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MBTA spends record-high \$96.2 million on overtime in 2019

By [Matt Rocheleau](#) Globe Staff, Updated January 7, 2020, 4:44 p.m.



Repair work resulted in a surge in overtime for the MBTA in 2019. CRAIG F. WALKER/GLOBE STAFF

The MBTA spent a record-high \$96.2 million on overtime last year as the agency grappled with fallout from a train derailment that crippled its busiest subway line and forged ahead on long-term projects to try to bolster the public

transit system.

The figure marked a 17 percent jump from [the previous year](#), according to new data from the state comptroller's office.

It was the highest total the T has spent on overtime, eclipsing even the \$80.9 million the public transit agency spent during 2015 when recordbreaking snowfall drove up its labor costs.

Forty-two T employees made \$100,000 or more in overtime alone last year, up from just 15 the previous year.

Agency spokesman Joe Pesaturo said some of the increase in overtime spending was because of the months-long repair and recovery work the T had to perform in the wake of the derailment that damaged critical equipment along the Red Line in June, leading to prolonged delays.

He also attributed the overtime spike to the increased spending on capital improvement programs, which aim to upgrade and repair stations, vehicles, and other equipment. The agency has faced criticism in previous years for not investing enough in such long-term projects, prompting agency leaders to vow to increase spending on them.

“The MBTA is ramping up hiring to keep pace with the aggressive capital improvement programs, but at the same time, overtime spending is necessary to keep the critical work moving forward uninterrupted,” Pesaturo said.

Former state inspector general Gregory Sullivan, now a research director at the Pioneer Institute, agreed those two factors appeared to be driving the overtime pay increase.

“The MBTA is largely justified by the virtue of the circumstances they're confronted with and trying to deal with,” he said.

Still, Sullivan echoed a concern raised in a [recent report](#) that found the T, in its rush to push long-needed projects, has not prioritized safety.

“The staff there has been stretched to the limits,” he said.

Jim Evers president of the Boston Carmen’s Union, the largest labor union at the T, said in a statement, “When overtime increases steadily year over year, it points to a systemic management problem. The real solution is simple: hire the sufficient number of employees needed to get the job done.”

A spokeswoman for Governor Charlie Baker said in a statement, “Over the last year, the MBTA has made progress on delivering its \$8 billion infrastructure investment plan and this fall accelerated the pace of many investments across the system to deliver results to riders faster.”

“The administration and the MBTA will continue to increase safety and reliability investments in the system while protecting taxpayer dollars,” added the spokeswoman, Sarah Finlaw.

Overall, the agency’s payroll climbed by about 6 percent to \$586 million last year. The median pay for T employees was \$86,759.

Some 2,449 workers — more than one-third of all employees — took home more than \$100,000 last year.

The number of employees who made \$200,000 or more was 75 last year, up from 29 in 2018.

The top-paid employee was T General Manager Steven Poftak who made \$312,615.

Three others topped the \$300,000 mark; each collected more overtime pay than their base pay.

John Devlin, an electrician, made \$308,930, including \$192,236 in overtime; Stephen Mitchell, who holds the same job title, made \$306,860, including \$191,346 in overtime; and Transit Police officer Jonathan Tetreault collected \$301,140, including \$174,058 in overtime.

Pesaturo said Mitchell and Devlin each worked many hours on accelerated work for capital projects across the Green, Orange, and Red lines. He said electricians “perform very critical safety functions: ensuring that third rail and electrified overhead catenary is de-energized so that personnel can perform their tasks safely in work zones along the tracks.”

Pesaturo said Tetreault picked up many overtime and detail shifts that were available. He and other members of the union he belongs to also received retroactive pay after a new contract was ratified. And per the terms of the labor agreement, Tetreault received a reimbursement for having an advanced college degree, Pesaturo said.

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