

# The Case for Countywide Transit Investment *in Wayne County*

# Information

**Transportation Riders United (TRU)** is a Detroit-based 501c3 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.

**Connect Wayne County** is a campaign by Transportation Riders United to educate voters in advance of the Wayne countywide transit expansion millage vote August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2026. Connect Wayne County wants to give residents the chance to decide on affordable transportation options that work for them.

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- Sean Minty, service analysis for Western Wayne County communities
- Eric Li, mapping & GIS
- Mariam Ahmed, Ethan Casler, Nia Paton, and Sean McCormick, student research project "Transit, Healthcare in Wayne County Opt-Out Communities"

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This report was compiled with the best and most recent publicly available information as of May 2026. While TRU has made every effort at accuracy, we cannot guarantee the information is totally accurate. Please contact us with any questions or corrections.

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## Data sourced from (in order of reference):

- Information on local transit providers in opt-out communities sourced from municipal websites; data gathered in Summer 2025 by Makenna Litteral.
- Community Profiles; mSEMCOG; 2024.
- Demographic Emphasis Area; SEMCOG; 2024.
- "American Community Survey 2024;" U.S. Census Bureau; 2024.
- Transit, Healthcare in Wayne County Opt-Out Communities; Mariam Ahmed, Ethan Casler, Nia Paton, and Sean McCormick; 2026.
- Gen Z is less likely to have a driver's license. Here's why; Sara Cherinkoff, USA Today; 2024.
- Table DL-20 - Highway Statistics 2023; USDOT; 2023.
- Travel Patterns of Adults With Travel-Limiting Disabilities; Bureau of Transportation Statistics; 2024.
- Transportation Access to Core Services; SEMCOG; 2025.

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# The Need

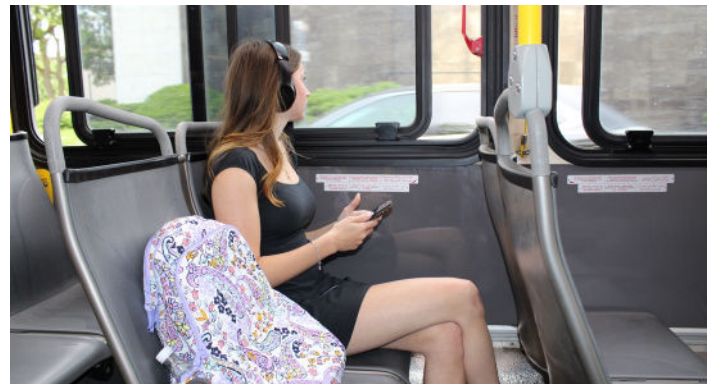
Wayne County is Michigan's most populous county, but it lacks countywide transit. Public transit is an essential public service, like the fire department, parks, or schools: some use it directly and everyone benefits from a stronger community. It is important to have a functioning public transit service to connect residents to their community and surrounding areas.

## Public transit leads to:

- **Independence** for seniors, disabled residents, and young people who do not want or can't afford to own a car;
- **Economic opportunity** and prosperity, by connecting workers to employers;
- **Environmental benefits**, like better air quality due to less automobile emissions;
- **Health benefits** for all ages, especially children and the elderly, due to better air quality and higher physical activity to get to and from public transit stops.

**"Lack of adequate public transportation is the biggest problem holding me back from greater community involvement.** Nankin Transit is a great service, but it alone does not provide the transportation I need to be engaged in the community."

Canton resident



**"When you're going to hire more prospective employees, easy transportation is a plus."**

Terry Wagner,  
owner of Heritage  
Logo Works, Livonia



**"29% [of Schoolcraft College students] reported missing class at least once due to unreliable transportation."**

2024 Schoolcraft College survey



Today, **roughly 350,000 Wayne County residents have little to no options** to get around if they can't drive, because their communities aren't connected to the regions transit system.

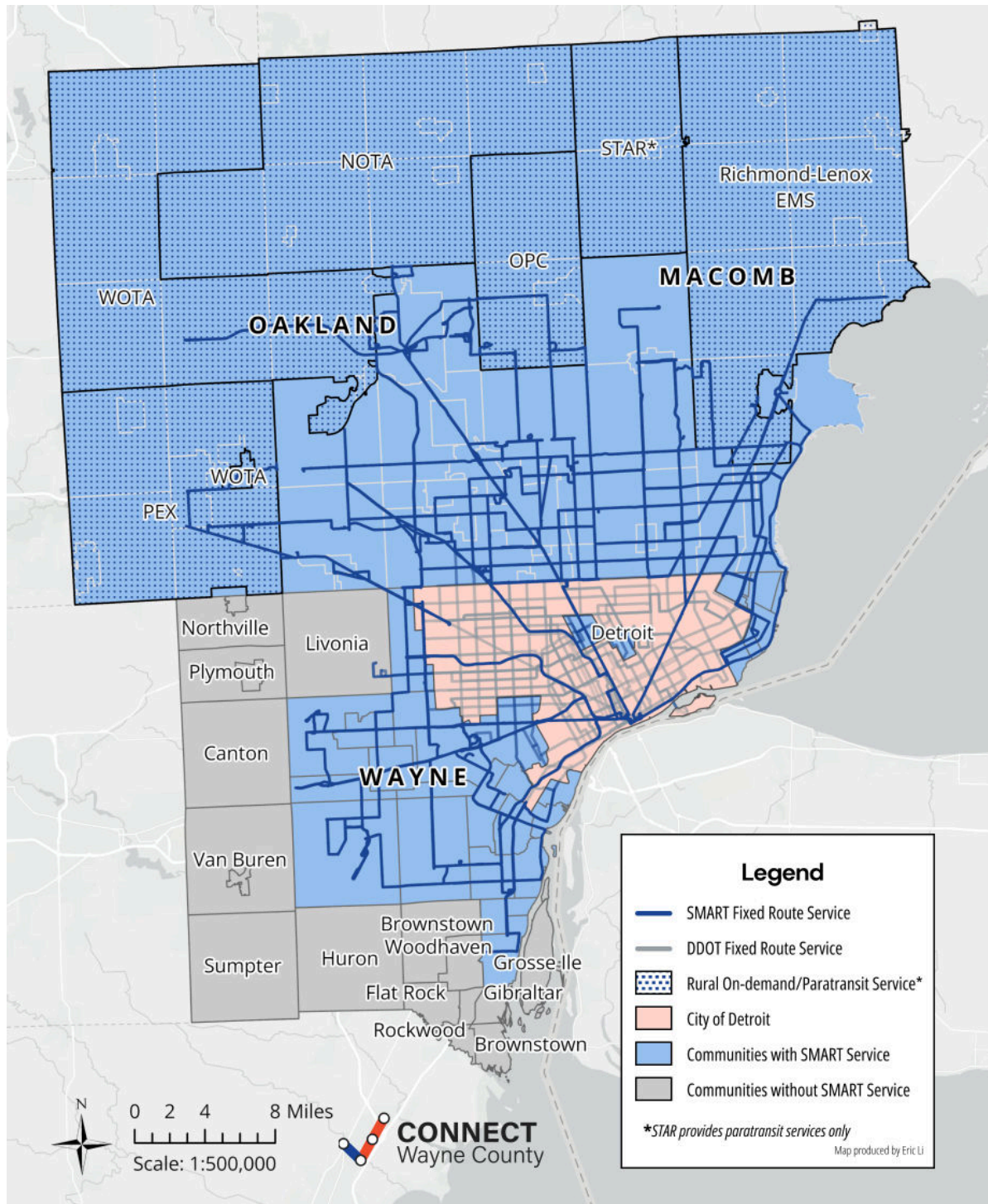
On August 4th, 2026, Wayne County residents will vote on a ballot proposal that will extend this essential service countywide. **TRU supports this proposal as an important step towards a better-connected region and a more prosperous County.**

**Public transportation is needed to serve all community members, including seniors, residents with disabilities, young adults, workers, and more.**

# Origins of Our Patchwork Network

In 1995, metro Detroit voters approved a millage (property tax) to fund public transit through the Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation (SMART). However, not everyone got to vote on the proposal. The elected officials of some Wayne County cities and townships decided to “opt out” of the vote on transit.

The result has been a patchwork transit system which severely limits mobility for hundreds of thousands of Wayne County residents. Areas in gray in the map below, including some of Wayne County’s largest cities and suburbs, have extremely limited access to transit.



# Towns Without SMART Have Limited Transit

**Thirty years later, these suburban communities have changed significantly.** Their population has grown by 27%, they are significantly more urbanized, and they have increasing numbers of senior residents and some of the largest job centers in the county.

**However, towns without SMART provide minimal public transit.** As shown below, this consists primarily of locally funded “dial-a-ride” services that only serve limited groups of people, in a limited area, during limited hours.



*A City of Livonia transit vehicle only takes people within Livonia or 1 mile beyond the city limits.*

Municipality	Eligibility	Service Hours	Fees	Limitations
Belleville & Van Buren Township	Residents aged 55+ or with a disability	M-F: 10am-2pm	\$2 - \$7 each way	Reserve 48 hours ahead between 10am-2pm. Trips in Van Buren Township and Belleville are \$2 each way and trips within a 20-mile radius are \$7 each way.
Brownstown Township	Residents aged 60+ or with a disability	T-Th: 9am-1pm, must check calendar for shopping	\$3 roundtrip for medical trips, \$1 roundtrip for shopping	Must apply and provide MI ID and disability documentation. Reserve 7 days ahead. Limited to predetermined shopping excursions and 3 miles north, east, and south of township.
Canton Township	Residents aged 55+, with a disability, or who qualify for social security	M-F: 8:30am-5pm	\$3 one way	Limited to areas served by Nankin Transit and St. Mary's Hospital in Livonia.
Flat Rock	Residents aged 60+, with a disability, or are low-income	M, T, Th: 9am-12:30pm	\$3 donation	Must provide proof of residency. Reserve one week ahead.
Gibraltar	Residents aged 60+ or with a disability	M-F: 8:30am-2:30pm	Free	Services reserved for doctor's appointments with Wednesday only for shopping trips at 9:30am. Reserve 48 hours ahead. Limit 2 appointments per resident per week. Limited to downriver area
Grosse Ile Township	Residents aged 60+, with a disability, or who don't own a car	M-F: 8am-4pm	\$5-\$6 one way, based on location	Reserve 48 hours ahead. Service \$5 on-island and \$6 off-island within a 5 mile radius.

Huron Township	55+, disabled, or low-income	M: 9:30am-4:30pm, T: 9:30am-2:30pm, Th: 9:30am-4:30pm	Donation based	Limited to doctor appointments, prescription pick-up and grocery shopping.
Livonia	Adults aged 18+	M-F: 7am-6:30pm	\$3 one way	Limited to City limits and 1 mile outside of city for medical appointments.
Northville & Northville Township	Residents aged 60+ or have a disability	M-F: 8:30am-3:30pm	\$1-\$4, based on location	Reserve 48 hours ahead. Limited to 8 mile radius for medical appointments and 4-mile radius for non-medical.
Plymouth & Plymouth Township	Residents aged 60+	M-F: 9am-2:30pm	\$2 one way	Reserve 48 hours ahead between 8:30-11:30am. Limited to City and Township limits.
Rockwood	Seniors or residents who are low to moderate income level	M, W, F: 9am-2pm	\$2 donation	At least 24 hours advance notice required. Limited to a 25-mile radius outside of Rockwood.
Sumpter Township	Residents aged 55+ or disabled	M-Th: 9am-1pm	\$10-\$15/year based on residency	Reserve 24 hours ahead of time. Must be a member of Sumpter Township Senior Center to utilize. Will not travel into Washtenaw County.
Woodhaven	Residents aged 62+ or with a disability	M-Th: 10am-4pm	Free	Reserve 48 hours ahead. Limited to City limits and certain medical facilities based on number of residents served.

**Most of these transit services are limited to seniors or people with a documented disability**, which leaves out many people who could benefit from public transit. Some of these people include:

- Young people without a driver’s license
- People who are temporarily disabled or injured and cannot drive
- People who cannot afford a car, or whose car breaks down
- People who would like other options besides driving

All of these transit services are limited in where and when they will transport people. Many only operate for a few hours on weekdays, and they are often limited to city or township boundaries.

**Our lives don’t end at city or township boundaries or on weekends, and our transit shouldn’t either.**

## The Case of Detroit

The City of Detroit is technically an “opt-out” municipality. However, it has long funded an extensive transit system, the Detroit Department of Transportation (DDOT), using money from the City’s general fund.

The funds from a countywide transit millage raised in Detroit could be used to supplement existing City investments in DDOT service, improving service within the city.



# Many County Residents Don't Drive

**In Wayne County, about 300,000 people do not drive:** 200,000 households lack a car, and 100,000 people have a disability that means they cannot drive (SEMCOG, 2024).

**However, it's not just people who don't drive who would benefit from expanded public transit.** Outside of Detroit, Wayne County is:

- 21.56% low-income
- 17.3% 65 or older
- 13.82% disabled

For these vulnerable groups, transit is a vital public service that enables thriving lives, access to opportunity, and freedom to move (Ahmed, Casler, Paton, McCormick, 2026).

**TRU estimates that there are over 50,000 people in suburbs without SMART bus service who do not drive,** out of about 350,000 people total in these communities. While some of these residents are eligible for paratransit, many low income families and youth are not, keeping them away from opportunities like school and work.

**If Wayne Countywide transit expansion were to pass, almost 170,000 Wayne county residents would likely gain access to a bus stop within a 10 minute walk.** Almost 130,000 of these people are in current opt-out communities, or about 1 in 3 residents (Ahmed, Casler, Paton, McCormick, 2026).

Additionally, every senior and person with a disability would gain paratransit service to Macomb, Oakland, and Wayne counties, and **60,000 residents in Southwest Wayne would gain on-demand dial-a-ride transit.**

**"As the cost of living continues to rise, seniors, young people, and struggling families continue to grapple with the lack of affordable transit options to move between work, school, grocery stores, day care, and doctor office visits. From what we see in our work every day helping families move from crisis to stability and from stability to prosperity, we know that reliable transportation is not a luxury: it is a necessary ingredient for thriving families and strong communities."**

Dr. Darienne Hudson,  
President and CEO,  
United Way for  
Southeastern Michigan



**"Countywide transit is crucial for students and their families to ensure equitable connection to education and the rest of their community.** Currently in Downriver there are many communities that have no transit connection whatsoever, and the students and young people in these communities are essentially trapped in their suburbs, unable to engage with their community without the use of private transport. **This leads to community fragmentation, lack of opportunity, and acute distress for our most vulnerable people."**

Ali Iqbal,  
Brownstown resident  
& WSU Student



City/ Township	Transit- Depend- ent HH	HH With No Car	Under 18	Est. teen non- drivers	Seniors (65+)	Est. Senior non- drivers	With Disab- ilities	Est. Disabled non- drivers	Est. total non- drivers
<b>Belleville</b>	601	521	719	200	771	120	873	350	<b>670</b>
Brownstown Twp	793	510	7,671	2,000	5,733	800	4,227	1,700	<b>4,500</b>
Canton Twp	3,221	1,497	22,913	6,000	16,292	2,400	9,501	3,800	<b>12,200</b>
Flat Rock	296	179	2,557	700	1,583	200	1,269	500	<b>1,400</b>
Gibraltar	190	139	905	250	1,333	200	920	350	<b>800</b>
Grosse Ile	517	207	2,242	550	2,963	450	1,364	550	<b>1,550</b>
Huron Twp	239	163	4,015	1,000	2,925	400	2,427	950	<b>2,350</b>
Livonia	2,298	1,223	17,566	4,800	20,888	2,000	11,191	4,500	<b>11,300</b>
Northville (City)	486	261	1,264	300	1,270	150	303	150	600
Northville Twp	930	339	6,638	1,800	5,935	900	2,445	1,000	<b>3,700</b>
Plymouth (City)	300	222	1,911	500	1,598	200	843	300	<b>1,000</b>
Plymouth Twp	720	350	5,771	1,500	6,315	900	2,829	1,100	<b>3,500</b>
Rockwood	95	32	795	200	587	100	279	100	<b>400</b>
Sumpter Twp	328	217	2,303	600	1,872	300	1,572	600	<b>1,500</b>
Van Buren Twp	1,049	512	4,772	1,200	5,352	800	4,149	1,600	<b>3,600</b>
Woodhaven	444	137	2,197	600	3,167	500	1,611	600	<b>1,700</b>
<b>Totals</b>	<b>12,507</b>	<b>6,509</b>	<b>84,239</b>	<b>22,200</b>	<b>78,584</b>	<b>10,420</b>	<b>45,803</b>	<b>18,150</b>	<b>50,770</b>

Data from the US Census Bureau American Community Survey 2024 and SEMCOG. Estimates are assumptions based on:

- Assumed ~25% of teens are non-drivers. Nationally 60% of teens 16-18 do not have a license (Cherinkoff, 2024).
- Assumed ~15% of seniors are non-drivers. Nationally 15-30% of seniors do not have a license (USDOT, 2023).
- Assumed ~40% of people with a disability don't drive. Nationally, about 50% of people with disabilities drove for their trips in 2022 (Bureau of Transportation Statistics, 2024).

# Many Residents Can't Get Where They Need To

In 2025, SEMCOG released the "Transportation Access to Core Services" tool, which shows how people all over Southeast Michigan can access services via walking, biking, driving, or transit.

**For people who can not drive, life is unlivable in many of our Western and Southern Wayne county suburbs.** As established, these people exist, and without transit, they can't get college, healthcare, or groceries.

## Canton

- **2,874 households are transit dependent**
  - 64% of those households are over a 30 min walk from ANY healthcare facility.
- 55% of households with seniors are over a 30 min walk from any healthcare
- **Nearly all low-income households are over a 30 minute bike ride from a community college**

## Livonia

- 2,460 households are transit dependent
- **All transit dependent households are over a 30 min walk from a community healthcare center**
- 15% of households are low income (5,894)
  - All are over a 30 min walk from a community healthcare center
  - Nearly all are over a 30 min walk from community college
  - Four in five are over a 30 min bike ride from community college

## Northville

*(city & township)*

- 687 households are transit dependent
  - **98% of transit-dependent households are more than a 30 minute walk from any healthcare facility**
  - 45% of transit-dependent households are more than a 30 minute walk to a grocery store

## Plymouth

*(city & township)*

- **1,147 households are transit dependent**
- 35 percent of households have seniors
  - 41 percent of households with seniors are over a 30 minute walk from any healthcare facility

## Southwest Wayne

*(Belleville, Huron, Sumpter, Van Buren)*

- 2,075 households are transit dependent
- 27% of households have seniors
  - **91% of households with seniors are more than a 30 minute walk from ANY healthcare facility**
- 20% of households are low-income

## Lower Downriver

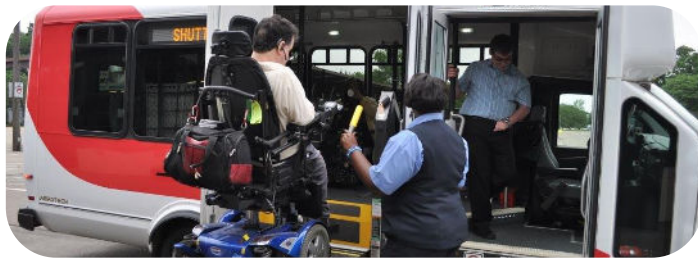
*(Brownstown, Flat Rock, Gibraltar, Grosse Ile, Rockwood, Woodhaven)*

- 1,906 households are transit dependent
  - Half of those households are over a 30 minute walk from ANY healthcare facility
- **35% of households have a senior**
  - 54% of households with seniors are over a 30 minute walk from any healthcare facility
- 18% of households are low income
  - **Nearly all low income households are over a 30 minute bike ride from a community college**

# What Transit Could Look Like

## Fixed Route Buses

Traditional buses, accessible to all, travelling along a fixed route on a regular schedule, could serve major corridors across Wayne County like Plymouth Rd, Ford Rd, Haggerty, Telegraph, and Fort. An extended Michigan Avenue route could bridge the gap between western Wayne and Washtenaw County.



## Paratransit Service

Smaller paratransit buses or vans can provide door-to-door service for seniors and people with disabilities. Existing services in western Wayne County could use millage funds to increase capacity, take on more trips, and extend their hours of operation.

## Express Buses

Express buses, like the existing D2A2 service between Ann Arbor and Detroit, have fewer and more widely spaced stops than local bus service. They prioritize speed and typically run during commuter hours.



## On-Demand / "Flex" Service

Like a more affordable version of Uber or Lyft, SMART's Flex service allows riders request a ride at a specific time to a specific location. SMART currently provides this service in lower-density areas where fixed-route transit is less viable.

# What It Would Cost

The primary local funding source available for public transit in Michigan is the property tax.

Currently, a ~1-mill property tax (millage) funds public transit in Wayne County's opt-in communities. For the owner of a \$200,000 home, that amounts to about **\$8 per month**, less than most streaming services.

This is a relatively low tax rate compared to what many other Michigan communities pay for transit.

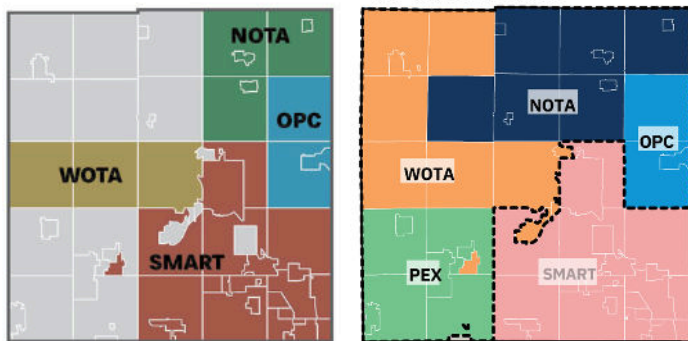
Area	Transit millage rate
Ann Arbor	4.33
Lansing	2.98
Battle Creek	2.66
Grand Rapids	1.47
Wayne/ Oakland/ Macomb	0.99

# The Oakland County Example

Until recently, many Oakland County communities had also “opted out” of transit services. **In 2022, however, Oakland County voters approved a countywide transit tax, much like the one that Wayne County voters will be asked to approve in 2026.**

That measure has allowed transit agencies - including both SMART and smaller rural transit agencies - to expand service, reaching thousands more people across the County.

## Oakland County rural transit expansion



Pre-2022 Vote

Current, 2026 Transit Map



**“At 62, I can imagine a time when driving will be difficult for me. Why should I give up mobility and access to things like my church, the OPC, and shopping?”**

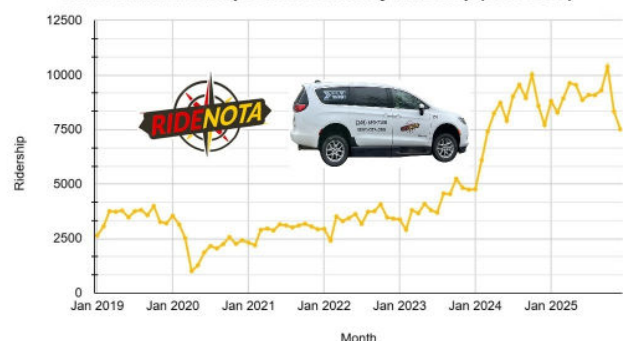
- Harper, Rochester resident, 2022. She did not have to give up this mobility after the 2022 millage passed.



## Some improvements include:

- **SMART has added new fixed routes.** This has led to greater connectivity throughout the counties and allows people to reach new destinations, like Twelve Oaks Mall.
- **Local transit agencies have hired more drivers and expanded service hours and areas.** These agencies include the North Oakland Transportation Authority (NOTA), Western Oakland Transportation Authority (WOTA), and OPC. Oakland County has also added another transit provider, People’s Express (PEX), which helps to cover a greater area and increase connectivity.
- **Supporting vulnerable groups.** Residents with disabilities, seniors, and low-income folks are able to access public transportation more easily.
- **Increased ridership.** More people are riding SMART, NOTA, and WOTA buses in Oakland County. Additionally, rural dial-a-ride services have opened their doors to any resident, regardless of age, ability, or income.

North Oakland Transportation Authority Ridership (2019-2025)



# Conclusion

**If Wayne County voters approve the transit millage on the August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2026 ballot, over 350,000 people will gain new and improved transit service in their communities.**

170,000 people will likely be within a 10 minute walk of a bus stop, every resident who is over 65 or has a disability will gain access to paratransit anywhere in the tri-county area, and all 60,000 residents of Southwest Wayne will likely gain access to an on-demand dial-a-ride service.

**This will benefit the over 300,000 people who don't drive in Wayne County and the 50,000 people in suburbs without SMART service who are left without options.**

All of this comes at the cost of \$8 a month for households in suburbs without SMART service and Detroit, and no new cost for the vast majority of Wayne county residents in suburbs with SMART bus service.

**Would you pay \$8 a month to provide a vital public service for 350,000 of your neighbors?** If yes, learn more and get involved at [ConnectWayneCounty.org](http://ConnectWayneCounty.org). Together, we can connect our county.

## Stay connected!



[ConnectWayneCounty.org](http://ConnectWayneCounty.org)



[@ConnectWayneCounty](https://www.instagram.com/ConnectWayneCounty)



Transportation Riders United  
PO Box 2668, Detroit, MI 48202



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**"Without access to reliable transportation, students may lose the opportunity to achieve their educational goals and pursue their dreams."**

Laurie Kattuah-Snyder,  
Chief Student  
Services Officer,  
Schoolcraft College



**"Too many seniors and people living with disabilities have not been able to meet their public transportation needs. With the proposed enhancements of the millage, they will better fulfill their needs, expand their independence, improve their overall quality of life, and maintain more connections throughout the entire county."**

Ronald Taylor,  
President & CEO,  
Detroit Area Agency  
on Aging



**"I just want the people in our community, the differently abled community, to have the same rights and access that other people do."**

Kim Snider,  
Livonia Resident



**CONNECT**  
Wayne County