

## PRESS CONTACTS

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## **Poll: More than three-quarters of Massachusetts residents support boosting funding for regional bus service.**

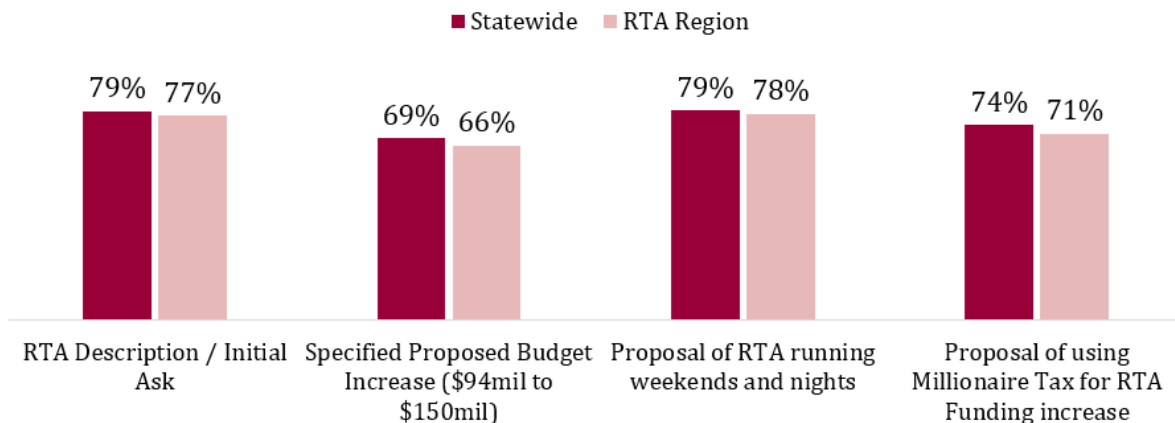
As lawmakers on Beacon Hill dig in on this year's state budget, 79% of Massachusetts residents support increasing funding for the state's 15 Regional Transit Authorities (RTAs), which provide local bus and paratransit service beyond the reaches of MBTA bus and subway service. Nearly as many (74%) support using some of the new voter-approved surtax on the portion of income over \$1 million to fund the increase.

That's according to a new poll of 1,401 Massachusetts residents conducted February 23 to March 7, 2023 by The MassINC Polling Group (MPG) in collaboration with the Regional Transit Authority Advocates Coalition (RTAAC). The poll was sponsored by The Barr Foundation.

Even when told the specifics of the policy – increasing the amount the RTA's receive in the budget from \$94 million to \$150 million – 69% of voters support the proposal. Support rebounds when new funding is earmarked for offering more bus service at night and on weekends (79%).

### **Support for RTA funding stays mostly steady with more context**

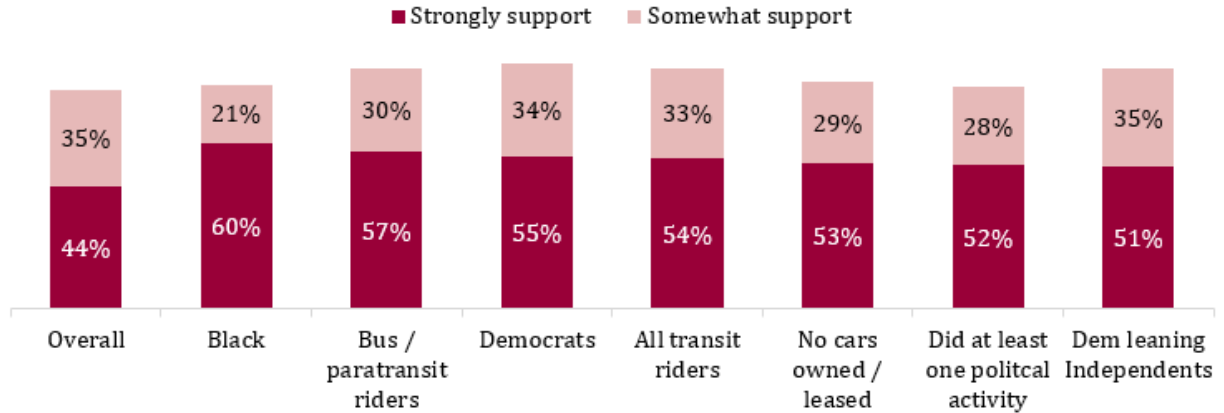
*% respondents who somewhat / strongly support increased RTA funding based on question's context*



“It’s not surprising for support for a policy proposal to decline slightly when real numbers are attached, and to increase when talking about how new funding would be used,” says MPG Senior Research Director Richard Parr. “What is perhaps more surprising is that support for RTA funding is strong across the entire state, not just in the areas served by RTAs that would benefit it.”

**Majorities of several subgroups *strongly* support more RTA funding**

*% overall and in each group who strongly and somewhat support proposal*



*Q: The state has 15 Regional Transit Authorities (RTAs) that run bus service outside the MBTA service area. The RTAs also provide on-demand, door-to-door paratransit service for passengers with disabilities that prevent them from using the bus. Would you support or oppose the state increasing the amount the RTAs get from the state budget?*

Strong support for increased funding reaches a majority among certain demographics. These include Black residents (60%), Democrats (55%), transit riders (54%), and those who don’t own or lease a car (53%).

Many of these subgroups are also overrepresented among bus riders, who are less likely to be white (54% versus 72% statewide), more likely to be under age 30 (34% versus 22%). A majority (53%) of riders make less than \$50,000 a year, 43% have a high school diploma or less education, and 80% do not own or lease a car (34%) or have only one car (46%).

Current riders are using the bus for many different types of trips – shopping and errands (74%), health care appointments (62%), work (61%), visiting friends and family (57%), and going out at night (52%). And 45% of current riders say they would want to use the bus for nightlife more than they can now, suggesting a latent demand for expanded night and weekend service. Non-riders also say they would like to use the bus to access nightlife (35%), but also basics like shopping and errands (40%), health care appointments (36%), and commuting to work (32%).

“A robust, statewide public transportation system is necessary to achieve better health for RTA riders, who, this survey shows, are more likely to be Black and low-income, and who rely on the bus for day-to-day activities like grocery shopping and going to the doctor,” says Alexis Walls, Assistant Campaign Director for the Massachusetts Public Health Association (MPHA) and co-chair of the Regional Transit Authority Advocates Coalition (RTAAC).

### Ridership differs by demographics

% who say they ride the bus/paratransit compared to statewide population by demographic

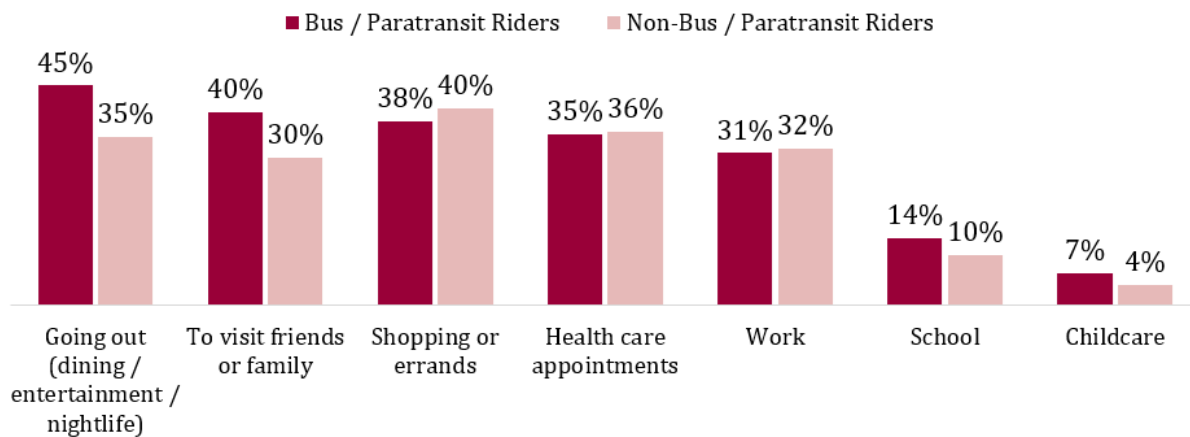
	Statewide	Riders
AGE	18-29	22%
	30-44	24%
	45-59	25%
	60+	29%
RACE	White	72%
	Black	7%
	Latino	11%
	Asian	7%
	All other	3%
INCOME	< \$50K	33%
	\$50-99K	30%
	\$100K+	29%
EDUCATION	High School or less	32%
	Some college, no degree	25%
	Bachelor's	23%
	Advanced degree	18%
CARS	None	12%
	One	39%
	Two	34%
	Three	8%
	Four or more	6%
EMPLOYMENT	Full-time	46%
	Part-time	16%
	Not employed	21%
	Retired	16%



Q: Which modes of travel do you use on a monthly basis to get around? Please select all that apply.

### Broad demand for bus trips to shopping / errands, healthcare appointments

% of bus riders and non-riders on where they'd like the bus to go that it doesn't currently



Q: What types of trips would you make using a public bus or paratransit service that you are currently unable to make?

But there are clearly challenges to growing ridership. The top reason given for not riding the bus often was not having bus service near their home (23%), but second to that was simply a preference for another mode of transport, especially cars (18%). As one resident put it: “I live in a suburb that doesn't have any bus routes to it from city, except some transit on demand for seniors mainly. But I don't need that service, which is limited anyway, since I have a car.”

“Having access to a car is clearly a factor in whether residents will ride the bus,” says MPG’s Parr. “At the same time, 46% of current riders have a single car, which they may be sharing with other members of their household. Public transit may be the difference between these households having one car or having to buy or lease another.”

As a result of these barriers to ridership, only 35% of residents statewide – and only 28% in the RTA service areas – think bus service near them good enough that they could rely on it to get where they need to go. Increased funding to improve service could move the needle on ridership. Residents say they would be at least somewhat willing to ride the bus if it were free (77%), faster (74%), more reliable, (73%), and served more in-demand destinations (72%).

Getting even a fraction of non-riders on board could pay dividends for the state’s battle against climate change. More residents are aware of a bus stop near their home or work (56%) than they are of an EV charging station (38%). This awareness gap is a reminder that the infrastructure for getting residents to leave their car at home is more built-out than the infrastructure for switching cars from gasoline to electricity.

“Improving public transportation statewide is a key strategy for meeting our climate goals and improving the health outcomes of whole communities, who benefit from reduced emissions and cleaner air that result from increased use of mass transit,” says Walls from MPHA and RTAAC.

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### **About the poll**

These results are based on a survey of 1,401 Massachusetts residents, including 967 who live in communities served by the state’s 15 Regional Transit Authorities (RTAs). Responses were collected via online survey, text messages, and live interviews via landline and cells phones between February 23 and March 7, 2023. The data were weighted to reflect known and estimated population parameters for residents with and without RTA service. Groups were then combined and weighted to the population parameters by race, age and gender, education, geography, and political identification for the state as a whole. The credibility interval for this survey is +/- 3.1 percentage points for the entire sample, including the design effect. This project was conducted by The MassINC Polling Group in collaboration with the Regional Transit Authority Advocates Coalition (RTAAC) and sponsored by The Barr Foundation.