



Our Vision and Priorities for Improved Regional Transit Authority Service in 495/MetroWest

Adopted by the Board of Directors October 4th, 2023

In accordance with the organization's 2022-2027 Strategic Plan, the 495/MetroWest Partnership's Transportation Committee convened a working group to review and update our organizational priorities for improved Regional Transit Authority services.

Service Operators: The 495/MetroWest Partnership's 36-community service area is served by five Regional Transit Authorities (RTAs):

- Greater Attleboro-Taunton Regional Transit Authority (GATRA)
 - Bellingham, Foxborough, Franklin, Medway, Norfolk, Plainville, Wrentham
- Lowell Regional Transit Authority (LRTA)
 - Acton, Littleton (Commuter Rail), Maynard, Westford
- MetroWest Regional Transportation Authority (MWRTA)
 - Ashland, Framingham, Holliston, Hopedale, Hopkinton, Hudson, Marlborough, Milford, Natick, Sherborn, Southborough, Sudbury, Wayland
- Montachusett Regional Transit Authority (MART)
 - Bolton, Boxborough, Harvard, Littleton, Stow
- Worcester Regional Transit Authority (WRTA)
 - Berlin, Grafton, Northborough, Shrewsbury, Southborough (Commuter Rail), Westborough

The 495/MetroWest Partnership's 36-community service area is served by two active Transportation Management Associations (TMAs):

- CrossTown Connect
 - Acton, Maynard, Littleton, Sudbury, Westford
- Neponset Valley TMA
 - Foxborough

The Partnership's vision for improved RTA service: The 495/MetroWest Partnership works towards robust regional transit service, which includes but is not limited to:

- Service that is safe, reliable, affordable, and accessible for all riders
- The ability of riders to utilize transit to access our full region, and unique destinations not currently served by fixed route bus service
- A coordinated approach to regional transit service connecting our region's different RTA service providers, along with other modes of transportation
- Enabling seamless origin-to-destination travel across all modes of public transit in the Commonwealth
- Growth and expansion of regional Demand Response Transit (DRT) services
- Increased service levels and more frequent headways, including more midday, nighttime, and weekend service
- New or enhanced service offerings designed to carry travelers within the 495/MetroWest region, including more north-south linkages
- Enhanced opportunities for employers, municipal governments, and mobility-as-a-service providers to collaborate on potential workforce transit solutions

Our priorities to improve Regional Transit Authority service throughout the 495/MetroWest region include:

- **Increased state financial support to Regional Transit Authorities:** Our vision for robust regional transit service will not be achieved without additional resources for our region’s five RTAs. The Partnership continues to be an advocate for the RTA Advancement Bill, which would set a floor for RTA state contract assistance at \$150 million. The Partnership also supports increased state investment in assisting RTAs to market their services to the public, including through necessary advertising and community outreach efforts; awareness of new or enhanced services is critical to expanding ridership and encouraging usage.
- **New or enhanced service offerings designed to carry travelers within the region, including more north-south linkages:** Current RTA service operations are characterized by carrying passengers from hubs (such as Framingham, Worcester, and Lowell) to neighboring communities, and vice versa, leaving significant localized and regional coverage gaps within the 495/MetroWest region itself. Some municipalities have limited-stop service that connects their community to the corresponding outside service hub, while others have local circulators that connect areas of high residential density to local employment and commercial centers. Ideally, the right mix of services would enable passengers to travel extensively within their own community and between other 495/MetroWest communities. The Partnership will work to identify and champion conceptual service expansion frameworks, which may include fixed-route and demand response provisions, from RTA operators in our service area, with a particular eye towards filling coverage gaps along the Route 85 and Interstate 495 corridors.
- **Increased service levels and more frequent headways, including more midday, nighttime, and weekend service:** Service levels must match existing workforce needs, including services that cater to midday and third-shift workers. Increased service levels should be paired with intuitive scheduling and predictable headways to better serve existing passengers and further induce ridership growth.
- **Growth and expansion of existing regional Demand Response Transit (DRT) services:** The Partnership believes the DRT service model is dynamic and well suited for moderate-density suburban communities lacking access to, or with limited access to, traditional fixed-route transit. The Partnership will continue to raise awareness for emerging and expanding DRT services in the region and advocate for unique funding opportunities, such as through the Boston MPO’s Community Connections program, that equip RTAs with the necessary capital to build out these services. While providing increased flexibility regarding destinations and commuting patterns, these services are available to the public at substantially more affordable rates than private Transportation Network Companies.
- **Enabling seamless origin-to-destination travel across all modes of public transit in the Commonwealth:** The Partnership supports innovative and pragmatic approaches to improving public transit accessibility and connectivity across the Commonwealth to further induce ridership. The Partnership will work with stakeholders to explore location-specific strategies and opportunities to improve connectivity and accessibility, including the interspersing of small-scale park and ride lots throughout connecting communities on interlocal routes. Seamless travel also includes supporting strategies to ensure the rider’s experience is both affordable (especially when compared with the cost of travel via private vehicle) and minimally cumbersome.
- **Enhanced opportunities for employers, municipal governments, and mobility-as-a-service providers to address return-to-office policies and collaborate on potential workforce transit solutions:** As a result of prolonged uncertainties over public health concerns and Return-to-Office (RTO) policies stemming from the pandemic, many TMAs temporarily halted or permanently discontinued shuttle service altogether. While TMAs also facilitate pooled commuter benefit programs for employers such as carpool/vanpool matching, guaranteed ride home, and bike-to-work programs, many TMAs play an integral role in creating “last mile” connections. Collaboration with local businesses will be a key component for the future of RTA service in the region. The Partnership will gauge employer workforce transit needs as RTO plans continue to take shape and evolve.