

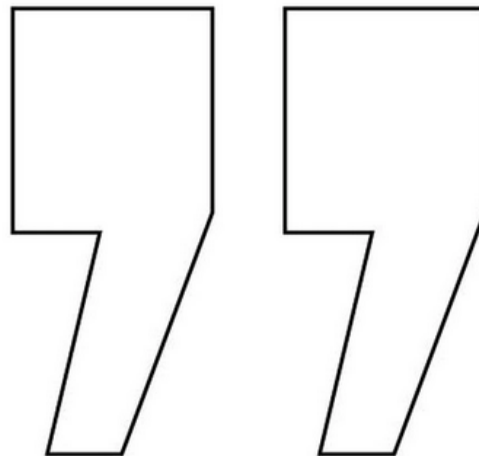
# The Boston Globe

THE ARGUMENT

## Will public transit in Massachusetts ever recover the ridership lost in the pandemic?

Read two views and vote in our online poll.

By **John Laidler** Globe Correspondent. Updated October 22, 2020, 6:56 p.m.



**NO**

**Frank Conte**

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It was not long ago that some social observers declared the triumph of the city over the shallowness of suburban life. Cities, we were told, are the future: environmentally smart, technologically innovative, and filled with vitality sprung from young enlightened residents who thrived on a night life, artistic sensibility, and a mostly car-free ethos. Then, along came the pandemic, which is

unsettling city planners and prompting millennials and boomers alike to consider relocating to boring suburbia.

Corporations have discovered what the founders of Uber and Lyft have long put into practice. Companies no longer need to underwrite fashionable, downtown offices with amenities and subsidized Charlie cards. Just as ridesharing drivers now supply the car; workers can supply the workspace. Corporate bean-counters can now shift the burden of operating costs to employees, who by working from home can furnish the desks, chairs, electricity, and heat.

Moreover, workers and managers are discovering that daily commutes harm productivity. Boston ranks terribly in drive-time-to-work metrics. The potential savings from working at home are enormous, complemented by a favorable work/life balance for the employee. [Telecommuting is going to become a permanent trend](#). The desire to be near like-minded people will fade as people weigh health risks.

This all spells disaster for public transit. It is unlikely the MBTA will ever recover its pre-pandemic ridership. [In the face of COVID-19, public transit has been decimated](#). The trend is not improving — in response to low revenue, [the MBTA is planning major budget cuts](#).

Growth in ridership follows a robust economy. And growth is not around the corner. [According to a recent poll by Princeton Research Associates, 34 percent of respondents believe the state's economy will only return to normal in 2022](#). Then there's the oncoming big sort-out in real estate. Downtown commercial real estate is unlikely to regain its glamour. Even if companies require on-site work two or three days a week, will public transit regain its convenience? The chance to drive downtown and park in competitively priced garages will make the MBTA less appealing even when we transition from the age of the lockdown.

Zoom is the new third rail of public transit.

Full link to the Argument feature of the *Boston Globe*:

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/10/22/metro/will-public-transit-massachusetts-ever-recover-ridership-lost-pandemic/?event=event12>