

Annual Legislative Report

March 31, 2022

RTA

**REGIONAL
TRANSIT AUTHORITY
OF SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN**

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MESSAGE FROM THE RTA BOARD

Honorable Members of the Michigan Legislature:

The Regional Transit Authority of Southeast Michigan (RTA) is the agency charged with coordinating transit planning activities, allocating federal and state funding, and securing new regional funding in Macomb, Oakland, Washtenaw, and Wayne Counties. The RTA works in partnership with the region's transit providers and community partners to serve 82 communities in Southeast Michigan. In a typical year, 120,000 trips are made daily on public transit in Southeast Michigan, connecting people to jobs, education, services, and their communities. On average, 60,000 paratransit trips are taken daily in the region, enabling seniors and people with disabilities to reach jobs, medical appointments, shopping, and social activities.

The needs and opportunities for coordinated regional investments in Southeast Michigan's transit system have perhaps never been greater. The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted our lives while underlining transit's critical role in getting essential workers where they need to go and ensuring a sustainable, equitable recovery that betters our region's economy and quality of life. Through the American Rescue Plan Act and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, Congress has made a generational investment in our transportation system.

The RTA adopted the Advance 2021 Regional Master Transit Plan to be used as a guide to quickly set in motion the projects and strategies needed to take advantage of this opportunity. While many of the strategies outlined in this plan will require building regional consensus on how to fund public transit, many of them can be accomplished now. We must move forward with these actions to strengthen our region's transit system, which will advance equity by increasing accessibility, satisfy the integrated mobility needs of Southeast Michigan communities, and promote livable, healthy, and sustainable growth. We encourage you to read the full plan and help us advocate for a more robust regional transit system by talking to your peers about why public transit is critical to Southeast Michigan.

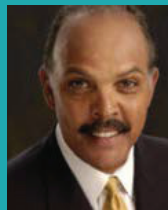
The Regional Transit Authority of Southeast Michigan (RTA) is pleased to submit its Annual Legislative Report. The report will highlight our programs and activities over the past year. The requirement for this report is contained within the RTA enabling legislation (2012 PA 387).

Sincerely,

Board of Directors, Regional Transit Authority of Southeast Michigan



Paul Hillegonds
Chair



Freman Hendrix
City of Detroit



Jon Moore
Macomb County



Donald Morandini
Macomb County



Brian Richard
Oakland County



Helaine Zack
Oakland County



Ned Staebler
Washtenaw County



Alma Wheeler Smith
Washtenaw County



June Lee
Wayne County



Erica Robertson
Wayne County

ABOUT THE RTA

The RTA was established in December 2012 under the legal authority of Michigan Public Act (PA) 387. As described in its articles of incorporation, the RTA was organized to establish and direct public transportation policy within a four-county region, which encompasses all of Macomb, Oakland, Washtenaw, and Wayne Counties, including the City of Detroit.

RTA is responsible for applying for and distributing operating and capital assistance grants to operators of public transportation within the metropolitan area, adopting a comprehensive public transportation plan for the metropolitan area, coordinating public transportation service functions between the operators of public transportation within the metropolitan area, and securing a dedicated source of local funding to sustain the long-term vision for the region.

OUR MISSION

The mission of the RTA is to manage and secure transportation resources that significantly enhance mobility options, to improve quality of life for the residents and to increase economic viability for the region. To accomplish this mission the RTA plans for and coordinates public transportation in the four-county region of Wayne, Oakland, Washtenaw and Macomb, and the City of Detroit.

OUR 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.

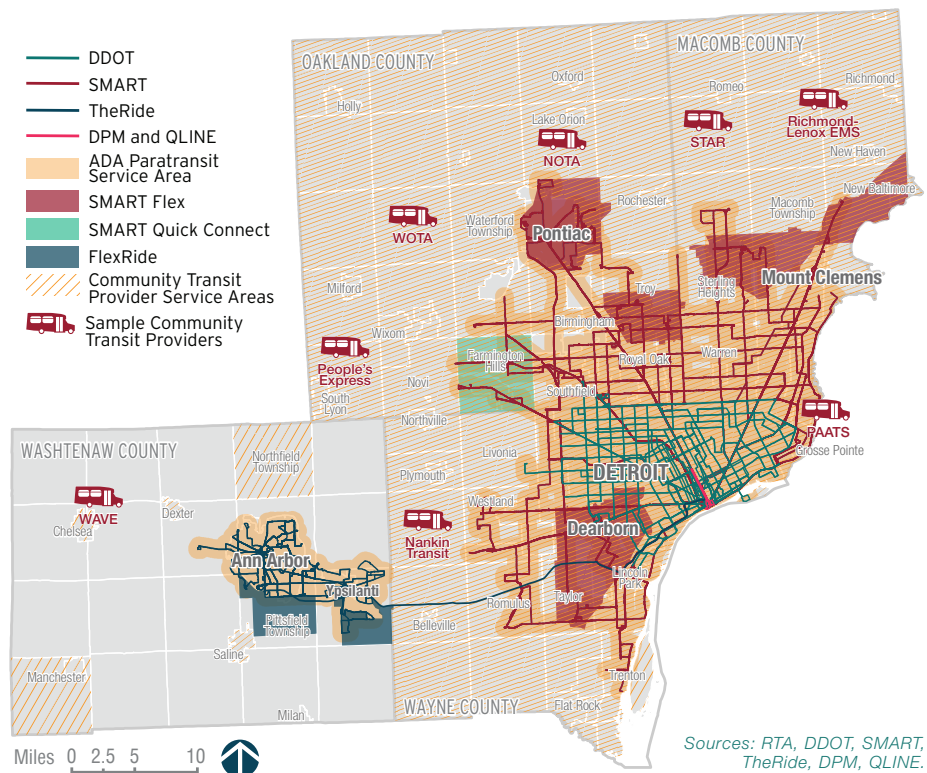
OUR BUDGET

The RTA's Fiscal Year 2022 Budget, Business Plan, and Audit information are available on the RTA website.

OUR REGION

The RTA 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. There are five major public transit agencies in Southeast Michigan that provide fixed-route public transit service: DDOT, DPM, QLINE, and SMART. DDOT and SMART 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. The region is also home to several municipally provided or coordinated local services that provide services for seniors and people with disabilities in local communities.

▼ Public Transit Service in Southeast Michigan, 2021



OUR CORE ACTIVITIES

Federal Designated Recipient: As the federally designated recipient of Federal and State funds that support transit and mobility for Macomb, Oakland, Washtenaw and Wayne Counties, the RTA must conduct its business in full compliance with Federal and State regulations and practices. RTA has maintained the core business practices, manuals and policies to remain in full compliance with federal regulations. This includes the Fiscal Year 2020 - 2022 Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) goal and Title VI Procedures.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on public transit operations throughout the Nation. As our communities recover from COVID-19, transit agencies are implementing new and enhanced measures to ensure the safety of their employees and passengers. RTA's federal funding actions over the last year were focused on the distribution of vital federal stimulus funding to support the transit providers and their customers through the COVID-19 pandemic. The transit providers continue to put the stimulus funding to use to help the region's recovery. Some highlights of what the funding has supported include:

- Operating budget support for providers that ran without fares to ensure social distancing and allow for the operators to drive safely.
- Purchase of PPE for employees and customers.
- Additional cleaning equipment.
- Vehicle improvements to further protect operators and customers, including upgrading vehicle sizes and new automated wheelchair securement systems.
- Ongoing vehicle maintenance, facility safety and security.
- Essential worker shuttle pilot programs in the City of Detroit.
- Free vaccine shuttles in participating counties.
- Extensive marketing and communications efforts focused on safe riding, mask wearing, and critical importance of transit service.

The RTA would like to work in partnership with the state legislature to maintain and expand the funding available for public transit. Potential actions that the legislature could consider would be funding the Local Bus Operating program at its full legislative ceiling, developing strategic funding programs for regional transit corridor projects, and including regional transit considerations in statewide economic development packages.

On November 16, 2022, President Biden signed the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, commonly known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), into law. BIL makes historic investments in our nation's public transportation infrastructure that will shape our future for decades to come. The RTA anticipates that this will immediately generate a 25-30% increase in the annual capital funding available by formula for the region. This funding will help to keep existing fleets, facilities, and associated infrastructure in a state of good repair, and it provides a small amount of support for ongoing planning efforts. The bulk of the BIL increases for transit provide additional funding for discretionary grant programs that focus on capital improvements. For example, BIL more than doubled the funding for the Capital Investment Grant program, which is the funding used by other regions in the nation to implement transit corridor improvements like bus rapid transit. It is important to note that these increases will only be maximized with support from the state in the form of match and coordination on projects on major urban corridors.

OUR CORE ACTIVITIES

Development of a Regional Master Transit Plan: A critical part of the RTA role in the region is to develop and annually update a Regional Master Transit Plan (RMTP). We are proud to say that the Board unanimously approved the most recent comprehensive update, Advance 2021, in December 2021. The plan sets a strategic agenda driven by public input to guide future transit planning and projects in Southeast Michigan and build on recent achievements and innovations. Advance 2021 is an aspirational but achievable vision that sets a strategic agenda to guide future transit planning and projects in Southeast Michigan and builds on recent achievements and innovations. The full [Advance 2021 Plan](#) can be viewed on the RTA website.

Advance 2021 goals are key milestones that the region must work together on to achieve the RTA's 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. The plan includes action steps within each strategy.

Expand Transit to New Places	Enhance Existing Services	Develop Innovative and Adaptable Solutions	Build Sustainable Partnerships	Secure Long-term Dedicated Transit Revenue
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.	Upgrade the frequency, reliability, comfort, safety, and speed of existing transit services to increase their value to current riders and to attract new ones.	Implement innovative programs and pilot projects to improve transit, increase flexibility, and encourage transit providers to adopt new technologies.	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.	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 systems count on to thrive.
EXPAND	ENHANCE	INNOVATE	PARTNER	FINANCE

The RTA has identified the seven key initiatives below from Advance 2021 as the key elements in our 2022 work program. These are the most important regional initiatives that the RTA can advance under BIL funding programs.

Advance regional transit corridor capital projects

Prepare a corridor project for potential federal investment

Advance regional fare modernization

Key to unlocking an integrated and coordinated mobility system

Develop a workforce development program

Necessary to have a transit specific program to retain and attract employees

Execute a regional transit technology strategic plan

Needed to make positive and proactive advancement in transit technology

Develop a bus stop strategic plan

Make access and mobility improvements to current transit routes

Develop a Zero-Emission Bus Transition Strategy

Needed to secure additional funding for zero-emission bus pilots

Develop additional strategic service pilots

Looking for ways to pilot new service types, or service in new areas

OUR CORE ACTIVITIES

Coordination with Transit Providers: The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the critical role our transit system plays in keeping Southeast Michigan moving. Our transit operators have been on the front lines safely transporting essential employees to and from work; these are the medical and service industry workers we have relied on for everyday needs throughout the pandemic. Over the last year the RTA supported the providers by providing swift access to much needed federal stimulus funding, continuing coordination through regular Provider's Advisory Committee (PAC) meetings, and continuing to develop necessary strategic planning and pilot efforts, including:



Detroit to Ann Arbor Express Bus Pilot (aka D2A2 Express)

Description: Coach service that connects Blake Transit Center in Ann Arbor to Grand Circus Park in Detroit through several roundtrips per day. Service started in October 2021. Service is managed in partnership with the Ann Arbor Area Transportation Authority.

Next Steps: The service will continue to run for the next several years under the existing pilot funding.

Regional Mobility Management

Description: RTA supports the MyRide2 website and call center, providing trip information for a services for seniors and people with disabilities throughout the region.

Next Steps: RTA intends to continue supporting this service and is looking for opportunities to grow the service to include more mobility tools for current and new users.

Coordinated Human Service Transportation Plan (aka OnHand Study) Funding

Description: First fully regional competitive call for projects totaling \$9.5 million in federal Enhanced Mobility of Seniors & Individuals with Disabilities program funds. Funding was provided to 87 projects throughout the region. The bulk of these projects were vehicle replacement and support for operations of small community transit services like North Oakland Transportation Authority, West Oakland Transportation Authority, Richmond Lenox EMS, Western Washtenaw Value Express, and Services to Enhance Potential.

Next Steps: RTA is working with the providers to develop a pilot project to fill high priority technology and service gaps for seniors and people with disabilities.

Michigan Ride Paratransit App Pilot

Description: The purpose of this app is to allow ADA paratransit customers throughout the region to book rides on multiple ADA paratransit providers. Funding for this pilot came from MDOT's Michigan Mobility Challenge program.

Next Steps: The pilot project is expected to end in 2022. RTA intends to use the learnings from this project to help the transit provider develop better technology for seniors and people with disabilities.

TRANSIT PROVIDERS

Over the last several years, the region's transit providers have improved service for riders. These improvements include:

DART CARD

A regional transit pass that provides access to any DDOT and SMART fixed-route bus, and the QLINE streetcar. Passes are active from 4 hours to 31 days and can be purchased onboard, at transit centers, online, or through the Dart app.

EZFARE

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.

FAST SERVICE

New FAST (Frequent. Affordable. Safe. Transit.) service powered by SMART offers limited stops to connect suburbs with Downtown Detroit quickly and easily. The high frequency service travels along the region's three busiest corridors at 15-minute intervals during peak operating hours.

STATE FAIR TRANSIT CENTER

The City of Detroit is constructing a new transit center as part of a large new development at the State Fairgrounds at Woodward and 8 Mile.

ELECTRIC BUS PILOT

DDOT and SMART were awarded a \$2.9 million federal grant to pilot electric buses technologies. This project will be done in partnership with DTE.

SMART FLEXSHUTTLE

SMART recently announced a two-year microtransit pilot providing dynamically-routed bus service to improve efficiency and reduce travel time. The service will operate in three high traffic areas, one each in Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties.

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.

TARGETED SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLANS

AAATA, DDOT, and SMART are all working to take detailed looks at their own systems to identify and prioritize improvements to efficiency and quality of service, and align their long term vision with the RTA's RMTP. These plans include: SMART Path Comprehensive Operations Analysis (COA) Plan and TheRide 2045. DDOT is in the early stages of completing a similar study of its network, which is anticipated to be completed in 2022.

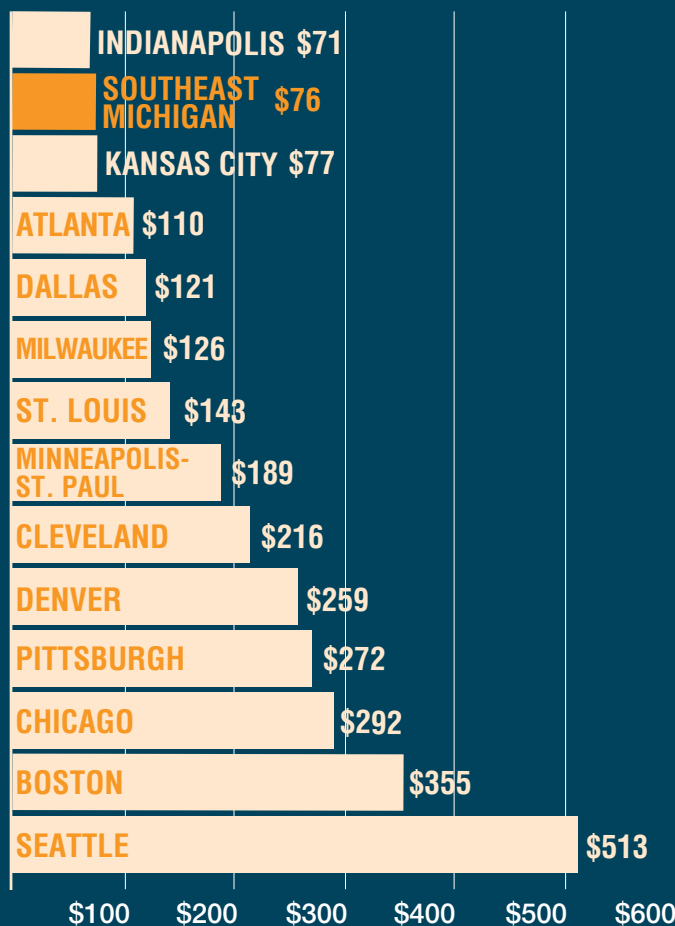


SUMMARY

Despite advancements, our region is still in need of a large sustainable investment to expand and enhance transit service, embrace emerging trends in mobility, modernize vehicles and infrastructure, and improve the customer experience.

The Detroit Metropolitan Area spends significantly less per capita on transit than peer regions, investing less than \$100 per capita on transit compared to an average of \$176 in peer regions.

While transit is a lifeline for many people in Southeast Michigan, many others—particularly minority, low-income, disabled, and older people in our region—still do not have access to the opportunities or services needed to thrive.



▲ Transit Operating Spending Per Capita in Southeast Michigan and Peer Regions, 2019

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