

July-August 2023

Sumner Tunnel Closure

Status Report Week 5

By Caitlin Allen-Connelly¹

(July 31 – August 4, 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 fifth work week (Week 5) of the closure (July 31 – August 4, 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 continues to be 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 an 8% decrease in traffic from June 2023; however, major congestion is still persistent during both the morning and evening commutes. Major congestion along RT-1A SB (Bell Circle and Ted Williams West Portal) made up an average of 76% of the morning AM peak congestion during Week 5, and an average of 73% of the time along US-1 SB (Copeland Circle and I-93). Major congestion was moderately lower on Monday, 7/31/2023 reported at 70% along each route, and significantly lower on Friday, 8/4/2023, accounting for 55% and 40% respectively of the AM peak congestion.
- 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 going forward.² Using the new baseline data, Blue Line ridership in Week 5 increased by

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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,

4% as compared to pre-closure ridership. [Note: Data reporting for Week 5 included extremely low ridership on Wednesday, 8/2/2023, which could be an error, and therefore was not included in this analysis].

- Orange Line ridership trends during Week 5 of the Sumner Tunnel closure show a decrease of 2% in average ridership compared to June. [Note: Data reporting for Week 5 included extremely low ridership on Wednesday, 8/2/2023, which could be an error and therefore was not included in this analysis].
- Commuter Rail ridership for the Newburyport/Rockport line shows an increase of 21% compared to average weekday ridership in June 2023. On Friday (8/04/23), ridership was up 28% from average weekly ridership in June 2023.
- When averaged together, free and reduced parking show an 97% increase in usage from June 2023, with free parking showing an average increase of 158% and reduced parking increasing by 36%.
- Ferry use increased by about 105% compared to June 2023.

MBTA Ridership Week 5 (July 31 – August 4, 2023) versus Pre-closure (June 2023)			
Line	June 2023 Average (daily)	Week 5 Average (daily)	% Change from June 2023
Blue Line	57,354	60,097	4%
Orange Line	45,146	44,062	-2%
Newburyport/Rockport Commuter Rail	9,837	11,930	21%
Ferry Service	682	1,399	105%
Silver Line	11,071	7,956	-28%
Chelsea Buses	19,803	18,084	-9%
Free Parking	287	741	158%
Reduced Parking	1,246	1,696	36%

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 5 (as of August 7, 2023), 59.3% of the programmed work was complete with 24 days remaining until the re-opening. The focus of Week 5’s work was to install steel arch supports and install precast arch segments. Thus far 67% of work is complete to install the steel arch supports and 67% of work is complete to install the precast arch segments. No significant issues were flagged by stakeholders or first responders during the daily 10 AM check-ins.

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 show an 8% decrease in traffic from June 2023 with lower traffic counts on Thursday (8/3/2023) and Friday (8/4/2023); however, major congestion persists during both the morning and evening commutes. During Week 5, major congestion along RT-1A SB (Bell Circle and Ted Williams West Portal) made up an average of 76% of the morning AM peak congestion during Week 5, and an average of 73% of the time along US-1 SB (Copeland Circle and I-93). Major congestion was moderately lower on Monday, 7/31/2023, reported at 70% along each route, and significantly lower on Friday, 8/4/2023, accounting for 55% and 40% respectively of the AM peak congestion. The Table below shows the % change in traffic counts during Week 5 as compared to June 2023.

Date	June 2023 Average	# of Riders (Daily)	% Change June 2023
7/31/2023	259,434	244,944	-6%
8/1/2023	259,434	244,944	-6%
8/2/2023	259,434	244,944	-6%
8/3/2023	259,434	232,115	-11%
8/4/2023	259,434	223,497	-14%
Week Average	259,434	238,089	-8%

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

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. The following summarizes 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 5 Blue Line ridership increased by 4% compared to pre-closure ridership. [Note: Data reporting for Week 5 included extremely low ridership on Wednesday, 8/2/2023, which could be an error, and therefore was not included in this analysis].

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 5, average weekday ridership on the Orange Line decreased by 2% compared to pre-closure counts. [Note: Data reporting for Week 5 included extremely low ridership on Wednesday, 8/2/2023, which could be an error, and therefore was not included in this analysis.]

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 5 of the Sumner Tunnel closure, average weekday ridership was 11,930, which is on average 21% higher than pre-closure ridership (in June). Ridership remained relatively constant throughout the week, with the highest increase on Friday, July 28, 2023, with 28% 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 5 of the Sumner Tunnel closure, average weekday ferry ridership was 1,399, which is on average 105% 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 5 of the Sumner Tunnel closure, average weekday ridership of the SL1 and SL3 lines of the Silver Line was 7,956, which is on average 28% lower than pre-closure numbers (in June). There continue to be indications that ridership on the SL1 is increasing from what it was pre-closure in June 2023, which suggests that people traveling from the airport 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 5 of the Sumner Tunnel closure, average weekday ridership was 18,084, which 9% lower than pre-closure numbers. Ridership was highest on Friday (8/4/23), with 20,824 riders, a 5% increase from pre-closure ridership.

g. Free Parking

The MBTA made the Gloucester, West Gloucester, Beverly Depot, Hamilton/Wenham, Monserrat, Newburyport, North Beverly, Rowley parking lots free. Week 5 parking usage increased on average 158% compared to weekday averages in June 2023, with the highest increase of 197% on Wednesday, 8/2/2023. These changes demonstrate the drivers continue to be willing to #DitchTheDrive and mode shift to public transportation for part of, or their entire journey.

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 5 was 36% 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.