

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND NEED



The Town of Natick, in cooperation with the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) and the MetroWest Regional Transit Authority (MWRTA), has completed a feasibility study, grounded in a robust public participation process, for improvements to the Natick Center MBTA Commuter Rail Station in Natick, Massachusetts. The Project consists of four primary components (see Figure 1):

1. An 890-foot long, 26-foot wide, full-length raised, center island commuter rail platform to serve eastbound and westbound commuter rail trains, as well as accommodate occasional freight on a "gauntlet track." (see Figure 2)
2. Three entrances to the MBTA commuter rail platform through a combination of an elevator, two walkways and stairs that will be fully accessible per the standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board (MAAB). (see Figures 3 and 4)
3. Multi-modal access through a designated MWRTA bus area for three buses, bicycle parking, streetscape enhancements, and a potential connection to the proposed Cochituate Rail Trail (CRT) (see Figure 5). Dedicated commuter rail parking is not included due to the transit-oriented development nature of the station area.
4. Passenger amenities such as a new plaza extending Moran Park over the rail tracks to connect to North Street (see Figure 6 and 7); sheltered waiting areas for commuter rail and MWRTA buses; canopies over the access platform and vertical circulation (see Figure 8); and other station amenities per the design standards for MBTA commuter rail stations.

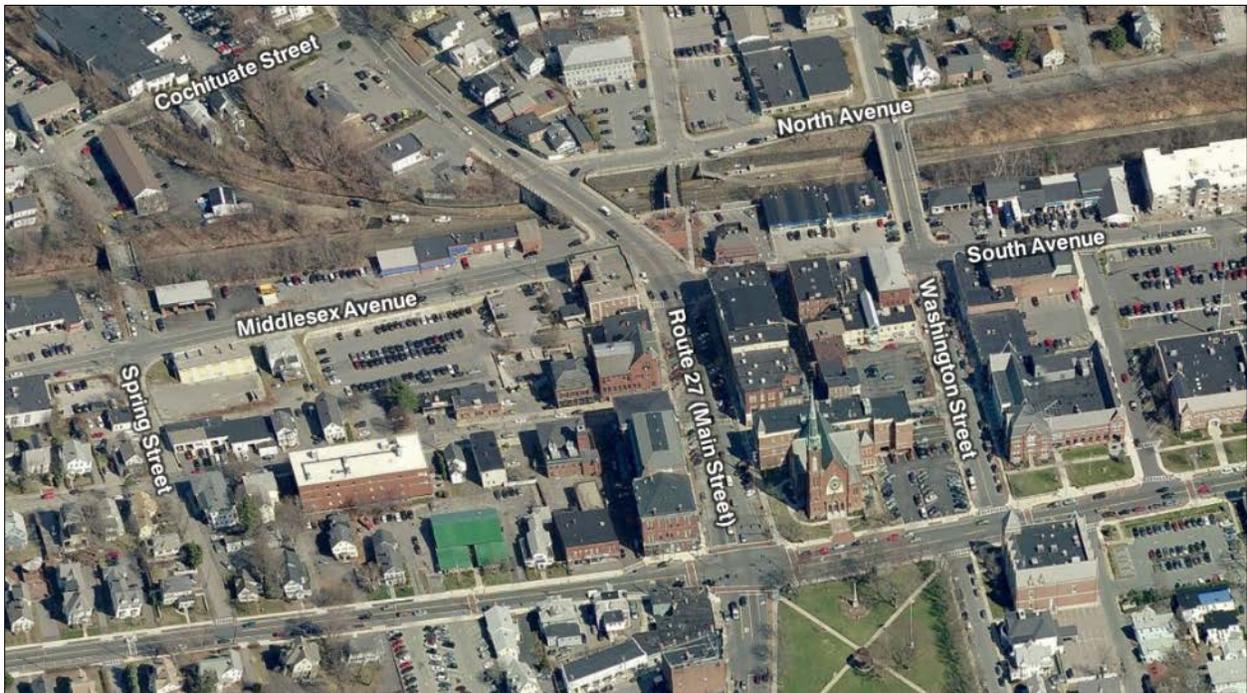
The primary purpose of this Project is to support current and projected transit ridership in the Town of Natick by providing an upgraded MBTA commuter rail station that integrates universal access in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). A reconstructed Natick Center Station will also provide enhanced access for all



Natick Center MBTA Commuter Rail Station Improvements

modes of travel; facilitate efficient rail operations, and support community and economic development in the heart of Natick Center. A reconstructed station would expand the current function of a commuter rail platform to become a multimodal transit hub integrating the existing MBTA commuter rail service, MWRTA bus service, potential connection to a future Cochituate Rail Trail, all within a vibrant, transit-oriented, walkable Town Center. The need for the Project stems from several inter-related transportation deficiencies that can be addressed through a reconstructed Natick Center Station:

1. Current lack of ADA-compliant access to the commuter rail platforms (no ramps or elevators).
2. Inadequate pick-up/drop off space for private vehicles and buses at the existing station.
3. Inadequate bicycle parking provided at the existing station.
4. Limited pedestrian access to the existing station due to steep, narrow, single point of access to platforms, and insufficient pedestrian paths from the surrounding Natick Center.
5. Lack of an established connection for the planned Cochituate Rail Trail (CRT) connecting Natick Center to Framingham.



Aerial View of Natick Center



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Through a public outreach process led by the Town of Natick's MBTA Station Advisory Committee, including an electronic survey with more than 200 responses, coordination with stakeholders and agencies, the following study goals were established:

1. **Transit** – Integrate MBTA commuter rail and MWRTA bus services by providing ADA-compliant, efficiently operated transit stations and connections for inbound commutes to Boston, and reverse commutes to Natick to access employment opportunities.
2. **Access and Circulation** – Integrate ADA accessibility, along with safe and convenient accommodation for local bus transit passengers, pedestrians, bicycles, and motor vehicle parking, pick-up/drop-off, and circulation to support the first/last mile of commutes associated with Natick Center Station.
3. **Community Development** – Pursue visual and infrastructure improvements that enhance the quality of Natick Center, integrate the CRT with station design, and explore joint development opportunities that may unlock potential funding sources.
4. **Costs** – Consider the relative costs of alternatives and pursue a variety of funding sources.
5. **Environmental** – Ensure that the station and associated development is compatible with the community, architecturally and functionally, while minimizing impacts on environmental resources.



Based on the public meeting and community survey, the most important issues to address through an improved Natick Center Station are:

1. Improve accessibility.

- a. Elevators and ramps were most frequently cited by survey respondents as needed improvements for people with physical limitations.
- b. A high-level commuter rail platform and improved station amenities were also noted as desirable through the public outreach process.

2. Improve pedestrian and bicycle access and accommodations.

- a. More than 50% of survey respondents currently walk to the station, and 5% bicycle.
- b. Better street crossings, followed by a range of walkability and safety improvements were cited by participants who walk to the station.
- c. Shelter is the most important upgrade for the majority of riders who responded to the survey, although other amenities are valued by about half of respondents.



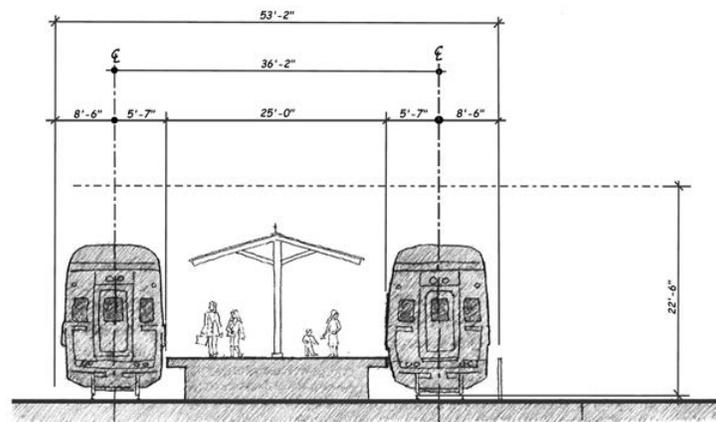
The core concept (described in the introduction) of the 890-foot long, full-length, full-high center island commuter rail platform; multiple station access points designed in accordance with ADA and MAAB; and multi-modal connections meet the goals of the project, and addresses the most important issues raised by the community. Additional

variations of the concept can be explored further to enhance some of the surface amenities and support ongoing community development efforts in Natick Center. These additional concepts include, but are not limited to:

- Creation of a more formal intermodal transit center, to accommodate MWRTA buses, either through potential air-rights development (See Figures 9 and 10), or redevelopment of properties adjacent to the rail corridor that may become available in the future.



- Evaluation of the options to develop a visitor center associated with Natick Center Station. The facility could provide information, ticket sales, and a passenger waiting area. In addition, the structure could house an elevator to the commuter rail platform. This would provide additional security and ease elevator maintenance requirements.
- Exploration of air-rights real estate development that is compatible with railroad operations, supports transit-use, and is consistent with the vision for Natick Center's community development.
- Design of connections to the proposed Cochituate Rail Trail (CRT) on the former Saxonville branch. This project is currently in the 25% design phase for a pedestrian and bicycle connection from Natick Center to the Framingham Town Line near Route 30. A street-level connection at Natick Center is planned, due to safety concerns associated with a direct connection from the proposed trail to the commuter rail platform.
- As a long-range additional alternative, an option for a future transit connection between Natick Center Station and the CRT should not be precluded with the advancement of Natick Center Station improvements. As a result of increased development density, MWRTA expects ridership demand to increase between Natick Center and the vicinity of the Natick Mall. There could be options for "clean transit" use of the CRT in the future (i.e., electric vehicles so that emissions are not a concern with a multi-modal corridor), in addition to the pedestrians and bicyclists.



Center Platform Concept

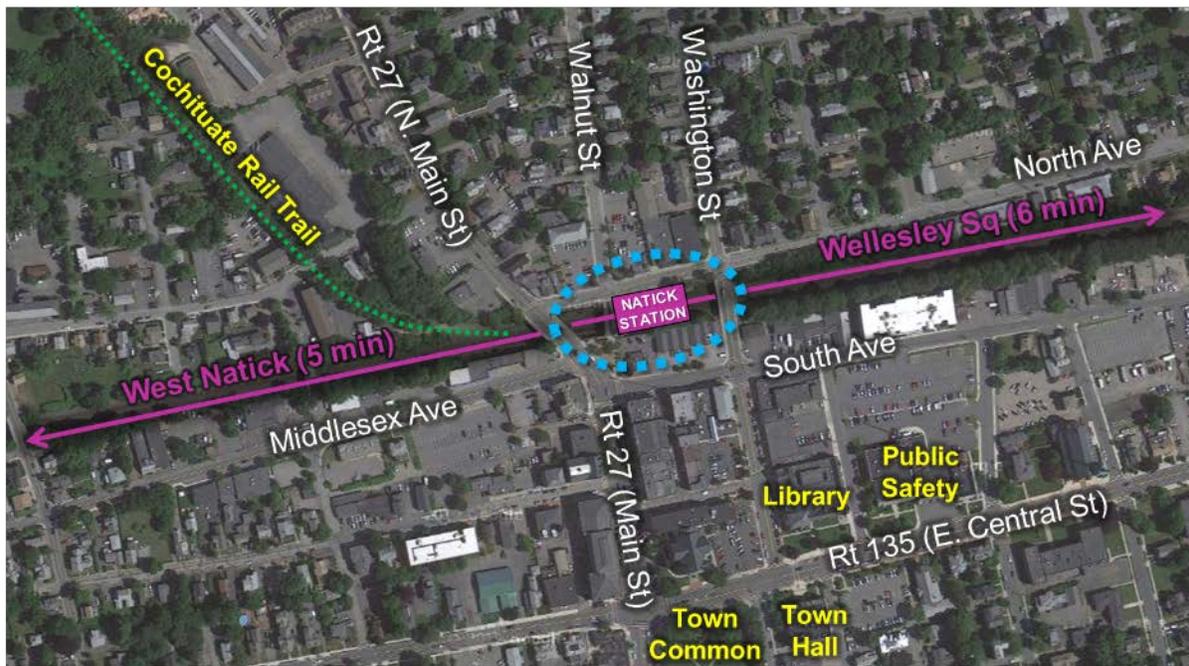


Natick Center MBTA Commuter Rail Station Improvements



The feasibility study concluded that a reconstructed Natick Center Station should remain in its existing location, which is ideally situated within the Town Center with excellent multimodal access and is roughly equidistant from adjacent stations on the Framingham/Worcester Line. Relocation of the station would be disruptive to transit ridership and economic activity in the surrounding business district. The proposed location and upgrades

present the best opportunity for integrated transit, transit-oriented development (TOD), and further investment in the Town Center.



Natick Center Station

