

COORDINATED PUBLIC TRANSIT HUMAN SERVICES PLAN



NORTHERN MIDDLESEX COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

JULY 2023



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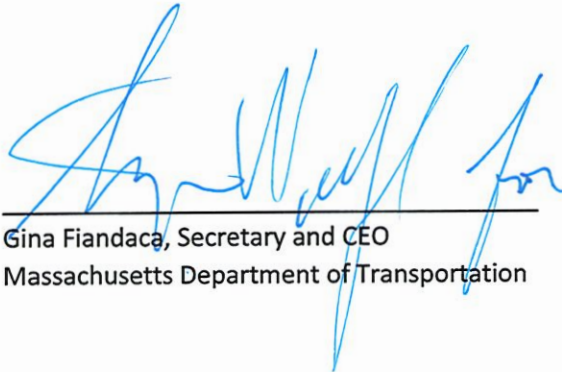
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MPO ENDORSEMENT
Federal Fiscal Year 2023
2023 Coordinated Public Transit Human Services Transportation Plan

The Coordinated Public Transit Human Services Transportation Plan (CPT-HSP) for the Northern Middlesex Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is a programming tool developed triennially as part of the Federal Transit Administration Section 5310 program (49 U.S.C. 5310) transportation planning process.

In accordance with guidelines Northern Middlesex, MPO was developed and submitted for a 21-day public review and comment period. Comments received have been addressed and are reflected in the final FFY 2023 Coordinated Public Transit Human Services Transportation Plan.

The Committee of Signatories representing the Northern Middlesex Metropolitan Planning Organization (NMMPO) by a majority vote hereby endorses the Federal Fiscal Year 2023 Coordinated Public Transit Human Services Transportation Plan on July 26, 2023, for the Northern Middlesex MPO with the chair signing on behalf of all members.



Gina Fiandaca, Secretary and CEO
Massachusetts Department of Transportation

8/9/23
Date

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Introduction

Northern Middlesex Council of Governments (NMCOG) is a regional planning agency established under Chapter 40B of the General Laws of Massachusetts. NMCOG is a public agency governed by an 18-member policy board comprised of locally appointed and elected officials from the City of Lowell and the eight surrounding Towns of Billerica, Chelmsford, Dracut, Dunstable, Pepperell, Tewksbury, Tyngsborough, and Westford. Our objective is to increase the capacity of municipalities and foster regional cooperation and coordination. The NMCOG transportation team serves as staff to the Northern Middlesex Metropolitan Planning Organization (NMMPO), a 7-member policy board tasked with carrying out the transportation planning process for the Northern Middlesex Region. The Northern Middlesex Council of Governments also conducts the public participation process for all certification documents. NMCOG staff serves as the transportation planning staff for the NMMPO.

The Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Transportation Plan (CPT-HST) is a triennially developed plan; Northern Middlesex Council of Government staff on behalf of the Northern Middlesex Metropolitan Planning Organization completes this plan. The plan assesses the transportation needs of persons with disabilities and seniors within the Northern Middlesex Region and coordinates with other transportation service providers. Input from seniors, individuals with disabilities, public, private, and non-profit transportation, and human service providers is used to update this plan. The development of this plan was conducted post-pandemic, as a result of the pandemic, transportation service providers are experiencing decreased ridership, leaving riders with limited service and fewer options. The goal of the CPT-HST is to identify strategies to improve the quality and availability of transportation services for the disabled and elder populations in the region. This plan serves as an intentional framework and pathway toward improvements to paratransit services in a clear format, including direct actions.

This CPT-HST has identified many transit needs for the region. Many of these unmet needs can be addressed with Section 5310 funding. Eligible entities are encouraged to apply for funding to provide services to fill these unmet gaps. As a result of this 2023 CPT-HST plan, actionable priorities have been outlined in the Assessment of Transportation Needs section of this report. This list of challenges should be used to inform future funding and guide transportation-related funding for 5310 programs.

Section 5310 Funding

In the context of the Northern Middlesex Region, the Lowell Regional Transit Authority is the direct recipient of Section 5310 funding, and the Councils on Aging the LRTA is contracted with are sub-recipients of 5310 funding. Federal transportation law, Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), requires that a region have an updated CPT-HST in order to be eligible to receive federal funding. The most recent US Census is used to determine the population of seniors and people with disabilities in each state to determine how Section 5310 funds are allotted. In Massachusetts, MassDOT administers the Section 5310 program in accordance with State Management Plans. Forty-five percent (45%) of the

funds may be spent on operating, while fifty-five (55%) percent must be spent on capital projects. There is a fifty percent (50%) match required for operating funds, while capital project match requirements require an eighty to twenty percent 80% - 20% (federal-local) funding split. Section 5310 funds can be used for expanded service beyond the mandatory ADA service area, and for fixed route service that aids in the transition from demand response.

Objectives of Section 5310

The BIL requires that all projects selected for funding under Section 5310: Enhanced Mobility for seniors and Individuals with Disabilities Program must show that they are responding to the unmet needs as documented in the CPT-HST. The Section 5310 Program is intended to enhance mobility for seniors and persons with disabilities. In providing funds for programs to serve the special needs of transit-dependent populations beyond traditional public transportation services and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) complementary paratransit services. The Federal Transit Administration [website](#) displays a comprehensive list of eligible activities.

Eligible Activities

Traditional Section 5310 project examples include:

- buses and vans
- wheelchair lifts, ramps, and securement devices
- transit-related information technology systems, including scheduling/routing/one-call systems
- mobility management programs
- acquisition of transportation services under a contract, lease, or other arrangement

Nontraditional Section 5310 project examples include

- 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 programs

Regional Context

The Northern Middlesex Council of Governments region covers 195.82 square miles and includes the following communities: Billerica, Chelmsford, Dracut, Dunstable, Pepperell, Lowell, Tewksbury, Tyngsborough, and Westford. **Figures 1 through 4** display the demographic spatial analysis in the NMCOG region based on the 2021 American Community Census data.

Figure 1 Lowell Regional Transit Authority Service Area Communities

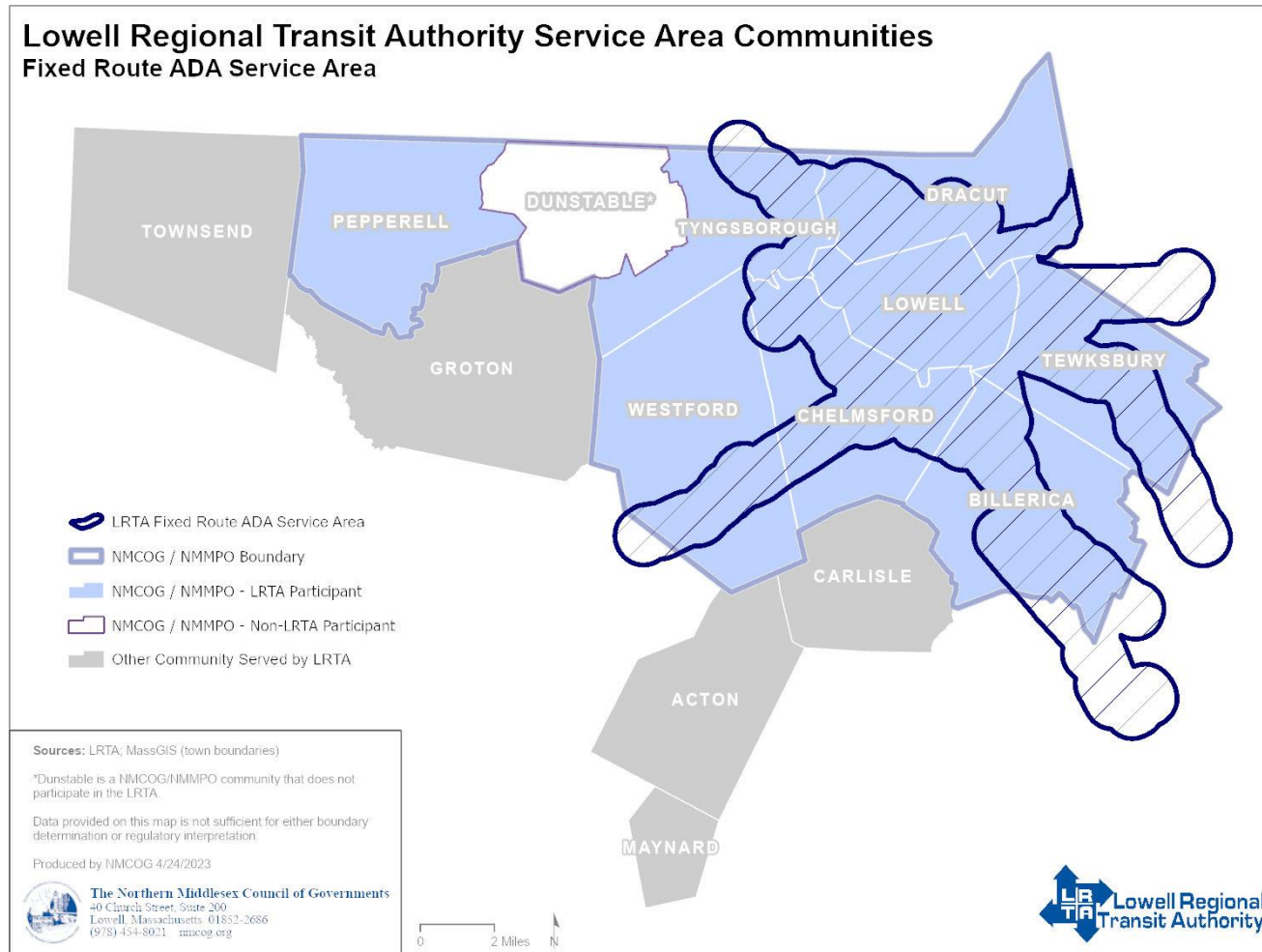


Figure 2 Northern Middlesex Population Change 65 and over from 2011-2021

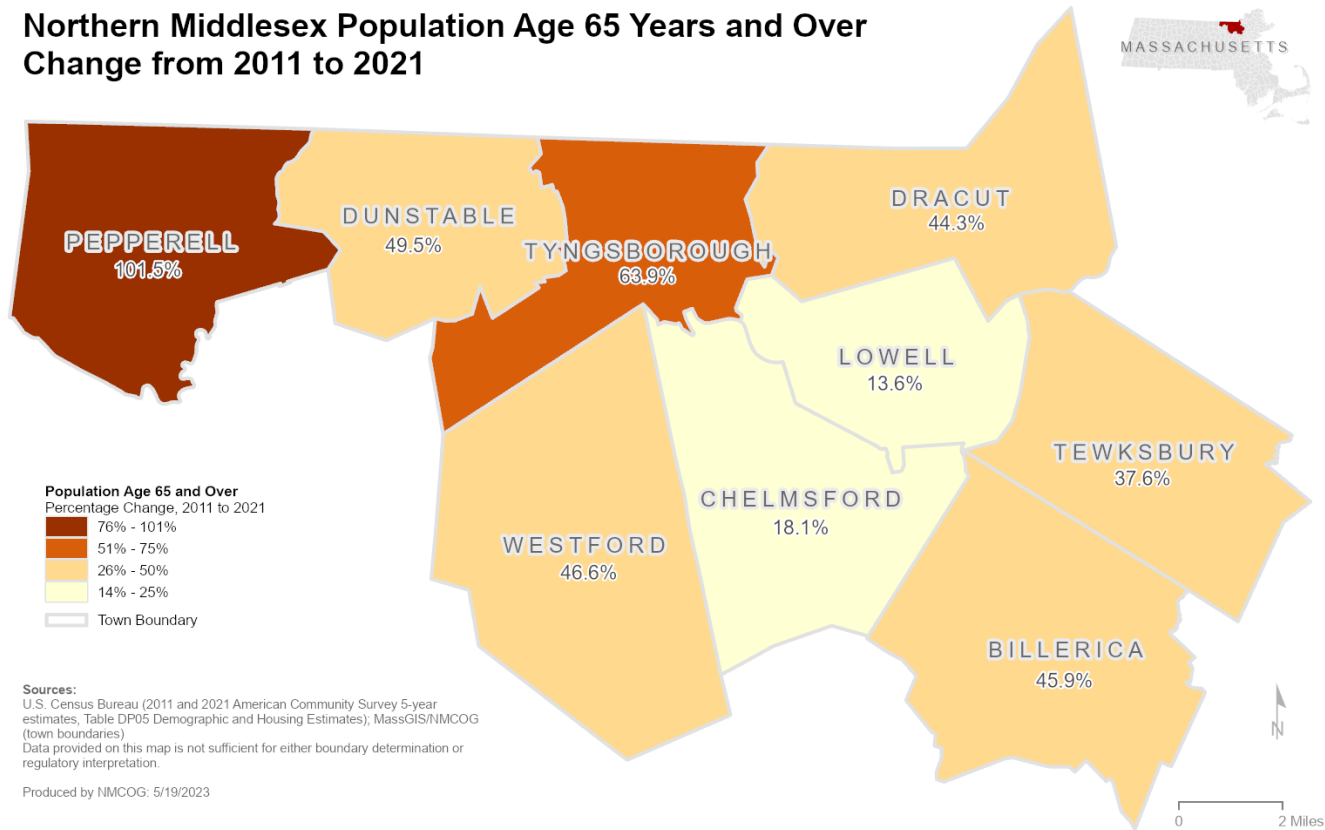


Figure 2 displays the population growth for persons 65 and older across the NMCOG region from the years 2011-2021. The darker shaded areas on the map represent the greatest population growth. As shown in **Figure 2**, all communities have experienced a population growth of the 65 and older cohort. The greatest growth took place in the town of Pepperrell (101.5%) and Tyngsborough (63.9%) and Dunstable (49.5%).

Figure 3 Northern Middlesex Senior Population per Square Mile

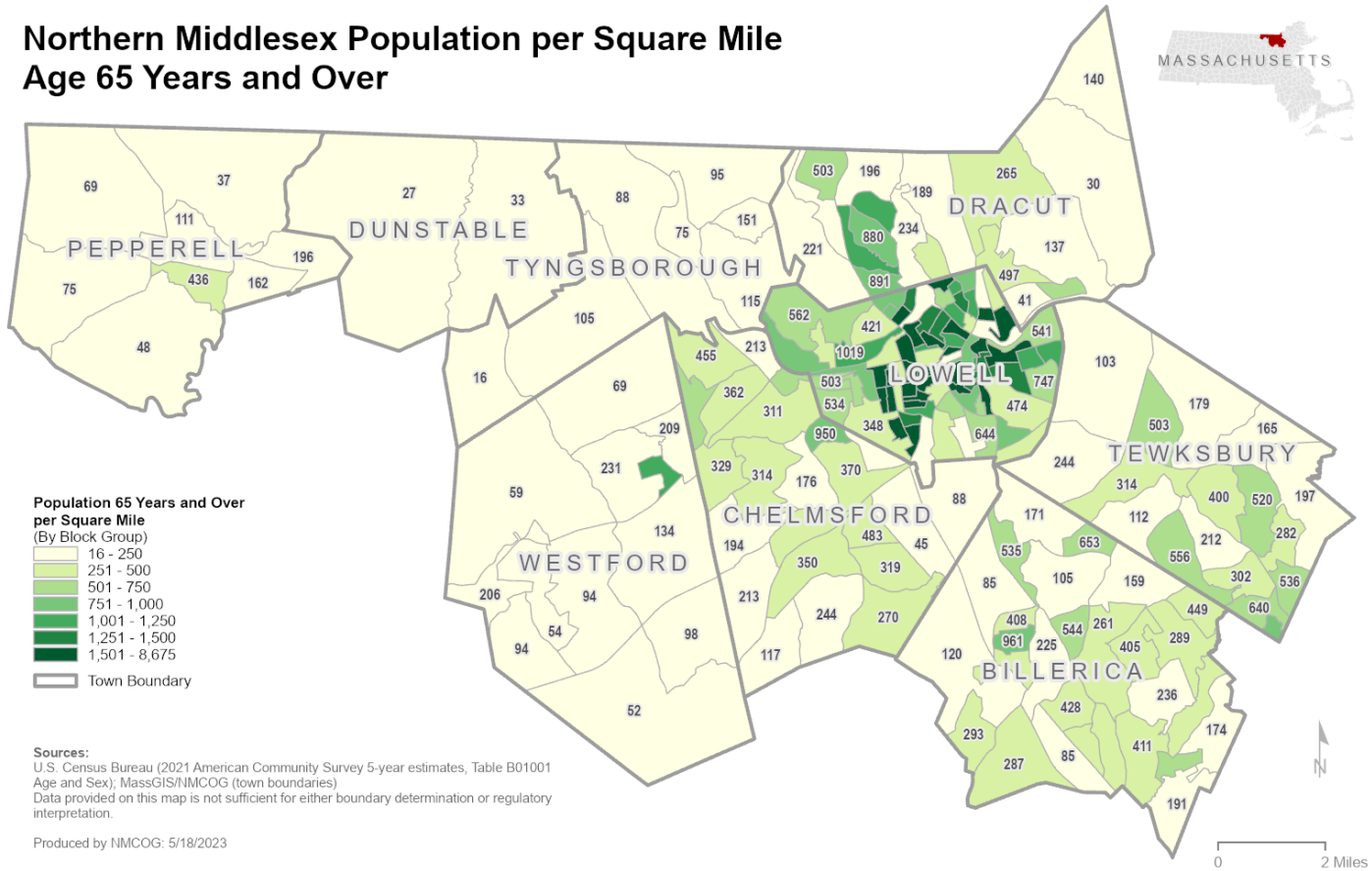
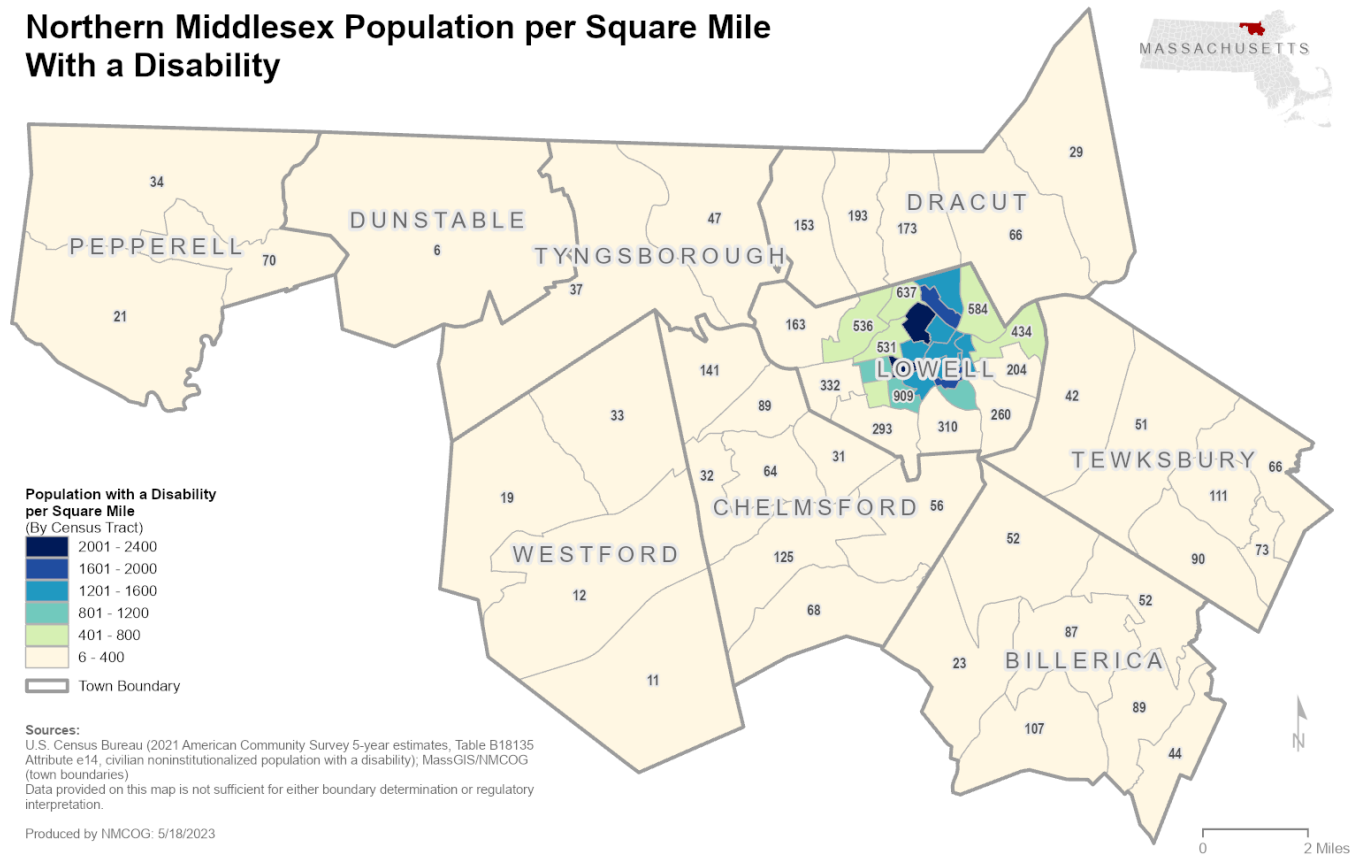


Figure 3 displays the population of persons aged 65 or older per square mile in the Northern Middlesex Region. The darkest green shading on the map represents the highest concentration of persons 65 or older per square mile. The city of Lowell has the greatest number of seniors in

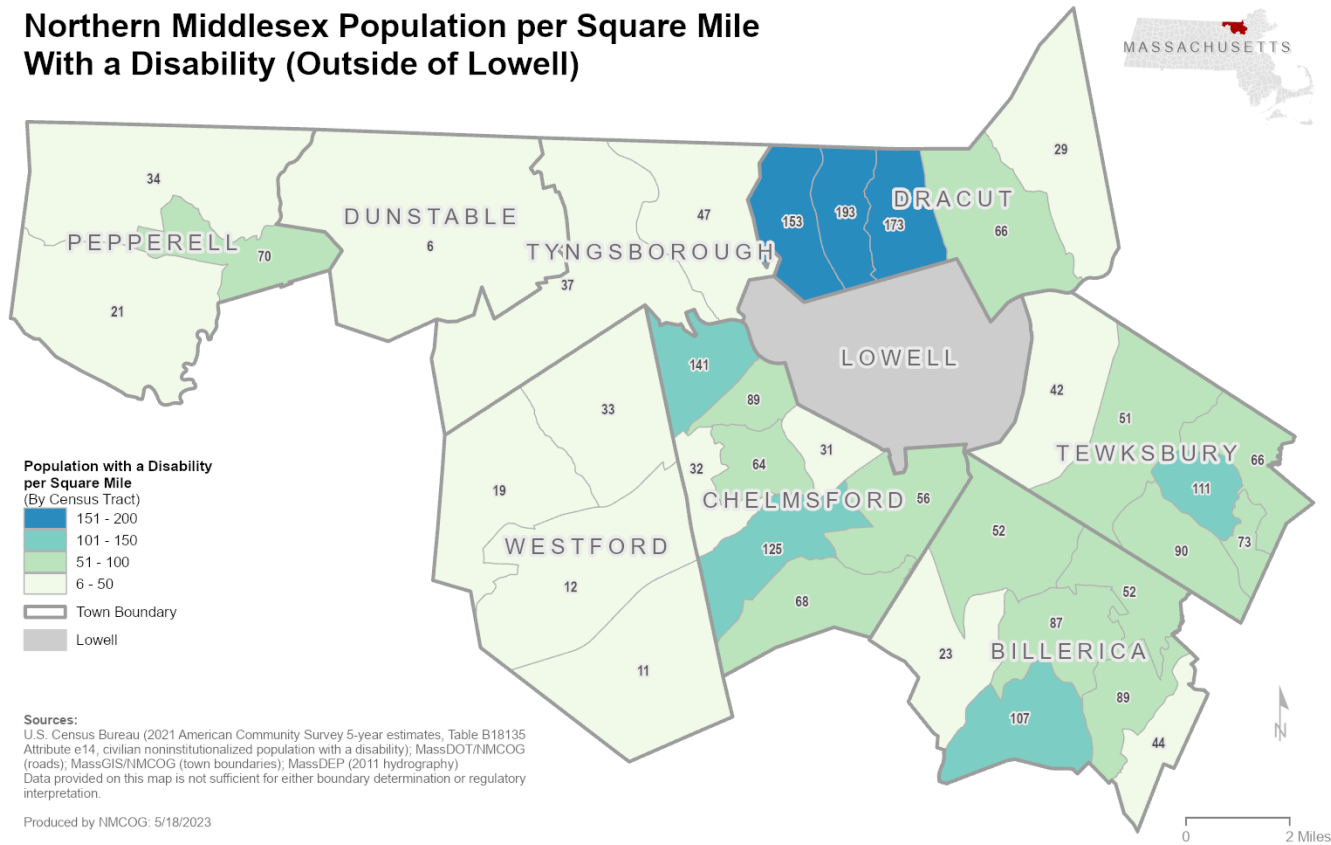
the Northern Middlesex Region per square mile. The most frequent transit service for our region is situated in Lowell, which may support the density of seniors, which in turn may inform the density of seniors per square mile.

Figure 4 Northern Middlesex Population per Square Mile with a Disability



In **Figure 4**, the dark blue shaded areas represent the populations with a disability per square mile. In the Northern Middlesex Region, the majority of persons with disabilities reside in the city of Lowell. From the available Census information, we can surmise that access to services in the Lowell area are better or more available to disabled populations, which supports greater population density.

Figure 5 Northern Middlesex Population per Square Mile with a Disability Outside of Lowell



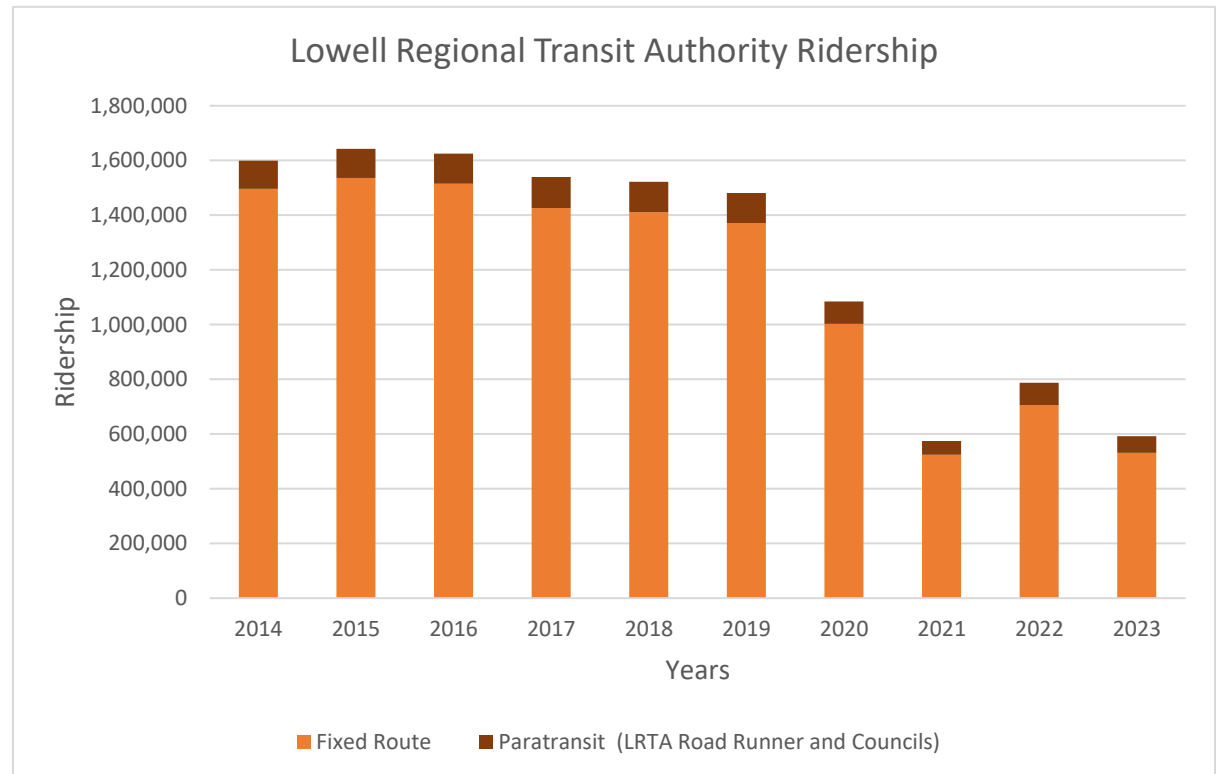
To understand the distribution of the disabled population in the Northern Middlesex Region, the city of Lowell was removed from the spatial analysis in **Figure 5**. The town of Dracut has the largest population of persons with a disability by census tract, as shown by the blue shading. Dracut has about 151-200 disabled persons per square mile. Notably, Billerica, Chelmsford, and Tewksbury have more than one hundred disabled residents per square mile as shown by the shading on census tracts.

Existing Services

The Lowell Regional Transit Authority’s service area encompasses 312.18 square miles and includes all nine NMCOG communities, as well as the towns of Acton, Carlisle, Groton, Maynard, and Townsend. The LRTA Administrator, David Bradley, manages the day-to-day affairs of the Transit Authority. The LRTA Advisory Board appoints the administrator position. The LRTA Advisory Board includes members from each of the 14 communities in the LRTA’s service area. LRTA board members are listed on the LRTA website. See **Appendix B** for additional details on the LRTA fare structures.

Transportation services within the Northern Middlesex Region are available through various public, non-profit, and for-profit providers. **Table 1** displays the LRTA ridership based on the state fiscal year. The Massachusetts state fiscal year runs from July 1 to June 30. The trips listed in **Table 1** for 2023 include the first three quarters of 2022, July 2022 through March 2023. As shown in **Table 1** LRTA, ridership decreased in 2020 and has not returned to pre-pandemic levels as of the third quarter of 2023. As our region recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, the ridership is anticipated to increase over time. The Lowell Regional Transit Authority (LRTA) is the primary transit service provider for the region and operates fixed route bus service in seven (7) communities within the Northern Middlesex region: Billerica, Chelmsford, Dracut, Lowell, Tewksbury, Tyngsborough, and Westford. **Appendix B** includes a list of wheelchair service providers.

Chart 1 Lowell Regional Transit Authority Ridership



Fixed Route

The City of Lowell is the central hub for the Lowell Regional Transit Authority bus route system, with ten bus routes exclusively serving the residents of Lowell. Additionally, all of the bus routes travel through the city, bringing the total number of bus routes for the overall system to eighteen.

Paratransit Services

The LRTA operates two paratransit service programs within the region. The LRTA Roadrunner is the Lowell-based Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) complementary paratransit service operating within the entire City of Lowell. Road Runner also operates with the ¾-mile corridor around each fixed route LRTA bus line. The service is reserved for ADA-certified passengers who are not able to access a fixed-route bus as a result of their disability.

The Council on Aging in each of the NMCOG communities, except Dunstable, operates the second paratransit service directly. The Town of Dunstable contracts its senior transportation to a company outside of the LRTA. The COAs collaborate with the senior centers in their respective municipalities. Paratransit services are funded under Section 5310 through the LRTA. The ADA service area defines a ¾-mile radius surrounding existing fixed routes in some instances, councils work across municipal lines to achieve Boston-based trips and manage more challenging routes for persons in need. There is no limitation on trip purpose or community as long as the trip's origin and destination are within ¾ miles of an LRTA bus route. For example, a resident of Billerica who is within the ¾ mile-fixed route buffer can travel to another location within the ¾ mile buffer in Billerica, Chelmsford, Dracut, Lowell, Tewksbury, Tyngsborough, or Westford. Trips are scheduled one day in advance by calling the Road Runner office in Lowell at (978) 453-0152.

Equity Considerations

Access to affordable, timely, reliable, and safe transportation is an essential component of a functioning and thriving region. The coordination of existing services and expanding services is important to ensure that all populations are able to participate fully in the community. Transportation Equity is central to transportation planning efforts. A central goal of transit is to facilitate social and economic opportunities by providing equitable access to affordable and reliable transportation options based on the needs of the populations served, particularly those traditionally underserved. An equitable transportation plan considers the circumstances influencing a community's mobility and connectivity needs, and this information is used to determine the measures needed to develop an equitable transportation network. To attain an equitable transportation network, components of Title VI, Environmental Justice (EJ), and Nondiscrimination are considered.

Engagement

Northern Middlesex Metropolitan Planning Organization

The NMCOG transportation team serves as staff to the Northern Middlesex Metropolitan Planning Organization (NMMPO). NMCOG also administers the public participation process for all certification documents. NMCOG staff serve as the transportation planning staff for the NMMPO. **Table 4** displays the engagement dates and public process conducted through the NMCOG, NMMPO, and the 2023 Coordinated Public Transit Human Services Transportation Plan. Appendix A of this report includes the written comment we received for this plan during the public comment period.

Table 2 Coordinated Public Human Services Transit Plan Timeline for Endorsement

Timeline and Deliverables	
NMMPO Meeting	Deliverable
April 26, 2023	Present Scope of Work before NMMPO
June 28, 2023	Present Draft Plan before NMMPO
June 30 – July 20, 2023	Public Comment Period (21 days)
July 17, 2023	Virtual Public Meeting
July 26, 2023	NMMPO Meeting Present Comments and Endorsement

The Northern Middlesex Council of Government staff conducted several engagement activities to learn about transportation challenges facing seniors in the nine communities that comprise the region. Transportation coordination is crucial for assisting seniors and individuals with disabilities because these individuals may face unique challenges when it comes to accessing transportation. For example, seniors may have mobility issues or health conditions that make it difficult for them to walk long distances or navigate public transportation systems. Individuals with disabilities may require specialized transportation services or accommodations to ensure that they can travel safely and comfortably. Some of the key benefits of transportation coordination for seniors and individuals with disabilities include:

- I. **Increased access to transportation:** Transportation coordination can help bridge the gap between different transportation services and providers, making it easier for seniors and individuals with disabilities to access the transportation options they need.
- II. **Improved mobility and independence:** By providing reliable and accessible transportation options, transportation coordination can help seniors and individuals with disabilities maintain their independence and mobility, allowing them to participate more fully in their communities.

- III. **Cost savings:** Coordinating transportation services can help reduce costs for both transportation providers and passengers, making transportation more affordable and accessible to a wider range of individuals.
- IV. **Enriched quality of life:** Access to transportation is essential for individuals to maintain their quality of life, allowing them to access healthcare, social activities, and other essential services.

Speaking directly with riders and other stakeholders was prioritized in the development of this plan. By engaging stakeholders throughout the transportation needs assessment process, decision-makers can ensure that the outcomes reflect the diverse needs and concerns of the community. This approach promotes transparency, and legitimacy, and ultimately leads to more effective transportation planning and development.

Merrimack Valley Regional Coordinating Council

The state of Massachusetts developed Regional Coordinating Councils as voluntary coalitions where representatives of human service agencies, state agencies, transit authorities, regional planning agencies, consumers, advocates, and other stakeholders can convene to discuss the transportation needs of area older adults, people with disabilities, and low-income commuters, and to brainstorm ways to collaborate on solutions. Each RCC is unique and represents local priorities. For the purpose of coordination, regional boundaries are not firm, and towns may choose to participate in more than one RCC. The Northern Middlesex Council of Government (NMCOG) is a member of the Merrimack Valley Regional Coordinating Council. In compliance with Section 5310, a Regional Coordinating Council Meeting was held on May 25, 2023, hosted by NMCOG and Merrimack Valley Planning Commission (MVPC).

The RCC meeting was held virtually and included stakeholders from both regions. The NMCOG presentation included maps that displayed the density of persons with disabilities, seniors, and the population growth of the region's senior population from 2011-2022. [Merrimack Valley Planning Commission](#) staff provided an overview of their region and shared the findings of a preliminary survey. [Merrimack Valley Transit Authority](#) shared news of their rebranding and efforts to consolidate paratransit services in the MVPC region under the name Mini Meva. Participants shared creative methods for identifying drivers for volunteer services by visiting college campuses and other key demographics to assist with van rides. Across both regions, participants highlighted the need for additional funding and capacity building around funding.

Meetings with Councils on Aging

NMCOG staff meet with the councils on aging across the Northern Middlesex Region on a bi-monthly basis. The meetings are open to all COA staff members, directors, planners, and other municipal employees. These meetings were created in response to the desire for collaboration identified while conducting research for the NMMPO long-range regional transportation plan update. NMCOG staff learned through this

outreach that there was a strong interest in collaborating and holding time for discussions across councils to share best practices and service-related challenges.

Separately, NMCOG transportation staff hosted meetings with three of our nine communities to hear directly from riders:

- On January 2023, NMCOG staff gave a presentation and held a discussion at the Chelmsford Senior Center.
- On May 12, 2023, NMCOG staff conducted a presentation at the Cameron Senior Center in Westford.
- On May 23, NMCOG staff held a virtual presentation and discussion with the Billerica Disability Commission.

These sessions encouraged active participation, fostered dialogue, and facilitated the exchange of ideas.

Council on Aging Survey

The communities of Lowell, Billerica, Tyngsborough, Dracut, Chelmsford, Pepperell, Tewksbury, and Westford have distributed a survey to collect information on their shuttle operations. The majority of trip types managed by the municipal councils on aging shuttle vans are local trips within their respective municipalities. Across the Northern Middlesex region, only one of the eight COAs reported having a volunteer driver program. All eight Northern Middlesex Councils identified funding as a major challenge to accomplishing trips for seniors and ADA riders. Among the challenges discussed were outdated technology and limited capacity for grant management and grant writing. The survey conducted was used to inform the transportation further needs assessment. **Table 2** displays the hours of operations, number of vehicles, and the number of drivers based on data reported by each council on aging representing the listed municipalities. The areas shaded in orange in **Table 3** reflect the locations that the Council on Aging Services.

Table 3 Northern Middlesex Council on Aging Operations

Municipality	Days of operation	Hours of operations	Number of Vehicles	Number of drivers
Billerica	Monday - Friday	8:00 am-3:00pm	3	5
Chelmsford	Monday - Friday	8:00am-4:30pm	3	5
Dracut	Monday - Friday	8:30am - 2:00pm	4	5

Table 4 Northern Middlesex Council on Aging Operations (cont.)

Municipality	Days of operation	Hours of operations	Number of Vehicles	Number of drivers
Lowell	Mon-Fri, Sat. Sun	9:00 - 2:30, 9:00-12:00pm	2	3
Pepperell	Monday - Friday	9:00 am-2:00pm	2	3
Tewksbury	Monday - Friday	8:00 am - 4:00pm	2	3
Tyngsborough	Monday - Friday	8:00 am - 4:00pm	2	3
Westford	Monday - Friday	8:00 am - 4:00pm	3	9

Source: Northern Middlesex Councils on Councils on Aging

Table 5 Northern Middlesex Council on Aging Service Areas

Councils on Aging Municipality	Locations Served							
	Billerica	Chelmsford	Dracut	Lowell	Pepperell	Tewksbury	Tyngsborough	Westford
Billerica	Orange	Orange	Grey	Orange	Grey	Orange	Grey	Grey
Chelmsford	Grey	Orange	Grey	Orange	Grey	Grey	Grey	Orange
Dracut	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Grey	Orange	Orange	Grey
Lowell	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange
Pepperell	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Orange	Grey	Grey	Grey
Tewksbury	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Grey	Orange	Orange	Grey
Tyngsborough	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey	Orange	Grey
Westford	Grey	Orange	Grey	Orange	Grey	Grey	Grey	Orange

*The areas shaded in orange on Table 3 reflect the locations that the Council on Aging Services.

Source: Northern Middlesex Councils on Councils on Aging

Assessment of Transportation Needs

NMCOG transportation staff provided stakeholders with opportunities to provide input on transportation needs across the Northern Middlesex region. We solicited feedback on existing transportation systems, identified challenges and opportunities, and gathered suggestions for improvement. We employed multiple methods, such as open forums, interviews, and conversations, to capture diverse perspectives and ensure inclusivity. We carefully analyzed the collected input to identify common themes, prioritize concerns, and assess the relative importance of various transportation needs. A list of challenges with ADA and senior paratransit services was used to determine the needs based on service levels, rider experience, and challenges identified. We developed the list of challenges below and separated them by stakeholder group to inform the suggested action items in this report. The challenges below have been formulated based on feedback from key proponents. These listed challenges should be used to support and inform work planning under the section 5310 program.

Rider Challenges

- Assist riders with clarity on cross-town trips or city trips, related to the LRTA service area and user residences
- Understanding COAs service areas, LRTA Road Runner Service area, and other available ride services
- Access to senior centers throughout the region to participate in other programs and activities (i.e. Tyngsborough to Chelmsford)
- Absence of evening and weekend shuttle service for recreational and church activities (i.e. town meetings, public meetings, and other events)
- Understanding the different types of paratransit trips (i.e. for disabled and seniors)
- Challenges with planning for longer or uncertain trip types such as medical or RMV purposes
- Understanding flag stop system for bus trips

Service Provider Challenges

- Ability to balance the needs of riders on trips to Boston versus local trips; having the van out of the town for a long period limits trips for a day
- Managing short notice trips requested by passengers due to doctor's schedules, etc.
- Outdated route service and senior center software programs
- Emergency rides home when appointment services run past COA hours
- Outdated dispatch software to confirm routes and navigate trips
- Support with grant writing
- Funding for capital and operating cost

- Limited ability to provide more service on afternoons, nights, and weekends
- Fallen ridership numbers since the pandemic
- Cancellations from riders due to weather, doctors, or other unforeseen reasons
- Challenges finding drivers for routes, especially longer routes
- Consistency of volunteer drivers
- Finding drivers able to assist with physical demands

Gaps in Services

- Access to Pheasant Lane Mall in Nashua New Hampshire, outside of the holiday season
- Emerson Hospital in Concord, Massachusetts
- Access to Bedford Veterans Memorial Hospital in Bedford, Massachusetts
- More access to Lahey Clinic in Burlington, Massachusetts
- Seamless, low effort links between transportation modes (i.e. bus and train)
- Access to Boston-based health and human services appointments

Suggestions / Actionable Efforts

- Conduct reviews of transportation services that utilize 5310 funding with an emphasis on equity
- Establish Bylaws containing official guidance for Councils on Aging in NM region to support rider service and transparency
- Assist COAs with addressing driver shortage through recruitment and advertising
- Conduct a study to evaluate the feasibility of a Northern Middlesex or Lowell-based shuttle to medical facilities in Boston
- LRTA, COAs, and other Transit Partners should attend NMCOG-hosted discussions with COAs and municipal staff to share challenges and identify opportunities to advance services for seniors and ADA populations, supported by the LRTA
- Identify and engage diverse stakeholders in Regional Coordinating Council Meetings hosted by NMCOG and MVPC
- Prepare and publicize clear materials to communicate service areas, fare structures, and eligibility for ADA and paratransit services for all Northern Middlesex communities including a clear explanation of the differences between the services, in collaboration with COAs and riders
- Increase mobility services for ADA persons under 65 years
- Identify methods to eliminate transfers from COAs to LRTA Roadrunner to improve rider experience
- Research technology to support paratransit services for COAs
- Collaborate and communicate with adjacent regional transportation authorities to improve paratransit services
- Provide workshops and materials on how to access transportation services in local areas
- Clear explanation and guidance for procurement and COA vehicle contracts

- Evaluate the feasibility of more on-demand trip services to address the urgent needs of clients

Existing Transportation Service Providers

Across the Northern Middlesex Region, there are multiple service providers in the region. Many of the services are operating separately and could benefit from stronger collaboration and coordination to achieve trips. This section includes a list of service providers and descriptions of the types of services offered. This list can be used to guide future coordination among service providers and the LRTA.

Commercial Wheelchair and Ambulance Services Providers

There are several wheelchair and ambulance service providers operating throughout the Northern Middlesex region. The wheelchair services generally operate on a 24-hour advance notice, pick up, and deliver senior and disabled customers both within the region and beyond. Many of these services transport customers to adult daycare in the mornings and afternoons, and therefore, the vehicles are underutilized during the midday. Ambulance services are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Often these ambulance services establish exclusive contracts with area nursing homes for all transportation. Exclusive transportation contracts result in costly non-emergency transportation services.

Concord Coach Bus Lines Boston Express (Route 3)

Boston Express runs a service from Manchester NH to Logan Airport, with three intermediate stops, including a stop at the Tyngsborough Park and Ride Lot. The service includes fifteen inbound and outbound trips on weekdays and ten inbound and outbound trips on Saturdays and Sundays. The hours of operation are between 5:30 AM and 11:45 PM on weekdays and 6:15 AM and 11:45 PM on weekends. For more information visit, <https://www.bostonexpressbus.com/download-and-print-the-schedule/>.

Disabled American Veterans (DAV) Shuttle Service

The Disabled American Veterans operates a fleet of vehicles around the country to provide free transportation to VA medical facilities for injured and ill veterans. The DAV offers non-emergency transportation service to the Lowell Veterans Community Care Center and the Bedford VA Hospital free of charge. For more information visit: <https://www.dav.org/get-help-now/medical-transportation/>.

AgeSpan (Care Ride Program)

AgeSpan, formerly known as Elder Services of the Merrimack Valley and North Shore, is a private, nonprofit agency dedicated to helping people in 28 cities and towns across northeast Massachusetts maintain the highest level of independence, health, and safety as they age. AgeSpan is a Massachusetts Aging Services Access Point and an Area Agency on Aging. For more information, visit <https://agespan.org/resources/>.

Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority Commuter Rail

The MBTA operates round-trip commuter trains from the MBTA North Billerica Station and Lowell Gallagher Station; both trains travel directly into the MBTA Boston North Station during the weekdays and trains on both Saturday and Sunday. The Lowell commuter rail travels through North Billerica Station, further increasing the availability for residents of the region to get to Boston. The Commuter Rail is divided into 11 fare zones, from Zone 1A to Zone 10. Stations in metro Boston are in Zone 1A, and every zone beyond that indicates each station's distance from Boston: the Gallagher Intermodal Center in Lowell is an MBTA Zone 6 location, and the North Billerica Station is in Zone 5. The MBTA Zones influence the cost of fares for riders. Additionally, the MBTA offers reduced fares for eligible riders. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the MBTA has adjusted fare prices, pass types, and schedules to accommodate various employment schedules and ridership patterns. For more information on reduced fares and eligibility, visit: <https://www.mbta.com/fares/reduced>.

Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority Bus Service (MEVA)

The Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority (MVRTA) Office of Special Services provides an array of transportation services to include the following: ADA and Non-ADA EZ Trans services, Ring & Ride services for residents of Boxford, Georgetown, Groveland, Newbury/Byfield, North Reading, West Newbury, the Maris Center in Amesbury and along the Route 28 corridor. Medi-Ride transportation service is also available for registered MVRTA Office of Special Services customers providing transportation service from the MVRTA service area to the Lahey Clinic in Peabody, and to hospitals in the City of Boston to their medical appointments. All MEVA fixed routes and EZ Trans paratransit services have been fare-free as of March 1, 2022. For more information visit: <https://www.mvrta.com/>.

Middlesex Community College Inter-Campus Shuttle

Middlesex Community College operates service between its Lowell and Bedford campuses, from 7:00 AM to 9:30 PM Monday through Thursday and from 7:00 AM to 4:00 PM on Friday. MCC provides additional shuttle service between the Bedford VA and their Bedford campus, from 7:15 AM to 6:00 PM, and operates two shuttle runs to the Billerica Mall, which connects with the LRTA number 13 route. There is no service provided on weekends and holidays. For more information visit: <https://www.middlesex.mass.edu/transportation/transportation/icshuttle.aspx>.

Montachusett Regional Transit Authority Bus Service

The Montachusett Regional Transit Authority (MART) operates the Health and Human Service demand response brokerage transportation within the Northern Middlesex region. The transportation is provided under four Massachusetts social service programs: MassHealth, Department of Health Early Intervention Program, Department of Developmental Services, and Special Education Transportation Services. The MART brokerage negotiates a price for these transportation services with the State agencies and then offers the trip to other public, non-profit and private transportation providers serving within the area of the desired trip. The MART service operates many trips, not only within the Northern Middlesex region, but throughout the state. For more information visit: <https://www.mrta.us/>.

UMASS Lowell Student Bus Service

UMass Lowell operates an extensive transit service, connecting various education facilities with student housing. The service includes six individual routes that operate from 7:00 AM to 7:00 PM seven days a week. There is also a demand response service that is available until 2:00 AM on Sunday through Wednesday and until 2:30 AM on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. Additionally, the University has agreements with the LRTA and MVRTA, enabling students to ride on those systems at no charge using their UCARDs. For more information visit: <https://www.uml.edu/student-services/transportation-services/>.

Conclusion

Continued maintenance of the coordination of transportation services can help identify specific challenges by collaborating with various transportation providers, agencies, and organizations to build a more seamless and efficient transportation network for seniors and individuals with disabilities. The Northern Middlesex Region is faced with an urgent need for improving conditions of senior and ADA transportation. The rider challenges NMCOG identified while conducting the engagement for the development of this plan illustrates the need for stronger coordination between our regional transit authority (LRTA), councils on aging, and other service providers. Across the region, there are several service providers and fragmented operations, resulting in challenges for riders and a lack of confidence in the current service operations. Without substantial collaboration and partnership from the LRTA, section 5310-funded services in the Northern Middlesex Region will suffer. To support the effective and efficient use of resources, this CPT-HST Plan seeks to coordinate transportation services and needs within a region. Transportation coordination of services is critical for ensuring that seniors and individuals with disabilities have access to the transportation services they need to maintain their independence, mobility, and quality of life. Northern Middlesex Council of Government is committed to this goal and will continue to work towards helping meet the transportation service needs identified in this CPT-HST and in agreement with guidance from MassDOT.

APPENDIX A

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Appendix A Public Comments

Public Comment Summary 2023 Coordinated Public Transit Human Services Plan

Comment Period: June 30, 2023 - July 20, 2023

Public Meeting Date: July 17, 2023

Comments Resident of Billerica – Andrew Jennings

(See next page)

Jessica Boulanger

From: Andrew Jennings <aajennings@aol.com>
Sent: Wednesday, July 19, 2023 10:45 PM
To: Lesley Shahbazian; Jessica Boulanger
Subject: Public Comment on Draft Coordinated Human Services Public Transportation Plan

My name is Andrew Jennings. I live at 29 Talbot Ave., North Billerica, Massachusetts. This email is an attempt to convey my thoughts and concerns about the draft Coordinated Public Transit Human Services Plan released by the Northern Middlesex Metropolitan Planning Organization June 28.

Although I currently serve as Billerica's representative on the Lowell Regional Transit Authority's Advisory Board, these views are my personal views and do not represent views of the Town or of the LRTA.

I believe that the draft did not meet its stated goal, "The goal of the CPT-HST is to identify strategies to improve the quality and availability of transportation services for the disabled and elder populations in the region." [1] There are no strategies stated in the draft, only "Suggestions / Actionable Efforts". And it was not clear in many cases who the suggestions were directed towards or who should be making the actionable efforts. Northern Middlesex Council of Governments should be the planning agency for Human Services Transportation within the region and establish active working relationships with neighboring regions to plan services that connect the Northern Middlesex Region with health care facilities outside the region.

I am very sympathetic to the challenges that the staff of NMCOG faced in developing this draft. Because human services transportation has been traditionally a poorly served market, it has drawn many providers into serving small segments of the market. LRTA, Senior Centers, non-profit charities, taxi companies, even ambulance companies provide service. There is no good data on origins and destinations, particularly for the trips not taken because the appropriate transportation service is not provided. The staff got data on the number of trips from the LRTA and the senior centers in its region, mined the available census data for information on where seniors and disabled persons live in the area, and conducted one of the most comprehensive public outreach efforts I have recently seen (even though it rarely reached users of human services transportation). But the result was not a plan with clear priorities and goals.

I sense (and the draft provides some data to support my hypothesis) that human service transportation in the region is less available and of lower quality than pre-pandemic. The pilot Sunday LRTA service, both fixed route and Road Runner has been discontinued. A shortage of drivers has impacted both LRTA and the Senior Center services. Simultaneously, the population of the region has changed with many more seniors, and likely more disabled residents. Thus, the region is falling behind in providing human services transportation.

I urge that before the draft is finalized, clear prioritized goals be set, and strategies be proposed to meet those goals. Northern Middlesex Council of Governments should take the lead in planning regional and inter-regional human services transportation and acknowledge that they are doing so in the final plan.

I personally believe that the highest priority goal should be to improve access for all populations for non-urgent medical trips. Ensuring that such access is available reduces the public's cost for medical care by diagnosing and treating issues before they become emergencies. Strategies I would use to achieve this goal include:

- Ensuring that the Northern Middlesex Regional Coordinating Council meets frequently, at least 9 times per year and discusses health transportation issues.
- Include at those council meetings the major regional health care providers. They would be a beneficiary of improved service and have important data for design of health care transportation. (Most of the Community Health Care Needs Assessments developed by these providers cite lack of transportation as one barrier to better health care.)
- Inventorying services provided by LRTA, Senior Centers, and the health care providers themselves to identify gaps in service and duplication of service.
- Developing with the health care providers a single information source so that those needing non-urgent transportation can schedule trips in conjunction with making appointments with the providers.

This plan needs goals and strategies. It needs NMCOG as a facilitator of the plan. The regional bodies need to dedicate themselves to provide noticeable improvement in human services transportation prior to the development of the next update of this plan in three to five years.

Thank you for consideration of my comments.

Andrew Jennings

[1] Page 5. DRAFT Coordinated Public Transit Human Services Transportation Plan – FFY 2023

NMCOG Staff Responses

In response to Andrew's message in paragraph 2, NMCOG staff has clarified that this report is directed toward the LRTA, as a direct recipient of 5310 funding. This is noted in the Introduction and Section on 5310 funding. NMCOG stands ready to support our communities in improving transit for seniors under the 5310 funding. The challenges in this report have been identified. NMCOG can establish goals to advance the development of this plan further, but support from our Transit Authority (LRTA) and other regional partners is required for the success of the implementation of this plan and achieve regional goals and priorities.

APPENDIX B

LRTA FARE STRUCTURE

Appendix B LRTA Fare Structure

LRTA Fare Category	
Regular Fare	Persons 13-59 years of age
Reduced Fare	Senior Citizen - 60 years or older with I.D.
	Disabled - With Statewide Transportation Access Pass (TAP) or a Medicare card
	Children between 6-12 years of age
Bus Fares	
Regular – within one community	\$1.25
Reduced - within one community	\$0.60
Regular Suburban – two or more communities	\$1.85
Reduced Suburban - two or more communities	\$0.90
Transfers	
Transfers with within one community Regular Fare	\$0.25
Transfers with within one community Reduced Fare	\$0.10
Transfers between two or more communities Regular Fare	\$0.50
Transfers between two or more communities Reduced Fare	\$0.25
Pass Program	
LRTA regular category "Adult CharlieCard"	\$44.00 per month
LRTA reduced "Student CharlieCard"	\$25.00 per month
LRTA reduced "Senior CharlieCard"	\$25.00 per month
Persons with a Disability "TAP CharlieCard"	\$25.00 per month
<i>LRTA bus passes are valid for unlimited travel on all City and Suburban routes during the term specified on the pass.</i>	
Road Runner demand response service:	
In-town	\$2.00
Suburban (out of town)	\$3.00
ADA Eligible	Discount of 20% with the purchase of 10 Ride Card:
In-Town 10 rides	\$16.00
Suburban 10 rides	\$24.00
Boston Hospitals	\$25.00

Source: Lowell Regional Transit Authority

APPENDIX C

SERVICE PROVIDER

DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTACTS

Appendix C Service Provider Contacts

Wheelchair and Ambulance providers

Wheelchair/Ambulance Providers	Address	Telephone
Alter-Ride Van Service	68 Hall Street, Dunstable	(978)758-9490
American Medical Response	Lowell	(978)458-6321
Gentle Arms Daily Transport	Chelmsford	(978)809-0033
Heart to Heart Transportation	114 Turnpike Road, Chelmsford	(978)455-5966
Maxiride Inc	96 Frederick Street, Dracut	(978)601-0208
Medicoach Transportation	1201 Westford Street, Lowell	(885)682-6224
Patriot Ambulance	248 Mill Road, Chelmsford	(978)367-5000
PrideSTAR EMS	229 Steadman Street, Lowell	(978)441-0911
Trinity E.M.S.	1201 Westford Street, Lowell	(978)441-9999
Wendo Transportation Serv.	626 Nashua Road, Dracut	(978)319-4114

Charter Bus Service

There are a number of non-profit organizations and private carriers operating charter, rental, livery, and other special transportation services within the region, including the following:

Bus Providers	Address	Telephone
First Student Bus	Ward Way, North Chelmsford	(978)251-4901
R.C. Herrmann Bus Co.	250 Littleton Road, Westford	(978)692-3143
Tewksbury Transit, Inc.	555 Whipple Road, Tewksbury	(978)851-9863
A&F Bus Company, Inc.	16 Wyman Road, Billerica	(978)663-8145
Bedford Charter Service	11 Railroad Avenue, Bedford	(978)257-9524
Fiore Bus Service	Plank Street, Billerica	(978)667-1114
Dunbar Bus Company	33 Middlesex Road, Tyngsborough	(978)649-7401
Plaza Transportation	410 Woburn Street, Tewksbury	(978)459-9600

Buckingham Bus Company	40 Station Avenue, Groton	(978)448-6057
Dee Bus Service, Inc.	30 Town Farm Road, Westford	(978)392-8639

Taxi Services

Company	Address	Telephone
Diamond Yellow Cab	50 Payne Street, Lowell	(978)458-6861
Broadway Cab Company	50 Payne Street, Lowell	(978)458-4769
Wilmington Taxi	Wilmington	(978)658-3859
Town Taxi	1040 Gorham Street, Lowell	(978)970-0202
A&M Taxi	Merrimack Ave, Dracut	(978)944-0674
Luna Cab Company	11 White Street, Lowell	(978)421-6321
Acre Cab Company	50 Payne Street, Lowell	(978)454-7748
A-1 Taxi	Lowell	(978)970-2909
Family Taxi	151 Princeton Blvd, Lowell	(978)453-0778
J&N Taxi	136 Highland St, Lowell	(978)454-5661
Checker Taxi	12 Bridge Street, Lowell	(978)441-9700
S&L Taxi	7 Fernwood Road, Billerica	(978)729-3302

Non Profit Organizations

Company	Address	Telephone
Community Team Work	Lowell	(978)459-0551
Elder Services of the Merrimack Valley	Lawrence	(978)683-7747
Cambodian Mutual Asst. Assoc.	Lowell	(978)454-6400
Coalition for a Better Acre	Lowell	(978)970-0600
American Cancer Society	National	(800)227-2345

APPENDIX D

2023 COORDINATED PUBLIC TRANSIT HUMAN SERVICES PLAN SURVEY

Appendix D 2023 Coordinated Public Transit Human Services Plan Survey

Northern Middlesex Council of Governments

Coordinated Public Transit Human Services Transportation Plan 2023

The Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Transportation Plan (CPT-HSTP) is a regionally developed plan that assesses the transportation needs of persons with disabilities and seniors within our region and is coordinated with other transportation service providers. This plan is updated every three to five years with input from, or representatives of, seniors and individuals with disabilities and public, private, and non-profit transportation and human service providers. The goal of the CPT-HSTP is to identify strategies to improve the quality and availability of transportation services for the disabled and elder populations in the region. Your responses to our questions below will be included in our final report and will help NMCOG evaluate the needs of the region.

First Name

First Name - Text

Kimberly

Christina

Debra

Barbara

Debra

John

Robert

Nandi

Last Name

Last Name - Text

Gagnon

Hess

Lasorsa

Roche

Siriani

Pellegrino

Rafferty

Munson

Q3 - What city or town do you represent?

What city or town do you represent?

Lowell

Tewksbury

Dracut

Tyngsborough

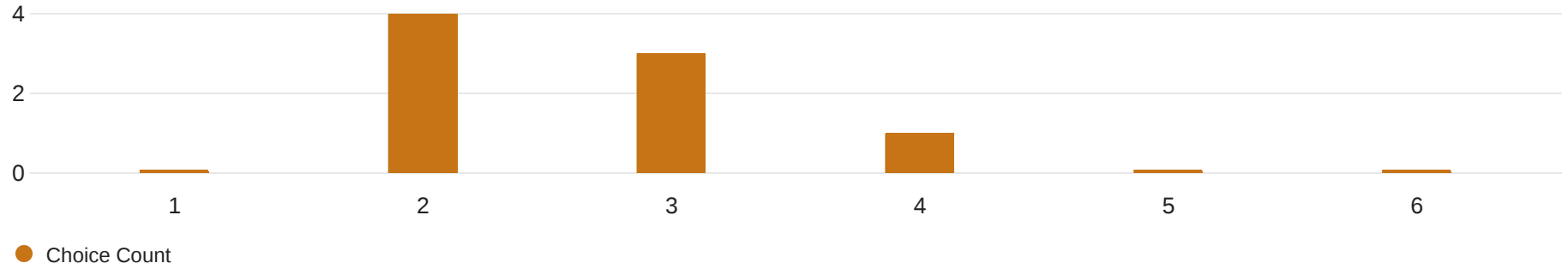
Chelmsford

Billerica

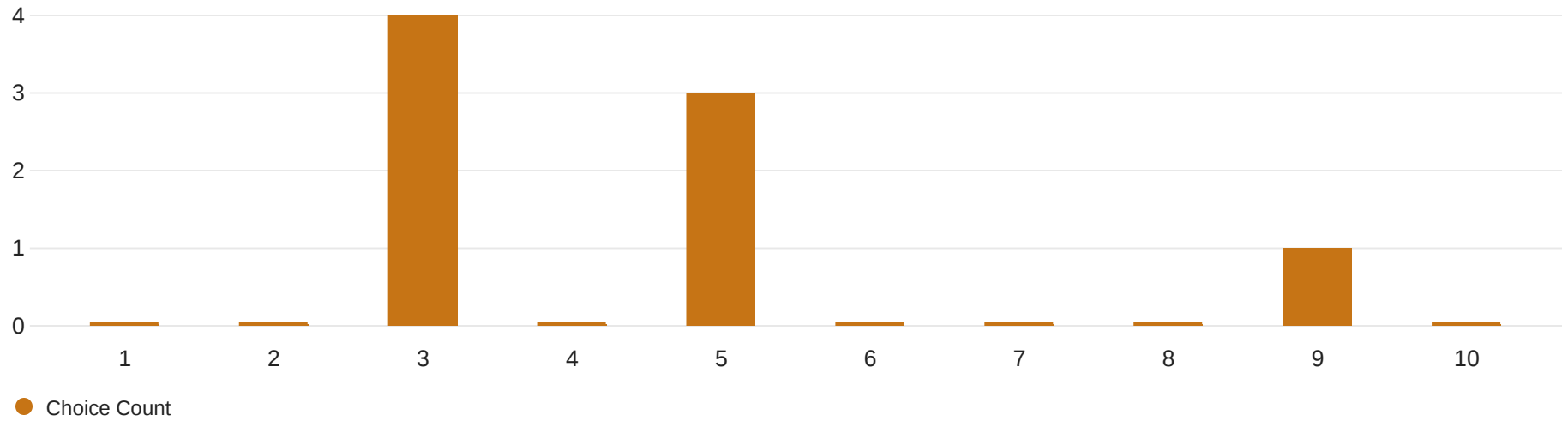
Westford

Pepperell

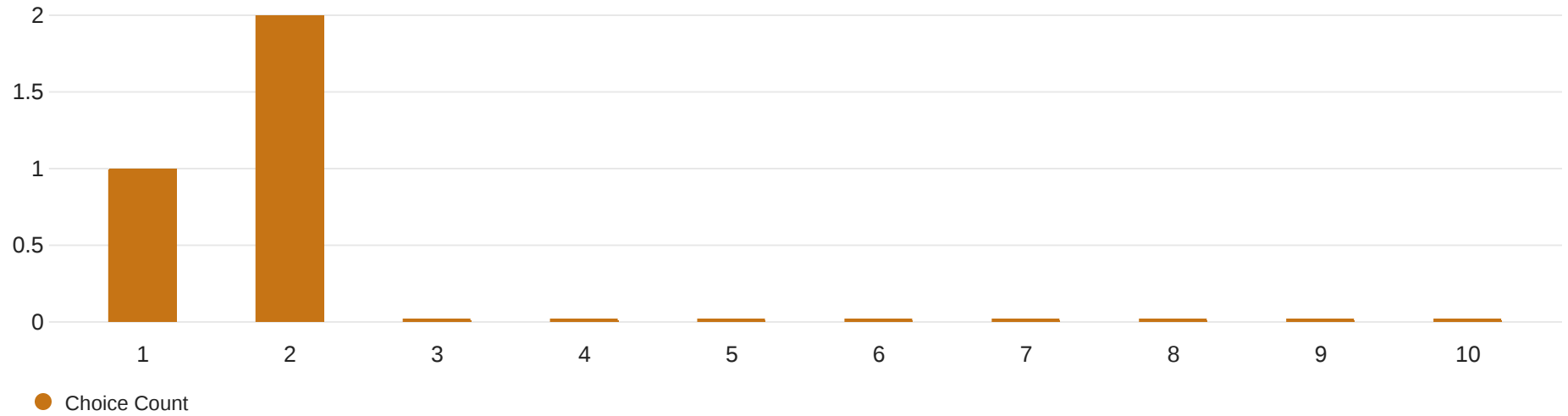
Q4 - How many vehicles do you have?



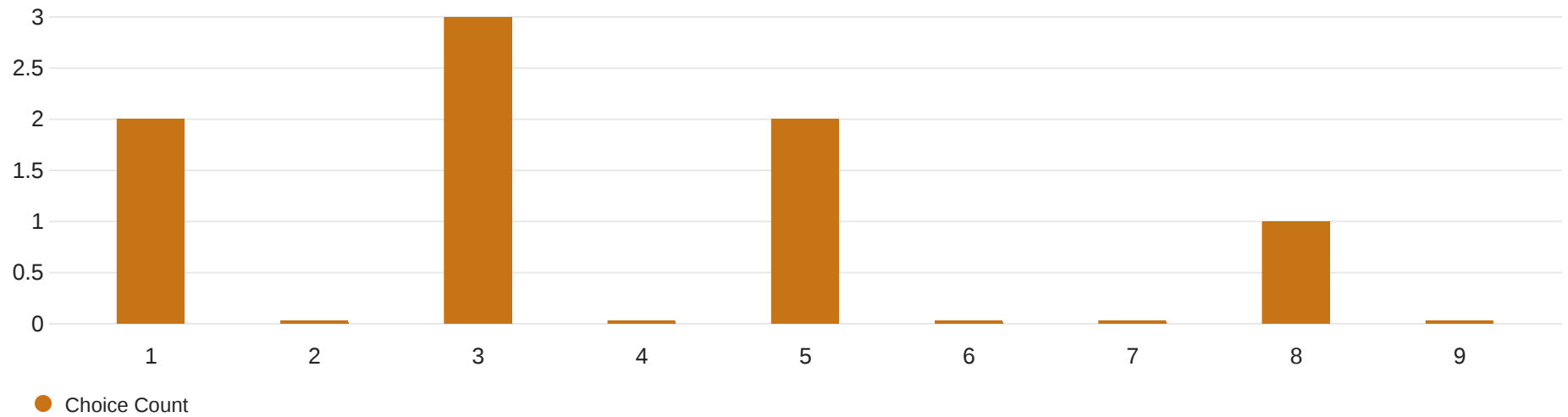
Q5 - How many drivers do you have ?



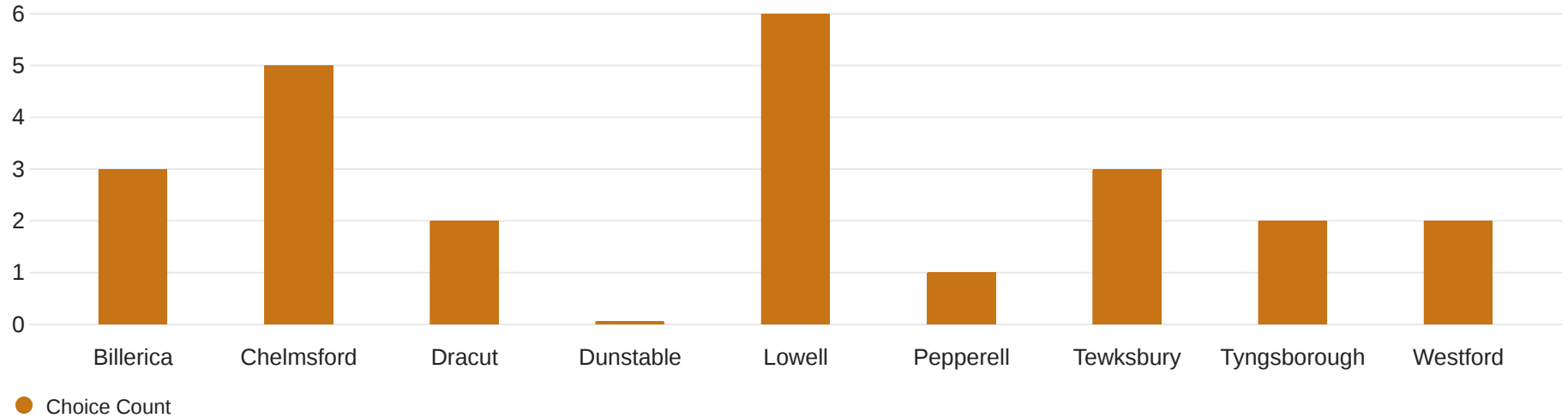
Q6 - How many drivers do you employ that work full time?



Q7 - How many drivers do you employ that work part time?



Q8 - What communities do you provide service to? (Select all that apply)

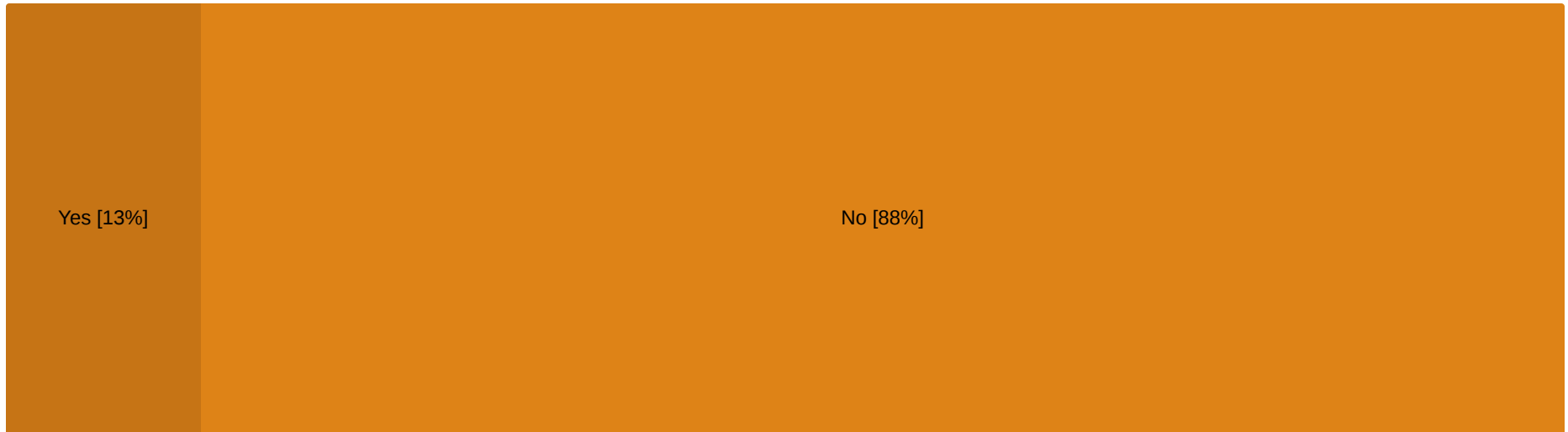


Q9 - What are the days and times that your service operates? Please enter your response in the boxes. - Selected Choice

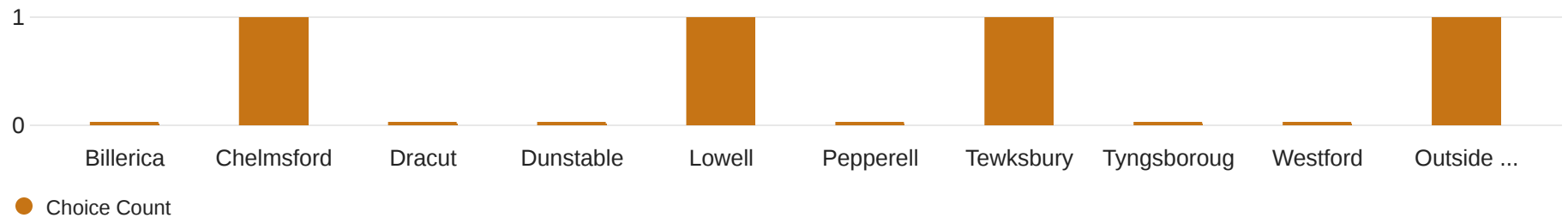
Days of the week (Example: Mon-Sun) [50%]

Hours of Operation (Example: 8am-4pm) [50%]

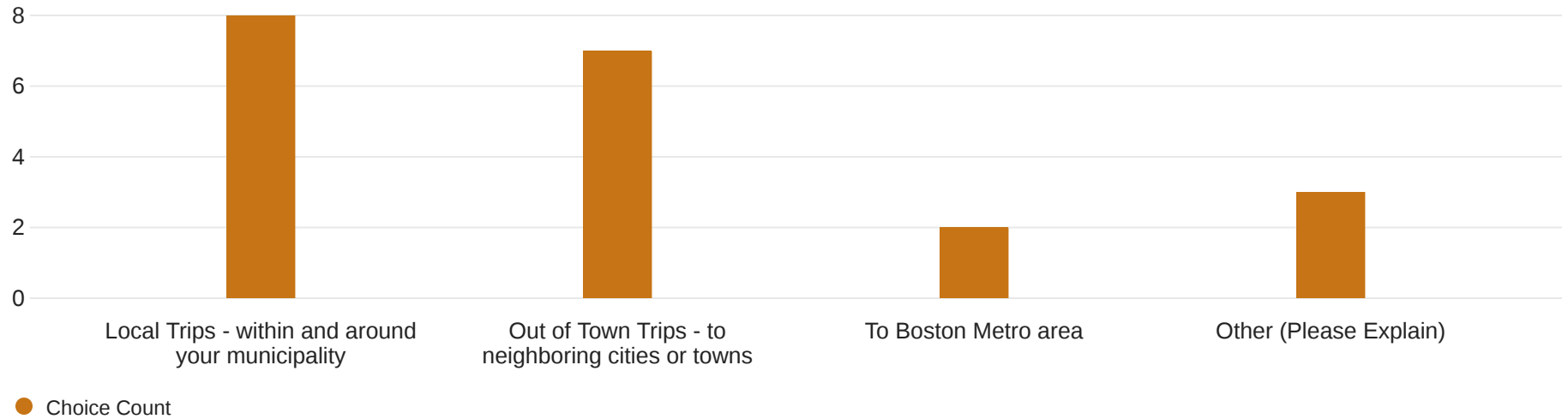
Q10 - Do you offer a volunteer driver program?



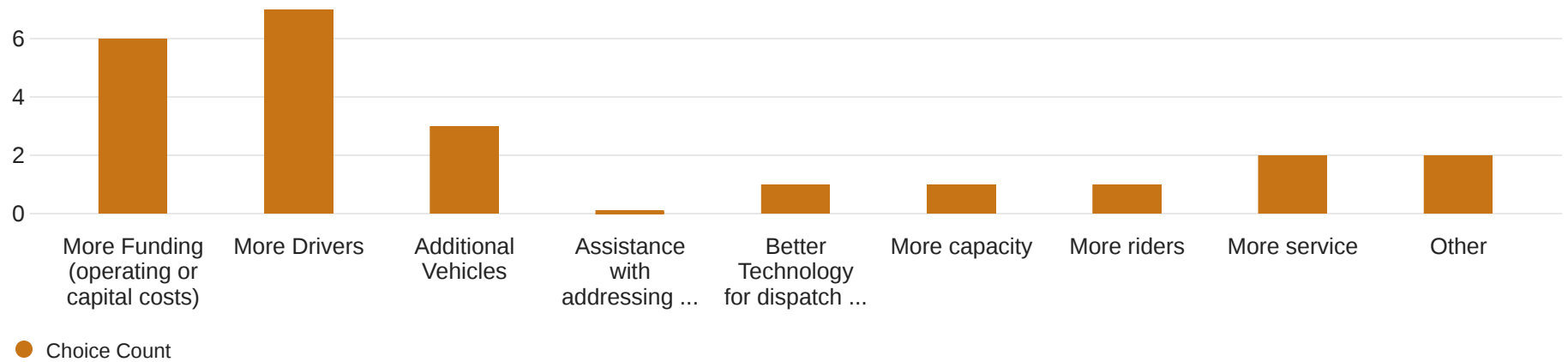
Q11 - If you selected yes please tell us what communities the Volunteer Drivers serve? (Select all that apply) - Selected Choice



Q12 - What are some places your riders typically like to go? - Selected Choice



Q13 - What are your organizations most critical needs to serve customers? (Select all that apply) - Selected Choice



Q14 - Please explain your selections for the question above. For example, Why did you select more drivers as a critical need for your town? Please use bullet points to summarize each selection.

Please explain your selections for the question above. For example, Why did you select more drivers as a critical need for your town? Please use bullet points to summarize each selection.

What city or town do you represent?

Only have 2 Full time who also double as the custodian.

Lowell

Right now with 2 vans and 3 drivers, we still cannot meet our communities needs.

-more funding needed to employ more drivers and/or increase part-time employment status to full-time

-more vehicles needed to be able to meet the needs of our community and to be able to add in longer distance trips without having to sacrifice local rides.

-additional drivers to help meet the unmet needs.

Tewksbury

I feel that if we had more funding, we could get more vehicles and more drivers

Dracut

We have been unable to fill openings fast enough

Tyngsborough

More Drivers- we need to hire more drivers, and without competitive rates, this is difficult.

Chelmsford

More Service- We need more service on late afternoons, nights and weekends.

Cannot afford to run a van for one or 2 passengers. Must generate Revenues to stay within budget.

Ridership has aged in place or passed on since covid.

Labor cost up, Maintenance cost up(aging fleet),Fuel cost up.

Special Trips for recreation help to support budget short fall.

Pre Covid total rides 7590 (including 615 Volunteers)

This Fiscal Year currently at 3240 (including 164 volunteers)

Billerica

Funding: We came in over budget last year due to cost of living raises for drivers as well as the increase in fuel costs

More Drivers: We had a really hard time covering driver vacations last summer and if we were to get an additional vehicle it would need an additional driver

Additional Vehicles: Because of the broad area which our service covers, there are times when our vehicles are in three different locations (i.e. Concord, Lowell, and Groton) and we have riders with needs in another area

Better technology: The current reason that we are able to do the amount of rides we do is that my mind works very well with geography, but in my absence coming up with fuel efficient routes is very difficult for others. Also, I spend a lot of time routing our three vans using our inhouse created Excel spreadsheet scheduler. There are times when it crashes, because lets face it, Excel wasn't designed to route transportation. Also it would be way more efficient if I could change a drivers route via a computer in the office and it would update a device within the vehicle.

Westford

More Capacity: The Town of Westford is seeing a steady increase in its Senior population. In the few years I have worked here we have gone from a Senior Demographic of approximately 2200 people, to 6500 people. As those people age in place and new Senior Housing is currently being constructed, the needs for transportation will surely increase, and the time to plan for that is now.

More Service: Westford does not have a viable option to get Seniors to and from Medical Appointments in Boston or at the Lahey Clinic in Burlington.

We are limited to providing rides only to a few neighboring towns, and only between 9-1:30. With additional funding, we would be able to accommodate afternoon rides, and also be able to transfer more residents to appointments.

Pepperell

Q15 - Please use the space provided to add topics, you would like us to discuss in our bi-monthly COA meetings. If you know of any organizations or potential speakers that you think would interest the group please add them in the space provided. Some examples might include: Age and Dementia trainings or a discussion on Funding Opportunities.

Please use the space provided to add topics, you would like us to discuss in our bi-monthly COA meetings. If you know of any organizations or potential speakers that you think would interest the group please add them in the space provided. Some examples might include: Age and Dementia trainings or a discussion on Funding Opportunities.

What city or town do you represent?

N/A	Lowell
-funding opportunities for a mini-van for Boston and Bedford VA rides (currently we do not have the availability to do these)	Tewksbury
N/A	Dracut
N/A	Tyngsborough
N/A	Chelmsford
N/A	Billerica

Funding and Age and Dementia are both great topics.

I also think a discussion around cannabis might be worthwhile based on my experience interviewing candidates for the driving position. I've turned many candidates down based upon their own cannabis use, and on two occasions I was asked by candidates if I thought it was discrimination in that a person could drink alcohol in their down time on the weekend, but not use cannabis which is legal on a state basis. I of course discussed the fact that it is not legal Federally and that we reported to the FTA, but I am curious if other COV's have had the same experiences, and if it is limiting them from selecting certain candidates as well.

Westfo
rd

N/A

Pepper
ell

