



Regional Transit Plan

Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority

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1. PROJECT OVERVIEW

The State Legislature has instructed all Regional Transit Authorities (RTAs) in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to undertake the preparation of a Regional Transit Plan as a requirement of the Transportation Finance Bill passed in 2013. These Regional Transit Plans present an opportunity to improve local bus service operations, identify new markets of service opportunity, and meet the identified needs for public transit services in each respective RTA service area. Section 63 of the Bill notes nine discrete tasks that each Regional Transit Plan must address. These tasks are as follows:

- (1) Comprehensive assessment of transit services
- (2) Thorough examination of the ridership trends for each line and service provided by the regional transit authority
- (3) Performance analysis of existing services
- (4) Development and evaluation of alternative service scenarios
- (5) Development of a recommendation to better align service with local and regional demand
- (6) Commonwealth's environmental policies
- (7) Fare rates and collection methods
- (8) Region's job creation goals and employment needs
- (9) Determination of whether the regional transit authority's service is deployed in the most effective way possible to accommodate the transit needs of the region's workforce.

Each RTA is also required to hold a public hearing on the draft Regional Transit Plan in order to inform the public and gather their input.

The Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority has prepared this Draft Regional Transit Plan in accordance with the Transportation Finance Bill.

2. PROJECT PURPOSE

2.1 RTA Overview

The Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority (MVRTA) operates under Massachusetts General Law Chapter 161B, a body politic and a corporate and political subdivision of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Its members consist of the cities of Haverhill, Lawrence, Newburyport, Amesbury, Methuen, Andover, Boxford, Georgetown, Groveland, Merrimac, Newbury, North Andover, Rowley, Salisbury and West Newbury.

MVRTA has a general responsibility to develop, finance and contract for the operation of mass transportation facilities within its territory. It is authorized to improve, modify, or extend existing facilities and enter into agreements with other parties, including government agencies, municipalities, authorities, private transportation companies, railroads, corporations, and other concerns, providing for construction, operation and use by such other party of any mass transportation facility or equipment of the Authority.

The affairs of the Authority are managed by an administrator who serves as the CEO and who is appointed by and serves at the pleasure of the Advisory Board. The Advisory Board consists of the chief executive officers of each member municipality. However, they may, by writing filed with the Authority, from time to time appoint a designee to act for him or her on the Advisory Board. By law, the Advisory Board consists of the mayor of each member city, the Town Manager of each member town and the chairperson of the board of selectmen of each member town. The Advisory Board adopts an annual budget, approves changes in fares and approves substantial changes in service.

Although responsible for establishing routes and setting fares, the Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority is prohibited by statute from directly operating any mass transportation services. It therefore relies on contracting these services out to one or more operators.

The Authority has retained the services of First Transit, Inc. of Cincinnati, Ohio to provide transit management services for the Authority's fixed route operations. First Transit, Inc. has formed a Massachusetts corporation named Merrimack Valley Area Transportation Co. to operate both fixed route bus and Boston Commuter Bus services as well as a Massachusetts corporation named Special Transportation Services to operate Paratransit service.

The MVRTA operates 25 fixed routes with weekday and limited Saturday Service. On weekdays, service runs from approximately 5:30 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. with most routes operating on a 60 minute off-peak frequency and 30 minute peak frequency. These routes carry just over 2.07 million riders annually (Table 1).

Table 1. Statistics by Service

| <i>*Projected through FY14</i> | Fixed Route | Boston Commuter Service | Paratransit |
|--------------------------------|-------------|-------------------------|-------------|
| Ridership | 2,013,148 | 62,975 | 72,563 |
| Revenue Miles | 1,308,473 | 73,122 | 546,134 |
| Revenue Hours | 116,414 | 4,382 | 38,789 |
| Weekday Peak Bus Count | 37 | 4 | 16 |
| Saturday Peak Bus Count | 19 | 0 | 5 |

The Authority also provides service to the elderly and disabled populations under the service name called EZ Trans. This service is provided in accordance with the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act in the communities of Andover, Lawrence, Methuen, North Andover, Haverhill, Amesbury, Newburyport, Merrimac and Salisbury.

The Authority also provides service to the general public under the service name Ring& Ride in the Towns of Newbury, Georgetown, Groveland, Boxford and West Newbury. The Authority also provides Commuter Bus Service to Boston from Methuen, Lawrence and Andover.

2.2 Core Goals and Objectives

In April 2014, representatives from several Regional Transit Authorities (RTAs) were asked what they wanted their Regional Transit Plans to accomplish. Ideas were developed and ranked by these representatives to create a core list of goals and objectives for each RTA’s Regional Transit Plan. The most highly-rated concepts – and those to which each of the Regional Transit Plans will respond – are as follows:

- Better align service with needs
- Improve efficiency and cost-effectiveness of system
- Improve transit access for the public
- Increase ridership levels
- Increase transit frequency and service options
- Increase revenue
- Improve transit access for transit-dependent populations
- Support economic development

While goals outline priorities, objectives are measurable actions that are necessary to realize the goals. The above list can be broken down as follows:

Table 2. Core Goals and Objectives

| Goals | Objectives |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase ridership levels • Better align service with needs • Support economic development • Increase revenue | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase transit frequency and service options • Improve transit access for the public • Improve transit access for transit-dependent populations • Improve efficiency and cost-effectiveness of system |

It should be noted that goals and objectives that were ranked favorably by individual RTAs but did not receive an overall high ranking will still be considered in the Regional Transit Plan for those authorities. Section 2.2 explains the goals and objectives that are specific to MVRTA.

2.3 MVRTA Goals and Objectives

In addition to responding to the core goals and objectives outlined in Section 2.1, the Regional Transit Plan for MVRTA is also based on concerns related to their system. In June 2012, the MVRTA Advisory Board adopted a Strategic Plan, which included the following mission statement, goals, and objectives:

Mission Statement

The MVRTA’s safe, dependable, affordable and convenient public transportation services set a standard of excellence in the Merrimack Valley. Its services are essential to the region’s quality of life, supporting mobility, economic development, and thriving, livable communities.

Goal 1: Deliver the Service of Choice

The MVRTA’s team of well-trained, courteous and professional staff will deliver public transportation services that will not only be competitive with other transportation modes, but will be a mode of choice for the traveling public. The MVRTA will continue to increase its mode share of the region’s trips.

Objectives:

1. Increase ridership by improving present services and implementing new ones that meet the demands of present and untapped customers.
2. Maintain MVRTA’s strong, positive agency reputation through its ‘front line’- its bus/van drivers and customer service staff.
3. Expand the MVRTA’s reputation as a transportation mode choice.

Goal 2: Maximize Mobility

The MVRTA will deliver flexible, affordable, innovative and effective transit services that enhance livability within the Merrimack Valley region and provide excellent connections to/from other regions. It’s services will enhance the region’s advantages as a place to live, work and recreate.

Objectives:

1. Improve service delivery within the MVRTA service district.
2. Reevaluate suburban services to maintain critical connections and maximize personal independence.

3. Continue to procure and operate state-of-the-art transit vehicles that accommodate riders of varying abilities.

Goal 3: Enhance Sustainability

The MVRTA will continue to partner with public and private interests to strengthen or create new Transit-Oriented Development within the Merrimack Valley region. It will prioritize transit access to its region's Concentrated Development Centers. It will continue to adopt new technology and practices that benefit the environment.

Objectives:

1. Reduce the carbon footprint.
2. Promote transit-oriented development.
3. Support increased collaboration with neighboring MPOs and governmental organizations.

Goal 4: Maintain Fiscal Responsibility

The MVRTA's operations and services make the most efficient use of the public's investment in its facilities, equipment and services. The MVRTA will continue to manage costs while meeting future transportation needs, including opportunities for partnerships with other public agencies and the private sector.

Objectives:

1. Leverage maximum funding from federal, state and other sources.
2. Pursue new and innovative financing.

Goal 5: Address Public Safety and Security

The MVRTA's emergency planning, training and equipment procurements are increasingly important to the region's network of public safety preparedness efforts. The MVRTA will continue to support local, state and federal safety and security initiatives.

Objectives:

1. Maintain and upgrade MVRTA system to meet daily safety and security needs and to ensure prompt, effective readiness for incident response.



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