February 2026

massDOT AECOM

Comprehensive Regional Transit Plan Update 2025

Montachusett Regional Transit Authority

Table of Contents

1 Executive Summary 1
1.1 Changes Since the 2020 Comprehensive Regional Transit Plan 1
1.2 Planning Process 2
1.3 Recommendations 2
2 Background and Context 4
2.1 Overview of MART Services 4
2.2 Purpose 5
3 Needs and Goals 7
3.1 Statewide Policies and Goals 7
3.2 Agency Mission 7
3.3 Identified Needs 7
3.4 Goals and Objectives 8
4 Existing Conditions 9
4.1 Transit Service Overview 9
4.1.1 Service Descriptions 11
4.1.2 Provided Service 13
4.1.3 Funding 15
4.2 Ridership and Service Operations 17
4.2.1 Fixed Route Ridership 19
4.2.2 Fixed Route Operations 25
4.2.3 Demand Response Ridership and Operations 27
4.3 Transit Service Performance 29
4.3.1 Service Effectiveness 29
4.3.2 Financial Performance 30
4.3.3 On-Time Performance 32
4.3.4 Customer Service 34
4.4 Regional Connections and Partnerships 35
4.5 Asset Management 35
4.5.1 Maintenance 35
4.5.2 Vehicles 37
4.5.3 Facilities 38
4.5.4 Technology 39
4.6 Policies and Procedures 39
4.7 Safety and Security 39
4.8 Peer Agency Analysis 41
5 Market Evaluation 45
5.1 Demographic Analysis 45
5.1.1 Population Density 46
5.1.2 Older Adult Population 46
5.1.3 Youth Population 47
5.1.4 Median Household Income 48
5.1.5 Low-Income Population 49
5.1.6 Zero-Vehicle Households 50
5.1.7 Population Other Than Non-Hispanic White 51

5.1.8 Adult Disabled Population....52
5.1.9 Title VI Population....53
5.1.10 Job Density....54
5.2 Transit Score....55
5.3 Public and Stakeholder Engagement....56
5.3.1 Route Redesign Community Engagement Activities....57
5.3.2 Pop-Up Event....58
5.3.3 Public Survey Effort....59
6 Performance Measures....61
6.1 Ridership....62
6.2 Financial....62
6.3 Customer Service and Satisfaction....63
6.4 Asset Management....63
6.5 Safety....64
6.6 Annual Performance....64
7 Trends and Uncertainties....65
7.1 Future Uncertainties....65
7.1.1 Population and Demographics....65
7.1.2 Affordability....66
7.1.3 Technology....67
7.1.4 Funding for Transit....68
7.2 2020 Alternative Scenarios....69
7.3 Looking Ahead: 2025 to 2030 Scenario Planning....70
7.3.1 Low Ridership....71
7.3.2 Medium Ridership....71
7.3.3 High Ridership....72
7.4 Future Opportunities....72
8 Recommendations....74
8.1 Changes Since the 2020 Comprehensive Regional Transit Plan....74
8.2 Planning for an Uncertain Future....74
8.3 Identified Needs....75
8.4 Recommendations....76
8.4.1 Service Recommendations....76
8.4.2 Capital Recommendations....77
8.4.3 Data and Performance Recommendations....78
8.4.4 Policy Recommendations....78
8.4.5 Coordination Recommendations....79
8.4.6 Recommendations for Additional Studies....80
8.4.7 Other Recommendations....80
9 References....81
Appendix A Fares....85
Appendix B Environmental Policy....92
Appendix C Public Survey Results....97

Figures

Figure 1. MART Hybrid Electric Bus 1
Figure 2. Massachusetts RTA Service Areas 5
Figure 3. MART Service Area 10
Figure 4. MART HST Brokerage Area 11
Figure 5. Annual Operating Cost by Mode (FY 2020 – FY 2024) 16
Figure 6. Annual System Ridership (FY 2020-FY 2024) 18
Figure 7. Ridership Breakdown by Service Type (FY 2024) 18
Figure 8. Monthly Ridership Trends (2022-2024) 19
Figure 9. Fixed Route Annual Ridership (FY 2020-FY 2024) 20
Figure 10. Annual Ridership by Route (FY 2024) 21
Figure 11. Weekday Average Ridership by Route (FY 2024) 22
Figure 12. Saturday Average Ridership by Route (FY 2024) 23
Figure 13. Sunday Average Ridership by Route (FY 2024) 24
Figure 14. Average Ridership Change from FY 2019 to FY 2024 25
Figure 15. Passengers per Hour by Route (FY 2024) 27
Figure 16. Demand Response Annual Ridership (FY 2020-FY 2024) 28
Figure 17. Fixed Route On-Time Performance (FY 2022-FY 2024) 32
Figure 18. On-Time Performance by Route (FY 2024) 33
Figure 19. On-Time Performance - Demand Response (FY 2022-FY 2024) 33
Figure 20. Number of Valid Complaints per 100,000 Passenger Trips: Fixed Route (FY 2020-FY 2024) 34
Figure 21. Number of Valid Complaints per 100,000 Passenger Trips: Demand Response (FY 2020-FY 2024) 35
Figure 22. Miles Between Road Calls, Fixed Route and Demand Response (FY 2020-FY 2024) 36
Figure 23. Preventive Maintenance Performed On Time (FY 2020-FY 2024) 36
Figure 24. Mean Miles Between Major Mechanical Failures (FY 2020-FY 2024) 37
Figure 25. Number of Preventable Accidents per 100,000 Revenue Miles, Demand Response and Fixed Route (FY 2020-FY 2022) 40
Figure 26. Number of Injuries per Million Vehicle Revenue Miles (FY 2020-FY 2024) 40
Figure 27. Number of Safety Events Million Vehicle Revenue Miles (FY 2020-FY 2024) 41
Figure 28. Population Density 46
Figure 29. Older Adult Population 47
Figure 30. Youth Population 48
Figure 31. Median Household Income 49
Figure 32. Low-Income Population 50
Figure 33. Zero-Vehicle Households 51
Figure 34. Population Other Than Non-Hispanic White 52
Figure 35. Adult Disabled Population 53
Figure 36. Title VI Population 54
Figure 37. Job Density 55
Figure 38. Transit Score 56
Figure 39. MART Pop-Up Event at Fitchburg Intermodal Transportation Center 59
Figure 40. MART Survey Promotional Graphic 60
Figure 41. Long-term Population Projections for Massachusetts (2000-2050) 65
Figure 42. Montachusett MPO Housing and Transportation Costs as a Percentage of Residents' Income 67
Figure 43. Inadequate Charging Infrastructure is the Leading Obstacle to Fleet Modernization 67
Figure 44. State Funding for Massachusetts' RTAs from FY 2007 to FY 2025 69

Figure 45. MART Annual System Ridership (FY 2020-FY 2024) 70
Figure 46. Which MART service improvements would be most beneficial to serve your community? (Select all that apply) 97
Figure 47. What are some ways MART could effectively promote its services to your community? (Select all that apply) 98
Figure 48. What are some reasons members of your community might not use the bus or regional transit services for certain trips? 99

Tables

Table 1. Recommendations 2
Table 2. Statistics by Service (FY 2024) 11
Table 3. MART Fixed Routes 12
Table 4. Span of Service and Frequency 14
Table 5. Operating Expenses Funding Sources (FY 2022-FY 2024) 15
Table 6. Farebox Revenue by Fiscal Year and Service Type (FY 2022-FY 2024) 16
Table 7. Capital Expenses Funding Sources (FY 2022-FY 2024) 17
Table 8. Annual Fixed Route Operating Statistics (FY 2020-FY 2024) 25
Table 9. Operating Statistics by Route (FY 2024) 26
Table 10. Demand Response Operating Statistics (FY 2020-FY 2024) 28
Table 11. Demand Response Metrics (FY 2020-FY 2024) 29
Table 12. Service Effectiveness (FY 2020 - FY 2024) 30
Table 13. Cost Effectiveness of Fixed Route (FY 2020- FY 2024) 31
Table 14. Cost Effectiveness of Demand Response (FY 2020- FY 2024) 31
Table 15. Active Equipment Inventory Summary (FY 2024) 37
Table 16. Facility Inventory Summary 38
Table 17. Peer Systems Census Data 42
Table 18. Peer Systems Operating Data (FY 2023) 43
Table 19. Peer System Performance 44
Table 20. Performance Measures Overview 61
Table 21. Ridership Metrics and Targets (FY 2026) 62
Table 22. Financial Metrics and Targets (FY 2026) 62
Table 23. Customer Service and Satisfaction Metrics and Targets (FY 2026) 63
Table 24. Asset Management Metrics and Targets (FY 2025) 63
Table 25. Safety Metrics and Targets (FY 2026) 64
Table 26. Annual Performance Metrics (FY 2026) 64
Table 27. Opportunities by Ridership Scenario 72
Table 28. Identified Needs 75
Table 29. Recommendation Categories 76
Table 30. Service Recommendations 76
Table 31. Capital Recommendations 77
Table 32. Data and Performance Recommendations 78
Table 33. Policy Recommendations 79
Table 34. Coordination Recommendations 79
Table 35. Recommendations for Additional Studies 80
Table 36. Other Recommendations 80
Table 37. Fixed Route Fare Policy 86
Table 38. On-Demand Fare Policy 87
Table 39. Cities and Towns in the MART Service Area with Climate Action Plan Transportation Goals 95

Acronyms

ACS	American Community Survey
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
APC	Automatic Passenger Count
AVL	Automatic Vehicle Location
CAD	Computer Aided Dispatch
COA	Council on Aging
CRTP	Comprehensive Regional Transit Plan
CWC	Clinton-Worcester Commuter [Route]/Worcester Commuter Shuttle
FPL	Federal Poverty Level
FRTA	Franklin Regional Transit Authority
FSU	Fitchburg State University
FTA	Federal Transit Administration
FY	Fiscal Year
GATRA	Greater Attleboro Taunton Regional Transit Authority
HST	Human Service Transportation
IIJA	Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act
ITC	Intermodal Transportation Center
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LEHD	Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics
MART	Montachusett Regional Transit Authority
MassDOT	Massachusetts Department of Transportation
MBTA	Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MRPC	Montachusett Regional Planning Commission
MWCC	Mount Wachusett Community College
NTD	National Transit Database
PTASP	Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan
RTA	Regional Transit Authority
RTD	Rail and Transit Division
TAM	Transit Asset Management
TERM	Transit Economic Requirements Model
TOD	Transit Oriented Development
UMass	University of Massachusetts
WRTA	Worcester Regional Transit Authority

Glossary

Access: The opportunity to reach a given destination within a certain timeframe or without significant physical, social, or economic barriers.

Accessible Vehicle: A public transportation vehicle that does not restrict access, is usable, and provides allocated space and/or priority seating for individuals who use mobility devices.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA): Passed in July 1991, gave direction to local transit agencies to ensure full access to transportation for persons with disabilities

Boarding: The total number of passengers getting on a transit vehicle during a specified period of time.

Capital Cost: The cost of equipment and facilities required to support transportation systems, including vehicles, radios, shelters, software, etc.

Central Transfer Point: A central meeting place where routes or zonal demand response buses intersect so that passengers may transfer. Routes are often timed to facilitate transferring and depart once passengers have had time to transfer. Strategic placement of the transfer point can attract riders to the system and may provide an opportunity for joint marketing promotions with local merchants.

Commuter Bus Service: Transportation designed for daily, round-trip service, which accommodates a typical 8-hour, daytime work shift (e.g., an outbound trip arriving at an employment center by 8 AM, with the return trip departing after 5 PM).

Computer Aided Dispatch/ Automatic Vehicle Location: A computer technology with advanced dispatching capabilities combined with automatic vehicle location, ensuring that vehicles are where they need to be when required.

Coordination: Pooling the transportation resources and activities of several agencies. The owners of transportation assets talk to each other to find ways to mutually benefit their agencies and their customers. Coordination models can range in scope from sharing information, to sharing equipment and facilities, to integrated scheduling and dispatching of services, to the provision of services by only one transportation provider (with other former providers now purchasing services). Coordination may involve human service agencies working with each other or with public transit operations.

Cost per Boarding: The total operating expenditures of a route or service divided by the number of total boardings. Boardings are often presented as unlinked passenger trips.

Cost per Revenue Mile or Hour: The total operating expenditures of a route or service divided by the number of revenue miles or revenue hours.

Cutaway Vehicle: A smaller bus built on a modified van or truck chassis with the rear section removed, allowing a bus shell to be added by a second manufacturer, creating a customizable mini-bus or shuttle for services like parantransit, local routes, or demand response.

Demand Response Service: Service to individuals that is activated based on passenger requests. Usually involves curb-to-curb or door-to-door service. Trips may be scheduled on an advance reservation basis or in "real-time." Usually smaller vehicles are used to provide demand response service. This type of service usually provides the highest level of service to the passenger but is the most expensive for the transit system to operate in terms of cost per trip. In rural areas with relatively high populations of elderly persons and persons with disabilities, demand response service is sometimes the most appropriate type of service.

Dial-a-Ride Service: A name that is commonly used for demand response service. It is helpful in marketing the service to the community, as the meaning of "dial-a-ride" may be more self-explanatory than "demand response" to someone unfamiliar with transportation terms.

Express Bus Service: Direct service from a limited number of origins to a limited number of destinations with no intermediate stops. Typically, express bus service is fixed route/fixed schedule and is used for longer distance commuter trips. The term may also refer to a bus that makes a limited number of stops, while a local bus makes many stops along the same route but as a result takes much longer.

Fair Share Amendment: A 4 percent Massachusetts surtax on income above $1 million annually approved by Massachusetts voters in 2022. The revenue generated by the surtax is constitutionally dedicated to funding public education and transportation.

Fare: Revenue from cash, tickets, and pass receipts given by passengers as payment for public transit rides.

Fare-Free Transit: Any transit service that does not require a passenger fare to ride.

Farebox Recovery Ratio: The percentage of operating costs covered by revenue from fares and contract revenue (total fare revenue and total contract revenue divided by the total operating cost).

Fixed Route: Transportation service operated over a set route or network of routes on a regular time schedule.

Headway: The length of time between vehicles moving in the same direction on a route. Headways are called short if the time between vehicles is short and long if the time between them is long. When headways are short, the service is said to be operating at a high frequency; if headways are long, service is operating at a low frequency.

Intercity Bus Service: Regularly scheduled bus service for the public that operates with limited stops over fixed routes connecting two or more urban areas not near, that has the capacity for transporting baggage carried by passengers, and that makes meaningful connections with scheduled intercity bus service to more distant points, if such service is available. Intercity bus service may include local and regional feeder services, if those services are designed expressly to connect to the broader intercity bus network.

Memorandum of Understanding: A formal, non-binding document that outlines the framework for cooperation, roles, responsibilities, and objectives between multiple agencies or jurisdictions involved in providing transit services.

Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO): The policy board of an organization created and designated to carry out the metropolitan transportation planning process. MPOs are required to represent localities in all urbanized areas with populations over 50,000.

Microtransit: A form of demand response service, open to the general public, that requires some type of "reservation," typically made via an app-based system. Typically, microtransit uses software algorithms to completely automate the scheduling of the trip, the fare collection (if any), and the route the driver will utilize (communicating with the driver via some type of mobile data terminals).

National Transit Database (NTD): The United States government's main repository of data about the financial, operating, and asset conditions of American transit systems.

Non-Revenue Vehicle: Any vehicle used by a public transit organization that is not used for passenger service but is essential to support transit operations and safety, such as service trucks, supervisor cars, and utility vehicles.

Operating Expenditure: The recurring cost of providing transit service (wages, salaries, fuel, oil, taxes, maintenance, insurance, marketing, etc.).

Operating Revenue: The total revenue earned by a transit agency through its transit operations. It includes passenger fares, advertising, and other revenues.

Paratransit Service: The transportation of passengers by motor vehicle or other means of conveyance by persons operating on a regular and continuing basis and the transportation or delivery of packages in conjunction with an operation having the transportation of passengers as its primary and predominant purpose and activity but excluding regular route transit. Paratransit includes transportation by carpool and commuter van, point deviation and route deviation services, shared-ride taxi service, dial-a-ride service, and other similar services.

Passengers per Mile or Hour: Productivity measure that takes the total passengers and divides by the miles and/or hours operated. The passengers may be presented as unlinked passenger trips and hours and/or miles may be presented as either total vehicle miles or hours or as revenue miles or hours.

Performance Indicator: A metric that provides meaningful information about the condition or performance of the transportation system but is neither managed nor used to evaluate the effectiveness of policies, strategies, or investments.

Performance Measure: A metric that measures progress toward a goal, outcome, or objective. This definition covers metrics used to make decisions or evaluate the effectiveness or adequacy of a policy, strategy, or investment.

Performance Target: A specific performance level representing the achievement of a goal, outcome, or objective.

Public Transportation: Transportation service that is available to any person upon payment of the fare either directly, subsidized by public policy, or through some contractual arrangement, and that cannot be reserved for the private or exclusive use of one individual or group. "Public" in this sense refers to the access to the service, not to the ownership of the system that provides the service.

Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan (PTASP): A plan published by a public transit agency containing processes and procedures that define a comprehensive, collaborative, and systematic approach to managing safety. All public transportation systems that receive federal funds under the FTA Urbanized Area Formula Grants are required to have a Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan.

Revenue Hour: The number of transit vehicle hours when passengers are being transported. Calculated by taking the total time when a vehicle is available to the public with the expectation of carrying passengers. Excludes deadhead hours, when buses are positioning but not carrying passengers, but includes recovery/layover time.

Revenue Mile: The number of transit vehicle miles when passengers are being transported. Calculated by taking the total mileage operated when a vehicle is available to the public with the expectation of carrying passengers. Excludes deadhead mileage, when buses are moving but not carrying passengers.

Revenue Vehicle: Any vehicle, such as a bus, train, or railcar, used to actively carry passengers or operating on a scheduled route to pick up or drop off passengers.

Ridership: The total of all unlinked passenger trips, including transfers. One trip that includes a transfer would be counted as two unlinked passenger trips.

Ridesharing: A form of transportation, other than public transit, in which more than one person shares the use of a vehicle, such as a van or car, to make a trip. Variations include carpooling or vanpooling.

Service Area: The geographic area that coincides with a transit system's legal operating limits (city limits, county boundary, etc.).

Service Gap: When certain geographic segments cannot be covered by transportation services. This term can also refer to instances where service delivery is not available to a certain group of riders, or at a specific time.

Service Span: The duration of time that service is made available or operated during the service day (e.g., 6 AM to 10 PM on weekdays).

Spare Ratio: The percentage/number of vehicles that an operator purchases in excess of the number of vehicles required to provide the maximum level of service. The spares are required so that some vehicles may cycle through a preventive maintenance regimen while the full level of planned service can still be provided.

Standard: A recommendation that leads or directs a course of action to achieve a certain goal. A standard is the expected outcome for the measure that will allow a service to be evaluated. There are two sets of transit standards.

- Service design and operating standards: Guidelines for the design of new and improved services and the operation of the transit system.
- Service performance standards: The evaluation of the performance of the existing transit system and of alternative service improvements using performance measures.

State Contract Assistance: The program through which the RTAs receive state operating funding for transit at the discretion of the Massachusetts Legislature via the state budget process annually. The total amount of state contract assistance funding provided in the state budget is allocated to the RTAs via a formula developed with RTA input.

State of Good Repair: The condition of physical assets used in public transit, such as vehicles, stations, and signals, that permits their full designed performance level, ensuring safe, reliable, and efficient use through regular maintenance and timely replacement.

Title VI: Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which requires that "No person in the United States shall, on the grounds of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance."

Total Operating Cost: The total of all operating costs incurred during the transit system calendar year, excluding expenses associated with capital grants.

Transfer: Passengers arrive on one bus and leave on another (totally separate) bus to continue their trip. The boarding of the second vehicle is counted as an unlinked passenger trip.

Transit Asset Management Plan: A strategic document that helps transit agencies systematically manage their capital assets, such as vehicles, facilities, and other equipment, over their entire lifecycle and to ensure they are safe, reliable, and cost-effective. Transit agencies that own, operate, and manage capital assets and receive funding from FTA are required to adopt a Transit Asset Management Plan.

Transit Dependent: A population or person who does not have immediate access to a private vehicle, or because of age or health reasons cannot drive and must rely on others for transportation.

Transit Economic Requirements Model: A computer application published by FTA that is designed to estimate transit capital investment needs over an extended time horizon, helping transit agencies assess current asset conditions and adopt an asset management strategy that achieves state of good repair.

Transit Subsidy: The operating costs not covered by revenue from fares or contracts.

Transportation Network Company: Private sector companies that provide software routing, scheduling, and payment services to independent contractor drivers for a fee; these drivers then utilize their own vehicles to provide a (typically) curb-to-curb transportation service, sometimes to sole riders and sometimes to pooled groups.

Trip Denial: Occurs when a trip is requested by a passenger, but the transportation provider cannot provide the service. Trip denial may happen because capacity is not available at the requested time. For ADA paratransit, a capacity denial is specifically defined as occurring if a trip cannot be accommodated within the negotiated pick-up window. Even if a trip is provided, if it is scheduled outside the pick-up window, it is considered a denial. If the passenger refused to accept a trip offered within the pick-up window, it is considered a refusal, not a capacity denial.

Unlinked Passenger Trip: Typically, one passenger trip recorded any time a passenger boards a transportation vehicle or other conveyance used to provide transportation. "Unlinked" means that one trip is recorded each time a passenger boards a vehicle, no matter how many vehicles that passenger uses to travel from their origin to their destination.

Useful Life Benchmark: The expected service life for a capital asset, like a bus or utility vehicle, before major overhaul or replacement. Standards for useful life benchmarks for different vehicle classes are defined by FTA.

Zero Emission Vehicle: A vehicle that produces no tailpipe pollutants or greenhouse gases during operation, primarly through electric power from batteries.

1 Executive Summary

This 2025 update of Montachusett Regional Transit Authority's (MART) Comprehensive Regional Transit Plan (CRTP) will shape and guide the region's transit priorities and improvements over the next five years. The recommendations in this plan emerged from a data-informed process that incorporated historical operational data, stakeholder feedback, a market analysis, and MART priorities. They establish a framework for advancing strategic service adjustments, capital improvements, and policy initiatives and make significant progress toward improving mobility for residents across the region.

Figure 1. MART Hybrid Electric Bus

Source: MART

1.1 Changes Since the 2020 Comprehensive Regional Transit Plan

The 2020 CRTP featured a range of recommendations including service enhancements and capital investments. In the last five years there has been a significant infusion of state and federal funding supporting expanded transit service. Some of the investments that MART has made over the past five years include:

- Implementing new pilot routes to expand service
- Expanding service to new communities using the MART Connects program
- Adding new weekend service on several routes
- Launching evening ride service in Fitchburg, Leominster, and Gardner
- Implementing new intercity express service between Fitchburg and Leominster
- Transitioning the Devens Regional shuttle from fixed route to on-demand service
- Increasing marketing efforts to reach new potential riders
- Installing an automatic passenger counter (APC) system onboard buses to track ridership data

1.2 Planning Process

The planning process for the CRTP was a collaborative effort in which MART engaged with key stakeholders, such as local municipalities as well as members of the general public. Input from these groups, along with guidance from statewide and regional transportation plans, was used to establish goals and objectives for this plan.

MART used both quantitative and qualitative input when developing recommendations. An evaluation of MART's current transit operations, including existing service levels, ridership patterns, and overall system performance, helped to identify baseline efficiencies and opportunities. It should be noted that the data in this plan were largely gathered between April and October 2025 to analyze existing conditions and provide a foundation for later elements. Therefore, the data referenced was largely from FY 2020 to FY 2024—the plan's five-year reporting period. Service enhancements and ridership changes beyond this timeframe, while sometimes discussed in the narrative, are largely not fully captured in the data represented.

Additionally, a market analysis was carried out to contextualize the region's demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. The analysis included factors such as population trends, job locations, and transit demand to pinpoint areas with critical needs.

In parallel, a robust outreach campaign was conducted, utilizing both in-person gatherings and virtual sessions to ensure input from a diverse group of stakeholders. Key outreach activities included a targeted stakeholder survey and an in-person pop-up event at the Intermodal Transit Center (ITC).

1.3 Recommendations

MART has developed 20 recommendations that address the needs identified through the CRTP planning process (Table 1). These recommendations will guide efforts over the next five years and provide a flexible approach to pursuing strategic improvements in mobility depending on how the future unfolds. For instance, significant changes in ridership demand or propulsion technology could change how certain recommendations are prioritized.

The recommendations are grouped into seven primary categories: service, capital, policy, performance, coordination, additional studies, and other (for those recommendations that do not fit elsewhere).

Table 1. Recommendations

Category	Recommendation
Service	Expand service in Gardner through extended service hours of operation and/or improving frequencies.
Service	Reduce frequencies on low performing routes (such as Route 11) to shift resources to high performing routes, if funding constraints require.
Capital	Explore alternate APC vendors to deploy a complete NTD-certified APC system across MART's entire fleet.
Capital	Procure new vehicles that enhance the passenger experience through vehicle design (i.e., low-floor or vehicle safety features).
Capital	Solicit vendor information for scheduling software solutions to improve trip scheduling efficiency.

Category	Recommendation
Capital	Maintain a state of good repair for all MART facilities and equipment.
Policy	Engage in continuous 6-month review process with member municipalities to align MART service with community needs and demands. Assess potential new routes or adjust existing routes to serve more people within the MART service area.
Policy	Continue to make safety improvements to MART facilities and promote a culture of safety for MART staff and passengers. This includes upgrading vehicle safety features (on-board diagnostic devices, unified camera systems, etc.) and creating a safe rider campaign to educate the public on flag stop safety, rider etiquette, etc.
Policy	Update publicly available system map to make it easier for passengers to understand the service available.
Performance	Lower on-time performance targets to 80%.
Performance	Implement a performance management system using best practices to track KPIs.
Performance	Begin tracking denied demand response trips to identify capacity constraints.
Coordination	Continue to collaborate with Devens leadership to understand community needs and potential transit solutions to serve growing job centers within the community.
Coordination	Continue to coordinate with neighboring RTAs to facilitate passenger transfers between systems.
Additional Studies	Implement designated fixed route bus stops, starting with high ridership routes and locations. Establish bus stop guidelines and policies to define the level of amenities at different types of bus stops in the MART network.
Additional Studies	Pursue grant funding to complete a microtransit study.
Additional Studies	Collect feedback from internal and external stakeholders on ways to improve upcoming online app for booking demand response and demand taxi trips.
Additional Studies	Evaluate potential demand for additional service in Athol.
Other	Continue investing in marketing and promotional efforts through multimedia content.
Other	Conduct public outreach through surveys or other means to determine whether there are any major destinations not being served by the existing system that may be impacting ridership.

2 Background and Context

MART, alongside the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' 14 other Regional Transit Authorities (RTAs), plays a crucial role in providing essential mobility options and lifeline services to millions of residents across the Commonwealth. Demonstrating its commitment to continuous improvement, MART updates its CRTP every five years. This document represents the 2025 update of the MART CRTP covering the years 2020 to 2025.

The chapters of the plan include:

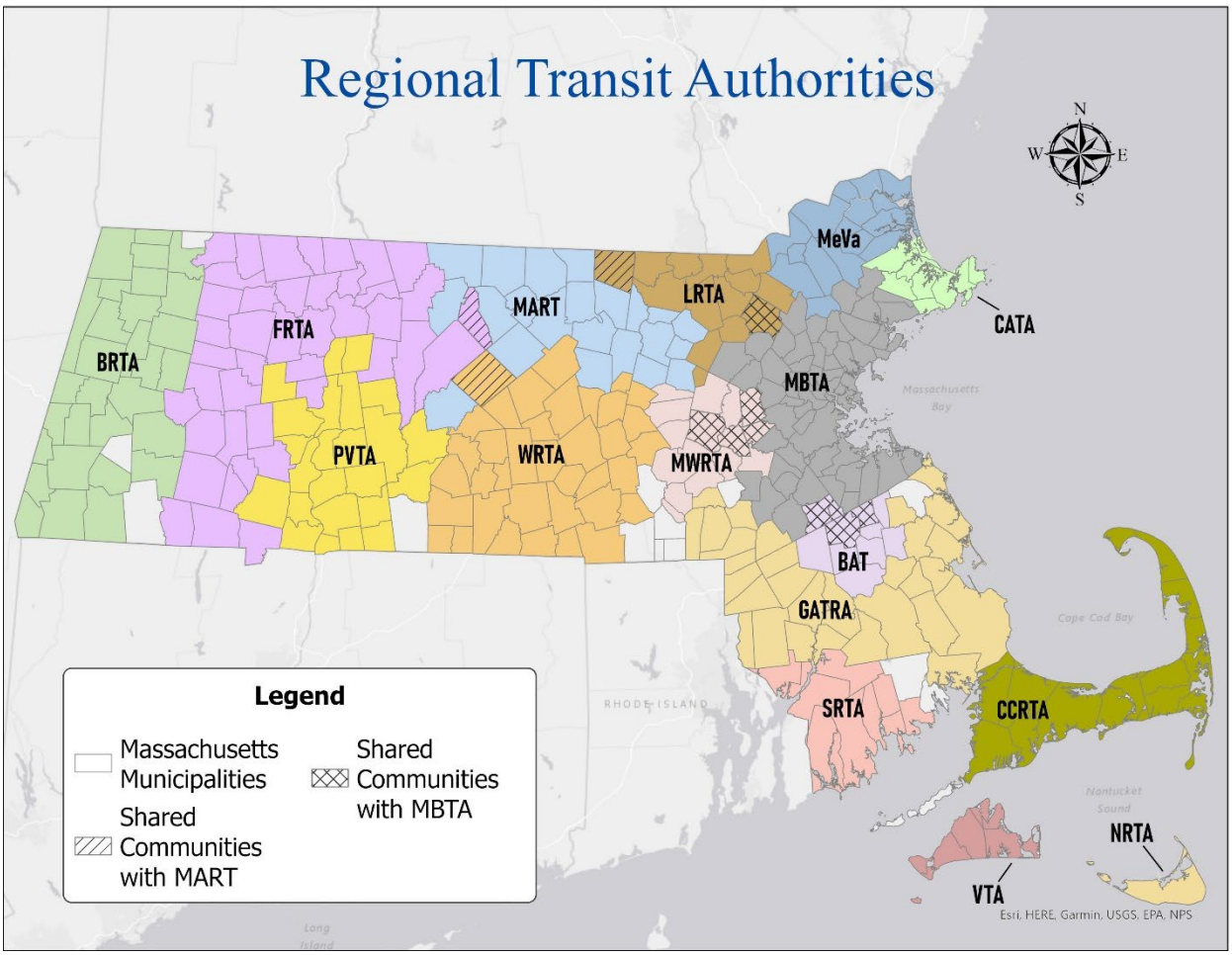
- Needs and Goals: Overview of identified needs and goals of MART that provide the foundation for recommendations over the next five years.
- Existing Conditions: Review of MART performance information.
- Market Evaluation: Assessment of transit demand through demographic analysis and engagement feedback results.
- Performance Measures: Review of performance measures used by MART to assess service.
- Trends and Uncertainties: Assessment of key uncertainties facing MART over the next five years and how those may impact implementation of recommendations.
- Recommendations: Listing of specific recommendations to guide MART priorities over the next five years.

Additionally, the CRTP contains appendices reviewing fare (Appendix A) and environmental considerations (Appendix B) based on the broader statewide and national context and public survey results collected through community engagement efforts (Appendix C).

2.1 Overview of MART Services

MART is headquartered in Fitchburg and is one of the 15 RTAs that, along with the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), operates public transportation in the Commonwealth. MART provides fixed route and demand response services within a large geographic area in north/central Massachusetts, serving 25 area cities and towns across 694 square miles (Figure 2). MART fixed route services are operated out of the ITC in Fitchburg. MART operates demand response service as federally required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to provide complementary service to individuals unable to use fixed route buses. Fitchburg is also the western terminus of the Fitchburg line of the MBTA Commuter Rail system. MART is one of two Human Service Transportation (HST) brokers in the Commonwealth (the other being the Greater Attleboro Taunton Regional Transit Authority [GATRA]). Notably, several MART services are designed to meet with and coordinate with the MBTA Commuter Rail line at key locations.

Figure 2. Massachusetts RTA Service Areas



Source: Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT)

Since the 2020 CRTP, MART has made new investments both in capital procurements as well as day-to-day operations. Additional information on those investments, as well as an overview of 2020 recommendations implementation, can be found in Chapter 8.

2.2 Purpose

The CRTP serves as a policy-level document outlining MART's vision and priorities for the next five years. Supported by the Commonwealth as part of a statewide effort, it complements other statewide and regional plans such as the *Beyond Mobility Massachusetts 2050 Transportation Plan* and *Report of the Task Force on RTA Performance and Funding* (see Chapter 3 for complete list of relevant plans).

The *Task Force* report, in particular, recommends that "[a]ll state contract assistance will be connected to performance targets via a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). MOUs will be bilaterally negotiated between MassDOT Rail & Transit Division (RTD) and each RTA and will identify performance targets in the following categories: ridership; customer service and satisfaction; asset management; and financial performance (incorporating a number of factors including farebox recovery ratio)." Based on this recommendation, the Massachusetts State Legislature has included language in the annual state budget since FY 2020 on the collection of performance data and the distribution of state funding in accordance with the most recently established MOU. As such, MassDOT RTD and the RTAs undergo a biennial bilateral negotiation process to establish an agreed upon MOU that includes performance targets in

the above-mentioned categories. Also included in the MOU is a commitment by the RTA to conduct a long-range CRTP as a mechanism to inform and support data-driven decisions, to work with local partners, and to communicate and discuss with MassDOT RTD on unmet needs or priorities and the potential for additional resources or support, if available.

Developed alongside these other plans, the CRTP provides guidance to MART state and local partners as they develop their own plans. The CRTP can also serve as a valuable tool for helping the public gain a clearer understanding of how MART operates, the value it provides, and opportunities for improvements in the future.

Over the next five years, this document will serve as a resource, offering strategic guidance to inform policy decisions that shape the region's transportation future. Acting as a roadmap for data-driven decision-making that can inform more detailed capital and operational planning, the CRTP plays a dual role: it is both a product of ongoing discussions on public transportation in the state and region and a catalyst for future dialogue and action.

3 Needs and Goals

Over the next five years, MART seeks to address critical needs within the agency and the communities it serves. As part of MART's CRTP, goals and objectives were identified for the next five years in alignment with the agency's mission. The goals set forth include improving and expanding service, upgrading MART equipment and facilities, and improving agency efficiency.

3.1 Statewide Policies and Goals

Over the last six years, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts has developed the following statewide planning and policy documents that are relevant to MART's CRTP update and goal setting:

- *Beyond Mobility Massachusetts 2050 Transportation Plan* (2024)
- *Regional Bus Network Assessment* (2024)
- *Benefits of Regional Mobility Managers Plan* (2023)
- *Clean Energy and Climate Plan for 2050* (2022)
- *Massachusetts State Plan on Aging* (2021)
- *Massachusetts 2050 Decarbonization Roadmap* (2020)
- *Report of the Task Force on RTA Performance and Funding* (2019)

Together, the documents highlight a number of robust goals and action steps that are relevant for all Commonwealth RTAs. Common goal themes as noted in the statewide documents that help inform the development of MART-specific needs and goals for the 2025 CRTP include:

- Promoting cross-RTA coordination and collaboration among services, where feasible
- Supporting and growing transit ridership
- Exploring and maximizing innovative funding sources
- Ensuring Council on Aging (COA) services prioritize access for older adults and persons with disabilities

As detailed further in this chapter, the overarching goals for the MART CRTP are aligned with many of these statewide goals.

3.2 Agency Mission

MART's mission is to serve people by getting them where they need to go to lead their lives.

3.3 Identified Needs

Through review and discussion of existing transportation challenges, past community feedback, the findings from the 2020 CRTP, and regional, state, and federal priorities, MART identified the following needs to target in the 2025 CRTP. The current list of needs includes the following, in no order of priority:

- Continuous improvements to operational efficiency
- Expanding access to MART services
- Enhancing safety and passenger comfort

- Increasing public awareness of MART services

3.4 Goals and Objectives

Starting with the 2020 CRTP, an evaluation was conducted of the previous goals, objectives, needs, and recommendations. This information served as the basis for MART staff to identify priorities, opportunities, and any potential barriers that will inform the 2025 CRTP. To identify goals and objectives, the evaluation focused on MART priorities. The evaluation also focused on the broader context, including Commonwealth policies and goals and federal considerations.

The overarching goals identified for the MART 2025 CRTP include continuous improvements to efficiency, implementing best practices, enhancing safety, and expanding service. The objectives associated with three goals are as follows, in no particular order of priority:

- Goal 1: Deliver efficient, safe, and comprehensive coverage to build ridership
  - Objective 1: Implement a continuous improvement process for MART's fixed bus routes to deliver efficient service and increase route frequencies.
  - Objective 2: Study transitioning from a flag-down system to designated stops across all routes.
  - Objective 3: Explore flexible alternative service types like microtransit to complement the fixed route system.
  - Objective 4: Support and expand rural routes to improve connectivity to the MART network and increase ridership.
  - Objective 5: Engage in best practice reviews to improve MART's overall operational safety.
- Goal 2: Enhance the MART fleet through unified technology systems and upgraded fleet design
  - Objective 1: Implement a complete APC system across MART's entire vehicle fleet.
  - Objective 2: Implement a unified video system across vehicles and facilities with audio and video capability and artificial intelligence (AI) compatibility.
  - Objective 3: Continue to upgrade the vehicle fleet while exploring enhanced design options to improve safety and comfort for riders.
- Goal 3: Improve MART's administrative capacity and public recognition
  - Objective 1: Expand operator recruitment efforts to meet service demands.
  - Objective 2: Develop and implement a performance management system to track key operational metrics.
  - Objective 3: Increase public awareness through strategic marketing and outreach initiatives.

These goals and objectives were assessed against progress since the 2020 CRTP in an effort to identify opportunities to meet MART's needs. These goals and objectives, along with a detailed data assessment of MART's system from the last five years, input from stakeholder engagement efforts, and more, were used to inform recommendations in the CRTP.

4 Existing Conditions

This chapter provides a comprehensive assessment of MART's existing conditions regarding transit services provided, ridership, and performance evaluation.

4.1 Transit Service Overview

MART was incorporated under Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 161B in 1974 and provides fixed route and demand response services within a large geographic area in north/central Massachusetts, serving 25 area cities and towns across 694 square miles (Figure 3). Communities located within MART's service area include Ashburnham, Ashby, Athol, Ayer, Barre, Bolton, Boxborough, Fitchburg, Gardner, Hardwick, Harvard, Hubbardston, Lancaster, Leominster, Littleton, Lunenburg, Phillipston, Royalston, Shirley, Sterling, Stow, Templeton, Townsend, Westminster, and Winchendon.

MART's 19 fixed routes are operated out of the ITC in Fitchburg. Fitchburg is also the western terminus of the Fitchburg line of the MBTA Commuter Rail system. MART is one of 15 RTAs that, along with MBTA, provide public transportation in the Commonwealth and is one of two HST brokers. Notably, several MART services are designed to meet with and coordinate with the MBTA Commuter Rail line at key locations.

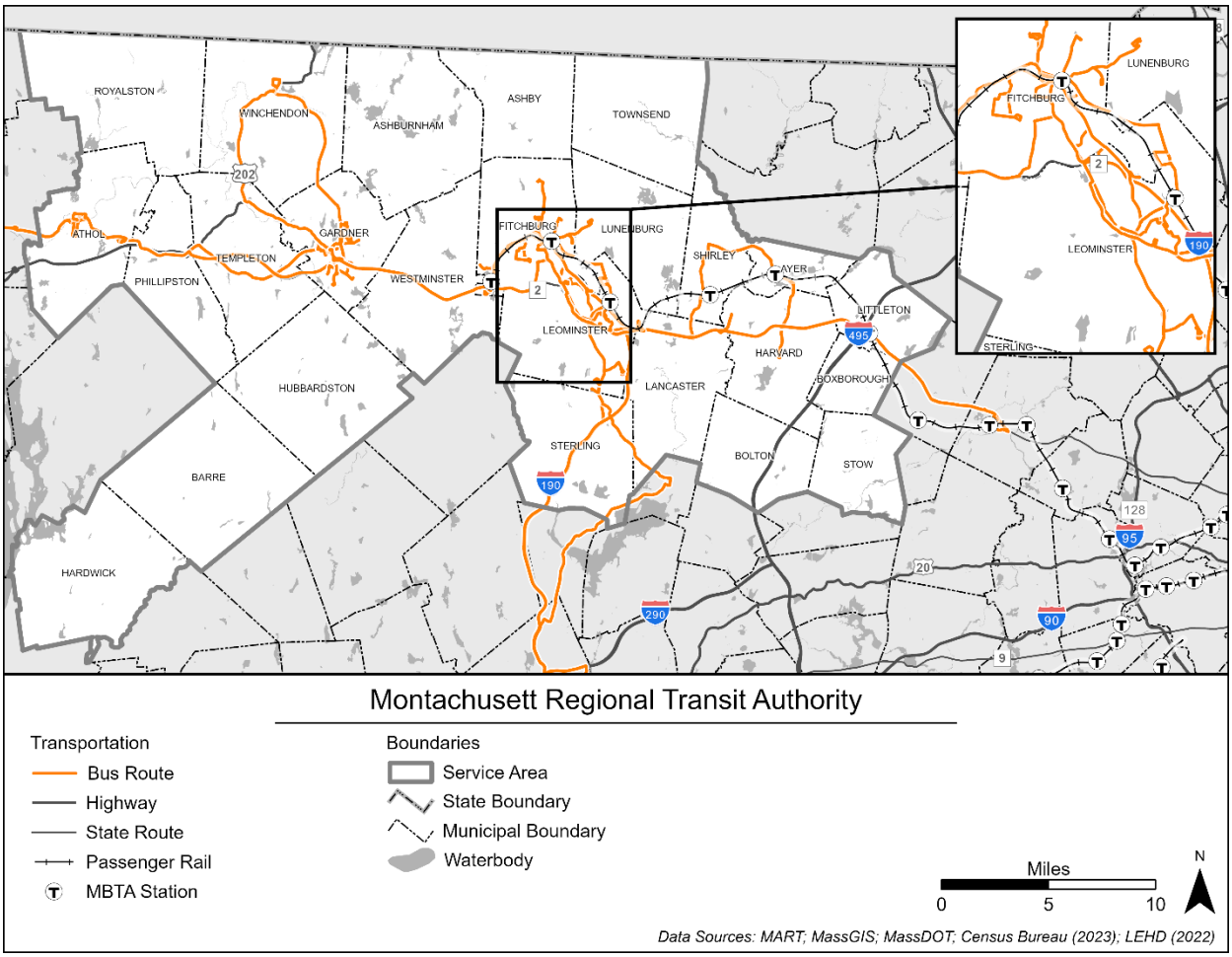
MART currently operates local and regional fixed routes, shuttle services to Boston and Worcester, as well as ADA paratransit, various Dial-a-Ride services, and subscription services. MART also operates an Evening Ride service and MART Connects curb-to-curb on demand service. MART Connects service is available in four communities: Ayer, Devens, Lancaster, and Shirley. This service is operated through taxi and livery service for trips up to 20 miles from a pickup location in one of the four participating communities. Reservations must be made by 2:00 PM the day before the scheduled trip. Evening Ride trips must be scheduled at least one business day in advance through MART. These trips are generally delivered by a private taxi company contractor. MART also supports COAs within the service area by providing vehicles for COAs to offer transportation.

As one of two HST brokers in the state, MART manages HST services for 286 of the 351 communities (82 percent) in Massachusetts and approximately 29,000 of the 37,000 HST consumers (78 percent) (Figure 4). HST connects riders to medical appointments, adult day health, home care services, workshops, day habilitation, and early intervention programs. The service is fare-free for riders, but costs are fully reimbursed by the funding agency.

MART also operates and maintains four park-and-ride facilities:

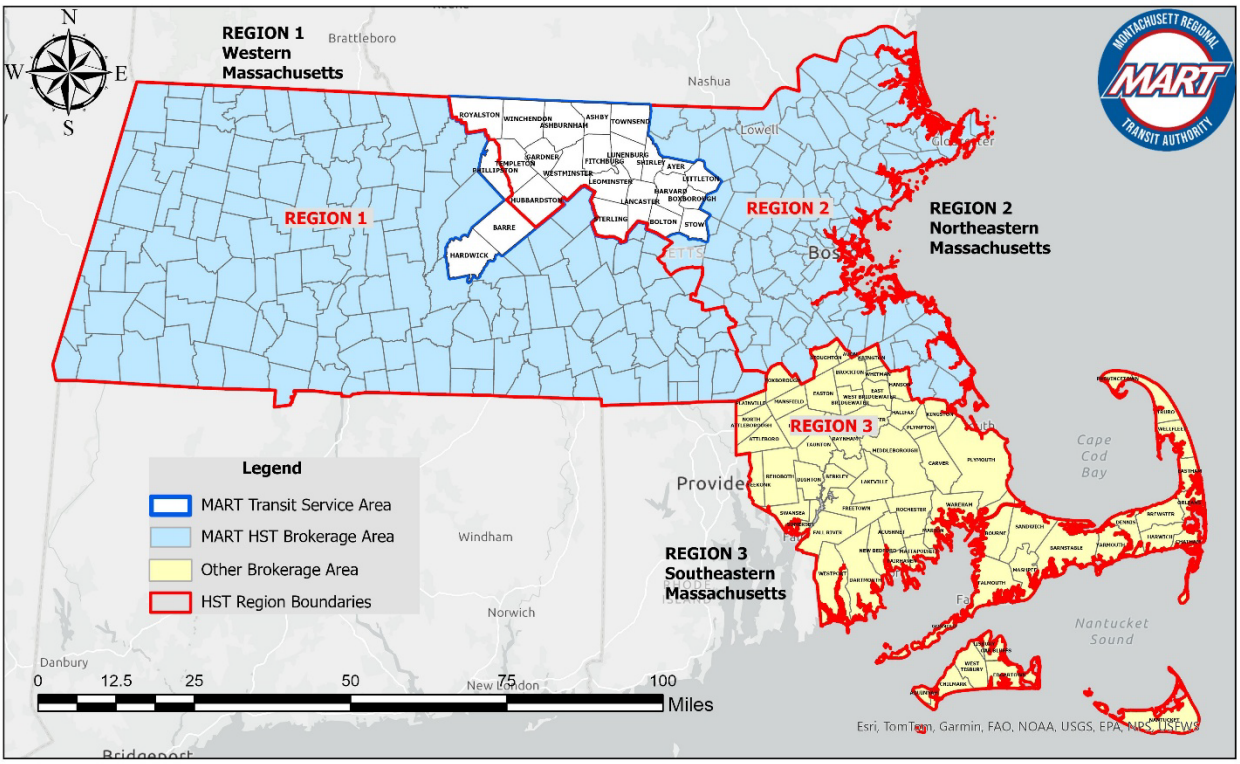
- Fitchburg ITC
- North Leominster ITC
- Wachusett Station (West Fitchburg)
- Ayer Station (Ayer)

Figure 3. MART Service Area



Source: AECOM (2025)

Figure 4. MART HST Brokerage Area



Source: MART (2025)

On an annual basis, MART carries approximately 977,000 fixed route and demand response passengers traveling approximately 6.5 million miles and operating nearly 300,000 revenue hours, with an operating budget of approximately $29.4 million (Table 2).

Table 2. Statistics by Service (FY 2024)

FY 2024 Data	Fixed Route	Percentage of Total	Demand Response	Percentage of Total	Total
Ridership	385,052	39.4%	591,768	60.6%	976,820
Revenue Hours	55,314	18.5%	243,808	81.5%	299,122
Revenue Miles	959,387	14.8%	5,515,861	85.2%	6,475,248
Operating Costs	$6,684,190	22.7%	$22,749,711	77.3%	$29,433,901

Source: MassDOT (2025)

4.1.1 Service Descriptions

This section summarizes the fixed routes currently provided by MART.

4.1.1.1 Fixed Routes

MART's service area is served by 19 fixed routes, including 14 local routes and 5 regional routes, outlined in Table 3. The Fitchburg ITC is the cornerstone of the MART system and is served by all lines entering or departing from Fitchburg (Routes 1 through 7, 11, Fitchburg State University [FSU], Route E1, CWC, and WSS). MART service extends from Orange and Athol to the west through Gardner and Fitchburg, eastward to Concord, and south to

Worcester. Service in the centrally located city of Gardner is provided on three local routes and four regional routes, while Athol, on the far western edge of the MART service area, has one local route, the Athol/Orange Shuttle (AO), and one regional route, the Athol Link (Route E3).

Table 3. MART Fixed Routes

Route Number	Route Name	Service Type	Service Destinations
1	Circle Line	Local Route	Fitchburg ITC, Twin City Marketplace, King's Corner
2	Main Line	Local Route	Fitchburg ITC, Monument Square via Route 12
3	Circle Line	Local Route	Fitchburg ITC and Monument Square via Merriam Avenue
4	Fitchburg State University	Local Route	Fitchburg ITC and FSU
5	Fitchburg Line II	Local Route	Fitchburg ITC, Cleghorn Neighborhood, Parkhill Plaza
6	Intermodal-Burbank-Fitchburg High	Local Route	Fitchburg ITC and Fitchburg High School via Route 31
7	Intermodal-John Fitch-Lunenburg Crossing	Local Route	Fitchburg ITC and Lunenburg Crossing Hannaford via State Route 2A. Deviates to Wallace Plaza
8	Leominster Line	Local Route	Monument Square and Leominster Senior Center via Orchard Hill Park, French Hills Neighborhood, and Mall at Whitney Field
9	Main Line	Local Route	Leominster Monument Square and Jytek Park
11	Intermodal-Great Wolf Lodge	Local Route	Fitchburg ITC, Post Office, Montachusett Industrial Park, Wachusett Station, Great Wolf Lodge
G1	Route 1 South	Local Route	MART ITC Gardner, Gardner City Hall, and Gardner Plaza via Gardner shopping centers
G2	Route 2 North	Local Route	MART ITC Gardner, Gardner City Hall, and Price Chopper via MWCC and Gardner High School
AO	Athol/Orange Shuttle	Local Route	Athol Depot ITC / YMCA, Market Basket and Orange Innovation Center via State Route 2A and central Athol
FSU	Fitchburg State University Shuttle	Local Route	Fitchburg ITC and FSU via North Street

Route Number	Route Name	Service Type	Service Destinations
E3	Athol Link	Regional Route	Athol YMCA and Garden City Hall via State Routes 101 and 2A
E4	Winchendon Link	Regional Route	Gardner City Hall with Winchendon Town Hall, MWCC, and Henry Heywood Hospital
E1	Intercity/MWCC	Regional Route	Fitchburg ITC and Gardner Depot, via Monument Square in Leominster and Village Square Westminster
CWC	Worcester Commuter Shuttle	Regional Route	Fitchburg ITC, UMass Medical Center, and Union Station Worcester via downtown Clinton and Monument Square
WSS	Wachusett Commuter Shuttle	Regional Route	MART Gardner Depot, Gardner City Hall, Wachusett MBTA Station, and Fitchburg ITC

Source: MART (2025)

4.1.1.2 Demand Response

As described previously, in addition to regular fixed route service, MART also offers a number of different demand response services, including demand response taxi service. These services include ADA paratransit service, which is provided within ¾ mile of existing fixed routes and has been expanded to include all of Fitchburg, Leominster, and Gardner. Additionally, COAs offer transportation throughout 24 of MART's member communities for older adults (age 60 or older) and disabled residents. MART also partners with Wood's Plus SWIFT RIDE to extend service hours for on demand service in Gardner.

The MART Connects service expands MART coverage through the use of taxi and livery service (transportation delivered via private providers). This service is available for residents in Ayer, Devens, Lancaster, and Shirley. Devens is also served by the Devens Ride Service, which specifically aims to serve workers commuting to the Devens regional enterprise zone. On-demand taxis operating between established stops at scheduled pick-up times supplement MART Connects service to Devens. MART's Evening Ride service is also offered via taxi seven days a week for late night transportation.

Monthly Ride subscription service also provides curb-to-curb service for recurring trips. These trips are shared with other customers. Finally, MART also offers on-demand commuter shuttles such as the Boston and Townsend Shuttles. Passengers must call ahead to request pick up from designated stops for service to MBTA stations.

4.1.2 Provided Service

MART span of service and fixed route headways are listed in Table 4. Fixed routes operating from Fitchburg primarily operate between 5:30 AM and 7:30 PM on weekdays. Most local routes operate with frequencies between 30 and 60 minutes. MART also operates a supplemental Route FSU Shuttle while the university is in session to provide an improved headway of about 12 minutes from the base headway of 25 minutes when school is not in session.

The three Gardner local fixed routes operate on 40-minute headways between 6:00 AM and 6:00 PM. The remaining local fixed route is Route AO, which operates on 60-minute headways connecting the two communities. Regional routes, such as the Route E3, Route E4, and commuter shuttles, operate during peak travel hours on weekdays only.

Table 4. Span of Service and Frequency

Route Number	Weekday Service Hours	Saturday Service Hours	Sunday Service Hours	Weekday Headway	Saturday Headway	Sunday Headway	Days Operated
1	6:00 AM – 7:30 PM	6:00 AM – 7:30 PM	9:15 AM – 4:30 PM	60-70 minutes	60-70 minutes	60 minutes	7
2	5:15 AM – 7:00 PM	5:15 AM – 7:00 PM	9:35 AM – 4:30 PM	25-minutes	25 minutes	40 minutes	7
3	6:00 AM – 6:25 PM	6:00 AM – 6:25 PM	N/A	60-70 minutes	60-70 minutes	N/A	6
4	6:30 AM – 6:30 PM	10:20 AM – 4:50 PM	N/A	10-20 minutes	60 minutes	N/A	6
5	5:20 AM – 7:25 PM	5:20 AM – 7:25 PM	9:20 AM – 4:35 PM	40 minutes	40 minutes	60 minutes	7
6	6:20 AM – 5:55 PM	9:35 AM - 5:20 PM	9:20 AM – 4:35 PM	50-60 minutes	50-60 minutes	60 minutes	7
7	6:20 AM – 5:45 PM	6:20 AM – 5:45 PM	9:20 AM – 4:35 PM	50-60 minutes	50-60 minutes	60 minutes	7
8	7:20 AM – 7:20 PM	7:20 AM – 7:20 PM	9:25 AM – 4:20 PM	30-50 minutes	30-50 minutes	40-45 minutes	7
9	5:50 AM – 5:40 PM	5:50 AM – 5:40 PM	9:25 AM – 4:20 PM	25 minutes	25 minutes	40-45 minutes	7
11	7:30 AM – 5:30 PM	7:30 AM – 5:30 PM	N/A	30-40 minutes	30-40 minutes	N/A	6
G1	6:25 AM – 5:40 PM	9:00 AM – 5:00 PM	N/A	40 minutes	40 minutes	40 minutes	7
G2	5:55 AM – 5:50 PM	9:15 AM – 4:50 PM	9:00 AM – 5:00 PM	40 minutes	35 minutes	35 minutes	7
AO	6:00 AM – 5:15 PM	10:00 AM – 3:15 PM	10:00 AM – 3:15 PM	60 minutes	60 minutes	60 minutes	7
FSU	6:30 AM - 6:30 PM	N/A	N/A	10-20 minutes	N/A	N/A	5
E3	5:45 AM – 6:40 PM	9:45 AM – 3:45 PM	9:45 AM – 3:45 PM	60 minutes	60 minutes	60 minutes	7
E4	7:15 AM – 4:20 PM	N/A	N/A	5 daily trips	N/A	N/A	5

Route Number	Weekday Service Hours	Saturday Service Hours	Sunday Service Hours	Weekday Headway	Saturday Headway	Sunday Headway	Days Operated
E1	6:15 AM – 6:00 PM	10:10 AM – 4:00 PM	N/A	110 minutes	70 minutes	N/A	6
CWC	6:15 AM – 5:00 PM	N/A	N/A	110 minutes	N/A	N/A	5
WSS	5:40 AM – 7:50 PM	N/A	N/A	5 inbound 5 outbound	N/A	N/A	5

Source: MART (November 2025)
N/A = Not Applicable

Service hours for complementary ADA paratransit aligns with the service hours of the given fixed route for which the service is a complement. Additional late-night service is provided through MART's Evening Ride on-demand service and MART Connects taxi service. Evening Ride service is available between 7:00 PM and 12:00 AM and MART Connects service is available between 5:30 AM and 10:00 PM. On-demand taxi trips to Devens operate between 6:00 AM and 7:24 PM. MART supports Wood's Plus on demand trips in Gardner from 6:00 PM to 12:00 AM, seven days a week.

4.1.3 Funding

Table 5 summarizes operating revenue for Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 through FY 2024. As shown, total operating revenues ranged from $17.4 million to $20.3 million. The primary source of operating revenue was State of Massachusetts funding, which accounted for about 44 percent of MART funds in FY 2024. Federal funding has historically comprised about 30 percent of total funding, while local funds have made up 14 percent. Farebox revenues made up about 13 percent of funding, followed by other funding sources (4 to 5 percent), and then partnerships and contracts (1 percent).

Between FY 2022 and FY 2024, the overall share of total MART operating funding made up by state funding increased, growing from 37 percent in 2022 to 44 percent in 2024. State funding increased for MART to cover losses in fare revenue associated with delivering fare-free service. For more information about state support of fare-free service, refer to Appendix A. Federal funding total contributions increased from 2022 to 2024, though the share of federal funds to total funding remained consistent.

Table 5. Operating Expenses Funding Sources (FY 2022-FY 2024)

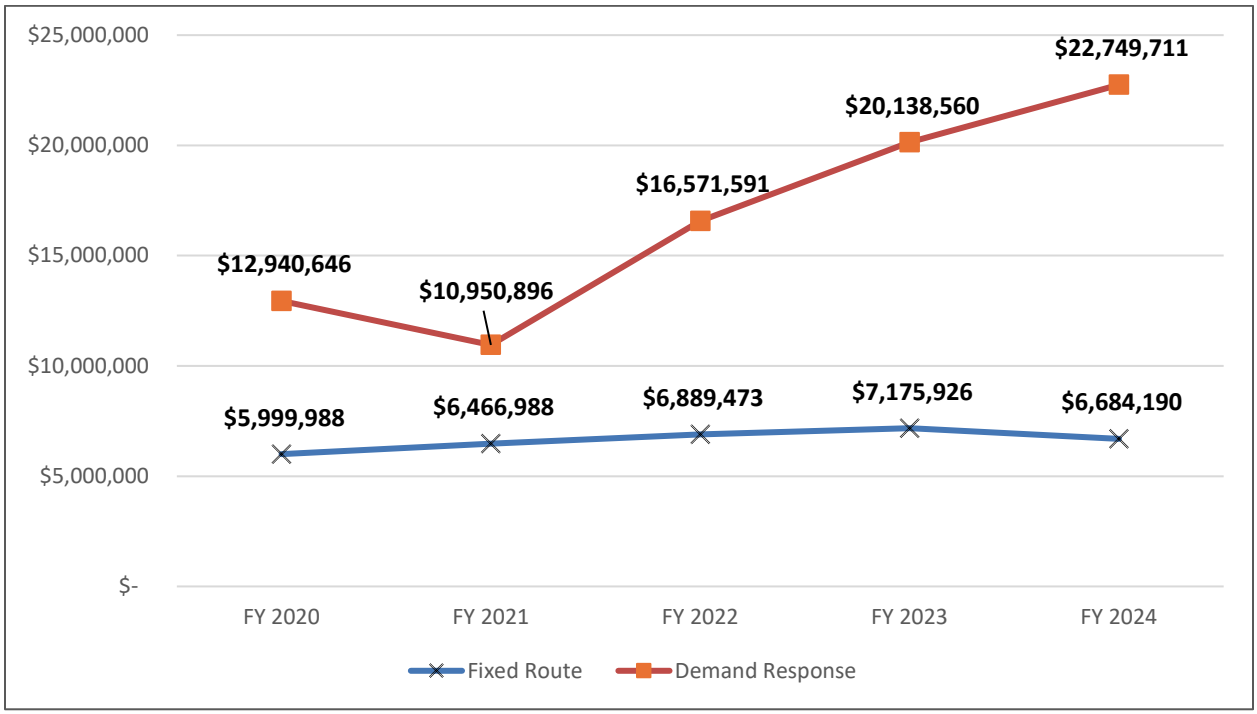
Funding Source	FY 2022	Percentage of FY 2022	FY 2023	Percentage of FY 2023	FY 2024	Percentage of FY 2024
Federal	$4,879,776	28%	$6,409,515	33%	$4,750,639	23%
State	$6,519,332	37%	$6,735,399	34%	$9,008,019	44%
Local	$2,661,589	15%	$2,728,128	14%	$2,796,331	14%
Farebox	$2,601,380	15%	$2,706,038	14%	$2,724,287	13%
Partnerships & Contracts	$310,675	2%	$282,949	1%	$266,931	1%

Funding Source	FY 2022	Percentage of FY 2022	FY 2023	Percentage of FY 2023	FY 2024	Percentage of FY 2024
Other	$704,846	4%	$766,197	4%	$937,345	5%
TOTAL	**$17,677,598**	**100%**	**$19,628,226**	**100%**	**$20,483,552**	**100%**

Source: MART (2025)

The annual operating cost for fixed route service increased year over year from FY 2020 to FY 2024, growing from approximately $6 million to nearly $6.7 million, representing an 11 percent increase in total cost (Figure 5). Demand response (including demand taxi service) operating costs grew even more throughout the five-year period, increasing by nearly 76 percent from FY 2020 to FY 2024. This increase in cost primarily occurred between FY 2021 and FY 2022 when HST services were consolidated to just two providers (MART and GATRA). Overall, total costs increased over 55 percent from FY 2020 to FY 2024.

Figure 5. Annual Operating Cost by Mode (FY 2020 – FY 2024)



Source: MassDOT (2025)

Table 6 breaks down farebox and contract revenue MART received annually from FY 2020 to FY 2024. Over the five-year period, MART's demand response services collected more revenue in fares compared to fixed route service. In FY 2024, MART collected approximately $2.3 million in demand response fares and nearly $400,000 in fares for fixed route. MART also contracted with FSU, which contributed approximately $270,000 annually.

Table 6. Farebox Revenue by Fiscal Year and Service Type (FY 2022-FY 2024)

Service Type	FY 2022	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024
Bus	$530,156	$431,662	$516,223	$523,602	$395,586
Demand Response	$2,464,838	$1,487,738	$2,085,157	$2,182,436	$2,328,701

Service Type	FY 2022	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024
TOTAL	$2,994,994	$1,919,400	$2,601,380	$2,706,038	$2,724,287

Source: MassDOT (2025)

MART sources of funding for capital expenditures are shown in Table 7. Federal funding comprised the largest share of funding in FY 2022, FY 2023, and FY 2024. State funding grew to be a larger share of total funding from approximately 23 percent in FY 2022 to over 37 percent in FY 2024.

Table 7. Capital Expenses Funding Sources (FY 2022-FY 2024)

Funding Source	FY 2022	Percentage of FY 2022	FY 2023	Percentage of FY 2023	FY 2024	Percentage of FY 2024
Federal	$5,746,784	76.78%	$3,982,872	69.14%	$3,017,948	62.76%
State	$1,737,773	23.22%	$1,777,951	30.86%	$1,791,140	37.24%
Local	$0	0.00%	$0	0.00%	$0	0.00%
Farebox	$0	0.00%	$0	0.00%	$0	0.00%
Other	$0	0.00%	$0	0.00%	$0	0.00%
TOTAL	**$7,484,557**	100.00%	**$5,760,823**	100.00%	**$4,809,088**	100.00%

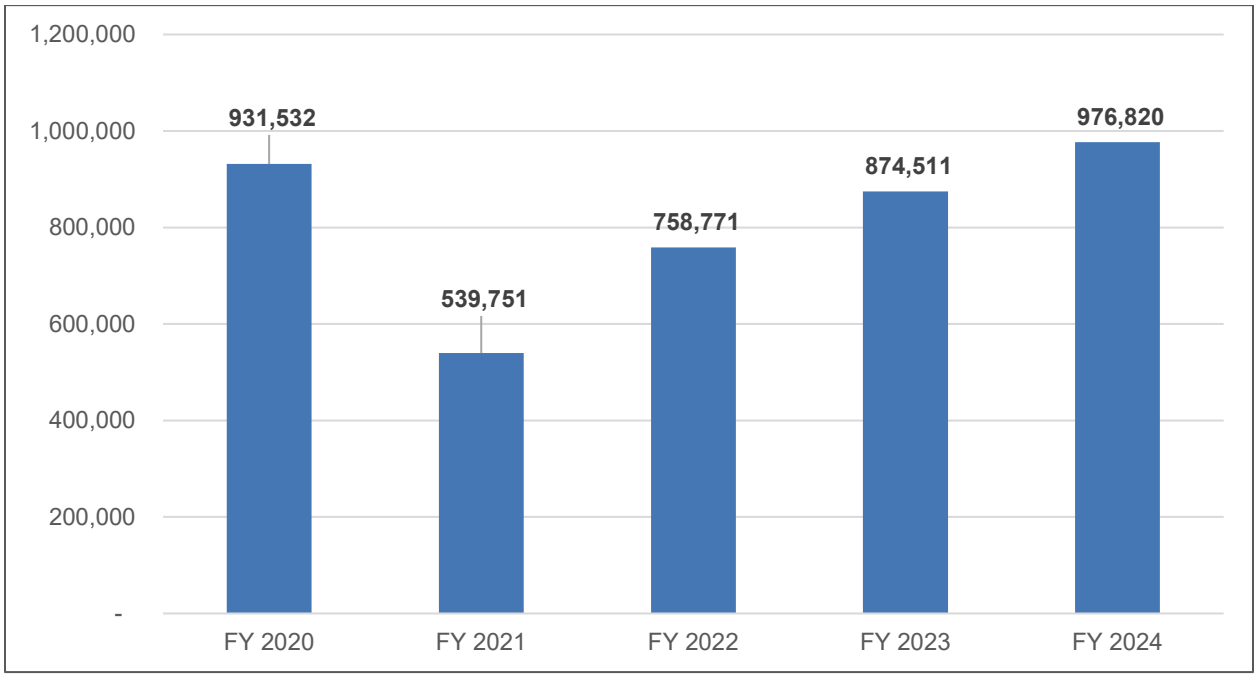
Source: National Transit Database (NTD) (2024)

MART also previously received COVID-era federal funding in the form of Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (which had to be obligated by May 11, 2023), Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (obligated by September 30, 2023), and American Rescue Plan Act funding (which had to be obligated by September 30, 2024). These fund sources could be used by MART for both capital and operating expenses, MART may have expended these funds before or after these fund source obligation deadlines, depending on the use of the funds for capital and/or operating expenses.

4.2 Ridership and Service Operations

MART's overall system ridership increased about 5 percent over the past four years, reaching nearly 980,000 annual riders across all modes in FY 2024 (Figure 6). Between FY 2020 and FY 2021, ridership declined by over 390,000 trips (42 percent) as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since FY 2021, ridership has continued to recover and has since exceeded FY 2020 ridership levels.

Figure 6. Annual System Ridership (FY 2020-FY 2024)

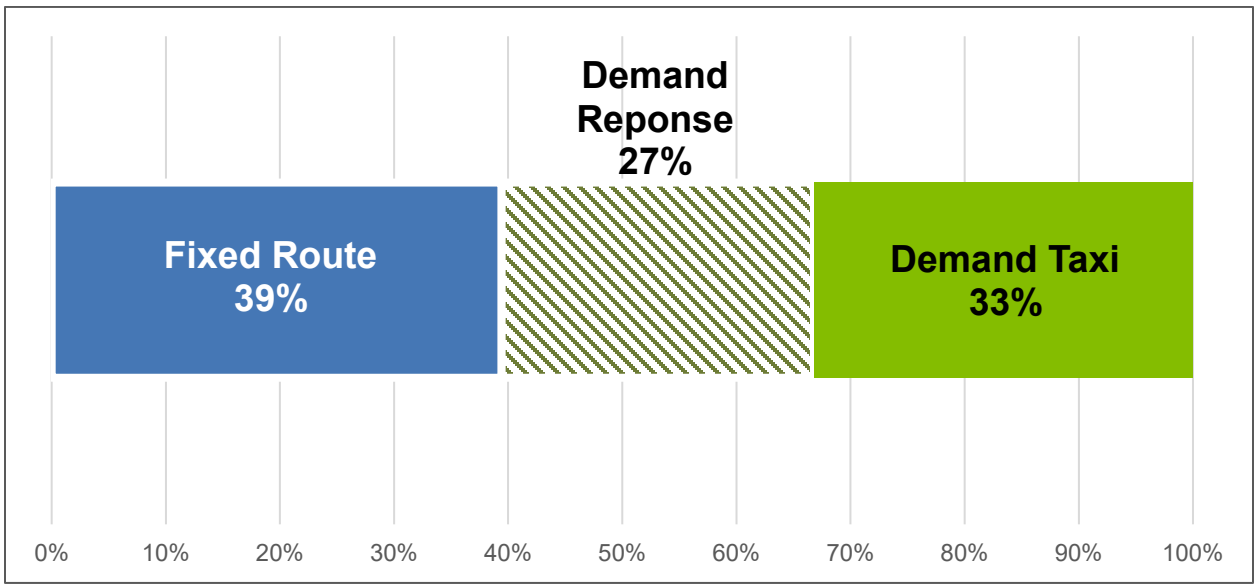


Source: MassDOT (2025)

Ridership is relatively evenly split between MART's three modes–bus, demand response, and demand response taxi. Fixed route bus trips comprised the largest share (39 percent) of MART's annual ridership in FY 2024 (Figure 7). Demand response taxi trips, which include trips through MART's Community Connect program, the Devens Ride Service, Evening Ride trips, and livery service, made up about 33 percent of all trips in FY 2024.

The remaining annual trips (27 percent) were demand response trips. These trips included complementary ADA paratransit services, deviated routes, subscription services, sponsored trips, and COA services.

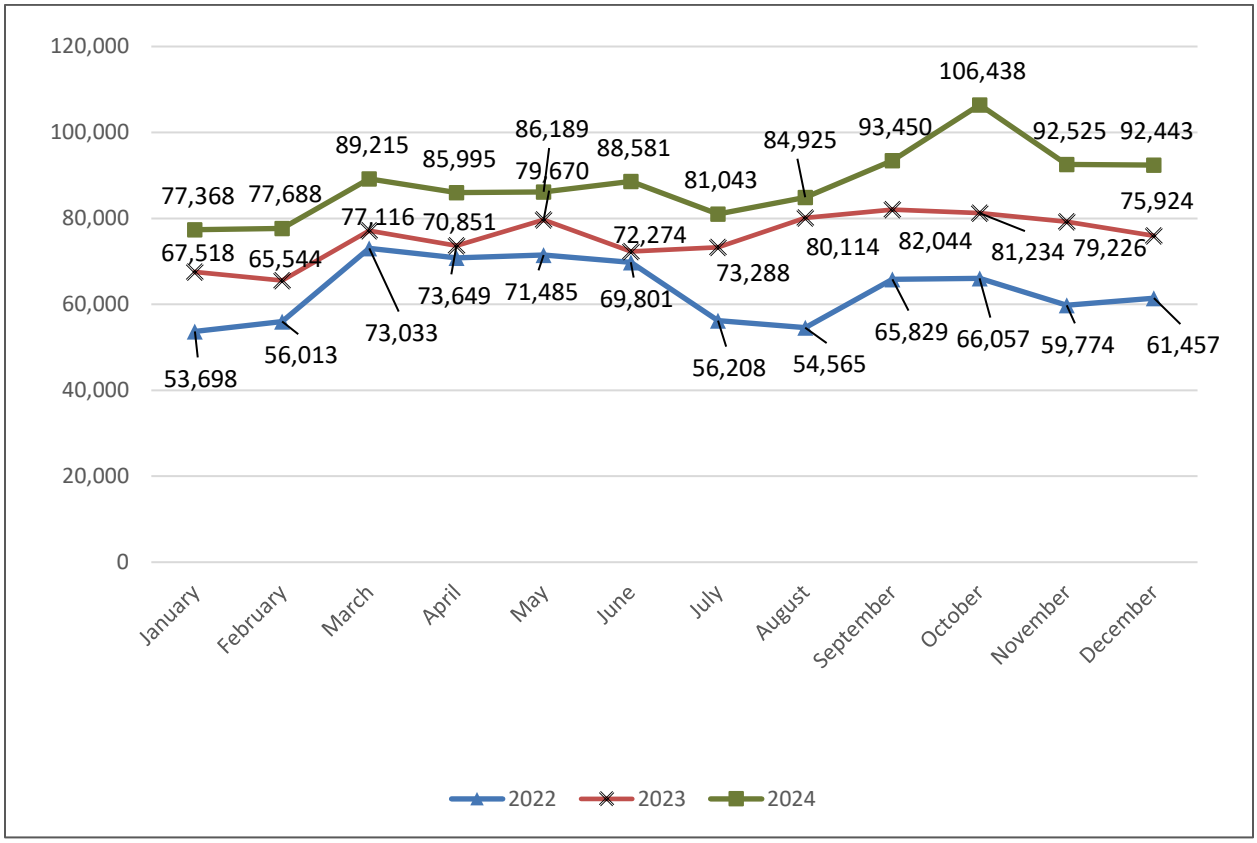
Figure 7. Ridership Breakdown by Service Type (FY 2024)



Source: MassDOT (2025)

Figure 8 highlights the month-to-month trends in systemwide ridership for FY 2022 through FY 2024. In general, ridership tended to be lowest in the summer months of July and August and highest in the early fall months of September and October.

Figure 8. Monthly Ridership Trends (2022-2024)

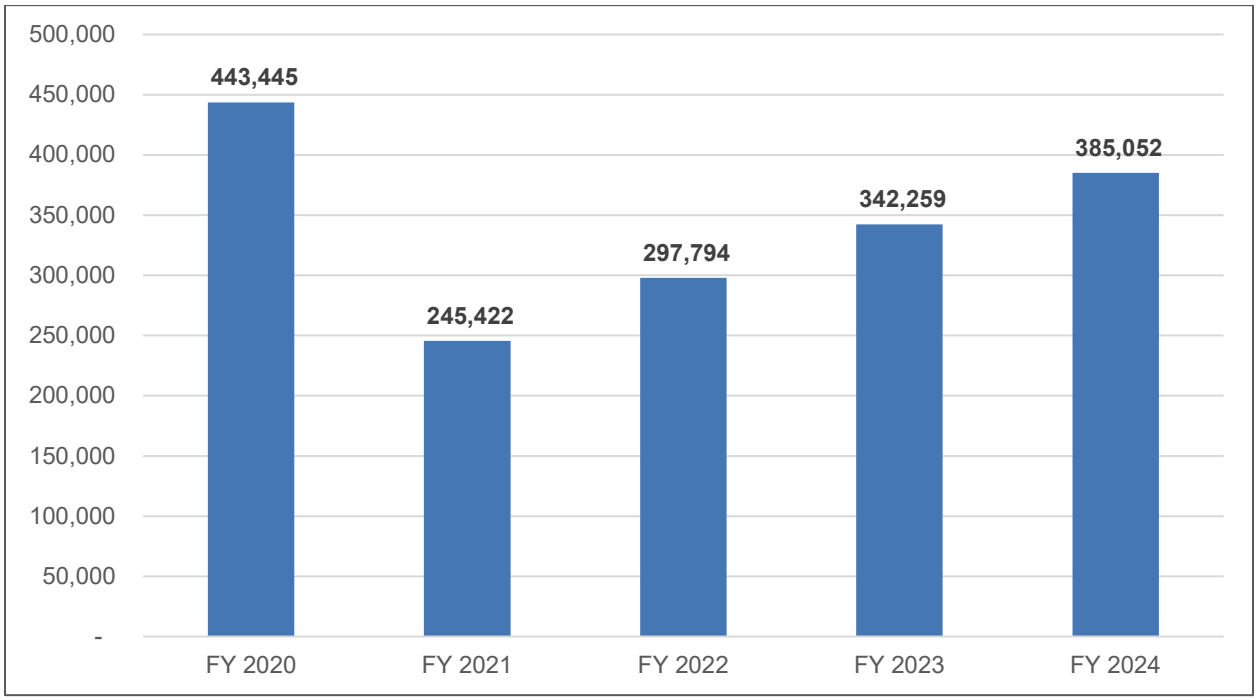


Source: MassDOT (2025)

4.2.1 Fixed Route Ridership

Fixed route ridership experienced a low in FY 2021 with a total of about 245,000 riders (Figure 9). Ridership rebounded in FY 2022 to reach about 300,000 riders. In FY 2024, ridership rose to approximately 390,000; however, it remained below pre-pandemic ridership levels. Ridership from FY 2021 to FY 2024 grew 14 percent annually.

Figure 9. Fixed Route Annual Ridership (FY 2020-FY 2024)



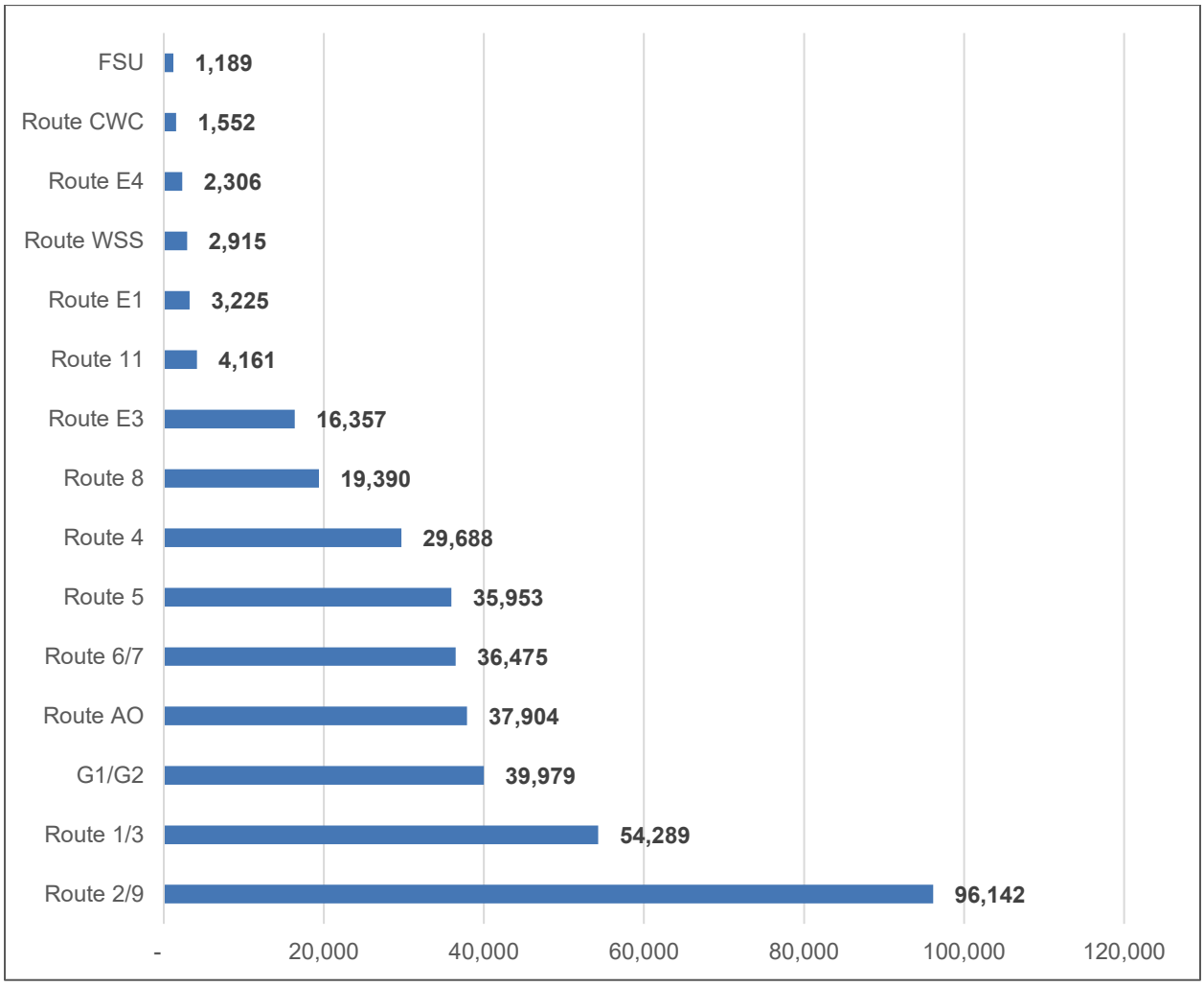
Source: MassDOT (2025)

Route-level ridership data in Figure 10 was combined for routes that operate as a pair where one route operates in one direction and the other serves the opposite direction.

At the route level, Routes 2 and 9 (Route 2/9), which connect Fitchburg to Leominster and both go between the MART garage and Monument Square, had the highest ridership in FY 2024 with over 96,000 trips collectively (Figure 10). Route 2/9 made up about one-quarter of all trips in 2024. Route 2 travels from the Fitchburg ITC to Mount Wachusett Community College (MWCC) and the MassHire Career Center, and the University of Massachusetts (UMass) Memorial Hospital in Leominster. Route 9 extends from Route 2 at Monument Square in Leominster and serves Johnny Appleseed Plaza, Walmart Plaza, and an industrial park in Leominster.

Routes 1 and 3 (Route 1/3) (which form a bidirectional pair) was the next highest ridership route with over 54,000 trips, or 14 percent of all trips. Route 1/3 operates in a large loop from Fitchburg to Leominster and provides connections to shopping destinations like Hannaford's and The Mall at Whitney Field. This route also serves the MBTA North Leominster Commuter Rail station. The FSU route had the lowest ridership in FY 2024, though this route only operates while FSU is in session. Other low ridership routes included Route CWC with about 1,500 total trips in FY 2024, which serves a number of medical facilities and a technical college in Worcester.

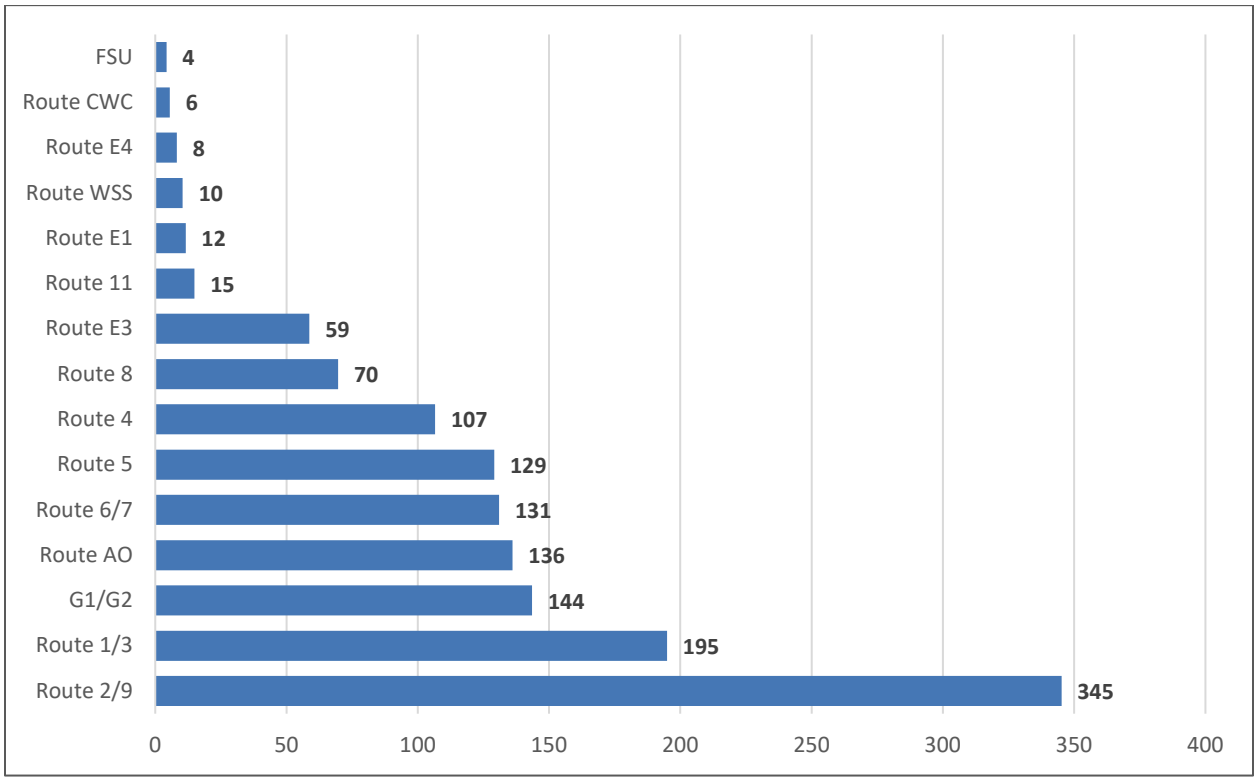
Figure 10. Annual Ridership by Route (FY 2024)



Source: MART (2025)

Average weekday ridership, shown in Figure 11, also shows strong ridership for Routes 2 and 9. As described, these routes connect major destinations in Fitchburg and Leominster, including a community college and a major hospital. On an average weekday in FY 2024, Route 2/9 had about 345 daily riders collectively. The lowest ridership route, the FSU route, which serves the university, had on average about four daily riders. The overall weekday average daily ridership across all routes was 87 riders.

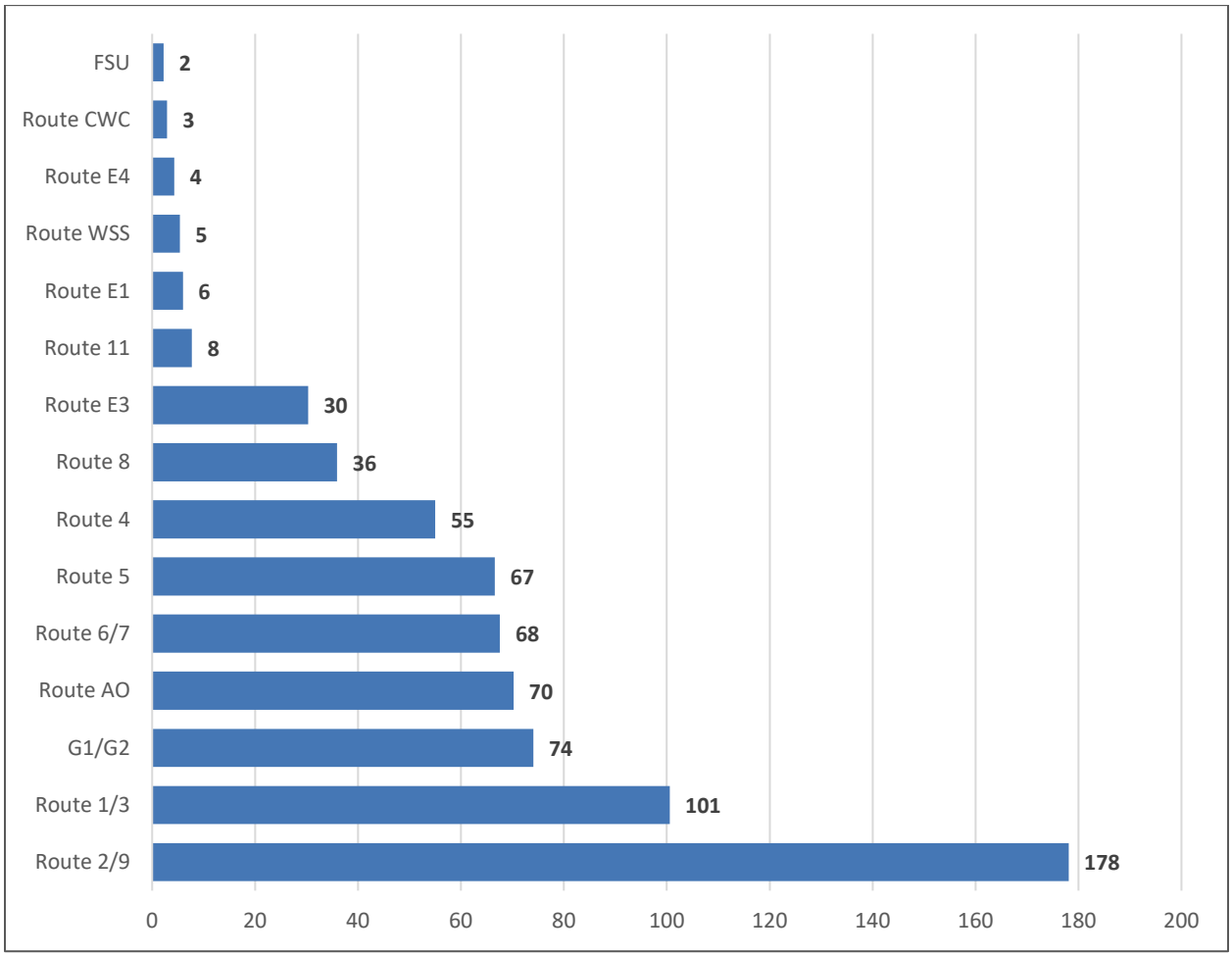
Figure 11. Weekday Average Ridership by Route (FY 2024)



Source: MART (2025)

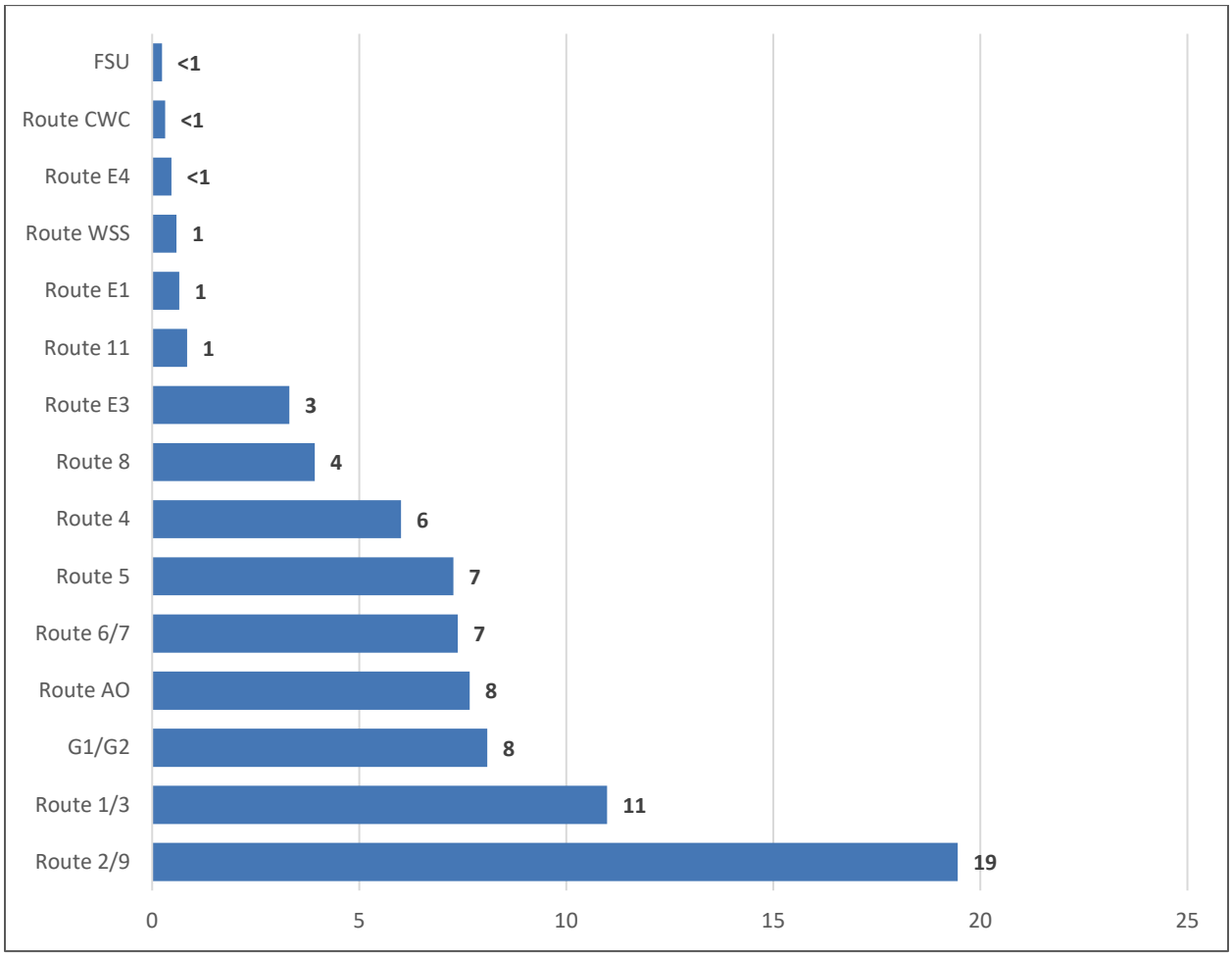
On weekends, average ridership trends were consistent with weekday trends. The fixed routes with the highest ridership were Route 2/9, Route 1/3, and Route G1/G2 (Figure 12 and Figure 13). Like Route 1/3, Route G1 circulates clockwise in the north and Route G2 counterclockwise in the south of Gardner. The routes circulates around Gardner, connecting residential areas like Heritage Village with shopping centers such as Gardner Plaza. The overall average daily ridership for Saturday, across all routes, was 45 daily riders and 5 daily riders for Sunday across all routes.

Figure 12. Saturday Average Ridership by Route (FY 2024)



Source: MART (2025)

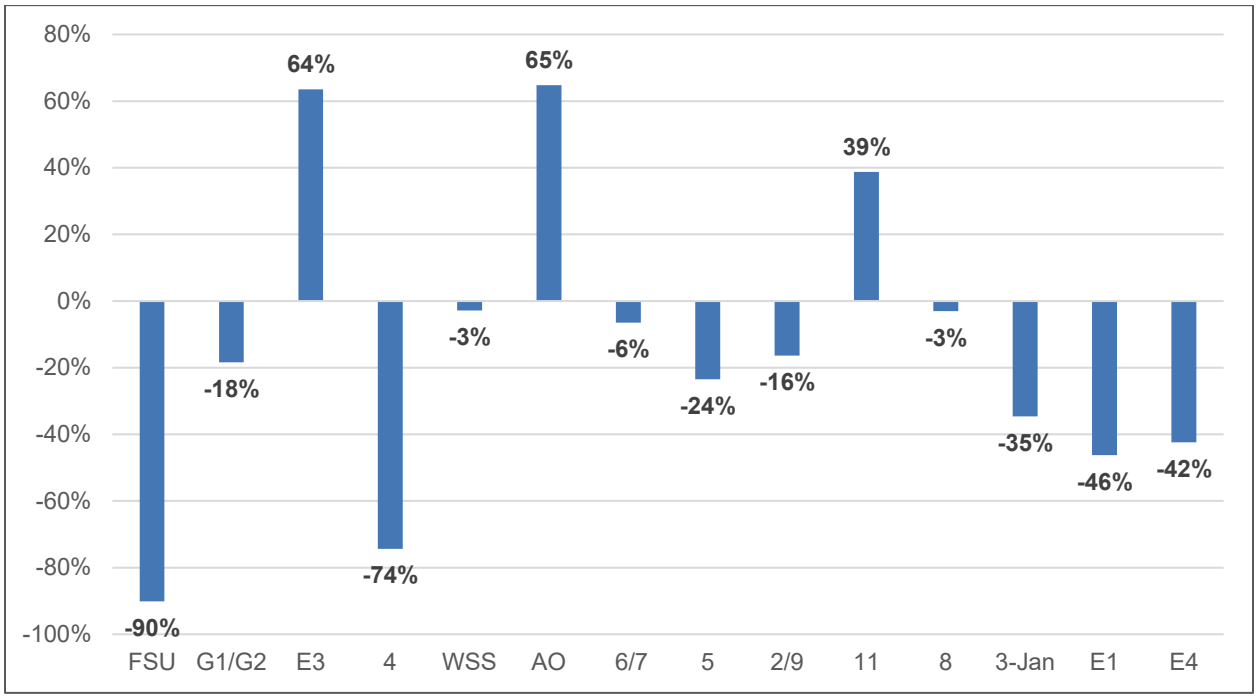
Figure 13. Sunday Average Ridership by Route (FY 2024)



Source: MART (2025)

The fixed routes with increases in average ridership were Route AO, Route E3, and Route 11 (Figure 14). Route AO serves major destinations in both Athol and Orange, including Athol Hospital and the YMCA in Athol as well as the Walmart and Orange Innovation Center in Orange. Route E3 also serves the YMCA in Athol as well as other shopping destinations including Hannaford and medical centers such as the Athol Memorial Hospital. Route 11 operates between the Fitchburg ITC, Wachusett Station, and the Great Wolf Lodge. Several routes experienced significant ridership decreases from FY 2019 to FY 2024, including the FSU route and Route 4.

Figure 14. Average Ridership Change from FY 2019 to FY 2024



Source: MART (2025)

4.2.2 Fixed Route Operations

MART's annual fixed route operating statistics are broken down in Table 8. This table compares ridership, service hours, distance served, and total operating costs between FY 2020 and FY 2024. Fixed route ridership dropped between FY 2020 and FY 2021 but increased every year between FY 2021 and FY 2024. However, FY 2024 ridership was still lower compared to FY 2020. On average, revenue hours and revenue miles grew year-over-year from FY 2020 to FY 2024. Operating costs for fixed route operations also increased steadily throughout the five-year period, rising an average of approximately 3 percent annually. Additionally, MART operated nearly 100 percent of scheduled trips between FY 2020 and FY 2024.

Table 8. Annual Fixed Route Operating Statistics (FY 2020-FY 2024)

Statistic	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024
Ridership	443,445	245,422	297,794	342,259	385,052
Revenue Hours	50,469	45,928	52,100	52,525	55,314
Revenue Miles	801,457	721,872	821,694	878,778	959,387
Operating Costs	$5,999,988	$6,466,988	$6,889,473	$7,175,926	$6,684,190

Source: MassDOT (2025)

MART's operating statistics for fixed routes in FY 2024 are broken down by route in Table 9. As identified previously, combined Routes 2/9 was the highest performing route when considering overall ridership and passengers per hour. Though not the highest overall ridership route, the second highest performing route for passengers per hour was the Route AO. As described previously, Route CWC had the lowest passenger trips per hour rates with approximately 1.1 passengers per revenue hour. Route E4 and Route E1 also had low passenger per hour rates with 1.5 passengers per revenue hour.

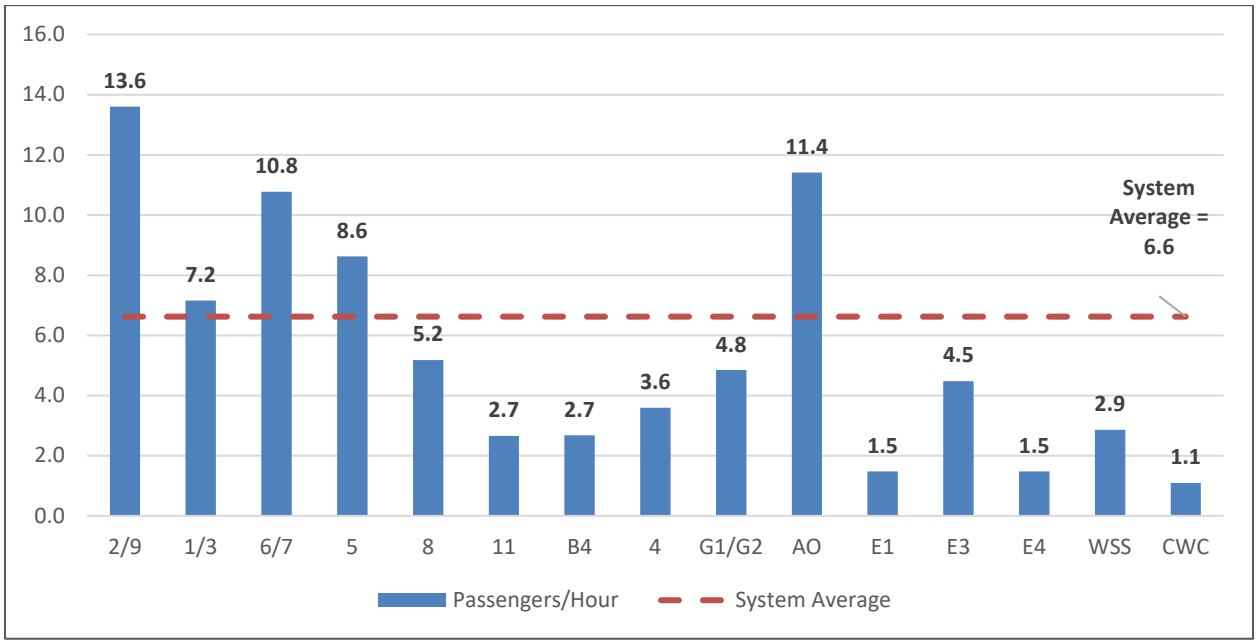
Table 9. Operating Statistics by Route (FY 2024)

Route	Ridership	Revenue Hours	Passenger Trips/ Hour	Revenue Miles	Passenger Trips/ Mile
1/3	54,289	7,588	7.2	106,546	0.5
2/9	96,142	7,068	13.6	103,098	0.9
4	29,688	4,696	6.3	40,818	0.7
5	35,953	4,171	8.6	61,488	0.6
6/7	36,475	3,385	10.8	45,095	0.8
8	19,390	3,742	5.2	45,387	0.4
11	4,161	1,565	2.7	28,186	0.1
B4	1,189	443	2.7	4,867	0.2
G1/G2	39,979	8,249	4.8	134,122	0.3
AO	37,904	3,323	11.4	69,163	0.5
E1	3,225	2,180	1.5	54,872	0.1
E3	16,357	3,650	4.5	109,034	0.2
E4	2,306	1,564	1.5	44,319	0.1
CWC	1,552	1,419	1.1	39,571	0.0
WSS	2,915	1,017	2.9	31,508	0.1

Source: MART, MassDOT (2025)

At a system level, MART's fixed routes served an average of approximately 6.6 passengers per hour during FY 2024. Several routes carried a higher number of passengers per hour, with combined Route 2/9, Route AO, and combined Route 6/8 representing the top three highest performing routes based on this metric (Figure 15). The majority of routes were below the system average. The three lowest performing routes were Route CWC, Route E1, and Route E4.

Figure 15. Passengers per Hour by Route (FY 2024)



Source: MART (2025)

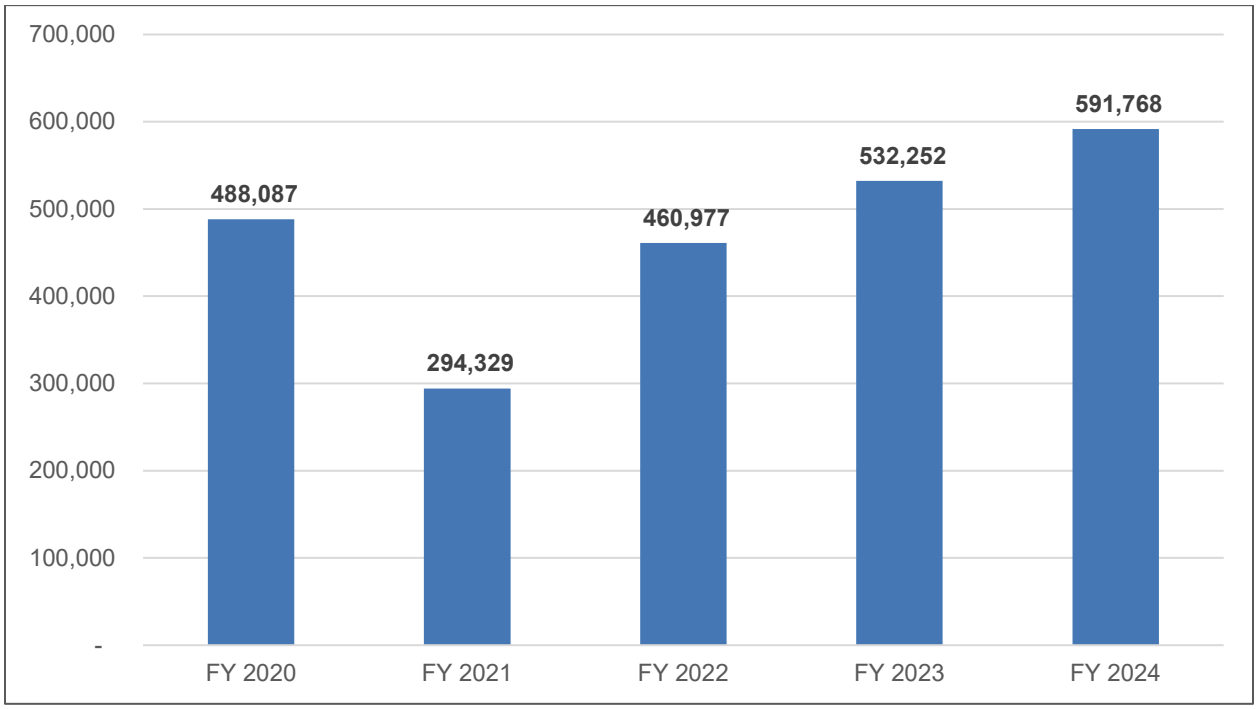
4.2.3 Demand Response Ridership and Operations

MART provides ADA paratransit service within the entirety of Fitchburg, Leominster, and Gardner, as well as parts of Lunenburg and Lancaster within a ¾-mile area surrounding regular fixed routes. MART also provides non-ADA paratransit service for older adults and people with disabilities in each of the member communities. Other services include demand taxi service such as HST, Evening Ride service, and MART Connects.

Demand response ridership represents 27 percent of the overall system ridership, and demand response taxi ridership comprises an additional 33 percent (for a combined 60 percent).

Annual demand response ridership dropped sharply in FY 2021 but has increased year to year since (Figure 16). Ridership rose to nearly 600,000 riders in FY 2024, surpassing FY 2020 levels.

Figure 16. Demand Response Annual Ridership (FY 2020-FY 2024)



Source: MassDOT (2025)

MART's annual operating statistics for demand response are broken down in Table 10. Revenue hours, revenue miles, and operating costs all dipped from FY 2020 to FY 2021 in parallel with ridership trends but have increased annually since 2021.

Table 10. Demand Response Operating Statistics (FY 2020-FY 2024)

Statistic	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024
Ridership	488,087	294,329	460,977	532,252	591,768
Revenue Hours	81,902	73,020	110,598	123,413	243,808
Revenue Miles	2,283,686	1,908,281	3,514,363	3,973,866	5,515,861
Operating Costs	$12,940,646	$10,950,896	$16,571,591	$20,138,560	$22,749,711

Source: MassDOT (2025)

MART's demand response service tracks the number of unique passengers, missed trips, no-shows, and late cancellations. MART uses the following definitions for each of these cases:

- Missed trips: Carrier fails to pick-up a passenger or when a vehicle arrives so late that the passenger will not arrive at his destination in time.
- No-show: Passenger is not available at the pickup location at the designated time.
- Late cancellation: Passenger does not notify to cancel their trip at least 30 minutes before their trip pickup time.

MART's annual demand response metrics are broken down in Table 11. The proportion of missed trips was essentially null in FY 2020, and it increased slightly in FY 2021, remaining below 0.5 percent from FY 2022 to FY 2024. The proportion of no-shows remained relatively constant, with a peak in FY 2023 of 3.7 percent. Overall cancellation rates have fluctuated year to year, with a period high of 1.7 percent in FY 2021 and a low of 0.8 percent in FY 2020.

Table 11. Demand Response Metrics (FY 2020-FY 2024)

Metric	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024
Unique Passengers	133,651	157,653	209,666	228,287	244,485
% Missed Trips	0.1%	0.6%	0.2%	0.3%	0.4%
% No-show Trips	3.0%	3.3%	3.1%	3.7%	3.1%
% Late Cancellation	0.8%	1.7%	1.0%	1.1%	1.0%

Source: MART (2025)

4.3 Transit Service Performance

This section provides information on MART's systemwide performance trends for fixed route and demand response services from FY 2020 to FY 2024. Transit service performance is evaluated in two categories: service effectiveness and financial performance. A comparison with peer transit systems across Massachusetts (excluding MBTA) and the nation is also provided.

4.3.1 Service Effectiveness

Service effectiveness describes the amount of transit service utilized per unit amount of transit service that is provided. Service effectiveness is measured using two indicators: passengers per mile and passengers per hour.

- Passengers per mile measures the average number of unlinked passenger trips taken for every vehicle revenue mile provided. Though the passengers per mile indicator is a strong measure of system efficiency, it is also influenced by the length of passenger trips. Smaller values likely represent longer trips where passengers are travelling greater distances or a poorly performing system. Larger values likely represent shorter trips where passengers are traveling smaller distances or a high-performing system.
- Passengers per hour measures the average number of unlinked passenger trips taken for every vehicle revenue hour provided. Passengers per hour is influenced by the geographic area and the average operating speed of a route. Higher values indicate a more efficient system.

Service effectiveness for MART's fixed route and demand response services from FY 2020 to FY 2024 are illustrated in Table 12. Service effectiveness for fixed route declined from FY 2020 to FY 2021 as a result of the pandemic, then increased between FY 2022 and FY 2024. While passengers per mile and passengers per hour were lower in FY 2024 compared to FY 2020, and both fixed route metrics were also significantly lower than national and state averages, values are trending in the positive direction and MART did meet its FY 2024 targets. In FY 2024, MART served 0.40 passengers per mile, while the state average was 1.25 and the national average was 1.92. Likewise, in FY 2024, MART served 6.62 passengers per revenue hour, while the state average was 17.87 and the national average was 23.06.

For demand response service, MART's service effectiveness is slightly lower compared to state and national averages. MART's passengers per mile peaked in FY 2020 with 0.21 and was 0.11 in FY 2024. In 2024, the state average was 0.12 and the national average was 0.13. Passengers per hour also peaked in FY 2020 with 5.96 and decreased in FY 2024 to 2.40. In 2024, the state average was 1.95 and the national average was 1.92. MART also met its FY 2024 targets for passengers per hour, though not for passengers per mile.

Table 12. Service Effectiveness (FY 2020 - FY 2024)

Productivity Metric	Fixed Route Passengers/ Mile	Fixed Route Passengers/ Hour	Demand Response Passengers/ Mile	Demand Response Passengers/ Hour
FY 2020	0.55	8.79	0.21	5.96
FY 2021	0.34	5.34	0.15	4.03
FY 2022	0.36	5.72	0.13	4.17
FY 2023	0.39	6.52	0.13	4.31
FY 2024	0.40	6.62	0.11	2.43
MART FY 2024 Targets	0.40	6.62	0.15	2.40
FY 2024 Massachusetts Average [a]	1.25	17.87	0.12	1.95
FY 2024 National Average	1.92	23.06	0.13	1.92

Source: NTD

[a] Massachusetts average excludes MBTA (from all modes).

4.3.2 Financial Performance

Cost effectiveness is a measure of a transit system's performance in financial terms, indicating how efficiently funds are used to deliver the service. Many variables influence the financial efficiency of a transit agency, including the size and other characteristics of the geographic area served, ridership, the cost of labor, and more. Cost effectiveness indicators are cost per mile, cost per hour, and cost per passenger.

- Cost per mile measures the overall expense of providing a transit service divided by the number of vehicle revenue miles provided by the service. A smaller value indicates more financially efficient system and/or faster operating speeds.
- Cost per hour measures the overall expense of providing a service divided by the number of vehicle revenue hours provided by the service. A smaller value indicates more financially efficient system and/or faster operating speeds.
- Cost per passenger measures the overall expenses required to operate the transit service divided by the number of unlinked passenger trips that were taken on the service. A smaller value indicates a financially efficient system and/or a mode with high ridership.

4.3.2.1 Fixed Route Financial Performance

Table 13 illustrates the cost effectiveness of MART's fixed route services from FY 2020 to FY 2024. MART's operating cost per mile increased from $7.49 per mile in FY 2020 to its peak in FY 2021 ($8.96/mile). Cost per mile has since decreased annually and in FY 2024 was $6.97; this was lower than both state and national averages, as were costs per hour. However, MART's cost per passenger for FY 2024 ($17.36) was higher than the state average of $7.93 and more

than double the national average of $8.24 per passenger. MART met its fixed route targets for all three cost effectiveness metrics.

Table 13. Cost Effectiveness of Fixed Route (FY 2020- FY 2024)

Cost Effectiveness Metric	Cost/Mile	Cost/Hour	Cost/Passenger
FY 2020	$7.49	$118.88	$13.53
FY 2021	$8.96	$140.81	$26.35
FY 2022	$8.38	$132.24	$23.14
FY 2023	$8.17	$136.62	$20.97
FY 2024	$6.97	$120.84	$17.36
MART FY 2024 Targets	$7.39	$123.14	$19.78
FY 2024 Massachusetts Average [a]	$9.88	$141.70	$7.93
FY 2024 National Average	$15.80	$189.95	$8.24

Source: NTD

[a] Massachusetts average excludes MBTA (from all modes).

4.3.2.2 Demand Response Financial Performance

Table 14 illustrates the cost effectiveness of MART's demand response services from FY 2020 to FY 2024. Demand response cost per mile in FY 2024 was lower than FY 2020's peak cost of $5.67 per mile. Compared to benchmarks, cost per mile in FY 2024 was lower than the state average, though not lower compared to the national average. Cost per hour for demand response decreased from its peak in FY 2020 to FY 2024 and was likewise lower than the national average (though not the state average). MART's cost per passenger varied over the course of the last five years from a low of $26.51 in FY 2020 to a high of $46.01 in FY 2024. Likewise, these costs were lower than the national average, though not the overall state average. MART met FY 2024 targets for all three cost effectiveness metrics.

Table 14. Cost Effectiveness of Demand Response (FY 2020- FY 2024)

Cost Effectiveness Metric	Cost/Mile	Cost/Hour	Cost/Passenger
FY 2020	$5.67	$158.00	$26.51
FY 2021	$5.74	$149.97	$37.21
FY 2022	$4.72	$149.84	$35.95
FY 2023	$5.07	$163.18	$37.84
FY 2024	$4.12	$93.31	$38.44
MART FY 2024 Targets	$6.42	$104.80	$46.01
FY 2024 Massachusetts Average [a]	$5.43	$87.07	$44.76
FY 2024 National Average	$6.32	$97.27	$50.57

Source: NTD

[a] Massachusetts average excludes MBTA.

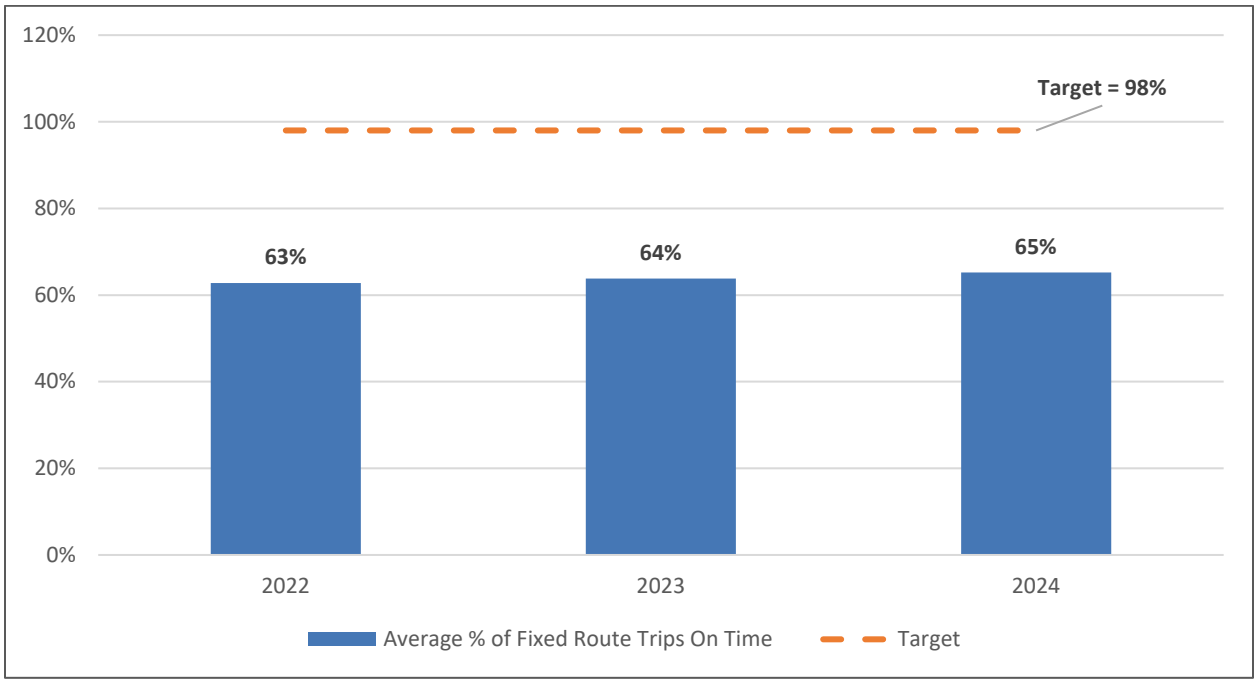
4.3.3 On-Time Performance

The following sections discuss fixed route and demand response on-time performance data during the FY 2020 to FY 2024 timeframe.

4.3.3.1 Fixed Route On Time Performance

Fixed route MART vehicles were considered on time if they arrived at stops within a range of 1 minute early to 5 minutes late. In FY 2024, MART's target for on-time performance was to operate 98 percent of all fixed route trips on time. Fixed route operations did not meet this goal in FY 2024 as the average on-time performance across all routes was 65 percent (Figure 17).

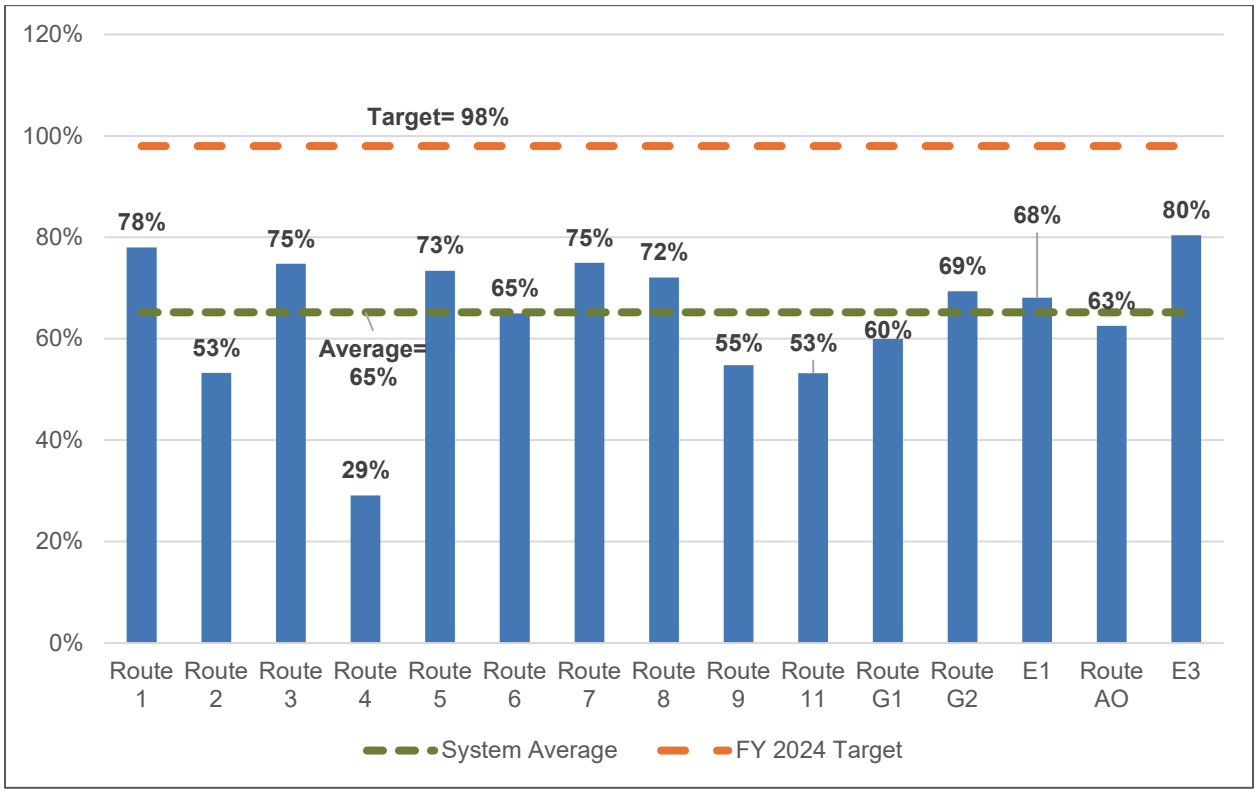
Figure 17. Fixed Route On-Time Performance (FY 2022-FY 2024)



Source: MART (2025)

Across the MART fixed route system, on-time performance averaged 65 percent in FY 2024, with no routes meeting the target of 98 percent on time performance (Figure 18). Route AO had the highest proportion of trips operating on time (80 percent), followed by Route 1, which had a 78 percent on-time performance rate. The lowest performing route with respect to on time performance was Route 4, with 29 percent of trips operating on time. No data were available for Routes FSU, CWC, and WSS.

Figure 18. On-Time Performance by Route (FY 2024)

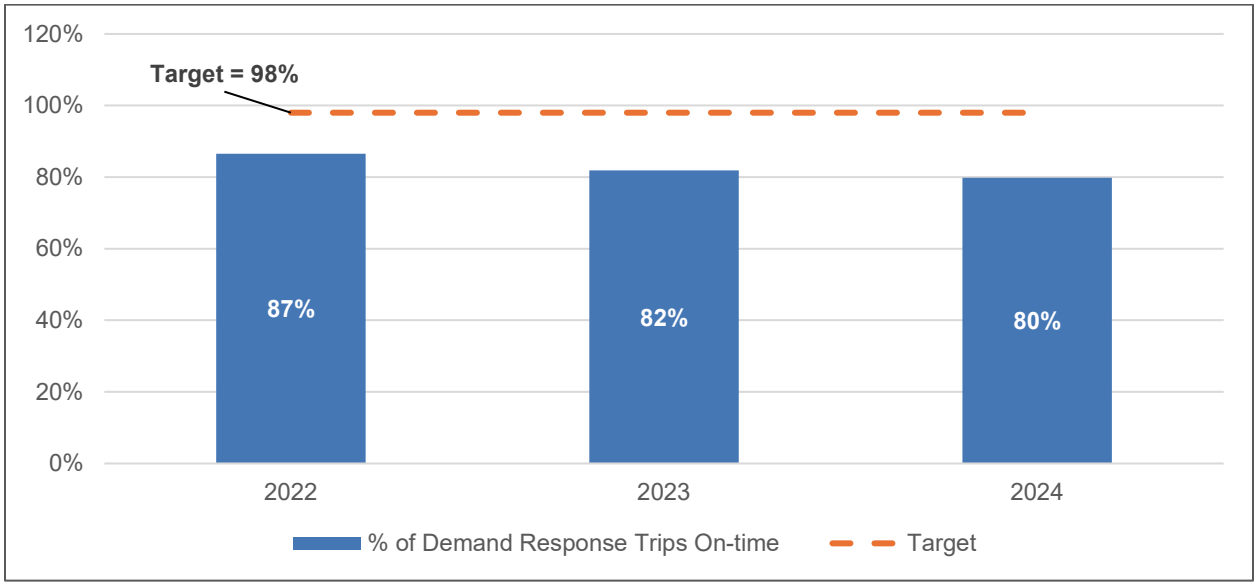


Source: MART (2025)

4.3.3.2 Demand Response On-Time Performance

For MART's demand response trips, on time is defined as trips that arrive either early or at the promised pick-up time. The on-time performance target for demand response operations is 98 percent, which was not met in FY 2022 to FY 2024 (Figure 19).

Figure 19. On-Time Performance - Demand Response (FY 2022-FY 2024)



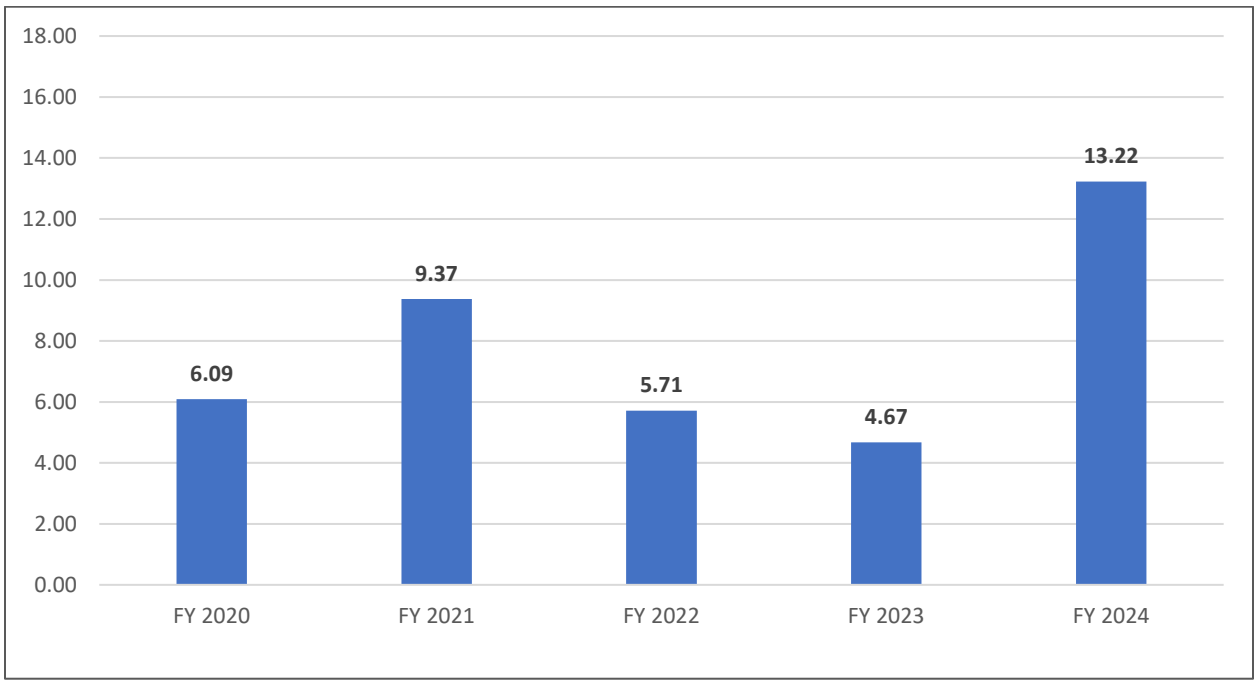
Source: MART (2025)

4.3.4 Customer Service

MART tracks the number of complaints per 100,000 passenger trips to normalize complaints across fluctuating ridership. The lowest complaint rate for fixed route in the five-year period was in FY 2023 (Figure 20). The following year (FY 2024) then experienced the highest rate of valid complaints per 100,000 trips. Complaints per 100,000 passenger trips for demand response service are shown in Figure 21. In general, the rate of complaints for demand response service is higher than fixed route service. FY 2020 and FY 2024 are two exceptions where fixed route had higher complaint rates. Complaints for demand response peaked in FY 2021 with nearly 17 per 100,000 passenger trips. FY 2024 had a lower rate of complaints with 10.65.

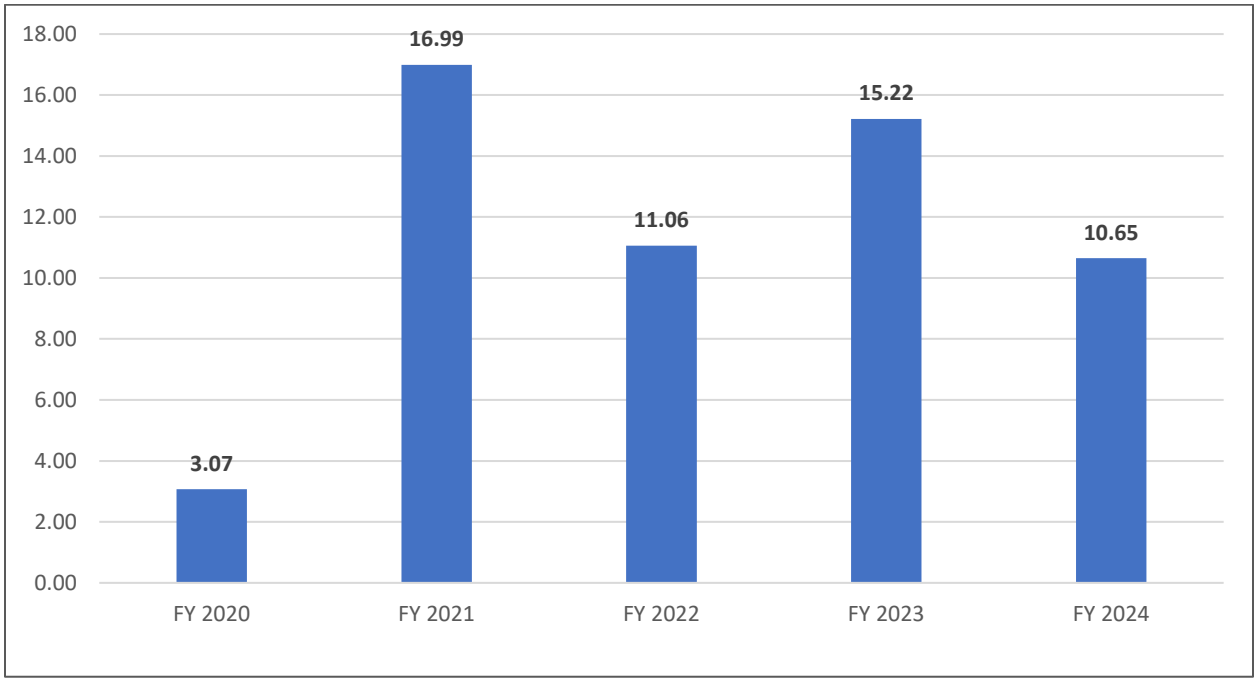
MART also tracks phone hold times for paratransit trip reservations/dispatch. Phone hold times steadily increased from 1 minute and 1 second in FY 2020 to 1 minute and 56 seconds in FY 2024.

Figure 20. Number of Valid Complaints per 100,000 Passenger Trips: Fixed Route (FY 2020-FY 2024)



Source: MART (2025)

Figure 21. Number of Valid Complaints per 100,000 Passenger Trips: Demand Response (FY 2020-FY 2024)



Source: MART (2025)

4.4 Regional Connections and Partnerships

The MART service area connects to MBTA and greater Boston via the MBTA Fitchburg Commuter Rail line. Passengers can transfer to MBTA at Wachusett Station in Fitchburg. The station includes parking facilities and is served by a commuter shuttle. MBTA service operates from Wachusett to Boston, with MART service area stops in Fitchburg, Leominster, Shirley, Ayer, and Littleton. MART also provides its own shuttles to Worcester and Boston. Travelers can transfer to other Worcester Regional Transit Authority (WRTA), MBTA, or regional rail services in either Worcester or Boston. Passengers can also transfer to the Franklin Regional Transit Authority (FRTA) in Orange.

In addition, the Yankee Trails private bus company operates from Dover, New Hampshire, to New York City via Newburyport, Lowell, Littleton, and Worcester. This line passes through the easternmost part of the MART service area. Greyhound service is also available in Ayer, Fitchburg, and Athol.

MassHealth members can also utilize MART's HST brokerage services to reach areas beyond the MART transit service area for non-emergency medical trips. MART brokers HST for two of the three regions, covering most of Massachusetts.

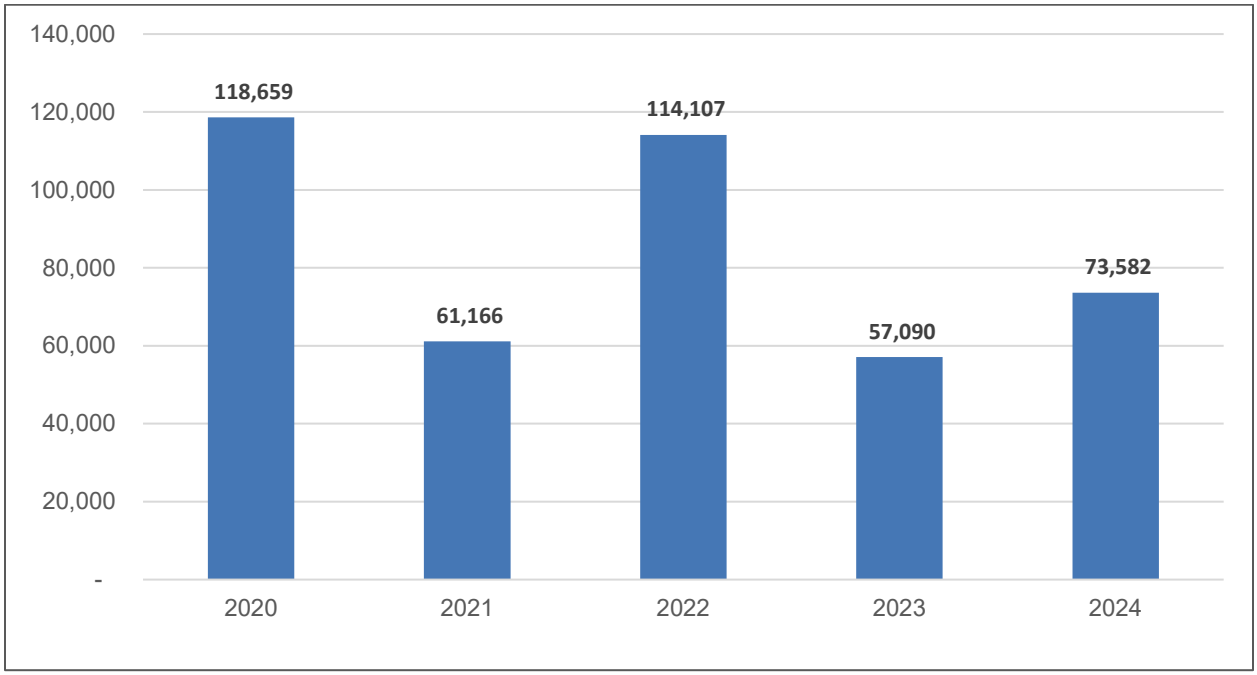
4.5 Asset Management

This section provides asset management information that pertains to MART vehicles and facilities over the FY 2020 to FY 2024 time period.

4.5.1 Maintenance

Miles traveled between road calls dipped from FY 2020 to FY 2021. From FY 2021 to FY 2022, miles traveled between road calls increased again to near FY 2020 levels (Figure 22). Miles between road calls decreased in FY 2023 and was approximately 74,000 in FY 2024.

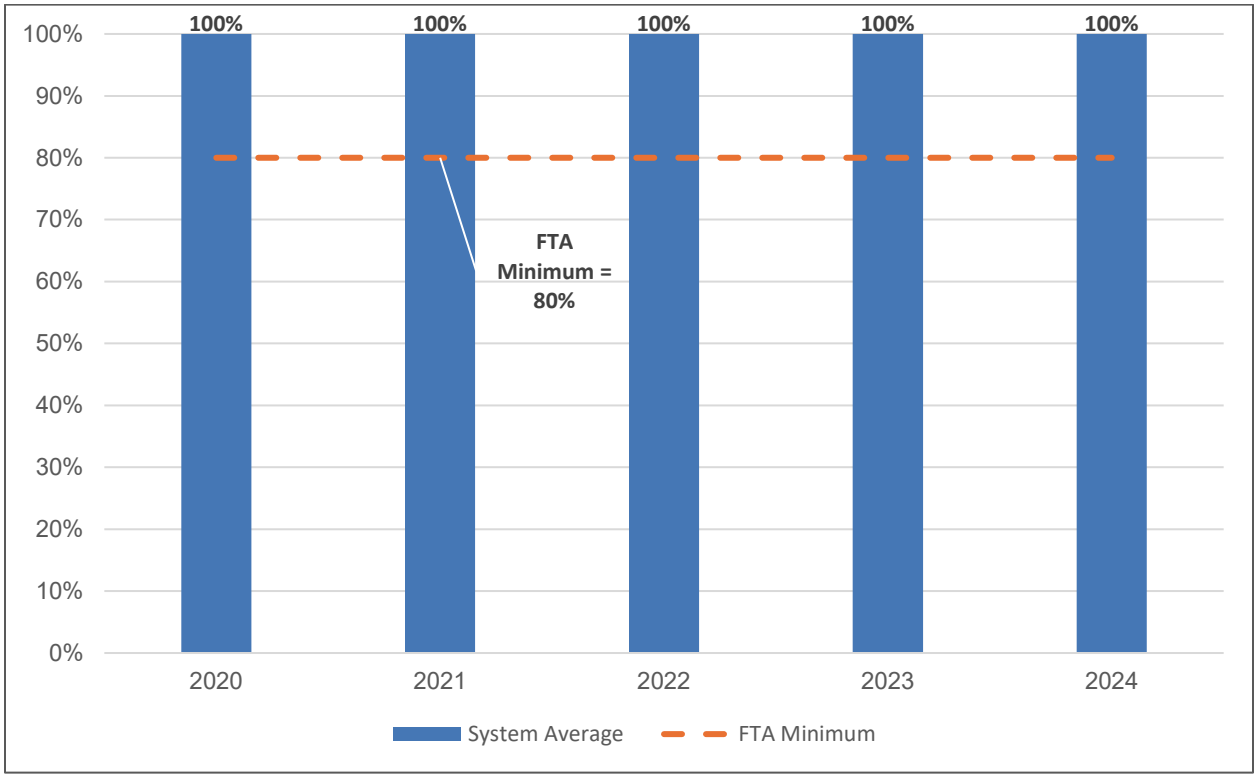
Figure 22. Miles Between Road Calls, Fixed Route and Demand Response (FY 2020-FY 2024)



Source: MART (2025)

MART completed preventive maintenance work on time for all modes between FY 2020 and FY 2024 (Figure 23). This meets the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) minimum of 80 percent on-time completion.

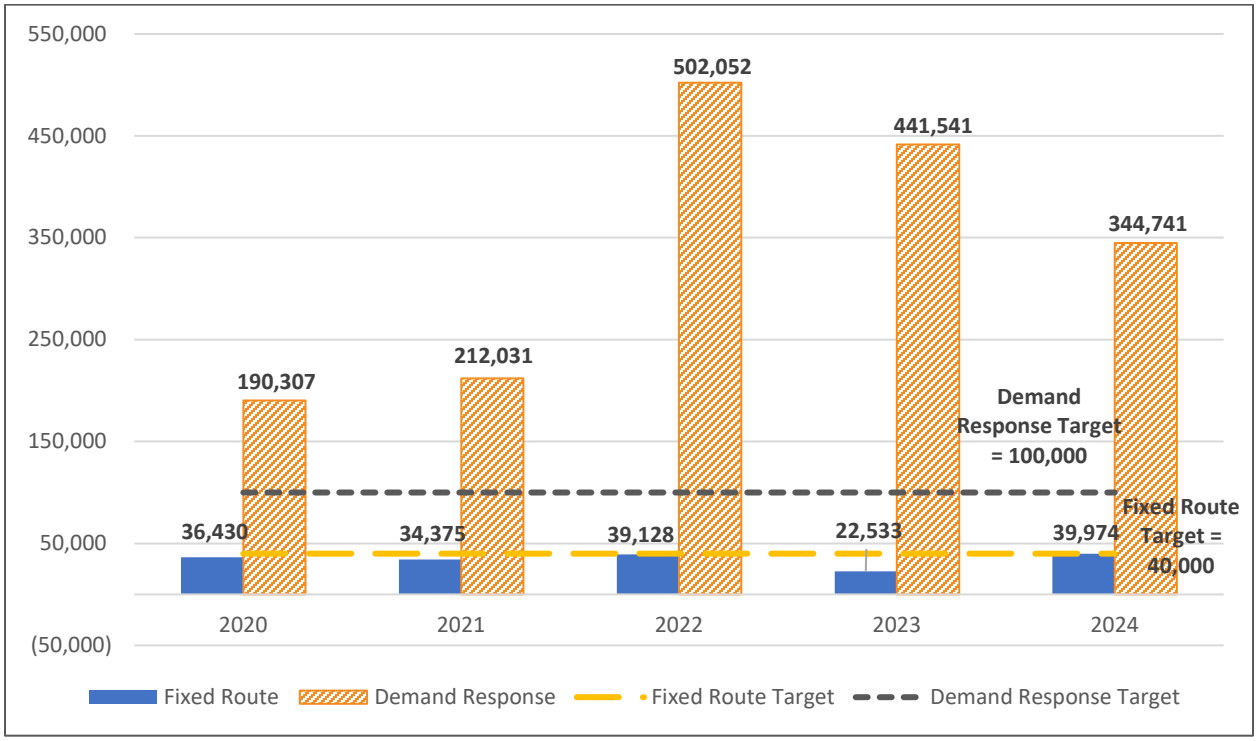
Figure 23. Preventive Maintenance Performed On Time (FY 2020-FY 2024)



Source: MART (2025)

MART experienced an increase in major mechanical failures on fixed route and demand response vehicles with fewer miles between failures on average (Figure 24). MART sets targets, documented in its Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan (PTASP), for mean miles between major mechanical failures (MART 2025b). Demand response service met MART targets each year, though fixed route service did not meet the RTA's target of 40,000 miles in any year.

Figure 24. Mean Miles Between Major Mechanical Failures (FY 2020-FY 2024)



Source: MART (2025)

4.5.2 Vehicles

MART operates a total of 207 revenue vehicles, with buses and cutaway vehicles making up a significant portion of the rolling stock (Table 15). Table 15 also provides the percentage of vehicles at or past their useful life benchmark.

Table 15. Active Equipment Inventory Summary (FY 2024)

Vehicle Type	Total Number	Average Age	Average Mileage	Percentage at or past Useful Life Benchmark
Bus	25	15.9	285,435	10.53%
Cutaway	147	6.4	111,208	10.34%
Trucks or other rubber tire vehicles	7	17.7	111,103	16.13%
Automobile	23	6.3	59,148	0%
Van	5	9.0	111,103	0%

Source: MART (2025)

4.5.3 Facilities

MART owns several facilities including three passenger transfer centers, three maintenance facilities, two storage facilities, and three parking facilities in addition to the headquarters in Fitchburg (Table 16). Half of MART's facilities have a Transit Economic Requirements Model (TERM) rating of 4, on a scale of 1 to 5, indicating the facilities are in good condition. The remaining facilities are rated 3 on the TERM scale, indicating the facilities are in adequate condition.

Table 16. Facility Inventory Summary

Facility Name	Type	Location	Landowner the Facility is on	Direct Capital Responsibility	TERM Rating
55 Authority Drive	Passenger - Bus transfer center	55 Authority Drive, Fitchburg	MART	Yes	4
Gardner Maintenance Facility	Maintenance facility (service and inspection)	555 Main Street, Gardner	MART	Yes	3
Storage Facility	General purpose maintenance facility/depot	840 Main Street	MART	Yes	4
100-160 North Main Street	Passenger - Bus transfer center	100-160 Main Street	MART	Yes	4
Maintenance Garage	General purpose maintenance facility/depot	1427R Water Street	MART	Yes	3
Bus, Training & Taxi Depot	General purpose maintenance facility/depot	100 Main Street	MART	Yes	3
Parking Garage	Parking structure	36-44 Nashua Street	MART	Yes	3
Parking Garage	Parking structure	144-160 Main Street	MART	Yes	3
Headquarters	Administration office / Sales office	1427R Water Street	MART	Yes	4
Storage Facility	General purpose maintenance facility/depot	840 North Main Street	MART	Yes	4
150 Main Street	Passenger - Bus transfer center	150 Main Street, Fitchburg	MART	Yes	4
573 South Street	Surface parking lot	573 South Street, Athol	MART	Yes	3

Source: MassDOT (2025)

4.5.4 Technology

MART began implementing the Passio Technologies system in May 2021 to support its computer aided dispatch (CAD)/automatic vehicle location (AVL) and APC functions. However, the agency has not fully transitioned away from manual passenger counting due to ongoing issues with the APC system, including functionality problems and route configuration challenges. At present, MART's CAD/AVL system is not certified for National Transit Database (NTD) reporting. Although there have been attempts to complete the certification process in the past, MART has encountered several obstacles. Nonetheless, the agency is currently working diligently to resolve these issues and move toward certification.

With the introduction of fare-free service, MART has become more reliant on APC data for tracking ridership. However, the lack of fare collection means there is no secondary method — such as revenue-based validation — to verify passenger counts. Under a fare-paying model, the amount collected would typically serve as a way to cross-check APC-reported ridership figures. Because of these limitations, MART continues to rely heavily on manual counts to ensure accuracy in reporting and planning. Until the APC system is fully functional and certified, manual counts remain the most reliable method for ridership data.

Additionally, though MART has had an on-demand system in place for roughly a decade, the RTA anticipates evaluating alternative vendors in the near future. While MART's existing third-party platform supports core service operations, the software presents two key issues. The first being occasional performance issues when booking trips (long loading times, delays in operation). These performance issues can be particularly challenging for MART staff assisting customers over the phone by creating unnecessary and unexpected delays. Secondly, internal review of trip data has led to the identification of several opportunities for improved trip optimization. Vehicle assignments and scheduling may not be fully maximized for efficiency under the current system. This has impacts on MART's overall fleet utilization. Overall, MART is seeking solutions that improve trip optimization, enhance fleet utilization, and further automate dispatching to support more efficient and reliable service delivery.

4.6 Policies and Procedures

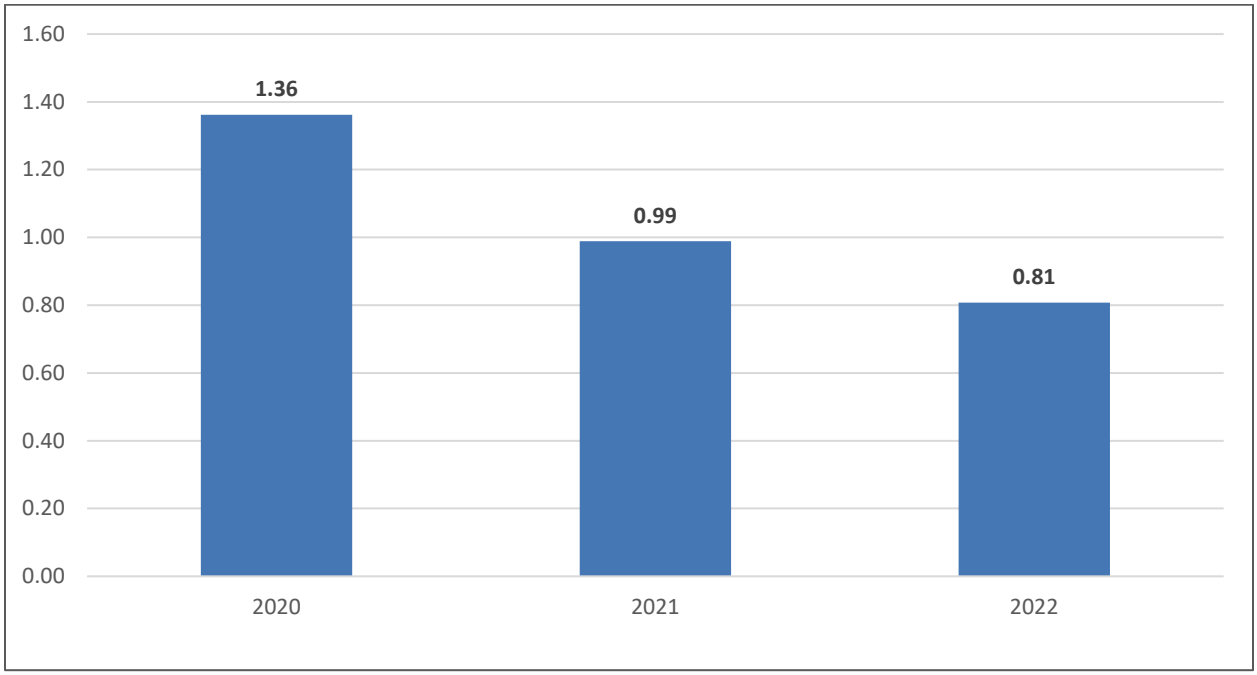
MART maintains several policies and procedures including formal processes for customer complaints as well as rules for riding. MART currently operates on a flag stop system where riders wishing to board the bus must signal the bus driver by raising their arm as the bus approaches. Prohibited behaviors onboard buses include smoking, eating and drinking, loud music, littering, graffiti, or other destructive and disruptive behaviors. Pets (not service animals) and bicycles are not permitted onboard (MART 2025c). Other guidelines include MART's Monthly Ride Service Guidelines, which specify that service is curb to curb, pickup windows, maximum time bus drivers will wait, and payment due dates (MART 2025a).

MART also recently formed a Safety Committee and regularly updates its PTASP. The PTASP documents MART's safety policies and procedures for all agency employees. It also outlines the agency's safety and security targets (MART 2025b).

4.7 Safety and Security

Preventable accidents per 100,000 miles fluctuated from FY 2020 to FY 2024, between 0.81 and 1.36 preventable accidents per 100,00 miles (Figure 25).

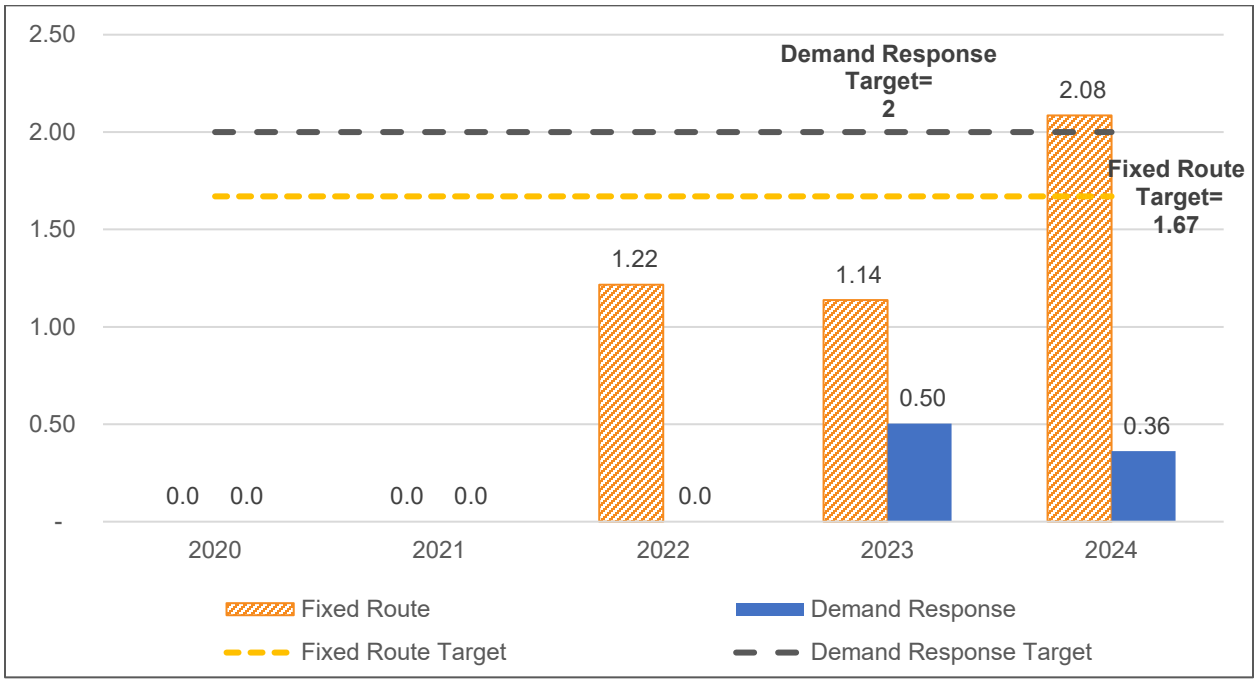
Figure 25. Number of Preventable Accidents per 100,000 Revenue Miles, Demand Response and Fixed Route (FY 2020-FY 2022)



Source: MART (2025)

MART has a target of zero fatalities for both demand response and fixed route service, as documented in its PTASP. MART met this target during the FY 2020 to FY 2024 time period. Injuries for fixed route and demand response were both zero in FY 2020 and FY 2021. Injury rates per one million miles are shown in Figure 26. In FY 2022, MART had 1.22 injuries per one million miles for fixed route and zero for demand response service. FY 2024 had the highest number of injuries with 2.08 for fixed route service and 0.34 for demand response.

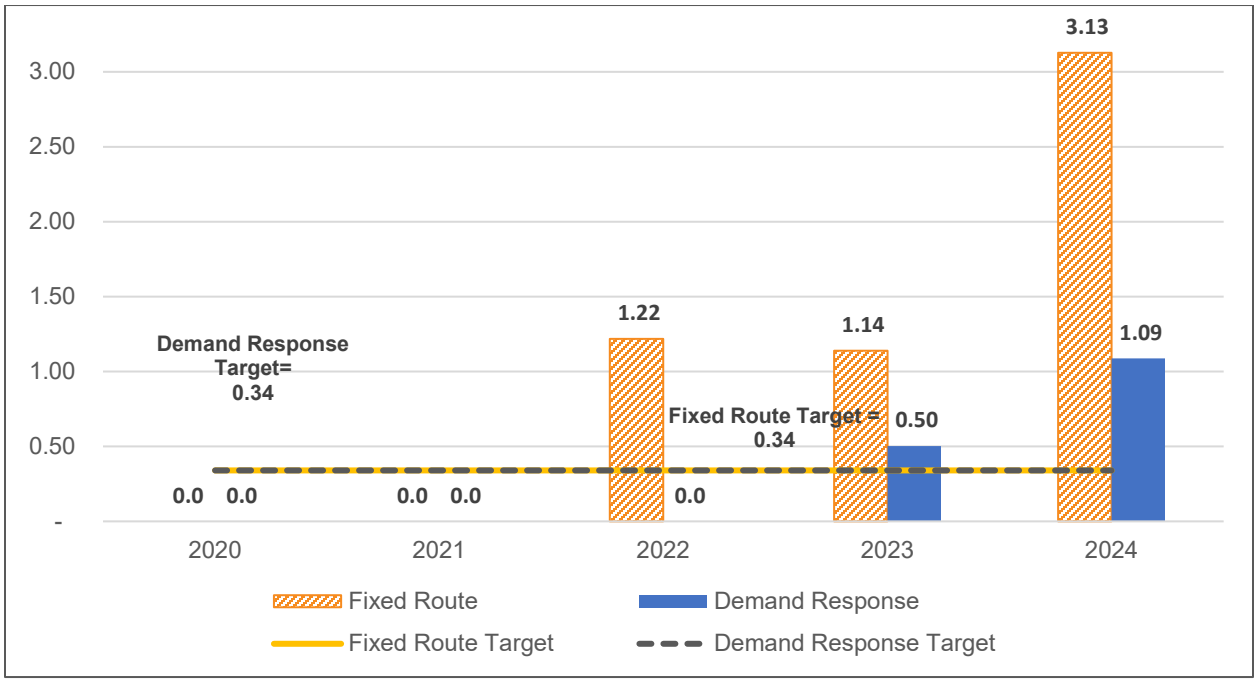
Figure 26. Number of Injuries per Million Vehicle Revenue Miles (FY 2020-FY 2024)



Source: MART (2025)

A major safety event is defined by FTA as all safety and security events that meet a NTD major event threshold for mandatory reporting (FTA 2020). MART targets zero safety events per 1,000,000 miles for demand response and fixed route. MART had 3.13 safety events for fixed route service and 1.09 demand response safety events per one million miles between FY 2020 and FY 2024 (Figure 27).

Figure 27. Number of Safety Events Million Vehicle Revenue Miles (FY 2020-FY 2024)



Source: MART (2025)

4.8 Peer Agency Analysis

As part of the CRTP update, a peer review was conducted to gain an understanding of how other similar systems are operating transit service. This peer review explores five transit authorities that operate in similar conditions. Although each transit system and route is unique, the similarities and differences in these five peers provide useful insight into how transit service is provided and operated throughout the country.

Peers were chosen using iNTD, which assigns transit agencies across the country and their service areas with likeness scores for demographic and service metrics summarized in Table 17 and Table 18, respectively. After excluding outliers (transit properties with two or more characteristics that differed from MART), iNTD's overall likeness score was used to rank peers and select the top five (FDOT 2025). MART's service area population is close to the peer average though the service area is more rural than three of five peers. Population growth rate differs slightly from the peer average as two peers have significantly lower growth rates compared to MART.

Table 17. Peer Systems Census Data

System	Town	State	Population	Population Density	10-Year Population Growth Rate	Percent Poverty
Green Mountain Transit Authority	Burlington	VT	292,211	141	5.5%	9%
Eerie Metropolitan Transit Authority	Erie	PA	189,872	2,466	−7.1%	16%
Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District	Urbana	IL	136,612	3,332	−7.4%	21%
Stark Area Regional Transit Authority	Canton	OH	375,586	646	−4.0%	12%
Greater Roanoke Transit Company	Roanoke	VA	217,312	5,054	1.4%	13%
Peer Average	N/A	N/A	242,319	2,328	−2.3%	14%
Montachusett Regional Transit Authority	**Fitchburg**	**MA**	**228,778**	**367**	**3.2%**	**12%**

Source: 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates

Table 18. Peer Systems Operating Data (FY 2023)

System	Ridership (Unlinked Passenger Trips)	Percentage of Service Miles Demand Response	Operating Budget	Revenue Miles Operated	Revenue Hours Operated	Farebox Revenue
Green Mountain Transit Authority	2,455,808	46%	$24,187,493	3,573,941	203,894	$2,013,642
Erie Metropolitan Transit Authority	1,423,465	30%	$22,331,761	2,594,434	184,583	$4,606,141
Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District	8,573,106	13%	$44,048,498	3,332,094	301,722	$6,737,491
Stark Area Regional Transit Authority	1,387,558	37%	$29,918,737	3,662,134	224,677	$1,674,432
Greater Roanoke Transit Company	1,287,135	29%	$12,744,876	2,266,478	141,514	$1,769,989
Montachusett Regional Transit Authority	**874,511**	**85%**	**$27,314,486**	**5,865,845**	**238,241**	**$2,787,486**

Source: NTD (2023)

A comparison of key service metrics, such as passengers per mile and cost per hour, is presented in Table 19. As shown, MART service generated fewer passenger trips per revenue mile and per revenue hour than peers. MART's cost per hour, however, is lower than all but one of the peer agencies. MART's farebox recovery ratio is higher than two of the peer agencies (Green Mountain Transit Authority and Stark Area Regional Transit Authority), though the subsidy per passenger is higher than all peers.

Table 19. Peer System Performance

System	Passengers per Mile	Passengers per Hour	Cost per Hour	Cost per Passenger	Subsidy per Passenger	Farebox Recovery
Green Mountain Transit Authority	0.69	12.04	$118.63	$9.85	$9.03	8.3%
Erie Metropolitan Transit Authority	0.55	7.71	$120.98	$15.69	$12.45	20.6%
Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District	2.57	28.41	$145.99	$5.14	$4.35	15.3%
Stark Area Regional Transit Authority	0.38	6.18	$133.16	$21.56	$20.36	5.6%
Greater Roanoke Transit Company	0.57	9.10	$90.06	$9.90	$8.53	13.9%
Montachusett Regional Transit Authority	**0.15**	**3.67**	**$114.65**	**$31.23**	**$28.05**	**10.2%**

Source: NTD (2023)

5 Market Evaluation

This chapter includes an overview of the existing demographic and socioeconomic characteristics for the MART service area. A market assessment can identify areas for existing and future connectivity based on population, job, and transit demand factors. This market assessment utilizes US Census Bureau's 2018-2022 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates (US Census Bureau 2023), the Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) 2022 data set (US Census Bureau 2025b) for the demographic data, and Replica data (Replica 2024) for the number of transit trips taken.

5.1 Demographic Analysis

Certain populations have a high propensity to ride transit. This demographic analysis considers several key population indicators of transit use and demand to guide MART's transit service planning. These are:

- Population Density: Population density is the key determinant of transit use, with transit offering a more efficient way to move many people in a constrained area than personal vehicles. Knowing the population density of the different parts of their service area can help transit agencies identify and plan for the most suitable types of transit to offer across multiple locations.
- Older Adult Population: Older adults are those residents 65 years of age or older. As people age, their ability to safely operate a personal vehicle often becomes limited, making transit or other shared transportation a vital part of maintaining mobility and accessing shops, medical resources, and entertainment.
- Youth Population: Youth are considered to be under the age of 18 years old. Many children and teenagers rely on transit to reach school, activities, sports, etc., often at times when their caregivers or school-sponsored transportation is unavailable.
- Median Household Income and Low-Income Population: Low-income households, defined as households earning 100 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL), are important measures to understand the potential for transit demand, as low income individuals and households tend to rely on transit. FPL varies by the number of people in the household; in 2023, the FPL was $14,580 for a household of one person and $30,000 for a household of four.
- Zero-Vehicle Households: Zero-vehicle households are those with no access to a private vehicle. They are likely to rely on transit service as a reliable source of transportation to meet their mobility needs.
- Populations other than Non-Hispanic White: Demographic groups other than non-Hispanic white populations are likely to rely on transit.
- Population with Disabilities: Those with a physical or mental disability are less likely to be able to operate a personal vehicle and often rely on transit use, especially paratransit services.
- Title VI Indicators: Title VI indicators combine low income and population other than non-Hispanic white (as previously described) to guide Title VI planning efforts.
- Job Density: The density of jobs, like population density, indicates a concentration of trip generators that may be well-served by transit, especially at shift changes that may result in many people commuting to or from work at the same time.

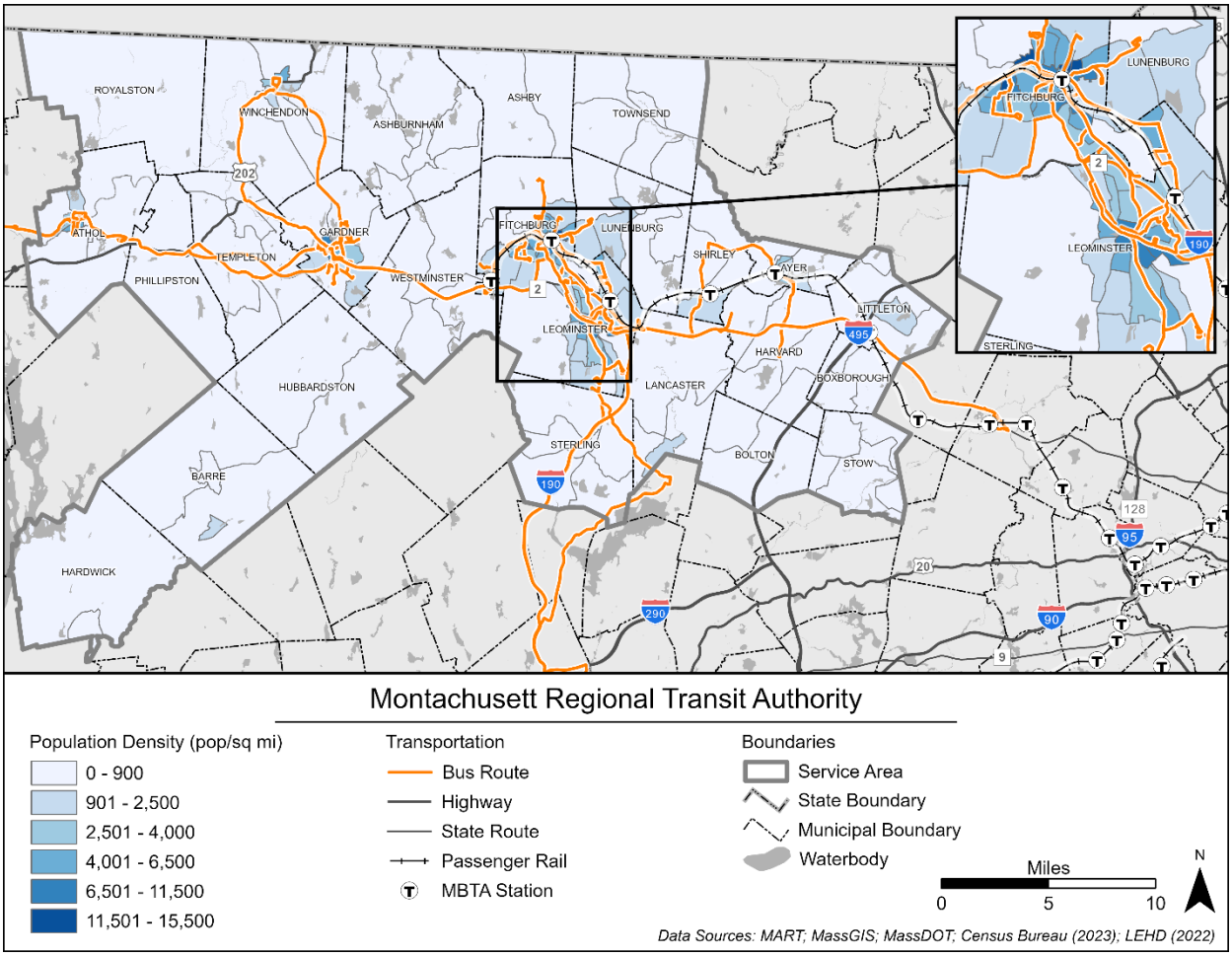
Together, these demographic indicators of the populations that have a high propensity to depend (and therefore take) transit enable MART to better contextualize existing service and best meet the unmet needs of different segments of the community. Sections 5.1.1 through 5.1.10 illustrate the distribution of each demographic indicator throughout MART's service area.

Note: The demographic analysis is performed at the Census Block Group level. A Census Block Group is made up of a cluster of Census Blocks (the smallest geographic unit) within a Census Tract. It typically contains between 600 and 3,000 people.

5.1.1 Population Density

The population density, or population per square mile, in the MART service area is shown on Figure 28. The average population density of the MART service area is 2,222 people per square mile. Population density is highest in central Fitchburg where MART is headquartered. Additional pockets of concentrated population are seen in Leominster, Gardner, Athol, and Winchendon. Overall, areas of high relative density are served by fixed routes.

Figure 28. Population Density



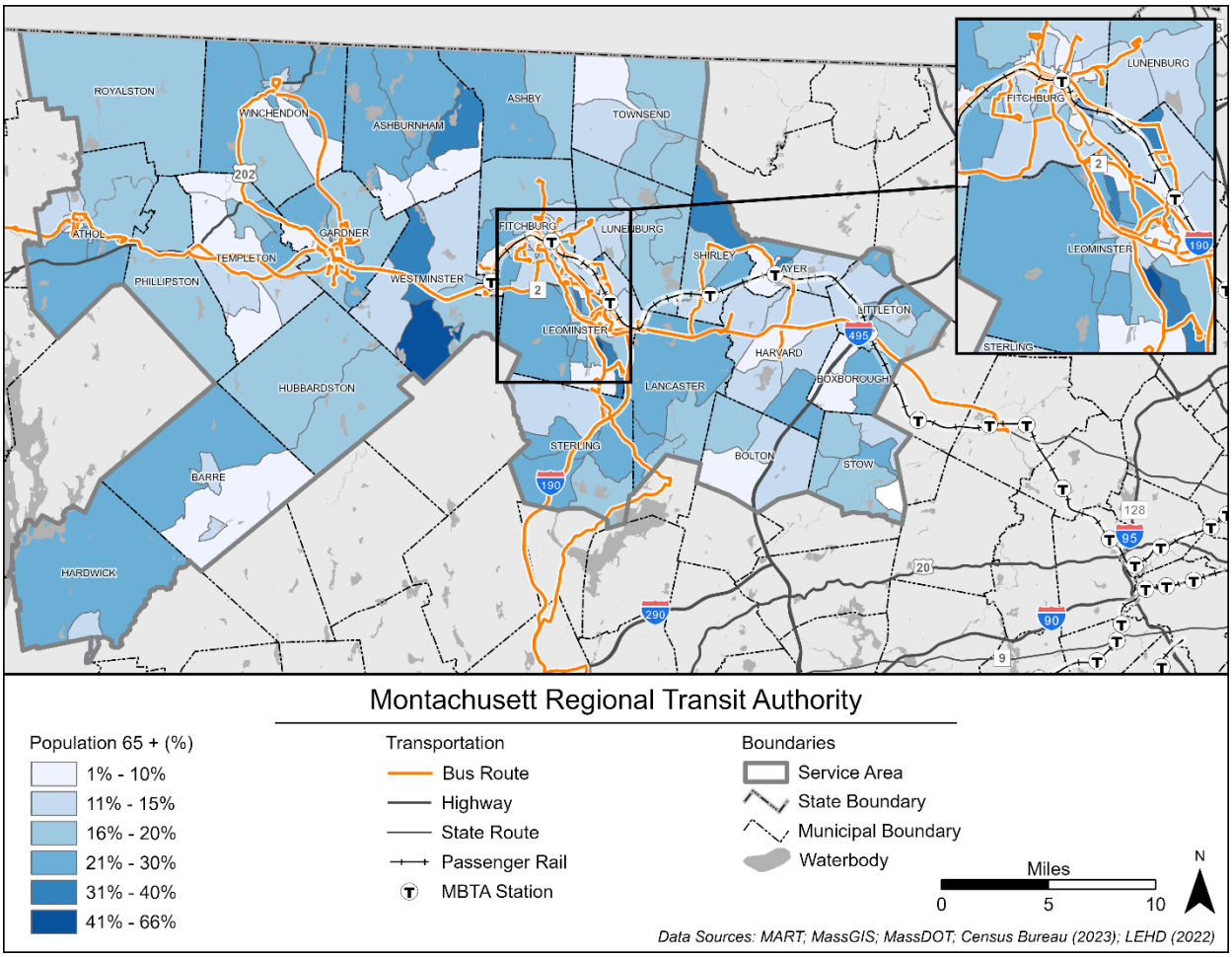
Source: AECOM (2025)

5.1.2 Older Adult Population

Older adults, defined as people equal to or greater than 65 years of age, are likely to be transit dependent and/or prefer utilizing transit to maintain their independence to access medical appointments, grocery stores, recreational opportunities, and more. As shown on Figure 29,

the area with the highest percentage of older adults is Westminster. Other pockets of high shares of older adults include parts of Ashburnham, Shirley, Ayer, and Leominster. MART's Route E1, which provides east-west service between Gardner and Fitchburg via Westminster and Leominster, serves the Westminster Senior Center. A concentration of older adults in northeastern Leominster is served by Route 1, and Route 9 serves older adult populations found in southeastern Leominster. Older adult populations in Ashburnham and Shirley are not connected to the MART fixed route network but are served through demand response service provided by the local COAs. Additionally, Shirley residents are eligible for MART Connects taxi service.

Figure 29. Older Adult Population

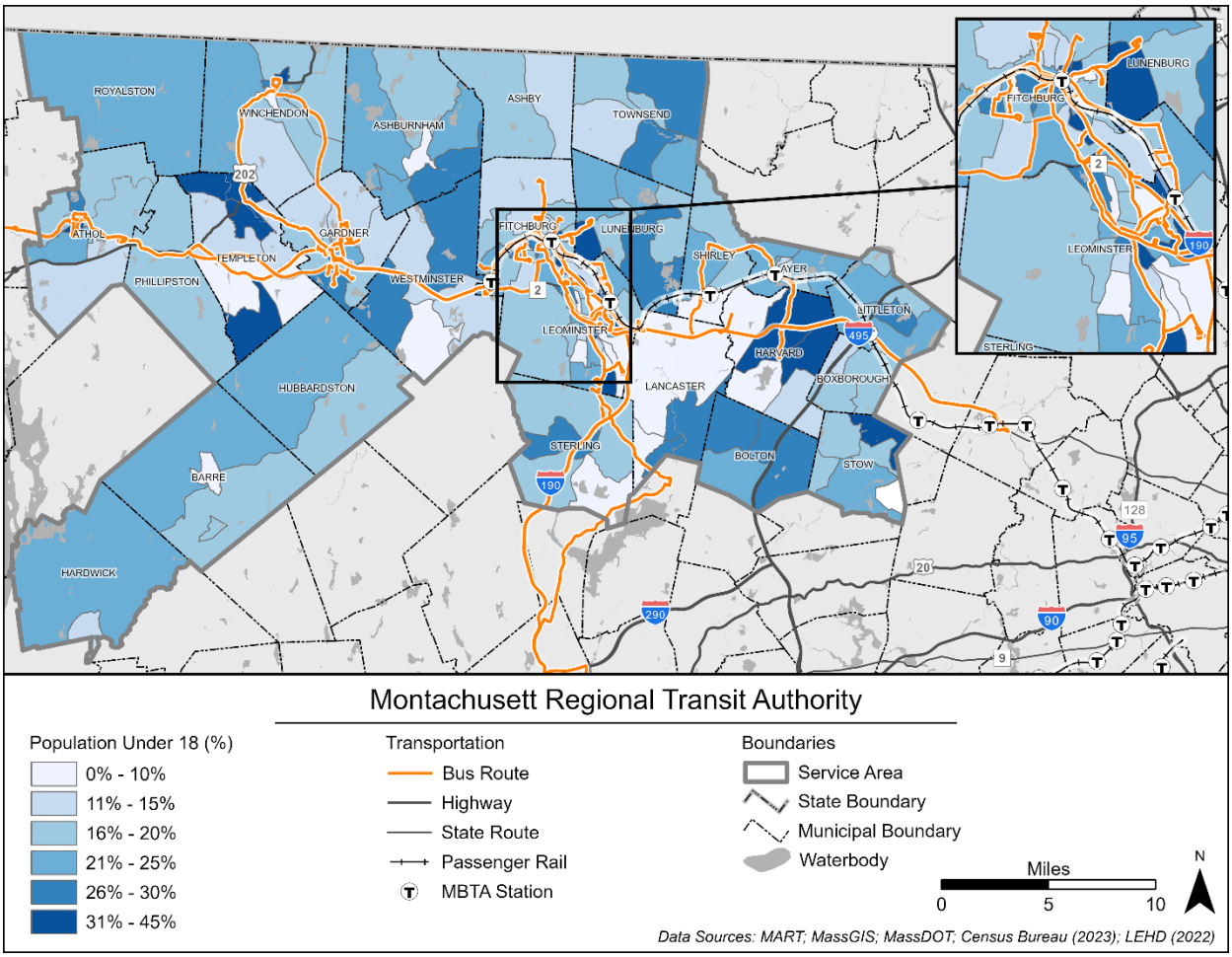


Source: AECOM (2025)

5.1.3 Youth Population

The youth population, defined as the percentage of the population under the age of 18, is shown on Figure 30. Generally, youth are likely to utilize transit as a reliable and convenient form of transportation in lieu of car ownership. High proportions of youth population can be seen in Lunenburg at the end of the Route 7 line and near the Leominster MBTA Commuter Rail station. Other locations include Winchendon and Templeton along Route E4 (Winchendon Link). Other concentrations not served by the existing fixed route system include populations in southern Templeton and northern Stow.

Figure 30. Youth Population

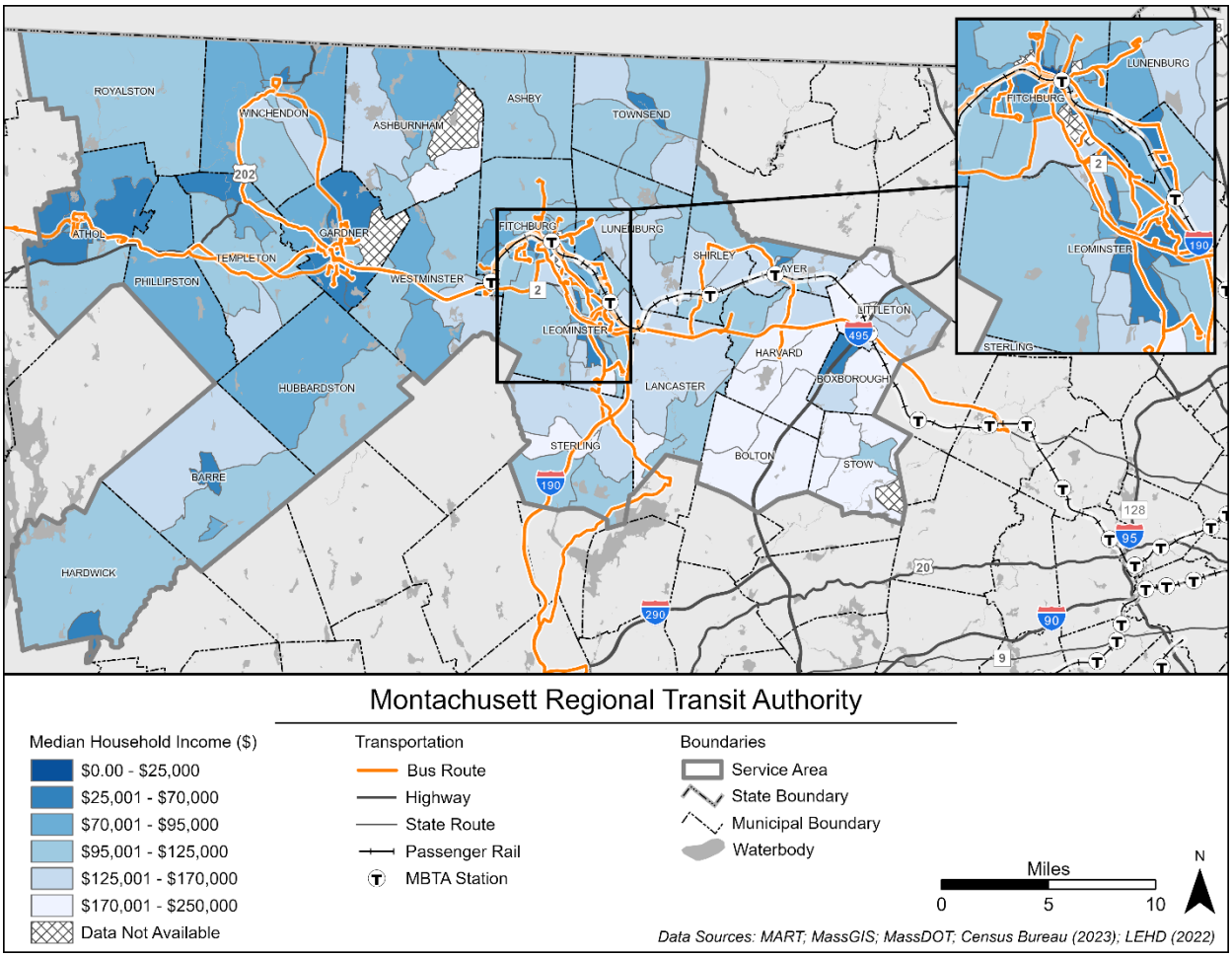


Source: AECOM (2025)

5.1.4 Median Household Income

Areas within the MART service area with the highest proportion of households with the lowest median incomes can be found in eastern Athol, Gardner, and northeast Templeton (Figure 31). Other areas with a high proportion of households with low median incomes are located in Winchendon at the end of Route E4 (Winchendon Link), near the Ayer MBTA station, and the southern edge of Hardwick. Leominster also has a high proportion of low median income households along MART fixed routes. Areas with high proportions of high median income households are located near the eastern edge of MART's service area in the communities of Bolton, Stow, Harvard, and Littleton.

Figure 31. Median Household Income

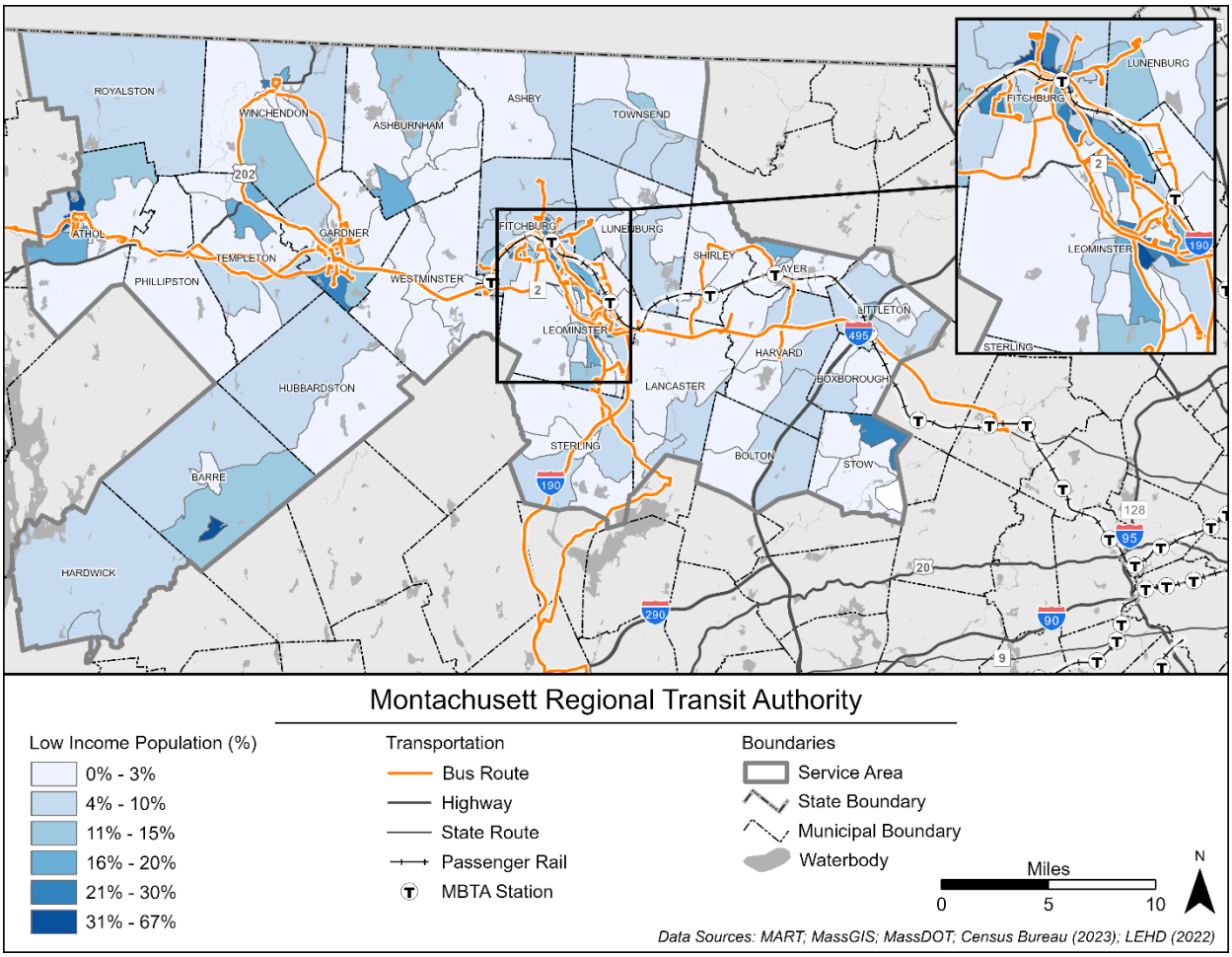


Source: AECOM (2025)

5.1.5 Low-Income Population

Proportions of the population considered low income are displayed on Figure 32. Low income is considered under 100 percent of the FPL. Much of the MART service area has relatively low rates of low income populations. Higher relative percentages of low income populations are found in Fitchburg and Leominster, served by local fixed routes in both communities. There are also portions of Athol, Gardner, and Winchendon with high percentages of low income population that are served by the existing MART system. There is a geographically small area in Barre with a relatively high population density (Figure 28) that has a cluster of low income residents. This area is not currently served by the fixed route network. Barre participates in MART's COA partnership but is not a member community for the MART Connects program.

Figure 32. Low-Income Population

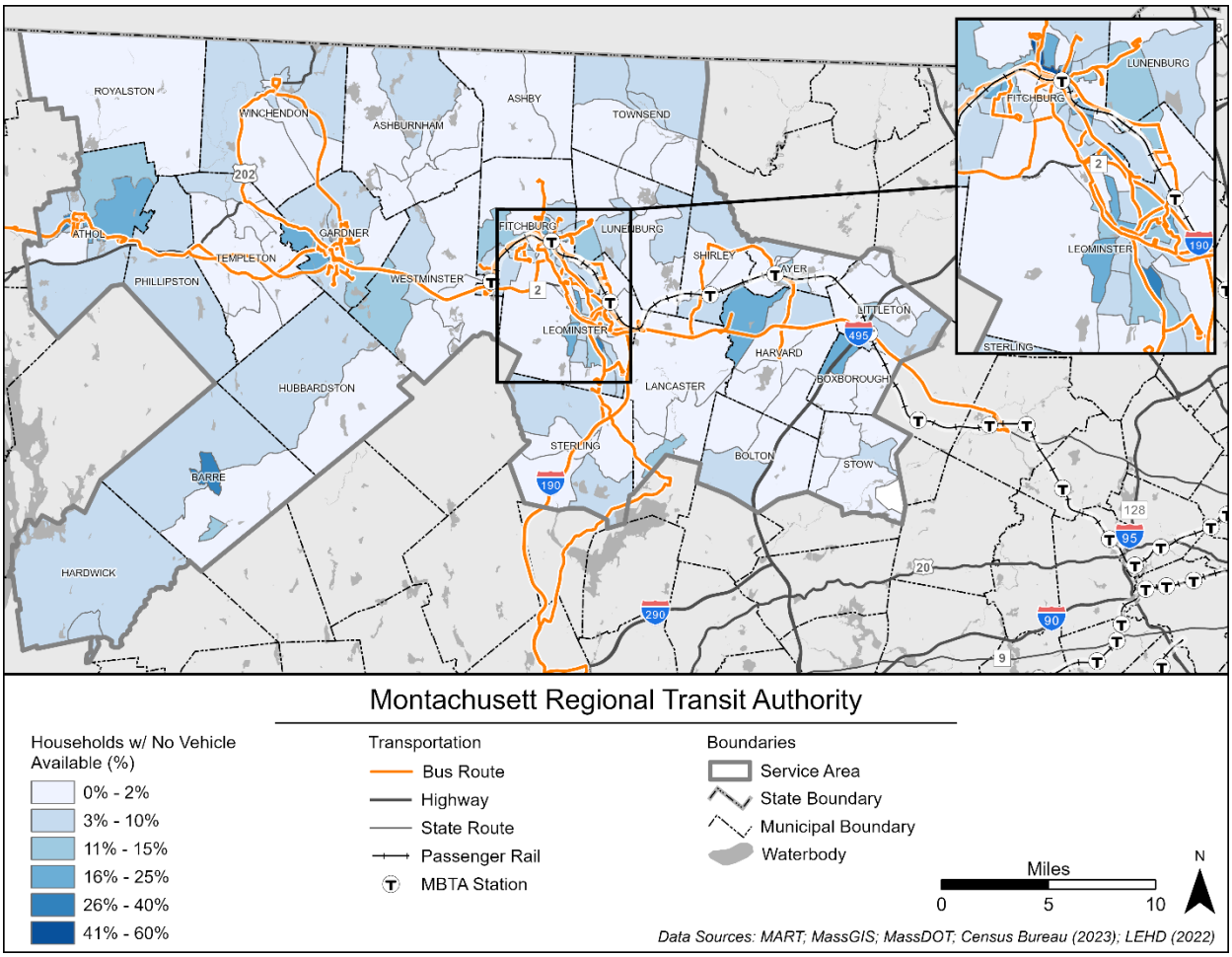


Source: AECOM (2025)

5.1.6 Zero-Vehicle Households

Similar to the share of residents classified as low income, communities in the MART service area have relatively low proportions of zero-vehicle households (Figure 33). Areas with high relative proportions of zero-vehicle households include pockets within Fitchburg and Leominster, western Harvard, western Boxborough, western Gardner, eastern Athol, and central Barre.

Figure 33. Zero-Vehicle Households

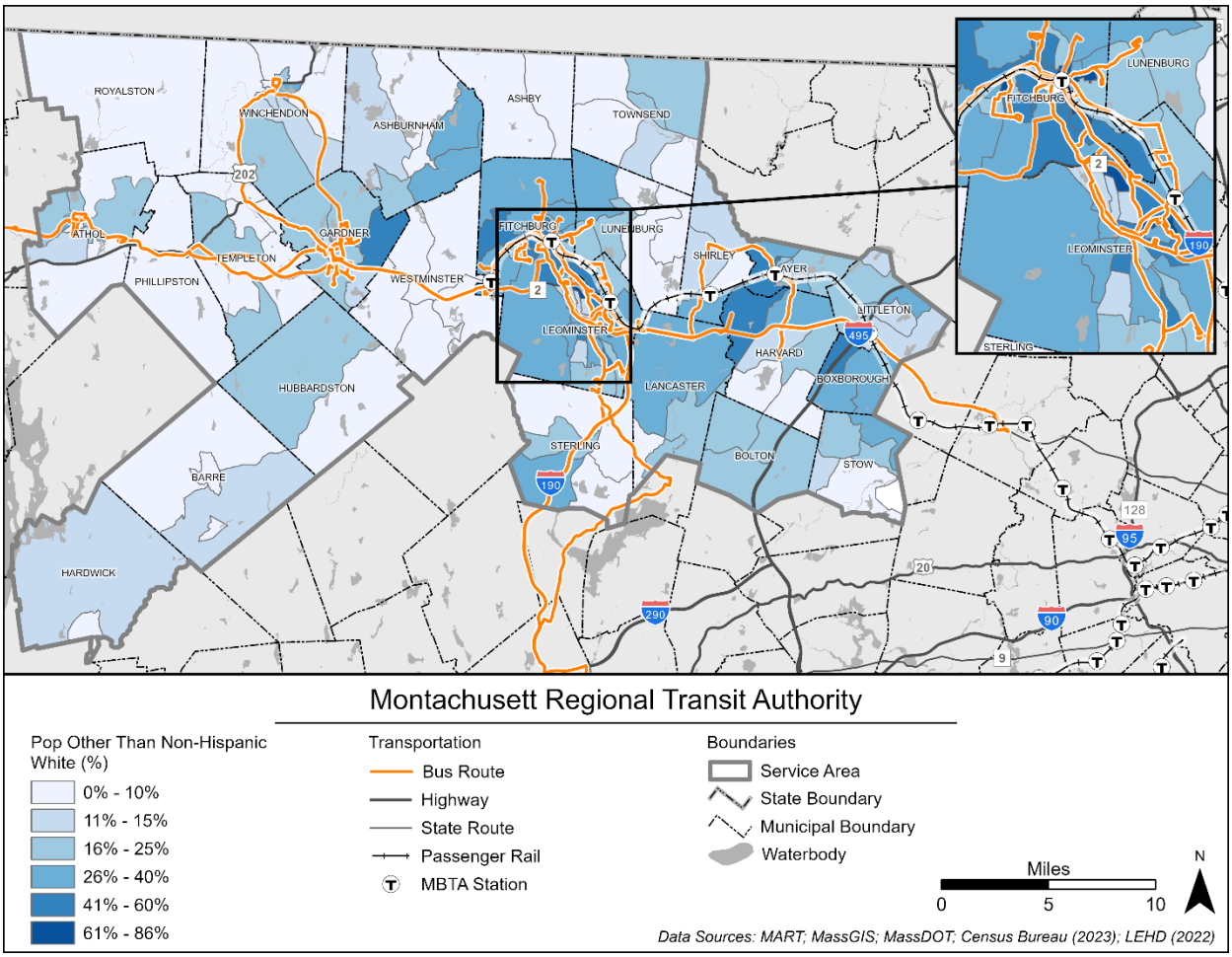


Source: AECOM (2025)

5.1.7 Population Other Than Non-Hispanic White

Figure 34 shows the proportion of the population other than non-Hispanic white. Generally, there are high proportions of non-white (or Hispanic) residents in the eastern half of MART's service area. Fitchburg and Leominster overall have high proportions of non-white populations. Portions of Gardner, Ayer, Harvard, and Boxborough also have high relative proportions.

Figure 34. Population Other Than Non-Hispanic White

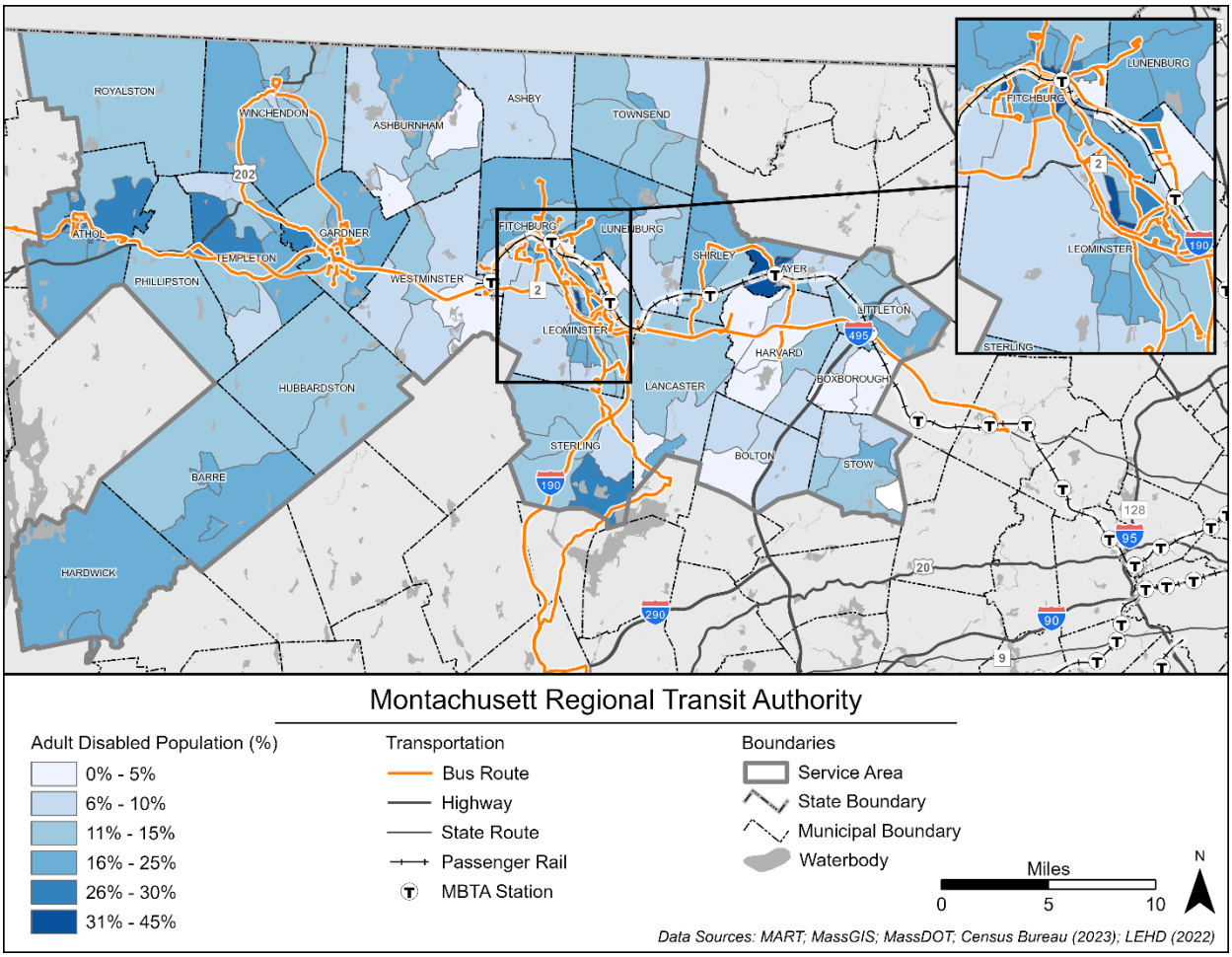


Source: AECOM (2025)

5.1.8 Adult Disabled Population

The proportions of adult disabled population are shown on Figure 35. Areas with the highest percentages of adult disabled residents can be found near the Ayer MBTA station as well as pockets of Leominster and Fitchburg. Other relatively high proportions are located in Athol, Templeton, and Gardner, as well as southern Sterling. Sterling is not connected to the fixed route MART network; however, the community has a local COA that provides transportation for older adults and adults with disabilities. The towns of Fitchburg, Gardner, and Leominster pay for ADA paratransit service throughout their cities (residents ride for free).

Figure 35. Adult Disabled Population



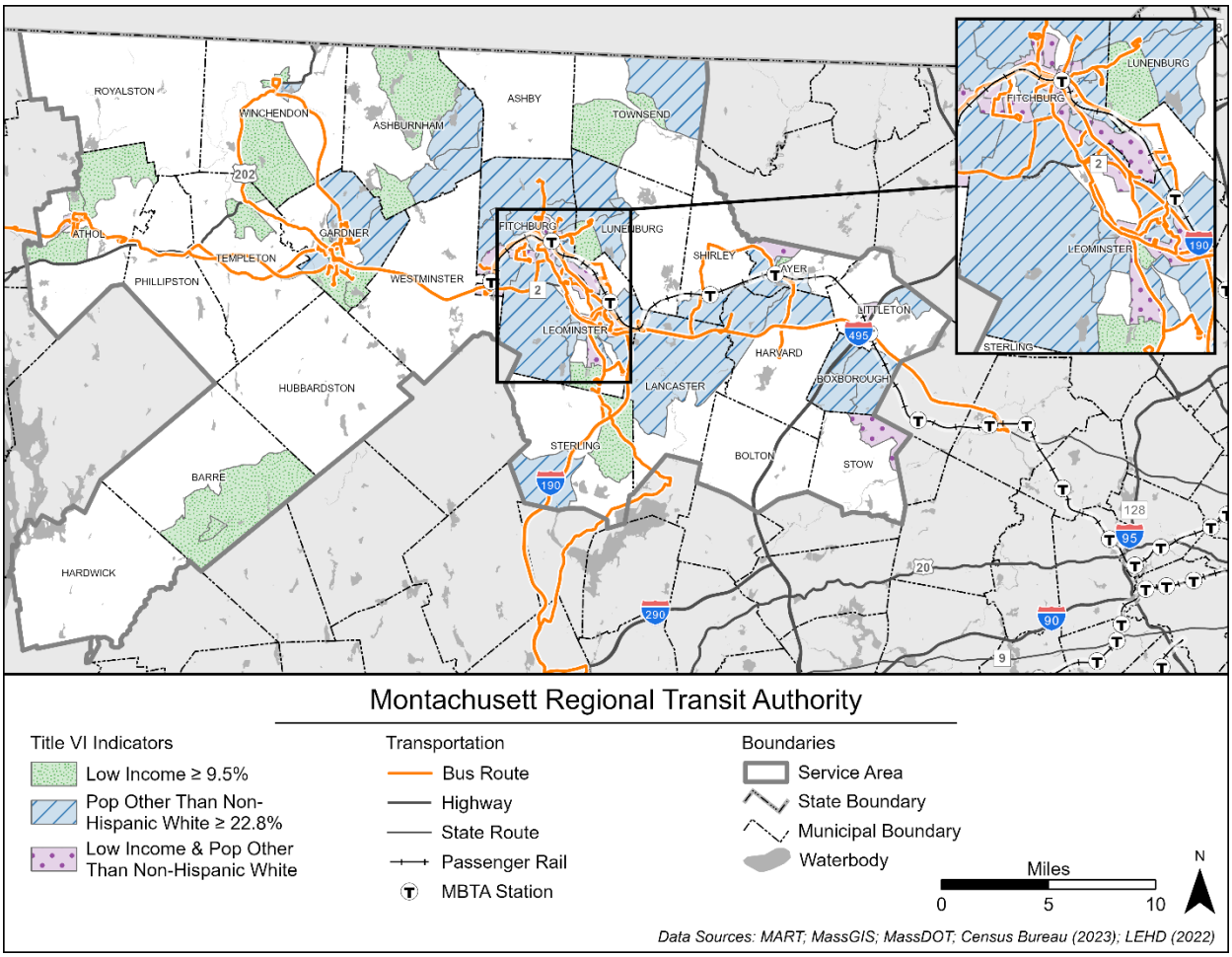
Source: AECOM (2025)

5.1.9 Title VI Population

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination based on race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability in a federally assisted program. Like other transit authorities, MART is required to comply with Title VI requirements as a recipient of federal funds. Title VI indicators include two factors: low income and population other than non-Hispanic white. For Title VI reporting, MART defines high minority areas as those Block Groups where more than 9.5 percent of the population is part of a minority group. The threshold for a Block Group to be considered as having a high percentage of low income households is greater than 22.8 percent.

Figure 36 maps Title VI populations (populations who meet one or both factors identified). Areas where proportions of low income or demographic groups other than non-Hispanic white exceed the set thresholds occur throughout the MART service area. Areas where both thresholds are exceeded are primarily located within Fitchburg and Leominster where the majority of fixed route service is concentrated. Northern Ayer, north of the MBTA station, northern Stow, and central Littleton also contain Title VI populations.

Figure 36. Title VI Population

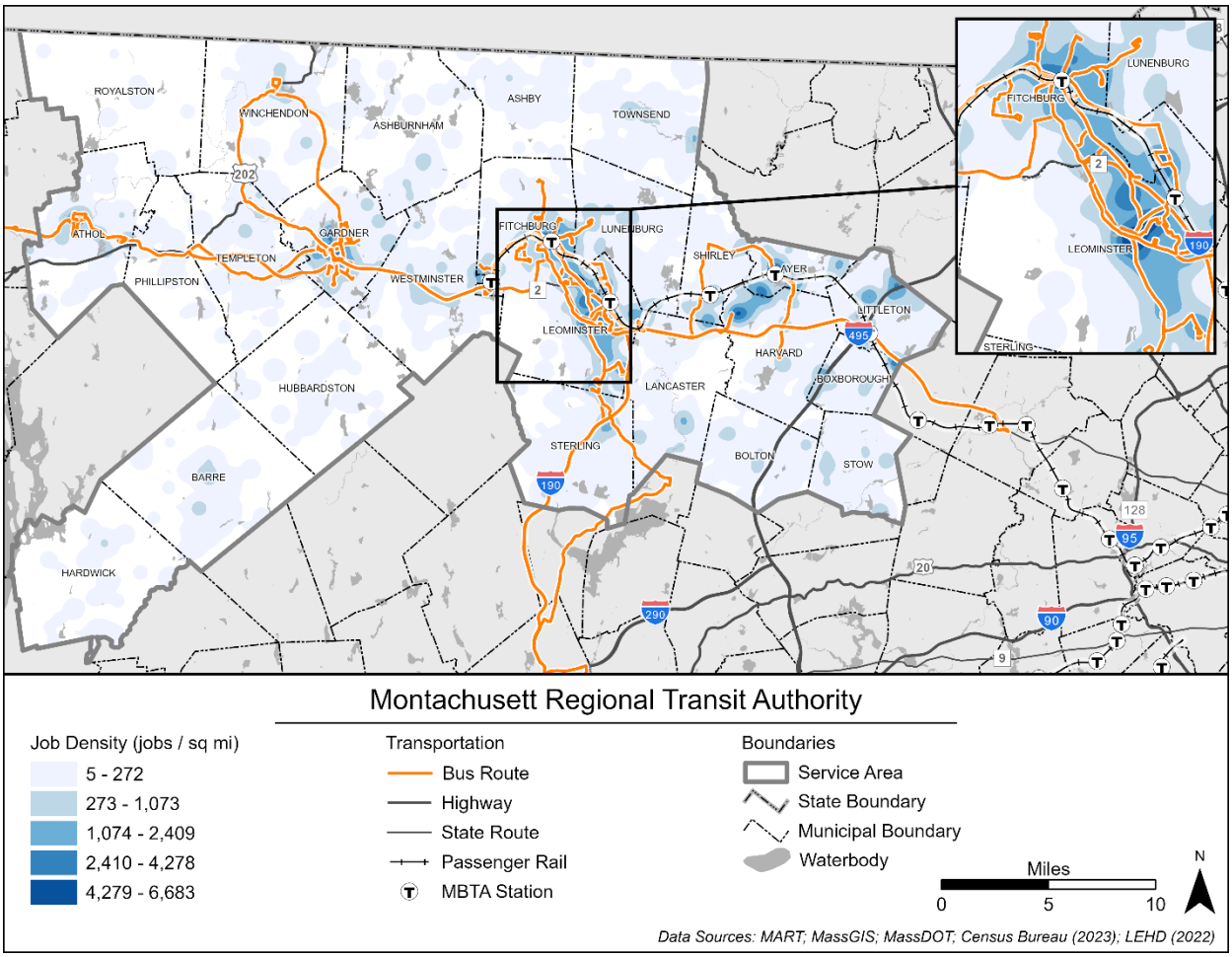


Source: AECOM (2025)

5.1.10 Job Density

Much of the MART service area has low job densities (Figure 37). Jobs are primarily concentrated in central Fitchburg and Leominster and are served by the existing fixed route network. Job clusters can also be found in Gardner and surrounding the Wachusett and Ayer MBTA stations. The Devens area south of Ayer also contains concentrations of jobs served by MART's Devens on-demand taxi service and a MassDOT Microtransit grant. MART service to job clusters in Littleton is available through the MART Connects taxi service. There is currently no regular fixed route service to Littleton.

Figure 37. Job Density



Source: AECOM (2025)

5.2 Transit Score

The transit score map provides a spatial analysis of the demographic characteristics of populations that typically indicate a high propensity to rely on transit. This transit score is a relative measure of how successful a fixed route transit system is expected to be in a region where most residents who can own cars and drive choose to do so. Used in conjunction with a congruency analysis of major transit generators, the transit score can be used to evaluate existing service and to identify areas of potential demand.

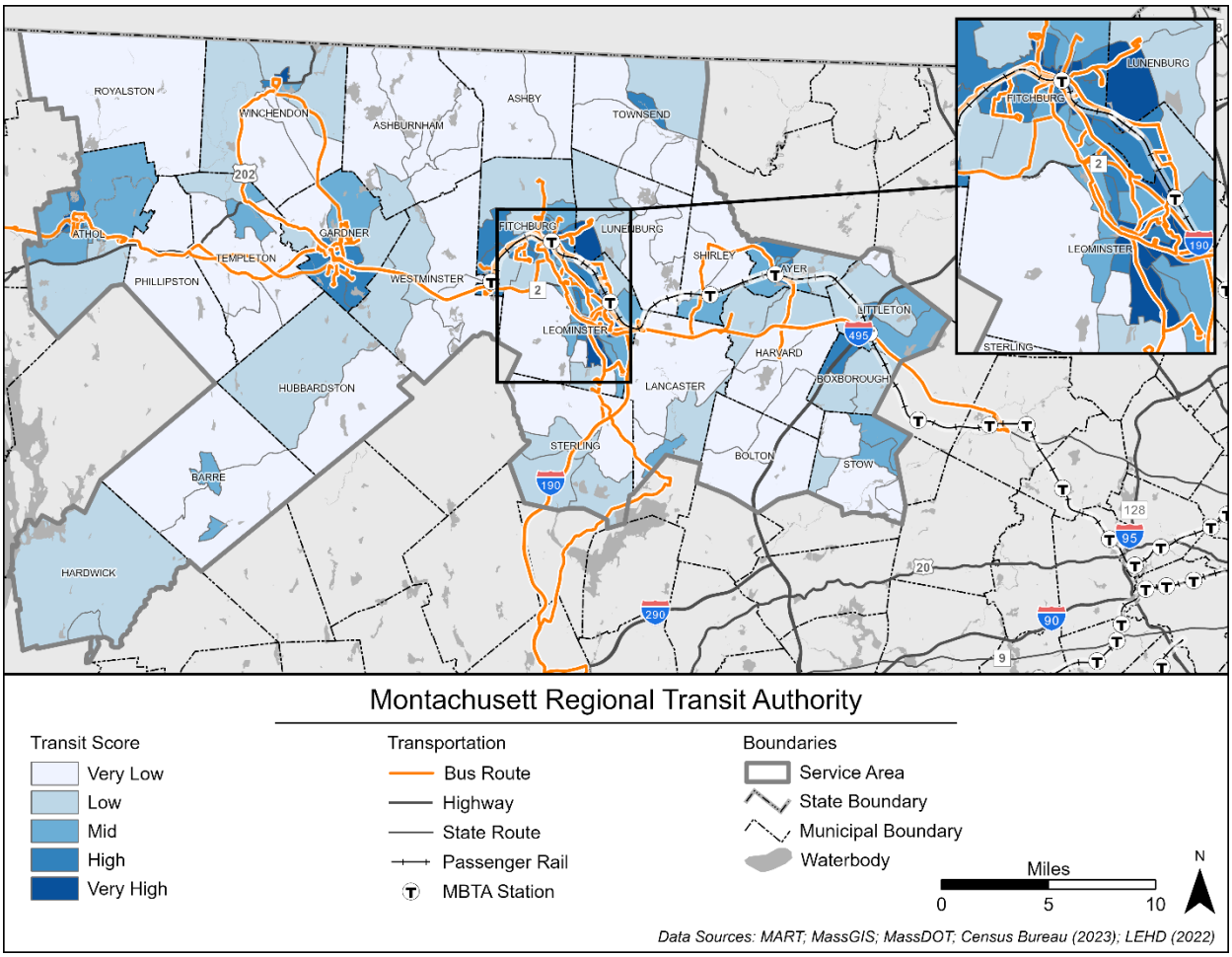
Block Group data were used for this analysis. Transit-oriented variables used for the analysis were:

- Overall population density
- Overall job density
- Density of the population under the age of 18
- Density of the population over the age of 65
- Median household income
- Percentage of the population living below the poverty level
- Percentage of zero-car households

- Percentage of the population other than non-Hispanic white
- Percentage of the population with disabilities
- Number of existing transit trips

Figure 38 maps the combined transit score throughout the MART service area. Overall, MART service aligns with the combined results. Fitchburg and Leominster have the highest scoring areas, indicating the highest level of transit propensity as well as the highest densities of fixed route service. Similarly, Athol and Gardner have areas with high transit scores, as does northern Winchendon. These communities are served by the MART fixed route system. Likewise, the area surrounding the Ayer MBTA station scored high and is served by a fixed regional route. There are areas where high scores indicate a high propensity of the population to need and ride transit. These include high scoring areas in Boxborough, which has a Boxborough Connects loop that serves the main points of interest in the community, which are not currently connected to the fixed route network.

Figure 38. Transit Score



Source: AECOM (2025)

5.3 Public and Stakeholder Engagement

Outreach and engagement for MART's CRTP were undertaken through robust engagement efforts completed in 2024 and 2025 as part of its route redesign initiative. These efforts provided a strong foundation of community input and stakeholder feedback. The focus for the

CRTP shifted to analyzing and integrating the feedback collected as part of these efforts to inform CRTP recommendations.

To supplement the 2024 data, MART distributed a targeted stakeholder survey to town administrators in its service area and held a pop-up event at the Fitchburg ITC. The activities were carried out in 2025, and a diverse range of voices and perspectives were captured to support CRTP development.

Key takeaways from these combined efforts include support for:

- Expanded and refined service coverage. Demand is strong for expanding service to new locations, shortening overly long routes, and improving access to key destinations like Boston hospitals and local neighborhoods.
- Improved frequency and reliability. Riders and stakeholders emphasized the need for more frequent, dependable service.
- Enhanced outreach and rider support. Respondents called for clearer communication through advertising, printed materials, and travel trainers. Listening sessions and targeted outreach were also recommended to better connect with underserved populations.

These takeaways indicate that MART riders and stakeholders value and depend on the transit service it provides and would like MART to expand coverage, increase frequency, and make it as straightforward as possible to use services. They were used in identifying the needs of MART and the population it serves as well as in developing the specific recommendations listed in Chapter 8.

Subsequent sections detail feedback collected during all of MART's engagement efforts.

5.3.1 Route Redesign Community Engagement Activities

In 2024 and 2025, MART explored redesign efforts for its Fitchburg and Leominster fixed routes. The goal of the redesign was to improve efficiency and access by increasing frequency on key routes, adding new express options, and adjusting or discontinuing underused services.

A variety of engagement activities informed these changes and are incorporated into this CRTP.

- Household survey: A targeted mailing campaign in Fitchburg and Leominster in 2024 yielded 1,514 responses, supported by incentives and strategic outreach materials. The survey captured a wide geographic and demographic spread, offering valuable insights into resident needs and preferences.
- Fixed route rider interviews: Conducted at MART's two major hubs, the ITC and Monument Square, these interviews in 2024 gathered direct feedback from active riders on service quality and improvement opportunities.
- Driver feedback initiatives: MART and a consultant team conducted separate studies in 2024 focused on driver perspectives, including interviews with 12 fixed route drivers to understand operational challenges and service delivery issues.
- Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC) Transportation Development Plan: The MRPC developed a transportation plan for Fitchburg, Leominster, and Gardner, released in 2025. As part of this plan, a community survey was conducted, which included input on MART services. Findings from this survey aligned closely with the 2024 studies, reinforcing consistent themes across multiple efforts.

- Political and community leader engagement: MART held targeted meetings in 2025 with local and state officials, including mayors, city councils, and state representatives, to review findings and gather strategic input.
- Public meetings: In-person and virtual meetings were held in Fitchburg and Leominster, supported by extensive multilingual outreach across media, community events, and public spaces. The primary purpose of these meetings was to communicate MART's route redesign efforts and to provide an open forum for community members to share feedback on MART services to inform planning decisions. These meetings were recorded and made available for public comment over a 14-day period.

Several key takeaways emerged from these engagement efforts around:

- Service efficiency and route design. Stakeholders consistently noted that many existing routes were too long, often exceeding an hour, making them inconvenient and difficult to support with higher frequency. In response, MART prioritized shortening routes and increasing frequency where feasible, focusing resources on corridors with high ridership potential.
- Targeted service adjustments. The redesign included the removal of stops with consistently low usage, such as the Department of Motor Vehicles on Route 9, which averaged one rider per day. New service areas were identified based on community input, including direct feedback from the Mayor of Leominster, who emphasized the need for service in the French Hill neighborhood.
- Data-driven planning. Surveys and driver interviews helped pinpoint areas with low ridership, safety concerns, and operational challenges, especially during winter months. These insights guided decisions to reallocate resources and improve route safety and reliability.
- Economic and development considerations. MART considered regional development trends, such as new housing and revitalization efforts in downtown Fitchburg, and the presence of major employers like AIS in Leominster. Small route deviations were proposed to better serve these employment centers and support economic growth.
- Community and political engagement. Feedback from city officials and public meetings reinforced the need for service in underserved areas. While some route changes in low-ridership zones received no public comment, the overall strategy emphasized shifting resources to areas with strong demand and potential for growth.
- Ongoing evaluation. MART is committed to reviewing routes every six months for continued responsiveness to rider needs and community changes. Demand response services were identified as a flexible solution for areas with low fixed route demand.

5.3.2 Pop-Up Event

MART hosted a pop-up outreach event at the Fitchburg ITC and engaged with more than 20 riders. Riders were invited to share their thoughts on current transit services, future improvements, priorities for regional mobility, or anything on their mind. Materials such as maps and informational materials outlining MART's proposed CRTP goals were shared (Figure 39), and feedback was collected on a range of topics.

- Location: Fitchburg Intermodal Transportation Center
- Date/Time: July 15, 2025, 1:30 PM to 4:00 PM

Figure 39. MART Pop-Up Event at Fitchburg Intermodal Transportation Center

Several participants expressed appreciation for existing services, while others highlighted areas for improvement such as later service hours, cleaner buses, and better driver conduct. Takeaways included:

- Strong support for continuing fare-free service due to financial hardship.
- Requests for expanded service hours, especially in the evening and on weekends.
- Concerns about mobile app usability, bus cleanliness, and driver behavior.
- Suggestions for route adjustments and infrastructure improvements (e.g., benches).
- Overall appreciation for the service, with constructive feedback aimed at enhancing the rider experience.

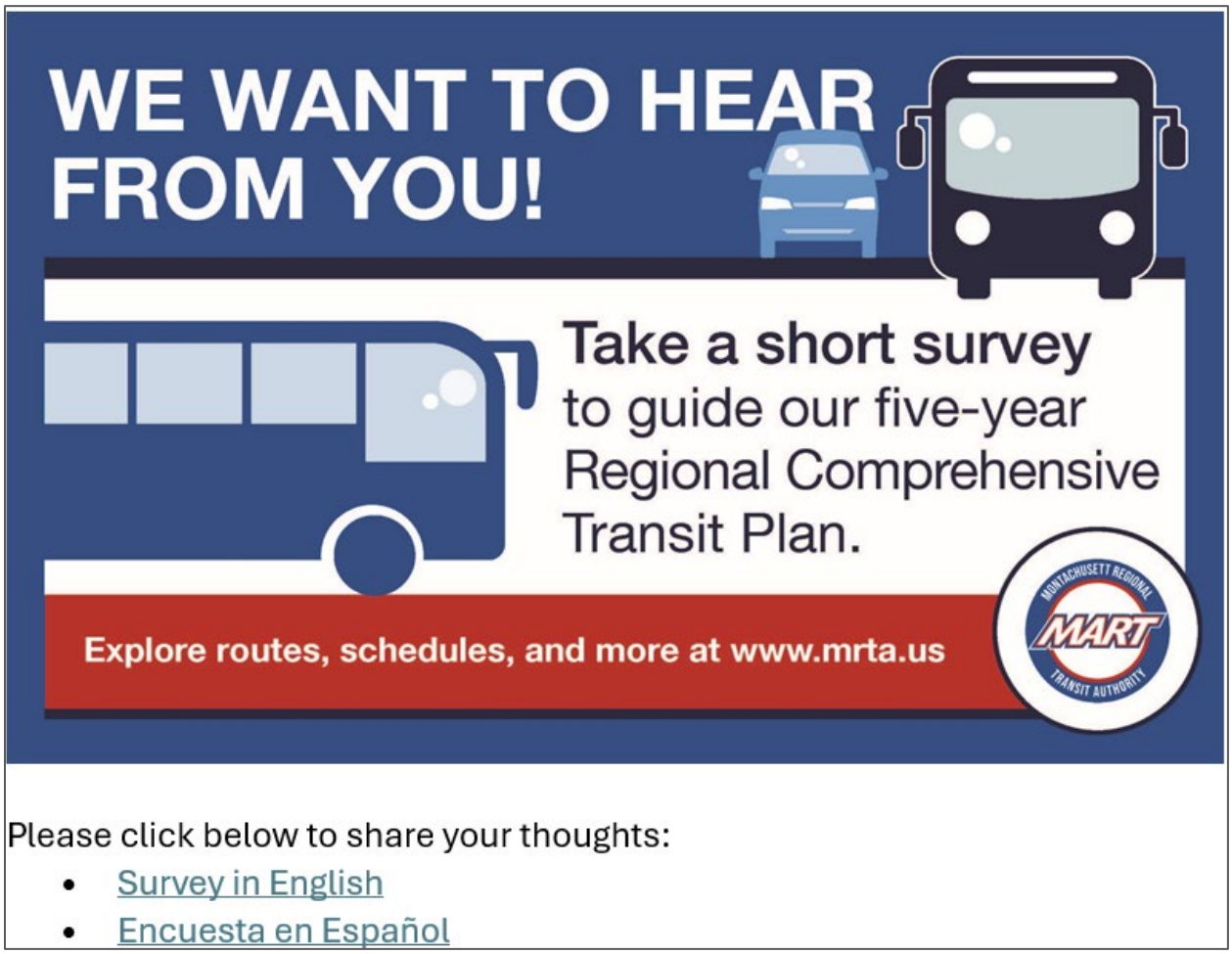
5.3.3 Public Survey Effort

As a primary tool to gather feedback, MART staff developed an online survey that was targeted at town administrators. The purpose of the survey was to get a better understanding of stakeholder preferences regarding current services and gather feedback about the desire for potential improvements or changes.

5.3.3.1 Survey Outreach

To promote participation, MART sent the survey and a graphic (Figure 40) via email to town administrators in Fitchburg, Gardner, Leominster, Townsend, Ashby, Athol, Ayer, Bolton, Boxborough, Lancaster, Littleton, Shirley, Sterling, Stow, Westminster, and Winchendon. An email reminder was also sent midway through the two-week period to encourage additional responses.

Figure 40. MART Survey Promotional Graphic



5.3.3.2 Survey Results Summary

MART's online survey opened on August 22, 2025, and closed September 2, 2025. The survey, which was hosted on Microsoft Forms, was available online in English and Spanish. Many of the survey questions allowed participants to select multiple responses. As a result, percentages given for results may not add to 100 percent. Seven responses were collected. Detailed survey responses can be found in Appendix C.

5.3.3.3 Key Takeaways

The following are key takeaways from the public survey.

- Desire for expansion to new locations and stops
- Desire to connect to other RTAs
- Desire for more frequent service
- Desire for more accessible bus stops
- Need to promote MART through increased advertising and travel training
- Desire for MART services to and from Boston hospitals and Townsend Common

6 Performance Measures

Performance measurement supports data-driven decision-making and is a foundational component of enhancing operational efficiency, improving the customer experience, ensuring safety, and meeting the numerous other goals that a transit agency may have. This chapter outlines the performance measures for MART and targets for each of them. Performance data can be found in Chapter 4.

MART reports performance data on a quarterly basis across a variety of metrics as described in this chapter. The targets are updated annually as mutually agreed upon by MART and MassDOT. Where an RTA is performing well, there is an opportunity for sharing of best practices to other RTAs in the Commonwealth. Where an RTA is not meeting targets, this is an opportunity to assess avenues for potential improvements.

A summary of performance measures is provided in Table 20.

Table 20. Performance Measures Overview

Category	Metric	Definition	Desired Direction
Ridership	Unlinked passenger trips	Number of boardings on public transportation vehicles (unlinked passenger trips)	Higher
Ridership	Unlinked passenger trips per vehicle revenue mile	Unlinked passenger trips divided by total miles operated while vehicles are in service (revenue miles)	Higher
Ridership	Unlinked passenger trips per vehicle revenue hour	Unlinked passenger trips divided by total hours operated while vehicles are in service (revenue hours)	Higher
Financial	Operating expenses per vehicle revenue mile	Total fully allocated operating expense divided by revenue miles	Lower
Financial	Operating expenses per vehicle revenue hour	Total fully allocated operating expense divided by revenue hours	Lower
Financial	Operating expenses per unlinked passenger trip	Total fully allocated operating expense divided by revenue unlinked passenger trips	Lower
Financial	Farebox recovery ratio	Total fully allocated operating expense divided by farebox revenue	Higher
Customer Service & Satisfaction	On-time performance	Vehicle departures that meet the RTA definition of "on-time" (see Section 6.3)	Higher
Customer Service & Satisfaction	Scheduled trips operated	Proportion of scheduled trips which are operated (i.e., not "dropped")	Higher
Asset Management	State of Good Repair	Proportion of capital assets beyond useful life (see Section 6.4)	Lower

Category	Metric	Definition	Desired Direction
Safety	Various	Multiple safety metrics and targets (see Section 6.5)	Varies

Source: NTD Database Manual

6.1 Ridership

Ridership is reported as unlinked passenger trips. Each boarding is counted and summed toward the overall unlinked passenger trip metric. This metric is also normalized to vehicle revenue miles and vehicle revenue hours to better understand how ridership compares to the level of service provided. Monthly data are submitted quarterly and compared to the annual target set by MART. Table 21 shows MART ridership targets.

Table 21. Ridership Metrics and Targets (FY 2026)

Metric	Fixed Route	Demand Response	Demand Taxi
Unlinked passenger trips	503,404	304,027	327,972
Unlinked passenger trips per vehicle revenue mile	0.42	0.15	0.07
Unlinked passenger trips per vehicle revenue hour	7.56	2.53	1.61

Source: MassDOT (2025)

6.2 Financial

Each RTA differs in the level of service, geographic area, modes operated, and other aspects of its operation, and as such financial metrics are reported normalized to revenue miles, revenue hours, and unlinked passenger trips. Typically, each RTA verifies its financial data annually through an end-of-year audit. Therefore, annual data are submitted for comparison against performance targets.

Farebox recovery ratio is a measure of revenue collected through fares as a ratio to operating expenses. As of FY 2026, all RTAs will operate fare-free fixed route service and fare-free complementary demand response (though "premium" service beyond federal ADA requirements may still charge fares). Demand response targets for farebox recovery ratio include subscription services and HST service, services for which MART is currently collecting fares. MART financial targets are displayed in Table 22.

Table 22. Financial Metrics and Targets (FY 2026)

Metric	Fixed Route	Demand Response	Demand Taxi
Operating expenses per vehicle revenue mile	$5.66	$6.27	$3.07
Operating expenses per vehicle revenue hour	$101.06	$103.28	$73.69
Operating expenses per unlinked passenger trip	$13.37	$40.80	$45.78
Farebox recovery ratio	4.00%	26.00%	1.00%

Source: MassDOT (2025)

6.3 Customer Service and Satisfaction

Reliability of service is an important element to providing transit that meets customer needs. Therefore, customer service and satisfaction is measured through on-time performance of fixed route and demand response modes. The definitions of on-time performance for each mode are:

- Fixed Route: Vehicle arrives at stops within a range of one minute early to five minutes late.
- Demand Response: Vehicle arrives either early or at the promised pick-up time.

Scheduled trips operated also measures service reliability, as "dropped" trips may suggest labor capacity limitations, equipment failure, or other operational constraints. From the customer's perspective, they are waiting for a bus that does not arrive, which is especially challenging for routes with less frequent service.

Monthly data are submitted quarterly and compared against the annual target. Table 23 shows MART customer service targets for fixed route and demand response service.

Table 23. Customer Service and Satisfaction Metrics and Targets (FY 2026)

Metric	Fixed Route	Demand Response	Demand Taxi
On-time performance	99.15%	88.00%	100.00%
Scheduled trips operated	100.00%	96.00%	100.00%

Source: MassDOT (2025)

6.4 Asset Management

The state of good repair for capital assets is a priority of MassDOT, FTA, and MART. Equipment in poor condition can result in reliability issues, safety risks, poor customer perceptions, and other problems that impede a successful transit operation. Each RTA has a Transit Asset Management (TAM) Plan that lays out the condition of facilities and priorities for capital improvements. The TAM Plan must be submitted every four years or whenever the RTA updates its targets, whichever comes first. Targets are reviewed annually and any updates are submitted to NTD. Table 24 breaks down MART targets for the percentage of vehicles that have exceeded their useful life, by vehicle type.

Table 24. Asset Management Metrics and Targets (FY 2025)

Metric	Target
Vehicles – Bus	10.00%
Vehicles – Cutaway	10.00%
Equipment – Trucks and Other Rubber Tire Vehicles	12.00%
Facilities – Passenger/Parking	0.00%
Facilities – Admin/Maintenance	0.00%

Source: MassDOT (2025)

6.5 Safety

Safety is the number-one priority when delivering transit service. As an urban system, MART develops a PTASP, which defines specific safety goals for the authority. These are updated annually in coordination with the MRPC and MassDOT. Performance data are submitted annually in NTD then provided to MassDOT. Safety targets and performance are shown in Table 25.

Table 25. Safety Metrics and Targets (FY 2026)

Metric	Fixed Route	Demand Response
Fatalities Target	0.00	0.00
Fatality Rate (per 1 million vehicle revenue miles)	0.00	0.00
Injuries Target	5.00	4.00
Injury Rate (per 1 million vehicle revenue miles)	1.67	1.33
Safety Events Target	1.00	1.00
Safety Event Rate (per 1 million vehicle revenue miles)	0.34	0.34

Source: MassDOT (2025)

6.6 Annual Performance

Two annual performance metrics reported to MassDOT vary by RTA. Each RTA may identify and report a metric and target of their choosing, and a second metric is chosen through the CRTP process based on prioritized recommendations. For the FY 2026 MOU period, the metric is tied to the 2020 CRTP. The two metrics for MART are:

- RTA-Choice Metric: Customer ticket kiosks for fixed route
- RTA-Choice Metric Tied to CRTP: Increased unlinked passenger trips for JARC Expansion

Other annual performance metrics are external partnerships and fleet composition by fuel type. Both are reported annually and are not compared against an annual target. Table 26 shows the breakdown of MART's current fleet by fuel type and the number of partnerships by service type.

Table 26. Annual Performance Metrics (FY 2026)

Metric	Fixed Route	Demand Response	Demand Taxi
Percent fleet composition - Electric	6.40%	0%	0%
Percent fleet composition - Hybrid	2.10%	0%	0%
Percent fleet composition – Compressed Natural Gas	0%	0%	0%
Percent fleet composition - Diesel	36.20%	0%	0%
Percent fleet composition - Gasoline	54.80%	100%	100%
External Partnerships	1	3	1

Source: MassDOT (2025)

7 Trends and Uncertainties

As part of the CRTP update, MART examined potential alternative scenarios based on future uncertainties and market trends. This chapter describes likely market trends and uncertainties, how they could impact transit ridership in the MART region over the next five years, and how MART could address them.

In developing this CRTP, recommendations were drafted that align with different ridership scenarios given their operational, policy, and financial implications. Organizing recommendations by ridership scenario enables MART to use the CRTP to decide which recommendations are most applicable to current conditions. Key topics and solutions that arose during the scenario discussions for MART to consider in the future are presented in this chapter.

7.1 Future Uncertainties

As MART prepares for the next five years, it is important to recognize and plan for trends that are both highly impactful and deeply uncertain. These uncertainties may define the operating circumstances of MART, possibly influencing factors such as public expectations of transit, service models, funding sources, transit technologies and infrastructure, and ultimately ridership demand. The following section outlines critical uncertainties that were explored during the workshop due to their potential to plausibly shape the future of MART's operations.

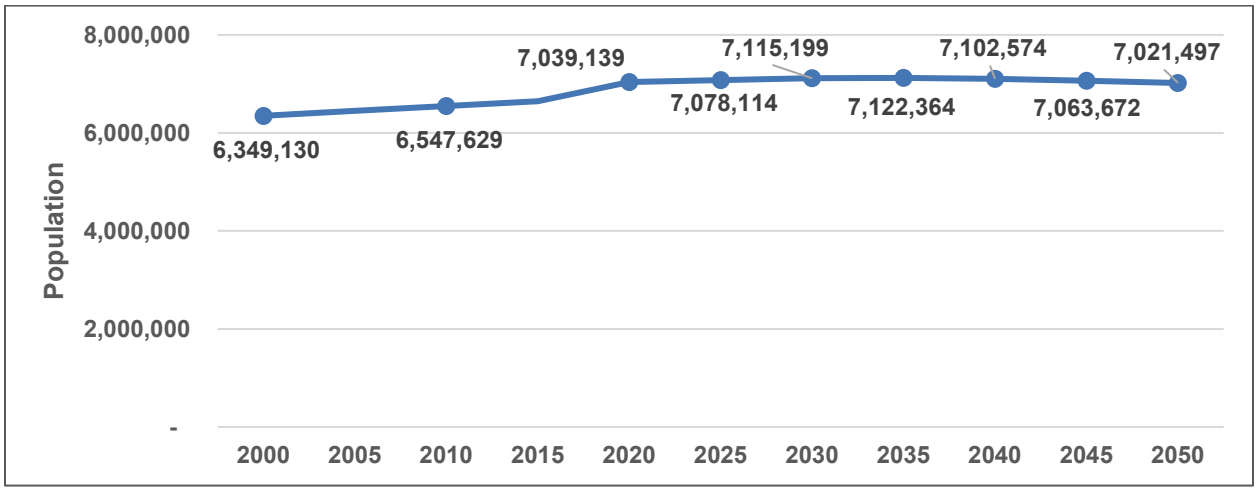
7.1.1 Population and Demographics

Population trends—including migration and aging—could impact transit ridership in the MART region.

7.1.1.1 General Population Trends

Massachusetts has experienced consistent population growth throughout the twenty-first century; however, as seen in Figure 41, the overall state population is projected to plateau with little-to-no growth from 2025 to 2035 and then decline from 2035 to 2050 (Renski 2015). This slow down and eventual decline in population is largely attributable to two factors: domestic out-migration and international migration uncertainty.

Figure 41. Long-term Population Projections for Massachusetts (2000-2050)



Source: UMass Donahue Institute 2025

Population and demographic trends are a defining influence on transportation needs, the quality of transit service, and the cultural expectations around transit. A stagnant or declining population may manifest in a variety of ways for MART, including:

- A reduced labor supply could present significant challenges to future workforce recruitment efforts.
- A small ridership base may reduce demand for transit and present the need for MART to make service changes.
- Changing demographics may shift public expectations about the function, frequency, and quality of regional transit service.

All of these present uncertainties that could influence MART's operations over the next five years.

7.1.1.2 Aging Constituency

Massachusetts' population is both older and aging at a rate that exceeds the national average. As of 2025, 20.4 percent of the state was 65 years or older (US Census Bureau 2025a). This is projected to increase to 22.3 percent of the state's population by 2030. Not only does the rate of aging in Massachusetts outpace national averages, it also exceeds earlier state-level estimates (Renski 2015).

Massachusetts' increasingly older population places more pressure on demand response transportation services. MART's ridership base (i.e., the total population living in its service area) is projected to decline by 0.4 percent from 2025 to 2030. While this represents a smaller decline than the state overall, and will therefore have a less pronounced effect on transit service (UMass Donahue Institute 2025), an aging population could impact MART through:

- Increased costs and workforce required to serve increased demand response service.
- Reduced pool of potential transit workers as more residents retire from the workforce.

7.1.2 Affordability

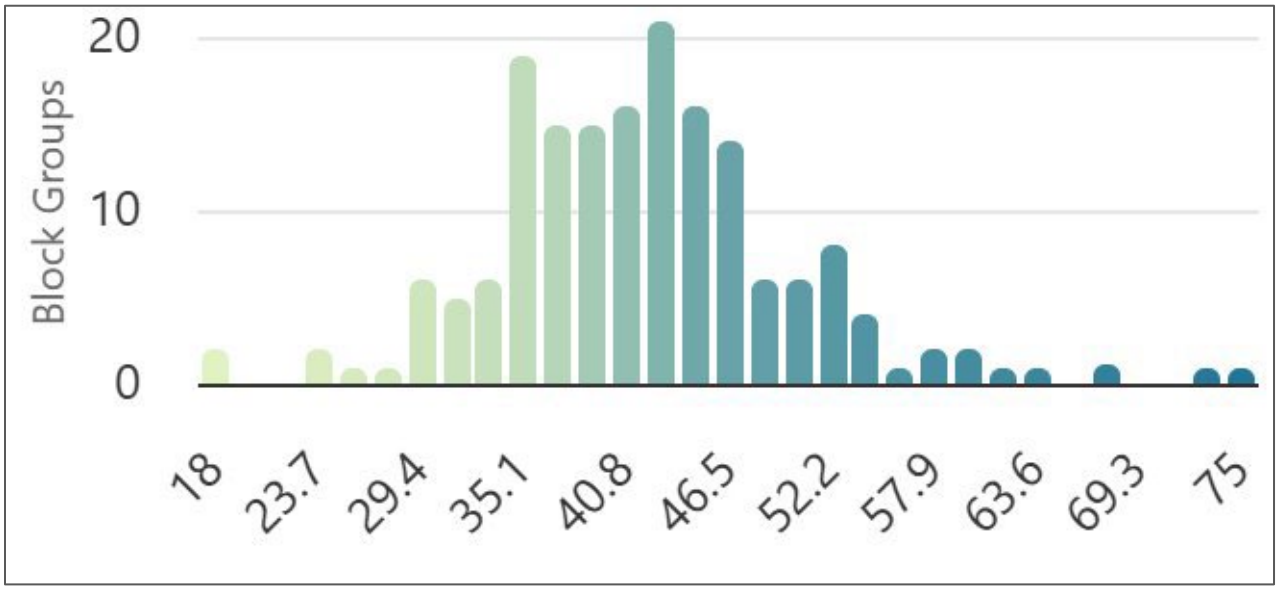
Massachusetts has some of the highest living costs in the United States. High and rapidly growing housing prices are at the center of the Commonwealth's affordability dilemma.

In tandem with housing costs, transportation expenses have also imposed an outsized burden on Massachusetts residents in recent years. According to Transportation for Massachusetts' 2024 survey, 71 percent of Massachusetts residents report housing cost burden, while 57 percent are burdened by transportation costs (Transportation for Massachusetts 2024). Among MART's ridership base, residents spend an estimated 43 percent of income on housing and transportation expenses as seen in Figure 42.

Cost is one of the single-most influential factors in determining an individual's place of residence and transportation needs. Affordability issues that could impact MART include:

- Potential for increased sprawl development and long commute distances.
- Increased costs to serve longer trip length.
- Additional service demand in lower cost rural areas if people relocate from higher cost urban areas.

Figure 42. Montachusett MPO Housing and Transportation Costs as a Percentage of Residents' Income



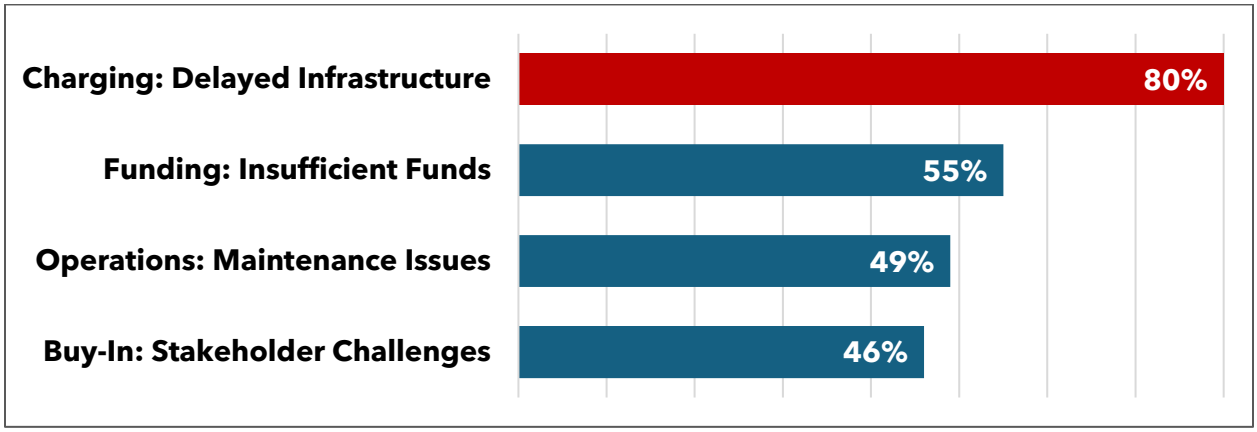
Source: Center for Neighborhood Technology, 2025

7.1.3 Technology

Transit agencies across Massachusetts and the United States have employed a diversity of approaches and levels of initiative towards fleet modernization. Fleet modernization within RTAs has also become highly contingent upon available funding streams at both the federal and state levels. At the federal level, the FTA Section 5339(c) Low or No Emission "Low-No" grant program has shifted priority from "no-emissions" procurements to funding low-emissions vehicle types (Ekbatani 2025).

Despite federal policy changes, Massachusetts has maintained fleet modernization goals. However, inadequate energy infrastructure has consistently presented a significant challenge to adoption of zero emission vehicles. As seen in Figure 43, in a 2025 survey, 80 percent of transit agencies reported infrastructure delays as the largest challenge to adopting zero emission vehicles (Optibus 2025). Insufficient electrical capacity, complex negotiations, and long lead times with utility providers can delay charging infrastructure.

Figure 43. Inadequate Charging Infrastructure is the Leading Obstacle to Fleet Modernization



Source: Optibus 2025 State of Public Transportation Industry Survey

Uncertainties surrounding travel demand from remote work and virtual services remain. These uncertainties could lead to:

- Increased demand from a greater return to in-person work
- Long-term normalization of the remote lifestyle, which could disrupt the public's perceived function of public transit

7.1.4 Funding for Transit

The stability and size of funding streams is a critical component factoring in MART's level of service and operational success. At the federal level, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) has provided over $550 billion in funding towards transportation programs across the United States and is expected to provide $660 billion across its total five-year lifespan but is subject to annual congressional budget appropriations. Funding in the amount of $116 billion in IIJA funds is allocated towards transit programs, which represents a 40 percent expansion in federal transit funding compared to past levels (Bureau of Transportation Statistics 2025).

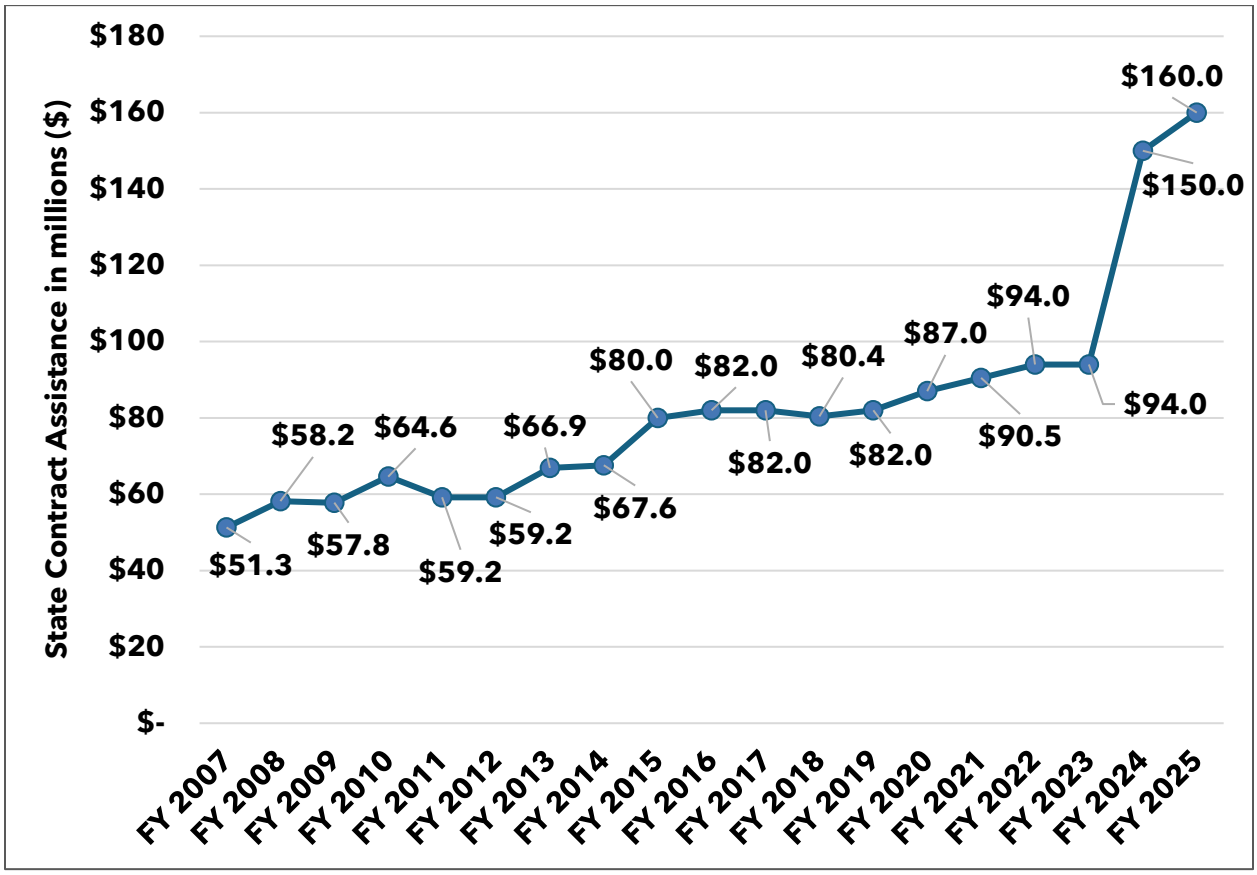
However, the IIJA is scheduled to expire at the end of FY 2026. Despite the unprecedented levels of transit funding and investment the act has facilitated, an immediate funding replacement is not guaranteed. Intermediate funding extensions have occurred between each of the last five federal transportation funding laws, comprising 7.5 years of the last three decades. Given this historical record, the level of federal transit funding is uncertain over the next five years.

State funding for Massachusetts' RTAs has consistently grown in recent years. Since 2020, total funding provided to all RTAs through state contract assistance has nearly doubled from $87 million to $160 million, as shown in Figure 44. In addition to general operating funds, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts has implemented additional funding through initiative-based channels, such as discretionary grant programs and fare-free pilots.

Fare-free transit at MART is on a trajectory to become long term as a product of state funding. Thirty-five million dollars was appropriated in FY 2026 for the implementation or continuation of fare-free transit at all RTAs. Additionally, a statutory amendment to Chapter 161B of Massachusetts General Laws now prohibits all RTAs from charging a fare for transit services but still maintains that fare-free transit be subject to annual funding appropriation. (For more information on fare-free transit and MART's fare policy, see Appendix A.)

Fare-free transit has demonstrated the potential to positively impact ridership at MART. However, the dependency on the Commonwealth's appropriation of future fare-free transit funding introduces uncertainty and could influence MART's operations.

Figure 44. State Funding for Massachusetts' RTAs from FY 2007 to FY 2025



Source: MassDOT 2025

7.2 2020 Alternative Scenarios

MART last updated its CRTP in 2020, at the peak of the pandemic, when it was facing many uncertainties that were largely outside of its control. The entire transportation industry was grappling with unknowns about the long-term impact of the pandemic on overall ridership, and whether remote work would drive increases in sprawl. Like all transit agencies, MART was unsure which routes and services would recover ridership first and which would see a slower recovery. Forces beyond the pandemic such as national economic policy, unemployment rates, education policy, availability of funding for capital investments, and municipal land use plans are also outside of its control.

In order to address these uncertainties, MART defined three qualitative thresholds for two factors (complexity and impact) to map out the future of transit demand through 2025. The three thresholds were:

- Low:
  - Complexity: Very little cost or barriers to implementation.
  - Impact: Unlikely to be noticed by riders.
- Medium:
  - Complexity: Low cost and high barriers to implementation or higher cost.
  - Impact: Would impact some riders and routes.

- High:
  - Complexity: Significant costs and/or barriers to implementation.
  - Impact: Large benefit to all riders.

MART assigned complexity and impact scores to all recommendations. MART was able to strategically implement recommendations using this methodology to grow ridership following the COVID-19 pandemic.

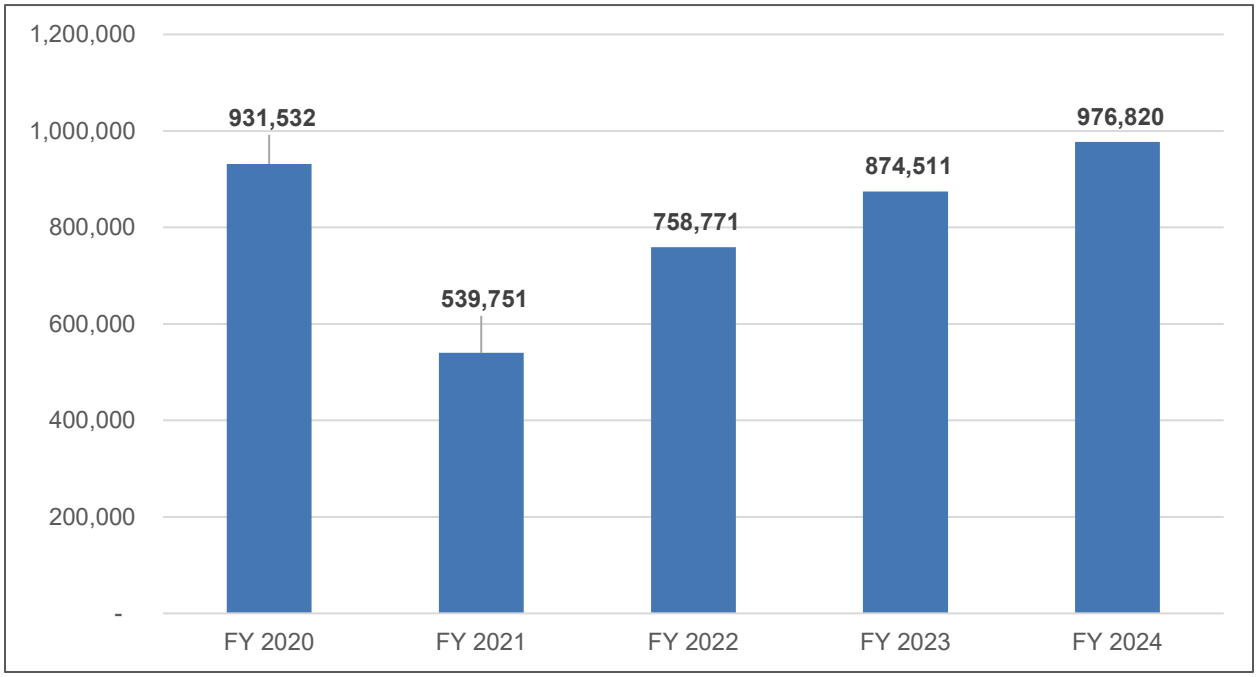
7.3 Looking Ahead: 2025 to 2030 Scenario Planning

Given that varied and numerous uncertainties will always affect the MART region, it is important to continue to plan for their impact on transit. While many of these trends lie beyond MART's control, how they unfold will likely have a significant impact on ridership. For this CRTP, MART is proactively responding by planning for different ridership levels over the next five years. As part of this process, MART explored three different ridership scenarios:

- Low ridership: Ridership remains at current levels.
- Medium ridership: Ridership increases to reach pre-pandemic levels (approximately a 13 percent increase).
- High ridership: Ridership increases an additional 10 percent (or approximately 23 percent above pre-pandemic levels).

Looking at the past five years, ridership data from FY 2020 to FY 2024 indicate that MART ridership has grown every year since 2021 (Figure 45).

Figure 45. MART Annual System Ridership (FY 2020-FY 2024)



Source: MassDOT 2025

MART ridership hit a low point in FY 2021, the first fiscal year that was entirely within the pandemic. Ridership rebounded over 40 percent between FY 2021 and FY 2022 and then grew 15.3 percent and 11.7 percent from FY 2022 to FY 2023 and FY 2023 to FY 2024, respectively. MART's FY 2024 ridership was 87 percent of pre-pandemic ridership (FY 2019 ridership was approximately 1.1 million trips).

Each ridership scenario for this CRTP is detailed in the following sections.

7.3.1 Low Ridership

The low ridership scenario MART considered is characterized by ridership numbers across services remaining at approximately today's ridership levels over the next five years (2025 to 2030).

Several factors could potentially contribute to this scenario:

- An economic downturn and higher unemployment could contribute to a lack of growth in work-related commutes.
- The continued prevalence of remote work could continue to suppress demand for commuting services.
- Demographic shifts, such as an aging population, might lead to a stagnant (or a decline in) school-based ridership.
- Challenges recruiting workforce for MART could limit the ability to continue or expand routes.

Together, these dynamics could position MART to experience existing levels of transit utilization.

In response to these potential impacts, MART considered the following questions:

- MART may need to adjust routes, schedules, or staffing to better match ridership demand that does not return to pre-pandemic levels. How will MART determine necessary changes in an equitable way?
- With flat ridership, how will MART navigate implementing new service or capital improvement priorities?
- How can MART reach new riders and lower barriers to using transit?
- If overall ridership remains steady by the proportion made up by demand response trips increases, how will MART navigate the likely operating expense increase?

7.3.2 Medium Ridership

The medium ridership MART considered is characterized by ridership numbers across services returning to full pre-pandemic levels (a 13 percent increase) over the next five years. This scenario could result from a combination of potential factors:

- Stagnant household incomes or high inflation might make personal vehicle ownership less feasible, leading more people to rely on public transit.
- A shift toward more consistent in-office work could increase the volume of work-related commutes.
- A successful service expansion could drive higher demand.

Together, these dynamics could position MART to experience considerable growth in transit utilization. In response to these potential impacts, MART considered the following questions:

- Given higher ridership levels, MART seeks to expand service; how will MART choose where to expand and how?
- MART is currently struggling with retaining a full workforce. What strategies or key partnerships can MART leverage to assist with this?

- What partnerships can MART leverage to meet demand, including unmet needs?
- Would MART need additional vehicle capacity to serve this level of ridership?

7.3.3 High Ridership

High ridership for MART is characterized by a substantial increase in ridership numbers across services, reaching up to 10 percent above pre-pandemic levels over the next five years. This scenario could be driven by several potential factors:

- A sharp rise in gas prices may encourage many people to choose public transit over personal vehicles.
- An even faster than projected increase in the aging population could lead to a significant increase in demand response ride requests.
- An expansion of service-based industries and tourism economies might create a sustained spike in ridership.

Together, these dynamics could position MART to experience substantial growth in transit utilization. In response to these potential impacts, MART considered the following questions:

- With a large ridership increase, and therefore commensurate demand for service, MART needs to hire more drivers, mechanics, customer service staff, etc.
- More service means more vehicles; how will MART handle space constraints and funding to purchase new vehicles?
- If demand response ride requests accelerate, what opportunities can MART leverage with COAs and local non-emergency transportation services to accommodate increased demand?

7.4 Future Opportunities

Table 27 summarizes the opportunities and corresponding scenarios that MART considered could occur over the next five years. Depending on ridership levels, MART can determine which strategic opportunities may be applicable to pursue. For items that are applicable regardless of ridership level, "all ridership" is indicated.

Table 27. Opportunities by Ridership Scenario

Ridership Scenario	Description of Opportunity
All	Monitor performance indicators to make service adjustments as needed.
All	Make it easier for prospective employees to apply for available operator positions.
All	Continue to invest in marketing and outreach efforts.
All	Continue to make safety improvements at MART transit centers to create a safe environment for passengers and staff.
All	Continue to provide operator safety training use trainers and technology tools such as driving simulators.
All	Transition from a flag stop system to defined bus stops.

Ridership Scenario	Description of Opportunity
Low	Modify existing routes to serve high demand areas with higher frequencies.
Low	Conduct public outreach to determine whether there are any major destinations not being served by the existing system that may be impacting ridership.
Low	Leverage ridership data to make decisions on where to decrease service if funding restraints require.
Low	Ensure consistent service delivery for existing routes to serve demand.
Low	Identify grant opportunities to fund service expansion to increase ridership.
Medium and High	Initiate partnerships with regional organizations to explore potential service options for serving educational institutions.
Medium and High	Explore new software options to improve MART's trip scheduling efficiency to expand capacity.
High	Evaluate the potential for raising fares for premium or subscription services.
High	Partner with other providers such as taxi livery companies to extend service capacity.
High	Pursue additional grant funding opportunities to fund purchase of new vehicles to deliver additional service.

Source: MART Alternative Workshop on October 21, 2025

8 Recommendations

The recommendations in this five-year plan emerged from a data-informed process that incorporated historical operational data, stakeholder feedback, industry standards, local policy, statewide objectives, and MART priorities. These recommendations establish a framework for advancing strategic service adjustments, capital improvements, and policy initiatives based on data-driven analysis, and make meaningful progress toward better mobility for residents across the region.

8.1 Changes Since the 2020 Comprehensive Regional Transit Plan

The 2020 CRTP included numerous recommendations across a variety of categories, such as service and capital investments. Furthermore, the 2020 plan was produced during the COVID-10 pandemic, a time when transit ridership plummeted. Since that plan was produced, there has been a significant infusion of state and federal funding supporting expanded transit service, namely from the IIJA on the federal level, and from the Fair Share Amendment from the Commonwealth.

Investments that MART has made with this funding over the past five years guided by the recommendations included in the 2020 CRTP helped drive ridership recovery. These included:

- Implementing new pilot routes to expand service
- Expanding service to new communities through the MART Connects program
- Starting new weekend service on several routes
- Launching evening ride service in Fitchburg, Leominster, and Gardner
- Implementing new intercity express service between Fitchburg and Leominster
- Transitioning the Devens Regional shuttle from fixed route to on-demand service
- Increasing marketing efforts to reach new potential riders
- Installing an APC system onboard buses to track ridership data

8.2 Planning for an Uncertain Future

The Commonwealth may face key uncertainties in the next five years that could significantly impact ridership levels. Chapter 7 describes these uncertainties, namely demographic, economic, and funding shifts, and provides low, medium, and high ridership scenarios that could occur depending on what happens. These ridership scenarios are:

- Lower Ridership: If the level of ridership demand over the next five years is on the lower end of expectations, some recommendations are more relevant such as conducting public outreach to identify potential areas of high demand currently underserved.
- Medium Ridership: If the level of ridership demand over the next five years is in the mid-level of expectations, more robust service and capital expansions may be warranted. Some of those might include recommendations regarding new software to improve operational efficiency.
- Higher Ridership: If the level of ridership demand over the next five years is on the higher end of expectations, then the most enhanced service and capital investments

may be warranted. Some of those might include exploring new types of service or new service areas.

The recommendations described in this chapter are linked to one or more of these ridership scenarios. In cases where a recommendation applies to all ridership scenarios, it is listed as a "core" recommendation. An example is continued collaboration with neighboring RTAs and closely monitoring key performance indicators (KPIs).

The next section presents recommendations for MART to use as a roadmap for the next five years across a variety of topic areas.

8.3 Identified Needs

The needs identified through the data and analysis documented in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 served as the foundation for the recommendations detailed in the subsequent sections. They were further augmented by staff review to confirm applicability to operational realities and ensure alignment with other planning documents (e.g., regional long-range transportation plan).

The recommendations in this plan directly respond to needs identified through the MART data analysis, market assessment, public and stakeholder input, and needs articulated in other regional and statewide plans. Needs identified through this planning process, as well as the element of the process that identified those needs, are shown in Table 28.

Table 28. Identified Needs

Need	Identified Through…
Set realistic and achievable targets	Existing Conditions Analysis
Meet ridership demand with appropriate service levels	Existing Conditions Analysis
Improve passenger experience and ease of use	Existing Conditions Analysis and Stakeholder Engagement
Improve on-time performance for fixed route	Existing Conditions Analysis
Expand access to service	Market Assessment
Mitigate capacity constraints	Existing Conditions Analysis
Enhance safety for passengers and staff	Existing Conditions Analysis
Collect, maintain, and analyze data to make informed decisions	Existing Conditions Analysis
Meet MART member municipalities' transit needs	Stakeholder Engagement
Serve growing job centers	Market Assessment
Collaborate with other providers to facilitate regional mobility	Stakeholder Engagement
Reach potential new riders and operating staff	Stakeholder Engagement

8.4 Recommendations

These identified needs have driven the development of the recommendations found in this section. MART discussed these needs during multiple workshops to identify the suite of recommendations presented below, taking into consideration the potential positive impact, risks, the level of effort to implement, feasibility, uncertainties, and other relevant factors.

The recommendations are organized into categories, including service, capital, policy, performance, coordination, additional studies, and other (Table 29). For recommendations that fall under multiple categories, the column labeled "Also in Category" highlights their cross-listing.

Table 29. Recommendation Categories

Category	Description
Service	Service recommendations deal with specific routing or other operational considerations of day-to-day provision of service.
Capital	Capital recommendations deal with the purchase or management of equipment, rolling stock, facilities, technology, or other assets.
Policy	Policy recommendations deal with practices and standards adopted by the transit agency to guide how the organization functions.
Data and Performance	Data and performance recommendations deal with using data to improve performance and the rider's experience.
Coordination	Coordination recommendations deal with communications between the transit agency and other regional and statewide partners.
Additional Studies	Additional studies recommendations deal with needs that require further examination in order to make an informed decision.
Other	Other recommendations deal with issues not addressed by the other categories.

8.4.1 Service Recommendations

Service recommendations for MART focus on changes to service, either by changing span of service or days per week operated (Table 30). Additionally, MART intends to continue using performance monitoring and stakeholder feedback to inform decisions regarding service expansion. All future service expansions require additional operational funding, as MART saw a reduction of over $350,000 in FTA Section 5307 federal funding from previous years starting in FFY 2024. Additionally, collective bargaining agreements have increased operational costs by $375,000. The reduction in federal funding and increased operational costs have also severely restricted MART's capital program.

Table 30. Service Recommendations

ID	Recommendation	Ridership Scenario	Also in Category...
1	Expand service in Gardner through extended service hours of operation and/or improve frequencies.	Medium	N/A

ID	Recommendation	Ridership Scenario	Also in Category...
2	Reduce frequencies on lower performing routes (such as Route 11) to shift resources to higher performing routes, if funding constraints require.	Core	N/A
3	Engage in continuous 6-month review process with member municipalities to align MART service with community needs and demands. Assess potential new routes or adjust existing routes to serve more people within the MART service area.	Core	Additional Studies; Coordination; Policy
19	Evaluate potential demand for additional service in Athol.	Higher	Additional Studies

N/A = Not Applicable

8.4.2 Capital Recommendations

MART's capital recommendations are related to enhancing the Authority's operations and passenger experience (Table 31). MART has APC technology; however, this technology is not fully aligning with MART's needs. After experiencing ongoing issues with the current vendor, MART is interested in exploring alternative systems. Additionally, improving safety as well as the passenger experience through updated vehicle design features and procuring software to improve trip scheduling are priorities for MART in the next five years. Nearly all future capital program expenditures will require additional capital funding. As noted previously, MART saw a reduction of over $350,000 in FTA Section 5307 federal funding from previous years starting in FY 2024 and has also needed to absorb increased operational costs of $375,000 for collective bargaining agreements with its three operating companies. The reduction in federal funding and increased operational costs have severely restricted MART's capital program, which has a $2+ million backlog of state of good repair projects.

Table 31. Capital Recommendations

ID	Recommendation	Ridership Scenario	Also in Category...
4	Continue to make safety improvements to MART facilities and promote a culture of safety for MART staff and passengers. This includes upgrading vehicle safety features (on-board diagnostic devices, unified camera systems, etc.) and creating a safe rider campaign to educate the public on flag stop safety, rider etiquette, etc.	Core	Policy
13	Explore alternate APC vendors to deploy a complete NTD-certified APC system across MART's entire fleet.	Core	N/A
14	Procure new vehicles that enhance the passenger experience through vehicle design (i.e., low-floor or vehicle safety features).	Core	N/A
15	Solicit vendor information for scheduling software solutions to improve trip scheduling efficiency.	Medium/ Higher	Data and Performance

ID	Recommendation	Ridership Scenario	Also in Category...
16	Implement designated fixed route bus stops, starting with high ridership routes and locations. Establish bus stop guidelines and policies to define the level of amenities at different types of bus stops in the MART network.	Core	Additional Studies; Policy
20	Maintain a state of good repair for all MART facilities and equipment.	Core	N/A

N/A = Not Applicable

8.4.3 Data and Performance Recommendations

MART plans to prioritize tracking and monitoring data using a performance management system to deliver high-quality and efficient service (Table 32). Related aspects of this overall performance goal include setting realistic and achievable on-time performance targets that can be communicated to operators and other staff. Improved data tracking, such as improved tracking of trip denials for demand response, will also aid in this larger goal. A lower, more achievable on-time performance target is recommended. MART's on-time performance for fixed route was 65 percent in FY 2024. MART intends to adjust targets while improving on-time performance of fixed routes to meet this new target.

Table 32. Data and Performance Recommendations

ID	Recommendation	Ridership Scenario	Also in Category...
6	Lower on-time performance targets from 98% to 80%.	Core	N/A
7	Implement a performance management system using best practices to track KPIs. This system will aid MART in improving efficiency and aligning service with demand.	Core	N/A
8	Begin tracking denied demand response trips to identify capacity constraints.	Core	N/A
15	Solicit vendor information for scheduling software solutions to improve trip scheduling efficiency.	Medium/ Higher	Capital

N/A = Not Applicable

8.4.4 Policy Recommendations

MART is committed to a six-month review process to ensure that its system aligns with community needs (Table 33). As part of this ongoing review, MART may make service adjustments or identify areas to implement new fixed routes or other services.

Table 33. Policy Recommendations

ID	Recommendation	Ridership Scenario	Also in Category...
3	Engage in continuous 6-month review process with member municipalities to align MART service with community needs and demands. Assess potential new routes or adjust existing routes to serve more people within the MART service area.	Core	Additional Studies; Coordination; Service
4	Continue to make safety improvements to MART facilities and promote a culture of safety for MART staff and passengers. This includes upgrading vehicle safety features (on-board diagnostic devices, unified camera systems, etc.) and creating a safe rider campaign to educate the public on flag stop safety, rider etiquette, etc.	Core	Capital
5	Update publicly available system map to make it easier for passengers to understand the service available.	Core	N/A
16	Implement designated fixed route bus stops, starting with high ridership routes and locations. Establish bus stop guidelines and policies to define the level of amenities at different types of bus stops in the MART network.	Core	Additional Studies; Capital

N/A = Not Applicable

8.4.5 Coordination Recommendations

MART's coordination recommendations include ongoing collaboration with neighboring RTAs to facilitate transfers between systems and support regional mobility (Table 34). Additionally, MART intends to continue coordinating with member municipalities to best meet service area resident needs.

Table 34. Coordination Recommendations

ID	Recommendation	Ridership Scenario	Also in Category...
3	Engage in continuous 6-month review process with member municipalities to align MART service with community needs and demands. Assess potential new routes or adjust existing routes to serve more people within the MART service area.	Core	Additional Studies; Policy
11	Continue to collaborate with Devens leadership to understand community needs and potential transit solutions to serve growing job centers within the community.	Core	N/A
12	Continue to coordinate with neighboring RTAs to facilitate passenger transfers between systems.	Core	N/A

N/A = Not Applicable

8.4.6 Recommendations for Additional Studies

Several opportunities for additional studies were identified as part of the CRTP planning process for this plan (Table 35). These opportunities include exploring microtransit, conducting a bus stop study to transition from flag stops to designated stops, and evaluating demand for additional service.

Table 35. Recommendations for Additional Studies

ID	Recommendation	Ridership Scenario	Also in Category...
3	Engage in continuous 6-month review process with member municipalities to align MART service with community needs and demands. Assess potential new routes or adjust existing routes to serve more people within the MART service area.	Core	Coordination; Policy
16	Implement designated fixed route bus stops, starting with high ridership routes and locations. Establish bus stop guidelines and policies to define the level of amenities at different types of bus stops in the MART network.	Core	Capital; Policy
17	Pursue grant funding to complete a microtransit study.	Higher	N/A
18	Collect feedback from internal and external stakeholders on ways to improve upcoming online app for booking demand response and demand taxi trips.	Higher	N/A
19	Evaluate potential demand for additional service in Athol.	Higher	Service

N/A = Not Applicable

8.4.7 Other Recommendations

MART has invested in marketing and outreach efforts over recent years and intends to continue to make outreach a priority (Table 36). MART also plans to continue conducting public outreach, particularly in a lower ridership scenario, to understand areas of need and demand within the service area.

Table 36. Other Recommendations

ID	Recommendation	Ridership Scenario	Also in Category...
9	Continue investing in marketing and promotional efforts through multimedia content.	Core	N/A
10	Conduct public outreach through surveys or other means to determine whether there are any major destinations not being served by the existing system that may be impacting ridership.	Lower	N/A

N/A = Not Applicable

9 References

Baker, Charlie. 2018. Executive Order 579, *Establishing the Commission on the Future of Transportation in the Commonwealth*. January 23, 2018. https://www.mass.gov/executive-orders/no-579-establishing-the-commission-on-the-future-of-transportation-in-the-commonwealth.

Baxandall, Phineas. 2025. *Fare-Free Public Buses are Yielding Results in Southeastern MA*. Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center. January 13, 2025. https://massbudget.org/2025/01/13/fare-free-srta/.

Bill H.5060. 2022. *An Act Driving Clean Energy and Offshore Wind*. https://malegislature.gov/Bills/192/H5060.

Bureau of Transportation Statistics. 2025. *Statistics on Transportation Funding by Mode in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act*. https://data.bts.gov/stories/s/Infrastructure-Investment-and-Jobs-Act-IIJA-Transp/7fjw-dp4g/.

Center for Neighborhood Technology. 2025. *Housing and Transportation Affordability Index*. https://htaindex.cnt.org/map/.

City of Fitchburg. 2020. *2020 Hazard Mitigation Plan– Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Plan*.

City of Gardner. 2010. *Green Communities Action Plan*. July 2010. https://www.gardnerk12.org/DocumentCenter/View/468/Green-Communities-Action-Plan-PDF?bidId=.

City of Gardner. 2012. *Urban Renewal Plan, Mill Street Corridor, Gardner, MA*. August 2012. https://www.gardner-ma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/472/Mill-Street-Corridor-Urban-Renewal-Plan-PDF.

City of Leominster. 2020. *Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Program Community Resilience Building Workshop Summary of Findings*. March 2020. https://www.mass.gov/doc/leominster-report/download.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts. 2008a. Chapter 169, *An Act Relative to Green Communities*. https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2008/Chapter169.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts. 2008b. *Global Warming Solutions Act Background*. Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs. https://www.mass.gov/info-details/global-warming-solutions-act-background.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts. 2020. *MA Decarbonization Roadmap*. Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs. https://www.mass.gov/info-details/ma-decarbonization-roadmap.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts. 2022. *2050 Clean Energy and Climate Plan*. Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs. https://www.mass.gov/doc/2050-clean-energy-and-climate-plan.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts. 2024a. *Beyond Mobility: Massachusetts 2050 Transportation Plan*. July 2024. https://www.mass.gov/doc/massdot-beyond-mobility-full-plan/download.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts. 2024b. *Regional Transit Innovation Grant*. Rail and Transit Division. https://www.mass.gov/how-to/regional-transit-innovation-grant.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts. 2025a. *A Home for Everyone: A Comprehensive Housing Plan for Massachusetts 2025-2029*. Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities. February 2025. https://www.mass.gov/doc/a-home-for-everyone/download.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts. 2025b. *Chapter 40R*. Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities. https://www.mass.gov/info-details/chapter-40r.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts. 2025c. Community Transit Grant Program. https://www.mass.gov/community-transit-grant-program.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts. 2025d. *Community Transportation Coordination*. Rail and Transit Division. https://www.mass.gov/info-details/community-transportation-coordination.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts. 2025e. *MassMobility*. Rail and Transit Division. https://www.mass.gov/orgs/massmobility.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts. 2025f. *Multi-Family Zoning Requirements for MBTA Communities*. Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities. https://www.mass.gov/info-details/multi-family-zoning-requirement-for-mbta-communities.

Devens Enterprise Commission. 2024. *Devens Forward Climate Action & Resilience Plan*. https://kladashboard-clientsourcefiles.s3.amazonaws.com/Devens/03_Devens_CAP_Final_HR.pdf.

Ekbatani, Taylor. 2025. *Report Highlights Shift in Federal Policy from EVs to Conventional Fuels*. April 28, 2025. https://stnonline.com/news/report-highlights-shift-in-federal-policy-from-evs-to-conventional-fuels/.

FDOT. 2025. Urban iNTDUrban: Integrated National Transit Database. https://ftis.org/urban_iNTD.aspx.

Fitchburg Redevelopment Authority. 2022. *Fitchburg Downtown Urban Revitalization & Development Plan*. January 2022. https://fitchburgredevelopment.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/FINAL-FRA-URP-9th-Amendment.pdf.

FTA. 2020. *Safety Performance Targets Fact Sheet*. August 2020. Federal Transit Administration. https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/2020-08/SafetyPerformanceTargetFactSheet_20200814.pdf.

GoTriangle. 2025. *Collaborative effort draws fresh ideas to help people without homes*. https://gotriangle.org/news/collaborative-effort-draws-fresh-ideas-help-people-without-homes.

Governor's Press Office. 2018. "Commission on the Future of Transportation Releases Recommendations Aimed to Move More People, Reduce Emissions in the Commonwealth." December 14, 2018. https://www.mass.gov/news/commission-on-the-future-of-transportation-releases-recommendations-aimed-to-move-more-people-reduce-emissions-in-the-commonwealth.

MART. 2021. *Comprehensive Regional Transit Plan Update*. Montachusett Regional Transit Authority. January 2021. https://www.mrta.us/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/2020ComprehensiveRegionalTransitPlan.pdf.

MART. 2025a. Monthly Ride Service Guidelines. Montachusett Regional Transit Authority. https://www.mrta.us/services/monthly-ride-service/.

MART. 2025b. *Public Transportation Agency Safety Action Plan*. Montachusett Regional Transit Authority. September 2025. https://www.mrta.us/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Presented-and-Approved-2025-PTASP.pdf.

MART. 2025c. Travel Training. Montachusett Regional Transit Authority. https://www.mrta.us/travel-training/.

Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs. 2021. *Massachusetts State Plan on Aging October 1, 2021 – September 30, 2025*. October 2021. https://www.mass.gov/doc/massachusetts-state-plan-on-aging-2021-2025/download.

MassDOT. 2019. *A Vision for the Future of Massachusetts' Regional Transit Authorities*. Report of the Task Force on Regional Transit Authority Performance and Funding. April 5, 2019. https://www.mass.gov/doc/a-vision-for-the-future-of-massachusetts-regional-transit-authorities/download.

MassDOT. 2023. *Would a System of Regional Mobility Managers Benefit Massachusetts? Final Recommended Action Plan*. August 2023. https://www.mass.gov/doc/would-a-system-of-regional-mobility-managers-benefit-massachusetts/download.

MassDOT. 2024a. *Healey-Driscoll Administration Announces Fare Free Regional Transit Service Across State*. Massachusetts Department of Transportation. October 24, 2024. https://www.mass.gov/news/healey-driscoll-administration-announces-fare-free-regional-transit-across-state.

MassDOT. 2024b. *MassDOT Regional Bus Network Assessment*. Office of Transportation Planning & Rail and Transit Division. September 2024. https://www.mass.gov/doc/massdot-regional-bus-network-assessment/download.

MassDOT. 2025. *Annual Report on the Regional Transit Authority Performance Management Program*. Massachusetts Department of Transportation. April 18, 2025.

MRPC. 2025. *Climate Pollution Reduction Grant – Comprehensive Climate Action Plan*. https://www.mrpc.org/comprehensive-planning/climate-pollution-reduction-grant-comprehensive-climate-action-plan.

NTD. 2023. TS2.2 - Service Data and Operating Expenses Time Series by System. https://www.transit.dot.gov/ntd/data-product/ts22-service-data-and-operating-expenses-time-series-system-0.

Optibus. 2025. *The State of Public Transportation Report*. https://optibus.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/eBook-2025-State-of-Public-Transportation-Report.pdf.

Renski, Henry. 2015. *Long-term Population Projections for Massachusetts Regions and Municipalities*. University of Massachusetts, Amherst. March 2015. https://pep.donahue-institute.org/downloads/2015/new/UMDI_LongTermPopulationProjectionsReport_2015%2004%20_29.pdf.

Transit Workforce Center. 2022. *Bus Driver Recruitment and Retention in Challenging Times*. April 2022. https://www.transitworkforce.org/resource_library/briefing-reportbus-driver-recruitment-and-retention-in-challenging-times/.

Transportation for Massachusetts. 2024. *Poll: Massachusetts Residents Feeling the Squeeze from Housing and Transportation Costs*. July 23, 2024. https://t4ma.org/poll-massachusetts-residents-feeling-the-squeeze-from-housing-and-transportation-costs/.

UMass Donahue Institute. 2025. *Massachusetts Population Estimates Program*. https://donahue.umass.edu/business-groups/economic-public-policy-research/massachusetts-population-estimates-program/population-estimates-by-massachusetts-geography/by-state.

US Census Bureau. 2023. 2018-2022 American Community Survey 5-year estimates. December 2023. https://census.hawaii.gov/main/2022acs-5yr-released/.

US Census Bureau. 2025a. *Older Adults Outnumber Children in 11 States and Nearly Half of U.S. Counties*. June 26, 2025. https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2025/older-adults-outnumber-children.html.

US Census Bureau. 2025b. "OnTheMap." https://onthemap.ces.census.gov.

Van Eyken, C. 2022. *Bus Operators in Crisis: The Steady Deterioration of One of Transit's Most Essential Jobs, and How Agencies Can Turn Things Around*. TransitCenter. July 2022. https://transitcenter.org/publication/bus-operators-in-crisis/.

Volinski, J. 2012. *Implementation and Outcomes of Fare-Free Transit Systems*. Transit Cooperative Research Program, Transportation Research Board, & National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. https://doi.org/10.17226/22753.

Worcester Regional Research Bureau. 2019. *The Implications of a Fare-Free WRTA*. Worcester Regional Research Bureau. May 22, 2019. https://www.wrrb.org/reports/2019/05/the-implications-of-a-fare-free-wrta/.

Appendix A Fares

Fare policy is part of a broader set of RTA and Commonwealth policies that support public access to transit, RTA revenue, transit system operations, and many other facets of transit service in Massachusetts.

This appendix explores fare policy for MART and fare replacement programs funded by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. It also examines the industry's best practices for fare-free transit operations and provides an outlook for the future of fare collection.

Fare Collection and Revenue Replacement Program

In accordance with state law, MART does not currently charge for fixed route or ADA paratransit service. In addition, it offers fare-free paratransit service to older adults transported under all COA services.

Fare-free Regional Transit – Statewide Background

The following subsections explain the evolution of fare collection/revenue replacement—from fare suspension during the COVID-19 Pandemic, to the Commonwealth's Try Transit Program and the funding for operations provided by the Fair Share Amendment.

COVID-19 Fare Suspension

In March 2020 the Commonwealth, along with the rest of the United States, was grappling with a global pandemic. To slow the spread of COVID-19, measures were put in place to encourage social distancing and minimize contact between front line service workers and the public. Several RTAs responded by suspending fare collection as part of their COVID-19 mitigation measures. Fare suspension durations varied across the Commonwealth and many RTAs, including MART, reinstated fare collection once measures were in place to protect bus operators from exposure to COVID-19.

Try Transit Program

Beginning on November 25, 2022, and through the end of 2022, MART received approximately $88,000 to suspend fare collection. The fare suspension was funded by a $2.5 million appropriation available to RTAs in the FY 2023 Massachusetts State Budget and restricted to fare-free operations. This was the first program funded with an appropriation in the state budget. The limited duration of the program made it challenging to measure changes in ridership trends. However, anecdotally, it was popular among riders.

Fare-free funding was extended to RTAs again in the FY 2024 Massachusetts State Budget with a $15 million appropriation restricted to fare suspension programs. The funding allowed for longer duration fare suspension, but remained a pilot program since it provided funds for a partial fiscal year. MART received approximately $300,000 and suspended fares for 6 months in FY 2024 and also received an additional $82,000 to suspend fares for some of FY 2025.

On balance, RTA customers, staff, and stakeholders across the Commonwealth considered the FY 2024 program successful and funding was again appropriated in the FY 2025 State Budget with $30 million. The FY 2025 appropriation provided for a full year of fare-free operations. MART received a grant of $1.1 million to support fare-free operation.

Fair Share Act

In November 2022, voters approved an amendment to the Massachusetts Constitution that assesses a 4 percent surtax on incomes over $1 million that would be restricted to education

and transportation. The Commonwealth began tax collection on January 1, 2023, and used the revenue collected during the remainder of the FY 2023 budget year to create a trust fund from which funds would be distributed in future years.

The FY 2024 budget contained the appropriation of first surtax revenues, and $1 billion was included in the budget; $510 million was appropriated to education and $490 million was appropriated to transportation. The RTAs were appropriated $25 million, and $15 million was used to support the FY 2024 Try Transit program. For FY 2025, the Fair Share Amendment was expected to generate $1.3 billion, $605 of which was appropriated to transportation. The RTA share increased to $90 million; $30 million was used to support the FY 2025 Try Transit program.

State Fiscal Year 2026 Fare-Free Budget and Legislation

The FY 2026 budget for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts was signed into law on July 4, 2025. In FY 2026, $35 million was appropriated for the implementation of year-round fare-free transit service across the Commonwealth's RTAs. This funding accompanies a statutory amendment to Chapter 161B of Massachusetts General Laws, which now requires RTAs to provide free service on all fixed route services as well as ADA paratransit services, subject to appropriation of funding to replace fare revenue. MassDOT is responsible for providing RTAs with fare revenue attributable to the fare-free service mandate. MART is required to collect and report ridership data to MassDOT in a format and frequency prescribed by MassDOT.

MART Fare Policy

Prior to fare-free service, MART charged the rates in Table 37 for fares. Current fares for MART Connects are shown in Table 38.

Table 37. Fixed Route Fare Policy

Fare Product	Fare Price
Single Trip (Standard Local)	$1.00
Single Trip (Reduced Local for Seniors age 60+ or for Disabled and/or Medicare Card Holders)	$0.60
Single Trip (Standard Regional)	$2.00
Single Trip (Reduced Regional)	$1.00
Child (under 6 Years Old with an Adult)	FREE
14-Day Pass (Standard Local)	$16.00
14-Day Pass (Reduced Local)	$10.50
14-Day Pass (Standard Regional)	$31.00
14-Day Pass (Reduced Regional)	$21.00
Monthly Pass (Standard Local)	$30.00
Monthly Pass (Reduced Local)	$20.00
Monthly Pass (Standard Regional)	$60.00
Monthly Pass (Reduced Regional)	$40.00

Source: MART Fare Policy, June 2025

Table 38. On-Demand Fare Policy

Fare Product	Fare Price
Evening Ride One-Way	$2.00
MART Connects Trip 1-10 Miles	$4.00
MART Connects Trip 11-15 Miles	$5.00
MART Connects Trip 16-20 Miles	$7.00

Source: MART Fare Policy, June 2025

Fare-free Program

MART received the following amounts from the state to support fare-free service in FY 2023 through FY 2025:

- FY 2023 – Try Transit holiday promotion: $88,231
- FY 2024 – Fare-free Implementation: $299,625
- FY 2025 – Fare-free Implementation: $1,260,813

RTA Fare-Free Experience and Lessons

Since the beginning of the fare-free program, MART has experienced a steady increase in ridership that has only grown the longer the program stays in place. One lesson MART learned early in the program was that program advertising needed to be more aggressive and consistent to ensure the public knew fares were free. On busy routes, fare-free service has significantly reduced boarding delays by removing fare collection.

Fare Collection Infrastructure

Fare collection equipment serves two main purposes: (1) collect, count, and securely store money deposited by riders upon boarding and (2) count passenger boardings. The amendment to Massachusetts General Law Chapter 161B in the FY 2026 state budget, which mandates fare-free service, changes considerations around the maintenance and use of fare collection equipment today and in the future.

Absent the need to collect fares, the equipment will likely be used primarily to count passenger boardings. Passenger counting is a secondary function of fare equipment, and while a historically reliable method to count boardings, technology is widely available to provide more detailed passenger boarding information. For example, MART currently uses APCs to provide ridership data that are more accurate and reliable than those derived from operator-based counts.

On-board equipment and ticket vending machines

MART currently uses an electronic GFI Genfare farebox system to scan passenger payments. Prior to suspension of fares, passengers could pay fares on the bus using cash or stored-value cards. Multi-day passes were available for purchase with cash or credit card at MART administrative offices in Fitchburg, Gardner, and Athol.

In 2022, MART switched from using the CharlieCard system, compatible with WRTA and MBTA fare collection, to the MART Card system. This stored value card system is supported by GFI Genfare. The MART Card was available to purchase via desktop or mobile application.

Passengers could reload value onto the card after registering with basic personal information such as name, email, and password. Passengers could add funds to purchase "pay as you go" fares or purchase monthly passes. The mobile app also allows passengers to select a "One Ride Mobile" ticket. To use the MART Card, passengers can activate a one-way ticket and display the ticket, or scan a monthly pass QR code for validation by the bus operator.

The MART Card system can only be used for MART trips. Passengers transferring to a separate service, such as MBTA or FRTA, must purchase fares through their connecting provider. MART has been working with a vendor to develop a new mobile application for fare collection. They anticipate launching the new app in early 2026.

The average age of the farebox equipment is approximately five to six years with an average cost of $38,000 annually to maintain the equipment. Farebox equipment is currently included in the latest MART TAM Plan. Retail sales locations for passes and stored value cards include the Fitchburg ITC, the Administrative Headquarters in Fitchburg, the Gardner Operations Facility, and Athol Depot.

MART currently collects fares for MART Connects, a taxi and livery service provided in select member communities. Rides can be for any purpose and are provided by taxis. MART also collects fares for their late-night Evening Ride service, which is also delivered via taxi, and for their Monthly Ride subscription service. Riders book MART Connects and Evening Ride service trips over the phone and pay by credit/debit card. Monthly Ride subscription passengers can arrange travel and payment over the phone or in person at the Fitchburg administrative office. Passengers who pay for the subscription service in person have the option to pay their fares with cash.

Staff who facilitate fare payment transactions also have other roles and responsibilities beyond sales including receiving customer calls, providing information and directions, and receiving and documenting customer complaints.

Cash Control and Management

MART currently handles cash collected from paid parking and from passengers paying for monthly subscriptions in cash at the administration center. MART's Head of Security, an armed security officer, collects cash at Commuter Rail parking locations (one in Leominster, two in Fitchburg, and one in Ayer). Cash is then transported to MART's finance department who is responsible for cash reconciling and depositing.

Fare-free Transit Best Practices

Agencies across the country have experimented with fare-free transit. This subsection details best practices for implementing a fare-free system.

Transit Access and Efficiency

Fare-free transit often increases access and efficiency.

Ridership

Fare-free transit almost always is associated with a significant increase in ridership. Fare-free transit has repeatedly shown to increase ridership by 20 to 60 percent for transit agencies in the United States. Agencies that went fully fare-free before the COVID-19 pandemic experienced 20 to 100 percent increases in ridership within the first two years of the policy change. Paratransit services have seen similar growth, with increases up to 60 percent after implementation of fare-free service. Studies suggest that 5 to 30 percent of new trips resulting

from fare-free policy come from those who previously took other motorized modes of travel (Volinski 2012).

Operational Efficiency

Fare-free transit simplifies both the ride experience for passengers and the workload of operators. Without fare collection, dwell time per passenger during boarding and alighting is reduced without the queues at the farebox; it also enables more efficient all-door boarding. Shorter dwell time improves on-time performance and service reliability. Fare-free transit has been acknowledged to have significantly improved on-time performance at RTAs in Massachusetts (Baxandall 2025).

Free fares may encourage more frequent shorter rides by passengers who may have otherwise walked. Despite the reduced dwell time per passenger resulting from elimination of farebox queues, more stops and larger boarding and alighting volumes may negatively impact absolute dwell time. This is most acute where stops are located in close proximity to each other and can be mitigated with increased spacing that balances operational efficiency with passenger access.

Financial Health

If not collecting fares, agencies must replace lost revenue; this is balanced against the fact that it costs agencies money to collect fares in the first place.

Revenue Sources

Identifying and acquiring alternative revenue sources to replace fare revenue is a significant barrier to implementing and maintaining fare-free transit. Securing a funding source for Massachusetts RTAs is essential to the maintenance of fare-free transit.

Revenue Collection Costs

The loss of revenue by eliminating fare collection is a concern for RTAs. However, fare-free transit also provides an opportunity for cost savings. Fare-free transit eliminates costs associated with the administration, enforcement, and equipment maintenance of fare collection. Fare administration, collection, and enforcement have been documented as consuming over 25 percent of fare revenue at Massachusetts RTAs (Worcester Regional Research Bureau 2019).

Increased ridership resulting from fare-free transit often creates the need for increased capacity. RTAs may need to act to effectively handle the increased demand, such as expanding fleets, hiring more staff, or expanding service. Agencies should anticipate or acknowledge the potential for higher costs associated with providing higher capacity service to accommodate increased ridership.

A bigger challenge for MART may be the complementary paratransit service provided for seniors and people with disabilities. Paratransit services do not scale the same as fixed route services. The personalized nature of the service means that, as more riders book more trips, both vehicle and staff productivity tends to fall and capacity to provide trips becomes strained. Funding is needed to not only replace revenue lost to fare suspension but also provide resources to hire and train additional staff needed to meet the growing demand for paratransit service.

Operator and Passenger Experience

Farebox disputes are the most likely incident that results in transit operator assaults. FTA reports operator assaults per unlinked passenger increased fourfold from 2009 to 2020 (Van Eyken 2022). Fare-free transit programs improve operator safety by eliminating conflict over fare collection, and have generally received positive feedback from operators. Many prominent transit organizations are in support of fare-free transit for its positive implications towards ensuring operation safety. Fare-free transit also reduces barriers to operator recruitment by reducing the need of operators to hold technical knowledge regarding farebox technologies (Transit Workforce Center 2022).

Fare-free transit can increase the number of non-destination riders (i.e., people who use the transit system for shelter or as a pastime). Fare-free transit is an attractive option for someone without shelter to find respite from weather. Because transit is a public service, it is a challenge to provide equitable access for all members of the community while discouraging non-destination riding that may be disruptive to other passengers.

Riding policies, like having all passengers exit the bus at the end of the line, can dissuade non-destination riding. Agencies can collaborate with social service providers to extend outreach and intervention opportunities (GoTriangle 2025). Loitering rules can be better enforced at terminals and bus stops, and rules of conduct can be imposed and enforced when customers act unruly or disturb other passengers on board.

Future of Fare-free Regional Transit

Funding fare-free transit in the future comes with both risks and opportunities.

Risks

Risks that go along with funding fare-free transit include the uncertainty of continued state funding and the provision of fare collection equipment should fare collection resume.

State Funding

Starting in the FY 2024 state budget, fare-free service was funded with a discretionary grant program appropriated annually and funded with Fair Share Amendment revenue. The FY 2026 state budget amended Massachusetts General Law Chapter 161B with a mandate for fare-free transit service. The transition from a discretionary program to a statutory funding requirement provides a greater degree of certainty to MART that the funds will be available each year; however, "subject to appropriation" in the amendment suggests that the funding could be at risk from prolonged budgetary constraints.

Fare Equipment State of Good Repair

MART continues to maintain fare collection equipment that is not being used. This maintenance adds costs to operating budgets with no direct benefit to the public or improved operating efficiency. The GFI Genfare fare collection system is now five to six years old. Fare collection equipment has a useful life benchmark of 5 to 10 years set by MART based on equipment type. Maintaining equipment that is no longer needed for fare collection and only used to count passengers is costly and does not produce the same precision passenger counts of an APC system.

The amendment to Massachusetts General Law provides certainty that lost fare revenue will be reimbursed. The risk, however, is that if the state budget is constrained and funds are not appropriated to reimburse lost fare revenue, MART will not have the capacity to collect fares

once fare collection equipment has been phased out. The timeline for a fare collection system design and implementation can take years. The long lead time means it is unlikely a new system can be deployed between the time fare-free funding is suspended and revenue is needed to maintain a balanced operating budget.

Opportunities

Fare-free transit benefits social service agencies, school districts, community colleges, four-year colleges and universities, and other community-based organizations that have historically made bulk pass purchases. MART had agreements with GFI Genfare for pass ticket vending machines, worth approximately $51,000 per machine. Fare-free transit is cost-saving for these institutions; however, it represents a revenue loss for MART, which is offset with Section 161B funds.

Opportunities for revenue enhancements to replace farebox collections are limited. Higher ridership may make advertising space inside the bus, at terminals, and stops more attractive as it is visible to more people. Additional vehicles in service to meet the demands of higher ridership may present more opportunities for vehicle exterior advertising space.

MART is considering using fare collection equipment to count passenger boardings. The equipment can register an accurate count of boardings; however, the technology is limited when compared to APC systems. When the equipment reaches its useful life benchmark, capital funds that would have been used for a system replacement can be reallocated for a technology upgrade that includes APC, AVL, and CAD systems. This suite of technology provides precise vehicle location and passenger counts that can be used to improve system performance; CAD systems improve communication between vehicles on the road and the dispatch office. Without the need for a fare collection system, MART can spend limited capital funds on technology that improves operations.

Future of Fare-Free Policy

With the passage of the FY 2026 state budget and the changes to Chapter 161B, there is increased certainty in the state policy environment with regard to fare-free regional transit. RTAs around the Commonwealth may choose to make policy and operational decisions that assume future funding replacement for fare revenue.

Appendix B Environmental Policy

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has set ambitious statewide goals regarding environmental quality, as have many of its regions and municipalities. With transportation emissions contributing significantly to statewide greenhouse gas emissions and poor air quality, efforts to reduce those emissions through technology or encouraging transit ridership are described in this appendix. This appendix highlights how those environmental policies or programs may intersect with, inform, or drive MART actions.

Overview of Environmental Policies that May Intersect with Regional Transit Authority Activities

The following sections identify RTA activities and the associated supportive policies:

- Commonwealth policies are statewide policies or goals that support specific RTA activities.
- Regional policies are any climate action plans established by Regional Planning Agencies if those plans include transportation goals, targets, or actions.
- Local policies are any municipal climate action plans with transportation goals. Separate transportation-specific plans are not included. Comprehensive plans are included if there is a strong and specific reference to climate change actions and no separate climate plan for the city. Natural Hazard Mitigation Plans, Net Zero Action Plans, and other plans that feature climate action are included.

RTA-specific goals and studies are another important source of information supporting specific RTA actions regarding environmental quality. Together, the statewide, regional, and local policy context should help to inform decision making and goals contained within the five-year RTA plan.

Foundational Commonwealth Environmental Policies

There are several foundational Commonwealth policies that set the stage for greenhouse gas emissions reductions from the transportation sector. These policies may support numerous RTA activities as they relate to greenhouse gas emissions reductions, given the alignment between emissions reductions and maximizing transit ridership, serving transit-oriented places, and installing green energy infrastructure.

- Global Warming Solutions Act: Signed into law in August 2008, this act required the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs to set economy-wide greenhouse gas emissions reduction goals, including for transportation, that achieve a 10 to 25 percent reduction below statewide 1990 levels by 2020 and at least 80 percent reduction below statewide 1990 levels by 2050 (Commonwealth of Massachusetts 2008b).
- Commission of the Future of Transportation in the Commonwealth: Established by Executive Order 579 (Baker 2018) in 2018, this commission developed multiple recommendations related to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and promoting energy efficiency (Governor's Press Office 2018).
    - 2050 Decarbonization Roadmap: Published in December 2020, the Roadmap is a result of a Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs planning process to identify cost-effective and equitable strategies for Massachusetts

to reach its goal of 85 percent greenhouse gas emissions reductions by 2050 and achieving net zero emissions (Commonwealth of Massachusetts 2020).

- Clean Energy and Climate Plan for 2050: Released in 2022, this plan represents Commonwealth policies and strategies to reach net zero in 2050 (Commonwealth of Massachusetts 2022).
- Green Communities Act: Signed in 2008, this act expanded energy efficiency, supported the development of renewable energy resources, created a greener state building code, and created the green communities program (Commonwealth of Massachusetts 2008a).
- Beyond Mobility: The statewide long-range transportation plan, published in 2024, lays out a number of actions to be undertaken by MassDOT, several of which focus on reducing greenhouse gas emissions from the transportation sector (Commonwealth of Massachusetts 2024a).

Maximizing Transit Ridership

Efforts by the Commonwealth as well as regionally have sought to maximize transit ridership.

Commonwealth Efforts

A key method of reducing environmental impact of the transportation sector is increasing ridership on transit, particularly if it shifts people from single-occupancy vehicles into a comparatively efficient transit bus. There have been multiple efforts undertaken at the statewide level to increase RTA ridership:

- Funding for Fare-Free Service: After a $15 million pilot for fare-free RTA transit in FY 2024, Massachusetts approved funding in its FY 2025 budget granting $30 million to 13 RTAs to provide year-round, fare free service (MassDOT 2024a).
- Coordination of Service Providers: MassDOT provides a toolkit on coordinating service providers to maximize mobility, increase ridership, and serve riders more efficiently. The toolkit includes case studies, ways to get involved, and Coordinated Human Service Transportation Plans developed by Regional Planning Agencies (Commonwealth of Massachusetts 2025d).
- Mobility Management: MassMobility is a MassDOT initiative that aims to increase mobility for those who lack transportation access, including seniors, people with disabilities, veterans, and low-income commuters (Commonwealth of Massachusetts 2025e).
- Regional Transit Innovation Grant: MassDOT has provided grants that provide funding to transit providers for innovative projects. Eligible projects enhance or expand existing service, provide innovative transit service, improve connectivity of rural areas and between regional transit service areas, or support electrification (Commonwealth of Massachusetts 2024b).
- 310 Code of Massachusetts Regulations 60.05, Global Warming Solutions Act Requirements for Transportation: Includes requirements that support maximizing transit ridership and may be an effective tool for RTAs who are working to increase ridership in communities that they serve.

Regional Efforts

The following regional policies are supportive of maximizing transit ridership.

- MRPC/*Comprehensive Climate Action Plan:* Reduce vehicle travel demand/improve transportation mobility (MRPC 2025).

Serving Transit-Oriented and Transit-Dependent Places

Both the Commonwealth and local governments have created policies geared towards serving transit-oriented and dependent places.

Commonwealth Efforts

There are several statewide initiatives to support the development of transit-oriented places and to focus transit service on those places that are most dependent on public transportation.

- Massachusetts Chapter 40R, or The Smart Growth Zoning Overlay District Act, Chapter 249 of the Acts of 2004: Encourages dense residential and mixed-use development through "smart growth" zoning districts. The goal is to increase housing supply by increasing the amount of land zoned for dense housing, including a high percentage of affordable housing units to be located near transit stations. Communities are eligible for Chapter 40R payments and other financial incentives upon state review and approval of a local overlay district (Commonwealth of Massachusetts 2025b).
- Section 3A of Massachusetts General Law c.40A, also known as the MBTA Communities Law: The goal of this law is to create zoning that encourages the development of housing in areas served by MBTA rapid transit (Commonwealth of Massachusetts 2025f). Given the overlap between RTA and MBTA rapid transit-served areas, as housing developments come to those areas targeted by the law, RTAs may consider enhancing complementary fixed route service depending on the context and need.

Local Efforts

The following local policies are supportive of serving transit-oriented or transit-dependent places.

- Fitchburg Downtown Urban Revitalization & Development Plan (Fitchburg Redevelopment Authority 2022)
  - Promote transit oriented development (TOD), particularly adjacent to commuter rail.
  - Promote TOD in downtown Fitchburg.
  - Support transportation choice in Fitchburg.
- City of Gardner Mill Street Corridor Urban Renewal Plan (City of Gardner 2012)
  - Expand housing opportunities near transit
  - Provide transportation choice and prioritize transit and other alternatives to single occupancy vehicle travel.
- Devens Forward Action Plan (Devens Enterprise Commission 2024)
  - Redevelop Vicksburg Square into a mixed use center.
  - Support diverse housing options for transit-dependent populations.
  - Encourage TOD.
  - Provide connections to transit stops.

Vehicle Emission Reductions

The Commonwealth and regional government have developed policies meant to reduce vehicle emissions.

Commonwealth Efforts

The Commonwealth has provided policy and funding support for transition of public transportation vehicles to zero-emission forms of propulsion. This complements RTA efforts to incorporate low- and zero-emission vehicles into their fleet.

- H.5060 An Act Driving Clean Energy and Offshore Wind, the Clean Energy and Climate Plan for 2050: This act contains numerous transportation-related actions. This policy can be supportive of those efforts in that it calls for the MBTA bus fleet to be all electric by 2040; RTAs could potentially leverage that electrification effort to support procurement of their own electric vehicles. Additionally, it requires MassDOT to provide technical and funding assistance to RTAs to help electrify their fleets and to provide RTAs with assistance to create an electric bus rollout plan. MassDOT is also directed to consult with RTAs on developing and issuing recommendations for a program of incentives for authorities to develop and maintain buses and other zero emissions vehicles (Bill H.5060 2022). The directives to MassDOT could be a significant source of support for RTAs in this work.
- Beyond Mobility: This statewide plan contains a specific action to support electrification of public transportation vehicles, including RTA vehicles (Commonwealth of Massachusetts 2024a).

Regional Efforts

The following regional policy is supportive of electrification.

- MRPC/*Comprehensive Climate Action Plan:* Electrify personal transportation networks (MRPC 2025).

Supportive Local Efforts

Table 39 demonstrates where MART's transportation planning efforts may coordinate with or support existing plan and policy goals for respective cities within the MART planning area. For cities that do not have climate plans or whose climate plans do not contain transportation-related actions, the transportation planning work of MART may help to fill the gap.

While transportation actions varied across communities, general themes emerged around mobility, access, affordability, greenhouse gas emissions reductions including electrification, and protecting transportation infrastructure (e.g., roads, bridges, culverts) from the effects of climate change to maintain continuity of operations and evacuation routes.

Table 39. Cities and Towns in the MART Service Area with Climate Action Plan Transportation Goals

City Name	Climate Action Plan	Transportation Included (Y/N)
Leominster	Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan	Y
Fitchburg	Hazard Mitigation Plan	Y
Gardner	Gardner MVP report Green Communities Action Plan	N Y

Challenges and Opportunities

MART currently faces challenges with fleet electrification efforts. MART's current facility in Fitchburg cannot accommodate electric vehicle charging infrastructure. This challenge will need to be addressed before electric vehicles can be deployed on routes serving Fitchburg. As of now, charging infrastructure can only be accommodated at MART's smaller, satellite facility in Gardner. MART's current electric vehicles will thus only be eligible for service within Gardner.

Efforts surrounding TOD have thus far sparked few coordination efforts between MART and member municipalities. Recently, developers in Fitchburg and Leominster contacted MART about transit infrastructure and service. Other potential considerations include the Devens Business Enterprise Zone, which is currently served by on-demand service and a commuter connection to Boston. MART welcomes opportunities to collaborate with member municipalities and with Devens leadership to provide service that meets the needs of residents throughout the MART service area. MART currently engages proactively with the housing authorities in Fitchburg, Gardner, and Leominster. This collaboration is leading to the installation of two bus shelters in Gardner and one in Fitchburg, with the housing authorities handling the permitting and concrete pad installation, and MART responsible for installing the shelters. In collaboration with the City of Gardner and the Gardner COA, MART will extend Routes 2 and 3 in spring 2026 to serve Gardner's new multi-use facility. This expansion will improve access to a range of services, including the COA, a food bank, gym, and other vital community resources. MART is in ongoing discussions with the cities of Fitchburg, Gardner, and Leominster to provide transit services to both redeveloped buildings being converted into housing in Fitchburg and new housing developments in Leominster and Gardner.

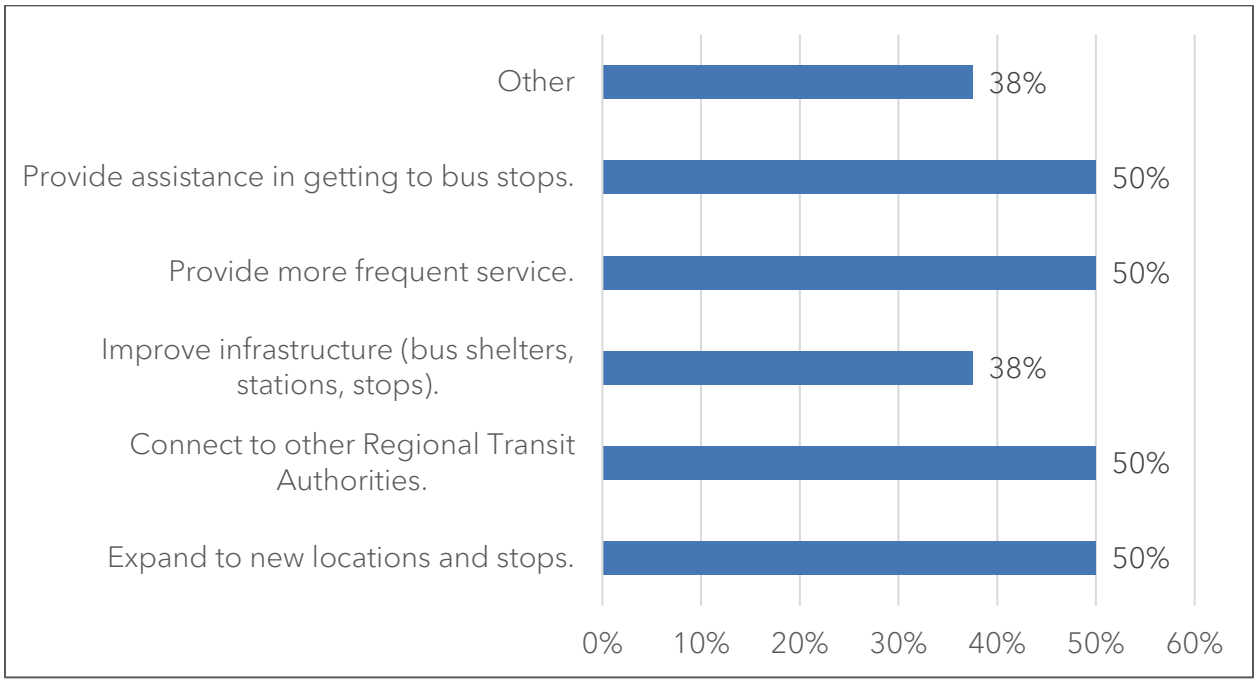
Appendix C Public Survey Results

This appendix includes the complete survey responses summarized in the Section 5.3.

Survey responses for what MART service improvements respondents wanted to see (Figure 46) reflected the following:

- Expand to new locations and stops (50 percent)
- Connect to other RTAs (50 percent)
- Provide more frequent service (50 percent)
- Provide assistance in getting to bus stops (50 percent)
- Improve infrastructure (bus shelters, stations, stops) (38 percent)
- Other (38 percent)

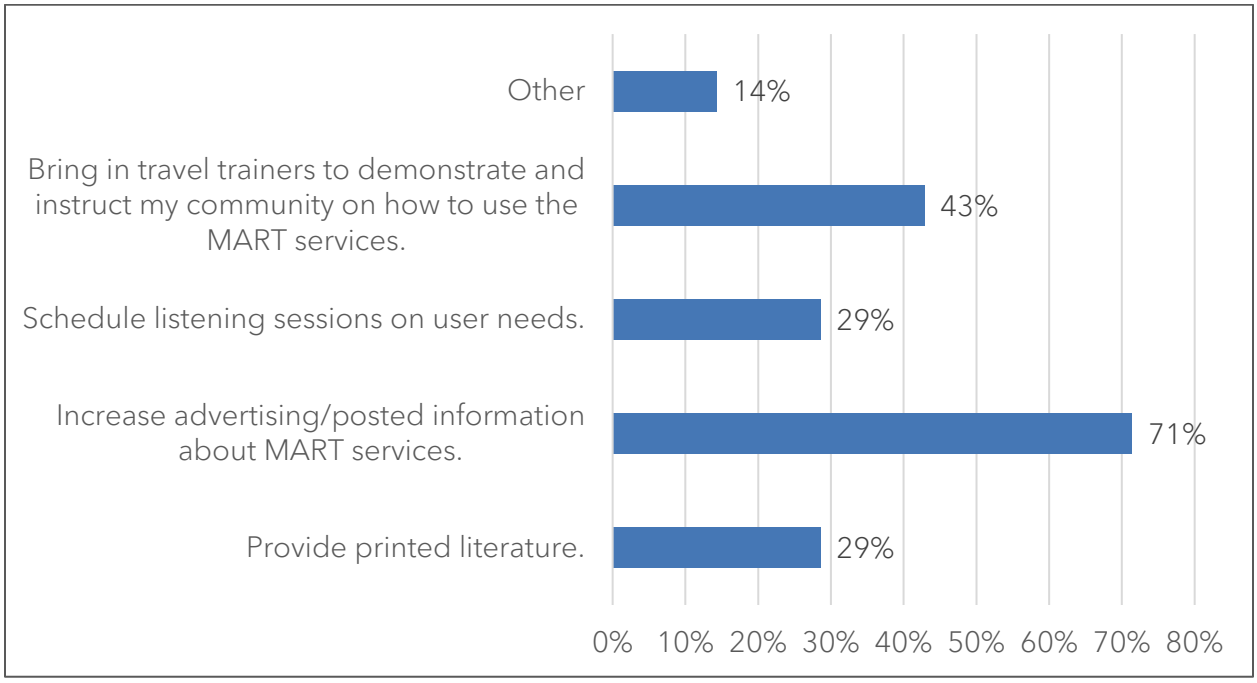
Figure 46. Which MART service improvements would be most beneficial to serve your community? (Select all that apply)



Survey responses for how MART could effectively promote its services (Figure 47) reflected the following:

- Increase advertising/posted information about MART services (71 percent)
- Bring in travel trainers to demonstrate and instruct my community on how to use the MART services (43 percent)
- Schedule listening sessions on user needs (29 percent)
- Provide printed literature (29 percent)
- Other (14 percent)

Figure 47. What are some ways MART could effectively promote its services to your community? (Select all that apply)



Respondents were asked what are key locations or neighborhoods MART does not currently serve that could be evaluated for future service, along with days of the week/times that this service might be needed. Direct responses included the following:

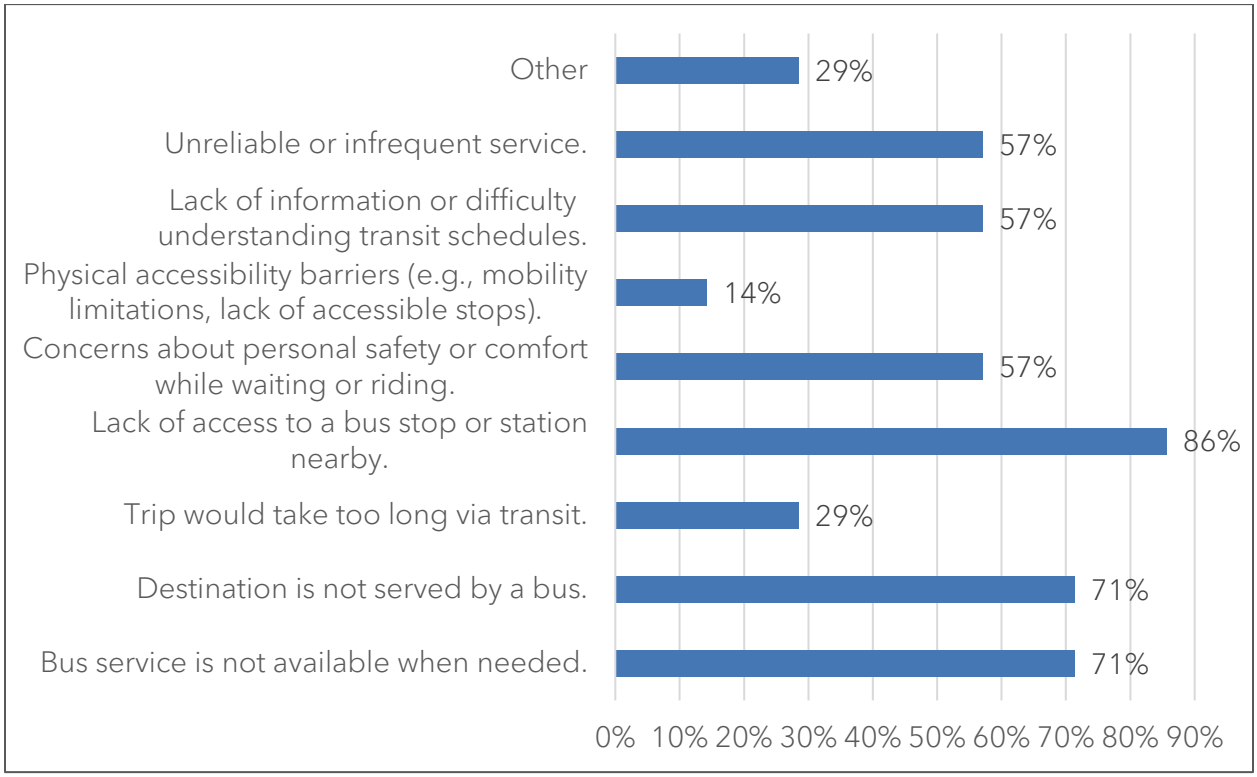
- Boston area hospitals are always a struggle to get to and while the ones not on a fixed route can be requested, some people will struggle with remembering to call for a return ride. Having a fixed route schedule for the Boston hospitals would be beneficial for those that struggle with multiple steps to make sure they get home.
- Townsend Common all week, three times a day, to connect to various routes. Townsend Library stop, three times a day during business hours (opening and closing).
- Center of Town.
- To make transit popular, the investment would need to be overwhelming as the community is rural.
- Town-wide routes with multiple buses.

Survey responses for reasons members of communities might not use the bus or regional transit for trips (Figure 48) reflected the following:

- Lack of access to a bus stop or station nearby (86 percent)
- Destination is not served by a bus (71 percent)
- Bus service is not available when needed (71 percent)
- Unreliable or infrequent service (57 percent)
- Lack of information or difficulty understanding transit schedules (57 percent)
- Concerns about personal safety or comfort while waiting or riding (57 percent)
- Trip would take too long via transit (29 percent)
- Other (29 percent)

- Physical accessibility barriers (e.g., mobility limitations, lack of accessible stops) (14 percent)

Figure 48. What are some reasons members of your community might not use the bus or regional transit services for certain trips?



Respondents were asked if there was anything else they would like to share with MART, or if they have any additional thoughts on MART service. Responses included the following:

- MART Connects has been a great transportation option to offer to the community. Having the access to transportation that is affordable for the weekends, early mornings and late evenings is a demand in our area. Having the distance expand beyond the 20-mile maximum would be beneficial.
- MART is a wonderful service. Catered advertisement for different age groups and transport to key places also for teenagers would be helpful.
- Appreciate the work you are attempting to accomplish.
- Unfortunately, while public transportation was cited as being important, the limited amount of services makes it unreliable. The amount of investment to make services reliable, timely, and effective would be extremely high.
- MART is a great service we are hoping to somehow integrate more in the future.
- Sporadic and limited service has appeared to make MART as a possibility for transportation difficult. The limited service has caused community members to rely more on rideshare services as it better suits their needs in terms of timing and destinations.