

‘Beats driving:’ South Coast Rail fast becoming popular commuter service since 2025 launch

By [Omar Mohammed](#) Globe Staff, Updated August 26, 2026, 6:57 a.m.



Commuters disembarked from the New Bedford/Fall River to Boston commuter line at the Church Street station in New Bedford earlier this month. PAT GREENHOUSE/GLOBE STAFF

It may have [taken three decades and a billion dollars](#), but for those who live in southern Massachusetts and work in Boston, the [South Coast Rail](#) has become a welcome alternative to the stress, expense and unpredictability of driving.

One of those commuters is Madison Angulo, 22, who on a recent Friday morning boarded the 9:24 a.m. train at New Bedford's Church Street station. Angulo works as an academic adviser at the University of Massachusetts Boston, and said the train has made it easier for her to work in the city and avoid its exorbitant rents by living in more-affordable New Bedford, where she grew up.

Occasional delays aside, taking the commuter rail has saved her money, especially at a time when [gas prices are soaring](#).

"I can commute and save more," said Angulo, who commutes three days a week.

Angulo is among thousands of residents who have embraced the New Bedford/Fall River to Boston commuter line that launched in March 2025. It's [the first time in more than a half century](#) that communities in the southern parts of the state have been given a direct train to Boston's South Station, while [overcoming funding challenges and some local opposition](#).

The benefits flow in the opposition direction, as well. It's allowed would-be visitors from the north to easily access and explore [the rich history](#), [literary traditions](#), [artistic sensibility](#) and [diverse food scene](#) that defines the South Coast.

Daily ridership during the week, which accounts for more than 90 percent of total ridership on the line, averages about 9,500 riders since it launched last year, and has stayed at that level through May, according to the MBTA. It's 3,000 passengers more than those who took the old Middleborough line, which stopped short of going all the way south to Fall River and New Bedford, in the months before the launch of South Coast Rail.

Average weekday ridership on the Fall River/New Bedford line

Ridership on what was formerly the Middleborough/Lakeville Line increased after service was extended to the South Coast.

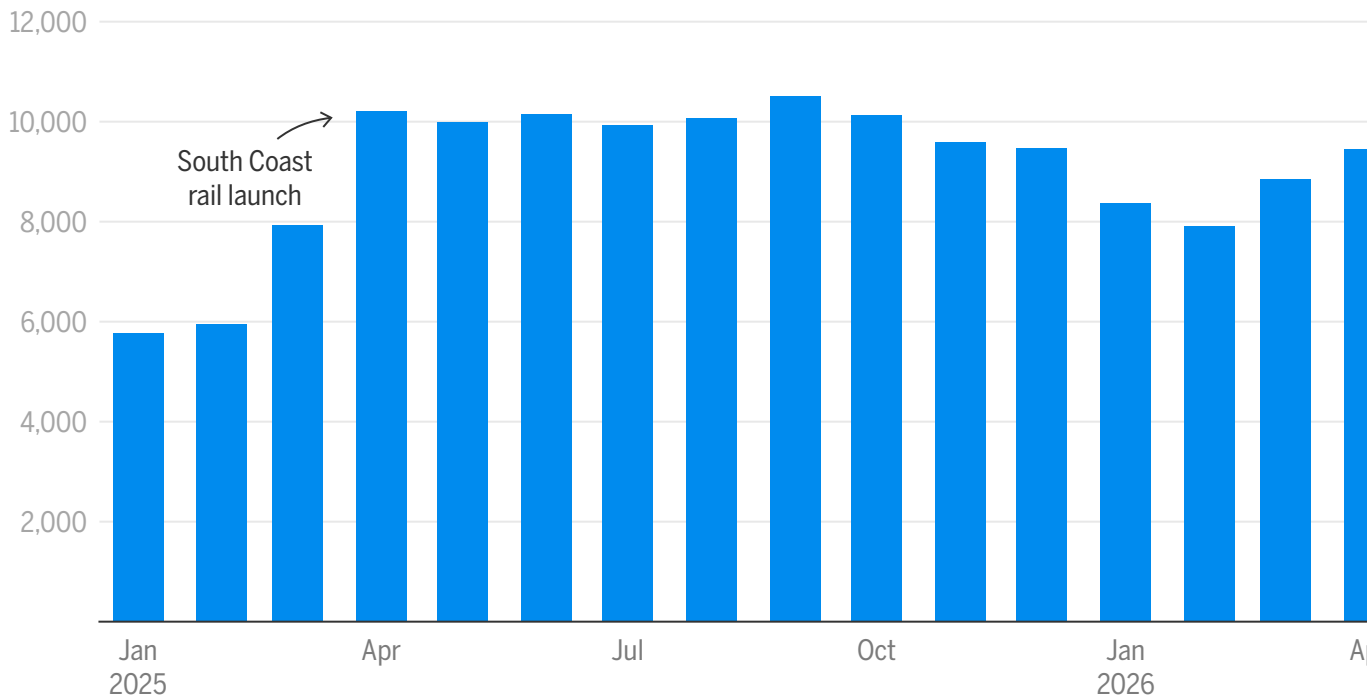


Chart: CHRISTINA PRIGNANO/GLOBE STAFF • Source: MBTA

Sam Storer, 63, who works as a software developer in finance in Boston, finds he’s more productive on the train. He lives in Mattapoisett and boards at Middleborough at around 5.30 a.m., 2-3 days a week.

“I start working an hour before I get to the office. That’d be dead time to me if I was driving,” said Storer, whose commute takes an hour, 45 minutes. “Nobody likes to commute, but it’s been reliable, consistent, economical, and relatively low stress.”

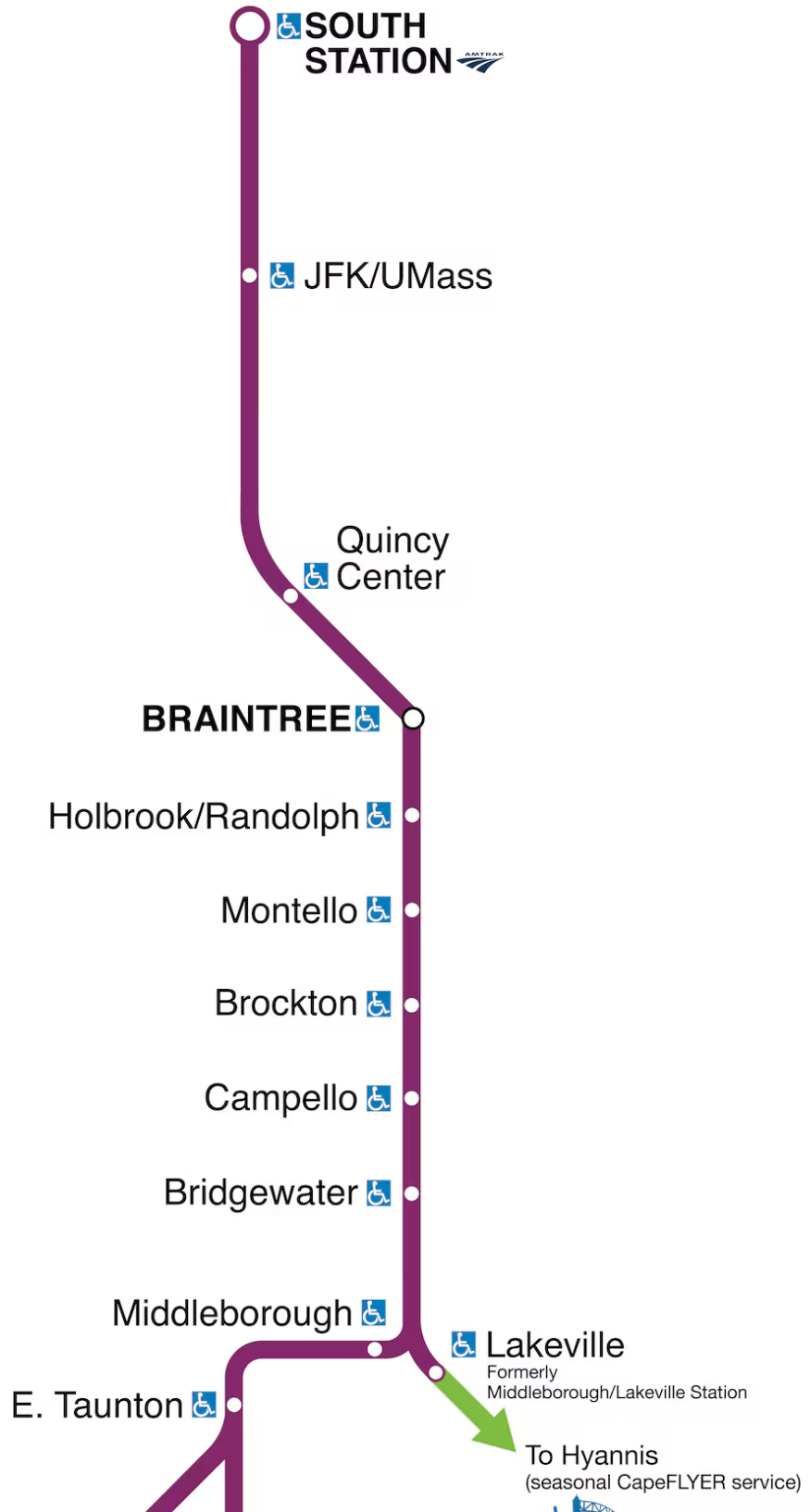
Some say, however, the MBTA could improve the experience for working commuters. Elise Rapoza, 40, who works as a policy analyst in Boston, said the MBTA could install Wi-Fi, offer more tables and power outlets, and perhaps get into Boston quicker and more frequently. But those are minor limitations, she said.

“I wouldn’t commute to Boston any other way. Instead of fighting against the traffic. I am sitting comfortably, working. I wish it was faster,” she said.

On the question of Wi-Fi and increased access to power outlets, MBTA spokesperson Lisa Battiston said the MBTA welcomed the feedback from riders, but currently there are no plans to add Wi-Fi to the commuter rail network.



Fall River/New Bedford Line





The new Fall River/New Bedford line. MBTA

Since the start of the service, Fall River trains had an on-time performance rate of about 92 percent, while New Bedford trains recorded 91 percent — in lockstep with the commuter network’s overall performance of 91 percent.

Each quarter, schedules are reviewed and revised as they try to balance the needs of the entire network with available trains and other resources, Battiston said.

As of May, the Fall River/New Bedford Commuter line ranked fourth highest in total ridership and fifth highest in average weekday ridership among all the commuter rail lines, according to the MBTA.

At 4:00 p.m., the MBTA Commuter Rail train pulled up to the Church Street station in New Bedford on a recent Wednesday. The South Coast Rail restores service between Boston and Taunton, Fall River, and New Bedford. PAT GREENHOUSE/GLOBE STAFF

Riders say the train has opened up different ways of connecting southern Massachusetts to the rest of the state.

At the Church Street station in New Bedford on a recent Friday, cars pulled up and dropped off passengers. It was a diverse bunch. Many were taking advantage of the last remaining weeks of [the T’s “Free Fridays”](#) offering, which ends on Friday. They were young families with children going into the city for the day, retirees taking the train for the first time, plus regular commuters, like Angulo, heading into Boston for work.

Hannah Bordeas, 53, a substitute teacher from Dartmouth, stood on the platform with her two children and their two friends, and were heading to Harvard Square. It’s better

than taking the car, which means she'd have to focus on driving while negotiating her kids' song requests.

"This is a lot easier," she said. "The kids love it. It's important for them to learn how to use public transport."

For the region, the rail line also offers a chance to attract workers who earn higher salaries in Greater Boston to settle in cities and towns on the South Coast who officials say boost the local economy. In [Taunton](#) and [Fall River](#), significant investments in mixed-use development are underway, bolstered by the arrival of the new service.

For some riders, like Michael Senra, the train is a decades-long promise that was finally kept. He grew up in New Bedford and now lives in Pennsylvania where he teaches at Lafayette College. As a child, he remembered driving into Boston with his family at least a couple of times a year but now appreciates the option of taking the train.

"It's a pretty smooth ride," Senra said. "Having lived in New Bedford, having public transportation to Boston after the idea of the train being discussed my entire life — it's nice that it didn't get lost. Especially for an area of South Coast that at times can feel neglected."

As the train whisked past farms, rural homes, city parking lots, and the green of forests toward Boston, Michael Haggerty quietly sat next to his bike, checking his phone. The 44-year-old teacher in Rockland boarded the train in Fall River and was heading to Bridgewater. He is a keen cyclist and over the last two months he has taken advantage of the free rides, getting off at stops along the commuter rail routes to explore biking trails in the region.

"It's been a very rewarding, very relaxing, experience," he said.

A few seats over, Dr. Myrlene Jean-Venant was engaged in an animating conversation with her colleague, Dr. Hannah Stohry. Both teach social work at Bridgewater State

University. They were heading to the Boston Public Library.

“Free train. Free library. Free Wi-Fi. Free AC,” Jean-Venant said, laughing.

“It’s been unseasonably hot,” Stohry added.

One passenger overheard the talk about how the commuter rail had been free on Fridays this summer and was surprised to discover the offer.

“Are you kidding me?” she exclaimed.

The train screeched to a stop at South Station at 10:57 a.m., a minute earlier than scheduled. People disembarked on to the platform, and soon they were enveloped by the bright and hot Boston summer.

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