



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY





## Executive Summary

### Moving Forward

Transportation in the Montachusett Region ranges from rural highways connecting small towns, to urban streetscapes and cities connected by major highways and arterials. Public transit on local, regional and statewide scales exist, as do major corridors where freight travels within and across our region to areas nationwide. Inhabitants of the region rely on this vast network to access jobs and recreation in the Montachusett region and beyond. The infrastructure that exists and the needs for our future develop a vision for transportation in the Montachusett region *“Moving Forward”* to 2040.

#### What is the RTP

The 2016 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) serves as a long term blueprint of the region’s transportation system. The current network is compared to the past and envisioned 25 years into the future. Needs are identified and a framework of projects and priorities are set across all modes, i.e. highway, transit, bicycle and pedestrian, freight, etc. The RTP also serves to provide as a basis for any federally financed transportation and transit project, program or study.



### Background

The Montachusett Region was settled as early as the 17<sup>th</sup> Century and began as small settlements that moved from an era of agrarianism into the age of industrialization and now into the era of information and communications. The region’s landscape varies from urban centers with a strong presence of mixed-uses (commercial, housing and in some cases industry) with well-established neighborhoods to small, sparsely populated rural communities containing “town commons”.

### Goals, Objectives and Performance Measures

Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (MAP-21) requires Performance Measures to inform and improve the MPO decision making process. Performance measures (PMs) are set to achieve a desired set of performance outcomes for a multimodal transportation network. After an MPO develops their set of performance outcomes, the PMs are used to track the

performance of the outcomes over time to determine the progress in meeting them. This tracking occurs through the ongoing data collection and planning activities of the MRPC. The development and tracking of PMs allows the MRPC to identify the areas that additional emphasis through TIP projects may be necessary to achieve a safe and dependable regional multimodal transportation network.

### Vision Statement

*The Montachusett Metropolitan Planning Organization seeks to provide a multi-modal transportation system that is safe, secure, efficient and affordable to all individuals while maintaining support and encouragement for economic development, growth and revitalization while simultaneously promoting a sustainable, healthy, livable and environmentally sensitive region.*

### Goals

Consistent with new federal legislation, the RTP is built on a performance-based planning approach with a vision statement, goals, objectives and performance measures. Goals were made and specific objectives were identified in the areas of:

- Goal 1 – Improve and Maintain Safety and Security
- Goal 2 – Reduce Congestion and Improve Mobility
- Goal 3 – Promote and Seek Equitable Transportation for All
- Goal 4 – Improve System Preservation and Maintenance of All Modes
- Goal 5 – Improve Economic Vitality and Freight Movement
- Goal 6 – Improve Transportation Options and Promote Healthy Modes
- Goal 7 – Reduce Green House Gas and Promote Environmental Practices and Sustainability

Performance Measures for each Goal are can be found in Chapter 2.

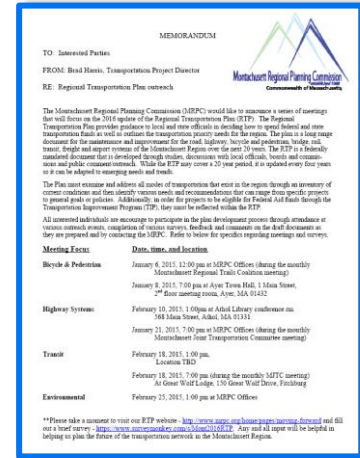
### Public Input

An important element of the development process for the RTP is public outreach and involvement. Towards this end, the MRPC utilized several public meetings as well as an online survey in an effort to solicit feedback on the needs and issues facing the region's transportation network.

Meetings were held as follows:

- Bicycle & Pedestrian Systems at MRPC Offices, Fitchburg & Ayer Town Hall
- Highway Systems at MRPC Offices, Fitchburg & Athol Public Library
- Transit Systems at Nu Café, Gardner & Great Wolf Lodge, Fitchburg
- Environmental Systems at MRPC Offices, Fitchburg
- MJTC/Public Outreach RTP Presentation at MRPC Offices, Fitchburg

Additionally, a survey was produced to solicit general opinions regarding the transportation systems and areas of need and emphasis. One hundred forty seven respondents provided feedback that combined with the comments made at the public outreach meetings helped to expand, clarify and form the objectives of the identified goals.



## Regional Profile

This chapter attempts to paint an overall picture of the region and its inhabitants. Various demographic data is compiled and trends are examined to see how the region is developing. From this analysis, the needs or impacts to the transportation systems are considered and

certain “Challenges” and recommendations and/or policies are put forward.



*Great Wolf Lodge, Fitchburg*

Also included in this chapter are projections for the region in terms of population, employment and housing. These projections were developed by MassDOT in coordination with the MPO and MRPC.

Table ES-1  
Population & Projections for the Montachusett Region

	2000	2010	2020	2030	2040	10 Year Percent Changes			
						2000-2010	2010-2020	2020-2030	2030-2040
Ashburnham	5,546	6,081	6,449	6,780	6,900	9.60%	6.10%	5.10%	1.80%
Ashby	2,845	3,074	3,228	3,340	3,313	8.00%	5.00%	3.50%	-0.80%
Athol	11,299	11,584	12,296	13,415	14,700	2.50%	6.10%	9.10%	9.60%
Ayer	7,287	7,427	7,546	7,685	7,700	1.90%	1.60%	1.80%	0.20%
Clinton	13,435	13,606	14,317	15,000	15,200	1.30%	5.20%	4.80%	1.30%
Fitchburg	39,102	40,318	41,520	42,260	42,340	3.10%	3.00%	1.80%	0.20%
Gardner	20,770	20,228	19,700	18,600	17,600	-2.60%	-2.60%	-5.60%	-5.40%
Groton	9,547	10,646	11,073	11,754	12,042	11.50%	4.00%	6.10%	2.40%
Harvard	5,981	6,520	6,511	6,559	6,700	9.00%	-0.10%	0.70%	2.10%
Hubbardston	3,909	4,382	4,791	5,230	5,480	12.10%	9.30%	9.20%	4.80%
Lancaster	7,380	8,055	8,735	9,434	9,600	9.10%	8.40%	8.00%	1.80%
Leominster	41,303	40,759	39,850	38,000	36,500	-1.30%	-2.20%	-4.60%	-3.90%
Lunenburg	9,401	10,086	10,550	10,730	10,480	7.30%	4.60%	1.70%	-2.30%
Petersham	1,180	1,234	1,277	1,325	1,350	4.60%	3.50%	3.80%	1.90%
Phillipston	1,621	1,682	1,702	1,685	1,600	3.80%	1.20%	-1.00%	-5.00%
Royalston	1,254	1,258	1,225	1,200	1,150	0.30%	-2.60%	-2.00%	-4.20%
Shirley	6,373	7,211	7,924	8,557	8,650	13.10%	9.90%	8.00%	1.10%
Sterling	7,257	7,808	7,950	7,750	7,500	7.60%	1.80%	-2.50%	-3.20%
Templeton	6,799	8,013	9,213	10,200	10,975	17.90%	15.00%	10.70%	7.60%
Townsend	9,198	8,926	9,000	8,600	7,900	-3.00%	0.80%	-4.40%	-8.10%
Westminster	6,907	7,277	7,504	7,625	7,445	5.40%	3.10%	1.60%	-2.40%
Winchendon	9,611	10,300	10,840	11,220	11,175	7.20%	5.20%	3.50%	-0.40%
<b>Region</b>	<b>228,005</b>	<b>236,475</b>	<b>243,201</b>	<b>246,949</b>	<b>246,300</b>	<b>3.71%</b>	<b>2.84%</b>	<b>1.54%</b>	<b>-0.26%</b>

## Equity

Complying with Title VI and Environmental Justice regulations is important to the MPO as well as to the overall transportation planning process. It ensures participation from all populations in order to address individual needs and requirements. Equity is a civil and human rights priority and major goal for the Montachusett Region. It requires making investments that provide all residents - regardless of age, race, color, national origin, income or physical ability - with opportunities to work, shop, be healthy, and play.

Towards that end, this RTP conducted a review/analysis of the identified populations within the region versus the implementation of past projects and future projects or recommendations in order to assess any undo benefit or burden. The resulting review indicated that these populations were not subject to underfunding in terms of projects or recommendations. Additionally, the projects identified consisted mainly of repair/replacement of existing

infrastructure and where new systems such as trails were identified they did not adversely impact a particular population but would instead prove helpful to the demographic.

### Infrastructure and Congestion



This chapter reports existing conditions on pavement and bridge infrastructure in the region. Comparisons are made to the condition of infrastructure from the previous RTP and recommendations are made going forward.

The Congestion chapter focuses on what are considered the most congested roadways and corridors in the region as well

as congestion related projects and studies done since the last RTP.

### Economic Vitality and Freight

This chapter provides a summary of the MA Freight Plan (Plan), existing MMPO freight conditions and supports the economic vitality goal and the Bike and Pedestrian challenge of promoting the economic advantages of the regional trail network and recreational destinations. The movement of freight and its impact to the highway network is also examined with the identification of locations that are in need of improved safety measures at at-grade crossings.



## Bicycle & Pedestrian

Increasing concern for air quality, energy conservation, rising fuel costs, and the health benefits of getting outdoors is leading to renewed interest in multi-modal transportation in the Montachusett Region and throughout the state. The MRPC has been working toward a more



sustainable transportation system by educating and promoting transportation mode choice throughout the region. This chapter examines and reviews existing and proposed Bicycle and Pedestrian transportation options while focusing on

the importance of mode shift.



## Safety

This chapter presents a review of high crash corridors and locations in the region and compares safety conditions between this RTP and 2012 RTP as well as safety improvement projects implemented since 2008. A review of safety problems in Environmental Justice areas is included. A listing of possible future projects and recommendations is also listed.

## Transit

This chapter presents a review of the state of the current transit network operating in the region from bus to commuter rail. Public outreach comments were significant and plentiful when related to transit. Many opportunities exist to expand and improve the system. Several recommendations are included to try to meet the various Challenges identified but as is often the case funding plays a major role in what can be implemented.



## Environment and Climate Change

This chapter seeks explains the effect of the environment and possible effects of climate change have as applied to the transportation system in the region.

Environment and climate change related programs, studies and initiatives are highlighted that can help the state meet it's Green House Gas reduction goals.



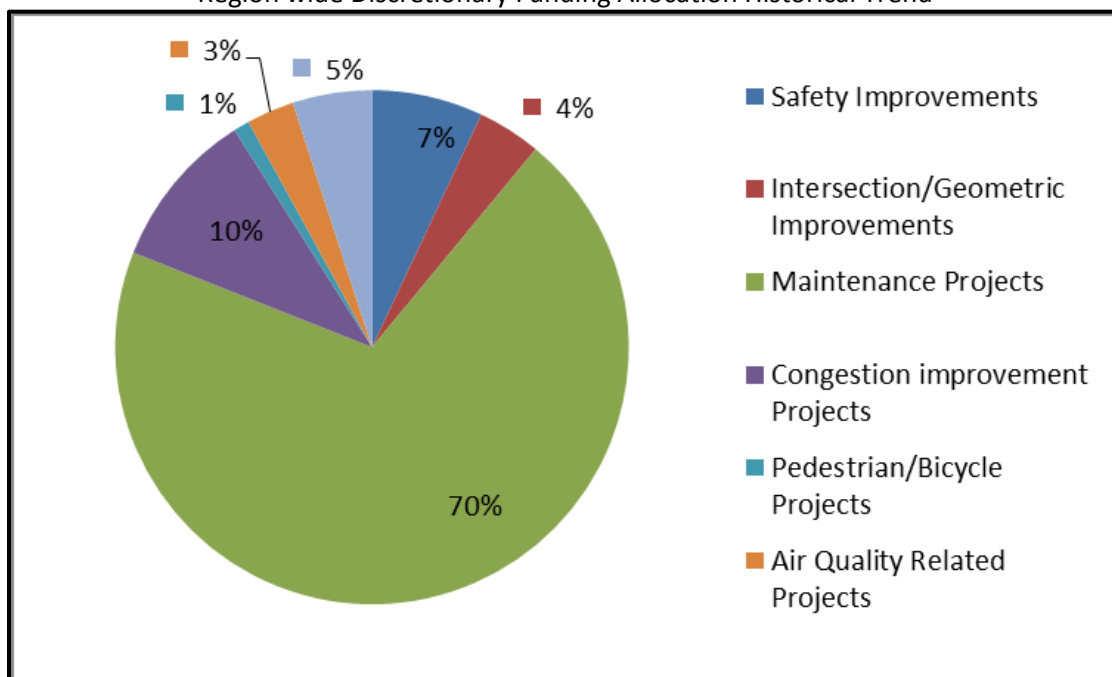
## Challenges and Moving Forward

This chapter summarizes the identified Challenges and Moving Forward recommendations that are identified in each individual chapter. The chapter is meant as a one stop location for the RTP.

## Financial Analysis

A major requirement of the RTP is that it be fiscally constrained over its 25 year life span. To achieve this, funding estimates are provided by MassDOT and the MPO estimates the fiscal impact of the project needs and recommendations identified in the RTP. Transit and Highway estimates are compared to anticipating funding levels to establish this fiscal constraint. Within this RTP, fiscal constraint was achieved. However, it should be noted that the potential readily exists for the needs to outstrip the funding available if continued monitoring of the various systems is not maintained.

Figure ES-1  
Region wide Discretionary Funding Allocation Historical Trend



## Conclusion

Moving Forward attempts to be a blueprint for the region to achieve a multi-modal transportation system that balances the varying needs of its population within the fiscal projections provided.