

Northern Tier Passenger Rail Study

massDOT
Massachusetts Department of Transportation

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Alternatives Development and Analysis Process

As the August newsletter noted, the next step in the Northern Tier Passenger Rail Study process involves the development of potential service plans (also known as "alternatives") for passenger rail service along the North Adams-Greenfield-Boston corridor.

The alternatives development process will take a two-phase approach. In Phase 1, the team will develop two alternatives to show the type of service schedules that could be achieved through a lower investment level and a higher investment level. A half-day public workshop will be held in fall 2022 to review the two initial service plan alternatives and evaluation framework. Feedback received will be used to develop four additional service plan alternatives as part of Phase 2.

Please use this [link](#) to sign up for Study updates. Information about how to register for and attend the workshop will be made available on the Study [website](#) once the event has been scheduled.

Railroad 101 for the Northern Tier Passenger Rail Study

The Northern Tier follows the route of the historical Fitchburg Railroad, 144-miles from Boston to North Adams. The route was first surveyed in the 1840s then constructed and completed with the opening of the 4-3/4-mile Hoosac tunnel in 1875. After crossing the Connecticut River at Greenfield, the route follows the Deerfield River upwards to Shelburne Falls and then into the Hoosac tunnel at Zoar.

Part 2 - Trackage and Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) Track Class

The Fitchburg Railroad carried peak levels of traffic between 1915 and 1920 with more than 100 trains per day. The entire line was double-track and operated very much like a 2-lane highway with the westbound trains on Track 1 and eastbound trains on Track 2. The condition of the line today has greatly changed. It is mainly single-track with one-way operations. In 1957, one of the two tracks in the Hoosac tunnel was eliminated to make room for taller and wider freight rail cars. It has several locations where trains can

wait on sidings to meet as trains pass in opposite directions - called "meet & pass" locations.

The FRA Track Class establishes minimum requirements for the condition and strength of the track to allow certain train speeds. In 2016, the MBTA completed an upgrade of the Fitchburg Commuter Rail Line, which included the installation of double-track and rehabilitation of the tracks to meet higher FRA Track Classes that allow a maximum train speed up to 79mph. The freight railroad segment between Fitchburg and North Adams is maintained for slower freight train speeds.

Ridership Estimation 101

Understanding the potential ridership is one way to help weigh the benefits and costs of a new passenger rail service. Ridership estimates can also provide information on potential mode shift - that is customers changing travel modes for trips they already make. How many of those existing trips may translate into railroad passengers depends on factors such as the frequency of service and overall travel time within the context of the overall travel market.

Moving trips from the highway to other modes, including the train, can positively affect road congestion, total vehicle miles traveled (VMT), and emissions. When paired with demographic information, ridership projections allow for an equity analysis of the passenger rail service project.

Estimating ridership depends on data, more specifically the matrix of data that reveals where people travel. For the Northern Tier Passenger Rail Study, available tools and data (including location-based services data) will be used to help build an overall travel matrix within the corridor and better understand the travel markets along the corridor.

The Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) is conducting a study to examine the benefits, costs, and investments necessary to implement passenger rail service from North Adams to Greenfield and Boston, with the speed, frequency, and reliability necessary to be a competitive option for travel along this corridor. Please visit the Study website for more information on the project: <https://www.mass.gov/northern-tier-passenger-rail-study>.

If information is needed in another language, please contact the MassDOT Title VI Specialist by phone at (857) 368-8580.

Caso esta informação seja necessária em outro idioma, favor contar o Especialista em Título VI do MassDOT pelo fone 857-368-8580.

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