Transportation Related Regional Tourism

2024 Regional Transportation Plan
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Tourism continues to be 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 an important and growing part of the region’s economy. The Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism (MOTT) estimated that in 2020 domestic travelers in Franklin County spent over $52.4 million (source: MA Office of Travel and Tourism 2021 Annual Report). While this represents a decrease in overall spending from $67.5 million accounted in 2019, it was during the COVID 19 pandemic when restrictions on travel and gathering were in effect.

As part of the 2020 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 many regional transportation planning projects. Bicycle related tourism, access to Franklin County by rail, increased access to recreation, and supporting the Scenic Byways are transportation topics discussed in the context of regional tourism. The following section provides an overview of the work that is currently underway or completed since 2020.

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 an important part of both transportation planning and economic development in the region.

The 2020 Regional Transportation Plan included recommendations to support bicycle tourism and the FRCOG has worked to implement the recommendations. The FRCOG has provided information and resources to support tourism opportunities related to bicycling throughout the county including encouraging 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. The FRCOG has also continued to advocate for
making it easier for travelers coming to the region on the Amtrak regional rail service to bring their bikes and skis. In addition, the FRCOG has followed up on work on a regional bicycle promotional campaign by developing ideas for themed rides that highlight the historic, cultural, and natural resources in the region.

The FRCOG also continued to work to implement a Bicycle Friendly Business Program for Franklin County. The program promotes a bike friendly atmosphere in the region by encouraging businesses to undertake small initiatives to make their establishment bicycle friendly. By completing initiatives and signing a pledge, the businesses may enroll in the Franklin County Bicycle Friendly Business Program. Bike friendly businesses receive promotional incentives like a window cling to display and listing on a website of participating businesses. The FRCOG developed a unique logo for the program and designed materials for recruiting businesses to participate in the program. The FRCOG reached out to businesses in the region and received responses from many businesses wanting to participate.

In 2022, the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce created a new website with a robust recreation listing. Bicycling is one of the featured activities. The Franklin County Chamber of Commerce is a business association that serves the 26 towns in Franklin County and is 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 the area.

The FRCOG provides four regional bicycle maps that are regularly 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. The FRCOG is working to install wayfinding signs on all of the Franklin County Bikeway routes. It is anticipated that the wayfinding signs will be installed on all of the routes during 2023.

Travel to Franklin County via Amtrak rail service on the Vermonter and Valley Flyer Lines are important connection for potential bicycle tourists. A goal of the 2020 Regional Transportation Plan was to advocate for additional capacity for carrying bikes on these Amtrak regional rail services. As noted in the table below Amtrak permits bicycles as carry-on luggage from all station stops along the Vermonter and the Valley Flyer. There is a limited number of bicycles allowed per train and reservations are required. There is also a fee to bring a bicycle on the trails and only standard size bikes are permitted.

Summary of the Amtrak Bicycle Policies on the Vermonter and Valley Flyer
Passenger Rail

Passenger rail is an important and growing transportation option for visitors traveling to Franklin County. On December 29, 2014, passenger rail service returned to Franklin County when Amtrak’s Vermonter was moved back onto the Connecticut River Main Line. In August 2019, an additional service was added to the Connecticut River Main Line when the Valley Flyer service started as a pilot. The Vermonter service has one daily train north and one train south between Washington, DC, and St. Albans, Vermont. The Valley Flyer provides passenger service from New Haven, Connecticut to Greenfield, MA with a connection to New York City. The Valley Flyer has two daily trips in each direction on weekdays and one in each direction on the weekend. While the Valley Flyer was added as initially added as a pilot and despite a shut-down during the Covid 19 pandemic service has resumed and outpaced the originally predicted ridership. On October 28, 2022, MassDOT announced that the Valley Flyer Passenger Service would be permanent. The Vermonter and the Valley Flyer stop in Springfield, Holyoke, Northampton, and in Franklin County at the John W. Olver Transit Center in Greenfield.

Two initiatives are underway to expand east-west rail options in Massachusetts. These options would better connect Franklin County and provide additional rail options for visitors to Franklin County. MassDOT completed the East–West Passenger Rail Study Final Report was completed in January 2021. The Report examined the potential benefits, costs, and investments necessary to implement new passenger rail services connecting western Massachusetts communities with central and eastern Massachusetts. It also identifies transportation corridors that provide new passenger rail connections between Pittsfield, Springfield, Worcester, Boston, and intermediate communities. There is also an initiative to develop an east-west rail connection along the northern tier corridor of Massachusetts that

<table>
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<th>Bicycle Reservation Required</th>
<th>Checked Service Available</th>
<th>Bicycle fee</th>
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<tr>
<td>Hartford Line/Valley Flyer</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>$5</td>
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<tr>
<td>(New Haven - Springfield - Greenfield)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>Select Stations</td>
<td>$10 between St. Albans and New Haven</td>
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<td>(Washington - New York - New Haven - St.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$20 between New Haven and Washington, DC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Albans)</td>
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</table>
would potentially include a stop in Greenfield. This study is currently underway and examining costs and options for making a passenger rail connection following the route of the historical Fitchburg Railroad, 144-miles from Boston to North Adams.

The following table shows the number of passenger arrivals and departures through the Greenfield station:

Table: Amtrak Vermonter Service Arrivals and Departures through Greenfield Station.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Arrivals and Departures</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>5,315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>5,885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>6,693</td>
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<td>2020*</td>
<td>3,318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021*</td>
<td>1,020</td>
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</table>

*Amtrak suspended the Vermonter and Valley Flyer services on March 26, 2020, and resumed services on July 19, 2021.

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 2021, the Greenfield, MA to New York City “city pair” is the seventh most active trip on the route. The second most popular destination is travel from New York City to Northampton, MA. According to the ridership data, the most popular destination/origin for ridership to/from Greenfield is New York City with Philadelphia the second most popular designation, and Washington, DC third.

Prior to the start of the Valley Flyer service in August 2019, the FRCOG received funding to hire a marketing consultant to create a promotional campaign for the new service. As a result, the watsons developed the Making Stops campaign. It has been successful and additional funding has been provided through MassDOT to continue the digital advertising campaign to encourage traveler to and from western MA to use the Valley Flyer.

The FRCOG continues to advocate for improved online information about train travel to Franklin County. 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 could be improved. 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 and an important issue in making rail a viable transportation option for visitors coming to Franklin County by rail. 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). However, there is limited bus service in the evenings and on weekends. The new FRTA Access Program offers a more flexible public transit option. The Access Program operates from 5:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. Monday through Friday and 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays and allows riders to schedule transportation up to one week in advance. Depending on when the rail passenger arrives and where they need to go, the fixed bus route may not be an option.

There are limited taxis, ride services, and rental car options available near the Greenfield Amtrak station. The Enterprise Rental Car office in Greenfield is 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 is closed in the evenings and on the weekends.

There are limited taxi and for-hire transportation services. There is currently one taxi company that serves the Greenfield station, 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 sporadic and often unreliable. 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. More options for last mile transportation are needed in order to better serve the Greenfield rail station and further encourage visitors to come to the Franklin County by rail.

**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. In addition, many artisans 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 two of the byways, the Connecticut River Byway (Route 63 and 47) and the Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway (Route 2) are 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 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 that discretionary program, a number of projects to enhance, protect and promote the intrinsic qualities of the Scenic Byways in Franklin County received funding. From 2012 through 2022 there was not an annual discretionary funding program but the Scenic Byway Discretionary Program funding was reinstated through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) in March 2022. The program funds improvements, such as byway facilities, safety improvements, and interpretive information, along roads in the United States that merit recognition at the national level for their outstanding scenic, historic, cultural, natural recreational and archeological qualities.

The following section describes the five scenic byways in Franklin County and any recently completed projects.

**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, some many sites and resources 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 reflected in the many surviving architectural resources that can be seen along the byway. In Franklin County, the Byway is Route 63 in the towns of Northfield, Erving, and Montague, and Route 47 in Montague and Sunderland. The Massachusetts Legislature designated the Franklin County section of the
Byway as a state scenic byway in 2000, and the Hampshire County section of the byway (Route 47 in Hadley and South Hadley) in 2003. In 2009, the Connecticut River Scenic Byway was designated as a National Scenic Byway. This is one of four nationally designated scenic byways in Massachusetts.

Recently Completed Projects

**Ervingside Streetscape Improvements**
The Connecticut River Scenic Byway passes through the Town of Erving on Route 63. Scenic Byway funding was awarded to complete the design and construction of sidewalk and streetscape improvements on Route 63. The project area included the Erving section of Millers Falls and the adjacent residential neighborhood known as Ervingside. The project improved pedestrian access and safety on a 1-mile section of Route 63, and was completed in 2020.

**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) was also first developed as a footpath for 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. Route 2 was called the Mohawk Trail when it was opened in 1927; however, there is growing understanding that the Byway should be renamed because it was used as a travel route by many native tribes and should not be associated exclusively to the Mohawk tribe that was not native to western Massachusetts.
In 2021 the Mohawk Trail Scenic Byway was designated as a National Scenic Byway. This is one of four nationally designated scenic byways in the Commonwealth.

**Route 112 Scenic Byway**
The Route 112 Scenic Byway was officially designated as a scenic byway 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.

**Route 116 Scenic Byway**
The Route 116 Scenic Byway was designated as a Scenic Byway in the towns of Deerfield, Conway, Ashfield, Plainfield, Savoy, and Adams in 2008. 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 the historic Conway Center. Route 116 continues west through historic Ashfield Center, where it intersects with the Route 112 Scenic Byway.

**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.

**Western Massachusetts Scenic Byways Promotional Campaign**
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.

View of Deerfield River along Route 2 in Charlemont

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 concluded in June 2019 with a total of 1,573 acres permanently protected from future development.

**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 last mile transportation for visitors arriving on regional rail options.
- 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 local tourism groups, chambers of commerce, and/or business associations to develop travel itineraries that focus 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.