

## 4.4 Bicycle & Pedestrian

### Introduction

Increasing concern for air quality, energy conservation, rising fuel costs, and the health benefits of getting outdoors is generating continued 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 section will review existing and proposed Bicycle and Pedestrian transportation alternatives while focusing on the importance of mode shift.

### Existing Infrastructure

#### A. Bikeways

Bikeways are special routes and/or facilities established to facilitate the movement of bicycles as an energy efficient transportation and/or recreational mode of travel. Bikeability is a measure of how well an area encourages biking for everyday trip purposes.

In 2019 MassDOT updated the “[Massachusetts Bicycle Transportation Plan](#)”. This plan consists of an overview, a roadmap which includes the vision, goals and principles, as well as initiatives and an action plan. As a part of this update development, MassDOT also developed the “Municipal Resource Guide for Bikeability” to go along with the updated Bike Plan. This plan is meant to assist communities in enhancing community bikeability and includes additional resources.

**The Vision, Goals and Principles identified in the updated Bike Plan include –**

Vision – Biking in Massachusetts will be a safe, comfortable, and convenient option for everyday travel.

- Goal 1 – Create high-comfort connected bike networks for people of all ages and abilities.
- Goal 2 – Increase the convenience and attractiveness of everyday biking.
  - Principle 1 – Treat all people the same regardless of travel mode
  - Principle 2 – Address gaps and barriers known to discourage everyday biking
  - Principle 3 – Lead by example and partner with municipalities to advance everyday biking

MassDOT developed a Capital Investment Plan (CIP) to manage funding that works towards this vision. This plan includes projects such as small-scale maintenance projects to large-scale multimodal modernization projects. All projects are scored based on their anticipated benefits in order to determine investment priorities. Additional programs include Complete Streets Funding Program, the Chapter 90 Program, the Multi-Use Pathways Program and the MassTrails Funding Program.

#### 1. Bikeway Projects in the Montachusett Region

- **Mass Central Rail Trail (MCRT)**– (Clinton/Sterling) The Montachusett Region considers the completion of this statewide trail a transportation priority as it is a vital link for regional and statewide trail connections. An estimated 53 miles of this trail are already open and, when complete, it will total around 104 miles of trail (<https://www.masscentralrailtrail.org/>).

- Sterling - The Sterling spur runs between Gates Road at Washacum Street in Sterling center, with parking at both trailheads. This trail section is constructed on the right-of-way of the previous Fitchburg & Worcester Railroad, which ran from Sterling Junction through Sterling Center to Pratt's Junction.



Wachusett Greenways, in partnership with Sterling and seven more regional towns and the Commonwealth, constructed and maintains the central portion of the statewide MCRT. The MCRT runs along a 30 mile route through Sterling, West Boylston, Holden, Rutland, Oakham and Barre following the old Mass Central Railroad alignment with other connecting lands. Twenty miles of the trail are complete and construction continues to fill in the gaps.

The Town of Sterling and Wachusett Greenways are collaborating to plan extension of the MCRT spur north from Washacum Street to Chocksett Road. MasDOT's construction of a roundabout at Route 12 and Chocksett Road, a second roundabout at I-190 Exit 6, with lane reductions, and additional pedestrian and bicycling accommodations offers the potential for safe extension of the route further north. The general direction of the Sterling Spur of the MCRT offers the potential to connect to the recently constructed Twin Cities Rail Trail in Fitchburg/Leominster.

- Clinton - The Clinton/Berlin areas are important components of the MCRT. Wachusett Greenways anticipates constructing the MCRT from West Boylston to Route 110, leading to a Clinton connection. The route from the West Boylston, Thomas Street trail entrance, bridges along the Route 140 Beaman Street causeway, then follows old Pleasant Street to the Bean Road, Sterling and Prescott Street, West Boylston line. Wachusett Greenways has identified trail route options from there to

Route 110 at Chase Hill Road, Sterling on DCR land and town roads. Wachusett Greenways is currently constructing the old Pleasant Street, West Boylston section.

The Town of Clinton recently purchased the segment of trail that includes the 1,000-foot tunnel in 2020. The Clinton Greenway Conservation Trust is currently working with the town of Clinton on the design phase for the remediation of the tunnel and the design of the trail from the tunnel to the Berlin town line.



When this design phase is completed, bid documents will be ready for the remediation of the tunnel and the trail will move on to the build phase. The Montachusett Region is in support of using Transportation funds to complete this work.

The DCR Wachusett Reservoir section of the MCRT in Clinton is already open and in use. It runs from gate 39 at South Meadow Road to Gate 43 at the base of Grove Street. This is the only trail along the Wachusett Reservoir where bikes are allowed. To connect the Clinton owned section of the trail to the DCR section of the trail, a crossing at Route 70 and the Nashua River will need to be designed and completed. This project will part of the next design phase for the Clinton section.

A connection to the west also needs to be designed and built to connect Clinton to the Sterling section of the trail. There are a few options to join these sections. One option is “rail with trail” as the rail bed between Clinton and West Boylston is still active. Another option may be to develop a trail along Route 110. An exact path has yet to be determined.

The MCRT could be the longest rail trail in the northeast and at Northampton it is going to connect directly with a North/South trail to New Haven, CT making for a totally

sustainable tourism experience for families. Boston to Northampton on the MCRT and then south to New Haven on the Farmington Canal Greenway and then take passenger rail back to Boston.

- **Nashua River Rail Trail** – (Ayer/Groton) This popular trail is a former railroad right of way that travels 11 miles through the towns of Ayer, Groton, Pepperell and Dunstable. Managed by the Department of Conservation and Recreation, the trail was officially opened to the public on October 25, 2002. The trail is an active transportation corridor to the Ayer Commuter Rail Station as well as a popular destination for recreation. Unfortunately, the condition of the trail surface has deteriorated over the years and it is in dire need of repairs.



- **North Central Pathway** – (Gardner/Winchendon) This recreational trail connects the communities of Gardner and Winchendon. The trail was broken down into phases to ease the development process.
  - Phase 1 – Dedicated paved trail from Park Street past Crystal Lake to Mount Wachusett Community College (MWCC)
  - Phase 2 – Using existing roads from MWCC, Kelton & Stone Streets to Route 140. This portion of the trail exists only as an on-street connection with signage. Once Phase 6 is completed, this phase will no longer be needed.
  - Dunn Park Spur – Existing roads from MWCC to Dunn Park with dedicated connector at the Middle School
  - Phase 3 – 3.2 miles paved from Route 140 to Old Gardner Road in Winchendon
  - Phase 4 – Downtown Winchendon to Glenn Allen Street
  - Phase 5 – \$1.7 Million-dollar project that consists of 2.1 miles starting at North Ashburnham Road to Glennallen Street (Rt. 202).



- Phase 6 – A \$8.3 Million-dollar bridge over Route 140 that is currently in the design process. It is listed on the Draft 2024-2028 TIP for year FY2027.
- Phase 7 – Proposed along the old rail bed from Park Street to the bridge at Route 140 (Phase 6).

When completed, this trail will provide the region with a link to many other recreational sites and activities including Dunn Pond, Gardner High School Athletic Facilities, Mount Wachusett Community College, Gardner Municipal Golf Course, the Gardner Veterans Rink, Clark YMCA, Grout Park and many more.

#### ○ **Twin Cities Rail Trail**

After over 20 years of planning, phase 1 of this 4.5-mile rail was completed in the summer of 2022. When all phases are completed, the trail will connect downtown Fitchburg to downtown Leominster via the former CSX railroad bed that parallels Route 12. Due to the complex nature of the trail design, the project was broken up into three phases.



- Phase 1 – Construction of this phase began during FY2020 and is the main portion of the trail connecting the area of First Street in Fitchburg south to Carter Park in Leominster. This portion of the trail has two major bridges and many road crossings.
- Phase 2 – Scheduled for FY2024, this phase will consist of a bridge over the Nashua River and existing railroad tracks over to the Intermodal station in Fitchburg. This phase of the trail is extremely important as it will connect trail users directly to the commuter rail as well as MART transit services.
- Phase 3 – This phase will continue the trail through Carter Park to Mechanic Street in Leominster. At the time of this write up, the City of Leominster is in negotiations with CSX to purchase the rail line through Carter Park. It is expected that this will be completed by 2024. If timing allows, this phase may be combined with Phase II to

shorten the time frame for project completion and reduce the project's administrative costs.

This trail provides a much-needed multi-modal connection from one city center to the other by providing many different populations, including environmental justice neighborhoods, access to recreation, shopping, medical centers as well as to transit options. Future connections south to Sterling and the Mass Central Rail Trail are a possibility for trail expansion.

**Ashburnham Rail Trail** – (Ashburnham) The Town of Ashburnham and Ashburnham Rail Trail (ART) Inc., a private not for profit, are working together toward their goal of a safe, non-motorized route between Ashburnham Center and South Ashburnham. This relatively flat, shared use path will benefit residents and visitors by providing a safe route along a very busy 2.5-mile section of Route 101 where sidewalks and bike lanes are currently unavailable due to geographic constraints.

Ashburnham is working toward two major aspects of this project:

1. Turnpike Road intersection looking west - Completion of the engineering and design of the 2.5-mile section of the Rail Trail, which will provide users convenient access to the many existing businesses and service of Ashburnham Center, as well as providing excellent opportunity for future growth in this area. Along the route, the Rail Trail would offer access to the Post Office, municipal soccer fields, J.R. Briggs Elementary School, and the William J. Bresnahan Community Center. The Town has purchased the abandoned railroad bed and both the Town and volunteers maintain and improve the trail. A multi-use path is included in the Reconstruction of Rte. 101S MassDOT TIP currently scheduled for completion in FY25. The path will allow safe pedestrian and bike access between Turnpike Road and the Bresnahan Community Center.



2. Bridge over Whitney Pond - At the South Ashburnham termination of the current Rail Trail, the goal is to connect the Ashburnham Rail Trail to the North Central Pathway of Greater Gardner and Winchendon via the abandoned Cheshire Branch of the former Boston & Maine Railroad. With this connection, Ashburnham would be a major entryway to a tri-state network of rail trails.

Progress on the 2.5-mile section of the trail has been difficult, slow, and will be expensive. However, the project is vital to Ashburnham's future economic development. To date, the Town has acquired ownership and/or rights to most segments that comprise the Rail Trail. In 2007 and with support of Ashburnham residents at Town Meeting, a 25% Design Plan was completed for the Rail Trail and an application for an Abbreviated Notice of Resource Area Delineation was submitted to the Ashburnham Conservation Commission. In 2022, MassDOT expressed an interest in linking the Rail Trail segment from downtown Ashburnham and Turnpike Rd. to the Rte. 101S TIP multi-use path. The Town must complete 100% of the design plan between Williams and Turnpike Rd., which includes a bridge before possibly receiving state funding to complete the project segment.

Challenges that lie ahead for completion of the Rail Trail include:

- Parking and access point delineations
- Clearing, grading and surface preparation
- Whitney Pond Bridge reconstruction after Whitney Pond Dam removal is completed.
- Bridge construction at the washed-out gulley behind the soccer fields
- Municipal, State and Federal permitting
- Applying for and receiving state and federal grant funding

The financial constraints have left Ashburnham and ART, Inc. with few options of moving forward with these expensive and major projects. Funding and grant money are limited for such a short but vital section of rail trail. That is why the Cheshire Line is such an important piece of the plan.



With greater awareness of the incredible asset they have in Ashburnham, the Town and ART, Inc. hope to keep their dream of a Tri-State Rail Trail alive.

- **Squannacook River Rail Trail – (Townsend/Groton)**

The construction of the Squannacook River Rail Trail has been broken down into four phases.

- Phase 1- Townsend center to Old Meetinghouse Road (Complete)
- Phase 2 - Old Meetinghouse Road to Townsend Harbor (Complete)
- Phase 3 - From the Bertozzi Wildlife Management Area in West Groton to the northern Crosswinds Drive crossing in West Groton (Complete)
- Phase 4 - From the northern Crosswinds Drive crossing to Townsend Harbor (behind the Harbor Village Mall). (Completion estimated for March 2024)

When completed, the Squannacook River Rail Trail will be 3.7 miles long. This multi-use recreational trail will parallel the scenic Squannacook River and will connect the town centers of Townsend Harbor and Townsend Center, two historical districts, two shopping centers, the North Middlesex Regional High School, and several major open space/conservation areas (notably Townsend State Forest and the Squannacook River and Ash Swamp Wildlife Management Areas). In Townsend, this trail closely parallels the bicycle and pedestrian unfriendly Route 119, providing a long-desired safe alternative to that state highway for non-motorized travel. The surface is/will be stone dust, with a 10-foot width. The rail bed is owned by the MBTA, and was leased in March 2015 by the non-profit Squannacook Greenways, Inc. Squannacook Greenways was the first non-profit in the state of Massachusetts to sign a lease to construct a rail trail with the MBTA. They were also the recipient of two MassTrails grants, funds from Groton's Community Preservation Act as well as private foundation money to continue efforts in project development. More information can be found at [sqgw.org](http://sqgw.org) and <http://squannacookgreenways.org/>.

- **Nashoba Regional Greenway (NRG)** - (Ayer, Devens, Harvard) The Nashoba region of Massachusetts is located between and around routes 128 and 495 in the vicinity of the Fitchburg commuter rail line. This greenway aims to connect shared-use trails and greenways, notably the Nashua River Rail Trail, the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail, the Assabet River Rail Trail, the Minuteman Bikeway, and the Mass Central Rail Trail. Currently, however, there are no designated safe/appropriate routes to connect these resources to mass transit, community centers, or regional attractions. The Nashoba Regional Greenways (NRG) coalition is a group of town officials and volunteers from fifteen communities who are working together to fill that gap using the existing road and trail network. They envision a network of quiet and safe routes, designated by signage, suitable for bicycles, pedestrians, strollers alike.

## B. Pedestrians

Like the roadway projects in the region, pedestrian facilities in the Montachusett Region are also limited due to a lack of funding. During these tough economic times, communities tend to focus their monies elsewhere. Local communities have expressed interest and support of improved pedestrian ways, often in connection with potential bikeways, but they lack adequate funding for the design and construction of these facilities.

As mentioned in the bicycle section above, in addition to the Massachusetts Bicycle Transportation Plan, the state of Massachusetts also created the [Massachusetts Pedestrian Transportation Plan](#) in 2019.

The Vision, Goals and Principles identified in the updated Pedestrian Plan include:

Vision – All people in Massachusetts will have a safe, comfortable, and convenient option to walk for short trips.

- Goal 1 – Eliminate pedestrian fatalities and serious injuries
- Goal 2 – Increase the percentage of short trips made by walking

## *Principles*

1. Value people walking and their travel needs, especially the most vulnerable – children, elderly, people with disabilities – to ensure they can walk safely.
2. Prioritize improvements for people walking by proactively addressing gaps and barriers that discourage walking and are known to increase the likelihood of crashes.
3. Lead the Commonwealth in meeting the pedestrian plan goals by supporting local municipalities and other agencies to increase everyday walking.

In 2020, the MRPC developed a Regional Bike and Pedestrian Plan. The MRPC incorporated data from the statewide Bike and Pedestrian Plans into this document as well as the information and recommendations that were included within this 2024 Regional Transportation Plan.

### **C. Sidewalks**

The majority of the communities in the Montachusett Region are rural in nature with small downtown areas. The areas typically contain sidewalks within the major activity centers. The urban communities have a more extensive infrastructure within the central business districts that facilitates pedestrian circulation. Efforts have been made to improve pedestrian access by means of sidewalk improvements, crosswalk delineation, and construction of handicapped ramps, improved lighting, and connections to municipal parking lots. Designated fixed route bus stops are also common along the sidewalks providing a connection between different modes of travel. MRPC conducted a sidewalk and bike lane inventory in 2020 which can be seen on the MrMapper site on the MRPC webpage - <https://mrmapper.mrpc.org/>.

### **D. Trails**

Using Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) funds, the MRPC was able to conduct a region wide trail inventory starting in 2005 and finishing in 2011. Through public outreach, local meetings and data collection, the MRPC was able to gather trail data for each of their 22 communities plus Devens. This data was broken down into three categories:

- Existing Formal – Trails that are open to the public.
- Existing Informal – Trails that exist but are not open to the public. These trails are likely on private or environmentally sensitive land.
- Potential – These are trails that are not currently in existence but that have potential for development in the future.

In 2012, the trail inventory data was updated through community outreach and field investigation. A Montachusett Regional Trail Guide was then created with the updated trail data in 2014. This guide includes all of the Existing Formal Trails along with local cultural and historical points of interest. The first guide consisted of 10,000 printed copies that were distributed throughout the region. These guides were so popular that they were all dispersed in just over a few years.

In 2019, the MRPC, with the help of the Montachusett Regional Trails Coalition (MRTC), updated existing trail data once again and published an updated Montachusett Regional Trail Guide. At the time of this document, the MRPC currently has approximately 665.5 miles of existing formal trails throughout the region. This total does not include the town of Groton, which owns its own trail inventory using an open-source application made by a third-party vendor. The third-party vendor has multiple legal requirements that must be met in order to use the data stored on its site. Because the application is open-source, anyone can submit or edit the data. Therefore, the data may not be reliable. In previous iterations of the Trail Inventory, the MRPC included Groton's trail data. However, once the hinderances of using the trail data stored on this application were recognized, it was decided that it would be in everyone's best interest to remove Groton's trail data from the MRPC's Trail Inventory.

### **Resources & Funding**

MassDOT developed the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) which will allow the state to develop and implement the Commonwealth's transportation investment strategy. This plan includes a magnitude of projects and project types – from small-scale maintenance projects to large-scale

multimodal modernization projects. All projects listed in the CIP are subject to the MassDOT Healthy Transportation Policy Directive which requires the incorporation of walking, bicycling, and transit in all projects.

Funding sources for multi-modal projects include:

- Complete Streets
- Chapter 90
- Shared Use Path Program
- Safe Routes to School
- MassTrails Grants
- Shared Streets and Spaces

#### A. Working with the Montachusett Regional Trail Coalition

The MRPC is partnered with the Montachusett Regional Trail Coalition (MRTC) in support of their mission “To advance local and regional connectivity, community commitment, and enthusiasm for trails in the Montachusett Region.” This mission was re-established during a strategic planning process that was made possible in part by a grant from the Community Foundation of North Central Massachusetts. During this process, a vision statement, guiding principles and goals were also established-

#### Vision Statement

MRTC envisions:

- fostering trail connections in and around the Montachusett region;
- serving as a centralized resource for regional trail planning;
- helping our communities see trails as essential infrastructure.

#### Guiding Principles

MRTC advances the development of diverse, high-quality shared-use trails and greenways that are sustainable and accessible:

- Collaboration - Seek participation of diverse stakeholders who represent the communities we serve.
- Connectivity - Advocate for trail linkages within and between communities to bring people and places together in the region.
- Accessibility - Provide trail experiences for people of all abilities and ages.
- Sustainable Development - Commit to developing trails that protect the environment and meet user needs through best management practices.
- Economic Vitality - Support the local economy by putting North Central Massachusetts on the map as a recreational and tourist destination.
- Healthy Lifestyles - Encourage the health, fitness, and well-being of residents by providing multimodal trail opportunities.
- Awareness & Education - Work to make trails a part of the community fabric, connect people with the natural world, and provide outdoor learning experiences for people of all ages.

### Goals

- Goal 1 – Identify, secure, and appropriately utilize the human and financial resources necessary to carry out the work of the strategic plan.
- Goal 2 – Develop and implement a marketing plan that targets the proper audiences, strengthens brand awareness, and supports MRTC’s mission.
- Goal 3 – Promote trail connectivity and usage throughout the region by identifying and acting upon opportunities for outreach, education, and advocacy.

The MRTC has been instrumental in gaining public involvement, education, and working with MRPC to identify trail gaps and priorities. Some of the significant trail projects that have been identified include:

1. Connecting the Twin Cities Rail Trail from its terminus in Leominster south to Sterling where it would connect to the Sterling Spur and the Mass Central Rail Trail.
2. Connecting the North Central Pathway in Winchendon to the Ashburnham Rail Trail to the south

### 3. A Gardner to Athol connection that has yet to be determined

Since COVID 19, the MRTC has been struggling to get up and running again. It is the hope that the group can regain momentum and continue their mission.

### B. Sidewalk Inventory & Pedestrian/Bicycle Connections for MART Bus Routes (2018)

This study focused on the Cities of Fitchburg, Gardner and Leominster, in particular, the major fixed bus routes within these communities. The goal was to find and prioritize areas where there are gaps in accessing the bus routes. The study area was defined by the areas within ¼ mile of the bus routes.

As part of the process, a sidewalk inventory was conducted within this study area, and trail data was also included to show transportation alternatives. Data was gathered regarding special populations and points of interest were noted. All of these data sets were mapped and assisted in the prioritization of key areas.

Priority areas for each community included:

- Fitchburg State University (Fitchburg) – This area was listed as one of the top bus routes (Route 4), is located in both of the top five specialty population block groups, and incorporates a major continuing education facility in the area. John Fitch Highway is also a major roadway in the City of Fitchburg (12,000-20,000 avg. vehicles per day). There is also recreational trails nearby at Coolidge Park and Fitchburg State University's athletic fields.
- Leominster Hospital (Leominster) – This area incorporates both elderly and disabled populations, is located on one of the top bus routes (Route 2) and travel routes (North Main Street (Rt. 12) - average of 15,000-30,000 vehicles per day), includes a major medical facility and shopping plazas as well as low income and/or elderly housing facilities.



- Johnny Appleseed Plaza (Leominster) – This is a large area that mostly encompasses Central Street (Route 12) along bus route 9 in the area of Johnny Appleseed Plaza and Willard Street, which connects over to the Walmart shopping area. This section includes both top populations of elderly and individuals with disabilities, low income and/or elderly housing facilities, shopping plazas, and a possible trail connection on the east side of the plaza.
- Parker Pond (Gardner) – This area is located in both of the top five specialty population block groups and is located in between two major routes, Route 68 and 101. The smaller side streets to the east of Parker Pond do not currently have sidewalks. The bus route connects the two routes via Foss Road and Robillard Street. Connections from the smaller side streets near Parker Pond to the bus route and major roadways would be ideal.
- Timpany Plaza (Gardner)– The area just north of Timpany Plaza is listed as having both disabled and elderly populations and is one of the top 5 block groups for elderly residents. It is located within walking distance to the bus route along both Timpany Boulevard and Pearson Boulevard. Both of these locations have many points of interest such as shopping and restaurants and recreational fields/playgrounds.
- Gardner Plaza Shopping Center (Gardner) – The Gardner Plaza is located just off of Route 2 to the north. There are shops and restaurants located here as well as along Pearson Boulevard. There are also two nursing homes and an elementary school located within close proximity. The main focus area is east of Elm Street which is just north of the plaza.

#### C. Mobility and Access (2022)

This study, similar to the Sidewalk Inventory & Pedestrian/Bicycle Connections for MART Bus Routes mentioned above, examined existing transportation infrastructure that covers vehicular

and non-vehicular mobility needs. The goal of the study was to identify key locations where accessibility should be improved in order to create more transportation options for a variety of ages and populations, specifically Environmental Justice and Title VI populations. Previous studies were examined to assist with identifying these key areas and also to prioritize them by most impactful need.

MRPC staff reviewed existing reports regarding accessibility. Studies that included data gathering for specific types of infrastructure such as trails, sidewalks, bike lanes, pavement condition, etc., were used to assist with the analysis. The main focus was around major destinations such as shopping areas, medical facilities and major employers. MRPC then broke down the data collection into two parts – mobility access for motorists and mobility access for non-motorist. Transit was used for both data sets and was also highlighted in previous reports regarding access to the transit bus lines. The main goal is to identify which areas have the greatest need for improvements in order to create a more user-friendly environment for both transportation modes.

Based upon the data collected and the analysis conducted, the following priority areas were identified. These are the top five priority areas based on the data analysis categories listed above. Each category (vehicular and non-vehicular) has its own set of priority areas and sometimes these areas overlap.

1. Gardner Center- This area has the highest number of analysis criteria with a total of 21 (11–Non-Vehicular & 10 –Vehicular) which makes it the top priority area for both categories. The analysis for this location was based on the following: located within two different vulnerable populations, the MART bus route is located nearby but not directly adjacent to the point(s) of interest (POI), poor pavement conditions adjacent to the POI, located adjacent to both vehicular and non-vehicular top crash clusters, sidewalks nearby but not adjacent to the POI, and no bike infrastructure, commuter rail stop, park & ride, or trails within the priority area.

2. Leominster Center - This location has 18 total points with 9 being a vehicular focus and 9 as non-vehicular. There are 3 vulnerable populations located within this area, which is the highest number of these types of populations within the entire analysis. There are no park & ride facilities, commuter rail stops, trails or bike infrastructure in this area. Poor pavement conditions and both motor vehicle and bike/pedestrian crash clusters adjacent to the points of interest, and sidewalks are present nearby, but connections could be made adjacent to the points of interest.
3. Athol Center - This location also has 18 total points (10 non-vehicular points and 8 vehicular points) in the analysis. The Athol Center is located within two different vulnerable populations, the MART bus route is located nearby but not directly adjacent to the point(s) of interest (POI), poor pavement conditions adjacent to the POI, located adjacent to non-vehicular top crash clusters, trails are located nearby but not adjacent to the POI, and no bike infrastructure, commuter rail stop, or park & ride within the priority area.
4. Fitchburg Center - This location has 17 total points for the analysis (7 for vehicular and 10 for non-vehicular). It is located in 2 top vulnerable populations, there are no park & ride facilities, the MART bus routes, sidewalks, bike infrastructure, and poor pavement conditions are located nearby but not adjacent to the points of interest, there are non-vehicular crash clusters adjacent to the points of interest and vehicular crash clusters nearby.
5. Leominster High School - This location has a total of 15 points for the analysis (8 vehicular and 7 non-vehicular). It is located in 2 vulnerable population groups and there are no commuter rail stops or park and ride facilities in the area. The MART transit bus routes are located nearby but are not adjacent to the points of interest, there are poor pavement conditions throughout the area which also extend adjacent to the points of interest, there are zero vehicular and non-vehicular crash clusters located in the area, there are sidewalks throughout the area and some that are adjacent to the points of interest but bike infrastructure and trails are nonexistent.

## Trends

The desire for more multi modal transportation options within the Montachusett Region has increased significantly over the past few years. More people are seeing the value in having these types of transportation options and are also advocating for the development of new, safer, bicycle and pedestrian facilities throughout the region. Programs such as Complete Streets and Safe Routes to School are gaining support from our communities -

- Complete Streets – 19 out of 22 communities have approved policies, one is registered, and 15 have received funding for multi modal projects
- Safe Routes to School – 18 out of 22 communities are partners with the program.

### Montachusett Region Communities Participation in Safe Routes to School & Complete Streets

Community	Safe Routes to School		Complete Streets		
	Participant	Infrastructure Funds	Tier 1 Policy	Tier 2 Prioritization Plan	Tier 3 Construction Funds
Ashburnham	X		2019	2019	2020
Ashby	X				
Athol	X		2019	2019	2020
Ayer	X		2016	2017	2019
Clinton	X		2016	2017	2017 & 2020
Fitchburg	X	2016-2017	2016	2017	2018 & 2020
Gardner	X	2022	2016	2017	2018 & 2023
Groton			2016	2017	2018 & 2022
Harvard	X		2017	2018	2019
Hubbardston	X		2017	2017	2018
Lancaster			2016	2017	2018 & 2022
Leominster	X	2022	2016	2017	2018
Lunenburg	X		2017	2018	2020
Petersham	X				
Phillipston			2018		
Royalston	X		Registered		
Shirley	X		2016	2018	2020 & 2023
Sterling	X		2020	2021	2022
Templeton			2017		
Townsend	X		2017	2018	
Westminster	X		2022	2022	
Winchendon	X		2016	2017	2022

The State is also contributing financially to trail projects through the MassTrails Grant program. This program provides grants to support recreational trail and shared use pathway projects across the Commonwealth. These grants are reviewed and recommended by the Massachusetts Recreational Trails Advisory Board and the Commonwealth's Inter-Agency Trails Team. There are two funding sources for the grant –

1. Recreational Trails Program (RTP) – these grants are federally funded through the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), administered at the State level, and provide funding for the development and maintenance of recreational trail projects, both motorized and non-motorized.
2. Commonwealth Trails Grants – “These grants are supported by the State’s annual Capital Investment Plan (CIP) and aim to help communities design, create and maintain off-road shared-use pathway connections between where Massachusetts residents live, learn, work, shop and recreate, especially by building out the longer distance regional networks of multi-use pathways across the state and filling in critical gaps in existing networks, or overcoming current barriers to connectivity.”

([www.mass.gov/guides/masstrails-grants](http://www.mass.gov/guides/masstrails-grants))

In 2022, seven communities within the Montachusett Region received MassTrails funding – Athol, Clinton, Gardner, Groton, Lunenburg, Sterling and Templeton.

Other notable funding sources are the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program (CMAQ) and Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP). CMAQ provides federal funding for states to support projects and programs intended to improve air quality and reduce traffic congestion. Example projects include – traffic flow improvements, public transit services and facilities, bicycle and pedestrian facilities and programs, rideshare activities, etc. The Twin Cities Rail Trail phase 2 and the North Central Pathway bridge project are currently scheduled in the FY2024-2028 Transportation Improvement Plan. The BIL continues the Transportation Alternatives set-aside from the Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) program. Eligible uses of the set-aside funds include all projects and activities that were previously eligible under

the Transportation Alternatives Program under the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21). This encompasses a variety of smaller-scale transportation projects such as pedestrian and bicycle facilities, recreational trails, safe routes to school projects, community improvements such as historic preservation and vegetation management, and environmental mitigation related to stormwater and habitat connectivity. (<https://www.mass.gov/doc/stip-ffy-2023-2027-appendix-funding-category/download> )

### **Recommendations**

As these multi modal trail and bikeway projects continue to be studied and developed, funding is always a major component. Increasing the existing funding programs and available dollar amounts are always critical to further these regionally significant projects. Additionally, continuing the study and planning of trail related developments in order to identify priority trails and trail connections are also key for alternate modes of transportation.