

# **COORDINATED PUBLIC TRANSIT - HUMAN SERVICES PLAN**

## **SUMMARY**



**MONTACHUSETT REGION**

**MPO ENDORSED**

**June 10, 2008**

**Prepared by  
Montachusett Regional Planning Commission**

## A. Introduction

With the passage of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act – A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) in to law in 2005, several new and revised programs were identified to fund transportation services. SAFETEA-LU requires that for those areas that wish to access these funds that the Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) develop a Coordinated Public Transit - Human Services Transportation Plan (Coordinated Plan). The Coordinated Plan focuses on three target populations within the Montachusett region, individuals with disabilities, low-income individuals (or persons below the poverty level) and the elderly, and seeks to identify gaps in existing transportation services and needs to meet those gaps.

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) funding programs addressed by the Coordinated Plan include Section 5310 Elderly Individuals and Individuals with Disabilities Mobility Assistance Program (MAP), Section 5316 Job Access Reverse Commute Program (JARC) and Section 5317 New Freedoms Program.

Section 5310 MAP is a competitive grant program to provide private non-profit and certain public agencies with capital equipment necessary for the specialized transportation of the elderly and individuals with disabilities.

The JARC program was instituted as part of the “Welfare to Work” initiative. *Job Access* grants are intended to provide new transit service to assist welfare recipients and other low-income individuals in getting to jobs, training, and child care. *Reverse Commute* grants are designed to develop transit services to transport workers to suburban job sites.

New Freedoms is a new program to fund innovative measures to serve people with disabilities seeking reliable and safe transportation beyond the scope of that currently offered in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

On March 8, 2007, Governor Deval Patrick announced that the Executive Office of Transportation (EOT) would be the designated recipient of the Section 5310 MAP funds for the Commonwealth. In addition, EOT will also act as the designated recipient of Section 5316 JARC and Section 5317 New Freedoms funds for the Montachusett Region.

The Montachusett Region Coordinated Transportation Plan has been developed as a tool to help local transportation providers and communities improve transportation services, increase efficiency of service delivery, and expand outreach to meet growing needs. It provides a framework to guide the investment of existing transportation resources and the acquisition of future funds.

As such a resource, this plan:

- Evaluates community demographics related to the target populations
- Assesses the transportation gaps and needs of the target populations
- Identifies strategies to address the gaps in transportation services
- Establishes relative priorities of the strategies

## **B. Demographics of Region**

### **1. Montachusett Regional Planning Commission**

The Montachusett region is located in north central Massachusetts and is comprised of 22 communities covering approximately 685 total square miles. The cities of Fitchburg, Gardner and Leominster comprise the major urban areas of the region. The remaining communities, with the exception of a few small urban type areas, are rural in nature. Total population according to the 2000 U.S. Census for the Montachusett region is 228,005.

The region is located in Middlesex and Worcester counties and is bordered by New Hampshire to the north. Located north of the city of Worcester and west of Boston, the region is served by Route 2 and I-190. Of greatest importance to the area is Route 2, running east-west throughout the entire region. This limited access roadway provides the area with a direct link to Boston in the east and to the western half of the state. Consequently, this highway is a major thoroughfare for the state as well as for the region. The region's major urban communities, Fitchburg, Leominster and Gardner, all border Route 2.

In the early 1980's, the completion of I-190 added a second major limited access highway to the region. This roadway provides direct access to Worcester, I-290 and the Massachusetts Turnpike.

### **2. Montachusett Regional Transit Authority**

The communities served by MART have grown steadily over the years. Initially comprised of Fitchburg, Gardner, Leominster and their immediate neighbors, MART now serves 21 communities in and out of the MRPC region. Communities outside of the MRPC region include Bolton, Boxborough, Hardwick, Littleton and Stow. Total population of the MART region is 207,449 according to the 2000 U.S. Census.

### **3. Target Populations**

According to federal guidance related to the development of a Coordinated Public Transit - Human Services Plan, the target populations for consideration are individuals with disabilities, low-income persons and the elderly. For the purposes of this plan, Census 2000 data was reviewed and analyzed for the target populations and area communities. Definitions related to the identification of the populations discussed are derived from those utilized by the U.S. Census Bureau.

#### *Target Population - Individuals with Disabilities*

Census 2000 collected data on disability through two sets of questions regarding long-lasting conditions in individuals 5 years of age and older. These questions asked about sensory disabilities (involving vision or hearing), physical disabilities (difficulty with stairs and walking) and the ability to perform certain activities (due to physical, mental or emotional issues). According to the Census 2000 Brief "Disability Status: 2000", "People were defined as having a disability if one or more of the following conditions were true:

- They were aged 5 or older and responded "yes" to a sensory, physical, mental, or self-care disability.
- They were aged 16 years or older and responded "yes" to a disability affecting going outside the home.
- They were between the ages of 16 and 64 and responded "yes" to an employment disability.

The following table identifies population statistics for persons with disabilities for MRPC and MART communities.

<b>MRPC/MART Communities</b>	2000 Population	Population 5 and Under	Disability Age 5 to 20	Disability Age 21 to 64	Disability Age > 65	Total w/Disability Age 5 and Over	% of Total Population w/Disability 5 yrs and Over
Ashburnham	5,546	332	90	459	200	749	14.37%
Ashby	2,845	166	40	176	119	335	12.50%
Ayer	7,287	513	175	878	293	1,346	19.87%
Fitchburg	39,102	2,637	1,036	5,098	2,386	8,520	23.36%
Gardner	20,770	1,244	454	2,507	1,295	4,256	21.80%
Harvard	5,981	342	91	265	106	462	8.19%
Hubbardston	3,909	293	77	306	81	464	12.83%
Lancaster	7,380	367	78	646	225	949	13.53%
Leominster	41,303	2,929	777	4,531	1,878	7,186	18.73%
Lunenburg	9,401	554	215	701	418	1,334	15.08%
Royalston	1,254	71	41	107	53	201	16.99%
Shirley	6,373	379	85	597	187	869	14.50%
Sterling	7,257	483	64	435	332	831	12.27%
Templeton	6,799	457	131	699	356	1,186	18.70%
Westminster	6,907	415	71	449	234	754	11.61%
Winchendon	9,611	690	274	1,048	348	1,670	18.72%
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>181,725</i>	<i>11,872</i>	<i>3,699</i>	<i>18,902</i>	<i>8,511</i>	<i>31,112</i>	<i>18.32%</i>

<b>MRPC Communities Only</b>	2000 Population	Population 5 and Under	Disability Age 5 to 20	Disability Age 21 to 64	Disability Age > 65	Total w/Disability Age 5 and Over	% of Total Population w/Disability 5 yrs and Over
Athol	11,299	648	260	1,238	727	2,225	20.89%
Clinton	13,435	803	287	1,883	802	2,972	23.53%
Groton	9,547	837	139	730	249	1,118	12.84%
Townsend	9,198	647	189	385	235	809	9.46%
Petersham	1,180	60	25	70	82	177	15.80%
Phillipston	1,621	96	18	169	50	237	15.54%
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>46,280</i>	<i>3,091</i>	<i>918</i>	<i>4,475</i>	<i>2,145</i>	<i>7,538</i>	<i>17.45%</i>

<b>MART Communities Only</b>	2000 Population	Population 5 and Under	Disability Age 5 to 20	Disability Age 21 to 64	Disability Age > 65	Total w/Disability Age 5 and Over	% of Total Population w/Disability 5 yrs and Over
Bolton	4,148	331	44	282	116	442	11.58%
Boxborough	4,868	358	32	275	53	360	7.98%
Hardwick	2,622	139	89	219	120	428	17.24%
Littleton	8,184	671	79	429	281	789	10.50%
Stow	5,902	510	50	252	120	422	7.83%
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>25,724</i>	<i>2,009</i>	<i>294</i>	<i>1,457</i>	<i>690</i>	<i>2,441</i>	<i>10.29%</i>

<b>TOTAL ALL MRPC Communities</b>	<b>228,005</b>	<b>14,963</b>	<b>4,617</b>	<b>23,377</b>	<b>10,656</b>	<b>38,650</b>	<b>18.14%</b>
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<b>TOTAL ALL MART Communities</b>	<b>207,449</b>	<b>13,881</b>	<b>3,993</b>	<b>20,359</b>	<b>9,201</b>	<b>33,553</b>	<b>17.33%</b>
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Within the MRPC region, 18.14% of the population over the age of 5 years is categorized as disabled. Four communities, Fitchburg, Gardner, Athol and Clinton, had had population percentages over 20%. Not surprisingly, these are four of the five most populated communities in the MRPC region. Of the five rural communities with total populations less

than 5,000 (Hubbardston, Ashby, Phillipston, Royalston and Petersham), the percent of those classified as disabled range from 12.5% (Ashby) to 16.99% (Royalston). Statewide, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts has an average of 18.5% of the population aged 5 and over identified as disabled. The MRPC region would appear to be comparable although there are areas that show a significantly higher percentage.

For the MART region, 17.33% of the population is disabled which is slightly below the statewide average of 18.5%. Only two MART communities have a disabled population over 20%; Fitchburg (23.36%) and Gardner (21.80%). The second smallest community in the MART region, Hardwick, has a disabled population of 428 individuals or 17.24% of its population 5 and older.

*Target Population - Low-Income Individuals*

The definition of “low-income” can vary depending on the agency or program in question as well as by other factors, i.e. region or state. For the purposes of this plan, “low-income” or “poverty” as defined by the 2000 Census was utilized since the census data is the basis for analysis. From the Census 2000 Brief “Poverty: 1999”, different poverty level thresholds are established based upon the size of the family unit. The following table provides these thresholds.

<b>Size of Family Unit</b>	
One person	\$8,501
Two people	\$10,869
Three people	\$13,290
Four people	\$17,029
Five people	\$20,127
Six people	\$22,727
Seven people	\$25,912
Eight people	\$28,967
Nine or more people	\$34,417

Source: Poverty: 1999, Census 2000 Brief, May 2003, U.S. Census Bureau

The following table identifies population statistics for low-income or poverty level individuals for MRPC and MART communities.

<b>MRPC/MART Communities</b>	2000 Population	Individuals Below Poverty Level	% of Total Population Below Poverty Level
Ashburnham	5,546	350	6.31%
Ashby	2,845	143	5.03%
Ayer	7,287	765	10.50%
Fitchburg	39,102	5,627	14.39%
Gardner	20,770	1,863	8.97%
Harvard	5,981	106	1.77%
Hubbardston	3,909	143	3.66%
Lancaster	7,380	237	3.21%
Leominster	41,303	3,889	9.42%
Lunenburg	9,401	382	4.06%
Royalston	1,254	109	8.69%
Shirley	6,373	172	2.70%
Sterling	7,257	213	2.94%
Templeton	6,799	588	8.65%
Westminster	6,907	212	3.07%
Winchendon	9,611	953	9.92%
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>181,725</i>	<i>15,752</i>	<i>8.67%</i>

<b>MRPC Communities Only</b>	2000 Population	Individuals Below Poverty Level	% of Total Population Below Poverty Level
Athol	11,299	1,038	9.19%
Clinton	13,435	949	7.06%
Groton	9,547	376	3.94%
Townsend	9,198	464	5.04%
Petersham	1,180	66	5.59%
Phillipston	1,621	93	5.74%
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>46,280</i>	<i>2,986</i>	<i>6.45%</i>

<b>MART Communities Only</b>	2000 Population	Individuals Below Poverty Level	% of Total Population Below Poverty Level
Bolton	4,148	75	1.81%
Boxborough	4,868	137	2.81%
Hardwick	2,622	195	7.44%
Littleton	8,184	290	3.54%
Stow	5,902	157	2.66%
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>25,724</i>	<i>854</i>	<i>3.32%</i>

<b>TOTAL ALL MRPC Communities</b>	<b>228,005</b>	<b>18,738</b>	<b>8.22%</b>
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<b>TOTAL ALL MART Communities</b>	<b>207,449</b>	<b>16,606</b>	<b>8.00%</b>
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Statewide the average percent of the population below the poverty level is 9.30% (source: Census 2000). Within the MRPC and MART regions, the average falls just below the statewide average, 8.22% and 8.00%, respectively. In both regions, only four communities exceed the statewide average, Fitchburg, Ayer, Leominster and Winchendon.

Within the MRPC region, 14 of the 22 communities (or 63.6%) have a population percentage below the poverty level that is below the region's average of 8.22%. Not surprisingly, the more urban and densely populated communities have a higher percentage of individuals below the poverty level.

For those communities in the MART region, 14 of the 21 (66.7%) have a population percentage that is less than the region's average of 8.00% individuals below the poverty level. As with the MRPC region, the urban, densely populated municipalities have the higher population percentages.

*Target Population - Elderly*

Elderly individuals are identified as those persons aged 65 or older. Statewide, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts has, according to the 2000 Census, 13.5% of the population classified as elderly. For the MRPC and MART regions, the percent of elderly individuals is slightly lower than the state average, 12.49% and 12.15%, respectively.

The following table identifies elderly population statistics for MRPC and MART communities.

<b>MRPC/MART Communities</b>	2000 Population	Population 5 and Under	Population between 5 and 64	Male Population over 65	Female Population over 65	Total Population over 65	% of Total Population over 65
Ashburnham	5,546	332	4,722	221	271	492	8.87%
Ashby	2,845	166	2,408	111	160	271	9.53%
Ayer	7,287	513	5,898	319	557	876	12.02%
Fitchburg	39,102	2,637	30,752	2,174	3,539	5,713	14.61%
Gardner	20,770	1,244	16,185	1,348	1,993	3,341	16.09%
Harvard	5,981	342	5,182	225	232	457	7.64%
Hubbardston	3,909	293	3,345	124	147	271	6.93%
Lancaster	7,380	367	6,280	288	445	733	9.93%
Leominster	41,303	2,929	32,741	2,209	3,424	5,633	13.64%
Lunenburg	9,401	554	7,718	498	631	1,129	12.01%
Royalston	1,254	71	1,060	56	67	123	9.81%
Shirley	6,373	379	5,408	252	334	586	9.20%
Sterling	7,257	483	6,119	315	340	655	9.03%
Templeton	6,799	457	5,467	363	512	875	12.87%
Westminster	6,907	415	5,739	330	423	753	10.90%
Winchendon	9,611	690	7,914	411	596	1,007	10.48%
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>181,725</i>	<i>11,872</i>	<i>146,938</i>	<i>9,244</i>	<i>13,671</i>	<i>22,915</i>	<i>12.61%</i>

<b>MRPC Communities Only</b>	2000 Population	Population 5 and Under	Population between 5 and 64	Male Population over 65	Female Population over 65	Total Population over 65	% of Total Population over 65
Athol	11,299	648	8,711	747	1,193	1,940	17.17%
Clinton	13,435	803	10,620	744	1,268	2,012	14.98%
Groton	9,547	837	8,042	295	373	668	7.00%
Townsend	9,198	647	7,929	241	381	622	6.76%
Petersham	1,180	60	913	82	125	207	17.54%
Phillipston	1,621	96	1,403	61	61	122	7.53%
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>46,280</i>	<i>3,091</i>	<i>37,618</i>	<i>2,170</i>	<i>3,401</i>	<i>5,571</i>	<i>12.04%</i>

<b>MART Communities Only</b>	2000 Population	Population 5 and Under	Population between 5 and 64	Male Population over 65	Female Population over 65	Total Population over 65	% of Total Population over 65
Bolton	4,148	331	3,559	118	140	258	6.22%
Boxborough	4,868	358	4,280	113	117	230	4.72%
Hardwick	2,622	139	2,124	146	213	359	13.69%
Littleton	8,184	671	6,548	396	569	965	11.79%
Stow	5,902	510	4,907	212	273	485	8.22%
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>25,724</i>	<i>2,009</i>	<i>21,418</i>	<i>985</i>	<i>1,312</i>	<i>2,297</i>	<i>8.93%</i>

<b>TOTAL ALL MRPC Communities</b>	<b>228,005</b>	<b>14,963</b>	<b>184,556</b>	<b>11,414</b>	<b>17,072</b>	<b>28,486</b>	<b>12.49%</b>
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<b>TOTAL ALL MART Communities</b>	<b>207,449</b>	<b>13,881</b>	<b>168,356</b>	<b>10,229</b>	<b>14,983</b>	<b>25,212</b>	<b>12.15%</b>
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Within the MRPC region, six communities have a higher percentage of elderly population than the state average. With the exception of the town of Petersham, which has the highest percentage of elderly in the MRPC region, 17.54%, the larger, more urban municipalities of Athol, Gardner, Clinton, Fitchburg and Leominster have the greatest percentage of elderly individuals.

For the MART region, only four communities exceed the state average of 13.50%. Three of the municipalities, Gardner, Fitchburg and Leominster, are the largest communities in the MART region, however, the third highest percentage of elderly exists in the community with the second smallest population. Hardwick has a total population of only 2,622 individuals but 13.69% are identified as elderly, aged 65 or older.

## E. Gaps, Needs and Comments

Through the analysis for this plan as well as previous studies, various gaps and needs in transit service have been identified or highlighted. This section attempts to summarize these issues.

### *Fitchburg/Leominster and Gardner Transit Development Plans (TDP)*

The MRPC conducts for MART on a regular basis a Transit Development Plan for the fixed route services in Fitchburg, Leominster and Gardner. Through analysis of existing ridership data, routes and hours of operation, and surveys of passengers and operators, recommendations were developed related to overall operation.

#### Fitchburg/Leominster TDP

- Expand service and hours to existing and planned shopping centers
- Expand service to Fitchburg Airport, the Wallace Civic Center, and the Gables Assisted Living Facility/Nursing Home.
- Adjust and expand hours of operation to accommodate work shifts
- Expand weekend service, both hours of operation and days of operation

#### Gardner TDP

- Adjust hours of operation to accommodate industrial park work shifts
- Adjust service frequency to Mount Wachusett Community College to accommodate students
- Adjust routes and times to accommodate high school hours of operation
- Adjust service at end of to provide transfer opportunities
- Adjust early hours of routes to accommodate commercial centers that operate 24 hours
- Adjust Saturday service and hours of operation to better match rider needs
- Improve service connections to Fitchburg/Leominster
- Improve marketing and outreach to public

#### Commuter Rail Survey

- Increase in the daily frequency of rail service between Fitchburg and North Station.
- Increase available parking spaces at all the stations
- Extend train service to Gardner

### *2007 Montachusett Regional Transportation Plan*

As part of the development of the 2007 Montachusett Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), the MRPC conducted an extensive outreach program. With the assistance of the firm Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc., a series of public meetings were held in each of the Montachusett Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) identified subregions as well as a single meeting for the region's three cities. Two regional workshops were also held to discuss the RTP process and the original regional meetings held. In addition, MRPC staff set up and manned table displays for a full Saturday at the Mall at Whitney Field in Leominster and for half a day at Mount Wachusett Community College in Gardner during the 30 day comment period to solicit comments and suggestions. Invited to the meetings were state and local officials, the general public, as well as local businesses and organizations. From these outreach efforts, several comments were received on several transportation related topics. For a complete list of comments, please see the full 2007 RTP. The following were related to transit services.

- Transit agencies should consider students when analyzing their routes
- Residential development in Gardner (and conversely the entire Region) will add to the population that will require bus service
- More bus stations/connections in the Ayer area
- Improved MBTA service

- Expansion of bus service Gardner
- Public transportation information improved
- Rail Improvements – High Speed Rail and Service

Within the RTP, challenges were also identified relating to paratransit and existing transit services.

#### Paratransit Challenges

A paratransit needs survey developed and distributed in 1990 to approximately forty organizations in the Montachusett Region, including councils on aging, human service agencies, a school for developmentally disabled children and adult day care facilities was designed to gather information on financial expenditures, trip purposes, number of passengers carried annually, ongoing ride sharing, and existing unmet needs.

The survey indicated that the transportation systems operated by councils on aging are among the greatest potential resources in the area. However, few disabled individuals were being served even though all councils-on-aging that utilize MART owned vehicles are mandated to transport disabled individuals. There is very little coordination between communities. A noticeable improvement over the years has been the willingness of councils-on-aging to expand their transportation services beyond just medical and nutritional trips. Councils-on-aging are now servicing the disabled in their communities.

#### Other Transit Challenges

Interstate bus service is limited to two companies providing minimal service to the region. Taxi service is provided in six Montachusett communities; however fares may be a deterrent to use.

Out-of-town transportation to medical appointments and work sites for the disabled is the single most pressing need at the moment. The major medical and rehabilitation centers are located in cities like Worcester, Framingham and Boston. In 1995, MART implemented daily shuttle service between Fitchburg and the Worcester and Boston areas for medical appointments.

Perceived need is for night and weekend services. Although more councils-on-aging perform some form of service it is not available evenings, weekends or holidays. It operates in a limited radius around the town served and transports only a small percentage of the area's disabled, even when vehicles are accessible. In an effort to remain autonomous, towns and councils-on-aging have developed isolated services. Cooperation between communities is therefore limited. A serious deterrent to cooperative planning and the development of coordinated service in the region relates to policies prohibiting inter-agency ridesharing agreements.

#### *Senior Mealsite Surveys*

Conducted by MART operators and partners resulted in the following responses:

- Increasing operating hours to include evening and weekend service.
- Creating daily fixed or deviated route service to eliminate the difficulty of scheduling a ride at least 24 hours in advance.
- Providing better transportation to rural areas and a connection to Worcester
- Offering affordable travel.
- Assisting with the coordination of transportation to special events for seniors
- Increasing marketing of existing services by placing information at senior centers and creating reference magnets about services. Letting seniors and people with disabilities know that they can access the services.
- Reducing fares.

- Providing options for travel within the entire Montachusett Region, not just within the urban area.

#### *Public Comments*

Comments made through various public meetings, i.e. MART Advisory Board and Montachusett Joint Transportation Committee (MJTC), have brought forth reoccurring comments from residents, transportation providers, and human service organizations. Needs and issues identified include:

- Existing public transportation services are vital to the communities they serve.
- Some Montachusett region residents would like to expand Council on Aging Services
- Travel to Worcester is currently inadequate and significant barriers exist to finding an affordable solution.
- Public Education and Awareness Campaign regarding existing services and the importance of transportation services to those using them is needed to enhance the system.
- Conduct a public outreach campaign to better inform special populations of their transportation options.

#### *Stakeholder Comments*

During their interviews with various providers and stakeholders, such as MART's Americans with Disabilities (ADA) Advisory Group, issues noted included:

- Sustaining existing services should be a priority
- Marketing and Outreach should be expanded
- Operation hours need to be extended
- Improved connection to other transportation systems
- Fixed and Deviated Route Service expansion to address changes in demographics and the region
- Service for seniors to outside areas
- Reasonable fares

#### *Coordinated Plan*

Through the analysis of the target populations and the coverage by the existing transit services gaps can be seen in the rural areas. Although demand responsive services provide needed connections to the target populations in these communities, a common theme expressed to MART and to the MRPC is the need to expand these options. The larger urban areas of Fitchburg, Gardner and Leominster have fixed route services that provide some form of coverage to varying degrees, improvements to the routes, hours of operation and services can also be implemented, given adequate funding.

- Expansion of services to meet varying employment hours and locations. Third shift workers in the industrial areas and parks have no option to utilize transit.
- Expanded service to commercial and medical facilities
- Service connections from rural communities to facilities in larger urban area
- Service to medical, employment and commercial facilities in the rural communities for the target populations
- Expansion of services on weekends and at night
- Improved commuter rail options through more and faster service as well as reverse commute
- Coordination of services with the commuter rail system

## **F. Priorities**

From the information outlined in this Coordinated Public Transit - Human Services Plan, the following priorities have been identified. Please note that the priorities listed are not intended to be all-inclusive. It is assumed that additional needs, gaps and priorities will be identified and established through further refinements of this plan.

### ***Sustain Existing Services and Maintain Vehicles***

A number of public and private transportation resources exist in Montachusett Region to support the three target populations. These are vital services to the County and must be maintained at least at their current level. In particular, the focus should be on ensuring the continuation of MART, Council on Aging vans, and CTS.

In order to maintain services, public transportation providers should seek to maintain current funds for operations and services and repair or replace vehicles as needed. JARC, New Freedom and MAP funding should be maintained and expanded to address the identified needs and services.

### ***Continue Communication with Stakeholders***

MART, other RTAs and transit providers should strive to continue conversations with social service providers, public figures, and community organizations to keep stakeholders informed about transportation options. One option is to include all identified stake holders in mailing to patrons and board meetings.

### ***Outreach and Market To Special Needs Populations***

Education and marketing about transportation services was noted as an unmet need. Existing efforts should be continued and combined with the following:

#### *Short Term*

- Provide service information to all social service agencies by a link to MART through websites

#### *Long Term With Additional Funding And Capacity*

- Newspaper campaign through articles
- Radio advertising
- Promotional marketing, ex. create refrigerator magnets with Transportation Network phone numbers

### ***Explore Additional Funding Options***

Limited funding and resources is a barrier to meeting the needs of the three target populations. Funding is particularly important for MART and CTS. In the short term, agencies/operators should seek to maintain current sources and develop relationships with more social service agencies.

### ***Extend Transit Services***

MART and other RTAs, if provided with enough funding to do so, should extend their hours to include all evening hours for individuals trying to get to work. Evening hours are also required for addiction and support groups, community college classes, and senior events. Sunday hours should also be examined if adequate funding is available.

### ***Encourage Employer Vanpools***

Employer vanpool options should be encouraged for businesses in the Montachusett Region. Some employers have had success with these services and it would decrease the burden placed on other public transportation services.

### ***Expand Services to Rural and Outlying Communities***

Through additional funding, the expansion of all services to the more rural communities should be expanded by any and all operators.

Service providers should seek to improve and enhance cooperative efforts related to service, routes, timing and coordination across agencies and agency boundaries in order to improve access and opportunities throughout the Region and Commonwealth.

***Expand and Increase Commuter Rail Options***

Connections with existing services to commuter rail stations should be expanded and improved. Both fixed route and demand responsive services should be examined if funding is available.

Commuter rail expansion and improvement to the region will also provide the target populations with more options. Expansion options should address areas such as reverse commute, service frequency, and rail line extension.

## Appendix C – Comments & Responses

Comment	Response
<p>1. Email from MART regarding update figures related to various transit services. Changes were noted on fares and costs on pages 15, 16, 17 and 19.</p>	<p>1. Corrections were noted and made to final document.</p>
<p>2. Comments made at May 21, 2008 MJTC meeting:</p> <p>a. B. Saiia - Lunenburg: Indicated that there should be an ongoing effort to advertise and promote services and potential transportation options through ads, stories and releases in local newspapers in order to inform citizens.</p> <p>b. D. Walsh - Athol: Indicated that there should be better cohesiveness between local transit providers, i.e. MART and the Franklin Regional Transit Authority (FRTA), related to scheduling and services to provide better access and opportunities to the western part of the Region.</p> <p>c. J. Oelfke - Shirley: Indicated that the demographics of the region should be considered as a whole rather than on an individual community basis; and commuters, especially on the Commuter Rail system, should not simply be thought of as persons traveling to work but all users of the system and the schedules and time coordination aspects of utilizing the train should consider this fact.</p>	<p>2.a. Comment noted. "Outreach and Market to Special Needs Populations" has been identified as a priority under this plan.</p> <p>b. Comment noted. Previously identified priority "Expand Service to Rural and Outlying Communities" expanded to identify the need for transit providers to improve coordination between agencies in order to enhance and improve services throughout the Region.</p> <p>c. While demographics in the plan are examined on a community level, the plan seeks to highlight areas where "gaps and needs" exist throughout the Region. Potential projects, as well as the priorities identified, are not necessarily community specific. Comment regarding the definition of commuters noted. Priorities throughout the transit system should address the needs of the target populations regardless of the trip purpose.</p>
<p>3. Letter from the Town of Athol stating the following:</p> <p>"We would like to see coordination of all RTAs within other RPAs and MPO districts regarding all of the elements of the coordinated plan under the "Gaps and Needs".</p> <p>"We would like to add that the commuter rail system be extended to Athol and bus services be increased to allow access to the western part of the Commonwealth."</p>	<p>3. Comments noted. As indicated under comment response 2b above, the wording under the priority "Expand Service to Rural and Outlying Communities" has be updated to reflect this concern.</p> <p>While not mentioned specifically, i.e. expansion of the commuter rail system to Athol, the priorities "Expand Service to Rural and Outlying Communities" and "Expand and Increase Commuter Rail Options" does hopefully address these concerns.</p>

Comment	Response
<p>4. Email from John and Charline Oelfke of Shirley stating the following comments:</p> <p>a. Planning appears done on a community by community basis and not regional. "Many gaps and overlaps can be found looking at the region as a whole, in addition to, town/city by town."</p> <p>b. A perception that "commute equals going to work...There are many...who need to get to locations on (or just off) the rail and bus lines..."</p> <p>c. Data is from the 2000 Census. A recent Shirley town census showed the elderly population to be approx. 12%, up from the 9% in 2000.</p> <p>d. Page 8 talks about increased frequency of service needed and also increased parking required. "We want to have people continue to think about increased access to trains not just increased parking."</p> <p>e. Building a garage is expensive, ..."a well timed and well linked coordinated bus system line can minimize the need...to requir(e) parking spaces at train garages...the same capability should be available for Lunenburg, Petersham or Royalston."</p> <p>f. "...strongly support a massive increase in public awareness and education....A risk...is that with increased awareness should come increased use and if the system is not ready for it, the experience will be poor and the process will be set back substantially..."</p> <p>g. Page 9 references transporting disable to medical facilities..."this service is also required by the elderly and poor and thus may need expansion over time to cover increased ridership."</p> <p>h. Page 11 talks about "expanding services to rural and outlying communities....It has no substance, no plan or call to action, etc."</p> <p>i. "We urge you to continue the process but to expand both the scope of transportation planning for the Region and to be more proactive about looking at the Overall integrated needs of the region and to minimize the "multi-local" approach that is present today."</p>	<p>4.a. Comment noted. Although demographics are community based, it is felt that the gaps, needs and priorities apply to the region as a whole and that any project proposals will help to address these regional needs.</p> <p>b. Comment noted. Priorities should reflect all users of the system and not those of a particular trip type.</p> <p>c. The plan is meant to be reviewed and updated on a regular basis. As better data is obtained, the analysis and priorities can be updated and improved. The limitations of the Census 2000 data are noted.</p> <p>d. Statement identified is derived from previous Transit Development Plans and Commuter Rail Surveys and are listed as examples of prior comments and identified needs. Project funds identified through this plan, i.e. JARC and New Freedom, would not be eligible for use on increased or new parking facilities but would be eligible for use on systems to increase access to the rail system. (Please see JARC and New Freedom eligible activities for further information.)</p> <p>e. The priorities "Expand Service to Rural and Outlying Communities" and "Expand and Increase Commuter Rail Options" hopefully address this issue.</p> <p>f. Comment noted. Project proposals submitted that address this priority should be examined and monitored to ensure that issues such as identified do not occur.</p> <p>g. Comment noted. Proposals under the JARC and New Freedoms funding address elderly, disabled and low income individuals.</p> <p>h. Comment noted. Although no specific project, route, service, etc. is identified as part of this priority, the gaps and needs related to expansion of services to rural and outlying communities have hopefully been highlighted in this plan. By identifying a need and priority, service providers can now seek to access funds to establish and address this issue. As future versions of this plan are developed, specifics to address this priority can be identified.</p> <p>i. Further revisions of this plan will be developed on a regular basis and continued public input throughout the process will ensure that issues such as that identified can be addressed accordingly.</p>