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# Transit Service Performance Review 2023





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### Land Acknowledgement

TransLink respects the Indigenous Nations within Metro Vancouver and acknowledges all First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples for their continued resilience, sustainable stewardship, and as active members of the community for generations to come. We recognize that in planning and managing the region's transportation system we have a role to play in supporting reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples.





## A Message from TransLink's CEO

**Metro Vancouverites continue to rely on TransLink's services to connect them to the people and places that matter most.**

In 2023, 900,000 people used transit each week to move around the region – that's about one third of Metro Vancouver's population. System-wide annual journeys were up 20.5 per cent, totalling more than 233 million in 2023.

This continued ridership growth, coupled with unprecedented regional population growth, resulted in increased demand for public transit. Metro Vancouver welcomed 90,000 new residents in 2023 alone, nearly double what was originally projected. Notably, over half of these new residents are choosing transit as their primary mode of transportation.

### **While population growth and strong ridership is welcome news, it has also created new challenges.**

Customers are now experiencing some of the highest levels of overcrowding compared to any period over the last decade. In many parts of the region, overcrowding doubled in 2023 compared to 2022.

It has become clear that transit service is struggling to keep up population growth, and without future investment, this problem will only worsen. We need to maintain a clear focus on the future, while delivering exceptional service today, to ensure transit infrastructure keeps up with growing demand.

Public transit is central to addressing some of our region's most pressing issues, serving as a catalyst for affordable housing and a thriving economy. Close access to public transit ensures residents can stay connected to job opportunities, educational institutions, and essential services – no matter where they live in the region.

This report illustrates that while strong ridership numbers are encouraging, we have a lot of work ahead of us. This isn't the first time that TransLink has faced challenges, but I am confident that we have a clear path to achieve the goals outlined in the Access for Everyone plan. We are dedicated to collaborating with the provincial and federal government to ensure our service aligns with the evolving needs of our customers, now and into the future.

Kevin Quinn, Chief Executive Officer, TransLink

# About this report

**TransLink manages Metro Vancouver’s integrated regional transit network. Our annual Transit Service Performance Review (TSPR) is one way we share information about the network and provides us with data and information needed to make ongoing decisions about how we plan and operate the region’s transit network.**

This year’s TSPR provides a high-level summary of transit ridership and utilization patterns from across our regional transit system in 2023, along with the factors and circumstances shaping and influencing these patterns. The TSPR compares ridership and utilization patterns from 2023 to those observed in 2022. Some comparisons are made to ridership and transit usage from 2019 to show how ridership continues to recover from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The TSPR also provides a summary of how we adapted transit service to respond to these patterns and some of the emerging issues that we have not been able to address fully, primarily due to an inability to expand service due to a lack of new funding and transit service resources in 2023.

Most ridership information in this report is based on boardings from Compass Card taps on buses and at fare gates. Boardings have been adjusted to account for lower tap rates on all-door boarding routes, cash users, and customers aged 12 and under, who travel for free. Passenger load and overcrowding data in this report is based on Automated Passenger Counter data.

**A BOARDING** is each time a customer enters a fare-paid zone, e.g., boarding a bus or tapping a fare gate.

**A JOURNEY** is a completed transit trip, regardless of the number of boardings or transfers. A customer starting their journey at Carvolth Exchange, taking a bus to Lougheed Town Centre Station, and then boarding the Millennium Line to Renfrew Station is taking one journey with two boardings.

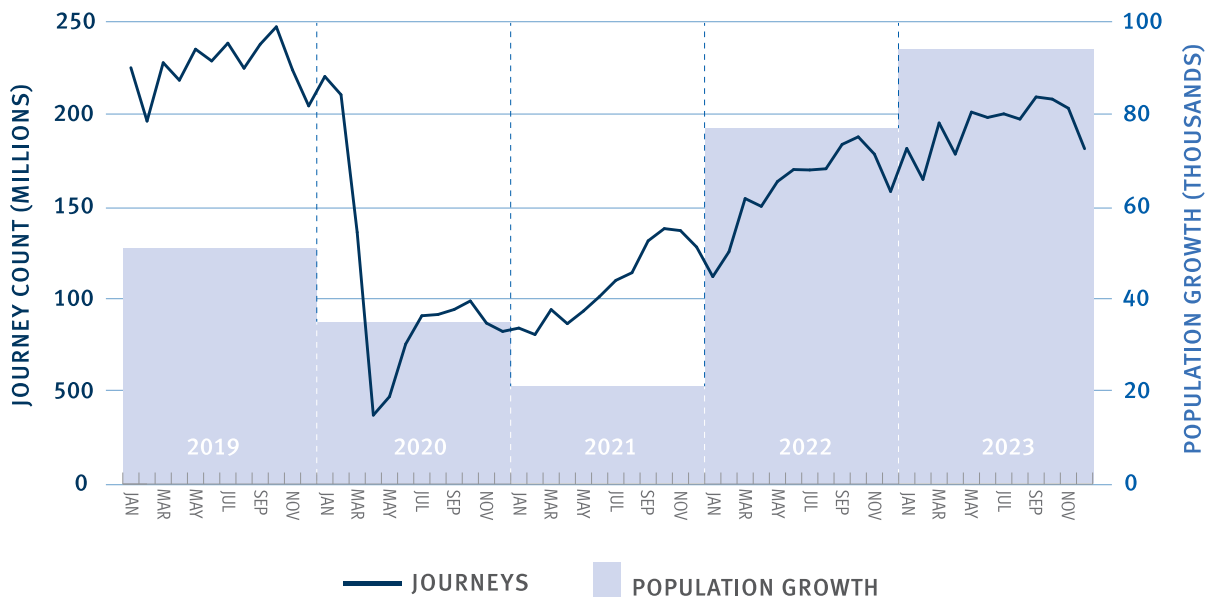
For more detailed data and insight on ridership trends and patterns in 2023 by service type and route, please visit the interactive data dashboards at [translink.ca/tspr](https://translink.ca/tspr).

# Summary of key trends

**Stronger than anticipated regional population growth in 2023 led to increased demand for public transit across Metro Vancouver.**

Our region is growing – and fast. Metro Vancouver welcomed 90,000 new residents in 2023, nearly double what we planned for in 2018 and three times more than what we saw annually for most of the 2000s. Since the start of 2022, the region’s population has grown by over 170,000, equivalent to adding a new City of Coquitlam in only two years. Newcomers to our region are more likely to rely on public transit and choose to live in areas near our transit network. Based on data between 2001 and 2021, more than 50% of new commuters in Metro Vancouver use public transit as their primary mode of commuting.

**Figure 1: System-Wide Monthly Journeys and Regional Annual Population Growth, 2019-2023**



*Note: Journeys are measured as a complete transit trip using Compass fare media or other proof of payment, regardless of the number of transfers.*



## Population growth has been a key driver in shaping the significant system-wide ridership increases we observed in 2023.

Annual journeys across our system in 2023 grew by 20% from 2022, totalling 233.2 million. In fall 2023, we served more than 430,000 unique customers on the average weekday, an increase of 50,000 compared to fall 2022. This is equivalent to nearly 30% of the total population of Metro Vancouver but also includes visitors from outside our region.

Metro Vancouver continues to be a leader among urban regions in Canada and the United States in post-COVID-19 pandemic ridership recovery and growth. Despite serving the 22nd most populous urban region in Canada and the United States, TransLink had the 4th highest rail rapid transit system ridership and the 3rd highest bus ridership in 2023. The recovery rate of total system-wide boardings<sup>1</sup> in 2023 (i.e. relative to 2019) was 87%.



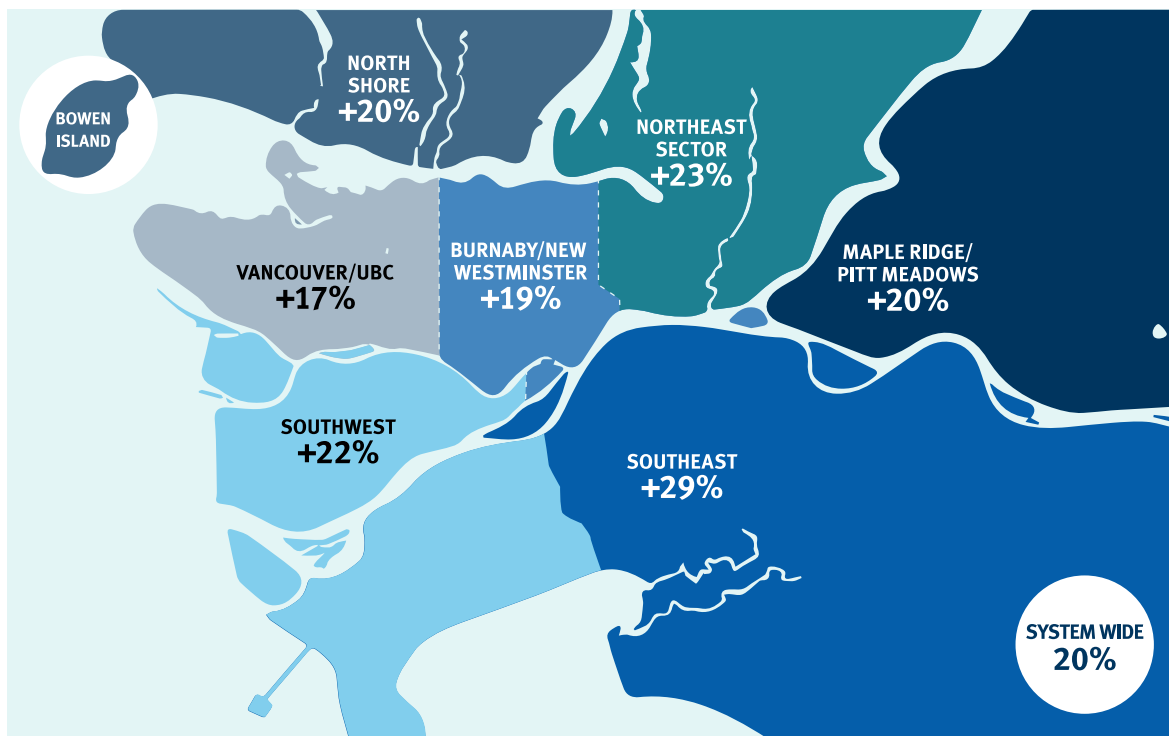
1 As in the 2022 TSPR, "recovery rates" presented here are calculated as total daily boardings in fall 2023, divided by total daily boardings in fall 2019.

## Ridership growth across our region is highest in the areas and places with the fastest population growth.

While ridership rose throughout Metro Vancouver in 2023, these increases were highest in areas where population growth since 2019 has been strongest: namely the Southeast, Northeast Sector, and Southwest sub-regions. Ridership in the Southeast, which includes Surrey and Langley, increased by 29% (over 16.3 million additional boardings) in 2023 compared to 2022. This is the continuation of a trend that began before COVID-19 in 2020 with most new ridership growth on the system moving from communities in the central Burrard Peninsula to outlying communities with more rapid population growth.

Ridership in some sub-regions was higher in 2023 than in 2019. The recovery rate of average daily boardings in the Southeast and Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows sub-regions in fall 2023 were 116% and 122%, respectively. Investments like the R3 Lougheed Highway RapidBus (introduced in January 2020) serving the Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows sub-region and service reallocation in the Southeast sub-region have helped provide significant new capacity and service that has helped support increased ridership growth and recovery in these areas.

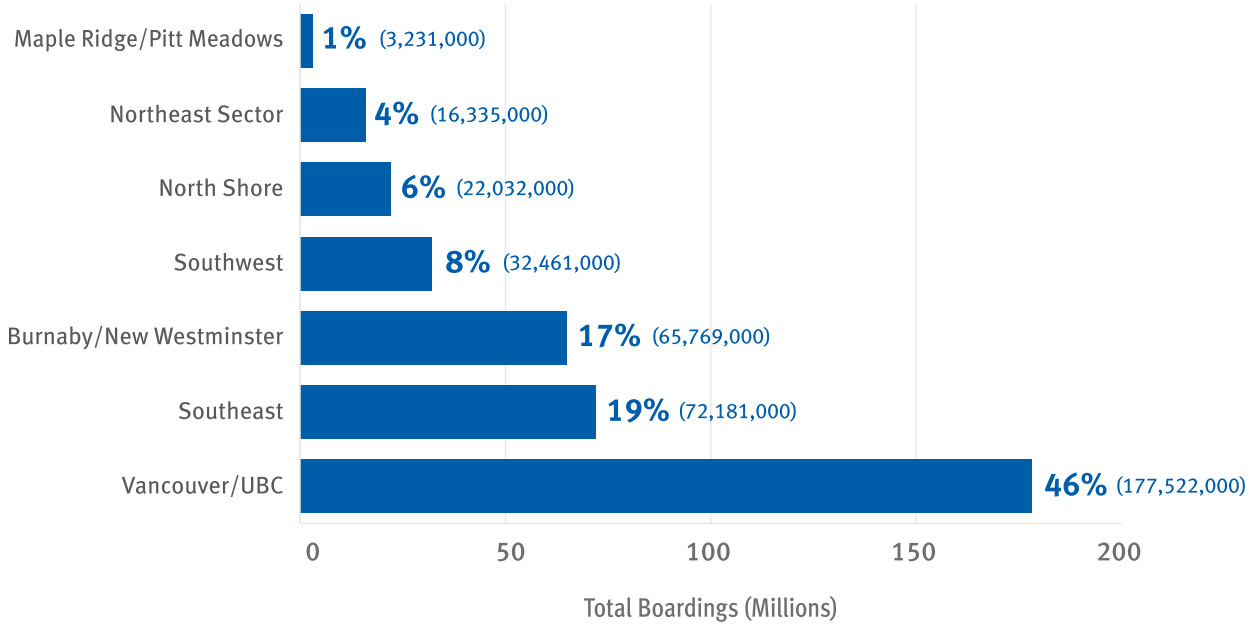
*Figure 2: Annual Ridership Growth by Sub-Region, 2022 to 2023*



*Note: Includes bus and SeaBus boardings and Expo-Millennium Line, Canada Line, and West Coast Express station entries. HandyDART boardings are not included as the HandyDART service has different sub-regional boundaries. Bowen Island is part of the North Shore sub-region.*

The Vancouver/UBC sub-region continues to generate the largest total ridership in the region, accounting for 46% of system-wide boardings (177 million boardings) in 2023. Ridership growth, however, continues to be the slowest in the region at 17% compared to 2022. Vancouver/UBC’s slower ridership growth can be attributed primarily to fewer trips into the Downtown Core as part of daily commuting, increases in overcrowding, and service reallocations. Excluding trips to and from Vancouver’s Downtown core, ridership growth in other parts of the Vancouver/UBC sub-region is similar to the rest of the region.

**Figure 3: Share of Ridership, by Sub-Region, 2023**



*Note: Includes bus and SeaBus boardings and Expo-Millennium Line, Canada Line, and West Coast Express station entries. HandyDART boardings are not included as the HandyDART service has different sub-regional boundaries.*










## Ridership grew consistently across all modes and services in 2023.

Ridership across all transit modes grew by almost 20% in 2023 compared to 2022 levels, reflecting the advantages of a well-integrated network.

Buses continued to be the primary mode of transportation in our system in 2023, accounting for over 242 million boardings or 63% of all boardings system-wide. This represents a 19% increase over 2022 levels. Bus boardings recovery in 2023 was at 88%.

*Table 1: Annual Year-over-year Ridership Growth by Mode and Average Daily Boardings by Day of Week, 2022 to 2023*

Transit Mode	 System Wide	 Bus	 Expo & Millennium Lines	 Canada Line	 SeaBus	 West Coast Express	 HandyDART
Ridership Growth (2023)	+20%	+19%	+21%	+20%	+20%	+47%	+23%
Average Daily Boardings (Mon-Fri)	1,208,000	752,000	311,000	120,000	15,000	5,300	4,600
Average Daily Boardings (Sat)	891,000	538,000	237,000	100,000	15,000	-	1,600
Average Daily Boardings (Sun/Hol)	721,000	443,000	183,000	84,000	11,000	-	1,400

Ridership on the Expo and Millennium lines increased by 21% in 2023 compared to 2022, exceeding 100 million total boardings. The Canada Line also experienced a similar increase of 20%, bringing total boardings across all three lines to over 140 million. SkyTrain boardings recovery in 2023 was 87% for all three lines combined.

SeaBus service saw a 20% increase in ridership compared to 2022, reaching over 5 million boardings in 2023. This brings SeaBus recovery to 84%.

West Coast Express (WCE) boardings increased by 47% in 2023 compared to 2022, surpassing 1.3 million boardings annually. This marks a significant milestone, with WCE ridership recovery now at 54%, exceeding 50% for the first time. The slower recovery of the WCE compared to other modes is likely due to its focus on commuter travel, which continues to be affected by work-from-home trends.

## With limited resources, reallocating available transit resources is the primary way we can support and respond to faster ridership growth across the region.

Growing ridership continues to put pressure on our system. We strategically reallocate transit service hours through quarterly service changes to respond to changing needs and travel patterns. In 2023, we reallocated 121,000 hours of total service hours from frequent services (or just over 2% of total service hours) to meet demands in different parts of the region.

Reallocations of service hours in 2023 have shown that demand exists around the region for more frequent and reliable transit. On average, routes and times on weekdays that received service improvements through reallocation saw a 30% growth in ridership between fall 2022 and fall 2023, while those with unchanged service grew by 11%. Examples of where we reallocated service hours in 2023 include:

- **Route 335 Newton/Surrey Central:**  
We added 11% more trips on weekdays and saw a 25% increase in boardings
- **Route 430 Metrotown/Brighthouse Station:**  
We added 3% more trips on weekdays and saw a 14% increase in boardings
- **Route 321 Surrey Central/White Rock:**  
We added 8% more trips on weekends and holidays and saw a 26% increase in boardings

### WHAT IS SERVICE REALLOCATION?

Without new funding to enable a net increase in bus service hours across the region, service reallocations are one of the key tools available to try to address changing and growing customer demands across our region. Service reallocations are taken only from frequent services and involves identifying routes and time periods where there is available capacity and reducing the amount of service provided. We use these extra transit service resources and strategically redistribute them to higher demand routes and time periods.

In 2023, we also saw the benefits of recent work with our municipal partners to optimize the efficiency of the bus network, like reducing and relocating low-usage bus stops and creating more dedicated road space for transit. These changes made transit faster and more reliable and freed up valuable service hours that can be reallocated where demand is high.

For example, optimizing bus stops and adding dedicated transit priority measures on routes 4 UBC/Powell and 7 Dunbar/Nanaimo in 2022 resulted in a five-minute reduction in round-trip travel times on these routes in 2023. This optimization freed up service hours, which were reinvested back into the system for further service enhancements. An example of this reinvestment was in the introduction of the new peak-hour route 80, serving the rapidly growing River District along Marine Drive in the City of Vancouver.

Despite these positive outcomes, we are reaching the limits of what benefits service reallocations can provide before affecting the reliability and usefulness of other parts of our frequent transit network.

## While strong ridership is encouraging, continued population growth has led to significant overcrowding across the system.

While ridership growth in 2023 was a positive indicator of public transit's value to our region, it also highlighted the limitations of what we can do with available funding and resources. Despite overall ridership still being lower than in 2019, more routes experienced significant overcrowding. Compared to 2022, over 30 bus routes saw a doubling in the rate of overcrowded trips during 2023. In Fall 2023, overcrowding levels generally mirrored Fall 2019, with overcrowding occurring on around 10% of all trips. However, in December 2023 overcrowding rates surpassed 2019 levels, highlighting the pressure being exerted on our system.

**An overcrowded trip is when the number of passengers on a transit vehicle exceeds the vehicle target capacity at any point during the trip.**

On overcrowded trips, for at least part of the trip:

- All seats are full and standing space is fully occupied
- Accessing the doors may be difficult for some passengers
- Standing passengers need to step off the vehicle to let others exit
- Pass-ups are likely at some stops



Some key examples of overcrowding across our network include<sup>2</sup>:

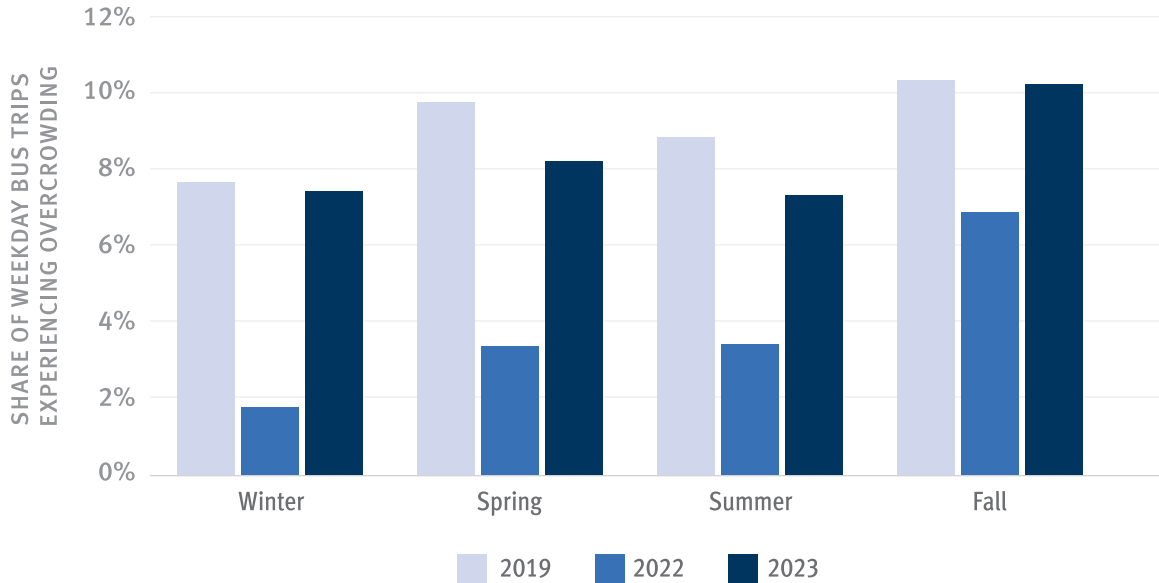
- **Route 49 Metrotown/UBC:** Almost 60% of weekday peak hour, peak direction trips on this route were overcrowded, highlighting the need for additional service during peak periods to serve residents, workers, and students during key commute times.
- **Route 321 Surrey Central/White Rock:** Overcrowding affected 56% of weekday peak hour, peak direction trips on this route, further emphasizing the impact of ridership growth in the Southeast sub-region.
- **Route 335 Newton/Surrey Central:** Overcrowding occurred on 35% of weekday and weekend trips, highlighting strong demand for transit on all days of the week and throughout the day.

<sup>2</sup> Overcrowding rates are for the months of September and October, which saw the highest rates of overcrowding in 2023. Weekday peak hours are 6-9am and 3-6pm. Peak direction refers to the busiest direction of travel for the route in each hour.



Overcrowding is a concern for all who use our system, especially those with accessibility needs or who may require additional space to travel safely and comfortably. Our customers have continued to report their concerns about overcrowding across our network through Customer Service Performance Reports. Between 2022 and 2023, customer ratings on experiencing an uncrowded bus or SkyTrain trip dropped from 7.3 to 7.1 out of 10.

Figure 4: Average Weekday Overcrowding on Bus, 2019, 2022, 2023





## Looking ahead to 2024

**Our region is facing increasing pressures from population growth and overcrowding. New funding starting in 2024 will help address some short-term needs, but long-term solutions are needed to ensure our transit system can meet the needs of a growing region.**

Unprecedented population growth coupled with increasing ridership in 2023 is overwhelming our existing infrastructure and system, and our customers are feeling the effects.

If current trends continue, overcrowding on our transit system will double in Surrey and increase 2.5 times in Vancouver by the fall of 2025. The Province of British Columbia's transit-oriented development initiatives, introduced in 2023 to promote new housing around transit, are a positive step but are also expected to increase transit demand at and along existing transit hubs and corridors in the coming years, further straining our transit infrastructure.

The good news is changes are coming to help address short-term needs and pressures on our system. TransLink's 2024 Investment Plan will include new funding to deliver investments like increasing service on over 60 bus routes across the region, extending evening hours on over 10 bus routes, and increasing service on the Canada Line, among others. New funding unlocked by the 2024 Investment Plan will help reduce our reliance on reallocating service to meet customer needs, as we did in 2023.

While these are steps in the right direction, the 2024 Investment Plan is not enough to meet the long-term needs of our growing region.

TransLink and the Mayors' Council are actively working with senior government partners to secure a new funding solution that will make it easier to provide a regional transportation system that is safe, reliable, and accessible to everyone.