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New year, New Service: MeVa Buses Will Be Running Sundays Starting in January

HAVERHILL – We live in a seven day a week world and thanks to a boost in state funding from the Massachusetts Legislature and Governor Healey, MeVa’s buses will be adding Sunday service to its schedule starting Sunday January 7, 2024. MeVa selected seven of its routes for Sunday service based on Saturday ridership, input from passengers and the community, and service to areas with a high concentration of Sunday employment, shopping, and places of worship. Sunday service was also designed to maximize coverage across MeVa’s service area and will serve every fixed route community except for Groveland and Newburyport.

Methuen resident Joey McDonald, 18, was thrilled about the addition of Sunday service because of the direct benefit to him and his family. “My mom works full time at the Loop,” he noted, “so now she can ride the free #1 bus to work on Sundays instead of paying expensive cab fares. On my end,” he added, “I will be able to go to the gym on Sundays, so the added service will keep me healthy!”

The routes that will be running on Sundays are the #1, which connects Lawrence with Haverhill via the Loop, the #2, which connects Lawrence with Andover via South Broadway, the #8, which connects Lawrence with North Andover via Parker Street/South Union Street and Colonial Heights, the #10, which connects Lawrence with Methuen via Broadway, the #13, which connects Haverhill with Plaistow NH via Main Street and North Avenue, the #17 which connects Haverhill with Merrimac, Amesbury, and Salisbury Beach, and the #24, which connects Lawrence with Lowell via Route 110. Buses will depart hourly from MeVa’s Transportation Centers at Buckley and Washington Square starting at 9am with the last bus departing at 5pm.

In addition to the new Sunday service, MeVa will also be extending Saturday service on Route #1 until 7pm and will run on 30 minute frequencies all day long. They will be also be adding previously unserved holidays to the schedule, including Martin Luther King Day, Presidents’ Day, Patriots’ Day, Juneteenth, Columbus Day and Veterans Day. The #14 will also extend from its current terminus in Ward Hill to Osgood Landing and the new Amazon distribution facility, while the #3 will start serving the Andover/North Andover YMCA via Route 133.

MeVa Transit is one of 15 Regional Transit Authorities (RTAs) across Massachusetts, which together serve the majority of communities in the state. The added Sunday service along with the later evening service introduced this past September were made possible by a \$56 million increase in funding for RTAs statewide that was included in the 2024 state budget. With the



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added dollars, Massachusetts RTAs finally have the resources to deliver a baseline of service that brings transit equity to areas outside Boston and Route 128.

State Representative Frank A. Moran held up MeVa's Sunday service as exemplary of what the legislature was seeking when he and his colleagues voted to increase funding for RTAs. "We need to invest in reliable, frequent, seven-day public transportation because it is an essential asset that allows those in our community to access employment, educational opportunities, and more," he said. "I would like to thank MeVa," he added, "for extending their bus schedules to provide transportation on Sundays, which will allow our residents, especially the very young and old, to have additional flexibility and freedom to connect with every opportunity."

Of course even with the new funding, the added service is only possible because despite a national driver shortage, MeVa has been able to recruit and retain a staff of professional drivers to cover the new runs. Thanks to a lot of hard work and creativity by MeVa's human resources team, the agency has been able to grow its driver workforce by 39.1% since August 2021, recently adding a new class of eight drivers with a new training class underway. As MeVa Human Resources Director Jaymi Swarbrick explains, "our secret sauce has been establishing MeVa as an inclusive environment, where management listens to and takes input from our frontline employees. As a result, people want to work here and we have the staff to operate the buses later in the evening and on Sundays."

About MeVa Transit:

MeVa Transit is the regional transportation agency serving the 16 communities along the Merrimack River from Andover to the seacoast. MeVa Transit runs fixed route buses and paratransit vans (mini MeVa) with service hubs in Lawrence, Haverhill, and Amesbury. In March of 2022, the MeVa board voted to go fare-free systemwide in a move to encourage ridership and alleviate some of the financial burden shouldered by residents in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to free fares, MeVa rebranded all their vans and buses, doubled service on Lawrence-based routes, extended service into Groveland, and optimized routing to improve efficiency. Since going fare free, fixed route bus ridership through November 2023 has more than tripled and has now exceeds pre-pandemic levels by 53.8%. On the paratransit side, November 2023 ridership has increased 186.4% and now exceeds pre-pandemic levels by 19.0%. For routes, schedules, and more information about MeVa Transit bus services, visit www.mevatransit.com.

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