Executive Summary
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Transportation in the Montachusett 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 exist, 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 Montachusett region and beyond. The infrastructure that exists and the needs for our future develop a vision for transportation in the Montachusett region “Working Towards the Future” to 2040.

What is the RTP

The 2020 Regional Transportation Plan (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 as a basis for any federally financed transportation and transit project, program or study.

Background

The Montachusett Region was settled 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”.

Montachusett MPO

2020 Regional Transportation Plan

Working Towards The Future

MPO Endorsed: July 17, 2019
Goals, Objectives and Performance Measures

Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21) requires Performance Measures to inform and improve the MPO decision making process. Performance measures (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 allows 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

“The Montachusett Metropolitan Planning Organization seeks to provide a multi-modal transportation system that is safe, secure, efficient and affordable to all individuals while maintaining support and encouragement for economic development, growth and revitalization while simultaneously promoting a sustainable, healthy, livable and environmentally sensitive region.”

Goals

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

Regional Profile

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.

Great Wolf Lodge, Fitchburg

Infrastructure and Congestion

This 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.
Table ES-1
Population & Projections for the Montachusett Region

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<th>TOWN</th>
<th>COUNTY</th>
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<th>2040</th>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Massachusetts 6,349,097 6,547,629 6,933,887 7,225,472 7,380,399 5.90% 4.21% 2.14% 12.72%

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 Montachusett Region. It requires making investments that provide all residents - regardless of age, race, color, national origin, income or physical agility - with opportunities to work, shop, be healthy, and play.
Towards that end, this RTP conducted a review/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 resulting review indicated that these populations were not subject to underfunding in terms of projects or recommendations. Additionally, the projects identified consisted mainly of repair/replacement of existing infrastructure and where new systems such as trails were identified they did not adversely impact a particular population but would instead prove helpful to the demographic.

**Economic Vitality**

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

**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 Montachusett Region and throughout the state. The MRPC has been working toward a more sustainable transportation system by educating and promoting transportation mode choice throughout the region. This chapter examines
and reviews existing and proposed Bicycle and Pedestrian transportation options while focusing on the importance of mode shift.

**Safety**

This chapter uses the Massachusetts Strategic Highway Safety Plan Update Focus and the Montachusett Region All Mode High Crash Locations Focus as an approach to improving safety in the region. A five-year lookback on crashes reveals the high crash locations and the trends associated with this type of data. Locations where there have been safety improvements have proved to have a significant reduction in crashes. It is recommended that future safety studies be conducted on the updated high crash location list.

**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. 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.
Environment and Climate Change

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 Input

An important element of the development process for the RTP is public outreach and involvement. Towards this end, the MRPC utilized several public meetings as well as an online survey and interactive mapping component in an effort to solicit feedback on the needs and issues facing the region’s transportation network.

Meetings were held as follows:

- Fitchburg/Leominster at MART Facility
- Harvard Town Hall
- Ayer Town Hall
- Phillipston Public Safety Building
- Winchendon Beals Memorial Library
- Montachusett Regional Trails Coalition meeting at MRPC

Additionally, a survey was produced to solicit general opinions regarding the transportation systems and areas of need and emphasis. Two hundred and three respondents provided feedback that combined with the comments made at the public outreach meetings helped to expand, clarify and form the objectives of the identified goals.
Planning Scenarios

Based off of the work that the Commission on the Future of Transportation in the Commonwealth recently completed, 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 Status Quo, Multiple Hubs and Strong Community Centers. These scenarios were established to assist communities with how to meet their future demands. Action related to the advancement of these scenarios would occur as part of the project development process by the municipalities and within the TIP prioritization and development process.

Financial Analysis

A major requirement of the RTP is that it be fiscally constrained over its 20-year 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

Working Towards the Future 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.