# Modernize Michigan Mobility for All


*Michigan strives to be a mobility leader, but largely ignores any non-car mobility. We need a truly modern transportation system that provides affordable, accessible, climate-friendly options for everyone while prioritizing walking, rolling, transit, and zero-emission union-made vehicles*

Transportation Riders United

# 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.


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# Introduction

Everyone has places to go, so everyone in Michigan should have affordable, reliable ways to get where they need to go, ways that don't threaten public safety or our planet. Yet Michigan mobility has for the past 75 years focused almost exclusively on gas-powered personal cars, too often in ways that harm our communities and exclude other mobility options. Cars can be important mobility options in many circumstances, but not for everyone, nor for every trip. Michiganders deserve a wide range of affordable, clean mobility options.

It's time for Michigan to rebalance our transportation systems in ways that work for everyone and minimize negative impacts. This Modernize Michigan Mobility report seeks to provide a vision of how a multimodal, electric transportation system could work for Michigan, how it would benefit our communities, and the policies necessary to achieve it.

# The Problem:
## *Lack of Mobility Options Exclude and Harm Many*

Many in Michigan are so used to a transportation system focused almost exclusively on cars that we've accepted or even stopped noticing the negative aspects of our current transportation system.

- **Over one thousand Michiganders are killed on our roads every year**.[1] Despite car safety technology and public education campaigns, that number remains stubbornly high. Seniors, youth, and people of color are disproportionately hurt, as are people walking and biking.

- **Not everyone drives** and those who don't suffer extreme barriers to simply complete everyday activities such as going to work, school, appointments, shopping, and running errands. These barriers are amplified as the needs in each community changes and as residents and visitors seek additional ways of getting around
  - **Seniors**: More than one in five seniors don't drive.[2] Fatal crash rates increase significantly for drivers over age 70 and are highest among drivers 85 and older.[3]
  - **Michiganders with Disabilities**: 14.7% of Michiganders have a disability, and many of them cannot drive due to this.[4] They depend on others for their transportation needs. Many simply remain stranded at home to avoid being a burden.
  - **Affordability**: Another one-quarter of Michiganders cannot afford to drive. It costs on average $12,000 every year to own and operate a car, including insurance, gas, maintenance, and repairs.[5] Detroit has the highest auto insurance of any big city ($5300/yr).[6] Nearly one-third of Detroit households don't have access to a car, often due to the expense. [7]

- **Driving is expensive**. Another one-quarter of Michiganders spend more than they can really afford on their cars. The average metro Detroit household spends 19.4% of their entire household income just on driving,[8] with many low income households spending fully 40%, [9]money they can't spend on education, healthy food, home repairs, or other investments.
  - Maintaining our ever-expanding road network despite a stagnant population adds enormous costs to all Michigan taxpayers.[10]

- **Pollution from cars and trucks harms public health**, especially for kids and older adults. Pollution exacerbates asthma, heart disease, and other medical crises and increases healthcare costs.[11]
  - **Transportation is also the leading source of US climate pollution**,[12] causing extreme weather, flooding, heat waves, and more. Most of that comes from individual internal-combustion cars and SUVs. And while vehicles have gotten more efficient, people are driving more and further each year, undermining efficiency improvements.

- Cleaner cars alone won't solve our transportation issues.
  - **Traffic congestion**: The average American now spends nearly an hour a day commuting.[13] As Bill Ford, Jr. said "The mobility model we have today will not work tomorrow. Four billion clean cars on the road are still four billion cars and a traffic jam with no emissions is still a traffic jam."[14]
  - Communities built for car-travel are usually isolate destinations far apart and include few options for people who don't drive to get around, requiring long unsafe walks alongside speeding cars. **Requiring cars for most trips encourages a sedentary lifestyle that worsens our epidemics of obesity and loneliness**.[15] And many people who want walkable communities move away from Michigan, including many talented young professionals.[16]

**It's time to build our communities in ways that fairly address the needs of all people!** Safer streets and cleaner cars, reliable buses and trains, more spaces to walk and bike - we need ways to move that save people money and time, reduce air pollution, and build more vibrant communities.

# The Solution:
## *Affordable, Sustainable Mobility Choices that Work for Everyone!*

There is no single transportation mode that works well for every person in every situation. It's time for Michigan to diversify our transportation system. While cars will always be part of Michigan transportation, mobility investments should prioritize walking, biking, transit, shared mobility, and electric mobility to provide a better future for us all.

### Design Communities to Maximize Access

Even before planning for mobility, **communities should be designed to enable easy access** to people's everyday destinations without requiring personal cars, as they were for centuries. Communities that have a mix of uses - like apartments above corner stores - and have high or moderate densities - like duplexes and condos - minimize the amount of travel people need to make in any given day.

If a pharmacy, grocery store, day care, coffee shop, and bank are all within an easy walking distance, families can access what they need while increasing their physical activity and social interactions while wasting less time, gas, and money driving all over.

### Prioritize Walking and Biking

**Walking should be a primary mode of mobility** that is safe and convenient for many trips in urban, dense suburban and small town settings. That means ensuring wide sidewalks that are safe and accessible to people in wheelchairs, pushing strollers, and those using other mobility devices. That also means creating direct efficient walking connections between neighborhoods and destinations. Wherever possible, sidewalks should be separated from car traffic, shaded, and have seating regularly available. If destinations are close together and walking feels not only safe but comfortable and attractive, people will choose this most affordable and healthy mobility option.

**Biking should also be prioritized as a serious way of getting around**. In vibrant healthy communities, biking is much more than just recreation for kids or athletes. Given that half of trips made in the US are under three miles,[17] bicycling can and should be a safe mobility choice for many of those trips. That requires well-marked, protected bike lanes and secure bike parking for people of all ages and abilities to safely and comfortably use bicycles, as well as scooters, electric wheelchairs, and other moderate-speed devices.

- **Bike share systems** are a great way to enable more biking for transportation in more circumstances.

## Make a Wide Range of Transit Broadly Available

**Public transportation provides another vital option** for people who want affordable travel and should be abundantly available across Michigan. Transit includes a range of vehicles and service models for different settings:

- **Passenger train service** can provide easy, reliable travel between cities. Michigan has many existing rail lines mostly used by freight which should be modified to operate passenger service.
  - **Intercity rail** currently connects Pontiac, Detroit, Kalamazoo, and Chicago and cities in between, with 2-3 round trips each day provided by Amtrak and funded by the State of Michigan. That service should run 6-8 times a day. Service connecting Detroit, Lansing, and Grand Rapids has been evaluated as feasible, as has Ann Arbor, Mt. Pleasant, and Traverse City and should be launched as soon as possible.
  - **Regional rail** can provide fast frequent connections among nearby cities like Detroit, Dearborn, and Ann Arbor or Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo. These would run 8-12 times each day to be truly convenient for daily travel and could operate anywhere rail lines currently exist.
  - **Intercity coach bus service** is an important supplement for connecting between mid-sized cities and rural areas where train service may not be feasible, and as a supplement to intercity rail connections between larger cities.

- **Rapid transit** is a great way to move a lot of people quickly along the busiest and densest corridors, like Michigan Avenue, Woodward, and Gratiot. When done right, rapid transit service runs every 5-10 minutes, available when people want it, and at speeds similar to driving, thanks to features like dedicated transit-only lanes and priority at traffic signals. These corridors are the backbone of any successful urban transit system.
  - **Light rail** service, with rails built into the streets, is most efficient and spurs the greatest economic development around it.
  - **Bus rapid transit** can provide similar mobility at lower construction costs.

- **Traditional bus transit** is the lifeblood of most public transit systems, reliably and affordably getting people where they need to go. This service tends to be provided by forty-foot buses with consistent routes and stops every day. Most effective transit runs at least every 10-20 minutes, although some routes in lower density communities may run less often. While they may be more frequent during rush hours, they need to operate evenings and weekends, especially for workers in retail, healthcare and hospitality.
  - **Express bus transit** moves more quickly by stopping at fewer places and using enhancements like bus-only lanes.

- **Dial-a-ride services** are also an important part of any transit system, both for people whose disabilities prevent them from accessing traditional buses and in low density suburbs and rural communities. These usually entail the resident calling or using an app to request a ride a few days ahead of time. Due to insufficient funding, these services have been largely confined to limited hours during weekdays, with no service available on weekends when many social activities occur. Clients are picked up at their homes and taken to their destination in shared vans or small buses. While a vital part of the mobility space, dial-a-ride services are more costly to provide.
  - **Paratransit** provides essential rides for seniors and people whose disabilities prevent them from accessing bus transit.
  - **On-demand rides** can also be a great supplement to a transit system, enabling residents in otherwise hard-to-serve areas to call or use an app to request a ride to their destination in under an hour.


## The Role of Cars: Increasingly Shared and Electric

**Shared mobility** provides another vital part of the mobility ecosystem. Where cars, SUVs, and vans are the necessary or preferred option, communities should strive to enable shared vehicles or rides.

- **Carpooling and vanpooling** can be a great way for people who travel the same routes at the same time to get where they need to go at lower cost.

- **Car rentals and car share** systems also provide auto-mobility without the added costs of personal ownership. People who can mostly get around walking, biking, or on transit can rent a car for the occasional hours or days they need one.

- **Ride-hailing** like Uber, Lyft, and publicly funded services (like SMART's Flex service) are also a great way to supplement all the above modes of mobility. If used too frequently, they can be costly and add to congestion and pollution but if only used occasionally, they can be a great way to handle last-minute trips.

**Electrify whenever possible**. Whether for trains, buses, cars, or bikes, electric vehicles are a much cleaner, more climate-friendly alternative to internal combustion engines, producing less noise and less pollution. This means having convenient and affordable charging infrastructure available where people live and work, and at a wide range of other destinations to enable people to travel where they need to go.

- Electric city and school buses can minimize pollution for vulnerable residents

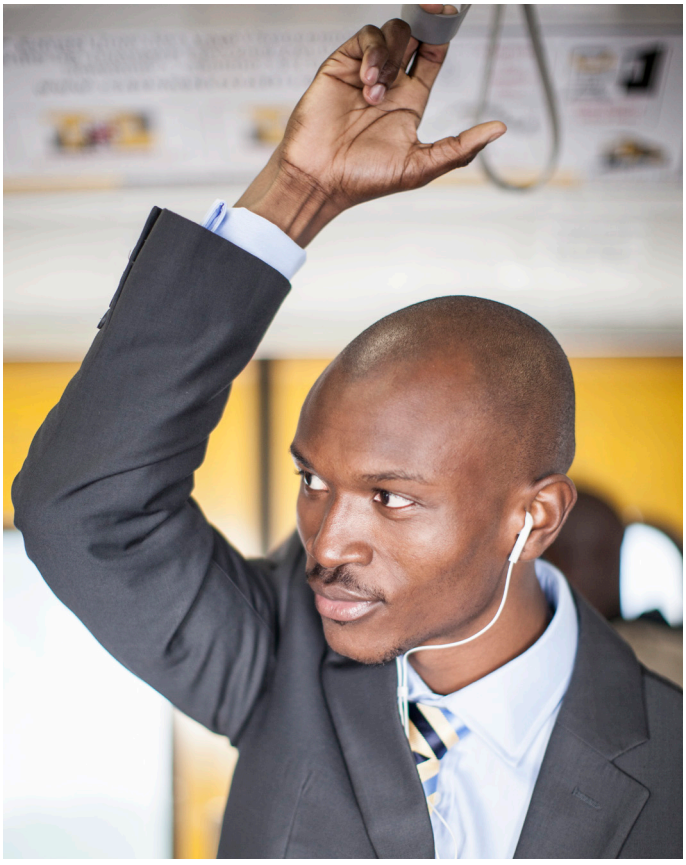
- E-bikes greatly expand the range people can comfortably bike

- Charging infrastructure must be available not only at individual homes, but also
  - In multi-tenant buildings
  - In dense neighborhoods
  - At businesses
  - Along travel routes
  - Public right-of-ways

**Autonomous and Connected Vehicles** may play a role in our mobility future, especially as shared shuttles along regular routes, but should not be considered a silver bullet solution that will resolve the many other problems caused by a car-centric society. They must be held to high safety standards in real-world situations, especially for people outside the vehicle.

**Personal cars** remain an important part of the mobility ecosystem, especially for carrying many or large items and for rural areas. When many people are able to use other modes for many purposes, traffic may decrease for those who need to drive. But personal cars should not be the assumed mode for most circumstances.

A truly multimodal transportation system that does not overly prioritize cars may result in occasional inconvenience like not always having parking immediately in front of every destination. But the trade-offs for having more options, more safety, and more vibrant cities are well worth it.



# Envision the Future

Imagine a family a few years in the future. After a quick breakfast on a busy morning, Dad walks with their daughter to school, then takes the rapid transit line two towns over to a work meeting, checking email and prepping for the meeting on the way.

Mom works from home on Zoom in the morning before renting an EV car-share for a few hours to take Grandma to a doctor's appointment and pick up some bulky items from Costco before picking up their daughter from school. Their teenaged son bikes to school then to his after-school job, then with a quick text to the family, meets up last minute with friends at the park before taking the bus home.

After her appointment, Grandma gets a paratransit ride to the senior center for yoga and her volunteer tutoring. To get some fresh air and exercise, Dad decides to rent an e-bike to ride home, stopping by the farmers market to get some fresh produce for dinner. After dinner, Mom catches the bus to meet her sister at the train station, in from Toronto for a few days, and they go out for a few drinks, grabbing an Uber home.

Five people, all able to do all the things a busy family needs and wants to do, and with the money they save by not paying for multiple cars, they save up for the kids' college and great vacations.

# Policy Pathway

Today's cities and today's transportation system are the result of decisions made by decades of politicians and planners. **We can create the transportation system we want, if we make strategic, thoughtful decisions to truly prioritize access, opportunity, safety, and health**. And there are important steps that leaders at the local, regional, state, and federal levels can all take to make our Modern Michigan Mobility vision into reality.

It's time to prioritize people when we're investing in transportation: our time, our communities, our wallets, and our health. It's time to replace gridlock with transportation options that make getting where we are going easier for everyone.

## Invest in options

For decades, more than 90% of Michigan's transportation spending has gone to highways, roads, and bridges, with little attention to or investment in non-car mobility.[18] That must change. Michigan must invest $1 billion a year in transit, rail, and other non-car transportation to start moving towards Modern Michigan Mobility.

This will fund not just local bus operating and vehicle replacement expenses for current transit services but also support transformational transit projects for reliable rapid transit and convenient cross-state connections.

Metro regions must invest in regional transit systems that provide safe, reliable, convenient options for people to get around. These must include a range of transportation options to serve a wide range of transportation needs.

## Reprioritize transportation spending

MDOT and other transportation agencies should be required to transparently quantify and compare the impacts of proposed transportation projects, evaluating not only their impact on congestion and pavement quality but also on safety, accessibility, pollution, and other state values. Virginia's SMART SCALE is an innovative assessment process Michigan could build off.[19]

State statute should require MDOT to account for additional climate pollution that would result from road expansion or decreases from multi-modal projects that reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and ensure they fit within the MI Healthy Climate Plan path to net-zero. Colorado and Minnesota have models Michigan could learn from.[20]

Spending on road-widening projects should be avoided, as they induce greater travel demand without decreasing travel times. Existing roadways can be better maintained if limited transportation resources are prioritized for maintaining existing infrastructure. Some roadways can be modified to allocate less capacity for cars and more for other transportation options.

Budgets and decision-making processes can be more explicitly and directly focused on achieving transportation outcomes that are aligned with affordability, safety, access, equity, and climate action.


> **"We can create the transportation system we want, if we make strategic, thoughtful decisions to prioritize access, opportunity, safety, and health."**

## Prioritize safety for all

Roads must be redesigned to recognize the needs of all users. Instead of focusing on moving as many cars as quickly as possible, planners and politicians need to provide attractive safe spaces for people who are walking, biking, and rolling with wider sidewalks, dedicated bike lanes, enhanced crosswalks, and narrower car-lanes. Slower streets are safer for all users

- Prioritize pedestrian safety improvements near bus stops, including crosswalks, curb cuts, and traffic calming.
- Invest in well-lit, ADA-compliant bus stops, benches, shelters, and real-time arrival tech.
- Ensure policing and surveillance are respectful, community-contextual, and prevent racial profiling

## Plan multimodal

Too often, transportation decisions are made in siloed isolation, focused on just one part of the transportation system. Despite Michigan's Complete Streets law, too often MDOT, county road commissions, and municipalities repave roads without ever considering whether they need bike or bus lanes, better crosswalks, sidewalks, or EV charging. Multimodal planning may be more complicated, but it's essential to create the future we need.

- Require community co-creation in major funding or service decisions, not just consultation
- Use language access, disability inclusion, and trusted messengers in engagement
- Invest in fare integration between DDOT, SMART, QLine, and micromobility (e.g., MoGo, scooters)

## Workforce Justice

- Ensure transit operator and maintenance staff are paid fairly, have strong union protections, and reflect the diversity of their community
- Offer training and pipeline programs for youth and returning citizens in transportation careers
- Invest in charging infrastructure in public spaces, and provide support or incentives for those in multi-family housing or rental properties.

## Enable EVs

- Support EV carshares, especially in lower-income and rural communities.
  - The BlueLA electric car-share program benefits communities throughout Los Angeles, CA, by reducing the need for car ownership and curbing tailpipe pollution.
  - The Michigan Carshare program provides access to shared electric vehicles in communities across Michigan including Grand Rapids, Ann Arbor, and Detroit with

affordable prices focused on low-income housing communities.

- Establish building codes and zoning ordinances that ensures EV charging infrastructure is enabled for all new buildings and parking areas.

## Land Use Reforms

- States and municipalities should adopt policies such as those proposed by the Parking Reform Network to eliminate parking minimums and therefore reduce urban sprawl, congestion, vehicle miles traveled, and car dependency.

- Legalize multi-family and mixed-use developments throughout urbanized areas

- Policies that advance housing projects through transit-oriented development can increase the number of affordable units and create high-density areas, particularly in proximity to high-frequency transit.
    - Avoid displacement. Protect residents from gentrification near new transit investments


# Endnotes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