

Route 205 – South Central: Service Change Proposal

July 2023

I. Description

Route 205 South Central is a local route that operates inbound service on Second Street and Pleasant Street, and outbound service on Acushnet Street and MacArthur Drive. Route 205 connects multiple low-income housing developments within medium- to high- density residential neighborhoods near Downtown New Bedford. Some key destinations served by Route 205 include Harborview Towers, Boa Vista Towers, Price Rite Marketplace. On weekdays, Route 205 operates every 60 minutes from 6:50 AM to 5:06 PM. On Saturdays, this route operates every 60 minutes from 8:00 AM to 5:16 PM.

The route's alignment operates inbound service which overlaps with the outbound portion of the loop on S 2nd Street near Boa Vista Towers. Although the route's overall running time is short, the route does cause riders to travel somewhat out of direction to access Price Rite Marketplace, which is the route's highest-ridership stop, outside of the New Bedford Terminal. Route 205's ridership throughout the day is very low and consistent during most trips. On weekdays, Route 205 ridership exhibits no peaks and most trips carry between 0 to 5 passengers. On Saturdays, ridership slightly increases throughout the day but carries no more than five passengers.

Route 205 is the lowest ridership route in the SRTA's New Bedford service area. This route has an average of 31 riders on weekdays and 30 riders on Saturdays. The route alignment was changed in August 2021 as a measure to address low ridership and ridership continued to decline after the change. Subsequent analysis of route ridership has indicated steady decline since the change was implemented.

II. Proposed Changes

The proposal for Route 205 eliminates the service entirely.

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.

The proposed elimination will reduce weekday revenue miles from 28.5 to 0 and reduce Saturday revenue miles from 25.9 to 0. Both weekday and Saturday revenue mile reduction exceeds the threshold for a Major Service Change and an equity analysis is warranted.

Disparate Impact Analysis

A disparate impact is one that affects a racial minority population that is more than 60% of the total population for the affected area. The United State Census most recent data for race and population was from the 2020 census; data at the census block level is the smallest geographic representation for the data and is the dataset used to determine disparate impact. The table below shows the results of the analysis.

| | Current Condition | % Racial Minority | Alternative A | % Racial Minority | % Affected |
|-----------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| Racial Minority | 3,521 | | 0 | | -100.00% |
| Racial Majority | 2,791 | | 0 | | -100.00% |
| Total | 6,312 | 55.78% | 0 | -100.00% | -100.00% |

The results of the analysis indicate that 55.78% of residents affected by the service change are identified as a racial minority. This does not meet the threshold for a disparate impact, however, 6 of 141 census blocks served by Route 205 exceed 60% racial minority residents and represents a potential disparate impact. All 6 of the census blocks will retain service provided by Route 201. Route 201 operates a longer span of service on weekdays and Saturdays and has much higher frequency than Route 205. The continued service of Route 201 mitigates the impact of the elimination of Route 205.

Based on these findings, there is no disparate impact resulting from the elimination of Route 205.

Disproportionate Burden Analysis

A disparate burden is one that affects low-income populations more so than non-low-income populations. Low income is defined by the US Department of Health and Human Services as any household with an annual income less than \$26,500. Data on low-income is provided by the American Community Survey in table B17001; data for the 2021 5-year estimates. The smallest geographic area for the data is a Census tract, a much larger area than a Census block, and why the population numbers in the table below are larger than in the table for Disparate Impact Analysis.

| | Current Condition | % Low Income | Alternative A | % Low Income | % Affected |
|----------------|--------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Low-income | 3,977 | | 0 | | -100.00% |
| Non-low-income | 10,163 | | 0 | | -100.00% |
| Total | 14,140 | 28.13% | 0 | -100.00% | -100.00% |

The results of the analysis indicate that 28.13% of residents served by Route 205 considered low-income. None of the 6 census tracts served by the route exceed 60% low-income residents.

Based on these findings, there is no disproportionate burden resulting from the elimination of Route 205.

IV. Discussion

Route 205 is a perennial under-performing route. Ridership had been in a steady decline leading into the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic which only exacerbated the decline. In response, the route was shortened from the historic alignment on Rivet St with service to Dartmouth St Stop & Shop and was terminated at Price-Rite on MacArthur Dr in 2021. The shortened route only caused further decline in ridership, lacking a strong anchor destination and a circuitous route through the South-Central neighborhood.

Eliminating a route is less than ideal, regardless of circumstances. The route may experience low ridership, but it does not experience no ridership. Customers rely on the service to move about the South-Central neighborhood. Fortunately, the neighborhood is also served by the Route 201 – Fort Rodman via Acushnet Ave and Pleasant St. Route 201 operates a longer span of service with greater frequency, which may be contributing to the ridership decline. Route 205 is competing for riders against a route with more convenient service, with the trade-off that it is a little more of a walk to access the route.

Because Route 205 is such a low-ridership route, the resources needed to continue operations can be used more effectively elsewhere in the New Bedford system.

V. Public Input

VI. Recommendation