



# BECOMING A BOARD MEMBER

*Or, “How you can play an essential role in revitalizing our region by being a Leader of TRU. . .”*

## A guide for prospective board members of Transportation Riders United, Detroit’s transit advocate

### Table of Contents

- From the Board President
- TRU – Our past, our present, and Detroit’s future
- TRU’s Mission, Vision, and Values
- Strategic Plan Summary, 2014-2017
- The Role of the TRU Board of Directors
  - Board Meetings
  - Your Responsibilities as a Board Member
- Desired Skills/Traits - [What does TRU need to improve its Board?](#)
- Next Steps - [How do I become a board member?](#)
- Contacts and Questions

# FROM THE BOARD PRESIDENT

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Welcome, and thank you for taking the time to look through this material. TRU is seeking to expand our Board and you may be a valuable addition to TRU! We want you to understand what being a member of the Board of Directors means to us as an organization.

Transportation Riders United (TRU) is Detroit's transit advocate. Our mission is to improve and promote transit in greater Detroit because we see this as one of the best ways to restore urban vitality, ensure transportation equity and improve our quality of life. TRU believes the Detroit region needs a balanced transportation network because transportation investments shape our future.

TRU works to make this happen by helping our fellow Detroit area citizens see the opportunities that transit offers, engaging them in important transportation decisions, watchdogging current transportation processes, providing transit expertise to decision-makers and overall working to be the public's voice to ensure that transportation investments support all of our interest in providing a system that is accessible, affordable, accountable and sustainable.

TRU's board of directors is our vital governing force; the board sets our policies and goals through strategic planning, ensures TRU has the financial resources to succeed and is responsible for TRU's adherence to our legal obligations and organizational values. Board members are also important community ambassadors.

What we want is a board of directors that reflects the best of Detroit: Diverse, dynamic and dedicated to getting the job done. Maybe you have experience in public transit issues, or economic/community development, or maybe you have a knack for politics or fundraising, or are well connected to decision makers in the region. If so, please look through the rest of the information to learn more about TRU, the responsibilities you would take up as a board member and what your next steps would be to explore making that happen.

Thank you again, and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Kelly Logan, TRU Board President

# TRU Our past, our present, and Detroit's future

In 1999, TRU began as a handful of people who were outraged by the Detroit region's poor transit service and lack of real leadership working to improve it. Some saw the connection between poor transit and Detroit's economic struggles. Others were concerned about the health impacts of air pollution from so many cars and trucks. Still others just wanted their bus to show up on time.

By 2001, TRU became an official 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to improving bus service, breaking down the barriers to real rapid transit, and advocating for smart investments in transportation. Over the next ten years, we successfully:

- Blocked the expansion of I-375 further onto the riverfront, a wasteful boondoggle which would have made impossible the resurgence of the Riverfront as the attractive pedestrian destination it is today;
- Pushed SEMCOG to change its voting structure to provide more balance between urban and rural interests in the region;
- Assisted in ensuring overwhelming voter support for each SMART millage renewal and persuading communities like Farmington Hills to remain in SMART; and
- Ensured Detroit leaders recognize the importance of reliable bus service as an essential city service (even if they are still unwilling to fund or manage it sufficiently).



Most importantly, we have led a transformation in overall public opinion on the importance and potential of public transit in greater Detroit. When we began, many people didn't think we even needed transit in the Motor City, or thought it was impossible to make happen here. Our outreach and education convinced people that quality transit is essential to the region. Now questions focus on how and when the region will improve transit, not whether or if.

TRU has grown from an all-volunteer organization raising red flags about harmful highway boondoggles to

a balance of professional staff and passionate volunteers working together to advocate for a stronger future for greater Detroit, built around high quality transit investments for our region.

TRU currently has three professional staff and several interns and consultants managing the day to day implementation of our mission and priorities. Board members and other volunteers still play an essential role in developing policy, providing expertise, and spreading our message throughout the region.



## TRU's MISSION

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TRU's mission is to improve and promote transit in greater Detroit in order to:

- Restore urban vitality,
- Ensure transportation equity and
- Improve quality of life.

TRU believes the Detroit region needs a balanced transportation network because transportation investments shape our future.

## TRU's VISION

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All people in greater Detroit will have reliable, safe, and affordable access to the places they live, work, shop, and play through a high-quality transit system.

An integrated network of buses, trains, bike routes, and other transportation options will seamlessly connect our cities, region, and beyond.

This system will foster attractive livable neighborhoods, vibrant cities, and a sustainable region.

## TRU's VALUES

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- TRU is dedicated to serving the public's best interest. We are part of the community and work on behalf of the community.
- TRU works hard because we are confident that we can make a difference over the long-term.  
We are results-oriented and mission-driven.
- TRU believes in collaboration and teamwork. We seek to engage new and diverse partners and supporters.
- TRU is committed to providing trustworthy information and to making well-reasoned, evidence-based decisions.
- TRU values openness and respectful candor. We strive to always act with honesty and integrity.

# STRATEGIC PLAN SUMMARY, 2014-2017

To effectively tackle the major challenges of improving public transit throughout greater Detroit, TRU leaders developed a Strategic Plan to guide and prioritize our work over a three-year time horizon. Because circumstances change, each year we revisit and adjust the Strategic Plan based on a situational analysis.

- **TRU's strengths and weaknesses:** We are proud to be seen by many as the Detroit area transit issue expert and as a reliable source of information, able to bridge the communications gap between different audiences. We are also pleased to be active participants in several transit Advisory Councils and coalitions. We strive to build upon these strengths even as we work to overcome weaknesses that include lack of sufficient influence and funding and the need to improve our communications.
- **Detroit area transit opportunities and challenges:** This is an exciting, yet challenging time for Detroit area transit, with a new Regional Transit Authority planning rapid transit and a public vote for dedicated funding. Polling and SMART millage results show that voters are open to such funding, even as politicians still struggle with budget deficits and anti-tax sentiment. While Detroit is fighting through bankruptcy and ongoing city-suburb antipathy and distrust, there is growing interest and investment in Detroit's revitalization, including the M-1 Rail streetcar.
- It is in consideration of this situational analysis that TRU commits to the following goals as the best ways to achieve our mission and vision over the years of 2014 through 2017.

## Programmatic/Transit Goals:

1. **Build majority support for dedicated regional transit funding** by watchdogging the RTA, building a broad coalition (Connect4Prosperity) of influential organizations, utilizing polling data to develop persuasive messages, and developing a detailed campaign plan for a successful 2016 funding vote.
2. **Push for maintained and improved DDOT bus service** by holding DDOT management accountable.
3. **Advocate major progress towards effective rapid transit** on Woodward, Gratiot, and Michigan Avenue.

We will also monitor other key transportation projects, including M-1 Rail streetcar, SMART bus service, commuter rail projects, I-94 widening, and I-375 replacement. However, unless circumstances change, we will not dedicate substantial staff time or resources to these.

## Organization Development Goals:

1. We will **improve and expand Board Development**, striving for an expanded board with sustainable leadership through strategic board recruitment, leadership succession planning, effective board training, and additional leadership opportunities.
2. We will **develop an organization resource plan for staffing and funding** TRU's work over the next three years, which could include a fully implemented fund development plan, more foundation grants, new major donors, and a human resource plan.
3. We will sustain and expand our **annual fundraising event** with sustainable board leadership, expanded volunteer involvement, and maximized business sponsor support.
4. We will develop and implement **tools and systems to more effectively share information**, such as improving our email engagement tools, doing more proactive media outreach, and distributing factsheets and policy papers.
5. We will develop and implement **systems for mobilizing organizations and influential individuals**.

In addition, TRU leaders also create an Annual Plan to prioritize our goals for a 12-month period. The Annual Plan and full 20-page Strategic Plan are available upon request.

Through this work, TRU seeks to improve our effectiveness, partnerships, and impact, resulting in public support for major new investments in regional transit improvement. While a few years of effort cannot undo decades of problems, it can put the region on the right path.



# THE ROLE OF THE TRU BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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The Board of Directors is the governing body for Transportation Riders United (TRU). This includes determining TRU's mission, budget and priorities as well as ensuring the organization has the financial resources to fulfill its mission. The Board also selects the Executive Director and provides financial, legal, and ethical oversight and accountability. Each director is elected for a three year term of office, and may serve two consecutive terms.

## BOARD MEETINGS

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We hold six to eight board meetings yearly; Board members are expected to make every effort to attend. These are generally two hours long on a weekday evening in Detroit.

## RESPONSIBILITIES OF BOARD MEMBERS

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As a Director of TRU's Board, you would be required to:

- Be strongly supportive of TRU's mission and vision;
- Actively participate in most Board meetings (in person or via conference call);
- Participate in TRU's annual Board review and planning retreat;
- Be an ambassador of the organization, sharing information about TRU programs among your networks and recruiting friends and colleagues to TRU events;
- Make a personally significant financial contribution to TRU, at the highest level feasible (based on personal finances, different amounts for everyone, among your top three donations);
- Assist in fundraising for the organization, including supporting our fundraising dinner and annual appeal;
- Be responsible for TRU's adherence to its legal obligations and organizational values;
- Publicly support all official decisions of the Board; and
- Assist in identifying future board members.

## DESIRED SKILLS/TRAITS - WHAT DOES TRU NEED TO IMPROVE ITS BOARD?

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TRU can best achieve its mission with a Board of Directors that provides diverse experiences and viewpoints as well as important skills and connections. While no one person could meet all of these measures, these are some of the traits we are seeking in potential new Board members.

- Geographic diversity - currently need more Detroiters, Macomb and Washtenaw County residents
- Racial diversity - currently need more African Americans, Latinos, and Arab Americans
- Finance and financial oversight experience
- Business people and/or connections to the Business Community
- Fundraising and event planning skills
- Communications skills and Public Relations experience
- Political experience and connections

## NEXT STEPS – *How do I become a board member?*

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1. Learn more and get your questions answered by meeting with a current Board Member and visiting our website.
2. [Meet the Board](#) with a member of the Board Development Committee, see how we work, and give the current board a chance to meet you.
3. [Complete a Board Application](#) and submit it by November 20 to [INFO@DETROITTRANSIT.ORG](mailto:INFO@DETROITTRANSIT.ORG) to explain your interest and skills.
4. TRU's Board Development Committee will evaluate Board candidates in comparison to the skills and connections we need on our Board and make recommendations to the full Board of Directors.
5. If this is a good match, then the Board of Directors will vote for a 'slate' of recommended candidates.
6. At the Annual Meeting in late January, the slate will be presented to members and voted on.

## CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS

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If you have questions or would like more information, please contact us:

- Kelly Logan, TRU Board President - [kelly.logan.me@gmail.com](mailto:kelly.logan.me@gmail.com) or (313) 645-4552
- Megan Owens, TRU Executive Director - [MOwens@DetroitTransit.org](mailto:MOwens@DetroitTransit.org) or (313) 963-8872
- Or any of TRU's current Board members.

TRANSPORTATION RIDERS UNITED



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500 Griswold, Suite 1650  
Detroit, Michigan 48226

[DETROITTRANSIT.ORG](http://DETROITTRANSIT.ORG)

Phone: (313) 963.8872 Fax: (313) 963.8876