

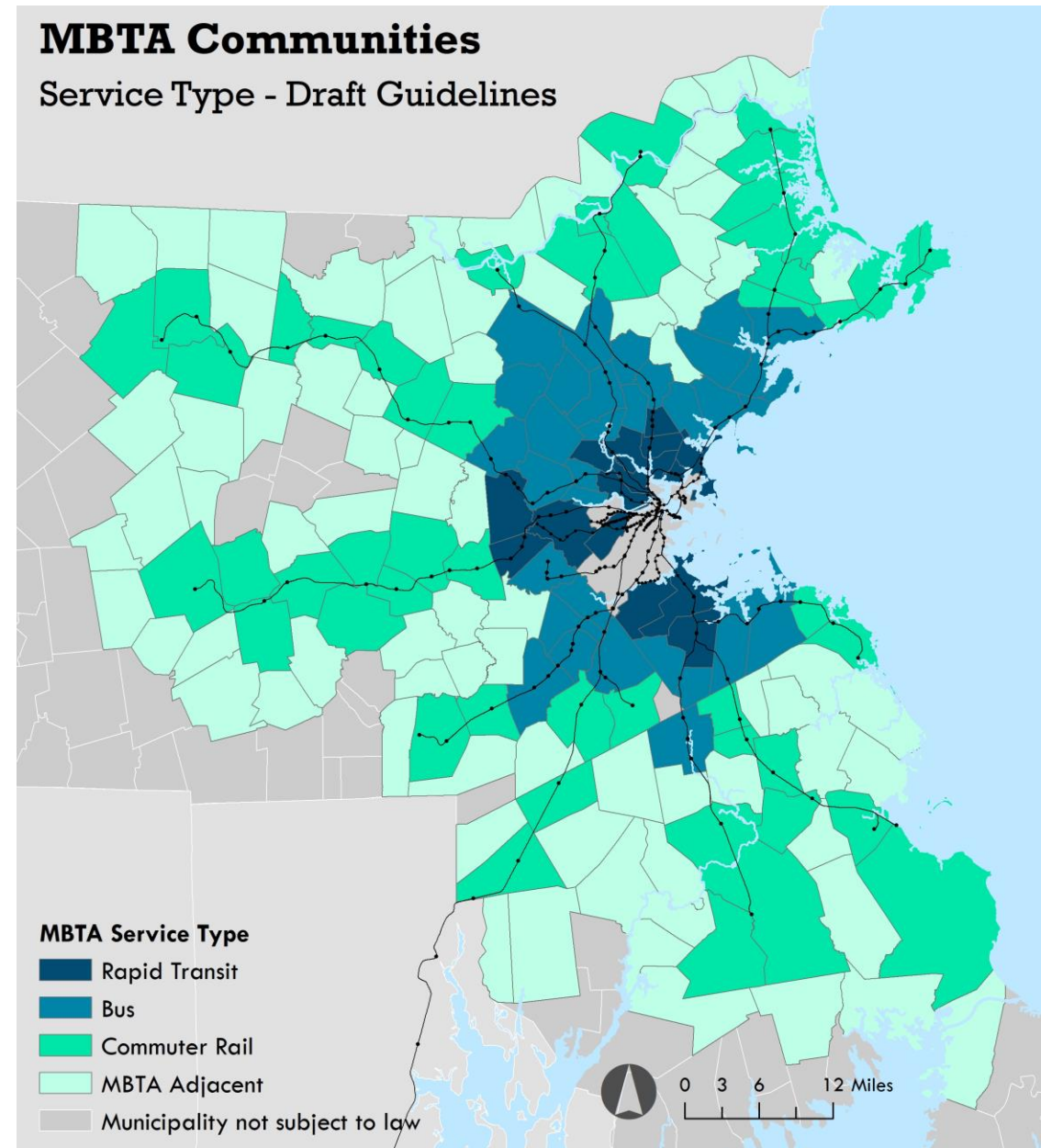
MBTA Communities Draft Guidelines  
Preliminary Analysis of Minimum Unit Capacity  
and estimated Net Unit Capacity

Metropolitan Area Planning Council

January 12, 2022

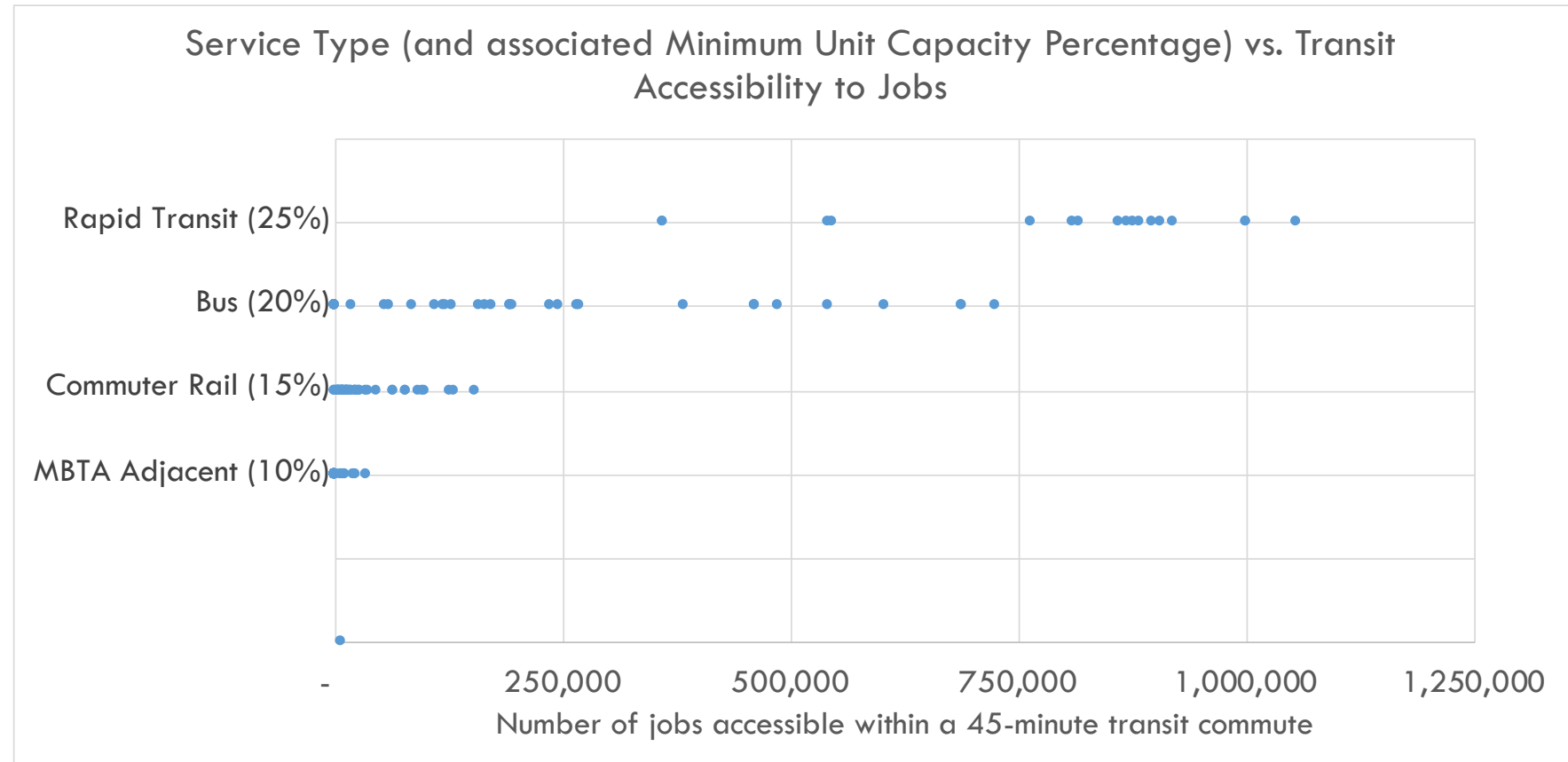
# Service Type

- For most MBTA Communities, the minimum unit capacity is based strictly on Service Type, shown on this map.
- Service types are based on the “highest” level of service provided. Eligibility is based a half-mile radius around stations and bus lines.
- A municipality may be assigned to a higher service level due to proximity to a station in a nearby city or town. For example, Arlington, Everett, Melrose, Wellesley, Weston, and Winthrop are all classified as Rapid Transit communities due to a station in an adjoining city.



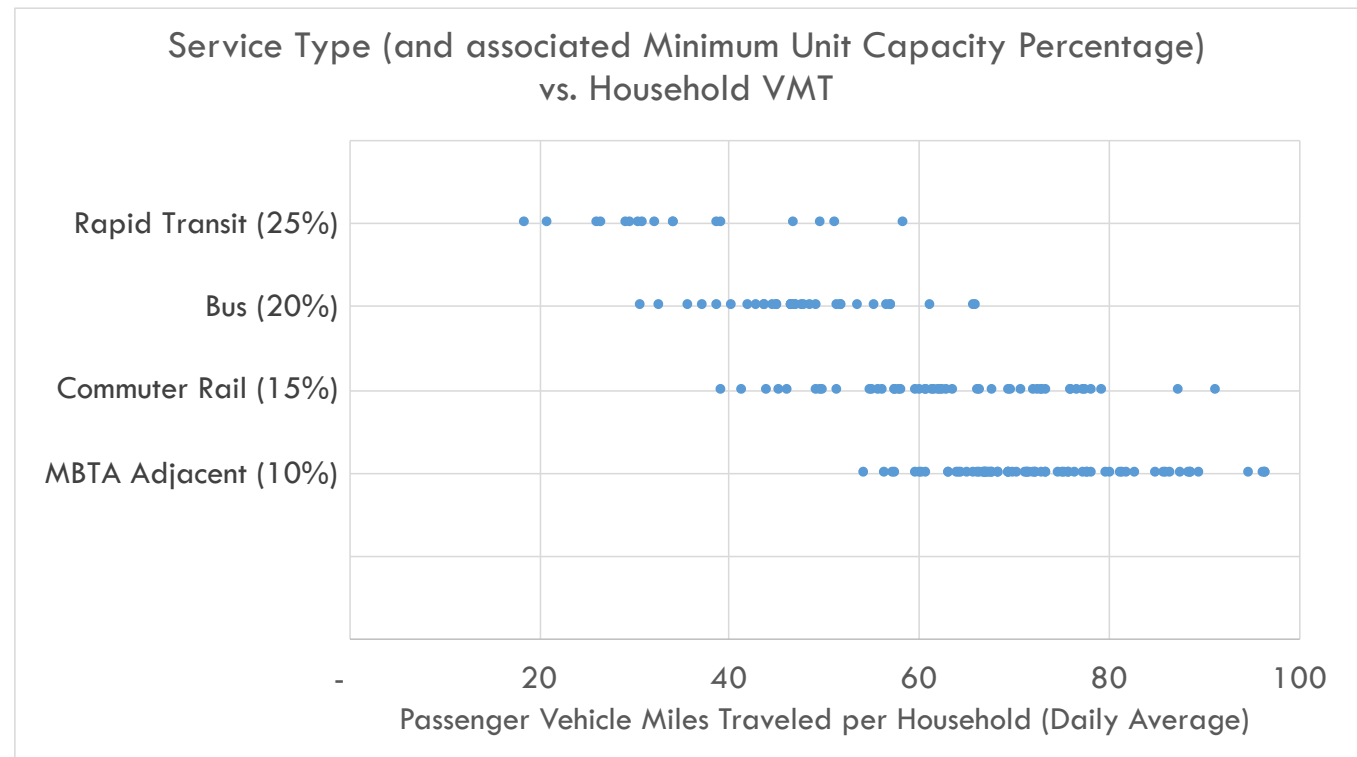
# Service Type and VMT

- Service Type is a weak predictor of transit quality. The chart below shows each municipality, grouped by service type and plotted against the number of accessible within a 45-minute transit commute
- While access to jobs is generally greater for the higher-level service types, there is considerable spread within types and overlap across types.



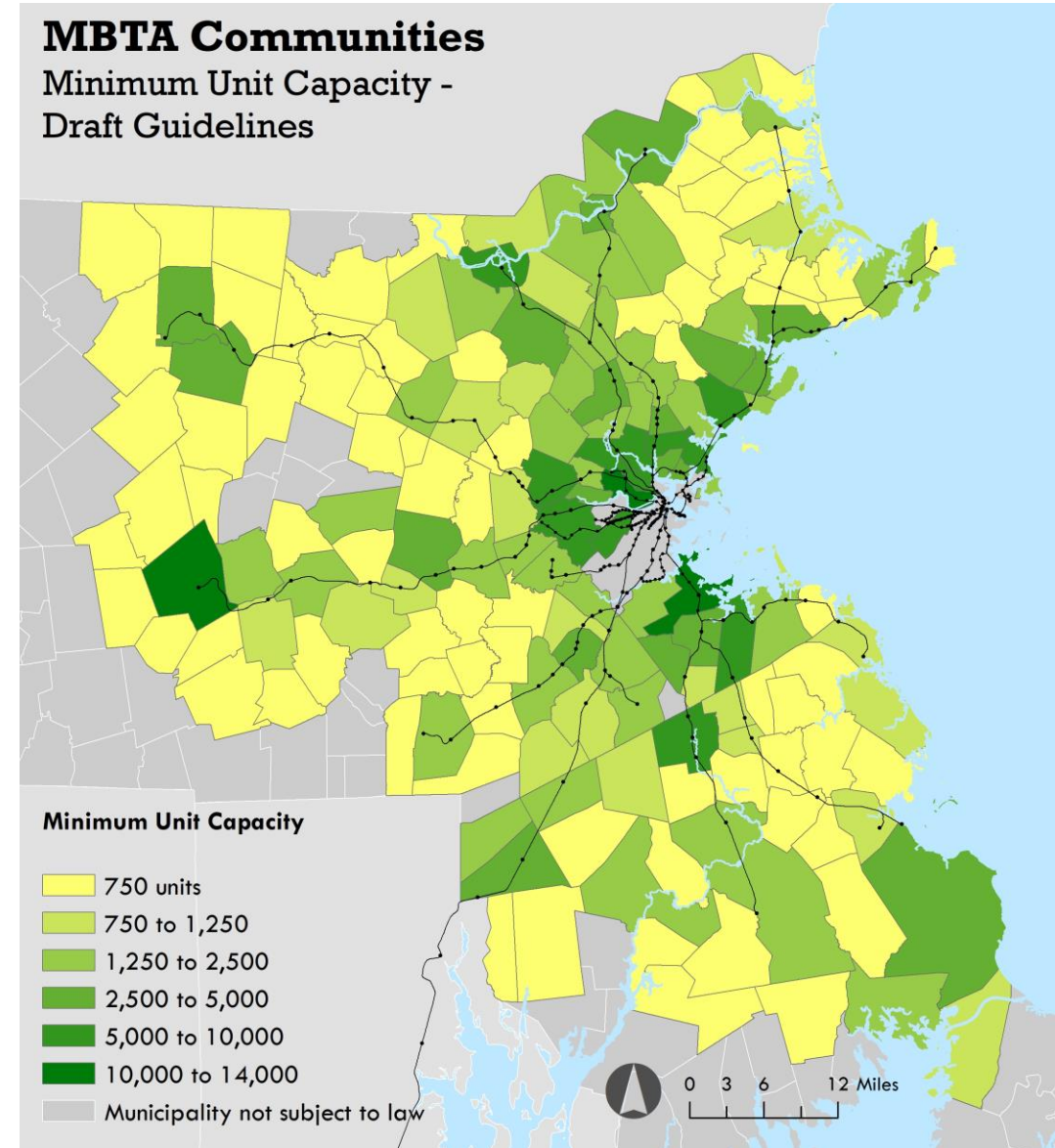
# Service Type and VMT

- Service Type is also weak predictor of how much the average household drives. The chart below shows each municipality, grouped by service type and plotted against the number of miles driven by the average household.
- While average VMT tends to be lower with higher service types, there is considerable overlap across the different service types.
- The variation within service types means that the requirements do not consistently require higher targets in communities with better transit access and lower VMT per household.



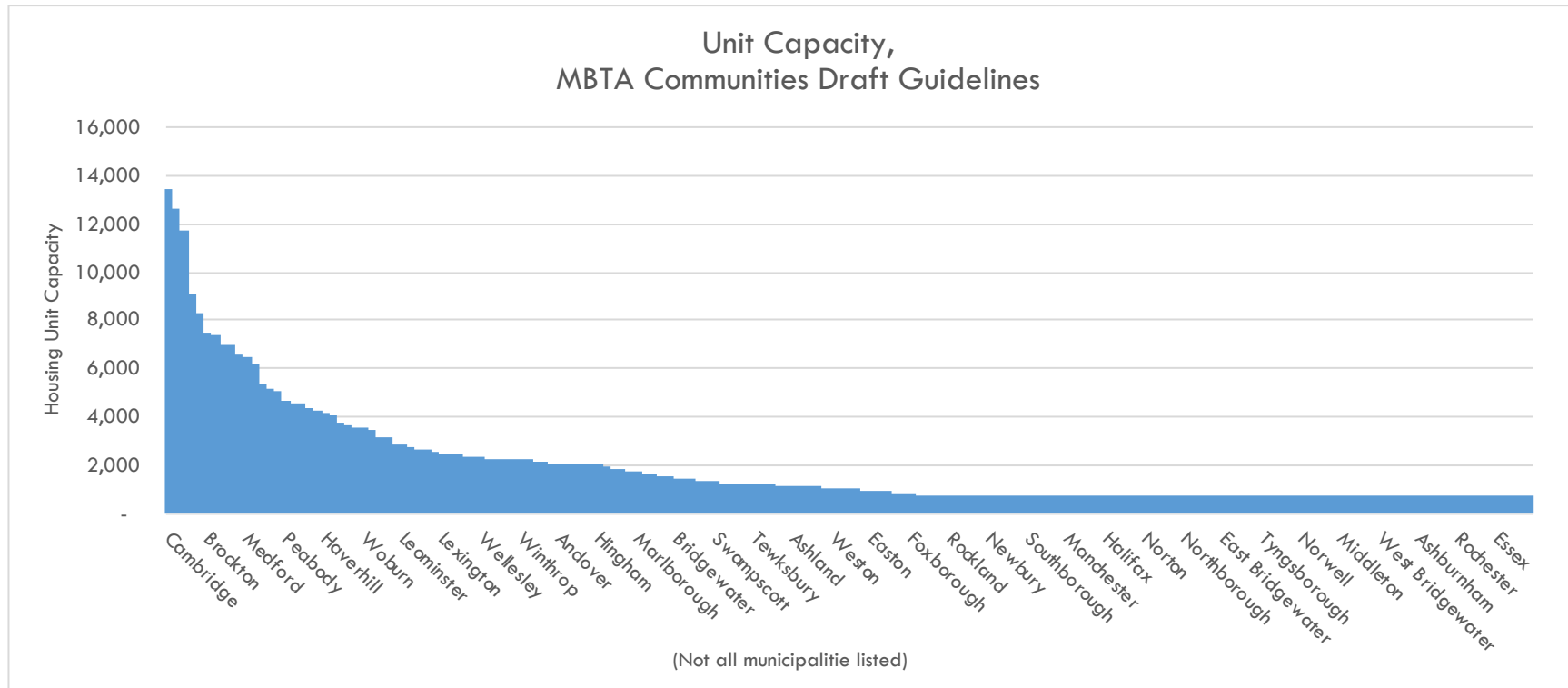
# Minimum Unit Capacity

- Minimum unit capacity is the number of housing units that must be zoned for as of right.
- It is calculated as a percent of existing housing units, with the percentage based on MBTA Service Type. There is a minimum standard of 50 acres & 750 units.
- This map shows the proposed unit capacity for each MBTA Community.
- More than two dozen cities and towns will have to zone for 3,000 units or more--over 10,000 in the cases of Cambridge, Worcester, and Quincy.
- 79 towns—almost half the total—will be subject to the 50 acre/750 unit minimum.
- The total unit capacity for all 175 MBTA Communities is 344,000 units.



# Unit Capacity

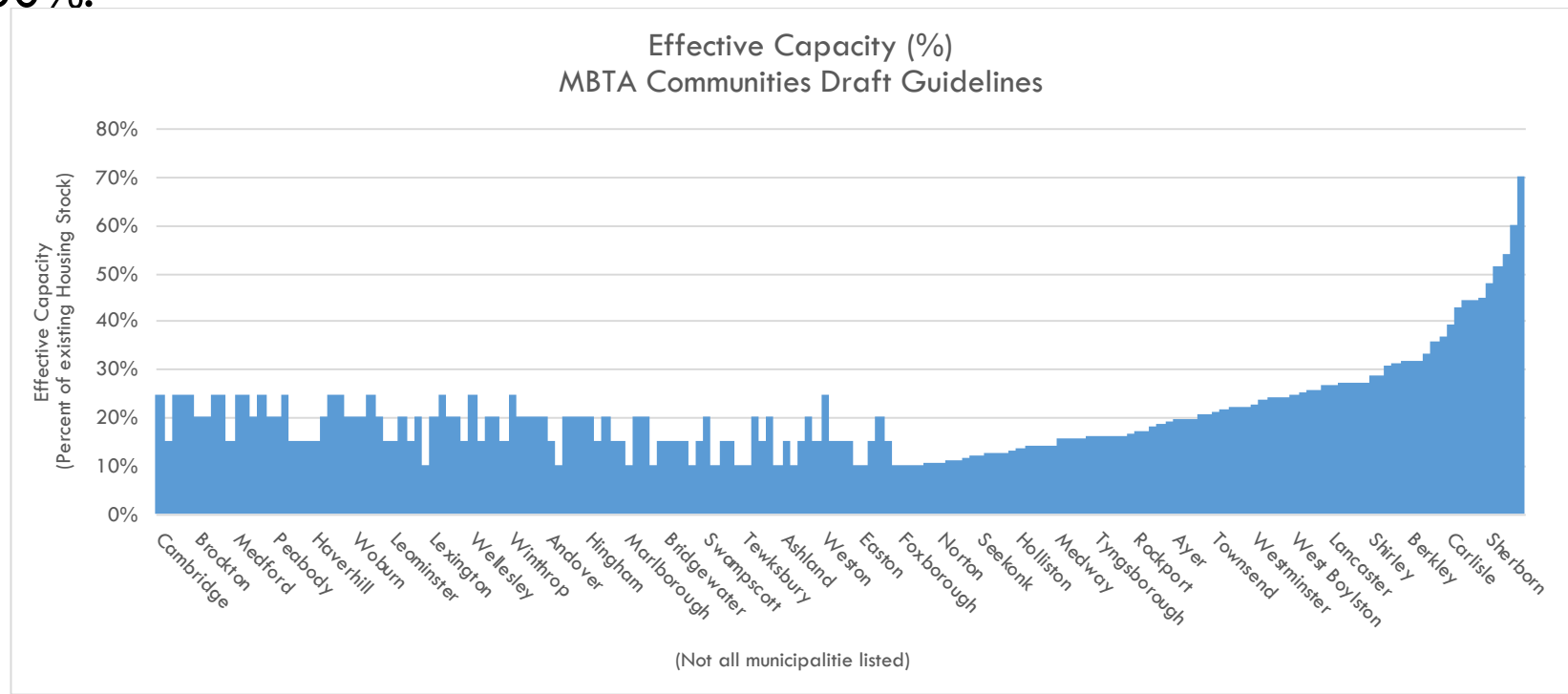
- Here's a chart of those same minimum unit capacity requirements, with municipalities ordered by their unit capacity. Those on the left have the highest requirements, up to 13,500 in the case of Cambridge
- The 79 municipalities on the right are those subject to the 50 acre/750 unit minimum.





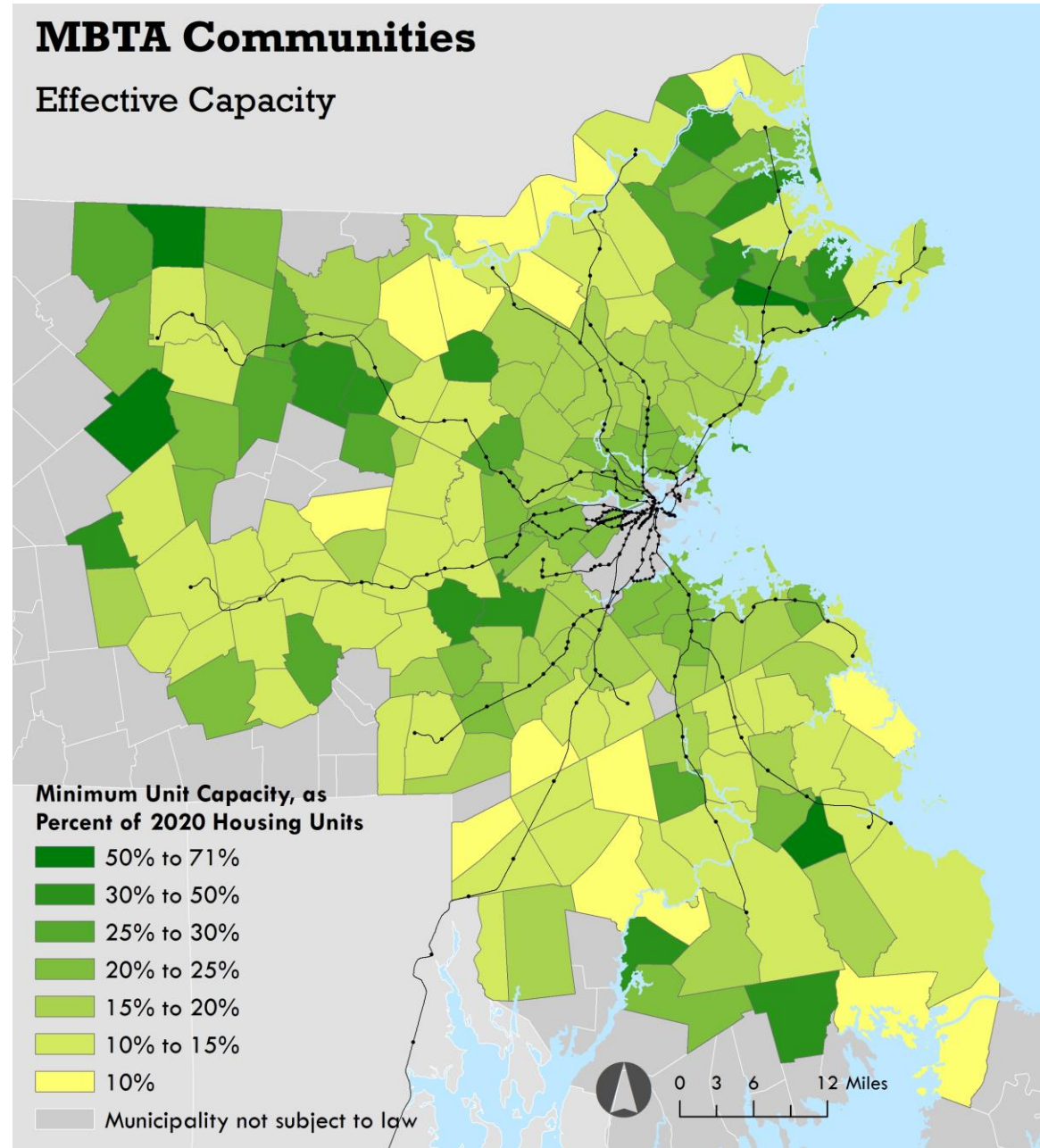
# Effective Capacity

- In this chart is those communities are in the same order, but unit capacity is expressed as a percent of existing housing units. (We call this “Effective Capacity.”) The impact of the 750 unit minimum becomes clear.
- For just over half the MBTA Communities (the ones on the left of the chart), the percentage is based on service type: 10%, 15%, and so forth.
- There are 79 towns where the effective capacity is higher than would be expected based on service type, because the calculated unit capacity is smaller than 750 units. 61 are MBTA Adjacent communities. The remainder were Commuter Rail and Bus communities.
- There are 28 towns where the effective capacity is greater than 25% and four with effective capacity greater than 50%.



# Effective Capacity

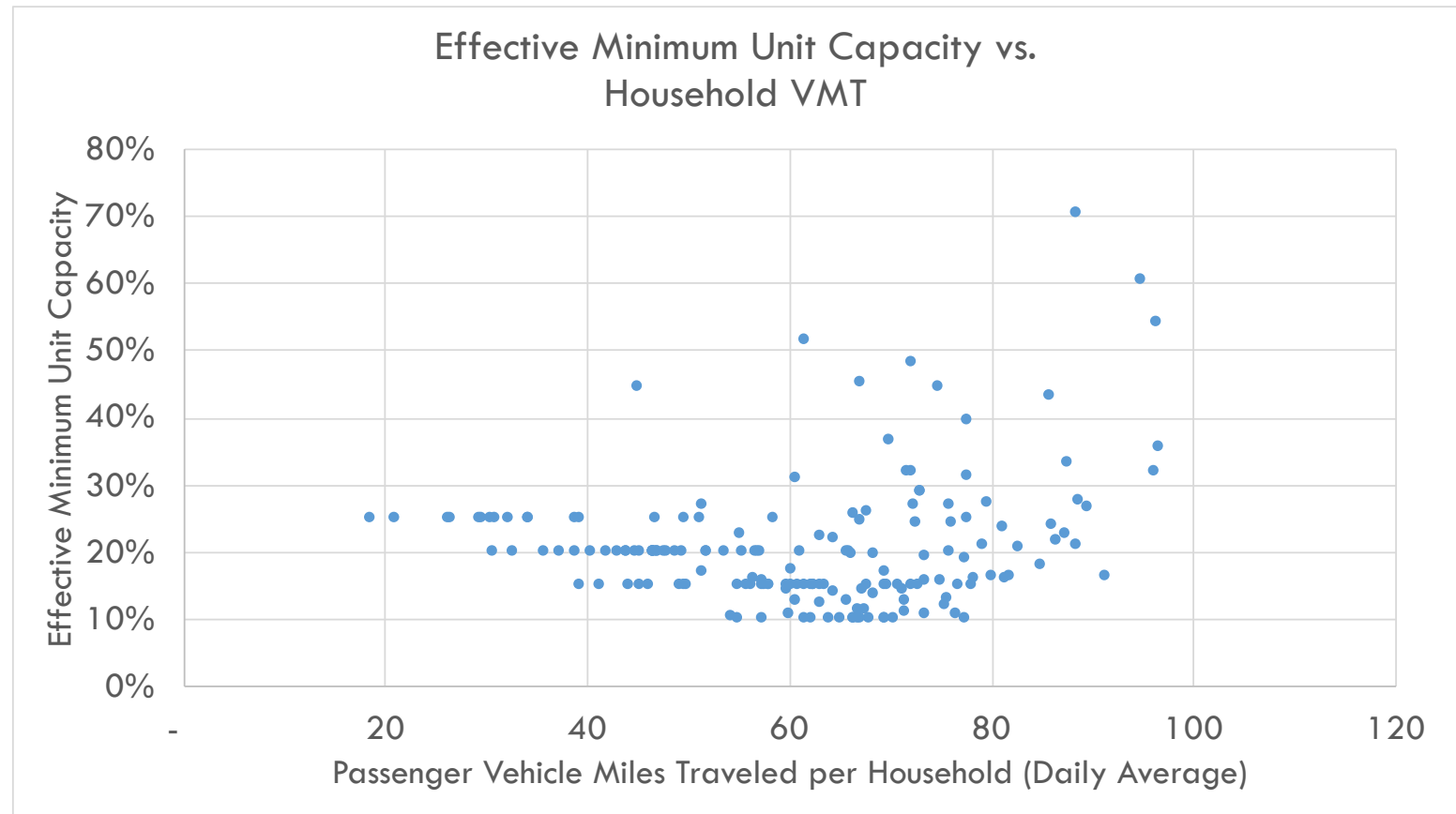
- Here's what that looks like on a map.
- The subway communities, where the unit capacity is 25% of existing housing units, are clearly visible at the core of the region.
- But the MBTA Communities with the highest effective capacity (in percentage terms) are largely around the edges of the Metro Boston region, mostly in communities without a transit station.





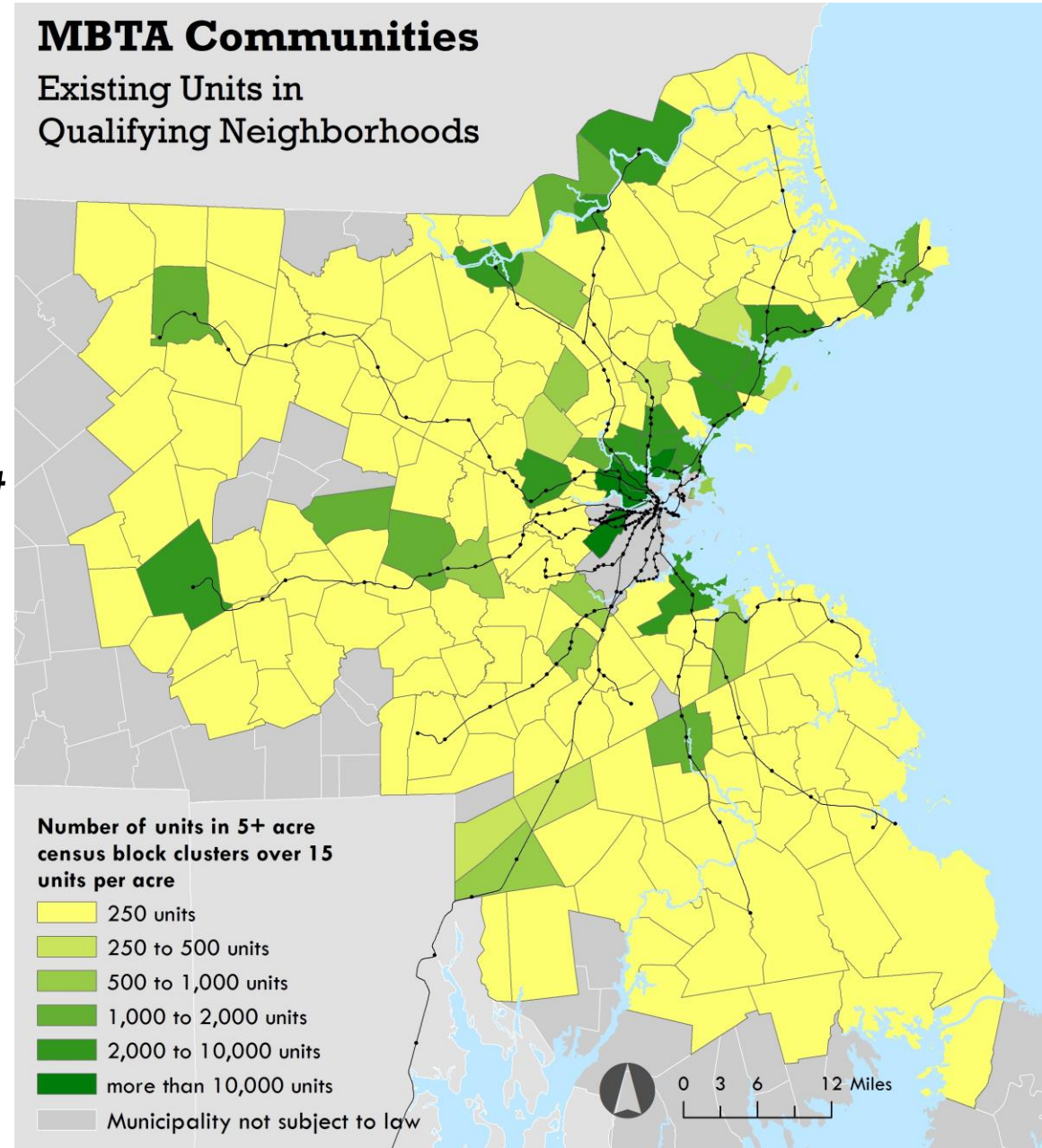
# Effective Capacity

- Those communities subject to the 750 unit minimum also tend to have higher VMT per household.
- This chart shows each municipality with the effective unit capacity plotted against average VMT per household. In percentage terms, the effective capacity is highest among the most auto-dependent communities.



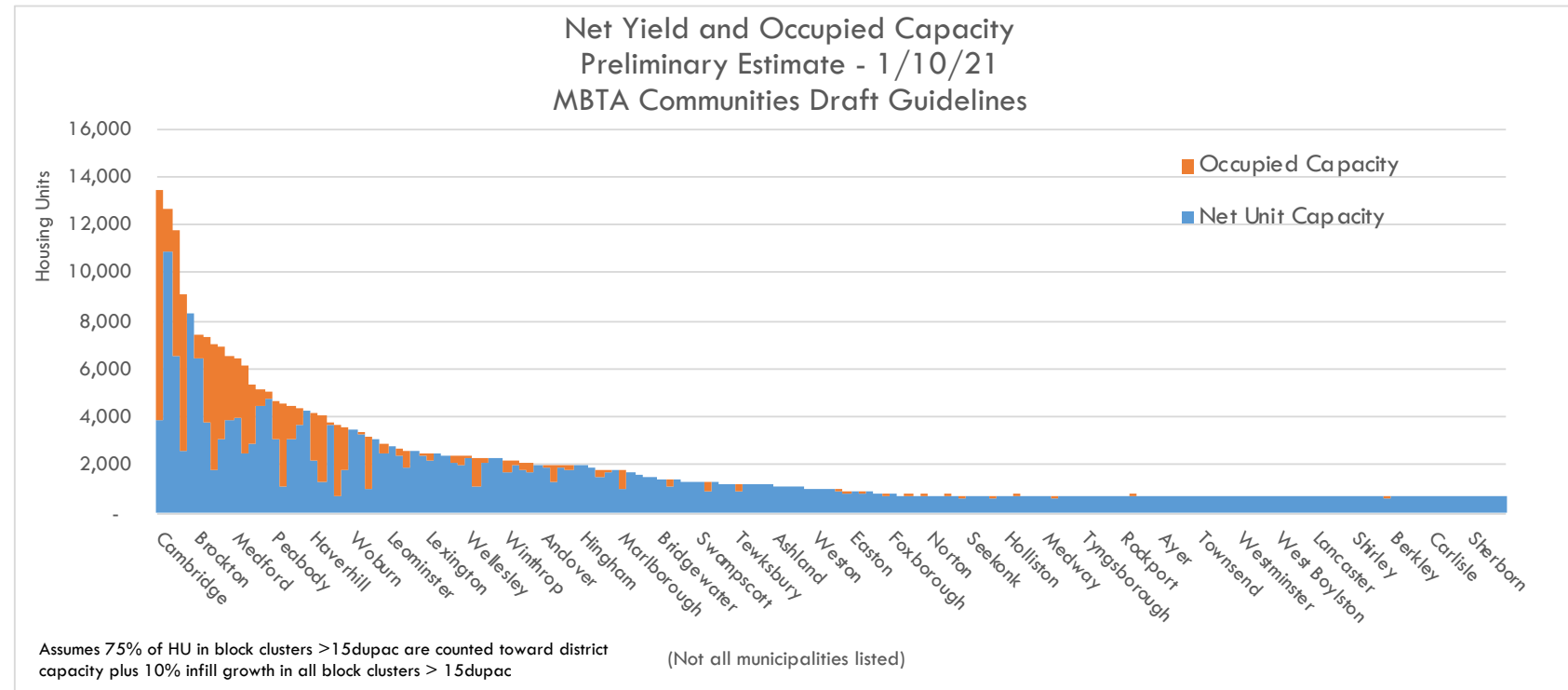
# Existing Units

- MBTA Communities must show that the total number of units allowable under the new zoning is greater than the Minimum Unit Capacity.
- When new zoning districts include parcels already occupied by existing units, the theoretical zoning capacity is counted toward the municipal total, even though the effective *net* increase on those parcels is less than the zoning capacity (even as low as zero.)
- By rezoning multifamily areas at their existing density, municipalities could satisfy the requirement without allowing for much new growth.
- Any neighborhood at or above the minimum density of 15 units per acre would be the first candidates for such rezoning.
- This map shows the total number of housing units in neighborhoods that are already at or above the 15 units per acre minimum.



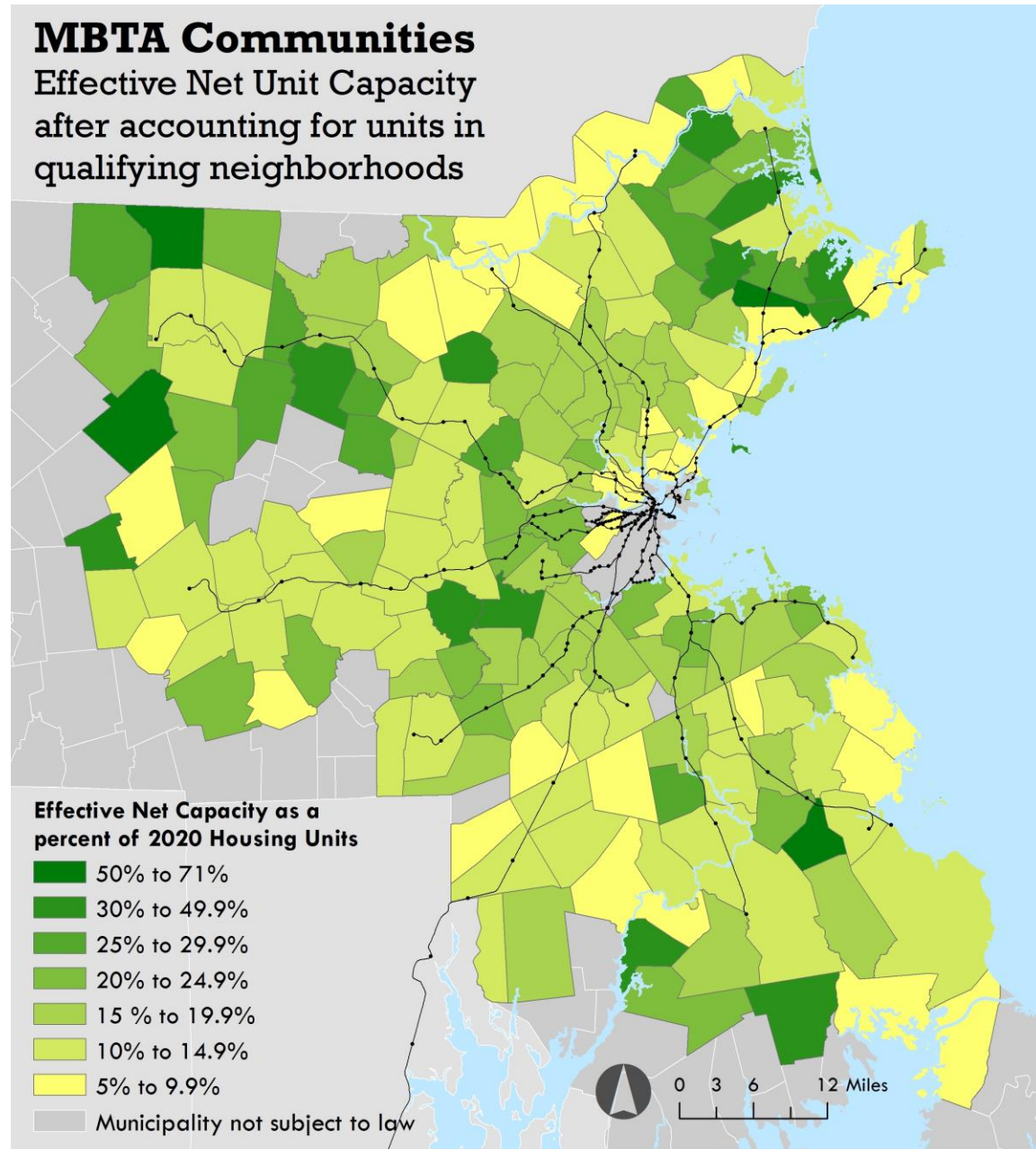
# Net Yield

- Widespread “legalization” of existing neighborhoods would have a big impact on the realistic net yield for some communities and for the region overall.
- This chart shows a preliminary estimate of how much of the minimum unit capacity might be satisfied by rezoning existing areas, and the resulting net yield. We assume that 75% of units in existing qualifying neighborhoods (those >15 units per acre) are counted toward the minimum unit capacity; and that neighborhood “legalization” allows for net increases of 10%.
- Using these assumptions, the zoning capacity on parcels that are already occupied might satisfy more than two thirds of the total unit capacity in some communities, and none in others.
- Overall, its likely that at least 75,000 existing units could be counted toward the minimum unit capacity, almost a quarter of the total unit capacity. With creative rezoning, that number could be even higher.



# Effective Net Capacity

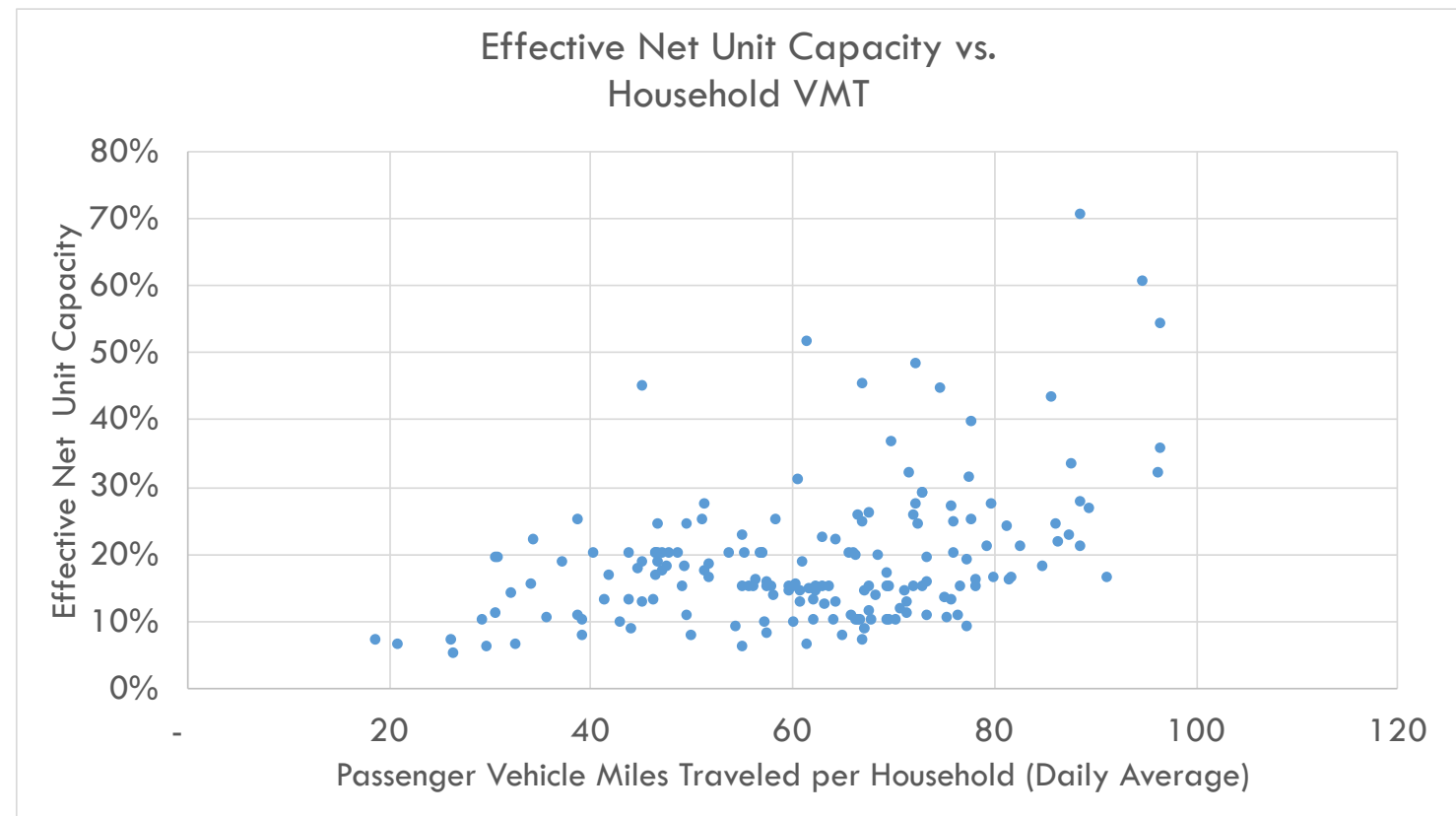
- If communities due pursue neighborhood “legalization” as a strategy, the effective net increase in zoning capacity is quite different than the nominal requirement.
- This map shows the effective net capacity using the assumptions described on the prior slide.
- The biggest differences are among the Rapid Transit communities. Despite the 25% standard for minimum unit capacity, the average effective net capacity could be 15% or lower.





# Transportation effects

- Here again is the plot of effective capacity against household VMT. In this case the effective *net* capacity is shown.
- The effective net capacity (in percentage terms) is highest in the most auto dependent locations.
- The most transportation efficient locations now have relatively small percentage increases in net capacity.
- If adopted and implemented equally across the region, the result would be to shift growth away from low-VMT areas.





# Preliminary Conclusions

- The 750-unit minimum could result in unreasonably high growth rates for many small towns
- Rezoning designed to “legalize” existing neighborhoods could reduce the effective net capacity by at least 25% regionwide.
- After accounting for how many existing units might be counted toward the minimum unit capacity, the most transportation efficient places have among the lowest effective net capacity requirements.
- In effect, the requirements would require relatively more capacity and growth potential in the least accessible parts of the region than in the core of the MBTA district.