

## Public Participation Plan

November 2024

Pioneer Valley Transit Authority



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# 1.0 PURPOSE AND NEED FOR PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

As a public agency, the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA) is obligated to proactively communicate information about its services, fares, and projects to its riders, member communities, and the general public. PVTA must also provide convenient ways for the public to participate in transit planning processes. The purpose of this Public Participation Plan (PPP) is to explain how PVTA will do that. This section describes PVTA’s services and communities served; explains the purpose and need for this plan; and describes the process of developing and adopting it.

## 1.1 Purpose and Need for this Plan

The purpose of this plan is to describe the information and public participation processes involved in the planning and delivery of PVTA’s services and projects.

The need for this plan stems from PVTA’s role as a public agency and recipient of state and federal transportation funds. PVTA must ensure that the benefits of its services are available as fairly as possible to all residents of member communities—and in a manner that reflects the values of these communities. Also, PVTA needs to make sure its services are available equitably to all people who are members of classes protected by federal and state laws.

To assure the stability and maximization of federal and institutional funding, PVTA must fulfill all relevant legal obligations for public participation for transit agencies that receive federal transportation funds, including 49 USC Sections 5307(b) and 5307(c)(1)(I), which require that there be locally developed processes to solicit and consider public comments before making any changes in fares, significant changes in service, and/or capital project development.

### 1.1.1 Federal Protections

To fulfill the purpose and needs described above, PVTA has prepared this plan consistent with the requirements of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and related statutes and regulations. Title VI prohibits discrimination in federally assisted programs and requires that “No person in the United States shall on the grounds of race, color or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.” The key objectives of Title VI that are relevant to this plan are to:

- Ensure that the level and quality of public transportation service is provided in a nondiscriminatory manner.
- Promote full and fair participation in public transportation decision-making without regard to race, color, or national origin.
- Ensure meaningful access to transit-related programs and activities by persons with limited English proficiency.

Related federal nondiscrimination laws administered by the Federal Highway Administration, the Federal Transit Administration, or both prohibit discrimination on the basis of age, sex, and disability. Additionally, PVTA provides meaningful access to its programs, services, and activities to

individuals with limited English proficiency, in compliance with US Department of Transportation policy and guidance on federal Executive Order 13166.

### **1.1.2 State Protections**

PVTA complies with the Massachusetts Public Accommodation Law, M.G.L. c 272 §§ 92a, 98, 98a, which prohibits making any distinction, discrimination, or restriction in admission to or treatment in a place of public accommodation based on race, color, religious creed, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, disability, or ancestry.

This plan also incorporates updates and considerations for virtual meetings and outreach. According to Massachusetts Law, the Act Relative to Extending Certain State of Emergency Accommodations, was signed into law July 16, 2022, extending the expiration of the provisions pertaining to the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law to March 31, 2023. HB.58 An Act making appropriations for the Fiscal Year 2023, which, among other things, extends the expiration of the provisions pertaining to the Open Meeting Law to March 31, 2025.

In addition to abiding by federal and state regulations, PVTA has produced this plan, which focuses on fulfilling the public participation needs and requirements of PVTA and its customers, communities, and federal partners.

## **1.2 Process to Develop and Adopt This Plan**

This plan was developed and adopted through the following process:

- PVTA's prior plan (adopted September 23, 2016) was reviewed and updated for consistency with peer agency policies, best practices, and lessons learned from prior iterations of the policy. A revised version of the plan was developed and presented to the Advisory Board with the triennial Title VI Program Update. The plan is consistent with the [FTA Circular 4702.1B](#) Title VI Requirements, the disparate impacts and disproportionate burdens policies were established as separate documents.
- The Public Participation Plan of the Pioneer Valley MPO was reviewed to determine which elements were relevant and applicable to PVTA's service area and legal obligations. These sections were retained for inclusion in this plan.
- PVTA posted the full copy of the draft of this plan on the PVTA website ([www.pvta.com](http://www.pvta.com)) on September 23, 2024.
- Email notifications of the availability of the draft Title VI 2024 Update and PPP for review were sent to all PVTA Advisory Board members, Town Clerks, relevant agencies, and others.
- The PVTA Title VI 2024 Program Update and Public Participation Plan were presented to the PVMPO Board meeting for comment and review
- MassDOT was notified through the PVMPO meetings (as the chair of the PVMPO)



- Meetings were held at Union Station and two (2) other common bus centers, and two (2) virtual public meetings were held to offer additional opportunities for in-person feedback.
- A summary of public comments received, and revisions made to the draft PPP was presented to PVRTA Advisory Board for adoption on November 20, 2024.

### **1.3 Outreach to People Often Underrepresented in Planning Processes**

PVRTA understands that participation in community and government planning processes, including those for transportation planning, requires residents to give up some of their personal time—while planners and transportation planning officials are typically paid to do this work and attend meetings.

Consequently, many residents do not have time or the ability to participate in planning. They may work second shift or have multiple jobs; they may have primary childcare responsibilities; they may use a mobility assistance device that limits the locations where they can safely or conveniently meet; they may already volunteer for other organizations; or they may need to address any number of important life tasks.

The needs and concerns of many people are often underrepresented in plans that may have an impact on their lives and communities. PVRTA is sensitive to this fact and is committed to reaching out to people who are often left out of planning processes.

With the supplemental Public Participation Plan Survey conducted as part of development of this document, PVRTA is aware that many riders are unaware of public meetings and hearings despite the extensive efforts outlined within this document. PVRTA takes this issue seriously and has adopted tactics to better reach the population.

## **2.0 TYPES OF ACTIVITIES THAT INVOLVE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

From the smile that a bus driver gives riders as they board each morning, to the construction of multi-million-dollar facilities, PVRTA engages with the public and its customers every day and in many ways.

PVRTA recognizes there are many different types of activities that require public participation. PVRTA strives to use the strategies and procedures that are best suited to each situation and the type of information that needs to be communicated to customers and the public.

This section describes five general types of activities in which PVRTA engages in that involve public participation.

### **2.1 Activities that Require Formal Public Hearings**

There are four types of activities for which PVRTA is required to conduct formal public participation (see [Appendix 1](#)). In summary, these are:

- Proposals for changes to the cost of fares or the way that they are paid.
- Proposals for a major change in bus or paratransit van service (typically when 25% or more of a bus route or paratransit van service area is affected).

- A new transit service is proposed.
- A new capital project is planned.

## **2.2 Activities that Involve the PVTA Advisory Board and Subcommittees**

The meetings of the PVTA Advisory Board are a regular venue for public participation. There are regularly scheduled 10 meetings per year, and time for public comment is reserved at each meeting. For participation in capital, financial, and service planning, PVTA encourages public attendance at these meetings, as well as those of the Advisory Board's Financial, Paratransit, and Route Planning subcommittees. The dates, times, and locations of all these meetings are posted on [www.pvta.com](http://www.pvta.com).

PVTA Advisory Board members also function as liaisons to their respective communities, sharing information with residents, local officials, and municipal agencies; board members also share comments from the PVTA customers, officials, businesses, and other constituents of their communities.

## **2.3 Activities that Involve Public Processes of Other Agencies**

PVTA participates in the public participation processes held by other agencies that pertain to plans and projects of the PVTA, thereby offering additional opportunities for public participation of people who wish to learn about and comment on PVTA services and projects. These are described below:

- As a recipient of FTA Section 5307 program funds, PVTA integrates its compliance with the public participation requirements of that program with the locally adopted public involvement process of the Pioneer Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (PVMPO), particularly for the development of the annual Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP), as well as the PVMPO's Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP). For projects that are included on the PVMPO's Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP), PVTA meets the program-of-projects requirements of the federal Urbanized Area Formula Program. The Chair of the PVTA Advisory Board is a voting member of the Pioneer Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (PVMPO), and the PVTA Administrator is an ex-officio member. All PVTA capital projects, as well as bus replacements and maintenance expenditures, are included on the TIP. The TIP development process involves additional public involvement activities and timeframes for public review and comment.
- PVTA staff work directly with the PVMPO, its Joint Committee on Transportation (JTC), the PVMPO's support staff at the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, the PVTA Advisory Board, and its Finance subcommittee to develop the PVTA-sponsored projects that are included and evaluated as part of the regional TIP process. PVTA staff attend JTC meetings, where information and comments on transit projects in the region are exchanged.
- PVTA participates in the PVMPO's development of the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), which involves extensive public participation and comments on transit-related elements of that plan.

- PVTA participates in the annual update process of Massachusetts Department of Transportation’s annual Capital Investment Plan, which involves public comment sessions throughout the Commonwealth.
- In addition, any projects that require an environmental assessment or an environmental impact statement will involve additional public involvement, as presented in joint FHWA/FTA environmental regulations, “Environmental Impact and Related Procedures,” 23 C.F.R. Part 771, as well as those of the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA).

## **2.4 PVTA Customer Service and Marketing**

PVTA performs many activities that involve sharing information with the public about the wide range of services and programs that PVTA provides. This involves ongoing daily engagement with riders and the public through many different channels, which are summarized below.

- Customer service offices at Union Station and Holyoke Transportation Center, including walk-in assistance, telephone assistance, and email correspondence.
- Public events to introduce new services, support existing services, vehicles, facilities, customer conveniences, organizational milestones.
- Paid advertising with local media outlets to air public service announcements and messages to make customers aware of PVTA services and ways to contact the authority.

## **3.0 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION STRATEGIES AND METHODS**

PVTA recognizes that different types of decisions have different impacts for customers and the public. Therefore, PVTA attempts to scale its public participation activities relative to the potential impact of changes that are being considered. Criteria include: the scale of a proposal (typically regional, municipal, or neighborhood); the level or frequency of the potential impact; and the short- and long-term financial impacts for customers, taxpayers, and PVTA itself.

This section describes the public participation strategies and methods that are available to PVTA. These are selected and implemented on the best judgment of PVTA staff and Advisory Board members with respect to the criteria above. PVTA also recognizes that public participation can be a fluid process, and that outreach measures may be added or altered, depending on the scale of a proposal’s impact and changes in the level of public interest.

### **3.1 Web-Based Communication**

The PVTA’s website ([www.pvta.com](http://www.pvta.com)) is the agency’s primary channel for public information and participation. All relevant news and information about bus schedules, van, and para-transit services, planning projects, agency governance, compliance with regulations, employment opportunities, vital documents related to service benefits, and many other topics are posted on this website. Importantly, the main page as well as “Alerts” and “Meeting Notices” pages are updated whenever a new meeting or event is scheduled.

PVTA also provides bus schedule information to Transit App and BusPlus+ web-based applications for iPhone and Android to provide users with access to bus schedule information and mobile ticketing.

PVTA also uses these social media services to communicate with bus riders:

- Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/PioneerValleyTransitAuthority>)
- X (formerly known as Twitter) (<https://twitter.com/pvta>)
- YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com>)
- Other PVTA adapted mobile technology apps such as Transit app (<https://transitapp.com/>) notifications and surveys

### **3.2 Notices on Vehicles**

Special notices in English and Spanish are posted on digital LCD screens on PVTA buses and are one of the most effective methods available to PVTA for communicating information to customers. Notices are typically for meetings and are posted at least 14 days before any event or change is scheduled to occur, and phone numbers to call for more information are included in every notice.

On buses, PVTA also posts printed “car cards,” which are advertisement-sized notices, in the areas above customer seating. Car cards are typically used for policy information, rather than to promote meetings or changes. Car cards are also produced in English and Spanish.

### **3.3 Media**

Media relations involve an increasing number of outlets and audiences. PVTA strives to target information to the people who will likely be most interested in it, and to use the media channels that they are most likely to watch, read, or listen to. As such, PVTA media relations involves a menu of items, which include:

- Press releases
- Paid advertising.
- Community calendar listings in newspapers, community newsletters, email lists, websites, and other media.
- Reciprocal sponsorships with radio, TV, and web-based media outlets.
- Making public information available in easy-to-understand formats.
- Public media (including local minority and non-English newspapers, radio stations, and television stations)
- Social media
- Posters, display boards, and flyers
- Fact sheets
- Brochures
- Annual Report
- Public service announcements
- Mailing and email lists
- Information stands at local events
- On Board LCD Screens and panel Car Cards

### 3.4 Public Meetings

Public meetings are critical to public participation. PVTA holds many types of public meetings, including:

- Bus rider forums, which are held quarterly at terminals and major bus route hubs
- Paratransit van rider meetings, which are held quarterly at accessible locations used by significant numbers of van riders.
- Formal meetings with specific agendas.
- Informal workshops.
- Customer listening sessions on service and planning topics proposed by PVTA, typically held at terminals or near major bus route hubs.
- Open houses where members of the public may speak individually or in groups with PVTA staff.
- Settings where PVTA representatives are available to speak directly with members of the public, such as media events.
- Public hearings that are required by the PVTA Public Hearing Policy (see [Appendix 1](#)).
- Public comment time at all PVTA Advisory Board meetings.

PVTA holds all its public gatherings in facilities that are accessible for people with disabilities and, wherever possible, near a bus route. Meetings at transit hubs and bus centers are also used to increase public participation. PVTA typically reviews demographic information about area where the meeting is to be held to decide when notices should be translated into languages other than English.

The availability of meeting handouts alternative formats—Braille, large print, and/or digital recording, and languages other than English—as well as other accommodations (language interpreters, sign language interpreters, CART translators, etc.) is explained in the meeting notices along with specific information on how to request these accommodations.

PVTA strives to make meetings welcoming to all members of the public. To develop this plan, PVTA surveyed riders to better understand what times of day and in places are convenient for customers and community residents (see [Appendix 9](#)). Staff arranging these meetings are proactive in asking what languages are likely to be spoken by all potential participants.

#### 3.4.1 Virtual Meetings

PVTA will continue to use virtual meetings and other forms of Virtual Public Involvement (VPI) enhances community outreach practices when in-person meetings are not possible or infeasible. Using VPI tools enhances and broadens the reach of public engagement efforts by making participation more convenient, affordable, and enjoyable for greater numbers of people. Virtual meetings were widely used during the Pandemic and are subject to Massachusetts Open Meeting Laws HB.58 An Act making appropriations for the Fiscal Year 2023 , which, among other things, extends the expiration of the provisions pertaining to the Open Meeting Law to March 31, 2025. PVTA will continue to use virtual meeting tools for the duration permitted by state law.

### **3.5 Individual Consultations**

PVTA arranges individual one-on-one consultations with customers in cases where people may wish to speak privately. These consultations are usually arranged in conjunction with a regularly scheduled public meeting, and instructions for scheduling one are provided in the meeting notice. Staff are proactive in asking what languages should be available for these consultations.

### **3.6 Participating in Meetings Held by Others**

PVTA representatives frequently attend meetings held by stakeholders and constituent groups, either at their invitation, or when requested by PVTA. Attending regular meetings of other organizations is a very efficient and effective means of public participation, as it significantly reduces logistical costs to PVTA. These types of meetings include:

- Municipal transportation committees
- Community based organizations
- Business associations
- Gatherings of elected and municipal officials
- Hearings or public meetings for the development of projects that may affect PVTA service
- Neighborhood councils and associations
- Project planning meetings held by municipal departments of public works, MassDOT, and the PVMPO

### **3.7 Surveys**

PVTA actively solicits public participation through regular surveys of customers and the regional travel market. These include:

- Bus rider customer satisfaction surveys
- Bus rider route-specific surveys
- Paratransit van riders satisfaction surveys
- Paratransit van riders service-specific surveys
- Non-transit rider market surveys
- Public Participation Plan Survey

PVTA also conducts service specific surveys and partners with area colleges and universities to conduct research related to planning grants and initiatives including the following:

- 2021 Areas of Persistent Poverty Grant Program Regional Transportation Survey
- 2021 Accelerating Innovative Mobility Program Grant Annual Mobile Ticketing Survey
- 2020 HOPE Grant Regional Transportation Survey
- Route and Service Specific Surveys

### **3.8 Methods for Engaging People Often Underrepresented in Planning**

When deemed appropriate and reasonable through previous survey results, Census data and past knowledge, PVTA may also conduct other activities to solicit public comment, including but not limited to:

- Public workshops and meetings in accessible locations.
- Combining meeting outreach efforts with ongoing marketing and promotions efforts.
- Providing notices to radio and television stations in English and Spanish.
- Taking proactive steps to ascertain in what languages written materials and public meetings should be available.
- Posting meeting presentations on [www.pvta.com](http://www.pvta.com) and emailing presentations to community groups for posting on their social media pages. This allows the public to review proceedings and comment through emails and letters.
- Reaching customers onboard bus routes and at common hubs and bus stops.
- Providing language assistance using electronic mobile tablets for surveys and feedback.
- Providing surveys in an online format that caters to the rider's mobile device browser's language settings.
- Engaging customers with mailed paper surveys with less access to online or electronic survey means.
- Comment cards.

### **3.9 Assuring Compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)**

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 encourages the involvement of people with disabilities in the development and improvement of transportation and paratransit services. PVTA strives to meet all ADA guidelines through the following steps and strategies:

- All meetings are accessible to people with mobility limitations.
- When necessary, auxiliary aids and services are furnished when reasonably feasible to allow a person with a disability to participate in public meetings. These include such services or devices as sign language interpreters, assistive listening headsets for simultaneous language translation, telecommunication devices for deaf persons (TDDs), pre-taped narrative descriptions, brailled materials, and larger print materials.
- Public meeting notices specify that such accommodation will be provided upon request within a reasonable window prior to the meeting date.
- Information posted on [www.pvta.com](http://www.pvta.com) is compatible with voice-to-text screen readers.

## 4.0 OBJECTIVES, PERFORMANCE MEASURES, AND DESIRED OUTCOMES

PVTA measures the performance of its services by identifying relevant data, collecting it, and evaluating it.

For public participation, PVTA focuses on the information that will be most helpful to Advisory Board members, administrative staff, and contract transit service operators in understanding how well PVTA is doing in achieving its desired public participation outcomes.

Table 4.0 summarizes PVTA’s public participation objectives; the performance measure(s) that are monitored related to the objective; and the desired public participation outcome for each objective.

*Table 4.0 Public Participation Outcomes*

	Objective	Performance Measures	Desired Outcomes
1.	<b>Make all useful information about PVTA services and plans easily available.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of website visits</li> <li>• Number of document downloads</li> <li>• Number of social media posts</li> <li>• Number of public meeting attendees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased public access to information.</li> <li>• Increased trust between the organization and the community</li> </ul>
2.	<b>Respond to, and proactively address, customers’ information needs.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of customer service visits/inquiries</li> <li>• Number of calls answered by telephone representatives</li> <li>• Number of media postings and comments</li> <li>• Response time to customer service concerns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain and increase PVTA’s responsiveness to customer information requests.</li> </ul>
3.	<b>Encourage customer feedback</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of concerns by phone, email, web</li> <li>• Number of persons contacted/engaged at face-to-face meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the number of customers who provide feedback.</li> <li>• Improve the use of feedback from staff and transit operators</li> </ul>
4.	<b>Be responsive and accountable to customers and the public</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of bus rider forums</li> <li>• Number of van rider meetings</li> <li>• Number of individual consultations held</li> <li>• Number of meetings held by others</li> <li>• Number of people who attend public meetings and events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain and increase the availability of PVTA staff to customers</li> </ul>



	Objective	Performance Measures	Desired Outcomes
5.	<b>Ensure that the benefits of PVTA services are available to all</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All vital documents are posted on <a href="http://www.pvta.com">www.pvta.com</a></li> <li>• All vital documents are translated to Spanish and available in other languages on request</li> <li>• At meetings, Spanish translation is always available and translation to other languages is available on request</li> <li>• Accommodation for people with visual and hearing disabilities is always available when anticipated and available on request in other instances.</li> <li>• In-person translation at meetings</li> <li>• Surveys are available in Spanish</li> <li>• Surveys are available to be taken by phone for people with visual impairment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assure that all vital documents relevant to the availability of the benefits of PVTA services are easily available in all languages and formats that may be requested or reasonably anticipated.</li> <li>• Assure that meetings are inclusive, representative of all targeted and affected populations.</li> </ul>
6.	<b>Provide formal public participation opportunities whenever fare changes, service reductions, or capital project plans are considered</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PVTA Public Hearing Policy is updated regularly and complies with federal requirements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PVTA meets and exceeds requirements for formal public participation for fare changes, service reductions, and project development.</li> <li>• PVTA always gives its best effort to inform the public about important changes in fares and service</li> </ul>
7.	<b>Inform the general public (including non-riders) of PVTA's services and plans</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of press releases issued</li> <li>• Number of interviews performed</li> <li>• Number of website updates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PVTA uses all media and web-based applications available to provide update-to-date information to people who need it</li> </ul>

	Objective	Performance Measures	Desired Outcomes
8.	<b>Provide customers with accurate and helpful service information</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Printed schedules are current and available on all buses and terminals</li> <li>• Website schedules are current and available</li> <li>• Number of bus rider forums held</li> <li>• Number of bus riders contacted</li> <li>• Number of van rider meetings held</li> <li>• Number of van riders contacted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PVTA service information is always easily available in formats that are convenient for customers and the public.</li> <li>• PVTA staff is available regularly to meet face-to-face transit customers.</li> </ul>
9.	<b>Survey customers and the public to identify successful services and programs and opportunities for improvement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All PVTA bus routes are surveyed every three years</li> <li>• Paratransit van riders are surveyed at least every three years</li> <li>• Non-transit rider market information is compiled every three years</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PVTA obtains reliable, relevant, and timely customer satisfaction and demographic information</li> </ul>
10.	<b>Community relations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of community meetings attended</li> <li>• Number of meetings with business associations and individual businesses</li> <li>• Number of meetings with local property owners and developers</li> <li>• Number of meetings with municipal elected officials and agency staff</li> <li>• Number of meetings with business associations and individual businesses</li> <li>• Number of meetings with local property owners and developers</li> <li>• Number meetings with municipal elected officials and agency staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PVTA is well-known and accessible to stakeholders in its service region.</li> <li>• PVTA participates in municipal and local development processes that could affect transit riders.</li> </ul>

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## APPENDIX 1:

### Pioneer Valley Transit Authority Public Hearing Policy

PVTA establishes and updates this Public Hearing Policy to fulfill federal requirements and guidelines for public involvement; encourage the participation of residents and stakeholders in its member communities in PVTA's planning processes; and engage PVTA riders and the general public in providing input on proposed service reductions or alterations, fare and media changes, and new capital projects.

#### 1. Public hearing requirements for major service change

PVTA will hold public hearings and fulfill the requirements of this Public Hearing Policy when:

- Any change in PVTA fare policies, rates, or media is being considered; or
- The establishment of a new route; or
- An alteration of service to existing fixed route service that impacts 500 unlinked passenger trips or more in a typical month of service and:
  - Cumulatively changes the number of vehicle revenue hours in the service area by 7.5% or more; or
  - Changes the number of revenue hours on any specific route by 20% or more; or
  - Changes the location or number of stops on any specific route by 25% or more.
- An alteration of service to existing non-ADA paratransit demand response service that meets the following criteria:
  - Cumulatively changes of the number of hours in the span of service within the service area by 20% or more; or
  - Changes of the number of hours in the span of service within a single PVTA Member Community by 20% or more; or
  - The establishment of service to a new community
- Service or fare changes which are considered temporary or pilot service, and which have a duration of 12 months or shorter, are not considered Major Service Changes.
- A major new capital construction or planning project that involves Federal or State funding participation is proposed.

#### 2. Initiation of the public hearing process for fare or service changes

The public hearing process will be initiated by the Advisory Board for proposals of the type and meeting one or more of the threshold criteria above.

If such a proposal or proposals are considered by the Route, Finance, and/or Paratransit Committee(s) of the Advisory Board, then relevant recommendations or actions by these committees and relevant supporting information will be presented to the members of the Advisory Board for their consideration prior to board action(s) and/or vote(s) on these proposal(s).

### 3. Public hearing locations, accommodations, and language access

The following conditions apply to PVTA public hearings:

- For proposals that are system-wide in nature (i.e., fare-related), a minimum of four public hearings will be held (one in Springfield; one in Holyoke, Chicopee, or Westfield; one in Northampton; and one in Amherst).
- For proposals that apply to individual bus routes or communities served by paratransit, at least one public hearing will be held in each transit corridor or community that would be affected by the proposed change.
- Public hearings will be held at locations that are accessible to PVTA fixed bus routes, such as public libraries, municipal buildings, and similar facilities that are convenient for PVTA bus riders or are served by paratransit if no fixed route bus stop is within walking distance. Hearing locations must be ADA accessible.
- Public hearings will be held at times of day that are likely to be convenient to the greatest number of PVTA customers and the public, and when PVTA service is available for people who are likely to be affected by the proposal(s).
- A meeting moderator who is not a PVTA employee will be provided if numerous attendees are expected at a public hearing. Fair and reasonable limits on speaking time for public hearing attendees may be imposed so that all who wish to speak may do so.
- Complete minutes of the hearing will be made.
- At least one member of PVTA senior staff (Administrator, Manager of Planning and Operations, or Chief Financial Officer) will attend each hearing.
- Translators for languages other than English will be provided upon request at least 7 calendar days before the hearing date. Spanish language translation will be provided at all hearings where any Spanish speaking customers and residents can reasonably be expected to attend. Requests for language translation received less than 7 calendar days prior to the hearing date or at the hearing itself will be accommodated to the best availability of staff. Staff will be proactive in determining potential needs to present written materials and meeting content in languages other than English and Spanish by proactively consulting riders, community organizations, local officials, board members and available demographic tools and information.
- Sign language interpretation and verbal descriptive assistance for people with visual impairments will be provided upon request at least 7 calendar days prior to the hearing. Requests for assistance received less than 7 calendar days prior to the hearing date or at the hearing itself will be accommodated to the best availability of staff.

#### 4. Public notification requirements

Public notifications of public hearings will include at a minimum the following:

- Preparation of a public hearing notice in English and Spanish that states: the purpose, date, time, and location of the hearing(s); the PVTA website address and phone number; and contact information to request language translation, sign interpretation and/or other accommodation.
- Preparation of a public hearing notice in a language or languages other than English or Spanish if requested by the public or suggested by a member of the PVTA Advisory Board or the public, or upon staff recommendation. Staff will be proactive in determining potential participant language needs for public hearings.
- Preparation and distribution of a press release or calendar announcement stating the hearing purpose and date(s) of the public hearing(s). The press release will be submitted at least 14 calendar days prior to the hearing date to the Daily Hampshire Gazette, Springfield Republican, and other relevant local and regional newspapers and websites, including a Spanish version to at least one Spanish language paper (El Pueblo Latino or LaVoz Hispana satisfy this requirement).
- PVTA Advisory Board members will receive a copy of the hearing notice via email in a timely manner so they may advise interested constituents and local officials.
- The public hearing notice will be posted on the PVTA website at least 14 days before the hearing date.
- Public hearing notices for proposals that would affect fixed bus route service will be posted on PVTA buses and transfer centers that operate in the geographic area affected by the proposal at least 14 days before the hearing date.
- Public hearings notices for proposals that would affect paratransit van services will be posted on all paratransit vans that operate in the geographic area affected by the proposal at least 14 days before the hearing date.
- All public hearing notices will be posted at the PVTA Customer Service Offices at Springfield Union Station, the Holyoke Transportation Center, and other major hubs and transfer points that riders who are potentially affected by the proposed change(s) are likely to use at least 14 days before the hearing date.
- The public hearing notice will be provided to the clerk of PVTA member municipalities that are likely to be affected by the proposal(s) at least 14 days before the hearing date.
- The public hearing notice will be provided to municipal Councils on Aging in the community or communities that would likely be affected by the proposed change at least 14 days before the hearing date.

## **5. Additional methods for submitting public hearing comments**

Public hearings will include the following additional methods for submitting comments. These will be available for a reasonable period prior to the hearing and up to 7 calendar days before the scheduled date of any Advisory Board action on the subject of the hearing and include:

- An email address to which written comments may be sent.
- A designated telephone voicemail box to receive comments up to 3 minutes in length.
- Letters via U.S. mail.

## **6. Documentation of the public hearing process**

The following public hearing documentation will be provided to the members of the Advisory Board for their consideration prior to any action or vote on the subject of those hearings:

- Sign-in sheets and comment forms filled out by hearing attendees.
- Copies of presentations and/or handouts provided to public hearings attendees.
- Meeting minutes of the hearing(s).
- Written summaries of voicemail messages received on the subject of the hearing.
- Copies of email messages and written letters received on the subject of the hearing.

## **7. Proposed changes that do not require public hearings**

- Fixed bus route schedule adjustments of 15 minutes or less.
- Typical variations in fixed route bus service between college/university academic and non-academic periods. (Proposed changes to academic “in session” fixed bus route service that would trigger the thresholds of Section 1 are not exempt.)
- Emergency situations. Proposals to hold public hearings on emergency-related changes will be presented to the Advisory Board if such a change is expected to be in effect for more than 180 days, and if the change meets the threshold requirements of Section 1.
- Reduced or free promotional fares that are offered on a daily basis or periodically within a period of 180 days.
- Temporary or pilot service changes that meet the threshold requirements of Section 1 may be instituted for 180 days or less without a public hearing. Such services lasting longer than 180 days and that meet the threshold requirements of Section 1 require that a proposal for public hearing(s) be presented to the Advisory Board at the first regularly scheduled Board meeting after the initial 180-day period ends, during which time the service or policy may continue to operate or be in effect.

## **8. Disparate impacts and disproportionate burdens analysis**

The information provided to the Advisory Board, Route, Finance, and/or Paratransit Subcommittees for consideration prior to any votes(s) on fare or service change proposals will include an analysis of potential disparate impacts and disproportionate burdens of the proposal(s) in accordance with PVTA's Disparate Impacts and Disproportionate Burdens Policies ([Appendix 2](#)).

If applicable, the information considered will include any Title VI Equity Analyses prepared according to the Federal Transit Administration's Title VI Fare Equity Analysis Ridership Data in [FTA Circular 4702.1B](#), of October 24, 2012. The Equity Analyses will include: 1) an evaluation of the proposal's potential disparate impacts on people of color (termed "minority" in the federal circular) as compared to white persons (termed "non-minority populations" in the federal circular); 2) an evaluation of the proposal's potential disproportionate impacts on low-income persons as compared to non-low income persons; 3) recommended feasible alternatives or modifications to mitigate potential adverse impacts or documentation of why the legitimate business purpose of the proposal cannot otherwise be accomplished.

## **9. Waivers and amendments**

The Advisory Board may vote to waive any of the requirements in Sections 1 through 7 of this Public Hearing Policy for specific public hearings or proposals.

The Advisory Board has the authority to amend this Public Hearing Policy.



## APPENDIX 2:

### PVTA Disparate Impact and Disproportionate Burdens Policies

#### **Disparate Impact Policy (racial discrimination)**

In accordance with the federal circular, and industry standards and best practices, the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority has defined a disparate impact as a Major Service Change in which the adverse impacts of the change that people of color experience as compared to non-people of color is 20% or more. For the purposes of this document, the term “people of color” is synonymous with the term “minority” as used in [FTA Circular 4702.1B](#) (page I-4).

#### **Disproportionate Burden Policy (low-income discrimination)**

In accordance with the federal circular, and industry standards and best practices, the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority has defined a disproportionate burden to be a change in service where low-income customers would experience a negative impact 20% or larger compared to non-low-income customers. For the purposes of this policy, “low-income” is defined as a person reporting an income below the federal poverty level (commonly referred to as 100% of the FPL)

If a Title VI Equity Analysis finds that a proposal would likely have adverse an impact that would be experienced by 20% or more of PVTA customers of color and/or customers considered to have low incomes, as compared to the local or regional averages, then PVTA must evaluate whether there are features of the proposal, or alternatives or modifications to it, that would likely achieve outcomes that are more fair and equitable for all.

If no feasible alternatives or modifications to mitigate a proposal’s anticipated adverse impacts on customers of color or with low incomes, PVTA will:

- Demonstrate that a legitimate business purpose of the proposal cannot otherwise be accomplished, and.
- Identify measures that will mitigate to the greatest extent possible the anticipated adverse impacts of the proposal on customers of color and/or with low incomes, and.
- Demonstrate that the proposal with mitigation is the least discriminatory approach available.

## APPENDIX 3: Pioneer Valley Transit Authority Fares and Passes

*As of November 2024.*

<u>Bus Fares</u>	<u>Price</u>	<u>Discounts</u>
Adult Basic Cash Fare	\$1.50	\$1.40
Adult Cash Transfer	\$0.25	
31-day Pass	\$54.00	\$52.00
31-day S&MI Pass	\$26.00	\$24.00
1-day Pass	\$3.50	
7-day Pass	\$15.00	
Child Fare (6-12)	\$0.90	
Child Transfer	\$0.25	
Child Under 5	<i>free</i>	
Senior & Mobility Impaired Cash Fare	\$0.75	
Senior & Mobility Impaired Cash Transfer	\$0.10	
1-ride ticket	\$1.50	\$1.40
<b><u>ADA and Senior Service Van Fares</u></b>		
Zone 1 (within town)	\$3.00	
Zone 2 (surrounding town)	\$3.50	
Zone 3 (beyond surrounding town)	\$4.00	
Outside ¾-mi required ADA service areas	\$5.00	
Pack of 20 Tickets valued at \$2.85 ea.	\$57.00	<i>(1 ride free)</i>
Pack of 10 Tickets valued at \$0.47 ea.	\$4.75	<i>(25¢ off)</i>

## APPENDIX 4:

### Sample Public Hearing Notice



## Public Hearing Audiencia pública

### Northampton Senior Van Service (Dial-a-Ride)

The Pioneer Valley Transit Authority is proposing a change to its Senior Van Service (Dial-a-Ride) in the City of Northampton in which Northampton Senior Services will provide van rides to destinations within the city limits.

The cost will be \$1 per ride (instead of \$2.50 per ride currently charged by PVTA). This service will be available Mon-Fri from 8:00AM to 4:30PM excluding holidays.

PVTA will continue to provide Senior Service van trips for Northampton residents who wish to travel to destinations outside the city at the existing fare rates.

**A public hearing for this proposal will be held:**

### Servicio para Personas de Edad Avanzada en Northampton

La Autoridad de Tránsito Pioneer Valley está proponiendo un cambio en su Servicio para Personas de Edad Avanzada (Dial-a-Ride) en la ciudad de Northampton, los Servicios para Personas Mayores de Northampton operará tal servicio dentro de los límites de la ciudad.

El costo será de \$1 por viaje (en lugar de los \$2.50 por viaje que actualmente es cobrado por PVTA). Este servicio será disponible de lunes a viernes de 8:00 AM a 4:30 PM excepto los días feriados.

PVTA continuará operando el Servicio de Personas de Edad Avanzada para los residentes que desean viajar a destinos fuera de Northampton a la tarifa vigente.

**Una audiencia pública para este cambio propuesto se llevará a cabo:**

**WED., OCT 12, 2016  
NORTHAMPTON CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS  
210 MAIN STREET (BEHIND CITY HALL)  
Session 1 from 3:30 to 4:30 PM; Session 2 from 6:00 to 7:00PM**

**TRADUCCIÓN EN ESPAÑOL PROPORCIONADA.** SPANISH language translation provided. Signing and interpretation for people with hearing and visual disabilities is available. Call 413-285-1179 or email [delvin@pvpc.org](mailto:delvin@pvpc.org) by Oct 5 to make arrangements.

**For more info: [pvta.com](http://pvta.com) or (413) 781-7882**

Notice date: rev 09/26/16

## **APPENDIX 5:**

### **Public Meeting or Hearing Check List**

- ✓ Meeting notices posted on buses, vans, and/or terminals in English and Spanish at least 14 days prior to meeting date.
- ✓ Press release in English and Spanish sent to Springfield Republican, Daily Hampshire Gazette, and at least 1 Spanish language newspaper at least 14 days before meeting date.
- ✓ Demographic inventory of community and consultation with Advisory Board representative in which meeting will take place to determine if additional language translations of meeting notices are needed or audio recording.
- ✓ Moderator, if large numbers of attendees are expected.
- ✓ Sign-in sheets
- ✓ Handouts of relevant materials (if any)
- ✓ “How to comment” sheet



## APPENDIX 7: PVTA Services, Ridership, and Customers

### PVTA Services

The PVTA is the largest regional transit authority in Massachusetts, serving 24 member communities in Western Massachusetts with a combined population of 623,629 (Census 2022 1-Year ACS).

PVTA is a designated recipient of funds from the Federal Transit Administration for the purpose of public transportation in a geographic area measuring approximately 600 square miles. PVTA's service area includes the Cities of Springfield, Chicopee, and Holyoke; the Five Colleges area of Northampton and Amherst, including more than 30,000 students and employees at the University of Massachusetts Amherst; and outlying suburban and rural communities.

PVTA provides fixed route (scheduled) bus service and demand response public transportation to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). PVTA owns and maintains a fleet of 189 heavy duty transit buses, 147 paratransit vans, and six (6) 18-passenger vans.



189 low-floor buses



147 paratransit vans



6 shuttle vans (18-passenger)

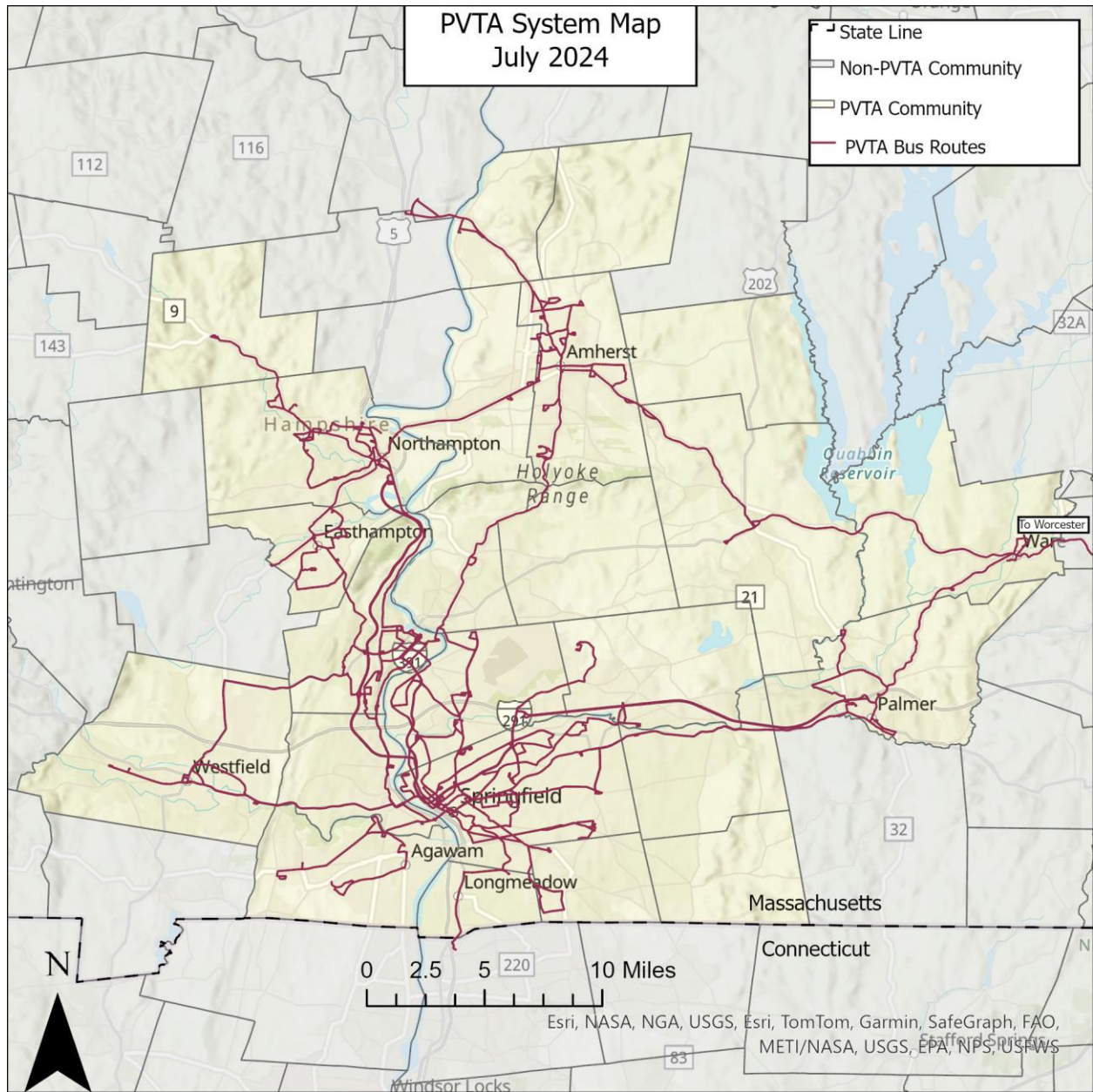
All PVTA vehicles are accessible, in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). All buses have low floors and a ramp at the front door so that persons using a wheelchair, scooter, walker, cane, or other mobility assistance device can board easily. All vans are lift equipped. All customers are encouraged to ask for ramps to be extended or lifts deployed so they can feel safe when boarding. Additional ADA features of PVTA buses include safety lighting, audio stop announcements, electronic stop announcement signs, priority seating, and designated areas with equipment to safely secure wheelchairs and scooters.

Created in 1974, PVTA had an operating budget of \$61 million in FY2023. Under Massachusetts law, PVTA and the Commonwealth's 13 other regional transit authorities may not directly operate transit services. Therefore, PVTA competitively contracts with private companies to operate its fixed routes bus routes and paratransit van services. Currently, these contract operators are UMass Transit Services, First Transit, and Hulmes Transportation Services.

Funding for PVTA operations and capital improvements comes from several sources: federal grant programs; state and local governments; institutions; advertising; and passenger fares, which accounted for 18% of the total cost of services in FY2023. A schedule of current PVTA fares is included as [Appendix 3](#).

There are 46 scheduled bus routes. Paratransit van service to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is provided at all locations in PVTA member communities and within ¼ of a mile in municipalities that are not members (South Deerfield, Enfield CT).

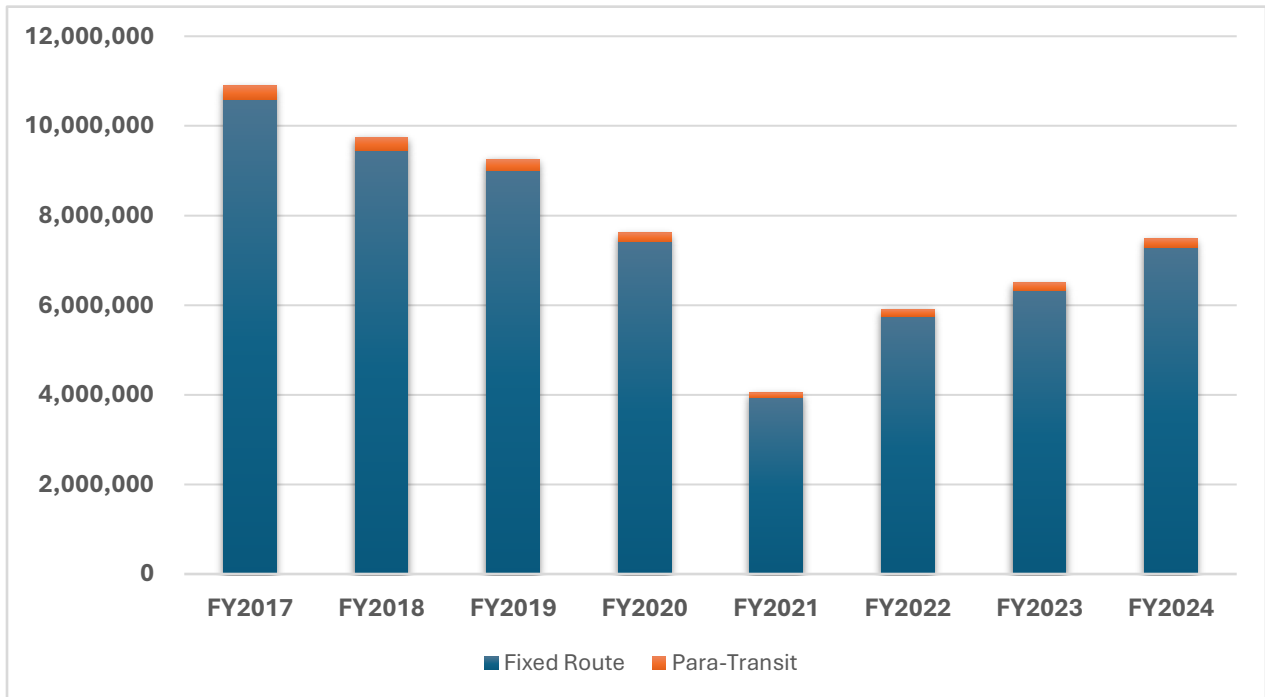
### PVTA Service Area



## PVTA Ridership and Customer Demographics

PVTA provided 7.5 million passenger trips for the most recently concluded fiscal year (FY2024 from July 1, 2023, to June 30, 2024), which is a 24% decrease since FY2019 (prior to the COVID-19 Pandemic). PVTA’s ridership includes bus riders, ADA clients for paratransit vans, and customers of its Senior Service van transportation (aka “Dial a Ride). After the loss in ridership during the pandemic in FY2021, PVTA has steadily won back 46% of the loss ridership and has continued to grow by nearly a 1 million trips each year since.

### PVTA Ridership FY2017 to FY2024



Source: FTA NTD Reporting

Based on ridership, fare payment patterns, and trip frequencies reported on rider surveys, there are an estimated 15,000 to 20,000 people who use PVTA at least once a week.

In general, PVTA customers are highly dependent on public transit. “Transit dependent” is generally defined as having no means other than public transit to make a typical trip. Approximately 68% of PVTA riders said they have “No other way to make my trip” (PVTA 2022/2024 onboard rider surveys).

FTA defines transit dependency as: 1) people without private transportation or private car; 2) elderly Aged 65 and older; 3) youths under age 18; and 4) persons below poverty or median income. With respect to these characteristics, PVTA’s most recent customer surveys found:

- 52.1% of PVTA customers do not own or have access to a private auto.
- 3.7% are Age 65 or older.
- Approximately one-fifth are 18 or younger
- More than half (55.2%) of PVTA riders have incomes at or below the federal poverty level.



Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that at least 2 of every 3 PVTA riders (10,000 to 13,400 individuals) meet at least one of the criteria for being transit dependent.

## Bus Riders

Demographic information presented in this section was compiled from on-board customer surveys of bus riders performed in 2022 (Northern System Survey) and 2024 (Southern System Survey). Additional information is presented from 2022 American Community Survey five-year estimates.

### Income of Bus Riders

PVTA customers on average have personal incomes that are significantly less than the regional average. In fact, the majority of PVTA customers report personal income that is at or below the federal poverty level, which is shown below for 2024.

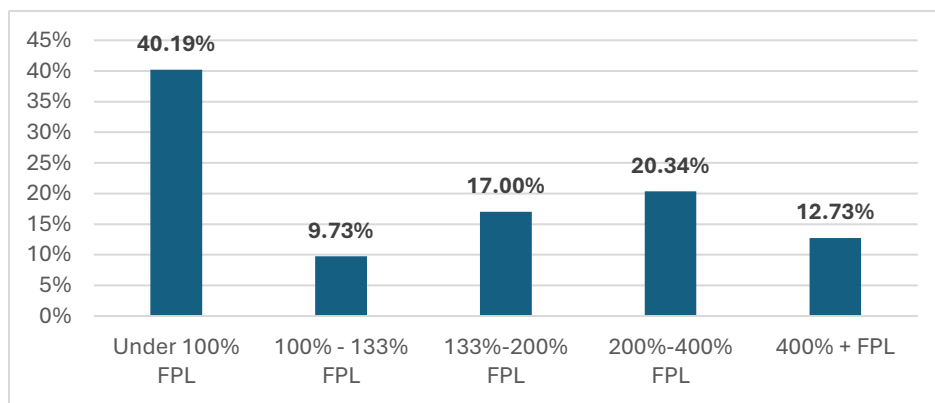
#### Federal Poverty Level (FPL) 2024

Household Size	Annual Income
For individuals	\$15,060
For a family of 2	\$20,440
For a family of 3	\$25,820
For a family of 4	\$31,200
For a family of 5	\$36,580
For a family of 6	\$41,960

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Results from PVTA System Customer Survey presented below show that more than 40% of PVTA customers are at or below the federal poverty level.

#### Reported Income of Customers



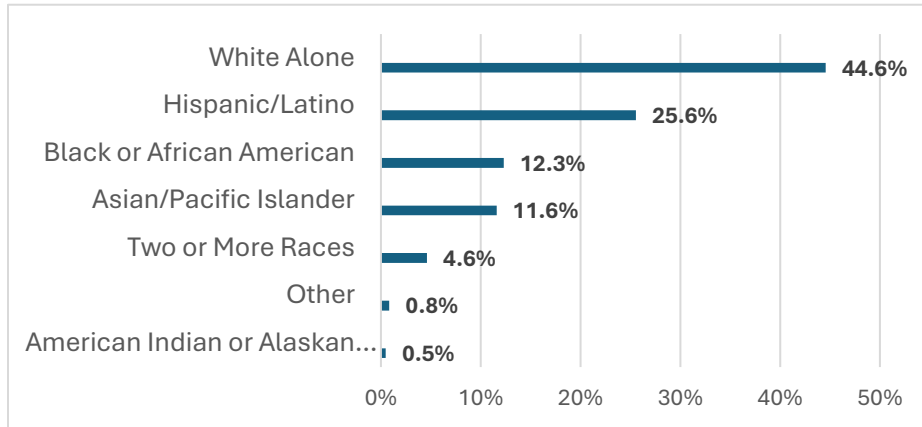
PVTA On Board Customer Surveys 2022 and 2024

According to the American Community Survey 2022 five-year estimates, 55% of commuters who take transit to work make less than \$10,000/year. Another 29% make between \$10,000-14,999, of which approximately 6% can reasonably be estimated to be below the \$11,700 federal poverty threshold. Therefore, the estimated proportion of transit commuters only in the region below the poverty level could be as high as 61%.

## Race of Bus Riders

People of color are the majority of PVTA bus riders, totaling approximately 55.4% of customers surveyed in 2022 and 2024.

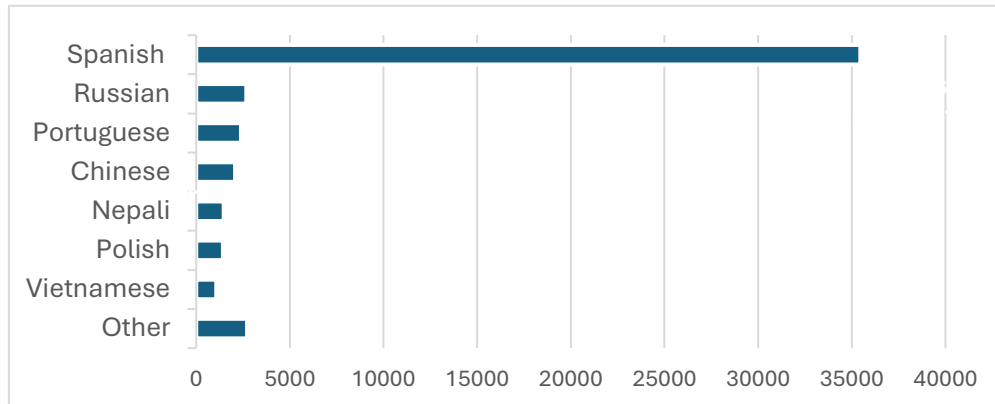
**Racial Characteristics of PVTA Customers**



*PVTA On Board Customer Surveys 2022 and 2024*

## Language and English Proficiency of Bus Riders

A significant and growing number of PVTA customers primarily speak a language other than English. The proportion of PVTA customers surveyed in 2022-2024 who said they speak English less than “Very Well” was 7.5%, this is significantly above the national average of 4.4% and the Massachusetts state average of 5.8%. The most prevalent among these other languages is Spanish, spoken by over 35,454 customers or 5.4% of all people in the PVTA service area.



*American Community Survey 2022 five-year estimates*

## Paratransit Van Customers

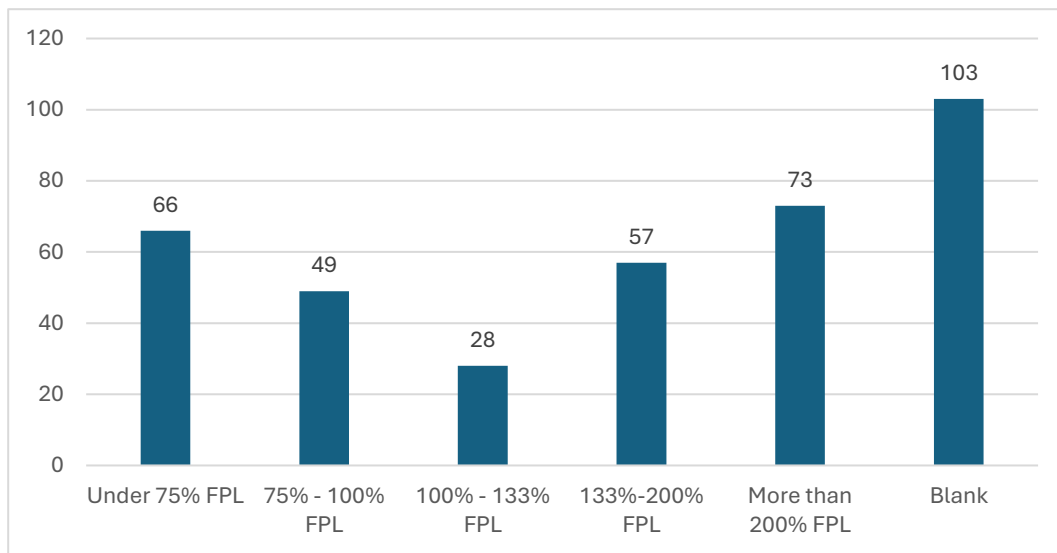
PVTA operates two paratransit demand response van transportation services: the complementary paratransit services for persons with doctor-verified disabilities as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which operates in the same geographic areas and hours as PVTA’s fixed routes; and the Senior Service van transportation program, which is available to any resident of PVTA’s service area age 60 and older Monday through Friday from 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM (except holidays) at the same fares as ADA service.

PVTA provided 176,976 rides through the Senior Van Service and ADA Paratransit programs. Rides provided by PVTA’s ADA and Senior Service van transportation programs comprised 2.7% of all trips in FY2023. Senior Service rides were approximately 60% of all van rides, and 1.6% of all PVTA rides.

## Income of Paratransit Van Customers

PVTA ADA and Senior Service van riders on average have personal incomes that are significantly less than the regional average. (PVTA does not collect or require Senior Service customers to provide income information to use the service.) In 2023, when the federal poverty threshold was \$14,580 for single person households, approximately 30% of all PVTA van riders (ADA and Senior Service) had incomes below the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). Therefore roughly 2 in every 6 van riders are living in poverty, and approximately 4 of every 6 van riders have incomes at or below the Federal Poverty Level.

### PVTA Van Riders “What is the Total Income of Household Members?” 2023 Survey Results

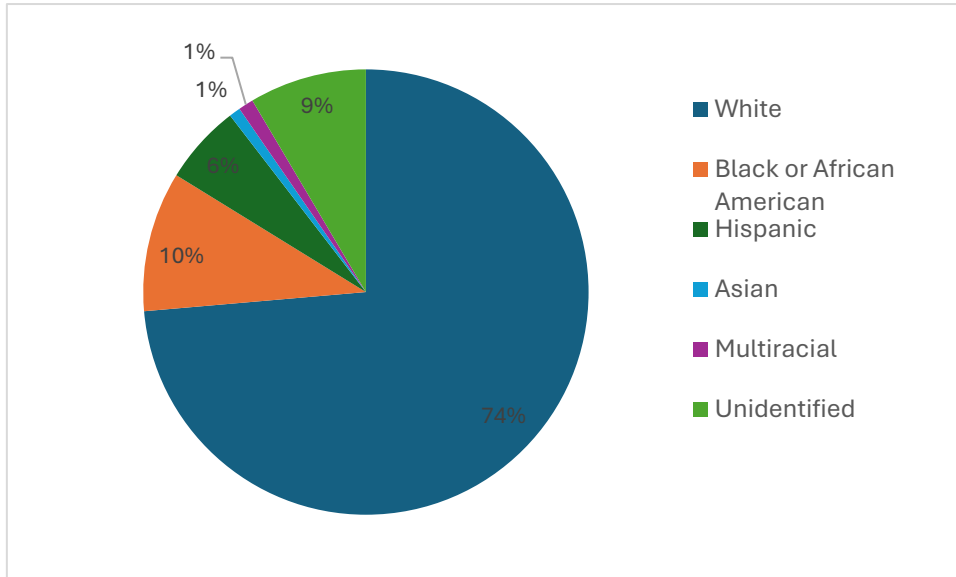


Source: PVTA Paratransit Customer Survey 2023

## Race of Paratransit Van Customers

The 2023 survey of PVTA ADA and Senior Service van riders (see chart below) found that 74% of riders were white and 18% were people of color. Of these people, 10% were Black, 6% were Hispanic, 1% Asian, and 1% multiracial.

**Racial Characteristics of PVTA Paratransit Customers from 2023 Survey**

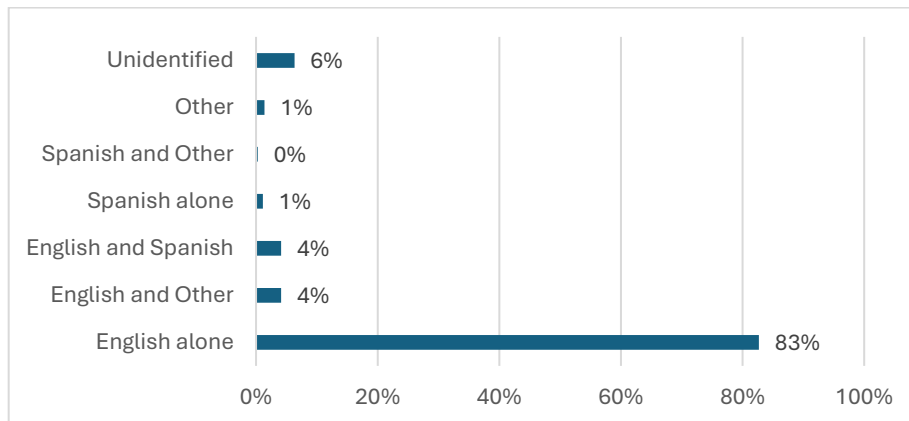


Source: PVTA Paratransit Customer Survey 2023

## Languages and English Proficiency of Paratransit Customers

The 2023 survey of ADA and Senior Service van riders found a small percentage (2%) of customers did not speak English at home, and the majority of those are Spanish speakers. Another 4% spoke both English and Spanish at home. The majority of customers, 83%, spoke only English at home.

**Primary Languages Spoken by All PVTA Van Service Customers 2023**



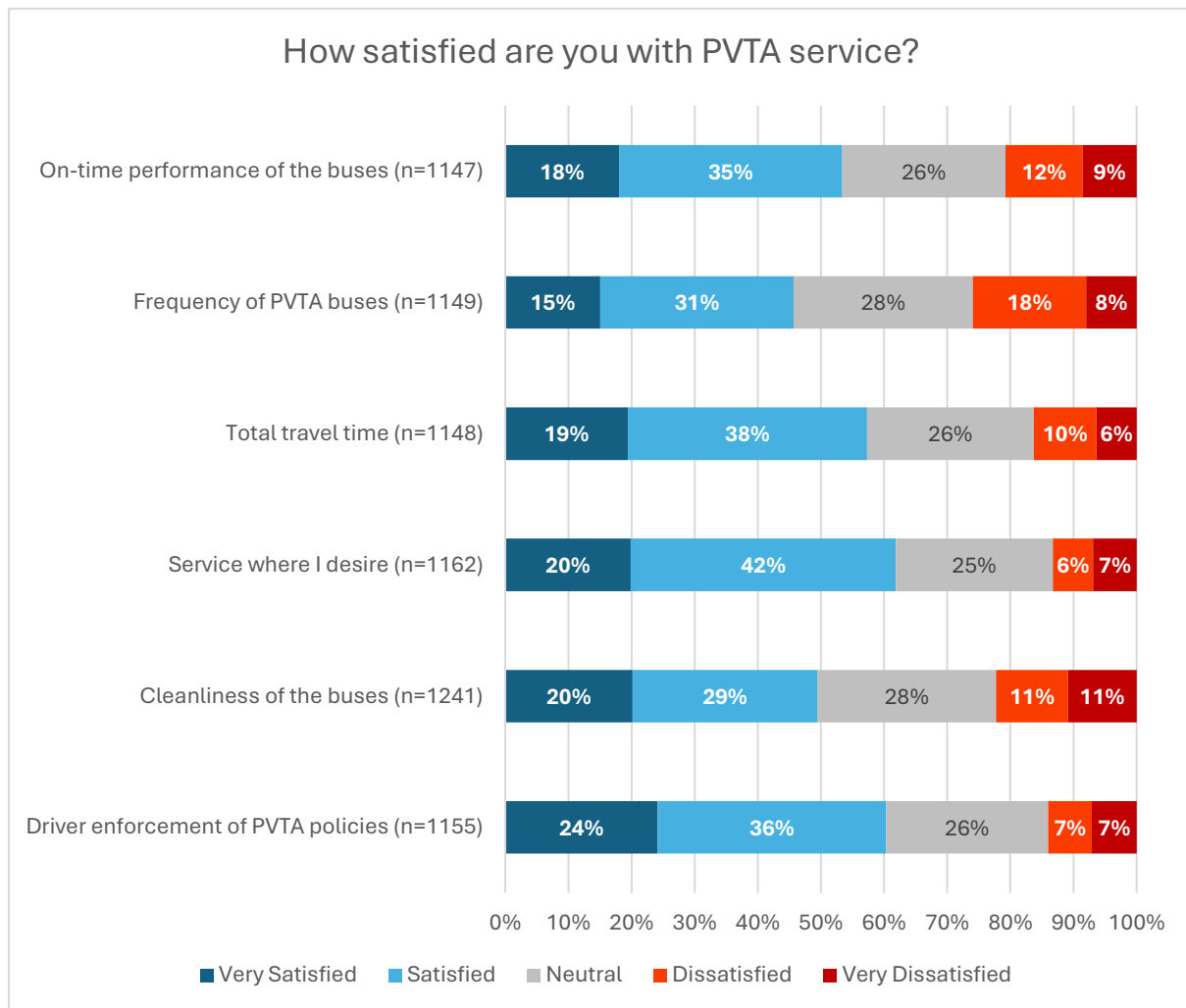
Source: PVTA Paratransit Customer Survey 2023

## APPENDIX 8: Customer Surveys and Public Participation

The Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA) regularly surveys our customers to better understand their travel needs, satisfaction with service, and priorities for improvement. Customer surveys also provide important information that helps PVTA comply with laws and regulations to assure the bus service in our region is fair, equitable and accessible.

In March, April and May of 2024, a total of 1,526 surveys were completed by PVTA customers on 25 bus routes primarily within Hampden County, PVTA’s Southern Service Region. These routes provide 56% of all PVTA fixed-route rides in the Pioneer Valley. Customer satisfaction ratings are summarized below.

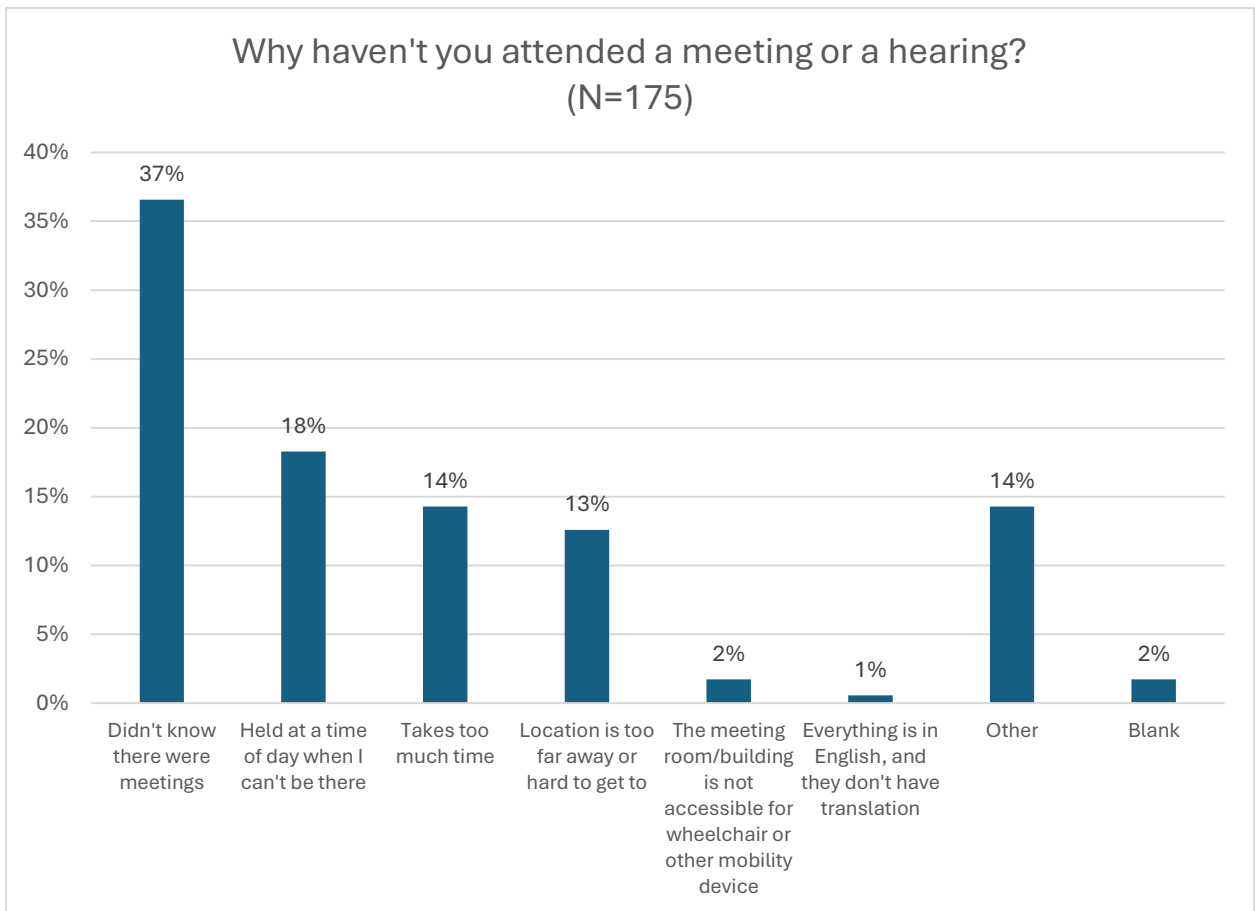
### How satisfied are you with PVTA Service?



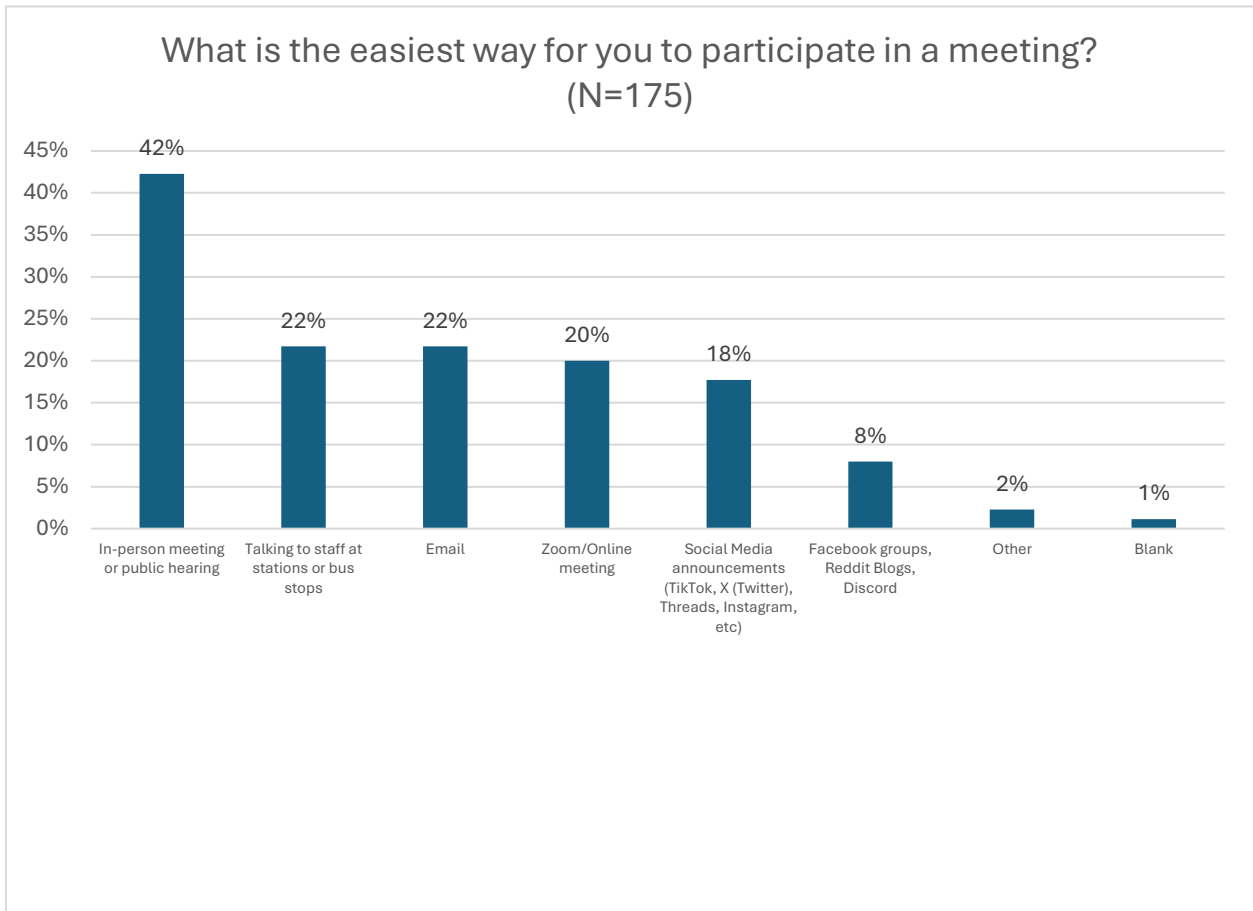
## APPENDIX 9: Rider Survey on Meeting Preferences

As part of the Public Participation Plan, PVTA employed PVPC in collecting opinions of bus riders on ways PVTA can communicate most effectively. Surveys were conducted between August 16<sup>th</sup> and October 16<sup>th</sup>, 2024, at major transit hubs (Union Station, Holyoke Transportation Center, UMass – Amherst and The Academy of Music in Northampton). Paper surveys were used in both English and Spanish. The survey was also available online through a QR code in the language set by the rider’s own mobile device. Results are shown below.

### Why haven't you attended a meeting or hearing?

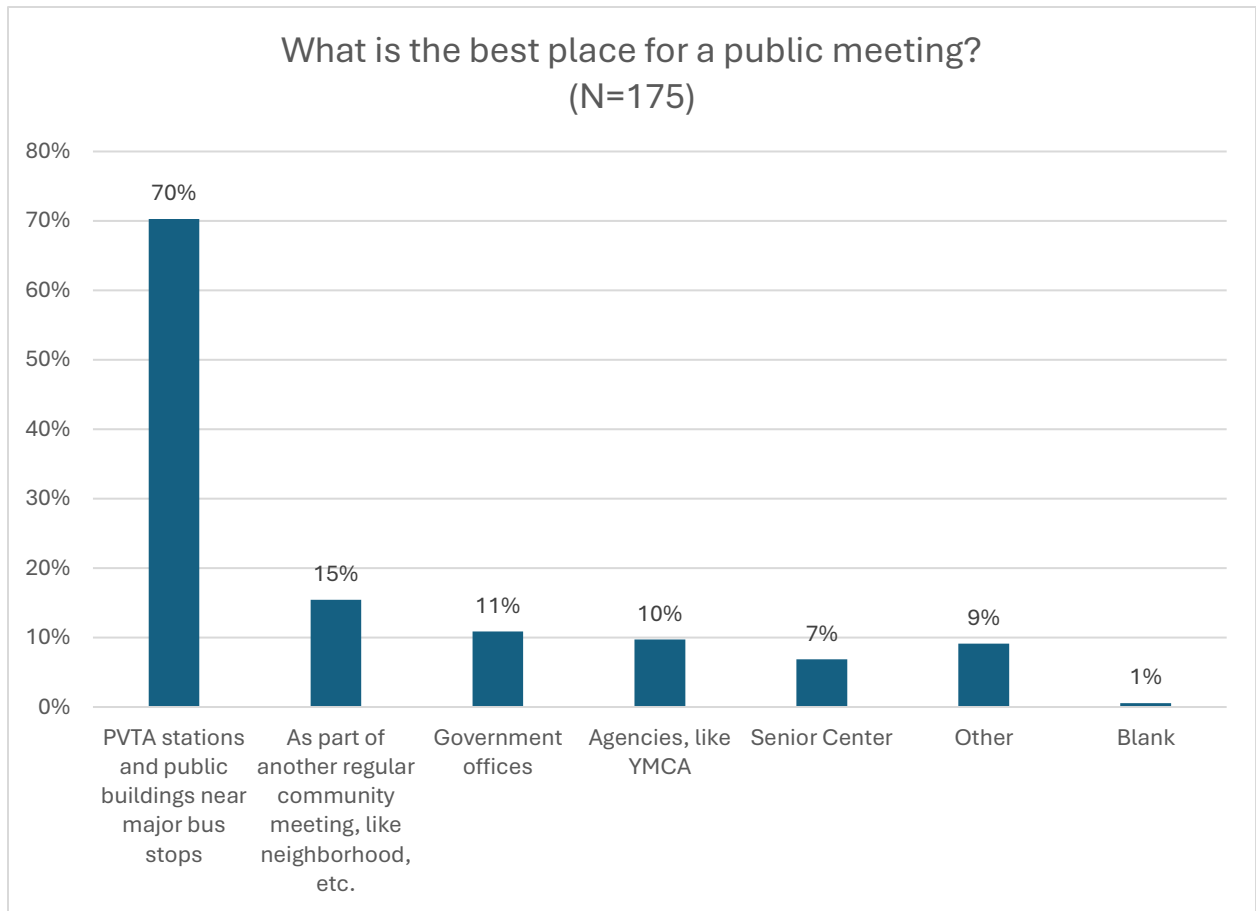


## What is the easiest way for you to participate in a meeting?



When asked how meetings and information can best be distributed, a clear plurality chose in-person meetings or public hearings. Talking to staff at stations or bus stops was also preferred. Email announcements, Zoom/Online meetings, and Social Media announcements were also preferred by more than 1/6 of those surveyed. Facebook groups, reddit blogs, and Discord had less interest.

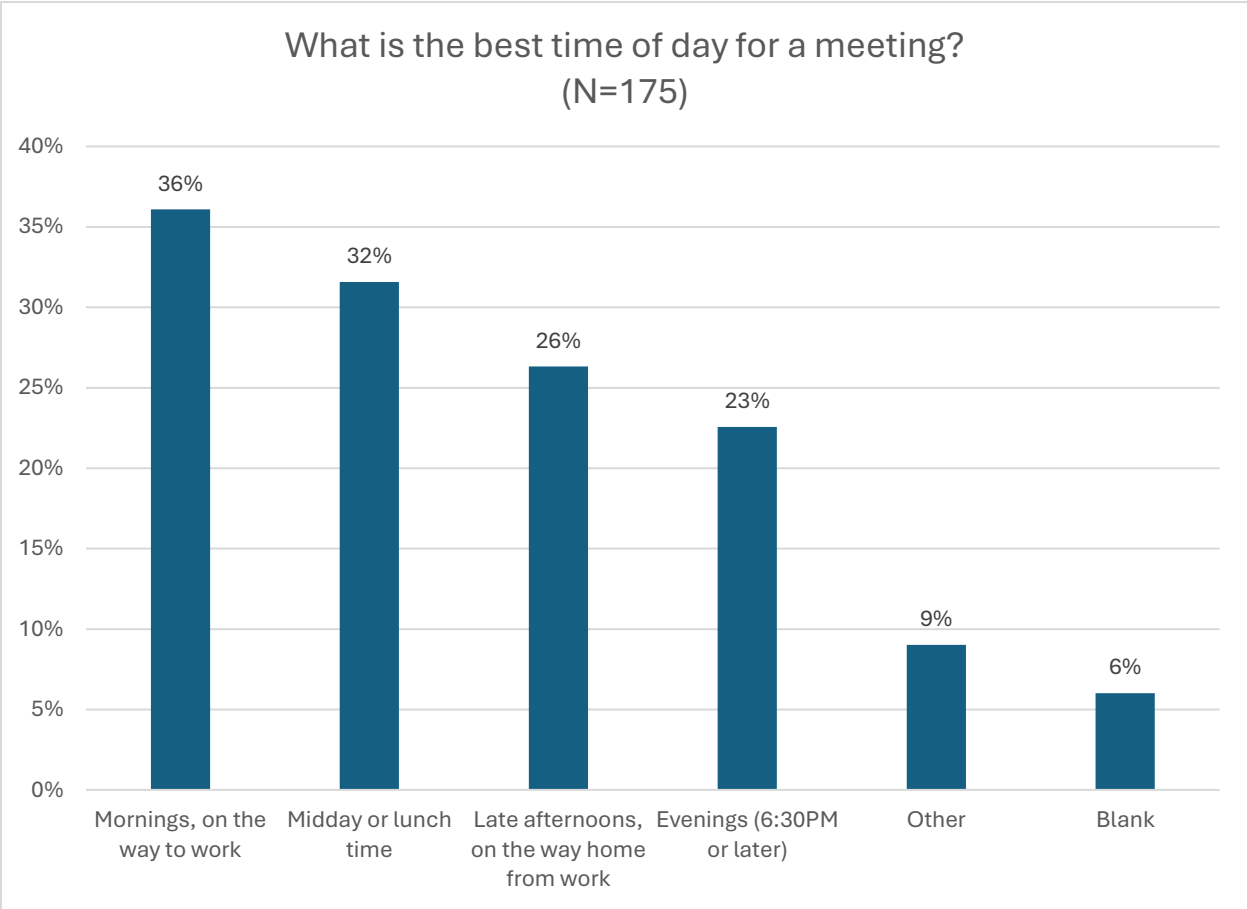
## What is the best place for a public meeting?



A majority of respondents felt that in-person meetings should be held at PVTA stations and public buildings near major bus stops. Roughly 1/10<sup>th</sup> of those surveyed felt each (Government offices; As part of another regular community meeting, like neighborhood, etc.; Agencies, like YMCA; Senior Center; and Other) were important locations.



# What is the best time for a meeting?



A plurality of those surveyed felt Mornings on the way to work were the best times to hold meetings, followed by Midday or lunch time and Late afternoons, on the way home from work.