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Transportation Related
Regional Tourism

2020 Regional Transportation Plan
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**Transportation Related Regional Tourism**
Tourism is an important topic when considering transportation and travel in Franklin County. The region is rich in scenic, natural, cultural, and historic resources, and visitors are significant contributors to the local economy. Tourism is recognized as an important and growing part of the region’s economy. The Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism (MOTT) estimated that in 2016 domestic travelers in Franklin County spent over $60 million (source: MOTT’s Economic Impact of Travel on Massachusetts Counties, CY2016). This represents an 8% increase (taking into account inflation) from traveler expenditures in 2006.

As part of the 2016 Franklin County Regional Transportation Plan a goal was adopted to promote auto and bicycle touring in the region while also preserving the natural, cultural and historic resources, and increasing access to regional recreational assets. Consequently, encouraging tourism has been the motivation behind a number of regional transportation planning projects. Bicycle related tourism, access to Franklin County by rail, and the Scenic Byways are among the transportation topics discussed in the context of regional tourism. The following section provides an overview of the related work that is currently underway or has been completed since 2016.

**Bicycle Tourism**
Bicyclists visiting the region are an important component of the Franklin County tourism sector. The region has many low volume scenic roads that are excellent bicycle touring routes. The significance of bicycle tourism and the number of people who travel to Franklin County to bicycle is being documented and discussed as part of several current planning studies.

A number of actions to support bicycle tourism were recommended as part of the 2016 Regional Transportation Plan. Since 2016, the FRCOG has undertaken work that provides information and resources to encourage tourism opportunities related to bicycling throughout the county; encourages the Visitor Centers, Chamber of Commerce and the Massachusetts Office Travel and Tourism (MOTT) to include information on bicycling in Franklin County in their tourism materials; and advocates for bikes and skis to be allowed on the Amtrak regional rail service.
In addition, the FRCOG completed outreach to the bicycle tourism community, researched bicycle tourism programs that have been implemented elsewhere in the country, and formulated next steps for developing a bicycling promotional campaign. During 2017, the FRCOG worked to develop a bicycle tourism plan. The FRCOG completed a survey about ideas for themed rides; created an inventory of regional bicycle events/activities and resources; researched the number of participants in several events; and administered on-line surveys of participants at several events.

During 2018, the FRCOG built on the previously completed research and outreach by developing a Bicycle Friendly Business Program for Franklin County. The program is intended to encourage a bike friendly atmosphere in the region. As part of this program, businesses are encouraged to undertake small initiatives to make their establishments bicycle friendly. By completing initiatives and signing a pledge, the businesses are enrolled in the Bicycle Friendly Business Program. Bike friendly businesses then receive promotional incentives like a window cling to display and listing on a website of participating businesses. Work is currently underway to develop themed bike routes, and coordinate the promotion of bicycling by the regional tourism officials.

The FRCOG also coordinated with the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce to promote recreation in Franklin County. The Franklin County Chamber of Commerce is a business association that serves the 26 towns in Franklin County and also one of the sixteen Massachusetts Regional Tourism Councils. As a tourism council the Chamber’s mission is to serve the hospitality industry and attract visitors to our area. The Franklin County Chamber of Commerce is developing a recreational marketing program with a strong emphasis on bicycling for the region, and the FRCOG is collaborating with the effort.

Additionally, the FRCOG provides regional bicycle maps. The FRCOG has four bicycling maps for the region that are routinely updated, reprinted and distributed. The maps highlight Franklin County Bikeway routes (both off-road bike paths and shared roadway sections), terrain, water stops, services available on the routes, and other information that may be helpful to cyclists. The maps were updated and reprinted in 2017, and are widely distributed throughout Franklin County to promote bicycling in the region.

Travel to Franklin County via Amtrak rail service on the Vermonter Line is an important connection for potential bicycle tourists. A goal of the 2016 Regional Transportation Plan was to advocate for bikes and skis to be allowed on this train because, at the time, bikes and skis were not allowed as carry-on luggage. However, the policy was updated April 29, 2016, and
now permits bicycles as carry-on luggage from all station stops along the Vermonter (from Washington, DC, to St. Albans, Vermont). Travelers should note that reservations are required, the number of spots for bicycles are limited to three per train, there is a fee to bring a bicycle, and only standard size bikes are permitted. While this updated policy is a positive step for regional recreational tourism, providing additional capacity to carry bicycles on the Vermonter continues to be a priority to allow for groups of bicyclists to travel to Franklin County by train.

**Passenger Rail**

Passenger rail is also an important transportation option for visitors traveling to Franklin County. On December 29, 2014, passenger rail service returned to Franklin County when the Amtrak’s Vermonter was moved back onto the Connecticut River Main Line. The service was reinstated with one daily train north and one train south between Washington, DC and St. Albans, Vermont. In Massachusetts, the Vermonter stops in Springfield, Holyoke, Northampton, and in Franklin County at the John W. Olver Transit Center in Greenfield.

In 2017, the FRCOG completed a report, *Attracting Visitors by Passenger Rail to Franklin County, MA*. The report noted that ridership during the first two years of service (2015 and 2016) at the Greenfield Station has grown. The most updated ridership figures show that this trend has continued. The following table shows the number of passenger arrivals and departures through the Greenfield station:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Arrivals and Departures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>5,315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>5,885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>6,190</td>
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Source: National Association of Railroad Passengers, “Amtrak Service in Greenfield, MA.”

Amtrak provides data on the most active trips along the Vermonter route. Amtrak refers to these trips as “city pairs”. According to the ridership data on the Vermonter Fact Sheet for 2017, the Greenfield, MA to New York City “city pair” is the sixth most active trip on the route. The top destination from New York City on the Vermonter route is Northampton, MA. According to the ridership data, the most popular designation/origin for ridership to/from Greenfield is New York City with Philadelphia the second most popular designation, and Washington, DC third.

Since the launch of the service on the Connecticut River Main Line, adjustments have been made to the schedule to improve the on-time performance. Additionally, there are plans for the passenger rail service at Greenfield station to be expanded as part of a pilot project starting in the fall of 2019. The pilot project will launch additional passenger rail service between Greenfield and Springfield with stops in Northampton and Holyoke, which will
connect to points south on the Hartford Commuter Rail Line. The current Vermonter schedule will be supplemented with four additional trains on weekdays and two additional trains on weekends and holidays. More information about this pilot can be found in Chapter 7, Passenger Rail.

As noted in Attracting Visitors by Passenger Rail to Franklin County, MA, it is difficult to determine the reason why increased numbers of passengers are using the Greenfield station. It is not clear if it is because it is closer than other stations that they may have used in the past (such as Amherst or Brattleboro) or if people are using passenger rail more frequently overall. Generally, domestic travel for leisure is increasing, although only a small percentage of the travelers currently choose to take the train. However, there is some generational that may spur continued increases in train ridership. It has been noted that millennials are willing to use different modes of transportation, and that baby boomers prefer affordable travel options. These factors may result in increased numbers of people using the train to travel. In conversations with regional tourism experts it was noted that most tourists to Franklin County are stopping on the way to another destination or during a visit with friends and family.

Attracting Visitors by Passenger Rail to Franklin County, MA, also examined whether Amtrak, the Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism (MOTT), and local business and organizations are promoting train travel to Greenfield. As a result of the examination, the some improvements to the promotional efforts were recommended. The Amtrak.com website includes information about the station’s host community and nearby traveler services such as parking, rental cars, and lodging. However, this information about Greenfield is not current and lacks details. The MOTT website, MassVacation.com, has a section about rail travel to the state, but offers very limited information about traveling to areas outside of Boston. At the local level, very few of the lodging, attractions, or other entities serving the tourism industry mention traveling by rail as an option to get to Greenfield or other areas of Franklin County.

Additionally, connections for the “last mile” transportation in Franklin County are limited. The Greenfield station is located at the John W. Olver Transit Center, which is the hub for fixed route bus service provided by the Franklin Regional Transit Authority (FRTA). There is limited bus service in the evenings and no weekend service. Depending on when the rail passenger arrives and where they need to go, the fixed bus route may not be an option. There is an Enterprise Rental Car office in Greenfield located less than one mile from the Greenfield station. The company will pick up or drop off customers at the Greenfield station on Monday through Friday. However, the Enterprise office closes before the train arrives on Saturdays and is closed on Sundays.

There are limited taxi and for hire transportation services. There are two taxi companies that serve the Greenfield station, one based in Greenfield and one based in Amherst. There is one
private livery service company based in Franklin County that serves Greenfield station as well. Ride-sharing companies, such as Uber and Lyft, offer their services for Western Massachusetts, but these services are limited in Franklin County. With this large service area, the frequency of available drivers to transport people in the Greenfield area is not known. For each of these service providers, travelers will need to contact them directly to arrange for transportation and may need to do so in advance of arriving at the Greenfield station.

**Scenic Byways Related Tourism**

The scenic, natural, recreational, historic, and cultural resources along the byways appeal to a wide range of interests. As previously noted, byway travelers experience a diverse landscape that includes the classic mill towns of New England, rolling hills, rural farmland, historic architecture, mountains, river valleys, and spectacular vistas. The byways cater to a variety of outdoor activities including hiking, picnicking, kayaking, canoeing, fishing, and skiing. Each byway has a unique history that is representative of different periods of time. In addition, there are many artisans who currently live and work in the area and provide opportunities to experience their crafts. The byways of Franklin County are an interconnected, region-wide network allowing travelers to explore these diverse and rich resources.

There are five scenic byways in Franklin County: the Connecticut River Scenic Byway; the Route 112 Scenic Byway; the Route 116 Scenic Byway; the Route 122 Scenic Byway; and the Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway. Four of the byways are state designated and one of the byways, the Connecticut River Byway (Route 63 and 47), is nationally designated.

Both state and nationally designated scenic byways are part of the National Scenic Byways Program, a grass-roots collaborative effort established to recognize, preserve and enhance selected roads throughout the United States. The Scenic Byways Program recognizes certain roads as scenic byways based on archeological, cultural, historic, natural, recreational and/or scenic qualities. In Massachusetts, eligible roads are officially designated as scenic byways through an act of the Legislature.

The designation is primarily honorary and intended to recognize the special nature of these roads, using it to promote and protect the area as determined by local interests. Until 2011, funding was available through an annual Federal discretionary grant program. Through the discretionary program, a number of projects that were intended to enhance, protect and promote the intrinsic qualities of the Scenic Byways in Franklin County received funding. While there has been no new Scenic Byway funding since Federal Fiscal Year 2012, there are previously funded project that are in the final stages of completion. The funded projects have enhanced existing tourism activities, and laid the groundwork for continued tourism initiatives along the byways.
The following section describes the five scenic byways in Franklin County and describes recently completed or active projects on each byway.

**Connecticut River Scenic Byway**
The Connecticut River Scenic Byway travels through the heart of the Connecticut River Valley and neighboring farmland, floodplains, and historic villages from northern New Hampshire and Vermont through Franklin County into Hampshire County in Massachusetts. Along the byway corridor, there are many sites and resources that highlight the rich history of the area dating back to the 1600s and the early inhabitation by Native Americans and Colonial settlers. The Connecticut River Valley’s history and farming heritage is still reflected in the many surviving architectural resources that can be seen along the byway. The Franklin County section of the byway, consisting of Route 63 in the towns of Northfield, Erving, and Montague, and Route 47 in Montague and Sunderland, was designated as a state scenic byway by the Massachusetts Legislature in 2000, and the Hampshire County section of the byway (Route 47 in Hadley and South Hadley) was designated in 2003. In 2009, the Connecticut River Scenic Byway was then designated as a National Scenic Byway. This remains the only nationally designated scenic byway in the Commonwealth.

**Recently Completed Projects**

*Connecticut River Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan Update*
A Corridor Management Plan was originally completed for the Byway in 1998, and provided recommendations for promoting economic opportunities while protecting the natural, cultural, and historic resources of the Byway. With funding through the National Scenic Byway Program, an update of the Corridor Management Plan was completed in 2016.

**Projects Underway**

*Ervingside Streetscape Improvements*
The Connecticut River Scenic Byway passes through the Town of Erving along Route 63. A one-mile section of this route was awarded funding to complete the design and construction of sidewalk and streetscape improvements. The project area includes the Erving section of Millers Falls and the adjacent residential neighborhood known as Ervingside. The project is intended to improve pedestrian access and safety. Plans for the sidewalk and streetscape elements are completed and are scheduled for construction in spring 2019.

**Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway**
The Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway is one of the earliest scenic byways in New England, receiving its designation in 1953. The byway travels on Route 2 and 2A through Berkshire,
Franklin and Worcester counties. In Franklin County, the byway travels through the towns of Charlemont, Buckland, Shelburne, Greenfield, Gill, Erving and Orange.

The western section of the byway (Williamstown to Greenfield) follows the east-west route first used by Native Americans between the Hudson River and the Connecticut River Valleys. The route continued to be used for travel by colonists and eventually was upgraded to support modern forms of transportation. The western section of the byway was the first state road to be designated and constructed as a scenic tourist route, opening amid much fanfare in 1914.

The eastern section (Greenfield to Athol) also first developed as a foot path of the Native Americans. The Europeans from the Connecticut River Valley later used this trail to settle the northern interior of Massachusetts and for commerce by horse and cart. Later, entrepreneurs from the cities in eastern New England built the Fifth Massachusetts Turnpike along much of the original pathway. During this development, the road was changed and improved to accommodate new modes of transportation and infrastructure.

There are no current Scenic Byway projects planned for the Mohawk Trail at this time.

**Route 112 Scenic Byway**

The Route 112 Scenic Byway was officially designated as a scenic byway by the Massachusetts Legislature in 2004. The Route 112 Scenic Byway travels through the Towns of Colrain, Shelburne, Buckland, and Ashfield in Franklin County and the Towns of Goshen, Cummington, Worthington, and Huntington in Hampshire County. It travels through historic town centers, working farms, scenic rivers, and majestic forests with beautiful mountains providing a backdrop. The corridor is rich in natural, cultural, and historic resources. In addition, the byway intersects with the Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway to the north and the Jacob’s Ladder Trail Scenic Byway to the south. A Corridor Management Plan for the Route 112 Scenic Byway was completed in 2009.

There are no current Scenic Byway projects planned for Route 112 at this time.

**Route 116 Scenic Byway**

The Route 116 Scenic Byway is the most recently designated Scenic Byway in Franklin County. In 2008, the Massachusetts Legislature designated Route 116 in the towns of Deerfield, Conway, Ashfield, Plainfield, Savoy, and Adams as a scenic byway. The byway travels 39 miles from the Deerfield/Sunderland town line (at the Connecticut River) to downtown Adams (in Berkshire County) at the intersection of Route 116 and Route 8. In
Franklin County, the Byway travels through the towns of Deerfield, Conway, and Ashfield. In Deerfield, the byway route follows the historic route of Route 116 (the current Route 116 bypass was constructed in the 1960s) onto Sugarloaf Street through historic South Deerfield center onto Elm Street and north onto Routes 5/10/116. The byway rejoins Route 116 to the west of South Deerfield center and travels west to historic Conway center, which travels past the Burkeville Covered Bridge which is on the National Register of Historic Places and has recently been restored. Route 116 continues west through historic Ashfield center, where it intersects with Route 112, which is also a designated scenic byway.

There are no current Scenic Byway projects planned for Route 116 at this time.

**Route 122 Scenic Byway**

In 2005, the Massachusetts Legislature designated Route 122 in the Towns of Paxton, Rutland, Oakham, Barre, Petersham, Orange, and New Salem as a scenic byway. The Route 122 Scenic Byway travels from the Paxton/Worcester town line to downtown Orange. Paxton, Rutland, Oakham, Barre, and Petersham are in Worcester County, and New Salem and Orange are in Franklin County. The Franklin County section of the byway travels along the northern end of the Quabbin Reservoir. In Orange, the byway terminates at the intersection of Route 122 and Route 2A, part of the Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway.

There are no current Scenic Byway projects planned for Route 122 at this time.

**Western Massachusetts Scenic Byways Promotional Campaign**

It is important that tourist information and services be available to travelers. Information including publications, brochures, maps, websites, and telephone numbers are crucial to encouraging tourism along the scenic byways. The corridor management plans for the scenic
byways contain inventories of the cultural, historical, natural, scenic, recreational, and commercial resources within each byway area. Through the Scenic Byway Marketing Project, enhanced informational resources and the byway website were developed to assist visitors to the area and byway travelers.

The Western Massachusetts Scenic Byway Marketing Project was a collaborative effort of the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC), the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC), the FRCOG, the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC), and the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) to create unified promotional materials for the seven scenic byways in western Massachusetts. The project included the development of individual byway logos, advertising materials, way-finding signs and a website. Way-finding signs were installed on all seven of the Scenic Byways. A website for the Scenic Byways in western Massachusetts was created, and http://www.bywayswestmass.com was launched in June 2013. The website contains information about points of interest and attractions along and near the seven Scenic Byways. The website is maintained and updated regularly in order to ensure that the information is up-to-date. A complete review and update was undertaken during 2018.

There are no current Scenic Byway marketing projects planned at this time.

![Land protected in Charlemont on the Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway.](image)

**Scenic Byway Land Protection Project**

The FRCOG worked with the Franklin Land Trust, MassDOT, the Massachusetts Department of Agriculture, the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, and the Massachusetts Department of Fish and Wildlife to permanently protect important scenic,
natural, and agricultural landscapes along the scenic byways in Franklin County. The project will conclude in June 2019 with a total of 1,573 acres permanently protected from future development. Below is a table of the acres protected on each of the Scenic Byways through this project.

Table 11-2 Acres of Land Protected on Each Byway

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Byway</th>
<th>Acres Protected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CT River</td>
<td>923.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MT Trail</td>
<td>557.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Route 112</td>
<td>53.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1534.02</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 11-1 Proportion of the Total Acres Protected by Byway
Promotion of Regional Tourism

The tourism and hospitality industry are important considerations as the future of the regional transportation system is planned. Transportation planning should reinforce and build on this momentum in the region to promote all of the region’s many tourism opportunities.

Recommendations

- Develop marketing and informational resources to promote Franklin County as a travel destination.

- Develop information and resources to encourage tourism opportunities related to bicycling throughout the county.

- Collaborate with the Visitors Centers, Chambers of Commerce, and the Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism (MOTT) to include information on bicycling in Franklin County in their tourism materials.

- Create advertisements to be used in bicycling magazines and websites promoting bicycling in Franklin County.

- Develop itineraries for bicycling and walking in the region.
• Advocate for additional capacity for carrying bikes on Amtrak regional rail service.
• Support the expansion of regional rail service both north-south and east-west.
• Improve marketing of regional rail.
• Develop additional local transportation options to connect rail passengers from the Greenfield station to accommodations and attractions.
• Request that Amtrak update its webpage for the Vermonter route to include an accurate service description and local information in the Route Guide for Greenfield.
• Promote Franklin County and its assets as a destination or a place to visit for rail passengers on the Vermonter route by coordinating with the local tourism groups, chambers of commerce, and/or business associations to promote travel by rail.
• Work with MA Office of Travel and Tourism (MOTT) to expand the description of rail service to Massachusetts on MassVacation.com.
• Explore opportunities to work with the local tourism groups, chambers of commerce, and/or business associations to develop travel itineraries that focuses on visiting by rail.
• Continue work to permanently protect scenic and agricultural lands along the scenic byways by purchasing conservation restrictions and/or agricultural preservation restrictions from willing landowners.
• Continue work to develop initiatives to market the byways of Western Massachusetts as travel destinations.
• Implement the recommendations of the corridor management plans for each of the scenic byways.