

TRU's 2025 Year in Review



TRU's 25th year was an eventful one! We saw major progress in the quest to Double DDOT, gaining a historic increase of funding for the department, and achieving new contracts for bus drivers and mechanics. Transit was elevated as a major issue in the Detroit mayoral election, as we conducted ride-alongs with every mayoral candidate and hosted a mayoral forum on transit.

We were proud to celebrate 25 years at our 25th anniversary gala, and were honored with testimonial resolutions from Wayne County and Detroit recognizing our work. We had numerous education opportunities this year, with 9 Transit

Tuesday Talks, over 57 media appearances, and the second graduating class of our Transportation Civic Academy.

TRU published three reports this year, including our State of Transit report, and reports on the "fix it first" policy for highways and cross-state transit. In our statewide efforts, we saw major success, with \$160 million more for local bus operations and new transformational transit projects, a historic increase! Finally, we were proud to grow our staff, with us having three interns this Summer, and new year-round members of the TRU team.

Progress in the Quest to Double DDOT

In our ongoing struggle to double DDOT service across the city, TRU and our allies in the **Double DDOT Coalition** won an additional **\$23 million (!)** in funding for transit in the city budget, helping DDOT institute two service increases over the course of the year.

After years of advocacy with our friends in Amalgamated Transit Union Local 26 and DDOT's other unions, we also **won major wage increases for DDOT workers**, ensuring the agency can recruit and retain drivers, mechanics, and other staff.

Although DDOT still faces a shortage of operable buses, new vehicles are finally arriving, and we're hopeful that in the coming year, DDOT will finally be able to restore service to pre-pandemic levels.

Elevating Transit as an Election Issue

Improving bus service hasn't always been a top issue in Detroit's municipal elections. This year, TRU set out to change that. While we don't endorse candidates, we wanted to make sure transit was a subject no candidate could afford to ignore.

In June, we hosted a **mayoral forum on transit** that drew over 150 people in-person and online. With the assistance of our friend Brother Cunningham, we also arranged **bus ride-alongs** with every mayoral candidate and multiple City Council candidates - 22 in all - educating the candidates on DDOT's importance to the city and giving them a chance to talk to bus riders. Finally, we prepared a **transit-focused questionnaire** so voters could familiarize themselves with candidates' views on the subject.

These efforts bore fruit! Mayor-elect **Mary Sheffield** identified transit as one of her **top 7 focus areas** and promised that "every resident will have access to transit that they can count



on.” She appointed TRU Executive Director Megan Owens as co-chair of her transition team task force on transportation and mobility. TRU looks forward to working with her and the new City Council in the years to come.

Celebrating at our 25th Anniversary Gala

TRU was founded 25 years ago as a few people who wanted Detroit to have more and better transit. Since then, TRU has become the leading transit advocate in Detroit, and has made a major impact on Detroit. We’ve elevated transit to being seen as a priority and need for our region, not an issue to be ignored. In honor of these achievements, we got over 250 people from TRU and the transit community together to celebrate 25 years of advocacy, education, and mobilization for more and better transit.

A special thanks to everyone who came, whether as a transit advocate, member of TRU, transit agency, government official, ally, or an individual, and celebrating these accomplishments.

We’re proud to have received **testimonial resolutions from Wayne County and the City of Detroit** recognizing the hard work we’ve done to improve transit in our communities. Thank you!



Celebrating at our 25th Anniversary Gala



This year, TRU hosted 9 Transit Tuesday Talks with a variety of guest speakers and topics. We got updates on Detroit transit on the **People Mover and DDOT** from Executive Director of Transit for the City of Detroit Robert Cramer, and People Mover Director of Services and Operations Tony Vinson. We also talked about **multimodal transit in Detroit** with Todd Scott, Executive Director of DGC, and Christina Peltier, Deputy Director of Complete Streets for the City of Detroit's Department of Public Works. To round out our Detroit focused Transit Tuesday Talks, we had a community engagement session for **Plan Detroit** with Julie Connochie and Dara O'Bryne, both City of Detroit planners.

For the rest of Southeast Michigan, we talked with Ben Stupka, RTA director, about **updates on the RTA services**, such as the Qline, DAX, and D2A2, along with what comes next. For SMART, we hosted Harmony Lloyd, Deputy Manager, who gave us updates on **SMARTer mobility**, SMART's system rework. Additionally, we brought TRU members to Ann Arbor and talked with TheRide's Deputy CEO of Planning & Innovation, Forest Yang on **TheRide's future plans**, and Lilliane Webb, Business Services Program Manager & **getDowntown** Director on Ann Arbor's program to get people to take transit and active transportation downtown.

We talked to Calhoun County Transit Director Mallory Avis, Oakland County Commissioner

Brendan Johnson and Oakland County Transportation Program Manager Eli Cooper about **countywide transit expansion** in Calhoun County (Battle Creek) and Oakland County.

Finally, our last Transit Tuesday Talk was on our **cross-state transit** report, and featured Chad Cushman, President of Indian Trails, Carolyn Ulsstad, Transportation Program Manager at Groundwork Center, and Peter Anastor, Director of MDOT Rail.

TRU appeared in the media at least 57 times



this year, a bit over once a week! This was across the web, social media, tv, print media and radio, and included a variety of topics. Some highlights included **FOX 2 coverage of the State of Transit 2025**, an **op-ed on state funding in the Free Press**, Megan interviewed about **Double DDOT on Channel 7**, TV coverage of our Double DDOT protests, **coverage of our mayoral forum on transit** across numerous news channels, The Detroit News publishing our **Double DDOT op-ed**, **Mary Sheffield directly mentioning TRU during the mayoral debate** on WXYZ, and numerous interviews by TRU staff, board members, and members across the year.

In the fall, TRU held our second annual **Transportation Civic Academy**, a ten-week course on transportation planning and policy that drew participants from across the city and region. Participants learned about subjects ranging from the history of transit in Detroit to the nuts and bolts of community organizing and advocacy. The course concluded with group projects on ideas for real-life interventions for the region's transportation system.



Reports & Research

Back in January, TRU released our **2025 State of Transit report**, assessing the state of the region's transit systems in their recovery from the "long COVID" that has afflicted transit agencies around the country. We plan to make this an annual effort, helping to educate key policymakers on metro Detroit's transit needs.

We also published two reports with a statewide focus. The first, prepared with the assistance of TRU board member Adam Goodman, was titled **"For Michigan Roads, MDOT Needs to 'Fix it First.'"** In the midst of a legislative debate over how to "fix the damn roads," we argued that the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) needs to stop spending billions on highway expansion projects and focus on maintaining existing infrastructure, as well as



investing in transportation options besides the automobile. (The reconstruction and widening of I-75 and I-94 in metro Detroit alone are projected to cost more than \$5 billion - imagine what kind of system we could have if we invested that money in transit!)

Our other statewide report was **"Reconnecting Michigan: A Vision for Cross-State Transit,"** outlining opportunities for Michigan to expand inter-city travel options, like express bus

and train service. It also discusses the need for investing in cross-state transit, examples from other states, and provides a vision for how we can have a cross-state transit system that serves the needs of all Michiganders. This report will inform our cross-state transit advocacy next year, and provides a blueprint for MDOT, the legislature, and candidates next year to make Michigan a national leader in cross-state transit.

Success in the Fight for State Funding

Over a quarter of the funding for Michigan's transit agencies comes from the state government, so what happens in Lansing has big implications for DDOT, SMART, and other transit providers. In conjunction with the Michigan Public Transit Association and the Amalgamated Transit Union, we brought **over 100 people to a Transit Day at the Capitol** on March 12, and talked to over 60 legislators in the space of a few hours.

Hundreds more people took action by emailing, calling and meeting with their state legislators, urging them to support a boost for public transit in the state budget after years of declining investment. When the dust settled on a budget deal in October, the state had committed nearly **\$160 million in additional money for local bus operations**, as well as a new fund to support “transformational transit projects” around the state.



Success in the Fight for State Funding

TRU was blessed to host a number of interns this year. Theresa De Benedetti joined us early in the year as our communications intern. She worked to improve TRU's video, social media, and news communications. Theresa will be continuing next year as our communications associate with more responsibilities over our social media channels and working to publish numerous op-eds.

Our three Summer interns were Aaron Puno (policy intern), Makenna Litteral (community outreach intern), and Logan Foust (fundraising intern). Aaron is studying at UM-Ann Arbor and did research on cross-state transit and rapid transit in Metro Detroit, along with a governor's policy platform. Makenna, a masters of urban planning & environment student at UM-Ann Arbor, helped with outreach about Wayne countywide transit, with the vote coming up in 2026. Finally, Logan, a student at Michigan State, helped us clean up

our database and made it much easier for us to do advocacy actions and fundraising pushes.

After working with TRU over the past two years, Lukas Lasecki, our engagement specialist who worked hard on engaging transit riders and working with volunteers, has left our team. They will be studying full time as a student at Oakland University, and will still be volunteering with TRU as time permits. Good luck Lukas!

Continuing into 2026 is Kiersten Bushbaker (research fellow), a UM-Ann Arbor student who's been hard at work collecting data for next year's State of Transit report.

After graduating this Winter, Petra Mihalko, TRU's communications manager, will be hired on full time. She'll coordinate our communications efforts and lead our cross-state transit advocacy.



Onward!

We're proud of what we've accomplished over 2025, and we're looking forward to more victories in 2026! One of our biggest campaigns will be in support of countywide transit in Wayne County - the last of the three primary metro Detroit counties not to fund transit on a countywide basis. Another will be a coalition to reform the Michigan Department of Transportation and win a more holistic approach to transportation investment. With your support, we can help continue building momentum for transit in metro Detroit and around the state!



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