

FY20

A YEAR LIKE NO OTHER



A LETTER FROM THE ADMINISTRATOR

DEAR BRTA STAKEHOLDERS

I have worked in public transportation administration for the past 18 years. Public transit, in general, has experienced more than its fair share of ups and downs. That said, I've never seen anything like the roller coaster ride of 2020 and hope never to again.

Customer fares are responsible for a small portion of our revenue. We rely on federal, state, and community funding for our annual Operation and Capital projects.

If you'll recall, our 2019 Annual Report was entitled PUBLIC TRANSIT: The Future is Here. I discussed the Governor's Commission on the Future of Transportation.

The Commission's report affirmed the importance of public transportation to the Commonwealth's future, prioritizing investment in the Commonwealth's 15 regional transit authorities (RTAs).

We started Fiscal Year 2020 with plenty of optimism and with good reason. In fact, we did receive more funding in 2020, both from the Commonwealth and Federal Transit Administration. We were able to continue what was originally a self-funded pilot program into expanded evening service. This meant shift workers at employers like WalMart could get to their jobs. We were also able to expand evening pilot service to both north and south county.



Actions like these contributed to fixed route ridership trending 5.4% higher with revenue trending 11.95% higher. We felt like we could get started exploring some of the innovations we'd like to build into the BRTA System.

Big bus, fixed route service is ideal to service dense population centers. Could we offer an on-demand service in addition to our fixed route service that would operate similarly to our paratransit program or Uber/Lyft to service more rural areas?

Then in March, everyone's world changed. On March 11, the World Health Organization announced we were in the midst of a global pandemic. The novel coronavirus or COVID-19 would soon impact all of our lives. On March 23, Governor Baker announced restrictions on non-essential travel, restrictions that would be enforced until April 28. Stay-at-home orders were issued. Only essential workers were exempt from these orders.

Essential workers included health care/public health and human services workers; law enforcement, public safety and first responders; food and agriculture; energy; water & wastewater treatment; transportation and logistics. Our drivers were needed to get employees to work and customers to

essential destinations like the grocery store, pharmacy, or medical appointments.

Throughout Berkshire County, bus service proved to be critically important to get many of these essential workers to their jobs. Given the stay-at-home orders and widespread shutdowns, ridership and revenue for both fixed route and paratransit fell pretty dramatically: fixed route ridership was down 58%; paratransit down 67%. Revenue declines were 52.2% and 76% respectively when compared to FY2019.

2020 was a year like no other. I'd like to close by thanking our dedicated drivers, mechanics, maintenance, supervisors, call center staff, and administrative staff for rallying during unprecedented times and circumstances. You and all of the essential workers will be remembered as the heroes during the COVID-19 pandemic.

My regards,

Robert Malnati



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TRANSPORTATION: THE BIG PICTURE



Getting people where they need to go is more complicated than you might imagine. Consider the Berkshires, with a service area the size of Rhode Island and where a considerable number of residents don't own cars. Getting residents where they want and need to go, when they need to get there, takes considerable planning.

The same holds true for visitors to the Berkshires who may not be accustomed to a rural public transportation system.

Transportation planning requires thinking outside the box. In areas like the Berkshires, a fixed route system can't fill all of the needs of residents and visitors.

BRTA was an early advocate for thinking differently about public transportation and advocated for the creation of a Transportation Management Association (TMA). 1Berkshire is another founding member. For the past 18 months, the TMA has been looking at how transportation impacts our regional economy.

Benjamin Lamb, 1Berkshire's Economic Development Director, is working to build a thriving Berkshire economy. To do so

requires a robust transportation system. According to Lamb, building an economy and a transportation system that meets the region's needs is not the work of any one agency. It's a highly collaborative effort that involves partners from a variety of sectors.

As BRTA Administrator Robert Malnati has made clear, Massachusetts' RTAs don't have all the necessary resources to address the full scope of the region's transportation needs. With the everchanging state and federal funding, combined with COVID related mandates limiting mobility, BRTA plays an important role in providing transportation for the "durable riders" to get to work, to school, to medical appointments, and to employment centers.



The TMA also considers the impact of transportation on tourism, a key regional economic driver. People come from all over the country—in fact, all over the world—to visit the Berkshires’ world class arts, culture, and entertainment venues. How do these visitors who infuse millions of dollars into the regional economy get around? By the same token, how can the region meet the public transit expectations of an influx of new residents coming from large cities?

Prior to March 2020 and the onset of the pandemic, Berkshire employers were having a tough time finding enough workers to add additional shifts to increase their capacity. One barrier for most potential employees was the lack of late-night bus service. Workers could ride the bus to work but there was no service to get home. Fortunately, grant funding made it possible to launch a pilot program with evening hours on four routes, helping to mitigate some of the challenges. The most successful pilot evening route connects downtown Pittsfield to the Berkshire Crossing retail center.

Beyond getting people to work and visitors to arts and culture venues, it’s important to look at transportation through a social justice lens. Thanks to legislative assistance from Senator Adam Hinds, the TMA was able to conduct a feasibility study to look at the transportation needs and the region’s

available resources—buses, paratransit vehicles, micro-transit, and ride share programs and the region’s available technology.

The TMA believes that by investing in a technological buildout of BRTA’s existing technology platform the group can begin to put the pieces together to align fixed route, paratransit, corporate van fleets, and ride share into a transportation model that reflects the needs of Berkshire residents, visitors, and business owners.

Having a built-out transportation plan will be critically important to jumpstart the region’s post-COVID economy. This is important work that will require additional partners, bringing fresh perspectives and additional resources in order to implement a complex plan. TMA members believe our region can meet the challenge.



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BRTA CHAMPIONS

MORE THAN A RIDE ON THE BUS

During the pandemic, most of us have developed a greater awareness of the people we depend on to help keep our lives on an even keel. They're officially classified as essential workers. Meet one of them, BRTA bus driver Anne Furey.

Anne has enjoyed every day of her 8 years and 5 months as a driver. She says the customers are what she loves most about the job. During these trying times, she tries to make eye contact with each of them as they get on the bus. Even though she and the customers are masked, she can sense if they are nervous about riding during the pandemic. She tells them to relax, find a seat, and enjoy the ride.

Many of her regulars become part of the BRTA community. Anne and her fellow drivers get to know these customers and their routines. Consider one gentleman who recently had a stroke. Anne happens to know his family and regularly checks in on his recovery. She says he's making progress rebuilding his strength.

Anne and her fellow drivers are impressed by this customer's cheerful outlook and sense of purpose—one that includes the BRTA. When he lost his wife, he decided he could be of help to his sister-in-law. He now rides the bus to run errands for her. He says he'll continue until the day he dies.

Anne says during the pandemic there are customers who ride the bus just to get out. She gives everyone a kind word and a relaxing ride to take their minds off their worries. She estimates 75% of her riders express their appreciation. She thinks they understand she sincerely cares about their wellbeing.



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CUSTOMER'S THOUGHTS ON THE PANDEMIC

Governor Baker's stay at home order and restrictions on non-essential travel issued on March 23rd was in effect until April 28. BRTA conducted a survey of customers (from May 6 until June 1) to get a sense of their concerns.

Nearly 64% of our customers believed the region was ready to reopen. This was a significant finding given that 72% of our customers were not able to work from home. When asked if they felt safe riding the bus, 70% indicated they felt safe. Nearly 62% believed that, overall, the BRTA handled

the pandemic well. Customers did indicate that the BRTA could have done a better job communicating. We believe our new website makes it much easier for our customers to find important information.





60%

continued
riding BRTA

72%

are not working
from home

83%

will not be working
from home

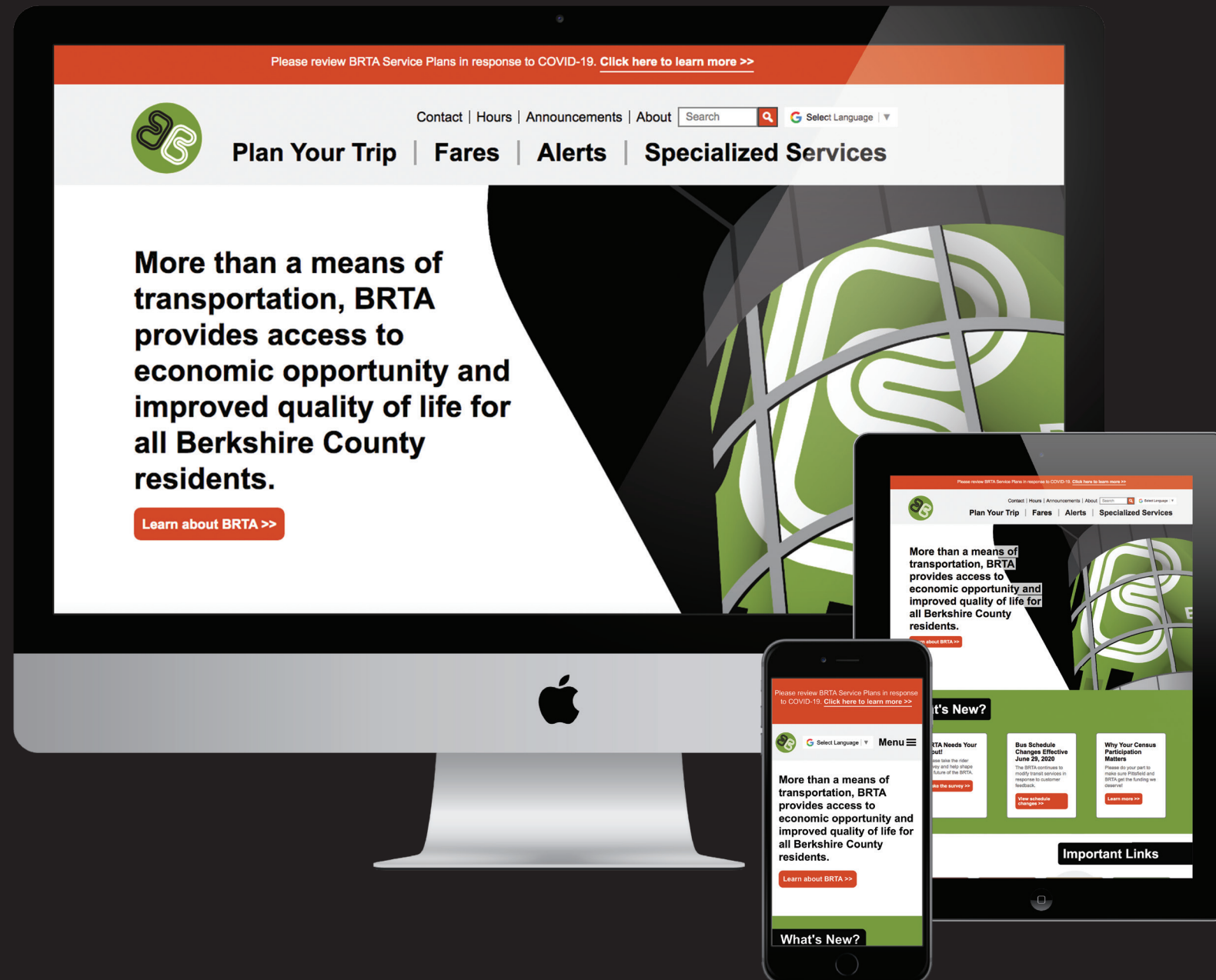


During the pandemic, the largest
concern of customers was not
sanitizing or safety precautions,
but **bus schedule changes**.

69%



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FIND YOUR WAY

AROUND OUR NEW WEBSITE

Thanks to monies awarded to BRTA through a state grant, we were finally able to fulfill a long-standing need. We were able to design, build, and launch our new website during fiscal year 2020.

WWW.BERKSHIRERTA.COM



THE PROCESS

The project started with a discovery process.

Working with the design team, we identified our goals for the site: delivering a better visitor experience, making the navigation more intuitive, and building on a platform that allowed for easy editing of content. We also ranked content according to its importance.

The design team took all of our input and built an interactive site map. We were convinced our first two goals could be achieved after exploring the site map. From review of site designs and refreshed content to giving final approval to the fully built site, the work was completed in just under 90 days. The new website makes it much easier to edit content to improve communication with our customers.



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Now, **CUSTOMERS** can:

- **PLAN** trips with a schedule and route tool and printable schedules
- **TRACK** BRTA buses in real time
- **LEARN** all about fares including who gets reduced fares and free rides
- **FIND** out how to purchase Charlie Cards—reusable, reloadable bus cards
- **CHECK** on service advisories and other important alerts
- **LEARN** about specialized services such as paratransit support and travel training

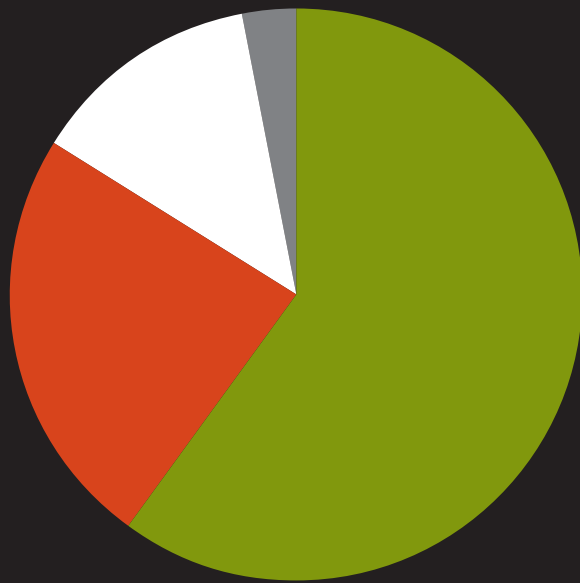
VENDORS who work with BRTA, and those companies that would like to, can easily access Requests for Proposal on our new site. The community at large can visit the site to get news and updates as well important notices about upcoming public meetings. The minutes of all of our board meetings are available on the site as well.

We invite you to take a look at our new site. We'd love to hear your feedback.

FY 2020

THE FINANCIALS

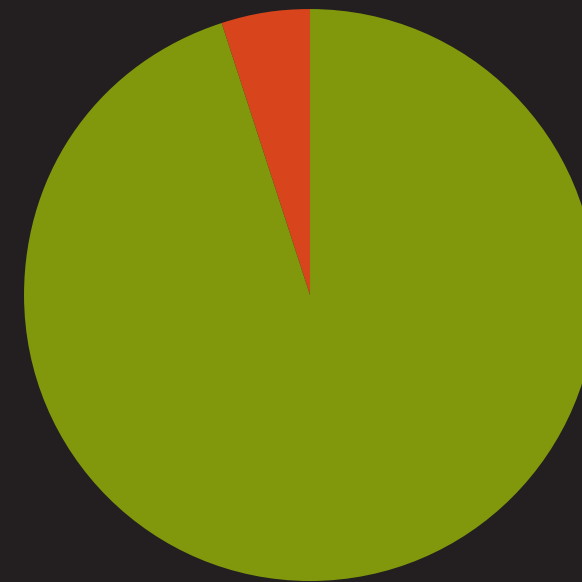
Total Operating +
Non-operating Revenues
of **\$16,506,616** by Source



- Transportation revenues 60%*
- State & local operating grants 24%
- Federal operating grants 13%
- Other 3%

* includes HST Brokerage revenue

Total Operating +
Non-operating Expenses
of **\$16,514,697** by Source



- Transportation services 95%
- Administration 5%



Fixed Route Ridership

429,730



Paratransit Ridership

22,561

BROKERAGE TRIP HISTORY

DESTINATION

FY20

FY19

DMA (Department of Medical Assistance)	189,745	211,374
DDS (Department of Developmental Services)	11,676	107,551
DPH (Department of Public Health)	3,126	4,231
MRC (Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission)	260	219
DMH (Department of Mental Health)	3,033	3,666
TOTAL	272,521	327,041

BRTA TRIP HISTORY

FY20

FY19

BIKES	4,400	5,645
MOBILITY DEVICES	2,347	1,737
TOTAL	6,747	7,382



THANK YOU

ESSENTIAL WORKERS



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