

Acton 2020

BURNING ISSUES: Highlight Sheets

GETTING AROUND ACTON

Key Points to Consider

Overview

- As with its neighboring communities, the 2000 Census showed that nearly 90 percent of Acton residents drove or rode in a car to work and 4.5 percent used public transportation (see Table 6.2).
- While car travel and to a lesser extent regional commuter transit will continue to predominate in the Town, participants in the comprehensive community planning process have expressed a desire for other viable alternatives.

Roadways

- In addition to regional traffic on Route 2, Acton's other principal roadways carry through traffic as well as local traffic. Also, because of their historical importance, maintaining their visual character is important to many residents based on the comprehensive community planning process.
- Many of the intersections along the road corridors are uncontrolled, which means that left-turning traffic creates backups; left-turns entering from side streets can also be difficult. This is particularly challenging along Great Road (Rt. 2A/119) where multiple driveways permit entries and exits that result in

conflicts and sometimes in crashes.

Public Transportation

- The MBTA recently began improvements to the Fitchburg Line, which include extending double tracking from Boston to Ayer to increase train speeds and on-time performance. The project also includes renovating the South Acton train station.
- In March 2010, the MBTA adopted the design alternative proposed by Acton residents via the South Acton Train Station Advisory Committee. The Acton Historic District Commission has begun reviewing the latest 60 percent design plans. (We need a way to bring this up to date. HDC has recently signed off on the plans, while retaining a plan to work with the MBTA on additional non-budget-changing aesthetic adjustments.
- The MBTA is working on improvements to the Littleton/495 commuter rail station. When construction is completed, express service currently available at the South Acton train station may be moved to the new station.
- Acton is in the area served by the Lowell Regional Transit Authority (LRTA), not the MBTA. While the LRTA does

Acton 2020

BURNING ISSUES: Highlight Sheets

- not provide fixed-route bus service in Acton, it provides funding for some of the paratransit service to Acton's senior and disabled communities.
- In 2009, Acton received \$95,188 in federal funding to initiate the MinuteVan shuttle service between the station and a 22-space satellite parking lot behind the West Acton Fire Station
 - The MinuteVan shuttle also offers dial-a-ride service outside of the commuter service hours to any destination in Acton for \$2 and to five locations in adjacent towns for \$4. Single ride and 10-ride tickets are offered.
 - Acton Council on Aging also provides shuttle service for Acton residents 60 years old and older and for disabled residents as space allows.
 - Yankee Line, Inc. provides weekday morning and evening charter-bus trips between East Acton, Concord Center, and Copley Square in Boston.
- require local streets to have a sidewalk on at least one side, while collector and arterial streets must have sidewalks on both sides.
- The town's Sidewalk Committee helps set priorities for pedestrian improvements and has published design guidelines for sidewalks. Acton has recently completed construction of many sidewalks. There are now 48 miles of sidewalks in Acton, for Acton's 120 miles of public and private roads.

Pedestrian Facilities

- Many of Acton's sidewalks are often on only one side of the street. Often, for reasons that include avoiding historic stone walls, large street trees, or property takings, sidewalks sometimes shift from one side of the street to the other.
- Acton Subdivision Rules and Regulations require developers to provide pedestrian improvements as deemed necessary by the Planning Board. They also

Acton 2020

BURNING ISSUES: Highlight Sheets

Bicycle Facilities

- Consistent with many communities described in the *Massachusetts Bicycle Transportation Plan*, Acton has many two-lane roads that are ideal for recreational cycling during off-peak times. However, these same roads are less than optimal for cycling when vehicular traffic volumes are higher and there are no marked bicycle lanes in the Town.
- At present, there is no bicycle committee or Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) subcommittee on bicycling.
- Acton is directly involved in two major rail trail projects. The Assabet River Rail Trail (ARRT) would extend from Marlborough to South Acton and provide an

important commuter link to the South Acton train station. The Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (BFRT) would extend from Lowell to Framingham. The Town has selected a design firm for the BFRT final design. Both of these projects await federal funding to be scheduled before they are built.

- The Acton Subdivision Rules and Regulations also address bike paths as deemed necessary by the Planning Board.

Table 6.2: Commuting Modes in Acton and Surrounding Towns

Town	Drive Alone	Car Pool	Public Transit	Walk	Work at Home	Other
Acton	80.8	7.4	4.5	1.2	5.6	0.4
Boxborough	84.6	5.9	2.4	1.1	5.9	0.0
Carlisle	77.1	4.3	2.8	1.7	13.9	0.2
Concord	76.8	5.2	5.2	2.8	9.1	0.9
Littleton	85.5	4.5	3.0	1.1	5.2	0.7
Maynard	82.6	8.6	2.6	2.3	3.3	0.6
Stow	84.2	4.6	3.5	1.2	5.8	0.7
Sudbury	84.8	3.8	3.1	1.7	5.9	0.7
Westford	88.0	5.3	1.2	0.6	4.8	0.1

Source: 2000 Census

Opportunities and Challenges posed by Existing Conditions

As the cost of transportation continues to increase (both driving and using public transportation), because of the increasing cost of energy for transportation the cost of commuting will likely be an increasingly important factor in residential and employment

Acton 2020

BURNING ISSUES: Highlight Sheets

decision making.

Funding for the MinuteVan shuttle is expected to decline in future years, and Acton will need to decide how and whether to continue funding these services.

Some improvements in conditions on Acton's roadway network are possible, but the areas in which Acton can improve transportation most appear to be in public transportation, walking, and bicycling.

Although controlling traffic speeds, particularly in residential areas, and managing traffic entering principal roads are both challenges, these initiatives may be worthwhile in terms of improvements in safety and livability and can be addressed through design changes (traffic calming) and police enforcement.

Sidewalk maintenance, particularly in winter months, is an ongoing challenge, owing to its cost.

Pathway linkages can be explored, particularly where connections can be made between adjacent parcels and from residential areas to commercial areas.

The addition of the MinuteVan Dial-a-Ride (DAR) service has shown that a more locally tailored service is popular. Discussions with adjacent towns and the Montachusett Area Transit Authority (MART) should be pursued to see if local service could be improved.

With two shared use paths in development and bicycle parking program expansion, there is an opportunity for the Town to form a bicycle committee, either independently or as part of the TAC.