

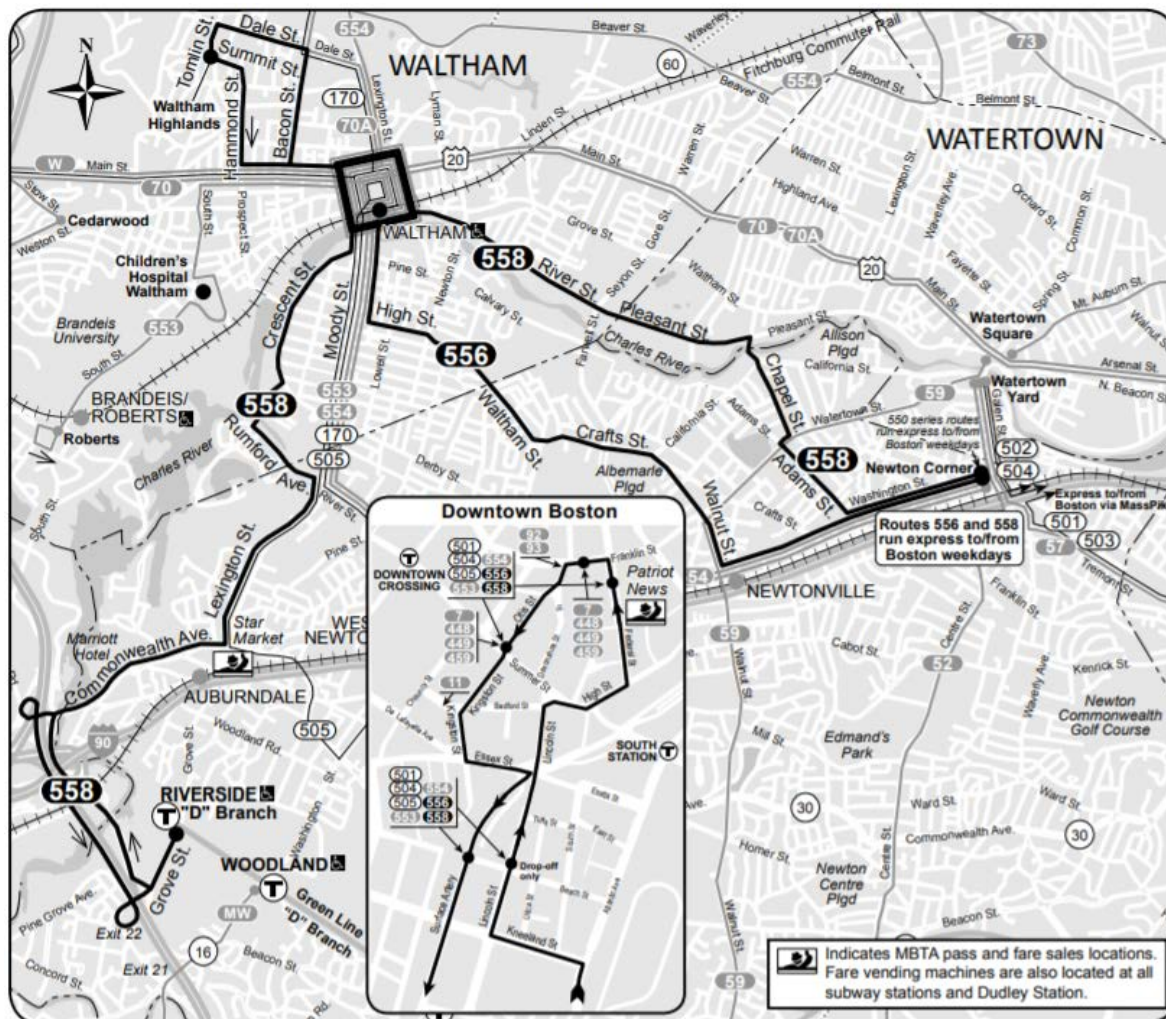
Route 556

Waltham Highlands – Downtown Boston

Route Overview

Route 556 Waltham Highlands – Downtown Boston is a weekday-only Commuter route providing service between Waltham Highlands and Newton Corner via Waltham Central Square, Newtonville, and Newton Corner with peak-only service continuing to Downtown Boston.

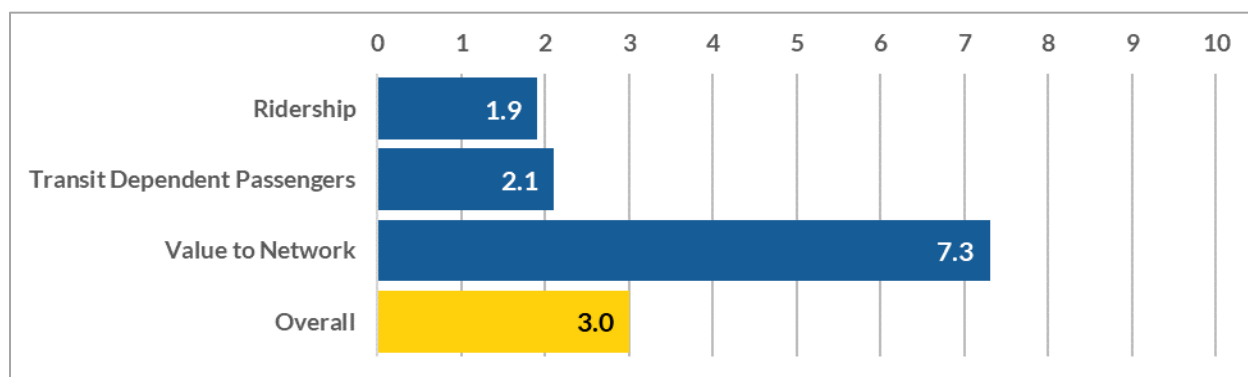
Figure 1 | Service Map



Network Importance

Route 556 is of low importance to the overall MBTA bus network, providing only weekday commuter service on a limited number of trips (see Figure 2), and very limited midday service. On a relative scale of 0 to 10, the route rates 1.9 in terms of ridership, 2.1 in terms of transit dependent ridership, and 7.3 in terms of its value to the network (which reflects the number of people who are uniquely served, the number of jobs and other important destinations, and the number of transferring passengers). Its overall score, which gives a 70% weighting to overall ridership and a 15% weight to both other measures, is 3.0.

Figure 2 | Relative Importance within MBTA Bus Network (on a scale of 0 to 10)



Service Patterns

Schedule

Route 556 operates the following frequencies during its service day:

- Beginning at 6:15 AM, Route 556 operates its first four inbound trips with 25 to 30 minute frequencies. The first trip does not serve Downtown Boston.
- At 8:15 AM, the route frequency decreases to 60 minutes.
- From 9:15 AM to 3:15 PM, buses do not continue downtown.
- During the PM peak and evening, outbound frequency increases to every 40 to 48 minutes.

Route 556 meets the MBTA’s Span of Service and Frequency Standards for Commuter routes.

Route 556 does not operate on weekends.

Table 1 | Schedule Statistics

SERVICE DAY	SPAN OF SERVICE	FREQUENCY (RANGE)	FREQUENCY (AVERAGE)	DAILY TRIPS (INBOUND/OUTBOUND)
Monday-Friday	6:15 AM to 7:20 PM			16/14
Sunrise	-	-	-	-
Early AM	6:15 AM to 6:59 AM	25 - 30	28	2/1
AM Peak	7:00 AM to 8:59 AM	30 - 60	42	3/2
Midday Base	9:00 AM to 1:29 PM	60	60	5/4
Midday School	1:30 PM to 3:59 PM	60	60	2/3
PM Peak	4:00 PM to 6:29 PM	30 - 60	40	2/4
Evening	6:30 PM to 7:20 PM	48	48	2/0
Late Evening	-	-	-	-
Night	-	-	-	-
Saturday	-	-	-	-
Sunday	-	-	-	-

Note: Span of service reflects the time the first bus begins service until the time the last bus finishes service.

Service Patterns

Route 556 travels between Waltham Highlands and Newton Corner via Waltham Central Square. Its peak period trips continue express to Downtown Boston via the Massachusetts Turnpike.

- Pattern 556.0 travels to/from Downtown Boston.
- Pattern 556.2 terminates in Newton Corner.

Table 2 | Service Patterns

PATTERN	ORIGIN	DESTINATION	UNIQUE FEATURE	TRIPS per WKD	TRIPS per SAT	TRIPS per SUN
INBOUND				16	-	-
556.0	Waltham Highlands	Downtown Boston	Via Waltham Central Square and Newton Corner	8	-	-
556.7	Waltham Highlands	Newton Corner	Via Waltham Central Square	8	-	-
OUTBOUND				14	-	-
556.0	Downtown Boston	Waltham Highlands	Via Waltham Central Square and Newton Corner	6	-	-
556.7	Newton Corner	Waltham Highlands	Via Waltham Central Square	8	-	-

Ridership

Route 556 carries 468 passengers per weekday, which is average for MBTA Commuter routes.

Ridership by Stop

Route 556 experiences modest ridership in Waltham Highlands, and at the dense commercial and transit centers of the Waltham Commuter Rail Station, Newtonville, Newton Corner, and most riders travel to Downtown Boston:

- 35 passengers per day board in Waltham Highlands, a medium density residential area.
- 32 passengers per day board along Main Street between Waltham Highlands and the Waltham Commuter Rail station, a high density commercial corridor also served by Route 70 Cedarwood – Central Square Cambridge and Route 553 Roberts – Downtown Boston.
- 20 passengers per day board at the Waltham Commuter Rail station.
- 23 passengers per day board along Route 556's three stops on Moody Street, also served by Route 553 Roberts – Downtown Boston, Route 554 Waverley Square – Downtown Boston, and Route 505 Waltham Center – Downtown Boston.
- 79 passengers per day board at the 14 stops along the 2.1 mile long High Street, Waltham Street, Craft Street, and Walnut Street corridor served uniquely by Route 556 between Moody Street and Newtonville.
- 25 passengers per day board and 19 alight at Washington Street @ Walnut Street in Newtonville, where Route 556 joins the Washington Street corridor also served by Route 553 Roberts – Downtown Boston and Route 554 Waverley Square – Downtown Boston.
- 55 passengers per day board and 60 alight at the seven stops along the 1.2 mile long Washington Street corridor between Newtonville and Newton Corner.
- 162 passengers per day, or about 60% of total boardings before the Newton Corner, continue onward to Downtown Boston.

Ridership by Trip

Ridership is highest on Route 556's first and last Boston trips of the day, indicating that there exists unmet demand for extended early AM and evening service to/from Downtown Boston. Midday ridership is very low, with fewer than six passengers per trip (see Figure 4 and Figure 5).

Figure 3 | Weekday Inbound Ridership by Stop Map

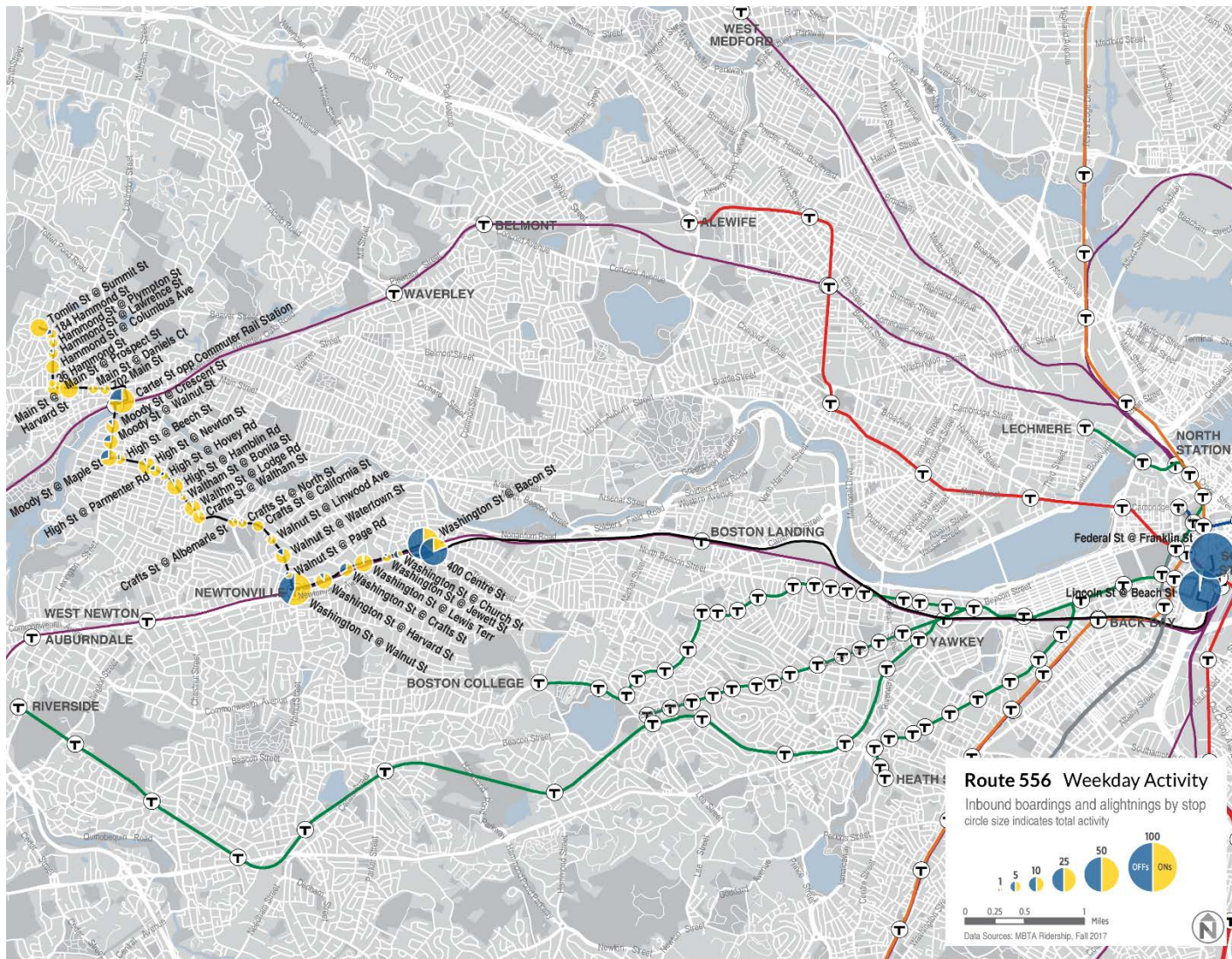


Figure 4 | Weekday Ridership by Trip: Inbound

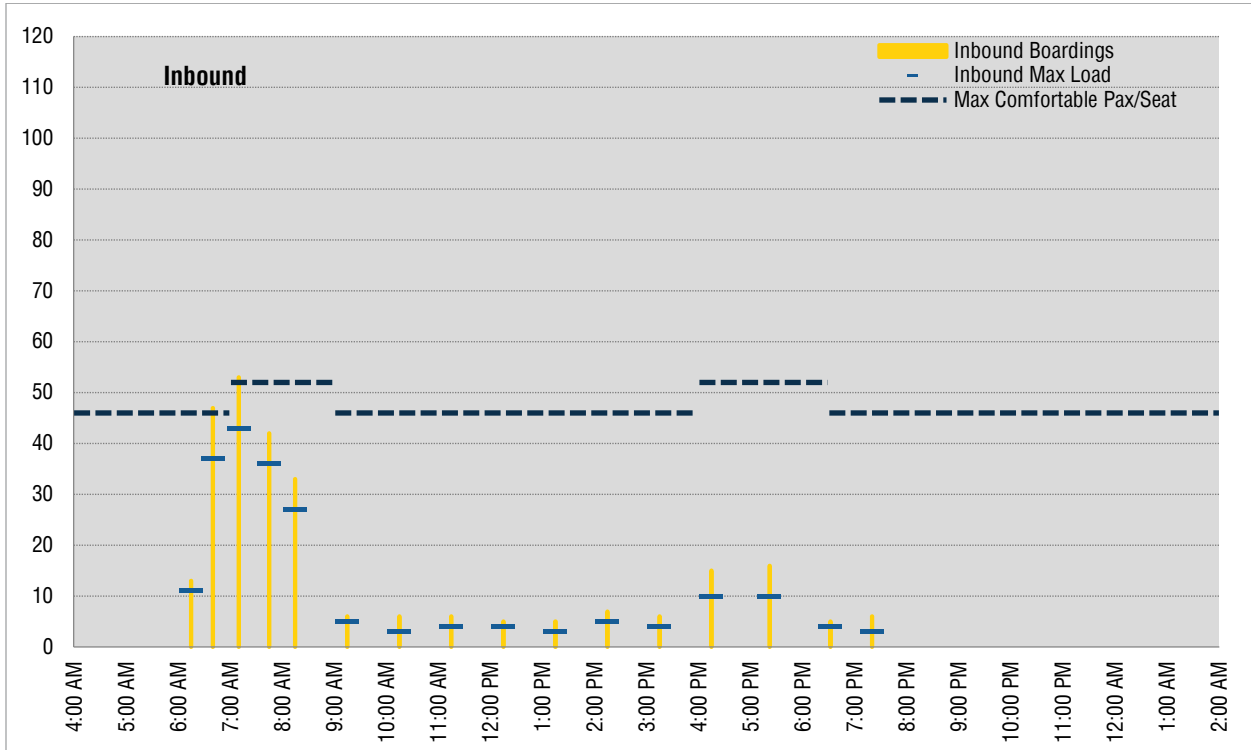
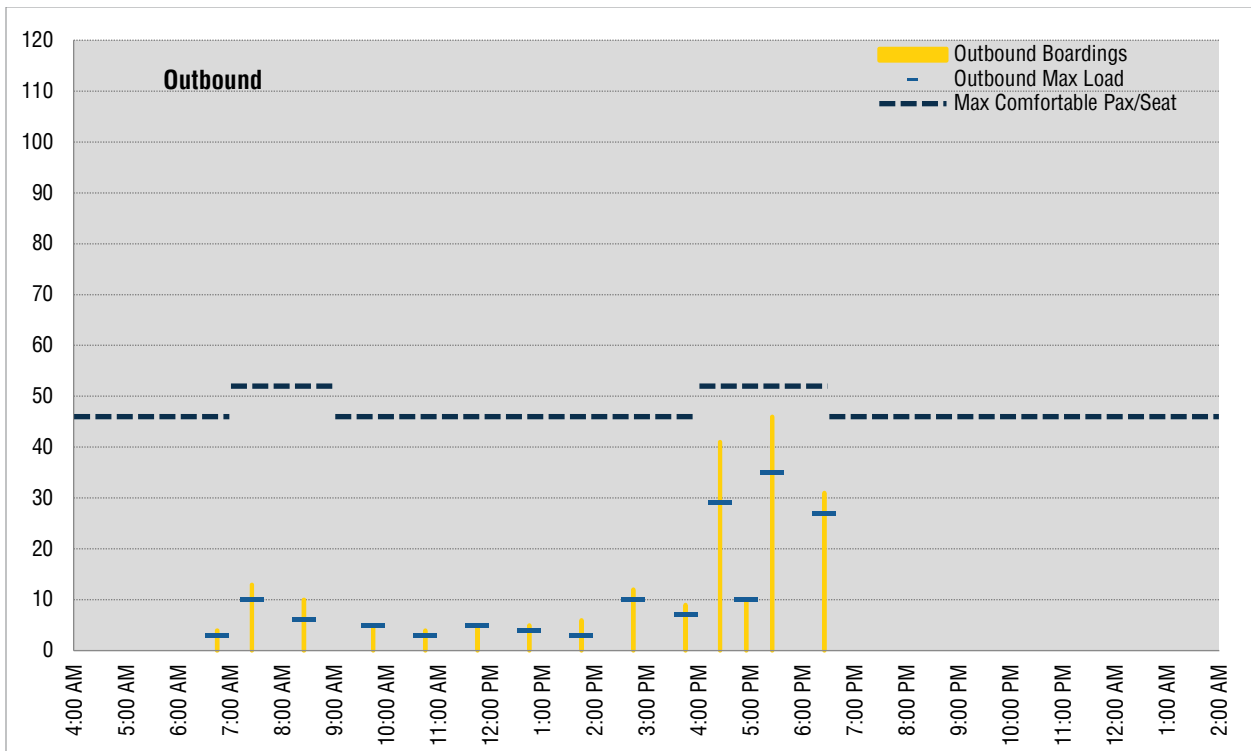


Figure 5 | Weekday Ridership by Trip: Outbound



Passenger Comfort

The MBTA desires that passengers travel in relatively comfortable conditions. At the same time, the MBTA’s definition of comfort reflects the very high volume environment in which the MBTA operates, and that some passengers may have to stand for a portion of their trip. More specifically, at least 92% of passengers’ travel times should be in comfortable conditions, and ideally, at least 96% of travel times should be in comfortable conditions. Comfortable conditions are considered to be 140% or less of seated capacity during high volume periods and 125% or less during other periods.

On Route 556, 100% of passenger minutes are in comfortable conditions, which is above the minimum standard (see Table 3).

Table 3 | Passenger Time Spent Traveling in Comfortable Conditions

	WEEKDAYS	SATURDAYS	SUNDAYS
Minimum Standard	92%	92%	92%
Target	96%	96%	96%
Actual	100%	-	-

Reliability and Speed

Reliability

Passengers using lower frequency services like Route 556 typically use published schedules to plan their trip. For these services, the MBTA measures reliability based how each trip runs compared to the schedule. Trips must depart within three minutes of their scheduled departure time, leave designated stops (known as timepoints) no more than one minute ahead or six minutes behind schedule, and arrive at their destination no more than five minutes behind its scheduled arrival time.

The MBTA does not always run every scheduled trip each day. Trips may be dropped due to severe traffic congestion or when there are not enough vehicles or drivers available to serve the full schedule. Current methods for measuring dropped have a high margin of error. The impact of dropped trips is therefore presented as a qualitative measure (Major, Minor, or Not an Issue) – and are excluded from reliability calculations.

Because many of Route 556’s trips travel on the Massachusetts Turnpike during peak hour, reliability is low, with overall route reliability of 52%, about average for a Commuter route.

Table 4 | Reliability

SERVICE DAY	ORIGIN/MID-ROUTE ON-TIME PERFORMANCE	DESTINATION ON-TIME PERFORMANCE	OVERALL RELIABILITY	DROPPED TRIPS
Monday-Friday	52%	62%	54%	0.1%
Saturday	-	-	-	-
Sunday	-	-	-	-

Running Times

Route 556’s trips to and from Downtown Boston arrive five minutes early to two minutes late during the AM peak and up to 10 minutes late during the PM peak.

Figure 6 | Scheduled & Median Travel Time by Trip: Route 556 Inbound

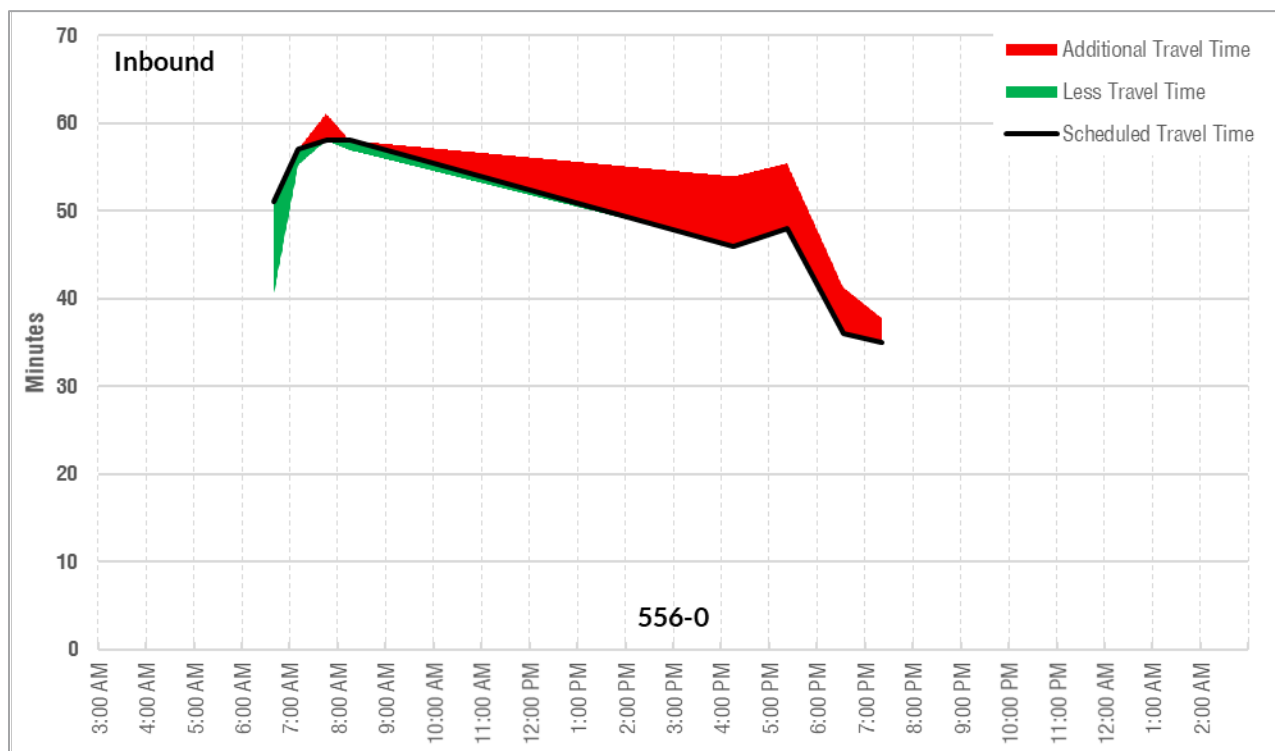
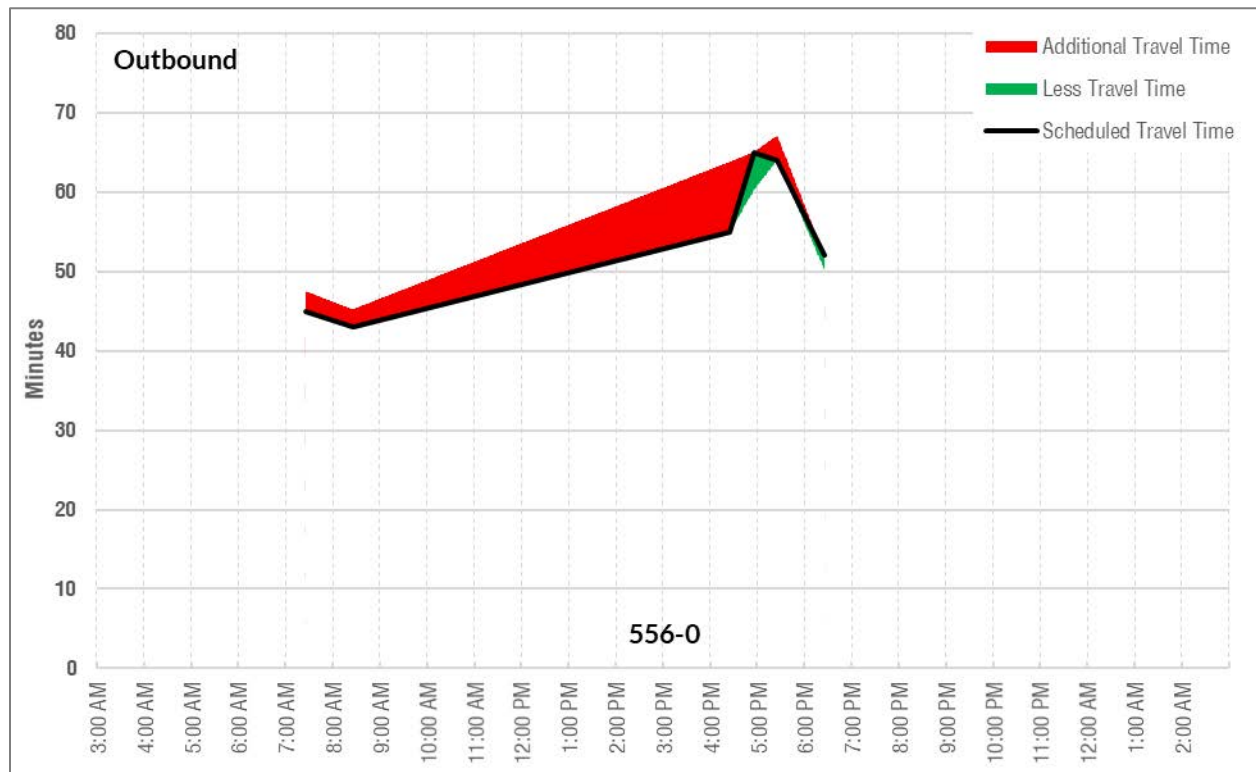


Figure 7 | Scheduled & Median Travel Time by Trip: Route 556 Outbound



Stop Spacing

Route 556's stops are too closely spaced, with an overall stop spacing of 762 feet between stops between its terminus in Waltham Highlands and Newton Corner. Stops are especially close along High Street, where the five stops have an average spacing of 630 feet. This close stop spacing results in inconsistent stop-to-stop boarding patterns, with boardings ranging from three passengers to 12 passengers along this corridor.

Summary

Route 556 provides an important connection between Waltham Highlands, Waltham Central Square, North Newton, Newtonville, Newton Corner, and Downtown Boston. Service could be improved by consolidating stops, and adjusting the scheduled running times.