

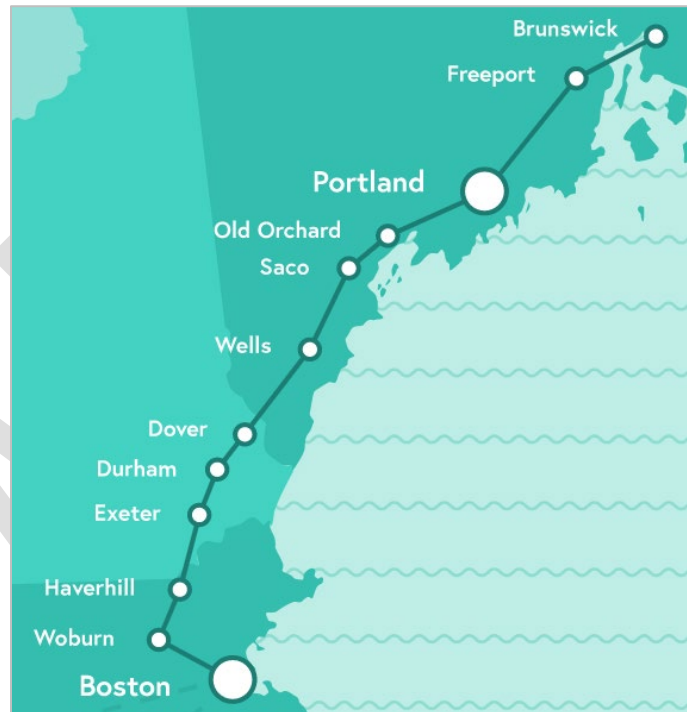
NNEPRA

AMTRAK DOWNEASTER

Route Overview

The Amtrak Downeaster passenger rail service connects Brunswick, ME with Boston, MA via five round trips per day. In the Transit Together study area, the Downeaster has stations in Freeport, Portland, Old Orchard Beach, and Saco. Old Orchard Beach Station is served seasonally, from May to October. The Downeaster is an Amtrak-operated route managed by the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPRA).

The Downeaster is both a local and regional transit route. The service operates beyond the Greater Portland region, connecting twelve communities in three states along a 143-mile corridor.



Alignment

The Downeaster is a fixed-guideway service that operates on Pan Am Railways right-of-way in the Greater Portland region. NNEPRA expects to relocate the current Portland station, which is on a branch line, to a new mainline location, which will reduce travel time in the region by 15 minutes.

Connections

Transfers to other transit services are possible at all Downeaster stations in the Greater Portland region: Freeport is served by METRO BREEZ (although the BREEZ stop is several blocks from the train platform); the PTC is served by METRO Route 1 plus the BREEZ, and private intercity bus operator Concord Coach Lines; Old Orchard Beach is served by the BSOOB Transit Route 52/53 and seasonal trolleys; Saco Transportation Center is served by all BSOOB Transit routes except one pattern of Route 70, and the YCCAC Southern Maine Connector.

Schedule

Downeaster service operates ten trains per day, seven days a week, with a span of nearly 24 hours.

Schedule Summary

	Span of Service	Headways (mins.)	Revenue Hours	On-Time Performance
Weekdays	4:30 AM to 1:15 AM	170-280	34	87%
Saturday				
Sunday				

Note: Span, frequency and revenue hours are from February 2022 data, while OTP is from fiscal year 2019.

Downeaster schedules are reviewed and modified as needed to meet travel demand. Frequency and span of Downeaster service are limited by equipment, host railroad agreements, and track capacity. The tracks on which the Downeaster operates are owned by the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, Pan Am Railways, and MaineDOT.

On-Time Performance

Downeaster passenger on-time performance was 87% in fiscal year (FY) 2019. NNEPRA partners with Pan Am Railways and Amtrak to regularly monitor performance and coordinate strategies to reduce passenger and freight train delays.

Ridership and Productivity

Ridership and Productivity by Day

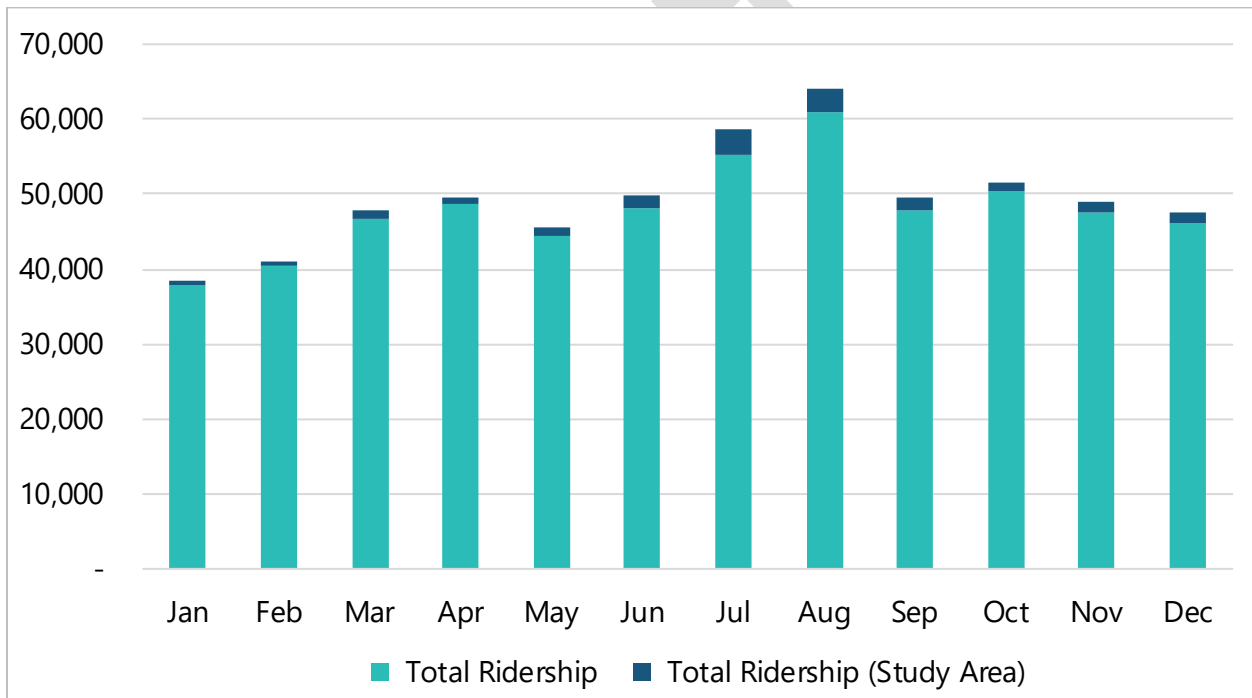
In October 2019, the Downeaster averaged 1,625 boardings per day. The Downeaster had the highest productivity of any transit route in the study area, with 48 boardings per train revenue hour.

Total Ridership by Month

FY 2019 Downeaster ridership varied seasonally, with the highest ridership occurring in summer months, followed by autumn and spring, with the lowest ridership during winter. It is reasonable to assume post-pandemic ridership will retain a similar seasonal variation.

The majority of Downeaster riders who start or end their trip in the Transit Together study area travel to or from a station outside the area; a small minority of riders travel entirely within the study area.

Total Ridership by Month (2019)

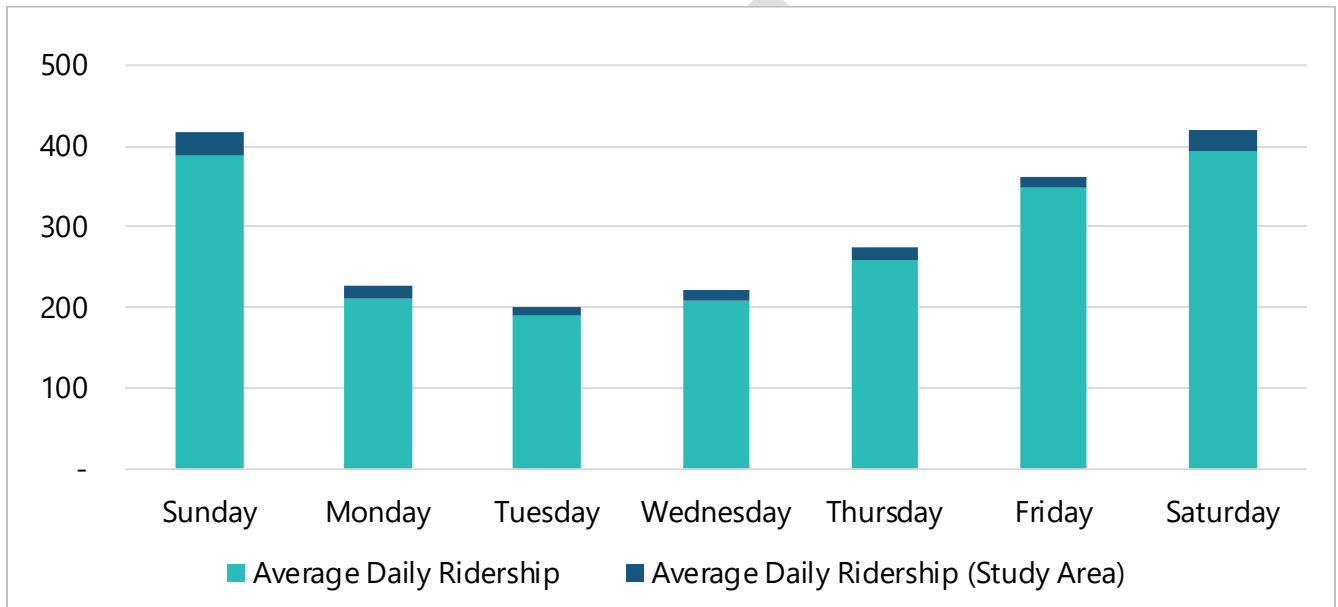


Ridership in the study area represents trips that both begin and end at Brunswick, Freeport, Portland, Old Orchard Beach, or Saco.

Average Daily Ridership by Day of Week

Assuming March 2021 as a representative month for ridership trends during the pandemic, Downeaster ridership was heavier on weekends. Monday through Wednesday ridership was about half of weekend ridership. In March 2021, the Downeaster was only operating four daily round trips between Brunswick and Boston.

Average Daily Ridership by Day of Week (March 2021)



Ridership in the study area represents trips that both begin and end at Brunswick, Freeport, Portland, or Saco.

Weekday Ridership by Origin-Destination

In March 2021, origin-destination patterns showed that most Downeaster riders were traveling to and from Boston, with the largest flows between the study area and Boston being from Portland and Brunswick. Within the study area, the largest origin-destination flows were between Brunswick and Portland and between Saco and Portland.

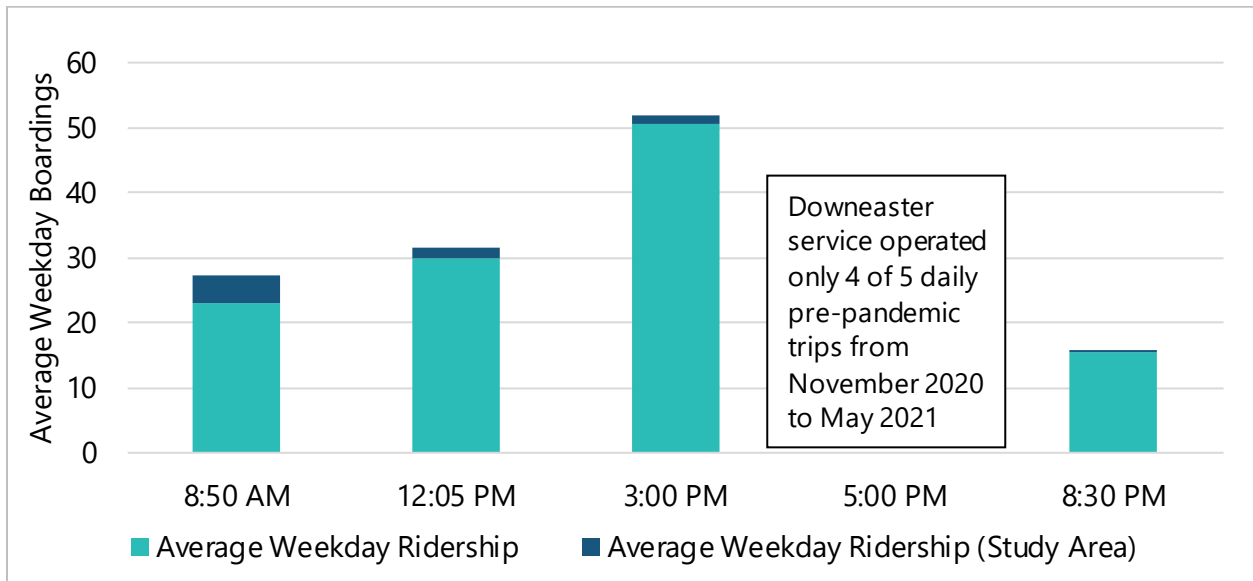
Weekday Ridership by Origin-Destination (March 2021)

	BRK	FRE	POR	ORB	SAO	WEM	DOV	DHM	EXR	HHL	WOB	BON	Total
BRK	-												-
FRE	2	-											2
POR	5	1	-										6
ORB	-	-		-									-
SAO	1	1	4		-								6
WEM	1	1	1			0							2
DOV	0	0	4			1	0						5
DHM	1	0	3			3	1	0					8
EXR	1	1	3			1	0	1	0				7
HHL	0	0	2			4	0	2	2	1			12
WOB	1	0	2			1	1	0	5	0			10
BON	20	7	41			19	15	18	27	17	12		177
Total	32	12	60			28	18	22	35	18	12		237

Weekday Ridership by Trip

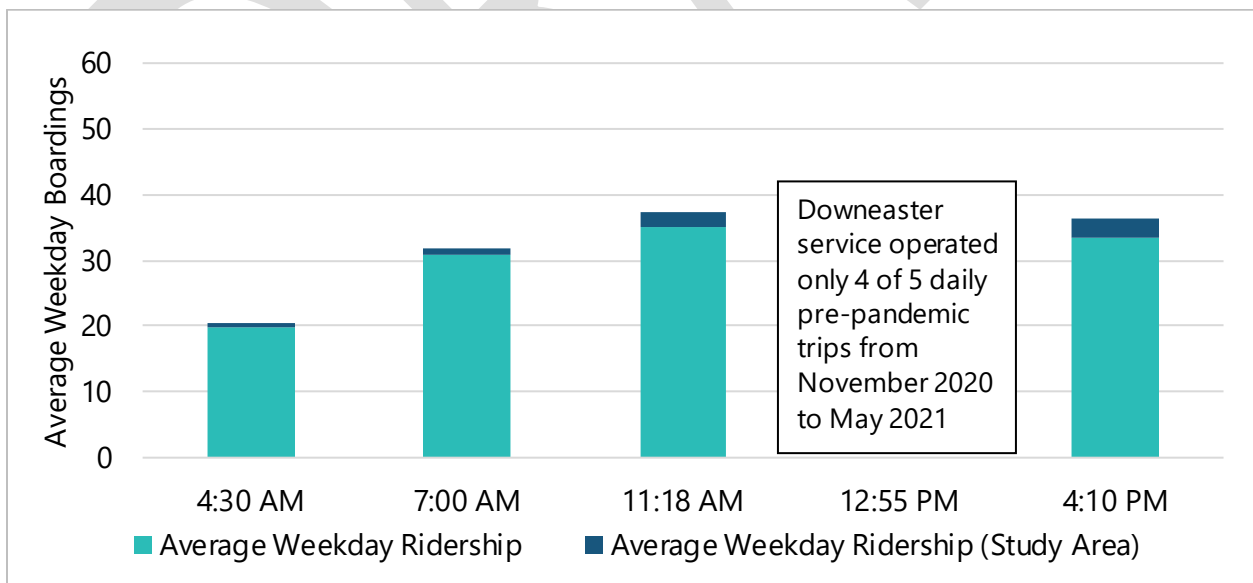
In March 2021, ridership by trip on the Downeaster exhibited a directional trend within the study area, with higher ridership on the 3:00 PM northbound trip and lower ridership on earlier and later trips. Southbound ridership was highest on 11:18 AM and 4:10 PM trips.

Weekday Boardings by Trip: Northbound (March 2021)



Ridership in the study area represents trips that both begin and end at Brunswick, Freeport, Portland, Old Orchard Beach, or Saco.

Weekday Boardings by Trip: Southbound (March 2021)



Ridership in the study area represents trips that both begin and end at Brunswick, Freeport, Portland, Old Orchard Beach, or Saco.

Overall Service Assessment

Strengths

- The Downeaster has a simple and direct alignment with a long a span of service.
- The Downeaster has relatively few stops, which keeps travel time low. Travel times between some stations are faster than automobile trip times.
- Downeaster productivity is the highest of all study-area transit routes.
- The Downeaster connects Greater Portland region communities to each other and to markets outside the region. The service is also part of Amtrak's national network, providing car-free access beyond Boston.

Weaknesses

- With five round trips per day, Downeaster service is less frequent than other services in the region.
- The location of Portland Station adds travel time for Downeaster passengers, is not within easy walking distance of employment and residential hubs, and is not served by all regional transit providers.

Opportunities

Some opportunities to strengthen the Downeaster are listed below. Some suggestions may be contradictory, as there is usually more than one approach to improving a route.

- The Downeaster largely parallels the most congested parts of I-295 and I-95 in Maine. The Downeaster could be an option for many regional travelers to reduce travel times and avoid traffic congestion, especially during the more congested summer months. As part of this overarching ridership growth strategy, increased frequency and better transit connections at stations could increase Downeaster ridership.
- There are several opportunities to reduce transit trip travel times in the Greater Portland region:
 - NNEPRA is actively looking to relocate the Portland station to a mainline location. This would save approximately 15 minutes. Other benefits include:
 - Better Downeaster access to key destinations such as Maine Medical Center, Northern Light Mercy Hospital, Portland's Veterans Administration Hospital, Maine College of Art, Hadlock Field, and downtown/Old Port.
 - Better integration with local bus service, as the station would be located closer to corridors served by METRO, BSOOB Transit and SPBS, including the Congress Street bus corridor.

- There are several opportunities to improve Downeaster's connectivity with the regional transit network:
 - Intermodal connections to the current or future Portland Station could be improved by connecting RTP Lakes Region Explorer, SPBS, and BSOOB Transit service to the Downeaster. Although BSOOB Transit connects with the Downeaster at Saco Transportation Center (and Old Orchard Beach Station, seasonally), it does not currently connect in Portland.
 - For less-frequent local bus routes, timing connections to the Downeaster would improve first-/last-mile transit connectivity for riders and improve station access.
 - Adding a one-seat local bus ride from the Downeaster station in Portland to Casco Bay Ferry Terminal would increase access for island residents and tourists, and encourage automobile-free travel to and within the region.
 - Visitors to the region have no easy access to key Portland destinations without a car. A seasonal tourism circulator could be designed to connect the Portland train station, Jetport, Portland Transportation Center, and the Portland Ferry Terminal with key destinations in the region.
 - Coordinate METRO BREEZ and BSOOB Transit Route 70 schedules with Downeaster service to improve overall transit span of service and/or frequency along the Biddeford-Saco-Portland and Brunswick-Portland corridors.
 - An additional pedestrian connection from Factory Island/Saco Transportation Center to downtown Biddeford would increase access to the Downeaster.
- NNEPRA is actively exploring a new Downeaster station in West Falmouth, near I-95 Exit 53. This would increase public transportation options for those traveling within the region and improve connectivity for Downeaster riders who originate north and west of the study area.