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Executive Summary

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Introduction

Transportation in the Montachusett Region (Region) ranges from rural highways connecting small towns, to urban streetscapes and cities connected by major highways and arterials. Public transit on local, regional and statewide scales exists, as do major corridors where freight travels within and across our Region to areas nationwide. Inhabitants of the Region rely on this vast network to access jobs and recreation in the Region and beyond. The infrastructure that exists today and the needs for our future create a vision for transportation in the Region in the Region's "*Journey to 2050*" Regional Transportation Plan (RTP).

What is the RTP?



The 2024 RTP serves as a long-term blueprint of the Region's transportation system. The current network is compared to the past and envisioned 25 years into the future. Needs are identified and a

framework of projects and priorities are set across all modes, i.e. highway, transit, bicycle and pedestrian, freight, etc. The RTP also serves to provide a basis for any federally financed transportation and transit project, program or study.

Background

The region was first settled by Indigenous Americans approximately 10,000 to 12,000 years ago. At the time of the English settlers in the 17th Century, the Abenaki and Wabanaki Confederacy lived in the region. The Confederacy set up the original trail connections of which many remain in use through today's modern transportation network and also provided many of the place names that are still used. The Region was settled by Europeans as early as the 17th Century and began as small settlements that moved from an era of agrarianism into the age of industrialization and now into the era of information and communications. The Region's

landscape varies from urban centers with a strong presence of mixed-uses (commercial, housing and in some cases industry) with well-established neighborhoods to small, sparsely populated rural communities containing “town commons”.

Demographics

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

Also included in this chapter are projections for the Region in terms of population, employment and housing. These projections were developed by MassDOT in coordination with the MPO and MRPC. Population and population projections are presented in **Table 2.1** below.

Table 2.1
Population & Projections for the Region

| TOWN | Census 2000 | Census 2010 | Census 2020 | Population 2030 | Population 2040 | Population 2050 |
|------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Ashburnham | 5,546 | 6,081 | 6,315 | 6,195 | 5,931 | 5,582 |
| Ashby | 2,845 | 3,074 | 3,193 | 3,554 | 3,732 | 3,760 |
| Athol | 11,299 | 11,584 | 11,945 | 11,706 | 11,195 | 10,581 |
| TOTAL | 7,287 | 7,427 | 8,479 | 9,128 | 9,424 | 9,353 |
| Clinton | 13,435 | 13,606 | 15,428 | 14,974 | 14,248 | 13,471 |
| Fitchburg | 39,102 | 40,318 | 41,946 | 41,614 | 41,193 | 40,305 |
| Gardner | 20,770 | 20,228 | 21,287 | 19,625 | 17,655 | 15,604 |
| Groton | 9,547 | 10,646 | 11,315 | 12,494 | 13,622 | 13,955 |
| Harvard | 5,981 | 6,520 | 6,851 | 6,964 | 7,144 | 6,945 |
| Hubbardston | 3,909 | 4,382 | 4,328 | 4,615 | 4,570 | 4,283 |
| Lancaster | 7,380 | 8,055 | 8,441 | 8,277 | 7,922 | 7,305 |
| Leominster | 41,303 | 40,759 | 43,782 | 41,404 | 38,098 | 34,581 |
| Lunenburg | 9,401 | 10,086 | 11,782 | 11,756 | 11,370 | 10,839 |
| Petersham | 1,180 | 1,234 | 1,194 | 1,108 | 963 | 839 |
| Phillipston | 1,621 | 1,682 | 1,726 | 1,674 | 1,540 | 1,346 |
| Royalston | 1,254 | 1,258 | 1,250 | 1,206 | 1,080 | 911 |
| Shirley | 6,373 | 7,211 | 7,431 | 8,476 | 9,258 | 9,803 |
| Sterling | 7,257 | 7,808 | 7,985 | 7,678 | 7,302 | 6,556 |
| Templeton | 6,799 | 8,013 | 8,149 | 8,926 | 9,511 | 9,915 |
| Townsend | 9,198 | 8,926 | 9,127 | 8,856 | 8,116 | 7,118 |
| Westminster | 6,907 | 7,277 | 8,213 | 7,932 | 7,541 | 7,019 |
| Winchendon | 9,611 | 10,300 | 10,364 | 10,285 | 9,824 | 9,135 |
| TOTAL | 228,005 | 236,475 | 250,531 | 248,447 | 241,239 | 229,206 |
| Statewide | 6,349,097 | 6,547,629 | 7,029,917 | 7,195,346 | 7,263,082 | 7,267,961 |

Goals, Objectives & Strategies, and Performance Measures

The Vision Statement, Goals, Objectives and Strategies (GO&S) inform, guide and improve the MPO decision making process. For this RTP, an update of the Vision Statement and the GO&S was undertaken. These updated statements are based on the prior RTP that were refined over a series of meetings and discussions with the MPO, members of the Montachusett Joint Transportation Committee (MJTC), and the general public. The establishment of these GO&S help to define and guide the scenarios, analysis and recommendations that encompass this RTP. The Vision Statement and Goals are presented below.

Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21) required Performance Measures (PMs) to inform and improve the MPO decision making process. PMs are set to achieve a desired set of performance outcomes for a multimodal transportation network. After an MPO develops their set of performance outcomes, the PMs are used to track the performance of the outcomes over time to determine the progress in meeting them. This tracking occurs through the ongoing data collection and planning activities of the MRPC. The development and tracking of PMs allow the MRPC to identify the areas that additional emphasis through TIP projects may be necessary to achieve a safe and dependable regional multimodal transportation network.

Vision Statement: Aspirational view of the regional transportation system in 2050

“ The Montachusett Metropolitan Planning Organization seeks to provide a multimodal and inclusionary transportation system that is safe, secure, efficient and affordable to all individuals while supporting and encouraging environmentally- sustainable economic development, growth, and revitalization in the Montachusett Region.”

Goals: General statements of what we wish to accomplish

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

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

Infrastructure and Congestion

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

The Congestion chapter focuses on what are considered the most congested roadways and corridors in the Region as well as congestion related projects and studies done since the last RTP.

Safety

This chapter presents the MRPC's ongoing commitment to the goal of improving roadway safety in the Region for all transportation modes. The Vision Zero, Safe System Approach, Equity, and Collaboration efforts found in the 2023 Massachusetts Strategic Highway Safety Plan are presented. The impact of COVID on fatalities and serious injuries is examined. The traditional method of recommending existing dangerous locations for safety improvements employed. Also, at-risk road segments that are susceptible to fatalities and serious injuries

related to speeding due to a number of roadway and societal risk factors are recommended for safety improvement projects.

Bicycle & Pedestrian

Increasing concern for air quality, energy conservation, rising fuel costs, and the health benefits of getting outdoors is leading to renewed interest in multi-modal transportation in the Region and throughout the state. The MRPC has been working toward a more sustainable transportation system by educating and promoting transportation mode choice throughout the Region. This chapter examines and reviews existing and proposed Bicycle and Pedestrian transportation options while focusing on the importance of mode shift.

Economic Vitality

The MRPC is committed to the goal of improving economic vitality in the Region by focusing on improving the transportation infrastructure that services the diverse economic drivers within the Region. The Economic Vitality Needs dialog provides a snapshot of the existing transportation infrastructure critical to the economic vitality of the Region that should be the focus of future improvement.

Transit

This chapter presents a review of the state of the current transit network operating in the Region from bus to commuter rail. Public outreach comments were significant and plentiful when related to transit. The negative impact of COVID on transit is examined. Many opportunities exist to expand and improve the system. Several recommendations are included to try to meet the various challenges identified but as is often the case funding plays a major role in what can be implemented. MART remains open to expanding services wherever possible to meet unmet regional needs and increase accessibility.

Environment

This chapter seeks explains the effect of the environment and possible effects of climate change have as applied to the transportation system in the Region. Environment and climate change related programs, studies and initiatives are highlighted that can help the state meet its Green House Gas reduction goals.

Public Outreach, Input, and Participation

An important element of the development process for the RTP is public outreach and involvement. Towards this end, the MRPC utilized several methods in an attempt to bring as many individuals as possible into the RTP development. This included updates at subregional workshops, meetings, targeted emails, an online survey, and hard copy survey distribution. The survey was completed by 303 individuals. Additionally, during the development of other planning documents, notice of applicability and linkage to the RTP were identified and incorporated.

Subregional workshops were held as follows:



REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN

JOURNEY TO 2050

PUBLIC OUTREACH WORKSHOPS

The Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC) would like to announce a series of meetings that will focus on the 2024 update of the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). The Regional Transportation Plan provides guidance to local and state officials in deciding how to spend federal and state transportation funds as well as outlines the transportation priority needs for the region. The plan is a long-range document for the maintenance and improvement for the road, highway, bicycle and pedestrian, bridge, rail, transit, freight and airport systems of the Montachusett Region over the next 20 years. The RTP is a federally mandated document that is developed through studies, discussions with local officials, boards and commissions and public comment/outreach. While the RTP may cover a 20-year period, it is updated every four years so it can be adapted to emerging needs and trends.

The Plan must examine and address all modes of transportation that exist in the region through an inventory of current conditions and then identify various needs and recommendations that can range from specific projects to general goals or policies. Additionally, in order for projects to be eligible for Federal Aid funds through the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), they must be reflected within the RTP.

All interested individuals are encouraged to participate in the plan development process through attendance at various outreach events, completion of various surveys, ~~feedback~~ and comments on the draft documents as they are prepared and by contacting the MRPC. All meetings are virtual except where noted.

Register through the QR Codes located next to each listed session above.
Registration can also be done through the MRPC website at www.mrpc.org.

Please take the RTP Survey - <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/JGK7WVR>

Subregion 1

November 14

10:00 – 11:00 am

Athol, Hubbardston, Petersham,
Phillipston, Royalston, Templeton,
Winchendon



Subregion 2

November 14

1:00 – 2:00 pm

Ashburnham, Ashby, Groton,
Townsend, Westminster



Subregion 3

November 15

10:00 – 11:00 am

Ayer, Harvard, Lunenburg, Shirley



Subregion 4

November 15

1:00 – 2:00 pm

Clinton, Lancaster, Sterling



Cities

November 17

10:00 – 11:00 am

Fitchburg, Gardner, Leominster



Transit / MART

November 29 5:30 – 6:30 pm

**** In person ****

MART Admin Bldg.
1427R Water Street
Fitchburg, MA 01420
Pizza will be provided.

Directions to MART Facility

Equity

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

Towards that end, this RTP conducted a review and analysis of the identified populations within the Region versus the implementation of past projects and future projects or recommendations in order to assess any undo benefit or burden. The conclusion of the review indicated that these populations were not subject to underfunding in terms of projects or recommendations in the Region.

Planning Scenarios

Based off of the work that the Commission on the Future of Transportation, staff developed scenarios based on the general concepts put forward by the Commission but more applicable to the Region's trends and communities. These scenarios include Gridlock, Vibrant Core, Multiple Hubs, and Statewide Spread. These scenarios were established to assist communities with how to meet their future demands. A past trend comparison attempt to identify successes or shortcomings since the prior RTP.

Financial

A major requirement of the RTP is that it be fiscally constrained over its life span. To achieve this, funding estimates are provided by MassDOT and the MPO estimates the fiscal impact of the project needs and recommendations identified in the RTP. Transit and Highway estimates are compared to anticipated funding levels to establish this fiscal constraint. Within this RTP, fiscal constraint was achieved. However, it should be noted that the potential readily exists for

the needs to outstrip the funding available if continued monitoring of the various systems is not maintained.

Conclusion

Journey to 2050 attempts to be a blueprint for the Region to achieve a multi-modal transportation system that balances the varying needs of its population within the fiscal projections provided.