

# La Crosse Area Planning Committee RTA Feasibility Study

Committee on Transit and Active  
Transportation (CTAT)

December 18, 2025



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# Agenda

- Project Scope
- Existing Services
  - Performance Measures
- Regional Demographics
  - Transit use propensity
- Relevant Past Studies and Plans
- Regional Transit Authorities Background in Wisconsin
- Out-of-state Peer Case Studies
- Potential Funding Sources
- Discussion

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# Project Scope of Work

# RTA Feasibility Study

- Studying the feasibility of forming an RTA in our region can help identify opportunities to coordinate services among regional providers.
- This study will assess potential for more equitable and sustainable funding structures that support both urban and rural areas within the region.
- Local governments and stakeholders can use the study as a data-driven foundation when evaluating how an RTA could improve planning, and system resilience.

# RTA Feasibility Study

## ■ Project activity through Spring 2026



Steering  
Committee  
Engagement



Legal/Regulatory  
Analysis



Governance  
Structure  
Scenarios



Funding  
Analysis



Community/Economic  
Impact

# Transit Service in the Region

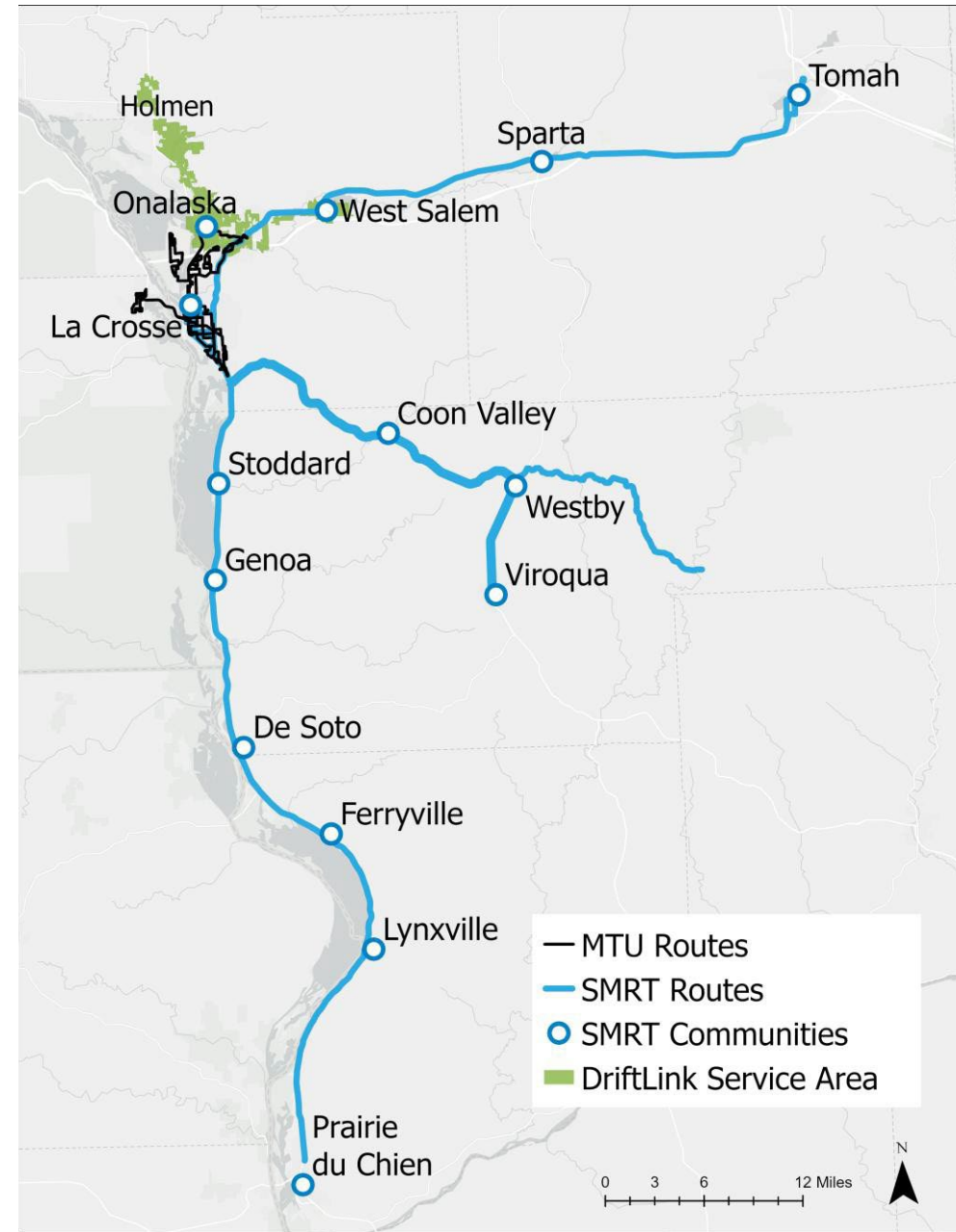
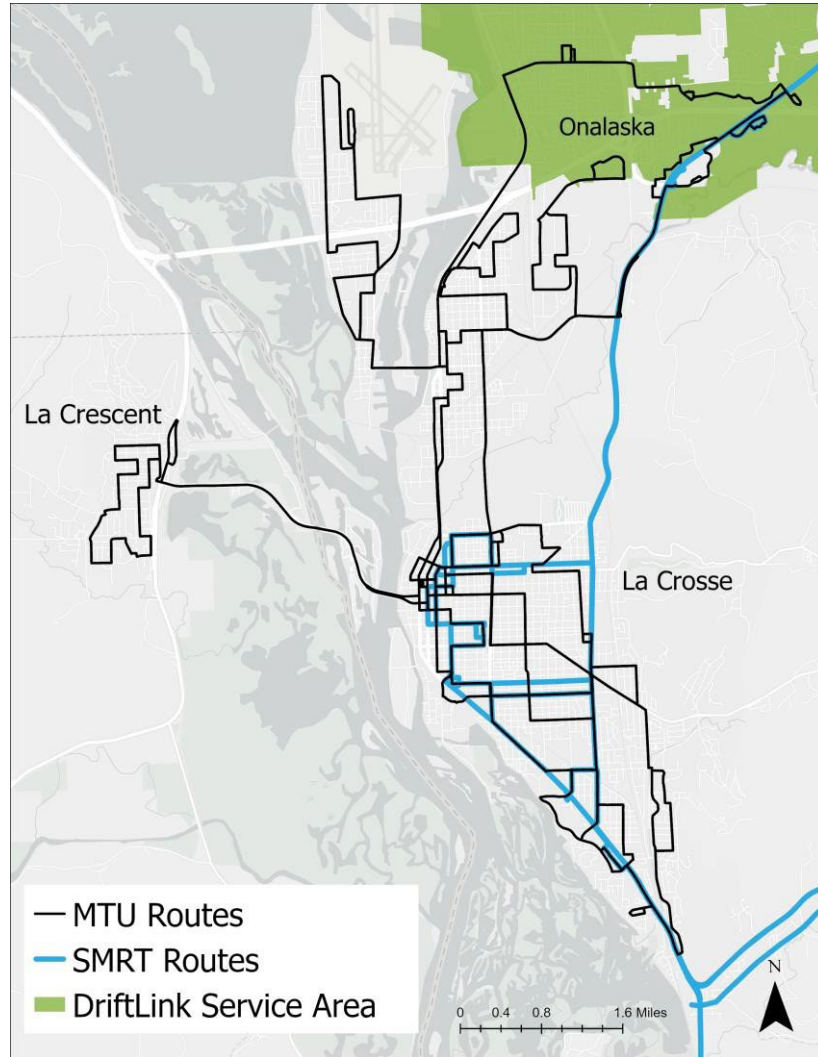


# Existing Public Transit Service

- MTU operates complementary paratransit and seven fixed routes focused on the City of La Crosse. MTU also provides contracted service to other municipalities.
- DriftLink provides shared-ride service for the City of Onalaska, Village of Holmen, and Village of West Salem. The service is administered by the City of Onalaska. Rides are available seven days a week between 6:30 AM and 7:00 PM.
- Scenic Mississippi Regional Transit (SMRT) is a weekday-only commuter bus system in Crawford, Monroe, Vernon, and La Crosse Counties in Wisconsin. It is administered by La Crosse County. Each route runs three or four round trips per day.

	Annual Ridership	Annual Operating Cost
La Crosse MTU (Bus)	667,034	\$6,213,958
La Crosse MTU (Demand Response)	18,338	\$525,307
DriftLink	59,071	\$982,248
SMRT	19,053	\$521,872

# Existing Service



# Specialized Transportation Services

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Non-Emergency Medical Transportation

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County ADRC Programs

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Veterans Transportation

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Private Taxi Services

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Transportation Network Companies (Uber, Lyft, Etc.)

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Tribal Transportation Programs

# Transit Funding in Wisconsin

- Typically, transit service is funded with a mix of State, federal, and local dollars.
- How the funding is distributed, and its eligible uses differ depending on whether the service is “urban” or “rural”

# Typical Funding Sources

## Federal Funding

- FTA Section 5307 (urban)
- FTA Section 5311 (rural)
- Bus and Bus Facilities
- Other Discretionary Funding
- FTA Section 5310

## State Funding

- 85.20 Mass Transit Operating Assistance
- 85.21 County Aid for Specialized Transportation

## Local Funding

- General Fund, Property Tax
- Fare Revenue
- Other Revenue Sources

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# Regional Demographics

# Data and Trend Review

- Indicators for equitable distribution of services
- Transit Service Indicators
  - Zero-vehicle households
  - Low-income population
  - Major transit destinations
  - Population and employment density
- Population trends:
  - Growth in suburban communities
  - Older adults' increasing population share in rural areas
  - New development in communities

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# Relevant Studies and Plans

- 2055 Metropolitan Plan Update
- 2021 Regional Transit Development Plan
- La Crosse County Coordinated Transit Plan (2019 – 2023)
- Area Comprehensive Plan(s)
- Grad River Transit Service Enhancement & Policy Plan
- La Crosse County Housing Study (In progress)

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# Regional Transit Authorities Background in WI

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# Historical Legislative Initiatives

Act 32 (2011) effectively banned RTA-enabling legislation

- Pre-Act 32 Proposed Legislation:
  - Framework for a Kenosha-Racine-Milwaukee RTA
  - Creation of Dane County, Chippewa Valley, Chequamegon Bay RTAs.
- New state legislation is required to reauthorize RTAs

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# Historical Legislative Initiatives

- Post 2011 Attempts to establish RTAs in Wisconsin
  - **2013 SB 259:** Proposed Fox Cities RTA with taxing authority (via referendum); passed Senate but died in Assembly – closes attempt since Act 32
  - **2023-2025 Budget:** Proposed reinstating 2009 RTA framework for Dane County, Fox Cities, SE Wisconsin, and multi-jurisdiction RTAs; removed in omnibus motion
  - **2025-2027 Budget:** Similar proposal failed again

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# Regional Transit Today

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# Multi-County Transit Commissions

- Wis. Stat. 66.1021
- Examples: Bay Area Rural Transit, Oneida-Vilas Transit Commission
- Enables unified public transportation across counties
- Governance:
  - Minimum three-member board appointed by participating entities and approved by governing bodies
  - May hire staff, adopt rules, purchase goods and services

# Intergovernmental Agreements



“Your Ride is Here”

608/364-2870

[www.beloittransit.com](http://www.beloittransit.com)

608/755-3150

[www.janesvillewi.gov](http://www.janesvillewi.gov)



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# Out-of-state Peer Case Studies

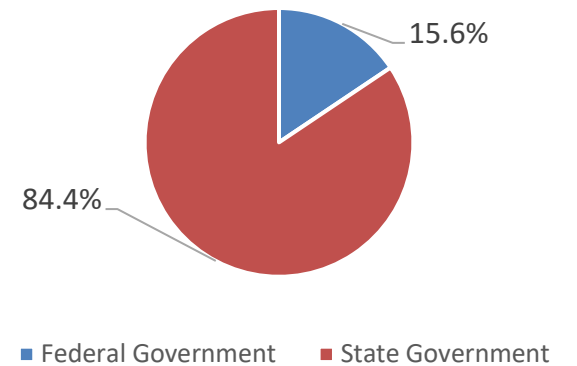
# Duluth Transit Authority (DTA)

DTA is a public mass-transit authority created by the MN Legislature under statute and formally established by the City of Duluth as a unit of the city Interagency agreement between Duluth, Superior, and DTA for management contractor (ATE Management)

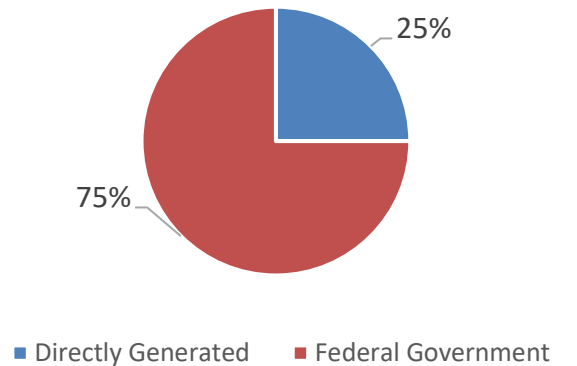
Partners with Duluth-Superior Interstate Council to secure federal grants

DTA has the authority to levy taxes. In 2026 it is approved to raise a property tax levy of 0.03123%

Operating Funding Sources



Capital Funding Sources



## Board of Directors



Duluth Council Dist. 1



Duluth Council Dist. 2



Duluth Council Dist. 3



Duluth Council Dist. 4



Duluth Council Dist. 5



City of Superior



At-Large Member



At-Large Member



At-Large Member

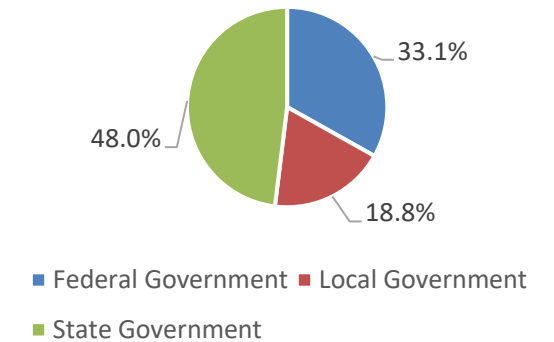
# CONNECT Transit

Established in 1972 as an intergovernmental agency by the City of Bloomington and the Town of Normal, Illinois to provide public transportation services within the two jurisdictions.

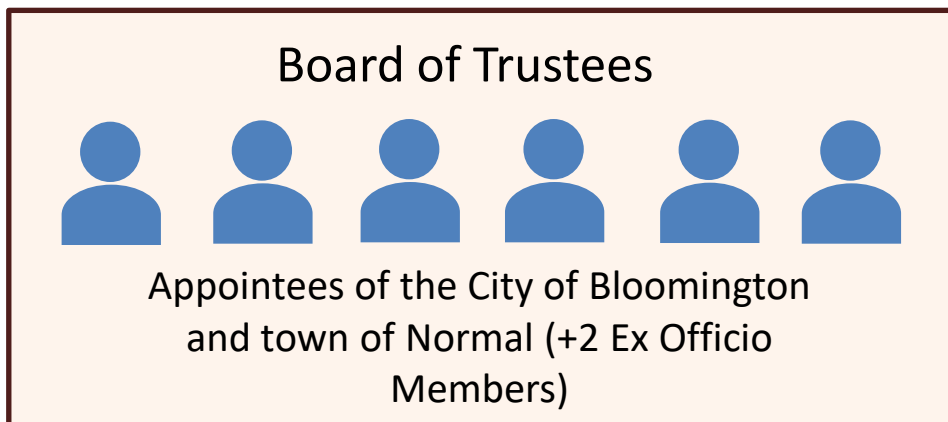
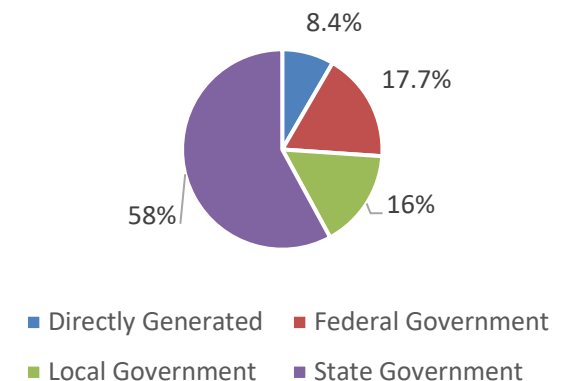
CONNECT has added Mclean County to its jurisdiction where it provides rural transit service.

Local funds allocated from Bloomington and Normal General Funds (~\$1.5 Million in 2024)

Capital Funding Sources



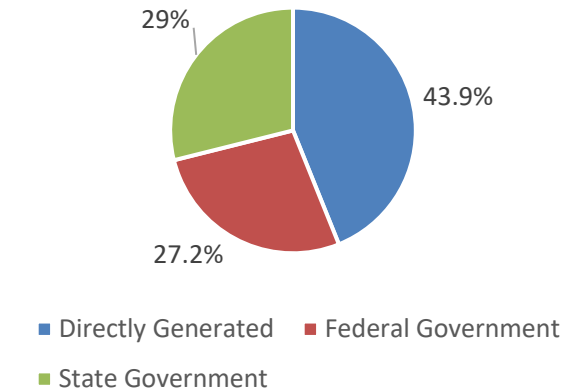
Operating Funding Sources



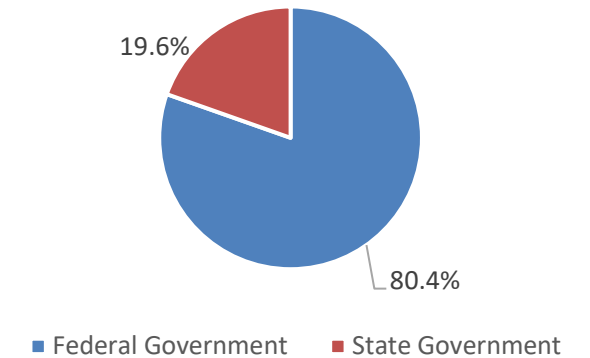
# Central County Transit Authority (CCTA)

Public transportation authority (formed under Act 196) that assumed operation of the Kalamazoo “Metro” system from the City of Kalamazoo, MI in 2016  
Coordinates with KCTA (Kalamazoo County Transportation Authority)  
Levies a 0.896 property tax millage in the urban area to fund fixed-route service  
KCTA levies a property tax 0.315 millage in Kalamazoo County to the Metro Connect demand-response service

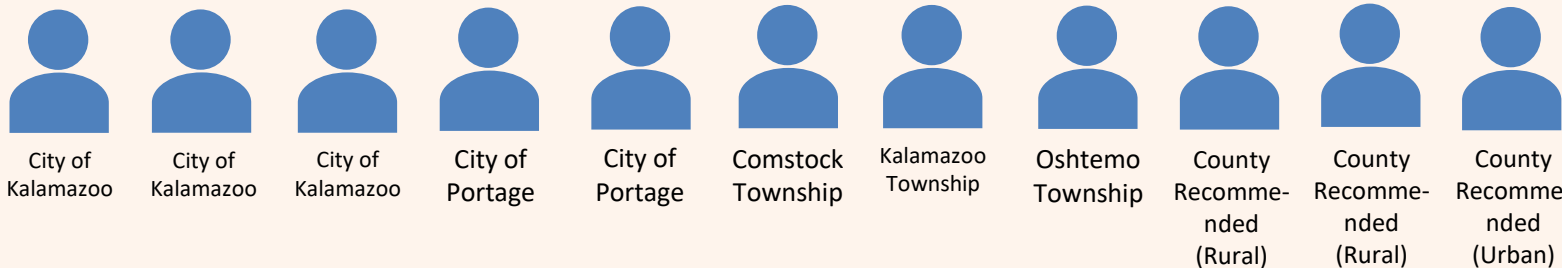
Operating Funding Sources



Capital Funding Sources



## Board of Directors



# State Policy Comparison

## Minnesota

- Authorities formed in state statute – with exceptions
- DTA formed by MN legislature in 1969
- SCMTC established by MN Legislature in late 1960's
- Enabling: Replacement Service Program (MVTA)
  - Local levy option

## Illinois

- Mass Transit Districts formed at local level authorized by the Local Mass Transit Districts Act
- Participation approved by township or municipality Boards of Trustees or County Boards of Commissioners
- City or County clerk reports the formation to the State of Illinois

## Michigan

- Enabling legislation and Authorities formed in state statute
- Public Transportation Authority Act of 1986
- Metropolitan Transportation Authorities Act of 1967 (SMART) & Regional Transportation Authority Act of 2012 (RTA)

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# Potential Funding Levels

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# Comparison with existing MTU/Driftlink/SMRT funding

## 2024 funding levels (Operating)

From existing agency budgets

- C La Crosse: \$7,179,850
- C Onalaska: \$1,049,541
- La Crosse County: \$558,480

**Total: \$8,787,871**

*○Note: reflects aggregate O&M for MTU, Driftlink, & SMRT, including state and federal assistance as reported to FTA.*

## Half-Cent (0.5%) RTA Sales Tax

Just among currently participating municipalities

- C La Crosse: \$8,033,913
- C Onalaska: \$4,112,147
- V Holmen: \$1,550,516
- V West Salem: \$844,579

**Total: \$14,541,155**

○65 percent higher than current funding levels

# Sales Tax Sensitivity Analysis

- The 2024 "half-cent" (0.5%) sales tax for La Crosse County was...
  - **\$17,297,675**
- If the County implemented a "full cent" (1.0%) sales tax...
  - **\$34,595,350**
- If a "quarter-cent" (0.25%) sales tax is implemented...
  - **\$8,648,837**

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# Discussion

# Question #1: Existing Strengths

- What is working well with existing governance and funding?
- What strengths do we want to retain?



# Question #2: Purpose and Need

- What are the current barriers to regional transit coordination?
- What are the most important benefits of an RTA would be?

# Question #3: Industry Peers

- Do any of the peer case studies feel like a replicable model for the La Crosse area?
- What do you want to know about peer organizations that have formed Regional Transit Authorities?



# Question #4: The Value of Transit

- What is a successful outcome of providing good regional transit service?
- Does the tax funding analysis outcomes resonate with the needs of the region?



**Thank You!**

