



# 14

**Public Input**







## **PUBLIC INPUT**

### **Introduction**

In an effort to seek public input for the 2011 Regional Transportation Plan update, the MRPC held public meetings in Gardner and Leominster as well as attended a Massachusetts Public Interest Research Group (MassPIRG) Transit Roundtable where information about the RTP was discussed. Invited to these meetings were state and local officials, the general public, as well as local businesses and organizations.

### **Meetings & Public Input**

At the above mentioned meetings, staff reviewed the need for, and the development process of, the RTP as well as leading a organized discussion based on three transportation related topics; highway, transit and alternate modes of transportation. Participants provided a wide range of ideas and issues related to each topic to the MRPC that highlighted the many challenges and problems faced by the Montachusett Region. Common themes included the need for more transportation assistance for the elderly and more public knowledge of the existing services, more fixed bus service, a need for more recreational opportunities, lack of funding and major problem areas (intersection, major roadways).

Along with holding public meetings, the MRPC also put together a Regional Transportation Plan survey which was offered online. To get the most survey responses possible, the MRPC put together a flyer that went out to 300+ members of our Transportation public participation mailing list, press releases were sent out to local media outlets including newspapers and local public access channels, notices were sent to the webmasters of all member communities, and a notice and link was placed on the MRPC website's homepage.

### **Meeting & Survey Summaries**

The following is a brief summary of the issues and comments expressed by participants at each meeting.

#### **June 30, 2010 – Gardner City Hall**

##### **Transit Related**

- Related to Westminster and Current Council On Aging (COA) Van Services
  - More public transportation options needed
  - Current COA is only allowed to serve elderly and disabled – Broaden scope of services
  - Currently exists a gap in services for young to middle aged citizens
  - COA trips are primarily more medical than social, i.e. shopping, attractions, etc.



- MART restrictions on rules related to the origin location of rides, i.e. trips begin in Westminster only
- Related to MART Marketing Efforts
  - More publicity of transit services needed to general public and agencies. i.e. there is a need to get the information on MART programs out to the public
  - MART schedules should be placed in city and town halls
  - MART needs to advertise
- Related to Funding
  - There is a need for more funding options in order to get more COA vans, etc. for towns
- Related to Fixed Route Services
  - Other surrounding communities could benefit from an expansion of services
  - More buses are needed from Gardner to:
    - Fitchburg
    - Leominster
    - Athol
- Winchendon was identified as having a huge transportation/transit services need

**Highway Related**

- Westminster has no or few trails/bike paths for recreational/commuting use
- Areas in Gardner with traffic issues/problems
  - Pearson Blvd.
  - Main St.
  - Hannaford Supermarket area, i.e. Timpany Blvd/Main St. “circle”
  - Route 2 On/Off Ramps
    - Merging on to Rt. 2 problematic – Traffic doesn’t let anyone in

**July 14, 2010 – Leominster City Hall**

**Transit Related**

- There needs to be more promotion of ways to encourage people to use more transit type options.
- Better rail connections are needed for rural communities to improve connections to transit options.

**Highway Related**

- Several Areas of Concerns Identified and Discussed including:
  - Intersection of Rt 119/Protor Rd that affects Groton/Townsend/Pepperell – Current blinking light inadequate. Recent study does not meet the requirements of traffic signal.
  - Route 12 south in Leominster needs work – Design funds needed to assist city.



- Route 117 and Mechanic Street in Leominster need work – Again design funds are needed
- Route 13 in Leominster presents a BIG bottleneck - Route 13 Railroad Bridge causes major problems.
- Also the section of Route 13 between Route 12 and Route 2 in Leominster also needs attention.
- Route 12 Bridge over Route 2 and the on/off ramps are an increasing safety issue.
- Drainage on Route 2 currently impacts and affects the Leominster Notown Reservoir – Environmental issues should be addressed.
- Route 119 in Groton in the vicinity of the Town Hall and Post Office
  - No sidewalks present a safety issue for pedestrians
- Bicycle/Pedestrian Trail Issues Discussed included:
  - Funding for bike trails keeps getting put off due to lack of either dedicated sources or competition with road and bridge projects
  - Fitchburg/Leominster Twin City Rail Trail
    - Funding needed to acquire Right-of-Way, design, etc.
    - More cooperation needed from rail companies
    - City of Leominster (and Fitchburg) should develop alternate plan(s) in case project can not move forward
  - More should be done to develop and establish bike trails (off road) and bike lanes (on road)
  - Squanacook Rail Trail in Groton and Townsend should be looked at from a regional standpoint.
- Funding Issues
  - More funds are needed on the local level to address pavement needs – Chapter 90 cuts make it difficult to maintain the city and town roads
  - Any future federal stimulus funds should consider the need for pavement improvements on the local level and be distributed accordingly.
  - The state needs to simplify the application processes for grants, etc.
    - An expansion of the Public Works Economic Development (PWED) program should be considered as it assists communities to address local needs.
    - There needs to be better and more publicity of grants and programs available to communities
    - Grants and programs need to have simpler processes/applications. They should be streamlined with better communication between the state/federal agencies and the municipalities.
    - Additionally there should be more integration between programs such as PWED and other potentially applicable funding sources.

**November 4, 2011 – MASSPIRG Public Transportation Roundtable at the Cleghorn Neighborhood Center, Fitchburg**



The attendees of this meeting were from a variety of backgrounds, including 1 small business owner, 2 MASSPIRG members, 3 affiliated with the Twin City CDC, one affiliated with the Boston Public Health Association, 2 Fitchburg students, and 7 people from the Neighborhood Center.

Issues that were discussed were Trip Frequency & Promptness, Safety, Communication, and Alternative Transportation. Some specific items mentioned were unreliable bus service, the need for after hours service, multi lingual bus schedules, difficulties with understanding the bus schedules and routes, and the need for more bike friendly communities.

## **Survey**

The MRPC put together a brief online survey to gather public input to identify issues and priorities for all modes of transportation within the region. This survey was located on the MRPC website and consisted of approximately eleven questions. There were 117 respondents from 21 communities, some of which were outside of the MRPC region. Although this survey sample was small, the data gathered was useful in assessing the public needs and wants regarding the transportation system in the Montachusett Region. In the future, the MRPC hopes to have a larger survey sample. Some of the survey results are as follows:



**1. In what community do you reside?**

MRPC Community	No. of Responses	Percent of Total Responses
Ashburnham	2	1.09%
Ashby	7	3.80%
Athol	1	0.54%
Ayer	18	9.78%
Clinton	4	2.17%
Fitchburg	14	7.61%
Gardner	8	4.35%
Groton	18	9.78%
Harvard	4	2.17%
Hubbardston	56	30.43%
Lancaster	1	0.54%
Leominster	8	4.35%
Lunenburg	3	1.63%
Petersham	1	0.54%
Phillipston	0	0.00%
Royalston	0	0.00%
Shirley	6	3.26%
Sterling	1	0.54%
Templeton	5	2.72%
Townsend	0	0.00%
Westminster	6	3.26%
Winchendon	6	3.26%
<b>Total</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>91.85%</b>

Non - MRPC Communities	No. of Responses	Percent of Total Responses
Auburn	1	0.54%
Bellingham	1	0.54%
Boxborough	1	0.54%
Franklin County	1	0.54%
Holden	1	0.54%
Nashua NH	1	0.54%
Northampton	1	0.54%
Orange	2	1.09%
Rutland	1	0.54%
Sunderland	1	0.54%
Warwick RI	2	1.09%
West Boylston	1	0.54%
Worcester	1	0.54%
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>8.15%</b>

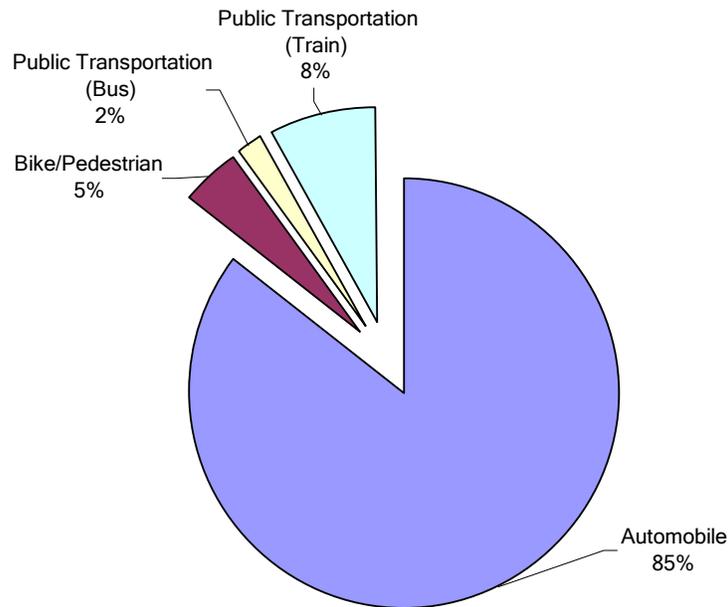
- 19 of 22 MRPC Communities Represented
- 15 responses outside of Region including: 1 from Nashua, NH and 2 from Warwick, RI

**2. In what community do you work?**

- 52 Different Locations or Responses with 36 (69.2%) from Outside of the Region
- Highest Outside Location: Boston/Cambridge – 14 Responses (7.6%)
- Within the Region: Fitchburg – 33 Responses (17.9%); Hubbardston – 16 (8.7%) and Gardner – 10 (5.4%)

**3. What is your main form of transportation?**

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Automobile	92.9%	171
Bike/Pedestrian	4.9%	9
Public Transportation (Bus)	2.2%	4
Public Transportation (Train)	8.7%	16



**4. What percentage do you utilize each of the following as a mode of transportation?**

Percent of Usage	Mode							
	Automobile		Bike/Pedestrian		Public Transportation (Bus)		Public Transportation (Train)	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
100%	86	46.74%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
80 to 99%	75	40.76%	1	0.54%	1	0.54%	4	2.17%
50 to 79%	9	4.89%	4	2.17%	0	0.00%	7	3.80%
20 to 49%	5	2.72%	2	1.09%	3	1.63%	5	2.72%
10 to 19%	4	2.17%	16	8.70%	3	1.63%	11	5.98%
1 to 9%	3	1.63%	52	28.26%	15	8.15%	36	19.57%
0%	2	1.09%	109	59.24%	162	88.04%	121	65.76%

**5. During your travels, what is your biggest concern regarding the transportation system? (ex: congestion; safety; intersections; conditions; schedule; etc.)**

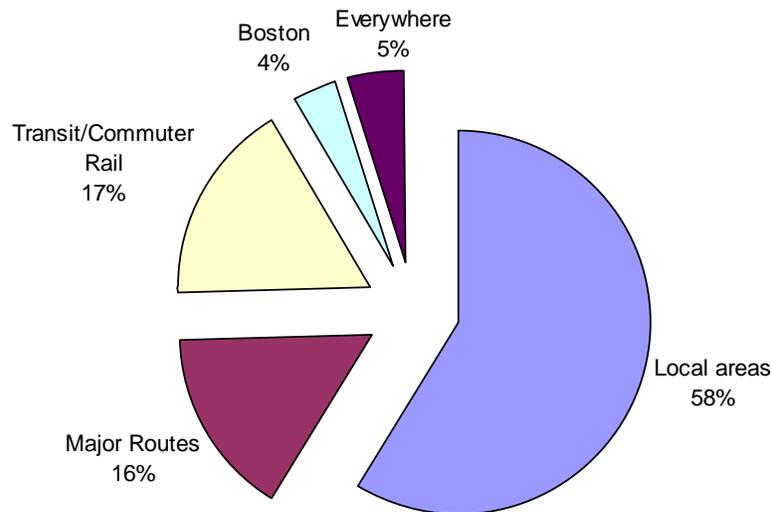
In general, the 184 responses broke down as follows:

- Road Condition Concerns – 53 comments (29.3%)
- Congestion Concerns – 52 comments (28.7%)
- Bus/Train Schedule & Service Concerns – 40 comments (22.1%)
- Safety Concerns – 30 comments (16.6%)



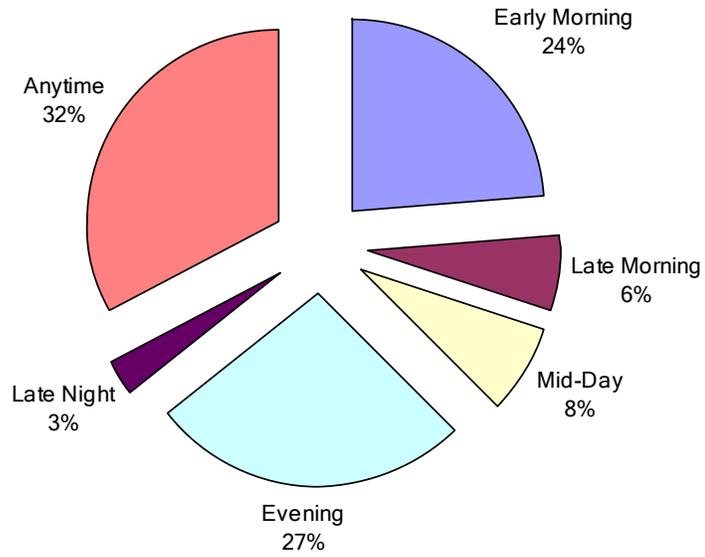
**6. Where specifically do these problems occur?**

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Local Areas	59%	64
Major Routes	16%	17
Transit/Commuter Rail	17%	19
Boston	4%	4
Everywhere	5%	5



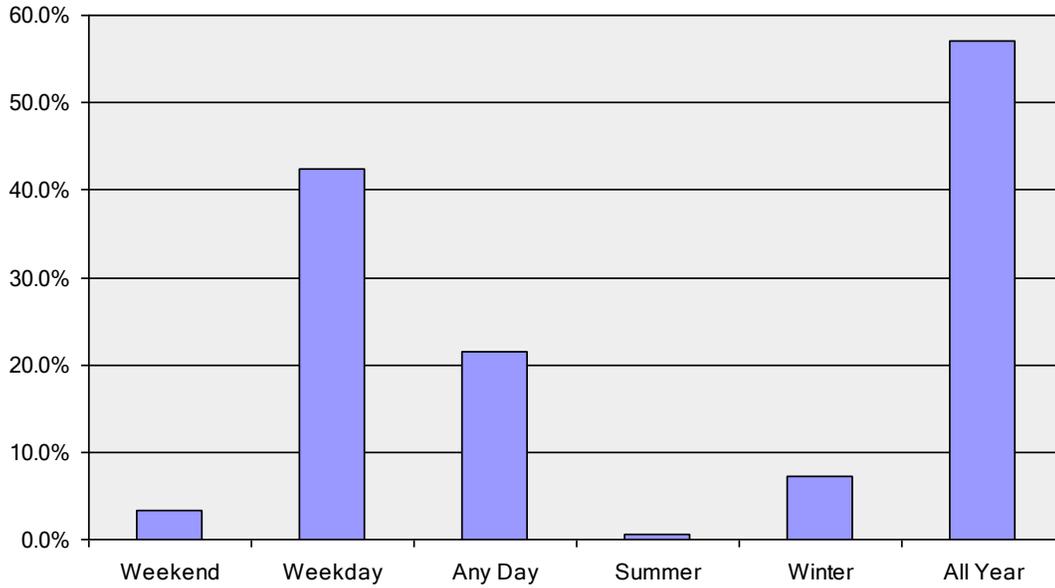
**7. What time of day are they the most difficult?**

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Early Morning	36.4%	67
Late Morning	9.2%	17
Mid-Day	11.4%	21
Evening	40.2%	74
Late Night	4.9%	9
Anytime	49.5%	91
Other (please specify)	14.1%	26



**8. When does this problem happen?**

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Weekend	3.4%	6
Weekday	42.4%	75
Any Day	21.5%	38
Summer	0.6%	1
Winter	7.3%	13
All Year	57.1%	101
Other (please specify)	6.5%	12



**9. If you were in charge of allocating transportation funds, how would you prioritize your projects? Please rate the following 1-10, where 1 is your top priority.**

Based upon the respondent’s answers, the following priority rankings were identified:

Answer Options	Rating Average	Response Count
Maintenance of Existing Roadways	3.14	161
Maintenance of Existing Bridges	3.96	158
Improve Transit/Commuter Rail	4.68	163
Alleviate Congestion	5.10	154
Access and Connectivity of All Modes	5.11	150
Improve Safety	5.15	158
Develop More Bike & Pedestrian Facilities	6.33	169
Improve Current Bike & Pedestrian Facilities	6.51	160
Intelligent Transportation System (ITS)	6.90	153
Improve Transportation Security	7.07	144



**10. What of the following do you feel has improved, stayed the same or worsened in the past few years?**

Answer Options	Improved	Stayed the Same	Worsened	No Opinion
Condition of Major Road Network	<b>65 (35.3%)</b>	<b>66 (35.9%)</b>	42	6
Condition of Local Road Network	23	55	<b>98 (53.3%)</b>	6
Condition of Existing Bridges	27	59	<b>77 (41.8%)</b>	16
Roadway Safety	13	<b>108 (58.7%)</b>	47	12
Congestion	3	<b>78 (42.4%)</b>	<b>87 (47.3%)</b>	12
Public Transportation	17	<b>98 (53.3%)</b>	29	33
Freight Transport Facilities	14	44	10	<b>109 (59.2%)</b>
Transportation for the Elderly or Disabled	23	58	17	<b>78 (42.4%)</b>
Air Quality & Vehicle Emissions	41	<b>70 (38.0%)</b>	30	35
Alternate Mode Facilities/Access (ex. bike trails)	39	<b>80 (43.5%)</b>	17	42
Traffic Monitoring Techniques (ex. Smart-Routes, Online Traffic Conditions)	39	<b>62 (33.7%)</b>	11	<b>65 (35.3%)</b>

## Survey Themes

The majority of the responses voiced concerns regarding pavement conditions and congestion along major roadways (Rt. 2) and local roadways. Most respondents felt the need to have transportation funds be put towards maintaining existing roads/bridges and improve the commuter rail service instead of using those funds to support security improvements, ITS and improvements to bike and pedestrian facilities. These themes are also consistent with findings in past planning documents and other regional and local plans (ie. Community Development Plans, Master Plans, Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies)

Due to the public input received at the above meetings and survey, the following list was developed:

### Improvements needed for Transit

- Bus and train access to/from rural areas
- Increase commuter rail parking
- Faster service to Boston
- Bus and Train schedule improvements

### Improvements needed for major highways

- Route 2 pavement improvements
- On/off ramp improvements (increase acceleration/deceleration lanes)
- Improved access to the highway

### Improvements needed locally - This was the highest priority for most survey responses.

- Pavement condition improvements for local roads
- Intersection improvements



- Bridge repair
- Rail trails
- Sidewalks
- Downtown parking areas

Information gathered from the meetings and the survey has been used in the overall development of the recommendations in Chapter 19 (Recommendations), and as data to support Chapter 1, (Goals, Policies and Strategies).