MTA Weekend Ridership Trends

Report 2-2027

OFFICE OF THE NEW YORK STATE COMPTROLLER

Thomas P. DiNapoli, State Comptroller

Rahul Jain, Deputy Comptroller

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Contents

Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic caused steep drops in ridership at the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), a trend experienced by transit systems across the country. With the advent of work-from-home policies, weekday MTA ridership has consistently risen but has not yet reached pre-pandemic, 2019 levels.

Ridership recovery has been stronger across MTA transit modes on weekends, again following the pattern of transit systems across the nation. Weekend patterns are more dependent on discretionary non-work activities than weekdays and these activities have been less affected by changes to commuting patterns that occurred in response to the pandemic. For example, during the summer and holiday season, average weekend ridership has been close to the 2019 level and has even exceeded it at times.

Weekend MTA bridge and tunnel crossings were the first to return to pre-pandemic levels in 2021, as car ownership rose initially during the pandemic. By 2023, paratransit rides fully recovered as the MTA enhanced the responsiveness and type of services provided. The MTA's commuter railroads also rebounded, partly boosted by programs to incentivize ridership. Average weekend ridership on the Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) in 2025 was 27 percent higher than in 2019, buoyed by new service provided to Grand Central Madison while Metro-North's average weekend ridership was at 92 percent of 2019 (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1
MTA Average Weekend Ridership

	2019	2025	% of 2019
Subway	5,494,195	4,882,867	88.9%
Bus	2,356,865	1,582,843	67.1%
Long Island Rail Road	210,313	267,567	127.2%
Metro-North Railroad	250,228	229,614	91.8%
Paratransit	34,025	53,480	157.2%

Sources: Metropolitan Transportation Authority; OSC analysis

Paid average weekend subway ridership in 2025 was at 89 percent of 2019 levels while paid bus ridership lagged at 67 percent of the pre-pandemic level. However, including fare evaders, bus ridership was closer to 81 percent of the 2019 level.

The recovery of weekend subway and bus ridership compared to the pre-pandemic level differs when comparing and contrasting subway and bus lines among the boroughs. Average weekend subway ridership in Manhattan in 2025 was at 92 percent of the 2019 level. Brooklyn and Queens weekend ridership had reached 90 percent of 2019 ridership. The Bronx, however, only reached 66 percent of the average weekend subway ridership in 2025 when compared to 2019 but showed improvement in 2025, rising by 8 percentage points.

It is notable that Manhattan has the lowest unemployment rate among all boroughs, while the Bronx has the highest rate of unemployment, as some weekend commuting patterns are related to employment. In addition, as the main tourism hub in New York City, Manhattan is likely benefiting from a near-return in overall tourists, including leisure visitors locally who visit the City.

Continued recovery in weekend ridership has been aided by MTA choices over service delivery. For example, the MTA has increased weekend service on subways by more than 5 percent, when comparing 2025 to 2019. Reliability of service has also improved. On-time performance (OTP) on weekends increased to 86.6 percent in 2025, higher than the 80.5 percent OTP in 2022 and higher than the 83.9 percent OTP in 2019.

As noted, the gap between ridership recovery on major modes of transit on weekends and weekdays has actually expanded in recent years, suggesting weekend demand remains an important driver of overall ridership recovery as weekend ridership as a percentage of the total continues to increase since 2019. Weekend ridership is a larger share of overall ridership for each transit mode than it was in 2019.

The Office of the New York State Comptroller (OSC) recommends that the MTA continues to focus on increasing the reliability and frequency of service on weekends to meet shifts in demand. Increasing discretionary travel, especially on weekends, is a large part of growing ridership beyond the pre-pandemic level and providing more revenue to the MTA. Data on crowding to better understand where service is most lacking on the weekend would be welcome. Also, the MTA should look more closely at struggling subway and bus lines, especially in the Bronx, which are lagging others in reaching the 2019 level. Improvements to service and continued efforts to reduce fare evasion, including through increasing enrollment in the Fair Fares program, may be ways to continue to bring paid bus and subway ridership back to pre-pandemic levels.

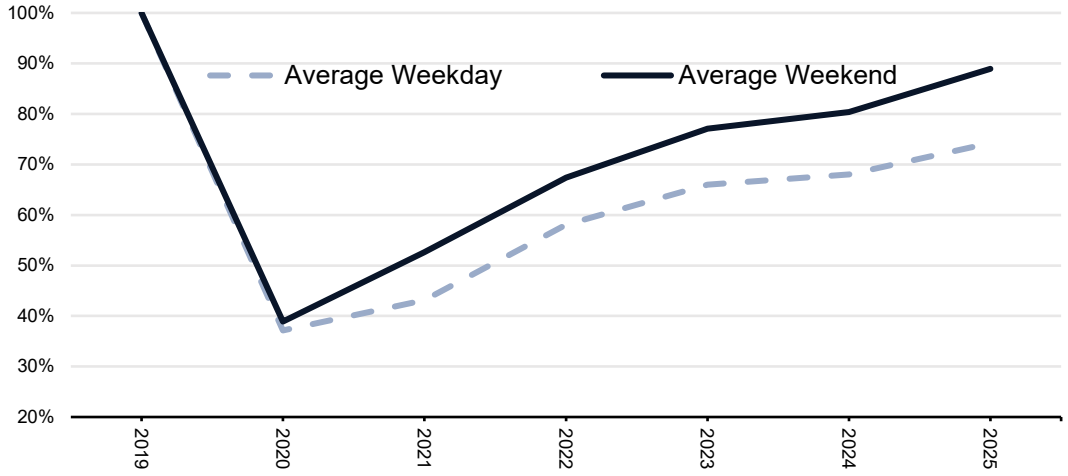
Weekend Ridership by Mode of Travel

Subway Ridership Stronger on Weekends Than Weekdays

The COVID-19 pandemic reached New York City in March 2020, causing steep drops in MTA ridership and transit systems across the country.[1] Ridership has risen consistently since the pandemic but continues to be below the 2019 level. Paid subway ridership as a percentage of 2019 ridership continues to increase, reaching 79 percent in December 2025. As more riders have the option to work from home and as greater leisure travel and tourism has recovered faster than in-office work, average weekday subway ridership has not recovered at the same pace as the average weekend ridership. In 2025, the average weekend had subway ridership at 89 percent of the 2019 level, an improvement from 2024 (80 percent). On the average weekday, however, subway ridership in 2025 was 74 percent of the 2019 level, improving from 68 percent in 2024 (see Figure 2). It is notable that amid efforts to encourage more workers returning to work, average weekend ridership continues to recover at a faster pace than weekday ridership. The gap between the two has grown over time from 2 percentage points in 2020 to nearly 15 percentage points in 2025. Weekend ridership was 20 percent of total ridership in 2025, up from 2019 when weekend ridership was 17 percent of the total.

FIGURE 2

Average Subway Ridership as Percentage of 2019 Ridership, Weekday and Weekend

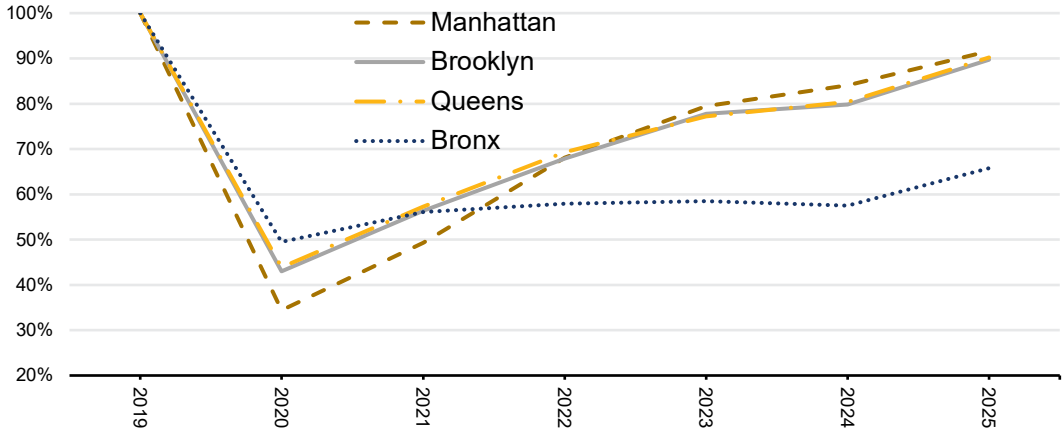


Sources: Metropolitan Transportation Authority; OSC analysis

Looking at average weekend subway ridership by borough sheds further light on how ridership has recovered. In 2025, average weekend ridership in Manhattan was at 92 percent of the 2019 level or 2.8 million riders while Brooklyn and Queens weekend ridership had reached 90 percent of 2019 ridership (see Figure 3). The Bronx, however, only reached 66 percent of the average weekend subway ridership in 2025 when compared to 2019. Average weekend ridership as a percentage of 2019 ridership increased 8 percentage points in 2025 from the prior year in the Bronx, after declining in 2024.

[1] OSC, *Fare Revenue Considerations for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority*, November 2022, https://www.osc.ny.gov/reports/osdc/fare-revenue-considerations-metropolitan-transportation-authority.

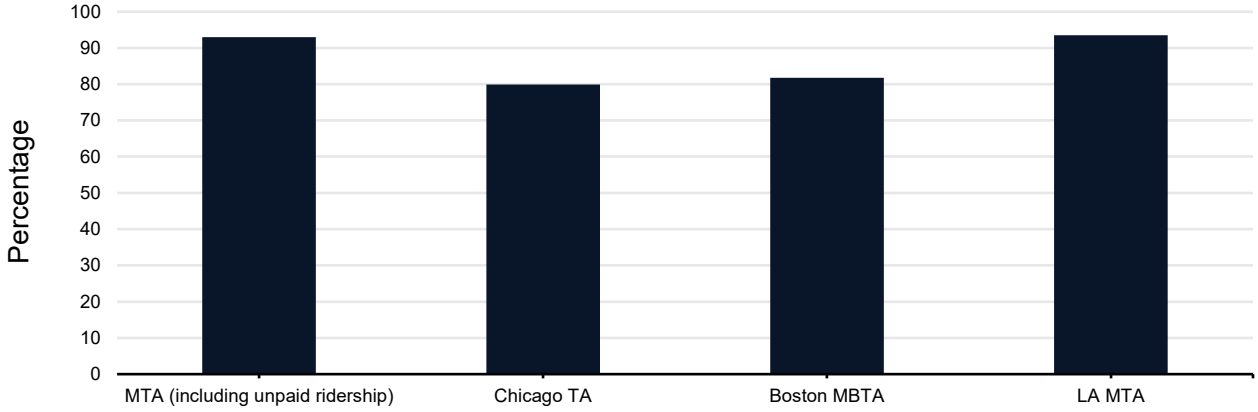
FIGURE 3
Average Weekend Subway Ridership Recovery Compared to 2019, by Borough



Sources: Metropolitan Transportation Authority; OSC analysis

Weekend subway ridership returning closer to pre-pandemic levels than during weekdays also has occurred in other transit systems as well. In 2025, the MTA's subway system's paid ridership on the weekends of 88 percent was closer to the 2019 level than in Chicago and Boston, both of which were at the 80 percent level (and included fare evaders). Los Angeles's system opened a new subway line in 2022 which brought its ridership recovery higher than the MTA's level. If estimated unpaid MTA subway ridership was included, average weekend subway ridership would rise to 93 percent of the 2019 level, close to Los Angeles's recovery and further improvement than compared to Chicago and Boston (see Figure 4).

FIGURE 4
Average Weekend Subway Ridership in 2025 Compared to 2019, Selected Cities



Sources: Metropolitan Transportation Authority; selected transit agency websites; OSC analysis

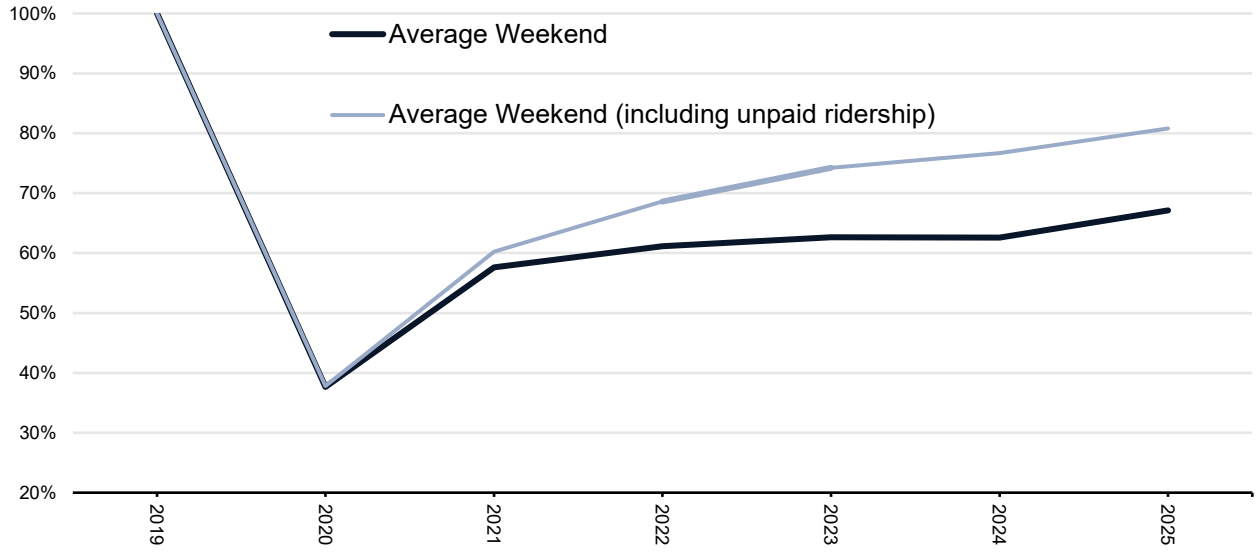
Paid Bus Ridership Lags Regional Transit Modes and National Peers

Paid bus ridership recovered quicker than other modes early in the pandemic as essential workers utilized the system. However, combined paid weekend bus ridership for New York City Transit (NYCT) and MTA Bus dropped to around 60 percent of the 2019 level starting in September 2023 and recovery has generally been at that rate ever since. The average paid bus ridership on the weekend was at 67 percent of the 2019 level in 2025, better than during an average weekday (65 percent).

One reason for paid bus ridership lagging is fare evasion. Fare evasion rates on MTA buses, which were at around 20 percent before the pandemic, rose as high as 50 percent in 2024. MTA efforts, working with the New York Police Department, to reduce fare evasion resulted in the rate dropping to an average of 46 percent in 2025. If estimated unpaid bus ridership were included in weekend ridership, bus ridership would be at 81 percent of the 2019 level in 2025, significantly closer to weekend recovery rates for other modes of transit (see Figure 5).

FIGURE 5

Average Weekend Bus Ridership as Percentage of 2019 Ridership, Paid and Total

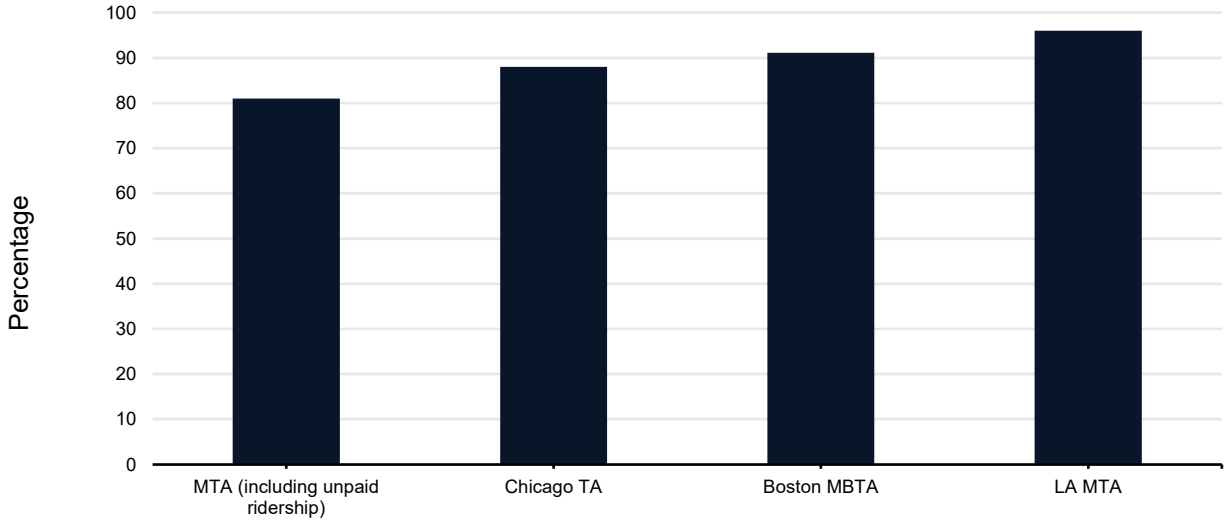


Sources: Metropolitan Transportation Authority; OSC analysis

Like subway ridership, weekend bus ridership has returned closer to pre-pandemic levels than during weekdays in other bus systems as well. In 2025, the MTA's bus ridership on the weekend of 81 percent including unpaid riders, as noted earlier, was lower than Chicago, Boston and Los Angeles which were at or above the 90 percent level including fare evaders (see Figure 6). MTA weekend bus ridership when fare evaders are excluded is estimated to be 67 percent of the 2019 level. The bus systems in Chicago, Boston and Los Angeles are more heavily relied upon than in New York as bus ridership, especially in Los Angeles, is higher or at least closer to subway ridership levels than in New York City.

FIGURE 6

Average Weekend Bus Ridership in 2025 Compared to 2019, Selected Cities



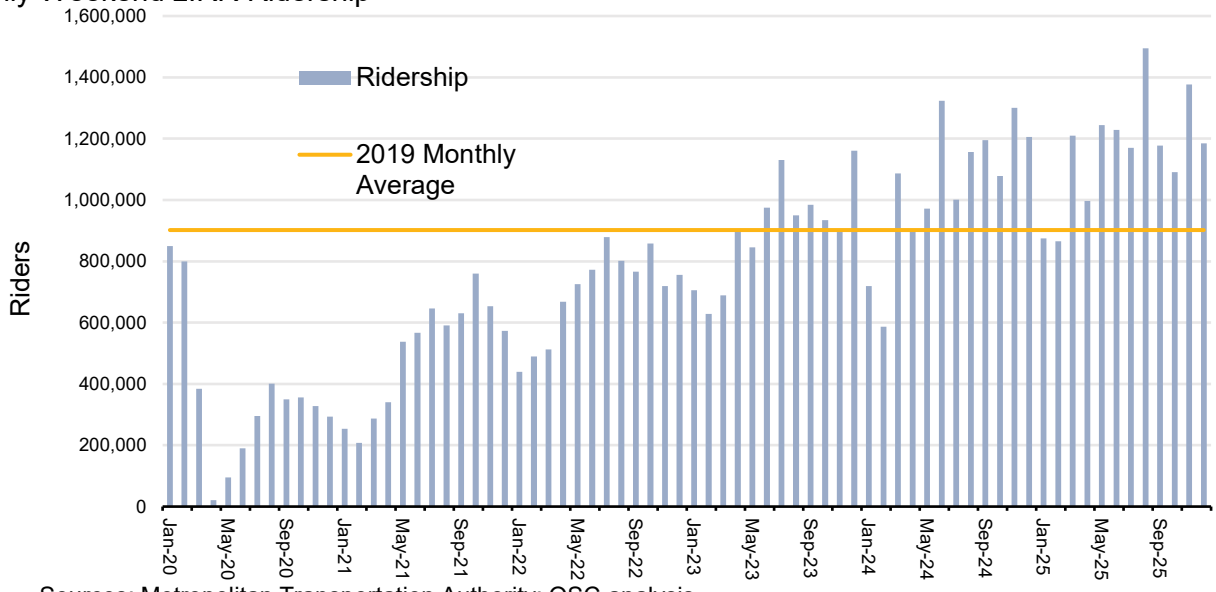
Sources: Metropolitan Transportation Authority; selected cities' agency websites; OSC analysis

Commuter Rail Recovery Leads Regional Transit Modes

Weekend ridership on the LIRR has soared since the end of the pandemic, reaching and exceeding the 2019 level nearly every month since 2023 when service to Grand Central Madison was implemented. LIRR weekend ridership is the only transit mode analyzed where ridership has fully recovered and even improved compared to the pre-pandemic baseline. In 2025, average weekend ridership of about

FIGURE 7

Monthly Weekend LIRR Ridership

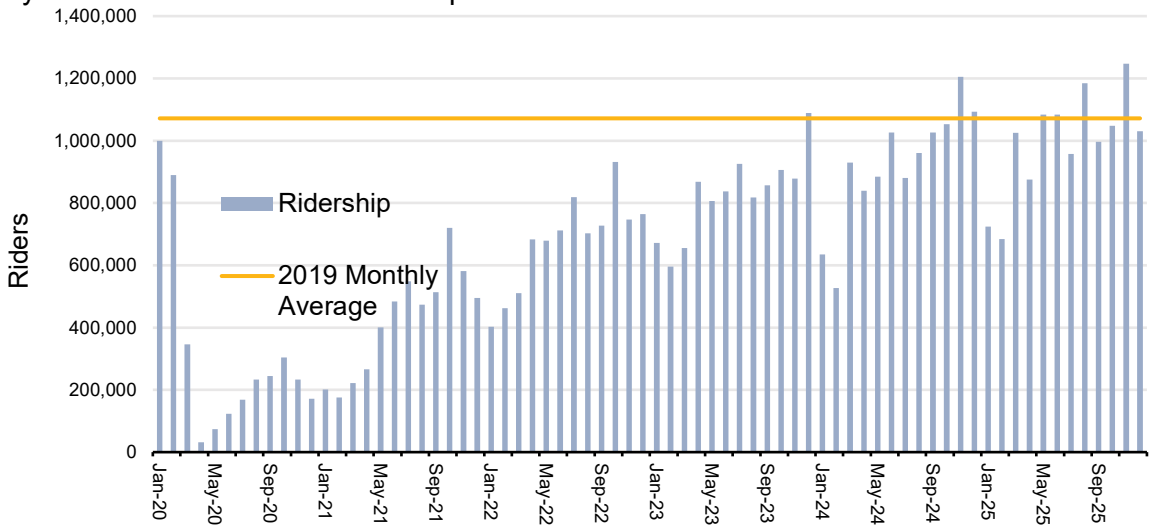


Sources: Metropolitan Transportation Authority; OSC analysis

267,000 was 27 percent higher than in 2019. Summer months and the holiday season in November and December have seen particularly heavy usage with ridership in August 2025 reaching 1.5 million riders (see Figure 7). Weekend ridership on the LIRR in 2025 was 17 percent of the total ridership for the year, a big jump from 2019 when weekend ridership was 12 percent of the total.

Metro-North monthly weekend ridership averaged more than one million riders in 2019 but then did not reach that level after the pandemic until December 2023. Since then, monthly weekend ridership has averaged just under one million with ridership as high as 1.2 million in November 2025 (see Figure 8). On an average weekend, Metro-North's ridership of about 230,000 was about 8 percent lower than in 2019. Weekend ridership on Metro-North in 2025 was 17 percent of the total ridership for the year, higher than in 2019 when weekend ridership was 15 percent of the total.

FIGURE 8
Monthly Weekend Metro-North Ridership



Sources: Metropolitan Transportation Authority; OSC analysis

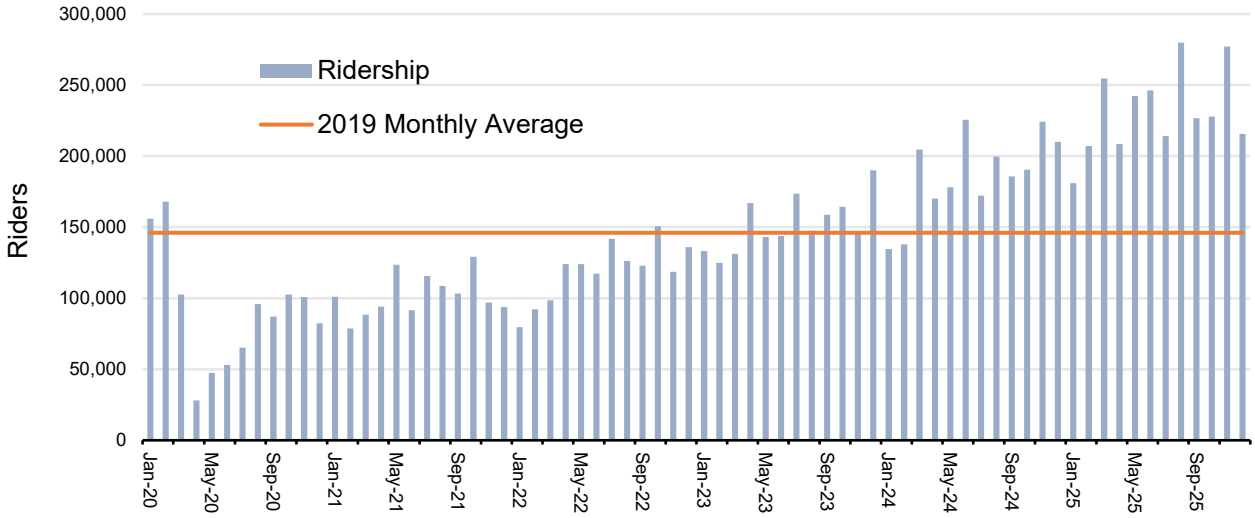
The commuter railroads instituted "Summer Saturday discounts" in 2024 and 2025 where monthly ticket holders could ride anywhere on that railroad at no extra cost regardless of the stations printed on the ticket and were able to have two additional passengers ride with them for $1 each way. A similar discount was also available in the winter of 2025. Such programs likely led to increases in ridership, especially in the summer, and should be continued or expanded to meet demand. The LIRR does not report ridership by branch while Metro-North does report by branch but does not break out weekend ridership from its off-peak ridership numbers, which limits data analysis of weekend trends.

Paratransit Changes Fuel Ridership Recovery, Cost Growth

Monthly weekend ridership on the MTA's paratransit service (Access-A-Ride) reached its 2019 level by April 2023 and has grown steadily since, reaching as high as 280,000 riders in August 2025 which is 79 percent higher than in August 2019 (see Figure 9). Since 2023, the MTA has provided a more

convenient service for riders where trips by for-hire vehicles can be scheduled through an online application.[2] The number of registrants also grew by 13 percent in 2025 leading to higher ridership and also improved customer satisfaction and on-time performance. As a result, the average paratransit weekend ridership in 2025 of about 53,000 was 57 percent higher than in 2019. As ridership has increased, paratransit contract costs have increased from $477 million in 2019 to $716 million in 2025, an increase of 50 percent.

FIGURE 9
Monthly Weekend Paratransit Ridership



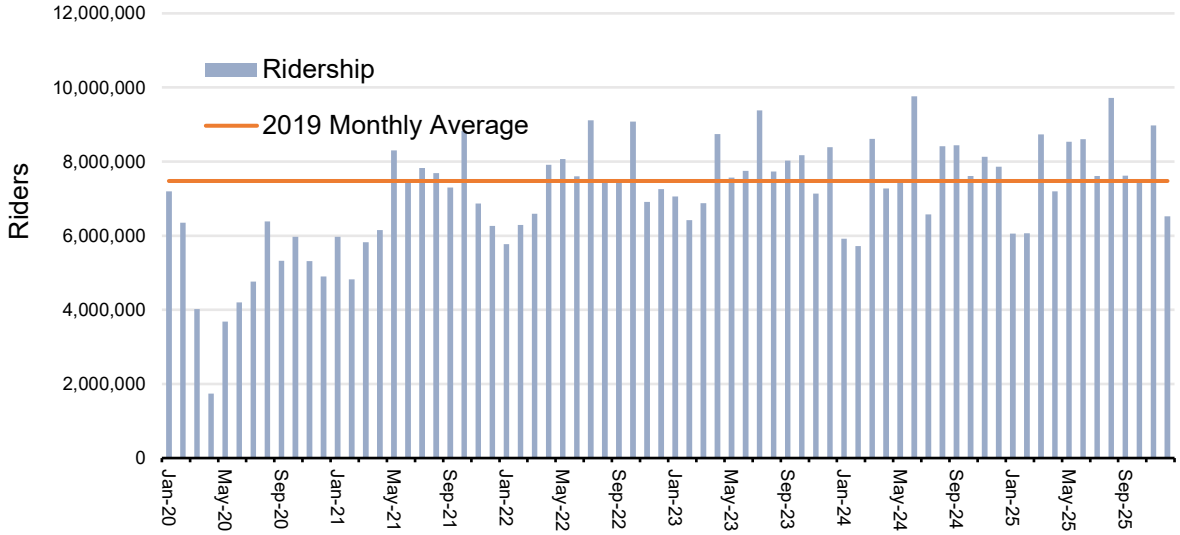
Sources: Metropolitan Transportation Authority; OSC analysis

MTA Bridge and Tunnel Crossings Largely Returned to Pre-Pandemic Trends

Compared to MTA trains and buses, monthly crossings on weekends over MTA bridges and tunnels recovered quicker to 2019 levels (see Figure 10). It only took until the spring of 2021 to reach the pre-pandemic level for the first time. Annual weekend ridership exceeded 2019 weekend crossings for the first time in 2023 by 3 percent, increased slightly in 2024 and then declined by 0.4 percent in 2025 after congestion pricing was implemented.

[2] OSC, *MTA's Paratransit Program: An Overview*, Report 12-2024, November 2023, https://www.osc.ny.gov/files/reports/osdc/pdf/report-12-2024.pdf.

FIGURE 10
Monthly Weekend MTA Bridge and Tunnel Crossings



Sources: Metropolitan Transportation Authority; OSC analysis

Average weekend crossings on the Hugh L. Carey Tunnel increased the most in 2025 when compared to 2019 (17.5 percent) while the major crossing with the lowest recovery on weekends was the Queens-Midtown Tunnel which only increased by 0.3 percent. Compared to 2024, which is the last year before congestion pricing was implemented, average weekend crossings on the Hugh L. Carey Tunnel were down 4.5 percent while average weekend crossings on the Manhattan span of the Robert F. Kennedy Bridge were up by 3.4 percent.

Weekend Subway/Bus Line Ridership Trends

Looking at the ridership on different transit lines during weekends provides additional insight on where weekend ridership is the closest to the 2019 level. It is important to note a few limitations of this analysis. For one, ridership by commuter rail lines and stations is not available. In addition, the MTA does not publish ridership information by subway line due to subway hubs serving multiple lines and the uncertainty of which line is being used. OSC examined stations that only served one subway line as part of this analysis, although this precludes a deeper analysis given the key role played by these major hubs.

As shown in Figure 11, weekend ridership in 2025 at stations that served only one subway line had a higher recovery than stations that served multiple lines (8.7 percent below the 2019 level).

Stations that only served the M line had weekend ridership that was 45 percent below the 2019 level in 2025. Ridership at stations that only served the A train were 37 percent below the pre-pandemic level. Conversely, weekend ridership at stations that only serve the 1 line was slightly better in 2025 than before the pandemic. Stations that only serve the F train also had a higher recovery for weekend ridership than the overall system at only 3 percent below the 2019 level. Another four lines (R, 7, N, and G) had a higher weekend ridership recovery than the system as a whole.

FIGURE 11

Average 2025 Weekend Ridership by Subway Line Compared to 2019

	2019	2025	% Change	Notes
M	30,220	16,719	-44.7%	Brooklyn and Queens service
A	105,512	67,075	-36.4%	Queens and Manhattan service
4	85,229	54,738	-35.8%	Bronx service
2	4,534	3,163	-30.2%	Only Wakefield/241 Street Station
5	10,457	7,416	-29.1%	Bronx service
3	43,218	31,157	-27.9%	Brooklyn and Manhattan service
D	62,466	47,659	-23.7%	Brooklyn and Bronx service
J/Z	61,109	48,532	-20.6%	Brooklyn, Queens & Manhattan service
6	274,078	219,905	-19.8%	Bronx and Manhattan service
Q	124,887	103,407	-17.2%	Brooklyn and Manhattan service
C	50,195	41,825	-16.7%	Brooklyn and Manhattan service
E	4,540	3,810	-16.1%	Only Jamaica/Van Wyck Station
R	61,825	55,568	-10.1%	Brooklyn service
7	281,422	259,779	-7.7%	Queens and Manhattan service
N	46,036	42,869	-6.9%	Brooklyn service
G	65,717	62,054	-5.6%	Brooklyn and Queens service
F	147,644	142,846	-3.3%	Brooklyn, Queens & Manhattan service
1	308,950	310,445	0.5 %	Manhattan and Bronx service
B	N/A	N/A	N/A	No Stations have only B service
L	112,284	197,852	76.2%	Tunnel work impacted 2019 ridership
Subtotal of Non-Hubs	**1,882,025**	**1,718,381**	**-8.7%**	
Multi-Line Stations	3,612,170	3,164,486	-12.4%	
Total	**5,494,195**	**4,882,867**	**-11.1%**	

Note: Stations that serve more than one subway line are excluded from the line analysis.
Sources: Metropolitan Transportation Authority; OSC analysis

Although weekend bus ridership in 2025 was down when compared to 2019, some bus lines have had paid ridership return faster than others and some lines' ridership has lagged significantly behind others. As seen in Figure 12, of the 10 best bus lines where average weekend ridership in 2025 was higher than the 2019 level, eight were Manhattan bus lines. The other two were located in Queens, both of which had portions of the route located in Long Island City.

FIGURE 12

Top 10 Largest Growth in Bus Line Average Weekend Ridership Compared to 2019

	2019	2025	% Change	Service Area
M12	1,085	2,013	85.5%	11th/12th Avenues
Q67	519	715	37.8%	Ridgewood-LIC
M55	2,664	3,245	21.8%	South Ferry-Midtown
Q103	1,121	1,301	16.1%	Astoria-LIC
M31	7,987	8,793	10.1%	57th Street
M1	9,118	9,801	7.5%	Soho-Harlem
M21	1,028	1,102	7.2%	Houston Street
M57	5,903	6,059	2.7%	57th Street
M11	11,274	11,458	1.6%	9th/10th Avenues
M42	7,082	7,089	0.1%	42nd Street

Sources: Metropolitan Transportation Authority; OSC analysis

Of the 10 bus lines where average weekend paid ridership in 2025 was still significantly below the 2019 level, eight operated in the Bronx, including one Select Bus Service (SBS) line, one in Manhattan, and one in Brooklyn (see Figure 13). SBS lines operate in dedicated lanes and require fares to be purchased before boarding in order to speed service. SBS lines also have fare evasion rates where it is estimated that on average 54 percent of riders evaded the fare in 2025, compared to other local buses (average of 45 percent in 2025). Five of these routes had weekend ridership higher than 10,000 in 2019 and none have reached that level since. Data on fare evasion is not available at the borough level to provide further insight.

In 2019, four of the five bus lines with the highest ridership were shared with SBS lines, including the M15/SBS, Bx12/SBS, B46/SBS, and M14/SBS (the B6 had the fifth highest ridership). By 2025, the M15/SBS remained the line with the highest ridership and the M14/SBS moved up to third, although notably, paid ridership was not higher for either line than in 2019. Two non-SBS lines, the Q58 and the B6 were ranked in the top five. The B46/SBS has dropped out of the top five and the Bx12/SBS had dropped to fifth, with ridership declining on the latter by nearly 61 percent.

FIGURE 13

Top 10 Largest Decline in Bus Line Average Weekend Ridership Compared to 2019

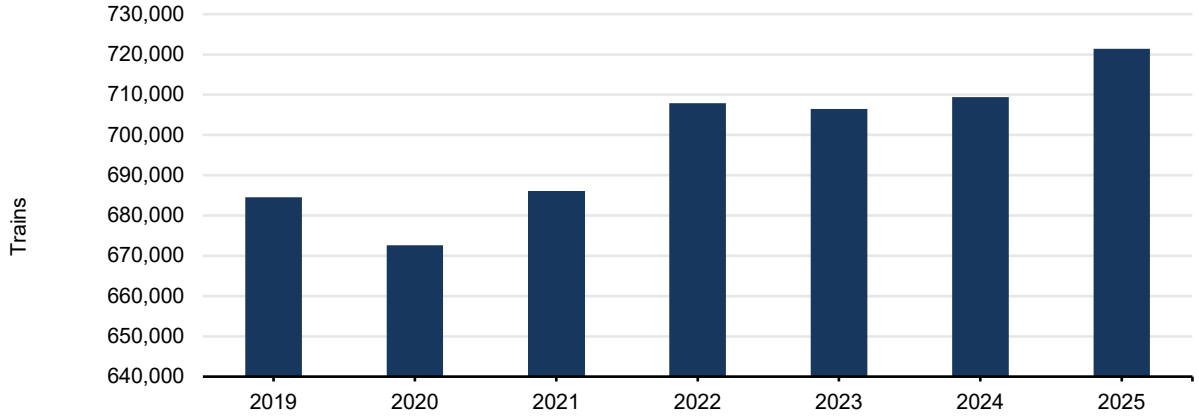
	2019	2025	% Change	Service Area
Bx41 Local/SBS	22,702	8,065	-64.5%	Melrose/Webster Avenues
Bx35	15,289	5,433	-64.5%	167th Street
Bx29	3,411	1,217	-64.3%	Bruckner Boulevard
Bx39	16,436	5,923	-64.0%	Gun Hill Road
Bx27	5,985	2,203	-63.2%	Westchester Avenue
Bx36	25,060	9,326	-62.8%	Tremont Avenue
Bx32	3,909	1,465	-62.5%	Morris/Jerome Avenues
B14	6,126	2,309	-62.3%	Pitkin/Sutter Avenues
Bx31	6,893	2,613	-62.1%	Eastchester Road
M100	15,654	5,971	-61.9%	Broadway/Amsterdam Ave

Sources: Metropolitan Transportation Authority; OSC analysis

Weekend Performance Metrics

The MTA has increased subway service on the weekends to help meet increased demand. In 2019, the MTA scheduled nearly 685,000 subway trains on the weekend. In 2020, the MTA reduced service to about 673,000 trains on weekends during the pandemic when most riders were essential workers. As discretionary travel began to return, the MTA increased service by 2 percent to more than 686,000 trains on weekends in 2021 which was more than was scheduled in 2019. The MTA has continued to increase service thereafter to more than 721,000 weekend trains in 2025, 1.7 percent more than in 2024 and 5.4 percent more than in 2019 (see Figure 14). The MTA has noted they have added $35 million in weekend service since 2023.

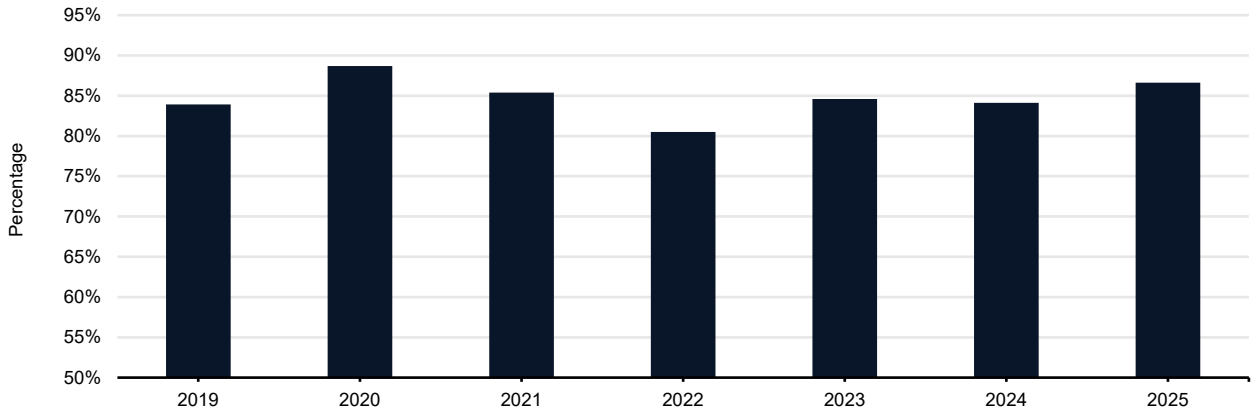
FIGURE 14
Scheduled Weekend Subway Service



Sources: Metropolitan Transportation Authority; OSC analysis

As weekend service has increased, OTP on weekends has also improved. In 2019, weekend subway OTP was at 83.9 percent which was a large improvement from the year before (70.3 percent). Weekend OTP improved to 88.7 percent in 2020 with low ridership but slipped in 2021 and 2022 as

FIGURE 15
Weekend Subway On-Time Performance



Sources: Metropolitan Transportation Authority; OSC analysis

ridership began returning. In 2025, weekend subway OTP was 86.6 percent, higher than in 2019 even as service on weekends has increased (see Figure 15).

MTA scheduled about 544,000 buses on weekends in 2019 and was able to run about 525,000 buses delivering 96.5 percent of scheduled service. The MTA began scheduling more weekend bus service in 2022 with scheduled service at 560,000 buses in 2025, 3 percent more than in 2019. Because the MTA was able to deliver 94.7 percent of scheduled service, only 531,000 buses were run, 6,000 more than in 2019 (1 percent). If the MTA had been able to deliver bus service at 96.5 percent of scheduled service in 2025 like it did in 2019 (which it has not been able to achieve since that year), it may have been able to provide another 10,000 bus trips on weekends. OTP data was not available for weekend bus trips. OSC recommends that the MTA re-examine bus route designs and improve bus availability efforts to meet demand on weekends.

Prepared by the Office of the State Deputy Comptroller for the City of New York

Contact

Office of the New York State Comptroller
110 State Street, 15th Floor
Albany, New York 12236

(518) 474-4044

www.osc.ny.gov