



TRU Statement on Regional Transit Ballot Loss

On November 8, nearly 900,000 people throughout southeast Michigan voted to support a major investment to improve regional transit in the largest show of transit support this region has ever seen. Unfortunately, slightly more people voted against it. As we at TRU evaluate how to best continue fighting for improved transit, it is important to review what happened and how far the transit advocacy effort has come.

What Happened

The Regional Transit Authority ballot proposal that was placed before Macomb, Oakland, Washtenaw and Wayne County voters on November 8 fell 17,200 votes short of the majority required to pass, with no votes outweighing yes votes by 50.5% to 49.5%.

	Yes %	Yes Votes	No Votes	Total Votes on RTA measure
Detroit	64.5%	144,474	78,503	222,977
Washtenaw	56.2%	94,274	73,632	167,906
Oakland	49.9%	292,401	293,510	585,911
Outer Wayne	46.9%	215,036	243,087	458,123
Macomb	39.9%	148,161	222,807	370,968
total	49.52%	894,346	911,539	1,805,885

Lacking majority voter approval, the tax will not be implemented and the RTA will not have the revenue needed to implement the Regional Transit Plan. Note that this does not alter current DDOT, SMART, People Mover, AAATA and M-1 Rail operations, which will continue largely as they have previously.

Unfortunately, this means tens of thousands of people will continue to be left without access to opportunities and our region will fall further behind other metro areas. The problems the Regional Transit Plan attempted to address will continue to fester.

What Went Wrong

There are many reasons why people chose to vote against it or not vote at all. We can only speculate about what might have led to a different result; a broader public engagement effort over the past two years, or perhaps a robust field campaign involving more direct voter contact. Maybe the messaging about seniors and workers without cars wasn't the most persuasive.

Ultimately, there may have been nothing that those working to pass this could have done to buck the national trends that depressed urban votes and energized people who felt failed by government and angry at “others.” We may never know for sure.

Extraordinary Show of Support

Despite the outcome, transit supporters should feel quite proud of the effort we undertook. The RTA crafted a great plan that would have benefited many people. Hundreds of organizations, businesses, and civic leaders spoke out on the need for reliable regional transit. And many passionate volunteers and activists got involved and spread the Vote Yes message. We at TRU offer our sincere and deep thanks to each and every one of those supporters.

This regional transit effort has been growing slowly for decades, and has never been as big or broadly supported as it is today. Nearly 900,000 people, most of whom never ride transit, voted to invest in improving our region’s transit. Now we need to build on that support and continue to fight for more and better transit.

What’s Next

The short answer is that no one knows yet.

The RTA is still here and will continue in its mission to coordinate and improve transit throughout the four-county region. They will continue the Reflex express bus service and will seek other low-cost ways to improve regional transit. At the same time, they will evaluate the ballot loss and explore options for raising the necessary funds for major transit improvements. While the law allows them to go back to the ballot in Nov 2018, other transit renewals make that difficult. RTA reports that all options remain on the table.

TRU is still here. TRU has been working for more than 16 years to tackle the transit problems facing our region. And we will be here for many years to come, continuing to fight for more and better transit for our community.

TRU is undertaking a strategic planning process of our own, evaluating the region's transit opportunities and challenges along with TRU's strengths and weaknesses, then using that information to decide our plans and priorities for the next three years. Your input is welcomed at www.DetroitTransit.org.

Whatever path we take, it will be essential for transit supporters continue to work together in continuing to press for the transit improvements that will ensure access to opportunity and a vibrant Detroit region. Thank you for your past efforts. Please stay involved!