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# TRANSIT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

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2022-2026



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION/METRA TRANSIT SYSTEM  
COLUMBUS CONSOLIDATED GOVERNMENT  
Columbus, GA

# TRANSIT DEVELOPMENT PLAN (TDP)

Department of Transportation/METRA Transit System

Columbus Consolidated Government

Columbus/Muscogee County

2022 - 2026

## Plan Purpose

The **Columbus-Muscogee County Transit Development Plan (TDP)** intends to chart past and current community growth and development with the goal of using this information to project the future public transit needs of the Columbus/Muscogee County area. In doing so, the TDP intends to anticipate and plan for those needs.

## METRA's Mission

METRA's will continue to meet the public transportation needs of its citizens and those commuting into the Columbus Muscogee County. The mission and commitment of METRA Transit System is to provide safe, reliable, dependable, and cost-effective transit services with a professional team of employees dedicated to our customers' needs and committed to excellence. In order to accomplish this mission, METRA follows Federal Transit Administration (FTA) regulations, the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) requirements, the Title VI and Limited English Proficiency Program (LEP) requirements, Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) and Affirmative Action (AA) laws, the National Transit Database (NTD) Section 15 requirements, and Sections 5303/5307/5309 program requirements to facilitate transportation. METRA operates with special care given to improving the mobility of low-income individuals and families in our community. In addition, METRA continues to focus on preparing for the future transit needs of our residents.

Keeping up with the changing dynamics of our community means that we have to listen to our entire community and take note of spoken and unspoken needs. We will continue to maintain a stable budget that is doable and continue to work within our means while addressing those needs. METRA makes every effort to achieve the most cost-effective approach that will benefit its customers the most. METRA responds to service requests by developing maps, projecting costs, and doing the research required to determine if a requested service is warranted or not. METRA also examines if there is available funding to achieve this request.

## Community Growth

Growth in the Columbus, Georgia urbanized area is continuing, despite the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting economic downturn, because the positive economic changes of the past continue to spur growth in the area. These changes included: the relocation of the Armory Division from Fort Knox to Fort Benning, the opening of the



Kia car plant, downtown expansion of the Columbus State University's campus including student housing, the expansion of Columbus Technical College, the National Cash Register's (NCR) relocation from Dayton, Ohio, the creation of a whitewater rafting course on the Chattahoochee River, well planned and promoted recreational and entertainment venues that occurred in the central business entertainment district, the redevelopment of historic buildings including the Eagle Phenix Mill which was converted into middle/high end residential loft apartments, and many other developments.

The Columbus downtown area, which is branded as "Uptown Columbus," continues to be revitalized and redeveloped. Two hotels are currently being constructed along Broadway and new small businesses continue to open or relocated to that area, spurring further growth. The city/county consolidated government, the Columbus Consolidated Government or CCG, has recently completed several streetscape revitalization projects and plans to implement major infrastructure upgrades and expansions in the future to accommodate the area's growth.

Community growth extends and follows several major travel corridors in Columbus/Muscogee County: Interstate 185, Macon Road SR 29, 2nd Avenue, Veterans Parkway, South Lumpkin Road, the North Bypass US 80, the Chattahoochee Riverwalk, and the alternative walking/jogging/biking trails located throughout the city. Columbus/Muscogee County continues to be an employment hub (Ft. Benning, TSYS, and AFLAC to name a few), a regional medical treatment center (Piedmont Regional Hospital and St. Francis Hospital), and a recreational destination (the Columbus Civic Center, Chattahoochee Riverwalk, and Chattahoochee whitewater rafting). If you lived in Columbus twenty years ago and came back today, you may find yourself thinking "wow, Columbus has changed a lot and for the better," or "this town is a wonderful place to live and work."

As the public transit system for Columbus-Muscogee County, METRA Transit System continues to plan for these changes in our community, addressing any transit needs from the community that may arise.

## Helping the Environment

Columbus/Muscogee County has worked consistently with the Federal Environmental Protection Agency and Georgia environmental agencies; public and private corporate partners for the expressed purpose of maintaining attainment designation for air quality. METRA worked with local large truck agencies on a committee to develop a local resolution which would set a reasonable idling time limits for large trucks, heavy duty vehicles and buses. This action was positively received citywide.

METRA has filled its fuel tanks with clean diesel since 2006. City staff continue to research the most cost-effective method available enhance air quality. This research resulted with METRA contracting for hybrid electric/diesel buses. The hybrid bus contract will further reduce the fuel emissions for the fleet. Four hybrid buses were constructed and delivered in FY2013. METRA will continue to research cost-effective ways of implementing alternative energy vehicles that help our environment.

## Data Collection

Origin and destination travel surveys are conducted annually. Travel surveys yield definitive results, affirming routes and identifying needed service adjustments. When collecting data, bus operator input is critical because operators know the pick-up and destination patterns of METRA's customers the best and operators are able to tell if an event, such as a business relocation or new business opening, will affect our ridership. Meeting the community's travel demands is foremost goal for our data collection. This goal is in mind when METRA staff develop grants, perform bus maintenance, and train bus operators. Transit development and a full understanding of the transportation needs of riders today and into the future is part of METRA's daily work life. As such, METRA is determined to use the data collected in order to increase connectivity within Columbus while continuing to develop METRA as viable and efficient alternative to driving individual personal vehicles.

## History of Area Transit Commuting Patterns

Public Transportation has been a part of the fabric of the region since 1868 and the need for public transportation as an integrated component of the transportation network is continuing to increase. While the need for public transportation is increasing, funding is a parallel challenge that has to be maintained in order to keep up with transit demand. Nationally, the commitment to public transportation is being seen in increased funding opportunities and in the transportation funding legislations. Transportation is the lifeblood that moves the country, the state, and hometowns like Columbus.

## HIGHLIGHTS OF PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION IN THE REGION:

-1868 Columbus Railroad Company provides service.

-1921 Howard Bus Company initiated service to Ft. Benning.

-1924 Columbus Transportation Bus Company incorporated to provide service to Columbus and Phenix City.

-1930's and 1940's Columbus Transportation Bus & Howard Bus Companies provide services.

-1936 Georgia Power Company Electric streetcar facilities phased out.

-1945 to 1960 suburbanization, increased auto travel, decreasing revenues and increasing operating decline in transit ridership.

-1978 Howard Bus lines goes out business sells assets to the City of Columbus; METRA created to provide regular fixed route and complementary paratransit service.

-1978 to 1989 METRA provides service to Columbus and Phenix City.

-1989 Phenix City begins service to its area through the Phenix City Express (PEX).

-2000 Construction of city owned garage/park and ride location.

-2004 Construction of city garage/park and ride location.

-2005 Fixed route buses all have bike racks.

-2006 Construction of city garage/park and ride location.

-2006 METRA fleet using clean diesel fuels only.

-2010 Rails to Trails an alternative transportation system; walking, jogging trail connects to METRA fixed routes at several locations.

-2020 The Health & Human Services Shuttle (HHSS) begins operation. This new service directly serves both Health Department locations in Columbus. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, METRA implements social distancing policies, increased bus and facility sanitation, and temporarily implements a Saturday schedule for weekdays.



Bus operators stand in front of Columbus Transportation Company (CTC) bus. Columbus, GA. C. 1937.

## Transit Challenges

METRA's challenges mirror that of other public transit systems. They include the following issues:

- Adjusting services to achieve a more cost-effective evening service schedule.
- Designing services that meet the needs of our dedicated ridership.
- Educating and informing potential riders who have never used public transit.
- Increasing access to public transit in our community.
- Adjusting service frequency and wait time between buses to meet demand.
- Maintaining equipment and facilities.
- Minimizing costs while maximizing service.
- The increasing costs of diesel fuel, oil, and replacement parts.

## Service and Facilities Description

METRA was incorporated as a department of the city government in the 70's. The goal remains to provide public transportation services to the Columbus/Muscogee County urbanized area. METRA provides fixed route transit service with ten (10) fixed routes and complementary paratransit service (for individuals who are disabled and unable to use the fixed route service) within a  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile radius of the fixed routes. Service begins at 4:30 a.m., with last line up at 8:30 p.m. METRA operates six (6) days a week, Monday through Saturday. On average, METRA provides over one million, two hundred thousand passenger trips annually.

METRA operates a single campus facility located at 814 Linwood Boulevard near the Columbus Central Business District and adjacent to regional medical facilities and state human resources offices. The one-campus location houses METRA's administration and maintenance buildings along with the bus Transfer Center. The Transfer Center has covered bays for each route, an indoor and outdoor waiting area, ticket window, and other customer conveniences. There is a commercial bay for taxis, interstate buses and private non-emergency transit vehicles.

## Facilities Maintenance Plan

The following section highlights the Administration Building

Ongoing Projects (provided as needed):

- Plumbing, repairs and updates made as needed.

- The facility is cleaned daily, and the exterior property is maintained.
- Interior and exterior property is repaired or replaced as needed.
- Controlled access doors and gates increasing security, ongoing.
- Floor tiles and carpet, upkeep and repairs as needed, ongoing.
- Roof, repair and replaced administration and maintenance buildings, 2011.
- ADA Ramp (installed 2003 along with access sidewalk).
- Security System for building (upgraded to automatics sliding doors).
- Smoke detectors and alarms (installed since inception of building maintained per code by City) annual.
- Each building has AED equipment, battery replacements annual.
- Automated Vehicle Location system for route information and security 2020-2021.

## Transfer Center

### Projects:

- 2021-2022: Planned customer area, customer bathroom upgrades, and employee bathrooms upgrades.
- Roof inspected and repairs conducted when needed.
- Benches and customer seating, monitor and update as needed. Next replacement planned for 2021.
- Concrete walkway monitor and repair when needed.
- Plumbing, repairs and updates made as needed.
- Oil separator, engineering inspection they will recommend repairs when needed
- Automatic gates monitored and repaired or replaced as needed.
- Security system/cameras, additional cameras added as needed.
- Cameras repaired/replaced.
- Bus bays and customer walkway inspected, and repairs made as needed.
- Light fixture changes and repairs made as needed.
- AC/Heating to be replaced in 10 years.
- Parking lot striping, update again in 2-3 years, based on use.

## Upper Shop

### Projects:

- Floor lifts, monitor and replace when needed.
- Electric door (capital budget).
- Plumbing, repairs and updates made as needed.
- Security cameras (installed 2005, 2006, 2007, and 2010).
- AC/Heating replaced in 2010.

## Lower Shop

### Projects:

- Floor lifts, monitor and replace when needed.
- Electric Gate installed 2008 and updated 2010.
- Plumbing, repairs and updates made as needed.
- AC/Heating replace in 10-12 years.
- Bus Wash (to be replaced in 2021).
- Security Cameras (installed 2004, 2005, 2010).
- Vault unit (updated 2001).
- Vault equipment updated 2010.
- Electricity monitor.
- Fuel tanks (updated 2002).
- Fuel pumps (updated in 2009).

## Bus Parking Lot

### Projects:

- Resurfacing 2006 and 2011.
- Security lighting 2008.
- Security cameras 2007, 2008, and 2010.

## Routes

### Projects:

- 15 replacement bus shelters, 17 replacement bus benches, and numerous trash cans placed on the fixed routes throughout the entire system

METRA has a working Facilities, Safety and Security Team that reviews all facilities annually. The team monitors the facilities and recommends updates and changes as needed. The recommended updates and changes are the initial basis of the capital improvement budget for the coming year. Each building and division is represented on the team. The safety team is headed by the Maintenance Manager.

[Please see exhibit “A” for current Facilities Maintenance Schedule].

## Annual Bus Replacement Schedule

METRA’s approved Bus Replacement Schedule is included in the Metropolitan Planning Organization’s Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The bus replacement schedule relies on the Federal requirements for minimal useful life age and or mileage FTA C 9030.1C.9. Capital equipment is disposed of at the annual City auction. The schedule is updated annually and approved at the MPO level annually.

[Please see exhibit “B” for current Bus Replacement Schedule].

## Service Delivery

METRA service delivery focuses on operational strategies that will improve and enhance the delivery of public transportation services in Columbus/Muscogee County.

### Fixed Routes

- Provide 30-minute headways for fixed route buses.
- Consider fixed routes to undeserved areas as the need arises (currently serving all census tracts and housing developments in this category).
- Extend current service hours to enable 3<sup>rd</sup> shift workers to get to work (currently workers can get home on the 4:30 am buses).
- Expand fixed routes to panhandle of the county as population density increases and ridership can be supported.

### Extend Saturday Service

- Expand paratransit service to complement fixed route changes.

### Access

- Continue coordination with City for construction of curb cuts and sidewalks to increase access at bus stops and shelters.

- Replace paratransit buses with low floor buses (most of paratransit buses have lifts for disabled customers, more request from customers topping 650 pounds).

### Transfer Center

- Inter-city access with 3 park and ride locations for commuters coming into Columbus/Muscogee County to work, inter-city access. The inter-city access plan has been approved by the Regional Roundtable for the statewide transportation planning in Georgia. The entire regional plan will be voted on in 2013.
- Construct park-n-ride locations for commuters coming into Muscogee County; north – Harris County, south – Chattahoochee County and east – Talbot County.

### Enhancements

- Continue to add shelters and bus stops with benches.
- Continue to English/Spanish translation of transit information.

### Outreach

- Continued community involvement outreach with seniors, youth/schools, and other targeted community groups.
- Continued involvement with disabled community groups in order to know and meet their changing needs.
- Continued attendance Hispanic Outreach Committee.
- Continue to participate in area career days.
- Continue partnership with at risk students working with them on subjects like; how to ride a bus, potential career opportunities, and public transit as a way of life.
- Continue partnering with the biking and pedestrian community as part of inter-modalism.
- Continuing partnering with the Clean Air Campaign.
- Fostering working relationship with private non-medical transportation providers, the Veterans Administration transportation unit, area cabs, Phenix City Express (PEX), Columbus State Transportation, and others.
- Continue to partner with non-profits and public agencies:
  - Georgia Department of Human Resources (GDHS);
  - Department of Parks and Recreation;
  - Muscogee County School District (MCSD);
  - Homeless Task Force, Enrichment Services (Head Start, Weatherization and other federal programs);
  - New Horizons (mental health);

- Workforce Investment (WI) summer youth work location;
- The Georgia Health Department;
- Georgia Department of Labor (GDL);
- Juvenile Courts (students detail buses on Saturdays supervised by JC Correctional Office);
- State Courts (authorized site for Community Service Workers assigned by the courts);
- Breakfast Buddies (mentoring of elementary school children at designated school);
- Youth Advisory Council (YAC) leadership for students 6<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grades;
- Mayor's Committee for Persons with Disabilities;
- Public Safety (Police, Sheriff, Marshall, Fire Department and Emergency Management Services) emergency transportation during crisis evacuations;
- National Night Out supports neighborhood watch programs;
- Anti-Copper Theft Task Force Program;
- Ronald McDonald House, House of Mercy, and United Way (donations);
- Annual Communities in Motion Day, public information.

### Sustainability Efforts

- Continue efforts to maintain “green” buses and facilities. METRA has successfully partnered with the Georgia Clean Air Campaign and was designed an official partner in December 2011 by demonstrating a commitment toward cleaner air.
- Continue to recycle fluids (oil and lubricants) according to EPA standards.
- Continue to maintain underground fuel tanks to EPA standards.
- Continue to recycle/eco-disposal of paper, cans, and plastic.
- Upgrade lighting and fixtures replacing older incandescent lighting when possible.
- Upgrade buses to hybrid or alternative fuel buses as funding permits.

### Congestion Management

- Mass transportation during emergencies.
- Congestion relief at citywide events (e.g., annual county fair).

## Financial Plan

METRA's fiscally balanced financial plan is a part of the approved Transportation Improvement Plan and the State Transportation Improvement Plan. The plan is updated annually. The plan is provided in exhibits "B" and "C".

## Conclusion

The consensus of METRA's Transit Development Program activities is to support the implementation of activities and strategies that foster the transit service needs of the city/county and those of the commuters into the county. In addition, METRA recognizes the need for staying abreast of the current Federal, State and Local requirements of public mass transportation.

The bottom line, the TDP sets down a working framework of how transit has evolved from its earliest years and into the future, toward providing safe, efficient and cost effective transit service that meets the diverse needs of individuals and groups traveling to and throughout Columbus/Muscogee County. These goals are accomplished within the framework of funding, regulatory requirements, and local decisions that are congruent with other transportation planning efforts.

# Exhibit A: Bus Replacement Schedule

BUS REPLACEMENT SCHEDULE												
Department of Transportation/ METRA												8/7/2020
BUS MODEL (TOTAL FLEET)	Annual Element	YR1	YR2	YR3	YR4	YR5	YR6	YR7	YR8	YR9	YR10	YR11
	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26	FY27	FY28	FY29	FY30	FY31
NEW VEHICLES	7	16	1	0	0	3	5	3	5	1	2	5
TOTAL VEHICLE	45	49	49	48	47	46	46	45	45	45	45	45
PEAK USAGE	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28
CONTINGENCY	6	8	9	6	6	6	8	8	8	8	8	8
SPARE	12	13	12	12	12	12	10	9	9	9	9	9
SPARE RATIO	43%	46%	43%	43%	43%	43%	36%	32%	32%	32%	32%	32%
VEHICLES RETIRED	8	12	2	1	1	4	5	4	5	1	2	5
BUS MODEL (Fixed Route)	Annual Element	YR1	YR2	YR3	YR4	YR5	YR6	YR7	YR8	YR9	YR10	YR11
	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26	FY27	FY28	FY29	FY30	FY31
NEW VEHICLES	5	9	1	0	0	1	3	1	3	0	1	2
2002 Chance Trolley 30'	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
2008 LF Gillig 35'	1	X										
2009 LF Gillig 35'	4	1	1	X								
2010 LF Gillig Trolley 30'	4	3	3	3	2	1	X					
2011 LF Gillig 35'	4	3	3	3	3	2	X					
2012 Orion 35'	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	X			
2016 LF New Flyer 35'	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	2
2017 LF Gillig 30'	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
2018 LF Gillig 35'	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
2019 LF Gillig	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
2020 LF New Flyer		5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
2021			9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
2022				1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
2023												
2024												
2025							1	1	1	1	1	1
2026								2	2	2	2	2
2027									1	1	1	1
2028										3	3	3
2029												
2030												1
TOTAL VEHICLES	32	34	35	34	33	32	32	32	32	32	32	32
PEAK USAGE	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18
CONTINGENCY	6	8	9	6	6	6	8	8	8	8	8	8
SPARE	8	8	8	8	8	8	6	6	6	6	6	6
SPARE RATIO	44%	44%	44%	44%	44%	44%	33%	33%	33%	33%	33%	33%
VEHICLES RETIRED	6	7	1	1	1	2	3	1	3	0	1	2

BUS MODEL (DEMAND RESPONSE)	Annual Element	YR1	YR2	YR3	YR4	YR5	YR6	YR7	YR8	YR9	YR10	YR11
	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26	FY27	FY28	FY29	FY30	FY31
NEW VEHICLES	2	7	0	0	0	2	2	2	2	1	1	3
2014 Goshen	2	X										
2015 Goshen	3	X										
2016 Goshen (TSPLOST)	1	1	X									
2019 LF Champion	5	5	5	5	5	3	1	X				
2020		2	2	2	2	2	2	X				
2021			7	7	7	7	7	7	5	4	3	X
2023												
2024												
2025							2	2	2	2	2	2
2026								2	2	2	2	2
2027									2	2	2	2
2028										2	2	2
2029											1	1
2030												1
<b>TOTAL VEHICLE</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>PEAK USAGE</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>SPARE</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>SPARE RATIO</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>30%</b>
<b>VEHICLES RETIRED</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>