

Agenda
3/23/09 (6)

To see if the Town will raise and appropriate, or appropriate from available funds, \$24,500 to be expended by the Town Manager for the implementation of a town shuttle program.

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The Town's Transportation Advisory Committee is developing a program to relieve congestion at South Acton Station and increase usage of the commuter rail by instituting a park and ride shuttle system. The program will expand the hours of use of the two vans which now serve the Town's population of older adults and persons with disabilities. At the same time the availability of the transportation service to older adults and persons with disabilities will increase through operational efficiencies and expanded hours.

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The requested funding will be the Town's share of funding based on the expected approval of the Town's grant application for federal transportation funding (the Grant). It is expected that funding under this warrant will be reimbursed through the Town's Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) assessment, the "Cherry Sheet" funds held by the Lowell Regional Transportation Authority and/or other revenues to be instituted in support of this program.

This article's funding represents 20% of the first year cost of the program under the Grant, minus some money from parking lot fees that can be applied to the match. Second year funding will be 30%, third year funding will be 40%, and subsequent years will require funding independent of this Grant. Aside from the reimbursement money expected from Cherry Sheet funds, funding in the second and subsequent years is being identified and is a necessary element in the application for the Grant. The Grant application is expected to be approved, but in the event it is not, the funding under this warrant will be returned to General Operation Budget funds.

Population in Need	Evidence of Need	Proposed Improvement	Advantages
Older Adults, Persons with Disabilities and others with transportation limitations	--2008 Online Survey (956 respondents)	--Increased hours	By design, any change will retain present quality of COA van management
	--2008 Paper Senior Survey (18 respondents)	--Consolidate management of current paratransit vans (only if services are managed locally)	Increased hours to support employment as well as attendance at evening meetings and events
	--Interviews with Commission on Disability representatives	--Incorporate new limited taxi voucher system	Schedule and operating efficiencies
	--Interviews with Council on Aging staff		Accommodates other members
	--June, 2007 Town Transportation Forum		
	--United Way		

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	<p>Meeting in 2005 and later identification of transportation as need</p> <p>--Ongoing communications to town by email and letters to editor</p>		<p>of the non-driving populations as needed</p>
<p>South Acton Rail Station Train Riders</p>	<p>--Online Survey (956 respondents)**</p> <p>--2009 Polls at South Acton Rail Station</p> <p>--2009 Interviews with Potential Park-and-Ride Lot Owners</p> <p>--2007 License Plate Survey at Rail Station</p> <p>--Ongoing communications to town by email and letters to editor</p> <p>--January, 2006 South Acton Rail Station Committee Forum</p> <p>--June, 2007 Town Transportation Forum</p>	<p>--Shuttle from Park-and-Ride Lot</p> <p>--Parking Management Changes (meter replacement, changes in fee structure)</p> <p>--Explore federal grant funding of third vehicle under Federal Transit Administration 5310 program</p>	<p>Reduces parking demand</p> <p>Improves reliability for commuters</p> <p>Reduced congestion at South Acton Rail Parking Lot</p> <p>Reduces global warming emissions</p> <p>Supports Reverse Commutes</p>

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Town of Acton Transit Needs Analysis - Overview of Preferred Alternative

Project Objectives:

- Alleviate parking congestion at South Acton Rail Station
- Provide transportation alternatives for Acton residents
- Meet travel needs of transit dependent community
- Enhance local environmental stewardship and reduce carbon imprint

Proposed Transportation Program: Create an integrated system of flexible transportation resources that improves the efficiency of existing services and facilities while creating travel options, especially for commuters but also for members of the general public.

1. Consolidate and centralize management of existing demand response transportation services (i.e., Council on Aging and Road Runner).
2. Implement parking management strategies at South Acton Rail Station, by increasing per diem parking charges to market rates, improving parking collection techniques and incrementally increasing resident parking charges.
3. Implement flexible parking shuttle to South Acton Rail Station.
4. Expand hours of demand response service into commuter periods and allow members of the general public to use service to travel to/from rail station.

Strategy 1: Consolidate and Centralize Management of Local Transportation Resources

Strategy rationale: Improves operational efficiency of services, reduces administrative costs, increases trips provided and frees up van capacity for other uses.

Strategy explanation: Combine operations of existing demand response services (COA van and Roadrunner) into a single entity, either a public entity or a private vendor. The program manager may also administer park and ride shuttle to rail station. Consolidated operations will improve service efficiency by increasing opportunities to share rides and provide more trips. Key challenges are associated with administrative impacts on agencies currently managing programs and ensuring seamless transition for customers.

Strategy 2: Expand Parking Management at South Acton Rail Station

Strategy rationale: 1) Reduce demand at train station by ensuring parking charges reflect prevailing regional rates and generates some resources to support shuttle service

Strategy overview: The Town of Acton currently charges a per diem rate of \$2.50 for parking and sells resident stickers for \$50 per year. Recent increases in MBTA parking charges (as of 11/15) mean rates (especially residential rates) are below prevailing regional rates. Lower than average rates attract travelers to the train station, increasing traffic congestion and frustrating commuters. Implementing parking management strategies, therefore, is the single most important strategy to reducing parking demand and increasing use of parking shuttles and demand response services. Increased parking revenues can be used to pay for park and ride lot costs associated with park and ride lot shuttle program (strategy 3). These funds will offset Town of Acton's local match for the suburban mobility grant program.

Strategy 3: Implement Flexible Parking Shuttle

Strategy rationale: Reduce parking demand at train station

Strategy overview: Create park and ride lot at key location near the train station and operate a shuttle between parking lot and train station. Implementation of the shuttle requires identifying and securing use of a parking lot, identifying an operator, and marketing the service to residents

and non-residents. Shuttle would operate 5 hours per day from approximately 6:30 am – 8:00 am and 5:00 pm to 7:30. Total costs for parking and the shuttle must be below per diem parking rate – likely on the order of \$1 per day, with fares collected during the am trip only.

Strategy 4: Create New Commuter Demand Response Services

Strategy rationale: Provide option for commuters traveling from parts of Acton not easily served by park and ride shuttle. Secondary benefit would be expanded service for older adults and persons with disabilities.

Strategy overview: Currently, one vehicle operates weekdays and a second operates vehicle mid-week (Tuesdays through Thursdays). Both vehicles are available 8 am to 4 pm. We propose increasing service hours of the mid-week vehicle to operate five days a week from approximately 7:00 am to 9:00 pm and allowing all residents to use service to travel to/from train station during peak period. Total service hours of demand response service will increase from 24 to 70 hours per week, improving mobility for all residents. The strategy assumes the Town of Acton requests LRTA to expand demand response service by 16 hours – this action is independent of the suburban mobility grant. The Town of Acton through the suburban mobility grant will be responsible for commuter oriented (remaining 30 hours) service.

Table 1: Overview of Proposed Alternative

Strategies	Description	Additional Vehicle Requirements	Total Operating Costs	Cost to Town of Acton
1 - Consolidate Demand Response Operations	Jointly manage and operate the two demand response services	use existing	--	
2 - Parking management at Rail Station	Set market rate pricing at South Acton Rail Station. Portion of revenue earned can support park and ride lot costs and counted as local match.	N/A	None	(\$7,500)
3 - Implement Flexible Shuttle Service	Operate flexible shuttle between nearby parking lot and Acton Rail Station	share existing	\$69,000	\$13,800
4 - Expand Demand Response Services	Create new commuter demand response service available to all residents; Add 44 hours/week of new demand response service; 16 hours funded by LRTA; 28 hours funded by Suburban Mobility Grant Program as new service	share existing	\$91,000	\$18,200
Total Annual Cost for Program:			160,000	\$24,500

Cost Assumptions:

Flexible shuttle cost assumptions: \$55/hr x 4 hrs/day x 50 weeks plus \$7,500 for park and ride lot rental plus 10% contingency

Demand Response van service: \$55/hrs x 30 hrs/week x 50 weeks plus 10% fee/contingency

Assumes shuttle and DR services will not operate commuter services on major holidays