



**North Reading Community Compact Completion Report  
Paratransit Study - \$5,000 Grant Award**

**1. What Community Compact best practice was selected?**

Best Practice #2: Regionalization/Shared Services

**2. Why was this best practice selected?**

North Reading has no public transportation or paratransit services within its borders, and is evaluating options to provide transportation for those who are unable to transport themselves. The Town is represented at our regional planning agency and among regional transportation working groups.

**3. What technical assistance or funding was provided to your municipality?**

If technical assistance:

- 1) Who provided the technical assistance? N/A
- 2) Describe the technical assistance that your municipality received for this best practice: N/A

If a grant was issued:

- 1) What amount was the grant? \$5,000
- 2) What did your municipality use the grant for? The town contracted with the Metropolitan Area Planning Council to study alternatives for paratransit, evaluate best practices used in other towns, and provide recommendations for which approaches would work best. A scope of the project and its phases are provided below. The total project budget is \$15,000, including the \$5,000 Community Compact award to be used for Phase I, and \$10,000 in municipal funds to be used in Phase 2. Phase I was completed earlier in June 2017, and Phases 2 and 3 were completed in July and August. Phase 4 is nearly complete, with minor edits being made on the final report. Phase 4 is estimated to be complete by early October.

**4. Next steps: What steps has your municipality already taken as a result of this completed Community Compact? What are your anticipated next steps?**

North Reading has considered the information provided by MAPC in their review of other paratransit systems in the Commonwealth, among them the Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority. This was a valuable step in helping the town understand what alternatives may be available to us, including partnerships with Councils on Aging, potential new regional collaboratives, and other paratransit alternatives.

While this work was ongoing, and knowing that membership in MVRTA was a possible outcome of this effort, the town took steps toward meeting with MVRTA officials to determine whether membership would be feasible and would meet the town's needs. Ultimately, the town decided that of the alternatives provided, joining MVRTA and using a service modeled on their existing Ring and Ride service would best meet the town's needs. The town's Board of Selectmen has since voted to join MVRTA, and MVRTA has accepted the town's membership. The Town's work with MAPC continued beyond the Phase I evaluation (paid for by the Community Compact funds) and has included surveys to town residents to determine how, when and by whom the new MVRTA service will be used. MVRTA and the town are relying on this information in creating a plan of service for North Reading residents. The town anticipates the new service will become available to residents as early as fall of this year. This has been met with a very positive response in the town, since providing paratransit has long been an elusive goal, despite a strong, demonstrated need.

### **Scope of Services and Phasing:**

#### **Project Work Plan: North Reading Paratransit Study**

*Phase 1: \$5,000 (Community Compact Funds)*

#### **Status: Complete**

##### Task 1: Review of Other Paratransit Systems

MAPC researched other paratransit agencies in Massachusetts to find potential models for shared services, funding, and operations including shared dispatching, shared vehicles. Sources of information include the Mobility Management Center at MassDOT and the Regional Coordinating Councils. MAPC and the Town also spoke with representatives from the Merrimack Valley Regional Coordinating Council and the Boston North Regional Coordinating Council to solicit feedback on strategies to improve paratransit services. MAPC documented possible applications of these models and best practices to North Reading's paratransit needs.

*Phase 2: \$10,000 (Municipal Funds)*

#### **Status: Complete**

##### Task 2: Data Collection and Inventory

MAPC compiled information about the current transportation services provided in North Reading, including the Council on Aging and Veteran Services. MAPC collected data including a sample of manifest data to determine typical ridership, routing, origins/destinations, vehicle information, hours of operations, fare structure, funding structure, contracting, and other data as

available. This data collection task allowed MAPC to see where the opportunities for sharing services exist and set a baseline to work from.

#### Task 3: Stakeholder Engagement

**Status: Complete**

North Reading and the MAPC reached out to representatives of the North Reading Council on Aging, the Commission on Disabilities, North Reading Veteran's Services department, and the North Reading Social Service Action Team to review the scope of work and to further develop the methods to complete the study. MAPC is currently soliciting final comment from these groups on the report.

In addition to information from staff and volunteers already active in this area, the Town and MAPC conducted direct outreach to senior residents to help ensure that recommendations are based on realistic consideration of their needs. The survey was administered online, and in a printed version that was mailed back to the Town. Survey results, as well as previous out-of-town trips provided by volunteers and arranged through the COA, were provided to MVRTA to provide a baseline from which to create the new service program.

#### Task 4: Recommendations and Final Documentation

**Status: A comprehensive review report has been delivered by MAPC to the town, with minor additions and clarifications forthcoming. Completion estimated by October 2017**

Based upon the information collected in the previous tasks, MAPC developed a set of recommendations for North Reading to improve the paratransit services for its citizens. The recommendations report included options for improved service, and items for further study and evaluation. MAPC is now in the process of presenting the draft recommendations to the Town for their input. After receiving comments, MAPC will revise the report (if needed) and submit a final PDF version to the Town.