



**Testimony in support of**  
**H.3547/S.2261 An Act to Establish Free Access to Ride to Elections in Massachusetts**  
**Submitted to the Joint Committee on Transportation**  
**By Nancy Brumback, LWVMA Election and Voting Legislative Specialist**  
**July 28, 2021**

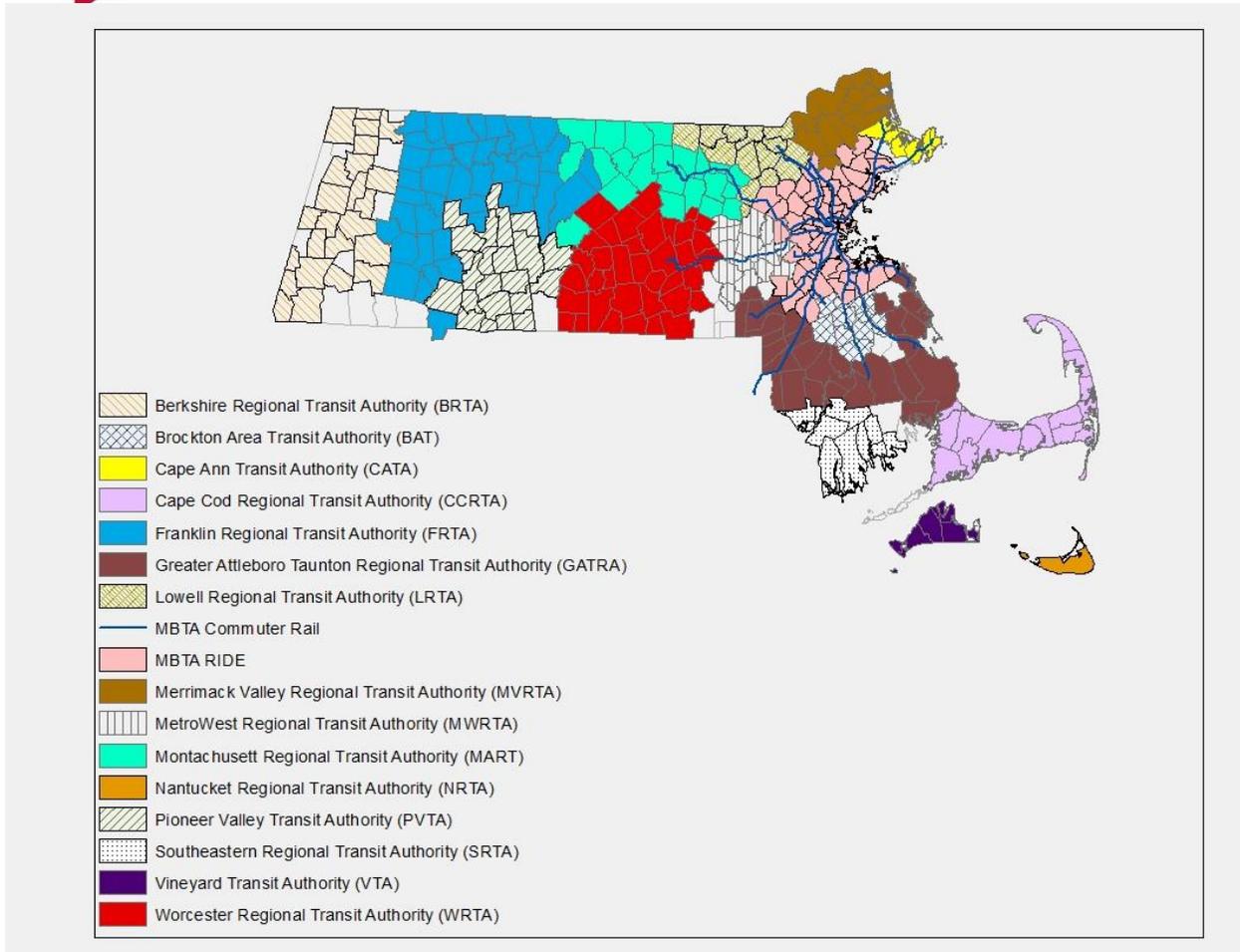
Sometimes, just the smallest change can make a difference. In the case of voting, if a person on their way to work can get off the bus at their polling place then get back on—without paying a fare—that could be the trigger for them to vote.

This bill, H.3547/S.2261 An Act to Establish Free Access to Ride to Elections in Massachusetts, also known as the FARE Act, can do just that. It proposes to make buses, subway, and trolley services in the state's 15 regional transit authorities fare-free on the days of state-wide primaries and elections. No ID or proof of voting would be required; the systems would just be free to all riders. The FARE Act would only apply to bus, subway, and trolley services, not to commuter rail services.

The FARE Act would be in effect on the days for statewide primaries and elections. That means two days every two years. Dozens of communities, including San Diego, Dallas, Austin, Harris County, TX (Houston), New Orleans, Charlotte, NC, and Kansas City, plus all of Los Angeles County, provide free public transit on Election Day.

While Massachusetts voter turnout in the fall 2020 elections hit record highs, the results in different communities was unequal. In the state's suburban, high-income communities, voter turnout reached 85% or even 90%. But in the state's urban, diverse, lower-income communities, voter turnout was more than 30% lower. Voters in those urban communities depend more on mass transit to get to jobs, shopping, and, on Election Day, to the polls. As of 2017, 9% of white households in Massachusetts did not have reliable access to a car. That rate rose to 25% for Black households and 27% for Latino ones. Approximately 70% of those that ride the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA), which serves Springfield, depend on it as their only mode of transit; 50% of those riders live below the poverty line. If mass transit were free on Election Day, it might encourage more people to vote. It might even remind people to vote when they don't have to pay their fare.

This MassDOT map below points out that the benefit of this bill would be statewide, not just in Boston. Note the commuter rail lines shown as blue lines on the map would not be included:



The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts, representing 47 local Leagues from Cape Cod to the Berkshires, urges this committee to report the FARE Act favorably and take this one small step to improving access to the ballot box.

Thank you for your consideration.