PURSUING A WAYNE-WASHTENAW TRANSIT STRATEGY

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WHY WAYNE-WASHTENAW?

In the November 2016 election, a majority of Wayne County and Washtenaw County residents voted to support the Regional Transit Authority of Southeast Michigan’s ballot proposal to expand public transit. Unfortunately, the measure was narrowly defeated in the four-county region as a whole.

Since the election, representatives of all four counties and the City of Detroit have been meeting to negotiate a revised RTA proposal for the November 2018 ballot. Wayne County has taken a critical leadership role in this process. Unfortunately, the Oakland and Macomb County Executives remain unwilling to support a compromise proposal.

We are hopeful that the Oakland and Macomb County Executives can still be persuaded to support a full 4-county RTA proposal. However, it is time for Wayne County and Washtenaw County to begin moving forward with a “Plan B” alternative should a 4-county plan fail to occur.

A Wayne-Washtenaw transit strategy is that alternative.

EXISTING SERVICE

Wayne County and Washtenaw County currently have transit service provided by three primary agencies: the Detroit Department of Transportation (DDOT), the Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation (SMART), and the Ann Arbor Area Transportation Authority (AAATA, or TheRide). The extent and frequency of existing transit service is shown in the map below.
These transit agencies provide an essential service for hundreds of thousands of people in the region. However, the service they provide in Wayne and Washtenaw County is limited in three main areas: frequency, coverage, and regional connections.

- Because the metro Detroit region funds transit at less than half the national average per capita, Wayne bus service is infrequent where it exists. Due to the lack of adequate funding, SMART bus service has been cut back across the region, but in Wayne County most severely (service was cut by 37% between 2000 and 2013). All but two Wayne SMART routes run only hourly.

- Moreover, many suburban areas, such as the Wayne County suburbs of Livonia and Canton, are not part of the existing transit systems at all, meaning that there is no bus service to those areas. Washtenaw County service is also very limited outside of Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti.

- Furthermore, there is little consistent regional transit service across county and city lines. In particular, there is virtually no public transit service between Wayne County and Washtenaw County, despite the fact that 26,000 Wayne County residents commute to work in Washtenaw, and 20,000 Washtenaw residents commute to Wayne everyday. Travel between Detroit and much of western Wayne County is extremely difficult with minimal service where it exists at all.

The whole of Metro Detroit is facing a serious transit crisis, one which is especially severe in Wayne County. The recent failure of our bid for the second Amazon headquarters due to our inadequate public transportation has highlighted for many the need to address this problem immediately. Better transit would not just help us compete for the investment of companies like Amazon in the future; it will also make it possible for our region to develop such job growth on our own. Reliable, regional transit is essential to extend work and educational opportunities for all. We cannot afford to let 2018 slip by without a major new transit measure making it to ballot. Wayne County needs another opportunity to invest in its future.

GOALS FOR A WAYNE WASHTENAW TRANSIT STRATEGY

Unless there are dramatic shifts in the stated positions of Oakland and Macomb County leadership on a four-county RTA measure, Wayne County and Washtenaw County need to begin working together to adopt a two-county transit plan. The Wayne County Commission and the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners would then need to act to place a funding measure on the ballot in each county.
We believe that a Wayne-Washtenaw transit measure must accomplish the following goals:

1. Generate additional funds for transit. The relatively modest 2016 RTA plan would have more than doubled transit investment in the region. A Wayne-Washtenaw measure must address the severe need for transit funding.

2. Enhance local transit services. Even where transit exists, it is often infrequent. The proposal must enhance the frequency of existing services.

3. Extend transit to areas that do not participate in the existing systems. Most of western and southern Wayne County has no transit service at all, including major job centers like Livonia.

4. Create new regional services linking Wayne and Washtenaw County. Transit links between these two counties are now functionally nonexistent.

5. Act as a bridge to a full-four county plan. A Wayne-Washtenaw plan would yield major improvements, but it is not a substitute for a full four-county proposal. It should build momentum for a four-county RTA proposal by prioritizing services that can be implemented quickly, such as expanded local bus service and regional express bus service (like RefleX or FAST).

An interim two-county strategy will not solve all the region’s transit challenges. However, it would allow for significant improvements in transit, making a major difference in people’s lives. It will also build political momentum for more comprehensive regional strategies in the future. In other regions, such as San Francisco and Atlanta, transit expansion has followed a similar path. Some counties moved forward first, and they were later joined by others.

The following maps help to indicate the existing needs for transit, and suggest some routes that could be part of a Wayne-Washtenaw transit proposal. A more extensive process of planning and public engagement will be needed to determine the exact content of the plan.
DATA

JOB CONCENTRATION
- Detroit: 248,000 Jobs
- Dearborn: 87,000 Jobs
- Livonia: 89,000 Jobs
- Romulus: 34,000 Jobs
- Ann Arbor: 116,000 Jobs

POPULATION DENSITY

DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT DISTRICTS
Investing in pilot projects to solve the first last mile problem, transporting riders to major routes, shuttle services for areas not conducive to fixed route service. Autonomous vehicle testing.

Creating a fast connection between Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti, Wayne, Dearborn, and Detroit. Higher Capacity, limited stops, and dedicated right of way make this the most attractive mode to connect Ann Arbor and Detroit.

Founded in 2015, the Motor City Freedom Riders are an organization of bus riders and our allies, working together to improve public transit in the belief that “transportation is freedom” and that everyone has the right to move. We believe that expanded public transit is necessary for economic prosperity, environmental sustainability, and a just society. We have members in Wayne, Oakland, Macomb and Washtenaw County, and are governed by a Board of Directors elected by the members.

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