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MBTA unveils online performance dashboard

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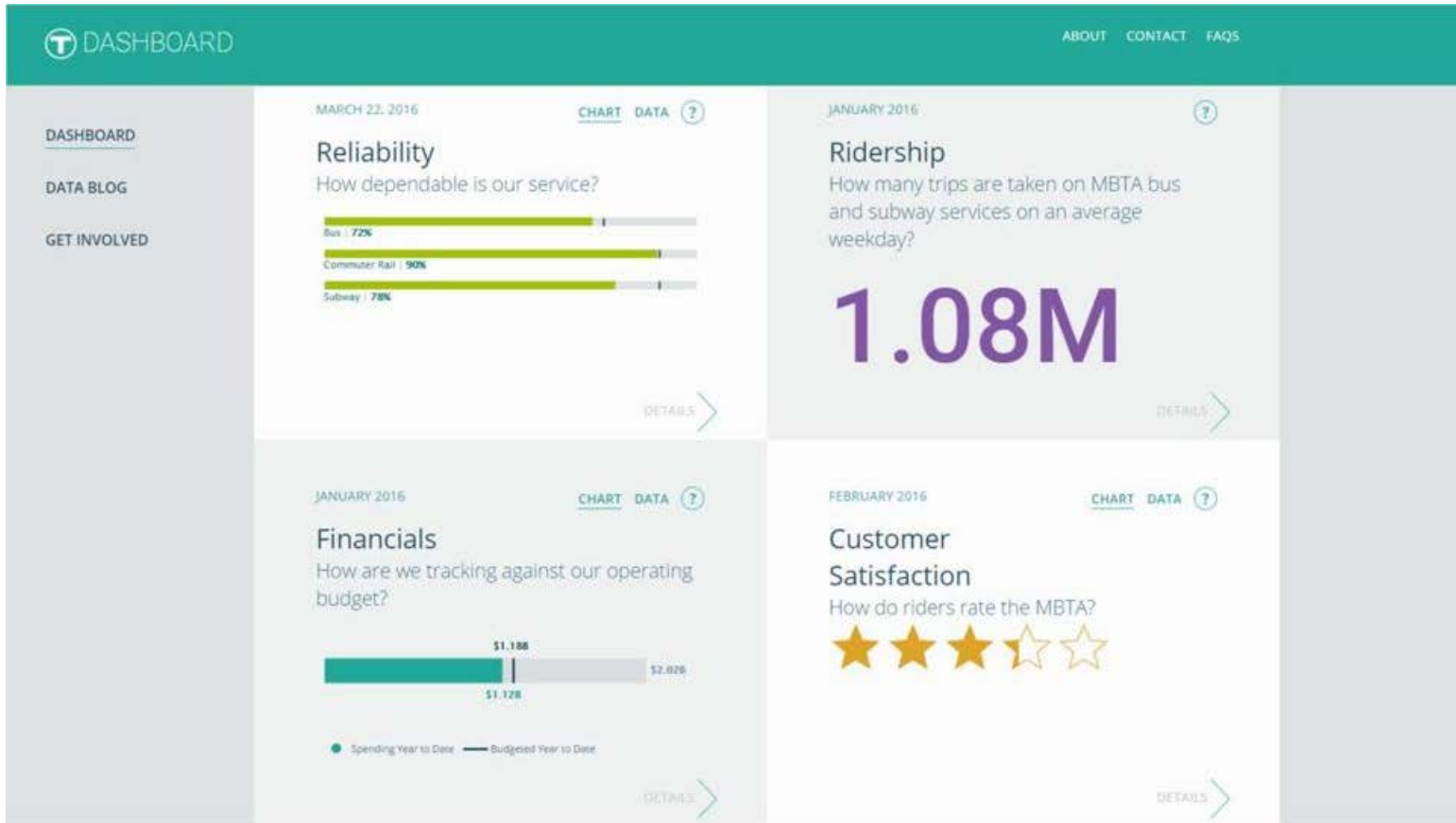
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MBTA

The MBTA is launching a new performance dashboard website this week.

By Matt Rocheleau

GLOBE STAFF MARCH 27, 2016

Riders often complain that the MBTA’s one-word descriptions of service delays — “minor” or “moderate,” for example — don’t quite capture the nuance of their commutes.

Now, the transit agency is hoping to use numbers to paint a clearer picture of how slow — or smooth

— riders' commutes were.

The MBTA is launching a new interactive website this week that, using data, aims to offer an easy-to-digest look at its performance. The site will show not only whether trains and buses have run on schedule, but also whether the agency is staying on budget, how many people are riding, and how happy or unhappy customers are.

The “performance dashboard” was designed to be significantly more user-friendly than the agency’s old way of showcasing similar information through a series of complex, jargon-filled reports.

“A lot of performance reports the T has issued in the past can be so overwhelming that they miss the point,” said Rachel Bain, assistant secretary for the Office of Performance Management and Innovation, which works with both the T and the state transportation department. “So much of our stuff ends up being, even to me, gibberish.”

The goal of the dashboard “is to give our customers a way to easily understand how the T is performing,” added Bain, who oversaw the project’s development.

She said the site will not only provide greater transparency but will also be useful for T officials to better identify areas where the agency can make improvements. It is believed to be the first of its kind among major transit systems in the United States, officials said.

The dashboard’s look is clean, simple, and straightforward. Bain said that the site was modeled after the design of dashboards commonly used in health applications, like [Fitbit](#).

“We wanted to be free of that label that, ‘Oh, it’s just another government website,’ ” Bain said.



For those who want to dive deeper into a topic, a few clicks or taps can give them a wealth of additional detail.

For example, users can look at the reliability of every single bus route, commuter rail line, and subway line. Users can also filter the data to show how faithfully trains and buses kept to their schedules on specific dates and during rush hour or non-rush-hour periods.

There's even — for the first time ever — data on the performance of the Green Line, which can now be monitored thanks to newly installed technology to track trolley whereabouts.

For now, the most recent reliability statistics displayed on the dashboard are for the day before.

But the T has real-time data on subway performance that it will make public Monday, allowing interested third-party developers to use the information to create their own apps that could show more current statistics on service reliability.

Data on other topics — ridership, finance, and customer satisfaction — will be updated monthly.

The agency said it may add other topics of interest, including sections that would show statistics about employee overtime spending and how unscheduled absences are affecting service.

“A lot of thought went into what to put in the dashboard, and the focus was really that the T needs to be accountable for doing its fundamental job of getting people where they need to go, when they need to be there,” Transportation Secretary Stephanie Pollack said.

For example, she said, “You have a bad commute, you want to click and say, ‘Did I just have a bad day? Or is this line always like this?’ ”

The dashboard, which the T plans to formally unveil at a fiscal control board meeting Monday, can be accessed at www.mbtackontrack.com or from a link on the homepage of MBTA.com.

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