



Regional Transit Authority
Of Southeast Michigan

Advancing Regional Transit Improvements

Annual Legislative Report

FEBRUARY 2026

RTAmichigan.org

1001 Woodward Avenue,
Suite 1400
Detroit, MI 48226



REGIONAL UNITY & STATE PARTNERSHIP

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Dear Honorable Members of the Legislature,

As you are aware, the Regional Transit Authority of Southeast Michigan (RTA) is required by our founding legislation to deliver an annual report to the Michigan Legislature. In this report, we provide an overview of the regional transit system, capturing trends and highlights.

Before I dive into the specifics of this year's report, I'd like to acknowledge and formally thank the Legislature for its definitive investment in our state's transit system. Last year was a watershed moment: the solution of a transportation funding package that increases local bus operating (LBO) funds, puts money into capital and operational support, and carves out space for transformative projects. The sum of this investment is improvement and advancement. The RTA and local transit providers have received this message loudly and clearly and are building systems that can scale to support the growth and improvement we all wish to see.

Our region experienced more ridership growth in 2025, signaling a continued recovery from the shock to systems that the pandemic imposed. Transit providers in Southeast Michigan are putting long-term plans into motion, revising routes so that they better serve workers, job-seekers, and families. This work is critical to our state's financial health.

Southeast Michigan remains committed to partnership — in transit and across related industries. In the fall of 2025, the RTA rallied every major transit agency in Southeast Michigan to adopt a critical technological upgrade. With the improved Transit app experience, riders from across the region can now use one app to pay fares, plan their trips, book on-demand trips, and track their ride in real time. This enhanced experience removes barriers to riding and catches us up with peer regions. This project could not have been completed without financial support from MDOT, and Michigan residents are the ones who directly benefit.

In addition, we continue to see outstanding returns in novel forms of transit, such as express and nonstop buses that respond directly to demand. The RTA is building stronger streets and introducing buses meant to navigate and complement our transportation system — so that transit serves everyone, whether you own a car or not. Bold and responsible transformation is already underway.

In the next few pages, you'll find these trends explored in greater detail, accompanied by an explanation of funding streams and the RTA's role. We remain committed to a transit system based on and geared toward connection; partnership will take us there. I encourage you to **Get on Board!**

Sincerely,

Ben Stupka
Executive Director

RTA BOARD & COUNTY LEADERSHIP GUIDING THE WAY

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.

OUR MISSION | Creating new and better ways to move and connect people.

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

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.

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.

  <p>Dave Massaron <i>Chair</i> Governor Appointed</p>	  <p>Jon Moore Macomb County</p>	  <p>Don Morandini Macomb County</p>	  <p>Jeannette Bradshaw Oakland County</p>	  <p>Helaine Zack Oakland County</p>
  <p>Freman Hendrix City of Detroit</p>	  <p>Ned Staebler Washtenaw County</p>	  <p>Alma Wheeler Smith Washtenaw County</p>	  <p>June Lee Wayne County</p>	  <p>Dr. Erica Robertson Wayne County</p>

What We Do



TRANSIT SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS

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



DRIVERS AND DOERS

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



COMMUNITY CONNECTORS

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

COLLABORATING TO REIMAGINE TRANSIT

Southeast Michigan, the state’s most populous and economically productive region, has a large public transit network covering an expansive geographic footprint.

Various types of transit **connect people where they need to go.**

3,000
sq. miles

4.3 MILLION
people

FIXED ROUTE BUS	JOBS
SMALL VANS	EDUCATION
EXPRESS BUSES	BUSINESS
RAIL	CULTURAL DESTINATIONS
STREETCAR	HEALTHCARE

29.7 MILLION
rides provided by the
5 largest transit
providers

Transit offers solutions to regional workforce, economic development, and mobility opportunities. In fact, fixed-route transit is available within ¼ mile for:

 56% of jobs	 61% of households living in poverty	 64% of households with one car or less
---------------------------	--	--

Improving the System Through Engagement with Transit Riders

Residents of Southeast Michigan recognize the value of transit, whether they take transit or rely on people who do.

Results of the representative 2025 RTA community survey showed:

1 OUT OF 3 PEOPLE
USED PUBLIC TRANSIT IN THE LAST YEAR

97% SAW THE BENEFIT OF
IMPROVING PUBLIC TRANSIT

STRONG COLLABORATION WITH TRANSIT PROVIDERS

In collaboration with our transit providers - Detroit Department of Transportation (DDOT), the Detroit People Mover, Ann Arbor Area Transportation Authority (TheRide), and Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transit (SMART) - the RTA has undertaken strategic initiatives to improve service reliability, reduce operational inefficiencies, and elevate coordination.



Providers Advisory Committee

The state designed coordination into RTA’s legislation, requiring a single body of experts to bring together leaders from the region’s largest transit agencies to collaborate and solve challenges. By sharing expertise and leveraging shared resources, the Providers Advisory Committee drives cost-effective solutions, sparks innovation, and delivers transformational improvements that benefit riders and communities alike.



Leadership from RTA, DDOT, SMART, TheRide and MDOT at the launch event of Transit app Royale, thanks to a grant from the Michigan Department of Transportation.

With providers, the RTA stewards an integration agenda. This agenda covers projects we are working on together to eliminate duplicative efforts and create a better rider experience. Projects include:

- Express buses
- Corridor enhancements
- Transit technology
- Mobility wallet
- Bus stop improvements
- Mobility management

RESPONSIBLE STEWARDSHIP OF PUBLIC FUNDING

Public transit funding is complicated. RTA's role is to maximize funding opportunities and navigate complex funding flows in partnership with transit providers.

As the legally designated federal recipient, RTA weaves together money from many different places, each with its own rules. Federal dollars can only be used for certain purposes, state programs have strict requirements, and local funding depends on property values or millages that change over time.

\$95 MILLION

Pass-Through Funds Distributed

\$11 MILLION

Merit-Based Grants Distributed to
39 Transit Providers

RTA Distributes Critical Federal Funds to Transit Providers



RTA is the federally designated agency that oversees and distributes pass-through and grant-specific federal funding to large and community-level transit providers, such as the Western Oakland Transportation Authority (WOTA), Northern Oakland Transportation Authority (NOTA), and Richmond-Lenox EMS. In 2025, the RTA awarded critical federal funds for seniors and people with disabilities to 39 community-level providers, local governments, and nonprofits.

Making Every State Dollar Go Further



The Legislature's historic \$45 million increase to baseline local bus operating (LBO) significantly narrowed the gap in operating costs that transit agencies have faced over the past five years. While LBO stabilizes day-to-day service, it cannot on its own fund long-term modernization or major infrastructure improvements. The new Neighborhood Road Fund (NRF) and Infrastructure Projects Authority Fund (IPAF) offer pathways to align road upgrades with transit capital projects on regionally significant corridors. RTA will work with MIO, MDOT and the transit providers to leverage these funds.



Local millages and other operating revenues all play essential roles in the complex flow of transit funding, helping agencies meet day-to-day service needs. In 2025, the Legislature eliminated opt-out provisions used by many communities in Wayne County, ensuring they must participate in future countywide millage elections. Wayne County plans for an August 2026 ballot initiative to remove opt-outs as a result of legislative action. Creating more flexibility in funding helps local communities achieve economic and mobility goals for their residents.

RTA's coordinating role brings these tools together. By aligning LBO, NRF and IPAF around shared regional priorities, RTA, in partnership with MDOT and transit providers, ensures state dollars are strategically leveraged to unlock larger federal capital grants. Collaboration strengthens regional competitiveness for federal funding, leveraging state match dollars that scale to secure more resources.



IMPROVING RIDER EXPERIENCE

A better rider experience is essential to helping more people choose transit with confidence.

It's Now Easier to Plan a Trip, Pay for Transit, and Track Your Ride

In October, the RTA partnered with the Transit app to provide Transit Royale upgrades to all Southeast Michigan riders, thanks to a grant from MDOT. Through the partnership, the RTA and regional transit partners integrated payments, tracking, and on-demand services into the Transit app, making it the first and only one-stop app for transit service in the region. This collaboration is an example of what regional transit agencies can accomplish when partnering with innovators and state leadership.

Payment Integration

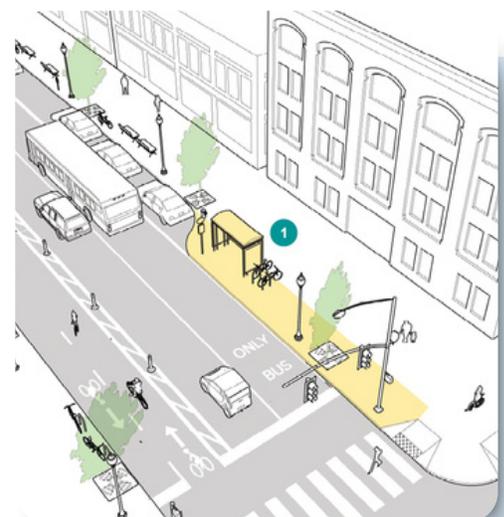
The RTA is carrying out its Mobility Wallet pilot thanks to a separate state-funded MDOT grant. The Mobility Wallet simplifies payments for riders and transit agencies and is an important pillar of a modern digital experience.

Access to Transit

Better Transit Stops That Boost Safety and Comfort for Riders

RTA's Access to Transit is the first program for the region that builds safety and accessibility at high-usage, high-need transit stops. The RTA collaborates with local communities to make transit easier to access, with investments like crosswalks, bike racks, live schedules, shelters, and wayfinding. Construction is anticipated to begin on the first round of locations in 2026.

The first round of the program includes \$3.16M in federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) funding that covers five locations, including Pittsfield Township, Detroit, Dearborn, Warren, and Southfield.



Credit: NACTO



HELPING SENIORS & PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES MAINTAIN INDEPENDENT LIVING

Mobility 4 All

The Mobility 4 All program is a regional initiative by the RTA to improve transit for people with disabilities, older adults, and individuals with limited incomes.



In 2025, the RTA distributed more than \$11 million in federal Section 5310 funds to 39 transit agencies and community providers. These investments supported continued and expanded service, the purchase and maintenance of vehicles, and the hiring and retention of staff. The RTA also conducted extensive engagement en route to completing an M4A plan that sets goals and creates coordination priorities.

Through M4A, the RTA partners with:

- Community providers to support the capital and operational needs of critical services.
- Mobility managers, like MyRide2, that offer guidance and training for navigating transportation.
- Transit providers to support Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and paratransit services.

“

FUNDING AWARD

This grant is truly life-changing for Milan Seniors for Healthy Living. It means our seniors won't have to choose between isolation and independence. They can keep showing up for the moments that matter—doctor visits, family gatherings, coffee with friends. These are the things that give life meaning. We are profoundly grateful to the RTA for recognizing how vital mobility is to the dignity and well-being of our aging loved ones.

– Alan Lown, Transportation Director of Milan Seniors for Healthy Living

Community Services

Southeast Michigan is home to more than 100 transit agencies. The RTA provides funding, guidance, and technical support as part of the M4A program. Combined with local funding streams, these efforts ensure seniors and people with disabilities can reach medical appointments, engage socially, and live with a level of independence.

CONNECTING PEOPLE TO WORK, EDUCATION & DESTINATIONS

Express Buses Demonstrate Demand & Scalable Growth

RTA's two proven express buses follow a national trend that delivers a compelling transit option for commuters and complements local bus services. Express bus routes can be easily expanded with new dedicated funding without the high cost of new infrastructure.

Detroit to Airport Express Bus (DAX)

Downtown Detroit to DTW

Detroiters and suburban residents rely on DAX for inexpensive rides to get to work or personal travel at the Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport (DTW).

Detroit's tourism and business travel economies benefit from many hotels and conventions depending on DAX as a reliable airport travel option for their guests.



D2A2

106,000+ RIDERS

+15,000 from 2024

Monday-Friday, 16 round trips daily
6:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m.
Saturday-Sunday, 8 round trips daily



DAX

57,000+ RIDERS

+25% from 2024

16 round trips daily
365 days a year
3:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m.

96% of riders are **satisfied with their overall experience** on D2A2 and DAX.

40% of riders reported **using D2A2 to get to and from work.**



Detroit to Ann Arbor Express Bus (D2A2) Downtown Detroit to Downtown Ann Arbor

The D2A2 express bus service is a critical transportation link between Detroit and Ann Arbor. D2A2 provides a cost-effective and convenient connection to work, education, and cultural events. Continued investment in D2A2 is essential to sustain the connection of two major employment hubs, ensuring that employers in both counties can attract and retain skilled employees. Based on RTA's 2025 ridership survey, more than 41% of riders wouldn't make the trip to Detroit or Ann Arbor without D2A2.

\$1 MILLION+ IN ANNUAL TICKET REVENUE

TICKETS: \$8 at door; \$6 with reservation

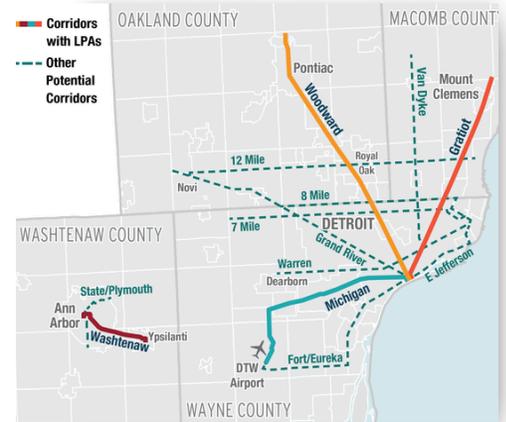
STRONGER COMMUNITIES & LOCAL ECONOMIES

Our four main corridors – Gratiot, Michigan, Woodward, and Washtenaw Avenues - are the most important job hubs in the state.

Delivering Capital Projects on Rapid Transit Corridors

Southeast Michigan needs a starting point for building bus rapid transit (BRT). The foundation begins with Gratiot, Michigan, Washtenaw, and Woodward Avenues - where directed investment will make the largest and most immediate impact.

RTA, local transit providers, and MDOT have prioritized these four corridors for future capital investment. Building BRT infrastructure and service will show value, build regional confidence for transformational transit progress, and set the stage for future expansion across the region. RTA adopted community-supported plans called locally preferred alternatives (LPAs) on these four corridors, articulating potential roadway infrastructure, technology, safety, and accessibility improvements.



These 4 corridors are **business & job centers**.



400,000+ JOBS

within **½ mile** of Gratiot, Michigan, Washtenaw & Woodward Avenues

QLINE Streetcar: A Regional Gateway Connecting People to Downtown Detroit & Beyond

For many, QLINE is their first experience with our region’s transit system. A free, safe, and reliable ride along Woodward Avenue creates a positive first impression, one that encourages people to explore more transit options to get around. When QLINE riders feel confident and comfortable, they’re more likely to consider riding other forms of transit.

One-Year Anniversary

In October 2025, the RTA celebrated one-year of ownership of the 3.3-mile QLINE streetcar, taking over operations from the M-1 Rail nonprofit. The RTA has been a responsible public steward, discovering efficiencies in administrative cost and facilitating long-term capital and safety planning. The RTA is in regular communication with the state about how QLINE can best serve residents and visitors to the Woodward Corridor.

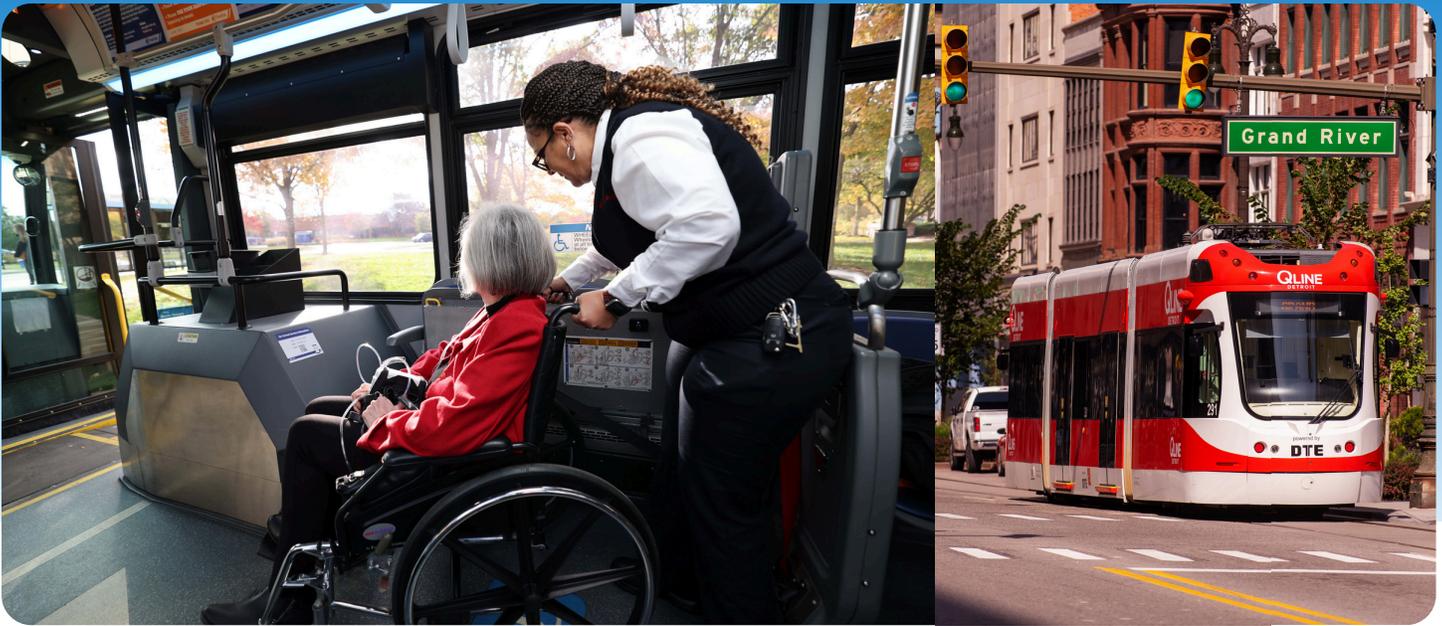


RTA partners with the Michigan Economic Development Corporation as a premier QLINE sponsor until 2028.



**1+ MILLION
RIDERS IN 2025**

\$10 BILLION
in **economic development**
from QLINE investment



BUILDING ON SUCCESS, LEADING WHAT'S NEXT

After decades of competition within, Southeast Michigan is moving forward through collaboration and shared purpose. The RTA is a product of that partnership, and tools like the Transit app show what is possible when agencies, communities, and riders come together around a unified vision.

As the state charts the course ahead with stable transit funding and a new transformative projects fund, the RTA Board and executive staff welcome opportunities to share our insights from research, surveys, and pilot projects with the Legislature, state departments, and peer agencies.

To build a truly regional and statewide transit system for our residents, knowledge-sharing and lessons learned will be key.

Connect With Leadership

The RTA remains your partner in building what's next for Southeast Michigan, knowing that a stronger, better-connected region strengthens Michigan as a whole. Strategic transit investments in Southeast Michigan power statewide economic competitiveness and support the population growth our state urgently needs.

We welcome continued dialogue, briefings, and opportunities to assist as you navigate complex mobility issues and explore new investment strategies. Together, we can deliver a modern, connected transit system that advances the region and secures a more prosperous future for all of Michigan.

HOW WE CAN HELP

- Technical expertise
- Knowledge sharing
- Funding strategy
- Policy advising
- Research
- Testimony
- Presentations

Get on Board!



RTAmichigan.org

(313) 402-1020 | info@rtamichigan.org

1001 Woodward Avenue,
Suite 1400
Detroit, MI 48226

Budgets & Audits

