



City of Cambridge

Executive Department

YI-AN HUANG
City Manager

CMA 2025 #84
IN CITY COUNCIL
April 14, 2025

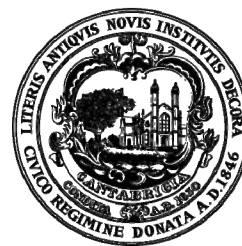
To the Honorable, the City Council:

Please find a memorandum regarding Awaiting Report #25-23 and a Citywide Shuttle Bus Pilot program from Cambridge Department of Transportation Commissioner, Brooke McKenna.

Very truly yours,

Yi-An Huang
City Manager





To: Yi-An Huang, City Manager
From: Brooke McKenna, Commissioner
Date: April 10, 2025
Subject: Awaiting Report 2025-23

In response to Awaiting Report 25-23 requesting that the City Manager work with relevant City departments and institutional stakeholders currently operating some form of shuttle to explore options for a municipal transit pilot program, we report the following:

Introduction

The staff of the Transportation Department is preparing a study scope of work to identify service gaps and potential improvements in the public transit and shuttle network in the city. This is an important preliminary step in exploring a municipal transit pilot. The study will take place over 12 months using consultant services and will be funded through a combination of existing operating funds and development mitigation funds specifically provided to explore these issues. The study will include community and stakeholder engagement, data analysis, peer comparisons, and policy review among other approaches.

In the material below, we describe:

- Our current understanding of the public transit network, including available-to-the-public (“open door”) private shuttles in addition to the MBTA’s services
- Areas for consideration in the study
- Expected outcomes of the study

Current Transit Network

Public transit access in Cambridge is relatively abundant. Within the city boundaries, we have access to publicly- and privately-operated public transit. Among them are:

- 25 MBTA local bus routes plus
- 6 MBTA frequent bus routes
- fare-free EZRide shuttle
- fare-free Harvard University campus shuttles
- paid Longwood Collective (formerly known as MASCO) M2 route
- 1 commuter rail station



- Nearby access to 7 rapid transit/subway stations on the Red and Green Lines (includes 5 stations within Cambridge as well as Davis Square and Union Square)

On a [typical weekday day in 2024](#), about 58,000 MBTA bus and subway riders board at stations or stops in Cambridge. This is in addition to riders of private shuttle riders that we do not have data for.

In addition to these scheduled and “fixed” route services, Cambridge is also served by MBTA’s paratransit service THE RIDE and provides funding for the local operations of the Door2Door community transportation service. Door2Door primarily serves people with disabilities and seniors with affordable community transportation primarily to medical visits.

The City set long-term goals in the Envision Cambridge citywide plan to increase the share of residents that live within walking distance of a subway station, frequent bus route, and quality sustainable transportation options. While the [Envision Cambridge mobility dashboard](#) will be updated with 2024 housing and transportation data when it becomes available, the 2023 statistics provide a fairly recent understanding of access to transit:

- 49% of Cambridge residents lived within a 1/2-mile walk of a subway station
- 35% of Cambridge residents lived within a 1/4-mile walk of a frequent bus route

While these statistics provide an overall picture, we know access to public transit and shuttles is different by neighborhood. In addition, not all bus or shuttle routes operate all day or all week. To show this variability, we include the two attached maps:

1. The first map shows public transit that runs on all days of the week.
2. The second map shows frequent transit and shuttles on weekday commuter hours. We use the MBTA’s definition of a frequent bus route of at least every 15 minutes although some of these routes have better schedules, with buses at least every 7-8 minutes during rush hours.

This amount of access to quality public transit results in higher public transit use than many other cities in the US with similar populations.

Areas for Consideration

The study will explore various ways to maximize transit access in the city, including identifying gaps in service, improving existing shuttle and local transit, considering new services, and the financial implications of these opportunities.

To identify gaps in existing service, the study will consider issues such as:

- Access to local and neighborhood business districts including local retailers or groceries
- Accessing opportunities like education or employment from specific areas



- Transportation for people with disabilities who have limited mobility to access essential services
- Affordability for people from households with limited incomes and older people on fixed incomes
- Transportation for younger people who may not have a bicycle or access to a motor vehicle
- Reduced vehicular access and parking due to changes in the layout of our streets made to accommodate separate bicycle lanes and other uses for our streets

Looking at expansion of existing services or introduction of new services, the study will consider issues such as:

- Potential for overlapping services to compete for the same riders
- Significant costs of operating public transit or community transportation
 - For example, the MBTA spends around \$300 per hour running local buses not including capital expenses, and local on-demand transit trips could cost as much as \$20 per ride
- Ensuring the City is not paying twice for duplicative coverage, given the City's existing \$12 Million annual funding to the MBTA
- Ensuring prioritization of underserved communities

Expected Study Outcomes

The main outcomes of this study will be to:

1. Identify gaps in the combined shuttle/bus/subway network
2. Understand current shuttle operations in Cambridge including both "closed-door" and "open-door" services
3. Identify peer municipalities with similar transit/shuttle configurations and gather applicable lessons to apply to Cambridge
4. Explore improvements to existing shuttles and define the considerations for establishing additional shuttle services or new routes with existing shuttle providers

The study will provide the insights needed for decision making after the conclusion of the study as well as providing actionable steps to improve mobility in Cambridge. These could include:

- Identifying ways to make Cambridge residents, workers, students, and visitors aware of existing "open door" shuttles and encourage use of these shuttles, many of which are fare free
- Document ideas for improving efficiency of existing shuttles including the EZRide, university campus shuttles, and private/employer shuttles



- Highlight ways to improve the rider experience for these shuttles such as stop amenities, locations, and public information
- Explore opportunities to add new shuttle routes to existing services
- Considerations for starting up a new municipal shuttle service including financial and other feasibility considerations.

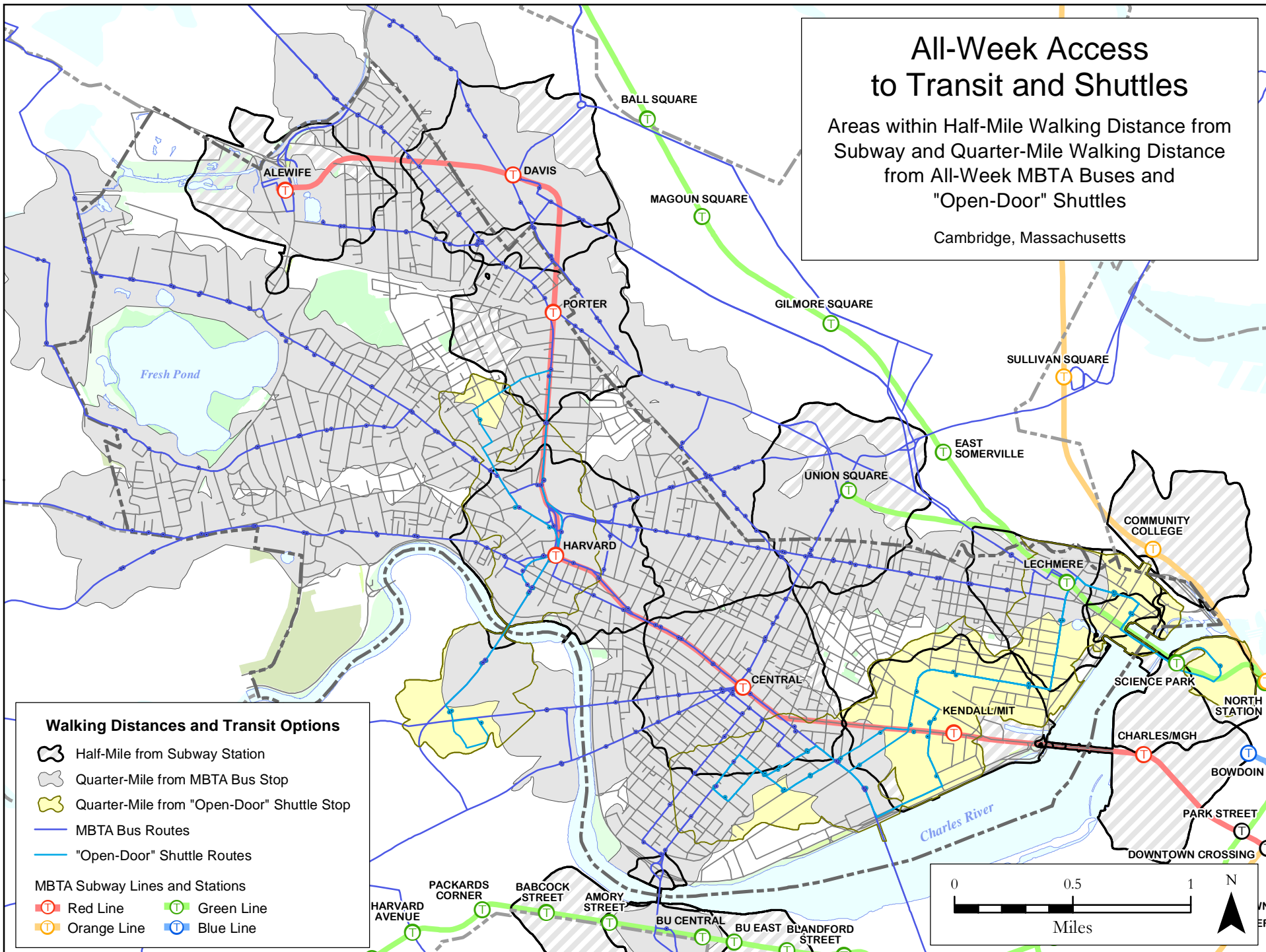
Enclosures:

Two maps showing transit and shuttle access in Cambridge

All-Week Access to Transit and Shuttles

Areas within Half-Mile Walking Distance from
Subway and Quarter-Mile Walking Distance
from All-Week MBTA Buses and
"Open-Door" Shuttles

Cambridge, Massachusetts

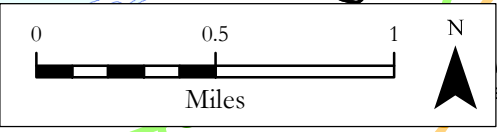


Walking Distances and Transit Options

- Half-Mile from Subway Station
- Quarter-Mile from MBTA Bus Stop
- Quarter-Mile from "Open-Door" Shuttle Stop
- MBTA Bus Routes
- "Open-Door" Shuttle Routes

MBTA Subway Lines and Stations

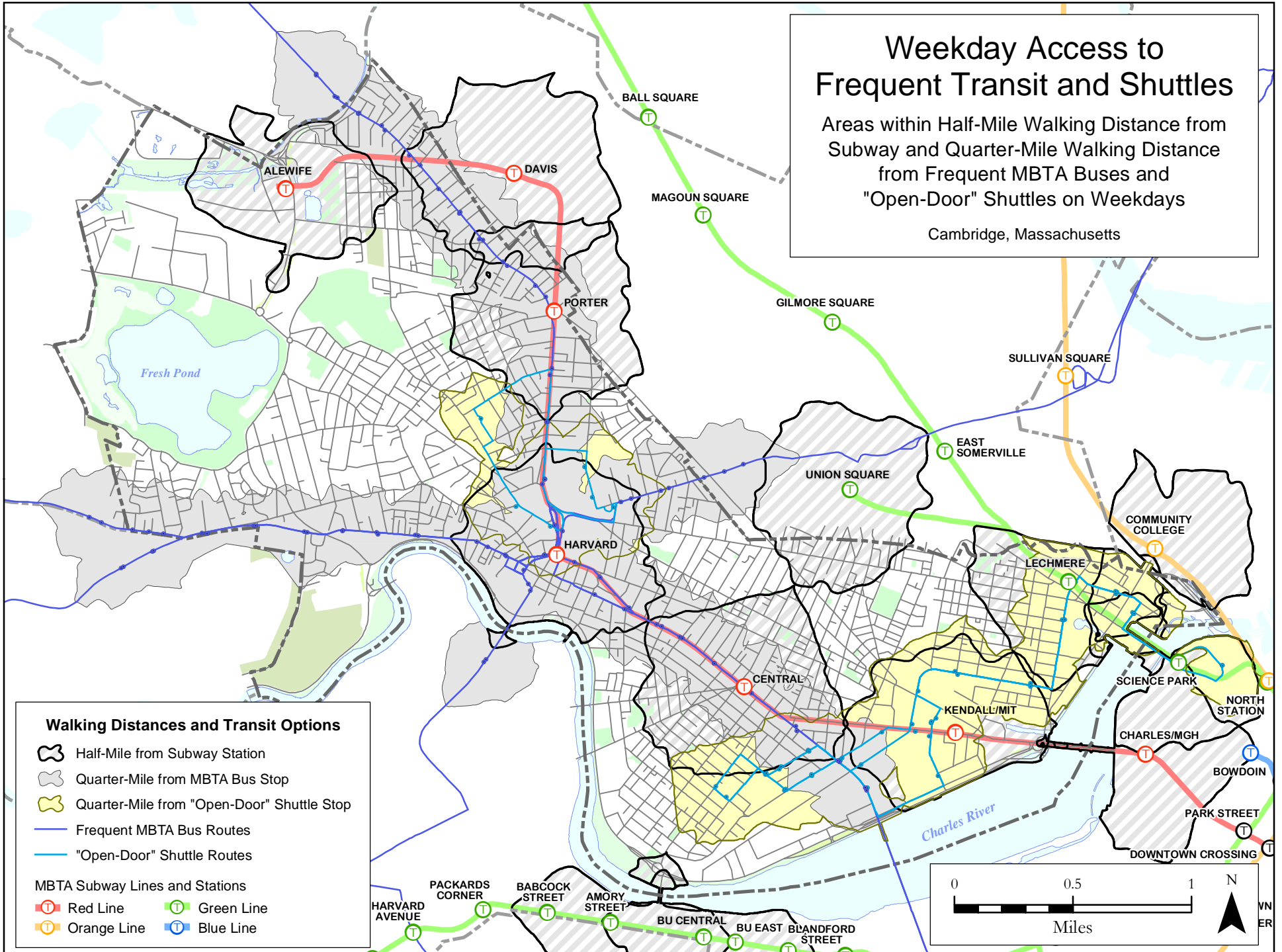
- Red Line
- Green Line
- Orange Line
- Blue Line



Weekday Access to Frequent Transit and Shuttles

Areas within Half-Mile Walking Distance from Subway and Quarter-Mile Walking Distance from Frequent MBTA Buses and "Open-Door" Shuttles on Weekdays

Cambridge, Massachusetts



Walking Distances and Transit Options

- Half-Mile from Subway Station
- Quarter-Mile from MBTA Bus Stop
- Quarter-Mile from "Open-Door" Shuttle Stop
- Frequent MBTA Bus Routes
- "Open-Door" Shuttle Routes

MBTA Subway Lines and Stations

- Red Line
- Green Line
- Orange Line
- Blue Line

