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AECOM

Comprehensive Regional Transit Plan Update 2025

Worcester Regional Transit Authority



Acknowledgements

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Acronyms

ACS	American Community Survey
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
APC	Automatic Passenger Counter
ARPA	American Rescue Plan Act
AVL	Automatic Vehicle Location
CAD	Computer Aided Dispatch
CARES	Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security
CMMPO	Central Massachusetts Metropolitan Planning Organization
CMRPC	Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission
COA	Council on Aging
CRTP	Comprehensive Regional Transit Plan
ESS	Elder Shopper Service
FTA	Federal Transit Administration
FY	Fiscal Year
GTFS	General Transit Feed Specification
IIJA	Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act
LEHD	Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics
MART	Montachusett Regional Transit Authority
MassDOT	Massachusetts Department of Transportation
MBTA	Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority
MMM	Mobility Management Model
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPO	Metropolitan Planning Organization
MWRTA	MetroWest Regional Transit Authority
NTD	National Transit Database
PTASP	Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan
PVTA	Pioneer Valley Transit Authority
QCC	Quinsigamond Community College
RMV	Registry of Motor Vehicles
RTA	Regional Transit Authority
RTD	Rail & Transit Division
TAM	Transit Asset Management
TERM	Transit Economic Requirements Model
UMass	University of Massachusetts

Comprehensive Regional Transit Plan Update

Worcester Regional Transit Authority

WDS	Webster, Dudley, Southbridge
WPI	Worcester Polytechnic Institute
WRTA	Worcester Regional Transit Authority
WSU	Worcester State University

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 paratransit, 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, primarily through electric power from batteries.

1 Executive Summary

This 2025 update of the Comprehensive Regional Transit Plan (CRTP) for the Worcester Regional Transit Authority (WRTA) 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, industry standards, local policy, statewide objectives, and WRTA 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. WRTA Central Hub



Source: AECOM (2025)

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 WRTA has made over the past five years include:

- Implementation of fare-free transit service, directly addressing the 2020 recommendation to reduce the cost of transit use for riders.
- Realization of a comprehensive update to schedules, such as improved frequencies and spans and reinstated full Friday service, aligning with multiple past recommendations to enhance service and improve on-time performance.
- Introduction of new Via-WRTA on-demand microtransit service in parts of Northborough, Shrewsbury, and Westborough, complete with a dedicated rider app to book rides.

- Communication and marketing improvements, enhanced clarity of service information, facilitated rider tools such as real-time vehicle tracking, overhauled and redesigned WRTA website, as well as the ongoing system rebrand project to refresh the WRTA brand design and increase system visibility. These improvements align with the previously identified need to pursue website updates, in a broader capacity.
- Near-complete replacement of fixed-route Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD)/ Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL) technology to improve performance monitoring and real-time information for both enhanced internal operations and improved customer-facing tools, connecting to the past goal of enhancing WRTA's performance management system.
- Ongoing bus stop study to comprehensively assess bus stops, improve bus stop spacing, and develop an accurate bus stop inventory.
- Strategic and focused outreach and engagement efforts, such as the 2024 fixed route customer satisfaction survey and 2025 demand response customer satisfaction survey, utilizing innovative outreach tools including open houses, bus banners, online advertising, and social media to boost response rates.
- Ongoing comprehensive service analysis to explore the potential for further service enhancements to meet rider demand.
- Ongoing facility capital projects to renovate and enhance infrastructure to meet rider demand and maintain facilities in a state of good repair.
- Robust and intentional hiring strategy to recruit and maintain operators.

1.2 Planning Process

The planning process for the CRTP was a collaborative effort in which WRTA prioritized engagement with the public and with WRTA operators to understand long-term priorities. WRTA utilized feedback from these groups, previous input from municipal partners, along with input from concurrent agency planning efforts, regional and statewide transportation plans, and reflections since 2020 to establish goals and objectives for this plan.

WRTA used both quantitative and qualitative input when developing recommendations. An evaluation of WRTA'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 was largely gathered between April and October 2025 to analyze existing conditions and provide a foundation for later elements. Therefore, the data referenced is 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 the most critical needs.

A robust outreach campaign was conducted, focusing on an intentional social media campaign along with an in-person pop up to promote a rider survey and collect feedback. WRTA gathered 486 responses using online and paper surveys across multiple languages. An operator survey was also distributed to gather insight from WRTA's drivers.

1.3 Recommendations

WRTA has developed 36 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 could change how certain recommendations are prioritized. These recommendations are grouped into seven primary categories: service, outreach and engagement, technology, capital assets, training and operations, data and performance, and partnerships and funding. Some recommendations incorporate elements that connect to other recommendations in different categories, such that pursuing one recommendation may consist of applying strategies or achieving related goals that are also applicable to another recommendation. Table 1 highlights these instances of overlap.

Table 1. Recommendations

ID	Recommendation	Recommendation Overlap
Service		
S1	Build on preliminary analyses and conduct a service expansion analysis (Appendix A) to extend service spans on high-ridership fixed routes (i.e., earlier mornings or later evenings).	N/A
S2	Build on preliminary analyses and conduct a service expansion analysis (Appendix A) to increase frequency on high ridership fixed routes (i.e., 15-minute clock-face schedule).	N/A
S3	Conduct a fixed route service analysis for crosstown route implementation to supplement the existing hub and spoke service. Refine service planning assumptions, develop cost estimates, and conduct additional engagement as needed.	C6
S4	Explore expanding microtransit zones utilizing data (i.e., demographics, ridership, funding availability, and public feedback) to inform decision-making and equitable deployment strategy development.	DP1
S5	Continue to coordinate with neighboring RTAs (i.e., MWRTA) for the deployment of additional service connection points, such as microtransit zones and fixed routes (i.e., PVTA Route B79).	PF4
S6	Utilize data (i.e., transit propensity market data) and stakeholder and public feedback to identify opportunities to address transit needs in peripheral communities.	OE1, OE3, DP1
S7	Align future demand response service improvements with best practices and outcomes from the Demand Response Study (WRTA 2025) and recommendations for improvements.	N/A
S8	Evaluate the feasibility of limited bus stop fixed route service.	DP1

ID	Recommendation	Recommendation Overlap
S9	Monitor on-time performance to determine the impact of WRTA's comprehensive schedule updates in April 2025 and identify opportunities to further improve on-time performance.	DP3

Outreach and Engagement

OE1	Launch and maintain quarterly hybrid paratransit, and maintain fixed route rider forums (conducted at the WRTA Central Hub).	S6
OE2	Advance system rebranding to continue to build awareness of the WRTA system and grow ridership.	C3
OE3	Continue to engage the Visually Impaired Community task force to solicit feedback on capital projects (i.e., the WRTA Central Hub Renovation project) and system improvements.	S6, C4

Technology

T1	Complete the replacement of WRTA's CAD/AVL technology with the Systrans Navineo system.	N/A
T2	Implement real-time trip planning technology using a GTFS-Realtime feed, available through the new Systrans Navineo system.	N/A
T3	Implement real-time digital signage along heavy ridership corridors.	C3
T4	Implement trip planning kiosks at high ridership locations and/or eventual mini hubs.	C7
T5	Identify opportunities for strategic deployment of transit signal priority improvements.	N/A
T6	Procure and implement new demand response technology to consolidate all demand response contractors into one system, improve customer-facing tools, and facilitate service delivery flexibility.	N/A

Capital Assets

C1	Complete the WRTA Bus Stop Study and align future bus stop modifications with study recommendations. Implement bus stop infrastructure in partnership with the City of Worcester.	PF1
C2	Develop bus stop guidelines that reflect Bus Stop Study outcomes, WRTA preferences for bus stop placement, and coordination with municipalities.	PF1
C3	Implement new vehicle wrapping and bus stop signage in alignment with the system rebranding.	OE2, T3
C4	Complete the WRTA Central Hub Renovation project, incorporating feedback from stakeholders such as the Visually Impaired Community task force.	OE3

ID	Recommendation	Recommendation Overlap
C5	Conduct a site-selection analysis for potential mini hubs by building on a fixed route transfer point performance assessment (see DP2) and collecting public feedback. Depending on analysis outcomes, advance the implementation of mini hubs including exploring a short-term pilot.	DP2
C6	If crosstown service is implemented, procure additional vehicles to meet additional service demand, or consider alternate service design using existing assets.	S3
C7	Based on mini hub analysis (see C4), identify and procure capital infrastructure at high ridership locations such as safety amenities, rider technology, and right-of-way. Coordinate with municipality partners for identification and implementation.	T4, PF1

Training and Operations

TO1	Maintain support of fixed route contractor’s open hiring approach. Continue exploring further opportunities with fixed route and demand response contractors to leverage emerging workforce markets.	N/A
TO2	Continue to improve WRTA's safety and de-escalation training program.	N/A
TO3	Ensure WRTA contractors comply with all required training programs for their staff. Furthermore, ensure contractors actively promote training and engagement opportunities for all drivers.	N/A

Data and Performance

DP1	Continue to identify opportunities to streamline data collection and processing and to leverage data for informed decision-making (i.e., the potential for microtransit expansion, increased service in more peripheral communities, or limited bus stop fixed route service).	S4, S6, S8
DP2	Evaluate performance at route transfer points throughout the service area to identify viable locations for potential mini hub development.	C5
DP3	Monitor on-time performance to determine the impact of WRTA's comprehensive schedule updates in April 2025, and identify opportunities to further improve on-time performance.	S9

Partnerships and Funding

PF1	Explore and leverage new or enhanced partnership opportunities to support capital projects (bus stop installations, mini hub development, etc.) and service efficiency/ expansion improvements.	C1, C2, C7
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ID	Recommendation	Recommendation Overlap
PF2	Continuously explore and pursue additional funding opportunities through partnerships and local, state, and federal resources.	N/A
PF3	Explore opportunities to engage with community development authorities, CMRPC, and municipal planning departments to monitor transit-oriented development opportunities that align with existing and planned transit service for enhanced connectivity.	N/A
PF4	Continue to collaborate with neighboring RTAs (MWRTA, MART, PVTA) to identify areas for transit connection enhancements.	S5
PF5	Continue to engage with member communities/towns to identify opportunities for improved demand response service efficiency.	N/A

N/A = Not Applicable

2 Background and Context

WRTA, alongside the Commonwealth of Massachusetts's 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, WRTA updates its CRTP every five years. This document represents the 2025 update of the WRTA CRTP, intended to support planning efforts over the next five years, through 2030.

The chapters of the plan include:

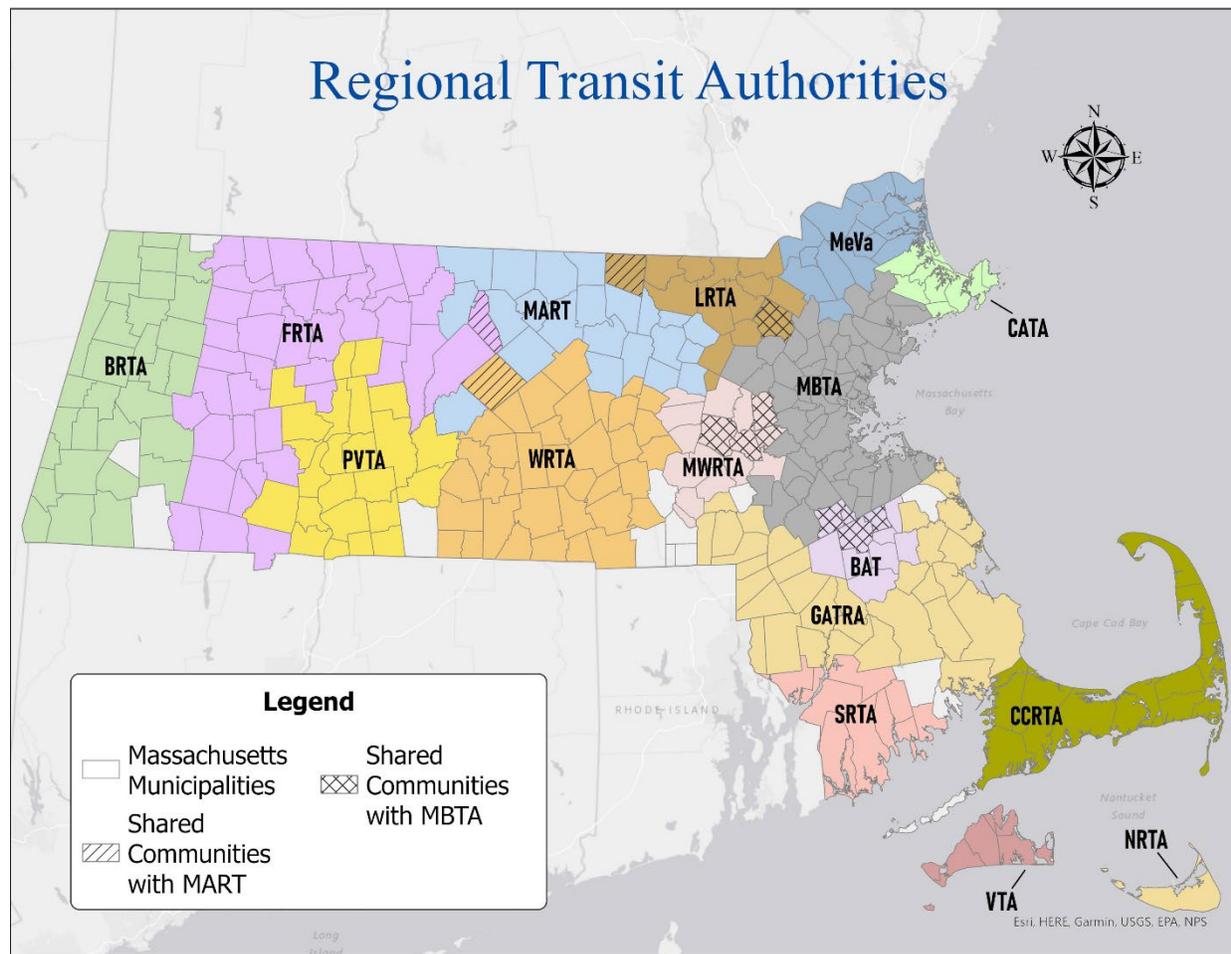
- **Needs and Goals:** Overview of identified needs and goals of WRTA that provide the foundation for recommendations over the next five years.
- **Existing Conditions:** Review of WRTA performance information.
- **Market Evaluation:** Assessment of transit demand through demographic analysis and engagement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

Additionally, the CRTP contains multiple appendices. Appendix A provides the results of a preliminary service planning assessment for phased implementation of more consistent spans and increased frequencies across fixed routes. Two appendices review fare (Appendix B) and environmental (Appendix C) considerations based on the broader statewide and national context. Fare-free service described in Appendix B in particular has been attributed as a key strategy supporting the ongoing recovery in transit ridership after the COVID pandemic. More information, including the history, context, and funding approach for fare-free service, can be found in that appendix.

2.1 Overview of WRTA Services

WRTA is headquartered in Worcester and is one of the 15 RTAs that, along with the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), provides public transportation in the Commonwealth (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Massachusetts Transit Providers



Source: Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT)

WRTA offers transit service within its service area consisting of 37 member communities. Fixed route service is offered in 16 of the 37 member communities via 23 city fixed routes, 3 community shuttle fixed routes, and 1 special fixed route providing grocery shopping trips from various housing complexes twice a week. The city fixed routes share a common terminus of the WRTA Central Hub in Worcester.

WRTA provides complementary Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) paratransit service within a 3/4 mile area surrounding each fixed route, in compliance with Federal Transit Administration (FTA) regulations, as well as non-ADA paratransit service for older adults and people with disabilities in each of the member communities.

WRTA partners with the Towns of Auburn, Clinton, Grafton, Holden, Leicester, Millbury, Northborough, Oxford, Shrewsbury, West Boylston, and Westborough to provide demand response services for older adult and/or disabled residents of these communities. Eight of these communities opt into WRTA's Mobility Management Model (MMM) Program. The MMM Program is a demand response transportation service for seniors and individuals with disabilities that is cooperatively supported by WRTA and WRTA member communities. The intent of the MMM Program is to increase transportation options for vulnerable populations within the WRTA service area that have limited or lack access to other public transit options. The program also mitigates the responsibility and challenges that municipalities experience when providing transportation directly, by centralizing passenger scheduling and vehicle

dispatch and by increasing operating efficiencies through the grouping of passenger trips that are optimized by scheduling and routing software to save time.

WRTA also contracts with SCM Elderbus, a private non-profit 501(c)3 organization, to provide ADA and non-ADA demand response services to older adult and disabled residents of 22 WRTA communities south, west, and northwest of Worcester. Finally, WRTA offers Via-WRTA, an on-demand microtransit service that is operated by Via Transportation, Inc. and is available in parts of Northborough, Shrewsbury, and Westborough, complete with a dedicated rider app to book rides.

Since the 2020 CRTP, WRTA 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 WRTA'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* (refer to 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 for WRTA's 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 WRTA 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, WRTA seeks to address critical needs within the agency and the communities it serves. As part of the CRTP update, goals and objectives for this timeframe were identified that align with WRTA's stated mission. The goals set forth include reimagining mobility solutions, prioritizing innovative planning and capital projects, and promoting WRTA's value in the community.

3.1 WRTA Mission

WRTA operates according to its stated mission to “provide convenient, comfortable, safe, reliable, cost-effective mobility services contributing to the economic vitality of the region.”

3.2 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 WRTA'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 WRTA-specific needs and goals for the 2025 CRTP include:

- Promoting cross-RTA coordination and interconnectivity across 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 WRTA CRTP update include service, system performance and monitoring, system awareness, coordination, and resiliency, which are in alignment with these statewide goals. Statewide goals to convert public transit fleets to be zero emission support broader sustainability goals of providing all people access to a clean and healthy environment. WRTA is still exploring the long-term operational feasibility to implement, operate, and maintain zero emission technologies.

3.3 Identified Needs

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

- Increasing/enhancing transit services
- Retaining existing riders and attracting new riders
- Simplifying rider interaction with the system
- Right sizing access across the WRTA service area
- Continually assessing and improving system performance
- Exploring and positioning WRTA for future funding opportunities

3.4 Goals and Objectives

As part of WRTA's CRTP, goals and objectives were identified for the next five years in alignment with the agency mission.

Starting with the 2020 CRTP, an evaluation was conducted of the previous goals, objectives, needs, and recommendations. This information served as the basis for WRTA staff to identify priorities, opportunities, and any potential barriers for the 2025 CRTP. To identify goals and objectives, the evaluation focused on priorities of WRTA and the community and stakeholders. Additional consideration was given to regional goals, such as those of the metropolitan planning organization (MPO) and of major regional partners in areas such as housing and economic development. The evaluation also focused on the broader context, including Commonwealth policies and goals and federal considerations.

The overarching goals identified for WRTA's 2025 CRTP are focused on service, planning and capital improvements, and community value, which are reflective of the agency's prioritized needs and opportunities. The objectives associated with each of these three goals are as follows, in no particular order of priority:

- **Goal 1. Reimagine mobility solutions**
 - Objective 1: Assess span(s) of service and service frequency to meet rider needs and priorities.
 - Objective 2: Evaluate the need and potential market for a crosstown network, including mini hubs, to support the usability of the network.
 - Objective 3: Continue monitoring and analyzing service and performance data to identify enhancement opportunities, such as for expanded weekend service or increased frequencies.
 - Objective 4: Assess opportunities for limited bus stop fixed route service on trunk routes and major corridors.
 - Objective 5: Focus on strategies to address low ridership routes/areas and consider alternative service types to fixed route service.
 - Objective 6: Assess microtransit service for long-term operational feasibility and identify potential funding opportunities as a replacement for low efficiency flex shuttle routes.
 - Objective: Utilize service and performance data to inform agency decision-making.
- **Goal 2: Prioritize innovative planning and capital projects**
 - Objective 1: Coordinate CRTP efforts with ongoing initiatives to avoid duplication of efforts and maximize planning efficiency and outcomes including bus stop study and infrastructure enhancements, demand response study, and rider education and training.

- Objective 2: Identify strategies to equitably distribute assets for maximized efficiency and longevity of services.
- Objective 3: Explore strategies to improve service legibility/clarity for riders.
- **Goal 3: Promote WRTA's value in the community.**
 - Objective 1: Advance system rebranding to promote agency awareness and attract new riders.
 - Objective 3: Coordinate with municipalities, Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC), and MBTA to identify opportunities that align with WRTA goals or that would support improvements to WRTA's transit system.
 - Objective 4: Explore innovative funding opportunities such as partnerships, subsidies, or grants.

These highlighted intentions, along with a detailed data assessment of WRTA's system from the last five years, provided a framework for the analysis and specific recommendations in the CRTP.

4 Existing Conditions

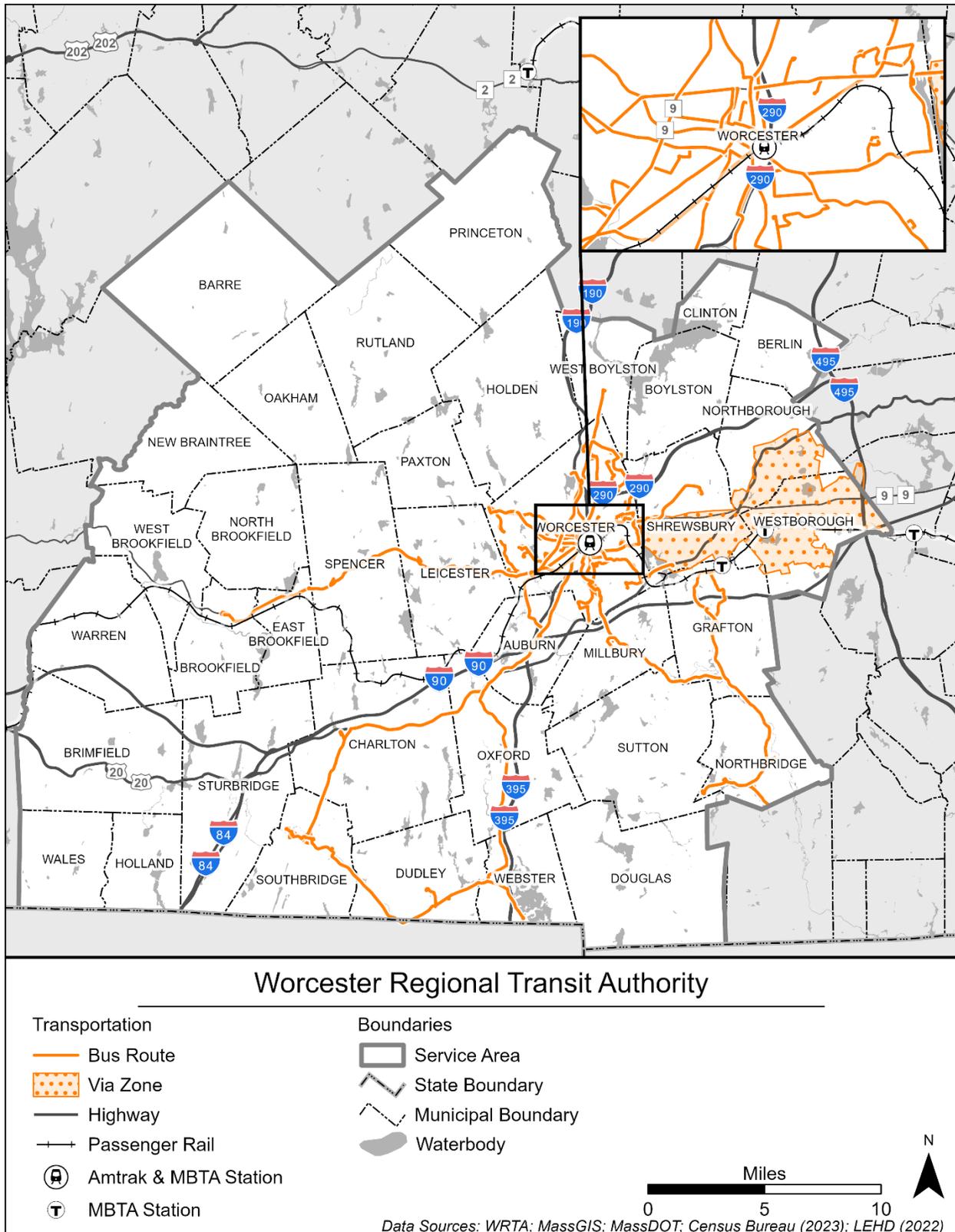
This chapter provides a comprehensive assessment of WRTA's existing conditions regarding transit services provided, ridership, and performance evaluation.

4.1 Transit Service Overview (2020-2024)

WRTA provides varying types of transit service within its 37 member communities (Figure 3). These communities are Auburn, Barre, Berlin, Boylston, Brimfield, Brookfield, Charlton, Clinton, Douglas, Dudley, East Brookfield, Grafton, Holden, Holland, Leicester, Millbury, New Braintree, Northborough, Northbridge, North Brookfield, Oakham, Oxford, Paxton, Princeton, Rutland, Shrewsbury, Southbridge, Spencer, Sturbridge, Sutton, Wales, Warren, Webster, Westborough, West Boylston, West Brookfield, and Worcester. WRTA operates 23 city fixed routes, 3 community shuttle fixed routes, and 1 special fixed route providing shopping trips from various housing complexes twice a week. The 23 city fixed routes share a common terminus of the WRTA Central Hub in Worcester. Fixed route service is offered in 16 of the 37 member communities: Auburn, Brookfield, Charlton, Dudley, East Brookfield, Grafton, Leicester, Millbury, Northbridge, Oxford, Shrewsbury, Southbridge, Spencer, Webster, West Boylston, and Worcester.

WRTA provides complementary ADA paratransit service within a $\frac{3}{4}$ mile area surrounding each fixed route in compliance with FTA regulations, as well as non-ADA paratransit service for older adults and people with disabilities in each of the member communities. WRTA partners with the municipalities of Auburn, Clinton, Grafton, Holden, Leicester, Millbury, Northborough, Oxford, Shrewsbury, West Boylston, and Westborough to provide demand response services for older adult and/or disabled residents of these communities. WRTA also contracts with SCM Elderbus, a private non-profit 501(c)3 organization, to serve older adult and disabled residents of 22 WRTA communities south, west, and northwest of Worcester. WRTA has an additional contract with Worcester Yellow Cab to provide trips for ambulatory passengers when demand response service trip demand exceeds system capacity, which is qualified as demand taxi service. Finally, WRTA offers Via-WRTA, an on-demand microtransit service in parts of Northborough, Shrewsbury, and Westborough, complete with a dedicated rider app to book rides.

Figure 3. Service Area and Routes



4.1.1 Fixed Route Descriptions

4.1.1.1 Fixed Routes

WRTA's service area is served by 26 fixed routes, in addition to the Elder Shopper special fixed route service, outlined in Table 2. The majority of WRTA fixed route service operates from the WRTA Central Hub in Worcester to the surrounding communities of the service area, following a hub and spoke model.

Table 2. Fixed Routes

Route Number	Route Name	Service Type	Service Destinations
1	Walmart 146 via Providence and Granite Street	Fixed Route - City	WRTA Central Hub, Worcester Academy, Vernon Medical Center, Rice Square, Worcester Senior Center, Vernon Hill Park, Walmart
2	Tatnuck Square via Pleasant Street	Fixed Route - City	WRTA Central Hub, Pleasant Street Apartments, Newton Square, Tatnuck Square, Sunny Hill Drive, Worcester Airport
3	Worcester State University via Highland Street	Fixed Route - City	WRTA Central Hub, Canterbury Towers Apartments, WPI, Doherty High School, Newton Square, May Street School, WSU
4	The Shoppes at Blackstone Valley via Millbury Street	Fixed Route - City	WRTA Central Hub, Kelley Square, Crompton Park, Walmart, Millbury Center, Shoppes at Blackstone Valley
5	Blithewood/Massasoit via Grafton Street	Fixed Route - City	WRTA Central Hub, Grafton Street School, Billings Square, Worcester East Middle School, South Plaza, Roosevelt School, Broad Meadow Brook
6	West Tatnuck via Chandler Street	Fixed Route - City	WRTA Central Hub, City Hall, Federal Building/U.S. Courthouse, Chandler Elementary School, Family Health Center, Foley Stadium, WSU, Tatnuck Square
7	Washington Heights Apartments via Mill Street	Fixed Route - City	WRTA Central Hub, City Hall, Federal Building/U.S. Courthouse, Chandler Elementary School, Family Health Center, Clark University, Lakeside, Coes Pond Village, and Washington Heights Apartments
825	Park Avenue Connector	Fixed Route - City	WRTA Central Hub, Canterbury Street, Cambridge Street, Main Street, Webster Square Plaza, Park Avenue, Mill Street Plaza, Lakeside Apartments, WPI, Greendale Mall, Shore Drive Medical Facility

Route Number	Route Name	Service Type	Service Destinations
11	The Fair Plaza via Vernon Hill and Greenwood Street	Fixed Route - City	WRTA Central Hub, Kelley Square, Vernon Medical Center, Worcester Senior Center, Curran Apartments, Walmart, Quinsigamond Village Community Center, Autumn Woods Apartments, The Fair Plaza, Imperial Distributors
12	Edgemere Crossing and DTA/RMV via Grafton Street	Fixed Route - City	WRTA Central Hub, Grafton Street School, Billings Square, North High School, Worcester East Middle School, South Plaza, Southwest Commons, Edgemere Crossing
14	Market32 and QCC via Burncoat Street	Fixed Route - City	WRTA Central Hub, Belmont Towers Apartments, AdCare Hospital, UMass Hahnemann Hospital, Burncoat Street, QCC, Market32, Higgins Industrial Park
15	Shrewsbury Center via Shrewsbury Street and Route 9	Fixed Route - City	WRTA Central Hub, Christoforo Columbo Park, UMass Medical Center, White City Plaza, Lakeway Commons, Marketplace Shrewsbury, Shrewsbury Town Hall, Shrewsbury Center
16	Lincoln Plaza via Hamilton Street and Lake Avenue	Fixed Route - City	WRTA Central Hub, Grafton Street School, North High School, Quinsigamond State Park, Lincoln Park Towers Apartments, UMass Medical Center, Plantation Towers Apartments, George Booth Apartments, Lincoln Plaza
19	Webster Square - Clark University via Main Street	Fixed Route - City	WRTA Central Hub, City Hall, Federal Building/U.S. Courthouse, Clark University, Webster Square, Webster Square Plaza, South High School, Airport Industrial Park
23	East Mountain Street via Lincoln Street	Fixed Route - City	WRTA Central Hub, Lincoln Square, AdCare Hospital, UMass Hahnemann Hospital, Lincoln Plaza, Lincoln Village Apartments, Worcester Arts Magnet School, Century Drive, The Fairways Apartments
24	UMass Medical Center via Belmont Street	Fixed Route - City	WRTA Central Hub, Mechanics Hall, Belmont Towers Apartments, UMass Memorial Hospital, Green Hill Tower Apartments, Seabury Heights Apartments, Worcester Recovery Center, UMass Medical Center
26	Great Brook Valley via Lincoln Street	Fixed Route - City	WRTA Central Hub, St. Vincent Hospital, AdCare Hospital, UMass Hahnemann Hospital, Lincoln Plaza, Great Brook Valley, Clark Street School

Route Number	Route Name	Service Type	Service Destinations
27	Auburn Mall via Main Street	Fixed Route - City	WRTA Central Hub, City Hall, YMCA Central Branch, Clark University, Webster Square, Webster Square Plaza, Auburn High School, Auburn Mall
29	Southbridge - Charlton	Fixed Route - City	WRTA Central Hub, Auburn Mall, Amazon Distribution Center, Charlton Family Practice, Imcon, QCC Southbridge, Southbridge Hotel and Conference Center, Jacob Edwards Library, Big Bunny Plaza
30	West Boylston Walmart via Grove Street and West Boylston Street	Fixed Route - City	WRTA Central Hub, St. Vincent Hospital, Gateway Park, The Trolley Yard, Reliant Medical Group, QCC, West Boylston Walmart
31	Lincoln Plaza via Elm Street and West Boylston Street	Fixed Route - City	WRTA Central Hub, Elm Park, WPI, Reliant Medical Group, Greendale Mall, QCC, The Fairways Apartments, Clark Street School, Great Brook Valley, Lincoln Plaza
33	Leicester, Spencer, Brookfield via Route 9	Fixed Route - City	WRTA Central Hub, City Hall, Federal Building/U.S. Courthouse, Clark University, Webster Square, Webster Square Plaza, Leicester Center, Leicester Walmart, Spencer Center, Western Worcester District Court, Brookfield Center
42	Auburn, Oxford, Webster via Southbridge Street	Fixed Route - City	WRTA Central Hub, College of the Holy Cross, Auburn Mall, Route 12, Oxford Walmart, Oxford Center, Webster Plaza, Webster Town Hall
A	Northbridge Walmart - Shoppes at Blackstone Valley via Grafton Street	Fixed Route - Community Shuttle	Northbridge Walmart Supercenter, New Village Whitinsville, Northbridge Senior Center, Tri-County Medical Center, Linwood Mill Apartments, Riverdale and Rockdale Villages, South Grafton/Fisherville Villages, Shoppes at Blackstone Valley
B	Northbridge - Grafton Stop & Shop - Grafton MBTA Station	Fixed Route - Community Shuttle	Northbridge Walmart Supercenter, New Village Whitinsville, Northbridge Senior Center, Tri-County Medical Center, Linwood Mill Apartments, Riverdale and Rockdale Villages, South Grafton/Fisherville Villages, Grafton Town Common, Stop & Shop, Grafton MBTA Station

Route Number	Route Name	Service Type	Service Destinations
WDS	Webster, Dudley, Southbridge Shuttle	Fixed Route - Community Shuttle	Big Bunny Plaza, Southbridge Harrington Hospital, Big Y Plaza, Nichols College, Dudley District Court, Dudley Housing Authority, Webster Town Hall & Senior Center, Webster Harrington Hospital
ESS	Elder Shopper	Fixed Route - Special	Shaws, Price Chopper, Big Y, Marble Street Apartments, Coes Pond Village, Upsala Street Apartments, Seabury Heights, Green Hill Towers, Colony Retirement Homes, Canterbury Towers, Illyrian Gardens

Source: WRTA

4.1.2 Provided Service

All fixed routes, demand response, and on-demand services operate every weekday, except for demand response services in Boylston, which only run on Tuesdays and Thursdays. On Saturdays, WRTA operates a reduced schedule on most fixed routes and ADA service, and further reduced schedules are provided on Sundays on 13 fixed routes. Weekday frequencies vary depending on the route and time of day, with city routes operating at headways ranging from 15 to 90 minutes and community shuttle routes running approximately every 45 to 120 minutes (Table 3).

Table 3. Span of Service and Headway

Route Number	Weekday Service Hours	Saturday Service Hours	Sunday Service Hours	Weekday Headway (Minutes)	Saturday Headway (Minutes)	Sunday Headway (Minutes)	Days Operated
1	5:52 AM - 9:47 PM	8:15 AM - 4:28 PM	9:45 AM - 5:13 PM	45	45	45	7
2	5:50 AM - 9:39 PM	9:45 AM - 5:34 PM	10:00 AM - 5:19 PM	60	60	45	7
3	5:10 AM - 9:40 PM	9:45 AM - 5:09 PM	N/A	45	45	N/A	6
4	6:35 AM - 9:54 PM	6:15 AM - 9:35 PM	10:00 AM - 5:27 PM	75	75	75	7
5	4:48 AM - 8:51 PM	5:22 AM - 8:17 PM	10:15 AM - 5:39 PM	45	45	45	7
6	5:35 AM - 10:27 PM	7:00 AM - 7:46 PM	N/A	60	60	N/A	6

Route Number	Weekday Service Hours	Saturday Service Hours	Sunday Service Hours	Weekday Headway (Minutes)	Saturday Headway (Minutes)	Sunday Headway (Minutes)	Days Operated
7	5:09 AM - 8:43 PM	6:15 AM - 9:34 PM	9:45 AM - 6:05 PM	30	60	60	7
825	6:10 AM - 9:32 PM	N/A	N/A	90	N/A	N/A	5
11	4:57 AM - 11:18 PM	6:00 AM - 9:52 PM	8:30 AM - 7:43 PM	30	60	60	7
12	6:10 AM - 9:53 PM	N/A	N/A	60	N/A	N/A	5
14	6:41 AM - 10:23 PM	N/A	N/A	30	N/A	N/A	5
15	5:20 AM - 9:24 PM	9:50 AM - 5:44 PM	N/A	75	60	N/A	6
16	6:10 AM - 10:23 PM	9:15 AM - 5:05 PM	N/A	45	45	N/A	6
19	5:30 AM - 10:56 PM	5:30 AM - 10:33 PM	10:30 AM - 6:23 PM	15-30	30	60	7
23	5:30 AM - 8:54 PM	6:30 AM - 9:17 PM	11:30 AM - 7:05 PM	30	30-60	60	7
24	5:25 AM - 8:45 PM	6:30 AM - 9:20 PM	9:30 AM - 6:45 PM	30	60	60	7
26	5:20 AM - 11:48 PM	6:15 AM - 9:00 PM	8:45 AM - 5:06 PM	20-30	30	60	7
27	5:09 AM - 9:50 PM	6:05 AM - 9:17 PM	8:45 AM - 5:03 PM	30-45	40	80	7
29	5:25 AM - 7:22 PM	8:00 AM - 7:53 PM	N/A	120	120	N/A	6
30	5:55 AM - 10:46 PM	6:30 AM - 9:23 PM	11:00 AM - 6:24 PM	20-30	30	60	7
31	6:16 AM - 9:46 PM	8:43 AM - 4:48 PM	N/A	45	45	N/A	6

Route Number	Weekday Service Hours	Saturday Service Hours	Sunday Service Hours	Weekday Headway (Minutes)	Saturday Headway (Minutes)	Sunday Headway (Minutes)	Days Operated
33	5:14 AM - 9:03 PM	6:50 AM - 10:31 PM	10:00 AM - 5:57 PM	60-120	60	60	7
42	5:20 AM - 9:08 PM	7:00 AM - 8:51 PM	N/A	120	120	N/A	6
A	9:10 AM - 4:45 PM	N/A	N/A	100	N/A	N/A	5
B	5:20 AM - 7:35 PM	N/A	N/A	60	N/A	N/A	5
WDS	5:10 AM - 7:10 PM	N/A	N/A	45-80	N/A	N/A	5
ESS	Tuesday: 9:10 AM - 12:10 PM Thursday: 8:55 AM - 12:00 PM	N/A	N/A	1 Round-Trip per Day	N/A	N/A	2

Source: WRTA

Note: In April 2025, WRTA implemented system-wide schedule changes and reinstated full Friday service as of August 2025. Friday service had been reduced on certain routes and specific trips starting in January 2022.

N/A = Not Applicable

4.1.3 Transit Service Performance

This section provides information on WRTA’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 and the nation is also provided.

WRTA’s annual fixed route operating statistics are broken down in Table 4. Aside from a slight drop from FY 2020 to FY 2021, ridership increased year to year between FY 2020 and FY 2024. Revenue hours peaked in FY 2022 and have declined each year since, and revenue miles peaked in FY 2023, decreasing in the following year. Operating costs for fixed route operations increased steadily throughout the entire five-year period, rising an average of 6 percent annually.

Table 4. Annual Fixed Route Operating Statistics (FY 2020-FY 2024)

Statistic	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024
Ridership	2,421,591	2,196,138	3,064,750	3,935,481	4,565,909
Revenue Hours	141,017	157,474	170,656	168,084	165,604
Revenue Miles	1,679,708	1,842,754	2,019,637	2,054,466	2,030,245

Statistic	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024
Operating Costs	\$20,833,738	\$22,266,953	\$24,257,795	\$25,277,209	\$26,198,756

Source: NTD

WRTA’s annual operating statistics for combined demand response and demand taxi service are broken down in Table 5. Revenue hours, revenue miles, and operating costs all dipped from FY 2020 to FY 2021 in parallel with ridership trends but increased annually since that year.

Table 5. Annual Demand Response Combined Operating Statistics (FY 2020-FY 2024)

Statistic	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024
Ridership	141,951	98,304	141,273	197,948	210,753
Revenue Hours	66,267	55,045	66,115	83,305	90,732
Revenue Miles	951,388	799,840	992,331	1,296,169	1,383,683
Operating Costs	\$5,726,650	\$4,910,843	\$5,416,848	\$6,606,914	\$7,091,756

Source: NTD

4.1.3.1 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 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 either longer trips where passengers are travelling greater distances, or a poorly performing system. Larger values likely represent either 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 WRTA’s fixed route and demand response services from FY 2020 to FY 2024 are illustrated in Table 6. WRTA has increased its fixed route productivity by over 50 percent since FY 2021, performing above the state and national averages for passengers per mile and passengers per hour, which is indicative of a highly effective service. For combined demand response and demand taxi, WRTA exceeds the state and national averages for passengers per mile and passengers per hour, which indicates higher-than-average productive service.

Table 6. Service Effectiveness (FY 2020-FY 2024)

Fiscal Year	Fixed Route Passengers/Mile	Fixed Route Passengers/Hour	Demand Response Passengers/Mile	Demand Response Passengers/Hour
FY 2020	1.44	17.17	0.15	2.14
FY 2021	1.19	13.95	0.12	1.79
FY 2022	1.52	17.96	0.14	2.14
FY 2023	1.92	23.41	0.15	2.38
FY 2024	2.25	27.57	0.15	2.32
FY 2024 Massachusetts Average ^a	1.25	17.87	0.12	1.95
National Average	1.92	23.06	0.13	1.92

Source: NTD

^a The Massachusetts average includes all 15 Massachusetts RTAs and excludes MBTA and other non-RTA peers.

4.1.3.2 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 geographic area, ridership, 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 a 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 a 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.

Fixed Route Financial Performance

The cost effectiveness of WRTA’s fixed route services from FY 2020 to FY 2024 is illustrated in Table 7. In FY 2024, WRTA was more financially efficient compared to both national and state averages for cost per passenger and compared to national averages for cost per mile and cost per hour. Costs per mile and per hour have risen year over year since FY 2020, due to operating costs steadily increasing and revenue hours and miles decreasing after FY 2022 and FY 2023, respectively. Costs per passenger have decreased since FY 2021, due to ridership growth rates exceeding those of operating costs year to year.

Table 7. Fixed Route Financial Efficiency (FY 2020-FY 2024)

Fiscal Year	Cost/Mile	Cost/Hour	Cost/Passenger
FY 2020	\$12.40	\$147.74	\$8.60
FY 2021	\$12.08	\$141.40	\$10.14
FY 2022	\$12.01	\$142.14	\$7.92
FY 2023	\$12.30	\$150.38	\$6.42
FY 2024	\$12.90	\$158.20	\$5.74
FY 2024 Massachusetts Average^a	\$9.88	\$141.70	\$7.93
FY 2024 National Average	\$15.80	\$189.95	\$8.24

Source: NTD

^a The Massachusetts average includes all 15 Massachusetts RTAs and excludes MBTA and other non-RTA peers.

Demand Response Financial Performance

The cost effectiveness of WRTA's combined demand response and demand taxi services from FY 2020 to FY 2024 is illustrated in Table 8. WRTA's financial efficiency for these services is higher than national and state averages for all measures. Since FY 2021, WRTA's demand response ridership increased year over year in tandem with increases in revenue miles, revenue hours, and operating costs, allowing WRTA to maintain higher than average financial efficiency and relatively stable cost rates.

Table 8. Demand Response Financial Efficiency (FY 2020-FY 2024)

Fiscal Year	Cost/Mile	Cost/Hour	Cost/Passenger
FY 2020	\$6.02	\$86.42	\$40.34
FY 2021	\$6.14	\$89.22	\$49.96
FY 2022	\$5.46	\$81.93	\$38.34
FY 2023	\$5.10	\$79.31	\$33.38
FY 2024	\$5.13	\$78.16	\$33.65
FY 2024 Massachusetts Average^a	\$5.43	\$87.07	\$44.76
FY 2024 National Average	\$6.32	\$97.27	\$50.57

Source: NTD

^a The Massachusetts average includes all 15 Massachusetts RTAs and excludes MBTA and other non-RTA peers.

4.1.4 Funding

WRTA's capital expenses are funded by a mix of federal, state, local, and other funding, with federal funds consistently making up a larger share of these expended funds. The split in share between federal funds and state and local funds used for capital expenses was more even in FY 2023 compared to both the previous and following fiscal years. This was due to both the drop in total capital expenses in FY 2023 and the significant increase in state funds allocated

for operating costs in FY 2024, which allowed WRTA greater flexibility to put federal funds towards capital projects (Table 9).

Table 9. Funding Sources Expended on Capital (FY 2022-FY 2024)

Funding Source	FY 2022	Percentage of FY 2022 Total	FY 2023	Percentage of FY 2023 Total	FY 2024	Percentage of FY 2024 Total
Federal	\$8,845,606	78.01%	\$1,689,620	55.51%	\$7,834,750	80.00%
State	\$811,919	7.16%	\$1,067,854	35.08%	\$350,922	3.58%
Local	\$109,373	0.96%	\$190,161	6.25%	\$284,101	2.90%
Farebox	\$0	0.00%	\$0	0.00%	\$0	0.00%
Other	\$1,571,900	13.86%	\$96,042	3.16%	\$1,323,684	13.52%
TOTAL	\$11,338,798	100.00%	\$3,043,677	100.00%	\$9,793,457	100.00%

Source: WRTA

WRTA is funded by a mix of federal, state, local, and other funding with an average of \$32,212,081 expended annually on operations from FY 2022 to FY 2024. The largest source of WRTA’s operating funds in FY 2024 came from state funding (over \$22.6 million), followed by local funds (over \$6 million). State funding increased at a rate of 67 percent between FY 2023 and FY 2024, while federal funding dropped at a rate of 61 percent in that same period (Table 10). WRTA has not generated passenger farebox revenue on its fixed route and demand response services since going fare free in March 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. The remaining fare revenue in FY 2023 and FY 2024 was generated by the microtransit service provided in Shrewsbury and Westborough. “Other funding,” consisting of advertising revenue, sale of capital assets, interest income, and miscellaneous, doubled between FY 2023 and FY 2024, largely due to a doubling of interest income. Overall, annual operating expenses increased from \$29.9 million in FY 2022 to \$34.2 million in FY 2024, for an average annual growth rate of 7 percent.

WRTA also previously received COVID-era federal funding in the form of Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act (which had to be obligated by May 11, 2023), Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) (obligated by September 30, 2023), and American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding (which had to be obligated by September 30, 2024). These fund sources could be used by WRTA for both capital and operating expenses. In FY 2020, WRTA received approximately \$5 million in CARES funding, followed by an additional \$4.8 million in FY 2021, and \$4.2 million in FY 2022 consisting of both CARES and ARPA fund sources. WRTA continued to augment service with federal and state funding sources.

Table 10. Operating Funds Expended by Funding Source (FY 2022-FY 2024)

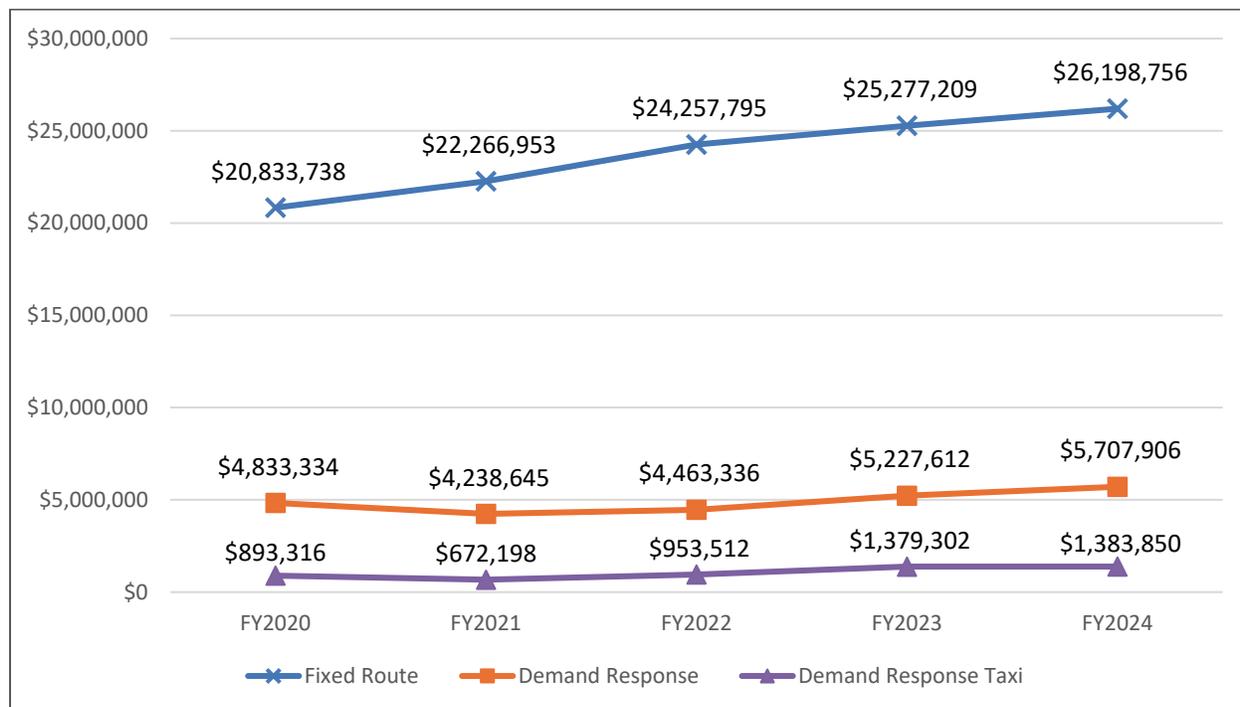
Funding Source	FY 2022	Percentage of FY 2022 Total	FY 2023	Percentage of FY 2023 Total	FY 2024	Percentage of FY 2024 Total
Federal	\$10,064,910	33.7%	\$12,734,985	39.1%	\$4,918,309	14.4%
State	\$13,803,857	46.2%	\$13,537,755	41.6%	\$22,610,972	66.1%
Local	\$5,710,724	19.1%	\$5,947,660	18.4%	\$6,096,454	17.8%

Funding Source	FY 2022	Percentage of FY 2022 Total	FY 2023	Percentage of FY 2023 Total	FY 2024	Percentage of FY 2024 Total
Farebox	\$0	0.0%	\$70,475	0.2%	\$72,799	0.2%
Other	\$297,880	1.0%	\$257,018	0.8%	\$512,446	1.5%
TOTAL	\$29,877,371	100.0%	\$32,574,893	100.0%	\$34,210,980	100.0%

Source: NTD

The annual operating cost for fixed route service increased year to year from FY 2020 to FY 2024, at an average annual increase rate of 6 percent (Figure 4). Demand response and demand response taxi operating costs have increased since FY 2022, with the greatest jump occurring between FY 2022 and FY 2023 (15 percent for demand response and 54 percent for demand response taxi service).

Figure 4. Annual Operating Cost by Mode (FY 2020-FY 2024)



Source: NTD

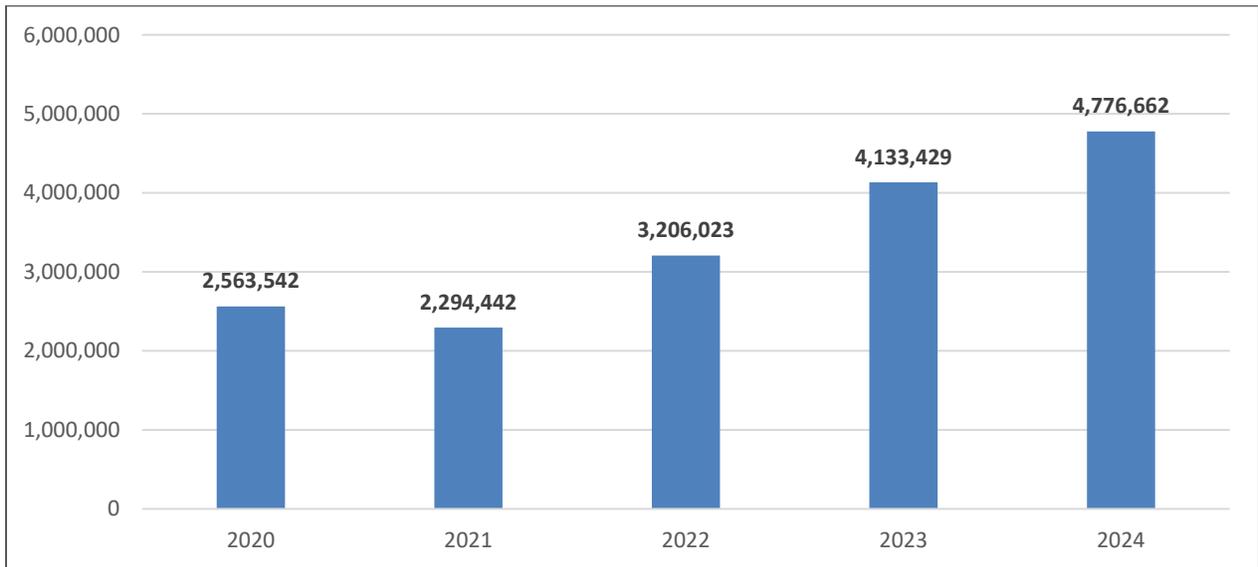
Note: Total annual operating expenses do not align when comparing the sum of operating funds expended by funding source and the sum of operating costs by mode.

4.2 Ridership and Service Operations

WRTA’s overall system ridership was nearly 4.8 million riders in FY 2024, and it trended upward from FY 2020 to FY 2024, with a minor decrease in ridership occurring from FY 2020 to FY 2021 (Figure 5). By FY 2022, systemwide ridership rose to surpass that of the year immediately preceding the COVID-19 pandemic. WRTA’s ridership growth from FY 2022 onward occurred at an unprecedented rate for the agency, increasing by an annual average rate of 28 percent. This growth is largely attributed to WRTA ridership steadily rebounding through the pandemic recovery period in combination with a positive response to fare-free transit and service improvements and increases, such as the expansion of service spans and frequency. WRTA’s

launch of the on-demand microtransit service also contributed to the system’s ridership growth.

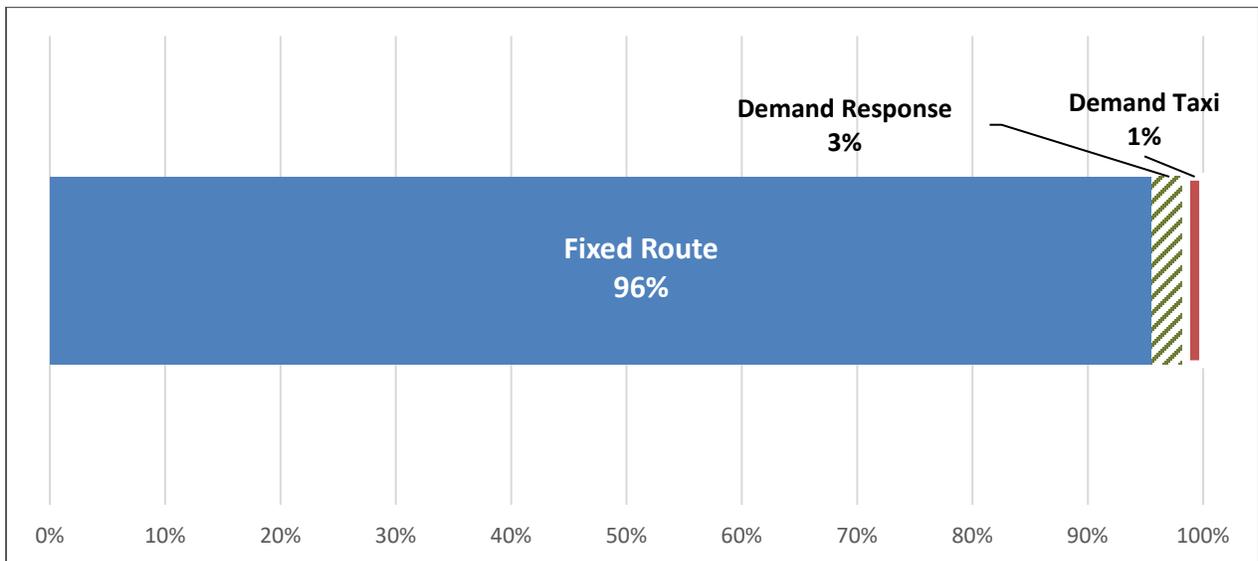
Figure 5. Annual System Ridership (FY 2020-FY 2024)



Source: NTD

In FY 2024, WRTA provided the majority of trips on its fixed bus routes, with only 3 percent of trips taken on demand response services and 1 percent on demand taxi services, which comprises all ADA and non-ADA demand taxi trips (Figure 6).

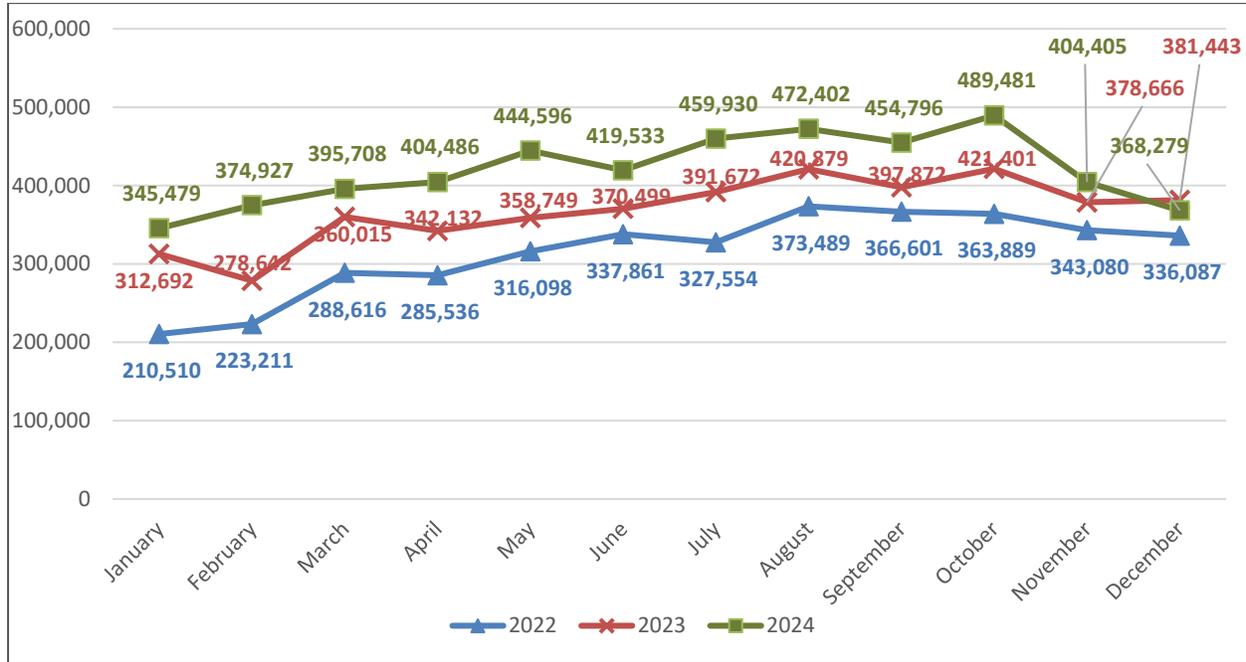
Figure 6. Ridership Breakdown by Service Type (FY 2024)



Source: MassDOT

Monthly ridership from 2022 to 2024 indicates that ridership typically trends upward from the start of the calendar year until August. This upward trend is followed by a slight dip in September and an increase in October, before decreasing through the end of the year (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Monthly Ridership Trends (2022-2024)

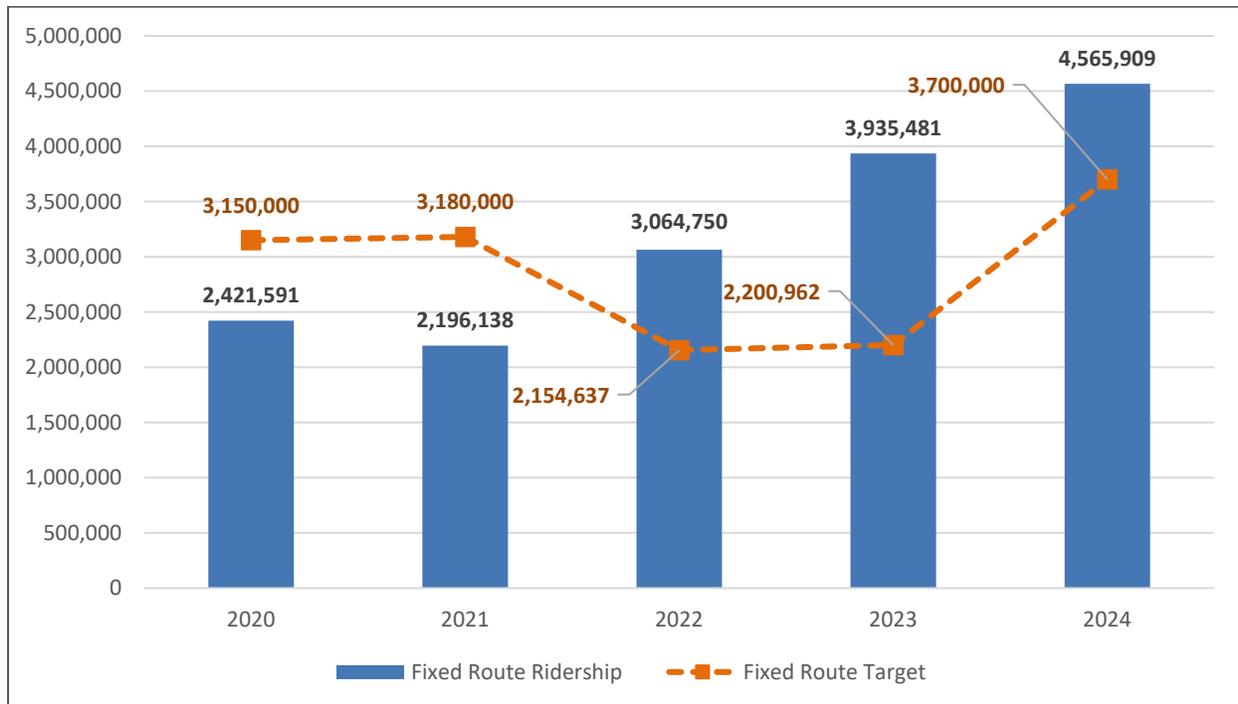


Source: NTD

4.2.1 Fixed Route Ridership

Fixed route ridership experienced a low in FY 2021 with a total of just under 2.2 million riders (Figure 8). Since that year, ridership steadily increased at an average rate of 28 percent annually. In FY 2024, ridership rose to a high total rider count of nearly 4.6 million, nearly one million more riders than the FY 2024 fixed route ridership target of 3.7 million.

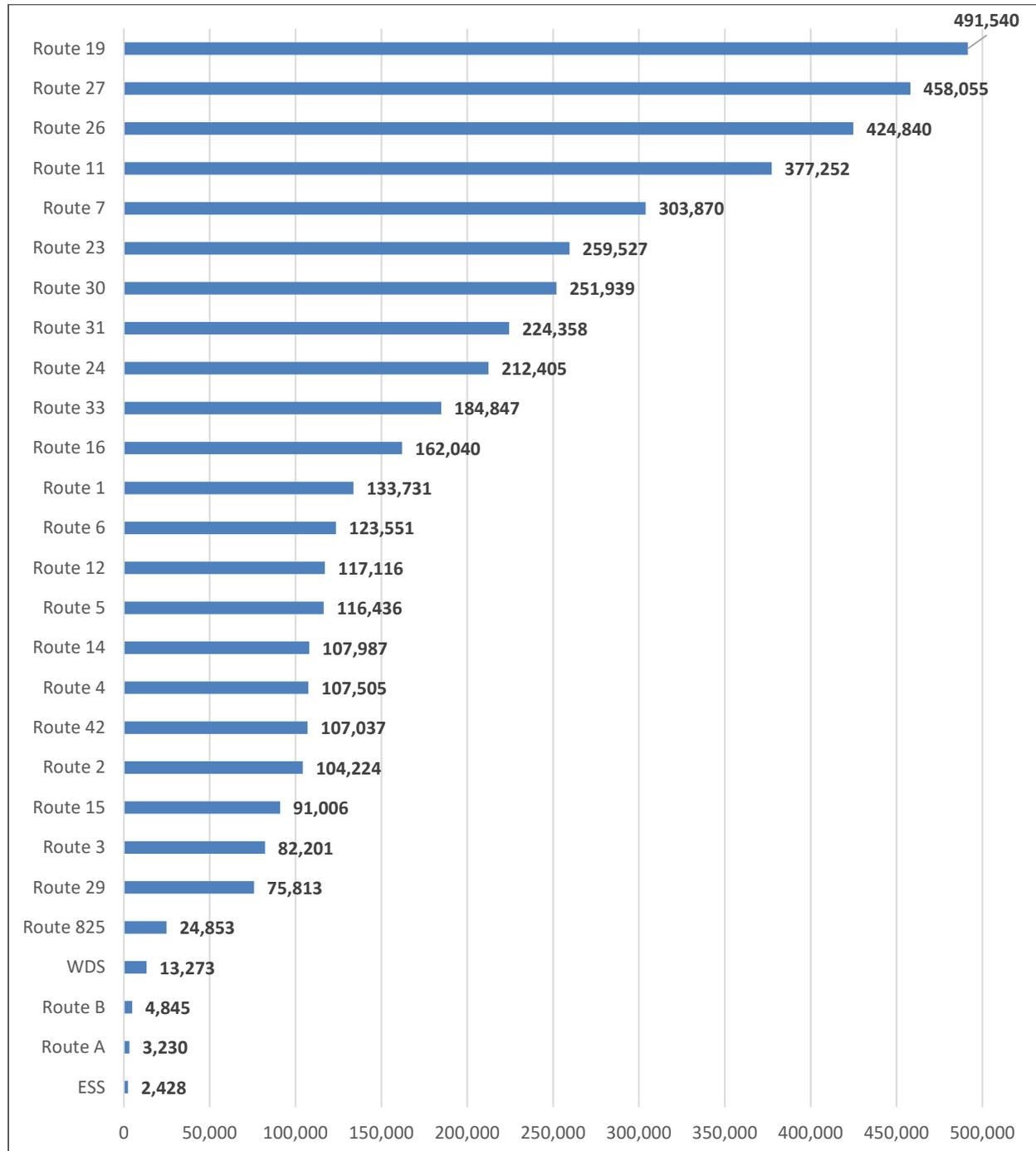
Figure 8. Fixed Route Annual Ridership (FY 2020-FY 2024)



Source: NTD (Ridership), MassDOT (Targets)

At a route level, Routes 19, 27, and 26 have the greatest number of riders annually across the WRTA fixed route network (Figure 9). These three routes connect the WRTA Central Hub in Worcester to the Webster Square neighborhood of Worcester (with service to Webster Square Plaza, Clark University, and several grade schools), the Great Brook Valley neighborhood of Worcester (with service to hospitals, Lincoln Plaza Shopping Center, and grade schools), and the Auburn Mall in Auburn (Route 27). Both Routes 19 and 27 also serve Main Street, which has a very high transit propensity. The special Elder Shopper Service (ESS) fixed route, which only runs two days a week, and the A, B, and Webster, Dudley, Southbridge (WDS) community shuttle routes represent the four lowest ridership routes by a wide margin.

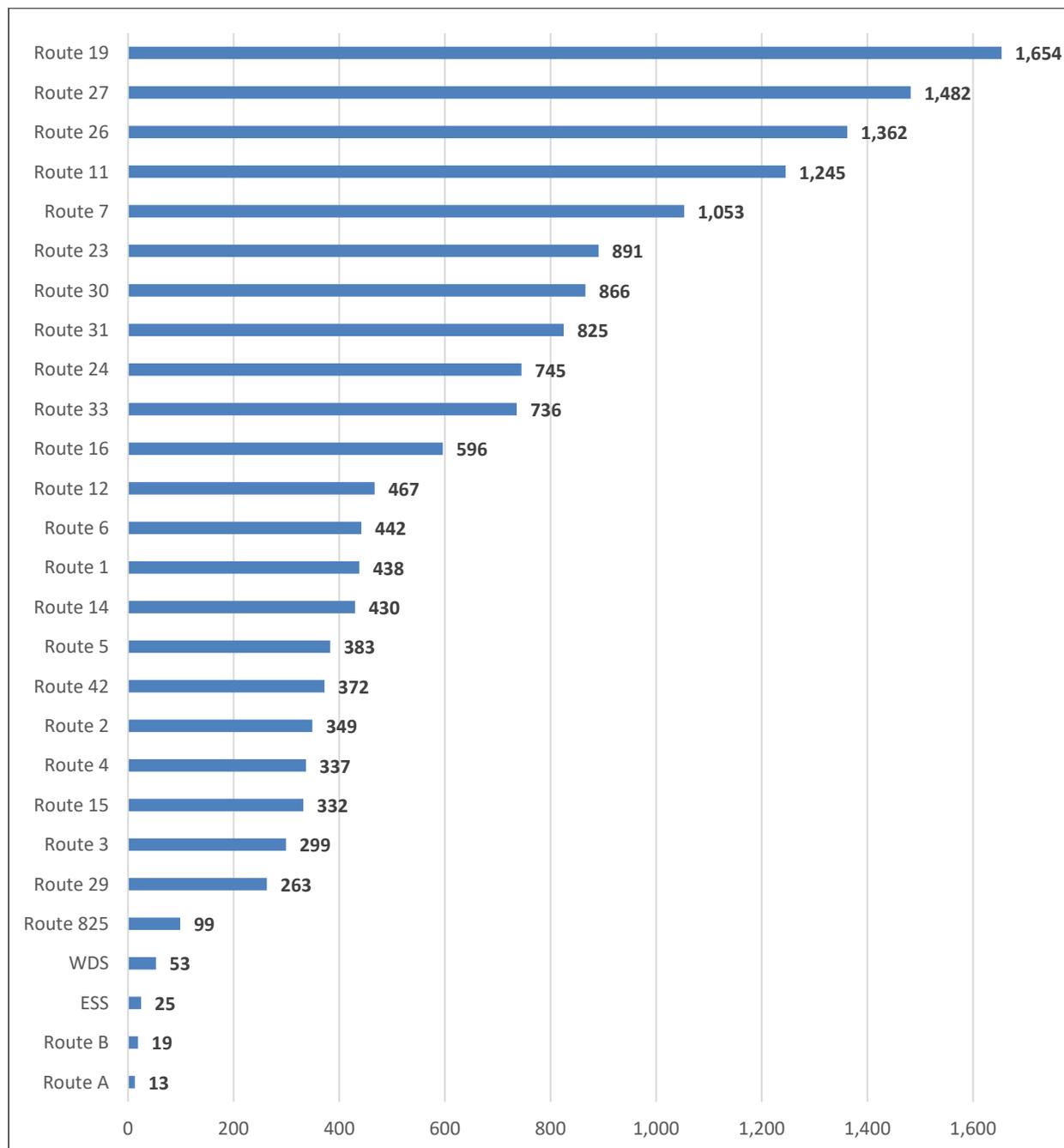
Figure 9. Annual Ridership by Route (FY 2024)



Source: WRTA

In descending order, Routes 19, 27, and 26 are the fixed routes with the highest average weekday ridership across the system, and the lowest ridership routes on weekdays are the ESS and the A, B, and WDS community shuttles (Figure 10). These weekday average route-level ridership patterns are consistent with annual route-level ridership patterns.

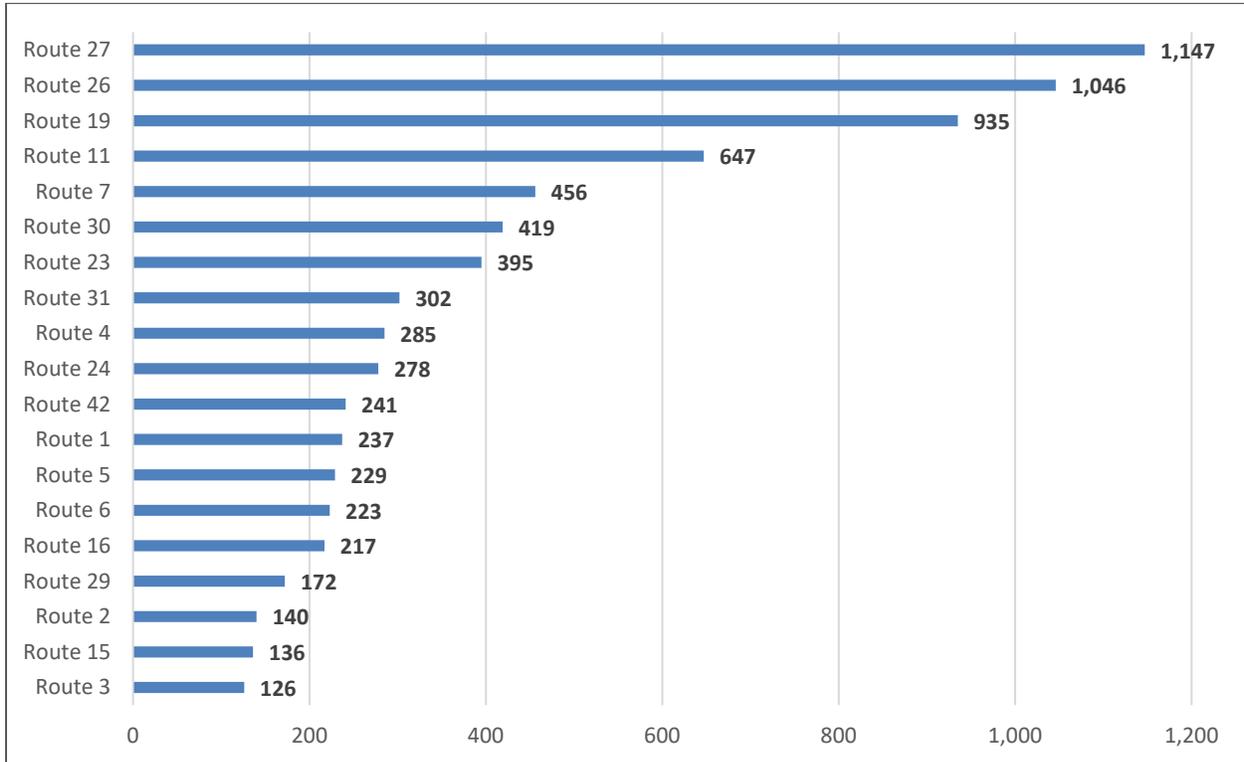
Figure 10. Weekday Average Ridership by Route (FY 2024)



Source: WRTA

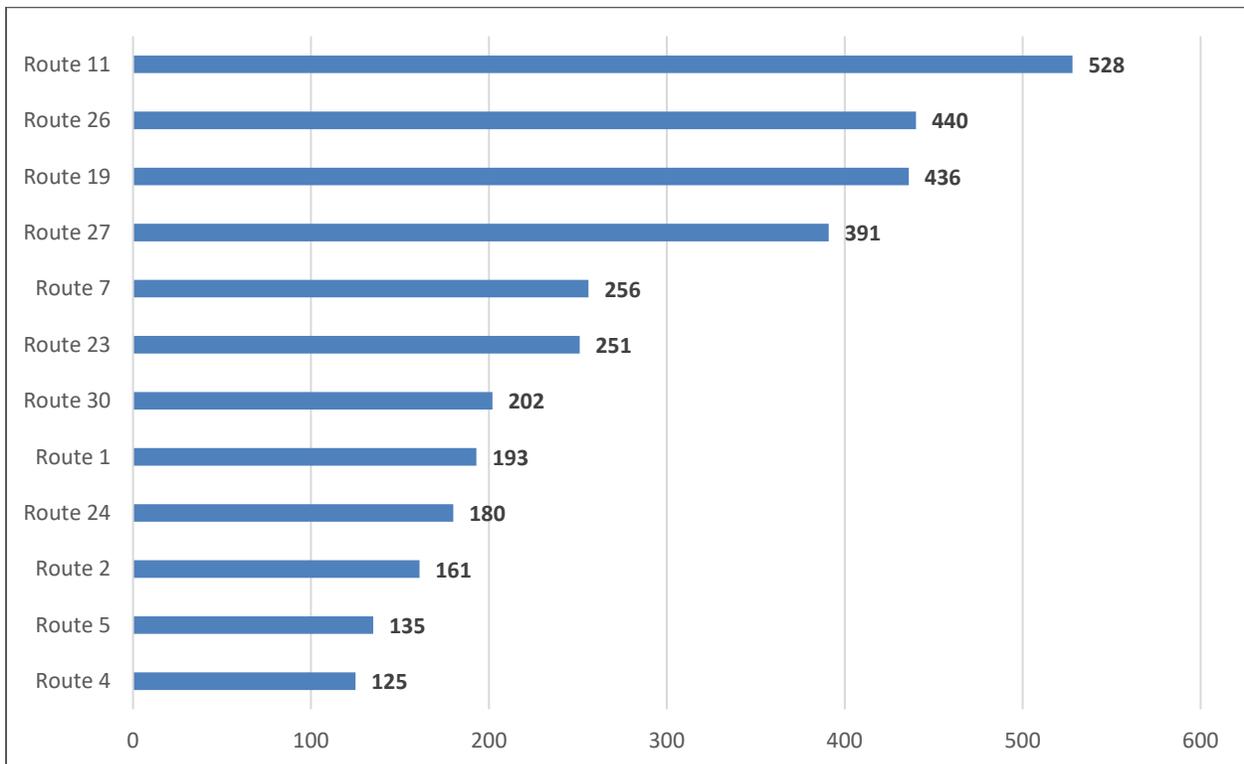
On weekends, average ridership trends vary from weekday trends. The fixed routes with the highest ridership on Saturdays are, in descending order, Routes 27, 26, and 19 (Figure 11), and on Sundays the highest ridership routes are Route 11, followed by Routes 26 and 19 (Figure 12). Route 11 connects the WRTA Central Hub in Worcester to Fair Plaza in South Worcester, via Vernon Hill and Greenwood Street. Route 33 is not included in Figure 11 and Figure 12 as weekend service began in FY 2025.

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



Source: WRTA

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

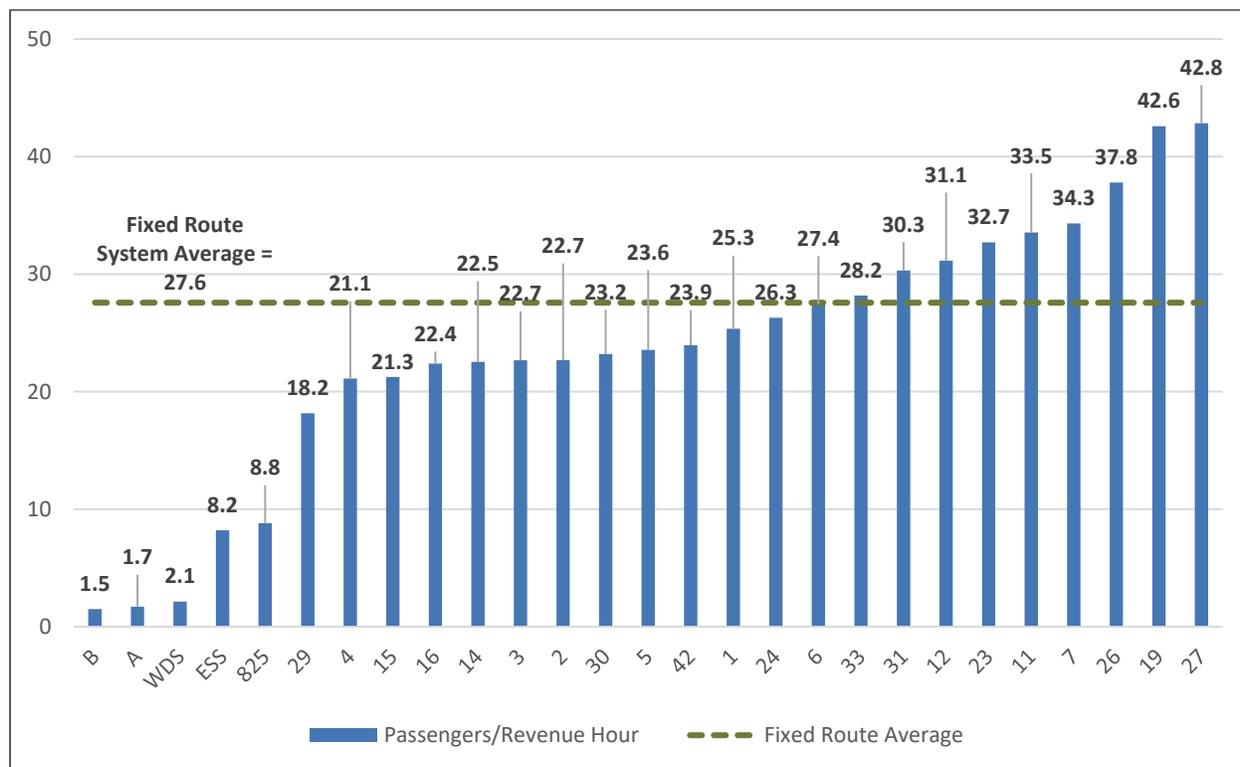


Source: WRTA

4.2.2 Fixed Route Operations

At a system level, WRTA’s fixed routes served an average of over 27 passengers per revenue hour during FY 2024. One-third of all fixed routes carried a higher number of passengers per revenue hour, with Routes 27, 19, and 26 representing the top three highest performing routes based on this metric (Figure 13). Five routes were significantly below the fixed route system average: the Route B community shuttle accounted for the lowest ridership per revenue hour, followed by the Route A community shuttle, the WDS community shuttle, ESS, and Route 825.

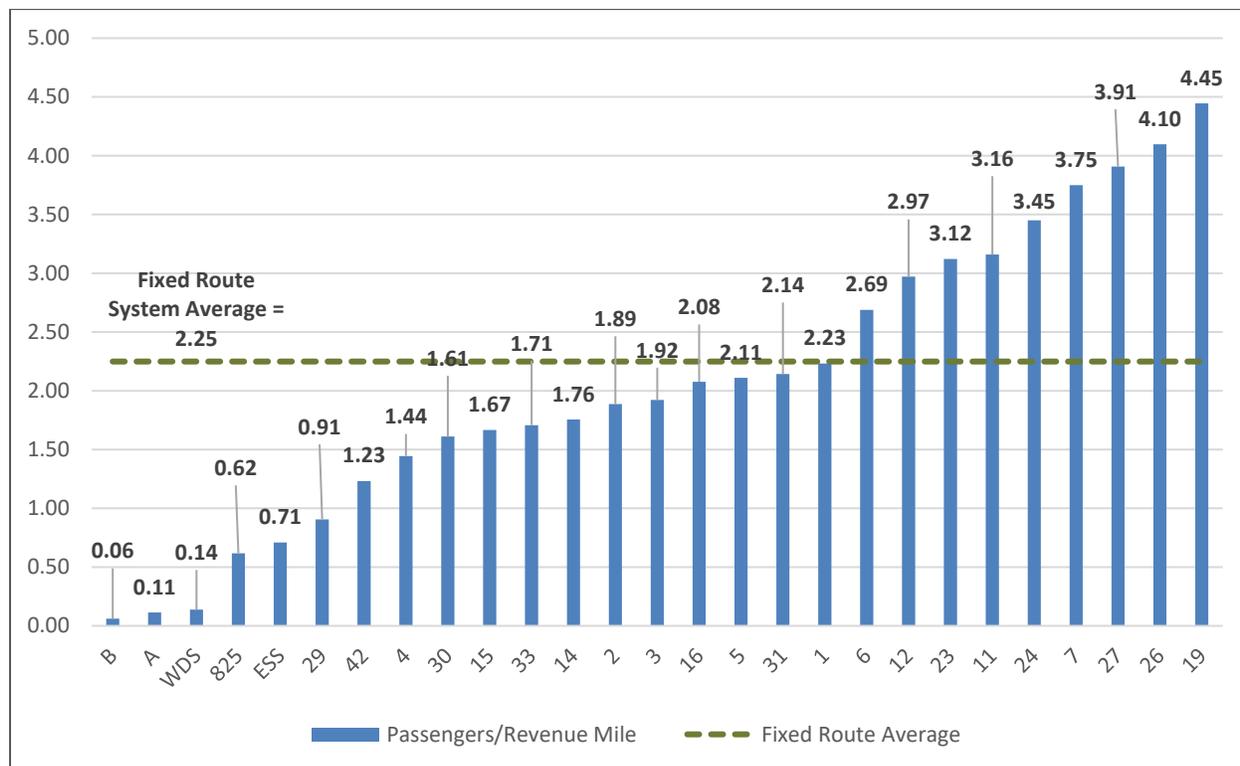
Figure 13. Passengers per Revenue Hour by Fixed Route (FY 2024)



Source: WRTA

WRTA’s fixed routes served an average of 2.25 passengers per revenue mile traveled during FY 2024. One-third of all fixed routes carried a higher number of passengers per revenue mile, with Routes 19, 26, and 27 representing the top three highest performing routes based on this metric (Figure 14). While Routes 31 and 33 performed higher than the fixed route average for passengers per revenue hour, their performance was lower than average when considering passengers per revenue mile. Routes 6 and 24, while performing lower than average in passengers per revenue hour, were above average in passengers per revenue mile. Six routes carried fewer than one passenger per revenue mile, with Community Route B accounting for the lowest ridership per revenue mile, followed by Community Route A, WDS, Route 825, ESS, and Route 29. These lower performing routes are consistent with those evaluated per the passengers per revenue hour metric.

Figure 14. Passengers per Revenue Mile by Fixed Route (FY 2024)



Source: WRTA

WRTA’s operating statistics for fixed routes in FY 2024 are broken down by route in Table 11. As identified previously, Routes 19, 26, and 27 were the highest performing routes when considering overall ridership, passengers per hour, and passengers per mile. Routes A, B, and ESS had the lowest overall ridership in FY 2024, although ESS operates significantly fewer hours and miles compared to all other WRTA fixed routes. ESS therefore surpasses WDS in passenger trips per hour and surpasses both WDS and Route 825 in passenger trips per mile. Of the city fixed routes, Routes 825, 3, and 15 had the lowest overall ridership in FY 2024. Those that performed the lowest in passenger trips per hour were Routes 825, 4, and 15, and those that performed lowest in passenger trips per mile were Routes 825, 4, and 30.

Table 11. Operating Statistics by Route (FY 2024)

Route	Ridership	Revenue Hours	Passenger Trips/ Hour	Revenue Miles	Passenger Trips/ Mile
1	133,731	5,276	25.35	59,906	2.23
2	104,224	4,595	22.68	55,247	1.89
3	82,201	3,626	22.67	42,770	1.92
4	107,505	5,091	21.12	74,401	1.44
5	116,436	4,944	23.55	55,179	2.11
6	123,551	4,502	27.44	45,967	2.69
7	303,870	8,857	34.31	81,057	3.75
825	24,853	2,822	8.81	40,247	0.62

Route	Ridership	Revenue Hours	Passenger Trips/ Hour	Revenue Miles	Passenger Trips/ Mile
11	377,252	11,247	33.54	119,434	3.16
12	117,116	3,761	31.14	39,421	2.97
14	107,987	4,792	22.53	61,516	1.76
15	91,006	4,281	21.26	54,595	1.67
16	162,040	7,238	22.39	78,023	2.08
19	491,540	11,544	42.58	110,581	4.45
23	259,527	7,935	32.71	83,161	3.12
24	212,405	8,082	26.28	61,550	3.45
26	424,840	11,240	37.80	103,705	4.10
27	458,055	10,691	42.84	117,203	3.91
29	75,813	4,174	18.16	83,668	0.91
30	251,939	10,858	23.20	156,398	1.61
31	224,358	7,403	30.31	104,683	2.14
33	184,847	6,560	28.18	108,286	1.71
42	107,037	4,471	23.94	86,852	1.23
A ^a	3,230	1,889	1.71	28,404	0.11
B ^a	4,845	3,224	1.50	78,492	0.06
WDS ^a	13,273	6,205	2.14	96,081	0.14
ESS	2,428	296	8.20	3,421	0.71

Source: WRTA

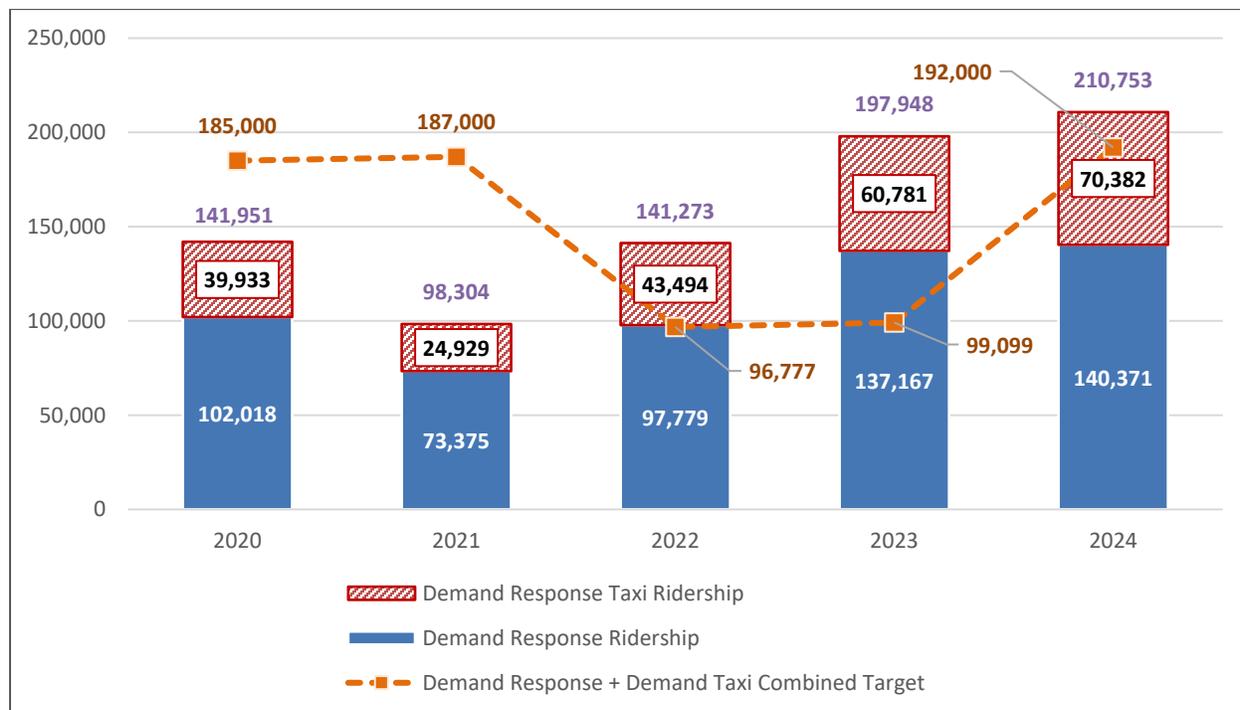
^aCommunity Shuttles

4.2.3 Demand Response Ridership and Operations

WRTA's demand response ridership, inclusive of complementary ADA paratransit, non-ADA demand response, and on-demand microtransit services, represents 3 percent of the overall system ridership, and demand taxi ridership represents 1 percent.

Annual demand response ridership, including demand taxi service, dipped in FY 2021 but has increased year to year since (Figure 15). Excluding demand taxi trips, ridership rose to over 137,000 riders in FY 2023 following the launch of microtransit service. This growth represented more than a 40 percent increase from FY 2022 and surpassed the FY 2023 combined demand response / demand taxi ridership target of 99,099 by nearly 40,000 riders. In FY 2024, non-overflow demand response ridership exceeded the 140,000 target specific to that mode by 371 passengers. In that same year, total demand response service, including demand taxi ridership, exceeded the FY 2024 combined target of 192,000 by nearly 20,000 riders. From FY 2022 to FY 2024, demand taxi ridership represented approximately one-third of all demand response ridership, which points to an increase in overall demand for demand response service that WRTA continues to support by increasing its contracted-out overflow trips.

Figure 15. Demand Response Annual Ridership (FY 2020-FY 2024)



Source: NTD (Ridership), MassDOT (Targets)

For demand response service, WRTA defines missed trips, no-shows, late and same-day cancellations, and refusals. WRTA uses the following definitions for each of these cases:

- **Missed trips:** When the vehicle never arrives, or arrives beyond the 20-minute pickup window, and the customer chooses to not take the trip.
- **No-show:** When the vehicle arrives at a location within the pickup window and the customer is not present, did not call ahead to cancel, or cancels at the door.
- **Late cancellation:** A cancellation placed within 1 hour of the scheduled pick-up window.
- **Same day cancellation:** A cancellation placed at least 1 hour prior to the scheduled trip time.
- **Refusal:** When a passenger engages in violent, seriously disruptive, or illegal conduct.

WRTA’s annual demand response metrics for both ADA and non-ADA paratransit, excluding demand taxi service, are broken down in Table 12. The proportion of missed trips was essentially null over the five-year period, remaining at a constant 0.01 percent each year except for a drop to zero percent in FY 2021. The proportion of no-shows was at its lowest in FY 2021 (2.03 percent), then peaked in FY 2022 at 2.64 percent, before decreasing annually since that year. WRTA maintained a zero percent refusal rate over the five-year period. Finally, overall cancellation rates fluctuated year to year, with a period high of 17.06 percent in FY 2020 and a low of 12.70 percent in FY 2023.

Table 12. ADA and Non-ADA Combined Demand Response Metrics (FY 2020-FY 2024)

Metric	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024
% Missed Trips	0.01%	0.00%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%
% No-show	2.30%	2.03%	2.64%	2.50%	2.38%
% Refusals	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
% Cancellation	17.06%	14.91%	15.23%	12.70%	14.66%

Source: WRTA

These same metrics are tracked for WRTA’s demand taxi service, broken down in Table 13. The proportion of missed trips, no-shows, and cancellations was greater than for non-overflow service. Over the five-year period, the lowest rate of missed trips was 0.01 percent in FY 2021, and the highest was 0.03 percent in FY 2023. The proportion of no-shows was also at its lowest in FY 2021 (2.51 percent), then increased by nearly 1 percent in FY 2022 and remained consistent around the 3.5 percent mark over the following two years. Cancellation rates fluctuated annually, with a period low of 21.40 percent in FY 2021 and a period high of 25.47 percent in FY 2024. From FY 2022 to FY 2024, the margin between demand response and demand taxi no-show rates and cancellation rates widened year to year. Just as for non-overflow demand response service, WRTA maintained a zero percent refusal rate over the five-year period.

Table 13. Demand Taxi (Overflow Service) Metrics (FY 2020-FY 2024)

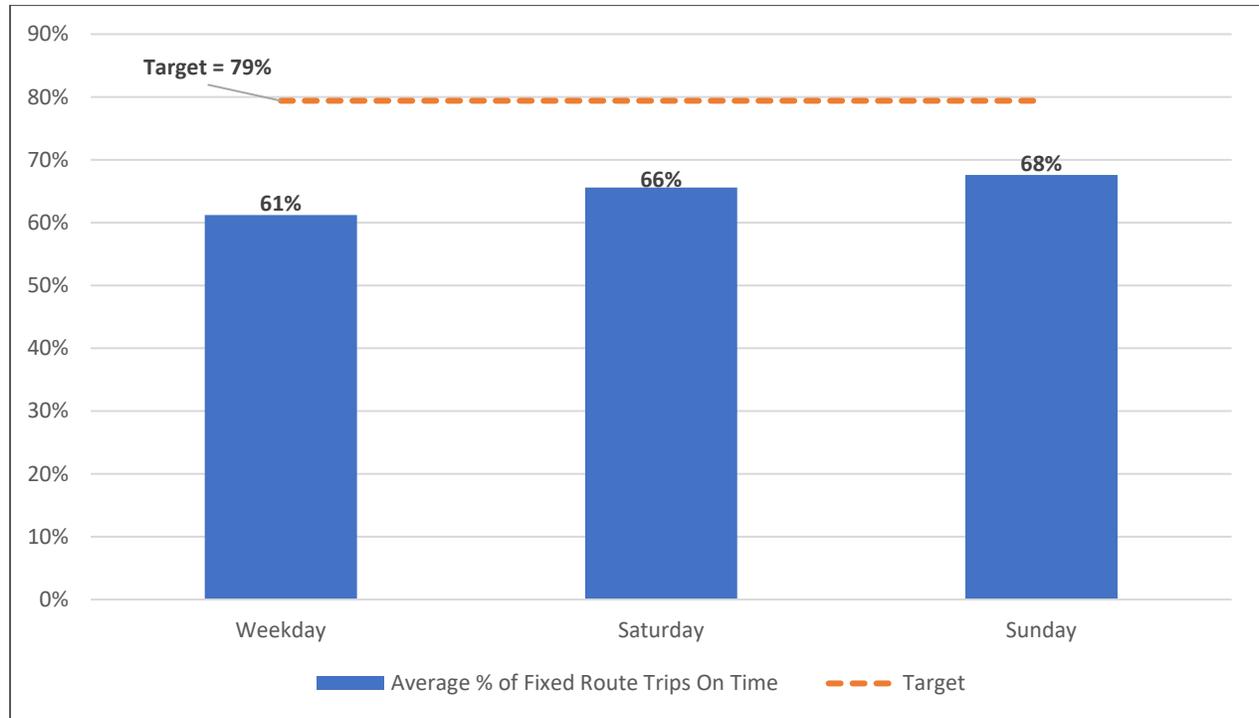
Metric	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024
% Missed Trips	0.02%	0.01%	0.02%	0.03%	0.02%
% No-show	2.97%	2.51%	3.50%	3.47%	3.55%
% Refusals	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
% Cancellation	25.26%	21.40%	23.68%	21.45%	25.47%

Source: WRTA

4.2.4 On-Time Performance and Trip Completion

WRTA revised its definition of on time for evaluating city fixed route on-time performance halfway through FY 2024. Prior to November 2023, vehicles were considered on time if they were operating within a range of 1 minute early to 10 minutes late relative to the fixed route schedule. Since December 2023, WRTA’s revised business rules set a higher standard for on-time performance. Vehicles are now considered on time if they are operating within a range of 1 minute early to 5 minutes late relative to set time points in the schedule. In FY 2024, WRTA’s target for on-time performance was to operate 79 percent of all city fixed route trips on time (Figure 16). Beyond its definition update in FY 2024, WRTA implemented systemwide schedule changes in April 2025 to enhance bus reliability and improve on-time performance.

Figure 16. On-Time Performance - Fixed Route (FY 2024)

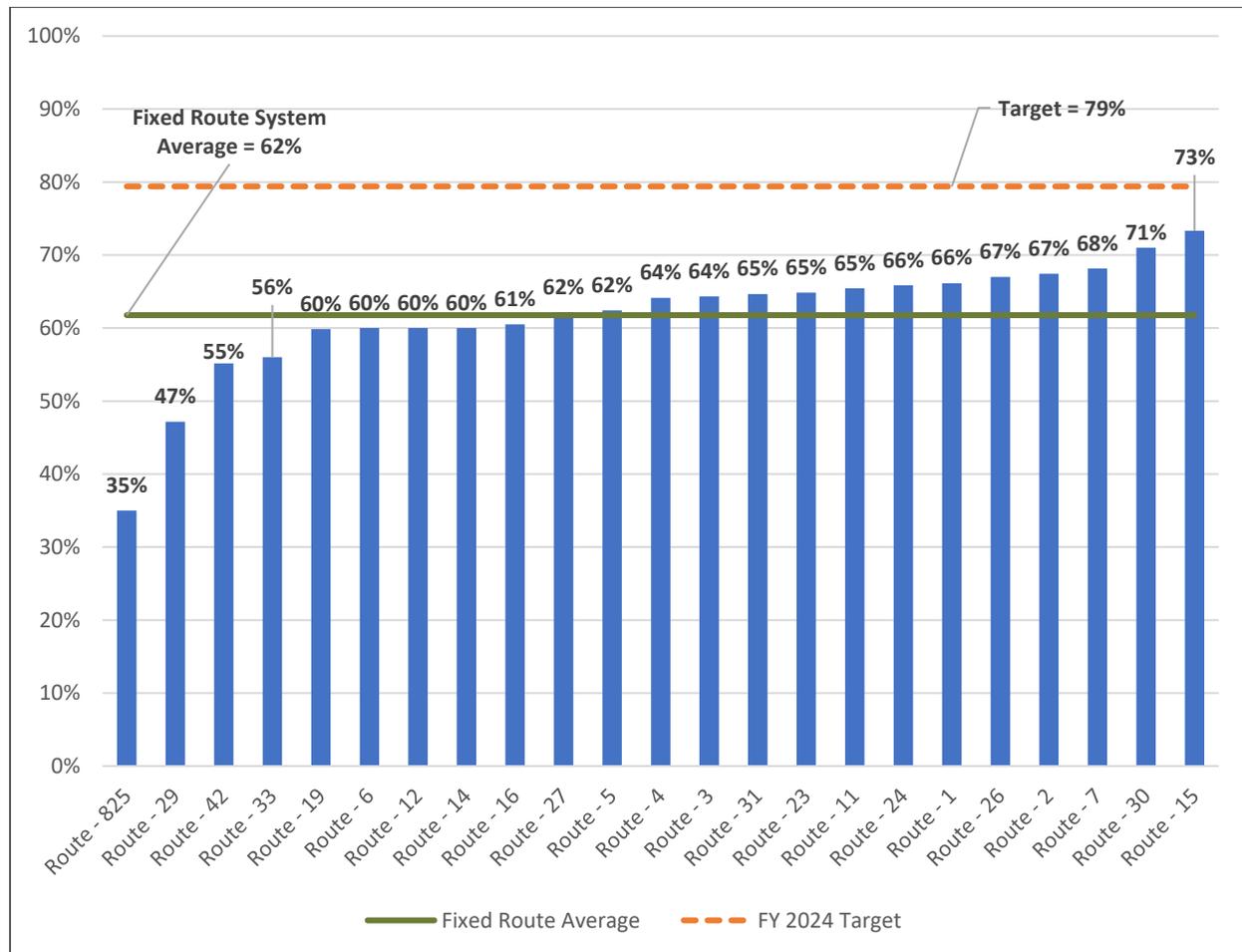


Source: WRTA

Note: Fixed route on-time performance is only tracked for city fixed routes; therefore, the average fixed route on-time performance does not account for performance on community shuttles or the ESS special route.

Across the WRTA city fixed route system, on-time performance averaged 62 percent in FY 2024 (Figure 17). Route 15 had the highest proportion of trips operating on time (73 percent), followed by Route 30, which had a 71 percent on-time performance rate. The lowest performing route according to on-time performance is Route 825, with 35 percent of trips operating on time. Routes 29 and 42 had 47 percent and 55 percent on-time performance, respectively, and six other routes had an on-time performance that fell below the 62 percent fixed route system average (Routes 33, 6, 12, 14, 19, and 16).

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

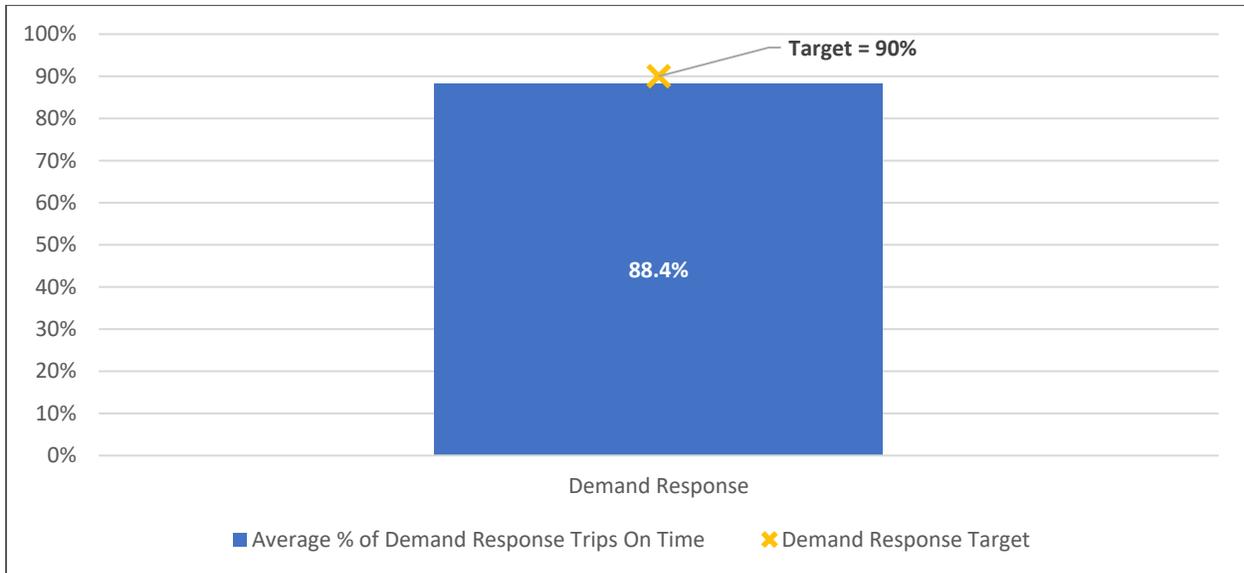


Source: WRTA

Note: Community shuttles and the ESS special route are not included in this chart as fixed route on-time performance is only tracked for city fixed routes.

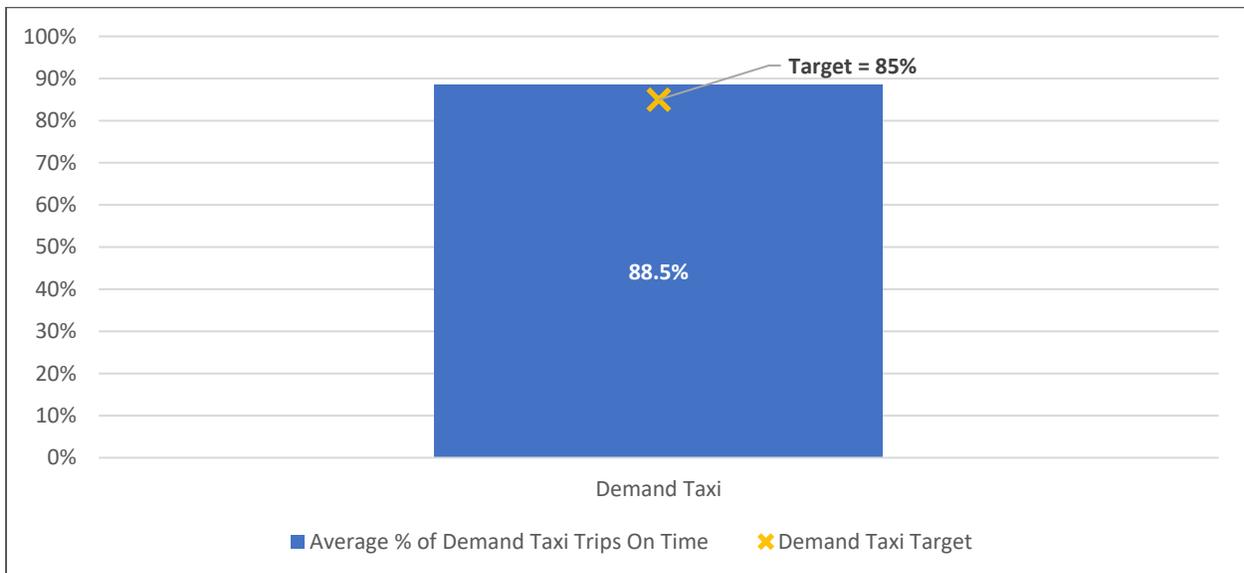
For WRTA’s demand response and demand taxi trips, on time is defined as trips that arrive either early or within the scheduled 20-minute pick-up window. The FY 2024 on-time performance for demand response operations, excluding demand taxi service, was 88.4 percent, and the FY 2024 on-time performance for demand taxi operations was slightly higher at 88.5 percent (Figure 18 and Figure 19).

Figure 18. On-Time Performance - Demand Response (FY 2024)



Source: WRTA, MassDOT

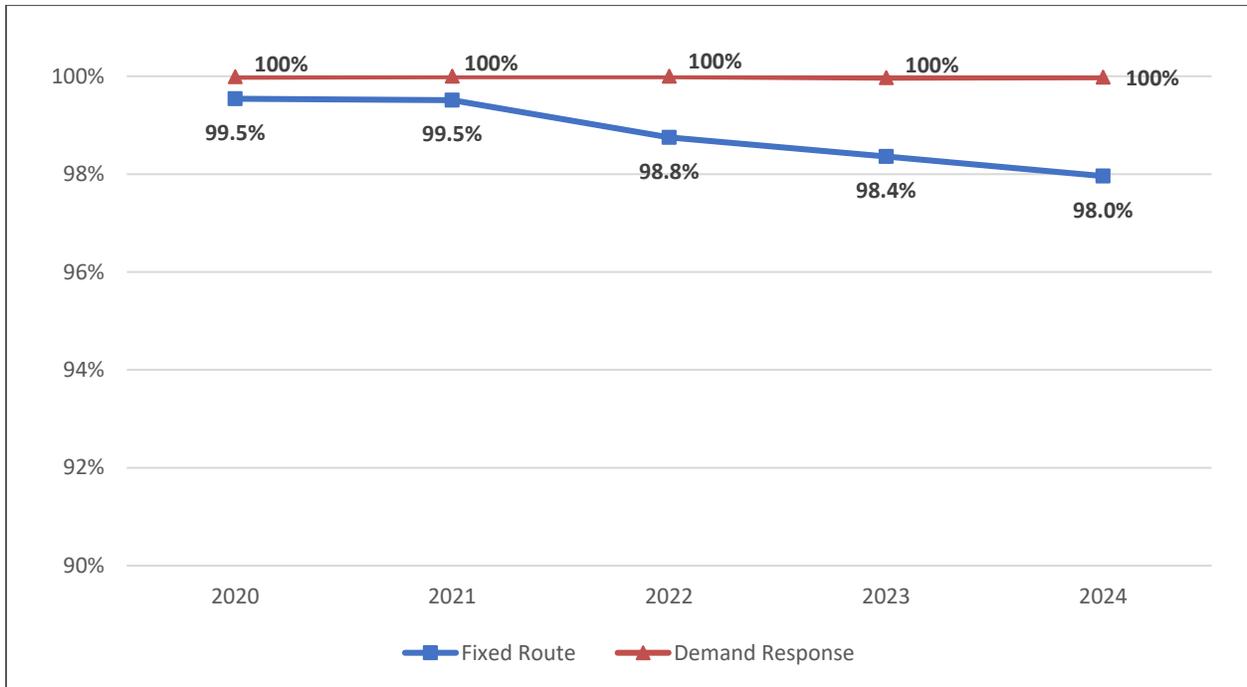
Figure 19. On-Time Performance - Demand Taxi (FY 2024)



Source: WRTA, MassDOT

WRTA operated 100 percent of scheduled demand response trips between FY 2020 and FY 2024 (Figure 20). WRTA’s fixed route service reported a declining trend in fulfilled scheduled trips since FY 2021 attributable to operator shortage challenges, with an average annual decrease rate of 0.4 percent.

Figure 20. Percentage of Scheduled Trips Operated (FY 2020-FY 2024)



Source: MassDOT

4.2.5 Customer Service

WRTA tracks the annual number of complaints per 5,000 passenger trips on both fixed route and demand response services to normalize complaints across fluctuating ridership. On fixed route services, there was a peak in the number of valid complaints per 5,000 trips in FY 2022, which was followed by a 44 percent decrease in FY 2023 to the lowest complaint rate in the five-year period. This rate was sustained into FY 2024 (Figure 21). On demand response services, the rate of complaints was higher than on fixed route but declined steadily year to year, dropping by 62 percent between FY 2020 and FY 2024 to a low rate of 2.35 complaints per 5,000 passenger trips in the last fiscal year (Figure 22).

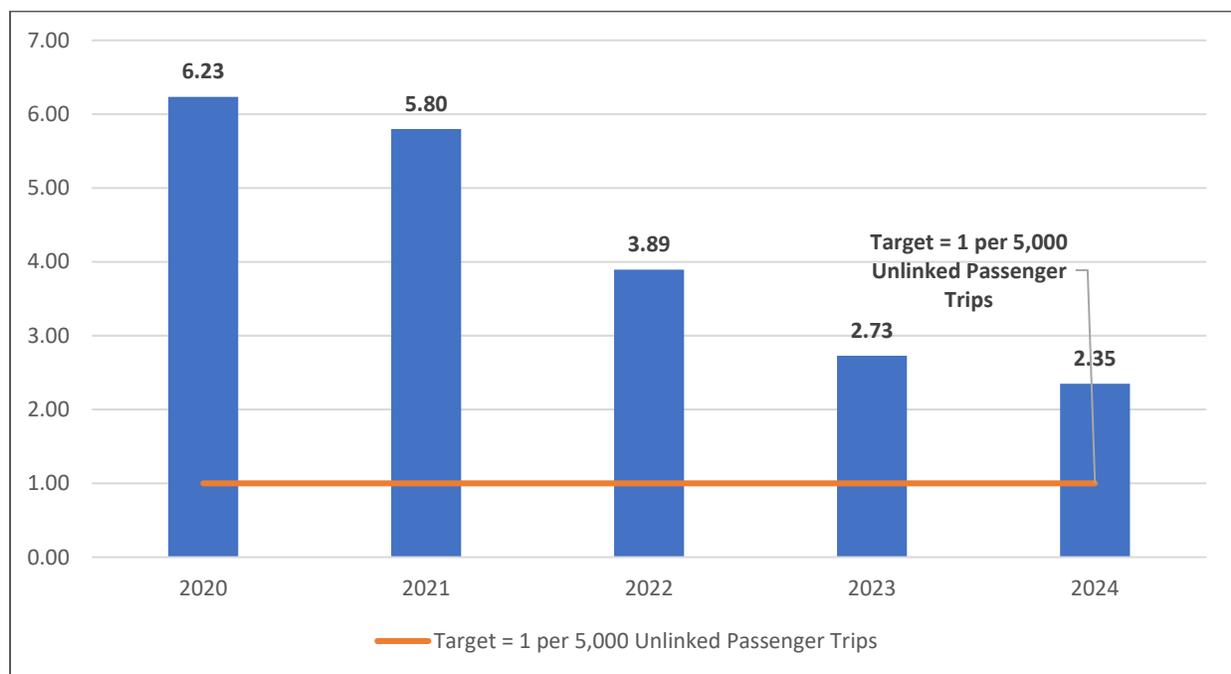
WRTA also began tracking phone hold time in FY 2024, averaging 1 minute and 31 seconds of general customer service hold time and 1 minute and 11 seconds of paratransit reservations/dispatch hold time.

Figure 21. Number of Valid Complaints per 5,000 Passenger Trips: Fixed Route (FY 2020-FY 2024)



Source: WRTA

Figure 22. Number of Valid Complaints per 5,000 Passenger Trips: Demand Response (FY 2020-FY 2024)



Source: WRTA

4.3 Partnerships and Regional Connections

WRTA partners with the COAs of Auburn, Clinton, Grafton, Holden, Leicester, Millbury, Northborough, Oxford, Shrewsbury, West Boylston, and Westborough to provide demand response services for older adult and/or disabled residents of these communities.

WRTA's fixed route network provides direct access to the MBTA Framingham/Worcester Commuter Rail line and the Lake Shore Limited Amtrak line at the WRTA Central Hub in Worcester. This connection provides WRTA riders with multimodal transportation options and

greater regional mobility. The Commuter Rail connects Worcester to Boston via Framingham, and the Amtrak route connects Worcester eastward to Boston and westward to Chicago via Springfield, upstate New York, and Cleveland, Ohio. Also at the WRTA Central Hub, riders can connect from WRTA services to Greyhound and Peter Pan intercity buses for travel to cities throughout New England, south to cities such as New York City and Washington, DC, and north into Canada. The Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA) operates its B79 intercity fixed route connecting Amherst and Worcester at the WRTA Central Hub, and the Montachusett Regional Transit Authority (MART) operates its Fitchburg-Clinton-Worcester Commuter route between the MART garage in Fitchburg and the WRTA Central Hub.

In the western part of WRTA's service area, the Quaboag Connector offers curb-to-curb demand response service to residents of the Quaboag Valley, which includes the WRTA communities of Brookfield, East Brookfield, North Brookfield, Warren, and West Brookfield.

In select areas of Northborough, Shrewsbury, and Westborough, WRTA offers Via-WRTA on-demand microtransit service. On July 1, 2025, WRTA expanded pick-up and drop-off locations to include the Solomon Pond Mall and the Southborough MBTA Commuter Rail station to offer a direct connection with MetroWest Regional Transit Authority (MWRTA) fixed route service.

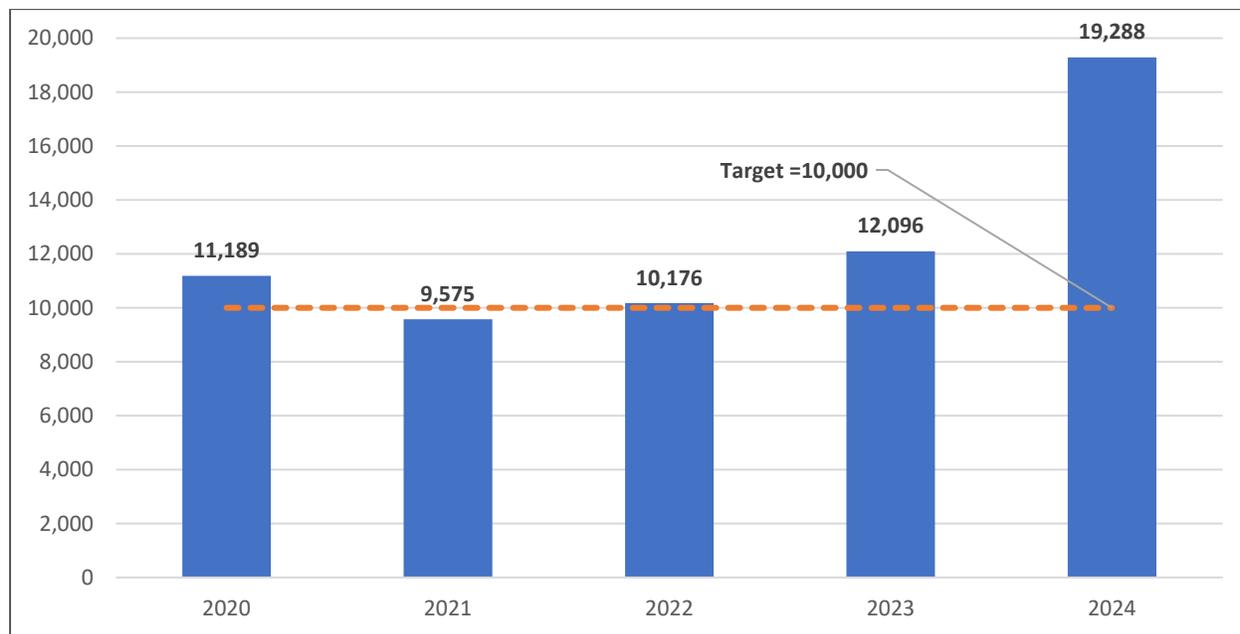
4.4 Asset Management

Per Massachusetts General law Chapter 161b, WRTA is required to contract out for the management of transit operations. These contractors operate fixed route and/or demand response services. WRTA has a total fleet of 129 active revenue vehicles. This section highlights the data WRTA tracks and the targets it sets related to the condition, maintenance, and performance of its assets, as well as any implemented or planned technology upgrades to support operations.

4.4.1 Maintenance

The miles traveled between road calls metric provides a means of understanding the annual frequency of road call occurrences in the context of revenue miles traveled. A higher average of miles between road calls indicates a lower rate of road calls. Miles between road calls across WRTA's system dipped from FY 2020 to FY 2021 below the WRTA-identified target of 10,000 miles, pointing to a higher frequency of road calls in FY 2021. Since that year, the frequency of road calls decreased, indicated by the increase in miles traveled between road calls year to year. The most significant decrease in road call frequency occurred between FY 2023 and FY 2024 — miles between road calls increased by over 59 percent (Figure 23). The reduction in the road call frequency is a result of WRTA's replacement of 10 older buses in FY 2024.

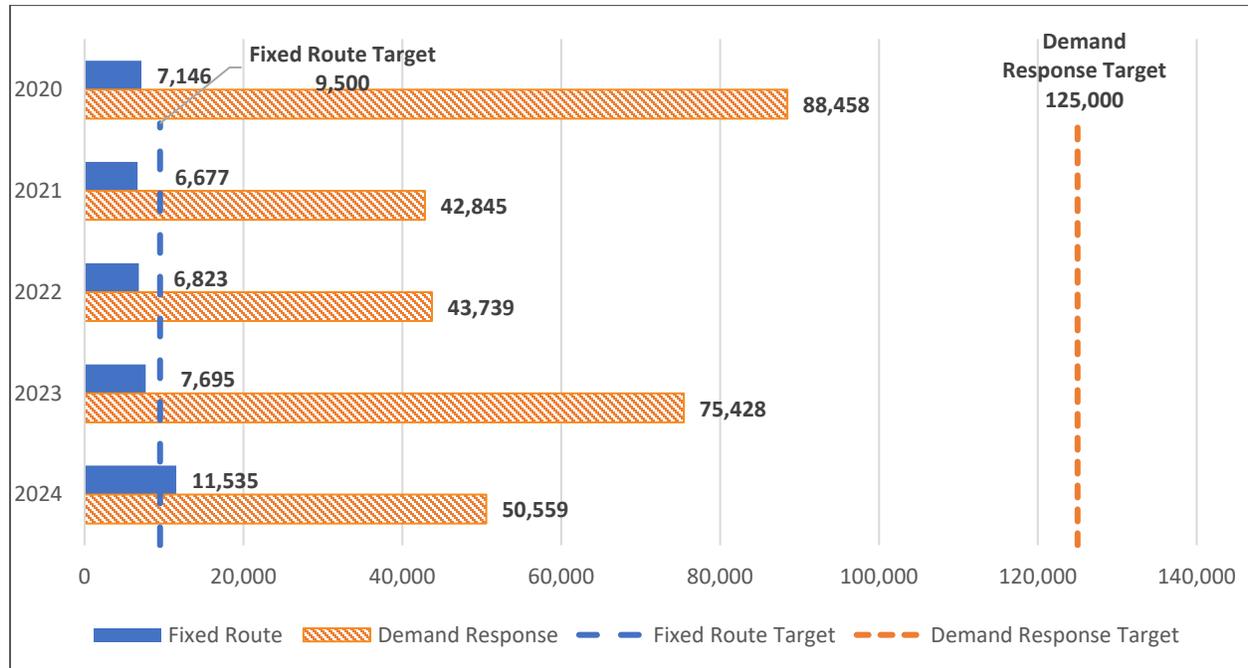
Figure 23. Miles Between Road Calls Systemwide (FY 2020-FY 2024)



Source: WRTA (road calls), NTD (revenue miles)

Similar to the mean miles traveled between road calls metric, mean miles between major mechanical failures provides a means of understanding the annual frequency of major mechanical failures in the context of revenue miles traveled. A higher average of miles between major mechanical failures indicates a lower rate of failures. The National Transit Database (NTD) defines major mechanical failures as “a failure of some mechanical element of the revenue vehicle that prevents the vehicle from completing a scheduled revenue trip or from starting the next scheduled revenue trip because actual movement is limited or because of safety concerns.” WRTA experienced a reduced frequency of major mechanical failures on fixed route vehicles between FY 2021 and FY 2024. The mean miles traveled between major mechanical failures steadily increased year to year since FY 2021, reaching a high of over 11,500 miles in FY 2024 and exceeding the WRTA-identified target of 9,500 miles between failures by over 2,000 miles (Figure 24). Major mechanical failures on demand response vehicles occurred at a period low frequency in FY 2020, with an incident occurring on average every 88,458 miles, which did not meet WRTA’s target of 125,000 miles. The rate fluctuated year to year since FY 2020, with the most frequent major mechanical failures occurring in FY 2021 and FY 2022.

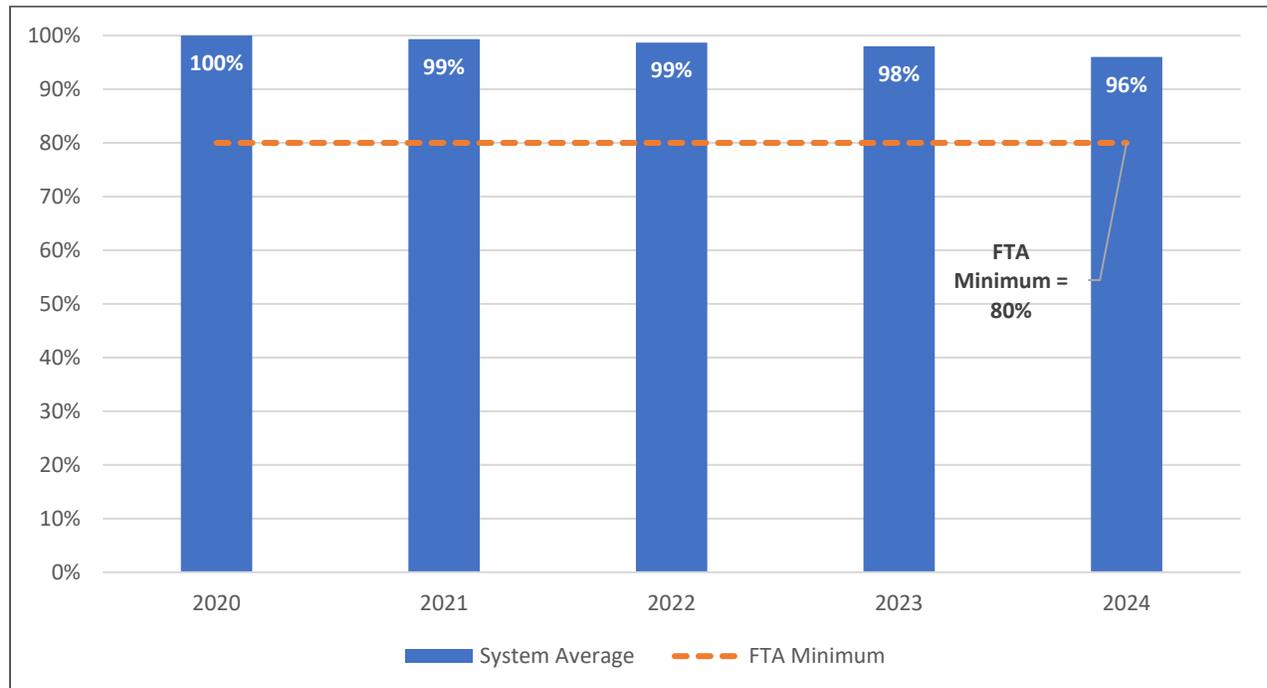
Figure 24. Mean Miles Between Major Mechanical Failures (FY 2020-FY 2024)



Source: WRTA (major mechanical failures), NTD (revenue miles)

The FTA standard for preventive maintenance is that revenue vehicles undergo regular maintenance service according to a schedule based on vehicle miles. The minimum percentage of preventive maintenance completed on time is 80 percent, meaning 80 percent of vehicles have received preventive maintenance service within the scheduled mileage. In the FY 2020 to FY 2024 period, WRTA continued to exceed this minimum systemwide, although its on-time completion rate steadily declined year to year (Figure 25). Preventive maintenance was at a period low of 96 percent completed on-time in FY 2024.

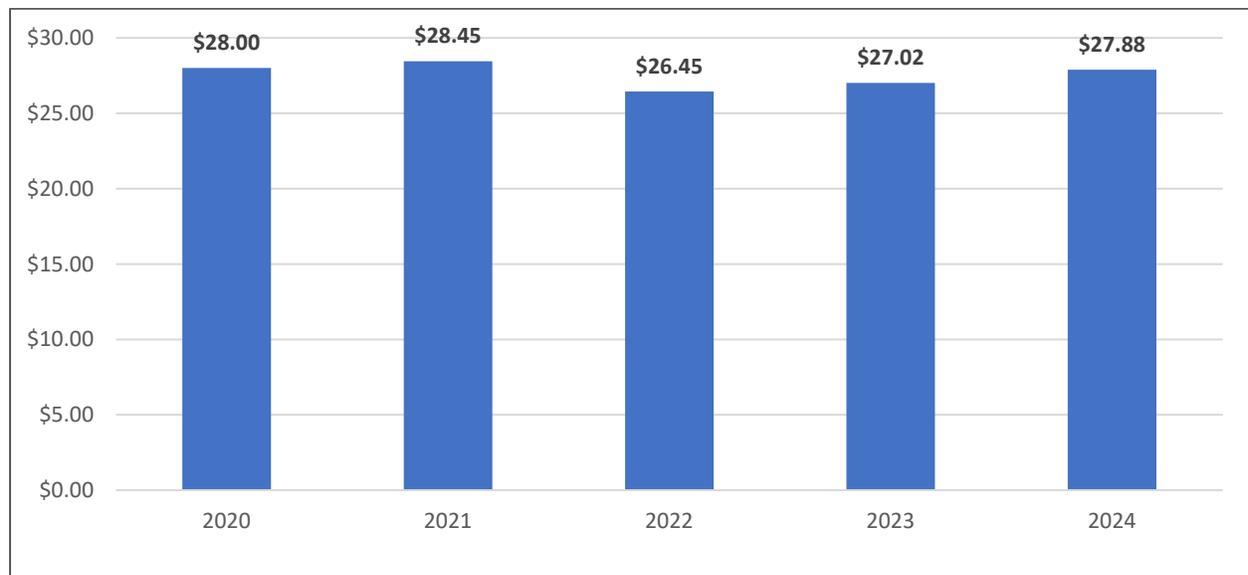
Figure 25. Systemwide Percentage of Preventive Maintenance Performed On-Time (FY 2020-FY 2024)



Source: WRTA

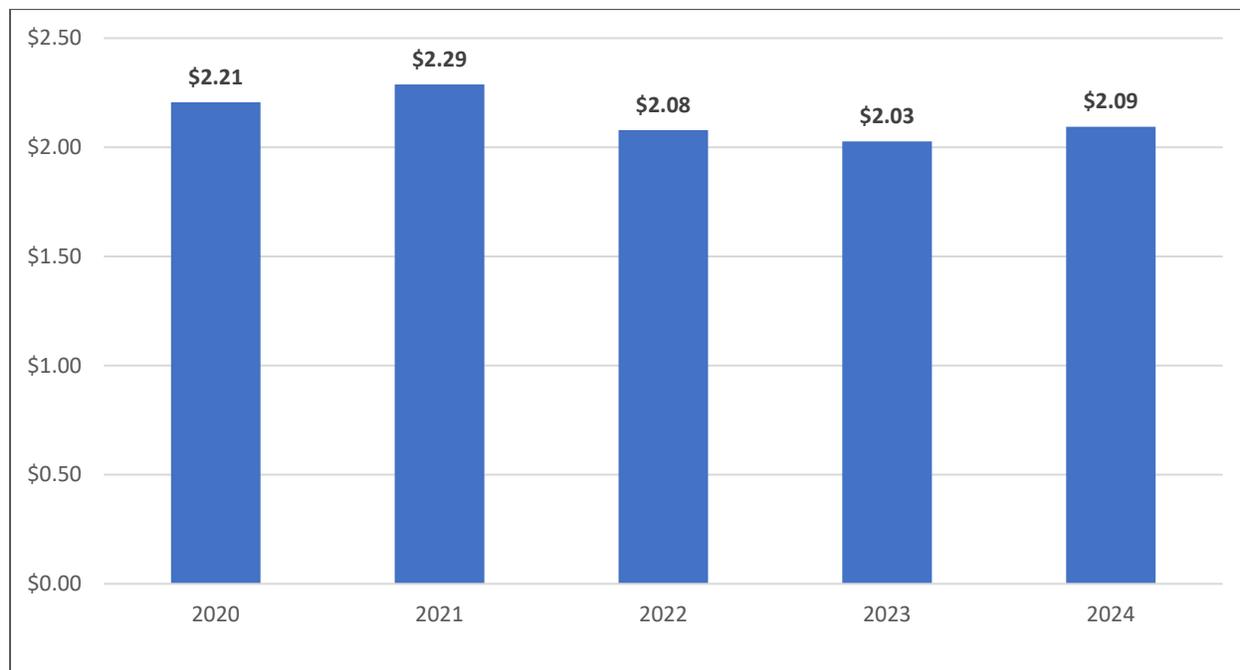
The cost of vehicle maintenance for WRTA saw slight decreasing trends overall between FY 2020 and FY 2024, when considering both maintenance cost per revenue hour and maintenance cost per revenue mile systemwide (Figure 26 and Figure 27). These trends are in line with the increases in service and overall cost inflation. Over the five-year period, the average cost of maintenance was \$27.56 per revenue hour and \$2.14 per revenue mile.

Figure 26. Maintenance Cost per Revenue Hour (FY 2020-FY 2024)



Source: WRTA

Figure 27. Maintenance Cost per Revenue Mile (FY 2020-FY 2024)



Source: WRTA

4.4.2 Vehicles

WRTA’s FY 2024 fleet consisted of 129 active revenue vehicles, with buses and cutaway vehicles making up a significant portion of the rolling stock (Table 14). Per the vehicle replacement standards defined in WRTA’s Transit Asset Management (TAM) Plan (WRTA 2022), 17 percent of the agency’s buses and 25 percent of cutaways are at or past their useful life benchmark.

WRTA operates 88 revenue vehicles in maximum service — 45 for fixed route and 43 for demand response. Vehicles operated in maximum service for demand response do not include the 10 automobiles used for the demand taxi service, as WRTA does not own or have any capital responsibility for those vehicles. The spare ratio for WRTA’s fixed route service is 20 percent. The spare ratio for fixed route is calculated based on the FTA definition, where spare ratio is equivalent to the difference between vehicles available in maximum service and vehicles operated in maximum service, divided by vehicles operated in maximum service. WRTA has 54 vehicles available in maximum service for fixed route service. Vehicles available in maximum service differ from active vehicle counts as vehicles available in maximum service refers to the maximum number of revenue vehicles at any given point in the reporting year by mode and type of service, while active vehicles refer to the vehicles available for service on the last day of the fiscal year.

Table 14. Equipment Inventory Summary (FY 2024)

Vehicle Type	Total Active Number	Average Age (Years)	Average Mileage	Useful Life Benchmark (Years)	Percentage at or past Useful Life Benchmark
Bus	58 ^a	6.3	255,507	12	17%
Cutaway	55	4	81,214	6-7	25%

Vehicle Type	Total Active Number	Average Age (Years)	Average Mileage	Useful Life Benchmark (Years)	Percentage at or past Useful Life Benchmark
Automobile ^b	10	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Minivan ^c	6	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Trucks or other rubber tire vehicles (Non-Revenue)	8	11	53,588	10	50%
Automobile (Non-Revenue)	2	9	15,617	7	50%

Source: NTD, WRTA

^a The total number of active buses is greater than the total number of vehicles available in maximum service for fixed route by four vehicles because four of WRTA's buses are part of a contingency fleet.

^b WRTA does not have capital responsibility for these 10 automobiles, as they are owned by the third-party taxi contractor for the demand taxi service.

^c WRTA does not have capital responsibility for these 6 minivans, as they are owned by a third-party contractor for the on-demand microtransit service.

N/A = Not Applicable

4.4.3 Facilities

WRTA owns one maintenance and operations facility and one public-facing transit hub with an administrative office, both located in Worcester (Table 15). The WRTA Maintenance and Operations Facility, opened in 2016, has a Transit Economic Requirements Model (TERM) rating of five, on a scale of one to five, indicating the facility is in excellent condition. The WRTA Central Hub, opened in 2013, is rated at 4.9 on the TERM scale, indicating the building is also in excellent condition.

Table 15. Facility Inventory Summary

Facility Name	Type	Location	Landowner the Facility is on	Direct Capital Responsibility	TERM Rating
WRTA Maintenance and Operations Facility	General Purpose Maintenance Facility/Depot	42 Quinsigamond Avenue, Worcester, MA 01610	WRTA	Yes	5
WRTA Central Hub	Administrative Office / Sales Office	60 Foster Street, Worcester, MA 01608	Worcester Redevelopment Authority	Yes	4.9

Source: MassDOT

4.4.4 Technology

As of October 2025, WRTA maintains the following technology assets:

- Systrans Navineo technology for CAD/AVL, automatic passenger counter (APC), and automated in-vehicle announcements
- StrataGen Systems, Inc. demand response dispatching software
- TripSpark Technologies Ranger demand response mobile data terminals
- GIRO Inc. HASTUS Scheduling software
- Seon on-board cameras
- Website and mobile-friendly site for smart phone users
- Ron Turley Associates parts/inventory management software
- Microsoft Dynamics Great Plains financial software
- Next arrival information for customers using phone app or computer, including text-based and QR code instructions

4.4.4.1 Fixed Route CAD/AVL

As of October 2025, WRTA replaced its existing fixed route CAD/AVL system with Navineo CAD/AVL, provided by Systrans. This upgraded system will enhance internal operations by enabling real-time vehicle tracking and monitoring, as well as improving communication between dispatchers and vehicle operators. Dispatchers will be able to send updates to operators and vehicles more quickly, including outlining detours that can be displayed while in route.

At the same time, Navineo will significantly improve the passenger experience. WRTA will be able to produce a GTFS-Realtime (GTFS-RT) feed, allowing real-time bus location information to be accessed through a variety of applications. Passengers will be able to track buses in real time using popular platforms such as Google Maps, Transit App, and other services that support GTFS-RT feeds, making travel more predictable and convenient.

Other key features of the new technology suite include 29-inch infotainment screens on all buses that display a route ladder and departure/arrival times for upcoming bus stops, next-stop information for passengers with disabilities, voice announcements in English and Spanish, display of on-board vehicle capacity, etc. (Figure 28).

Figure 28. In-Vehicle Infotainment Screen Displaying a Service Alert in Spanish



4.4.4.2 Demand Response (Planned - 2026)

In early 2026, WRTA plans to build on the momentum of its new fixed route CAD/AVL system and turn its attention to a new demand response technology suite. The goals of the project are to streamline all demand response contractors onto one single system, improve customer-facing tools (including vehicle tracking, vehicle determination, automated calls/texts when a vehicle is on its way), and be able to allow service delivery flexibility such as same-day trip accommodations. The existing technology suite has served the agency well, but the marketplace is always evolving, and WRTA is aware that there are new product suites with attractive features that would better serve its passengers, operators, dispatchers, and schedulers.

WRTA is committed to modernizing both its fixed route and demand response technology suites as it increases operational efficiencies for the agency, improves the agency’s response for route detours/disruptions, provides better visibility for the fleet, enhances the passenger experience with more reliable information, transparency, and accessibility—all with the goal of making WRTA more attractive to ride.

4.5 Policies and Procedures

4.5.1 Code of Conduct

WRTA has established a Code of Conduct to enhance safety and customer experience, to facilitate the proper use and conduct on WRTA property for the purpose of passenger comfort and the protection of passengers and WRTA employees, and to ensure the payment of fares for the use of the system. These policies can be found on the WRTA website and are presented in Table 16, organized by transit vehicle and hub/WRTA property.

Table 16. WRTA Policies

Policy	Description
Code of Conduct - Transit Vehicle (Prohibited Activities)	A detailed list of prohibited activities is provided on WRTA’s website: https://therta.com/routes-schedules/code-of-conduct/
Code of Conduct - Hub Facility and Property (Prohibited Activities)	Prohibited activities at the Hub Facility and Property align with the prohibited activities as described in the Code of Conduct for transit vehicles. Additional prohibited activities include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possessing items that necessarily, because of their size or quantity, block entry and exit of passengers, block or prohibit access to windows, and/or general movement within a WRTA facility and on the WRTA property, or access to seating, any facility fixtures, or area(s) for the safe and general use or purpose.
Code of Conduct - Hub Facility and Property (Permitted Activities)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consuming any food or non-alcoholic beverages, excluding medicine.

Policy	Description
Title VI Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Title VI Program has been prepared to ensure that the level and quality of WRTA’s fixed route and demand response services are provided in a nondiscriminatory manner and that the opportunity for full and fair participation is offered to WRTA’s riders and other community members in accordance with the Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Source: WRTA

In the event of a violation of the Code of Conduct, depending on the severity, WRTA may contact local law enforcement and reserves the right to deny WRTA service and possible suspension of WRTA service in the future.

For repeat or major offenders, the Director of Operations and/or Operations Supervisor will issue a written notice stating the cause and duration of the suspension and the process for requesting review. Suspension shall be in effect upon issuance of the notice and shall remain in effect during any review process. Within 10 business days after issuance of a service suspension notice, the offender may deliver to the WRTA Administrator a verbal or written request for review of the suspension and an opportunity to present reasons for reconsideration of the suspension. All requests for review must be submitted via WRTA Customer Feedback. Within 10 business days after receiving a request for review, the WRTA Administrator and/or designees will set up a telephone or in person hearing to review the service suspension decision with the offender. The WRTA Administrator and/or designees then will decide to affirm or reverse the suspension within 10 days following the hearing. The post-hearing decision will be final.

WRTA reserves the right to impose disciplinary sanctions, including suspension from bus service, as it deems appropriate in any particular situation. WRTA expressly reserves the right to permanently ban passengers from service for any major infraction, including first offenses.

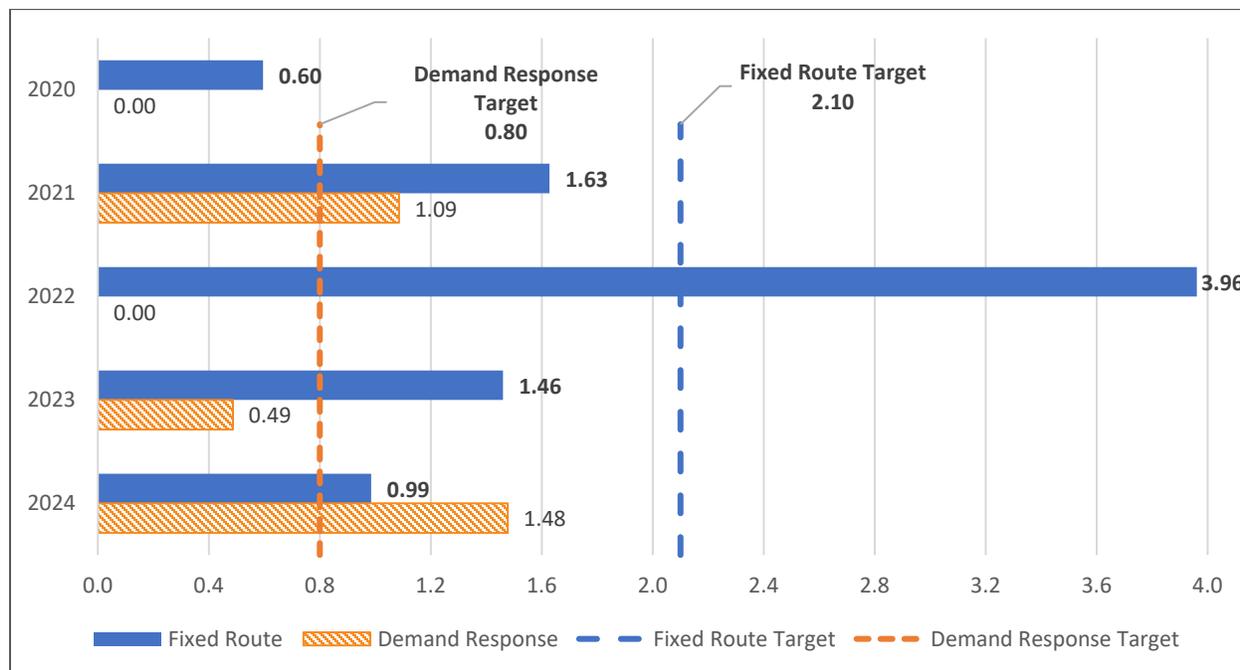
4.5.2 Safety and Security

As an urban system, WRTA develops a Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan (PTASP), which defines specific safety goals for the RTA. WRTA has a target of zero fatalities per million vehicle revenue miles for both demand response (which includes directly operated and contracted demand response and demand taxi services) and fixed route. Over the last five years, WRTA has not recorded any fatalities on either service type.

WRTA’s target for injuries per million vehicle revenue miles on demand response services (inclusive of demand taxi service) is 0.8 or less, and 2.1 or less on fixed route services (Figure 29). WRTA policy is to track major (serious) injuries only.

For fixed route, the target was met for each fiscal year except FY 2022. In FY 2022, the fixed route injury rate was more than twice that of all other years. The injury rate dropped to nearly a third of the FY 2022 rate in the following fiscal year (1.46 injuries per million vehicle revenue miles) and decreased further in FY 2024 to just below one injury per million vehicle revenue miles. No injuries were recorded on demand response services in FY 2020 and FY 2022. The highest injury rate on demand response was recorded in FY 2024 (1.48 injuries per million vehicle revenue miles).

Figure 29. Injuries per Million Vehicle Revenue Miles (FY 2020-FY 2024)

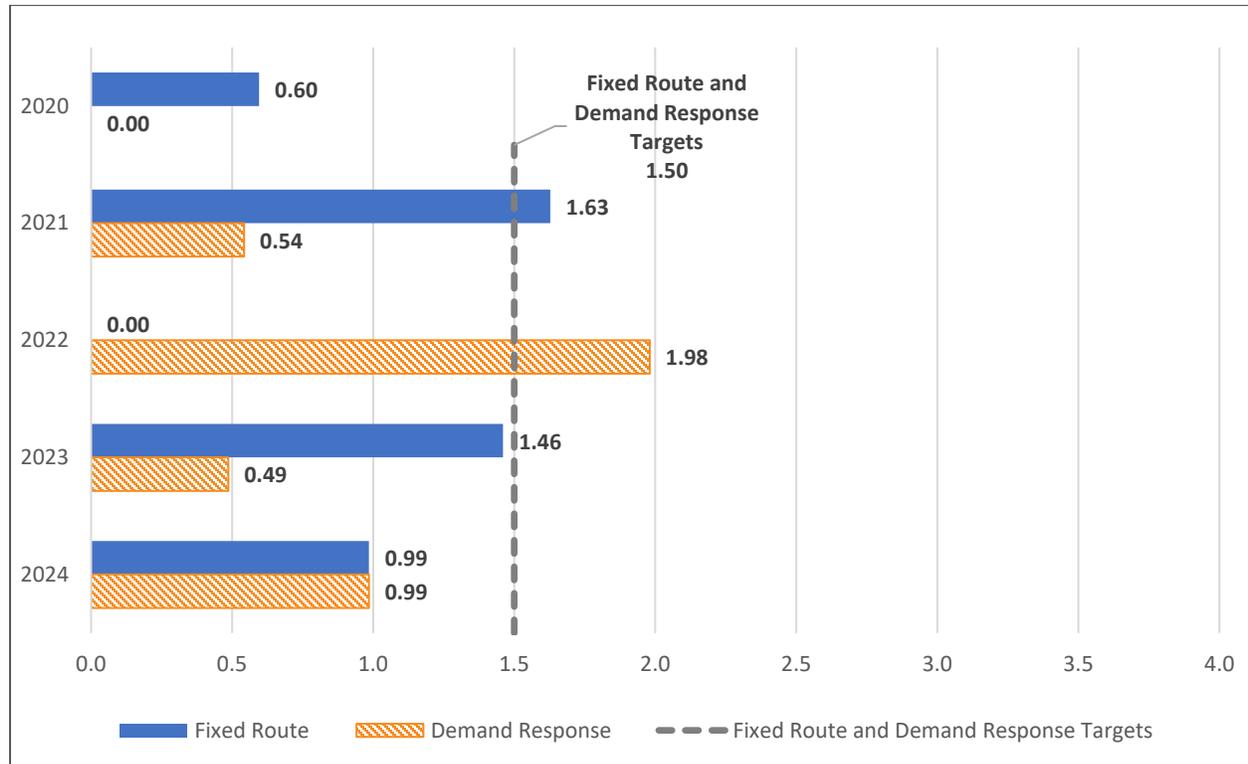


Source: WRTA

WRTA sets target limits for safety events per million vehicle revenue miles for both demand response and fixed route services. A safety event is defined by FTA as “all safety events meeting an NTD major event threshold [...]” (FTA 2020). WRTA targets 1.5 safety events per million vehicle revenue miles for both fixed route and the suite of demand response services including ADA, non-ADA, and demand taxi (Figure 30).

The frequency of safety events on fixed route service fluctuated between FY 2020 and FY 2024, with a peak in FY 2021 at 1.63 events per million vehicle revenue miles, immediately followed by a drop to zero safety events in FY 2022. FY 2023 saw the same safety event count on fixed route as in FY 2021 (three events), but fixed route vehicle revenue miles in FY 2023 were greater than that in FY 2021, leading to a reduced frequency of safety events. The safety event rate dropped further in FY 2024 due to a decrease in that year’s count of safety events on fixed route services. The safety event frequency on demand response was null in FY 2020, then increased in the following two years to peak in FY 2022 at 1.98 safety events per million vehicle revenue miles. In FY 2023, the safety event rate dropped to a quarter of that in the previous fiscal year, then doubled in FY 2024 to reach a rate of just under one safety event per million vehicle revenue miles.

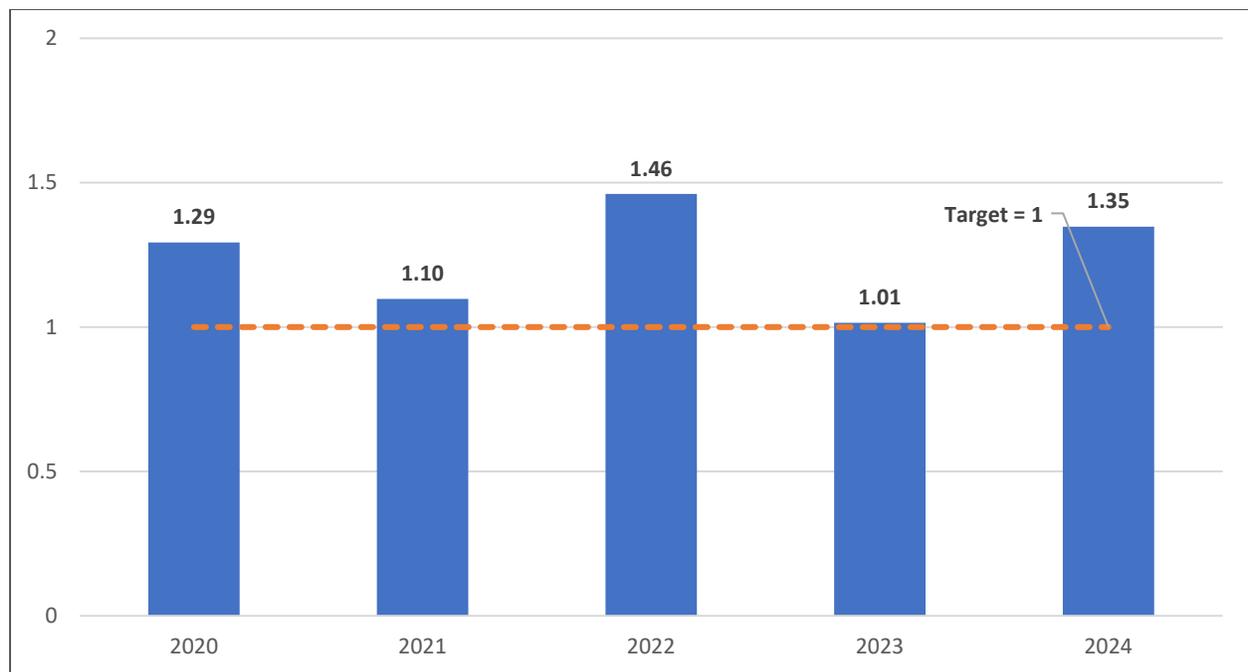
Figure 30. Safety Events per Million Vehicle Revenue Miles (FY 2020-FY 2024)



Source: WRTA

Systemwide preventable accidents per 100,000 miles fluctuated from FY 2020 to FY 2024, remaining between 1.01 and 1.46 preventable accidents per 100,00 miles in each year (Figure 31). The target for this metric is one preventable accident per 100,000 miles.

Figure 31. Preventable Accidents per 100,000 Miles (FY 2020-FY 2024)



Source: WRTA

4.6 Peer Agency Analysis

A peer agency analysis assesses transit agency peers relative to WRTA that operate in a similar operating environment. Although each transit system is unique, the general similarities and differences provide useful insight into comparative transit statistics. Peers were chosen based on the American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates (FY 2023) that reflect similarities in service area size, service area population density, and transit operating characteristics including ridership, operating budget, revenue hours and revenue miles, and farebox revenue.

Table 17 highlights Census data for the eight peer agencies in comparison to WRTA. WRTA has the second highest service area population and the highest population growth rate relative to the other systems, although its population density is the third lowest. WRTA’s poverty rate is below the peer average of 12.6 percent.

Table 17. Peer Systems Census Data (FY 2023)

System	Town	State	Population	Population Density	Population Growth Rate (2018-2023)	Percent Poverty ^a
Brevard County (2023)	Titusville	FL	643,979	414	11.2%	10.1%
Escambia County (2023)	Pensacola	FL	241,661	1,279	0.0%	12.7%
Stark Area RTA (2023)	Canton	OH	375,586	646	0.0%	12.1%
Greater Peoria Mass Transit District (2023)	Peoria	IL	240,110	2,287	14.4%	17.6%
Cumberland Dauphin-Harrisburg Transit Authority (2022)	Harrisburg	PA	511,009	3,730	0.0%	13.3%
Erie Metropolitan Transit Authority (2023)	Erie	PA	189,872	2,466	0.0%	14.6%
Southeastern Regional Transit Authority (2023)	New Bedford	MA	308,614	1,068	0.0%	13.0%
Brockton Area Transit (2023)	Brockton	MA	255,876	2,975	0.5%	7.7%
<i>Peer Average</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>345,838</i>	<i>1,858</i>	<i>3.3%</i>	<i>12.6%</i>
Worcester Regional Transit Authority (2023)	Worcester	MA	578,732	668	20.7%	11.0%

Source: US Census Bureau, WRTA

^a Refers to the percentage of households below 100 percent of the federal poverty rate.

The operating data by peer are shown in Table 18. WRTA’s ridership and operating budget are the highest among its peers, while the proportion of revenue miles operated for demand response services is the third lowest (4.8 percent) and well below the peer average of 8.4 percent. WRTA operates above the peer average of approximately 2.7 million revenue miles and above the peer average of approximately 178,000 revenue hours. In FY 2023, WRTA was

the only system among its peers operating fare-free service, which explains the gap in WRTA's farebox revenue relative to that of its peers (averaging over \$2.1 million).

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
Brevard County (2023)	1,855,968	4.4%	\$16,962,063	3,054,174	160,937	\$1,363,530
Escambia County (2023)	894,386	12.6%	\$14,903,332	2,224,973	153,676	\$1,388,525
Stark Area RTA (2023)	1,387,558	10.8%	\$29,918,737	3,662,134	224,677	\$1,674,432
Greater Peoria Mass Transit District (2023)	1,871,743	7.3%	\$26,093,814	3,078,411	182,595	\$1,494,964
Cumberland Dauphin- Harrisburg Transit Authority (2022)	1,150,133	11.9%	\$20,278,765	2,816,993	183,103	\$2,398,430
Erie Metropolitan Transit Authority (2023)	1,423,465	10.3%	\$22,331,761	2,594,434	184,583	\$4,606,141
Southeastern Regional Transit Authority (2023)	2,368,548	3.8%	\$23,915,663	2,244,380	168,287	\$1,858,230
Brockton Area Transit (2023)	1,859,235	6.0%	\$17,671,996	1,664,039	163,109	\$2,655,747
<i>Peer Average</i>	<i>1,601,380</i>	<i>8.4%</i>	<i>\$21,509,516</i>	<i>2,667,442</i>	<i>177,621</i>	<i>\$2,180,000</i>
Worcester Regional Transit Authority (2023)	4,133,429	38.7%	\$31,884,123	3,350,635	251,389	\$70,475

Source: NTD, WRTA

Table 19 highlights how WRTA compares with its eight peer agencies when considering metrics related to ridership, operating costs, subsidies, and farebox recovery. WRTA's performance for passengers per revenue mile and per revenue hour is greater than that of its peers. WRTA has the lowest cost per passenger, in addition to the lowest subsidy per passenger due to its minimal fare revenue. WRTA's cost per hour is just above the peer average of \$120.1 per hour.

Table 19. Peer System Comparison Metrics (FY 2023)

System	Passengers/ Revenue Mile	Passengers/ Revenue Hour	Cost/ Revenue Hour	Cost/ Passenger	Subsidy/ Passenger	Farebox Recovery
Brevard County (2023)	0.61	11.53	\$105.40	\$9.14	\$8.40	8%
Escambia County (2023)	0.40	5.82	\$96.98	\$16.66	\$15.11	9%
Stark Area RTA (2023)	0.38	6.18	\$133.16	\$21.56	\$20.36	6%
Greater Peoria Mass Transit District (2023)	0.61	10.25	\$142.91	\$13.94	\$13.14	6%
Cumberland Dauphin-Harrisburg Transit Authority (2022)	0.41	6.28	\$110.75	\$17.63	\$15.55	12%
Erie Metropolitan Transit Authority (2023)	0.55	7.71	\$120.98	\$15.69	\$12.45	21%
Southeastern Regional Transit Authority (2023)	1.06	14.07	\$142.11	\$10.10	\$9.31	8%
Brockton Area Transit (2023)	1.12	11.40	\$108.34	\$9.50	\$8.08	15%
<i>Peer Average</i>	<i>0.64</i>	<i>9.16</i>	<i>\$120.08</i>	<i>\$14.28</i>	<i>\$12.80</i>	<i>10%</i>
Worcester Regional Transit Authority (2023)	1.23	16.44	\$126.8	\$7.71	\$7.70	0.2%

Source: NTD, WRTA

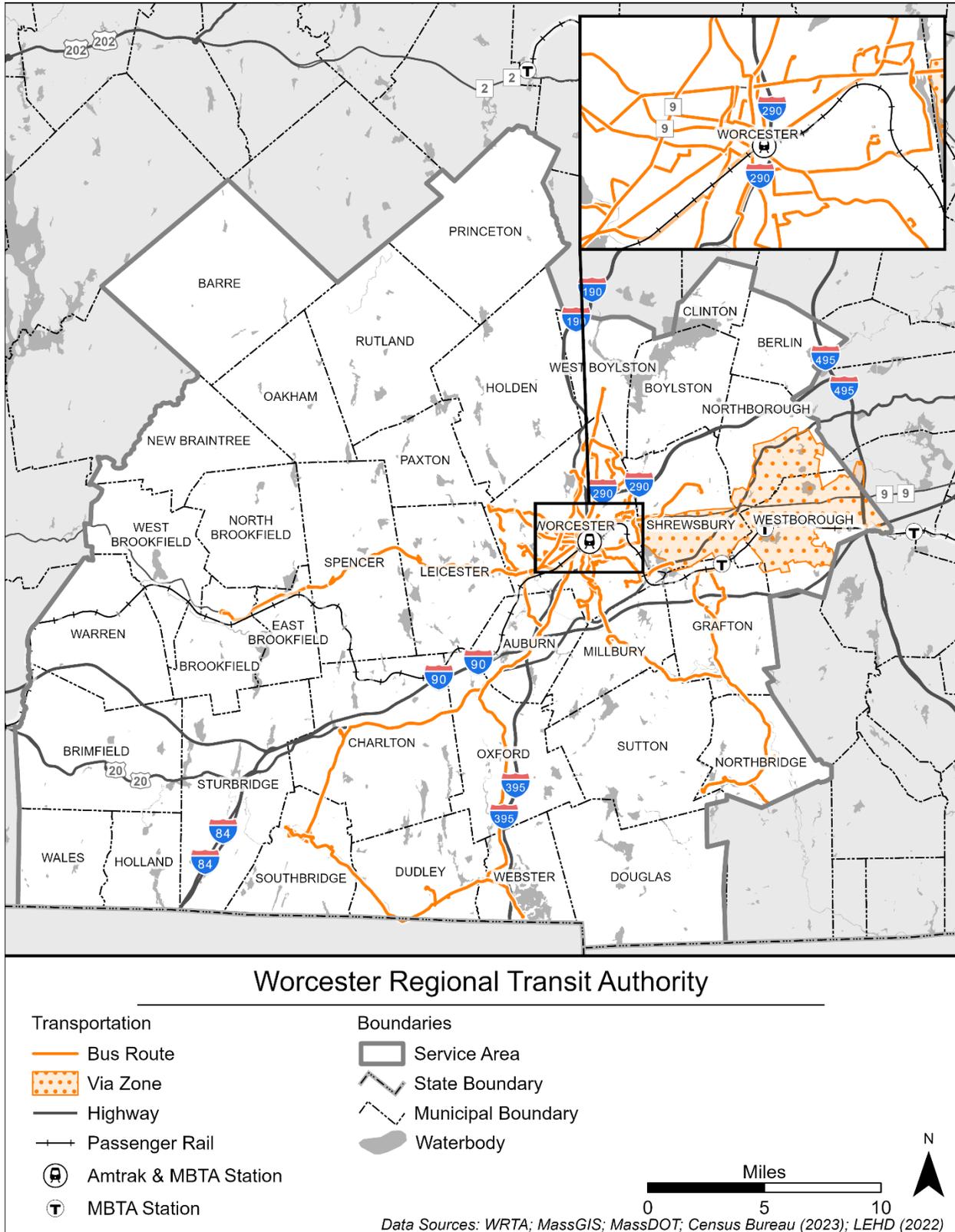
5 Market Evaluation

This chapter includes an overview of the existing demographic and socioeconomic characteristics for the WRTA service area as shown in Figure 32. 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 ACS 5-year estimates released in 2023 (the latest data available), 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.

This chapter also summarizes the findings from the stakeholder and public engagement activities undertaken as a part of the planning process. WRTA conducted a multi-day pop-up event, an operator survey, and a widely promoted public survey to better understand regional mobility needs. High-level findings from those activities are presented in this chapter. Together, the demographic analysis and engagement results directly inform the needs and recommendations presented in Chapter 8.

As shown in Figure 32, WRTA has 37 communities in its service area. WRTA fixed route service spans 16 of these communities, connecting Worcester to the surrounding communities of Auburn, Brookfield, Charlton, Dudley, East Brookfield, Grafton, Leicester, Millbury, Northbridge, Oxford, Shrewsbury, Southbridge, Spencer, Webster, and West Boylston.

Figure 32. Overview of WRTA Service Area



Source: AECOM (2025)

5.1 Demographic Analysis

The demographic analysis considers several key population indicators of transit use and demand to guide WRTA's transit service planning.

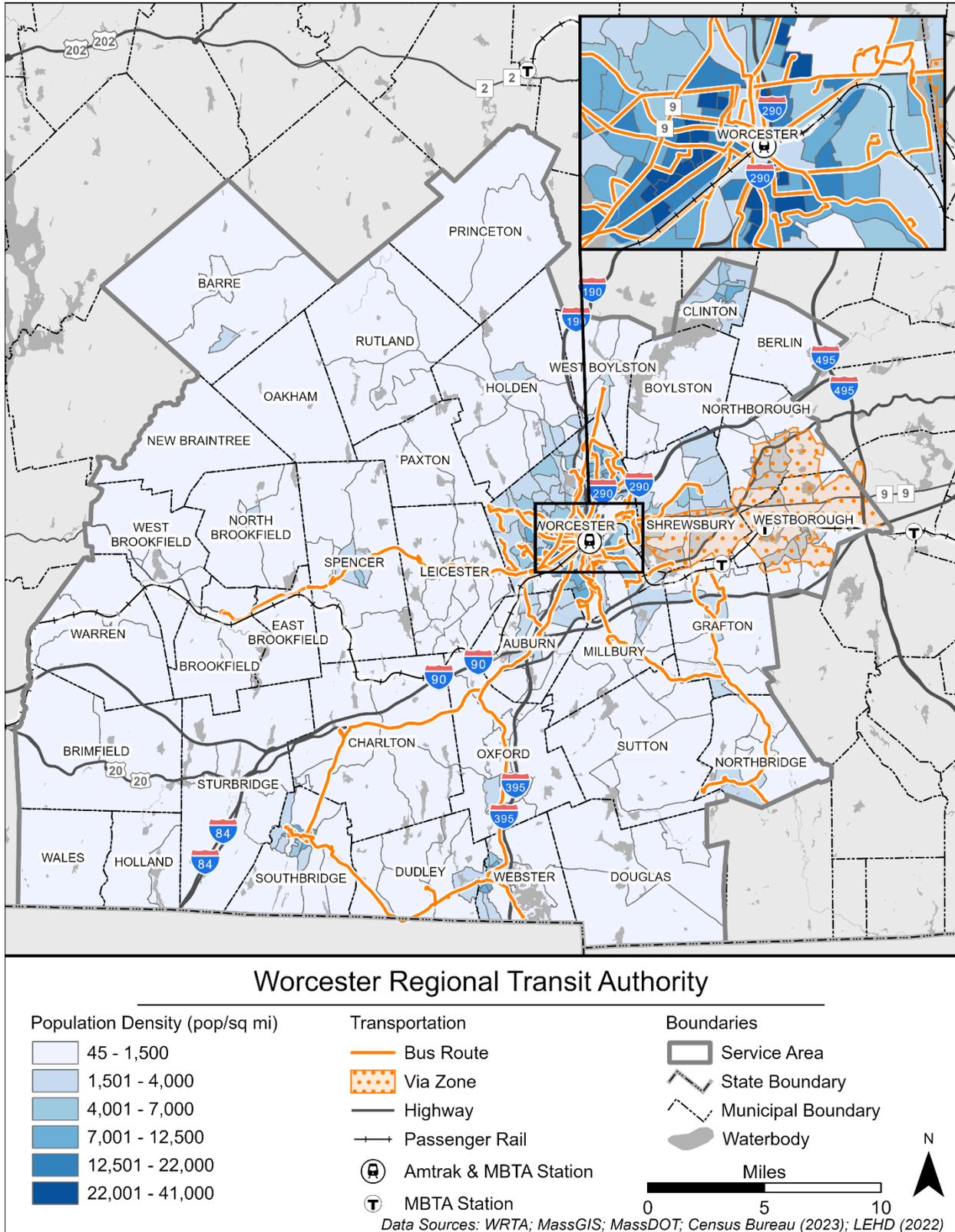
- Population density is a key determinant of transit use, with transit offering a more efficient way to move many people in a constrained area than personal vehicles. Knowing the population density can help transit agencies identify and plan for the most suitable types of transit to offer people in areas of different density.
- Older adult population includes 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 includes people 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 are important measures to understand the potential for transit demand, as low-income individuals and households tend to rely on transit.
- Zero-vehicle households are likely to rely on transit service as a reliable source of transportation to meet their mobility needs.
- Populations other than non-Hispanic White is an important metric to comply with federal regulations and agency goals to ensure service for majority-minority communities.
- Population with disabilities shows the concentration of people who, by some measure of physical or mental disability, cannot readily operate a personal vehicle and often rely on transit use, especially paratransit services.
- Title VI indicators include low-income and population other than non-Hispanic white (as previously described) and are used to guide Title VI planning efforts.
- Job density, 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 enable WRTA to better contextualize their 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 WRTA's service area.

5.1.1 Population Density

The population density, or population per square mile, in the WRTA service area is shown on Figure 33. Population density is highest in the City of Worcester, which is the heart of the WRTA service area. The WRTA Central Hub for fixed route transit and the MBTA Worcester Commuter Rail Station are adjacent to each other in downtown Worcester, facilitating multimodal transfers. Additional pockets of concentrated population are in Clinton, Shrewsbury, Southbridge, Spencer, and Webster. Fixed routes are currently available in these areas with greater population density, except in Clinton.

Figure 33. 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, and recreation. As shown on Figure 34, high concentrations of population over 65 exist in parts of Auburn, Brookfield, Charlton, Millbury, Shrewsbury, Spencer, West Boylston, West Brookfield, and Worcester. For older adults located within the fixed route service area who may no longer be able to access the service, WRTA offers ADA and non-ADA paratransit services. WRTA also partners with local COAs and SCM Elderbus to operate demand response services for older adults (over the age of 60) and disabled residents (regardless of age) in the participating communities.

5.1.3 Youth Population

The youth population, defined as the percentage of the population under the age of 18, is shown on Figure 35. Youth are likely to utilize transit as a reliable and convenient form of transportation, in lieu of car ownership. The youth population is generally evenly distributed across the service area, although small pockets of high concentrations of youth population are in central Worcester and southeastern Dudley, as well as in parts of Charlton, Clinton, Rutland, Holden, Shrewsbury, and Westborough.

5.1.4 Median Household Income

Median household income is based on household size and reported income. As shown in Figure 36, households with median incomes between \$15,000 and \$55,000 are concentrated in the City of Worcester and portions of Auburn, Brookfield, Clinton, Dudley, East Brookfield, Northbridge, Spencer, Southbridge Warren, and Webster. High median household incomes are concentrated in the Towns of Princeton, Rutland, Northborough, Grafton, Sutton, Westborough, Shrewsbury, Holden, Oxford, and Sturbridge.

5.1.5 Low-Income Population

WRTA uses a common measure of low income when evaluating its service area, where low income is defined as households below 150 percent of the federal poverty rate. For WRTA this is block groups with a larger than average low-income population, or 16.7 percent. Figure 37 shows the low-income population in the WRTA service area. The highest concentration is in Worcester, with additional high concentration pockets in Barre, Dudley, Spencer, Warren, and Webster, largely aligning with the low median household income areas identified in the previous subsection.

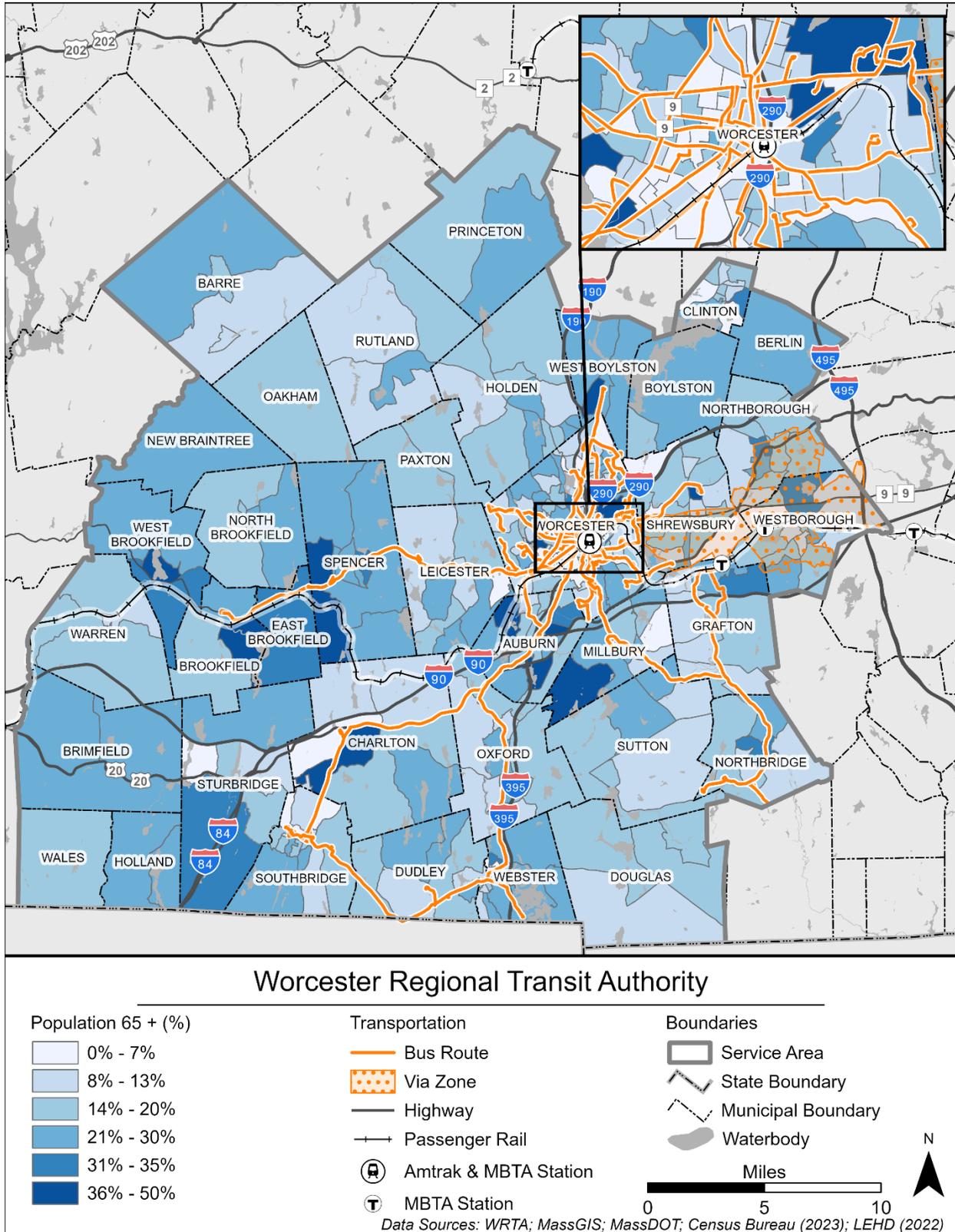
5.1.6 Zero-Vehicle Households

The highest concentration of households without access to a personal vehicle is in Worcester, as shown in Figure 38, particularly in the Piedmont and Oak Hill neighborhoods, between Highlands Street and Main Street, and northeast of the WRTA Central Hub and Worcester MBTA Station. Outside of the City of Worcester, zero-vehicle households are also highly concentrated in the Towns of Auburn, Dudley, Southbridge, Spencer, and Webster, which suggest potential for increased fixed route service and enhanced transit connectivity.

5.1.7 Population Other Than Non-Hispanic White

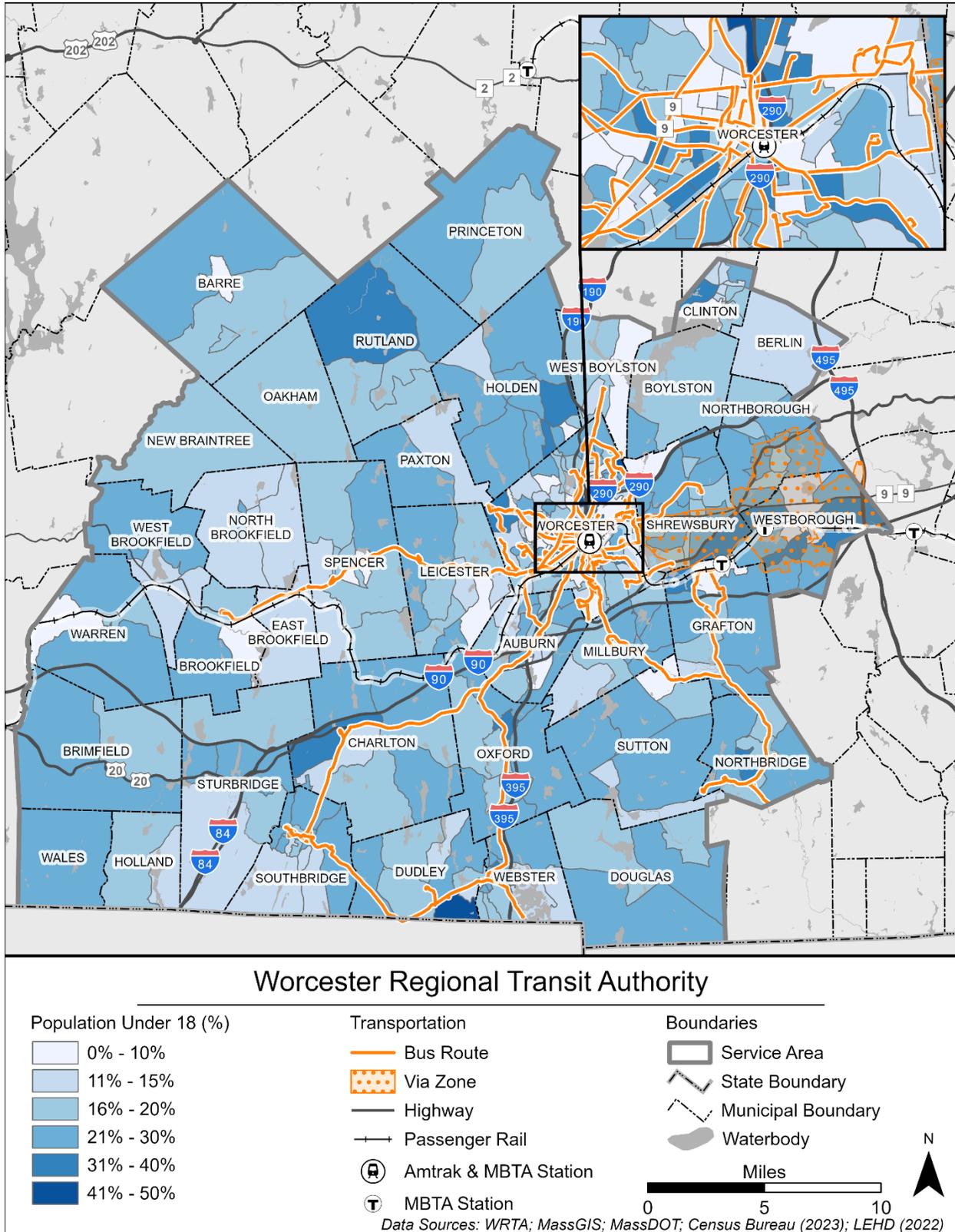
Figure 39 shows the concentration of demographic groups other than non-Hispanic white. These populations are concentrated in Worcester, Westborough, Southbridge, and Shrewsbury.

Figure 34. Older Adult Population



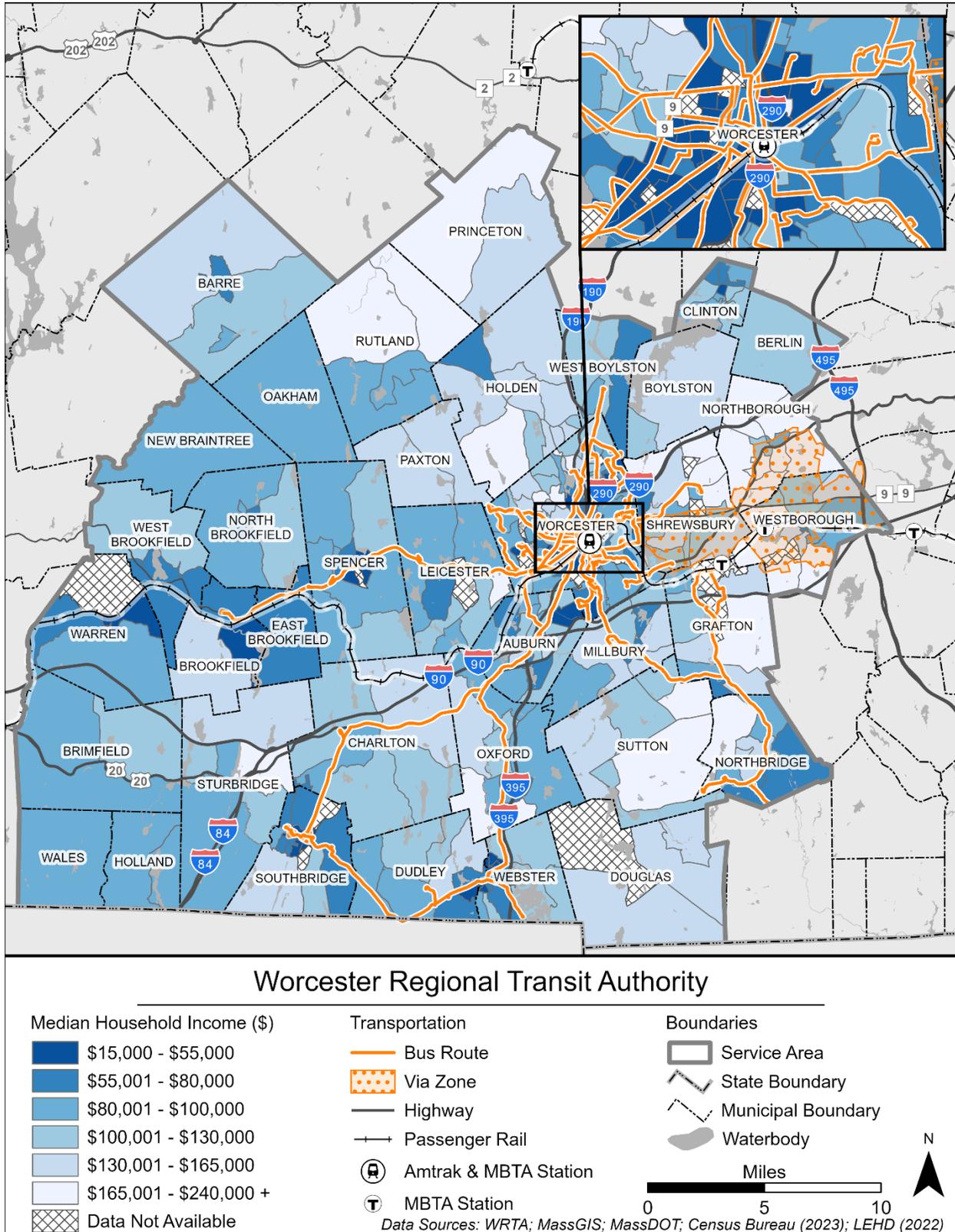
Source: AECOM (2025)

Figure 35. Youth Population



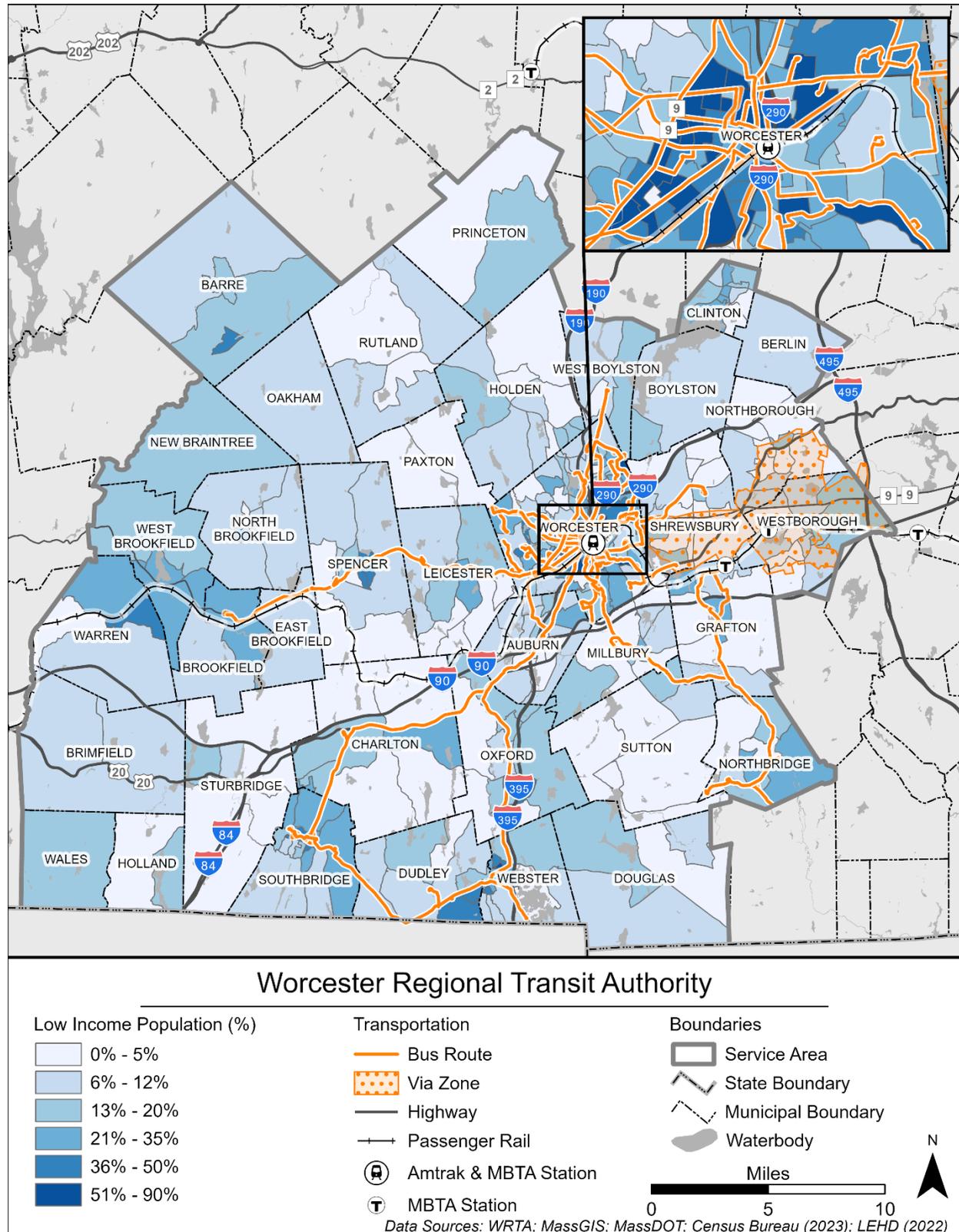
Source: AECOM (2025)

Figure 36. Median Household Income



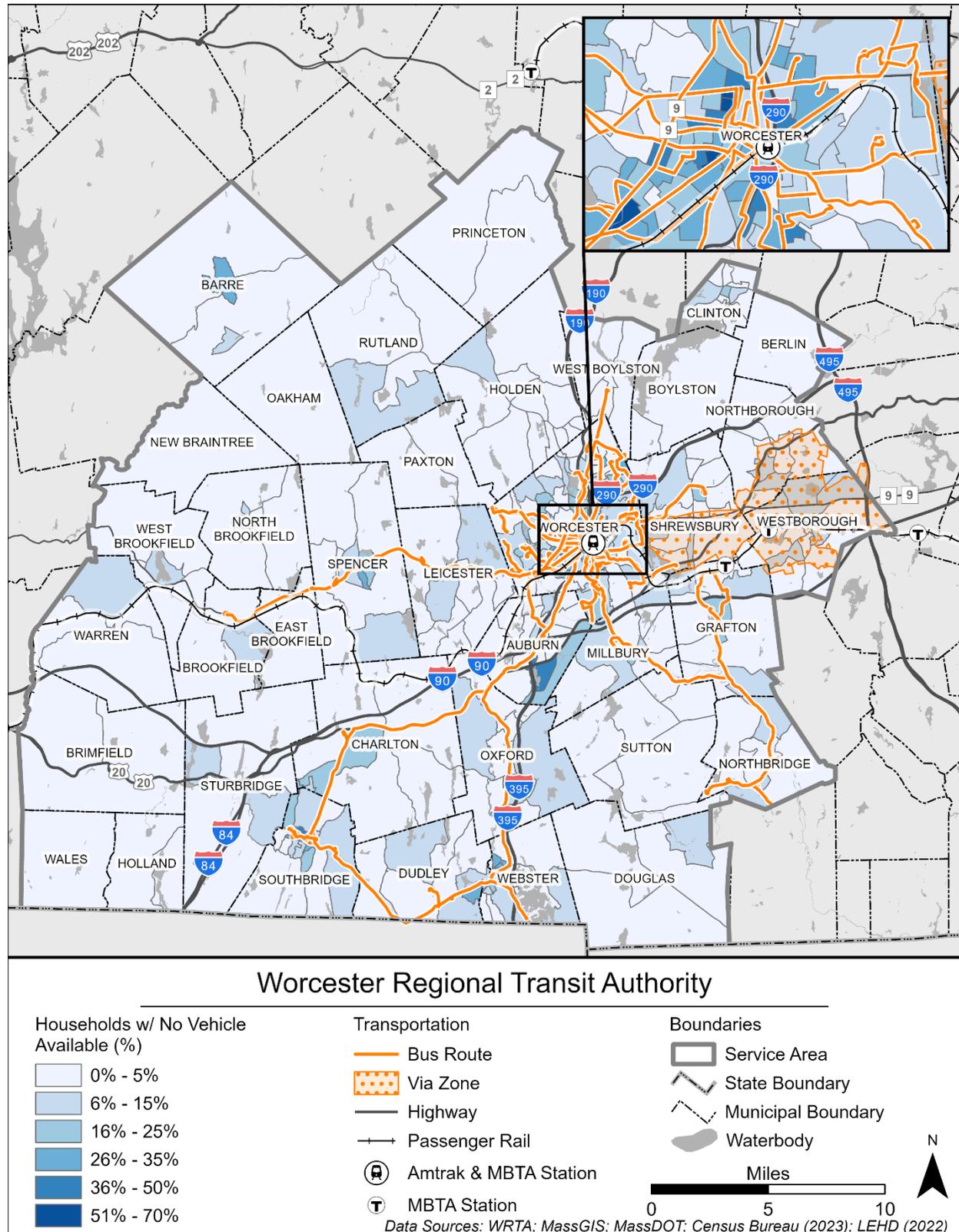
Source: AECOM (2025)

Figure 37. Low-Income Population



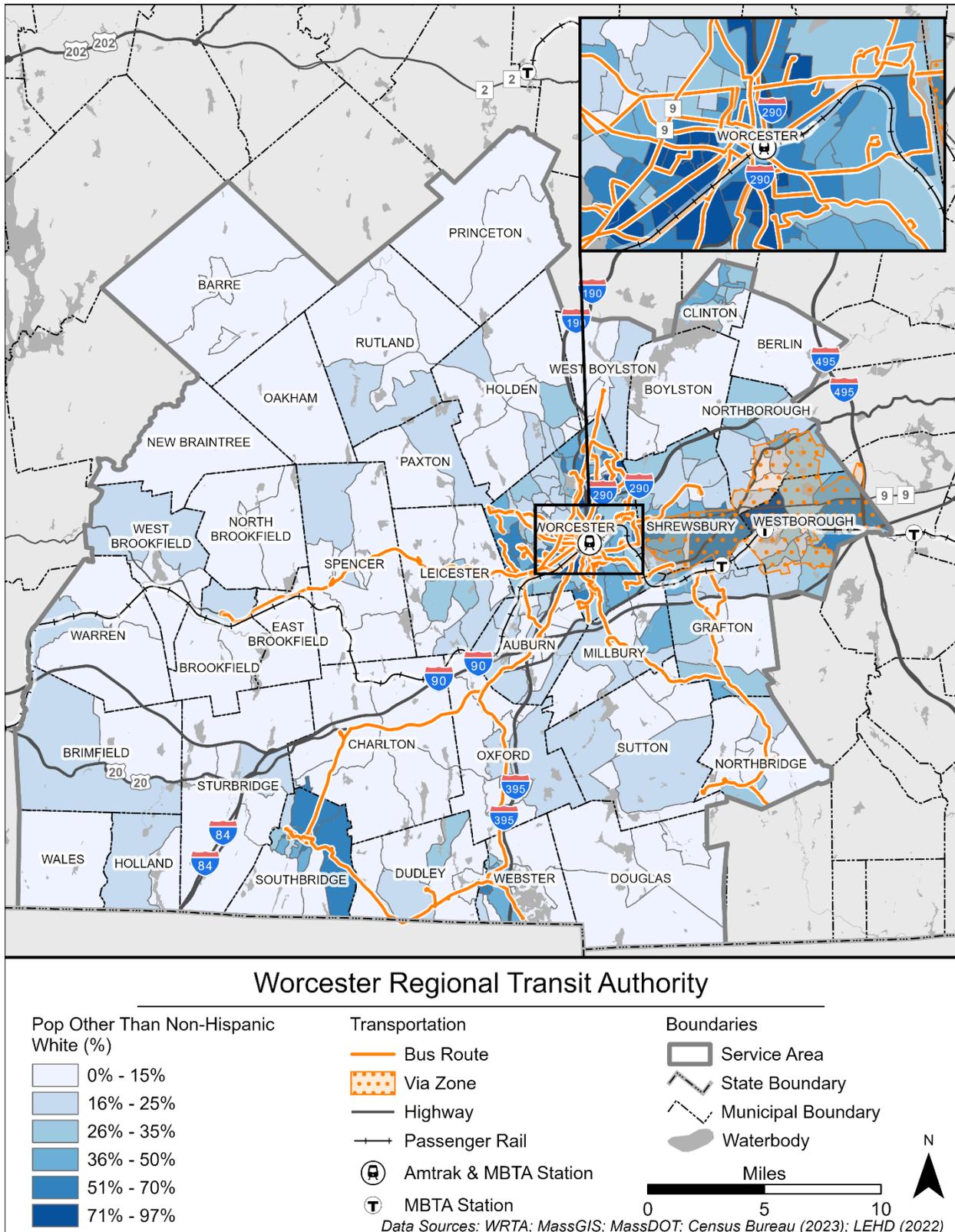
Source: AECOM (2025)

Figure 38. Zero-Vehicle Households



Source: AECOM (2025)

Figure 39. Population Other Than Non-Hispanic White



Source: AECOM (2025)

5.1.8 Adult Disabled Population

MassDOT and WRTA utilize data on older adults, persons with disabilities, and low-income populations to identify opportunities to improve mobility across the service area. The population of adults with a disability is more consistently distributed across the western half of the WRTA service area, while the eastern half has more pockets with low proportions of adult disabled population (Figure 40). Comparatively high concentrations of adults with disabilities are in Auburn, Brookfield, Dudley, Northbridge, Southbridge, Webster, West Brookfield, and Worcester.

5.1.9 Title VI Population

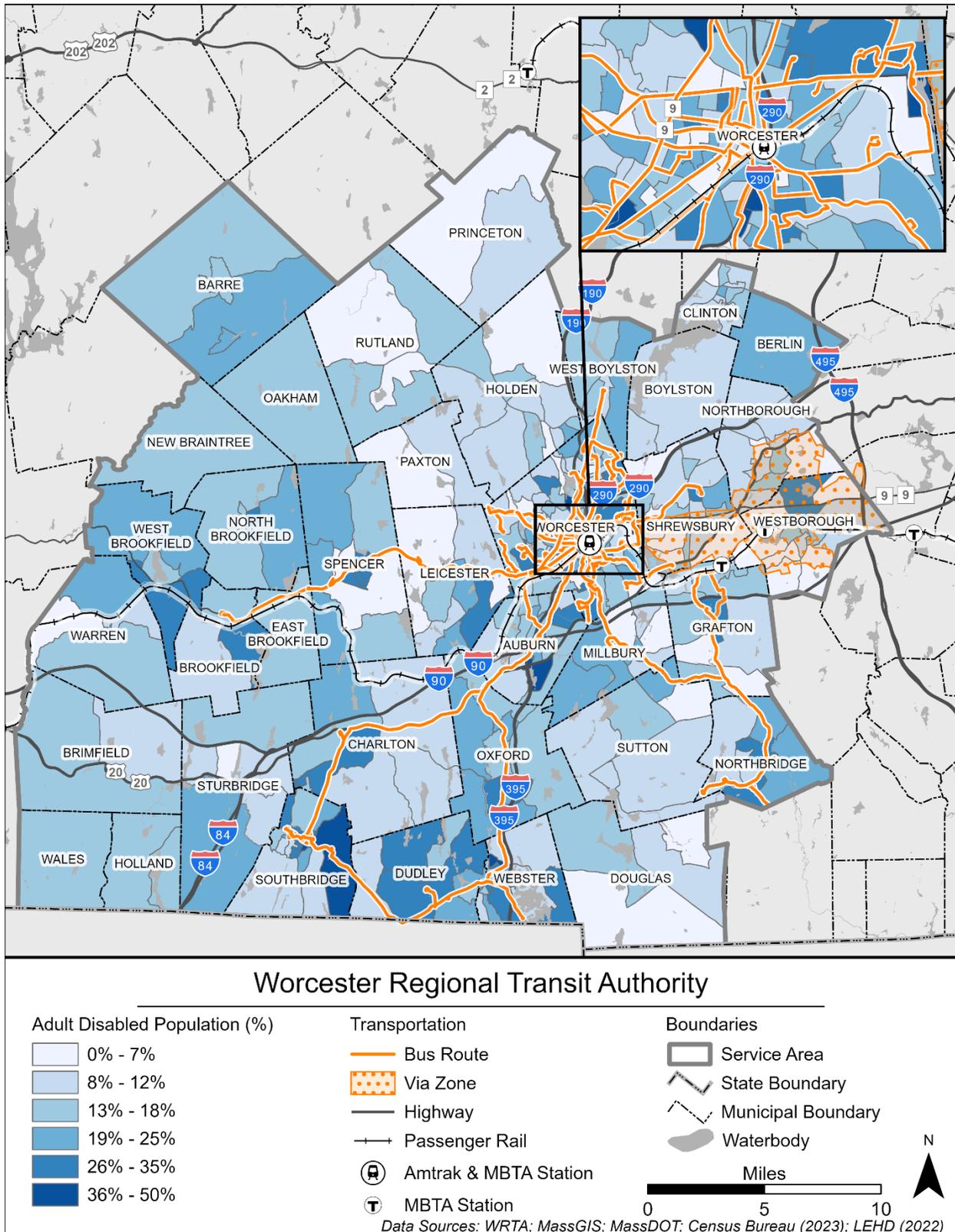
Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination based on race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability in federally assisted programs. As a transit authority, WRTA is required to comply with Title VI requirements as a recipient of federal funds.

For Title VI reporting, WRTA defines minority as a block group with a larger than average minority threshold, which is approximately 30.6 percent. Title VI indicators include two factors: low income and population other than non-Hispanic white. Figure 41 shows two factors as previously described and highlights communities where the population is both low income and non-Hispanic white. Specifically, low-income communities are dispersed across much of the service area, with a few large pockets located in the abutting communities of West Brookfield, Brookfield, and Warren, and small pockets in Auburn, Charlton, Clinton, Dudley, Grafton, Northbridge, West Boylston, and Worcester. Non-Hispanic white communities include parts of Worcester and additional pockets in the communities east of Worcester. Clinton, Leicester, Northbridge, Southbridge, and Worcester are communities with concentrations of both low-income and non-Hispanic white populations. As WRTA modifies any fixed route service or introduces new fixed route service, the Title VI market analysis can help inform program modifications and long-term engagement strategies.

5.1.10 Job Density

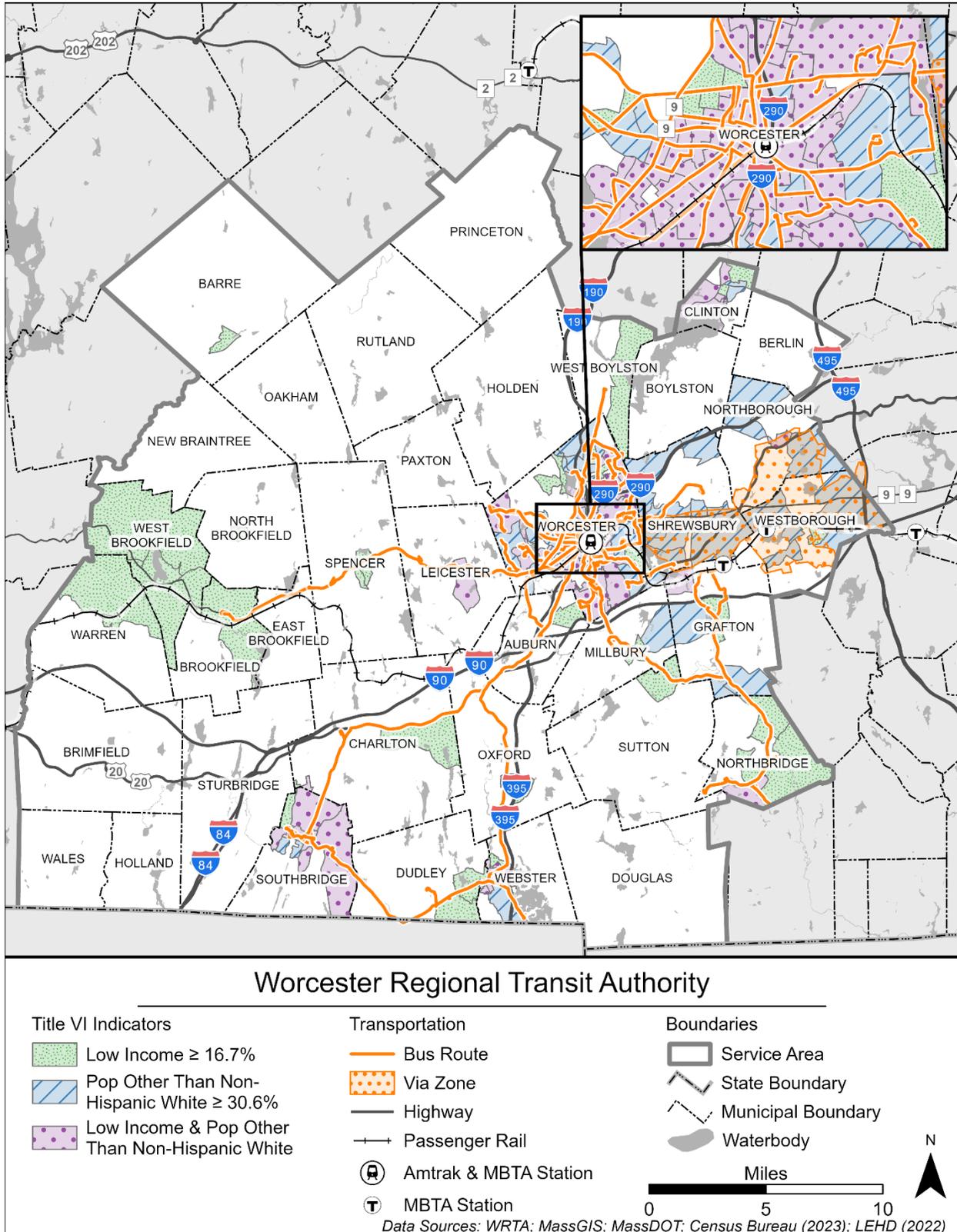
Job density is highest in Worcester's Central Business District, with other pockets of employment at the ends of certain WRTA fixed routes such as in Southbridge and Webster, as shown on Figure 42. Additional areas with high employment are in Auburn, Clinton, Northbridge, Shrewsbury, and particularly Westborough, where there are many office parks and employment centers situated near the intersection of MA Route 9 and Interstate 495.

Figure 40. Adult Disabled Population



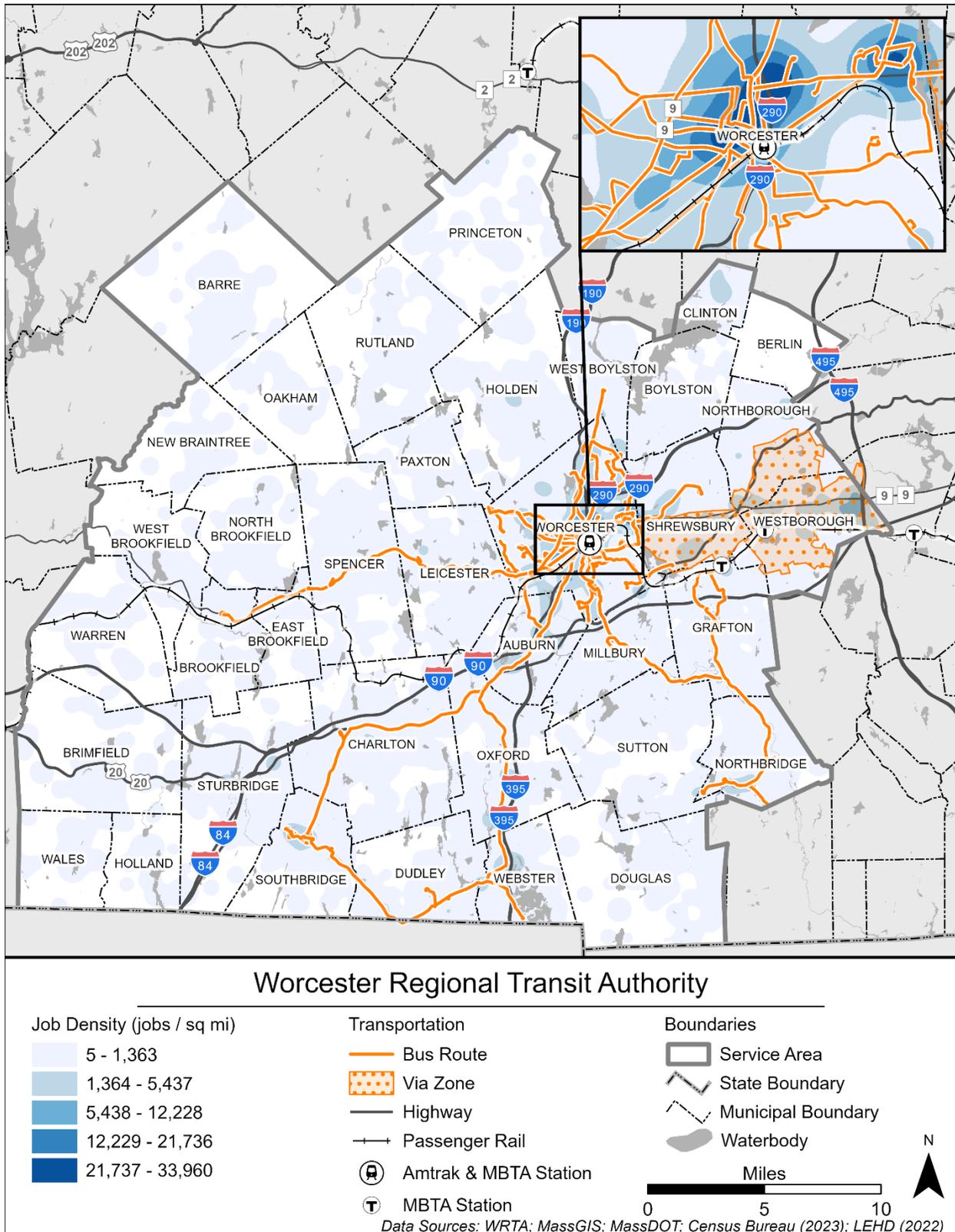
Source: AECOM (2025)

Figure 41. Title VI Population



Source: AECOM (2025)

Figure 42. Job Density



Source: AECOM (2025)

5.2 Transit Score

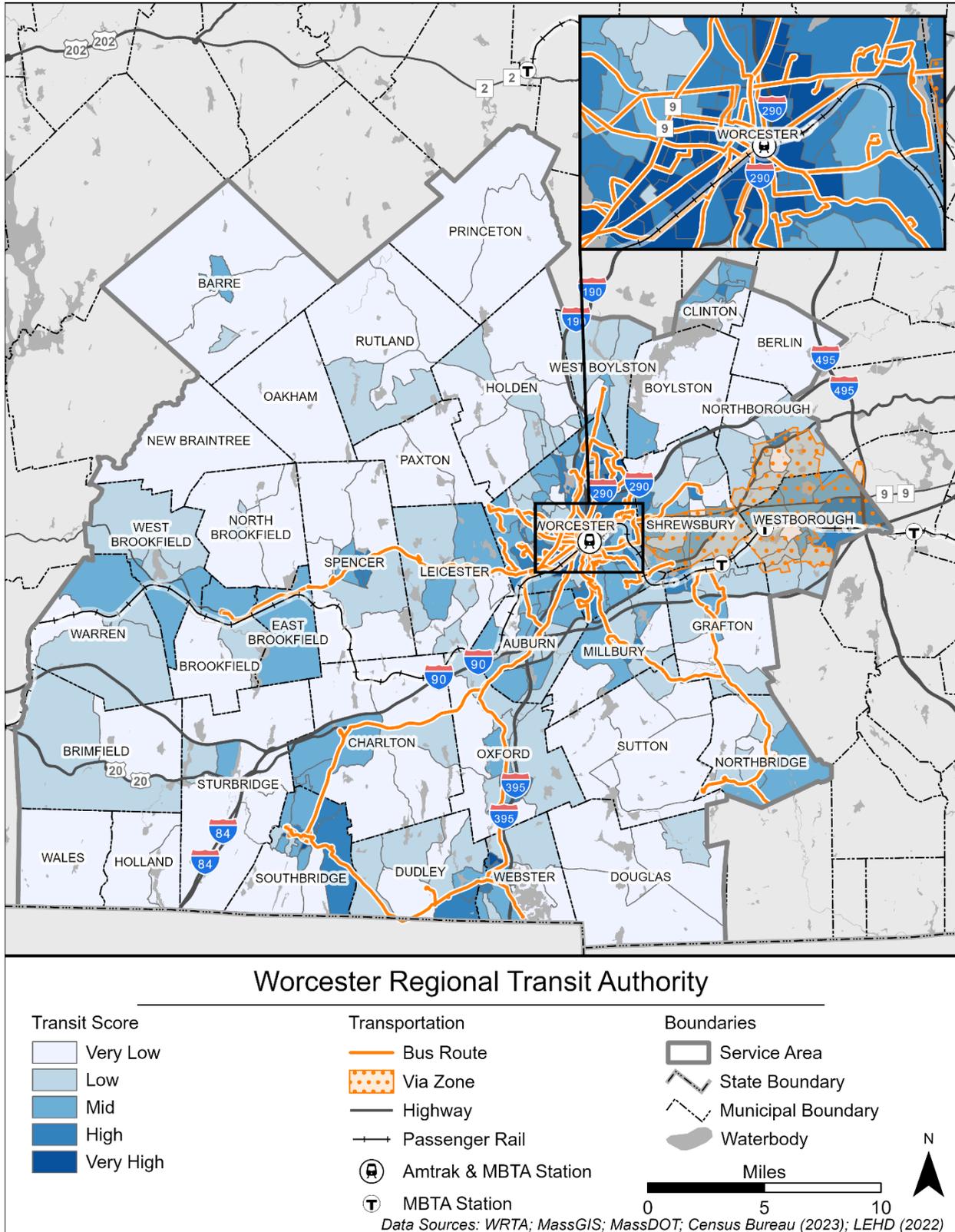
The transit score map is created to spatially analyze several transit-oriented demographic and socioeconomic characteristics at the same time (the characteristics discussed individually in this chapter so far). The transit score is a relative measure of how successful a fixed route transit system is expected to be in a particular region. 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.

Demographic and socioeconomic information is collected from the US Census Bureau for a region divided into smaller geographic units such as tracts, block groups, or blocks. Block groups and census tracts were used for this analysis. Transit-oriented variables used for the analysis include:

- 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 transit trips taken

Figure 43 illustrates the transit scores across the WRTA service area. Certain areas of a community have wide-ranging transit scores based on the existing transit routes. Worcester and Webster are the only communities in the service area with geographic units scoring very high for transit scores. In Worcester, areas with very high transit scores are concentrated around the WRTA Central Hub and Worcester MBTA Station. The very high transit scoring area in Webster is along MA Route 12 (WRTA Route 42). Other communities like Clinton, Grafton, Shrewsbury, Southbridge, Spencer, and Westborough have high transit scoring areas, some of which are along WRTA fixed routes, while others are not served by fixed routes—Clinton and Westborough (although the MBTA Framingham/Worcester Line stops in Westborough, and the community is predominantly served by Via-WRTA). With a few exceptions, transit scores tend to be lower in communities that are located farther from WRTA fixed routes or the MBTA Commuter Rail line.

Figure 43. Transit Score



Source: AECOM (2025)

5.3 Public and Stakeholder Engagement

Outreach and engagement for WRTA's CRTP were undertaken through a pop-up event, an operator survey, and a widely promoted public survey. 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 pertain to:

- **Expanded weekday service.** The majority of riders use the service for work and want more frequent service both earlier and later in the day to accommodate different work shifts.
- **Improved weekend service.** Greater frequency and later hours on weekends were common requests, which would improve riders' ability to access local events and destinations across the region.
- **Revised fixed route schedules.** Operators emphasized the need for increased service and enhanced schedules to mitigate issues of vehicle overcrowding, reduced on-time performance, and operator stress.
- **Continued fare-free service.** Riders were largely grateful for fare-free service and shared some concerns about its potential conclusion.
- **Enhanced cleanliness on buses and at the Hub.** Some riders and operators shared concerns about fare-free service's effect on safety and cleanliness at WRTA's Central Hub and on buses.
- **Expanded service area.** Riders shared locations they would like to see WRTA serve, including regional, shopping, medical, and recreational destinations.
- **Internal communication and support.** Operators highlighted the importance of improved collaboration and communication within the agency.

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

5.3.1 Pop-Up Event

- **Location:** WRTA Central Hub, Worcester, MA
- **Date and time:** September 17 – September 18, 2025, 9 AM to 5 PM

WRTA held an in-person pop-up to distribute information, advertise its survey, and seek public feedback. Bilingual support staff were on hand to engage with the Spanish-speaking ridership, and staff also assisted many riders who took the survey via tablets and cell phones, to address technology and literacy challenges.

More than 200 riders were engaged, and they were invited to share their thoughts on current transit services, future improvements, priorities for regional mobility, and their experiences via the online survey as well as comment cards handed out and returned at the event.

Some riders shared concerns about fare-free service's effect on safety and cleanliness at WRTA's Central Hub and on buses.

The following comments were collected on comment cards distributed at the pop-up event. Cards were filled out by WRTA users or on behalf of WRTA users by WRTA staff. The comments replicate what was written on the cards with minor edits to spelling, punctuation, and grammar.

- More frequent buses. There used to be more buses—every 20 minutes. Now it can be one hour for the next bus.

- We need the 3, 31, and 2 to stop again at the side of City Hall; this is a big issue of inconvenience; they used to stop before.
- I take the 33, and we need a few more buses in the morning; also, some of the new drivers need to learn respect and kindness please, such as: the lift is not an aggravation—it's to help those who can't get on the bus alone.
- Fire all the bus drivers; they are all bad, evil people; and we did not choose the WRTA—we want another company that's [illegible].
- Route 24 several times has driven by me at the bus stop in a hurry, not even slowing down to look and see if someone is waiting.
- It's just A-OK; without the bus services, this city is out of reach; and the best of all is that no one has to pay the price now; thank you; very truly.
- Fix the broken pole at 1305 Main Street; broken since the crash—need to fix before winter.
- Service is fine, except for no one is happy.
- Bus drivers drive like they are driving a car fast and stop short; passengers are bouncing around; people that ride the bus like me have health problems, back problems—bouncing around hurts; I even saw one lady fall out of her seat onto the floor; my son has bad balance and he fell on his face because the bus wasn't lowered; they need to slow down.
- The bus stops are a problem because the drivers do not stop (bus 26, 30, 7,3); they need to improve signage.
- A lot of people miss bus because drivers drive by bus stop; maybe they stop at every stop for a minute or two.
- Your staff is doing a wonderful job—thank you for your drivers [illegible].
- Transportation to Northboro Crossing (Wegmans) also along Route 9 in Shrewsbury, Northboro, and Westboro; transportation to medical appointments throughout Central Massachusetts; Uber [microtransit] service from Hudson or Central Massachusetts to Worcester for medical appointments.
- Thank you very much for keeping it easy to get around with free fare ride; it is a really great help getting around the city and even doing day trips to the store and friends' houses—thank you.

The following are key takeaways from the pop-up event.

- Riders appreciate the fare-free policy.
- Some riders shared concerns about fare-free service's effect on safety and cleanliness at WRTA's Central Hub and on buses.
- Riders raised issues about driver interactions, with several complaints of buses not stopping.
- Riders had suggestions for more frequent and expanded service on bus routes they use.

5.3.2 Operator Survey

As part of the CRTP, a survey was developed for bus operators to collect additional information from the operator perspective, based on their experiences and what they hear from customers

regarding current services. The goal of this initiative was to identify potential improvements or changes that could enhance service delivery. Survey cards were distributed to 107 full-time bus operators, and 11 responses were received. These responses provided valuable input and were reviewed to identify common themes.

The following is a summary of the survey results.

- Operators indicated that they preferred bus routes that are not crowded, overwhelmed, or rushed and where they have time to take breaks and use restrooms.
- Several operators said WRTA should prioritize adding more service and time to busy routes, as some schedules are too tight and can be stressful for both the operator and the rider. Routes 7, 11, 24, 7, and 30 came up multiple times as routes that could use schedule adjustments or more service.
- Suggestions for customer-facing improvements included clearer communication for riders including signage and announcements, improved bus cleanliness, expanded weekend service, and reinstatement of fares (as suggested by some operators).
- Suggestions for operator-facing improvements included better inner-agency communication and support for drivers, including customer de-escalation training, and increased security.

5.3.3 Public Survey Effort

As a primary tool to gather feedback from current riders, WRTA staff developed an online survey. The purpose of the survey was to gain a better understanding of stakeholder preferences regarding current services and gather feedback on potential improvements or changes.

5.3.3.1 Survey Outreach

To promote participation in the online survey, WRTA shared it through multiple channels:

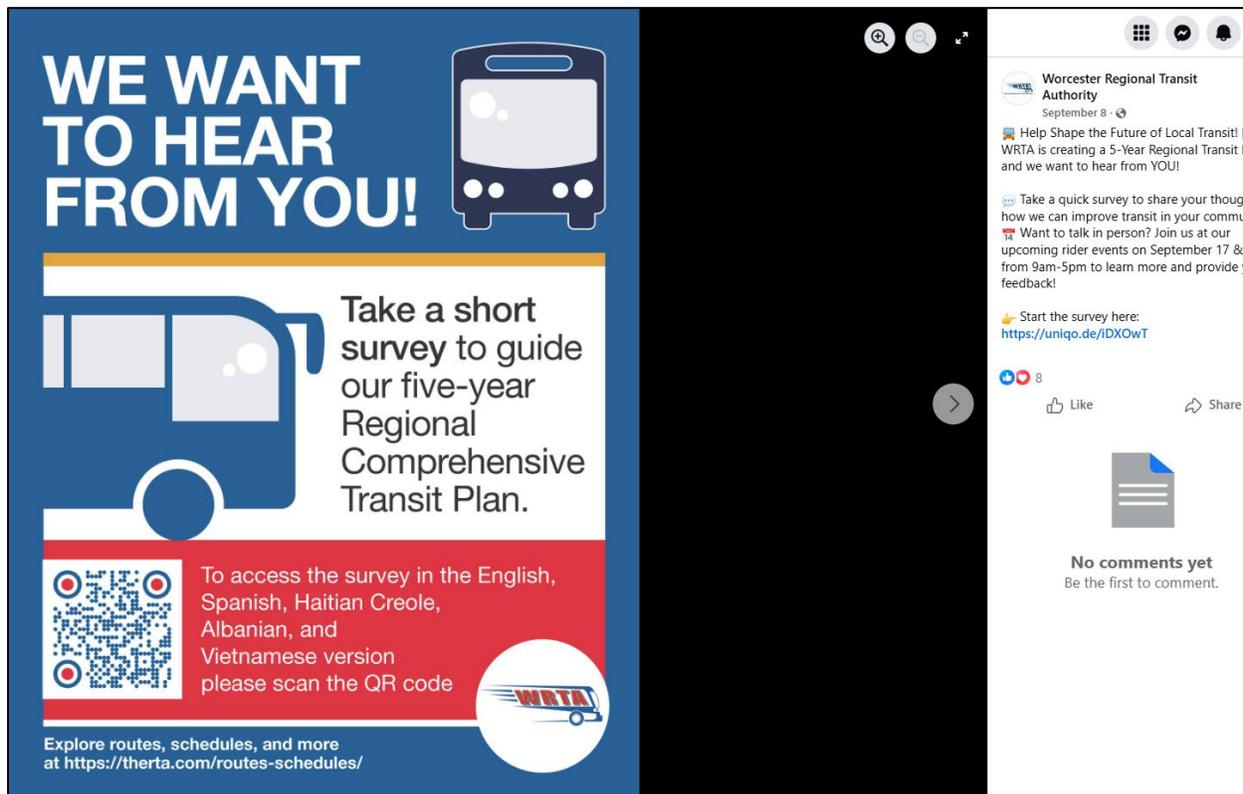
- WRTA staff promoted the survey, as well as the pop-up event, on bus-side advertisements and flyers hanging on grab bars inside buses (Figure 44).
- WRTA staff posted on social media and distributed flyers featuring the survey link and QR code prior to the pop-up event to create awareness and increase survey participation in support of the CRTP (Figure 45).
- WRTA staff created a poster to continue to promote the survey at the pop-up event.
- WRTA staff had paper copies of the survey available in English, Spanish, Haitian Creole, Albanian, and Vietnamese at the pop-up event, and also distributed survey flyers at the pop-up for people in a rush, so that they could take the survey at a later time.

The survey was designed to be mobile-friendly. The survey link was accompanied by a QR code to enable a quick scan using a smart phone to direct immediately to the survey.

Figure 44. Bus-side poster and hanging flyer advertises WRTA survey and pop-up



Figure 45. WRTA social media post



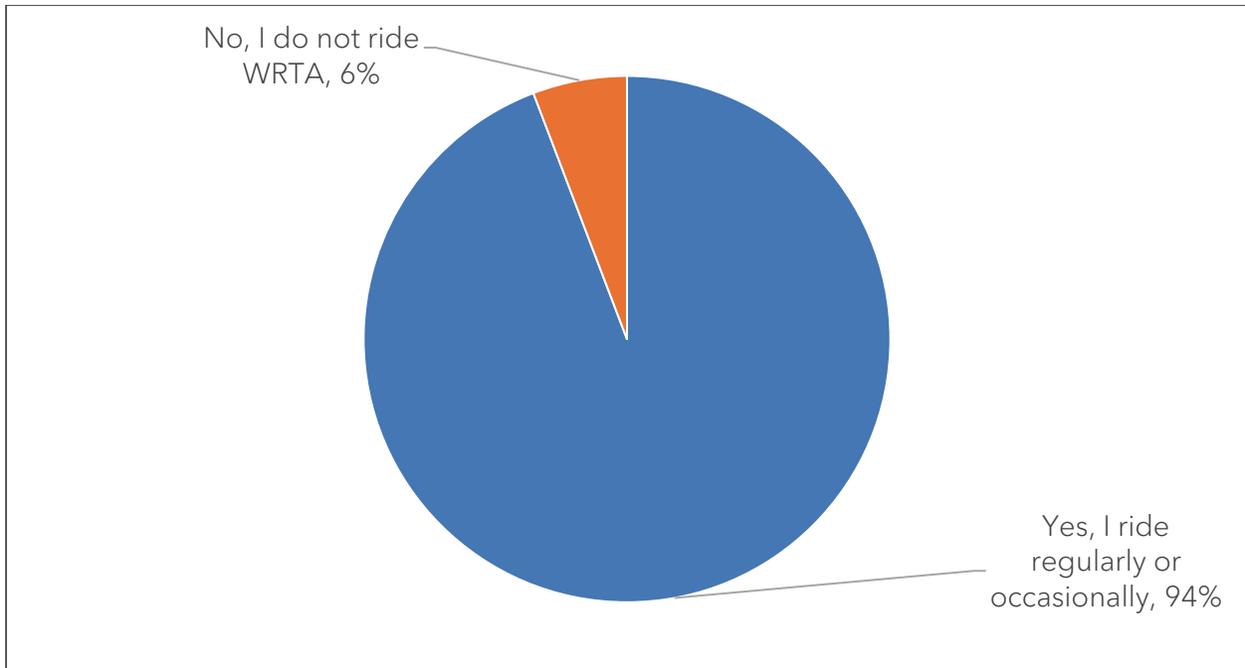
5.3.3.2 Survey Results Summary

WRTA’s online survey opened to the public on September 1, 2025, and remained open through October 13, 2025. The survey, which was hosted on Microsoft Forms, was available online in English, Spanish, Haitian Creole, Albanian, and Vietnamese.

Of the 486 responses collected using online and paper surveys, 386 people, or 79 percent of survey respondents, responded in English, 93 people (19 percent) responded in Spanish, 5 people (1 percent) responded in Haitian/Creole, and 2 people (1 percent) responded in Vietnamese.

Survey responses reflected that 94 percent of respondents use WRTA at least occasionally, and 6 percent do not (Figure 46).

Figure 46. Do you ride WRTA services at least occasionally?



Respondents were asked, if they do ride, what route or service do they most frequently use. Among over 425 responses, the top 10 most mentioned routes were:

- Route 19: 85 mentions
- Route 27: 83 mentions
- Route 11: 69 mentions
- Route 33: 68 mentions
- Route 30: 60 mentions
- Route 7: 59 mentions
- Route 26: 57 mentions
- Route 23: 53 mentions
- Route 31: 51 mentions
- Route 5: 50 mentions

Specific destinations and routes used included:

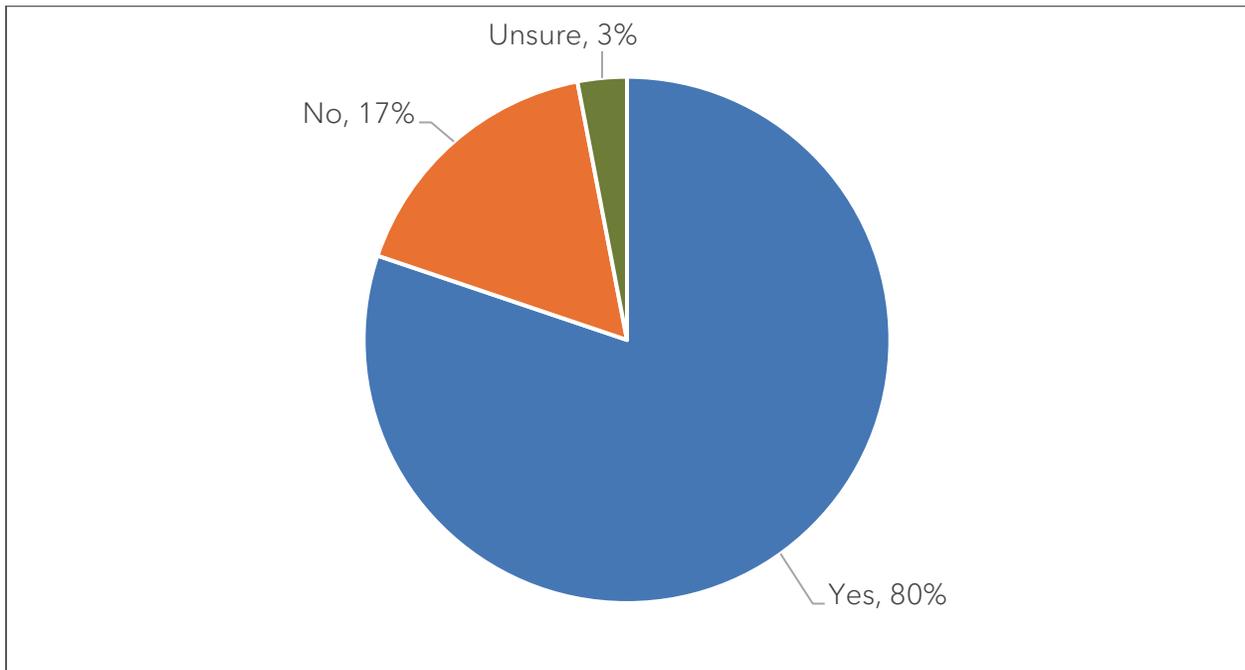
- Main Street Bus
- Southbridge
- Tatnuck to Downtown
- Webster, Dudley, Southbridge Shuttle
- Grafton
- Worcester
- University of Massachusetts (UMass)
- Walmart

- Canterbury Street

Some riders said they use the trips for work, medical appointments, or visiting family.

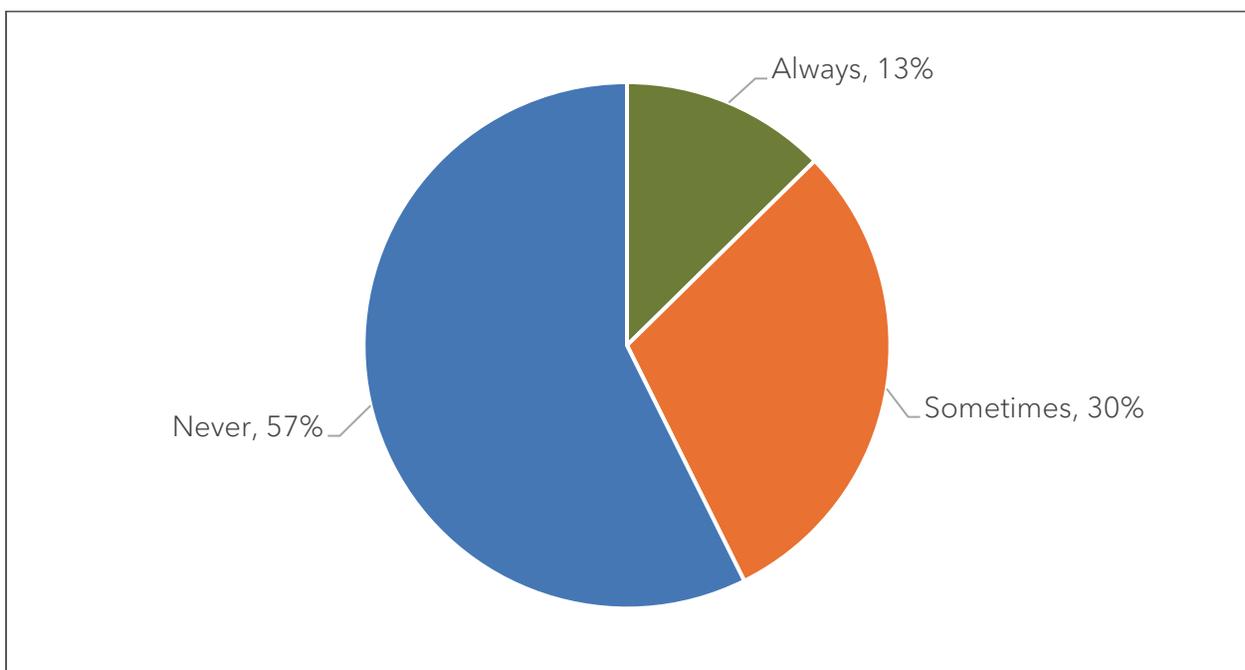
Survey responses regarding whether respondents currently live within walking distance (defined as one-quarter mile) from a bus stop (Figure 47) reflected that 80 percent of respondents answered yes, 17 percent answered no, and 3 percent responded unsure.

Figure 47. Do you currently live within walking distance (one-quarter mile) from a bus stop?



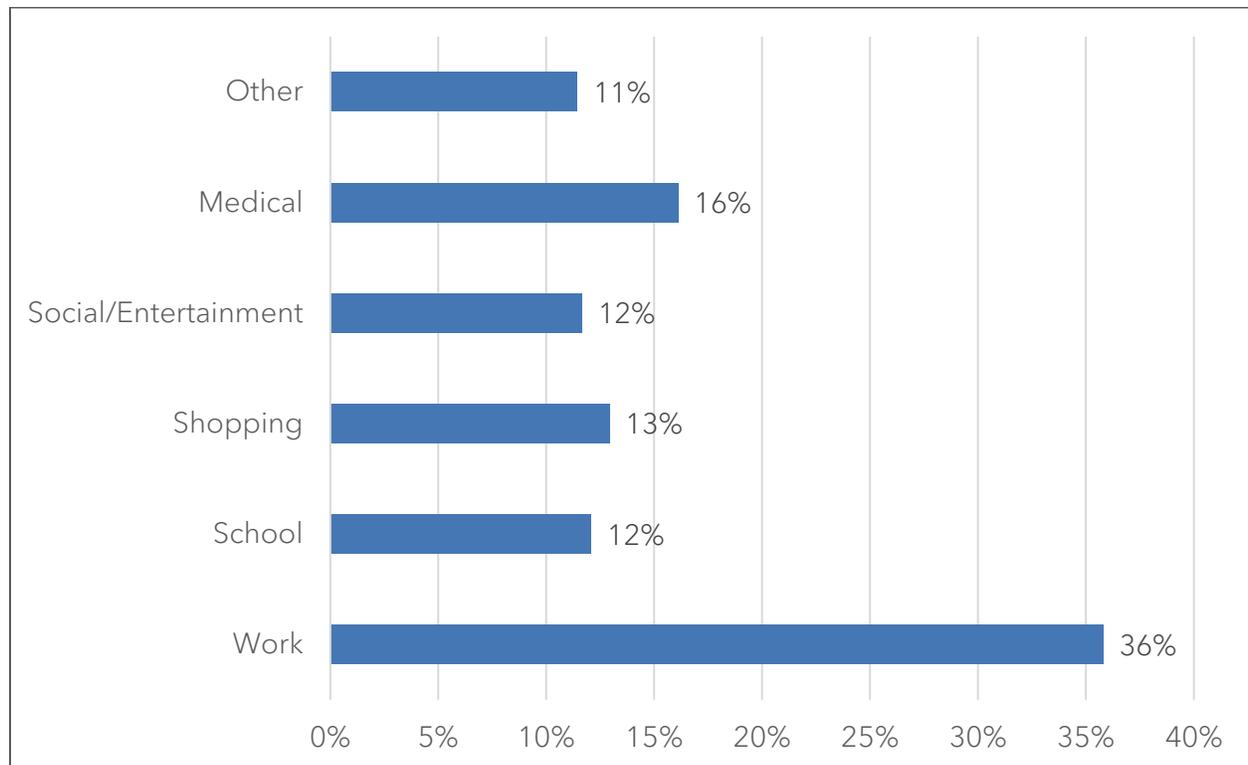
Survey responses about personal vehicle access (Figure 48) reflected that 57 percent of respondents never have access to a personal vehicle, 30 percent sometimes have access, and 13 percent always have access.

Figure 48. Do you have access to a personal vehicle?



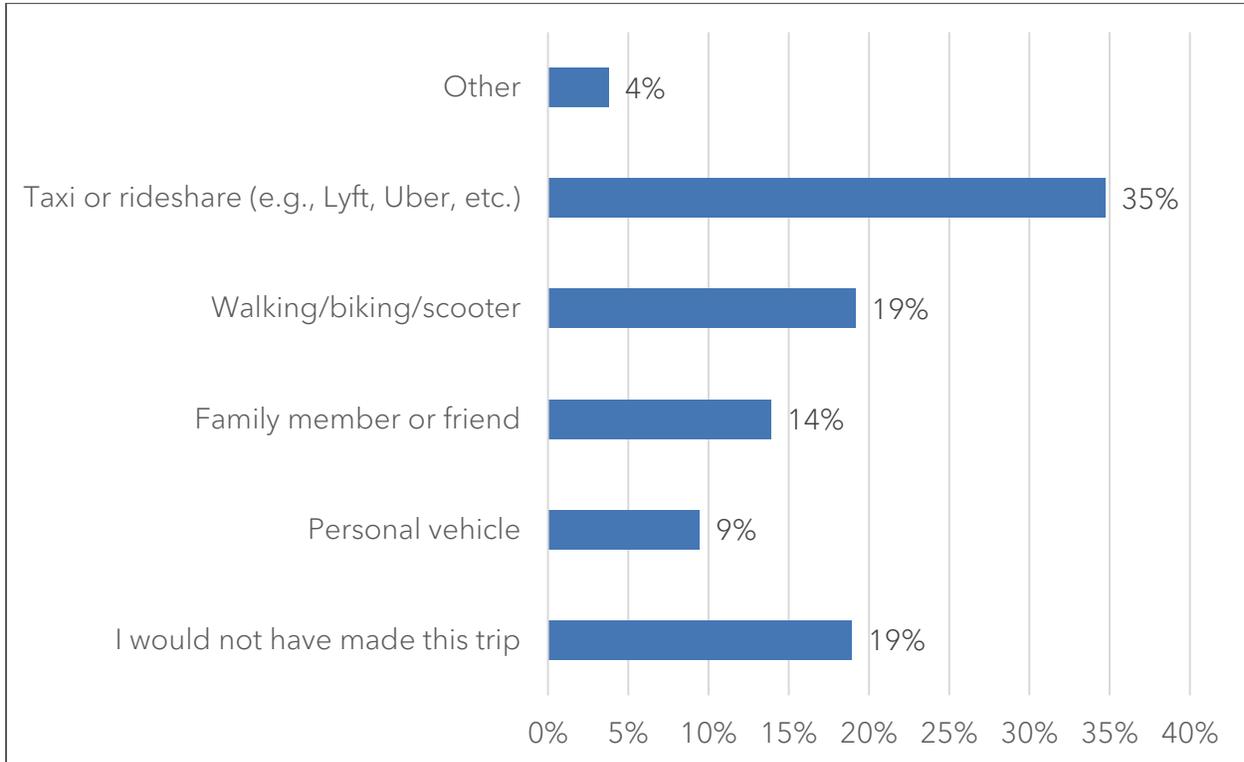
Survey responses about the primary purpose of respondents' most recent trip on WRTA (Figure 49) reflected that 36 percent used WRTA for work, 16 percent used it for medical reasons, 13 percent used it for shopping, 12 percent used it for social/entertainment reasons, 12 percent used it for school, and 11 percent answered other.

Figure 49. What was the primary purpose of your most recent trip on WRTA?



Survey responses on how respondents would have made the trip from the previous question if WRTA was not a choice (Figure 50) reflected that 35 percent of respondents answered taxi or rideshare (Lyft, Uber, etc.), 19 percent answered walking/biking/scooter, 19 percent answered I would not have made this trip, 14 percent answered family member or friend, 9 percent answered personal vehicle, and 4 percent answered other.

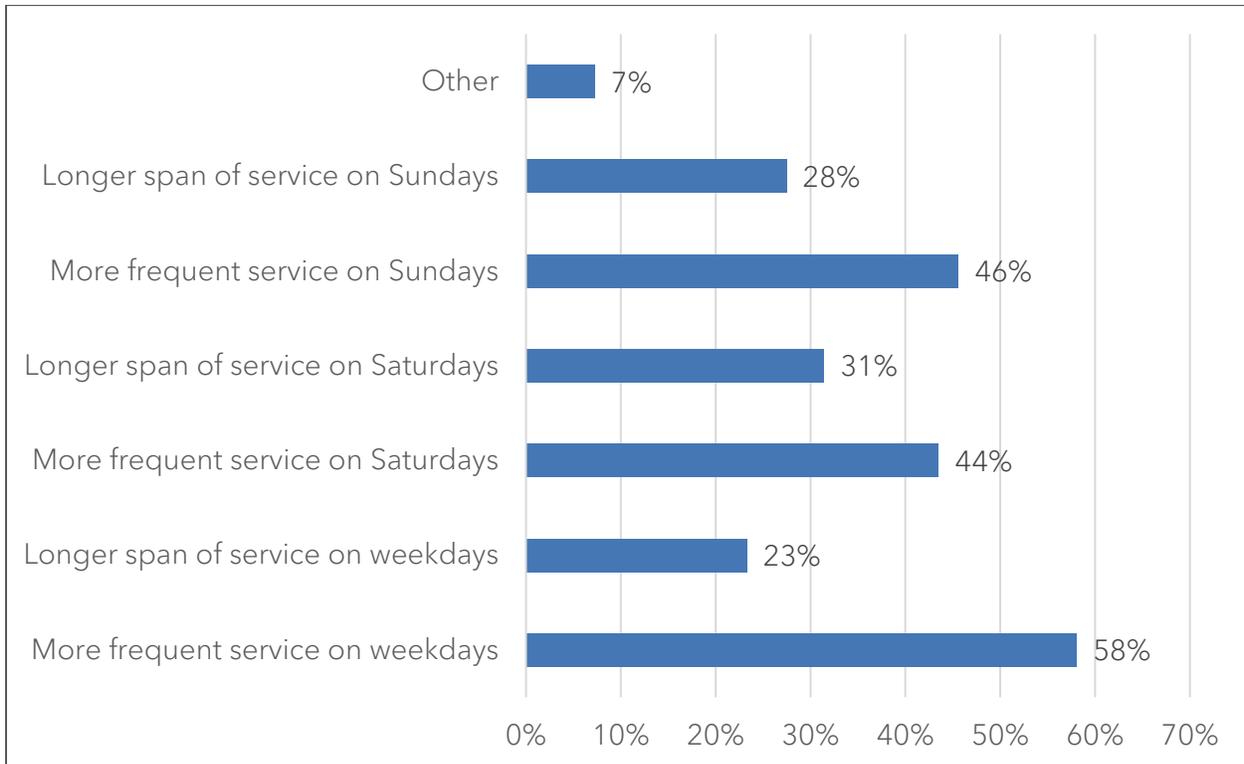
Figure 50. How would you have made this trip if WRTA was not a choice?



Survey responses were asked what WRTA improvements would most benefit them (Figure 51). Respondents could select up to three choices, and their selections included:

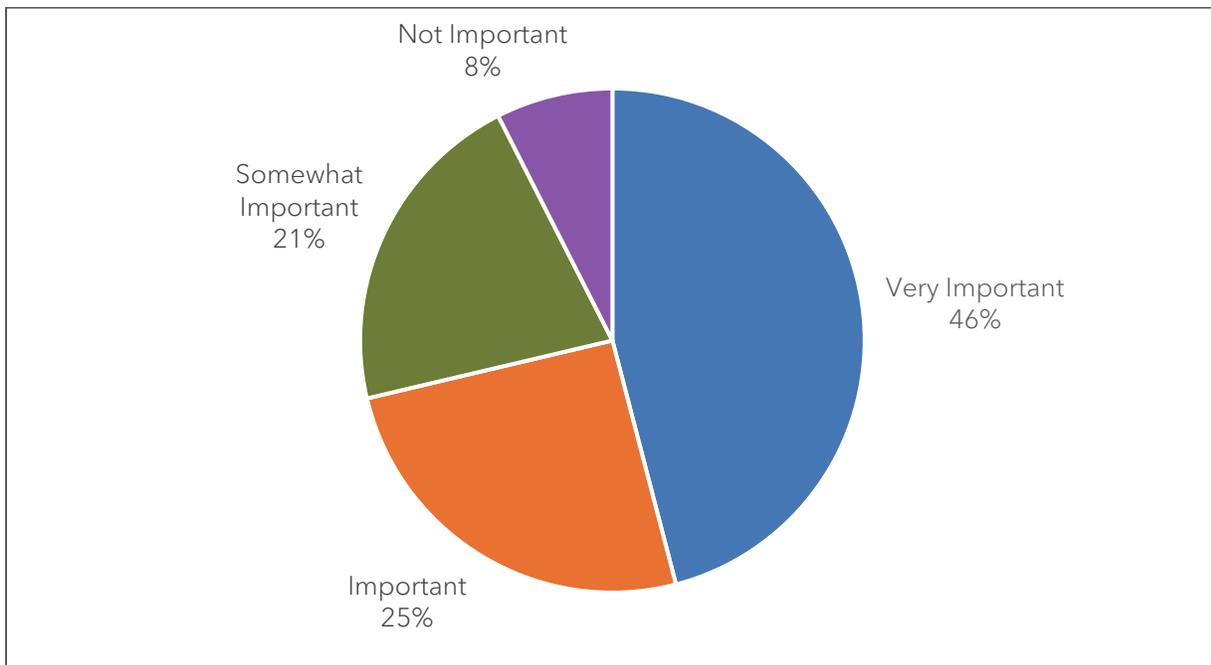
- More frequent service on weekdays (58 percent)
- More frequent service on Sundays (46 percent)
- More frequent service on Saturdays (44 percent)
- Longer span of service on Saturdays (31 percent)
- Longer span of service on Sundays (28 percent)
- Longer span of service on weekdays (23 percent)
- Other (7 percent)

Figure 51. Which improvements would benefit you the most? Select your top 3 choices.



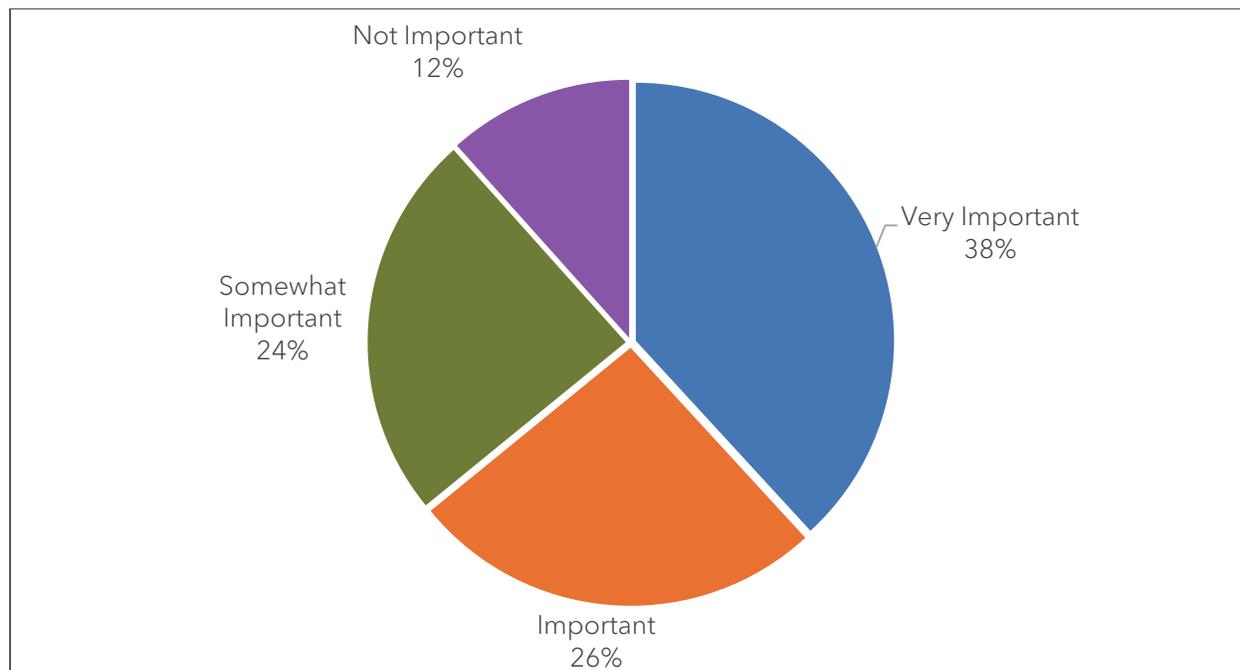
WRTA is exploring the potential of implementing new services, such as crosstown service or limited stop service, to the system in the future. Respondents were asked to assess the importance of these two service types. Regarding crosstown service, a majority of survey respondents indicated that adding crosstown service would be very important (46 percent) or important (25 percent) (Figure 52).

Figure 52. Please select the importance of WRTA adding crosstown routes in the future



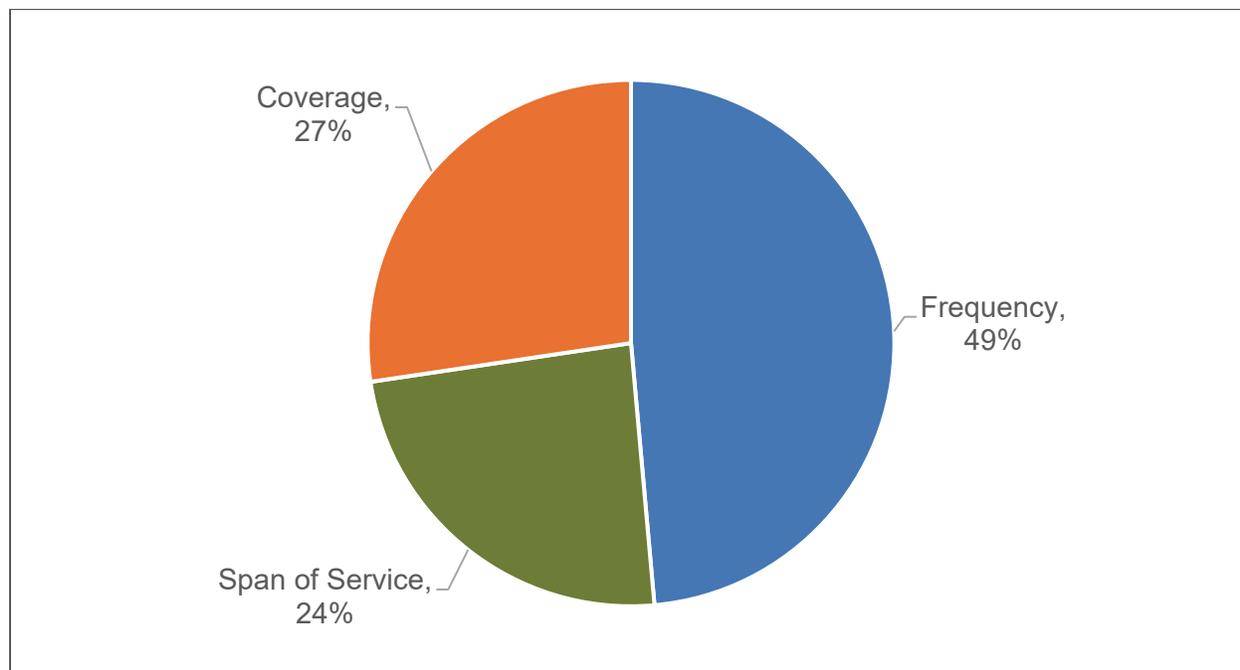
Comparatively, for limited stop service, a majority of respondents indicated that adding this new service would be very important (38 percent) or important (26 percent) (Figure 53). Based on the total number of respondents for these questions, survey respondents would indicate higher importance of crosstown service than limited stop service; however, only a small percentage of respondents indicated that either service type is not important indicating strong support for either service type.

Figure 53 Please select the importance of WRTA adding a new limited stop service in the future.



Survey responses on how WRTA should prioritize transit service (Figure 54) reflect that 49 percent of respondents answered frequency (the complete survey answer option was “Frequency. WRTA should prioritize running existing service more often, even if it means fewer geographic areas have access or that the span of service may be shorter”). This was followed by 27 percent answering span of service (the complete survey answer option was: “Span of service. WRTA should prioritize starting service earlier and/or running service later in the day, even if it means buses run less frequently and fewer geographic areas have access”). Finally, 24 percent answered coverage (the complete survey answer option was: “Coverage. WRTA should prioritize service throughout the area and maximize access, even if it means buses do not run as often or for as many hours a day”).

Figure 54. How should WRTA prioritize transit service?



Respondents were asked about locations they would like to go that are currently not served or not easily reachable by a WRTA bus. Among 290 answers, the following were major takeaways:

- Many responses mentioned towns and cities outside Worcester that people would like service to/from, including
 - Boston, Springfield, Lowell, Holden, Grafton, Paxton, Northbridge, Southbridge, Westborough, Northborough, Shrewsbury, Clinton, Douglas, Uxbridge, Rutland, Auburn, Boylston, Milford, Framingham, Leominster, Marlborough, Ware, Palmer, Fitchburg, Ayer, Putnam (CT), and Orange.
- Popular shopping areas included:
 - Solomon Pond Mall
 - Auburn Mall
 - Shrewsbury Market Basket
 - Northborough Crossing
 - White City Plaza
 - Apex Mall
 - Ocean State Job Lot
 - Wegmans
 - AutoZone
 - Home Depot
 - Big Y
 - BJs
- Educational/community institutions included:
 - Assumption University

- Quinsigamond Community College
- Local public schools
- Jewish Community Center
- Rides to medical destinations all over the area, as well as outside of the area, were mentioned.
- Recreational destinations in the area were mentioned.
- Service suggestions included:
 - More frequent service to Southbridge
 - Reintroduce discontinued routes (Barry Road)
 - Direct connections between towns without using the hub
 - Commuter bus services to cities in the area
 - Better bike storage on buses
 - Improved frequency and reliability
 - Weekend service requests

Riders were asked about any other ideas they would like to share. Among over 300 answers, the following were the major takeaways:

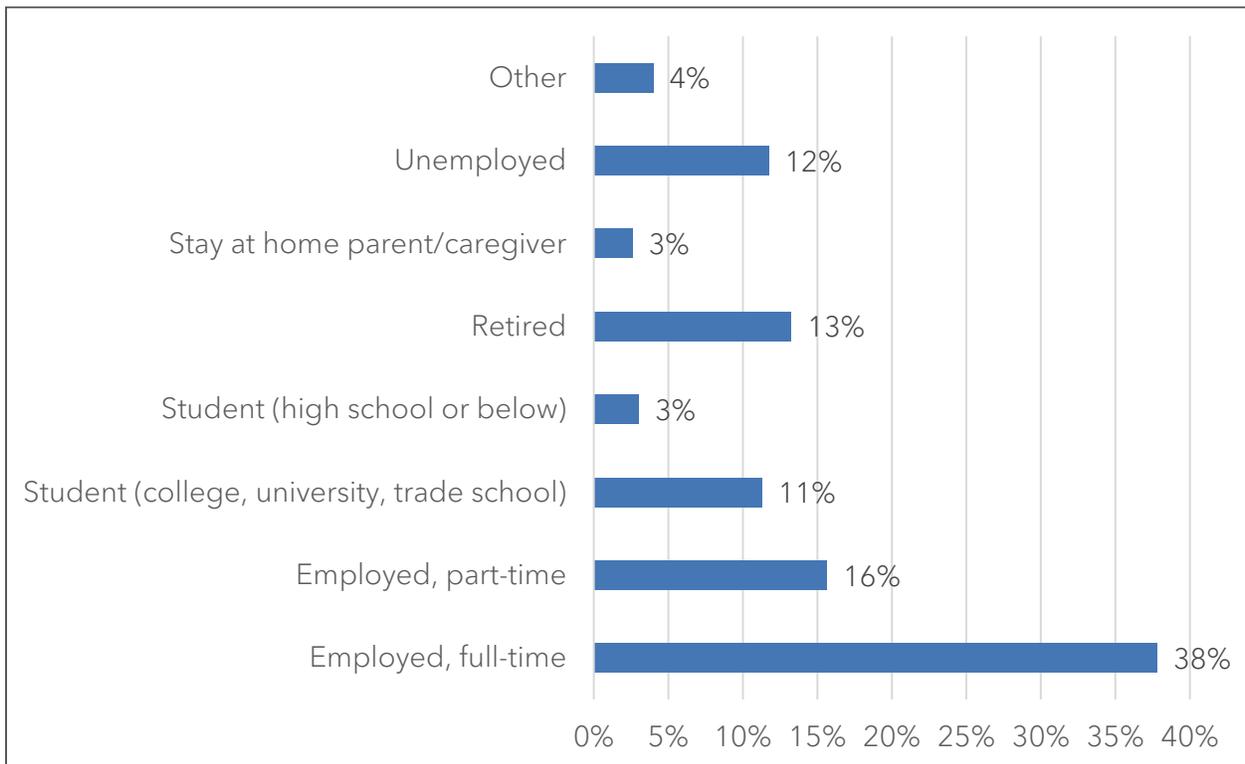
- Desire for service improvements, including:
 - More frequent service on weekends and late evenings.
 - Expanded coverage to underserved areas like Spencer, Southbridge, and rural towns.
 - Better coordination with MBTA and other RTAs.
 - Better shelters, benches and signage
 - Cleaner bus stops
 - Better accommodations for strollers, walkers, and bikes
 - Improved safety and security
- Some common complaints included:
 - Buses are consistently late, or early.
 - Apps are inconsistent in tracking.
 - Buses arrive together, followed by long gaps.
- Fare-free service is largely embraced, though some say it encourages disruptive behavior.
- Concerns about access for low-income and rural residents.
- Desire for community shuttles and college routes.
- Comments on driver behavior and need for better training.

5.3.3.3 Survey Demographic Questions

Survey responses reflecting respondent employment status (Figure 55) include the following:

- Employed, full time (38 percent)
- Employed, part-time (16 percent)
- Retired (13 percent)
- Unemployed (12 percent)
- Student (college, university, trade school) (11 percent)
- Stay at home parent/caregiver (3 percent)
- Student (high school or below) (3 percent)
- Other (4 percent)

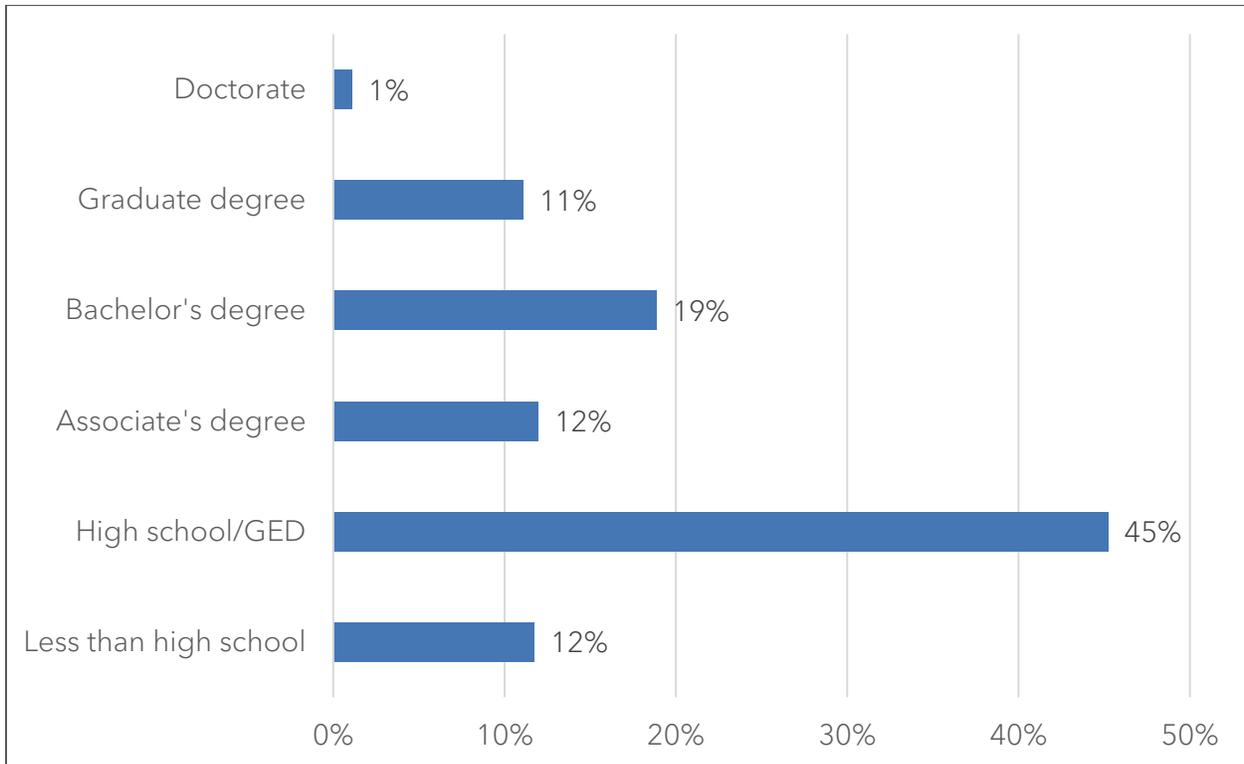
Figure 55. What best describes your employment status?



Survey responses reflecting educational attainment (Figure 56) include the following:

- High school/GED (45 percent)
- Bachelor’s degree (19 percent)
- Associate’s degree (12 percent)
- Less than high school (12 percent)
- Graduate degree (11 percent)
- Doctorate (1 percent)

Figure 56. What is your educational attainment?



Survey responses reflecting respondent race/ethnicity (Figure 57) include the following:

- White (46 percent)
- Hispanic or Latino/a (29 percent)
- African American or Black (16 percent)
- Asian or Asian American (5 percent)
- Other (3 percent)
- American Indian or Alaska Native (2 percent)
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (0 percent)

Respondents could select all that applied.

Figure 57. What is your race/ethnicity? (Select all that apply)

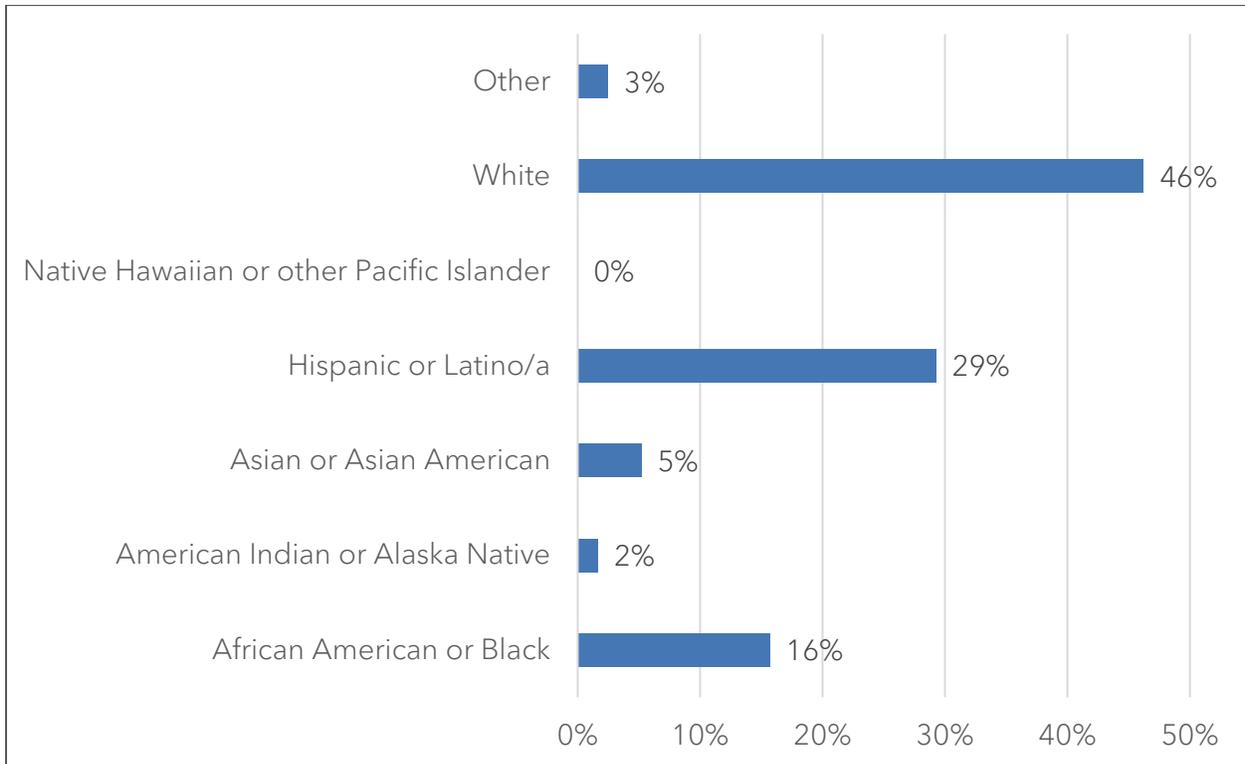
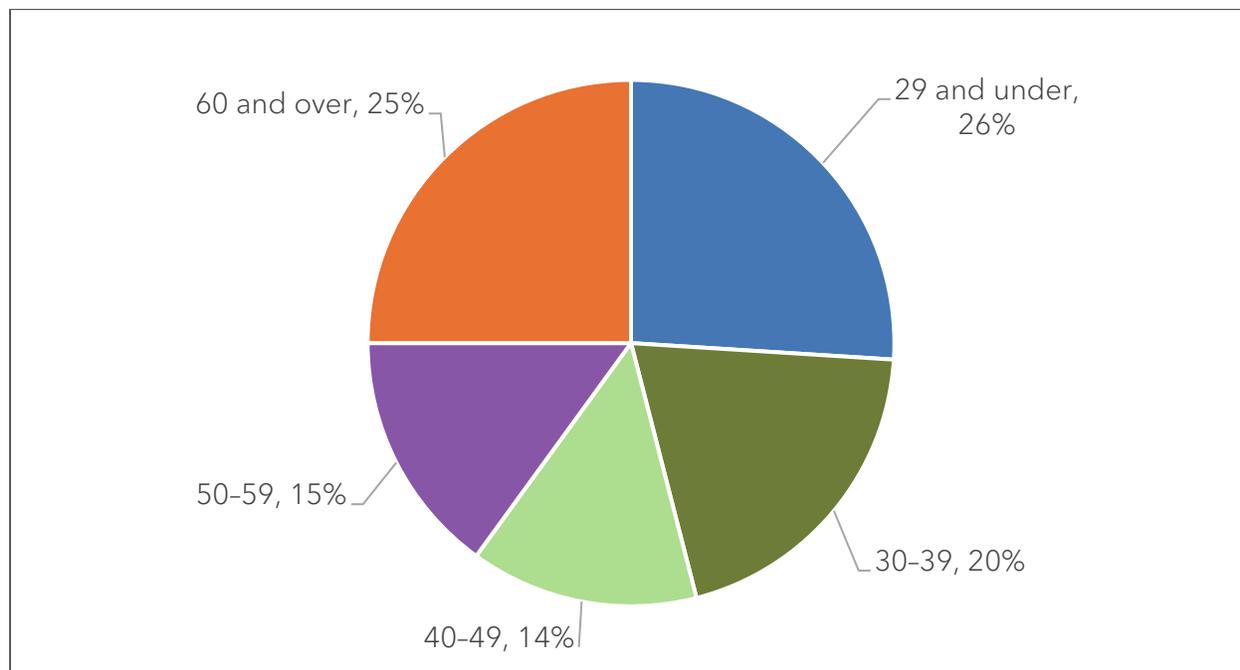


Figure 58 presents the age distribution of survey respondents:

- 29 and under (26 percent)
- 60 and over (25 percent)
- 30-39 (20 percent)
- 50-59 (15 percent)
- 40-49 (14 percent)

Figure 58. What is your age?



5.3.3.4 Key Takeaways

The following are key takeaways from the public survey.

- Many respondents use WRTA regularly and live within walking distance of a stop.
- Work, school, and medical appointments are the largest uses of WRTA.
- Many rely on WRTA to make their trip or would need assistance from others or rideshare.
- There is a desire for:
 - More frequent weekday and weekend service.
 - Longer service hours, especially at night and on weekends.
 - New routes.
 - Better bus stops (from cleanliness to features).

6 Performance Measures

Performance measurement is a foundational component of enhancing operational efficiency, improving customer experience, ensuring safety, and meeting the numerous other goals that a transit agency may have by supporting and driving data-driven decision-making. This chapter outlines the performance measures and targets selected and defined by WRTA. Data examining performance from FY 2020 through FY 2024 can be found in Chapter 4.

WRTA reports performance data to MassDOT on a quarterly basis across a variety of metrics as described in this chapter. The targets are updated annually as mutually agreed upon by WRTA and MassDOT for the FY 2026 through FY 2027 time period. Where an RTA is performing well, there is an opportunity to share best practices with other RTAs in the Commonwealth. Where an RTA is not meeting these targets, this is an opportunity to assess avenues for potential improvements.

6.1 Ridership

Ridership is reported as unlinked passenger trips. Each boarding is counted and summed toward the overall unlinked passenger trips 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. WRTA ridership metrics and targets are shown in Table 20. Monthly data are submitted quarterly and compared to the annual target set by WRTA.

Table 20. Ridership Metrics and Targets (FY 2026)

Metric	Fixed Route	Demand Response	Demand Taxi
Unlinked passenger trips	5,025,000	163,000	76,025
Unlinked passenger trips per vehicle revenue mile	2.30	0.15	0.15
Unlinked passenger trips per vehicle revenue hour	28.00	2.40	2.30

Source: MassDOT

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 by vehicle revenue miles, vehicle revenue hours, and unlinked passenger trips. As discussed in Chapter 4, these financial metrics measure the expense rate for providing a transit service based on revenue miles, revenue hours, and trips. A smaller value indicates a more financially efficient system, faster operating speeds, and/or a high ridership. Farebox recovery ratio is a measure of revenue collected through fares as a ratio to operating expenses. As of FY 2025, WRTA operates fare-free fixed route and demand response services. As such, the farebox recovery ratio target for fixed route, demand response, and demand taxi services is zero percent. WRTA financial targets are displayed in Table 21.

Typically, each RTA verifies its financial data annually through an end-of-year audit. Data are submitted as the raw operating cost and farebox revenue collection, then normalized for comparison against performance targets.

Table 21. Financial Metrics and Targets (FY 2026)

Metric	Fixed Route	Demand Response	Demand Taxi
Operating expenses per vehicle revenue mile	\$13.77	\$10.15	\$2.46
Operating expenses per vehicle revenue hour	\$168.88	\$157.97	\$36.03
Operating expenses per unlinked passenger trip	\$6.13	\$65.74	\$16.55
Farebox recovery ratio	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%

Source: MassDOT

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 are measured through on-time performance of fixed route and demand response modes. The definitions of on-time performance for each mode are:

- Fixed Route:** The WRTA fixed-route APC system defines on-time performance as a vehicle that arrives/departs a scheduled timepoint within one minute before the scheduled time, and up to five minutes after the scheduled time. On-time performance data are processed by APCs and data are available to WRTA.
- Demand Response:** The WRTA MMM paratransit system defines on-time performance as a vehicle that arrives/departs a scheduled pickup location before the scheduled time, up to the requested time. On-time performance data are processed by onboard TripSpark Ranger units and data are available to WRTA via StrataGen’s ADEPT software reporting suite. COA on-time performance data for vehicles that are not within the WRTA MMM are self-reported manually.

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 vehicle that does not arrive. For fixed route service, this is especially challenging for routes with less frequent service.

Monthly data are submitted quarterly and compared against the annual target. Table 22 shows WRTA’s customer service targets for fixed route, demand response, and demand taxi service.

Table 22. Customer Service and Satisfaction Metrics and Targets (FY 2026)

Metric	Fixed Route	Demand Response	Demand Taxi
On-time performance	80.00%	90.00%	90.00%
Scheduled trips operated	99.50%	99.98%	99.98%

Source: MassDOT

6.4 Asset Management

The state of good repair for capital assets is a priority of MassDOT, FTA, and WRTA. 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 TAM Plan that lays

out the condition of assets 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 23 breaks down WRTA targets for the percentage of vehicles exceeding their useful life, by vehicle type, and Table 24 shows the target for the percentage of facilities exceeding their useful life, by facility type.

Table 23. Vehicle Asset Management Metrics and Targets (FY 2025)

Metric	Target
Buses	27%
Cutaways	12%
Automobiles (Non-revenue)	0%
Trucks and other rubber tire vehicles (Non-revenue)	75%

Source: MassDOT

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

Metric	Target
Passenger/parking facilities	0%
Administrative/maintenance facilities	0%

Source: MassDOT

6.5 Safety

Safety is the number-one priority when delivering transit service. As an urban system, WRTA develops a PTASP that defines specific safety goals for the authority. These are reviewed annually and updated as part of a PTASP update and shared with CMRPC and MassDOT for performance planning efforts. Safety targets are shown in Table 25.

Table 25. Safety Metrics and Targets (FY 2025)

Metric	Fixed Route	Demand Response
Fatalities	0	0
Fatality Rate (per 1 million vehicle revenue miles)	0	0
Injuries	20	4
Injury Rate (per 1 million vehicle revenue miles)	2.1	0.8
Safety Events	14	8
Safety Event Rate (per 1 million vehicle revenue miles)	1.5	1.5
System Reliability (miles between failures)	9,500	125,000

Source: MassDOT

6.6 Annual Performance

Annual performance metrics reported to MassDOT are unique metrics chosen by the RTA. As part of the bilateral MOU negotiation process, each RTA identifies and reports a metric and target of their choosing, and a second metric is chosen based on prioritized recommendations included in the CRTP. For the FY 2026 MOU period, the metric is tied to the 2020 CRTP. The two metrics for WRTA are:

- **RTA-Choice Metric:** Complete Phase I of the full CAD/AVL system deployment with Systrans. Phase I consists of converting all existing CAD/AVL equipment from the prior vendor to Systrans on all fixed route buses and select cutaway vehicles.
- **RTA-Choice Metric Tied to CRTP:** Complete new “Bus Stop Design Guidelines and Capital Plan” document and begin first phase of new bus stop sign replacements and installations throughout the fixed route system.

Other annual performance metrics are external partnerships and fleet composition by fuel type, as shown in Table 26. Both are reported annually and are not compared against an annual target.

Table 26. Fleet Composition by Fuel Type and External Partnership Annual Performance Metrics and Targets (FY 2026)

Metric	Fixed Route	Demand Response	Demand Taxi
Percent Electric Fleet	0%	0%	N/A
Percent Hybrid Fleet	28%	0%	N/A
Percent Compressed Natural Gas Fleet	0%	0%	N/A
Percent Diesel Fleet	72%	0%	N/A
Percent Gasoline Fleet	0%	100%	N/A
Number of External Partnerships	0	13	1

Source: MassDOT

Note: There is no reported fleet composition data for demand taxi vehicles, as WRTA does not have capital responsibility for these vehicles.

N/A = Not Applicable

7 Trends and Uncertainties

WRTA held an alternatives scenario workshop on October 20, 2025, to explore future uncertainties and market trends that could potentially impact transit over the next five years. During this exercise, WRTA examined how these trends might influence ridership levels and identified how it may respond to each scenario. In developing this CRTP, it is essential that the recommendations align with operational, policy, and financial realities over time. The recommendations are informed by ridership scenarios, enabling WRTA to identify which recommendations are most applicable based on current conditions. Key topics and solutions that arose during the scenario discussions for WRTA to consider in the future are presented below.

7.1 Future Uncertainties

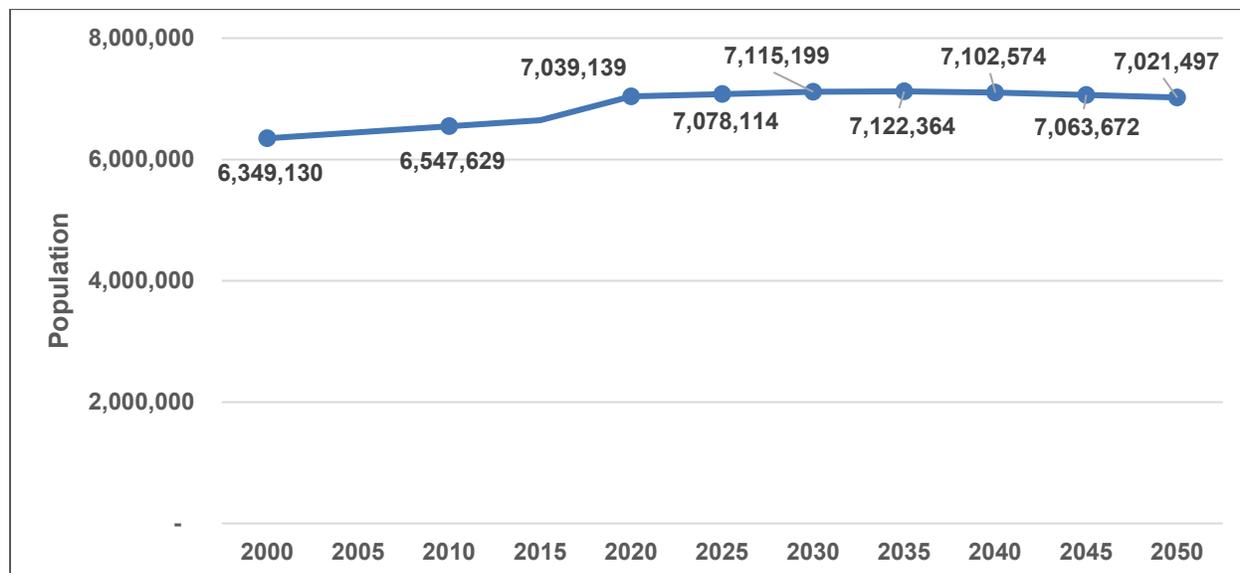
As WRTA prepares for the next five years, it is important to recognize and plan for trends that are both highly impactful and deeply uncertain. These uncertainties may define the operating circumstances of WRTA, possibly influencing factors such as public expectations of transit, service models, funding 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 WRTA's operation.

7.1.1 Population and Demographics

7.1.1.1 General Population Trends

Massachusetts has experienced consistent population growth throughout the twenty-first century and at a pace that exceeds neighboring New England states. This is particularly true in most recent years, as Massachusetts recorded the largest annual percentage increase in population in over a decade from 2023 to 2024 (UMass Donahue Institute 2025). However, as seen in Figure 59, the population of Massachusetts is projected to plateau with little to no growth from 2025 to 2035 and then decline from 2035 to 2050 (Renski 2015; UMass Donahue Institute 2025). A slowdown and eventual decline in population is largely attributed to two factors: domestic out-migration and international migration uncertainty. First, multiple migration measures, such as the U-Haul Growth Index, indicate very large rates of domestic migration out of the state (U-Haul 2025). In 2022, Massachusetts lost an estimated 24,000 working-age adults and 54,000 residents total through migration to other states. Second, international migration—one of the largest and most consistent sources of new residents to the Commonwealth—is highly uncertain and subject to significant changes in the future.

Figure 59. Long-term Population Projections for Massachusetts (2000-2050)



Source: UMass Donahue Institute 2025

When considering WRTA's service area, migration into the Worcester region from areas of Massachusetts east and south of Worcester has made the city an outlier in the state trends of a stagnant or declining population. Worcester County's population saw a 0.97 percent increase from 2020 to 2024. Issues like affordability are a predominant driver of people relocating towards communities like Worcester outside of the Interstate 495 beltway.

Population and demographic trends hold a defining influence on transportation needs, the quality of transit service, and the cultural expectations around transit. Should the statewide trends of a stagnant or declining population begin to manifest in the Worcester region, a variety of impacts could arise, 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 WRTA 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 are integral to determining WRTA'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. In 2025, 20.4 percent of the state is 65 years or older compared to 18 percent of the US population (UMass Donahue Institute 2025; US Census Bureau 2025a). Individuals aged 65 years or older are projected to increase to 22.3 percent of the state's population by 2030. Meanwhile, the national population for this same age group is projected to increase to 21 percent of the population (Vespa 2018). Coincidentally, the proportion of Massachusetts residents aged 21 or younger is projected to decline through 2030 (Point32 Health Foundation 2025). Not only does the rate of aging in Massachusetts outpace national averages, but it also exceeds earlier state-level estimates (Renski 2015).

In 2025, 26.7 percent of Worcester County residents are above the age of 60, and that percentage is projected to grow through 2050. Between 2018 and 2022, the population of people aged 60 to 84 increased by 42 percent, and the county continues to age faster than the rest of the Commonwealth. The aging constituency will create more pronounced effects on transit service compared to statewide estimates. Massachusetts' increasingly older population places more pressure on demand response transportation services. Given the cost-intensiveness of demand response compared to fixed route transit, accommodating increased demand response activity imposes larger workforce needs and potentially higher operating costs on WRTA. Meanwhile, workforce recruitment challenges may be exacerbated as a large proportion of the population ages out of their working years. The impact of aging among Massachusetts residents therefore presents uncertainty that should be considered in WRTA's future operations.

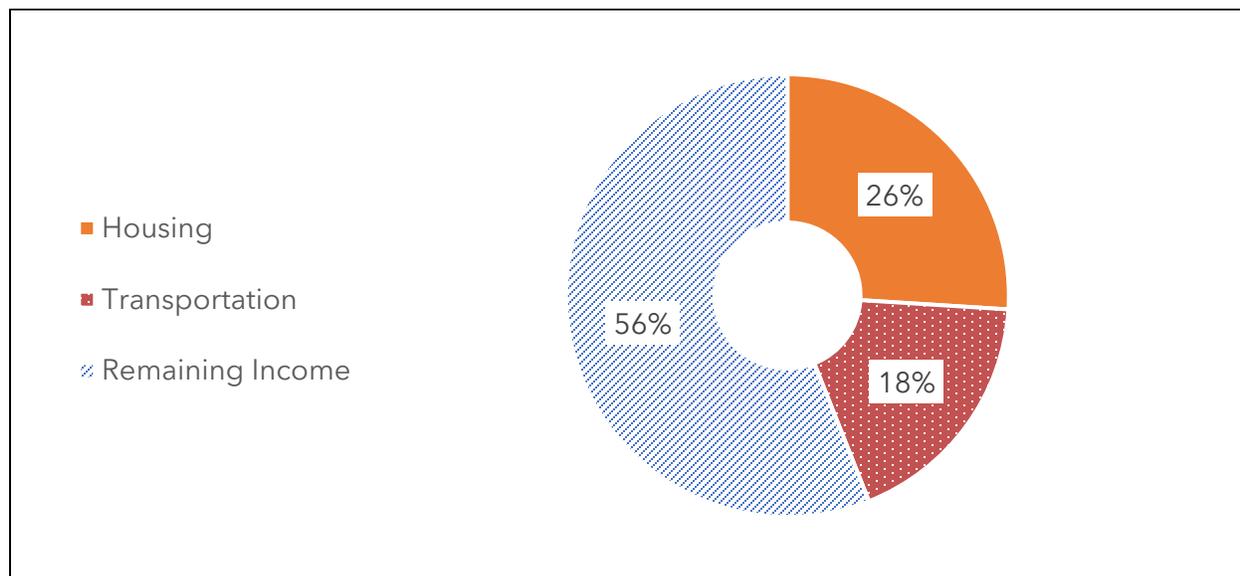
7.1.2 Affordability

The cost of living has increased considerably in Massachusetts, representing some of the highest rates across the United States. High and rapidly growing housing prices are at the center of the Commonwealth's affordability dilemma. Soaring housing costs are largely attributed to an insufficient supply of units. The Massachusetts Comprehensive Housing Plan estimates 222,000 homes need to be produced from 2025 to 2035 to adequately meet the needs of all residents (Commonwealth of Massachusetts 2025a). Production rates in recent years have fallen below the annual rate required to meet this goal, thus signaling continued shortages and rising housing prices into the future.

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. Among the cost-burdened, 53 percent of these residents foresee themselves moving within or out of Massachusetts due to issues of affordability, further fueling rates of out-migration and geographic disparities (Transportation for Massachusetts 2024). Among WRTA's ridership base, residents spend an estimated 44 percent of their income on housing and transportation expenses as seen in Figure 60 (Center for Neighborhood Technology 2025).

Affordability is one of the single-most influential factors in determining an individual's place of residence and transportation needs. Issues of affordability widen disparities around transportation access within communities and induce sprawling development and migration patterns that strain the transportation system between communities. As the basic expenses of shelter and getting around continue to rise, individual commuting distances and demand for less expensive transportation options will likely increase. This poses a unique challenge to WRTA to appropriately balance more extensive transportation needs of the individual while accommodating a potentially increased ridership demand at the community level.

Figure 60. Worcester County Housing and Transportation Costs as a Percentage of Residents' Income



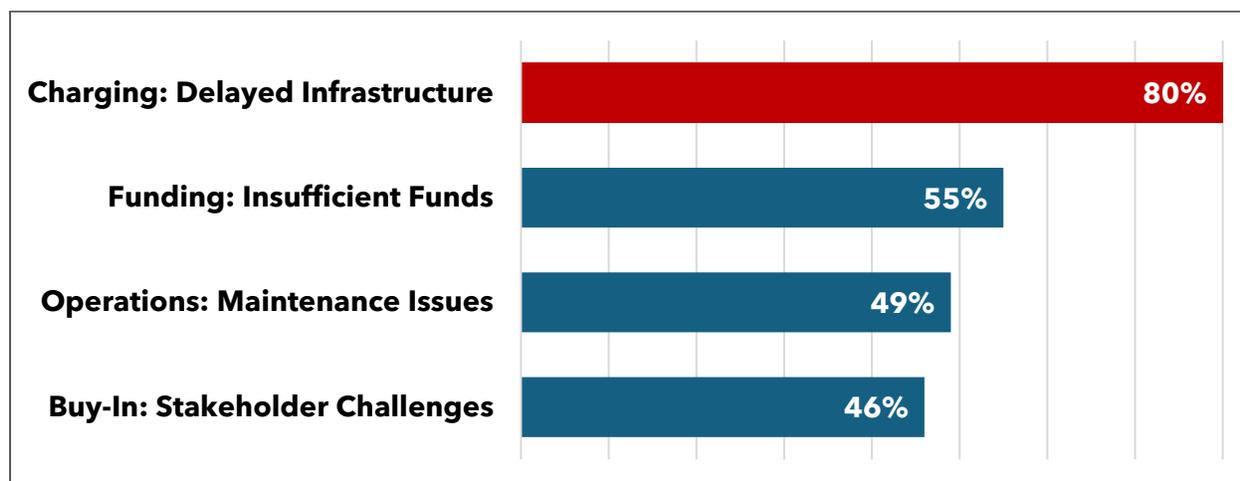
Source: Center for Neighborhood Technology, 2025

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 regional transit agencies 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 is shifting toward a trend of funding a more diverse array of vehicle procurements outside of “no-emissions” procurements (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 61, 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 61. Inadequate Charging Infrastructure is the Leading Obstacle to Fleet Modernization



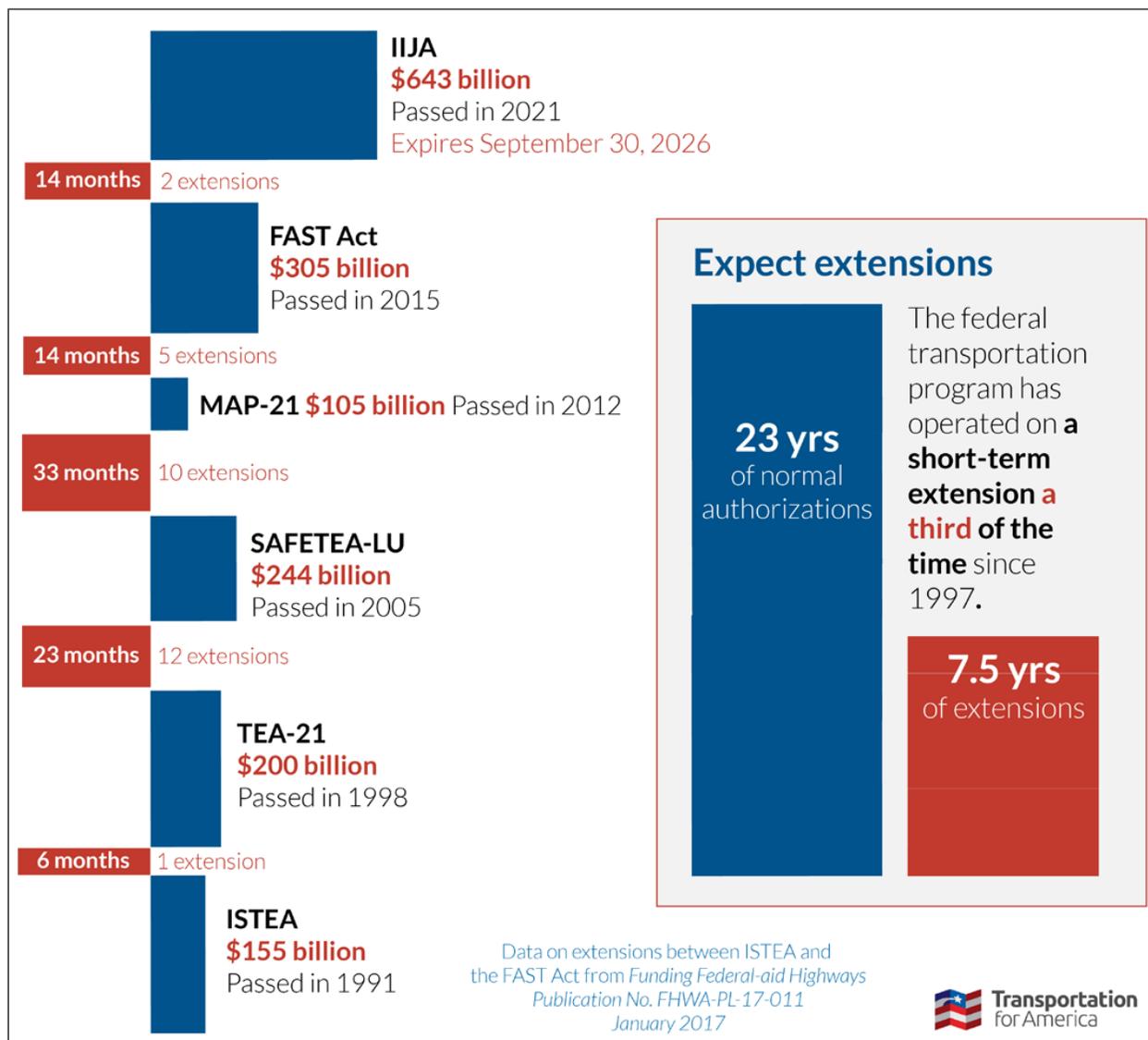
Source: Optibus 2025 State of Public Transportation Industry Survey

Over the past five years, remote work and virtual connectivity have significantly altered the commuting patterns of WRTA’s general population. Now, five years since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, remote work has been more permanently cemented as a long-term fixture of the job landscape in Massachusetts and the United States in general. Additionally, the transition of other routine daily functions towards remote services, such as telemedicine and online delivery platforms, has further lessened individual travel needs. As remote work and virtual services evolve, WRTA could experience substantially different impacts on ridership and transit demand. For example, a widespread return to in-person work could increase transit demand. Continued expansion of telemedicine services may lessen need for demand response services. Increased adoption of remote work and long-term normalization of the remote lifestyle, such as with the decrease in “brick and mortar” shopping, could disrupt the public’s perceived function of public transit.

7.1.4 Funding for Transit

The stability and size of funding streams is paramount to determining WRTA’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. 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, as shown in Figure 62 (Davis 2025). Given this historical record, the level of federal transit funding is uncertain over the next five years.

Figure 62. Record of Extensions for the Last Six Federal Transportation Funding Laws

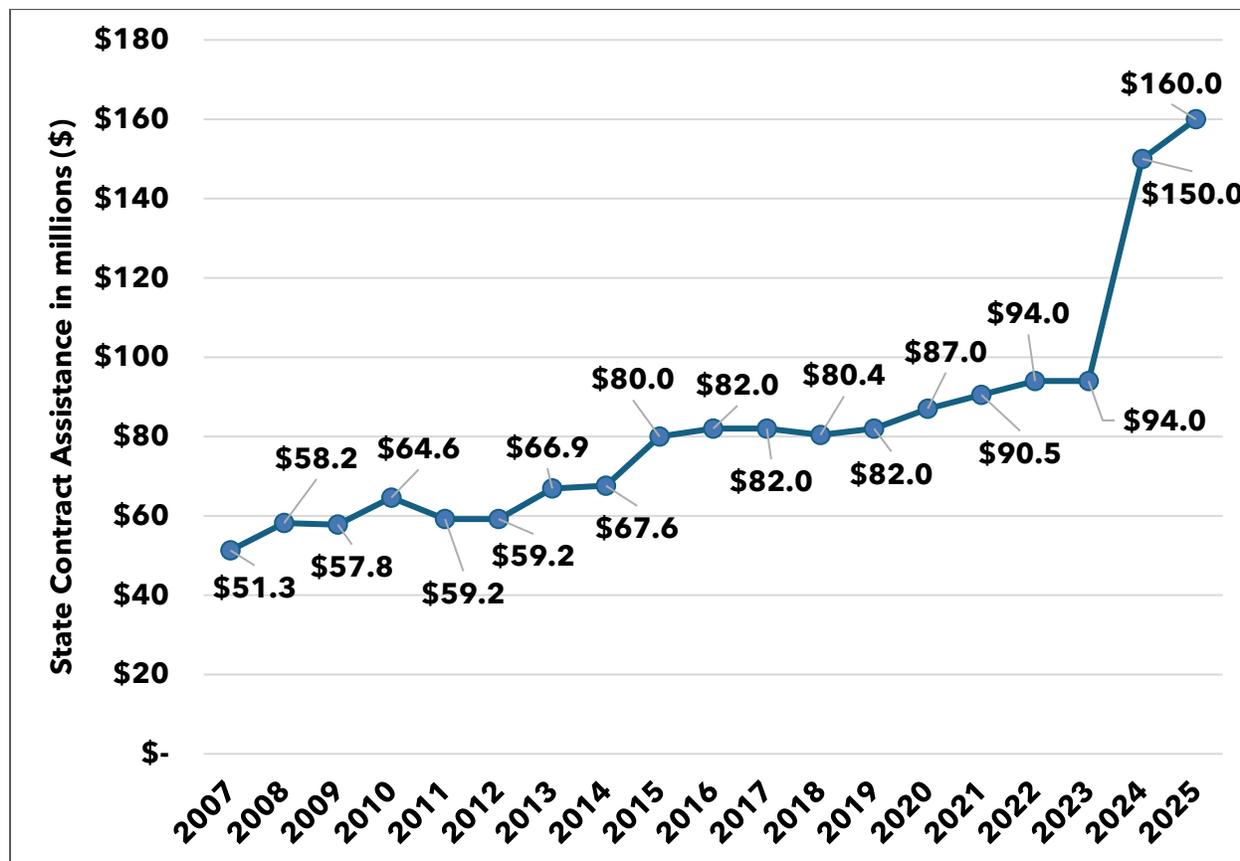


Source: Davis 2025

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 63 (MassDOT 2025). 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 WRTA is on a trajectory to become long term as a product of state funding. \$35 million 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 prohibited 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 WRTA’s fare policy, see Appendix B.) Fare-free transit has demonstrated the potential to positively impact ridership at WRTA. However, the dependency on the Commonwealth’s appropriation of future fare-free transit funding introduces uncertainty and could influence WRTA’s operations.

Figure 63. State Funding for Massachusetts' RTAs from FY 2007 to FY 2025



Source: MassDOT 2025

7.2 2020 Alternative Scenarios

WRTA last updated its CRTP in 2020, at the peak of the pandemic, when WRTA was facing many uncertainties across the transportation landscape 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, WRTA was unsure which routes and services would recover ridership first and which would see a slow 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 were all outside of its control. However, WRTA could plan for the resulting impacts to demand for its services.

In order to address this uncertainty, WRTA defined three qualitative ridership scenarios to map out the future of transit demand through 2025. The three scenarios were:

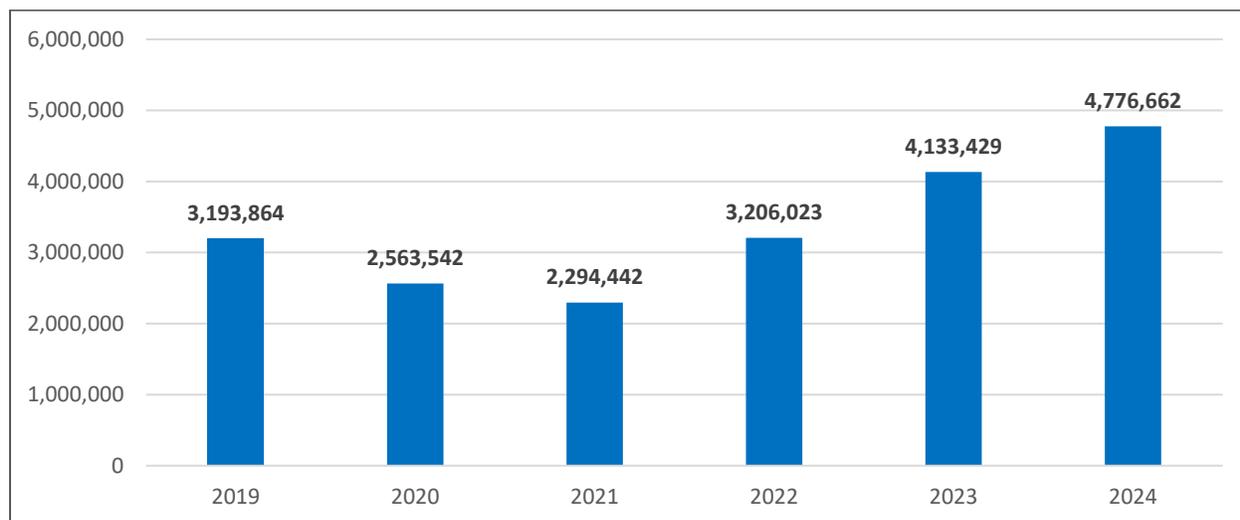
- **Low Ridership:** Ridership that remains below 60 percent of 2019 levels.
- **Medium Ridership:** Stable ridership between 60 and 85 percent of 2019 levels.
- **High Ridership:** Ridership that returns to 86 percent or more of 2019 levels.

Today, looking at ridership levels from FY 2020 to FY 2024, WRTA's ridership aligned with the high ridership scenario.

WRTA's foresight in planning for three potential scenarios ensured it was well-prepared for the fluctuating annual ridership changes and the overall rebound growth in ridership from 2021 to 2024, as shown in Figure 64. This enabled the organization to effectively utilize the 2020 CRTP

recommendations that aligned with the high ridership scenario for informed decision making and WRTA priority action items. WRTA implemented recommendations addressing core needs, such as the near-complete replacement of CAD/AVL technology to enhance WRTA's performance management system and improve public-facing tools and the implementation of fare-free transit. WRTA also implemented recommendations addressing medium- and high-ridership scenario needs, such as expanding service coverage and increasing frequencies.

Figure 64. WRTA Annual System Ridership (2019-2024)



Source: MassDOT, 2025

7.3 Looking Ahead: 2025 to 2030 Scenario Planning

In light of the varied and numerous uncertainties affecting the United States, Massachusetts, and WRTA's region, key questions emerge: "What comes next?" and "What can be done?" While many of these trends lie beyond WRTA's control, how they unfold will likely have a significant impact on ridership. WRTA can proactively respond by planning for different ridership levels over the next five years. As part of this process, WRTA conducted a workshop that explored three different ridership scenarios: low ridership, medium ridership, and high ridership.

The scenarios, distinctly determined for fixed route and demand response modes, assume the continuation of the Fair Share Amendment's support for fare-free transit, and a steady operating budget for WRTA over the next five years. The scenarios are defined as follows with FY 2024 set as the baseline ridership year, and they are further detailed in the following sections:

- Fixed Route Scenario:
 - **Low Ridership:** Reduction in ridership from 2024 levels.
 - **Medium Ridership:** Ridership remains steady, with up to 5 percent growth.
 - **High Ridership:** Growth in ridership exceeding 5 percent.
- Demand Response Scenario:
 - **Low Ridership:** Reduction in ridership from 2024 levels.
 - **Medium Ridership:** Ridership remains steady.
 - **High Ridership:** Growth in ridership.

7.3.1 Low Ridership

Low ridership for WRTA is characterized by reduced ridership from 2024 levels over the next five years (2025 to 2030) for both fixed route and demand response modes.

Several market trend factors could potentially contribute to this scenario:

- Economic downturn and widespread unemployment could significantly reduce work commutes.
- Continued prevalence of remote work could further suppress demand for commuting services.
- Demographic shifts, such as an aging population, might lead to a decline in work or school-based ridership.

These potential market trends, as discussed previously, could collectively shape WRTA's ridership patterns in a low-ridership scenario.

In addition to these potential trends, WRTA considered other factors that may cause ridership to reduce over the next five years. Based on this question, WRTA identified the following driving factors for a low ridership potential scenario:

- Reduction in anticipated federal and/or state funds, such as Fair Share Amendment state funding, which would restrict WRTA's ability to afford its ongoing operations, fare-free services, and planned capital investments.
- Challenges with hiring and retaining operators despite the increased hiring budget, pay increases for contracted operators, and robust hiring promotion efforts.
- Significant reduction in "brick and mortar" shopping, which is a primary trip purpose among WRTA riders, due to store closures and the continued rise of online shopping.

7.3.2 Medium Ridership

Medium ridership for WRTA is characterized by ridership remaining steady compared to 2024 levels on demand response services, and ridership remaining steady with up to 5 percent growth on fixed route services over the next five years.

Several market trend factors could potentially contribute to this scenario:

- 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.
- Localized developments such as new transit-oriented housing developments, pursued in proactive coordination with WRTA, could further contribute to ridership growth in this scenario.

These potential market trends, as discussed previously, could collectively shape WRTA's ridership patterns in a medium ridership growth scenario. In addition to these potential trends, WRTA determined that the driving factors for stable ridership levels would be the following:

- Continued federal and state funding to support operations, fare-free service, and planned capital investments.
- Success in continuing to hire drivers, which would support WRTA's ability to maintain services.

- Continued commitment to engagement and improving the rider experience, such as with the implementation of new and upgraded customer-facing technology, maintained vehicle state of good repair, and improved on-road transit infrastructure.

7.3.3 High Ridership

High ridership for WRTA is characterized by ridership growth from 2024 levels exceeding 5 percent on fixed route services, and any degree of ridership growth on demand response services over the next five years.

This scenario could be driven by several potential factors:

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

These potential market trends, as discussed previously, could collectively shape WRTA's ridership patterns in a high-ridership scenario. In response to these potential impacts, WRTA considered in addition to the external market trends, why might ridership increase?

Based on this question, WRTA determined that the driving factors for a high-ridership potential scenario would be the following:

- Continued federal and state funding to support operations, fare-free service, service enhancements, and capital investments.
- Increased investment in vehicle assets and operator hiring.
- Successful service enhancements and expansion (such as extended hours, express fixed route, crosstown fixed route, etc.).
- Enhanced fixed route corridors, with a particular focus on the permanency of WRTA's trunk routes within the City of Worcester, such as by installing real-time signage and other transit infrastructure to improve service visibility and the rider experience.

7.4 Future Opportunities

Table 27 summarizes the opportunities and corresponding scenarios that arose during the scenario discussions. Depending on ridership levels over the next five years on fixed route and demand response, WRTA can determine which strategic opportunities may be applicable to pursue. For items that are applicable regardless of ridership level, "all scenarios" is indicated.

Table 27. Opportunities by Ridership Scenario

Ridership Scenario	Description of Opportunity	Relevant Mode
All Scenarios	Monitor / seek opportunities for increased funding or additional funding sources. Potential tools include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify potential external partnerships for fixed route service, and maintain / bolster partnerships, such as those with member municipalities and contracted operators, to support the continuation of services and/or service expansions. • Maximize data-driven decision making opportunities through regular and accurate reporting efforts. 	Fixed Route and Demand Response
All Scenarios	Maintain WRTA’s open hiring approach, while exploring further opportunities to leverage emerging workforce markets, such as the growing immigrant population.	Fixed Route and Demand Response
Low Ridership	Monitor population and demographic trends in the service area, paying particular attention to the potential influx of non-transit riders within WRTA’s core and the resulting decrease in residents that use transit.	Fixed Route and Demand Response
Low Ridership	Utilize ridership reports to make data-driven decisions on how to balance service with demand and where to reduce service, should funding restraints require.	Fixed Route and Demand Response
Low Ridership	Conduct outreach to identify developing trends in customers’ transit needs to support informed decision making around provided service.	Fixed Route and Demand Response
Medium Ridership	Invest in customer-facing technology and the state of good repair of vehicles to enhance the rider experience and comfort with the system.	Fixed Route and Demand Response
Medium Ridership	Continue building positive relationships with redevelopment authorities and planning developers to boost proactive and collaborative planning/design practices, where WRTA is included in planning and design considerations for future transit-oriented development.	Fixed Route
Medium / High Ridership	Continue efforts to implement bus stop consolidation and rebalancing and support more efficient service operations.	Fixed Route
Medium / High Ridership	Explore opportunities to develop sustainable partnerships with neighboring RTAs and promote increased regional transit connections.	Fixed Route and Demand Response
High Ridership	Investigate strategies to handle increased demand, particularly on demand response services in communities with rising aging in place. Explore and recognize creative perspectives around demand response services and out-of-the-box solutions for meeting the needs of communities.	Demand Response

Source: WRTA Alternative Workshop on October 20, 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 WRTA 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. Since that plan was produced, there has been a significant infusion of state and federal funding supporting expanded transit service. Recommendations that WRTA has implemented over the past five years, as well as additional investments made, include:

- Implementation of fare-free transit service, directly addressing the 2020 recommendation to reduce the cost of transit use for riders.
- Realization of a comprehensive update to schedules, such as improved frequencies and spans and reinstated full Friday service, aligning with multiple past recommendations to enhance service and improve on-time performance.
- Implementation of website updates for improved clarity of services and facilitated rider tools such as real-time bus location data, which aligns with the previously identified need to pursue website updates.
- Near-complete replacement of CAD/AVL technology to improve performance monitoring and real-time information for both enhanced internal operations and improved customer-facing tools, connecting to the past goal of enhancing WRTA's performance management system.
- Ongoing bus stop study to comprehensively assess bus stops, improve bus stop spacing, and develop an accurate bus stop inventory.
- Introduction of new Via-WRTA on-demand microtransit service in parts of Northborough, Shrewsbury, and Westborough, complete with a dedicated rider app to book rides.
- Ongoing system rebrand project to refresh the WRTA brand design and increase system visibility.
- Clear strategy to engage and understand riders through focused outreach and engagement efforts, such as through the 2024 fixed route customer satisfaction survey and 2025 demand response customer satisfaction survey. Utilized innovative engagement efforts including open houses, bus banners, online advertising, and social media, contributing to high rates of rider response.
- Ongoing comprehensive service analysis to explore the potential for further service enhancements to meet rider demand.
- Ongoing facility capital projects to renovate and enhance infrastructure to meet rider demand and maintain facilities in a state of good repair.

- Robust and intentional hiring strategy to recruit and maintain operators by engaging with the operating company to develop a budget that attracted commercial driver's licensed drivers, eligible to operate heavy-duty transit vehicles, and offer full-time hours.

8.2 Planning for an Uncertain Future

As described in Chapter 7, the Commonwealth may face key uncertainties in the next five years, including ridership. The five-year vision accounts for these variables, particularly the level of ridership by mode in the WRTA service area. Refer to Chapter 7 for ridership scenarios and their impact on the plan.

Depending on how the future unfolds, different uncertainties may impact the listed recommendations differently. For the purposes of the CRTP, level of ridership demand by mode was identified as one of the key uncertainties driving WRTA actions, including:

- **Low Ridership:** If the level of ridership demand over the next five years decreases from 2024 levels for both fixed route and demand response services, a focus on recommendations that are not contingent on sustained or increased ridership levels would be judicious. Thus, in a low ridership scenario, pursuing the list of core recommendations would be warranted.
- **Medium Ridership:** If the level of ridership demand over the next five years remains steady for both modes compared to 2025 levels, with up to 5 percent growth on fixed route, more robust service and capital expansions may be warranted. Some of those might include conducting service analyses to inform decisions around service enhancements, utilizing data to identify the feasibility of mini hub development, and prioritizing high-ridership corridors for real-time bus stop signage.
- **Higher Ridership:** If the level of ridership demand over the next five years increases for both modes from 2025 levels, with fixed route growth exceeding 5 percent, then enhanced service and capital investments may be warranted. Some of those might include exploring opportunities to expand Via-WRTA zones, evaluating the feasibility of implementing limited stop fixed route service, and identifying and pursuing opportunities to deploy transit signal priority improvements.
- **Core:** Many recommendations are included regardless of ridership level and are considered core needs, which also correspond to the recommendations of interest under a low ridership scenario. These include advancing WRTA's system rebrand and vehicle wrapping effort, launching and maintaining quarterly paratransit rider forums, implementing real-time trip planning tools along with the new CAD/AVL technology deployment, completing the WRTA Central Hub Renovation project, and continuing efforts to streamline data collection and analysis processes to support data-driven decision making.

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

8.3 Identified Needs

The recommendations in this plan directly respond to needs identified through the WRTA 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 listed in Table 28.

Table 28. Identified Needs

Need	Identified Through...
Extended spans of service on high-ridership routes	Needs and Goals, Existing Conditions Analysis, Public and Stakeholder Engagement
Increased frequencies on high-ridership routes	Needs and Goals, Existing Conditions Analysis, Public and Stakeholder Engagement
Crosstown service implementation	Needs and Goals, Existing Conditions Analysis, Public and Stakeholder Engagement
Expanded Via-WRTA geographic coverage	Needs and Goals
Addressed transit need in peripheral communities	Needs and Goals
Improved demand response service	Needs and Goals, Alternatives Scenarios
Limited bus stop fixed route service	Needs and Goals, Existing Conditions Analysis, Public and Stakeholder Engagement
Consistent targeted rider engagement	Alternatives Scenarios
Improved marketing, visibility, and attractiveness of WRTA services	Needs and Goals, Fares, Environmental Policy
Improved rider-facing tools, technology, and training opportunities	Needs and Goals, Alternatives Scenarios
Upgraded/new technology to increase operational efficiency	Existing Conditions Analysis
Updated bus stop placements with increased spacing to improve on-time performance and route efficiencies	Needs and Goals, Alternatives Scenarios, Fares, Environmental Policy
Updated WRTA Central Hub	Existing Conditions Analysis
Identification of high ridership transfer points suitable for greater bus stop amenities	Needs and Goals, Existing Conditions Analysis, Alternatives Scenarios, Environmental Policy
Increased ridership	Needs and Goals, Existing Conditions Analysis, Alternatives Scenarios, Environmental Policy
Maintained efforts to support and retain drivers	Needs and Goals, Existing Conditions Analysis, Public and Stakeholder Engagement
Improved data collection and quality to support data-driven decision-making	Needs and Goals, Alternatives Scenarios, Existing Conditions Analysis
Identification of alternative revenue sources	Needs and Goals, Alternatives Scenarios
Funding to sustain fare-free service, particularly demand response operations and the greater resource needs	Needs and Goals, Alternatives Scenarios, Fares, Environmental Policy

These identified needs drove the development of the recommendations found in this section. WRTA 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.

8.4 Recommendations

The needs identified in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 served as the foundation for the recommendations detailed in the subsequent sections. The quantitative data analysis in the existing conditions section and market assessment, in combination with the qualitative feedback from the public and stakeholder outreach, provided the basis for these recommendations. 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 are organized into categories, including service, outreach and engagement, technology, capital assets, training and operations, data and performance, and partnerships and funding (Table 29). For recommendations that fall under multiple categories, a note in the final column highlights their cross-listing.

Table 29. Recommendations Categories

Category	Description
Service	Service recommendations deal with specific modes, routes, or other operational considerations of day-to-day provision of service.
Outreach and Engagement	Outreach and engagement recommendations deal with marketing, engagement and education efforts and agency policies.
Technology	Technology recommendations deal with the procurement of transit technologies and functionality upgrades.
Capital Assets	Capital assets recommendations deal with the purchase or management of equipment, rolling stock, facilities, or other assets.
Training and Operations	Training and operations recommendations deal with staff hiring and retention practices.
Data and Performance	Data and performance recommendations deal with the systems and protocols for monitoring agency operations.
Partnerships and Funding	Partnerships and funding recommendations deal with coordination between the RTA and other regional and statewide partners, particularly to leverage funding opportunities.

8.4.1 Service Recommendations

Service recommendations for WRTA focus on continuously monitoring services and service performance, identifying service improvement and expansion opportunities, and exploring and planning for these opportunities (Table 30). WRTA is advancing its Comprehensive Service Analysis, focused on exploring potential enhancements to the fixed route bus network and expected to be completed by summer 2026. The public comment period for the Comprehensive Service Analysis was open in fall 2025, and any relevant feedback provided by the public through the CRTP engagement effort will be considered as part of the analysis. WRTA is also conducting a Bus Stop Study, focused on assessing and improving bus stop

locations and spacing. Coordination with these ongoing planning efforts, as well as additional funding and vehicle and staff resources, is critical to the responsible and successful implementation of these recommendations, and robust promotional efforts must be incorporated to support public awareness. WRTA also intends to continue using performance monitoring and stakeholder feedback to inform decisions regarding service changes and expansion, a strategy that is incorporated into the service recommendations as a core need.

Table 30. Service Recommendations

ID	Recommendation	Ridership Scenario	Category Overlap
S1	Build on preliminary analyses and conduct a service expansion analysis (Appendix A) to extend service spans on high ridership fixed routes (i.e., earlier mornings or later evenings).	Medium / High	N/A
S2	Build on preliminary analyses and conduct a service expansion analysis (Appendix A) to increase frequency on high ridership fixed routes (i.e., 15-minute clock-face schedule).	Medium / High	N/A
S3	Conduct a fixed route service analysis for crosstown route implementation to supplement the existing hub and spoke service. Refine service planning assumptions, develop cost estimates, and conduct additional engagement as needed.	Medium	Capital Assets
S4	Explore expanding microtransit zones utilizing data (i.e., demographics, ridership, funding availability, and public feedback) to inform decision-making and equitable deployment strategy development.	High	Data and Performance
S5	Continue to coordinate with neighboring RTAs (i.e., MWRTA) for the deployment of additional service connection points, such as microtransit zones and fixed routes (i.e., PVRTA Route B79).	Core	Partnerships and Funding
S6	Utilize data (i.e., transit propensity market data) and stakeholder and public feedback to identify opportunities to address transit needs in more peripheral communities.	Core	Outreach and Engagement, Data and Performance
S7	Align future demand response service improvements with best practices and outcomes from the Demand Response Study (WRTA 2025) and recommendations for improvements.	Core	N/A
S8	Evaluate the feasibility of limited bus stop fixed route service.	High	Data and Performance
S9	Monitor on-time performance to determine the impact of WRTA's comprehensive schedule updates in April 2025, and identify opportunities to further improve on-time performance.	Core	Data and Performance

N/A = Not Applicable

8.4.2 Outreach and Engagement Recommendations

WRTA has made important progress in recent years in improving its engagement and marketing efforts to facilitate the successful solicitation of feedback, increase service awareness, and boost ridership. As an example, WRTA launched a targeted engagement campaign with the Visually Impaired Community task force through discussion sessions in fall 2025 to identify key accessibility challenges and concerns around the WRTA Central Hub's physical limitations. Potential solutions and opportunities for improvement were identified to inform WRTA's ongoing facility improvement planning efforts. Over the next five years, regardless of ridership levels, WRTA is committed to continuing this work and to effectively advertising new or modified services, such as through its ongoing system rebrand effort, regular paratransit rider forums starting in 2026, and additional targeted outreach and marketing (Table 31).

Table 31. Outreach and Engagement Recommendations

ID	Recommendation	Ridership Scenario	Category Overlap
OE1	Launch and maintain quarterly hybrid paratransit rider forums, and maintain fixed route rider forums (conducted at the WRTA Central Hub).	Core	Service
OE2	Advance system rebranding to continue to build awareness of the WRTA system and grow ridership.	Core	Capital Assets
OE3	Continue to engage the Visually Impaired Community task force to solicit feedback on capital projects (i.e., the WRTA Central Hub Renovation project) and system improvements.	Core	Service, Capital Assets

8.4.3 Technology Recommendations

WRTA has demonstrated a motivation to update or implement new technologies both to support internal operational efficiencies and to offer public-facing tools for enhanced accessibility, comfort, and ease of use when riding WRTA services. Moving forward, WRTA will be able to leverage the imminent deployment of the new Systrans Navineo CAD/AVL technology for further technology updates. Funding would be required to achieve several of the technology recommendations (Table 32).

Table 32. Technology Recommendations

ID	Recommendation	Ridership Scenario	Category Overlap
T1	Complete the replacement of WRTA's CAD/AVL technology with the Systrans Navineo system.	Core	N/A
T2	Implement real-time trip planning technology using a GTFS-Realtime feed, available through the new Systrans Navineo system.	Core	N/A
T3	Implement real-time digital signage along heavy ridership corridors.	Medium / High	Capital Assets

ID	Recommendation	Ridership Scenario	Category Overlap
T4	Implement trip planning kiosks at high ridership locations and/or eventual mini hubs.	Medium / High	Capital Assets
T5	Identify opportunities for strategic deployment of transit signal priority improvements.	High	N/A
T6	Procure and implement new demand response technology to consolidate all demand response contractors into one system, improve customer-facing tools, and facilitate service delivery flexibility.	Core	N/A

N/A = Not Applicable

8.4.4 Capital Assets Recommendations

WRTA continues to prioritize maintaining and updating its facility infrastructure, and the agency has initiated or demonstrated interest in expanding its capital assets, such as bus stop infrastructure and mini hubs at high ridership locations (Table 33). Funding and coordination are necessary for each of these recommendations to be achieved (i.e., MassDOT support is required for bus stop installation efforts).

Table 33. Capital Assets Recommendations

ID	Recommendation	Ridership Scenario	Category Overlap
C1	Complete the WRTA Bus Stop Study and align future bus stop modifications with study recommendations. Implement bus stop infrastructure in partnership with the City of Worcester.	Core	Partnerships and Funding
C2	Develop bus stop guidelines that reflect Bus Stop Study outcomes, WRTA preferences for bus stop placement, and coordination with municipalities.	Core	Partnerships and Funding
C3	Implement new vehicle wrapping and bus stop signage in alignment with the system rebranding.	Core	Outreach and Engagement, Technology
C4	Complete the WRTA Central Hub Renovation project, incorporating feedback from stakeholders such as the Visually Impaired Community task force.	Core	Outreach and Engagement
C5	Conduct a site-selection analysis for potential mini hubs by building on a fixed route transfer point performance assessment (see DP2) and collecting public feedback. Depending on analysis outcomes, advance implementation of mini hubs including exploring a short-term pilot.	Medium / High	Data and Performance
C6	If crosstown service is implemented, procure additional vehicles to meet additional service demand, or consider alternate service design using existing assets.	Medium / High	Service

ID	Recommendation	Ridership Scenario	Category Overlap
C7	Based on mini hub analysis (see C4), identify and procure capital infrastructure at high ridership locations such as safety amenities, rider technology, and right-of-way. Coordinate with municipality partners for identification and implementation.	High	Technology, Partnerships and Funding

8.4.5 Training and Operations Recommendations

WRTA is committed to sustaining a positive, supportive, and safe workplace culture, such as through enhanced training programs and creative solutions to engage new operators (Table 34).

Table 34. Training and Operations Recommendations

ID	Recommendation	Ridership Scenario	Category Overlap
TO1	Maintain support of fixed route contractor’s open hiring approach. Continue exploring further opportunities with fixed route and demand response contractors to leverage emerging workforce markets.	Core	N/A
TO2	Continue to improve WRTA's safety and de-escalation training program.	Core	N/A
TO3	Ensure WRTA contractors comply with all required training programs for their staff. Furthermore, ensure contractors actively promote training and engagement opportunities for all drivers.	Core	N/A

N/A = Not Applicable

8.4.6 Data and Performance Recommendations

WRTA continues to pursue opportunities to improve data quality and leverage collected data for enhanced performance monitoring and data-driven decision making. Access to accurate data will support decision-making, greater clarity and transparency around operations, and expanded opportunities to leverage performance assessments (Table 35).

Table 35. Data and Performance Recommendations

ID	Recommendation	Ridership Scenario	Category Overlap
DP1	Continue to identify opportunities to streamline data collection and processing, and to leverage data for informed decision-making (i.e., the potential for microtransit expansion or increased service in more peripheral communities).	Core	Service
DP2	Evaluate performance at route transfer points throughout the service area to identify viable locations for potential mini hub development.	Medium / High	Capital Assets

ID	Recommendation	Ridership Scenario	Category Overlap
DP3	Monitor on-time performance to determine the impact of WRTA's comprehensive schedule updates in April 2025, and identify opportunities to further improve on-time performance.	Core	Service

8.4.7 Partnerships and Funding Recommendations

WRTA intends to continue efforts to maintain and enhance partnerships with statewide, regional, and local leaders and organizations. WRTA recognizes the critical value of ongoing coordination and strategic and creative fund-seeking approaches to ensure its services continue to improve and meet transit needs (Table 36).

Table 36. Partnerships and Funding Recommendations

ID	Recommendation	Ridership Scenario	Category Overlap
PF1	Explore and leverage new or enhanced partnership opportunities to support capital projects (bus stop installations, mini hub development, etc.) and service efficiency /expansion improvements.	Core	Capital Assets
PF2	Continuously explore and pursue additional funding opportunities through partnerships and local, state, and federal resources.	Core	N/A
PF3	Explore opportunities to engage with community development authorities, CMRPC, and municipal planning departments to monitor transit-oriented development opportunities that align with existing and planned transit service for enhanced connectivity.	Core	N/A
PF4	Continue to collaborate with neighboring RTAs (MWRTA, MART, PVTA) to identify areas for transit connection enhancements.	Core	Service
PF5	Continue to engage with member communities/towns to identify opportunities for improved demand response service efficiency.	Core	N/A

N/A = Not Applicable

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Appendix A Service Plan

Two preliminary service analyses were conducted to assess operational needs for establishing consistent and increased spans of service on weekends and for establishing consistent and increased frequencies on weekdays. These analyses group WRTA's fixed routes into three tiers of service based on weekly ridership, with Tier 1 and Tier 2 mirroring WRTA's categorization of its routes in the Fixed Route Customer Satisfaction Survey Report (WRTA 2024) and Tier 3 combining Tier III and Tier IV routes from the report. A summary of weekend service span improvements is provided in Table 37. Figure 65 through Figure 71 detail how each route's service span would change and the associated increase in revenue hours for each short-, mid-, and long-term scenario.

Under the service span analysis, the following proposed changes would apply to Tier 1 routes:

- Short-term: Apply Saturday span to Sundays
- Mid-term: Begin Saturday service on Sundays for routes with no Sunday service
- Long-term: Apply a 7:00 AM to 7:00 PM minimum weekend span

The following proposed changes would apply to Tier 2 routes:

- Short-term: Apply Saturday span to Sundays
- Mid-term: Begin Saturday service on Sundays for routes with no Sunday service
- Long-term: Apply a 8:00 AM to 6:00 PM minimum weekend span

The following proposed changes would apply to Tier 3 routes:

- Short-term: N/A
- Mid-term: Begin Saturday service on Sundays for routes with no Sunday service
- Long-term: Apply a 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM minimum weekend span

Table 37. Proposed Weekend Span Recommendations

Route	Existing		Short-Term		Mid-Term		Long-Term	
	Span	Service Hours	Span	Service Hours	Span	Service Hours	Span	Service Hours
Tier 1 Proposed Changes								
11	08:30 AM-07:43 PM	11.22	06:00 AM-09:52 PM	15.87	No Change	No Change	No Change	No Change
19	10:30 AM-06:23 PM	7.88	05:30 AM-10:33 PM	17.05	No Change	No Change	No Change	No Change
26	08:45 AM-05:06 PM	8.35	06:15 AM-09:00 PM	14.75	No Change	No Change	No Change	No Change
27	08:45 AM-05:03 PM	8.30	06:05 AM-09:17 PM	15.20	No Change	No Change	No Change	No Change
Tier 2 Proposed Changes								
7	09:45 AM-06:05 PM	8.33	06:15 AM-09:34 PM	15.32	No Change	No Change	No Change	No Change
23	11:30 AM-07:05 PM	7.58	06:30 AM-09:17 PM	14.78	No Change	No Change	No Change	No Change
24	09:30 AM-06:45 PM	9.25	06:30 AM-09:20 PM	14.83	No Change	No Change	No Change	No Change
30	11:00 AM-06:24 PM	7.40	06:30 AM-09:23 PM	14.88	No Change	No Change	No Change	No Change
31	No Service	0.00	No Service	0.00	08:43 AM-04:48 PM	8.08	No Change	No Change
Tier 3 Proposed Changes								
1	09:45 AM-05:13 PM	7.47	No Change	No Change	No Change	No Change	08:15 AM-No Change	8.97
2	10:00 AM-05:19 PM	7.32	No Change	No Change	No Change	No Change	09:45 AM-05:34 PM	7.82

Route	Existing		Short-Term		Mid-Term		Long-Term	
	Span	Service Hours	Span	Service Hours	Span	Service Hours	Span	Service Hours
3	No Service	0.00	No Service	0.00	09:45 AM-05:09 PM	7.40	No Change	No Change
4	10:00 AM-05:27 PM	7.45	No Change	No Change	No Change	No Change	06:15 AM-09:35 PM	15.33
5	10:15 AM-05:39 PM	7.40	No Change	No Change	No Change	No Change	05:22 AM-08:17 PM	14.92
6	No Service	0.00	No Service	0.00	07:00 AM-07:46 PM	12.77	No Change	No Change
12	No Service	0.00	No Service	0.00	No Service	0.00	09:00 AM-05:00 PM	8.00
14	No Service	0.00	No Service	0.00	No Service	0.00	09:00 AM-05:00 PM	8.00
15	No Service	0.00	No Service	0.00	09:50 AM-05:44 PM	7.90	No Change	No Change
16	No Service	0.00	No Service	0.00	09:15 AM-05:05 PM	7.83	No Change	No Change
29	No Service	0.00	No Service	0.00	08:00 AM-07:53 PM	11.88	No Change	No Change
33	10:00 AM-05:57 PM	7.95	No Change	No Change	No Change	No Change	06:50 AM-10:31 PM	15.68
42	No Service	0.00	No Service	0.00	07:00 AM-08:51 PM	13.85	No Change	No Change
825	No Service	0.00	No Service	0.00	No Service	0.00	09:00 AM-05:00 PM	8.00

Figure 65. Match Sunday Service to Saturday on Tier 1 and 2 Routes: Short-Term

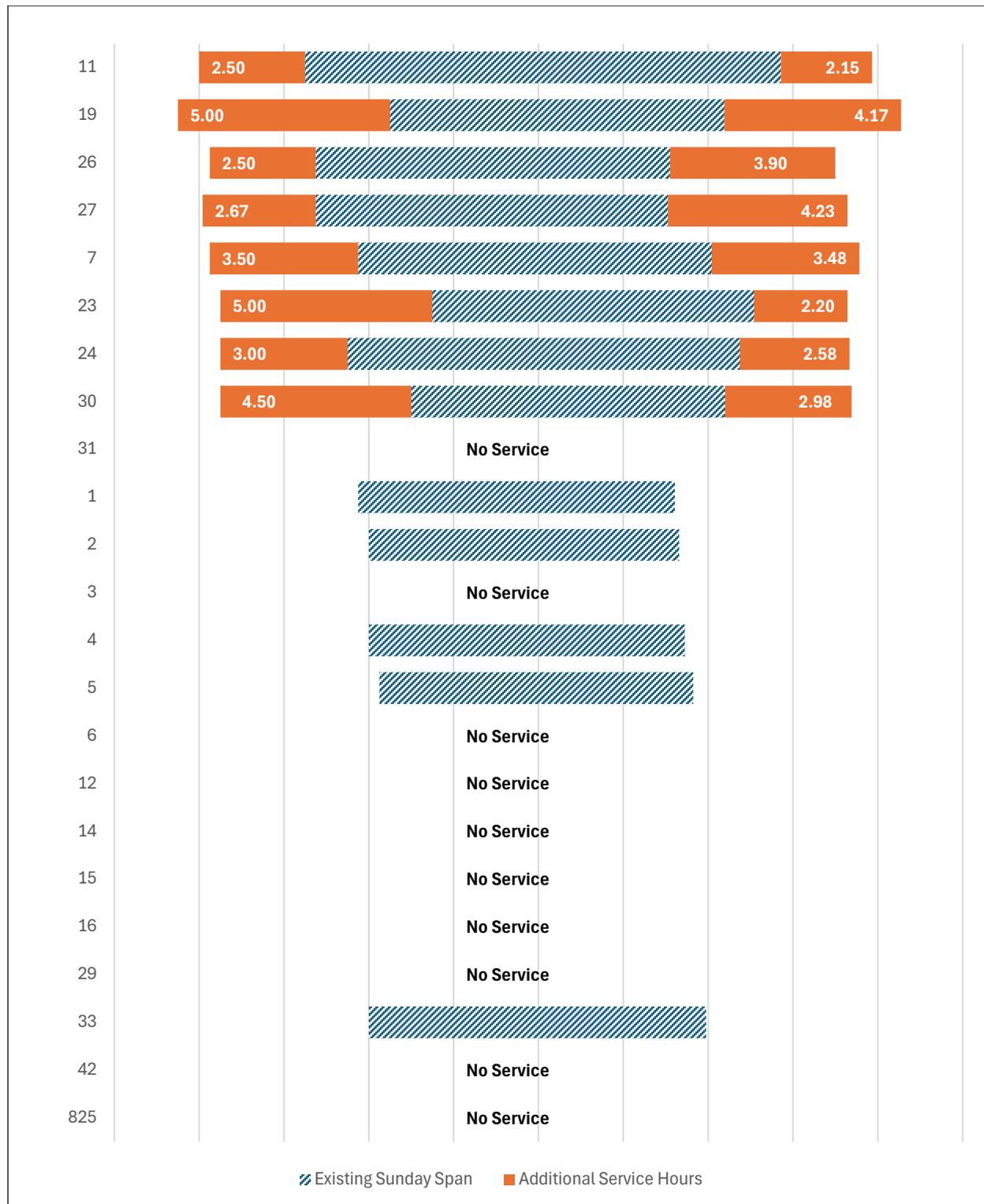


Figure 66. Increased Sunday Revenue Hours by Route: Short-Term

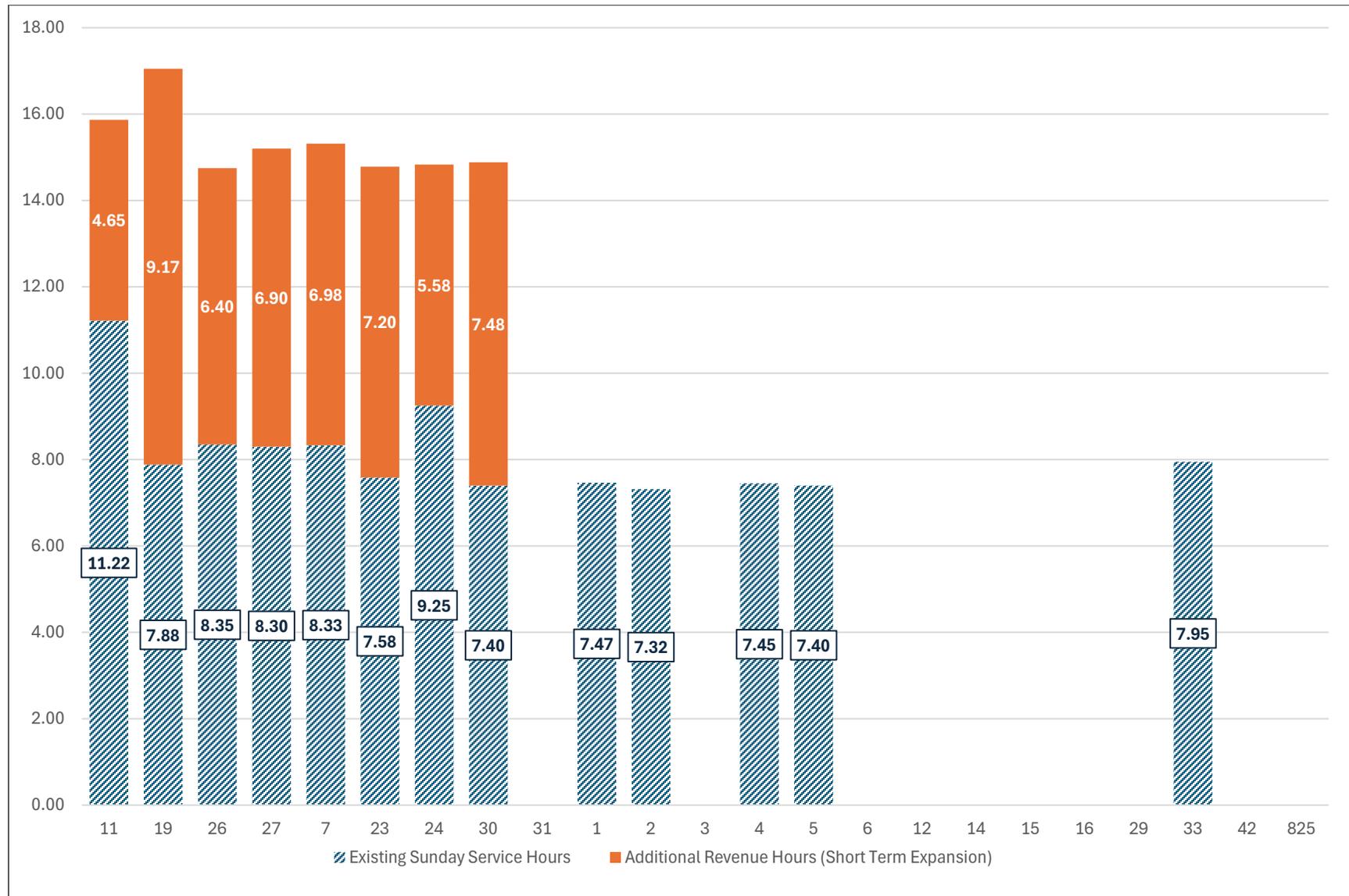


Figure 67. Match Sunday Service to Saturday on Routes Without Current Sunday Service: Mid-Term

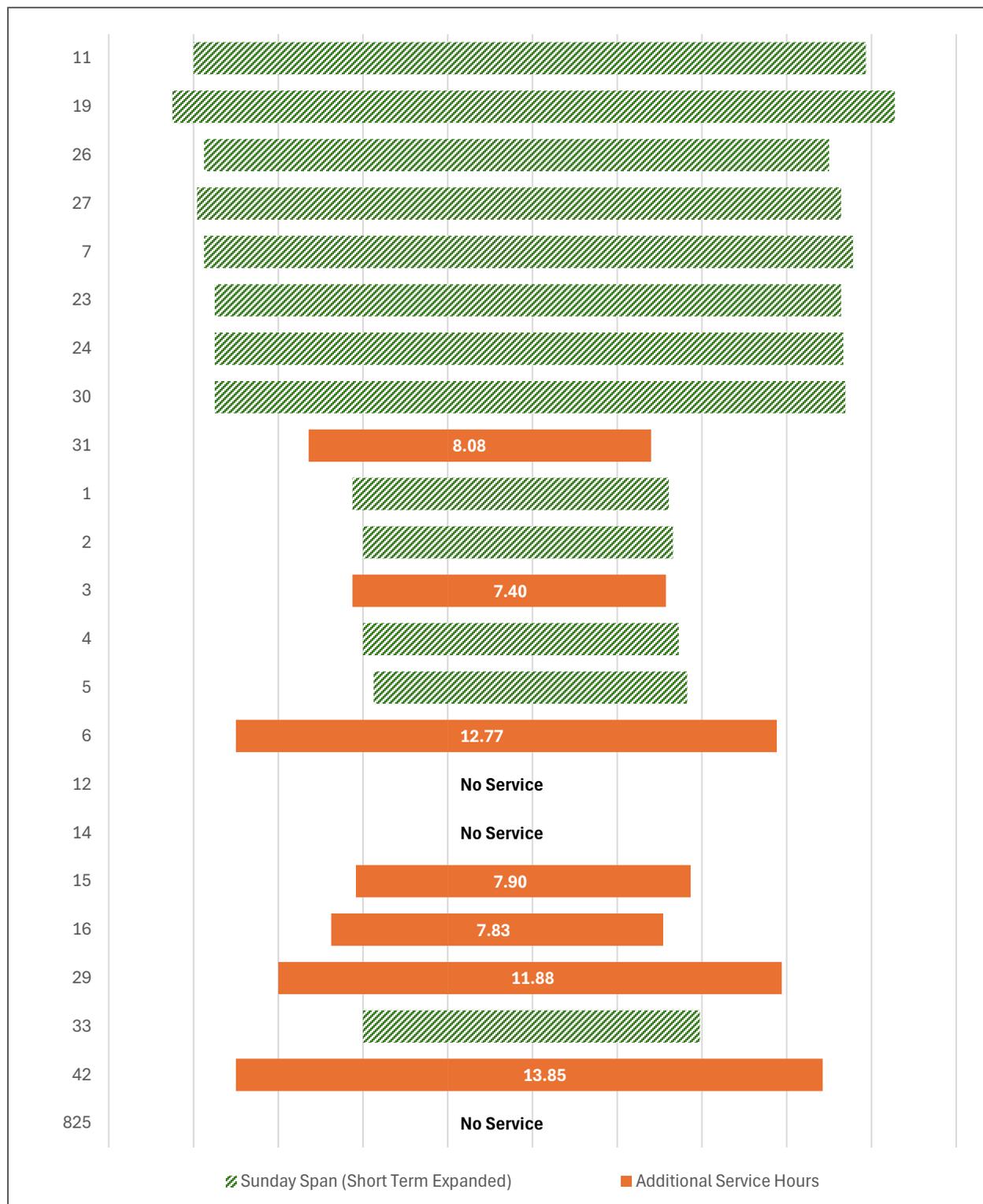


Figure 68. Increased Sunday Revenue Hours by Route: Mid-Term

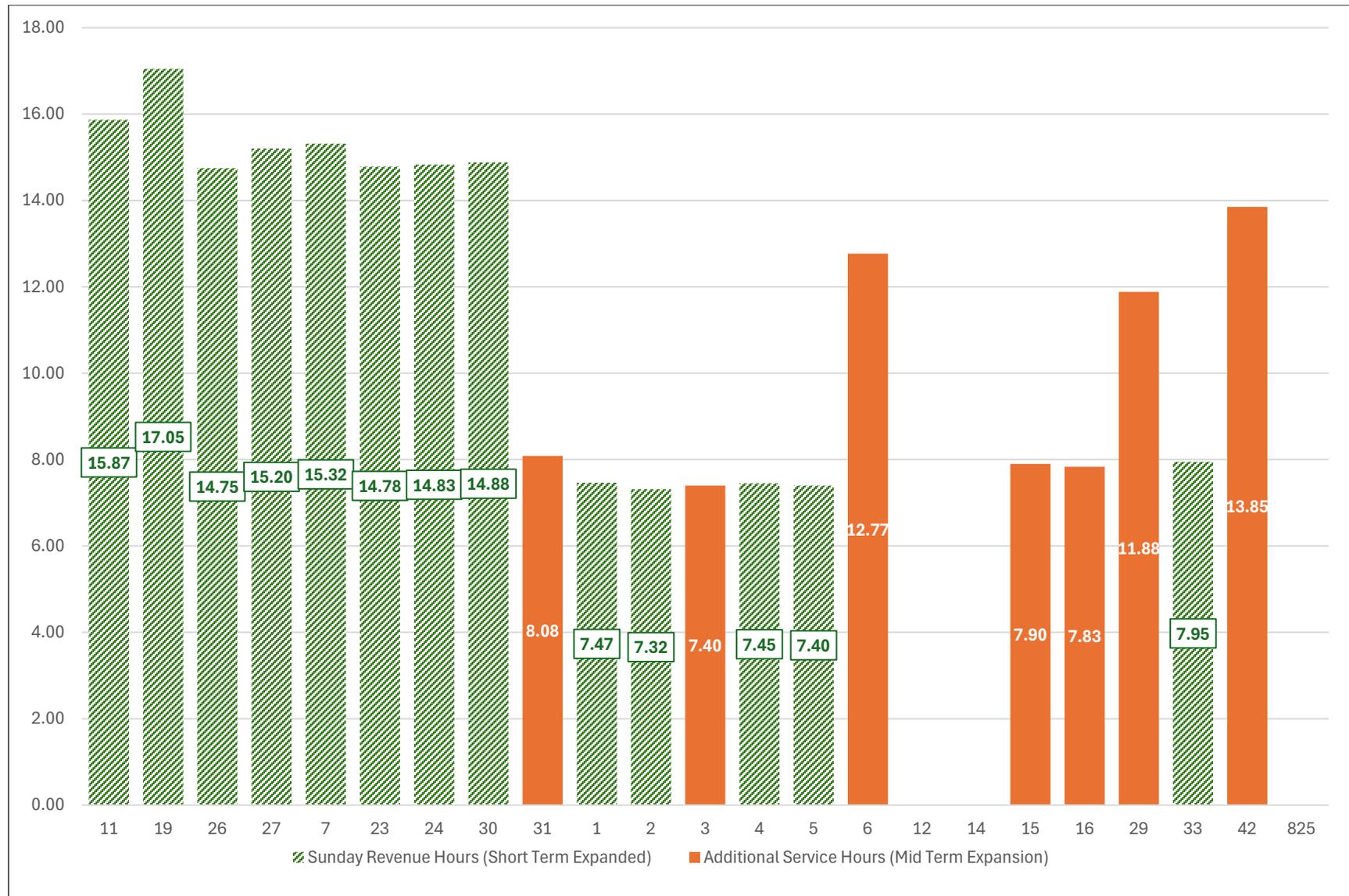


Figure 69. Minimum 9 AM to 5 PM Weekend Span on All Routes: Long-Term

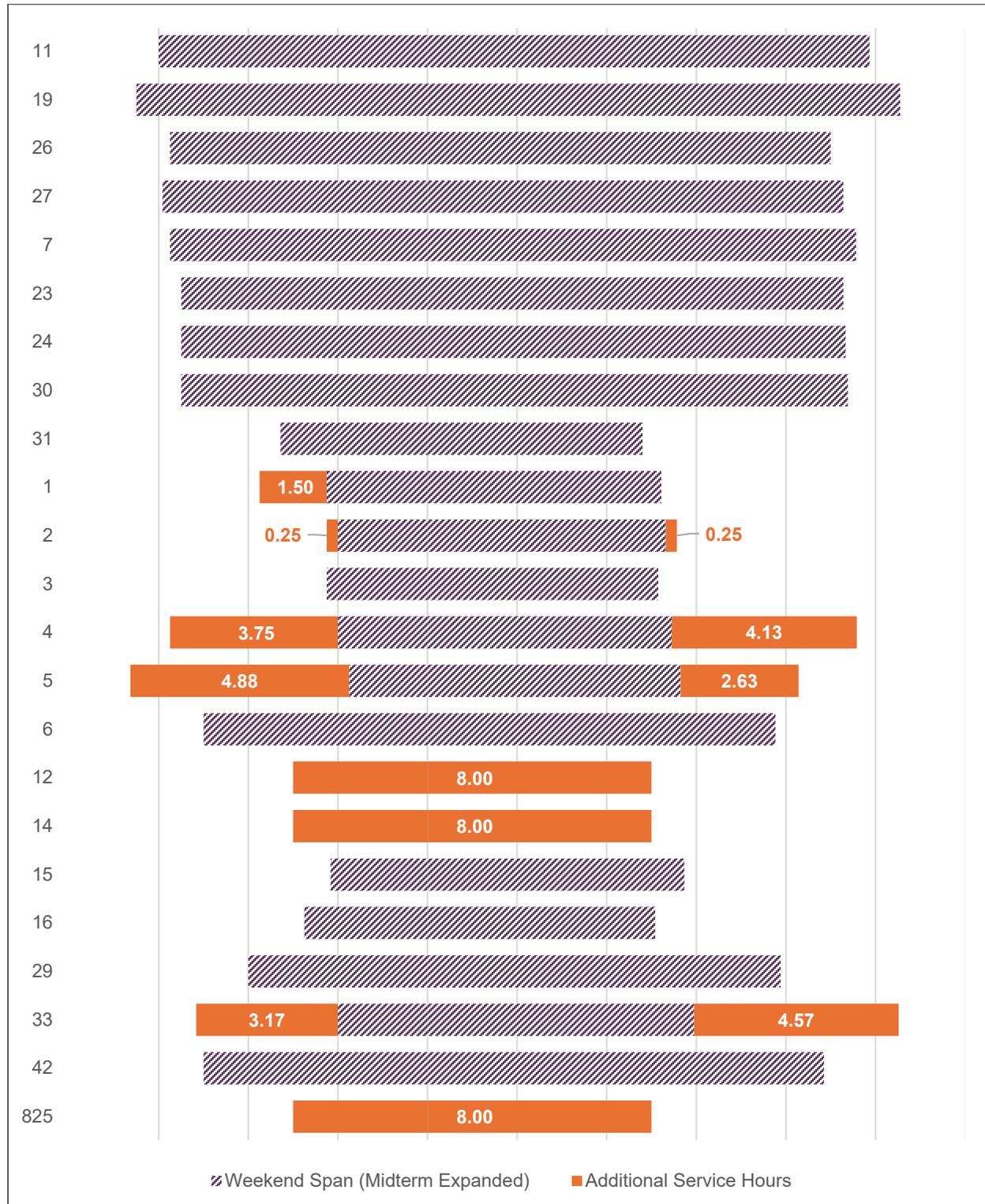


Figure 70. Increased Weekend Revenue Hours by Route: Long-Term

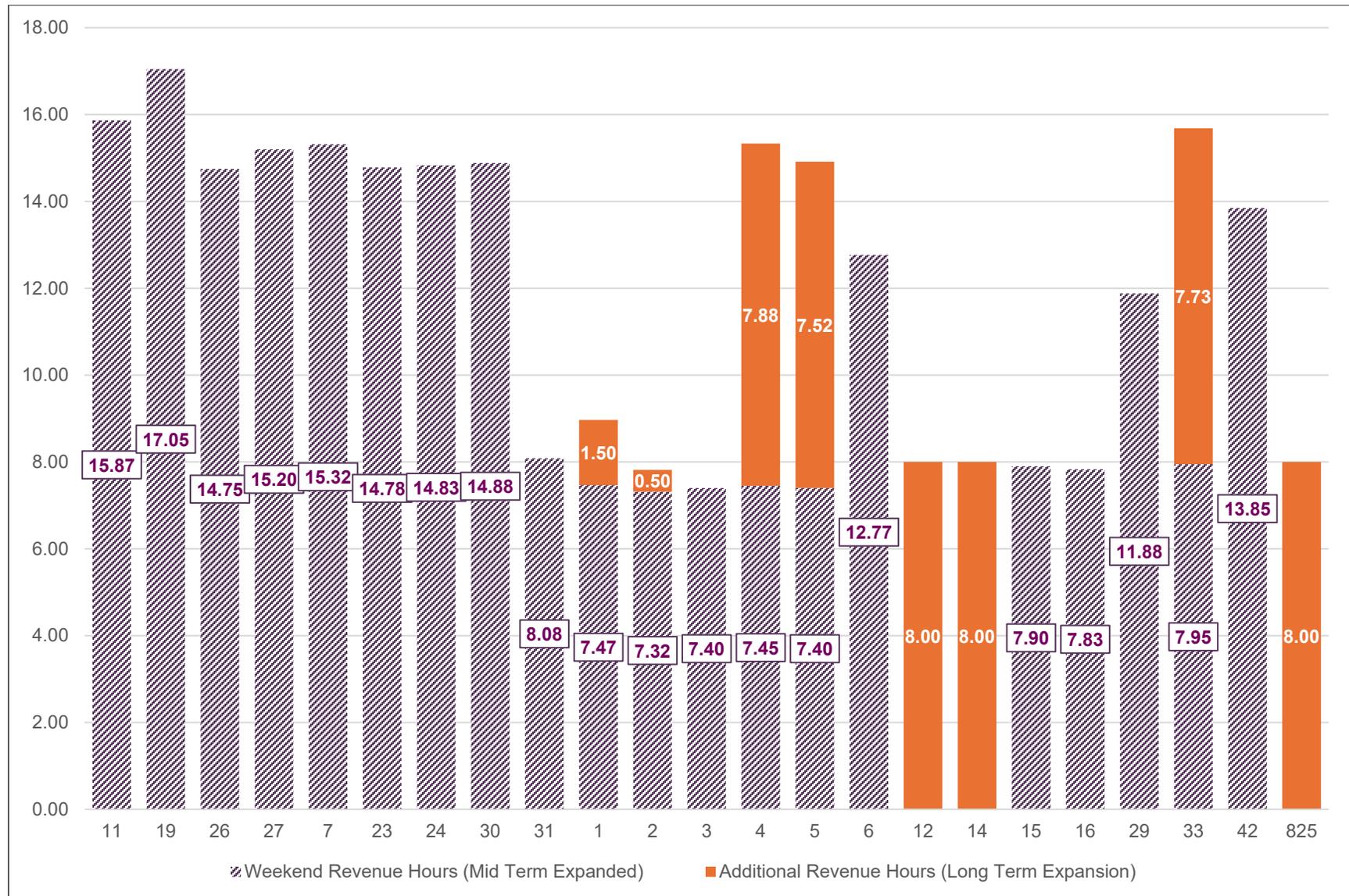
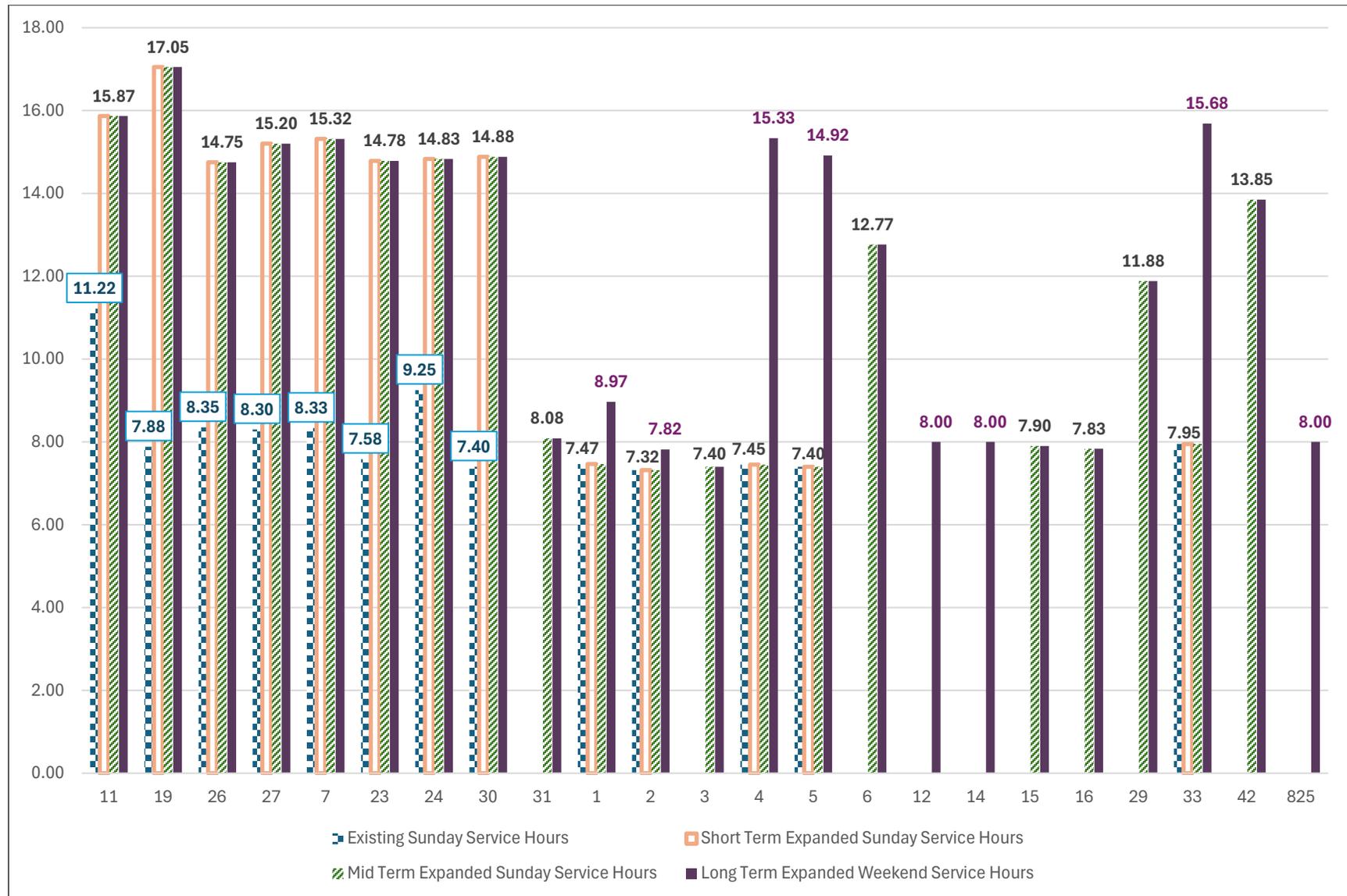


Figure 71. Expanded Sunday Service Hours in the Short- and Mid-Term and Expanded Weekend Service Hours in the Long-Term



A summary of weekday frequency improvements is provided in Table 38. Vehicle needs are detailed by frequency increase level in Figure 72, and service hour needs by frequency level are detailed in Figure 73. Under the frequency analysis, the following proposed changes would apply to Tier 1 routes:

- Low Increase: Increase peak frequency to 30 minutes
- High Increase: Increase peak frequency to 15 minutes

The following proposed changes would apply to Tier 2 routes:

- Low Increase: Increase peak frequency to 60 minutes
- High Increase: Increase peak frequency to 30 minutes

The following proposed changes would apply to Tier 3 routes:

- Increase peak frequency to 60 minutes

Table 38. Proposed Weekday Frequency Recommendations

Route	Existing		Short Term		Mid Term	
	Service Hours	Vehicle Count	Service Hours	Vehicle Count	Service Hours	Vehicle Count
Tier 1 Proposed Changes						
11	34.20	1.90	No Change	No Change	68.40	3.81
19	41.00	2.33	No Change	No Change	71.00	4.04
26	39.42	2.17	No Change	No Change	66.92	3.68
27	36.73	2.26	41.80	2.57	82.33	5.07
Tier 2 Proposed Changes						
7	29.97	2.10	No Change	No Change	No Change	No Change
23	26.50	1.76	27.38	1.82	No Change	No Change
24	28.42	1.89	No Change	No Change	No Change	No Change
30	36.90	2.84	No Change	No Change	No Change	No Change
31	24.60	1.64	41.00	2.73	No Change	No Change
Tier 3 Proposed Changes						
1	16.10	1.06	No Change	No Change	No Change	No Change
2	14.13	0.94	No Change	No Change	No Change	No Change
3	14.30	0.90	No Change	No Change	No Change	No Change
4	15.71	1.05	18.13	1.21	No Change	No Change
5	14.35	0.93	No Change	No Change	No Change	No Change
6	15.87	0.99	No Change	No Change	No Change	No Change
12	15.47	1.05	No Change	No Change	No Change	No Change
14	14.67	0.96	No Change	No Change	No Change	No Change
15	14.52	0.97	16.75	1.12	No Change	No Change
16	23.45	1.55	No Change	No Change	No Change	No Change
29	13.53	1.13	23.20	1.93	No Change	No Change
33	24.48	1.74	28.25	2.01	No Change	No Change
42	19.33	1.38	27.07	1.93	No Change	No Change
825	13.75	0.98	19.25	1.38	No Change	No Change

Figure 72. Vehicle Needs by Frequency Increase Level

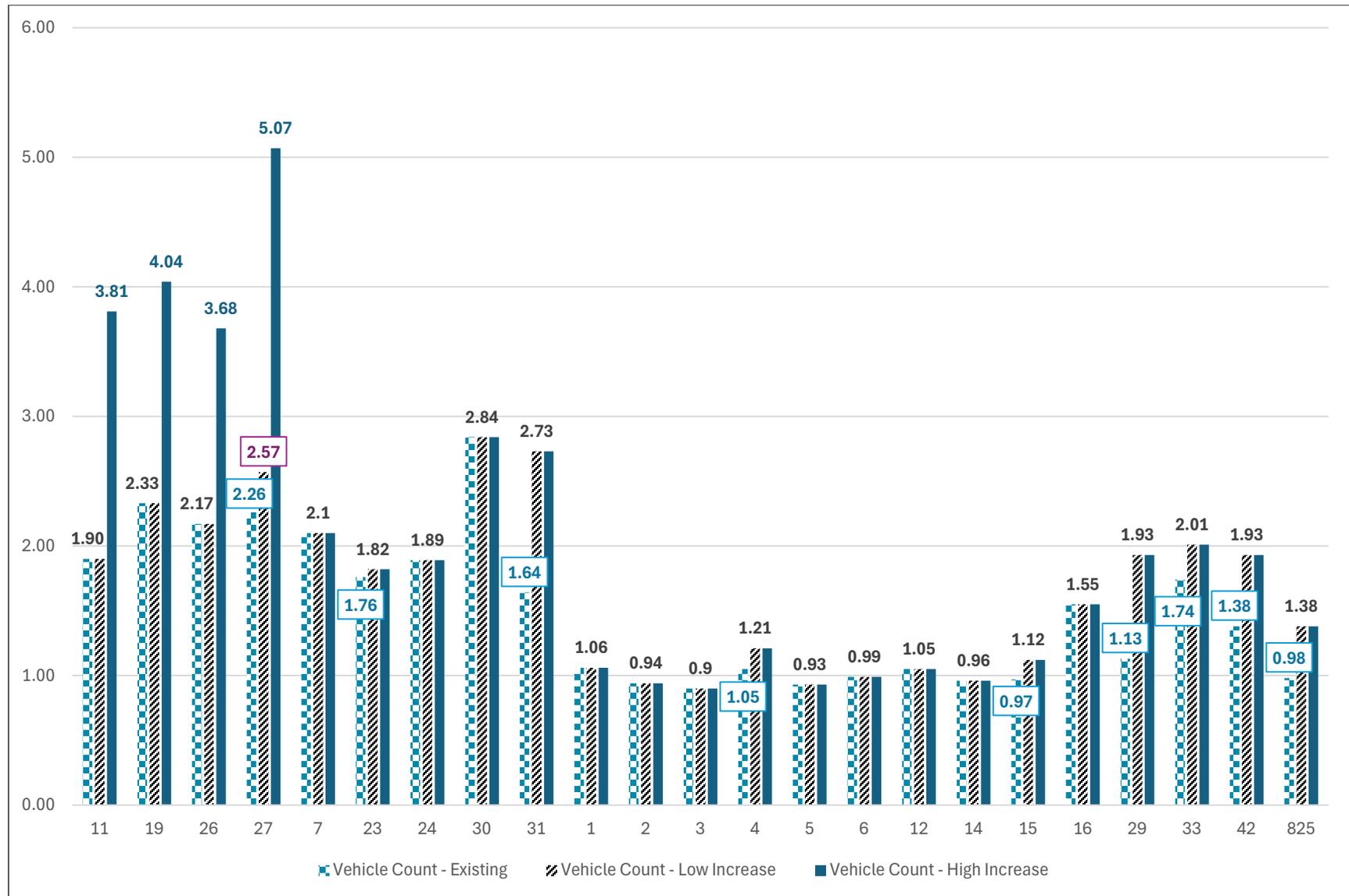
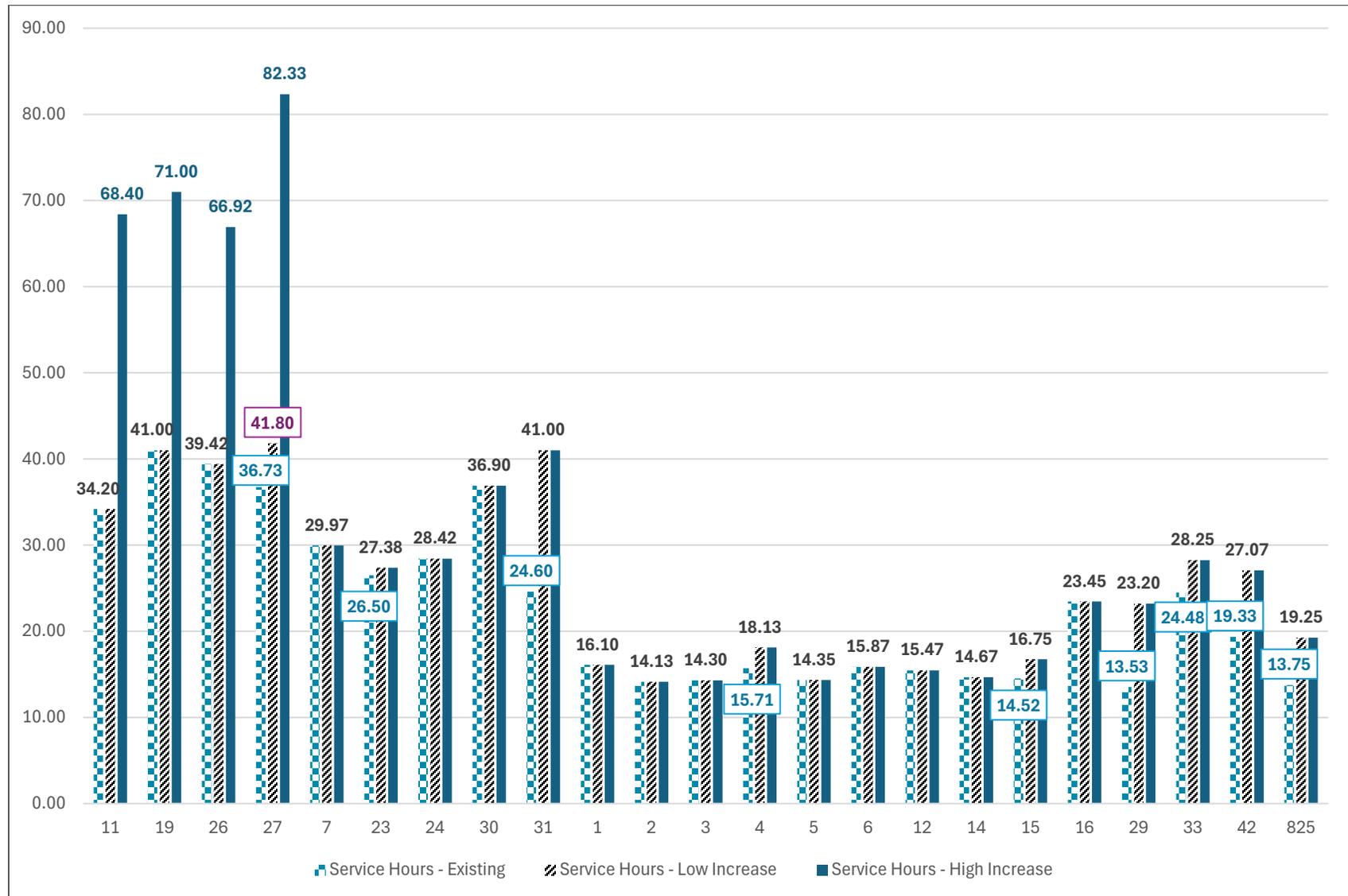


Figure 73. Service Hours by Frequency Increase Level



Appendix B Fares

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

This appendix explores fare policy for WRTA 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

WRTA's fixed route and demand response services have been fare-free since April 2020. WRTA continues to charge a fare (\$2.00) for its Via-WRTA on demand service. The following subsections describe the evolution of fare collection and revenue replacement— from fare suspension during the COVID-19 pandemic to the approval of funds for fare-free operations in the Commonwealth's FY 2026 budget— and WRTA's fare policy.

Fare-free Regional Transit - Statewide Background

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, including WRTA, responded by suspending fare collection as part of their COVID mitigation measures. Fare suspension durations varied across the Commonwealth and many RTAs reinstated fare collection once measures were in place to protect bus operators from exposure to COVID-19. WRTA has maintained fare-free operations since its initial fare collection pause in April 2020.

Try Transit Program

Beginning on November 25, 2022, and through the end of 2022, WRTA received \$404,937 to continuing suspending fare collection. WRTA had been fare-free since April 2020, but benefited in the last month of 2022 from the appropriation of \$2.5 million 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 makes 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. WRTA received \$1,994,623 and extended fare-free service for the full fiscal year, through June 2024.

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 and went beyond revenue replacement and extended funding to address the increased costs associated with increased ridership. WRTA received a grant of \$5,517,286 to support its ongoing 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 was the first year funds were appropriated, \$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. The Fair Share Amendment was expected to generate \$1.3 billion, \$605 million 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 prohibits RTAs from charging passenger fares for all fixed route services and paratransit services, subject to appropriation of funding to replace fare revenue. MassDOT is responsible for reimbursing RTAs for lost fare revenue attributable to the fare-free service mandate. WRTA is required to collect and report ridership data to MassDOT in a format and frequency prescribed by MassDOT.

RTA Fare Policy

WRTA last adopted their fare policy in the spring of 2017, which increased fares on fixed route and paratransit services to the rates shown in Table 39 and Table 40. Fares were suspended in April 2020.

Fares

Table 39. Fixed Route Fare Policy

Fare Product	Fare Price
Full-Fare (riders age 14+ or unaccompanied children age 9+)	\$1.75
Child (Age 5-13 Years Old with an Adult)	\$0.85
Child (under 5 Years Old within an Adult)	FREE
One Day Pass (Maximum 8 Rides)	\$4.50
Reduced One Day Pass (Children and Elderly/Disabled with ID; Maximum 8 Rides)	\$2.25
31 Day Pass	\$57.00
Reduced 31 Day Pass (Children and Elderly/Disabled with ID)	\$28.50
College Semester Pass (College Student with ID)	\$125.00

Source: WRTA Fare Policy, 2017 (suspended as of 2020)

Table 40. Paratransit Service Fare Policy

Fare Product	Fare Price
One-Way ADA Paratransit (In Town)	\$2.75
One-Way ADA Paratransit (One Town Away)	\$3.00
One-Way ADA Paratransit (Two Towns Away)	\$3.25
One-Way ADA Paratransit (Three or More Towns Away)	\$3.50
Non-ADA Paratransit (Base Fare) ^a	\$1.50

Source: WRTA Fare Policy, 2017 (suspended as of 2020)

^a Non-ADA Paratransit base fares start at \$1.50, and increase \$0.25 per town traveled.

Fare-free Program

Appropriations in the Massachusetts State Budget between FY 2023 and FY 2025 for fare-free transit operations provided the following annual funding amounts for WRTA:

- FY 2023 - Try Transit holiday promotion: \$404,937
- FY 2024 - Fare-free Implementation: \$1,994,623
- FY 2025 - Fare-free Implementation: \$5,517,286

Fare-free Transit Best Practices

Transit 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 percent to 60 percent for transit agencies in the United States. Agencies that went fully fare-free before the COVID-19 pandemic experienced 20 percent 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 percent 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 Impacts

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 can be reduced without the queues at the farebox; it also enables more efficient all-door boarding. Shorter dwell time can help improve on-time performance and service reliability.

Free fares may encourage more frequent shorter rides by passengers who may have otherwise walked. Despite some agencies experiencing 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, as is the case for WRTA, which can be mitigated with increased spacing that balances operational efficiency with passenger access. WRTA has an ongoing bus stop study to address challenges associated with bus stop spacing and to improve on-time performance, increase route efficiencies, and improve the rider experience.

Financial Health

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 important to the maintenance of fare-free transit. Small to mid-sized agencies, like Massachusetts' RTAs, where fare revenue is a small portion of operating revenue, face less financial difficulty in implementing and maintaining 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 has been documented as consuming over 25 percent of fare revenue at some 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 high costs associated with providing high capacity service to accommodate increased ridership.

A bigger challenge for WRTA may be the complementary paratransit service provided for older adults 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 tend to fall and the 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.

Future of Fare-free Regional Transit

Risks

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 Laws 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 WRTA 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.

Opportunities

Fare-free transit removes a financial barrier for all riders and benefits social service agencies, school districts, community colleges, colleges and universities, and other community-based organizations that have historically made bulk pass purchases.

Opportunities for revenue enhancements to replace farebox collections are limited. High 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 high ridership may present more opportunities for vehicle exterior advertising space.

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 regarding 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 C 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 WRTA 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.

RTA-specific goals and studies are another important source of information supporting specific RTA actions regarding environmental quality. Together, the statewide and regional 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 percent 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), 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

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 2024b).
- **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 older adults, 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 policy is supportive of maximizing transit ridership.

- CMRPC/*Greater Worcester Priority Climate Action Plan 2024-2035* (CMRPC 2024):
 - Continue fare-free public transportation
 - Reduce vehicle travel demand
 - Improve mobility and incentivize mode shift from personal vehicles to public transportation
 - Enhance last mile connections from transit
- Central Massachusetts Metropolitan Planning Organization (CMMPO)/*Coordinated Public Transit Human Services Transportation Plan* (CMMPO 2024):
 - Continue fare-free transit services
 - Increase COA capacity to manage more transit requests
 - Engage large employers, chambers of commerce, and senior centers in transportation solutions
 - Increase and improve transit services and connectivity
 - Update paratransit scheduling procedures to reduce travel times and trip length
 - Diversify transit promotion and pair Travel Training with health professionals
- CMMPO/*2050 Connections* (CMMPO 2023):
 - Continue the downward trend in drive alone commute modes
 - Maintain or increase the percentage of environmental justice population that intersects WRTA bus routes
 - Update and improve transit bus stop signs and surroundings
 - Identify viable options for interested WRTA communities not served by fixed route transit
 - Improve transit reliability, multimodal connections, and accessibility to all users
 - Maintain fare-free operations
 - Prioritize the construction of reliable, safe, and affordable public transit
- CMMPO/*2026-2030 Transportation Improvement Program* (Draft) (CMMPO 2025):
 - Encourage mode shift with transit and active transportation amenities
 - Enhance multimodal integration and connectivity
 - Promote efficient transit operations
 - Improve access to transit

Serving Transit-Oriented and Transit-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.

Regional Efforts

The following regional policy is supportive of serving transit-oriented or transit-dependent places.

- *CMRPC/Greater Worcester Priority Climate Action Plan 2024-2035 (CMRPC 2024):*
 - Reduce overall vehicle travel demand and improve mobility for all modes of transportation
 - Pursue opportunities to support transit-oriented development
 - Enhance last mile connections from transit
- *CMMPO/Coordinated Public Transit Human Services Transportation Plan (CMMPO 2024):*
 - Develop a Housing Coordination Plan with emphasis on transit-oriented development
- *Southern Worcester County Economic Development Organization/2023-2028 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy:*
 - Strongly support fixing insufficient infrastructure, increasing transit options, and making town centers more walkable
 - Improve transportation systems through additional first and last mile connections
- *CMMPO/2050 Connections (CMMPO 2023):*
 - Invest in high density, mixed use, and transit-oriented developments

Vehicle Emission Reductions

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). 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 policies are supportive of electrification.

- CMRPC /*Greater Worcester Priority Climate Action Plan 2024-2035* (CMRPC 2024):
 - Scale up fuel switching efforts for public transportation vehicles.
 - Clean transit, electrify regional public transit buses, and install associated charging infrastructure
- CMMPO/*Coordinated Public Transit Human Services Transportation Plan* (CMMPO 2024):
 - Support WRTA TAM state of good repair goals and vehicle decarbonization
- CMMPO/2050 Connections (CMMPO 2023):
 - Reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote sustainable practices
- CMMPO/2026-2030 Transportation Improvement Program (Draft) (CMMPO 2025):
 - Continue investing in new support vehicles, shuttle buses, and hybrid diesel buses

Challenges and Opportunities

WRTA continues to explore investments that encourage mode shift from single-occupancy vehicles to transit, in alignment with Commonwealth and regional plans for the environment. WRTA supports mode shift through continued fare-free service, now in the agency's sixth year. Additional efforts to attract riders include planned service improvements and expansions, system rebrand, and implementation of bus stop spacing and amenity improvements. These efforts aim to support WRTA's visibility and attractiveness to riders and non-riders alike and encourage further mode shift from personal vehicles to public transit.

WRTA will continue to explore alternative methods of reducing both its own and its communities' carbon footprint, including the continued use of hybrid buses.