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By Alyssa Sandoval

December 01, 2014 4:20PM

Middlesex towns inaugurate Alewife-to-work shuttle service

Through a unique and powerful growing public-private partnership of communities along the Route 3 Corridor from Burlington to Lowell, one of the first initiatives to bear fruit is the formation of the Middlesex 3 Transportation Management Association (TMA).

TMA is a partnership between businesses and communities. Participants join together to reduce traffic congestion and air pollution, and to improve transportation options in a defined region. In this example, the Middlesex 3 TMA membership is available to all business and communities that cover the Middlesex 3 Coalition's boundaries including Bedford, Billerica, Burlington, Chelmsford, Lexington, Lowell, Tewksbury, Tyngsboro, and Westford.

In addition to ride-matching, emergency ride homes, and other transit related programs, one of the TMA's first major services provided is a new commuter shuttle service (the M3 Shuttle) that will pick up employees at Alewife Station in Cambridge directly to the MITRE Corporation's Campus on Burlington Road in Bedford. From there, it will go to E-Ink to drop employees off at the company's campus in Billerica. Within a quick 30-minute ride, employees are able transported via private shuttle service (including free wifi) to Bedford.

The M3 TMA's first shuttle from Alewife to Bedford began on Monday, Dec. 1.

MITRE, a not-for-profit organization that operates research and development centers for the federal government, is offering the shuttle service to its employees starting in December 2014. At the recent Benefits Fair held at MITRE's campus, dozens of employees said they were enthusiastic to see an alternative to driving solo or taking the longer MBTA bus ride with many stops along the way. The company sees even more long-term benefits.

"We hope offering an easier way to get to our Bedford campus from public transportation will enable us to attract potential employees in the Boston area," said Peter Sherlock, MITRE senior vice president and director of Bedford Operations. "We want our workforce to be comprised of the best local talent we can find to help deliver creative, innovative solutions to our government sponsors, now and in the future."

Bedford's Town Manager, Rick Reed, noted that "Establishing the TMA with this shuttle service is another significant step towards ensuring the long-term economic vitality of the Middlesex 3 region."

Stephanie Cronin, executive director of Middlesex 3 Coalition, and Alyssa Sandoval, Bedford's Economic Development coordinator, have been actively promoting the service to businesses in the Crosby Drive Business District in Bedford. In addition, the goal is that this shuttle serves as a model for other businesses seeking to join on to help solve their employees' commute woes and also to help retain and recruit new employees that live in the more urban locations in and around Boston.

Bedford's growing hub of biotech and tech companies in the Wiggins Avenue Business District adjacent to the nearby Hartwell Avenue Business District in Lexington are also served by the 128 Business Council's Rev Shuttle service in partnership with the town of Lexington

Alyssa Sandoval is the Economic Development coordinator for the town of Bedford.

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Growth along Route 128, I-495 brings more jobs — and traffic



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JOANNE RATHE/GLOBE STAFF

Rush hour extends to both sides of Route 128/Interstate 95 near the commuter artery's junction with Route 2.

By **Scott Van Voorhis** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT DECEMBER 24, 2014

The Route 128 and Interstate 495 corridors are booming once again, spinning off thousands of new jobs, but the resurgent economy may be generating a frustrating side effect: traffic congestion.

More than 8,600 new jobs are projected through 2030 in the office- and lab-packed stretch of Route 128/Interstate 95 between Weston and Burlington, according to the Metropolitan Area Planning Council.

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Meanwhile, the area stretching between Natick and Westborough has morphed into a major “net importer of labor,” according to a report by Framingham State University’s MetroWest Economic Research Center. Translation: More jobs are being generated than there are local workers to fill them.

So what do these studies mean in terms of your morning drive? Commuters from across Greater Boston — as well as parts of New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Maine, and Western Massachusetts — are jamming major highways and local byways to get to their jobs by 8 or 9 each morning.

“If we have more jobs, we will have more traffic,” said Maureen Dunne, professor emeritus and researcher at the Framingham State center. “That’s one reason traffic has become heavier in recent years.”

The section of I-495 between Interstate 290 and the Massachusetts Turnpike is already over capacity, with more than 100,000 cars passing through each day, a Massachusetts Department of Transportation study noted last year.

Traffic along that busy stretch of I-495 is expected to grow another 20 to 30 percent by 2030, according to a separate report by the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission.

Meanwhile, the local stretch of Route 9 is choking on its own success, carrying 50,000 cars a day, according to the MassDOT study.

Route 128, also handling far more traffic than its design capacity, faces a similar challenge. The stretch between Route 3 in Burlington and the Mass. Pike will see traffic soar 77 percent through 2030, according to the Metropolitan Area Planning Council.

“Traffic has definitely gone up since 2010,” said Monica Tibbits-Nutt, executive director of the 128 Business Council, which runs shuttle buses between transit centers and major employers to ease the strain on the commuter artery. “It’s definitely still bad and it’s worse than it was last year.”

Gridlock on the major highways, in turn, is spreading to local roads and downtowns across the region.

Traffic backups of a mile or more on Route 135 heading into Natick Center from Framingham are far from unusual. And Route 20, whether in Sudbury, Marlborough, or Waltham, is reliably miserable.

The rising tide of traffic comes alongside a big jump in the number of jobs locally at everything from tech and biotech firms to financial services companies.

The number of jobs in 13 area communities hit a low of 169,950 in May 2009 as the recession wound down, according to the MetroWest Economic Research Center. Its study covered Ashland, Framingham, Holliston, Hopkinton, Hudson, Marlborough, Natick, Northborough, Sherborn, Southborough, Sudbury, Wayland, and Westborough.

Since hitting bottom, the region has added more than 13,000 jobs, with the biggest gains in financial services, professional, and business services, including technology, hotels, and retail, Dunne noted.

Overall, jobs in MetroWest communities now outnumber the local workforce by 26,616, meaning they are filled by commuters traveling each day from other parts of the state and beyond, according to the research center.

Yet, even as traffic mounts, local residents don't appear to be adding to the congestion.

The number of cars and trucks registered to people living in the western suburbs has been on the decline since the recession, state Department of Transportation numbers show.

Several local communities — including Ashland, Holliston, Hudson, Lexington, Natick, Southborough, Waltham, Wayland, and Westborough — saw the number of vehicle registrations post modest declines from 2009 to early this year, the agency reports. Hopkinton saw an increase, while the overall number of vehicles in Northborough was relatively unchanged.

But all that doesn't surprise Tibbits-Nutt. The 128 Business Council's shuttle buses are moving commuters from all points of the compass to companies along the highway corridor, she noted.

"A lot of people are coming from Boston and Cambridge and Somerville," Tibbits-Nutt said. "You are also seeing people from Western Massachusetts, and South and North Shore. People are definitely moving out a little bit."

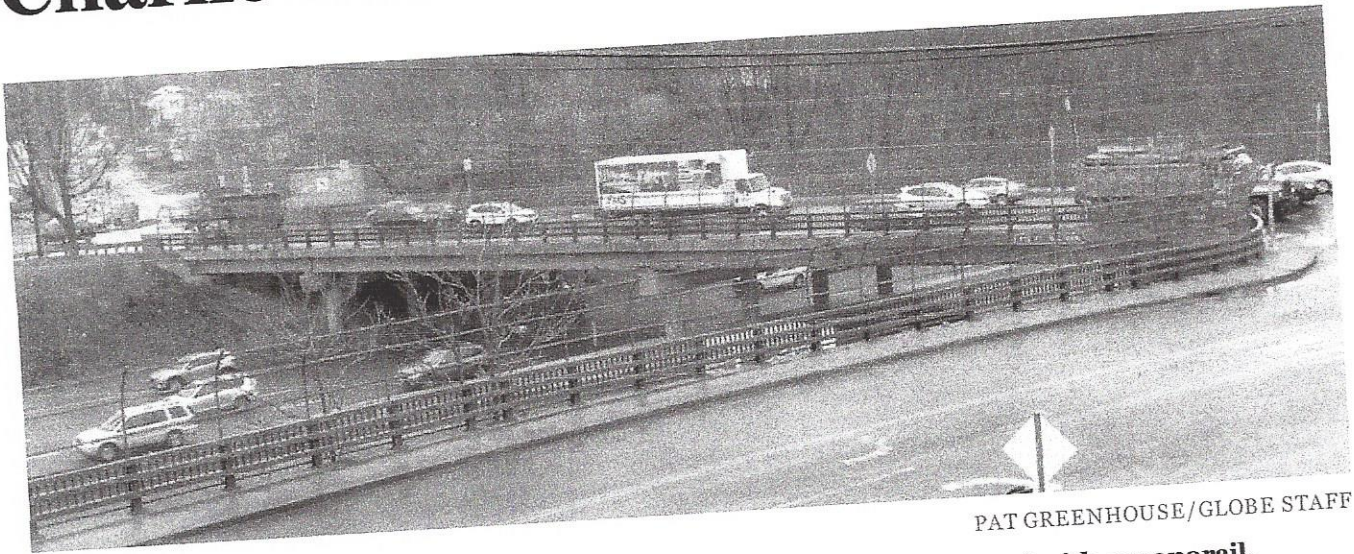
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Brockton, Lawrence, Waltham have development wish list for Charlie Baker



PAT GREENHOUSE/GLOBE STAFF

Congestion on Route 128 and intersecting streets in Waltham could be eased with a monorail, according to Mayor Jeannette McCarthy.

By Steven A. Rosenberg | GLOBE STAFF JANUARY 04, 2015

Lawrence wants the state to spend \$70 million to help build a new police station and training academy.

Brockton needs millions from Beacon Hill for a new public safety building and to change its one-way Main Street traffic back to two ways.

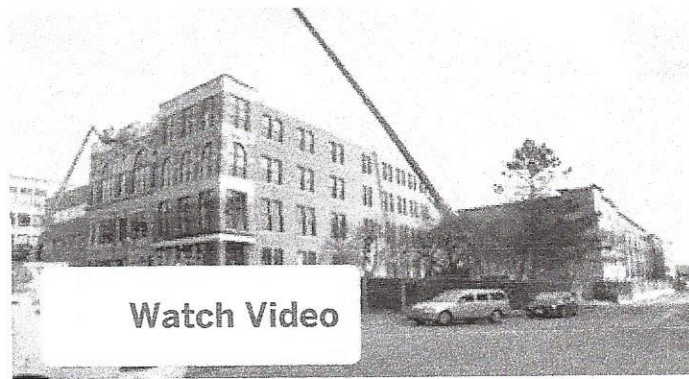
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Waltham has asked the state to build a public transportation monorail along Route 128 and a new bridge over the highway that can handle more cars.

As Governor-elect Charlie Baker prepares to take the oath of office on Thursday, mayors of the three cities are preparing wish lists for the new administration. City leaders have high hopes for Baker, whose campaign promises included no cuts to local aid and developing contracts with cities that specify state-local collaboration.

Baker's first major appointment to his inner circle was Jay Ash, the Chelsea city manager who will lead the state's housing and economic development agency with Gloucester Mayor Carolyn Kirk as his deputy. Ash declined to be interviewed for this article.

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Needs in development

New administration can expect wide debate on charter schools, aid, curriculum issues

Baker faces suburban transit projects and short funds

On the surface, the three cities — Waltham, Brockton, and Lawrence — would seem to have a lot in common. Brockton built its reputation as a shoe manufacturing capital; Waltham made watches; Lawrence's massive mills along the Merrimack River produced textiles.

But as their mills and factories closed in the last century, the city's downtowns changed in different ways.

Waltham, boosted by its location alongside Route 128, has flourished. Its hills overlooking the highway are now dotted with office parks and high-tech companies, and its downtown is filled with restaurants and luxury apartments.

Meanwhile, Brockton and Lawrence have struggled, with their downtowns marked by vacant storefronts and empty lots. While the two cities have tried to lure developers to build housing and open new businesses, their leaders say aid from the state is key to any recovery.



GEORGE RIZER FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

One-way traffic on Main Street in Brockton would be converted to two-way to improve access to the center of the city.

“Any mayor is going to tell you that we need unrestricted local aid, because we can’t pay our bills. We absolutely need more funding,” said Brockton Mayor Bill Carpenter, who has been on the job for a year and envisions a thriving downtown in the near future.

Carpenter said he is pleased with the Patrick administration’s grants to Brockton over the last eight years. Recent big-ticket items include a \$27.4 million commitment to construct a health sciences building at Massasoit Community College and a \$21.5

million grant to renovate a downtown Main Street building to house a satellite college campus for the University of Massachusetts Boston, Massasoit, and Bridgewater State University.

In addition, MassDevelopment, the state's finance and development authority, recently invested \$26 million in housing and health center projects in downtown Brockton through tax-exempt bonds and tax credits.

As Baker prepares to take office, Carpenter is preparing to pitch the new governor more projects proposed for Brockton's downtown. Two of his biggest priorities are making Main Street two-way to improve traffic flow and adding a public safety building that would house police and fire personnel serving the city's 94,000 residents.



JOHN BLANDING/GLOBE STAFF

An alley near 431 Essex St. in Lawrence will be cleaned up to link the Northern Essex Community College campus and downtown.

"We need to lobby effectively; we need to make a strong argument," Carpenter said.

While department stores such as Almy's and Kresge's are just a memory on Main Street, John Merian said he believes downtown Brockton is poised for redevelopment. Merian grew up there, owns a tuxedo shop on Main Street, and is chairman of Brockton 21st Century Corporation, which works with the city to stimulate economic growth.

“We want people to live here and have a good experience, and businesses to stay, and new businesses to come,” Merian said.

In Lawrence, the state committed \$90 million over the last eight years toward grants, tax credit programs, bonds, studies, and other subsidies, including a \$3.9 million project to repave and upgrade Merrimack Street this year. This spring, the city also will use a \$900,000 grant to beautify an Essex Street alleyway that connects Northern Essex Community College to the downtown. Last January, the college opened a \$27.4 million health and technology center.

Lawrence Mayor Dan Rivera said the state grants received during the Patrick administration helped bring stability to a city of nearly 78,000 that has the highest unemployment rate in the state — 11 percent — more than double the state average of 5.2 percent.

With many of its historic mills either partially used or vacant, Rivera said he believes new businesses will choose to come to Lawrence, where rents are cheaper than other nearby cities and an eager workforce awaits. For Rivera, though, any new development and state aid is tied to the process of changing the city’s perception as an unsafe place to visit or do business.

Public safety is Rivera’s main priority these days. Last month, the state gave Lawrence \$1 million to help pay the salaries of 10 new police officers — some of whom will walk a beat in the city’s downtown.

As soon as Baker takes office, Rivera will seek to persuade him to fund a new police station and training academy that would cost \$70 million to build. The facility would replace the city’s existing station and also connect to a police training academy that would serve as an educational hub for new officers throughout New England. The proposed facility would be built across from the new Northern Essex campus and would be run by the city, the college, and the state.

“We hope to start on it next year if we can get some money,” Rivera said.

Waltham Mayor Jeannette McCarthy has been spending a lot of time along Route 128 lately, where a \$4 million improvement project was completed this year. She is convinced more than ever the state needs to find a way to get more cars off the highway while also keeping the traffic flowing.

As president of the Massachusetts Mayors' Association, she recently pitched Baker the idea of creating a monorail for the MBTA and the commuter rail that would run along the center of Route 128 with stops in Burlington, Waltham, and Westwood.

"I think long-term, it has to be part of their plan. If Disney can do it, we can do it," said McCarthy, who envisions a monorail station at the intersection of routes 20 and 117.

She also is lobbying the state to build a five-lane bridge at the same intersection that would accommodate the increased traffic from office parks, Route 128, and those who want to shop at the new Market Basket mall on 119 acres formerly occupied by Polaroid. To date, 280,000 square feet of retail space has been developed at that location, and there is the potential to build another 1 million square feet for businesses.

To get to the shopping center these days, motorists have to drive through a maze of back roads or enter alongside Route 128 on the existing bridge over the highway, which is choked with traffic.

With an unemployment rate of 4.1 percent, Waltham has done a good job of putting its 62,000 residents to work. But McCarthy said she wants more.

"We have tremendous growth here, but my goal as mayor is to try to keep the downtown vital, to keep 128 vital, and to also protect the neighborhoods," she said.

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