

Metro System Continues Recovery From Pandemic

COVID-19 impacted not only the Kalamazoo community but the public transportation system. While following state and local restrictions, Metro needed to adjust day to day operations. These adjustments took time to implement, and it will take time to recover from their impacts. The public transportation system will continue to increase service while using insight and safety measures developed during the pandemic as the variant remains in our community.

As part of the plan to return service to pre-COVID levels, Metro has returned to fares, and opened more seating. Cost-cutting measures, service reductions and emergency funds have kept the public transportation system financially stable throughout the pandemic. Despite service disruptions, Metro provided 1.4 million rides during 2020.

Metro Connect, the system's curb-to-curb service, provided important support for the pandemic restrictions in fixed-route service. When Metro's fixed route buses reduced hours of service, Metro Connect maintained operating hours until midnight Monday through Friday, until 10 pm on Saturday and from 8 am to 6 pm on Sunday. This provided essential after-hours transportation to Kalamazoo County residents. Metro Connect implemented social distancing on all vehicles during the height of COVID and just increased seating capacity this summer.

Metro's system is slowly increasing service with expanded seating capacity on all vehicles, and Metro Share vehicles being reserved by nonprofit agencies. Masks are still required on all Metro vehicles and was recently extended by the U.S. Department of Transportation until January 2022.

Millage Renewal Sought With Lower Tax Rate

Kalamazoo County voters will be asked on November 2 to consider a renewal millage to support the public transportation system in Kalamazoo County for five years, beginning in 2022.

The renewal for 0.3124 mills will support the Metro Connect and Metro Share programs. Metro Connect provides a shared ride origin-to-destination service and supports the lifestyle of its passengers by providing essential transportation that keeps them connected throughout Kalamazoo County. Metro Share provides group transportation services for nonprofit agencies that serve seniors and individuals with disabilities.

It is the first renewal of this county-wide millage, and is lower than the millage passed in 2015, and lower still than the 2009 millage of 0.40.



Tina Smith uses Metro Connect for Dialysis appointments.



Metro Connect Fills Gaps During Pandemic

When fixed-route bus service was suspended from April 2 to May 18, 2020, riders who “absolutely, positively” needed to get someplace important had Metro Connect to help. In fact, throughout the entire pandemic, Metro Connect maintained regular hours to safely serve those with critical needs up until midnight Monday through Friday.

Metro Connect provides county-wide transportation to anyone in Kalamazoo County with a focus on seniors and those with a disability.

William Carree, a Vietnam-era veteran, uses Metro Connect for doctor’s appointments and grocery store visits “once or twice a month.” He could drive, he says, but his doctor warns him of sudden seizures, “and I don’t want to put other motorists at risk.” He reduced his grocery store visits significantly during the pandemic and is thankful for the service in the community. Metro Connect drivers can assist with groceries to a rider’s door by requesting the Grocery Assistance Program when scheduling a ride.

Tina Smith, who moved to Kalamazoo from North Carolina to be near her daughter, uses Metro Connect for dialysis. Dialysis is also why David Fletcher rides, who like many riders brings a personal care attendant. Personal care attendants for those who need assistance ride for free.

Kathy Johnson was in a car accident five years ago and can’t drive, but she can work, so Metro Connect makes it possible for her to serve her clients as a health aide. “It has been a real blessing to me,” she says.



Kathy Johnson takes Metro Connect to work



“I’m like a lot of seniors who don’t drive,” says Sharon DeHaan, who lives in a senior residence. “I still like to be independent, and it’s a service I can’t do without.” DeHaan uses Metro Connect to go to the store, to church and to the doctor. “I also use it to volunteer,” she adds.

“It’s my freedom. It’s my independence. That’s what makes me feel good,” says Stephan Bristow, who uses a wheelchair. “I put the money on the Token Transit app, and away I go. It’s enjoyable independence for me.”



How The Public Transportation System Works

More than two-thirds of riders use the system for work, school and medical appointments

Public transportation in Kalamazoo County exists because of a unique arrangement between citizens, local, state and federal governments, and nonprofit organizations.

The system is governed by two publicly led authorities. The Central County Transportation Authority (CCTA) and the Kalamazoo County Transportation Authority (KCTA) are made up of representatives of participating Kalamazoo County agencies and citizens.

Metro's public support in the form of millages and passenger fares leverage state and federal funds. 54% of Metro's budget is derived from millages (36%) and fares (18%). The remaining percentages are derived from the state and federal governments and public grants.

More than two-thirds of riders use the system for work, school, and medical appointments. Almost 90 percent don't have cars. Before the pandemic, annual bus ridership approached three million rides, and some 168,000 rides were offered through Metro Connect.

Additionally, Metro Share historically was providing over 52,000 rides through nonprofit agencies. The goal is to return to those numbers as soon as feasibly possible and like other transit providers nationwide, this will take time.

The community benefits from having a transportation system that has a wide range of services that meet many needs. Metro partners with schools and with employers for ride-to-work programs. These programs remove the hurdle of reliable transportation.

Many of the local government agencies in Kalamazoo County partner with Metro. The cities of Kalamazoo and Portage, along with the Road Commission of Kalamazoo County and the Michigan Department of Transportation, work with Metro on bus stop improvements as part of road construction projects.

Metro is a significant force in economic development and job creation in Kalamazoo County and directly affects the quality of life of citizens throughout the area.

How to Use Metro Connect

All Kalamazoo County residents can use Metro Connect. This service travels throughout Kalamazoo County and provides trips to the VA Hospital in Battle Creek seven days a week. Rides may be scheduled with at least 24 hours' notice and up to seven days in advance. All riders must register to schedule rides. Discounted rates of \$3 and \$4 per ride (based on location) are available to qualifying riders after registration. Registration, rates, and additional information is available by calling 269-337-8847 or by visiting kmetro.com/metro-connect.



Know The Facts About the Millage Renewal

What's on the Ballot . . . All Kalamazoo County voters will be asked November 2 to consider a renewal millage to support funding for Metro Connect and Metro Share.

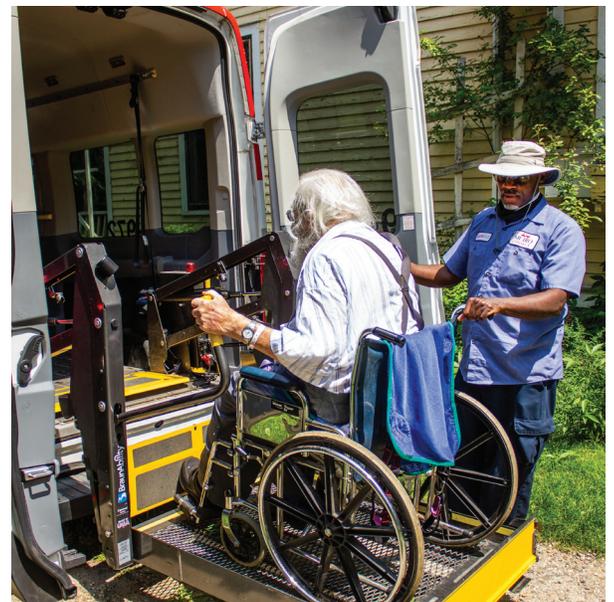
The First Renewal . . . This is the first renewal of this county-wide millage, lower than the millage passed in 2015. It is not an increase in taxes.

The Cost of the Renewal . . . The cost of the 0.3124 millage request for a homeowner whose home has a taxable value of \$100,000 is approximately \$31 a year. Both the economy and the quality of life for people in the greater Kalamazoo community benefit from reliable transportation made possible by this millage. Metro provides an important mode of transportation for employers and their employees, seniors, students, and for those who can't drive.

Funds Raised . . . Millage funds are an important component of the public transportation budget, and currently represent 36% of Metro's operating funds. Millage revenues and fare collection are leveraged to receive state and federal grants.

For more information regarding the millage request, call (269) 337-8087.

To get more information on Metro Connect, visit kmetro.com/Metro-Connect or call (269) 337-8477.



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