

2. TRANSIT SYSTEM



The private automobile is not the only way to travel within the Capitol Region. Alternative travel modes include local and express bus service provided primarily by CT Transit, paratransit services provided for the elderly and persons with disabilities through the Greater Hartford Transit District, and rideshare services provided by the Rideshare Company. In addition, transportation services are provided by a variety of human services agencies and programs.

These services play an important role in meeting the travel needs of our residents. They serve the basic mobility needs of our transit-dependent population: the elderly, persons with disabilities, and families that do not own a car. They also serve the commuting needs of a small but significant portion of the Region's workers. About 3.8 percent of all workers in the Region take the bus to work (2000 Census). Of those who work in Hartford, about 7.8 percent commute by bus; and of those who work in the Hartford CBD, about 14.4 percent commute by bus. In total, almost 13.5 million trips a year are served by our transit system (CT Transit ridership data.) The bus system removes a significant portion of cars from the roads during the most congested periods of the day and in some of the most congested areas.

TRANSIT SERVICES
CT TRANSIT:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Local bus service• Commuter bus service
TRANSIT DISTRICT
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Services for elderly residents• Service for persons with disabilities
RIDESHARE COMPANY
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rideshare service for commuters
HUMAN SERVICE AGENCIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Services for elderly residents• Service for persons with disabilities

The Council of Governments recognizes that while transit is a small part of a much larger transportation system, it is a critical part nonetheless. In fact, the Council has increasingly sought to place more emphasis on transit improvements as a way to improve mobility for those who rely on transit, to provide viable travel choices for everyone, and to reduce congestion on our streets. Since the mid 1990s, CRCOG has undertaken several initiatives to improve transit options.

Recommended Transit Improvement Program

The Region's recommended transit improvement program is based primarily on the 2001 Regional Transit Strategy (RTS.) But, it also includes recommendations reflecting the Council's work with the Jobs Access Program, its bus stop policy, the locally coordinated human services plan and recommendations from previous Regional Transportation Plans. In addition, the RTS recommendations have been revised for those particular corridors where feasibility studies have been completed.

Rapid Transit Service

In 2001, CRCOG completed an intensive 2-year effort to define a new vision for a transit system that would serve travel needs within the Region, and provide transit links to cities outside the Region as well. The resulting Regional Transit Strategy (RTS) contained a vision for regional transit in the Hartford region that aims to restore balance among modes in our transportation system and provide travelers with more choices.

The RTS recommended that new rapid transit services be developed in five corridors, as summarized below and illustrated in the figure on the following page. Since the RTS was adopted in 2001, planning and/or design activities have been initiated in the four most promising corridors, and the summaries below have been updated to include that information.

New Britain Busway: New busway¹ between Hartford and New Britain, located in the Amtrak corridor from Hartford to Newington, and then in the New Britain Secondary corridor for the connection to New Britain. This project is currently in the final design phase, and it is expected that operations could begin as early as 2011.

Griffin Busway: Proposed busway located in the Griffin rail corridor from Union Station to Griffin Office Park in Bloomfield, with bus service extended to Bradley Airport via Route 187. A feasibility study of this busway has been completed. The final recommendation is to defer construction of a busway until there is sufficient experience with the New Britain Busway operations to evaluate its success. This recommendation is based on the fact that the cost-effectiveness ratio for the Griffin Busway is not sufficient to meet the minimum federal criteria at this time. The study also recommended that efforts be taken to build the ridership potential of the corridor. The details of this recommendation are being developed in the Northwest Corridor Transit Study, currently underway.

Manchester Busway: Recommended busway from Hartford to Manchester and Vernon. A feasibility study of the Manchester (now entitled Hartford East Busway) was completed and recommended a phased approach for implementing a busway in this corridor. Recommendations include:

- Near term: Operate in I-84 HOV lanes. Construction of four transit stations (Reservoir, Buckland, Hartford Turnpike and Rockville), and two later (Simmons and Manchester). Expand bus operations to serve those locations and downtown Hartford.
- Long term: Construct a second busway and nine stations in the Connecticut Southern Railroad corridor (not including the Manchester Industrial Spur) between Depot Square in Manchester and Governor Street in East Hartford. Expand bus operations to serve those stations.

Rocky Hill Busway: Proposed busway located in the Hartford/Middletown rail corridor from Union Station to Rocky Hill, with bus service extended to Middletown. No feasibility study is planned for this corridor at this time since it had the smallest potential ridership of all the corridors.

New Haven – Hartford - Springfield

Commuter Rail Service: Improve intercity rail service to serve commuter trips, provide better connections with rail service in New Haven, and provide a connection to Bradley Airport. The completed feasibility study of the NHHS commuter rail service recommended:



¹ Busways are roadways built for the exclusive use of buses. Allowing for rapid service, flexible operation, and a “one-seat ride.” The busways recommended here will be built to allow future conversion to light rail transit if increases in passenger volumes warrant a higher capacity system.

- Commuter rail service between New Haven and Springfield, in the AMTRAK right-of-way
- 30-minute headways (frequency of service)
- 12 stations (including Hartford, Newington, Windsor, Windsor Locks & Enfield in CROG)
- Improved or new stations with high-level platforms, grade-separated pedestrians facilities, bicycle storage and racks, and additional parking if required
- A minimum of 18 miles of extended double track sections
- Modified local bus service to serve the stations
- Shuttle bus connection from the rail station in Windsor Locks to Bradley International Airport

Union Station: Union Station plays an important role in interregional and interstate rail and bus service, and in the future will be an important element of the busway system and the commuter rail system. The station is also an important cultural and historic asset. In its present state, it is expensive to maintain and operate, and it must be upgraded to effectively serve the future transportation needs of the region. The details of the improvements needed at Union Station are being developed in the Northwest Corridor Transit Study, currently underway.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **Rapid Transit System.** Develop a new rapid transit system inclusive of services in the five corridors, as described above.
2. **Rail Corridor Preservation.** Continue to preserve existing rail rights-of-way for future transportation use. The policy includes all existing rail rights-of-way and it allows for the interim use of the rights-of-way for other transportation functions such as multi-use trails.
3. **Union Station Enhancement.** Continue to support efforts to improve, upgrade and enhance Union Station as the major multi-modal transportation center in the Region and as the central station for the Region's rapid transportation system.

Better Bus & Paratransit Service

Even with significant investments in a rapid transit or fixed guideway system, the local bus service and paratransit services will continue to provide the fabric that ties our transit system together. The following recommendations, which are based on both the RTS and other regional transit policies, are intended to assure that the existing services are both properly maintained and improved to meet identified needs.

JOBS ACCESS PROGRAM. In cooperation with the CT Department of Social Services and a host of other social service and transit agencies, CROG started the Jobs Access Program in 1997. Over the past 10 years, the Federal Transit Administration and the Connecticut Department of Transportation have also provided funds to help in the growth of the Jobs Access program. This program provides rides to work for welfare-to-work clients and other low-income residents who want to work, but who cannot reach certain job sites due to lack of a car, lack of regular bus service to the site, or lack of bus service for second or third shift schedules. This innovative program matches clients to the best available transportation service that meets their commute needs. In the year 2006, the Jobs Access Program provided about 47,000 trips per month for about 3,250 residents who needed help getting back and forth to work.

Jobs Access=3,250 residents find jobs & rides to work

LOCALLY COORDINATED HUMAN SERVICES TRANSPORTATION PLAN. In cooperation with the Connecticut DOT and various human services agencies and transportation providers, CROG is creating a locally coordinated human services transportation plan. This plan is a separate document, and outlines how the region will seek to meet the transportation needs of the low-income residents, the elderly, and persons with disabilities.

BUS STOP SIGN AND SHELTER POLICY. In the year 2000, CRCOG adopted a bus stop policy that will help improve bus stops throughout the Region by establishing a program to install and replace passenger shelters at important bus stops, establishing a program to install new bus stop signs at all stops in the Region, and better defining town responsibilities for maintaining bus stops. The policy and resultant improvement programs reflect a desire to improve conditions for bus patrons where they wait to board the bus.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **Maintain & improve existing levels of service.** It is the policy of the Council of Governments that the bus and paratransit systems in the Region are critical to meeting the mobility needs of the Region's transit dependent population. Furthermore, the bus system is an important "alternate" mode of travel for many of the Region's other residents. The Council recognizes the importance of both these functions and Council is committed to a policy of maintaining the existing levels of service and to improving those services where appropriate.
2. **Access for Bicyclists.** CRCOG also recognizes that many low-income individuals, who rely on transit for their travel, also rely on bicycle transport. Therefore, the transit system must be adequately integrated with bicycling, with bike racks on buses and bike parking racks at major stops.
3. **Jobs Access Program.** The Region should continue its Jobs Access program. It is important to develop new systems to provide access to jobs for those who are seeking jobs, but who lack personal transportation.
4. **Locally Coordinated Human Services Transportation Plan.** The Region should continue the LOCHSTP planning process.
5. **ITS for Transit.** The operational efficiency of the existing transit and paratransit services should be improved by integrating advanced technologies into current operations, maintenance, and management functions. Specific recommendations such as advanced vehicle location systems are described in "Intelligent Transportation Systems: A Strategic Plan for the Capitol Region."



Using technology to enhance local bus service is a high priority for CRCOG's EJ Advisory Board. Technology can enhance the transit experience of all transit riders, but especially the transit dependent. Technologies such as GPS, advanced vehicle location systems, electronic next bus arrival signs, and next stop announcement systems can improve service reliability and make it easier for riders to use the bus. These systems should be introduced in the Hartford area as soon as possible.

Major bus stops and transit centers should be equipped with electronic signs that tell how long one must wait until the next bus arrives. These next bus arrival signs use real-time data collected from GPS units on buses that give riders up to the minute information on bus arrival times. Buses can also be equipped to automatically announce the next bus stop, if an AVL system is installed on the CT Transit buses. Transit priority added to traffic signals can help keep buses on schedule. And computer-aided dispatch can improve efficiencies for both fixed route and dial-a-ride services.

- ***Expedite ITS Projects.*** Implementation of ITS for transit services in the Hartford area has lagged behind that for highways. CRCOG should work with ConnDOT, CT Transit, the Greater Hartford Transit District, and the Rideshare Company to expedite the implementation of ITS for transit services. A primary objective should be to equip major bus stops and transit centers with electronic signs that tell how long a customer must wait until the next bus arrives.
- ***New Britain Busway*** – ITS elements such as automatic vehicle location (AVL), real time bus arrival information signs, and possibly even vehicle guidance systems should be an integral part of this new rapid transit facility.

- *Radio System Replacement* – CT Transit’s current radio system is not a digital system, which has made it impractical to install an AVL system. Given that the radio system is over 15 years old, replacement is needed. Any new system should be digital and allow CT Transit to start developing AVL capabilities.

6. ***Better Bus Services.*** The RTS recommended several improvements to the existing bus system:

- More hours of service and increased service frequency.
- More timed transfer centers.
- New routes: provide circulators within activity centers where appropriate, and provide a circumferential route in the region’s inner ring suburbs.
- Modifications to existing routes: create more direct service, improve operating efficiency or prevent duplication of route segments.
- Integration of alternate fueled vehicles in the transit fleet as soon as practicable.

Better Circulation within Activity Centers

A downtown circulation system was evaluated as part of the RTS and proved to be integral to the success of the rapid transit facilities. The RTS also identified neighborhood circulators as services that can improve access in an activity center while allowing more efficient operation of regional routes.

The 2004 Regional Transportation Plan recommended the implementation of a downtown circulator in Hartford. A special task force was subsequently formed by the Metro Hartford Alliance to explore ways of bringing this service to a reality. Funding was identified, a route was selected and a marketing program developed. Operating since September 2005 as the **Star Shuttle**, this route successfully serves residents, workers and visitors, especially those visitors who are in town for events at the new Connecticut Convention Center. The success of this service has spawned requests for similar routes elsewhere in the city, and Region.

The Northwest Corridor Transit Study will further examine issues of transit circulation in downtown Hartford, including the evaluation of the feasibility of establishing a transit center, and evaluating the downtown circulation of all bus routes. The Buckland Hills Corridor Study is also investigating opportunities for local circulating bus services.



RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. ***Downtown Circulator.***

- Continue to support the Star Shuttle service in downtown Hartford.
- Explore other opportunities for similar circulator routes in Hartford.

2. ***Buckland Hills Circulator.*** As part of the Buckland Hills Transportation Study, examine the potential benefits of reorienting service in this area, including the construction of a transit center.

3. ***Northwest Corridor Transit Study.*** As part of the Northwest Corridor Transit Study, examine the potential benefits of reorienting service in downtown Hartford and recommend improvements.

Better Portals to the Transit System

Both the RTS and the regional bus stop policy placed new emphasis on those locations where people gain access to the transit system. More people will be encouraged to use the transit system if these ‘portals’ to the system are improved.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **Major Transfer Centers.** The creation of timed transfer centers, or mini-transit hubs, outside downtown Hartford should be created. A transfer center creates the opportunity for a person to get to other bus routes more directly and more quickly. Furthermore, the transfer center encourages several routes to come together outside of downtown Hartford, resulting in improved mobility at the new hub. Recommended locations include:

- Copaco Plaza (Bloomfield)
- West Farms Mall (Farmington)
- Buckland Hills Mall (Manchester)
- Wethersfield Shopping Center (Wethersfield)



2. **Transit Stations.** Fixed transit stations are a key element of each of the proposed rapid transit lines. Each major station should include appropriate amenities to make them both attractive and convenient to use. Stations will include covered platforms with enclosed station areas (i.e., buildings) at high ridership locations. Transit-oriented development is also encouraged at and near all stations.

3. **Transit Supportive Uses at Stations.** When individuals travel to and from work, their trip often has several purposes: dropping children at day care, taking care of errands, picking up dinner. For some commuters, these other needs make transit infeasible for the work trip. But if retail facilities, day care, dry cleaning establishments, and other services are made available at transit centers and stations, the transit trip becomes feasible. The development of such services at key transit centers and stations should be encouraged. Buckland Hills and Park Street (on the New Britain Busway) are proposed as prototypes, with others to follow.

4. **Bus Stop Signs.** CROCOG's Bus Stop policy recommended the creation of a bus stop sign program to install standardized signs at all stops. That program is now well underway. CROCOG will continue to support this effort.

5. **Bus Shelters.** CROCOG is presently working with the towns to develop a cohesive and coordinated regional bus shelter program. CROCOG will continue to support this effort.

Better Transit-Land Use Connections

In order for the proposed transit improvements to realize their full promise, they need to be fully integrated into the surrounding land use. Before the advent of the automobile, cities were largely shaped by their transit lines and routes. Today, highways and roadways tend to be a stronger determinant of land use and urban form. But one clear goal of CROCOG has been to use transit as a tool to shape urban form. A more detailed discussion of CROCOG's support for making this transit-land use connection can be found in Chapter 1.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. **Support Transit Oriented Development** along Transit Lines, as described in *Chapter 1: Linking Land Use and Transportation*.