



2023 ANNUAL REPORT

Metro Momentum Broadens Horizons

Innovation and Outreach in the Driver's Seat

Kalamazoo County's public transportation system – Metro – strengthened operations in 2023 while laying plans to meet the changing needs of its riders.

Metro provides some two million rides a year, assuring consistent community access to a diverse ridership. The fixed-route system (buses) saw ridership increases again this year on most of its 21 routes. Ridership was also up for the paratransit, on-demand program (Metro Connect) and the shared-van service for nonprofit organizations (Metro Share).

Ridership increases created the need to recruit, hire and train new staff. In August, a campaign resulted in the hiring of 12 new drivers.

"Metro offers a real career, not just a job" says Sean McBride, Metro's Executive Director. "Metro provides benefits, security and opportunities for growth and advancement. We thrive as an organization when our staff is committed to our mission of being the first choice in transportation for all."

The past year also saw a continued emphasis on rider safety, upgraded maintenance equipment to extend the life of the fleet and an increased use of mobile technology, including the bus-locator app myStop Mobile and digital-fare app Token Transit.

In December 2023, Metro debuted a refreshed webpage. The site features a more user-friendly layout and includes a trip planner on the home page. As part of a comprehensive outreach effort, the site will be regularly updated with Metro-related information to facilitate meaningful engagement with the community.

As Metro's administration and workforce continued to improve and strengthen existing services, the organization's two policy-setting boards reviewed public input and have focused on the future of Metro in the coming years and decades.



The Metro of Tomorrow

Transforming Transportation – Exploration Leading to Dynamic Future

Metro staff, administrators and community representatives – the entire Metro team – spent much of 2023 envisioning what the future of public transportation could look like.

“The Metro of tomorrow,” says Executive Director Sean McBride, “will be a more dynamic version of what we have today.” An example of shifting rider expectations is the rise of private rideshare operations like Uber and Lyft. While these companies meet a cultural demand for quick, individual service, they are not financially sustainable for regular transportation needs.

“Innovation is key,” says Greg Rosine, who has dedicated much of his professional life and two decades of volunteer work to designing and overseeing transportation systems. “Traditional transportation models still have strengths; we need to blend those strengths with the demands of modern life when planning the future of Metro.”

Rosine, the former top official at the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), is the long-serving chair of both the Kalamazoo County Transportation Authority (KCTA) and the Central County Transportation Authority (CCTA). Those two quasi-governmental authorities, composed of public officials and involved citizens, guide the work of the Metro transportation system.

Says Rosine: “You have two dozen buses meeting the needs of thousands of riders, so it comes down to schedules. Day in and day out, the Parchment bus has to be at Riverview and Glendale at 8:24 a.m. on its way to Wal-Mart. Yes, it is predictable, but it also represents a rigidity that makes it hard to respond to someone’s very personal needs.” This conflict strikes at the heart of the issue Rosine and his colleagues on Metro’s governing boards have faced as they try to meet “Uber-like expectations.”

This challenge is not unique to Metro. Looking for long-term solutions, Rosine posits, may include an

organizational arrangement with smaller buses and better integration with the system’s on-demand service, Metro Connect.

The secret, Rosine continues, is to create opportunities for greater flexibility while maintaining high ridership. “We need to maintain what we know works while exploring ways to meet the needs of our diverse and expanding ridership.”

“We know the public has high expectations, so we are looking at ways to be more responsive, knowing we have to do it cost effectively,” says McBride, “We oversee the service, but we are also guardians of the funds that make that service possible.”

Rosine adds that it is important to continue to communicate with the public about these changes. “Public trust is at the heart of Metro’s work,” he says.



Who's Riding Metro?

Kalamazoo Icon Talks Independence & How Metro Keeps Her

Many Kalamazoo residents may recognize the smiling face of Judy Sarkozy, co-founder of Sarkozy Bakery and long-time Kalamazoo Icon. One might associate her with the smell of fresh-baked bread or the year-round Farmer's Market downtown – but Judy can also be associated with Metro as a regular bus rider.

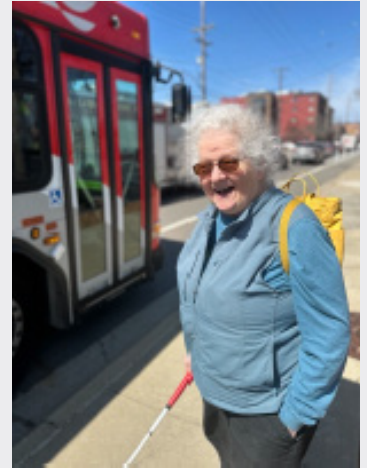
In 2023, the fiercely independent businesswoman woke up with sudden and significant vision loss. "I was broken-hearted," Judy said recounting being told she would no longer be able to drive. Not one to sit around idle, Judy immediately began looking at her options. Her goal was to preserve her independence and continue living life on her own terms.

Relying on other people's schedules for her transportation needs did not sit well with the octogenarian, who continues to work at Sarkozy's Bakery and enjoys an active social life. Although she was aware of the bus, it had never directly impacted her daily life. "[Riding the bus] takes time and planning, which I was not willing to do before," Judy said. "But I can not be independent if I do not do it now."

The hardest part of learning to ride the bus was getting herself to use it the first time.

"People are uncomfortable because they do not know it," she said, "but it gets easier and easier each time." She had to plan, learn the routes, learn the apps and was sometimes frustrated when technology failed. Judy now "outfits" herself with a charged phone, backpack and raincoat when she heads out to travel. She also lauds the unexpected benefits of public transportation: the healthier daily activities and cost savings.

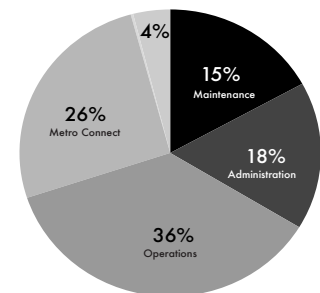
But most important to Judy, riding Metro connects her to the community and provides a sense of camaraderie with fellow riders. "If more people rode it, they would find out," Judy said. "People getting on say 'hello' and people getting off the bus say 'thank you' to the driver... it makes a difference." Judy recounted some of the challenges of adapting to this new life, but added with a smile, "Now, I am very pleased."



2023 Operating Revenue and Expenses

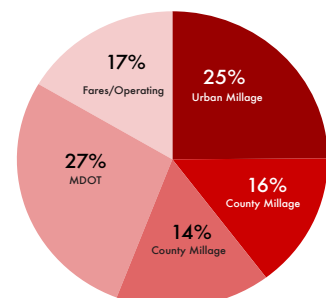
Operating Expenses - \$20,195,680

Administration	3,720,791
Maintenance	3,053,095
Operations	5,369,515
Metro Connect	5,322,898
Metro Share	46,617
Kalamazoo Transportation Center (KTC)	707,310



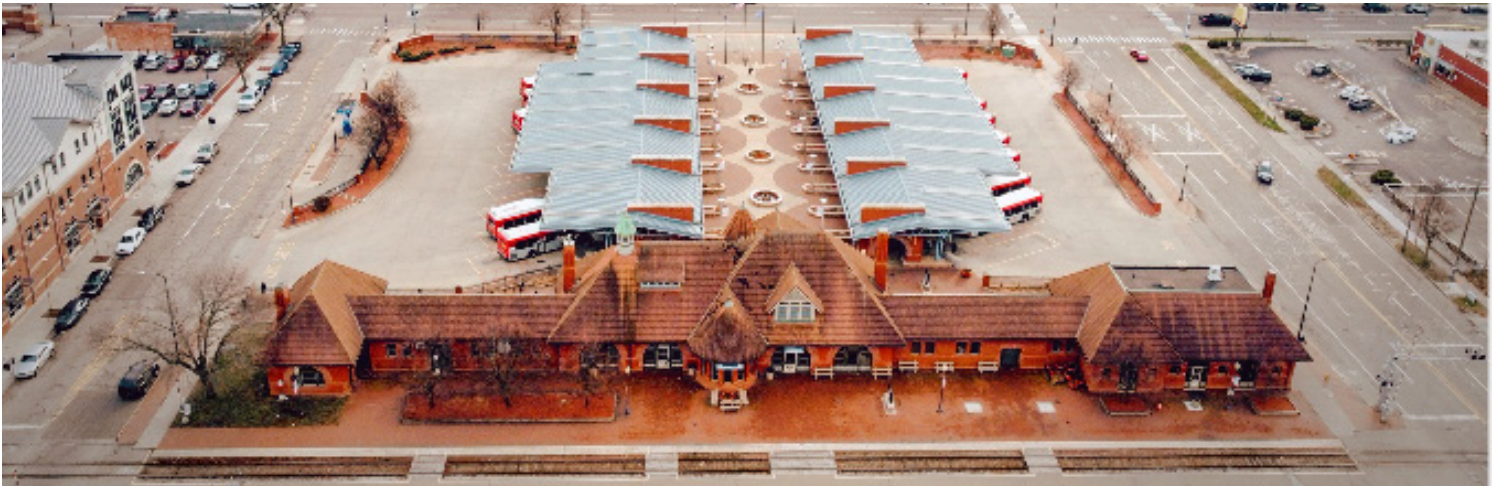
Operating Revenue - \$21,834,800

Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT)	5,953,424
Urban Millage	5,454,559
Federal Transit Administration (FTA)	3,584,258
County Millage	3,130,757
Fares/Operating	3,711,802



METRO CONNECT SHARE LINK

530 N. Rose Street Kalamazoo, MI 49007 | www.kmetro.com | (269) 337 - 8222



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- Robert D. Britigan, III
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- Dusty Farmer
- Rodney Halcomb
- Lisa Mackie
- Jim Pearson
- Randy Thompson
- Greg Rosine - Chair
- Garrylee McCormick - Vice-Chair

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- Tafari Brown
- Dusty Farmer
- Aditya Rama
- Gary Sigman
- Tim Sloan
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- Curtis Aardema - Vice-Chair

Metro Leadership

- Sean McBride, Executive Director
- Greg Vlietstra, Director of Support Services
- Keshia Woodson-Sow, Director of Operations
- Robert Branch, Deputy Director Fleet and Facilities
- Sarah Joshi, Deputy Director of On-Demand Services and Planning