

July-August 2023

Sumner Tunnel Closure

Status Report Week 6

By Caitlin Allen-Connelly¹

(August 7-11, 2023)

On July 5, 2023, at 12:01 AM the [Sumner Tunnel Restoration](#) full summer closure began; the tunnel will reopen on September 1, 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 sixth work week (Week 6) of the closure (August 7-11, 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. Some high-level observations are summarized below:

- MassDOT data show an 11% decrease in traffic from June 2023; however, major congestion persists during both the morning and evening commutes. During Week 6, major congestion along RT-1A SB (Bell Circle and Ted Williams West Portal) made up an average of 78% of the morning AM peak congestion and an average of 72% of the time along US-1 SB (Copeland Circle and I-93) during the same period. Major congestion was moderately lower on Monday morning, 8/7/2023, at 70% along each route, and significantly lower, at 45%, on US-1 SB on Friday morning, 8/11/2023.
- Blue Line ridership in Week 6 increased by 12% as compared to pre-closure ridership with a 17% increase on Thursday, 8/10/2023.
- Orange Line ridership trends during Week 6 of the Sumner Tunnel closure show similar ridership compared to June except for Thursday (8/10/2023) and Friday (8/11/2023), which both saw a 7% increase in ridership.
- Commuter Rail ridership for the Newburyport/Rockport line continues to increase with 27% more riders during Week 6 compared to average weekday ridership in June 2023.

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Ridership was highest on Monday (8/7/2023) and Tuesday (8/8/2023) with a 28% increase in ridership.

- When averaged together, during Week 6, free and reduced parking show an 37% increase in usage from June 2023, with free parking showing an average increase of 49% and reduced parking increasing by 25%. These numbers are much lower than in previous weeks, which may be due to issues with parking count collection and reporting.
- Ferry use in Week 6 increased by about 64% compared to June 2023, which is substantially lower than the previous weeks, which may be due to ridership data collection and reporting.

MBTA Ridership Week 6 (August 7-11, 2023) versus Pre-closure (June 2023)			
Line	June 2023 Average (daily)	Week 6 Average (daily)	% Change from June 2023
Blue Line	57,354	65,171	12%
Orange Line	45,146	45,352	0%
Newburyport/Rockport Commuter Rail	9,837	12,449	27%
Ferry Service	682	1,118	64%
Silver Line	11,071	7,171	-35%
Chelsea Buses	19,803	18,103	-9%
Free Parking	287	426	49%
Reduced Parking	1,246	1,557	25%

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 6 (as of August 14, 2023), 72.3% of the programmed work was complete with 17 days remaining until the re-opening. During Week 6's work the team completed 100% installation of steel arch supports and precast arch segments. Installation of steep drop ceiling supports, and new drop ceiling are remaining. No significant issues were flagged by stakeholders or first responders during the daily 10 AM check-ins.

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 11% decrease in traffic from June 2023 with lower traffic counts on Wednesday (8/9/2023) and Thursday (8/10/2023); however, major congestion persists during both the morning and evening commutes. During Week 6, major congestion along RT-1A SB

(Bell Circle and Ted Williams West Portal) made up an average of 78% of the morning AM peak congestion and an average of 72% of the time along US-1 SB (Copeland Circle and I-93). Major congestion was moderately lower on Monday morning, 8/7/2023, at 70% along each route, and significantly lower on US-1 SB on Friday morning, 8/11/2023. The Table below shows the % change in traffic counts during Week 6 as compared to June 2023.

Date	June 2023 Average	# of Riders (Daily)	% Change June 2023
7/31/2023	259,434	236,749	-9%
8/1/2023	259,434	236,749	-9%
8/2/2023	259,434	227,737	-12%
8/3/2023	259,434	221,563	-15%
8/4/2023	259,434	233,617	-10%
Week 6 Average	259,434	231,283	-11%

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 6, Blue Line ridership increased by 12% compared to pre-closure ridership.

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 6, average weekday ridership on the Orange Line was equal to pre-closure counts. With higher ridership (7% increase) on Thursday (8/10/2023) and Friday (8/11/2023).

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 6 of the Sumner Tunnel closure, average weekday ridership was 12,449, which is on average 27% higher than pre-closure ridership (in June). Ridership remained relatively constant throughout the week, with the highest increase on Monday

(8/7/2023) and Tuesday (8/8/2023), with 28% more riders than the average day in June 2023.

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 6 of the Sumner Tunnel closure, average weekday ferry ridership was 1,118, which is on average 64% higher than pre-closure ridership (in June) and inexplicably significantly lower than other weeks, which could be due to ridership count collection and reporting.

e. Silver Line

The MBTA is offering increased service on the SL1 and some free fares on the SL3. During Week 6 of the Sumner Tunnel closure, average weekday ridership of the SL1 and SL3 lines of the Silver Line was 7,171, which is on average 35% lower than pre-closure numbers.

f. Chelsea Buses

The MBTA made the 111, 112, 114, 116, 117 bus routes free. During Week 6 of the Sumner Tunnel closure, average weekday ridership was 18,103, which 9% lower than pre-closure numbers.

g. Free Parking

The MBTA made the Gloucester, West Gloucester, Beverly Depot, Hamilton/Wenham, Monserrat, Newburyport, North Beverly, Rowley parking lots free. Week 6 parking usage increased on average 49% compared to weekday averages in June 2023, with significantly lower use on Thursday (8/10/2023) and Friday (8/11/2023) with a 56% and 72% decrease compared to June 2023. These numbers are much lower than in previous weeks, which may be due to issues with parking count collection and reporting.

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 6 was 36% compared to June 2023. These numbers are much lower than in previous weeks, which may be due to issues with parking count collection and reporting.