

RELATED FRCOG PROJECTS WITH TRANSPORTATION IMPLICATIONS

This section briefly overviews programs and projects that the Franklin Regional Council of Governments is working on which are related to and impact the region's transportation systems, but that are not directly funded through transportation planning grant programs. A summary listing of FRCOG reports that may be relevant for transportation projects and planning appears in Appendix 6.

Regional Policy Plan

In December 1998, the FRCOG completed a *Regional Policy Plan* with funding provided by the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs through the Planning for Growth Program. This document offers suggestions to guide growth and protect the natural and cultural resources of Franklin County. The Plan addresses a number of topics including land use and growth management, historical preservation and community character, natural resources, open space, agriculture, pollution, economic development, community facilities and services, housing, and transportation. The Plan suggests overall policy goals that the region should pursue as well as performance standards and guidelines specific for each topic.

Among other things, the *Regional Policy Plan* provides a framework for creating a local master plan. It also identifies specific zoning and non-zoning techniques for protecting natural and cultural resources and for balancing economic growth and environmental preservation.

For reference, the transportation chapter of the *Regional Policy Plan* is provided in Appendix 5.

Regional Open Space Project

One of the recommendations of the *Regional Policy Plan* was to inventory and assess open space in Franklin County. The county has vast areas of unprotected open space, which are at risk for sprawling development in the future as the county grows and development pressures increase. Many communities in the county have outdated or inadequate zoning bylaws and subdivision regulations that do little to protect open space. A goal of the *Regional Policy Plan* was to identify priority areas for open space protection at a regional scale. Doing so assists federal, state, regional, and local agencies, as well as land trusts, in targeting their land acquisition and purchase of development right (PDR) efforts.

The FRCOG's Regional Open Space Project was funded with a grant from the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA). Through the project, the FRCOG developed a series of county-level maps to identify important open space areas. These maps showed land uses, forested areas, and critical natural resource areas, among other attributes. Based on these maps, the FRCOG then identified and mapped potential greenbelt areas for the county. All of the maps have been approved by the Franklin Regional Planning Board. Communities may wish protect the suggested greenway areas from future development.

The map of the potential greenways identifies areas where linkages between critical resource areas could be created. These linkages and greenbelts extend beyond local political boundaries to cover much of the county. Based on the project maps, over 60 percent of the county is considered potential greenway spaces. One concept is to ultimately create a comprehensive network of greenbelts encompassing all the towns in the region.

To date, the Regional Open Space Project has been conducted entirely at the county level. However, the FRCOG may be available, primarily on a fee basis, to extend the project to focus on individual communities. FRCOG staff can develop the same types of maps at the town level. FRCOG staff can also assist communities with building upon any local Open Space Planning initiatives that may have already taken place or that are currently underway.

Economic Development Activities

The FRCOG is a participant in the Comprehensive Economic Development (CEDS) Program run through the federal Economic Development Administration (EDA). As described by the EDA, the purpose of the CEDS program is to establish “a process that will help create jobs, foster more stable and diversified economies, and improve living conditions.” The CEDS program encourages a coordinated local planning process that involves individuals and local and regional entities working together to guide the economic development activities of their region.

The Greater Franklin County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Committee was formed to accomplish this task. Through this committee, a regional economic development vision and goals were created, and regional strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats were assessed. These elements are used as a guide to create a five-year action plan and strategies for accomplishing the formulated goals and objectives. Specific projects and programs that promote these objectives were identified by CEDS Committee members, and listed and prioritized for implementation within the action plan. The CED Committee evaluates and updates economic activities within the region and assesses the CED process on an annual basis, and releases annual reports during the interim periods between the full five-year plans.

In 2000, the FRCOG and CEDS Committee completed the five-year *Greater Franklin County Region Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy*. Specific topics that were addressed in the 2000 Strategy include brownfield redevelopment, telecommunications infrastructure improvements, support of agriculture-based value-added businesses, and the attraction and retentions of light manufacturing industry businesses. In 2001, the FRCOG and CEDs Committee released the *Greater Franklin County CEDS 2001 Annual Report*. The *Annual Report* contains an update on regional goals and objectives and an evaluation of the 5-year work program and the CEDS process.

Town Master Plans

The FRCOG completes master plans for the towns within the Franklin County region on a fee-for-service basis. A Master Plan is a long-range plan that is intended to guide the development in a town according to a town-determined vision. It is a comprehensive document that looks at all aspects of a community including natural resources, historic resources, transportation, public infrastructure and municipal services, economic development, and land use and zoning. The Master Plan includes inventories, maps, and analyses of current conditions and resources, as well as recommended strategies for accomplishing the goals and objectives that the town has prioritized. The master plan may also include a capital improvement program to coordinate large-scale expenditures in the context of the plan’s goals. Most importantly, the master plan is a planning guidance document created by and for the citizens of a community.

In 1998 and 1999, the FRCOG worked with the towns of Buckland and Shelburne to prepare an inter-municipal master plan. The aims of the Master Planning process were to comprehensively inventory natural and cultural resources and infrastructure, to evaluate existing land use regulations,

and to identify and prioritize long-term capital improvement needs. The resulting document will help guide future growth, open space and natural resource protection, and economic development initiatives in the two towns.

More recently, the FRCOG recently completed a master plan for the town of Deerfield. The FRCOG is currently underway with master planning processes for the towns of Erving and Athol. Also, the FRCOG is presently working with the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission on developing the Athol Master Plan.

