

**SENATE . . . . . No.**

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**The Commonwealth of Massachusetts**

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PRESENTED BY:

***Patricia D. Jehlen***

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*To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in General Court assembled:*

The undersigned legislators and/or citizens respectfully petition for the adoption of the accompanying bill:

An Act relative to fare free buses.

\_\_\_\_\_

PETITION OF:

NAME:

*Patricia D. Jehlen*

DISTRICT/ADDRESS:

*Second Middlesex*

**SENATE . . . . . No.**

[Pin Slip]

[SIMILAR MATTER FILED IN PREVIOUS SESSION  
SEE SENATE, NO. 2246 OF 2023-2024.]

**The Commonwealth of Massachusetts**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**In the One Hundred and Ninety-Fourth General Court  
(2025-2026)**  
\_\_\_\_\_

An Act relative to fare free buses.

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:*

1           SECTION 1. (a) There shall be within the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, a  
2 pilot program for fare free buses. The program shall establish a minimum 1 year pilot, whereby,  
3 access to bus service is free for any person who boards an MBTA bus, without pass, cash fare, or  
4 CharlieTicket. The program may include all MBTA bus routes and shall at a minimum include  
5 no less than 10 priority bus routes as established by the MBTA, and 10 routes that are not top 20  
6 routes, but that experienced higher than average ridership between the months of March 2020-  
7 December 2020. The program shall include no less than 3 routes that operate with terminuses at:  
8 1. MBTA commuter rail suburban stations; 2. MBTA heavy rail or subway stations; 3. bus depot  
9 destinations.

10           (b) There shall be a fare free MBTA bus advisory group consisting of 10 members to  
11 oversee the pilot program. The advisory group shall include: the general manager of the MBTA;

12 the director of bus operations; the secretary of transportation or a designee from the department;  
13 1 members of the fiscal management and control board chosen by the board at a public meeting;  
14 a labor designee; the executive director of LivableStreets or a designee; the executive director of  
15 ACE or designee; 1 member of the MBTA advisory council, chosen by the council; 1 person  
16 representing people with disabilities; 1 seat for an Environmental Justice municipality within the  
17 MBTA region.

18 (c) The fare free MBTA bus advisory group shall create, with the assistance of MassDOT  
19 and MBTA staff, goals, standards, and key metrics for the development and tracking of the fare  
20 free bus pilot. It shall hold public meetings at which public testimony will be accepted not less  
21 than quarterly and present all relevant data and implementation information. The advisory group  
22 shall form sub-groups as needed, including to evaluate the impacts on ridership, equity, increase  
23 in access to MBTA heavy rail, system efficiency, on-time performances of bus routes, any cost  
24 savings as compared to fare revenue impact, impact on fare evasion, impact on bus driver and  
25 rider incidents, or any other area identified by the advisory group. The advisory group shall  
26 identify ridership community representatives for each of the routes that are part of the pilot and  
27 those representatives shall be allowed to participate in each of the meetings or portions of  
28 meetings where those routes are discussed. The advisory group shall have full access to any data  
29 or record related to the pilot. The MBTA and MassDOT shall identify and assign a team of staff  
30 dedicated solely to the support of the advisory group and the performance of the pilot.

31 (d) The pilot shall commence not later than December 31, 2026. The advisory group shall  
32 present formal findings not less than every six months thereafter to the joint fiscal management  
33 and control board and MassDOT Boards. A final report on the pilot shall be submitted to the

34 joint fiscal management and control board and MassDOT boards not later than 3 months after the  
35 conclusion of the pilot.

36 SECTION 2. (a) All Regional Transit Authorities operating in Massachusetts shall  
37 operate a pilot program for fare free buses. The program shall establish a minimum 1 year pilot,  
38 where by, access to bus service is free for any person who boards an RTA bus, without pass or  
39 cash fare. The RTA program may include all bus routes within the specified Regional Transit  
40 Authority and shall include at least one route that experienced higher than average ridership  
41 between the months of March 2020-December 2020.

42 (b) There shall be a fare free RTA advisory group to oversee the pilot program. The  
43 advisory group shall include: 1 representative from each participating RTA; the secretary of  
44 transportation or a designee from the department; 1 member of RTAAC; 1 person representing  
45 people with disabilities; 1 member from an Environmental Justice community in a participating  
46 RTA region; 1 municipal designee within a participating RTA region.

47 (c) The fare free bus RTA advisory group shall create, with the assistance of MassDOT  
48 staff, establish goals, standards, and key metrics for the development and tracking of the fare free  
49 bus pilot. It shall hold public meetings at which public testimony will be accepted not less than  
50 quarterly and present all relevant data and implementation information. The advisory group shall  
51 form sub-groups as needed, including to evaluate the impacts on ridership, equity, increase in  
52 access to MBTA heavy rail, system efficiency, on-time performances of bus routes, any cost  
53 savings as compared to fare revenue impact, impact on fare evasion, impact on bus driver and  
54 rider incidents, any expansion routes or linkage routes that could be brought online, or any other  
55 area identified by the advisory group. The advisory group shall identify ridership community

56 representatives for each of the routes that are part of the pilot and those representatives shall be  
57 allowed to participate in each of the meetings or portions of meetings where those routes are  
58 discussed. The advisory group shall have full access to any data or record related to the pilot.  
59 MassDOT shall identify and assign a team of staff dedicated solely to the support of the advisory  
60 group and the performance of the pilot.

61 (d) The pilot shall commence not later than December 31, 2026. The advisory group shall  
62 present formal findings not less than every six months thereafter to the joint fiscal management  
63 and control board and MassDOT Boards. A final report on the pilot shall be submitted to the  
64 joint fiscal management and control board and MassDOT boards not later than 3 months after the  
65 conclusion of the pilot.