

The State of Detroit Area Transit: Limited, Yet Improving

Summary by TRU, Dec. 2015

After many years of struggle and decline, **Detroit area transit is finally starting to get better.**

It's **far from good enough**, with too many people still waiting for late buses or left completely without options.

Yet improvements are coming and **the future looks bright**

Throughout southeast Michigan, 100,000 people depend on public transit each day to get to work, school, shopping, and elsewhere. Sometimes those rides are easy and convenient. Yet all too often, riders must arrange their lives around bus schedules, are left waiting too long for overcrowded buses, or completely lack reasonable transit options.



Our region's patchwork system of severely underfunded transit services hurts individuals, families, businesses, and our region as a whole. Thankfully, flaws and gaps are increasingly understood and **important efforts are underway to improve our region's transit**, as detailed in this summary.

RTA Making Progress on Coordination and Planning

The Regional Transit Authority (RTA) is taking important steps forward in their mission of improving transit coordination and service for southeast Michigan.

Together with the RTA, transit providers are working on integrating their fare systems and better coordinating routes.

The RTA has made progress **developing a region-wide transit map** (right), setting and reporting on performance standards, and **analyzing a regional fare system**.

The RTA also worked hard in 2015 to analyze current transit service and seek public input to develop plans for future transit service:



- Planning is underway for **rapid transit** along **Woodward, Gratiot and Michigan Avenue**, with consultants evaluating potential stop locations, routing, and alignments and local stakeholders sharing their comments, concerns and priorities.
- **Commuter rail** plans have been revived and expanded to connect Detroit and Dearborn with Metro Airport, Ypsilanti and Ann Arbor.
- The RTA is evaluating the entire region's transit needs using public input and technical data. They are exploring **significant expansions and improvements** where the current system lacks.



RTA Planner Ben Stupka and RTA Citizen Advisor Larry Krieg helped seek public input on transit plans and priorities throughout the summer.

In 2016, the RTA will give voters the option of investing in a significant

upgrade of transit throughout the region. A draft transit plan and millage proposal will be released in spring of 2016. Implementation of these rapid transit and service expansion plans depends of voter-approval of the millage proposal.

DDOT Makes Much-Needed Improvements

Detroit's motto translates to "we will rise from the ashes," and it feels a little like Detroit's bus service is doing just that. They started the year with horrendous service, with one-third of scheduled buses never even leaving the terminal. The buses that did operate were frequently late and overcrowded, creating stress and anger.

While still far from providing truly sufficient service, **Detroit has made huge strides:**

- Detroit received **80 new buses and hired 100 new drivers**, enabling 100% of DDOT's scheduled buses to get on the road. After years of only 60-80% pulling out, this is enormous and much needed progress.
- DDOT placed video cameras on their buses and mobilized dedicated transit police officers to minimize and quickly respond to crime.
- Riders can now utilize the **RideDDOT smartphone app** to track bus locations and expected arrival in real-time, in addition to its Text My Bus service.
- DDOT is also **planning for service improvements in 2016, including restoring some 24-hour service**, re-configuring 8 routes, and addressing other rider complaints and service problems.

DDOT still has much work ahead to provide truly reliable, attractive, high quality service, which will require substantially more funding. Yet Director Dan Dirks (above) and his team are finally on the right track, which we wholeheartedly applaud.



Mayor Duggan and DDOT enthusiastically welcomed Vice President Joe Biden's help in purchasing 80 new buses for the DDOT fleet.



Other Transit News

- The **M-1 Rail streetcar continues construction**. The traffic headaches it is causing now will be worth it when they begin operations in early 2017 – the first streetcars in Detroit in more than 60 years!
- **SMART has ordered new buses**, began installing solar-lighted bus shelters, and made facility improvements. Yet despite their increased millage, SMART has no public plans to expand or restore bus service.
- After years of debate, the **Michigan legislature finally passed a transportation funding package**. Despite being providing insufficient funds to meet the needs and potentially threatening other budget priorities, we are pleased that it includes an increase in state funding for Michigan’s public transit agencies, for the first time in nearly 30 years.



TRU representatives joined M-1 Rail in celebrating the coming return of streetcar service to Detroit with a fun new float in the Thanksgiving Day Parade.

Transit Improvements Made Possible by Long-Term Advocacy Work

It is vital to remember that these improvements don’t happen randomly or in a vacuum. It is only through long hard advocacy work by TRU and many partners and allies that transit has finally begun to turn around. We sincerely thank everyone who has been involved in this important progress.

Continued progress and significant service expansion will only be possible with increased funding, as the RTA will be proposing. Without a doubt, 2016 will be a make-or-break year for Detroit area transit.

Please get involved today to help ensure even greater transit progress in 2016!!

