



2024

RTP



Executive Summary  
Regional  
Transportation  
Plan



# 2024 Executive Summary to the Regional Transportation Plan

## Final Report

Prepared by the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission

For the Pioneer Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization

*Front cover photo of the Columbia River Greenway Bridge Construction courtesy of the Friends of the Columbia River Greenway*

*Back cover photo of the Columbia River Greenway Bridge Construction courtesy of Tim Doherty*

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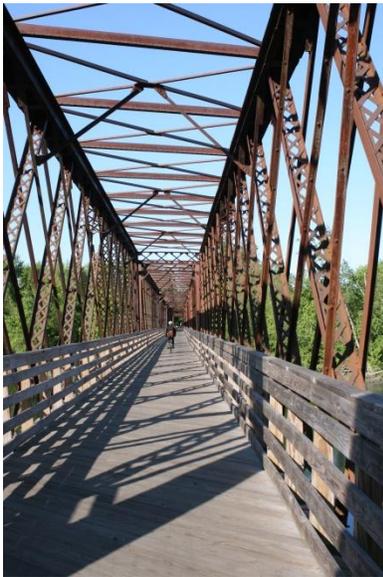


## What is the RTP?

The Pioneer Valley Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) outlines the direction of transportation planning and improvements for the Pioneer Valley through the year 2050. It



provides the basis for state and federally funded transportation improvement projects and planning studies. Last published in 2019, the RTP is updated at least every 4 years and is endorsed by the Pioneer Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO).



As the Pioneer Valley's blueprint for maintaining a safe and efficient transportation system for all modes of travel, this long-range plan identifies the region's goals, strategies, and projects to both enhance and maintain our transportation system. The RTP is developed in concert with the federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) legislation also referred to as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL). Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) priorities and initiatives also assist in RTP development.

All projects included as part of the regional Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) must come from a conforming RTP. This is extremely important as most major transportation improvement projects rely on federal transportation funds for construction.

Although the RTP focuses on transportation, it is a comprehensive planning document that has been developed and coordinated with other planning efforts in the region. The plan recognizes that while we do not know the future, change is inevitable and must happen in a manner that is beneficial to our residents, workers, economy, landscape, and climate. Our regional transportation system plays a significant role in influencing how the region will grow and change. By planning for the future, we can ensure transportation improvements are equitable, sustainable, and accommodate all users.



# 2024 Pioneer Valley RTP Chapter Summary

## Introductory Chapters

### Chapter 1

#### 2024 Update to the RTP

Defines the RTP Vision, Goals and Emphasis Areas

### Chapter 2

#### Transportation Planning Process

Summarizes key federal and state transportation requirements, participants and products.

## Public Participation Chapters

### Chapter 3

#### Public Participation

Provides a summary of RTP public participation efforts and comments received on the draft RTP.

### Chapter 4

#### Equity

Certifies compliance of the RTP with Title VI, Environmental Justice, and Justice 40 laws.

## Existing Conditions Chapters

### Chapter 5

#### Regional Profile

Summarizes the characteristics of the regional transportation system.

### Chapters 6 – 11

#### Safety, Security, Congestion, Pavement, Sustainability, Livability and Climate Change

Provides an overview of ongoing transportation planning activities in each of the above areas to advance RTP goals, planning studies, and projects.

## System Performance Chapters

### Chapter 12

#### Performance Measures

Identifies the regional targets developed to track system performance.

### Chapter 13

#### Future Forecasts

Summarizes future regional population, housing, and employment forecasts.

### Chapter 14

#### Needs, Strategies, Projects

Prioritizes the transportation improvement projects included in the RTP.

## Conformity Chapters

### Chapter 15

#### Financial Element

Identifies the projects that can be funded using current revenue sources.

### Chapter 16

#### Conformity

Addresses compliance with federal and state air quality requirements.

### Chapter 17

#### Environmental Consultation

A summary of consultation efforts with environmental groups to develop the RTP.

## **RTP Vision:**

*The Pioneer Valley region strives to develop and maintain a safe, dependable, resilient, environmentally sound, and equitable transportation system for all using performance-based strategies that promote sustainability, health, and economic vitality.*

### **RTP Goals:**

1. **Safety** - To provide and maintain a transportation system that is safe for users of all travel modes and eliminates fatalities and serious injuries.
2. **Operations and Maintenance** - To provide a transportation system that is dependable, resilient, and accessible for all users. To give priority to adaptable repair of existing infrastructure.
3. **Environmental** - To minimize the transportation related adverse impacts to air, land, wildlife, and water quality and strive to improve environmental conditions, reduce noise, and incorporate green infrastructure.
4. **Coordination** - To facilitate collaborative efforts between the general public and local, state, and federal planning and project implementation activities. To coordinate planning activities and projects with neighboring states and regions.
5. **Energy Efficiency** - To reduce car dependency and promote the reduction of energy consumption through demand management techniques and increasing the use of energy efficient travel modes.
6. **Cost Effective** - To provide an affordable transportation system for all users that is cost effective to maintain, improve and operate.
7. **Intermodal/Multimodal** - To provide access to and between all travel modes for people and goods while maintaining quality and affordable service.
8. **Economically Productive** - To maintain a transportation system that promotes and supports economic stability and expansion.
9. **Quality of Life** - To provide and maintain a transportation system that enhances quality of life and improves the social and economic climate of the region.
10. **Environmental Justice** - To provide an equitable distribution of transportation benefits and burdens for all people as defined in the region's Title VI Notice of Nondiscrimination.
11. **Land Use** - To incorporate the concepts of Sustainable Development in the regional transportation planning process and integrate the recommendations of the current Regional Land Use Plan into transportation improvements.
12. **Climate Change** - To promote and advance transportation projects that reduce vulnerability to the effects of climate change, decrease the production of greenhouse gasses, such as CO<sub>2</sub>, and advance new energy technologies consistent with the Pioneer Valley Climate Action & Clean Energy Plan.

## RTP Emphasis Areas

Emphasis areas were identified to assist in the achievement of the RTP vision and are related to each of the twelve Regional Transportation Goals.

### RTP Emphasis Areas

- 1 Safety and Security**

The safety and security of the regional transportation system are vital to the effective movement of people and goods. It is important to ensure that the transportation system is safe for all users across all modes. Our regional transportation infrastructure and operations centers rely on emergency preparedness to ensure they are secure from all threats. The RTP will advance projects and studies through a Safe System Approach that advances a vision to achieve zero roadway fatalities and serious injuries.


- 2 Movement of People**

The movement of people is generally what most people associate with the word "transportation." It consists of the identification of means to increase the efficiency of all modes of travel. This emphasis area includes the principles of "Complete Streets" to enhance how the region can more fully utilize public right-of-way to improve mobility, safety, quality of life, and allow all modes of travel to share the street.


- 3 Movement of Goods**

The availability of an efficient, multimodal transportation network to move goods through the region is essential to maintain economic vitality. Congestion often hinders the movement of goods by making travel times longer and unpredictable. Delays in the supply chain that result in increased shipping costs are often passed on to the consumer. Transportation improvements must consider the impact on common delivery modes such as air, rail and truck to ensure goods can be delivered in a safe and timely manner.


- 4 Movement of Information**

The movement of information consists of the ability to utilize technology to maximize the efficiency of the existing transportation system and to convey real-time travel information. This includes the upgrade of necessary physical and informational infrastructure to support the integration of new technology. Real time information such as ongoing construction activities, roadway incidents, and severe weather alerts improve safety and reduce travel times for drivers and transit riders. Investments in innovative technology-based solutions increase access to transportation for all users and result in a more flexible and resilient transportation system.


- 5 Sustainability**

Sustainability considers both the environmental and social costs of the transportation system. It improves access and mobility while reducing environmental impacts. A sustainable transportation system helps achieve state and national greenhouse gas reduction goals and net-zero emissions by 2050. Sustainable projects advance healthy lifestyles, support livable communities, address the impacts of climate change, and increase the number of zero-emission vehicles.



## RTP Problem Statements

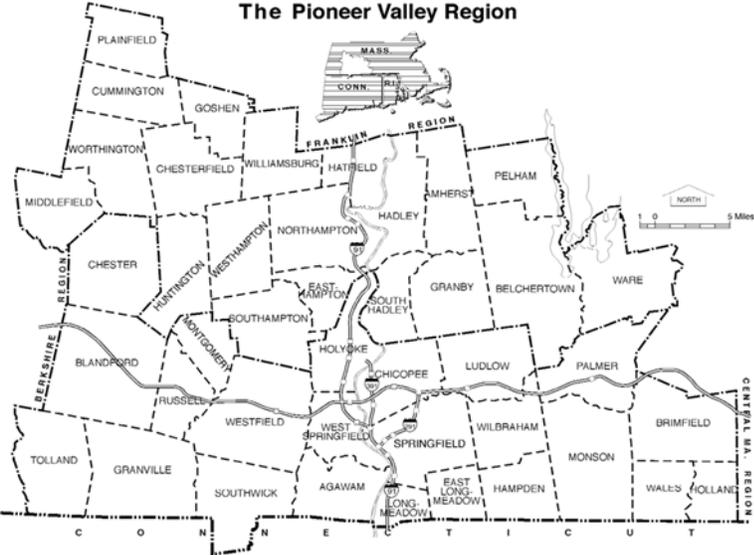
Problem statements were developed to identify the potential obstacles to achieve the region's Vision for the transportation system. Problem statements are concise descriptions of the overarching issues that must be addressed through the implementation of the RTP.

1. Existing resources are insufficient to support the state of good repair of the regional transportation system and do not properly compensate for inflation.
2. There is an urgent need to decrease the number of motor vehicle crashes that result in a serious injury or fatality, particularly for bicyclists and pedestrians.
3. Existing passenger rail and transit service does not meet the needs of residents of the Pioneer Valley. Expanded passenger rail and transit connectivity, particularly to eastern Massachusetts, is integral to education, economic development, and workforce development.
4. There is a need for innovative, cost-effective intermodal connections, independent of the regional transit authorities, that support and enhance transportation options for downtown areas, village centers, and rural areas.
5. Increased and comprehensive resources and policies to improve sustainability in the transportation sector are necessary if the region is to meet its fair share of national and state greenhouse gas reduction goals.
6. The built environment for walking, bicycling and transit is hampered by significant barriers that include narrow road and bridge cross sections, disjointed/unconnected off-road trail networks, a lack of sidewalks, uniformity in signs/markings, transit access points and maintenance issues.
7. The regional transportation system is not prepared to adequately support future change. The system must be prepared for the safe and seamless integration of concerns such as autonomous vehicles, electric vehicle charging infrastructure, and climate change.
8. People use the regional transportation system differently based on their age, ability, income, occupation, and residence. The regional transportation system must continue to evolve to safely meet the needs of all.
9. There are inconsistencies in how cities and towns regulate development and their requirements to reduce single occupant vehicle use and encourage alternative forms of transportation.



10. The regional transportation infrastructure, particularly a lack of dedicated freight parking, hinders the movement and distribution of freight.

**Our Region**



The Pioneer Valley Region consists of 43 cities and towns covering 1,179 square miles. Bisected by the Connecticut River, it contains a diverse economic base including well known educational institutions and prime agricultural land. Its unique combination of natural beauty, cultural amenities, and historical character make the Pioneer Valley region an exceptional environment in which to live and work.

**Highways**

- 4,402 Roadway Miles
- 1,500 Federal Aid Eligible Roadway Miles
- 688 Bridges
- 14,171,000 Daily Vehicle Miles Travelled

The Pioneer Valley area is considered the crossroads of transportation in Western Massachusetts. Situated at the intersection of the area's major highways, Interstate 90 and Interstate 91, the region offers easy access to all markets in the Eastern United States and Canada. Major southern New England population centers are

accessible in hours.

Based on data from the 2021 American Community Survey, regional travel behavior changed dramatically because of the Covid-19 pandemic. The number of people working from home has almost doubled and many employers continue to offer the option to work from home at least a portion of the week. This reduces daily vehicle miles travelled and effects the peak hours of travel.

### PVTA

- Serves 24 communities
- 192 vehicle fixed route fleet
  - 15 electric
- 42 fixed bus routes
- 128 van paratransit fleet

### North/South Rail Service

- Amtrak and CTRail
- 13 arrivals/13 departures
- 28,000 riders in 2017

The regional transit system offers many different modes of public transportation. Intra-county and intercity buses, passenger rail service, van service for seniors and disabled riders, ridesharing, and park and ride lots are all vital to the mobility of the region's residents.

A 2019/22 passenger survey found that nearly 30% of PVTA riders use the bus to commute to work. Fixed route transit ridership decreased dramatically during the Covid-19 pandemic but has increased by nearly 57% in fiscal year 2022.

Springfield Union Station is currently served by 28 trains daily. The FRTA provides paratransit service to 14 towns in the region.

Bicycling and walking are inextricably linked to quality of life in our communities. The Pioneer Valley region affords some of the best environments for walking and bicycling in the Commonwealth. An expanding network of off-road trails, vibrant downtowns laced with sidewalks and scenic shared-use roadways create an unmatched potential. The focus of this plan is on the design and construction of projects and the implementation of programs that improve safety and encourage bicycling and walking for people of all ages and abilities.

### Bicycle Network

- 90+ mile network across 17 communities
- ~50 miles of on-road lanes
- Bike racks on all fixed route transit vehicles

### Pedestrian Network

- Varies by community
- More comprehensive in downtown and village centers
- 79 Schools participate in MA Safe Routes to School

### Trucking

- Dominant mode for freight
- Small, private carriers

### Rail Carriers

- CSX Transportation
- Springfield Terminal Railways
- New England Central
- Pioneer Valley Railroad
- MassCentral Railroad

The major interstates and rail lines in the Pioneer Valley Region enable the quick delivery of goods to some of the nation's largest cities. Freight is moved in and out of the Pioneer Valley primarily by truck with rail, air and pipeline carrying the remaining goods. The Pioneer Valley Regional Freight Plan aims for enhanced access to intermodal facilities and increased collaboration between various stakeholders to spur economic development within the region.

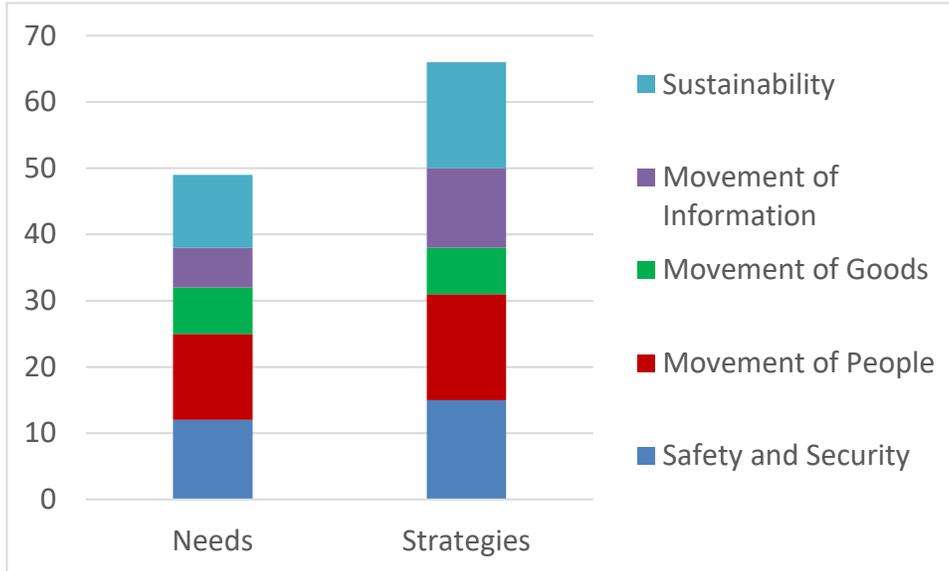
The regional population growth slowed significantly between 2010 and 2020; only experiencing a net growth of 0.87%. While the number of households in the region has increased, household size is decreasing. Less than 20% of all households report a size of four or more. Per capita income in the Pioneer Valley region has been increasing steadily having grown by over \$8,000 since 2015.

#### Demographics

- 2020 population = 626,972
  - Up 0.87% from 2010
- 2020 regional households = 240,099
- 2021 total employment = 272,505
- Median household income = \$65,653
- 2015 registered vehicles = 489,999



## Needs and Strategies

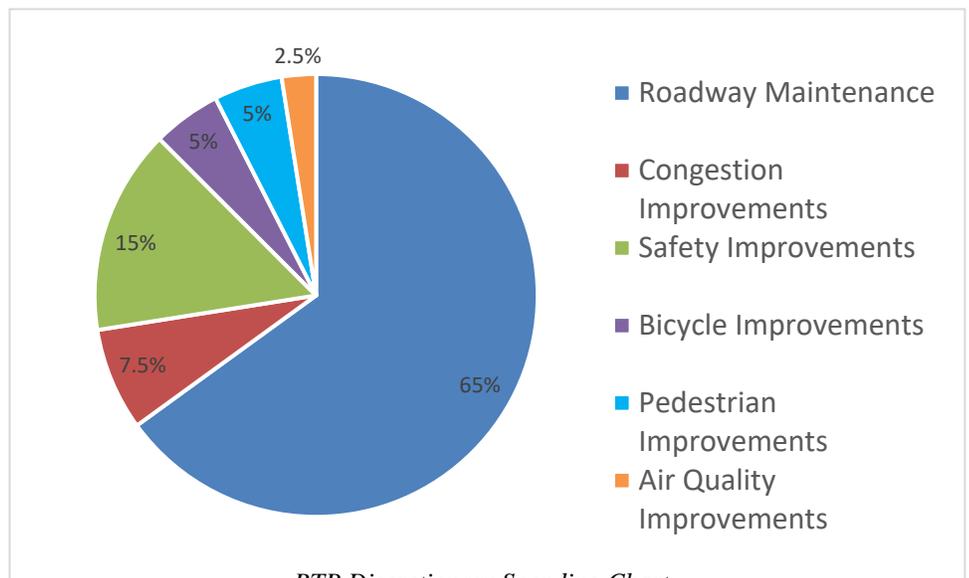


To achieve the RTP vision and goals, 49 transportation needs, and 66 associated strategies were developed. Needs and Strategies are prioritized as either “Immediate,” “Future,” or “Ongoing.” Immediate priorities are of high importance and must be addressed through the implementation of

future planning studies and projects. Future priorities are considered areas of medium importance that should be addressed in the development of future projects. Ongoing priorities are areas that require routine attention through the regional transportation planning process. Needs and Strategies are summarized by RTP Emphasis Area. Some strategies address multiple needs.

## RTP Projects

The RTP advances planning studies and implements improvement projects that will enhance the transportation system in a manner consistent with our vision. The MPO uses the regional Transportation Evaluation Criteria as a management tool to identify projects of regional priority and program them in the RTP. The Pioneer Valley



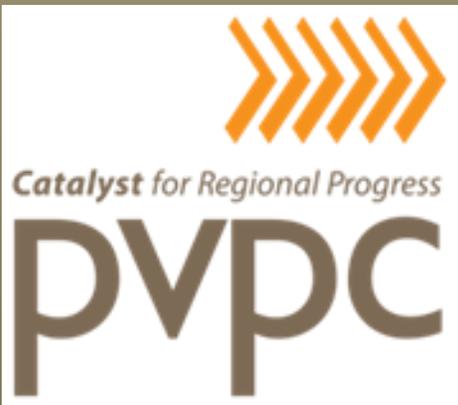
MPO developed a preferred scenario for how to allocate their discretionary funding over the life of the RTP. Estimated revenue for highway and transit projects and maintenance is \$8,759,766,821 over the life of the plan.



## Our Future

It is not unusual for planning studies, environmental permitting, and project design to take several years before a project can advance to construction. The Pioneer Valley Region has benefited from many major transportation improvements advanced through the RTP and TIP process. The list includes but is not limited to the expansion to passenger rail service from Northampton to Springfield and into the State of Connecticut, the purchase of new electric buses for the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority, and the reconstruction and widening of Route 9 in Hadley. The region also benefited from multiple expansions of the Columbia River Greenway Rail Trail in Westfield, safety improvements through the Safe Routes to School Program, and upgrades to 13 traffic signals and intersections on the Route 33 corridor in Chicopee. None of these improvements would have been possible without an investment of regional transportation dollars.

Strategic planning is a continuing process that produces planning documents and programs which decision-makers can use to prioritize local needs. A truly effective planning process relies upon the input of the chief elected official(s), city and town staff, and the general public. In addition, the strategic planning process is based on a realistic assessment of the impact of investments on safety, equity, mobility, sustainability, quality of life, and economic vitality. All recommendations generated through the strategic planning process must have a real potential for implementation. The RTP for the Pioneer Valley is the mechanism through which the region can successfully implement transportation improvement programming to attain our vision.



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