

CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE POLICY POSITION

TOPIC: RTA leadership to maximize federal investment to improve SE MI transit

REC. NUMBER: 2021.01

DATE ADOPTED: by the full CAC April 26, 2021 *(with modest policy subcommittee amendments)*

ISSUE PRESENTED

New federal leadership recognizes the importance of public transit and the need to invest to ensure access to opportunity. Southeast Michigan transit leaders must be prepared to seize upon this opportunity and attract the most possible federal funding to improve and expand our region's public transit.

RECOMMENDATION

The CAC recommends that the RTA board and staff take proactive leadership in developing a prioritized list of southeast Michigan transit projects that could be completed or advanced with federal investment. This listing should start with components of the RTA's board-approved 2016 Regional Transit Master Plan, but should expand broadly from there.

This prioritization should be done in a collaborative manner, in coordination with CAC, transit agencies, transit riders, and business and civic leaders who are supportive of transit improvement.

This coordinated list should be used to prioritize use of American Rescue Plan funds, some of which should be used to enhance the capacity of the RTA to coordinate and manage these important projects. It should also be used to make requests to the Biden Administration and Michigan's congressional delegation for future investment in improving our region's transit.

BACKGROUND & IDEAS

The RTA recently received \$214 million for southeast Michigan from the federal CARES and CRSSA Coronavirus relief laws. Fully 99.5% of those funds were passed through to the public transit agencies. The \$134 million from the CARES Act were spent largely on increased sanitation, PPE, driver shields, larger buses, lost fare revenue, and vaccine shuttles. The \$60 million of CRRSAA have been allocated but have largely not yet been spent.

The American Rescue Act, passed in March 2021, is estimated to provide \$134 million to the region. Funding for payroll and operations are prioritized but explicit rules have not yet been set.

Congress is also considering the Biden Administration's American Jobs Act, which would also direct substantial funding for public transit, and will later in the year be re-authorizing the federal surface transportation bill, which could also allow for major federal investment in transit. These are still uncertain but southeast Michigan should be ready.

Initial ideas from CAC members and others include:

- Ensure every bus stop in the region has clear bus stop signage with route, frequency, and contact information
- Install new solar bus shelters at every transfer point in the region, each with real-time bus information and full ADA accessibility
- Replace the People Mover's fareboxes so they can join the DART regional pass
- Provide driver bonuses and/or hazard pay to recruit and maintain enough bus drivers to run full reliable service (esp DDOT)
- Prep and pilot traffic signal priority on Woodward to allow buses to run quicker
- Expand the electric bus pilot, since they spew less exhaust and cost less to run long-term
- A team of transit ambassadors to listen to rider needs, encourage safe riding, and promote new services like D2A2 bus, the Transit App, and the DART app
- Install air cleaners on transit buses to protect riders from traffic exhaust, COVID-19, and other airborne diseases
- Pilot Reflex-type cross-county transit services, perhaps on Grand River
- Construction and rehab costs to get the A2-Detroit train ready to run
- Study the feasibility of electric commuter rail trains/light rail
- Study the feasibility of restoring commuter train service between Detroit and Pontiac

However, these are just a few ideas. We of the CAC would be happy to provide more details, examples, and sources for these ideas. We strongly urge the RTA to take leadership to gather more ideas and collaboratively evaluate and prioritize them for greatest regional impact.