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Reemergence of the 21st Century Massachusetts Gateway City: The Role of Commuter Rail Connectivity in Improving Employment Opportunity and Access

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Reemergence of the 21st Century Massachusetts Gateway City:  
The Role of Commuter Rail Connectivity in  
Improving Employment Opportunity and Access

An assessment of proposed South Coast Rail integration strategies  
to maximize economic development in  
Fall River, Massachusetts

A Master’s Research Project

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Abstract

The South Coast Rail is a proposed transit infrastructure upgrade project that is intended to provide affordable Commuter Rail connectivity from Boston, Massachusetts to the South Coast Region communities of Fall River, New Bedford, and Taunton. State and regional policy makers have debated the practicality of this project over the last 25 years while the estimated project cost reached $2.2 billion in 2013. The most fundamental benefit of this proposed project is improved economic stability in the South Coast Region in the form of increased access to employment opportunities, local industrial development, and expanded municipal tax revenue.

Increasingly, public transit nodes like Commuter Rail stations are becoming ideal sites for concentrated development, both commercial and residential, with the intent of clustering amenities and promoting more efficient use of urban land. Massachusetts Gateway Cities like Fall River have emerged as model communities to encourage this concentrated development around public transit, often referred to as “Smart Growth”, due to their sizable populations and often underutilized infrastructure.

This research examines the relationship between Massachusetts Gateway City employment patterns and Commuter Rail transit service through the analysis of employment related statistics and spatial assessment of demographic trends around transit station sites. This evaluation is intended to support South Coast Rail planning strategies in order to maximize the positive economic impact of public transit improvement for the city of Fall River, Massachusetts.
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Summary of Research Findings

The revitalization of Gateway Cities is viewed as a key strategy to enhance Massachusetts’ overall prosperity moving forward in the 21st Century by diversifying the Commonwealth’s economy, both by industry type and geographic location, and by improving the quality of life for many low and moderate-income individuals who reside in these former industrial communities. Massachusetts investment in this strategy is underscored by innovative support initiatives like Gateway Plus Action Grants, the Economic Development Incentive Program, the Massachusetts Department of Transportation’s “21st Century Transportation Plan”, and the Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development’s “Choosing to Compete in the 21st Century – Economic Development Plan.”

These diverse support mechanisms allow many Massachusetts Gateway Cities to tailor their respective revitalization strategies to specific local needs, however it is often challenging to determine the most appropriate initiation point, and accompanying state support program, that may serve as the best catalyst for subsequent private investment that is so critical to achieving sustained economic and cultural revitalization for Massachusetts Gateway Cities.

This challenge is exemplified by the City of Fall River, Massachusetts, which is debating the level of impact that new Commuter Rail transit service may have in improving resident employment opportunity and access, and whether or not alternative neighborhood-specific investment may be a more effective revitalization strategy.

The following analysis indicates that the presence of Commuter Rail transit service coincides with less dramatic job loss in Massachusetts Gateway Cities over the last decade, but is not an effective catalyst for sustainable local economic development unless it is accompanied by municipal planning actions that are specifically aimed to capitalize on activity generated by new public transportation systems. Additionally, new Commuter Rail transit stations present a high potential in terms of displacing local residents who are the intended beneficiaries of expanded transit service, and this service often disproportionately improves access to knowledge industry employment that may not be appropriate for many existing Gateway City residents, particularly those that are in closest proximity to Commuter Rail station locations.
For the city of Fall River specifically, regional bus service and improved public transit access to the neighboring city of Providence, RI should receive more attention during transit improvement planning, as these priorities more closely align with employment patterns displayed by existing city residents. Support for locally owned businesses around existing and new public transit nodes should also be a critical area of focus during transit improvement planning because it has the ability to capture and retain outside buying power and effectively increases municipal tax revenue.

Ultimately, effective Commuter Rail transit service must be bookended by destination locations if Gateway Cities, and Commuter Rail service itself, are to prosper. This mutually beneficial model is displayed in communities like Worcester, Lawrence, and Brockton, MA, and can exist in Fall River if city representatives more actively demand appropriate local improvement that is enhanced by Commuter Rail transit service. Thriving Gateway Cities exist outside of the Commonwealth’s Commuter Rail network just as ineffective and underutilized Commuter Rail stations exist within it. This is an important reality for Fall River stakeholders to remember when debating community revitalization strategies moving forward.

**Overview of the South Coast Rail Extension**

The South Coast Rail is a proposed public transportation project that will extend Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) Commuter Rail service from South Station in downtown Boston to the South Coast of Massachusetts. This proposed project is intended to provide affordable and reliable Commuter Rail service to the only three cities that contain over 35,000 residents, and are within 50 miles of Boston, that do not currently have access to the Commonwealth’s Commuter Rail network (Fall River, New Bedford, Taunton).

Existing MBTA Commuter Rail service reaches Providence, RI to the west of the South Coast region, and Lakeville, MA to the northeast (*Figure 1*). The South Coast Rail project calls for the extension of Commuter Rail service from Stoughton, MA directly to this underserved region. In order to achieve this extension, the Massachusetts Executive Office of Transportation and Public Works (MassEOT), in collaboration with the MBTA and three regional planning agencies,
intends to construct 10 new rail stations, upgrade and reconstruct existing track infrastructure, improve the capacity of 45 bridges, and enhance 46 railroad at-grade crossings (*Massachusetts Executive Office of Transportation 2009*).

Although the South Coast Rail extension has remained in the proposal phase for nearly 25 years, the Massachusetts House of Representatives unanimously voted to authorize $2.2 billion for project funding in January of 2014 (*Holtzman 2014*). This recent push, led by Governor Deval Patrick, greatly supports ongoing technical assistance and infrastructure related funding that has incrementally improved preparation for an active Commuter Rail corridor to the South Coast Region.

Many supporters of the proposed rail extension cite economic improvement and transit equity for South Coast residents, while opposing parties frequently reference limited ridership estimates and overlooked local solutions to economic instability (*Stergios 2013; Seelye 2013*).

Regardless of the long-standing debate surrounding the potential impact of the South Coast Rail extension, MassEOT maintains clear expectations that continue to drive this project forward. The agency’s anticipated benefits upon completion of this large infrastructure project include:

- An improved economy in southeastern Massachusetts as a result of new jobs in the region
- The creation of immediate employment opportunities associated with project construction
- The improvement of older industrial cities that are struggling with high unemployment and disinvestment
• Reduced environmental degradation as a result of decreased automobile usage, and the integration of energy efficiency and renewable energy technology into project design
• The preservation of natural resources by limiting the need for expanded land use
• Increased access to Boston area jobs and services for current South Coast residents
• Increased access to affordable housing, located in the South Coast Region, for Boston area workers
• More equitable access to the state’s Commuter Rail network, particularly for the cities of Fall River and New Bedford

For the purpose of this research project, the relationship between MBTA Commuter Rail service and employment opportunity for South Coast residents is the primary point of examination.

MassEOT anticipates that this project will directly contribute to 3,800 new jobs by 2030, with 2/3 locating in the South Coast Region and 1/3 near Boston. The majority of this projected job increase is expected to be in Professional, Scientific, Design, and Technical Industries (NAICS 54). Additional local jobs are expected as a result of expanded commercial activity and increased private investment for the region (Massachusetts Executive Office of Transportation 2009).

Two rail station sites are proposed for the city of Fall River under this MassEOT vision. Depot Station is a multi-modal rail and bus facility that will serve as the primary point of Commuter Rail access for area residents. Station plans call for an energy efficient parking facility with surrounding residential development, improved area greenspace, and increased pedestrian activity (Figure 2). This site currently provides limited commercial activity but is conveniently situated alongside the city’s scenic waterfront.

Issue

The proposed South Coast Rail extension faces a variety of obstacles from project funding and stakeholder collaboration to the realistic return on this large-scale public investment in transit infrastructure. This anticipated return on investment often takes the form of regional economic impact associated with affordable public transit to the Boston area’s strong economy. Pro South
Coast Rail extension discussions invariably focus on job creation and access within a region that has experienced some of the most significant job loss in the Commonwealth over the last ten years. Secondarily, potential public return on investment often references local neighborhood stabilization around specific Commuter Rail station sites, in the form of dense, mixed use development. The planning field as a whole, and Massachusetts policy makers, has adopted this balance of economic development and compact growth patterns as the ideal method to achieve modern community revitalization, and subsequent public funding available to Massachusetts Gateway Cities aligns with this vision.

It is common for state level policy and “innovative” planning practices to influence local strategies that are intended to improve communities both economically and socially. The problem that arises with this top down strategy is the propensity for duplicative and prescriptive practices to emerge that are entirely removed from ground level issues that are occurring in communities like Fall River. Massachusetts funding streams and incentives may be committed to the improvement of public parks, infrastructure upgrades, mixed-use development, and transit-oriented development, so Massachusetts communities, particularly those that struggle to attract private investment, understandably assume that these strategies should be incorporated into their local improvement efforts. Additionally, the competitive nature of these funding opportunities has the potential to create an environment in which applicant communities are pressed to adopt a
reactive model for community improvement that is contingent upon incoming funding as opposed to a proactive and comprehensive model that is also a primary tenant of modern planning theory.

The South Coast Region is also a proud, blue-collar area that has received information about a potential South Coast Rail for almost 25 years while existing rail lines are improved and extended across Massachusetts and neighboring Rhode Island. The topic has expanded well beyond an economic revitalization strategy, and has become a political dividing point in which many South Coast residents view the project as an equity issue just as much as an economic development issue. At this point, the project has become a symbolic representation of an underserved region that is pushing for state attention that is all too often focused elsewhere.

This project context exemplifies how planning strategies can easily become an overly political endeavor that loses sight of local-scale community needs and, perhaps more importantly, a community’s capacity to creatively address those needs. Fall River maintains a variety of feasible long-term planning goals, but the emotional component associated with the South Coast Rail can easily fostered a common perception that this fluctuating project has the potential to solve more Fall River community challenges than it may actually be able to deliver upon completion. Ultimately, the proposed South Coast Rail extension has been lauded as a viable solution to improve Fall River’s ongoing economic instability, but as of yet, it remains unclear as to how this new MBTA Commuter Rail service specifically relates to resident employment patterns and fits the transit needs of South Coast residents who are seeking improved employment.

**Purpose**

This research project is intended to examine the relationship between MBTA Commuter Rail service in Massachusetts and employment opportunity trends amongst local residents who live in proximity to Commuter Rail station sites. The multi-faceted nature of economic development does not often lend itself to the establishment of unilateral causal relationships, so it is unrealistic to assume that this research may result in definitive claims that new Commuter Rail access directly impacts local job creation. For this reason, it is far more feasible to examine if salient
and common patterns arise when comparing employment trends over time amongst Massachusetts communities that have varying degrees of access to Commuter Rail service.

This research will first establish if and how employment patterns within Massachusetts cities, that are similar to Fall River, differ based on access to Commuter Rail service. These findings should serve as a baseline to inform further examination that is intended to discern how residents frequently utilize and benefit from Commuter Rail service.

The Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) itself emphasizes the fact that Commuter Rail access alone cannot sustain positive economic growth, and therefore must be accompanied by surrounding planning efforts that are intended to maximize the impact of this potential community asset. Fall River community leaders have worked closely with relevant state agencies to determine how Commuter Rail transit may be effectively infused into ongoing community improvement strategies. This research is intended to provide additional insight in order to further inform these key stakeholder decisions as the proposed South Coast Rail extension continues to move forward (Massachusetts Executive Office of Transportation 2009).

Research Questions:

1. Do employment trends over the last 10 years vary significantly between Massachusetts communities that have access to MBTA Commuter Rail service and those that do not?

2. How have various Massachusetts communities attempted to incorporate MBTA Commuter Rail service into wider economic development planning?

Research Methodology

Massachusetts policy makers often refer to the Commonwealth’s older industrial cities as Gateway Cities. Under Massachusetts General Law 23A, section 3A, a Gateway City is defined as a municipality with a population between 35,000 and 250,000, a median household income that is below the state average, and a rate of higher education attainment that is also below the state average (Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development 2014). Although not
explicitly stated in these designation qualifications, almost all Massachusetts Gateway Cities are former industrial centers that are home to large immigrant and minority populations. As of 2013, Massachusetts has designated 26 municipalities as being Gateway Cities, including Fall River, New Bedford, and Taunton (Figure 3).

The purpose of this Gateway City designation is to establish common strategies and resources in terms of alleviating poverty, attracting investment, and improving the overall quality of life within these important urban centers throughout the Commonwealth (Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development 2014). Conveniently for this research, 14 of these cities maintain active Commuter Rail service within the community, while 12 of these cities do not. For these reasons, this Gateway City cohort serves as an insightful source for analysis when attempting to observe the relationship between Commuter Rail service and employment opportunity for urban Massachusetts residents who live outside of the greater Boston area.

These 26 Gateway Cities are ideal for this research project because they share similar traits and qualifications for specific state funding programs. The 14 cities that have access to Commuter Rail service provide a clear study group that is referred to as “Connected Cities”, and the 12
cities without Commuter Rail access serve as a control group that is referred to as “Disconnected Cities”.

**Phase I: Framing the Debate**

Research for this project was conducted in three distinct phases. The first phase consists of a review of relevant academic literature and project news coverage that is used to frame the debate surrounding the proposed South Coast Rail extension. Contemporary academic literature in this phase is used to provide a wider context regarding economic and social community impact associated with improved transit infrastructure and transit-oriented development strategies. Complementary analysis of state and local coverage of the proposed South Coast Rail extension is also critical in terms of documenting varying opinions of the project and, more specifically, who is voicing these particular opinions. This phase is necessary in terms of understanding how this proposed project is moving forward and how various stakeholders stand to benefit upon project completion.

**Phase II: Gateway City Employment Indicators (2000 – 2012)**

The second phase of research incorporates purely quantitative data into the previous social debate. United States Census Bureau data are utilized to examine how employment related indicators have changed amongst Gateway City residents from 2000-2012. These indicators include total population, unemployment rate, median household income, industry employment type, commute time to work, and public transit to work. The MBTA also produces bi-annual Ridership and Service Statistics (Blue Books) that provide data on the average number of daily Commuter Rail riders based on specific rail lines and individual station sites. This information has been limited to inbound ridership to Boston in the past, but expanded to include outbound ridership in 2013, largely in recognition of emerging interest in reducing the MBTA Commuter Rail transit system’s heavy reliance on the Boston area job market.

Ideally, these quantitative employment indicators will contribute to a baseline comparison between Disconnected and Connected Gateway Cities. According to MassEOT expectations,
employment trends amongst Disconnected City residents should lag behind those exhibited by Connected City residents. Both study and control group findings are compared to state and national trends in an effort to discern if any significant deviation from wider employment patterns is occurring within Massachusetts Gateway Cities. This second phase of research is not intended to determine causality, but rather to assess if there are significantly different employment patterns between these two groups of Gateway Cities from 2000-2012.

*Phase III: Spatial Assessment and Observations*

The third phase of research aims to complement preceding quantitative state level data with select local level spatial and qualitative analysis. Purely quantitative data has the potential to be misleading if not accompanied by an examination of ground level activity that is directly responsible for quantitative data change over time. This is particularly relevant when considering the benefit of a local Comuter Rail station asset that maintains a fixed geographic location.

Census Bureau employment indicators may suggest an overall increase in jobs and income within a particular Gateway City, but this improvement may not be evenly distributed amongst residents of that particular city. It is critical to first determine if Comuter Rail service is associated with increased access to jobs and, if so, then what particular segment of that local population stands to benefit the most from this increase in job access.

In order to examine this question in further detail, Phase II employment related change, and additional demographic change (race, age, family size) is observed in more detail for three specific Gateway Cities (Brockton, Fitchburg, Lawrence). The local distribution of this change across designated Census Tracts is assessed using Esri Geographic Information Systems (GIS). This mapping analysis visually displays city resident employment and demographic trends as they relate to Comuter Rail station proximity.

The third phase of research also includes Comuter Rail station site visits for these three Gateway City case studies. These site visits serve as an opportunity to observe how residents of
these respective cities are utilizing stations, and the surrounding area in order to access jobs. These observations are strictly focused on how MBTA Commuter Rail passengers access the station itself, the amount of people who are boarding and departing trains at the station, the demographics of people who are utilizing Commuter Rail service, local employment and commercial opportunities within walking distance of the station, and how the community has incorporated Commuter Rail transit into wider community improvement strategies.

The City of Fall River is specifically considered during all three phases of research. This particular attention is required in order to assess Fall River’s employment conditions as they relate to various Gateway Cities across the state, and to consider various approaches that the city may adopt in order to appropriately incorporate new public transit infrastructure into existing community improvement strategies.

**Framing the Debate**

**Contemporary Literature**

The public debate surrounding the proposed South Coast Rail offers a real time example of the ongoing examination of economic and social behavior associated with transit-oriented development that is occurring within the planning field as a whole. The field has experienced a renewed emphasis on dense village center design after witnessing the negative side effects of sprawling modernist design principles that dominated planning theory for much of the 20th Century. This return to more traditional planning models was largely championed by the New Urbanism movement of the late 20th Century, which encourages smaller-scale construction, shared community space, pedestrian access to services and amenities, and reduced vehicular dependency (*Katz, Scully & Bressi 2004*). This comprehensive theory sits at the crossroad between multiple planning specializations, and therefore generates much debate as to which particular specializations most effectively initiate positive economic growth and overall community revitalization.

The challenge that Massachusetts faces with the South Coast Rail, and MBTA Commuter Rail service in general, is how to successfully connect various nodes of New Urbanism in a mutually
beneficial manner. Boston is the economic and social centerpiece of Massachusetts, and is a prime example of New Urbanism principles, partly due to the fact that its basic layout is largely unchanged since the Colonial era. This conscious and subconscious primacy placed on the Boston area has resulted in infrastructure, political activity, and economic activity that are concentrated toward Boston, and surrounding communities must adapt to this dynamic. Gateway Cities face particular challenge when planning to succeed within this context because they are expected serve as county level centers for economic and social activity while also providing access to larger urban economic centers like Boston. MassInc., a leading Gateway City research institution, addresses this challenge by suggesting that Gateway Cities must revitalize at the local level and reconnect at the regional level in order to reemerge as high functioning centers for economic activity. In theory, this strategy is feasible but, in reality, Massachusetts Gateway Cities often lack the financial resources to achieve one of these expectations, let alone both (MassInc 2007).

MBTA Commuter Rail stations have emerged as potential opportunities to simultaneously address both of these expectations placed upon Gateway Cities, particularly those located in central and eastern portions of Massachusetts. These sites are often strategically located near Gateway City downtown areas and provide affordable public transit access to surrounding area employment opportunities. Although this method to enhance Gateway City improvement efforts has attracted recent financial support, again MassEOT acknowledges that rail service alone cannot sustain widespread economic development if not supported by local practices aimed at enhancing the positive impact of this asset. This leaves Gateway City leaders with the task of determining how to best incorporate Commuter Rail service into a wider economic development strategy in order to create more jobs locally and improved access to job opportunities regionally.

In deconstructing the primary principles of New Urbanism, Gateway City leaders must determine the appropriate balance of Economic Development Strategy, Transit-Oriented Development, and Local Place Making that will tailor incoming public transit funding to the employment needs of local Gateway City residents and employees.
**Economic Development Strategy**

Economic development theory, as it relates to the Gateway City challenge, typically focuses on one of three ways to improve local job, income, business, and municipal tax revenue growth. The first method is founded on an export-based model that emphasizes the local production of commodities that can be exported in order attract outside financial resources (*Jacobs 1984; Macbean 2011; Marshall 2013*). Gateway Cities were founded on this economic development model, as they relied heavily on the revenue from manufactured goods to employ residents and subsequently fund community improvements. Rail lines played a critical role in this form of economic development as they provided efficient distribution of locally made products to various regions throughout the country. Modern Gateway Cities often attempt to bolster this form of economic development by attracting new businesses through incentives, skilled labor, and affordable industrial or commercial space (*Shaffer, Deller & Marcouiller 2006; Breakstone 2010*).

The second method to promote economic development focuses primarily on the retention and expansion of existing businesses within a community. Naturally, if existing businesses improve, whether a result of sound business planning or community support, new employment opportunities will be made available to local residents. Common Gateway City techniques to improve this aspect of local economic development include small business technical assistance, the development of small business incubators, and professional development training for local residents (*Eisinger 1995; De Grip & Sauermann 2013; Lannan 2014; Smith 2010*).

The final approach to modern economic development emphasizes collaboration amongst businesses located within and across communities. Complementary businesses, that are located in close proximity, are thought to enhance the overall economic strength of a geographic area (*Cumbers & MacKinnon 2004; Marquez, Ramajo & Hewings 2003*). Many Gateway Cities previously exemplify this cohesive clustering as various community businesses benefited from, and enhanced the productivity of, larger industrial anchors of the local economy (*Center for Popular Economics 2010; Isserman 2000; Stephens & McCauley 2012*).

Although greater Boston is the primary focal point for economic activity within the state, Massachusetts Gateway Cities are increasingly more attractive for potential emerging business
that cannot afford the costs associated with starting and maintaining a business in that area (Forman & Larson 2014). Gateway City economic development, of any three forms, has the ability to enhance the local quality of life by providing direct jobs and increasing the community’s overall property tax revenue. Lawrence and Lowell are commonly referenced examples of Gateway Cities that have redeveloped underutilized commercial and industrial space like the Ayer Mill and the Hamilton Canal District in an effort to attract new business spill over from the greater Boston region (Hoyte & Leroux 2007; Lannan 2014). Relocating businesses, in addition to new small businesses, ultimately provide job opportunities for local residents and attract outside financial resources through the distribution of locally made products.

Economic development is often cited as the most fundamental process to improve and sustain local employment opportunity. In any capitalist system, financial resources are of critical importance for reliable employment and social mobility. Public funding is often provided to initiate economic development processes, but sustainable economic development must be maintained through subsequent free market forces (Isserman 2000; Weeden & Grusky 2014).

Opposition to economic development as the primary approach to achieve stable employment opportunity most frequently highlights a disregard for social impacts and the propensity for free market failure. If decisions are made purely based on financial outcomes, as is the case for many criticized corporations, social consideration can be reasoned away as being irrelevant to a clear financial bottom line (Weeden & Grusky 2014; Acemoglu & Robinson 2013). Additionally, modern urban revitalization itself emerged as a public response to free market failures. Public intervention was required to repair communities that were not capable of attracting and retaining the private investment that ultimately contributes to more employment opportunity (Newman & Ashton 2013). Free market forces that shifted manufacturing jobs away from Gateway Cities, and ushered in a modern wave of “knowledge industry” employment around Boston, directly resulted in the economic failure that many Gateway Cities still have not entirely recovered from. With this relatively recent free market impact in mind, it is challenging to fully endorse economic development as the primary approach to long-term Gateway City improvement without considering the greater social implications that may result from this strategy (Leit 2006).
Transit-Oriented Development (TOD)

Contemporary literature regarding transit-oriented development has contributed to recent economic discussions that shift away from more traditional debates between various localized methods to improve employment opportunity. Regional connectivity, specifically transit-oriented development, emerged in the late 20th Century as an economic development strategy that promotes opportunities for more employment stability, through improved public transit accessibility. The principles of transit-oriented development promote compact, generally mixed-use development at or near transit stops to encourage walking and transit use (Anderson & Forbes 2011). With this emerging approach, both local residents and businesses are provided the flexibility to locate in strategically beneficial areas without sacrificing market access (Alstadt & Weisbrod 2011). Moderate-income residents can effectively live in more affordable locations with minimal impact on potential income earnings and commuting expenses. This type of labor market is a relatively new phenomenon that has garnered widespread recent analysis (Wood et al. 2014; Olaru & Smith 2011; Anderson & Forbes 2011).

Employment opportunity that is less limited by physical location can produce a market environment that is diverse and more easily adapted (Cervero 2004). Historically, Gateway Cities were known for relatively specific industries that made them more vulnerable to market fluctuation. Robert Cervero of the University of California, Berkeley contemplates the potential impact of this dynamic when he discusses how transit-oriented development does potentially increase economic stability through diversity, but in such a way that can diminish local authority. More access to more jobs is hard to oppose, but Gateway City dependence on outside job markets presents new threats to the development of a sustainable local economy (Cervero 2013).

MassINC. research indicates that improved transit service displays a positive correlation with local public transportation ridership (MassINC. 2013). If rail service is improved, then more residents are likely to utilize this service. Similar research findings also suggests that shorter, and more affordable, public transit commutes can result in more hours worked, more time spent with families, and decreased living costs (Malekafzali & Bergstrom 2011).
These findings are particularly interesting when considering the proposed South Coast Rail extension. Two of the explicit goals of extended rail service are affordable access to the Boston area for current South Coast residents, and more affordable housing opportunities for Boston area employees. Essentially, potential employees who cannot afford to live in the greater Boston area can still access the area’s strong job market. The difficulty with this argument is steadily increasing MBTA ridership fares. The travel time and expense required for a Fall River resident to commute to the Boston area may conceivably nullify the affordable cost of living benefit that is associated with the South Coast Region to begin with. MassEOT projections estimate a round trip travel time of approximately 2 ½ hours from Fall River to South Station, with a ticket fare of $20 (Massachusetts Executive Office of Transportation 2009).

Although transit-oriented development has increased in popularity over the past decade, one major critique of this style of growth is the threat to social equity. MBTA Commuter Rail stations are frequently situated in portions of Gateway Cities that tend to have higher minority and moderate-income populations as a result of historic industrial uses and labor related housing associated with rail infrastructure (Forman & Koch 2012). This segment of a Gateway City population may therefore benefit the least from an asset that is located within their own neighborhood, or may even be priced out of their neighborhood all together due to increased land value that often results from active Commuter Rail service (Duncan 2011; Pendell, Gainsborough & Lowe 2012).

Somerville, MA is a leading Massachusetts City in terms of assessing displacement potential around proposed public transit stations, and exploring zoning techniques intended to limit this displacement. The movement of transit-dependent populations away from new transit stations not only decreases access to employment opportunities for these specific residents, but also diminishes overall transit ridership. Proposed techniques to limit this displacement around new transit stations in Somerville include variances that require a higher percentage of affordable housing units for all new residential development projects, and community input regarding new amenities that cater to the needs of existing residence more so than incoming commuters (Metropolitan Area Planning Council 2014).
Local employment related investment might also suffer within a Gateway City neighborhood that has attracted significant funding to improve transit related infrastructure. Effectively, residents utilize their transit-oriented neighborhood as a means to leave that physical space entirely. This may place less community value on the area surrounding a transit station as a viable location for economic development and job creation (Chatman & Noland 2013).

Attleboro, MA and Haverhill, MA are prime Gateway City examples of this unintended outcome that can occur following extensive investment in transit infrastructure upgrades. These station sites experience high levels of auto traffic during rush hours but remain as vast and unused parking facilities during daytime hours. Even more concerning is the fact that these local economies struggle to adequately capture this daily influx of buying power due to a lack of surrounding commercial activity. A rail station has the potential to remain as a feeder site that primarily benefits the greater Boston area if it is not accompanied by local economic development and job creation (Chatman & Noland 2013). Rail lines that are bookended by destination locations not only serve to decentralize state dependence on the greater Boston economy, but also present an opportunity to bolster struggling MBTA Commuter Rail ridership and profits.

**Local Place Making**

Place Making is an approach to urban revitalization that focuses less on economic impact motivations for development, and shifts primary importance toward social input and interaction that can result from changing urban spaces (Kent, 2008). Advocates for local Place Making as a process to improve the social and cultural experience that can be generated by a physical space almost always build upon the theories of Camillo Sitte, who observed organic interaction and walkability in Europe, William Whyte, who observed human behavior in urban spaces around the world during the mid-1900’s, and Jane Jacobs, who advocated against large-scale modernist development in New York during the later-1900’s (Sitte 1889; Whyte, 1943; Jacobs, 1961). These scholars are among the first planning theorists who incorporate social science within a field that was previously dominated by free market economics and physical design. Current leaders in the push for better Place Making frequently argue that physical development that does not
adequately preserve the local character and creativity of a specific area will be unsuccessful in attracting the necessary level of resident activity to sustain long-term economic growth (Faulk, 2006; Hoyte & Leroux 2007; Alexander, 1979). “Whenever and wherever societies have flourished and prospered rather than stagnated and decayed, creative and workable cities have been at the core of the phenomenon” (Jacobs, 1961).

Andre Leroux, of the Massachusetts Smart Growth Alliance, even claims that some of the most unique Place Making and economic development activity tend to take place in former industrial cities that have been somewhat disconnected from the modern global economy (Hoyt & Leroux, 2007). The Place Making revitalization strategy ultimately aims to rework public spaces to primarily reflect the needs and desires of local residents. It is thought that active utilization of a public space must be achieved before any long-term improvement can gain traction. Prescriptive revitalization techniques that have been adopted by the planning field can be placed on a physical space, but will remain as an ineffective use of public and private investment if it is not fully endorsed by the community that will ultimately use the space on a regular basis (Kent, 2008).

Although it is an idealistic notion to focus on overall social well being as an important contributor to community stabilization, the unavoidable importance of economics is the most common point of contention for scholars who do not fully embrace the Place Making criteria as a feasible model to revitalize Massachusetts Gateway Cities. An improved quality of life is an admirable goal, but aesthetics and an enriched sense of community are not always prosperous endeavors (Mcgahey & Vey 2008; Sander 2003). The expense of projects that are intended to enhance local Place Making also tend to vary greatly and, more often than not, the full impact of these types of projects is not fully quantifiable. An improved sense of place is something that can be perceived but it is far more challenging to prove, target, and replicate. Many community-based organizations within Gateway Cities like New Bedford and Pittsfield have adopted a double bottom line mission that recognizes the need for simultaneous economic and social improvement. These goals are not mutually exclusive, but it is challenging to determine how this balance can be realistically maintained (Massachusetts Association of Community Development Corporations, 2012; Forman & Creighton, 2012).

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1 Quote from The Death and Life of Great American Cities by Jane Jacobs. Pg. 6
Conclusion

Massachusetts Gateway Cities rose to prominence in the 19th Century as a result of the main principles of economic development theory. Natural river resources provided an affordable source of energy to fuel industrial expansion and provide a variety of employment opportunity (Dunwell 1978). Private investment flooded Gateway Cities throughout the state in order to capitalize on new technology and affordable operating costs for businesses. These same Gateway City assets exist today, but the continual free market search for increased profits has significantly reduced the amount of industrial anchors within these communities. A lack of local high-wage jobs associated with skilled labor and knowledge industry employment has resulted in Gateway City populations that are more reliant on service industry employment (MassINC. 2007). These types of jobs typically offer lower pay, inconsistent hours, and minimal benefits that are critical to long-term economic stability. Interestingly, medical and education related employment has experienced a resurgence in many Gateway Cities including Springfield and Worcester. Although these public institutions provide adequate employment opportunity, they are often exempt from local property taxes and, all too often, employees are not local residents themselves (Badger 2013).

Transit-oriented development has emerged as a possible strategy to alleviate the vulnerability associated with more locally focused economic development efforts. Valid arguments can be made both in favor and opposed to the long-term benefits of transit-oriented development. Although this strategy has been lauded by planning theorists and academics as a viable solution to employment access inequity, as well as environmental preservation, the real world results of this strategy remain ongoing. Existing research concerning the community impact of public transit nodes primarily examines shorter transportation systems like subways and buses as opposed to regional Commuter Rail systems. Additionally, this analysis appears to frequently focus on topics related to ridership numbers, resident displacement, and property value fluctuation. Rarely do we see analysis of regional employment access and local job creation for current residents as a result of new public transportation stations.

Firmly established notions regarding traditional forms of economic development and job creation have shaped our understanding of how and why Gateway City’s continue to struggle with
poverty and unemployment. Although the principles of transit-oriented development have emerged as a strategy to address the shortcomings of free-market driven economic development, the long-term impact, particularly concerning low and moderate-income Gateway City residents, remains to be an unknown variable. This theoretical uncertainty is perfectly encapsulated by the debate unfolding around the proposed South Coast Rail extension. State agencies and political leaders discuss this Commuter Rail expansion as a necessary step to drive Massachusetts forward as a 21st Century economy, but research organizations and local residents are still slow to fully embrace this investment as a means to improve their daily access to employment and overall economic stability.

**Fall River Challenges**

The city of Fall River is situated in southern Bristol County and is the tenth most populated city in the Commonwealth with approximately 89,000 residents. The city is located 15 miles east of Providence, RI and 50 miles south of Boston. Like all Massachusetts Gateway Cities, Fall River has an extensive history of textile industries that were supported by hydropower from the Quequechan River and strategic access to both rail and ocean based shipping. These historic assets are matched by strong social and cultural traditions that were established by European immigrants that began to take advantage of the city’s expanding employment opportunity as early as 1700 (*City of Fall River 2010*).

The city maintains a diverse population that is densely located, but struggles with unemployment rates that have been higher than regional, state, and national averages for several decades (*ibid*). Fall River has also lost more local jobs over the last ten years than any other Gateway City within the Commonwealth. These negative Fall River employment trends are matched by the second lowest median household income of all Massachusetts Gateway Cities, and the shortest commute time to work amongst all Gateway Cities located east of Worcester. Of Fall River’s 37,471 labor force participants in 2010, approximately 47% worked within the city limits. This is a significantly higher percentage than the majority of Massachusetts Gateway Cities that maintain Commuter Rail access, but this local Fall River employment has declined by nearly 3,000 jobs since 2000. This trend increasingly forces Fall River residents to seek employment in
other areas throughout the region, with limited public transit access to these areas. The city of Fall River has experienced steady population decline since 1930 as a result of these negative employment opportunity trends, with a 3.4% decrease from 2000 to 2010 (United States Census Bureau 2010).

These unfavorable economic indicators are often attributed to wider Bristol County trends, particularly when seeking evidence to support the region’s need to connect to the Commonwealth’s Commuter Rail network. Although this is a convenient argument, it may not be supported when considering employment trends in the neighboring Bristol County cities of Attleboro and New Bedford. Attleboro, which provides Commuter Rail access, displays comparable recent job loss to Fall River, while New Bedford, which does not provide Commuter Rail access, has experienced positive job growth from 2000 to 2010. These neighboring cities are a narrow comparative group, but certainly present employment trends that suggest that the correlation between Commuter Rail service and improved employment opportunity may not be as significant as MassEOT literature may suggest, and South Coast residents may anticipate.

Despite these challenges, the city continues to take extreme pride in its culture and place as an historic tourist destination. Recent city master plans have identified specific community goals that include: Neighborhood stabilization through housing and streetscape improvements, Sustainability through investment in renewable energy initiatives and improved public transportation, Economic Development through job training programs and downtown revitalization, and Cultural Preservation through the rehabilitation of historic structures and promotion of historic districts (City of Fall River 2010). It is the hope that the proposed South Coast Rail extension will support these established community goals, but the high profile of this state funded project does have the potential to shift attention away from conversant local improvement strategies in favor of a more prescriptive state initiated strategy.
South Coast Rail Extension Project Promotion & Debate

Public assessment and discussion of the proposed South Coast Rail extension most frequently arises in one of three forms. As project leader, MassEOT is the primary producer of literature and quantitative assessment regarding the anticipated impacts of Commuter Rail service to the South Coast region. In general, this agency focuses almost exclusively on the positive potential of the proposed rail extension, and distributes materials that serve to both promote project details and inform local stakeholders. Secondary media coverage regarding South Coast Rail progress is also common amongst local print and television based outlets within the greater Fall River/New Bedford area. The Fall River Herald Newspaper and Providence WPRI 12 News serve as principle resources for residents seeking project updates, while Boston based media outlets tend to highlight the project whenever major funding or milestones are achieved. These South Coast area news resources often discuss the rail extension with tempered excitement, and are easily accessibly to area residents, particularly those who may not frequently engage in the South Coast Rail public planning process.

The final, and least common, form of project coverage is produced by independent research entities like MassInc. and the Pioneer Institute. These entities promote themselves as bi-partisan organizations that engage in strategic research and programs in order to inform policy decisions in Massachusetts. Both of these organizations contribute somewhat more impartial perspectives during this ongoing project discourse, with the Pioneer Institute taking a more hard line stance in support of locally targeted alternatives to this heavy focus on Commuter Rail expansion, including improved regional bus service and neighborhood economic development incentives.

These various methods for disseminating South Coast Rail extension information are interesting to consider because they each provide unique perspectives that represent the wider debate surrounding the project itself. Additionally, the particular process required in accessing this assorted information results in clear target audiences that may only receive narrow coverage of a complex debate. Overall transparency is perhaps a strength for each of these respective outlets, but audience preference and engagement ultimately dictates how stakeholders perceive the appropriateness of the proposed South Coast Rail extension as a viable tool to improve the economic outlook for the South Coast Region.
The Massachusetts Executive Office of Transportation and Public Works’ 2009 *South Coast Rail Economic Development and Land Use Corridor Plan* serves as the culmination of an extensive public due diligence effort to shape a coherent vision for corridor development through the year 2030. This document was formed over an 18-month period in which state and regional practitioners worked closely with South Coast representatives through 100+ public meetings. The plan calls for the clustering of jobs and housing around new transit stations that will be strategically located within existing neighborhoods that provide a distinct urban character. This strategy is intended to preserve the natural environment within the South Coast Region while simultaneously targeting economic development efforts toward the region’s population centers (Figure 4). This planning process is held up as the first example of successful integration of transportation investment and economic and land use development on a regional scale in Massachusetts. This public document is made available on the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) website, and is used as an informative tool for regional and local planning officials.

From a purely employment related standpoint, the corridor plan projects that new South Coast Commuter Rail service will directly contribute to 3,500 – 3,800 net new jobs for the region by 2030, which is a 5% increase over projected growth sans rail transit. One fourth (23%) of

*Figure 4 – South Coast Region Population Centers*

Source: MassDOT, 2012
these net new jobs are expected to be in Professional, Scientific, Design, and Technical Industries (NAICS 54). Common job types within this industry include legal services, information technology, accounting, engineering and architectural services, and research consulting. This particular industry is one of the fastest growing both nationally, and in Massachusetts, despite currently accounting for approximately 5% of total jobs within the South Coast Region (MassEOT 2009). Ancillary economic activity in the form of additional business sales, increased household incomes, and expanding property tax revenue are also projected benefits that are expected to see more significant increases due to Commuter Rail service according to MassEOT.

Another fundamental element of the South Coast Rail Economic Development and Land Use Corridor Plan consists of specific station site design and expanded residential and commercial use around these sites. Selected priority development station sites serve to relocate projected growth that may otherwise occur in more suburban areas throughout the region. This concentrated growth also promotes mixed-use development and increased resident activity that, in turn, attracts private investment. MassEOT references the fact that businesses and developers alike value active rail service even though they may not directly utilize it for daily commuting.
Commuter Rail station design and location also provide a critical opportunity for South Coast Rail project leaders to engage community members. Public feedback is important to inform overall project design, with the intent of addressing community needs while maintaining the existing character of the area (Figure 5). During various public meetings, Fall River residents frequently voiced concerns regarding connections between proposed Commuter Rail station sites and downtown Fall River, parking capacity, locally owned business development, and the station’s ability to serve as a gateway to this historic city. Despite these constructive resident comments, supplemental MassEOT project workshop documents clearly convey a sense of strong public support for new rail service, and the need to rapidly push this project forward (South Coast Rail 2010).

The MassEOT, along with a variety of collaborative state agencies, was able to produce a concise vision for economic development in the South Coast region that effectively compliments public rail transit corridor construction with this Economic Development and Land Use Corridor Plan. Although the creation of this comprehensive public document adequately provides project transparency and public participation, it should not be overlooked that these state agencies maintain a vested interest in the completion of this rail project. This document fulfills a promotional need as much as it fulfills an informational need. Furthermore, reasonable resident concern expressed during public meetings appears to only be addressed in a cursory fashion throughout MassEOT documents. Common comments are listed but not addressed in a manner that suggests how these concerns will be used to improve station design and economic development strategies.

These state agencies have engaged in extensive community outreach, but ultimately remain as the primary source for disseminating project information and serve as a single perspective in terms of anticipated long-term benefits of the proposed South Coast Rail.

Regional News Coverage

Local news coverage of the proposed South Coast Rail extension predominately offers overviews of project updates and opinions of the project from political leaders and area stakeholders (Figure 6). It is common to read summaries of community meeting discussion points in the Fall River
Herald Newspaper and watch snippets of political leaders expressing their support for the South Coast Rail on WRPI News 12. The frequency of coverage is typically cyclical, as the recent promise of significant project funding has floated the South Coast Rail back to the top of many area news outlets.

Despite this reoccurring coverage, it is interesting to observe the media proficiency in narrowing a news topic into its most basic form. The majority of Fall River news coverage almost exclusively associates new South Coast Rail service with new jobs, while other important points of consideration are left out of coverage entirely. A 2012 WRPI news story introduced the segment concerning the proposed South Coast Rail with the preface of, “Its all about Jobs” and proceeded to provide no information regarding how many jobs, where the jobs are located, what types of jobs these will be, and who are the intended recipients of these jobs (WRPI 2012). The only take away for a viewer watching this segment is that Commuter Rail service equals new jobs for the region.

In addition to promoting a direct causal relationship between Commuter Rail service and new jobs, local media coverage often incorporates divisive language in describing the process of bringing Commuter Rail service to the South Coast Region. News organizations understandably attempt to sensationalize stories as a means to attract interest, and South Coast Rail coverage is not exempt from this practice. Headlines like, “Meeting on South Coast Rail Project Update Sparks Heated Debate” (Holtzman 2014), “The Long and Winding Rail” (Salsberg 2013), and “South Coast State Senators Say They’ll ‘fight like hell’ for Rail” (Rios 2014) are common in local news coverage of the proposed project. The simplification of this important community opportunity into a single point of debate in which residents should either be in favor or opposed effectively
curtails constructive discourse concerning feasible strategies to improve employment opportunity for Fall River residents. This all or nothing approach to rail service has resulted in a clear target to achieve job creation, while short-term local solutions receive far less community discussion.

The use of cautious optimism is also a noticeable commonality amongst South Coast Rail news coverage. Frequently, positive progress will be discussed, but the story is concluded with unenthusiastic statements like, “We still have a long way to go (WRPI 2013).” There is almost a comedic attitude used in the delivery of these disclaimer statements. This activity reflects a general undertone that appears to capture the perspective of a large portion of South Coast residents. The South Coast Rail project timeline, combined with frequent political posturing, has the potential to dissuade local residents from actively participating in a process that is often more rhetoric than action.

Independent Research Organizations

In 2007, MassINC. and The Brookings Institution collaborated to conduct an extensive analysis of the economic landscape of Massachusetts and the role, or lack thereof, of Gateway Cities. The resulting Reconnecting Massachusetts Gateway Cities report depicts a distinct growth pattern of concentrated population and economic growth around Boston that is matched by aging, lower-income, and inconsistently served former industrial cities that are scattered across the Commonwealth. The report also highlights infrastructure, affordability, and diverse labor forces within Gateway Cities, and how these underutilized assets can serve to alleviate statewide economic dependence on the greater Boston region. Increased Gateway City investment, particularly relating to education, job training, adaptive re-use, and transportation, are the highlighted recommendations of the MassINC. report (MassINC. 2007).

MassInc. does not favor municipal level economic development strategies or regional transit expansion, but rather suggests a tailored combination of both in order to encourage improved employment opportunity for Gateway City residents (MassInc. 2007). This is a broad stance that remains vague enough to avoid critique and lacks the substantive directive that many Gateway City leaders are seeking. Despite this shortcoming, the MassInc. report serves as a seminal
moment in identifying common Gateway City challenges and encouraging the development of a working Gateway City collaborative.

Since this initial 2007 analysis, MassINC. has continued to assess how Massachusetts can more effectively encourage economic development in and around various Gateway Cities that increasingly serve as concentrated hubs for the Commonwealth’s working poor residents. Similar to MassEOT’s *South Coast Rail Economic Development and Land Use Corridor Plan*, MassINC. is motivated to target statewide economic improvement toward these existing urban centers due to underutilized infrastructure, labor forces, and cultural assets that, in turn, reduce the need for expanded land use in order to generate economic growth (*MassINC 2014*).

The Gateway Cities Innovation Institute was created in 2012 to further encourage collaboration between Gateway City representatives in an effort to share resources and effectively lobby for increased state support. A critical report that emerged from this new institute is the *Where the Jobs Are: Employer Access to Labor Transit* report, which is another collaboration with the Brookings Institution. Report findings rank how well 100 metropolitan areas across the nation connect area employees to job opportunities via public transportation. The Providence-New Bedford- Fall River Metropolitan area ranked 72nd in this study, with under 20% of metropolitan area residents having the ability to access “typical” employer locations by public transportation in under 90 minutes (*Brookings Institution 2012*).

MassInc. and the Brookings Institution rarely display direct support for the proposed South Coast Rail, but their collaborative research continually reinforces the need to improve public transportation options and efficiency, particularly within Gateway Cities, as a strategy to improve employment access for large segments of the Massachusetts population.

The Pioneer Institute is perhaps the leading organizations in opposition of the proposed South Coast Rail extension. In 2013, the executive director of the Pioneer Institute wrote a Commonwealth Magazine article titled, *South Coast Rail Not the Way to Go: Let’s Invest in Cities, not Transporting People out of Them*. This discussion acknowledges the fact that the South Coast Region has not received a fair share of state investment, but investing in the
transformation of Fall River and New Bedford into bedroom commuter communities for Boston is not the correct strategy to improve the South Coast economy.

From a purely numbers standpoint, the article anticipates that the cost to sustain South Coast Rail service will not be covered by projected ridership fares, thus increasing MBTA operating loses that continue to place a financial burden on Massachusetts tax payers. Existing MBTA Commuter Rail service is not well maintained or prosperous, so it is irresponsible to expand a service that is already ineffective.

From a community revitalization perspective, the article highlights the fact that Gateway Cities can only begin to thrive if they become destination locations for employment and social activity. Even portions of the $2.2 billion South Coast Rail price tag will be more impactful if they are reallocated for local projects that align with a community established strategy. Better schools, safer streets, and local businesses is the preferred method to bring communities like Fall River and New Bedford back to economic prosperity, rather than transporting residents away from these communities for work. This strategy also results in a shorter and more direct road to reviving South Coast communities that also removes time consuming federal and state involvement in local community improvement (Commonwealth Magazine 2013).

Conclusions

In general, South Coast residents are in favor or neutral about the prospect of Commuter Rail service to Taunton, Fall River, and New Bedford. News coverage rarely depicts firm resident opposition to the proposed project. Similarly, the majority of state and political leaders that maintain influence on project progress have expressed verbal support for this Commuter Rail extension. Local leaders like Fall River Mayor William Flannigan and Massachusetts Congressman Joseph Kennedy are perhaps the most vocal champions of the project, while 2014 Massachusetts Gubernatorial Candidates are still slow to make strong endorsements during ongoing campaigns. The most significant opposition for the project certainly comes from independent research and data analysis. These types of informative documents do not usually
present outright disapproval of the project, and instead, elect to highlight less dramatic economic growth in the South Coast Region as a result of new Commuter Rail service.

These various resources for South Coast Rail project information are in agreement with the challenges facing Fall River, and are even largely in agreement with what successful economic development in the city may look like. The clear point of distinction revolves around the most appropriate method to initiate this economic recovery in Fall River. South Coast Rail supporters discuss the project as if the South Coast region needs rail service to jump-start a stagnant economy, and project detractors discuss the need for local community improvement to precede any potential large-scale transportation infrastructure improvements. These opposing viewpoints agree on the end goal but approach it from fundamentally different positions. Boston’s strength must ignite the South Coast economy, or the South Coast must stabilize its economy if connections to Boston are to be effective.

Perhaps the most interesting take on the South Coast Rail potentially comes from passing resident feedback included in the MassEQT South Coast Rail Economic Development and Land Use Corridor Plan. These comments consistently express temporary support for extended rail service that is contingent upon improved connections between Fall River Depot station and downtown Main Street, the establishment of locally owned businesses around proposed station sites, adequate parking facilities, and the importance of promoting Fall River as a vibrant city through these station designs. This Fall River resident stance is closely mirrored by city planning documents that do not hold the South Coast Rail above local priority points like downtown revitalization and local job training.
Statewide Quantitative Analysis (26 Gateway Cities from 2001 – 2013)

Employment Opportunity Change

Local area employment opportunity change is the most fundamental point of entry to begin analysis of how Commuter Rail service plays a role in improving the economic stability of Massachusetts Gateway Cities, particularly for low and moderate income residents within those cities. The Massachusetts Department of Labor and Workforce Development maintains a database of average annual jobs within all Massachusetts communities based to income tax reporting. This employment data is averaged across financial quarters in order to adjust for seasonal variation. These local employment opportunities are also separated by industry type, providing a more detailed understanding of where particular job growth or decline is occurring. These employment numbers represent the total number of jobs that exist within a community regardless of where particular employees may live. In other words, these numbers do not represent how many Gateway City residents are employed, but rather how many jobs exist within a specific Gateway City.

Limited sample size is a significant concern when observing employment opportunity change over time within a particular city. If a large company happens to close during the fiscal year, area employment numbers will be skewed considerably. For this reason, grouping Gateway Cities into Connected and Disconnected cohorts helps to reduce outlying data that is impacted by specific local change. Similarly, percentage change over time, rather than total employment change, is a useful method to adjust for total population and total employment opportunity that obviously varies between individual Gateway Cities.
Chart 1 displays employment opportunity change from 2001 to 2013. These preliminary findings clearly indicate that Gateway Cities have experienced more considerable job loss than state and national averages as discussed by MassInc. MassEOT claims that Commuter Rail access contributes to improved local employment opportunity is also supported by this preliminary analysis as Disconnected Gateway Cities, particularly Fall River, have experienced the most job loss of all assessed groups. The 2008 recession lies directly at the center of this 12-year employment snapshot, so it is not surprising to observe noticeable job loss across all assessed groups. No definitive claims can be made regarding the relationship between Commuter Rail service and increased local employment opportunity as a result of this preliminary analysis, but it is clear that the Connected Gateway City cohort absorbed the negative economic impacts of the recession more favorably than the disconnected cohort, at least in terms of employment stability. Commuter Rail service may play a role in this reduced negative impact as a result of labor market flexibility that is frequently attributed to transit-oriented development. As Alstadt and Weisbrod discuss, transit-oriented development can serve to alleviate the economic vulnerability that was common to Gateway Cities that maintained highly specialized, and predominantly manufacturing based economies.
The Medical and Healthcare Industry (NAICS 62) experienced the most positive job growth from 2001-2013 across almost all Gateway Cities, while the Manufacturing Industry (NAICS 30) frequently experienced the most significant job loss. In general, Disconnected Gateway Cities display slower Medical and Healthcare Industry growth and faster Manufacturing decline. This same trend arises when analyzing a variety of industry sectors. Almost all employment change trends follow similar patterns, but Disconnected Gateway Cities consistently underperform when compared to Connected Gateway City, state, and national averages. Disconnected Gateway City positive growth is less significant, and negative decline is more pronounced.

Following Alstadt and Weisbrod’s theory, these Gateway City findings appear to indicate that, over the last decade, rapidly growing industries in Massachusetts were more likely to locate within Gateway Cities that have Commuter Rail access as opposed to those that do not. This is not to say that rail access itself is the primary motivation for this Medical and Healthcare industry investment, but these Connected Gateway Cities apparently presented a more attractive environment for private investment from 2001 to 2013.

Another interesting observation from this preliminary analysis of employment opportunity change is the fact that Connected Gateway City trends more closely mirror those of the state, and Disconnected Gateway City trends are more comparable to the nation. Obviously all Gateway Cities have experienced overall job loss, but it appears that Disconnected Gateway Cities have no physical public transit connection, as well as a less interdependent economic connection. Andre Leroux of the Massachusetts Smart Growth Alliance discusses this phenomenon when he references “Forgotten Cities”. He uses this term to describe communities that evolve in a manner that is unique from surrounding economic influence. He discusses this forgotten relationship as a potential strength in terms of developing creative solutions to economic challenges. Cities like Pittsburg, PA, Detroit, MI, and Youngstown, OH have dealt with this economic isolation on a larger scale, and have almost embraced the challenge of initiating economic revitalization on their own terms. This is a remarkably challenging undertaking, but Disconnected Gateway Cities like Fall River perhaps feel forgotten on an emotional or policy level, but have not reached the level of physical isolation that can trigger the entrepreneurial response that is underway in Leroux’s “Forgotten Cities.” The 25-year promise of a physical and economic connection between the South Coast Region and greater Boston has not allowed these
communities to benefit from the physical connection itself or accept and embrace disconnection. In a sense, the region is left in limbo to wait for outside action, rather than having a definitive starting point to initiate local economic revitalization with or without the assistance of Commuter Rail service to Boston.

**Specific Industry Outliers**

The only two industry sectors that provide clearly dissimilar growth patterns between Connected and Disconnected Gateway Cities over the last decade are the Professional and Technology Industry (NAICS 54) and the Retail and Trade Industry (NAICS 44-45). This is remarkably interesting because these two industry sectors were both specifically highlighted in the *South Coast Rail Economic Development and Land Use Corridor Plan*. The Professional and Technology Industry was promoted as the primary growth sector if active South Coast Rail service were to occur, and the Retail and Trade Industry was mentioned as a secondary benefit of dense development around new rail transit stations.

According to MassEOT, 23% of all net new jobs resulting from South Coast Rail service will be within the Professional and Technology Industry. This is an estimated 805 to 874 new jobs. Interestingly, this is one of the only industries that have experienced positive growth within Disconnected Gateway Cities. In fact, Fall River has displayed more Professional and Technology Industry job growth over the last decade than almost any other Gateway City (*Chart 2*). This is a significant departure from all other industry trends. The South Coast Rail is openly promoted as a job growth tool at the state, regional, and local level, but MassEOT’s most impressive job growth prediction is, in actuality, the enhancement of perhaps the only positive job growth industry in Fall River. This particular job growth is projected to occur with or without Commuter Rail service.
Any and all enhancement of a growing job sector in the South Coast Region is important to future economic improvement, but it is perhaps misleading for the MassEOT to highlight its support of a $2.2 billion rail infrastructure project by citing job growth that is not catalyzed by rail service itself. Similarly, Chart 2 displays Connected Gateway Cities as the only group of analysis that has experienced recent Professional and Technical Industry job loss. These findings indicate that rail service does not have a positive correlation with Professional and Technology Industry growth across the Commonwealth, particularly following the 2008 recession. Rail service seems to provide adequate support to enhance existing regional industry growth, which is an important asset. However, MassEOT has allowed public opinion to embrace the idea that the South Coast Rail creates jobs, when a more accurate description is that the South Coast Rail will enhance job growth within industries that are already doing well in the South Coast Region.

Employment within the Professional and Technical Industry requires skilled human capital that is achieved through higher education attainment. Fall River has identified job training as a community priority, but low and moderate income Fall River residents, who are the most in need of improved employment, may not possess the necessary qualifications to enter this emerging South Coast industry. Surrounding labor markets can serve to fill this potential void in qualified
Fall River skilled employees, and this process is only enhanced by improved public transit access to the region.

Analysis of the Retail Trade Industry (NAICS 44-45) indicates that Connected Gateway Cities have experienced positive growth in this industry while all other assessed groups display employment decline. These findings support MassEOT and transit-oriented development discussions that promote transit stations as viable locations to stimulate local commercial activity. Retail stores typically serve as the last point in distributing merchandise and goods to consumers. Unfortunately, this industry also presents a noticeably high level of leakage from local economies, meaning a large percentage of profits generated from retail sales are used to pay for commodities that are produced outside of the Gateway City itself. Essentially, the Retail Trade Industry is not proficient in retaining profits generated from sales within the local economy (US Department of Labor 2014).

These findings do not directly attribute Retail Trade Industry stability in Connected Gateway Cities to commercial development around transit stations. Gateway Cities are regional population centers that often provide services and amenities for surrounding communities that maintain more suburban characteristics that may not be conducive to retail trade, particularly large-scale retail trade. Shopping malls, big box commercial corridors, and neighborhood-based convenience stores are far more likely to locate in Gateway Cities as a result of market demand and strategic location. For example, the Holyoke mall is the largest employer within the city of Holyoke (MA Department of Labor and Workforce Development 2013). This large shopping center serves as the only accessible mall for large portions of Hampshire and Hampden County residents. High shopper activity generates increased employment opportunity for Holyoke residents, but retail stores like Macys, Crate and Barrel, Apple, and Best Buy syphon money away from the local economy rather than redistributing it. Employee earnings certainly contribute to local property taxes and local spending, but beyond that, a significant portion of profits generated at the Holyoke Mall return to retail store headquarters that are often not located in Holyoke.
Although Gateway Cities are often viewed as viable environments for Retail Trade Industry activity for a variety of factors, it is clear that Connected Gateway Cities have outpacedDisconnected Gateway cities in terms of employment growth in this sector over the last decade. The reasoning behind this variation is unclear, but it is fair to assume that ease of access to these locations, and overall population growth contributes to the relative stability of Retail Trade employment opportunity for Connected Gateway City residents. MassEOT noticeably does not promote Retail Trade Industry job growth as a primary benefit of South Coast Rail service, despite discussion regarding the importance of commercial activity around Fall River’s proposed Depot Station. Transit-oriented development literature also highlights the same enhancement of retail sales that is depicted in this analysis.

These employment growth findings suggest that Fall River officials should continue to promote Professional and Technology Industry growth, and further encourage connections to locally owned retail businesses within Depot Station design plans. The Professional and Technology Industry is the region’s most rapidly expanding economic contributor, and distinguishes the region from other Gateway Cities that may be attracting other industries through previously discussed affordability and infrastructure assets. Fall River has an opportunity to continue to promote itself as an affordable location that serves as a Professional and Technology Industry
cluster. Connected Gateway Cities have seemingly not invested in this industry, and Fall River is in a prime position to fill this void through small business assistance, job training, and affordable operating costs for this emerging industry. This economic development strategy is recommended for the region regardless of rail service, and only stands to be enhanced if or when active Commuter Rail service returns to the region.

The leakage concern within the Retail Trade Industry can be alleviated if locally owned businesses, and the sale of locally made products, is encouraged in downtown Fall River. This industry support also stands to address multiple goals identified in city planning documents. In addition to retaining more sale revenue, unique retail shops are capable of attracting outside consumers and promoting Fall River’s cultural diversity. Neighboring New Bedford has capitalized on a unique Whaling Industry with museums, themed shops, and specialty restaurants. This example can serve as a model for Fall River to promote its strong fishing and sailing culture as an economic development strategy. The Retail Trade Industry is highly dependent on imported goods intended for local scale. This is not an ideal industry anchor for a city seeking significant economic revitalization, but it is flexible enough to generate considerable job growth through strategic location and original product sales.

Public Transit to Work

The reduction of vehicular dependency across Massachusetts is a primary goal of public investment in transit infrastructure improvements. MassEOT has endorsed the expansion of public transit to and from the Boston area as a viable strategy to decrease pollution, land use expansion, and commute time traffic patterns on roadways. The proposed South Coast Rail extension is seen as an alternate transit option to Route 24, which often experiences vehicular congestion during commute time hours.

The Southeastern Regional Transit Authority (SRTA) provides daily bus service for 10 South Coast communities. This transit authority primarily serves Fall River and New Bedford residents and does not provide direct access to Providence, RI (Southeastern Regional Transit Authority 2014). This limited bus range diminishes access to employment opportunities for Fall River area
residents who possess no, or intermittent, access to a personal vehicle. Compounding this challenge is the fact that the SRTA displays no collaboration with Rhode Island’s extensive RIPTA bus network even though their respective service areas are separated by approximately 14 miles. Infrequent Peter Pan buses service currently provide the only public transportation service between the South Coast and Providence for a fare of around $12 (Peter Pan Bus Lines 2014). This lack of regional bus collaboration supports the Brookings Institution findings that the Providence-New Bedford-Fall River Metropolitan area does not adequately connect area employees to critical job centers (Brookings Institution 2012).

Public transportation ridership to work has declined in Fall River annually since 2000. This drop bottomed out in 2012 with 432 residents indicating that they utilize public transit as their primary mode of transportation to work. This is the 5th lowest total amongst all Gateway Cities, trailing only Leominster, Pittsfield, Methuen, and Westfield. This trend also contradicts both Connected and Disconnected Gateway City data over that same time period (Chart 4). MBTA Commuter Rail ridership data indicate that an average of 753 passengers board Commuter Rail trains at Connected Gateway City transit stations daily. This number represents only a fraction of overall public transit ridership in these Connected Gateway Cities. An average of 3,493 Connected Gateway City residents utilize public transportation as their primary means to access employment. These numbers are most likely buoyed by subway ridership amongst several Gateway Cities within close proximity to Boston, but also indicate that bus ridership to work is often more common than Commuter Rail ridership in many Gateway Cities. Gateway Cities like Brockton, Springfield, and Lowell have responded to this trend by enhancing regional bus service, promoting collaboration between Regional Transit Authorities (RTAs) and passenger rail transit providers during station improvement planning, and purchasing energy efficient bus fleets (Brockton Area Transit Authority, 2014).
MBTA Commuter Rail stations, particularly recently constructed or rehabilitated ones, incorporate multiple modes of transportation including rail, bus, taxicabs, and bike lanes. Commuter Rail service is the impetus for these station sites, but these findings indicate that bus service is more frequently utilized by Gateway City residents. Disconnected Gateway City public transit ridership numbers that are also higher than average Commuter Rail ridership further supports this conclusion.

MassEOT’s Fall River Depot Station design integrates an SRTA bus stop on the southern portion of the site. This multi-modal design seems to work well in other Gateway Cities, but it is interesting that Commuter Rail service to these sites often receives top billing despite attracting less ridership. Improved SRTA service in Fall River may serve as a less expensive strategy to bolster Fall River resident access to employment opportunity. It is unlikely that SRTA bus service would reach the Boston area, but it certainly stands to provide more efficient access to neighboring Providence or other Bristol County communities. This bus system improvement could also serve as an interim step as South Coast Rail service is not expected to be active until 2016 at the earliest (WPRI 2013).
Fall River Resident Employment Location

Approximately 47% of Fall River residents work within the city itself. This is among the highest of all Gateway Cities. This is not necessarily a negative statistic, but does generate some concern when considering the fact that the city has lost nearly 4,000 jobs over the last 10 years. Fall River residents are bearing the brunt of this job loss through decreased commercial/industrial tax revenue and increased local unemployment. With reduced opportunity to access surrounding job markets via public transportation, this insular dynamic perpetuates economic decline.

Thriving and expanding Gateway Cities should make a concerted effort to promote the hiring of local residents, but stagnant Gateway City economies must adapt by providing adequate transit service to residents who must seek employment in surrounding area job markets. Fall River has demonstrated that this challenge is difficult to overcome, but preceding analysis indicates that an appropriate solution to this challenge is certainly not entirely dependent on a large-scale transit infrastructure project like the proposed South Coast Rail.

Chart 5 displays how Fall River residents are adapting to local job loss, and where they are successfully gaining employment that is no longer available to them within the city itself. These findings are key in assessing the primary debate regarding prescriptive planning practices that gain political and theoretical support, and tailored strategies that reflect the needs and behavior of local residents. Fall River resident employment within Massachusetts has declined over the last 10 years and residents are increasingly seeking employment in neighboring Rhode Island. This trend highlights how jurisdictional boundaries can play a major role in determining development priorities but often have lesser impact on actual social behavior.

Long-standing social and economic connections between the South Coast Region and the State of Rhode Island are not being considered with the proposed South Coast Rail that is driven by political connections to Boston.
The organic Fall River resident solution to local job loss is employment opportunity in Rhode Island. This location fulfills many desirable traits for employees including proximity and a concentration of diverse industry types while maintaining the affordable cost of living that is associated with the South Coast Region. This behavior is more noticeable following the 2008 recession, but existed even prior to the national economic downturn.

Rarely do Massachusetts Gateway Cities, and Regional Transportation Agencies, exhibit strong interstate collaboration. Understandably, Massachusetts policy makers place a high priority positive state growth. Massachusetts is the priority, and Boston is the Commonwealth’s economic and symbolic centerpiece. While this Boston-centric mentality continues, residents of cities like Pittsfield, Springfield, Haverhill, and Fall River can access employment in neighboring states in a fraction of the time it takes to reach Boston using Commuter Rail transit. Additionally, physical distance from Boston significantly impacts Commuter Rail ridership, and often results in insufficient operating revenue (MBTA, 2011). Equitable Gateway City public transit access is an important point to consider when planning for improved Massachusetts Commuter Rail service, but does not outweigh the need for economically responsible transit improvements and transit service that mirrors the behavior of residents who will ultimately utilize the service itself.
Conclusions

Massachusetts Gateway Cities display relatively similar employment trends over the last 10-years regardless of MBTA Commuter Rail Connectivity. The majority of Gateway Cities, aside from Lawrence, Lowell, Haverhill, and Chelsea, have experienced significant local job loss since 2000, and have only stabilized this employment decline over the last 2-3 years. This is a common pattern across the state and nation, although Massachusetts Gateway Cities present a much steeper drop off in local employment opportunity, largely due to significant manufacturing decline. In general, Disconnected Gateway Cities did not fair as well as Connected Gateway Cities over this time period despite sharing similar general trends across a variety of industry sectors. Positive job growth within Disconnected Gateway Cities was not as pronounced, and job decline was more rapid.

The two most inconsistent industry types when comparing Disconnected and Connected Gateway City employment trends are the Professional and Technology Industry (NAICS 54) and the Retail Trade Industry (NAICS 44-45). Disconnected Gateway Cities, and specifically the City of Fall River, have experienced rapid employment growth in the Professional and Technology Industry. This separates Fall River from various other Gateway City growth patterns, and suggests that city leaders should explore all opportunities to develop this industry regardless of potential Commuter Rail service.

The Retail Trade Industry has declined in all research study groups aside from Connected Gateway Cities. This finding encourages transit-oriented development recommendations to strategically locate commercial opportunities near dense transit and residential areas. If the proposed South Coast Rail extension does occur, it is highly recommended that city officials and station designers effectively connect station users to area retail stores, particularly locally owned retail stores.

The majority of South Coast Rail discussions focus solely on Commuter Rail service, with only passing mention of multi-modal SRTA bus service. Analysis of Gateway City commuting patterns indicates that bus service attracts more daily passengers than Commuter Rail transit does. For this reason, it is recommended that transportation
planners and Depot Station designers place a heavier emphasis on bus service and explore opportunities to connect with the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA) bus network. This recommendation can serve as a cost-effective alternative to current sizeable station site plans or an interim employment access strategy while South Coast Rail plans continue to be debated.

**Gateway City Case Analysis**

The Massachusetts Gateway Cities of Brockton, Fitchburg, and Lawrence have been selected for case analysis to observe how Fall River’s counterparts across the Commonwealth have attempted to incorporate Commuter Rail infrastructure into overall community economic development strategies in order to maximize job creation. These respective cities present specific characteristics that directly relate to challenges currently facing the city of Fall River. Brockton, MA is located 30 miles north of Fall River and serves as the closest Connected Gateway City of comparable population to Fall River. Fitchburg, MA is currently the last station stop on the Fitchburg/South Acton Commuter Rail line, and represents the furthest rail distance from the greater Boston area (approximately 50 miles). Lawrence, MA is the only Massachusetts Gateway City with a lower median household income than Fall River, but has managed to attract the highest amount of new employment opportunities of any Gateway City over the last decade (+3,650 since 2005).

These case study cities are intended to provide additional insight regarding how local residents are utilizing Commuter Rail service, how the quality of life is changing around Commuter Rail stations, and how city leaders are attempting to maximize Commuter Rail service in promotion of local job creation and regional job access.

The following case study details are comprised of municipal level employment and demographic data provided by the United States Census Bureau from 2001 to 2013, and station area site visits conducted in the spring of 2014. Typically, census tract level data serve as the scale of assessment in order to maintain data consistency over time, and because this unit is considered to be the statistical equivalent of a neighborhood (*Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard 2011*).
Commuter Rail Station Site Description

The Brockton MBTA Commuter Rail station is located two blocks east of the Main Street commercial corridor in the heart of the “City of Champions”. The station, and the rail line itself, bisects the city’s downtown area with commercial, civic, and mixed-use properties to the west and dense single and multi-family residential properties to the east. Industrial properties run parallel to the rail line as it elevates above downtown and serves as a backdrop to the city’s modest skyline (Figure 7).
The station is a basic facility that provides awnings and minimal seating for residents waiting for inbound trains to Boston. The majority of riders are dropped off at the station by automobiles or walk despite a new parking garage facility located across the street. Station users were surprisingly diverse in terms of both race and age. The majority of individuals boarding the train were dressed in professional attire and appeared to be young professionals. The train itself was filled upon entering the station, presumably from riders boarding in Bridgewater and Middleborough to the south. Approximately 50-100 riders boarded inbound trains before significantly dropping off to 20-30 after 9:30am. Riders almost exclusively utilized the train for inbound service with almost no passengers departing trains headed outbound from Boston.

Interestingly, the primary Brockton Police station is located directly adjacent to the Commuter Rail station. Police vehicles and officers are omnipresent and add confusion as to station access, ability to utilize the property itself, and station isolation.

The Brockton Area Transportation (BAT) bus terminal is located in a recently renovated structure across the street from the Commuter Rail station. This facility is active and lively throughout the day and appears to provide more necessary service to local Brockton residents. Indoor seating, frequent bus service, and small food shops create a welcoming, albeit fast moving, atmosphere (Figure 8).

When standing on the commuter rail platform, the most noticeable surrounding city elements are new market rate loft apartments, large-scale construction work, and a high level of pedestrian and automobile activity. The city is busy. Three impressive loft style residential buildings are located within a short walk of the station, but do provide noticeably uninspired names like “Lofts at SoCo” and “Station Lofts”. Construction of two additional loft-housing buildings is underway.
and several historic brick structures appear to provide an opportunity for similar adaptive reuse projects to continue in the area (Figure 9).

The diversity of local job opportunity is immediately apparent upon walking around the station area. A mix of banks, manufacturing businesses, small retail and food establishments, large medical service facilities, auto dealers, and active office buildings all operate in close proximity to each other. The W.B. Mason office supply headquarters is also located in the shadows of the train station. The impressiveness of this commercial activity is perhaps enhanced by signage that radiates a sense of local pride and expansion (Figure 10). Now hiring signs, support local businesses signs, and a “Brockton Works” add campaign effectively draw attention away from the few vacant and for rent signs that do exist and the large amount of litter that lines side streets that surround Main Street. There are certainly areas that may be perceived as being “rough” but welcoming and talkative pedestrians do provide a sense of safety that is not often common in areas that maintain a similar aesthetic.

An entire city block directly across the street from the Commuter Rail platform is being redeveloped into a mixed-use commercial and residential block. The $100 million construction project is lead by Boston based Trinity Financial, and will result in a mixture of residential, retail, and commercial space with a 325-space parking garage (The Enterprise 2014). The Brockton Mayor’s Office collaborated with project leaders to promote a job fair prior to construction in order to fill construction jobs, and subsequent management and security jobs, with local residents.

Overall, the area surrounding the Brockton MBTA Commuter Rail station produces an environment in which people are busy, positive, and moving in a good direction in terms of economic development. The train station itself is underutilized, and the design is more comparable to a
police fortress than a public transit facility. The location of the police station also appears to separate local resident/employee activity at the bus station from commuting activity at the rail station. There is a sense that residents who utilize the bus service are not welcome at the train station.

The level of activity around the BAT bus station, in addition to recent facility upgrades, seems to indicate that Brockton leaders elected to target transit related funding for improved bus service in downtown Brockton as opposed to Commuter Rail station improvements. This strategy illustrates the ability to adapt transit-oriented development techniques to fit more immediate employment related needs of local residents. Bus service often fills a less prominent role in multi-modal Commuter Rail station plans, but downtown Brockton demonstrates how proactive community leadership can reverse this relationship.

Social and Economic Community Change

The total Brockton population has remained stable for almost twenty years. Despite this consistent number of city residents, local employment opportunity has decreased by nearly 1,400 jobs since 2000, but the number of residents participating in the labor force has only declined 1.42% since the 2008 recession. This resiliency coincides with rail transit to work numbers that have increased annually for the last 10-years. Labor force participation is particularly strong in eastern portions of the city that consist of moderately dense residential neighborhoods that display some of the highest numbers of medical and education related employment (Figure 11).
Interestingly, the Brockton Census Tract with the lowest labor force participation sits directly adjacent to the Brockton Commuter Rail station (Marked by the “T” transportation symbol in Figure 11). This same Census Tract (5109) also provides the lowest rail transit ridership to work, and lowest amount of residents leaving Brockton to reach work.

This is the exact location where several converted residential loft builds are located and construction is underway to create a multi-acre mixed-use complex.

Future Census Tract analysis is expected to yield higher labor force and transit ridership in this area as a result of significant community investment in Smart Growth principles.

The western portion of Brockton produces surprising results when analyzing employment tends at the Census Tract level. Very few residents in this area of the city take advantage of Commuter Rail Service and there are a noticeably low percentage of these residents who are employed by companies outside of Brockton (Figure 12). This is particularly surprising when considering that these tracts sit along the boarder of the city and are bisected by the main thoroughfare running north to Boston and south to Fall River (Route 24).

Brockton appears to provide important flexibility for local residents when it comes to employment access. This flexibility may be due in part to municipal planning and private investment, as well as the city’s strategic geographic location.
The white population in Brockton has declined by 24% since 2000. The majority share of this white population loss has occurred along the main Commuter Rail line, but not at the Brockton Commuter Rail station itself. This 10-year pattern results in a bullseye shape in which the most distinct decline in white population is concentrated in a ring between downtown areas that provide the easiest access to public transit and single-family residential areas. This trend partially aligns with critiques of transit-oriented development that discuss the potential for minority residents to be pushed away from transit assets as residential development and urban amenities are increasingly situated in these prime real estate locations.
**Fitchburg, Massachusetts**

County: Worcester  
2012 Population: 40,403  
Average Daily Commuter Rail Ridership for Residents: 27

**Commuter Rail Integration Strategy:**  
Prescriptive  
Civic Minded (Investment in Tax Exempt Entities)

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**Commuter Rail Station Site Description**

The Fitchburg MBTA Commuter Rail station is located on the eastern end of the city’s historic downtown district. The location serves as a buffer between Main Street commercial activity and high-density residential areas. Fitchburg State College is located directly north of the station and maintains offices within the Intermodal Transportation Center itself. The 4 story parking garage is the most noticeable feature of the site from all surrounding viewpoints, with train and bus access set back behind Main Street facades.
The Commuter Rail station is referred to as the Intermodal Transportation Center and provides a minimal Commuter Rail boarding area (Figure 13), a Montachusett Regional Transit Authority (MART) bus terminal, small food stands, and taxi cab service. A small parking lot (approximately 60 spaces) abuts the MBTA Commuter Rail line itself and serves as the primary parking option for commuters, despite the previously referenced sizeable parking garage (Figure 14).

Morning Commuter Rail service from Fitchburg begins noticeably early, presumably due to the 90 minute transit time to Boston, and infrequent service throughout the course of normal weekdays. Boarding passengers appeared to be predominately white and over the age of 30. The majority of these passengers were dressed in professional attire. Approximately 25 passengers boarder each early morning train before a steep drop off in ridership after 8:15am.

The majority of daytime activity at the site occurs within the bus terminal portion of the facility, and around food and taxi cab stands. Diverse riders continually board and depart small MART buses, and are able to wait in warm indoor seating areas for bus service. The general mood within the Intermodal Transportation Center was dull and offered little interaction between riders.

When standing on Main Street in front of the Intermodal Transportation Center, the most noticeable surrounding city elements are cars, small food establishments, a new Fire Station facility, and underutilized buildings. The city is not actively engaging. Passing motorists appear to be heading toward work related activities but pedestrians move slowly and are not welcoming. Visitors are immediately drawn to historic architecture that lines the traditional downtown corridor that is located 2 blocks west of the transit station. Upon reaching the gateway to the
In the historic downtown, it is clear that the majority of these structures are underutilized as well (Figure 15). Active businesses include social service organizations, banks, civic services, and passive business like law firms. For rent signage is common and the most well maintained facilities are publicly owned and exempt from local property taxes. The public library, city hall, municipal offices, and a Nashua River park are welcoming and aesthetically appealing, but are noticeably lacking in resident activity. This perceived disconnect between downtown investment and resident need is perfectly exemplified by the most inviting building on the beautiful town common that serves as a vintage luxury car collector’s office.

Active manufacturing facilities are located slightly east of the Fitchburg transit station (Micron Products; Fitchburg Plumbing Supply) and on the far western edge of the downtown along Route 2A (Seawall Folding Box; DeMar Technologies; Headwall Photonics). These appear to be large manufacturing operations that are producing a variety of commodities locally, and are accessible via MART bus transit. A commercial plaza that contains a super market and various retail stores is also located directly across the train tracks from the Intermodal Transportation Center on Water Street.

Overall, the area surrounding the Fitchburg Intermodal Transportation Center produces an environment in which unique Fitchburg assets are underutilized and planning efforts are largely adopted in a prescriptive manner. It feels as if Fitchburg has pursued a variety of revitalization projects, but none quite fit the current community. The Commuter Rail station itself is an impressive facility that undoubtedly came with a heavy public price tag, yet commuters prefer to park in a small adjacent lot. The Fitchburg municipal offices are relocating into a rehabbed mill facility while prime downtown real estate sits with boarded windows. A massive suspension bridge was constructed over rail lines in 2005, but pedestrians often walk on a dirt path over the tracks in order to cross from one side to the other. A
beautiful river park is centrally located but surrounded on three sides by multi-lane traffic. An adaptively reused industrial building sits directly across the street from the transit station with a large sign that reads, “Student Housing.” These are all impressive projects that have succeeded elsewhere but result in a lack of cohesion in downtown Fitchburg.

Tax-exempt entities like libraries, schools, fire stations, and museums are the anchor activities surrounding the Fitchburg Commuter Rail station. These are important community assets but offer less return on investment in terms of stabilizing a local economy and providing viable job opportunities for area residents. Fitchburg leadership appears to be adept at attracting state attention in terms of projects and financing, but currently falls short in transferring that attention into downtown development that successfully reverses the visible image of a declining city (Figure 16). This issue of negative public perception is outlined in the city’s Vision 2020 Comprehensive Master Plan but remains as a reality for any visitor to downtown Fitchburg (Fitchburg 2008). Progress has been made in terms of public art and adaptive reuse projects, but the overall tone of the community area surrounding the Fitchburg Commuter Rail station is far less positive than both Brockton and Lawrence.

Although overall Commuter Rail ridership amongst Fitchburg residents is the lowest of any Connected Gateway City, regional bus service again emerges as a critical community service in terms of resident access to internal employment opportunities, particularly amongst downtown residents travelling to industrial facilities along Route 2A toward Westminster. Notably however, this MART bus service only provides three shuttle trips to Worcester’s expanding job market with a round trip fare of $20 (MART 2013).
Social and Economic Community Change

The total population in Fitchburg has fluctuated around 40,000 residents since the early 20th Century. This population has remained steady despite the fact that the community has lost over 2,000 local jobs since 2001. Similar to Brockton, this local job decline does not coincide with a similar decline in overall labor force participation (+2.5% since 2001). This information indicates that Fitchburg residents are increasingly leaving the city itself to seek employment but, unlike Brockton, they are most likely utilizing automobile transit in order to reach these jobs as evident by low and slowly declining resident Commuter Rail ridership to work numbers.

Labor force participation is noticeably high in southwestern portions of the city where durable goods manufacturing and education employment is common (Figure 17). These neighborhoods primarily consist of residential subdivisions and moderately dense single and multi-family housing. Interestingly, Fitchburg neighborhoods located in northern and southern portions of the city present more medical and hospitality based industry participation as well as more significant numbers of resident leaving the city for this employment (Figure 18). This trend is not necessarily surprising because Route 2 toward Worcester and Gardner, and Route 13 toward Nashua, NH are the two primary transit routes that access the city near these neighborhoods. These surrounding large urban centers present strong medical industries that appear to be attracting increasing numbers of Fitchburg residents.

Fitchburg’s relatively isolated location has resulted in a culture of car dependency for residents seeking stable employment. Transportation planning around both rail and bus service is well intentioned, but it appears that city employment patterns follow economic opportunity rather
than fixed public transit systems. As a result, heavy public investment in a new Intermodal Transportation Center appears to be an ineffective use of funds that may have been more effective if used to target MART shuttle service to Worcester or local economic development initiatives in collaboration with Fitchburg State College or existing area businesses. To be clear, Massachusetts municipalities are rarely granted discretion to utilize state support for projects that are unrelated to clearly established funding priorities, but this Fitchburg scenario highlights how targeted funding, intermodal transit in this case, creates an environment in which municipalities may react to available funding rather than developing a proactive planning strategy that remains in tact regardless of influence from low hanging financial fruit distributed by the state.

The adaptive reuse of underutilized industrial structures in downtown Fitchburg is perhaps the most promising development occurring around the Commuter Rail station. This strategy is common amongst Massachusetts Gateway Cities that have impressive building stocks that are also often extremely affordable to rent or buy. The MassInnovation Center, which houses Habitat for Humanity offices as well as a regional charter school, and the Fitchburg Plumbing Supply facility are two successful examples of this economic development strategy.

When comparing Fitchburg and Brockton employment trends, it is clear that residents have adapted to the decline in local employment opportunity by utilizing the most accessible transportation option that provides service to the nearest active job center. Both Fitchburg and
Brockton residents benefit from the affordable Gateway City cost of living, and Fitchburg residents use automobiles to access the greater Worcester job market just as Brockton residents increasingly utilize Commuter Rail service to access the greater Boston area job market.

Both communities have targeted industrial facilities around MBTA Commuter Rail stations for adaptive reuse projects. Brockton has successfully pushed forward several market-rate residential development projects that indicate a transition to a modern “Smart Growth” commuter community, similar to that envisioned in the Fall River Depot Station plan. Fitchburg, which currently presents less demand for new residential development, has instead targeted underutilized industrial buildings for new creative economy and high-tech manufacturing related employment (Figure 19). Fall River Depot Station plans more closely resemble Brockton’s Commuter Rail integration strategy, while Fall River’s greater Boston connectivity potential is more comparable to that of Fitchburg.

*Figure 19 – Micron Products Facility in Downtown Fitchburg*

*Source: Micronproducts.com, 2014*
**Lawrence, Massachusetts**  
**County:** Essex  
**2012 Population:** 76,982  
**Average Daily Commuter Rail Ridership for Residents:** 162

**Commuter Rail Integration Strategy:**  
Entrepreneurship (Locally Owned Business)  
Local Placemaking

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**Commuter Rail Station Site Description**

The Lawrence, MA MBTA Commuter Rail station is located on the southern edge of the Merrimack River. The site is located within a sparsely populated stretch of industrial land between Interstate 495 to the east and Route 28 to the west. Unlike Brockton and Fitchburg, the station site is slightly removed from downtown commercial activity, which is concentrated along several parallel streets located north of the river (Canal Street and Essex Street). Despite this separation, station activity is high and consistent throughout the course of the weekday. The site is truly multi-modal as users access and leave the station via car, bus, train, bike, and by foot.
Commuter Rail riders are diverse in terms of age, race, and attire. The majority of ridership occurs during standard commute time hours, but Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority (MRTA) bus activity and reduce Commuter Rail activity remains steady during off peak hours.

The station facility consists of a five-level parking garage, an MRTA bus terminal, multiple indoor waiting rooms, police department vehicle parking, and 2 seemingly vacant small food establishments. Parking spaces fill up quickly and rider interaction is common. Station facility employees are also present and accessible. This station is the highest functioning of all three case study sites.

Large current and former industrial buildings that house manufacturing, commercial, office, and residential uses surround the station site (Figure 21). These employment opportunities that are within walking distance of the station are presumably the reason for much of the areas activity, and Lawrence presents the only case study station in which a significant number of Commuter Rail departures were observed (approximately 15-20 per train). Smaller-scale commercial activity in the form of stores and restaurants are located across the scenic Merrimack River, as well as several new and highly active medical related facilities. Many of these local businesses appear to be owned and staffed by area residents as evident by a noticeable level of multi-cultural community pride in the form of signage, product sales, pedestrian discussions, and public artwork (Figure 22).
Pedestrian and bike friendly infrastructure also draws interest toward the city’s North Canal Historic District (Figure 23). Many of these projects were partially funded by state initiatives like the MassWorks Infrastructure program, and planned in collaboration with active community groups like Lawrence CommunityWorks (Lawrence CommunityWorks 2009). This pedestrian-scale development that provides a dense variety of amenities and employment opportunity directly aligns with New Urbanism principles that are encouraged by planning theorists and practitioners. This strategy has also been successfully adapted to fit the existing character of the neighborhood and its residents.

The New Balance Factory located directly across the street from the Commuter Rail station is viewed locally as a significant catalyst in the positive economic growth that is occurring within the city of Lawrence (Eddings 2013). This project was the culmination of a long and transparent planning process, and has drawn private investment toward the community in order to sustain and enhance area economic activity. The long redevelopment of the New Balance factory sits in juxtaposition to the rapidly redeveloped Riverwalk Mill that houses a variety healthcare related businesses, and was largely financed by private investment that was used to attract bank loans and New Markets Tax Credits (NMTC) (MassDevelopment 2011).

Overall, the Senator Patricia McGovern Transportation Center in Lawrence is the Commuter Rail station case study that is most comparable to the MassEOT vision laid out for Fall River’s Depot Station. Interestingly, this success has been achieved in Lawrence using public transit infrastructure upgrades as a tool to augment creative local economic development strategies that
have been established by both political and resident leadership, rather than viewing the rail station as a centerpiece for economic recovery.

Figure 23 – Lawrence North Canal Historic District

Social and Economic Community Change

Lawrence, MA has experienced steady population growth since the early 1990’s and boast the most significant increase in local employment opportunity of any Gateway City in Massachusetts over the last decade (+3,650 jobs since 2005). The Health Care and Social Assistance Industry and the Durable Manufacturing Industry account for the bulk of this steady employment increase. Despite this impressive employment expansion, Lawrence maintains the highest percentage of residents living below the poverty line of any Massachusetts Gateway City and a steady decline in resident labor force participation, particularly amongst residents living in and around the North Canal Historic District (Figure 24). This phenomenon is the opposite of what is occurring in Fitchburg, MA. Public perception and quantitative data indicate that the city of Lawrence is recovering nicely in terms of economic stability. Unfortunately, this local job
growth is not reaching many city residents. Large-scale employers are locating in the heart of downtown Lawrence, but outside populations are seemingly filling many of these jobs.

This concerning trend is perfectly exemplified by the previously referenced Riverwalk Mill. Hundreds of new jobs within this mill complex are accessed by employees streaming off of the adjacent Interstate 495 in automobiles, with many exhibiting New Hampshire license plates. On-site restaurants, banks, and childcare services compound this problem. Effectively, Riverwalk Mill employees have no need to walk the 1-mile required to support vibrant North Canal Historic District businesses. Non-residents are filling a large percentage of Lawrence jobs, and the city is not effectively capturing this daily influx of buying power. Municipal tax revenue certainly increases as a direct result of new industrial and commercial activity, but unskilled local labor and ineffective connections between buying power and local businesses have hindered Lawrence’s efforts to maximizing economic revitalization in neighborhoods surrounding the McGovern Transportation Center.

Similar to previous Gateway City case studies, MRTA bus service is a clear community asset in Lawrence. Unlike both Brockton and Fitchburg, the primary MRTA bus station is not located within the multi-modal Commuter Rail station, and is instead situated across the Merrimack River within neighborhoods that struggle with poverty and present the lowest percentage of residents leaving Lawrence city limits in order to reach employment (Figure 25). These neighborhoods are provided with access to multiple forms of public transit but continue to
struggle with achieving stable employment. This dynamic indicates that job training programs and new retail and manufacturing related jobs, similar to the successful New Balance Factory, should be a priority in terms of targeting employment opportunity to this segment of the city’s population.

Conversely, Lawrence neighborhoods in northeastern and southwestern portions of the city contain populations in which over 50% of residents do not work within the city. These neighborhoods also represent the longest distance from Commuter Rail transit amongst almost all city Census Tracts, indicating that these residents most likely use personal vehicles to access centrally located transit stations or their specific employment location.

Lawrence is an exemplary Gateway City in the push for regional urban revitalization in Massachusetts. Deliberate planning strategies have incorporated accessible public transit, local placemaking, dense mixed-use development, and new business development. These are critical elements of economic stability and overall community revitalization that have materialized over the last ten years in Lawrence. Labor force training and small business development that is intended to support new community economic anchors has undoubtedly lagged behind, but Lawrence has overcome significant hurdles that many Massachusetts Gateway Cities continue to grapple with.
Takeaways for Fall River

Community Specific Recommendations

1. Support Professional and Technology Industry Growth (NAICS 54)

The Professional and Technology Industry is emerging in the South Coast Region. This is a trend that appears to be a unique strength in many Disconnected Gateway Cities, particularly the city of Fall River. Much like the collaboration displayed between Lawrence community leaders and large companies like New Balance, Fall River stands to benefit by focusing initial economic growth strategies on specific business leaders within this industry. Affordable operating costs and relatively easy connection to Providence and Boston based clients are location benefits, and economic development incentives like state tax credits, infrastructure upgrade support, and local tax increment financing are financial benefits.

Complementary job training that prepares residents and students to succeed in this industry is an additional strategy intended to minimize the number of projected incoming jobs that are filled by outside labor. Accounting, Auditing, and Management Analysis related training programs are highly relevant and should be enhanced locally. Diverse industry growth is critical to local economic stability, but the Professional and Technology Industry provides a clear point of entry to initiate community discussion with potential new businesses and workforce training program providers.

2. Encourage the Continued Adaptive Reuse of Underutilized Structures for Industrial, Commercial, and Residential Uses that Align with both Current and Potential Future Resident Needs

This development priority has been adopted by almost every Massachusetts Gateway City. The redevelopment of historic community structures into diverse and affordable property is remarkably effective in achieving a high level of economic and social activity within a
concentrated area. These often large structures also have the ability to serve multiple purposes depending on specific community needs. Brockton adaptive reuse projects primarily serve to improve the city’s market-rate housing stock, Fitchburg projects are often related to high-tech industrial space and student housing, and Lawrence area projects frequently support durable goods production, medical related office space, and affordable housing. Fall River has already achieved adaptive reuse success with various projects such as Commonwealth Landing, PrimaCare Medical Center, and Curtain Residential lofts. These projects are indicative of private development interest in Fall River real estate, but are also noticeably short on local goods production and mixed-income housing. If continued positive growth occurs, and is accelerated by Commuter Rail service, then quality employment opportunity and reasonable housing options for existing residents may decline. This potential threat is emerging in Brockton as free market demand has resulted in a boom in market-rate housing around the Commuter Rail station. These residential development projects are able to utilize smart growth incentives provided by the state, but often only serve the needs of an incoming population rather than the existing area population.

Private investment and free market forces are key elements of sustained economic recovery that should not be deterred based on potential threats of displacement. Fall River community leaders should however work in collaboration with interested developers, and utilize municipal regulatory tools to promote appropriate adaptive reuse projects that maximize the number of benefiting residents. Diverse adaptive reuse projects, that serve multiple segments of the South Coast Region’s population, are effective in creating a culturally vibrant community locally (Lawrence) that also attracts incoming resident who are seeking affordable urban living and the amenities that are associated with it (Brockton).

3. **Enhance Community Pride through Affordable Signage Upgrades and Public Art Projects**

Signage and aesthetically appealing physical space is effective in altering public perception and drawing pedestrians away from specific transit hubs in order to support the local economy. The physical condition and pessimistic signage that surrounds Fitchburg’s Intermodal Transportation Center overshadows relatively stable city employment patterns. Visitors and residents alike can immediately perceive the level of value that is placed on a physical space, and this perception
impacts how individuals choose to interact with that space. Brockton signage is blue collar and hard working, Fitchburg signage is often uninspiring, and even sometimes outright negative, and Lawrence signage is unique and bright (Figure 26). Often individual signs for businesses or events are far more noticeable than formal way-finding related signage that is maintained by the city itself.

Similarly, public art projects are often utilized to promote community culture and encourage resident collaboration. Gateway City public art projects can range in scope, cost, and subject matter, and can arise from formal city endorsement or organic resident activity. In general, signage upgrades and public art projects are relatively inexpensive and stand to have long-term community benefit if well maintained.

Fall River city planning documents establish historic preservation and downtown revitalization as clear priorities for future development (City of Fall River 2008). Signage is an effective and inexpensive strategy to support these goals. Design consistency is often viewed as a basic element of signage upgrade initiatives, but Fall River leadership should remain aware that this type of visual community upgrade also presents an important opportunity to showcase the city’s culture and pride through diverse and unique visual elements. Enhanced community investment
in neighborhoods surrounding public transit nodes stands to draw more daily resident activity, and expand visitor activity that is typically concentrated around more well-known community amenities like Battleship Cove and the proposed Depot Station.

4. Promote Collaboration Between Southeastern Regional Transit Authority (SRTA) and Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA) Bus Service in Order to Provide Public Transit Connections Between Fall River and Providence

Fall River economic and social data points are frequently collected at the Providence-New Bedford-Fall River Metropolitan Statistical level. Providence, RI also serves as the closest employment center to the city of Fall River. Despite these facts, consistent public transit service between these two communities does not currently exist. The Southestern Regional Transit Authority has invested in fleet and station upgrades over the last few years (Holtzman 2013) and the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority is frequently recognized for it’s comprehensive service (RIPTA 2012). Approximately 4.6 miles, and a state border, separate SRTA and RIPTA service areas (Swansea Mall to Warren Rt. 60 Bus Line). The precedent for interstate regional transit authority collaboration has been established by shared RIPTA and Greater Attleboro-Taunton Regional Transit Authority (GATRA) service, and the SRTA should follow suit in order to adequately service the needs of Fall River area workers.

Employment location data indicate that increasing numbers of Fall River residents are seeking employment outside of Massachusetts, and this transit strategy supports that trend with minimal bus service change and expenditure. A shared transit station in Swansea or Warren presents the most basic solution, although rapid shuttle service between the two cities is more ideal. This interstate public transit service also stands to increase outbound South Coast Rail ridership to Fall River itself, as rail passengers will have public transit access to multiple major cities in this scenario. Integrated bus service in Lawrence effectively transports employees to and from the McGovern Transportation Center, while Brockton and Fitchburg bus service is heavily utilized, but often remains independent from Commuter Rail activity, aside from physical proximity.
Shared RIPTA and GATRA service, MRTA bus route planning, and the Fitchburg to Worcester shuttle service are all useful models that the SRTA can evaluate in order to determine the best local strategy to maximize integration between multiple forms of public transit at the proposed Depot Station site, and attempt to provide transit service that best fits the employment patterns of local residents.

5. Organize Resident Leadership Entities to Attract More Public Participation in Local Planning Efforts

Successful Gateway City revitalization in Lawrence, MA is a direct result of active political leadership, socially conscious business development, and organized resident participation. South Coast resident input regarding proposed Commuter Rail service is perhaps the most specific, and least discussed, viewpoint in the debate surrounding the proposed South Coast Rail. State transportation agencies and regional political leaders are guiding this project and local resident participation most often arises in the form of feedback and critique. This is public participation that is reactive to existing proposals, as opposed to being proactive in shaping project plans from the start.

Active Lawrence resident groups like Lawrence CommunityWorks are critical in terms of providing accessible technical skills to residents, and articulating often disjointed resident goals. This type of grassroots resident leadership does not usually have the capacity to independently achieve community revitalization, but does incorporate transparent discourse into planning strategies. This balanced perspective is paramount in producing project plans that most appropriately address the concerns of multiple segments of the local community. Additionally, many community-based leadership groups qualify for various funding programs, and are extremely innovative in developing inexpensive solutions to identified community challenges.

Community Development Corporations (CDCs), youth leadership programs, and nonprofit advocacy groups are all examples of common resident leadership activities. The proposed South Coast Rail planning process highlights the propensity for resident contribution to slide into an ancillary position, and the establishment of active community leadership groups is a proven
strategy to avoid this dynamic if not with this specific project, certainly for Fall River area development moving forward.

South Coast Rail Design Specific Recommendations

1. Reduce the Scale of Depot Station Design Plans (Grand Design) and Place Higher Emphasis on Bus Related Plan Elements

Fall River Depot Station plans call for a multi-story parking facility that is wrapped by mixed-use structures and includes an SRTA bus stop. Project leaders and residents have recommended a “grand design” that serves as a gateway to the city. Zoning amendments that align with New Urbanism principles are also encouraged in order to create a traditional village center atmosphere around the station. Under this plan, a large parking structure is effectively hidden as a means to maintain aesthetic appeal and a clear separation exists between rail and bus access points.

Gateway City Commuter Rail ridership data indicate that regional bus transit attracts far more daily ridership than that of rail, aside from two clear outliers (Attleboro, Salem). Interestingly, these two outliers also present two of the highest median household income levels of all 26 designated Gateway Cities. Commute time itself also highlights a possible relationship with station ridership activity (Figure 27). Gateway Cities that provide 30-50 minute transit times to Boston display a significantly higher level of Commuter Rail ridership when compared to the majority of cities outside of that commute time window. Gateway City residents in the greater Boston area presumably utilize subway and bus service rather than Commuter Rail, while residents who live over an hour away from Boston are far more likely to utilize automobile transit to work. It should be stated that significant local population and strong economic connections to Boston appear to contribute to Worcester’s position as an outlier in this evaluation of the relationship between Commuter Rail ridership and commute time to Boston amongst Massachusetts Gateway Cities.

This trend indicates that a large Depot Station parking structure may be an inefficient use of space and resources, similar to Fitchburg’s Intermodal Transportation Center parking garage.
Concern regarding underutilized parking is enhanced when considering the existing pedestrian connection between the proposed Depot Station site and the 4-level Pearl Street parking facility.

Stronger connections between Commuter Rail and SRTA bus access points within the station also stands to promote socio-economic interaction that occurs in Lawrence, but is noticeable lacking in both Brockton and Fitchburg.

Figure 27
Data Sources: 2012 MBTA Ridership and Service Statistics, 2012 MBTA Transit Schedules

**Relationship Between Commuter Rail Ridership and Transit Time**

2. **Capitalize on Incoming Buying Power Associated with Commuter Rail Ridership through Strategic Vehicular Access to Station Parking and Clear Connections to Downtown Business**

The park and ride phenomenon is a consistent threat with Gateway City Commuter Rail stations. Conveniently located station parking facilities often cater to the needs of potential commuters who access the site via automobile from surrounding communities. This station design element is common, and reduces the ability of Gateway City small businesses to capture this daily influx in buying power. Compounding this reduction in commuter interaction with local economic activity is the fact that commuters can often walk directly from their parked car to bus/rail access.
without even gaining exposure to surrounding community assets. This multi-modal station design is incorporated in many new stations with the intent of streamlining the commuter process, but also gives the rider almost no opportunity to contribute to the local economy.

This lack of buying opportunity is highlighted at the McGovern Transportation Center in Lawrence, MA. The 1-mile stretch from Interstate 495 to the Commuter Rail station provides perhaps the most direct access to the site from many surrounding communities, however this heavy traffic route provides almost no small business-activity. Station site designs attempt to combat this flaw by incorporating commercial and office space into the transit station structure itself. This technique aligns with state supported “smart growth” development but also directly competes with surrounding businesses and available commercial space. New station commercial space is frequently more expensive than existing community space as a result of the high activity location, and also lacks important community character that can be experienced by visiting existing local businesses.

Vehicular station access routes that produce visual awareness of surrounding Gateway City assets, along with enticing pedestrian access to downtown commercial areas are critical in terms of capturing buying power by providing clear opportunities for daily commuters to spend more time in Fall River and explore portions of the city that are not directly associated with the Commuter Rail station itself. MassEOT representatives and Fall River residents have both expressed the importance of providing more conveniences around Depot Station but seemingly undervalue the importance of also drawing commuters away from newly developed station sites.

Signage, greenways, public artwork, local advertising, and community events are all effective techniques to draw commuters away from a limited city experience that often results from Commuter Rail station interaction. These station sites serve as alternative Gateways to the city and should promote as much movement toward the city as they do away from it.
3. Consider the Establishment of Design Guidelines and Special Permitting for First Floor Residential Use to Better Achieve Development Goals Within the City’s Arts Overlay District (AOD)

Fall River Transit Oriented Development and Commercial Mill District base zoning regulations, as well as an Arts Overlay District, cover the immediate land surrounding the proposed Depot Station site (City of Fall River 2014). These regulations have been adopted by the city in order to shape development that is anticipated to occur as a result of new Commuter Rail transit and continued redevelopment of the city’s downtown and waterfront districts. These districts clearly promote dense residential development, adaptive reuse of former industrial facilities, and creative cultural activities. This work highlights the city’s proactive approach to guiding positive change in these areas, and recognition of their importance to Fall River’s future. Although these regulations are clear, two potential weaknesses arise, particularly related to the vision for the Arts Overlay District (AOD) and the restriction of ground-floor residential units.

The Fall River AOD is intended to expand art and culture, increase the amount of fine art related activities, and achieve more positive use of important community space. These intentions are clear in their ultimate goal but vague in their vision to achieve this goal. Lawrence, Holyoke, Pittsfield, and Worcester have realized success in similar planning strategies, but not without challenge. The experiences of these similar communities are invaluable in terms of assisting Fall River to develop a more articulate development vision for investors within the AOD. Design guidelines are often established to enhance use-based zoning regulations within overlay districts in many Massachusetts communities. These design standards are also flexible enough to range from recommended guidelines to enforced regulations. Design guidelines have the ability to address façade consistency, connections between commercial activity and the historic waterfront, signage character, pedestrian and bike walkway materials, lighting style, and the integration of public artwork.

Figure 27 – Portland, OR “River District Design Guidelines” image
In 2008, the City of Portland, OR created a River District Design Guidelines document to more effectively achieve district goals that are similar to that of the Fall River AOD (Figure 28). This document includes ideal visual elements, both from within Portland itself and from inspirational communities, and discusses how these elements contribute to greater district goals (City of Portland 2008). Fall River has a cohort of Gateway Cities to pull design inspirations from in order to create similar design guidelines for growth around the proposed Depot Station site and within the entire AOD.

The Fall River AOD also clearly limits first-floor residential development. Area commercial and mixed-use development is the intent of this regulation, but the absence of residential development by special permit has the potential to result in unintended consequences. Ground-floor commercial development around Depot Station should be of top priority however, slower than anticipated private investment, combined with restricted residential development, can result in vacancy rates that minimize the vibrancy of the AOD. The AOD is an innovative planning strategy and should be provided with a level of flexibility in order to adapt to organic area development that may not perfectly align with outlined goals to achieve economic and cultural revitalization around the proposed Depot Station.
References


City of Fall River. “Fall River Zoning Ordinance.” 2014


South Coast Rail, Fall River Depot Station Area Workshop. Fall River, MA: 2010


Appendix: Gateway City Data Tables

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*Data Source: US Census Bureau (2000 – 2012)*
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<tr>
<td>Lynn</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Quincy</td>
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<tr>
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_Data Source: US Census Bureau (2000 – 2012)_
## Average Annual Local Jobs

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*Data Source: MA Department of Labor and Workforce Development (2001 – 2013)*