The activity I wanted to focus on was the process of purchasing one’s MBTA ticket, finding the track, and possibly gathering some extra information to plan their trip. Being from outside Atlantic City, New Jersey, I have had my fair share of train rides to and from Boston. Although I am familiar with the train ticketing system many others become baffled and overwhelmed when using this type of travel. I wanted to gather the necessary information from others using a similar train system and what they felt of the current systems. Interviewing travelers gave me other perspectives and ideas of potential new systems that could be implemented in the future to help alleviate traveler’s anxiety and issues.

Throughout my observations one could tell the people that were familiar with the system of purchasing a ticket and getting on the train; however, you could also see people who seemed lost and foreign to the normal ticketing and boarding process. Now, obviously, a majority of these people simply had some type of ticket already, most likely a Charlie card or some type of yearly commuter card, and they just passed by monotonously. For the people that didn’t have a card they made their way to the MBTA’s ticketing systems. These systems used to purchase tickets works well, people seem to see the machines and instinctively react if they need a ticket. Train tickets, not just MBTA tickets, are very vague and never portray clear information—this is when confusion and frustration can affect passengers. I think a great system would be an automated electronic agent that would have the ability to take verbal questions and it could return information about one’s trip. This information could include the customers train track number, future scheduling times, and anything else related to the MBTA or the specific station—in this case Ruggle’s and its surrounding area. The technology for voice recognition software has improved immensely recently and has the ability to take on such tasks. Retrieving the information is the easy part for the system as it can get most things that MBTA already provides on its website. The system could possibly be even built in to their current machines, or maybe have a new similar machine developed with the new functionality. This would alleviate the issues of having confused customers trying to study a map, clogging up walking areas, and more importantly ensuring they are comfortable with their planned trip.

During my observation process I also interviewed two people; I will refer to them as participant 1 and 2. I wanted to ensure before interviewing people that I talked to two different types of people; one that looked to know the normal procedure at Ruggle’s and one that seemed unfamiliar to the process. Focusing on these two different types of people I could get viewpoints from opposite ends of the spectrum to see if this type of system implementation could be helpful for all. The first participant was someone normal to the process. I could tell when he walked up the stairs and through Ruggle’s station without hesitation he had gone
through this process before. I approached him when he made his way past the ticketing machines and asked him about what he thought about the current ticket and boarding system. He mentioned that he believes the ticketing system is efficient, but also brought up my same points about foreigners to the system sometimes seem to struggle with the process and normally ask others for information. He didn't mention any type of solution but identified the main problem as, people knowing where to go to find there train. Those were his main points, he a to the tracks after we finished. This man had a Charlie card and didn't have to purchase his ticket. He simply took out his card, scanned it at the gates, and continued on to his train.

One thing I thought after this interview was about a type of illuminated “smart” floor space. After purchasing a ticket, the system this could inform the customer to follow the given path (a type of illuminated line) to the track. This could give the customer a more secure and informative path to the train and ensure he is in the right area. This new type of “smart-area” technologies are big and upcoming in the world of tech and could have an impact on public transportation.

The second MBTA customer was, like I mentioned, on the other side of the spectrum in terms of knowledge on the normal process. She walked up the stairs from the circle outside and cautiously made her way up and towards the MBTA ticketing machines. Looking nervous and uncomfortable she walked up to a machine and started to follow the on-screen instructions. I noticed she had to continuously press the same buttons to get them to work. This is exactly what I see all the time from many people, probably tourists or other people not familiar with such a system. After struggling with the touchscreen for almost 5 minutes she made her purchase and made her way to the map, which showed the train lines and directions. She seemed extremely perplexed and wasn’t sure which train she needed to take and where to get on. While she was observing the map I went up to her. I started the conversation asking her about the system and process she had to go through. She began talking about the difficulty of the screens and how their responsibility was usually inaccurate. After talking about the ticketing process she simply asked me, “Can you show me where to go?” At this moment I knew she had hit the familiar road block – finding the track. I helped her and we went through the manual process together; she thanked me and went on her way while I received some great information. This is why I believe if there was a multi-lingual electronic agent either built in to the ticketing devices or a separate machine it could help immensely.

After going through this process and being able to sit and observe a scene it’s quite interesting to break down the world around you into small pieces of data. I felt myself thinking almost outside the box, and trying to observe slight common human behaviors. I got an impression of a few different things; one was the human behavior to never want to make a mistake. The reason it was so easy to tell if someone was foreign to the system was the speed at which they go
through the process. I believe this to be the reluctance of making a mistake; people observe and analyze the world around them to ensure they make the right decision. One may ask why they are so worried about making a mistake – this brings me to the second part of my analysis. There could be many explanations, but my hypothesis is that the natural human reaction, in an unfamiliar public place, is that they strive to “fit in” with social normality’s. Another point on this topic relates to my agent system idea, I found people who didn’t know what they were doing, seemed reluctant to ask anyone for help. I believe this is because of the social judgment idea for most, and I unfortunately decided that most people may rather talk to a machine then a human being. There’s no need to worry about social normality’s when dealing with a machine with no feelings or human behavior. As if our world isn’t already completely consumed with people interacting machines already, but who knows what will happen to the human demeanor over the coming decades. I think the agent system I talked about could be very successful and help many people; however, after going through this observation I realized, even more, that the age of the machine is on the upcoming and the natural human behaviors are shifting.