

# FRANKLIN COUNTY PARK AND RIDE STUDY



SEPTEMBER 2008

FRANKLIN REGIONAL COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS  
425 MAIN STREET, GREENFIELD, MA 01301  
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**SEPTEMBER 2008**

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# FRANKLIN COUNTY PARK AND RIDE STUDY

## Introduction

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Franklin County is the most rural county in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Because of this rural character and accompanying low population density, most residents rely heavily on their private vehicles for travel. This dominant mode of travel makes transportation planning in the region a unique and interesting challenge. The goal of this report is to identify and evaluate potential park and ride lots throughout the county in order to provide residents travel options for their trips both in the county and to destinations outside of it. Alternatives to the single occupied vehicle have become much more of a vital issue recently as fuel prices continue to increase. This increase in costs could greatly impact Franklin County residents if they have little choice regarding transportation options.

Single occupied vehicles are by far the dominant form of transportation within Franklin County. The 2000 U.S. Census, the best and most recent data for this subject, shows that 79% of county residents commute alone to work. At the same time, 10% carpool, 1% use public transit, and 3% walk to work. The number of registered vehicles in Franklin County has been increasing at a rate much faster than the county population. Between 1990 and 2005, the number of registered vehicles increased by 47%, while the population in the county grew by only 6%. By providing park and ride lots located at key strategic points in the county, residents will have alternatives to their personal motor vehicle for commuting by either carpooling with others or using public transit, and they will also be able to save money on costs.



## Definitions

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This report refers to a number of transportation specific terms. To clarify, the following definitions are provided by American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO).

**Corridor** – a broad geographical area that defines general directional flow of traffic. It may encompass a mix of streets, highways, and transit alignments.

**Mode** – a particular form of travel (e.g. walking, bicycling, traveling by bus, traveling by carpool, traveling by train).

**Multimodal** – serving more than one transportation mode (e.g. automobile, bus, rail, or carpool, etc.).

**Public Transit** – passenger transportation service to the public on a regular basis using vehicles that transport more than one person for compensation, usually but not exclusively, over a set route or routes from one fixed point to another. Routes or schedules of this service may be predetermined by the operator or may be determined through a cooperative arrangement.

**Ridesharing** – the function of sharing a ride with other passengers in a common vehicle. The term is usually applied to carpools and vanpools.

**Single Occupant Vehicle (SOV)** – any vehicle carrying only the driver.

**Vanpool** – A prearranged ridesharing function in which a number of people travel together on a regular basis in a van, usually designed to carry six or more persons.

## Overview of Park and Ride Lots

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Park and ride lots have existed throughout the country since the 1920s in various forms and have gained popularity especially during the last thirty years as global oil prices have increased. There are many different types of park and ride lots, but the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) has generally defined them as a *“collection point for travelers to transfer between the auto mode and transit (bus or rail), or between the single occupant vehicle (SOV) and other higher occupancy vehicle (vanpool or carpool) modes.”*<sup>1</sup> The United States Government has made multimodal facilities, such as park and ride lots, a priority through the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) and the Transportation Equity Act for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (TEA-21). These pieces of legislation, including the current federal

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<sup>1</sup> AASHTO Guide for Park and Ride Facilities, 2004. Pg. 3.

transportation bill, "Safety-LU," have attempted to lessen the reliance on the single occupant vehicle by prioritizing projects that emphasize multimodal travel and transit. Because park and ride lots provide the opportunity for travelers to shift from a single occupied vehicle to higher occupancy modes, they offer many benefits that include:

- Costs savings for drivers due to less fuel consumed;
- Decrease in traffic congestion;
- Improvement in air quality; and
- A more efficient use of public investment at the local, state, and federal levels.

### **Types of Park and Ride Lots**

There are a wide range of types of park and ride lots. According to AASHTO, the type depends on their actual site location, intended function, and location relative to a destination.<sup>2</sup> Some lots are ***Informal Park and Ride lots***, in which there is no formal designation by a government or transportation authority. Informal park and ride lots are often locations near a major transportation corridor or transit station, in which motorists simply regularly leave their vehicles either in on-street parking or on surrounding properties without formal permission by property owners or promotion by any transportation agency. The presence of these lots usually signifies a need for more formal lots in the area. While an advantage of these types of lots is that they usually do not require any public investment, they may have issues with safety and maintenance (such as snow removal) since they are not formally recognized park and ride lots.

At a slightly more formal level, another type of lot is the ***Opportunistic or Shared Use Park and Ride lot***. These park and ride lots share a parking facility with other designated uses such as a convenience store, church, school, or shopping mall. These lots tend to be small in nature with a parking capacity ranging between 5 and 30 spaces. An advantage of shared use lots is that they can be constructed at low costs and be developed quickly. Studies have found that the parking facility providers, especially commercial uses, experience an increase in business sales by allowing commuters to use

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<sup>2</sup> AASHTO Guide for Park and Ride Facilities, 2004.

their parking lot.<sup>3</sup> Usually, simple lease agreements are established between the property owner and the park and ride facility operator prior to the development of the lot as a park and ride to clarify liabilities, use, and maintenance of the facility.

A third type of park and ride lot that AASHTO has identified is the ***Park-and-Pool lot***. These lots are usually small in nature and are not located near public transit. Their purpose is intended to serve as a staging point for carpools and vanpools. This type of lot can be either a shared use lot or an exclusively-designated park and ride lot.

Park and ride lots are usually located along a key transportation corridor in between a majority of the travelers’ origins and destinations. This location can vary with respect to distance between these locations depending on the nature of the area being served. AASHTO has identified a hierarchy of different types of park and ride lots based on their distance to the “destination market” (for example, a job or commercial center). Table 1 below provides a summary of this hierarchy.

**Table 1. Park and Ride Facilities by Distance to Destination Market<sup>4</sup>**

<b>Facility Type</b>	<b>Distance from Primary Destination</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Public Investment</b>
Suburban Park and Ride Lots	4 to 30 miles	Intermodal or change-of-mode service provided	Tend to be publicly funded but offer opportunities for joint ventures or privatization
Remote Long Distance Lots	40 to 80 miles	Intercity commuters served	Typically publicly funded
Local Urban Park and Ride Lots	1 to 4 miles	Fills gap between suburban market and central business district; informal, shared use, or opportunistic	Often publicly funded, but provide opportunities for private operation
Peripheral Park and Ride Lots	Located at edge or periphery of primary destination	Intercept travelers prior to activity center; satellite park and ride lot	Opportunities for private investment; public investment should be carefully evaluated

<sup>3</sup> Wambalaba, Francis. “Evaluation of Shared Use Park and Ride Impact on Properties,” Center for Urban Transportation Research, University of South Florida. April, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> AASHTO Guide for Park and Ride Facilities, 2004, pg. 8.

The majority of Franklin County park and rides will take the form of either the Suburban Park and Ride Lots or the Remote Long Distance Lots due to the rural nature of the county and its location in relation to major destinations and job centers.

### **Criteria for a Successful Park and Ride Lot**

For a park and ride facility to be successful, there are many factors that must be carefully considered including, but not limited to: potential ridership, site availability, travel costs, and transit amenities. Park and ride lots are designed to serve a particular transportation corridor, such as Interstate 91 or Route 2. People will use park and ride facilities when they are able to reduce their travel costs (either through time or money) by carpooling or taking public transit at the park and ride facility. To ensure that this situation is possible, a park and ride lot should be located near, and with easy access to, a major transportation corridor and ideally along a public transit route. If public transit is available at the location, the timing of the service should be closely matched with the schedule of the park and ride users in order to minimize time costs in waiting. An important, but often overlooked, element of a successful park and ride is community support for the facility. Depending on its size, a park and ride can impact a community in various ways, such as increased traffic; therefore, support from neighboring residents is significant. The success of a park and ride lot also hinges on the physical design of the lot. If the facility is designed to be attractive, safe, and comfortable for waiting, the higher the probability of its success.

## **Assessment of Current Conditions in Franklin County**

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### **Demographic Conditions**

Franklin County is located in the northern portion of the Connecticut River Valley. It is the most rural county in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and has a population of approximately 72,300 people and a population density of 100 people per square mile.<sup>5</sup> There are twenty-six municipalities within the county, which range greatly in size. The largest municipality of the county, the City of Greenfield, had an estimated population

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<sup>5</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2005.

of 17,835 residents in 2005, while the smallest town, Monroe, had a population of only 100 residents.

In 1999, the most recent year for which there is county-wide land use data, 77% of the land in the county was forested, 17% was in agriculture, and only the remaining 6% was developed for residential and commercial uses. Despite trends of suburbanization throughout the country, Franklin County has remained a rural area.

The population of Franklin County is a stable one – between 1990 and 2000 it increased by about 1,440 residents, which is equal to a 2.1% growth rate. Some towns within Franklin County grew at a slightly faster rate over this time period. These faster growing communities are those located closest to job opportunities in Hampshire County, primarily: Conway (18%), Shutesbury (16%), New Salem (16%), Sunderland (11%), and Whately (14%). A few towns within the county lost population over this time period, namely Monroe and Rowe – which saw a large local employer close and are located the farthest from any major employment center.<sup>6</sup>

More recently, the U.S. Census estimates that Franklin County's population has slightly increased between 2000 and 2006. The towns that grew the most during this period are Northfield, Orange, Erving, Conway, and Bernardston. At the same time, there were a few towns that experienced population losses. Greenfield and Montague lost approximately 469 and 121 residents, respectively.

Population projections show that over the next twenty-five years, Franklin County will grow by 26% or 18,565 people. This will bring the total population of the county to 90,100 residents by the year 2030. A larger portion of this population will be aged 65 years old and older. This cohort's percentage of the total population is projected to grow from 14% to 21% by 2030. However, balancing this "graying" of the population is the projected increase of two much younger cohorts – residents aged 4 years old and younger and between the ages of 18-24. These age groups are expected to increase by at least 20%. This increase is likely a result of younger families relocating to the county from the south in search of better housing affordability.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 1990 and 2000.

<sup>7</sup> 2007 Regional Transportation Plan, Franklin Regional Council of Governments. April, 2007. Ch. 4, pg. 7.

## **Transportation Conditions**

The majority of Franklin County roadways are functionally classified as “rural local” roads. However, there are a number of roadways that serve as primary transportation corridors for both travelers within the county and for the wider region. These include Interstate 91, Route 2, Route 116, Route 5/10, Route 63, Route 202, and Route 112. These roadways and other primary roads in the county can be seen in a map in Appendix A according to their functional classification.

Traffic volumes on these main roads vary, but are far higher than most roadways in the county, which usually average between 500 and 1,000 vehicles a day. The most heavily traveled roadway in Franklin County is Interstate 91 which averages between 28,000 and 32,000 vehicles per day (beginning from the Greenfield Rotary and heading south). The eastern section of Route 2 is the second most heavily traveled roadway in the county at an average of 23,000 vehicles per day. Traffic volumes drop significantly on Route 2 west of the Greenfield Rotary. Traffic counts at the Charlemont/Savoy town lines average just 2,500 vehicles per day. Other prominently traveled corridors in the county include Route 116 between the Sunderland/Amherst town line to Route 5/10 in Whatley (18,000 vehicles per day) and the Route 5/10/116 corridor between Interstate 91 Exits 24 and 25 (14,000 vehicles per day).<sup>8</sup>

## **Employment and Commuting Patterns**

While only a small percentage of Franklin County’s land is developed as residential and commercial uses, there are a variety of businesses within the county that offer both manufacturing and service industry employment. The majority of the largest employers in the county are located along the several main transportation corridors, including: Interstate 91, Routes 5/10, 63, 112, and 116. A map in Appendix A shows the location of the major employers within Franklin County. They are primarily centered in the towns of Deerfield, Greenfield, Montague, Orange, and Whatley. In addition to the employment opportunities sited at these locations, there are also large employment centers in the nearby counties of Hampshire and Hampden. In 2000, approximately 63% of Franklin County residents worked within Franklin County. The 37% that worked outside the county primarily commuted to Hampshire County (21%), Worcester County (5%), Hampden County (5%), or Windham County, VT (2%).<sup>9</sup> As of 2002, the largest single

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<sup>8</sup> 2007 Regional Transportation Plan, Franklin Regional Council of Governments. April, 2007. Ch. 4, pg. 23.

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2000.

employer of Franklin County residents is the University of Massachusetts (UMass) in Amherst to the south of the county. The second largest employer is Yankee Candle in Deerfield/Whatley.

**Public Transit Conditions**

Franklin County is currently served by two public transit authorities – the Franklin Regional Transit Authority (FRTA) and the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA). The latter of which primarily serves Hampshire and Hampden Counties to the south. Both authorities operate fixed-route bus systems and also offer a more flexible “dial-a-ride” paratransit service for their respective regions. The FRTA operates eleven fixed-service bus routes that cover twenty-three of the towns within Franklin County and also extends south to several towns within Hampden and Hampshire Counties and east to the towns of Athol, Petersham, and Phillipston in Worcester County. The transit routes primarily follow the main transportation corridors of the region – Interstate 91, Routes 2, 116, and 5/10. A map in Appendix A shows the routes of both transit authorities in Franklin County and the surrounding region.

Overall, the ridership of the FRTA bus routes has increased over the last few years. Between 2002 and 2008, there was an increase of 32% for all routes within the system. Table 2 below shows ridership statistics for the specific routes.

**Table 2. Ridership Statistics for FRTA Routes, FY 2002 to FY 2008<sup>10</sup>**

<b>Route</b>	<b>Total Ridership FY2002</b>	<b>Total Ridership FY2008</b>	<b>% Change in Ridership FY2002-2006</b>
West Route	5,295	5,600	5%
North Route	3,379	568	-83%
Valley Route	9,117	19,359	112%
G-Link Route	13,661	31,954	134%
Former GMTA Routes (7 routes)*	81,029	91,536 (FY2005)	13.0% (FY2002-05)
<b>Total for all Routes</b>	<b>112,481</b>	<b>149,017</b>	<b>32%</b>

\*In 2006, the Greenfield Montague Transportation Area (GMTA) bus system merged with the FRTA. Ridership data individually by route were not available for the former GMTA routes.

The PVTA routes in Franklin County are mainly used by employees and students at the University of Massachusetts (UMass). The ridership on these routes is the highest when

<sup>10</sup> Franklin Regional Transit Authority, July 2008.

UMass is in session as the vast majority of the riders are students – surveys estimate it at 65-90%. This is particularly true of the Amherst-Sunderland Route along Rt. 116. The PVTA routes in Franklin County have not experienced the same growth in ridership as the FRTA system has in the last several years. In fact, from 2002 to 2008, there was a slight total decrease of 0.7% in riders. This could be the result of changing UMass enrollment patterns and the construction of additional student housing on campus, which reduced the demand for student housing off-campus, such as in Sunderland. Table 3 illustrates this ridership trend for the Franklin County routes of the PVTA.

**Table 3. Ridership Statistics for PVTA Routes, FY 2002 to FY 2008<sup>11</sup>**

<b>Route</b>	<b>Total Ridership FY2002</b>	<b>Total Ridership FY2008</b>	<b>% Change in Ridership FY2002-2008</b>
Route 31 Amherst/Sunderland	396,570	400,941	1.1%
Route 46 Amherst-South Deerfield	13,196	12,108	-8.2%
<b>Total for all Routes</b>	<b>416,000</b>	<b>413,049</b>	<b>-0.7%</b>

## **FRCOG Park and Ride Study Methodology**

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The goal of this report is to identify and evaluate potential park and ride lots throughout Franklin County in order to provide residents travel options for their trips both in the county and to destinations outside of it. This report will also make recommendations and outline next steps that should be taken in order to help make these park and ride lots a reality for Franklin County.

To identify potential sites for park and ride facilities, the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG) has undertaken a number of tasks to ensure a comprehensive examination of both park and ride issues and the needs of the county. These tasks are outlined below:

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<sup>11</sup> Pioneer Valley Transit Authority, 2008.

- 1) Study literature regarding park and ride facilities (requirements, issues, advantages, disadvantages, types, etc.)
- 2) Examine commuter statistics for Franklin County residents from the “Journey to Work” data of the 2000 U.S. Census to understand travel patterns.
- 3) Determine primary destinations (i.e. employment centers) for Franklin County residents.
- 4) Identify main transportation corridors within Franklin County.
- 5) Compare the public transit routes to these main transportation corridors.
- 6) Contact MassHighway to discuss park and ride issues and gather information regarding potential locations.
- 7) Identify preliminary potential park and ride locations through the use of basic criteria and conversations with residents of the county.
- 8) Survey users of the already established Charlemont Park and Ride Lot and users of sites that may be in use as informal park and ride lots.
- 9) Perform site visits of potential locations for further evaluation.

The results of the commuting data and employment statistics from the U.S. Census show that Franklin County residents are commuting to several primary destinations. These are: Greenfield, Deerfield/Whatley, Amherst, Northampton, and points south in Hampden County. To reach these destinations, residents largely travel along a few key corridors that include Interstate 91, Route 2 (between Orange and Greenfield), and Route 116 (from Rt.5/10 to Amherst), and Route 5/10 (between I-91 Exits 24 and 25). This information helped narrow potential park and ride locations to sites along these corridors. Beyond a close proximity to these transportation corridors, other criteria were taken into consideration for selecting specific park and ride locations. These include:

- Easy access to the major transportation corridor
- Availability of public transit
- Whether the location would serve as a long-term or short-term facility

- Ownership of the property (preferred sites would already be owned by MassHighway or local government or by owners that might be amenable to a shared use lot).

FRCOG performed a survey of users of the existing MassHighway Charlemont Park and Ride located on Route 2 at the Charlemont/Buckland town line. The survey was completed on a daily basis for a week in July 2008 (see Appendix B for the survey). The results of this survey show that this park and ride facility is sufficient for the demand associated with commuting along Route 2, west of the Rotary. During the survey period, there were only a few vehicles parked in the lot leaving a large amount of excess capacity. The surveys (and those from a 2006 study) show that many of the commuters use this facility to join carpools to travel west of Franklin County. These destinations include the towns of North Adams and Williamstown.

## **Potential Park and Ride Locations**

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Based on the criteria outlined above, the following sites have been identified as potential locations for park and ride facilities in Franklin County. Appendix A shows maps and aerial photographs of these sites.

### **Interstate 91 Corridor Park and Ride Lots**

- 1) *Whately/South Deerfield Route 5/10 near Exit 24*
- 2) *Route 2 Rotary*
  - a. Visitors Center
  - b. Big Y or Home Depot

### **Route 2 Corridor Park and Ride Lots**

- 1) *Route 2 in Orange*
  - a. West River Health Center
  - b. Northern Lights Log Homes
  - c. Route 2/122 interchange
  - d. Route 2/202 interchange islands
- 2) *Great Falls Discovery Center in Turners Falls*
- 3) *Route 2 and 5/10 interchange*
  - a. Cherry Rum Plaza
  - b. Route 2 and 5/10 Interchange Islands

## **Route 116 Corridor Park and Ride Lots**

- 1) ***Sunderland 7-11***
- 2) ***Former Sunderland Library***
- 3) ***Seven-O's on Rt. 116***
- 4) ***Mt. Sugarloaf State Reservation***

## **Evaluations of Potential Park and Ride Locations**

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This section of the report evaluates each of the above locations as potential park and ride facilities. Each of the locations have both advantages and disadvantages in terms of meeting the criteria to be a successful park and ride lot. These pros and cons must be weighed and prioritized when determining if any of these sites should be developed and, if so, the timing of their development.

### **Interstate 91 Corridor Park and Ride Lots**

- 1) ***Whately/South Deerfield Route 5/10 near Exit 24.*** MassHighway has already identified this site as an optimal location for a park and ride facility and has begun the design of this lot. Its central location will serve I-91 commuters as well as people traveling along Rt. 5/10 and south to Rt. 116 heading towards Amherst. Users of this facility will be able to carpool/vanpool and use public transit via the FRTA bus system and potentially the PVRTA system if an existing route is slightly changed. This lot will most likely attract users that are traveling south to Hampshire and Hampden Counties. These users will probably live either in close proximity to the site or north of the location along I-91.
- 2) ***Rt. 2 Rotary.*** This site is a good central location on the main corridors of I-91 and Route 2. It would most likely attract users residing in the northern, western, and eastern portions of the county as they travel to southern destinations such as Amherst, Northampton, and Springfield. The rotary has the advantage of being served by public transit that goes to locations around Franklin County and to points south in the Pioneer Valley. Another advantage of this site is that it has very easy access from both I-91 and Route 2. The following locations are specific sites in which a park and ride lot could be placed around the rotary.

- a. Visitors Center. Within the rotary area, this is probably the most ideal site as it is already owned by MassHighway. The site has capacity for approximately sixty spaces here. Observations throughout July and August 2008, one of the busiest times of the year besides fall foliage time for the Visitors Center, show that usually there are only about five to fifteen vehicles present in the lot at a time. The access into and out of this site is fairly easy as it is located on the eastern side of the rotary, which is usually less congested. Public investment would be minimal, other than the installation of signage.
- b. Big Y or Home Depot. After the Visitors Center, these two sites would be the next easiest options to implement as a park and ride facility for the rotary. Both locations have plenty of parking – the Home Depot is less crowded than the Big Y during the day when park and ride users would be there. If the Big Y parking lot is chosen as the park and ride site, it is recommended that this be focused at the extreme western side of the parking lot, where there is more capacity and less traffic. The western side of the rotary on Route 2 is more congested due the presence of the commercial centers, which could make access into and out of the lots slightly difficult. As a result, traffic signals may be needed depending on the level of demand for the park and ride. Fortunately, these sites would require little public investment, since the parking infrastructure has already been constructed, and could be implemented in the short term – depending on lease negotiations with the property owners. Currently, the FRTA buses already make scheduled stops at the Big Y.

### **Route 2 Corridor Park and Ride Lots**

- 1) **Route 2 in Orange**. This location would benefit from a park and ride facility due to the high traffic volumes of commuters traveling to the west on Route 2 towards Greenfield, and to a lesser extent, to the south towards Amherst on Route 202. The following locations are specific sites in which a park and ride lot could be developed in this area.
  - a. West River Health Center (Rt. 2, Exit 14). This location is located just off of Route 2 on West River Street, which makes access easy for commuters. The site has a potential capacity for approximately twenty spaces for park

and ride users. The existing FRTA public transit does currently make “on-demand” stops at this location. With a potentially higher demand from park and ride users, this site could easily become a regularly scheduled transit stop. As with the sites located at the rotary, public investment would be minimal since the lot is already constructed. This lot could be available to park and ride users quickly depending on lease negotiations with the property owner.

- b. Northern Lights Log Homes (Rt. 2, Exit 14).** This potential park and ride site is located just across the street from the West River Health Center. It is currently being used as a site to assemble log homes and has very little traffic into and out of the site. The property has a much larger, albeit somewhat unfinished, parking lot than the West River Health Center. Because the site is rather unfinished and rough, its conversion to a park and ride lot would require public investment. Not only would the site need to be resurfaced, but work would need to be done to increase the visibility from the road for the safety and comfort of the park and ride users. This would involve the installation of lights, thinning of trees, and potential re-grading. While this site does have advantages over the West River Health Center as a park and ride (larger lot with less traffic), it would be more appropriate for the G-Link bus route to make stops at the Health Center. This is because the Health Center is a community facility, as opposed to Northern Lights Log Homes, which is a private entity.

It should be noted that both the West River Health Center and the Northern Lights Log Homes properties were used as remote parking for the annual Orange Garlic and Arts Festival in the Fall of 2008. Shuttle buses ran between these lots and the festival. This arrangement with these property owners bodes well for potential arrangements regarding a park and ride facility on either of the sites.

- c. Rt. 2/122 Interchange.** Just south of the Route 2 and Route 122 interchange – on Route 122 – there is currently a forested parcel on the right. This property contains a dirt lot that currently seems to be functioning as an informal park and ride based on field observations and anecdotal evidence. The property is currently in private ownership and it is

not known whether the owner is aware of this situation. This informal use of the lot shows that there may be a strong demand for a park and ride facility in this area. It is a good location for commuters going either west or south from Orange as it is directly located next to the interchanges of Route 2 and 122. Acquiring and/or leasing the property and construction of a parking lot could take a considerable amount of time, making this site a longer term solution for a park and ride facility in the area. In addition, because complete construction of a facility would be required, a much larger amount of financial investment would be required to fund this project, as opposed to the potential shared use lots mentioned above.

- d. Route 2/202 Interchange Islands. A potential location for a park and ride facility along Route 2 in Orange is in the interchange islands that exist at the junction of Route 2 and 202. This land is right-of-way owned by MassHighway. Because there is significant planning, development, and construction associated with such a site, this is a long term solution for a park and ride lot. The shared use sites mentioned above would be good tests for the level of demand for a park and ride facility. If they perform successfully, then it may be necessary to explore a more permanent, long term solution that these interchange islands would offer.
- 2) Great Falls Discovery Center.** Turners Falls is a good central location to serve commuters from the eastern portion of the county as they travel to Interstate 91 and destinations to the south. The Great Falls Discovery Center has the advantage of being located just next to the Gill-Montague Bridge connecting to Route 2 for easy access. However, in the short term this location may be a drawback for this site, since the upcoming reconstruction of the Gill-Montague Bridge could greatly impact the access to the site. Conversely in the long term, by placing a park and ride facility in Turners Falls, a beneficial side-effect of the location could be an increase in commercial traffic for downtown businesses. An advantage of this site is that the FRTA bus route currently stops only a short block away from the Discovery Center, offering public transit to the potential park and ride. An added plus to this site is that the Franklin County Bikeway crosses this property, which allows a third mode of transportation (public transit, carpool, and bike) for park and ride users. In addition, public investment and the amount of time it would take to implement a park and ride at this location should be

minimal since there are already parking lots present and the property is owned by the Commonwealth. Currently, there are approximately forty parking spaces at the Discovery Center .

**3) Rt. 2/Rt. 5/10 Interchange.** This location would primarily serve north county residents as they head south to long distance destinations such as Northampton, Amherst, and Springfield due to easy access to Interstate 91. This location is currently served by public transit – FRTA’s Campus North Route. It should be noted that because of this location’s close proximity to the Route 2 Rotary, if there is a park and ride established at the rotary, then this area would probably not be needed for a facility as both would most likely be serving the same populations. The following sites are potential locations for park and ride facilities in this area.

- a. Cherry Rum Plaza. This location is easily accessible for residents commuting from the northern portion of the county. It is situated directly off of the interchange at Route 2 and 5/10. The Plaza has a very large parking lot with a total capacity of approximately 220 parking spaces, allowing plenty of room for a park and ride facility. The FRTA Campus North Route has a scheduled stop at this site, making access to public transit very simple.
- b. Route 2/5/10 Interchange Islands. As a more permanent, longer term solution to the need for a park and ride facility in this area, the land within the Route 2 and Route 5/10 interchange right-of-way could serve this purpose. This land is already owned by MassHighway. As mentioned previously, a project of this type would require a substantial amount of time, planning, and funding to be implemented. Success at a Cherry Rum Plaza park and ride would demonstrate that there is a need for a more permanent facility.

**4) Route 116 Corridor Park and Ride Lots**

- a. **Sunderland 7-11.** This site along Route 116 is very convenient for commuters from Franklin County traveling south to the Amherst/Hadley area, but can also serve commuters traveling in the reverse direction to

Greenfield. The 7-11 parking lot has the great advantage of being served by both PVTA and FRTA transit, with both making scheduled stops at the lot. The PVTA bus route through Sunderland runs very frequently at every fifteen minutes when UMass is in session. During the summer, it has reduced service which runs approximately every thirty-five minutes. The parking lot has capacity for roughly ten park and ride vehicles. The use of this lot as a potential park and ride facility would require minimal investment as the lot already exists and pedestrian access to the site has been recently upgraded. It could be implemented rather quickly – depending, of course, on negotiations with the property owner agreeing to a shared use lot. Because this lot would primarily serve UMass students and employees, the lot would function much like AASHTO’s definition of a “Suburban Park and Ride” or even a “Peripheral Park and Ride,” which were described in Table 1.

The completion of the planned MassHighway park and ride lot in Whatley/South Deerfield on Route 5/10 may to some extent compete for users of the 7-11 park and ride lot due to their close proximity to each other. However, demand for the 7-11 facility will most likely continue to be strong for students and employees of UMass, which has high parking fees. In addition, for at least the short term, the Whatley park and ride would only be served by the FRTA, which does not have as frequent service to the UMass campus as the PVTA routes, making the 7-11 lot more desirable for UMass commuters.

- b. Former Sunderland Library.** This location, at the intersection of Route 47 and School Street in Sunderland, offers similar locational benefits as the Sunderland 7-11 in terms of assisting the same population and being served by public transit. Although, here the bus systems do not actually stop at the site, but instead stop less than a quarter of a mile away. The library has capacity for six to eight parking spaces. Because the site is owned by the Town of Sunderland, arrangements for a shared use lot could be fairly straightforward to allow a park and ride be implemented quickly in the short term.

- c. Seven-O's on Rt. 116.** Just south of the 7-11 on Route 116, is a bar establishment called Seven-O's. It has a very large parking lot with an approximate capacity of thirty spaces. This location enjoys almost all of the same benefits as the 7-11 site and would serve the same population. One advantage to the site is that Seven-O's is closed during the day, which means that just about all of the parking lot capacity could be used for a park and ride. A disadvantage to this location is that the recent pedestrian upgrades along Route 116 stop about 700 feet short of the site, making pedestrian access from here to the bus shelter down and across the street dangerous. To safely make this a park and ride, the pedestrian upgrades will need to be extended to this site, which will require significant public investment and make this site more suitable for the long term.
- d. Mt. Sugarloaf State Reservation in South Deerfield.** This state park contains a dirt-surface parking lot located at the intersection of Sugarloaf Street and Route 116 in South Deerfield. There has been anecdotal and observational evidence that this lot has been acting as an informal park and ride for the area. To determine whether this was true, FRCOG surveyed users of the lot on a daily basis for a week in July 2008 (see Appendix B for survey). Results showed that there are indeed people who park in the lot and use the PVTA bus service that stops there to commute to Amherst. This parking lot is conveniently located near the other main transportation corridors of I-91 and Route 5/10 with easy access into and out of the parking lot. While the surveys show that there is demand for a park and ride facility in this area, this particular site is probably not an ideal location for the long term. The MassHighway Whatley/South Deerfield Route 5/10 and the Sunderland 7-11 park and ride lots will most likely be able to serve the needs of the commuters currently using Mt. Sugarloaf when they are implemented.

## **Next Steps and Recommendations**

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The above section outlines basic advantages and disadvantages for each of the locations around the county that could serve as potential park and ride facilities. The few informal park and ride lots that have appeared in several locations demonstrate that there is a need for such facilities. The continued increase in fuel prices will only strengthen this need in the future. To make park and ride lots a reality in the county, there are several next steps that should be taken.

The initial step is to prioritize which facilities should be implemented first based on the reality of limited resources and that not all of the lots will be able to be developed at once. Based on the U.S. Census commuter data, traffic counts, surveys, and conversations with county residents and MassHighway officials, it seems that there are a few key sites that should be prioritized. These are:

- 1) Visitors Center at the Route 2 Rotary
- 2) Sunderland 7-11 on Route 116
- 3) Whatley/South Deerfield Route 5/10 near I-91 Ext 24
- 4) West River Health Center in Orange on Route 2

After having prioritized the potential locations, the towns in which these sites are located should be contacted so that their feedback can be elicited. Upon receiving town support regarding the location of the proposed facilities, a MassHighway "Project Need Form" should be completed. This formally seeks state participation on park and ride projects in the county and initiates MassHighway's involvement. Once the Project Need Form has been completed, it may be determined by MassHighway that before definitive steps can be taken to create an actual park and ride lot, a formal study providing modeled demand and travel data for each of the park and ride sites will be required.

Fortunately, aside from the Whatley/South Deerfield site which is already under design by MassHighway, the three key sites listed above do not require significant amounts of funding or resources to implement. The most important, and potentially most difficult, step of putting into action these park and rides lots is the successful execution of lease agreements between the property owners and the park and ride operators (most likely MassHighway). The property owners may feel that having a park and ride share their existing parking lots will bring unwanted negative effects. They may fear that they will not be left with sufficient parking for their customers or that the park and ride will lead

to litter and higher maintenance costs. These issues can be addressed through carefully worded leases. In addition, these potential negatives can be outweighed by the possibility of the provision of public transit or the possibility of increased business at the site by park and ride users, who would normally not have been patrons prior to the park and ride's existence. MassHighway is experienced at creating lease agreements for park and ride lots and has executed several in the region. Once the prioritized potential park and ride sites have been finalized, MassHighway should be involved to begin the lease arrangement process.

The presence of park and ride lots in Franklin County is important as ever as fuel prices continue to climb and county residents are left with little options besides their singly-occupied vehicle. The park and ride lots offer transportation choices for all areas of the county.

**Appendix A - Maps**

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