ADVANCE 2021 RTA

A Transit Plan for Southeast Michigan

December 2021

RTA
REGIONAL TRANSIT AUTHORITY
OF SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN

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INTRODUCTION

ADVANCE 2021 RTA

Image courtesy of SMART.

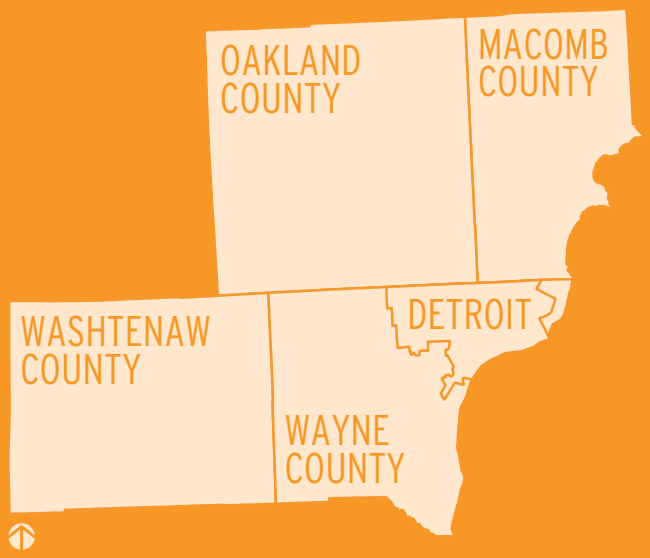
01 INTRODUCTION

Regional Transit Authority of Southeast Michigan

The Regional Transit Authority of Southeast Michigan (RTA) was established by Public Act 387 of 2012 as the authority responsible for developing a regional master transit plan, coordinating regional transit projects and programs, and distributing federal and state transit formula funds in the four county region that includes Macomb, Oakland, Washtenaw, and Wayne Counties. RTA is the only entity enabled to pursue a regional ballot initiative to secure local funding for supporting and improving transit services. Its 10-member board is appointed by the county executives of Wayne, Oakland and Macomb Counties, the chair of the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners, the Mayor of Detroit, and the Governor of Michigan. Since 2012, RTA has advanced planning projects aimed at securing additional funding, developed and launched pilot projects, supported regional coordination initiatives, and led several strategic studies. These efforts have sought to enhance economic vitality and improve quality of life in the region.

RTA envisions ***a region with sufficient and stable funding to support improved public transit options that will advance equity by increasing accessibility; satisfy the integrated mobility needs of Southeast Michigan communities; and promote livable, healthy, and sustainable growth***. RTA works in partnership with the region's public transit agencies to achieve this vision: Ann Arbor Area Transportation Authority (AAATA, also known as TheRide), Detroit Department of Transportation (DDOT), Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation (SMART), Detroit People Mover (DPM), M-1 RAIL (operating as QLINE), and over 80 community-sponsored transit providers that serve areas across Southeast Michigan.

RTA has updated its Regional Master Transit Plan (RMTP) in order to set a strategic agenda for transit. *ADVANCE 2021* is RTA's most recent RMTP and will guide future transit planning and projects in Southeast Michigan.



▲ FIGURE 1-1: RTA Region: Southeast Michigan

ADVANCE 2021

***ADVANCE 2021* presents RTA's strategic agenda for improving transit in Southeast Michigan.** This plan looks at existing transit services, recent accomplishments, ongoing projects, transit markets, travel patterns, and public input to define broad strategies that will help guide the region's transit system toward RTA's vision.

***ADVANCE 2021* is driven by public input.** RTA conducted public outreach for *ADVANCE 2021* from May through September of 2021. Despite the challenges created by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, RTA engaged with over 4,320 people. Feedback helped build on prior planning and engagement to refine RTA's strategic agenda. Since 2015, RTA has engaged with over 15,000 people at almost 200 outreach events. This includes targeted outreach to seniors, people with disabilities, and people with low incomes that was conducted for RTA's 2020 "OnHand: Expanding Transportation Access Across Southeast Michigan" ("OnHand") plan.

***ADVANCE 2021* is an aspirational but achievable vision for Southeast Michigan's transit system.** Many of the strategies outlined in this document require additional resources, whether funding or partnerships, to implement. Currently, there is no regional source that provides long-term funding for transit operations (e.g., wages and fuel) and capital improvements (such as new buses or maintenance facilities). Even so, RTA, DDOT, SMART, TheRide, DPM, QLINE, and the region's many community transit providers can implement some of these strategies now, and can prepare to implement longer-term strategies when funding becomes available. The recent passage of the federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) will help fund future transit projects. However, increased competitive grants will require regional coordination, and Southeast Michigan will still need local funding to sustain improvements.

***ADVANCE 2021* is a first step toward transit equity.** RTA is committed to institutionalizing equity in its organizational structure, implementing projects and policies that address inequities, and conducting inclusive public engagement. Advancing equity is a critical component of the vision, goals, and strategies in this plan, and will be carried forward as RTA implements it.

02

TRANSIT IN SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN

ADVANCE 2021 RTA

Image courtesy of the City of Detroit.

02 TRANSIT IN SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN

Transit Services in Southeast Michigan

RTA covers a four-county region that encompasses all of Macomb, Oakland, Washtenaw, and Wayne Counties, including the City of Detroit. This region, Southeast Michigan, is home to over 4.2 million people in 2,730 square miles including urban, suburban, and rural areas. Given the different physical and demographic characteristics of this vast region, transportation needs vary across communities, as do the existing transit services in place to address them.

People often associate traditional buses and trains with the term, “public transit,” but Southeast Michigan’s services extend beyond these modes to include a vast network of demand-response, microtransit, bike and scooter shares, and commuter services. In 2019, people in Southeast Michigan used these services for over 50 million rides (see Figure 2-1). Buses are the backbone of public transit, and people in the region rode the bus almost 45 million times in 2019.

In 2019, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, over 136,000 trips were made daily on public transit in Southeast Michigan, connecting people to jobs, schools, medical appointments, essential services, and their communities. On average, 2,700 paratransit trips were taken every day in the region, providing independence to seniors and people with disabilities. Almost all of Southeast Michigan has transportation service through public transit agencies and/or municipally-provided or -coordinated services. About 28% of the region is within three quarters of a mile of fixed route service (see Figure 2-2).

The next pages include an overview of transportation services in the region.

RTA

RTA's role is to develop and coordinate regional transit planning activities, allocate federal and state transit funding, and secure new regional funding for public transit in Macomb, Oakland, Washtenaw, and Wayne Counties. Through RTA, federal and state funding is provided to large public transit agencies and to community transit providers. RTA is also responsible for coordinating transit providers' applications for competitive grants, which bring additional federal and state funding to Southeast Michigan.

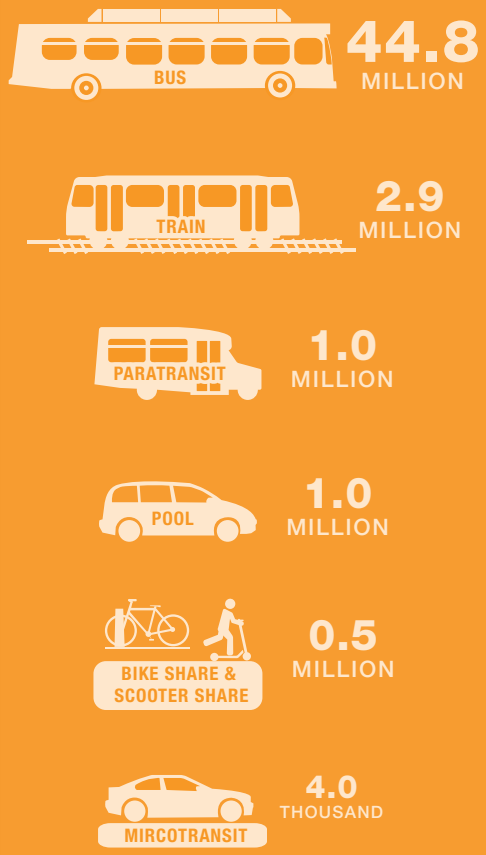
Under current state legislation, RTA is authorized to raise funding for public transit through a property tax millage and through a motor vehicle registration tax. At present, RTA does not raise revenue through either of these taxes, and would need the approval of a majority of voters in the four counties to do so. In 2016, an RTA ballot proposal to raise funding for public transit through a property tax millage did not pass by a narrow margin.

Though RTA does not currently raise funding, it plays a key role in allocating funding to support existing fixed-route and demand-response services, and coordinating regional planning. Future funding would allow RTA to support service improvements that better connect the region.

PUBLIC TRANSIT AGENCIES

There are five major public transit agencies in Southeast Michigan that provide fixed-route public transit service: TheRide, DDOT, DPM, QLINE, and SMART. DDOT, SMART, and TheRide offer bus service, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) complementary paratransit service for people with disabilities who are not able to ride fixed-route services, and some additional services. DPM and QLINE operate rail service in the City of Detroit.

DDOT is the largest public transit agency in Michigan, and people rode the system almost 23 million times in 2019. In the same year, SMART provided over 9 million rides, and TheRide provided almost 7 million (see Figure 2-14).



▲ FIGURE 2-1: Transit Ridership by Mode, 2019. Sources: National Transit Database (NTD), MoGo, City of Detroit, and Commute with Enterprise.

TheRide

TheRide, officially known as AAATA, operates public transit service in the Cities of Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti, and in Ann Arbor, Pittsfield, Scio, Superior, and Ypsilanti Townships. TheRide operates fixed-route buses, and event and airport services. A-Ride is TheRide's ADA paratransit service, and the agency also operates FlexRide, a microtransit service. In partnership with RTA, TheRide offers Detroit to Ann Arbor Express Bus Service (D2A2).

DDOT

DDOT, a department of the City of Detroit, provides fixed-route service throughout the City of Detroit as well as in portions of neighboring suburban communities, including Dearborn, Hamtramck, Highland Park, Livonia, and Southfield, among others. The agency provides ADA complementary paratransit service through MetroLift.

SMART

SMART operates transit service in all of Macomb County, and in portions of Oakland and Wayne Counties that have opted-in to service through a property tax millage. SMART provides a variety of services in the region, including fixed-route bus service, and paratransit, commuter, and demand-response services. Connector is SMART's ADA and demand-response service. In 2021, SMART launched two microtransit services, SMART Flex and Quick Connect. SMART also partners with local communities and groups of communities to support community transit services.

The Detroit People Mover

Operated by the Detroit Transportation Corporation, DPM is a fully automated light-rail system that runs on an elevated single-track loop around Downtown Detroit.

QLINE

QLINE, operated by M-1 RAIL, is a 3.3-mile streetcar serving 12 locations along Woodward Avenue from Downtown Detroit, through Midtown, to New Center. Launched in 2017, QLINE is the newest member of the region’s fixed-route transit network.

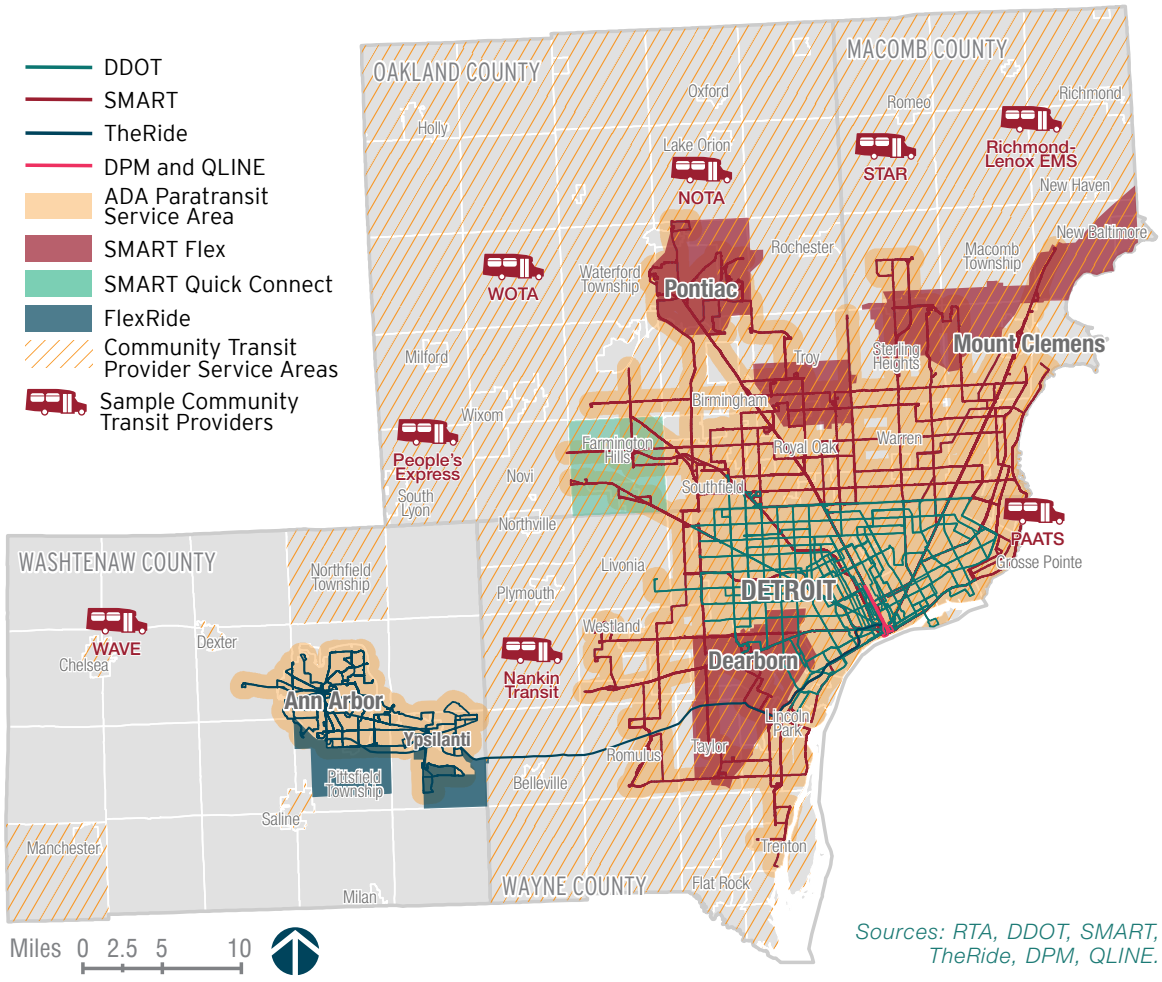
Connections to Other Regions

Flint, Port Huron, and Windsor, Ontario's transit agencies operate services that connect their regions to Southeast Michigan. Flint's Mass Transit Authority provides service to Auburn Hills and Troy, where they connect to SMART services. Port Huron's Blue Water Area Transit operates bus service to Chesterfield Township, providing a transfer to SMART. Transit Windsor operates daily service to Downtown Detroit, where it connects with DDOT, SMART, DPM, QLINE, and D2A2.

COVID-19 Service Impacts

Since March of 2020, COVID-19 has drastically altered travel patterns and transit services around the world. Between April 2019 and 2020, overall travel in Southeast Michigan decreased by 38%.[1] On public transit, ridership declined by 53% in 2020, almost 22 million fewer trips (see Figure 2-14). Transit agencies have been hard at work to continue operating services that are safe for riders and staff, and to maintain reliable service levels during a national labor shortage. However, current levels of

▼ FIGURE 2-2: Public Transit Service in Southeast Michigan, 2021



Sources: RTA, DDOT, SMART, TheRide, DPM, QLINE.

▲ SMART's CPP supports community transit providers across Macomb, Oakland, and Wayne Counties. Image courtesy of SMART.

service do not reflect “normal” operations. Transit agencies are making updates to meet changing needs and reflect labor challenges. DDOT and SMART have temporarily reduced frequencies, and TheRide stopped running commuter routes. DPM and QLINE halted operations due to decreased levels of demand. QLINE relaunched service in September 2021, and DPM is considering options for reinstating service.

Despite these changes, public transit has remained a critical service for essential workers to travel to their jobs and for those who rely on it to access everyday needs.

COMMUNITY-SPONSORED TRANSPORTATION

Community-sponsored transportation systems generally focus on providing local trips to seniors and people with disabilities, though some also provide rides for people with low incomes, and others are open to everyone. There are over 80 community-sponsored providers covering much of the region. These range from independent systems, like Western-Washtenaw Area Value Express (WAVE), North Oakland Transportation Authority (NOTA), and Western Oakland Transportation Authority (WOTA), to services funded through SMART’s Community Partnership Program (CPP). CPP allows communities that opt into SMART’s local funding to develop and deliver targeted local on-demand services. Currently, 76 communities participate in SMART’s CPP, including Nankin Transit, Pointe Area Assisted Transportation (PAATS), Richmond-Lenox EMS, Senior Transportation with Advanced Reservations (STAR), and many others.

Community transportation services are a critical resource for many people in the region, but struggle to receive adequate funding to fully meet their communities’ needs. RTA supports these providers through Federal Transit Authority's (FTA) Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities Program, which helps fund operations and capital projects.

▲ Riders on MoGo's bike share system in Detroit. Image courtesy of MoGo Detroit.

During the pandemic, these providers have adapted services to meet their communities' needs. For example, Richmond-Lenox EMS set up a vaccination site and partnered with SMART to offer rides to vaccine appointments. WOTA has been providing free rides to vaccinations, and delivering groceries.

OTHER TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

There are a variety of other transportation and mobility services in Southeast Michigan that range from institutional fixed-route systems, like the University of Michigan's bus network, to bike share systems like MoGo in Detroit, to mobility management services like myride2.

Institutional and Employer Services

Some institutions and employers offer transportation services to their students, staff, and visitors. These include the University of Michigan, the College for Creative Studies, the Detroit Medical Center, and the Henry Ford Health System. The largest of these systems is the University of Michigan's bus network, which operates 11 bus routes and provided over 7.4 million trips in 2019. Wayne State University discontinued its shuttles in 2021, instead offering students and faculty free passes for DDOT, SMART, QLINE and MoGo.

Micromobility

Bike and scooter shares are available in parts of Detroit, Ann Arbor, and southern Oakland County. These micromobility services provide options for shorter trips and first and last mile connections. MoGo has 75 stations in greater Downtown Detroit, northwest Detroit, Ferndale, Royal Oak, Oak Park, Berkley, and Huntington Woods. In 2019, people took over 101,000 rides on MoGo. ArborBike was a seasonal bike share system in Ann Arbor. TheRide planned to relaunch the system in 2020, but this was postponed due to COVID-19. There are also a number of private scooter share companies operating in Detroit and Ann Arbor.

▲ MDOT's MichiVan program offers commuter vanpools in the region, and across the state. Image courtesy of Commute with Enterprise.

Nonprofit Agencies

There are more than 20 nonprofit organizations in the region that provide a range of human services transportation to specific populations, or for specific types of trips. These include the American Cancer Society's Road to Recovery, St. Patrick Senior Center, Inc., Jewish Family Services, and the Rochester Area Neighborhood House, among others.

Private Transportation Providers

Private transportation companies, taxi companies, and transportation network companies (TNCs, e.g., Uber and Lyft) are available across the region. Car-sharing companies, like Zipcar, are available at limited locations. These companies do not receive public funding for services, though some partner with government entities and nonprofits to provide subsidized service. Some private providers offer Medicaid recipients non-emergency medical transportation. Private services may have higher costs, may require smartphones, and may not be accessible to all users.

Mobility Management Services

Mobility management services offer people assistance with finding information on transportation options, planning and scheduling trips, and provide travel trainings to help them learn to use services. The Area Agency on Aging–1B's (AAA1B) myride2 program, United Way's 211 Ride, and Ride@50+ Washtenaw County offer mobility management services in Southeast Michigan.

Carpool and Vanpool

MDOT and TheRide sponsor MichiVan and VanRide, respectively, which offer commuter vanpool service in the region. The Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) provides Southeast Michigan Commuter Connect, a service that matches commuters to carpools and vanpools.

RECENT ACHIEVEMENTS AND ONGOING PROJECTS

Over the last several years, the region's transit providers have made a number of improvements to their services and have partnered to connect and coordinate services and amenities. The section below highlights some of the region's major achievements and ongoing initiatives.

Expanded Services

Microtransit

SMART and TheRide both offer new microtransit services: SMART's Quick Connect and SMART Flex, and TheRide's FlexRide. These innovative services operate similarly to TNCs, offering on-demand rides to destinations within certain zones, or to bus services if a rider is seeking to travel farther. Rides can be scheduled via smartphone app or by phone call.

D2A2

TheRide and RTA have partnered to launch D2A2, a new hourly service that connects Downtown Ann Arbor and Downtown Detroit. The service was discontinued during the COVID-19 pandemic and re-launched on October 18, 2021.

MoGo Expansion

In June 2020, MoGo expanded its bike share system with 31 new stations in northwest Detroit, Ferndale, Royal Oak, Oak Park, Berkley and Huntington Woods, bringing the system to a total of 75 stations in Detroit and southern Oakland County.

Western Oakland Transportation Authority (WOTA)

Launched in 2020, WOTA provides demand-response transportation services for adults aged 55 and over, and people with disabilities living in Highland, Waterford and White Lake Townships, and the City of Walled Lake. WOTA consolidated services previously provided by separate areas.

▲ SMART Flex provides microtransit service in Dearborn, Pontiac and Troy, and in the Hall Road area. Trips can be booked via smartphone app, or by phone call. Image courtesy of SMART.

Enhanced Services

New Frequent Services

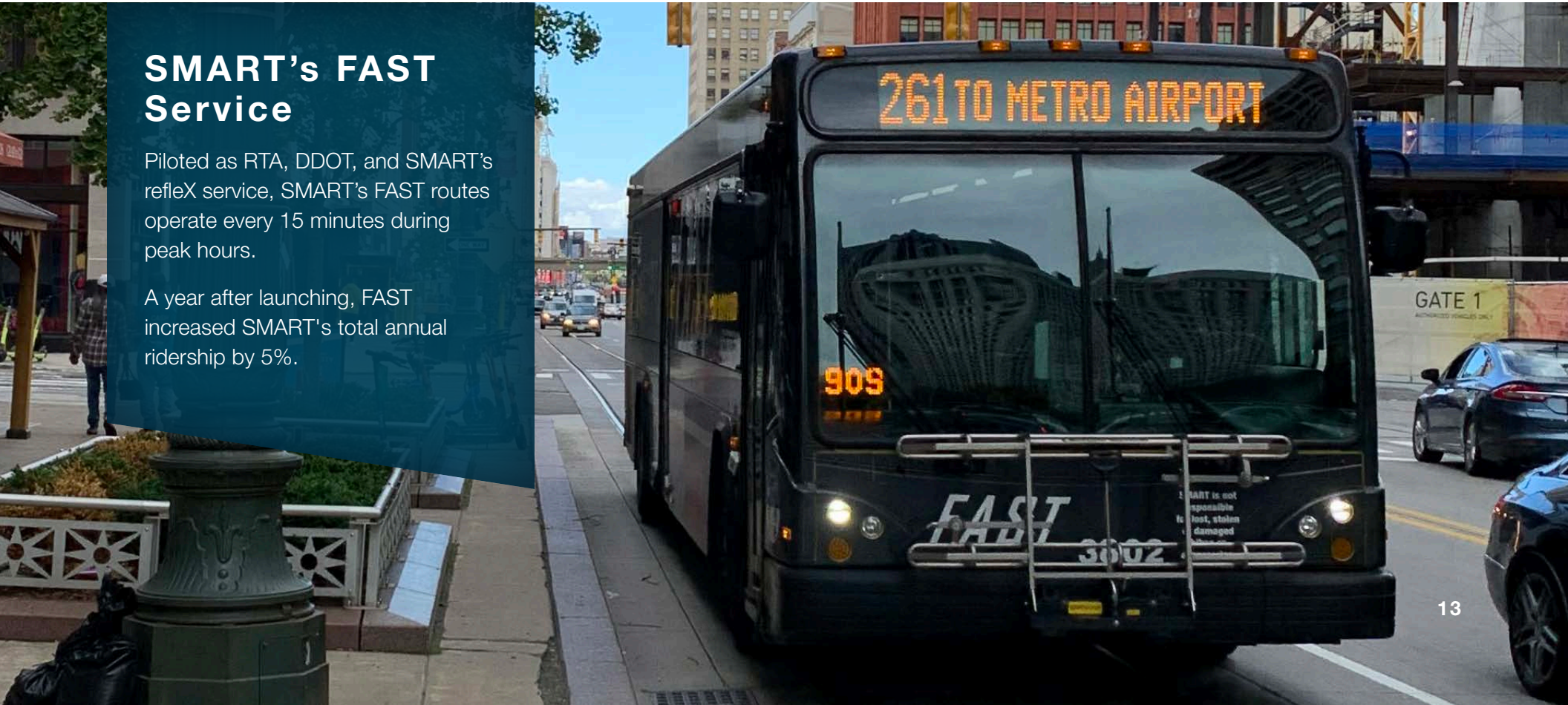
DDOT and SMART both introduced new services in 2018. DDOT's ConnectTen network improved its 10 most popular routes, adding 24-hour, seven days a week service and peak hour frequencies of 20 minutes or less. SMART's FAST (Frequent. Affordable. Safe. Transit.) service offers frequent, limited-stop service along the region's three busiest corridors during peak hours. Due to COVID-19, frequencies have been decreased in response to driver shortages.

FAST was modeled after refleX, a jointly operated service piloted in a partnership between RTA, DDOT, and SMART in 2016. RTA funded refleX through the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) Improvement Program.

SMART's FAST Service

Piloted as RTA, DDOT, and SMART's refleX service, SMART's FAST routes operate every 15 minutes during peak hours.

A year after launching, FAST increased SMART's total annual ridership by 5%.



▲ QLINE installed the region's first dedicated transit lane on Woodward Avenue. The lane is being used by QLINE, DDOT, and SMART to help reduce delays caused by traffic. Image courtesy of QLINE.

SMART, DDOT, and TheRide Planning Initiatives

The SMART Path Comprehensive Operations Analysis (COA) Plan, completed in April 2020, took a detailed look at SMART's fixed-route system, and identified and prioritized improvements to efficiency and quality of service. These improvements address multiple aspects of service to increase on-time performance, streamline routes, increase frequencies, add major destinations, and implement new types of service, like microtransit.

DDOT is in the early stages of completing a similar study of its network, which is anticipated to be completed in 2022. TheRide is currently in the process of developing a long-range plan, TheRide 2045, that will guide the implementation of new local services and technologies.

Dedicated Transit Lane

In 2021, QLINE installed the region's first transit-only lane on a 0.3 mile stretch of Woodward Avenue in front of Little Caesars Arena (LCA). This dedicated transit lane will help improve on-time performance for DDOT, SMART, and QLINE, while increasing pedestrian, rider, and driver safety, especially during events at LCA.

New Technologies

Electric Vehicle Pilot

DDOT and SMART were jointly awarded $2.6 million through FTA's Low or No Emission Bus Program to pilot electric buses. The pilots are anticipated to launch in early 2022, and will help the agencies plan for further fleet electrification and emissions reduction.

Michigan Ride Paratransit App

The MI Ride smartphone app is a trip booking platform where riders can directly schedule ADA paratransit trips on Connector and MetroLift. This pilot was funded through the state's Michigan Mobility Challenge grant, and is a significant partnership between RTA, DDOT, SMART, SEMCOG, and AAA1B to better coordinate paratransit service in the region.

New Fare Media

In 2019, DDOT, SMART, and QLINE launched Dart, a regional transit pass that provides access to any of their fixed routes. Dart modernized, simplified, and unified the agencies' fare structures, and added a smartphone app payment option. DDOT and SMART are currently planning the next steps toward an integrated fare system that includes new technologies that simplify the process for riders, bus operators, and agencies.

TheRide launched EZFare, a pilot contactless mobile ticketing application, in 2020. EZFare was implemented during COVID-19 in an effort to reduce transmission of the virus through contact, and to understand the potential for a permanent mobile ticketing option.

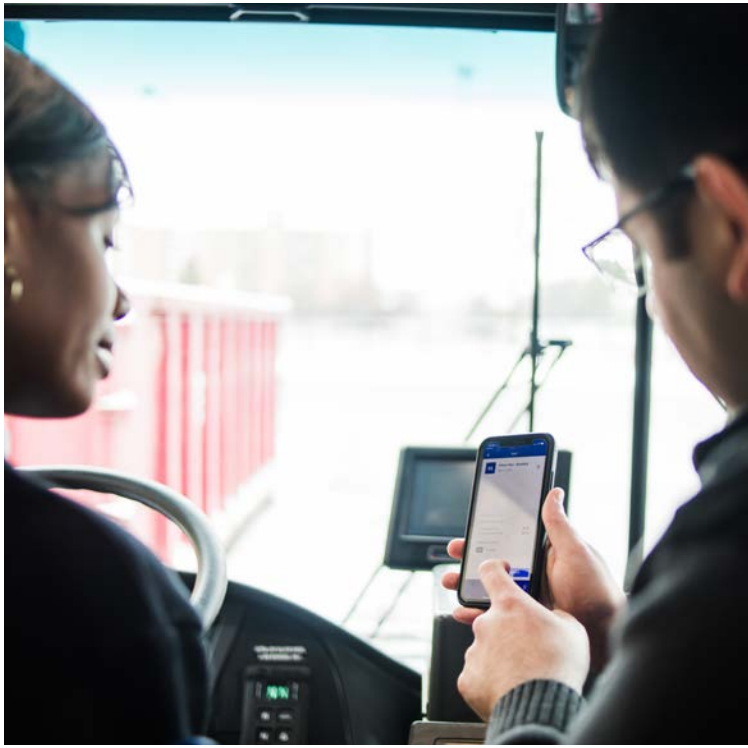
MoGo and some scooter shares can be paid for and unlocked through Transit App, a smartphone app that provides trip planning, real-time information, and fare payment in regions around the world.

Real-Time Information

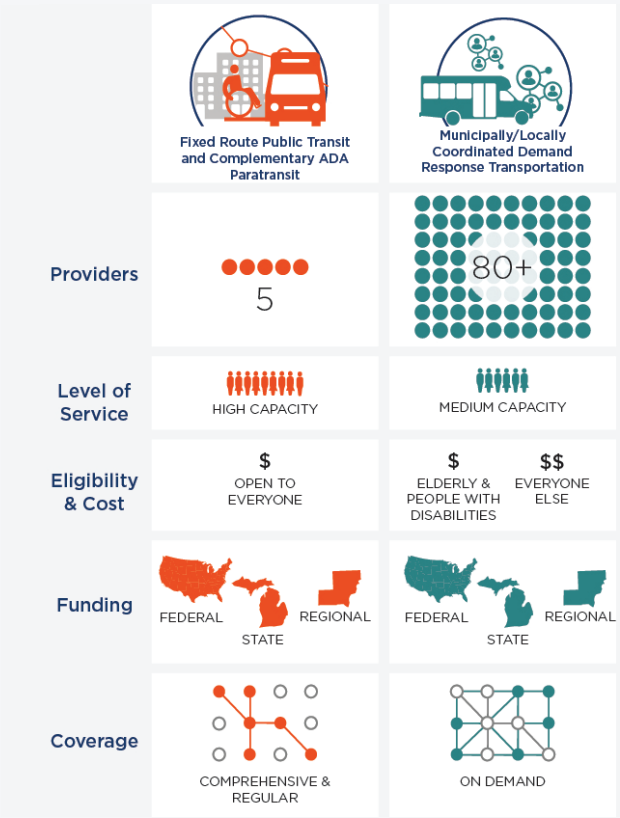
DDOT, TheRide, SMART, and QLINE offer real-time information through multiple platforms. Smartphone users can access real-time information though Transit App. TheRide and SMART offer additional real-time information on their websites. While many people can access next-arrival information on smartphones, not everyone has access to the internet while waiting. To address this, SMART also has real-time displays on 47 of their bus shelters, and QLINE has next-arrival information at its stations.

Connected and Automated Vehicles Corridor

MDOT is planning a connected and automated vehicles (CAV) corridor along Michigan Avenue and I-94, connecting Ann Arbor, Detroit, and other communities along the corridor through infrastructure and technology that aims to reduce congestion and increase safety. The project would begin with connected public transit buses and shared-mobility services.



▲ The Dart transit pass includes a smartphone app-based payment option. Image courtesy of DDOT.



▲ FIGURE 2-3: "OnHand" inventoried the region's public, private, and nonprofit transportation providers, describing available services and needs. Image excerpted from "OnHand."

Intelligent Woodward Corridor Project

In 2019, MDOT received $5.5 million from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to design, deploy, and evaluate an intelligent transportation network on Woodward Avenue in Detroit. The network will support autonomous and connected vehicles, and transit agencies that operate on the corridor, including DDOT, SMART, and QLINE. One component of the project is transit signal prioritization (TSP), which modifies traffic signals when transit vehicles are present, minimizing delays caused by red lights.

Concurrently, QLINE is separately seeking to implement TSP on its streetcars. MDOT and QLINE are coordinating to ensure that systems are integrated.

Coordinated Planning

"OnHand: Expanding Transportation Access Across Southeast Michigan"

In 2020, RTA completed “OnHand: Expanding Transportation Access Across Southeast Michigan” ("OnHand"), which identifies the transportation needs of individuals with disabilities, older adults, and people with low incomes in the region, and inventoried existing transit services in the region (see Figure 2-3). "OnHand" defines RTA’s strategy for improving transportation and mobility for these populations. The plan includes five goals and 31 strategies, many of which will be addressed in **Chapter 4: Planning Ahead**.

"OnHand" fulfills the federally-required coordinated planning process. Prior to this project, each of the region’s major transit providers completed individual Coordinated Human Services Transportation Plans (CHSTP). This joint project streamlined the planning process and will guide projects that further coordination of funding and services among providers.

Downtown Detroit Transportation Study

The "Downtown Detroit Transportation Study" was completed by SEMCOG, the City of Detroit, and MDOT in 2018. This study evaluated existing transportation conditions in Downtown Detroit and developed tactics to manage future demands for traffic, parking, transit, biking and walking. One recommendation was to implement transit-only lanes on short lengths of streets to improve operations for DDOT and SMART. The plan also recommends implementing TSP, an integrated fare system with off-board payments, enhanced bus stop designs, and bike and pedestrian infrastructure improvements.

"Downtown Detroit Transportation Study"

This study recommends transit-only lanes on Congress and Larned Streets between Washington Boulevard and Randolph Street in Downtown Detroit. These would improve reliability and support high-frequencies. Transit lanes would include queue jumps, which prioritize buses by allowing them through red lights before other vehicles.

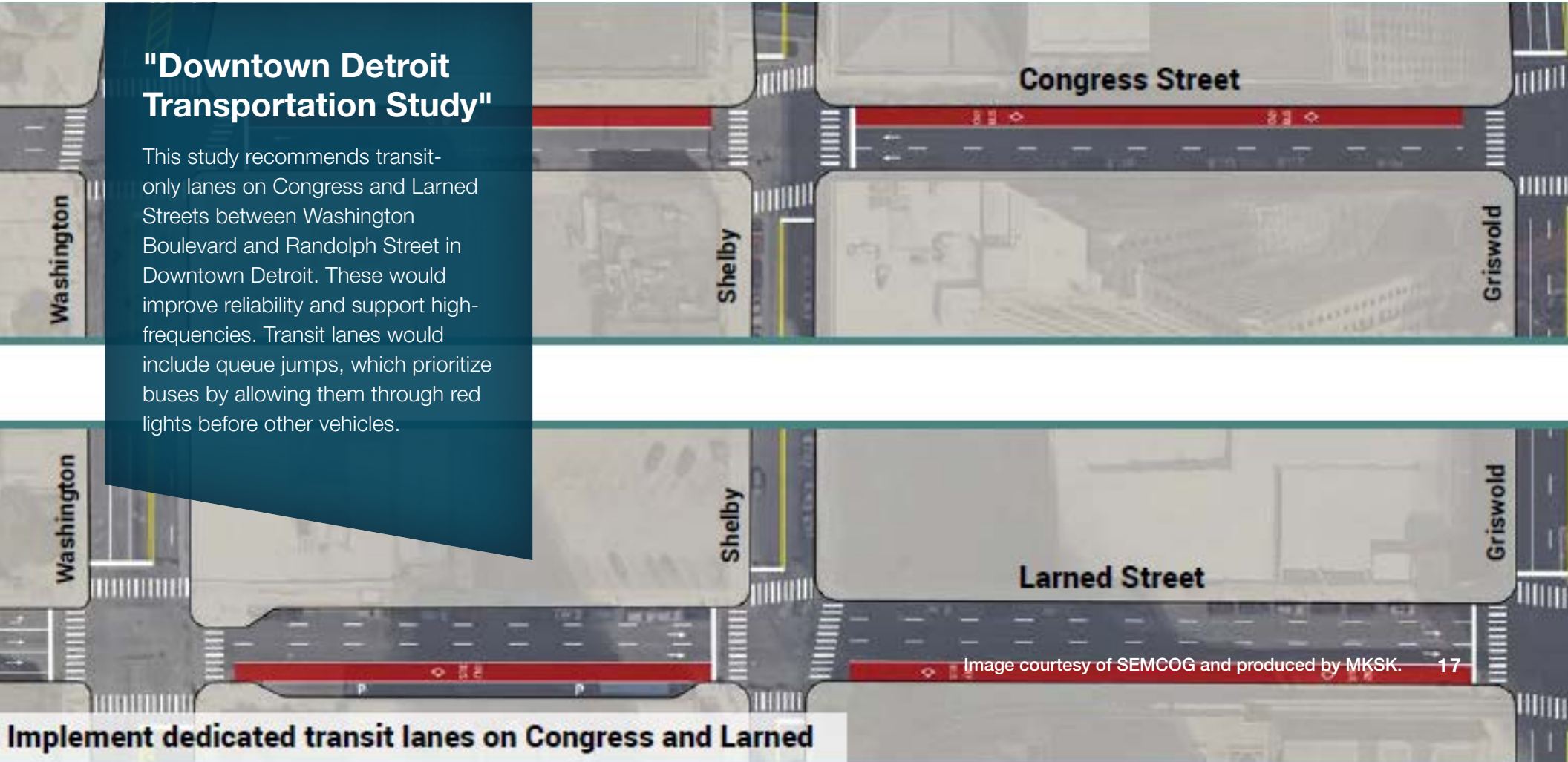
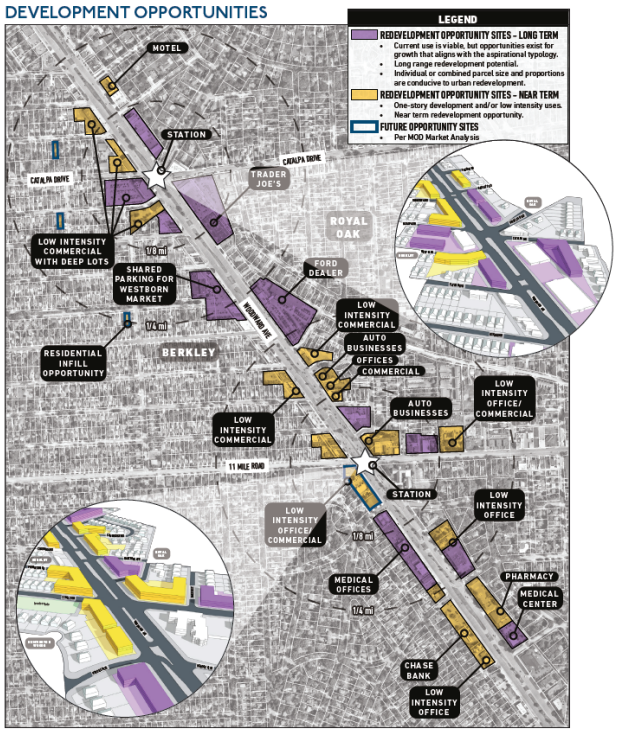


Image courtesy of SEMCOG and produced by MKSK.

Implement dedicated transit lanes on Congress and Larned



▲ FIGURE 2-4: The MOD Study considered how transit and mobility improvements could encourage the development of transit supportive land uses and affordable housing. Image excerpted from the "MOD Study Action Plan."

Mobility Oriented Development Study

In 2020, RTA completed the "Mobility Oriented Development (MOD) Study" along the Woodward Avenue corridor and the Ann Arbor-Detroit rail corridor. This study developed land use and mobility strategies that will allow transit agencies and local governments to coordinate development and mobility improvements around transit stops (see Figure 2-4). These improvements would provide better access to transit and mobility services, and encourage transit supportive development and affordable housing around transit hubs.

Workforce Mobility Equity Study

RTA is conducting a targeted study to better understand the specific regional transit gaps for unemployed or transit-dependent residents of equity communities in Detroit. The study will result in high-level recommendations for improved fixed and flexible transit solutions that create better connections for these populations so they can be prioritized for implementation. The study also includes the baseline development of a mobility needs assessment tool that can be rolled out to job seeking and unemployed Detroit residents, as well as residents in other equity communities in the region, to help them navigate mobility resources.

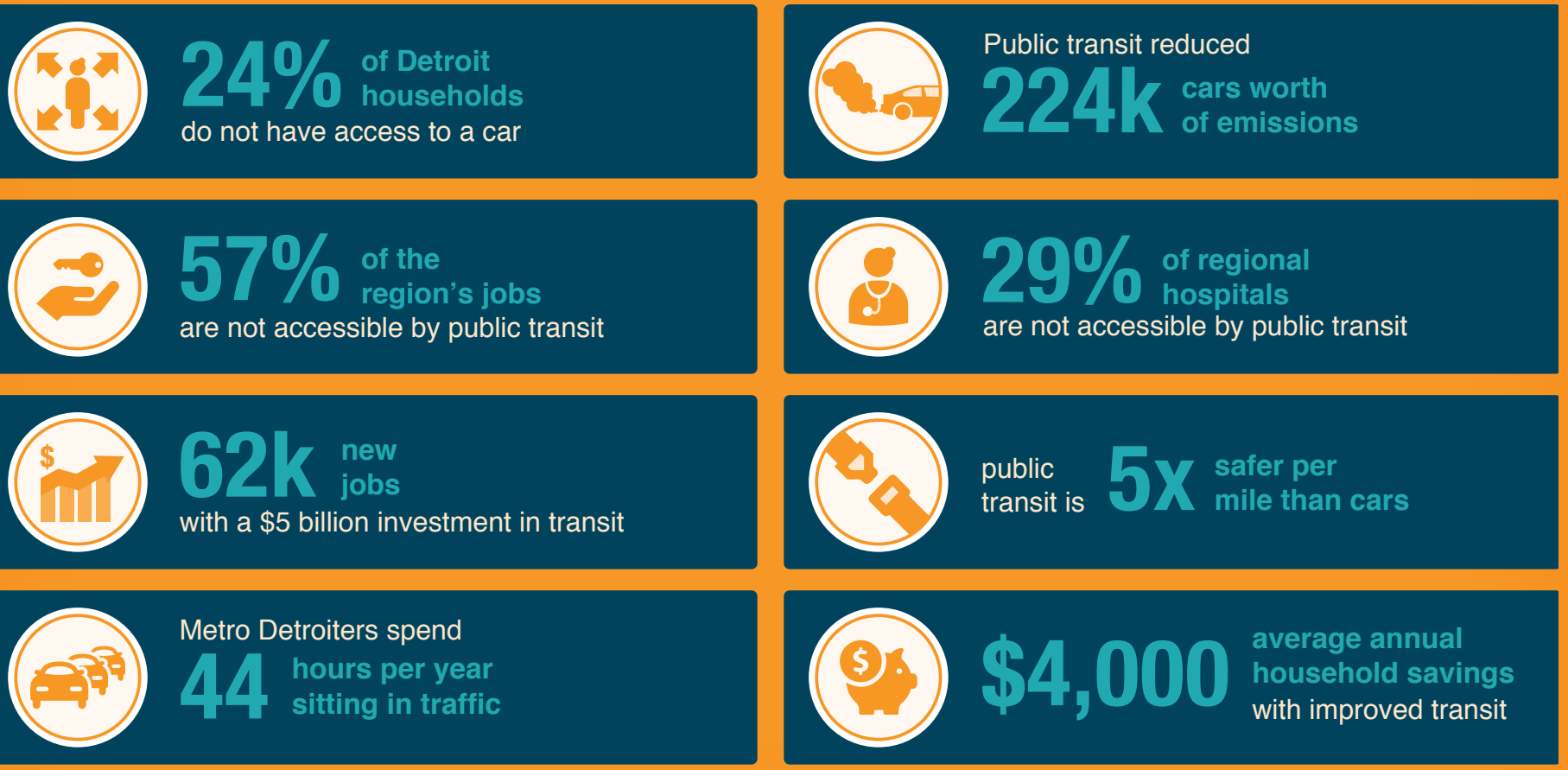
Funding

Federal Grant Funding

Since 2016, DDOT and SMART have brought over $25 million in federal funding to the region through competitive grant awards to reconstruct DDOT's Coolidge Terminal, purchase new fare technologies, pilot electric buses, and complete planning studies.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, the federal government has provided Southeast Michigan with $375 million, a record level of funding, to support continued operations, new safety protocols, and economic recovery from the pandemic.

WHY TRANSIT MATTERS IN SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN



▲ FIGURE 2-5: Why Transit Matters in Southeast Michigan

Why Transit Matters

Public transit benefits everyone, even those who do not ride it themselves, by strengthening communities and the region as a whole. For riders, public transit can improve personal freedom, access to opportunities and essential services, and can lower transportation expenses. For the region as a whole, public transit improves economic stability, regional competitiveness, and quality of life, and reduces congestion and pollution.

Public transit is critical to making Southeast Michigan a more equitable and prosperous region. However, limitations of the current transit network combined with sprawling development patterns are holding the region and its residents back. Investing in public transit can help improve the quality of life of people who rely on it for everyday activities, who are predominantly Black and from low- and moderate-income households (see Figure 2-6).

Some of the challenges public transit can address, and the benefits it can provide are described below.

PERSONAL FREEDOM

Frequent public transit offers people the freedom to go where they want, when they want. This freedom to move is especially important for people who do not have access to personal vehicles, but also adds freedom of choice for people who do. Regionally, over 9% of households do not have access to a vehicle, but in Detroit this increases to almost a quarter of households.[2] More access to more destinations in less time increases the options people have available for where to work and shop, or what doctors to see.

WHO RIDES FIXED-ROUTE PUBLIC TRANSIT IN SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN?

85%	ride more than 3 days a week
93%	walk to their stop
70%	are Black/African American
51%	have household incomes below $25k
48%	do not have a vehicle at home
48%	do not have a valid driver's license
24%	do not have a credit or debit card
10%	do not have a smartphone

▲ FIGURE 2-6: Southeast Michigan's Fixed-Route Public Transit Riders, 2019. Source: SEMCOG 2019 On-Board Transit Survey.Includes DDOT, SMART, TheRide, DPM, and QLINE riders.

ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITY

The average Metropolitan Detroiter has access to over two million jobs within one hour by car, but fewer than 65,000 within a one-hour transit trip (see Figure 2-7). Only 43% of the region's jobs are within a quarter mile of a public transit stop. An Accessibility Observatory study of the 50 largest metropolitan areas in the United States ranked the region eighth in job accessibility by car and 38th in job accessibility by transit.[3] This disparity represents an enormous gap in access to opportunity, especially for people with lower incomes and people of color, who are less likely to have access to a vehicle than people who are white in Southeast Michigan.[4] Additionally, Detroiters, 78% of whom identify as Black, spend higher proportions of their wages and their time on commuting than Metropolitan Detroiters.[5] Commute times have been shown to be the strongest indicator of someone's odds of escaping poverty.[6] Addressing gaps in regional transit connectivity can be a powerful way to address poverty in Southeast Michigan.

A lack of reliable access to transportation is the most commonly cited barrier for job seekers in the region, and limits their potential job opportunities.[7] This also impacts employers, who have access to a limited pool of qualified candidates. Additionally, transportation barriers contribute to turnover rates, decreasing job security and increasing employer costs.[8] The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this issue for employers, who are having difficulty hiring workers from a labor force already limited by transportation barriers. Lack of access to opportunity hurts the region's workers and employers, as well as their customers.

THE AVERAGE METROPOLITAN DETROITER CAN ACCESS **2 MILLION JOBS IN A 1 HOUR DRIVE**, BUT **ONLY 65,000 IN A 1 HOUR TRANSIT TRIP.**

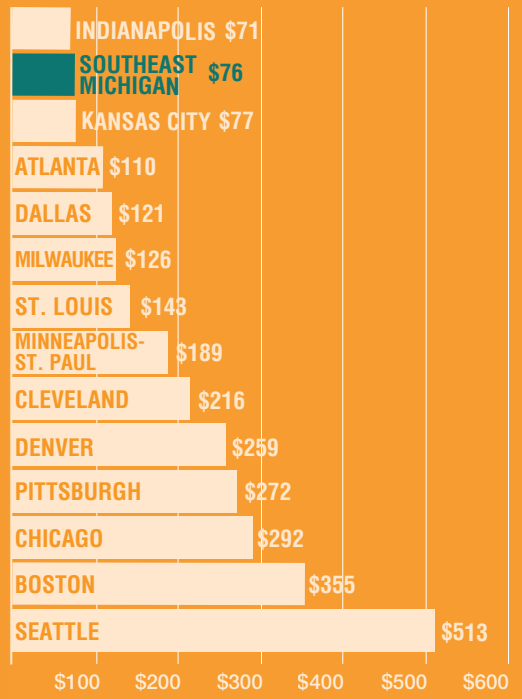
▲ FIGURE 2-7: Access to Jobs by Car and Public Transit Within an Hour in Metropolitan Detroit

INCREASED ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

Transit investments attract residents and businesses, provide better access to jobs, and improve the economy now and for the future. RTA's 2018 "Connect Southeast Michigan" plan identified that $5.4 billion in transit spending over a 20-year period would create approximately 62,000 jobs in the region and add $6.6 billion to Southeast Michigan's gross regional product. Transit drives growth and could mean new job opportunities, more neighborhood amenities, and more tax revenue for local schools leading to more equitable communities across the region.

REGIONAL COMPETITIVENESS

Businesses increasingly cite proximity to transit as an important criterion for retaining a skilled workforce, and research indicates that businesses of all sizes benefit from improved transit networks.[9] Southeast Michigan spends significantly less per capita on transit than peer regions, investing $76 per capita on transit compared to an average of $211 in peer regions (see Figure 2-8).[10] When businesses look for locations, they may choose areas that invest more in public transit, meaning Southeast Michiganders are missing out on job opportunities and new services. As the region learned in the 2018 national competition for Amazon's second headquarters, when businesses are looking for new locations, they may be choosing areas that invest more in public transit.



▲ FIGURE 2-8: Transit Operating Spending Per Capita in Southeast Michigan and Peer Regions, 2019

REDUCED CONGESTION

In 2019, the average metropolitan Detroit commuter lost 43.5 hours to congestion, and Ann Arbor area commuters lost 32.1 hours to congestion.[11] Time spent sitting in traffic could be used to spend time with family, create a new business, or just relax. With an average of 1.1 passengers per car in Detroit work trips, one bus of commuters can remove 45 or more personal vehicles from the road.[12] For public transit riders, that means greater reliability, fewer delays, and shorter commutes. For drivers, that could mean 45 fewer cars in front of you on the highway.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENTS

Motor vehicles are the largest contributors to air pollution in the United States. In 2018, public transit in Southeast Michigan helped to save 281,314 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent, an equal amount to the annual emissions of over 224,000 personal cars. Public transit helps to avoid greenhouse gas emissions in two ways. Firstly, people who ride transit are avoiding personal vehicle trips. Secondly, for riders and non-riders, transit improvements generally create land use efficiencies, where destinations locate closer to the households that travel to them. These efficiencies result in shorter driving trips and can make communities more walkable.[13]

Increasing transit ridership further reduces emissions. Per a report from the International Transport Workers' Federation and the C40 Cities Leadership Group, public transit ridership will need to double globally in order to achieve emissions reductions goals and mitigate the impacts of climate change.[14]

PUBLIC HEALTH BENEFITS

Increasing transit ridership helps to improve air quality. This can reduce Southeast Michigan’s asthma rates, which are among the highest in the country. Detroit has double the adult asthma rates of the State of Michigan as a whole.[15] High levels of air pollution have also been linked to higher COVID-19 death rates.[16] Cleaner air can reduce asthma triggers, meaning healthier families, a healthier region, and lower healthcare costs.

Additionally, only 71% of the region's hospitals are within a quarter mile of a transit stop, limiting rider's access to healthcare.

IMPROVED SAFETY

Many people perceive public transit to be unsafe, but it is actually safer than traveling by car, from both crash and crime perspectives. In 2019, there were 128,443 crashes in the four counties, only 102 of which involved transit. Traveling by public transit was five times safer per mile than by car. Every day in Southeast Michigan, an average of 26 people are injured or killed in a crash.[17]

A very small portion of violent crimes occur on transit vehicles or at transit stops. In the United States in 2019, for every 519 reported violent crimes, only one occurred on public transit.[18] The types of crime that car drivers, passengers, and transit riders experience are different, making direct comparisons difficult. However, data indicate that drivers are more susceptible to crime than transit riders.[19] Fewer cars and more public transit means safer trips.

FINANCIAL SAVINGS

Auto ownership creates significant costs for residents of Southeast Michigan, particularly for low-income households. In 2019, Metropolitan Detroiters spent an average of 16% of their annual household budget on buying and maintaining personal vehicles, an average of $10,562.[20] In areas with higher levels of transit use, households spend closer to 10% of their budgets on transportation, which could mean an average household savings of about $4,000 in Southeast Michigan.[21] Additionally, Detroiters, 78% of whom identify as Black, spend higher proportions of their wages and their time on commuting than Metropolitan Detroiters.[22] Transit improvements can free up income to be invested in education, housing, or at local businesses. In Southeast Michigan, more than one-fifth of households earned less than $25,000 in 2019, making car ownership a major financial burden. This can be even harder in Detroit, where 42% of households earned under $25,000.[23]

Southeast Michigan's Transit Markets and Travel Patterns

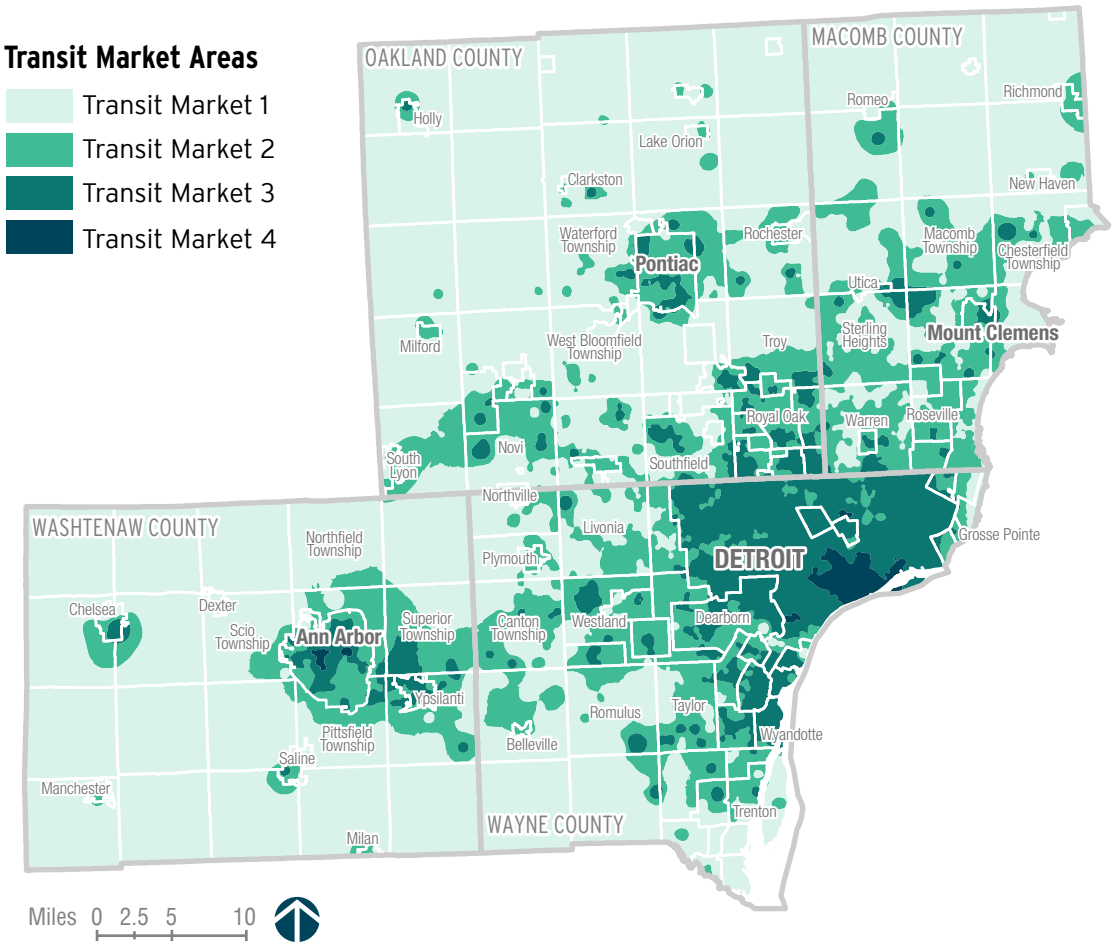
To understand how to achieve RTA's vision and goals, RTA reviewed how demand for public transit differs across the region. Transit markets are a tool for considering this demand in the context of different development and demographic patterns. Travel patterns indicate where people are going. Transit markets and travel patterns help demonstrate demand for public transit services and which modes are appropriate to address them.

TRANSIT MARKETS

Southeast Michigan is comprised of over 150 communities across four counties with different transit demands that cannot be addressed uniformly across the region: there is no "one-size-fits-all" strategy.

Transit markets are a tool for understanding potential transit demand and grouping areas with similar transportation needs to consider which services may work for specific communities. They are not a final determination of which transit modes should

▼ FIGURE 2-9: Transit Market Areas, Southeast Michigan, 2019



Sources: US Census Bureau Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics Origin-Destination Employment Statistics (LODES), US Census Bureau American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates, US Department of Homeland Security Homeland Infrastructure Foundation-Level Data.

go where, but can be used as a starting point for conversations about which services a community wants or needs. For example, a bus rapid transit (BRT) service along Gratiot Avenue might work well for communities in Detroit and southern Macomb County. However, improving the capacity of demand-response service and providing connections to Gratiot Avenue via that service would more appropriately address the needs of City of Richmond residents. Strategies, discussed in **Chapter 4: Planning Ahead**, are geared toward the markets where they are generally most appropriate.

The region's transit markets were identified through an index that considered job and population density, walkability, transit dependence, and major activity centers and essential services such as grocery stores, medical facilities, colleges and universities, major arenas, and the Detroit Wayne County Metropolitan Airport (DTW). Transit markets are shown in Figure 2-9 and are described on the following page. Figure 2-10 is a general guideline for which service models are appropriate in which transit markets. When planning specific services, a more detailed analysis will be required and might consider existing services, trip volumes, community development goals, and available funding.

▶ FIGURE 2-10: Transit Market and Service Type Matrix

Service Model	Market 1	Market 2	Market 3	Market 4
Micromobility		X	X	X
Demand-Response	X	X	X	X
Microtransit	X	X	X	
Standard Fixed Route		X	X	X
High-Frequency Fixed Route		**on major corridors**	X	X
Commuter Services		X	X	X

Transit Market 1

Transit Market 1 typically includes rural and suburban areas with low population and employment densities. On-demand transportation services for the general public are appropriate here and, in general, fixed-route services are not optimal. Taxi and TNC voucher programs, or token programs like Wyandotte's, can increase mobility for people in Market 1.

Transit Market 2

Transit Market 2 is generally comprised of suburbs and town centers with low to moderate densities, high rates of car ownership, and less traditional street grids, which make it harder to access transit stops. Fixed-route service at moderate frequencies and commuter services are well-suited to Market 2, and can be supported by on-demand services where fixed-route service is limited or not viable. BRT or light rail are appropriate on major corridors that connect to Markets 3 and 4.

Transit Market 3

Transit Market 3 has moderate to high population and employment densities, a traditional street grid, and lower levels of car ownership. It includes urban areas, dense suburbs, and employment and shopping centers. Market 3 has high transit demand and the potential to support high-frequency fixed-route service during most of the day. Major corridors are well suited to rapid transit such as BRT and light rail, and to MOD. First and last mile services can foster connections to fixed-route services.

Transit Market 4

Transit Market 4 includes Detroit and Ann Arbor's urban centers. These are the region's densest and most walkable areas. Market 4 has the highest levels of transit demand and the greatest potential for high-frequency fixed-route services, rapid transit corridors, and 24-hour services. There is also a high demand for ADA paratransit services that complement these higher-frequency services. Market 4 has a high level of need for high quality pedestrian and bike infrastructure.

All Transit Markets

While each market has different characteristics and needs, there are needs that cut across markets. Services that address populations with high transportation needs, such as people with disabilities and limited mobility, people with low incomes, and seniors, are needed across the entire region. New technologies including trip planning and booking platforms and regional fare systems would improve mobility for people across Southeast Michigan.

Market Gaps and Opportunities

Approximately 81% of Southeast Michigan is covered by a public transit mode, whether fixed-route, paratransit, community transit, microtransit, or a combination of services. Fixed-routes operate in about 28% of the region, covering its denser areas. Existing services largely match the transit markets, but there are gaps in service and opportunities for greater alignment.

Transit Market 1

- Most services are geared toward seniors and people with disabilities and are not available to the general public.
- Some areas of Oakland County and much of Washtenaw County lack public transit options.
- Services are limited outside of weekdays between 8:00 AM and 5:00 PM, and are often confined to municipal borders.

Transit Market 2

- Transit services are largely available, but some areas lack fixed-route services where there is demand.
- Some areas are missing pedestrian infrastructure and first and last mile services that help riders access transit.

Transit Market 3

- Market 3 is mostly covered by fixed-route service, but there are gaps in service to suburban and town center destinations.
- Rapid transit services on major corridors would better connect these market areas to each other and to the larger region.
- Particularly in Macomb, Oakland, and Wayne counties, there is a lack of high frequency services that run every 15 minutes or better. Additionally, many routes operate less than every 30 minutes.
- Services are limited during nights and weekends.

Transit Market 4

- There is a lack of high frequency services, particularly outside of peak hours.
- Services are limited at nights and during weekends.
- Increased densities can reduce people's reliance on cars and provide greater opportunities to use transit.
- Rapid transit services on major corridors would provide faster connections to and from these popular destinations.

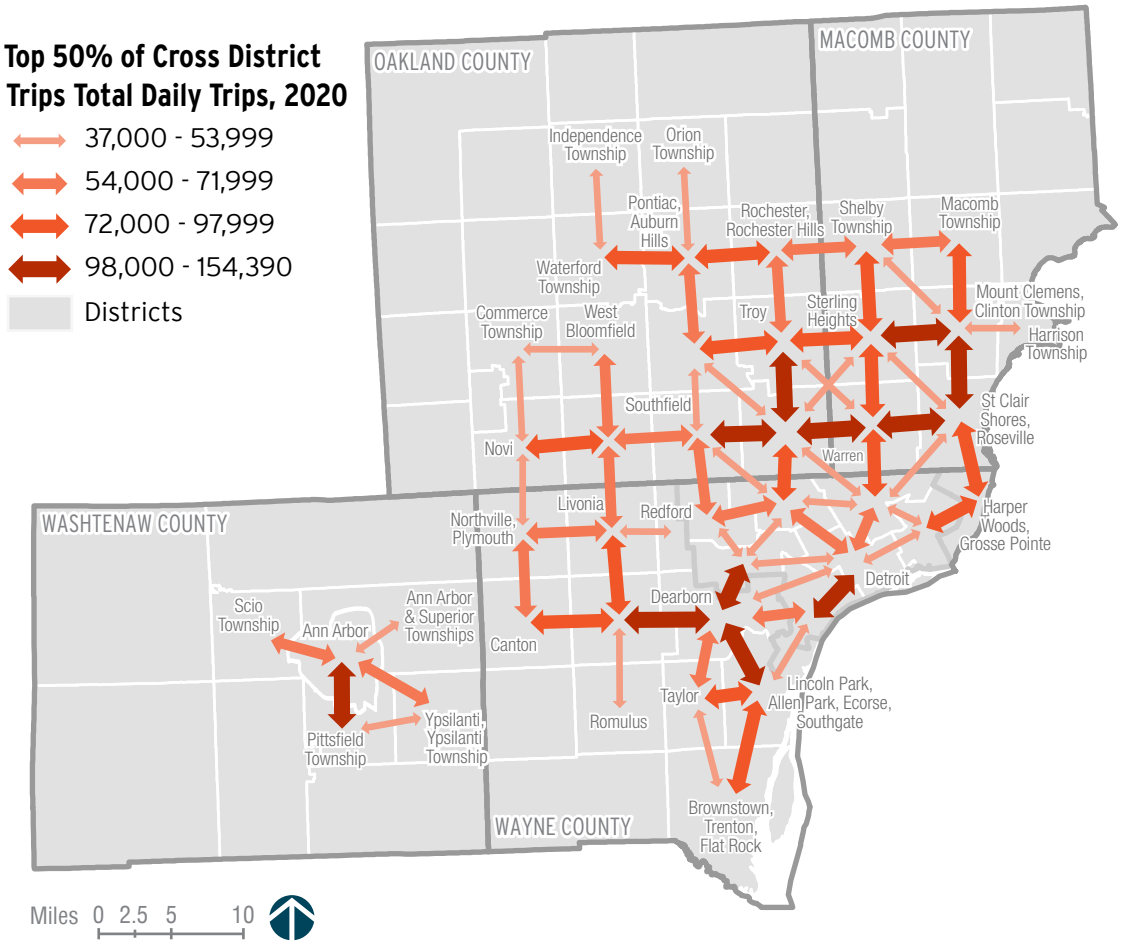
All Transit Markets

- Limited services during late nights and weekends create challenges for trips to work and essential services.
- Only 10% of the region's fixed-route network operates every 15 minutes or less, and primarily only during weekdays.
- Frequent services are largely on major corridors, and riders may have long wait times for connecting services.
- Transit markets are not confined by municipal boundaries, yet some transit services are, resulting in a need to transfer when crossing city or county borders. At times, there is no service to transfer to.

REGIONAL TRAVEL PATTERNS

People take over 19 million trips each day to go to work or school, run errands, and meet everyday needs in the RTA region. Most trips are local: people traveling within their communities or going to ones that are nearby. Generalizing neighboring municipalities into districts, Figure 2-11 demonstrates the most common trips between districts. Large trip volumes occur around Downtown Detroit, to and from Dearborn, across southeastern Oakland County and southern Macomb County, and between Ann Arbor and Pittsfield Township. These trips can be challenging to complete on public transit if you do not live near a route with frequent service. Less than 1% of daily trips in the region take place on public transit. Forty-five percent take place in single-occupancy vehicles, and an additional 47% are in cars with two or more passengers. Almost 7% of trips are taken by pedestrians and just over 1% by bicyclists.

▼ FIGURE 2-11: Top 50% of Cross-district Trips, Southeast Michigan, 2020

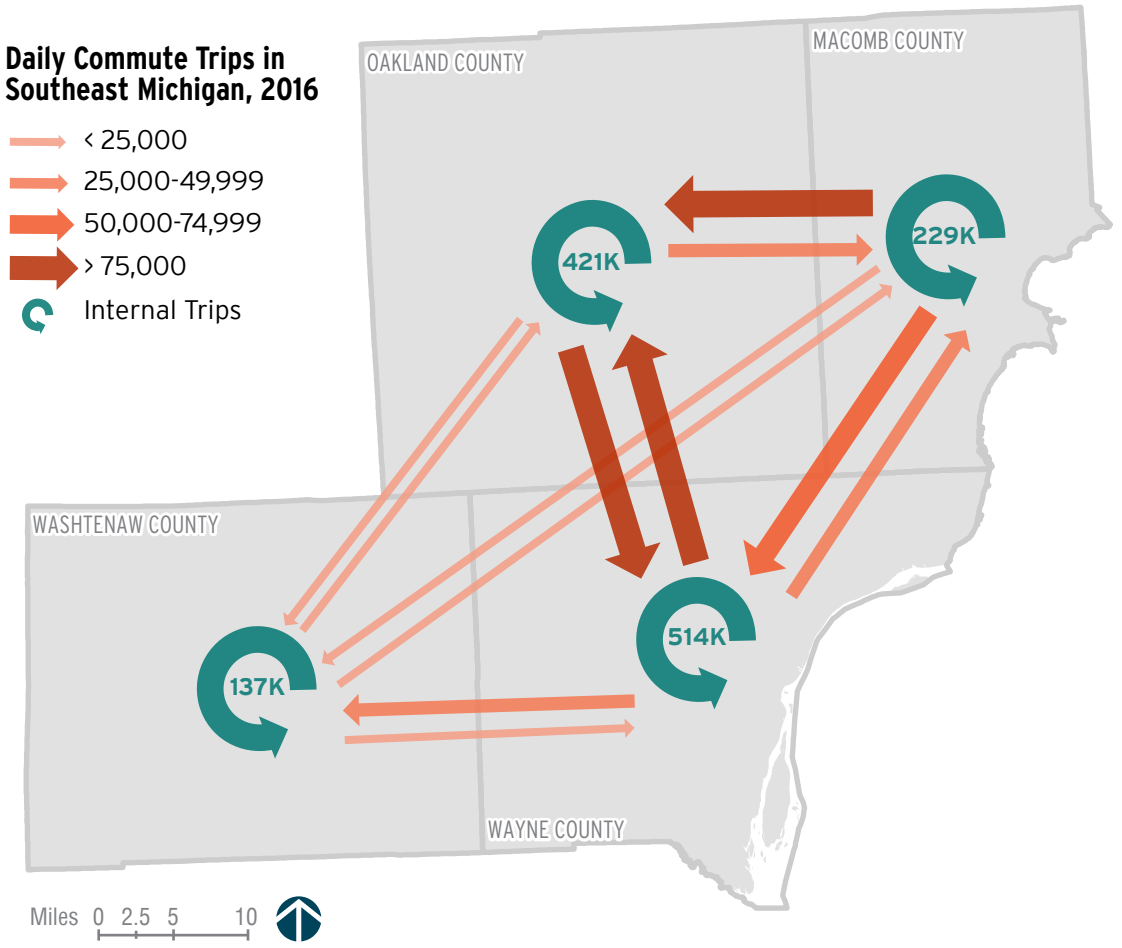


Source: SEMCOG.

Work-related travel accounts for less than a quarter of trips in the region. SEMCOG estimates that about 70% of commuters drive alone to work, while a little over 1% use public transit.[24] Approximately 72% of the region's commuters live and work in the same county. Macomb County residents are most likely to leave the county for work: 41% work outside of the county, largely in Oakland or Wayne Counties. The largest numbers of commuters travel between Oakland and Wayne Counties. Over 110,000 Oakland County residents work in Wayne County, and over almost 102,000 Wayne County residents commute to Oakland County (see Figure 2-12). More than half of the workers who live in Detroit reverse commute to jobs outside of city (see Figure 2-13).[25]

Most travel is for non-work purposes: school, shopping and errands, medical appointments, entertainment, care work, or other needs. Some of these trips can be challenging without a car, particularly if someone needs to make one or more stops on their way to another destination.

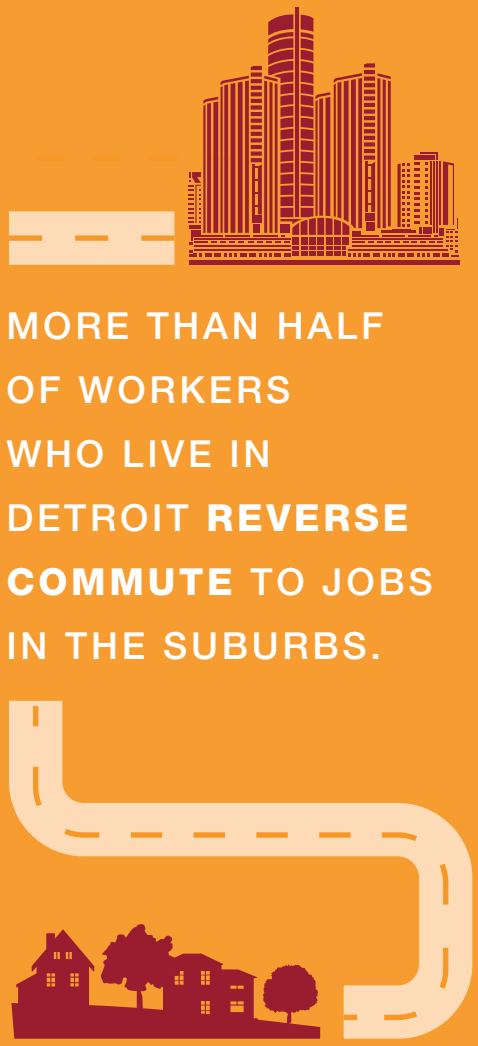
▼ FIGURE 2-12: Daily Commute Trips in Southeast Michigan, 2016



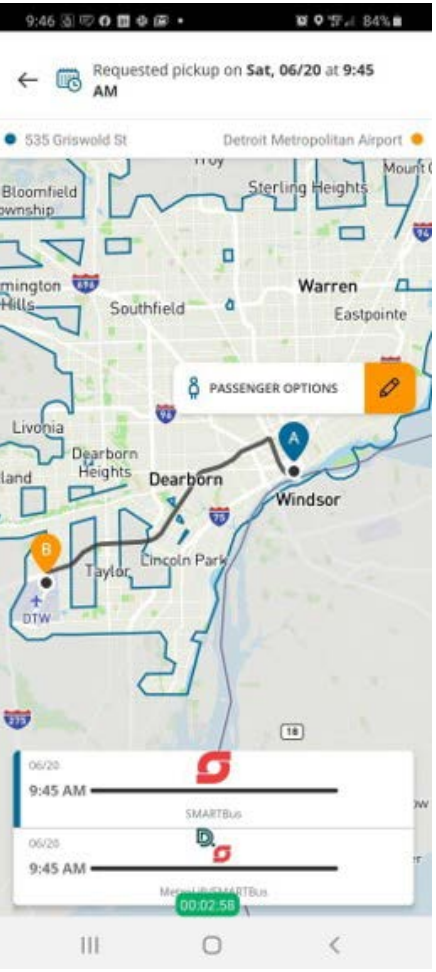
Source: Census Data for Transportation Planning Products (CTPP).

The areas with the largest amounts of travel are generally in the densest parts of the region, and have the highest levels of transit service. However, travel patterns do highlight some themes that need to be addressed in order for transit to meet the needs of a larger number of people and to be a more attractive option:

- There are gaps in fixed-route service coverage, particularly in Transit Market 2 and 3 areas with high trip volumes.
- High volumes of trips cross the City of Detroit's borders, and while DDOT and SMART do have routes that cross jurisdictions, many routes and community transit services end at city and county lines.
- There are high volumes of east-west trips in and between Macomb and Oakland Counties that could be better served by additional routes and higher frequencies.
- There are high volumes of east-west trips across Wayne County and in the City of Detroit that could be better served by additional routes and higher frequencies.
- There are high volumes of north-south trips in Macomb County and eastern Oakland County where high-frequency services may address demand.
- Travel between Washtenaw County and the rest of the region is limited, but so are transit options.
- The region has a number of trip centers that should be prioritized for high levels of transit service and investment.



▲ FIGURE 2-13: Detroit Resident Reverse Commutes



▲ New technologies can make it easier for riders to book trips. RTA's MI Ride app is testing how people across the region can schedule paratransit rides in one place.

The Changing Transit Landscape

New technologies are changing transit systems and the ways people access them. In recent years, agencies are focusing more on mobility, which broadly encompasses the different modes people use to get to their destinations. These changes have implications in the short and long term.

COVID-19 has led to drastically reduced ridership on public transit, and to reductions in service as agencies struggle with labor shortages and different levels of demand. However, decreased transit ridership has been a national trend in recent years, and has been attributed a number of factors. Some regions have seen an uptick in ridership as transit agencies have developed clear strategies for making transit a more attractive and more convenient option.

SERVICE AND TECHNOLOGY TRENDS

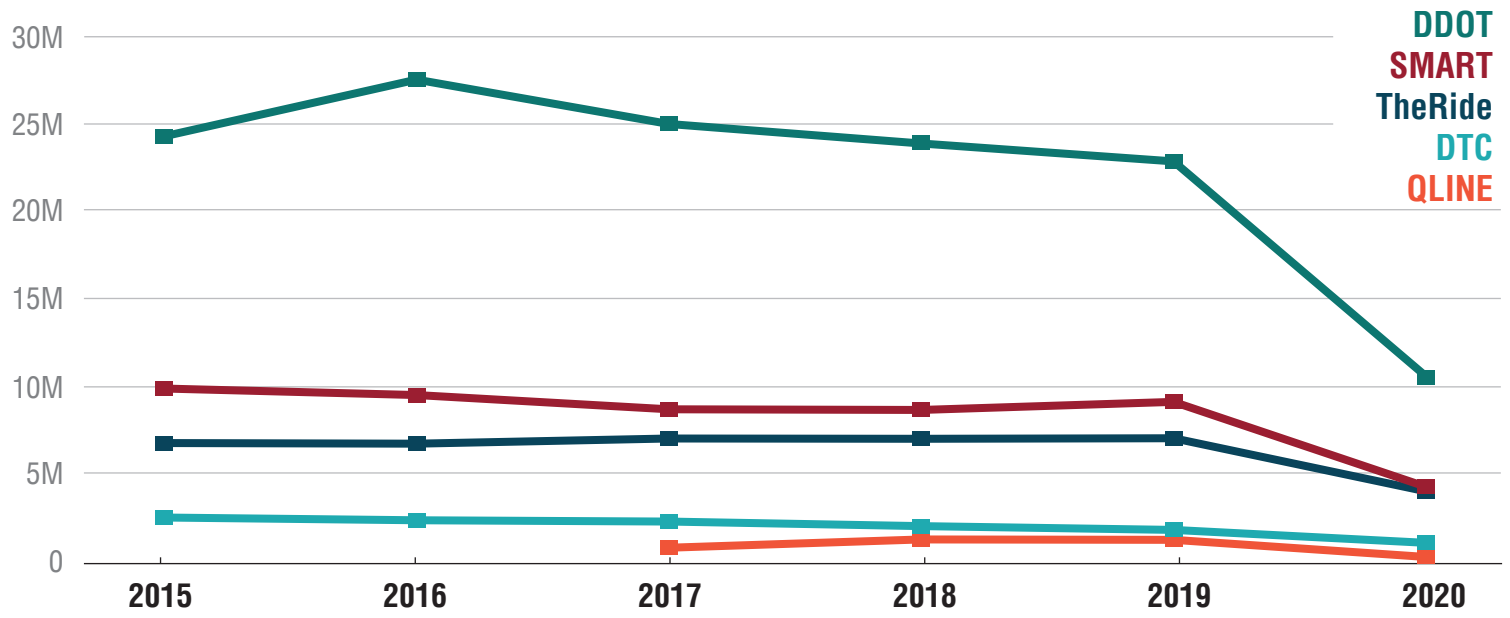
Technology is fundamentally changing the transit and mobility landscape. The ability to plan, request, and pay for a trip with a mobile phone combined with the increase in shared-use mobility systems, such as car, bike and scooter shares, has changed the way people move around metropolitan areas. Additionally, TNCs are growing rapidly and reported 2.6 billion passengers in 2017, a 37% increase from 1.9 billion in 2016. They have the opportunity to close first and last mile mobility gaps, provide more customized service, and improve convenience for existing and future riders. Further, connected, autonomous, and electric vehicles will move us toward a safer and more sustainable mobility future. However, these new technologies will contribute to congestion and climate change if they are not integrated with public transit.

Changes to the transportation ecosystem need to be considered in an equity context: for example, a large number of transit riders cannot afford the required technology (e.g., a smartphone and data plan) and private transportation companies do not have an incentive to provide affordable services in low-income areas. New technologies can be implemented in ways that ensure everyone can benefit from them. For example, people who do not have or are not comfortable using smartphones can schedule rides on SMART and TheRide's microtransit services by telephone.

RIDERSHIP TRENDS

Both nationally and regionally, transit ridership has been declining in recent years. Between 2016 and 2019, national annual transit ridership declined by approximately 6% from 10.4 billion to 9.8 billion passenger trips. Southeast Michigan experienced a 9% decrease in transit trips over the same period, from 46 million to 42 million annual passenger trips on the region's major transit providers. There are a number of reasons for declining transit ridership, including increased telecommuting, low gas prices, population decline, and the introduction of new transportation services and technologies, like TNCs, car-sharing, bike, and scooter sharing. Since March of 2020, COVID-19 has furthered ridership declines as many people began working or going to school remotely. In Southeast Michigan, ridership declined by 53% in 2020 (see Figure 2-14).

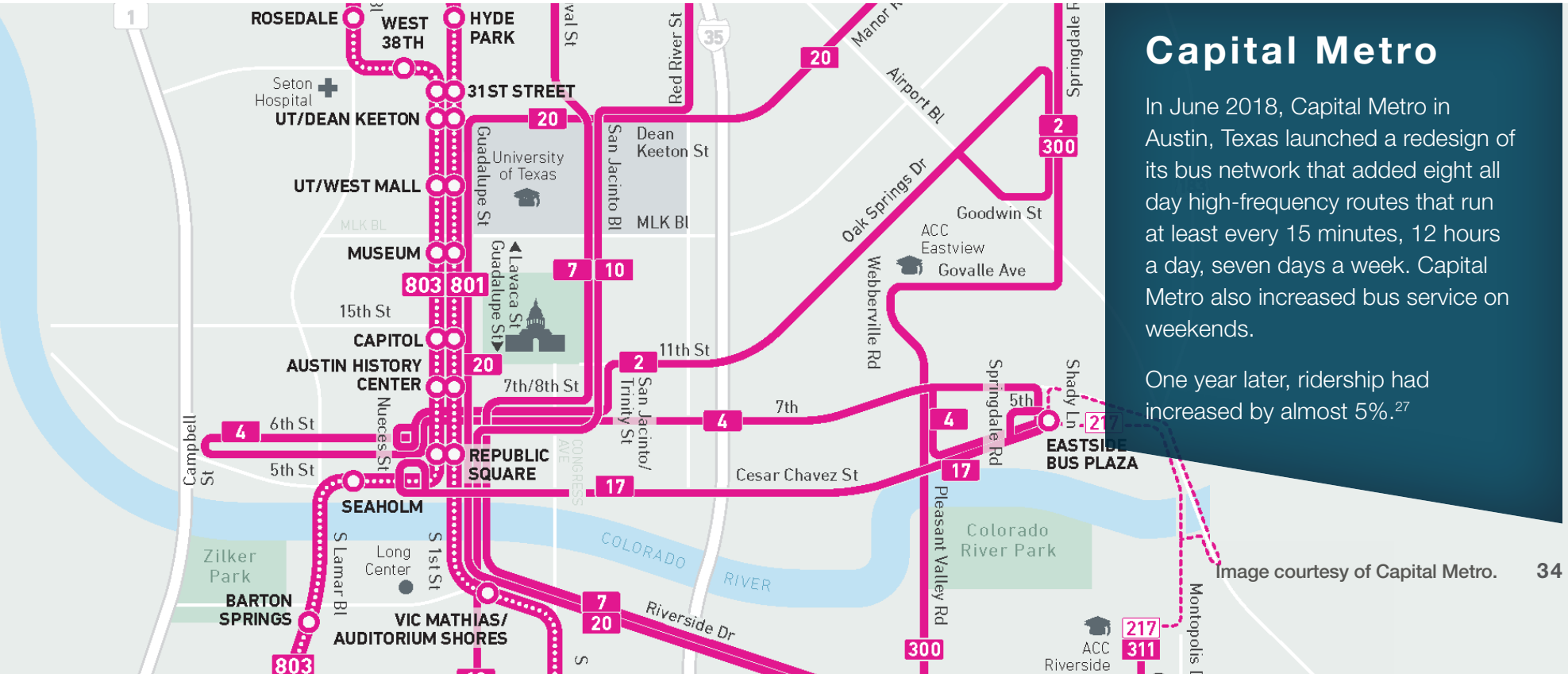
▶ FIGURE 2-14: Annual Public Transit Ridership by Agency, 2015-2020. In 2020, COVID-19 led to a 53% decline in ridership as many people stayed at home.



Sources: NTD, DDOT, SMART, TheRide, DPM, QLINE.

While national trends prior to COVID-19 demonstrate declining transit ridership, between 2010 and 2019 this decline was only on buses, while other modes, such as rail and paratransit, saw increases. Data also show that regions where transit networks were redesigned or expanded to focus on frequency, like Seattle, Washington and Austin, Texas, saw ridership increase. This is reflected locally: between 2018 and 2019, SMART ridership increased by 5% after the introduction of FAST, and rail ridership in Detroit increased by 27% with the introduction of QLINE. These trends indicate that transit ridership improves when residents are provided with high-quality transit options that meet their needs.

Additionally, the national and regional population of adults age 65 and over is increasing. In Southeast Michigan, this population is projected to increase from 15% of the population in 2015 to 23% in 2045.[26] Between 2016 and 2019, Detroit's population of older adults increased by 7%, and over the same period DDOT's paratransit trips increased by 34%. Transit must adapt to ensure that funding and service levels continue to meet this population's needs. As people with higher levels of technological literacy age, services will also need to be improved to match their expectations.



Capital Metro

In June 2018, Capital Metro in Austin, Texas launched a redesign of its bus network that added eight all day high-frequency routes that run at least every 15 minutes, 12 hours a day, seven days a week. Capital Metro also increased bus service on weekends.

One year later, ridership had increased by almost 5%.[27]

Image courtesy of Capital Metro.

▲ Transit agencies instituted new cleaning protocols to help keep riders and bus operators safe during the COVID-19 pandemic. Image courtesy of TheRide.

LONG TERM IMPACTS OF COVID-19

As the pandemic continues, it is still unclear what long-term impacts COVID-19 will have. The pandemic has largely kept people at home and away from the job centers, educational institutions, and events that are the backbone of transit ridership. Changing commutes and work schedules have decreased travel during the typical morning rush hour and has spread trips out throughout the day.[28] This has renewed attention to commuters who work outside of the traditional 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM schedule.

With the availability of vaccines, people are returning to offices and social gatherings, and are traveling more than they were prior to COVID-19 related shutdowns.[29] Despite low risks of transmission on public transit, riders have not yet fully returned to transit.[30]

The pandemic has highlighted the critical role public transit plays in keeping Southeast Michigan moving. Transit operators have been on the front lines safely transporting essential workers to and from their jobs; these are the medical and service industry workers Southeast Michigan has relied on for everyday needs throughout the pandemic. Public transit has remained a critical service for those who rely on it to access everyday needs, such as grocery stores, pharmacies, and medical appointments. Southeast Michigan's transit providers have adapted services to offer rides to vaccine appointments, and have even delivered groceries.

As the region adapts to the long-term impacts of COVID-19, RTA and regional transit providers will continue to adapt to new travel patterns and safety precautions, while looking for opportunities to enhance existing transit service to ensure that there are not major upticks in congestion. RTA is committed to ensuring services are delivered equitably so people who rely on public transit are able to access opportunities and essential services. As the region recovers from the pandemic, public transit will continue to strengthen Southeast Michigan’s communities and economy, and create a more equitable and sustainable region.

03

WHAT WE HEARD

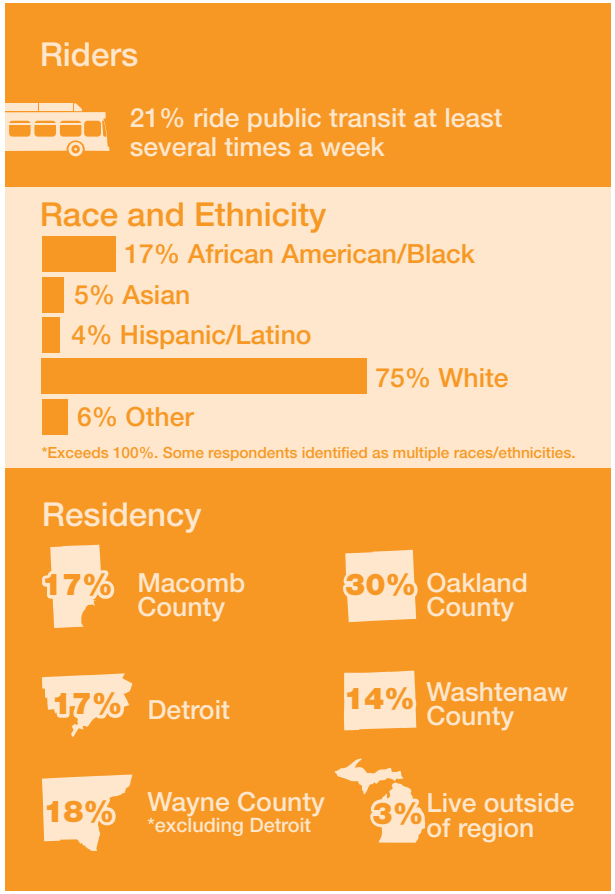
Image courtesy of the TheRide.

03 WHAT WE HEARD

Public Engagement Process

In order to create a plan to improve public transit that meets the needs of Southeast Michiganders, RTA conducted surveys, virtual open house meetings, community listening sessions, and targeted rider outreach. COVID-19 made in-person engagement a challenge, but virtual meetings allowed more people to fit meetings into their schedules or watch recorded meetings at a more convenient time. Between May and September 2021, RTA heard from over 4,320 people. An overview of who participated in the surveys is included in Figure 3-1.

▲ A member of RTA's street team surveying riders at Rosa Parks Transit Center in Downtown Detroit.



▲ FIGURE 3-1: *ADVANCE 2021* Survey Respondent Demographics

SURVEYS

RTA conducted three surveys throughout the *ADVANCE 2021* engagement process. The first was a general public survey that was conducted online in May 2021. It included almost 1,100 regional residents and was weighted to reflect the population of each county proportionally. This survey sought to understand how people across the region think about public transit and transit service trade-offs (see next section), as well as their expectations for a regional transit network.

A second survey was available on RTA's website, and at open house meetings and listening sessions from June through September 2021. This survey provided feedback on how people consider trade-offs, and what their priorities are for travel in the region and improvements to the regional transit network.

In the third survey, completed over the course of one week in August 2021, a street team surveyed bus riders at 10 of the most used transit stops across the region. This survey was shorter than the others so that riders could quickly complete it while traveling. Since some riders were in a rush, surveyors also handed out flyers with information on how to take the survey online or via text at a later time. The goal of this survey was to understand riders' priorities for improvements to the regional system.

OPEN HOUSES AND LISTENING SESSIONS

RTA held nine virtual open house events and 15 listening sessions. The open house meetings were organized by county, with two meetings focused on each county, and one centered on the City of Detroit. Meetings were held virtually due to the challenges of meeting in person during COVID-19. People without access to a computer were able to attend and comment by phone. Open house meetings were also recorded so that those who were not able to attend could watch them and complete the survey at a later time.

The listening sessions provided an opportunity to hear from specific groups in order to understand their unique needs and priorities for public transit. Groups included advocates for transit and people with disabilities, representatives from faith-based organizations and shelters for the unhoused, students, and the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, among others.

FUTURE ENGAGEMENT

COVID-19 created both challenges and opportunities for public engagement and led to the use of new tools. Increased concerns about safety made holding in-person public meetings a challenge. While RTA's street team surveyed riders at major transit centers and stops, they were unable to reach more riders by conducting surveys on buses. However, virtual meetings allowed participants to more easily fit meetings into their schedules and, if they could not attend, allowed them to watch meetings and submit comments online and by phone when it was convenient for them.

In the future, as it is safe, RTA will employ a hybrid virtual and in-person approach to public engagement. This is especially important since about 12% of households in the region, a third of which live in Detroit, do not have home internet access.

In order to advance equity in transit, RTA is committed to improving its efforts to engage with people of color, who were underrepresented in the surveys. This will ensure that historically underrepresented voices are heard so that disparate impacts can be addressed. Additionally, residents of Oakland and Macomb Counties were also underrepresented in the surveys. RTA will need to improve outreach in these counties in future engagement activities.

If you were not able to provide input, RTA still wants to hear from you! RTA will be conducting additional outreach to develop future plans.

PRIOR ENGAGEMENT

For its 2020 "OnHand" plan, RTA conducted targeted outreach to seniors, people with disabilities, and people with low incomes. Outreach included a survey that received over 1,200 responses from 72% of the region's zip codes. Surveyors went to senior housing complexes and churches, and met with students with special needs to hear about their transportation needs.

"OnHand" was completed in collaboration with stakeholders representing and advocating for these populations, and who provide services directed toward them.

Engagement conducted for "OnHand" was used to support ADVANCE 2021.

▲ New bus shelters with real-time information were identified as a top regional priority. SMART has real-time monitors at 47 of its bus shelters, including the one pictured above. Image courtesy of SMART.

Public Needs and Priorities

BUDGET EXERCISE

Survey respondents were asked to allocate a budget to example improvements to indicate their priorities within budget constraints. Across transit markets, respondents prioritized the top eight improvements similarly. These top priorities are:

1. Install 500 new bus shelters with real-time information.
2. Implement an expanded regional fare system with a mobile app-based payment option.
3. Build an Ann Arbor-Detroit commuter rail system.
4. Construct designated transit lanes on five major corridors.
5. Expand community transit providers' service on evenings and weekends.
6. Add 50 new bike share stations.
7. Upgrade 10 bus routes to have 24-hour service.
8. Implement a regional "one-click, one-call" trip booking platform.

These priorities indicate a strong desire for both large- and small-scale capital improvements, as well as extended service hours. There is a clear desire for "flagship" projects on major road or rail corridors, and for new amenities and technologies that make transit more comfortable and easier to use. Larger-scale projects would require additional federal, state, and local funding, while some smaller projects could be carried out with existing funding sources or competitive grants. Extending service hours will require additional local or state funding, or new federal funding that is eligible to use for operating expenses.

Though riders and non-riders indicated a strong desire for increased frequencies in other survey questions, in this activity, it was not a top selection. However, transit-lanes on major corridors, which was a priority, would allow for frequency improvements.

Priorities were consistent across the region, even in areas where improvements may not be implemented. For example, a high number of respondents in Macomb and Oakland Counties prioritized Ann Arbor-Detroit commuter rail. As projects are developed, additional outreach will be necessary to understand what these priorities mean to residents in each community.

FIXED-ROUTE SERVICE TRADE-OFFS

Ideally, public transit agencies would be able to provide services that meet all needs, at all times. However, given funding constraints, transit agencies must prioritize resources, which requires making trade-offs. While there are various possible trade-offs, three that impact transit service the most are: ridership versus coverage, direct routes versus connections, and all-day versus workday service (see Figure 3-2). Trade-offs are not a decision between one or the other, but about finding a balance and setting priorities for how services should operate in general.[31]

RTA asked Southeast Michiganders to weigh in on these trade-offs to set a direction for planning future services.

Ridership versus Coverage

Prioritizing ridership or coverage helps determine where transit services should operate. Essentially, the trade-off is between placing routes where the most people will use them (ridership) or spreading them out so that more people have access to service, even if they do not use it (coverage).

Ridership-focused services prioritize resources on corridors the most people travel on. Additional frequency makes service more reliable, as wait times are shorter. However, routes may be farther from origin or destination points. Services focused on coverage are more spread-out so that more people can access them, but this leads to lower frequencies. These services may not have high ridership, but help ensure everyone has access to some amount of service.

Survey respondents were evenly split on ridership versus coverage. Therefore, RTA should attempt to balance services between high-ridership corridors and those that might run less frequently but connect to more locations.

Direct Routes versus Connections

Prioritizing direct routes or connections determines where routes go and how riders get there. The trade-off is between a “one-seat” route that takes a rider directly from an origin to a destination (direct route), or one that goes to connection points and might require transferring to a different route, or routes, to complete a trip.

Direct routes must serve multiple destinations, making them longer and more circuitous, or there may need to be multiple routes connecting an origin to various destinations. This means less frequency and longer trips, but riders can travel directly

to a destination without transferring. Alternatively, connections allow for shorter routes and more frequent service. However, reaching a destination might require transferring to one or more routes.

Survey respondents prioritized connections, though, some commented that service must be frequent and reliable so that riders can be confident that their next bus is coming.

All-Day versus Workday Service

Even if there is a route nearby, it may not operate at the times someone needs it. All-day service ensures routes are available throughout the day and night. During times with lower demand, there may be longer wait times and lower ridership. At peak hours, there may be less frequent and more crowded buses. Workday service prioritizes frequent service during "rush hours," meaning more options for nine-to-five commuters, with less frequency and service at other times of the day.

Survey respondents preferred all-day service, since many people work outside of the nine-to-five workday, and need access to services and amenities at other times. All-day service also supports the desire many people expressed to use public transit for entertainment trips. RTA should prioritize service that is available throughout the day, though, it may need to be less frequent.

Summarizing Trade-Offs

Considering these trade-offs together can help guide planning future services. Trade-offs must be considered in the context of other priorities identified by the public.

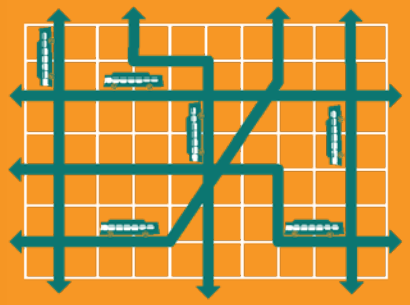
Respondents indicated they want transit to strike a balance between frequent service on high-ridership corridors and less frequent service that provides access to additional destinations. Connections should be prioritized, which would help support more frequency. Services should be available throughout the day and night.

Public feedback indicates a strong desire for frequent service and rapid transit on major corridors. These corridors could serve as an all-day transit network that connects to other fixed routes or other services, such as microtransit and micromobility.

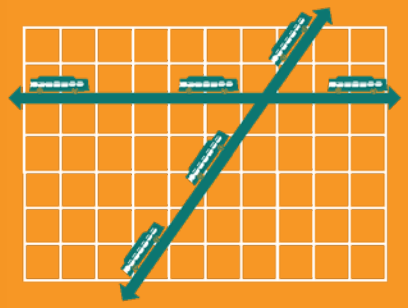
> **WE ARE A 24-HOUR SOCIETY. OUR TRANSIT SYSTEM SHOULD REFLECT THAT.**
>
> *—Washtenaw County Respondent*

TRANSIT TRADE-OFFS

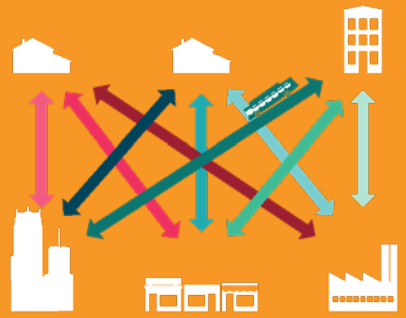
Coverage



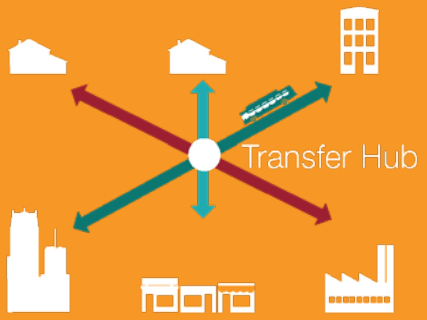
Ridership



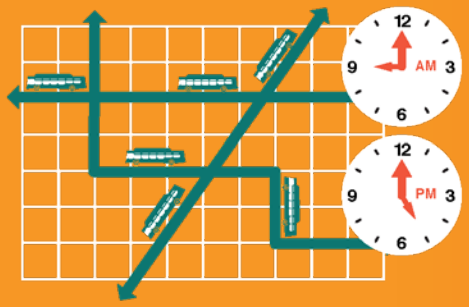
Direct Routes



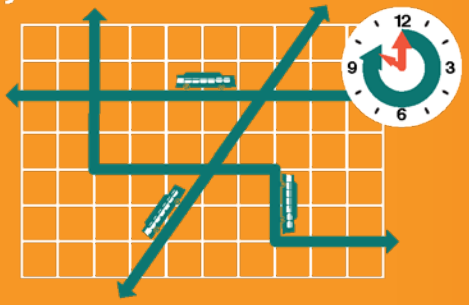
Connections



Workday



All Day



▲ FIGURE 3-2: Transit Trade-Offs

KEY FINDINGS

According to the general, regionally representative 2021 survey RTA conducted in the spring of 2021, 76% of Southeast Michigan residents believe public transit is vital to the region, but only 37% found it to be readily available in their communities. Though many people in the region rely on public transit to get to work or school, to run errands, or for transportation in general, in the short term, the majority of respondents are most interested in using public transit to access concerts, sports games, and other forms of entertainment. This is reflected in destination preferences: three of the most popular responses were Downtown Detroit, Downtown Ann Arbor, and DTW. In the longer term, respondents hope that public transit will reduce their need for a personal car, and would like transit in Southeast Michigan to be on par with systems in other large cities across the United States. Southeast Michiganders who do not frequently use transit would like to use it to travel to jobs, hospitals, and medical appointments and to go shopping.

But what is stopping them from using transit more often now? The largest barrier is the frequency of service. Riders and non-riders alike overwhelmingly want more frequent service. Riders cited increased frequency as their priority improvement, while non-riders indicated increased frequency was most likely to make them use public transit more often. Similarly, both riders and potential riders want more nighttime and weekend service, reflecting a desire for more service to entertainment venues and the jobs that operate them.

Downtown Ann Arbor and Detroit, DTW, and major employers were cited as key destinations that should be reachable by public transit. Frequent, occasional, and non-riders all prioritized these places.

Current riders were more likely to prioritize higher frequencies, increased nighttime and weekend service, and more comfortable bus stops than other potential improvements.

KEY FINDINGS FROM *ADVANCE 2021* AND "OnHand"

- 76% of residents believe public transit is vital to the region.
- Riders and non-riders strongly desire more frequent services.
- Residents want "flagship" projects on major corridors.
- Frequent and occasional riders want more evening, nighttime, and weekend service.
- ADA riders struggle to find rides on evenings and weekends.
- Amenities like bus shelters, a regional fare system, and a “one-click, one-call” paratransit booking tool are very popular.
- Riders, particularly seniors and people with disabilities, struggle to access bus stops.
- Infrequent riders consider public transit to be most useful for entertainment-related trips, but in the longer term, want public transit to be an alternative to a car for everyday trips.
- Downtown Detroit and Ann Arbor, and DTW are key transit destinations.
- Detroiters experience the most barriers to transportation relative to each county.

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON REGIONAL PRIORITIES

RTA has engaged the public for multiple efforts, including the 2016 RMTP, 2018's "Connect Southeast Michigan," and "OnHand." While many of the region's priorities have remained the same, engagement conducted for *ADVANCE 2021* has reinforced some priorities, and demonstrated that RTA needs to increase its focus on others. Below are some areas RTA learned it needs to prioritize more than it has in the past.

Frequency Improvements

Riders and non-riders have indicated that frequency improvements are a top priority. RTA should emphasize high frequencies on major regional routes, and increasing frequencies on routes throughout the regional transit network.

Transit Stop Amenities

Previous plans included new bus shelters that were primarily focused around new services. Respondents indicated that RTA should prioritize adding bus shelters and other stop amenities to improve existing stops across the region.

Community Transit Providers

People like their local community transit providers and want to continue to use and support them. Based on feedback, RTA should strengthen relationships with community providers, promote the ways they currently support them, and find new ways to support their sustainable growth.

First-Last Mile Service

Microtransit and micromobility have gained popularity since previous plans were completed. There is a strong desire to expand these modes, and RTA should seek opportunities to support these services, and the infrastructure needed to safely use them.

WHAT WOULD MAKE YOU LIKELY TO USE PUBLIC TRANSIT MORE OFTEN?

> **INCREASED LOCAL PUBLIC TRANSIT OPERATIONS TAILORED TO COMMUNITY NEEDS (NOT ONE SIZE FITS ALL).**
>
> *—Macomb County Respondent*

04
PLANNING AHEAD

04 PLANNING AHEAD

RTA's Vision

// RTA envisions a region with sufficient and stable funding to support improved public transit options that will advance equity by increasing accessibility; satisfy the integrated mobility needs of Southeast Michigan communities; and promote livable, healthy, and sustainable growth.

This vision is an ideal but realistic target for Southeast Michigan's transit network. Toward this vision, RTA has identified five goals, which are milestones that must be achieved to reach the vision. Each goal includes a series of strategies, which are approaches RTA and public transit agencies can take toward reaching these goals. Strategies may contribute to multiple goals, but are grouped according to the goal they impact most. Figure 4-1 outlines how RTA's vision informs goals, which in turn inform strategies and actions.

▲ FIGURE 4-1: Vision, Goals, Strategies, and Actions. RTA's vision informs its goals. Strategies are approaches to achieving goals, and can be implemented through actions.

Goals

// EXPAND: Expand Transit to New Places

Connect more people to more destinations including jobs, educational opportunities, and healthcare services in Southeast Michigan through an expanded regional transit system with a focus on expanding access for equity populations; this includes seniors, people with disabilities, and low-income households.

// ENHANCE: Enhance Existing Services

Upgrade the frequency, reliability, comfort, safety, and speed of existing transit services to increase their value to current riders and to attract new ones.

// INNOVATE: Develop Innovative and Adaptable Solutions

Implement innovative programs and pilot projects to improve transit, increase flexibility, and encourage transit providers to adopt new technologies.

// PARTNER: Build Sustainable Partnerships

Support existing transit provider efforts to sustain and improve core services, implement expansion programs through active coordination with local transit providers and nonprofits, coordinate with agencies that have goals related to accessibility improvements, and provide a seamless user experience.

// FINANCE: Secure Long-term Dedicated Transit Revenue

Position Southeast Michigan for economic success by raising regional revenues and leveraging state and federal funding opportunities to sustain and expand the mobility services that residents, employers, businesses, developers, and education system count on to thrive.

Strategies

Strategies are approaches RTA, the region's public transit agencies, and other partners can take toward reaching *ADVANCE 2021*'s goals, allowing for the overall vision to be achieved. Strategies are organized by goal, but may actually contribute to multiple goals. Strategies include actions that can be taken in the short-, mid-, or long-term. Short-term actions can be carried out in the next five years, mid-term actions can be carried out in five to 10 years, and long-term actions will take longer than 10 years to fully implement. Actions also list a generalized budget required to implement them, categorized as one, two, or three dollar signs. A budget of "$" is an action that is estimated to cost under $5 million, or one with annual costs under $5 million. Actions with "$$" are estimated to cost between $5 and $10 million on a one-time or annual basis. Actions with one-time or annual costs above $10 million are categorized with "$$$."

Not all strategies should be applied in all areas of the region. Transit market icons (see **Chapter 2: Transit in Southeast Michigan**) indicate where they would be most appropriate.

There are a total of 22 strategies within the five goals. Each strategy contains one or more action items. Actions should be taken by RTA and public transit agencies to expand transit, enhance services, develop innovative solutions, build partnerships, and secure revenue in the region, with the overall intent of supporting public transit options that advance equity, increase accessibility, satisfy mobility needs, and promote livable, healthy, and sustainable growth.

// Transit market icons indicate where strategies should be implemented.

Market 1

Market 2

Market 3

Market 4


All Markets

// GOAL: EXPAND
expand transit to new places

STRATEGIES & ACTIONS	TIMELINE	COST
01 // Expand fixed-route services to regional destinations		
▸ Develop criteria for route extensions and new routes that include access to jobs and services, and equity outcomes.	Short-term	$
▸ Develop a prioritized list of route extensions and new routes, and an inventory of the resources needed to implement them, including operations funding, vehicles, staff, and passenger amenities.	Short-term	$
▸ Pilot route extensions to key areas.	Mid-term	$$
▸ As funding becomes available, support the implementation of new and extended routes.	Long-term	$$$
02 // Ensure all areas of the region have public transit service		
▸ Seek funding to implement services for people with disabilities, seniors, and people with low incomes in areas of Washtenaw and Oakland Counties that lack service.	Mid-term	$$
▸ As funding becomes available, programs should be expanded to include the general public.	Long-term	$$
03 // Expand microtransit services to additional areas		
▸ Add and extend microtransit zones to new places.	Long-term	$$

STRATEGY
01

EXPAND

Expand fixed-route services to regional destinations

There are over two million jobs in Southeast Michigan and only 43% of them are within a quarter mile of a public transit stop. While the average Metropolitan Detroiter has access to over two million jobs within a one-hour car ride, fewer than 65,000 are accessible within a one-hour transit trip.[32] Further, of the region's 65 colleges and universities, and 59 hospitals, only 65% and 71%, respectively, are within a quarter mile of a transit stop. Transit service gaps limit residents' ability to access jobs and services, and impact employers, who have a limited pool of candidates.

In public engagement completed as part of the *ADVANCE 2021* process, respondents highlighted four key regional destinations: Downtown Detroit, Downtown Ann Arbor, DTW, and more generally, major employers. These destinations are primarily located in Transit Markets 2, 3 and 4, much of which has transit service. However, gaps do exist, and opportunity areas have been identified in Figure 4-2. In partnership with transit providers, RTA can help remove barriers to create new routes and extend existing ones to improve access to opportunity areas. In fact, RTA and TheRide have partnered to do this: D2A2 provides a daily connection between Downtown Ann Arbor and Downtown Detroit, two major regional destinations.

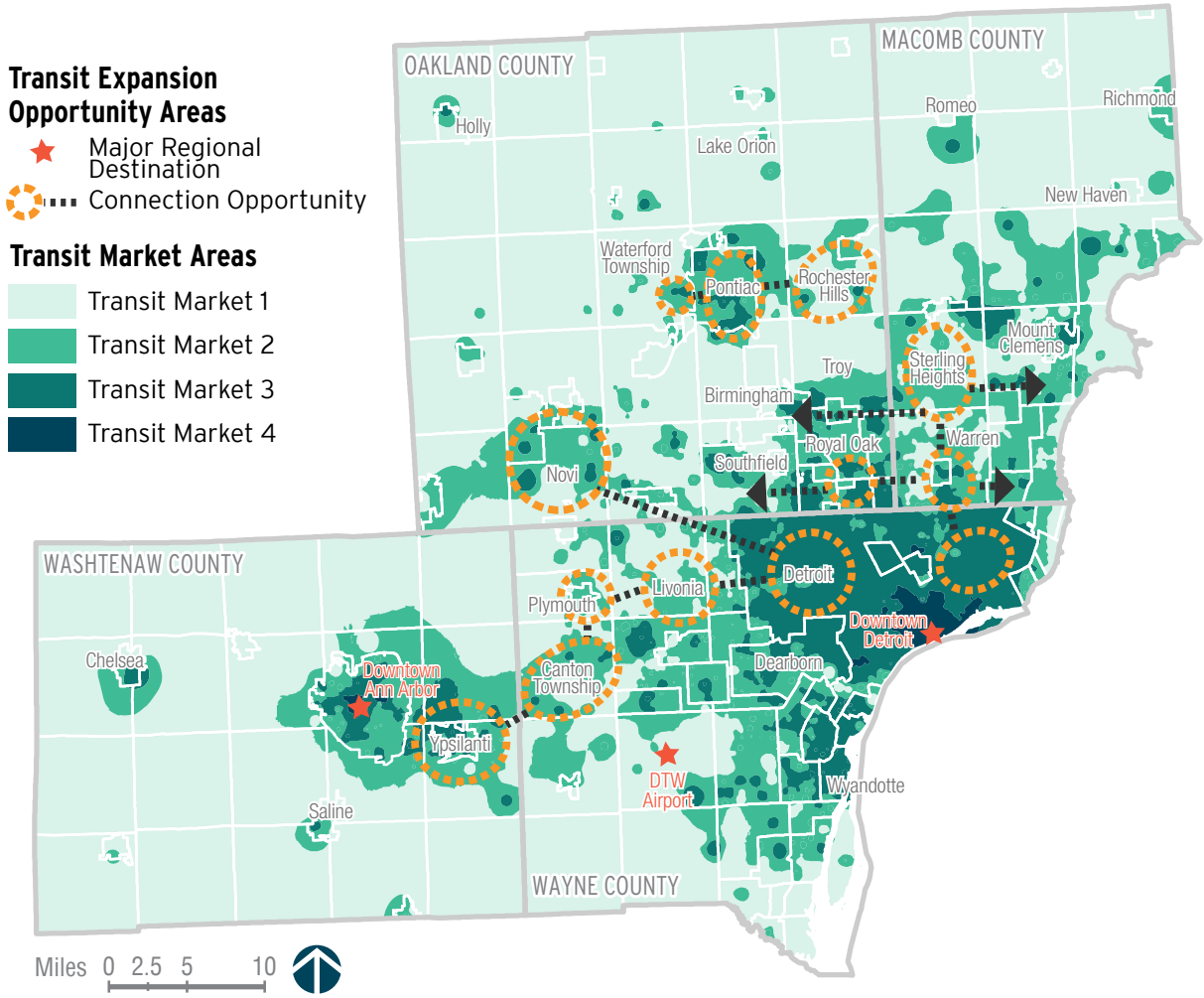
Additional service expansions should be prioritized based on increased access to jobs and major destinations, and on how they improve equity outcomes. Expanded services should consider connections with the broader transit network, including comfortable and safe transfer points.

ACTIONS

- Develop criteria for route extensions and new routes that include access to jobs and services, and equity outcomes.
- Develop a prioritized list of route extensions and new routes that serve opportunity areas and major regional destinations, and an inventory of the resources needed to implement them, including operations funding, vehicles, staff, and passenger amenities.
- Pilot route extensions to key areas.
- As funding becomes available, support the implementation of new and extended routes.

STRATEGY
01
EXPAND

Expand fixed-routes services to regional destinations



▶ FIGURE 4-2:
Transit Expansion Opportunity Areas

STRATEGY
02

EXPAND

Ensure all areas of the region have public transit service

The majority of the RTA region does have public transit service, whether through one of the region's large fixed-route providers, or through smaller municipal or community providers. However, some parts of the region lack public transit options. Though private and nonprofit services are available in these areas, they may have higher costs for riders and may not be accessible to all users.

Much of rural Washtenaw County lacks public transit. In Oakland County, Bloomfield Hills, Keego Harbor, Lake Angelus, Orchard Lake Village, and Sylvan Lake currently lack service. In partnership with these communities and existing transit providers, RTA should explore what services would be most appropriate to ensure that options are available for those who need them. These areas are largely in Transit Market 1, where flexible demand-responsive services might help provide connections to other areas and other transit services.

ACTIONS

- In partnership with communities and transit providers, seek funding to implement services in areas that lack them for people with disabilities, seniors, and people with low incomes. Possible solutions could include expanding the service areas of existing providers, contracting with taxi and TNC services to create microtransit zones, or creating voucher programs to subsidize taxi and TNC rides.
- As funding becomes available, community transit services should be expanded to include the general public.

▲ In places where fixed-route service may not be desirable or viable, community transit providers help ensure seniors and people with disabilities are able to go where they need to. Image courtesy of WAVE.

STRATEGY
03

EXPAND

Expand microtransit services to additional areas

TheRide and SMART provide microtransit service in Southeast Michigan through FlexRide and SMART Flex. Microtransit, or flex services, leverage new technologies that allow riders to request vehicles as needed, rather than booking them days in advance. These services operate in zones to provide local trips, and offer a first and last mile option that connects to fixed-route services. Microtransit is appropriate in areas or at times where there may not be enough demand for fixed-route service. This model is well suited to Southeast Michigan's Transit Markets 1 and 2, and parts of Market 3. Microtransit zones can be centered around employment areas, shopping centers, and transit hubs to improve access to jobs, essential services, and the broader region.

ACTIONS

- Work with transit providers to add and extend microtransit zones to new places, particularly to provide late night service, supplement services offered by community transit providers, and to provide first and last mile service.

▲ TheRide's FlexRide is a microtransit service that operates in Pittsfield and Ypsilanti Townships. FlexRide also offers late-night and holiday service in the Cities of Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti when fixed-route and ADA services do not operate. Image courtesy of TheRide.

//GOAL: ENHANCE
enhance existing services

STRATEGIES & ACTIONS	TIMELINE	COST
04//Implement a frequent transit network		
▸ Develop criteria for frequent routes that consider existing ridership, and access to jobs and services, particularly for equity populations.	Short-term	$
▸ Develop a prioritized network of high frequency routes.	Short-term	$
▸ Apply for funding to pilot frequency improvements on prioritized routes.	Mid-term	$$
▸ As funding becomes available, implement the high-frequency route network.	Long-term	$$$
▸ Work with the region's bus operators to increase frequencies on bus routes across the region.	Long-term	$$$
05//Increase fixed-route services during off-peak hours		
▸ Complete a study focused on nighttime and weekend travel patterns and shift times.	Short-term	$
▸ Increase nighttime and weekend service.	Long-term	$$
06//Increase on-demand service hours to include evenings, late nights, and weekends		
▸ Develop pilot programs in areas where there is high demand for access to essential services, and high proportions of equity populations.	Mid-term	$$
▸ Support increased service hours on on-demand services.	Long-term	$$$

STRATEGIES & ACTIONS	TIMELINE	COST
07//Invest in transit corridor projects		
▸ Review and update existing Locally Preferred Alternatives (LPA) to reflect current conditions.	Short-term	$$
▸ Prioritize corridors for capital projects, and advance them through FTA's environmental review process and Capital Investment Grants (CIG) Program to apply for funding.	Mid-term	$$
▸ Partner with local governments to develop transit supportive land use and affordable housing policies.	Mid-term	$
▸ Pilot smaller-scale transit priority improvements.	Mid-term	$
▸ Implement corridor capital projects.	Long-term	$$$
▸ Identify additional potential rapid transit corridors and create a regional corridor development plan.	Long-term	$$
08//Create universal service standards for ADA paratransit services and community transit providers		
▸ Work with community transit providers to create a universal set of rider eligibility criteria.	Short-term	$
▸ Develop plans and raise funding to increase service hours and eligibility, or address specific needs.	Mid-term	$
▸ Support the implementation of consistent hours of operation and eligibility requirements.	Long-term	$$
09//Streamline business processes to enable seamless travel across jurisdictional boundaries		
▸ Create a working group to develop programs and policies for seamless cross-jurisdictional travel.	Short-term	$
10//Expand community transit provider services		
▸ Create an advisory committee for community transit providers.	Short-term	$
▸ Implement a technical assistance program to support community transit providers with planning activities, capital improvements, and grant applications that can increase capacity.	Mid-term	$
▸ Support the purchase of vehicles, equipment and facilities, and hiring additional staff.	Long-term	$$
11//Promote and expand carpools, vanpools, and park-and-rides		
▸ Promote carpools, vanpools, and park-and-rides.	Short-term	$
▸ Develop a regional park-and-ride strategy.	Mid-term	$
▸ Work with transit agencies to develop additional park-and-ride lots, and services to them.	Mid-term	$$

STRATEGY
04
ENHANCE

Implement a frequent transit network

Frequent bus service operates every 15 minutes or better throughout the day on weekdays and weekends, making transit more reliable. In Southeast Michigan, only 10% of the region's fixed-route network operates frequently, and primarily only during weekday peak hours.

In the surveys conducted for *ADVANCE 2021*, riders and non-riders identified greater frequency as a top priority. For riders, frequency was the most desired improvement. Non-riders cited higher frequencies as the enhancement most likely to get them to use public transit.

A frequent network operating every 15 minutes or better at least 18 hours a day would help decrease trip times and make it easier to travel to jobs and essential services. Frequency improvements should also be made across the entire network to foster connections to other routes and services.

ACTIONS

- Partner with transit agencies to develop criteria for frequent routes that consider existing ridership, and access to jobs and services, particularly for equity populations.
- Using the criteria above, work with transit providers to develop a frequent transit network that operates every 15 minutes or better. Potential routes to consider are identified in Figure 4-3.
- Apply for funding to pilot frequency improvements.
- As funding becomes available, implement the frequent transit network.
- As funding becomes available, work with the region's providers to increase frequencies across the region.

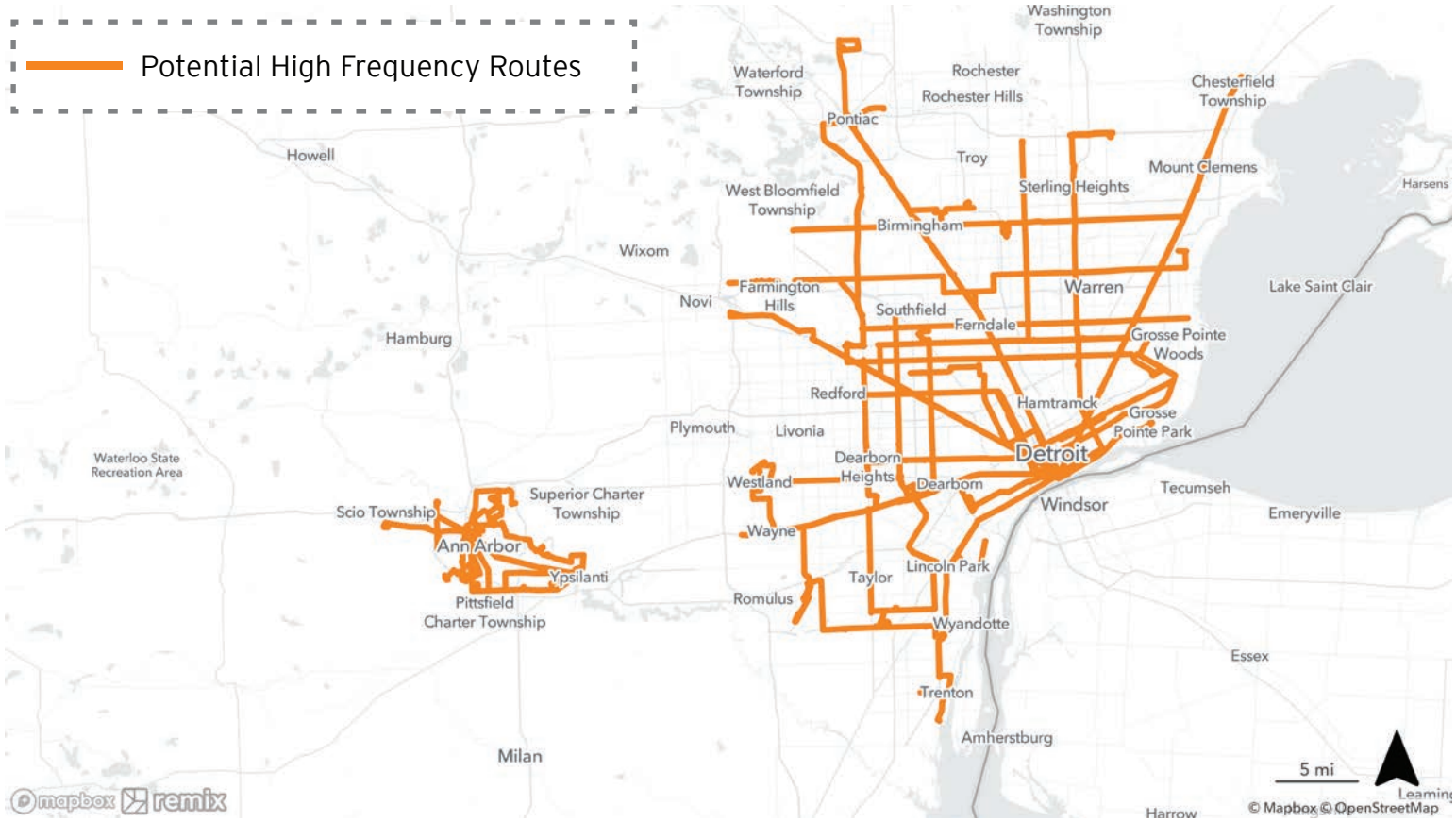
// Case Study

In 2019, TransitCenter conducted an analysis of transit ridership in the 35 regions of the United States with the highest transit ridership, and found that despite national trends of declining ridership, seven regions saw ridership increase. These increases could be traced to service improvements. In Austin, Houston, and Seattle, ridership increases resulted from reorienting service toward high frequencies across their networks. Detroit was one of the cities that saw ridership rise as a result of increased frequency. One year after SMART introduced FAST service, ridership increased by over 5%.[33]

STRATEGY
04

ENHANCE

Implement a frequent transit network



▶ FIGURE 4-3: Potential Frequent Transit Corridors

STRATEGY
05

ENHANCE

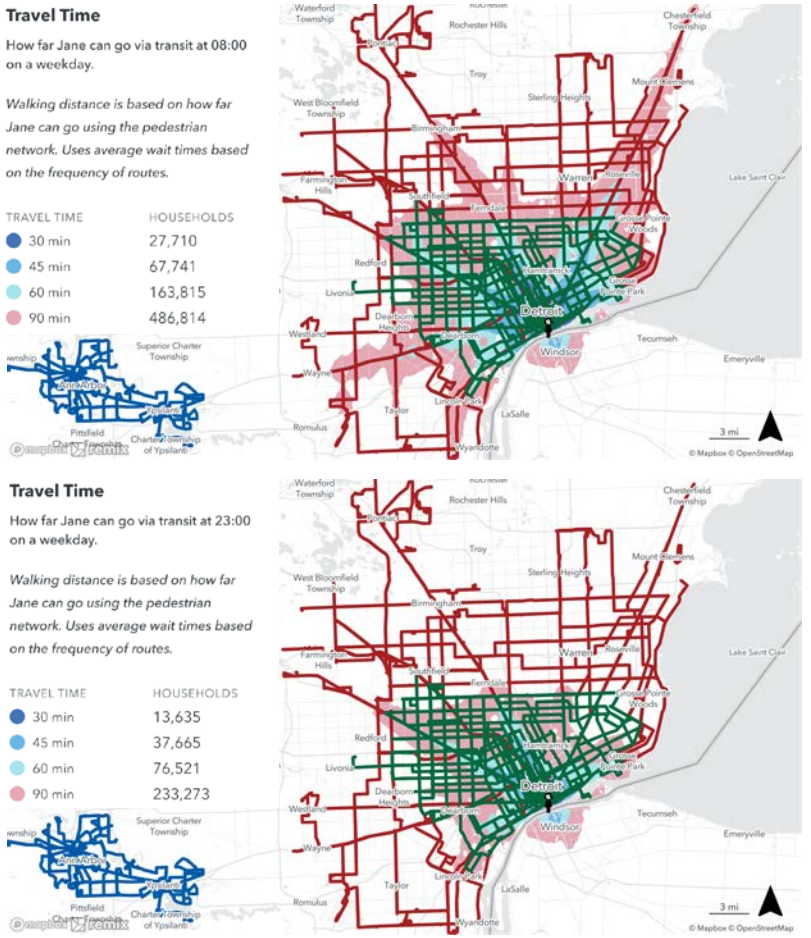
Increase fixed-route services during off-peak hours

Fixed-route services are limited during evenings, nights, and weekends, which can be challenging for people who rely on transit during those times. While off-peak and weekend coverage is relatively similar, frequencies drop significantly, increasing travel and wait times. At 11:00 PM on weekdays, fewer than half as many households are accessible within 90 minutes of Downtown Detroit as are at 8:00 AM (Figure 4-4). For service industry employees and visitors to Downtown Detroit's entertainment districts, this difference limits the viability of using public transit.

Southeast Michiganders have expressed a desire for all-day service that is available at night and on weekends. Increased service hours should be focused on routes that serve destinations that are frequented during off-peak hours. Markets 3 and 4 should be prioritized for increased service spans, though improvements should be considered from a network perspective rather than on a route-by-route basis to allow for transfers.

ACTIONS

- Conduct a study of nighttime and weekend travel patterns and shift times, and develop a prioritized list of areas to enhance service hours, or implement alternative service models.
- Increase nighttime and weekend service.



▲ FIGURE 4-4: Travel Times from Campus Martius at 8:00 AM versus 11:00 PM on Weekdays.

STRATEGY
06

ENHANCE

Increase on-demand service hours to include evenings, late nights, and weekends

On-demand transportation services are limited during evenings, nights, and weekends. Paratransit services provided by DDOT, SMART, and TheRide follow fixed-route schedules, and community transit services generally operate Monday through Friday between 8:00 AM and 5:00 PM, with some exceptions.

In the "OnHand" survey, the largest barrier to travel identified by people 65 and above, people with disabilities, and people who are unemployed was finding rides in the evenings and on weekends. Shopping and personal errands were cited as the most difficult trips to make, followed by medical services and visiting friends and family. Expanding weekend and evening service would remove barriers to these trips and increase independence for those who rely on on-demand services.

ACTIONS

- Develop pilot programs in areas with high demand for access to essential services, and high proportions of equity populations. Pilots might include: increased funding for community transit providers for expanded service hours, a taxi and TNC voucher program that subsidizes or pays for rides during certain times, or microtransit service during times when other services are not available.
- As funding becomes available, support increased service hours.

// Case Study

DDOT, the City of Detroit's Office of Mobility Innovation, and the New Economy Initiative's Night Shift pilot offered $7 vouchers for taxi or TNC rides for travel to or from a bus stop between 11:00 PM and 5:00 AM, when many buses do not operate, or operate infrequently. This pilot ended in 2020, but is a service model that could provide transit options during specific times, or to specific locations, like grocery stores or shopping centers.

STRATEGY
07
ENHANCE

Invest in transit corridor projects

Transit corridor projects can prioritize transit on streets, improving the speed, reliability, and capacity of public transit services. There are multiple forms corridor projects can take, from installing TSP at key intersections, to implementing BRT or light rail service, to more intensive commuter rail lines. Frequent and reliable corridor services can also increase ridership; since the Silver Line BRT launched in 2012, The Rapid, Grand Rapids' transit system, saw ridership increase by 40% on its corridor. The Rapid completed a second BRT corridor, the Lake Line, in August 2020.

In Southeast Michigan, studies for potential corridor-based transit improvements have already been completed on Woodward, Gratiot, Jefferson, Michigan, and Washtenaw Avenues, and on a rail connection between Ann Arbor and Detroit, but projects have not yet been implemented. In 2015 and 2016, locally preferred alternatives (LPAs) were adopted for Gratiot, Michigan, and Washtenaw Avenues, and the Ann Arbor-Detroit commuter rail corridor. Since these LPAs were adopted, there have been changes in transit and mobility technology and service models, transit agencies have updated services, and there have been changes in regional development, demographics, and travel patterns.

Given these changes and the strong desire the public expressed for corridor projects, the existing LPAs should be updated to reflect current conditions. RTA can also incorporate the land use and mobility framework from the MOD study to help encourage the development of transit supportive land uses and affordable housing, and to guide the design of mobility hubs. Additional planning work and funding will be required to make these projects a reality, but refining the LPAs will make the region more competitive for federal funding, and when funding becomes available, these projects will be "shovel ready."

In addition to the LPAs that have already been adopted, new corridors should be studied for longer term transit projects. These studies would require robust public engagement to determine the most appropriate improvements for these corridors, whether BRT, rail, or another mode. Figure 4-5 identifies the corridors with existing LPAs, and potential future corridors to study, including Fort Street, and Grand River, Van Dyke, and Warren Avenues, among others. These corridors demonstrate potential based on transit markets, connections to regional destinations, and ridership on existing services.

STRATEGY
07

ENHANCE

Invest in transit corridor projects

Advancing transit corridor projects will require strong partnerships between transit agencies, municipalities, planning departments, road agencies, and communities along these corridors.

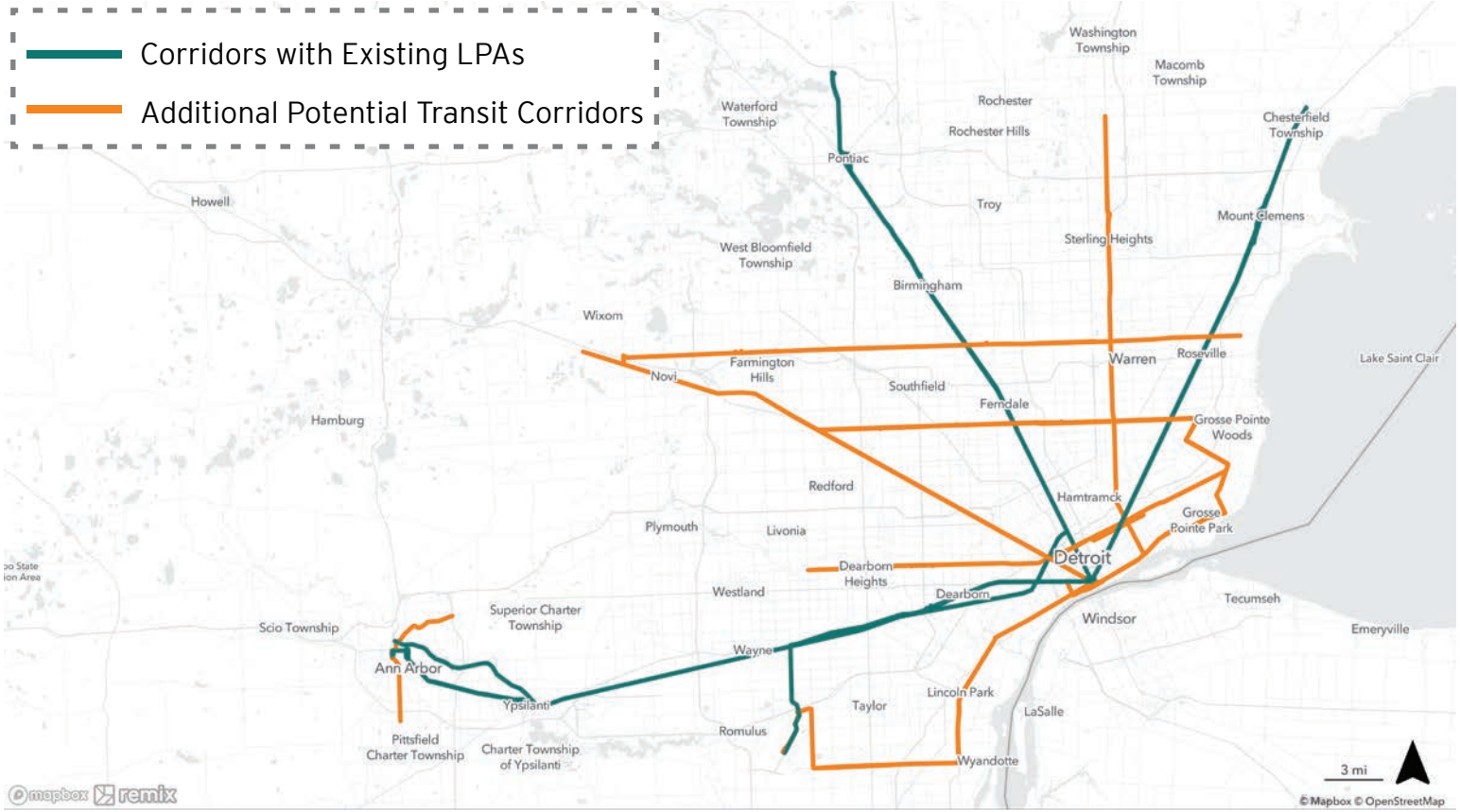
ACTIONS

- Review and update existing LPAs to reflect current conditions.
- Prioritize corridors for capital projects, and advance them through FTA's environmental review process and Capital Investment Grants (CIG) Program to apply for funding.
- Partner with local governments to develop transit supportive land use and affordable housing policies.
- Implement corridor capital projects.
- Pilot smaller-scale transit priority improvements such as those on Congress and Larned Streets identified in the 2018 “Downtown Detroit Transportation Study," and the new dedicated transit lane on Woodward Avenue.
- Identify additional potential transit corridors and create a regional corridor development plan. This plan would include alternatives analyses that would help guide decisions on the most appropriate modes, whether buses, BRT, light rail, or other services, for those corridors.

▲ The Gratiot Avenue LPA includes BRT operating in a dedicated lane in the center of the street from Downtown Detroit to M-59. The route serves 19 stations and five park-and-rides. Image from the Gratiot Avenue LPA.

STRATEGY
07
ENHANCE

Invest in transit corridor projects



▶ FIGURE 4-5: Potential Transit Corridors

STRATEGY
08

ENHANCE

Create universal service standards for ADA paratransit services and community transit providers

DDOT, SMART, and TheRide offer ADA paratransit service for people who are not able to use their fixed-route services due to disability. There are over 80 other independent providers offering transit service to seniors and people with disabilities across the region, both within and outside of DDOT, SMART, and TheRide's service areas.

While community transit providers are critical to helping seniors and people with disabilities to maintain their independence, the large number of providers can cause confusion among riders. In a survey conducted as part of the "OnHand" planning process, riders said that "identifying available services" was one of their top concerns. This is furthered because they have inconsistent operating practices, and there are variations in service offerings and policies. For example, while many offer services to seniors, the age threshold for who is considered a senior varies between 55, 60, and 65 depending on the provider. Other differences include days and hours of operation, reservation requirements and processes, and fare prices. Some of these differences are created by funding limitations: a community may not be able to fund transit at a high enough level to support service on additional days or hours, or to segments of the population. Policies and scheduling and operating practices also vary among the ADA paratransit service providers.

ACTIONS

- Work with Southeast Michigan's community transit providers to create a universal set of rider eligibility criteria, making it simpler for people to qualify for, schedule, and use services. This would help to reduce temporal gaps in the network based on different days and hours of operation.
- Work with communities to develop plans and raise funding to increase service hours and eligibility, or to address specific populations or needs.
- As funding becomes available, support the implementation of consistent hours of operation and eligibility requirements.

STRATEGY
09

ENHANCE

Streamline business and scheduling processes to enable seamless travel across jurisdictional boundaries

On fixed-route, ADA paratransit, and community transit services, one of the most common challenges is traveling to destinations across jurisdictional boundaries. This can be especially challenging for riders using ADA paratransit services. According to the "OnHand" survey, riders with disabilities face greater difficulties making cross jurisdictional trips than other riders. Providers do coordinate services to arrange for transfers, but delays can lead to missed transfers or long wait times. RTA, DDOT, and SMART are currently working toward streamlining the cross-agency coordination process through the MI Ride paratransit app pilot, but there are still improvements to be made.

Improving these trips would increase independence for people who rely on ADA paratransit service, and would improve access to jobs, essential services, social events, and other everyday needs.

ACTIONS

- Create a working group to develop programs and policies for creating seamless cross-jurisdictional travel. As defined in "OnHand," tactics might include:
  - Providing riders with taxi or TNC vouchers for these trips.
  - Assigning cross-border trips to a jointly contracted provider.
  - Consolidating ADA paratransit service regionally.
  - Implementing paratransit vehicle tracking systems so wait times can be updated in real-time.

// Case Study

In the Phoenix region, fixed-route services are operated independently by local entities, but are consistently branded as Valley Metro Paratransit and operated as a shared service. Valley Metro is the service provider with member cities contributing funds and participating in service management and oversight.[34]

STRATEGY
10

ENHANCE

Expand community transit provider services

Community transit providers offer local transportation service across the region, and are a lifeline for people in lower-density areas that do not have access to fixed-route and ADA paratransit service. Systems like NOTA, People's Express, Richmond-Lenox EMS, STAR, WAVE, WOTA, and many others provide services to seniors and people with disabilities that help them to maintain independence. Some providers also offer service to people who have low incomes, and others are open to the general public. In almost all areas identified as Transit Market 1, these are the only public transit services. This is also true in some areas in Transit Market 2 and smaller, noncontiguous Market 3 areas.

While there is a need for additional service, many community providers are unable to extend services beyond seniors and people with disabilities. If someone is not eligible for service in their area, they do not have access to public transit. Additionally, in places where services are open to the general public or individuals with low incomes, schedules and reservation requirements can be challenging for people traveling to work, or social and recreation trips. Community transit providers should expand eligibility with the ultimate goal of being open to the general public so that everyone has access to public transit. In 2016, the Village of Milford and Milford Township did this by partnering with People's Express to expand transportation services from seniors and adults with disabilities to all residents of the two communities.

ACTIONS

- Create an advisory committee for community transit providers, similar to the current Providers Advisory Committee that exists for the region's major public transit providers.
- Implement a technical assistance program to support community transit providers with planning activities, capital improvements, and grant applications that can increase capacity.
- As capital and operating funding becomes available, support the purchase additional vehicles, garages and dispatch and maintenance facilities, and the hiring of additional staff including drivers, mechanics, and administrators.

STRATEGY
11

ENHANCE

Promote and expand carpools, vanpools, and park-and-rides

In 2019, there were almost one million vanpool rides with origins and/or destinations in Southeast Michigan. MDOT, SMART, and TheRide operate 50 park-and-rides in the region that support the use of vanpools, carpools, and fixed-route transit. SMART and TheRide are studying opportunities for expanding the use of park-and-rides; SMART completed an analysis of park-and-ride services on FAST corridors, and TheRide is considering new park-and-ride services as part of its TheRide 2045 long-range planning effort.

Pooled rides help keep drivers off the road, reducing vehicle emissions and congestion. They also provide a commuting option for people who are unable to drive, if they can be picked up at their origin or travel to a meeting point. These options are available to workers in all sectors.

Carpools and vanpools work well as a commuting option for people in areas without fixed-route service, and particularly in Transit Market 1 and parts of Market 2.

ACTIONS

- Work with SEMCOG, MDOT, TheRide and employers to promote carpool and vanpool programs.
- Develop a regional park-and-ride strategy that builds on the MOD Study, SMART's park-and-ride analysis, and TheRide 2045.
- Work with transit agencies to develop additional park-and-rides and services to them.

▲ TheRide offers nine free park-and-ride lots in its service area and SMART provides 16. Image courtesy of TheRide.

//GOAL: INNOVATE
develop innovative and adaptable solutions

STRATEGIES & ACTIONS	TIMELINE	COST
12//Implement a state-of-the-art seamless regional fare system		
▸ Work with DDOT and SMART to expand Dart, and design and implement a state-of-the-art fare system.	Mid-term	$$
▸ Partner with TheRide, QLINE, and DPM to ensure they are prepared to join the fare system.	Mid-term	$$
▸ Expand the fare system to paratransit and community transit services.	Long-term	$$
13//Implement a regional trip planning and mobility management platform		
▸ Implement a Mobility as a Service (MaaS) platform that promotes seamless travel throughout the region.	Mid-term	$$
▸ Coordinate with MDOT's Office of Passenger Transportation to consider a statewide MaaS platform.	Long-term	$$
14//Implement a regional paratransit and on-demand booking and payment app		
▸ Investigate how to integrate or consolidate provider trip scheduling technologies across the region.	Mid-term	$$
▸ Extend MI Ride to community transit provider services.	Long-term	$$
▸ Integrate MI Ride with a seamless regional fare system.	Long-term	$$
▸ As funding becomes available, seek opportunities to offer scheduling same-day service.	Long-term	$$
15//Develop and implement a zero-emissions fleet transition plan		
▸ Develop a regional zero-emissions fleet transition plan.	Short-term	$
▸ Develop and submit competitive grant applications to purchase zero-emissions buses and infrastructure.	Mid-term	$

STRATEGY
12

INNOVATE

Implement a state-of-the-art seamless regional fare system

Southeast Michigan's residents have identified a seamless regional fare system as a top priority. The region's transit agencies have made great strides toward integrating their fare systems. Most notably, DDOT, SMART, and QLINE's Dart transit pass, which provides access to any of the fixed routes on those systems. Launched in 2019, Dart streamlined the fare structures of these agencies, eliminated transfer fees, and added an app-based payment option.

A modernized fare system would allow transit agencies to implement an account-based system, letting riders manage their own accounts and easily add value to their passes on computers, smartphones, or at local businesses. These systems also enable agencies to institute "fare capping," where regardless of how many individual trips a rider takes, they would never pay more than the cost of a monthly pass. This is an important equity tool because current riders who cannot afford the upfront cost of a monthly pass are penalized for paying on a ride-by-ride basis.

With the relaunch of D2A2 in October 2021, riders may desire one way to pay and make transfers between systems when traveling between Washtenaw and Wayne Counties. Expanding Dart to D2A2 and TheRide, as well as to DPM, will make these transfers easier.

In 2019, RTA completed a concept of operations for an integrated fare system, and DDOT and SMART have secured funding to advance it. The region is prepared to take the next steps toward a modern integrated fare system.

ACTIONS

- Work with DDOT and SMART to expand Dart, and design and implement a fare system that includes new hardware and software, account-based systems, fare capping, and other best practices for a state-of-the-art fare system.
- Partner with TheRide, QLINE, and DPM to ensure they are prepared to join the system in the short- or long-term.
- Expand the fare system to paratransit and community transit services.

STRATEGY
13

INNOVATE

Implement a regional trip planning and mobility management platform

Southeast Michigan has a vast network of public, private, and nonprofit entities that provide mobility service through buses, paratransit vehicles, microtransit, taxis and TNCs, carshares, vanpools, bicycles, and scooters. It can be challenging for people to know what options are available and how to use them.

Mobility as a Service (MaaS) integrates all of these options into one place: essentially, MaaS is a menu of the transportation options available in a user's area at a point in time. Apps like Transit and Moovit are MaaS platforms where users can access bus and train routes and schedules, unlock bikes and scooters, or book rides with TNCs. MaaS can be integrated with fare systems, making it possible to plan and pay for a trip in one place.

Mobility management services, such as myride2, help users navigate the transit system, but there is not a single resource where riders can access maps, schedules, and other information on all of the region's providers. Regional MaaS could also serve as the basis for a statewide system, allowing people to easily plan travel throughout Michigan.

ACTIONS

- Implement an integrated MaaS platform that promotes seamless travel throughout the region.
- Coordinate with MDOT's Office of Passenger Transportation to consider a statewide MaaS platform.

// Case Study

In the summer of 2021, the City of Pittsburgh launched two programs, MovePGH and Universal Basic Mobility, that support the City's equity principles that all residents can easily access fresh food, afford basic transportation, and travel safely without relying on a vehicle.

MovePGH is the first MaaS platform in the United States that integrates transit and shared-mobility services in one app, as well as in physical mobility hubs where riders can access a bus, bike, scooter, moped, carshare, or shared ride. These services are collaborating, instead of competing, to help people choose options that fit their needs at the moment, and foster connections between services.

Universal Basic Mobility is a pilot that addresses gaps in access to services faced by low-income residents. By providing 100 low-income residents with monthly subscriptions to use transit and shared-mobility services, this pilot will help ensure that the benefits of MovePGH are available equitably.[35]

STRATEGY
14

INNOVATE

Implement a regional paratransit and on-demand booking and payment app

The challenges of navigating the region's complex transit network can be particularly acute for people using demand-response services. Over 85 entities provide these services in Southeast Michigan, each with different service areas, hours of operation, and terminologies. Booking a trip, or even figuring out how to book one, can be a confusing experience for some riders. Myride2 helps people to understand what services are available, but the region lacks a "one click, one call" trip-scheduling tool or call center. This would remove a barrier to trip planning because a rider would not need to figure out which provider to call, or if they offer service at that time. A "one click, one call" platform would make booking a trip a relatively effortless experience.

RTA is currently piloting the MI Ride app in collaboration with DDOT and SMART. The app allows ADA paratransit riders to book trips on Connector and MetroLift. MI Ride has reduced the amount of time it takes users to schedule trips, and has made it easier for agency staff as well.

The pilot will result in lessons-learned, potential improvements, and next steps. One of major the challenges in this pilot has been integrating the application with existing scheduling software, especially since the region's transit agencies all use different technologies.

ACTIONS

- Investigate how to integrate or consolidate provider trip scheduling technologies across the region.
- Extend MI Ride to community transportation provider services, allowing passengers to schedule rides from anywhere in the region.
- As a seamless regional fare system is realized, integrate it with MI Ride to allow riders to book and pay for their trip at the same time.
- As funding becomes available, seek opportunities to allow scheduling same day service.

STRATEGY
15

INNOVATE

Develop and implement a zero-emissions fleet transition plan

Transportation is one of the largest contributors to air pollution in American cities. Public transit will play a critical role in lowering vehicle emissions and creating a more sustainable region. In additional to getting more people to ride public transit instead of driving, transit agencies can reduce pollution by replacing diesel buses that have reached the end of their useful lives with low or no emission buses.

Zero-emission buses are cleaner, quieter, and more efficient than diesel buses. However, there are a number of barriers to implementing them, including higher upfront costs for vehicles and infrastructure, and the impacts they have on operations, scheduling, and maintenance, which require additional staff training.

DDOT and SMART are anticipating to launch an electric bus pilot in early 2022. The pilot will help these agencies understand how electric buses work in their operating environments, and what improvements and trainings will be required in order to scale-up the number of electric vehicles.

Increasing the size of zero-emission fleets will require significant planning to ensure funding and infrastructure are in place, and that training is completed before buses arrive. Additionally, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act includes a provision requiring applicants to FTA's Low or No Emission Program to submit a zero-emission fleet transition plan in order to be eligible for funding.[36] A regional transition plan would help agencies set collaborative emissions reduction goals, ensure they are prepared to operate and maintain new buses, and are eligible to pursue federal funding for them. It would also create opportunities for efficient partnerships, shared infrastructure, and knowledge sharing between agencies and other community partners. The plan could also be used to prioritize projects and grants applications.

ACTIONS

- In collaboration with DDOT, SMART, and TheRide, develop a regional zero-emissions fleet transition plan.
- Develop and submit competitive grant applications to purchase zero-emissions buses and the infrastructure required to support them.

//GOAL: PARTNER
build sustainable partnerships

STRATEGIES & ACTIONS	TIMELINE	COST
16//Develop and implement a regional capital plan		
▸ Develop a regional capital plan.	Short-term	$
17//Create a task force to investigate and develop solutions for workforce training and retention challenges		
▸ Partner with transit agencies to create a regional task force to investigate the region's workforce challenges and develop strategies, programs, and partnerships to address them.	Short-term	$
▸ Expand transit workforce training programs to additional institutions and workforce development agencies in the region and incorporate trainings on new technologies, like electric vehicles.	Mid-term	$
18//Install bus shelters at existing stops across the region		
▸ Partner with transit agencies to develop a prioritized list of bus stops where shelters should be installed.	Short-term	$
▸ Seek discretionary funding to purchase and install bus shelters, and provide technical assistance to complete the necessary reviews and permitting processes.	Short-term	$
▸ Partner with cities and road agencies to streamline permitting processes and requirements for installing bus shelters.	Mid-term	$
▸ Develop regional design standards for bus shelters and bus stops.	Mid-term	$
▸ Purchase, install, and maintain new bus shelters, or provide funding to DDOT, SMART, and TheRide for that purpose.	Long-term	$$$

STRATEGIES & ACTIONS	TIMELINE	COST
19//Partner with municipalities and road agencies to make pedestrian and bikeway improvements		
▸ Partner with transit agencies and municipalities to prioritize pedestrian and bikeway improvements at stops that are the least accessible, and work with road agencies to implement improvements.	Mid-term	$$
▸ Partner with transit agencies, SEMCOG, MDOT, and county and local road agencies to develop regional standards for sidewalks, crosswalks, and bicycle infrastructure near transit stops.	Mid-term	$
▸ Seek funding to implement access to transit improvements in line with standards laid out in RTA's MOD Study.	Mid-term	$
20//Support the implementation of first and last mile options		
▸ Advocate for microtransit and micromobility to be equitably deployed across the region.	Short-term	$
▸ Partner with microtransit and micromobility providers to integrate services with a regional fare system.	Mid-term	$
▸ Support the purchase of equipment and infrastructure, such as, microtransit vehicles, bikes, and docking stations, and provide funding to operate and maintain services.	Long-term	$$

STRATEGY
16

PARTNER

Develop and implement a regional capital plan

A capital plan outlines the known improvements a transit agency needs to make in the upcoming years to maintain their assets in a state of good repair and to make strategic improvements. Capital plans also describe the amount of funding needed, the funding sources, and may include aspirational projects and funding sources (such as competitive grants).

A regional plan would help to set and coordinate regional priorities, consolidate planning and funding processes, and help RTA measure regional progress. Each transit agency has its own capital plan, but combining them into a unified regional capital plan is essential for growing Southeast Michigan's transit network. As services are expanded and enhanced across Southeast Michigan, a unified capital plan would be needed to ensure that there will be enough vehicles to operate them, and equipment and space in maintenance facilities to maintain them.

A regional capital plan is essential for RTA to be able to carry out its responsibilities as described in Public Act 387 of 2012. A coordinated capital plan would also help the region jointly apply for federal funding, or to prioritize a certain provider's needs in a given year, rather than providers competing with each other for grant funding.

ACTIONS

- Collaborate with transit agencies and community transit providers to develop a regional capital plan that incorporates the needs of all regional public transit agencies, including community transit providers.

▶ FIGURE 4-6: Major Capital Assets Owned and Operated by Large Transit Agencies

Transit Agency	Buses/Trains	Paratransit Vehicles	Stops/ Stations	Transit Centers	Maintenance Facilities
DDOT	298	*0	5,423	2	3
SMART	276	120	5,648	1	3
TheRide	104	79	1,231	2	1
DPM	10	0	13	0	1
QLINE	6	0	20	0	1
Community Providers	0	367	N/A	0	**0

*DDOT contracts paratransit service and vehicles.
**Most community providers rely on SMART, municipal departments, or local mechanics for maintenance.

STRATEGY
17

PARTNER

Create a regional task force to investigate and develop solutions for workforce training and retention challenges

In recent years, there has been a bus operator and mechanic labor shortage across the United States, and Southeast Michigan's transit agencies have been no exception. COVID-19 has increased hiring and retention challenges as employers across the country struggle to find workers. In 2019, TransitCenter identified some of the factors contributing to recruitment and retention challenges including low wages, a lack of opportunities for advancement, high stress, and a lack of schedule flexibility.[37] To address the recruitment of mechanics, DDOT has partnered with Wayne County Community College and Detroit at Work, the City's workforce development entity, to provide a 16-week diesel mechanic training that is free to qualifying Detroit residents.

On the national level, in August 2021, FTA awarded funding to support the first national Transit Workforce Center (TWC), which will provide technical assistance to transit agencies to recruit, train, and retain employees, and improve employee diversity. The TWC will also provide opportunities for current and future employees to be trained in bus electrification to ensure workers' skills stay up to date with changing technologies. While this will create opportunities for regional transit agencies to improve recruiting and retention and develop training programs, more immediate and more local solutions are needed to address the driver and mechanic shortages.

ACTIONS

- Partner with Southeast Michigan's transit agencies to create a regional task force to investigate the region's workforce challenges and develop strategies, programs, and partnerships to address them.
- Expand transit workforce training programs to additional institutions and workforce development agencies in the region, and incorporate trainings on new technologies, like electric vehicles.

STRATEGY
18

PARTNER

Install bus shelters at existing stops across the region

Bus shelters can help riders feel safer and more comfortable, and protect them from weather while they wait for their bus. One study found that the quality of a bus stop impacted how people perceived their wait times. Riders waiting at stops with shelters felt their wait was shorter than it actually was, while riders at stops with no amenities felt the wait was longer.[38]

Southeast Michiganders have identified adding bus shelters to existing stops as a top priority. Currently, only 6% of the region's over 12,000 bus stops have a bus shelter.

While they can greatly improve riders' experiences, bus shelters can be challenging for transit agencies to install and maintain. Though a standard bus shelter itself costs under $20,000, they require significant staff time and sometimes consultant support to implement. Some of the additional costs can include completing environmental reviews (if using federal funding) and applying for permits. Permitting can be a challenge because sidewalks can be under the jurisdiction of state, county, or local road agencies, each with their own permitting processes and requirements.

Maintaining an expanded bus shelter program will require sustainable funding to ensure transit agencies can keep shelters clean, clear of snow, and in good condition. DDOT is currently exploring advertising revenue as a way to help cover these costs. One challenge to keeping shelters in good condition is car crashes: DDOT currently loses an average of 11 bus shelters per year due to crashes.

ACTIONS

- In partnership with transit agencies, develop a prioritized list of bus stops where shelters should be installed, with consideration to ridership, proximity to populations with limited mobility, and equity.
- Apply for funding for bus shelters and provide technical assistance to complete reviews and permitting processes.
- Partner with cities and road agencies to streamline permitting processes and requirements for installing bus shelters.
- As long-term funding sources are identified, purchase, install, and maintain new bus shelters, or provide funding to DDOT, SMART, and TheRide for that purpose.
- Develop regional design standards for bus shelters and bus stops, including criteria for locating shelters.

STRATEGY
19

PARTNER

Partner with municipalities and road agencies to make pedestrian and bikeway improvements

According to SEMCOG's 2019 "Regional On-Board Transit Survey," 90% of transit riders walk to their stop, 1% bike, and 9% drive or are dropped off. However, accessing transit stops can be challenging in areas that lack pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, or where it is in poor condition. Well-maintained sidewalks and safe crosswalks are necessary to access transit stops, and need to be accessible to people of all ages and abilities. Only 23% of the region's crosswalks are marked, which can make crossing feel unsafe for many pedestrians. Similarly, bike lanes that are protected from traffic can help improve safety and comfort for cyclists. While the region's buses do have bike racks, stops should include safe places to lock a bike. In winter, a lack of snow removal can make accessing transit even more challenging.

SEMCOG's 2020 "Bicycle and Pedestrian Mobility Plan for Southeast Michigan" identifies equity emphasis areas, which have high proportions of populations that are more likely to rely on public transit, but lack the pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure that makes it accessible. These populations include children, seniors, low-income households, transit dependent households, and people who identify as American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, Black, or Hispanic or Latino.

Improving pedestrian and bicycle access to bus stops is critical to improving transit in Southeast Michigan, but transit agencies do not have authority over the sidewalks and bike lanes that provide access to transit stops. These improvements will require partnerships between transit agencies and road agencies, who have jurisdiction over and funding for pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, and with developers, who are often responsible for building sidewalk improvements around their projects. This will require building partnerships and balancing the priorities of multiple entities.

ACTIONS

- Partner with transit providers and municipalities to prioritize pedestrian and bikeway improvements at the stops that are the least accessible, and work with road agencies to implement improvements. Particular attention should be paid to SEMCOG's equity areas to ensure that people who rely on public transit have unrestricted access to it.
- Partner with transit agencies, SEMCOG, MDOT, and county and local road agencies to develop regional standards for sidewalks, crosswalks, and bicycle infrastructure near transit stops.
- Seek funding to implement access to transit improvements in line with standards laid out in RTA's MOD Study.

STRATEGY
20

PARTNER

Support the implementation of first and last mile options

Most people are willing to walk up to a quarter- to half-mile, about five to ten minutes, to or from a transit stop. When stops are farther away, first and last mile services can help bridge the gap between an origin or destination and a stop. Microtransit and micromobility services can provide first and last mile options. These services already exist in Southeast Michigan, and RTA should strive to make them more widely available.

FlexRide and SMART Flex offer microtransit service in certain zones, including connections to transit stops. MoGo provides bike share service in parts of Detroit and southern Oakland County. ArborBike was a seasonal bike share system in Ann Arbor, and TheRide is developing a plan to relaunch it. There are also a number of private scooter share companies operating in Detroit and Ann Arbor.

ACTIONS

- Advocate for microtransit and micromobility to be equitably deployed across different communities in the region, and to include adaptive options for people of all abilities.
- As the region works toward a seamless fare system, partner with microtransit and micromobility service providers to ensure they are part of this system, or at the least, can be easily integrated into the system in later phases. This would make using these services seamless and cost-effective for riders.
- As funding becomes available, support the purchase of equipment and infrastructure, such as, microtransit vehicles, bikes and docking stations, and provide funding to operate and maintain services.

//GOAL: FINANCE
secure long-term dedicated transit revenue

STRATEGIES & ACTIONS	TIMELINE	COST
21//Increase per capita transit spending to be on par with peer regions		
▸ Adopt *ADVANCE 2021*.	Short-term	N/A
▸ Develop a plan for a future funding initiative.	Short-term	$
22//Support provider funding initiatives and grant applications		
▸ Continue to support the region's transit providers in their funding initiatives and competitive grant applications.	Ongoing	$
▸ Provide technical assistance to large and small transit providers for pursuing, coordinating, and managing grant applications, and ensure that they align with the regional strategic goals.	Short-term	$

STRATEGY
21

FINANCE

Increase per capita transit spending to be on par with peer regions

Southeast Michigan invests far less in operating public transit than peer regions do. In 2019, the region spent $76 per capita on operating public transit, while peer regions spent an average of $211 per capita. Since 2014, per capita spending in the region has kept up with inflation, but is still lagging behind other regions. Businesses have increasingly cited proximity to transit as an important criterion for retaining a skilled workforce.

RTA does not currently raise revenue, and to do so, would need a majority of voters in the four counties to support a ballot initiative. By advocating for future funding that would support operating public transit, RTA can help bring regional transit spending in line with peer regions, and ensure Southeast Michigan can compete with them economically by offering similar levels of transit service, mobility options, and amenities.

ACTIONS

- Adopt *ADVANCE 2021*.
- Develop a plan for a future funding initiative that begins with creating an expenditure plan. This plan would build on the strategies in *ADVANCE 2021* by developing them into a prioritized list of viable projects for RTA and its regional partners to implement. The expenditure plan would determine the levels of funding required for each project. This plan is further discussed in **Chapter 5: Next Steps**.

STRATEGY
22

FINANCE

Support provider funding initiatives and grant applications

Southeast Michigan's transit providers raise funding through a number of resources, including federal and state sources, local governments, property taxes, passenger fares, and philanthropy. RTA oversees and distributes federal and state transit funding that is allocated to the region. Transit providers currently raise other types of funding on their own.

SMART and TheRide raise funding through property tax millages that must be renewed by a majority of voters every four to five years. Some community transit providers also rely on millages to support their services.

Transit providers pursue competitive grants awarded through federal and state sources, and through SEMCOG. Since 2016, DDOT and SMART have brought over $25 million in federal funding to the region through competitive applications to reconstruct DDOT's Coolidge Bus Terminal, purchase new fare technologies, pilot electric buses, and complete planning studies.

ACTIONS

- Continue to support the region's transit providers in their funding initiatives and competitive grant applications.
- Provide technical assistance to large and small transit providers for pursuing, coordinating, and managing grant applications, and ensure that they align with the regional strategic goals.

05
NEXT STEPS

Image courtesy of MoGo Detroit.

05 NEXT STEPS

Implementing Strategies

While implementing some strategies will require sustainable funding, some actions can be completed in the short- and mid-terms without it. RTA will work with Southeast Michigan's transit providers, communities, counties, and other partners to complete actions that can lead to improvements in the short-term, while working toward longer-term actions. An agency business plan will help guide these short-term actions and build capacity to implement longer-term actions when funding becomes available. RTA will develop a business plan after *ADVANCE 2021* is adopted. Completing long-term actions, especially those that increase operating costs, will require more funding, but RTA can start laying the groundwork for future projects. For example, RTA can update existing LPAs so that corridor projects are ready for implementation once funding is identified.

Funding Public Transit

ADVANCE 2021 was developed without a defined budget in order to set a strategic agenda for the future of transit that guides Southeast Michigan toward RTA's vision and goals. Some actions can be implemented with existing funding or through one-time competitive grants. RTA, its partner agencies, and local communities will work toward implementing these. However, many of the strategies and actions outlined in **Chapter 4: Planning Ahead** will require a substantial investment. New revenue sources will be needed to purchase and maintain new vehicles and technologies, build and maintain new infrastructure, and operate and sustain new services. Realizing RTA's vision will require regional consensus on how to fund public transit.

▲ BRT routes, like The Rapid's Laker Line, require large investment from federal, state and local governments to build and operate service. Image courtesy of The Rapid.

EXISTING FUNDING SOURCES

Public transit in Southeast Michigan is currently funded through federal, state, and local government sources, as well as through property taxes, passenger fares, and philanthropic contributions. At the federal level, funding is provided by FTA and FHWA through annual grant programs that are based on demographic and transit system characteristics. These characteristics are used in a formula to determine the level of funding for a metropolitan area, and so these are often referred to as “formula funds.” The federal government also provides funding through competitive grant programs. Since 2016, Southeast Michigan has been awarded over $25 million in federal grants. However, the region has not pursued large-scale grants for major corridor improvements, such as BRT projects.

Southeast Michigan received over $375 million for public transit in COVID-19 recovery funding through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES), Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA), and the American Rescue Plan (ARP). The majority of this funding is supporting the region's transit providers as they work to update service levels to meet changing needs, and keep riders and staff safe. RTA set aside $24 million of ARP funding to advance regional projects. In early 2022, RTA will work with DDOT, SMART, TheRide, DPM, and QLINE to collaboratively advance one or more of the strategies described in **Chapter 4: Planning Ahead**.

In November 2021, IIJA was signed into law, demonstrating a federal commitment to increasing investment in public transit across the country. The state of Michigan is expected to receive $1 billion in formula funding to improve public transit over the next five years, and can compete for additional federal grant funding.[39] However, capital improvements funded by IIJA will require local funding to operate and sustain improvements.

Federal funding often requires a local match, typically 20%. MDOT generally provides public transit agencies with these matching funds, and also provides operating funding through the Local Bus Operating (LBO) Program. LBO can support up to 50% of an agency's annual

operating costs, but historically provides about 30% due to current funding levels. LBO funding is raised through state gas taxes. MDOT also supports planning and technology initiatives through a competitive grant program, and provides operating funds for specialized services for seniors and people with disabilities.

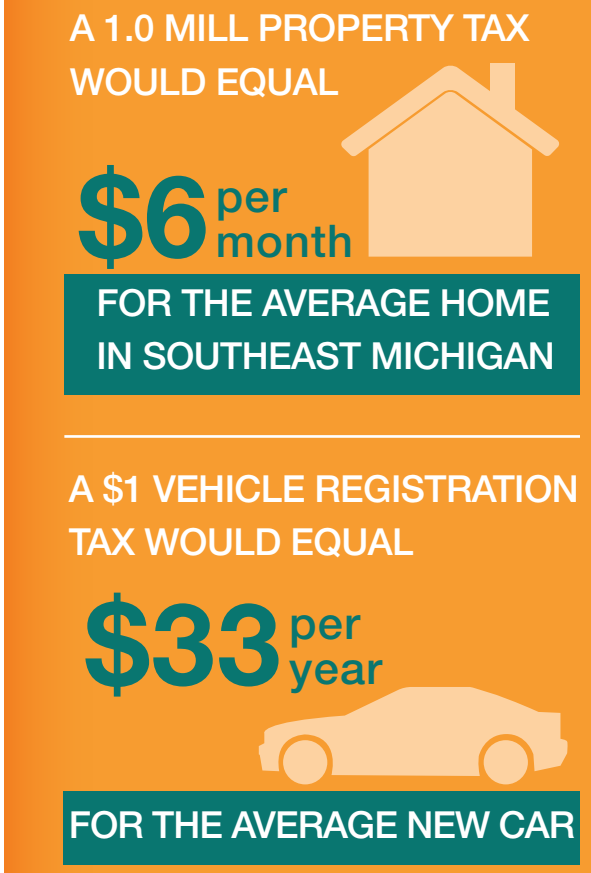
Local funding varies by agency, but passenger fares support transit across the region. DDOT and DPM's operations are funded through the City of Detroit's general fund, which has to balance multiple city priorities. SMART and TheRide raise dedicated transit funding through local property tax millages. TheRide raises additional funding through service agreements with governments outside of its millage area. Most community transit providers are supported by their local governments and many are also supported through SMART's CPP. QLINE is funded through corporate partnerships and philanthropies.

POTENTIAL FUTURE REVENUE

Current revenue is insufficient to support all of the goals, strategies, and actions in *ADVANCE 2021*. RTA is authorized by the state to raise funding for public transit through a property tax millage and a motor vehicle registration tax (see Figure 5-1). Both taxes are applied based on every $1,000 of taxable value. RTA does not currently raise revenue through either tax and, to do so, would need a majority of voters to approve a ballot initiative.

RTA is also able to apply for funding through competitive grant programs, though typically, these grants support capital projects but do not provide funding needed to operate service.

Public transit is funded differently in regions across the United States. In addition to the methods above, some common methods are local sales taxes, parking and rental car taxes, tolls, real estate transfer fees, development impact fees, and value capture. RTA is not currently authorized to generate revenue through these mechanisms, and some, like a local sales tax, would require changes to the State of Michigan's constitution.



▲ FIGURE 5-1: Average Costs of a Property Tax Millage and Vehicle Registration Tax. Sources: State of Michigan, AAA.

A FUTURE BALLOT INITIATIVE

A successful future ballot initiative starts with *ADVANCE 2021*. This plan sets a strategic agenda for regional transit, and defines broad strategies that will guide future projects, policies, and initiatives. However, many of these strategies will require additional funding to implement. The region will need to identify sustainable long-term funding to implement new and expanded services, and capital improvements. As mentioned above, RTA has two methods for raising funds, both of which must be approved by voters: a property tax millage and a motor vehicle registration tax. A potential path toward a successful ballot initiative is outlined in Figure 5-2, and will require additional planning.

▼ FIGURE 5-2: Route to a Potential Ballot Initiative.

2021

ADVANCE 2021

The RMTP sets a strategic agenda to guide future projects, policies, and initiatives.

2022

BUILDING CONSENSUS

The region will need to decide which tax mechanisms and amounts to propose in a future ballot initiative. At the same time, RTA and transit providers will develop a list of all potential projects that can advance its vision, goals, and objectives.

2023

EXPENDITURE PLAN

RTA will develop fiscally constrained scenarios that balance potential projects with the proposed funding amount. Through public engagement, a final scenario will be decided. Metrics for measuring success and advancing transit equity will be determined.

2024

POTENTIAL BALLOT INITIATIVE

Voters will decide whether to approve the scenario identified in the expenditure plan.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

After a successful ballot initiative, RTA will develop a blueprint for how and when projects will be realized.

Achieving RTA's Vision

ADVANCE 2021 sets forth a strategic agenda to guide Southeast Michigan's public transit network toward RTA's vision of ***a region with sufficient and stable funding to support improved public transit options that will advance equity by increasing accessibility; satisfy the integrated mobility needs of Southeast Michigan communities; and promote livable, healthy, and sustainable growth***. The vision, goals and strategies outlined in this plan will inform ongoing and future planning activities and projects in the region, and will be reviewed and updated annually, as needed.

To achieve this vision for public transit, a sustainable regional funding source will need to be put in place. But prior to that, some of the actions outlined in **Chapter 4: Planning Ahead** can be carried out to improve services and prepare for future funding. It is critical to achieve these early wins while laying the groundwork for long-term improvements that will implement RTA's vision and address the region's mobility challenges.

COVID-19 has reinforced the critical role public transit plays in keeping Southeast Michigan moving. People across the region have relied on transit to travel to work and to access everyday needs, such as grocery stores, pharmacies, and medical appointments. Public transit has also transported essential workers to their jobs, keeping hospitals, nursing homes and grocery stores running throughout the pandemic. A robust public transit system is key to an equitable recovery from COVID-19.

A stronger regional transit system, and therefore a stronger region, is possible in Southeast Michigan, but will require strong partnerships between RTA, DDOT, SMART, TheRide, DPM, QLINE, and the region's many community transit providers, as well as the region's communities, counties, and MDOT. RTA needs your help to improve transit and achieve its vision: stay involved, continue to share your needs and opinions, ride transit, and talk to your friends, family, and coworkers about why public transit is critical to Southeast Michigan.

STAY INVOLVED!

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ADVANCE 2021 RTA

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The RTA was created by Public Act No. 387 of 2012. Its 10-member board is appointed for three year terms by the county executives of Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties, the chair of the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners, the Mayor of Detroit, and the Governor of Michigan. The Governor's appointee serves as chair and without a vote.

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