Trans4M Factsheet:
Regional Transit Authority

Summary
A Regional Transit Authority (RTA) is a public agency that manages public transit services for multiple cities and/or counties in a metropolitan area. Overseen by an appointed board and run by a professional staff, an RTA ensures smooth coordination between different bus and rail lines in a region and leads the development of new transit services where needed. An RTA also manages transit budgets and proposes new funding to area voters to consider. Metro Detroit needs an RTA to support better coordination of local providers and to lead development of regional transit connections.

Governor Snyder has made creation of an RTA one of his top transportation priorities, and has worked with the metro Detroit leadership and legislators to craft a regional transit authority proposal that would:

- Plan, construct, and operate rapid transit systems on major regional corridors in the 4-county metro Detroit area
- Coordinate local providers (SMART, DDOT, AATA) with each other and with the rapid transit system
- Enable a new funding mechanism (requiring voter approval) for the region to fund rapid transit and potentially support local services
- **NOT** absorb or combine local transit providers in their entirety

Action
Trans4M supports the passage of state legislation that would establish a Regional Transit Authority for greater Detroit.

The following features of the RTA proposal are positive:

- RTA Board members would be appointed to fixed terms--not at-will--and could not be elected officials, employees of the appointing body, or employees of a transit agency, providing some insulation and independence from political whim.
- Most business of the RTA would be performed on a majority vote basis, avoiding unworkable veto powers.
- The RTA would have the power to ask voters for dedicated funding, either through property tax or a newly created “regional transit fee” that would be collected at time of vehicle registration or driver’s license renewal, but would be structured so as to be separate from vehicle registration, avoiding potential for constitutional cannibalization.
of CTF (Note: until legislative language in hand, this is the fuzziest, most headache-inducing part of the proposal)

- The RTA would encompass the entire 4-county (Wayne, Oakland, Macomb, Washtenaw) area, without “opt-out” areas, and would allow additional contiguous counties to join.
- The RTA would have a mandate to pursue development of a rapid transit system on major, inter-county corridors (Woodward, Gratiot, M-59, Michigan Ave/I-94).
- The RTA would act as an umbrella coordinating body over the existing transit providers, with the ability to incentivize improvements via both carrot (sharing of RTA-specific funding) and stick (withholding of a limited amount—10%—of State operating funds).
- The RTA does not appear to threaten, redirect, or encumber any current local or Federal funds to existing transit providers; as noted above, a fraction of State operating assistance may be subject to withholding as part of the RTA’s “coordination” directive, but not enough to cripple transit agencies.

The following features of the RTA proposal are concerns, or could be improved upon:

- The proposal retains a unanimous vote requirement for acquisition or operation of any form of passenger rail system, potentially hindering existing plans for Woodward light rail, A2-Detroit or WALLY commuter lines. *(This is thought to be a requirement of Oakland County’s participation, to allay fears that the RTA would simply tax Oakland to fund Detroit’s light rail. The proposal does allow the RTA to establish “mode-specific subsidiary corporations”, leaving a window open for, e.g., a Metro Detroit Rail Authority that could operate light or commuter rail under the RTA umbrella, albeit with some budgetary and operational silo-ing.)*
- The proposed funding source is described as a flat fee, rather than any kind of *ad valorem*, making it potentially regressive. *(To what extent can benefits of RTA be seen as promoting equity / accruing to lower-income residents and households?)*
- The RTA proposal does not address the larger funding or structural issues plaguing the DDOT system. *(To what extent does proposal allow DDOT and SMART to shift resources to better meet overall system needs? Otherwise, this is generally an issue of keeping other needs in public view--understood that trying to fix all the problems with an RTA is what has sunk past proposals.)*
- The RTA would replace RTCC as the designated recipient of Federal operating funds, and it is unclear what will become of the historical 65/35 funding split that DDOT relies on. *(If existing funding split is not preserved, can some transition period be built in to avoid sudden/catastrophic funding shifts?)*

**Other legislation:**

Legislation was introduced early in 2011 by Senators Bert Johnson (D-Detroit), Rebekah Warren (D-Ann Arbor), and Tom Casperson (R-UP) – SBs 443-445. These bills, which continued attempting to create an RTA by merging SMART and DDOT, would appear to be abandoned and replaced by the new bills.
For More Information
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