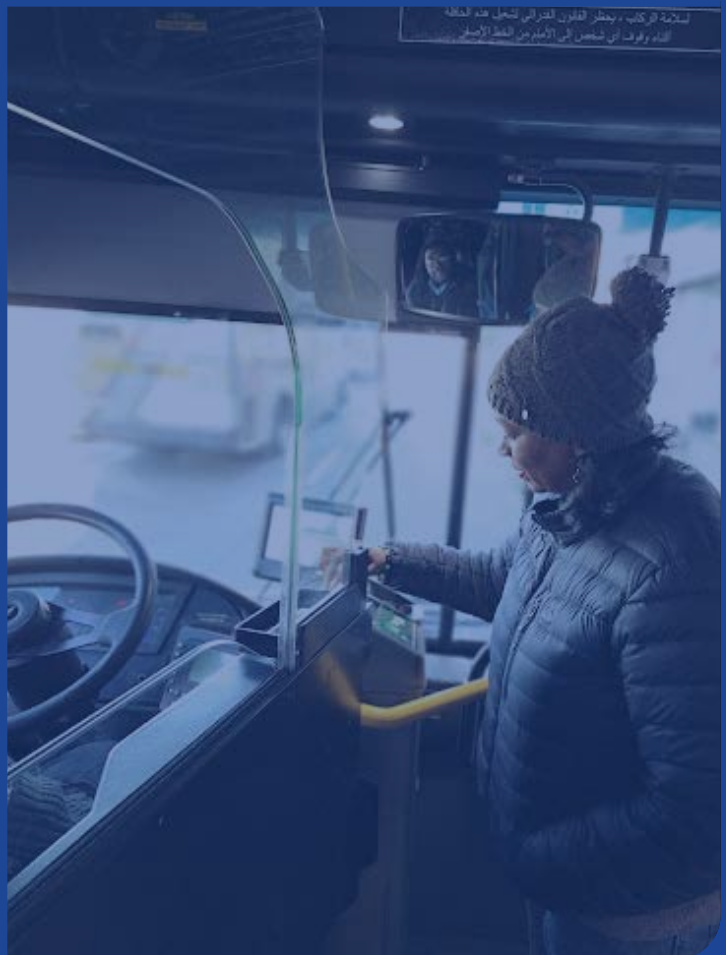
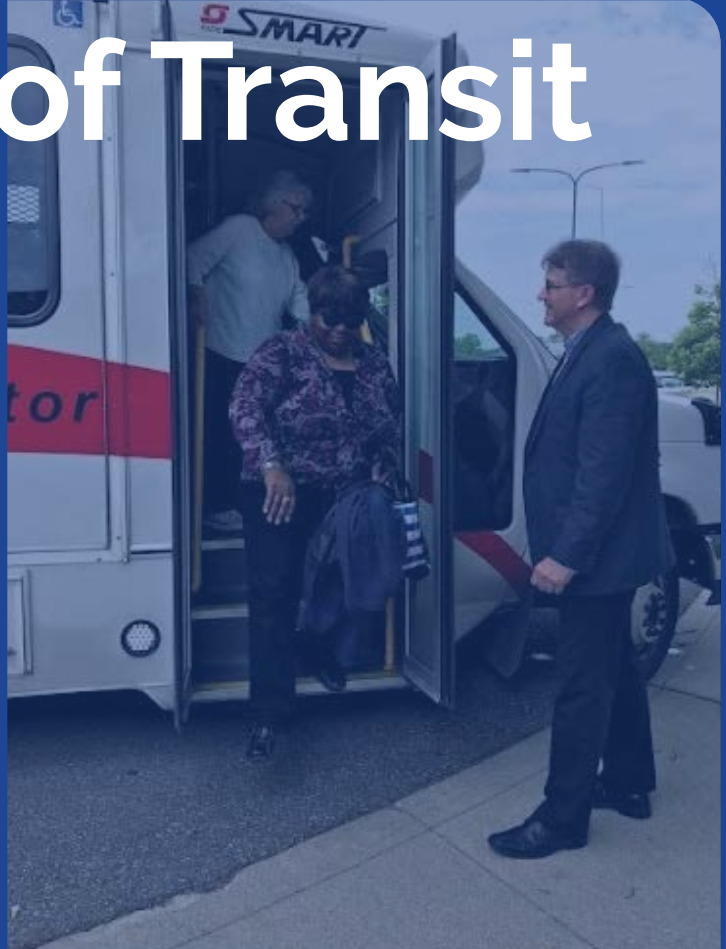


The State of Transit 2025



Information

Transportation Riders United is a Detroit-based nonprofit organization with over 25 years of transit advocacy experience. TRU believes everyone should be able to get where they need to go, regardless of whether they drive. TRU educates, advocates, and mobilizes for more and better public transit and other affordable, sustainable mobility options throughout the Detroit region.

Authored by Joel Batterman, with support from Lukas Lasecki and Megan Owens.

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Please send input to info@detroittransit.org

This report was compiled with the best and most recent publicly available information as of early January 2025. While TRU has made every effort at accuracy, we cannot guarantee the information is totally accurate. Please contact us with questions and corrections.

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Executive Summary

Tens of thousands of people across the metro Detroit region depend on public transit every day to get to work, school, doctors' appointments, recreation, and more. Hundreds of transit agency staff work tirelessly to drive, fix, clean, plan, and manage those transit vehicles; yet most of that is unseen by most people throughout the region. This State of Transit report seeks to shine a spotlight on the importance, strengths, challenges, and improvements needed for the Detroit region's public transit system.

The State of Transit for metro Detroit in 2024 was adequate for some users, providing millions of essential rides. **Yet for others, transit was nearly non-existent**, despite every community having transit needs. Overall, **metro Detroit transit continues to fall far short** of the robust, reliable, convenient system that the region needs to expand opportunities, save people money, and to boost the region's attractiveness and prosperity.

Transit across metro Detroit has been severely underfunded for decades, with the region investing a fraction of what other regions invest, so our transit agencies have long provided only a very modest level of transit service. The

COVID-19 pandemic worsened the situation. SMART and DDOT drastically cut back service to deal with decreased staffing and modified demand. The agencies' inability to provide reliable service reached a crisis point. In July 2023, TRU released a report titled SOS: Save Our Service, which urged better pay for drivers to help their ranks and end the epidemic of no-show buses.

Since then, both agencies have made significant efforts to attract more workers and to modify their service to address changes in travel patterns. Over the course of 2024, **DDOT and SMART made gradual improvements in reliability**, and DDOT phased in a series of service improvements. This resulted in a significant growth in ridership, a key barometer of how well transit is serving our region.

Other transit systems in the region demonstrated that **when service is introduced or improved, more people will ride**. Ann Arbor's TheRide has expanded bus service even beyond pre-pandemic levels; in response, more people are riding. Thanks to the 2022 Oakland County transit ballot vote, rural transit providers like the North Oakland Transportation Authority (NOTA) and Western Oakland

Transportation Authority (WOTA) also boosted service and are now serving record levels of riders. Ridership on the Regional Transit Authority's D2A2 service between Detroit and Ann Arbor has also been growing steadily.

The task for DDOT and SMART in 2025 is to continue progress towards timely, reliable service, and to get more buses on the road to provide the frequent service that makes transit a more convenient option.

The agencies themselves, however, can only do so much with the paltry level of funding they currently receive. To provide the great transit we need, **we need action from elected officials to double transit investment on the local and state levels**. We, the people of the region, must hold them accountable for delivering the investments in public transit that will enable our residents and our region to thrive.



Introduction

A robust and reliable public transit network is vital to the future of the city of Detroit and the entire metropolitan region. Although personal automobiles are the dominant mode of transportation in our region, other transportation options are critically important for a multitude of reasons. Many residents of our region are physically or financially unable to drive. The costs of buying, insuring, and maintaining a car continue to escalate, creating a huge burden for many young adults and working families. Better public transit contributes to our region's quality of life and economic prosperity. Finally, it helps reduce air pollution and slows climate change.

Most of this report focuses on public transit services as

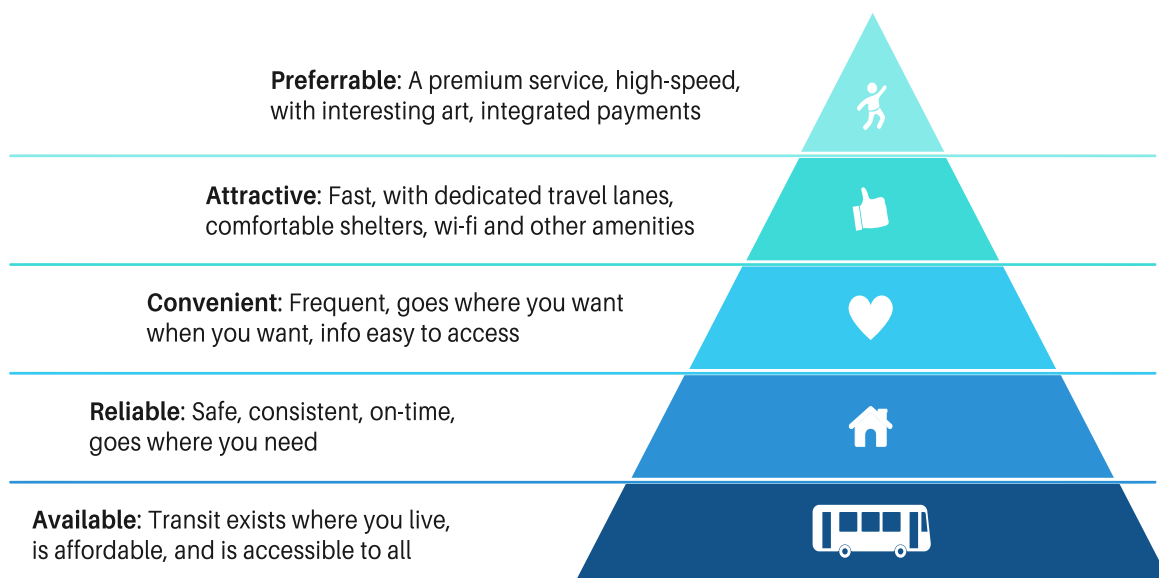
they exist now. **TRU and many others believe metro Detroit can and should have a much more robust transit system,** one that runs every 5-10 minutes, quickly and conveniently connecting across various parts of the region and state. Over several decades, the RTA and numerous other agencies have developed regional transit plans or proposals, any of which would have drastically improved and expanded transit, if implemented. While those types of major expansions are needed, this report will not focus there.

That said, in order for Detroit and Michigan to compete with other cities and states for population growth and economic development, we must have high expectations of transit agencies and transit service in

metro Detroit. Michiganders have traveled to other cities, states, and countries, and have experienced good transit for themselves and there is no reason transit in Michigan could not be just as good, save for political will and financial investment.

Since everyone has to walk before they can run, TRU developed this Hierarchy of Transit Needs, showing the importance of first getting the basics right. **Accessibility, reliability and frequency are the three most critical traits of quality public transit,** as riders and researchers have long emphasized. Since 1999, TRU has pushed Metro Detroit's public transit agencies hard to focus on getting these basics right.

Hierarchy of Transit Needs



Any discussion of Detroit area transit must discuss funding. **Just like schools, libraries, fire departments, and parks, public transit is a public service that depends on public investments of public funding.** Public transit depends on a mix of local, state, and federal funds, in addition to bus fares, ads, and service contracts. The Detroit region has long funded transit at a lower rate per capita than almost any other US metropolitan area. In fact, **the Detroit area spends about ⅓ per capita of what many major metro areas invest in transit.** Even a brilliantly-run agency can only achieve so much with such a paltry amount of funding, especially when trying to serve such a large, sprawled out region. Detroit, the region, and the state must invest more in public transit to improve current services and develop new ones.

While SMART and DDOT are the largest and most well-known transit agencies in Michigan and the focus of much of this report, it is important to acknowledge that **Michigan has 77 transit agencies in urban and rural areas in every county in Michigan.** And most of those agencies are struggling to meet the needs of their communities as costs rise far faster than revenues. The aging of Michigan's population adds even greater demands, yet state investments in transit have remained stagnant, failing to keep up with rising costs and demands. Efforts by TRU, legislative champions, and other organizations to restore state funding levels for such things as Local Bus Operating funds will benefit not only the Detroit area, but all communities across Michigan.

Michigan Metropolitan Areas with Fixed Route Transit



Annual Transit Investment by Metropolitan Area, per Person

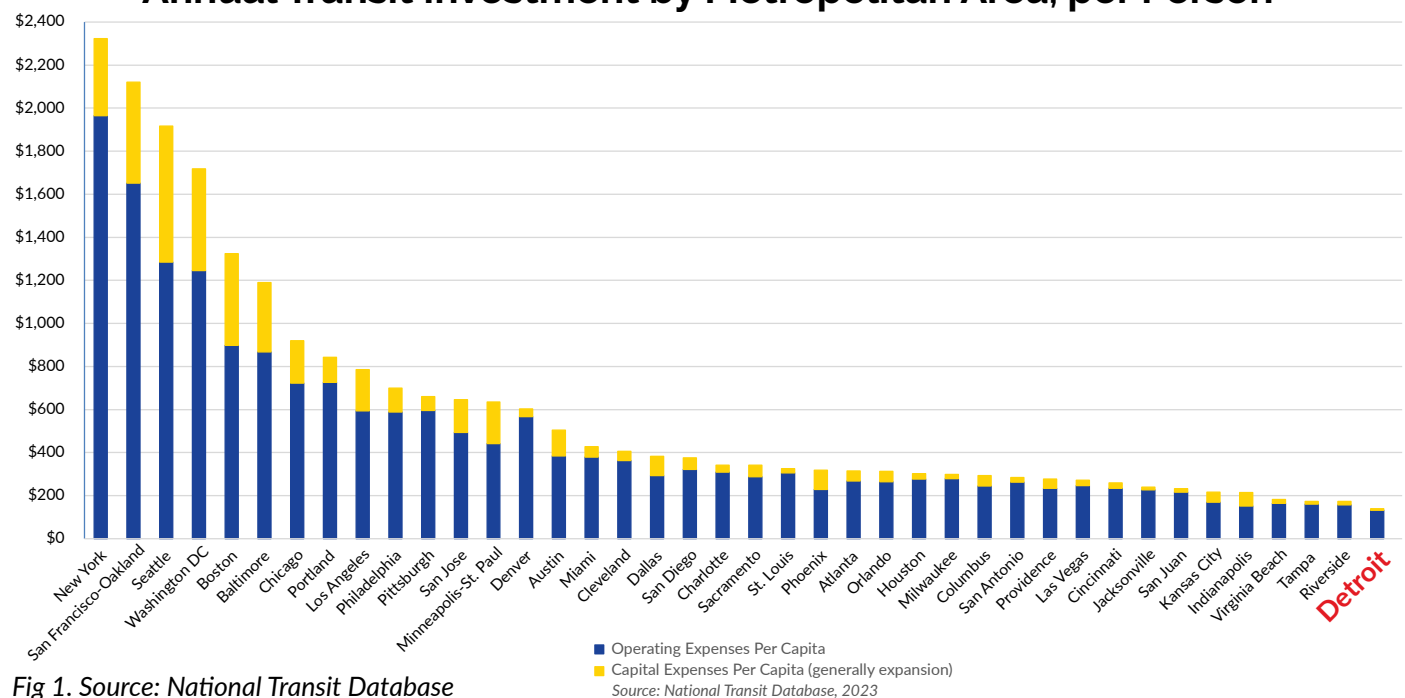


Fig 1. Source: National Transit Database

DDOT and SMART: Overcoming Barriers to Service Restoration

DDOT and SMART each carry tens of thousands of riders every day, connecting people to jobs, schools, appointments, recreation, and elsewhere.

Even before the pandemic, both systems were facing a shortage of operators. The pandemic, however, exacerbated the issue, as it did for agencies nationwide. By decreasing route frequency, **SMART and DDOT both eventually stabilized service at roughly three-fourths and two-thirds of pre-pandemic levels, respectively.** However even after these cuts, both systems still experienced serious reliability issues, largely due to lack of staff and functional vehicles. (Ultimately, both of these issues stem from the lack of adequate funding.)

As a result of these service issues, as well as changes in work patterns, ridership recovery for both systems has been slow. Ridership did not consistently surpass 50% of pre-pandemic levels until mid-2023. Since then, ridership appears to be recovering somewhat more quickly, perhaps due to SMART and DDOT's progress towards making service more reliable.

A major barrier to increased service was a labor shortage at both DDOT and SMART, largely caused by low pay for bus drivers, mechanics, and other staff. In 2023, DDOT drivers earned a starting wage of only \$15/hour, and SMART drivers only \$19/hour, much lower than their peers at other transit

agencies, including TheRide. As discussed below, however, both agencies have made progress towards addressing this issue.

The data suggests that with increased service, ridership will grow and eventually surpass pre-pandemic levels. Both DDOT and SMART, however, have struggled to restore service. **Although some trends are encouraging, both agencies must continue to improve service – both quantity and quality** – in order to not just surpass pre-pandemic ridership but to provide an affordable and truly convenient option for people throughout the region.



DDOT

The Detroit Department of Transportation (DDOT) is the largest transit provider in the state of Michigan. Its 37 fixed bus routes, primarily serving the cities of Detroit, Dearborn, Hamtramck, and Highland Park, carry an average of over 40,000 riders on a typical weekday. However, since DDOT is a city

department, its local funding source is the City of Detroit's General Fund, which makes it vulnerable to cuts in the city's annual budget cycle.

Fortunately, Mayor Duggan and City Council bucked this trend last year. They provided DDOT with a major budget boost in the fiscal year 2025 City budget, bringing DDOT's general fund allocation to \$114

million, and its total budget to \$189 million.

The budget boost was intended to bring the department's ranks of bus drivers to 627, up from 510 in the previous year's budget, and to cover the cost of increasing the starting wage from \$16.15 per hour to \$19.15 per hour.

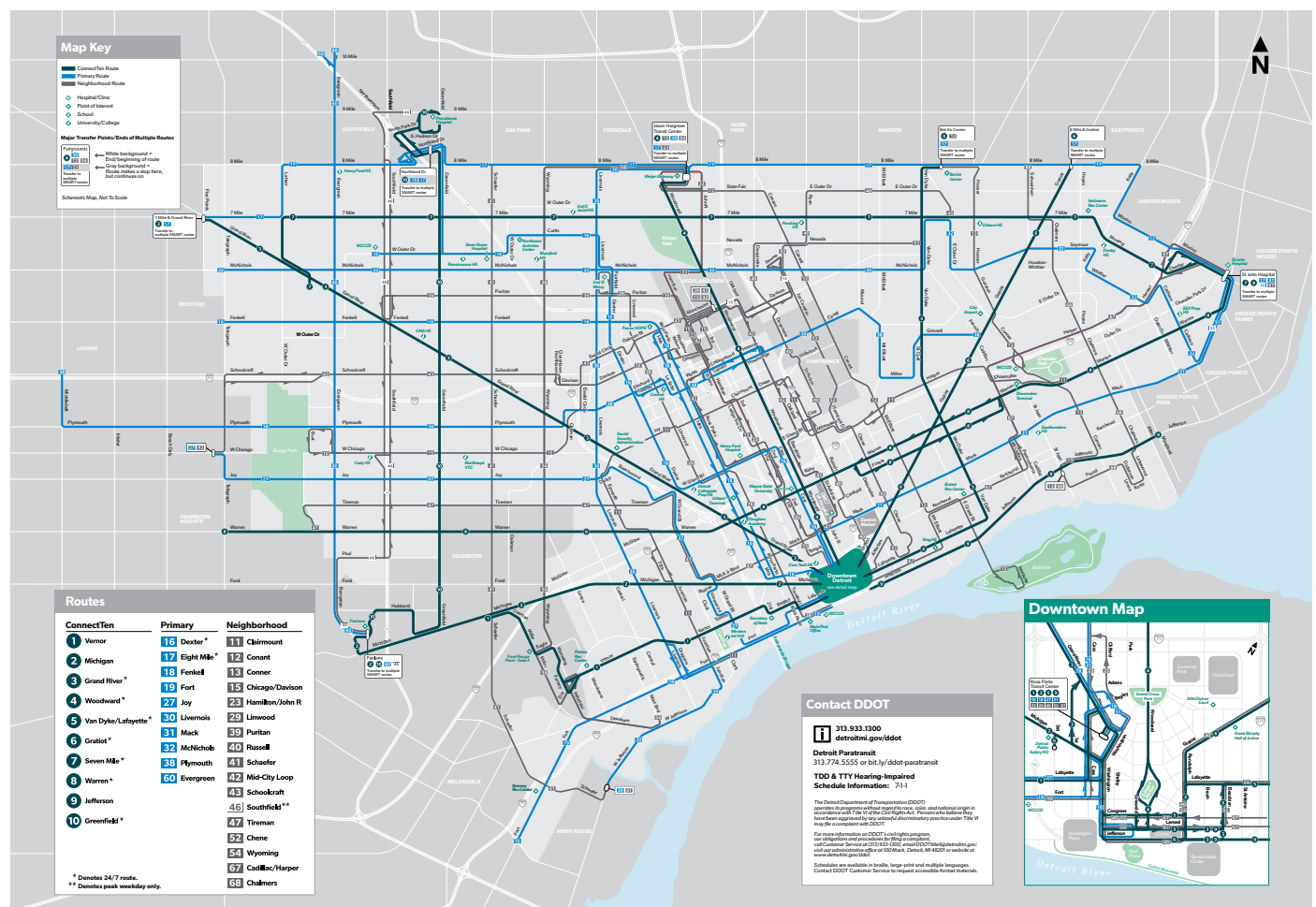
However, while DDOT continues to recruit and train drivers, it has fallen short of meeting prior targets. As of January 2025, DDOT had 514 active drivers out of 627 budgeted positions in the City's fiscal year 2025 budget; the agency

“Despite challenges, DDOT achieved significant service improvements over 2024.”

”

DDOT System Map

Last Revised: May 11, 2024



previously projected having 584 drivers by September, and 653 by January 2025.

Following the wage increase, **however, a shortage of operable buses is now the system's primary barrier to reliable service.** Despite delays in procurement, DDOT expects to replace 45 aging 2012-model buses by the fall of 2025. DDOT is currently in contract negotiations with its mechanics, represented by AFSCME Local 312, which should yield a more competitive wage and speed recruitment, enabling more consistent maintenance of its current fleet.

Despite these challenges, **DDOT achieved significant service improvements over 2024.** Scheduled service (shown on figure 2 in light green) has increased several times over the year, with another round of improvements set to take place in April 2025. As shown, as of January, only 147 buses were scheduled to operate in the weekday morning schedule; as of November, there were 178, an increase of 24%. Reliability has improved as well. Despite a slump in the summer (which seems to occur every year), in November 2024 an average of just one scheduled bus per day did not make it out of the terminals during the afternoon shift. Afternoon on-time performance has increased from 62% to 77%: still less than ideal, but a substantial improvement. Ridership appears to have

DDOT Afternoon Pullout %, 2022-2024



Fig 2. Source: DDOT Performance Dashboard

Monthly DDOT Ridership, 2020-2024



Fig 3. Source: DDOT Performance Dashboard



Some days they run appropriately. Other days, they don't...They need to service those buses more. It's just like your car. If you don't maintain your car, you have an issue with it.

- Karen M., DDOT rider, Detroit



responded to increased service and improved reliability. 2024 is the first year since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic that **ridership consistently exceeded 1 million riders per month**.

Capital Projects

In May 2024, DDOT opened the new **Jason Hargrove Transit Center**, replacing the old State Fair “Transit Center”—a series of unheated shelters off Woodward Avenue—with a modern, sheltered, dignified facility in a refurbished historic building. The building includes a ticket office, public bathrooms, and an indoor waiting area, and is named after a long-time DDOT driver and transit safety advocate who tragically died in the first weeks of the COVID pandemic.

DDOT has also used American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding to begin **installing dozens of new and replacement bus shelters across the city**, with more expected in the spring of 2025.

Additionally, DDOT is in the process of **rebuilding its Coolidge Terminal**, a major bus storage and maintenance facility. This \$160 million capital project is described as one of the largest in the city’s history, and is scheduled for completion at the end of 2025. The rebuilt Coolidge Terminal will replace the aging Gilbert Terminal, in service since 1948, as the main bus garage serving



Old State Fair Transit Center



New Jason Hargrove Transit Center



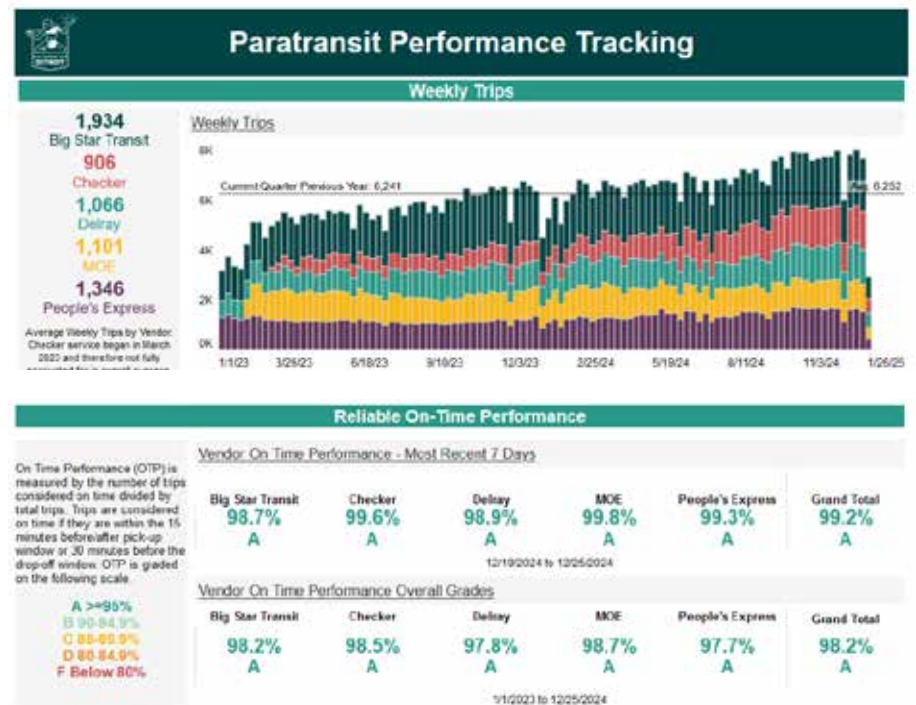
New DDOT shelter installed with ARPA funds.

Detroit's west side; a role it's served since a fire closed the original Coolidge Terminal in 2011. When finished, the Coolidge Terminal will provide a more modern storage and maintenance facility for buses, new infrastructure for hydrogen and battery-electric buses, and better amenities for DDOT staff.

Paratransit

Perhaps the **biggest recent DDOT success has been in the area of paratransit**, the curb-to-curb dial-a-ride service for seniors and people with disabilities formerly known as MetroLift. In 2023, after Detroit City Council heeded disabled riders' demands and voted down a contract renewal with paratransit management company Transdev, DDOT administration brought paratransit management in-house, establishing its own call center to dispatch rides while contracting with local bus and taxi companies to provide them.

These improvements resulted in greatly improved rider satisfaction and ridership growth. Although riders are currently expected to call at least one day ahead to book a ride, DDOT announced in 2024 that it would introduce same-day paratransit by the end of the year; the service is now expected to launch in early 2025.



Source: DDOT Paratransit Dashboard

DDOT Reimagined

In early 2024, DDOT released its long-term "DDOT Reimagined" plan, the culmination of two years of extensive public outreach and careful analysis of ridership trends. In addition to redrawing some routes, **the plan calls for roughly doubling DDOT service over a 7-10 year period.** Under this plan, every route would run every 30 minutes or better on weekdays, with roughly half of the routes running every 10-20 minutes; if implemented as planned, more than half of Detroit residents, and 85% of current DDOT riders, would live within a five-minute walk from a frequent route. The plan also calls for widespread improvements to stop infrastructure, which are expected to reduce dwell times, improve accessibility, and enhance riders' protection from the

weather. TRU applauds this vision for an improved DDOT network that better meets the city's public transit needs.

However, to fully realize the vision of DDOT Reimagined, the Department will require 60% more buses in its fleet, nearly twice its current number of bus drivers, and a myriad of capital improvements. **These developments can only occur with major increases to local, state, and federal funding;** and DDOT plans to hire a consultant in 2025 to determine their cost. In the meantime, TRU and a coalition of allied groups are urging the Mayor and City Council to make incremental steps towards fulfilling that vision in the fiscal year 2026 budget: **Boost the City's general fund contribution to DDOT to \$150 million, up from \$114 million in FY 2025.**

SMART

The Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation (SMART) serves a combination of transit needs throughout a large part of the metro Detroit region. **SMART provides fixed route buses, paratransit, Flex on-demand service, and a range of community services throughout much of Macomb and Oakland, and parts of Wayne County.** In addition to serving many of the region's suburbs, it provides regional service on a number of routes – especially on major arteries like Woodward and Gratiot – between the suburbs and downtown Detroit. These routes have been heavily used not just by suburban commuters to the downtown, but by Detroit residents accessing jobs and opportunity in the suburbs.

SMART service has historically been geographically limited by its funding structure. When the property tax supporting its services was established in 1995, Wayne and Oakland Counties allowed individual municipalities to “opt out” of the tax. Many communities’ elected leaders chose to do so; and for the next 28 years, transit could only be expanded into these communities if their leaders voted to place the issue on a ballot. This created a patchwork system that excluded transit riders from many of the region’s fastest-growing cities and townships. However in 2022, Oakland County

voters opted to tax themselves for transit on a countywide basis, bringing bus service to areas where it previously did not exist. The tax rate was last increased, to roughly 1 mill, in 2014. **Service to Novi, Wixom, and Bloomfield Hills began in September 2023; while routes serving Rochester, Rochester Hills, Waterford, and White Lake were added to SMART’s network in 2024.**

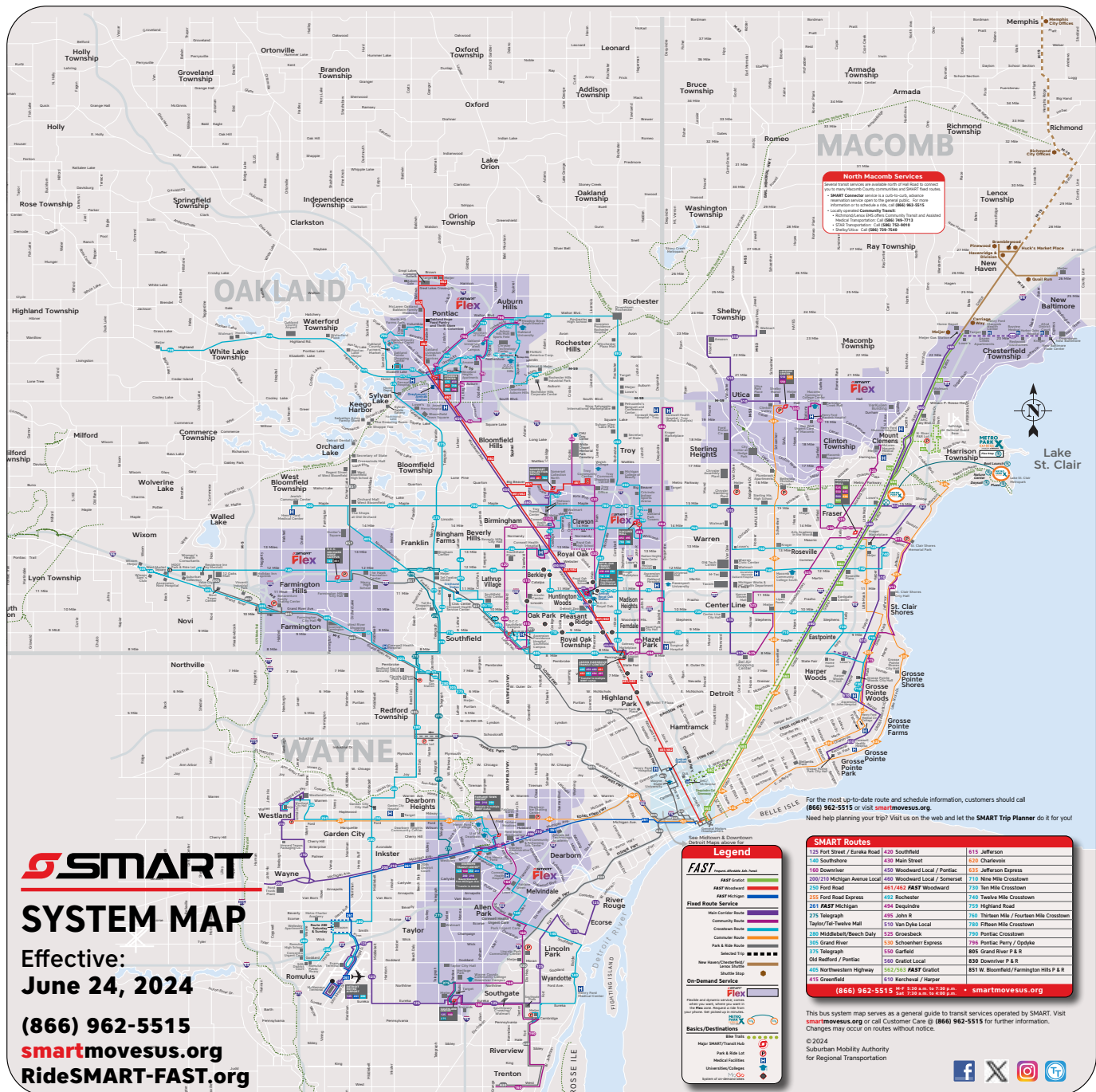
However, these historic expansions have been troubled by SMART’s unreliable service. For much of its history, SMART was known for comparatively reliable and timely service, despite its geographic limitations and relatively sparse route network outside of its major corridors. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic caused significant service cuts, and worsened a severe shortage of bus operators, causing a steep decline in reliability. SMART frequently lacked enough drivers to operate all of their scheduled services- causing many promised trips to be canceled outright. When TRU surveyed 100 SMART riders in 2023, a majority said they experienced missed runs either

“often” or “all the time.”

SMART responded to the crisis by stepping up hiring efforts. In August 2024, after 18 months of negotiations, SMART’s fixed-route bus drivers, represented by Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1564, approved a new contract with management, which raised the starting wage for drivers to \$26.95 per hour, a much-needed increase of 32%. Other staff unions (those representing mechanics and paratransit operators, for instance) also negotiated significant raises. As with DDOT, these steps have helped to grow the ranks of drivers, but the agency has not yet reached full capacity. SMART reported employing 350 fixed-route operators in February 2024, 82% of the 426 budgeted positions; by November, they had grown to 398 (93%).

Over the course of 2024, SMART’s service reliability gradually improved as more operators were hired. In the second quarter, less than 92% of scheduled trips actually ran, leaving riders stranded waiting for buses that would never arrive. This improved to 97%





by the 4th quarter; though it still fell short of DDOT's 99%, and the national standard of 100%. As one SMART rider opined, "a schedule is a promise to riders," and getting buses out of the garage is a transit agency's most basic task to fulfill that promise.

Of the buses that did run, only 61% operated on-time (one minute early to five minutes late) in the first quarter; by year's end, SMART's on-time performance improved to nearly 68%, though still below national standards.

In 2023, SMART began its own system-wide redesign planning process, "SMARTer Mobility," to evaluate post-pandemic travel changes and to figure out how to maximize service and meet today's needs. After much study and outreach, in the summer of 2024, the agency and its consultants released two different alternative scenarios: one prioritizing service frequency and the other providing more service coverage. While either would provide some improvements, both are bound by current funding levels. Without significant new funding, neither fulfills the region's transit needs. TRU recommends another scenario not bound by current funding but one focused on true transit needs, as DDOT Reimagined does.

At the time of writing, TRU has limited data on SMART para-transit performance, although

SMART Fixed-Route Bus Pullout Rates

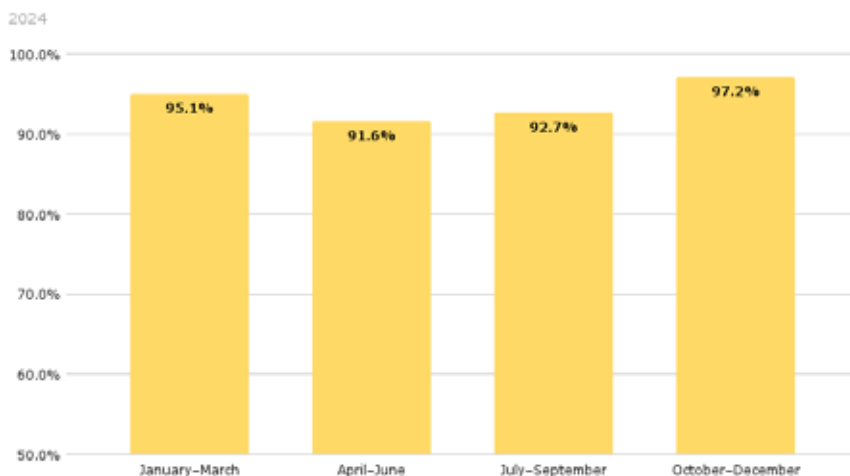


Fig 4, Source: SMART

SMART Fixed-Route Bus On-Time Performance, 2024

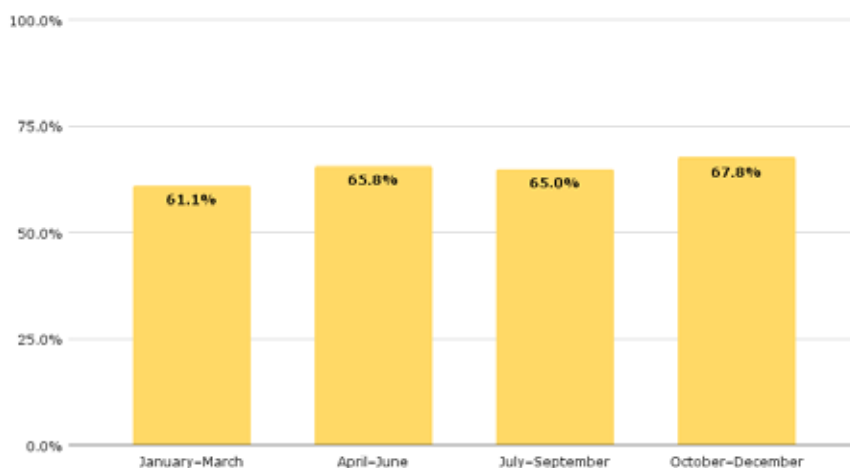


Fig 5, Source: SMART

SMART ridership, fiscal years 2019-24

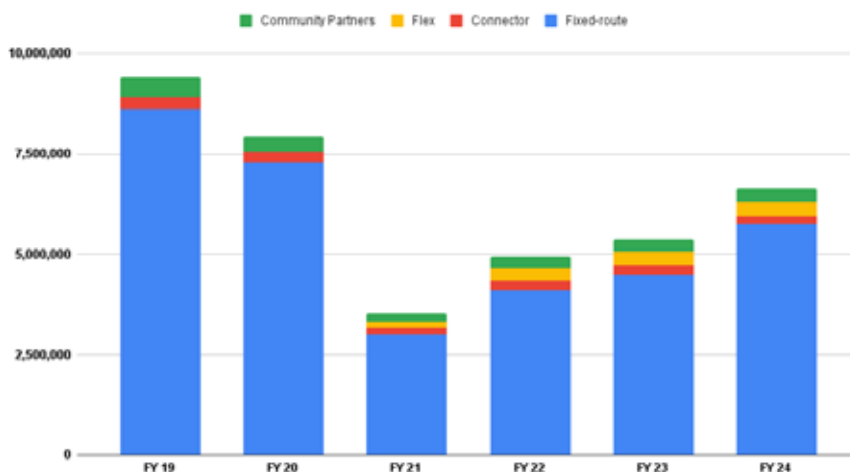


Fig 6, Source: SMART

ridership has been gradually increasing from its pandemic-era low.

Since 2021, SMART has also contracted with Via Transportation for its Flex service, an on-demand transit option similar to Lyft and Uber, which is available in a number of zones in the SMART service area. While generally popular among riders and community leaders, this pilot service is limited in range, has high costs per ride, and its reliability has varied.



“

I've noticed a number of new bus drivers lately and am taking that as a promising sign that SMART may get back to pre-pandemic service levels soon. I would like to see data from SMART confirming that service has returned to normal. At that point, I'll gladly once again encourage people to give the bus a try.

”

- Chuck A., Royal Oak



Small Agencies Make Big Strides

While DDOT and SMART provide the vast majority of transit in southeast Michigan, there are several other important transit providers serving Metro Detroit's communities. Some experienced major growth this past year as they expanded hours and services.

Rural Providers

Four smaller agencies provide transit services in the less-populated areas of Oakland County: the **Northern Oakland Transportation Authority (NOTA)**, the **Rochester Older Persons' Commission (OPC)**, **People's Express (PEX)**, and the **West Oakland Transportation Authority (WOTA)**. These systems provide advanced reservation rides, primarily serving seniors and disabled riders. The passage of the 2022 Oakland County transit millage enabled these authorities to significantly expand services by hiring more drivers and expanding their bus fleet. This has enabled the authorities to serve many more people with expanded hours and days of service and larger areas of service. As shown in figure 7, **NOTA ridership more than doubled between 2022 and 2024.**

In 2023, WOTA added eight entire communities to its

service area, four of which previously lacked any transit service. NOTA added five, doubling its service area, and more than doubled its fleet and workforce; as a result, NOTA's ridership grew more than 125% between 2022 and 2024. OPC and People's Express expanded their driving areas, allowing their riders access to more destinations in more communities. **All four agencies expanded their hours of operation to include evenings and Saturdays- with NOTA, PEX, and WOTA also starting Sunday service.**



The last time I tried to schedule a ride with our old transportation service, it was 22 days before I could get a ride to a grocery store. Since WOTA came to our area, I can schedule rides to the grocery store, the restaurant, and places where I can play trivia."

- Theresa, senior WOTA rider



Annual NOTA Rides, 2019-2024



Fig 7, Source: NOTA

Parts of western Wayne County receive paratransit service from Nankin Transit. Parts of northern Macomb are served by Richmond Lenox EMS. TRU did not gather data or evaluate the performance of these agencies.



RTA

The **Regional Transit Authority (RTA)** previously served only as an umbrella agency over the region's transit agencies, but in 2024, it expanded to also serve as an operating agency, with the **takeover of Detroit's QLINE streetcar** from its private developer, M-1 Rail, in October.

The QLINE, the 3.3-mile streetcar on Woodward Avenue in downtown and midtown Detroit, continued to see ridership growth last year, largely due to its fare-free service: fares have been waived since 2021, and will be until 2039, thanks to a state subsidy supporting QLINE operations. **Average daily ridership reached nearly 3,200 in 2024, a significant increase** from 2,800 in 2023 and 1,700 in 2022. On the first day of the 2024 NFL Draft, the QLINE provided over 24,000 rides, the highest single-day total in the system's history.

For several years following its opening in 2017, the QLINE struggled with service consistency and timeliness, due in large part to parked cars blocking its tracks. Over the past few years, QLINE leaders have made significant improvements to service consistency, by **adding Detroit's first dedicated transit-only road lane** in front of Little Caesars Arena, gaining a towing license and tow truck to clear illegally

parked cars, and implementing traffic signal prioritization to reduce trip times. In M-1 Rail's rider surveys, 85% report waiting less than 15 minutes and 42% less than ten minutes; and 78% were satisfied with their trips.

In 2024, the RTA also **launched the Detroit Air Xpress (DAX)**, a non-stop express bus service linking downtown Detroit with Metro Airport in just a 30-minute ride. This new service, operated under contract by Indian Trails, operates 16 times daily, with service available from the early hours of the morning until late evening. It's **the fastest and most convenient transit service to Metro Airport yet**, and has proven useful for local travelers, visitors, and airport workers alike. In its first nine months of operation, DAX has seen steady ridership, but a slight decline in November and December, likely due to weather conditions.



Detroit Air Xpress Ridership by Month

March–December 2024

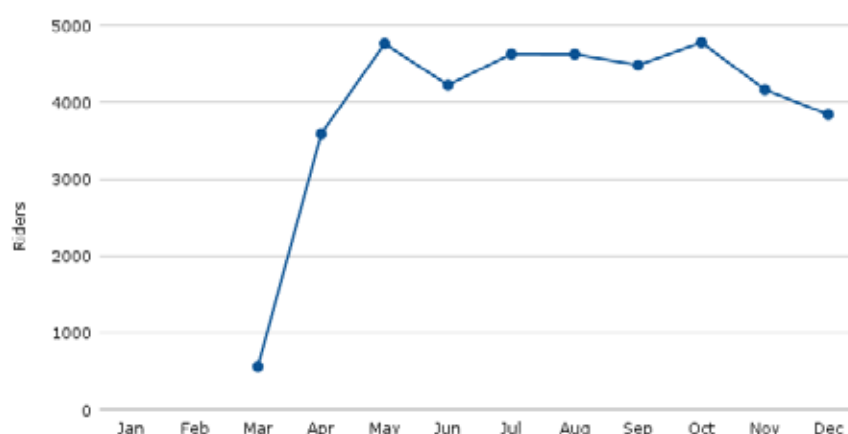


Fig 8, Source: RTA

The RTA has also seen steady ridership growth on its **D2A2** express bus service (also operated by Indian Trails), which runs hourly between downtown Detroit and Ann Arbor. D2A2's ridership has grown steadily since its launch in 2021, and more than 10,000 trips were taken in the month of September 2024. However, **D2A2 and DAX are pilot projects funded by state grants, and their operating funds are only guaranteed until the grants expire in September 2025 and April 2025, respectively.** The RTA is planning to use some remaining American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding to support the services over the next several years, as long as they remain viable. **Permanent, sustainable funding will be needed for the RTA to continue offering these services in the long-term.**

D2A2 Ridership by Month
2022-2024

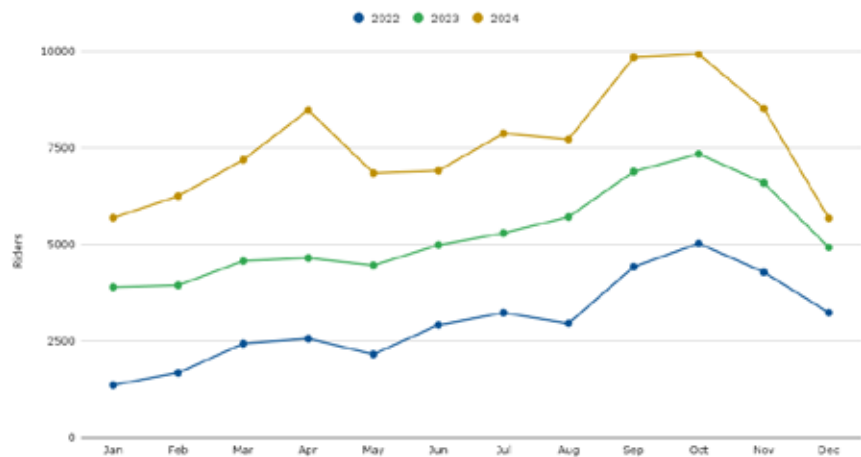


Fig 9, Source: RTA

3,900 on an average weekday in the third quarter. It provided 70,000 rides during the NFL Draft in April, when the People Mover ran special 24-hour service. DTC considers the free service pilot a success, and has secured enough private funding to continue fare-free People Mover operations through at least the end of 2025.



People Mover

Operating completely on its own track above street level, the Detroit People Mover is Detroit's most reliable transit system, although it serves the smallest area. The Detroit Transportation Corporation (DTC) rolled out a number of service improvements on the People Mover in 2024, and growth in ridership followed. With support from corporate sponsor Priority Waste, DTC **eliminated the People Mover's previous 75-cent fare;** and as a result, it provided **over a million rides in 2024,** with

DTC also **carried out a myriad of capital improvements** to the People Mover in 2024, including the addition of real time tracking, upgrades to station communication systems, and an extensive series of repairs to the system's track. The latter project necessitated a shutdown of the system from September to November 2024, during which DTC's staff hosted a number of community events. In 2025, DTC will engage in a landmark study exploring expansion and other capital improvements to the People Mover, and expects to welcome a new fleet of used railcars toward the year's end.



Rider Experience

From September to November of 2024, TRU surveyed over **1,100 transit riders in the Detroit metropolitan area** about their experiences with transit services in the region, while also discussing the importance of elections to public transit service; and helping them to register to vote, find their polling places, and take advantage of early and absentee voting. While not a scientific survey, we believe we reached a relatively representative cross-section of DDOT and SMART riders, although with Detroiters somewhat overrepresented.

In contrast to frequent perceptions of transit service in Detroit, most riders we surveyed rated overall service quality relatively well. Perhaps surprisingly, on a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the best, a majority of riders rated service a 6 or higher; the average rating given was 6.8. These results are a reminder that although transit service in Detroit is much more limited than it is in many cities, the service does satisfy a vital need for many riders, and in many cases satisfies it relatively well.

That said, **only half of respondents said that their buses were always or usually on time.** Fully 17% said rarely or never and another 33% said only some of the time. When

Riders' Ratings of Overall Transit Service Quality

Transportation Riders United Survey, September-November 2024

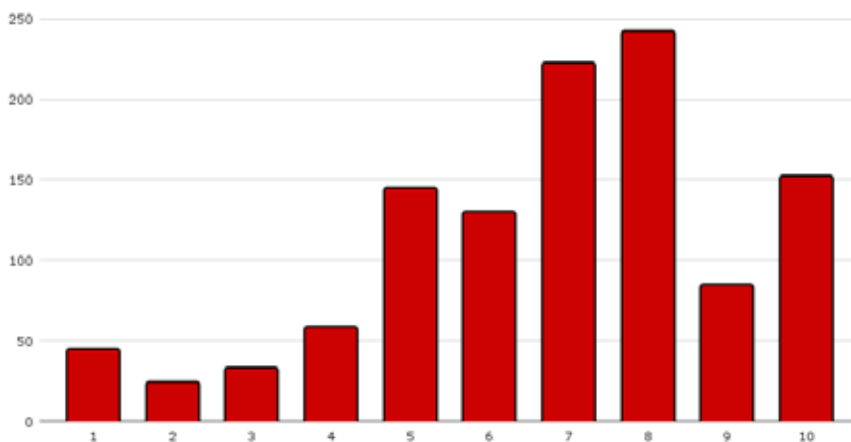


Fig 10, Source: TRU Rider Survey

asked how long their longest wait for a late bus was, many had waited 1-2 hours, with numerous people reporting waits of 3 or 4 hours and several even reporting even longer waits.

By far, **riders' largest area of concern was on-time performance (OTP).** Almost one-third of riders mentioned late buses as a serious problem, and that number increases to a full one-third if combined with the number who mentioned reliability, a closely related issue. (In our coding of responses, "on-time performance" refers to the bus showing up on schedule, whereas "reliability" refers to the bus arriving at all.)

The second most commonly mentioned issue for riders was **frequency**: having to wait too long between buses.

(Obviously, this metric is also tied to on-time performance and reliability.) One-fifth of riders identified this as a problem.

Third was **riders' experiences interacting with transit staff**: about 14% cited the rude or discourteous conduct of bus drivers and customer service staff as a major problem, with many saying that they are **frequently passed by drivers at bus stops.**

The other top ten concerns, in descending order, were bus cleanliness; reliability; span (hours of service); safety (including more security on buses); workforce (hiring more drivers or increasing pay); amenities (like more shelters, benches, and outlets on buses); and fleet (bus design).

Problems Mentioned by Detroit Area Transit Riders

Transportation Riders United Survey, September–November 2024

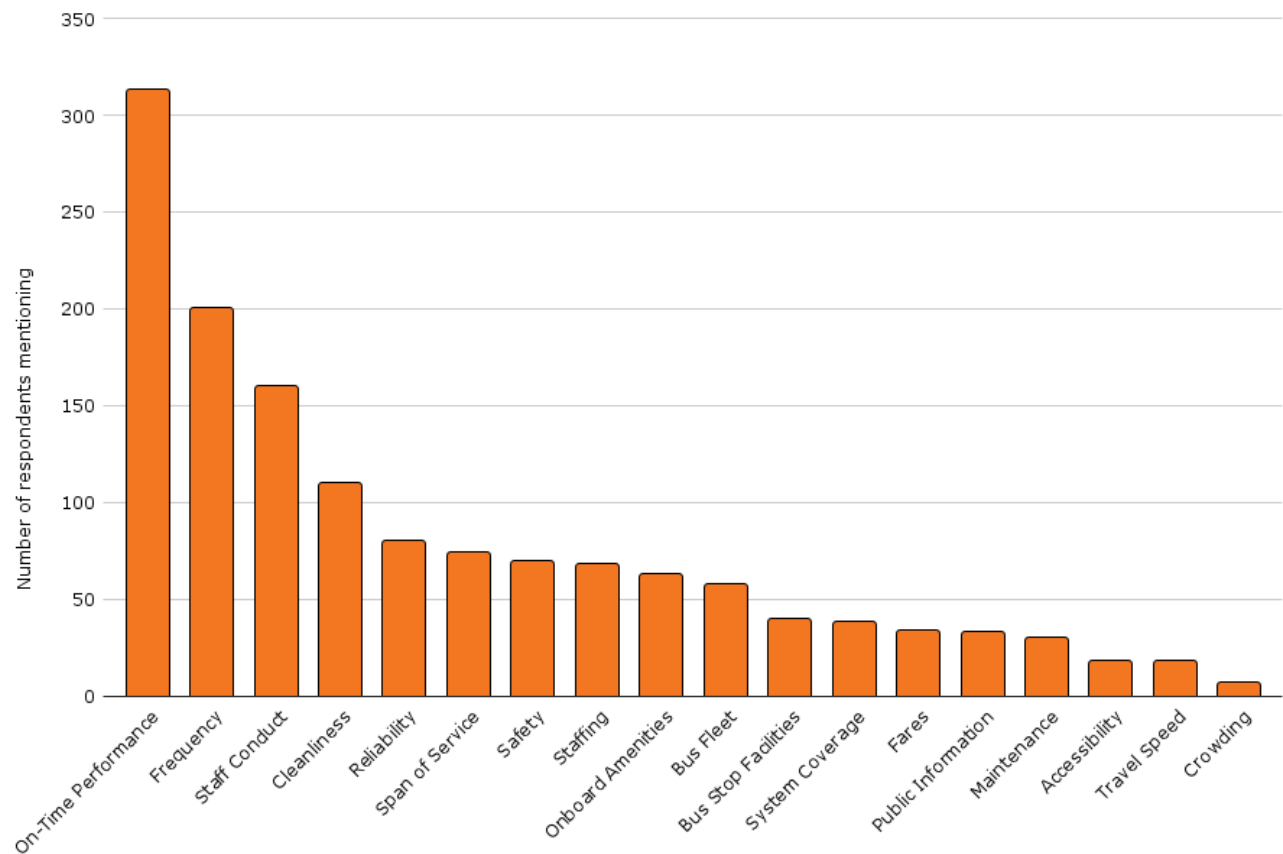


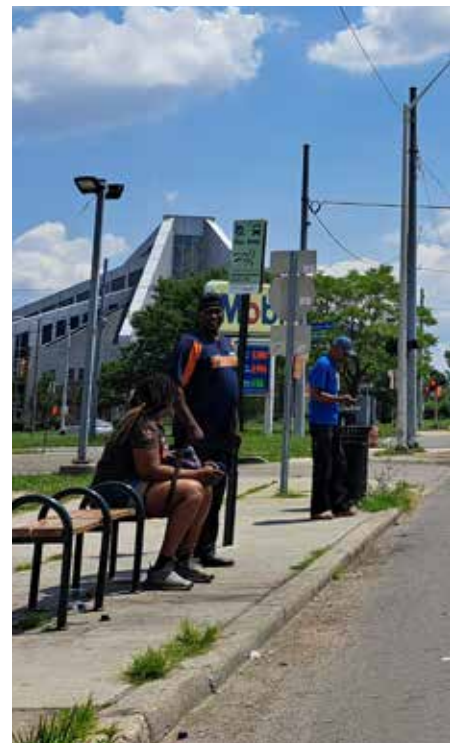
Fig 11, Source: TRU Rider Survey

“

Years ago, the buses used to come every 2 to 3 minutes. If you missed a bus, you could just catch the next one. They just need better service.

- Clyde, Southfield

”



Recommendations

The people of metro Detroit need accessible, reliable, frequent transit service to be able to affordably and reliably get to work, school, and everywhere else we need. The only sure way to regrow ridership in the wake of the pandemic is to continue to expand service and ultimately to expand transit service frequency, range, and hours.

DDOT must continue to improve service reliability, as well as service frequency, in order to continue growing ridership and continue on the path towards the full DDOT Reimagined proposal. To do so, the City should increase wages for DDOT staff in order for DDOT to remain competitive with other employers in the region.

To make this possible, TRU and a coalition of over two dozen organizations are urging Detroit City Council and the Mayor to allocate a full \$150 million in general fund dollars to DDOT in the fiscal year 2026 budget. **The City also needs to develop a plan to achieve the full DDOT Reimagined plan within 3 years.** Riders cannot wait a decade for frequent reliable service.

In response to rider input, the City should invest more in customer service training for operators, as well as working

with mechanics to substantially improve bus maintenance.

SMART must continue progress to ensure reliable service for riders by continuing hiring efforts and getting buses into a state of good repair. Anything less than 99% of scheduled buses pulling out and operating each day is unacceptable and must be treated as the crisis it is.

In the wake of the passage of Michigan's House Bill 6088 of 2024, which sets up a 2026 vote of the people on county-wide transit in Wayne County, SMART must also work with Wayne County leadership to develop a plan for transit improvements throughout the County, particularly in the western and southern Wayne County communities that previously were not part of the SMART system.

SMART also needs to work with mechanics to substantially improve bus maintenance to ensure a consistent, reliable pool of buses are available to provide all scheduled service.

TRU also requests that SMART establish an online performance dashboard, similar to DDOT's, so that the public can measure progress towards improving service.

Other providers should build on their success in growing ridership by expanding service hours and area as much as possible, as well as ensuring people throughout their communities are aware of the important services they offer.

Perhaps most importantly, **elected officials at the local, county, regional, and state level must boost investment in public transit,** including identifying and implementing new funding sources for transit. So long as Michigan and metro Detroit continue to underfund transit, agencies will not be able to deliver the level of service that riders - and the region - need and deserve. We look forward to continuing to work with our elected officials to generate new transit funding. This is especially important given the uncertainty of federal support for transit in coming years.



Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic dealt a major blow to public transit in the Detroit region. Five years after the pandemic's onset, our transit agencies are slowly recovering, but persistent underfunding has severely affected their ability to do so.

As this report has discussed, **transit agencies provide critical services to tens of thousands of people each day.** These agencies can and should take steps to improve internal operations to better serve the public. Much of this work is already in progress. Yet ultimately, even the best-run agency can only do so much with a limited amount of funding. **There is no substitute for greater investment when it comes to improving transit in Detroit.**

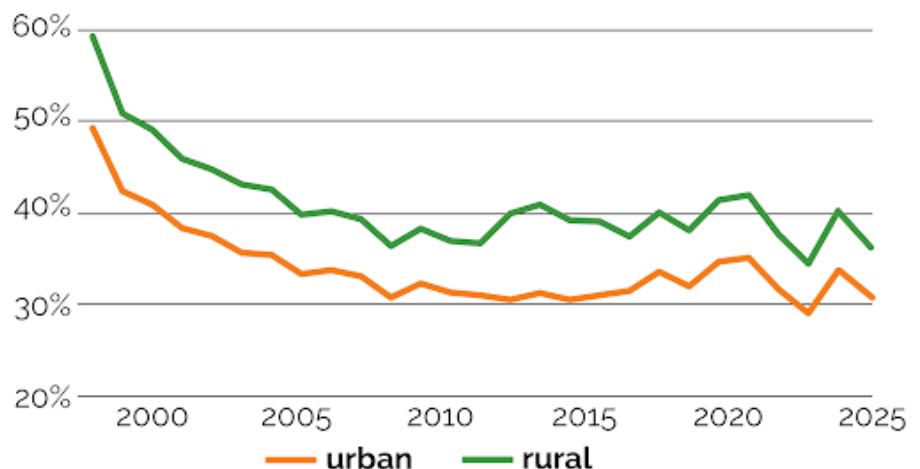
To secure that investment, we need action from our elected officials at all levels of government. There has been some progress on this front. There is no longer talk of privatizing DDOT, as there was in the lead-up to the Detroit bankruptcy a dozen years ago, and a growing number of elected officials in the suburbs acknowledge the need for better transit as well. Rhetoric, however, is not enough; concrete action is essential.

Metro Detroit can have a transit system that affordably and reliably connects workers to jobs, students to schools, seniors to appointments, and everyone in our region to the places they want and need to go. It can help families save money that can be better invested in their homes, education, and local businesses. **A great transit system can also make our region a more vibrant and attractive place where people want to live, work, visit, and invest. We can, if our leaders are willing to, focus on transit and make the investments we need.**

TRU urges all to work together to ensure a prosperous future for our community.



Local Bus Operation (LBO) Distribution Percentages



Source: MDOT Office of Passenger Transportation
Fig 12, Source: MDOT Office of Passenger Transportation

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