

Transit

Introduction

Transit continues to be a major transportation factor in the in the Montachusett region. From fixed route buses to commuter rail, shuttles and on demand services, many individuals rely on the regional transit system for access to services such as jobs, grocery stores, medical facilities, schools, social services, and recreation. Expansion and continued improvements to the transit system will continue to be a major factor in the overall goal of reducing the number of single occupant vehicles (SOV) on the road network, and in the reduction of greenhouse gases (GHG).

Since the completion and endorsement of the 2020 Montachusett RTP (July 2019), the region, Commonwealth, nation and the world suffered under the constraints and consequences of the global Corona Virus pandemic. From early 2020 to late 2022, various federal, state and local mandates limited the ability for numerous services, businesses and activities to operate as usual. The resulting effect to the transit system was a significant impact, i.e., reduction, to ridership and revenue. Because of this, an effected review and comparison of trends in fixed route, paratransit and commuter rail services from 2019 to 2023 cannot be developed and analyzed with any degree of certainty. The best that can be accomplished is to identify the impacts and then monitor the gradual return to pre-pandemic normalcy. In the following sections, a review of pre-pandemic figures from the 2020 RTP will be presented along with statistics that illustrate the pandemic impacts to the various transit systems.

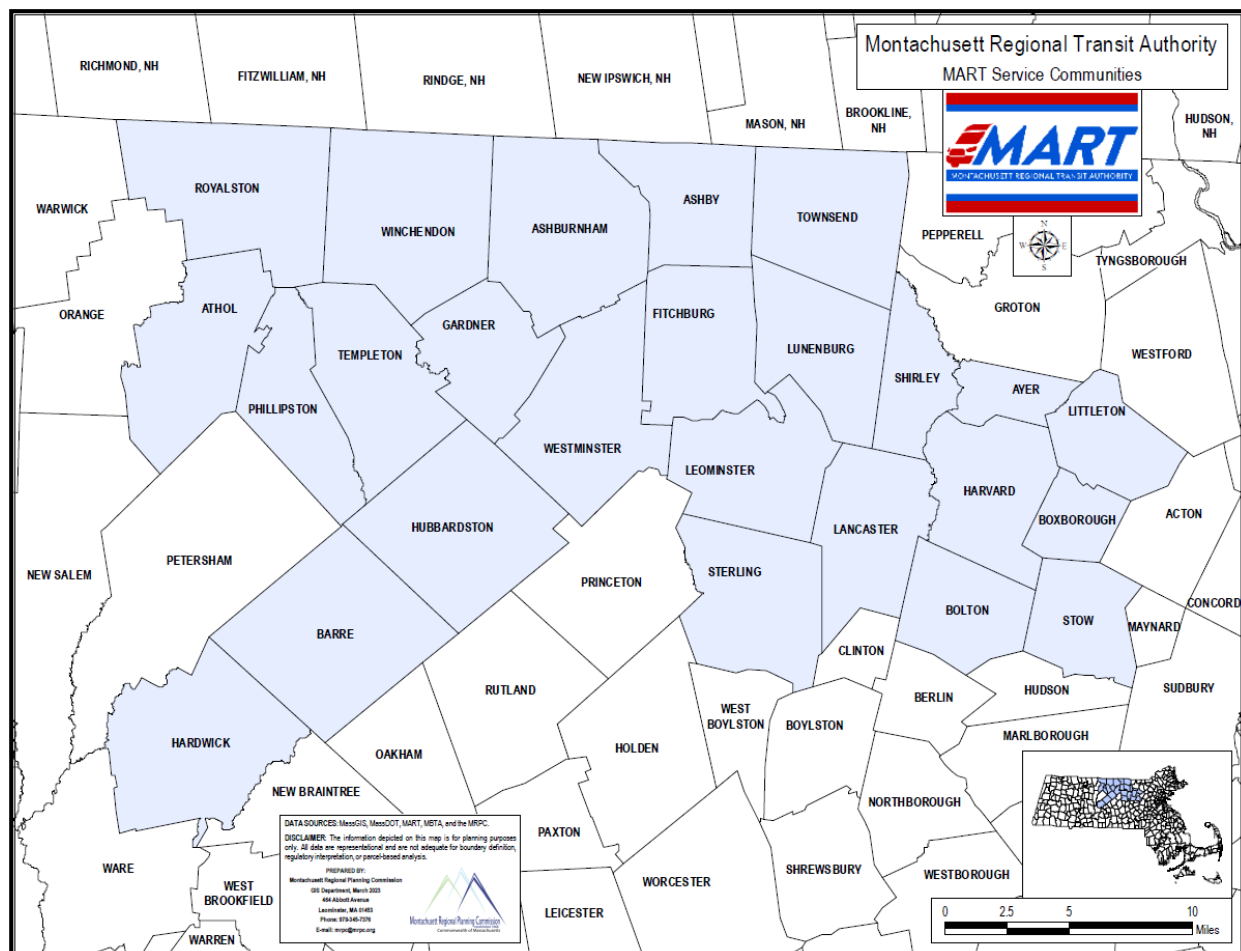
Transit System Overview

A. RTA Jurisdiction

Within the region, the Montachusett Regional Transit Authority (MART) is the major provider of services. As has been the case since the authority was started in 1978, fixed route services are mainly concentrated within the urban cities of Fitchburg, Leominster, Gardner and to a lesser degree – Westminster, Lunenburg and Lancaster. Over the past ten years, service has expanded slowly into neighboring rural communities. The expansion has been driven both by requests by

local communities, as well as the need for services to integrate with redesigned fixed routes and schedules. The communities served by MART have grown steadily over the years. Since 2019, MART has added three additional communities to its service area: Barre, Phillipston, and Townsend. MART now serves 25 total communities. In the MRPC region are the 19 communities of Ashburnham, Ashby, Athol, Ayer, Fitchburg, Gardner, Harvard, Hubbardston, Lancaster, Leominster, Lunenburg, Phillipston, Royalston, Shirley, Sterling, Templeton, Townsend, Winchendon, and Westminster. Outside of the Montachusett region, MART serves the 6 communities of Barre, Bolton, Boxborough, Hardwick, Littleton, and Stow.

Figure 4.7-1 MART Jurisdiction



Fixed route bus, paratransit and subscription services are operated by a private management company, currently, Management of Transportation Services, Inc. MART's brokerage

transportation is operated by a variety of private vendors throughout Massachusetts. The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) is responsible for commuter rail services from Fitchburg to Boston. MART has also worked with communities to develop micro transit services to support expanded business opportunities and a growing number of regional attractions in its service area. Over the past three years, MART has endeavored to accomplish many of the goals that were set established in the 2020 RTP, albeit within the numerous and unprecedented challenges presented by the pandemic, some of which are still presenting limitations on the ability to provide expanded services, primarily workforce expansion and funding limitations.

Pre-Pandemic Transit

A. Fixed Route System

1. Fitchburg/Leominster and Gardner

Local fixed route bus services operate along set routes and follows a set schedule Monday through Saturday. Twelve (12) routes are available in Fitchburg, Leominster and Gardner. There is also a supplemental route to Lunenburg in the afternoon. Buses also run more frequently (15 minutes) to and from Fitchburg State University during the campus school year on weekdays. Bus services are not offered on Sundays and holidays. Regional frequencies vary depending on the route.

Table 4.7-1: Fixed Routes Yearly Ridership

Fixed Routes	2015	2016	2017	2018	Percent Change 2015 to 2018
Leominster/Fitchburg	605,952	591,374	496,005	470,744	-22.31%
Gardner	57,193	58,852	47,548	45,848	-19.84%

Source: Montachusett Regional Transit Authority – 2020 RTP

MART’s fixed-route bus ridership decreased over the 4-year period from FY 2015 to FY 2018. The biggest single decline was from 2016 to 2017 with at 16% drop in Leominster/Fitchburg ridership and a 19% drop in Gardner ridership. Ridership data from 2018 indicates the decline

leveled off between FY 2017 and FY 2018, with a 5.09% drop in Leominster/Fitchburg ridership and a 3.58% drop in Gardner ridership.

2. Regional Services

In 2019, MART had a number of regional fixed route bus and shuttle services that spanned a wide geographic area. Most of the services were new and did not cover the 4 years of the 2020 RTP. The Link Bus service is available along Route 2/2A between Greenfield and Gardner, stopping in Gardner, Templeton, Phillipston, and Athol. The Athol Link connected to Route 32 and was operated by the Franklin Regional Transit Authority (FRTA). MART also operated the Winchendon Link which traveled along state Routes 68 & 202 from Gardner through Baldwinville (a section of Templeton) to Winchendon Center.

Table 4.7-2: Link Yearly Ridership

Link Route	2015	2016	2017	2018	Percent Change 2015 to 2018
Athol Link	31,238	19,559	13,883	10,694	**
Athol-Orange Shuttle	N/A	10,318	18,124	22,043	**
Winchendon Link	5,760	6,022	5,388	5,158	-10.45%

Source: Montachusett Regional Transit Authority – 2020 RTP

The drop in ridership on the Athol/Orange link between 2015 and 2016 was due to a change in services. In FY16 the Athol-Orange Fixed Route Shuttle was initiated, i.e. November 2015. This service replaced an old Dial-A-Ride service and instituted a local fixed route service between Athol and Orange. Therefore, the ridership was not actually lost, but just diverted to a different route. Combining Athol Link ridership with the Athol-Orange Shuttle ridership shows an increase of almost 5%. The Winchendon Link continued to ups and downs; peaking in FY16 at 6,022 riders and bottoming out at 5,158 in FY18.

The Intercity Bus Route travels within Gardner, through Westminster, then to Fitchburg and Leominster. This route runs from Labor Day up to Memorial Day.

Table 4.7-3: Intercity Yearly Ridership

Intercity Routes	2015	2016	2017	2018	Percent Change 2015 to 2018
Intercity Bus	18,409	16,690	10,383*	7,608	-58.67% [!]
Wachusett Shuttle	N/A	N/A	2,284	4,284	**

Source: Montachusett Regional Transit Authority – 2020 RTP

* This figure includes the Commuter Bus runs through May, and excludes the riders diverted to the new Wachusett Shuttle.

[!] 58% decrease includes the Wachusett Shuttle riders.

The Wachusett Shuttle began service on September 30, 2016 (FY 2017) and had an 87.57% increase in ridership due to the opening of Wachusett Station. This route diverted some of the riders from the Intercity Bus who rode to access the downtown Fitchburg Commuter Rail Station. This shuttle has a shorter route with more runs with direct access between Gardner City Hall and Wachusett Station.

In FY2017 MART, through a public-private partnership with the Devens Enterprise Commission, launched a new regional shuttle to provide the commuters from Fitchburg and Leominster with access to jobs in Devens, and with stops in the local communities of Shirley and Ayer (the Commuter Rail Stations) in order to provide the last mile connection. This service began slowly but was able to achieve a measurable ridership in only ten weeks. It continued to grow into 2018 with a peak ridership of 508 in the month of March 2018.

In June 2018, in collaboration with the towns of Littleton and Westford, MART launched the Littleton-Westford Commuter Rail Shuttle, which provided last mile access from the Littleton/495 MBTA Commuter Rail Station to the many business and technology companies along Route 110 in Littleton and Westford. The first month of ridership had 250 riders for only 4 hours of service a day, Monday through Friday.

Table 4.7-4: Other Regional Shuttle Yearly Ridership

Intercity Routes	2015	2016	2017	2018	Percent Change 2015 to 2018
Devens Regional	--	--	416*	4,701	**
Littleton-Westford Commuter	--	--	--	250 [†]	**

Source: Montachusett Regional Transit Authority – 2020 RTP

* Started as a pilot in late April 2017. Launched at full-time route in October 2017.

[†] Launched on June 4, 2018. Only 1 month of ridership.

At the time of the 2020 RTP, ridership on fixed routes (excluding the Wachusett Shuttle) continued to decrease. The change from FY2017 to FY2018 seemed to show the decrease was slowing, from an overall decrease of -21.96% between FY2016 and FY2017 to -12.04% between FY2017 and FY2018.

B. Paratransit

MART's complementary paratransit service in 2019 included origin to destination transportation for citizens with disabilities who were eligible under the criteria of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). In other communities in the region, twenty-one (21) member Councils on Aging (COA) provided service for seniors and the disabled; Royalston did not have MART affiliated COA transportation available. Prices and times of operation varied per community.

Table 4.7-5: Paratransit Yearly Ridership (not including COA)

Communities	2015	2016	2017	2018	Percent Change 2015-2018
Leominster/Fitchburg	93,655	74,095	68,606	71,565	-23.59%
Gardner	18,707	15,341 [†]	16,367	18,837	0.69%
Athol	51,081	17,760 [‡]	1,485	1,470	**
Dial-A-MART Services*	155,958	158,758	155,627	146,166	-6.28%

Source: Montachusett Regional Transit Authority – 2020 RTP

* Includes traditional Dial-A-MART for social service agencies such as GVNA & 7 Hills, as well as HST services such as MassHealth rides and routes for DDS. DDS routes account for 65% of the rides.

[†] Westminster ADA new service added.

[‡] Athol services changed from full scale Dial-A-Ride to breakout into Athol ADA, Athol COA & Athol Fixed Route shuttle beginning in November 2015. This number reflects 4 months of full Dial-A-Ride and 8 months of Athol ADA only. About 40% of the ridership was diverted to the fixed route shuttle in the first year. FY17 reflects a full year of Athol ADA Only. Athol COA

ridership is about 10% of the original Dial-A-Ride (~5100 rides per year). The percentage change from FY 2017 to FY 2018 is a decrease of 1.01%.

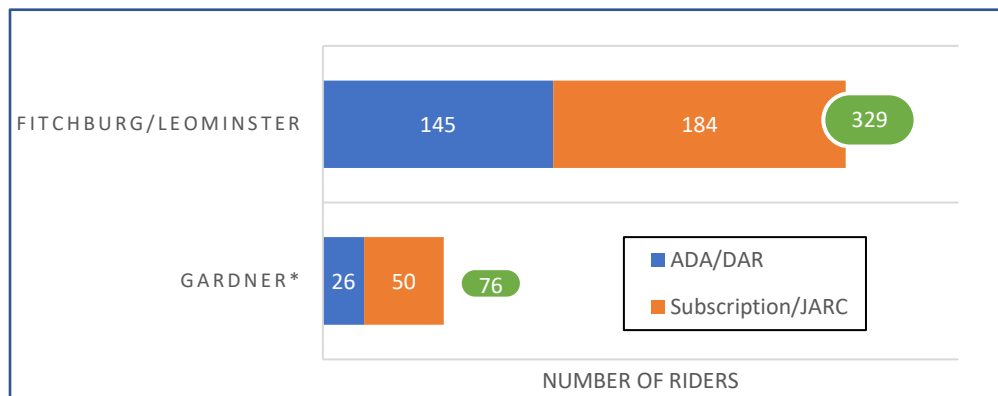
Table 4.7-6 COA Yearly Ridership

Communities	2015	2016	2017	2018	Percent Change 2015-2018
All COA Service	116,756	117,084	111,100	107,830	-7.65%

Source: Montachusett Regional Transit Authority – 2020 RTP

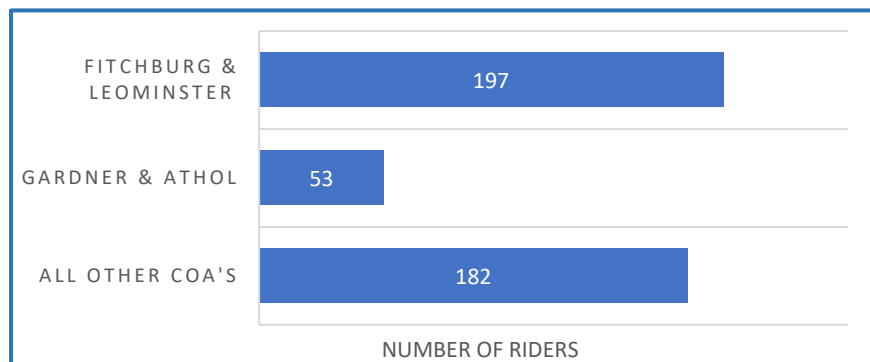
During 2015, paratransit and COA ridership peaked, but then they experienced a gradual decline. The following charts (Figures 4-56 and 4-57) highlight the average daily paratransit (not including contracted social service agency rides) and COA ridership across different services and communities at the time of the 2020 RTP.

Figure 4.7-2: Paratransit Average Daily Ridership (2018)



Source: Montachusett Regional Transit Authority – 2020 RTP

Figure 4.7-3: Council on Aging Average Daily Ridership (2018)



Source: Montachusett Regional Transit Authority – 2020 RTP

C. Dial-A-MART

Dial-A-MART service is transportation that serves the needs of either human service agencies or targeted populations (elderly, individuals with disabilities, and/or low-income individuals) through eligible agency sponsored trips. Service is provided on a negotiated cost basis with the agencies. MART utilizes the Dial-A-Mart Services to allow its operating company to act as a private vendor to the Brokerage Services Division of MART. This allows for cost savings to the brokerage program and increased revenue to support paratransit operations.

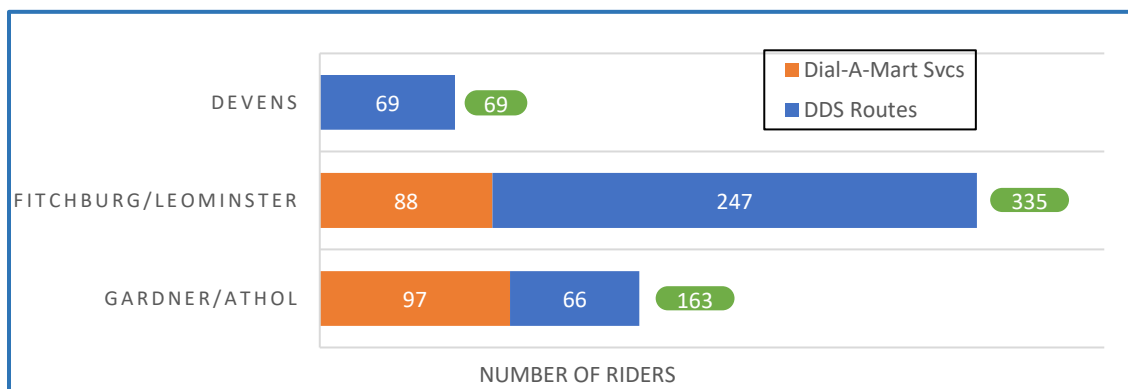
Figure 4.7-4 highlights average daily ridership figures for the Dial-A-Mart services and the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) routes brokered by MART from 2015 to 2018. Overall, the average daily ridership decreased by approximately 2%. However, ridership fluctuated each year, as can be seen in Table 4.7-7.

Table 4.7-7: Dial-A-MART Yearly Ridership

Communities	2015	2016	2017	2018	Percent Change 2015 to 2018
Dial-A-MART Services*	155,958	158,758	155,627	146,166	-6.28%

Source: Montachusett Regional Transit Authority – 2020 RTP

Figure 4.7-4: Average Daily Ridership for Sponsored Paratransit Services (2018)



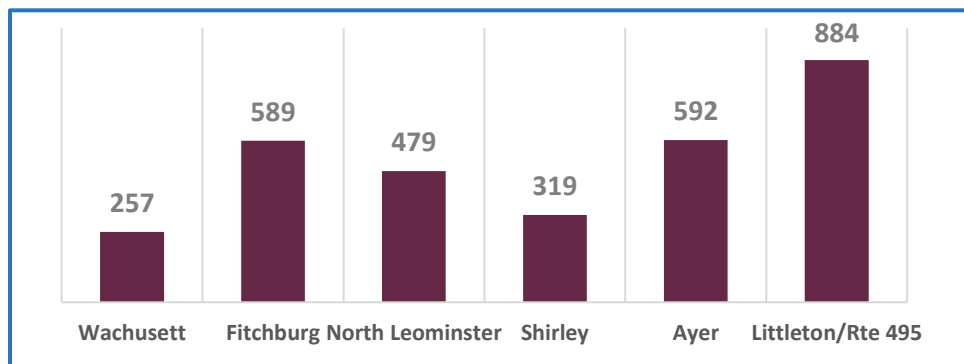
Source: Montachusett Regional Transit Authority

D. Commuter Rail Stations

Commuter rail service is managed by the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA). In September 2016, MBTA extended service 4.5 miles of the Fitchburg Line with the opening of the Wachusett Station in Fitchburg. MART provided a transit shuttle from Gardner to Wachusett Station. The Fitchburg Line thus operates from Wachusett to Boston, with stops in Fitchburg, Leominster, Shirley, Ayer and Littleton within the MART service area. In 2019, the MBTA audit reported that of the various north-side commuter rail lines, the Fitchburg line had experienced the largest real increase and percentage increase for riders. Since 2012, two inbound trains and two outbound trains were added to increase service on this line.

At that time, daily ridership for the commuter line, shown in Figure 4.7-5, had a large number of riders boarding and alighting at the Littleton stop. The Littleton stop parking facilities added parking for an additional 50 vehicles at the time of the 2020 RTP. It still remained at capacity daily, with some drivers often parking illegally.

Figure 4.7-5: Commuter Rail Average Daily Ridership



Source: Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority and Central Transportation Planning Staff - 2020 RTP

Table 4.7-8: Commuter Rail Lot Parking Spaces – Current (2023)

Community	Commuter Rail Station	Current No. of Parking Spaces		Percent usage	Planned Parking Spaces	Estimated Year of Completion
			In use*			
Fitchburg	Wachusett Station	360	127	35.28%	360	Completed
	Main Street	425	311	73.18%	425	Completed
Leominster	North Leominster	360	133	36.94%	360	Completed
Shirley	Front Street	65	120	184.6%	65	N/A
Ayer	Main Street/Park Street	65	65	100%	200	Completed
Littleton	Foster Street	250	255	102%	250	Completed
Total		1,530			1,665	

Source: Montachusett Regional Transit Authority – 2020 RTP
 Parking lot usage was counted on Thursday July 11, 2019 by the MRPC.

Table 4.7-9 displays the percentage changes in ridership from 2012 to 2018. Due to Wachusett station's introduction in 2016, data to calculate a percentage change for boarding/alighting at Wachusett Station, as well as some percentages for the Fitchburg stop was not available. Most notable is the inbound change for the Littleton stop which saw an increase of 135.6% boarding and a 700% increase in alighting. Other notable changes included a 50% increase of outbound boarders at the North Leominster stop, a 38% decrease in the same measure at the Shirley stop, and in 71.6% increase in outbound alighting at the Littleton station.

The changes in daily ridership are shown in Figure 4-7.6. At the time, the trend seemed to indicate that ridership was holding steady, with a large increase at the Littleton station.

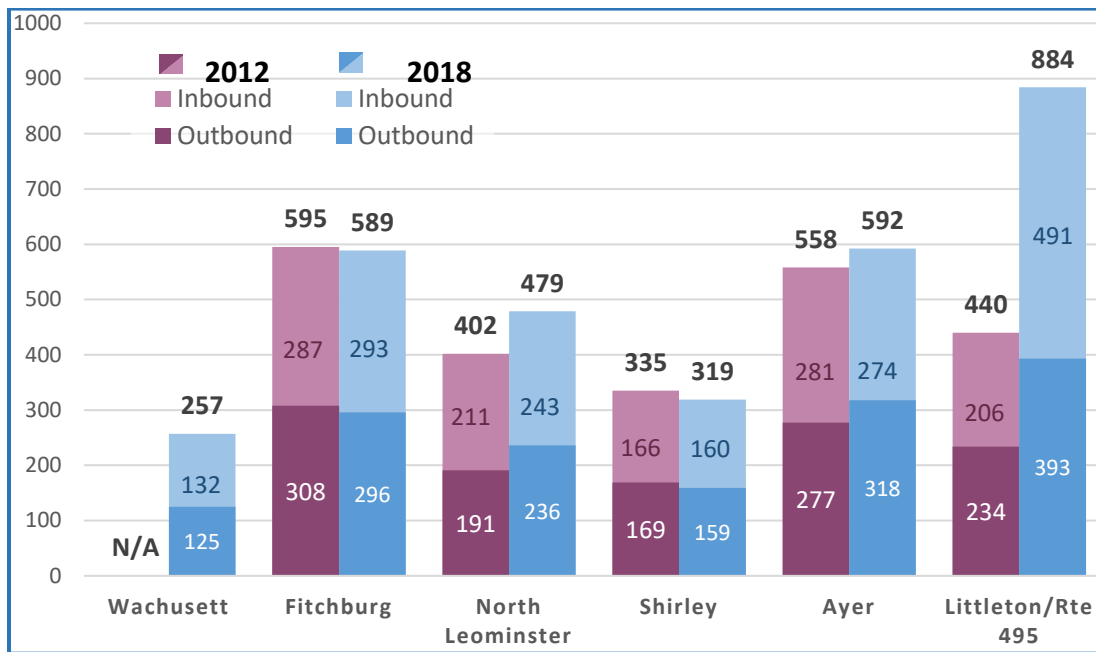
Table 4.7-9: Percentage Change in Commuter Ridership from 2012 to 2018

	Inbound		Outbound	
	Boarding	Alighting	Boarding	Alighting
Wachusett	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Fitchburg	n/a	n/a	n/a	-3.9%
North Leominster	11.8%	n/a*	50%	23.3%
Shirley	-4.5%	8.3%	-38%	-3.2%
Ayer	-2.0%	-6.3%	-9%	18.2%
Littleton/Rte 495	135.6%	700.0%	-22%	71.6%

Source: Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority and Central Transportation Planning Staff – 2020 RTP

*Data collected by the MBTA and the CTPS did not record any alighting at the North Leominster stop during their study in 2012, and therefore a percent change cannot be calculated.

Figure 4.7-6: Commuter Rail Daily Ridership, 2012 vs 2018



Source: Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority and Central Transportation Planning Staff – 2020 RTP

Pandemic and Post Pandemic Transit

A. Fixed Route System

1. Fitchburg/Leominster and Gardner

In 2019, the trend of decreased ridership along the fixed route system in Fitchburg, Leominster and Gardner continues as documented in the last RTP. Beginning in 2020 with the onset of the COVID pandemic and all of its associated restrictions on the public and transit agencies, the decrease in ridership (and its associated revenues) took a major decline. From 2020 to 2022, ridership fell in Fitchburg/Leominster and Gardner, 56.6 % and 28.14%, respectively. In Fitchburg/Leominster, this represented a more than 50% decrease in total ridership per year.

Table 4.7-10: Fixed Routes Yearly Ridership

Fixed Routes	2019	2020	2021	2022	Avg Ridership Per FY 2015 to 2019 Pre-Pandemic Years Yearly Ridership	Avg Ridership Per FY 2020 to 2022 Peak Pandemic Years Yearly Ridership	2023 (7 Months)
Leominster/Fitchburg	436,204	346,478	181,837	221,250	520,056	249,855	144,497
<i>Avg Ridership Per Month</i>	<i>36,350</i>	<i>28,873</i>	<i>15,153</i>	<i>18,438</i>	<i>43,338</i>	<i>20,821</i>	<i>20,642</i>
Gardner	48,642	48,030	31,046	37,481	51,617	38,852	28,788
<i>Avg Ridership Per Month</i>	<i>4,054</i>	<i>4,003</i>	<i>2,587</i>	<i>3,123</i>	<i>4,301</i>	<i>3,238</i>	<i>4,113</i>

Source: Montachusett Regional Transit Authority

Table 4.7-11: Fixed Routes Yearly Ridership

Fixed Routes	Percent Change Non-Pandemic Years (2015-2019)	Percent Change Pandemic Years (2020-2022)	Percent Change 2015 to 2022
Leominster/Fitchburg	-38.91%	-56.60%	-173.88%
Gardner	-17.58%	-28.14%	-52.59%

Source: Montachusett Regional Transit Authority

In the first seven months of 2023, ridership figures are showing an improved situation for both the Fitchburg/Leominster and Gardner systems. Average monthly ridership is currently equaling or exceeding monthly figures from the pandemic years of 2020 to 2022. This trend will hopefully continue as we move further away from the pandemic crisis.

2. Regional Services

Ridership on the Link System also saw ridership decreases during the peak pandemic years of 2020 to 2022. Although in most instances a ridership decline was already underway from 2018 to 2019, once the crisis hit, the decline doubled from the 2018 to 2019 levels. The Winchendon Link system alone saw a 41.39% decline cutting ridership almost in half from 2019 levels.

Table 4.7-12: Link Yearly Ridership

Link Route	2019	2020	2021	2022	Percent Change 2018 to 2019	Percent Change 2020 to 2022
Athol Link	10,011	11,890	10,681	10,565	-6.82%	-12.54%
Athol-Orange Shuttle	22,758	21,306	17,756	20,585	3.14%	-3.50%
Winchendon Link	4,285	3,539	2,122	2,503	-20.37%	-41.39%

Source: Montachusett Regional Transit Authority

The Intercity Bus ridership drop while on a decline heading into 2019, once the pandemic appeared, ridership dropped over 90% from 2019 to 2020. Overall, ridership dropped an incredible 804.90% during peak pandemic years.

The Wachusett Shuttle that provided access to Wachusett Station and the Fitchburg Commuter Rail Line saw ridership decrease 52.77% as commuters altered their regular work routine from travel east into the Boston Metro area to a work from home stance.

Table 4-.7-13: Intercity Yearly Ridership

Intercity Routes	2019	2020	2021	2022	Percent Change 2019 to 2020	Percent Change 2020 to 2022
Intercity Bus	5,839	4,244	266	469	-37.58%	-804.90%
Wachusett Shuttle	3,360	3,946	1,618	2,583	14.85%	-52.77%

Source: Montachusett Regional Transit Authority

The trend of double-digit percentage drops in ridership continues when looking at the shuttle services implemented by MART. The Devens Regional shuttle lost over half of its yearly ridership from 2019 to 2022. The Littleton-Westford Commuter shuttle while stable from 2019 to 2020, by 2021 the service was discontinued altogether. Resumption has not been planned as of this RTP.

Table 4.7-14: Other Regional Shuttle Yearly Ridership

Intercity Routes	2019	2020	2021	2022	Percent Change 2019 to 2020	Percent Change 2020 to 2022
Devens Regional	3,989	2,239	1,533	1,468	-78.16%	-52.52%
Littleton-Westford Commuter	2,452	2,420	0	0	-1.32%	N/A

Source: Montachusett Regional Transit Authority

B. Paratransit

The use of paratransit services also saw changes based on COVID restrictions put in place. Ridership was decreasing from 2018 to 2019, those decreases accelerated from 2020 to 2022. However, with the exception of Athol, paratransit ridership has grown from the peak pandemic year of 2021 to 2022. Paratransit service lends itself to a more health secure option that can be attractive to users, especially the more COVID vulnerable individuals.

Table 4.7-15: Paratransit Yearly Ridership (not including COA)

Communities	2019	2020	2021	2022	Percent Change 2019 to 2020	Percent Change 2020 to 2022
Leominster/Fitchburg	70,991	53,832	48,169	71,722	-31.88%	24.94%
Gardner	25,398	21,431	15,532	18,614	-18.51%	-15.13%
Athol	1,314	1,154	558	291	-13.86%	-296.56%
Dial-A-MART Services	138,093	92,308	24,353	63,261	-49.60%	-45.92%

Source: Montachusett Regional Transit Authority

C. Dial-A-MART

Dial-A-MART services while remaining relatively consistent were showing a slight yearly decline heading into 2019. Ridership then dropped severely beginning in 2020 until it hit a low in 2021 approximately 80% below 2019 levels. However, in 2022, ridership levels were beginning to recover from the COVID lows as it grew over 61% from 2021.

Table 4.7-16: Dial-A-MART Yearly Ridership

Communities	2019	2020	2021	2022	Percent Change 2019 to 2020	Percent Change 2020 to 2022
Dial-A-MART Services	138,093	92,308	24,353	63,261	-49.60%	-45.92%

Source: Montachusett Regional Transit Authority

D. Commuter Rail Stations**Table 4.7-17: Commuter Rail Lot Parking Spaces – Current and Future Potential**

Community	Commuter Rail Station	Current No. of Parking Spaces	In use*	Percent usage	Potential/Planned Parking Spaces	Estimated Year of Completion
Fitchburg	Wachusett Station	360	127	35.28%	360	Completed
	Main Street	425	311	73.18%	425	Completed
Leominster	North Leominster	360	133	36.94%	360	Completed
Shirley	Front Street	65	120	184.60%	65	N/A
Ayer	Main Street/Park Street	65	65	100%	200	Completed
Littleton	Foster Street	250	255	102%	250	Completed
Total		1,530			1,665	

Source: Montachusett Regional Transit Authority

*Parking lot use counted on Thursday July 11, 2019 by MRPC

E. Other Current Transit Capital Improvements

MART has purchased and deployed a fleet of minibuses (Arbocs) which were purchased and deployed to significantly reduce:

- Fleet acquisition costs
- Operational costs
- Maintenance costs

The minibuses will be used to:

- Operate fixed routes with ridership that does not warrant a large-frame bus

- Establish feeder routes between unserved and under-served areas of the fixed route communities and the current fixed routes; and
- Develop shuttle routes between rural communities and the fixed route communities for access to fixed route services.

MART has purchased and is utilizing recently acquired GPS-based transit technologies:

- Genfare Fare Collection System
 - Provides Multiple Purchase Options
 - Mobile devices
 - Internet
 - On-vehicle
 - Ticket Vending Machines
 - Provides Internal Data Collection and Trend Analysis
 - Ridership
 - Boarding location
 - Payment methodology
- Passio Go! System
 - Provides passengers w/ estimated arrival time at stops.
 - Provides transit staff w/ operational vehicle tracking.
 - Automated Passenger Counters
 - Provides transit staff w/ On-Time Performance capabilities for analyzing and improving fixed route and paratransit system performance.

F. Other Current Transit Operational Improvements

The Athol Shuttle route and schedule was modified in December 2022, increasing the service area and improving the route timing. Ridership has increased by 6% through June 2023.

The Advisory Board of the Transit Authority recently voted to approve several key fare policy changes:

- Full fares were reduced from \$1.25 to \$1.00

- School age students ride free
- No cost transfers for inter-city regional routes

MART has also recently launched two new micro transit services:

- Sterling, Lancaster, and Lunenburg service (funded by MassDevelopment Taxi/Livery grant)
- Bolton, Boxboro, Littleton and Stow service (funded by MAPC Community Connections grant)

Measures Implemented During Pandemic

In response to the pandemic, MART and other RTAs implemented a number of measures to combat spread and to provide a safe transit experience for riders and employees. Many of these particular measures have remained in place in place as part of the overall transit system.

Table 4.7-18: Pandemic Measures Implemented by MART

Pandemic Measure	Date Implemented	End Date	Results/Action	Continued
Driver Safety Partitions in Rollingstock	3/1/2020	N/A	Allowed Drivers to Continue Work Throughout Pandemic	To Remain in Place
Vehicle Enhancement - Static Disinfectant	3/1/2020	N/A	Extra Cleaning Allowed Drivers and Ridership to be More Comfortable	To Remain in Place
Personnel Segregation – Implemented Alternating Schedules, Work from Home Policy and Separation of Personnel into Different Facilities to Adhere to Distance Guidelines	2/20/2020	5/15/2022	Provided a Safer Work Environment. Policies were Discontinued with Reduction of COVID Threat	Discontinued
Garages Disinfection - Handrails and Elevators	3/1/2020	5/15/2022	Cleaning Allowed for Comfort and Safety of Employees and Ridership	Discontinued
Wearing of Masks and Gloves	3/1/2020	3/15/2023	Lifted when Federal Mandate Discontinued	Discontinued
Rolling Stock Reconfigured to Include Medical MERV Rated Filters	5/1/2020	N/A	Improved Driver and Ridership Conform and Security	To Remain in Place

Improvements Made Since 2019

MART has been striving to accomplish many of the goals that were established in the 2020 RTP. The following have been implemented or are scheduled to be implemented by the time of the next scheduled RTP in 2028.

Table 4.7-19: Improvements Implemented by MART Since 2019

RTA Projects/Programs	FY	Reason	Est Cost
Vehicle Exhaust Detection System (Co/No) for Facilities	2021	Safety Feature at 840 North Main & 1427R Water St. to detect and alarm when fumes reach safety limits	\$90,000
Gardner Bay Flooring	2021	Stripped and recoated failing slab for entire bus-bay	\$428,000
Employee Parking Lot Reconfiguration	2021	Demolished, regraded, and paved new lot	\$246,000
840 North Main St Office Renovation - (Phase 1 & 2)	2021-2023	Completed total conversion of 1st floor space into office space for 46 staff. Modern office setting and prototype for future renovations.	\$900,000
1427R Water Street Facility - Fire Panel	2022	Replaced fire panels past useful life, with a 4100ES system	\$62,00
1427R Water Street Facility - VR Lift	2022	Replaced aging Parallelogram lift with new Vertical Rise lift	\$112,000
Service Contracts - Multiple	2022-2026	Service contracts with trades for preventative maintenance. Part of initiative to better support, maintain and extract value out of existing systems. Cost is per/year.	\$130,000
New Farebox System	2022	Allows RTA to better understand the relationship of ridership vs. revenue	\$1,500,000
New APC - Passenger Counter System)	2022	Increases knowledge through data acquisition to improve transportation needs of the ridership	\$565,000
New Security Camera System	2022	Improves over all safety of employees and ridership	\$200,000
Thermal Compliant Vehicle Data/Functional Devices	2022	Improves data gathering capacity located in vehicles.	\$50,000
Rolling Stock Consortium - Procurement Vans/Cutaways	2022	Group of RTA's that procure smaller rollingstock as a unified group.	Multi million-dollars
LBE Grant Award - EV/Solar Study for Water St. Facility for DOT-FHWA CFI Grant	2023	Award of \$75,000 to conduct concept and preliminary work for DOT-FHWA's CFI Grant with goal of acquiring funding for construction.	\$75,000

Table 4.7-19: Improvements Implemented by MART Since 2019 (cont.)

RTA Projects/Programs	FY	Reason	Est Cost
Ayer - Depot Square Project	2023	Completed Depot Square Project to finalizing MART's commitment to the Town of Ayer.	\$540,000
Athol Depot - Facade Restoration	2023	Completed historical restoration of the Athol Depot. Included masonry, doors, windows, and hardware.	\$580,000

Human Service Transportation Brokerage Improvements

MART responded to a Request for Proposals issued by the Executive Office of Health and Human Services for Human Service Transportation (HST) Brokerage Services in June of 2020 and was subsequently awarded two of the three newly defined regions for brokerage services to commence on July 1, 2021. MART now manages more than eighty-two percent (82%) of the HST brokerage for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

To enhance the management of the brokerage services, MART developed and deployed additional technologies and reporting systems including:

- **Technologies**
 - MassHealth Member Trip Booking Portal
 - Facility Trip Booking Portal
 - Call Center w/ Integrated Voice Response (IVR)
 - Real-time notifications to customers for vehicle arrivals
 - Web portals for Complaint and Service reporting
 - GPS vehicle tracking
 - Vendor Contract Management and Credentialing Portal
 - Integration w/ Lyft
- **Reporting Dashboards**
 - Trip volume reporting (by agency, trip type, region, etc.)
 - Distribution by Company, driver, vehicle type, etc.
 - On-time performance

- Expenditure reporting (by agency, trip type, region, city/town/etc.)
 - Total cost of trips
 - Average cost per trip
- Call Center Metrics
 - Call Volume
 - Answered vs. Abandoned Calls
 - Call Duration
 - Available agents (by hour, region, agency, etc.)
- Complaints
 - Complainant Information
 - Transportation Provider Information
 - Complaints by category
 - Time to resolve and notification to consumer
 - By Agency, region, date, etc.

The significant enhancement to the technologies used to manage the brokerage operations, as well as the enhanced and upgraded dashboard reporting has substantially improved the customer experience and the abilities of MART and the HST office to manage the expanding needs and growth of the HST brokerage.

For FY23, MART provided nearly 5.8 million trips with a budget of \$235 million. The trips continue to increase post-COVID and MART is continuing to increase the pool of transportation providers providing services. The new integration with Lyft will greatly improve the increasingly frequent need to provide same day / next day trips, as well as non-emergent hospital trips and releases.

Trends

As indicated in the review of the ridership figures during the pandemic years of 2020 to 2022, clearly show and illustrate the negative impacts being felt by MART as well as other RTAs across the nation. Ridership and its corresponding revenue figures have placed a major strain and

burden on the transit system from fixed routes to commuter rail. Figures also indicate that trends are beginning to turn around and rebound from the lowest points of the pandemic.

Filling service gaps, meeting service needs, and increasing accessibility to residents continues to be a priority for MART. MART will continue to review its various transit routes and options as well as its facilities and rolling stock.

Transit Challenges

1. MART and its operating companies are still experiencing significant financial and operational impacts resulting from increased costs related to supply chain shortages, as well as a challenging workforce and labor participation environment.
2. Capital projects continue to be negatively impacted, due to significantly higher costs, contractor responsiveness and supply chain product availability.
3. All MART commuter rail garage facilities continue to generate substantially less parking fare revenue than the pre-pandemic period.
4. Although ridership continues to recover, both fixed route and paratransit ridership are still below pre-pandemic levels.

Recommendations

In order to provide increased mobility for Montachusett area residents that do not own automobiles or that choose to be less dependent on a personal vehicle, MART will need to continue to refine and implement public transit programs designed to increase ridership. To accomplish this, it will be necessary to examine the routes and schedules in order to determine the most efficient and effective services. Overcoming the negative effects of the COVID pandemic will be a continued long-range effort for the transit authority. MART remains open to expanding services wherever possible to fill service gaps, meet unmet regional needs and increase accessibility to health facilities and social services.

Where it becomes apparent that certain services are needed, MART should continue to work with those institutions to examine requests, organizational involvement, and ways to help

defray the cost of the additional services. Continued participation of local industries, businesses, major shopping centers and schools in developing appropriate schedules, routes and promotional programs is an important part of this ongoing planning and implementation of services.

Special service provided to the elderly and the disabled will need to be closely monitored to insure continuation of appropriate levels of service. The continuation of brokerage programs with the Department of Public Health, Department of Developmental Services, MassHealth, Department of Mental Health, MRC, and MCB is of major importance and should remain a focal issue.

In addition to increased and improved routing and scheduling, it will be necessary for MART to maintain and improve the operating condition of its vehicle fleet. The present vehicle fleet is constantly being replaced with new lift equipped ADA compliant equipment. The Montachusett TIP process should continue to be utilized to upgrade and replace buses and vans for the MART fleet, as well as continue to upgrade maintenance facilities. Opportunities in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) provide an opportunity to replace existing vehicles with electric, net zero and energy efficient vehicles. Additionally, the supporting infrastructure needed to supply these new technologies should also remain a major goal for MART.

It is recommended that MART collaborate with municipalities to lift the age requirement on the Council on Aging public transportation vehicles in order to provide service to a larger portion of the community. The Council on Aging van services could be expanded to operate on weekends and nights so that those who utilize the service have more scheduling opportunities.

It is recommended that MART continue to increase its social media presence to better promote services and information to the community. MART should continue to collaborate with local municipalities to promote available public transit options on the municipalities' websites and social media pages. It is also recommended that MART continue to disseminate information through traditional media like local newspapers, local access television, and radio while still improving its social media presence. Within the last RTP, it was recommended that MART hold

periodic training sessions in order to teach users on how to read and follow bus schedules. The pandemic obviously derailed this initiative. Training videos were developed and placed on the web as part of their outreach efforts. However, in person outreach meetings should return as an effort for the Transit Authority.

Most of the above actions are designed to improve efficiency and lower overall demand on the highway system. There remain several key and identifiable avenues by which the MART system can be both properly maintained and improved. They are:

Table 4.7-20: Recommended Programs/Projects

RTA Projects Recommendations	Expected FY	Reason for Recommendation	Est Cost
Ridership Demographics Study	2023-2026	A large project involving MART and its Operating company to understand where the ridership is, where they want to go etc. in order to maximize mobility.	N/A
ITC Roof, Concourse & Stair Tower, Main Street - Fitchburg	2023-2024	3 Projects to modernize and rehabilitate the aging Intermodal Transportation Center (ITC)	\$1,250,000
Rebranding Campaign	2023-2025	Standardization of agency image (Logo/Colors) across its portfolio of buildings and fleet vehicles	\$400,000
Elevator Modernization	2023-2024	Upgrade original elevator components following an assessment. Project will have two phases and cover all 7 elevators/lifts across MART the portfolio.	\$500,000
Hydrogen Fueling Station - FTA's Lo-No & Bus-Bus Facility Grant Submission	2024-2025	Infrastructure for Hydrogen Fueling station to make-ready the Water St. Facility for Hydrogen Fuel Cell (HFC) Zero Emission fleet vehicles	\$5,000,000
ITC Parking Garage - Structural Repairs, Main Street - Fitchburg	2024-2025	Address original design flaws to ensure structural integrity and safety and to prolong the facility's life expectancy.	\$950,000
Fuel Station Upgrades - Systemwide	2024-2025	Final fuel station upgrades so that the system will last through the final rollover of the combustion fleet vehicles as the fossil fuels are phased out for ZEV (Hydrogen & EV).	\$235,000
North Main St. Parking Expansion - Leominster	2025	Additional parking at the new 840 North Main St. Facility in Leominster	\$480,000

Table 4.7-20: Recommended Programs/Projects (cont.)

RTA Projects Recommendations	Expected FY	Reason for Recommendation	Est Cost
HVAC Replacement 1427R Water Street - Fitchburg	2025	Replace underperforming HVAC system at Administrative offices.	\$400,000
EV Vehicle Charing Infrastructure - DOT-FHWA CFI Grant Submission	2025-2026	Infrastructure upgrades for Electric Vehicle Charging Stations, Solar Canopy, Battery Backup, and Utility hookup in order to make-ready the Water St. Facility for Electric Vehicle (EV) Zero Emission fleet vehicles	\$8,000,000
ITC Atrium, Main Street - Fitchburg	2026+	Repurpose for public/governmental use the underutilized North Pod Atrium at the Intermodal Transportation Center	\$680,000
ITC 2nd Floor 100 & 150 Main Street - Fitchburg	2026+	Refurbish existing open office space, improve layout, floor plan, and space use at the Intermodal Transportation Center.	\$900,000
ITC New Garage Lighting & Protection Main Street - Fitchburg	2026+	New garage lighting with anti-bird features at the Intermodal Transportation Center	\$200,000
ITC Asphalt Sealing & Restriping, Main Street - Fitchburg	2026+	Topcoat/resealing and striping of asphalt + concrete sealant at the Intermodal Transportation Center	\$320,000
Wachusett Station, Fitchburg Commuter Rail Asphalt Resealing + Concrete Sealing & Striping	2026+	Topcoat/resealing and striping asphalt + concrete sealant at the Wachusett Rail Station	\$380,000
NL Asphalt + Concrete Sealing & Restriping	2026+	Topcoat/resealing and striping asphalt + concrete sealant	\$280,000
Mechanic/Bay Side Update with New Equipment -Gardner Facility	2026+	Update Mechanic Space, Floors, Painting, Wash Bay Epoxy, plus 2 new Post Lifts	\$1,100,000
840 North Main St. Facility 2nd Floor Office Renovation - Leominster	2026+	2nd Floor Office Build Out and Refurbishment of Space for Better Utilization; to include Rehab of Bathrooms. An Assessment to determine a better layout to be conducted. Existing layout from a prior car dealership.	\$900,000

Table 4.7-20: Recommended Programs/Projects (cont.)

RTA Projects Recommendations	Expected FY	Reason for Recommendation	Est Cost
ITC Generator Replacement, Main Street - Fitchburg	2026+	Replace generator that supports 150 Main Street facility. Old generator installed in 2005 at the Intermodal Transportation Center.	\$120,000
840 North Main St. Facility Generator Replacement - Leominster	2026+	Replace generator that supports 150 Main Street facility. Old generator installed in 2005.	\$120,000

Other Future Transit Improvements Planned

The following transit improvements are currently in process or will be getting underway during FY24:

- The Gardner fixed routes are being assessed for:
 - Service area improvements
 - Improvements to the route schedules for commuter and local businesses
- Assessing and analyzing Fitchburg / Leominster fixed routes to enhance routing and schedules.
- Purchasing a facility within Devens to establish a satellite operations center to improve the ability to develop fixed route services to Devens, as well as to provide services in the eastern portion of our service area.
- Launching transit dashboards for improved access to information