







# 2

# Planning Framework

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# Why a Long-Range Transportation Plan?

The goal of any planning project ultimately is to identify a need, propose a feasible project or program to address that need, and secure funding to implement the project or program. This Regional Transportation Plan will document Berkshire County's current state of transportation needs and make long-term recommendations to address those needs. Specifically, the RTP will be accomplishing the following objectives:

## 1. PROVIDE CERTIFICATION TO STATE AND FEDERAL PARTNERS FOR THE REGIONAL PLANNING PROCESS.

A Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is a decision-making body that provides an interface between federal transportation funding and local transportation priorities. An MPO is required to represent cities and metropolitan areas with populations above 50,000 persons. The RTP is one of three Certification Documents that demonstrate that the region is following a planning process which is continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive. This "3-C" planning process is codified in 23 U.S.C. §134(c)(3):

*PROCESS OF DEVELOPMENT. — The process for developing the plans and TIPs shall provide for consideration of all modes of transportation and shall be continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive to the degree appropriate, based on the complexity of the transportation problems to be addressed.*

## 2. DOCUMENT THE REGION'S EXISTING AND PROJECTED TRANSPORTATION NEEDS.

This Plan will consider projects and programs over a 20-year planning horizon. Current data and performance measures related to our transportation system will be documented, along with regional population and demographic statistics. Population and workforce trends are projected up to 2050 at a regional level, to assist with planning for capacity and budgeting levels over the 20-year planning horizon. Refer to the **Socioeconomic Data and Projections** in Chapter 3 for more details on these data.

## 3. PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND INPUT.

Public involvement is a critical piece of the Regional Transportation Plan and any public infrastructure project. Learn more about the RTP 2024 public engagement process in the following section.

## 4. PROPOSE PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS TO ADDRESS THE NEEDS DOCUMENTED.

As transportation and travel needs are distilled from data sources and public input, transportation planning staff will undertake a process of proposing and weighing project or program solutions. The proposals must meet a need or correct a deficiency, have a positive impact on safety and the environment, and be fiscally constrained to reasonable cost estimates based on forecast funding from state and federal sources.

## 5. DEMONSTRATE FISCAL CONSTRAINT.

Every metropolitan area in the United States receives a share of federal dollars based both on predetermined funding formulas as well as competitive grants that offer a fixed amount of funding to qualified applicants. The RTP must demonstrate that proposed projects or programs will be able to be funded from known sources or be scheduled to commence once funding is available. Projects that do not have a funding source are unlikely to move forward in the planning process to design or construction until a source is identified.

## 6. REDUCE GREENHOUSE GASES AND OTHER POLLUTANTS.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) tracks regional air quality improvement progress since the passage of the Clean Air Act. As part of this oversight, the Berkshire Region must verify that proposed projects and programs have a neutral or positive impact on air quality, particularly impacts to ozone and carbon monoxide. Learn more about air quality conformity requirements in **Chapter 6**.

## How to Use This Plan

This document is broken into its major chapters and smaller sub-parts. In this Chapter, the framework on which this plan was built will be explained in greater detail. An effective Regional Transportation Plan must take into consideration existing conditions of the region, such as population size and demographics, socioeconomic conditions that influence the region's mobility, job and employer prospects, and other traits that influence travel like lifestyle, shopping, and commuting habits. These data are gathered from various sources, including the Census, American Community Survey, the RTP Transportation Community Survey, and past plans and studies from around the region.

This chapter will also illustrate the regional, state, and national legal frameworks around which transportation planning is built. The region does not exist in a vacuum — coordination between all levels of government is essential to maintaining a high quality transportation system.

**Chapter 3 - Regional Data & Context** will go deeper into sources of information that contributed to the development of recommendations in this plan. This long-range transportation plan must consider a twenty-year *planning horizon* — that is, projections of population, socioeconomics, and project and priority recommendations must be considered out to twenty years from publication of this plan. Twenty years is considered an average time frame for a generation to move from one stage of life to the next, and the longest practical time line to make concrete transportation policy recommendations.

**Chapter 4 - Regional Goals & Recommendations** details the major goals of the Berkshires' transportation system, along with project and policy, and staff work recommendations to pursue those goals. Each goal is broken into several concrete Objectives. Key actions and targets will be noted where prudent, in order to illustrate a path toward achieving a particular objective. See **Figure 2-1** for a diagrammatic view of this format. Projects that have been or could be programmed into other regional certification documents will be listed under **UPWP Activities** or **TIP Projects** within each goal. These activities and projects are the “real-world” reflections of the priorities listed in this plan.

**Figure 2-1: RTP Recommendation Layout**



**Chapter 5 - Fiscal Constraint Analysis** takes a financial lens to the recommendations listed in this Plan. Fiscal constraint refers to the realization that publicly-funded infrastructure budgets are inherently limited by revenue collection rates, funding formulas and material and labor costs to construct and operate projects. Long-range transportation plans like the RTP2024 apply the twenty-year planning horizon to this financial analysis. The first five years of this period are already reasonably laid out in the region's Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP). Beyond these five years, a revenue projection exercise using an inflation-adjustment formula will generate an inherently conservative projection of future TIP funding periods. Project recommendations must fit into the projected revenue amounts during these periods, or they may be listed as “unfunded.” Unfunded projects are still listed as priorities, but do not currently have a known source of funding. They may be programmed at a future time when revenues for a certain period are more concretely known.

Finally, **Chapter 6 - Air Quality Conformity** takes an environmental lens to project recommendations, both to ensure that any projects have a neutral or positive effect on regional air quality, and to certify that the region meets Ambient Air Quality (AAQ) standards set forth by the EPA.



## Public Engagement

### BACKGROUND: THE MPO 3-C PROCESS

To ensure that the needs of the traveling public are considered objectively, and that the evolving trends and needs of the transportation system are accounted for, the regional planning process follows the “3-C” approach. The federal legislation that authorizes and certifies regional planning agencies, like Berkshire County’s, states that planning activities must be continuous, cooperative, and comprehensive. For more information on how the 3-C process applies to state and federal agency coordination, see the **Levels of Government in Transportation Planning** section on page 38.

Public feedback, involvement, and engagement are essential components of the transportation planning process. Early outreach helps ensure that as many community members as possible are engaged. Outlets for feedback allow residents to share their voices. The *RTP2024* public engagement process was multifaceted.

### COORDINATION WITH STATEWIDE LONG RANGE TRANSPORTATION PLAN (SLRTP): BEYOND MOBILITY 2050

The Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) hosted stakeholder engagement sessions throughout the Commonwealth in the fall of 2022 and winter of 2023. BRPC participated in two “meeting-in-a-box” focus group discussions facilitated by MassDOT. The goal of meetings-in-a-box was to create a repeatable, objective engagement process with different communities, via an online survey and focus group discussion to elaborate on stakeholder responses.

BRPC hosted two focus groups: members of the Berkshire MPO and TAC in November 2022 and members of the Berkshire Regional Coordinating Committee on Transportation (BRCCOT) in March 2023. Responses from these focus groups assisted both MassDOT in gathering informed feedback for the Beyond Mobility plan, and assisted BRPC in gathering additional public feedback to inform recommendations for this RTP. Deeper analysis of responses will be reflected in the final Beyond Mobility report from MassDOT.

## ONLINE COMMUNITY SURVEY

The most reliable way for staff to gather public feedback from around Berkshire County was to host an online Transportation Community Survey. The survey covered a wide range of transportation topics, including:

- ◆ Transportation challenges
- ◆ Desired changes
- ◆ Lifestyle/commute habits
- ◆ Satisfaction/dissatisfaction
- ◆ Budget Prioritizing
- ◆ Extreme weather impacts
- ◆ Transit
- ◆ Active Transportation
- ◆ Future technology
- ◆ Location and income

The invitation to take the survey was shared through many different avenues. A flyer campaign in both English and Spanish was run across Berkshire County, with flyers posted or mailed to town halls and city halls, local businesses and other public places like post offices. Flyers were also hung around the Pittsfield Intermodal Transportation Center, and inside BRTA buses.

## EVERY DOOR DIRECT MAIL

Berkshire planning staff conducted targeted outreach to areas of Pittsfield and North Adams using the United States Postal Service’s Every Door Direct Mail system, or EDDM. This service assists with mass printing and delivery of marketing or outreach material via the postal service. The intent for utilizing this tool was to focus additional outreach effort to local Environmental Justice (EJ) qualifying populations. For this outreach, Census tracts in Berkshire County that are designated under the Justice40 initiative were chosen. The Justice40 initiative stems from an executive order of the Biden administration, targeting at least 40% of funds related to certain federal programs to Census tracts that have been historically underserved or underinvested in. The EJ Mapper tool provided by the EPA highlighted several Census tracts within Berkshire County - in the cities of Pittsfield and North Adams - as underserved within the definitions of Justice40.

Figure 2-2: EDDM Outreach Postcard



The Every Door Direct Mailing was delivered to approximately 6,800 households along mailing routes that covered the Census tracts as thoroughly as possible. It should be noted that the postal delivery routes do not match up perfectly with the Census tract boundaries, and therefore some households outside of the Justice40 tracts received mailings, and some households within the Census tracts did not.

The EDDM mailing consisted of a two-sided postcard that invited recipients to take the online Transportation Community Survey. It also provided context around the long-range Regional Transportation Plan process and a background for the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission. See **Figure 2-2** for an example of the postcard that was mailed.

## PUBLIC OUTREACH MEETINGS

In the month of November 2022, BRPC planning staff hosted three opportunities for in-person and virtual public involvement around Berkshire County. The meetings were held at the following dates and times:

- ◆ November 2, 2022 at 5:30 pm, at the Berkshire Athenaeum (Pittsfield Public Library)
- ◆ November 10, 2022 at 5:30 pm, at the North Adams City Hall
- ◆ November 16, 2022 at 5:30 pm, at the Great Barrington Firehouse

Participants were able to attend the meetings in-person or register to join the meeting via Zoom webinar. Spanish interpretation on the Zoom webinars was also available by request in advance of the meeting. At the meetings, BRPC staff presented more details about the RTP process, and invited feedback, questions and dialogue with attendees.

## COMMUNITY SURVEY FINDINGS

Between November 2022 and January 2023, planning staff received feedback and input from over 360 stakeholders about the region's transportation system. It is important to note that this survey is not statistically or scientifically rigorous due to staff and budget limitations. The responses to the Transportation Community Survey provide valuable insight into the existing conditions and current needs of county residents, and is also only one piece of the planning framework in constructing this Regional Transportation Plan. The goals, objectives, and recommendations made by this plan are the result of the continuous, coordinated, and comprehensive planning framework as described throughout this section.

Planning staff found that despite the EDDM postcard being mailed to 6,800 households, only 24 of the associated QR codes were scanned according to the survey metrics data. This may not include participants who manually typed in the survey URL from the postcard. Regardless, if all 368 survey responses were generated from the EDDM postcard, that equates to an approximate 5% return on the outreach investment. The causes of low returns cannot be correlated specifically with any certain factor, though it can be hypothesized that the outreach could have been perceived as a generic marketing survey, the postcards were mixing with other mail, and the requiring of the participant to take positive action as opposed to being solicited for responses all contributed to the challenges of receiving public feedback at scale.

## Demographics

The survey respondents skew older in age and higher in income than the average Berkshire County resident. While a concerted effort was made to reach residents of all backgrounds, those with more time to dedicate to answering a survey, a reliable Internet connection, and awareness of this planning initiative were more likely to submit a response. See **Figure 2-3**.

## Transportation Challenges

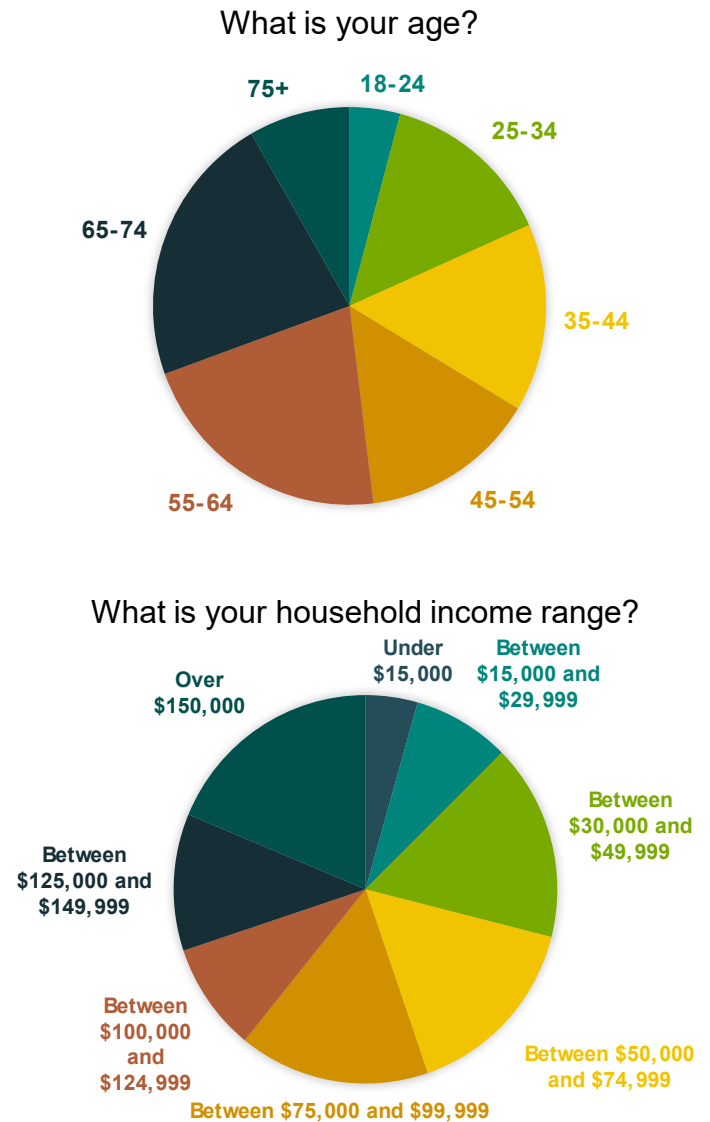
As part of the continuous transportation planning process, transportation challenges that were posed in the previous 2020 RTP Transportation Needs Survey were put forward again to ascertain if there were any changes over the 4-year time period, especially after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The only major difference between the questions was that the 2024 survey eliminated one response category: "Somewhat of a challenge" and only listed answer options of "Major challenge," "minor challenge," and "I don't experience this challenge."

Between 2020 and 2024, the top three scenarios listed as a "major challenge" by the most respondents remained as "Sidewalk conditions/availability prevent me from walking more," "BRTA bus not available when I need it," and "Lack of bike paths/lanes prevent me from biking more."

In the 2024 survey, the "Lack of bike paths" response remained the top "major challenge," while sidewalk conditions overtook BRTA availability as the second highest challenge. "Having my opinion be heard when transportation decisions are made by local leaders" remained the next most prevalent issue after BRTA availability. These findings have fed into the development of recommendations and activities shared in **Chapter 4**.

Another trend that persisted from 2020 to 2024 was the notion that respondents' age and health conditions do NOT prevent them from driving. Challenges of age and health were the lowest recorded as being a "major challenge" to respondents. Despite the largest proportion of respondents to the 2024 survey being over age 65, age and health were listed as the least challenging aspects of transportation. In this vein, a concern often raised from municipal leaders, MPO members and participants in focus groups beyond the Community Survey was the difficulty in coordinating transportation services for senior and disabled

**Figure 2-3: Survey Respondent Basic Demographics**



passengers. This would seem to indicate that once residents reach an age beyond what is safe for driving, there is a major shift in the quality and connectivity of transportation options.

## Travel, Lifestyle, Commuting Characteristics

The vast majority of respondents listed using a personal vehicle as their main option of traveling around the region, at 88% of respondents. The remaining 12% of responses included 4% who walked, 3% who used BRTA transit, 2% who bicycled, and the remaining respondents reporting carpooling, getting rides, using taxi or rideshare, or something else. The average travel time to work reported by respondents was 17.2 minutes. When asked, 65% of respondents said that the COVID-19 pandemic did not have any major impacts on their commute or transportation options. Comments

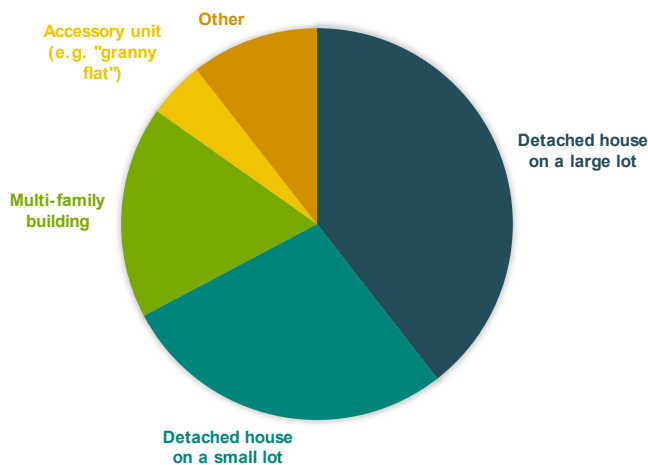
provided indicated that people who were retired did not generally experience impacts, while others shifted to hybrid or remote work, "gig economy" work, or walked or cycled more. See the **Appendix** for all open-ended responses to survey questions.

In terms of lifestyle, respondents reported mixed habits in shopping. A slight majority reported trending more toward in-person shopping over browsing online. When asked where one saw themselves living in the next stage of their life, the largest proportion of respondents said they envisioned (or possibly already lived in) a detached home on a large lot. This is indicative of a rural land use pattern that is common around Berkshire County outside of the built-up and urbanized areas. The next largest proportion envisioned living in detached homes on smaller lots, which are more indicative of suburban or denser urban neighborhoods (e.g., with building lots of less than half an acre). The remaining one-third of respondents were split between envisioning life in multi-family housing, living in accessory dwelling units (ADUs), or something else. See **Figure 2-4** for a visual breakdown of responses. The highest-ranked determining factor for where respondents would opt to live was housing affordability, followed by travel times to and from destinations.

For employer-supported workplace transportation, such as employee shuttles, there was a mix of support among funding schemes. The largest proportion responded that they would be willing to pay an equivalent amount to a BRTA bus fare, with the next largest cohort responding that it should be paid for another way without cost to the employee.

**Figure 2-4: Preferred lifestyles**

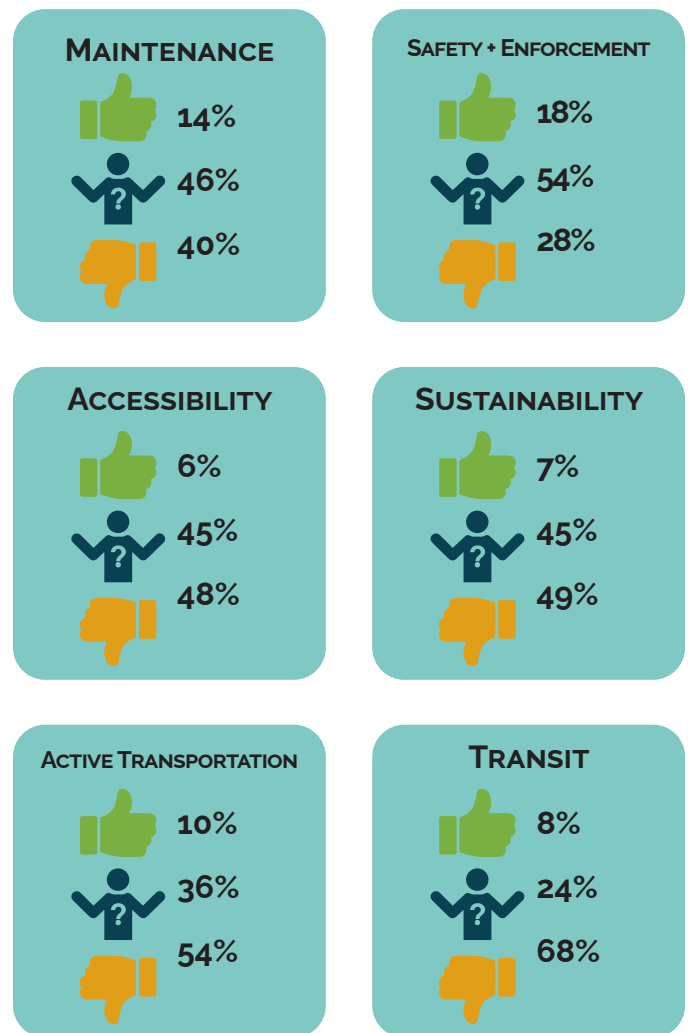
Where do you see you or your family most likely living in the next stage of your life?



### Transportation Satisfaction Levels

Survey respondents were asked to report their levels of satisfaction with broad components of the transportation system. Response options included "Satisfied," Dissatisfied," or a neutral option such as "Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied" or "I'm on the fence." Satisfaction levels are illustrated in **Figure 2-5** below. For each of the six categories (Maintenance, Safety and Enforcement, Accessibility, Sustainability, Active Transportation, and Transit), none received a plurality of "Satisfied" responses.

**Figure 2-5: Satisfaction Levels of system components**



Maintenance received the highest number of "Satisfied" responses at 14%, Safety and Enforcement received the highest number of neutral responses at 54%, and Transit received the highest number of "Dissatisfied" responses at 68%. Respondents could also rate from 1-5 the overall conditions of pavement, signage, and striping that they observed. Out of **5.0**, the average rating was **2.54**. For conditions of signage and striping, out of **5.0**, the average rating was **2.79**.



### Desired Changes to the Transportation System

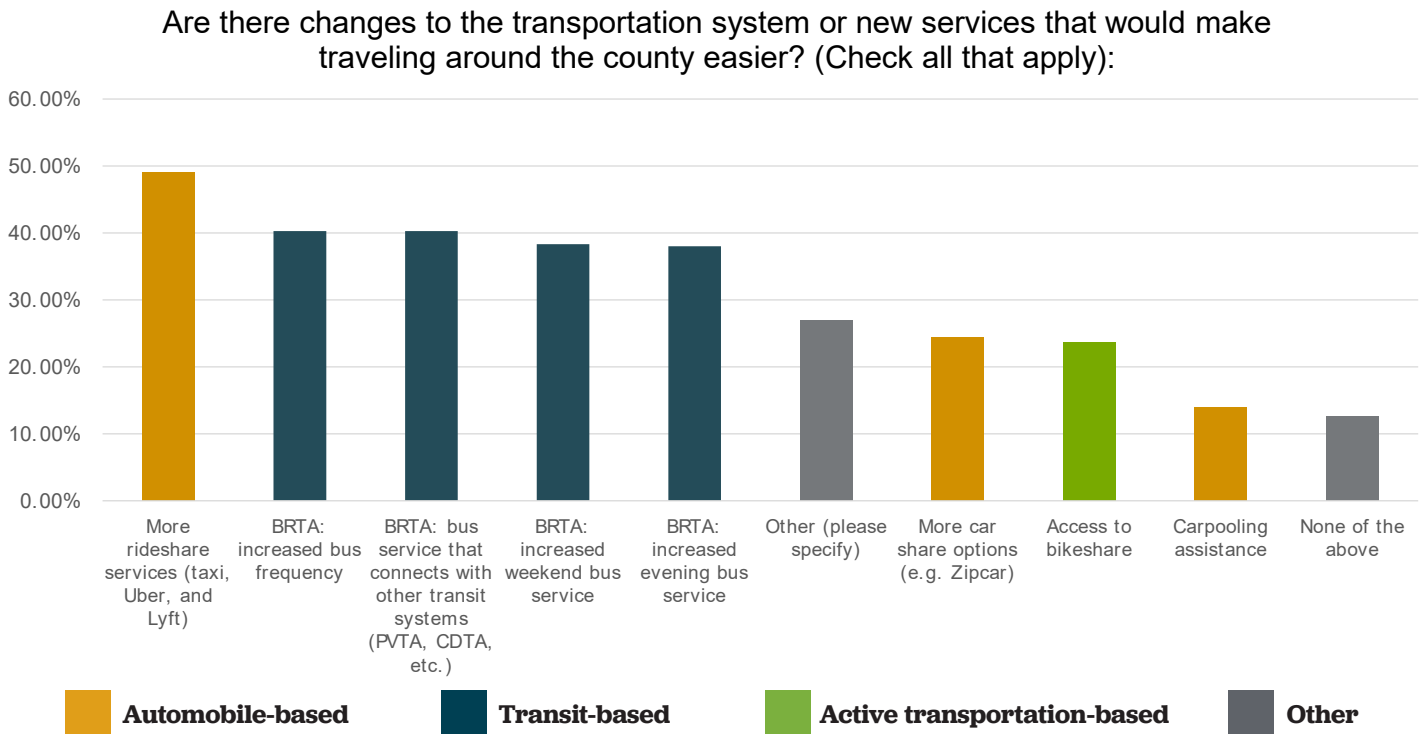
In response to inquiries to transportation challenges and satisfaction levels, respondents were asked to choose which changes to the transportation system would make travel around the region easier. Options included more rideshare services, increased bus frequency, hours, and coverage, more car sharing options, access to bikeshare, carpooling assistance, or none of the above. The most frequently chosen answer was more rideshare services such as taxis, Uber, and Lyft. Improved components of the transit system all occupied second, third, fourth and fifth place. See **Figure 2-6** for response levels for each improvement option. Comments in response to the “Other”

building or widening roads, improving streetscape appearance, and moving freight more efficiently.

### Public Transportation and Passenger Rail

Survey respondents overwhelmingly do not use the region's public transportation system. When asked how one currently utilizes our public transportation system, a combined 84% responded with “I very rarely/never use the public transportation system,” and “We have a public transit system?” One blind spot for this survey was directly inviting public transit users to answer the questionnaire. BRPC sees great value in partnering with the Berkshire Regional Transit Authority (BRTA) staff to engage with transit riders more directly to get their feedback in future outreach

**Figure 2-6: Desired Transportation Changes**



option heavily featured constructing more bike paths and bike lanes, as well providing more rail service, EV charging infrastructure, transit services for hilltowns — those outside the major “spine” of central Berkshire County and the river valleys, senior transportation, and shuttle services.

When asked to rank future budget priorities, the highest priority selected overall was improving public transit, followed by funding maintenance of our existing assets, and improving safety for all road users. Other investments that were ranked lower on the list included enhancing the existing transportation network with new technology,

strategies. Intercepting riders at the ITC terminal is one strategy, possibly interviewing customers who are waiting to board their bus with a very brief questionnaire. Riding along and interviewing interested passengers on the buses themselves is another strategy. This should be considered as a special study effort for planning staff and is discussed further in **Goal 3: Expand Public Transportation Services and Options.**

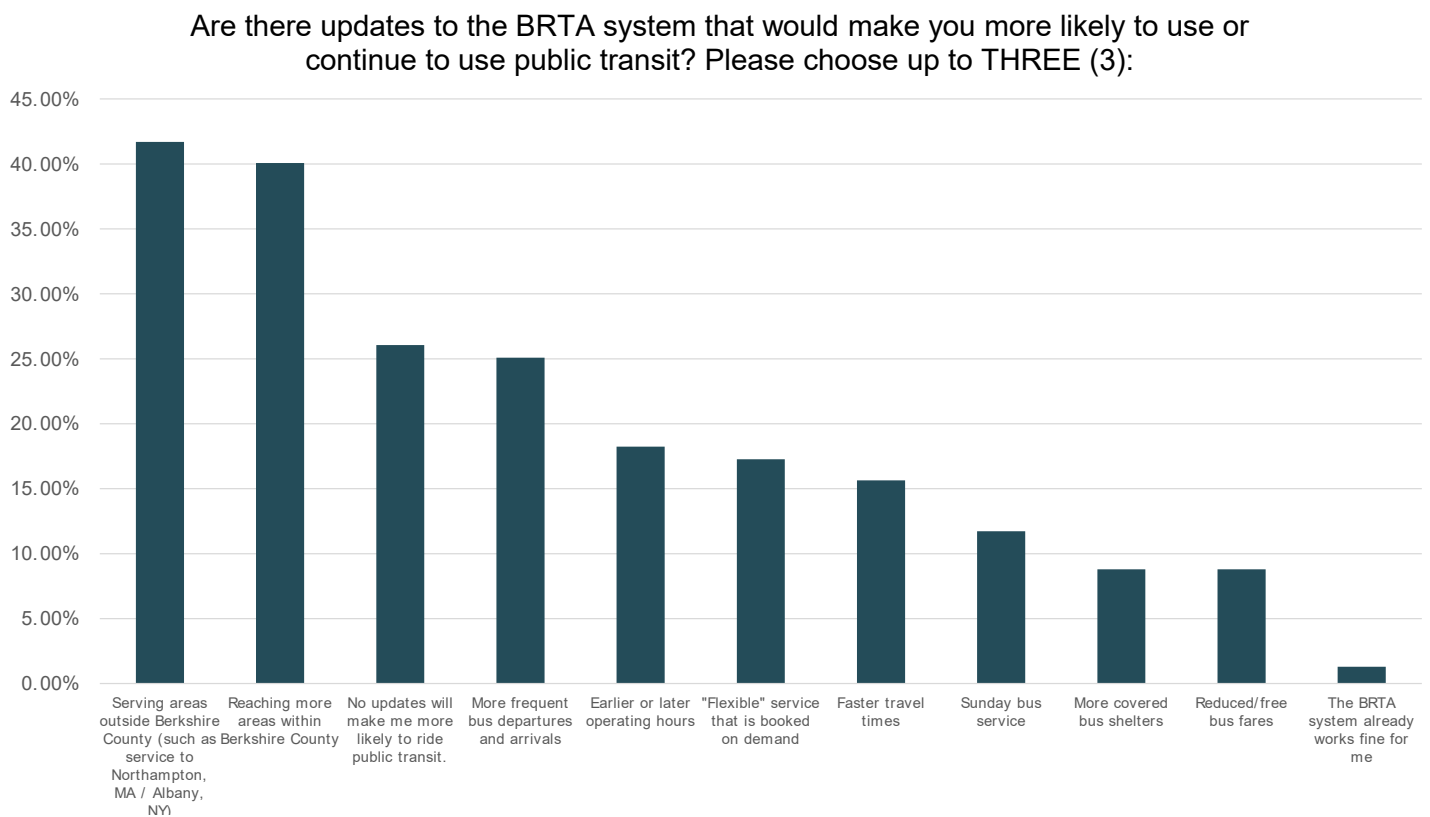
Despite low ridership overall from respondents, the Community Transportation Survey was able to gather insights into what enhancements could be made to attract more and continued ridership.

Respondents could choose up to three changes that they would feel makes the region's public transit work better for them. The top-chosen response was to serve areas outside of Berkshire County — such as connections to Albany, NY or Northampton, MA. The second highest choice was to reach more areas within Berkshire County. The third-place response indicated that no updates would make the respondent more likely to ride public transit. See **Figure 2-7** below for the break-out of all responses.

### Active Transportation

As noted previously, gaps in sidewalks and bike infrastructure were noted as two of the largest challenges to mobility for survey respondents. When asked to rank potential investments in active transportation for Berkshire County, respondents listed repairing and building new sidewalks as the highest priority. Expanding the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail was the second-highest ranked project, followed by building Berkshire Bike Path segments in southern Berkshire County, and installing more on-road bike lanes for applicable streets. Support for a regional bike-share system was strong

**Figure 2-7: Desired Transportation Changes**



A large contingency of survey respondents expressed support for enhanced passenger rail, with 79% reporting that they would be likely to use a passenger rail connection, if it existed, for reaching destinations in the Northeast region. Open-ended comments for transit issues also heavily supported rail, along with elaborations on improvements for public transportation. Overall, there is appetite for improvements to rail and transit infrastructure in Berkshire County. While high-quality fixed-route service will always prove challenging in a rural region, there are additional options that can be explored like micro-transit and rideshare.

overall from survey respondents, though interest in using such as system was mixed. Just under one-third (the highest proportion) of respondents reported that they support a bike-share system but would likely not use it themselves. 27 percent reported that they support and would occasionally use a bike-share system, while 19% reported they would be likely to use it. 24 percent of respondents did not support investing in a bike-share system. Public comments included support for more separated bike infrastructure, as well as re-working downtown Pittsfield's bike lane network.



## ***Sustainability and Technology***

Survey respondents were asked to share what weather and climate impacts they observed on the roads in their communities. The most frequent response was downed trees and power lines. The next two most widespread impacts reported were ice accumulation and bridge damage. Road flooding and washouts rounded out the top responses. Other less common responses were sinkholes, impassable mud, no major effects, something else, and rock slides/mud slides onto the roadway. Respondents who provided comments heavily noted the prominence of potholes on roads around the region, as well as impacts to travel from winter weather.

Concern for impacts on natural habitats and wildlife linkages was also shared by community members and organizations. Ensuring that our infrastructure has a reduced impact on the environment is an important step in mitigating climate change and its impacts.

The survey also supplied an open-ended prompt for respondents to share locations where weather and climate-related impacts were observed. Many noted the city of Pittsfield in general, including particular local streets. Hinsdale, Great Barrington, Stockbridge, Egremont, North Adams, Clarksburg, Florida, Richmond, Lenox Dale, and Lanesborough were also referenced. The full open-ended responses are available in the **Appendix**.

Respondents shared more thoughts about sustainability in general, including support for more EV charging infrastructure, implementing hybrid/electric buses, transitioning utilities to be underground, enhanced wildlife crossings, concern for amounts of salt used on the roadways, and concern for maintenance of gravel roads as the climate changes.

Responses were mixed in adopting new transportation technology. The biggest need expressed was for greater coverage of rideshare services like

Uber and Lyft, with a 2.98/5.0 rating from respondents. The next highest level of interest was for personal rideable technology, such as e-bikes and e-scooters, with a rating of 2.92. Autonomous vehicles rated at 2.29, vehicle sharing, such as Zipcar, rated at 2.23, and other new technology like drones, robots, etc., rated at 2.04. The region will likely not be an early adopter for most cutting-edge transport-related technology, but needs to stay current on emerging trends in order to not fall behind.

## ***Conclusion***

The RTP Community Transportation Survey provided a window into the public's view of transportation issues around the county. As noted, the survey results do not tell the whole story, but provide one piece of the overall data-driven process of transportation planning.

Important insights were gathered that will help inform project prioritizations in the RTP. For instance, strong support for regional transit connections to neighboring communities in New York's Capital Region and Pioneer Valley was an unexpected highlight. Notable challenges to walking, cycling, and transit will continue to support additional funding and planning efforts toward those initiatives.

Every piece of feedback from the region's constituents and stakeholders is valuable in the development of a high-quality regional transportation plan. It is the role of planning staff and other levels of leadership to gather and interpret public feedback, and develop priorities that can balance the desires of all parties involved.

Transportation planning staff and stakeholders, along with political leadership should continue to provide accessible and empowering outlets for public involvement, especially to those communities who have been historically under-invested, disadvantaged, and experiencing disproportionate externalities of the transportation system, such as excessive pollution, injuries, and travel times.

## Alignment with Regional Data and Studies

The backbone of an effective long-range regional transportation plan is the incorporation of past planning efforts from constituent communities, and coordination of priorities with state and federal stakeholders. In order to best meet the needs of the region, it is important to distill the findings of local studies to be sure they are appropriately considered for future resource opportunities. A regional plan should also take into account the priorities of higher levels of government, so that the region is in the best position to request and receive additional resources as they become available. This section will list and summarize prudent studies from municipalities, the Berkshire Region, and at the state level.

### LOCAL PLANNING STUDIES

Studies conducted in recent years by municipalities in Berkshire County may include Comprehensive Plans, Open Space and Recreation Plans (OSRPs), Complete Streets, or other Master Plans. Studies referenced here have generally been published recently and are still in implementation phases.

#### 2019

##### ***Town of Adams Open Space and Recreation Plan***

Pursuant to the Plan's stated goal, among others, to "continue to develop and maintain multi-use and multi-generational recreational opportunities that bring together Town residents," one objective recommends development of a cross-town network of bicycle routes that utilize the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail as a "spine." The Plan also recommends developing a connector trail for bicycling from the Adams Visitors Center to the Greylock Glen outdoor recreation facilities. A circulator shuttle in conjunction with BRTA is also recommended to be explored.

#### 2017

##### ***Town of Cheshire Master Plan***

The town lists their key transportation issues within the plan as: 1) general road and bridge maintenance, and 2) participation in the regional transportation planning process. The Plan lists a goal of "provid[ing] a complete and well-maintained transportation system that safely accommodates vehicles, pedestrians, and cyclists."

#### 2016

##### ***Town of Dalton Master Plan***

The Plan lists major transportation issues of flooding during major weather events, increasing access to maintenance funds such as Chapter 90, and improving alternative transportation options. The town has also been working to get a reconstruction plan for Division Road over the finish line. Currently, it is programmed in the TIP for 2027-2028.

#### 2018

##### ***Town of Hinsdale Open Space and Recreation Plan***

The town's latest OSRP lists one of its goals as creating more opportunities for outdoor recreation. Pursuant to that goal, one objective is to create more opportunities for cycling by widening shoulders or installing bike lanes where feasible.

#### 2017

##### ***Lanesborough Economic Development Plan***

This plan notes the importance of Route 7 to the town's economic development. It recommends improvements to the roadway that create a "gateway" and/or "town square" feature, which could encourage more patrons to visit local businesses and more entrepreneurs to consider doing business in the town.

#### 2021

##### ***Town of Lenox Master Plan***

The town's Master Plan lays out a vision of a "transportation and circulation network that meets the needs of its residents and visitors." Several goals and action items are put forward in pursuit of that vision. These include:

- ◆ Implementing recommendations from the town's Complete Streets plan
- ◆ Providing transportation choice by enhancing system connectivity between modes
- ◆ Prioritizing safety for all users of the transportation system
- ◆ Prioritizing projects that enhance walkability and bikeability for visitors by ensuring adequate connections to town destinations
- ◆ Increasing livability of Lenox by improving access to active mode facilities and/or transit services
- ◆ Developing a multimodal transportation



system that is sensitive to the historic districts and rural scenic character of Lenox

- ◆ Ensuring that improvements are equitably distributed throughout the town

In addition, the Master Plan calls for continuing to provide adequate transportation services for senior and disabled residents, implementing enhanced local public transit, maintaining a state of good repair of local roads, and increasing access to means of transportation, including shuttles and rail.

#### **2014**

##### ***North Adams Vision 2030 Comprehensive Plan***

The Comprehensive Plan includes several goals across different categories that relate to transportation planning. These include continuing bike path planning, conducting a downtown and neighborhood walkability study, implementing urban walking routes, studying the Route 2 overpass, and conducting a downtown parking study. Route 8 and Route 2 are also targeted for corridor enhancements such as streetscape improvements and creating gateways between the city and neighboring towns.

#### **2016**

##### ***Town of Otis Master Plan and Open Space & Recreation Plan***

The most recent Master Plan for the town lists several transportation goals:

- ◆ Providing a complete and well-maintained system of roads
- ◆ Increasing access to public and alternative transportation in the town
- ◆ Enhancing the bicycle and pedestrian environment in the town
- ◆ Addressing wildlife crossings in future roadway projects.

#### **2021**

##### ***City of Pittsfield Bicycle Facilities Master Plan***

From the Fall of 2020 to the Fall of 2021, the City of Pittsfield conducted a study of, and released a master plan for, a comprehensive network of bicycling facilities on City streets. The final proposed network includes context-sensitive facilities to create safe cycling routes to as many areas of the city as possible. Depending on the adjacent use to the right-of-way, traffic volumes and speeds, available road space, and regional connectivity, a street could be proposed to include painted bike

lanes, a separated path, shared street space, or buffered bike lanes. The BFMP should be consulted when resurfacing and other improvements are made to streets in the city, especially Federal-aid and regionally significant routes.

#### **2019**

##### ***City of Pittsfield Hazard Mitigation Plan Update***

The latest Hazard Mitigation Plan covers needs of city transportation infrastructure including roads, bridges, and culverts. There are ten bridges identified in the city as structurally deficient. Roads in Pittsfield, especially in close proximity to the Housatonic River, can be vulnerable to flooding. Participants in the plan development also expressed concern about the amounts of salt and sand needed to keep the streets clear in winter weather, and potholes and sinkholes becoming more problematic with extreme freeze/thaw cycles during the winter season.

#### **2016**

##### ***Town of Sandisfield Master Plan***

Several transportation goals are put forward in the Master Plan. They include: providing a complete and well-maintained system of roads, improving public and non-motorized transportation in the town, and establishing a wayfinding system and improving local signage. Route 57 was noted as a major east-west route through the town, which is entirely under local jurisdiction. Placement on the TIP was noted as a priority. Addressing future bridge needs, adopting a Complete Streets approach, and enhancing services for seniors also were listed as discrete objectives.

#### **2016**

##### ***Town of Stockbridge Visioning Plan***

It was noted as part of the visioning process, transportation options and connections were a key concern. Rail transportation was future hope, along with ride share services, taxis, and other means of connecting to nearby towns and cultural venues. Increasing cycling as a viable alternative to automobile use, particularly around downtown, was noted by participants. The "2036 vision" of Stockbridge includes people moving throughout town by various means of transportation and being less car-reliant. Community activities are clustered near downtown where walking and cycling is safest and most accessible. Regional connections by rail are also available. A town Transportation Planning exercise was recommended.

## REGIONAL PLANS

**2023**

### ***Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy***

Transportation infrastructure is a vital component of a competitive local economy. The Berkshires' most recent CEDS report covers a five-year span between 2023 and 2027. The details of potential infrastructure investments will be explored in **Goal 2: Foster Economic Development**. The CEDS lays out five overarching goals, several of which have transportation planning implications:

- ◆ Healthy People (Foster the wellbeing of all residents by ensuring affordable, equitable access to food, housing, education, and healthcare)
- ◆ Resilient Communities (Equip our communities to serve their constituents, steward resources, and manage governance effectively.)
- ◆ Robust Infrastructure (Prioritize improvements to critical elements of economic prosperity, including communications, transportation, and utilities.)

The SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis for the region currently lists public transportation as a weakness. As workforces around the county continue to age and contract, and land use policies allow for scatter-site development of workplaces and industries, use of public transit as a means of commuting has declined.

Relevant priorities and project recommendations that foster economic development will be explored further in **Goal 2**.

**2014**

### ***Sustainable Berkshires Report***

This report lists a major goal of providing quality infrastructure and services. Heavy traffic in downtowns was listed as a concern for noise and air pollution as well as safety. The transportation network can also create barriers for business development in areas with limited highway access. The high cost of personal mobility when car ownership is all but required to move about the county negatively impacts the populace, especially those who are unable to drive due to age or disability. Transportation financing is another goal for study and improvement, such as increasing Chapter 90 funds and directing 1¢ MBTA surcharges back to the region.

**2020**

### ***Berkshire County Outdoor Recreation Plan***

This plan, produced in conjunction with Mill Town Capital, lists several recommendations for Berkshire outdoor recreation that can be supported with transportation investments:

- ◆ Develop trail connections from recreational venues and along waterways to downtowns of the cities and towns of Berkshire County
- ◆ Review new development and transportation projects for recreation synergies and needs
- ◆ Consider shuttles for paddlers, hikers, and bikers for one-way trips
- ◆ Work with municipalities to incorporate Complete Street principles into future infrastructure improvements
- ◆ Increase lengths of paved bike trails by expanding county-wide and creating connections to downtowns and recreational areas
- ◆ Increase availability and use of protected and dedicated bike lanes, increasing the width of shoulders on roads that do not have bike lanes

**2022**

### ***Electric Vehicle Charging Station Plan***

The purpose of this plan is to increase awareness of electric vehicle (EV) technology and advance the strategic installation of charging stations throughout the region. Major goals include: education of the public on current states of charging technology, equipping municipalities with information to make decisions on electrification investments, and recommending feasible pathways to build sustained engagement and a comprehensive charging network around the county. These ideas will be explored further in **Goal 6: Adapting for Sustainability and Resilience**.

**2023**

### ***Coordinated Human Services Transportation Plan***

The CHST is an initiative with the goal of gathering and coordinating all transportation services that are focused on serving those who are elderly, disabled, or low-income. The plan development involves gathering feedback from stakeholders in the community who may fit into one or more of those categories, as well as convening transportation service providers. The plan then works to recommend efforts to further enhance and coordinate these services and identifies funding opportunities to implement projects and programs.



## STATEWIDE PLANS

**Figure 2-8: Average Chapter 90 dollars per mile of road by county (via State Auditor)**

**2021**

### **Public Infrastructure in Western Massachusetts: A Critical Need for Regional Investment and Revitalization**

This report was published in October 2021 by the Office of the State Auditor. As laid out in the report, this study had four overall purposes:

- ✦ Estimate the costs for infrastructure needs, by category, in Western Massachusetts,
- ✦ Highlight funding sources, and gaps in funding, for infrastructure development and maintenance,
- ✦ Propose a model for funding infrastructure projects for Western Massachusetts municipalities,
- ✦ Engage policymakers in discussions on the infrastructure needs of Western Massachusetts municipalities

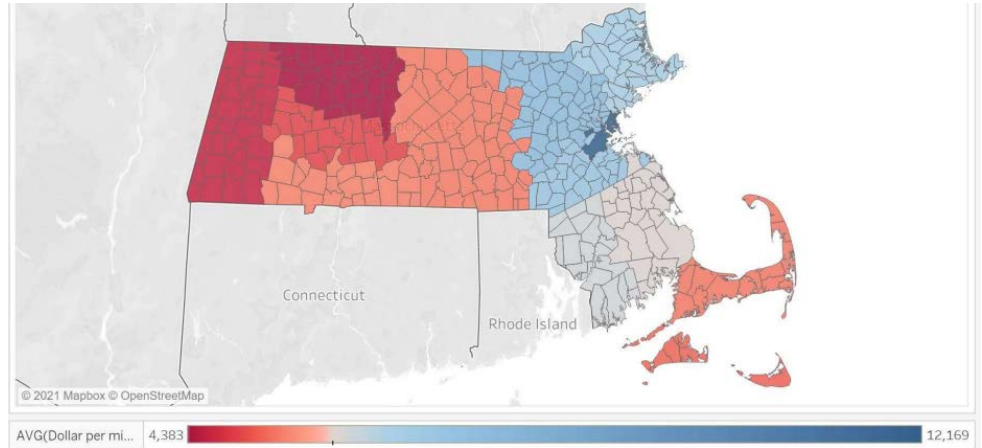
The report considered three different general types of infrastructure: Broadband Internet, roadways (including sidewalks, lighting, culverts and small bridges), and municipal buildings (exclusive of educational facilities).

The report highlights the difficulties that many municipalities experiencing population decline have with raising additional revenue to fund maintenance and services. Proposition 2 ½, for example, sets a cap on “how much tax revenue can be extracted from property wealth, even though property taxes are often the greatest source of revenue for a municipality,” per the report. New property growth allows a town to gain more revenue beyond that limit.

The State Auditor’s report makes several recommendations related to transportation infrastructure. While Berkshire County may have little direct control over when or if these recommendations are implemented, local stakeholders and regional planning staff are prepared to assist as needed.

#### **Recommendations:**

1. The Chapter 90 Program needs additional funding and formula reform.



The Chapter 90 Program is the direct state-aid program in Massachusetts that provides towns and cities with maintenance funds for their local roads. See **Goal 1a** for additional information about the program. The Chapter 90 funding pool has been held steady at \$200,000,000 for nearly a decade, and this has caused the purchasing power of the funding to steadily erode. The report highlights the town of Lenox, where \$436,051 was received in Chapter 90 funding in FY2015, but that amount had declined 35% to \$282,098 by FY2020. This can be traced to multiple factors such as population loss and redistribution of the static pool of formula funds to other growing communities. Overall, towns in the Berkshires lose out on a per-mile basis of funding. Rural roads often carry less traffic than urban counterparts but still must be built to a certain minimum standard. **Figure 2-8**, taken from the report, shows a comparison of average Chapter 90 funding per mile. The disparity ranges from a low of \$4,383 per mile average in the FRCOG region to a high of \$12,169 per mile in Suffolk County. Berkshire County averages to about \$4,826 per mile of Chapter 90 funding, based on BRPC analysis.

Supposing that the median Chapter 90 funding per mile, based on the amounts given in **Figure 2-8**, was \$8,276, the Berkshire region would need to see a funding increase of 71% percent on average to reach this figure. This would add up to about \$13,150,000 in combined Chapter 90 funding to the 32 municipalities in Berkshire County.

**Figure 2-9: Chapter 90 Program Formula Weights, Current and Proposed**

	Current Chapter 90 Formula Weights	Proposed Chapter 90 Formula Weights
Road Mileage	58.33%	69.33%
Population	20.83%	15.33%
Employment	20.83%	15.33%

The report also recommends re-formulating the Chapter 90 program to put more emphasis on road mileage and less on population and employment figures. Apportioning funds to each town is done by considering a town's road mileage under local control, the town's population, and how many jobs are within the town. Current and proposed weighting of these formula components are shown below in **Figure 2-9**.

### *2. Repair and replacement of small bridges and culverts need more funding and attention*

According to the State Auditor's report, there are over 2,000 small bridges and culverts in western Massachusetts, at varying levels of need. It is recommended for MassDOT to provide in-house technical assistance to municipalities for small bridge design and other projects, especially small communities who may not have the resources available to procure an engineering design through a third-party consultant. Additionally, creating a library of design templates for stream crossings is a project that was endorsed by the Culvert and Small Bridge Working Group, and is currently being further explored. It is also recommended to implement a layer of separation between the technical expertise and various funding arms of regional agencies, as well as MassDOT agencies. Technical assistance programs could be housed elsewhere as well, such as the Executive Office of Housing and Community Development.

### *3. The Small Town Road Assistance Program requires greater funding and modification to better meet the needs of small towns and rural communities.*

Per the State Auditor's report: "The Small Town Road Assistance Program (STRAP), which is a stressed resource that is dedicated to the needs of small communities, should be enhanced in two ways. First, the MassWorks enabling statute should be amended to provide a larger percentage (15 or 20%) of MassWorks's annual funding towards STRAP projects, rather than the current 10%. In addition, the \$1 million cap per project for STRAP projects should be removed, which will allow larger projects to take advantage of the program."

#### **2019-2021**

#### **Statewide Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Plan and Update**

The previous Statewide Bicycle Transportation

Plan was written in 2008. In 2019, a new version was written, taking into account new acceptance of modern cycling infrastructure, research, and policies. In 2021, the Plan was supplemented with selected exemplary projects encompassing the vision and mission of the Plan. This Plan is broken into visions, goals, and principles for traveling both by bicycle and foot. Priority projects on both state and local roads are explored, as well as new methodologies in data collection, design criteria, equity performance measures, legislation, and public education. The plan was developed through a combination of public participation and steering from the Massachusetts Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Board (MABPAB).

#### **Vision for Bicycling:**

Biking in Massachusetts will be a safe, comfortable, and convenient option for everyday travel.

**Goal 1:** Eliminate bicyclist fatalities and serious injuries.

**Goal 2:** Increase percentage of everyday trips made by bicycling

**Principle 1:** Value people bicycling and their travel needs, especially the most vulnerable - children, elderly, people with disabilities - to ensure they can safely bicycle.

**Principle 2:** Prioritize improvements for people bicycling by proactively addressing gaps and barriers that discourage bicycling and are known to increase likelihood of crashes.

**Principle 3:** Lead the Commonwealth in meeting the Bicycle Plan goals by supporting local municipalities and other agencies to advance everyday biking.

This vision along with these goals and principles will be acted on through investments in the Capital Investment Plan, which are now subject to the MassDOT Healthy Transportation Policy Directive. Additional funding comes in the form of the MassTrails Program, Complete Streets program and the Chapter 90 program. See **Chapter 4 Objective 1a** for more information about Chapter 90, and Objective 5a for more information on the Complete Streets program.

Towns and cities are encouraged to obtain a copy of the [MassDOT Municipal Resource Guide for Bikeability](#), released as a companion to the 2019 State Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. The guide provides an introduction to municipal staff and



leadership on the core principles of bikeability and supplies the tools and information needed to create safe, comfortable, and convenient bike networks that appeal to the broadest base of people. Topics include why bikeability is important, designing for all ages and abilities, planning bikeable communities and connected networks, establishing bikeshare, collecting data, and maintaining four-season bikeways.

According to the state of bicycling data used for the 2019 plan development, 1.4% of daily trips in the Commonwealth are made by bike. Nearly 8,600 crashes involving a bicyclist were recorded between 2010 and 2015. 51 of these crashes were fatal, 661 caused serious injury, and 5,615 crashes caused other injuries. Safety initiatives from Complete Streets, Vision Zero (a framework of setting a goal of zero fatalities), the Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP), and the MassDOT Office of Traffic Safety offer resources to address these statistics. The Berkshire RTP will discuss how the region aligns with each of these entities in subsequent chapters.

### **2023 Massachusetts Freight Plan**

This document is currently undergoing an update from its previous 2017 version. MPO staff is actively participating in this development effort. The purpose of the plan is to provide an update to the previous 2017 state freight plan and fulfill the obligation of providing an updated state freight plan to the FHWA every four years moving forward. The 2023 Freight Plan offers the following vision statement for freight movement in the Commonwealth:

*“Supporting safe, resilient, and secure multimodal freight movement in Massachusetts through investing in key freight assets to improve economic competitiveness, provide efficient and reliable freight mobility, and support healthy and sustainable communities.”*

The 2023 Freight Plan is assessing the following goals:

- ◆ System Condition
- ◆ Safety and Resiliency
- ◆ Mobility and Reliability
- ◆ Economic Competitiveness
- ◆ Equity and Environmental Sustainability

These goals are being pursued under the principles of fostering equity and collaboration and

building organizational capacity at MassDOT. Each of the goals listed above is being tracked by a number of performance measures, many of which delve deeper into the original FAST Act Performance Measures, continued by the BIL. The 2023 Freight Rail Plan makes many recommendations under four broad strategies:

- ◆ Immediate Strategies
- ◆ Robust Strategies
- ◆ Hedging Strategies
- ◆ Shaping Strategies

Highlighted actions from each of these strategies include the following:

- ◆ Analyze and improve lighting conditions on corridors with higher rates of truck-involved crashes
- ◆ Improve safety at highway-railgrade crossings
- ◆ Incorporate rumble strips into new and existing interstate and rural roadways
- ◆ Establish framework for prioritizing multimodal freight projects with a focus on equity
- ◆ Emphasize the need for timely and accurate reporting of crash data involving freight vehicles or at-grade rail crossings
- ◆ More fully integrate freight planning into MassDOT activities
- ◆ Promote driver education on stopping distances when operating at higher speeds
- ◆ Promote road user education on safe vehicle operation and visibility around trucks
- ◆ Study and perform curbside demand management
- ◆ Explore and incorporate real-time and other new data sources to better understand freight movements
- ◆ Use critical freight corridors to support and advance projects that improve multimodal freight mobility
- ◆ Consider opportunities to improve MassDOT design guidance, policies and procedures to protect against extreme weather and reduce other contingencies
- ◆ Promote efforts to increase awareness of fatigue among truck drivers and operators
- ◆ Improve freight worker access to transit
- ◆ Support low-impact freight and industrial development in urban locations

- ◆ Support action to preserve industrial land uses in the Boston area
- ◆ Reduce the number of at-grade crossings
- ◆ Improve and preserve freight connections to/from Boston's waterfront freight facilities
- ◆ Encourage e-bike/cargo bicycle delivery
- ◆ Deploy safety upgrades in MassDOT fleets
- ◆ Deploy lateral protective devices (side guards) on MassDOT truck fleet
- ◆ Study and update building codes to allow for more efficient deliveries
- ◆ Study and modify municipal zoning codes to allow for neighborhood micro-hubs and other in-town warehouse spaces
- ◆ Support efforts to reduce distracted driving
- ◆ Study and support development of Advanced Air Mobility (AAM)

## 2018

### **State Rail Plan**

Finalized in 2018, the purpose of the State Rail Plan is to guide the future of the rail system and rail services in the state. This updates on the previous rail plan published in 2010. The Plan will be used as a blueprint to set policies and priorities, serve as a basis for federal and state rail investments, establish means of coordinating with adjoining states, private parties, and federal agencies, and meet the planning requirement established by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA).

The long-term vision of the State Rail Plan focuses on several initiatives:

- ◆ Long-term Reliability and Resiliency
- ◆ Modernization
- ◆ Optimization
- ◆ Regional Balance

Rail investments were ranked into three tiers in the Plan: 1, 2, and 3. Tier 1 is described as being high priority for implementation. Tier 2 projects warrant further study. Tier 3 projects do not have any actions recommended at the time of writing. Projects that have been analyzed in Berkshire County include the Western Massachusetts to Boston Passenger Rail Service Study (East-West Rail), Berkshire Flyer Passenger Rail Service, and Housatonic Passenger Rail Service. All projects listed are in Tier 2 except for Housatonic Passenger Rail Service, which is in Tier 3.

Improvements and investments in the state rail system going forward under the State Rail Plan place a state-of-good-repair paradigm as a top priority. Investments are reflected predominantly in the state Capital Investment Plan (CIP). Besides the projects listed under Tiers 2 and 3 in Berkshire County, four at-grade crossing safety improvements on the Housatonic Line have been completed under the State Rail Plan.

### **Ongoing**

#### **East-West Rail and Northern Tier Rail Studies**

These feasibility studies are ongoing and are further discussed in **Chapter 4, Objective 3b**. As noted above in the State Rail Plan, implementation of an East-West passenger rail service from Boston to Western Massachusetts is listed as a Tier 2 project (warranting further study).

## FEDERAL PLANS AND INITIATIVES

### 2022

#### **National Roadway Safety Strategy**

The National Roadway Safety Strategy (NRSS) was released in January 2021 by the US Department of Transportation (USDOT). The NRSS lays out the national concern for rising fatalities and serious injuries on the roads and seeks to utilize a new Safe Systems approach to reduce these statistics to zero. The NRSS has five overall objectives that will work in concert to reduce deaths and injuries:

- ◆ **Safer People:** Encourage safe, responsible driving and behavior by people who use our roads and create conditions that prioritize their ability to reach their destination unharmed.
- ◆ **Safer Vehicles:** Expand the availability of vehicle systems and features that help to prevent crashes and minimize the impact of crashes on both occupants and non-occupants.
- ◆ **Safer Roads:** Design roadway environments to mitigate human mistakes and account for injury tolerances, to encourage safer behaviors, and to facilitate safe travel by the most vulnerable users.
- ◆ **Safer Speeds:** Promote safer speeds in all roadway environments through a combination of thoughtful, equitable, context-appropriate roadway design, appropriate speed-limit setting, targeted education, outreach campaigns, and enforcement.



- ◆ **Post-Crash Care:** Enhance the survivability of crashes through expedient access to emergency medical care, while creating a safe working environment for vital first responders and preventing secondary crashes through robust traffic incident management practices.

Per the USDOT, these five objectives were built atop the following principles of a Safe System approach:

- ◆ **Death and Serious Injuries are Unacceptable:** A Safe System Approach prioritizes the elimination of crashes that result in death and serious injuries.
- ◆ **Humans Make Mistakes:** People will inevitably make mistakes and decisions that can lead or contribute to crashes, but the transportation system can be designed and operated to accommodate certain types and levels of human mistakes, and avoid death and serious injuries when a crash occurs.
- ◆ **Humans Are Vulnerable:** Human bodies have physical limits for tolerating crash forces before death or serious injury occurs; therefore, it is critical to design and operate a transportation system that is human-centric and accommodates physical human vulnerabilities.
- ◆ **Responsibility is Shared:** All stakeholders—including government at all levels, industry, non-profit/advocacy, researchers, and the general public—are vital to preventing fatalities and serious injuries on our roadways.
- ◆ **Safety is Proactive:** Proactive tools should be used to identify and address safety issues in the transportation system, rather than waiting for crashes to occur and reacting afterwards.
- ◆ **Redundancy is Crucial:** Reducing risks requires that all parts of the transportation system be strengthened, so that if one part fails, the other parts still protect people.

The Safe Systems approach in Berkshire County is explored further in **Chapter 4 Objective 4a**. Investments in infrastructure, programs and staff resources will be needed to align the Berkshires with the eventual goal of zero deaths and serious injuries on our roads.

## 2019

### ***Rural Opportunities to Use Transportation for Economic Success (ROUTES) Initiative***

Per the USDOT, the ROUTES Initiative “seeks to address disparities in rural transportation infrastructure by developing user-friendly tools and information, aggregating USDOT resources, and providing technical assistance to rural and Tribal stakeholders. The ROUTES Initiative aims to ensure rural transportation infrastructure’s unique challenges are considered in order to meet priority transportation goals of safety, mobility, and economic competitiveness.”

The ROUTES initiative provides tools and resources for rural communities in the United States, such as Charging Forward Toolkit for Planning Rural Electric Mobility Infrastructure, as well as a rural applicant toolkit for other federal funding opportunities. The Berkshire region will work to stay informed of future opportunities arising from the initiative.

## **Levels of Government in Transportation Planning**

Long-range planning must involve a wide range of stakeholders from different levels of government. From the hyperlocal neighborhood organizations and nonprofits to municipal governments, regional organizations, MassDOT, and the federal government, the 3-C process takes into account all stakeholders for a region’s transportation plan. This section will highlight the different levels of government involved with the transportation planning process and the resources they provide.

### ***Local Organizations***

These groups may advocate for and advance the position of a particular neighborhood or district of a municipality. Building relationships with grassroots organizations is an invaluable asset for learning about current conditions on the ground in a particular area, and for helping to build support for studies and projects that could stand to benefit the area. Examples of local, advocacy, or grassroots organizations in the Berkshires include the United Neighbors Organization (UNO) in North Adams, and Downtown Pittsfield, Inc., Morningside Initiative and Westside Legends in Pittsfield.

### ***Municipal Governments***

Each town and city in Berkshire County is administered by a local government body. The body may

consist of a Select Board and/or Town Administrator, or a Mayor and City Council. Each municipality administers its locally-owned roadways through its Highway Department or Department of Public Works. These offices will receive funds directly from town budget line items and state Chapter 90 reimbursement (discussed below) to perform maintenance and construction activities on pavement, utilities, culverts, bridges, traffic signals, and other infrastructure. Transportation planners often will ascertain a town's transportation needs through its Master Plan, Complete Streets plan, outdoor recreation plan, corridor studies or other analyses that point to a town's long term priorities. These plans provide context and justification for larger budget priorities and requests from a regional planning agency or MPO in its Long-Range Transportation Plan (such as the RTP2024), Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) and Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP).

### ***Regional Organizations***

Some entities span multiple communities in a region in order to provide shared services or to promote priorities that affect a larger area than one neighborhood or town. Examples of these kinds of organizations can include regional nonprofits such as Berkshire United Way, Northern Berkshire Community Coalition, 1Berkshire, Berkshire Natural Resources Council, Berkshire Bike Path Council, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, and more. These entities help to provide a bigger picture of regional issues. They may also be providers or recipients of grants to provide assistance to other organizations. Regional school districts and chambers of commerce can also be found around Berkshire County.

### ***Metropolitan Planning Organization***

Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) are designated by the federal government to represent metropolitan areas and their transportation needs. Metropolitan areas may span multiple political jurisdictions, such as cities, counties, or states. The unique economic and political structures that historically comprised a metropolitan area often require a holistic view to solve current problems. The MPOs work to solve these unique challenges by bringing together representatives from across a region to make decisions related to regional planning priorities.

### ***State Department of Transportation (MassDOT)***

MassDOT is the state agency responsible for construction, maintenance and administration

of state-owned rights-of-way (ROW), bridges, tunnels, rails, and other infrastructure necessary for the safe and efficient movement of people and goods across the Commonwealth. Every state has an equivalent Department of Transportation, with examples in neighboring states being NYSDOT (New York), ConnDOT (Connecticut), and VTrans (Vermont). State DOTs serve as the immediate stewards of Federal highway dollars, through direct apportionment via legislation and grant programs that are either discretionary or distributed based on need via a funding formula. State DOTs may then pass funds further on to municipalities directly, via mechanisms like Chapter 90, the Municipal Pavement Program, and Complete Streets to name several examples in Massachusetts. MassDOT has several divisions with different functions: Highway, Rail and Transit, Aeronautics, the Registry of Motor Vehicles, and the MBTA mass transportation system.

### ***Federal Government***

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and its parent department, the USDOT, help to set the direction of national transportation policy and budget priorities. While the federal government delegates all highway maintenance responsibilities to the states (i.e. there are no "federally owned" roads), Washington still holds significant sway over the design and prioritizing of our transportation system by distributing federal shares of transportation dollars to many large-scale transportation projects. Designs that utilize federal funding must adhere to specified design standards, usually promulgated through AASHTO and ITE.

Coordination between levels of government is an essential component of public planning. Building relationships with local, regional, state, and federal leadership allows work to be done on behalf of the residents who use the infrastructure every day. Taking full advantage of the resources allocated for a region like Berkshire County means being familiar with the plans and priorities of elected leadership at the state and federal level, as well as the needs and desires of local leaders representing their constituents. Public planning succeeds when resources are connected to a need that is expressed, or processes are made to work better for the residents they serve. It is an ongoing process, as plans and programs evolve and new priorities are put forward.