

The Republican.

It takes Springfield residents 15 minutes longer to take a PVTa bus to work, on average, than to drive, MassINC study says

By Jim Kinney
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SPRINGFIELD — City residents who use the bus for their commutes spend an average of 15 minutes longer getting to work each day compared with people who drive.

And that's if the **Pioneer Valley Transit Authority** bus runs near their jobs and if service starts early enough to get them there on time and lasts late enough to get them home, according to a report issued Tuesday by **MassInc**, that links bus service with job opportunity.

"It's common sense," said Benjamin K. Forman, research director at MassInc, a nonpartisan Boston think tank that used to go by the name Massachusetts Institute for a New Commonwealth. "If you can't get to that second-shift job, if you can't get home at the end of that shift, you can't keep that job. Places that have more robust public transportation have more people in the work force. If service improves so people's commutes are shorter they might be able to have a second job, or spend more time with their families"

The average bus trip to work is 36 minutes compared with 21 by car in Springfield. Looking at the Pioneer Valley as a whole, the average trip to work is just 23 minutes by car but 32 minutes by bus, Forman said citing U.S. Census Data from 2011. Christopher D. Alvarez, a transit organizer with Alliance to Develop Power in Springfield, said he routinely hears from people who spend two hours or more riding buses to work, taking the bus is not practical especially if someone is working two or more jobs to make ends meet.

"People have to plan their entire day around public transportation," Alvarez said. "The buses - when they finally get on the bus - they go to a central location downtown where people have to make transfers."

Mary L. MacInnes, administrator of the **Pioneer Valley Transit Authority**, said everyone knows that no one with any options is going to wait 45 minutes for a bus, a wait that does

happen at times now. Sixty percent of authority riders take a bus only because they have no other transportation choices. And the inconveniences born by those riders impact their job prospects.

“MassInc’s basic point that they are trying to make is that you really can’t get the ridership until you can provide a level of service,” MacInnes said. “What would happen if you had funding to add frequency.”

PVTA ridership fell in 2006 when service was cut by about 21 percent. Since then, its gone up every year reaching 11 million riders in fiscal 2011-12. MacInnes expects to top 12 million riders this fiscal year. Overall, it serves 24 communities in the Pioneer Valley with 174 buses and 144 vans.

The MassInc report comes out as the Massachusetts Legislature debates a Patrick Administration transportation plan that could direct \$1.5 billion in new state revenue to the state’s 15 transit agencies, like the PVTA.

For the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority, that could increase annual state funding from \$17.2 million a year to a new total of \$49.9 million.

Besides the funding, Forman said his group is also calling on transit agencies to undertake a series of ongoing reforms such as the increased performance metrics, keeping track of how many people are carried how often and where, and transparency which could include using smart phone technology and LED screens at bus stop to tell riders where buses are in real time.

MacInnes said the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority is already working on those last two suggestions.

“We are in a position now where we have done everything we can do, short of adding service,” she said.

Putting those more buses out on the street would take money, ideally the \$49.9 million.

The authority is using a \$100,000 federal planning grant to pay toward a \$200,000 comprehensive route and service study. Consultants will look at every bus and every neighborhood. Where are the riders? Where are the people? where can service be cut and where

must it be expanded.

MacInnes said the results of that study will be available in February of 2014.

The PVTA also has a \$450,000 state grant for real-time displays. Later this year, LED screens displaying all incoming buses and estimated arrival times will be installed in the 15 busiest PVTA stops. the information is already available online.