



Regional Transit Authority
Of Southeast Michigan

ANNUAL LEGISLATIVE REPORT

MARCH 2025

RTAmichigan.org

1001 Woodward Avenue
Detroit, MI 48226



MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Dear Honorable Members of the Legislature,

I am pleased to once again submit this annual legislative report on behalf of the Regional Transit Authority of Southeast Michigan (RTA), fulfilling the requirements set out in our founding legislation. This report reflects on a year of change and growth that has thrust our regional transit system again center-stage in discussions of job access and talent attraction.

As the Legislature knows, the RTA plays a crucial and expanding role in orchestrating a complex network of transit services in Southeast Michigan. On the note of expansion, the RTA took ownership of the QLINE from the M-1 RAIL nonprofit in 2024, opening opportunities for collaboration and federal investment. Our region also had the privilege to host the NFL Draft, and that weekend, our transit system banded together to provide more than 100,000 trips to, from, and around downtown—enabling locals and tourists to access the event. We continue to build regional connections that recognize travel patterns and connect people across jurisdictional boundaries.

In 2025, the RTA will continue to support state goals—from job creation to infrastructure improvement—and build partnerships across industries. Based on the ridership growth of last year, it is clear that transit continues to connect people to opportunity, enhance the attractiveness of our state to job-seekers, and strengthen community-building by supporting aging adults and people with disabilities.

We have achieved success by securing one-time federal funding and directing those investments to key regional projects and programs. This makes our success an encouraging example of how a regional coordinating agency can make change. However, that change will be short-lived unless we secure additional sustainable funding sources for transit.

Inside this report is a recap of the RTA's role in the previous year and supporting documentation. You'll also discover the RTA's new brand, with revamped mission and vision statements that reflect our evolving regional responsibilities. I encourage you to reach out with comments or collaborative ideas on how transit can support our region and state. To echo our new tagline, I invite you to **Get On Board**.

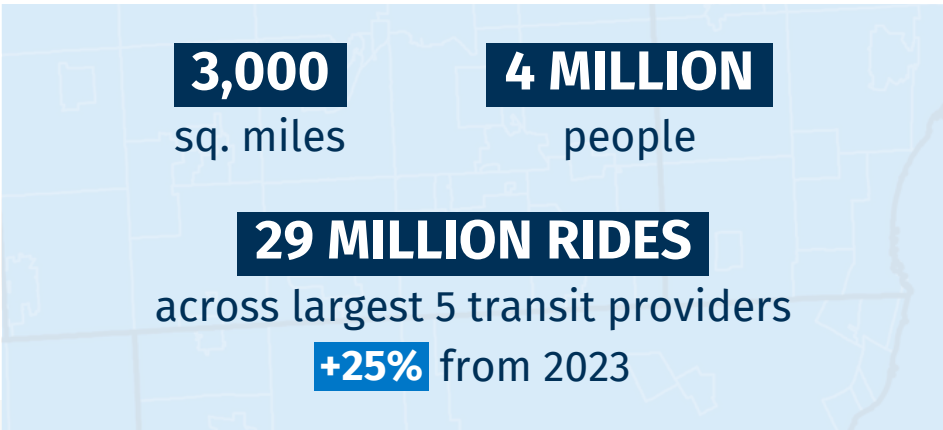
Sincerely,

Ben Stupka
Executive Director

ABOUT RTA

The RTA partners with transit providers, communities, companies, and citizens to create a vision for public transit—what it can be, what it can do, and what we can achieve with it—and bring that vision to life. By exploring new strategies for improving transit coverage and service, securing and overseeing funding, and increasing accessibility to transit offerings, the RTA plays a crucial role in unleashing our region’s boundless potential.

The state Legislature established the RTA through PA387 in 2012. The agency’s core responsibilities are managing all state and federal transit funding for the region, coordinating with all regional transit providers, and delivering the Regional Transit Master Plan. The RTA operates the QLINE streetcar in Detroit.



MISSION

Creating new and better ways to move and connect people.

VISION

A Southeast Michigan where advances in transit create greater prosperity for all.

VALUES

- Creativity:** Bringing innovative thinking to enhance the transit experience.
- Empathy:** Understanding how we can help improve lives across the region.
- Opportunity:** Leading the way to the future of transit in Southeast Michigan.

RTA Board of Directors

Our 10-member board is appointed for three-year terms by the Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb County executives, the chair of the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners, the Mayor of Detroit, and the Governor of Michigan. The Governor’s appointee serves as a non-voting chair.



Dave Massaron
Chair
Governor Appointed



Jon Moore
Macomb County



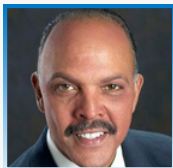
Don Morandini
Macomb County



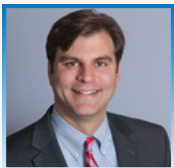
Jeannette Bradshaw
Oakland County



Helaine Zack
Oakland County



Freman Hendrix
City of Detroit



Ned Staebler
Washtenaw County



Alma Wheeler Smith
Washtenaw County



June Lee
Wayne County



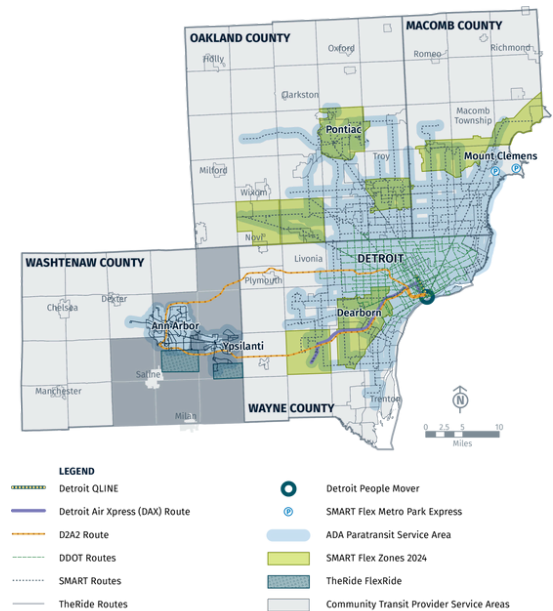
Dr. Erica Robertson
Wayne County

OUR REGION

Southeast Michigan has a large public transit network covering an expansive geographic footprint. The state's most populous and economically productive region offers various transit services, from small vans to express buses to rail. Transit service is critical in connecting people across the region to education, jobs, healthcare, and cultural hubs.

In Metro Detroit, 2.3 million jobs are accessible in a one-hour car trip, compared to 64,000 in a one-hour transit ride. In the four-county area, 58 hospitals provide essential care, yet they struggle to get their employees to work, and many patients struggle to get to the hospital. Despite access to transit challenges, ridership continues to increase post-pandemic levels, with over 29 million rides in 2024.

In collaboration with our transit providers, SMART, Detroit Department of Transportation (DDOT), TheRide, and the People Mover, the RTA has undertaken strategic initiatives to improve service reliability, reduce operational inefficiencies, and elevate coordination.



SMART



DDOT



TheRide



People Mover



QLINE
Managed by RTA

RTA's Role

Modernizing our mass transit will not happen overnight. The Legislature created the RTA to coordinate, plan, and fund a complex network of transit providers, working together to serve the region's and residents' needs. In addition to its primary responsibility for managing state and federal formula funds for all transit services in the region, the RTA and its provider partners have been entrepreneurial in closing transit gaps and improving service. The RTA has launched successful services like D2A2 and DAX with grant funding and provided stability for the QLINE streetcar. While we continue to innovate, we also need to turn our focus to sustaining success beyond the start-up funding phase.

What We Do



WE'RE TRANSIT SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS

We're deeply experienced, data-driven, dig into the nuts and bolts, and lead all regional planning.



WE'RE DRIVERS AND DOERS

We generate new ideas, implement them, test them, and assess the results.



WE'RE COMMUNITY CONNECTORS

We bring together citizens, governments, and businesses to solve problems and create opportunities.



The RTA Takes Over the QLINE, Expanding Operations

The RTA completed a transfer of the QLINE from the M-1 RAIL nonprofit in September 2024, bringing the streetcar system and all its assets under the RTA umbrella. The transfer was a full-circle moment, as the RTA's establishment by the Legislature was critical in unlocking key federal funds required to build the QLINE. With ridership at an all-time high, transitioning the QLINE to RTA management ensures the streetcar remains a public transit option long into the future.

The RTA sees the QLINE as a catalyst for advancing larger discussions about enhancing transit in Southeast Michigan. Ownership of the QLINE creates opportunities for greater connections and collaboration with existing transportation systems.



**1.1 MILLION
QLINE RIDERS**

+12% IN 2024

The RTA and regional partners have introduced transit pilots and programs that successfully filled service gaps. Growing ridership demonstrates the need for expansion on major routes to downtowns and transportation hubs and overall improvements to the transit ecosystem.



The RTA partners with the Michigan Economic Development Corporation to promote "You Can in Michigan" on six QLINE streetcars for a multi-year period.

OUR IMPACT

Detroit to Ann Arbor Express Bus (D2A2)

The RTA's ongoing express bus service from Downtown Detroit to Downtown Ann Arbor, D2A2 has a loyal following that gets people safely and comfortably to work, school, and events. D2A2 demonstrates how new transit services attract riders, uncovering pent-up demand for fast direct routes.

“

Since I don't have a car, D2A2 just saved me a lot of time and money!

– **Dima D.**, 2024 Rider Survey



D2A2

90,700+ RIDERS
IN 2024

+150% RIDERS FROM 2022

+40% RIDERS FROM 2023



Detroit to Airport Express

45,000 RIDERS

MARCH 2024 - MARCH 2025



Detroit to Airport Express

Launched in March 2024 with significant fanfare, the Detroit Air Xpress (DAX), RTA's newest express bus service, operates between Downtown Detroit and the Detroit Wayne County Metropolitan Airport (DTW). In just over nine months of operation, RTA demonstrated the unmet need for a direct, low-cost, fast option for people to get to the airport.

“

The ride from downtown Detroit to Metro Airport was perfect. The big bus left on time. It arrived on time. The price was right. The vehicle was clean. The driver was courteous to passengers and careful behind the wheel.

– **Joe Lapointe**, *Detroit Metro Times*



Mobility 4 All

Seniors and people with disabilities want to remain self-sufficient and live independently. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) is a critical funding source that helps pay for planning, designing, and deploying transportation for seniors, older adults, and people with disabilities in Oakland, Macomb, Wayne, and Washtenaw counties.

Transit authorities must consistently support the needs, strategies, and solutions identified in RTA's Mobility 4 All Plan. For the FY2023-2024 cycle, RTA distributed funding through a competitive grant process to 30 community providers totaling \$13.2 million through the 5310 federal program. These funds pay for vehicle replacement, drivers for local dial-a-ride, and other programs that get individuals to health, wellness, and other services. Richmond Lenox Transit, Western Washtenaw Area Value Express (WAVE), Western Oakland Transit Authority (WOTA), Nankin Transit EMS in Wayne County, and the City of Detroit are examples of providers that received grant awards.

30
COMMUNITY PROVIDERS
Received funding through RTA



MyRide2.com

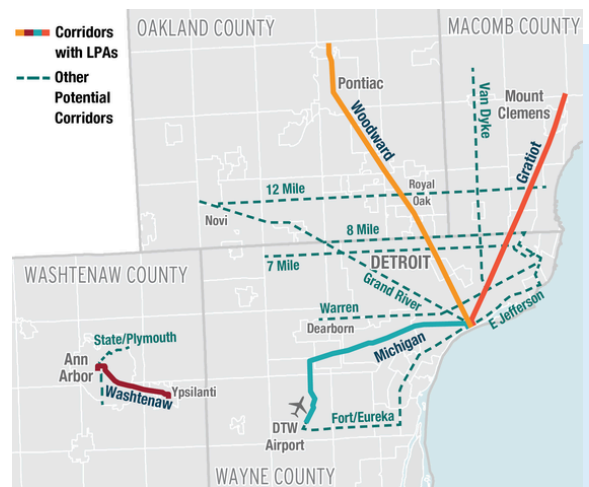
The RTA oversees the MyRide2 program, which helps seniors and adults with disabilities connect to accessible rides using web-based information and call centers. This service is done in partnership with AgeWays, and it is available across the entire region. It served over 5,000 requests in 2024.

Rapid Transit Corridors Framework

RTA leads corridor-based capital planning projects that improve public transit services' speed, reliability, and capacity. RTA's corridor framework identifies a vision for the region's rapid transit network and articulates potential roadway infrastructure, technology, safety, and accessibility improvements along priority regional transit routes. RTA adopted bus rapid transit locally preferred alternatives (LPAs) on Gratiot, Michigan, Washtenaw, and Woodward Avenues.

State and Federal Grant Leadership

In 2024, RTA led multiple collaborative federal grant efforts with MDOT, the Michigan Infrastructure Office, SEMCOG, county leadership, elected officials, and transit providers for engineering and design funding to advance corridor projects forward. State match dollars made it feasible for the region to submit nationally competitive proposals.



WHAT IS REQUIRED TO IMPROVE AND SUSTAIN

The Regional Transit Master Plan (RTMP) is the RTA’s technical blueprint for guiding projects and investments that advance transit system improvements. Three priorities guide how the RTA identifies which projects receive funding from current and potential sources to improve existing services, expand transit coverage, innovate resilient projects, and sustain future programs.

RTMP Transit Priorities


Move People


Strengthen Access


Enhance Experience

The RTMP lays out transit projects and possibilities that would be realistic under several funding scenarios. A full list of projects tied to expected cost can be found in the latest [RTMP appendix](#).

Funding Disadvantages Compared to Economically Competitive Regions

In recent years, pandemic relief stimulus packages have allowed the RTA to shore up and innovate our transit system. Because of this closing funding window, the RTA has successfully rolled out pilots and proof-of-concept projects under a lean and efficient operating model. Sustaining this progress is the challenge lying ahead. As ARP funds expire, additional transit investment and dedicated funding sources are needed to maintain competitiveness for investment and talent.

Primary Sources of Funding

Funding for transit service and infrastructure comes from three sources. Each is limited, contributing to long-term instability for all transit providers, including the RTA.



Federal: RTA is the federally designated agency that annually oversees and distributes funding from federal programs to transit providers in Southeast Michigan. Larger transit providers depend on this funding to replace buses, upgrade maintenance facilities, and improve transit stops. Community transit agencies' budgets depend on approximately 50% federal funding to cover essential services such as critical door-to-door, wheelchair-accessible vans and mini-buses with qualified drivers.



State: Local Bus Operating (LBO) reimbursement is the only state funding pathway to cover a portion of transit agencies' operating expenses. However, it is not enough to stabilize core operating expenses or position transit agencies to make longer-term strategic investments to modernize service, technology, and infrastructure. LBO remains consistently underfunded below its full annual legislative ceiling of 50% urban / 60% rural.



Local: Current transit millages (dependent on local property value), contracts with businesses and entities, bus fares, general fund contributions from local governments, and advertisement revenue are examples of local funding options. However, these are insufficient to sustainably pay for transit operations or investments for major infrastructure projects. Southeast Michigan misses out on economic benefits because of insufficient funding sources for transit and the flexibility to scale the system to achieve what people and businesses want.



STRATEGIC PARTNERS ACHIEVING A SHARED VISION

Nearly 90% of people in our region believe transit is a significant benefit. Our residents, business groups, and officials have led the charge in advancing ideas that modernize our transit system and drive economic benefits for our residents and state. The RTA's Board of Directors has in turn adopted legislative policy principles to guide transit progress in the state:

- Reshape state funding pathways to increase transit investment.
- Investment in road infrastructure is an investment in transit infrastructure.
- Help people lead independent lives through accessible transit.
- Strengthen alignment across intersecting policies: land use, housing, workforce, economic development, and healthcare.

RTA Leadership Ready to Support

Following a promising year for transit advancement in Southeast Michigan, we must capitalize on the momentum by doubling down on the policies, projects, and priorities that have proven successful. Fundamentally, the transit issue in our state is not one of ability but resources and creativity.

The RTA is ready to assist the Legislature in developing and advising on smart transportation policies. Our expert team is available to meet and speak before committees. We will keep the Legislature abreast of developments at the local and federal levels that may transfer over to the state. As always, the RTA invites you to visit our website, stop by our offices, or take a trip with us. **Get On Board!**





RTAmichigan.org

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RTA FY 2024-2025 Budget