

Moving  
Together

19



# Rural Transportation – Recent Policies and Projects

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# Three Recent Policy Developments on Rural Transportation

## Governor's Commission on the Future of Transportation

- 2018 – designed to think about the long-term future of transportation in Massachusetts as of 2040.
- Consideration given to many variables such as changes in technology, climate change and demographics, and how they affect, and are affected by, transportation
- Specific recognition of challenges facing rural communities. Rural recommendations include:
  - Ensure necessary infrastructure is available to support autonomous vehicles and Transportation Network Companies (TNCs) across the state, including rural areas.
  - Evaluate how Regional Transit Authorities (RTAs) are able to address transportation needs in rural areas and how TNCs may supplement these services

## Recent Policy Developments – Future of Transportation Commission (cont.)

- Explore coordination of local transportation services such as RTA's school buses, Councils on Aging, MassHealth and private van services and how they might share transportation assets
- Assess feasibility increased transportation services, including rail, to rural areas to connect them to larger urban areas both in and out of state.

Other recommendations relevant to rural areas:

- Better broadband to facilitate use of transportation technology;
- Programs to ensure availability of charging stations to promote transition to electric vehicles.

## 2. Recent Policy Developments - Rural Policy Plan

- Rural Policy Advisory Commission (RPAC) established by legislature has just completed a Rural Policy Plan (October 2019)
- Plan covers a multitude of issues facing rural Massachusetts
- Rural transportation recommendations include:
  - Several items on infrastructure, such as Chapter 90 roads funding, small bridges and culverts, design funding, new technology and resiliency
  - Mobility items include better funding for RTAs
  - Redesign public transportation to allow smaller vehicles and newer technology and for sharing of resources of schools, RTA and councils on aging
  - Expand intercity bus and rail service
  - Promote electric vehicles and installation of charging stations
  - Expansion of broadband
  - Promote bicycle and pedestrian modes of travel

### **3. Recent Policy Developments - Transportation Climate Initiative**

The Transportation and Climate Initiative (TCI) is a regional collaboration of 12 Northeast and Mid-Atlantic states and DC that seeks to improve transportation, develop the clean energy economy and reduce carbon emissions from the transportation sector. It would also raise funds for emissions reduction projects.

TCI is modeled on the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) that has been in place for several years among several states to address power plant source emissions.

TCI Rural Symposium in October 2019 (no formal report yet) looked at ways to ensure rural benefits from TCI funded projects.

Discussions include the types of programs in the Futures Report and the Rural Policy Plan: cooperation between RTAs and TNCs; broadband; electrification of the fleet; better rail service; sharing of bus fleets.

**Stay Tuned!**

## **Suburban/Urban Strategies May Not Work in Rural Areas**

Example: Dublin California – suburban city

Local transit authority partners with taxis and TNCs to subsidize 50% of rides up to \$5.00 – not a good model for rural areas where there are no taxis or TNCs, and limited cell service

Example: Denver and Boulder - car and ride sharing at affordable housing complexes

Local transit authorities can contract with companies like Enterprise, CarShare and Zipcar to provide vehicles to be used by residents of affordable housing facilities. Would only be feasible in rural towns with enough affordable housing units to support the costs.

## **Recent Pilot Project: Quaboag Connector**

2017 Pilot Project funded on a match basis by MassDOT and local supporters

Two 5-8 passenger vans donated by Pioneer Valley Transit Authority

Serves 9 towns in central Massachusetts – looking to expand

Riders can schedule rides two days in advance – by phone – no need for apps.

\$2 each way; connects to local bus stops

Scheduling priority for employment and education; requests for rides for medical and shopping go on a waiting list

700-900 rides per month

## Hilltown CDC Easy Ride

Demand response service under contract to the Franklin Regional Transit Authority operations taken over from prior provider in June 2017.

Van service for seniors over 60 and vets of any age - Riders must be pre-approved

Riders must contact the dispatcher at least 24 hours in advance – dispatcher then tries to make a schedule to accommodate requests

Regular shopping trips to Pittsfield and Northhampton

Van is offered to Councils on Aging for group outings for a fee, helped by grant from Highland Valley Elder Services

Also have a Driver Pool for occasional rides for appointments outside the service area using personal vehicles – coordinated by the dispatcher and supported by grant funding

## Another option to explore: coordination of separate bus systems

Our communities buy or rent different bus assets for specific subsets of the population

Councils on Aging, health care organizations, public transit authorities and schools all use busses - minimal sharing

Can we stop using our various bus assets only for a single purpose, and do more cross-organizational sharing of these expensive resources?

In particular, school busses are idle many hours of the business day – can they be made available for non-school passengers?

Two recent studies:

<http://www.ncsl.org/print/transportation/schoolbusneeds08.pdf>

[http://www.saferoutesnj.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Final-Coordination-School-and-Public-Transit\\_VTC.pdf](http://www.saferoutesnj.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Final-Coordination-School-and-Public-Transit_VTC.pdf)