



July-August 2023

Sumner Tunnel Closure

Status Report Week 4

By Caitlin Allen-Connelly¹

(July 24-28, 2023)

On July 5, 2023, at 12:01 AM the [Sumner Tunnel Restoration](#) full summer closure began; the tunnel will remain closed until August 31, 2023. In efforts to minimize the congestion surrounding the Sumner Tunnel, the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT), in collaboration with the MBTA (Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority), is encouraging residents and visitors to [#DitchTheDrive](#) and choose public transportation during the closure. Detailed information on Sumner Tunnel mitigation can be found [here](#).

This update provides a status report covering the fourth work week (Week 4) of the closure (July 24-28, 2023) summarized from data and trends provided by MassDOT and the MBTA. Preliminary data from MassDOT and the MBTA continue to suggest that the alternative transportation options promoted under the #DitchTheDrive campaign are inducing demand for public transit; however, there is some anecdotal evidence to suggest some movement back to driving for some trips. This emphasizes the need for a robust and ongoing public media campaign. Some high-level observations are summarized below:

- MassDOT data show that the highest traffic delays are on Tuesdays with busier afternoon traffic leaving Logan Airport on Thursdays and daily over capacity on the Ted Williams Tunnel starting as early as 4:00am and continuing throughout the day and evening. Traffic delays and travel times along the routes being monitored are roughly the same as last week: morning traffic delays along RT-1A SB (Bell Circle and Ted Williams West Portal) and US-1 SB (Copeland Circle and I-93) resulting in travel times increasing by 2-30 minutes, and afternoon delays resulting in travel times increasing by 2-15 minutes.
- For the Blue Line, MassDOT and the MBTA changed the average baseline ridership number (period from June 1 to July 4, 2023) from 37,068 used for Week 3 to 57,354 for

¹ Caitlin Allen-Connelly is Senior Advisor on Transportation

Week 4.² The change in count methodology results in an overall decrease in Blue Line ridership from -2% to -8% except for Wednesday (7/26/2023) where ridership increased compared to the new baseline by 3 percent. Using the new baseline data Blue Line ridership in Week 4 increased 78% compared to the same week in July 2022.

- Orange Line ridership trends during Week 4 of the Sumner Tunnel closure show an increase of 4% in average ridership compared to June 2023 and 37% lower ridership than in 2022.
- Commuter Rail ridership for the Newburyport/Rockport line shows an increase of 20% compared to average weekday ridership in June 2023, and a 51% increase compared to the same week in July 2022. On Friday (7/28/23), ridership was up 23% from average weekly ridership in June 2023.
- When averaged together, free and reduced parking show an 83% increase in usage from June 2023, with free parking showing an average increase of 134% and reduced parking increasing by 32%.
- Ferry use increased by about 103% compared to June 2023.

MBTA Ridership Week 4 (July 24-28,2023) versus Pre-closure (June 2023)			
Line	June 2023 Average (daily)	Week 4 Average (daily)	% Change from June
Blue Line	57,354	55,703	-3%
Orange Line	45,146	46,809	4%
Newburyport/Rockport Commuter Rail	9,837	11,804	20%
Ferry Service	682	1,384	103%
Silver Line	11,071	8,150	-26%
Chelsea Buses	19,803	17,360	-12%
Free Parking	287	673	134%
Reduced Parking	1,246	1,644	32%

Source: MassDOT Daily Sumner Tunnel Updates with summarized week average daily ridership versus pre-closure ridership

Sumner Tunnel Restoration Progress

According to MassDOT's daily Sumner Tunnel updates, at the end of Week 4 (as of July 28, 2023), 44.3% of the programmed work was complete with 31 days remaining until the re-opening. The focus of Week 4's work was to prepare the arched ceiling of the tunnel. To date, 37% of the progress on installing steel arch supports and 37% of the progress installing the precast arch segments has been completed. No significant issues were flagged by stakeholders or first responders during the daily 10 AM check-ins.

² The change in baseline ridership numbers is an attempt to provide an apples-to-apples comparison between pre-closure and closure ridership counts. During the closure, ridership counts are based on automated passenger count (APC) technology, which counts all riders who go through the open fare gates. When the fare gates are closed, ridership counts are calculated based on CharlieCard fare taps, which may not capture all riders, i.e., riders who use the system for free based on age or other.

Traffic Trends

The Sumner Tunnel closure impacts traffic along three primary routes carrying freight and passenger vehicles: 1) RT-1A SB (Bell Circle and Ted Williams West Portal); 2) US-1 SB (Copeland Circle and I-93); and 3) RT-99 SB (Sweetser Circle and Gilmore Bridge). MassDOT is monitoring traffic along these routes throughout the day and reports on impacts during the morning and afternoon peaks.

MassDOT data for Week 4 show that the highest traffic delays are on Tuesdays with busier afternoon traffic leaving Logan Airport on Thursdays and daily over capacity on the Ted Williams Tunnel starting as early as 4:00am and continuing throughout the day and evening. Traffic delays and travel times along the routes being monitored are roughly the same as last week: morning traffic delays along RT-1A SB (Bell Circle and Ted Williams West Portal) and US-1 SB (Copeland Circle and I-93) resulting in travel times increasing by 2-30 minutes, and afternoon delays resulting in travel times increasing by 2-15 minutes.

Transit Ridership Trends

The MBTA and MassDOT are monitoring ridership trends across modes that are part of the Sumner Tunnel closure mitigation plan: Blue Line, Orange Line, Newburyport/Rockport Commuter Rail, Ferry Service, Silver Line, Chelsea Buses. They are also tracking data on parking at lots that offer reduced or free rates during the Sumner Tunnel closure. In Week 4, the MBTA changed the baseline ridership number for the Blue Line. The following has been summarized from data and trends provided by MassDOT and the MBTA.

a. Blue Line

The MBTA is offering free fares on the Blue Line to induce demand and promote mode shift. During Week 4 of the Sumner Tunnel closure, the MBTA changed the post-closure baseline ridership number for the Blue Line, increasing the metric by more than 20,000 riders. As a result, in Week 4, average ridership on the Blue Line decreased by 4% compared to pre-closure ridership. This does not seem to reflect the real situation on the ground, and A Better City will continue to monitor data for any further adjustments.

b. Orange Line

The Orange Line intersects with the Blue Line at State Street; therefore, ridership trends are now included in the MassDOT and MBTA daily. During Week 4 of the Sumner Tunnel closure, the MBTA changed the post-closure baseline ridership number for the Orange Line, increasing the metric by more than 11,000 riders. As a result, for Week 4, average

weekday ridership on the Orange Line was 46,809, which is on average 4% higher than pre-closure ridership. A Better City will continue to monitor ridership trends.

c. Newburyport/Rockport Commuter Rail

The MBTA decreased the fare along the entire Newburyport/Rockport Commuter Rail Line from (up to) Zone 8 fare (\$12.25) to the Zone 1A fare (\$2.40) each way. During Week 4 of the Sumner Tunnel closure, average weekday ridership was 11,804, which is on average 20% higher than pre-closure ridership (in June). Ridership remained relatively constant throughout the week, with the highest increase on Friday, July 28, 2023, with 23% more riders than the average day in June 2023. This increase may be associated with the decreased fare and #DitchTheDrive campaign.

d. Ferry Service

The MBTA has made the East Boston Ferry free, has decreased the rate of the Winthrop Ferry to Zone 1A (\$2.40) and has added a new ferry, the Lynn Ferry, with a Zone 1A fare (\$2.40) for the closure. During Week 4 of the Sumner Tunnel closure, average weekday ferry ridership was 1,384, which is on average 103% higher than pre-closure ridership (in June). The data suggests that free and reduced fares on the ferries and the #DitchTheDrive campaign are continuing to induce demand, resulting in mode shift.

e. Silver Line

The MBTA is offering increased service on the SL1 and some free fares on the SL3. During Week 4 of the Sumner Tunnel closure, average weekday ridership of the SL1 and SL3 lines of the Silver Line was 8,150, which is on average 26% lower than pre-closure numbers (in June). There are indications that ridership on the SL1 is increasing significantly from what it was pre-closure in June 2023, which suggests that people traveling from the airport, in particular, may be shifting their mode and opting to #DitchTheDrive.

f. Chelsea Buses

The MBTA made the 111, 112, 114, 116, 117 bus routes free. During Week 4 of the Sumner Tunnel closure, average weekday ridership was 17,360, which 12% lower than pre-closure numbers. Ridership was lowest on Tuesday (7/25/23), with 15,612 riders, a 251 decrease from pre-closure ridership. This decrease in ridership may be the result of reduced service on these routes as part of the MBTA summer schedule change (effective 7/2/2023).

g. Free Parking

The MBTA made the Gloucester, West Gloucester, Beverly Depot, Hamilton/Wenham, Monserrat, Newburyport, North Beverly, Rowley parking lots free. Week 4 parking

usage increased on average 134% compared to weekday averages in June 2023, with the highest increase of 195% on Tuesday and Wednesday, July 25-26, 2023. These changes demonstrate the drivers continue to be willing to #DitchTheDrive and mode shift to public transportation for part of, or their entire journey. [Note: Data collection for free parking may continue to vary as the MBTA standardizes data collection for free parking.]

h. Reduced Parking

The MBTA reduced parking rates to \$2 a day at the following station parking lots along the Blue Line and the Newbury/Rockport Commuter Rail line: Beachmont, Suffolk Downs, Orient Heights, Wonderland, Salem, and Swampscott. The average weekday increase during Week 4 was 32% compared to June 2023. This change again shows that drivers continue to be willing to #DitchTheDrive and mode shift to public transportation for part of, or their entire journey.