

## **Wachusett Corridor Smart Growth Plan Economic Development Element**

### **I. Background**

The Wachusett Commuter Rail Extension Project involves the construction of a new Wachusett Station in Fitchburg, a new Westminster Layover Facility, and upgrades to the existing Fitchburg Commuter Rail Line, a branch of the commuter rail network serving Eastern and Central Massachusetts operated by the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA). The new station will be located in West Fitchburg in close proximity to Route 2 at Route 31 in the existing 231 Industrial Park. The layover facility in Westminster will be located in the existing Westminster Business Park near Route 2A.

The project is expected to:

- Improve mass transit options to communities west of Fitchburg;
- Improve the region's economy by reducing commute time from the Montachusett Region to the Boston area job market;
- Increase the supply of commuter rail parking for travelers in the western part of the region; and,
- Improve the operation and capacity of the Fitchburg Line train Layover Facility.

In addition, by improving overall access to region, the project provides a potential catalyst to enhance development opportunities in the vicinity of the station area and improve the regional housing market.

The design of the project has been completed and construction of the station and layover facility began in late 2012. Construction is expected to be completed by the end of 2014. Commuter rail service to the new station is expected to begin in fall, 2015.

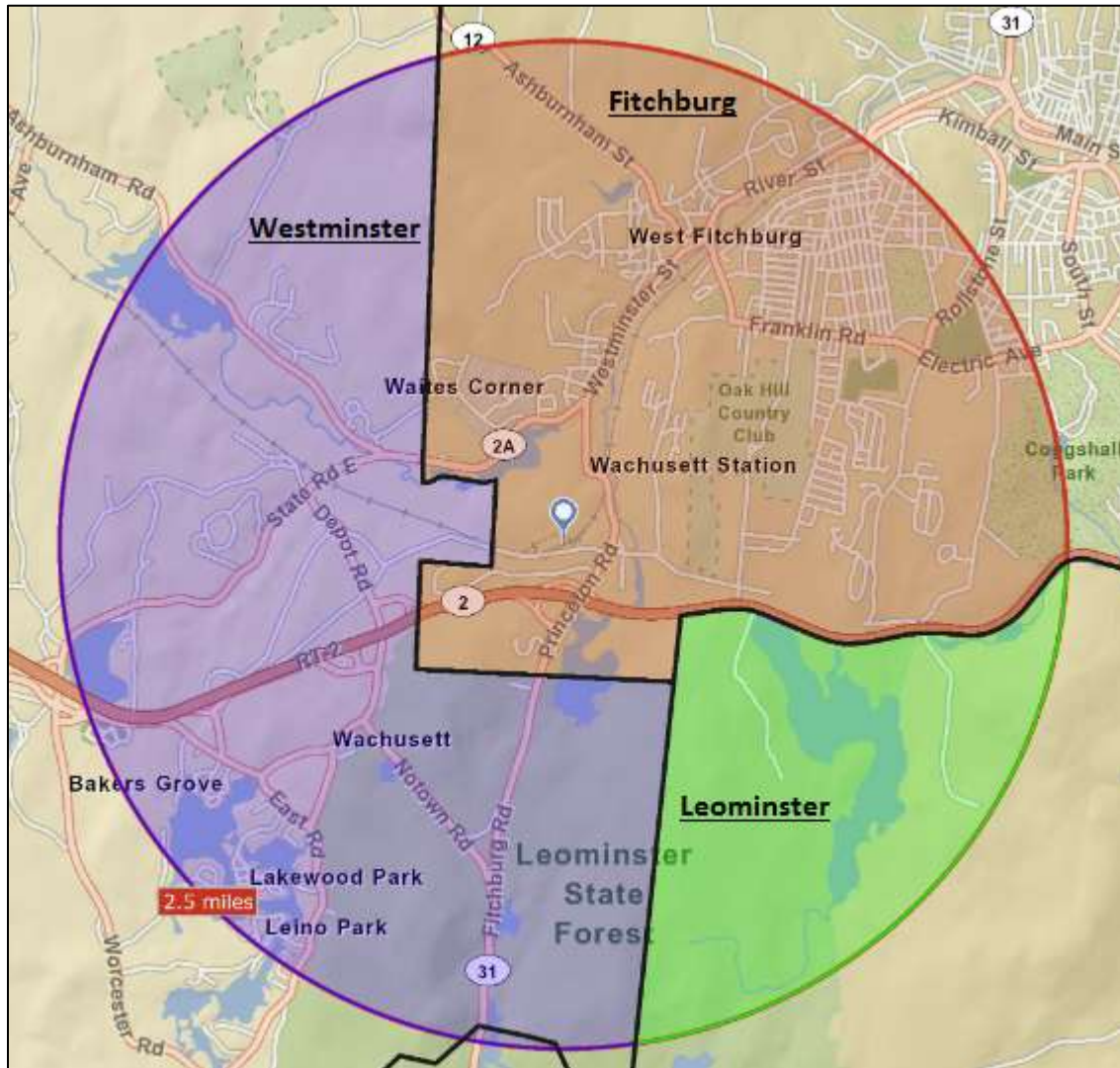
To assess the impacts of the Wachusett Commuter Rail Extension for the Smart Growth Plan, a study area corridor was defined as a circle with a 2.5 mile radius with the new Wachusett Station as the center. This study area also encompasses the Westminster Layover Facility. This distance was chosen because it is an easily bikeable distance from the station. The study area covers approximately 12,566 acres or 19.6 square miles. As shown in Figure 1, the study area covers portions of three communities, including the southwestern corner of Fitchburg, the northwestern corner of Leominster, and a portion of east central Westminster. Note that a very small portion of the study area, approximately 17 acres, is also in Princeton.

For the purpose of this economic development analysis, the focus is on project impacts within the defined Wachusett Corridor study area. However, as will be noted in the text, some data used in the analysis is not available at the study area level. In those cases, data may be reported at the community level.

## II. Assessment of the Wachusett Corridor's Current Economic Base

### Population and Households

Tables 1 and 2 show the population and households in the study as distributed among the three communities of Fitchburg, Leominster, and Westminster and for the study area communities as a whole.



**Figure 1: Wachusett Smart Growth Corridor Study Area**

As shown in the table below, approximately 85 percent of the study area's population is located in Fitchburg. Westminster accounts for slightly more than 13 percent of the study area's population. As discussed elsewhere in this Plan, although Leominster accounts for approximately 15 percent of the study area's land area, its portion of the study area is largely within the Leominster State Forest and therefore has limited development, accounting for less than one percent of the study area's population and households.

**Table 1: Study Area and Study Area Community Population**

	Wachusett Corridor				Entire Community		
Population	Full Study Area	Fitchburg	Leominster	Westminster	Fitchburg	Leominster	Westminster
2000	13,216	11,216	18	1,982	39,098	41,297	6,907
2010	14,234	12,104	19	2,111	40,318	40,759	7,277
% Growth 2000 to 2010	7.7%	7.9%	5.6%	6.5%	3.1%	-1.3%	5.4%

Source: U.S. Census

As shown in Table 1, population in the study area increased by nearly 8 percent from 2000 to 2010. Each community within the study area also grew. In each case, growth within the study area for each community sector exceeded the rate of growth for the larger community of which it is a part.

Change in the number of households within the study area, shown in Table 2, shows a similar pattern to population, with a growth in study area households of slightly over 11 percent from 2000 to 2010. It should be noted that the rate of household growth exceeded population growth because, concurrent with the change in population, was a trend toward smaller household size, from 2.6 in 1990 to 2.5 in 2010.

**Table 2: Study Area Households**

	Wachusett Corridor				Entire Community		
Households	Full Study Area	Fitchburg	Leominster	Westminster	Fitchburg	Leominster	Westminster
2000	5,011	4,270	9	732	14,942	16,489	2,529
2010	5,587	4,787	10	790	15,165	16,767	2,716
% Growth 2000 to 2010	11.5%	12.1%	11.1%	7.9%	1.5%	1.7%	7.4%

Source: U.S. Census

## Education

As shown in Table 3, residents of the study area with a high school diploma or General Educational Development (GED) diploma represent the largest segment of the study area population in terms of educational attainment. Approximately 21 percent of the study area population has some college and 12 percent has an Associate's Degree. The proportion of the study area with a Bachelor's Degree or higher (including Professional School degrees) is 23.4 percent. Within the individual communities in the study area, 21.1 percent of the Fitchburg population has a Bachelor's Degree or higher, while 49.7

percent of Leominster's population and 29.0 percent of Westminster's population have Bachelor's Degrees or higher.

**Table 3: Study Area Educational Attainment**

Educational Attainment 25+	Study Area		Fitchburg	Leominster	Westminster
	#	%	%	%	%
No Schooling	105	1.0%	1.1%	0.0%	0.7%
Some School	1176	11.2%	12.0%	3.7%	9.1%
GED or Equiv.	3338	31.9%	33.4%	18.4%	27.5%
Some College	2169	20.7%	21.0%	16.8%	20.2%
Associate's Degree	1223	11.7%	11.4%	11.4%	13.5%
Bachelor's Degree	1632	15.6%	14.2%	32.4%	19.2%
Master's Degree	655	6.3%	5.5%	13.8%	8.6%
Professional School Degree	96	0.9%	0.9%	1.6%	0.6%
Doctorate	63	0.6%	0.5%	1.9%	0.6%

Source: 2005-2009 American Community Survey; ESRI-BAO

To support job development within the study area and the region as a whole, it will be important to assure that the available workforce has the necessary technical skills to meet the needs of area employers. The Montachusett Regional Vocational School ("Monty Tech") located in Fitchburg and also within the study area offers trade school curriculum at the high school level. Mount Wachusett Community College (MWCC) located in Gardner (to the west of the study area) offers two-year degree programs and Fitchburg State University (FSU) offers four-year degree programs. In addition, the North Central Massachusetts Workforce Investment Board, Inc. promotes the economic and social welfare of the region through education, employment and training programs that increase the employability of young people and adults. Further investigation into the technical skills needed by existing and prospective employers should be conducted as part of the overall economic development effort undertaken in conjunction with the Wachusett Smart Growth Plan.

### **Median Household Income and Household Poverty**

Median household income in the study area is \$62,480. As shown in Table 4, this is higher than the median household income of the Cities of Fitchburg and Leominster, but less than the Town of Westminster. It is also less than the statewide median household income of \$64,496. Median household incomes for residents of the study area in all three communities are higher than the overall

community in which they reside. The median household income of the study area residents who live in Fitchburg is the lowest of the three communities at \$58,635.

**Table 4: Study Area Median Income**

Study Area	Fitchburg Sector	Leominster Sector	Westminster Sector
\$62,480	\$58,635	\$106,277	\$81,983
Worcester County	Fitchburg City	Leominster City	Westminster Town
\$63,720	\$47,369	\$56,582	\$74,931

Source: 2005-2009 American Community Survey; ESRI-BAO

There were 559 households in the study area that had income below the poverty level in the past 12 months or 9.8 percent of study area households. This is slightly below the rate experienced by Worcester County during the same period (9.9%). Of these households, 11.0 percent of the study area households in Fitchburg, 5.0 percent of the households in Leominster, and 3.2 percent of the households in Westminster had income below poverty level in 2010.

### III. Profile of Employment and Employers

#### Employment and Unemployment

Recent employment and unemployment statistics are not reported at a level that would enable an assessment at the study area level. Only community level statistics or greater are reported by the Massachusetts Labor and Workforce Development office. Table 5 presents employment and unemployment statistics for study area communities as of August 2013.

**Table 5: Employment and Unemployment (August 2013)**

	Fitchburg City		Leominster City		Westminster Town		Worcester County		Mass. State	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
<b>Total Labor Force</b>	18,264	44.5%	20,078	47.7%	3,714	49.7%	403,486	50.7%	3,529,700	54.2%
<b>Number Employed</b>	16,435	90.0%	18,141	90.4%	3,417	92.0%	372,135	92.2%	3,287,900	93.1%
<b>Number Unemployed</b>	1,829	10.0%	1,937	9.6%	297	8.0%	31,351	7.8%	244,700	6.9%

Source: Massachusetts Labor and Workforce Development Office

As indicated in the table, the City of Leominster has the largest overall labor force among the three Wachusett communities. It also had the largest number of unemployed of these three communities, but this represented 9.6 percent of the City's workforce compared to 10.0 percent of the workforce which was unemployed in Fitchburg during the same period. Of particular concern, however, was the fact that the percent unemployed in all three Wachusett communities was higher than the unemployment rate for both Worcester County and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts during the same period. All three

of the study area communities have lost total employment since 2000. This is an indicator of the relatively stagnant state of the North Central Massachusetts region's economy compared to the County, particularly in the Metropolitan Worcester area with its educational and medical institutions and the State which is anchored by the vibrant economy of the Metropolitan Boston area with its strong technology and professional services base.

## Employment and Jobs

Table 6 shows the estimated distribution of employment of study area residents by industry based on American Community Survey data from 2005 to 2009.

**Table 6: Employment of Study Area Residents**

Study Area Resident Employment	Total		Fitchburg	Leominster	Westminster
<b>Total</b>	8089	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting	60	0.7%	0.2%	4.2%	2.6%
Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction	14	0.2%	0.2%	0.0%	0.0%
Construction	563	7.0%	7.4%	4.5%	5.5%
Manufacturing	1220	15.1%	15.7%	13.3%	12.2%
Wholesale trade	236	2.9%	2.9%	2.3%	3.4%
Retail trade	925	11.4%	11.3%	12.3%	11.9%
Transportation and warehousing	265	3.3%	3.5%	0.0%	2.8%
Utilities	42	0.5%	0.6%	0.0%	0.1%
Information	266	3.3%	3.1%	9.1%	2.8%
Finance and insurance	531	6.6%	6.4%	6.1%	7.4%
Real estate and rental and leasing	178	2.2%	2.0%	2.9%	3.2%
Professional, scientific, and technical services	309	3.8%	3.6%	5.8%	4.5%
Management of companies and enterprises	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Administrative & support and waste management services	448	5.5%	5.2%	2.6%	7.8%
Educational services	734	9.1%	9.3%	7.8%	8.1%
Health care and social assistance	1147	14.2%	13.6%	17.2%	16.6%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation	82	1.0%	0.9%	0.0%	1.8%
Accommodation and food services	319	3.9%	4.2%	4.9%	2.4%
Other services, except public administration	284	3.5%	3.5%	3.2%	3.6%
Public administration	467	5.8%	6.4%	3.6%	3.3%

Source: 2005-2009 American Community Survey; ESRI-BAO

As indicated in the table, the top three industries employing study area residents are Manufacturing, Health Care and Social Assistance, and Retail Trade in that order. Within the individual study area communities, these same industries are the primary source of employment although Health Care and Social Assistance is the largest source of employment among these three industries in Leominster and Westminster, rather than manufacturing. It should be noted that historic U.S. Census statistics show that 43.7 percent of the Region's workforce was employed in manufacturing in 1980. As shown in the

table, recent statistics from the American Community Survey show that current employment in manufacturing is 15.1 percent of the workforce, a decline of more than 65 percent over approximately 25 years. This is certainly indicative of the changing employment profile of the region and also shows the need to take proactive steps if the Region's existing manufacturing employment is to be retained or expanded.

### Workplace Location

Workplace journey-to-work information is available at the community level from the U.S. Census but not at the subarea level. Table 7 indicates the major workplaces where workers within the three Wachusett communities are employed. Not surprisingly, the primary workplaces for workers in the three communities are their own hometown places of residence, with 38.4 percent of Leominster residents working within Leominster, 32.3 percent of Fitchburg residents working in Fitchburg, and 27.6 percent of Westminister residents working in Westminister. Looking at the Montachusett Region overall, the largest proportion of residents from the Region who work within the Region are employed in the City of Leominster (13.9%). However, as will be discussed below, few, if any, of these jobs within Leominster are actually located within the Wachusett study area. It should also be noted, given the future availability of commuter rail from Wachusett Station with service oriented to the Boston core, that fewer than 2 percent of the Region's residents commute to Boston. This, of course, could change in the future as a result of improved commuter rail service.

**Table 7**  
**Residence to Workplace Flows for Fitchburg, Leominster, Westminister and Montachusett Region 2010**

Residence		Workplace											
Community	# of Workers	Hometown		Gardner		Fitchburg		Leominster		Worcester		Boston	
		Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent
Fitchburg	18,188	5,876	32.31%	431	2.37%	5,876	32.31%	3,332	18.32%	1,005	5.53%	259	1.42%
Leominster	19,713	7,560	38.35%	356	1.81%	1,776	9.01%	7,560	38.35%	1,176	5.97%	384	1.95%
Westminister	3,826	942	24.62%	317	8.29%	540	14.11%	516	13.49%	189	4.94%	102	2.67%
Region Totals	111,601	30,813	27.61%	7,672	6.87%	11,780	10.56%	15,558	13.94%	6,110	5.47%	2,195	1.97%

Source: U.S. Census 2010

### Employers

To provide some context for the types of industry and employment in the vicinity of the Wachusett Station site, it is useful to have an understanding of the economic history of the area. The following is quoted from the City of Fitchburg website but is also applicable to Leominster and, to a lesser extent, Westminister:

History points clearly to the Nashua River as the original source of growth for the community. From around the river, the factories that were built became the source of employment and



income that built Fitchburg's neighborhoods. As Fitchburg grew and prospered, it became a destination for the immigrant -- moving west from Boston, building the city and its future.

Fitchburg's location on the Nashua River led to its development initially as an industrial center where mills were built to take advantage of the readily available water power. The construction of rail lines passing through Fitchburg on the Boston to Albany line increased the city's position as a manufacturing center. Heavy industries such as machine and tool works, clothing, and paper mills were the engines of significant growth throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Since the 1960s, there has been a general trend of heavy industry migration away from the northeastern United States. The paper industry, one of the oldest and historically the largest in Fitchburg, has increasingly chosen to locate its pulp-to-paper mills closer to its northern pulping plants in order to reduce transportation costs. The erosion of the manufacturing base led to a less prosperous population, which in turn took its toll on Fitchburg's commercial sector. During this same period, the rise of the regional shopping center further diminished the role of Intown Fitchburg as a commercial center. This loss of more traditional industries has, in recent years, been mitigated by growth in non-manufacturing industries such as construction and professional services, as well as a rise in certain manufacturing industries such as plastics, medical goods and services, and chemicals.<sup>1</sup>

This evolution is reflected in the current mix of industries located within the study area, many of which were originally established in connection with the paper manufacturing industries that once dominated the local economy. Table 8 lists the top 25 employers in the study area on the basis of number of employees. Although the largest single employer, TRW Automotive, is located in Westminister, the majority of larger employers are located in Fitchburg. Most of these employers are located on or in the vicinity of Authority Drive, immediately adjacent to the Wachusett Station site.

**Table 8: 25 Largest Employers in Study Area**

<b>Business name</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>Employees</b>	<b>NACIS Code</b>
TRW AUTOMOTIVE U.S. LLC	State Rd. E	Westminister	273	3321
AVERY DENNISON CORPORATION	Industrial Rd.	Fitchburg	220	3222
L.U.K. CRISIS CENTER, INC.	Westminister St.	Fitchburg	155	6241
BOUTWELL, OWENS & CO., INC.	Authority Drive	Fitchburg	140	3231
THE NEWARK GROUP INC	Newark Ave.	Fitchburg	120	5622
ROYAL PLAZA CORP	Royal Plaza Dr.	Fitchburg	120	7211
MAR-LEE COMPANIES, INC.	Authority Drive	Fitchburg	80	3335
COURTYARD OF MARRIOTT FITCHBURG	Royal Plaza Dr.	Fitchburg	80	7211
FITCHBURG SCHOOL DISTRICT	Reingold Ave.	Fitchburg	80	6111

<sup>1</sup><http://www.ci.fitchburg.ma.us/visitors/about/history/>



FORM MODU INC	Industrial Rd.	Fitchburg	75	3371
PUBLISHERS STORAGE AND SHIPPING CORP.	Development Rd.	Fitchburg	66	4931
NEW ENGLAND KEYBOARD, INC.	Princeton Rd.	Fitchburg	50	3341
CROCKER TECHNICAL PAPERS, INC.	Westminster St.	Fitchburg	50	3221
DENARDO WIRE AND CABLE CO., INC.	Industrial Rd.	Fitchburg	45	4236
CANO CORPORATION	Industrial Rd.	Fitchburg	41	3372
MILES KEDEX CO, INC.	Rowtier Rd.	Westminster	35	3133
FITCHBURG WELDING CO., INC.	Curtis Rd.	Westminster	35	3323
VINYL TECHNOLOGIES, INC.	Industrial Rd.	Fitchburg	35	3339
M R RESOURCES INC	Authority Drive	Fitchburg	33	3345
CADO PRODUCTS, INC.	Princeton Rd.	Fitchburg	30	3252
OMNOVA SOLUTIONS INC.	Authority Drive	Fitchburg	28	3251
ROCHELEAU TOOL AND DIE CO, INC.	Industrial Rd.	Fitchburg	28	3332
LOCK INSPECTION SYSTEMS, INC.	Authority Drive	Fitchburg	26	3339
EYLES ELECTRIC, INC	Westminster St.	Fitchburg	25	2382
MINUTEMAN INTERNATIONAL COMPANY LIMITED	Arbor Way	Fitchburg	22	4232

Source: ESRI-BAO

#### IV. Retail Market Potential

To assess the retail market potential as an aspect of commercial economic development for the study area, an analysis was conducted using the Esri Business Analysis Online (Esri-BAO) analytic tool. This tool was developed to provide a “snapshot” of retail market supply and demand within a given study area. It provides an analysis of consumer spending to show market demand or retail potential and an examination of business revenues or retail sales to show market supply.

The database used for this analysis includes the latest market statistics for Retail Trade and Food Services and Drinking Places (the retail market), utilizing data from the 2007 Census of Retail Trade and Consumer Expenditure Surveys (2010 and 2011) from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Retail sales data also incorporates business data input from Dun & Bradstreet. Consumer spending data is drawn from the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ annual Consumer Expenditure Surveys and the Census of Retail trade which is then adjusted by Esri based on demographic profiles specific to the given study area. This provides for improved differentiation of spending, particularly in smaller markets where distinctions can be difficult to measure and for big-ticket items where consumer preferences are more pronounced.

The database reflects geographic inventories and boundary definitions such as block groups, tracts, and counties based on 2010 geography, enabling the analysis to be applied at a finer level than the overall community. In this case, the analysis was conducted for the defined Wachusett Study Area which includes subareas of three communities, consolidated into a single study area. Dollar estimates of supply and demand are presented in the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) which

defines 27 industry groups in the Retail Trade sector as well as four industry groups within the Food Services and Drinking Places subsector.

By comparing supply and demand, the analysis is also able to estimate a Leakage/Surplus Factor which provides a measure of the balance between the volume of supply (retail sales) generated by retail industry and demand (spending by households or retail potential) within the same industry. “Leakage” in an area represents a condition where a market’s supply is less than its demand. Therefore retailers outside the area are fulfilling demand for retail products from area consumers and demand is “leaking” out of the trade area. Surplus represents a condition where the area’s supply exceeds the area’s demand. Therefore retailers are attracting shoppers that reside outside of the trade area, so there is a surplus in market supply. This information can be used in a variety of ways, but one aspect of its use is as a potential indication of retail opportunity in instances where the leakage factor is high. Caution must be used in interpreting results however, taking into account the size of the market, the type of commodities involved, the extent of the overall regional market and the location and relative strength of competitive retail markets.

Table 9 presents the results of the retail market analysis. The first set of rows indicate total demand and supply by major industry categories (retail, food & drink, and retail and food & drink combined). Looking at all industries combined, there is a total demand of \$147.4 million for retail and food & drink by the market represented by the Wachusett Study Area but only \$42.5 million in goods supplied by the 71 businesses represented in the market. This means that there is “leakage” of approximately \$104.8 million spent by Study Area consumers for goods purchased outside of the study area. Looking at specific industries, only the categories of Beer, Wine & Liquor Stores and Non-store Retailers, shown as Direct Selling Establishments, are shown as providing a surplus within the Study Area. In terms of total magnitude, Grocery Stores and Automobile Dealers are the categories showing the greatest leakage in dollar value, although Shoe Stores and Vending Machine Operators show the greater leakage “factor” based on the percentage of goods actually sold within the Study Area. Whether these industry categories represent opportunities for development and investment within the Study Area would require further investigation.

**Table 9: Study Area Retail Market Analysis**

<b>Industry Summary</b>	<b>Demand (Retail Potential)</b>	<b>Supply (Retail Sales)</b>	<b>Retail Gap</b>	<b>Leakage/Surplus Factor</b>	<b>Number of Businesses</b>
Total Retail Trade and Food & Drink	\$147,392,164	\$42,545,179	\$104,846,985	55.2	71
Total Retail Trade	\$132,502,955	\$38,143,241	\$94,359,715	55.3	59
Total Food & Drink	\$14,889,208	\$4,401,938	\$10,487,270	54.4	12
<b>Industry Group</b>	<b>Demand (Retail Potential)</b>	<b>Supply (Retail Sales)</b>	<b>Retail Gap</b>	<b>Leakage/Surplus Factor</b>	<b>Number of Businesses</b>
Motor Vehicle & Parts Dealers	\$24,768,815	\$3,919,416	\$20,849,398	72.7	4
Automobile Dealers	\$21,602,240	\$3,629,018	\$17,973,222	71.2	3
Other Motor Vehicle Dealers	\$1,318,669	\$5,171	\$1,313,498	99.2	0
Auto Parts, Accessories & Tire Stores	\$1,847,905	\$285,227	\$1,562,679	73.3	1
Furniture & Home Furnishings Stores	\$3,373,935	\$884,090	\$2,489,845	58.5	3
Furniture Stores	\$1,671,333	\$195,192	\$1,476,141	79.1	1
Home Furnishings Stores	\$1,702,602	\$688,899	\$1,013,704	42.4	2
Electronics & Appliance Stores	\$4,668,959	\$792,885	\$3,876,074	71.0	5

Bldg Materials, Garden Equip. & Supply Stores	\$4,160,854	\$2,235,351	\$1,925,503	30.1	5
Bldg Material & Supplies Dealers	\$3,597,261	\$1,986,397	\$1,610,864	28.8	4
Lawn & Garden Equip & Supply Stores	\$563,593	\$248,954	\$314,639	38.7	1
Food & Beverage Stores	\$26,369,207	\$10,150,751	\$16,218,455	44.4	10
Grocery Stores	\$22,362,843	\$4,154,647	\$18,208,196	68.7	5
Specialty Food Stores	\$1,126,305	\$162,590	\$963,715	74.8	1
Beer, Wine & Liquor Stores	\$2,880,058	\$5,833,514	-\$2,953,456	-33.9	4
Health & Personal Care Stores	\$14,317,385	\$2,651,420	\$11,665,966	68.7	1
Gasoline Stations	\$13,167,556	\$1,680,466	\$11,487,090	77.4	2
Clothing & Clothing Accessories Stores	\$9,889,673	\$204,129	\$9,685,544	96.0	0
Clothing Stores	\$7,301,923	\$7,657	\$7,294,267	99.8	0
Shoe Stores	\$1,344,065	\$0	\$1,344,065	100.0	0
Jewelry, Luggage & Leather Goods Stores	\$1,243,685	\$196,472	\$1,047,213	72.7	0
Sporting Goods, Hobby, Book & Music Stores	\$3,932,142	\$763,111	\$3,169,031	67.5	5
Sporting Goods/Hobby/Musical Instr Stores	\$3,181,385	\$636,203	\$2,545,182	66.7	4
Book, Periodical & Music Stores	\$750,757	\$126,908	\$623,849	71.1	1
General Merchandise Stores	\$15,434,863	\$1,656,186	\$13,778,677	80.6	5
Department Stores Excluding Leased Depts.	\$8,555,680	\$1,028,572	\$7,527,108	78.5	1
Other General Merchandise Stores	\$6,879,183	\$627,614	\$6,251,569	83.3	4
Miscellaneous Store Retailers	\$3,522,808	\$1,742,560	\$1,780,248	33.8	13
Florists	\$267,824	\$120,503	\$147,320	37.9	1
Office Supplies, Stationery & Gift Stores	\$1,269,373	\$509,400	\$759,974	42.7	6
Used Merchandise Stores	\$574,235	\$132,182	\$442,053	62.6	1
Other Miscellaneous Store Retailers	\$1,411,376	\$980,475	\$430,902	18.0	4
Nonstore Retailers	\$8,896,759	\$11,462,876	-\$2,566,117	-12.6	7
Electronic Shopping & Mail-Order Houses	\$6,314,114	\$627,139	\$5,686,975	81.9	2
Vending Machine Operators	\$221,730	\$0	\$221,730	100.0	0
Direct Selling Establishments	\$2,360,915	\$10,835,737	-\$8,474,823	-64.2	5
Food Services & Drinking Places	\$14,889,208	\$4,401,938	\$10,487,270	54.4	12
Full-Service Restaurants	\$7,835,937	\$2,107,646	\$5,728,291	57.6	4
Limited-Service Eating Places	\$5,876,957	\$2,157,624	\$3,719,333	46.3	5
Special Food Services	\$766,275	\$51,046	\$715,229	87.5	1
Drinking Places - Alcoholic Beverages	\$410,040	\$85,622	\$324,418	65.5	1

Source: ESRI-BAO

Results of this analysis are illustrated in the following figures. Figure 2 shows leakage and surplus by the major industry subsectors. As indicated in the table above, Nonstore Retailers is the only market category for which the Study Area provides a surplus.

**Figure 2: Leakage/Surplus Factor by Industry Subsector**

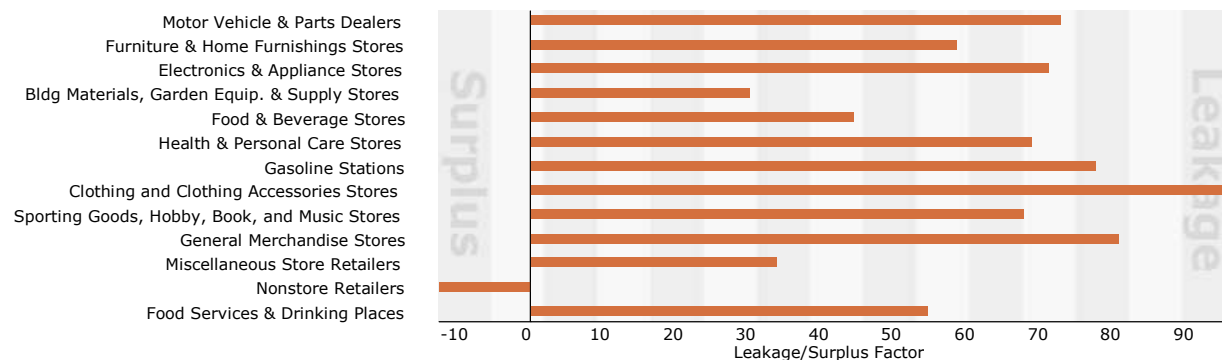


Figure 3 provides a more detailed breakdown of leakage and surplus by individual industry groups. As discussed only the categories of Beer, Wine & Liquor Stores and Non-store Retailers are shown as providing a surplus within the Study Area.

**Figure 3: Leakage/Surplus Factor by Industry Group**



## V. Real Estate Conditions: 2013

### Industrial Real Estate Market

According to CBRE Global Research and Consulting, “The Greater Boston Industrial Market continued to trend in a positive direction...in the second quarter of 2013.” The first half of 2013 was found to be a transitional time and showed continued recovery. Landlords were still willing to drop their rates to attract tenants due to significant vacancy in the market but the frequency of extremely low rates diminished as the market continued to recover from the recession.<sup>2</sup> The Metro West market was particularly strong in the second quarter, which has now had four consecutive quarters of growth. However, the Route 495/Route 2 West portion of the Metro West market still had the highest availability rate (39.7%), the second highest vacancy rate (35.3%), and the lowest average asking rent (\$4.94 SF/YR) of all of the Suburban Boston submarkets. The Route 495/Route 2 West submarket has approximately 7.5 million square feet of rentable area of industrial space, representing 5.2 percent of the overall Suburban Industrial market.

<sup>2</sup> CBRE Global Research and Consulting, Suburban Boston Industrial MarketView, Q2 2013.

Nevertheless, according to the Foster Report, the Fitchburg-Leominster market for modern industrial real estate appeared to pick up in 2012, the first year of positive absorption since 2006, and there is a growth in investor confidence in Central Massachusetts.<sup>3</sup> Increased production demand is resulting in increased demand for industrial space. As of January, 2013, the vacancy rate for modern industrial space in the Fitchburg-Leominster area is 19.8 percent, a decrease from the previous year when it was 21.6 percent. Typical modern industrial space is defined as single-story masonry/steel buildings. They include open warehouse and manufacturing facilities which generally include 5-10 percent office space with ceiling heights of at least fourteen feet. Newer buildings typically have higher clearance, closer to twenty feet, a greater proportion of office space, and also may have climate controlled manufacturing areas.

**Table 10: Modern Industrial Space in Fitchburg and Leominster: January 2013**

City	Gross Building Area	Percent of Building Area	SF Available/Vacant	Percent Vacant
Leominster	6,177,986	70.1%	1,483,793	24.0%
Fitchburg	2,630,639	29.9%	262,399	10.0%
Combined Total	8,808,625	100.0%	1,746,192	19.8%

Source: The Foster Report – Fitchburg/Leominster Massachusetts, January 2013

As shown in Table 10, Leominster has a total supply of almost 6.2 million square feet of modern industrial space, representing approximately 70 percent of the Fitchburg-Leominster market. Leominster's vacancy rate is 24 percent. Fitchburg's total supply of approximately 2.6 million square feet represents about 30 percent of the market and had a vacancy rate of 10 percent as of January 2013.

No new industrial buildings were constructed in 2012 or are proposed for 2013, as of January, 2013. According to the Foster Report, sales of properties in 2012 were substantially below replacement cost. As a result, demand for new construction would be limited to specialized and high image facilities or additions to existing facilities which would otherwise be expensive to relocate. Until the price differential between existing and new construction narrows, there will be limited demand for new facilities.

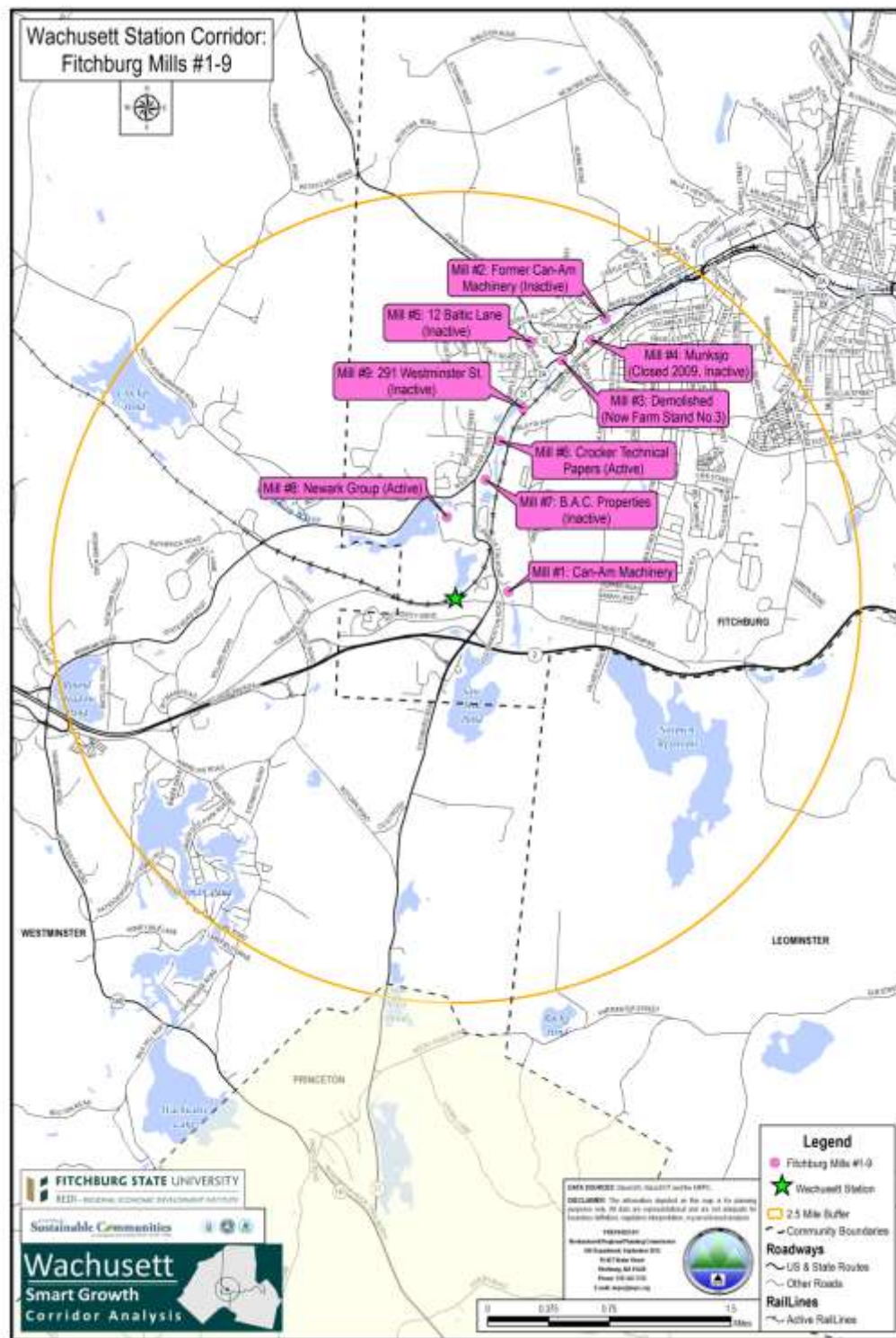
**Table 11: Mill Space in Fitchburg and Leominster: January 2013**

City	Gross Building Area	Percent of Building Area	SF Available/Vacant	Percent Vacant
Leominster	1,069,351	21.2%	300,798	28.1%
Fitchburg	3,970,734	78.8%	805,460	20.3%
Combined Total	5,040,085	100.0%	1,106,258	21.9%

Source: The Foster Report – Fitchburg/Leominster Massachusetts, January 2013

As shown in Table 11, over 78 percent of the area's mill space is located in Fitchburg. The locations of mills in the vicinity of the Wachusett Corridor, all of which are in Fitchburg, are shown in Figure 4. Mill type space is older, and was generally constructed around the turn of the nineteenth century. They

<sup>3</sup> The Foster Company, The Foster Report: Fitchburg/Leominster Massachusetts, Leominster, MA, January 2013.





were originally built for single occupant businesses such as textile and paper. Many of these mills in the Fitchburg-Leominster area were later used for plastics manufacturing. They are primarily brick multi-story buildings, generally in fair to poor condition. There is a large inventory of mill space in the Fitchburg-Leominster area. The vacancy rate for mill space as of January 2013 was 21.9 percent, an increase from January 2012 when it was 20.6 percent. Available lease space can often be obtained for low rent and often can be used to meet short term needs or by start-up users requiring lower cost space. However, with the availability of modern space at low pricing, utilization of mill space may no longer be cost effective. There are also environmental issues with mill space such as chemical saturation in the floors and older in-ground oil or chemical tanks. While remediation is possible, it can be expensive and can also result in reluctance from lenders to finance mill property acquisition. Some of these properties are classified as “brownfield” sites as discussed below.

Leominster’s base of existing mill space is declining as properties are being converted to residential or commercial use or are demolished or abandoned as they are no longer considered economically feasible to restore. Vacancy in Leominster mill space has increased in the past year as manufacturing operations have relocated to modern space for improved efficiency. Some mill space in Fitchburg is also being converted to residential housing. In Fitchburg, the greatest absorption of mill space has been as entire buildings have been converted to residential use. However, there is still a substantial supply of mill space for start-up businesses and seasonal storage. Assuming continued improvement in economic conditions, as the supply of modern properties is absorbed, there may be increased demand for mill space at least on a short-term basis.

### **Office Real Estate Market**

According to CBRE Global Research and Consulting, the Suburban Boston Office market absorbed more space in the first half of 2013 than it had since 2005. In general, CBRE reports that “the Suburban Office market has passed the point of recovery after the last recession and has strengthened into growth mode.”<sup>4</sup> Total availability of office space is down (20.4% compared to 22.6% from the same period in 2012) and build-to-suit activity continues to be the primary interest of larger tenants. The Metro West area remains the strongest performing office market in Greater Boston with positive absorption of office space and a decrease in vacancy to 14.5 percent, making it the tightest of the three suburban metro markets. However, much of this activity is centered in the Route 128 West submarket. In contrast, the Route 495/Route 2 West submarket of the Metro West market, which includes the Fitchburg-Leominster area, had a higher availability rate (24.2%), a higher vacancy rate (18.2%), and a lower average asking rent (\$14.23 SF/YR) than the Metro West market and overall Suburban Office market as a whole. The Route 495/Route 2 West submarket has approximately 4.7 million square feet of rentable area, representing 4.2 percent of the overall Suburban Office market.

### **Brownfields**

While considering the status of the commercial and office real estate market in the Wachusett Corridor, it should be noted that there are a number of “brownfield” sites in the area which may offer potential

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<sup>4</sup> CBRE Global Research and Consulting, Suburban Boston Office MarketView, Q2 2013.



redevelopment opportunities. There are numerous sites which are considered “Brownfields” within the Wachusett Corridor according to an inventory compiled by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP). Within that inventory, Chapter 21E<sup>5</sup> sites are contaminated by petroleum or other hazardous material and are subject to special restrictions for redevelopment. Such sites are classified by tiers based on their level of contamination and their owner’s compliance with regulation. According to a search of the MassDEP website (<http://www.mass.gov/anf/research-and-tech/it-serv-and-support/application-serv/office-of-geographic-information-massgis/datalayers/massdep-21e.html>), the Wachusett Corridor study area has four active Tier Classified Chapter 21Es sites detailed in Table 12 and Figure 5. It should be noted that there are other Chapter 21E sites in Massachusetts that are not contained in MassDEP’s data layer. For example, MassDEP’s data layer does not include (1) contaminated sites that have not been reported to MassDEP or (2) sites for which a Response Action Outcome (RAO) has been submitted to MassDEP. Also, Chapter 21E sites that have not yet been Tier Classified are not contained in this data layer.

**Table 12**  
**MassDEP Tier Classified Chapter 21E Sites**  
**Wachusett Corridor Study Area**

Site Name	Address
Bedard Residence	89 Vine St., Fitchburg
Nagy Springs	749 Westminster Hill Rd. Fitchburg
Cresticon Sub NGGEC (Former Litton)	180 State Rd. E Westminster
Between 359 and 699	Franklin Rd. Westminster

Source: Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection

Brownfields properties are often located where there is an existing infrastructure and other amenities. The cleanup and redevelopment of brownfields properties can be a way to stimulate the economy and promote environmental protection goals. There are federal and state brownfields programs incentives available to buyers, and sometimes sellers, of contaminated property provided there is a commitment to cleanup and redevelopment. Brownfields properties are often located where there is an existing infrastructure, workforce and other amenities such as available in the Wachusett Corridor. State incentives can help parties identify risk, limit liability, and fund the cleanup of brownfields sites enabling their reuse for industry, housing and other purposes.

Potentially, there could be brownfields grants available that could assist with the remediation of brownfield sites. In the past, the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC) was awarded five Brownfields Site Assessment grants and a Brownfields Clean-Up Revolving Loan Fund from the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Although MRPC Brownfields funds have been exhausted, MRPC applied to EPA in winter 2014 for additional grant funds for Phase I and Phase II Environmental Site Assessments of eligible “brownfield” sites in the Montachusett Region. If MRPC is successful in attaining

<sup>5</sup> Under the Massachusetts Oil and Hazardous Material Release Prevention Act (M.G.L. c21E)

grant funds, funds could be available to conduct site assessments in Montachusett Communities as soon as fall 2014. Moreover, MRPC also applied in winter 2014 for a Brownfields Cleanup Revolving Loan Fund to facilitate the actual clean-up of priority sites.

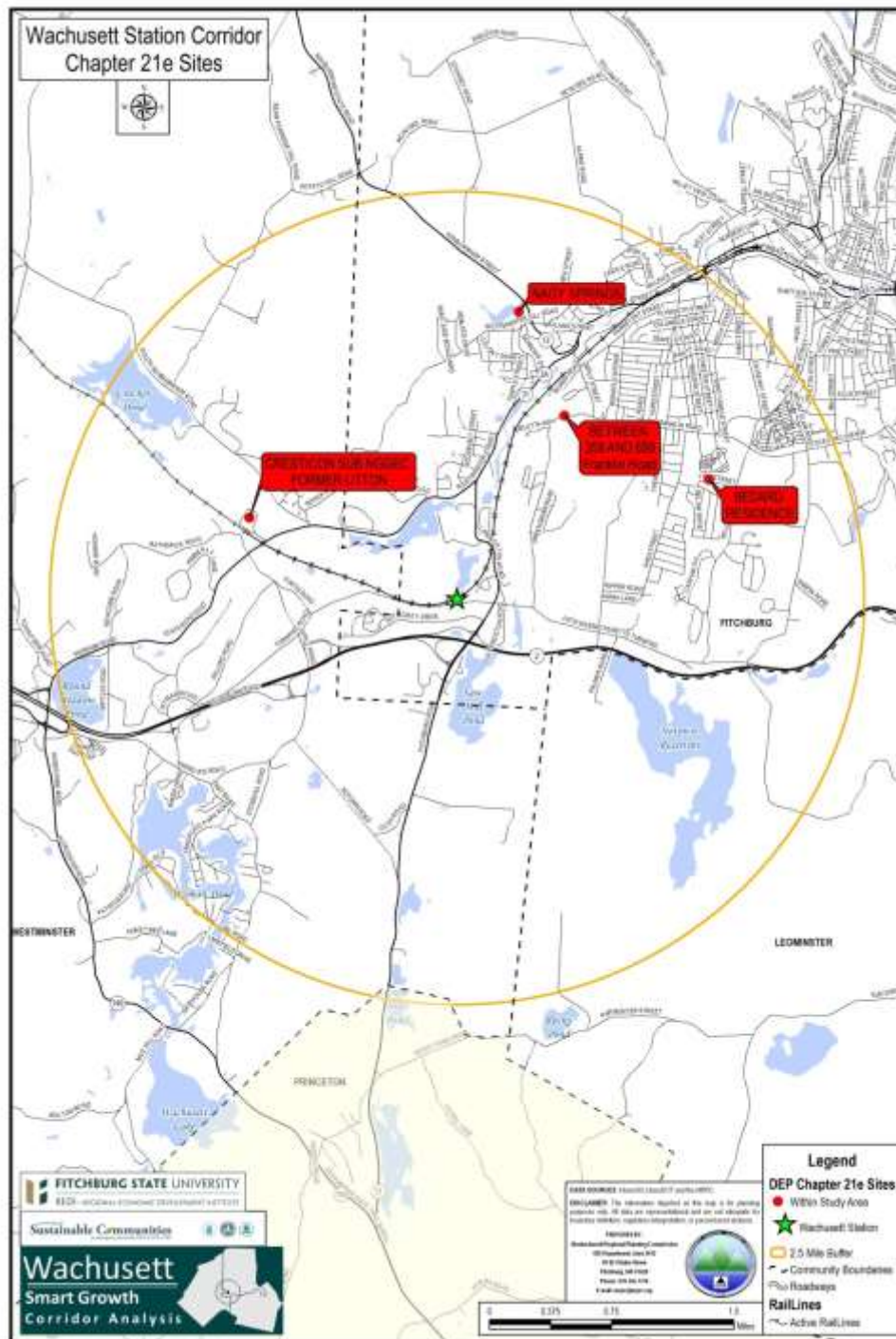


Figure 5: MassDEP Tier Classified Chapter 21E Sites

The US EPA defines a brownfield as such:

“Brownfields are real property, the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant. Cleaning up and reinvesting in these properties takes development pressures off of undeveloped, open land, and both improves and protects the environment.”

A Phase I Environmental Site Assessment typically includes the following:

1. Physical inspection of the entire subject property.
2. Interviews with persons knowledgeable of the property.
3. Review of state and federal lists of known contaminated sites, hazardous materials users, spills and underground tanks.
4. Evaluation of nearby operations for their potential to affect subject property.
5. Interpretation of topographic maps and aerial photographs.
6. Review of any existing environmental documents for the project area.
7. Current and past use of the property.
8. Review of recorded owner history at applicable register of deeds office.
9. Conclusions and recommendations.

The purpose of a Phase I report is to determine if there is a need for a Phase II Environmental Assessment. If a site has a potential for soil and/or groundwater contamination, a Phase II Site Assessment should be conducted by an experienced environmental engineering firm. Subsurface analysis of water and soil is conducted during a Phase II Environmental Site Assessment. A comprehensive understanding of soil and groundwater is required in order to design the correct soil boring and monitoring well installations that should discover, characterize or delineate contamination that could be impacting human health, the water supply and the value of the subject property, and neighboring properties.

## **VI. Impact of Commuter Rail Services on Real Estate Values**

In conjunction with the assessment of environmental impacts from the construction of Wachusett Station and the Wachusett Layover Facility, MART's and the MBTA's consultants documented research into the impacts of commuter rail facilities on real estate values in the vicinity of the project area. Two studies are cited:

- One study is specifically a Real Estate Analysis of the Fitchburg Commuter Rail Line including the effect on property values. Results indicate that there is an increase in single family residential property values of approximately 6.7 percent by virtue of being located near a community having a commuter rail station.<sup>6</sup>
- One study in Philadelphia of Southeastern Pennsylvania Transit Authority and Port Authority of New Jersey Commuter Rail service found strong evidence that accessibility from commuter rail

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<sup>6</sup> Armstrong Jr., Robert J., Impacts of Commuter Rail Service as Reflected in Single-Family Residential Property Values, Transportation Research Record 1466, Transportation Research Board

stations is indeed capitalized into house values with an “increase of 6.4 percent of the average house value being observed.”<sup>7</sup>

However, a somewhat contradictory study compared effects of commuter rail in Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas; Los Angeles, California; Tacoma to Everett, Washington; and San Jose, California and found, over a 10 year period, that homes adjacent to a commuter rail corridor increased in value by 162 percent while homes in the same overall zip code area increased in value by 165 percent. The study concluded that property values “were more effected [*sic*] by overall local and regional market forces than by new immediately adjacent passenger rail lines.”<sup>8</sup>

## **VII. Economic Development Goals of the Wachusett Communities**

As part of the process of identifying goals and objects for economic development in the Wachusett Corridor, a review of municipal economic development and Master Plans was conducted to identify the specific community-wide economic development goals of each of the three Wachusett Communities.

The City of Fitchburg documents its economic goals and objectives in its Vision2020 Comprehensive Master Plan which was adopted in 1998. Goals which have relevance to the Wachusett Corridor are:

- Retain, attract, foster, and celebrate companies that will contribute to Fitchburg’s revitalization by nurturing citizens through opportunities to work, learn, and advance; investing in the community; and meeting residents’ and visitors’ needs for goods and services.
- Stimulate the creation of new employment through a diverse economic base.
- Seek economic development that will have the least possible negative impact on neighborhoods and the physical environment.
- Expand Fitchburg’s job and tax base by developing an inventory of industrial space that will be attractive to industry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

The City of Leominster does not have a Master Plan but adopted a Community Development Plan in 2004. This plan identifies a number of economic development goals for the community. Goals which have relevance to the Wachusett Corridor are:

- Promote regional cooperation in housing, transportation and boundary development issues.
- Promote diversification of jobs in the community.
- Support and expand existing community efforts to increase development of businesses that provide jobs, increase tax revenues and expand opportunities for existing businesses.
- Encourage businesses that are compatible with adjacent land uses and resource protection concerns.
- Create and consistently implement and fund a capital improvements program to maintain existing infrastructure in order to facilitate business development, enable the workforce to

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<sup>7</sup> Voith, R. Changing Capitalization of CBD-Oriented Transportation Systems: Evidence from Philadelphia, 1970-1988, Journal of Urban Economics, 1993.

<sup>8</sup> URS, “Impact of Transit Rail Lines on Property Values” (draft), October 2007.

access local commercial and industrial businesses and facilitate the delivery of raw materials and shipment of finished goods.

- Promote development that is consistent with the Sustainable Development Principles promulgated by the Massachusetts Office for Commonwealth Development. In addition, promote compact development, expand housing opportunities, reutilize brownfields and abandoned buildings, plan for livable communities, promote livable communities, advance sound water policy, preserve working natural landscapes and promote sustainable development via other actions.

The Town of Westminster is currently going through an update of the community's Master Plan. The following is the primary economic development goal of the Master Plan's Economic Development chapter, revised in January 2014, and is highly relevant to the Wachusett Corridor:

- Westminster desires a robust and diverse local economy that provides tax revenues for the town and living wage jobs for local residents in a business friendly environment, with a timely and predictable permitting system and a municipal infrastructure capable of supporting new and expanding businesses and industries.

#### **VIII. Economic Development Issues and Opinions Cited by Ethnic Community Focus Groups**

In addition to the identification of economic development goals and objectives for the Wachusett Communities, additional outreach was conducted to better understand the economic development issues of the primary ethnic communities residing in the corridor. Three focus groups were held with ethnic communities in the Wachusett Corridor to gather information and ideas relevant to the anticipated impacts and benefits of the new station which would be in close proximity and provide service to these communities. A Latino focus group was held at the Cleghorn Neighborhood Center on October 2, 2012, a Hmong focus group was held at the Fitchburg Public Library on October 27, 2013 and a Vietnamese focus group was held at the Fitchburg Public Library on November 1, 2012.

A number of different topics were discussed at these sessions including Economic Development. A wide range of opinion was expressed at each session on the economic development opportunities and strategies that relate to the new station's development. The Latino group emphasized rehabilitation of existing plants and factories within the study area, potentially as new housing or entertainment centers, and the need to attract new investors. The group also identified a number of commercial needs within the community such as food businesses, clothing and shoe stores, bakeries and pastry shops. As strategies, the group cited a need for economic aid to assist in developing small businesses and educational programs to assist entrepreneurs. The Hmong community also saw a need to develop small retail businesses to support anticipated growth in the area. The Vietnamese community believes that the new station would bring more visitors and business to the area and also felt that a train schedule with earlier trains would enable visitors to arrive in the area earlier in the day to conduct their business.

## **VII. Economic Development Strategies for the Wachusett Corridor: Goals, Objectives and Recommendations**

Based on the information gathered to assess economic development opportunities resulting from the development of the Wachusett Station, the following goal, objectives, and recommendations were developed to facilitate the economic development of the Wachusett Corridor and Montachusett Region and to improve the overall economic climate and quality of life in the affected communities.

### **Goals and Objectives**

#### **Goal**

*To leverage the benefits of improved commuter rail service and the development of the Wachusett Station and Layover Areas to enhance the economy of the Wachusett Corridor and improve the quality of life of area residents, consistent with the character of the affected communities and area development plans.*

#### **Objectives**

- Establish a collaborative and coordinated economic development strategy that reflects the interests and needs of the affected Wachusett Corridor communities and recognizes the mutual benefits of regional cooperation.
- Diversify the local economic base by retaining existing businesses and attracting new businesses that provide competitive salaries and employ the locally-available workforce.
- Assess the development and redevelopment opportunities that are offered within the Wachusett Corridor and provide the necessary support to enable these opportunities to be realized.
- Assess the workforce skills needed by current and potential future area employers and work with local educational institutions to assure that appropriate training and educational programs are offered that support the development of these skills.
- Take advantage of the extensive natural, scenic, and recreational resources of the region to enhance opportunities for recreational and eco-tourism.
- Obtain federal and state grants to support workforce and infrastructure development and support for business development and expansion.

#### **Recommendations**

To identify opportunities for economic development in the Wachusett Corridor and strategies that could be employed to achieve the goals and objectives for the economic development of the Wachusett Corridor, discussions were held with local community planners and representatives of key organizations,

initially focusing on a set of generic economic development strategies. These strategies were then refined through these discussions. These strategies are discussed below:

**1. Establish a collaboration mechanism among the three Wachusett communities** – Initially, the concept of a multi-community economic development committee was considered as a means to facilitate collaboration and coordination of activities among the Study Area communities and assure that their respective efforts achieve beneficial results for all three communities rather than conflict with the plans and activities within individual communities. There is a general consensus that there are mechanisms already in place that could accomplish this objective and there is little enthusiasm for establishing an entity which may duplicate capabilities that are already available. One entity that would be well-positioned to take on this role is the existing MRPC Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Committee. The CEDS Board includes five members of the private sector and six members from the public sector. It was established in 1994 and has been supporting several economic development strategies in the Montachusett Region, including providing guidance on regional economic issues; updates and amendments to the CEDS document; and guidance, direction, and advice concerning grant opportunities and applications. Given the structure and range of activities already undertaken by this board, it could be in an opportune position to facilitate intercommunity cooperation to achieve maximum benefits for the Wachusett Corridor and the overall Montachusett Region. CEDS meetings are widely publicized and local and state officials/agencies/businesses/the general public and others are highly encouraged to attend and participate. However, given the current structure and membership of the board, there are no board members currently representing the communities of Fitchburg, Leominster, or Westminster. As such, the option of appointing new members or establishing a subcommittee with representation from these communities should be considered. Conceivably, this group could act as the steering committee or “point-of-contact” for a variety of economic development activities related to the new station on behalf of the affected communities and provide a mechanism for regional collaboration on many of the strategies which could effectively leverage economic development in the Wachusett Corridor.

**2. Survey Existing Businesses in the Corridor** – The most effective economic development opportunities start with the businesses that have already been established within the corridor. This begins with support to enable these businesses to be retained or to expand. Support could be logistical and/or financial. If effective assistance is to be provided to these businesses, it is necessary to understand their needs, constraints and challenges. This information can be assembled through a comprehensive survey of these businesses. However, it can be difficult to identify the key personnel who might have this critical information or, once contacts are identified, to elicit a response from these personnel given their typical range of responsibilities. An organization which has extensive insight into area businesses and preexisting relationships with key personnel within these businesses is the North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce (NCMCC). Given the linkages which NCMCC already has with area businesses, it offers an excellent means of connecting with the personnel who would be in the best position to provide the necessary information to support the retention and/or expansion of area businesses. Therefore a business survey could be effectively facilitated through the NCMCC.



**3. Conduct a Comprehensive Site Evaluation and Establish a Computerized Database of Properties** – A wide variety of potential development properties, along with a wide range of constraints and attributes, exist within the Wachusett Study Area. Each site is unique and offers varying opportunities for redevelopment or reuse. Information about these properties can be difficult to access although it is vital for potential developers who may be considering investment in the corridor. Assembling this information can be challenging and time consuming. It can also be difficult to maintain to assure that it is kept current. A comprehensive database could be established and maintained through a cooperative effort involving the NCMCC, MRPC, and the three communities (most likely in conjunction with the Fitchburg Redevelopment Authority and the Assessor's Offices of the individual communities). The database could be centrally maintained and publicly available to prospective developers with a mechanism in place to assure that it is kept up-to-date as conditions change. (It should be noted that the Town of Westminster is currently working with the Greater Gardner Chamber of Commerce to compile a similar development inventory for Westminster. This inventory could conceivably be consolidated with an inventory of the full Wachusett Corridor.)

**4. Identify Opportunities for Renovation/Reuse of Existing Properties and Proactively Work to Foster Redevelopment of "Brownfields"** – Particularly within the Fitchburg sector of the Wachusett Corridor, there are a number of existing industrial properties that are either underutilized or currently vacant that offer opportunities for reuse. Many of these properties may have environmental issues that would need remediation and are classified as "brownfield" sites. Some of these sites have existing structures which could be renovated for various uses. Other sites are either undeveloped or would require demolition of existing structures. Given their environmental issues, remediation of these sites would be necessary before any redevelopment could occur. The Federal Brownfields Program is administered through the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The typical process involved in remediating a contaminated site involves Site Assessment, Site Investigation (a more thorough review of site conditions), and a Remedial Action Plan. This process could potentially be facilitated through the CEDS Board, described above, and the Montachusett Brownfields Opportunity Group which is supported by MRPC. It is also conceivable that funding from the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration (EDA) to MRPC could be used to support a grant application to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for Brownfields assessment and clean-up.

**5. Identify Needs and Secure Funding for Infrastructure Improvements** – Based on discussions with planners from the affected communities, it is apparent that the City of Fitchburg has adequate utility, sewer, and water infrastructure in place to accommodate expected levels of development and/or redevelopment in the Wachusett Corridor. Given development constraints in the Leominster portion of the corridor, new commercial or industrial development within Leominster are not expected to be extensive and would likely be accommodated by existing infrastructure. The Town of Westminster also has adequate utility and water and sewer service to serve the needs of the first phase of development of the Westminster Business Park (Phase I). However, according to the Westminster Town Planner, there is not adequate sewer capacity to accommodate full build-out of Phase II of the Business Park's development without expansion of the Whitman River Treatment Plant. The Town is currently looking for funding to support expansion of the plant. One other option to consider could be tying into the

Fitchburg treatment system. That would likely require a feasibility analysis and a cooperative agreement between the Town of Westminster and the City of Fitchburg. While there may be a number of ways these sewer needs might be met, it is apparent that full development of the Westminster Business Park would require further infrastructure improvements in order to move forward.

With regard to transportation infrastructure, a potentially significant impediment to economic development in the Wachusett Corridor is the railroad bridge over Route 31/Princeton Road to the north of Fifth Mass Turnpike. As discussed in the Transportation Element of this Smart Growth Plan, this bridge involves a reverse curve, a narrow cross section, poor sight distances, and low clearance. It is currently a hazardous location for motorists and a constraint for trucks carrying freight in the corridor.

In its current condition, these constraints could have an impact on future economic development in the vicinity of this bridge, limiting the flow of freight traffic into and out of the corridor. Another circulation issue potentially affecting development in the corridor is the limited accessibility to the property within and adjacent to the Newark America site, west of Route 31/Princeton Road, south of its intersection with Route 2A/Westminster Road. This property offers development potential which would be restricted given current access to the site. These are issues which should be considered as plans for the area are developed.



#### **6. Work with Local Educational Institutions to Train the Future Employees of the Wachusett Corridor –**

To support the growth of the Wachusett Corridor, it is essential that available workforce within the corridor can benefit from the opportunities that development of the corridor offers. In order to do this effectively, adequate training and educational opportunities must be available that can provide local residents with the technical skills needed by current and future employers in the corridor. To accomplish this, a cooperative effort needs to be undertaken in coordination with local employers, the Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, the Massachusetts Office of Business Development and local educational institutions such as Fitchburg State College, Wachusett Community College, and Montachusett Regional Vocational Technical School to identify the skills needed by existing and potential new employers. An assessment of the technical skills needed by area employers can, in part, be gathered through a survey of existing businesses (see Strategy #2). Depending on the skills needed, training and educational programs should be developed that will support the long-term vocational needs of the community to provide the technical talent needed to maintain and grow the industries and enterprises of the Wachusett Corridor. This is clearly not a strategy that can be quickly implemented and will necessitate cooperation among a number of entities and require a long-term commitment of resources.

**7. Identify Opportunities for Increased Recreational and Eco-Tourism** – As discussed in the Open Space Element of this Plan, areas of Westminster and Leominster within and adjacent to the Wachusett Corridor provide extensive opportunities for outdoor recreational activities. These areas include Leominster State Forest and Wachusett Mountain State Reservation. Both of these areas offer facilities for four-season recreation including hiking, bicycling, fishing, skiing/snowboarding, and snowmobiling. A full-service ski area is operated at Mount Wachusett, approximately 6 miles from the station site. The ski area operates in conjunction with the Wachusett Village Inn. In addition, the former Courtyard by Marriott/ CoCo Key Resort is being redeveloped into a 400+ room Great Wolf Resort which will offer the largest indoor water park in New England, less than a mile from the Wachusett Station site. These facilities, in addition to other area hotels, bars and restaurants, could benefit from increased patronage assuming adequate transportation linkages can be provided with the new station. These could include shuttle services and extensions of existing trails and bike paths. Discussions have already occurred with the Montachusett Regional Transit Authority (MART) regarding shuttle connections to the new Great Wolf Resort. Further coordination with local trails committee such as the Leominster Trail Stewards, recreational commissions, and private enterprises such as local hotel operators should be supported to inventory and promote local recreational opportunities with particular focus on amenities available in the Leominster State Forest and Wachusett Mountain State Reservation and to identify opportunities to facilitate utilization of these facilities by visitors from outside of the Wachusett Corridor.

**8. Explore Funding Opportunities for Economic Development** – A variety of programs are available at both the State and Federal level that could support economic development activities in the Wachusett Corridor, particularly through investment in new or expanded infrastructure. For example, the Federal Economic Development Administration (EDA) makes construction, non-construction, and revolving loan fund investments under the Public Works and Economic Adjustment Assistance Programs. Grants or loans made under these programs can be used to “leverage regional assets to support the implementation of regional economic development strategies designed to create jobs, leverage private capital, encourage economic development, and strengthen America's ability to compete in the global marketplace.” These grants are intended to develop initiatives that advance new ideas and creative approaches to address rapidly evolving economic conditions. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts also supports economic development through MassDevelopment, the state's finance and development authority, and the MassWorks Infrastructure Program through the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development. These programs can be used to support infrastructure improvements and facility development. A thorough assessment of funding opportunities should be conducted to identify the programs which would be most applicable and beneficial to support the needs and development of the Wachusett Corridor. Establishment of partnerships among communities will enhance the likelihood of successful pursuit of these opportunities.

**9. Market the Region** – To a large extent, marketing of business opportunities in North Central Massachusetts is already being conducted through the North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce (NCMCC) and the Fitchburg Redevelopment Authority (FRA). In conjunction with the NCMCC, the FRA, and the Steering Committee proposed in Strategy #1, a targeted marketing strategy

should be undertaken to promote the opportunities and amenities offered by the Wachusett Corridor. Some of these attributes include:

- Location in relation to the regional transportation network
- Quality of life
- Excellent educational resources
- Comparatively lower cost of housing
- Talented, skilled workforce
- Strong civic leadership
- Scenic and recreational amenities
- Easy access to Metropolitan Boston without the costs

A comprehensive marketing plan for the corridor could be developed to promote these attributes and attract new businesses and employers to the area.