

On the Move: An Assessment of Current Transportation Services, Community Needs and Future Options for Grafton and Northbridge

Final Report

September 2026



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Worcester Regional Transit Authority (WRTA) has operated Routes A and B in Grafton and Northbridge since 2013. Route A provides service between Walmart in Northbridge and the Shoppes at Blackstone Valley. Route B provides service between Walmart in Northbridge and the Grafton MBTA station (during commuting hours) and Stop and Shop in Grafton (midday).

Both routes operate as flag-stop services, meaning riders along the route must hail the bus. There are no bus stop signs, though the routes provide front-door service to Walmart, Linwood Mills (Route A only), the Northbridge Senior Center, Tri-Valley Medical Center (Route A only), Shaw's, and Stop and Shop (Route B only). Buses can deviate up to $\frac{3}{4}$ mile from the route with an advance reservation.

Routes A and B are the lowest performing routes in the WRTA bus network. Route A serves approximately 1.6 riders per hour, while Route B serves approximately 1.7 riders per hour. At the same time, the WRTA's cost to operate these routes continues to increase, rendering them financially unsustainable.

The WRTA, and its consultant Nelson\Nygaard, undertook this study to assess all public transportation options in the towns of Grafton and Northbridge before identifying alternatives for future service. The goal of this study is to align available resources with mobility solutions that would meet each community's public transportation need.

Following field observations, data analysis, and community discussions, the project team advanced two alternative paths forward:

- Operate a reduced fixed route schedule that would operate only along Main and Church Streets in Northbridge, the area with the highest ridership today.
- Eliminate Routes A and B and integrate Grafton and Northbridge into WRTA's Mobility Management Model.

Both alternatives, and the process of developing them, are detailed in the following sections of this report. The WRTA presented both service options to town leaders, WRTA Advisory Board members, and the public. The WRTA hosted five public meetings, two in each town and one virtually.

Ultimately, the WRTA Advisory Board voted in its July 2026 meeting to eliminate Routes A and B and coordinate with Grafton and Northbridge on their integration into the Mobility Management Model (MMM). Routes A and B are set to be eliminated on August 28, 2026. The timeline for integrating Grafton and Northbridge into the MMM is still to be determined.

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MAIN REPORT

INTRODUCTION

The Worcester Regional Transit Authority (WRTA) operates two low-performing shuttle routes (Routes A and B) in Grafton and Northbridge. In addition, through their Councils on Aging (COAs), both towns operate local services and support trips for out-of-town medical appointments.

Routes A and B have had historically low ridership since they began operating in 2013 and are the lowest performing routes in the WRTA system. The WRTA's transit management contractor's most recent collective bargaining agreement with its vehicle operators changed compensation and labor categories, which in turn significantly increased operating costs for the routes. The increased operating costs and continued low ridership means that continuing to operate Routes A and B is not sustainable.

In anticipation of necessary changes to Routes A and B, the WRTA commissioned this study by Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates (the consultant) to assess services, analyze funding, and evaluate and recommend a path forward.

This report is organized under a few distinct themes:

- This introduction provides an overview of Routes A and B, their operating characteristics, performance, and the resources needed to operate each route.
- The report then outlines other public transportation options in Grafton and Northbridge, namely services associated with each town's COA.
- The report then presents the alternatives evaluated by the consultant team, including their benefits and tradeoffs, and the community discussions that followed the development of both alternatives.
- The report concludes with an ultimate recommendation to eliminate both routes and integrate both towns into the WRTA's Mobility Management Model (MMM), which was adopted by the WRTA Advisory Board in their July 2026 meeting.

ROUTES A AND B

Route A operates as a community shuttle route that runs on weekdays between approximately 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. The bus travels along a fixed route between Walmart in Northbridge and the Shoppes at Blackstone Valley.

Route B operates for a longer span of service, every weekday between 5:20 a.m. and 7:35 p.m. The bus travels along a fixed route between Walmart in Northbridge and Grafton Commuter Rail Station (during commuting hours) and Stop and Shop in Grafton (midday). The additional early morning and evening hours on Route B are designed to accommodate commuter trips to Grafton MBTA station. See Figure 1.

Figure 1 Span of Service for WRTA Routes A and B

Route	Weekday Operating Hours	Roundtrips
A	9:10 AM – 4:45 PM M–F	5
B	5:20 AM – 7:35 PM M–F	12

Source: WRTA. Full schedules for both routes can be found in Appendix A

Both routes have been in operation since 2013 and have historically carried very low ridership. Routes A carries an average of 12 passengers per weekday, and Route B carries an average of 22 riders per weekday. Riders can call the WRTA to request that the bus deviate up to $\frac{3}{4}$ mile off the route.

Figure 2 summarizes the weekday with the highest ridership and the number of riders on that day, the highest ridership hour of the day, and the average weekday ridership using four weeks of data from November 2025.

Figure 2 November 2025 Ridership WRTA Routes A and B

Route	Highest Ridership Weekday	Ridership (on peak day)	Highest Ridership Hour of the Day	Average Weekday Ridership
A	Wednesday	17	1 – 2 PM	12
B	Monday	27	2 – 3 PM	22

Source: WRTA via operator tallies

Route A – Walmart to the Shoppes at Blackstone Valley

Route A operates five daily round trips every weekday between 9:10 a.m. to 4:45 p.m. (7.6 revenue hours per day). The shuttle travels between Northbridge and Millbury via Grafton and Sutton, and, like all fixed routes on the WRTA, is currently fare-free.

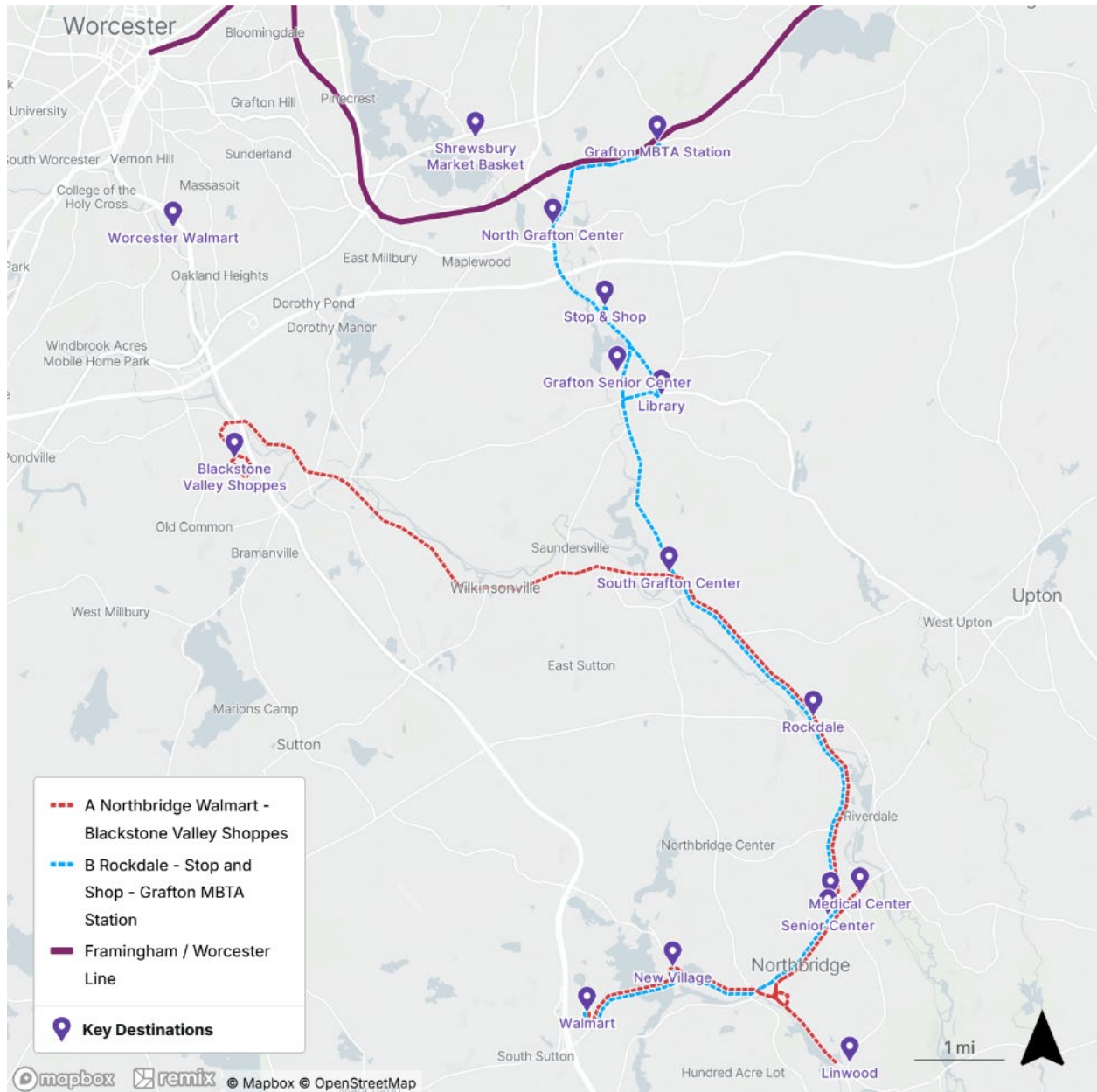
Route A uses a flag stop system, which means anywhere along the route where it is safe for an operator to stop, a rider can flag down the bus to board or alight. The shuttle operates closed door in Millbury and Sutton, serving just the Blackstone Valley Shoppes in Millbury where riders can connect to WRTA Route 4. This means that no stops can be made while the bus is in Millbury and Sutton, aside from at the Blackstone Valley Shoppes.

Route A runs in parallel to Route B for much of its alignment through Northbridge before the routes diverge in South Grafton at the Route 122A (Main Street) intersection.

Key destinations along Route A include Northbridge Walmart Supercenter, New Village Whitinsville, Northbridge Senior Center, Tri-County Medical Center, Linwood Mill Apartments, Riverdale and Rockdale Villages, South Grafton/Fisherville Villages, and the Shoppes at Blackstone Valley.

See Figure 3, where Route A is shown in red alongside key destinations.

Figure 3 Route A Alignment



Based on November 2025 data, Route A serves approximately 12 riders per day or approximately 1.6 riders per hour. When the consultant team collected field data in February 2026, they observed 12 riders on the route. See discussion below.

Route B – Walmart to Grafton MBTA Station

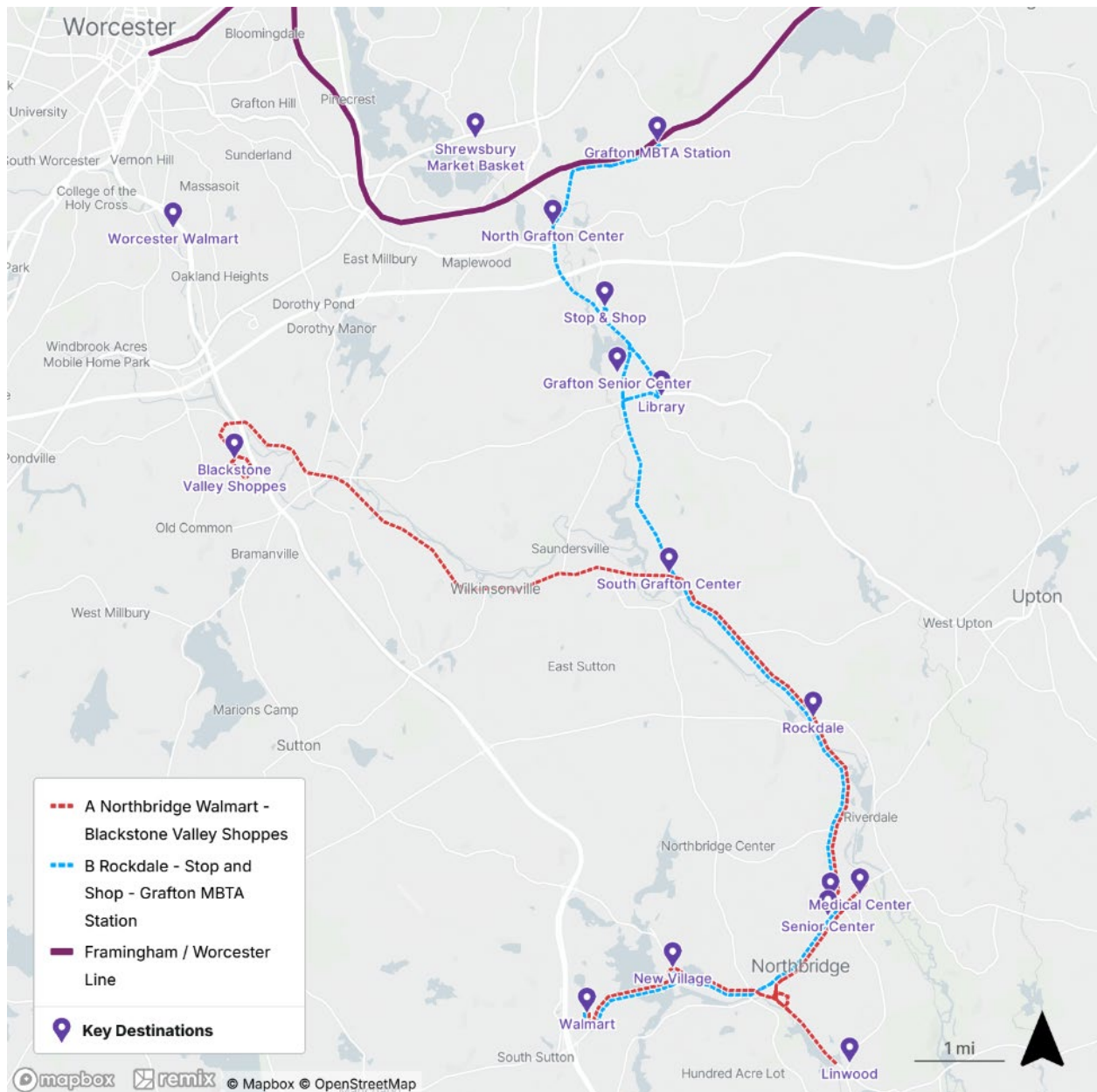
Route B operates twelve daily round trips every weekday between 5:20 a.m. to 7:35 p.m. (12.9 revenue hours/day). The shuttle travels between Northbridge and Grafton and is fare free.

On the Move: Northbridge and Grafton
Worcester Regional Transit Authority

Like Route A, Route B also operates on a flag stop system. One early trip and all trips after 5:15 p.m. operate as a closed-door service between Northbridge New Village and the Grafton MBTA station. There is a one-hour gap in service at midday for shift change purposes.

Route B runs in parallel to Route A for much of its alignment through Northbridge before the routes diverge in South Grafton at the Route 122A intersection. Key destinations along Route B include Northbridge Walmart Supercenter, New Village Whitinsville, Riverdale and Rockdale Villages, South Grafton/Fisherville Villages, Grafton Town Common, Stop & Shop, and, during the morning and evening commute, Grafton MBTA Station. See Figure 4, where Route B is shown in blue alongside key destinations.

Figure 4 Route B Alignment



Based on November 2025 data, Route B serves approximately 22 riders per day or approximately 1.7 riders per hour the bus is on the road. Similarly, the consultant team observed 24 riders in February 2026 during its field observations, discussed in detail below. Ridership north of Shaw's in Northbridge is generally low.

Route A and B Field Observations

Riders

To better understand how Routes A and B operate today, two members of the consultant team rode one full day of service on Route A and Route B. One team member rode part of Route B on February 4, 2026, while the other rode all of Route A on February 4, 2026, and the remaining part of Route B on February 9, 2026. Monday and Wednesday were chosen because they

represented peak ridership days according to November 2025 data. While on board, the team spoke with the operator, observed ridership trends, and spoke with some of the riders.

The few Route A and Route B riders the consultants spoke with stated they ride the bus several times a week, primarily to access shopping destinations such as the Shaw's/Ocean State Job Lot Plaza and Walmart in Northbridge. There were also some riders who reported using the bus to commute to jobs in these retail plazas.

Riders described themselves as relying on the bus to get around, though some would take the bus one way and carpool or receive a ride from a family member in the other direction. This was true primarily for riders who shared that their shift began or ended outside of when the shuttle operated.

Most observed trips were short trips. Some common trip pairs observed include between New Village Whitinsville and Walmart, between New Village Whitinsville and Downtown Northbridge, and between Downtown Northbridge and the Shaw's/Ocean State Job Lot Plaza.

Most observed trips were concentrated along segments where Routes A and B overlap. Riders the consultant spoke with commented that they catch whichever bus came first to complete their trip.

Very few observed rides on either route began or ended north of the Shaw's/Ocean State Job Lot Plaza in Northbridge. This portion of the route accounts for nearly half the run time but serves very few riders. Similarly, there were no riders observed on the closed-door Route B trips to and from the Grafton commuter rail station.

Figure 5 shows observed ridership on Routes A and B during the consultant team's field visits.

Field Observations and Stakeholder Conversations

The following field observations were completed by the consultant as part of this project:

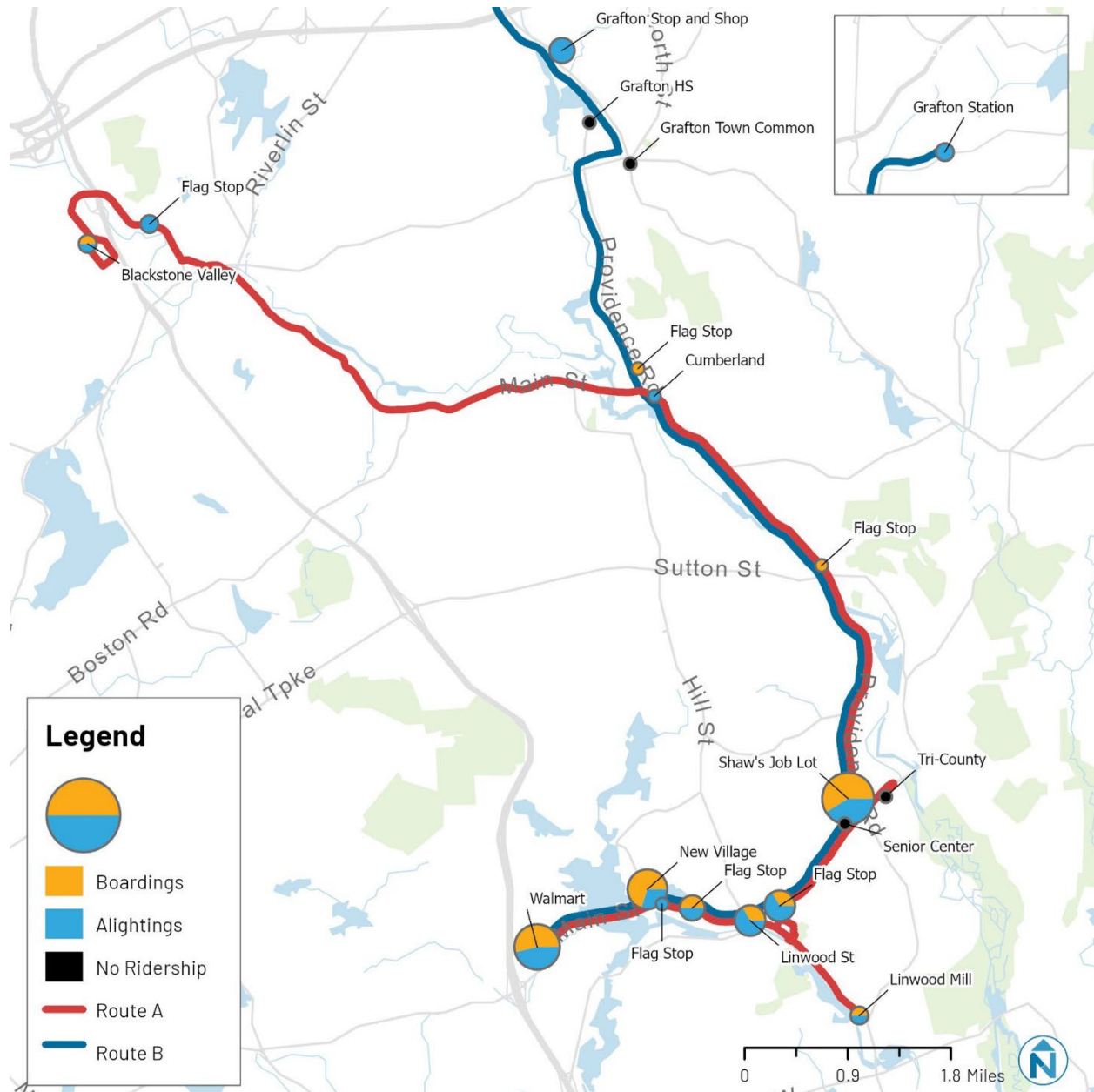
Route A Ride-Along

- Wednesday, February 4, 2026

Route B Ride-Along

- Wednesday, February 4, 2026, and Monday, February 9, 2026

Figure 5 Observed Ridership on Routes A and B (February 2026)



Operators

Operators on both Routes A and B commented that the schedule leaves insufficient layover time at the end of the route, meaning the following trip would begin late or they would not have enough time to use the restroom or eat a meal. Operators were observed taking a break at Shaw's before proceeding north to either Grafton Station or the Shoppes at Blackstone Valley because of available restroom facilities.

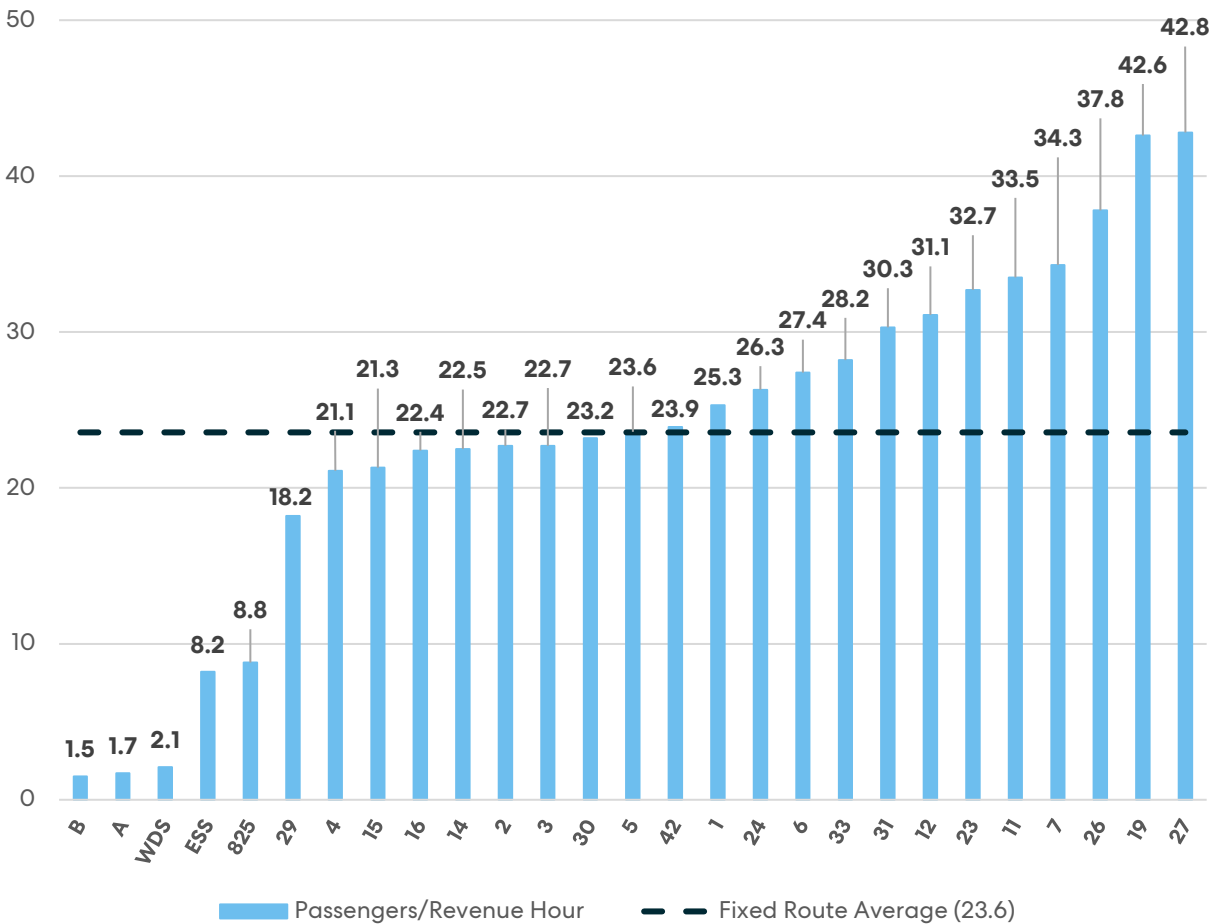
Operators also commented that the schedule was tight between timepoints and while there was little traffic congestion along the route, navigating the parking lots at Walmart, Stop and Shop, Grafton MBTA Station, and Shaw's led to some delays.

While some operators stated that they regularly drove Routes A or B, those that were not familiar with the routes found the schedule, including closed door service on Route B and the short turn midday trip on Route A confusing.

Route Comparison

As shown in Figure 6, Routes A and B are the least productive routes in the WRTA system. Productivity is measured as the number of passengers per revenue hour, or the number of hours the bus is in service operating.

Figure 6 Passengers Per Revenue Hour by Route (FY 2024)



Source: WRTA

Notably, Routes A and B are considerably less productive than the average fixed route and are significant outliers within the WRTA system, even compared to other lower performing routes.

While community shuttles versus full-size buses operating within Downtown Worcester may not be a one-to-one comparison, the typical Council on Aging shuttle within the WRTA service area operates at approximately two passengers per revenue hour. Having a public shuttle option that operates less productively than an origin-to-destination COA service highlights how poor ridership on Routes A and B is and necessitates a new approach to service delivery in the area.

Key Findings

The following are key findings from engaging with riders, operators, key COA stakeholders, and observing the operations of Routes A and B:

- Routes A and B are the least productive routes in the WRTA system. Many origin-to-destination COA services transport more riders per hour than Routes A and B do.
- Routes A and B are historically low ridership routes. Some trips throughout the day were observed to have zero ridership. This is particularly true for the closed-door trips to and from the Grafton Commuter Rail station.
- Routes A and B have tight schedules, which makes on-time performance difficult. The route also covers many miles and unexpected delays, like train crossings, parking lot congestion, and traffic can worsen travel times along the route.
- The riders who take Routes A and B today are often transit dependent and use the bus to get to work or complete shopping trips.
- While many of the existing riders are older adults, some riders are unlikely to qualify for service offered through a Council on Aging.
- Ridership is unevenly distributed along the route. There are more riders along Main and Church Streets in Northbridge, but very few riders north of the Shaw's/Ocean State Job Lot Plaza.

FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

Revenues for regional transit authorities like the WRTA derive from state and Federal grants, local assessments, farebox revenues, and own-source revenue such as advertising.¹ The Towns of Grafton and Northbridge receive an annual local assessment from the WRTA for the services it provides in both communities. Under Section 9 of Chapter 161B of Massachusetts General Laws, this local assessment is calculated based on the “loss” (operating cost minus revenue) incurred by the agency for providing service within each town.² Figure 7 shows the FY 2025 local assessment for each community.

Figure 7 Current WRTA Local Assessments by Town (FY 2025)

	Grafton	Northbridge
Current assessment	\$101,903	\$138,647

Source: WRTA Financial Audit FY 2025

As shown in Figure 8 and Figure 9, WRTA’s cost to operate fixed-route services in Grafton and Northbridge has consistently exceeded local assessment amounts, requiring WRTA to subsidize the route by offsetting the deficit against other revenue sources. In the past, the WRTA has absorbed these costs, but their future escalation makes this approach infeasible going forward.

¹ [Annual Report on the Regional Transit Authority Performance Management Program and RTA Performance Progress Report for Fiscal Year 2024, MassDOT](#)

² [Official Audit Report – Worcester Regional Transit Authority. Issued August 3, 2018](#)

Figure 8 Operating Costs for Routes A and B and Town of Grafton Assessment (FY 20–25)

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Cost of operation in Grafton	\$118,443	\$111,900	\$116,280	\$102,273	\$109,250	\$108,370
Grafton town assessment	\$95,146	\$86,294	\$86,616	\$70,876	\$99,868	\$101,903
Difference (WRTA subsidy)	\$ (23,297)	\$ (25,606)	\$ (29,664)	\$ (31,397)	\$ (9,382)	\$ (6,467)

Source: WRTA Financial Audit FY 2020 – 2025

Figure 9 Operating Costs for Routes A and B and Town of Northbridge Assessment (FY 20–25)

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Cost to operate in Northbridge	\$183,884	\$172,945	\$172,598	\$151,807	\$162,163	\$160,856
Northbridge town assessment	\$139,707	\$126,728	\$120,686	\$97,057	\$135,514	\$138,647
Difference (WRTA subsidy)	\$ (44,177)	\$ (46,217)	\$ (51,912)	\$ (54,750)	\$ (26,649)	\$ (22,209)

Source: WRTA Financial Audit FY 2020 – 2025

In future fiscal years, labor agreements with operators and inflation will lead to significant, continued growth in the cost to operate Routes A and B. The future cost to operate Routes A and B is projected to be more than double current costs today. Under Section 9 of Chapter 161B, these additional expenses would be assessed to Grafton and Northbridge.

To maintain modest increases to both town's assessments, the WRTA's subsidy for both routes would need to grow considerably. As a result, the gap between the cost to operate and assessments is too large to continue to operate the routes as they are today.

COMMUNITY TRANSPORTATION PROVIDERS AND LOCAL CONTEXT

In addition to the WRTA, the Grafton and Northbridge Councils on Aging provide transportation to older adults and people with disabilities in their respective communities. These services provide an alternative transportation source beyond the WRTA for a subset of the community. The consultant reviewed these services to more comprehensively understand the public transportation ecosystem in both communities.

Town of Grafton

Grafton Council on Aging

The Grafton Council on Aging provides paratransit service for residents sixty years old and older and people with documented disability. They operate this service using three vehicles, one town-owned bus, one hybrid minivan that the town maintains, and one WRTA owned and maintained bus. The COA has a transportation staff of three part-time drivers and one full-time transportation coordinator. Service operates on weekdays from 9 a.m. – 3 p.m. in-town and serves out-of-town medical trips on different days.

Reservations are required 48-hours in advance and can be made by calling the Council on Aging. For non-WRTA transportation to medical appointments is free due to community donations. In-town service is available every day for errands (\$3.00) and medical appointments. Daily service is also available on weekdays to the Senior Center for lunch and activities.

Riders can take trips outside of Grafton only on specific days, depending on their destination. The fares for these trips vary by destination:

Worcester: Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays, \$4.00 round trip

Shrewsbury & Westborough: Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, \$3.50 round trip

Millbury and Sutton: Tuesdays, \$3.50 round trip

Milford: Tuesdays & Thursdays, \$4.00 round trip

Grafton COA advertises its COA service, including using flyers like the one shown in Figure 10.

Figure 11 presents Grafton's FY 2027 budget for transportation services, a combination of actual budgeted driver salaries and maintenance and an estimated fuel and allocation for program management based on figures from the Northbridge COA (roughly twice Northbridge's numbers as Grafton's annual ridership is approximately double Northbridge's).

Figure 10 Grafton Senior Center Shuttle Service Flyer



Source: Town of Grafton

Figure 11 FY 2027 Grafton Budget for Transportation Services

Item	Budget
Driver salaries	\$113,289.16
Vehicle maintenance and repairs (actual)	\$8,000.00
Fuel (estimated)	\$15,000.00
Reservations, scheduling, and program management (estimated)	\$20,000.00
Total	\$156,289.16

Source: Town of Grafton COA, Town of Northbridge COA

In 2025, the Grafton COA provided 7,200 trips. 3,111 of these trips were on the WRTA-owned van (43%) while the remaining trips were on the two Grafton COA vehicles. Figure 12 is a photo of the WRTA van (blue) and the Grafton COA van (white).

Figure 12 Grafton COA Vans outside Grafton Municipal Building



Figure 13 shows Grafton COA’s ridership for the month of March 2026. Grafton COA ridership exceeds ridership on Routes A and B combined in both Grafton and Northbridge, despite operating on a similar span of service and number of vehicles.

Figure 13 Grafton COA Transportation Ridership (March 2026)

	COA Van	Minivan	WRTA Van	Total
Trips	277	150	279	706
Cancellations	47	14	30	91
Riders 60+	107	23	99	229
Riders <60 (disability)	22	6	35	63
Wheelchairs	22	6	35	63

Source: Grafton Council on Aging

2025 Master Plan Transportation Findings

According to its 2025 Master Plan, most residents in the Town of Grafton use cars for their everyday transportation, and many of their trips are to destinations outside of Grafton. The majority of respondents never use the commuter rail (52%), and almost all respondents never use the WRTA Community Shuttles (96%). The master plan notes that increasing paratransit service could help reducing the number of vehicles on the road and valuable a service to a portion of the Town’s population.

Respondents were specifically asked what improvements would increase their WRTA ridership. Over half of respondents requested greater coverage in Grafton and 33% requested greater coverage outside of Grafton.

The Master Plan included specific goals and objectives related to public transportation service in Grafton. The most relevant for this report is Goal 2: Encourage multimodal transportation to reduce congestion and improve quality of life. This goal included actions to partner with the WRTA to improve public bus service, explore on-demand service options, and increase paratransit services, including by integrating the Grafton Council on Aging into the Mobility Management Model.

Town of Northbridge

The Town of Northbridge is currently in the process of updating its Master Plan. The Town's previous Master Plan was written in 1994. The plan is anticipated to be adopted in late 2026 and will reflect the findings of a community priorities survey.

Prior to 2013, the WRTA had no service operating in Northbridge, including through the Council on Aging. Today, Northbridge remains the only WRTA member community that does not have any demand-response relationship with the authority. The COA service, operated independently by the Town, is detailed below.

Council on Aging Shuttle

The Northbridge Council on Aging operates a shuttle service using two town-owned vehicles (see Figure 14). On most days, only one of the two vehicles is in use.

Figure 14 Northbridge Council on Aging Van



Northbridge COA has two part-time shuttle drivers. The shuttle operates Monday through Thursday during the day and Friday in the morning to Shaw's/Ocean State Job Lot Plaza, in-town medical and general appointments, and Walmart. Passengers call the Senior Center to schedule a ride, trips are logged in the MySeniorCenter app, and then manually scheduled for drivers.

The shuttle is funded through state formula grant (80%), the town budget, and donations from the Friends of Northbridge Elders. Senior Center trips are free, otherwise; the fare is \$1 per trip. The expenses of running the shuttle service are shown in Figure 15.

Figure 15 FY2026 Northbridge Budget for Transportation Services

Item	Budget
Driver salaries	\$31,104
Vehicle maintenance and repairs	\$3,000
Fuel	\$7,500
Reservations, scheduling, and program management (estimated)	\$10,000
Total	\$51,604

Source: Town of Northbridge COA

In 2025, the Northbridge COA shuttle provided over 4,000 trips. As shown in Figure 16, many of those trips were for shopping or medical appointments, or to travel to the Senior Center. Over the calendar year, the COA shuttle served 115 unique riders, for an average of 37 trips per rider, indicated repeat demand for the shuttle service. Because of this, frequent riders become familiar with and comfortable around the Town's operators.

Figure 16 2025 Northbridge Shuttle Statistics

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

Source: Town of Northbridge

Out-of-Town Medical

In addition to the COA shuttle, seniors in Northbridge have access to an out-of-town medical program through Friends of Northbridge Elders. Residents sixty years old or older can request a ride by calling the Senior Center up to 72 hours in advance. A volunteer, driving their own vehicle, will bring the resident to their out-of-town appointment, wait for them, and then drive them back home. All communication between volunteers and riders is managed through the Senior Center.

Riders are charged a fee based on the trip distance. This is used to reimburse the volunteer drivers in part for their mileage. In 2025, 277 trips were provided. This amounts to approximately 23 trips per month.

ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS

Using the findings from existing data, field visits, and the review of public transportation options in both communities, the consultant team analyzed service alternatives. The goal was to develop future service approaches that could continue to meet as much public transportation demand in Grafton and Northbridge as possible within both community's local assessment and with available transportation services. Four initial options were identified:

1. Operate reduced fixed-route service in Northbridge only
2. Apply the Mobility Management Model (MMM) to both town's COAs
3. Operate microtransit in Northbridge
4. Increase local assessments to continue operating Routes A & B

The potential for microtransit (option three) was included in the WRTA's 2026 Comprehensive Regional Transit Plan Update. That plan included as a strategy to "Assess microtransit service for long-term operational feasibility and identify potential funding opportunities as a replacement for low efficiency flex shuttle routes."

At present, the lack of modern demand-response scheduling and dispatching technology renders a WRTA-operated microtransit operation infeasible. While it may be possible to engage a third-party vendor to operate microtransit, the low productivity challenges of Routes A and B would remain, rendering a contracted microtransit service financially infeasible within each town's assessment.

Option four would require a willingness from the residents of Grafton and Northbridge to absorb a significantly increased local assessment. Both communities recently faced Proposition 2 ½ overrides and pursuing local transportation funding increases is not currently feasible.

As a result, the consultant team advanced options one and two for additional evaluation and consideration.

Option 1: Operate Reduced Service in Northbridge

Existing ridership on Routes A and B is highest between Walmart and Shaw's/Ocean State Job Lot Plaza in Northbridge. The consultant team explored a potential fixed-route alignment along this corridor that would eliminate all service north of Shaw's/Ocean State Job Lot Plaza. This was assumed to be a single route served by one vehicle.

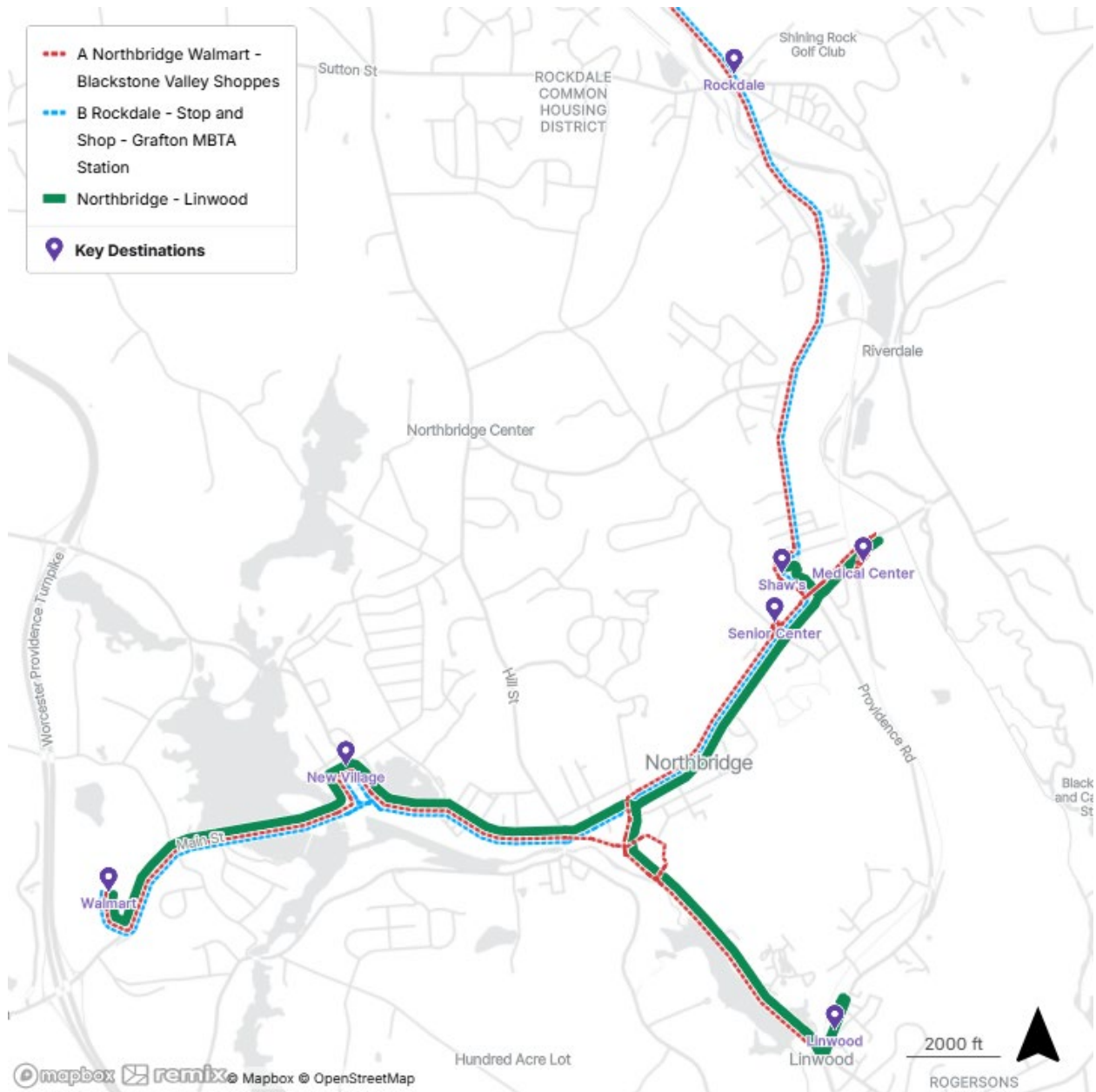
Because this reduced serve would only cover Northbridge, the consultant constrained the total amount of funding to \$140,000, a modest adjustment to Northbridge's FY 2025 assessment of \$138,647.

Based on the WRTA's projections for future operating costs, the available \$140,000 translated to roughly 1,200 annual revenue hours of service, or six hours of service per day (9 a.m. to 3 p.m.), four days per week. The consultant designed the route to maintain hourly headways, meaning the bus would make six round trips per day.

Figure 17 outlines the potential service alignment in green. The route would follow the existing Route A alignment from Walmart and through New Village and downtown Northbridge before concluding at Shaw's/Ocean State Job Lot Plaza.

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Figure 17 Reduced Fixed Route Service in Northbridge Only



Benefits

This option would maintain *some* fixed-route service in the highest ridership area. The route would continue to serve the most trip patterns the consultant observed, namely between New Village and Walmart, New Village and Downtown Northbridge, and New Village and Shaw's/Ocean State Job Lot.

Access to the medical center would be maintained, and while existing ridership was low, the deviation in one direction to Linwood preserves access for those living at the mills and for local students.

Considerations

The four-day, six-hour operating schedule could be unappealing to current and future riders. Today, in the sections of Northbridge where Routes A and B overlap, buses come more frequently. Under this alternative, only one bus would be operating, meaning waiting times for the bus would be longer and the implication of missing the bus would be more severe. In addition, the service would no longer provide access to Grafton, any other WRTA routes, or the commuter rail station.

Because operating costs will continue to grow, outpacing the annual assessment, the WRTA would have to either pass on increased costs to Northbridge annually or further reduce service each year to align with the available local assessment. This largely is the same issue Routes A and B face today and further curtailing the route every year is unlikely to improve ridership or rider's experience using the service.

Option 2: Apply the Mobility Management Model to the Councils on Aging

The WRTA's Mobility Management Model (MMM) is an approach to paratransit service planning that more efficiently uses existing transportation resources across the WRTA region. Under the MMM, the WRTA assumes responsibility for reservations, scheduling, and dispatch. The WRTA also owns and maintains vehicles. Communities that participate in the model do so by hiring and compensating drivers, covering fuel, and obtaining insurance for the vehicle. Program associated costs are reimbursed by the WRTA.

The MMM often represents an expansion of service compared to an individual community's existing paratransit offerings. Because service is centrally scheduled across the region, the WRTA can deliver more efficient service by combining trips. Generally, however, the vehicles assigned to each community remain within the community most of the time, occasionally making trips to surrounding areas.

Benefits

The MMM allows for more efficient schedules, which can reduce wait times for riders and expand access to out-of-town trips. The WRTA handles scheduling centrally, which means trips to or from similar destinations can be combined more efficiently to make better use of existing transportation resources. For example, a van from Northbridge may be able to pick up a passenger in Grafton on the way to UMass Medical Center in Worcester, allowing a Grafton van to instead provide additional in-town trips. In many communities, out-of-town appointments are restricted to certain days or, in the case of Northbridge, require volunteer drivers. The MMM allows for broader access to trips across the WRTA region.

Another benefit is the reduced cost to municipalities of running COA transportation. Because reservations and scheduling are handled by WRTA, COA staff can focus more of their time on directly serving local seniors and less time on transportation planning. Likewise, the WRTA maintains vehicles and reimburses the towns for fuel, wages, and insurance. Grafton and Northbridge are currently dedicating local resources to these costs, which can be absorbed into each town's WRTA local assessment.

Considerations

Moving to an MMM would remove the direct interactions with some local seniors. In addition, while the drivers a community provide could be the same drivers as today, it is possible that some trips would take place in vans driven by other drivers with whom residents are unfamiliar. In the example above, the rider in Grafton may be initially unfamiliar with the van driver from Northbridge.

Perhaps most importantly, services operated under the MMM would be limited to seniors and customers with disabilities. While some current riders would still qualify, there would be some Routes A and B riders who would not qualify and no longer have a public transportation option in their community.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

To provide opportunities Grafton and Northbridge community members to provide feedback on the study, the WRTA provided information on its website, posted flyers (in English and Spanish) with QR codes to provide feedback in WRTA vehicles, coordinated with local officials to publicize the study and to conduct interviews, and conducted public meetings. During this initial engagement phase, the project feedback form did not receive any responses from the community.

On Monday February 9, 2026, during field data collection, the consultant team interviewed staff at both the Northbridge and Grafton Senior Centers to better understand each community's operations and the experiences of COA staff. The findings of these discussions are incorporated into this report.

Public Meetings

The WRTA staff presented the findings of the alternatives analysis to the WRTA Advisory Board at its May 2026 meeting and received approval to conduct public meetings in both communities the following month. The WRTA held in-person public meetings at 1 and 4 p.m. in Northbridge (June 15) and in Grafton (June 16). Present at the meetings were WRTA staff, representatives of CMTM, the company that operates WRTA vehicles, and a member of the consultant team. Across the six meetings, six members of the public and four town staff members attended.

In Northbridge, attendees expressed opposition to eliminating the routes. Attendees asked if charging a fare could help subsidize the service and expressed concerns about challenges making connections to Worcester and the impact of eliminating the service on riders who would not be eligible for the MMM.

In Grafton, attendees also expressed opposition to eliminating the routes. They spoke in favor of increasing marketing and publicity for the routes and converting to a fixed stop system. Attendees also noted the growth of denser multifamily residential development in Grafton and the potential new demand for transit this may generate in the community.

In both communities, riders shared personal stories riding Routes A and B and the destinations the services allow for them to access, such as opportunities in Worcester or social services in both communities.

In addition to the four in-person meetings, the WRTA also hosted a virtual public meeting on June 22, 2026, at 6 p.m. This meeting was attended by WRTA staff, members of the consultant team, and two members of the public. A community member commented on the impact the change in employee classifications has had on labor costs on both routes and asked for clarification on eligibility of the MMM. There were no other public comments at the virtual meeting.

The WRTA staff also presented the study findings to the Grafton and Northbridge Select Boards. Other town officials were involved at various stages of this entire study process.

Online Feedback Form

In addition to the five public meetings, the WRTA also maintained an online feedback form hosted on its website throughout the project. The WRTA received a handful of public comments following the public meetings. These comments included support for the service and operators, challenges with the existing route alignment, service, and schedule, the limited connections to the MBTA commuter rail, and opposition to eliminating the service, particularly from a few transit-dependent riders.

Feedback from Northbridge's master planning survey was also shared, showing that 51% of the 179 respondents to the survey were aware that the WRTA offered bus service from Northbridge on Routes A and B.

More detailed community feedback can be found in Appendix B.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This report recommends advancing alternative two, which eliminates Routes A and B and implements the WRTA's Mobility Management Model to Grafton and Northbridge COA services. While eliminating service will be impactful for the few riders that use both routes today, the increased operating costs necessitate these changes.

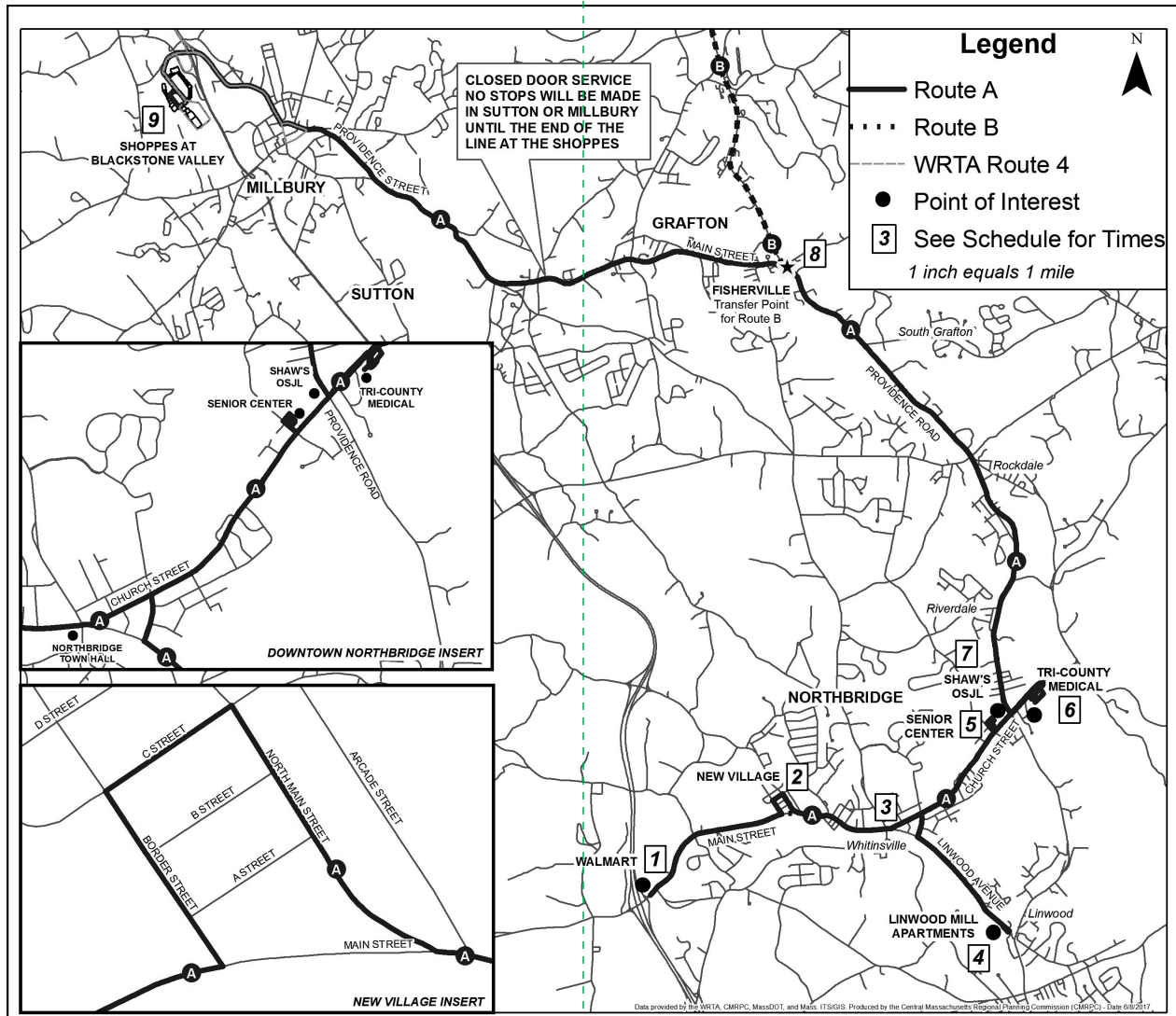
The WRTA presented this report's findings and summarized public input to the WRTA Advisory Board on July 16, 2026. The Board then voted to eliminate Routes A and B. Following the Board meeting, the WRTA announced that service on Routes A and B would end on August 28, 2026. The WRTA posted a service alert on the WRTA's homepage and on Route A and Route B pages. In addition, the WRTA posted a flyer on Route A and B vehicles, and a notification was sent to Transit App users alerting them to the service change. Town officials in Grafton and Northbridge also received a copy of the flyer to share with their communities. Copies of these announcements are included in Appendix C.

The WRTA staff will continue to work with Council on Aging staff in Grafton and Northbridge to facilitate their onboarding into the Mobility Management Model. At this time, the potential onboarding timeline remains to be determined.

APPENDIX A

ROUTE A AND ROUTE B SCHEDULES

ROUTE MAP



How to Ride the Bus

If this is your first trip on the bus, you may be a little nervous. Don't worry — WRTA personnel are ready to help you! Here are a few tips:

- It is best to arrive at the curbside at least five minutes early. Buses will stop if they are waved down and if it is safe to stop at that location.
- When boarding the bus, give exact cash fare to the driver (if you qualify for reduced fare, show your identification card to the driver).
- As the bus approaches your stop, let the driver know where you want to leave the bus.

For more information on How to Ride the Bus, visit www.therta.com/faqs/how-to-ride-the-bus or call 508-791-9782

ROUTE A

NORTHBRIDGE WALMART—SHOPPES at BLACKSTONE VALLEY via Route 122A

Effective Date: June 26, 2017

Serving:

- ♦ Walmart Supercenter
- ♦ New Village Whitinsville
- ♦ Northbridge Senior Center
- ♦ Shaw's/Ocean State Job Lot
- ♦ Tri-County Medical Center (MRHC)
- ♦ Linwood Mill Apartments
- ♦ Riverdale and Rockdale Villages
- ♦ South Grafton/Fisherville Villages
- ♦ Shoppes at Blackstone Valley

Translation

English: If this information is needed in another language, please visit www.therta.com and use the Google Translate feature.

Portuguese: Se esta informação é necessária em outro idioma, por favor visite www.therta.com y e use o Google Translate.

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**For Transit Information,
call 508-791-9782 or visit
www.therta.com**



Worcester Regional Transit Authority

OUTBOUND — WEEKDAYS

See the map for matching time point locations

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
BUS STARTS	BUS LEAVES	BUS LEAVES	BUS LEAVES	BUS LEAVES	BUS LEAVES	BUS LEAVES	BUS LEAVES	BUS ENDS
Walmart	New Village Core Mark	Church and Linwood Streets	Linwood Mill Apts.	North-bridge Senior Center**	Tri-County Medical Center	Shaw's/Ocean State Job Lot	Rt. 122A South Grafton+	Black-stone Valley Shoppes
9:10	9:13	9:16	9:20	9:30	9:34	9:37	9:47	9:57
10:50	10:53	10:56	11:00	11:10	11:14	11:17	11:27	11:37
12:30	12:33	12:36	12:40	12:50	12:54	12:57^		
1:30	1:33	1:36	1:40	1:50	1:54	1:57	2:07	2:17
3:10	3:13	3:16	3:20	3:30	3:34	3:37	3:47	3:57

** Travels through the Northbridge Senior Center
 ^ This trip ends/starts at Shaw's/OSJL Plaza
 + Connection with WRTA Route B
 — Connection with WRTA Route 4

Welcome Aboard the WRTA!

This route timetable shows the times of departure at major stops along the route and contains route maps and other important information. Additional information can be obtained by calling the WRTA Information Line at **(508) 791-WRTA (9782)** or visit our website at www.therta.com.

Weekday Service is provided on Martin Luther King Jr. Day, President's Day, Patriot's Day, Columbus Day, Veterans' Day, and the Day after Thanksgiving.

NO SERVICE ON: New Years Day; Memorial Day; Independence Day; Labor Day; Thanksgiving Day; Christmas Day

Please, NO Music, Smoking, Eating, or Drinking

INBOUND — WEEKDAYS

See the map for matching time point locations

9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
BUS STARTS	BUS LEAVES	BUS LEAVES	BUS LEAVES	BUS LEAVES	BUS LEAVES	BUS LEAVES	BUS LEAVES	BUS ENDS
Black-stone Valley Shoppes	Rt. 122A South Grafton+	Shaw's/Ocean State Job Lot	Tri-County Medical Center	North-bridge Senior Center**	Linwood Mill Apts.	Church and Linwood Streets	New Village Core Mark	Walmart
10:00	10:15	10:25	10:28	10:31	10:40	10:44	10:47	10:50
11:40	11:55	12:05	12:08	12:11	12:20	12:24	12:27	12:30
		^1:05	1:08	1:11	1:20	1:24	1:27	1:30
2:20	2:35	2:45	2:48	2:51	3:00	3:04	3:07	3:10
4:00	4:15	4:25	4:28	4:31	4:39	4:42	4:45	

WRTA FARE INFORMATION

Effective July 1, 2017

Full Cash Fare (Adults age 14 and up)	\$1.75
Senior//Disabled Cash Fare	\$0.85
Children 5-13 years of age accompanied by an adult	\$0.85
Children 9 years of age not accompanied by an adult	\$1.75
Children under 5 with adult	FREE

ACCESSIBILITY: All WRTA buses are wheelchair accessible. For TTY service call Massachusetts Relay TTY (800) 439-2370.

PROPER IDENTIFICATION: One of the following valid identification cards must be shown to the driver each time you board:

SENIOR. WRTA Senior I.D. card

DISABLED Statewide Access Pass/WRTA ADA Photo I.D. / MCB I.D.

MEDICARE. Medicare card with Photo I.D.

*The Federal Transit Administration permits transit systems to set a minimum age limit for children riding without a parent or guardian. The WRTA has set this age limit at Nine (9) years old. In order to ensure compliance with this age limit, operators may question a child seeking to board a bus who appears, in the operator's opinion, to be Eight (8) years old or younger. If an operator is not satisfied with a child's answer, the operator may call for assistance from a WRTA supervisor and/or public safety personnel. This policy applies to Paratransit Service as well.

Flexible Routing

Buses can leave the route and "flex" to locations within 3/4 of a mile off the route and be open to the general public. To request a flex, please call **508-752-9283** or **1-877-743-3852** by 4:30pm the day prior to the trip.

WRTA limits the number of flexes on each trip to two by-request flexes on each trip to most locations within 3/4 mile of the route. If a flex is not available for your desired trip time, you can choose another time or get to a bus stop along the route.

PLEASE HAVE EXACT FARE READY WHEN BOARDING THE BUS. DRIVERS DO NOT MAKE CHANGE.

FARE IS CASH ONLY. CHARLIE CARDS CANNOT BE USED. ACTIVATED ONE-DAY AND MONTHLY MAGNETIC PASSES WILL BE HONORED.

SERVICE DOES NOT RUN ON SATURDAY OR SUNDAY

Welcome aboard the WRTA!

This route timetable shows the times of departure at major stops along the route and contains route maps and other important information. Additional information can be obtained by calling the WRTA Information Line at (508) 791-WRTA (9782) or visit our website at www.therta.com.

Weekday Service is provided on Martin Luther King Jr. Day, President's Day, Patriot's Day, Columbus Day, Veterans' Day, and the Day after Thanksgiving.

NO SERVICE ON:

New Years Day; Memorial Day; Independence Day; Labor Day; Thanksgiving Day; Christmas Day

**Please, NO Music,
Smoking, Eating,
or Drinking**

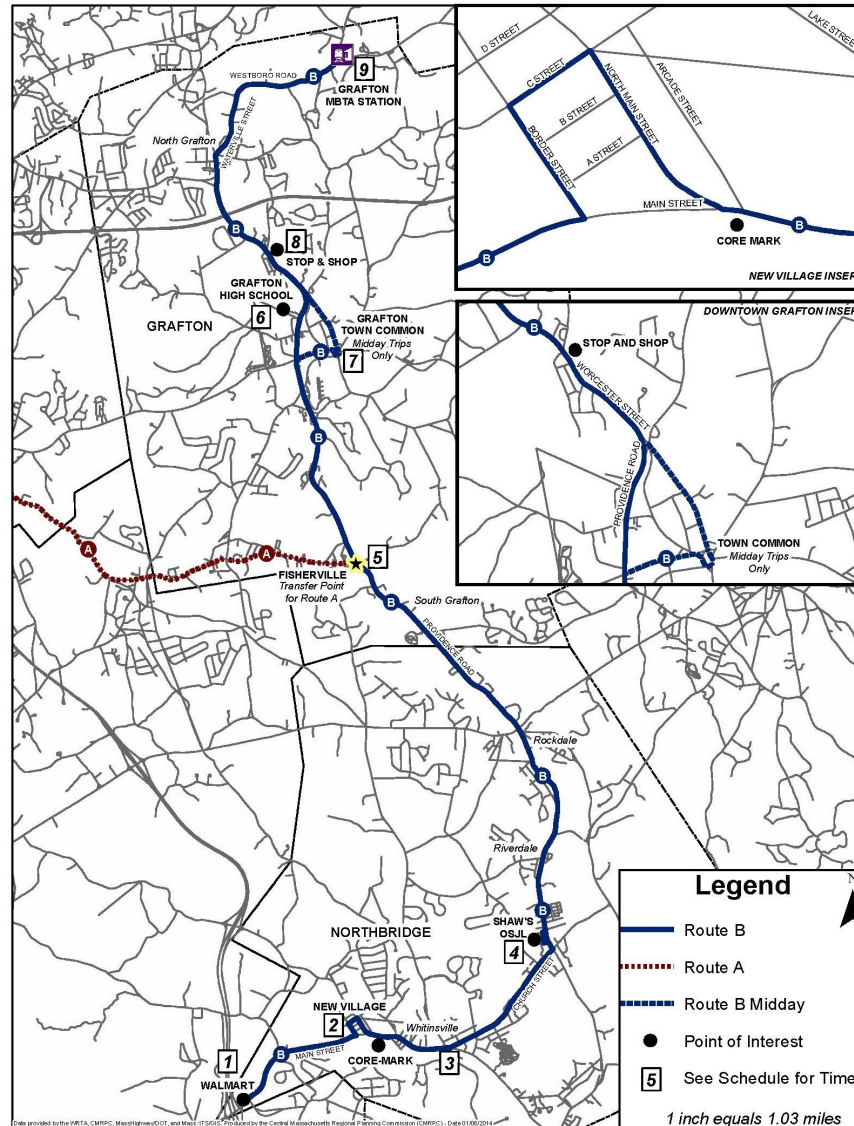
How to Ride the Bus

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- When boarding the bus, give exact cash fare to the driver (if you qualify for reduced fare, show your identification card to the driver).
- As the bus approaches your stop, let the driver know where you want to leave the bus.

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ROUTE MAP



ROUTE B

**WALMART—ROCKDALE—STOP &
SHOP—GRAFTON MBTA STATION**

Effective Date: November 15, 2023

Serving:

- ♦ Walmart Supercenter
- ♦ New Village Whitinsville
- ♦ Shaw's/Ocean State Job Lot
- ♦ Riverdale and Rockdale Villages
- ♦ South Grafton
- ♦ Fisherville
- ♦ Grafton Town Common
- ♦ Stop & Shop
- ♦ MBTA Commuter Rail Station

Translation

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Worcester Regional Transit Authority

OUTBOUND — WEEKDAYS

See the map for matching time point locations

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
BUS STARTS	BUS LEAVES	BUS LEAVES	BUS LEAVES	BUS LEAVES	BUS LEAVES	BUS LEAVES	BUS LEAVES	BUS ENDS
Walmart	C Street/ New Village	Church and Linwood Streets	Shaw's/ OSJL*	Fisherville+	Grafton High School	Grafton Town Common	Stop & Shop	MBTA Station—
5:20	5:24	5:27	5:31*	5:35			5:42	5:50
	6:32	6:35	6:39*	6:43	6:47		6:52	7:02
7:55	7:58	8:01	8:05*	8:15		8:20	8:25	
8:55	8:58	9:01	9:05*	9:15		9:20	9:25	
10:02	10:05	10:08	10:12*	10:22		10:27	10:32	
11:02	11:05	11:08	11:12*	11:22		11:27	11:32	
1:20	1:23	1:26	1:30*	1:40		1:45	1:50	
2:20	2:23	2:26	2:30*	2:40		2:45	2:50	
3:20	3:23	3:26	3:30*	3:40		3:45	3:50	
4:20	4:23	4:26	4:30*	4:40		4:45	4:50	5:00
	5:37	Closed Door Express Back to Grafton MBTA Station						6:00
	6:37	Closed Door Express Back to Grafton MBTA Station						7:00

*Travels through Shaw's/OSJL Plaza

+ Connection with WRTA Route A

— Connection with MBTA Commuter Rail

WRTA FARE INFORMATION

July 1, 2017

Full Cash Fare (Adults age 14 and up)	\$1.75
Senior/Disabled Cash Fare	\$0.85
Children 5-13 years of age accompanied by an adult	\$0.85
Children 9 years of age not accompanied by an adult	\$1.75
Children under 5 with adult	FREE

*The Federal Transit Administration permits transit systems to set a minimum age limit for children riding without a parent or guardian. The WRTA has set this age limit at Nine (9) years old. In order to ensure compliance with this age limit, operators may question a child seeking to board a bus who appears, in the operator's opinion, to be Eight (8) years old or younger. If an operator is not satisfied with a child's answer, the operator may call for assistance from a WRTA supervisor and/or public safety personnel. This policy applies to Paratransit Service as well.

ACCESSIBILITY: All WRTA buses are wheelchair accessible. For TTY service call Massachusetts Relay TTY (800) 439-2370.

PROPER IDENTIFICATION: One of the following valid identification cards must be shown to the driver each time you board:

SENIOR WRTA Senior I.D. card

MEDICARE. Medicare card with Photo I.D.

DISABLED Statewide Access Pass/WRTA ADA Photo I.D. /
Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB) I.D.

**SERVICE DOES NOT RUN ON
SATURDAY OR SUNDAY**

INBOUND — WEEKDAYS

See the map for matching time point locations

9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
BUS STARTS	BUS LEAVES	BUS LEAVES	BUS LEAVES	BUS LEAVES	BUS LEAVES	BUS LEAVES	BUS LEAVES	BUS ENDS
MBTA Station—	Stop & Shop	Grafton Town Common	Grafton High School	Fisherville+	Shaw's/ OSJL*	Church and Linwood Streets	C Street/ New Village	Walmart
6:00	Closed Door Express Back to New Village						6:32	
7:15	7:25	7:30		7:35	7:45*	7:49	7:52	7:55
	8:25	8:30		8:35	8:45	8:49	8:52	8:55
	9:31	9:36		9:41	9:52*	9:56	9:59	10:02
	10:32	10:37		10:42	10:52*	10:56	10:59	11:02
	11:32	11:37		11:42	11:52	11:56	11:59	12:02
	1:50	1:55		2:00	2:10	2:14	2:17	2:20
	2:50	2:55		3:00	3:10	3:14	3:17	3:20
	3:50	3:55		4:00	4:10*	4:14	4:17	4:20
5:15	Closed Door Express Back to New Village						5:37	
6:15	Closed Door Express Back to New Village						6:37	
7:15	Closed Door Express Back to New Village						7:35	

Flexible Routing

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WRTA limits the number of flexes on each trip to two by-request flexes on each trip to most locations within 3/4 mile of the route. If a flex is not available for your desired trip time, you can choose another time or get to a bus stop along the route.

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APPENDIX B

PUBLIC FEEDBACK

Public Meeting Notes – Routes A & B (Grafton & Northbridge)

Date: Monday, June 15, 2026 at 1:00 PM

Location: Northbridge Town Hall, Selectmen's Meeting Room

Attendees:

Josh Rickman, WRTA
Nick Burnham, WRTA
Dave Trabucco, CMTM
Joe Campbell, CMTM
Kevin Kelly, CMTM
Zack Gavel, Nelson\Nygaard
Gary Bechtholdt, Town of Northbridge
Laura Cameron, Public
Jeffery Pearlston, Public

Meeting Opened at 1:05 PM

Nick Burnham thanked everyone for their attendance and asked for introductions around the room. During the meeting, Mr. Burnham gave a PowerPoint presentation regarding On the Move: Grafton & Northbridge (Routes A & B) Transportation Assessment; a service planning study led by WRTA and its planning consultant, Nelson\Nygaard and in tandem with both host communities.

The study was initiated as the WRTA's Route A and B shuttles have been in operation since 2013 and are the lowest-performing routes in the system. Future operating costs will more than double due to contractual changes and costs are likely to increase approximately 5% annually, rendering the routes to be financially unsustainable. The presentation included information on both Routes A and B, route and system productivity, field observations conducted by Nelson\Nygaard, Council on Aging services, and financials.

The study yielded two alternative service approaches;

1. Operate reduced WRTA shuttle service in Northbridge only, eliminate Grafton service.
2. Implement WRTA's mobility management model to Grafton and Northbridge Council on Aging services.

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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 • Worcester**

The following comments, questions, and clarifications were provided during the meeting:

- Attendee stated their opposition to the proposed elimination of both Routes A and B.
- Comment that fixed bus stop signs would be better than existing flag-stop system and would help increase ridership.
- Comment that more awareness of the routes to the public would increase ridership.
- Question if the WRTA surveyed riders during the study to gauge public opinion if charging a fare to use Routes A and B would be acceptable to riders, as the fares would help subsidize the service.
 - WRTA noted that the study did not include a formal passenger survey, but did have an open-comment feedback form that riders could submit.
- Attendee stated their concern that eliminating Routes A and B and implementing the Northbridge Council on Aging into the WRTA's Mobility Management Model (MMM) would leave non-eligible existing riders with limited transportation options.
- Comment that the Route A service does not connect well to Worcester. A trip can currently take up to 2.5 hours.
- Comment that the current transfer from Route A to Route 4 at The Shops at Blackstone Valley in Millbury can be challenging if either route is operating behind schedule.
- Attendee proposed an alternative service concept: WRTA should consider having one route operate three trips per day to Grafton/Northbridge, seven days a week. For example, there would be one roundtrip each day in the morning, afternoon, and evening.
- Question if WRTA plans to provide presentation to the Northbridge Select Board?
 - WRTA noted that Northbridge officials have been involved in the study since it was initiated at the beginning of the calendar year.
- Attendee commented regarding a complaint they filed with WRTA Customer Service in April 2026.

Without any additional questions, Mr. Burnham closed the meeting at 2:00 PM.

Public Meeting Notes – Routes A & B (Grafton & Northbridge)

Date: Monday, June 15, 2026 at 4:00 PM

Location: Northbridge Town Hall, Selectmen's Meeting Room

Attendees:

Josh Rickman, WRTA

Nick Burnham, WRTA

Anthony Novelli, CMTM

Jose Rivas, CMTM

Zack Gavel, Nelson\Nygaard

Gary Bechtholdt, Town of Northbridge

Kelly Bol, Town of Northbridge

Meeting Opened at 4:08 PM

Nick Burnham thanked everyone for their attendance and asked for introductions around the room. During the meeting, Mr. Burnham gave a PowerPoint presentation regarding On the Move: Grafton & Northbridge (Routes A & B) Transportation Assessment; a service planning study led by WRTA and its planning consultant, Nelson\Nygaard and in tandem with both host communities.

The study was initiated as the WRTA's Route A and B shuttles have been in operation since 2013 and are the lowest-performing routes in the system. Future operating costs will more than double due to contractual changes and costs are likely to increase approximately 5% annually, rendering the routes to be financially unsustainable. The presentation included information on both Routes A and B, route and system productivity, field observations conducted by Nelson\Nygaard, Council on Aging services, and financials.

The study yielded two alternative service approaches;

1. Operate reduced WRTA shuttle service in Northbridge only, eliminate Grafton service.
2. Implement WRTA's mobility management model to Grafton and Northbridge Council on Aging services.

The following comments, questions, and clarifications were provided during the meeting:

- The Northbridge Council on Aging has identified a rider who uses Route B once a week. The rider is a caregiver for a Northbridge resident and uses the route from the Grafton MBTA Station and stays overnight in Town and uses the COA transportation the following day to run errands.

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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 • Worcester**

The COA noted that this individual likely could be flexible with their travel schedule but questioned how this individual could receive service to and from the Grafton MBTA Station. The trip timing could be a challenge to get back to Northbridge.

Without any additional questions, Mr. Burnham closed the meeting at 5:00 PM.

Public Meeting Notes – Routes A & B (Grafton & Northbridge)

Date: Tuesday, June 16, 2026 at 1:00 PM

Location: Grafton Municipal Center, Conference Room A

Attendees:

Josh Rickman, WRTA

Nick Burnham, WRTA

Dave Trabucco, CMTM

Kevin Kelly, CMTM

Zack Gavel, Nelson\Nygaard

Stephenie Abate, Town of Grafton

Christian D'Emilia, Town of Grafton

Talia Beausouil, Public

Daniel Cusher, Public

Nathan Recchia, Public

Meeting Opened at 1:02 PM

Nick Burnham thanked everyone for their attendance and asked for introductions around the room. During the meeting, Mr. Burnham gave a PowerPoint presentation regarding On the Move: Grafton & Northbridge (Routes A & B) Transportation Assessment; a service planning study led by WRTA and its planning consultant, Nelson\Nygaard and in tandem with both host communities.

The study was initiated as the WRTA's Route A and B shuttles have been in operation since 2013 and are the lowest-performing routes in the system. Future operating costs will more than double due to contractual changes and costs are likely to increase approximately 5% annually, rendering the routes to be financially unsustainable. The presentation included information on both Routes A and B, route and system productivity, field observations conducted by Nelson\Nygaard, Council on Aging services, and financials.

The study yielded two alternative service approaches;

1. Operate reduced WRTA shuttle service in Northbridge only, eliminate Grafton service.
2. Implement WRTA's mobility management model to Grafton and Northbridge Council on Aging services.

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The following comments, questions, and clarifications were provided during the meeting:

- Attendee stated increased marketing and publicity should be done to increase ridership.
- Comment that fixed bus stop signs would be better than existing flag-stop system and would help awareness and visibility of the routes.
 - Additional comment that it is difficult to understand how to use the current flag-stop system. Attendee noted that she works in a group home setting that has had prospective passengers call WRTA Customer Service, who explained how to wave down the vehicle.
- Question about how the WRTA Mobility Management Model would work for passenger trips destined outside of the WRTA service area, particularly to Milford and Upton.
- Attendee noted that they have used Routes A and B to access volunteer opportunities in the City of Worcester.
- Question about why one of the alternative service approaches considers reduced service for Northbridge, but not for Grafton – particularly with the MBTA Station in Grafton.
 - Conversation amongst multiple attendees regarding future/current housing developments and whether new, higher density development could increase ridership to the point of maintaining existing shuttle services.
- Attendee noted that they were not aware of the WRTA study, or of the public meeting schedule until days prior to this meeting.
 - Additional comment that an individual shared that they spoke to an operator of Route A who was not aware of the proposal/public meetings, and that they called WRTA Customer Service who was not aware either.
 - WRTA and CMTM both followed up that the issue would be researched into, but that Operators and Customer Service staff received information in advance of the public meeting schedule.
- Question about if the service could ever return to Grafton in the future, if the current routes are eliminated.
- Question related to the assessment process and operating costs to the town.
- Question if WRTA plans to provide presentation to the Grafton Select Board?
 - WRTA noted that Grafton officials have been involved in the study since it was initiated at the beginning of the calendar year.

Without any additional questions, Mr. Burnham closed the meeting at 2:00 PM.

Public Meeting Notes – Routes A & B (Grafton & Northbridge)

Date: Tuesday, June 16, 2026 at 4:00 PM

Location: Grafton Municipal Center, Conference Room A

Attendees:

Josh Rickman, WRTA

Nick Burnham, WRTA

Joe Campbell, CMTM

Jose Rivas, CMTM

Zack Gavel, Nelson\Nygaard

Ken Castonguay, Public

Meeting Opened at 4:25 PM

Nick Burnham thanked everyone for their attendance and asked for introductions around the room. During the meeting, Mr. Burnham gave a PowerPoint presentation regarding On the Move: Grafton & Northbridge (Routes A & B) Transportation Assessment; a service planning study led by WRTA and its planning consultant, Nelson\Nygaard and in tandem with both host communities.

The study was initiated as the WRTA's Route A and B shuttles have been in operation since 2013 and are the lowest-performing routes in the system. Future operating costs will more than double due to contractual changes and costs are likely to increase approximately 5% annually, rendering the routes to be financially unsustainable. The presentation included information on both Routes A and B, route and system productivity, field observations conducted by Nelson\Nygaard, Council on Aging services, and financials.

The study yielded two alternative service approaches;

1. Operate reduced WRTA shuttle service in Northbridge only, eliminate Grafton service.
2. Implement WRTA's mobility management model to Grafton and Northbridge Council on Aging services.

The following comments, questions, and clarifications were provided during the meeting:

- Comment that fixed bus stop signs would be better than existing flag-stop system and would help awareness and visibility of the routes.
- Attendee noted that information regarding the service should be in the Grafton News.

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- Attendee noted that the Transit app is good, but sometime loses cellular service in the area due to lack of network coverage.
- Attendee agreed that the ridership figures from field observations was representative of his own personal observations of how people use both routes (primarily in Northbridge).
- Comment about a program in Grafton off Main Street who may have interest in using WRTA services.

Without any additional questions, Mr. Burnham closed the meeting at 5:00 PM.

Public Meeting Notes – Routes A & B (Grafton & Northbridge)

Date: Monday, June 22, 2026 at 6:00 PM

Location: Virtual; Zoom Platform

Attendees:

Josh Rickman, WRTA

Nick Burnham, WRTA

Zack Gavel, Nelson\Nygaard

Bill Schwarz, Nelson\Nygaard

Unnamed Attendee, Public

Unnamed Attendee, Public

Meeting Opened at 6:02 PM

Nick Burnham thanked everyone for their attendance and asked for introductions around the room. During the meeting, Mr. Burnham gave a PowerPoint presentation regarding On the Move: Grafton & Northbridge (Routes A & B) Transportation Assessment; a service planning study led by WRTA and its planning consultant, Nelson\Nygaard and in tandem with both host communities.

The study was initiated as the WRTA's Route A and B shuttles have been in operation since 2013 and are the lowest-performing routes in the system. Future operating costs will more than double due to contractual changes and costs are likely to increase approximately 5% annually, rendering the routes to be financially unsustainable. The presentation included information on both Routes A and B, route and system productivity, field observations conducted by Nelson\Nygaard, Council on Aging services, and financials.

The study yielded two alternative service approaches;

1. Operate reduced WRTA shuttle service in Northbridge only, eliminate Grafton service.
2. Implement WRTA's mobility management model to Grafton and Northbridge Council on Aging services.

The following comments, questions, and clarifications were provided during the meeting:

- Attendee commented that they had spoken with an operator of Routes A and B who noted that WRTA's operating company had opted to make all operators full-time instead of having part-time operators, which has led to the additional operating costs.

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- Attendee asked for clarification regarding the service proposal to implement both Grafton and Northbridge Council on Aging services into the WRTA's Mobility Management Model.
 - WRTA confirmed that the services would only be available to passengers over the age of sixty, or anyone with a disability regardless of age.

Without any additional questions, Mr. Burnham closed the meeting at 7:00 PM.

On the Move: An Assessment of Current Transportation Services, Community Needs, and Future Options for Grafton and Northbridge (WRTA Routes A & B)

All feedback received during Public Review and Comment Period through WRTA Project Website
Comments edited slightly for spelling, clarity, and anonymity.

- Doing a great job I enjoy the public transportation. The drivers are nice, very polite and friendly.
- I would think that community shuttles need a bicycle carrier on them.
- I've recently begun relying on the Grafton shuttle as I commute from Worcester. I take the B line in the morning but unfortunately the route skips Fisherville/ Cumberland on the way down (which is already a decent walk to where I'm going) so I have to get off at Church & Linwood, transfer going back in the direction I just came, then walk. This adds almost 40 mins to the commute. I like the route, I just wish it had more stops and departures, the 83 (A) going pack towards Grafton too.
- The current walk to Routes A/B is a no-go after a physical retail shift, and the timing doesn't match my hours. I am an Uber user who would switch to a WRTA van service immediately if it were on-demand or had better 'front door' access.
- As a rider of the Route B service, I am alarmed at your plans to discontinue it. The problem with the route is that it fails to capture the single biggest potential generator of riders: the Grafton MBTA Station because of the limited service to that station. My suggestion would be to run a frequent bus service along that route to the Grafton MBTA Station (and promote it). I'm also a regular user of the Grafton MBTA Station and I see every hour at least 5-20 people waiting for rides there.
- I attended the meeting at the Grafton Municipal Center at 1PM today on the future of Routes A and B. I would like to add that I took Route B to get to the meeting (a 14-minute walk from the Grafton Public Library) and to return home. I attended the meeting about the future of public transit in Grafton, via public transit. Consider what this means for the turnout of future public meetings.
- I am writing to express my frustration regarding the B bus service in Whitinsville, Massachusetts. I waited at the bus stop in front of Shaw's for over 15 minutes for the scheduled B bus, but it never arrived. As a result, I had no choice but to take an Uber to make my train on time. I rely on WRTA transportation, and this experience was very disappointing. I would like to know if this is something that happens frequently or if this was an isolated incident.

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- I would like you to consider keeping the route A and B bus schedules. We are in South Grafton. My daughter needs to be in Worcester on a daily basis. She relies on the route A bus to get her into Millbury and then to Worcester. She has no other means of transportation, so without the bus, it would make for a great inconvenience. Please reconsider keeping these routes as I'm sure there are many other people who rely on these services.
- Thank you for allowing me to reach out for comment. Over the past 14 years as I developed a new lifestyle with learning to manage epilepsy and my disability, years after losing my ability to drive. Something amazing happened. The WRTA had begun a new program in my area I was so happy and excited about being able to get around and conduct any business with state and federal building, renewal of IDs etc. one of the most significant things I have witnessed in recent years is its popularity is growing. Many riders I find are in situations similar to mine. As I'm on the road to recovery I noticed many riders use the transportation for work. That inspired me. I thought, perhaps I could do that. Changing these schedules will directly affect some riders who use it to get to work. I found it necessary to advocate as that is my goal, to get back in the work force to achieve independence, please reconsider. I'll be happy to raise money and spread awareness of the service, I think it's wonderful. The drivers are very friendly and professional...thank you.
- I use the routes A and B to connect to Worcester and my place of employment. Routes A and B are essential to the Blackstone Valley community. Routes A and B still connect plenty of people to schools, jobs and the city of Worcester, while there may not be as many passengers on routes A and B.
- Please consider that this will take away the primary reliable transportation method to many living and working in the Blackstone Valley, as the city of Worcester and the access to it, is still essential to us.
- Results in the Planning Board's follow-up master planning survey.
Q3: Are you aware of the WRTA bus service from Northbridge to the MBTA Commuter Rail Station in Grafton & the Shoppes at Blackstone Valley in Millbury?
Yes, 51% No, 49% (179 responses).

APPENDIX C

SERVICE DISCONTINUATION ANNOUNCEMENTS



Important Service Update: Routes A & B to be Eliminated

[Home](#) / **Important Service Update: Routes A & B to be Eliminated**

Following a public review process and community meetings, the WRTA Advisory Board has approved the elimination of Routes A & B, effective August 28, 2026.

Last Day of Service: Friday, August 28, 2026

Why is this change being made?

- Routes A & B had the lowest ridership in the WRTA system.
- Operating costs continued to increase.
- Public input was gathered before a final decision was made. (<https://therta.com/the-extra-mile/>)

We can help connect you with:

- WRTA fixed-route bus service (where available)
- Free Travel Training to learn how to use the fixed-route system
- Grafton Council On Aging services (for eligible riders)
- Northbridge Council On Aging services (for eligible riders)

Affected Routes: A: Northbridge Walmart - Blackstone Valley Shoppes, B: Rockdale - Stop and Shop - Grafton MBTA Station

IMPORTANT SERVICE UPDATE

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ALL RIDES ARE FARE FREE THROUGH JUNE 30, 2027

