



TRANSIT

Transit is an important mode of transportation in the Montachusett region. Transit provides access to essential services such as jobs, grocery stores, medical facilities, schools and social services, in addition to recreational transportation. In order to encourage people to switch from driving to riding, a transit system must be efficient and effective, convenient and safe.

Montachusett Regional Transit Authority (MART) provides a variety of transportation services for residents of the Montachusett Region and other areas throughout the Commonwealth. The communities served by MART have grown steadily over the years. MART now serves 22 communities in and out of the MRPC region: Fitchburg, Leominster, Gardner, Ashburnham, Shirley, Ayer, Lancaster, Sterling, Hubbardston, Royalston, Littleton, Winchendon, Ashby, Templeton, Westminster, Hardwick, Lunenburg, Harvard, Bolton, Boxborough, Stow and Athol. Fixed route bus services, paratransit and subscription services are operated by a private management company, namely, Management of Transportation Services, Inc. All other transportation is operated by a variety of private vendors in Massachusetts. The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) is responsible for commuter rail services from Fitchburg to Boston.

Transit Equity

The Montachusett Regional Transit Authority (MART) operates the fixed route transit system in the region. Fixed route service is concentrated within the urban cities of Fitchburg, Leominster and Gardner. Over the years, service has expanded slowly into neighboring communities based upon need, local requests and area attractions. MART has been striving to accomplish many of the goals that were set established in the 2015 RTP.

Additionally, on a regular basis, the MRPC conducts Transit Development Plan (TDP) for the fixed route communities that involve a review of demographics, attractions and local



public outreach to identify issues and needs for the system. From these studies, adjustments are made to better serve the population.

In September 2018, the Montachusett MPO endorsed a “Coordinated Public Transit–Human Services Transportation Plan (CPT-HST)” update that documents the region’s unmet human-service transportation needs of individuals with disabilities, low-income individuals (or persons below the poverty level) and the elderly. The target populations for the CPT-HST align with the Title VI and EJ target populations.

The CPT-HST Plan was developed as a tool to help local transportation providers and communities improve transportation services, increase efficiency of service delivery, and expand outreach to meet growing needs. It also seeks to provide a framework to guide the investment of existing transportation resources and the acquisition of future funds. A series of priorities and recommendations are included in the CPT-HST Update to address transit equity issues and are incorporated in this RTP within the Transit chapter.

Improvements Made Since 2015

MART has been striving to accomplish many of the goals that were set established in the 2015 RTP.

- MART, as a result of the Comprehensive Service Analysis, revised its bus schedules for all local routes in Fitchburg/Leominster and Gardner effective in September 2015.
- Route 11 was re-routed to the new Great Wolf Lodge resort in Fitchburg to accommodate the workforce of that business.
- In order to ensure continued service levels a fare increase was implemented in July 2015. MART had not previously increased fares in eight years. Due to the increasing demand and lack of increase in Commonwealth funding, this fare increase was an important part of the overall financing of MART. This may have had a negative impact on ridership, although downward ridership is being experienced all over the country.
- Brokerage services continue to increase in volume every year. Services have grown from \$105 million in 2014 to \$160 million in 2018.



- MART received a TIGGER II grant in 2011 to implement projects to reduce its carbon footprint. With this grant MART has made several improvements to its facilities resulting in substantial energy savings overall. MART has:
 - i. Built two Solar PV systems at its Water Street facility in Fitchburg and the Maintenance Facility in Gardner
 - ii. Replaced all lighting in all facilities with LEDs
 - iii. Replaced its HVAC systems with new high efficiency systems in its Water Street and Main Street facilities,
 - iv. Installed a BackNet Energy Management system in all its facilities
 - v. Installed Thermal Destratification Fans in all its vehicle storage facilities.
- Wachusett Station was completed and opened for commuter rail and commuter shuttle service on September 30, 2016. The Wachusett Shuttle runs from Gardner City Hall in a 20-minute one-way run from 5:15am to 7:40pm with break intervals throughout the day. The service times are meant to coincide with train arrival and departure times.
- MART added three new fixed route shuttles since the last RTP:
 - i. Wachusett Shuttle began on 9/30/2016 to coincide with the opening of Wachusett Station.
 - ii. On April 24, 2017 MART began a pilot project to provide service between Fitchburg/ Leominster and the Devens Enterprise Zone. The service was designed by a public-private collaborative between MART, the Devens Enterprise Commission, Mass Development, and private companies with businesses located in the Devens Zone. The shuttle brings workers from Fitchburg and Leominster to stops in Shirley, throughout Devens, and Ayer. The service was made into a normal route in October 2017.
 - iii. On June 4, 2018 MART began a “last mile” commuter rail shuttle service. This shuttle travels between the MBTA Littleton Commuter Rail Station and goes along Route 110 in Littleton and Westford out to the Westford Technology Park (Juniper Networks). The service



only runs at AM peak and PM peak commuting hours and is designed to meet the commuters coming off and going to the Littleton commuter train station.

Fixed Route

Local - 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 4-29: 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

As Table 4-29 shows, MART's fixed-route bus ridership decreased over the 4-year period from FYs 2015-2018. The biggest single decline is from 2016 to 2017 with at 16% drop in Leominster/Fitchburg ridership and a 19% drop in Gardner ridership. Ridership data from 2018 seems to indicate that the decline has leveled off between FY 2017 and 2018, with a 5.09% drop in Leominster/Fitchburg ridership and a 3.58% drop in Gardner ridership.

Regional Services

MART has a number of regional fixed route bus and shuttle services that span a wide geographic area. Most of the services are new and don't cover the entire 4 years of the 2015 RTP.

The Link Bus service is available along the Route 2/2A between Greenfield and Gardner, stopping in Gardner, Templeton, Phillipston, and Athol. The Athol Link connects to Route



32 operated by the Franklin Regional Transit Authority (FRTA). MART also operates the Winchendon Link which travels along state routes 68 & 202 from Gardner through Baldwinville and into Winchendon Center.

Table 4-30: 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

*The dramatic 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 began (November 2015). This service replaced an old Dial-A-Ride service and instituted a local fixed route between Athol and Orange. Therefore, the ridership was not truly lost, 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 continues to have its 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, then through Westminster (began in 2016), then to Fitchburg and Leominster. This route has always run from around Labor Day up to Memorial Day.

Table 4-31: 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

* 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, which began service in on September 30, 2016 (FY 2017), has had an 87.57% increase in ridership due to the opening of Wachusett Station. (Also includes riders served by MART brought between MBTA stations due to track construction in some months.) This new route diverted some of the riders from the



Intercity Bus who rode to access the downtown Fitchburg Commuter Rail Station. This shuttle is a shorter route and 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, with stops in the local communities of Shirley and Ayer including the Commuter Rail Stations there to provide the last mile connection. It began slowly but was able to achieve measurable ridership in only ten weeks. It continued to grow in 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 provide 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 an outstanding 250 for only 4 hours of service a day, Monday through Friday. The following table (Table 4-32) displays the ridership for these routes.

Table 4-32: Other Regional Shuttle Yearly Ridership

Intercity Routes	2015	2016	2017	2018	Percent Change 2015 to 2018
Devens Regional	--	--	416*	4701	**
Littleton-Westford Commuter	--	--	--	250†	**

Source: Montachusett Regional Transit Authority

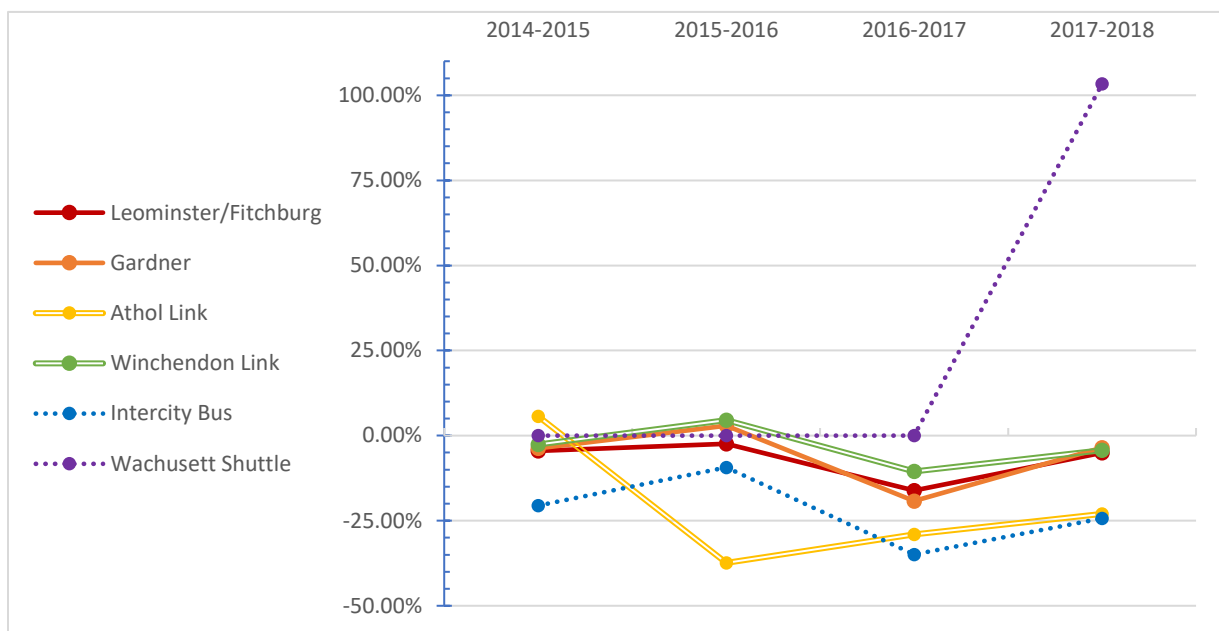
* Started as a pilot in late April 2017. Launched at full-time route in October 2017.

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

The following figure (Figure 4-55) displays the percent change in ridership from each fiscal year. The Devens Shuttle and Littleton-Westford Commuter Shuttles are **not included** due to the lack of data to accurately calculate percent change in service.



Figure 4-55: Change in Yearly Ridership, Fixed Routes



Source: Montachusett Regional Transit Authority

While ridership on fixed routes (excluding the Wachusett Shuttle) has continued to decrease, the change from FY2017 to FY2018 seems to show the decrease slowing, from an overall decrease of -21.96% between FY2016 and FY2017 to -12.04% between FY2017 and FY2018.

Paratransit

MART has a fleet of 165 vans and small buses for paratransit service. MART's complementary paratransit service includes origin to destination transportation for citizens with disabilities who are 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) provide service for seniors and the disabled; Royalston does not have MART affiliated COA transportation available. Prices and times of operation vary per community.

**Table 4-33: 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

* 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%.

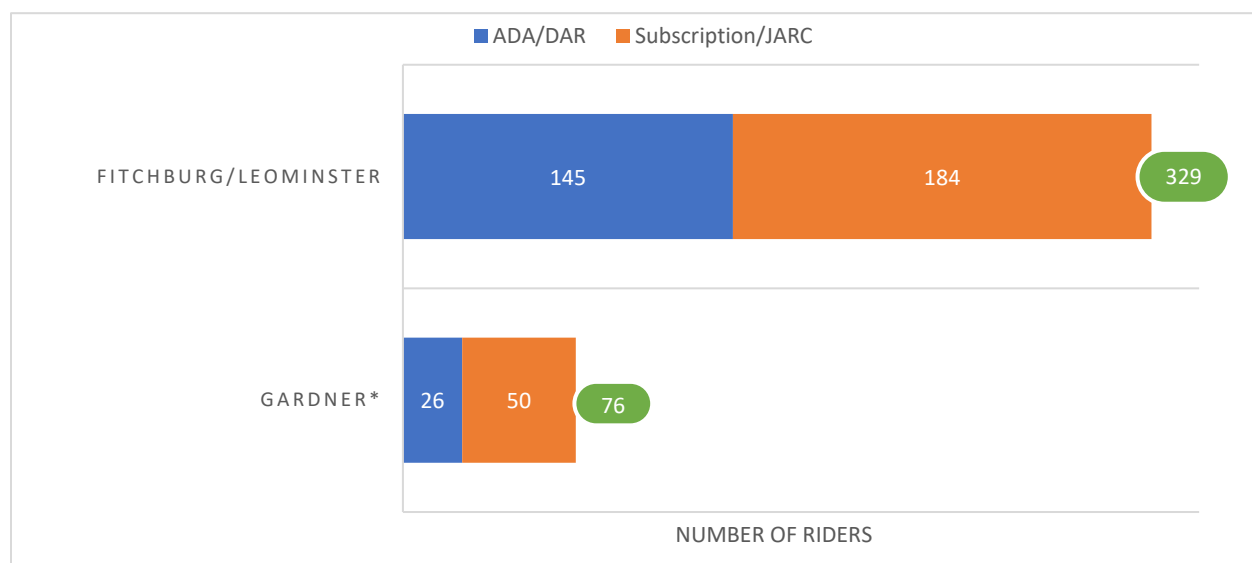
Table 4-34: COA Yearly Ridership

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

During 2015, paratransit and COA ridership peaked, but since then has seen a gradual decline. The following charts (Figures 4-56 and 4-57) highlight average daily paratransit (not including contracted social service agency rides) and COA ridership across different services and communities.

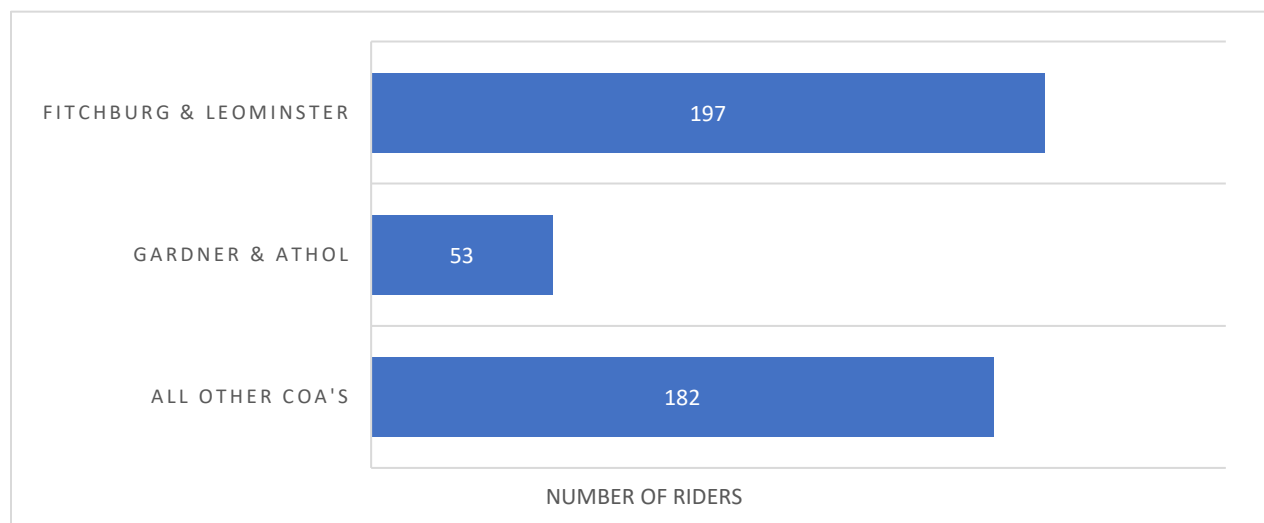


Figure 4-56: Paratransit Average Daily Ridership (2018)



Source: Montachusett Regional Transit Authority

Figure 4-57: Council on Aging Average Daily Ridership (2018)



Source: Montachusett Regional Transit Authority

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.

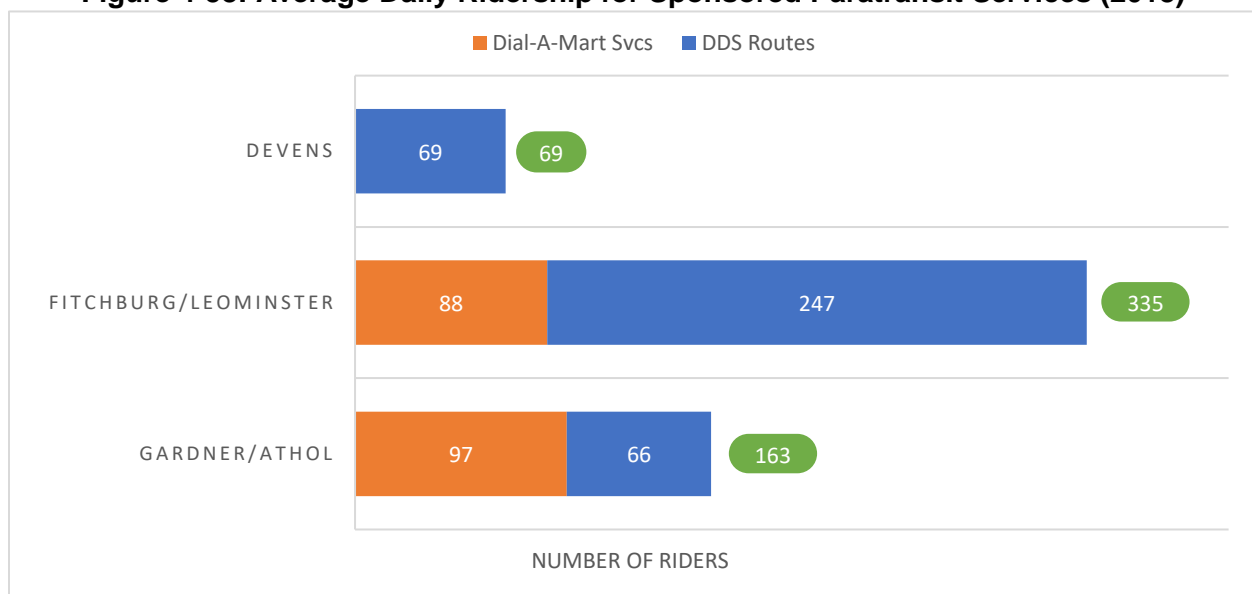
The following chart (Figure 5-58) highlights average daily ridership figures for the Dial-A-Mart services and the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) routes brokered by MART. Overall, average daily ridership has decreased by approximately 2%. However, ridership fluctuates each year, as can be seen in Table 4-35.

Table 4-35: 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

Figure 4-58: Average Daily Ridership for Sponsored Paratransit Services (2018)



Source: Montachusett Regional Transit Authority



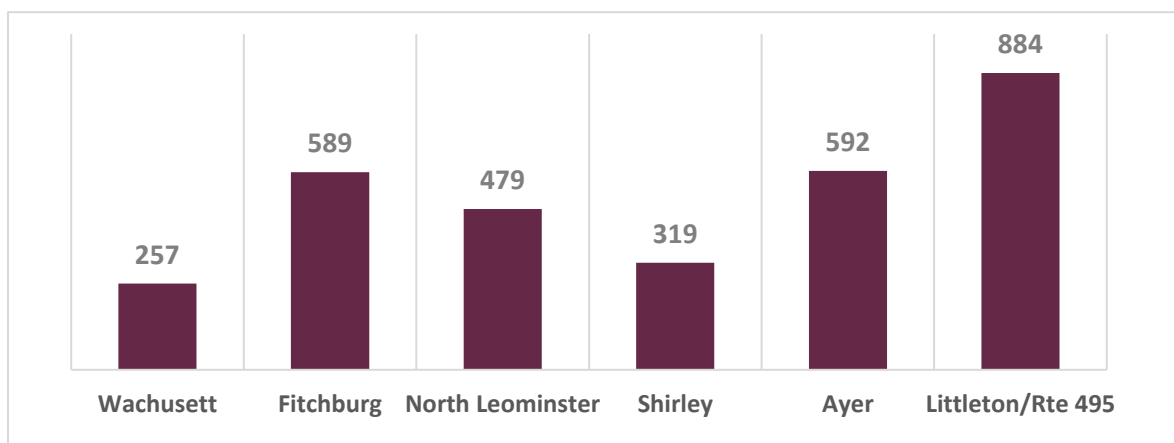
Commuter Train Stations and Parking Facilities

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 provides a transit shuttle from Gardner to Wachusett Station. The service operates from Wachusett to Boston, with stops in Fitchburg, Leominster, Shirley, Ayer and Littleton.

The MBTA audit reports that of the north-side commuter rail lines, the Fitchburg line has experienced the largest real increase and percentage increase for riders. Since 2012, two inbound trains and two outbound trains were added to increase service.

The daily ridership for the commuter line can be seen in Figure 4-59, with a large number of riders boarding and alighting at the Littleton stop. Notably, the Littleton stop's parking facilities recently added parking for an additional 50 vehicles, but is still often at capacity daily, with some drivers parking illegally. Current parking capacity and potential additions are presented in Table 4-36.

Figure 4-59: Commuter Rail Average Daily Ridership



Source: Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority and Central Transportation Planning Staff

**Table 4-36: 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	184.6%	65	N/A
Ayer	Main Street/Park Street	65	65	100%	200	Under construction
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.

Table 4-37 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. Most notable is the inbound change for the Littleton stop, an increase of 135.6% boarding and a 700% increase in alighting. Other notable changes include 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 can be seen in Figure 4-60. The trend seems to indicate that ridership is holding steady, with a large increase at the Littleton station. Once again data for 2012 ridership for Wachusett Station is unavailable due to its introduction in 2016.



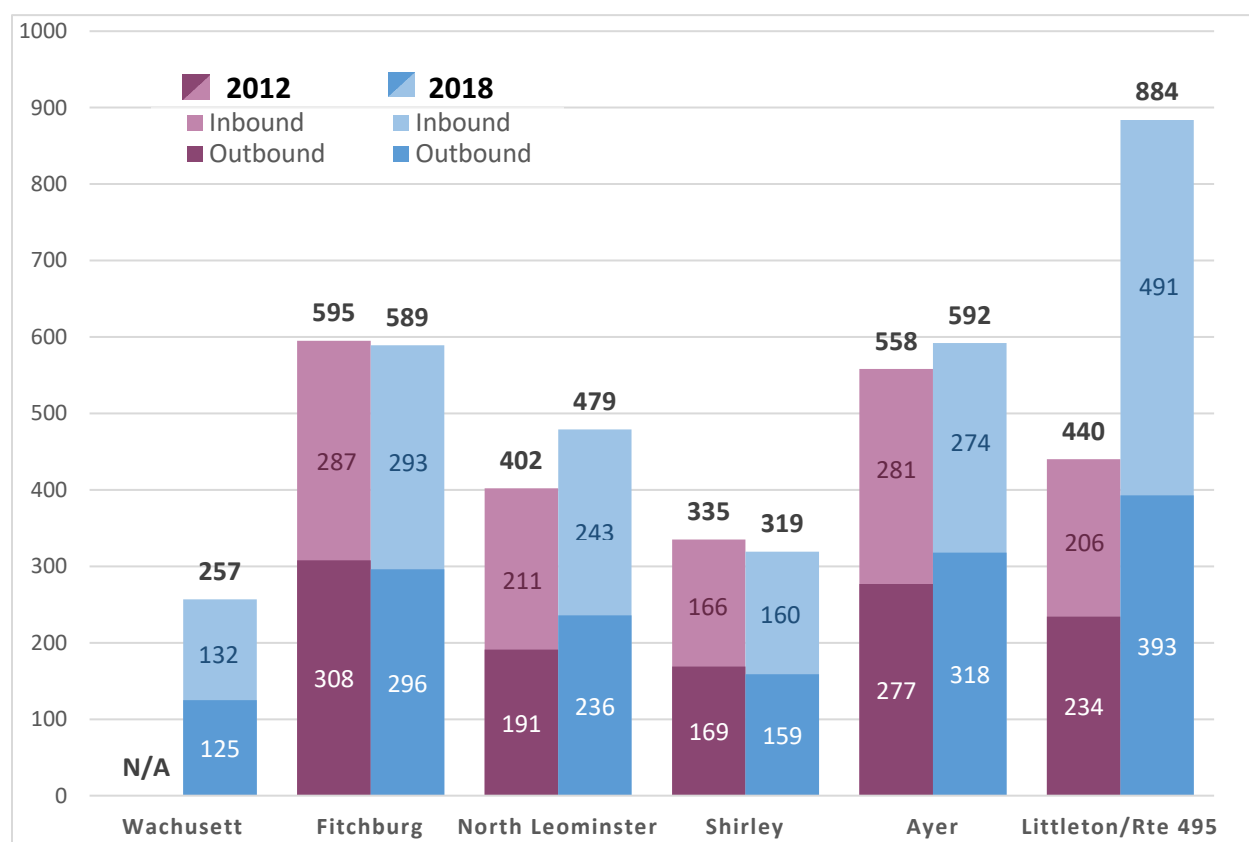
Table 4-37: Percentage Change in Commuter Ridership from 2012 to 2018

	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

*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 4-60: Commuter Rail Daily Ridership, 2012 vs 2018



Source: Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority and Central Transportation Planning Staff



Trends

Analysis of ridership on all MART services indicates a decrease in ridership, which is being experienced all over the country. Filling service gaps, meeting service needs, and increasing accessibility to residents continues to be a priority for MART. MART has been making improvements to its facilities to increase energy efficiency, and continued improvements to its parking facilities at commuter rail stations will benefit commuter ridership and the residents of the Montachusett region.

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. It will be necessary to examine the routes and schedules to determine the most efficient and effective service. MART is 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, for example evening transportation to local colleges (Mount Wachusett Community College, Fitchburg State University, etc.), 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 monitored to insure continuation of appropriate levels of service in light of MART's complementary ADA plan. Continue brokerage programs with the Department of Public Health, Department of Developmental Services, MassHealth, Department of Mental Health, MRC, and MCB.

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.

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 increases its social media presence to better promote services and information to the community. MART could collaborate with local municipalities to promote available public transit options on the municipalities' websites and social media pages. It is recommended that MART disseminates information through traditional media like local newspapers, local access television, and radio. It is also recommended that MART consider holding periodic training sessions in order to teach users on how to read and follow bus schedules.

Most of the above actions are designed to improve efficiency and lower overall demand on the highway system at a relatively low cost. In summary, there are several key and identifiable avenues by which the MART system can be both properly maintained and improved. They are:

- Continued monitoring of routes and schedules so that any beneficial changes can be identified and implemented;
- Alternative sources of funding for continued transit operations must be developed and instituted;
- The marketing effort must be upgraded and increased to inform the public of transit availability and efficiency;



- Additional equipment such as radios, lift equipped trolleys, lift equipped buses, lift equipped vans, etc., should be acquired;
- Driver safety, CPR, first aid, and sensitivity courses should be maintained;
- Transit services for the elderly and disabled should continue to be upgraded as necessary to insure both availability and accessibility in compliance with MART's ADA complementary paratransit plan;
- Paratransit services provided by MART to social service agency clients should continue to be monitored for coordination of effort;
- Brokerage programs with Department of Public Health, MassHealth, Department of Mental Health, MRC, MCB, and Department of Developmental Services should be monitored for greater coordination and continued use of private enterprises.
- MAP Purchases for Elderly and Disabled Services (Section 5310).
- Collaborate with MART and municipalities to lift age restriction on COA public transit as well as increase service hours in order to better serve the communities that rely on COA public transit.
- Increase social media presence to better promote information (such as schedules, services, etc) to local community; hold periodic training sessions for the communities on how to read schedules

The following are recommendations limited to commuter rail operations that likely effect the identified target populations.

- Increase available parking at the Shirley, Ayer and Littleton commuter rail stations.
- Extend train service to Gardner.
- Improve Handicapped accessibility at Shirley and Ayer Train Stations.
- Explore possibility of a regional commuter rail facility in the Devens Enterprise Zone.