

# Chapter 1: Introduction



The Akron Metropolitan Area Transportation Study (AMATS) is the metropolitan planning organization responsible for ensuring comprehensive transportation planning for Summit and Portage counties and parts of Wayne County. This responsibility includes coordination with various agencies in Northeast Ohio, including two transit providers, METRO RTA in Summit County and the Portage Area Regional Transportation Authority (PARTA) in Portage County. The portions of Wayne County in the AMATS region are currently served by a transportation provider in partnership with Stark Area Regional Transit Authority which operates demand response service to portions of Wayne County. This plan examines the current transit coverage of the AMATS region through a brief overview of the demographics of the region and an examination of the service that the two major transit authorities provide. The plan also provides a brief goals and strategy matrix, which highlights methods that can help sustain and grow the impact of transit.

In planning for all 723,549 potential users in the AMATS region, transit provides a necessary tool to ensure mobility access for disabled, elderly, and low-income residents. Providing a strong and efficient transit system is essential for a dynamic region preparing for the future. METRO RTA and PARTA both provide traditional fixed-route service, operating a combined 39 routes throughout Summit and Portage Counties, as well as express routes to Cleveland.

Both transit agencies also provide demand response services to seniors, individuals with disabilities and workforce trips with smaller buses and vans that operate as complementary service to fixed route service.

At a minimum, transit provides basic mobility to those without access to vehicles. Transit riders use services to get to work, to get to a doctor, to run errands, to visit family and friends, etc. Some transit users may even choose to ride a bus instead of taking a car, saving wear and tear on their vehicle and avoiding parking fees. Additionally, transit reduces emissions and congestion in metropolitan areas, which is a benefit for all users of the roadways. Both transit authorities deploy Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) buses on their fixed routes and in the case of METRO RTA, electric powered buses which have much cleaner emissions for the environment than diesel or gasoline powered vehicles.

Lastly, transit can provide a basis for development, spurring economic development along a bus route by potentially adding jobs to an area. In some cases, transit-oriented development (T.O.D) can be implemented, which is defined as a type of urban development that is designed and constructed with transit access in mind. It usually includes mixed-use development and easy access to transit in a defined area. One of the goals of the area transit plan are for municipalities and transit authorities to work together to develop these areas of mixed use which could include T.O.D. projects that help community

revitalization efforts by creating opportunities for people to access transit, employment, social services, housing and grocery options within a centralized area or along a transit route. This type of development takes a community effort and needs full support from municipalities as well as transit providers to have a positive impact on the well-being of the public and the local economy.

# Chapter 2: Existing System

## Demographics of the AMATS area

The data described below is analyzed at a Block Group (BG) level of geography. The analysis includes the population characteristics described in the table below. This data is conducted using 2020 Census information and 2022 5-year American Community Survey (ACS) data for the region.

<b>Total Population</b>	Current population and future population projections
<b>Age</b>	Number and percentage of elderly (65+) population
<b>Race</b>	Number and percentage of racial minority groups
<b>Disability</b>	Number and percentage of people with disabilities
<b>Income</b>	Number and percentage of both individuals and households with incomes below the federal poverty level
<b>Limited-English Proficiency</b>	Number and percentage of population that speaks English “less than very well”
<b>Carless Households</b>	Number and percentage of households that do not own a vehicle

### General Population Trends

The AMATS region includes all of Summit and Portage with a small portion of Wayne County, the area, like any other metropolitan region, encompasses a diverse array of communities with varying densities, land uses, and numerous other physical and human geographical traits. A crucial component of this plan is to examine these demographic characteristics to better understand the population’s needs and identify any transportation gaps.

The region’s population trend mirrors that of current Midwestern-“rust belt” cities with an industrial history, showing a declining population in a large centralized downtown city. Surrounding cities either shrink or remain stable and most growth occurs within the suburban areas further from the city center.

As of 2020, the City of Akron is Ohio’s fifth largest city, containing a population of 190,469. The City’s population peaked in 1960 at 290,351, subsequently declining in population as deindustrialization and suburbanization negatively affected most midwestern population centers. Although the City of Akron has lost about one-third of its population since its peak, surrounding Summit County has grown modestly during this same period: 513,569 to 540,428 (1960 to 2020). However, Summit County is modestly down from its peak population (1970) of 553,371.

Portage County grew much more rapidly during the last half of the twentieth century and, in fact, is at its population peak in 2020. For comparison, Portage County had a population of 91,798 in 1960

compared to a 2020 population of 161,791. Although still growing, the 2020 census indicates that this growth appears to have leveled-off; the county only grew 0.2% between 2010 and 2020.

	Summit	Portage	Wayne (AMATS Portion)	Total Region
<b>Total Population</b>	540,428	161,791	19,734	<b>723,549</b>

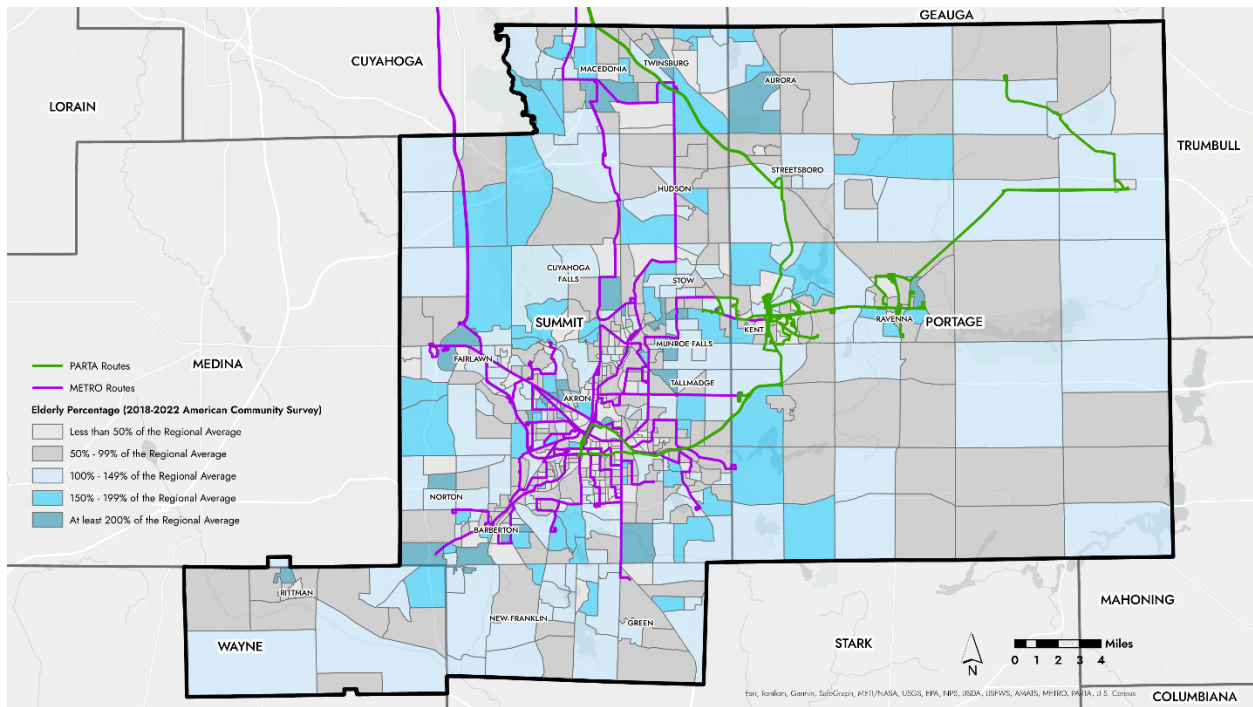
The maps on the following pages [which will be made larger on the final plan] illustrate how the present-day regional population based on demographic information gathered through 2022 American Community Survey Census data is distributed throughout the entire AMATS planning area.

### Age

Elderly populations are defined as being aged 65 and older. Within the AMATS planning area, many of the areas of high elderly populations are outside of the high-density urban core—cities like Akron, Barberton, Cuyahoga Falls and Kent—though higher elderly populations can be found throughout the region, even within portions of those cities. Some of the larger percentages of elderly populations are in large suburban condominium or senior specific apartment developments. This population is expected to increase in the following years as the Baby Boomer generation reaches retirement age, many of which will need some sort of transportation assistance as driving personal vehicles becomes more difficult or impossible for many. Below is a chart that depicts the number of individuals who are 65 and older and the percentage of the senior population within each county of the AMATS region.

	Summit	Portage	Wayne/Medina (AMATS Portion)	Total Region
<b>Elderly Population</b>	100,350	27,897	4,105	<b>132,352</b>
<b>Elderly Percentage</b>	18.6%	17.3	19%	<b>18.3%</b>

2022 ACS-5-year Community Survey Data



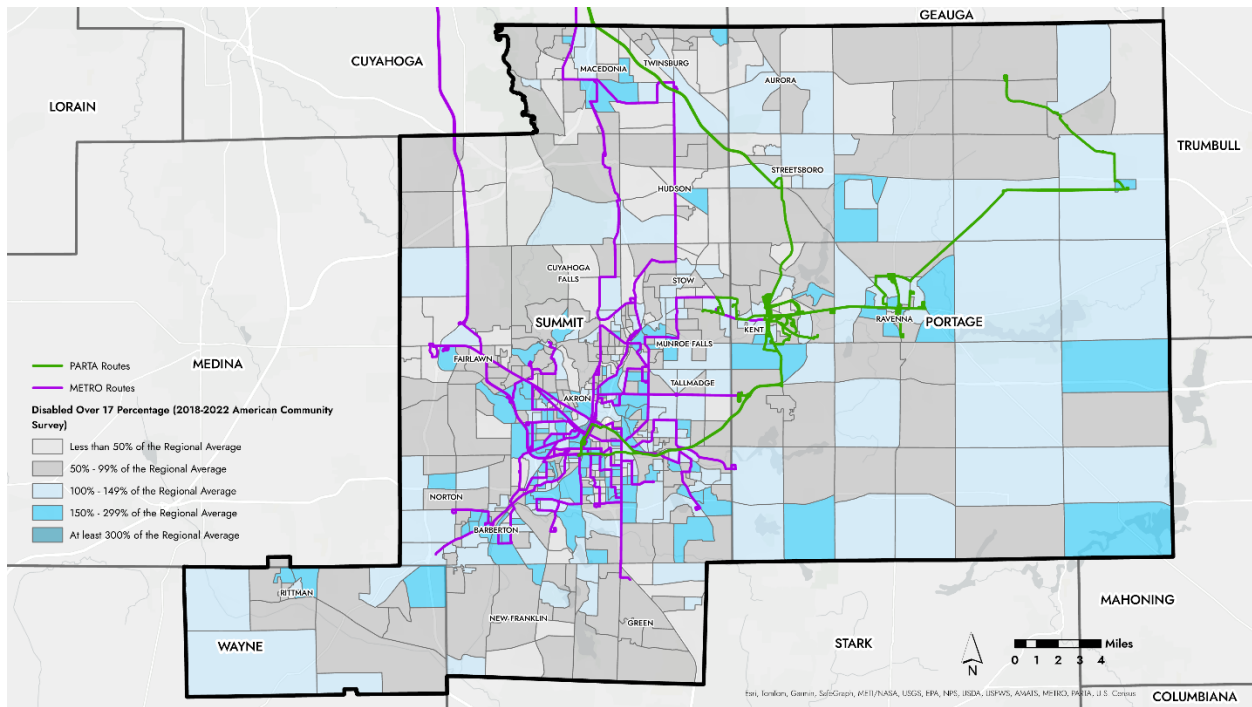
Elderly ACS 2022

### Disability

Disabled populations are adults—over the age of 17—who have hearing, vision, cognitive, ambulatory, self-care, or independent living difficulties. The disabled population is more geographically scattered than the other groups analyzed. Some of the areas with the highest percentage of disabled population are within the cities of Akron and Barberton, although both have many areas of below-average disabled populations, often in adjoining BGs. Other areas of above-average disabled populations can be found throughout all portions of the planning area.

	Summit	Portage	Wayne/Medina (AMATS Portion)	Total Region
<b>Disability Population</b>	66,563	18,832	2,561	<b>87,956</b>
<b>Disability Percentage</b>	15.8%	15%	15.9%	<b>15.6%</b>

2022 ACS-5-year Community Survey Data



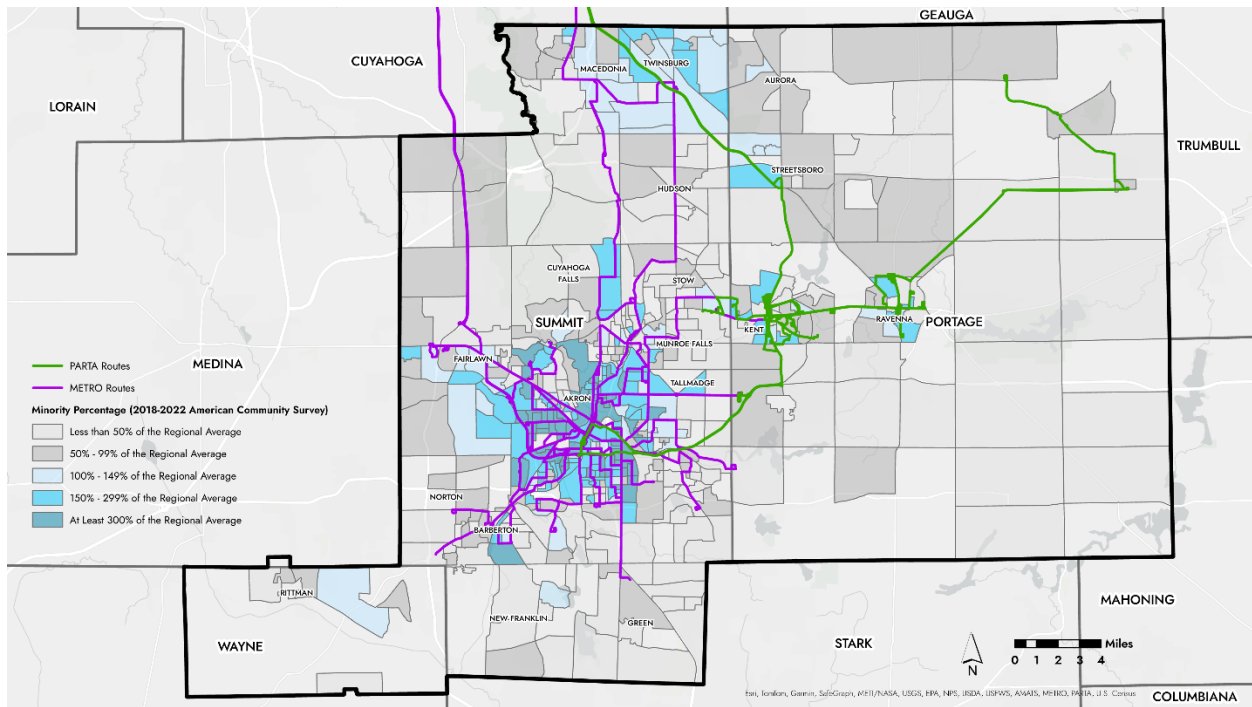
Disability ACS 2022

## Race

Minorities are defined as non-white populations. Within the Greater Akron area, black populations are by far the most common minority group, though several other minority populations exist throughout the area. The highest concentrations of minority populations are in the City of Akron, particularly in West Akron and, to a slightly lesser extent, in the Middlebury, East Akron, and North Hill sections of the city. There is also a high minority population in the Twinsburg Heights section of Twinsburg Township. Other notable concentrations of minority populations can be found in portions of the cities of Barberton, Kent, Ravenna, Streetsboro and Twinsburg, and Copley and Twinsburg townships. Summit County has far more racial diversity than the balance of the planning region. Below is a chart that depicts the number of minority individuals and a percentage of the minority population within each county of the AMATS region.

	Summit	Portage	Wayne/Medina (AMATS Portion)	Total Region
Minority Population	129,800	18,437	1,305	149,542
Minority Percentage	24%	11.4%	6%	22.52%

2022 ACS-5-year Community Survey Data



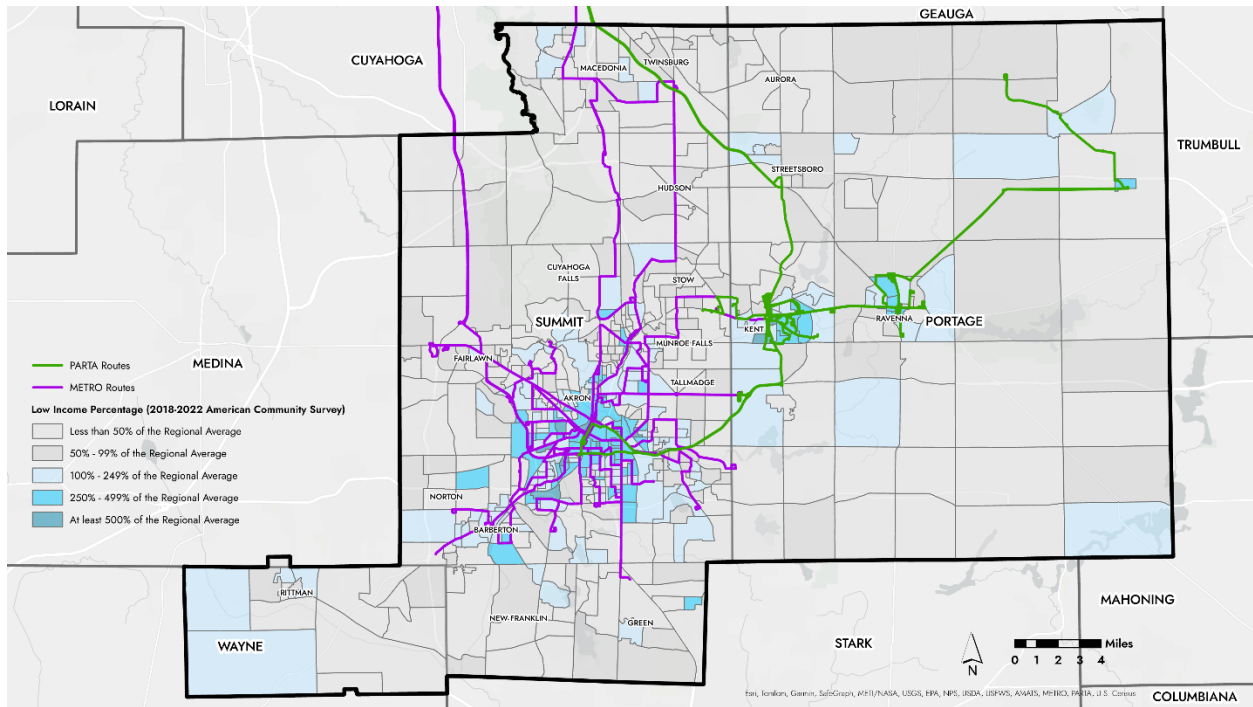
Minority ACS 2022

### Low Income

Low-Income is defined as the population receiving less annual income than the regional average. For this Plan, both household and individual incomes were considered separately below is the data and map for individuals. In the Greater Akron area, many of the lowest-income areas are within the City of Akron. Significant low-income populations are spread throughout the city, generally closer to the center. Additionally, some sections of the cities of Kent, Ravenna, Barberton, Green, and Cuyahoga Falls, as well as the Village of Windham, have significant low-income populations. There are also block groups throughout the region with above-average low-income populations, particularly in rural areas. Below is a chart that depicts the number of low-income below 150% of poverty for individuals and a percentage of the low-income population within each county of the AMATS region.

	Summit	Portage	Wayne/Medina (AMATS Portion)	Total Region
Low Income Population	65,839	17,374	1,752	86,151
Low Income Percentage	12.64%	11.15%	8.87%	12.20%

Low Income Individuals ACS 2022



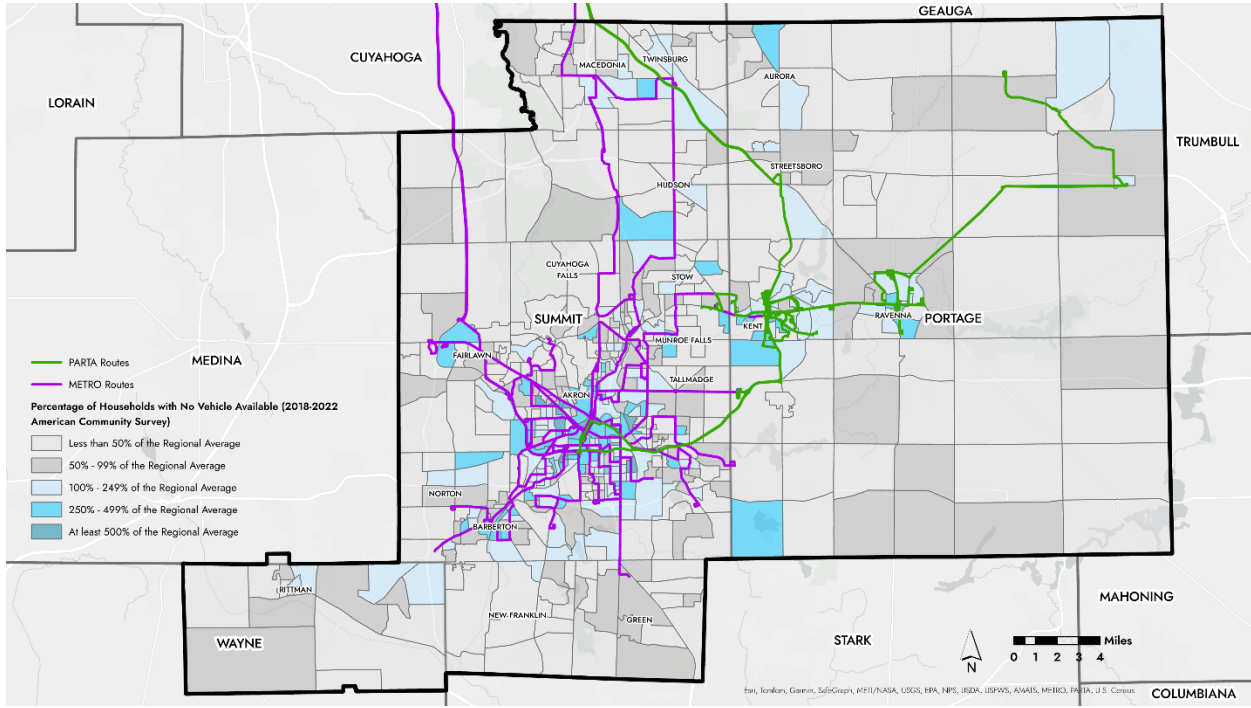
Low Income ACS 2022

### Carless Households

This data is collected at the household level rather than the individual level and represents the percentage of households within each block group without a car. It's important to note that the reasons for this vary, including age, disabilities, lack of affordability, and personal choice. Some individuals may choose alternative transportation options but still have access to a personal vehicle, for most others, they're an essential part of life. The number of households without access to a personal vehicle can be used as a tool for predicting the number of people that rely on transit or other modes of transportation, other than a personal vehicle. A strong concentration of the region's carless households can be found within the city of Akron. There is a correlation with many of the lower income block groups within the city and carless households. Other areas of carless households can be found within the AMATS planning region. Most of these tend to be in more walkable communities, block groups where large senior housing facilities exist, or, as in Northeastern Portage County, where Amish populations exist. Below is a chart that depicts the number of carless households and a percentage of the carless household population within each county of the AMATS region.



	Summit	Portage	Wayne/Medina (AMATS Portion)	Total Region
Carless Household Population	22,212	5,473	497	28,182
Carless Household Percentage	9.7%	8.6%	6%	9.3%



Carless Household ACS 2022

Prior to 2020, the number of households without access to a vehicle slightly resembled the amount of average weekday transit ridership of 22,603 (Ave. of 2018 and 2019). However, the number of households without access to vehicles did not see the decrease that transit ridership faced starting in April of 2020, of which ridership has still not recovered to pre-pandemic levels.

## Current Transit System Overview

The AMATS area consists of Summit, Portage and parts of Wayne County, the two major transit systems within the region are: METRO Regional Transit Authority (METRO), which operates primarily in Summit County with regional connections to Brimfield located in Portage County and an express route into downtown Cleveland, and Portage Area Regional Transit Authority (PARTA), which operates primarily in Portage County, with an express route that serves downtown Akron. Both transit options offer fixed route and demand response services for qualifying individuals of the elderly, disabled and low-income (consider re-wording) communities. For the AMATS-coverage portions of Wayne County, Stark Area Regional Transit Authority (SARTA) operates WCT (Wayne County Transit) in partnership with Community Action Wayne/Medina. WCT provides countywide service Monday through Saturday from 6am to midnight and is a reservation-based service. No fixed route is offered, however.

### Ridership/Travel Patterns: "Frequency VS. Coverage"

When transit systems' operators and planners are thinking about route planning because it is not feasible to be in every place running on 10-minute schedules, the balance between frequency and coverage is an overall underlying thought at all times in route planning. A frequent ridership model emphasizes service along densely populated routes, linking individuals to major employment hubs and operating extended hours. While effective in serving specific routes, ridership models typically prioritize maximizing trip volume while minimizing operational costs per passenger.

A coverage model measures the proximity of residents to transit lines within a certain radius, irrespective of service frequency or hours of operation. Successful coverage models ensure widespread accessibility to transit but may incur higher operating expenses per passenger trip. Success metrics for coverage models focus on geographic reach rather than trip volume.

No transit system exclusively adheres to either ridership or coverage principles. Transit providers aim to incorporate both values, offering a high number of trips while still catering to less densely populated areas. Special efforts are directed towards reaching communities with higher concentrations of vulnerable populations and desired destinations.

### Transit Coverage:

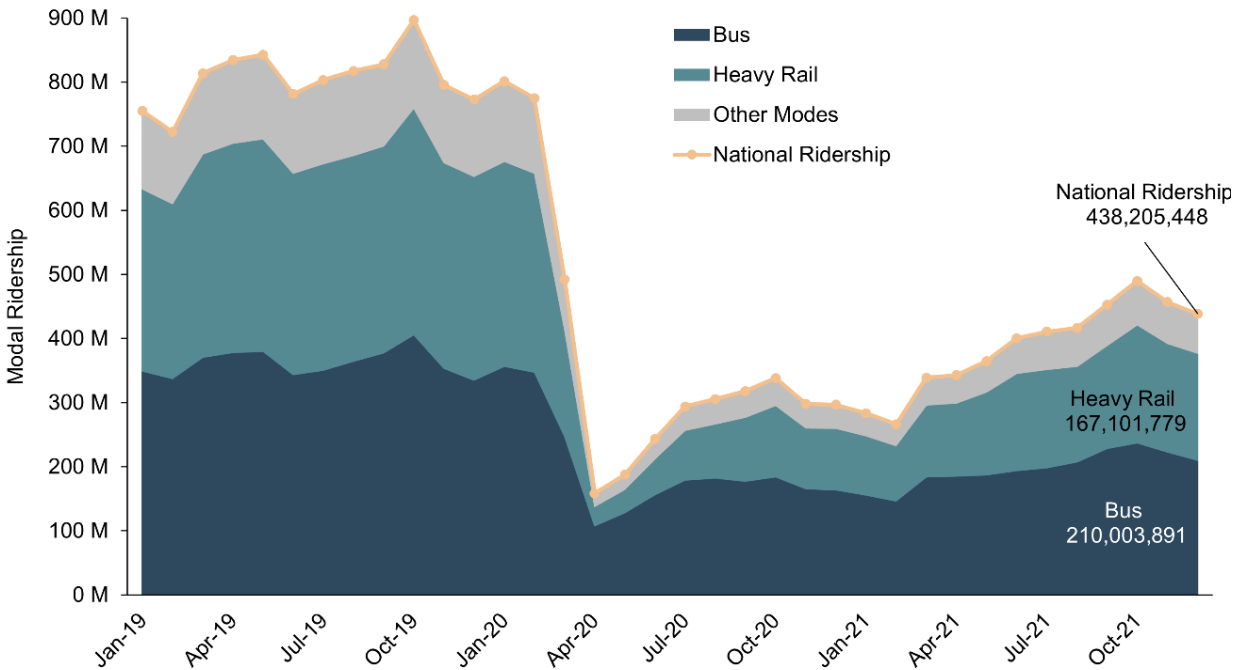
[Map of transit routes and table of communities with % of transit coverage will be provided for the final draft].

One factor to examine when evaluating the success of a system, is overall transit coverage served by fixed route services. The above map and following table were produced using data from the American

Community Survey - 2019 5 year estimates. Out of the entire AMATS region's 2020 population of 723,549, ###,### people (almost XX% of the population) have access to fixed-route transit within a quarter mile. It should be mentioned that the quarter mile standard is only part of the picture. A comprehensive multi-modal network includes bus shelters, park and ride lots, bike paths and sidewalks. This integrated approach makes access to transit stops seamless and traveling longer distances to stops more feasible.

The following table (Table #) shows all the communities with access to fixed-route transit within the AMATS region. Older, established cities with a higher density of development have better transit coverage. Cities such as Akron, Kent, Ravenna, Barberton, and Cuyahoga Falls offer some of the highest levels of transit access in the area. Some smaller suburban communities (Look at new coverage\*\* Insert communities that stand out) also offer excellent coverage. As expected, there are very low levels of transit access in rural communities.

**National Ridership Trends: Figure 1** depicts monthly ridership trends for the US Public Transit revenue miles which is a measure of activity. [NTD National Trends and Summaries 2021](#)

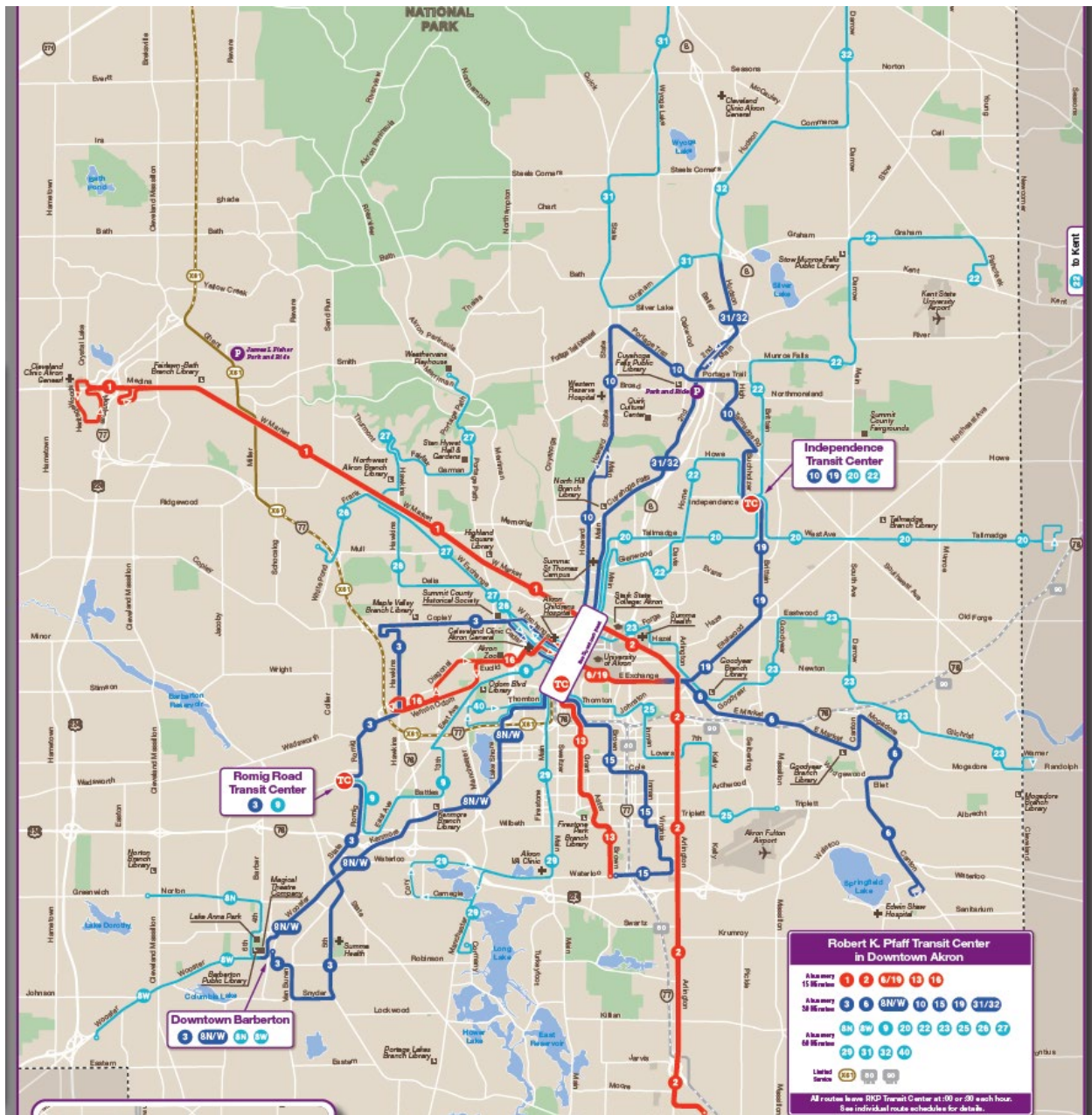


**Figure 1. National Monthly Ridership for Heavy Rail vs. Bus (2020–2021)**

National ridership experienced a massive decrease in ridership across all modes starting in March of 2020. Larger transit systems have reached or exceeded pre-covid levels but some larger, mid-size and smaller urban transit agencies have yet to fully recover ridership levels compared to pre-covid levels.

**METRO RTA:**

METRO RTA operates fixed route service from the Robert K. Pfaff Transit Center located just south of the downtown city center, consists of **24** fixed routes with the following key features: 1) five high-frequency 15 minute corridors and eight 30 minute routes, 2) streamlined service with increased route directness and more consistent weekend service, and 3) additional regional connections to Brimfield and Cuyahoga County as well as an express route to downtown Cleveland. [METRO RTA System Map](#)



METRO's demand response services operate multiple programs including METRO ADA and Select.

**METRO ADA:** Complementary Americans with Act (ADA) service for eligible persons with disabilities. Service is available at the same times as METRO fixed route service, with the pick-up location and destination no further than 3/4 of a mile from a fixed route.

[METRO ADA Services](#)

**METRO Select:** involves a variety of services based on qualifying factors.



METRO SCAT Service for seniors and persons with disabilities who live outside the ADA zone and qualify for service. Trips also include coordination and provision of transportation services for Medicaid eligible residents Non-Emergency Transportation (NET) trips to Medicaid eligible medical facilities, as well as Title III trips for eligible Direction Home (Area on Aging and Disabilities) participants. METRO Call-A-Bus zones which is a workforce development program for making suburban connections that are difficult for fixed route to adequately serve. Areas include Macedonia, Twinsburg, Townships of Sagamore Hills, Twinsburg, and Northfield Center and the Villages of Northfield and Reminderville, or riders within the City of Green.

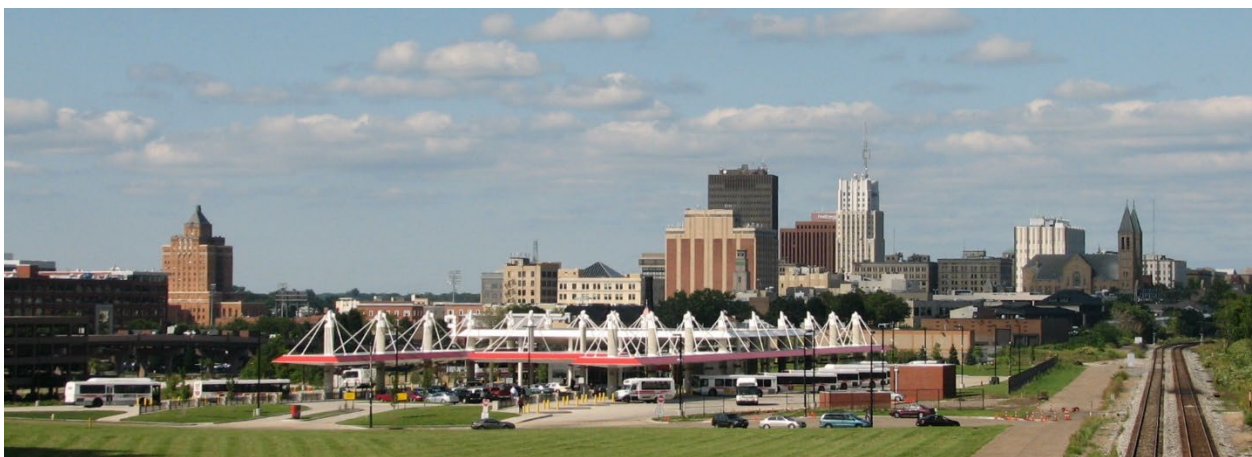
[METRO Select Services](#)

### **METRO Capital Assets:**

[ Add pictures of all types of Buses: CNG-Electric and smaller vans/buses. METRO has an active fleet of 222 vehicles comprised of 131 Large Fixed Route CNG and Electric buses and 91 Demand Response CNG/Electric/Gas/Diesel fuel vehicles. METRO's fleet is varied and includes 60-foot articulated, 40-foot diesel, 40-foot CNG, and 40-foot hybrid buses. Smaller vehicles including less than 30 foot buses and transit vans for Demand Response Services also are part of the fleet. All METRO fixed route buses are equipped with bike racks and all revenue vehicles are handicap accessible.]

### **METRO Facilities:**

Robert K. Pfaff Transit Center: 631 South Broadway, Downtown Akron. Main Transit Center for all METRO Fixed Route Buses and Connections with PARTA, SARTA and Greyhound services.



Maintenance and Operations Building- 416 Kenmore Boulevard, Akron, OH. New facility being constructed on current site of administration and maintenance facility.



[METRO RTA New Maintenance Facility Design Renderings](#)

**METRO RTA-Trillium Public CNG Station:** 416 Kenmore Blvd: Next door to Operations and Maintenance Facility.



**Romig Road Transit Center:** Located in Amazon Fulfillment Center: 2450 Romig Rd. Akron, OH. Currently serves Routes # 3 and #9



**Independence Transit Center-** Located on Independence Ave-Across from the old Chapel Hill Mall. Serves Routes #10, #19, #20 and #22



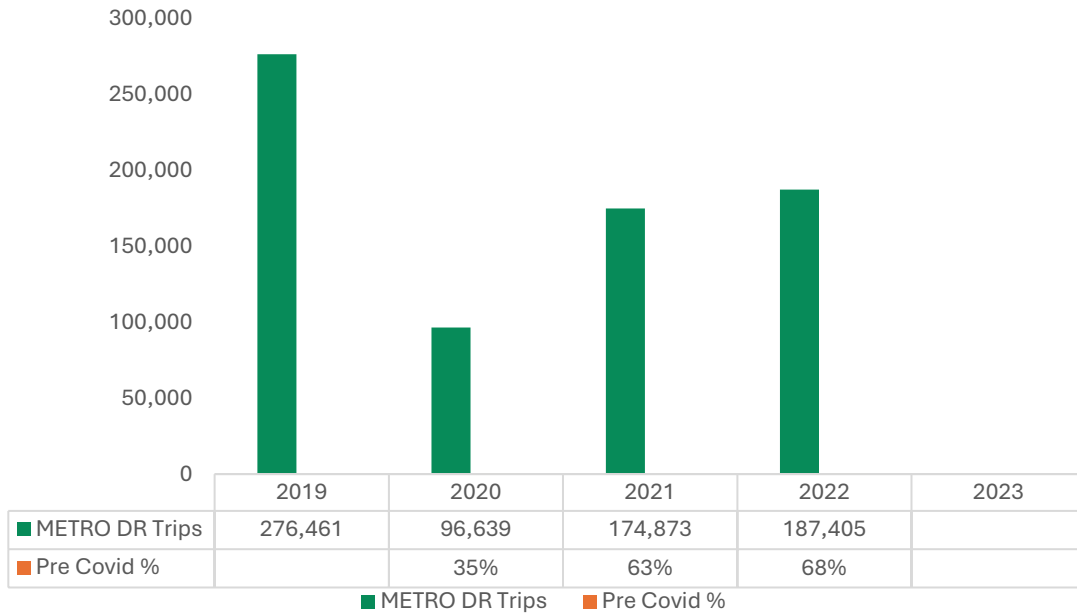
**METRO Ridership Performance:** [Ridership information and analysis to be provided in the final draft. AMATS plans to examine ridership by route from 2019-2023. Overall METRO ridership was affected negatively in 2020 and is still recovering to pre-covid levels]

#### **METRO Demand Response:**

METRO's Demand Response program consists of 91 small LTV or Transit Vans that transport people throughout Summit County 7 days a week. Below is a table that depicts demand response ridership based on National Transit Database reported unlinked passenger trips by year. METRO's demand response program number of trips vastly decreased in 2020 and accounted for 35% of pre covid levels. The next two years 2021 and 2022 saw trips increase to 63% and 68% of pre covid levels. Last



year, 2023, saw an increase in the number of trips. [2023 numbers will be included in the final draft report.]



**PARTA:**

PARTA provides fixed routes and demand response services for Portage County, Ohio. Portage County. PARTA operates a fleet of 62 revenue vehicles, all of which are accessible for individuals with disabilities. PARTA’s administrative offices and maintenance garage are located at 2000 Summit Road in Kent, Ohio. PARTA’s fixed route service operates two divisions—county and campus. County service offers 15 fixed routes with the highest frequency route operating every 30 minutes. County routes operate Monday through Saturday with express service to Akron and Cleveland operating Monday through Friday. PARTA also has a contract with Kent State University to operate campus service. Campus service consists of five fixed routes with frequencies ranging between 9 and 15 minutes, Monday through Friday, and reduced service on Saturday and Sunday. PARTA offers complementary ADA paratransit service for individuals with disabilities whose pick-up location and destinations are no more than ¾ of a mile from a fixed route.

[PARTA System Map Inserted here for final draft]

PARTA’s demand response service operates Monday through Friday, 5:00 a.m. – 11:00 p.m., and Saturday, 8:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m. Demand response service covers all of Portage County; however,

some townships are limited to certain days of the week. For those who qualify, PARTA provides Title III trips for Direction Home (Area Agency on Aging and Disabilities) participants; and, in addition, free transportation to medical appointments is available through the NET program. PARTA's ADA fare is \$2.00, reduced fare for the elderly and disabled is \$3.00, and the public fare is \$6.00 per one-way trip.

### **PARTA Capital Assets:**

[PARTA's Pictures will be added to each type of vehicle fixed-route buses comprised of 32 large buses and 3 small buses/light transit vehicles (LTVs). Additionally, PARTA has **23** Light Transit Vehicles (LTVs) and **5** vans/small transit vehicles (STVs) that provide demand response service.. All PARTA large fixed route buses are equipped with bike racks and all revenue vehicles are handicap accessible.]

### **PARTA Facilities**

**Kent Central Gateway:** Located at the corner of E. Erie and DePeyster Streets (201 E. Erie Street), Kent OH



PARTA's Kent Central Gateway, a multi-modal transportation facility in the heart of downtown Kent, offers a central point of operations for transportation in Portage County, in addition to a secondary hub at University Hospitals in Ravenna.

**Administration and Maintenance Building Storage Facility and Wash Bay: 2000 Summit Road, Kent, OH**



**CNG fueling station: 2000 Summit Road in Kent**



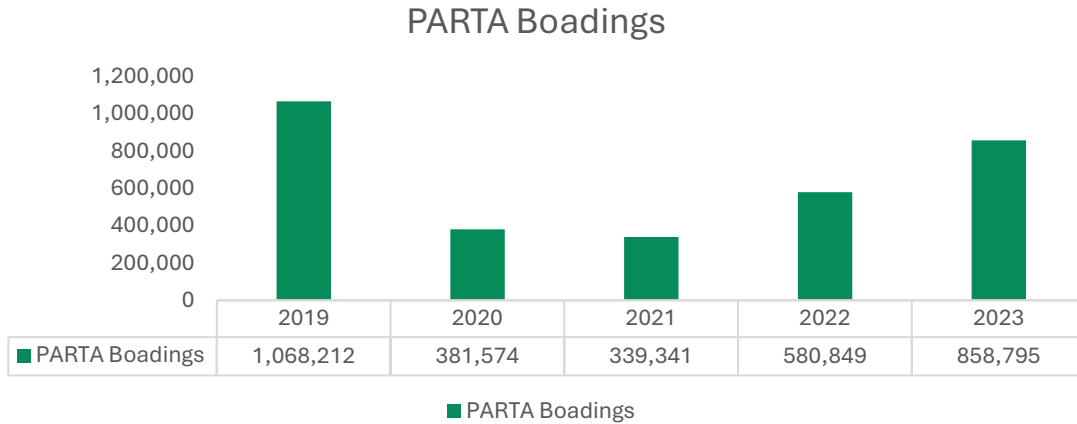
**PARTA Ridership Performance: Inner Urban and Rural route performance:**

PARTA's routes run on coordinated timing for easier transfers and reduced wait times. PARTA consistently monitors routes to identify gaps in services and make changes as necessary. In addition, PARTA offers a "Dial-A-Ride" demand-response bus service county-wide to everyone, regardless of qualification.

PARTA currently offers 15 fixed routes, consisting of 8 county routes, 2 express routes to Akron and Cleveland and 5 campus routes that service Kent State University. When looking at the performance of their fixed routes one metric is to examine boardings by route. "Boardings" are the number of times a passenger boards a bus. A passenger making a round-trip would count as two boardings.

PARTA's number of boardings reached a total of 1,068,212 in 2019 with their campus routes-#58 Summit East (373,546) and #51 Campus Loop (139,641) experienced the highest number of

boardings and #35 Interurban East (158,885) and #30 Interurban West (69,824) was their highest number of boardings for county fixed routes.



PARTA’s ridership dipped to their lowest point in 2021 with 339,341 boardings, which accounted for 32% of 2019 pre-covid ridership. Ridership showed an increase to 54% in 2022 and reached 80% of pre-covid levels by 2023. This loss and recovery of ridership mirrored the same trend of other local agencies and national trends.

PARTA’s highest four performing routes in terms of ridership (boardings) as of 2023 are routes; #58 Summit East (288,338), #51 Campus Loop (165,657), #35 Interurban East (138,096) and #30 Interurban West (68,328). These four routes make up 77% of total ridership (boardings) for PARTA. Summit East and Interurban East have recovered to 77% and 87% of pre-covid levels. Interurban West is at 98% and Campus Loop is performing at 119% of pre-covid levels. If these ridership numbers continue at this pace, PARTA’s ridership is predicted to meet or exceed pre-covid levels within the next year.

**PARTA Boardings by Route 2019**

Route	Ridership
<b>Weekday</b>	
30-Interurban West	69,824
35-Interurban East	158,885
40-Suburban North	32,842
45-Suburban South	39,639
46-Downtowner	N/A
60-Black Squirrel	12,760
70-Wind/Garr	10,255
80-Raven West	4,273
85-Raven East	11,577

**Weekend**

30-Interurban, Sat.	14,424
35-Interurban East, Sat	Combined w/ 30
40-Suburban, Sat.	4,687
45-Suburban South	Combined w/ 40
46-Downtowner, Sat.	N/A

**Express**

90-Akron Express	18,880
100-Cleveland Express	5,381

**Kent State University**

51-Campus Loop	139,641
53-Reverse Loop	62,608
55-Allerton	71,566
57-Stadium Loop	11,381
58-Summit East	373,546
59-Night Shuttle	26,043

**PARTA Boardings by Route 2023**

Route	Ridership
<b>Weekday</b>	
30-Interurban West	68,328
35-Interurban East	138,096
40-Suburban North	20,338
45-Suburban South	19,260
46-Downtowner	637
60-Black Squirrel	N/A
70-Wind/Garr	5,095
80-Raven West	9,613
85-Raven East	Combined w/ 80

**Weekend**

30-Interurban, Sat.	8,867
35-Interurban East, Sat	Combined w/ 30
40-Suburban, Sat.	3,087
45-Suburban South	Combined w/ 40
46-Downtowner, Sat.	285

**Express**

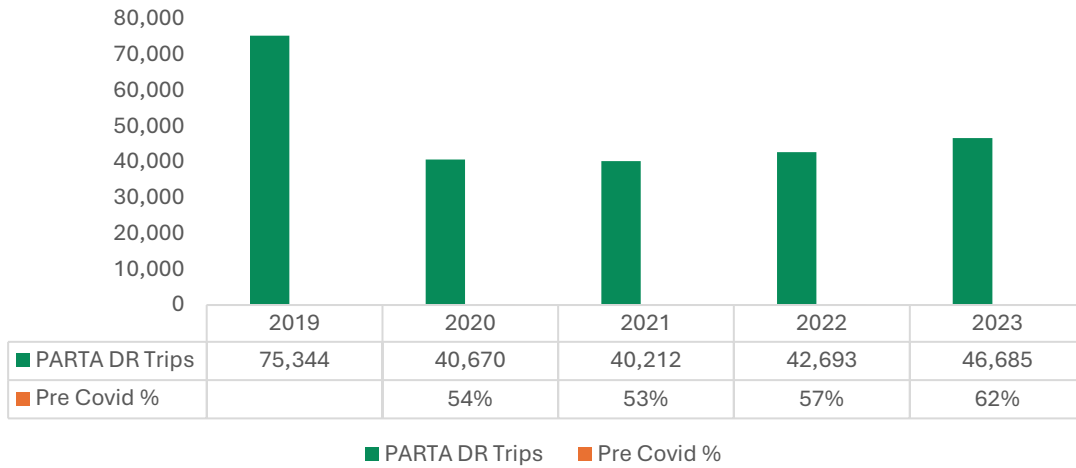
90-Akron Express	14,589
100-Cleveland Express	2,743

**Kent State University**

51-Campus Loop	165,657
53-Reverse Loop	Suspended
55-Allerton	56,245
57-Stadium Loop	33,725
58-Summit East	288,338
59-Night Shuttle	23,892

**PARTA Demand Response:**

PARTA’s Demand Response program consists of 23 small LTV or Transit Vans that transport people throughout Portage County 6 days a week. Below is a table that depicts demand response ridership based on National Transit Database reported unlinked passenger trips by year.



PARTA’s number of trips decrease by 46% from 2019 to 2020 as the pandemic affected transit operations and services of the entire region as well as the entire country. PARTA has yet to recover demand response trip numbers to pre-pandemic levels.

## Challenges

### **Aging of America increased cost of transit service:**

The statistics show that the senior population will reach a peak between 2025 and 2030 perhaps going beyond that. That means more individuals will be looking for affordable demand response public transportation service to help age in place and promote more active lifestyle for the aging demographic. The recent Summit County [Area on Aging 2022 Adult Needs Assessment](#) identifies one of the key findings as needing more robust medical transportation services and states that a third of the residents do not have access to affordable, reliable and consistent public transportation. Increased collaboration between the medical community and the public and private transportation providers of the region is needed to better serve the aging population.

For all transit authorities costs of goods and services are on the rise and the need to maintain a state of good repair has become more difficult. The Federal Transit Authority (FTA) has defined and helps assist transit agencies maintain bus and rail systems in a State of Good Repair (SGR) and is one of FTA's highest priorities. The FTA recommends Transit Asset Management (TAM) practices to preserve and expand transit investments. Having well maintained, reliable transit infrastructure will help ensure safe, dependable and accessible services.

### **Understanding and adjusting to the workforce needs of the area:**

Transit Authorities need to understand the recent local workforce trends in the area in order to best maximize service. However, this is not a transit only concern. Local regional economic development strategies need to consider existing transit service when attracting new employers, especially employers with a higher transit dependent workforce. Companies are looking to relocate to areas with cheaper rent and cost of living for their employees and another cost savings benefit is being located on an existing transit line providing employees the choice or ability to use public transit service. These decisions and conversations about land use are complex and certain opportunities may not exist for some businesses to locate along a transit line however, communication between these two interests need to align in order for overall cohesive land use planning that benefits all transportation users.

**METRO specific-Investment in TOD/BRT and need for increased local funding for operational increase to support these programs:** Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) refers to the planning and development of transit-oriented communities that integrate housing, businesses, and amenities around transit stations, promoting walkability and ensuring easy access to transit stations on foot through well-designed pedestrian pathways. Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) is an advanced, high-quality transit system that delivers safe, fast, and comfortable service. Improvements typically found within BRT routes include fewer stops, traffic signal priority, off-board fare collection, and elevated platforms which create a better trip experience compared to typical bus service.



PARTA and City of Kent have partnered on TOD projects in the past with the Kent Central Gateway project being located downtown Kent in an area of growing mixed-use development. METRO RTA is exploring TOD and BRT projects for the near future [METRO RTA BRT Information Page](#) .

TOD and BRT involves not only large amounts of Federal and State grant funding but a considerable amount of local funding investment by transit authorities as well as local municipalities. Transit systems may be hesitant to increase their share of local sales tax which accounts for much of their local operating budgets, so collaboration and investment between local communities is essential for these large types of investments. The areas of specific investment need to be considered a joint effort between communities and the local transit authority. As local budgets become tighter, and as inflation and costs rise, investments for these types of large-scale projects can be difficult for communities and transit agencies to justify.

**METRO/PARTA specific areas that are currently not served by transit:** In general, it is difficult for mid-size transit systems to be everywhere for everyone. Therefore, it becomes inevitable that some suburban and rural areas may not be served by fixed route service. Public transportation, by nature, is designed to provide the widest, most efficient service to as many riders as possible. While METRO and PARTA strive for continuous improvement in meeting the needs of all riders, it is not currently economically or logistically feasible to offer fixed route line service throughout all neighborhoods within each of their counties. Local municipalities who are currently underserved or not served need to voice their concerns to their respective transit authority about potential transit coverage. Transit authorities have the challenge of examining the cost and effectiveness of serving a particular area and need to create a cost benefit analysis for each community or be willing to discuss feasibility of what that service might look like. This is the challenge that all transit authorities face as current demand for transit does not yet support that level of investment for a 24/7 expansion of service. Finally, even in areas where fixed route coverage exists, there are additional gaps created when the sidewalk infrastructure does not fully and safely connect destinations and bus stops.

## Public Outreach and Stakeholders

This plan involved discussions with the two major local transit authority METRO RTA and PARTA on the different issues facing transit as well as some of their future goals and strategies. The AMATS staff is also allowing our member organizations as well as the public a comment period for the month of August beginning with AMATS Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and Citizens Involvement Committee (CIC) meetings August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024. After the final comments have been received, AMATS staff plan to integrate any changes brought on by specific relevant comments into the plan and to ask for approval of the full final transit plan during our September TAC and Policy meetings.

METRO and PARTA work with a number of local public and private organizations in order to provide the current levels of service that both respective agencies provide. Last year, AMATS along with



METRO and PARTA, developed a [Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan](#). METRO and PARTA assisted in gathering a list of stakeholders that either work with or provide transportation for older adults, individuals with disabilities, and/or people with low incomes, a full list of participants can be found in appendix A of the Coordinated Plan. Various agencies were identified, including agencies representing:

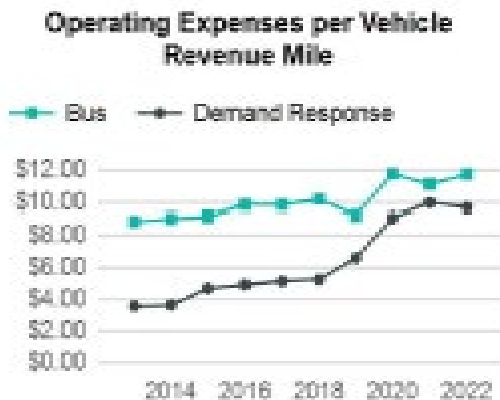
- a. Public transit
- b. Senior center or other organization serving older adults
- c. Local County and/or city government
- d. Department of Developmental Disabilities (local/regional) office and programs
- e. Department of Health and Human Services office (local/regional)
- f. Department of Job and Family Services office
- g. Private transportation providers

Stakeholders were invited to participate in the Planning Committee. METRO and PARTA also invited some of their loyal transit riders to ensure that citizen concerns and ideas were represented within the group for the coordinated plan that was published in 2023.

# Chapter 3: Performance Measures

Performance and asset measures are widely used in the transit industry today, with most transit agencies reporting basic information about their service to the [National Transit Database](#) (NTD). After data reporting was required by Congress in 1974, the FTA's National Transit Database (NTD) was set up to be the repository of data about the financial, operating and asset conditions of American transit systems. The NTD records the financial, operating, and asset condition of transit systems helping to keep track of the industry and provide public information and statistics. The NTD is designed to support local, state and regional planning efforts and help governments and other decision-makers make multi-year comparisons and perform trend analyses. It contains a wealth of information such as agency funding sources, inventories of vehicles and maintenance facilities, safety event reports, measures of transit service provided and consumed, and data on transit employees.

FTA uses NTD data to apportion funding to urbanized and rural areas in the United States. Transit agencies report data on a few key metrics including Vehicle Revenue Miles (VRM), Vehicle Revenue Hours (VRH), Passenger Miles Traveled (PMT), Unlinked Passenger Trips (UPT), and Operating Expenses (OE). The National Transit Database has an agency profile page [NTD Agency Profile Page](#) where the public can view NTD yearly reports of transit authorities to learn more about their production. Operating Expenses per vehicle per revenue mile is an example of some of the information when viewing these agency profiles, as seen below for METRO and PARTA.



METRO 2022



PARTA 2022

## Transit Asset Management

Transit Asset Management (TAM) is the strategic and systematic practice of procuring, operating, inspecting, maintaining, rehabilitating, and replacing transit capital assets to manage their

performance, risks, and costs over their life cycles to provide safe, cost effective, and reliable public transportation. TAM uses transit asset condition to guide how to manage capital assets and prioritize funding to improve or maintain a state of good repair. Federal regulations require the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) to develop a rule to establish a strategic and systematic process of operating, maintaining and improving public transportation capital assets effectively through their entire life cycle. FTA's national Transit Asset Management system rule defines the term "state of good repair," requires grantees to develop a TAM plan, establishes performance measures, establishes annual reporting requirements, and requires FTA to provide technical assistance. In July 2016, FTA published a final rule for TAM. The rule requires FTA grantees to develop asset management plans for their public transportation assets, including vehicles, facilities, equipment, and other infrastructure.

A state of good repair (SGR) is a threshold that identifies the desired performance condition of a capital asset, such as a bus, transfer facility, or office building. An asset is in a state of good repair when it is able to operate at a full level of performance. This means:

- The asset is able to perform its designed function.
- Does not pose a known or unacceptable safety risk (condition); and
- Its life cycle investments have been met or recovered (Useful Benchmark- ULB)

SGR performance targets are based on realistic expectations derived from the most recent available data (condition and ULB), FTA performance measure criteria, and the financial resources from all sources that the area reasonably expects to be available during the TAM plan horizon period for capital planning purposes. Each agency works with the Federal Transit Administration to set individual targets for their respective systems.

### **Local TAM Targets**

PARTA has set a goal to maintain their fleet with at least 100 percent of the vehicles are at least in fair or good condition. As of 2022, 100 percent of the large bus fleet meets this standard, which consists of 24 diesel, 6 CNG and 3 CNG fueled trolley buses. 90 percent of the 23-gasoline fueled small LTV cutaway and 100 percent of the 5-van fleet meets the standard of good or fair condition. PARTA intends to replace vehicles to meet this 100 percent goal. PARTA currently has 5 facilities including an administration building, maintenance building, wash bay facility, CNG fueling station and bus storage facility which are all located at 2000 Summit Rd. Kent, Ohio. The Kent Central Gateway, which is a multimodal transfer center with parking is located at 201 E. Erie St. Kent, Ohio and all facilities are in new or good condition based on a recent facility condition assessment.

METRO has set targets for SGR and determined that their overall revenue vehicles should be less than 15% over their ULB, on average. METRO also reviews its Bus Improvement Plan (BIP) annually to ensure the buses are within the ULB of 12 years. This helps to keep their fleet reliable and reduce maintenance costs.

SOGR Policy Targets			
FTA Category	Sub-Group	Limit	Measurement
Revenue Fleet (ULB)	Overall Revenue Vehicles	< 15% over ULB	varies 4-15 years
	Bus 60'	< 10% over ULB	< 12 Years
	Bus 40'	< 15% over ULB	< 12 Years
	Bus 45' Commuter	< 5% over ULB	< 15 Years
	Bus 35'	< 15% over ULB	< 12 Years
	Paratransit	< 15% over ULB	< 5 Years
Facilities (SOGR)	Facility	< 10% Under 3.0 SOGR	SOGR
	Facility Assets	< 10% Under 3.0 SOGR	SOGR
Infrastructure	Track, Signals	< 10% Under 1.0 SOGR	SOGR
Equipment	Heavy Equipment	< 25% Over ULB	SOGR
	Non-Revenue Vehicles	< 25% Over ULB	< 8 Years

**Current METRO RTA TAM Targets for Vehicles**

METRO currently as of 2023 is meeting all vehicle goals. Only showing 6% of their 131 large bus fleet bus fleet has met or exceed their ULB. METRO’s large bus fleet consist of 127 CNG buses and 4 electric buses. Of the smaller LTV cutaway and vans METRO as of 2023 has zero vehicles that are beyond their useful life benchmark.

All of METRO RTA’s parking facilities meet condition rating goals. However, 16% of their administrative and maintenance facilities are rated below 3 on the condition scale, see facility ratings chart below.

Rating	Open Defects From	Open Defects To	Overdue PMs	Notes from Data Migration Spreadsheets
5	0	10	0	5 = No unfunded or deferred maintenance activities.
4	10	20	1	4 = Some temporary deferment of PM and CM; no activity skipped completely.
3	20	30	2	3 = More frequent deferment and extended of PM and CM; some activity skipped altogether.
2	30	50	3	2 = PM and CM activity frequent delayed or skipped until major problems surface.
1	50		4	1 = Significant back log of PM and CM work due to history of deferred and skipped activities.

METRO RTA’s administration, maintenance, storage facilities, wash bay and CNG station are located at the Kenmore location, only the maintenance and administration building are in need of upgrades.

The RKP Transit Center located downtown Akron and Independence and Romig Road Transit centers are in new or good condition. METRO is already in the process of improving their overall facility conditions rating by constructing a new maintenance facility at the 416 Kenmore Blvd location. More information on the project can be found on their [website](#).

## Transit Safety

The Public Transportation Agency Safety Plans ([PTASP](#)) regulation ([49 CFR Part 673](#)) requires operators of public transportation systems that receive federal funds under the FTA [Urbanized Area Formula Grants \(Section 5307\)](#), and rail transit agencies subject to the FTA [State Safety Oversight \(SSO\)](#) program, to develop an Agency Safety Plan (ASP) that includes the processes and procedures to implement a Safety Management System (SMS). SMS is a comprehensive, collaborative, and systematic approach to managing safety.

The PTASP requirement is in part to ensure that all agencies are examining and defining their safety roles, responsibilities and protocols on a more regular basis. It also requires agencies to examine new potential threats to their system and develop and adapt to industry best practices methods for safety and dangerous situations. The plan highlights different risk mitigation, safety assurance and provides an overall comprehensive Safety Management systems (SMS) framework to guide agencies approach to safety.

Some key performance indicators (KPIs) that are examined through the PTASP may not all have specific data that can be measured such as how secure a certain facility is, which is more of a full safety risk assessment taking into account such as (METRO RTA PTASP language):

- Step 1: Collecting Information;
- Step 2: Assessing Severity;
- Step 3: Assessing Likelihood;
- Step 4: Determining the Safety Risk Index; and
- Step 5: Documenting Results.

However, some KPI's yield specific data that can be analyzed and compared such as safety performance targets (SPT's) and they are examined by each transit agency and reported to the NTD on a yearly basis:

- Fatalities: Total number of fatalities reported to NTD and rate per total vehicle revenue miles (VRM)
- Injuries: Total number of injuries reported to NTD and rate per total VRM by mode.
- Safety Events: Total number of safety events reported to NTD and rate per total VRM by mode.
- System Reliability: Mean distance between major mechanical failures by mode.

METRO RTA for example, utilizes Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and Safety Performance Targets (SPTs) within the organization to 1) monitor company health, 2) measure progress, 3) analyze patterns over time, 4) solve problems or tackle opportunities and 5) make adjustments to stay on track. This information is intended to answer two primary questions that aid METRO RTA in the assessment of its performance and help determine where or if changes in policy or procedure is required: Why did performance change? What actions are being taken to improve performance?

Both METRO and PARTA are dedicated to safety and these plans help assist agencies examine, track and improve overall safety levels.

# Chapter 4: Vision, Goals, and Strategies

## Vision

The area's two regional public transit providers—METRO and PARTA—each have visions that guide their mission and operations. While each agency's overall vision might be different because of size/scale of the agency, the populations they serve, and geography, there is significant common ground between what each agency wants to accomplish.




Taking into account these differences and similarities, the AMATS 2024 Transit Plan's general, overarching vision for the region is as follows:

Provide safe and equitable transit service for the region. Improve the accessibility of life-sustaining trips with access to employment, food and medical facilities. Healthy smart collaboration with community partners to provide innovative service approaches to the needs of the area. Continue to remain financially stable and to pursue all relevant State and Federal funding opportunities.

## Goals and Strategies

The matrix on the following pages provides numerous six and eleven strategies that support the AMATS Transit Plan's vision.

**Goals** are listed and defined in the pink-shaded sections of the matrix. Each goal falls into one or more categories:

- Collaboration Goals 
- Funding Goals 
- Service Goals 

**Strategies** corresponding to each goal are listed below each goal. Strategies are what can be done to accomplish each of the broader goals. Each goal has between one and four strategies listed.

**Implementation** lists the agencies responsible for putting the strategies into action. Lead agencies would be those primarily responsible for the effort, while supporting agencies include those who would likely participate in the effort.

**Additional Notes** is a catch-all, general summary category that might describe how and why a strategy gets implemented, why it is important, and other general nuance about past work or specific areas of focus.

# Transit Plan Goals and Strategies Matrix



= Collaboration Goal



= Funding Goal



= Service Goal

Strategy	Implementation		Additional Notes
	Lead	Support	
<b>Goal # 1: Invest in programs supporting transit goals</b> <p><i>Transit agencies provide a level of service that supports the needs of the area and to invest in opportunities that promote a safe, sustainable and equitable transit system.</i></p>			
Pursue available Local, State and Federal funding programs that support transit operations and projects.	METRO, PARTA	AMATS	More information on specific programs can be found in the <i>Implementation</i> section of this chapter.
<b>Goal # 2: Invest in sustainable fleet and operations</b> <p><i>Transit agencies make sound decisions and create a visible opportunity to lead by example.</i></p>			
Pursue and ensure a sustainable fleet and maintain a state of good repair to preserve the investment in transit and maintain sustainability of thier service.	METRO, PARTA		Invest in updating fleet and meeting FTA Transit Asset Management Targets as well as investing in preventative maintenance practices ("fix it first" philosophy) to maintain a state of good repair for all vehicles.
<b>Goal # 3: Integrate transit into regional transportation projects</b> <p><i>Creating a robust public transportation network becomes a primary consideration of many roadway improvement projects.</i></p>			
Work with local communities to discuss integration in roadway projects with a transit add on component like a bus shelter or enhanced waiting environments.	METRO, PARTA, AMATS	Community Officials, AMATS	Transit authorities and local officials can have a shared understanding of projects before plans are made, allowing them to maximize potential for transit improvements when necessary.
<b>Goal # 4: Ensure that transit is an intergral component of land use planning efforts</b> <p><i>Sound land-use decisions and future development can improve the public transportation network, and quality transit services can allow development to occur more responsibly.</i></p>			
Partner with economic development agencies and local officials when conversations about business attraction and expansion occur.	Community Officials, Econ. Dev. Agencies, METRO, PARTA		It is important to locate jobs—especially when employees us transit—in areas where service exists or can be provided. Having transit agencies involved in regional employment conversations helps inform the planning process.
Communicate the benefits of increasing the transit footprint and the positive effect this can have on the region and quality of life for transit users.	METRO, PARTA	Community Officials, AMATS	Building partnerships between transit agencies and community officials will help to build trust and a stronger public transit network.
Continue to explore the feasibility of and pursue Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) in the City of Akron and surrounding municipalities.	METRO	Akron , C. Falls, Barberton, Fair-lawn, Green, Springfield, AMATS	Once METRO and its partners decide on final alternatives (several potential routes have been studied in-depth), partners can negotiate how local shares of BRT development will be paid. Partners can then pursue FTA's Small Starts funding.
Explore opportunities for Transit-Oriented Development (TOD)	METRO, possibly PARTA	Private developers, Community officials, CDCs/NDCs	METRO is exploring TOD near their RKP Transit Center, south of downtown Akron. Other possible locations include Akron's Middlebury Neighborhood and the Arlington Rd. corridor. Downtown Kent has seen significant TOD over the past 15 years.
<b>Goal # 5: Optimize transit service</b> <p><i>Transit agencies adapt to the inevitable and continuous changes occurring in communities.</i></p>			
Study current service and conduct service optimization every 5-10 years to adjust to new travel patterns.	METRO, PARTA	AMATS	METRO recently completed (2023) the Reimagine METRO redesign; PARTA intends to take a comprehensive look at route optimization in 2025. AMATS can assist as needed by analyzing demographic and employment data.
Examine potential coverage to peripheral locations.	METRO, PARTA		Demand for expansion into exurban communities exists, but can be difficult to justify because of total ridership and mileage.
Continue to invest in new technologies that improve the ridership expereince and efficiency of operations.	METRO, PARTA		Various technologies, such as scheduling software for service or personell, can assist transit agencies by making operations more efficient. PARTA recently invested in ITS improvements.
<b>Goal # 6: Increase sidewalk access to bus stops and shelters</b> <p><i>The transportation system safely accomodates all people, regardless of their mode of transport.</i></p>			
Apply for funding opportunities to create or improve infrastructure for pedestrians and bicyclists, ensuring safe access to and from transit stops.	Local Communities	AMATS, METRO, PARTA	Quality pedestrian access from homes, places of employment, medical facilities, and stores to transit stops is essential for safety, but it also allows transit to become a more viable mode of transportation for more people.



## Implementation

Each of this plan's goals and many of the strategies require funding to implement. Transit agencies have access to myriad federal, state, and local funding sources.

### Federal Grant Programs

Federal funding programs are generally used for capital expenses. Transit agencies can often utilize multiple federal funding sources for one project, administered at the state level by the Ohio Department of Transportation.

The primary source of federal funding for capital and maintenance projects is the Federal Transit Authority's (FTA) **Section 5307 Program**. These funds are typically used to purchase new buses, equipment, and for preventative maintenance and planning.

To better serve elderly persons and persons with disabilities, the transit agencies are also eligible for FTA's **Section 5310 Enhanced Mobility for the Elderly and Disabled Program** funds. Also known as the Specialized Transportation Program, these funds may be used for capital or operating expenses.

FTA's **Section 5339 Bus and Bus Facilities Program** can also fund capital projects. These funds are also used for new buses or for capital facilities.

Within the Section 5339 Funding Program is a discretionary source dedicated to funding zero and low-emission buses in order to reduce air pollution. This is known as the **Low or No Emissions Grant Program**

Funding for implementing or expanding Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) is available through FTA's **Small Starts** Program.

Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) **Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBG)** is the most versatile funding option that can be used for a variety of projects including highways, transit and bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

**Congestion Mitigation Air Quality Program (CMAQ)** can be used for projects that improve air quality, such as CNG buses, traffic signal improvements, and park and ride lots.

**Carbon Reduction Program (CRP)** can be used for projects designed to reduce transportation emissions, defined as carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions from on-road highway sources. Projects eligible for CRP funds include roundabouts, operational projects that improve traffic flow, clean fuel bus purchases, and bicycle and pedestrian projects.

## **State Grant Programs**

The **Ohio Transit Partnership Program (OTP2)** is a competitive grant program that was established to provide additional capital funding to Ohio's public transit operators for projects emphasizing system preservation. METRO RTA and PARTA have each received OTP2 funds almost every year since 2012. The OTP2 funds have come from ODOT-attributable federal funds (CMAQ or STBG), and now come from state general revenue funds (GRF). Although the OTP2 program now uses state general revenue funds (instead of CMAQ or STBG as it did in the past), the amount of funding is insufficient for the needs of the transit agencies. According to the Ohio Statewide Transit Needs Study from 2015, "The use of GRF (general revenue funds) in Ohio to fund public transit has been in steady decline" since 2000.

The **Diesel Emissions Reduction Grant (DERG) Program** is offered by ODOT annually in coordination with the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (OEPA) to public and private sector diesel fleets (motor vehicle, marine, locomotive, and highway construction equipment). METRO and PARTA have each been awarded DERG funds regularly on an annual basis for a number of years.

The **Urban Transit Program (UTP)** is a statewide source of funding catered to transit service in Ohio's urbanized areas with populations of 50,000 or greater (therefore both METRO and PARTA receive funding). UTP is a flexible funding source available for a wide variety of activities that support the provision of public transportation.

## **General Revenue Ohio State Funding**

Until recently, besides the small amount of OTP2, and urban and rural funding programs the State of Ohio had no stable or dedicated funding for transit service. The overall Transit agencies rely on federal funds for their capital, maintenance, and planning expenses, but these aren't always sufficient. The small amount of local funding transit agencies receive from sales tax may not cover their operations. Additionally, smaller transit agencies may not be able to use federal funds because they are unable to come up with the required local match. As the State of Ohio demonstrated in 2019 with the gas tax increase, there is a need for increased and dedicated funding at the state level. State general revenue funds for transit have been declining since their peak in 2000 and dwindled down to \$6.5 million in in State Fiscal year 2018-2019 for urban and rural transit agencies.

AMATS Policy Committee discussed the state funding to support transit in 2019 and approved a motion for the AMATS staff to provide a letter of support that requested that the governor support a \$70 million investment beginning with the 2020-21 budget. This amount was substantially smaller than the recommendation that came out of the Ohio Statewide Transit Needs Study in 2015. That study, produced by ODOT, recommended the state invest \$120 million a year in transit, rising to \$185 million in 2025, in order to cover 10% of the costs to preserve Ohio's transit system and provide the stable and reliable funding source that is so greatly needed.

The past two budget cycles (FY2022-FY2023 and FY2024-2025) show a substantially larger investment of \$74,029,272 (\$37,014,636 per year) for Ohio Transit Systems than in previous cycles. This increased investment allows transit agencies the flexibility to use State General Revenue Funding as local match to Federal funding. The 2023 [Ohio Legislative Service Commission Report](#) details on page 3 provide the breakdown for public transit funding.

### **Local Funding**

Local sources of funding are essential to providing the daily operations transit riders depend upon. The transit agencies' operating expenses are primarily funded through two local sources.

**Dedicated sales tax revenue** is by far the largest source of local revenue. For METRO RTA, this amounts to a .50% sales tax while PARTA benefits from a .25% sales tax. These sales tax funds can be used for operations as well as a match for federal funds.

Another local source of funding is the **fare box revenue**, which are the funds received from riders. This revenue makes up a small part of the operating budget, and can vary by month and by route, making it difficult to plan ahead using this source. The transit agency's operating expenses are funded mainly through these two local sources.