Berkshire Regional Planning Commission Microtransit Feasibility Study

Berkshire County Microtransit Recommendations

September 23, 2025

Prepared by:

BRPC Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

Foursquare ITP

Agenda

- Project overview
- Introduction to microtransit
- Needs assessment summary
- Service recommendations
- Questions and next steps

Project Overview

Background

- Berkshire County faces the challenges of providing a comprehensive and effective transit service for all its residents and visitors.
- Public transportation is more available in the county's developed areas, leading to limited access outside of the larger town centers and greater reliance on personal vehicles.

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Project Thesis

Berkshire County needs more ways to get around.

Many people have limited transportation options, especially youth and seniors, people with disabilities, and people without access to a car.

Microtransit is well-suited to Berkshire County's size, land use, population, and trip demand.

This is an app-based, on-demand transit service that operates within certain zones. Similar to a ride-hailing app but publicly operated, you can request convenient and affordable rides with clear and consistent pricing.

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Microtransit Feasibility Study

- **Study Goal:** Develop recommendations for the implementation of a pilot microtransit service.
- **Long-Term Goal:** Provide a sustainable, permanent microtransit service.

Introduction to Microtransit

How It Works

Request a trip

Select a pickup time, a pickup point, and a dropoff point within the same zone. You can book using an app, a phone call, or a website.

Pickup in a designated zone

A microtransit vehicle picks you up, and you might share it with other riders.

Pick up and drop off others (sometimes!)

The microtransit vehicle drops you off, and other riders might be dropped off first if their destinations are closer.

Drop off in a designated zone

Zones are conveniently located for easy access to nearby destinations or transit connections.

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Why It's Useful

Accessibility
Expands transit coverage, allowing you to reach places that are harder to get to.

Flexibility
Offers more convenient travel times compared to bus schedules.

Connectivity
Connects to bus routes so you can use both together.

Fiscal Responsibility
Allows us to provide transit to more people in places where traditional bus is less efficient.

South County Connector currently provides microtransit in Great Barrington and the surrounding towns, but we want to see how it could be done in other parts of the county.

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Where Could Microtransit Work?

Needs Assessment Summary and Findings

Demographic Suitability

Where People Live

Demographic Suitability

Microtransit is most suitable in places with **medium to low** Transit Potential (density) but **medium to high** Transit Need (transit-oriented populations).

	Transit Need (transit-oriented populations)			
Transit Potential (jobs + population per acre)		**Low**	**Low-Medium**	**Medium to High**
	Less than 5	Low Demand for Any Transit	Suitable for Microtransit	High Priority for Microtransit
	5 or more	Somewhat Suitable for Fixed-Route	Suitable for Fixed-Route	High Priority for Fixed-Route

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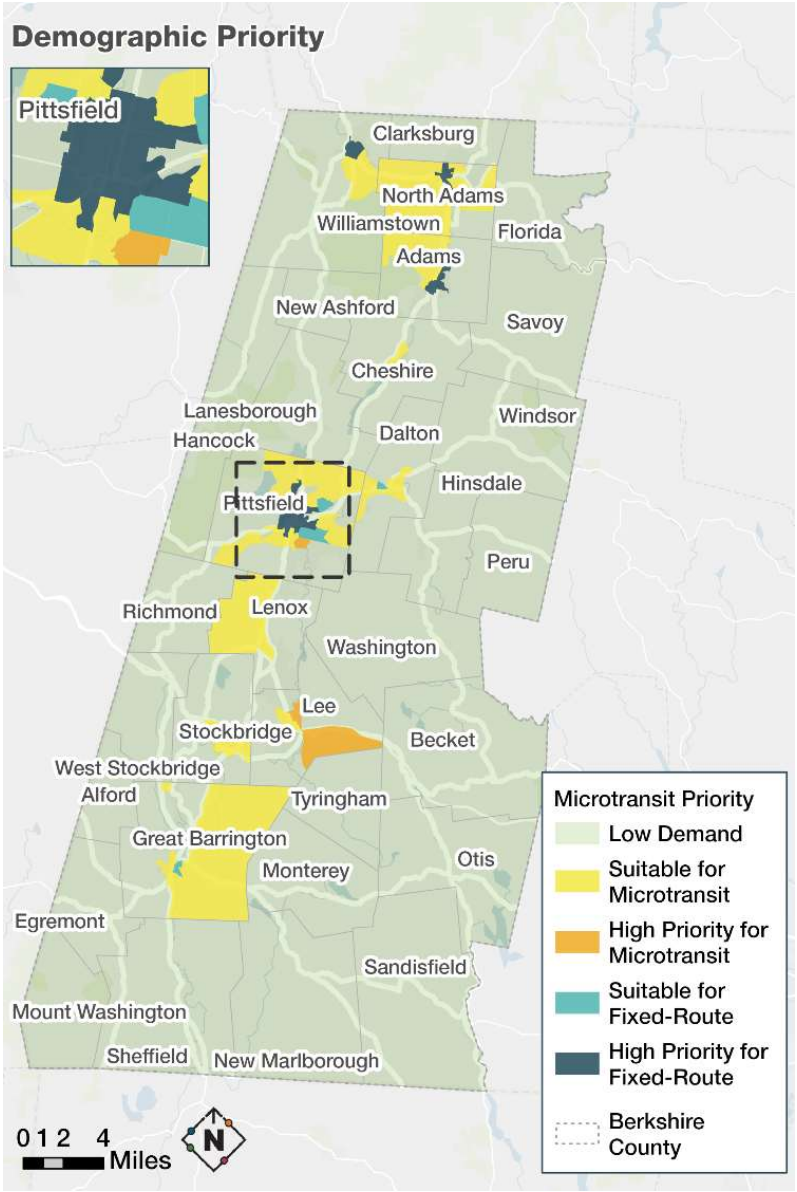
Demographic Suitability

- Areas most likely to be suitable for microtransit:
  - Williamstown
  - North Adams
  - Adams
  - Pittsfield (outside of Downtown)
  - Dalton
  - Lenox
  - Lee
  - Stockbridge
  - Great Barrington



Sources: 2023 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year Estimate, 2022 Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD).

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Travel Demand

Where People Want to Go

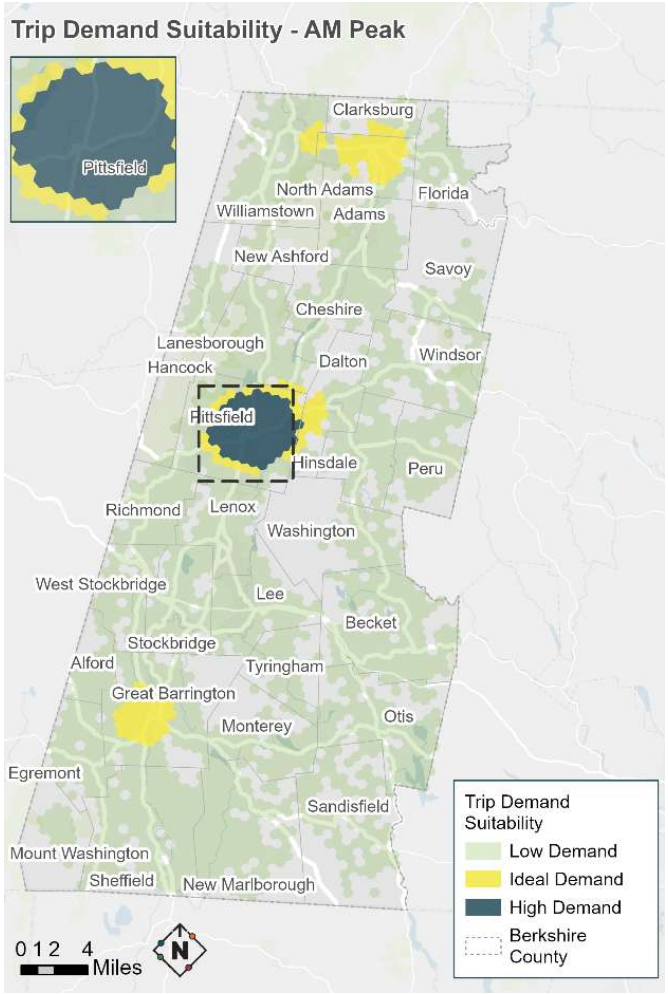
Methodology

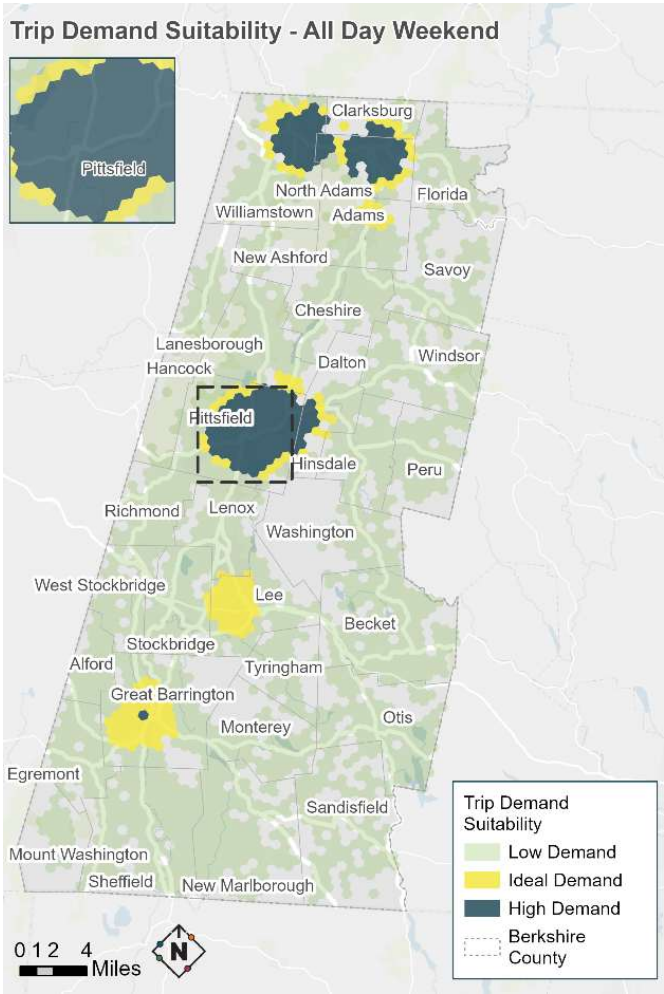
- We analyzed trips across the County using Replica, an activity-based travel demand model. We looked at:
  - Time of day
  - Duration
  - Purpose.
- Our expertise tells us that the trips most suitable for microtransit are:
  - Shorter than transit trips
  - Do not form a recognizable corridor
  - Spread throughout the day
  - Between areas of lower density
  - For a desirable purpose (e.g., shopping, medical appointment).

Trip Demand Suitability

- AM Peak microtransit suitability (left):
  - Great Barrington
  - North Adams
  - Williamstown
  - Pittsfield (outside of Downtown)
- PM Peak and Weekend microtransit suitability:
  - Williamstown, North Adams, and Pittsfield (outside Downtown).
  - Lee
  - Great Barrington

Source: Replica (https://www.replicahq.com/)





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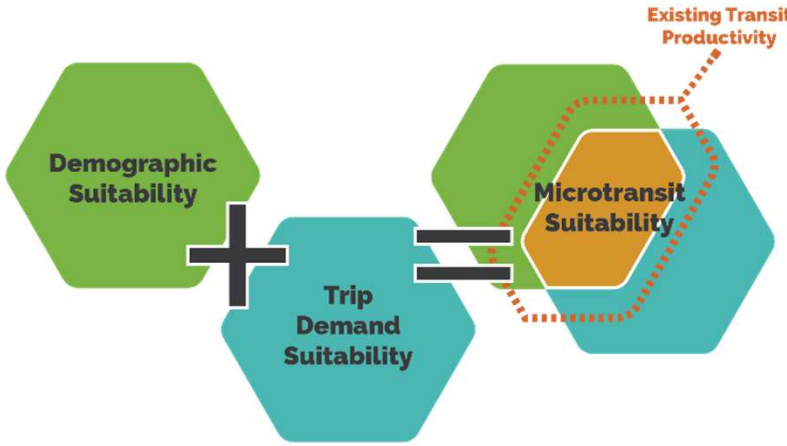
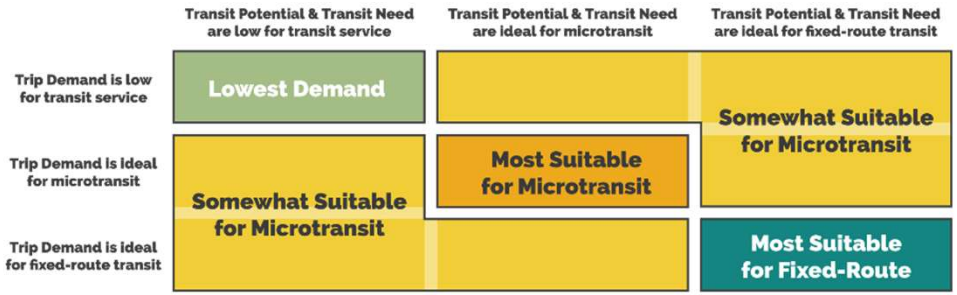
Summary

Where Microtransit is Most Suitable

Methodology

Overlaps between Demographic Suitability and Trip Demand Suitability indicate where microtransit can be most successful.





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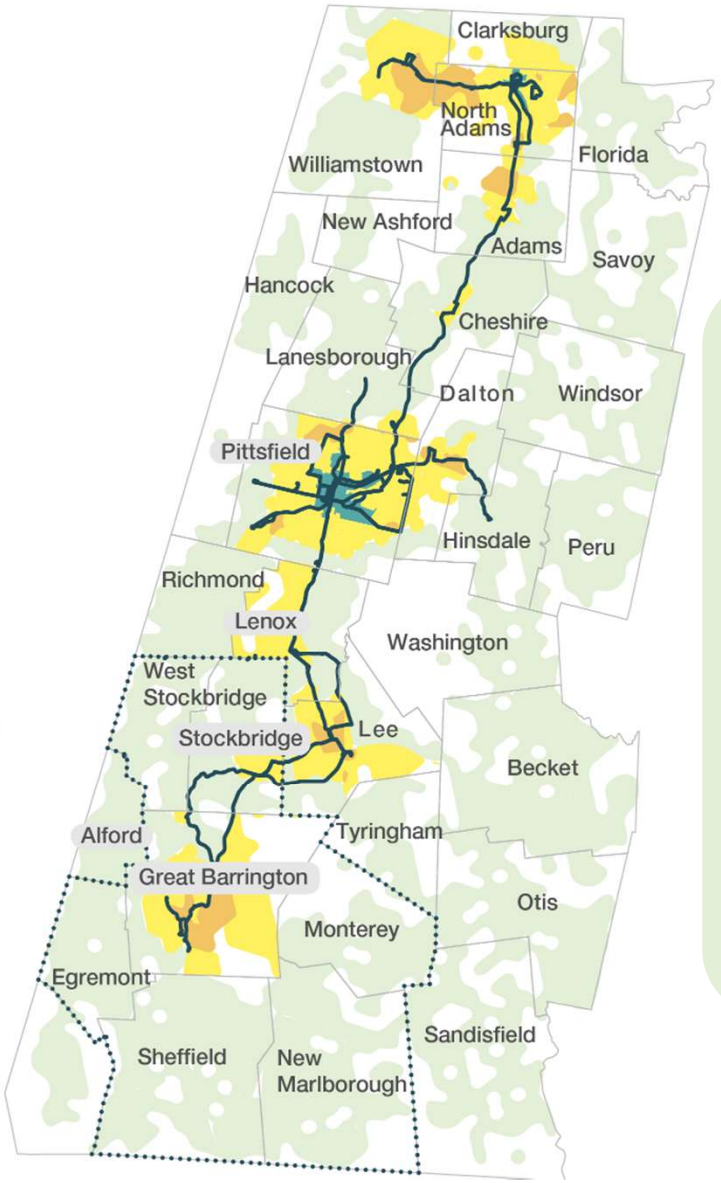
How We Assessed Suitability

We reviewed travel demand data to see which parts of the county have these characteristics:

- **Least Need:** Low density and low transit need.
- **Somewhat Suitable:** Low density **but** medium transit need.
- **Most Suitable:** Medium density **but** high transit need.
- **Best Served by Buses:** High density **and** high transit need

Higher job and population density is better for transit, while transit need measures who is most likely to ride it: the youth and seniors, people with disabilities, and people without access to a car.



Microtransit Suitability

We analyzed where microtransit could work:

- Least Need
- Somewhat Suitable for Microtransit
- Most Suitable for Microtransit
- Best Served by Buses
- Existing Bus Routes
- Existing South County Connector Service Area

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Key Takeaways

Many residents still lack convenient access to bus service. The broad coverage that microtransit affords can fill these gaps.

Lenox has only three major bus stops despite a relatively high number of transit-dependent residents.

In Adams and North Adams, residents who live farther from main corridors face limited or no access to reliable public transit.

Pittsfield has suburban pockets with medium to high transit reliance where residents lack convenient access to bus stops.

Microtransit works best for short trips throughout the day in less-dense areas.

This means that the town centers of North Adams, Adams, and Pittsfield are best served by buses, but the areas surrounding them may be better served by microtransit.

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What did we hear from the public and stakeholders?

Engagement Summary

Outreach Goals

- The Microtransit Feasibility Study project team conducted public engagement in Summer 2025—virtually and in person—to achieve two main goals:

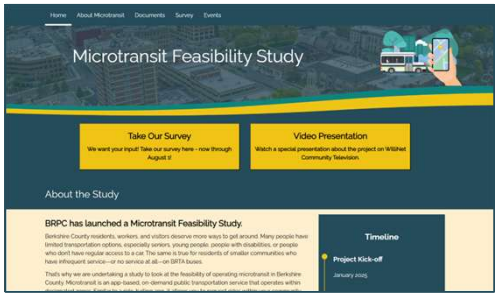
Share Information

Introduce the project overall; summarize study findings so far.

Receive Feedback

Introduce and collect feedback on the proposed new microtransit service.

Engagement Activities



Project Website

4 Public Open House Events

Survey

Promotional Flyers

Promotional Social Media

WilliNet (Local Access TV) Interview

Survey: Key Themes and Takeaways

- Interest in proposed service is highest within North County and Central County.
  - A majority of respondents came from Pittsfield, North Adams, and Williamstown.
- Interest in proposed service is highest among riders who currently make trips using modes other than driving alone.
- In open-ended comments, key themes were keeping wait times low, ensuring reliability, and safety. Many respondents suggested making the zones larger in order to get to more places, especially north-south travel.
- In stated trade-off questions, respondents were time-sensitive: more than half would not pay more than $2 for a 45-minute wait, but more than half would pay $5 or more for a 15-minute wait.
- Riders expressed interest in using microtransit to complete trips between and within North Adams, Pittsfield, and Williamstown.

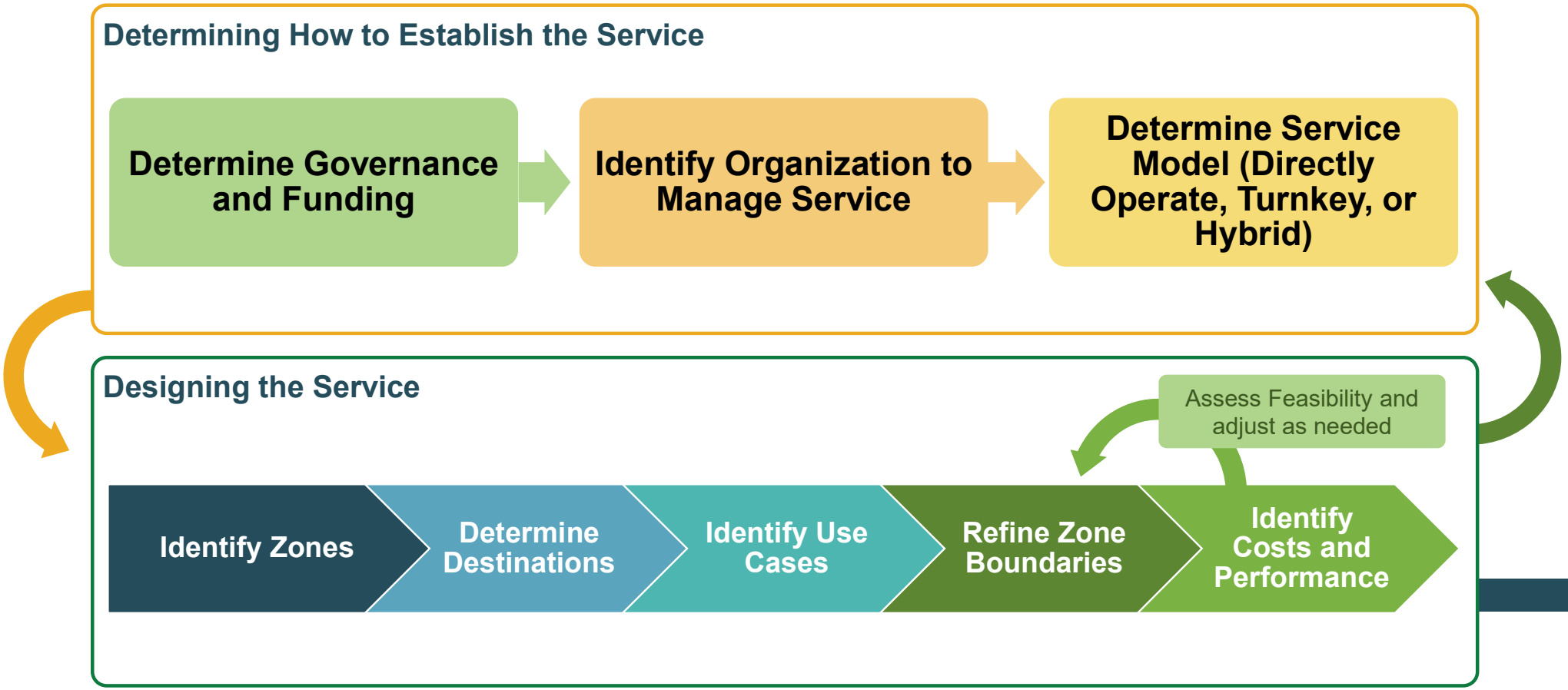
What Could Microtransit Look Like in Berkshire County?

Service recommendations

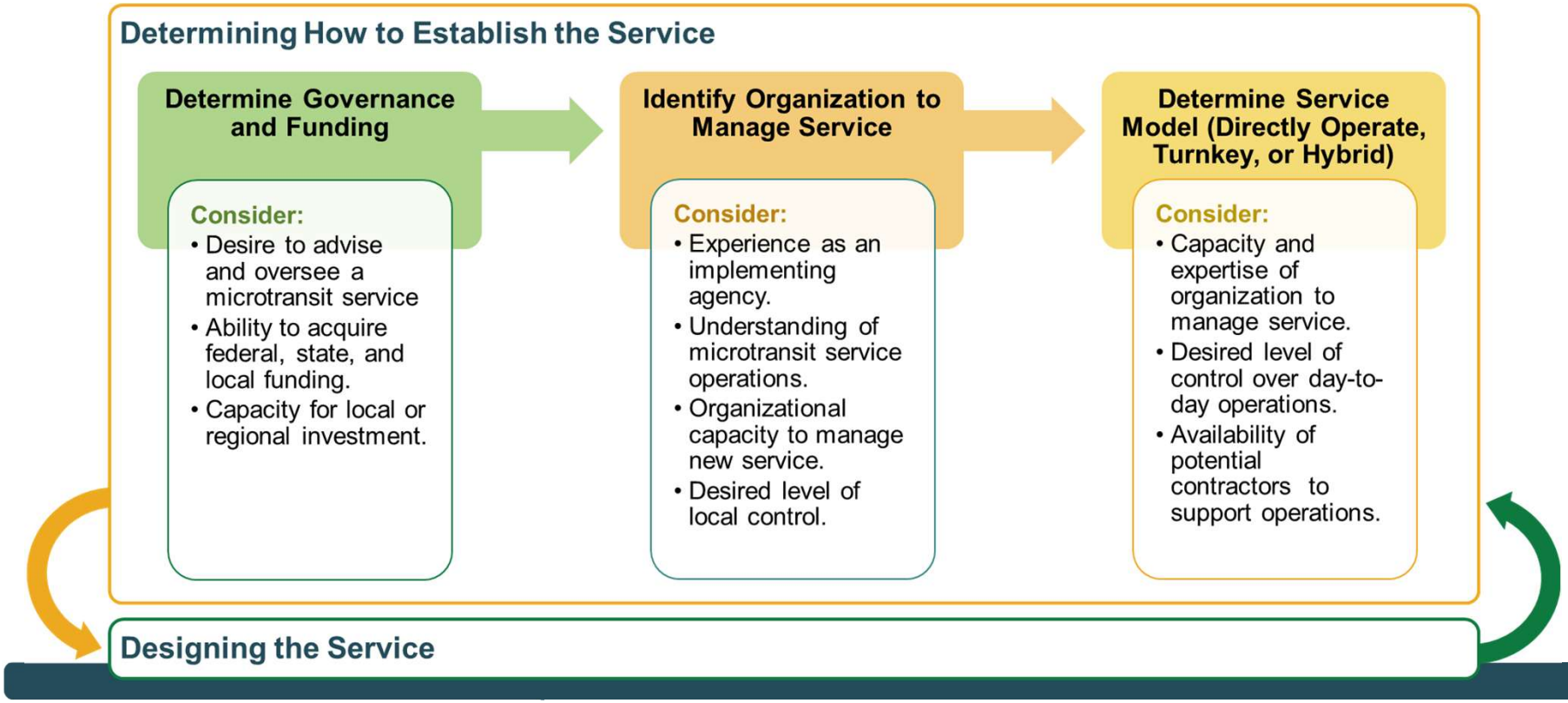
Establishing and Designing a Service

What are the steps to taking a service from plan to operations

What are the steps to establishing microtransit service?



Considerations for Establishing the Service



Establishing a Service

Governance & Program Administration

Establish a **new microtransit operating division within the BRTA** to govern and manage the system with **support from stakeholders**, such as local jurisdictions, BRPC, and MassDOT.

Funding

BRTA would take on the responsibility of administering, allocating, and disbursing resources for the microtransit service. To support both operational needs and capital investments, member **cities and towns would contribute matching funds**, similar to how BRTA's fixed-route service is funded today.

Establishing a Service

Vehicles & Capital Investments

BRTA would procure vehicles or utilize vehicles already in the BRTA fleet. BRTA could also provide maintenance and vehicle storage in-house. **Member cities could partner with BRTA for vehicle storage** to help reduce deadhead distance.

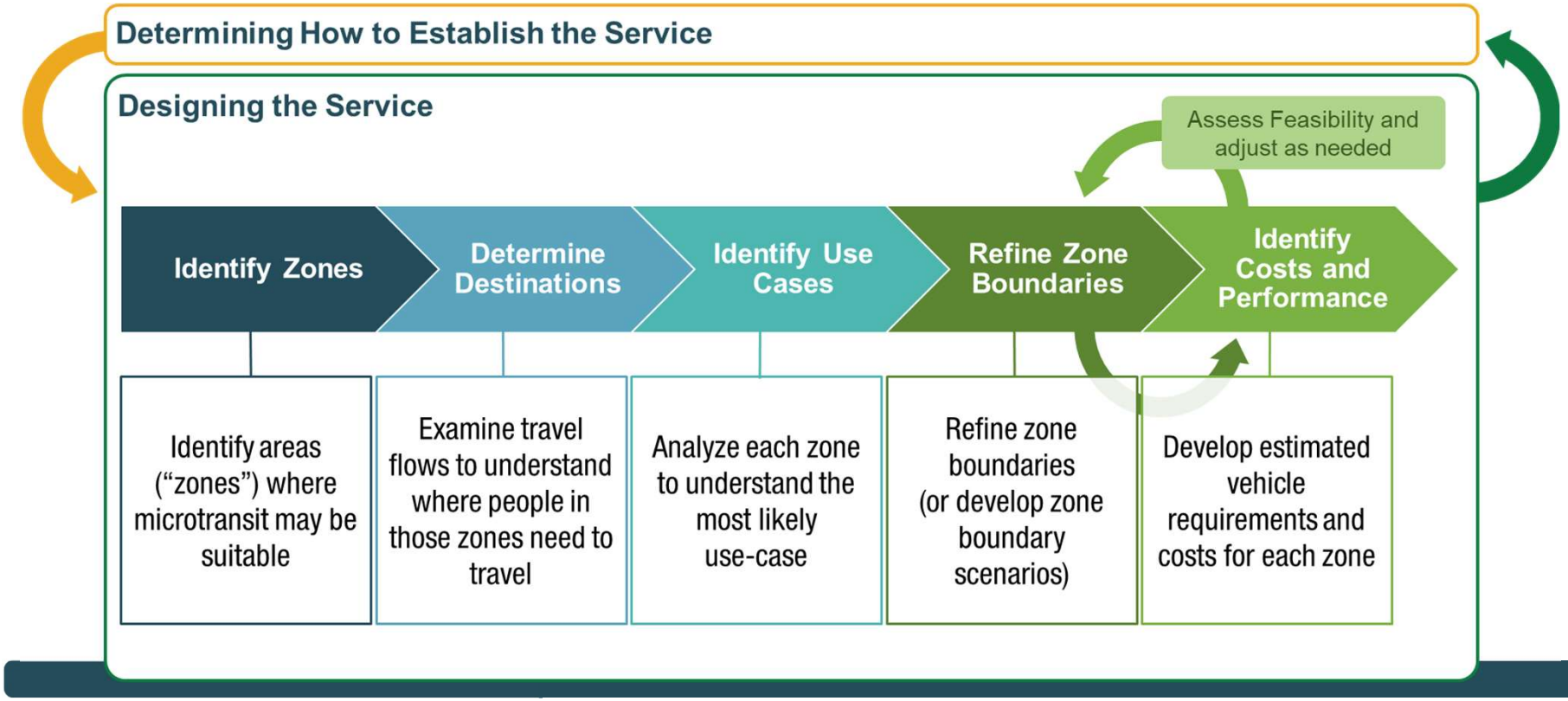
Service Model

Given the rural nature of Berkshire County, **a directly operated microtransit model is recommended**. This approach allows the transit agency to retain operational control while leveraging a third-party technology platform to manage ride requests, routing, and scheduling efficiently.

Service Design

Where do we recommend service

Service Design Steps



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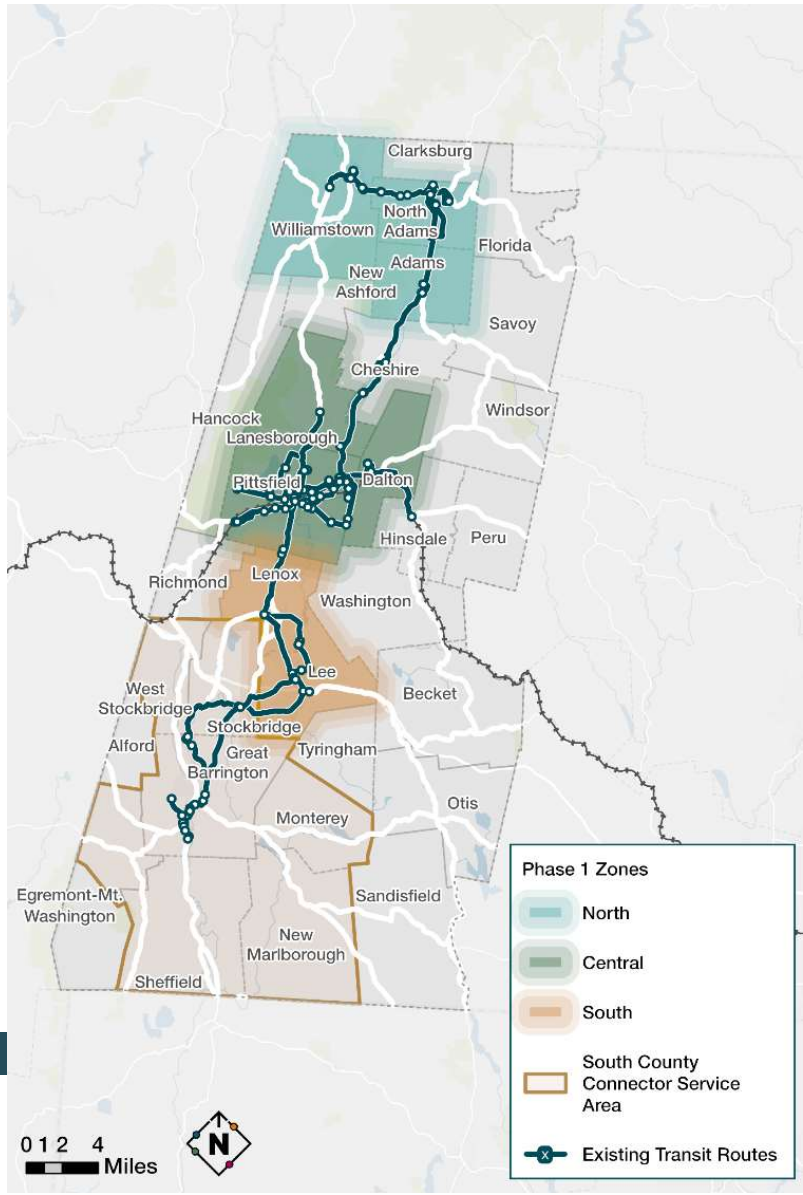
Recommendations

- **Long-term vision:** Implement microtransit service across the **all** of Berkshire County.
- Full implementation can take several years and will require **investment and coordination** from stakeholders, including BRTA, BRPC, local towns, and other partners.
- Implementation of microtransit in the long-term may require additional study to confirm feasibility, demand, and costs.

Phase One

- Implements new microtransit service in North and Central County and expands South County Connector Service to Lenox and Lee.
- Captures area with strong demand.

Zone	Estimated Annual Ridership	Estimated Vehicle Needs
North	15,000	2
Central	18,600	2
South	7,800	2



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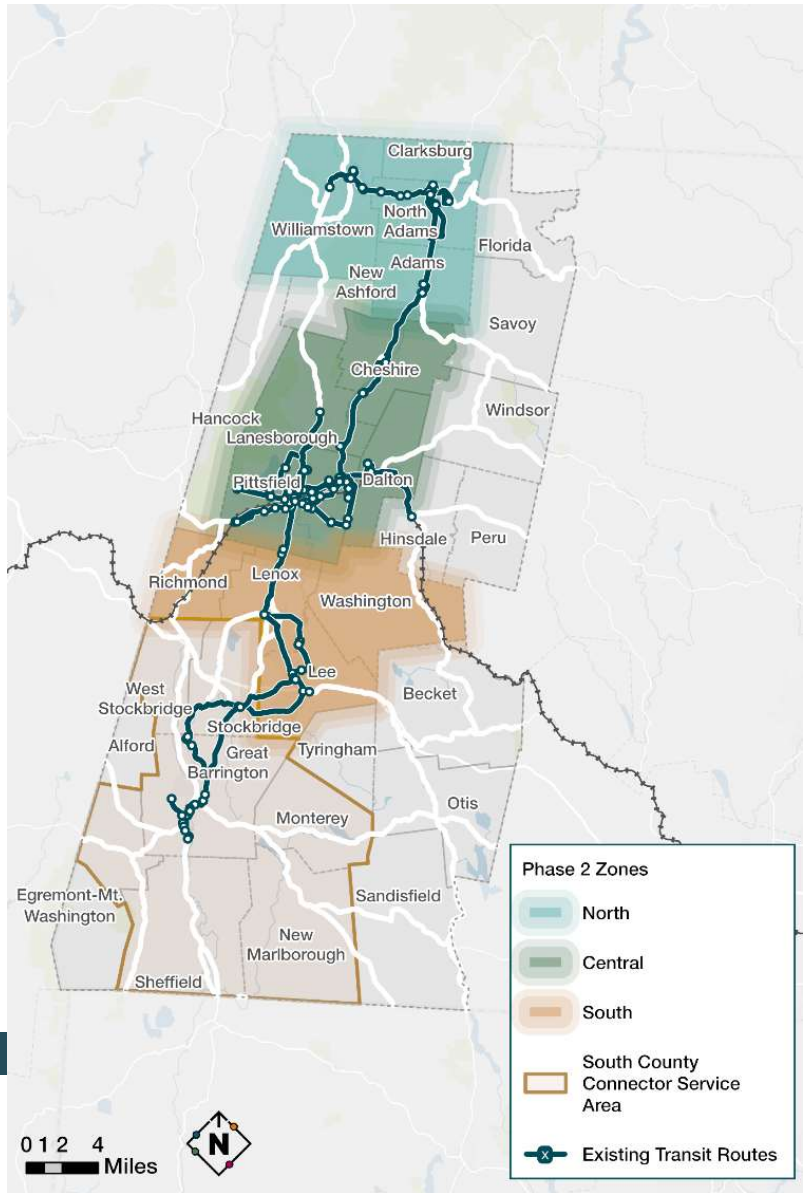
Phase Two

- Adds additional towns in North, Central, and South County.
- Expansion strengthens coverage across the county's edges.

Zone	Estimated Annual Ridership	Estimated Vehicle Needs
North	16,000	2
Central	19,400	2
South	8,250	2



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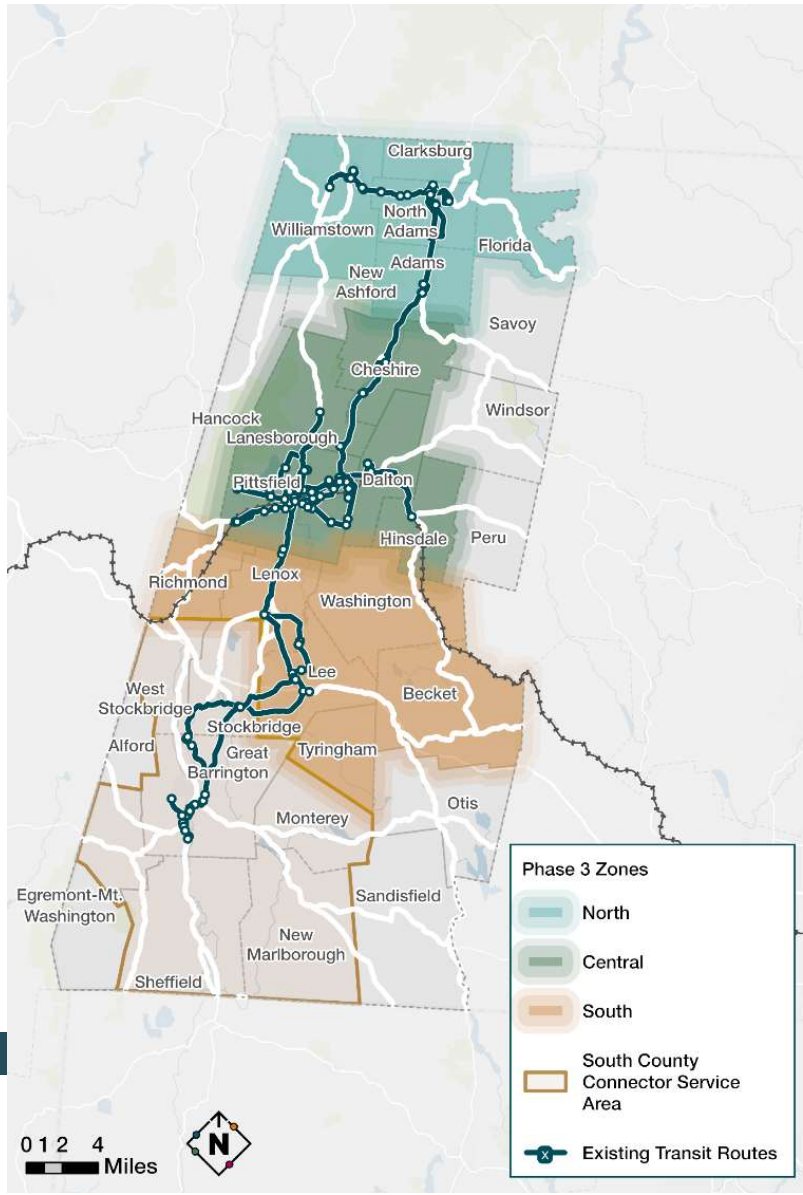
Phase Three

- Expands coverage to four towns with limited or no fixed-route service.
- New service serves as a testing ground for implementation in more rural areas of the county.

Zone	Estimated Annual Ridership	Estimated Vehicle Needs
North	16,300	3
Central	20,000	3
South	9,500	2



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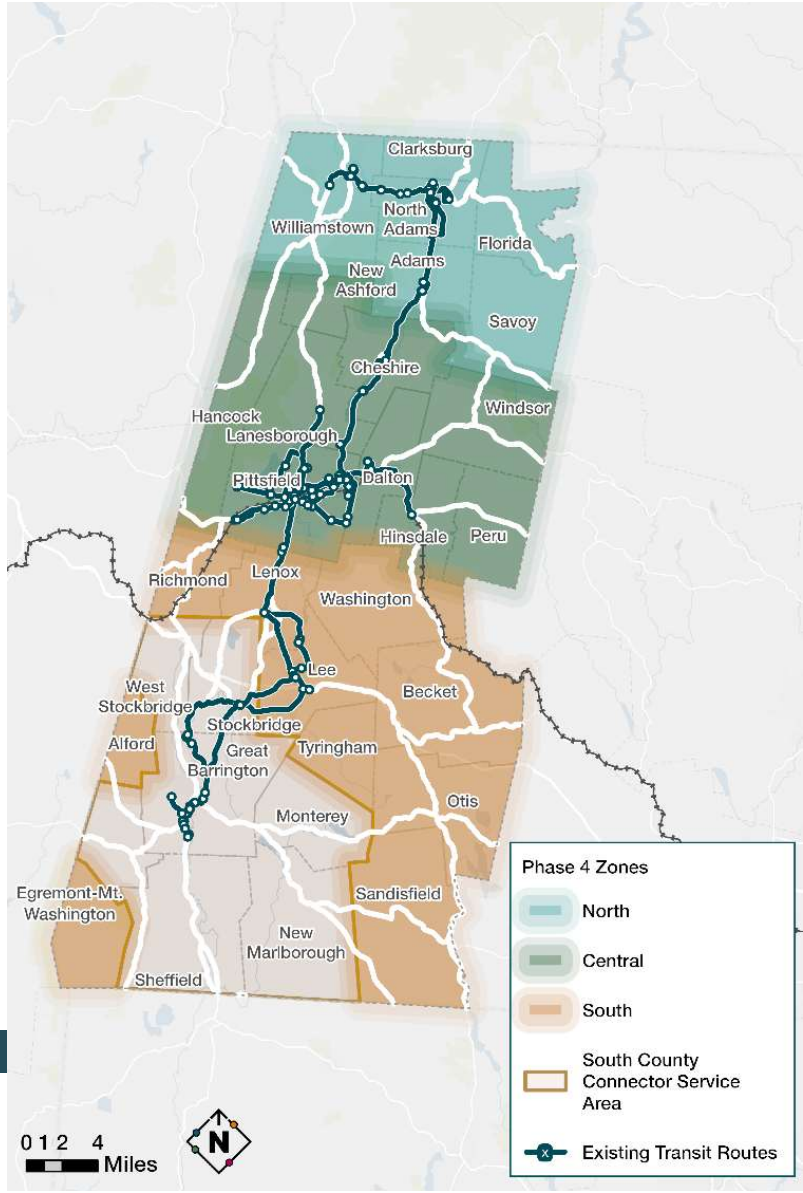
Phase Four

- Adds remaining towns to ensure full coverage of the county.
- May only be feasible in the long-term and implementation will be informed by service performance.

Zone	Estimated Annual Ridership	Estimated Vehicle Needs
North	16,500	3
Central	21,000	3
South	10,850	2



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Estimated Annual Operating Costs

- Cost Assumptions:
  - $50 cost per vehicle revenue hour
  - $5,650 annual per vehicle fee
- Additional one-time software set up fee of $100,000-$150,000 not included in estimates.

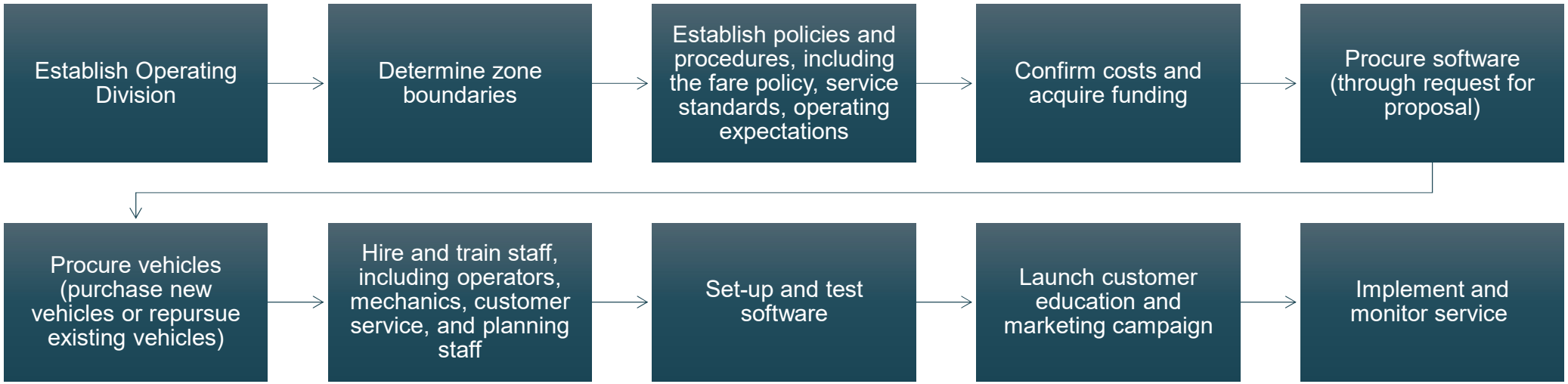
Zone	Total Estimated Annual Operating Cost			
	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
North	$411,700	$414,300	$427,300	$448,550
Central	$570,300	$606,700	$611,900	$656,550
South	$182,900	$185,500	$307,700	$312,900

Cost Drivers

- Staffing needs
- Marketing
- Software and hardware
- Vehicles and storage
- Fare collection
- Other costs

Implementation Process

Initial implementation typically takes at least **12 months**.



Future Considerations

Future Expansion

- The **phased expansion** laid out here presents one path forward.
- Expansion to new towns in Phases Two, Three, and Four should be **informed by customer and stakeholder feedback and BRTA's experience operating service**.
- **Support from local jurisdictions** is vital prior to implementing service in a new location.
- Expansion should be informed by ongoing service performance.

Service Integration

- BRTA and South County Connector could consider **integrating operations**.
- Service integration could take many forms: **joint procurement, a shared pool of operators, or full integration**.
- Integration would require additional study.

Questions & Next Steps

Next Steps


January
Project Kickoff
Feb. – March
Needs Assessment
April – June
Operational Scenarios Development
July
Public Outreach
August – Sept.
Implementation Recommendations
We are here

Thank you!

Learn more at **FoursquareITP.com**

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