

Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Transportation Plan for Franklin County



July 2023



**Franklin Regional
Council of Governments**

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Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Transportation Plan for Franklin County

Introduction

The Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Transportation Plan (CPT-HST) is a locally developed plan that assesses the transportation needs of persons with disabilities and seniors within Franklin County and is coordinated with other transportation service providers. This plan is updated every three to five years with input from, or representatives of, seniors and individuals with disabilities, and public, private and non-profit transportation and human service providers. The goal of the CPT-HST is to identify strategies to improve the quality and availability of transportation services for the disabled and elder populations in the region.

The federal transportation law, Fixing America’s Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act), requires that a region have an updated CPT-HST in order to be eligible to receive federal funding. Specifically, the FAST Act requires that all projects selected for funding under the Section 5310: Enhanced Mobility for Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities Program must show that they are responding to the unmet needs as documented in the CPT-HST. The Section 5310 Program is intended to enhance mobility for seniors and persons with disabilities by providing funds for programs to serve the special needs of transit-dependent populations beyond traditional public transportation services and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) complementary paratransit services.

The Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG) first prepared a CPT-HST (then called a Locally Coordinated Plan) for the region in 2007. The FRCOG is the regional planning agency for Franklin County and also staffs the metropolitan planning organization (MPO) for the region. This latest update to the plan identifies any recent changes to the transit resources available in the region and the disabled or elder population in Franklin County.

This CPT-HST has identified many transit needs for the region. Many of these unmet needs can be addressed with Section 5310 funding. Eligible entities are encouraged to apply for funding to provide service to fill these unmet gaps. Evaluation criteria and priorities are outlined at the end of this CPT-HST as to how projects will be selected for funding.

Public Input and Transportation Coordination

There are many different groups and agencies that organize, provide, or assist with transportation for populations such as the elders and disabled. To ensure the most effective and efficient use of resources, this CPT-HST Plan seeks to coordinate the transportation services and needs within a region. To help with this issue, the state has formed Regional Coordinating Committees (RCCs), whose membership is composed of representatives or stakeholders of transportation services within a specific region. The Franklin County RCC was created in 2014 and merged with the Franklin Regional Transit Authority's (FRTA) Transit Advisory Committee since many of the members served on both committees and their missions were very similar in scope. The RCC is a voluntary advisory board which provides a forum for open discussion, information exchange, and decision-making about regional transportation priorities. The RCC meets with the FRTA's Transit Advisory Committee on a bi-monthly basis.

The FRTA conducts extensive public outreach as part of any major changes to its fixed route services. The last major change occurred as a result of the Covid-19 Pandemic in which fixed-route service was made free through June of 2024. As part of the outreach conducted in the spring of 2020, the FRCOG and FRTA received a large amount of input regarding not just the fixed route services, but also information on the type of general transportation services needed in the region, demand response needs, current transit gaps, and priorities for transportation.

The FRCOG also updates the Regional Transportation Plan every four years. This plan is a comprehensive document examining all modes of transportation and provides the basis for future long-term transportation planning in the region. The FRCOG has just completed an update of this Plan in July 2023. The update involved gathering extensive public input on transportation priorities and conducting socio-demographic analysis to better understand the transportation and population needs of the region.

The FRTA also updated its Regional Transit Plan in 2020. This plan provides a number of recommendations across five categories including Investment & Performance, Accountability, Service Decisions, Quality of Service, and Environmental Sustainability. The update to this plan involved data collection, goal development, and planning for community and rider engagement. Public Outreach included an online stakeholder outreach survey, an operator-driver survey, and a public survey.

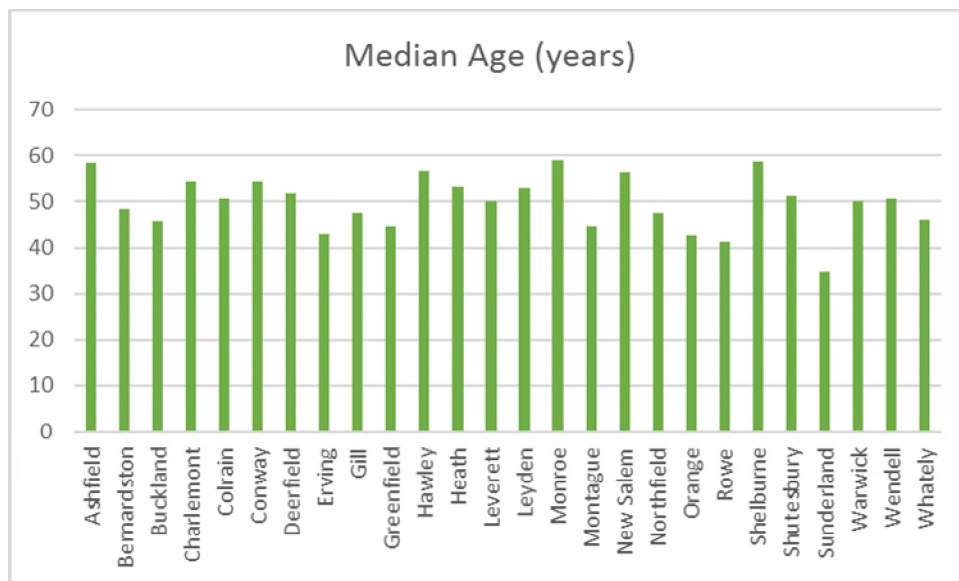
Population Overview

Franklin County is the most rural county in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. It has a total population of 71,085 people spread over twenty-six municipalities. There are several

large employment and population centers within Franklin County. They are: Greenfield (pop. 17,661), Montague (pop. 8,565), Orange (pop. 7,622), and Deerfield (pop. 5,090).¹

Like much of the nation, Franklin County’s population is getting older as the “Baby Boomer” population ages. Currently, half (52%) of the population is aged 45 years and older and 22% is aged 65 years and older. Figure 1 below shows that the median age for many communities in Franklin County are around 50 years old. On average, the largest population centers have younger median ages as compared to the more rural towns in the region such as Ashfield, Hawley, and Shelburne, which are older.

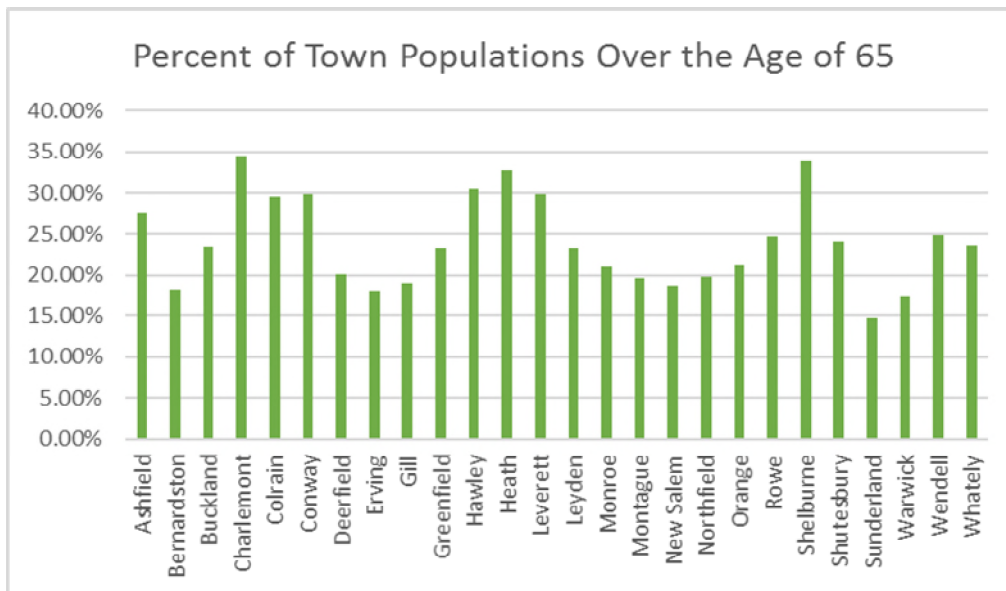
Figure 1. Median Age by Town in Franklin County for 2021.



The size of the population aged 65 years and older is expected to increase dramatically in the future. Those aged 65 years and older will make up a quarter of the Franklin County population by 2040. Figure 2 shows that the towns located farthest away from the Franklin County population and employment centers have the highest shares of elders. Providing transportation services to these geographically distant and spread out populations can be challenging and expensive. Currently, the Councils on Aging vehicles are the only transportation option for many towns and they are often operating at capacity.

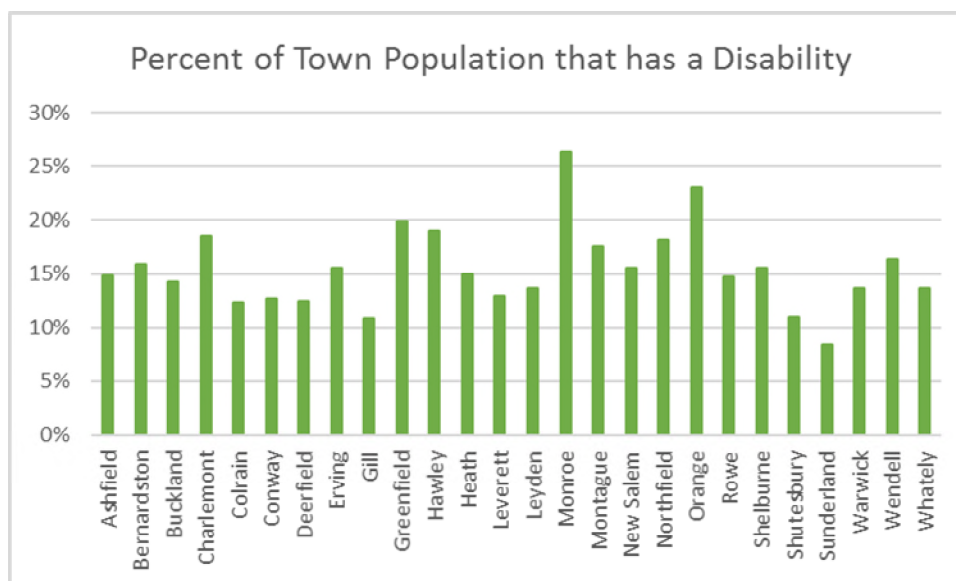
¹ Unless otherwise noted, all socio-economic demographic data is from the U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2017-2021 Five-Year Estimates.

Figure 2. Percent of Town Population that is over the Age of 65 Years Old in 2021.



The disabled population in Franklin County is composed of all age groups. In 2017, there was a total of 11,747 persons with disabilities in the county or 17% of the total population. The U.S. Census classifies disabilities in the following categories: hearing difficulty, vision difficulty, cognitive difficulty, ambulatory difficulty, and self-care difficulty. As might be expected, the population aged 65 years and older has the highest percentage of disabilities in comparison to the younger populations.

Figure 3. Percent of Town Population that Has a Disability in 2021.



The income levels of a community often indicate the potential transportation needs of a region. Areas with lower-income populations tend to benefit more from the existence of public transportation because the costs associated with using public transportation are less than the costs of owning and maintaining a car. In addition, low income households often do not have the resources needed to cope with rising fuel costs, such as moving closer to work or purchasing a more fuel-efficient vehicle.²

In general, U.S. Census data shows that Franklin County's incomes are much lower than Massachusetts as a whole. In 2021, the county's median household income was \$64,949, which was much less (27% less) than Massachusetts's median household income of \$89,026. Another income indicator is per capita income. By this measure, Franklin County's income is still 22% lower than the Commonwealth's. Franklin County's per capita income is \$37,740, compared to the Massachusetts per capita income of \$48,617.

In 2021, the poverty rate for Franklin County was 10.6%, which was slightly higher than the state rate of 9.9%. This is a change from 2017 in which Franklin County had a slightly lower poverty rate (10.9%) than the state average (11.1%). The areas experiencing higher poverty rates than the state average include large population centers, such as Greenfield (13.2%) and Orange (16.1%). Other areas with higher poverty rates include the small towns located farther from major employment centers, such as the towns of Wendell (13.6%), Charlemont (16.4%), Hawley (17.9%), and communities with a higher concentration college students, such as Sunderland (13.8%).

Transportation Resources

Due to the rural nature of Franklin County and its small population, residents are largely dependent on private vehicles for transportation. According to the U.S. Census, only 8.4% of Franklin County households do not have vehicles compared to a much higher proportion of 12.1% of Massachusetts households. The FRTA provides the majority of public transit within the region. Listed below is a brief summary of the different types of transportation services available within Franklin County. The Franklin County Regional Coordinating Council has created a detailed inventory of all transportation services within the region. This inventory can also be seen below and includes information on passenger eligibility, service areas, days and hours of operation, cost, and contact information.

² Cooper, Mark N. "Rising Energy Prices Strain Household Budgets and the Economy For Most Americans," *Consumers Union*. September 2004.

Franklin Regional Transit Authority (FRTA)

The FRTA is the primary transit authority serving Franklin County. The FRTA has the largest service area of any transit authority in the Commonwealth and serves 41 towns in Franklin, Hampshire, Hampden, and Worcester Counties. Twenty-three of the twenty-six communities within Franklin County are members of the FRTA (all except Leverett, Monroe, and Sunderland).

Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA)

The PVTA is a second transit authority operating in the Franklin County region. The PVTA is based in Springfield and principally serves communities in Hampshire and Hampden Counties. The PVTA has two member towns in Franklin County: Leverett and Sunderland. It also provides fixed route services to Deerfield and the Whately Park and Ride, both are FRTA member towns.

The FRTA provides the following services:

Fixed Route Services

Ten of the 26 communities within Franklin County have some level of fixed route service for their communities. Almost all of the fixed route service is only available on weekdays during the daytime. The exception is the PVTA service to Sunderland (Route 31), which runs on Saturday and Sundays and in the evenings.

FRTA Access Program

The FRTA Access program was launched in 2020 as a pilot program for alternative transit options from the regular fixed route schedules. Riders are able to schedule a trip through the FRTA mobile app as well as through the online portal. Trips are restricted to certain “zones” established by the FRTA and is available Monday through Friday from 5:30 am to 7:30 pm and on Saturdays and Sundays from 9:30 am to 5:30 am. Fares range from \$3 for a one way trip within the same zone and \$4 for a one way trip between different zones.

Med-Ride Program

The FRTA provides transportation for elderly residents (over 60 years old) in Franklin County who need to travel outside of the county for medical purposes. There is a charge of \$0.40 per mile and uses volunteer drivers and private automobiles.

Demand Response Service

FRTA demand response transportation is a curb to curb service offered to elders 60 years or older, eligible LifePath consumers, nursing home residents, or Veterans with a disability rating of 70% or greater. Days, hours of operations, fares, and service varies depending on the town. The PVTA demand response service is a door to door service. Both services operate only on weekdays.

ADA Paratransit Services

The ADA Paratransit Services are for disabled individuals who are located within $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile of a fixed route service. This is a curb to curb service, although door to door service will be provided if requested at the time of the reservation. The cost for ADA service is typically twice the fare of the regular fixed route fare. The PVTA also provides this service for PVTA member towns within Franklin County. Its offers door to door service.

Other transportation services available within the region include:

Intercity Bus Lines

Greyhound Lines operates service to Franklin County with one round trip to Greenfield each day. The Greenfield station is located at the John W. Olver Transit Center and tickets can be purchased directly through Greyhound either online or on the phone.

Amtrak

Amtrak's Vermonter service stops in Greenfield at the John W. Olver Transit Center twice a day (once in each direction). Passengers can take the train either north to St. Alban's, VT or south to Washington, DC. Amtrak's Valley Flyer services runs between Greenfield and New Haven, CT with two daily roundtrips. There are stops in Northampton, Holyoke, and Springfield along the route.

Taxis

There are currently no taxi services operating in Franklin County.

Rideshare Services

Private transportation network companies (TNCs), also known as ridesharing services such as Uber and Lyft, have been operating in Franklin County in a limited manner. In 2021, there was only a total of 343 rideshare trips that originated in Greenfield. This is an 86% decrease in trips from 2019 in which 2,455 rideshare trips originated in Greenfield.³

Other Private Services

There are a few limousine, van, and charter bus services based in Franklin County. The limousine services are:

- F.M. Kuzmeskus, Gill
- Deerfield Car & Shuttle Service, LLC

Van and charter bus services are:

- F.M. Kuzmeskus Inc., Gill

³ Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities. "Rideshare in Massachusetts," 2021.
<https://tnc.sites.digital.mass.gov/>.

The inventory on the following pages provides detailed information on all available transportation resources in the greater Franklin County region.

Franklin County Regional Transportation Inventory*

Program	Rider Eligibility	Trip Type	Service Area	Days & Hours of Service	Wheelchair-Accessible	Cost	Phone	Website
Franklin Regional Transit Authority (FRTA) fixed route	general public	all	Connecting Greenfield to Sunderland, Orange, Charlemont, Montague, and Northampton & towns along the way	M-F	yes	Currently fixed routes are free due to CARES Act funding. (Usually: \$1.50 each way; discounts for seniors, people with disabilities, & veterans. Monthly passes available.)	(413) 774-2262	www.fрта.org
Franklin Regional Transit Authority (FRTA) Access Program	General public	all	Greenfield, Montague, Deerfield, Whately, Gill, Leyden, Erving, Orange, New Salem, Warwick, Wendell, Shelburne Falls, Charlemont, Athol	M-F: 5:30-7:30 & Sat-Sun 9:30-5:30	yes	\$3 within zone, \$4 between zones	(413) 774-2262	www.fрта.org
Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA) fixed route	general public	all	Hampden and Hampshire Counties, plus Sunderland, Deerfield, Leverett (demand response only) in Franklin County	6 days a week (in Franklin County)	yes	\$1.50 each way; discounts for seniors, disabled, & children. Monthly passes available.	(413) 781-7882	www.pvta.org
Montachusets Regional Transit Authority (MART)	general public	all	Orange, Athol, and Fitchburg region.	M-F 6am-6pm	yes	\$1.25 each way; discounts for seniors, disabled, & children. Monthly passes available.	(978) 345-7711	http://www.mrta.us/
GAAMHA, Inc.	general public	all	anywhere in MA; out of state sometimes	24/7	yes	Variable (average \$1.25)	(978) 632-0934	www.gaamha.org

Franklin County Regional Transportation Inventory*

Program	Rider Eligibility	Trip Type	Service Area	Days & Hours of Service	Wheelchair-Accessible	Cost	Phone	Website
						per mile and \$15 per hour wait time)		
FRTA demand-response	seniors age 60+, LifePath consumers, nursing home residents, veterans with rating 70% or higher	varies by town	FRTA service area	varies by town	yes	varies by town	(413) 774-2262	www.fрта.org
FRTA Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) paratransit service	people with disabilities who apply and are found eligible	all	within 3/4 mile of a fixed route bus	same as fixed route	yes	twice the fixed route fare	(413) 774-2262	www.fрта.org
FRTA MedRides volunteer driver program	seniors age 60+	medical, out of county	from Franklin County to out of county locations	M-F	no	\$0.40 per mile	(413) 774-2262	www.fрта.org
Highland Valley Elder Services	home care consumers	medical & grocery	24 towns in Hampshire and Hampden County				(413) 586-2000	www.highlandvalley.org
Rides for Health volunteer driver program (LifePath)	home care consumers	medical	Franklin County & North Quabbin	7 days a week	not guaranteed	donations accepted	(413) 775-5555	www.fchcc.org/services/services-for-elders/rides-for-health
MassHealth transportation	eligible MassHealth consumers	medical	statewide & participating healthcare providers out of state	24/7	yes	free	(800) 841-2900	http://www.fрта.org/getting-around/masshealth-transportation/
Road to Recovery - American Cancer Society	cancer patients	medical	Massachusetts		no	free	(800) 227-2345	www.cancer.org/treatment/supportprograms/services/road-to-recovery
Cooley Dickinson shuttle to Mass General Hospital	current Cooley Dickinson patients	medical	Cooley Dickinson (Northampton) to Mass General (Boston)	M-F, leaves at 6:30am and departs Mass General at 3pm	yes	free	(888) 554-4234	https://www.cooleydickinson.org/mghshuttle/

Franklin County Regional Transportation Inventory*

Program	Rider Eligibility	Trip Type	Service Area	Days & Hours of Service	Wheelchair-Accessible	Cost	Phone	Website
Community Health Center of Franklin County (CHCFC)	CHCFC Member Patients	medical	Franklin County & North Quabbin Region	M-F	yes	free	(413) 325-8500 ext. 106	https://www.chcfc.org/transportation

*Transportation services are color-coded based on passenger eligibility. Inventory as of June 2023.

Assessment of Transportation Needs

The FRCOG and the FRTA have recently conducted several analyses and plans that examine the transportation system in the region and, in particular, looked at the public transit system. These studies and planning processes include:

- 2023 RTP
- 2020 FRTA Regional Transit Plan
- 2020 Franklin County Regional Transportation Plan
- East County Transit Study (2016)
- 2018 FRTA Fixed Route Service Changes
- 2017 FRTA Fixed Route Service Changes
- 2015 Franklin Regional Transit Plan
- 2015 Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan for Franklin County
- Regional Coordinating Council Transportation Inventory (2015)
- 2011 Franklin County Regional Transportation Plan
- Survey of Select Populations Regarding Transit Service, 2014
- Needs Assessment of Franklin County Councils on Aging, 2012
- North County Transit Study, 2011
- Transit Services and Needs in Western Franklin County, 2008

Through this planning work and the input gathered from public outreach, the following service gaps and needs have been identified:

- Additional fixed transit routes to allow access to employment, education, and services;
- More frequent fixed route service to accommodate passengers' needs to move between employment, childcare, and services in a timely manner;
- Evening and weekend transit service to allow access to employment, education, and services;
- Improved 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;
- Improve connectivity between RTA regions;
- Better links between transportation modes;
- Provision of transportation services to residents located in the more rural areas of Franklin County far from fixed transit routes;
- Marketing of existing transportation services;
- Maintenance of vehicles at or above a state of good repair; and

- Acquisition of modern accessible service equipment and technical applications.
- Support the integration of alternative fuel sourced vehicles and supporting infrastructure such as EV charging stations.
- Support the inclusion of rider friendly amenities such as benches, shelters, and bike racks.

Evaluation Criteria

Projects submitted for consideration of Section 5310 funding will be evaluated and ranked based on the following criteria:

- Number of passengers served;
- Degree of provision of access to employment, education, or services; and
- Degree to which Environmental Justice populations are served.

Priorities for Implementation

Priority for projects will go towards those that:

- Provide access to employment, education, and services;
- Provide service to address barriers for seniors and disabled communities; and
- Provide connections to other transit services.

Conclusion

Access to affordable, timely, reliable, and safe transportation is an essential component of a functioning and thriving region. The coordination of existing services and expanding services is important to ensuring that all populations, but particularly the elders and disabled, are able to participate fully in the community. Franklin County is dedicated to this goal and will continue to work towards helping meet the transportation service needs identified in this CPT-HST.