

Detroit Area Transit: 2014 Year in Review

2014 was an exciting year of progress for Detroit area transit.

While our region still fails to provide sufficient, reliable transit options, huge strides have been taken at the Regional Transit Authority, M-1 Rail streetcar, and elsewhere. TRU is proud of our role in helping move the region forward.

Please enjoy this review of Detroit area transit progress and what's on tap for 2015.

TRU Welcomes New Regional Transit Authority (RTA) CEO Michael Ford

While the RTA was created by the state legislature in 2012 and began official operations in 2013, it has only just begun many important aspects of its work. **The Board hired as CEO Michael Ford**, whose leadership brought the Ann Arbor-Ypsilanti community together around a shared vision of how transit investment can improve the community. Since September, he's been working to repeat that success for the four-county region.

The RTA appointed the first Citizens' Advisory Committee (CAC) to advise and support the RTA. The CAC provided recommendations to the RTA on effective public engagement, a regional transit map, SMART bus service within Detroit, and routing of bus rapid transit on Woodward in Detroit. This diverse group of transit



New RTA CEO Michael Ford (left) impressed community members with his vision and candor at TRU's fall meeting in November, his first major community event.

supporters from throughout the region will continue to play a key role in the RTA's work for years to come.

The RTA's Providers Advisory Committee worked hard developing a regional transit map and studying ways to integrate transit fares. The RTA also approved a preferred alternative for **Bus Rapid Transit on the full length of Woodward Avenue** and launched studies for rapid transit on Gratiot and Michigan Avenues.

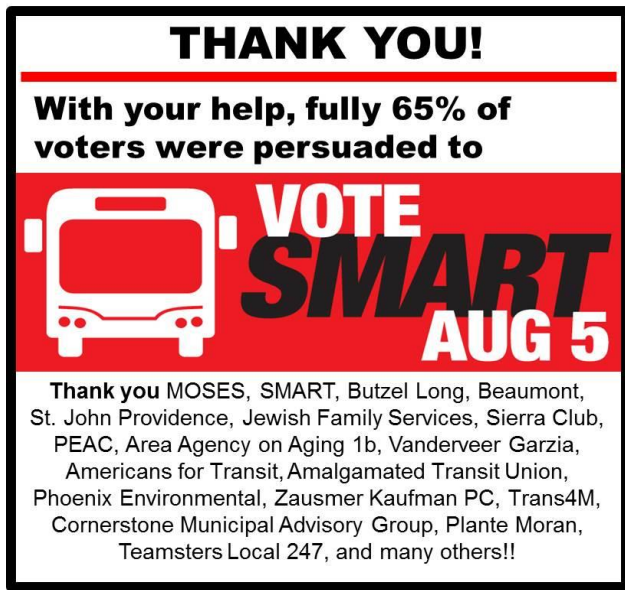
Next Up: 2015 and 2016 will be even busier, **bringing the region together around a Regional Master Transit Plan** that will prioritize transit improvements for the next 20 years. The RTA will soon be fully staffed and ready to start building the broad regional consensus that will be needed to pass regional transit funding in 2016.



TRU was pleased to participate on the first RTA CAC, with dozens of diverse community leaders and transit supporters from across the region.

Voters Strongly Support Millage Increases for Local Bus Service

In May, voters in Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti, and Ypsilanti Township supported a millage increase by an overwhelming 71%. AAATA, Partners for Transit, and other supporters made a strong case for “More Buses, More Places, More Often,” following an in-depth community conversation creating a Master Plan of the transit improvements that will best improve the community. New routes, longer hours and more frequent service are already benefiting riders and the broader community.



In August, voters in parts of Oakland, Wayne, and Macomb Counties considered the first SMART millage increase in 12 years. To ensure voters understood how essential SMART service is to the community, TRU brought together transit supporters and created the **Keep SMART Rolling campaign**. With presentations to community groups, mailings to likely voters, editorial board meetings, social media outreach, a telephone town hall discussion, and more, we made a persuasive case for passing the millage increase.

In the end the millage passed in each county with support from 73.6% of Oakland voters, 63.1% of Wayne County voters, and 59.6% of Macomb voters. **In total, nearly twice as many people voted to pay more to keep the SMART buses rolling than opposed it.** SMART has already ordered new buses to replace much of their aging fleet and riders can depend on SMART for four more years.

These votes, along with positive preliminary polling results, provide optimism that voters in the four-county region (including Washtenaw) will support the 2016 ballot measure to fund major transit improvements and expansion. Stay tuned!

Concerted Efforts at DDOT, Yet Little Improvement for Riders to Date

Detroit has been paying renewed attention to its struggling bus system as well. **Mayor Duggan has frequently stated that improving DDOT bus service is one of his top priorities.** Just days after taking office, he hired former SMART Director Dan Dirks to run DDOT. Dirks has been working hard to tackle endemic problems that have long plagued DDOT. Those efforts include:

- Hiring more mechanics and drivers,
- Training new middle management,

- Ensuring sufficient bus parts for repairs, and
- Purchasing 81 new buses to replace old buses.

Despite making very important strides, **on the ground service has not noticeably improved for riders.** Far too many buses arrive late or don't arrive at all. Buses that are operating are still bunched together and overcrowded. Hopefully the efforts of Mayor Duggan and Director Dirks will start to show real results soon.



ited (TRU), a nonprofit group dedicated to improving transit
earn more at www.DetroitTransit.org or 313-963-8872.

M-1 Rail Streetcar Now Under Construction!

Some of the most exciting progress in Detroit area transit was the start of construction of the M-1 Rail streetcar on July 28, 2014. Once completed in 2016, M-1 Rail will be the first streetcar in sixty years. It will provide convenient attractive transit every 8-12 minutes from downtown through midtown Detroit through clean efficient electric and battery power. In conjunction with a complete

rebuild of Woodward Avenue, rails are currently being built into the roadway for the streetcar.

TRU's Executive Director Megan Owens serves on the Community Advisory Council for M-1 Rail, offering suggestions on ways to maximize the benefits of M-1 for riders and the community.



While M-1 Rail construction causes some short-term headaches, it will provide great long-term benefits.



TRU staff, board members, and founders signed a section of ceremonial M-1 Rail track.

Additional Transit Progress Across the Region and State

Both Dearborn and Troy celebrated the opening of their grand new multimodal transit centers in 2014. Many years in the planning and preparation, both now offer much nicer places to await the Amtrak train, along with regional linkages between train, bus, taxi, bike trails, and more.

Grand Rapids celebrated the launch of their Silver Line Bus Rapid Transit service, the first in the state. BRT offers more frequent service through busy corridors and runs faster through pre-paid level boarding, traffic signal priority, and other enhancements.

The Michigan Department of Transportation has also begun studying the feasibility of **train service connecting Detroit to Lansing and Grand Rapids.** While still years off, this is the essential and exciting first step.

In the waning hours of the legislative year, transit also won another potential victory. A complex package of bills was passed to address road funding needs without harming transit, cities, or schools. It requires approval from state voters in May 2015 to raise the state sales tax.

If passed, this package would provide \$1.2 billion for road and bridge repair along with approximately \$112 million for transit systems across the state and additional funds for cities, schools, and other priorities. The last time new funds were raised for roads, transit

was completely cut out, so TRU and our allies at Michigan Public Transit Association and Trans4M advocated successfully through calls, emails, and legislative visits for funding of Michigan's complete transportation system. Next question - will voters approve it?



TRU Director Megan Owens testified before the legislature about the importance of state investment in transit.

Regional Transit Awards Recognizes Remarkable Transit Champions

These victories and others were only possible because of hard-working passionate people. Each year, TRU hosts the Regional Transit Awards dinner to recognize and celebrate these transit champions. Thanks to generous support from sponsors, auction donors, and others, this event is also TRU's biggest fundraiser of the year. In 2014, TRU were pleased to award the following leaders:

- Exemplary Innovation Award: myride2 mobility management by Area Agency on Aging 1B
- Forward Motion Award for Most Effective Public Servant: Senator Bert Johnson
- Corporate Transit Champion: Detroit Bus Company
- Unsung Hero Award: Cindy Reese of MOSES
- Transit Employee of the Year: David Glenn, DDOT driver
- Under 30 Breakthrough Transit Champion: Carsten Applegate, DDOT planner



Cindy Reese was recognized for her persistent dedication by TRU's Board President Kelly Logan (left) and Vice President Bob Prud'homme.

Join us at the 2015 Regional Transit Awards

on May 7 at Detroit's Hotel St. Regis to celebrate more transit leaders.

Nominate this year's champions at

www.DetroitTransit.org/AwardShow.

Working Together for a Great Transit Future

TRU's founders were laughed at fifteen years ago when they mapped out the improvements needed for quality transit to improve the Detroit region, including:

- A strong Regional Transit Authority to coordinate and fund transit improvements;
- Rapid transit on Woodward, Gratiot, and other major corridors;
- Restored passenger rail service in the region and across the state; and
- Broad support from voters and regional leaders for investing in improved transit.

Thanks to their persistence and the support of thousands of others, their initial vision is on its way to becoming reality! Yes it has taken far too long. Yes, we still have a long way to go.

But with the staff and volunteers of TRU **working together with transit riders, community partners, and elected leaders, we can continue this progress and make great transit a reality for Greater Detroit.**

We look forward to working with you for a great 2015!



Created by Transportation Riders United (TRU), a nonprofit group dedicated to improving transit throughout greater Detroit. Learn more at www.DetroitTransit.org or 313-963-8872.