



Transportation Riders United

RTA Victory!!

How Did It Happen?

The exciting victory of creating a Regional Transit Authority for southeast Michigan may have felt like a rush of a few days of action, but it was truly years in the making. Here is an overview of how it happened.



TRU, MOSES and others have been advocating for a **Regional Transit Authority for over a decade** now as an essential step in improving transit in our region. Every other major metro area has one regional agency to coordinate, improve, fund, and advance transit throughout their region. It was clear the Detroit region needed one too; a lesson we shared with policy makers, researchers, riders, students, partners, and anyone else who would listen.



In 2010, the **Transportation for Michigan (Trans4M) coalition** was formed to transform transportation policy in Michigan and immediately **made advocacy for an RTA one of the first priority issues**. Led by TRU, Michigan Suburbs Alliance and others, it remained a top priority for the past two years. This **statewide support proved essential**,

especially from partners like the Michigan Land Use Institute and Disability Advocates for Kent County. We also brought together business leaders, senior advocates, the disability community, and many others to make the case for an RTA to our state leaders.



In 2011, TRU and our Trans4M allies **urged Governor Snyder to make RTA a major priority**.



We gathered thousands of citizen petitions, letters for dozens of business leaders, and other support statements and presented them to Lt. Governor Brian Calley (image left). **And they listened!** The Governor specifically called for a strong RTA in his Infrastructure Address. He appointed Dennis Schornack (below right) who worked diligently with

local leaders and advocates to create a challenging but critical compromise that all of the county and city leaders could get behind.



Even with strong support from the Governor and County Executives, we still needed **strong bi-partisan support in introducing the bills**. Several local state senators approached the Senate Transportation Chair, Tom Casperson, seeking his support. Although a Republican who represents the UP where traffic congestion means two logging trucks, he was open to the idea. Senator Casperson accepted Senator Bert Johnson's invitation to come down to Detroit and spend a day learning about and riding our transit system.

TRU's Ruth Johnson made a transit overview presentation, then **led the Senators and Dennis Schornack on a day-in-the-life ride on the SMART and DDOT buses** all throughout the region. It was quite a powerful experience highlighting the lack of coordination and inconvenience of our current system and the need for improvements. And Sen. Casperson became a powerful ally!



So, Sen. Tom Casperson (R-Escanaba), Sen. Bert Johnson (D-Detroit), and Sen. Rebekah Warren (D-Ann Arbor) (faces above right) introduced a package of bills in January 2012 to create, fund, and manage an RTA. Carefully crafted, **it addressed all of the essential issues, including governance, funding, coordination, and more**, while avoiding certain

legacy cost and merger issues that proved too intractable. Essential to its success was **careful compromise that the executives of all four counties and Detroit could agree** upon (if begrudgingly). Those local leaders or their deputies then provided essential unanimous testimony to legislative hearings (image left), that legislators had a hard time disputing.



R-PATH, the coalition of county commission and city council leaders, also vocally advocated for it and got strong resolutions of support from each local legislative body, to strengthen the statements of support from the County Executives.

TRU and our Trans4M allies were involved from the very start, meeting with the Governor's office and legislators to help shape the legislation to achieve the best possible RTA. Once introduced, we **brought dozens of people from across the state to the Capitol to meet with their legislators and make the case for the RTA**. Hundreds more called and emailed legislators from home, following a series of up-to-the minute action alerts we provided over the course of the year.



We ensured that **each RTA hearing was packed with diverse supporters**, representing municipal leaders, business leaders, bus riders, and other advocates. Only a few opposing voices ever spoke up. Local media and Lansing insiders noted that we had more supporters at the RTA hearings than did hearings on the personal property tax and other major issues. This enormous and near-unanimous support proved very impressive to legislators.

After several months of debate, substantial public pressure, and several key amendments addressing valid concerns, **the Senate Transportation Committee passed the bills in April with solid bi-partisan support**. But Senate Majority Leader Richardville struggled to get enough Republicans on board to feel secure putting it up for a vote, despite strong Democratic support. So it stalled most the summer and fall waiting for a Senate vote.



The voices of support calling for the RTA only strengthened over the summer, with US Transportation **Secretary Ray LaHood** (left at podium) **personally providing unprecedented levels of support** and withholding federal funding of the M-1 Rail streetcar project until an RTA was

created. This spurred powerful support and advocacy from the M-1 business leaders to push for RTA passage as well.

Our coalition continued to advocate to individual senators to build their understanding, address their concerns, and ensure support. Local partners including MOSES and the Troy Chamber of Commerce mobilized constituent supporters to make a powerful case to local legislators. Once it became clear that we had a solid majority of state Senators in support, we also increased pressure on the Majority Leader to hold the vote, even without a majority in his Republican caucus.



Finally **on Nov. 27**, at the start of the lame duck session, **the Senate passed the package with strong bi-partisan support** (14 Republicans and 11 Democrats). It moved to the House with less than ten session days scheduled before the end of the year.

TRU and our Trans4M allies worked hard to make sure House members understood the benefits of the RTA as well, holding two more **big RTA Days at the Capitol**, testifying before the House Transportation Committee, distributing RTA information to every House office twice, and mobilizing calls and emails from across the state.



Despite strong bi-partisan support for the policies, the Republican leadership rushing through so-called "Right-to-Work" legislation nearly derailed the entire effort. In protest, Democrats vowed to oppose anything and everything, including legislation they strongly supported like the RTA. On Dec. 5, the House Transportation Committee passed the package with only Republican votes.

The Governor maintained his strong support for RTA as one of his top priorities and mobilized his entire legislative team to work for its passage. M-1 business leaders (right) ramped up their push, with personal phone calls to legislators on the House floor. Trans4M partners at the Michigan Environmental Council, the Michigan Public Transit Association, and the Michigan Municipal League provided ongoing in-Capitol advocacy and up-to-the minute updates. **Supporters from across the state and beyond made calls, emails, tweets, Facebook posts and every other sort of outreach they could rally to keep attention on the importance of the RTA.**



After two attempts that fell short, **on Dec. 6 the RTA bill passed 57-50**, with almost exclusive Republican votes. The funding bill and rest of the RTA package also passed over the following week. The Governor signed them in Detroit Dec. 19.

It took incredible effort by hundreds of people across the state and across the political spectrum to get this done.

A sincere thank you to each and every one of you!

After a moment to celebrate and pat ourselves on the back, we'll get back to work. In many ways, **this is more of a beginning than the end**. Now that the RTA has been approved, County Executives must select board members who are truly dedicated to a bold, regionally focused transform of transit in southeast Michigan. That board must then hire experienced professional staff who have developed quality regional transit elsewhere. They must develop and truly integrate a citizens' advisory council that they respect and listen to. They must update the Regional Transit Plan and identify a clear path to implementing it. They must put on the ballot and make the case for public investment in the transit system.

The coming effort won't be easy, but it is **the essential path forward to a high quality regional transit system** that will provide affordable attractive transportation choices and move our region into the 21st century. Let's get started!!