

III. CIRCULATION

Developing safe and sustainable ways to get around Woonsocket

INTRODUCTION

Woonsocket's historic Downtown, with its compact and pedestrian-oriented street network, provides ample opportunities to support the growth of a thriving downtown business district. Through improvements to Downtown streets and public spaces, including enhanced wayfinding to promote a "park and walk" business district, and placemaking to highlight Woonsocket's historic context within the Blackstone River Valley and the City's role in the birth of the American Industrial Revolution, its transportation network is positioned to support economic development. The Blackstone River Bikeway is another important asset, which provides regional bicycle connections and recreational opportunities for both residents and visitors. Additionally, Woonsocket's location between three large regional employment and population centers – Providence, RI and Worcester and Boston, MA – provides opportunities to connect more residents to the regional job market with improved transportation links, especially through the potential return of commuter rail service to downtown Woonsocket. Overall, the City's transportation network of roads, transit infrastructure, sidewalks, and paths, is a strength that can be leveraged to help more people access jobs and opportunities both within and outside of the city, and to promote Woonsocket's businesses, arts, culture, and identity as a historic industrial hub.

Vision Statement: Over the next 20 years, Woonsocket will focus on developing a safe and sustainable transportation network to provide transportation options for people of all ages and abilities, and to efficiently transport goods and services to support local businesses. Investing in a transportation network focused on sustainable mobility will allow for continued economic growth by attracting business to Woonsocket and connecting residents to regional job centers.

ROADWAY NETWORK

Woonsocket's roadway network provides access to the City's commercial centers for both people and freight, while connecting residents to their everyday needs. The network is comprised of principal arterials that connect to highways providing regional connections, as well as minor arterial, collector, and local roadways providing access to local destinations. Safety for all roadway users, including drivers, transit riders, pedestrians, and bicyclists, is a critical component of a well-functioning roadway network. Identifying potential projects and policies that prioritize multimodal safety

will allow the City to develop a transportation system designed for people of all ages and abilities.

WHAT WE HEARD

- Roadways need repair, with roadway condition being the top need identified in the community survey. Residents are concerned about roadway safety, including implementing measures to reduce speeding.
- Traffic congestion is an issue, especially during evening commute hours to employment centers (e.g., Mendon Road south of its intersection with Cumberland Hill Road, which connect to the Highland Corporate Park and CVS headquarters).
- Some roads within the City are “overbuilt” for existing capacity, meaning that some road space can be allocated to other uses. Examples include Truman Drive, which the City recently converted from a three-lane road to a two-lane road,¹ and Diamond Hill Road (State Route 114).

“The roads really need to be redone as well as lights and sidewalks.” – Community Survey Respondent

GETTING IT DONE

GOAL III-1: Ensure Woonsocket has a well-maintained and consistently upgraded roadway network to transport people safely and efficiently to local and regional destinations.

POLICY III-1.1: Repair and maintain existing infrastructure, including roads and bridges.

ACTION III-1.1.a: Develop a cyclical Pavement Management Program to collect and retain sidewalk and roadway condition data, and to help identify potential roadway infrastructure needs. This Pavement Management Program should be merged with the Sidewalk Prioritization Program so that improvements are cohesively managed and implemented.

ACTION III-1.1.b: Leverage state programs such as the Municipal Road and Bridge Revolving Fund (MRBRF) and State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) to finance infrastructure projects,

¹ City of Woonsocket, Truman Drive Greenway RFP, 2021, https://www.woonsocketri.org/sites/g/files/vyhlf5231/f/uploads/rfp-truman_drive_greenway.pdf.

including capital improvements to roads, bridges, and sidewalks. Projects must be added to RIDOT's Project Priority List (PPL) to be eligible for funding.

ACTION III-1.1.c: Develop a prioritized list of necessary rehabilitation/reconstruction of major arterial and collector roads, including Mendon Road, Diamond Hill Road, Cumberland Hill Road, Manville Road, Main Street and Truman Drive.

ACTION III-1.1.d: Routinely re-assess the structural capacity of Woonsocket's bridges to accommodate truck weights.

POLICY III-1.2: Create policies and investment programs for infrastructure to improve roadway safety for all users.

ACTION III-1.2.a: Develop a "Vision Zero" Plan to reduce vehicle speeds, improve roadway safety for all users, and achieve the goal of zero fatalities and severe injuries.

ACTION III-1.2.b: Implement recommendations from recent Road Safety Audits (RSAs) conducted on Diamond Hill Road, Cass Avenue, and in Downtown, including installing Rapid Rectangular Flashing Beacons (RRFBs), curb extensions, raised crosswalks, and a road diet².

ACTION III-1.2.c: Identify opportunities to implement "complete streets" to reduce vehicle speeds and provide safe sustainable transportation options on existing roadways, particularly on roadways providing access to town destinations and in areas with a high number of crashes.

² RIDOT, Road Safety Assessment: Cass Avenue, 2018.

RIDOT, Road Safety Assessment: Diamond Hill Road, 2020.

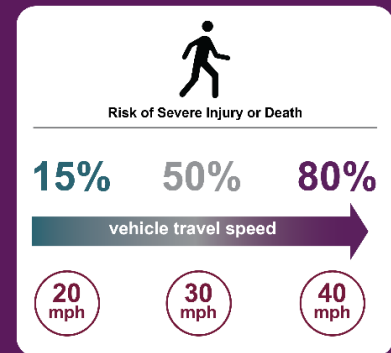
RIDOT, Road Safety Assessment: Downtown Woonsocket, 2019.

VISION ZERO

To raise awareness of safety and promote a culture of reduced vehicular speeds, some communities have developed a “Vision Zero” Plan. “Vision Zero” acknowledges that many factors contribute to safe mobility - including roadway design, speeds, behaviors, technology, and policies - and sets clear goals to achieve the shared goal of zero fatalities and severe injuries.

Safety is directly related to vehicle speed, which impacts crash severity.

<https://visionzeronetwork.org/about/what-is-vision-zero/>



POLICY III-1.3: Optimize the operations of the roadway network.

ACTION III-1.3.a: Create a freight access management program to identify optimal freight routes, including installing appropriate signage so trucks avoid low clearance bridges.

ACTION III-1.3.b: Evaluate the traffic signal equipment and signal timing Citywide to see if changes could be made to optimize operations, including upgrading traffic signals, installing loop detectors, repairing or installing new pedestrian signals, and making adjustments to signal timing, especially for areas with the highest number of crashes.

POLICY III-1.4: Improve clarity and ease of use of the existing roadway network.

ACTION III-1.4.a: Upgrade road signs on a regular basis to ensure easy identification of State Routes and other notable destinations in the City.

ACTION III-1.4.b: Work with the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission to make updates to historical markers

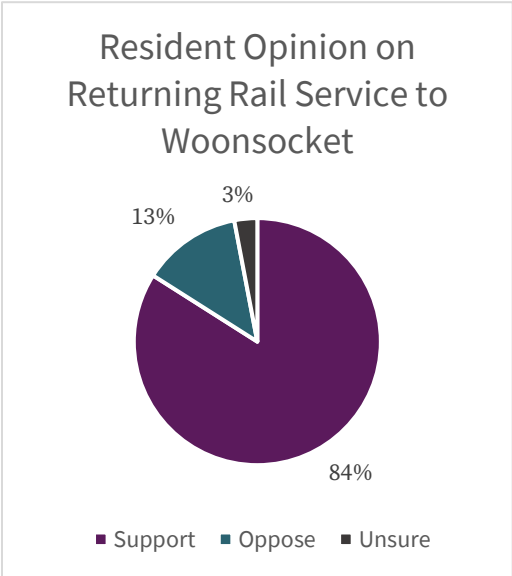
and other signs, helping to advance the goals of placemaking and wayfinding in Woonsocket’s historic districts.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Improving and expanding public transportation in Woonsocket will benefit the community by connecting residents to both local and regional job centers and destinations. It is critical to find ways to provide access to as many job opportunities as possible for residents, both within and outside City limits. In addition to bus service provided by the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA), Woonsocket has the physical foundation for commuter rail service, with a centrally located train station Downtown with access to a regional rail line, and the community support for expanded service. By working with local and regional stakeholders to advocate for expanded transit service, Woonsocket can promote economic development through increased transit access.

WHAT WE HEARD

- The vast majority (84%) of survey respondents are supportive of restoring commuter rail service to Woonsocket, with only 3% of respondents opposed, and 13% unsure. Providence is the number one preferred commuter rail connection, followed by Green Airport and Worcester, MA.
- 18% of Woonsocket residents live in a household without access to a private vehicle, limiting accessibility and demonstrating need for increased local public transit options.
- Improving RIPTA bus stops with more amenities, especially Downtown, was a common theme from the community survey.
- There is a need for transit connectivity to regional job centers, including Providence and Worcester, Boston, and Norfolk County in Massachusetts. This not only includes exploring the restoration of commuter rail service, but also working with RIPTA and Massachusetts RTAs to improve regional bus service. As of 2023, the RIPTA 54 bus to Providence is the only regional transit connection³.
- There is a need for additional paratransit services for Woonsocket’s senior citizens and residents with disabilities, according to the Woonsocket Department of Human Services.



³ RIPTA, 54: Lincoln/Woonsocket, 2023, <https://www.ripta.com/routes/54/>

GETTING IT DONE

GOAL III-2: Provide high quality public transportation services connecting residents, workers and visitors to the places they live, work, and play.

POLICY III-2.1: Improve local transit connectivity, especially for Woonsocket's transit-dependent population.

ACTION III-2.1.a: Work with RIPTA to examine opportunities for a mobility hub downtown, and to implement the most aggressive plans presented in Transit Forward 2040⁴, including bus access to Highland Corporate Park, higher frequency along all bus routes, and on-shoulder bus travel on RI-146A.

WHAT IS A MOBILITY HUB?

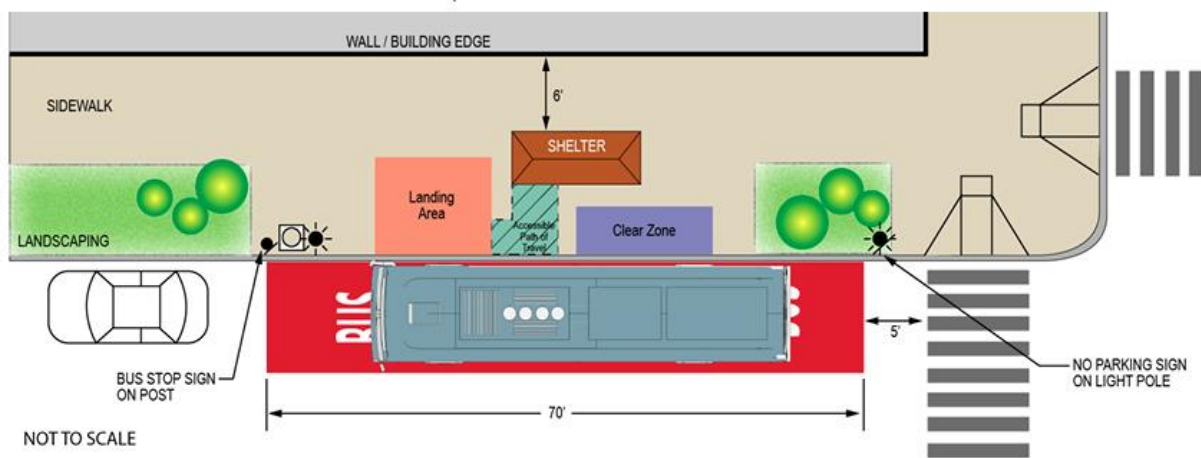


Mobility hubs are places where people can access services or amenities as they transfer between modes of transportation, such as transit, walking, bicycling, or driving. Mobility hubs are typically located where different bus routes converge, or a connection to another mode, offering a safe, secure waiting area, and serve areas with high average daily riders. The major features of a mobility hub are connectivity, safety and security, multimodal connections, and design and amenities. Likely locations for mobility hubs are downtowns or neighborhood centers, hospitals or medical buildings, shopping centers or malls, college campuses, and large business parks.

⁴ RIPTA, RIDOT, & RI Statewide Planning, Transit Forward RI 2040, 2020, <https://transitforwardri.com/pdf/TFRI%20Recs%20Briefing%20Book-Final%20201230.pdf>

ACTION III-2.1.b: Work with RIPTA to make changes to routing, scheduling, and service hours to best meet the needs of residents, especially for vulnerable and transit-dependent populations (e.g., elderly, students, and low-income).

ACTION III-2.1.c: Assess bus stop conditions and identify potential physical improvements, including opportunities to enhance accessibility and passenger amenities (e.g., benches, shelters), especially for high-ridership locations such as the John Cummings Way stop between Clinton Street and Social Street.



Ideal bus stop layout and amenities, from the Rhode Island Bus Stop Design Guide (2017)⁵

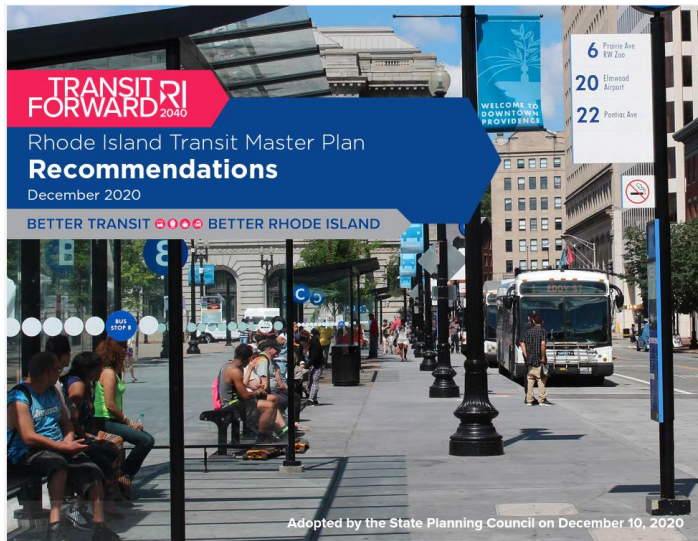
ACTION III-2.1.d: Work with RIPTA to advocate for additional paratransit services via the RIDE program, as Woonsocket's senior population would benefit from additional door-to-door services for their everyday needs.

POLICY III-2.2: Expand transit connectivity to regional job centers and other destinations.

ACTION III-2.2.a: Implement the recommendations from the *Transit Forward RI 2040 Plan*, including a new bus route through the City connecting to Bellingham, MA and a new regional bus route offering better service to Providence.

⁵ RIPTA & RIDOT, Rhode Island Bus Stop Design Guide, 2017, https://www.ripta.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/rigsdg_final_print_version.pdf.

ACTION III-2.2.b: Reestablish commuter rail service in the City, and advocate for a connection between Woonsocket and regional destinations, including Providence, Green Airport, and Worcester. Work with other regional stakeholders to promote commuter rail along the Providence & Worcester Railroad, while opposing any changes to the rail rights-of-way that would jeopardize the possibility of future commuter rail service.



Transit Forward RI 2040 is Rhode Island’s master plan for transit service over the next twenty years, including recommendations for short-term and long-term improvements.

WALKING & BIKING

Woonsocket’s existing sidewalk and bicycle networks provide a solid foundation to support additional pedestrian and bicycle activity throughout the City. Providing options for walking and biking will increase accessibility to jobs, schools, shopping, and health care, while encouraging more multimodal activity Downtown. Regionally, connections to the Blackstone River Bikeway (BRB) provide opportunities to bring visitors to Downtown and connect residents to local and regional destinations.

WHAT WE HEARD

- Improvements to bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, especially Downtown, could encourage more activity and people to choose modes of transportation other than driving. The community survey revealed if improvements were made to transportation infrastructure, **33% of people would prefer to make their daily trips by walking, and 21% would prefer biking** – this indicates that a desire for alternative modes, but there are barriers preventing residents from choosing to walk or bike.

- The Blackstone River Bikeway is an asset for both residents and visitors. The addition of on-street bike infrastructure connecting to the BRB could encourage more local use of the bikeway for commuting and shopping trips with better connections between local neighborhoods and commercial areas.

*“Woonsocket is a tight, densely developed community that is entirely car dependent but shouldn't be. Many residents do not own cars and many more would make trips on foot or bike if we could.” -
Community Survey Respondent*

GETTING IT DONE

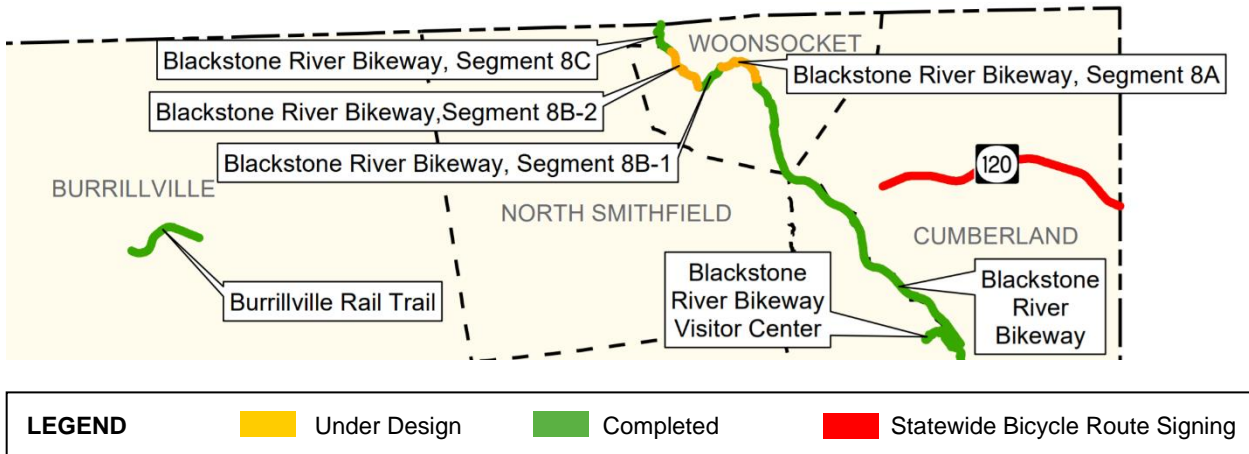
Goal III-3: Develop a safe, comfortable, and accessible network of walking and biking routes throughout the City connecting residents and visitors to Citywide destinations, natural and cultural amenities, and commercial areas.

POLICY III-3.1: Invest in improved bicycle and pedestrian facilities Citywide to encourage people to choose these modes rather than driving for short trips.

ACTION III-3.1.a: Create a Citywide Bicycle Plan to evaluate the overall bicycle network and develop recommendations for improved safety and connectivity.

ACTION III-3.1.b: Add additional on-street bicycle infrastructure to connect local neighborhoods to the BRB to increase recreational opportunities and potential for everyday use for residents, and to attract tourists Downtown.

ACTION III-3.1.c: Identify streets with potential for bicycle and pedestrian improvements due to their proximity to areas with pedestrian-oriented land uses, available right-of-way, or ability to connect to recreational opportunities such as the BRB. For example, Cumberland Street and the northern part of Cumberland Hill Road have the potential to provide improved walking and biking facilities to facilitate connections between the residential neighborhoods to the east and Downtown and the Blackstone River to the west. Other examples include Manville Road, Harris Avenue, River Street, South Main Street, Providence Street, and Park Avenue.



When completed, the Blackstone River Bikeway will connect through Woonsocket, Cumberland, Lincoln and Pawtucket.⁶

POLICY III-3.2: Prioritize pedestrian safety and accessibility to encourage more walking trips throughout the City.

ACTION III-3.2.a: Evaluate the Zoning Ordinance to identify opportunities to include incentivizes for developers to make accessibility upgrades on sidewalks adjacent to new/redevelopment.

ACTION III-3.2.b: Develop a Sidewalk Prioritization Program to develop an inventory of sidewalk conditions to prioritize where to make improvements for pedestrian connectivity and accessibility. Priority factors might include whether a sidewalk provides access to grocery stores, farmers markets, and other similar food providers, as food access has been identified as a priority for the City. This Sidewalk Prioritization Program should be merged with the Pavement Management Program so that improvements are cohesively managed and implemented.

FUNDING FOR SIDEWALKS

As a designated entitlement community, the City of Woonsocket is eligible for funding through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program. The City can use this program to fund identified local public infrastructure needs. Priority is given to those in income eligible neighborhoods.

⁶ State of Rhode Island, Statewide Bicycle System, 2020, http://www.dot.ri.gov/travel/bikeri/docs/RI_Statewide_Bicycle_System.pdf.

DOWNTOWN

With walkable streets, historic charm, and direct access to the Blackstone River Bikeway, Downtown Woonsocket has the potential to further establish itself as a “park and walk” business district, attracting residents and visitors to its local businesses to create vibrant and lively streets, and building on its identity as a historic hub of the Industrial Revolution. Making changes to wayfinding and public parking, and upgrading streetscapes and multimodal infrastructure, could help advance the goals of a revitalized Downtown.

WHAT WE HEARD

- Downtown Woonsocket has ample public parking, which is often underutilized. There is an oversupply of parking and a lack of wayfinding to direct residents and visitors to public parking facilities.
- One of Downtown Woonsocket’s biggest strengths is its pedestrian-oriented street network. Improvements to both pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure would encourage more people to visit Downtown on bike or foot. Improved wayfinding, placemaking, and public spaces could encourage people to spend more time Downtown after they arrive.

“The library is great, however, its location is not convenient. There are few residents that live a walkable distance from it, it is located on a busy, dangerous street, and there isn't any safe bicycle access to it. Redeveloping that part of the city and focusing on interconnected pedestrian and bike networks could draw more city residents to make use of it.” – Community Survey Respondent

GETTING IT DONE

GOAL III-4: Increase access to Downtown Woonsocket’s commercial area through enhanced transportation infrastructure.

POLICY III-4.1: Assess current and future parking needs Downtown to identify opportunities to better manage parking demand.

ACTION III-4.1.a: Evaluate parking supply near the train station to plan for potential demand of future restored commuter rail service and new infill development.

ACTION III-4.1.b: Evaluate the Zoning Ordinance for further opportunities to reduce or remove parking minimums and allow for shared parking, as initiated with the Downtown Overlay District⁷.

⁷ WOONSOCKET, RI., ZONING ORDINANCE, ch. 2 § 1-6, 1994, Amended 2019.

POLICY III-4.2: Improve wayfinding Downtown to help with navigation and placemaking.

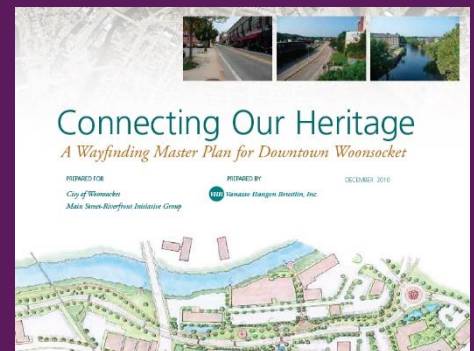
ACTION III-4.2.a: Develop a wayfinding program to improve access to and within Downtown to take advantage of Woonsocket's walkable streets and to help visitors locate public parking.

ACTION III-4.2.b: Use wayfinding signs to establish consistent "branding" for Downtown to help establish its identity as a historic district.

WAYFINDING PROGRAMS

As people engage with a community while walking, wayfinding signage can direct people to destinations of interest, promote existing pedestrian connections, and can add to the feeling of comfort and accessibility of a street.

A wayfinding plan was completed in 2010 but should be updated to meet evolving needs and redevelopment in downtown⁸.



⁸ City of Woonsocket, Connecting Our Heritage: A Wayfinding Master Plan for Downtown Woonsocket, 2010.

POLICY III-4.3: Invest in multimodal infrastructure to encourage activity and foot traffic Downtown.

ACTION III-4.3.a: Implement multimodal improvements to Main Street to help bring more residents and visitors Downtown. Improved pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure conditions will serve as a placemaking strategy by supporting a people-oriented commercial district.

ACTION III-4.3.b: Identify roadways that could support multimodal projects like the Truman Drive Greenway, which will help advance the goal of making Downtown more attractive for pedestrians and bicyclists by providing dedicated facilities and expanding green space.



Truman Drive Greenway project converts two of the four existing vehicle lanes to a shared use path and linear park. A portion of this project has been completed with the removal of a vehicle lane and construction of the bikeway along the west side of the roadway.⁹

⁹ Design and Illustrations prepared by Stephen R. Crasfulli, RLA, for the Woonsocket Planning Board, Design Review Commission and River Overlay District Review Commission in 2019.