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Transit and Paratransit

2011

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN

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provide work-related transportation and transportation to G-Link bus stops so access to the Fixed Routes could be made. Since its first year, CTS ridership has more than doubled. A map of the service areas for both the FRTA and the PVTA is contained at the end of this chapter.

Fixed Route Transit Services

Fixed route transit service in Franklin County is provided by the FRTA and the PVTA. While the FRTA operates most of the routes (the FRTA currently operates six fixed service routes) in Franklin County, the PVTA operates two fixed service routes which travel through the Franklin County communities of Sunderland and Deerfield. Transit routes operated by the FRTA are limited to weekdays and non-holidays, while the two routes operated by the PVTA operate also on the weekends. The PVTA does not operate on major holidays, but does run on reduced schedules for minor holidays.

Franklin Regional Transit Authority (FRTA)

The FRTA is the primary transit agency for Franklin County. The FRTA's service territory extends into Hampshire, Hampden, and Worcester Counties. The FRTA serves the most rural and geographically expansive area of all the Regional Transit Authorities in Massachusetts. The service area includes twenty-three towns in Franklin County and extends south to Blandford, Russell, and Southwick in Hampden County, west to Middlefield in Hampshire County, and east to Athol, Phillipston, and Petersham in Worcester County. The FRTA was established in 1978 with the provisions of Chapter 161B.

The FRTA is funded from a combination of federal, state, and local funding sources as well as from revenue generated from fares. Each of the towns that are serviced by the FRTA pay an assessed amount based on: the level of costs associated with Demand Response transportation, a percentage of Fixed Route

costs based on population of the town, and historical data.

The FRTA presently has 42 transit vehicles in total, which includes 9 buses, 13 minibuses, and 20 vans, all of which are wheelchair accessible. All of the buses used for fixed route service have bicycle racks on the front of the buses. The bicycle racks hold two to three bicycles each and are on the buses year-round. Between July 2009 and June 2010 (Fiscal Year 2010), the FRTA fixed routes transported a total of 116,553 passengers, an average of 9,712 riders per month. This is an 8 percent decrease from Fiscal Year 2008.

Table 9-1 outlines current FRTA bus route schedules, frequency, and fare schedule. Bus fares for FRTA fixed route service currently ranges from \$1.00 (Routes 21 and 22), \$1.50 (Routes 31, 32, and 41) to \$3.00 (Route 23). Passengers with valid Statewide Access Passes, ADA cards, Medicare cards, and persons over 60 years old ride for half (1/2) of the listed fare. Passengers with a valid MA Commission for Blind card, FRTA Veteran's photo ID card, or a valid Department of Veteran's Affairs photo ID card ride for free. Children under the age of 5 ride free when accompanied by a fare-paying adult. In June of 2010, the FRTA installed electronic fareboxes on all fixed route transit buses. These fareboxes are intended to make riding the bus easier and more convenient by allowing riders to purchase a magnetic fare ticket that can be used for multiple rides. Additionally, the electronic fareboxes also accept cash.

In January 2008, the FRCOG released the study, *Transit Services and Needs in Western Franklin County*. This study examined current transit service

Table 9-1: FRTA Routes and Route Frequency

Route	Primary Destination(s) from Downtown Greenfield	Number of Round-Trips on Weekdays	Fare (One-way)
21	Greenfield	9	\$1.00
22	Montague	8	\$1.00
23	Amherst	2	\$3.00
31	Northampton	6	\$1.50
32	Athol	7	\$1.50
41	Charlemont	4	\$1.50

Note: FRTA Routes effective as of September 21, 2009.

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in the western region of the county and recommended ways to expand services. Through surveys, FRCOG staff found that there was considerable interest by residents to having more frequent and longer service for transit along Route 2 west from Greenfield to Charlemont. In early 2009, the FRTA conducted an analysis of all of their fixed route services. This review was the first time an in-depth comprehensive analysis had been conducted since the FRTA consolidated with the GMTA (Greenfield Montague Transportation Area) in 2006. The results of both of these studies led to a number of changes to almost all of FRTA's fixed route services in September 2009.

On September 21, 2009, the FRTA changed its transit routes and schedules as a result of the system review performed in 2009. The revised routes are described in detail in the section below and are summarized in Table 9-1. Ridership data for

these routes is only available since the September 2009 change and this information is contained in Table 9-2. Table 9-3 shows the annual ridership rates for the former FRTA routes, prior to the change, for the fiscal years (FY) 2007 to 2009. These statistics show that ridership grew between 2007 and 2009.

FRTA Fixed Route Descriptions

Route 21: Greenfield Community Route

Route 21 (Greenfield Community Route) traverses around Greenfield, reaching the majority of Greenfield's primary shopping destinations and

Table 9-2: Ridership Statistics for the Revised, Current Routes, FY 2010

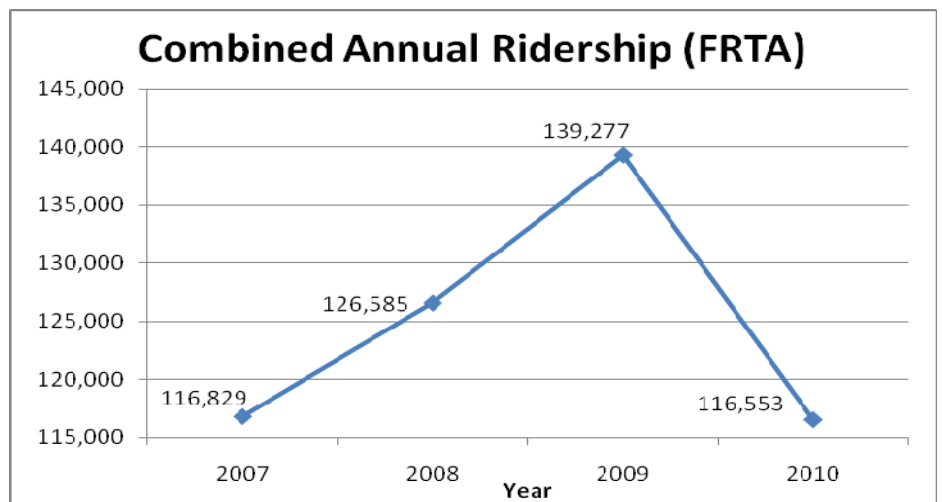
Route	Annual Ridership FY 2010
Route 21 (Greenfield)	25,687
Route 22 (Montague)	24,548
Route 23 (Amherst)	4,733
Route 31 (Northampton)	20,674
Route 32 (Athol)	32,857
Route 41 (Charlemont)	6,014

Table 9-3: FRTA Ridership Statistics, FY 2007 to FY 2009

Route	Annual Ridership FY 2007	Annual Ridership FY 2008	Annual Ridership FY 2009	Percent Change from FY 2007 to FY 2009
West	4,989	5,600	5,887	+ 18.0%
North	1,102	568	360	- 67.3%
Valley	16,389	19,359	21,459	+ 30.9%
G-Link	31,930	31,954	37,688	+ 18.0%
Greenfield Division	62,419	69,104	73,883	+18.4%
Total	116,829	126,585	139,277	+ 19.2%

Source: Franklin Regional Transit Authority.

Figure 9-1: Combined Annual Ridership



residential areas. The westbound route starts at Court Square in downtown Greenfield and travels to major destinations in downtown Greenfield, including: the Franklin Medical Center, Cherry Rum Plaza, Greenfield High School, Leyden Woods, Greenfield Community College (GCC), the Big

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Y/Home Depot shopping centers, and the Greenfield Corporate Center. The one-way fare for this route is \$1.00 and the entire route takes approximately one hour and fifteen minutes roundtrip.

The schedule for this route currently consists of four westbound runs per day with the earliest run leaving Court Square at 8:00 A.M. and the latest leaving at 4:45 P.M. In the eastbound direction, this route currently consists of five runs per day with the earliest one leaving Court Square at 6:15 A.M. and the latest leaving at 6:00 P.M.

While Route 21 (Greenfield Community Route) is a relatively new route, it has many similarities to the route which preceded it – the Federal/Conway Route. The major differences between the two routes are the additional stops included in the revised Route 21 to Stop & Shop, GCC, Big Y and Home Depot Plaza, as well as the Greenfield Corporate Center. Previously, the stops at GCC, Big Y and Home Depot Plaza were included on the Greenfield Community College Route. Route 21 is a consolidation of the former Federal/Conway Route and the GCC Route, providing more destinations on the new route.

Route 22: Montague/Greenfield Route

Route 22 (Montague/Greenfield Route) provides service between the communities of Greenfield and Turners Falls, with limited service also provided to Montague Center and Millers Falls. Route 22 begins at Court Square in Greenfield and travels to major stops that include Farren Care Center, Turners Falls High School, and Turners Falls Industrial Park.

The schedule for this route currently consists of eight runs per day with the earliest run leaving Court Square at 6:15 A.M. and the latest leaving at 6:30 P.M. Of these eight runs, three provide additional service to Millers Falls and Montague Center.

Route 22 (Montague/Greenfield) closely resembles the former Turners Falls Route. The major differences between the two routes is the shifting of

certain stops (Stop & Shop, Franklin Medical Center) off of the former Turners Falls Route and onto the previously discussed Route 21 (Greenfield Community Route), thus resulting in a shorter and more direct Route 22.

Route 23: Amherst/ Greenfield Route

Route 23 (Amherst/Greenfield Route) connects Greenfield to the University of Massachusetts Amherst campus, via Turners Falls, Millers Falls, and Montague Center. The schedule for this route currently consists of two round-trip runs per day with the earliest run leaving Court Square at 6:45 A.M. and the latest leaving at 3:05 P.M.

Prior to the major route changes implemented in September 2009, transit riders wishing to access the UMass campus had to utilize the Valley Route which would take them as far as Sunderland, where they would have to transfer to a PVTA/UMass Transit bus to access the campus. This revised route, Route 23, provides a direct connection between the communities of Greenfield, Turners Falls, Millers Falls, and Montague Center to the UMass campus.

Route 31: Northampton/Greenfield Route

Route 31 (Northampton/Greenfield Route) connects the communities of Greenfield, Deerfield, Whately, and Northampton. Starting at Court Square in Greenfield, Route 31 travels to Deerfield where its stops include Hardigg Industries, Frontier High School, South Deerfield Center, and Deerfield Industrial Park, with additional stops at the Yankee Candle Store for all runs starting with the 9:15 A.M. run. After stopping in Deerfield, Route 31 proceeds on to Whately and continues on to Northampton, stopping at the Big Y/Wal-Mart Plaza and the Academy of Music. The one-way fare for this route is \$1.50 and the entire route takes approximately an hour and a half roundtrip.

The schedule for this route currently consists of six round-trip runs per day with the earliest run leaving Court Square at 5:15 A.M. and the latest leaving at 5:15 P.M. Route 31 very closely resembles the former Valley Route with the only noticeable difference being the removal of the UMass connector in Sunderland from the route.

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Route 32: Athol/Greenfield Route

Route 32 (Athol/Greenfield Route) serves to connect several communities along Route 2 east, from Greenfield to Athol. Route 32 also connects major destinations for users, including: the Franklin Medical Center, Stop & Shop, the Orange Health Center, Wal-Mart, the YMCA in Athol, and the Athol Memorial Hospital. The one-way fare for this route is \$1.50 and the entire route takes approximately two hours roundtrip. The schedule for this route currently consists of seven round-trip runs per day with the earliest run leaving Court Square at 5:00 A.M. and the latest leaving at 5:15 P.M. This route was by far the most popular route in FY 2010 with 32,857 riders.

Route 32 (Athol/Greenfield) is the same route as the former G-Link Route with some very subtle changes to departure and arrival times. The G-Link Route started in October in 1999 and was the result of a joint collaboration between the FRTA, FRCOG, and the Montachusett Regional Transit Authority (MART) to improve access to jobs. The entire G-Link service operates between Greenfield and Gardner, with connections to Fitchburg and to the commuter rail line running between Fitchburg and Boston. The FRTA runs the western portion of the service, now called Route 32, and MART runs the eastern portion of the service and the connecting bus service to Fitchburg.

Route 41: Charlemont/Greenfield Route

Route 41 (Charlemont/Greenfield Route) primarily serves West Franklin County, connecting the communities of Greenfield to Shelburne, Buckland, and Charlemont. Route 41 starts at Court Square in Greenfield and travels along Route 2 towards Shelburne Falls. After Shelburne Falls, Route 41 either travels to Mohawk High School (the first route of the day) or to the Buckland Park and Ride lot (the remaining routes). The remaining two stops include the Academy at Charlemont and Charlemont Center. The one-way fare for this route is \$1.50 and the entire route takes approximately two hours roundtrip.

Route 41 (Charlemont/Greenfield) is the same route as the former Campus West Route with some very

subtle changes to departure and arrival times and number of daily runs.

Historically, this route only operated between September and June, when the Academy at Charlemont was in session and route frequency varied within that time frame. However, the FRTA recently secured JARC funding to extend this route to become year-round with additional number of runs per day to make the route more usable for commuters. This route operates four runs Monday through Fridays. The earliest run departs Court Square at 6:55 A.M. with the latest run departing from Court Square at 4:15 P.M. (Monday through Friday).

The Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA)

The Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA) is based in Springfield, Massachusetts and is the regional transit authority for the Pioneer Valley. The PVTA was created in 1974 with the purpose of rebuilding and expanding the region's transit fleet and services. The PVTA is the largest regional transit authority in Massachusetts with a fleet of 174 buses and 144 vans. The PVTA has 24 member towns in Hampshire, Hampden, and Franklin Counties, including Leverett and Sunderland and provides fixed-service bus routes as well as demand-response services for the elderly and disabled.



PVTA bus at UMass

The PVTA operates two main transit routes in Franklin County: Route 31(Sunderland/South Amherst) and Route 46 (South Deerfield/UMass). Route 31 (Sunderland/South Amherst) connects the UMass campus to Sunderland Center with multiple stops en route. Route 46 (South Deerfield/UMass) links the UMass campus to South Deerfield Center

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as well as several stops along the way. The fare for both of these routes is \$1.25 for a one-way ticket, although students, faculty and staff of the Five Colleges ride for free. The routes operate 7 days a week except on holidays, with a slightly modified schedule on the weekends. In general, ridership along these routes has increased in the last 5 years, as shown in the graphic below,

Figure 9-2: Annual Ridership on PVRTA, Routes 31 and 46

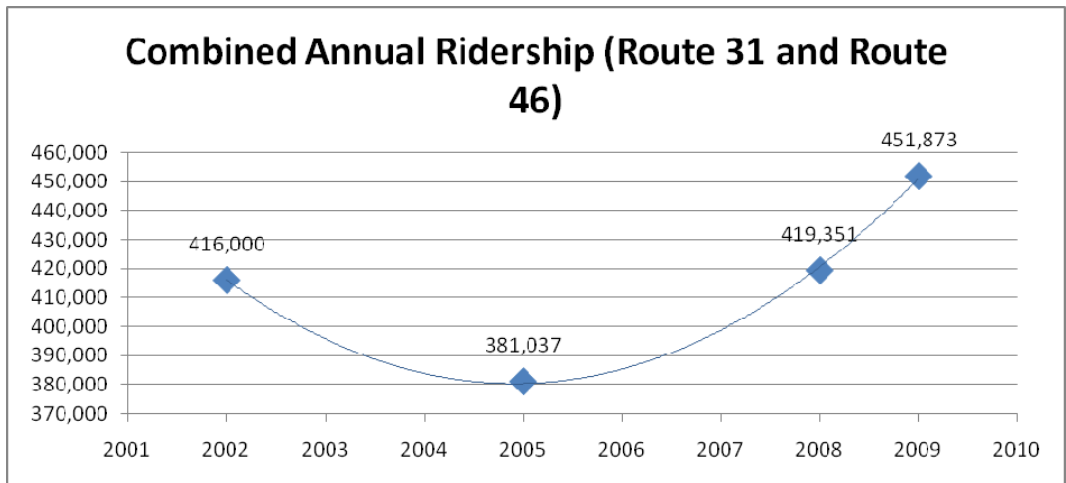


Figure 9-2. The combined annual ridership for these routes was approximately 416,000 riders in 2002, which decreased to 381,037 riders in 2005.

Since this decline in 2005, annual ridership has grown significantly. In fact, ridership has increased nearly 20 percent from FY 2005 to FY 2009. This increase may be attributed to a large number of factors which may include rising gas prices, economic downturn, and increased University enrollment.

In the most recent past, annual ridership for Route 31 for the fiscal year (FY) 2009 was approximately 431,756 riders, equivalent to nearly 36,000 riders per month on average. Annual ridership for Route 46 for FY 2009 was approximately 20,117 riders, an average of 1,676 riders per month. Ridership data is contained in Table 9-3. As shown in Figure 9-3, which displays ridership trends for Route 31 over the course of the fiscal year, ridership is greatly dependent upon the academic schedule. Ridership along these routes decreases significantly when UMass is not in session.

PVRTA Fixed Route Descriptions

The following section is a detailed description of the PVRTA routes that run within Franklin County.

Route 31: Sunderland/South Amherst

Route 31 provides transit services

between the communities of South Amherst and Sunderland. Route 31 operates from 7:00 a.m. until at least midnight every night, with service extending to 1:00 a.m. on Thursdays, Fridays and Sundays, and to 2:00

a.m. on Saturdays. During the regular UMass academic year, Route 31 provides 59 runs to Sunderland Center each weekday, as well as 21 runs on Saturdays and 14 runs on Sundays, for a total of 330 runs each week. When UMass is not in session, the number of weekday runs to Sunderland Center drops from 59 per day to 26 per day. Route 31 is traditionally the PVRTA route with the highest ridership.

In 2009, Route 31 carried approximately 55,666 riders during its peak month, September. The lowest ridership occurred during the month of June, registering only 15,777 riders. Ridership along Route 31 increased nearly 8 percent from FY 2008 to FY 2009.

Table 9-3: Ridership Statistics for PVRTA Routes to Franklin County, FY 2008 to FY 2009

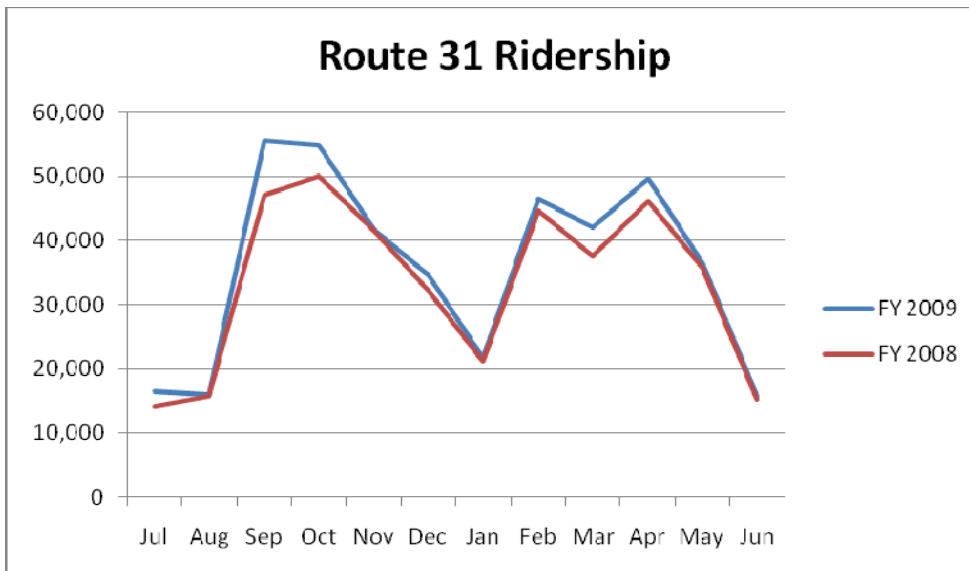
Routes	Annual Ridership FY 2008	Annual Ridership FY 2009	% Change in Ridership, FY 2008 to 2009
Route 31 (Sunderland/ South Amherst)	400,941	431,756	+ 7.7%
Route 46 (South Deerfield/ UMass)	18,410	20,117	+ 9.3%
Total	419,351	451,873	+7.8 %

Table 9-4: PVTA Routes to Franklin County, and Route Frequency

Route	Schedule	Number of Round-Trips on Weekdays	Number of Round-Trips on Saturday	Number of Round-Trips on Sunday	Total Trips per Week
Route 31 (Sunderland/South Amherst)	Regular	59	21	14	330
	Reduced	26	16	11	157
Route 46 (South Deerfield/UMass)	Regular	6	5	3	38
	Reduced	6	4	2	36

Note: Reduced schedule in effect when UMass is not in session.

Figure 9-3: Route 31 Ridership on Monthly Basis



Route 46: South Deerfield/UMass

Transit service between South Deerfield and UMass is provided by Route 46 which also provides transit service to North Amherst Center. Route 46 operates from 7:00 a.m. until a little after 10:30 p.m. on Monday through Saturday and operates a limited schedule (3 runs) on Sundays. During the UMass academic year, Route 46 provides 6 runs to South

Deerfield Center each weekday, as well as 5 runs on Saturdays and 3 runs on Sundays, for a total of 38. When UMass is not in session, the number of weekday runs remains the same while the number of runs on the weekends decreases to 4 runs and 2 runs on Saturdays and Sundays, respectively. In 2009, Route 46 carried 2,425 riders during its peak

month of September. The lowest ridership occurred during the month of August, registering only 951 riders.

Paratransit/ADA Transit and Dial-A-Ride Van Services

The FRTA and PVTA each offer paratransit and dial-a-ride services, also referred to as demand-response transportation, to elderly and disabled residents in their

member communities. In all Franklin County communities, except Monroe, van transportation through the FRTA or PVTA is available for seniors age 60 and over and for some people with disabilities that affect their ability to drive and use regular fixed-route transit service. In Monroe, MassHealth clients have access to van service through the Berkshire Regional Transit Authority (BRTA) for medical trips. All of the BRTA, PVTA, FRTA buses and vans are wheelchair accessible. Priority for van service is given to

people with disabilities and seniors and for essential purposes, such as medical care.

Under the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, paratransit services must be provided in all areas with local fixed route bus services for people who can't use the local bus system due to their disability. The ADA seeks to provide people with disabilities the same access to public transportation as people without disabilities. The FRTA's Paratransit Services are for disabled individuals who are available within three-quarters (¾) mile of a fixed route corridor and cannot navigate or access the provided fixed route service due to their disability.

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Table 9-5: Paratransit Service in Franklin County

Town	Paratransit Service	Demand Response Service Provider	MedRide Service Provider
Ashfield	No	Shelburne COA	Greenfield COA
Bernardston	No	Bernardston COA	Greenfield COA
Buckland	Yes ¹	Shelburne COA	Greenfield COA
Charlemont	Yes ¹	Shelburne COA	Greenfield COA
Colrain	No	Shelburne COA	Greenfield COA
Conway	No	Shelburne COA	Greenfield COA
Deerfield	Yes ^{1,2}	FRTA	Greenfield COA
Erving	Yes ¹	Erving COA	Greenfield COA
Gill	Yes ¹	FRTA	Greenfield COA
Greenfield	Yes ¹	FRTA	Greenfield COA
Hawley	No	Shelburne COA	Greenfield COA
Heath	No	Shelburne COA	Greenfield COA
Leverett	Yes ¹	Amherst COA	No
Leyden	No	FRTA	Greenfield COA
Monroe	No	No	No
Montague	Yes ¹	FRTA	Greenfield COA
New Salem	No	Orange COA	Greenfield COA
Northfield	No	Bernardston COA	Greenfield COA
Orange	Yes ¹	Orange COA	Greenfield COA
Rowe	No	Shelburne COA	Greenfield COA
Shelburne	Yes ¹	Shelburne COA	Greenfield COA
Shutesbury	No	Stavros	Greenfield COA
Sunderland	Yes ²	Hulmes Transportation	No
Warwick	No	Orange COA	Greenfield COA
Wendell	Yes	Orange COA	Greenfield COA
Whately	Yes ¹	FRTA	Greenfield COA

Notes:

1: ADA Paratransit services are provided for disabled individuals who are available within ¾ mile of a fixed FRTA route corridor and cannot navigate or access a regular fixed route due to their disability.

2: ADA Paratransit services are provided for disabled individuals who are available within ¾ mile of a fixed PVTA route corridor and cannot navigate or access a regular fixed route due to their disability.

Sources: Information was obtained from the Franklin County Home Care Corporation, FRTA, and PVTA.

There are several limitations to ADA transportation services in Franklin County, largely a result of its rural nature. Large land area and low population density are the primary factors for the county's limited fixed-route transit services and as a result, there are no requirements to provide ADA transportation services for at least half of Franklin County towns. Much of the van service which is provided in Franklin County is, therefore, demand response service, which is optional and offered at the regional transit authorities' discretion. For the

towns with fixed-route transit services, ADA van service is available to qualifying residents during the regular route's hours of operation.

The FRTA and PVTA each contract with local private van companies to provide both the mandated ADA paratransit service and optional dial-a-ride service within their regions. For the FRTA, many of the providers are local Councils on Aging (COAs) that also offer other services to seniors.

Additional Programs and Services

Human Service Transportation

Additional transportation services, such as van transportation, are offered to qualifying Franklin County residents through the Department of Developmental Services (DDS), Department of Public Health (DPH), and the Division of Medical Assistance (DMA), as well as other various state-level human service agencies. The FRTA can arrange transportation by request for elders and the disabled residents in the area through a network of public and private

transportation providers. The travel that can be funded through these programs is often limited to a few specific types of trips, such as medical trips or transportation to job training. Regional transit authorities generally coordinate the transportation services for the State's human service agencies. Transportation services for MassHealth, DMA, and DPH in Franklin County are currently coordinated by the FRTA and provided by private transportation operators.

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The plan also identifies the priorities in which projects will be funded. The top three priorities include: 1) a focus on funding operations over capital projects; 2) provide connections to other transit services; and 3) provide access to employment, education, and services.

Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) Program

The Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) Program is a source of federal funding that was created through federal transportation legislation and is administered by MassDOT. The focus of the JARC Program is to improve transportation mobility for low-income individuals to help them access and retain employment, as a means to assist people in moving off of public assistance. The JARC Program provides competitive grants to local governments and non-profit organizations to develop transportation services to connect low-income persons to employment and support services. The JARC Program and funding have emphasized public transportation access to and from suburban areas, but has also provided funding for rural areas. In Massachusetts, non-urbanized areas with populations under 50,000 are projected to received a total (statewide) of approximately \$651,000 in JARC funding during the 2011-2015 timeframe. These funds are highly competitive.

In November 2009, the FRTA received \$100,000 in JARC funding for three years to expand services to West County. More specifically, this additional funding source is aimed at expanding services for Route 41 (Charlemont/Greenfield). The operating schedule for this route has historically been dependent upon the academic schedule of the Academy of Charlemont and the additional funding has expanded services on this route by adding 2 runs per day as well as creating a more consistent operating schedule throughout the year to better accommodate the commuting needs of its riders.

In 2009, the FRTA also submitted a grant application to augment service on Route 32 (formerly the G-Link) connecting Greenfield and Athol. The JARC program awarded FRTA \$144,000 for this service.

New Freedom Program

The New Freedom Program is a program administered by the Federal Transit Authority (FTA) which developed from the New Freedom Initiative introduced under Executive Order 13217, "Community-Based Alternatives for Individuals with Disabilities." The goal of the New Freedom Program is to provide additional tools to overcome existing barriers facing Americans with disabilities seeking integration into the work force and full participation in society. A lack of adequate transportation has consistently been identified as a primary barrier to work for individuals with disabilities. This program seeks to reduce barriers to transportation services and expand the transportation mobility options available to people with disabilities.

Private Carriers and Other Transportation Services

Bus Service

Peter Pan Bus Lines offers service to Franklin County with two trips to Greenfield and Deerfield each day. One trip runs southbound from Greenfield to Springfield, and one runs northbound from Springfield to Greenfield. Peter Pan currently uses the Upper Pioneer Valley Visitors Center located at the Route 2 Rotary in Greenfield to pick up and discharge passengers. In 2007, ridership was estimated by Peter Pan to be between 5 and 7 passengers boarding or discharging per day. Reports today show that ridership is still light. The service operates everyday linking Greenfield, Deerfield, Amherst, Northampton, Holyoke Mall, and Springfield. Passengers can switch buses in Amherst and Springfield for other destinations, including: Worcester, Framingham, Boston, and points in Connecticut and New York.

Greyhound, formerly the Vermont Transit Company, operates two bus trips daily that pass through Greenfield on their Springfield – White River Junction, Vermont run. Greyhound uses the curb stop at Court Square to pick up and discharge passengers. From Springfield, riders can connect to other routes to Hartford, New York City, and cities father south such as Philadelphia and Washington,

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DC. Ridership on this line has decreased recently causing the number of runs to be cut back to two a day, rather than the three that previously were run.

Taxi Service

Taxi service has increased in recent years for Franklin County. Previously, there was only one service, but there are now two taxi companies serving Franklin County: About Town Taxi and ABC Cab. There are also a few other cab companies based in towns close to the region and provide service to some Franklin County towns, such as Athol Taxi in Athol. Taxi companies also operate from Gardener to the east; North Adams to the west; Winchester, New Hampshire to the north; and Northampton and Amherst to the south.

Other Private Services

There are several limousine services in Franklin County. There are a larger number of van and charter bus services based in Franklin County. One of the largest bus services in the county is F.M. Kuzmeskus, Inc, which is based in the Town of Gill.

Current Activities and Future Plans

The FRCOG periodically conducts studies to assess transit services and ongoing unmet transit needs in the Franklin County Region. The FRCOG is committed to working to ensure that all Franklin County residents have access to transportation facilities and services. To do so, FRCOG coordinates with the FRTA to explore ways to improve the region's bus system and work specifically to support better access to jobs, training, and needed services for low-income residents.

North County Transit Study

The objective of the currently underway North County Transit Study is to document prospective ridership demand, potential routes and times, funding needs, and other logistics necessary to implement a year-round transit route serving the North County towns of Bernardston, Northfield, and Gill. There is currently no transit service to or from this area of the county nor are there connections to other transit routes. Previous service was sporadic and based on the Northfield Mount Hermon School schedule, making it difficult for residents to use the

route since the days and times of runs were inconsistent. Service was discontinued completely at the end of FY2009. In December 2009, the Northfield campus was sold and plans to create the C.S. Lewis College were formed. It is expected that the new college will bring in approximately 800 students beginning in the 2012 Academic Year and will contribute to transit demand in the area. The final product of this study will be a report listing potential ridership, routes, times, fares, and funding sources that can be used to implement broader North County transit services.

Franklin Regional Transit Center

Since the year 2000, the FRCOG has participated in a multi-organizational effort to develop a Regional Transit Center in Franklin County. In 2004, a location was chosen for the facility, which is located in Greenfield's downtown Urban Renewal District. The Regional Transit Center, which will be owned and operated by the FRTA, will be an approximately 20,800 square foot building that will centralize all transit operations in the region. The facility will sell tickets, provide rest rooms and waiting areas sheltered from the weather, and will provide office space for the FRTA and the FRCOG. The building is intended to be a model "green" structure incorporating sustainable energy and building techniques wherever possible. Construction began on the Transit Center in October 2010 and is expected to be completed in December of 2011. In addition, the site is adjacent to rail lines with funds set aside to build a rail passenger platform. As Chapter 7, "Passenger Rail" explained, passenger rail will be returning to Greenfield along the Connecticut River line with a planned stop at the Regional Transit Center in Greenfield.

Environmental Justice

The FRCOG continues to work on implementing environmental justice within the region. Since Fiscal year 2001, the FRCOG has had a specific task related to environmental justice in its annual Unified Planning Work Program. Through this task, the FRCOG conducts outreach to low-income residents and minority populations, and works with the regional transit agencies to ensure that transit planning and programming activities in Franklin

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County are nondiscriminatory and as inclusive as possible, and that low-income and minority residents have good access to transit services.

In 2003, FRCOG conducted a review of transit services in the region to determine if the Environmental Justice target areas in the county have a higher or lower level of transit service compared to the region as a whole. The analysis showed that in many respects, the populations within the Environmental Justice target areas are better served by the public transit system than Franklin County residents as a whole. However, while the Environmental Justice target areas have some of the best transit access in the region, the level of service is still in need of improvement. For example, there is no evening or weekend service to any of the target areas. When the 2010 Census data becomes available at the town level, FRCOG will update this analysis to determine whether this situation remains or has changed over time.

Alternative Transportation Plan

In 2009, FRCOG staff completed an *Alternative Transportation Plan* examining Franklin County's potential alternatives to the singly-occupied vehicle. The public transit system is a strong option for county residents, but it does have weaknesses. The Plan identified the following challenges of the current public transit system:

- The greatest challenge to providing more transit service in Franklin County is the limited funding available. One of the most popular bus routes in the region is the G-Link Route, which runs between Greenfield and Athol (now called Route 32). The G-Link Route has no secure long-term funding despite the fact that ridership continues to increase every year on this route.
- Limited availability of funding means that most of the public transit service in Franklin County is available only on weekdays during the daytime hours.
- Studies have shown that the county's Environmental Justice target areas are better served than the rest of the county population by public transit. However, the level of service is not sufficient for their needs.

Regional Transportation Plan Survey

The following comments were compiled from the RTP survey that was completed as part of the public participation process for this RTP update.

Improving transit services in Franklin County was clearly a very high priority for the majority of survey respondents. They provided the following ways in which they would like to see the public transit system expanded:

- Provide more service to outlying towns;
- Add evening and weekend service to routes;
- Coordinate scheduling of route for workers; and
- Improve on-demand service for the elderly and handicapped.

Recommendations for Transit and Paratransit Services

Short Term Recommendations

- Work with the FRTA and the PVTA to find ways to provide **Sunderland and Leverett seniors and residents with disabilities with transit/paratransit access** to the Frontier Senior Center in South Deerfield and to other Franklin County towns, such as Greenfield and Montague. (Note: Sunderland and Leverett are PVTA member towns.)
- **Promote current paratransit**, Dial-a-Ride, and Access to Jobs transportation services among low-income residents and disabled residents who could benefit most from these services.
- Consider **potential locations for additional bus stops in Shelburne Falls and along Route 2** factoring in safety concerns, the usefulness of the locations for bus riders, and the stops' impacts on the route schedule; then, propose the most suitable locations for new stops.
- Assist MassDOT with the development of the **Park and Ride** lot that is planned for Whately near South Deerfield and Interstate 91.

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- Coordinate between the FRTA and the PVRTA and investigate options for providing the planned **Whatley Park and Ride lot** with transit services from both transit authorities.
- Investigate options for providing better **transit services to the Whatley Park and Ride lot, Upper Pioneer Valley Visitors Center Park and Ride**, and other lots, as they come online.
- Conduct meetings with town officials and local Council on Aging representatives to **provide information about bus services and funding costs** and to discuss any issues with current services and any interest in service expansions. These local meetings, and publicity about them, would be another way of increasing residents' knowledge of the transit system and gaining additional input on residents' transit needs.

Long Term Recommendations

- Explore the interest and costs of **increasing van services for seniors and residents with disabilities**, focusing on parts of the West County area, such as the section of Conway near Deerfield, that currently have less than weekly van service and access. Through discussions with the Shelburne Senior Center and FRTA, evaluate the extent to which West County residents who wish to use the van services for trips are currently unable to do so.
- Consider **extensions of the West Route** to communities off of Route 2 and the possibility of bus service along Route 116 between West County and South Deerfield.

Ongoing Recommendations

- Continue to work with the regional transit authorities and other transportation providers to: **monitor and evaluate routes**; to address unmet transportation needs and current problems with connectivity between routes and inter-regional service connections.

- Continue to work with the FRTA, PVRTA, and the MART to **keep area legislators informed about the regional importance of Route 32 (formerly G-Link) and Route 31 (formerly Valley Route)** and about the demand for expanding the routes to include additional runs and evening and weekend service to better assist residents with access to employment, education, and training opportunities. Importantly, work to **obtain permanent funding for Route 32**.
- Support the continued operation and **expansion of transit services to the Northern Tier** (north of Route 2) to promote access to jobs.
- Continue to **monitor the implementation of the recommendations of the Fitchburg Commuter Rail Service Expansion Study**, particularly the recommendations that could most affect Franklin County commuters, including: the creation of a park and ride facility in Gardner and the extension of commuter rail service west of Fitchburg.
- Support the reinstatement of **evening and weekend transit services** in Greenfield and Montague to meet transit rider demand.
- Support the provision of **paratransit and dial-a-ride van services for elderly residents and riders with disabilities**, and work to expand van transportation availability, especially in areas with less than daily services and as the elderly population in the region grows.
- **Expand current outreach and publicity efforts** to provide information about FRTA transit services and to encourage bus usage. Current, accurate information on bus services and schedules ideally should be available from a variety of locations. Current information on bus services and schedules should also be available in a variety of mediums electronically through the web sites of the FRTA, regional organizations, and town governments, and

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in print through local newspapers and through the distributed schedules. Outreach efforts should target the populations who are most likely to use transit services and to need transit assistance, such as low-income residents, disabled residents, and the elderly.