

July-August 2023

Sumner Tunnel Closure

Status Report Week 7

By Caitlin Allen-Connelly¹

(August 14-18, 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 seventh work week (Week 7) of the closure (August 14-18, 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 a 10% decrease in traffic from June 2023; however, major congestion persists during both the morning and evening commutes. During Week 7, major congestion along RT-1A SB (Bell Circle and Ted Williams West Portal) made up an average of 80% of the morning AM peak congestion and an average of 76% of the time along US-1 SB (Copeland Circle and I-93) during the same period.
- Blue Line ridership in Week 7 increased by 1% as compared to pre-closure ridership. This is 11% lower than last week, which may indicate ongoing difficulties with capturing and reporting ridership.
- Orange Line ridership trends during Week 7 of the Sumner Tunnel closure show a decrease of 7% in ridership compared to June, which is a decrease from last week and may indicate ongoing difficulties with capturing and reporting ridership.
- Commuter Rail ridership for the Newburyport/Rockport line continues to increase with 24% more riders during Week 7, which is slightly lower than last week.

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- When averaged together, during Week 7, free and reduced parking show an 78% increase in usage from June 2023, with free parking showing an average increase of 122% and reduced parking increasing by 33%.
- Ferry use in Week 7 increased by about 169% compared to June 2023.

MBTA Ridership Week 7 (August 14-18, 2023) versus Pre-closure (June 2023)			
Line	June 2023 Average (daily)	Week 6 Average (daily)	% Change from June 2023
Blue Line	57,354	57,736	1%
Orange Line	45,146	41,858	-7%
Newburyport/Rockport Commuter Rail	9,837	12,150	24%
Ferry Service	682	1,832	169%
Silver Line	11,071	8,773	-21%
Chelsea Buses	19,803	16,983	-14%
Free Parking	287	637	122%
Reduced Parking	1,246	1,661	33%

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 7 (as of August 21, 2023), 86.2% of the programmed work was complete with 17 days remaining until the re-opening. Installation of steep drop ceiling supports and new drop ceiling is 61% complete. 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 a 10% decrease in traffic from June 2023; however, major congestion persists during both the morning and evening commutes. During Week 7, major congestion along RT-1A SB (Bell Circle and Ted Williams West Portal) made up an average of 80% of the morning AM peak congestion and an average of 76% of the time along US-1 SB (Copeland Circle and I-93) during the same period. The table below shows the % change in traffic counts during Week 7 as compared to June 2023.

Date	June 2023 Average	# of Riders (Daily)	% Change June 2023
7/31/2023	259,434	245,172	-5%
8/1/2023	259,434	245,172	-5%

8/2/2023	259,434	231,005	-11%
8/3/2023	259,434	222,644	-14%
8/4/2023	259,434	229,017	-12%
Week 7 Average	259,434	234,602	-10%

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 7, Blue Line ridership increased by 1% as compared to pre-closure ridership. This is 11% lower than last week, which may indicate ongoing difficulties with capturing and reporting 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 7 of the Sumner Tunnel closure ridership decreased by 7% in ridership compared to June. This is a decrease from last week and may indicate ongoing difficulties with capturing and reporting ridership.

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 7 of the Sumner Tunnel closure, average weekday ridership was 12,449, which is on average 24% higher than pre-closure ridership (in June).

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 7 of the Sumner Tunnel closure, average weekday ferry ridership was 1,832, which is on average 169% higher than pre-closure ridership.

e. Silver Line

The MBTA is offering increased service on the SL1 and some free fares on the SL3. During Week 7 of the Sumner Tunnel closure, average weekday ridership of the SL1 and

SL3 lines of the Silver Line was 8,773, which is on average 21% lower than pre-closure numbers.

f. Chelsea Buses

The MBTA made the 111, 112, 114, 116, 117 bus routes free. During Week 7 of the Sumner Tunnel closure, average weekday ridership was 16,983, which is 14% 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 7 parking usage increased on average 122% compared to weekday averages in June 2023.

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 7 was 33% compared to June 2023.