9 Transit Services

2024 Regional Transportation Plan
Franklin County’s rural nature makes it 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.

The parts of the region with the best transit access and most service are 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 limited funds and the higher cost of providing services to a more dispersed population with limited funds.

The role of the FRCOG in the context of regional public transit access is to work with the regional transit agencies, MassDOT, and other stakeholders 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 priorities identified in the Regional Transportation Plan and other local, regional, and state planning processes that have been conducted.
The Franklin Regional Transit Authority (FRTA) provides the majority of public transit services to Franklin County with some additional services provided by the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA). A total of nine 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, the Town of Orange is served by the FRTA and Montachusett Regional Transit Authority (MART), which provides transit services to the neighboring Worcester County/Montachusett region. The MART provides a fixed route shuttle that connects the towns of Athol and Orange on an hourly basis on the weekdays and Saturday.

Both the FRTA and PVTA also provide paratransit and demand response service to their respective towns with the level of the service varying significantly. The level of service depends on the financial contributions of a community. In addition, the FRTA provides a microtransit service called FRTA Access to portions of Franklin County. A map of the service areas for the FRTA is contained at the end of this chapter.

Despite the vast geographic area of the county and its rural character, there is a large and growing demand for increased public transit options. Through public outreach conducted during the development of this Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), it is clear that there is a very strong desire and need for increased and improved transit services in the region. This demand for increased transit services has also been frequently expressed to FRCOG staff not only at transit-related events, but also at meetings/events that focus on wide-ranging topics that include housing, economic development, health services, education, and many others. FRCOG staff have been hearing from residents, employers, service providers, educators, and others that they have felt very frustrated and limited by the lack of public transit options that exist in the region.

By far, the most frequent comment received about transportation in the region is the need for expanded bus service, particularly on the weekends and in the evenings. There is currently no FRTA fixed route services available on the weekends, nor in the evenings past 7:30 PM. This makes employment at non-standard 9-5 shifts very difficult for county residents without vehicles and employers, and running basic errands on the weekends or after work extremely hard.

**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. The PVTA operates two
fixed service routes, which travel through the Franklin County communities of Sunderland and Deerfield. Fixed 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 and when UMass Amherst is not in session (summers and winter breaks).

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 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 vehicles used for fixed route service and the Access program have bicycle racks on the front of the buses. The bicycle racks hold two to three bicycles each and are on the buses year-
The FRTA operates out of the 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, WiFi service, and bicycle parking. The FRTA has just finished the construction of a new Maintenance Facility located in Montague.

Table 9-1 outlines current FRTA bus route schedules and frequency. Bus fares for FRTA fixed route service have been suspended since the COVID-19 Pandemic. The FRTA suspended fare collection during the pandemic to limit close contact and encourage ridership and was able to use federal CARES Act funding to supplement the lost fare revenue. There has been enough CARES Act funding to allow the FRTA to suspend fares at least until June 30, 2023 and this is expected to continue for at least one additional year.

Prior to the pandemic, fares had been $1.50 per trip. Passengers with valid Statewide Access Passes, ADA cards, Medicare cards, persons over 60 years old, 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 half of the listed fare ($0.75). Children under the age of five ride free when accompanied by a fare-paying adult.

The FRTA has 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 plastic reloadable fare cards, called a GoCard! GoCards! can be used for multiple rides and are also available as a monthly pass in which a user can take unlimited rides for 31 consecutive days for $40.00. The FRTA also provides paper magnetic tickets for single use or smaller value increments. The tickets and cards may be purchased at the FRTA offices or at a kiosk in the JWO Transit Center lobby.
FRTA’s annual ridership saw an increase between Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 and FY 2019. In the beginning of 2017, the FRTA redesigned their fixed route system to streamline the service and add/reconfigure routes. These changes resulted in this increase in ridership as shown in Figure 9-1. During that period, the ridership increased by roughly 5,000 riders at a time when other regional transit authorities across the Commonwealth experienced declines in ridership. While the chart also shows the drastic decrease in ridership due to the COVID-19 pandemic that occurred in 2020; the trends for the last three years show a rebounding ridership. Particularly, when the last year of FY23 data does not yet account for the 4th quarter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Route</th>
<th>Primary Destination(s) from Downtown Greenfield</th>
<th>Number of Round-Trips on Weekdays</th>
<th>Start and End Times of Routes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20 (GreenLink Connector)</td>
<td>Greenfield</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4:35am-9:55am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 (Greenfield Community)</td>
<td>Greenfield</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8:00am-7:30pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 (Sunderland/Greenfield)</td>
<td>Sunderland</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6:45am-7:30pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 (Crosstown Connector)</td>
<td>Montague-Greenfield</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7:15am-7:20pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 (Northampton/Greenfield)</td>
<td>Northampton</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5:00am-6:40pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32 (Orange/Greenfield)</td>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5:00am-6:45pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 (Charlemont/Greenfield)</td>
<td>Charlemont</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7:00am-6:25pm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9-1: FRTA Fixed Routes as of February 2019.
Figure 9-1: FRTA Fixed Route Ridership 2017-2023*

*FY23 data does not include the 4\textsuperscript{th} quarter.

Figure 9-2 shows the ridership statistics for each of the FRTA fixed routes for FY 2019 and FY 2023. The ridership statistics show that the most popular routes have slightly changed since before the pandemic. Previously, Route 31 (Northampton) and Route 32 (Orange) were the most popular routes within the FRTA system, followed by the Route 21 and Route 24 servicing the Greenfield and Turners Falls downtowns. After the pandemic, while the Route 31 (Northampton) route is still very popular, the Route 21 (Greenfield) and Route 24 (Turners Falls) have increased in popularity with less people using the Orange route.
**FRTA Fixed Route Descriptions**

**Route 20: Greenlink Connector**
Route 20 serves the downtown Greenfield area and is focused on getting riders to their destinations early in the mornings. The Route 20 only runs from 4:35 A.M. to 9:55 A.M. and serves the high density residential areas. The route has been timed to meet the Greenfield High School and Greenfield Community College (GCC) class schedules as well. The Greenlink Connector loop takes approximately 20 minutes to travel and runs about every 30 minutes with extra service around 8:00 A.M to serve GCC students.

**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: Cherry Rum Plaza, Greenfield High School and Middle School, Leyden Woods, Greenfield Community College (GCC), the Big Y shopping center, and the Greenfield Corporate Center. The entire route takes approximately forty-five minutes roundtrip. The schedule for this route consists of twelve runs per day with the earliest run leaving the JWO Transit Center at 8:00 A.M. and the latest arriving back at the JWO at 7:30 P.M.
Route 23: Sunderland/ Greenfield Route
Route 23 (Sunderland/Greenfield Route) connects Greenfield to Sunderland, via Turners Falls, Millers Falls, and Montague Center. This route is timed to make transfers at the Sugarloaf Estates to the PVTA Route 31 that provides service to UMass Amherst, because the riders are primarily commuters and students traveling to UMass. The schedule for this route currently consists of six round-trip runs per day with the first run leaving the JWO Transit Center at 6:45 A.M. and the last leaving at 6:10 P.M.

Route 24: Crosstown Connector
The Route 24 connects downtown Greenfield and Turners Falls throughout the day with runs occurring every hour. Major destinations along the route include Stop and Shop, Franklin Medical Center, Food City, and the JWO Transit Center. The route originates in Turners Falls at Avenue A and 11th Street, and takes approximately an hour roundtrip. The first run begins at 7:15 A.M. and ends at the JWO at 7:20 P.M.

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 MassDOT Park & Ride, and continues on to Northampton, stopping at the Big Y/Wal-Mart Plaza and the Academy of Music. The entire route takes approximately an hour and forty minutes roundtrip. The schedule for this route consists of seven round-trip runs per day with the earliest run leaving the JWO Transit Center at 5:00 A.M. and returning at the end of the day at 6:40 P.M. This route connects with a PVTA route in Northampton and is the most popular route in the FRTA system.

Route 32: Orange/Greenfield Route
Route 32 (Orange/Greenfield Route) connects several communities along Route 2 east, from Greenfield to Orange. Route 32’s major destinations include: the Farren Care Center, the Orange Health Center, and the Wal-Mart and Hannafords Shopping Centers. The entire route takes approximately an hour and forty-five minutes 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 returning at 6:45 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 major destinations includes GCC, Big Y Shopping Center, Shelburne Falls, the Charlemont Park and Ride, and the Academy of Charlemont. The earliest run departs JWO at 7:00 A.M. and returning at the end of the day at 6:25 P.M. The entire route takes approximately an hour and a half 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.¹ 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 $1.50 for a one-way ticket, although students, faculty and staff of the Five Colleges ride for free. Both the PVTA and the FRTA employ interoperable farebox systems, which means that both systems are able to read the different RTA fare cards, although they are not currently set up to do so.

**PVTA Fixed Route Descriptions**

The following section is a detailed description of the PVTA routes that run within Franklin County. Table 9-2 summarizes the PVTA routes that serve Franklin County.

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¹ The MBTA is not considered a regional transit authority. It is however the largest public transit provider in the Commonwealth, followed by the PVTA.
**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 11:50 P.M., with service extending to 1:00 A.M. on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays, and to 11:20 P.M. on Sundays. Route 31 is traditionally one of the PVTA routes with the highest ridership. While its ridership is very high, Route 31 is also greatly dependent upon the academic schedule, which causes ridership to decrease 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 and has a total of two runs per day – once in the morning and once in the afternoon/evening weekdays. There is no weekend service on this route.

**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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Route</th>
<th>Number of Round-Trips on Weekdays</th>
<th>Start and End Times of Routes</th>
<th>Number of Round-Trips on Saturday</th>
<th>Number of Round-Trips on Sunday</th>
<th>Typical Weekday Peak Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Route 31 (Sunderland/South Amherst)</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>7:09 A.M. – 11:41 P.M.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Route 46 (South Deerfield/Whately Park &amp; Ride/UMass)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7:25 A.M. – 5:20 P.M.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Irregular</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: PVTA runs a reduced schedule when UMass is not in session.
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 cannot 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 (¾) 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. 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 that 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 (FTM, the operating company for the FRTA) provides the ADA service. Table 9-3 on the next page summarizes the paratransit/demand response service that is available by town in Franklin County.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Town</th>
<th>Paratransit Service</th>
<th>Demand Response Service Provider</th>
<th>MedRide Service Provider</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ashfield</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Shelburne COA*</td>
<td>FRTA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bernardston</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Bernardston COA</td>
<td>FRTA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buckland</td>
<td>Yes(^1)</td>
<td>Shelburne COA</td>
<td>FRTA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlemont</td>
<td>Yes(^1)</td>
<td>Shelburne COA</td>
<td>FRTA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colrain</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Shelburne COA</td>
<td>FRTA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conway</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Shelburne COA</td>
<td>FRTA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deerfield</td>
<td>Yes(^1)</td>
<td>FTM**</td>
<td>FRTA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erving</td>
<td>Yes(^1)</td>
<td>Erving COA</td>
<td>FRTA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gill</td>
<td>Yes(^1)</td>
<td>FTM</td>
<td>FRTA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greenfield</td>
<td>Yes(^1)</td>
<td>FTM</td>
<td>FRTA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawley</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Shelburne COA</td>
<td>FRTA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heath</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Shelburne COA</td>
<td>FRTA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leverett</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Amherst COA</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leyden</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>FTM</td>
<td>FRTA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monroe</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montague</td>
<td>Yes(^1)</td>
<td>FTM</td>
<td>FRTA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Salem</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Orange COA</td>
<td>FRTA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northfield</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Bernardston COA</td>
<td>FRTA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>Yes(^1)</td>
<td>FTM</td>
<td>FRTA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rowe</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Shelburne COA</td>
<td>FRTA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelburne</td>
<td>Yes(^1)</td>
<td>Shelburne COA</td>
<td>FRTA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shutesbury</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>FRTA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunderland</td>
<td>Yes(^1)</td>
<td>Hulmes Transportation</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warwick</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>FTM</td>
<td>FRTA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wendell</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>FTM</td>
<td>FRTA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whately</td>
<td>Yes(^1)</td>
<td>FTM</td>
<td>FRTA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
1: ADA Paratransit services are provided for disabled individuals who are available within ¾ mile of a fixed FRTA route corridor and cannot navigate or access a regular fixed route due to their disability.
*COA is the town-run Councils on Aging.
**FTM is Franklin Transit Management – the operator for the FRTA.
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. Transportation services for DDS, DMA, and DPH in Franklin County are currently coordinated by the Montachusett Area Transit Authority (MART) and provided by private transportation operators.

**Microtransit Services**

In 2020, the FRTA created the FRTA Access Program, which is a microtransit service. Microtransit uses real-time technology, similar to how private TNCs conduct ridesharing, to provide flexible and dynamic transit services except that is provided by a public entity. The use of smart technology allows transit providers to optimize vehicle usage, reduce costs, and improve the experience for riders. This form of transportation has also been called flexible transit or mobility services.

Microtransit is a very good fit for a rural region such as Franklin County, where communities are spread far apart. The traditional, fixed route model relies on a bus traveling from point A to point B every day whether there are riders or not. Instead, a flexible microtransit service could change its route as it goes from point A to point B depending on real-time demand. This flexibility and better efficiency increases ridership and reduces costs by only running when necessary.

Currently, the FRTA Access program uses the demand response vehicles that the operating company FTM operates for the FRTA. Demand response users have priority seating on the vehicles, but through the Access program software, the general public can book rides on these vehicles when there are available spaces. The Access program currently operates in four zones in Franklin County and the fare is $3.00 one way within a zone and $4.00 between zones. The service is available on weekdays from 5:30 A.M. to 7:30 P.M and on the weekends from 9:30 A.M to 5:30 P.M. Users are able to book rides using an app on their mobile phones on the same day or up to one week in advance. This service has been extremely popular with riders. Currently, the program is at capacity and ridership growth is limited by the number of vehicles and availability of drivers.

**Private Carriers and Other Transportation Services**

**Bus Service**

The Greyhound Bus Lines operates a north-south service to Franklin County with one trip to Greenfield each day. The Greenfield station is located at the John W. Olver Transit Center.
Passengers can switch buses in Springfield for other destinations, including: Worcester, Framingham, Boston, and points in Connecticut and New York.

**Taxi Service**
There is currently no taxi service operating in Franklin County.

**Other Private Services**
There are currently two limousine services and only one van and charter bus service based in Franklin County. One of the largest private bus services in the county is F.M. Kuzmeskus, Inc, which is based in the town of Gill.

**Ridesharing**
Transport Network Companies (TNC) are private companies that provide rideshare services, such as Uber and Lyft. While very popular in the state, the availability of TNCs in Franklin County remains very limited – particularly after the pandemic. In 2021, there were 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.\(^2\) TNCs have the potential to be a good transportation alternative to Franklin County residents who cannot access the fixed routes or need rides when the buses are not running – particularly on the weekends and the evenings. However, there are potential limitations that should be considered with these services. The first is that they may be too expensive for low income residents, as well as requiring credit cards and smart phones, which pose additional barriers to service. The second is that TNCs are not usually ADA accessible, which restricts the ability of Franklin County residents with disabilities from accessing these services.

**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.

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The inventory was distributed 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 and has been updated by the FRCOG as providers change.

**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. This Plan is regularly reviewed and an update is currently in progress and should be completed by July 2023. In 2020, the FRCOG identified the following transportation needs:

- 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;
- More flexible transit system that employs use of technology;
- 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.

**Transit Planning 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.
**Regional Transit Plan**

In 2020, the FRTA updated its Regional Transit Plan that examined the existing fixed route, demand response system, and fare structure and made recommendations for improvement. The recommendations from the Regional Transit Plan include:

- More frequent fixed route bus service
- Extended weekly hours (specifically evening service)
- Weekend service (specifically fixed route Saturday service)
- Improved connections with adjoin RTAs
- Simplified demand response fare structure
- Expanded microtransit system

Since the 2020 Regional Transit Plan, the FRTA has implemented portions of the recommendations of the report, including fixed route changes and expanded Access program hours in the evenings and weekends.

**Microtransit**

The flexibility and efficiency of the microtransit Access program has been very effective for a rural transit authority like the FRTA. It has also been overwhelmingly popular with riders. Because of this success, the FRCOG and FRTA have been investigating ways to expand this program throughout the county and to make connections to other RTAs.

**Ridesharing Program for Social Service Providers**

Using funding from a state earmark, in 2021 the FRCOG began a pilot program working with social service providers in Franklin County to provide free rides to their clients through the Access program when the fixed route buses are not available. The feedback from the partners is that this program provides critical transportation alternatives to the agencies’ clients at times when they are most needed. Because it uses the FRTA Access program, capacity is currently limited due to the program’s popularity and restricted capacity. The FRCOG currently has funding for this pilot for one additional year and will be conducting surveys of users to determine next steps once the funding is gone.

**Fare Free Public Transit**

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the FRTA has suspended fares for its fixed route system using CARES Act funding to supplement the lost fare revenue. Because of the relatively small size and lower ridership numbers of the FRTA, it actually costs the FRTA more money to collect the fares than it receives in fare revenue. As a result, the FRTA and the FRCOG has begun analyzing data and planning for ways for the FRTA to permanently
suspend fares. This would not only be a cost saving, but would potentially increase ridership and make it easier for lower-income riders to use the system.

**Transit Asset Management (TAM) Plan**
The FAST Act requires that all public transit providers monitor and manage their public transportation assets to improve safety and increase reliability and performance and to establish performance measures. To accomplish this, transit providers of a certain size must create a Transit Asset Management Plan and update it every four years. The FRTA falls into the Tier II level of reporting and the PVTA is considered a Tier I, due to the size of their transit fleets. The TAM plans were updated in January 2023 and provide an inventory of each RTA’s assets, detail their condition, and outline a project-based prioritization of investments with the goal of achieving and maintain a state of good repair of its assets.

**Marketing of the FRTA Services**
In 2023, the FRCOG secured funding to hire a consultant to create a branding and marketing campaign for FRTA’s fixed route service and Access program. With the help of the consultant, ads and a commercial were created advertising the FRTA services. Public feedback has shown that many people in Franklin County remain unaware of the FRTA’s service options and the goal is change that through this marketing campaign. Below is one example of several images that were created for billboard advertising as well as on social media images. The commercial can be viewed at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6VYZhBdGMSc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6VYZhBdGMSc). The intention is to continue to implement the marketing strategy to increase public awareness of FRTA’s services in the region.

**Billboard for the FRTA**

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**Save this.**  
By riding this.

Less cars. Less carbon.  
[frta.org](http://frta.org)
Recommendations for Transit and Paratransit Services

Short Term Recommendations

➢ Promote current 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 coordinate possible service to these locations.

➢ Attract TNCs, such as Uber and Lyft, to bring ridesharing to the region as an additional transportation alternative to residents and employees.

➢ Expand the FRTA Access program throughout Franklin County and enable connections to the PVTA.

Long Term Recommendations

➢ Improve connections between Franklin County and UMass Amherst, one of the region’s largest employer.

➢ Consider extensions of the fixed route system to serve the West County (Rt. 116) and North County (Rt. 5/10) regions.

➢ Permanently suspend fares on fixed route system.

Ongoing Recommendations

➢ Continue to work with the FRTA, PVTA, and the MART to keep area legislators informed about the regional importance of transit and the increasing 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.

➢ Support 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. Relatedly, the FRCOG is the only regional planning agency that does not receive funding to assist with transit planning. Advocate for increased transit planning funding for FRCOG staff.
Expand current outreach, marketing, and publicity efforts to provide information about FRTA transit services and to encourage bus usage. Outreach efforts should target the populations that 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.

Seating Recently Installed at FRTA Benches