

Section Four:

Addressing Municipal Sustainability: Impacts to Local Services and Taxes

One of the goals of the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership project is to support the financial health and sustainability of communities in the 21-town region. As many municipalities in the region struggle to balance budgets, how can this initiative benefit the towns? This chapter will analyze the potential impacts on and benefits to municipalities, specifically addressing municipal services, tax revenue impacts, and overall municipal finance impacts.

Municipal Services Impacts – Public Safety and Roads

Several potential outcomes of the Partnership's anticipated federally designated funding for the 21-town region are the establishment of a demonstration forest or forests and a visitor information and technical resource center (See more about the evolving vision for a MTWP Forest Center in Section 7). Additionally, some private landowners choosing to place a Conservation Restriction (CR) on their land may allow for public access to their property. These conservation and forestry-related initiatives, along with potential efforts to market the region and improve access to existing outdoor recreational sites including State Forests and Parks, could increase the number of visitors to the region.

As discussed in Section 3: Forests as an Economic Driver, tourism contributes to the economy by bringing in outside dollars to the region. In 2018, tourism generated \$16 million in local tax receipts within Berkshire and Franklin Counties and supported 4,400 jobs. Tourism also helps support local businesses, which in turn pay taxes to municipalities. More coordinated marketing of the region has been identified as a need, which could help attract more visitors and keep them in the region longer. Some towns in the Partnership region do not have many existing businesses, however, or lack the water and sewer infrastructure needed to support an increase in economic activity. For these towns, an increase in visitors to outdoor recreational areas will not result in an increase in tax revenues but may require additional town services such as trash pick-up, road maintenance, and emergency response. Infrastructure to support tourism, such as public restrooms, ATMs, parking, signage, and other forms of public information, is also limited in many towns.

An increase in visitors to the 21-town region, particularly tourists who are engaging in outdoor recreation activities, could also result in an increase in demand for emergency services. Because of the volunteer nature of many of the region's fire departments and ambulance services, the cost of providing these services would not necessarily increase. However, finding enough volunteers to cover the increase in calls could place a strain on municipalities, many of which are already in need of more volunteers and rescue equipment such as All-Terrain Vehicles. The region also has a specialized rescue team made up of volunteers. Training for members is funded through the Western Region Homeland Security Advisory Council (WRHSAC), which allocates funds from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Forest fires started by campfires and other human activities could also increase. In 2020, there were a total of 134 tree, brush, or grass fires reported in Berkshire and Franklin Counties.¹ According to the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation's Bureau of Forest Fire Control, roughly 9 out of 10 forest fires in the region are started by human activities. The Bureau provides aid and assistance to municipalities with forest fire prevention, detection, and suppression on state and private lands. During the 2014 public outreach for the MTWP Partnership Plan, the need for supplies, such as ATVs to assist in search and rescue and fire equipment for back-country fires, and training for volunteers was identified. The Bureau administers several U.S. Forest Service programs that provide funding, equipment, and training to town fire departments for forest fire suppression. DCR Bureau of Forest Fire Control staff identified an existing need for more funding and staff support for providing training to town volunteers, which would only increase if more volunteers were needed in the region.

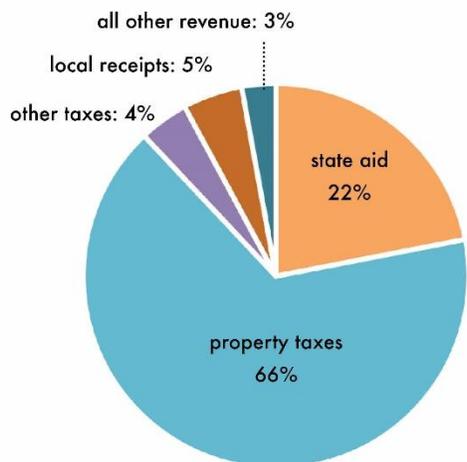
An increase in traffic on the region's roads may result in the need for more policing. The roads along the Deerfield River in Charlemont, Florida, and Monroe provides a current example. Over the past decade, traffic along Zoar Road and River Road in these towns has increased steadily as the Deerfield River has become a popular destination for rafting, kayaking, and tubing. While several outfitter companies located off of Route 2 in Charlemont utilize their own vans and buses to shuttle their patrons, many more people come to the region on their own to access the river at various points. Winding, narrow roads that typically carry a few hundred cars a day suddenly carry between 1,000-2,000 cars a day on weekends during the summer months. Speeding can be a problem, and parking areas become overcrowded, resulting in cars parked alongside the road. Litter, trespassing on private property to gain access to the river, lack of bathroom facilities, and unsafe river use are also major issues along the river.

In 2013, the Charlemont Police Department raised funds for a river patrol to be stationed at the Zoar Picnic Area on Zoar Road. Brookfield Renewable Energy LP matched the town funds to help support the patrol. The town of Monroe has also identified the need for a police presence on weekends in the summer to address the influx of visitors, and at a 2022 Select Board meeting with the Partnership discussed the possible need for speed bumps in strategic locations.

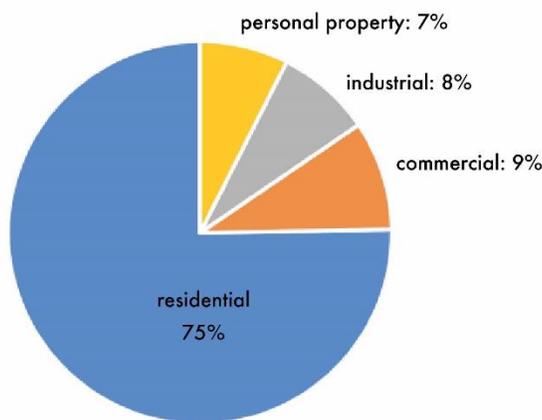
Additional traffic on the region's rural roadways may also lead to a need for increased road maintenance and infrastructure projects to accommodate larger amounts of traffic. Many towns in the region already struggle to maintain roads within their budgets. Spending on public works is the second largest budget expenditure for most towns, after education.

¹ Massachusetts Fire Incident Reporting System. County Profiles. 2020 Fire Data Analysis.

Figure 5-1: 21-Municipal Tax Revenue



21-Town Revenues by Source, FY2020



21-Town Property Tax Levies by Class, FY2020

Data Sources:
 MA
 Department of
 Revenue,
 Division of
 Local Services.
 Data Analytics
 and Resources
 Bureau,
 General Fund
 Revenue and
 Expenditure
 Reports and
 Tax Levy By
 Class Reports
 (Schedule A),
 2020.

Tax Revenue Impacts

Property taxes make up a significant percentage of town revenue in the 21-town region; in FY2020, 66% of general fund² revenue came from property taxes (Figure 5-1). Several communities skew this figure: Clarksburg and North Adams both relied on property taxes for only about 30-40% of revenue in FY2020, while the share of State Aid was significantly higher in these communities, as well as in New Ashford and Savoy. Most of the 21 towns relied on property tax revenues for 60% or more of their total revenue, with State Aid generally accounting for less than 20% of revenue (town-by-town information can be found in Appendix C).

Given the rural nature of the region, most of the 21 towns rely heavily upon residential property taxes compared to commercial, industrial, and personal property taxes. In FY2020, 75% of property tax revenue in the 21-town region was from residential taxes (Figure 5-1). There are several communities that receive the majority of property tax revenue from commercial and/or industrial uses, affecting the average for the 21 towns. These communities include Rowe, Monroe, and Florida, which receive tax revenue from the utility companies that operate dams and a pumped storage facility along the Deerfield River to generate electricity. These communities received 75% or more of property tax revenue from these sources. In contrast, 17 towns received 75% or more of property tax revenue from residential land uses, with a total of five towns relying on residential taxes for 90% or more of property tax revenue.

² The general fund is used to account for most financial resources and activities governed by the normal town meeting or city council appropriation process.

Many towns expressed concern during the early public outreach for the Woodlands Partnership about the potential loss of property tax revenue from placing land under Conservation Restrictions (CR). Because a CR permanently removes the development rights from the land, the land is no longer valued for its potential for residential development. A 2015 analysis of assessed values within 13 of the 21 towns³ in the region shows that, on average, land with a CR (not enrolled in Chapter 61) is valued at roughly 32% of the value for all land in a town (Table 5-1). Land enrolled in the Chapter 61 program, which assesses land at its current use – either forestry, agriculture, or open space and recreation – is valued at roughly 3% of the Per Acre Assessed Value of all land in a town, on average.

If land *not* currently enrolled in the Chapter 61 program were to be protected with a CR, then a town would likely experience a loss in property tax revenue.⁴ However, the CR developed for the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership (see Appendix B) is focused on encouraging active forest management. It is assumed, therefore, that many of the property owners who may be interested in pursuing a CR through the Partnership would already be enrolled in the Chapter 61 program for active forest management,⁵ and in those cases, the town would not see a loss in tax revenue when the land is placed under a CR.

Unlike a Conservation Restriction, the Chapter 61 program does not provide permanent protection for the land, which can be converted to another use if a town chooses not to exercise its right of first refusal and if back taxes are paid. If forested land is transferred from Ch. 61 into a CR, there would be no further local tax impact, and these woodlands may be low-hanging fruit in promoting conservation, since property owners would already be savvy about both forest management plans and tax benefits.

An increase in forestry and wood-product businesses in the region could translate to more commercial, industrial, or personal property tax revenues for municipalities. Types of businesses that might be supported through an increase in forestry activities include forestry and logging businesses, sawmills, wood and paper product manufacturers, and artisans. Towns with few or no commercial tourism-related businesses may benefit from the increased forestry-related business expansions to benefit their tax base.

³ The 13 towns included are Ashfield, Buckland, Charlemont, Colrain, Conway, Hawley, Heath, Leyden, Monroe, North Adams, Rowe, Shelburne, and Windsor. The remaining seven towns had insufficient data to include in the analysis.

⁴ Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust has a policy of paying property taxes on all land owned by the organization, even though it is exempt from paying property taxes as a non-profit. Although an added expense for a small organization with limited budget, such policies, if viable to implement, may improve community relations by demonstrating support for local municipal economies. Mt. Grace Land Conservation Trust. 2022. Conserved Lands. <https://www.mountgrace.org/visit/conserved>

⁵ Ch. 61A is for landowners interested in agriculture or forestry and Ch. 61B for owners pursuing open space/recreation.

Table 5-1: Analysis of Assessed Values for Land under Different Levels of Protection in 13 of the 21 Towns within the Region

	Total Acreage	Total Assessed Land Value	Per Acre Assessed Value
All land*	227,274	\$798,646,256	\$3,514
Land under a CR	10,391	\$11,630,891	\$1,119
Land under Ch. 61	15,232	\$1,369,460	\$90

* Includes State-owned land.

Source: MassGIS Level-3 parcel data and town assessor data (multiple fiscal years), accessed February 2015.

Payment in Lieu of Taxes Reimbursement

In FY2020, an average of 22% of municipal revenue in the 21-town region came from State Aid. Included in this revenue source are payments to towns for state-owned land, known as Payment in Lieu of Taxes, or PILOT. Massachusetts General Law establishes reimbursement payments to towns and cities for tax-exempt state-owned land for the tax revenues lost. A formula based on property value and the latest 3-year state-wide average tax rate is used to determine the payment to each town. The Department of Revenue’s Bureau of Local Assessment estimates the fair market value of state-owned properties every four years, and cities and towns receive their payments annually every November.⁶

Since Fiscal Year 1996, there has been a shortfall in the appropriation of PILOT payments, resulting in reimbursements well below 100% statewide. In 2020, over \$45 million was needed to fully fund the program statewide, but only \$30 million was appropriated, resulting in a \$15 million shortfall. In FY2021, communities in the 21-town region were reimbursed a total of \$990,867, a rate of \$12.35 per acre of eligible state-owned land. These payments fell \$498,433 short of what the region would have received if the state had fully funded PILOT payments to communities (Table 5-2). PILOT payments per acre vary considerably by town, ranging from \$2.99 per acre in Monroe to \$39.89 per acre in North Adams.

In most towns, PILOT payments for state-owned land make up a small percentage of the State Aid⁷ being received. In FY2021, only about 3% of State Aid came from PILOT payments for the 21-town region. However, there were nine towns where PILOT payments made up a significant percent (>10%) of State Aid in FY2021, and PILOT payments made up over 20% of State Aid to the following towns: Hawley (approximately 53% of \$112,387 in Aid); Leyden (approximately 25% of \$120,221 in Aid); and Windsor (approximately 41% of \$236,959 in Aid).⁸

⁶ *Cherry Sheet Manual*. Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Division of Local Services. <https://www.mass.gov/doc/cherry-sheet-manual/download>

⁷ State Aid including Unrestricted General Government Aid, Chapter 70 payments, and PILOT payments.

⁸ MA Department of Revenue, Division of Local Services. Final Municipal Cherry Sheet Estimates, FY2021.

Table 5-2: FY2021 PILOT Payments and Shortfall in the 21 Towns

Town	Total State-Owned Land (Acres)	State-Owned Land Value	100% PILOT Payment*	Actual PILOT Payments	Actual PILOT Payment Per Acre	PILOT Shortfall
Adams	5,564	\$7,399,100	\$108,915	\$72,391	\$13.01	-\$3,6524
Ashfield	627	\$1,319,100	\$19,417	\$12,905	\$20.58	-\$6,512
Buckland	135	\$252,100	\$3,711	\$2,468	\$18.28	-\$1,243
Charlemont	2,059	\$1,993,500	\$29,344	\$19,505	\$9.47	-\$9,839
Cheshire	4,896	\$11,630,300	\$171,198	\$113,786	\$23.24	-\$57,412
Clarksburg	3,660	\$1,980,500	\$29,153	\$19,375	\$5.29	-\$9,778
Colrain	3,229	\$4,430,600	\$65,218	\$43,347	\$13.42	-\$21,871
Conway	3,248	\$4,789,500	\$70,501	\$46,860	\$14.43	-\$23,641
Florida	5,492	\$3,756,800	\$55,300	\$37,757	\$6.87	-\$17,543
Hawley	8,487	\$6,044,200	\$88,971	\$59,136	\$6.97	-\$29,835
Heath	915	\$462,500	\$6,808	\$4,526	\$4.95	-\$2,282
Leyden	901	\$3,101,400	\$45,653	\$30,343	\$33.68	-\$15,310
Monroe	2,626	\$801,600	\$11,800	\$7,843	\$2.99	-\$3,957
New Ashford	3,271	\$3,236,600	\$47,643	\$31,666	\$9.68	-\$15,977
North Adams	2,195	\$8,950,100	\$131,745	\$87,566	\$39.89	-\$44,179
Peru	6,693	\$5,061,800	\$74,510	\$49,522	\$7.40	-\$24,988
Rowe	422	\$721,600	\$10,622	\$7,059	\$16.73	-\$3,563
Savoy	12,596	\$8,441,800	\$124,263	\$82,590	\$6.56	-\$41,673
Shelburne	73	\$244,300	\$3,596	\$2,390	\$32.74	-\$1,206
Williamstown	7,010	\$16,714,900	\$246,043	\$163,531	\$23.33	-\$82,512
Windsor	6,141	\$9,843,000	\$144,889	\$96,301	\$15.68	-\$48,588
21 Towns	80,240	\$101,175,300	\$1,489,300	\$990,867		-\$498,433

* Calculated using statewide average tax rate 2020-2022 of \$14.72 per \$1000.

Data Sources: Total State-Owned Land acreage provided by Ben Smith, Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs; State Owned Land Valuations (2020); Municipal Cherry Sheets (2020)

A December 2020 report by State Auditor Suzanne Bump highlighted the current shortcomings of the PILOT program for state-owned lands, due to chronic underfunding and mechanisms that are disadvantageous to more rural portions of the state.⁹ Because PILOT reimbursements are calculated partly based on property values, communities with stagnant, decreasing, or slowly increasing property values, largely in the western and central portions of the state, have seen reductions in PILOT payments over time.¹⁰ Meanwhile, many communities in the eastern part of the state have seen an increase in PILOT payments as property values have risen, meaning that affluent urban and suburban communities in eastern Massachusetts tend to be the largest recipients of PILOT reimbursements.¹¹ In order to help reduce these inequalities, the Auditor’s report makes several recommendations, including:

- Strengthening the PILOT program as a whole by increasing appropriations to fully fund the program for state-owned lands;

⁹ Futterman, Noah. 2020. *PILOT Programs Undermined by Lack of Funding and Tax Rulings, Report Finds*. Mass.gov

¹⁰ Bump, Suzanne M. 2020. *The Impact of the State-Owned Land PILOT and Solar Taxation Policies on Municipalities, Executive Summary*. Mass.gov

¹¹ Bump, Suzanne M. 2020. *The Impact of the State-Owned Land PILOT and Solar Taxation Policies on Municipalities, Executive Summary*. Mass.gov

- Adding a “hold harmless” provision to the program that would guarantee communities do not see a reduction in reimbursements over time even if property values decline;
- Adjusting how reimbursements are calculated; and,
- Including additional state-owned properties in the program such as courthouses and correctional facilities.¹²

State Sen. Adam Hinds (D-First District – Berkshire, Franklin, Hampshire and Hampden counties) and Auditor Bump sponsored a bill in 2021 (S.1875/H. 2831) addressing these issues, which aims to “ensure that communities receive fair compensation from the Commonwealth for untaxed state-owned land within their boundaries.”¹³

The Municipal Financial Sustainability Standing Committee of the MTWP voted unanimously on Sept. 13, 2021, to recommend to the MTWP Executive Committee that members of the Board meet with elected officials to raise concern about the inequities and inadequacies of the current PILOT formula for rural towns, advocate for reforms, and authorize the Committee to investigate suggestions for revising the PILOT formula, in order for the program to better support the financial stability of municipalities in the 21-town region. The Executive Committee subsequently accepted this recommendation and raised the issue of PILOT formula reform with several state legislators during fall meetings.

Sen. Hinds also filed S 1880: “An Act to create a forest carbon incentive program to enhance carbon storage on private timber lands.” This bill would add a Forest Resilience Program into MGL Chapter 61 (Forest Tax Law) which would allow landowners to choose a 20-year plan that focuses on carbon storage and climate resilience and would fund landowners and the town for enrollment. This bill could focus sustainable forestry on verified climate resilience practices and help bring revenue into the region; however, the bill was not voted out of Committee.

The Federal government also provides Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) payments to local governments to help offset losses in property taxes due to non-taxable Federal lands within their boundaries. These payments can help local governments carry out services such as firefighting and police protection, construction of public schools and roads, and search-and-rescue operations. The payments are made annually for tax-exempt Federal lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management, the National Park Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (all agencies of the Interior Department), the U.S. Forest Service (part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture), and for federal water projects and some military installations. Currently North Adams is the only community within the 21-town region that has federally owned land (21 acres).

¹² Office of the State Auditor. 2020. Recommendations: State-Owned Land PILOT. Mass.gov

¹³ DeLuca, Zack. 2021. Local, State Officials Talk Disproportionate Impact of PILOT Programs on Western Mass. Communities. The Greenfield Recorder, 7/23/21.

Community Finances

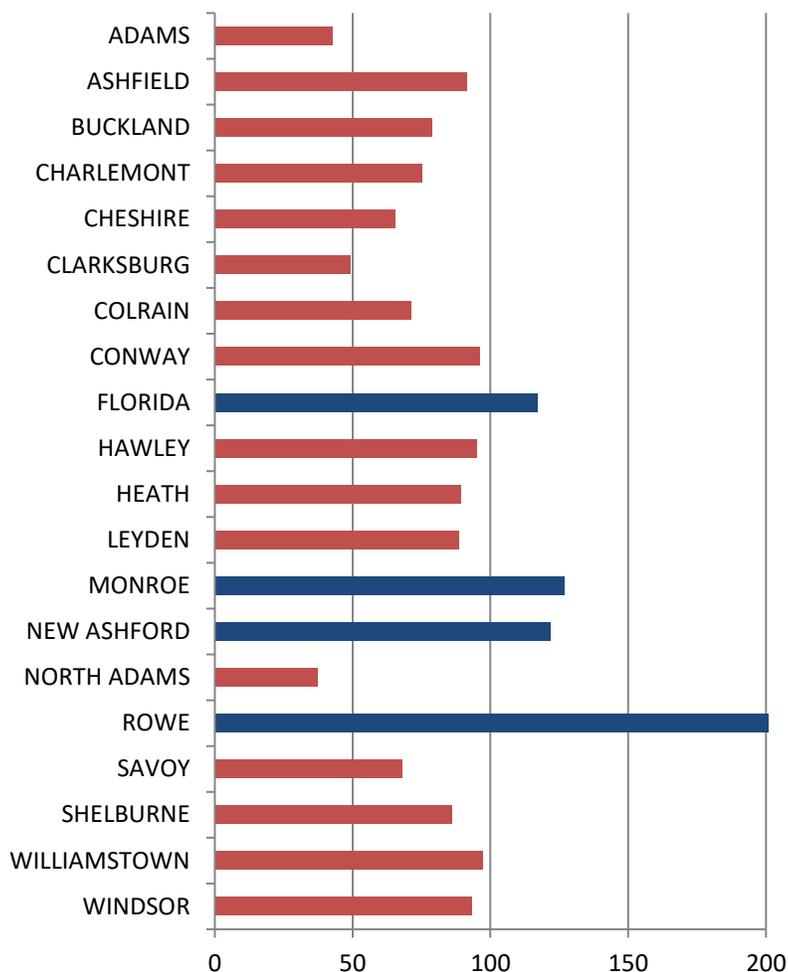
The overall financial health of the communities within the 21-town region should be considered when evaluating the potential impacts of increased conservation, tourism, and forestry. Towns in the region have little room to absorb a loss in tax revenue from placing land under a CR, unless new revenue comes from elsewhere. They also have limited capacity to increase spending on policing, road maintenance, or other costs associated with an increase in visitors to the region. A stable source of revenue needs to be identified to help municipalities provide these services.

As discussed above, most towns in the region rely heavily upon residential property taxes for revenue and have limited ways to earn revenue from other sources. Figure 5-2 displays each town's per capita equalized value, representing the full and fair cash value of all taxable property in the town divided by the town's population, as a percentage of the State average (or 100%). The figure indicates that the value of taxable property for 16 of the 21 towns in the region is below the state average.

Property taxes are the largest source of revenue for most of the towns in the region. Lower property values, combined with lower wages and incomes in the region (discussed in Section 3), make it difficult for towns to raise property taxes without placing further financial burden on their residents. Furthermore, the amount that taxes can be raised each year is limited by tax levy constraints imposed by Proposition 2 ½, and increases beyond the yearly limits require an override vote by the town, both at a town meeting and by election ballot.

Currently, towns spend the most on education, followed by public works (Figure 5-3). On average, in FY2020 communities spent 49% of their budget on education and 14% on public works. Very little of town budgets were spent on police (5%) and fire (2%), which reflects the small population of most communities and the volunteer nature of fire departments.

Figure 5-2: 2012 Equalized Per Capita Taxable Property Value as a Percent of the State Average

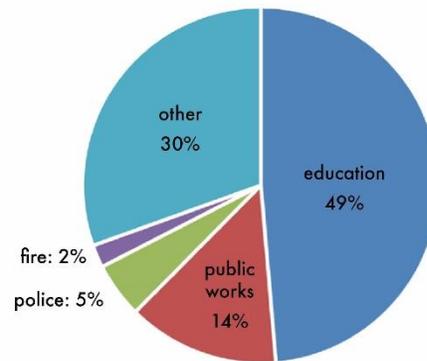


** Rowe has an Equalized Value per capita that is 529% of the State average due to the presence of a pumped storage facility.*

Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Division of Local Services Municipal Databank/Local Aid Section

Towns can get reimbursed for some public works expenses through the State Chapter 90 program. This program reimburses municipalities for capital improvement projects for road construction, preservation, and improvements that create or extend the life of capital facilities. The funds can be used for maintaining, repairing, improving, or constructing town and county ways and bridges that qualify under the State Aid Highway Guidelines issued by the Public Works Commission. Items eligible for Chapter 90 funding include roadways, sidewalks, right-of-way acquisition, shoulders, landscaping and tree planting, roadside drainage, street lighting, and traffic control devices.

Figure 5-3: Town Expenditures by Category



21-Town Expenditures by Category, FY2020

Data Source: MA Department of Revenue, Division of Local Services. Data Analytics and Resources Bureau, General Fund Revenue and Expenditure Reports (Schedule A). 2020.

Each municipality in Massachusetts is granted an annual allocation of Chapter 90 reimbursement funding based on roadway miles (city- or town-accepted), population, and employment. In FY2021, Chapter 90 reimbursement allocations ranged from \$43,120 in New Ashford, to \$435,324 in North Adams, with an average allocation of \$203,815 per town (Table 5-3).¹⁴

¹⁴ <http://www.mhd.state.ma.us/default.asp?pgid=content/stateaid01a&sid=about>

Table 5-3: FY2021 Chapter 90 Apportionments

Town	FY2021 Ch. 90 Apportionment	FY2021 Public Works Expenditures*
Adams	\$287,324	\$2,538,682
Ashfield	\$294,555	\$1,850,100
Buckland	\$184,999	\$1,439,929
Charlemont	\$179,999	\$695,732
Cheshire	\$200,252	\$878,203
Clarksburg	\$74,542	\$334,880
Colrain	\$318,708	\$821,674
Conway	\$264,761	\$2,201,186
Florida	\$162,146	\$607,026
Hawley	\$175,120	\$840,626
Heath	\$208,934	\$1,262,442
Leyden	\$142,604	\$1,592,643
Monroe	\$65,278	\$288,714
New Ashford	\$43,120	\$125,016
North Adams	\$435,324	\$3,943,812
Peru	\$144,138	\$479,269
Rowe	\$142,143	\$774,020
Savoy	\$197,375	\$591,832
Shelburne	\$208,361	\$886,283
Williamstown	\$300,276	\$2,446,161
Windsor	\$250,163	\$971,117
21-towns total	\$4,280,122	\$25,569,347

*Includes general fund public works expenditures and capital projects.

Data Sources: MassDOT Chapter 90 Program; MA Department of Revenue, Division of Local Services. Data Analytics and Resources Bureau, General Fund Revenue and Expenditure Reports and Capital Fund Reports (Schedule A), 2021.

American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) payments

The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) was a \$1.9 trillion economic stimulus bill passed by Congress on March 11, 2021 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Included in the bill was a provision for aid to be provided to state, local, and tribal governments to help these entities respond to the economic impacts of the pandemic. \$3.4 billion was provided to municipalities and counties in Massachusetts.¹⁵ Below are the amounts allocated to towns in the 21-town region (Table 5-4):

¹⁵ Mass.gov. 2022. About COVID-19 Federal Funds. <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/about-covid-19-federal-funds>

Table 5-4: ARPA Payments by Town (2021)

Town	ARPA Allocation Amount
Adams	\$838,395
Ashfield	\$179,716
Buckland	\$193,637
Charlemont	\$129,056
Cheshire	\$327,508
Clarksburg	\$171,447
Colrain	\$173,854
Conway	\$196,044
Florida	\$74,838
Hawley	\$34,959
Heath	\$72,745
Leyden	\$74,838
Monroe	\$12,037
New Ashford	\$23,341
North Adams	\$1,332,431
Peru	\$87,294
Rowe	\$40,716
Savoy	\$70,651
Shelburne	\$192,276
Williamstown	\$778,106
Windsor	\$90,643

Source: U.S. Treasury ARPA Allocations, May 25, 2021. https://41g41s33v added2vc05w415s1e-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/US_Treasury_NEU_Allocation_May_25_2021.xlsx

In Berkshire County, the planned uses for ARPA payments in the parks/recreation category are as follows:¹⁶

- \$200,000 to allow Mass Audubon to repair ecological, trail, and forest damage caused by extreme weather at the group’s Pleasant Valley property in Lenox.
- \$200,000 to the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission and I Berkshire to establish an outdoor recreation website for Berkshire County and adjoining regions.
- \$50,000 for facility upgrades to Clarksburg State Park.
- \$35,000 for facility upgrades at Natural Bridge State Park.
- \$35,000 for facility upgrades at Savoy Mountain State Forest.

¹⁶ Parnass, Larry. Here’s what Berkshire County is getting in ‘earmarks’ from the Legislature’s \$4 billion ARPA plan. The Berkshire Eagle, Dec. 3, 2021. https://www.berkshireeagle.com/news/local/what-berkshire-county-getting-covid-relief-money-state/article_ff1fc002-546d-11ec-b48f-8322c5e058ab.html

Federal Infrastructure Bill

The \$1.2 trillion Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) was signed into law by President Biden on November 15, 2021.¹⁷ Included in the bill were funds targeting environmental issues and climate change, including investment in public transit, a network of electric vehicle chargers, clean energy transmission, resiliency in the face of droughts, floods, and wildfires, and legacy pollution cleanup.¹⁸ Massachusetts was awarded \$9.5 billion in federal infrastructure funds, to be disbursed over 5 years.¹⁹ This funding will include \$106.5 million for a resiliency program, \$63.5 million for electric vehicle infrastructure, \$9.3 million for a carbon reduction program,²⁰ \$2.5 million in energy efficiency conservation block grants, and \$367.6 million for environmental remediation.²¹

Many of the energy and environmental infrastructure programs included in the BIL are new, and the MA EOEEA will need further guidance from the federal government before finalizing a list of qualifying programs.²² Regional Transit Authorities in Massachusetts are expected to receive \$591 million for modernization, maintenance, fleet upgrades, and replacement of facilities and vehicles, and funds will also be used to improve the commuter rail, freight rail, and intercity rail systems in Massachusetts, including federal-state partnership grants for the modernization of the Northeast Corridor.²³ An \$8 million expansion of the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail (bike path) is planned between Adams and North Adams,²⁴ and funds for numerous bridge replacement and repair projects have already been allocated (Table 5-5).²⁵

¹⁷ The White House. Biden Administration Releases Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Guidebook for State, Local, Tribal and Territorial Governments. Statements and Releases, Jan. 31, 2022. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/01/31/biden-administration-releases-bipartisan-infrastructure-law-guidebook-for-state-local-tribal-and-territorial-governments/>

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Baker-Polito Administration Outlines Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Funding for Massachusetts. Mass.gov, Feb. 3, 2022. <https://www.mass.gov/news/baker-polito-administration-outlines-bipartisan-infrastructure-law-funding-plans-for-massachusetts>

²⁰ Staff Reports. Baker Outlines \$9.5B in Investment from Federal Infrastructure Bill. iBerkshires, Feb. 3, 2022. <https://www.iberkshires.com/story/67160/Baker-Outlines-9.5B-in-Investment-From-Federal-Infrastructure-Bill.html>

²¹ Baker-Polito Administration Outlines Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Funding for Massachusetts. Mass.gov, Feb. 3, 2022. <https://www.mass.gov/news/baker-polito-administration-outlines-bipartisan-infrastructure-law-funding-plans-for-massachusetts>

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Staff Reports. Baker Outlines \$9.5B in Investment from Federal Infrastructure Bill. iBerkshires, Feb. 3, 2022. <https://www.iberkshires.com/story/67160/Baker-Outlines-9.5B-in-Investment-From-Federal-Infrastructure-Bill.html>

²⁵ The \$3 Billion Bridge Program. <https://www.mass.gov/news/baker-polito-administration-outlines-bipartisan-infrastructure-law-funding-plans-for-massachusetts>

Table 5-5: BIL-Funded Bridge Projects in the 21-Town Region

Town	Project	Funding
Adams	Quality St. bridge over Hoosic River	\$4,584,860
Charlemont	East Oxbow Rd. bridge over Oxbow Brook	\$3,323,503
Cheshire	Sand Mill Rd. bridge over Dry Brook	\$1,920,760
Colrain	Route 112 bridge over North River	\$428,272
Colrain	Adamsville Rd. bridge over Vincent Brook	\$3,310,826
Conway	North Poland Rd. bridge over Poland Brook	\$3,284,850
Heath	Jacksonville St. bridge over West Branch Brook	\$1,637,130
North Adams	Greylock Bridge (Route 2) over Hoosic River	\$17,769,440
North Adams	Brown St. bridge over Hoosic River	\$945,192
Rowe	Cyrus Stage Rd. bridge over Potter Brook	\$1,729,717
Williamstown	Main St. bridge over Hemlock Brook	\$1,888,123

Source: The \$3 Billion Bridge Program. <https://www.mass.gov/news/baker-polito-administration-outlines-bipartisan-infrastructure-law-funding-plans-for-massachusetts>

Summary and Key Findings

- Growing local businesses, sustaining the region’s workforce, population, and rural way of life, and bringing outside dollars into the region all have the potential to be supported by focusing resources on the protection of the region’s forests, supporting working forests and forest-related businesses, and increasing tourism in the region.
- An increase in visitation and active forest management may require more road maintenance, emergency response capacity, and tourism or business infrastructure. Many towns in the region operate on a tight budget and would benefit from a stable source of revenue to help pay for these municipal services.
- PILOT payments to towns for tax-exempt state-owned land vary from year to year, and do not make up the difference in tax revenue loss experienced by towns. The MTWP Municipal Sustainability Committee and Executive Committee have voted to advocate for an updated PILOT formula that more equitably addresses reimbursement to rural communities.

- Increasing land conservation in the region with Conservation Restrictions could result in tax revenue loss for towns if the land is not currently enrolled in the Chapter 61 “current use” program for forestry. The model CR developed by Franklin Land Trust for the Woodlands Partnership, however, focuses on working woodlands, which would appeal to landowners already enrolled in Chapter 61 for active forest management, resulting in no tax revenue loss to towns.