of its Board.

B. Evaluating our Mission:

To evaluate progress toward achieving this mission, MeVa has identified the following Service Objectives:

1. Availability

Services should be geographically available throughout the communities and should operate at convenient times and frequencies.

2. Reliability

Services should be operated as scheduled (on-time) within the permitted parameters.

3. Safety

Services should be provided in a manner that is safe for the community, consumers and employees alike.

4. Efficiency

Services should be provided in a manner that promotes efficient use of resources and consumer quality.

5. Cost Effectiveness

Services should be tailored to target markets in a financially sound and cost-effective manner.

II. Service Standards



FTA Requires, at a minimum, that quantifiable standards be set for each of the following categories:

A. Vehicle Load

Vehicle load is expressed as the ratio of passengers per seats on a vehicle during the vehicle's maximum load point. When vehicles are consistently exceeding service standards, MEVA will consider adding additional vehicles or expanding the capacity of vehicles serving the route. Vehicle load standards are set to 140% of seating capacity – which allows standees on large heavy duty transit vehicles. The Peak Max Load number of passengers is dependent on vehicle model and size. Currently MeVa has on bus model – the Gillig Low Floor with two sizes 29' and 35'. The following table shows the peak load capacities.

Bus Model	Number of Seats	Peak Load Standard	Peak Max Load
Gillig Low Floor 35'	26	140%	44
Gillig Low Floor 29'	31	140%	55

Table 5: Load Standard by Vehicle Type

There are currently 3 bus routes that have low ridership and only run at peak service times. These routes are currently performed on paratransit vehicles. These vehicles have a passenger seating capacity of 12. No standees are allowed on this vehicle type.

B. Vehicle Headway

Vehicle headway is frequency of service or the time interval between two vehicles traveling in the same direction on the same route. Lawrence based routes, with a few exceptions, run 30 minutes headways all day. Haverhill and Newburyport based routes, with a couple exceptions, run 60 minutes headways. Attachment 1 at the end of this appendix contains the most recent fixed route bus schedule updates, (as they will be on 7/1/25), which include MEVA's frequency standards. Service frequency is be improved first on routes that exceed the load factor standards. As on 7/1/25 two of the heaviest ridership routes will move to 20-minute headways.

C. On-Time Performance (OTP)

Standards for bus routes are designed to ensure that routes operate as reliably as possible without early departures, chronic delays, or unpredictable wait and/or travel times.

1. Bus Time Point Tests:

To determine whether a bus is on-time at an individual time point, such as the beginning of a route, end of a route or a scheduled point in between, MeVa uses check points. For scheduled departure services, customers generally time their arrival at bus stops to correspond with the specific scheduled departure times. To be considered on time, a time-point crossing of any trip with a leading headway of 20 minutes or more must meet the relevant condition out of the following:



- Origin: The trip must leave its origin time-point between 0 minutes before and 5 minutes after its scheduled departure time.
- Mid-route: The trip must leave the mid-route time-point(s) between 0 minutes before and 7 minutes after its scheduled departure time.
- Destination: The trip must arrive at its destination time-point between 5 minutes before and 5 minutes after its scheduled arrival time.

The following table lists each of these time points for every route in MeVa's system:

Route #	Route Name / Direction	Origin Time Point	Mid Route Time Point	Destination Time Point
Lawrence Routes				
1	Lawrence-Haverhill Via Loop	McGovern	Target	WSQ
	Inbound	Washington Sq	Target	McGovern
2	Andover Via So. Broadway/Andover	McGovern	Shawsheen Square	School & Main
	Inbound	School & Main	Shawsheen Square	McGovern
3	Woodridge/N. Andover	McGovern	Chickering Rd Peters St	N/A Mall
	Inbound	N/A Mall	Chickering Rd Peters St	McGovern
4	Prospect Hill/ McGovern	McGovern	Prospect & Swan	Walmart
	Inbound	Walmart		McGovern
5	Water Street/ McGovern	McGovern	Water & Ames Street	Dana Farber
	Inbound	Dana Farber	Water & Ames Street	McGovern
6	LGH/Holy Family	McGovern	Elm Tower	Holy Family
	Inbound	Holy Family	Elm Tower	McGovern
7	Beacon/ Mt. Vernon/ North River	McGovern	Lawrence Vocational School (GLTS)	Springhill Marriot
	Inbound	Springhill Marriot	Lawrence Vocational School (GLTS)	McGovern
8	Woodridge Via Colonial Heights	McGovern	Plaza 114 /North Parish Road	N/A Mall
	Inbound	N/A Mall	Plaza 114 /North Parish Road	McGovern
9	N. Andover Mall / Merrimack College	McGovern	Heritage Place	Merrimack College
	Inbound	Merrimack College	Heritage Place	McGovern
10	Broadway/Village Mall	McGovern	Methuen Square	Village Mall
	Inbound	Village Mall	Methuen Square	McGovern
11	Lawrence -Haverhill Express	McGovern	WSQ	Pond & High Street
	Inbound	Pond & High Street	Washington Sq	McGovern



12	Lawrence Crosstown	The Center	Broadway & Essex Street	The Center
21	Andover Shuttle	The Robb Center	Andover Commons	YMCA
		Andover Commons	YMCA	The Robb Center
24	Lawrence -Lowell	McGovern	Merrimack Plaza	Lowel RTC
	Inbound	Lowel RTC	Merrimack Plaza	McGovern
Haverhill Routes				
13	Plaistow Via North Ave	Washington Sq	North Ave	Walmart
	Inbound	Walmart	North Ave	Washington Sq
14	Bradford- Ward Hill	Washington Sq	Amazon	McGovern
	Inbound	McGovern	Amazon	Washington Sq
15	Hilldale-Westgate	Washington Sq	Hilldale Ave & Monument Street	Westgate Plaza
	Inbound	Westgate Plaza	Hilldale Ave & Monument Street	Washington Sq
16	Washington St- Westgate	Washington Sq	Washington St / Julian Steele Apartments	Westgate Plaza
	Inbound	Westgate Plaza	Washington St / Julian Steele Apartments	Washington Sq
17	Haverhill- Salisbury Beach	Washington Sq	Route 110 & Main St	Salisbury Beach
	Inbound	Salisbury Beach	Route 110 & Main St	Washington Sq
18	Riverside- Groveland	Washington Sq	Kennedy Circle	Groveland Housing
	Inbound	Groveland Housing	Kennedy Circle	Washington Sq
Newburyport Routes				
19	Newburyport Center- Amesbury	Newburyport Commuter Rail (CR)	Market Basket	Costello
	Inbound	Costello	Market Basket	Newburyport CR
20	Newburyport Center- Salisbury	Salisbury Beach	State Street /Library	Newburyport CR
	Inbound	Newburyport CR	State Street /Library	Salisbury Beach
Special Routes				
23	Beach Shuttle- Seasonal	TBD	TBD	TBD
26	IRS- Raytheon	McGovern	So Broadway & Mt. Vernon St	IRS- Raytheon
27	Beacon St Tripper	Beacon St & Andover St	Clifton St & Andover St	Durso Ave.

Table 6: Bus Route Time Points

2. Bus Route Test:

The second part of the On-Time Performance Standard determines whether or not a route is on time, based on the proportion of time-points on the route that are on time



over the entire service day. 75% of all time-points on the route over the entire service day must pass their on-time tests.

Time Point Test	Origin Time Point	Mid-Route Time Point(s)	Destination
Scheduled Departure Trips:	Start 0 minutes early to 5 minutes late	Depart 0 minutes early to 5 minutes late	Arrive 2 minutes early to 5 minutes late
Route Test			
For any given bus route to be in compliance with the OTP Standard, 75% of all time points must be on-time according to the above definitions over the service period measured.			

Table 7: Summary of Bus OTP Standard

D. Service Availability

Service availability is a general measure of the distribution of routes within an agency's service area as well as the span of service hours. Definition of peak service hours also a consideration when determining frequency headways.

1. Distribution

MEVA fixed bus routes are organized to provide more service to the areas with higher densities (see base map). More than half of the fixed bus routes service Lawrence, the community with the highest population density. Coast Communities have long routes with 60-minute frequencies. Rural communities with the lowest density receive non-ADA Mini Meva demand response service.

2. Span of Service

Span of Service is the hours which fixed routes will run. They vary by demand on Weekdays versus Saturdays and Sundays. The span of hours can also vary by route groups (Lawrence vs. Haverhill vs. Seacoast). Table 8 below lists the defined span of service hours. Table 9 lists the time of weekday (peak hours) definitions.

FIXED ROUTE/ADA HOURS OF SERVICE			
Service Area	Weekdays	Saturday	Sunday
Lawrence/Lowell	5:00 AM - 9:00 PM	7:00 AM- 7:00 PM	9:00 AM- 5:00 PM
Haverhill	5:00 AM - 9:00 PM	7:00 AM- 7:00 PM	9:00 AM- 5:00 PM
Seacoast	5:30 AM - 7:00 PM	7:30 AM- 6:30 PM	No Service

Table 8: Span of Service

Time Period	Definition
Early Morning	5AM-7AM



AM Peak	7AM-9AM
Mid-Day	9AM-3PM
PM Peak	3PM-6PM
Evening	6PM-9PM

Table 9: Weekday Time Period Definitions

III. Service Policies

FTA requires fixed route transit providers to develop a policy for each of the following service indicators:

A. Distribution of Transit Amenities

Transit amenities refer to items of comfort and convenience available to the general riding public, such as benches, shelters, route maps, timetables, trash receptacles and intelligent transportation systems.

1. Transit Centers:

There are three transit stations run by MEVA: McGovern Transit Center in Lawrence, the Washington Square Station in Haverhill and the Costello Transportation Center in Amesbury. All are wheelchair accessible, have air conditioning and heat. Benches are available at all transit stations. Route maps are located at stations and the website. The McGovern Station is now equipped with full-colored LCD monitors that lists all the bus arrival times, as well as LED signs above each bus birth.

2. Fixed Route Buses:

All buses are wheelchair accessible and are equipped with functional heat, air conditioning, talking bus systems, LED next stop displays, and full-color LCD infotainment displays. All buses are equipped with bike racks for the fronts of the buses with space for two bikes.

3. Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS):

All MeVa buses are equipped with Automatic Passenger Counters that record as passengers get on and off the bus. There is a fully equipped CAD-AVL in the back-office system. This is tied to the GTFS defined timetables on MeVa's website site as well the interactive map to give passengers bus estimated arrivals times.

4. Bus Shelters:

There are various bus shelters around the service area. Some have been in place a long time. So have been installed during MassDOT Highway projects on state roads, which there are many in our region. Recently MeVa applied for funds from MassDOT to install 19 bus shelters – 4 in Amesbury and 15 in Lawrence. The City of Methuen and the Town of North Andover also received funding for 2 shelters each. MeVa designed a shelter that is all metal with short sides in MeVa colors. They are equipped with benches, large



over hangs, and solar lighting. MeVa member communities are asked if they want these shelters and where they believe, along MeVa's bus routes, the shelters should be placed.

5. Bus Stops:

MeVa is in the process of developing a bus stop policy which will take into account all transit amenities that can be incorporated. Different geographies and densities will dictate what time of stops can be placed. MeVa is transitioning our system from a flag-down system to a fixed stop system. This will take some time to fully

B. Vehicle Assignments

Vehicle assignment refers to the process by which transit vehicles are placed into service in stations and routes throughout the system. It is MEVA's policy and practice to assign vehicles to public bus routes in a manner that does not discriminate against any socio-economic group of the public, nor the transportation-disabled.

Vehicles are assigned to drivers on a daily basis based on location in the yard, evening used vehicles go out first thing in the morning since they are washed and fueled last and previous days morning vehicles are then used in the afternoon rotating the fleet. Full service requires 44 buses on route and some of the vehicles are swapped during driver change.

Assignment adjustments are occasionally made within a particular group of vehicles so as to maintain similar mileage-age for preventative maintenance purposes, but such adjustments are made without regard to the areas or public served by the vehicle.

Attachment 1

Route	Route Name	First/Last Trip	Weekday Frequency	Saturday First/Last Trip	Saturday Frequency	Sunday First/Last Trip	Sunday Frequency
Lawrence Routes							
Route 1	Lawrence-Haverhill Via Loop	5:00 AM - 9:00 PM	20 mins. all day	7:00 AM- 7:00 PM	30 mins 10AM-6PM 60 mins. Remaining	9:00 AM- 5:00 PM	60 mins. All day
Route 2	Andover Via So. Broadway	5:00 AM - 9:00 PM	30 mins. all day	7:00 AM- 6:00 PM	60 mins. All day	9:00 AM- 5:00 PM	60 mins. All day
Route 3	Woodridge/N. Andover	5:00 AM - 7:00 PM	30 mins. all day	6:25AM-6:25 PM	60 mins. All day	no service	
Route 4	Prospect Hill/McGovern	5:15 AM - 9:00 PM	30 mins. all day	6:45AM-5:45 PM	60 mins. All day	9:00 AM- 5:00 PM	60 mins. All day
Route 5	Water Street/McGovern	5:25 AM - 7:25 PM	30 mins. all day	7:25 AM- 6:25 PM	60 mins. All day	no service	
Route 6	LGH/Holy Family	5:00 AM - 7:00 PM	30 mins. all day	7:00 AM- 6:00 PM	60 mins. All day	no service	
Route 7	Beacon/ Mt. Vernon/ North River	5:15 AM - 7:15 PM	30 mins. all day	7:15 AM - 6:15 PM	60 mins. All day	no service	
Route 8	Woodridge Via Colonial Heights	5:00 AM - 7:00 PM	30 mins. all day	7:00 AM- 6:00 PM	60 mins. All day	no service	
Route 9	N. Andover Mall / Merrimack College	5:15 AM - 9:00 PM	30 mins 5:15AM-7PM 60 mins. Remaining	7:15 AM - 6:15 PM	60 mins. All day	9:00 AM- 5:00 PM	60 mins. All day
Route 10	Broadway/Village Mall	5:15 AM - 9:00 PM	30 mins 5:15AM-7PM 60 mins. Remaining	6:45AM-5:45 PM	60 mins. All day	9:00 AM- 5:00 PM	60 mins. All day
Route 11	Lawrence -Haverhill Express	5:45 AM - 6:15 PM	60 mins. all day	no service		no service	
Route 12	Lawrence Crosstown	7:00 AM - 5:00 PM	30 mins. all day	no service		no service	
Route 21	Andover Shuttle	9:20 AM - 4:20 PM	70 mins. all day	no service		no service	
Route 24	Lawrence -Lowell	5:00 AM - 9:00 PM	30 mins. all day	7:00 AM- 6:00 PM	60 mins. All day	9:00 AM- 5:00 PM	60 mins. All day
Haverhill Routes							
Route 13	Plaistow Via North Ave	5:00 AM - 9:00 PM	30 mins 8AM-6PM 60 mins. Remaining	7:00 AM- 6:00 PM	60 mins. All day	9:00 AM- 5:00 PM	60 mins. All day
Route 14	Bradford- Ward Hill	5:30 AM - 7:00 PM	30 mins. all day	7:00 AM- 6:00 PM	60 mins. All day	no service	
Route 15	Hilldale-Westgate	6:00 AM - 7:00 PM	60 mins. all day	7:00 AM- 6:00 PM	60 mins. All day	no service	
Route 16	Washington St- Westgate	5:30 AM - 6:30 PM	60 mins. all day	7:30 AM- 6:30 PM	60 mins. All day	no service	
Route 17	Haverhill- Salisbury Beach	5:00 AM - 7:00 PM	60 mins. all day	7:00 AM- 6:00 PM	60 mins. All day	9:00 AM- 5:00 PM	60 mins. All day
Route 18	Riverside- Groveland	6:00 AM - 7:00 PM	60 mins. all day	7:00 AM- 6:00 PM	60 mins. All day	no service	
Newburyport Routes							
Route 19	Newburyport Center- Amesbury	5:30 AM - 6:30 PM	60 mins. all day	7:30 AM- 6:30 PM	60 mins. All day	no service	
Route 20	Newburyport Center- Salisbury	6:10 AM - 7:10 PM	60 mins. all day	7:10 AM- 6:10 PM	60 mins. All day	no service	
Special Routes							
Route 23	Beach Shuttle- Seasonal	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD
Route 26	IRS- Raytheon	5:55 AM & 3:20 PM	tripper	no service		no service	
Route 27	Beacon St Tripper	7:05 AM & 3:30 PM	tripper	no service		no service	

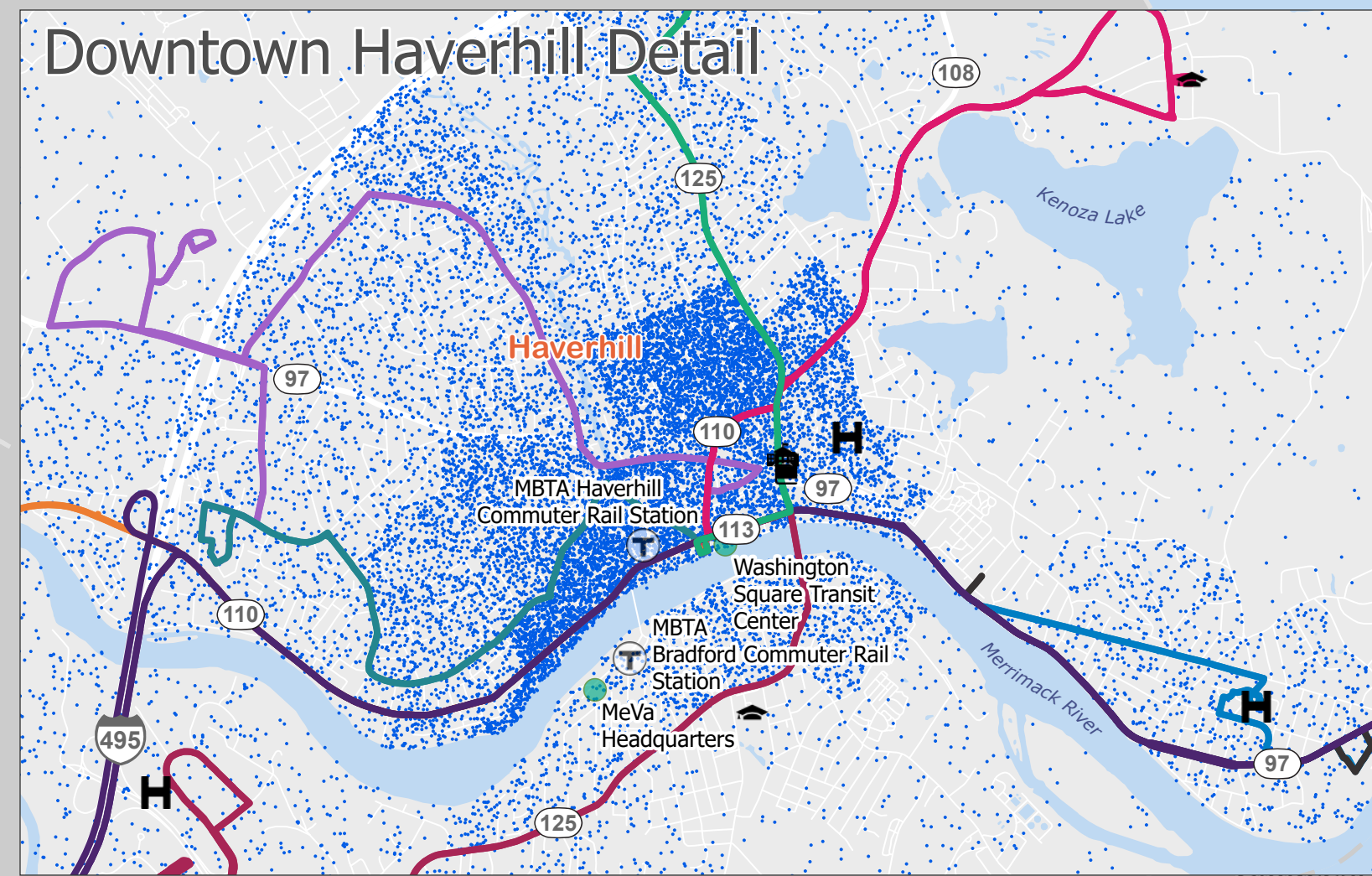
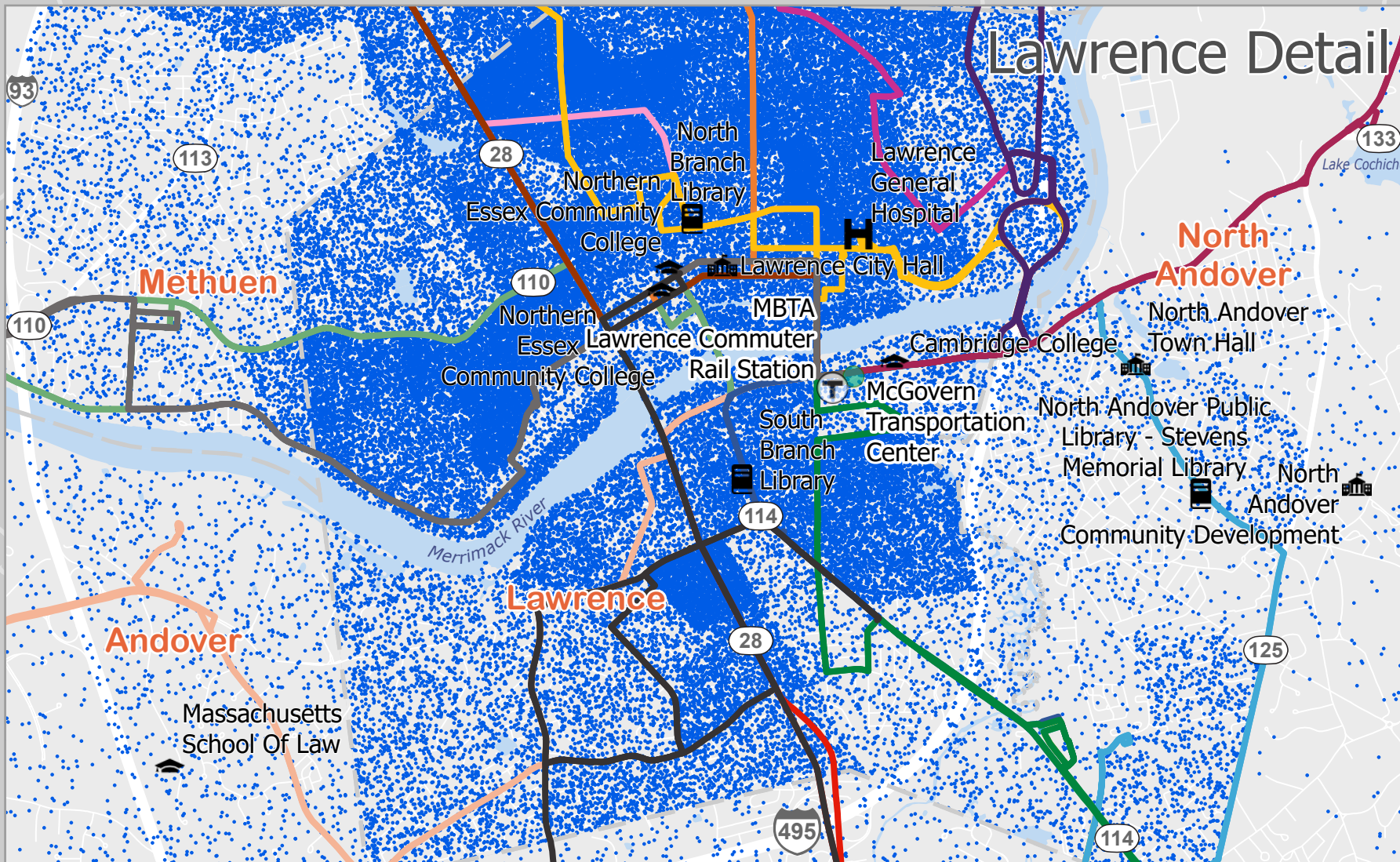


APPENDIX F Demographic and Service Profile Maps & Draft Major Service Change Policy



Merrimack Valley Transit

Service Area Minority Population



Minority Population
1 Dot = 1 Resident

Key Destinations

- City/Town Office
- College
- Hospital
- Library
- MBTA Commuter Rail Stations
- Bus Hubs and Facilities
- MeVa Service Area

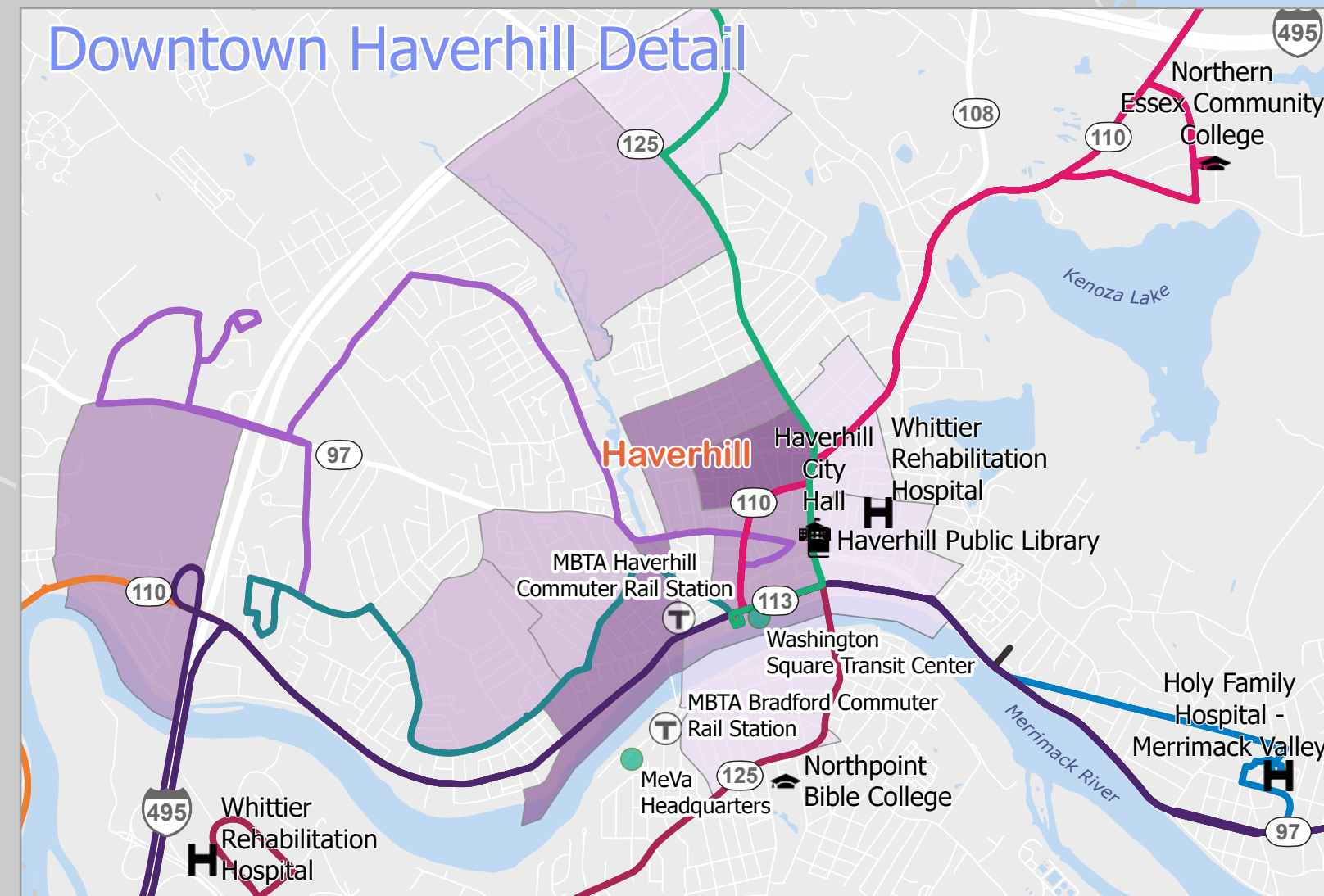
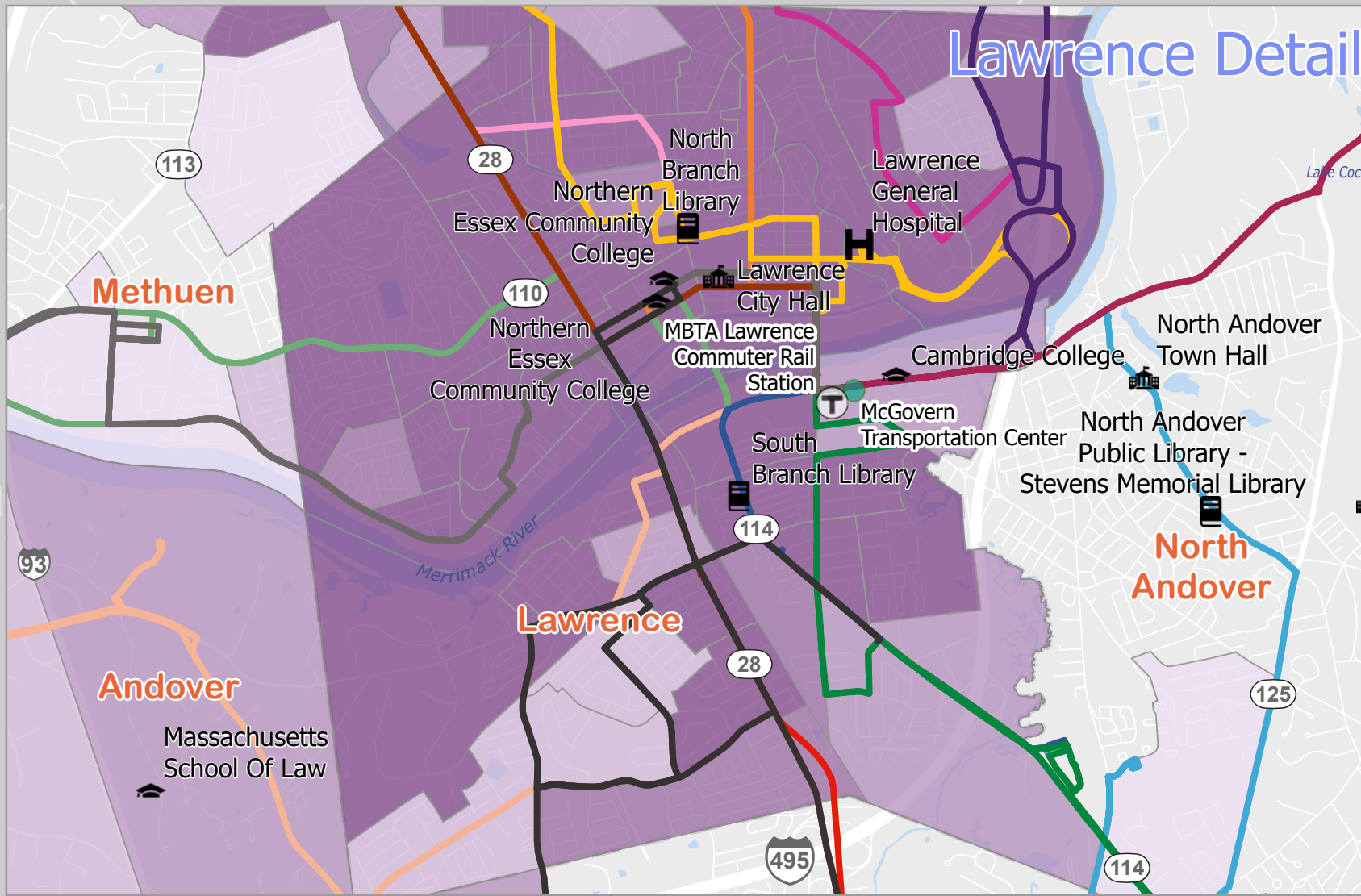
*Data by block group from 2019-2023 ACS 5-year Estimates Table B03002.

- MEVA Bus Routes**
- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 Lawrence-Haverhill via The Loop | 14 Lawrence Haverhill via Amazon/Ward Hill |
| 2 Andover Square via South Broadway | 15 Westgate Plaza via Hilldale |
| 3 North Andover/Woodridge | 16 Westgate Plaza via Hilldale |
| 4 The Loop via Prospect Hill | 17 Salisbury Beach via Haverhill |
| 5 Merrimac Plaza/Dana Farber via Water St | 18 Riverside/Groveland |
| 6 Holy Family Hospital | 19 Amesbury/Costello |
| 7 Beacon Street/Mount Vernon | 20 Salisbury Beach via Newburyport |
| 8 North Andover Mall via Parker Street | 21 Andover Shuttle |
| 9 Merrimack College/North Andover Mall | 22 Buttonwoods Express |
| 10 Village Mall via Broadway | 23 Beach Express |
| 11 Lawrence-Haverhill-Newburyport Limited | 24 Lawrence-Lowell |
| 12 Lawrence Crosstown | 26 IRS/Raytheon |
| 13 Stateline Plaza/Plaistow | 27 Beacon Street Special |



Merrimack Valley Transit

Service Area Minority Block Groups



Percent Minority Population

- 39.8% - 50%
- 50% - 60%
- 60% - 70%
- 70% - 80%
- Greater than 80%

Key Destinations

- City/Town Office
- College
- Hospital
- Library
- MeVa Service Area

*Data by block group from 2019-2023 ACS 5-year Estimates Table 803002. Service Area total percent minority population is 39.8%

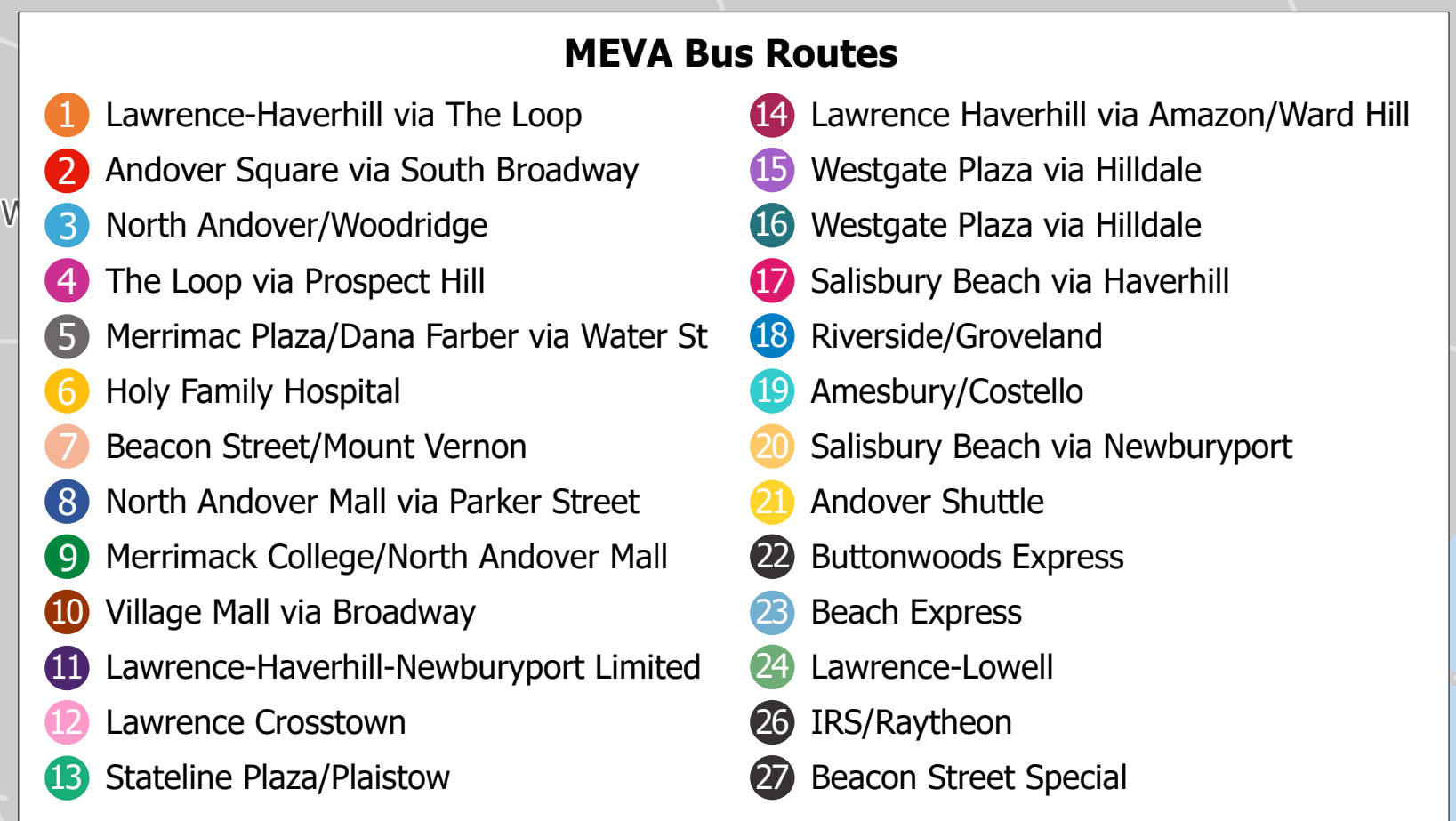
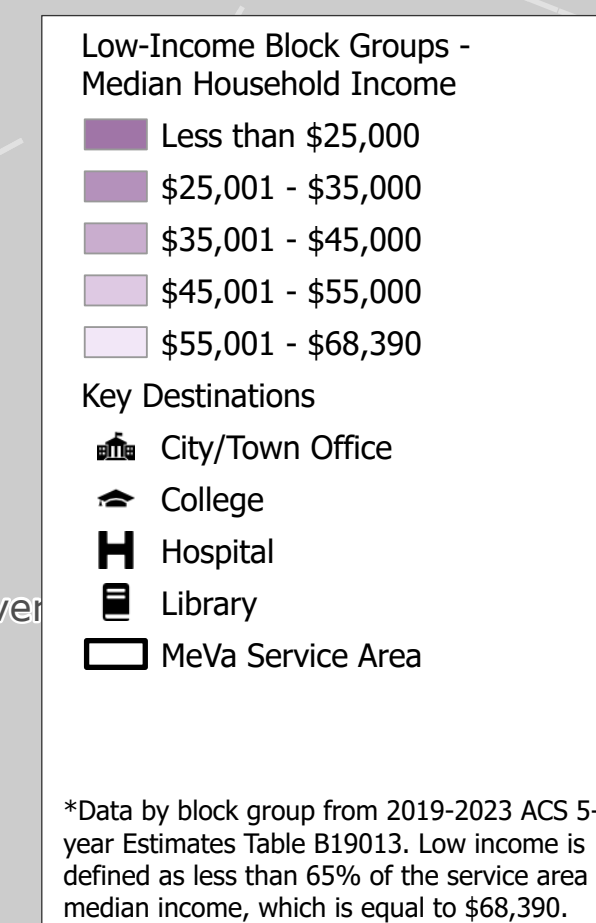
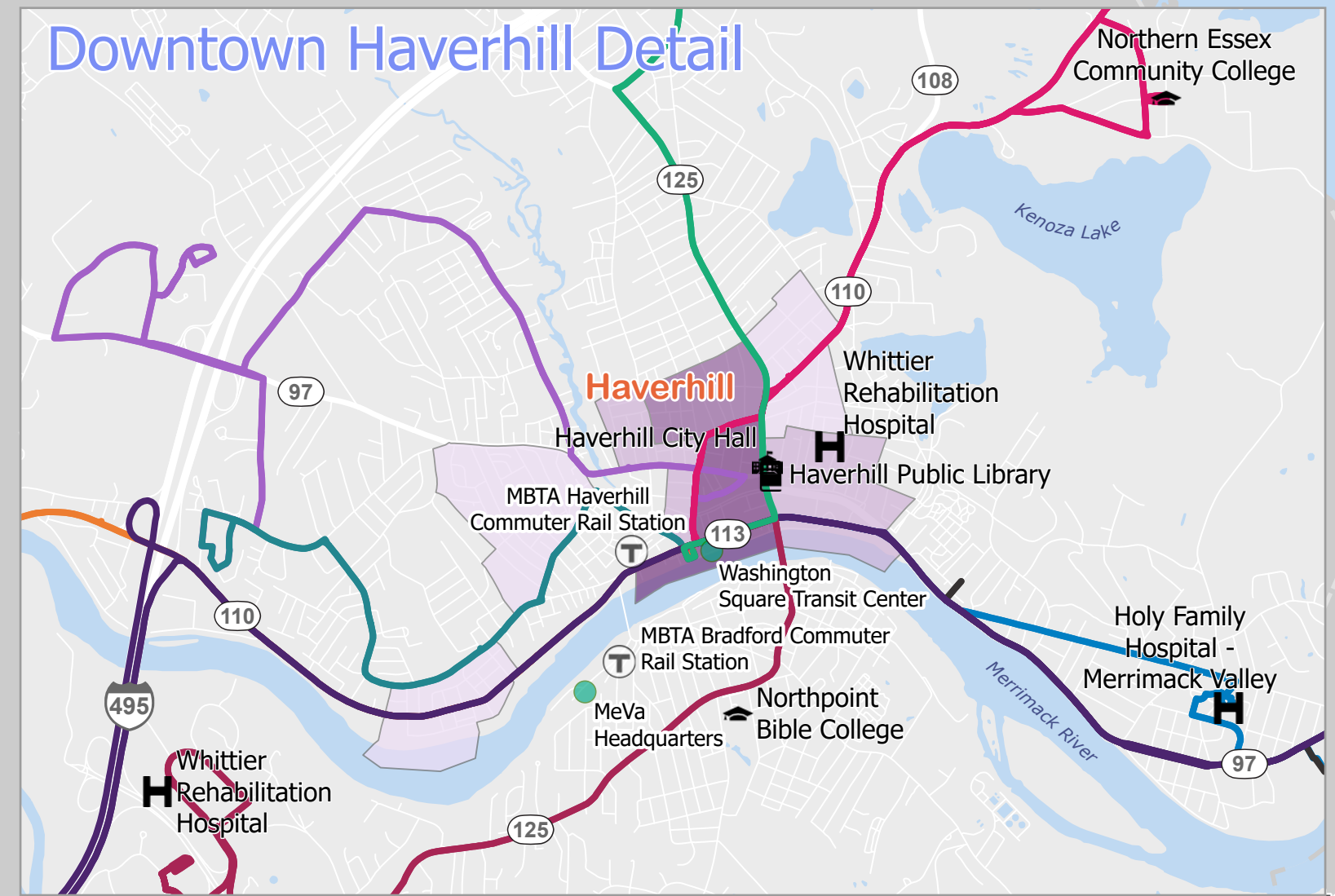
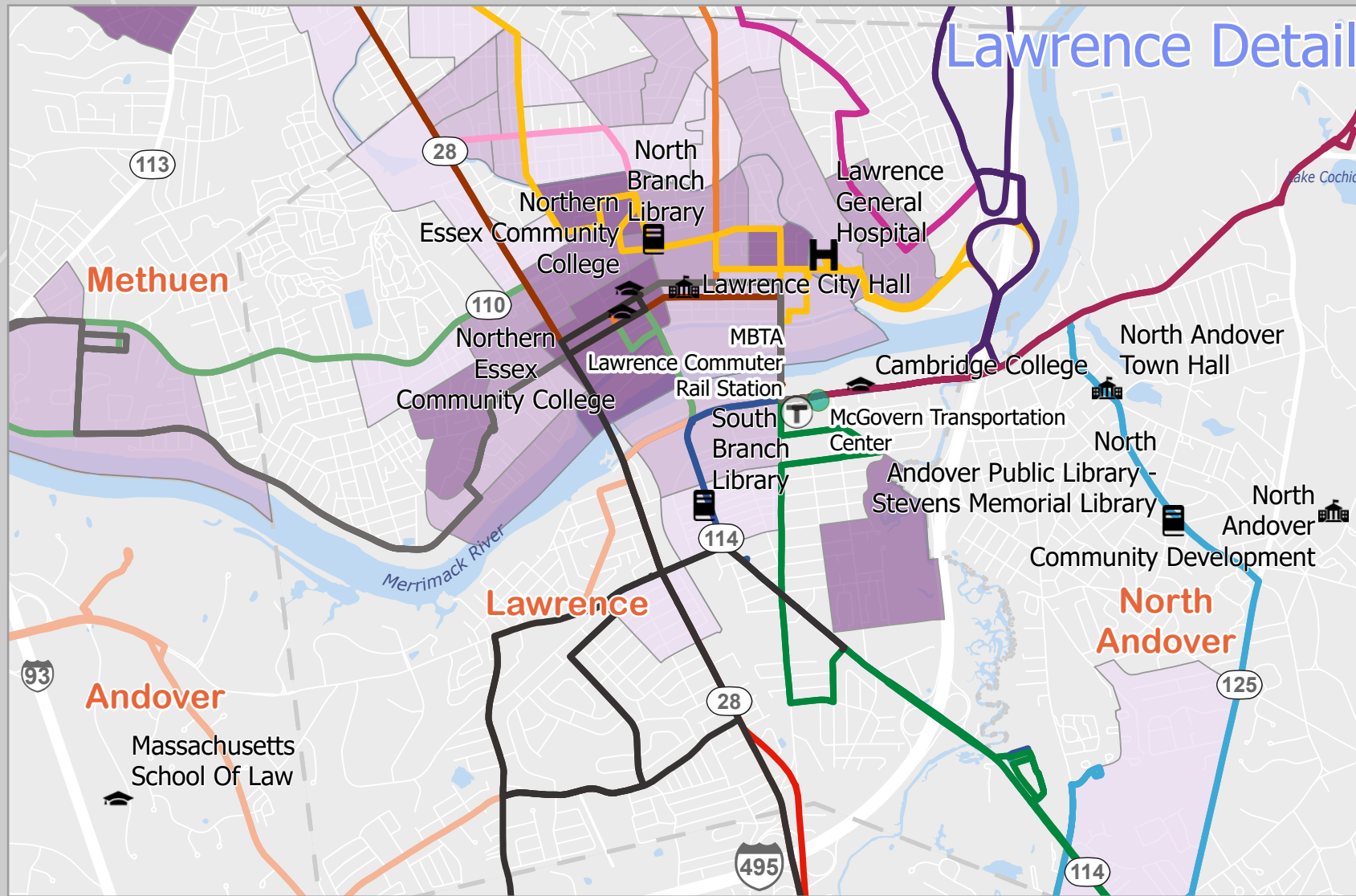
MEVA Bus Routes

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 Lawrence-Haverhill via The Loop | 14 Lawrence Haverhill via Amazon/Ward Hill |
| 2 Andover Square via South Broadway | 15 Westgate Plaza via Hilldale |
| 3 North Andover/Woodridge | 16 Westgate Plaza via Hilldale |
| 4 The Loop via Prospect Hill | 17 Salisbury Beach via Haverhill |
| 5 Merrimac Plaza/Dana Farber via Water St | 18 Riverside/Groveland |
| 6 Holy Family Hospital | 19 Amesbury/Costello |
| 7 Beacon Street/Mount Vernon | 20 Salisbury Beach via Newburyport |
| 8 North Andover Mall via Parker Street | 21 Andover Shuttle |
| 9 Merrimack College/North Andover Mall | 22 Buttonwoods Express |
| 10 Village Mall via Broadway | 23 Beach Express |
| 11 Lawrence-Haverhill-Newburyport Limited | 24 Lawrence-Lowell |
| 12 Lawrence Crosstown | 26 IRS/Raytheon |
| 13 Stateline Plaza/Plaistow | 27 Beacon Street Special |



Merrimack Valley Transit

Low Income Block Groups





DRAFT - Merrimack Valley Transit (MeVa) Major Service Change Policy

The Merrimack Valley Transit (MeVa) Major Service Change Policy establishes a clear and structured process for evaluating, approving, and implementing significant service modifications. This policy is designed to ensure that major service changes are handled with transparency, equity, and public engagement, while minimizing adverse impacts on the communities MeVa serves.

This policy also ensures compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, requiring a Service Equity Analysis to assess the impacts of proposed changes on minority and low-income populations. MeVa is committed to providing equitable access to transit services and mitigating any disproportionate burden resulting from major service changes.

I. Major Service Change Definition

A major service change is defined as any change in service from the previous fiscal year that meets at least one of the following criteria:

A. Establishment of a New Fixed Route:

The creation of a new bus route providing fixed-schedule service.

B. Elimination of a Fixed Route in its Entirety:

The complete removal of an existing fixed-route bus service from the MeVa transit system.

C. Significant Routing Changes:

Any change that alters 25% or more of a route's routing or hours, measured in miles, or hours of service. This may involve rerouting a portion of the bus route, reducing service frequency, changing the span or days of service, or altering major route alignments.

D. Permanent Route Changes:

A route modification intended to remain in place for longer than six months, or one intended to become permanent through the next scheduled service change period.

E. Relocation of Stops or Stations by More Than a Quarter Mile:

Moving an existing stop or station by 0.25 miles or more to a new location. Note: This will only pertain to locations where hardened bus stops have been established. As MeVa transitions from flag stops to fixed bus stops, this criterion will increase in applicability.

F. Closure or Removal of a Stop or Station Without Replacement:

The elimination of a stop or station that is not replaced with an alternative stop or station within 0.25 miles of the original location. Note: This will only pertain to locations where hardened bus stops have been established. As MeVa transitions from flag stops to fixed bus stops, this criterion will increase in applicability.



G. Controversial Changes:

Service changes that are anticipated to generate significant public concern or impact a particular community or interest group. Such changes may arise from public feedback, local government concerns, or any other group involvement.

II. Exemptions from Major Service Change Requirements

The following types of modifications are exempt from the Major Service Change Policy and do not require a Service Equity Analysis:

A. Special Event Services:

Temporary transit services designed to provide transportation for festivals, parades, fairs, or other community events.

B. Routing Changes Due to Construction or Facility Closures:

Detours or temporary service adjustments required to navigate around construction zones, facility closures, or other infrastructure disruptions.

C. Emergency Services:

Special transit services operated during emergencies, such as evacuations or the transportation of displaced individuals.

D. Temporary Service or Route Changes:

Changes that are expected to last for six months or less are exempt unless they become permanent.

While exempt changes are not subject to the Service Equity Analysis, they are still communicated to riders through appropriate public outreach efforts.

III. Implementing Procedures

A. Public Participation

To ensure transparency and community involvement, the following steps will be taken before implementing any major service change:

1. Public Hearing Notification:

- A Notice of Public Hearing will be issued at least seven days prior to the scheduled hearing. The notice will include:
- A clear description of the proposed service change.
- The date, time, and location of the public hearing.
- Information on how the public can submit comments.



- The notice will be published in a local newspaper with general circulation and promoted via MeVa's communication channels, including the MeVa website, social media platforms, and onboard notices.

2. Public Hearing and Feedback Collection:

- MeVa will host a public hearing to gather input from affected communities, transit riders and any other groups that would like to participate.
- Attendees will have an opportunity to provide verbal or written feedback.

3. Presentation to the MeVa Transit Advisory Board – Fixed Route Service Committee:

- Proposed major service changes must be presented to the MeVa Transit Advisory Board Fixed Route Service Committee for review. In addition to the standing members of the Fixed Route Service Committee, board members from affected communities are typically invited to committee meetings addressing proposed changes within their city or town. The Fixed Route Service Committee votes to recommend planned changes to the full MeVa Advisory Board. The meetings of the Fixed Route Service Committee are open to the public.

4. Presentation to the MeVa Transit Advisory Board for Final Approval:

Following review and recommendation from the Fixed Route Service Committee, the proposed major service change will be presented to the MeVa Transit Advisory Board for final approval. The Advisory Board will review public feedback, alignment with MeV's mission and vision, and the recommendation of the Fixed Route Service Committee.

B. Implementation Procedures

Once a major service change is approved, the following steps are taken to ensure successful implementation and effective communication with riders:

1. *Rider Notification:*

MeVa will notify the public through multiple channels to ensure broad awareness of the upcoming service change. Rider notifications will include:

- Detailed descriptions of the approved service change
- The effective date of the new service schedule
- Instructions for navigating the updated transit system
- Revised transit maps capturing the new service

Notices will be posted at:

- Transit centers
- Onboard bus digital screens
- The MeVa website
- Social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram
- Drivers' rooms to keep operators informed.



2. Outreach & Education Efforts:

To further engage riders and community groups, MeVa will conduct targeted outreach efforts, such as:

- MeVa staff presence at transit hubs to answer rider questions.
- Distribution of informational flyers onboard buses and at key locations.
- Collaboration with local organizations, community centers, and other groups to ensure hard-to-reach populations are informed.

IV. Monitoring and Evaluation

Following implementation, MeVa will conduct a post-implementation review to assess the success of the service change. This will include:

A. Data Monitoring:

MeVa will track key performance indicators such as:

- Ridership trends
- Customer feedback
- Service reliability

1. Adjustments as Needed:

If issues are identified, MeVa will consider additional adjustments to improve service performance and rider satisfaction.

By following this detailed process, MeVa ensures that major service changes are conducted with careful planning, public involvement, and a commitment to equitable service delivery. This approach helps MeVa maintain a strong focus on community needs, regulatory compliance, and operational efficiency.



APPENDIX G MeVa Fare-Free Evaluation and Business Case Final Report

MeVa Fare-Free Evaluation and Business Case

Final Report





Acknowledgements

Commissioners of the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission

Project Contributors

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Project Consultants

Stantec
Rivera Consulting

Rider focus group and interview participants
Rider survey respondents

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Lawrence Mayor's Health Task Force
Lawrence General Hospital
AgeSpan
Northern Essex Community College
Haverhill Public Private Partnership
Greater Lawrence Community Action Council
City of Amesbury Council on Aging



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40	<u>Health Impact</u>
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Executive Summary

MeVa's fare-free program has fostered a **multitude of operational, environmental, and social benefits**, accomplishing all of its goals in various ways.

Together, the monetary value of those benefits **supports a business case for the fare-free program**, as they well exceed the costs of lost fare revenue.

Beyond quantifiable benefits, highlights of the program's impact include:

- **More people are patronizing more businesses in the Merrimack Valley**, benefiting both tax revenue and job access
- The time that it takes people to get on the bus has been **cut in half**, reducing idling and allowing buses to run more efficiently
- People are driving less, **reducing emissions and improving safety**
- People report **high satisfaction with bus service, increased access to medical care, and decreased social isolation**

Operational Efficiency

Buses absorbed more riders with limited impact; staff have more time

Ridership

Ridership is higher than ever and continues to grow

Rider Experience

Riders are highly satisfied with service, although concerned about crowding

Driver Experience

Drivers are having a better experience with far fewer conflicts

Health Impact

More people are making more healthcare related trips on the bus

Economic Impact

Riders are saving money, and more riders are visiting more businesses

Transit & The Community

Perceptions of MeVa are positive

Social & Neighborhood Life Impact

More people can access opportunities for leisure and recreation

Environmental Impact

People are opting for the bus, cutting emissions equivalent to taking over 200 cars off the road

Business Case

The quantifiable financial benefits of the fare-free program are over \$2,000,000 annually, exceeding the amount previously collected from fares



Introduction



What is the fare-free program?

In March 2022, MeVa suspended fares across the system. All rides on fixed-route buses and paratransit have now been **free to all passengers for almost three years.**




This program was originally funded through federal COVID-19 relief funds and has been sustained using state funding from the Fair Share Amendment.

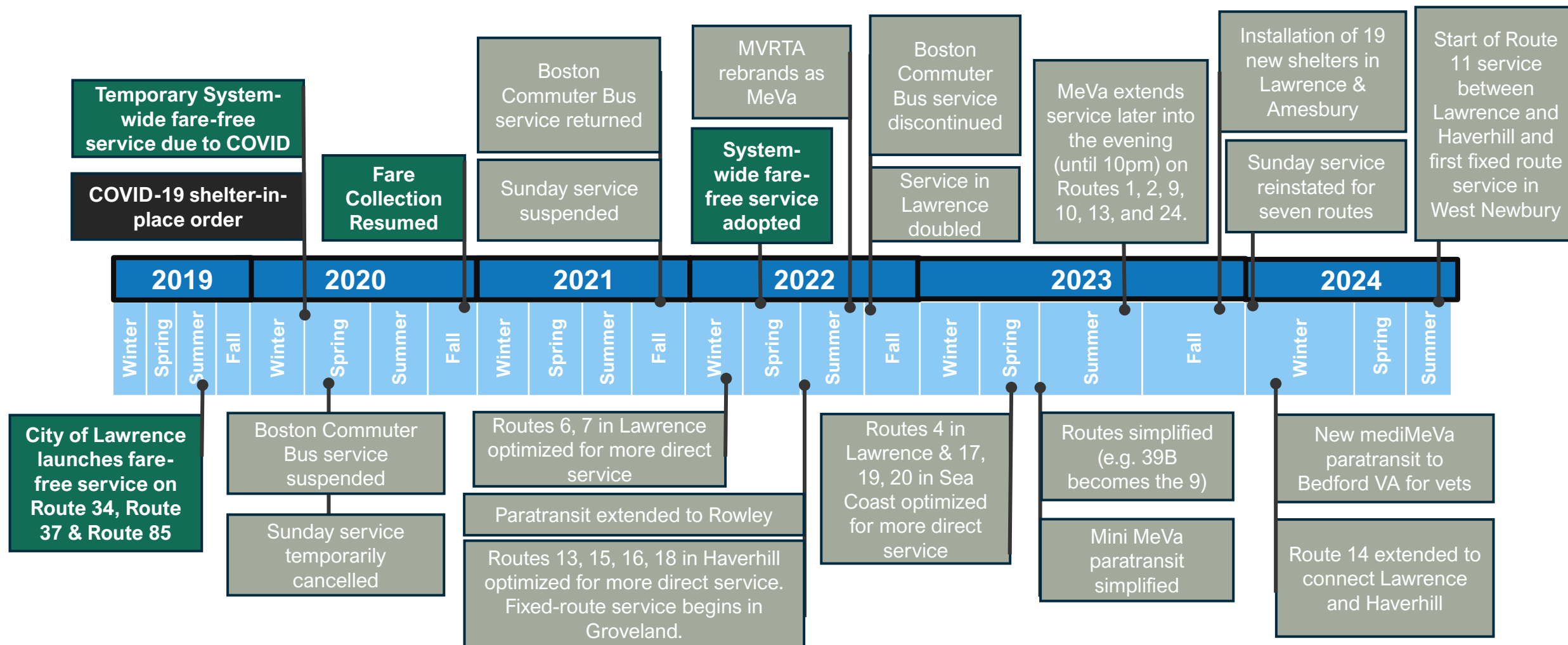




MeVa has a lot going on, including going fare-free!

These service changes are likely also responsible for some of the benefits that the fare-free program supports.

-  = General Service Change
-  = Fare Policy Change
-  = External Change

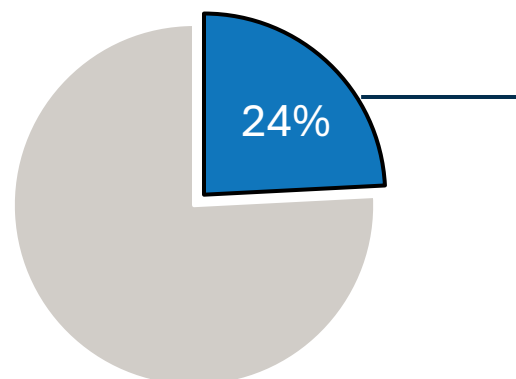




Fares were expensive to collect and comprised a small part of total operating costs.

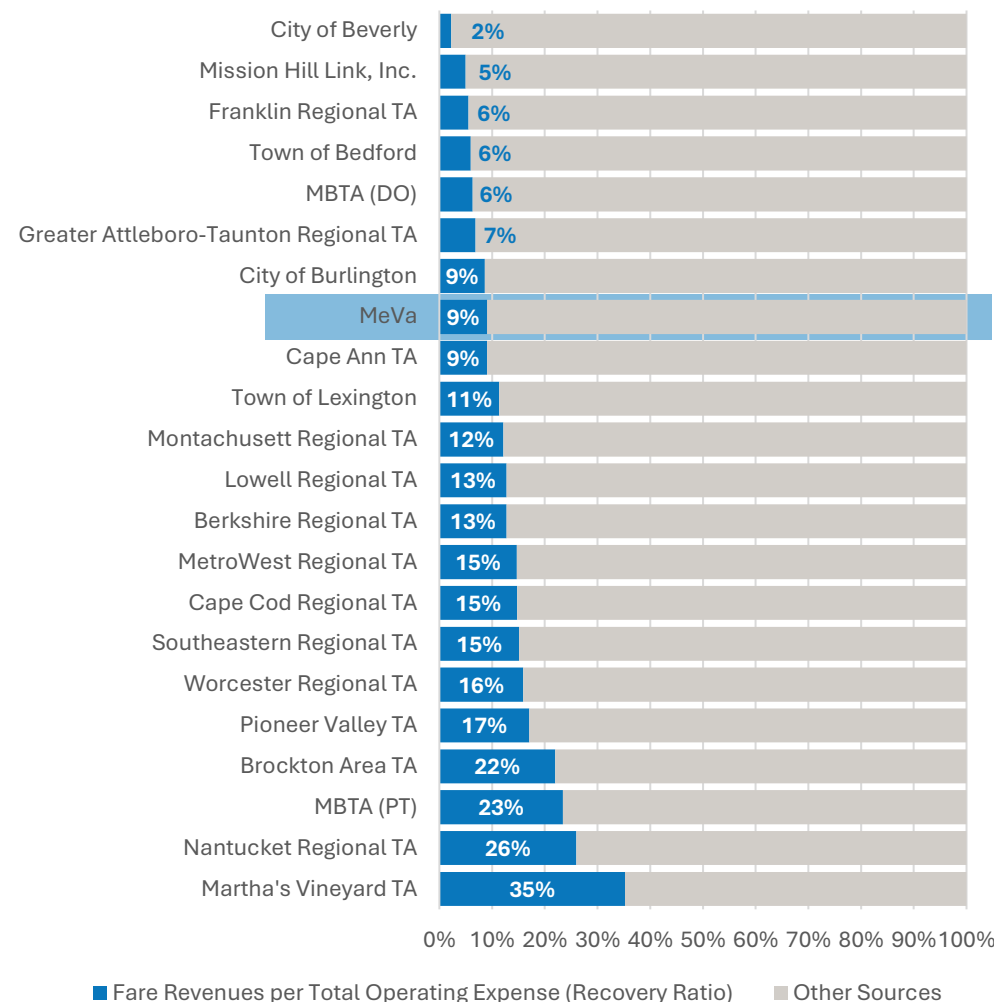
- It cost MeVa **\$0.24 of every dollar collected** to collect fares on its fixed route buses in 2019. However, this includes only the direct costs of fare collection, and not ancillary costs resulting from increased dwell time and other impacts and externalities outlined in this report.
- Bus fares made up about only 9% of the agency's operating expenses for bus service. This ratio is known as the "farebox recovery ratio (FRR)."
- This FRR was in line with other RTAs in Massachusetts.

Cost of MeVa Fare
Collection as Proportion of
Fare Revenue (2019)



Insurance
Armored car services
Farebox maintenance /
equipment fees
Labor: Money room,
maintenance, etc.

Fare Revenue vs. Operating Expenses
(Bus, NTD, 2018)





What is this report?

This report evaluates MeVa's fare-free program with the intent of **informing future service and justifying future operational funding support requests.**

The evaluation uses a variety of tools to measure how the program is performing relative to established goals. These include traditional transit performance metrics such as ridership and on-time performance, as well as the full range of benefits and costs associated with the fare-free program. Where possible, the report quantifies benefits in terms of dollars.

Look for these symbols to understand the source of information throughout the report:



In-person surveys



Focus Groups and one-on-one interviews



Quantitative data such as bus operations, Census data, and MeVa administrative operations data

Additional information on metrics and methodology can be found in the Appendix section of this report.





Fare-Free Program Goals

Operational Efficiency

Reduce travel times and improve reliability; streamline administrative operations

Rider Experience

Improve rider safety, satisfaction, and comfort while reducing crowding

Ridership

Increase overall ridership for new and existing riders; increase rider diversity; improve rider retention, including on paratransit

Driver Experience

Reduce conflicts between riders and drivers; boost driver satisfaction; provide labor cost savings

Health Impact

Positively impact rider health by providing increased connectivity to medical care

Economic Impact

Provide savings to riders; improve access to training and employment opportunities; increase local tax revenue; provide a boost to the local economy

Transit & The Community

Positively impact community satisfaction with transit and overall happiness; boost market awareness

Social & Neighborhood Life Impact

Facilitate improved social connectivity, including for seniors and people with mobility challenges

Environmental Impact

Contribute to mode shift from vehicles to buses (including from rideshare); reduce GHG emissions and increase energy efficiency; make living car-free or car-light more feasible and attractive

Business Case

Provide a total bundle of benefits with greater value than the cost of the program



Fare-Free Program Findings

Operational Efficiency

Buses absorbed more riders with limited impact; staff have more time

Rider Experience

Riders are highly satisfied with service although concerned about crowding

Ridership

Ridership is higher than ever and continues to grow

Driver Experience

Drivers are having a better experience with far fewer conflicts

Health Impact

More people are making more healthcare related trips on the bus

Economic Impact

Riders are saving money; more riders are visiting more businesses

Transit & The Community

Perceptions of MeVa are positive

Social & Neighborhood Life Impact

More people can access opportunities for leisure and recreation

Environmental Impact

People are opting for the bus, cutting emissions equivalent to taking over 200 cars off the road

Business Case

The financial benefits of the fare-free program exceed the amount previously collected from fares



Data Sources

This fare-free Business Case Analysis assembled quantitative and qualitative data from a wide variety of sources, ranging from a public survey, focus group discussions, one-on-one interviews with riders, and staff interviews to ridership, operational, and economic datasets.



In-Person and Online
Rider Survey



Focus Groups and 1-on-1
Interviews with Riders,
Drivers, and Service
Organizations

MeVa Staff Interviews



MeVa Operational
Data

Additional Context and
Datasets Related to
MeVa and the
Merrimack Valley

We are grateful to all those who contributed to this report, including all survey participants, focus group and interview participants, MeVa staff members, Merrimack Valley Planning Commission staff members, and the MeVa Advisory Board.



Survey Administration

Administration Methods

- For the survey, **surveyors rode bus routes or stood at transfer centers**, asking people to participate in the survey on an iPad. Riders had the option to answer in English or Spanish.
- Surveyors distributed business cards with a website and **QR code** to the online survey.
- Riders also heard about the survey through emails from MeVa and MVPC, communications from community partners, and online via social media.
- Dispatchers asked paratransit riders to participate in the survey **when they called in to make a reservation**.




Administration Details

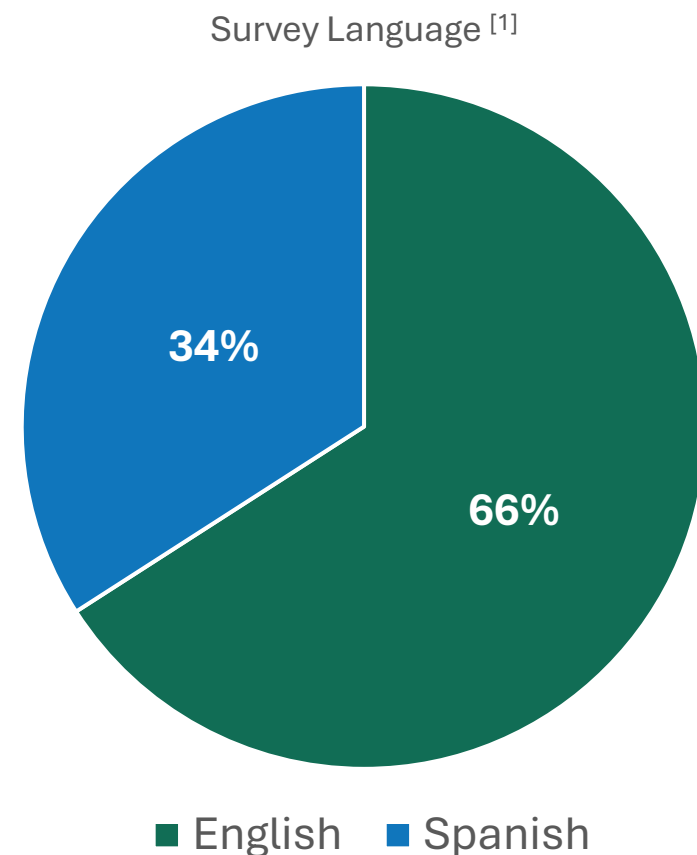
- ▶ Release Date: June 2024
- ▶ Methodology: Rode each route at least once; rode more popular routes more than once
- ▶ Time Spent: +70 hours in the field
- ▶ Response Rate: 663 responses, 34% in Spanish





Survey Responses

-  The survey exceeded a validity target of 370 with **663 total responses**.
-  The survey was available in both English and Spanish. One third of survey responses were in Spanish, however many riders who responded in English possess bilingual proficiency.
-  Many Spanish speakers may have answered in English, as around half of all transit riders who speak Spanish in the MeVa service area also speak English. ^[2]





Evaluation Focus Groups



The evaluation held three focus groups, offering input from diverse perspectives.

1. MeVa Riders

- Recruited from survey respondents
- **20 riders of the MeVa Buses & Mini MeVa**
 - 5 Spanish-speaking riders
 - 2 paratransit riders

2. MeVa Drivers

- Recruited in collaboration with MeVa staff
- **12 bus drivers**

3. External Service Providers

- Recruited from a list from the MeVa Community Relations Team
- **6 service providers**
 - 2 Healthcare Providers
 - 1 Education Provider
 - 1 Economic Development Organization
 - 2 Senior Support & Service Provision



Rider Focus Group Demographics

- ▶ 20% aged 16-20 years
- ▶ 15% aged 65+
- ▶ 80% with less than a bachelor degree for education
- ▶ 35% identified as Hispanic or Latino
- ▶ 20% identified as African American or Black









Ridership

Program Goals

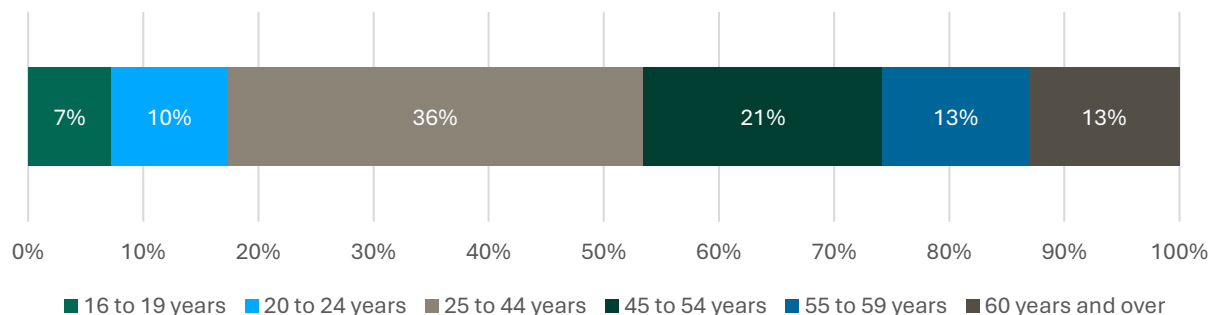
- Increase overall ridership for new and existing riders
- Increase rider diversity
- Improve rider retention, including on paratransit



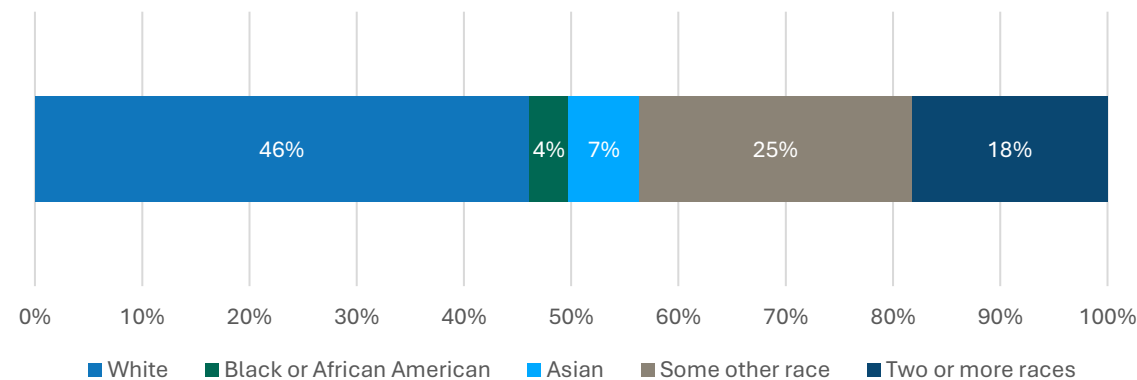
MeVa riders are diverse.

-  The fare-free program is sustaining a diverse rider base.
-  MeVa riders identify as a variety of races. **Half (50%) of riders are of Hispanic or Latino origin.**
-  There are more female riders (63% of total) than male.
-  Rider ages are nearly evenly distributed across working age categories.

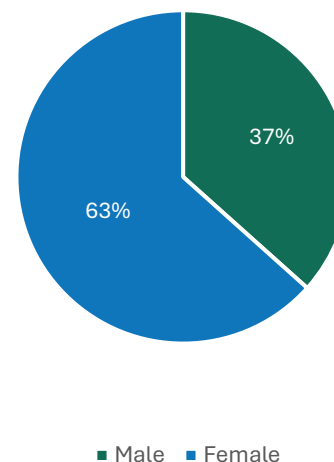
Age [3]



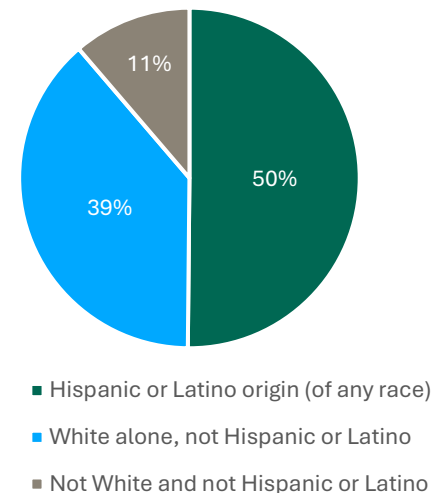
Race [4]



Sex [5]





Hispanic Ethnicity [6]





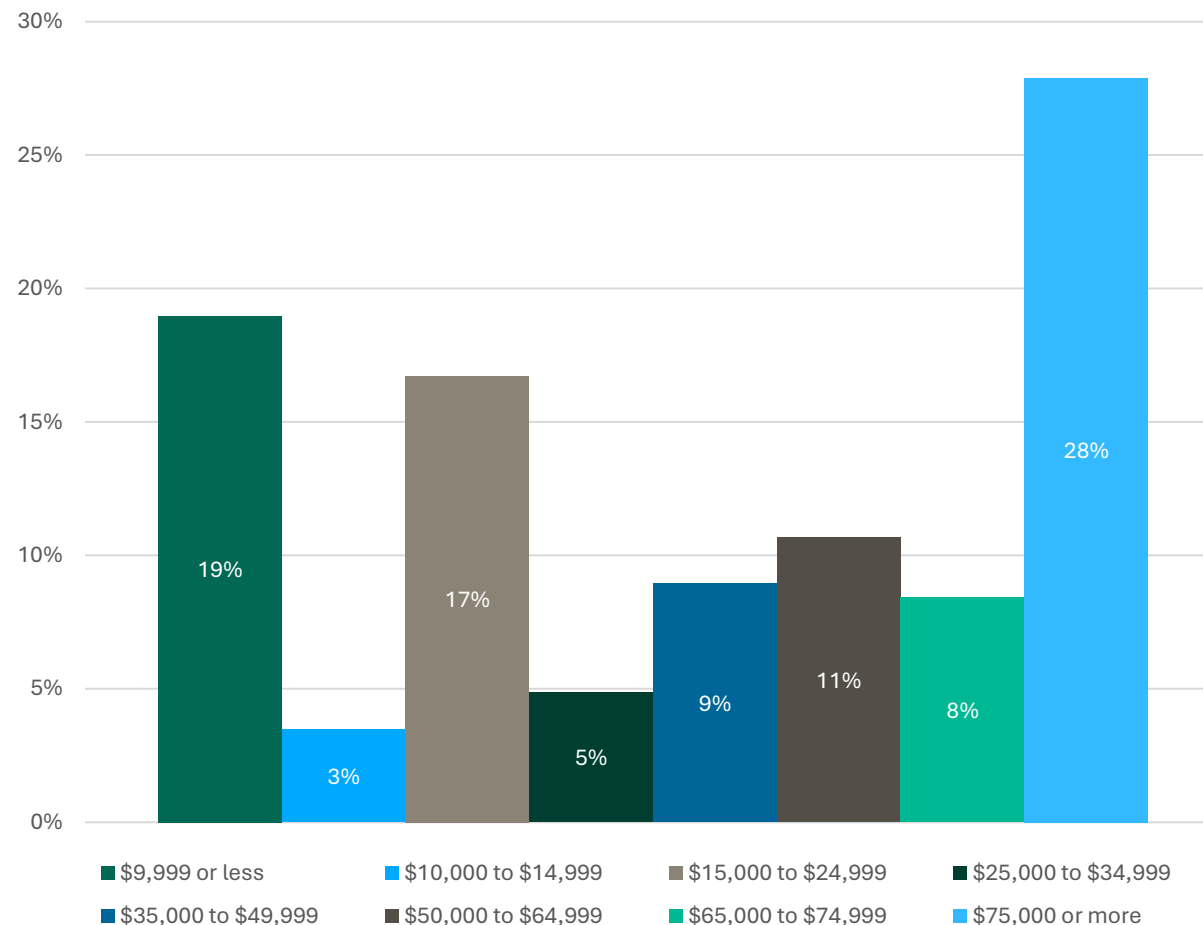
MeVa serves New Americans and lower-income households.

 **One third of riders (33%) were born outside the U.S.**

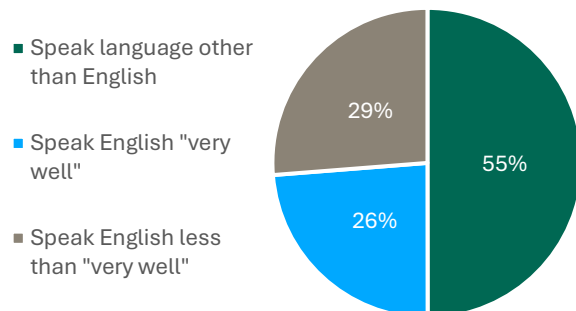
 **One in five MeVa riders (19%) make less than \$10,000, nearly 40% make less than \$25,000 and 72% make less than \$75,000.**

 **Over a quarter of riders (29%) speak English less than “very well.”**

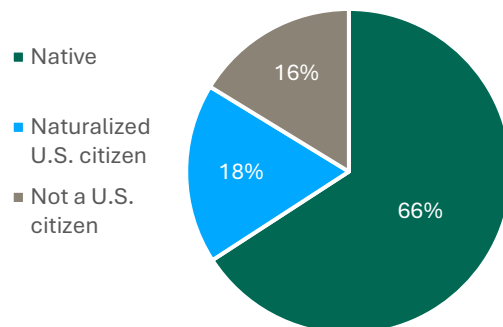
Q: What is your annual income? ^[9]



Ability to Speak English ^[7]





Citizenship Status ^[8]



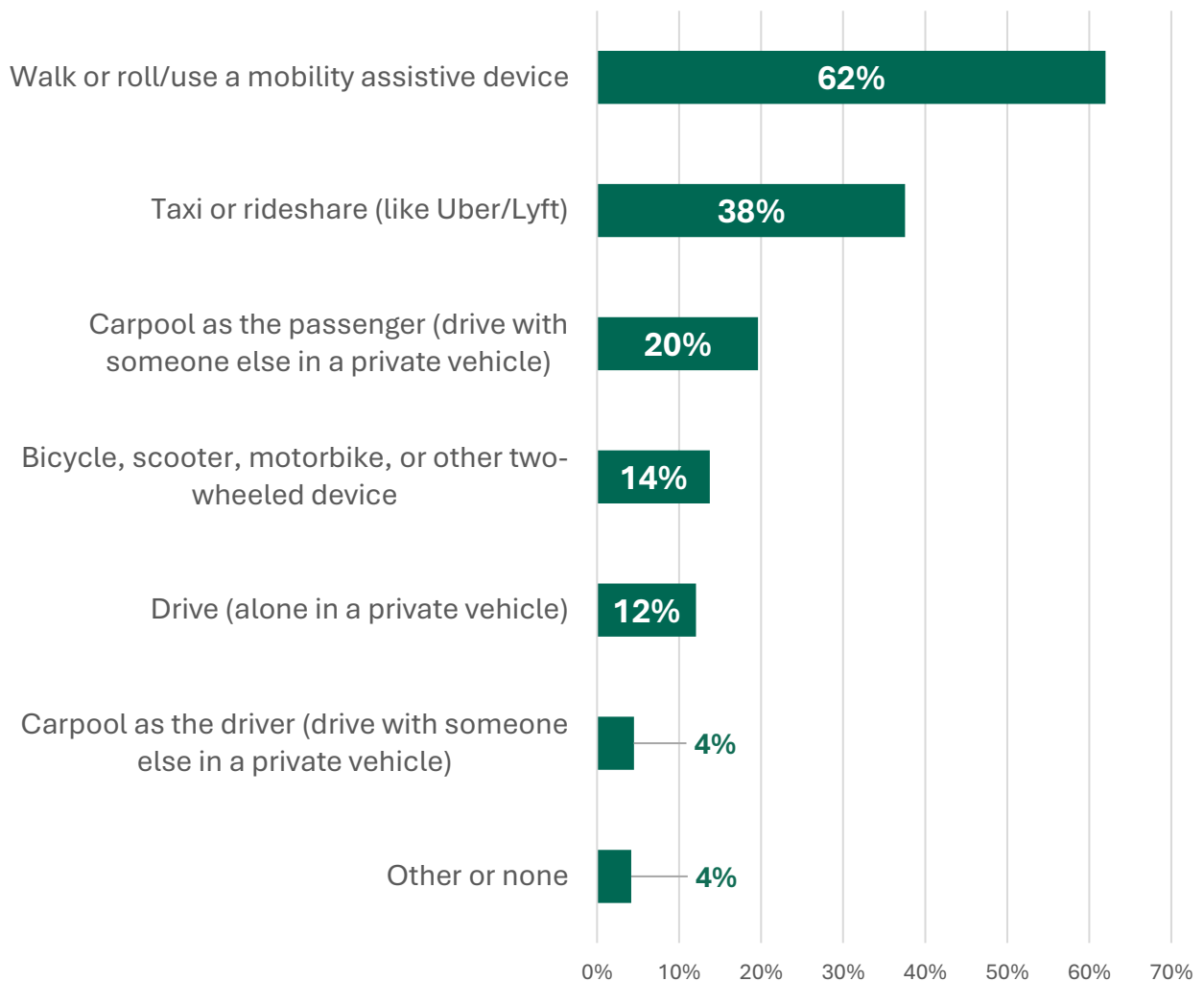


Many riders rely on MeVa for all transportation.

-  The vast majority of MeVa riders rely on the bus for transportation – and have only walking/rolling as an alternative.
-  Only 12% of riders said they had **access to a private vehicle**.



Q: What other transportation options do you have available to you, besides the bus? (select all that apply) ^[10]

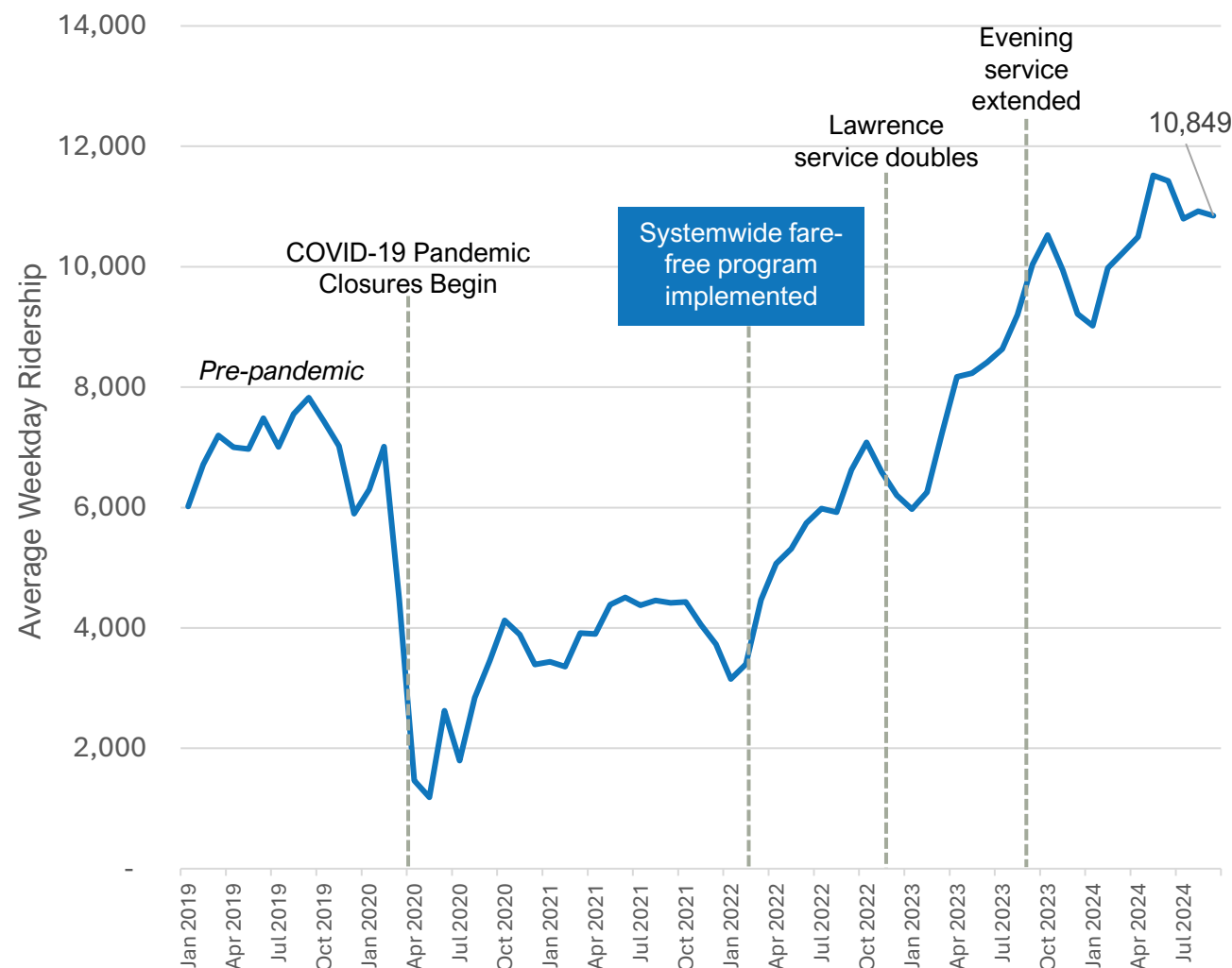




Ridership is high and continues to grow.

-  Ridership is high and trending up, **exceeding pre-pandemic totals** by nearly 60%. ^[11]
-  The fare-free program occurred alongside increases to MeVa service, including greater frequency, span, and days of operation. It is important to note that **service improvements were a separate initiative** complementing the fare-free program.
-  Growth has primarily occurred where MeVa had existing capacity, so there is effectively **zero additional cost to carry more riders.**
-  **Ridership per revenue mile of service increased from 1.55 to 1.76** from 2019 to 2024, indicating buses are better utilized even considering additional service. ^[11]

Average Weekday Ridership - All Fixed Routes ^[11]

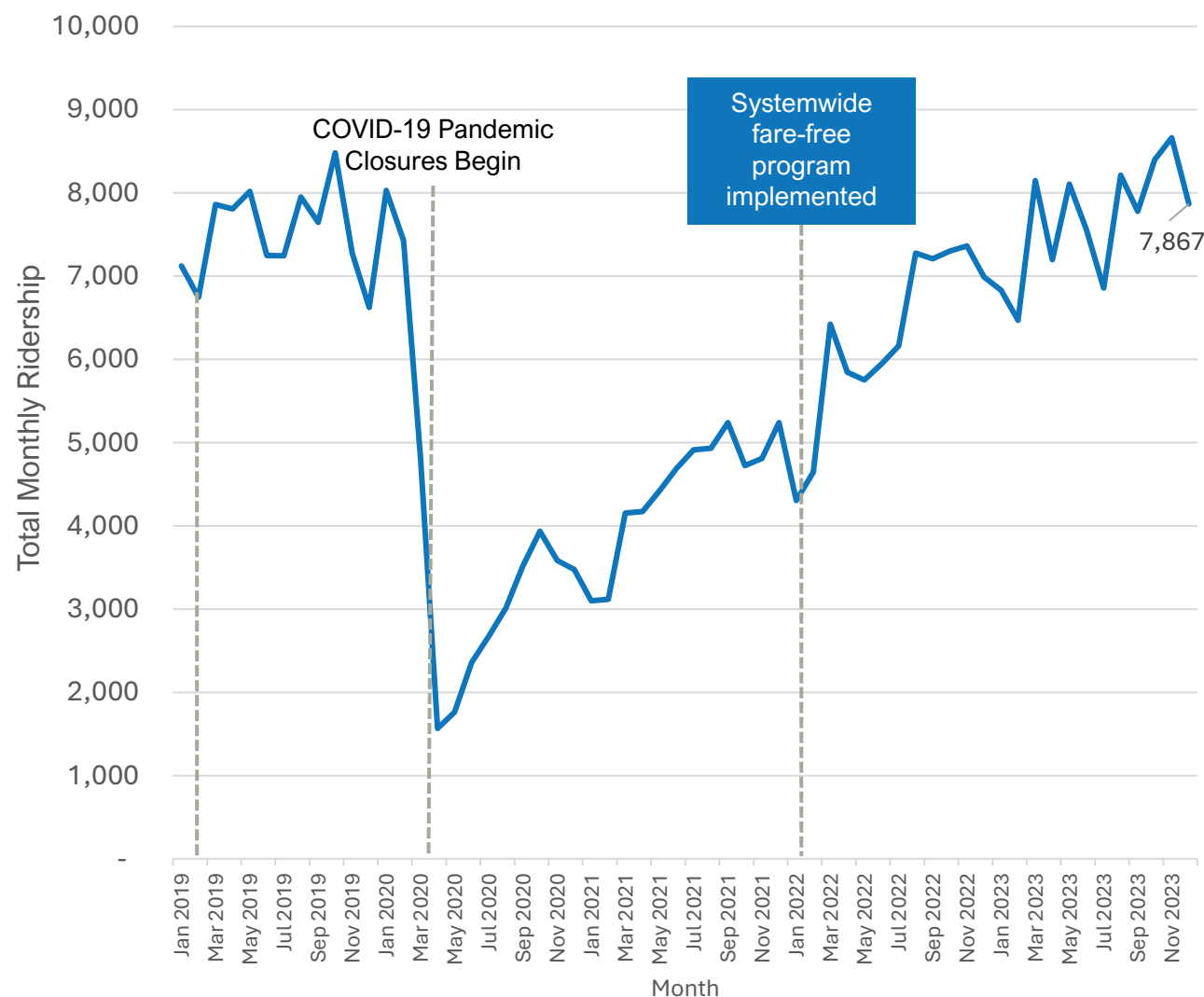




Paratransit ridership grew, but not excessively.

- Paratransit ridership **grew significantly** immediately after the fare-free program was implemented and continues to grow.
- Ridership is exceeding pre-pandemic levels by 2%; however, **fixed-route ridership growth has well outpaced paratransit.** [11]
- Demand for paratransit is **manageable and has not increased so much as to require new service.**
- Paratransit ridership growth over this period may also be attributable to expanded outreach and a simplification of service offerings which occurred simultaneously to the fare-free program.





Total Monthly Ridership – All Paratransit Services [12]

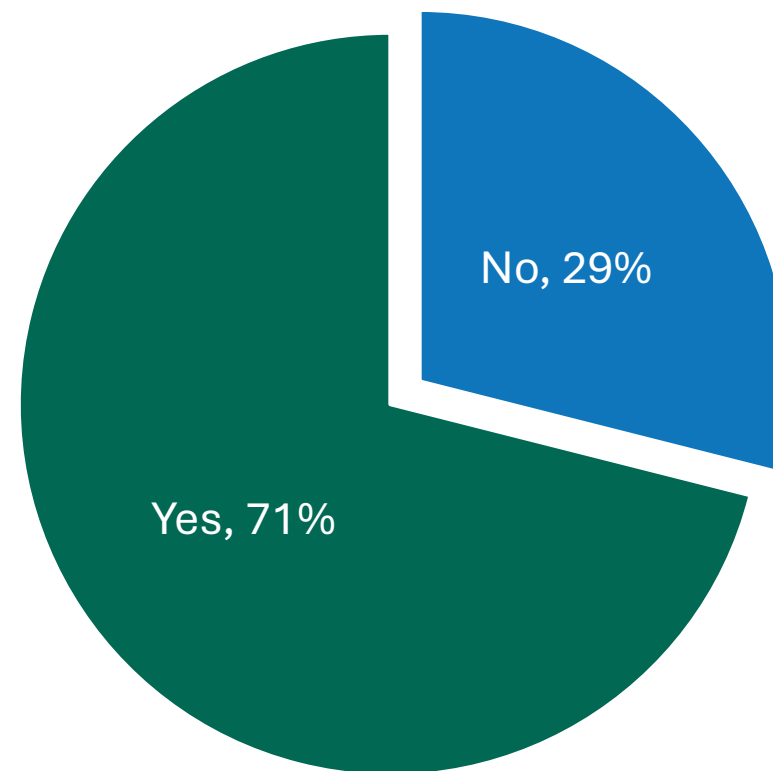




Many riders have never paid a fare on MeVa.



Q: Did you use the bus before it was free? ^[13]

-  Nearly **30% of riders have never paid a fare on MeVa buses**, equating to about 3,250 daily riders.
-  These riders in particular would **poorly perceive fare re-introduction**.
-  Many of these respondents were initially **attracted to the bus because it is free**, while others moved to the area or had other changing life circumstances since 2022.
-  Around **30% of riders who would have taken rideshare** (if they were not taking the bus) are new to the MeVa system. Rideshare is more expensive than both free and most paid transit.



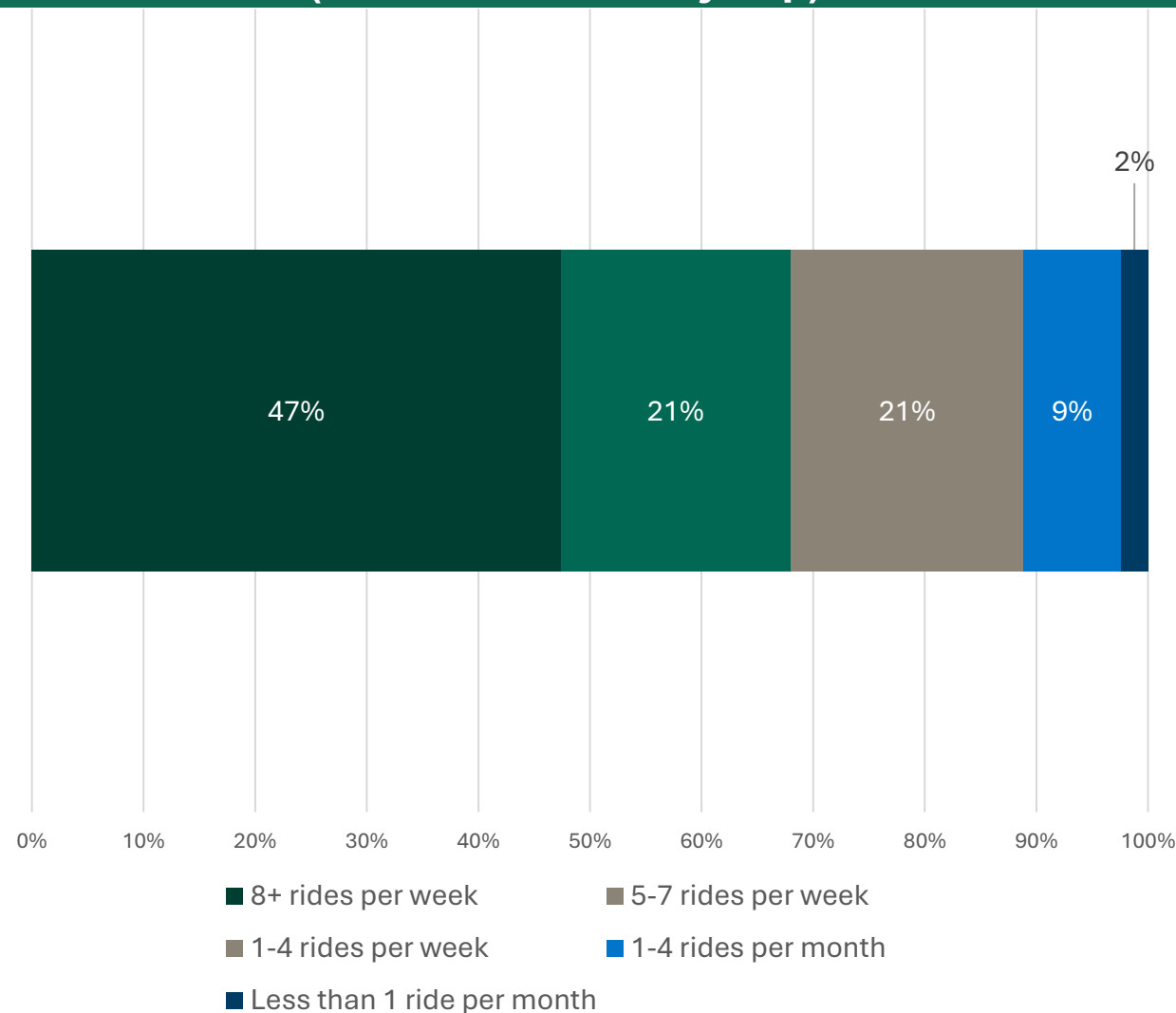


MeVa is retaining regular riders and gaining more.

-  **New riders are becoming frequent riders.**
Half of those who started riding after the start of the fare-free program now take the bus eight times per week or more.
-  **Around half of all riders take MeVa buses nearly every day, and nearly 90% ride at least once per week.**






Q: How often do you ride the bus?
(1 ride is a one-way trip) ^[14]

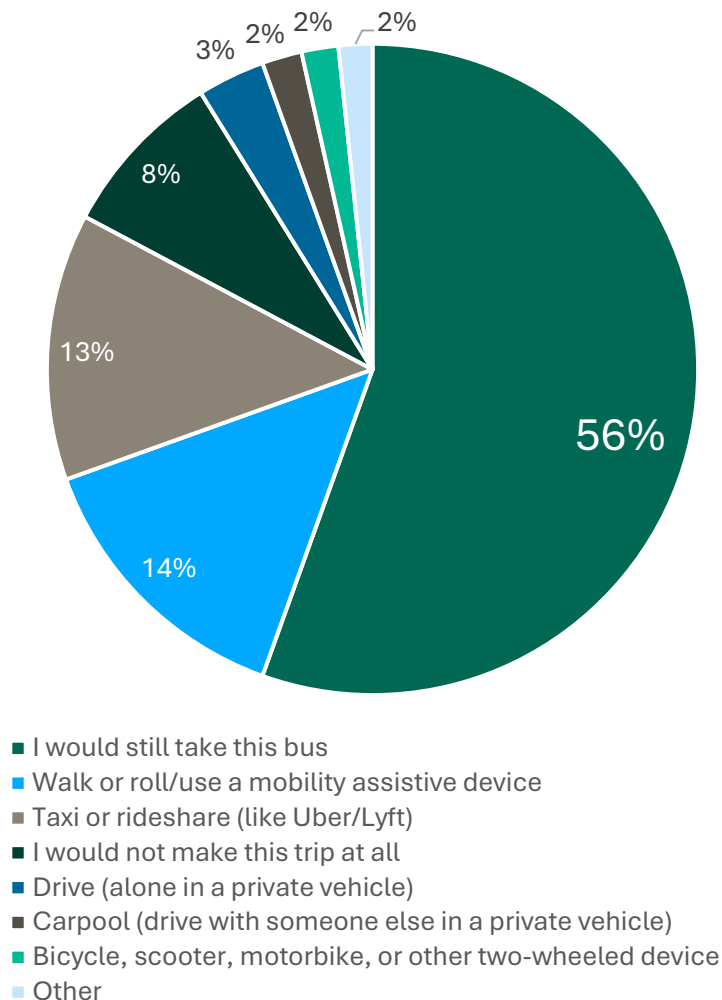




People are shifting modes and taking new trips.

-  The fare-free program is inducing mode shift, resulting in fewer trips by private vehicle and rideshare. Nearly **20% of all trips on MeVa buses would have occurred by vehicle** if the bus was not free.
-  **Eight percent (8%) of trips are newly generated** due to the fare-free program.
-  Riders are taking new trips for shopping and leisure (38%), but also to go to work or school (32%), access healthcare (13%), and to run errands (13%).

Q: How would you have made this trip (or your most recent trip) if the bus were not free? ^[15]





Operational Efficiency

Program Goals

- Reduce travel times and improve reliability
- Streamline administrative operations



Staff resources can support new things. ^[16]




Labor Category	Staff	Time Before Fare-Free Program	Time After Fare-Free Program	Total Hours Saved / week
Maintenance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Maintenance SupervisorsMechanics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Vaulting buses (transferring cash and coins from buses to the vault)Farebox maintenance (diagnosing problems, removing parts, submitting tickets online, tagging, and shipping)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Engine repairNon-farebox maintenanceCleaning diesel particulate filters	80 hours vaulting buses & 30 hours maintaining fare collection equipment
Operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Road Supervisors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Real-time maintenance & troubleshooting when fareboxes failed in serviceReplacing buses removed from service when fareboxes failed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Repair of vans/paratransit vehiclesNo service adjustments required due to farebox issues	6 hours troubleshooting farebox failure
Administrative	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Senior level staffHR ManagementPayroll ManagementReservationists	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Counting and bundling with multiple staff requiredStaff pulled abruptly from work to cover money room due to uncertainty around armored car arrival time	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Responses to rider callsParatransit schedulingOutreach	12 hours counting and bundling in the money room

Financial Impact:

- *Staff time saved under the fare-free program is the equivalent of **three full-time employees**.*



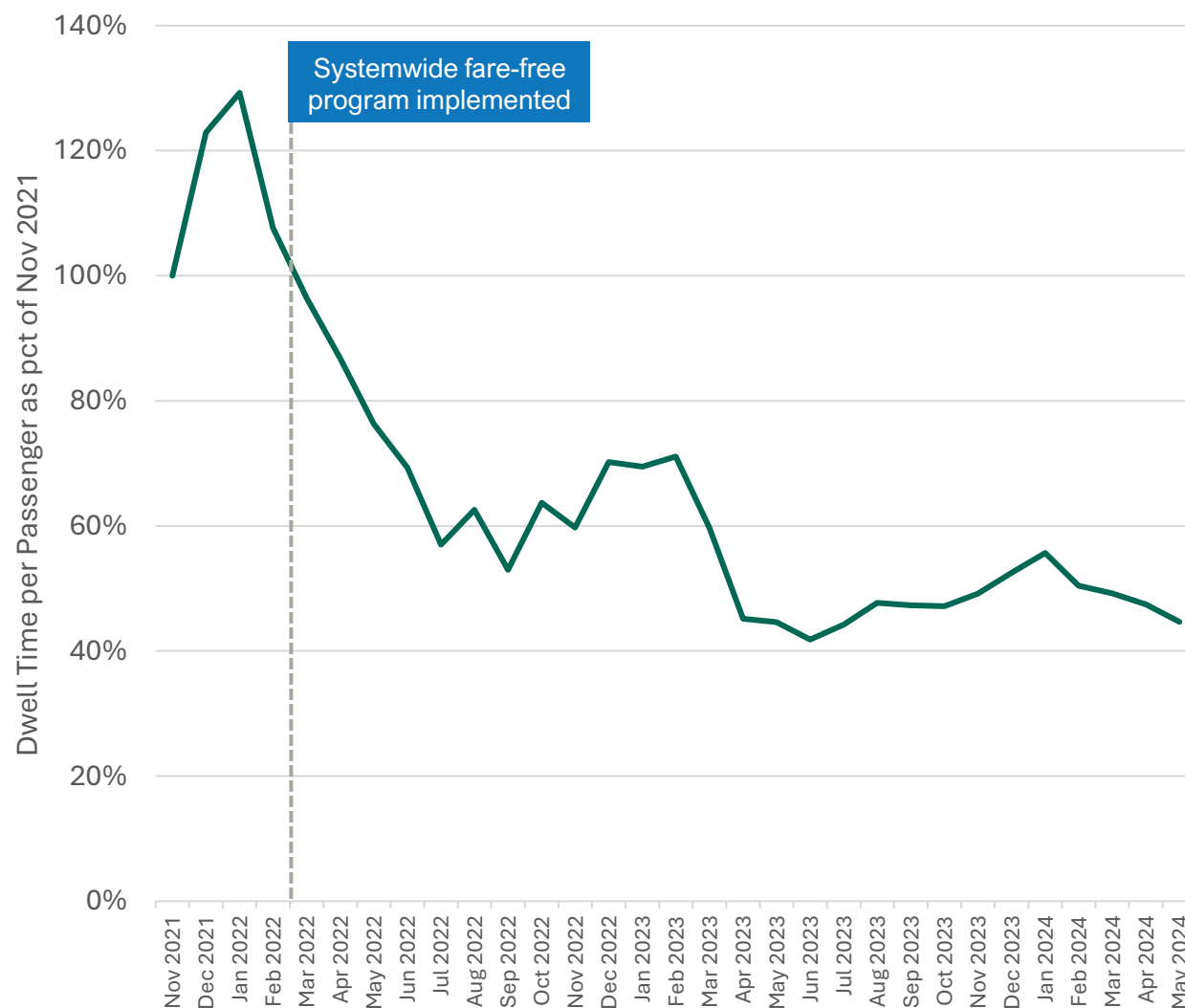
It is faster to get on the bus.

-  Dwell time per passenger **decreased by half** immediately after buses became fare-free.
-  On average, each passenger is boarding twice as fast without the need to pay a fare.
-  Additionally, **drivers emphasize that the elimination of fareboxes has created faster boarding processes and helps to reduce traffic on the streets** as vehicles are not blocked by the bus for a long time.

Financial Impact:


▶ *Not enough data*


Dwell Time per Passenger ^[17]



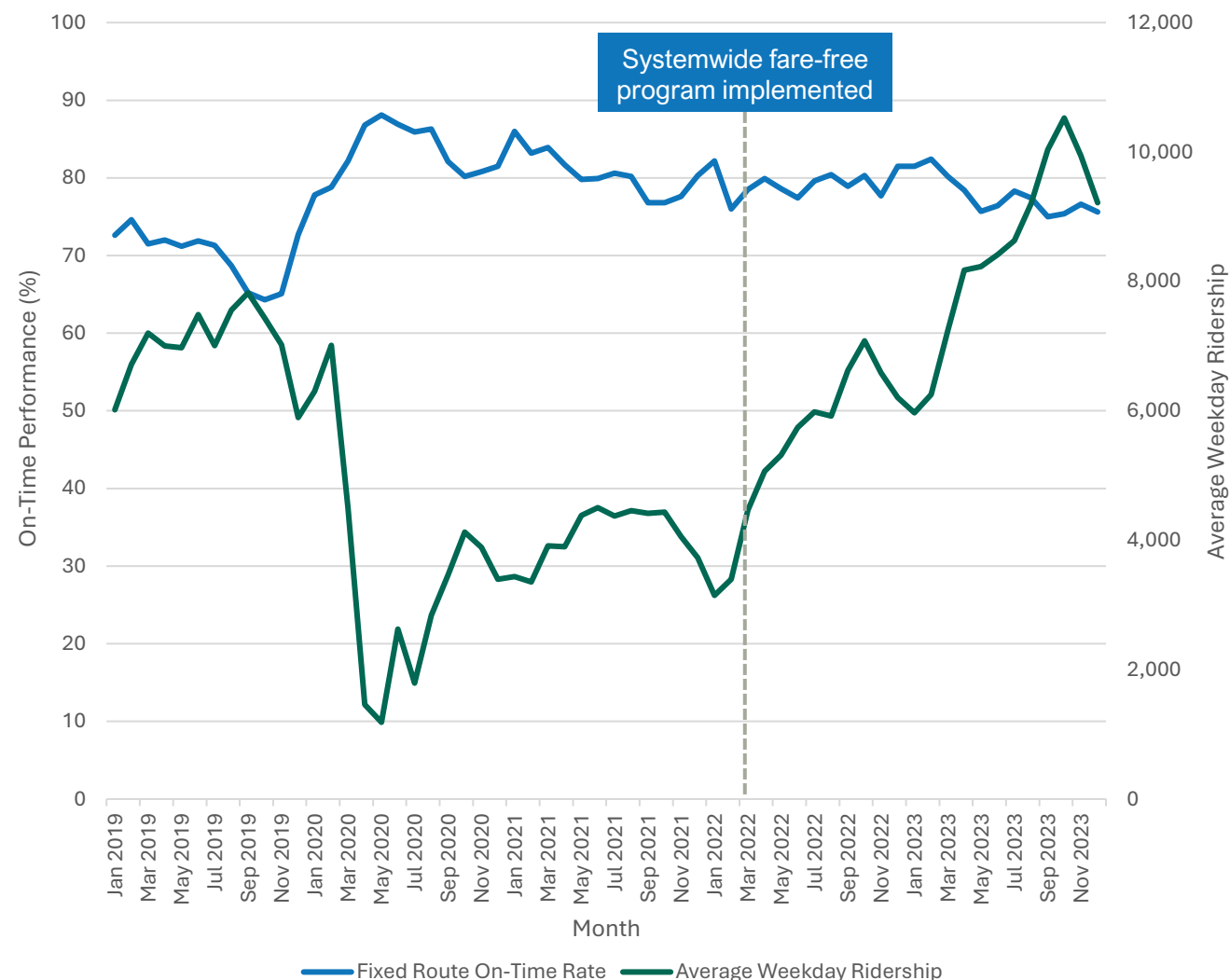


Despite ridership gains, on-time performance has not changed significantly.

 **On-time performance has remained relatively consistent** since the beginning of the fare-free program. This means that although buses may be stopping more frequently due to increased ridership, on-time performance has not been negatively impacted.


 While MeVa does not currently allow all-door boarding, other fare-free bus services have reduced passenger boarding times at high-ridership stops[†] by allowing rear-door entry, which could potentially further reduce dwell times.

Fixed-Route On-Time Performance and Ridership ^[18]





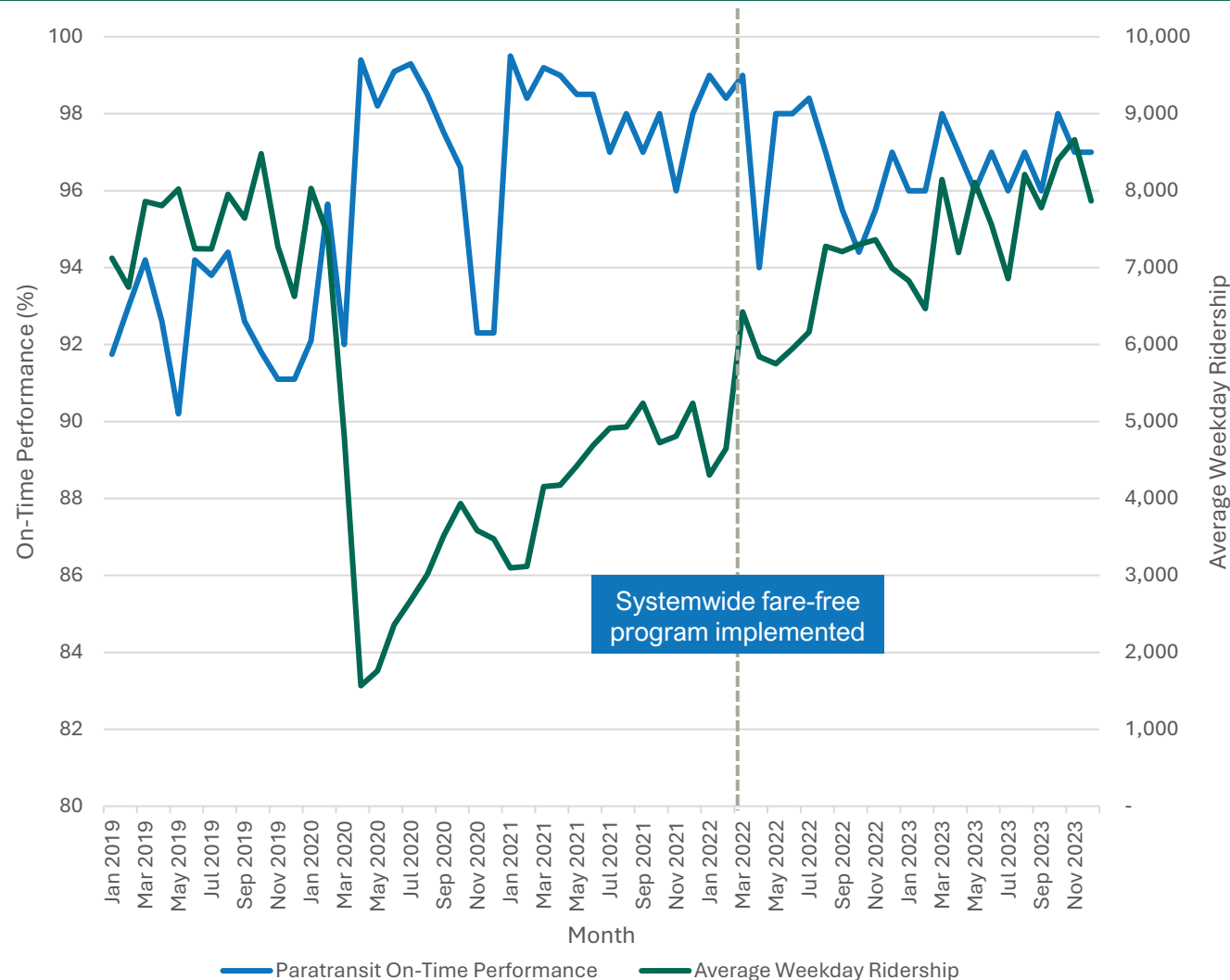
Paratransit on-time performance has also been consistent.

 **Paratransit on-time performance has not changed** considerably since the start of the fare-free program **despite continued ridership growth.**

“Having the bus be free now is better for us because it runs smooth - **you save more time.** We used to have to wait for the ticket to come out, call the supervisor to fix the machine, etc., now we don't have to deal with all of that.”

- *MeVa Driver* ^[17]

Paratransit On-Time Performance and Ridership ^[19]






Rider Experience

Program Goals

- Improving safety, comfort, and rider satisfaction
- Reducing crowding



Riders overwhelmingly approve of MeVa's service.

 **Eighty-six percent of MeVa riders were either satisfied or extremely satisfied** with their bus routes.

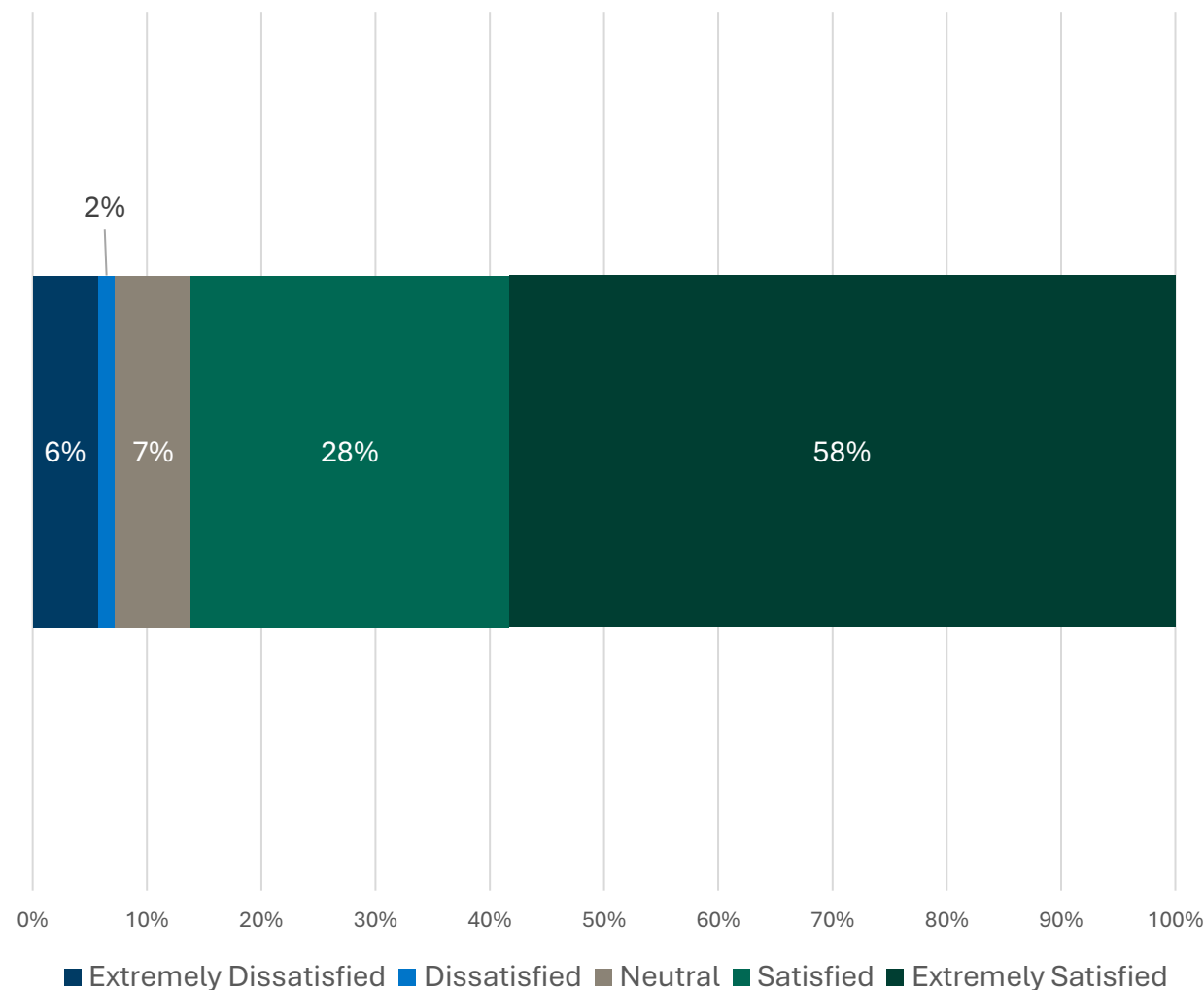
 Approval of MeVa service **exceeds typical levels seen at transit agencies** across the country. ^[20] Nearly 60% of MeVa riders are extremely satisfied with service, compared to 40% at other agencies.

 As ridership has increased, riders indicate that **they feel safe despite busier buses.**

"I really don't know too much of anything that they could do to make it better. What they have available is **absolutely amazing** with the service working as well as it does."



- MeVa Bus Rider ^[21]

Q: In the past month, how satisfied have you been overall with this free bus route? ^[22]





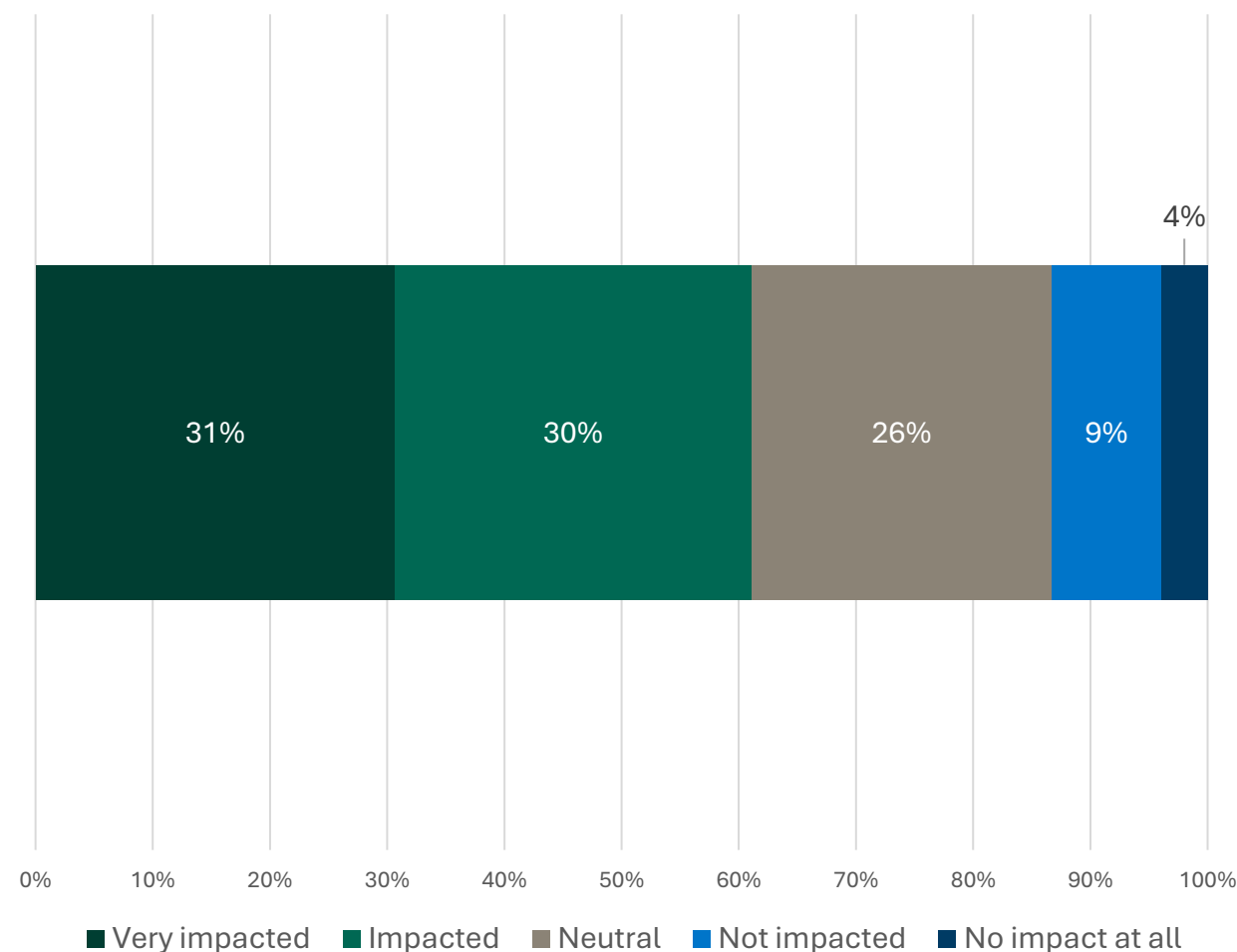
Paying a fare again would be inconvenient for riders.

-  Riders indicated they would face significant logistical impacts – from the **need to add additional time to their trip, to remembering the fare, to general hassle associated with payment.**
-  Around **two-third of riders indicated that they would be logistically impacted** and nearly a third would be very impacted.

“It is easier for everyone to not have a fare because it's not like I have to get out now, check if I have to find the money, or I have to refill my card. **I can get out easier from the bus.** I can get out quicker, knowing the fact that I don't have cash. I can just get on and get to my destination as soon as possible.”

- MeVa Bus Rider ^[23]

Q: How much would you be logistically impacted if you had to pay for the bus? ^[24]





Riders find some routes overcrowded.

- Although overall riders are very satisfied with MeVa service, their **main concern was crowding**.
- Riders only mentioned overcrowding for specific routes that serve larger populations or are hubs of economic activity. Route 1 came up most frequently.
- Drivers did not express concerns about overcrowding.**
- Paratransit riders mentioned **needing to book their ride far in advance**, especially during peak hours.

“I work at the Merrimack Plaza, so sometimes **I know which buses are crowded** on the way back, and I am semi handicapped, so I have a knee problem and a back problem. **I will wait an extra half hour** to take 24 home.”

- MeVa Bus Rider [25]

“They only had the hour buses on Saturday. It used to get packed on Saturday because everybody would go out Saturday. **That's why they added the half hour on Saturdays now, because it's been so packed.**”

- MeVa Bus Rider [26]



Removing fares creates more consistency and clarity for riders.

- ❶ Inconsistent enforcement of fare collection produced a varied experience which differed route to route and day to day – **the fare-free program ensures a consistent experience** for all.
- ❷ The **transfer process was often tedious** and confusing for riders, leading to delays, potential conflict with drivers and potential overpayment.



*The transfer experience was **unreliable and confusing for riders** and was **difficult for drivers to explain**.*

To transfer, riders needed to request a printed paper ticket from the driver when paying for their first fare. This was also the process if someone overpaid for a fare.

*These tickets were **not available at all locations** and **sometimes became unreadable** if wet or damaged. These issues left some riders to pay another full fare (or forfeit any money paid above the price of the fare). When redeeming paper tickets, riders were also limited to only one per ride. [26]*





Driver Experience

Program Goals

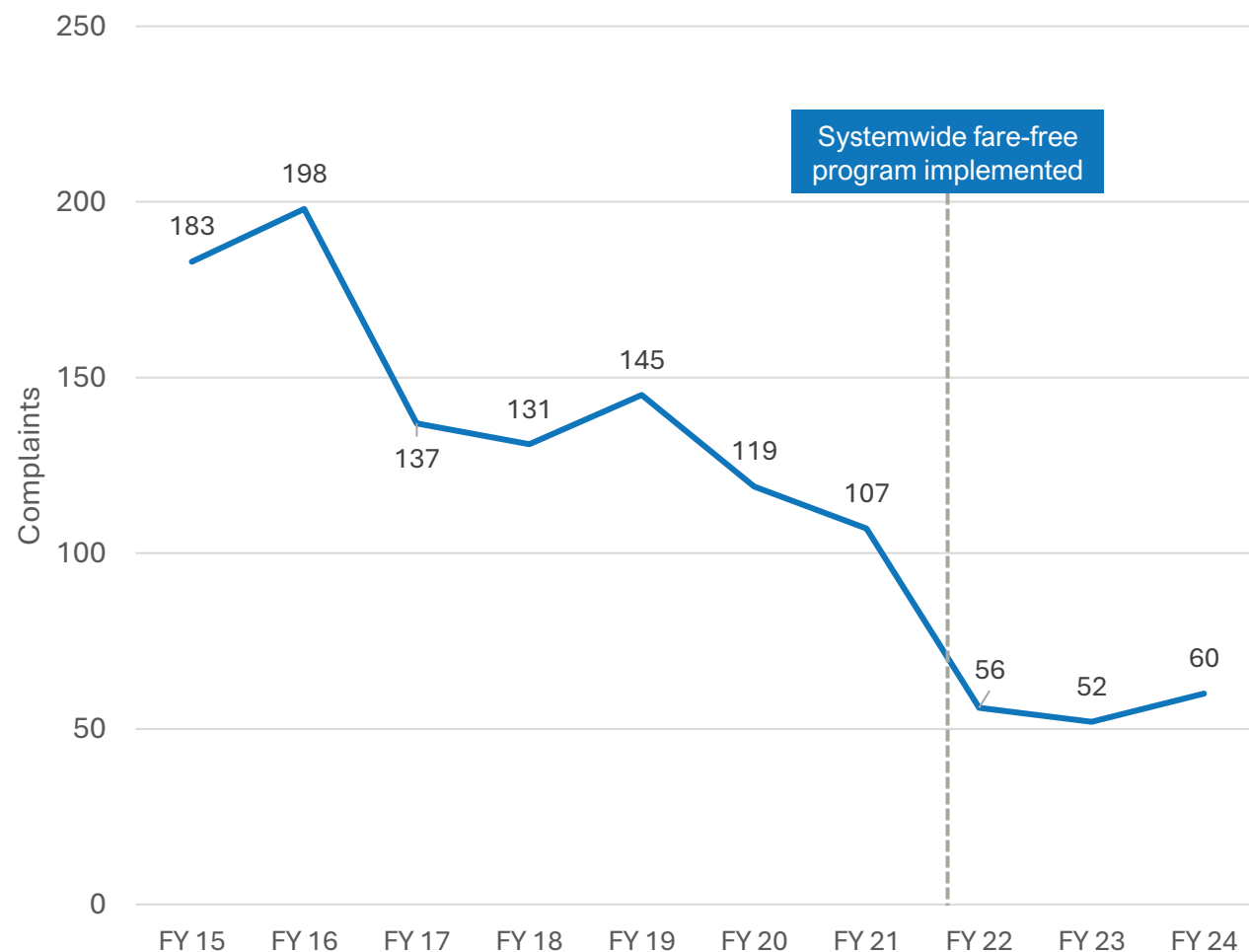
- Reduce conflicts between riders and drivers
- Boost driver satisfaction
- Provide labor cost savings



Rider complaints have plummeted.




-  Rider complaints decreased by nearly half in the year the fare-free program was enacted and have since remained low, **even as ridership almost tripled.** [27]
-  The reduction in complaints has **boosted workforce morale**, as administrative staff experience less stress and spend less time receiving, logging, and investigating complaints.

Total Rider Complaints by Fiscal Year [28]





There are fewer rider/driver conflicts.

-  Riders and drivers mention that eliminating fares has **reduced conflicts** during rides.
-  With less conflict, riders and drivers have a **more pleasant experience**.
-  Riders noted that **free access to transit emphasizes the idea of public transit as being “accessible to all.”** One reported effect of this was that **people are more understanding of their fellow riders**.

“When people had to pay and didn't have the money, they would argue with you. But now that people don't have to pay it's less of a headache.”

- MeVa Driver ^[29]

“They have previously banned people from the buses for doing stupid things and harassing the bus drivers. But you can't kick people off for no reason, because it is public transportation. **Everybody has a right to ride.**”

- MeVa Bus Rider ^[30]



Drivers are more satisfied, which translates to customer goodwill.

- ③ Removal of fares, in parallel with other improvements to operations, has **significantly improved driver satisfaction**.
- ③ Drivers **act as the spokespeople for MeVa service**. If drivers are happier, so are riders.
- ③ The fare-free program has also **eliminated conflicts between drivers** originating from differing attitudes towards enforcement of fare collection. Drivers who had been stricter about enforcing fare policy previously resented more lenient drivers. The suspension of fare collection eliminated this source of tension.

“This place (MeVa) has done a 360 since I started working here. I was working more than 60 hours per week. 70 hours sometimes. Now we don't feel tired. **It's fun to come to work now!**”

- MeVa Driver^[31]

“After we started running for free, they started adding more runs every half hour. One thing brings to the other things, because they had to hire more drivers, so more opportunity for work from more people.”

- MeVa Driver^[32]



Drivers are better able to serve riders.

- Drivers feel that MeVa has been able to place a stronger emphasis on training and safety **by shifting the focus away from fare collection.** This additional training is improving reliability and the customer experience.

“I think that the drivers are more courteous now because they used to feel kind of rushed doing the fare boxes.”

- MeVa Bus Rider ^[33]








Health Impact

Program Goals

- Positively impact rider health by providing increased connectivity to medical facilities and improving overall access to care



People report that MeVa provides important access to healthcare.

-  Riders pointed to **healthcare services as among the most common destinations**. Both Lawrence General Hospital and health clinics in downtown Haverhill were mentioned as the most popular stops[†].
-  The convenience of not needing a fare and the frequency of buses was noted as a key support for riders **reaching doctors appointments on time**.
-  The analysis also uncovered mental health benefits. The **sense of freedom and independence is a significant emotional benefit for paratransit riders and seniors** who take pride in taking care of themselves without the need to be dependent on family.

“Lots of people go to Lawrence General. We got a lot of people to go to church and the clinic on 34 Haverhill Street. Those are pretty popular stops.”




- MeVa Bus Rider [34]

“A lot of elderly now go to their doctor's appointments via the bus. I've dropped them off right at the clinic. **People who work at hospitals and clinics, they've been taking the bus more too.”**

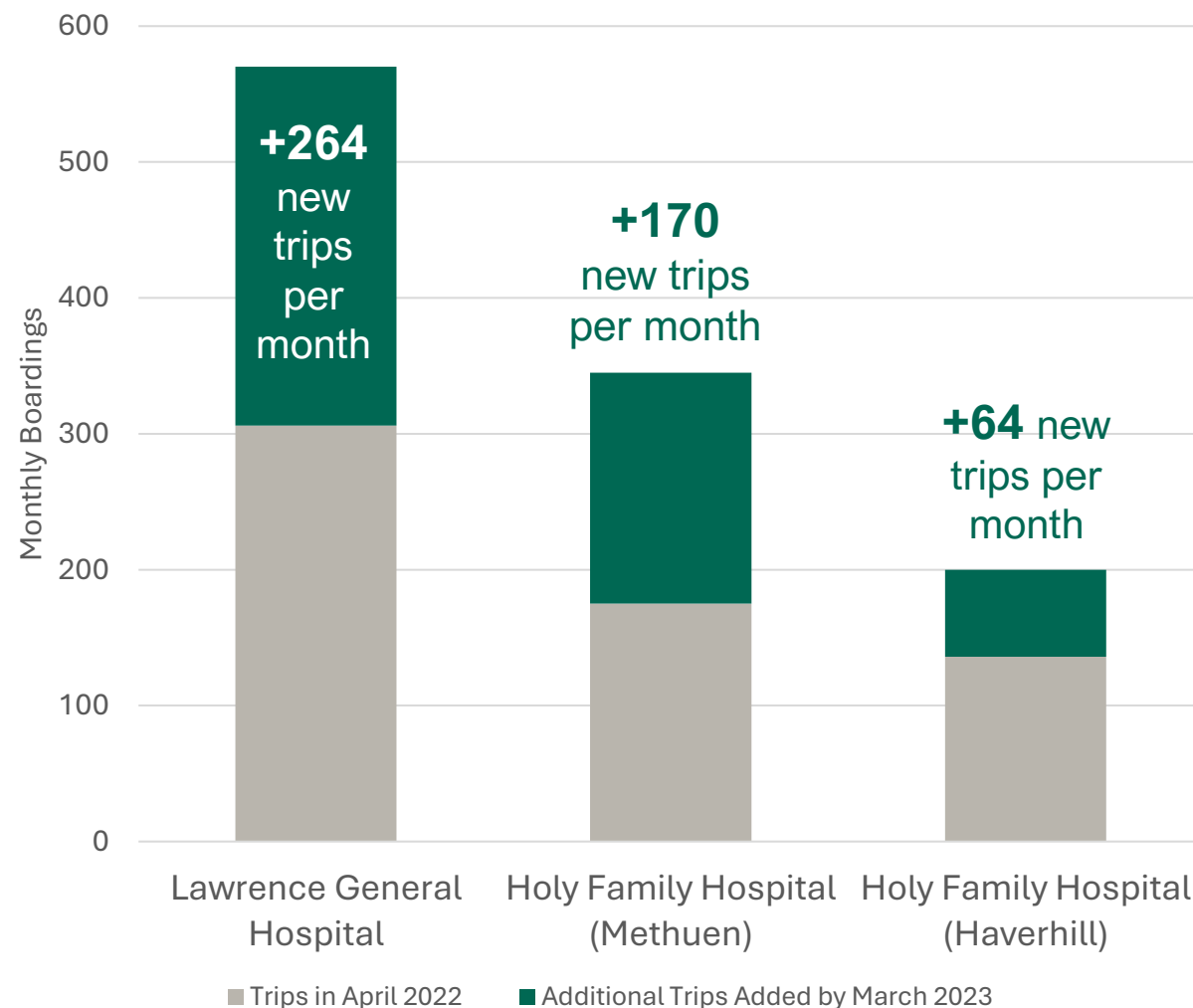
- MeVa Driver [35]



People are making more trips to medical centers on the bus.




-  In the first year of the fare-free program, more riders began using **MeVa buses to access hospitals and medical centers**; this generated over 500 additional trips to these locations per month.
-  **Trips to Lawrence General and Holy Family Hospital in Methuen nearly doubled** in the first year of the program. This is especially notable given the drop in available appointments at both Holy Family Hospitals due to ongoing financial and legal issues surrounding Steward Health Care, which owned both hospitals at the time. [36]
-  The Lawrence General Hospital 2019 Community Health Needs Assessment identifies access to transportation as a barrier to access to healthcare, and this program targets that issue.

Ridership at Key Medical Stops[†] (April 2022 – March 2023) [37]





People who use MeVa for healthcare rely on transit.

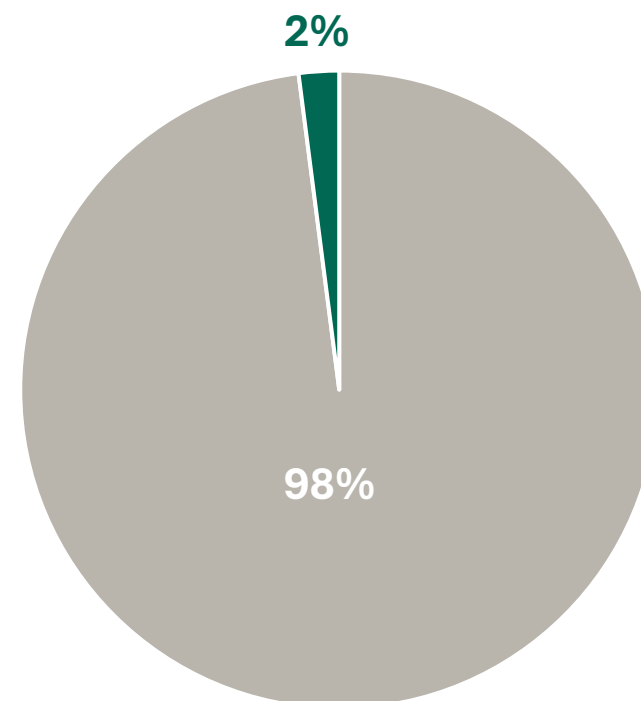
-  **People using MeVa for healthcare rely on transit**, as nearly all riders who indicated they use MeVa for healthcare appointments do not have a car.
-  **Forty-three percent of riders use the bus for healthcare** related travel.
-  For 8% of riders, healthcare is their primary bus trip purpose.

Q: What is the primary purpose of the trip that you are currently making or most recently made on the MeVa bus?
Filtered to healthcare-related trips only^[38]

Compared to:





Q: What other transportation options do you have available to you, besides the bus? (select all that apply)

- Healthcare Riders without a Vehicle Available
- Healthcare Riders with a Vehicle Available





More people on the bus means safer roads.

-  **No one on a MeVa bus was injured** in a roadway crash in the past few years.
-  However, between 2019 and 2023 there were 34,700 crashes on roads in the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission area resulting in nearly 11,000 injuries and fatalities. ^[39]
-  Therefore, **mode shift from vehicle trips results in an increase in roadway safety.**
-  There is a **financial benefit associated with this increased safety** given the societal costs of damage to vehicles, injuries to people, and fatalities, even conservatively including documented injuries associated with people who are walking to the bus.

Financial Impact:

- ▶ *Crashes averted from people choosing to take the bus over driving or rideshare due to the fare-free program saved the equivalent of **\$140,000** per year.*






Economic Impact

Program Goals

- Provide savings to riders, improve access to training and employment opportunities
- Increase local tax revenue
- Provide a boost to the local economy



On average, people are saving \$230 a year.

-  The average MeVa bus rider is saving **\$230 per year**.
-  Riders applied their savings to cover the cost of **internet and cell phone connectivity costs, taking their family out for a meal, or buying a gift for a loved one.**
-  Riders mentioned most **commonly using the money they save on food.** These users specifically noted that they could now afford healthier and fresher food options.

Amount Saved by Rider Type ^[40]		
Rider Type	Trips per Week	Amount Saved per Year
Daily rider, non-passholder	10	\$650
Daily rider, passholder	10	\$360
Occasional rider, non-passholder	2	\$130

MeVa Fare Policy Prior to the Fare-Free Program				
Fare Type	Adult	Senior/ Disabled/ Students	Beach Bus	Children Ages 5 and Under
Cash Fares	\$1.25	\$0.60	\$2.00 - \$3.00	Free
Charlie Card Fares	\$1.00	\$0.50	\$2.00 - \$3.00	
Monthly Passes	\$30.00	\$15.00	N/A	
Transfers	Free			



It would be financially challenging for people to start paying for the bus.

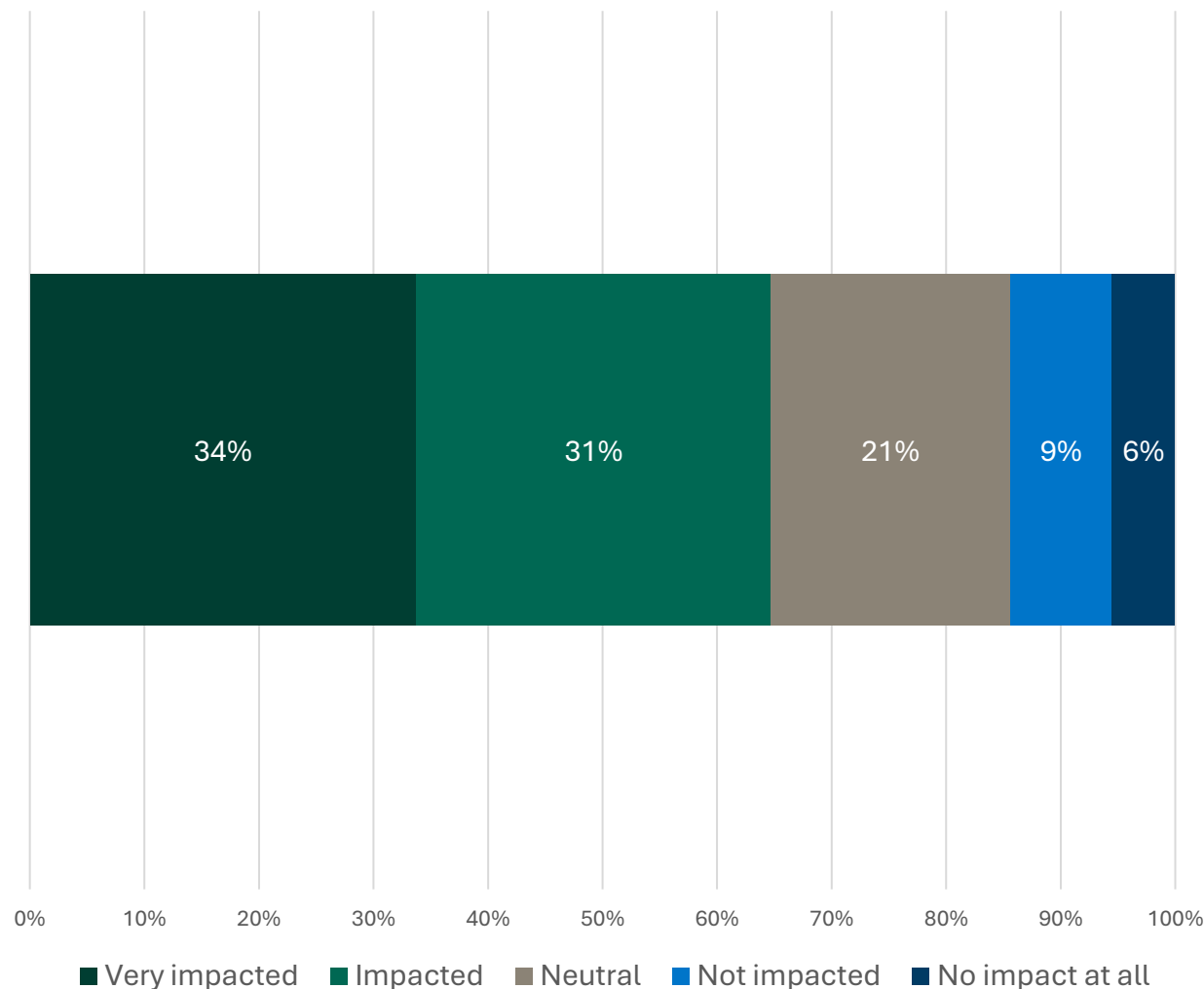


Two-thirds (65%) of riders indicated that they would experience financial hardship if fares were to return, with over a third (34%) of respondents indicating they would be “very impacted” financially.

“If I was paying for all the rides you're looking at **\$80 a month, that's pretty much my grocery bill.** But now we're saving. Certainly, that's more I can use for my groceries.”





- MeVa Bus Rider ^[41]

Q: How much would you be financially impacted if you had to pay for the bus? ^[42]





Riders use the bus to shop and dine.

-  **More than half of MeVa riders report shopping as one of their trip purposes.**
-  Some riders also mentioned that **the money saved can be used for additional shopping and dining.**^[43]
-  The lack of fare enables people to make **multiple trips** to these places, which better suits most people's complex lives that often involve needing to trip-chain.
-  Some riders also mentioned how the bus routes going to shopping centers in Lawrence are more crowded on Saturdays as **families make their way shopping.**

"The Market Basket in Lawrence. Every Market Basket is gonna have an issue if the fare-free program is no longer there. Ridership to every Market Basket has been increasing in the last two years."

- MeVa Driver ^[44]

"I like to go to Savers and plaza, or I like to go to Walmart, you know. I like to take my niece out for lunch and stuff. **So that extra money helps me so I can get the things I need.**"

- MeVa Bus Rider ^[45]



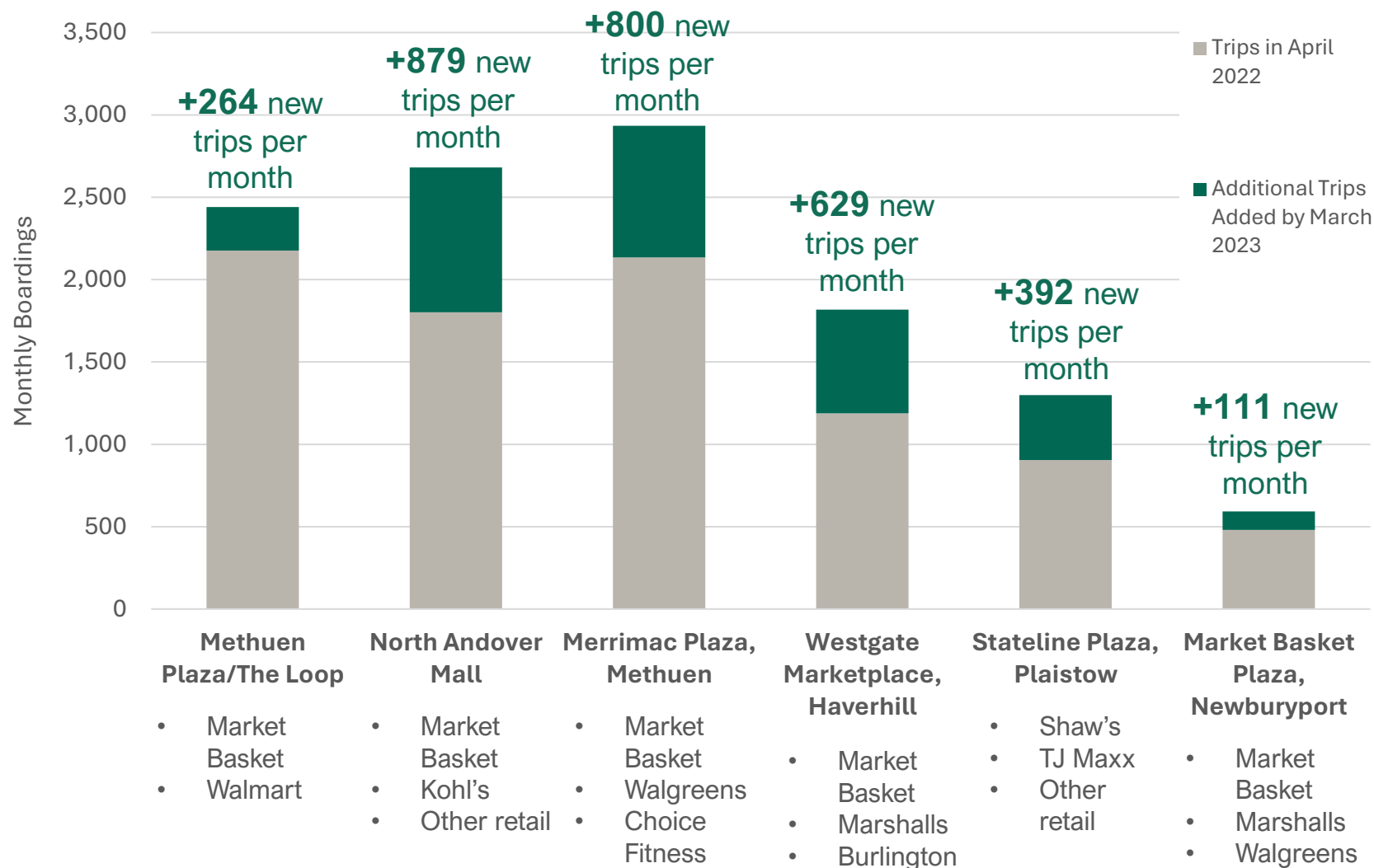
MeVa brought more people to businesses to spend money and/or for work.

In the first year of the fare-free program, more **riders used MeVa buses to access shopping centers and businesses**, with thousands of new trips every month.

This **also represents greater employee access**; a 2021 survey (prior to the fare-free program) showed that transportation was the third biggest barrier to work. [46]

This analysis also sought to quantify local tax revenue impacts, but findings were inconclusive. [47]

Ridership at Key Business Centers (April 2022 – March 2023) [48]





Transit and the Community

Program Goals

- Positively impact community satisfaction with transit and overall happiness
- Boost market awareness



Positive impacts of the fare-free program reverberate to transit in general.

- MeVa has created **good will in the community**; through free fare and outreach efforts, **people are excited about the bus and MeVa**.
- Riders **previously felt embarrassed or self conscious when they were not able to pay a fare**. Therefore, many avoided taking the bus and either walked more, relied on family or friends, or did not make the trip at all.
- Free fare and increased frequency has fostered a degree of trust with MeVa in the community. Several riders noted that **they are now able to rely on the bus** as their primary means of transportation.

“I think MeVa really works hard to make it as easy as possible. And I think the free fare is just a contributing factor to that. **They have brought an excitement that busing has never had before.**”




- Service Provider, Economic Development ^[49]

“During the week, it's Monday through Friday, all buses, all launch buses are ... every half hour. Majority of the buses run every hour on Saturday ... so that **makes it really easy to get to places.**”

- MeVa Bus Rider ^[50]



Service providers see fare-free as essential in the community.

-  **Service providers view the fare-free program as an essential resource** to support growing populations, especially in gateway cities such as Lawrence.
-  Service providers view **access to affordable transit as a source of intergenerational access to resources**, with the free bus having far reaching impacts on the culture and long-term economic development of the region.
-  **Service providers feel that the fare-free program supports their efforts**, because it makes it easier for people to reach their facilities, offers an easy solution for people with transportation needs, and complements their existing programming.

“Immigrants are not going to stop coming here. This is a gateway city. We are also an age friendly community so having this bus system, **it's intergenerational access to resources, to jobs, healthcare, education, entertainment.** It is one less thing people have to worry about.”

- Service Provider, Healthcare ^[51]

“I think **MeVa really works hard to make it as easy as possible.** And I think the free fare is just a contributing factor to that. They have brought an excitement that busing has never had before.”

- Service Provider, Senior Programming ^[52]



Drivers are the main line of communication to riders.

- ③ Drivers act as important representatives for MeVa, serving as the **main source of information for community members**.
- ③ Drivers act as the spokespeople for MeVa service, so **if they are happier, this is passed on to customers**.
- ③ New immigrants find it difficult to access information on bus routes, including fare policy and how to pay, as they often do not have access to the internet on their mobile phones. These communities **rely on community word of mouth or drivers**. Determining how to pay for the bus was another intimidating barrier for new riders unfamiliar with the system.

“What I would like MeVa to do is advertise more. I think that when we spoke for those few minutes yesterday, I mentioned that once upon a time, I had a low vision group at the Senior Center, and I **had a representative come from MeVa with applications and paperwork so that people could understand what it was about.**”




- Mini MeVa Rider ^[53]

“It would be good to provide information to the newly arrived. They usually don’t know which door to board or deboard from. Maybe **providing information in both languages.**”

- MeVa Bus Rider interviewed in Spanish ^[54]



Riders trust drivers' ability to provide a safe ride.

-  Riders **trust and depend on the driver's ability** when navigating unfamiliar situations.
-  With drivers freed from having to enforce fare policy, **riders expressed trust and comfort in how drivers have handled challenging situations.** When navigating an unsafe scenario involving another passenger, a rider said, **“If I feel unsafe, I go and stand near the driver.”**
-  Increased ridership on buses **improves riders' sense of safety.** Busy MeVa buses offer “safety in numbers”.

“I just try to stay away from people like that who could harm me. I **either stand next to or sit up front, next to the driver, you know, you can't stop people.**”

- MeVa Bus Rider ^[55]






Social and Neighborhood Life Impact

Program Goals

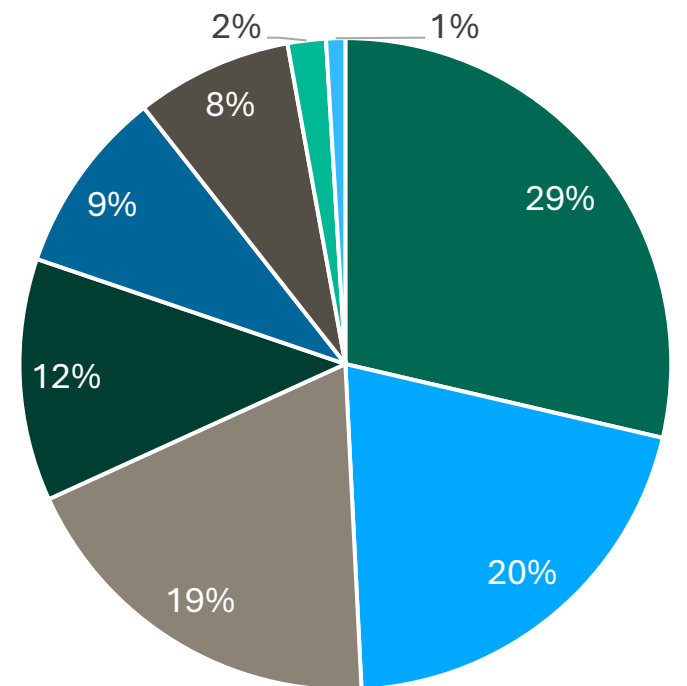
- Facilitate improved social connectivity, including for seniors and people with mobility challenges



MeVa is not only for work or school.

-  Riders use MeVa for many other purposes – including for **errands, shopping, leisure, and to access healthcare**.
-  **MeVa does not see traditional “work commute” peaks.** Trips to various types of destinations occur throughout the day.
-  Two-thirds of people use the bus for **multiple trip purposes**.




Q: What is the primary purpose of the trip that you are currently making or most recently made on the MeVa bus? (choose one) ^[56]



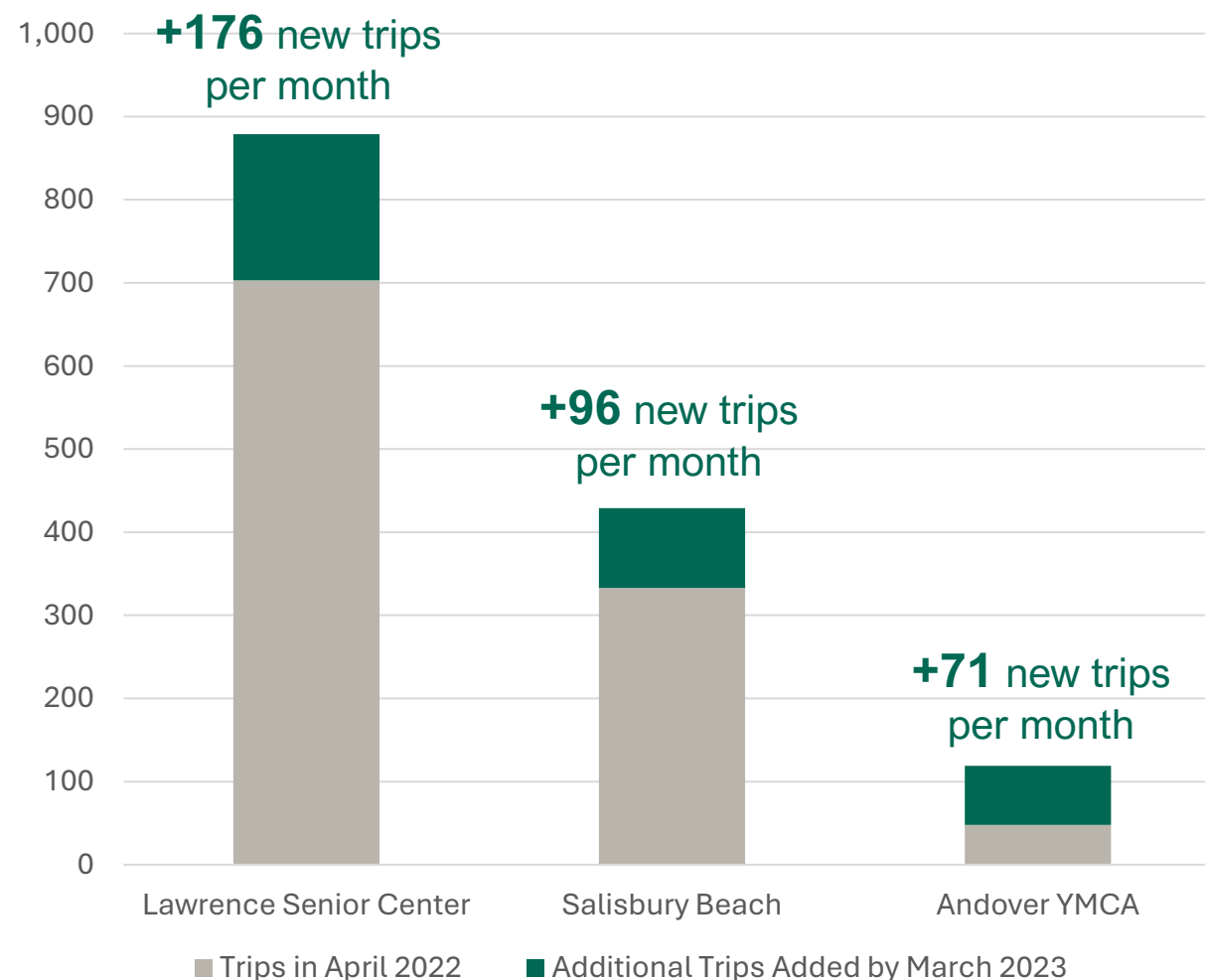
- Work
- Errands (post office, bank, etc.)
- Shopping (groceries, clothing, pharmacy, other retail)
- School
- Leisure travel (entertainment, social, etc.)
- Healthcare (an appointment, etc.)
- Other (Please specify):
- Senior Center



There are new trips on the bus to community destinations.




-  New trips occurring only because the bus is fare-free are more likely to be **for healthcare and leisure** than other destinations.
-  Riders also made more trips to key **social and recreational destinations**, including Lawrence Senior Center (the Center), Salisbury Beach, and the Andover/North Andover YMCA.
-  **Paratransit riders can access community spaces** such as senior centers more frequently, which plays a significant role in their wellbeing.

Ridership at Community Destinations (April 2022 – March 2023) ^[57]

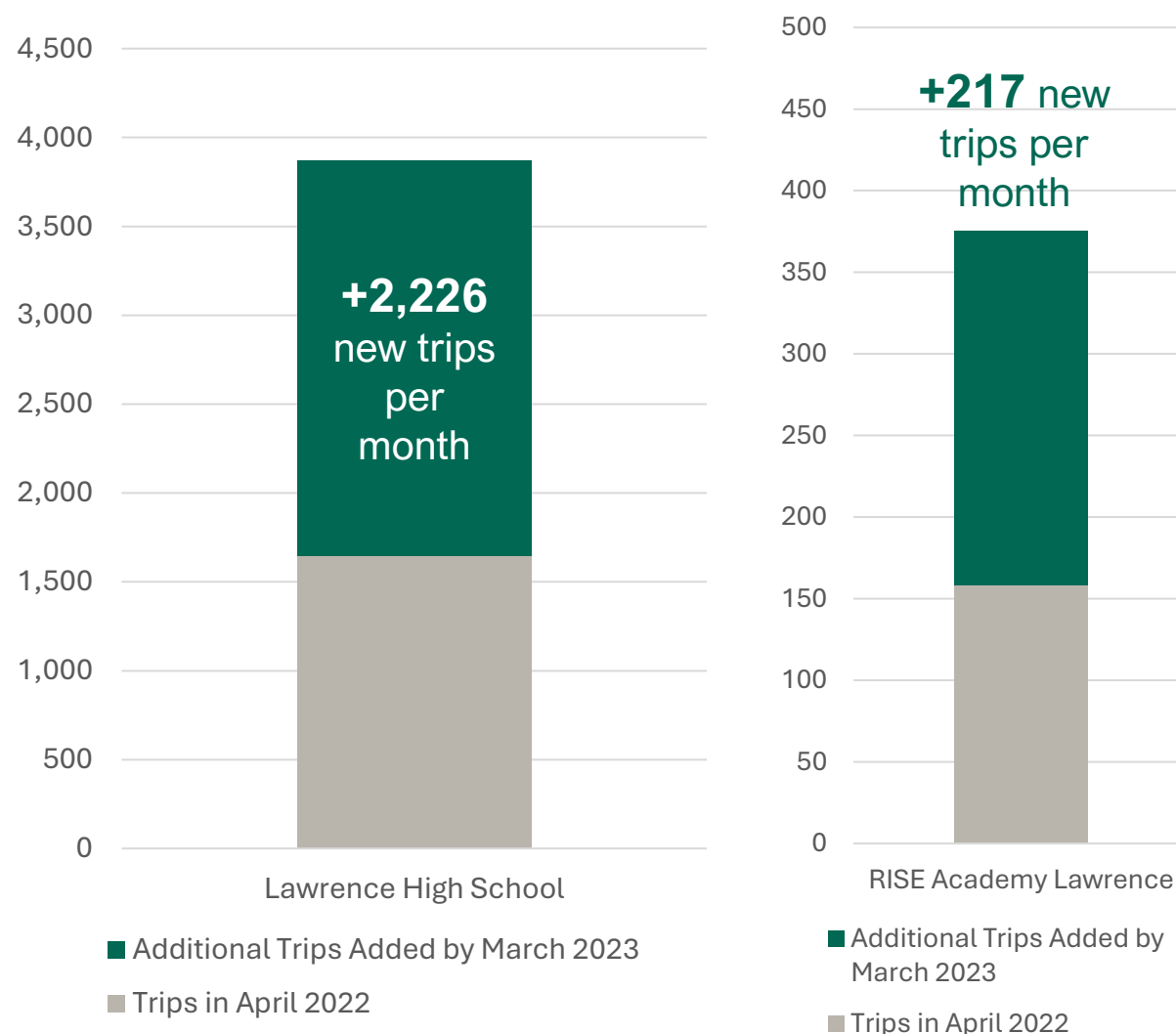




There are new trips on the bus to schools.



-  In the first year of the fare-free program, riders made **thousands of new trips to Lawrence High and RISE Academy**, an alternative public school in Lawrence.
-  **Students also use the bus** to get to afterschool activities and early college programs.
-  Students report the lack of fare **lowers barriers and increases accessibility to new locations beyond** school and home.

Ridership at Schools (April 2022 – March 2023) ^[58]





The fare-free program has improved access, reducing social isolation.

-  People are using the bus for more types of trips, improving community and personal wellbeing.
-  Including community and recreational spaces such as Salisbury Beach, libraries, senior centers, and the gym, **riders are accessing key community spaces via transit more frequently than before the bus was fare-free.** Such anecdotes highlight the importance of having access to affordable transport as a way of avoiding social isolation.
-  A senior Mini MeVa rider with impaired vision mentioned **that they are able to easily meet their friends for a meal because the service is so easy to use.**
-  Another rider shared that **because of the multiple bus route options, they are able to visit family and friends more often.**

“I have people who are now going to the gym because **it is so convenient to get there, and they also don’t have to pay for it.**”

- MeVa Driver ^[59]

“I’m pretty involved spiritually and there’s a place nearby for yoga classes and healing sessions [...] **it keeps me alert, up to date, aware, and always making new friends.**”

- MeVa Bus Rider ^[60]




Environmental Impact


Program Goals


- Contribute to mode shift from vehicles to buses (including from rideshare)
- Reduce GHG emissions and increase energy efficiency
- Make living car-free or car-light more feasible and attractive



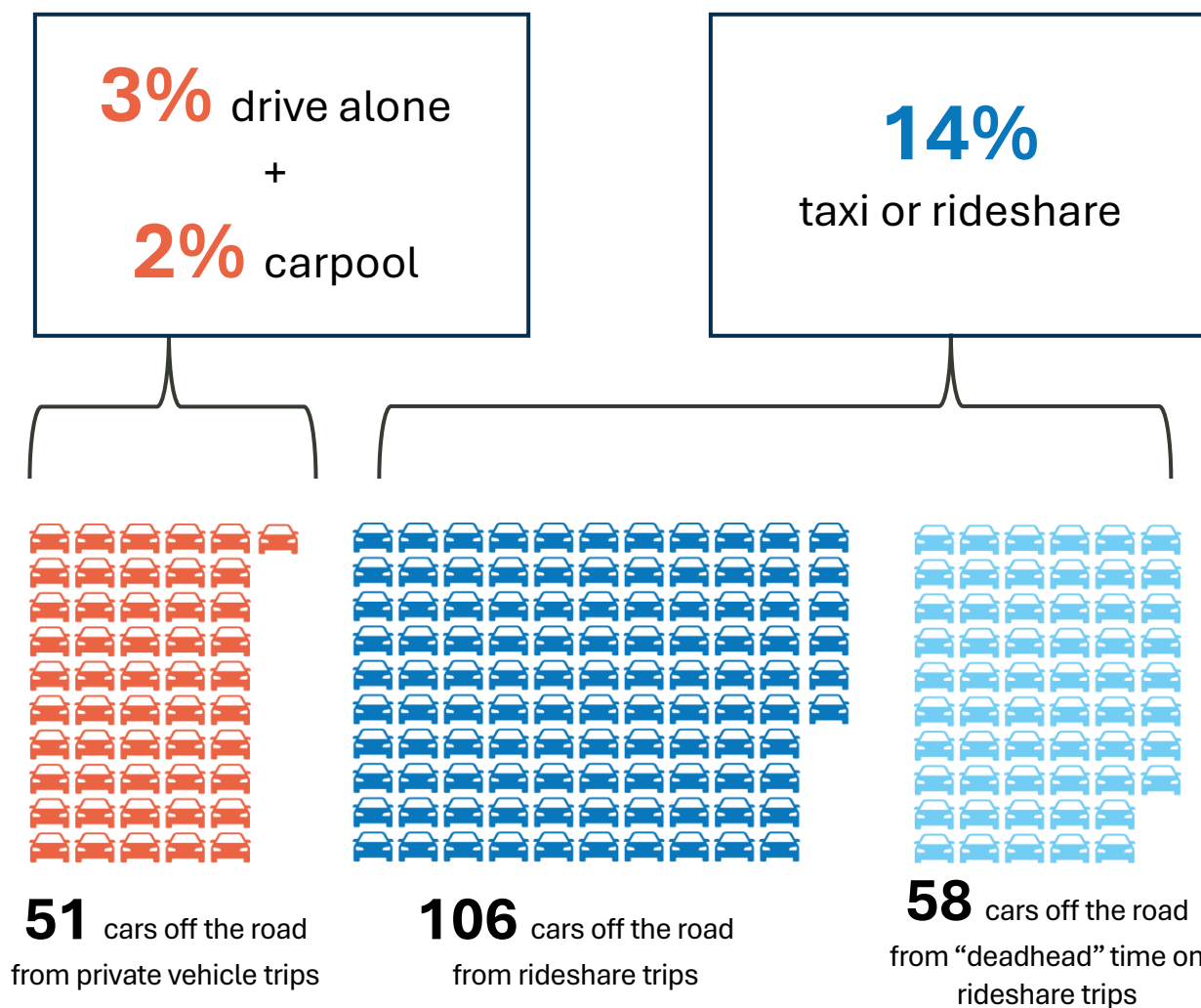
The fare-free program is reducing GHG from driving and rideshare.

 **Nearly 20% of all trips on MeVa buses would have occurred by vehicle** (drive alone, carpool, or rideshare) if not for the fare-free program.

 From June 2023 to May 2024, the fare-free program cut 176 tons of CO2 per year from drive alone and carpool trips, equal to **the emissions of 51 vehicles** in a year. ^[61]

 From June 2023 to May 2024, the fare-free program cut 369 tons of CO2 per year from rideshare trips, equal to the emissions of 106 vehicles in a year. ^[61] Including “deadhead” time – the time between trips when a rideshare driver has no passenger – this number increases to removing **164 vehicles in a year.** ^[62]

Q: How would you have made this trip (or your most recent trip) if the bus were not free? ^[63]





Business Case

Program Goals

- Provide a total bundle of benefits with greater value than the cost of the program



Financial Benefits to the Community

This report estimates the total monetary value of benefits of MeVa's fare-free program, including benefits to the agency and benefits to community.

In 2019, the final full year of fare collection, MeVa collected just over \$1.5 million in fare revenue after adjustment for inflation. **The inflation-adjusted sum of all benefits resulting from the fare-free program total \$2.02 million, well exceeding the revenue lost from not collecting fares.**^[64] A breakdown of benefits and associated values is shown on page 65, with additional detail on methodology located in the appendix. This total does not include additional benefits which could not be readily quantified, which are described on page 66.

MeVa would **incur additional costs to reinstitute fares, including procuring and installing a new system,** as described on page 64.





Financial Benefits: MeVa Operational Dollars

The cost to collect fares for MeVa is multi-faceted and **exceeds \$300,000 per year**. Key components include:

- When fareboxes broke, **buses came out of service for repairs**.
- Staffing the money room is a logistical challenge**. For safety, armored cars cannot pick up on a schedule. When the armored cars arrive, two MeVa staff must adjust their work schedules to access the money room.
- MeVa also **paid fees and provided significant labor** to support the farebox infrastructure.

All benefits adjusted for inflation and expressed in 2022 dollars.

Category	Benefit Details	Annual Amount	Source
Fare Collection Direct Costs	Insurance cost associated with fareboxes and fare collection system	\$5,000	World Insurance Associates (MeVa estimate)
	Armored car services	\$15,870	MeVa financial records (2017-2019)
	Farebox maintenance and equipment fees	\$77,267	MeVa financial records (2017-2019)
Fare Collection Labor Costs	Labor associated with money room counting and bundling	\$20,155	MeVa staff interview
	Labor associated with maintenance of fare collection equipment	\$50,388	MeVa staff interview
	Labor associated with vaulting buses	\$134,368	MeVa staff interview
	Labor associated with real time troubleshooting of farebox failure	\$10,078	MeVa staff interview
Subtotal – MeVa Fare Collection Costs		\$313,126	



Financial Benefits to the Community



Quantifiable community benefits associated with the fare-free program exceed **1.7 million dollars**.



Adding the total value of the program's community benefits to MeVa's savings on fare collection indicates that the fare-free program provides an **overall benefit of over \$2,000,000**.



These include emissions reductions from people using the bus instead of rideshare or driving.

All benefits adjusted for inflation and expressed in 2022 dollars.

Category	Benefit Details	Annual Amount	Source
Emissions Reduction	Total societal cost of emissions averted	\$204,762	USDOT BCA Guidance (2024)
Noise	Total cost of noise pollution averted	\$3,636	USDOT BCA Guidance (2024)
Pavement Damage	Total cost of pavement damage averted	\$95,683	Victoria Transport Policy Institute (2023)
Congestion Cost	Total cost of congestion averted	\$264,085	USDOT BCA Guidance (2024)
Vehicle Operating Cost	Reduced vehicle operating cost due to mode shift	\$995,103	USDOT BCA Guidance (2024)
Safety	Total cost of crashes averted	\$140,446	USDOT BCA Guidance (2024)
Subtotal – Community Benefits		\$1,703,715	
Subtotal – MeVa Fare Collection Costs		\$313,126	
Total		\$2,016,841	



Additional Benefits to MeVa and The Community

Category	Benefit Details
Access to Medical Care	Given the increase in ridership to medical facilities, the fare-free program has had a positive impact on people seeking treatment as well as preventive care. Individuals who have been impacted by the policy are among those most vulnerable to barriers to healthcare and delayed diagnosis and treatment. Health clinics along MeVa routes overwhelmingly serve people who are 200% or more below the federal poverty line.
Increased Funding Opportunities	Many transit funding sources – including State, Federal, and private philanthropic – allocate funding based primarily on ridership or passenger miles. MeVa is positioned to receive significantly greater funding as a result of ridership growth since the system became fare-free. If fares were reinstated, a ridership decrease would threaten funding.
Social Connectivity	Many new trips generated as a result of the fare-free program are trips to social destinations, including senior centers, community centers, and recreational facilities. fare-free buses enable and encourage community members to access these destinations more frequently. As many MeVa riders are lower-income (39% of riders make under \$25,000 per year), the fare-free program provides access to community destinations for those would not otherwise have the means to attend. This improved access and connectivity reduces social isolation and loneliness.
Access to Employment	Prior to the start of the fare-free program, transportation was identified as a notable barrier to employment opportunities in the Merrimack Valley. Riders are better able to access jobs when the need to pay a fare is eliminated.
Access to Education	Schools in the Merrimack Valley, including Lawrence High School, experience high levels of chronic absenteeism. Significant ridership growth at schools in the region following the start of the fare-free program has correlated with reduced levels of absenteeism and potentially enabled students to attend school more consistently. See page 57 for additional detail.



The (Financial) Cost of Reinstating Fares

- Fare collection has many components beyond just fareboxes, shown in the diagram to the right.
- Previous fare collection equipment procurement by MeVa and other Massachusetts RTAs indicates an inflation-adjusted cost of \$19,000 per validator. For MeVa's 74 buses, **this would amount to cost of over \$1.4 million to purchase new fareboxes.**^[65]
- Other organizations would experience a cost as well. **Service providers reported that if the fare-free program ceased, they would need to resume programs that connected people with reduced fare programs,** a significant financial and administrative undertaking. The fare-free buses have been key in bridging resource gaps for service providers.

Components of a Fare Collection Program ^[66]





Conclusion



Fare-Free Program Key Findings

MeVa's fare-free program has fostered a **multitude of operational, environmental, and social benefits**, accomplishing the majority of its goals.

Together, the monetary value of those benefits **supports a business case for the fare-free program**, as they well exceed the costs of lost fare revenue.

The program has increased ridership, improved riders' and drivers' experiences, and reduced emissions. This assessment's focus groups and surveys allude to additional benefits beyond those described in this report. Detail on additional potential benefits to consider in future study is included in the appendix.

Operational Efficiency
Buses absorbed more riders with limited impact; staff have more time

Ridership
Ridership is higher than ever and continues to grow

Rider Experience
Riders are highly satisfied with service, although concerned about crowding

Driver Experience
Drivers are having a better experience with far fewer conflicts

Health Impact
More people are making more healthcare related trips on the bus

Economic Impact
Riders are saving money, and more riders are visiting more businesses

Transit & The Community
Perceptions of MeVa are positive

Social & Neighborhood Life Impact
More people can access opportunities for leisure and recreation

Environmental Impact
People are opting for the bus, cutting emissions equivalent to taking over 200 cars off the road

Business Case

The quantifiable financial benefits of the fare-free program are over \$2,000,000 annually, exceeding the amount previously collected from fares



Data Gaps and Potential Future Analysis

Fare-free transit has potential linkages to a number of additional impacts beyond those described in this report that may further expand the basket of benefits and solidify the program's business case.

At present, data gaps prevent effective study of these potential impacts. Data surrounding these topics is generally unavailable or is not available at the necessary geographic or temporal specificity to enable analysis in relation to a fare-free bus program.

Future evaluations may consider these topics should the necessary data become available.

Operational Efficiency

Reduction in dwell times and increased bus MPG

Data Needed: Stop-level dwell times, Bus MPG controlled for traffic and other external factors

Driver Experience

Reduced driver turnover and increased staff retention

Data Needed: Turnover rates across a larger sample size

Health Impact

Improved local health outcomes and increased preventive care

Data Needed: Medical facility appointments and attendance, population health data

Economic Impact

Increased business sales and local tax revenue

Data Needed: Sales and tax data by individual business or corridor

Social & Neighborhood Life Impact

Increased school attendance

Data Needed: School attendance data across a larger sample size or specific to transit riders

Environmental Impact

Reduced regional traffic and improved air quality

Data Needed: Air quality and traffic with greater geographic specificity and controlled for external factors

Rider Experience

Reduced crowding

Data Needed: Bus crowding data



Appendix



Methodology

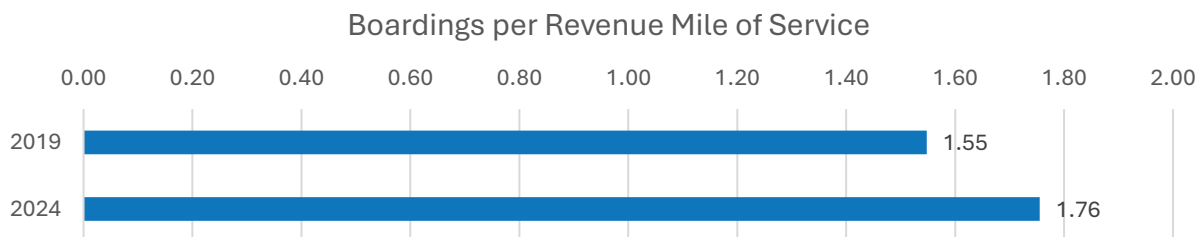


Systemwide Ridership

Methodology

The demographic profile of MeVa riders was developed using the most recent ACS census data available (2023). Findings reflect the demographics of people who answered “public transit” when asked to list their primary commute option and live within the MeVa service communities of North Andover, Amesbury, Andover, Haverhill, Lawrence, Methuen, Newburyport, and Salisbury (total of 3,373 respondents). While some respondents may use the MBTA Commuter Rail, this analysis relies on an assumption that MeVa is the primary transit service in the region and this data primarily reflects MeVa users. Findings related to whether riders have paid a fare, rider retention, and mode shift are based on the project’s online and in-person survey with a total of 663 responses.

Systemwide ridership analysis relied on monthly boardings for all fixed-routes and paratransit from January 2019 to present to include pre-pandemic totals as well as all shifts in ridership before and after the start of the fare-free policy. Systemwide ridership data was available across the entirety of this period, enabling a full analysis across six years. A proportion of the observed increase in ridership is likely due to increased service frequency over the past three years. As a result, this analysis involved normalization of ridership by revenue miles of service on a yearly basis for 2019 and 2024. Results of this analysis are shown below.



Input Data

- Monthly MeVa systemwide boarding totals for all fixed routes, January 2019 – September 2024
- Monthly systemwide MeVa paratransit boardings, January 2019 – September 2024
- MeVa revenue miles of service, 2019 and 2024
- American Community Survey 5-year (2019-2023) estimates



- Rider survey
 - Q: Did you use the bus before it was free?
 - Q: What other transportation options do you have available to you, besides the bus? (select all that apply)
 - Q: How often do you ride the bus? (1 ride is a one-way trip)
 - Q: How would you have made this trip (or your most recent trip) if the bus were not free?





Stop-Level Ridership

Methodology

Stop-level⁺ ridership totals were compiled to support health, economic, and social metric analyses. Ridership at specific stops⁺ adjacent to key destinations became available starting in April 2022, the second month of the fare-free policy.

These analyses compare ridership on a monthly basis in April 2022 to the end of the first year of the fare-free policy in March 2023. This time period was selected due to data availability limitations and as one year serves as an ideal increment for comparison. Ridership data from April 2022 is reasonable to consider as a “pre-program” benchmark as travel patterns shifted gradually as riders became aware of the fare-free program.

The difference in trips between March 2023 and April 2022 is considered the number of “new trips” occurring each month following the start of the fare-free policy.

Ridership figures are supported by findings from focus group outreach.

Input Data

- Monthly MeVa stop-level⁺ boarding totals at key locations, April 2022 and March 2023



- MeVa Bus Rider focus group discussion





Operational Efficiency

Methodology

Organizational efficiency takeaways were generated based on interviews with key senior MeVa staff members who were in their roles prior to the start of the fare-free policy. Staff identified the tasks no longer necessary, the staff involved, the number of hours saved, and if relevant, the additional work staff may perform with that time. Staff time was quantified using the general hourly value (\$32.30) for labor published by USDOT in Benefit-Cost Analysis guidance.

Dwell time per passenger was calculated by identifying the total amount of dwell time at all stops[†] which were not timepoint stops (i.e., stops where the bus may stand by to realign with scheduled departure times) and had at least one passenger boarding. Total dwell time was then divided by total ridership at these stops[†] to estimate the average dwell time for a single passenger. This analysis considered dwell times and boardings from November 2021 and May 2024, the full time period for which data was available. Dwell time data as reported may be higher than true dwell times due to data collection limitations, however, relative shifts and trends in dwell times were considered meaningful. On-time performance was evaluated from January 2019 to December 2023 to include pre-pandemic performance as well as all shifts before and after the start of the fare-free policy.

Input Data

- Dwell times at non-timepoint stops[†] with passenger boardings, November 2021 – May 2024, fixed-routes only
- Total boardings at non-timepoint stops[†] with passenger boardings, November 2021 – May 2024, fixed-routes only
- On-time performance, January 2019 – September 2024, fixed-routes and paratransit
- USDOT Benefit-Cost Analysis Guidelines (2024)
[67]



- MeVa Bus Driver focus group discussion
- MeVa Bus Rider focus group discussion
- Staff interviews
 - Assistant General Manager of Maintenance
 - Director of Human Resources
 - Lead Road Supervisor





Economic Impact

Methodology

This analysis compared the number of trips per week taken by the average MeVa rider (as determined from the survey results) to the total number of passenger trips over the course of a year to estimate the average amount of money saved by a MeVa rider as a result of the fare-free policy. By dividing these two numbers – after converting the weekly trip total to yearly – an estimate of the total number of unique MeVa riders in a year was generated.

The total fare revenue collected by MeVa in 2019 was then divided by this unique rider total to derive the average amount saved by a rider, \$231. Other potential amounts saved were calculated based on an assumed number of trips per week, and an assumption that those riders would pay the full cash fare of \$1.25 for each trip if they did not purchase a pass.

This analysis used the year 2019 for passenger trips and fare revenue due to the impacts of COVID-19 on ridership and fare collection. MeVa ridership has increased significantly since 2019. However, had fares been collected, fare revenue would have increased alongside ridership. Ridership increases are therefore unlikely to have impacted the results of this analysis.

Input Data

- MeVa systemwide total number of unlinked passenger trips, 2019 CY, National Transit Database ^[68]
- MeVa total fare revenue, 2019 CY, National Transit Database ^[69]



- Rider survey
 - Q: How often do you ride the bus? (1 ride is a one-way trip)



Trips per Week, MeVa Rider Survey (2024)		Percent Of Total
	8	47%
	6	21%
	2.5	21%
	0.5	9%
	0.1	2%



Crash Analysis

Methodology

This analysis determined the financial benefit of reduced vehicle crashes as a result of the fare-free policy by estimating the number of property damage only, injury, and fatal crashes averted and calculating the associated financial benefit. Vehicle- and bus-involved crashes from the MassDOT IMPACT database within the MeVa service area were totaled across a five-year period from 2019 to 2023 to include pre-pandemic totals, totals before and after the start of the fare-free policy covering all full years for which data was available. The total number of vehicle person trips across that period were determined using Replica trip volumes on a weekly basis, including all trips made in a vehicle as the driver or passenger. Using the total number of crashes and total vehicle person trips, a ‘crash per person trip’ rate was determined for each crash type. The rider survey indicates that 19% of all trips on MeVa would have occurred by vehicle if the fare-free policy were not in effect. Multiplying this number by the total number of MeVa boardings in 2023, the last full year for which data was available, indicates the number of person trips by vehicle averted. Applying these totals to the ‘crash per person trip’ rates for each crash type yields the number of crashes averted.

These totals were reduced by a ‘crash per person trip’ rate for bus travel based on bus-involved crashes and the total number of MeVa boardings in 2023. We note that this approach may be conservative, as bus-related crashes did not necessarily injure people on the bus. The results of this calculation, in total crashes averted, are shown in the table to the right. Crashes averted are negative for fatal crashes due to a fatality which potentially occurred while a pedestrian was walking to a bus stop. These totals were then compared to USDOT assumptions to generate a financial benefit.

Input Data

- Vehicle crashes within the MeVa service area, 2019-2023, MassDOT IMPACT ^[70]
- Total vehicle person trips within MeVa service area, Replica, 2019-2023
- MeVa systemwide total number of unlinked passenger trips, 2023 CY, National Transit Database ^[71]
- USDOT Benefit-Cost Analysis guidelines (2024) ^[72]
- Rider survey
 - Q: How would you have made this trip (or your most recent trip) if the bus were not free?



Crashes Averted (2023)

Crash Type	Crashes Averted	
PDO Crash	\$9,100	3.90
Injury Crash	\$313,000	1.53
Fatal Crash	\$14,022,900	-0.03



Environmental Impact

Methodology

The environmental impact of the fare-free policy was assessed from the perspective of mode shift and the total number of vehicle trips – including drive alone, carpool, and rideshare – averted. This followed the following steps:

1. For each month during the most recent 12-month period for which data was available (June 2023 to May 2024), systemwide average daily boardings were multiplied by the proportion of survey respondents who indicated they would have made their trip by either driving alone (3%), carpool (2%) or rideshare (14%).
2. This number of 'person trips' was then converted to vehicle trips, assuming an average vehicle occupancy of 1.00 for private vehicle trips, 1.67 for rideshare trips, and 2.00 for carpool trips.
3. Vehicle trips were converted to vehicle miles traveled using the average trip length for vehicle trips in the Merrimack Valley. This VMT number was averaged across the twelve months studied and annualized.
4. Carbon dioxide averted was determined using a per mile emissions standard from the EPA. These totals were converted from tons of carbon dioxide to vehicles using EPA assumptions of metric tons of CO₂ emitted per vehicle per year. Rideshare trip lengths include an additional 55% scaling to account for 'deadhead' time when drivers are traveling without a passenger (in between trips).

This analysis does not account for increased emissions from buses due to additional ridership. We note this assumes that there is not a notable amount of additional greenhouse gas emissions on buses that carry more people.

Input Data

- Average daily systemwide MeVa boardings, monthly, June 2023 to May 2024
 - EPA CO₂ per mile and per vehicle emissions standards^[73]
 - Research on rideshare 'deadhead' time as a proportion of total trip length, Transportation Research: Transport and Environment (2019)^[74]
 - Average vehicle occupancy, National Household Travel Survey (2017)^[75]
 - Median vehicle trip length within MeVa service area, average of Spring and Fall 2023 Replica
- Rider survey
 - Q: How would you have made this trip (or your most recent trip) if the bus were not free?





Additional Financial Analysis

Methodology

The conversion of staff time saved into a financial benefit is described in the Operational Efficiency section. Emissions reduction benefits, noise benefits, pavement damage benefits, congestion benefits, and vehicle operating cost benefits are all a function of VMT reduction calculated from mode shift reducing driving and rideshare trips. The process for calculating VMT is described in the Environmental Impact section. Vehicle miles traveled averted are then quantified in financial terms using USDOT Benefit-Cost Analysis guidance.

Input Data

- USDOT Benefit-Cost Analysis guidelines (2024)
[76]



Category	Benefit Details	Yearly Amount	Source
Fare Collection Direct Costs	Insurance cost associated with fareboxes and fare collection system	\$5,000	World Insurance Associates MeVa estimate
	Armored car services	\$15,870	MeVa financial records (2017-2019)
	Farebox maintenance and equipment fees	\$77,267	MeVa financial records (2017-2019)
Fare Collection Labor Costs	Labor associated with money room counting and bundling	\$20,155	MeVa staff interview (Jaymi Swarbrick)
	Labor associated with maintenance of fare collection equipment	\$50,388	MeVa staff interview (Dan Flaherty)
	Labor associated with vaulting buses	\$134,368	MeVa staff interview (Dan Flaherty)
	Labor associated with real time troubleshooting of farebox failure	\$10,078	MeVa staff interview (Lionel Metet)
Emissions Reduction	Total societal cost of emissions averted	\$204,762	See Environmental Impact analysis
Noise	Total cost of noise pollution averted	\$3,636	See Environmental Impact analysis
Pavement Damage	Total cost of pavement damage averted	\$95,683	See Environmental Impact analysis
Congestion Cost	Total cost of congestion averted	\$264,085	See Environmental Impact analysis
Vehicle Operating Cost	Reduced vehicle operating cost due to mode shift	\$995,103	See Environmental Impact analysis
Safety	Total cost of crashes averted	\$140,446	See Crash Analysis



Considered but Inconclusive Metrics

Fare-free transit has been linked to many additional potential impacts, from efficiencies within the transit agency to broader social and economic benefits. As the study team developed this report, several additional metrics of interest were identified. After investigation, several metrics were dismissed due to a lack of robust data or inconclusive analysis results. These methodologies are included here as future studies may find this information useful or may possess the data necessary to more fully pursue these analyses. These include:

- Retail Spending
- School Attendance
- Bus Driver Turnover
- Regional Traffic Trends
- Bus MPG



Retail Spending

Considered but Inconclusive

Analysis of stop-level[†] ridership trends indicated that ridership outside key retail destinations had grown considerably. The goal of this analysis was to further investigate this apparent trend to identify whether increased trips to these locations impacted in-person retail spending in the Merrimack Valley, including whether a statistically-significant increase in retail spending had occurred following the start of the fare-free policy in March 2022. To evaluate this, this analysis produced a linear mixed-effects statistical model to compare changes in retail spending over time within the MeVa service area to non-fare-free municipalities including Montachusett Regional Transit Authority and Greater Attleboro Taunton Regional Transit Authority. These two transit agencies were selected as comparison groups due to their service areas sharing general similarities with the MeVa service area. This model controlled for changes to income and population as well as typical seasonal shifts.

Findings indicated no statistically-significant increase in retail spending throughout the entirety of the Merrimack Valley. Many additional factors may have a larger effect on regional spending patterns and obscure the impact of fare-free bus policy.

Input Data

- In-person retail spending data within MeVa, Montachusett RTA, and GATRA service area municipalities, January 2019 – August 2024, Replica
- American Community Survey 5-year (2018-2022) median household income estimates
- Population by municipality, 2019 – 2022, Massachusetts Department of Revenue ^[77]





School Attendance

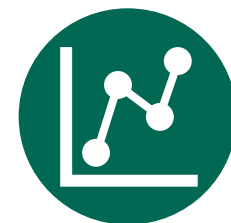
Considered but Inconclusive

Analysis of stop-level[†] ridership also indicated a notable increase in the number of boardings adjacent to schools, including Lawrence High School, following the start of the fare-free policy. To determine whether this ridership increase translated into a statistically-significant increase in school attendance, a difference-in-difference statistical model was created to evaluate changes to chronic absenteeism (students absent 10%+ of school days) over time at schools 1) within walking distance (¼ mile) of a MeVa bus stop and 2) not within walking distance of a MeVa bus stop. In total, 31 public middle and high schools were considered. This analysis controlled for any changes to childhood poverty rate.

Comparing 2021 (pre-fare-free) to 2023 (post-fare-free), no statistically-significant change to chronic absenteeism was observed at schools within walking distance of MeVa stops[†]. As with retail spend, many additional factors may have a larger effect on school attendance and obscure the impact of fare-free bus policy. However, MeVa's fare-free program has been a key component of maintaining school attendance following the effects of COVID-19.

Input Data

- Chronic absenteeism rates at MeVa service area schools, 2021 and 2023, Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education ^[78]
- American Community Survey child poverty rate estimates 2021 and 2022





Bus Driver Turnover

Considered but Inconclusive

In interviews and focus group discussions, many MeVa bus drivers and administrative staff indicated support for the fare-free policy and indicated ways in which the policy improves their day-to-day work.

To explore whether the fare-free policy may have an impact on staff turnover at MeVa (i.e. fewer drivers and administrative staff leaving MeVa due to fare collection-related issues), this analysis considered staff termination data from 2020 to present.

Analysis was limited to voluntary terminations which were unrelated to promotions, medical issues, or personal reasons not related to work. Excluding 2020 due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, voluntary staff turnover has remained low and relatively consistent (4 or fewer departures per year). This accounts for 1-3% of all MeVa staff.

While turnover has decreased by only a small number of staff since the start of the fare-free policy, the number of voluntary terminations was already very low. Voluntary terminations in 2023 and 2024 were fewer than prior to the start of the fare-free program, even as the number of total MeVa staff increased.

Input Data

- MeVa staff count and terminations, 2020 - 2024



Voluntary Terminations, not including maintenance/service staff, promotions, medical reasons, or other personal reasons not related to work

Year	Total Non-Maintenance/Service Staff	Voluntary Terminations	
2020	121	9	7% of all staff
2021	119	4	3%
2022	125	4	3%
2023	144	1	1%
2024	156	3	2%



Additional Analyses and Data Sources

Considered but Inconclusive

Additional metrics considered included:

- Regional Traffic Trends

Regional traffic volumes within the MeVa service area were considered to determine whether a notable shift had occurred following the start of the fare-free policy. Replica vehicle trip volumes indicated no notable change from Fall 2021 to Fall 2023. Given the data available, it is difficult to isolate the impact of the fare-free program. However, mode shift and associated vehicle miles traveled reductions are assessed elsewhere in this report using data from the rider survey.

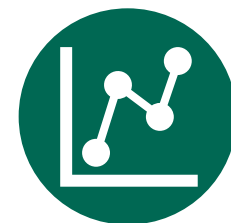
- Bus MPG

MeVa bus MPG was also considered given the impacts to dwell time identified in the Operational Efficiency section. However, no notable change to bus MPG was observed.

Potential additional data sources such as Replica transit trip volumes (and associated trip characteristics) as well as Streetlight volumes were considered but unavailable due to concerns regarding data validity or gaps in data availability. Data on MeVa bus crowding was not available.

Input Data

- MeVa systemwide yearly average MPG, 2017 – 2024
- Vehicle trips within MeVa service area municipalities, Fall 2021 – Fall 2023, Replica



Unused Data Sources

- Transit trips (volumes, locations, trip taker characteristics), Replica
- Streetlight vehicle and transit trip volumes





References (1 of 3)

ID	Citation/Notes
†	Stops refer to everywhere passengers are picked up and dropped off, including flag and designated stops
1	Based on (95% confidence interval / 5% margin of error / ~10,000 daily riders. MeVa Fare-Free Rider Survey – June 2024. N = 663
2	American Community Survey 2019 -2023, 5-Year Estimates. Universe: Workers who Speak Spanish at Home and Speak English “very well”
3	
4	American Community Survey 2019 -2023, 5-Year Estimates. Universe: Workers 16 years and Over who Primarily Use Public Transit to Commute (North Andover, Amesbury, Andover, Haverhill, Lawrence, Methuen, Newburyport, Salisbury).
5	
6	
7	
8	American Community Survey 2019 -2023, 5-Year Estimates. Universe: Workers 16 years and Over who Primarily Use Public Transit to Commute. N = 3373
9	
10	MeVa Fare-Free Rider Survey – June 2024. N = 647
11	MeVa Fixed Route Systemwide Ridership Totals January 2019 – September 2024; MeVa Revenue Miles of Service, yearly, 2019 and 2024; Pre-Pandemic calculation compares Spring 2019 to Spring 2024.
12	MeVa Paratransit Ridership Totals January 2019 – December 2023; Pre-Pandemic calculation compares Fall 2022 to Fall 2023.
13	MeVa Fare-Free Rider Survey – June 2024. N = 653
14	MeVa Fare-Free Rider Survey – June 2024. N = 656
15	MeVa Fare-Free Rider Survey – June 2024. N = 632
16	MeVa staff interviews with Assistant GM of Maintenance Dan Flaherty, Director of Human Resources Jaymi Swarbrick, and road supervisor Lionel Metet
17	GMV MeVa/MVRTA Bus Dwell Time and Stop-Level [†] Ridership Nov 2021 – May 2024. Includes only non-timepoint stops and stops with passenger boardings; Dwell time per person calculated by dividing total dwell time by boardings at selected stops
18	MeVa Fixed Route Systemwide Ridership Totals January 2019 – September 2024
19	MeVa Fixed Route Systemwide Ridership Totals January 2019 – September 2024
20	Demographic Breakdown of Transit Rider Satisfaction, Transportation Research Record: Journal of the Transportation Research Board (2024)
21	Rider Focus Group, Summer 2024
22	MeVa Fare-Free Rider Survey – June 2024. N = 655
23	Rider Focus Group, Summer 2024
24	MeVa Fare-Free Rider Survey – June 2024. N = 655
25	
26	Rider Focus Group, Summer 2024
27	Rider Focus Group, Summer 2024. MeVa Fixed Route Systemwide Ridership Totals January 2019 – September 2024
28	MeVa Fixed Route Systemwide Ridership Totals January 2019 – September 2024
29	Driver Focus Group, Summer 2024
30	Rider Focus Group, Summer 2024
31	
32	Driver Focus Group, Summer 2024



References (2 of 3)

ID	Citation/Notes
33	Rider Focus Group, Summer 2024
34	Rider Focus Group, Summer 2024
35	Driver Focus Group, Summer 2024
36	Community Health Needs Assessment, 2022, Greater Lowell Health Alliance
37	MeVa Fixed Route Ridership by Stop [†] . April 2022 – March 2023
38	MeVa Fare-Free Rider Survey – June 2024. N = 49
38	MassDOT IMPACT Crash Data, 2019-2023, Crashes within MeVa Service Area (excludes Lowell)
40	Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority Monthly Reports (FY 2019), MeVa fare structure prior to fare-free program– 1,841,509 total trips (not including transfers), \$1,463,829.39 total fare revenue; 5.59 trips per rider per week derived from MeVa Rider Survey 2024
41	Rider Focus Group, Summer 2024
42	MeVa Fare-Free Rider Survey – June 2024. N = 652
43	See Appendix Page for Retail Spending Findings.
44	Driver Focus Group, Summer 2024
45	Rider Focus Group, Summer 2024
46	Workforce Survey Results of Merrimack Valley Employers, MVPC
47	Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority Monthly Reports (FY 2019) \$1,463,829.39 total fare revenue; MARC Kansas City Zero Fare Impact Analysis
48	MeVa Fixed Route Ridership by Stop [†] . April 2022 – March 2023
49	Service Provider Focus Group, Summer 2024
50	Rider Focus Group, Summer 2024
51	Service Provider Focus Group, Summer 2024
52	
53	Rider Focus Group, Summer 2024
54	
55	Rider Focus Group, Summer 2024
56	MeVa Fare-Free Rider Survey – June 2024. N = 613
57	MeVa Fixed Route Ridership by Stop [†] . April 2022 – March 2023; Paratransit Rider Interviews
58	MeVa Fixed Route Ridership by Stop [†] April 2022 – March 2023; Lawrence High School Post Grad Student Video
59	Driver Focus Group, Summer 2024
60	Rider Focus Group, Summer 2024
61	Calculation relies on EPA Emissions standards and an MeVa service area-specific average vehicle trip length assumption from Replica (4.4 mi), Carpool vehicle occupancy estimated at 2 persons per vehicle.
62	Research indicates that rideshare drivers travel an additional distance equal to 55% of the actual ride trip length while in between trips. Travel and energy implications of ridesourcing service, Transportation Research Part D: Transport and Environment (2019)
63	MeVa Fare-Free Rider Survey – June 2024. N = 632
64	MeVa total fare revenue, 2019 CY, National Transit Database
65	Joint Farebox Procurement, Massachusetts Regional Transit Authorities, 2012
66	Total Cost of Ownership Analysis, May 2022, Consult Hyperion



References (3 of 3)

ID	Citation/Notes
67	Benefit-Cost Analysis Guidance for Discretionary Grant Programs US Department of Transportation
68	https://www.transit.dot.gov/ntd/transit-agency-profiles/merrimack-valley-regional-transit-authority
69	https://www.transit.dot.gov/ntd/transit-agency-profiles/merrimack-valley-regional-transit-authority
70	https://apps.impact.dot.state.ma.us/cdv/
71	https://www.transit.dot.gov/ntd/transit-agency-profiles/merrimack-valley-regional-transit-authority
72	https://www.transportation.gov/mission/office-secretary/office-policy/transportation-policy/benefit-cost-analysis-guidance
73	https://www.epa.gov/greenvehicles/greenhouse-gas-emissions-typical-passenger-vehicle
74	https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1361920918309878?via%3DiHub
75	2017_nhts_summary_travel_trends.pdf
76	https://www.transportation.gov/mission/office-secretary/office-policy/transportation-policy/benefit-cost-analysis-guidance
77	https://dlsgateway.dor.state.ma.us/reports/rdPage.aspx?rdReport=Socioeconomic.Population.population_main
78	https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/statereport/attendance.aspx

Memorandum

TO: Noah Berger, Administrator, Merrimack Valley Transit (MeVa).

CC: Liza Cohen, Principal, Stantec

FROM: Patrick Reed, Transportation Program Manager, Merrimack Valley Planning Commission (MVPC)

DATE: January 13, 2025

SUBJECT: Fare Free Evaluation Focus Groups – Methodology Documentation

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT: In the spring of 2024, MVPC engaged consultant firm Stantec for the purpose of evaluating Merrimack Valley Transit's (MeVa) fare free policy. The intent of the evaluation includes the consideration of both quantitative and qualitative metrics as well as the development of a business case for the policy. Stantec subcontracted with Rivera Consulting to execute focus groups and interviews related to the policy. This memo details Rivera's methodological approach to qualitative data collection for the purposes of documentation.

DISCUSSION: Rivera Consulting developed the methodological approach discussed herein for Stantec and MVPC's approval. Following approval, Rivera facilitated data collection.

Central Research Question

Rivera employed the following central research question to guide focus group/interview planning and preparation: *"How effectively does the fare-free bus program enhance the region's environmental, economic, operational, and quality-of-life goals for its residents and the overall transportation system?"*

Research Approach

Initially, Rivera proposed three focus groups with 6-7 members per group. Rivera proposed that the three groups should be separated to optimize conversations. The first group included riders, the second group included drivers, and the third group included service providers. Rivera intended to include paratransit riders as a separate group; however, based on needs physical identified during the recruitment process, Rivera adjusted its process to instead hold one-on-one phone interviews to better accommodate this population.

Recruitment

Rivera recruited riders using Stantec's on-bus and online quantitative surveys, contacting riders who provided their email information for recruitment. Beyond the survey, Rivera also contacted Spanish-speaking riders

who were referred by other riders. MeVa assisted Rivera regarding recruitment of paratransit riders and drivers by providing contact lists of potential candidates. For the eservice provider focus group, Rivera developed a topical list of service provider types (e.g. healthcare, education, etc.). Merrimack Valley Planning Commission (MVPC) and MeVa staff coordinated to provide options to Rivera to contact for recruitment.

The rider group (including paratransit one-on-ones) ultimately included 20 riders, including five Spanish-only speakers and two paratransit riders. It is important to note that Rivera did not differentiate bilingual riders from English-only riders, and that a significant portion of MeVa's ridership is bilingual. As such, it is likely the case the some number of the 15 riders spoke more than one language; however, the research team did not document this. 20 percent of the recruited riders were between the age of 16 and 20. 15 percent identified as age 65 or older. In terms of education, 80 percent of the recruited riders identified as having less than a bachelors degree. 35 percent self-identified as Hispanic/Latino/Latinx, and 20 percent identified as African American or Black.

The service provider group included two healthcare workers, one education provider, one representative from an economic development organization, and two senior support/service providers.

Facilitation

Rivera facilitated focus groups and interviews, using three separate facilitation guides. Facilitators encouraged open-ended conversations to ensure collected data reflected the perspectives of participants. Staff from Rivera transcribed participant interactions. Attachment A

Following the focus groups and interviews, Rivera mapped the qualitative data using an asset-mapping coding approach. Rivera developed qualitative codes based on a review of the transcripts' common subjects. Rivera then assigned coded data to one of five broad topics: Rider Experience and Interaction, Benefits and Use Cases, Operations, Rider Safety, and Overall Impact. Rivera also designated each coded data item as an asset, barrier, or recommendation.

CONCLUSION: Qualitative research clarifies, highlights, contextualizes, supports, and occasionally raises questions about the findings of quantitative research. Rivera's focus groups and interviews accomplish these ends. MVPC understands that Stantec will use Rivera's qualitative data to contextualize findings in its fare free evaluation and business case. In particular, focus group and interview findings will help extend the reach of quantitative findings by answering questions that are challenging to address in a brief quantitative survey (e.g. How have rider-driver interactions changed since the policy was introduced? How have drivers' experiences changed since the policy was introduced?). Additionally, MVPC believes that direct rider, driver, and service provider quotes will help improve the interest and readability of the final report. MVPC shared MeVa's interest in Stantec's findings, and looks forward to review of the final report.

Attachment:

Attachment A. Rivera Consulting Facilitation Guides

Attachment A. Rivera Consulting Facilitation Guides

MEVA Fare-Free Bus Program Bus Drivers Focus Group Facilitation Guide Rivera Consulting | May 2024

Research Purpose:

This research seeks to evaluate the impact of the Merrimack Valley's fare-free bus program on the region's **environmental, economic, operational, and quality-of-life goals**. Per the project's [Request for Proposal](#), the primary goals of this evaluation are to 1) inform the future service provided by the fare-free program and 2) justify potential future operational funding support requests. The core metrics that drive focus group facilitation include an assessment of driver satisfaction, rider experience, mode shift, and accessibility to the provision of key community services. Additionally, this research will be key in highlighting narratives and user stories that will continue to shape the program design and service delivery going forward.

Research Question:

The central question this research seeks to answer is "How effectively did the fare-free bus program enhance the region's environmental, economic, operational, and quality-of-life goals for its residents and the overall transportation system?"

Research Approach:

A focus group is a semi-structured conversation in which a group of participants express views about a topic. Focus groups are facilitated by one or more moderators/facilitators, but a key element of their value is that participants have the opportunity to guide the conversation. Facilitating participant-driven conversations makes focus groups a vital tool for understanding emerging themes in participant responses.

Rather than seeking to extract specific pieces of information from each participant, evaluative focus groups seek to prompt open discussions between participants that yield insights into our core metrics. Each proposed prompt aligns with one or more of the evaluation topics outlined in this framework. It is important to note that these prompts are **not a script** for focus groups. Rather, they are intended to kick-start a conversation between participants and to let that conversation evolve organically.

Since the Focus Groups with drivers are intended to be in person, the prompts below are made interactive, and facilitators are encouraged to create space for activities. In addition to understanding key outcomes such as ridership patterns, rider safety, etc., the discussion will also explore the program's impact on driver well-being.

Focus Groups With Bus Drivers

Recruitment Approach:

Rivera Consulting will work closely with the MEVA's driver-facing team to engage drivers and secure an appropriate time and venue that aligns with existing schedules. Drivers in the group will need to have a range of tenure with MEVA, with a majority of them having been on the job before March 2022, when the Fare Free Program was put in place. The inclusion of newer operators is encouraged but should be a minority. A small number of the participants will also be paratransit drivers serving priority resident groups and driving vans. The size of the focus group will be 7-8 drivers.

Recording and Privacy:

Rivera Consulting facilitators will ask the drivers for consent at the start of the session to record the discussion. All responses will remain anonymous, and the recording will be solely for qualitative research analysis and documentation by the Rivera Consulting team.

Focus Group Introduction Script:

Thank you all for being here today. We're going to be talking for about 90 minutes today about the bus lines in the Merrimack Valley that have recently become fare-free. Basically, we're going to ask a few questions about what you think about the bus and what your experience operating it has been like. We want this conversation to be as open as possible, so feel free to say whatever the question brings to mind for you, even if it's not directly in response, and feel free to respond to what other people are saying, whether you agree or disagree.

Focus Group Questions for Bus & Paratransit Drivers

Part 1: Ridership Experience & Interaction (30 mins)

In this section, we want to understand the current state of ridership in the Merrimack Valley. We specifically want to understand how ridership has changed since the implementation of the fare-free bus program and how that has influenced drivers' interactions with riders.

The materials needed for this section are a large 24X36 printout of the Merrimack Valley map, pencils, post-its, and stickers.

For facilitator: On the following questions, we are going to ask drivers to identify the characteristics of each line in relation to their comfort level. We are going to prompt them to identify the routes in which they feel more comfortable driving in, areas that they don't like driving in, and areas in which they don't feel safe before and after the implementation of the fare-free bus program. Present them with the map of the area and provide them with [stickers](#), post-its, and pencils to write on it. Access the map [here](#).

1. Can you give us an overall view of how ridership has changed since the fare-free program was implemented in early 2022? *Facilitators to provide some time-based prompts to gauge memory*
 - a. Prompt for facilitators:
 - i. Increase/decrease in Crowdedness - ***please mark on the map the routes you think are more crowded after the implementation of the program***
 - ii. Types of riders who are using the bus the most (seniors, service workers, students, etc.) - ***please mark on the map the routes/ areas where you notice a high demand for your services by seniors or people with disabilities***
 - iii. Friction between/ with riders
 - iv. Road accidents - ***Please mark on the map areas that you think are more accident prone***
2. Reflecting on your responses above, how would you say your interactions with riders have changed after the implementation of the program?
 - a. What are some challenges in your interaction with riders and what are some ways in which interactions have improved since the program implementation?
3. How have your interactions with non-destination riders changed since the implementation of the program? (By non-destination drivers, we refer to typically unhoused individuals who often use public transit as temporary shelter.)

Part 2: Operations (20 mins)

In this section, we want to understand the day-to-day operations of the Merrimack's Valley Bus Transit System and understand how the implementation of the fare-free bus program impacted management and operations.

1. Tell us about how the implementation of the program has changed the operating procedures for you during a trip? Eg: Changes to how people board the bus, changes to stops and frequency of stops etc.
2. How do you think the reliability, frequency and predictability of service has changed since the implementation of the program?

3. What factors usually cause delays or changes in the frequency of buses? How much do these factors impact service after the implementation of the program?

Part 3: Benefits & Use Cases (15 mins)

In this section, we want to understand the various benefits that drivers have experienced since the implementation of the fare-free bus program and better grasp how bus uses have changed since then. The focus in this interview will be to gather driver's observations about felt benefits and payoffs for people using the fare free program however it will be explored and articulated in more detail during the rider focus groups.

1. What are some changes you have noticed about how people ride the bus?
 - a. Prompt for facilitators:
 - i. Longer and/or shorter rides
 - ii. New popular stops
 - iii. Types of riders they are seeing more of
 - iv. Changes in increase/decrease travel times for riders
2. Tell us about a time when you thought your service and the implementation of the fare free program were really able to make an impact in people's lives?
3. How has the implementation of the program changed your day to day satisfaction with your job?

Part 4: Rider Safety (15 mins)

In this section, we want to highlight conditions created by fare-free that improve driver well-being at their job.

1. How has traffic movement changed since the implementation of the fare-free program?
 - a. Prompt for facilitator:
 - i. Less traffic, more safety? Mode shift because of the program?
2. What were some of the things you learned during training to ensure rider safety?
 - a. How (if at all) has the implementation of the fare free program helped you in practicing this learning?

Part 5: Overall Impact (10 mins)

In this section we are going to gather any final thoughts or insight before we conclude the session.

1. If you could choose between working on two similar routes in which one is fare-free and one is not, which would you choose? Why?
2. Is there anything else you'd like to say that we haven't talked about yet?

**MEVA Fare Free Bus Program
Rider Focus Group Guide
Rivera Consulting | June 2024**

Research Purpose:

This research seeks to evaluate the impact of Merrimack Valley Transit (MeVa)'s fare-free bus program on the region's **environmental, economic, operational, and quality-of-life goals**. Per the project's [Request for Proposal](#), the primary goals of this evaluation are to 1) inform the future service provided by the fare-free program and 2) justify potential future operational funding support requests. The rider focus groups will unpack rider experience, understand trip purpose, comfort, and ease of use. At the same time, the conversations will give insight on aspects of rider safety, connectivity to essential and non-essential services, and economic benefits from free public transport. Additionally, this research will be key in highlighting narratives and user stories that will continue to shape the program design and service delivery going forward.

Research Question:

The central question this research seeks to answer is "How effectively did the fare-free bus program enhance the region's environmental, economic, operational, and quality-of-life goals for its riders and the overall transportation system?"

Research Approach:

A focus group is a semi-structured conversation in which a group of participants express views about a topic. Focus groups are facilitated by one or more moderators/facilitators, but a key element of their value is that participants have the opportunity to guide the conversation. Facilitating participant-driven conversations makes focus groups a vital tool for understanding emerging themes in participant responses.

Rather than seeking to extract specific pieces of information from each participant, generative focus groups seek to prompt open discussions between participants that yield insights into our core metrics. Each proposed prompt aligns with one or more of the evaluation topics outlined in this framework. It is important to note that these prompts are **not a script** for focus groups. Rather, they are intended to kick-start a conversation between participants and to let that conversation evolve organically.

Focus Groups With Riders

Recruitment Approach:

There will be three rider focus groups of 60 minutes each. Two of three sessions will focus on the city hubs of Lawrence and Haverhill while one will be a miscellaneous with people across cities and towns. The universe of participants will be developed based on the quantitative survey responses collected as part of this project. As part of that survey dissemination, points of contact have been collected amongst survey participants for further focus group participation.

The goal with each focus group will be to have a diverse mix of participants across gender and age spectrum, as well as priority resident groups such as seniors and people with disabilities. Preference will be given to an in-person focus group with the intent of maximizing interaction. However, schedule constraints amongst participants will likely mean that focus group execution will be conducted virtually.

Recording and Privacy:

Rivera Consulting facilitators will ask participants for consent at the start of the session to record the discussion. All responses will remain anonymous, and the recording will be solely for qualitative research analysis and documentation by the Rivera Consulting team. If we plan to use specific quotes in reports or other public-facing materials, we will seek specific consent from the quoted participant.

Focus Group Introduction Script:

Thank you all for being here today. We're going to be talking for about 60 minutes today about your experiences with the free public bus service you now have access to. We're going to ask a few questions about what you think about the bus and what your experience riding it has been like. We want this conversation to be as open as possible, so feel free to say whatever the question brings to mind for you, even if it's not directly in response, and feel free to respond to what other people are saying, whether you agree or disagree.

Focus Group Questions for Riders

Part 1: Ridership Experience and Interaction (15 mins)

We want to start by unpacking some of your experiences while using the free bus service. What is the experience of getting in and out of the bus, what are the kind of interactions you have when riding the bus and more.

1. When and how did you learn that the bus service is free?
2. If you were to score your experience of riding the bus out of 10, how would you rate it and why?
3. What are your interactions with drivers and other riders in the bus now that the service is free? How is it different from when you paid for the bus? (More pleasant/ less pleasant)
 - We have heard in other focus groups that there are fewer conflicts on bus rides, what would you say to that? Is there a change in how you experience this during your rides now that the bus is free?

Part 2: Operations (10 mins)

In this section, we want to understand your view on how the bus actually runs. Think about topics such as speed, reliability, boarding, the frequency of stops, etc.

1. What is the route you use most often? If you were to score the route based on reliability what score would you give it on a scale of 1 to 10 and why?
2. At what time of the day would you usually use the bus and how crowded does it get?
 - a. What are some locations that you think are very popular, - A lot of people get on and off the bus?... why?
 - b. How easy or difficult is it to board the bus? Has this experience changed since the implementation of the fare-free program?

Part 3: Benefits and Use Cases (15 mins)

We want to learn about the benefits you associate with having free public transport infrastructure. We specifically want to hear about why you use the bus, how your purpose for using the bus has changed since it became free, your experience while riding the bus, and more.

1. What would you say are some changes in your everyday routine since you started since the bus became free?

Prompts for facilitators:

 - a. Reducing dependence on driving
 - b. Reduce taxi/ uber rides
 - c. Being driven by family or friend
 - d. Less walking
 - e. Meeting/ talking to people on the bus
 - f. Taking new trips/ making existing trip more easy
2. What are some reasons why you use the bus? Are there places that you visit more often now that the bus is free?
 - a. Office/ Work/ School (**facilitator to focus more on this option**)

- b. Accessing healthcare and other essential services
 - c. Visiting community hubs- eg. libraries, community centers, senior centers etc.
- 3. In what ways (if any) has the free bus service helped you save money?... And what have you used that money for instead?

After initial answers, prompts for facilitators:

- a. Groceries
 - b. Leisure activities
 - c. Education/ Skill development opportunities
- 4. Five years from now, how would you like to see the free bus service evolve?
 - a. More routes to new locations
 - b. Tech-based solutions such as arrival boards/ timing monitors
 - c. Bus stop locations and designs

Part 4: Congestion and Safety (10 mins)

Next we would love to hear from you about your views on safety on the bus as well as road safety and how it impacts your experience.

- 1. What do you think MeVa can do to make you feel safer during the rides? ***Feel free to send us a response as a DM if you are not comfortable speaking in the group***
- 2. On your usual route are there specific parts of your journey where you experience delay because of traffic and congestion on the road? Where do you see this?

Part 5: Overall Impact (10mins)

As we wrap up, we want to give you a minute for any final questions or thoughts you have about our discussion today.

- 1. Apart from the bus being free, what are some other reasons for you to keep using the bus?
- 2. If a new reduced fare option replaces the free bus program, based on income or other factors, what would be your opinion on that?
- 3. Fill in the blank: Public transportation should/ should not be free because _____
- 4. Is there anything else you'd like to say that we haven't talked about yet? sounds good

Facilitation Approach:

- After reading the introductory script, pose the first question and then let the conversation flow freely and organically until it loses momentum, or until people start making the same points

repeatedly. Then introduce follow-ups as appropriate to guide the conversation, or move on to the next question set.

- After the first few question sets, use active listening tools to encourage quieter participants to contribute to the conversation (e.g. “what do you think about that, ____” or “How does that relate to the experience that you shared of ____?”)
- Remember that not every focus group needs to touch on every prompt—the prompts are there to start an open conversation about the focus topic

Analysis Approach:

- After each focus group, final transcripts will be produced by Rivera’s AI transcription service, developing an index of respondents and properly attributing each response
- Rivera Consulting will analyze responses in Dedoose using two rounds of qualitative coding. In the first round, RC will conduct a descriptive code noting each topic and theme discussed in the focus group. In the second round after all focus groups are complete, RC will conduct a second round of analytic coding to categorize topics and themes into assets, barriers, and recommendations for the fare-free bus program in each of the four core evaluation areas
- Rivera Consulting will develop a memo detailing assets, barriers, and recommendations for each of these four core evaluation areas based on this analysis

MEVA Fare Free Bus Program

1:1 Interview Guide

Rivera Consulting | Aug 2024

Research Purpose:

This research seeks to evaluate the impact of Merrimack Valley Transit (MeVa)’s fare-free bus program on the region’s environmental, economic, operational, and quality-of-life goals. Per the project’s Request for Proposal, the primary goals of this evaluation are to 1) inform the future service provided by the fare-free program and 2) justify potential future operational funding support requests. The rider interviews will unpack rider experience, understand trip purpose, comfort, and ease of use. At the same time, the conversations will give insight into aspects of rider safety, connectivity to essential and non-essential services, and economic benefits from free public transport. Additionally, this research will be key in highlighting narratives and user stories that will continue to shape the program design and service delivery going forward.

Research Question:

The central question this research seeks to answer is “How effectively did the fare-free bus program enhance the region’s environmental, economic, operational, and quality-of-life goals for its riders and the overall transportation system?”

Research Approach:

An interview is a semi-structured conversation in which an interviewer engages a participant to express their views about a topic. Interviews are facilitated by one or more interviewers, but a key element of their value is that participants have the opportunity to share their perspectives in depth. Facilitating participant-driven responses makes interviews a vital tool for understanding emerging themes in participant feedback.

Rather than seeking to extract specific pieces of information from each participant, generative interviews seek to prompt open discussions that yield insights into our core metrics. Each proposed question aligns with one or more of the evaluation topics outlined in this framework. It is important to note that these questions are not a strict script for interviews. Rather, they are intended to initiate a conversation with the participant and to allow that conversation to evolve organically.

Interviews With Riders**Recruitment Approach:**

We aim to conduct a total of five interviews, each 30 minutes long. Participants will be from all the cities and towns that receive services from MeVa. The universe of participants will be developed based on the quantitative survey responses collected as part of this project. As part of that survey dissemination, points of contact have been collected among survey participants for further interview participation.

The goal with each interview will be to have a diverse mix of participants across gender and age spectrum, as well as priority resident groups such as seniors and people with disabilities. Preference will be given to in-person interviews with the intent of maximizing interaction. However, schedule constraints among participants will likely mean that the interviews will be conducted by phone. The conversations will be with Spanish-speaking residents to understand their experiences.

Recording and Privacy:

Rivera Consulting facilitators will ask participants for consent at the start of the session to record the discussion. All responses will remain anonymous, and the recording will be solely for qualitative

research analysis and documentation by the Rivera Consulting team. If we plan to use specific quotes in reports or other public-facing materials, we will seek specific consent from the quoted participant.

Interview Introduction Script:

"Thank you for being here today. We're going to be talking for about 30 minutes about your experiences with the free public bus service you now have access to. We're going to ask a few questions about what you think about the bus and what your experience riding it has been like. We want this conversation to be as open as possible, so feel free to say whatever the question brings to mind for you, even if it's not directly in response.

Please note that all interviews will be confidential, and you are not required to answer any questions you don't feel comfortable answering. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you can choose to skip any question or stop the interview at any time."

Interview Questions for Riders

Part 1: Operations (10 mins)

In this section, we want to understand your view on how the bus actually runs. Think about topics such as speed, reliability, boarding, the frequency of stops, etc.

1. What are the routes you use most often?
Paratransit: When do you usually opt in for a Mini Meva service and for what?
Paratransit: How long is your ride usually?
2. What are some of the barriers that you encounter when you ride these routes/ Mini Meva?
 - a. Prompt for not adequate signage
 - b. **Paratransit:** Onboarding onto a mini Meva
 - c. **Paratransit:** Booking a mini Meva
 - d. Information not being provided in Spanish, etc.
3. Paratransit: Has there been any change in the availability of the service since
4. What are the most pressing needs you experience when riding the bus/ Mini Meva?
 - a. Formal bus stops
 - b. Information being provided in Spanish
5. Now that the fare does not exist, has it changed your experience with public transportation and in what ways?

Part 2: Benefits and Use Cases (15 mins)

We want to learn about the benefits you associate with having free public transport infrastructure. We specifically want to hear about why you use the bus, how your purpose for using the bus has changed since it became free, your experience while riding the bus, and more.

1. What are some reasons why you use the bus? Are there places that you visit more often now that the bus is free?
 - a. Office/ Work/ School (**facilitator to focus more on this option**)
 - b. Accessing healthcare and other essential services
 - c. Visiting community hubs- eg. libraries, community centers, senior centers etc.
2. In what ways (if any) has the free bus service helped you save money?.. And what have you used that money for instead?

After initial answers, prompts for facilitators:

- a. Groceries
 - b. Leisure activities
 - c. Education/ Skill development opportunities
3. **Paratransit:** If it wasn't for Mini Meva what kind of transportation would you have chosen/ would have helped you?
4. Five years from now, how would you like to see the free bus service evolve?
 - a. More routes to new locations
 - b. Tech-based solutions such as arrival boards/ timing monitors
 - c. Bus stop locations and designs

Part 3: Overall Impact (10mins)

As we wrap up, we want to give you a minute for any final questions or thoughts you have about our discussion today.

1. If a reduced fare program replaces the current free bus program, based on income or other factors, what would your opinion on that be?
2. How would you feel if you had to pay for the service you are getting currently?

Facilitation Approach:

- After reading the introductory script, pose the first question and then let the conversation flow freely and organically until it loses momentum, or until people start making the same points repeatedly. Then introduce follow-ups as appropriate to guide the conversation, or move on to the next question set.
- Remember that not every interview needs to touch on every prompt—the prompts are there to start an open conversation about the focus topic

Analysis Approach:

- After each interview, final transcripts will be produced by Rivera's AI transcription service, developing an index of respondents and properly attributing each response

- Rivera Consulting will analyze responses in Dedoose using two rounds of qualitative coding. In the first round, RC will conduct a descriptive code noting each topic and theme discussed in the interview. In the second round after all interviews are complete, RC will conduct a second round of analytic coding to categorize topics and themes into assets, barriers, and recommendations for the fare-free bus program in each of the four core evaluation areas.
- Rivera Consulting will develop a memo detailing assets, barriers, and recommendations for each of these four core evaluation areas based on this analysis.

MeVa Fare-Free Bus Evaluation Focus Group Guide

Service Providers in Merrimack Valley

Rivera Consulting | Aug 2024

Research Purpose:

This research seeks to evaluate the impact of the Merrimack Valley’s fare-free bus program on the region’s **environmental, economic, operational, and quality-of-life goals**. The primary goals of this evaluation are to 1) inform the future service provided by the fare-free program and 2) justify potential future operational funding support requests. The core metrics that drive focus group facilitation include an assessment of driver satisfaction, rider experience, mode shift, and accessibility to the provision of key community services. Additionally, this research will be key in highlighting narratives and user stories that will continue to shape the program design and service delivery going forward.

Research Question:

The central question this research seeks to answer is “How effectively did the fare-free bus program enhance the region’s environmental, economic, operational, and quality-of-life goals for its residents and the overall transportation system?”

Research Approach:

This research is part of a mixed-methods approach led by Stantec and Rivera Consulting, which seeks to offer both quantitative and qualitative insights into the role of the fare-free program in making public transportation accessible and advancing quality of life goals. This research framework discusses the role of qualitative focus groups with Service Providers in this broader research plan.

A focus group is a semi-structured conversation in which a group of participants express views about a topic. Focus groups are facilitated by one or more moderators/facilitators, but a key element of their value is that participants have the opportunity to guide the conversation. Facilitating

participant-driven conversations makes focus groups a vital tool for understanding emerging themes in participant responses.

Rather than seeking to extract specific pieces of information from each participant, evaluative focus groups seek to prompt open discussions between participants that yield insights into our core metrics. Each proposed prompt aligns with one or more of the evaluation topics outlined in this framework. It is important to note that these prompts are ***not a script*** for focus groups. Rather, they are intended to kick-start a conversation between participants and to let that conversation evolve organically.

Given that this is a focus group with service providers in the Merrimack Valley from municipal organizations, employers, healthcare providers, and social infrastructure providers it is intended to build an ecosystem view of how improving access to public transportation impacts provision of other public services and access to jobs.

Participants:

- Janel D'Agata-Lynch, Anna Jaques Hospital
- Elecia Miller, Lawrence Mayor's Health Taskforce
- Elaine Davey, Lawrence Public Schools
- Christina Penna, AgeSpan
- Giselle Peguero, Northern Essex Community College
- Allison Heartquist, Haverhill Public Private Partnership
- Vilma Martinez Dominguez, Greater Lawrence Community Action Council
- Doreen Arnfield, City of Amesbury Council on Aging

Focus Group Introduction Script:

Thank you all for being here today. We're going to be talking for the next 75 mins about the fare-free bus service in Merrimack Valley. We want to understand how you think free public transport has impacted the community at large? How has it impacted your programming and service provision? What are economic, educational, social or health impacts on residents and who may still be left out and why? We would also love to hear your point of view on how it has impacted local businesses and communities? Finally we are interested in your perspectives on the impact of cost savings on your constituencies.

We want this conversation to be as open as possible, so feel free to say whatever the question brings to mind for you, even if it's not directly in response, and feel free to respond to what other people are saying, whether you agree or disagree.

Focus Group Prompts:

Intro

- Please introduce yourself and share a bit about your organization or role in the community

Part 1: Ridership Experience & Interaction (20 mins)

- Are any of you users of the MeVa public buses or services and how would you describe your overall experience?
- Who do you think utilizes the free public bus service and benefits from it the most?
 - Who are the people the service is yet to reach?
- Do you think making the buses free, makes other services such as Healthcare or Education services more accessible to people? How so?
- We have heard a range of answers when it comes to the benefits of the free fare bus programs....
 - What do you think are some of the benefits for your constituent groups?
- **Important question:** Have you heard anecdotes or stories from residents you interact with about their usage of the fare free routes to visit local businesses or access services?

Part 2: Benefits & Use Cases (20 mins)

- Based on your interactions with businesses/ other service providers in different towns and cities, how is increased ridership benefiting them?
- Have you noticed a change in the number of people driving? Say through the number of cars in your facility's parking lot at a given time or total number of persons accessing your service(s).
- How do you think the development of new businesses/ innovation hubs, housing, medical facilities is going to impact ridership in the coming years, what should MeVa consider on a programmatic level moving forward?
- Are there specific locations or areas that you think are particularly benefiting from increased ridership? Why?
 - **Important question:** Has the increase in ridership changed the way you are providing services or implementing your programs?
- Do your customers/patrons/target audience feel that the program is saving them money? Why do you think so?

- From the money saved on transportation, how do you think people are spending on services?

Part 3: Operations (15 mins)

- Have you heard anything from your constituents or community partners about changes to bus reliability since the buses became fare-free?
- From your interactions with people with disabilities, what might be some hesitations of using public transportation that they still experience?
- Have you had to educate people or spread awareness about the free bus service? And how have you done that?
- Apart from the service being free, what might be some of the other reasons why people prefer taking the public transport?
- Based on your observations, have you noticed a change in parking availability in neighborhoods?
 - Wait times at restaurants?
 - Crowd at shopping complexes?
 - Use of public libraries?

Part 4: Rider Safety (10 mins) -

- ***From the research thus far we have heard that there is an increase in non-destination riders since the buses have become free?*** What are some other types of collaborative interventions that need to be considered to enhance rider safety?
- What are measures or training requirements that need to be added to ensure safety of paratransit riders?

Part 5: Overall impact (15 mins)

- In summary, how would you say the fare free program is making a difference for your constituents? - should I ask this question? - no
- Is there anything that you wish MeVa and other authorities knew about the fare-free buses and the role that it plays in people's lives?
-
- Is there anything else you'd like to say that we haven't talked about yet? -go for it

Facilitation Approach:

- After reading the introductory script, pose the first question and then let the conversation flow freely and organically until it loses momentum, or until people start making the same points repeatedly. Then introduce follow-ups as appropriate to guide the conversation, or move on to the next question set.
- After the first few question sets, use active listening tools to encourage quieter participants to contribute to the conversation (e.g. “what do you think about that, ____” or “How does that relate to the experience that you shared of ____?”)
- Remember that not every focus group needs to touch on every prompt—the prompts are there to start an open conversation about the focus topic

Analysis Approach:

1. After each focus group, Rivera Consulting will transcribe the recording, responses will be analyzed based on contingency group in order to keep responses anonymous
2. Rivera Consulting will analyze responses in Dedoose using two rounds of qualitative coding. In the first round, RC will conduct a descriptive code noting each topic and theme discussed in the focus group. In the second round after all focus groups are complete, RC will conduct a second round of analytic coding to categorize topics and themes into assets, barriers, and recommendations for the fare-free bus program in each of the four core evaluation areas
3. Rivera Consulting will develop a memo detailing assets, barriers, and recommendations for each of these four core evaluation areas based on this analysis