



ADVANCE
2021 RTA

A Transit Plan for Southeast Michigan

EXECUTIVE
SUMMARY

JANUARY 2022

RTA

REGIONAL
TRANSIT AUTHORITY
OF SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN

Image courtesy of the City of Detroit.

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FROM THE BOARD

Public transit is an essential service vital to Southeast Michigan's communities. COVID-19 has reinforced the role our region's transit providers play in providing safe transportation for essential workers and others who rely on it.

Though the global pandemic continues to be a daily reality, we must focus on recovering from COVID-19 and building a stronger, healthier, more resilient, and more equitable region. Successful regional economic recovery and growth requires a vibrant transit system that is fast, reliable, innovative, and connects people to jobs and essential services across the four counties. It is now, more than ever, that we need to set a strategic agenda for what a truly regional transit system in Southeast Michigan should look like.

We are proud to present *ADVANCE 2021*, which does just that. While many of the strategies outlined in this plan will require building regional consensus on how to fund public transit, many of them can be accomplished now. We must move forward with these actions to strengthen our region's transit system, which will advance equity by increasing accessibility, satisfy the integrated mobility needs of Southeast Michigan communities, and promote livable, healthy, and sustainable growth.

We encourage you to read the [full plan](#) and help us advocate for a more robust regional transit system by talking to your peers about why public transit is critical to Southeast Michigan.

ADVANCE 2021 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Regional Transit Authority of Southeast Michigan

The Regional Transit Authority of Southeast Michigan (RTA) was established by [Public Act 387 of 2012](#). RTA is responsible for developing a regional master transit plan, coordinating regional transit projects and programs, and distributing federal and state transit formula funds in the four county region that includes Macomb, Oakland, Washtenaw, and Wayne Counties. Its 10-member board is appointed by the county executives of Wayne, Oakland and Macomb Counties, the chair of the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners, the Mayor of Detroit, and the Governor of Michigan.

RTA works in partnership with public transit agencies to fulfill its role. Under state legislation, RTA is authorized to levy a regional property tax millage and a motor vehicle registration tax to secure local funding for improving transit services. These taxes are required to be approved by voters in Southeast Michigan.

ADVANCE 2021

[ADVANCE 2021](#) is RTA's most recent Regional Master Transit Plan (RMTP). The plan sets a strategic agenda to guide future transit planning and projects in Southeast Michigan, and build on recent achievements and innovations.

- ▶ **ADVANCE 2021 presents RTA's strategic agenda for improving transit in Southeast Michigan.**
- ▶ **ADVANCE 2021 is driven by public input.**
- ▶ **ADVANCE 2021 is an aspirational but achievable vision for Southeast Michigan's transit system.**
- ▶ **ADVANCE 2021 is a first step toward increasing transit equity.**

Transit Services in Southeast Michigan

PUBLIC TRANSIT AGENCIES

Five major public transit agencies operate in the region. Ann Arbor Area Transportation Authority (TheRide), Detroit Department of Transportation (DDOT), and Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation (SMART) offer bus service, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) paratransit service for people who are not able to ride fixed-route services, and some additional services. The Detroit People Mover (DPM) and M-1 RAIL (operating as QLINE), operate rail service in Detroit (see Figure 1).

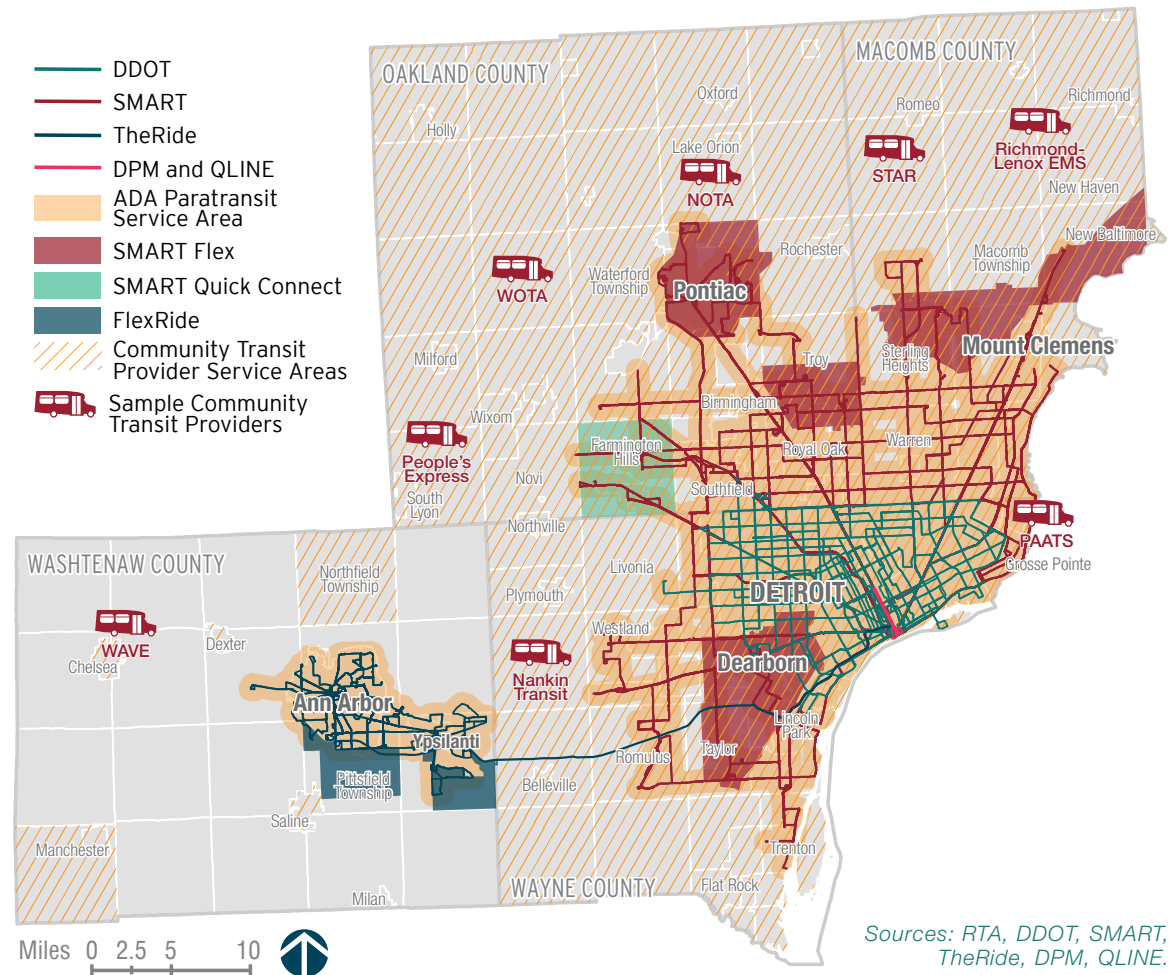
COMMUNITY-SPONSORED TRANSPORTATION

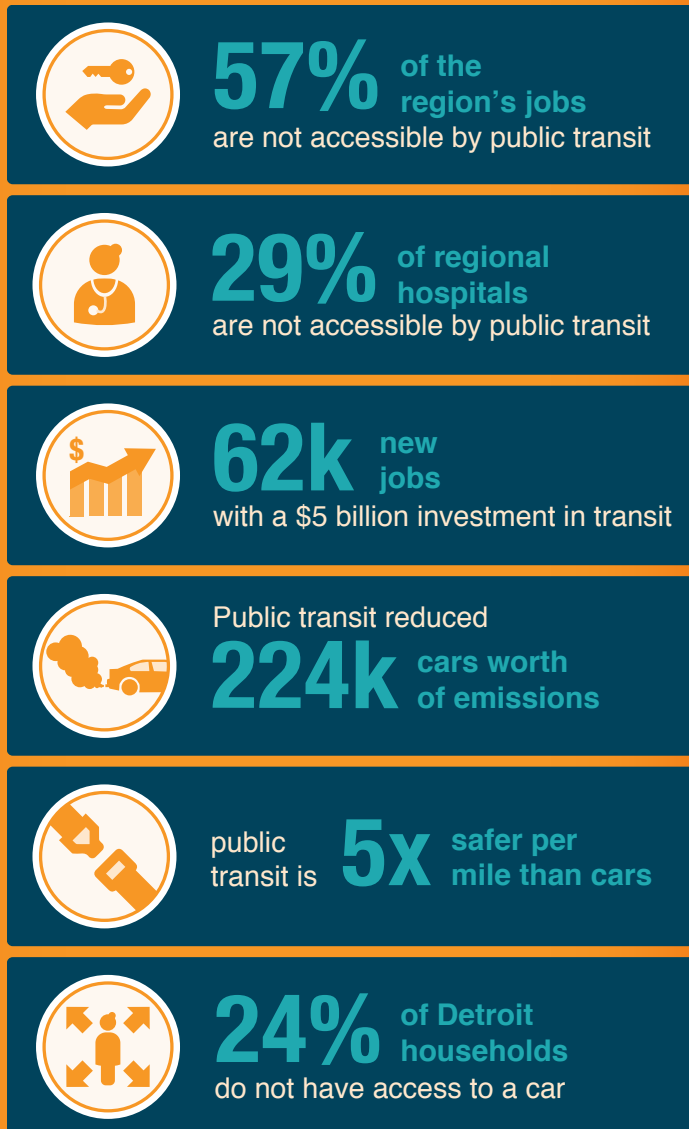
Over 80 community-sponsored transit providers serve Southeast Michigan. These entities generally focus on providing local trips to seniors and people with disabilities, though some also provide rides for people with low incomes, and others are open to everyone.

OTHER SERVICES

See [Chapter 2: Transit in Southeast Michigan](#) for information on other transportation and mobility services in the region.

▼ FIGURE 1: Public Transit Service in Southeast Michigan, 2021





▲ FIGURE 2: Why Transit Matters in Southeast Michigan

SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN INVESTS 36% AS MUCH AS PEER REGIONS DO ON TRANSIT OPERATIONS.



▲ FIGURE 3: Transit Operations Spending in Southeast Michigan

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



▲ FIGURE 4: Access to Jobs by Car and Public Transit Within an Hour in Metropolitan Detroit

Why Transit Matters

Public transit benefits everyone, even those who do not ride it themselves, by strengthening communities and the region as a whole. For riders, public transit can improve personal freedom and access to opportunities and essential services. For the region as a whole, public transit is a critical component of 21st century infrastructure that helps businesses attract and retain talent, draws new businesses and entrepreneurs, and reduces congestion and pollution.

Public transit is essential to making Southeast Michigan a more equitable and prosperous region. However, limitations of the current transit network combined with sprawling development patterns are holding the region and its residents back. Investing in public transit can help improve the quality of life of people who rely on it for everyday activities, and can attract new talent to the region, helping businesses drive innovation.

Public Engagement Process

SURVEYS, OPEN HOUSES, AND LISTENING SESSIONS



To better understand the transit needs of Southeast Michiganders, RTA conducted three surveys, nine virtual open house meetings, and 15 listening sessions with special interest groups. COVID-19 made in-person engagement a challenge, but virtual meetings allowed more people to fit meetings into their schedules or watch recorded meetings at a more convenient time.

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON REGIONAL PRIORITIES

Public engagement demonstrated that many regional priorities identified in previous plans have remained the same. However, outreach uncovered areas RTA should increase its focus on:

Frequency Improvements

Riders and non-riders indicated that frequency improvements on all routes are a top priority.

Transit Stop Amenities

Respondents prioritized adding bus shelters to improve existing stops across the region.

Community Transit Providers

People like their local community transit providers. There is strong interest in RTA continuing to support them, and finding new ways to support their sustainable growth.

First-Last Mile Service

Microtransit and micromobility have gained popularity, and there is a strong desire to expand these modes and the infrastructure needed to safely use them.

KEY FINDINGS FROM ADVANCE 2021

- ▶ 76% of residents believe public transit is vital to the region.
- ▶ Riders and non-riders strongly desire more frequent services.
- ▶ Residents want "flagship" projects on major corridors.
- ▶ Frequent and occasional riders want more evening, nighttime, and weekend service.
- ▶ Amenities like bus shelters, a regional fare system, and a "one-click, one-call" paratransit booking tool are popular.
- ▶ Infrequent riders consider public transit to be most useful for entertainment-related trips, but in the longer term, want public transit to be an alternative to a car for everyday trips.



▲ **FIGURE 5: Vision, Goals, Strategies, and Actions.** RTA's vision informs its goals. Strategies are approaches to achieving goals, and can be implemented through actions.

RTA's Vision

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

ADVANCE 2021 Goals

// **EXPAND:** Expand Transit to New Places
// **ENHANCE:** Enhance Existing Services
// **INNOVATE:** Develop Innovative and Adaptable Solutions
// **PARTNER:** Build Sustainable Partnerships
// **FINANCE:** Secure Long-term Dedicated Transit Revenue

Strategies

Strategies are approaches RTA, public transit agencies, and other partners can take toward reaching *ADVANCE 2021*'s goals, allowing for the overall vision to be achieved. There are 22 strategies organized within the five goals. Each strategy contains one or more actions that require varied timelines and budgets to implement. Not all strategies are appropriate in all parts of the region. Transit market areas indicate where they should be implemented. For more information on transit markets and strategies see [Chapter 2: Transit in Southeast Michigan](#) and [Chapter 4: Planning Ahead](#) in the plan.

// GOAL: EXPAND

expand transit to new places

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

Short-term = 1-5 years, Mid-term = 5-10 years, Long-term = 10+ years

\$ = <\$5 million, one-time or annually; \$\$ = \$5-\$10 million, one-time or annually; \$\$\$ = >\$10 million, one-time or annually

//GOAL: ENHANCE

enhance existing services

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

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//GOAL: ENHANCE (CONTINUED)

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

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//GOAL: INNOVATE

develop innovative and adaptable solutions

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

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//GOAL: PARTNER

build sustainable partnerships

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

Short-term = 1-5 years, Mid-term = 5-10 years, Long-term = 10+ years

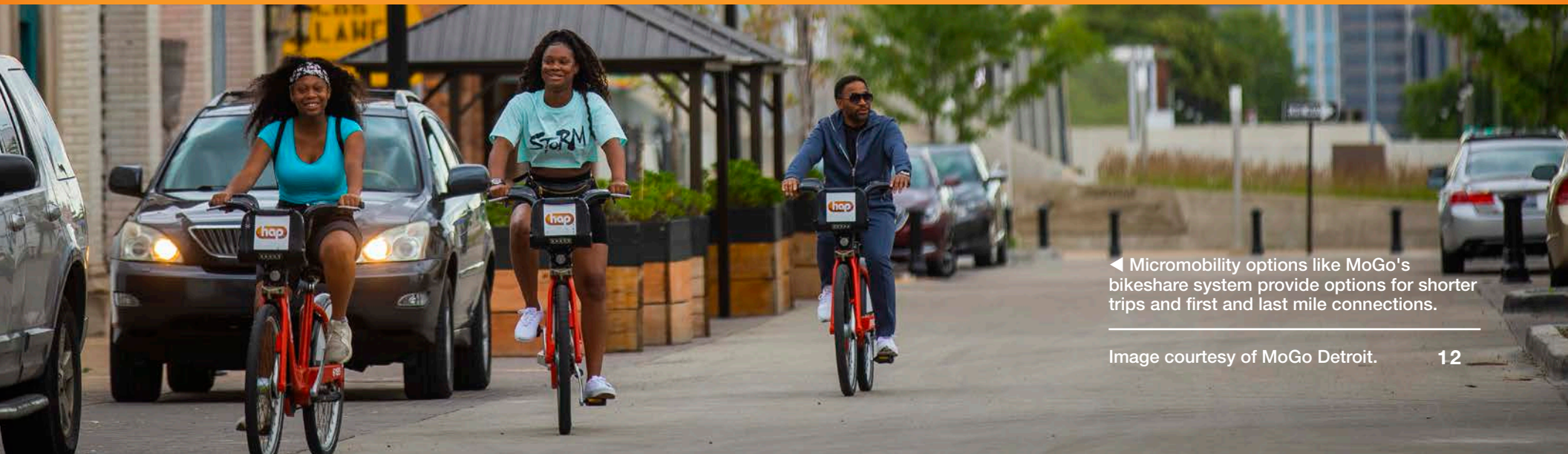
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//GOAL: PARTNER (CONTINUED)

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

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◀ Micromobility options like MoGo's bikeshare system provide options for shorter trips and first and last mile connections.

Image courtesy of MoGo Detroit.

//GOAL: FINANCE

secure long-term dedicated transit revenue

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

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STAY INVOLVED!

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click the icon or visit RTA's website to read the plan



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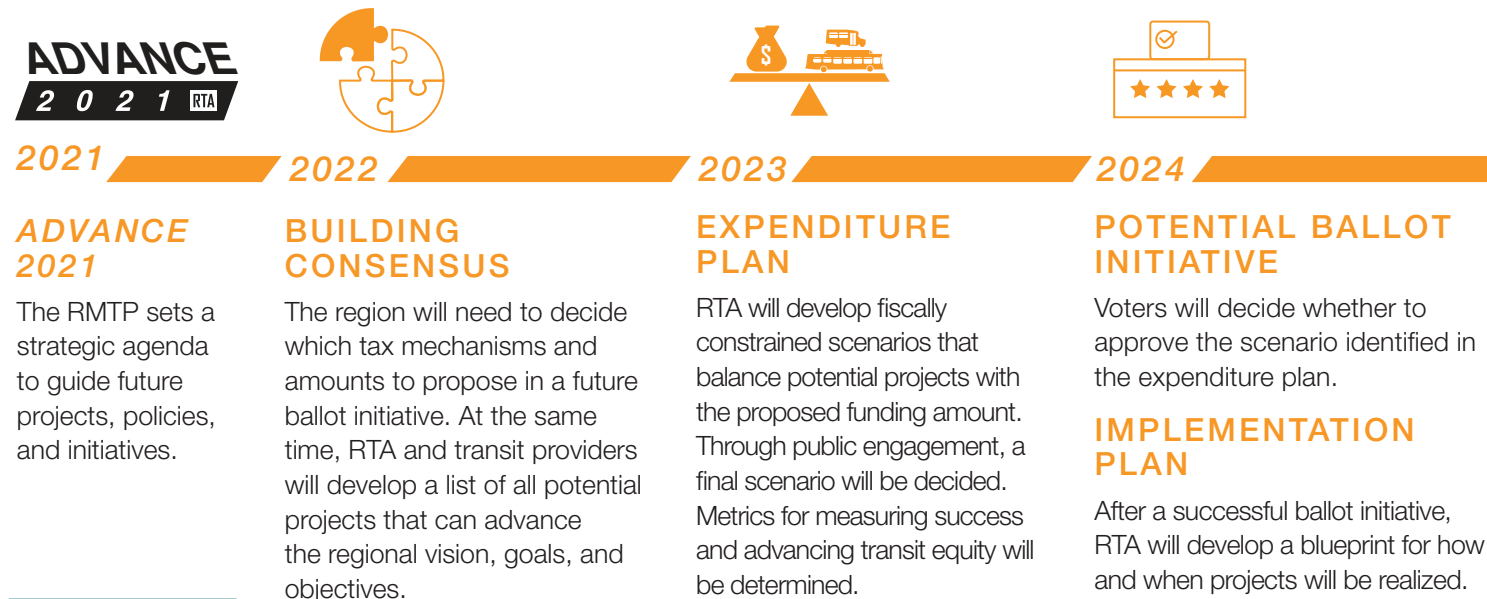
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Next Steps

ADVANCE 2021 sets forth a strategic agenda to guide improvements to Southeast Michigan's public transit network. The plan was developed without a defined budget for implementation. Many strategies will require a sustainable regional funding source. New revenue will be needed to purchase and maintain new vehicles and technologies, build and maintain new infrastructure, and operate and sustain new services. Realizing RTA's vision will require regional consensus on how to fund public transit. A potential path toward a successful ballot initiative is outlined in Figure 6.

However, some actions can be carried out now. RTA is committed to partnering with transit agencies and communities to advance these actions with existing funding or through competitive grants.

A stronger regional transit system, and therefore a stronger region, will require robust partnerships between RTA, transit agencies, community transit providers, MDOT, and the region's communities and counties. RTA needs your help to improve transit and achieve its vision: stay involved, continue to share your needs and opinions, ride transit, and talk to your friends, family, and coworkers about why public transit is critical to Southeast Michigan.



▲ FIGURE 6: Route to a Potential Ballot Initiative.

ADVANCE

2021 RTA



**REGIONAL
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