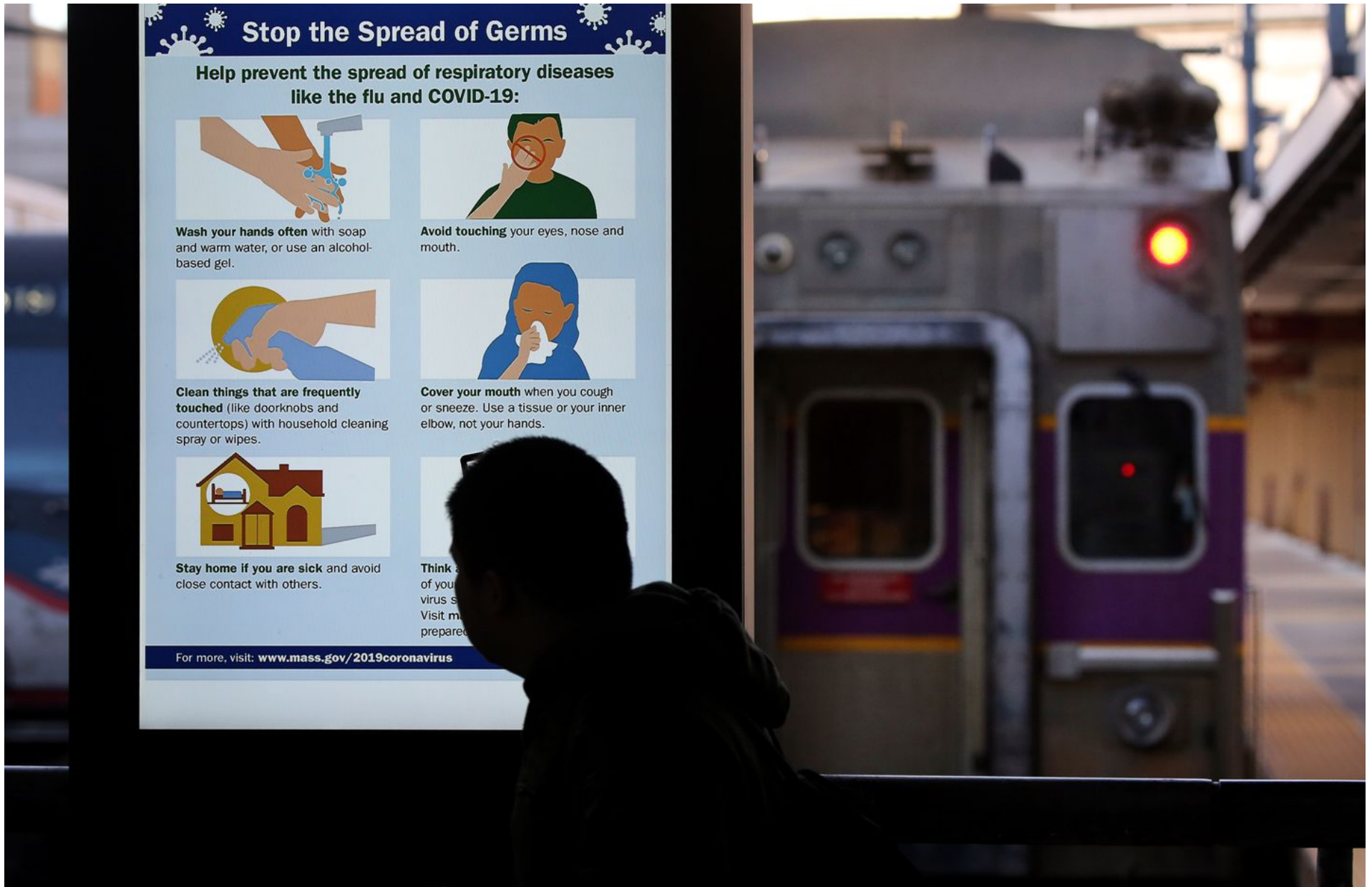


# MBTA to reduce train and bus service, close ferry

By [Adam Vaccaro](#) and [Matt Rocheleau](#) Globe Staff, Updated March 16, 2020, 1:09 p.m.



Transit service will be reduced amid the coronavirus outbreak. CRAIG F. WALKER/GLOBE STAFF/FILE

With ridership drastically reduced due to the coronavirus outbreak, the MBTA will limit weekday service starting Tuesday, running a Saturday schedule on the subway and most bus lines.

The T said the reduced levels of service are meant to balance the needs to limit crowding while adequately serving a much smaller ridership that still includes essential workers in the wake of the shutdown of schools, workplaces, and the broader regional economy.

Riders still using the subway can expect trains on the Red Line every 14 minutes on the separate Braintree and Ashmont lines, and therefore every seven minutes north of JFK/UMass; every nine to 11 minutes on the Orange Line; every nine to 13 minutes on the Blue Line; and every seven to 13 minutes on each Green Line branch, meaning there will be more frequent service where the branches converge. The Mattapan trolley linking to the Ashmont Red Line station will run every 12 to 26 minutes.

Buses will run less frequently, including on the Silver Line, though long-distance express routes will maintain weekday service. The ferry system will be closed outright, with passengers directed to the commuter rail instead. But the commuter rail will also operate on a reduced schedule; the T said those schedules will be posted online at [mbta.com/coronavirus](https://www.mbta.com/coronavirus). Keolis Commuter Services, which operates the commuter rail for the T, added that it would be distributing new schedules to riders at key stations Monday.

The Ride, which provides door-to-door service for riders with disabilities, including senior populations who are most vulnerable to the virus, will continue to operate normally.

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“The MBTA plays an important role in slowing the spread of the coronavirus while continuing to provide critical services to medical professionals and other employees in key industries that rely on public transit,” MBTA general manager Steve Poftak said in a statement. “While some of these changes are inconvenient, they maintain a responsible balance between protecting the health and safety of the MBTA workforce and our customers, and our goal of continuing to run safe and reliable service without major disruptions.”

On a typical day, assuming there are none of the familiar delays, the Red Line is supposed to run trains every 4.5 minutes during rush hour, the Orange Line every six minutes, and the Blue Line every five minutes, with trolleys every six minutes on each Green Line branch.

The new commuter rail schedules will differ by line, but show sharp drops in service on some parts. For example, on a normal weekday, six trains leave Providence for Boston between 6 a.m. and 9 a.m. Starting Tuesday, only three will leave within that window.

Boston Mayor Martin J. Walsh, whose administration does not operate the state-run MBTA, said he was not overly concerned that reduced transit service would cause crowding, because ridership and overall activity in the city was

already so low.

“Many people are working from home or they’re not working,” Walsh said Monday. “With the MBTA, I’m expecting to see a decrease in ridership across the board, and I think over the next couple of weeks we’re going to see a larger decrease in ridership.”

The T’s ridership collapse has been obvious to anybody who has stepped on a train in recent days. But on Monday, the agency released numbers for last week, showing a gradual but steep drop as the state and the nation fell into crisis. By Friday, station entries on the subway and Silver Line were down by 48 percent compared to a more typical week in February, according to the T’s preliminary data analysis.

MBTA spokesman Joe Pesaturo said the new schedules would remain in place “until further notice.”

The T ran regular service Monday but [had previously said it was developing contingency plans in case it had to reduce](#) frequencies. Washington, D.C., last week announced plans to reduce subway frequencies during rush hour.

In a memo to staff sent Sunday night suggesting schedule changes were coming, Poftak asked bus drivers and train operators to continue working as much as possible during the major disruptions from the coronavirus.

“Employees should continue planning for their families well being, especially now with the closure of all public school districts,” Poftak wrote. “But it’s in the spirit of public service that I ask essential personnel, those of you that operate and keep our system running everyday, to continue doing the job you do best, for all of our riders.”

[Transit advocates said over the weekend that](#) it would be reasonable for the MBTA to reduce some service under the circumstances, if it properly balanced the needs of people to get around, especially in key industries like healthcare and

groceries, and limited crowding.

While the T plans to close its ferry system, the agency that runs boats to and from Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket has no plans to stop service.

"We'll continue to run until someone says we can't," said Steamship Authority spokesman Sean Driscoll.

If any travel restrictions come later, Driscoll said he expected they would make an exception for "critical services" such as the Steamship Authority, which not only shuttles passengers but also vital supplies — food, fuel, and medicine — to the islands.

"I don't foresee any reality under which we run no boats," he said by phone Monday.

"Will it continue to be the schedule we're on now? I can't say that," he added.

If a significant number of authority staff were to become sick or quarantined, the authority may be forced to reduce service, he explained. It may also consider changes if demand gets low enough. But, Driscoll said, "so far we have not seen a huge drop-off in traffic."

Like the MBTA, the Steamship Authority has taken additional steps to clean its ferries and buses and has asked riders to wash their hands frequently and follow social distancing guidelines while on board.

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