



**SRPEDD**  
Southeastern Regional Planning  
& Economic Development District



# FOOD ACCESS AND SECURITY IN TRANSPORTATION (FAST) PLAN

2026

SRPEDD TRANSPORTATION DEPARTMENT



# **FOOD ACCESS AND SECURITY IN TRANSPORTATION (FAST) PLAN**

## **For the SOUTHEASTERN MASSACHUSETTS METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION**

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# Transportation Planning Acronyms

ACS – American Community Survey (Census)  
ADA- American with Disabilities Act  
CFR - Code of Federal Regulations  
CIP – Capital Investment Plan  
CMAQ – Congestion Mitigation / Air Quality  
CMR - Code of Massachusetts Regulations  
DEP - Department of Environmental Protection  
EPA- Environmental Protection Agency  
FAPRO - Federal Aid Programming and Reimbursement Office  
FFY - Federal Fiscal Year  
FHWA – Federal Highway Administration  
FTA – Federal Transit Administration  
GATRA – Greater Attleboro Taunton Regional (Transit) Authority  
GHG – Greenhouse Gas  
GIS- Geographic Information System  
HIP - Healthy Incentives Program  
IIJA - Infrastructure and Investment Jobs Act  
JTPG - The Joint Transportation Planning Group  
LEP - Limited English Proficiency  
LOS – Level of Service  
MAP-21 - Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act  
MARPA - Massachusetts Association of Regional Planning Agencies  
MassDOT – The Massachusetts Department of Transportation  
MaPIT - MassDOT’s Project Intake Tool  
MEPA- Massachusetts Environmental Protection Act  
MOU - Memorandum of Understanding  
MPO - Metropolitan Planning Organization  
NHS - National Highway System  
NOFO - Notice of Funding Opportunity  
OTP - Office of Transportation Planning  
Pinfo – MassDOT’s Project Information Tracking System  
PPP – Public Participation Program  
PRC – Project Review Committee  
RSA – Road Safety Audit  
RTA – Regional Transit Authority  
RTP – Regional Transportation Plan  
SGR – State of Good Repair  
SIP – State Implementation Plan  
SMMPO - The Southeastern Massachusetts Metropolitan Planning Organization  
SRPEDD – Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District  
SRTA – Southeastern Regional Transit Authority  
STIP – State Transportation Improvement Program  
TAM Plan – Transit Asset Management Plan  
Title VI – Federal law that mandates that any program, project or service be provided without regard to anyone’s race, color, or national origin  
TIP – Transportation Improvement Program  
TOD – Transit Oriented Development  
ULB – Useful Life Benchmark  
UPWP - Unified Planning Work Program  
VMT - Vehicle Miles Traveled  
VOC - Volatile Organic Compound

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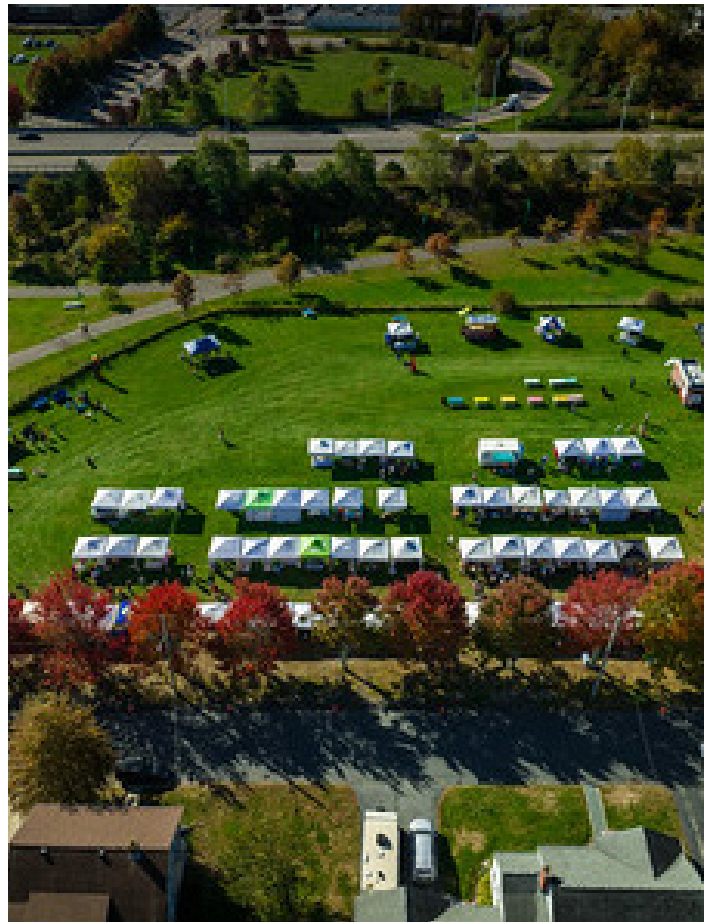
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# Executive Summary

The Southeastern Massachusetts Metropolitan Planning Organization (SMMPO), and SRPEDD Transportation Department as staff to the SMMPO, seeks to better understand the current regional landscape regarding barriers, facilitators, and other factors influencing food access across the 27 municipalities. The Southeastern Massachusetts Metropolitan Planning Organization (SMMPO) is the agency responsible for conducting the federally required metropolitan transportation planning process for the 27 cities and towns that comprise the SRPEDD region. SRPEDD transportation staff also serve as the staff for the SMMPO. The creation of a plan centered on food access can help to provide a pathway to additional SMMPO studies and future project development to advance a transportation network that meaningfully supports healthy food access across the region.

Across the region, community members may use a combination of grocery stores, convenience stores, restaurants, fast food establishments, farmer's markets, food pantries, farm stands, food delivery services, schools, and government assistance programs to access a variety of food choices. Similarly, the SMMPO region is home to a wide variety of agriculture and food-based businesses and organizations that make up a diverse regional food system. Gaps in access and availability of healthy food options, however, leave significant portions of the region without easy access to food as well as the resources necessary to make healthy food choices.

Through strong public engagement efforts, core public health principles, examination of existing GIS data, and regional coalition involvement, the SMMPO Food Access and Security in Transportation (FAST) Plan provides a better understanding of the current food access landscape and provides suggestions for supporting regional food resilience and equitable healthy food access through integrated transportation investments and practices. These materials seek to open dialogue on the improvement of the region's transportation network and infrastructure required to adequately support and sustain long-term improvements in the food access ecosystem.



# Overview

Work for the Food Access and Security in Transportation (FAST) Plan began in October 2024, and Phase 1 of this process completed in September 2025. Phase 2 began immediately afterward and continues through September 2026.

Since the beginning of this plan, the food access landscape in the SMMPO region has continued to rapidly change and adapt to both new and recurring circumstances. The government shutdown in October and November 2025 emphasized the fragility of food assistance services across the state, leaving thousands of individuals and families across the region vulnerable to heightened food insecurity and its negative consequences. The slow rebound of financial assistance to services such as SNAP continues to threaten the certainty of where community members, especially those most in need, will get their next meal. These disruptions in services come at a time when data reflects a growing number of Massachusetts residents experiencing food insecurity. According to the Greater Boston Food Bank's 2026 report, 2 out of every 5 households (40%) reported experiencing food insecurity within the last year. Up 3% in just one year, more than 2 million individuals across the state remain unsure as to where their next meal would be sourced from.

SMMPO staff have begun to map food access disparities with the creation of a Food Access Scoring Matrix. This one-of-a-kind toolkit can be widely adopted and utilized by other MPOs, municipalities, and community partners across the country to

assess food access and food insecurity in their communities. With an emphasis on the relationship between transportation planning and food access, the data produced can help to inform future transportation planning initiatives and projects to create more just, equitable, and healthy places for all individuals. SMMPO staff also expanded its public engagement process over the project period. By capturing public feedback, this information provides greater context to the data points determined by the Food Access Scoring Matrix.

As the food access landscape is constantly changing, adapting, and evolving, the FAST Plan must be responsive and aware of these varying circumstances to ensure the information provided is up-to-date and reliable. At any time, food retailers may open or close, food assistance benefits may expand or shrink, and the variety of transportation services provided may change. Each of these factors, and more, will undoubtedly affect community members across the SMMPO region, with an even greater impact on those most directly affected by such significant changes. As a result, the SMMPO staff commits to ensuring the information in this plan is reflective of changing circumstances, to the best of its ability. The addition of new information will be routinely updated in this document and reflected on the SRPEDD Food Access webpage.

# Food Access, Health, and Socioeconomic Experiences

In 2024, according to the Greater Boston Food Bank's 2025 Food Access Report, more than 1 in 3 households (37%) in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts reported experiencing food insecurity within the last year. This number reflects a continued upward trend, year after year, in the total number of individuals (roughly 2 million) who have shared concerns about where their next meal would come from. Further, rates of food insecurity disproportionately impact certain demographics more significantly than others, with Hispanic, Black, Native American / Alaskan Native, and LGBTQ+ populations all reporting rates of food insecurity above 50% within the state last year. Older adults and college students also reported high levels of food insecurity across the state.

Oftentimes, individuals must make difficult choices between accessing food and other necessities, such as the costs associated with housing, medical expenses, childcare, and transportation. Beyond the costs of food access, the financial strain associated with other incurred costs can deeply affect an individual's ability to have a reliable, affordable, and healthy food source. Across the state, 89% of the households that reported food insecurity also experienced struggles affording at least one other basic need – most often, these basic needs included heating and electricity, housing costs, and medical expenses. (GBFB, 2025). When individuals must forego one or several basic needs to maintain financial stability, both personal health and overall well-being can be significantly and negatively impacted by these decisions.

In terms of personal health and its relationship to healthy food access, chronic conditions such as asthma, diabetes, and mental health disorders have been linked to food insecurity. In Massachusetts, 67% of food-insecure adults and 51% of food-insecure children reported having at least one of the previously mentioned chronic conditions (GBFB, 2025). 40% of these food-insecure adults also reported having skipped vital medical or dental care visits, with cost being highlighted as the top reason. Beyond the direct impact to individual health outcomes related to food-insecurity, the subsequent healthcare and operational costs attributable to food insecurity are estimated to be \$1.3 billion annually among Medicaid recipients (GBFB, 2025). These estimates come from the high costs of care for food insecurity related hospitalizations and emergency room visits.

Vehicle ownership is one of the key indicators of food access, as households that have access to a car generally have access to the largest number of grocery stores, frequent a larger variety of stores, and make more grocery trips each month (Massachusetts Department of Transportation, 2025). While food retailers are more limited in rural and some suburban parts of the state and SMMPO region, food accessibility is still relatively high due to high rates of vehicle ownership (Massachusetts Department of Transportation, 2025).

Nine percent of households in the SMMPO region, or roughly 58,478 people, however, do not have access

to a vehicle (American Community Survey 2018-2022 5-Year Estimates). 18 SRPEDD communities have at least one neighborhood where 9-20% of households do not have a car. SMMPO communities where vehicle ownership is lowest or where 5% or more of the population does not have a vehicle include New Bedford, Fall River, Taunton, Attleboro, Fairhaven, Dartmouth, Wareham, Middleborough, and Mansfield, with Fall River and New Bedford having above the region's average number of households with no vehicle at 16% and 18% respectively.

While car dependence strongly impacts access to healthy food, other factors shape households' decisions about food choices. Poverty and household income are strong determinants of food insecurity, especially when considered alongside current rising grocery, housing, and healthcare costs. According to 2018-2022 ACS 5-Year Estimates, the SMMPO region has a median household income of \$84,085, which is 13% lower than the state average of \$96,505. 10% of households in the SMMPO region are experiencing poverty; that is, their median annual household income is 65 percent or less than the statewide median household income of \$62,728 (poverty measure defined by the Commonwealth's methodology). This is in comparison to 12% in 2014, which shows a relatively stable poverty rate over the past 8 years.

In addition to vehicle access and income, another systemic factor that constrains food access in the region is relentlessly increasing housing costs, a trend not confined to the SMMPO region. Households experiencing financial hardship and housing costs often make difficult trade-offs between basic living necessities. Escalating housing costs in the region and state leave many low- and moderate-income households with limited budgets

for food and other health necessities.

A 2024 report by the New Bedford Economic Development Council revealed that "86% of New Bedford households don't make enough money to afford a mortgage for a typical home in the city" and "if forced to move, more than two thirds of New Bedford renters would find the typical asking rent to be unaffordable" (New Bedford Economic Development Council, 2024). The report revealed a typical asking rent of \$1500 in New Bedford, \$1500 in Fall River, \$2,000 in Attleboro, and \$1900 in Taunton for 2023, with housing costs continuing to increase very disproportionately compared to wages. Fall River and New Bedford are currently among the most affordable communities in the region and state, but untamable real estate with rising property values and rents, growing gentrification (the process of changing neighborhood characteristics marked by wealthier residents displacing poorer residents), high housing demand fueled by displacement from other regions, low supply, and outdated zoning policies put a strain on household budgets. Similarly, escalating costs of gas and electric utilities contribute to housing cost burden and further pressure on household budgets.



# Federal Assistance and the Healthy Incentives Program

State and federal assistance programs often serve as primary resources for food access. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, more commonly referred to as SNAP, is the federal assistance program that provides financial assistance to low- or no-income individuals and households to afford healthy and nutritious food options at local grocery stores and other food retailers. Eligibility gaps remain prevalent in accessing SNAP benefits, with 44% (21 million) of food insecure individuals across the US not qualifying for SNAP due to state-specific income thresholds, often between 130% and 200% of the federal poverty line (Feeding America, 2025). These eligibility gaps highlight an important and critical misalignment between federal aid assistance and community-level need.

The Greater Boston Food Bank's 2025 study found among survey respondents that "among households with food insecurity, 89 percent reported they had trouble paying for at least one other basic need (such as housing, heat and electricity, medical needs, transportation, childcare, and/or debts or other bills), compared with only 26 percent of food-secure households" (Greater Boston Food Bank, 2025). It also found that over one-third of food insecure households reported struggling to afford transportation. Food-insecure respondents identified utilities, transportation, and mortgage or rent as the top three basic needs competing for their food dollars. They estimated needing an additional \$628 per month or \$7,500 per year to meet their basic food, housing, utilities, transportation, childcare, and

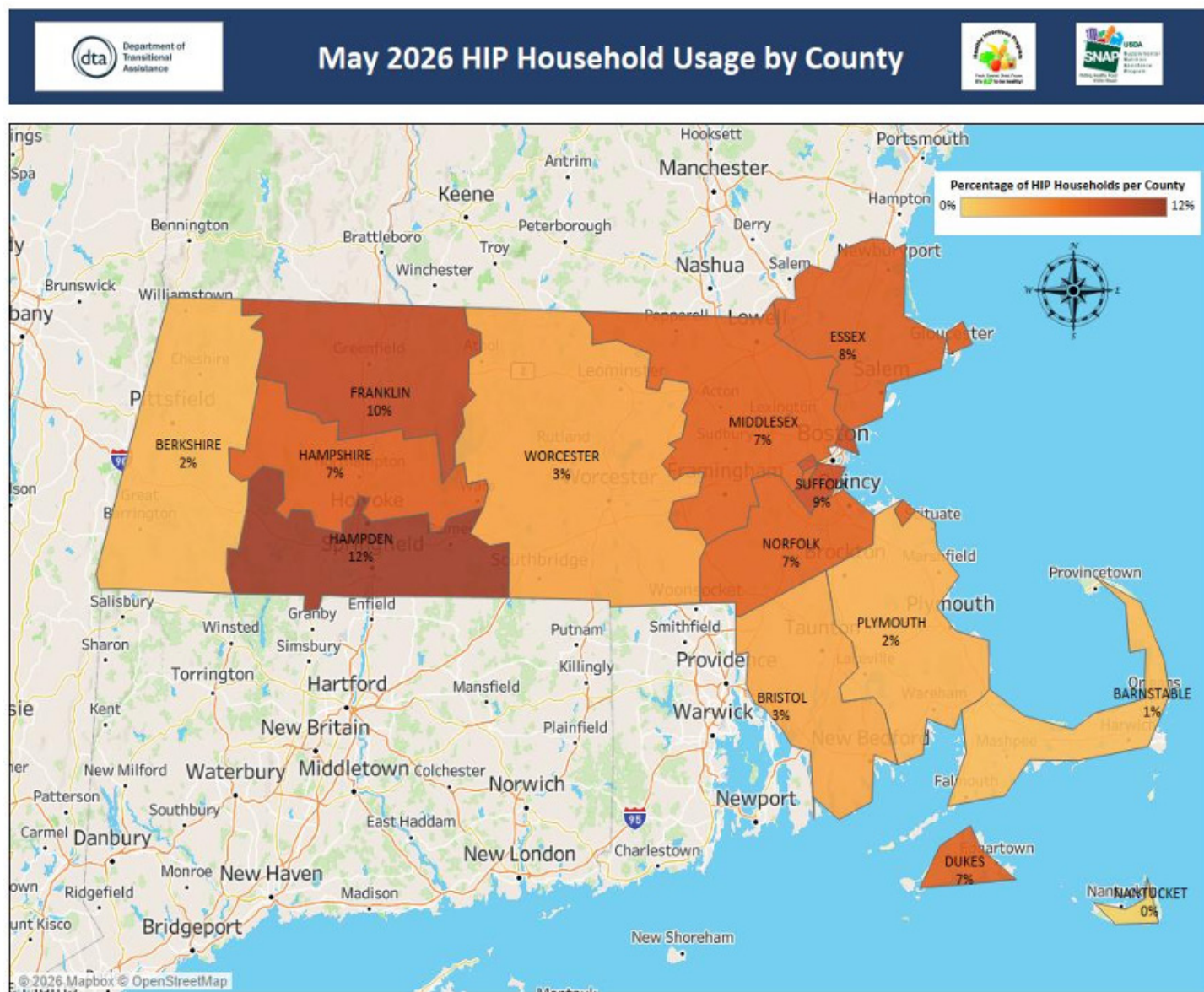
healthcare needs (Greater Boston Food Bank, 2018).

As of February 2025, more than 1.1 million Massachusetts residents utilized SNAP benefits to help put food on the table (Food Research and Action Center, 2025). This number reflects only 79% of SNAP-eligible food-insecure households across the state (often referred to as the "SNAP Gap"), highlighting a coverage gap that must be addressed (GBFB, 2025). Although SNAP benefits serve as a resource for food insecure households to begin to meet basic food needs, 75% of users across the state highlighted a need for greater support in fully realizing their food needs.

In Massachusetts, other federal and state financial assistance programs seek to increase access to healthy food options. The state's Healthy Incentives Program (HIP), operated by the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA), provides enrolled SNAP users with a dollar-for-dollar reimbursement when users buy healthy, fresh, and local foods directly from farmers (HIP Fact Sheet, 2025). The HIP program has faced a variety of financial setbacks and limitations that have made long-term utilization less predictable. As of July 2025, the once-cut monthly benefits were fully restored to their original values, with assistance set to be provided at \$40/60/80 increments depending on household size (Healthy Incentives Program Coalition, 2025). Since the HIP program began in 2017, almost 240,000 households have used HIP and purchased more than \$81 million in

healthy, local food (HIP Fact Sheet, 2026). 61% of users included a senior, 22% included children, and 42% included a person with a disability. HIP users could be counted within multiple categories, explaining why these percentages do not add up to 100.

For every dollar spent using HIP benefits, \$2 is generated in local economic impact through farmers using these funds to support local goods and services. HIP benefits have provided users with 1.23 daily servings of healthy fruits and vegetables, which can dramatically reduce the prevalence of chronic disease and its associated health care expenditures. With such evident and positive impacts, a key priority remains in advancing HIP utilization. In both Bristol and Plymouth County, HIP household usage was reported at only 3% and 2%, respectively, in May of 2026 for all eligible households. Beyond SNAP and HIP, other programs such as Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and the free school lunch program provided at schools enrolled in the National School Lunch Program to all students at no cost serve as other methods to help reduce the level food insecurity experienced across the state. Below, Figure 1 from the Department of Transitional Assistance shows the HIP household usage rates per county of all eligible participants. These low utilization rates underscore a key need to further advance education regarding HIP to those who may not know they are eligible for assistance.



# Agricultural Preservation and Local Farmlands

The Commonwealth has a deep and rich history in agriculture that heavily shapes the food access landscape. Across the state, the agriculture industry contributes more than \$10 billion to the economy annually (MA Farmland Action Plan, 2023). The industry creates almost 30,000 farm-working job opportunities and more than 45,000 secondary jobs within the food sector. There are, however, direct and immediate threats to farmlands across the state. The MA Farmland Action Plan (2023) reports that, by 2040, between 50-90,000 acres (nearly 15% of the total agricultural land area) of farmland are projected to be converted for other uses, making Massachusetts the third-most at-risk state in the country for land conversion risk. This loss equates to a loss of more than 1,200 local farms, \$91 million in revenue, and almost 5,000 sector-based jobs.

In 2022, Bristol County recorded 507 total farms, a number that reflects a 26% decrease from 2017 (Census of Agriculture, 2022). These farms spanned almost 28,000 acres of land and produced a total market value of \$46,163,000, averaging \$91,052 in product value sold per farm. 884 producers managed these farms, with a majority (525 / 59%) being male. In 2022, Plymouth County recorded 809 total farms, a number that reflects a 7% increase from 2017. These farms spanned over 54,000 acres of land and produced a total market value of \$90,237,000, averaging \$111,541 in product value sold per farm. 1,580 producers managed these farms, with a majority (979 / 62%) being male.

The Marion Institute's Food System Assessment (2021) highlights the significant pressures placed on the region's food system and identifies opportunities for continued resilience. Specifically, the region's farmland workforce continues to age, as the average age of producers stands at almost 60 years. Further, workers in the food and agriculture industries earn wages below their counterparts in other sectors. In moments of regional or industry disruption, as was seen during the COVID-19 pandemic, the food system may be severely strained in both physical and financial capacity. Workforce sustainability remains a focus area for bolstered resilience, as an aging workforce and limited participation among younger workers threatens the long-term prospects of local food production and farmland viability.

Resilient food systems must center localized agricultural development and a commitment to supporting regional farm systems that produce high quality, nutritious, and affordable healthy food options for communities. Further, the SMMPO region's transportation network must prioritize making healthy food access points accessible beyond a personal vehicle -- the region's bus, pedestrian, and bicycle networks can help strengthen this need for agricultural resilience.

# Active Transportation

Access to healthy, affordable food is a foundational determinant of health. Walking, biking, and micromobility options offer essential non-driving transportation modes for many residents, especially for urban, low-income, or car-limited households. During Phase 1, initial discussions with food system organizations, including Coastal Foodshed, Southeastern Massachusetts Agricultural Partnership (SEMAP), Coastline Elderly Services, local food pantries, and other food system stakeholders revealed some common threads related to transportation, further detailed below.

An initial review of active transportation infrastructure (sidewalks, crosswalks, curb ramps, bike lanes, and paths) near food retail and distribution destinations such as supermarkets, corner stores, farmers markets, and food pantries confirmed a need for more focused analysis. In addition to initial stakeholder interviews and infrastructure review, SMMPO staff have also reviewed a variety of local, regional, and statewide policies and plans related to the intersection of the transportation and food systems, including local Complete Streets Prioritization Plans, the Southeastern Massachusetts Food System Assessment, MassDOT's Healthy Transportation Policy Directive, the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan, and the Healthy Community Design Toolkit's Municipal Strategies to Increase Food Access. Many of the action strategies included in these policies and plans served as useful tools in the development of this plan's final recommendations.

## *Initial Findings*

### 1. Infrastructure & Access Gaps

- **Sidewalk and Bike Network Discontinuity:** Many food retailers are located along high-speed arterial roads with insufficient or incomplete sidewalks and limited bike facilities.
- **First- and Last-Mile Barriers:** Micromobility infrastructure (e.g., secure bike parking, high-visibility crosswalks, and high-quality sidewalks) is often missing near food access points.
- **Limited Connectivity to Transit:** Where transit serves food destinations, pedestrian and bike connections to stops are often unsafe, indirect, or in many cases non-existent.

### 2. Land Use and Spatial Disparities

- Most communities in the region have complete streets prioritization plans, but it is unclear at this stage which of those prioritization plans directly link pedestrian and bike improvements to food access locations.
- In many communities, major grocery stores lie outside a safe 10–15-minute walk or bike ride, especially for those without cars.
- Low-income populations seem to be overrepresented in areas with poor active transportation infrastructure and limited healthy food options.

### 3. Ongoing Initiatives and Innovations

- The continued build out of regional high-comfort bicycle and pedestrian networks, such as the South Coast Bikeway or Taunton River Trail, could provide long-term connectivity to healthy fresh food for urban and rural communities alike.
- Local food access organizations, such as Coastal Foodshed, are having success with innovative mobile farmer markets or delivery of fresh, locally grown produce directly to local institutions like Housing Authority properties, and serve as a model for expanding access to the State's Healthy Incentives Program (HIP), in particular.
- The increased availability of e-bikes and e-scooters, and specifically e-cargo bikes, could increase the capacity of local organizations and businesses to more affordably distribute, and individuals to access, healthy food. These mobility devices are particularly useful in urban areas, or areas in close proximity to a high-comfort network that is connected to food retail and distribution locations.

***"Would like to see more off-road bike paths in the area. It is so dangerous to bike on the road despite the laws that have been passed to try and improve this. This would also help people stay healthy by increasing recreational walking, biking, and rollerblading."***

- (Rehoboth resident, 30-39)

***"It would be enjoyable to walk or ride a bike. However, our town has improved its sidewalks, but they are still lacking or do not connect. Further, there are many driveway openings along Main Street (Route 58). The backroads do not have sidewalks or a biking lane."***

- (Carver resident, 50-59)



# Transit Considerations

There are two Regional Transit Authorities (RTAs) within the SRPEDD region. SRTA has fixed route and Demand Response bus services within 10 communities, most notably serving New Bedford and Fall River. Demand Response is SRTA's paratransit service for all qualifying individuals with a disability. Transit bus frequency (headways) varies between 20-60 minutes depending on the route. Routes 9 (Intercity Route), 201, and 202 have 20-minute headways, while most other routes have half-hourly service. SRTA provides paratransit services for any location in all 10 communities. GATRA generally has 60-minute headways and serves 33 communities primarily within the SRPEDD region. GATRA has fixed route, Dial-A-Ride, and on-demand transit. There are also community-based organizations like South Shore Community Action Council, who provide door-to-door transportation primarily for older adults, and people with disabilities to connect community members to critical programs and services. Councils on Aging also have some shuttles (some of which are operated by GATRA) to provide transportation to improve access to services.

In 2024, SRTA released a Year End Fixed Route Ridership Analysis that includes data for a widely distributed rider survey. 61% of people surveyed said their household has "zero motor vehicles" and 49% of respondents said they use the bus "every day." People riding SRTA buses were also asked about why they were using the bus. 41% of respondents shared that they were using the bus for "shopping/errands," which was also the most common response in the 2024 Rider Survey.

There are obstacles to food access in the region. There are challenges pertaining to infrastructure, service hours, and transit headways. There are large food retailers that do not allow transit shelters or awnings for people waiting for the bus within the SRPEDD region. The 2023 Regional Coordinated Human Services Transportation Plan asked agencies about public transportation recommendations, which included an identified barrier to groceries: "No weekend transportation, no buses in evening, limited services even in city for grocery shopping especially" (CHSTP, 2023). There is also an identified barrier to food access in SRPEDD communities that don't currently have fixed route service: "The closest bus stop is a mile away from Dighton Housing Authority who provides affordable housing for elderly/Disabled people. The closest grocery store is miles away from the Authority" (CHSTP, 2023). It is worth noting that parts of Dighton previously had fixed route service.

There are also opportunities to improve food security and access through public transit. Buses, mini-buses, vans, and shuttles can be equipped to securely hold people's groceries while shopping to make a more comfortable and convenient experience. There can be transit shelters designed to accommodate people carrying groceries and protected from weather. In particular, Massachusetts has a single-use plastics ban, and there are people grocery shopping with paper bags. Having shelters would ensure people accessing food will have their bags secured without having their groceries potentially destroyed in the rain or snow. Having a minimal

walkshed between transit routes and food retailers/non-commercial food distributors is important for accessibility as well as ridership. In a 2025 peer-reviewed study on food access with public transit in Rhode Island, researchers utilized a 5-minute walkshed in each direction based on responses from community leaders (Bay, et al., 2025).



# Public Engagement

The SMMPO region varies greatly by community – thus, the ways in which individuals access food options varies greatly, too. While many individuals rely on personal vehicles to get to and from food access locations, others rely on alternative forms of transportation, such as walking, bicycling, and taking the bus from one of the SMMPO region’s two transit authorities (the Greater Attleboro Taunton Regional Transit Authority, GATRA, or the Southeastern Regional Transit Authority, SRTA). This feedback, provided through strong public engagement efforts, provides invaluable insight into how the current regional transportation network either advances or deters individuals from accessing the greatest variety of healthy, affordable, and accessible food options throughout their communities.

For this plan, SMMPO staff held multiple meetings with a variety of community-based organizations that provide food access-related services to subpopulations within the SMMPO region. These community partners represent a broad constituent base – from at-risk children and families to elderly populations, local farmers, and SNAP recipients, a wide range of priorities and concerns were discussed. Beyond conversation, promotional engagement material describing the purpose and goals of the FAST Plan were distributed amongst community partners to share with their constituents.

During these meetings, community partners were asked to provide feedback and expertise regarding regional food access and transportation concerns and how their organization helped to support regional food access and resiliency efforts. Specific guiding questions during these meetings included:

- How does transportation access impact your work?
- What, if any, transportation concerns have been identified by the communities / individuals you interact with?
- Beyond transportation concerns, what other priorities should be addressed to improve healthy food access?

These questions sought to better understand the current barriers and facilitators that SMMPO community partners experienced when providing services to their constituents. Broadly, reliability and accessibility of public transportation services was noted as a barrier to providing the necessary frequency of service to and from food access locations. Several community partners noted that current transportation routes often require individuals to make multiple transfers and walk unjustifiably long distances. These logistics can be made more difficult with multiple bags of groceries, especially among children, the elderly (specifically homebound seniors), and parents with young children. Beyond transportation, the affordability of healthy foods was noted

as another barrier to access. Specifically, limited SNAP and HIP benefits provide little flexibility of choice as food prices continue to rise. Further, several fresh food vendors noted that many farmer's markets across the region are barely viable for farmers to profit from, thus creating very limited incentive to participate. These cost prohibitive decisions simultaneously limit the variety of healthy food choices available to individuals who attempt to spend their HIP budget via farmer's markets. Finally, food pantries in the region noted that organizational capacities can negatively impact operational hours for community members to access food from these pantries. This constraint, combined with limited public transportation service to specific food pantry locations, can severely limit the level of access possible for individuals, especially those with the most urgent transportation barriers. Figure 2 belows highlights a publicly distributed FAST Plan flyer that highlights food access facts, a call to action, and ways to provide feedback on the plan.



## FOOD ACCESS AND SECURITY IN TRANSPORTATION (FAST) PLAN

SRPEDD seeks to better understand the current regional landscape regarding barriers, facilitators, and other factors influencing food access across the region's 27 municipalities.

### FAST FACTS

In 2024, 1 in 3 MA households reported experiencing food insecurity at some point in the last 12 months.

In the last year, 69% of food insecure people had to choose between paying for food and paying for transportation.

Food insecure people are more likely to experience chronic disease, poor mental health, and greater healthcare costs.

### HELP US UNDERSTAND

- What transportation mode(s) do you use to get to food access locations? What barriers make these places difficult to access?
- What barriers do you face in meeting your family's food needs?
- How has food insecurity impacted your health/wellbeing?

### PROVIDE FEEDBACK

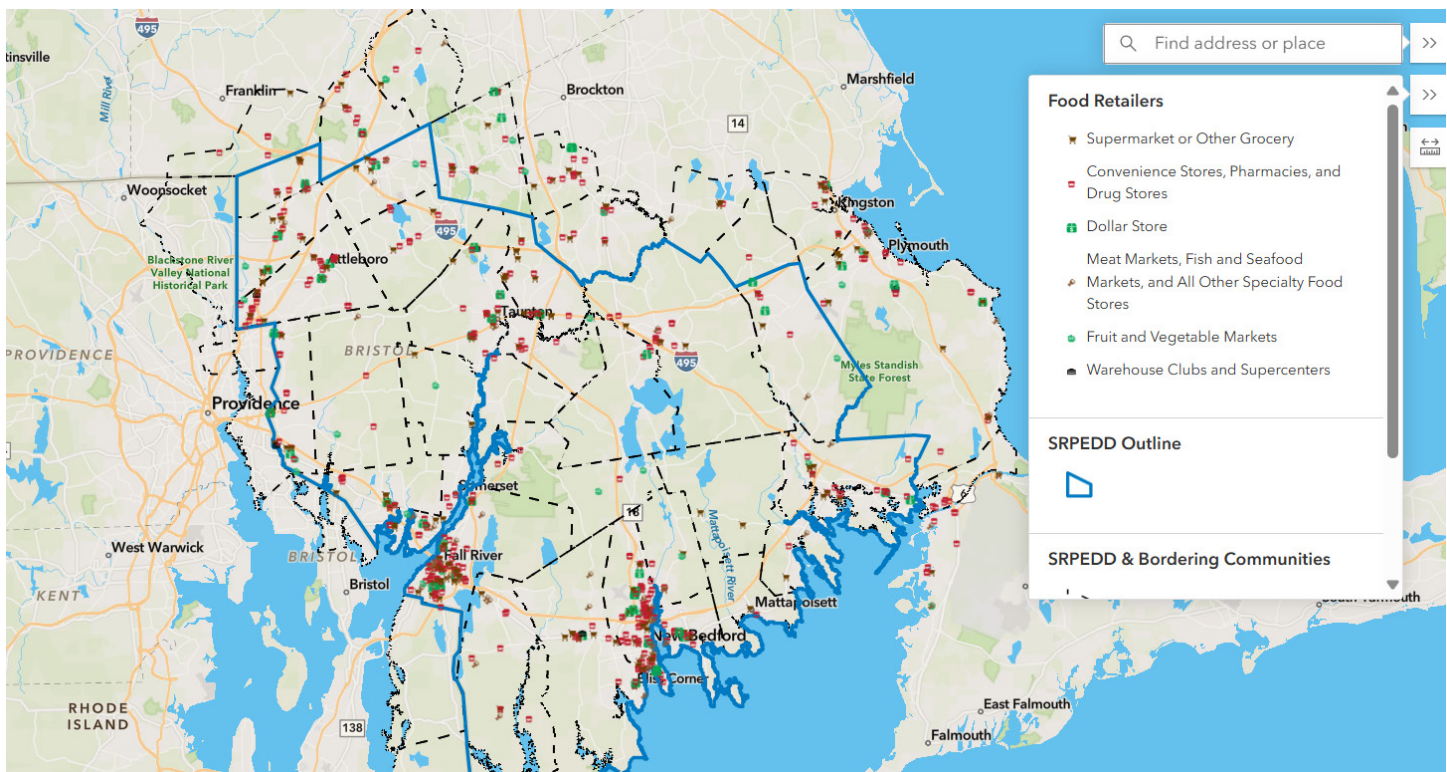
Comments may be offered by a variety of methods, including:

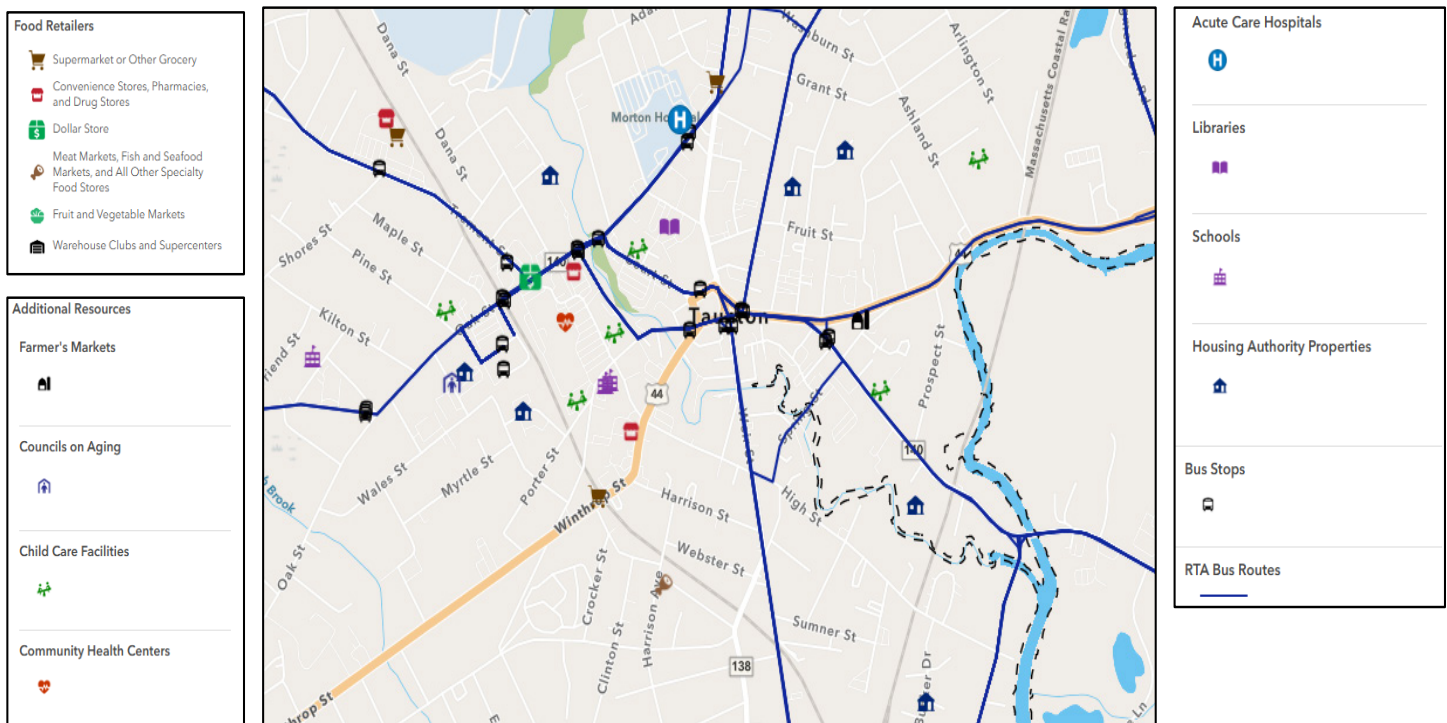
- ✉ [nsoutier@srpedd.org](mailto:nsoutier@srpedd.org)
- 🌐 [www.srpedd.org/contact-us/](http://www.srpedd.org/contact-us/)
- 📱 @srpedd

# Critical Destinations Food Access Map

Throughout the development of the FAST Plan, staff created the Critical Destinations Food Access Map. This online, publicly accessible food access GIS toolkit is intended to be used as a resource to better understand the current landscape of food access and transportation within the SMMPO region. GIS data was assembled for this project from a variety of sources to gain a comprehensive view of food systems in the SRPEDD region. Massachusetts food retailer information was derived from data provided by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) and Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT), restaurant and fast-food locations were derived from tax accessor data, and other layers were derived from existing MassGIS databases.

This GIS data visually represents the geographic distribution of food access locations (such as grocery stores, convenience stores, food pantries, farmers markets, etc.), as well as transportation-specific information, including service routes and stops for MBTA, SRTA, and GATRA, and the SMMPO region's pedestrian and bicycle networks. Additional resources, such as the locations of local hospitals, housing authorities, childcare centers, councils on aging, schools, and libraries have also been included. These organizations and institutions play a significant role in addressing food access and other social determinants of health. Below, Figure 3 provides a broad overview of the SMMPO region and some of the key data points available to users of the Critical Destinations Food Access Map. The online map can be accessed on the SRPEDD Food Access Webpage at the following link: <https://srpedd.org/transportation/food-access/>





As Figure 4 shows, taking a closer look at one of our communities, Taunton, it is possible to see the puzzle pieces of community resources and access points come into focus. Using this resource, an individual can determine where nearby traditional food access points may be located, what childcare and healthcare services are available nearby, where specialty food markets and food pantries can be accessed, and which bus routes may be able to provide service to each of these destinations. The information on this map serves as a resource to our community partners and a starting point for better identifying key transportation initiatives that will support regional food access.



# Food Access Scoring Matrix and Methodology

SMMPO staff have begun to map food access disparities with the creation of a Food Access Scoring Matrix. This one-of-a-kind toolkit can be widely adopted and utilized by other MPOs, municipalities, and community partners across the country to assess food access and food insecurity in their communities.

The Food Access Scoring Matrix utilizes a quantitative scoring methodology to better assess the multiple factors that impact food access across the SMMPO region. Using a 0-10 scoring scale, the matrix looks at census tract level data to determine relative food access based on four specific criteria:

- Accessibility
- Diversity
- Affordability
- Social Vulnerability

These four criteria serve as the baseline for assessing relative food access within a given census tract in a way that standardizes the evaluation process. This allows each census tract to be ranked according to their ability to meet these specific criteria. How each criterion is measured is defined as follows:

## Accessibility

The accessibility criterion of the matrix measures the relative ability for an individual to access a food location point via public transportation within a given census tract.

| Metric                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Yes       | No       |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|----------|
| Presence of at least one (1) mainstream grocery store within the designated census tract that is accessible by public transit (within a 0.25 mi walk from the transit stop).                                                           | +1        | 0        |
| Presence of at least one (1) non-mainstream grocery store (e.g., convenience store, pharmacy, or dollar store.) within the designated census tract that is accessible by public transit (within a 0.25 mi walk from the transit stop.) | +1        | 0        |
| Presence of at least one (1) food retailer located on or within a 0.25 mi walk of the Regional Bike Network.                                                                                                                           | +1        | 0        |
| <b>Total Possible Points</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <b>+3</b> | <b>0</b> |

## Diversity

The diversity criterion of the matrix measures the relative variation in types of food location points within a given census tract.

| Metric                                                                                                                                                    | Yes       | No       |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|----------|
| Presence of more than one (1) food location point within the designated census tract.                                                                     | +1        | 0        |
| Presence of at least one (1) specialty food location (e.g., Meat & Fish Market, Fruit & Vegetable Market, etc.) point within the designated census tract. | +1        | 0        |
| Presence of at least one (1) identified farmers' market within the designated census tract.                                                               | +1        | 0        |
| Presence of at least one (1) identified food pantry location within the given census tract.                                                               | +1        | 0        |
| <b>Total Possible Points</b>                                                                                                                              | <b>+4</b> | <b>0</b> |

## Affordability and Social Vulnerability

Affordability is a main component to food access, and the ability for individuals to pay for certain foods can impact where, when, and how often they buy food. Certain neighborhood characteristics, such as socioeconomic status and housing and transportation access, can also influence food affordability and access. Here, these characteristics influence social vulnerability, a marker for how susceptible a census tract is to changes in the food access ecosystem. These two criteria of the matrix measure the relative affordability and access of a food location point within a given census tract. Secondary data sets, the Rural Advancement Foundation International's Grocery Gap Atlas and the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention's Social Vulnerability Index, assess the relative socioeconomic advantage and disadvantage level within a given census tract. The Economic Research Service's Food Access Research Atlas further substantiates this work by determining both low-income and low-access census tract information. To better understand how points are awarded based on the chosen metrics, each of these external databases and their methodologies are described below:

- Grocery Gap Atlas: Provides census tract-level scores from 0-100 based on grocery store market concentration. The greater the market concentration within a few corporations, the lesser the flexibility there is in accessing affordable food options (seeing as the corporations with market control can virtually set all prices). When less variety in grocery store options occur, prices of products become more competitive.
- Social Vulnerability Index (SVI): Provides census tract-level scores from 0 - 1, with scores closer to 1 indicating more social vulnerability. The SVI uses 16 markers related to socioeconomic status, household characteristics, racial/ethnic minority status, and housing/transportation access to determine the score.

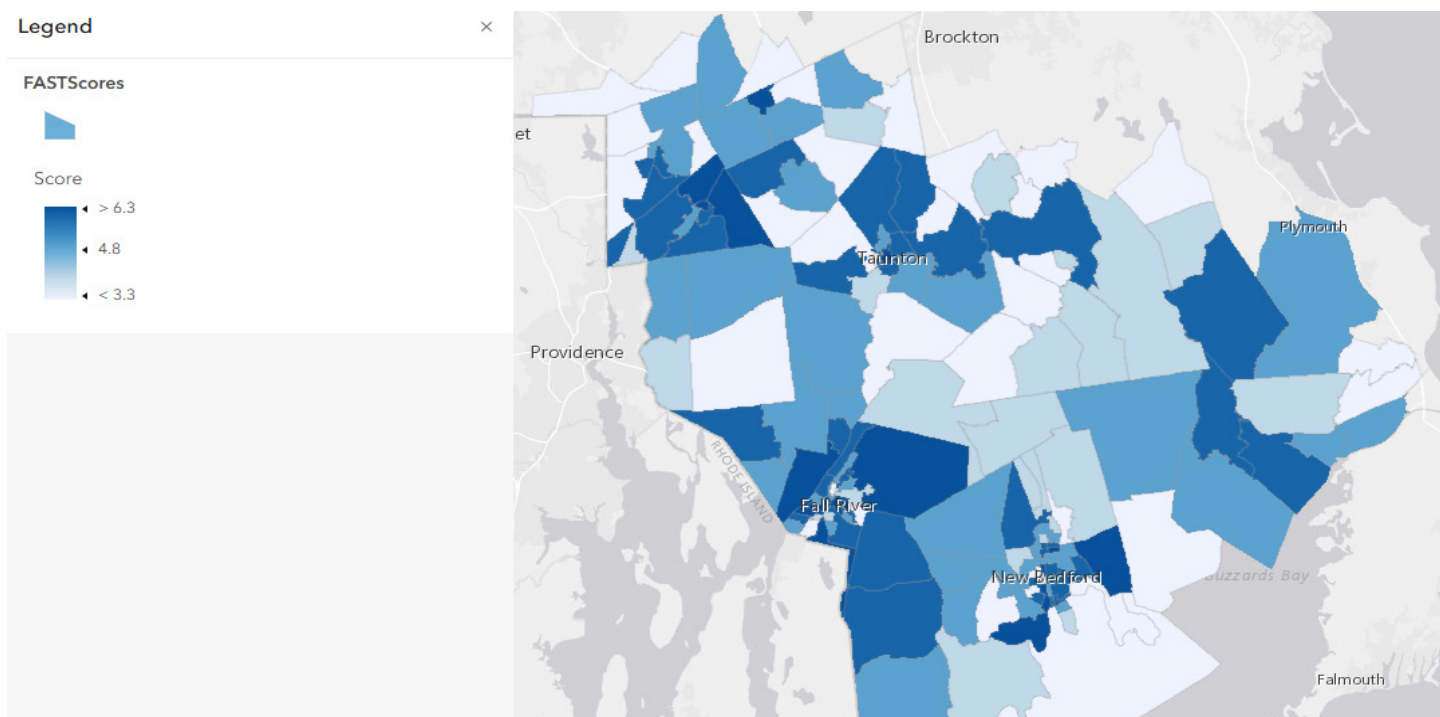
- Food Access Research Atlas: provides census tract-level scale for which census tracts qualify as low-income, low-access, both, or neither.

| Metric                                                                                                                          | Yes       | No       |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|----------|
| The designated census tract has been ranked at a low or low-to-medium SVI level at or below a value of 0.5.                     | +1        | 0        |
| The designated census tract has been ranked a Market Concentration score at 50 or below.                                        | +1        | 0        |
| The designated census tract is neither a low-income or a low-access (at 1 and 10 miles) tract, as determined by 2019 FARA data. | +1        | 0        |
| <b>Total Possible Points</b>                                                                                                    | <b>+3</b> | <b>0</b> |

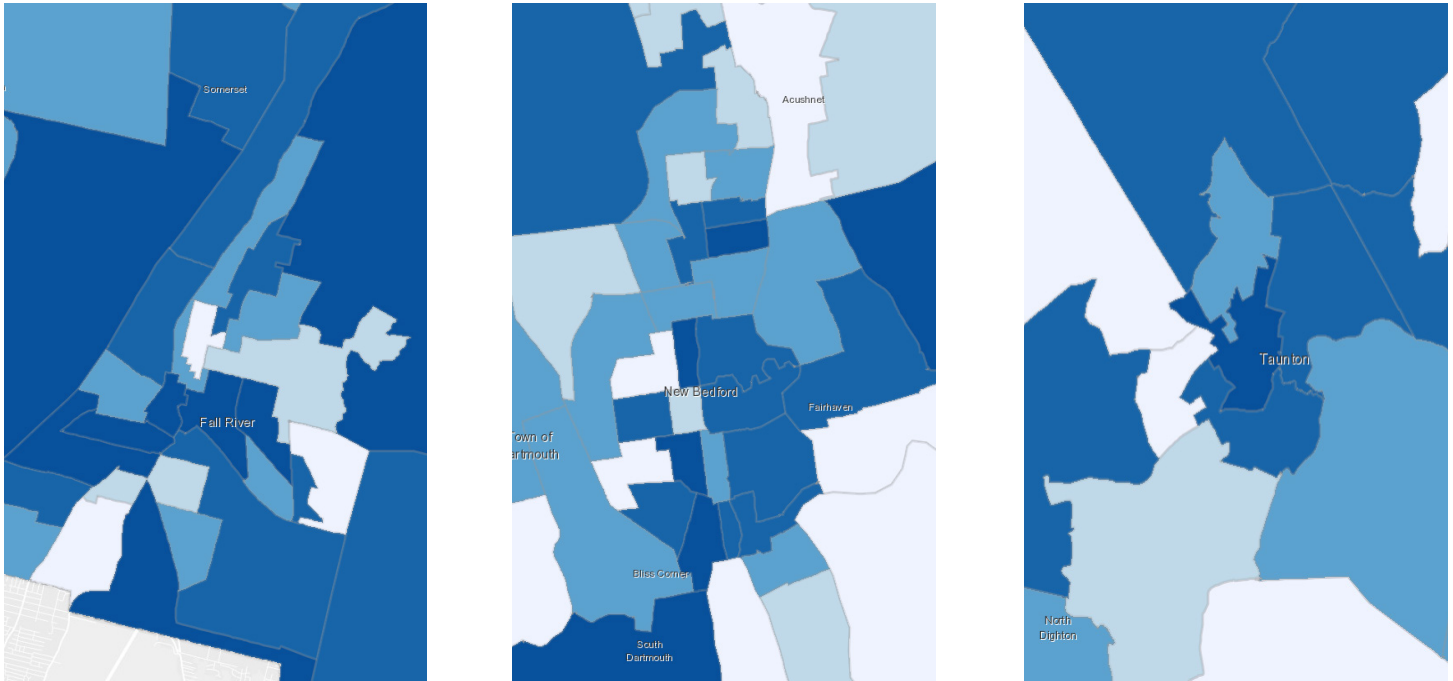
## Findings

The information included in the Critical Destinations Food Access map served as the baseline data for this analysis. While some of these resources may be more closely linked to food access than others, capturing a broad scope of community resources helps to better understand the gaps in services provided to communities that directly impact an individual's ability to support themselves and others.

Data from the matrixes listed previously was loaded into a GIS program to perform an analysis. Using location data for grocery stores, farmer's markets, specialty markets, etc., within data exported from MassGIS, the Grocery Gap Atlas, the Food Access Research Atlas, and the Social Vulnerability Index provided SMMPO staff the ability to assign scores to census tracts. Overlaying all of the information onto a map allows for a much easier assignment of scores across the region. Figure 5 below shows a region-wide overview of the how the Food Access Scoring Matrix is applied to each census tract.



A score closer to 10 is represented by darker shades of blue and shows census tracts that have fewer vulnerabilities for food access. A score closer to 0 is represented by lighter shades of blue and shows census tracts that have greater vulnerabilities for food access. Although the scoring rubric allows for scores between 0 and 10, the region's highest value was 8, and the lowest was 1. As can be seen, scores vary across the region and even within specific municipalities. This observation highlights how local food access variation can be. Scores also vary between urban and rural locations in the region. Given the relatively equal distribution of values between 1 and 8 across the region, this confirms that the Food Access Scoring Matrix has strong evaluation criteria in assigning these scores. Had there been too many 0s or too many 10s, this may have indicated a need to reevaluate how points were scored and awarded.



Above, Figure 6 shows three zoomed in snapshots (from left to right) of Fall River, New Bedford, and Taunton, each of which have several smaller census tracts. As noted, even different areas of the same city may be assigned very different scores. These scores, determined by the Food Access Scoring Matrix, provide meaningful context into how certain areas of a municipality may be more at risk to food access and transportation concerns than other areas. Similarly, even though two census tracts may score the same value (for example, a score of 7), this value could mean different things for different tracts, depending on which positive scores were awarded from the matrix. For example, one census tract may receive an additional point for having a farmers market included within it, while another may not. This online, publicly accessible map allows users to click on each census tract in the region to determine which exact points from the Food Access Scoring Matrix were awarded. This tool may prove helpful to community officials as it can help to identify the specific needs of each census tract in a town or city. This information is included as a layer in the Critical Destinations Food Access Map, available at this link: <https://srpedd.org/transportation/food-access/>

# Transit Access to Food Assistance Services Map

SMMPO staff also developed the Transit Access to Food Assistance (TAFA) mapping tool. This online, publicly available resource supplements the Critical Destinations Food Access Map and provides more detailed information regarding which pantries and free meal services are along specific bus routes and bus stops in the SMMPO region. This mapping tool was created as a result of the unmet transportation needs survey in the SMMPO's CHSTP, recent uncertainties in SNAP funding cuts across Massachusetts and the country, and the recent government shutdown in October and November of 2025. As a result, food insecurity is growing across the state at a time when government food programs have been restricted or reduced, leaving community members vulnerable to limited assistance and access to resources and food options.

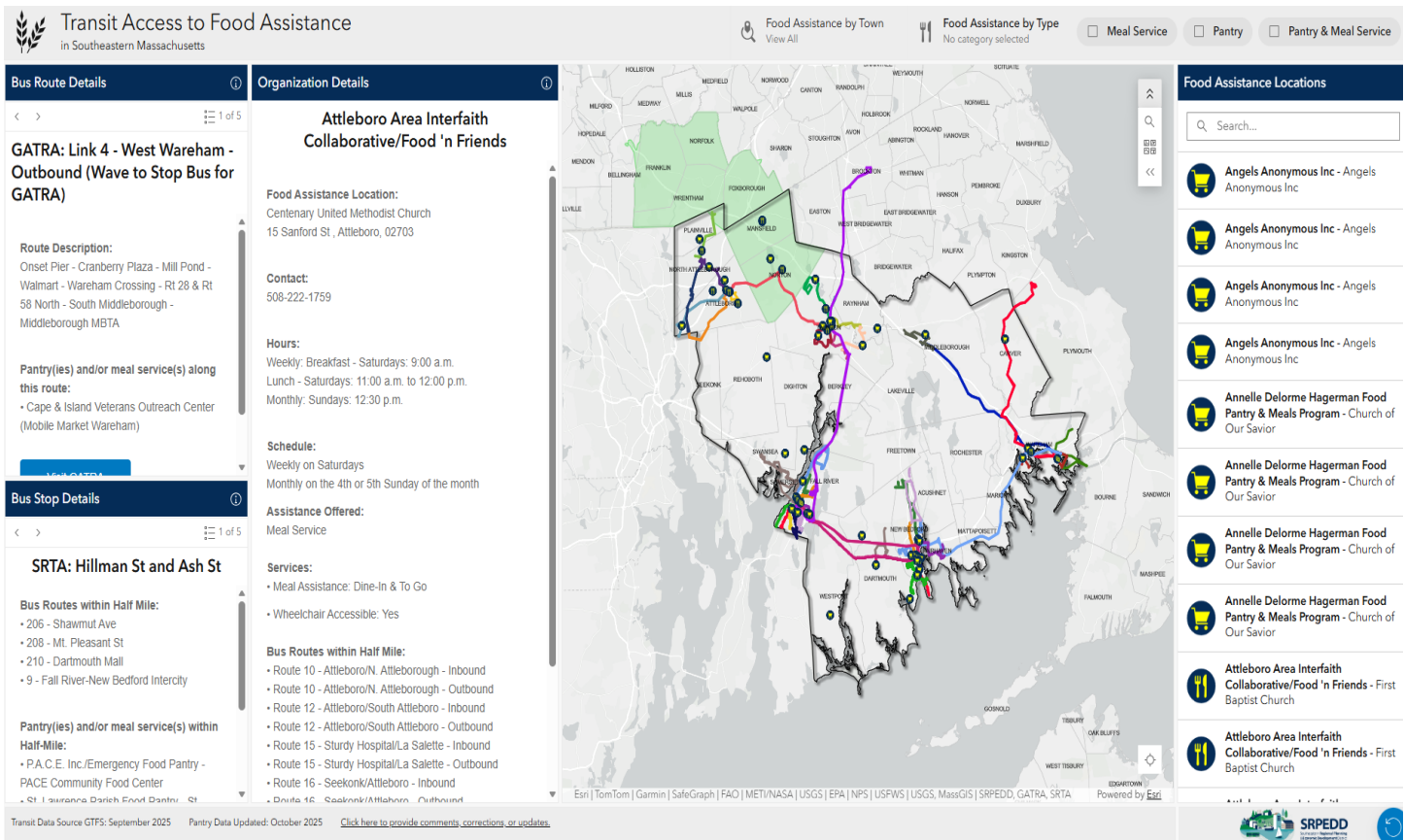
Across the SMMPO region, similar to public transportation, food pantries offer a lifeline to our neighbors, and SMMPO staff identified a gap in resources available that help our community members locate and access vital services. Further, nearly 1 in 10 (9%) of residents in the SMMPO region do not have access to a personal vehicle. There are some areas, especially in the region's urban cores, where nearly 75% of residents have no car (such as New Bedford's Census Tract 6518). As a result, it is vital that the region's public transportation services continue to meet the needs of individuals with fewer means to access healthy, affordable food options. As a result, the TAFA identifies which pantries are transit accessible and provides detailed information on hours of operation, diets, and languages offered to support

community members in making informed decisions. The creation of this mapping tool was a key priority outlined in Phase 1 of the FAST Plan and promotes meaningful conversation regarding how the SMMPO's regional transit authorities can better plan for greater access to food resources.



***"I do wish I didn't have to take a car, but even though most of the places I go are within the same city I live in, I don't know enough about public transportation. And when I have tried to take the buses in the past, I have really confused about where exactly stops are."***

- (Attleboro resident, 21-29)



The mapping toolkit works in several ways. As Figure 7 above shows, users can click on either a pantry, a bus route, or a bus stop to show available food access sites. The main page of the toolkit provides information on the selected route, stops, and organizations. Further, when navigating the map, food assistance locations (on the right-most pane of the toolkit) will update based on which community the user zooms into.

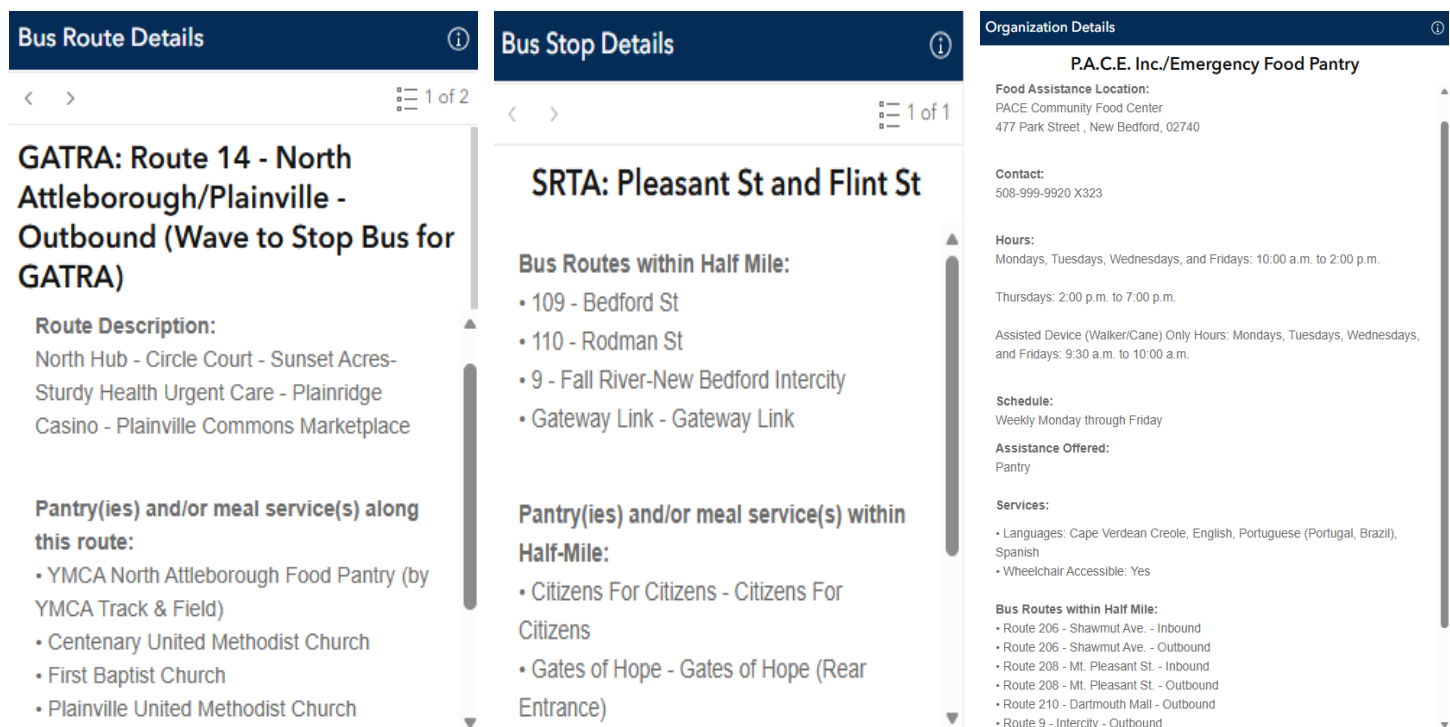
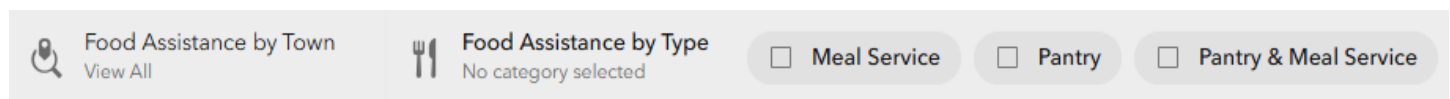


Figure 8 above shows the scope of information provided by the TAFE. For example, an individual who lives, works, or travels frequently nearby GATRA's Route 14 can use the map information to determine the stops that GATRA Route 14 makes (each stop named in the order of the route) and the pantry(ies) and/or meal services(s) that are available to a passenger along this specific route. Similarly, an individual can locate their specific bus stop instead of a particular bus route. For example, an individual who lives, works, or travels frequently near the SRTA Pleasant Street and Flint Street bus stop can use the map information to determine which bus route the stop is located along (in this case, SRTA Route 9). They can also see which additional bus stops exist within a half-mile of this stop and the pantry(ies) and/or meal service(s) that are available to a transit user within a half-mile from this bus stop. The map also provides detailed information for users who select a specific food assistance site, rather than a transit stop or route. For example, an individual who chooses the P.A.C.E. Inc. / Emergency Food Pantry in New Bedford can identify the organization's address, contact information, hours of service, weekly schedule, type of food assistance services offered, language and accessibility resources, and bus routes located within a half-mile of the location.

Below, in Figure 9, the bar on the top right of the mapping toolkit provides additional filters for users to specify their personal criteria. Users can select food assistance locations by town (for the 18 towns in the SMMPO region that have food assistance services) and by type of food assistance provided (meal service, pantry, or both).



This resource serves as a strong supplement to the Critical Destinations Food Access map. All individuals deserve easy access to food and other support services, and the TAFE begins to bridge the gaps in information available to community members most in need and for those without the ability to use a personal vehicle to access their daily resources. The variety of choices available to users of the TAFE attempts to provide an accessible and easily understood tool for community members, municipal partners, and partner organizations to utilize and promote as a meaningful resource in furthering food access and security across the SMMPO region. The online map can be accessed on the SRPEDD Transit Webpage at the following link: <https://srpedd.org/transportation/transit/>

# Healthy Living Survey and Analysis Methodology

To supplement the quantitative data sourced from the Critical Destinations Food Access Map, Transit Access to Food Assistance map, and Food Access Scoring Matrix, a public survey was produced to better understand the lived experiences, identified needs, and meaningful input from community members. In collaboration with the development of the SMMPO's Age-Friendly Mobility Plan, the Healthy Living Survey was developed. The Age-Friendly Mobility Plan is a regional effort to identify trends, needs, and gaps, set priorities, and support local action toward making changes that improve livability, accessibility and inclusivity of transportation for people of all ages, with a focus on helping older people live well.

The Healthy Living Survey inquired about residents' experiences and needs related to food access, aging, and transportation to help better understand the needs of the region's community members. Responses from the survey, combined with the Food Access Scoring Matrix and other quantitative data in this plan, will help to support transportation-specific projects and investments moving forward. The survey sourced answers from all individuals who live within the SMMPO region and emphasized how meaningful input from respondents would help inform decisions made to support healthier communities in the future.

The Healthy Living Survey was structured around 15 questions related to food access and healthy aging for respondents to provide meaningful input, with 5 additional demographic-focused questions to help understand the broad range of

respondents, their backgrounds, and lived experiences. Examples of the types of questions provided in the Healthy Living Survey include:

- What are the top places you visit regularly (e.g. every week or few weeks) and why?
- What are the biggest challenges you face in getting where you need to go?
- Do you know about transportation options available to you if you are unable to drive?
- In the past 12 months, were you ever worried food would run out before you had money to buy more?
- How much do you spend on groceries per month?

This survey was administered both electronically via Survey123 and physical paper copies. The Survey123 version of the Healthy Living Survey provided translations of the questions in English, Spanish, Haitian Creole, Khmer, Portuguese, Vietnamese, and Traditional and Simplified Chinese. Paper copies were available in English, Spanish, Portuguese, and Haitian Creole. These copies were distributed broadly across the region to a variety of community partners. Outreach was conducted to over 100 unique organizations, including community councils on aging, food pantries, schools and universities, public libraries, disability coalitions, religious institutions, veteran associations, child and family service organizations, healthcare facilities, and

social services programs. To the right, Figure 10 highlights the English version of the Healthy Living Survey flyer that was distributed both online and in-person.

On May 26 and June 17, 2026, SMMPO staff participated in canvassing events at the regional transit authorities' major bus terminals. During these times, staff communicated with local transit riders about their experiences using the bus for a variety of services, including accessing food, employment, and other personal trips. Questions related to the survey were asked, and the content of these conversations was documented and included as meaningful input in lieu of individuals taking the full Healthy Living Survey. Three unique social media posts were distributed across the SMMPO's Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn profiles. Staff also promoted the survey through community-specific public and private Facebook community groups. The survey was first made live in mid-March and concluded in early July.



## HEALTHY LIVING SURVEY

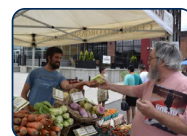
SRPEDD is developing a regional Age-Friendly Mobility Plan and Food Access and Security in Transportation Plan.

We are looking for your input to better understand Southeast Massachusetts residents' experiences and needs relating to food access, aging, and transportation.

Help us plan for healthier communities!



Scan for Survey  
or Visit  
[arcg.is/04u4ez0](https://arcg.is/04u4ez0)



Learn More at: [www.srpedd.org/agefriendlyplan](https://www.srpedd.org/agefriendlyplan) and [www.srpedd.org/transportation/food-access](https://www.srpedd.org/transportation/food-access)



# Healthy Living Survey - Key Findings

## Demographics

In total, 435 unique responses were provided to the Healthy Living Survey. Respondents skewed predominantly older; almost 75% (325) of respondents were at or above 60 years old. 22% (96) of respondents were between the ages of 30-59, and 3% (14) were 29 or younger. This range reflects an emphasis on the response rate of the region's councils on aging, which participated significantly in survey outreach.

Among those who self-identified in the survey:

- 88% (381) of respondents identified their race/ethnicity as white
- 27% (117) of respondents identified as living with a disability and/or mobility challenge
- 96% (419) of respondents indicated that English was spoken at home (multiple languages could be selected)
- Almost 34% (151) of respondents indicated an annual household income of less than \$50,000; 28% (123) indicated an annual household income between \$50,000 and \$100,000; 19.5% (85) indicated an annual household income over \$100,000; more than 17% (76) preferred to not answer.
- Almost 92% (400) of respondents own one or more vehicles. This number reflects a broader trend observed in the SMMPO region for vehicle ownership

rates.

- More than 17% (75) of respondents indicated that they relied on some type of food assistance benefits (SNAP, WIC, School Lunch Programs, or Local Food Pantries).

Responses were received from all 27 communities in the SMMPO region. Of the 435 survey responses, the communities with the greatest number of submissions include North Attleborough (55), Carver (30), and Taunton (30). Almost 18% (77) of responses came from one of the region's four Gateway Cities (Attleboro, Fall River, New Bedford, and Taunton).

## Key Responses

When asked where they would like decision makers to prioritize improvements or investments in the region that would make getting around easier and more comfortable, more than 47% (206) chose sidewalk improvements. Almost 44% (191) chose safer intersections, 36.5% (159) chose to expand public transportation to more areas, and more than 34% (149) chose public transportation frequency and reliability. Respondents were able to select more than one priority area, and these four metrics represent the four highest-ranked priorities for this question.

When asked whether they knew about transportation options available to them in a situation where they were no longer able to drive (either temporarily or permanently), almost 47% (202) of

respondents noted that they did not. This statistic highlights a key gap in resource sharing that could help individuals better understand the choices available to them in a moment of need. Respondents were asked to name the top places they regularly visit (e.g. every week or few weeks), and many respondents noted similar locations; grocery stores (e.g. Stop and Shop, Market Basket, Walmart, Shaw's, BJ's, and Trucchi's), convenience stores and pharmacies (e.g. CVS, Walgreen's, and Dollar Tree), and doctor's offices or hospitals for medical appointments were three of the most commonly cited locations. Additional responses highlighted restaurants, places of worship, libraries, senior centers, and local parks as frequented destinations.

When asked how they most commonly get to the places highlighted in their response, almost 89% (386) of respondents reported driving themselves. Traffic was listed as one of the greatest challenges experienced in getting where respondents needed to go, as well as the costs of gas and car maintenance, personal schedules and timing, and a lack of alternative transportation options beyond a personal vehicle.

At some point in the last 12 months, almost 16% (69) of respondents indicated that they were worried about food running out before they had money to buy more. Weekly shopping for groceries was the most reported frequency with 69% (301) of respondents, and an additional 20% (88) reported shopping bi-weekly. Almost all respondents, 97% (422), reported primarily getting their food from grocery stores. Multiple choices could be selected, and other common responses included farmers' markets at 19% (84) of respondents, 13% (58) at fast food establishments or restaurants, and almost 9% (39) from food pantries.

Most respondents, 57% (250), spent between 10-30 minutes traveling to their primary food source; almost 38% (160) spent less than 10 minutes, and less than 6% (25) spent more than 30 minutes. More than 38% (167) of respondents reported spending between \$200 and \$400 per month (\$2,400-\$4,800/year) on groceries, and almost 29% (126) reported spending between \$400 and \$600 per month (\$4,800-\$7,200/year), highlighting a significant portion of annual income dedicated to food spending alone.

Several of the questions included in the Healthy Living Survey provided the opportunity for open-ended responses, where respondents could write freely and provide feedback related to the specific question. When asked about challenges regarding food access and transportation, many respondents provided meaningful anecdotes about their personal experiences affording food, navigating transportation, and additional challenges that impact making these decisions. The following quotes provide additional context to the Healthy Living Survey and help the SMMPO better understand how transportation needs can be identified and improved upon.



***"Secure sidewalks to reach the town's grocery store, etc. is essential. We have a son that is autistic, two neighbors that are legally blind, and they deserve the independence of walking into town safely."***

- (Carver resident, 50-59)

***"Transportation and food availability are often an issue in my community because there are so few amenities left in our neighborhood."***

- (New Bedford resident, 50-59)

***"Seniors living alone also have financial issues. Grocery prices are high, utility fees have greatly increased, and our cost of living increases never keep up with the actual cost of living increases."***

- (Fairhaven resident, 80 or older)

***"Transportation needs to go where people need to. Buses need to prioritize hospitals and high-volume doctors' offices. Better signage for bus stops for sure. Expansion of bus services to places up the South Shore to connect with Plymouth."***

- (Carver resident, 21-29)

***"Just cause people make decent money doesn't mean they can actually afford food – wish there was a way we could get help."***

- (Seekonk resident, 40-49)

# FAST Plan Action Items and Recommendations

As a product of this work, the following FAST Plan Action Items serve as a roadmap for how the SMMPO and its regional and municipal partners can help to support a more resilient and connected regional food network. At its core, food resilience requires the coordinated efforts of a variety of partnerships. SMMPO staff, regional transit authorities, local elected officials, councils on aging, farmers and agricultural specialists, food pantries, and places of worship are just a handful of the stakeholders involved in creating a broad food access network, and it is pertinent that communication and coordination efforts align to best support all individuals across the region in accessing affordable, healthy, and reliable food options.

The eight action items included in this section emphasize how a broad coalition of regional partners can begin to coordinate efforts successfully. Many of these action items overlap in their intended goals and outcomes, but they may require a different approach or subset of regional partner collaboration to be achieved. Each of the included action items are supported by additional subtasks that can help initiate and maintain meaningful change regarding food access.

## 1. Prioritize safe, equitable transportation projects

- **Action 1.1:** Continue to identify high risk areas and implement data-driven strategies to reduce fatalities and serious injuries across the region, as outlined in the SMMPO Regional Safety Action Plan.

- **Action 1.2:** Utilize available data sets to better understand low-income, low-access areas in the SMMPO region to better service meaningful connections and identify possible transportation improvement projects that can help enhance equity outcomes.
- **Action 1.3:** Develop a routine process for incorporating food access, social vulnerability, and transportation equity measures into future SMMPO plans and projects, specifically through the continued use of the Critical Destinations Food Access Map as data.

## 2. Expand mobility options beyond the car

- **Action 2.1:** Continue to work with SRTA and GATRA to help identify public transit needs within the region and further emphasize their fare-free, paratransit, and microtransit services to community members. Further, expand educational outreach on the GATRA flag stop system to help inform riders on how to use the network.
- **Action 2.2:** Work with municipalities to identify and respond to gaps in both pedestrian and bicycle networks to support advancements in active transportation opportunities.
- **Action 2.3:** Continue to support the development of municipalities' language, policy, and enforcement procedures regarding micromobility devices (e-bikes, e-scooters, etc.) that can meaningfully help individuals travel

without a personal vehicle.

- **Action 2.4:** Support the expansion of local, neighborhood-style amenities (markets, pantries, etc.) that are within walking and/or bicycling distance to limit short-range trips in an automobile.
- **Action 2.5:** Encourage municipalities and regional partners to improve first- and last-mile connections between neighborhoods, public transportation services, and food access locations through improved transportation infrastructure.

### 3. Uphold food insecurity as a public health priority

- **Action 3.1:** Encourage that food access is treated as a primary goal in the development of safe, healthy, and affordable communities, particularly through meaningful zoning and transportation policies.
- **Action 3.2:** Provide educational resources to local partners, municipal staff, and community members on the importance of food access and its impact on improved quality of life.
- **Action 3.3:** Promote collaboration with the region's hospitals, community health centers, councils on aging, and other healthcare organizations to identify shared goals and responsibilities between food access and transportation.
- **Action 3.4:** Support the incorporation of food access and transportation indicators into local and regional public health assessments to standardize data and monitor changes in community needs.

### 4. Address high costs of living beyond food access

- **Action 4.1:** Continue to promote free fares for transit through the continued monitoring of its benefits to the region.
- **Action 4.2:** Promote sustainable and affordable housing and employment policies that support livable communities and lower costs of daily living.
- **Action 4.3:** Promote multimodal transportation access to affordable housing and employment hubs to decrease transportation related costs.



## 5. Provide educational resources for communities

- **Action 5.1:** Distribute SMMPO resources, such as the Critical Destinations Food Access Map and Transit Access to Food Assistance Services Map, to community partners to educate individuals on food access locations and public transportation options.
- **Action 5.2:** Ensure that all materials are distributed both electronically and as paper copies to promote equity in educational resources. These materials will also be translated into all of the region's predominant languages, beyond Safe Harbor languages.
- **Action 5.3:** Continue to create and distribute PSAs and other educational materials, with a specific focus on public transportation resources.
- **Action 5.4:** Maintain routine communication with community partners, food pantries, religious institutions, and other local organizations to ensure all public resources are updated and factually correct.
- **Action 5.5:** Promote partnerships with schools, libraries, senior centers, housing authorities, healthcare organizations, and other community partners as trusted distribution points for SMMPO food access materials and transportation resources.

## 6. Support local farmlands and the food economy

- **Action 6.1:** Increase awareness of local food providers and farm stands to

support a diverse, local, and sustainable food ecosystem in Southeastern Massachusetts.

- **Action 6.2:** Highlight public transportation and multimodal transportation options to communities around local farmlands and work with RTAs to expand service options.
- **Action 6.3:** Advance education on the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP), specifically its benefits to local farmers and ability to provide SNAP recipients with healthy, local, and affordable fruits and vegetables.
- **Action 6.4:** Promote state and regional policy on the establishment of a Southeastern Massachusetts food bank, which would help to fill a significant gap in the food assistance and distribution network in the state.

## 7. Expand network of food access organizations

- **Action 7.1:** Convene a routine roundtable of local food access champions to create opportunities for information sharing, with a specific focus on addressing identified transportation concerns.
- **Action 7.2:** Continue participation in and collaboration with the South Coast Food Policy Council to emphasize and encourage the importance of transportation access to food.
- **Action 7.3:** Encourage SMMPO staff to continue to promote the FAST Plan, additional food access resources, and transportation support at all public engagement opportunities and meetings with community partners.

- **Action 7.4:** Develop and maintain a regional directory of food access organizations, transportation providers, healthcare services, and community partners that can be routinely updated and shared among food access stakeholders to streamline coordination and collaboration.

## 8. Establish regional and multi-state partnerships

- **Action 8.1:** Encourage collaboration between MPOs on statewide initiatives to broaden the benefits of improved transportation to food access.
- **Action 8.2:** Encourage and promote cross border transit and multimodal transportation connections between Rhode Island and Massachusetts to provide more options for food access.
- **Action 8.3:** Promote collaboration, funding opportunities, pilot programs, and regional planning activities with neighboring MPOs, RTAs, state agencies, and the State of Rhode Island to improve multimodal transportation connections, regional food resilience, and shared resources.



# FAST Plan Action Items



Prioritize safe, equitable transportation projects



Expand mobility options beyond the car



Uphold food insecurity as a public health priority



Address high costs of living beyond food access

# FAST Plan Action Items



Provide educational resources for communities



Support local farmlands and the food economy



Expand network of food access organizations



Establish regional and multi-state partnerships

# Conclusion

This document serves as the baseline assessment for the current food access and transportation landscape across Southeastern Massachusetts. Throughout the two years of its development, the FAST Plan has engaged intensively with the region's community members, local partners, and municipal officials to better understand advancements and barriers present in addressing both food access and transportation issues. Further, this plan has begun the work of sourcing, evaluating, and communicating meaningful data. The Critical Destinations Food Access Map, Food Access Scoring Matrix, and Transit Access to Food Assistance Services map serve as key resources in cataloguing essential resources and services for the residents of Southeastern Massachusetts. These analyses have been further developed through the Plan's Healthy Living Survey, which has provided detailed and informative insight into the lived experiences and needs of residents from all 27 towns and cities within the SMMPO region.

Food access and transportation conditions are rapidly changing. The needs, values, and priorities of our local communities reflect an environment where many are uncertain where their next meal may be sourced from. The survey responses received highlight a growing concern regarding the costs of living, transportation expenses, and food insecurity. Regional farmlands and the local economy continue to respond to strained federal and state resources. Public health priorities are responding to a variety of challenges in advancing food equity and healthy communities. Many of our

communities remain vulnerable to these issues and several others.

As a result, the work produced in this plan remains more important than ever. As conditions change over time, this plan attempts to meaningfully predict, address, and respond to these varying circumstances. The recommendations and action items included help to provide support and guidance to the region's 27 towns and cities for a healthier, safer, and more affordable future. From these, greater outcomes can be achieved in ensuring that all residents of Southeastern Massachusetts are able to benefit from improved food access and secure transportation options.

