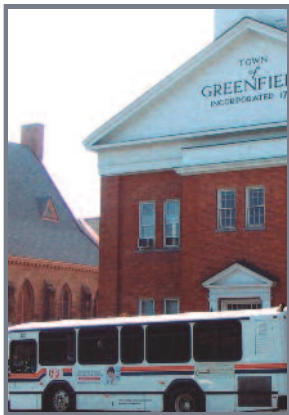


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March 2011

2011 REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN



Providing a vision for the county's transportation systems in a context that is suitable for the rural nature of the region

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2011 Regional Transportation Plan

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Introduction

2011

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN

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realistic, a financial component has been included as part of this plan.

The Franklin Regional Council of Governments

The Franklin Regional Council of Governments (referred to as the FRCOG) serves the towns of the Franklin County Region in the upper Connecticut River Valley in Western Massachusetts. The FRCOG integrates regional and local planning, human service advocacy and coordination, and the provision of municipal services such as cooperative purchasing and building inspection to advance the following regional goals:

- Balancing economic development with the protection of natural and cultural resources, and with the rural character and heritage of the region;
- Ensuring the most economical creation and delivery of public services in a rural region comprised of many political subdivisions;
- Building healthier communities by developing and connecting broad-based coalitions, which raise the level of expectations for community achievement.

The FRCOG advocates on behalf of its member communities at the state and federal level to ensure that funding, programs, and policies are sensitive and respond to the rural nature, economic strengths, and human and natural resources of the region.

Additionally, the Franklin Regional Council of Governments serves as one of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' thirteen (13) Regional Planning Agencies and Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO). An MPO consists of a Committee of Signatories, who together make decisions about transportation planning goals, projects, priorities, and funding. In Franklin County, this group is referred to as the Franklin County Transportation Planning Organization (TPO). In its role as TPO member, the FRCOG follows federal transportation planning regulations, including the establishment of a citizen advisory group to participate in transportation planning activities. The FRCOG staff is responsible for coordinating and working with the other TPO members to develop, implement, and routinely update the Regional Transportation Plan

for Franklin County, as well as provide a wide range of other planning services.

For clarity, it is important to note that "Franklin County" as a governmental entity no longer exists; the RTP refers geographically to the 26 towns in our region as "Franklin County." References to "Franklin County" throughout this document should be interpreted as meaning the collective group of the 26 towns. Reference to the FRCOG will mean the entity providing the services and serving as a regional government.

The Franklin County TPO is governed by a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that was executed in 2006 and updated in 2010. As defined by the MOU, the TPO's committee membership contains nine members including the following representatives:

- The Secretary of the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) (to act as the Chair of the FCTPO);
- The Administrator of the Highway Division of MassDOT;
- The Chair of the Franklin Regional Council of Governments Executive Committee;
- The Chair of the Franklin Regional Transit Authority;
- The Franklin Regional Council of Governments Regionally Elected Official;
- The Mayor of Greenfield; and
- Three Franklin County Sub-Regional Appointments (one from the West County, one from Central County, and one from the East County sections of Franklin County as defined in the MOU).

The MOU defines that the FCTPO shall have the responsibilities of developing, reviewing, and adopting the region's annual transportation Unified Planning Work Program, the Regional Transportation Plan, the Transportation Improvement Program, and air quality conformity determinations. The MOU further states that the FCTPO shall have the responsibility of meeting all of the provisions of the federal 3C (Continuing, Cooperative, Comprehensive) Transportation Planning Process that may include: the initiation of studies, evaluation and recommendation of transportation improvements,

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and the programming of funds for transportation projects in the region for which funding is sought for implementation. The MOU also states the FCTPO shall be the forum for cooperative decision-making by officials of local government, regional planning commission, regional transit authority, and state officials representing state transportation agencies.

The MOU defines that the Franklin Regional Planning Board (FRPB) will act as an advisory board to the FCTPO in order to ensure that all transportation decisions are considered within the context of comprehensive regional planning. The composition of the FRPB includes a Select Board and Planning Board member designee from each town as well as 18 at-large members. The FRCOG is, by state designation and consistent with applicable federal transportation laws, the primary transportation planning staff for the FCTPO and also serves as the principal source of transportation planning for local and regional transportation projects.

Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU)

The federal legislation that guides transportation planning (including Regional Transportation Plans) and projects is called the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU). On August 10, 2005, President George W. Bush signed SAFETEA-LU into law as the latest federal transportation legislation. SAFETEA-LU has guaranteed funding for highways, highway safety, and public transportation. It represents the largest surface transportation investment in our Nation's history. SAFETEA-LU replaced two previous landmark federal transportation legislations: the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) of 1991 and the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) enacted in June of 1998. ISTEA revolutionized the planning and funding of highway and mass transit construction, maintenance, and operations throughout the United States. TEA-21 confirmed the federal government's commitment to establish a nationwide transportation system that reflects the country's environmental, social, and energy goals. SAFETEA-LU builds on the foundation of these two previous acts by supplying the funds and refining the programmatic framework for

investments needed to maintain and further develop the country's transportation infrastructure.

SAFETEA-LU addresses the many challenges facing our transportation system today, such as improving safety, reducing traffic congestions, improving efficiency in freight movement, increasing intermodal connectivity, and protecting the environment, as well as laying the groundwork for addressing future challenges. SAFETEA-LU promotes more efficient and effective Federal surface transportation programs by focusing on transportation issues of national significance, while giving State and local transportation decision makers more flexibility for solving transportation problems in their communities.¹ It also elevated alternative forms of transportation like bicycling and walking to the level of legitimate transportation modes. This Regional Transportation Plan was developed with the framework and focuses of this transportation legislation in mind.

The Regional Transportation Plan

SAFETEA-LU requires that each MPO complete a regional transportation plan and update it at least every four years. SAFETEA-LU further specifies that:

"...the Plan and TIPs for each metropolitan areas shall provide for the development and integrated management and operation of transportation systems and facilities (including accessible pedestrian walkways and bicycle transportation facilities) that will function as an intermodal transportation system for the metropolitan planning area and as an integral part of an intermodal transportation system for the State and the United States."

In summary, a Regional Transportation Plan is a planning document that details existing conditions, identifies present deficiencies, and projects future needs related to transportation systems for a particular geographical area. The RTP reviews all types of transportation, including vehicular, rail, air, bus, bicycle, and pedestrian. The RTP is intended to provide the basis for regional transportation

¹ United State Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, *A Summary of Highway Provisions in SAFETEA-LU*, FHWA website, <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/safetealu/summary.htm>. 2005.

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planning activities and is updated at least every four years. The update is intended to provide an opportunity to review and update transportation priorities within the region. The Regional Transportation Plan is required to forecast the transportation needs of the region for the next twenty-five years (the year 2035 for this plan) and it is required to do so in the context of financial constraint.

The recommendations in the Franklin Regional Transportation Plan provide the framework for transportation projects in the county. It is from this list of recommendations that projects are chosen to be designed, funded, and implemented. Historically, the region has been very successful with the rate at which the RTP's recommendations have been implemented. Table 1-1 shows that out of the twenty recommendations from the previous 2007 Regional Transportation Plan, five have already been completed and another nine are in progress or are nearly completed.

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Table 1-1: Top 20 Recommendations from 2007 Regional Transportation Plan and Their Implementation Status*

	Recommendation	Status	Notes
1	Implement I-91 Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) Fiber and Conduit Installation	Completed	
2	Implement Route 116 Sunderland Safety Improvements	Completed	The physical improvements will be monitored for several additional years to determine efficacy.
3	Construct I-91/Route 2 Rotary Safety and Pedestrian Improvements	Completed	
4	Construct Northfield Streetscape and Safety Improvements	Completed	This project has been split into 2 projects. The Streetscape portion has been completed.
5	Rehabilitate Route 2 Bridges in Charlemont	Completed	
6	Acquire Scenic Easements along Designated Scenic Byways	In Progress	\$2.2 million has been or will be spent on acquiring scenic easements. This project will remain ongoing.
7	Construct a Park-and-Ride Lot near I-91 exit 24 in Whatley	In Progress	This project has been programmed for 2011 in the FC TIP using CMAQ funds.
8	Rehabilitate the Gill-Montague Bridge	In Progress	Construction is underway.
9	Advance Route 2 Safety Improvements in Erving, Farley, Erving Center, and Gill/Greenfield	In Progress	
10	Plan for Passenger Rail from Franklin County to Boston	In Progress	
11	Expand Bus Service throughout the county along Route 2 (east and west) and along Routes 5/10	In Progress	Bus service has been expanded along Rt. 2 west. A study is underway to expand it along Rt. 5/10.
12	Initiate Passenger Rail service from New Haven, CT to St. Albans, VT with a stop in Greenfield	In Progress	Stimulus funding has been awarded and construction underway.
13	Implement Safety and Traffic Flow Improvements along Route 2 between the I-91/Route 2 Rotary and Home Depot in Greenfield	In Progress	
14	Construct the Franklin Regional Transit Center	In Progress	Construction is underway and should be completed in January 2011.
15	Rehabilitate the General Pierce Bridge	Not yet started	Rehabilitation of the Gill-Montague Bridge must be completed first.
16	Construct Route 2 West Safety Improvements including protected turn lanes at Colrain-Shelburne Road and South Maple Street in Shelburne, and Traffic Calming in Charlemont Village Center.	Not yet started	
17	Construct a Bikeway to connect the downtowns of Orange and Athol	Not yet started	
18	Realign I-91 Northbound Exit 24 Ramp Realignment	Not yet started	
19	Serve as a Leader in Promoting Alternative Fuel Fleet Conversion	Not yet started	
20	Construct a Climbing Lane along Route 2 up Greenfield Mountain	Not yet started	Preliminary feasibility study has been completed.

*Projects are not listed in any order of priority.