



Fare-Free Bus Pilot 1-Year Evaluation

June 2025

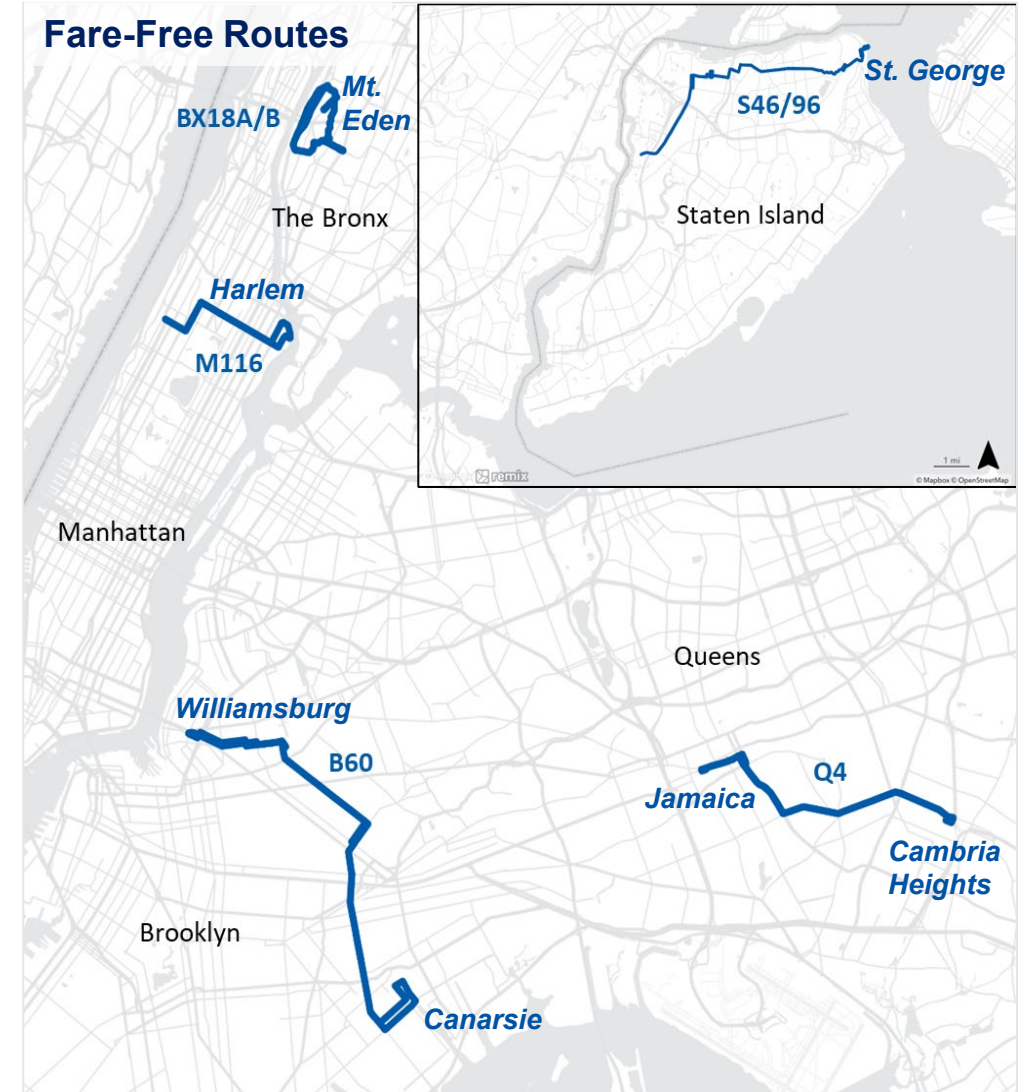
About the Pilot

The 2023 New York State budget mandated the MTA to select and operate one fare free bus route in each borough for 6-12 months.

MTA's route selections considered:

- Equity for low income and disadvantaged communities, access to employment and commercial area(s)
- Existing route capacity, limited crowding conditions, service adequacy
- Minimal overlap with other MTA bus services
- Fare evasion levels

The pilot began September 24, 2023, and fare collection resumed on September 1, 2024.



Evaluation Summary

Main Pilot findings:

1. Ridership increased on all routes.
2. Limited new ridership: existing riders used the fare-free routes more than new route riders.
3. Service performance had mixed results.
4. Fare evasion on nearby routes was consistent with systemwide rates.
5. Foregone revenue and related costs amounted to more than \$16.5M over the pilot period, including foregone fare revenue on pilot routes, as well as additional lost revenue and operational costs.

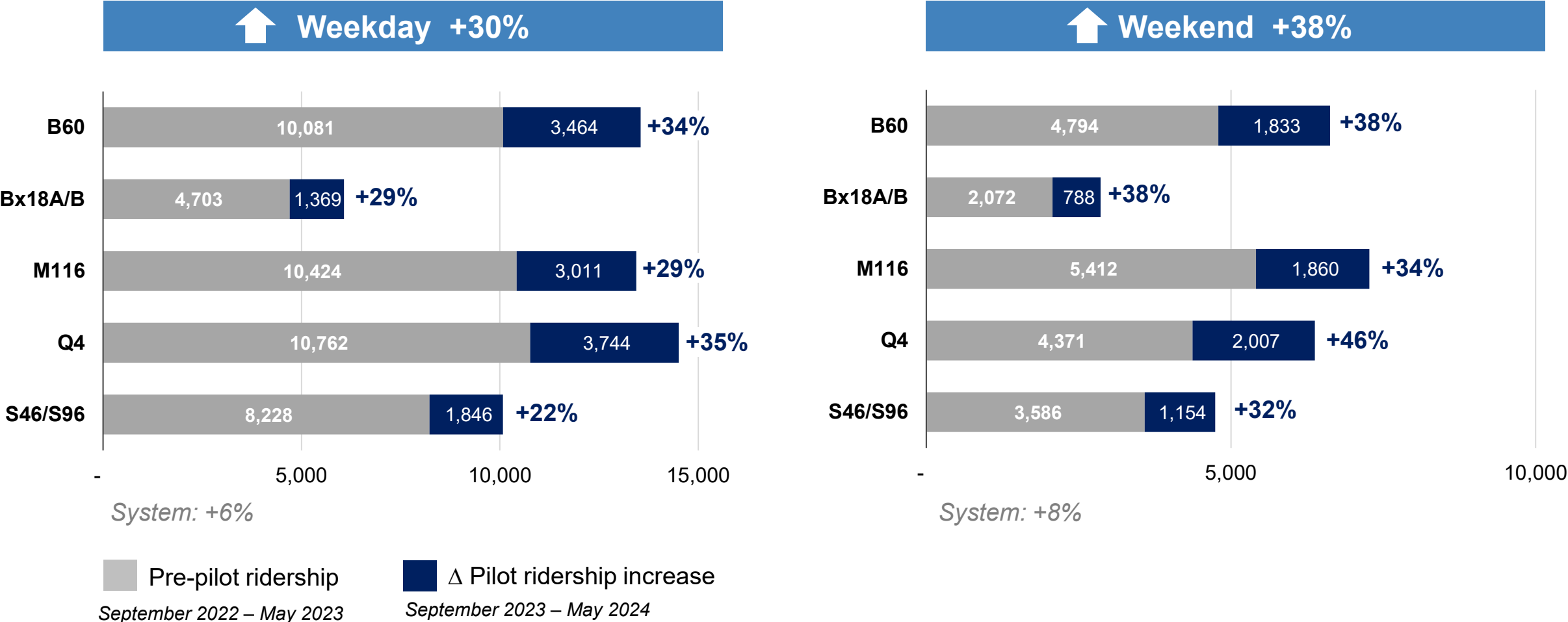


Evaluation Methodology

- The MTA presented results from the first nine months of the pilot period to the MTA Board during the [NYC Transit Committee in July 2024](#).
- The initial assessment examined the comparative periods of September to May pre-pilot and during the pilot, which aligns with the school year when bus ridership is highest.
- The MTA similarly evaluated the remaining months of the pilot, June through August, to complete the full pilot program evaluation.
- Since ridership trends vary between school months and summer months, the following findings present both the nine-month period from September to May (i.e., “school months”) and June through August (i.e., “summer months”) where applicable.

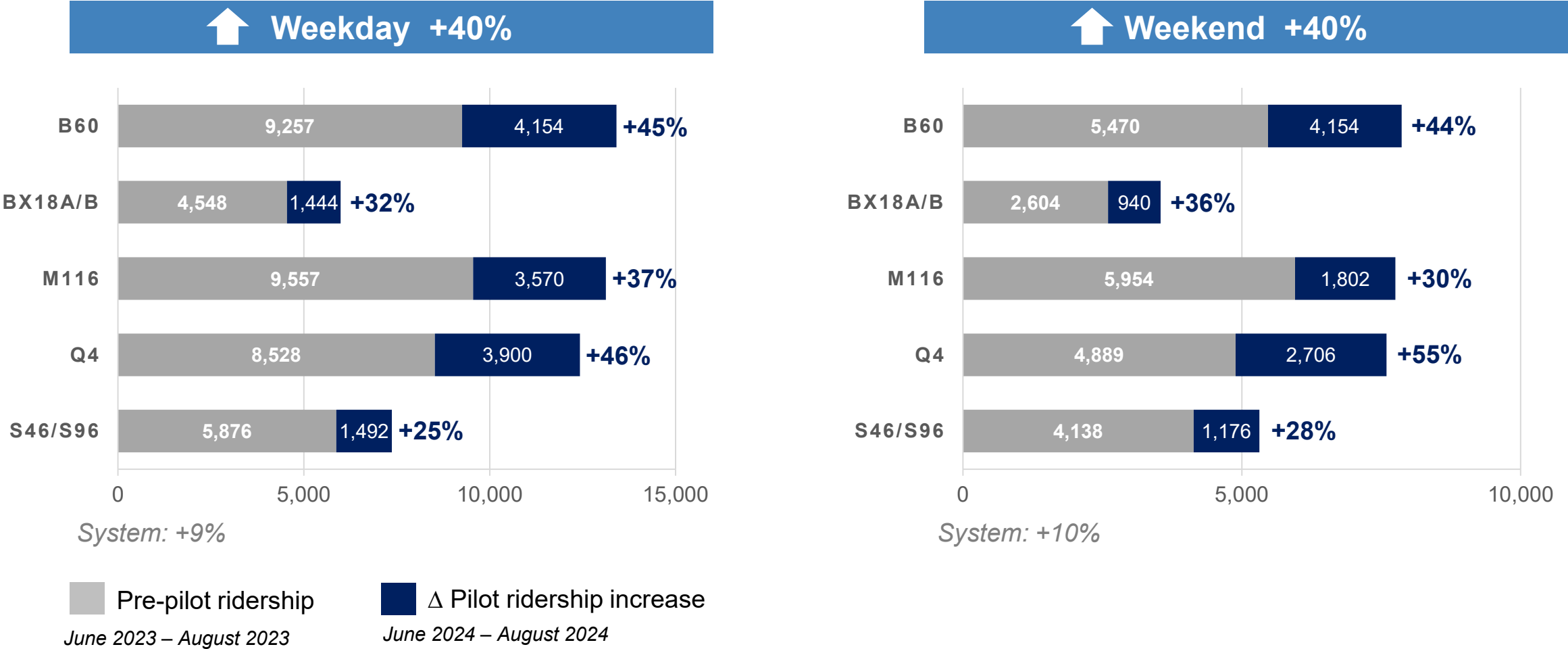
Ridership during school months increased on all routes

Pre-Pilot vs. Pilot Ridership Increases



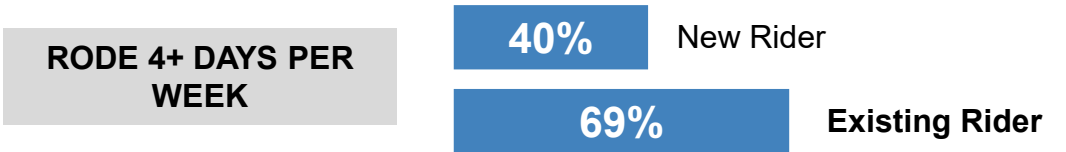
Ridership during summer months increased on all routes

Pre-Pilot vs. Pilot Ridership Increases

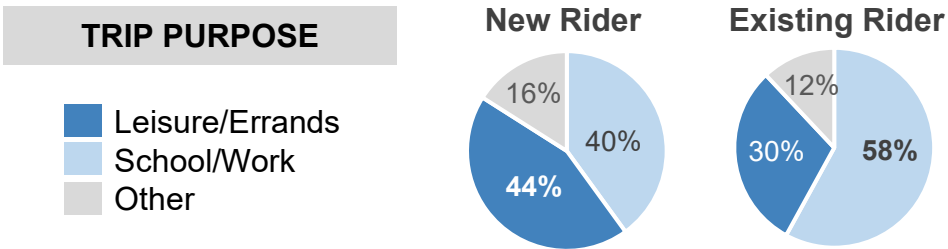


Limited new ridership: existing route riders took most of the new trips

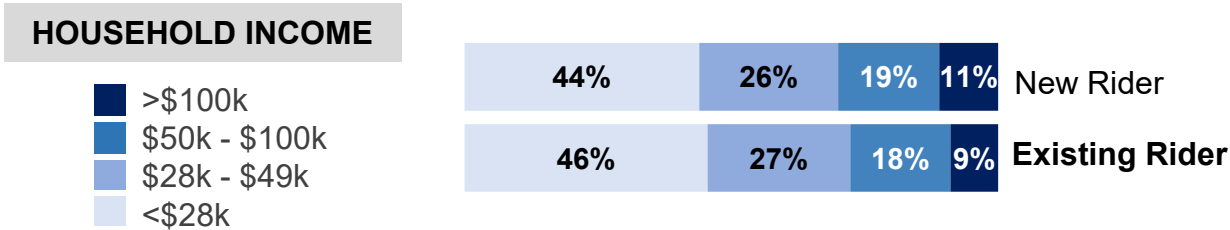
While 12% of riders were new to the route, **existing riders used the route more frequently** and drove ridership increases.



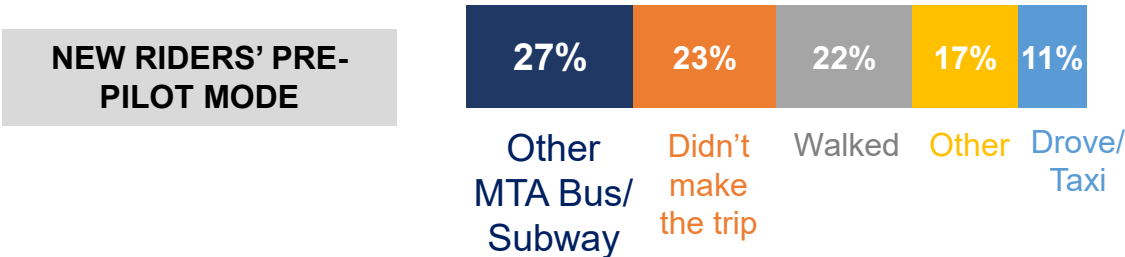
New riders were **more likely to travel for errands and leisure**, than for school or work.



New riders and existing riders **had similar income profiles**.





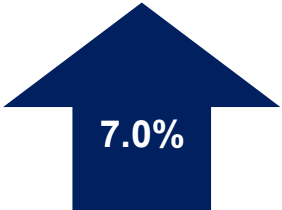









Pre-pilot, more than **one-quarter** of new riders **used other paid MTA bus and subway** service.



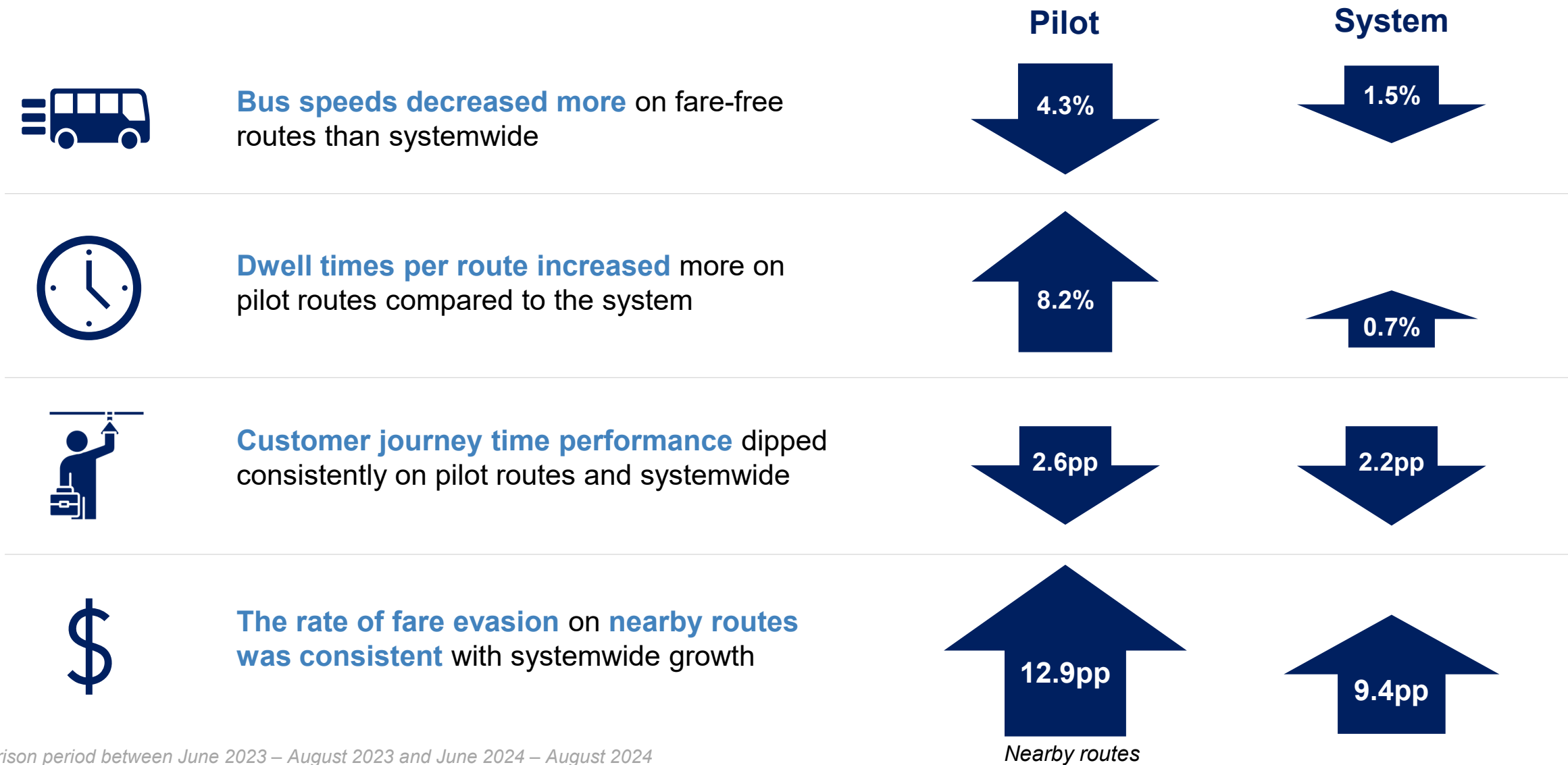
Source: RSG; Survey of 3,600 Pilot riders and 2,200 pre-Pilot riders

Service performance metrics during school months were mixed

		Pilot	System
	Bus speeds decreased on fare-free routes and systemwide	 2.2%	 2.3%
	Dwell times per route increased more on pilot routes compared to the system	 7.0%	 1.0%
	Customer journey time performance dipped more on pilot routes than systemwide	 2.2pp	 1.6pp
	The rate of fare evasion on nearby routes was consistent with systemwide growth	 8.1pp	 7.2pp
		Nearby routes	

Comparison period between September 2022 – May 2023 and September 2023 – May 2024
Note: “pp” indicates percentage point change

Service performance metrics during summer months were mixed



Comparison period between June 2023 – August 2023 and June 2024 – August 2024
Note: “pp” indicates percentage point change

The total pilot represents a loss of approximately \$16.5 million

The MTA estimates the full cost of the pilot program from September 2023 through August 2024, which includes foregone revenue on pilot routes, additional lost revenue, and operational costs as follows:

Farebox Revenue Loss <i>Based on the ridership estimates and the average bus fare (i.e., lower than the full fare), this represents total fares that would have otherwise been collected from riders on free routes.</i>	\$10.8 M
Farebox Revenue Loss on Nearby Services <i>Nearby paid bus routes and subway stations experienced lower ridership, likely due to the adjacent free service.</i>	\$1.7 M
Additional Access-A-Ride Impact and Revenue Loss <i>AAR had more riders and was required to provide free service for AAR pickup locations within 0.5 miles of the free routes, resulting in additional revenue loss.</i>	\$2.8 M
One-Time & Upfront Costs <i>Additional costs incurred for program initiation, implementation, marketing, and other services.</i>	\$1.1 M
Total Cost to the MTA	\$16.5 M

Additional Metrics for Pilot Evaluation

Service Performance – Service Delivered

Service Delivered is the percent of scheduled buses that are actually provided during peak hours.
Positive numbers indicate more reliable service.

School Months (Sep – May)

Route	Pre-Pilot	Pilot	Change (pp)
B60	97.4%	95.7%	-1.7%
Bx18A/B	92.6%	93.9%	+1.3%
M116	99.6%	98.0%	-1.6%
Q4	97.5%	97.4%	-0.1%
S46/S96	94.3%	90.0%	-4.3%
Fare-Free Avg	96.7%	95.1%	-1.6%
Systemwide	95.4%	95.6%	+0.2%

Summer Months (Jun – Aug)

Route	Pre-Pilot	Pilot	Change (pp)
B60	96.9%	93.0%	-3.9%
Bx18A/B	97.0%	95.6%	-1.4%
M116	98.5%	96.7%	-1.8%
Q4	98.3%	96.9%	-1.4%
S46/S96	89.9%	88.7%	-1.1%
Fare-Free Avg	96.3%	94.4%	-1.9%
Systemwide	95.0%	94.5%	-0.5%

Routes measured during weekday peak periods. Systemwide includes Local and Limited routes in peak hours.
School Months Pre-Pilot period: September 2022 – May 2023; School Months Pilot period: September 2023 – May 2024
Summer Months Pre-Pilot period: June 2023 – August 2023; Summer Months Pilot period: June 2024 – August 2024

Service Performance – End-to-End Bus Speed Changes

End-to-end bus speeds measure the average speed of buses on their route.

School Months (Sep – May)

Route	Pre-Pilot (mph)	Pilot (mph)	% Change between pre-Pilot and Pilot periods
B60	6.0	5.9	-2.2%
Bx18A/B	5.6	5.6	+0.5%
M116	5.3	5.2	-2.6%
Q4	7.8	7.4	-4.8%
S46/S96	10.3	10.0	-2.2%
Fare-Free Avg	7.0	6.8	-2.2%
Systemwide	8.1	7.9	-2.3%

Summer Months (Jun – Aug)

Route	Pre-Pilot (mph)	Pilot (mph)	% Change between pre-Pilot and Pilot periods
B60	6.1	5.8	-4.9%
Bx18A/B	5.6	5.6	0.0%
M116	5.4	5.3	-1.9%
Q4	7.5	7.0	-6.7%
S46/S96	10.3	10.0	-2.9%
Fare-Free Avg	7.0	6.7	-4.3%
Systemwide	7.0	6.9	-1.5%

Routes measured during weekday peak periods. Systemwide includes Local and Limited routes in peak hours.

School Months Pre-Pilot period: September 2022 – May 2023; School Months Pilot period: September 2023 – May 2024

Summer Months Pre-Pilot period: June 2023 – August 2023; Summer Months Pilot period: June 2024 – August 2024

Service Performance – Customer Journey Time Performance

Customer Journey Time Performance is the percent of riders who arrive at their destination within 5 minutes of the schedule. Positive numbers indicate more reliable service.

School Months (Sep – May)

Route	Pre-Pilot	Pilot	Change (pp)
B60	67.2%	63.3%	-3.9%
Bx18A/B	70.9%	69.6%	-1.3%
M116	85.0%	84.2%	-0.8%
Q4	78.1%	74.6%	-3.5%
S46/S96	69.9%	65.9%	-4.0%
Fare-Free Avg	75.8%	73.6%	-2.2%
Systemwide	72.9%	71.3%	-1.6%

Summer Months (Jun – Aug)

Route	Pre-Pilot	Pilot	Change (pp)
B60	71.1%	64.1%	-7.0%
Bx18A/B	74.0%	73.0%	-1.0%
M116	89.2%	87.3%	-1.9%
Q4	83.6%	80.2%	-3.4%
S46/S96	71.9%	66.3%	-5.6%
Fare-Free Avg	79.8%	77.2%	-2.6%
Systemwide	76.4%	74.4%	-2.0%

Routes measured during weekday peak periods. Systemwide includes Local and Limited routes in peak hours. Change represents percentage point change.

School Months Pre-Pilot period: September 2022 – May 2023; School Months Pilot period: September 2023 – May 2024

Summer Months Pre-Pilot period: June 2023 – August 2023; Summer Months Pilot period: June 2024 – August 2024

Service Performance – Additional Bus Stop & Travel Time

Additional Bus Stop Time is the average time riders wait for a bus beyond schedule. Positive numbers indicate less reliable service.

Additional Travel Time is the average time riders are on the bus beyond schedule. Positive numbers indicate less reliable service.

School Months (Sep – May)

Route	Additional Bus Stop Time			Additional Travel Time		
	Pre-Pilot (min)	Pilot (min)	Change (min)	Pre-Pilot (min)	Pilot (min)	Change (min)
B60	2.51	3.06	+0.6	0.38	0.68	+0.3
Bx18A/B	1.95	2.02	+0.1	0.09	0.05	+0
M116	1.05	1.01	0	-0.45	-0.24	+0.2
Q4	1.30	1.29	0	0.47	1.01	+0.5
S46/S96	2.68	3.03	+0.4	0.19	0.53	+0.3
Fare-Free Avg	1.78	1.88	+0.1	0.11	0.4	+0.3
Systemwide	1.95	2.10	+0.2	0.403	0.639	+0.2

Routes measured during weekday peak periods. Systemwide includes Local and Limited routes in peak hours.

School Months Pre-Pilot period: September 2022 – May 2023; School Months Pilot period: September 2023 – May 2024

Service Performance – Additional Bus Stop & Travel Time

Additional Bus Stop Time is the average time riders wait for a bus beyond schedule.
Positive numbers indicate less reliable service.

Additional Travel Time is the average time riders are on the bus beyond schedule.
Positive numbers indicate less reliable service.

Summer Months (Jun – Aug)

Route	Additional Bus Stop Time			Additional Travel Time		
	Pre-Pilot (min)	Pilot (min)	Change (min)	Pre-Pilot (min)	Pilot (min)	Change (min)
B60	2.33	3.07	+0.7	-0.38	0.35	-0.4
Bx18A/B	1.85	1.87	0	-0.49	-0.86	+0.7
M116	0.84	0.99	0	-1.07	-0.93	+0.1
Q4	1.00	1.00	0	-0.27	0.25	+0.5
S46/S96	3.08	3.51	+0.4	-0.49	-0.31	+0.2
Fare-Free Avg	1.65	1.75	+0.1	0.58	0.28	-0.3
Systemwide	1.83	1.98	+0.2	-0.10	0.05	+0.2

Routes measured during weekday peak periods. Systemwide includes Local and Limited routes in peak hours.
Summer Months Pre-Pilot period: June 2023 – August 2023; Pilot period: June 2024 – August 2024

Service Performance – Wait Assessment

Wait Assessment is the percent of buses that arrive within 5 minutes of schedule at timepoints, measuring how evenly buses are spaced apart.

Positive numbers indicate more reliable service.

School Months (Sep – May)

Route	Pre-Pilot	Pilot	Change (pp)
B60	65%	69%	+4%
Bx18A/B	71%	61%	-10%
M116	79%	78%	-1%
Q4	76%	75%	-1%
S46/S96	62%	56%	-6%
Fare-Free Avg	71%	69%	-2%
Systemwide	70%	68%	-2%

Summer Months (Jun – Aug)

Route	Pre-Pilot	Pilot	Change (pp)
B60	67%	60%	-7%
Bx18A/B	73%	70%	-3%
M116	83%	80%	-3%
Q4	80%	78%	-2%
S46/S96	60%	53%	-7%
Fare-Free Avg	74%	71%	-3%
Systemwide	71%	68%	-3%

Routes measured during weekday peak periods. Systemwide includes Local and Limited routes in peak hours. Change represents percentage point change.

School Months Pre-Pilot period: September 2022 – May 2023; School Months Pilot period: September 2023 – May 2024

Summer Months Pre-Pilot period: June 2023 – August 2023; Summer Months Pilot period: June 2024 – August 2024

Fare Evasion

The rate of **fare evasion** on nearby bus routes and subway stations.

School Months <i>September – May</i>	Pre-Pilot	Pilot	Change (percentage point)
Nearby Fare-Free Average	47.0%	55.1%	+8.1%
Systemwide	35.5%	42.7%	+7.2%

Summer Months <i>June – August</i>	Pre-Pilot	Pilot	Change (percentage point)
Nearby Fare-Free Average	48.3%	58.7%	+10.4%
Systemwide	34.2%	41.7%	+7.5%

Systemwide excludes Fare-Free routes, routes nearby Fare-Free routes, routes with less than 40% Automatic Passenger Count coverage, and all Select Bus & Express Bus routes
School Months Pre-Pilot period: September 2022 – May 2023; School Months Pilot period: September 2023 – May 2024
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Cost Evaluation (September 2023 – August 2024)

Route	Farebox Revenue Loss	Revenue Impact to Nearby Services	Incremental Access-A-Ride Costs	One-Time & Upfront Costs*	Total by Route
B60	\$2,760,000	\$630,000	\$1,180,000	\$217,000	\$4,787,000
Bx18	\$722,000	\$148,000	\$182,000	\$217,000	\$1,269,000
M116	\$2,831,000	\$369,000	\$496,000	\$217,000	\$3,914,000
Q4	\$2,987,000	\$272,000	\$388,000	\$217,000	\$3,865,000
S46/S96	\$1,579,000	\$302,000	\$542,000	\$217,000	\$2,641,000
12-Month Total	\$10,880,000	\$1,722,000	\$2,788,000	\$1,085,000	\$16,475,000

*Represents an average across the five routes.

Farebox revenue loss represents the expected revenue from riders on the Fare-Free routes.

Revenue impact on nearby services represents ridership on Fare-Free routes that may have been drawn from other routes, resulting in incremental fare loss above expected paid ridership at neighboring subway stations and paid bus routes.

Incremental Access-A-Ride costs includes foregone farebox revenue and incremental cost to operate free service above planned service levels, with higher than anticipated ridership.

One-time and upfront costs include marketing, consultant support, and other pilot launch costs.

Scheduled Service Frequency, Bx18A/B & B60

Bronx, Bx18A/B

Day	To Morris Heights, Highbridge (Bx18A)	To Morris Heights, Highbridge (Bx18B)	Avg. Frequency (minutes)			
			AM	Mid	PM	Nite
Weekday	5:10am – 12:55am	5:00am – 12:40am	10	20	10	-
Saturday	5:00am – 12:30am	5:15am – 12:15am	30	20	15	-
Sunday	5:10am – 12:45am	4:55am – 12:30am	30	20	20	-

Brooklyn, B60

Day	To Williams Av	To Williamsburg Bridge Plaza	Avg. Frequency (minutes)			
			AM	Mid	PM	Nite
Weekday	All times	All times	8	12	10	60
Saturday	All times	All times	20	15	15	60
Sunday	All times	All times	20	20	20	60

Scheduled Service Frequency, M116

Manhattan, M116

Day	To Broadway	To Pleasant Av	Avg. Frequency (minutes)			
			AM	Mid	PM	Nite
Weekday	5:10am – 1:25am	4:30am – 1:00am	5	10	8	-
Saturday	7:00am – 1:25am	6:30am – 1:00am	15	12	10	-
Sunday	5:00am – 1:30am	4:30am – 1:00am	20	12	12	-

Scheduled Service Frequency, Q4 Local / Limited

Queens, Q4 LCL / LTD

Day	To Parsons Blvd	To 235 St	Avg. Frequency (minutes)			
			AM	Mid	PM	Nite
Q4 Local						
Weekday	All times	All times	9	12	10	60
Saturday	All times	All times	12	10	10	60
Sunday	All times	All times	15	15	12	60
Q4 Limited						
Weekday	5:34am – 8:57am	6:51am – 8:27am	6	-	7	-
	-	2:50am – 8:20pm				

Scheduled Service Frequency, S46 / S96

Staten Island, S46 / S96

Day	To Parsons Blvd	To 235 St	Avg. Frequency (minutes)			
			AM	Mid	PM	Nite
S46 Local						
Weekday	All times	All times	6	12	10	30
Saturday	All times	All times	15	15	15	30
Sunday	All times	All times	30	15	15	30
S96 Limited						
Weekday	4:00pm – 11:00pm	5:20am – 8:13am	12	-	15	-

Verbal and Physical Assaults Against Bus Operators

Number of **verbal and physical assaults** against bus operators on fare-free routes.

Route	Pre-Pilot	Pilot	% Change
B60	14	10	-28.6%
Bx18A/B	7	2	-71.4%
M116	10	6	-40.0%
Q4	5	9	+80.0%
S46/S96	11	5	-54.5%
Fare-Free Avg	47	32	-31.9%
Systemwide	1,663	1,407	-15.4%

Pre-Pilot period: September 2022 – August 2023; Pilot period: September 2023 – August 2024