



To: Detroit City Council; Mayor Mike Duggan; City Budget Office
 Cc: Michael Staley, Director, Detroit Department of Transportation
 From: AFSCME Local 312; AFSCME Local 214; ATU Local 26; Detroit Disability Power; Detroit Greenways Coalition; Detroit Jews for Justice; Detroit People’s Platform; Eastside Community Network; Great Lakes Environmental Law Center; Michigan Climate Action Network; Michigan Environmental Justice Coalition; Michigan League for Public Policy; Metropolitan Organizing Strategy Enabling Strength; Sierra Club, Transportation Riders United; Warriors on Wheels of Metropolitan Detroit
 Date: December 13, 2024
 Subject: Double DDOT: Put Detroit on a Path to Expanded Public Transit

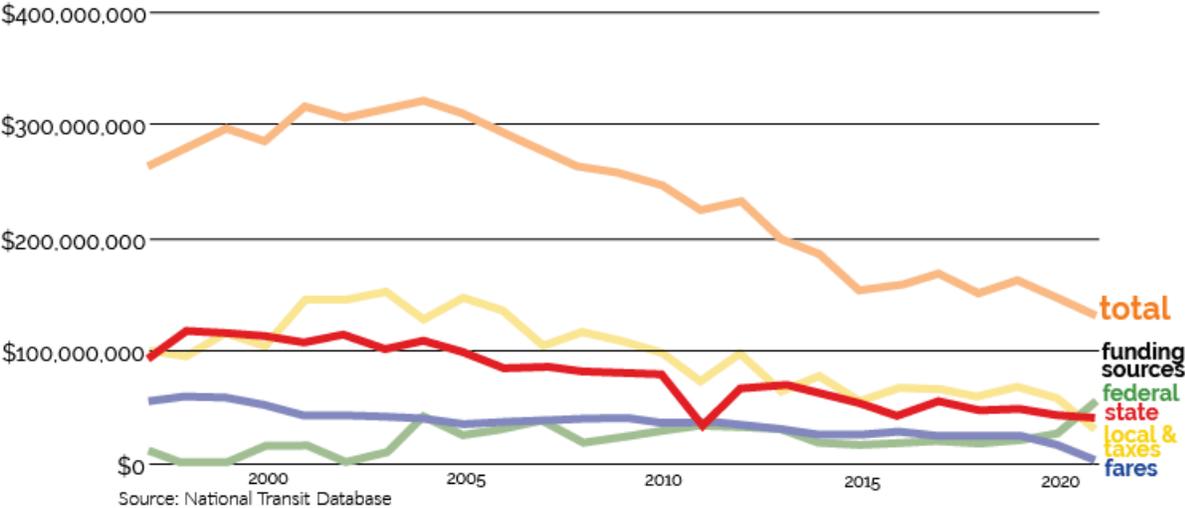
Dear Mayor Duggan and members of City Council:

Public transit is a critical need for our city and its residents. To ensure a better future for all, Detroit must prioritize public transit in the fiscal year 2026 budget, putting the City on a course to implement the DDOT Reimagined plan and double Detroit Department of Transportation (DDOT) bus service over a period of 3-5 years.

The Present: A Severely Under-funded System

While DDOT’s budget was significantly increased last year, the Detroit region continues to fund transit at the lowest rate **of all major metropolitan areas in the U.S.** The City’s investment in DDOT bus service has not only lagged behind peer cities but has also declined significantly over time, as shown in the chart below.

DDOT Operating Budget, 1997-2021 (Inflation Adjusted)



Detroit residents face a trifecta of inequity: the **highest auto insurance rates**, the **lowest median income**, and the **lowest public transit funding** among all major U.S. cities. By some estimates, one in three Detroiters lack access to a car, and even more lack access to a reliable one. Detroit’s underfunded public transit system turns these challenges into an inescapable crisis, trapping residents in a cycle of systemic inequality, forcing many to miss rent payments, lose jobs, struggle to access healthcare and education, or even leave the city altogether.

Detroit’s historical legacy of segregation and redlining continues to scar our city with structural disadvantages that disproportionately burden Black and low-income residents. In this context, we must ask: **Why does Detroit, whose Black and low-income residents face the steepest barriers to car ownership in the nation, continue to have the lowest-funded public transit system of any major US city?** In the words of transit activist Brother Cunningham, “Many riders know this underfunding is no accident. They see it as a consequence of entrenched patterns of segregation and gentrification that exclude Black and low-income residents. It’s gentrification on steroids!” This is a wake-up call to city leadership: Detroit cannot overcome these systemic barriers without unprecedented action.

The Future: The Path to DDOT Reimagined

With more funding, Detroit could add more buses and routes, increase frequency, improve cleanliness and safety, and upgrade stops with shelters and benches. It would reduce resident job losses and city income tax losses. It could create equitable bus fares, and reduce environmental harms through an updated low/no emission fleet. It could raise wages and benefits for drivers, mechanics, and customer service staff, retaining experienced legacy drivers who are safest on the road.

By creating opportunities that would lift Detroiters out of poverty, statistics predict that public transit spending would generate broader economic returns. According to a 2020 report by the American Public Transportation Association (APTA), every dollar invested in public transit generates five dollars in economic activity, meaning greater transit funding could significantly increase tax revenue. Doubling DDOT would ultimately pay for itself.

The **DDOT Reimagined** plan, prepared by DDOT with input from riders and residents and completed in January 2024, provides a blueprint for this transformation: doubling bus service, increasing route frequency, and connecting more residents to jobs, schools, healthcare, and opportunity. But this vision will remain out of reach without a clear capital expenditure plan to make it a reality. We call on the City to accelerate the DDOT timeline from 7-10 years to a 3-5 year timeline, ensuring these critical improvements reach residents as quickly as possible.

Last year, the City substantially increased general funds dedicated to DDOT, raising that total to \$114 million. To stay on track to “double DDOT,” as called for in the DDOT Reimagined plan, we urge the Mayor and Council to increase general fund dollars to DDOT to \$150 million in the fiscal year 2025-26 budget.

The Mayor has noted that DDOT is currently unable to use its entire existing budget due to a shortage of operators, mechanics, and operable buses. However, increasing DDOT's budget to increase staff wages would result in hiring and maintaining more staff.

This is a pivotal moment for the city to demonstrate bold leadership and **prioritize public transit as an essential lifeline for all residents**. We urge you to stay on course to “**double DDOT**” by allocating \$150 million of general fund dollars to DDOT for FY 2026.

Sincerely,

Muneer Islam, President
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Tony Herring, President
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Brother Cunningham, at-large transit activist

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