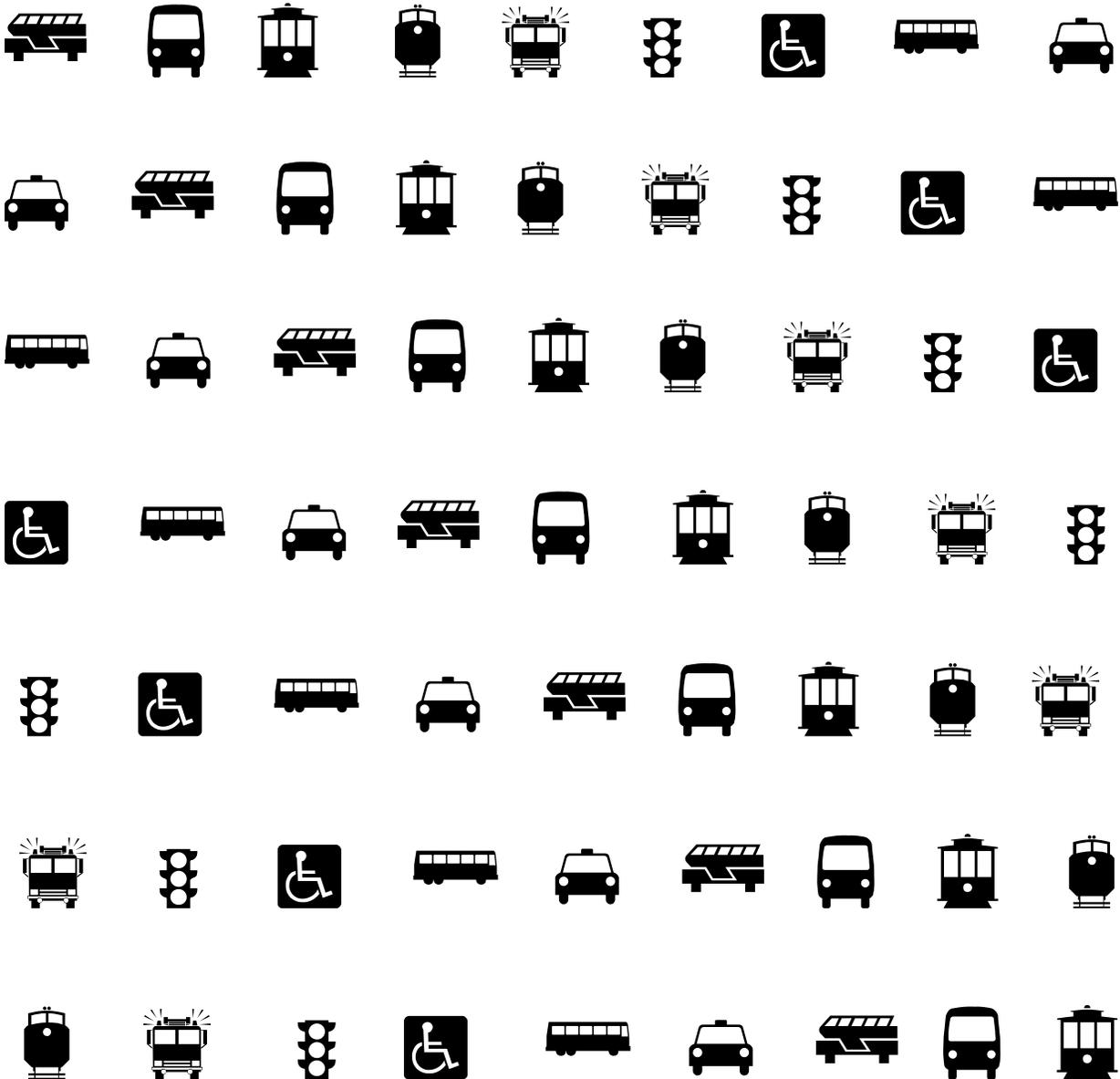# Chapter I
Executive Summary

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A. INTRODUCTION

Nashua Transit System (NTS), a direct operation of the City of Nashua, currently provides public transportation services to the City of Nashua and limited service to the surrounding communities. The existing system is extremely efficient, however relatively small for an area with a population just below 200,000. Southern New Hampshire is one of the fastest growing regions of the state. During the previous decade, fixed route transit ridership increased at twice the rate of population growth. As growth continues to increase, the transit system will need to expand to accommodate the anticipated increase in transit needs and demands.

Expansion of the existing transit system, within the City of Nashua and the surrounding region, will be necessary to continue meeting the demand for public transportation services. The Transit Plan for the Nashua Region will guide the development of transit service in the NRPC region for the next 20 years. The plan is focused on meeting the needs of the transit dependent population. Currently, few incentives exist for drivers to switch transportation modes and utilize public transit. This will only change as the cost of owning and operating an automobile increases considerably. The plan does provide service improvements catered to commuters, however, the plan focuses on meeting the needs of the transit dependent population.

Chapter Two, the Introduction, provides an overview of transit history in the region and a more detailed discussion of significant issues facing the transit system. These issues include improving and expanding existing services, regionalization, increasing the efficiency, security and amenity of the transit system, and funding changes. These topics will be discussed in greater detail throughout the plan.

B. EXISTING TRANSIT SYSTEM

Chapter Three describes the existing transit system, the routes that are served, the number of rides being provided and the vehicles and facilities used to provide the services. Chapter Three also describes the people who currently use the transit system based on data from an on-board transit survey conducted in May of 2002. The following are key points of the on-board transit survey findings:

Household Income
- At least 60% of riders were considered low income and the highest proportion of these riders had an annual household income of less than $20,000.

Vehicle Availability
- Forty six percent of households did not own a vehicle.
- Seventy nine percent of riders did not have access to a vehicle for that particular trip.

Age and Disability Status
- Seventy six percent of riders were between the ages of 19 and 64 years of age.
- A very low proportion of riders were under 18 years of age and above 65 years of age.
- Disabled riders comprised 14% of all riders.

Frequency of Transit Use and Mode of Access to Transit
- Riders most frequently used public transit because they did not own a vehicle, while convenience, economic reasons and inability to drive were contributing factors as well.
- Seventy eight percent of riders used the bus three or more days per week and 44% of all riders used the bus at least five days each week.
- Almost half of all riders walked five-minutes or less to access public transit, however 23% of all riders walked 5 minutes or longer to access the bus.

Destination
- Almost one-half of all riders traveled to and from employment opportunities, and 59% of riders were engaged in full or part time employment.

Senior Citizens
- Very few senior citizens used public transit to access medical services.

Based on the data collected in the on-board transit survey, the best predictors of transit need in the NRPC region are median household incomes below 80% of the region-wide median, high numbers of households with either no vehicles available or only one vehicle available, a high percentage of households headed by senior citizens and a high percentage of disabled individuals.

In the development of the Transit Plan for the Nashua Region, the following transit system needs were identified:
- Expand service hours.
- Increase frequency of service.
- Improve the efficiency, security and rider amenity of the transit vehicles by implementing on-board passenger information systems, automatic vehicle location/mobile data systems, on-board security systems and "clean diesel" engine technology.
- Provide passenger information at bus stops.
- Provide shelters at the highest use bus stops.
- Build a permanent headquarters/garage for the transit system.
- Shift ambulatory riders from paratransit to fixed route service.
- Develop on-going funding sources for the JARC service between Westside Plaza in Nashua and the Milford Oval.
- Expand the transit service outside of Nashua based on the increasingly regionalized federal funding streams.
- Identify areas in the region that need transit service using data from the on-board survey and 2000 Census data.

C. REGIONAL TRANSIT NEEDS

Chapter Four identifies areas of the region that have the highest potential transit needs based on the presence of demographic characteristics that are good indicators of transit need. In this analysis, those criteria were identified through analysis of the on-board transit survey data that is described in Chapter Three. Overall, seven criteria were determined to be the best indicators of transit need in the region. These criteria are population density, youth population, elderly population, disabled status, median household income, poverty status and automobile availability. High concentrations of youth, elderly and disabled populations are good indicators of transit need because a high percentage of these populations do not drive private automobiles and in many cases are transit

dependent. Low median household incomes are often directly linked to automobile availability. Automobile ownership is extremely expensive, and for many low income and poverty status individuals, private vehicle costs are prohibitive, and forcing them to be transit dependent.

Analysis of these criteria led to the development of a transit needs index score. The transit needs index score assigned a number to each geographic area and ranked them according to transit need. This information was also mapped to display the areas with the greatest transit needs. The following list identifies specific towns within the NRPC region and their corresponding transit needs.

- **Expansion within Nashua** – Nashua remains the area of the region with the highest concentration of transit need. Most of the areas of the region with the highest potential levels of transit need are in the downtown area of Nashua. As a result, expansion of service by extending service hours and by increasing service frequency would seem the highest priorities for better meeting transit needs.

- **Hudson** – Hudson seems to have the second highest overall level of transit need. In addition, due to the proximity of the highest transit need areas in Hudson with the highest transit need areas in Nashua, it may also be the easiest community to extend transit service.

- **Milford** – Although Milford is rather remote from the highest transit need areas in Nashua, it also has a high level of transit need. Through the JARC program described in Chapter Three, Milford already has some level of regularly scheduled transit service

- **Merrimack** – Merrimack has an area of concentrated transit need in the northern section of the town along US 3.

- **Amherst and Wilton** – These communities have some level of transit need, but clearly not to the extent of the foregoing. Nonetheless, both these towns depend on Milford to some extent as a sub-regional center for shopping and services. Connection of these communities to Milford with a low level of service should be considered.

- **Hollis and Brookline** – These communities have a relatively low need for transit services compared with other areas in the region. But from the data it appears likely that a small resident population of elderly individuals could benefit from regularly scheduled service from both towns to Nashua and back to provide access to shopping and medical services.

The transit needs index score, combined with existing land use data on transit destinations, housing density, environmental justice and existing transit system data, will serve as a base for developing proposed transit services.

D. GOALS AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

The rider characteristics and transit needs identified in the previous chapters have been considered in the development of the goals and implementation plan discussed in Chapter Five. Chapter Five identifies twelve goals for the improvement of transit service in the region and specific steps to implement each goal. The goals cover the following categories: service frequency, Nashua service area, regional service area, affordability, passenger amenities, safety, education, intermodal network, air quality/environment, demand response, transit system efficiency and regionalization. The

proposed transit services listed under each goal are proposals only and specific transit service options would be further developed during the planning period. It is important to stress that proposed transit service extensions are dependent upon local financial participation from the participating towns.

Proposed service improvements include the following items:

- Decrease headways on City of Nashua routes.

- Extend morning and evening service hours on City of Nashua routes.

- Establish a Daniel Webster Highway Circulator in southern Nashua's retail area.

- Provide limited fixed route service to Daniel Webster College and Nashua North High School.

- Provide fixed route and demand response service between Nashua and Milford.

- Establish a shared deviated fixed route service between Amherst, Milford and Wilton.

- Establish a shared deviated fixed route service between Brookline, Hollis and Nashua.

- Provide fixed route and demand response service between Merrimack and Nashua.

- Provide fixed route and demand response service between Hudson and Nashua.

- Enhance passenger amenities through additional bus shelters, updated bus stop signs with schedule information and lighting, and an on-board voice annunciation system.

- Improve system security through the installation of video security cameras.

- Develop a Transportation Demand Management/Vanpooling plan for the region.

- Enhance Intelligent Transportation System technologies through traffic signal priority, transit vehicle tracking and electronic fare boxes.

- Improve connections outside the region with access to Boston, Derry-Salem, Keene, Lowell, and Manchester.

- Continue to develop the extension of the commuter rail from Lowell to Nashua.

- Begin the development process for extending commuter rail from Nashua to Manchester.

- Analyze the benefits and impacts of the regionalization of the existing transit system.

- Develop a plan for addressing potential funding changes due to anticipated United States Census 2010 findings.

E. FUNDING

Chapter Six identifies funding sources, provides cost estimates for proposed transit services and discusses anticipated changes in future federal funding for public transit projects within the region. Funding sources include Section 5307 funds, Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality funds and Job Access and Reverse Commute funds. The strengths and weaknesses of each fund are thoroughly discussed in this section. Table 6-1 (p. VI-3) lists these funding options with the corresponding costs to local communities to establish the proposed transit services discussed in Chapter Five.

This is followed by a discussion of the key issue of future funding based on the definition of the Nashua Urbanized Area. Transit system funding is based on the population of the urbanized area.

The Nashua Urbanized Area currently has a population below 200,000 and is considered a small urbanized area. It is anticipated that the population will exceed 200,000 in the 2010 Census, and the region will then be considered a large urbanized area. Small urbanized areas can utilize Section 5307 funds for operating and capital expenditures, however, large urbanized areas may only utilize these funds for capital expenditures. Therefore, it is critical that a plan be developed to effectively address this issue and identify future funding sources for operating expenses to maintain the same level of transit service during this transition.

Federal funding for transit projects is dependent upon a local match from participating communities. Therefore, the continuation of existing services and the implementation of new services are financially constrained by local support and local match money for transit projects.

F. CONCLUSION

Growth in Southern New Hampshire is anticipated to steadily increase over the 20 year planning period. The existing transit system will need to expand all aspects of its operation to meet the increased demand and remain competitive within the industry. Future service improvements and expansions of the transit system are dependent upon financial support from local communities. Therefore a vital part of the successful implementation of the plan will be gaining local support for transit services throughout the region.