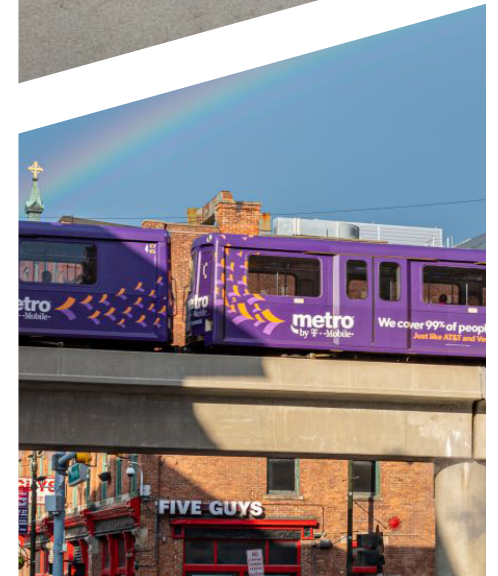


# 2023 Regional Transit Master Plan Update

February 2024



# RTA

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary ..... *[to be provided in final version]* ..... ii

Introduction ..... 1

Trends, Opportunities, & Accomplishments ..... 7

Public Engagement ..... 21

Regional Transit Priorities ..... 26

The Path Forward ..... 39



**REGIONAL  
TRANSIT AUTHORITY**  
OF SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN

1001 Woodward Avenue, Suite 1400  
Detroit, MI 48226  
313-402-1020

rtamichigan.org  
info@rtamichigan.org

The Regional Transit Authority of Southeast Michigan (RTA) believes the people and communities of Southeast Michigan deserve a more equitable, reliable, and effective public transit system. An accessible transit system is critical public infrastructure that is necessary to foster a livable, climate-resilient, and thriving region. A champion for everyone, RTA envisions Southeast Michigan as a welcoming place where all people can enjoy access to opportunity, recreation, and community through connected transit.

RTA develops regional transit plans, coordinates a complex network of local service providers, accelerates pilot projects and programs, and distributes public transportation funds regionally.

RTA has a 10-member Board of Directors appointed by the Governor of Michigan, the Mayor of Detroit, the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners Chair, and Executives of Macomb, Oakland, and Wayne Counties. Serving a unique role in the region, RTA pools resources and generates ideas to solve decades-long public transit challenges in Southeast Michigan and tackles difficult shared problems that riders have identified as deficiencies in the regional network.

By plugging these gaps, RTA advances transit as a more equitable, reliable, and inviting mode of transportation for all people in the region and paves the way for future shared mobility developments.

This document fulfills the requirements to annually update the regional transit plan as outlined in the Regional Transit Authority Act, Public Act 387 of 2012.

The preparation of this document was financed in part through: cooperation with the Department of Transportation; the Federal Transit Administration; and the participation of the Michigan State Transportation Commission. This document was prepared in February 2024 for the Regional Transit Authority of Southeast Michigan.

# INTRODUCTION

# INTRODUCTION

The Regional Transit Authority of Southeast Michigan (RTA) has spearheaded and led the regional transit planning effort for the past decade and is now striving to secure wrap-around funding opportunities to support a robust transit system for Southeast Michigan. In this update to the Regional Transit Master Plan (RTMP), RTA reviews recent progress made by transit agencies and mobility service providers, and considers national trends that transit agencies are responding to. The RTMP also outlines the consolidated list of 10 regional transit priorities, distilled from the previous 23 strategies, that are designed to lead the way into a future of high quality public transit. These priorities are informed by public engagement RTA conducted as part of the RTMP process, and are coordinated with the region's transit providers.

RTA's plans and projects set a path for critical public transit enhancements and prepare the region for rapid transit routes that connect Detroit and the four counties of Macomb, Oakland, Washtenaw, and Wayne. A robust regional transit system is critical for growing both the region and the state's population and economy. Dedicated funding to operate services and build transit infrastructure will be required in order to fully implement such a system.

## RTA's Role

RTA plans, funds, coordinates, and accelerates regional transit services, projects, and programs in Southeast Michigan, which comprises all of Macomb, Oakland, Washtenaw, and Wayne Counties, including the City of Detroit (see Figure 1). Within these roles, RTA is responsible for leading regional transit planning, developing and implementing new services, allocating federal and state funding to transit service operators, and securing new regional funding sources for public transit. Since it was established in 2012, RTA has led the development of several plans, studies, and discretionary grant applications, supported regional coordination initiatives, and developed and launched pilot services and technologies. Some of the projects RTA has led include the reFlx service pilot, which was the precursor of FAST, the Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation's (SMART) limited stop bus service, the Michigan Ride Paratransit app, Detroit to Ann Arbor Express Bus Service ([D2A2](#)), the ongoing mobility wallet pilot



Figure 1: RTA's role in Southeast Michigan's regional transit system.

project, and with Detroit to Airport Express service, which will begin in spring 2024.

RTA is responsible for annually allocating transit funding provided by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) to Southeast Michigan's transit agencies and community transportation services. In 2023, RTA allocated over **\$200 million** from these sources to support transit service in the region.

Subject to voter approval, RTA has the authority to levy a property tax and a motor vehicle registration fee to fund investments in transit service and infrastructure. Though RTA does not currently raise revenue through either of these mechanisms, additional funding is key to improving transit in Southeast Michigan.

RTA's vision is **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 RTMP guides RTA and its partners, such as transit agencies, community transit providers, nonprofit organizations, and government entities, toward achieving this vision.

### The RTMP

RTA updates the RTMP annually to document Southeast Michigan's regional transit priorities, which guide projects and investments going forward. The 2023 update builds upon the 2022 RTMP update, incorporating new public and stakeholder feedback and condensing

### RTA'S GOALS



#### FUND TRANSFORMATIVE MOBILITY

Position Southeast Michigan for economic success by increasing funding and aligning regional policy advocacy.



#### IMPROVE EXISTING SERVICES

Upgrade the frequency, reliability, comfort, safety, and speed of existing transit services, including fixed-route and demand-response services.



#### EXPAND TRANSIT COVERAGE

Connect more people to more destinations in Southeast Michigan through an expanded regional transit system with a focus on expanding access for equity populations.



#### INNOVATE RESILIENT PROJECTS

Implement expansion programs through active coordination and partnership with local transit providers and nonprofits.



#### SUSTAIN FUTURE PROGRAMS

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

Figure 2: RTA's goals guide the regional priorities outlined in this RTMP.

23 strategies into 10 consolidated and focused investment priorities. It is also an opportunity to celebrate recent accomplishments, consider national and local trends in the transit industry, and realign goals, priorities, and next steps for the future of transit in the region.

Like the previous versions, the 2023 RTMP Annual Update is grounded by five goals that support RTA's vision: Fund, Improve, Expand, Innovate, and Sustain (see Figure 2). The RTMP newly identifies 10 regional investment priorities that support these goals and the vision; however, this is a strategic document and it is tied to a budget. **A critical next step in advancing regional transit is to identify sustainable regional funding sources and develop an expenditure plan that identifies specific projects to be funded over a long-term period.**

## Southeast Michigan's Transit System

Southeast Michigan has a large transportation network that covers the majority of the region, though there are some gaps where transit service is not available, or is restricted to certain populations, such as seniors or people with disabilities. Available services range from fixed-route bus and rail, demand-response service (origin to destination services such as paratransit, dial-a-ride, on-demand, and microtransit), micromobility, and

### RTA'S TRANSIT ECOSYSTEM

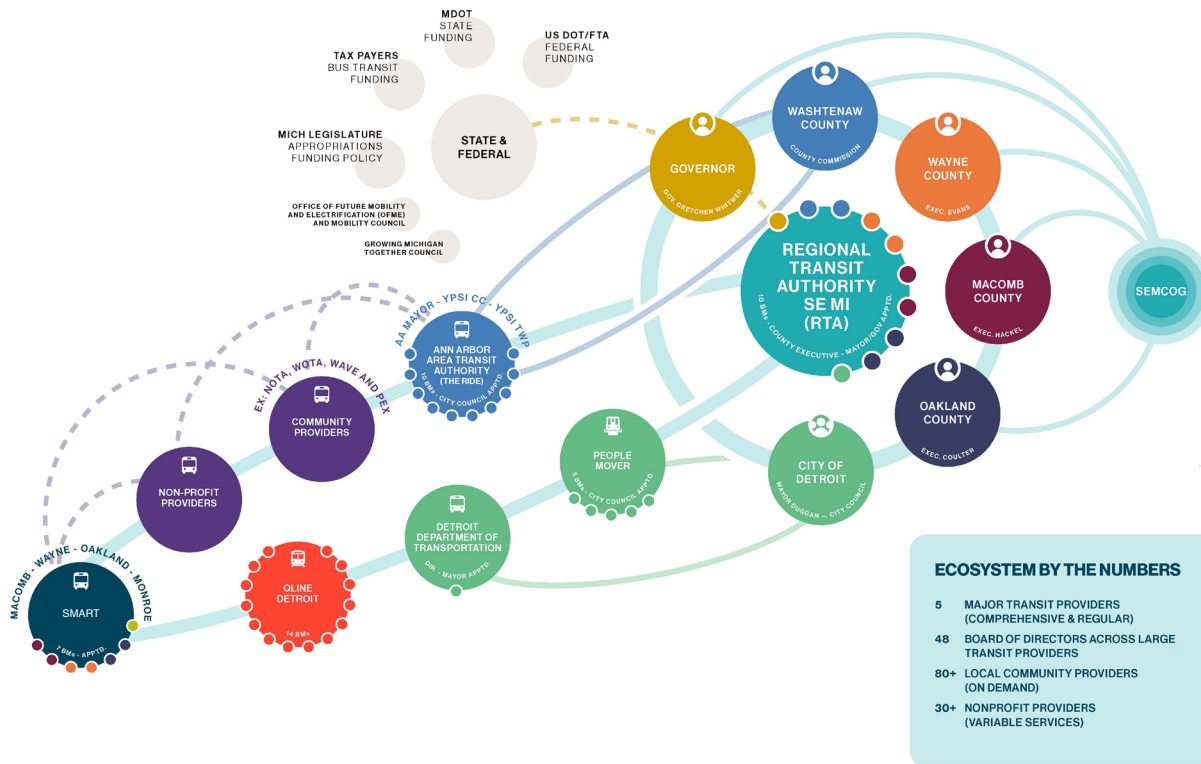


Figure 3: RTA operates within a complex transit ecosystem that comprises transit agencies, mobility service providers, and multiple levels of government.

carpool and vanpool services. These are offered through public transit agencies, community-sponsored transportation services, institutional- and employer-sponsored transportation, for-profit companies, and other providers. Some of these options are available to the general public, and others are geared toward specific populations, such as people aged 65 and over and people with disabilities, students, or veterans. A map of public transit service areas is shown in Figure 4.

RTA operates within a complex transit ecosystem that comprises transit agencies, mobility service providers, and multiple levels of government (see Figure 3). RTA partners with many of these entities to plan and coordinate services, fund improvements, and increase awareness of existing transportation options.

### Public Transit Agencies

RTA is the umbrella organization that connects the five public transit agencies that operate fixed-route bus or rail service in the region: the Ann Arbor Area Transportation Authority (AAATA, also known as TheRide), Detroit Department of Transportation (DDOT), Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation (SMART), Detroit Transportation Corporation (DTC, operating as the Detroit People Mover [DPM]), and M-1 RAIL (operating as QLINE). RTA and M-1 RAIL are currently considering RTA acquiring QLINE and managing its operations.

### PUBLIC TRANSIT SERVICES IN SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN

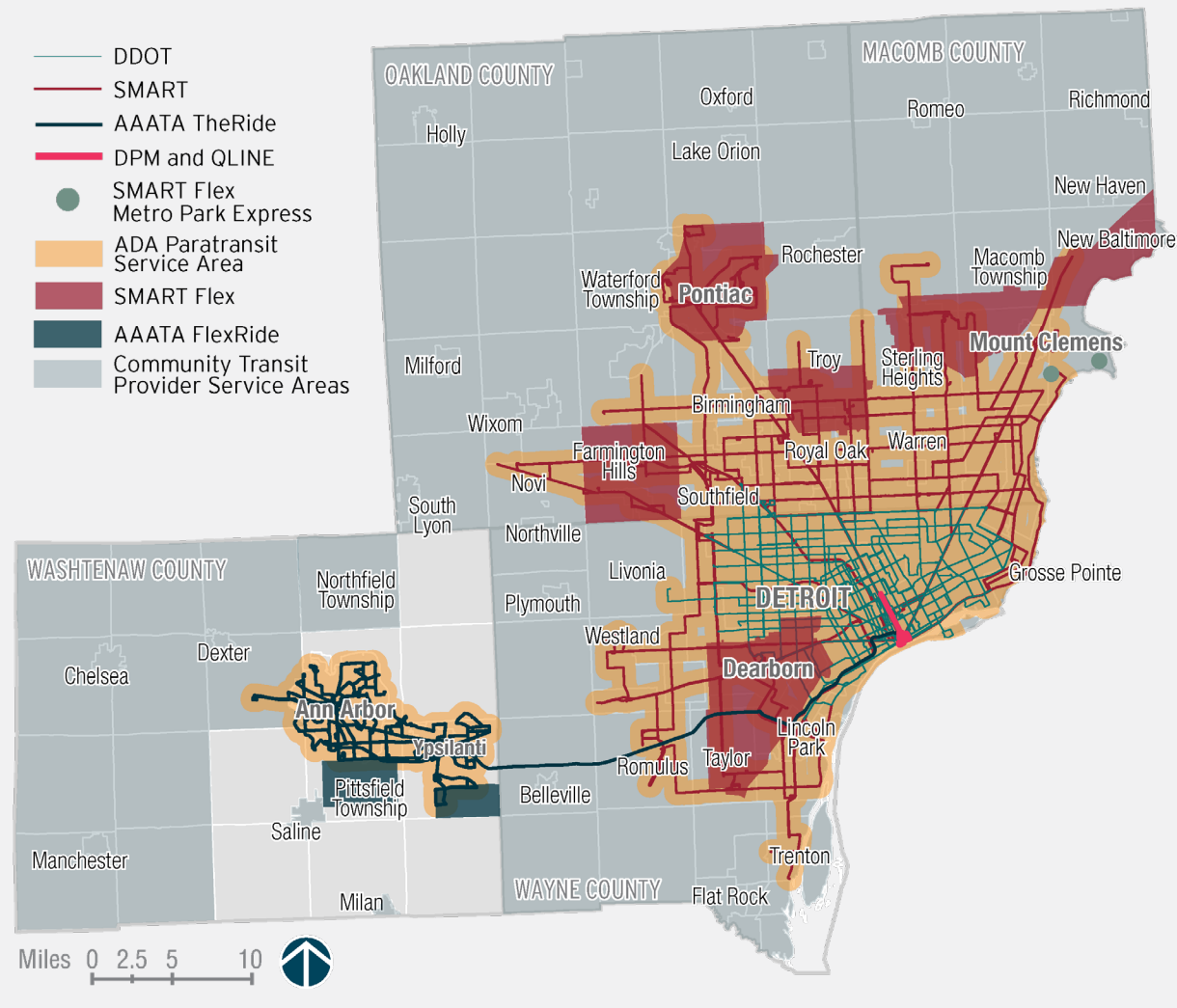


Figure 4: In Southeast Michigan's four-county region, public transit is available in most places through bus, rail, demand-response, microtransit, and other services. While some transit services are fully open to the public, others provide for the specific needs of certain populations, such as people aged 65 and over and people with disabilities.

DDOT, SMART, and TheRide also operate Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) complementary paratransit services for people with disabilities who are unable to ride bus or rail services. These are pre-scheduled trips that take a rider directly from their origin to their destination. SMART and the TheRide offer additional demand-response and other services with broader eligibilities. With \$2 million in funding from RTA, in 2024, DDOT will provide same-day paratransit service that goes beyond federal requirements, improving access to transit (see Figure 5 for a brief description of services and follow the links to agency websites for more information). D2A2, the Detroit to Ann Arbor Express Bus Service, is operated by RTA and was started in partnership with TheRide. DPM and QLINE both operate rail service in the City of Detroit.

Beyond Southeast Michigan, Amtrak, Flint's Mass Transit Authority (MTA), Port Huron's Blue Water Area Transit, Livingston County's Livingston Essential Transportation Service (LETS), Transit Windsor, various coach bus services, and other providers offer connections to other regions.

### Mobility Navigation

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 (AAA1-B) [myride2](#) program (which is funded through RTA), United Way for Southeastern Michigan's 2-1-1 helpline, and the [AARP Ride@50+ Washtenaw County](#) offer mobility management services for navigating transit options in Southeast Michigan.

### Micromobility

Micromobility services, such as bikeshare and scootershare, are options for shorter trips and traveling to or from bus stops and train stations. [MoGo](#) is the Detroit area's bikeshare system, and currently has 83 stations in Detroit and southern Oakland County. In 2024, MoGo plans to add up to 20 new stations in Detroit. In 2023, people took almost 100,000 rides on MoGo. There are also private companies operating e-scooters in Detroit and e-scooters and e-bikes in Ann Arbor.

### Community-Sponsored Transportation Services

In addition to the fixed-route agencies, there are over 80 community-sponsored transit providers serving areas across Southeast Michigan.



[DDOT](#) provides fixed-route bus service and ADA paratransit service throughout Detroit and in portions of neighboring communities, including Dearborn, Hamtramck, Highland Park, Livonia, and Southfield.



[SMART](#) provides fixed-route, ADA paratransit, demand-response, and microtransit services in all of Macomb County and portions of Oakland and Wayne Counties.



[TheRide](#) provides fixed-route, airport, ADA paratransit, demand-response, and microtransit services in the Greater Ann Arbor-Ypsilanti area. In partnership with RTA, TheRide offers D2A2 service.



The [Detroit People Mover](#) is a fully automated rail system that runs on an elevated single-track loop around Downtown Detroit.



[QLINE](#) is a 3.3-mile streetcar serving 12 locations along Woodward Avenue including Downtown Detroit, Midtown, and New Center.

Figure 5: Southeast Michigan's public transit agencies.



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. RTA awards annual funding from FTA's Section 5310 Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities grant program to support these community-sponsored transportation services. In 2023, RTA awarded over \$12 million to 29 service providers.

Community-sponsored transportation service providers range from independent systems, like, North Oakland Transportation Authority (NOTA), Peoples' Express (PEX), the Rochester Older Persons' Commission (OPC), Western Oakland Transportation Authority (WOTA), and Western-Washtenaw Area Value Express (WAVE), 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 services. There are currently 76 communities participating in SMART's CPP, including Nankin Transit, Pointe Area Assisted Transportation (PAATS), Richmond-Lenox EMS, Senior Transportation with Advanced Reservations (STAR), Transportation of Southfield Seniors (TOSS), and many others.

### Institutional and Employer Transportation

Some institutions and employers offer transit services to their students, staff, and visitors. The largest of these systems is the University of Michigan's bus service, which operates 13 bus routes and provided 4.3 million trips in 2022.<sup>1</sup>

### Nonprofit Agencies

A number of nonprofit organizations in the region provide a range of transportation to specific populations, or for specific types of trips. RTA provides funding to nonprofit agencies through its FTA Section 5310 Program. In 2023, RTA provided funding to Freedom Road Transportation Authority, Oakland Community Health Network, and PEAC, among others.

### Carpool and Vanpool

MDOT and TheRide sponsor MichiVan and VanRide, respectively, which are commuter vanpool services. The Southeast Michigan Council of Governments' (SEMCOG) [Southeast Michigan Commuter Connect](#) is a website where people can plan trips and match with carpools and vanpools.



Figure 6: People often think of public transit as buses and trains, but it also includes specialized services that take people directly to and from their jobs, medical appointments, schools, grocery stores, or other essential services. In lower density areas, these services are more effective at meeting local needs. Image Credit: SMART.

# TRENDS, OPPORTUNITIES, & ACCOMPLISHMENTS

# TRENDS, OPPORTUNITIES, & ACCOMPLISHMENTS

In May of 2023, the US government ended the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency, marking the end of the pandemic, which had an enormous impact on how people moved around in day-to-day life.<sup>3</sup> As the world discovers what "normal" looks like coming out of the pandemic, the transit industry is considering how to equitably serve riders and communities, respond to labor shortages, and address funding deficits. Successful approaches to meet these challenges include embracing new technologies, focusing on travel needs beyond the nine-to-five commute, and investing in bus rapid transit (BRT) and transit-oriented development (TOD). Through the annual RTMP update, RTA considers how these industry trends as well as recent progress and accomplishments impact prioritization of resources going forward.

## Major Trends in Public Transit

### The Post Pandemic Transit Landscape

Nationally and locally, transit ridership has not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels, though it is beginning to recover. COVID-19 had a huge impact on transit service with ridership declining as people left their homes less often and many office workers began working from home. As of the end of 2023, national transit ridership was at 77 percent of pre-pandemic levels.<sup>4</sup> In calendar year 2019, people in Southeast Michigan took over 42.1 million transit trips. In 2023, people rode transit over 22.8 million times, 54 percent of pre-pandemic ridership (see Figure 7).<sup>5</sup> Ridership recovery has varied by mode and agency, and some US transit systems have even exceeded pre-pandemic ridership. Improving service reliability and on-time performance can help increase ridership, but can be challenging in the face of the national transit workforce shortage. Investments like bus lanes, signal priority, and high frequency services can also help boost reliability.

Work from home policies in some employment sectors became popular during the pandemic, resulting in lower transit ridership. Some expect this trend to reverse as many employers are asking workers to return to

TRANSIT RIDERSHIP, CALENDAR YEARS 2019-2023

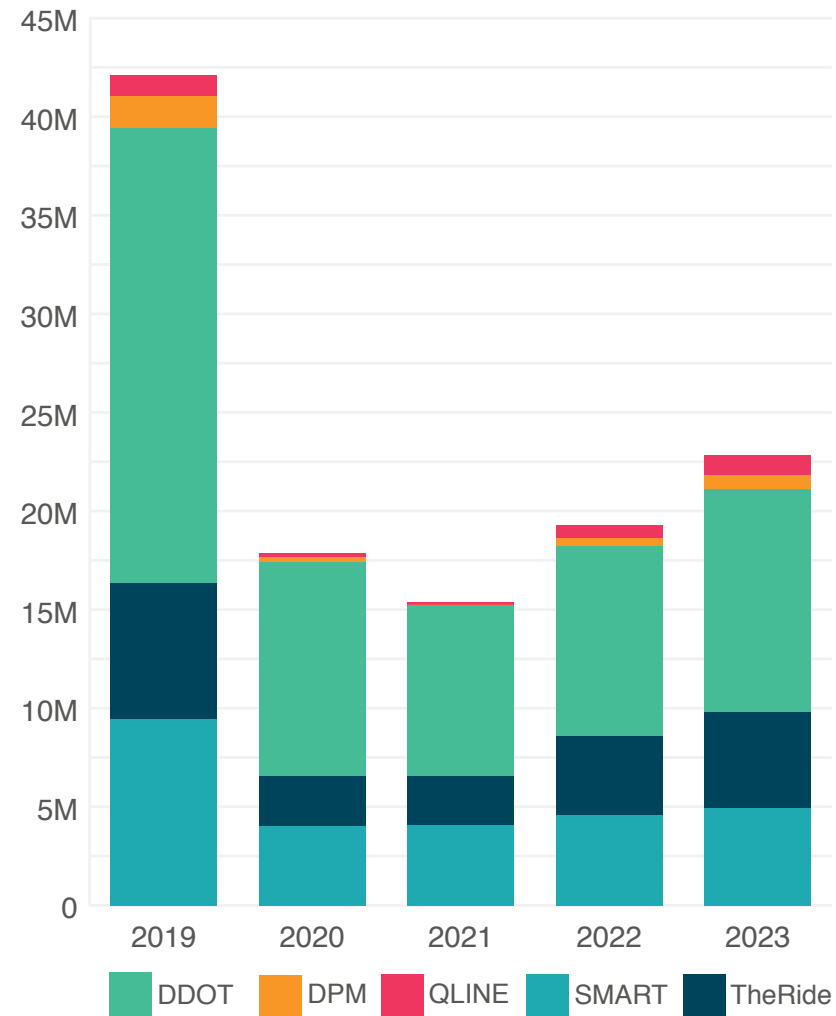


Figure 7: In 2019, people took over 42 million trips on public transit in Southeast Michigan. Ridership declined as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and changing worksite policies, but has been rising in the last two years. Source: National Transit Database.

the office and enforcing in-person work policies.<sup>6</sup> As of October 2023, 24 percent of Michigan households had someone working from home at least once a week, compared to more than 36 percent in August 2021.<sup>7</sup> In Downtown Detroit, 45 percent of daily workers have returned compared to 14 percent in April 2020.<sup>8</sup>

The pandemic also brought to focus those essential workers who are not able to work from home, and the role they play in keeping Southeast Michigan's economy going. Many of these workers do not have nine-to-five work schedules and do not work in downtowns. Public transit is an essential service for many essential workers, but transit has not always prioritized their travel patterns.

Additionally, most trips are not work-related and since the pandemic, trips have been more spread out throughout the day rather than during rush hours.<sup>9</sup> According to the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) 2022 National Household Travel Survey, 21.9 percent of total trips and 34.5 percent of transit trips were to or from work or work related.<sup>10</sup> According to SEMCOG's 2019 *On-Board Transit Survey* data, 53.2 percent of transit trips in the RTA region were work-related.<sup>11</sup> The higher proportion of work-related transit trips in Southeast Michigan may indicate that there is a greater need for transit services to better accommodate non-commute trips. One way to achieve this might be increasing service throughout the day, in the evenings, and on weekends. Helping people travel more easily to go shopping and run errands will support riders and the economy.


COVID-19's long-term impacts on cities, work policies, and travel patterns will take time to understand, but in Southeast Michigan, transit agencies are monitoring trends, listening to riders, and planning services that address transportation inequities and meet current and future needs.

### Overcoming Workforce Challenges

Transit agencies in Southeast Michigan and across the country are facing hiring and retention challenges, further intensified by the pandemic. Labor shortages have made it harder to operate scheduled service and to implement planned service improvements. Challenges in workforce retention include the aging driver workforce, changing skills sets related to alternative power transitions, and lengthy application, training, and








Figure 8: Transit agencies in Southeast Michigan are hard at work to hire and train new employees. Bus operators go through a robust training and licensing course, and are celebrated at graduation. Image Credit: City of Detroit.



## TRANSIT AGENCIES ARE HIRING!

Click the agency logos to apply for available positions.

---

licensing processes. In 2022, 43 percent of transit industry workers were over 55, compared with 24 percent in all industries. As a large number of transit workers get closer to retirement age, transit agencies will need to recruit new employees to continue operating services.<sup>12</sup> Nationally, the number of jobs available for transit and intercity bus drivers is expected to increase by 21 percent by 2030, which is a higher rate of job growth than most other occupations.<sup>13</sup>

Agencies across the US are implementing strategies to boost recruitment and retention, including rolling hiring processes, increased collaboration between human resources and operations departments, more recruiting staff, hiring incentives, improved marketing, simplified descriptions of jobs and benefits packages, career pathways programs, and programs to help workers manage stress and burnout.<sup>14</sup>

Transit agencies have the opportunity to foster long-term career opportunities for staff, including advancement from drivers and mechanics to management roles, through communications of these opportunities as well as incentives. Career fairs and increased marketing of open positions can help agencies reach job seekers, such as SMART's Drive a Bus with Us career fair in June of 2023, where potential candidates could try driving fixed-route and paratransit vehicles.<sup>15</sup>

### Funding Public Transit Operations

For some transit agencies, fares represent a significant portion of operating revenues. Reduced ridership since the pandemic has led to decreased fare revenue. FTA provided transit agencies with COVID-19 relief funding to ensure transit services could continue to operate, keeping the economy going. As this funding runs out, transit agencies, cities, and advocates around the country are considering alternative revenue sources to maintain, improve, and expand public transit service, and to help them catch up on the backlog of projects that have been underfunded for decades. Investing in public transit supports the regional economy; In Southeast Michigan, every dollar invested in transit generates two dollars in economic returns, making transit a good investment in the regional economy.<sup>16</sup> Increasing funding is critical to improving service, which will lead to increasing ridership: **when transit works for people, they take it.**

### SPENDING AND RIDERSHIP IN THE TOP 25 UZAS, 2022

Urbanized Area	Population	Per Capita Operations Expenditures	Per Capita Ridership
New York-Jersey City-Newark, NY-NJ <sup>‡</sup>	19.4M	\$815	141
Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim, CA	12.2M	\$244	29
Chicago, IL-IN <sup>‡</sup>	8.7M	\$308	33
Miami-Fort Lauderdale, FL	6.1M	\$167	14
Houston, TX	5.9M	\$115	10
Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, TX	5.7M	\$122	8
Philadelphia, PA-NJ-DE-MD	5.7M	\$300	35
Washington-Arlington, DC-VA-MD <sup>‡</sup>	5.2M	\$562	37
Atlanta, GA	5.1M	\$119	11
Boston, MA-NH	4.4M	\$415	48
<b>Southeast Michigan*</b>	<b>4.1M</b>	<b>\$70</b>	<b>5</b>
Phoenix-Mesa-Scottsdale, AZ	4.0M	\$96	9
Seattle-Tacoma, WA <sup>‡</sup>	3.5M	\$482	35
San Francisco-Oakland, CA <sup>‡</sup>	3.5M	\$655	50
San Diego, CA	3.1M	\$143	21
Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN	2.9M	\$199	16
Tampa-St. Petersburg, FL	2.8M	\$75	7
Denver-Aurora, CO	2.7M	\$232	21
Riverside-San Bernardino, CA	2.3M	\$68	3
Baltimore, MD <sup>‡</sup>	2.2M	\$340	23
Las Vegas-Henderson-Paradise, NV	2.2M	\$114	19
St. Louis, MO-IL	2.2M	\$136	9
Portland, OR-WA	2.1M	\$289	27
San Antonio, TX	2.0M	\$113	13
Sacramento, CA	1.9M	\$120	6
Average		\$252	25
Average Without Outliers**		\$151	15

Figure 9: Of the 25 most-populous urbanized areas (UZAs) in the US, Southeast Michigan spends the second lowest per capita on transit operations and has the second lowest per capita ridership. Source: National Transit Database.

\*Southeast Michigan includes the Detroit and Ann Arbor UZAs.

\*\*The average excludes outliers in terms of per capita spending, which are marked with a double dagger symbol "‡".

Compared to peer regions, Southeast Michigan spends less per capita operating public transit, which results in less service and lower ridership. Investing in transit service leads to more people using it and greater vitality for the region. Southeast Michigan comprises two urbanized areas (UZAs), Detroit and Ann Arbor. Combined, Southeast Michigan is the eleventh most-populous region in the US (Detroit is twelfth on its own). Of the 25 largest UZAs, Southeast Michigan spends the second least per capita on public transit, followed by Riverside-San Bernardino, California, and the least of the top 15 biggest UZAs (see Figure 9). It is not a coincidence that Southeast Michigan also provides the second lowest number of vehicle revenue miles (a measure of how service is provided) per capita and has the second lowest transit ridership per capita. In terms of total ridership, Southeast Michigan also trails behind its peers as third lowest.

On average, the top 25 largest UZAs spend \$252 per capita on transit operations. Removing transit intensive cities such as New York, Chicago, Washington DC, Boston, Seattle, San Francisco, and Baltimore, average peer per capita spending is \$151, more than double Southeast Michigan's.

Southeast Michigan also spends less compared to its Midwestern peers, and has the second lowest per capita spending and ridership (see Figure 10). The region also has the third-lowest per capita vehicle revenue miles. Additionally, Cincinnati is the only other Midwestern peer area that lacks regional rail or bus rapid transit (BRT).

FTA provides grants for capital projects, but does not typically provide operating funding, which is a local responsibility. In Southeast Michigan, local funding

PER CAPITA OPERATIONS EXPENDITURES AND RIDERSHIP, SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN AND PEER REGIONS, 2022

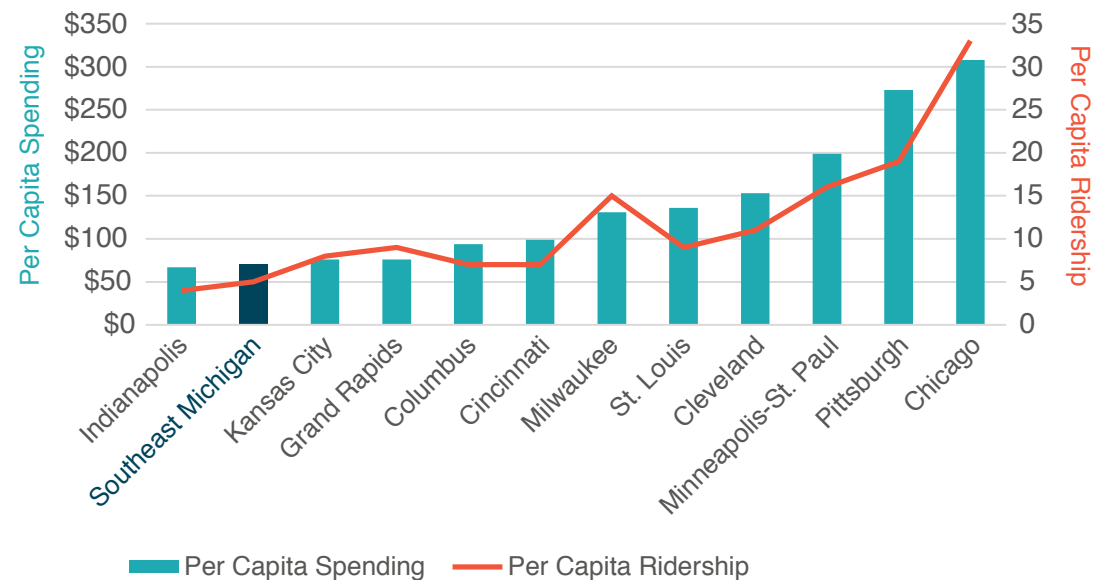


Figure 10: Southeast Michigan spends less per capita operating public transit than peer regions, and has per capita lower ridership. Source: National Transit Database.

sources vary by agency, but are typically provided through property taxes and municipal general funds. A portion of an agency's expenditures are supported by MDOT's Local Bus Operating (LBO) Assistance Program, which can legally provide up to 50 percent of an urban agency's operating expenses, but given funding levels, is typically closer to 30 percent.

Across the US, transit agencies use an array of revenue sources, but sales taxes are the most common source of local funding.<sup>17</sup> In Michigan, local option sales taxes are not currently allowed by the state constitution and the state sales tax is capped at six percent.

In 2022, the greater Ann Arbor-Ypsilanti area and Oakland County approved millages that will increase capital and operating funding for transit. **Despite these measures, additional long-term and sustainable funding will be required to complete transformational transit projects in the region.**

### Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) and Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)

Transit services support equitable community development through TOD, which prioritizes denser, mixed-use, walkable communities that allow people to get around their neighborhoods without needing a car. High-quality transit service, improved streetscapes, placemaking, easy access to other mobility services, and reduced parking requirements make development more feasible and facilitate the inclusion of affordable housing. TOD can create opportunities to generate revenue that supports transit service through tax increment financing (TIF) or joint developments where a transit agency and developer partner on the investment and the profits.

Community investments can sometimes lead to gentrification in the longer term. But when done sustainably, TOD can help support development while keeping communities in place and increasing access to opportunities. The Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority (CapMetro) in Austin, Texas is currently leading an Equitable TOD (ETOD) study to ensure their planned rapid transit projects will "focus on equity, prioritize underrepresented voices, [and] align transit and housing strategies across multiple agencies."<sup>18</sup> TOD requires strong partnerships with government entities that control zoning, land use, and housing policies. Transit agencies across the country are partnering with other levels of government and communities to create stronger and more equitable neighborhoods through



Figure 11: The East Liberty TOD along the Martin Luther King Jr. East Busway in Pittsburgh, a bus-only highway that operates BRT service. The TOD project improved bus stops, created 360 housing units and 361 jobs, and increased ridership at bus station by six percent.<sup>2</sup> Image Credit: Pittsburgh Regional Transit.

TOD. In 2020, RTA completed the [Mobility-Oriented Development \(MOD\) Study](#), which provides a framework for coordinating land use and mobility strategies to guide TOD along regional corridors.

Rapid transit services such as subways, light rail lines, and BRT support TOD. BRT is a bus-based service that mimics many of the features of rail, such as farther apart stops, stations with level-boarding platforms, transit signal priority, and dedicated lanes. Cities across the US are increasingly deploying BRT to provide frequent and reliable transit service and to support TOD. Fixed guideway transit services like BRT have been correlated with metropolitan area job and gross domestic product (GDP) growth.<sup>19</sup> Local business leaders like Dan Gilbert of Rocket Companies support rapid transit services as a necessary strategy to attract talent to the region.<sup>20</sup>

BRT may be an effective strategy to increase transit ridership and encourage community development in Southeast Michigan. RTA has been accelerating BRT projects by analyzing major corridors to gain an understanding of their competitiveness for grant funding through the FTA's Capital Investment Grants (CIG) Program, which provides funding for rapid transit projects. Building on this analysis, in Fall 2023, RTA led a regional application called *Advancing Corridors for Transit: the Neighborhood-Oriented Way (ACT NOW)* to the US Department of Transportation's (USDOT) Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods (RCN) Grant Program. If awarded, the grant will fund the design and environmental review of BRT service on Woodward Avenue and the deployment transit enhancements for mobility hubs at major intersections on the Gratiot Avenue, Michigan Avenue, and Washtenaw Avenue corridors. Even if not awarded, this collaboration built consensus around future projects that RTA can seek other funding for.

### Low- and No-Emission Vehicles

Transit agencies are considering alternative fuel technologies, such as electric batteries, hydrogen fuel cells, compressed natural gas, and propane, and are learning what infrastructure and resources are needed to transition to lower emission vehicles. The environmental benefits of reducing single-occupancy vehicle trips through public transit can be increased even more through the timely transition to lower emissions vehicles as current



Figure 12: DDOT and SMART each currently have four battery electric buses in their fleets. Image Credit: Trevor Logan, Jr.



vehicles need replacement. While the transition can ultimately provide environmental benefits, it can also present challenges that transit agencies have not met before. This could include investments in new technologies for charging and storing vehicles, training operations and maintenance staff on new systems, managing energy grid and battery endurance concerns, and navigating the emerging market of fleet manufacturers.

Regional efforts to deploy low- and no-emission vehicles will help the State of Michigan achieve its [MI Healthy Climate Plan](#) goal of increasing access to clean transportation options by 15 percent each year. In 2022, TheRide completed its *Alternative Bus Propulsion Study*, and is considering Battery Electric Buses (BEBs) and Hydrogen Fuel Cell-Electric Buses (FCEBs). TheRide plans to deploy an [FCEB pilot](#) starting in 2025, pending federal grant funding. DDOT and SMART each deployed four electric buses in 2022 to explore how the new propulsion technology will impact operations and facility needs.<sup>21</sup> Both of the region's rail systems, QLINE and DPM, are fully electric.

### Mobile Applications (Apps) for Riders

Smartphone apps have been changing the way people plan trips. Riders increasingly expect to have real-time arrival information and fare payment options available on their devices that can help them easily navigate the transit system. In Southeast Michigan, riders can use a number of apps to look up trip information, including DDOT's Bus Tracker app, Transit App, Google Maps, Moovit, and others. MDOT is currently exploring a statewide Mobility as a Service (MaaS) system, and RTA is on the steering committee to provide insight on the project with the potential for piloting a regional option over the next few years beginning as early as 2024. Additionally, DDOT, SMART, TheRide, and MoGo offer app-based fare payment options.

MaaS is a concept that consolidates trip planning, real-time information, payment, and booking in one platform. Some transit agencies are developing their own trip planning apps, while others are making schedule data publicly accessible so that technology companies can offer solutions. In some cases, transit agencies are pursuing both options. Having multiple tools available allows riders to choose the one that works

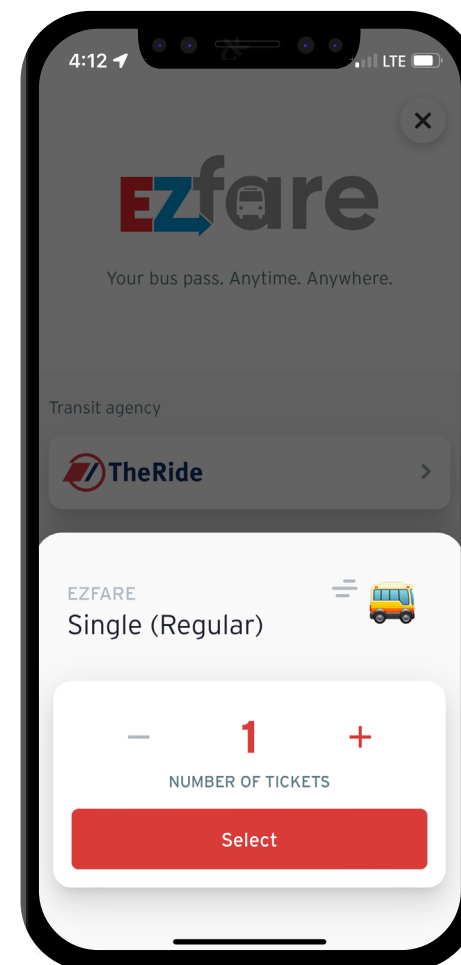


Figure 13: TheRide offers app-based fare payment and ticketing through EZfare, which can be accessed in the EZfare, Transit, Moovit, and Uber apps. In the Transit and Moovit apps, riders can also plan trips and see real-time arrival information. Image Credit: EZfare.

best for them. However, an environment with too many options, especially where they are not fully integrated with all services or modes, can be confusing for riders and can limit functionality.

A critical component of trip planning apps is the data that feeds them. Transit agencies need to have high-quality, standardized, up-to-date, and readily available data in order for the apps to be useful to travelers. The California Integrated Travel Project (Cal-ITP) is a statewide initiative that aims to streamline fare collection and the provision of real-time information. Cal-ITP can serve as a model for RTA to facilitate technology improvements that benefit riders and providers.

## Recent Regional Transit Accomplishments

In the past year, RTA and its partners have achieved a number of accomplishments, including developing new and expanded services, undertaking planning initiatives, and proceeding with capital projects that will improve transit and help advance RTA's vision and goals. This section highlights some of the major achievements.

### New, Improved, and Expanded Services

#### Additional Trips on D2A2

In response to demand for later service, RTA and TheRide added D2A2 trips at midnight and a mid-evening trip on weekends in the summer of 2023. A Frequent Rider Passbook is now available, which includes 50 one-way rides for \$100, a 60 percent savings. D2A2 ridership has consistently grown in 2023, and surpassed 7,000 monthly rides in November.

#### Detroit to Airport Express Pilot

Building on the success of the D2A2 pilot, RTA is planning to launch Detroit to Airport Express, a pilot bus service between Downtown Detroit and the Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport (DTW) in spring 2024. Detroit to Airport Express is supported by a \$2.5 million Carbon Reduction Program (CRP) grant through SEMCOG from USDOT and MDOT.



Figure 14: D2A2 takes riders between Grand Circus Park in Downtown Detroit and the Blake Transit Center in Downtown Ann Arbor.

### Mobility Wallet Pilot

In partnership with DDOT, SMART, QLINE, DPM, MoGo, United Way for Southeastern Michigan, Detroit at Work, and the Downtown Detroit Partnership, RTA will pilot a mobility wallet in 2024 that can help connect job seekers with employment opportunities. Through this pilot, RTA seeks to gain a better understanding of the potential for a mobility wallet to make it easier for riders to pay for transit and other mobility services. MDOT and the Office of Future Mobility and Electrification (OFME) provided \$1 million to support the pilot through the [Mobility Wallet Challenge](#).

### Oakland County Service Expansions

Resulting from Oakland Transit, the county-wide millage that passed in 2022, transportation services in Oakland County have expanded. In September, SMART expanded service on five routes to provide access to new areas. Routes 450-Woodward Local and 462-FAST Woodward now serve stops in Bloomfield Hills. Routes 305-Grand River and 740-Twelve Mile were extended to serve Novi and Wixom, and Route 805-Grand River Park and Ride was extended to serve Novi and additional stops in Farmington Hills. SMART is also planning new bus routes in Rochester, Rochester Hills, Waterford, and White Lake in 2024.

The Oakland County millage has also funded improvements to community-sponsored transportation services in Oakland County, and as a result, ridership at NOTA, OPC, WOTA, and People's Express increased more than 20 percent.<sup>22</sup> NOTA expanded service to cover Brandon, Independence, and Springfield Townships and the Village of Clarkston. WOTA has expanded service to Groveland, Holly, and Rose Townships, the Village of Holly, Keego Harbor, Lake Angelus, Orchard Lake, and Sylvan Lake. WOTA has also increased its hours of service, and in some communities more people are now eligible for service. NOTA, OPC, and WOTA also standardized their fares to \$2.00 per ride. People's Express is contracted to provide services in South Lyon, Wixom, the villages of Milford and Wolverine Lake, and Commerce, Lyon, and Milford Townships. People's Express increased its service area, now providing trips between communities, and standardized its fares as well.



Figure 15: Voter approved funding in 2022 has allowed local transit providers like NOTA to expand their service hours. Image Credit: NOTA.



Figure 16: TheRide plans to enhance service on Washtenaw Avenue with a new limited-stop express service between Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti. Image Credit: TheRide.

### Washtenaw Avenue Express Service

TheRide received \$2.1 million through SEMCOG's CRP grant award to operate an express bus service on Washtenaw Avenue starting in 2024. The limited-stop service will decrease travel times between Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti. The service was recommended in TheRide's plan, [TheRide2045](#), and might set a foundation for a future BRT service.

### Zero-Fare Services

Zero-fare services are increasingly being considered across the US as a way to remove barriers to accessing transit and increasing mobility equity. QLINE has been operating fare-free since Fall 2021, when it reopened after COVID-19 shutdowns. Ridership has been steadily increasing and reflects the diverse population of the region. In 2024, DPM will pilot zero-fare service, with sponsorship support. As free services, QLINE and DPM will help increase access not only for residents and employees, but also for visitors during major events, such as the National Football League (NFL) draft in 2024.

### MoGo System Expansion and Cash Payments

At the end of 2022, MoGo, in partnership with the City of Detroit was awarded \$676,672 through SEMCOG's CRP grant for another MoGo expansion, which will add up to 20 new station locations in Detroit.

As a result of the [Connect/D](#) study, MoGo is considering relocating some stations to better serve as a first/last mile option for bus riders. The study also led MoGo to accept cash payments at DivDat Kiosks, which are available at 59 locations in metropolitan Detroit.

### Planning Initiatives

#### Transit Agency Planning Initiatives

DDOT, SMART, and TheRide all have ongoing or recently completed service planning initiatives. In 2022, TheRide adopted [TheRide2045](#), a long-range plan that provides a vision for the transit system and steps toward implementing it. Supported by a millage increase that passed in 2022, TheRide is focused on implementing the first phase of the plan, which proceeds through 2028. This phase includes increasing frequencies on all routes, increasing service hours, improving nighttime



Figure 17: The Detroit People Mover will operate a zero-fare service pilot in 2024.



Figure 18: MoGo is currently planning a bikeshare expansion in partnership with the City of Detroit. Image Credit: MoGo.

on-demand service, piloting a limited-stop service on Washtenaw Avenue, a new bus garage, transit center improvements, transit signal priority or BRT on major corridors, and improving accessibility.

**DDOT Reimagined** is DDOT's ongoing process for redesigning its bus network and identifying service, capital, and operating improvements to better connect Detroiters to opportunities. A draft plan was released in April 2023 and a final plan is anticipated to be released in early 2024.

SMART's **SMARTer Mobility Program** is an effort to evaluate existing services in order to expand and integrate services, possibly create a user-friendly mobile app, and make SMART Flex a permanent service.

### Corridor Studies

New transit services and infrastructure begin as planning processes that identify desired improvements, review feasibility, estimate costs, and consider funding sources. MDOT is studying two major corridors in the Southeast Michigan, and will begin on a third in 2024. The **Gratiot Avenue Planning and Environmental Linkages** (PEL) study is considering options that improve safety for pedestrians, cyclists, and transit riders, and the potential to include transit infrastructure on the Detroit portion of the road. The study will review previously completed plans, such as RTA's **Gratiot Avenue Transit Study**. MDOT's **Washtenaw Avenue** PEL study will create a multimodal vision for the corridor and expand on the **Reimagine Washtenaw Avenue** plan and the **Michigan Avenue Corridor Study**, which includes a Washtenaw Avenue BRT. The Woodward Avenue study aims to develop a corridor vision focused on safety, multimodal mobility, and improving infrastructure condition.

### Intercity Passenger Rail Services

In December 2023, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) announced that four intercity passenger rail corridors in Michigan will receive grant funding to develop service plans through the Corridor Identification and Development (Corridor ID) Program. These include the Wolverine Corridor, which operates between Chicago and Pontiac through Detroit, the Chicago to Grand Rapids Corridor, the Chicago to Port Huron Corridor, and the Cleveland-Toledo-Detroit Corridor, which is a potential new service that could stop at DTW.



Figure 19: DDOT transformed an old bus into a mobile outreach center to gather input for *DDOT Reimagined*. Image Credit: City of Detroit.



Figure 20: A rendering of the inside of DDOT's State Fair Transit Center. Image Credit: City of Detroit.

## Major Capital Projects

### DDOT's Coolidge Terminal and State Fair Transit Center

DDOT is currently undertaking two large capital projects: the Coolidge Terminal Replacement Project and the State Fair Transit Center. The new Coolidge Terminal replaces a facility that was damaged and decommissioned after a fire in 2011. Construction began in November 2023 and is anticipated to be completed in 2024. The facility will have capacity to maintain and operate 144 buses, and have the potential to be expanded in the future.

Construction on the State Fair Transit Center began in May 2023 and it is anticipated to open in Spring 2024. The transit center will include indoor waiting areas, retail and restaurant spaces, a ticketing office, and restrooms for the public and bus operators. The transit center will make it easier and more comfortable to transfer between routes and services.

### TheRide's Ypsilanti Transit Center Expansion

TheRide is planning an expansion to the Ypsilanti Transit Center to update the facility and accommodate planned service increases. This project is supported by a \$7 million appropriation from the federal government. Planning and design are expected to continue through 2025, followed by construction in 2026 through 2027.

### People's Express Maintenance Facility

MDOT was awarded \$10.5 million through FTA's 2023 Bus and Bus Facilities Program to build a new maintenance and operations facility for People's Express near Ann Arbor.

### Detroit Mobility and Innovation Corridor

Construction of the Detroit Mobility and Innovation Corridor in Detroit's Downtown and Corktown neighborhoods is expected to begin in 2024. When completed, this project will add BRT-style bus stops, better cyclist and pedestrian access to bus stops, and dedicated transit and connected and autonomous vehicle (CAV) lanes to Michigan Avenue. This MDOT project was awarded \$25 million by USDOT in 2022. RTA supported the project by developing the benefit-cost analysis required for the application.



Figure 21: Congresswoman Debbie Dingell and TheRide's CEO Matt Carpenter at the announcement of a \$7 million federal appropriation for the new Ypsilanti Transit Center. Image Credit: TheRide.



Figure 22: The preliminary design of the Detroit Mobility and Innovation Corridor, which was awarded \$25 million by USDOT in 2022. Image Credit: City of Detroit.

## Regional Challenges and Opportunities

Considering transit industry trends, as well as ongoing, planned, and completed projects in Southeast Michigan, Figure 23 outlines potential focus areas for regional transit.



Post-pandemic uncertainty and lower ridership pose challenges for implementing new services, but also provide opportunities to consider adapting services to meet both current and future needs.



Workforce recruitment and retention challenges impact current services and delay future services, but provide opportunities to build partnerships between agencies and with education institutions, and to market the benefits of transit jobs.



New funding in Oakland County and the Ann Arbor-Ypsilanti area provide opportunities to improve and expand services. However, there is still limited funding to provide a truly regional transit system.



Gaps in the transit network provide opportunities for new services that connect people to jobs, schools, medical centers, and amenities. Funding these services poses a challenge.



Regional pilot projects are opportunities to test new services and technologies and gather information on how to make them more successful when sustainable funding is identified.



New trip planning and fare payment technologies can help people more easily navigate the transit system, and remove barriers to using services. These technologies require agencies to publish and maintain high-quality service data.



FRA funding for improvements to intercity passenger rail service provides an opportunity to strengthen connections to other regions, and add regional rail services on infrastructure.



Transit agency-led planning initiatives provide a foundation for local and regional service, setting priorities for capital planning and funding pursuits.



New and improved transit centers and maintenance and operations facilities provide opportunities to expand services in the future and to create safer and more comfortable environments for riders and staff.



Rapid transit projects can improve comfort, reliability, and speed while supporting the TOD projects that will help Southeast Michigan attract talent and businesses and grow the regional economy.



Partnerships with road agencies and micromobility providers (e.g., MoGo) can help improve connections to and from transit services and can make transit more accessible.



Low- and no-emission vehicle propulsion technologies can help improve air quality but require training programs, facility and infrastructure upgrades, and may require service adjustments that consider refueling times and locations.

Figure 23: Challenges and opportunities for regional transit in Southeast Michigan.



# PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT



# PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

In 2023, RTA engagement efforts focused on hearing from residents and riders about the transit improvements that matter to them the most. RTA engaged with the public at popular community events, regional transit centers, and through an online survey. Public feedback helped shape the development of RTA's priorities.

## Community Events and Rider Outreach

In August and September of 2023, RTA set up booths at 11 events across the four counties and spoke with riders at three regional transit centers. RTA conducted rider outreach at transit centers and major stops in 2021, but with 14 in-person engagements, this was RTA's largest outreach effort since the onset of the pandemic. Staff shared information about transit services and discussed rider experiences and priorities. Attendees were asked to place stickers on an interactive board to identify which of the goals and strategies from the 2022 RTMP update they felt were the highest priorities (see Figure 25). Over 370 people participated in the interactive board activity and many more had conversations with RTA staff. Additionally, RTA engaged with the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) to hear their feedback on the goals and strategies (see Figure 24 for a full list of events).

## Online Survey

Similar to in-person engagement, online survey participants were asked to rank the priority of RTA's goals and strategies, as well as give feedback on specific ongoing and potential projects. The survey was available from September through early November. RTA promoted the survey at in-person outreach events, on social media and RTA's website, and with fliers posted at several major bus stops across Macomb, Oakland, Washtenaw, and Wayne Counties. The greatest number of respondents indicated that they discovered the survey through social media. Both the survey and materials promoting it were available in English, Arabic, and Spanish. RTA received 238 survey responses. While the survey was not a representative sample of the region, RTA worked to reach other members of the public during in-person outreach, and strives to continually improve the engagement process.



### DETROIT

- August 25 – Market Fridays at Cadillac Square
- August 27 – Wayne State University FestiFall
- September 19 – Rosa Parks Transit Center



### MACOMB COUNTY

- September 8 – Mount Clemens Art & Craft Show
- September 30 – Shelby Farmers Market



### OAKLAND COUNTY

- August 17 – Southfield Back to School Fair
- September 13 – Oakland County Farmers Market
- September 20 – Royal Oak Transit Center



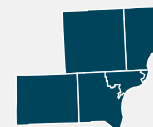
### WASHTENAW COUNTY

- September 13 – Washtenaw Community College Welcome Day
- September 19 – Ann Arbor Tech Trek
- September 26 – Ypsilanti Transit Center



### WAYNE COUNTY

- September 22 – Dearborn Summer Market
- September 24 – Lincoln Park Farmers Market
- September 28 – Wyandotte Farmers Market



### REGIONAL

- August 28 – RTA Citizens Advisory Committee

Figure 24: Public engagement events for the 2023 RTMP Update.

## Key Findings

Based on over 370 interactive board responses, improving existing services is the highest priority goal to the public, followed by expanding transit to new places, building sustainable partnerships, developing innovative and adaptive services, and lastly, securing long-term dedicated transit revenue. RTA found a substantial difference between the importance of funding to transit agencies and to the public, which makes sense: riders are more focused on the services they need than on how to fund them. According to a 2021 survey conducted by RTA, 76 percent of the Southeast Michigan's residents believe that public transit is vitally important to the region. RTA can play a key role in educating the public on how long-term funding can make desired improvements possible, as well as help the public understand RTA's role in securing funding for these vital services.

Online survey respondents expressed that growing transit ridership in the region through continual improvement of services is important to them. Increasing ridership can elevate support for transit and may bolster RTA's efforts to secure long-term funding. When asked to rank RTA's goals in order of importance, respondents indicated that expanding and funding regional transit should be RTA's top priorities and that innovative and flexible services were least important to them (see Figure 27). Regarding priorities for improving access, they listed safety projects as a top priority, followed by bus stop accessibility improvements. Respondents indicated they were least interested in projects focusing on information about how to ride transit and creation of an app for seamless fares and trip booking (see Figure 27).

Over three quarters of survey respondents supported RTA's efforts to develop BRT, promote ridership, improve bus stops, and increase safety and security. Respondents also largely support D2A2 and the mobility wallet, but were less interested in a paratransit trip booking and payment app and workforce equity efforts. Zero emissions vehicles (ZEV) were respondent's lowest priority to continue working toward (see Figure 28).

Additionally, through in-person outreach, RTA staff identified a wide range of familiarity with existing transit services in the region, with some people very aware of transit options, and others having no knowledge of services in their area. While conducting outreach at transit centers, staff noticed that riders were more familiar with existing services but less aware of RTA and



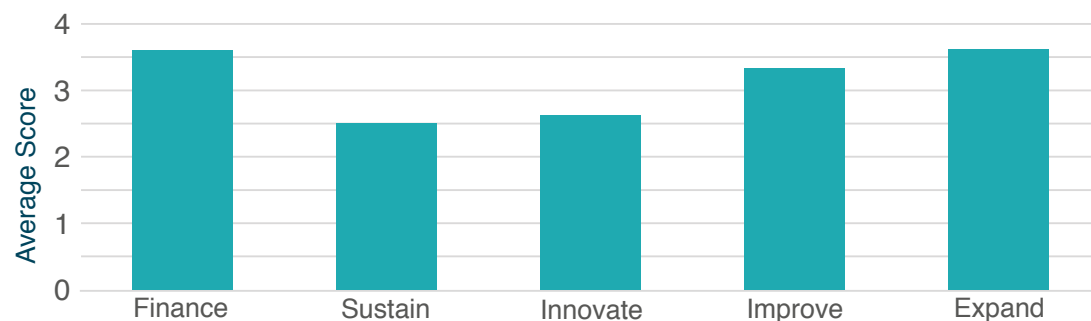
Figure 25: RTA staff asked regional residents and riders to place a sticker on the RTA goal that was most important to them.



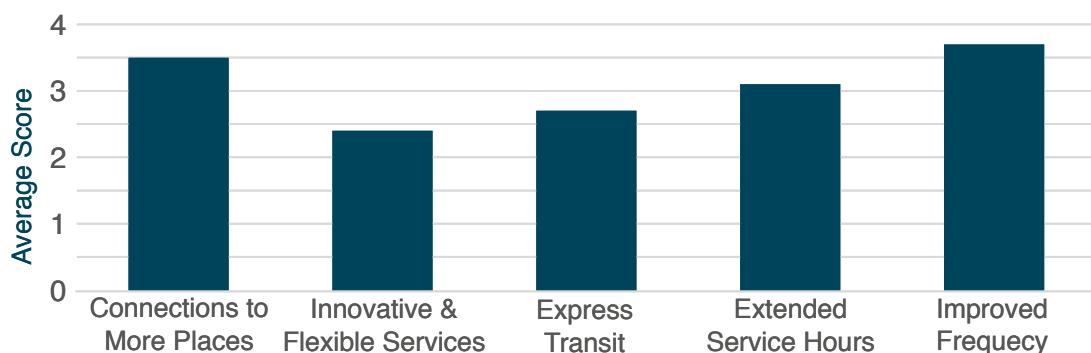
Figure 26: RTA staff engaged with the public at events booths to talk about their regional transit experiences and priorities.

KEY SURVEY FINDINGS

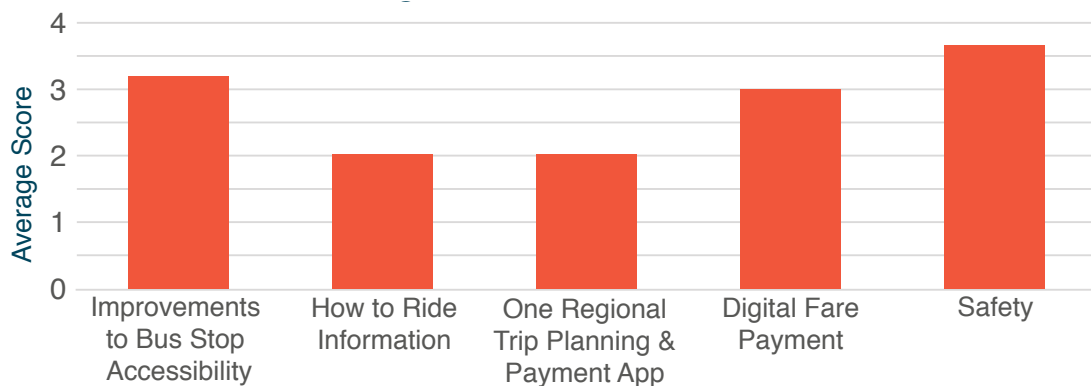
Priority Goals, Ranked 1 (Low) to 5 (High)



Service Priorities, Ranked 1 (Low) to 5 (High)



Priorities for Improving Access, Ranked 1 (Low) to 5 (High)



Survey Respondent Comments

“Look towards the cities that thrive and you will see robust transit, not an emphasis on cars and more roads!”

“Improving safety and frequency are the two most-important things to tackle to increase ridership.”

“It would be nice to have at least more bus shelters and bike racks.”

“Please encourage multimodal transit! Being able to take a bike on a bus really expands your network's reach! Please help get safe biking infrastructure throughout your network!”

“Focus on building BRT & dedicated transit lanes.”

“As a disabled person with a small income, I know all too well that regional transit is so important to building a more equitable society. Access to public transit directly effects my ability to survive financially. Our dependence on individual car ownership is a huge detriment to the environment and to our society.”

Figure 27: Key findings and sample comments from RTA's public engagement in the fall of 2023.

its role than people attending community events. Through engagement, RTA learned that it can do more to educate the public on transit services and its own role in sustaining them.

### Transit Agency Feedback

RTA engaged with the region's public transit agencies and MoGo to ensure the RTMP is aligned with their goals and initiatives. Public awareness of services was a key theme among all agencies, indicating the importance of marketing services and conducting educational outreach. Providers indicated that securing long-term funding was a top priority for the region, and would help them to achieve RTA's goals. Additionally, providers expressed a desire to continue strengthening partnerships, whether it be with local municipalities or other mobility services, to enhance their existing services and the connections between them. DDOT and SMART hope to see a focus on workforce development strategies through a regional effort.

### Agency Conducted Public Engagement

DDOT, SEMCOG, and TheRide each conducted public engagement in 2023, and RTA reviewed key findings to understand what partner agencies are hearing. SMART is in the process of gathering public feedback and is committed to sharing responses with RTA for future consideration. Common themes included:

- A strong desire for BRT and light rail transit (LRT) along major corridors.
- Increasing the frequency and reliability of existing routes.
- Providing more amenities and information at bus stops.
- Operating more frequent and affordable services to the airport.
- More service on weekends and at night.
- Adding integrated first and last mile services.
- Improving accessibility to public transit.
- Addressing safety and cleanliness concerns on vehicles and at stops.

### If you are reading this, it's not too late!

If you have not yet engaged with RTA or have additional thoughts to share on regional transit, it is not too late to make your voice heard. RTA continually welcomes the public to reach out through email, social media, or participation in RTA's public meetings. Contact information can be found on the last page of this document and on [RTA's website](#).

### PUBLIC PROJECT PRIORITIES

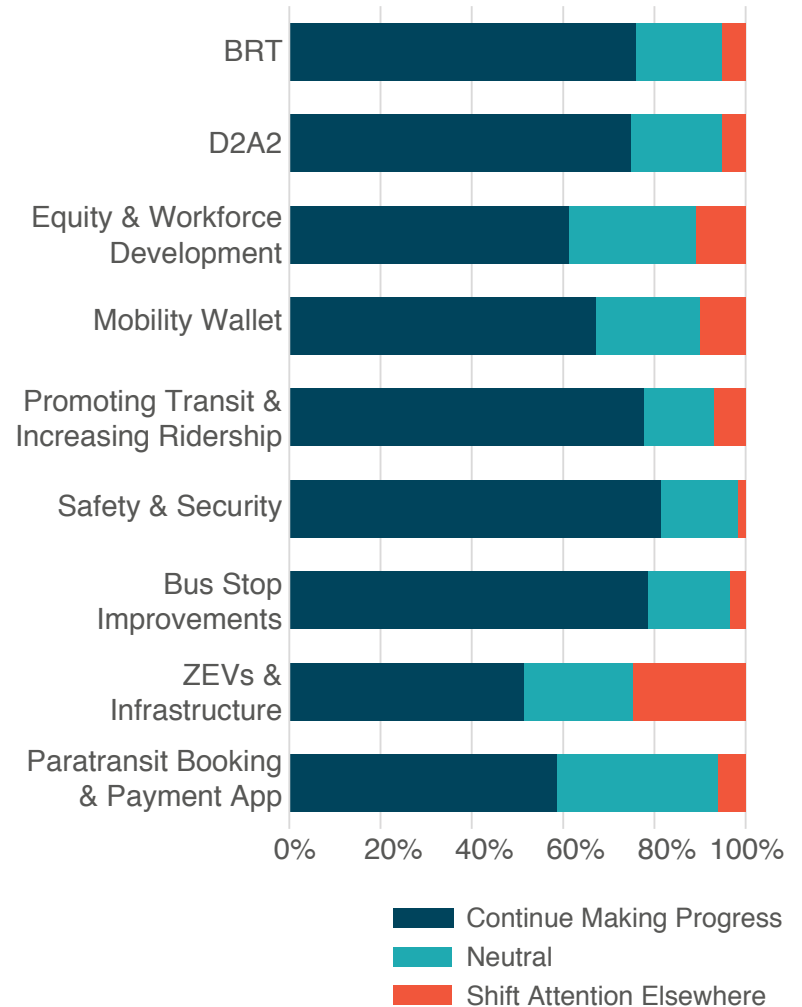


Figure 28: Survey respondents were asked whether or not they felt RTA should continue to focus on certain projects. Safety and bus stop improvements were respondent's highest priorities, while zero emission vehicles were their lowest.

# REGIONAL TRANSIT PRIORITIES

# REGIONAL TRANSIT PRIORITIES

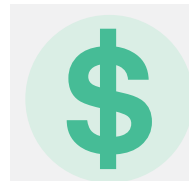
## Funding Regional Priorities

Central to delivering RTA's mission and achieving its vision and goals is maintaining and increasing funding for public transit in Southeast Michigan. **Fund Transformative Mobility** is an overarching goal that will allow RTA and its partners to invest in the 10 regional transit priorities discussed in this chapter. RTA works to increase transit funding through grant opportunities and by building regional partnerships.

In Southeast Michigan, public transit is currently funded through multiple federal, state, and local sources. The federal government provides formula funding on an annual basis to the region that can be used to support capital projects. There are also annual opportunities to apply to discretionary grants for specific projects. MDOT provides the match funding required to use federal grants and also provides a portion of agencies' operating funds through the Local Bus Operating (LBO) Assistance Program. This program can legally provide up to 50 percent of an urban agency's operating expenses, but given funding levels, is typically closer to 30 percent. The state also provides five million dollars annually for QLINE's operations through the Convention Center Development Fund, which is funded through taxes on liquor and hotel accommodations. Local funding is provided through property taxes and municipal general funds.

RTA has three strategies toward its goal to Fund Transformative Mobility in Southeast Michigan that are organized around current funding, one-time funding, and new long-term funding (see Figure 29). Actions that RTA and regional partners can complete are grouped by these funding categories to highlight what can be accomplished with different levels of funding.

## RTA'S FUNDING STRATEGIES AND OPPORTUNITIES



### FUND TRANSFORMATIVE MOBILITY

Position Southeast Michigan for economic success by increasing funding and aligning regional policy advocacy.

Funding Categories	Strategies	Opportunities
No New Funding	Execute a multi-year budget and business plan to align with advocacy for advancing regional policies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Utilizing existing federal, state, and local funding sources.</li> </ul>
One-Time Funding	Collaborate on regional grant applications and support provider funding initiatives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Federal, state, and SEMCOG discretionary grant Programs.</li> <li>Federal earmarks.</li> <li>Nonprofit partnerships.</li> <li>Corporate sponsorships.</li> <li>Public-private partnerships.</li> </ul>
Sustainable Funding	Elevate per capita transit spending for greater services in Southeast Michigan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Property tax millage.</li> <li>Vehicle registration tax.</li> <li>Additional opportunities to be determined.</li> </ul>

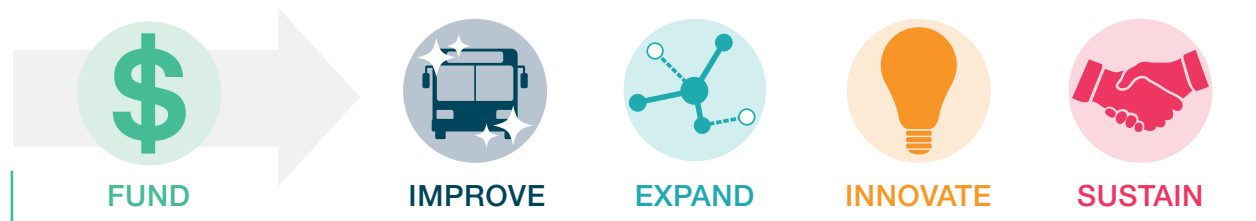
Figure 29: RTA's strategies to increase funding Southeast Michigan to support regional transit priorities.

## Regional Transit Priorities

For this RTMP annual update, RTA reviewed the strategies and actions in previous versions and consolidated them into 10 regional transit priorities based on public input, transit industry trends, recent accomplishments, and ongoing projects in Southeast Michigan.

RTA's goals are to fund transformative mobility, improve existing services, expand transit coverage, innovate resilient projects, and sustain future programs (see Figure 2). These goals guided the development of the regional transit priorities. Each priority supports aspects of RTA's goals and serves as a crucial step toward achieving them.

RTA sets out to lead, guide, and support the accomplishment of these 10 regional priorities through activities that plan, fund, coordinate, and accelerate them in the region. Figure 30 outlines RTA's regional transit priorities, and this chapter provides more information on each priority, including actions RTA and its partners can carry out with no new funding, with one-time funding, and with a new, long-term regional funding source.



### REGIONAL TRANSIT PRIORITIES

				Invest in and Implement a Rapid Transit Network
				Increase Frequency, Reliability, and Hours on Fixed-Route Services
				Build On and Coordinate Demand-Response Services
				Grow Mobility Access to Local Communities and Regional Destinations
				Regionalize Trip Planning and Fare Payment Systems
				Enhance Ride Quality and Promote On-Board Safety
				Upgrade Multimodal Connections To and Between Services
				Advance Accessibility, Comfort, and Well-Being at Transit Stops
				Recruit, Develop, and Retain a Thriving Workforce
				Modernize and Maintain Infrastructure in a State of Good Repair

Figure 30: RTA's 10 regional priorities aim to achieve RTA's goals. Sustainable regional transit funding will be required to support these priorities.

# Invest In and Implement a Rapid Transit Network

Plan, design, fund, and implement rapid transit services along regionally significant corridors that support TOD, and work with local communities to develop TOD plans that encourage equitable economic growth.

## Why it Matters

Rapid transit networks, such as subways, light rail, and BRT, improve access to jobs, essential services, and other opportunities. BRT routes provide communities with the benefits of rail, such as frequency and speed, while costing less to implement and offering greater flexibility for adjustment to travel and development patterns. BRT provides frequent, all-day bus service, using dedicated lanes, stations with level boarding platforms, prepaid fares, and real-time arrival information, all of which makes the rider experience more comfortable and convenient.

TOD provides opportunities for economic development, market-rate and affordable housing, and placemaking. Capital investments in transit are proven to catalyze business growth and housing development near transit stops. Together these strategies encourage lively, walkable neighborhoods with thriving businesses, further improving mobility options for all.

## Public Feedback

Rapid regional transit has been a consistent priority during public outreach that RTA has conducted since its inception. Recent engagement conducted by RTA and other regional entities has reinforced that a rapid transit network is still a strong priority for people in our region.



Figure 31: The IndyGo Red Line, a 13 mile BRT system in Indianapolis, Indiana. Image Credit: IndyGo.

## Implementation Activities

### With No New Funding

- Prioritize regional corridors for capital investment and develop a funding strategy for capital improvements and operations.

### With One-Time Funding

- Conduct or update corridor studies to determine which rapid transit modes best support local and regional needs.
- Partner with municipalities to develop policies that support transit-oriented communities.
- Complete the project development and environmental review required to fund rapid transit corridor projects.

### With Sustainable Funding

- Build and operate a network of regional rapid transit corridors.

## Supported Goals



Rapid transit and TOD will expand access to opportunity and can improve upon existing transit services while leveraging partnerships between transit agencies, mobility service providers, multiple levels of government, and developers.



## Recent Progress and Accomplishments

- There are planned and ongoing studies on Gratiot, Washtenaw, and Woodward Avenues that will identify preferred transit projects.
- RTA adopted BRT locally preferred alternatives (LPAs) on Gratiot, Michigan, Washtenaw, and Woodward Avenues.
- Dedicated transit and connected and autonomous vehicles lanes will be installed on Michigan Avenue.
- SMART's FAST service, which was based on RTA's reflex pilot, and TheRide's planned Washtenaw Avenue Express lay the foundation for future BRT services.
- RTA has conducted a preliminary analysis of major corridors for FTA CIG program funding.
- In 2023, RTA submitted a \$138 million RCN grant application to potentially fund rapid transit corridor project development on Woodward Avenue and to construct improvements to other corridors.

### POTENTIAL RAPID TRANSIT CORRIDORS

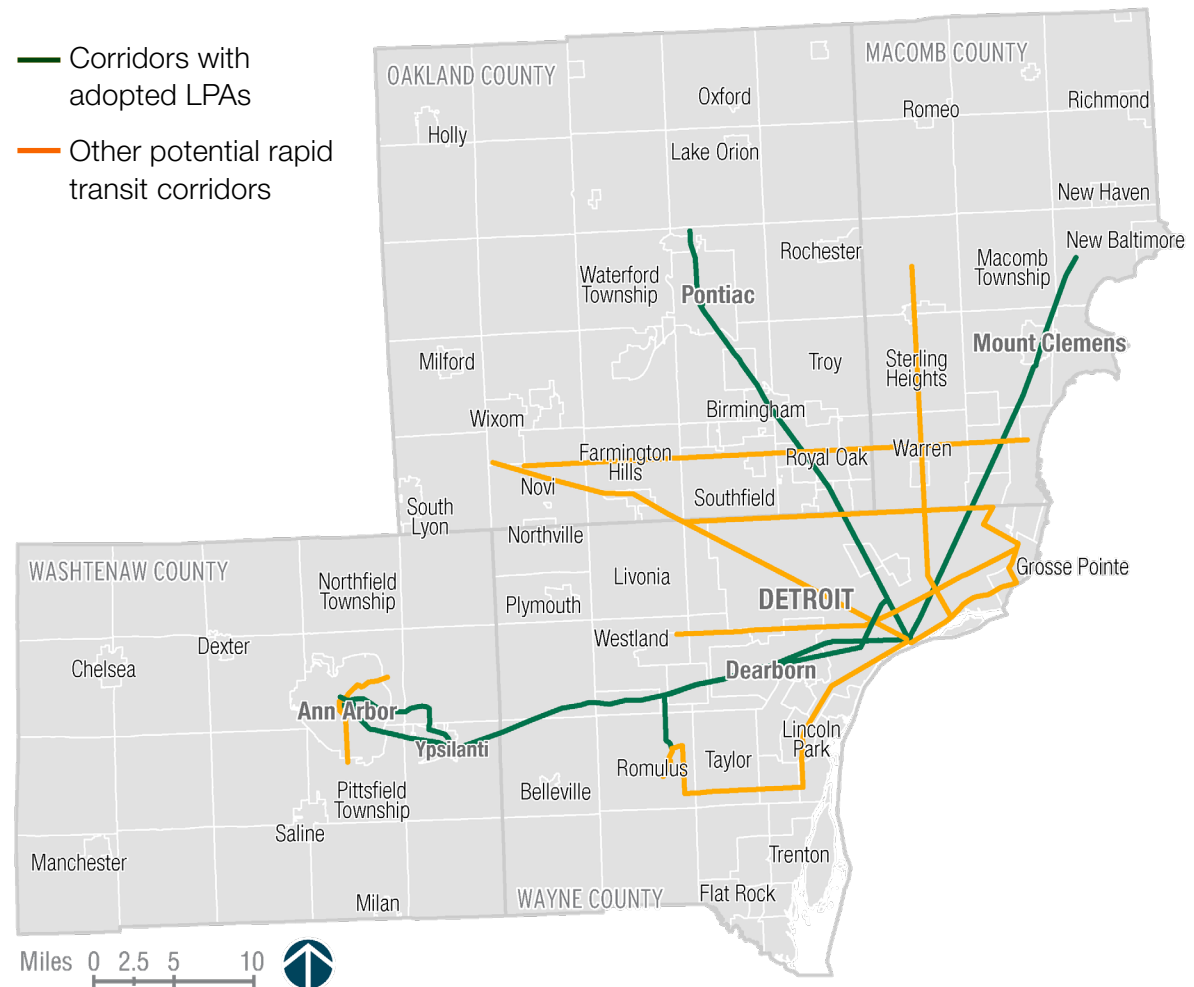


Figure 32: RTA and its partners have identified 13 potential rapid transit corridors in Southeast Michigan, including: Ann Arbor-Detroit Commuter Rail, East Jefferson, Fort/Eureka, Grand River, Gratiot, Michigan, State/Plymouth, Van Dyke, Warren, Washtenaw, Woodward, 8 Mile Road, and 12 Mile Road. Previous planning process have identified locally preferred alternatives on five of these corridors: Ann Arbor-Detroit Commuter Rail, Gratiot, Michigan, Washtenaw, Woodward.

# Increase Frequency, Reliability, and Hours on Fixed-Route Services

Develop a core network of transit routes with frequencies of at least every 15 or 30 minutes for 18 hours every day of the week, and increase the number of 24-hour bus and rail routes. Implement improvements that increase reliability and on-time performance, such as dedicated lanes, queue jumps, streamlined boarding, and transit signal priority (TSP).

## Why it Matters

Frequent service that is available throughout the day provides reliable transit for those who work a nine-to-five schedule and those who do not. Since 46 percent of transit trips are not work related, providing all-day access to groceries, health services, education, and other places is critical to ensuring riders can rely on transit to get to all of their destinations. High frequency all day services enables people to ride with confidence that they will arrive on time and always make the last bus back home. Improving frequency and reliability have been shown to increase transit ridership.<sup>23</sup>

## Public Feedback

Improved frequency and hours of service are consistently among the highest priorities in engagement RTA has conducted. In the 2023 survey, respondents ranked increasing frequency as their top priority.

## Recent Progress and Accomplishments

- DDOT, SMART, and TheRide have all identified service improvements to routes through their planning processes.
- In 2021, QLINE deployed the region's first dedicated transit lane on a 0.3 mile segment of its route and TSP at 26 intersections along Woodward Avenue.
- DDOT plans to increase frequency on the 9–Jefferson route to every 10 minutes on weekdays and every 15 minutes on weekends in 2024.

## Supported Goals



Increasing frequency, reliability, and service hours are the cornerstones of improving existing services for current riders and attracting and future riders.



Figure 33: The dedicated transit lane on Woodward Avenue allows QLINE, DDOT, and SMART to avoid congestion near Little Cesar's Arena. Image Credit: M-1 RAIL.

## Implementation Activities

### With No New Funding

- Identify and implement tactical pilot projects that increase reliability (e.g., temporary dedicated lanes).

### With One-Time Funding

- Pilot frequency and service hours improvements on priority routes identified in agency plans.
- Deploy small-scale capital projects that improve reliability at key locations, such as in-lane stops.

### With Sustainable Funding

- Increase frequencies and service hours on routes across the region.
- Implement corridor-wide capital projects that increase reliability, such as TSP and dedicated lanes.

# Build On and Coordinate Demand-Response Services

Improve mobility for people who rely on demand-response transit services by offering same-day services, increasing hours of operation, expanding eligibility to more people, and streamlining transfers between services.

## Why it Matters

Fixed-route bus and rail services are not efficient in all parts on the region, particularly in lower-density suburban communities and rural areas. There are over 80 government and nonprofit agencies providing demand-response transit service in Southeast Michigan, each with its own hours and days of operation, service areas, eligibility criteria, trip scheduling processes, and costs. This can make it challenging for people to understand what options are available and how to use them. In some areas, there may not be services available if a rider does not fit the eligibility criteria.

Additionally, Michigan's population is aging, with 2.7 million seniors projected to live in the state by 2030.<sup>24</sup> Many demand-response services in the region provide rides to this growing population and will need to expand capacity to meet demand.

## Public Feedback

At RTA engagement events, some attendees indicated they were unaware of existing services in their area, and if they are eligible. Booking trips that cross service areas have been identified as a common pain point for both riders and agency staff.

## Recent Progress and Accomplishments

- With new funding, NOTA, OPC, and WOTA have standardized their fares. NOTA, People's Express, and WOTA increased their service areas, and NOTA increased its hours of operation.
- In 2024, DDOT will offer same-day paratransit rides with funding provided by RTA.
- In 2020, RTA completed a regional Coordinated Human Services Transportation Plan (CHSTP) and began a consolidated Section 5310 call for projects process.

## Supported Goals



This priority focuses on expanding and improving demand-response services across the region, requiring strong partnerships between providers to coordinate and promote services, and implementing technologies that make it easier to book and operate services.



Figure 34: WAVE provides fixed-route and demand-response service in parts of Washtenaw County. Image Credit: WAVE.

## Implementation Activities

### With No New Funding

- Promote existing services in the region through an educational campaign.
- Create a task force dedicated to streamlining transfers between services and developing a regional eligibility and registration process.
- Update the CHSTP.

### With One-Time Funding

- Identify funding and develop a Rides to Wellness pilot.

### With Sustainable Funding

- Build on myride2 to create a regional paratransit call center and booking system.
- Broaden eligibility for demand-response services.
- Expand hours of operation for demand-response services and provide same-day service options.
- Implement a sustainable Rides to Wellness program.

# Grow Mobility Access to Local Communities & Regional Destinations

Ensure transit service that is tailored to local needs is available in every community in Southeast Michigan. This can include demand-response and microtransit services in lower density areas, new or extended fixed-route service in higher density areas, and express services that serve major regional destinations and provide access to other regions.

## Why it Matters

Public transit is an essential service for those who depend on it, including the 12.5 percent of households in the region that are transit dependent.<sup>25</sup> Nationally, people can save over \$13,000 a year by riding transit instead of owning a car, a huge sum for many of the region's residents that can be invested back into local communities.<sup>26</sup>

With new millage funding in Oakland County, network gaps have been filled in many areas that previously lacked transit service. However, some communities in Washtenaw County and western Wayne County lack transit service and connections to major destinations. As an example, according to an analysis using Remix, a seven mile long route extension in Livonia would connect people to over 16,000 additional jobs, as well as a hospital, college, and nursing home.

## Public Feedback

On average, respondents to the survey said expanding service to new areas was their highest priority. People are especially interested in new airport services and increasing the Michigan Flyer service hours. Some respondents also desire connections to Livingston County, outside of the RTA region.

## Recent Progress and Accomplishments

- RTA's Detroit to Airport Express is anticipated to begin service in spring 2024.
- New funding in Oakland County has allowed SMART, NOTA, People's Express, and WOTA to expand their services to more areas.
- The D2A2 pilot began operating in 2021 and provided 7,000 rides in October 2023.

## Supported Goals



Regional partnerships and innovative service pilots will be required to expand services to parts of the region that lack transit service, or that warrant higher levels of service.



Figure 35: SMART's Connector provides demand-response service to communities across metropolitan Detroit. Image Credit: SMART.

## Implementation Activities

### With No New Funding

- Launch the Detroit to Airport Express pilot and evaluate the service for long-term potential.
- Partner with intercity bus and rail service providers to foster connections to other regions.

### With One-Time Funding

- Pilot additional airport services and other regional express routes.

### With Sustainable Funding

- Sustain D2A2 and Detroit to Airport Express as permanent services.
- Expand services in communities across the region and, in particular, in areas of Washtenaw and Wayne counties that are not currently served.
- Adding airport express service connections to Macomb and Oakland Counties.

# Regionalize Trip Planning and Fare Payment Services

Implement a regional multimodal fare collection system that simplifies payment and transfers between services and modes, and streamlines fare policies across providers, creating a seamless navigation experience. Deploy a trip planning platform that helps riders plan and schedule trips, and that is integrated with the regional fare system.

## Why it Matters

Navigating the transit and mobility network can be challenging, especially without a centralized source of information on all services available in Southeast Michigan, or one easy way to pay for them. Cities across the United States are working to integrate transportation options into a unified app or fare card. Streamlined, regional fare payments and trip planning tools can help riders easily plan and pay for trips, providing greater freedom of movement.

## Public Feedback

Recent engagement with transit riders revealed that fare systems in the region need improved connection, both between agencies and modes to ensure riders are getting the best fares.

## Recent Progress and Accomplishments

- RTA is currently developing a mobility wallet pilot to test the feasibility of a solution and determine what would be needed for a broader implementation.
- myride2 offers web-based information and call centers to help people identify and use available mobility services in the region.
- QLINE provides zero-fare service, and DPM is piloting zero-fare service in 2024, removing a barrier to service and making it easier to connect to other modes.
- RTA's MI Ride Paratransit App Pilot resulted in lessons learned for a future solution.
- DDOT, SMART, and TheRide offer app-based payment options.

## Supported Goals



Innovative payment and trip planning technologies will improve current services by removing barriers to accessing them. This priority requires utilizing new payment technologies, and building partnerships between transit agencies and other mobility providers.



Figure 36: Tapping fare cards, credit cards, and mobile wallets has become a faster and easier way to pay fares. Image Credit: TheRapid.

## Implementation Activities

### With No New Funding

- Continue to develop and implement the mobility wallet pilot project.
- Continue to collaborate with MDOT on their statewide MaaS system.

### With One-Time Funding

- Deploy an account-based regional fare system that can be integrated with existing trip planning tools.
- Develop regional technology standards to ensure interoperability between technology systems.
- Create standardized data specifications and a publicly available GTFS data repository to support trip planning tools.
- Integrate myride2 with trip booking systems.

### With Sustainable Funding

- Develop a regional MaaS platform that includes paratransit trip-booking.

# Enhance Ride Quality and Promote On-Board Safety

Enhance the rider experience by addressing real and perceived safety and cleanliness concerns through marketing campaigns, staff training, upgraded onboard technologies, and a transit ambassadors program that is focused on customer service, community outreach, rider support, and a sense of security.

## Why it Matters

Flying is the safest way to travel, but that does not stop people from clinging to the armrest during takeoff.<sup>27</sup> Commonly held perceptions of safety and cleanliness concerns on public transit cause some people to avoid it if they can. Though data indicate that public transit is safer than driving from a safety and security perspective, perceptions of a lack of safety are a barrier to transit use.<sup>28</sup> Addressing actual and perceived safety and cleanliness concerns will improve the rider experience and help increase ridership.

## Public Feedback

Survey respondents expressed that safety was a high priority among initiatives that would remove barriers to using transit. In DDOT's [2023 Title VI Non-Rider Survey Report](#), 75 percent of respondents cited safety concerns on the bus as a reason why they do not ride transit. The second highest reason was cleanliness, which 44 percent of respondents labeled as a barrier to ridership. Though public transit is safe to ride and vehicles and stations are cleaned regularly, public and media perceptions need to be addressed to make the transit system more attractive.

## Recent Progress and Accomplishments

- The Transit Police regularly monitor DDOT, DPM, and QLINE services and buses and the QLINE have on-board cameras.
- DPM is updating the security equipment at all stations including cameras and public address (PA) systems.
- TheRide posts security guards at transit centers to promote pedestrian and passenger security.

## Supported Goals



Perception and stigma are closely tied to public opinions of safety and cleanliness that discourage some people from using public transit. Partnerships between RTA, transit providers, Transit Police, and social service agencies and organizations will help RTA improve the rider experience and help riders in need of additional support.



Figure 37: TriMet's Transit Safety Officers focus on customer service, community outreach, helping riders in need, and addressing safety concerns. Image Credit: TriMet.

## Implementation Activities

### With No New Funding

- Develop a public information campaign that promotes how safe public transit is and on vehicle cleaning protocols.

### With One-Time Funding

- Develop de-escalation and rider support training programs for transit operators.
- Upgrade onboard safety and security equipment.

### With Sustainable Funding

- Staff a transit ambassador program that provides riders with information, responds to cleanliness incidents, gathers feedback, addresses safety concerns, and assists riders in need of additional support services.

# Upgrade Multimodal Connections To and Between Services

Increase access to and from public transit by improving pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure at and near transit stops, promoting complete streets designs, enhancing park-and-ride services, and increasing the availability of microtransit and micromobility options.

## Why it Matters

Trips using multiple modes, services, or routes can extend the mobility range of riders and increase the number of destinations they can reach. In 2019, 44 percent of riders in Southeast Michigan made one or more transfers during their transit trips, while others connected to bikeshare, demand-response services, and other first and last mile solutions.<sup>29</sup> Multimodal trips can be made easier by locating major transit services near one another and forming essential partnerships between providers. Mobility hubs provide an opportunity to co-locate services such as transit stops, micromobility, secure bike parking, microtransit drop-off zones, and park-and-rides.

## Public Feedback

Over half of Connect/D survey respondents reported riding a bicycle and a bus in the same trip. Additionally, many DDOT survey respondents indicated a desire for route connection and timing improvements.

## Recent Progress and Accomplishments

- MoGo is planning an expansion that will add 20 new bikeshare stations that facilitate transit access in Detroit.
- In 2023, the City of Detroit was awarded \$24.8 million through the Safe Streets for All Program to improve safety and bus stop accessibility at 56 high-crash intersections to support safer transfers.
- TheRide is planning improvements to the Blake and Ypsilanti Transit Centers, and DDOT is constructing the State Fair Transit Center.

## Supported Goals



Upgrading first and last mile solutions will improve access to the existing transit system and will leverage innovative modes like microtransit and micromobility. It will require forming partnerships between agencies, mobility service providers, and government entities that own roadways.

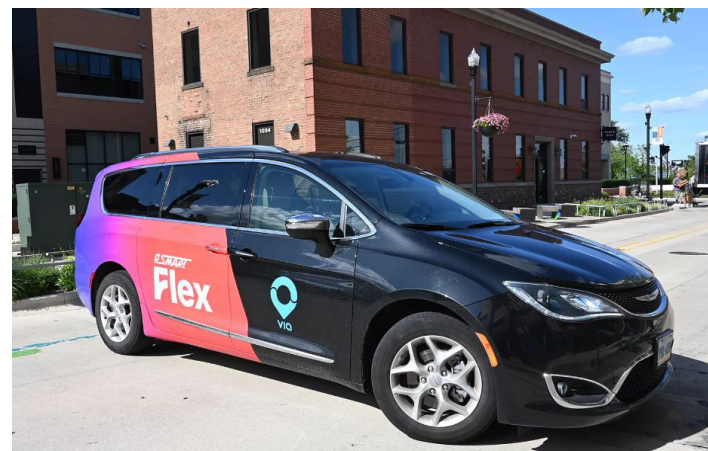


Figure 38: SMART Flex service operates in multiple zones and can be used to travel to and from bus stops. Image Credit: City of Dearborn.

## Implementation Activities

### With No New Funding

- Partner with local municipalities to improve pedestrian and bicycle access to transit stops through complete streets policies and guidelines.
- Prioritize key locations for mobility hubs, building on locations identified by *TheRide2045* and DDOT.
- Partner with MDOT to improve bus access to park-and-ride lots.

### With One-Time Funding

- Partner with MoGo to further expand bikeshare service that supports connecting to and from transit.

### With Sustainable Funding

- Build mobility hubs at major stops and transfer points.
- Expand microtransit services to facilitate access to transit stops.

# Advance Accessibility, Comfort, and Well-being at Transit Stops

Ensure transit stops meet ADA standards and have amenities and security features to help all riders feel comfortable waiting for their vehicle. This can include improving sidewalks and curb ramps, and providing seating, shelters, lighting, real-time signage, and greenscaping.

## Why it Matters

Transit stop amenities help riders feel safer, healthier, and comfortable and shield them from inclement weather. Research has shown that people waiting at bus stops with shelters perceive their wait times to be shorter than at bus stops without them.<sup>30</sup> Another recent study found that improved stops had increased use compared to unimproved stops, increasing ridership on those routes.<sup>31</sup> Making sidewalk networks more accessible can also shift ridership from paratransit to fixed-route service by removing barriers to access.<sup>32</sup>

## Public Feedback

Bus stop amenities and safety features, like shelters, seating, and lighting, are some of the most commonly requested improvements in the region, but can be challenging for agencies to implement due to limited funding, lengthy environmental review and permitting processes, and a lack of control over sidewalks and streets. Recent surveys conducted by DDOT for its network redesign reiterated this desire.

## Recent Progress and Accomplishments

- SMART is ensuring ADA compliant bus stops are installed prior to launching new and extended bus routes, and will begin a bus stop condition assessment in 2024.
- DPM plans to update all stations with new security technology and informational kiosks in 2024.

## Supported Goals



Safer, healthier, and more comfortable stops will improve riders' experiences on existing services and will increase accessibility for people who use mobility devices or strollers. Partnerships with municipalities and MDOT will be required to upgrade transit stops and ensure ADA compliance.



Figure 39: Shelters, lighting, seating, bike racks, and greenscaping are important components of transit stops that promote well-being. Image Credit: Reimagine Washtenaw.

## Implementation Activities

### With No New Funding

- Conduct a regional bus stop and rail station inventory to assess current conditions and ADA accessibility, and to prioritize improvements.
- Work with road agencies to streamline permitting processes for transit stop improvements.

### With One-Time Funding

- Issue an Access to Transit Program Call for Projects to fund transit stop priority projects.
- Partner with road agencies to create regional design and safety standards for bus stops.

### With Sustainable Funding

- Using regional design standards, upgrade stops across the region.



# Recruit, Develop, and Retain a Thriving Workforce

Recruit, develop, and retain a diverse and talented workforce to continue reliable operations of current service and the ability to expand services in the future. Ensuring competitive compensation and benefits packages, providing training on new technologies and career advancement, and updating recruitment practices will attract new employees while helping current employees grow and thrive.

## Why it Matters

Transit agencies across the nation have struggled to hire and retain the employees needed to operate and maintain transit systems. Without a stable workforce, agencies cannot implement new services, increase frequencies of existing routes, or even maintain current levels of service. According to a survey conducted by the American Public Transit Association (APTA) in February 2022, 92 percent of public transit agencies are struggling to hire new employees, and 66 percent are having difficulty retaining them. Bus operators and bus maintenance staff were ranked as the two most difficult positions to fill. Labor shortages have impacted transit service, with 71 percent of agencies having either cut service or postponed deploying service increases.

## Public Feedback

Some survey respondents felt that staffing shortfalls need to be addressed in order to deliver current services before expansions can be successfully implemented.

## Recent Progress and Accomplishments

- DDOT and SMART are offering bonuses and incentives to attract new bus operators and to encourage high attendance.
- SMART has hosted hiring events such as the Drive a Bus with Us career fair, where potential candidates could try driving fixed-route and paratransit vehicles.

## Supported Goals



Investing in the transit workforce is critical to expanding and enhancing services. RTA and transit agencies need to partner with schools and workforce training centers to develop innovative solutions to this challenge.



Figure 40: Vehicle operators, mechanics, and service attendants are the front-line staff that make Southeast Michigan move. Image Credit: TheRide.

## Implementation Activities

### With No New Funding

- Develop a regional task force to investigate recruitment and retention challenges and develop recommendations to address them together.
- Elevate marketing campaigns on the benefits of working in public transit.

### With One-Time Funding

- Partner with agencies to formalize training and coaching programs that promote career pathways and help employees advance in their jobs.

### With Sustainable Funding

- Build joint training centers for new and seasoned employees.
- Create pay and benefits packages that are competitive with other transportation industries.
- Run joint recruitment campaigns.

# Modernize and Maintain Infrastructure in a State of Good Repair

Maintain transit infrastructure, including buses and trains, passenger and maintenance facilities, and service vehicles, in a state of good repair to ensure continuous and safe operations. When replacing infrastructure, integrate innovative technologies and best practices that improve operational efficiencies and environmental impacts.

## Why it Matters

Maintaining existing assets is critical to continuing to operate transit services and the foundation for service expansions. Preventive maintenance routines can ensure agencies can provide quality service for years to come. As agencies seek to replace infrastructure, they need to be forward-thinking and incorporate best practices and new technologies. For example, agencies can replace vehicles with low- and no-emission vehicles over time, allowing them to incorporate charging and refueling infrastructure into facilities and to train staff to use and maintain new technology.

## Public Feedback

Public feedback tends to focus more on improvements to the system, rather than ensuring that current service can be sustained. Maintaining a state of good repair is critical to accomplishing both. Some respondents to the 2023 survey felt that funding should support service enhancements before adopting new technologies such as low- and no-emission vehicles.

## Recent Progress and Accomplishments

- DDOT is constructing the new Coolidge Terminal and Maintenance Facility.
- In order to increase capacity and accommodate low- and no-emission vehicles, TheRide plans to construct a new garage and renovate the Ypsilanti Transit Center.
- DPM is working to acquire replacement trains from the Toronto Transit Commission.
- In 2023, RTA distributed \$3 million in Section 5310 funding for agencies to replace and purchase new vehicles.

## Supported Goals



Maintaining transit assets will allow service providers to operate and improve core services. Innovative technologies and collaborative approaches will be considered as assets are rehabilitated or replaced.



Figure 41: In November 2023, Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan spoke at the groundbreaking of DDOT's Coolidge Terminal and Maintenance Facility, which replaces a closed and obsolete facility. Image Credit: City of Detroit.

## Implementation Activities

### With No New Funding

- Develop a regional strategy for discretionary grant applications.
- Develop a capital-needs based approach to annual federal funding allocations.
- Develop a capital plan for 5310-eligible agencies to understand their long-term needs.

### With One-Time Funding

- Replace vehicles at the end of their useful lives with low- and no-emission vehicles.

### With Sustainable Funding

- Continuously maintain and modernize transit infrastructure and address project backlogs.

## Regional Transit Priorities and Actions Matrix

This table includes all of the regional transit priorities along with their actions for each funding category: No New Funding, One-Time Funding, and Sustainable Funding.

Figure 42: Regional Transit Priorities and Actions Matrix

Regional Transit Investment Priority	Funding Category	Implementation Activity
Invest in and Implement a Rapid Transit Network	No New Funding	Prioritize regional corridors for capital investment and develop a funding strategy for capital improvements and operations.
Invest in and Implement a Rapid Transit Network	One Time Funding	Conduct or update corridor studies to determine which rapid transit modes best support local and regional needs.
Invest in and Implement a Rapid Transit Network	One Time Funding	Partner with municipalities to develop policies that support transit-oriented communities.
Invest in and Implement a Rapid Transit Network	One Time Funding	Complete the project development and environmental review required to fund rapid transit corridor projects.
Invest in and Implement a Rapid Transit Network	Sustainable Funding	Build and operate a network of regional rapid transit corridors.
Increase Frequency, Reliability, and Hours on Fixed-Route Services	No New Funding	Identify and implement tactical pilot projects that increase reliability (e.g., temporary dedicated lanes).
Increase Frequency, Reliability, and Hours on Fixed-Route Services	One Time Funding	Pilot frequency and service hours improvements on priority routes identified in agency plans.
Increase Frequency, Reliability, and Hours on Fixed-Route Services	One Time Funding	Deploy small-scale capital projects that improve reliability at key locations, such as in-lane stops.
Increase Frequency, Reliability, and Hours on Fixed-Route Services	Sustainable Funding	Increase frequencies and service hours on routes across the region.
Increase Frequency, Reliability, and Hours on Fixed-Route Services	Sustainable Funding	Implement corridor-wide capital projects that increase reliability, such as TSP and dedicated lanes.
Build On and Coordinate Demand-Response Services	No New Funding	Promote existing services in the region through an educational campaign.
Build On and Coordinate Demand-Response Services	No New Funding	Create a task force dedicated to streamlining transfers between services and developing a regional eligibility and registration process.
Build On and Coordinate Demand-Response Services	No New Funding	Update the CHSTP.

Regional Transit Investment Priority	Funding Category	Implementation Activity
Build On and Coordinate Demand-Response Services	One Time Funding	Identify funding and develop a Rides to Wellness pilot.
Build On and Coordinate Demand-Response Services	Sustainable Funding	Build on myride2 to create a regional paratransit call center and booking system.
Build On and Coordinate Demand-Response Services	Sustainable Funding	Broaden eligibility for demand-response services.
Build On and Coordinate Demand-Response Services	Sustainable Funding	Expand hours of operation for demand-response services and provide same-day service options.
Grow Mobility Access to Local Communities & Regional Destinations	No New Funding	Launch the Detroit to Airport Express pilot and evaluate the service for long-term potential.
Grow Mobility Access to Local Communities & Regional Destinations	No New Funding	Partner with intercity bus and rail service providers to foster connections to other regions.
Grow Mobility Access to Local Communities & Regional Destinations	One Time Funding	Pilot additional airport services and other regional express routes.
Grow Mobility Access to Local Communities & Regional Destinations	Sustainable Funding	Sustain D2A2 and Detroit to Airport Express as permanent services.
Grow Mobility Access to Local Communities & Regional Destinations	Sustainable Funding	Expand services in communities across the region and, in particular, in areas of Washtenaw and Wayne counties that are not currently served.
Grow Mobility Access to Local Communities & Regional Destinations	Sustainable Funding	Add airport express service connections to Macomb and Oakland Counties.
Regionalize Trip Planning and Fare Payment Services	No New Funding	Continue to develop and implement the mobility wallet pilot project.
Regionalize Trip Planning and Fare Payment Services	No New Funding	Continue to collaborate with MDOT on their statewide MaaS system.
Regionalize Trip Planning and Fare Payment Services	One Time Funding	Deploy an account-based regional fare system that can be integrated with existing trip planning tools.
Regionalize Trip Planning and Fare Payment Services	One Time Funding	Develop regional technology standards to ensure interoperability between technology systems.
Regionalize Trip Planning and Fare Payment Services	One Time Funding	Create standardized data specifications and a publicly available GTFS data repository to support trip planning tools.
Regionalize Trip Planning and Fare Payment Services	One Time Funding	Integrate myride2 with trip booking systems.

<b>Regional Transit Investment Priority</b>	<b>Funding Category</b>	<b>Implementation Activity</b>
Regionalize Trip Planning and Fare Payment Services	Sustainable Funding	Develop a regional MaaS platform that includes paratransit trip-booking.
Enhance Ride Quality and Promote On-board Safety	No New Funding	Develop a public information campaign that promotes how safe public transit is and on vehicle cleaning protocols.
Enhance Ride Quality and Promote On-board Safety	One Time Funding	Develop de-escalation and rider support training programs for transit operators.
Enhance Ride Quality and Promote On-board Safety	One Time Funding	Upgrade onboard safety and security equipment.
Enhance Ride Quality and Promote On-board Safety	Sustainable Funding	Staff a transit ambassador program that provides riders with information, responds to cleanliness incidents, gathers feedback, addresses safety concerns, and assists riders in need of additional support services.
Upgrade Multimodal Connections To and Between Services	No New Funding	Partner with local municipalities to improve pedestrian and bicycle access to transit stops through complete streets policies and guidelines.
Upgrade Multimodal Connections To and Between Services	No New Funding	Prioritize key locations for mobility hubs, building on locations identified by <i>TheRide2045</i> and DDOT.
Upgrade Multimodal Connections To and Between Services	No New Funding	Partner with MDOT to improve bus access to park-and-ride lots.
Upgrade Multimodal Connections To and Between Services	One Time Funding	Partner with MoGo to further expand bikeshare service that supports connecting to and from transit.
Upgrade Multimodal Connections To and Between Services	Sustainable Funding	Build mobility hubs at major stops and transfer points.
Upgrade Multimodal Connections To and Between Services	Sustainable Funding	Expand microtransit services to facilitate access to transit stops.
Advance Accessibility, Comfort, and Safety at Transit Stops	No New Funding	Conduct a regional bus stop and rail station inventory to assess current conditions and ADA accessibility, and to prioritize improvements.
Advance Accessibility, Comfort, and Safety at Transit Stops	No New Funding	Work with road agencies to streamline permitting processes for transit stop improvements.
Advance Accessibility, Comfort, and Safety at Transit Stops	One Time Funding	Issue an Access to Transit Program Call for Projects to fund transit stop priority projects.
Advance Accessibility, Comfort, and Safety at Transit Stops	One Time Funding	Partner with road agencies to create regional design and safety standards for bus stops.
Advance Accessibility, Comfort, and Safety at Transit Stops	Sustainable Funding	Using regional design standards, upgrade stops across the region.

<b>Regional Transit Investment Priority</b>	<b>Funding Category</b>	<b>Implementation Activity</b>
Recruit, Develop, and Retain a Thriving Workforce	No New Funding	Develop a regional task force to investigate recruitment and retention challenges and develop recommendations to address them together.
Recruit, Develop, and Retain a Thriving Workforce	No New Funding	Elevate marketing campaigns on the benefits of working in public transit.
Recruit, Develop, and Retain a Thriving Workforce	One Time Funding	Partner with agencies to formalize training and coaching programs that promote career pathways and help employees advance in their jobs.
Recruit, Develop, and Retain a Thriving Workforce	Sustainable Funding	Build joint training centers for new and seasoned employees.
Recruit, Develop, and Retain a Thriving Workforce	Sustainable Funding	Create pay and benefits packages that are competitive with other transportation industries.
Recruit, Develop, and Retain a Thriving Workforce	Sustainable Funding	Run joint recruitment campaigns.
Modernize and Maintain Infrastructure in a State of Good Repair	No New Funding	Develop a regional strategy for discretionary grant applications.
Modernize and Maintain Infrastructure in a State of Good Repair	No New Funding	Develop a capital-needs based approach to annual federal funding allocations.
Modernize and Maintain Infrastructure in a State of Good Repair	No New Funding	Develop a capital plan for 5310-eligible agencies to understand their long-term needs.
Modernize and Maintain Infrastructure in a State of Good Repair	One Time Funding	Replace vehicles at the end of their useful lives with low- and no-emission vehicles.
Modernize and Maintain Infrastructure in a State of Good Repair	Sustainable Funding	Continuously maintain and modernize transit infrastructure and address project backlogs.



# THE PATH FORWARD

# THE PATH FORWARD

Together, RTA and its partners can carry out some of the implementation activities outlined in this plan to improve, expand, innovate, and sustain transit services in Southeast Michigan. However, RTA needs a stable regional funding source to invest in the projects, services, and programs that will transform mobility and support a vibrant region.

## Next Steps

Without a stable regional funding source, RTA will work with transit agencies and other partners to plan, fund, coordinate, and accelerate transit improvements. RTA develops a business plan on an annual basis to align its budget and staffing to carry out priority projects. The RTMP will be used to develop the business plan and put resources toward projects that require minimal funding and toward grant applications that will provide one-time funding for specific projects. For example, the ongoing mobility wallet pilot, D2A2, and Detroit to Airport Express are funded through grants that will allow RTA to test new services while seeking permanent funding solutions.

The RTMP will be updated annually to capture changes to regional priorities based on future progress and input from riders, partners and the general public.

## The Path to Regional Transit Funding

Public transit is infrastructure, and regions across the US are investing in it to support economic growth. Funding sources for transit vary from region to region, but common sources are sales, property, income, payroll, and fuel taxes, vehicle registration fees, and tolls, among other sources. In Southeast Michigan, RTA is authorized to collect a property tax millage and a vehicle registration tax within its service area, subject to voter approval. Based on recent estimates, in 2023, a one mill property tax could have generated approximately \$160 million, and a \$1.25 vehicle registration fee could have generated \$114 million.

A 1.0 mill property tax would equal

**\$112** per year



for the average home in Southeast Michigan

A \$1.00 vehicle registration tax would equal

**\$37** per year



for the average vehicle in Southeast Michigan

Figure 43: Subject to voter approval, RTA is authorized to collect a property tax and a vehicle registration fee.



## Expenditure Plan and Ballot Process

Once a funding source (or sources) has been identified, RTA will develop an expenditure plan that proposes a multi-year program of projects that can be carried out with projected revenues. This process will involve considering different project scenarios (for example, which routes to increase frequency on or where to construct rapid transit corridors). RTA will engage with the public to determine which scenario to adopt. The expenditure plan will also identify metrics to measure successes and help identify future improvements.

RTA can then ask voters to approve a property tax and/or a vehicle registration tax to support this plan. A ballot initiative has to occur during a regular general election, so the next opportunities are November 2024 and 2026. To get on the ballot, the measure would need approval by seven of the nine voting RTA board members, including at least one from each county and the City of Detroit.

## Stay Engaged!

RTA cannot achieve its vision alone. The priorities outlined in this plan will require engagement, coordination, support, leadership, and action from RTA's regional partners, including transit agencies and providers, municipalities, counties, the state, businesses, nonprofits, elected officials, community leaders, advocates, and riders. You can support RTA and its vision by signing up for [newsletters](#), following RTA on social media, attending public meetings, and most importantly, by taking public transit and talking to your friends, families, and colleagues about how important it is to you and to the region.

It is never too late to provide input. Reach out to RTA, whether by email, social media, or in person to let us know how public transit can better service your needs. RTA's Board of Directors meets on the third Thursday of every month, the Providers Advisory Committee (PAC) meets quarterly, and the CAC meets monthly. Meeting calendars are available on [RTA's website](#). You can also [apply to join RTA's CAC](#).

In 2024, RTA will be updating the Coordinated Human Services Transportation Plan (CHSTP). The current plan, [OnHand: Expanding Transportation Access Across Southeast Michigan](#), was completed in 2020. Stay engaged with RTA for updates on the plan and to find out about opportunities to provide input.



Figure 44: Stay involved with RTA through RTA's website, social media, and public meetings. Image Credit: TheRide.

## NOTES

- 1 National Transit Database (NTD), "University of Michigan Parking and Transportation Services 2022 Annual Agency Profile," 2023, [https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/transit\\_agency\\_profile\\_doc/2022/50158.pdf](https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/transit_agency_profile_doc/2022/50158.pdf).
- 2 "East Liberty Transit Oriented Development," Urban Redevelopment Authority of Pittsburgh, accessed Dec. 19, 2023, <https://www.ura.org/pages/east-liberty-transit-oriented-development>.
- 3 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "End of the Federal COVID-19 Public Health Emergency (PHE) Declaration," last modified September 12, 2023, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/end-of-phe.html>.
- 4 APTA, " APTA Ridership Trends," accessed December 22, 2023, <https://transitapp.com/apta>.
- 5 NTD, October 2023 Complete Monthly Ridership (with adjustments and estimates), 2023, <https://www.transit.dot.gov/ntd/data-product/monthly-module-adjusted-data-release>.
- 6 Jack Grieve, "The Unofficial End of Summer May be the Official End of Full-time Remote Work," *Crain's Detroit Business*, September 1, 2023, <https://www.craigslist.com/workforce/remote-work-ends-some-employees-after-labor-day?>; Zachary Fleming, Redd Brown, and Ignacio Gonzalez, "American Work-From-Home Rates Drop to Lowest Since the Pandemic" Bloomberg, October 16, 2023, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-10-16/american-work-from-home-rates-drop-to-lowest-since-the-pandemic#xj4y7vzkg>
- 7 US Census Bureau' Household Pulse Survey, Week 63 Household Pulse Survey: October 18 - October 30, Employment Table 7a. Anyone in Household Teleworked or Worked from Home in the Last 7 Days, by Select Characteristics, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2023/demo/hhp/hhp62.html>; (November 8, 2023); US Census Bureau; Household Pulse Survey, Week 13 Household Pulse Survey: August 19 – August 31, Transportation Table 1. Teleworking during the Coronavirus Pandemic, by Select Characteristics, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2020/demo/hhp/hhp13.html>; (September 9, 2020).
- 8 "Downtown Detroit Dashboard," Downtown Detroit Partnership, accessed Dec. 19, 2023, <https://detroitdetroit.org/downtown-dashboard/>.
- 9 DW Rowlands and Tracy Hadden Loh, " Ensuring the intertwined post-pandemic recoveries of downtowns and transit systems," Brookings, August 8, 2023, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/ensuring-the-intertwined-post-pandemic-recoveries-of-downtowns-and-transit-systems/>.
- 10 "2022 NextGen National Household Travel Survey Core Data," Federal Highway Administration. U.S. Department of Transportation, Washington, DC, accessed Dec. 19, 2023, <http://nhts.ornl.gov>.
- 11 "SEMCOG 2019 On-Board Transit Survey," ETC Institute, accessed Dec. 19, 2023, [https://etcinstitute.com/transit/transit-dashboards/mi\\_semcoq/#Tophttps://etcinstitute.com/transit/transit-dashboards/mi\\_semcoq/#Top](https://etcinstitute.com/transit/transit-dashboards/mi_semcoq/#Tophttps://etcinstitute.com/transit/transit-dashboards/mi_semcoq/#Top)
- 12 Laurel Paget-Seekins, *People First*, (New York, NY: TransitCenter, July 2023), [https://transitcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/TC\\_People-First\\_Web-1.pdf](https://transitcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/TC_People-First_Web-1.pdf).
- 13 Patricia Tate, "City Careers on the Move: Occupations in Urban Transportation," U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, January 2022, <https://www.bls.gov/careeroutlook/2022/article/occupations-in-urban-transportation.htm>.
- 14 Paget-Seekins, *People First*.
- 15 Eric Laurence, "SMART Puts Potential Bus Drivers Behind Wheel During Recruiting Fair," *Detroit Free Press*, June 14, 2023, <https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/oakland/2023/06/14/smart-hiring-fair-oakland-county-m1-concourse/70319381007/>.
- 16 "Regional Input-Output Modeling System (RIMS II)," Bureau of Economic Analysis, U.S. Department of Commerce, accessed Jan. 31, 2023, <https://apps.bea.gov/regional/rims/rimsii/>.
- 17 Todd Litman, *Local Funding Options for Public Transit*, Victoria Transport Policy Institute, Nov. 1, 2023, <https://www.vtpi.org/tranfund.pdf>.
- 18 "Equitable Transit-Oriented Development (ETOD)," project connect, accessed Dec. 19, 2023, <https://www.projectconnect.com/projects/etod>.

- 19 Yingling Fan et. al, *Value of Transitways to Regional Economies: National and Twin Cities Perspectives*, CTS Report 20-08, TIRP #19, (Minneapolis, MN: Center for Transportation Studies University of Minnesota, 2020), 39, <https://www.cts.umn.edu/publications/report/value-of-transitways-to-regional-economies-national-and-twin-cities-perspectives>.
- 20 Nick Manes, "Dan Gilbert Makes Pitch for Expanded Mass Transit in Metro Detroit," *Crain's*, Nov. 30, 2023, <https://www.craigslist.com/transportation/dan-gilbert-makes-pitch-expanded-mass-transit>.
- 21 "DDOT Deploys Four Electric Buses as Part of Charge for Greener Operations," City of Detroit, May 23, 2022, <https://detroitmi.gov/news/ddot-deploys-four-electric-buses-part-charge-greener-operations>; Antonice Strickland, "SMART Unveils New Electric Vehicles to Provide Cleaner, Safer and More Affordable Transit in SE Michigan," SMART, Sept. 22, 2022, <https://www.smartbus.org/Portals/0/EV%20Unveiling%20Press%20Release%202022%20FINAL.pdf>.
- 22 "Oakland County Public Transit Is on a Roll a Year After Voters Approved Millage," Oakland County Michigan, October 17, 2023, <https://www.oakgov.com/Home/Components/News/News/900/2027#!>.
- 23 Jarret Walker, "The Transit Ridership Recipe," Human Transit (blog), Sept. 19, 2016. <https://humantransit.org/basics/the-transit-ridership-recipe#frequency>.
- 24 Michigan State Plan on Aging Fiscal Years 2021-2023, Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, accessed Dec. 19, 2023, [http://www.advancingstates.org/sites/nasuaad/files/Michigan\\_State\\_Plan\\_on\\_Aging\\_FINALOct12020\\_703804\\_7.pdf](http://www.advancingstates.org/sites/nasuaad/files/Michigan_State_Plan_on_Aging_FINALOct12020_703804_7.pdf).
- 25 US Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table B08203 Number of Workers in Household by Vehicles Available, <https://data.census.gov/>.
- 26 Jarred Bonina and Matthew Dickens, *Transit Savings Grow as Auto Costs and Gas Prices Increase*. APTA Policy Briefs. American Public Transportation Association, Sept. 2023, <https://www.apta.com/wp-content/uploads/APTA-POLICY-BRIEF-Transit-Savings-09.27.2023.pdf>.
- 27 Transportation Fatalities by Mode, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, U.S. Department of Transportation, Accessed Dec. 22, 2023, <https://www.bts.gov/content/transportation-fatalities-mode>.
- 28 Littman, Todd, "Safer Than You Think! Revising the Transit Safety Narrative," Victoria Transport Policy Institute, May 9, 2023, <https://www.vtpi.org/safer.pdf>.
- 29 SEMCOG 2019 On-Board Transit Survey, ETC Institute, Accessed Dec. 22, 2023, [https://etcinstitute.com/transit/transit-dashboards/mi\\_semcog/](https://etcinstitute.com/transit/transit-dashboards/mi_semcog/).
- 30 Transit Shelters and Other Amenities Affect Perceived Wait Times," Center for Transportation Research, University of Minnesota, Jan. 10, 2015, <https://www.cts.umn.edu/publications/catalyst/2015/january/transit>.
- 31 Ja Young Kim, Keith Bartholomew, Reid Ewing, "Another One Rides the Bus? The Connections Between Bus Stop Amenities, Bus Ridership, and ADA Paratransit Demand," *Transportation Research Part A: Policy and Practice*, Vo. 135 (May 2020): 280-288, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tra.2020.03.019>.
- 32 Ibid.

-  [rtamichigan.org](https://rtamichigan.org)
-  [info@rtamichigan.org](mailto:info@rtamichigan.org)
-  [facebook.com/rtamichigan](https://facebook.com/rtamichigan)
-  [@rtamichigan](https://twitter.com/rtamichigan)
-  313-402-1020



**REGIONAL  
TRANSIT AUTHORITY**  
OF SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN