

# 2023 Coordinated Public Transit - Human Services Transportation Plan



## Report Funding

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## Arabic

فالي ميريماك في الحضري التخطيط لمنظمة التابع التمييز لمنع السادسة الفقرة بمنسق الاتصال يُرجى ،أخرى بلغة المعلومات هذه إلى بحاجة كنت إذا الأرقام اضغظ وتم 978-374-0519 :الهاتف على 15

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# Introduction

## What is the Coordinated Plan?

The primary purpose of the Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Transportation Plan (Coordinated Plan) is to identify the unmet transportation needs for seniors and individuals with disabilities as well as strategies for addressing them. The Coordinated Plan is tied directly to the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) 5310 grant program. An entity may apply for grants under this program only if the service is included in the Coordinated Plan.

According to the FTA, the purpose of the 5310 grant program is 'to improve mobility for seniors and individuals with disabilities by removing barriers to transportation service and expanding transportation mobility options. This program supports transportation services planned, designed, and carried out to meet the special transportation needs of seniors and individuals with disabilities in all areas.'<sup>1</sup>

Projects eligible under the 5310 grant program included traditional and non-traditional services:

Traditional:

- Purchase buses and vans
- Purchase and installation of wheelchair lifts, ramps, and securement devices
- Transit-related information technology systems including scheduling/routing/one-call systems
- Implement mobility management programs
- Acquisition of transportation services under a contract, lease, or other arrangement (both capital and operating costs are eligible capital expenses)
- Non-Traditional:
- Provide travel training
- Volunteer driver programs
- Building an accessible path to a bus stop including curb-cuts, sidewalks, accessible pedestrian signals or other accessible features
- Improving signage or way-finding technology
- Incremental cost of providing same day service or door-to-door service
- Purchasing vehicles to support new accessible taxi, rides sharing and/or vanpooling programs
- Mobility management

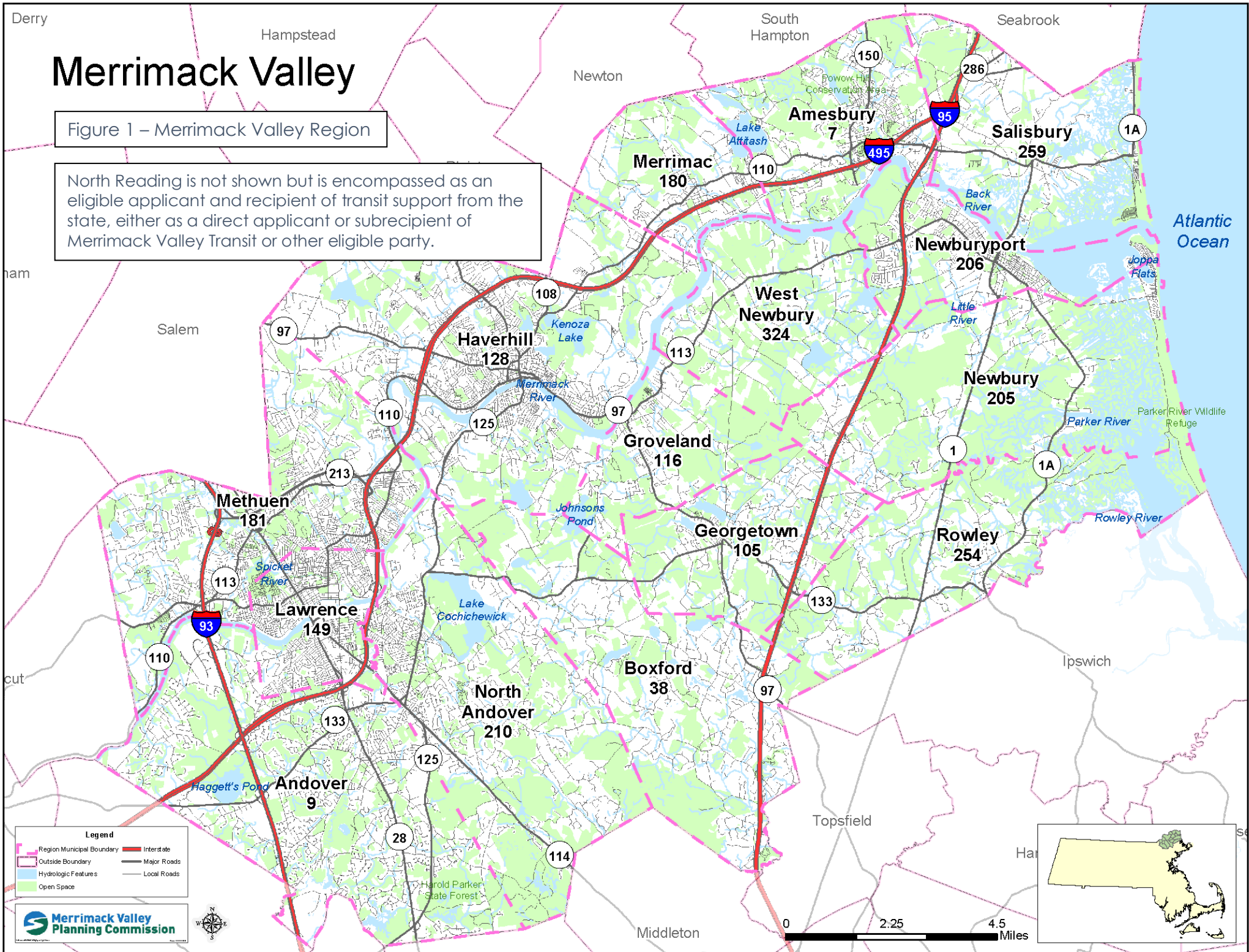
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<sup>1</sup> FTA Fact Sheet, ENHANCED MOBILITY OF SENIORS AND INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES Chapter 53 Section 5310. <https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/docs/funding/grants/37971/5310-enhanced-mobility-seniors-and-individuals-disabilities-fact-sheet.pdf>

# Merrimack Valley

Figure 1 – Merrimack Valley Region

North Reading is not shown but is encompassed as an eligible applicant and recipient of transit support from the state, either as a direct applicant or subrecipient of Merrimack Valley Transit or other eligible party.



## I. Demographics

For the purpose of this plan, the geographic region includes 15 communities, which are members of Merrimack Valley Transit's (MeVa) region, and North Reading. While North Reading falls beyond the bounds of the Merrimack Valley and is not shown in Figure 1, it receives paratransit service support from MeVa.

### Age and Disability

The Merrimack Valley's population has been growing from 332,393 in 2000 to 379,349 in the 2017-2021 American Community Survey, which is a 14% increase in population. Not surprising, the population of people ages 65+ has increased with the Baby Boom generation. Consistent with past years, more rural communities are aging faster than urban areas Table 1).

Twelve percent of the population is identified as disabled according to the 2017-2021 American Community Survey. Not surprising, more disabled people live in urban areas and more minorities with disabilities live in urban areas. For example, 60% of the City of Lawrence's disabled population is also minority. This is fairly low considering the city is 87% minority as a whole. Many smaller communities, such as Salisbury and Rowley, have high percentages of disabled people living in their communities, which is likely due to the higher number of people ages 65+ (See Table 2).

**Table 1: Population Age 65+ 2010-2021**

Community	2010	2015	2021	% Change 2010-2021	2021 Total Pop	% of 2021 Pop
Amesbury	2,011	2,403	2,764	37%	17,286	16%
Andover	4,453	5,445	5,432	22%	36,323	15%
Boxford	1,049	1,316	1,460	39%	8,188	18%
Georgetown	924	1,262	1,520	65%	8,461	18%
Groveland	973	1,230	1,114	14%	6,739	17%
Haverhill	7,405	8,641	9,567	29%	67,093	14%
Lawrence	6,557	7,466	8,938	36%	87,798	10%
Merrimac	842	1,048	1,340	59%	6,698	20%
Methuen	6,521	7,574	8,619	32%	52,536	16%
Newbury	924	1,251	1,518	64%	6,745	23%
Newburyport	2,880	3,741	3,794	32%	18,282	21%
North Andover	3,768	4,523	4,798	27%	30,671	16%
North Reading	1,845	2,245	1,927	4%	15,549	12%
Rowley	672	947	1,178	75%	6,135	19%
Salisbury	1,260	1,638	1,928	53%	9,152	21%
West Newbury	484	675	857	77%	4,500	19%
<b>Total</b>	<b>40,723</b>	<b>49,160</b>	<b>56,754</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>382,156</b>	<b>15%</b>
	<b>333,748</b>	<b>351,748</b>	<b>382,156</b>	15%		
	<b>12%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>15%</b>			

Sources: U.S. 2010 Census, ACS 2015, ACS 2021 (Table S0101)



**Table 2: Disabled Population in the Merrimack Valley**

<b>Community</b>	<b>Total Civilian Non- Institutionalized Population</b>	<b>Total with Disability</b>	<b>% Total Pop. with Disability</b>	<b>Total Disability &amp; Minority</b>	<b>% Disabled Pop. that is minority</b>	<b>% Disabled population Age 65+</b>
Amesbury	17,074	1,961	11%	178	9%	38%
Andover	36,060	2,352	7%	232	10%	55%
Boxford	8,188	742	9%	17	2%	57%
Georgetown	8,461	768	9%	14	2%	63%
Groveland	6,739	415	6%	0	0%	44%
Haverhill	66,476	9,208	14%	2,035	22%	35%
Lawrence	86,941	12,086	14%	7,213	60%	35%
Merrimac	6,678	749	11%	82	11%	44%
Methuen	52,221	6,014	12%	1,406	23%	43%
Newbury	6,740	506	8%	2	0%	65%
Newburyport	18,048	1,658	9%	70	4%	53%
North Andover	30,425	3,367	11%	370	11%	39%
North Reading	15,580	1,516	10%	0	0%	35%
Rowley	6,091	818	13%	0	0%	56%
Salisbury	9,127	1,319	14%	141	11%	41%
West Newbury	4,500	505	11%	72	14%	45%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>379,349</b>	<b>43,984</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>11,832</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>41%</b>

Note: Disabilities in this data set include difficulties with vision, hearing, ambulatory, cognitive, self-care or independent living.

Source: ACS 2017-2021 Table S1810.

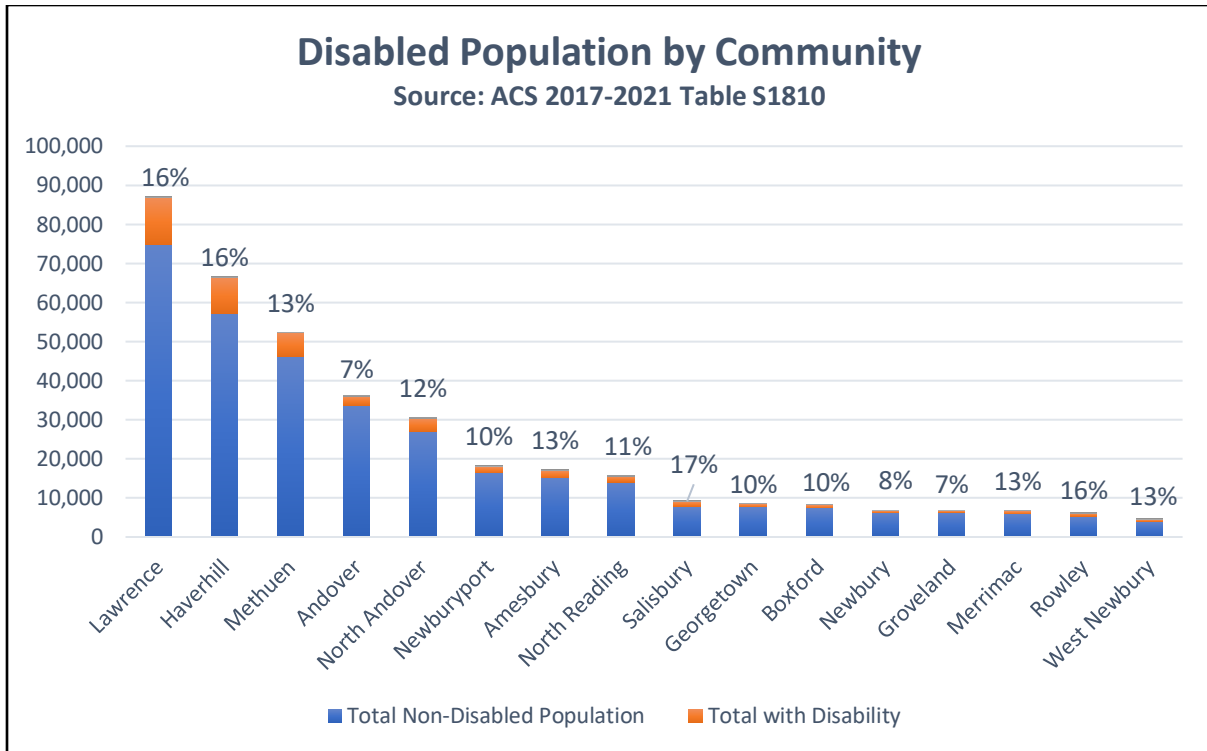


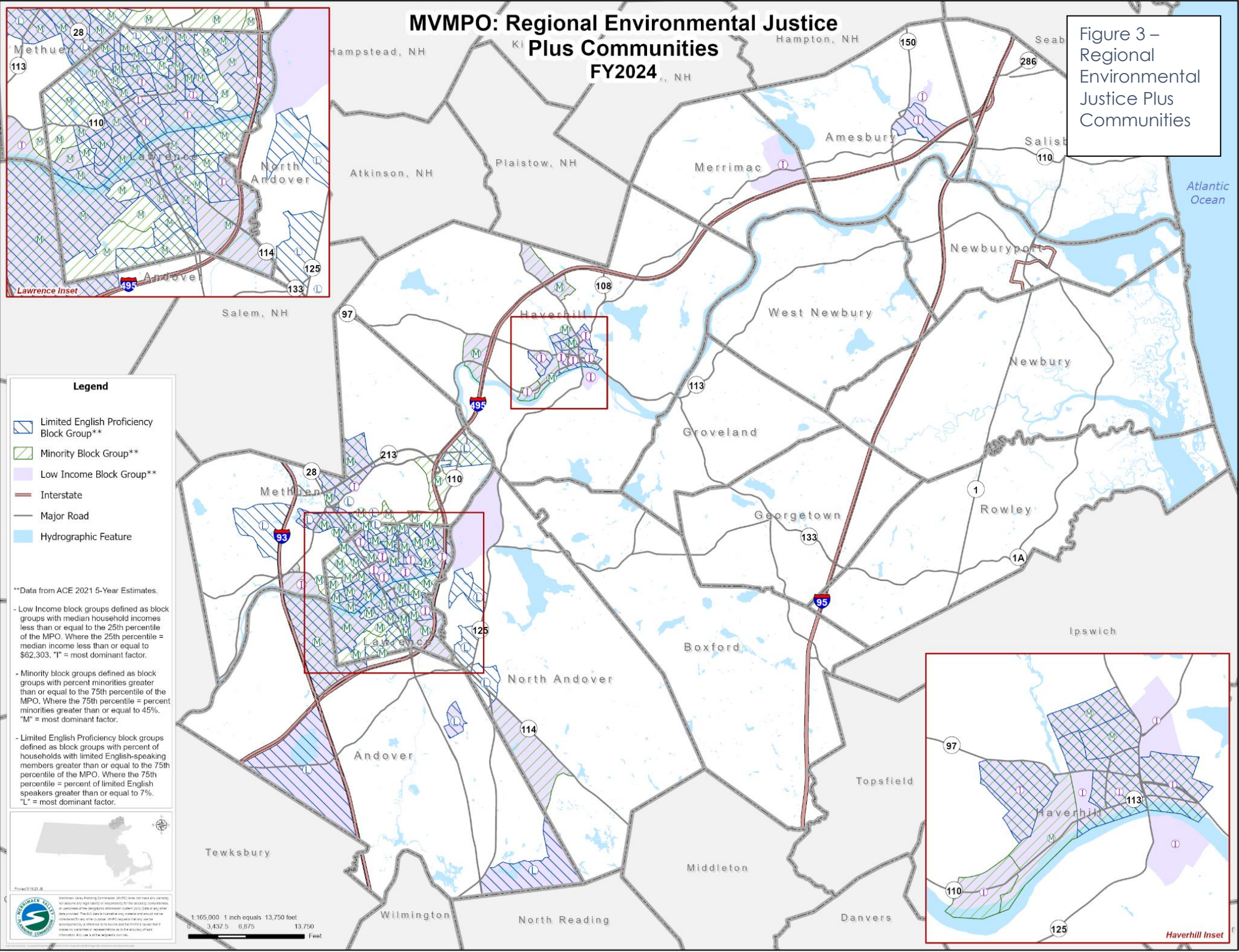
Figure 1: Disabled Population by Community

### Regional Environmental Justice Plan Communities

The MV Metropolitan Planning Organization (MVMPO) uses the state's Regional Environmental Justice Plus (REJ+) geographic designations to inform equity based planning. REJ+ considers several factors, including income, race, age, disability status, access to a vehicle, and language proficiency, highlighting locations in the region that should be prioritized for support. Figure 3 depicts the region's REJ+ populations.

# MVMPO: Regional Environmental Justice Plus Communities FY2024

Figure 3 – Regional Environmental Justice Plus Communities



**Legend**

- Limited English Proficiency Block Group\*\*
- Minority Block Group\*\*
- Low Income Block Group\*\*
- Interstate
- Major Road
- Hydrographic Feature

\*\*Data from ACE 2021 5-Year Estimates.

- Low Income block groups defined as block groups with median household incomes less than or equal to the 25th percentile of the MPO. Where the 25th percentile = median income less than or equal to \$62,303. "I" = most dominant factor.
- Minority block groups defined as block groups with percent minorities greater than or equal to the 75th percentile of the MPO. Where the 75th percentile = percent minorities greater than or equal to 45%. "M" = most dominant factor.
- Limited English Proficiency block groups defined as block groups with percent of households with limited English-speaking members greater than or equal to the 75th percentile of the MPO. Where the 75th percentile = percent of limited English speakers greater than or equal to 7%. "L" = most dominant factor.

1:165,000 1 inch equals 13,750 feet  
3,437.5 6,875 13,750 Feet

11/23/23

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Haverhill Inset

## II. Assess Current Transportation Resources

This section details many of the existing transportation services being provided in the Merrimack Valley.

### Merrimack Valley Transit (MeVA)

MeVA is the primary provider of public transportation in the Merrimack Valley region. The MeVA service district consists of the following 16 communities: Amesbury, Andover, Boxford, Georgetown, Groveland, Haverhill, Lawrence, Merrimac, Methuen, Newbury, Newburyport, North Andover, North Reading, Rowley, Salisbury and West Newbury.

MeVA provides several types of transit services including fixed route, ADA and non-ADA on-demand services, an on-demand medical van service outside the region and an employment van providing access to jobs in New Hampshire.

### Fixed Routes

MeVA has recently updated several of its fixed route services. Its primary routes include:

Lawrence Area Routes:

- Route 1, serving Lawrence, Methuen, and Haverhill
- Route 2, serving Lawrence and Andover
- Route 3, serving Lawrence and North Andover
- Route 4, Prospect Hill, serving Lawrence and Methuen (east)
- Route 5, Water Street, serving Lawrence and Methuen (west)
- Route 6, Holy Family Hospital/Lawrence Street, serving Lawrence and Methuen
- Route 7, Beacon Street, serving Andover and Lawrence
- Route 8, Colonial Heights/North Andover Mall, serving Lawrence and North Andover
- Route 9, North Andover Mall/Phillips Street, serving Lawrence and North Andover
- Route 10, Methuen Square, serving Lawrence and Methuen
- Route 12, Lawrence Crosstown, serving downtown Lawrence
- Route 21, Andover Shuttle, serving Andover and North Andover

Haverhill Area Routes:

- Route 13, Main Street/North Avenue serving Haverhill, and Plaistow
- Route 14, Bradford/Ward Hill serving Haverhill, and Bradford
- Route 15, Hilldale Avenue/Haverhill Commons, serving Haverhill
- Route 16, Washington Street/Westgate Plaza, serving Haverhill
- Route 18, Riverside/Groveland, serving Haverhill and Groveland
- Route 22, Buttonwoods Express, serving Haverhill (limited service)
- Amesbury & Coastal Community Area Routes
- Route 19, Newburyport Commuter Rail/Amesbury, serving Amesbury and Newburyport
- Route 20, Newburyport Commuter Rail/Salisbury Beach, serving Salisbury and Newburyport

### Cross-Regional Routes

- Route 17, Haverhill/Salisbury Beach via Amesbury, serving Haverhill, Merrimac, Amesbury and Salisbury
- Route 23, Beach Express, Lawrence and Salisbury
- Route 24, Lawrence-Lowell, serving Lawrence, Dracut, and Lowell

All of MeVa's fixed route buses are wheel-chair accessible.

MeVa's routes are currently in the midst of various updates as part of an improvement. MeVa's most current system map can be found at their website: <https://www.mvrta.com/>. Users may click on the "Map" button to review the routes noted above, as well as a few legacy and special routes.

The Lowell Regional Transit Authority (LRTA) provides fixed-route service between Andover's Raytheon facility and downtown Lowell, via North Tewksbury. For more information, please visit <https://lrta.com/>.

**MeVa Communities Served:** Fixed route service operates in Amesbury, Andover, Groveland, Haverhill, Lawrence, Newburyport, North Andover, Merrimac, Methuen and Salisbury. One fixed route serves New Hampshire, providing access to several shopping plazas in Plaistow.

**Frequency:** All Lawrence-based fixed routes run on 30-minute headways during the week and 60-minute headways on Saturday. All Haverhill-based buses run on 60-minute headway on weekdays and weekends.

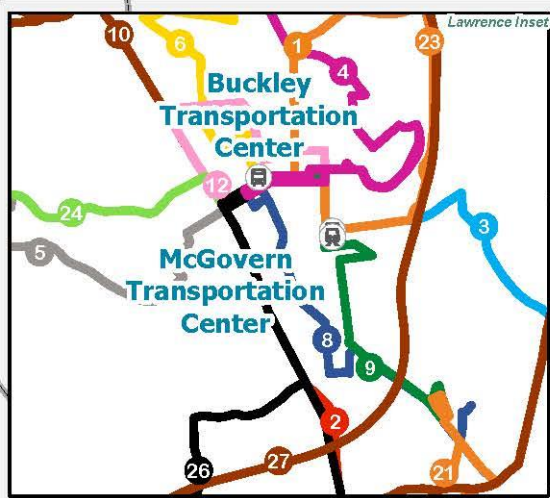
**Hours of Operation:** Bus service runs from 5 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. on weekdays and from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. on weekends. Currently, there are no fixed route services on Sundays.

**Cost:** MeVa went fare free in March 2022.

**Ridership:** Ridership has increased in FY23, largely due to increased frequencies in Lawrence and the elimination of fare. The figure below depicts MeVa's ridership by month. FY23 summer ridership now exceeds pre-pandemic levels. MeVa representatives note that many non-ADA and ADA elderly individuals use standard fixed route service in addition to the agency's paratransit offering

# MeVa Merrimack Valley Transit

## Service Area Basemap



**Bus Routes**

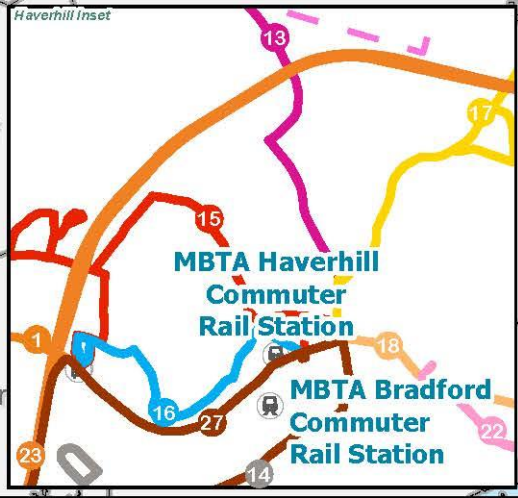
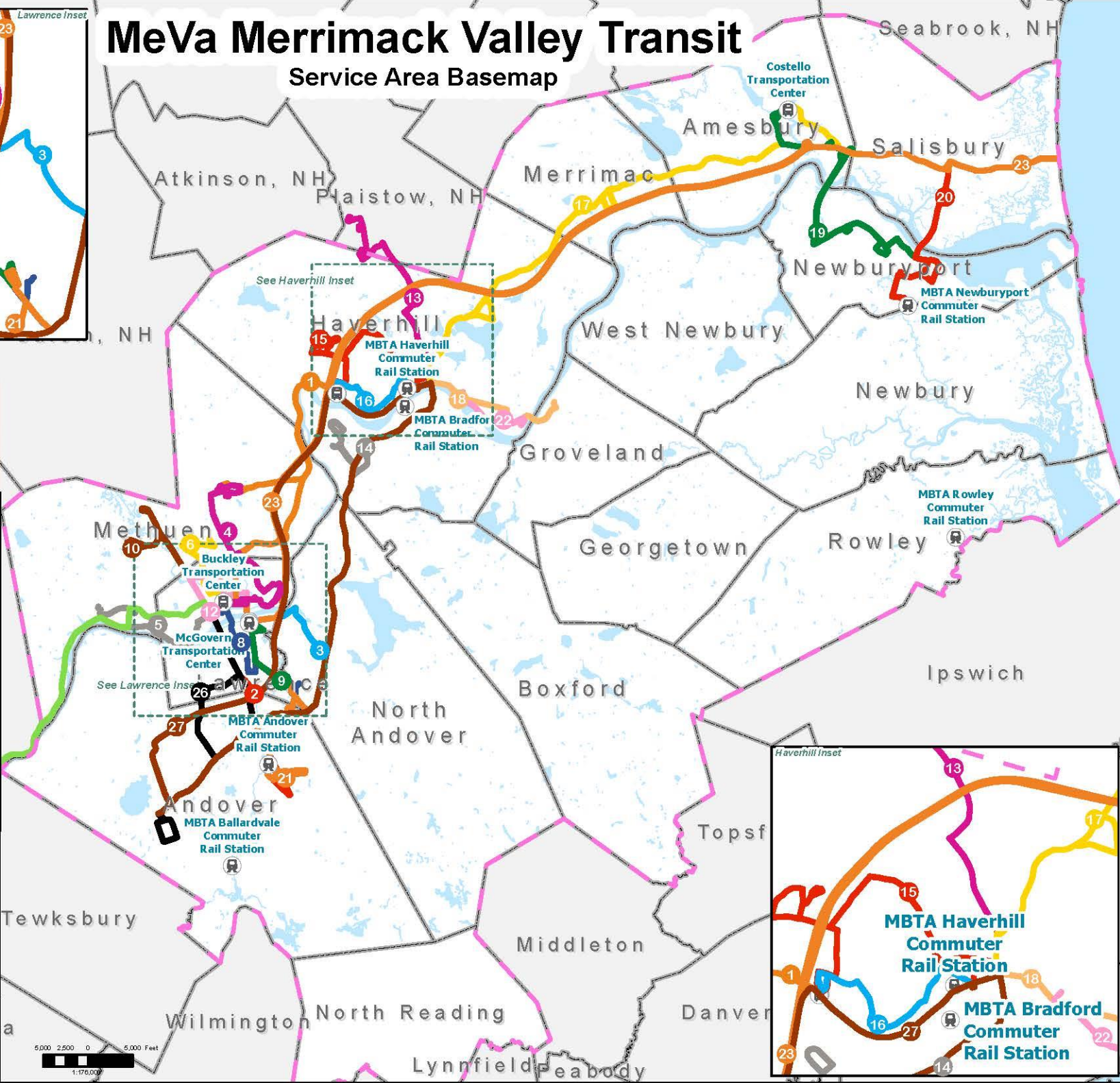
1 Lawrence-Methuen-Haverhill	14 Bradford/Ward Hill Hilldale Avenue/
2 Andover	15 Haverhill Commons
3 North Andover	16 Washington Street/Westgate Plaza
4 Prospect Hill	17 Haverhill-Salisbury Beach via Amesbury
5 Water Street	18 Riverside/Groveland
6 Holy Family Hospital/Lawrence Street	19 Newburyport CR-Amesbury
7 Beacon Street	20 Newburyport CR-Salisbury Beach
8 Colonial Heights/North Andover Mall	21 Andover Shuttle
9 North Andover Mall/Phillips Street	22 Buttonwoods Express
10 Methuen Square	23 Beach Express
11 Lawrence-Haverhill Direct	24 Lawrence-Lowell
12 Lawrence Crosstown	26 IRS/Raytheon
13 Main Street/North Avenue	27 Beacon Street Special

**Legend**

- Train Station
- Bus Station
- MeVa Service Area
- Hydrographic Feature
- Municipal Boundary

Merrimack Valley Planning Commission

Scale: 0, 2500, 5000 Feet  
1:176,000



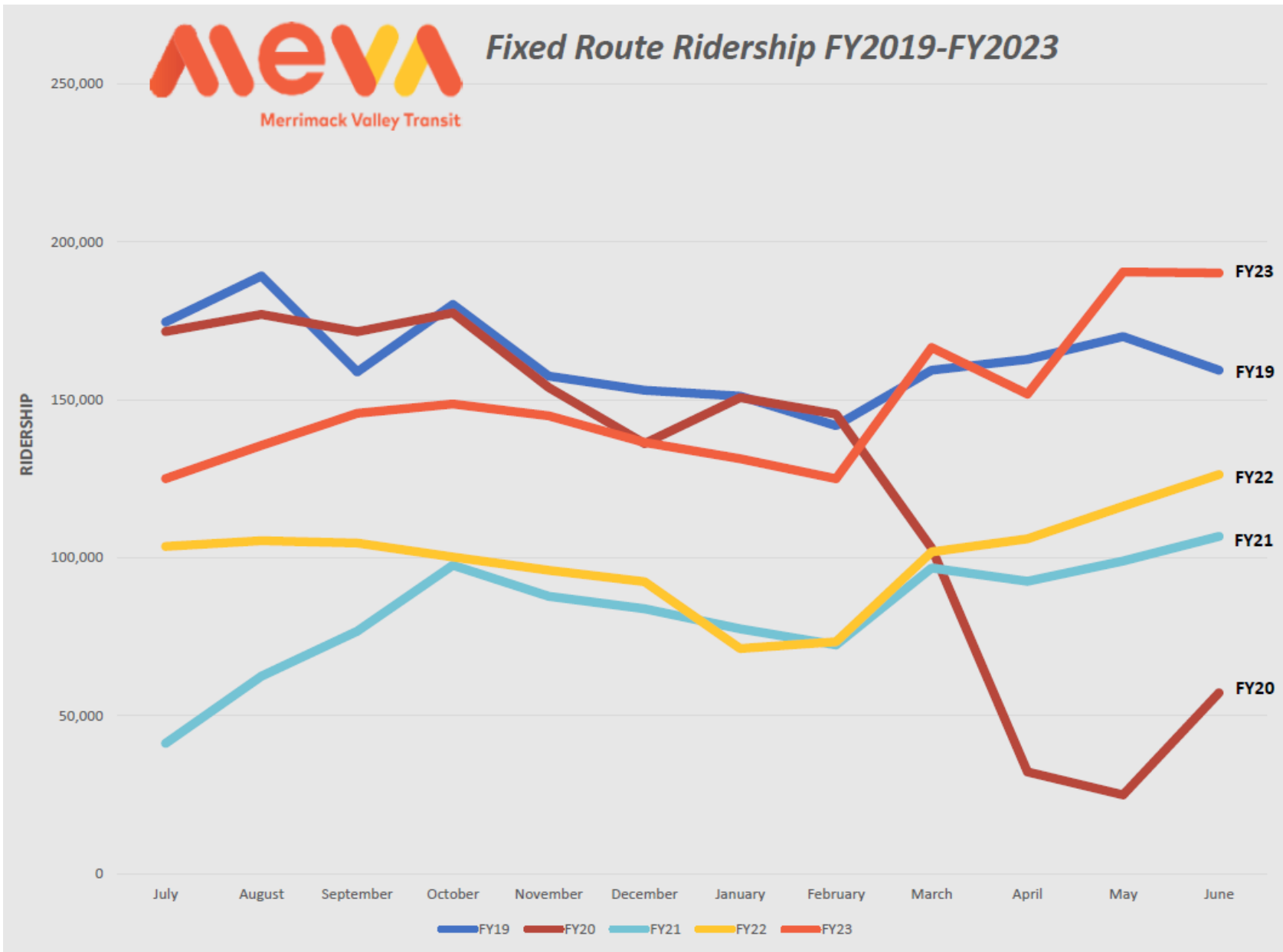


Figure 4. MeVA fixed route ridership from FY2019-FY2023

## **On-Demand Service**

In the spring of 2023, MeVa rebranded its various paratransit services under the single mini MeVa umbrella. mini MeVa provides an array of transportation services, including ADA service, Non-ADA mini MeVa service, and Ring and Ride Service. Like MeVa's fixed route, these services operate with a fare free policy. Additionally, hours of operation have been expanded slightly for some services for the purposes of consistency. All paratransit services are now offered 5:00am-8:00pm on weekdays and 7:00am-7:00pm on Saturdays.

**mini MeVa ADA Service:** These services are provided to only persons with certified disabilities, per the definition of eligibility established in the American with Disabilities Act. The definition includes both physical and cognitive disabilities. Service is only provided within  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile from a fixed route.

With certification, if an individual lives outside the MeVa service area and is ADA eligible with another transit authority, the individual may use mini MeVa for up to 30 days in a rolling calendar year.

Rides must be scheduled at least one day in advance and require a one-hour period between drop off and pick-up.

**mini MeVa Non-ADA Service:** mini MeVa Non-ADA services are provided to persons who are 60 years or older *and* persons who meet the eligibility requirements established under ADA that request service beyond the  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile corridor on each side of a MeVa fixed bus route, but who reside within the communities serviced by MeVa (Amesbury, Andover, Groveland, Haverhill, Lawrence, Merrimac, Methuen, Newburyport, North Andover, and Salisbury). Trips must be reserved two days in advance and require a one-hour period between drop-off and pick-up.

**mini MeVa Ring & Ride:** This curb-to-curb service provides transportation for residents of Boxford, Georgetown, Groveland, Newbury, Rowley, and West Newbury. The service provides connections from the noted to communities to anywhere in Merrimack Valley. Trips must be reserved one day prior to service.

**Medi-MeVa:** This on-demand service offers connections from Merrimack Valley communities, with the addition of North Reading, to select Peabody- and Boston-based hospitals and medical centers. The service is available to anyone registered with Special Services department. The service operates on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays.

**Salem, NH Employment Shuttle:** MeVa provides legacy service for residents of Andover, Haverhill, Lawrence, Methuen and North Andover from a passenger's place of residence to their jobs on Rt. 28 in Salem, NH. Service hours are Monday through Friday from 6:00am to 7:00pm, excluding holidays. MeVa is not accepting new applications for this service.



**Table 3: Table EZ Trans Ridership FY2022<sup>1,2</sup>**

<b>Community</b>	<b>ADA Rides</b>	<b>ADA Distinct Riders</b>	<b>NON ADA Rides</b>	<b>NON ADA Distinct Riders</b>	<b>Totals</b>
Amesbury	5,147	71	385	19	<b>5,622</b>
Andover	5,048	51	529	15	<b>5,643</b>
Dracut	22	1	0	0	<b>23</b>
Groveland	269	2	0	0	<b>271</b>
Haverhill	12,997	155	248	25	<b>13,425</b>
Lawrence	8,673	122	101	13	<b>8,909</b>
Merrimac	1,798	16	0	0	<b>1,814</b>
Methuen	11,615	115	418	20	<b>12,168</b>
North					
Andover	3,637	53	530	12	<b>4,232</b>
Newburyport	892	28	44	2	<b>966</b>
Salisbury	1,935	23	13	3	<b>1,974</b>
<b>Totals</b>	<b>52,033</b>	<b>637</b>	<b>2,268</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>55,047</b>

<sup>1</sup>See previous information about changes service branding and hours of operation.

<sup>2</sup>MeVa representatives note that many non-ADA and ADA elderly individuals use standard fixed route service in addition to the agency's paratransit offerings.

### MBTA

The MBTA provides commuter rail service between the Merrimack Valley and Boston's North Station along the Newburyport and Haverhill rail lines, serving seven stations. The MBTA does not provide current ridership numbers for each line.

	Haverhill Line	Newburyport Line
Hours	5:18 a.m. and 12:07 a.m.	4:49 a.m. to 12:16 a.m.
Number of Inbound Trips	13	13

## Councils on Aging

Many area **Councils on Aging** (COAs) own vans and provide limited transportation services for shopping, medical appointments and accessing COA programs.

**Table : Rides Provided by Councils on Aging**

Town	Total Rides FFY2022	Geographic Range	Trip Purpose	Cost
Andover	3,675	Andover	Medical, Grocery, Senior Center	0
Amesbury	Just Initiating	Amesbury primarily	Medical, Grocery, Senior Center	0
Boxford	100+	50-mile radius	Senior Center, Medical, Field Trips	\$3
Georgetown	221	Georgetown, Haverhill, Newburyport, Beverly, Danvers and Peabody	Social Trips, Medical, Grocery, Senior Center	0
Groveland	1,542	Groveland, Haverhill, West Newbury, Peabody, Burlington	Social Trips, Medical, Grocery, Senior Center	\$8.00 Round Trip Groveland/Georgetown/Haverhill; \$15 Round Trip Other Places
Merrimac	7,500	Merrimac; Boston, Amesbury, Haverhill, Newburyport, Peabody, Burlington	Medical, Grocery, Senior Center	0 in town; \$4 out of town
Newburyport		Newburyport	Grocery, Banking, Hair, Medical	\$1 donation recommended
North Andover			Senior Center, Medical, other	
Rowley			Medical; Monthly Outing; Grocery	
Salisbury			Medical, Therapy and Shopping	

In addition, many COAs work with the **Northern Essex Elder Transport (NEET)** to coordinate volunteer drivers for medical appointments for residents of the Merrimack Valley, excluding Andover and Lawrence. NEET drivers provided approximately 3,045 rides in FY 2022. Elders using NEET must be ambulatory. Volunteers are reimbursed for their expenses associated with providing transportation in their own cars. Their demand-response service is currently provided Monday through Friday between 6:00 AM and 6:00 PM. NEET rides are fare free, though donations are appreciated.

### Non-Profit Organizations

Many non-profit organizations provide transportation services primarily for people who participate in their programs. Transportation is not their mission, but they fill a need for many of their members and clientele.

The **Northeast Independent Living Program** provides transportation to its clientele, but will also provide transportation to other veterans and disabled persons upon request.

**Age Span (formerly Elder Services of Merrimack Valley)** provides rides in the greater Lowell area and recently initiated the same service for the Greater Haverhill area. The program is intended to be a last resort transportation option for seniors to medical appointments. In FY2022, Age Span provided 8 rides in Groveland and 27 in Haverhill.

### Veterans

The VA Bedford has a shuttle service between the Veterans Hospital in Bedford and outpatient clinics in Jamaica Plain, Lynn, Haverhill, Gloucester and Lowell. There is not service for people in Lawrence. The van service provides rides between Haverhill and the Bedford VA Hospital two times per day.

### Ride Hailing

Transportation Network Companies (TNCs) such as Uber and Lyft are also known as ride hailing services. These services are available throughout the region. Usage of these services increased between 2018 and 2021.

**Table 4: ‘Ride Hailing’ Rides Starting in Municipality**

Community	2018	2021	%Δ	2021 % of Rides Starting and Ending in Municipality	# Rides/ Person
Amesbury	9,984	13,590	36%	25%	0.78
Andover	85,159	77,382	-9%	21%	2.12
Boxford	2,526	3,340	32%	16%	0.41
Georgetown	2,488	3,530	42%	13%	0.42
Groveland	1,903	2,702	42%	7%	0.4
Haverhill	104,076	214,714	106%	62%	3.17
Lawrence	350,752	418,634	19%	53%	4.7
Merrimac	1,386	2,959	113%	7%	0.44

Methuen	104,578	169,201	62%	31%	3.19
Newbury	4,343	3,088	-29%	10%	0.46
Newburyport	26,196	16,582	-37%	27%	0.91
North Andover	55,409	60,016	8%	22%	1.94
Rowley	1,989	2,962	49%	16%	0.48
Salisbury	9,109	9,324	2%	20%	1.01
West Newbury	1,272	1,039	-18%	2%	0.23
<b>Totals</b>	<b>761,170</b>	<b>999,063</b>	<b>31%</b>		

### Privately Contracted Mobility Services

Representatives from Lawrence noted that many elderly individuals in the city use private limousine service. Data on the use of these services can sometimes be challenging to follow.

### Transportation Coordination

Based on outreach, it is challenging for individuals who need services to learn about the universe of availability. Councils on Aging serve as a transportation information hub and coordination center for people in many communities. Seniors especially look to a trusted adviser for help and often need someone who can figure out what transportation works best for them. MeVa has also proven useful. Asian seniors noted turning to a particular trusted MeVa employee for services. Many individuals do not use the internet to look up information about the fixed route or on-demand services, and even in cases where potential users explore the internet for services, many available services have limited internet visibility. Veterans have an equally challenging time figuring out what services can be used to travel to various veterans medical centers.

### Ride Match

Ride Match was created in 2010 to attempt to improve service access and increase the online visibility of providers. Ride Match provides an on-line searchable directory of transportation providers. Understanding how hard it is for customers to identify transportation service providers across the Commonwealth, the Greater Attleboro Taunton Regional Transit Authority (GATRA) initiated this project to help “fill the gaps and provide the state’s most vulnerable populations, and the agencies that serve them, with a way to easily identify all the transportation options within their communities.” After testing it out locally, GATRA expanded the program statewide. Mass Ride Match can be found at [www.massridematch.org](http://www.massridematch.org)



Between July, 2021 and June 30, 2022, 301 searches were made through Ride Match for transportation options on MeVA or connections between MeVA and destinations outside the region with other regional transit authorities such as the MBTS, CATA (Cape Ann), and the Worcester RTA.

### III. Identifying Service Growth and Improvement Areas

The Merrimack Valley Planning Commission (MVPC) sought input from individuals and people representing organizations who work with seniors and people with disabilities or that provide transportation services. Outreach included:

- Regional Coordinating Council – a voluntary coalition of transportation providers, planners, human service providers and advocates collaborating to identify and address regional transportation needs.
  - Questionnaire (August/September) and discussion with organizations that regularly participate. Received 32 responses to the questionnaire.
  - RCC Stakeholder Meeting on May 25, 2023
- Focus group meeting with Veterans at the monthly coffee hour in Methuen on October 25, 2022.
- Focus group meeting with Spanish-speaking seniors at the Center in Lawrence on November 3, 2022.
- Focus group meeting with Chinese/Vietnamese/English-speaking seniors at the Center in Lawrence on November 7, 2022.
- Public meeting on November 16, 2022.

Participants in the different meetings were asked about:

1. What do they like about the current transit service.
2. What transportation needs are not being met. What gaps are there in the system?
3. What service suggestions do they have for meeting the needs that they identified.
4. What coordination/information/training services are needed?

The list below provides insight into those needs, gaps, and strategies gathered through the outreach process. They have been organized or grouped as appropriate.

	<b>General Topics</b>	<b>Growth and Improvement Area</b>	<b>Suggested Strategies</b>
<b>User Identified Growth Areas</b>	Physical Access to Transit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Flag system is hard for people to understand and use especially people who cannot see well</li> <li>People need more shelters and sidewalks.</li> <li>Dangerous intersections prevent people from easily accessing transit.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Institute bus stops.</li> <li>Provide more shelters.</li> <li>Ensure sidewalks and safe crossings are available.</li> <li>Identify unsafe intersections.</li> <li>Maintain fares free for MeVA.</li> </ul>
	Information Access to Transit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Language barriers.</li> <li>Seniors don't access information on the internet.</li> <li>Maps, brochures and other information are not readily available.</li> <li>Veterans need an app that helps them navigate the complex transportation options. There is no good transportation information center.</li> <li>Ride Match is not used generally.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create better marketing materials that include picotgrams, languages, maps, etc.</li> <li>Explore multi-media options for promoting service and providing materials to the public.</li> <li>Include maps and route information on bus stops.</li> <li>Better distribution of materials to Councils on Aging, organizations and employers.</li> <li>Ensure that all transit stations and shelters have information and maps.</li> <li>Create standing Council on Aging forums for coordination.</li> </ul>
	New or Improved Service/Better Coordination of Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited times and days. For example, no Sunday service and non-ADA services end at 5 pm, which is early.</li> <li>Hard to use the system when you have to use a couple of different types of service like Ring and Ride with Fixed Route</li> <li>Service to New Hampshire and other out-of-region destinations.</li> <li>Need more transportation to medical appointments.</li> <li>Seniors on the outskirts of town need access (could be an information problem).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve coordination/scheduling systems to reduce lead times for ride requests.</li> <li>Sundays.</li> <li>Extended hours, especially non-ADA, which ends at 5 pm.</li> <li>Better coordination between RTAs and Veterans Affairs (MBTA and LRTA).</li> <li>Funding share systems that allow interregional services to reduce transfer needs.</li> <li>Explore service to out-of-region service destinations including access to areas in New Hampshire.</li> <li>Increase transit for medical trips. Better coordination and easy to find/use information for medical trips out of the region.</li> </ul>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create standing Council on Aging forums for coordination.</li> <li>• Expand Bedford VA service to Lawrence.</li> </ul>
	On-Demand Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need low-floor vans</li> <li>• Takes to long to obtain vans.</li> <li>• It is cumbersome and challenging to apply for on-demand services.</li> <li>• Travel buddies needed.</li> <li>• Need extended hours and access to more destinations including outside the region.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain transit infrastructure in state of good repair and with best ADA accessibility options. Routine purchase new vehicles.</li> <li>• Be able to fund emergency ride home programs through TMCs or taxis where existing transit/paratransit is not an available option.</li> </ul>
<b>Operator Identified Growth Areas</b>	Access to Labor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fewer professional drivers; need new labor force for paratransit drivers.</li> <li>• Additional volunteers necessary to support nonprofit services.</li> <li>• Difficulty reaching potential transit driver applicants.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore various opportunities advertise for labor in and volunteers in different media, including social media, but also through public engagement, and local paper sources.</li> <li>• Create a cross-regional labor pool.</li> <li>• Create a single multi-region/multi provider advertisement campaign to reduce costs, matching volunteers to service providers on the back end.</li> </ul>
	Guaranteed, Sustainable Funding Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficult to ensure stable operations without funding certainty.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with state partners to create opportunities for multiple years of operating funding, with agreements to ensure performance and monitoring.</li> </ul>
	Grant Preparation Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need support for grant writing.</li> <li>• Need single location where both public and private grant opportunities are located.</li> <li>• Need support compiling materials—may be beyond the typical portfolio of a volunteer.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinate joint grant requests across multiple agencies to reduce overall labor and improve probability of success.</li> <li>• Leverage MVPC and MeVa staff to prepare grant materials.</li> </ul>
	Dispatch and Navigation Software	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to explore new and expanding technology.</li> <li>• Need to consider dispatch coordination across operators.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider multi-agency/multi-operator purchasing to reduce procurement costs. Or consider single purchased with multiple agencies licensed to use single, shared program.</li> <li>• Consider standing operator forums to exchange ideas/tools/best practices.</li> </ul>

## Priorities and Resources

Through data analysis, discussions, the questionnaire, and public prioritization input, the following priorities were identified that would improve transportation services and meet many of the needs and gaps in service listed above.

**Improve existing service and provide new transit services.** Providing transportation to destinations outside the region, into New Hampshire, to medical appointments, the Bedford VA, and the North Shore continue to be a common theme in discussions. Hours of operation for on-demand service and Sunday service are also a major concern for seniors. This also includes purchasing of accessible vehicles.

While COVID dealt a significant blow to all transit authorities across the country, MeVA has since come back strong. In 2022, MeVA heard from riders about the need for extending the Route 13 further into New Hampshire to access Walmlart and the Market Basket and instituted the change.

**Resources:** Providing service outside the region is more challenging for a variety of reasons and requires funding. RTAs, Councils on Aging, municipalities, and non-profit organizations can access Community Transit Funds for operating needs, including additional drivers, as well as capital expenses to purchase vans to initiate and extend service. MeVA has done this in the past when it initiated the Medi-Ride and the Route 28 on-demand employment service. MeVA can also access RTA Capital funds (state funds) and FTA 5339 funds.

**Better coordination of transportation services.** Better coordination is needed between transit authorities, private transportation providers, non-profit providers, Veterans Affairs, and Councils on Aging.

A network of providers already exists and to some extent there is coordination. The Regional Coordinating Council examine its coordination issue and invite missing partners to the table such as the Veterans groups in order to drill down into the coordination problems and find additional solutions. Topics of interest and concern may range from inter-regional service to share dispatching service, shared procurement, and shared marketing campaigns.

**Resources:** Community Transit Grants can be used for coordination and mobility management.

**Improve information and distribution.** It is evident that many people do not know how to use existing transportation services. Information needs be made available using a variety of media aimed at different audiences to ensure people can better understand and access existing transportation. This includes people who do not speak English well or who have a hard time using electronic resources. Information should be 'on the street' at bus stops as well as at transit hubs, at organizations, medical centers, popular destinations and more.



MeVA is in the process of increasing their visibility with the new branding and bus colors. They are modifying their fixed bus routes and have begun the process of planning for implementing bus stops. New brochures, maps and information will follow. The suggestions provided by participants will add to the menu of options for these projects.

**Resources:** The regional transit authorities use Federal Transit Administration (FTA) 5307 operations funding to pay for their outreach, maps and brochures. Depending on the project, Community Transit Funds may also be used for these purposes (MeVA has used these funds to create training videos, for example). Creative marketing campaigns may be designed, and if deemed appropriate by MassDOT, implemented using Community Transit Grant funding.

**Improve accessibility of the system.** Improving access includes implementing bus stops (with information see Improve information distribution), increasing the number of bus shelters, addressing safety at intersections and at bus stops, improving pedestrian access and more.

MeVA has already begun working with communities to add bus shelters and is in the planning phase for implementing bus stops.

**Resources:** Various resources are available for infrastructure improvements, such as Chapter 90 Funds (municipal funding that can be used for sidewalk, ADA ramps, crosswalks, etc.), MassTrails (if there is a trail nearby), FTA 5307 and 5339 (bus facilities), RTA Capital funds and federal transportation funds. Technical assistance for studies can be provided by the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission. Municipal and state (MassDOT) partnerships are important as they own and operate the transportation infrastructure.

### Comments Received on Draft Plan

1. During the August 2023 MVMPO meeting, representatives for Lawrence noted that many elderly city dwellers contract with private limousine services, and that no information has been compiled to assess the magnitude of such use. This comment was addressed on page 19.
2. During the August 2023 MVMPO meeting, representatives from MeVa noted that many non-ADA and ADA elderly individuals use standard fixed route service in addition to the agency's paratransit offerings. This comment was addressed on pages 12 and 16.
3. Staff received a written comment from Amesbury Council on Aging Director Doreen Arnfield on September 6, 2020, pasted below. Staff made no changes to the document as a result of the comment.

*"Thank you for the opportunity to provide my feedback. I looked closely at [pages] 21 and 22 as you suggested and found many good suggestions that I agree with specifically thinking about seniors, veterans and disabled adults. Making it a simple process with a flexible schedule for people seems to be the ask. Of course a little harder to implement. With Amesbury a border town, trips to NH would be welcomed. Continuing to strengthen COA partnerships to provide informational trainings for both staff and seniors would be helpful. All of these things were identified and I am only reiterating that these are the things I am hearing."*