



## Crumbling concrete, leaking roofs, and busted elevators: the state of the T



DAVID L. RYAN/GLOBE STAFF

**The ceilings at the commuter and Red Line stops in Porter Square leak during rainstorms, forming small puddles on the platforms below.**

By [Adam Vaccaro](#)

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The elevators at Aquarium Station have been out of service for months, roped off from passengers.

Corroding ramps at the commuter rail station in Winchester are patched with plywood, and exposed rebar peeks from the canopy overhead. The ceilings at the commuter and Red Line stops in Porter Square leak during rainstorms, forming small puddles on the platforms below.

While not on the scale of the falling concrete that forced the closure of the Alewife parking garage in August, hundreds of MBTA properties — stations, garages, and parking lots — are in disrepair, from equipment that seems permanently broken to shabby surroundings that make the daily commute that much more unpleasant.

“Dripping water, corroding metal, chunks of concrete missing,” Concord resident Christina Scherer said, listing conditions at the Porter Square commuter rail station. “If you’re not sure something’s going to fall on you, it certainly doesn’t put out a very good impression.”

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The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority has begun compiling a detailed inventory on the condition of its facilities to comply with new reporting requirements from the Federal Transit Agency. And a preliminary review from 2017, prepared in advance of the first batch of filings due this year, was sobering: More than half of 378 stations and parking facilities — 57 percent — scored 2 or less out of a possible 5, meaning they need significant repairs; 78 of those properties bottomed out with a rating of 1.

On the Orange Line, 11 of 20 stations rated a 1; the Red Line had nine of 22 stations with the lowest score, while the Blue Line

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had three. These include some of the biggest hubs in the system: South Station, Back Bay, Downtown Crossing, and JFK/UMass.

In an interview, Massachusetts Transportation Secretary Stephanie Pollack said that T facilities are safe and that any dangerous conditions are quickly

addressed. But though the agency is planning to spend hundreds of millions of dollars on upgrades, Pollack said they are not as high a priority as buying new vehicles or improving tracks and related equipment that more directly affect commutes.

“If they are not unsafe, then whether your stations are a little nicer or not nicer may not change the length of your commute or the on-time performance of the line,” Pollack said.



### **Concrete falls on car at Alewife garage**

The entire second floor of the garage will be closed for parking on Thursday as crews complete the repairs.

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In a city and region undergoing a building boom, with new construction and remodeled homes everywhere, the T's properties are often the neighborhood eyesore.

Outside the gates of one of the world's most prestigious universities, the underground bus stop in Harvard Square has holes in the ceiling where lights used to shine. At the foot of the gleaming new Millennium Tower, Downtown Crossing Station has big puddles of water even in dry conditions.

And in Winchester, across the street from an idyllic town park, a commuter rail station from the 1950s is

dressed in scaffolding as workers fight off years of disrepair.

“It’s definitely falling apart,” Tamara McDonald said of the Winchester station, which is scheduled to be rebuilt in the next few years. “It would be wonderful to have a station that matched the beauty of our town.”

But McDonald also highlighted why station conditions are not the most pressing priority for officials. If the T must choose between better stations or more reliable train service, “I’d go for reliability every time,” she said.



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**Corroding ramps at the commuter rail station in Winchester are patched with plywood, and exposed rebar peeks from the canopy overhead.**

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In previous years, the T graded its properties primarily by their age: Older ones got lower scores, and newer ones were rated higher. But in 2017, the agency assessed the overall condition of the facilities for “summary ratings” that it prepared ahead of its submission to the Federal Transit Agency.

The T provided the Globe with a spreadsheet listing the scores for individual properties, but cautioned that those ratings were not comprehensive and could change as a result of new, more detailed guidelines from the federal government. State officials did not provide details of the conditions that led to each rating.

Leaks or crumbling concrete could result in a lower rating, as could poor paving at surface parking lots or broken elevators at stations. But there are some inconsistencies in the scoring: The Tufts Medical Center Orange Line station was graded a 4 out of 5, even though it had a broken elevator at the time.

Age continues to be a factor: The 120-year-old Boylston Green Line Station was graded a 1 even though it doesn't appear to be in horrible shape. But some of the newest facilities, supposedly less affected by wear and tear, also received poor marks. The Silver Line platform at South Station opened in 2002 but was given a 1, possibly because of water infiltration.

Some lowly rated structures appear in worse shape than others. The Chinatown Orange Line stop was scored a 1; its most obvious defects are a few missing floor tiles and some chipped paint. But so was the Alewife garage, where potholes and deteriorating concrete have been a blight on the system since long before the August incident.

State Senator Patricia Jehlen has twice appeared before the MBTA's oversight board in recent months to complain about conditions at stations. She said the T's preliminary assessments don't inspire confidence. “It's at least good that they have an inventory,” she said. “But I think people will not feel comforted to know that most of their facilities are not in a state of good repair.”

The board is scheduled to discuss the condition of its facilities, vehicles, and other infrastructure at a meeting Monday.

Therese McMillan, a former Federal Transit Agency chief in the Obama administration, said the T's findings are not surprising. The new assessments were developed, she said, because federal officials suspected older systems were in need of so much repair.

“It's endemic across [older transit systems],” McMillan said. “This country has a very poor record of investing in its infrastructure. . . . But I think it's important you start with knowing exactly what your problem is.”

The T has an ambitious plan to upgrade all its properties and equipment within 15 years, which Pollack

*‘If they are not unsafe, then whether your stations are a little nicer or not nicer may not change the length of your commute, or the on-time performance of the line.’*

— *Stephanie Pollack, state transportation secretary, who said the T's budget priority is train and subway service improvements*

acknowledged would be a “big challenge. The agency is in the midst of a five-year, \$8 billion improvement spree that includes refurbishing two parking garages on the South Shore, new ventilation systems at Back Bay Station, and a complete rebuild of the Wollaston Red Line Station and Winchester Center commuter stop. The drab Lechmere Green Line Station, also rated a 1, will be moved and rebuilt as part of the Green Line extension to Somerville.

The MBTA said it has begun conducting more “preventative maintenance” to keep stations from deteriorating in the first place.

And the agency already addresses smaller problems as quickly as it can, such as recent replacements of crumbling concrete on the Park Street platform or exit gates at Copley Square.

Meanwhile, the agency recently hired a chief customer officer, whose charge will include improving lighting, signs, and other station fixtures.

The Baker administration has proposed record spending on repairs, even as the governor insists that more money isn’t the sole answer to the T’s problems. Pollack said that stations will receive a lot of attention, but the priority should be infrastructure that results in better service, such as new vehicles.

But Boston City Councilor Michelle Wu said Pollack’s rationalizing of priorities proves the T needs more money.

“The mind-set of operating from a point of scarcity is precisely the problem,” Wu said. “We as commuters should not have to choose between healthy station conditions and functional service levels.” Yet Pollack said even if more money is available, it could take time for improvements.

“It did not take 15, or 20, or 30 years to let the system get as bad as it is, and it can’t be fixed overnight,” she said.

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