

# Route 203 – Dartmouth St: Service Change Proposal

July 2023

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## I. Description

The Route 203 – Dartmouth St serves the west end and south end neighborhoods of New Bedford. Its major stops include the New Bedford Terminal, St. Luke’s Hospital, Dartmouth St Stop & Shop, and the Big Value Plaza. The route leaves the downtown New Bedford Terminal, travels south on Sixth Street to Union St, west on Union St, south on Rotch St (after 6 PM on weekdays the route continues to Rockdale Ave, south to Hawthorn and rejoins the route at Rotch St), east on Hawthorn St, south on Page St, east on Allen St, south on Dartmouth St, east on Rockdale Ave, north on Hemlock St, serves the south side of the Stop & Shop building, exits to Rockdale Ave, travels south on Dartmouth St, east on Edgeworth St through to Sol-E-Mar St where it ends the outbound pattern by the Dartmouth St Big Value Plaza. The inbound pattern starts on Sol-E-Mar St, north on Dartmouth St and reverses the outbound pattern. The route operates from 6:35 AM to 9:27 PM on Weekdays with thirty-minute headways; Saturdays it operates from 7:40 AM to 5:32 PM with sixty-minute headways.

The major destinations on the route are the St. Luke’s Hospital and Dartmouth St Stop & Shop. Ridership south of the Stop & Shop is significantly less than the rest of the route; 22% of stops on the route are south of Stop & Shop but only 6% of the boardings are recorded at these stops. Public input has indicated that there is a demand for a cross-town connection between the Brock Ave corridor and the Dartmouth St Stop & Shop; the NB3 currently serves this connection with limited service during the school year.

## II. Proposed Changes

### A. Alternative A

The proposed route realignment changes three segments of the route. The first segment proposal eliminates service on Union St west of County St, Rotch St, and Hawthorn St. The alternative alignment uses County St and Hawthorn St and returns to the existing alignment at Page St to maintain service to St. Luke’s Hospital.

The second segment proposal is to expand service to the Brock Ave corridor from a single daily round trip to hourly service on weekdays and bi-hourly service on Saturdays. The alignment would follow the segment proposal to St. Luke’s and follow the existing alignment to the Dartmouth St Stop & Shop. After departing Stop & Shop, the route turns east on Rockdale Ave, continues east on Cove Rd, and continues to Brock Ave. The alignment turns east on Ruth St and ends at Tripp Towers. The inbound alignment begins at Tripp Towers, turns south of East Rodney French Blvd, west on David St, north on Brock Ave and follows the outbound alignment to return to Stop & Shop. After departing Stop & Shop, the alignment follows the outbound alignment, including the proposed alternative between St. Luke’s Hospital and the SRTA New Bedford Terminal.

The third segment proposal reduces the frequency of service on Dartmouth St south of Stop & Shop to Big Value Plaza but maintains the existing alignment. The existing alignment operates with thirty-minute frequency on weekdays and hourly service on Saturdays; the proposal would reduce the frequency to hourly on weekdays and bi-hourly on Saturdays.

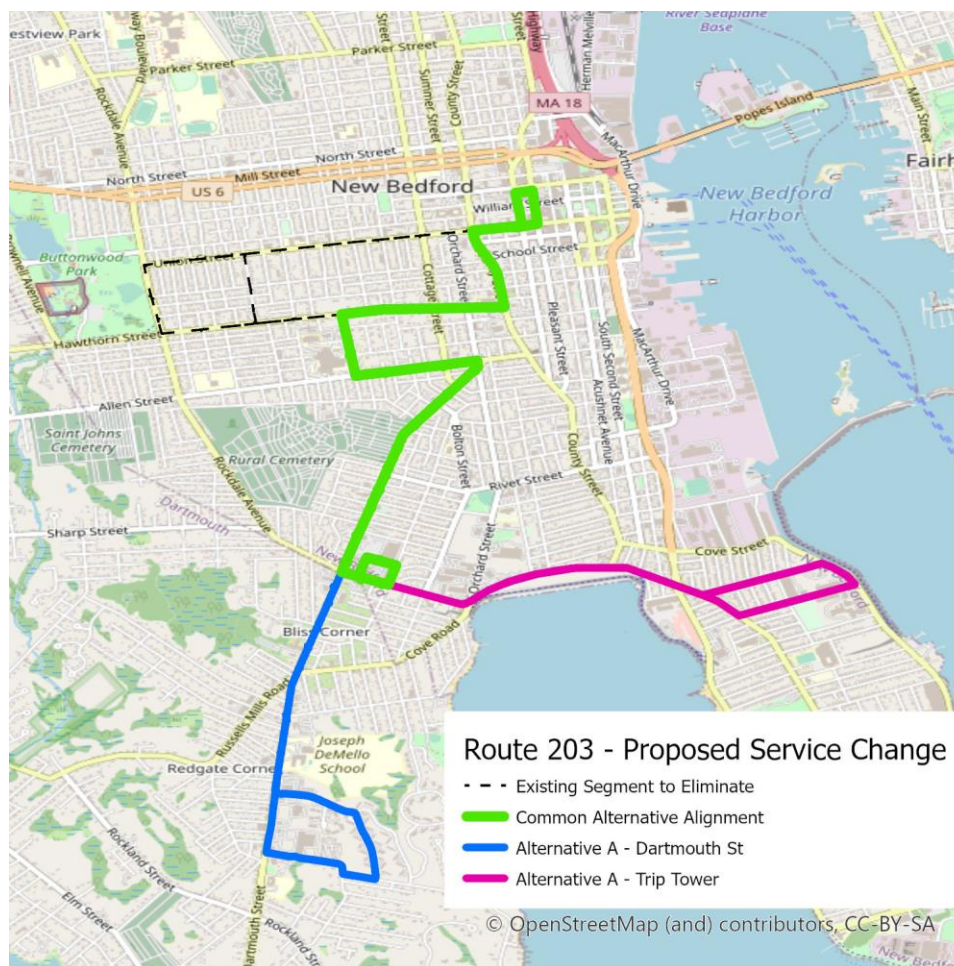


Figure 1: Alternative Alignments for Route 203

## B. Alternative B

The proposed route realignment eliminates service on Union St west of County St, Rotch St, and Hawthorn St. The alternative alignment uses County St and Hawthorn St and returns to the existing alignment at Page St to maintain service to St. Luke's Hospital. The remaining segments of the route remain in the existing condition with respect to alignment and service frequency.

## III. Title VI Equity Analysis

A Title VI Equity Analysis is required by the SRTA Title VI Program whenever a service change will result in a change of more than 25% of the revenue mileage for the route. Both alternatives exceed the 25% threshold and warrant an equity analysis. The parameters for a Title VI equity analysis is described in Chapter 8 to the 2022 SRTA Title VI Program and evaluates two factors: the effects of the change on racial minority groups and the effects of the change on low-income populations. In both measures, the effects are measured against the current conditions by establishing a baseline for racial minorities and low-income populations. If the affected population is more than 60% of the total, the change is determined to have an adverse impact.

### A. Alternative A

Alternative A reduces weekday revenue miles from 295.9 to 272.4, an 8% reduction; the Saturday revenue miles go from 99.7 to 90.7, a 9% reduction. The realignment does not meet the criteria for a Major Service Change and does not require a Title VI Equity Analysis.

### B. Alternative B

Alternative B reduces weekday revenue miles from 295.9 to 272.8, an 8% reduction; the Saturday revenue miles go from 99.7 to 90.8, a 9% reduction. The realignment does not meet the criteria for a Major Service Change and does not require a Title VI Equity Analysis.

## IV. Discussion

The proposed alternatives address long-standing issues related to the route and the corridors served by the route. Alternative B eliminates service on Union St and Rotch St. There is a proposal for the Route 206 that realigns service to Union St, mitigating the effects of the alignment shift of the Route 203 to County St. The residents of Rotch St have long requested the route be realigned, and when night service was introduced the route avoided Rotch St by using Rockdale Ave to travel to Hawthorn St and St. Luke's Hospital. Unfortunately, due to heavy traffic volumes at the intersection of Union St and Rockdale Ave, the alignment could not be adjusted during day-time service because it would make travel times inconsistent. This alignment addresses long standing issues and maintains access to the most popular destinations on the route.

Alternative A uses the alignment of Alternative B but expands route coverage by extending service to Brock Ave and Tripp Towers. Residents in this area have shown interest in a cross-town connection to Stop & Shop since it is the closet grocery store that also houses a bank branch office and a pharmacy. The expansion of coverage comes at a cost to service frequency. The Dartmouth St corridor south of Stop & Shop is currently served on weekdays every thirty-minutes and hourly on Saturdays. Alternative A proposes operating alternating patterns such that Dartmouth St will see service reduced to hourly on weekdays and bi-hourly on Saturdays. Weekday service is sub-optimal, however is only a mild inconvenience for people using the service; Saturday service is least preferred because bi-hourly service makes simple errands and tasks a much lengthier endeavor.

There are two possibilities to address service frequency on Saturdays: increase the service frequency to match weekdays or operate the Alternative B alignment only with no service to Brock Ave on Saturdays. Of the two, the more feasible option is the latter, operate the Alternative B alignment. Unfortunately, SRTA lacks the operational resources to increase the frequency of service on Saturday to address the bi-hourly operation of the split tails of the route.

## V. Public Input

## VI. Recommendation