



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The RTA Regional Transit Master Plan is a unified vision for the future of transit for Southeast Michigan. The following overview highlights key points of the 2023 update. The full plan includes further details.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Investments in transit service and infrastructure strengthen Southeast Michigan's economy, make the region more equitable and sustainable, improve residents and employees' quality of life, and help visitors explore what the area has to offer. The Regional Transit Authority of Southeast Michigan (RTA) has spearheaded and led transit planning efforts for the past decade and is now striving to secure wrap-around funding opportunities to support a robust transit system for Southeast Michigan.

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. In addition to planning, RTA pilots new services, applies for grants, and secures new regional funding sources for public transit. RTA also annually allocates over \$200 million in federal and state funding to the region's transit agencies and community transportation services.

The Regional Transit Master Plan (RTMP) guides RTA toward achieving its vision of ***a region with sufficient and stable funding to support improved public transit options that will advance equity by increasing accessibility; satisfy the integrated mobility needs of Southeast Michigan communities; and promote livable, healthy, and sustainable growth.*** RTA has five goals that support this vision: Fund, Improve, Expand, Innovate, and Sustain regional transit (see Figure E1). In this RTMP update, RTA reviews recent regional accomplishments, national transit industry trends, and public feedback to develop a consolidated list of 10 regional transit priorities to focus on. Dedicated funding is required to operate services and build transit infrastructure that can support growing the region's population and economy. **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.**

The Region'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. Five public transit agencies 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). Over 80 community-sponsored transit providers also serve the region, in addition to a number of organizations and companies that provide transportation and mobility services.



Figure E1: RTA's Goals.

Trends, Opportunities, and Accomplishments

Reviewing local and national trends and recent progress in Southeast Michigan provides a chance to consider how to leverage challenges into opportunities, celebrate victories, and consider areas to focus on going forward.

CHALLENGES



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.



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.

IMPROVED AND EXPANDED SERVICES



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.



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



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.

PARTNERSHIPS



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



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



Federal Rail Administration (FRA) funding for improvements to intercity passenger rail service provides an opportunity to strengthen connections to other regions, and to leverage infrastructure improvements to add regional rail services.

FACILITIES AND TECHNOLOGY



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



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.



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 E2: Opportunities for regional transit in Southeast Michigan.

Public Engagement

From August to September of 2023, RTA set up booths at 11 events across the four counties and spoke with riders at three regional transit centers. Staff talked to the public about transit services and asked attendees to place stickers on an interactive board to identify which goals and strategies from the 2022 RTMP update they felt were the highest priorities. RTA also conducted an online survey from September through early November where participants were asked to prioritize RTA's goals and strategies, and to give feedback on ongoing and potential projects. Over 600 people participated in the interactive board and the survey, providing input that helped shape the development of RTA's regional transit priorities.

RTA also coordinated with local transit agencies to ensure that the RTMP is aligned with their goals and initiatives, and with what they have heard from the public in recent engagement around their plans and projects.

Key Findings

Based on in-person engagement 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. Survey respondents ranked goals differently, with funding as the top priority followed by expanding, enhancing, improving, innovating, and, finally, sustaining.

Survey respondents were asked whether they supported ongoing and planned projects. Respondents largely supported RTA's efforts to develop BRT, promote ridership, improve bus stops, increase safety and security, and continue Detroit to Ann Arbor (D2A2) service. Respondents were less interested in a paratransit trip booking and payment app and workforce equity efforts. Zero emission vehicles (ZEV) were respondents' lowest priority to continue working toward (see Figure E3).

Through in-person outreach, RTA found that people had a wide range of familiarity with and awareness of existing transit services. Additionally, some people were not aware of RTA and its role. RTA learned that it can do more to educate the public on transit services and its own role in sustaining them.

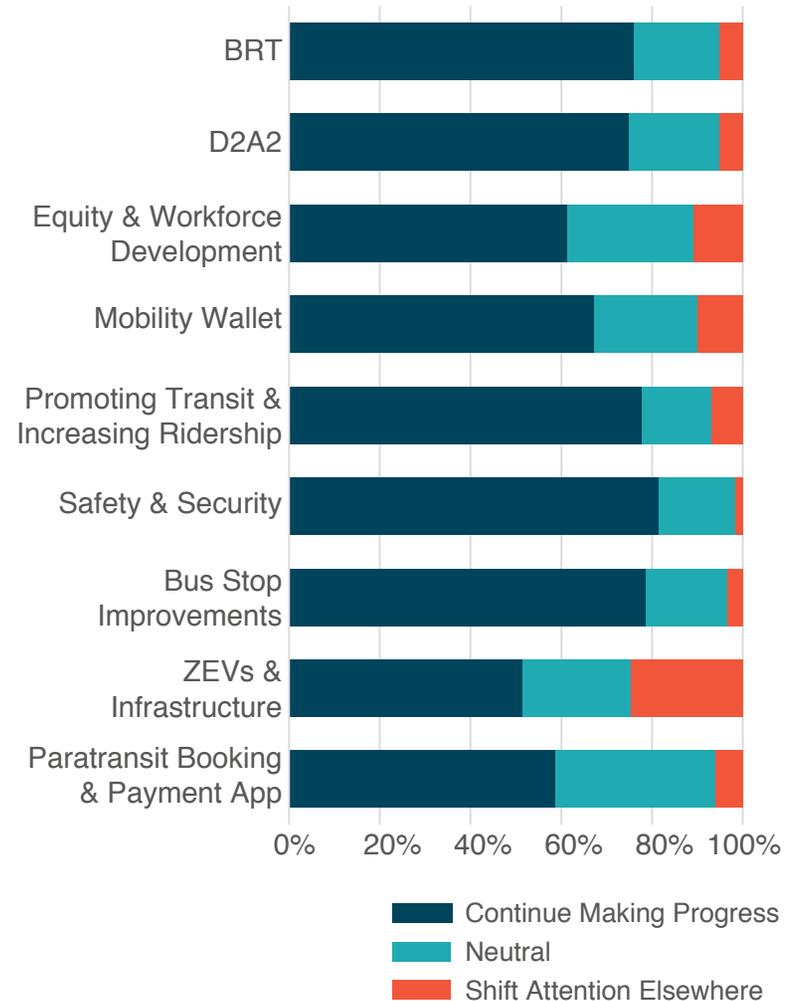


Figure E3: Survey respondents were asked whether or not they felt RTA should continue to focus on certain projects. Safety and bus stop improvements were respondent's highest priorities, while zero emission vehicles were their lowest.

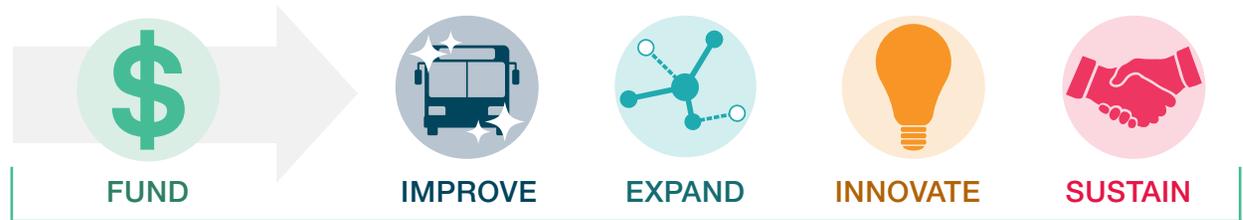
Regional Transit Priorities

In this RTMP update, RTA reviewed the strategies and actions in previous versions and consolidated them into 10 regional transit priorities for investment based on public input, transit industry trends, recent accomplishments, and ongoing projects in Southeast Michigan. RTA's goals guided the development of these regional transit priorities. Each priority supports aspects of RTA's goals and serves as a crucial step toward achieving them.

Fund Transformative Mobility is an overarching goal that will allow RTA and its partners to meaningfully invest in regional transit priorities. RTA has three strategies toward its goal to Fund Transformative Mobility that are organized around different funding levels:

- **Current Funding:** Execute a multi-year budget and business plan to align with advocacy for advancing regional policies.
- **One-Time Funding:** Collaborate on regional grant applications and support provider funding initiatives.
- **New Long-Term Funding:** Elevate per capita transit spending for greater services in Southeast Michigan.

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.



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 E4: 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 operationalize rapid transit services along regionally significant corridors that support TOD, and work with local communities to develop mobility-oriented development (MOD) plans that encourage equitable economic growth.

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

Develop a core network of transit routes with frequencies of at least every 15 to 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, traffic queue jumps, streamlined boarding, and transit signal priority (TSP).

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.

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.

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.

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

POTENTIAL RAPID TRANSIT CORRIDORS

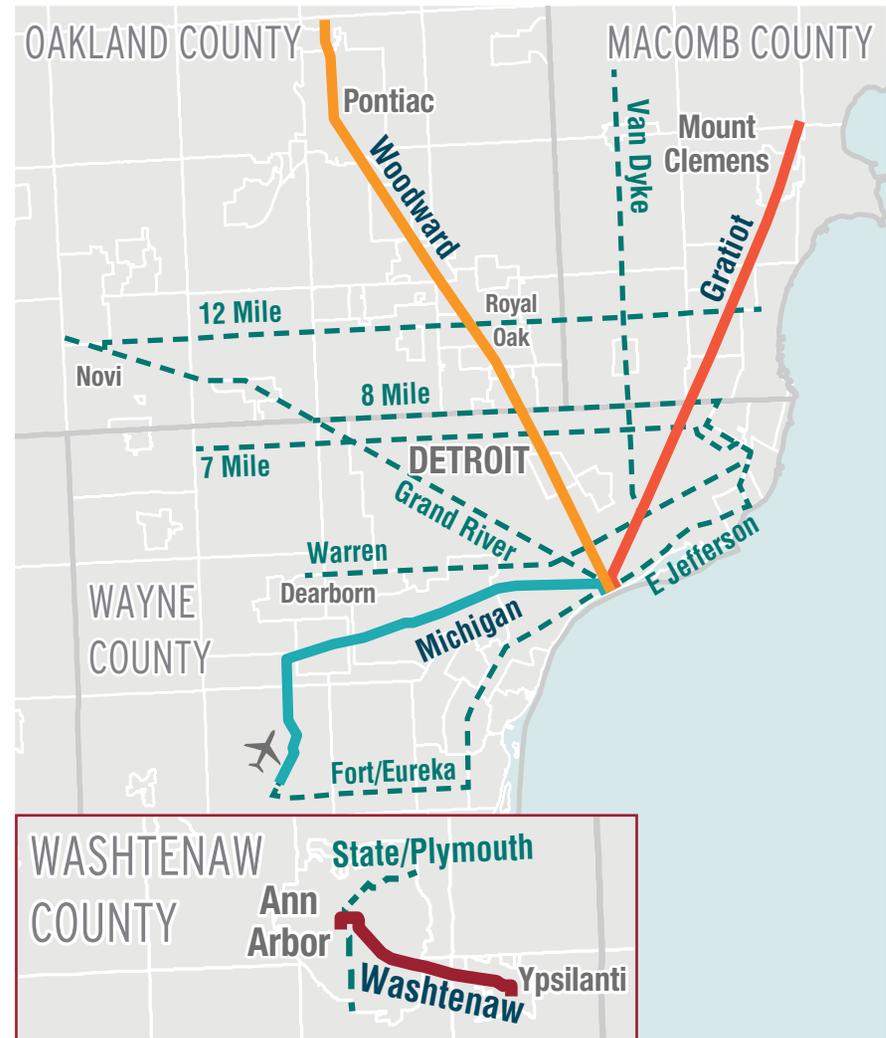


Figure E5: One of RTA's regional priorities is to invest in and implement a rapid transit network on major corridors, which include Gratiot, Michigan, Washtenaw, and Woodward Avenues, among others.

ambassadors program that is focused on customer service, community outreach, rider support, and a sense of security.

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.

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 healthy and comfortable waiting for their vehicle. This can include improving sidewalks and curb ramps, and providing seating, shelters, lighting, real-time signage, and greenscaping.

Recruit, Develop, and Retain a Thriving Workforce

Engage, support, and sustain 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.

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 efficacy and environmental impacts.

The Path Forward

Together, RTA and its partners can carry out several of the implementation activities outlined in this plan to improve, expand, innovate, and sustain transit services in Southeast Michigan. However, a stable regional funding source is required to fully invest in the regional transit priorities and transform mobility in the region.

The RTMP forms the foundation of RTA's annual business plan, which aligns its budget, staffing, and activities to carry out priority projects. In 2024, the business plan will prioritize projects that can be conducted with limited staff and on grant applications that will provide one-time funding for specific projects and pilots, such as D2A2 and Detroit to Air Xpress (DAX).

RTA is authorized to collect a property tax millage and a vehicle registration tax in Southeast Michigan, subject to voter approval. If and when RTA runs a ballot initiative, it would develop an expenditure plan that proposes a multi-year program of projects that can be carried out with projected revenues. The planning process involves considering different project scenarios (for example, which routes to increase frequency on or where to construct rapid transit corridors). Through public engagement, RTA will determine which scenario to adopt, and can then ask voters to approve a property tax and/or a vehicle registration tax to support the preferred scenario. In the interim, RTA will work with State and other stakeholders to pursue competitive grants and develop alternative funding options for priority projects.

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 you!

You can support RTA and its vision by signing up for [newsletters](#), following RTA on social media (@rtamichigan), attending public meetings, or by [applying to join](#) RTA's Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC). Information on public meetings is available on [RTA's website](#). Most importantly, you can support RTA by riding public transit and talking to your friends, families, and colleagues about how important it is to you and to the region.

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