

Acton 2020

BURNING ISSUES: Highlights

HIGHLIGHTS: GETTING AROUND ACTON

Key Points to Consider

Overview

- The Town of Acton is accessible by driving as well as by commuter rail (Fitchburg Line) and commercial bus to Boston). It is also possible to bike to and from other cities and towns, but not easy.
- As with its neighboring communities, the 2000 Census showed that over 88 percent of Acton residents drove or rode in a car to work and 4.5 percent used public transportation. This is a higher transit share than all surrounding towns except Concord (see Table 6.2).
- Ownership of automobiles and light trucks in Acton is approximately 2.07 per household, similar to neighboring towns, which range from 1.92 in Maynard to 2.53 in Carlisle.
- 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

- Acton's principal roadways other than Route 2 were designed for traffic volumes much lower than

they now carry. However, these roadways have visual character that is consistent with Acton's historic and rural heritage.

- 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.
- The Police Department and Town Engineer often receive complaints about traffic speeds on many of Acton's roadways, particularly on road segments between congestion hot spots. This is a common problem for most towns of Acton's size and density.

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

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- proposed by Acton residents via the South Acton Train Station Advisory Committee. The Acton Historic District Commission has reviewed and accepted the latest 60 percent design plans, and continues to work with the MBTA on additional non-budget-changing aesthetic improvements.
- The MBTA is working on improvements to the Littleton/495 commuter rail station. When construction is completed, the MBTA could potentially move the express service currently available at the South Acton train station to the new station, relieving parking demand at South Acton.
 - Acton is in the area served by the Lowell Regional Transit Authority (LRTA); the MBTA provides only commuter rail service. While the LRTA does not provide fixed-route bus service in Acton, it does provide some paratransit service to Acton's seniors and people with disabilities.
 - In addition to the LRTA paratransit service, Acton Council on Aging also provides shuttle service for Acton residents 60 years old and older and for disabled residents as space allows.
 - 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 available.
 - Yankee Line, Inc. provides weekday morning and evening charter-bus trips between East Acton, Concord Center, and Copley Square in Boston.

Pedestrian Facilities

- With the notable exception of recent sidewalk projects, most of Acton's sidewalks are narrow and often exist 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 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 and streets.

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Bicycle Facilities

- Acton has many two-lane roads that in the consultant’s judgment 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
West Concord village	84.3	3.4	5.7	1.2	4.7	0.6
Littleton	85.5	4.5	3.0	1.1	5.2	0.7
Littleton Common village	86.2	3.9	2.9	1.1	6.0	0.0
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: U.S. Census 2000.

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Opportunities and Challenges posed by Existing Conditions

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. These improvements would ultimately help to reduce traffic (as would housing and economic development choices that would reduce commuting and would make walking, biking, and use of public transportation more feasible for many people by reducing the distance one needs to travel to shopping, work, and other destinations).

- As the cost of transportation continues to increase because of the increasing fuel prices and public transportation fares, the expense of commuting will likely be an increasingly important factor in residential and employment decision making.
- Federal and state funding for the MinuteVan is expected to decline in future years, and Acton will need to decide how and whether to continue funding these services.
- 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) might result in opportunities to maintain and extend the service as outside funding declines.
- Although controlling traffic speeds, particularly in residential areas, through design ("traffic calming") and enforcement, and managing traffic entering principal roads are both challenges, these initiatives may be worthwhile in terms of improvements in safety and livability.
- 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.
- 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.