

Public Transit

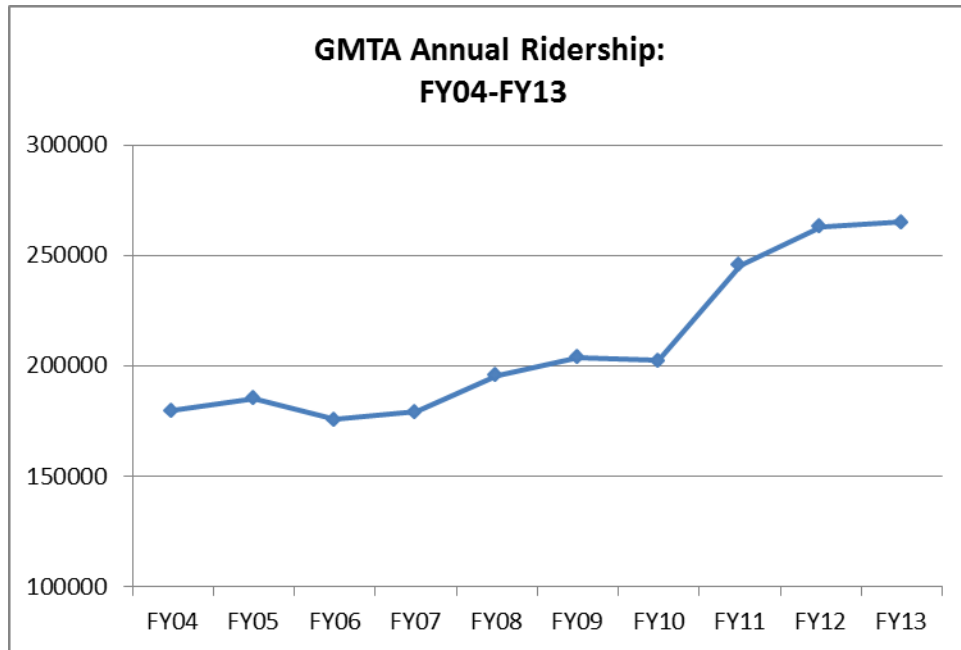
The Public Transit section of Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission’s Regional Plan is based on the Green Mountain Transit Agency’s (GMTA) Transit Development Plan (TDP), which provides a program for the expansion and enhancement of public transportation service in central and northwestern Vermont over a 10-year period and beyond. It is the foundational planning document for GMTA, as it establishes the framework within which all other short term service planning and capital planning occurs. A primary goal of the GMTA TDP is to work towards a unified public transportation system within the rural service area along with meaningful connections to the urban system in Chittenden County. To read GMTA’s full TDP, please visit <http://gmtaride.org/ccta-resources/transportation-documents/>.

Service Summary

The GMTA system in Central Vermont currently serves all of Washington County plus three towns in Orange County – Orange, Washington, and Williamstown. A range of GMTA services work to meet the diverse needs of the traveling public. These include year-round local routes that serve trips for all purposes, commuter routes that operate primarily during peak periods, seasonal routes that mainly serve skiers in the Mad River Valley and in Stowe, shuttle routes and other demand response services oriented toward seniors, people with disabilities and others who have limited transportation alternatives, and lastly a network of volunteer drivers. Regular scheduled bus services are summarized in Table 1 below; infrequent shuttle services that run less than once per day are not included in the table. Figure 1 presents GMTA annual ridership. For more specific GMTA route information, please visit <http://gmtaride.org>.

Table 1 GMTA Service Summary

Region/Service	Towns/Corridors Served	Span of Service	Level of Service
Central VT – Local	Montpelier, Barre City, Berlin	Monday-Saturday; 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m with longer hours on City Commuter and a later start on Saturday	Mostly hourly, with 30-minute peak service on City Commuter
Central VT – Commuter	US 2 corridors to Waterbury and St. J.; I-89 to Burlington; Route 12 to Northfield	Monday-Friday; peak periods only, with one midday Northfield and LINK trip	2 or more round-trips per peak period
Central VT – Seasonal	Mad River Valley	Daily during ski season; 7:00 or 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.	Every 30 minutes or better for most routes
Lamoille – Commuter	Route 100 Morrisville to Waterbury	Monday-Friday peak periods only	Four round-trips per day

Figure 1 GMTA Ridership

**Chart includes fixed route ridership only, excludes Link Express*

While ridership has trended toward the positive, changes in services and fares have had effects on ridership. Several routes have been cancelled over time due to under-performance, the Lamoille Valley Weekend Commuter for instance, while new routes have been added, such as the US 2 Commuter and the locally funded Montpelier Circulator. In response to a decline in ridership and budgetary allowances, fares were reduced in FY11. While this had the desired effect of increasing ridership, the FY12 budget required the increase of fares to their previous levels.

The Link Express from Burlington to Montpelier, has shown tremendous growth, and has discounted fares for State Employees in Montpelier.

Intercity Transportation

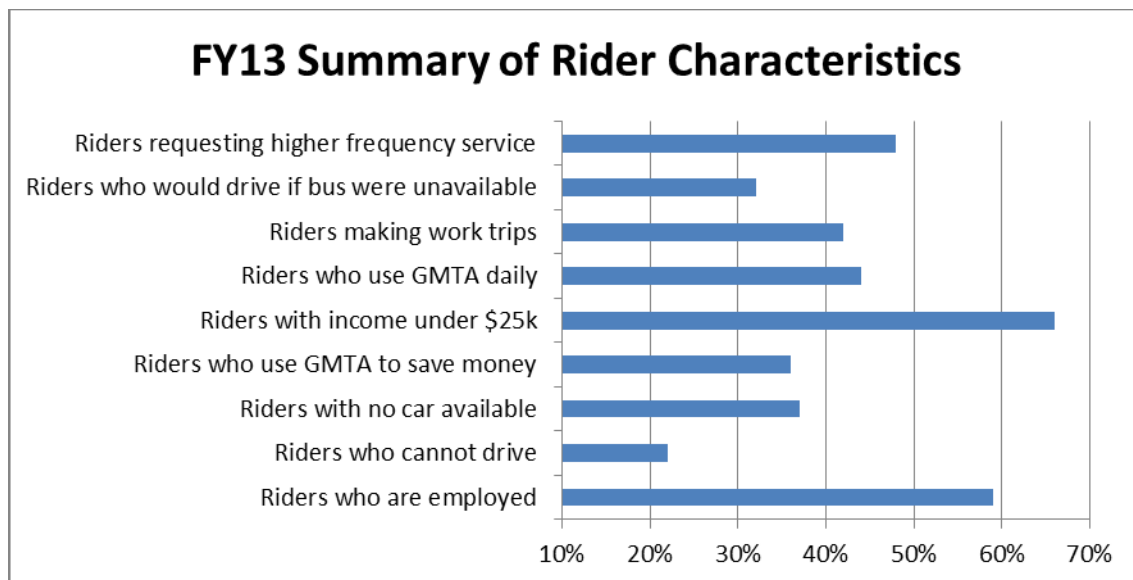
Greyhound provides intercity bus service to Montpelier scheduling four round-trips per day between Montreal and Boston. Northbound buses leave Montpelier at 3:00 am, 12:15 pm, 2:45 pm, and 7:30 pm. Southbound buses leave Montpelier at 3:15 am, 10:45 am, 2:35 pm, and 5:55 pm. Connecting service to New York City, Boston, and Rutland is provided at White River Junction.

Megabus daily serves Montpelier between Burlington and Boston.

Amtrak operates in the Central Vermont Region with stops in Berlin (named the Montpelier Junction station) and in Waterbury. The service is two-way with a northerly endpoint in St. Albans, Vermont and the southerly endpoint in Washington, D.C. (via Brattleboro, Vermont; Hartford, Connecticut; and New York City). The southbound train stops in Waterbury (9:28 a.m.) and Montpelier (9:42 a.m.). The schedule has been designed to provide one-daytime trip from Vermont to reach New York City in the late afternoon. The northbound train stops in Berlin (8:02 p.m.) and Waterbury (8:16 p.m.)

Profile of Riders

GMTA periodically conducts surveys of the riders on its year-round routes. The chart below shows a summary of some of the most relevant findings of these surveys.



Market Assessment

The GMTA service area is large and varied. The great majority of it is rural and sparsely populated, but there are significant concentrations of population and jobs in the economic center of Barre-Montpelier. Some of the rural towns have village centers that can support transit services oriented toward commuters or for occasional local travel, but the extent of regular full-day local service will probably not extend far beyond the corridors that are already served by local routes and some shopping routes that could be converted to full-day service. Much of GMTA's future growth will therefore likely be in the area of targeted peak hour commuter services linking communities to employment centers.

Garnered from 2010 Census data, Table 2 below presents a quick summary of key demographic characteristics GMTA's Central Vermont service area.

Table 2 GMTA Demographics Summary

	Total Population	% of Pop. within 3/4 mile of GMTA Route	Persons per Sq. Mi	% of Population Age 65 and Over	% of Low- Income Households	% of Zero- Vehicle Households
Central Vermont	65,034	53%	80	14%	16%	5%

Needs Analysis

Service Needs

As mentioned above, many of GMTA's riders belong to the market segment made up of people who depend on public transit for most or all of their mobility needs. More recently, as GMTA has introduced new commuter services such as the US 2 Commuter between Montpelier and St. Johnsbury (jointly operated with RCT), GMTA has been tapping into the commuter market, attracting riders who *are* able to drive, known as choice riders.

GMTA's services are designed to appeal to and meet the needs of both markets, though some routes are more oriented toward one or the other. The "commuter" routes (e.g., Link Express) and shuttles are obviously aimed at commuters. Most of GMTA's local routes are more oriented to transit-dependent riders in the Barre-Berlin-Montpelier zone. These routes are slower and more indirect, but offer wide coverage to densely developed neighborhoods.

As mentioned above, GMTA periodically surveys its riders and the general public through telephone and on-board surveys. These surveys and public outreach efforts identified a number of areas where GMTA service could be expanded to better meet the needs of the riders. These include longer service hours in the evening and more service on weekends, improved frequency, and service to more areas. Specific areas and corridors that were mentioned include the following:

- South Barre and other parts of Barre Town
- Route 12 corridor from Montpelier north (to Worcester)
- Route 14 corridor between Hardwick and Montpelier
- Year-round connection between Montpelier and the Mad River Valley
- Commuter service into Barre on Route 14 and US 302

Infrastructure and Facility Needs

Beyond service expansion, respondents to surveys and participants in public outreach requested further investment in shelters, benches, bike racks and other passenger facilities, as well as new technology such as real-time passenger information, Wi-Fi on buses, and trip planning software. Such investments in physical infrastructure and technology make the system more appealing to existing riders and future choice riders.

The pedestrian environment in bus service corridors is an essential element of the overall system. All passengers are pedestrians (either on foot or in a wheelchair) before they board the bus and after they exit. If the pedestrian environment is not safe, comfortable, attractive and accessible, then neither is the bus system, no matter how good the service is.

Perhaps most significantly, an investment in a viable multi-modal transit station is imperative. Steps have been made towards such a facility in downtown Montpelier: The so called “Carr Lot” on Taylor Street in Montpelier’s Downtown could serve GMTA’s local and commuter routes and Greyhound intercity routes, and would also improve connectivity for pedestrians’ and bicyclists’ access to these services. Additional information regarding the 1 Taylor Street (formerly known as the Carr Lot) may be found here, <http://www.montpelier-vt.org/group/102.html>.

Service Strategies

With the needs identified above, the Plan includes a wide range of service recommendations to be implemented as funding becomes available. These include the following:

- Commuter routes based in Central Vermont
 - Route 14 corridor north and south of Barre City with connections to Montpelier
 - Route 12 corridor north of Montpelier
 - US 302 corridor into Barre City, Berlin, and Montpelier
 - Warren/Waitsfield to Montpelier and Waterbury
 - *Link Express service extension to Barre City, (added by CVRPC, January 2014)*
 - *Direct Link service to Burlington International Airport, (added by CVRPC, January 2014)*
- Year-round local services
 - Circulator service in Barre City
 - Extension of City Route to South Barre & Barre City Elementary School
 - Service to East Barre/Websterville
 - Upgrades on existing local routes in Central Vermont
 - *ADA paratransit service during City Commuter service hours (Montpelier to Barre), (added by CVRPC, January 2014)*
- Seasonal service
 - Extended service period for Mad Bus routes

- Connections to the LINK Express for resort employees
- Demand response service
 - Increased service levels on existing shuttles
 - New shuttles from rural areas in Washington County to employment centers in Lamoille, Orleans and Caledonia counties
 - *ADA dedicated service provider akin to Special Services Transportation Agency in Chittenden County, (added by CVRPC, January 2014)*

Criteria for Service Development and Implementation

An essential factor in moving any of the service concepts listed above toward implementation is support from the community. This support can take the form of petitions from potential riders expressing a desire to ride the bus in a given corridor, but more importantly, it consists of financial commitments from town governments to provide the local share of the net operating cost of the route.

A second critical factor is ridership potential. In evaluating possible services, GMTA looks at available commuting and travel data to determine the likelihood that a new bus route would attract a sustainable level of ridership.

Cooperation and support from other external parties can also play a critical role in the development and implementation of a new service. For example, financial contributions towards operating and/or capital costs from private entities such as major employers and institutions can make one service more feasible than another. Other types of external cooperation that can influence route development are decisions by a particular entity to fully or partially subsidize rides taken by its employees or customers, or to limit parking at a particular facility.

A final, but critical consideration is cost. Other things being equal, a new or expanded service with a lower cost will be favored over one with a higher cost. This fact reflects the reality that funding is scarce and that existing dollars need to be as stretched as far as possible. Of course, it is rarely the case that all other things are equal, so community support and ridership potential are often more important factors in determining priority than cost alone.

Regional Coordination and Sustainability

GMTA plays an essential role in providing mobility in Central Vermont. Its services help sustain and expand the economy in its service areas, allowing for continued economic growth in a way that is consistent with reduced energy use, environmental protection, and sustainable land use. In order to achieve this, GMTA coordinates closely with local, regional, and state governments and works with the non-profit and private sectors to leverage public investment in transportation.

In addition to its public sector partners, GMTA reaches out to the private sector to build mutually beneficial relationships with employers and institutions. GMTA thereby benefits from financial support and increased ridership while the private partners benefit from access to a broader employee/customer base, reduced parking demands, and an image as a socially responsible entity.

A cooperative effort of GMTA, member municipalities, the state of Vermont, the regional planning commission, and the development community is needed to guide future development in the area into a form that is more conducive to efficient and sustainable transportation. The future expanded GMTA system that is recommended in this Plan can only be viable if it is planned in concert with future land use decisions that support public transportation and vice versa. As an example, Barre City recently reconstructed Route 302 through the downtown. The City worked with GMTA to identify specific bus stops along this downtown corridor and made them part of the streetscape project from the beginning, rather than add-ons at the end of the project. The combination of improved sidewalks and appropriately placed and sized bus pull-offs has improved the transit experience in Barre City.

Waterbury will also be undertaking a major reconstruction of the former State Complex facility, as well as reconstruction of Main St. & Route 100 North to Stowe. It will behoove the Town, CVRPC and GMTA to work together on these and future projects to ensure appropriate attention is paid to public transit accessibility and operations in the area. Whether this land use is called “smart growth,” “transit oriented design,” “pedestrian oriented design,” or some other term, it is essential that future development (especially the type that generates demand for public transportation) be focused in a geographical area that is compact and conducive to efficient operations. If public transportation is instead spread too thinly by being asked to serve larger and larger geographic areas infrequently, it will never be able to operate at a level of service that can be attractive to choice riders.

Costs and Funding

There are few, if any, recommendations in this Plan that can move forward to implementation without additional funding. While both costs and ridership increase significantly in an expanded system, it should be noted that costs increase more quickly than ridership. Most agencies try to serve their best potential markets first—the ones with the highest residential and employment density and the links with the highest demonstrated travel demand—and so system growth into the more distant future tends to address markets that are not quite as promising as those on which the system was built. The imperatives of supporting economic vitality, improving air quality, mitigating the severity of climate change, and enhancing mobility for all citizens argue strongly for a much more robust public transportation system.

Conclusion

This Plan should be viewed as a comprehensive plan, building toward an integrated transit system which will provide essential mobility and convenient and affordable travel alternatives for all people in the region. Realistically, the completion of every project in this Plan over the next ten years is not feasible. However, the growth of the public transit system—when coordinated with local transportation and development plans that include linear routes through dense village centers and consideration of pedestrian, bicycle, and park and ride access points—has the capacity to offer rural communities numerous benefits. Indeed, the growth of the GMATA *system* is inherently tied to the growth of its service area communities: GMATA and the communities working together can make public transit work in a rural setting.