

Chapter 1 - INTRODUCTION

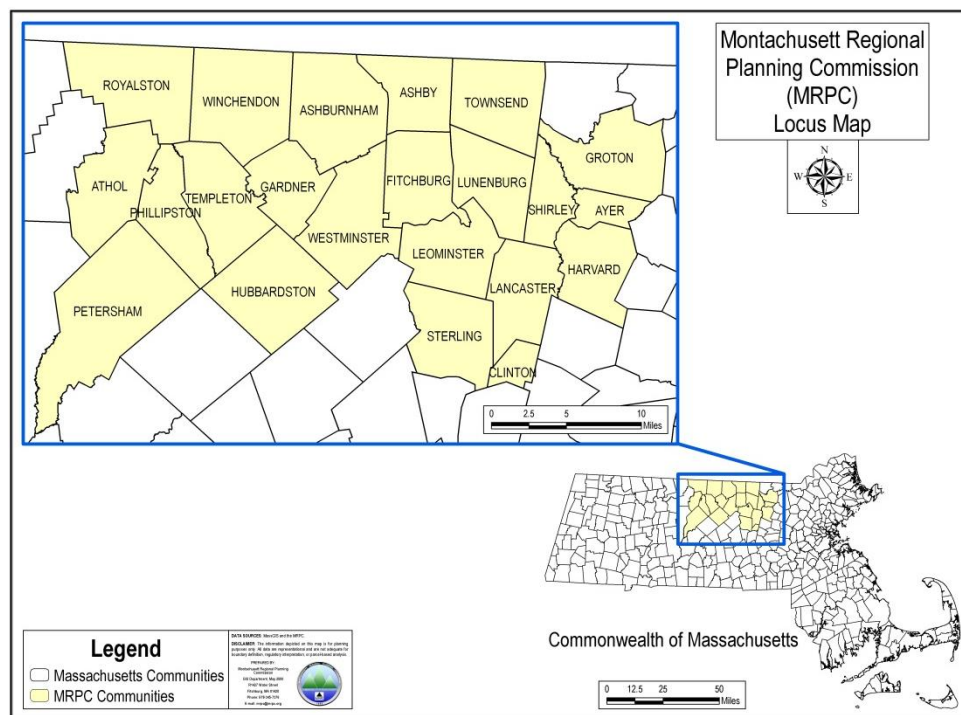


Chapter 1 – Introduction

Introduction

Moving Forward is the long range transportation plan (RTP) developed by the Montachusett Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). The RTP is an assessment of the multi-modal transportation network within the Montachusett planning region, its needs now and in the future, the resources available and the projects and policies, both state and federal, which will guide the region over the next 25 years to 2040. The development of this plan has followed a robust outreach program of public meetings and surveys in an effort to solicit local input and guidance on topics of performance measures, areas of concern, possible projects and prioritization.

Figure 1-1
Montachusett
MPO Region



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”.

The physical landscape can be described as “typical New England” with a topography that is highlighted by the high peaks of Mount Wachusett and Mount Watatic. Several other smaller rolling hills also dot the landscape. Three watersheds named the Chicopee River, Millers River and Nashua River also span the region. Several streams, mountain paths, rail-trails, urbanized downtowns and neighborhoods, historic village centers and new housing subdivisions are located throughout and are connected by a local, state and interstate road system. Also the region is spanned by a commuter and freight rail system that links the region to Boston and Albany, New York.

Montachusett Metropolitan Planning Organization (MMPO)

All urbanized areas with a population greater than 50,000 are required by the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) Federal regulations to designate an MPO for the area. The establishment of an MPO is necessary for the State to receive Federal transportation funds. The MPO region is situated in north central Massachusetts and includes 3 cities and 19 towns covering approximately 685 square miles. Overall, the population of the region in 2010 was 236,475. Route 2 runs east-west throughout the region and serves as the second major east-west highway in the Commonwealth. In the Montachusett Region, the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC) serves as staff for the MPO.

The MPO is currently comprised of the following signatories:

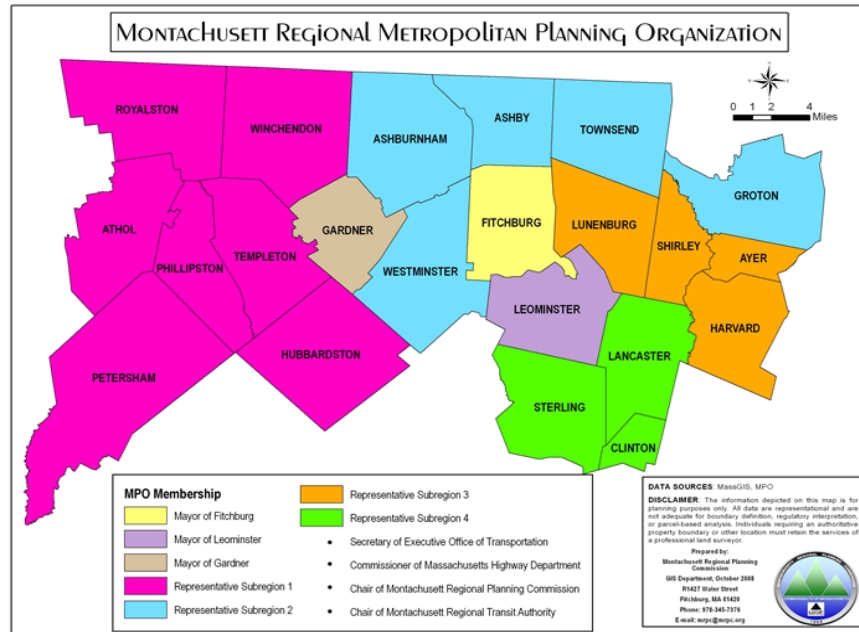
- Secretary and CEO of the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT);
- Administrator of MassDOT Highway Division
- Chairman of the MRPC,
- Chairman of the Montachusett Regional Transit Authority (MART),
- Mayor of Fitchburg,
- Mayor of Leominster
- Mayor of Gardner
- One Selectman from Subregion 1, 2, 3, and 4

The 19 rural communities have been grouped into one of these four geographically defined sub Regions:

- Subregion 1) Athol, Hubbardston, Petersham, Phillipston, Royalston, Templeton, and Winchendon;
- Subregion 2) Ashburnham, Ashby, Groton, Townsend, and Westminster;
- Subregion 3) Ayer, Harvard, Lunenburg and Shirley; and
- Subregion 4) Clinton, Lancaster, and Sterling.

These members serve as the MPO Policy Board that seeks to ensure a comprehensive, cooperative, and continuing (3C) transportation planning process in the Leominster - Fitchburg Urbanized Area and the Montachusett Region.

Figure 1-2
Montachusett
MPO Subregions



Montachusett Joint Transportation Committee

As part of the outreach and local participation process, a special advisory committee known as the Montachusett Joint Transportation Committee (MJTC) serves as the Transportation Policy Advisory Group for the Region. The principal mission of the MJTC is to foster broad and robust participation in the transportation planning process by maintaining a forum that brings together representatives of cities and towns, citizens concerned with the transportation planning process, other public agencies, and transportation providers, thereby facilitating, wherever possible, the consistency of transportation plans and programs for the Region with the policies, priorities, and plans of affected state and regional agencies, local communities, private groups and individuals within the region. Membership in the MJTC is comprised of locally appointed representatives (one designated by the community planning board and one by the Chief Elected Official) as well as representatives of area organizations or agencies. The MJTC strives to be as inclusive as possible and regularly encourages those groups wishing to be part of the process to formally request membership. The MJTC also participates in all Montachusett MPO meetings and has the opportunity to, whenever possible, review, comment and advise the MPO on matters being discussed.

Planning Documents and the MPO

The Regional Transportation Plan provides the basic framework for implementing future short-range and long-range transportation and air quality improvements in the Montachusett Region. In addition, it sets the basic transportation goals and objectives for the region. These goals and objectives are consistent with the long-range land use plan and the social, economic, and environmental policies of the region.

The RTP defines short and long range goals and objectives, identifies new transportation facilities and major changes to existing facilities, contains a broad range of infrastructure and operational projects that consider all modes of transportation and are designed to increase the efficiency of existing facilities.

In addition to the RTP, the MRPC staff annually produces a Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP).

The UPWP is a financial programming tool developed annually as part of the federally certified transportation planning process. This document contains task descriptions of the transportation-planning program of the MPO, with associated budget information and funding sources for the program year.

The TIP is a prioritized listing of transportation projects proposed for implementation during the future four federal fiscal years. TIP projects are identified by funding category so that where necessary priorities may be established for projects within each funding program.

Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21) is the federal transportation legislation that helps to define and guide the RTP. A key feature of MAP-21 “is the establishment of a performance- and outcome-based program. The objective of this performance- and outcome-based program is for States to invest resources in projects that collectively will make progress toward the achievement of the national goals.”

Performance measures and targets were developed by the MPO staff as part of this RTP to track the performance of elements of the regional transportation system. These performance measures will form the basis for system monitoring in the Montachusett Region. These regional performance measures will begin to be incorporated into the decision making process for the TIP over the next few development cycles. As these measures are further defined, refined and adopted on the federal and state level, it is expected that the Transportation Evaluation Criteria (TEC) used in the TIP development prioritization process will also be revised and/or updated to reflect them.

Continued within MAP-21, the following eight planning factors for both metro and statewide planning remain in effect:

1. **Economic Vitality** – Support the economic vitality of the metropolitan area, especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity and efficiency;
2. **Safety** – Increase the safety of the transportation system for motorized and nonmotorized users;
3. **Security** – Increase the security of the transportation system for motorized and nonmotorized users;
4. **Mobility** – Increase the accessibility and mobility of people and freight;
5. **Environment** – Protect and enhance the environment, promote energy conservation, improve the quality of life, and promote consistency between transportation improvements and state and local planned growth and economic development patterns;
6. **System Integration** – Enhance the integration and connectivity of the transportation system, across and between modes, for people and freight;
7. **System Management** – Promote efficient system management and operation, and;
8. **System Preservation** – Emphasize preservation of the existing transportation system

The RTP has been developed with these factors in mind. Additionally, the MPO has developed specific Goals and Objectives to guide the plan. These as well as their associated Performance Measures can be found in Chapter 2 of this document. The following is a brief list of the Goals.

- 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 and Freight Movement
- Goal 6 – Improve Transportation Options and Promote Healthy Modes
- Goal 7 – Reduce Green House Gas and Promote Environmental Practices and Sustainability

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.

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