



Value Through Action

2026-2028 Strategic Plan



Regional Transit Authority
Of Southeast Michigan



ABOUT THE RTA

The Regional Transit Authority of Southeast Michigan (RTA) has spearheaded and led regional transit planning efforts in the Detroit and Ann Arbor metropolitan area since the authority was created in 2012.

A robust regional transit system is critical for growing both the region and the state's population and economy. The RTA works in close collaboration with regional transit providers—including the Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation (SMART), the Detroit Department of Transportation (DDOT), and TheRide—to coordinate service improvements and strengthen the overall regional transit network.

The plans, programs, and projects that are led and coordinated by RTA define a path forward for critical public transit infrastructure and service enhancements. This prepares the region for future rapid transit—and other major capital and operational transit projects—which will result in enhanced regional access and connections between cities and communities in Macomb, Oakland, Washtenaw, and Wayne counties.

MISSION

Creating new and better ways to move and connect people.

VISION

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.*



DIRECT SERVICES



A 3.3-mile streetcar on the Woodward Corridor in Detroit with more than one million riders annually.



Express bus service between downtown Detroit and downtown Ann Arbor



Express bus service between Detroit and Detroit Metro Airport (DTW)

Since its creation, the Regional Transit Authority of Southeast Michigan (RTA) has worked to lay the foundation for a more coordinated and connected regional transit system. Over the years, the organization has helped convene regional partners, pilot new services, and elevate the importance of regional mobility as a driver of economic opportunity and quality of life across Southeast Michigan.

Today, the RTA complements the existing transportation system with express buses that travel on highways across existing provider service areas.

IN 2025, THE RTA PARTNERED WITH SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN TRANSIT PROVIDERS TO ADOPT A CRITICAL TECHNOLOGICAL UPGRADE: THE TRANSIT APP, WHICH PROVIDES A ONE-STOP-SHOP FOR RIDERS TO PAY FARES, PLAN TRIPS, BOOK ON-DEMAND TRIPS, AND TRACK THEIR RIDE IN REAL TIME.



These efforts reflect the central role the RTA plays in convening partners, aligning regional priorities, and advancing work that makes for an improved rider experience. It is in this spirit of partnership that this strategic plan was developed, inviting and incorporating the perspectives of the region's transit partners and stakeholders. This collaborative approach is the RTA's intended modus operandi going forward: partnering with service providers, local jurisdictions, SEMCOG, MDOT, and others to implement the plan's priorities and objectives. Through regular convenings and coordinated planning, the RTA will work to ensure that the organization best positioned to deliver a given service is supported in doing so.

The tremendous work of many, over years and decades, has helped Southeast Michigan reach this inflection point in which the belief that we can achieve more together is stronger than ever. This plan articulates the ways in which the RTA will play our part in continuing to advance transit in Southeast Michigan, focusing on delivering the greatest value to the public over the next three years and building momentum and support for a transformative transit future across the region.

Part of RTA’s ongoing planning work includes maintaining a Regional Transit Master Plan (RTMP) that serves as a unified vision and blueprint for transit progress in Southeast Michigan.

The RTMP process has included hundreds of meetings, thousands of comments, and years of discussion to understand what matters most for the people of Southeast Michigan.

Through this strategic plan, we are advancing five key programs from the Regional Transit Master Plan that will make everyday travel across Southeast Michigan faster, safer, and easier—helping people get to work, school, healthcare, and the places that matter most.



Express Bus: Provides fast, reliable connections between major destinations—helping people spend less time in traffic and more time where they need to be.

Transit Corridors: Reimagines major regional roads to move people more efficiently and safely, while creating stronger, more connected communities—with the QLINE serving as a catalyst for future investment.

Seamless Customer Experience: Makes transit simple and intuitive—so riders can plan, pay for, and track their trip in one place, without confusion or delay.

Expanded Access: Provides seniors and people with disabilities independence and ensures more people can reach essential services and stay connected to their communities.


Transit Stops: Makes bus stops safer, easier to reach, and more comfortable, while developing modern mobility hubs that connect different ways of getting around.


PRIORITY 1


BUILD ON RTA'S EXISTING PROGRAMS AND SERVICES


Objectives


- 1** Grow DAX and D2A2 ridership, and work with providers to establish new highway express bus service, where it would add value and where funding exists.



- 2** Partner to develop a regional approach to corridors and advance at least one signature corridor project to demonstrate the region's capacity to work together to deliver safe and effective transit.


- 3** Support local providers in using the Transit App, and coordinate with provider farebox replacements and on the potential future of the Mobility Wallet pilot.


- 4** Advance regional priorities from the Mobility4All program like expanded mobility management and travel training, and coordination with the community providers.


- 5** Coordinate with providers to implement Access to Transit, improving safety and accessibility at high-usage, high-need transit stops across the region.


- 6** Continue to improve and develop plans to leverage the QLINE, in close collaboration with the People Mover to provide for a more seamless user experience.







PRIORITY 1

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE








NOW | 2026

Launch and Strengthen Core Initiatives

-  Grow ridership on DAX and D2A2.
 Complete Express Bus Expansion Study.
-  Work with Woodward Avenue stakeholders to plan a signature project that leverages existing funding, including the RTA's federal funding for QLINE improvements.
-  Expand and improve the Transit app marketing with the providers, focusing on vehicle and station information.
-  Develop a fare modernization pathway using the Transit App and Mobility Wallet as baseline components.
-  Finalize plans to advance mobility management and travel training through Mobility4All.
-  Meet with providers to understand their preferences for implementing bus stop improvements funded by the Access to Transit program, and begin Phase 1 (design).

NEXT | 2027

Expand and Integrate Programs

-  Launch DAX and D2A2 improvements and develop new highway express bus services, pending funding and partnership.

-  Evaluate and implement the Woodward Avenue corridor project.
-  Expand adoption of the Transit App across regional providers.
Launch the next phase of the Mobility Wallet.
-  Issue competitive call for projects, for providers, local jurisdictions, and other non-profit organizations to apply for funding for projects aligned with the [Mobility4All Coordinated Plan](#).
-  Complete Phase 1 of the Access to Transit program, and begin Phase 2 (construction), directly or via providers.
-  Review and begin implementing planned improvements to QLINE service.

PRIORITY 1

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE





SUSTAIN | 2028

Expand Regional Impact

-  Maintain strong ridership growth on DAX and D2A2.
 Conduct a region-wide survey to gauge transit priorities and rider satisfaction.
-  Apply lessons from the Woodward corridor project to advance additional regional corridors, as appropriate.
-  Complete Phase 2 of the Access to Transit program, and begin Phase 3 (construction), directly or via providers.
 Strengthen regional coordination around fare systems, technology, and rider information tools.
-  Continue implementing QLINE improvements in alignment with regional providers.

METRICS

Progress toward these objectives will be tracked using the following measures:

-  Percentage growth in DAX, D2A2 and QLINE ridership
-  Percentage growth in adoption of the Transit App and Mobility Wallet
-  Percentage completed of needed transit improvements identified
-  Percentage increase in DAX, D2A2, and QLINE rider satisfaction via survey results

These metrics will help the RTA track both the completion and effectiveness of key strategic objectives.

PRIORITY 2

MAXIMIZE LOCAL, STATE AND FEDERAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES, REGARDLESS OF THE RECIPIENT.

Objectives

1



Convene collaborative discussions among providers to establish shared transit project priorities, from a regional perspective, to take advantage of new state funding and other opportunities; quarterback collaborative pursuit of funding in support of the projects.

2



Work with providers to understand, support, and collectively pursue local, state, and federal funding priorities—especially the upcoming county ballot proposals, funding from the new state infrastructure program, and competitive grant opportunities.

3



By 2028 and after first optimizing RTA's existing budget, work with regional partners to secure new sustainable funding sources to support the comprehensive operational and capital needs of RTA direct services (QLINE, D2A2, and DAX) as well as other local needs, where synergies exist.

4



Optimize the legislatively mandated Provider Advisory Council (PAC) and Citizens Advisory Council (CAC) for effectiveness.

PRIORITY 2

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

NOW | 2026

Align Regional Priorities and Optimize Internal Efficiencies



Evolve the RTMP process to focus on creating a consolidated list of priority transit projects that link with the RTA's Regional Capital Program and SEMCOG's Regional Transportation Plan.



Convene providers in a meeting or series of meetings to build a shared understanding of priority transit projects and to collaboratively synthesize those into a set of regional priorities.



Support the upcoming county ballot proposals, in coordination with the local jurisdictions.



NEXT | 2027

Secure Funding



As funding opportunities arise, alert providers and convene them to reflect on the priorities previously identified to determine which priorit(es) best aligns with the funding opportunity.

Quarterback a consensus-building process to align partners around projects that offer the greatest impact and are most competitive for available funding.



Work with regional partners to secure new external funding sources wherever possible and to secure contributions from regional partners where there is clear connection between RTA services and benefits to their constituents.



Leveraging learnings from Strategic Plan Priority 2, page 9, work with regional stakeholders to refocus the PAC and CAC for maximum effectiveness.

PRIORITY 2 IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

SUSTAIN | 2028



Continue ongoing dialogue with providers and regional stakeholders to ensure the region remains coordinated, prepared, and strategically aligned to maximize funding.



Convene the refocused PAC and CAC.



METRICS

Progress toward these objectives will be tracked using the following measures:

- ✓ Percentage of efficiency savings goal implemented and achieved
- ✓ Percentage of long-term funding gap solved
- ✓ Number of funding opportunities identified and shared with regional partners
- ✓ Number of funding applications submitted with letters of support from regional partners
- ✓ Total dollar value of funding applications submitted with regional coordination or support
- ✓ In future years, total funding dollars secured for projects through coordinated efforts

These metrics will help the RTA track both the scale of funding opportunities being pursued and the region's success in securing resources over time.

Internal Organizational Alignment to Deliver on the Plan

Achieving the priorities and objectives outlined in this strategic plan will require not only strong external partnerships, but also a deliberate and sustained focus on internal alignment. As the RTA advances this work, it will be essential to ensure that organizational structure, staffing, and business processes are driving as much value as possible for the region. This includes making intentional decisions about how RTA resources are deployed, how internal responsibilities are defined, and how internal systems support efficient and effective implementation.

To support this alignment, the RTA will undertake several key internal actions. The organization will explore opportunities to leverage internal capacity by bringing in house select professional services that are currently contracted. Staff roles and responsibilities will be updated to reflect strategic priorities, with an emphasis on clearly defined functions and more centralized business operations. In parallel, the RTA will strengthen financial alignment by assigning all applicable expenses to specific service lines within the budget.

Finally, the organization will evaluate and implement updated financial and purchasing systems to ensure that internal processes are modern, streamlined, and capable of supporting the RTA's evolving role.

Once these internal systems and structures are optimized, the RTA will be better positioned to seek out funding to ensure the sustainability of the organization as a whole. In doing so, the RTA will prioritize the pursuit of new external funding sources—including state and federal programs and competitive grant opportunities—as the first pathway for securing additional resources. Only once RTA's existing budget is optimized and new sources are pursued would other options be discussed.

Where appropriate, and where there is a clear connection between RTA services and benefits to local communities, the RTA will also work with regional partners to explore contributions that align with the value delivered to their constituents. This sequenced approach ensures that all funding strategies are pursued thoughtfully, transparently, and in a manner that reinforces regional collaboration.

Together, these efforts will position the RTA to more effectively deliver on its strategic plan, ensuring that internal capacity and resources are fully aligned with the ambition and impact of this strategic plan.

