

Board of Directors 2026 Legislative Agenda

Michigan's Legislature made a historic investment in 2025 with **\$160M for public transit**. This commitment begins to rebalance state transit funding and strengthens Michigan's ability to grow talent, attract business, and drive economic success.

Together with our transit providers, RTA will leverage these dollars strategically to improve reliability, expand service, and enhance rider experiences. We know costs are rising and ridership demand is growing, yet we remain nimble and will make every dollar count over the next year.

RTA's next step is **extending impact through partnership**. We're working with the state to align transit investments with Michigan's economic development strategies to grow talent, support businesses, create jobs, and strengthen communities. With continued collaboration, we can begin to build the modern transit system our southeast Michigan regional economy requires.

Building On Success. Leading What's Next.

Integrated Road and Transit Corridor Projects as Catalysts for Economic Growth

Michigan's new Neighborhood Road Fund (NRF) and Infrastructure Projects Authority Fund (IPAF) represent an unprecedented opportunity to advance our state's infrastructure by increasing alignment through road improvements paired with **transformational capital transit projects on regionally significant corridors**.

This is a strong start. To fully realize this potential, the legislature must remain focused on building a transportation system where roads and transit funding work better together, not in silos. More work is needed to ensure these new funds drive integrated projects that maximize economic impact and taxpayer dollars.

Flexibility is key. State law needs to explicitly define "Reasonable Appurtenances" (enhancements) to include Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) lanes and related transit amenities, removing barriers that prevent transit improvements from being incorporated into road projects.

RTA and MDOT plan for future rapid transit investment in Southeast Michigan's four most critical transit corridors: **Woodward, Michigan, Gratiot, and Washtenaw Avenues are economic engines, serving 34% of the region's jobs and 19% of the**

region's 4M residents. Michigan must ensure these new funds are the foundation for a long-term strategy that treats transit as a complementary partner with roads in economic development.

Both the Michigan Constitution and RTA's enabling legislation allow road funds to be used for reasonable purtenances, but the term is undefined in statute. These funds will position MDOT, RTA, and transit providers more competitively to unlock federal dollars.

Key Actions:

- Ensure Infrastructure Projects Authority Fund prioritizes capital investment for bus rapid transit and corridor improvements, with flexibility to fund regionally significant transit projects alongside road upgrades.
- Support Rapid Transit Lanes on State Trunk Lines to make it easier for express bus services to use existing infrastructure including High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes and Highway Flex Routes (using shoulders as extra lanes).
- Amend state law to include rapid transit and related amenities for road resurfacing and reconstruction projects. This would mean defining them as "Reasonable Appurtences".
- Leverage federal dollars by providing state match for transformational transit projects tied to corridor improvements.
- Ensure the future statewide transit plan includes a 10-year capital program that treats transit projects as economic drivers on par with road investments.

Express Buses Demonstrate Demand and Scalable Growth

Express buses using existing highways for fast direct routes are a smart investment for Southeast Michigan. Without the high cost of new infrastructure, RTA's two proven express buses pilots follow a national trend that delivers low-cost, convenient and productive time for commuters, business travelers and tourists. Additionally, these services can utilize existing MDOT upgrades like flex lanes, High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes, and other modernizations.

The RTA pilot services are exceedingly successful. They continue to have large ridership gains and well over 95% satisfaction from riders. Washtenaw and Wayne County leaders, the City of Detroit, downtown hotels and riders want these routes to become **permanent services with longer-term, dedicated funding.** Macomb and Oakland

counties have signaled the need for additional express buses connecting their northern locations to the airport and Downtown Detroit.

Key Actions:

- By 2027, provide ongoing, dedicated state funding from the Infrastructure Projects Authority Fund (IPAF) that invests in RTA's express bus program to launch two new express routes, one in Macomb and another in Oakland County.
- Support additional funding from the IPAF to make improvements that will make these service more convenient and efficient. Examples include bus on shoulder projects in congested areas, integrated stops at highway ramps, and enhanced park-and-rides.
- Adopt policies that allow transit agencies to enter flexible, long-term shared-use agreements for MDOT-owned park-and-ride lots near highway exits. This action will unlock scalable growth for express routes and deliver high economic returns without costly new construction.

Increase Funding for Community-Level Transit Services

People want to live self-sufficiently and independently. Michigan's aging population is driving record demand for rides for seniors, people with disabilities, and veterans. In RTA's four-county region dozens of community-level providers (WOTA, NOTA, OPC, WAVE, People's Express, Richmond Lenox EMS, etc.) deliver essential trips for medical care and daily needs. **Ridership on these services has more than doubled in the last two years.**

These providers face a **dual challenge: demand is rising** while nearly half of their funding depends on **competitive federal programs that are flat or declining**, producing persistent shortfalls. Last year, community level transit providers applied for \$22M in grant applications through RTA's 5310 federal formula distributed funds. Only \$11M was available over a two-year period, resulting in a **\$11M gap in funding** left to meet providers needed investments like new buses and operational costs.

At the same time, state and federal funding frameworks are misaligned. Community-level transit providers provide service within urbanized areas, which then don't qualify for rural programs (5311 federal, LBO state), yet must compete with large agencies like SMART for urban funds, leaving them "orphaned". Decades ago, the state created Municipal Credits and Specialized Services to help balance this gap when agencies like WOTAs and NOTAs were smaller.

Key Actions:

- Examine municipal credit and specialized services, for potential

improvements including possible expansion of better ways to deploy them.

Strengthening Transit Where It Matters Most

Updating Transit Funding Formulas & LBO Investments

The landmark \$45M increase to baseline LBO funding dramatically narrowed the gap in transit operating costs over the past five years. Transit agencies will avoid more service cuts as one-time dollars disappear.

RTA supports the Michigan Public Transit Association's policy positions for LBO and updating transit funding formulas. that RTA encourages legislators to increase funding flexibility and investment in LBO.

Key Actions:

- Increase LBO reimbursement to \$320M for FY2027.
- Update PA 51 to amend the LBO distribution population threshold to align with the federal definition of 200,000 for urbanized areas.
- Update and/or eliminate outdated references for local funding floors.
- Require state funding of the non-federal portion of transit capital projects, as has been the historic practice.

Increase Safety Protections for Transit Vehicle Operators

Transit operators face rising violence on the job. During the 2023–24 legislative session, Michigan lawmakers advanced HB 4917, legislation designed to strengthen penalties for assaults against bus, rail, and streetcar operators committed while they are working or because of their role as transit employees. Although the bill passed both chambers, it was laid over under the rules at the close of the session and has not yet taken effect.

The legislation aligns with national advocacy led by the American Public Transportation Association and reflects principles of the federal Violence Against Transit Workers Act. HB 4917 modernizes sentencing guidelines by elevating certain assaults from misdemeanors to felonies, increasing penalties for repeat offenses, and clearly recognizing transit operators as essential public-facing workers deserving of stronger legal protections.

Key Action:

- Support enactment and implementation of HB 4917.

Building on Successes: Leading Southeast Michigan's Transit Future

The Legislature created the RTA to coordinate transit across four counties, unlock federal funding for capital infrastructure programs that maximize the impact of state dollars. Over the past decade, the RTA has delivered that mission through innovative, onetime grant funded projects that improved service coordination, expanded mobility options, and ensured state and local partners speak with one regional voice.

Yet among the **nation's top 15 major metros, the RTA remains the only one that has a state mandate but no sustainable funding.** While RTA has used temporary federal ARPA funds responsibly to build regional pilot projects, programs and services, these funds end in 2028.

A predictable funding foundation for RTA operations would ensure we can keep doing what the Legislature created to do: align transit investments, leverage federal opportunities, and support Michigan's economic competitiveness by connecting people to jobs and employers to talent.