

State waits for Legislature to do its job on transit

(Bridge archive photo)

By Timothy R. Fischer/Michigan Environmental Council and Michele Hodges/Troy Chamber of Commerce

Our state's leaders must stop dithering and approve the regional transit authority bills ([Senate Bills 909, 911-912](#)) before the Michigan Legislature. An RTA matters for the entire state.



It would control transit tax expenditures in Southeast Michigan, cut duplicative service, force efficiencies and offer a higher level of transit service. It does not raise taxes one cent.

Old animosities that persist today have hindered progress in unifying our region and state for far too many decades. The current RTA legislation is the 24th attempt.

It has — so far — avoided a long history of pitfalls, and it includes necessary compromises in order to get regional leaders on board. It is a huge step in the right direction. Its benefits far exceed its shortcomings.

In short, an RTA would create the framework for a more streamlined and effective transit network. It's the type of framework that enables places such as Chicago, Denver, Washington, D.C., and almost every other city which beckons our daughters and sons to construct and operate comprehensive transit services.

These services get workers to jobs and shoppers to stores. They foster economic corridors that many Michigan developers are hungry to build. An RTA will force transit providers to coordinate service, cutting out existing duplication. It will force transit agencies to plan, and to plan together, to receive money. This will lead to a higher level of coordinated transit service.

The legislative proposal includes rapid transit routes. These express routes would connect the residential suburbs to Detroit's commercial and recreational districts. This rapid transit technology is best described as trains on tires. The advance ticket purchasing, comfortable seating, safe stations, and dedicated travel lanes are similar to train travel at a considerably lower cost.

An RTA will ensure that our tax money headed toward public transit is used



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much more efficiently than today — with less waste and duplication. It is common today to see a SMART bus and a DDOT bus driving down Woodward Avenue in Detroit together.

And each might be half full.

That's not the best way to do business. However, existing law prohibits SMART from picking up passengers along most of Woodward Avenue in the city. The RTA legislation provides a fix.

If the RTA bills don't pass, the transit agencies will still receive money — they will just not have the incentive to use it more wisely and efficiently. The RTA forces these efficiencies.

Again, these bills do not increase taxes one cent. They put the power to raise money in local hands. Taxpayers in the four counties and Detroit— not Lansing politicians — will decide whether they want to raise revenue locally to pay for public transportation upgrades.

Please urge your state legislators to vote yes on SB 909, 911-912.



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