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Transit & Paratransit Services



2016 Regional Transportation Plan

9 Transit and Paratransit Services

Because Franklin County is the most rural region in Massachusetts, it is difficult to effectively meet residents' transportation needs through fixed transit routes. The consequence is a limited public transit network and a region that is heavily dependent upon the personal automobile. This can be challenging for the estimated seven percent of households in Franklin County that do not have access to a vehicle, or those who are limited in their driving, such as the elderly.

Despite the vast geographic area of the county and its rural character, there is a growing demand for increased public transit options. Through public outreach conducted during the development of this Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), as well as outreach conducted for other transit-related projects in the county, it is clear that there is a strong desire and need for increased and improved transit services in the region. By far, the most common and frequent comment received about transportation in the region is for expanded bus service.

The parts of the region with the best transit access and more service are typically located in the larger town centers and downtown areas that have the highest population densities, such as: Greenfield, Turners Falls, Sunderland, Deerfield, and Orange. Sparsely populated areas have less transit access due to the higher cost of providing services to a more dispersed population with limited funds. A lack of secure long-term funding is a critical challenge to providing public transit in Franklin County. One of the most popular bus routes in the region, Route 32, has no secure long-term funding.

The role of the FRCOG in the context of regional public transit access is to work with the regional transit agencies and MassDOT to help with the following tasks:

- 1) provide the best transit services possible;
- 2) expand existing services to meet resident and worker needs as feasible;
- and 3) ensure that transit planning and programming activities in Franklin County are consistent with the principles of MassDOT's transportation vision, as clarified in its *YouMove* planning initiative.



FRTA Bus at the John W. Olver Transit Center

The Franklin Regional Transit Authority (FRTA) provides the majority of public transit services to Franklin County with some services provided by the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA). A total of eight fixed bus routes currently operate within Franklin County. All the towns in Franklin County except for Monroe, Sunderland, and Leverett are members of the FRTA. Sunderland and Leverett are members of the PVTA. Additionally, both the FRTA and PVTA provide paratransit and demand response service to their respective towns with the level of the service varying significantly by community. A map of the service areas for the FRTA is contained at the end of this chapter.

Fixed Route Transit Services

Fixed route transit service in Franklin County is provided by the FRTA and the PVTA. The FRTA operates seven of the fixed service routes in Franklin County, including the Corporate Shuttle. The PVTA operates two fixed service routes which travel through the Franklin County communities of Sunderland and Deerfield. Transit routes operated by the FRTA are limited to weekdays and non-holidays, while one of the two routes operated by the PVTA operates also on Saturdays. The PVTA does not operate on major holidays, but does run on reduced schedules for minor holidays.

Franklin Regional Transit Authority (FRTA)

The FRTA is the primary transit agency for Franklin County. The FRTA's service territory extends into Hampshire, Hampden, and Worcester Counties. The FRTA serves the most rural and geographically largest area of all the Regional Transit Authorities (RTAs) in Massachusetts. The service area comprises a total of 41 towns and includes 23 towns in Franklin County and extends south to Blandford and Southwick in Hampden County, west to Middlefield in Hampshire County, and east to Petersham in Worcester County.

The FRTA, like other RTAs, is funded from a combination of federal, state, and local funding sources as well as from revenue generated from fares. Each of the towns that are serviced by the FRTA pays a local assessment. This amount is based on: the



**John W. Olver Transit Center in Greenfield
(Credit: John Linden)**

number of one-way trips associated with demand response transportation in the town and the number of vehicle revenue miles of fixed route service in each town.

The FRTA presently has 42 transit vehicles in total, which includes 7 buses, 10 minibuses, and 25 vans, all of which are wheelchair accessible, and four service vehicles. All of the buses used for fixed route service have bicycle racks on the front of the buses. The bicycle racks hold two to three bicycles each and are on the buses year-round. The FRTA operates out of the newly constructed John W. Olver Transit Center located in downtown Greenfield. The JWO Transit Center is the first zero net energy transit center in the nation and houses the administrative offices of the FRTA and the FRCOG. It is located adjacent to an Amtrak-operated passenger rail line and accommodates intercity bus service. All of the fixed transit routes originate out of the JWO Transit Center. The building provides passenger amenities including rest rooms, indoor waiting area, a small café, WiFi service, and bicycle parking.

Table 9-1: FRTA Routes and Route Frequency

Route	Primary Destination(s) from Downtown Greenfield	Number of Round-Trips on Weekdays	Fare (One-way)
21	Greenfield	9	\$1.00
22	Montague	8	\$1.00
23	Amherst	2	\$3.00
31	Northampton	6	\$1.50
32	Orange	7	\$1.50
41	Charlemont	4	\$1.50
Corp	Corporate Center Shuttle	5	\$1.00

Table 9-1 outlines current FRTA bus route schedules, frequency, and fare schedule. Bus fares for FRTA fixed route service currently ranges from \$1.00 to \$3.00. Passengers with valid Statewide Access Passes, ADA cards, Medicare cards, and persons over 60 years old ride for half of the listed fare. Passengers with a valid MA Commission for Blind card, FRTA Veteran’s photo ID card, or a valid Department of Veteran's Affairs photo ID card ride for free. Children under the age of five ride free when accompanied by a fare-paying adult. In June of 2010, the FRTA installed electronic fareboxes on all fixed route transit buses. These fareboxes are intended to make riding the bus easier and more convenient by allowing riders to purchase a magnetic fare ticket that can be used for multiple rides. Additionally, the electronic fareboxes also accept cash. In 2013, the FRTA installed RouteMatch System technology so that passengers can track buses in real time using their phones or the internet.

FRTA's annual ridership saw a decline between Fiscal Year (FY) 2012 and FY 2014. Ridership declined slightly between 2012 and 2013 and then dropped more significantly between 2013 and 2014. This latter reduction in ridership can be mostly explained by the fact that during this time the Town of Athol switched to the MART service area away from the FRTA's. Since 2014, the fixed route ridership may be showing an increase. The first quarter of FY 2015 showed a 55% increase (17,219 additional riders) when compared to the first quarter of FY 2014 (July through September). Table 9-2 shows the annual ridership rates for the FRTA routes for the fiscal years (FY) 2012 to 2014.

Table 9-2: FRTA Ridership Statistics, FY 2012 to FY 2014

Route	Annual Ridership FY 2012	Annual Ridership FY 2013	Annual Ridership FY 2014	Percent Change from FY 2012 to FY 2014
Route 21 (Greenfield)	27,306	27,923	29,422	+7.75%
Route 22 (Montague)	25,771	25,875	25,277	-1.92%
Route 23 (Amherst)	5,242	5,088	2,772	-47.12%
Route 31 (Northampton)	30,316	33,163	31,480	+3.84%
Route 32 (Orange)	39,132	35,029	24,953	-36.23%
Route 41 (Charlemont)	9,616	8,130	8,176	-14.97%
Total	137,383	135,208	122,080	-11.14%

Source: Franklin Regional Transit Authority, April 2015.

FRTA Fixed Route Descriptions

Route 21: Greenfield Community Route

Route 21 (Greenfield Community Route) traverses around Greenfield, reaching the majority of Greenfield's primary shopping destinations and high density residential areas. Some major destinations in downtown Greenfield include: the Franklin Medical Center, Cherry Rum Plaza, Greenfield High School, Leyden Woods, Greenfield Community College (GCC), the Big Y/Home Depot shopping centers, and the Greenfield Corporate Center. The one-way fare for this route is \$1.00 and the entire route takes approximately one hour and fifteen minutes roundtrip. The schedule for this route consists of nine runs per day with the earliest run leaving the JWO Transit Center at 8:00 A.M. and the latest leaving at 6:00 P.M.

Route 22: Montague/Greenfield Route

Route 22 (Montague/Greenfield Route) provides service between the communities of Greenfield and Turners Falls, with limited service also provided to Montague Center and Millers Falls. Route 22 begins at the JWO Transit Center in Greenfield and travels to major

stops that include Farren Care Center, Turners Falls High School, and Turners Falls Industrial Park. The schedule for this route currently consists of eight runs per day with the earliest run leaving JWO at 6:15 A.M. and the latest leaving at 6:30 P.M. Of these eight runs, three provide additional service to Millers Falls and Montague Center.

Route 23: Amherst/ Greenfield Route

Route 23 (Amherst/Greenfield Route) connects Greenfield to the University of Massachusetts Amherst campus, via Turners Falls, Millers Falls, and Montague Center. The schedule for this route currently consists of two round-trip runs per day with the first run leaving the JWO Transit Center at 6:45 A.M. and the last leaving at 3:05 P.M. This route has the lowest ridership levels of the FRTA system.

Route 31: Northampton/Greenfield Route

Route 31 (Northampton/Greenfield Route) connects the communities of Greenfield, Deerfield, Whately, Hatfield, and Northampton. Starting at the JWO Transit Center in Greenfield, Route 31 travels to Deerfield where its stops include Frontier High School, South Deerfield Center, and Deerfield Industrial Park. After stopping in Deerfield, Route 31 proceeds on to Whately, with a stop at the newly constructed MassDOT Park & Ride, and continues on to Northampton, stopping at the Big Y/Wal-Mart Plaza and the Academy of Music. The one-way fare for this route is \$1.50 and the entire route takes approximately an hour and a half roundtrip. The schedule for this route currently consists of six round-trip runs per day with the earliest run leaving Court Square at 5:15 A.M. and the latest leaving at 5:15 P.M. This route connects with a PVRTA route. This route was the most popular route in FY 2014 with 31,480 riders.

Route 32: Orange/Greenfield Route

Route 32 (Orange/Greenfield Route) serves to connect several communities along Route 2 east, from Greenfield to Orange. Route 32 also connects major destinations for users, including: the Franklin Medical Center, the Orange Health Center, and the Wal-Mart and Hannafords Shopping Centers. The one-way fare for this route is \$1.50 and the entire route takes approximately two hours roundtrip. The schedule for this route currently consists of seven round-trip runs per day with the earliest run leaving the JWO Transit Center at 5:00 A.M. and the latest leaving at 5:15 P.M.

This route started as the G-Link Route in October in 1999 and was the result of a joint collaboration between the FRTA, FRCOG, and the Montachusett Regional Transit Authority (MART) to improve access to jobs. The entire G-Link service operates between Greenfield and Gardner, with connections to Fitchburg and to the commuter rail line running between Fitchburg and Boston. The FRTA runs the western portion of the service, now called Route

32, and MART runs the eastern portion of the service and the connecting bus service to Fitchburg. The two RTAs connect at the Hannafords in Athol for passengers to transfer.

Route 41: Charlemont/Greenfield Route

Route 41 (Charlemont/Greenfield Route) primarily serves western Franklin County, connecting the communities of Greenfield to Shelburne, Buckland, and Charlemont with four runs per day. Route 41 starts at the JWO Transit Center in Greenfield and travels along Route 2 towards Shelburne Falls. After Shelburne Falls, Route 41 either travels to Mohawk High School (the first route of the day) or to the Charlemont Park and Ride lot (the remaining runs). The other stops include the Academy at Charlemont and Charlemont Center. The earliest run departs JWO at 6:45 A.M. with the latest run departing at 4:45 P.M. The one-way fare for this route is \$1.50 and the entire route takes approximately two hours roundtrip.

The Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA)

The Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA) is based in Springfield, Massachusetts and is the regional transit authority for the Pioneer Valley. The PVTA is the largest regional transit authority in Massachusetts with a fleet of 174 buses and 144 vans. The PVTA has 24 member towns in Hampshire, Hampden, and Franklin Counties and provides fixed-service bus routes as well as demand-response services for the elderly and disabled.

The PVTA operates two main transit routes in Franklin County: Route 31 (Sunderland/South Amherst) and Route 46 (South Deerfield/Whately Park & Ride/UMass). Route 31 connects the UMass campus to Sunderland Center with multiple stops on the route. Route 46 links the UMass campus to South Deerfield Center as well as several stops along the way. The fare for both of these routes is \$1.25 for a one-way ticket, although students, faculty and staff of the Five Colleges ride for free.

PVTA Fixed Route Descriptions

The following section is a detailed description of the PVTA routes that run within Franklin County. Table 9-3 summarizes the PVTA routes that serve Franklin County.

Table 9-3: PVTA Routes to Franklin County and Route Frequency

Route	Schedule	Number of Round-Trips on Weekdays	Number of Round-Trips on Saturday	Number of Round-Trips on Sunday	Typical Weekday Peak Frequency
Route 31 (Sunderland/South Amherst)	Regular	55	17	12	15 minutes
Route 46 (South Deerfield/ Whately Park & Ride/UMass)	Regular	6	N/A	N/A	Irregular

Note: PVTA runs a reduced schedule when UMass is not in session.

Route 31: Sunderland/South Amherst

Route 31 provides transit services between the communities of South Amherst and Sunderland. Route 31 operates from 7:22 A.M. until at least midnight every night, with service extending to 1:00 A.M. on Thursdays, Fridays and Sundays, and to 2:00 A.M. on Saturdays. Route 31 is traditionally the PVTA route with the highest ridership. In 2013, Route 31 carried approximately 5,114 daily passengers. This is the third highest of weekday routes in the PVTA system. Route 31 also has an average of 67 riders per trip, which is more than any other PVTA route. While its ridership is very high, Route 31 is also greatly dependent upon the academic schedule, which decreases significantly when UMass is not in session. As a result, PVTA runs a reduced schedule during these times.

Route 46: South Deerfield/Whately Park & Ride/UMass

Transit service between South Deerfield and UMass is provided by Route 46. This route includes a stop at the Whately Park and Ride. Route 46 operates from 7:00 A.M. until 10:30 P.M. on Monday through Friday. There is no weekend service on this route. In 2013, Route 46 carried 111 passengers per weekday, which is the fourth lowest ridership of any PVTA route. The PVTA also runs a reduced schedule for this route when UMass is not in session.

ADA Paratransit Transit and Demand Response Services

The FRTA and PVTA each offer paratransit and demand response services, sometimes referred to as dial-a-ride van transportation, to elderly and disabled residents in their member communities. In all Franklin County communities, transportation through the FRTA or PVTA is available for seniors age 60 and over and for some people with disabilities that affect their ability to drive and use regular fixed-route transit service. All of the PVTA and FRTA buses and vans are wheelchair accessible. Priority for service is given to people with disabilities and seniors and for essential purposes, such as medical care.

Under the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, paratransit services must be provided in all areas with local fixed route bus services for people who can't use the local bus system due to their disability. The ADA seeks to provide people with disabilities the same access to public transportation as people without disabilities. The FRTA's Paratransit Services are for disabled individuals who are available within three-quarters ($\frac{3}{4}$) mile of a fixed route corridor and cannot navigate or access the provided fixed route service due to their disability.

There are several limitations to ADA transportation services in Franklin County, largely a result of its rural nature. Large land area and low population density are the primary factors for the county's limited fixed-route transit services and as a result, there are no requirements to provide ADA transportation services for at least half of Franklin County towns, due to the lack of fixed bus route service in the region. Much of the van service which is provided in Franklin County is, therefore, demand response service, which is optional and offered at the regional transit authorities' discretion. For the towns with fixed-route transit services, ADA service is available to qualifying residents during the regular route's hours of operation.

The FRTA and PVTA each contract with local private van companies to provide both the mandated ADA paratransit service and optional demand response service within their regions. For the FRTA, many of the providers are local Councils on Aging (COAs) that also offer other services to seniors. Franklin Transit Management (the operating company for the FRTA) provides the ADA service. Table 9-4 summarizes the paratransit/demand response service that is available by town in Franklin County.

Town	Paratransit Service	Demand Response Service Provider	MedRide Service Provider
Ashfield	No	Shelburne COA	FRTA
Bernardston	No	Bernardston COA	FRTA
Buckland	Yes ¹	Shelburne COA	FRTA
Charlemont	Yes ¹	Shelburne COA	FRTA
Colrain	No	Shelburne COA	FRTA
Conway	No	Shelburne COA	FRTA
Deerfield	Yes ¹	FTM	FRTA
Erving	Yes ¹	Erving COA	FRTA
Gill	Yes ¹	FTM	FRTA
Greenfield	Yes ¹	FTM	FRTA
Hawley	No	Shelburne COA	FRTA

Town	Paratransit Service	Demand Response Service Provider	MedRide Service Provider
Heath	No	Shelburne COA	FRTA
Leverett	Yes	Amherst COA	FRTA
Leyden	No	No	FRTA
Monroe	No	No	No
Montague	Yes ¹	FTM	FRTA
New Salem	No	Orange COA	FRTA
Northfield	No	Bernardston COA	FRTA
Orange	Yes ¹	Orange COA	FRTA
Rowe	No	Shelburne COA	FRTA
Shelburne	Yes ¹	Shelburne COA	FRTA
Shutesbury	No	No	FRTA
Sunderland	Yes ¹	Hulmes Transportation	No
Warwick	No	Orange COA	FRTA
Wendell	Yes	Orange COA	FRTA
Whately	Yes ¹	FTM	FRTA

Notes:

1: ADA Paratransit services are provided for disabled individuals who are available within ¼ mile of a fixed FRTA route corridor and cannot navigate or access a regular fixed route due to their disability.

Sources: Information was obtained from the Franklin County Home Care Corporation, FRTA, and PVTA.

Human Service Transportation

Additional transportation services, such as van transportation, are offered to qualifying Franklin County residents through the Department of Developmental Services (DDS), Department of Public Health (DPH), and the Division of Medical Assistance (DMA), as well as other various state-level human service agencies. Regional transit authorities arrange transportation by request for elders and disabled residents in the area through a network of public and private transportation providers. The travel that can be funded through these programs is often limited to a few specific types of trips, such as medical trips or transportation to job training. Regional transit authorities generally coordinate the transportation services for the State’s human service agencies. Transportation services for MassHealth, DMA, and DPH in Franklin County are currently coordinated by the FRTA and provided by private transportation operators.

Community Transit Services

Community Transit Services (CTS) was a major private transportation provider in the region. It was established in 1998 to provide transportation for work communities in the Athol-Orange areas and to help improve access to jobs for low-income individuals. However, in 2013 the funding for the program was cut and its service was folded into the Montachusett

Regional Transit Authority (MART) as a reduced dial-a-ride service for the Orange/Athol area. The discontinuation of this curb-to-curb public transportation service for the Northern Tier region along Route 2 is a major loss to the low income and other transit-reliant households.

Private Carriers and Other Transportation Services

Bus Service

Peter Pan Bus Lines and Greyhound Lines jointly operate service to Franklin County with two trips to Greenfield and Deerfield each day. The Greenfield station is located at the John W. Olver Transit Center and the Deerfield stop is located at Savage Market on Route 5/10. Passengers can switch buses in Amherst and Springfield for other destinations, including: Worcester, Framingham, Boston, and points in Connecticut and New York.

Taxi Service

There is currently only one cab company in the Greenfield area, About Town Taxi (none of their vehicles are handicapped accessible). There are also a few other cab companies based in towns close to the region and provide service to some Franklin County towns, such as Athol Taxi in Athol. Taxi companies also operate from Gardner to the east; North Adams to the west; Winchester, New Hampshire to the north; and Northampton and Amherst to the south.

Other Private Services

There are several limousine services in Franklin County. There are a larger number of van and charter bus services based in Franklin County. One of the largest bus services in the county is F.M. Kuzmeskus, Inc, which is based in the Town of Gill.

Public Transit Coordination

Regional Coordinating Councils

In 2012, Massachusetts established a Statewide Coordinating Council on Community Transportation with the objective of coordinating public transit services and human services throughout state. As part of this effort, Regional Coordinating Councils (RCCs) were established throughout the Commonwealth in 2014 – including a Franklin County RCC. The Franklin County RCC is composed of human service providers throughout Franklin County and the North Quabbin Region and meets bimonthly in conjunction with the FRTA Transit Advisory Committee. In 2015, the RCC created a Franklin Regional Transportation Inventory of all transportation services offered in Franklin County. The inventory also includes information about the cost, eligibility, and service area of all the transportation providers. The goal of the RCC is to finalize the inventory and distribute it to all human service providers in the region to better assist the needs of their clients. The inventory also provides

an excellent basis for transportation coordination in the region as it highlights the overlaps and gaps in service that currently exist. The inventory can be found at the end of this chapter.

Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan

The FRCOG has created a “Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan for Franklin County” that identifies transportation providers in the region and key public transit service gaps in Franklin County. In 2014, the FRCOG identified the following transportation needs:

- Implementing additional fixed transit routes to allow access to employment, education, and services;
- Implementing more frequent fixed route service to accommodate passengers’ needs to move between employment, childcare, and services in a timely manner;
- Implementing more evening transit service to allow access to employment, education, and services;
- Beginning weekend transit service to allow access to employment, education, and services;
- Improving connectivity between transportation providers serving Franklin County so that users can more easily transfer and move from Point A to Point B as efficiently as possible;
- Creating better links between transportation modes;
- Providing transportation services to residents located in the more rural areas of Franklin County far from fixed transit routes;
- Marketing of existing transportation services;
- Continuing the maintenance of vehicles at or above a state of good repair; and
- Acquiring modern accessible service equipment and technical applications.

Current Activities and Future Plans

The FRCOG is committed to working to ensure that all Franklin County residents have access to transportation facilities and services. To do so, FRCOG coordinates with the FRTA to explore ways to improve the region’s bus system and work specifically to support better access to jobs, training, and needed services for low-income residents.

Comprehensive Service Analysis

The FRTA is currently completing a Comprehensive Service Analysis (CSA) that examines the existing fixed route system and makes recommendations for improvement. The final CSA and its recommendations are due to the state legislature by June 30, 2015. At the beginning of the CSA planning process, the FRCOG partnered with the FRTA to conduct extensive public outreach in Franklin County to better understand the transit needs of the public. The outreach and its findings are summarized in the FRCOG report, “*Summary of*

Public Input Gathered at FRTA Community Conversations” (June 2014). Overall, it was very clear that the region wants:

- More frequent bus service;
- Extended weekly hours (specifically evening service); and
- Weekend service (specifically Saturday service).

Recommendations for Transit and Paratransit Services

Short Term Recommendations

- Promote current paratransit and demand response services among elder and disabled residents who could benefit most from these services.
- Promote the Park and Ride lots in the region as a way to bolster bus ridership.
- Coordinate between the FRTA and the PVTA to investigate options for improved connections between the two regions.
- Work with major employers and industrial parks in the region to better understand various shift times and possible service to these locations.

Long Term Recommendations

- Continue to work with the FRTA, PVTA, and the MART to keep area legislators informed about the regional importance of Route 32 and about the demand for expanding the routes to include additional runs and evening and weekend service to better assist residents with access to employment, education, and training opportunities. Importantly, work to obtain permanent funding for Route 32.
- Improve connections between Franklin County and UMass Amherst, the region’s largest employer.
- Consider ways FRTA could coordinate with GCC, FCHREB, and CDC to create a workforce development-focused shuttle. One example is exploring the feasibility of contributions from GCC toward the cost of fixed route service by way of students’ fees being charged as part of the tuition.
- Consider extensions of the fixed route system to serve the West County (Rt. 116) and North County (Rt. 5/10) regions.

Ongoing Recommendations

- Support the reinstatement of evening and weekend transit services to meet transit rider demand.

- Continue to work with the regional transit authorities and other transportation providers to: monitor and evaluate routes; to address unmet transportation needs and current problems with connectivity between routes and inter-regional service connections.
- Expand current outreach and publicity efforts to provide information about FRTA transit services and to encourage bus usage. Outreach efforts should target the populations who are most likely to use transit services and to need transit assistance, such as low-income residents, disabled residents, and the elderly. Outreach efforts should also focus on the general workforce commuters.
- Support the provision of paratransit and demand response services for elderly residents and riders with disabilities, and work to expand van transportation availability, especially in areas with less than daily services and as the elderly population in the region grows.
- Conduct outreach with the communities within the FRTA service area about the fiscal costs associated with services and how best to match their level of need with financial concerns.



Riders waiting to board a FRTA bus at the John W. Olver Transit Center.