



**WRTA**

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**WRTA Public Meeting  
On the Move: Grafton & Northbridge  
(Routes A & B) Transportation Assessment  
Monday, June 15, 2026**

## Why undertake this study?

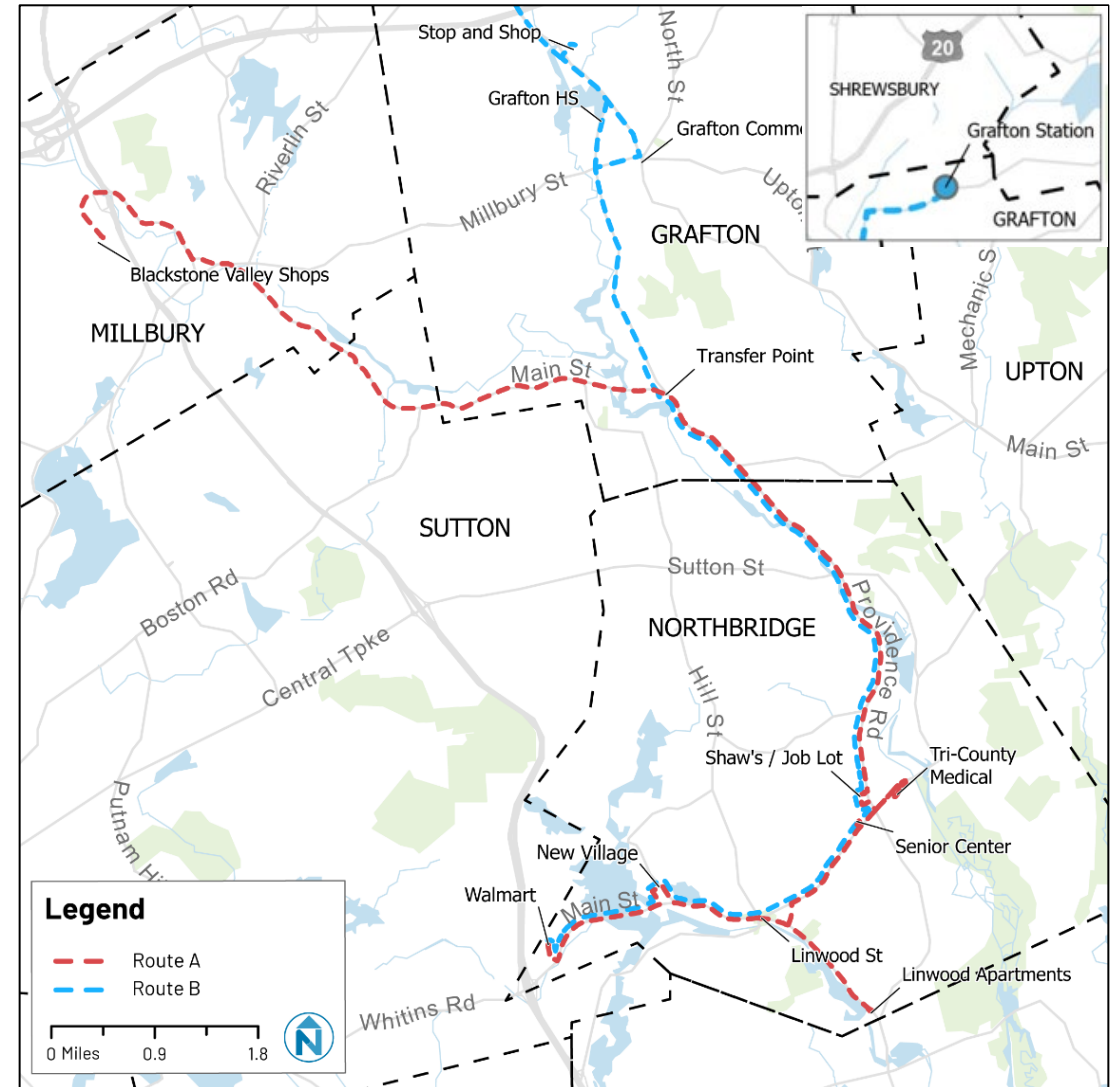
- **Context:** WRTA's Route A and B shuttles have been in operation since 2013. The routes have historically carried very low ridership. The new costs from WRTA's fixed route operator have increased. The combination of low ridership and higher costs make the continuation of these shuttles unsustainable.
- **Scope:** Assess all public transportation services in Grafton and Northbridge, including WRTA Routes A and B, Council on Aging vans, and volunteer driver programs, and identify options for providing future local service.
- **Goal:** Align resources with each community's public transportation needs.



**Worcester  
Regional  
Transit  
Authority**

# Overview

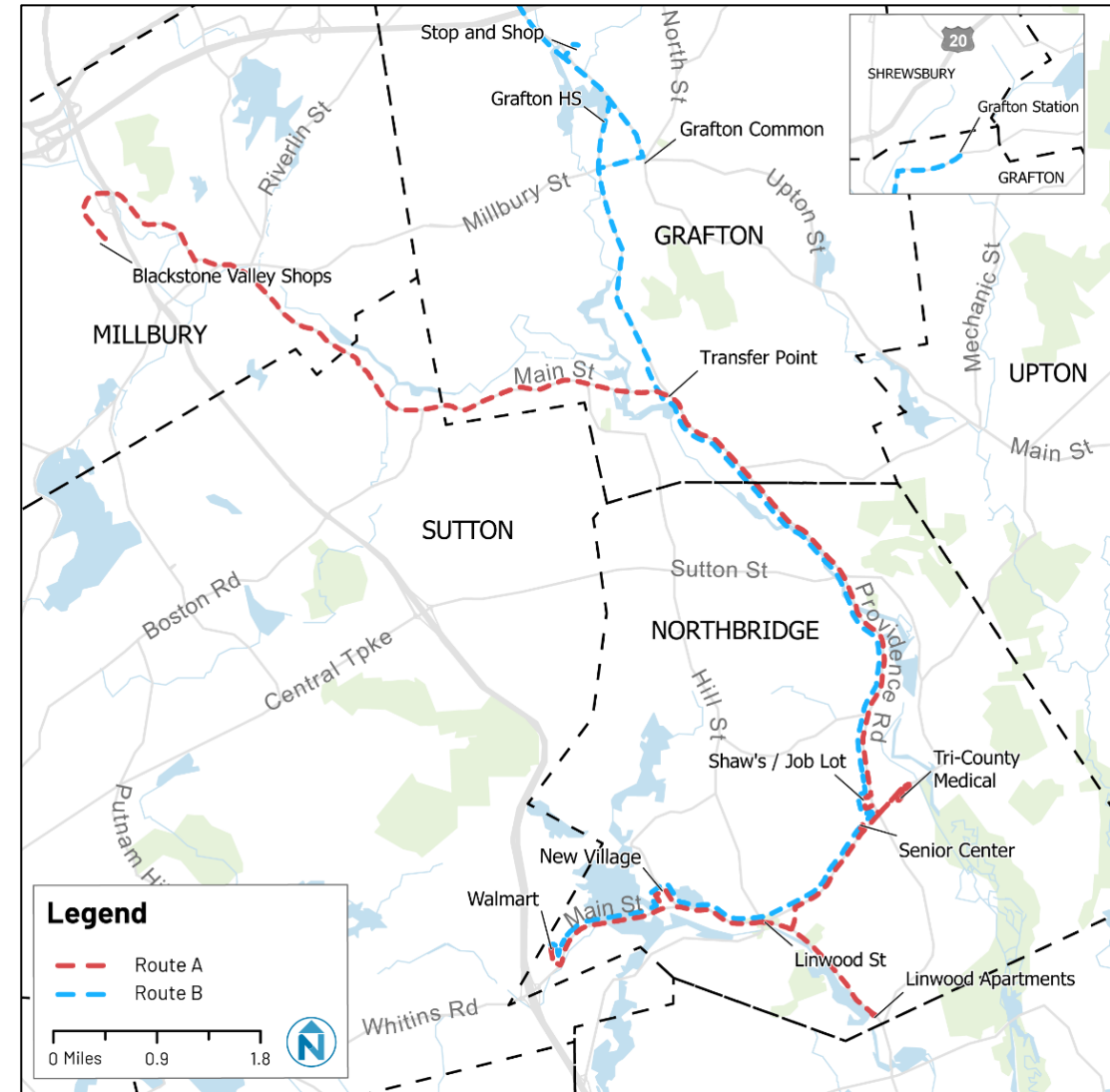
- Routes A and B operate as flag-stop shuttles on weekdays between Northbridge and Grafton
  - Both operate on the same route between the Northbridge Walmart and the Route 122/Route 122A intersection in South Grafton and buses can deviate up to  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile from the route (reservations required).
  - Route A serves also Linwood Apartments and Tri-County Medical Center in Northbridge and the Shops at Blackstone Valley in Millbury.
  - Route B also serves Grafton Village and Grafton MBTA Station (not every trip).



# Route A Service Characteristics

- Operates as a flag-stop service on weekdays from approximately 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. between Northbridge and Millbury via Grafton.
  - 7.6 revenue hours per day
  - Operates closed door between in Sutton & Millbury serving just the Blackstone Valley Shops (connection to WRTA Route 4).
- Serves approximately 12 riders per day (1.6 riders per revenue hour (November 2025)).
  - Peak weekday was Wednesday and peak hour was 3-4 p.m.

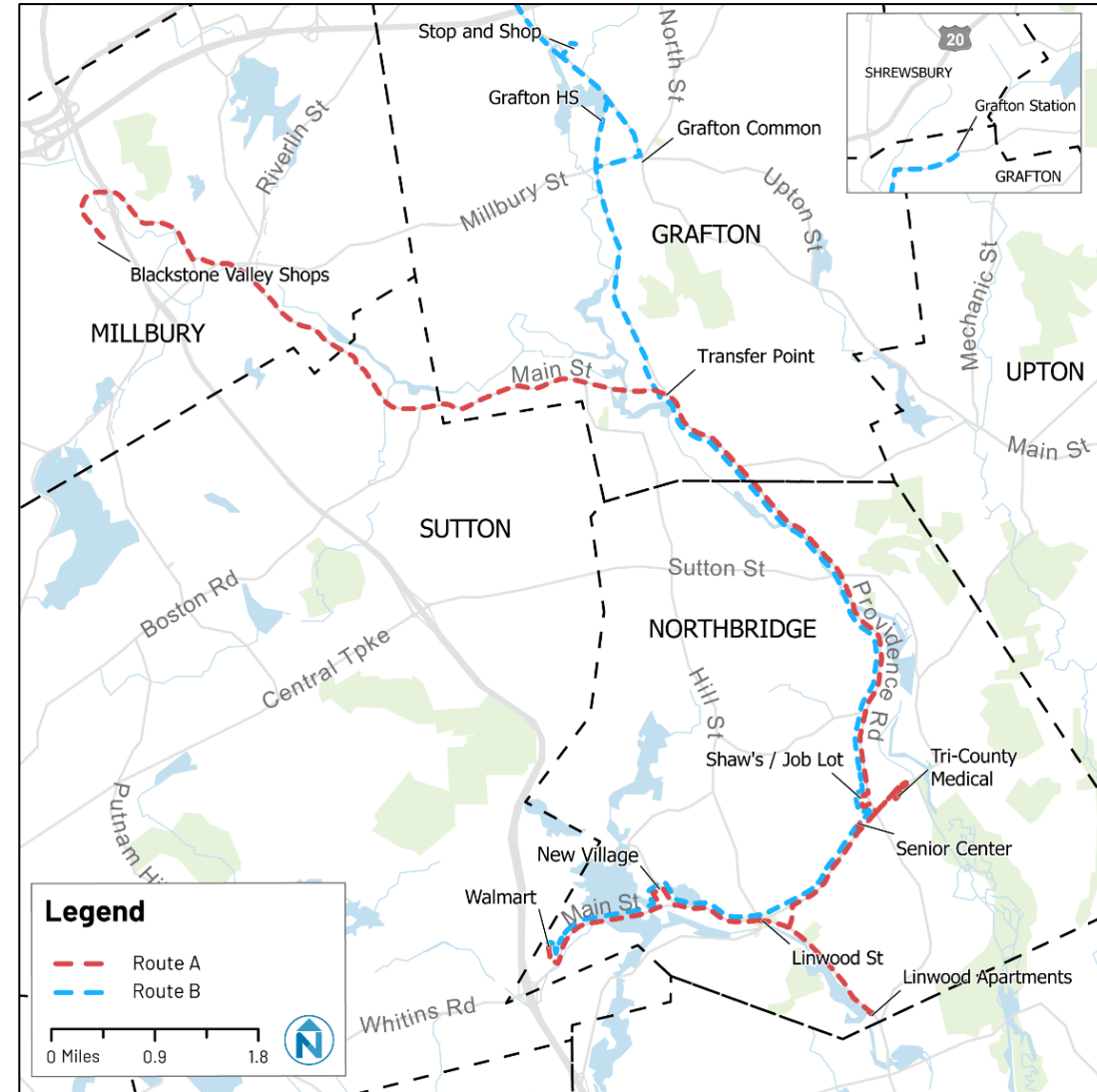
Route A Shuttle Shown in Red



# Route B Service Characteristics

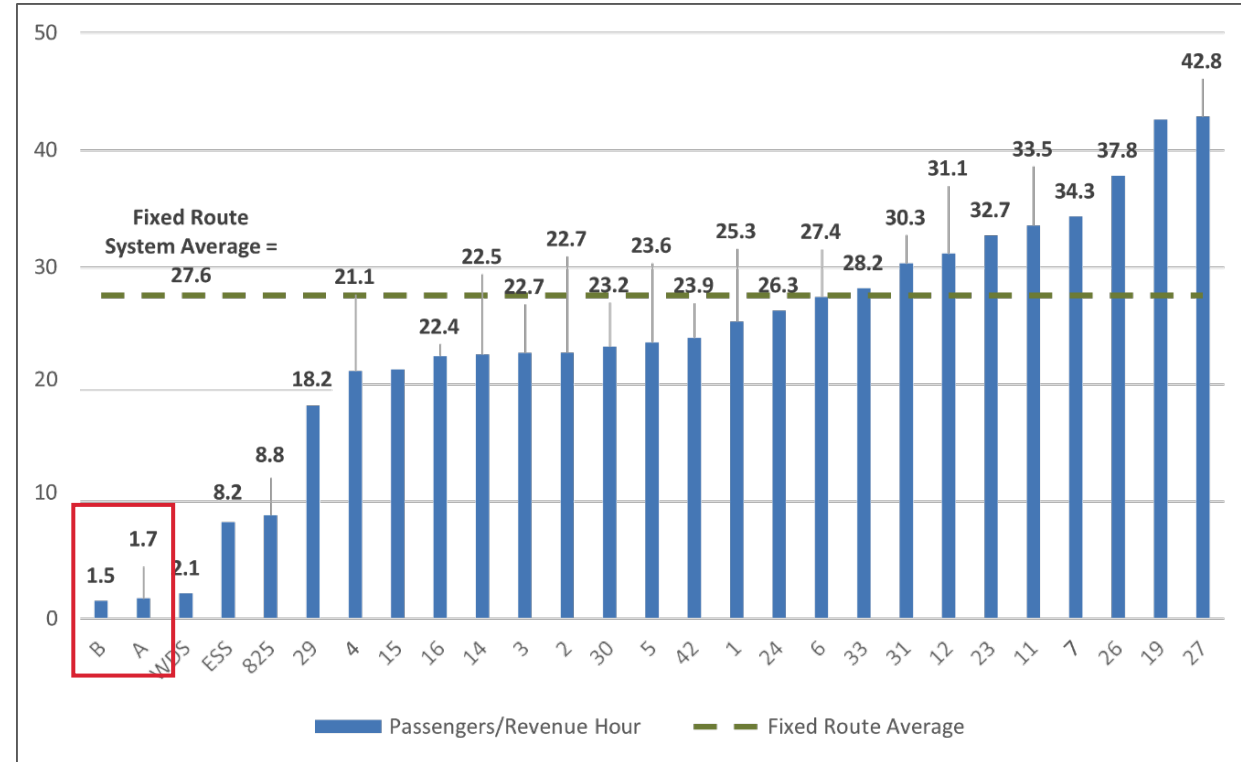
- Operates on weekdays from 5:20 a.m. to 7:35 p.m. between Northbridge and Grafton.
  - 12.9 revenue hours per day
  - One early trip and all trips after 5:15 p.m. operate closed door between Northbridge New Village and Grafton MBTA Station
- Serves approximately 22 riders per day (1.7 riders per revenue hour (November 2025 data)
  - Peak weekday was Monday and peak hour was 2-3 p.m.

Route B Shuttle Shown in Blue



# WRTA Route Productivity

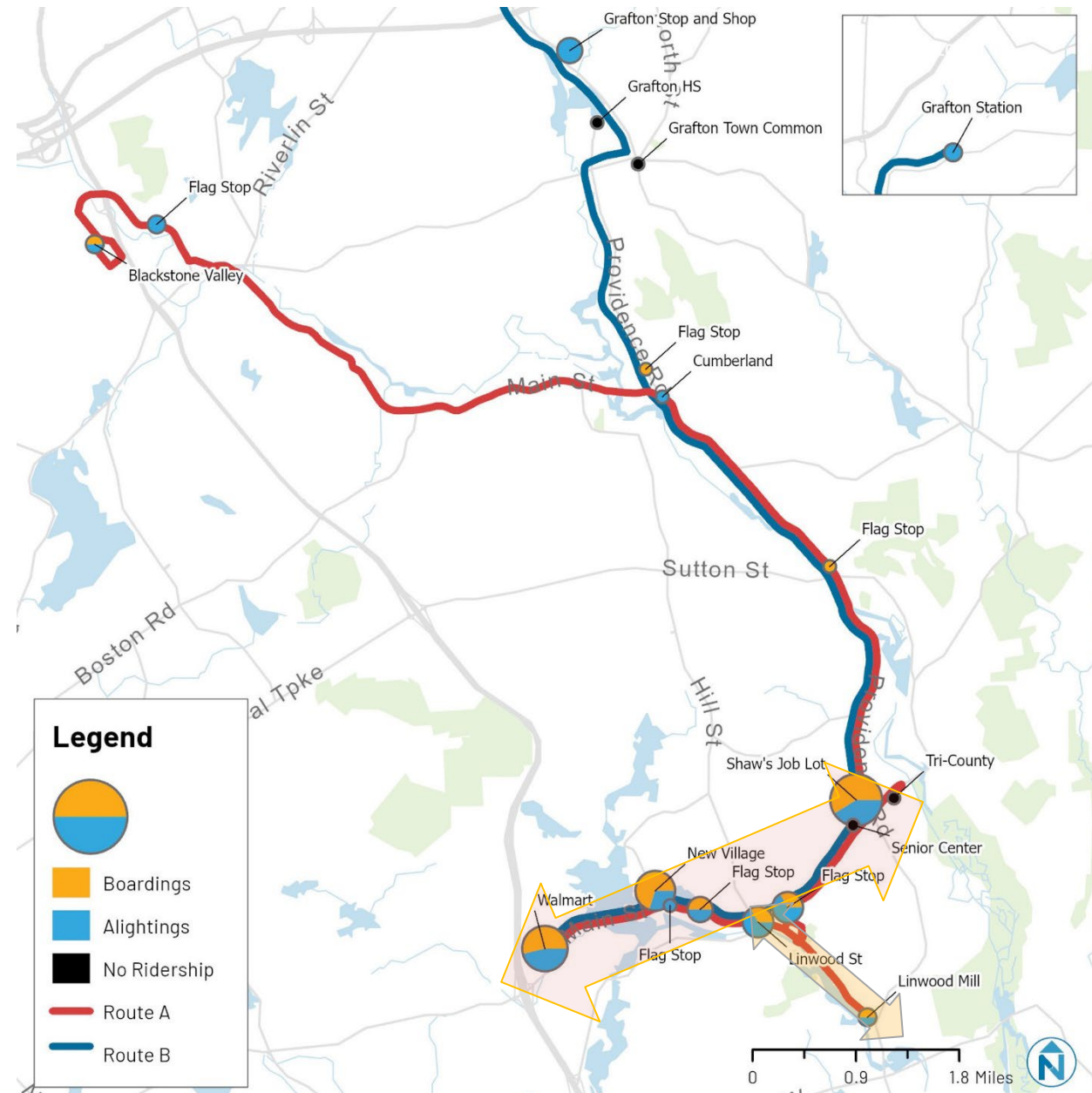
- Routes A and B are the lowest performing routes in the WRTA bus network.
- The chart to the right shows route productivity (passengers per revenue hour) for all WRTA routes in FY 2024.
  - The systemwide average for all WRTA bus routes was 27.6 passengers per revenue hour (PPRH).
  - Route B operated at **1.5 PPRH**.
  - Route A operated at **1.7 PPRH**.
  - While a different service model, the average COA provided 2.0 PPRH.



Source: WRTA

# Feb. 2026 Field Observations

- The study consultant rode both routes in February 2026 and confirmed the following.
- **Route A:** 12 riders observed
  - Travel between Shaw's and Blackstone Valley Shops accounted for nearly half of the route's run time but served very few riders
- **Route B:** 24 riders observed
  - Ridership north of Shaw's was similarly low
  - The deviation to serve Grafton Town Common added time but not riders
  - Several trips late in the day were well behind schedule
- **Both Routes:** most trips took place in Northbridge between Walmart and Shaw's/Job Lot with modest demand to/from Linwood



# Northbridge Council on Aging

- Northbridge COA operates a shuttle service and a volunteer driver program.
  - Also the only member community of the WRTA that does not receive any demand response service from the Authority.
- Two town-owned vehicles are available, but most days only one is in use with two part-time drivers.
- Service operates Monday-Thursday and Friday morning to Shaw's Plaza, in-town medical and general appointments, and Walmart.
- Trips are booked via MySeniorCenter; schedules developed manually, passengers call the Senior Center to schedule.
- Senior center trips are free; otherwise, fare is \$1 per trip.
- Service is “personalized.”

2025 Northbridge COA Statistics

Purpose	Trips	Percent
Shopping/Errands	1,312	31%
Medical	956	22%
Work	717	17%
Senior Center	1,003	24%
Other	274	6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,262</b>	<b>100%</b>
Unique riders	115	
Trips/rider	37	

Source: Northbridge COA

# Grafton Council on Aging

- Services for residents 60+ and others with documented disability
  - One town-owned van, one hybrid minivan (town maintains)
  - One WRTA owned and maintained van
- Three part-time drivers; one full-time transportation coordinator
- Operates weekdays 9 a.m. – 3 p.m. in-town and serves out-of-town medical on different days (see right)
- Reservations required 48-hours in advance
- Ridership in 2025 was 7,200 passengers
  - WRTA van had 3,111 passengers in 2025 (43%)



## Route A and B Costs

- Northbridge and Grafton's assessments only cover a portion of the operating costs for Routes A and B
- Based on the FY2025 budget, the WRTA provided a subsidy was \$28,676
- The increase in costs reflects labor-related expenses established through the operating contractor's workforce agreement.
- Future costs to operate these routes could more than double
  - With modest assessment and subsidy increases of 2-2.5% per year, the gap is too large to continue to operate these routes.

Town	Grafton	Northbridge	Total
Current assessment	\$101,903	\$138,647	\$240,550
Operating cost	\$108,370	\$160,856	\$269,226
<b>Shortfall</b>	<b>\$(6,467)</b>	<b>\$(22,209)</b>	<b>\$(28,676)</b>

Source: WRTA Financial Audit FY2025

# Alternative Service Approaches

**Task:** Identify options that work with existing assessment resources and available transportation services while considering the advantages and disadvantages of each.

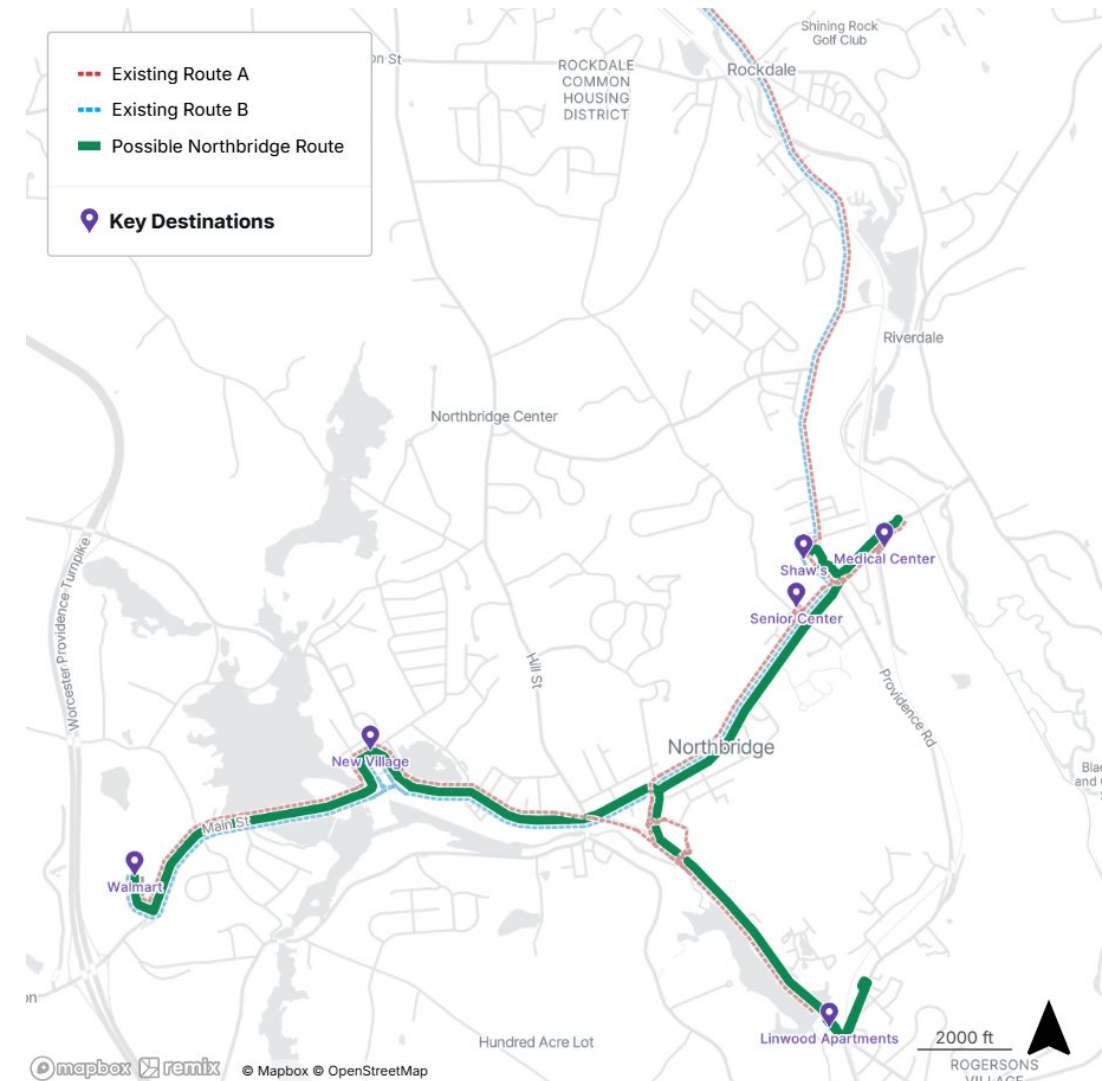
Options include:

**1. Operate reduced WRTA shuttle in Northbridge; eliminate Grafton service**

**2. Implement WRTA's mobility management model to Grafton and Northbridge COA services**

# 1. Operate Reduced Service in Northbridge

- **What is this service?**
  - Single route in Northbridge (no service in Grafton)
  - Applies all of Northbridge's \$140,000 assessment (adjusted for inflation)
  - At higher operating cost, translates to 1,200 revenue hours (FY 2027), which supports **6 hours per day** (9 a.m. to 3 p.m.), **4 days/week**
- **What are the benefits?**
  - Would continue to serve the busiest parts of the current service
- **What are potential drawbacks?**
  - Limited operating schedule, unattractive to current and future riders
  - Because of annual cost escalation, fewer service hours likely will be available each year
  - No connections to Grafton MBTA Station or to the rest of the WRTA network



## 2. Integrate Grafton and Northbridge COAs into the Mobility Management Model

- **What is this program?**
  - WRTA assumes responsibility for paratransit trip reservations, scheduling, dispatch, and owns and maintains fleet
  - Towns hire and compensate drivers (wages and fringe), cover fuel, and obtain vehicle insurance.
  - Vehicles serve each town (most often) and surrounding areas (occasionally)
- **What are the benefits?**
  - Town's contribution to COA transportation lowered dramatically, as WRTA reimburses Town for wages, fuel, insurance
  - No vehicle maintenance or need to handle reservations and scheduling
  - Customers can travel regionally including to medical appointments in Worcester
- **What are potential drawbacks?**
  - Trip reservations process no longer involves communicating with COA staff
  - Some trips may be handled by drivers not familiar to customers
  - Limited to only customers with disabilities and/or at least 60 years old

# Summary

- Routes A and B are the lowest-performing WRTA bus routes
- Future costs to operate these routes will more than double to and will increase approximately 5% per year thereafter, rendering them financially unsustainable.
- Options to continue to operate some service include:
  - Limited fixed-route service in Northbridge (4 days/week, 6 hours/day)
  - Integrate Grafton and Northbridge into WRTA's mobility management model for paratransit service

## Next Steps

- Presented service options to both towns, and to the WRTA Advisory Board
- WRTA Advisory Board voted to release service options for public review and comment at its May 21, 2026 meeting
- Administration conducts public meetings in both towns, and virtually, in June
- Administration presents public meeting findings at July WRTA Advisory Board meeting
- WRTA Advisory Board votes to endorse recommended service option
  - Timeline for potential elimination of Routes A & B, and potential onboarding of Grafton & Northbridge to MMM has yet to be determined

# Public Meeting Schedule

Meeting	Date	Time	Meeting Location
Northbridge – Meeting # 1	Monday, June 15, 2026	1:00 – 2:00 PM	Northbridge Town Hall, Level 1 (Selectmen’s Meeting Room)
Northbridge – Meeting # 2	Monday, June 15, 2026	4:00 – 5:00 PM	Northbridge Town Hall, Level 1 (Selectmen’s Meeting Room)
Grafton – Meeting # 3	Tuesday, June 16, 2026	1:00 – 2:00 PM	Grafton Municipal Center, Conference Room A
Grafton – Meeting # 4	Tuesday, June 16, 2026	4:00 – 5:00 PM	Grafton Municipal Center, Conference Room A
Virtual Public Meeting	Monday, June 22, 2026	6:00 – 7:00 PM	Virtual; Zoom <a href="https://qr1.be/8COCB0">https://qr1.be/8COCB0</a> 

# How to Provide Comments

In-Person	At All WRTA Public Meetings At the Virtual Public Meeting
By Email	<a href="mailto:Comments@TheRTA.com">Comments@TheRTA.com</a>
By Website	<a href="https://therta.com/the-extra-mile/">https://therta.com/the-extra-mile/</a>
By Phone	508-791-WRTA (9782), Option 2
By Mail	WRTA Director of Operations & Planning 60 Foster St. Worcester, MA 01608
<b>COMMENTS MUST BE SUBMITTED BY 4:30 PM FRIDAY, JULY 10, 2026</b>	



**WRTA**



**Thank you for attending today's public meeting!**