

Quaboag Connector Launches Route 9 Shuttle



Sheila Cuddy, Executive Director of the Quaboag Valley CDC, speaks at the launch event for the Route 9 Shuttle. THFCM photo

The Quaboag Connector, one of the Foundation's Round 5 Synergy Initiative projects, celebrated the official launch of its Route 9 Shuttle in June. As described in the June 23 edition of the [Ware River News](#), the Route 9 Shuttle is a new fixed-route transit service traveling from Belchertown to Spencer and stopping at key destinations in the Quaboag Valley.

The Route 9 Shuttle is a pilot expansion of the Quaboag Connector, which aims to develop a sustainable model for rural transportation to increase access to health and community resources within the Quaboag Valley region. The Quaboag Connector has provided over 6,000 rides to residents to date in 2022 and has received over \$1 million in funding from the Foundation since 2020.

Transportation is an important social determinant of health, and the Foundation is pleased to support this expansion to connect more residents of the Quaboag Valley region with

essential services. As noted in the article, State Rep. Todd Smola commented that the Route 9 Shuttle will fill a transportation void that exists between Worcester and Springfield. He explained, "[W]e want this program to continue to grow...there will always be a need for the Connector."

Developed in response to community feedback, the Route 9 Shuttle is a fixed-route service that runs at regular times on Saturdays at the cost of \$1 per ride and connects residents with workplaces, shopping centers, healthcare facilities, and town centers along Route 9. This service is an important addition to the existing demand-response service (which requires riders to reserve rides in advance) because it allows for spontaneity of travel and meeting riders' same-day travel needs.

Recent developments regarding the East-West Rail, which will likely include a stop in Palmer within the Quaboag Connector's service area, suggest that residents of the Quaboag Valley region may have additional transportation options in the future. In addition, the Quaboag Connector could serve as a model for last-mile service connecting riders in rural areas to the East-West Rail.

The Quaboag Connector is a project of the Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation (QV CDC), which has a mission to improve the quality of life in the Quaboag Hills Region by addressing the economic and social needs of its residents while maintaining the integrity and character of each community in the region. The project's leadership and advisory teams of the project are notable due to the significant involvement of leaders from numerous municipalities, regional and state agencies, and the communities themselves.

EXCITING NOTE: Bill Blodgett, a Quaboag Connector driver, and his wife Denise were surprised on Wednesday, August 3rd by the WooSox as Hometown Heroes. Sheila Cuddy, Executive Director of the QV CDC, described Bill as someone who brings a genuine helpful attitude to work with him every day. "He's a person who cares, about his riders, his co-workers, and his community. All of us at the Quaboag Connector could not be prouder of him."

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