

JULY 29, 2021

Pilot Program For Free MBTA Rides On Route 28 To Begin August 29

BOSTON (CBS) — Boston is beginning a free MBTA bus pilot program on Route 28. Riders won't need to pay a fare on the route from August 29 to November 29.

Route 28 is one of the most used bus routes in the city, both before and during the pandemic. It runs from Mattapan Square to Ruggles Station through Nubian Square and Roxbury Crossing.

According to Acting Mayor Kim Janey, there were approximately 12,880 riders every weekday on the route pre-pandemic. Ridership is steady throughout the day compared to most other routes that see low off-peak ridership.

The pilot program is funded by \$500,000 from the city with the goal of helping communities hit hardest by COVID-19. More than 2/3 of riders on Route 28 are classified as low-income, according to an MBTA survey.

“This pilot will help us achieve rider equity, provide monetary support to riders, and allow us to better understand what impact travel time,” Janey said. “[It] will measure the impact of free fares for ridership along the 28 bus route.”

The mayor took the bus to Monday's announcement. She said she, like many others, relies on dependable public transportation and would love to see free buses throughout the city.

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CORONAVIRUS

Boston Mayor Janey Sees Federal Aid as Path to Fare-Free Bus Rides

"It's obviously going to cost money," Janey said in a radio interview, noting that the MBTA is facing financial challenges

By [Staff and wire reports](#) • Published April 8, 2021 • Updated on April 8, 2021 at 3:14 pm

Free public transportation "would be great," Boston Mayor Kim Janey said Thursday Thursday, adding that she hopes state officials are looking at ways to use federal aid to make transit more equitable.

Janey said in a radio interview she has been a "strong advocate" for making the MBTA's 28 bus route -- which runs from Mattapan to Ruggles Station -- free to riders, and that she is looking at ways to do so via a pilot program.

"It will hopefully increase ridership. It will also help with the on-time boarding because it'll be -- you know, no need to go through your bag and look for change and where's your CharlieCard and tapping it," she said during a GBH [radio appearance](#). "So it will also increase the speed at which our buses flow through our city, and I think that is very important. As we do this pilot, it's important that we measure those things so we can see success and hopefully build from there."

The MBTA is a state-operated system. Its fares, last raised in 2019 over the objection of transit advocates and [some Boston officials](#), are voted on by the agency's oversight board. The 2019 fare hike did not increase the cost of bus rides.

Co-host Jim Braude asked Janey if she would be open to free transit across the whole system -- she said she would be -- and what steps would be required to get her there.

"It's obviously going to cost money," Janey replied, noting that the MBTA is facing [financial challenges](#).

The idea of free bus trips would need some buy-in from the MBTA, which has been under fire for service cuts it implemented in response to significant drops in ridership during the pandemic. While fewer riders means less fare revenue for the T, the federal government has steered large amounts of relief aid to the transit agency.

As federal relief funds land in Massachusetts, Janey said it is important to "look at piloting and see how we can use some of that federal money to get free buses."

"And I would say that we cannot continue to put the burden on our riders, particularly those who rely on bus transportation," she said. "Boston is the economic engine, not just for the commonwealth but for New England, and it's important that we not put all of that burden on bus riders, particularly when we know that they're more likely to be poor, more likely to be elderly, more likely to be people of color, so it is important that we think about ways that we can make this more equitable. I understand that there are challenges which is why I hope -- at the state level as well as the city level -- I am looking at that federal money and I hope our state partners are as well."

Janey, who was elevated from city council president to acting mayor on March 22, announced earlier this week that she will run for a full term in Boston's fall election. Other candidates have staked out positions on public transportation fares -- City Councilor Michelle Wu supports a [fare-free transit system](#), and Councilor Andrea Campbell says in her [transportation platform](#) that she would work with state officials and others toward eliminating bus fares.

When she was elected city council president in January 2020, Janey [highlighted the idea](#) of free buses in her opening address, saying, "We must find new ways to tackle old problems, like free MBTA buses to increase ridership and improve traffic flow in our city."

As mayor, Janey has a driver. She said she still sometimes rides the T, though it can be "a bit of a production."

"But it's important," she said. "It's a way that I connect and stay grounded and see firsthand the challenges with our public transit and also interact with residents in our city to see how things are

going."

Later, Janey gave an update on the city's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, saying, "Case numbers and positivity rates have remained relatively flat with some increase among younger Bostonians. We have seen a welcome increase in the number of residents getting tested across the city."

Earlier this week, Janey [unveiled the Boston Public Health Commission's "Hope" campaign](#), a new multilingual public awareness push in a bid to get more Bostonians vaccinated against the coronavirus.

She encouraged every Bostonian to get vaccinated when it is their turn. Until then, she said, they should stay vigilant by wearing masks in public, washing their hands, keeping their distance and continuing to get tested regularly.

"This campaign was created to speak to the heart of what has been missing in our lives and what can be better, if we get vaccinated," Janey said. "Every dose of the COVID-19 vaccine brings us one step closer to putting this pandemic behind us. Every dose gives us new hope for brighter days ahead."

The new public awareness campaign features ads with a diverse group of people who speak a variety of languages and aims to build trust with communities of color and others disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.

The move was one in a series of measures aimed to building equity in the city.

Also this week, Janey announced [a series of initiatives](#) to address inequities in city contracting.

The moves include a new fund, the Boston Contracting Opportunity Fund, to give small businesses grants of up to \$15,000 so they can become more competitive when applying for city contracts.

"When it comes to city contracts, business owners of color are too often overlooked and underrepresented," Janey said at a news conference, citing a recent city study that found that under 1% of city spending on goods and services went to Black- and Latinx-owned small businesses.

Boston is working to correct that with actions that range from "new bidding opportunities to capacity-building grants to virtual networking and new measures to hold ourselves accountable," Janey said.

A pilot program will offer "a diverse array of businesses" the opportunity to make improvements at Malcolm X Park in Roxbury. The city put together a five-person supplier diversity team and hired its first director of strategic procurement that will work across city departments, Janey said.

Janey, [who officially announced her campaign for a full term as mayor Tuesday](#), unveiled a new campaign Monday to [promote an equitable recovery for the city's tourism and hospitality industries](#) as well as small businesses which have been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Unlike past travel and tourism promotions, highlighting places like Fenway Park and Faneuil Hall, this effort has a different focus.

"The all inclusive Boston campaign boldly puts our people and our neighborhoods front and center for the very first time," the mayor said.

Janey said she continues to monitor coronavirus activity across six key metrics: daily positive cases, daily percent of positive cases, community COVID tests, COVID related emergency room visits, available ICU and medical surgical beds and ICU bed occupancy.

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