

CROSSING PATHS



BRTA FY23
ANNUAL REPORT



RIDERS + STAKEHOLDERS

A NOTE FROM THE ADMINISTRATOR

I had a feeling FY2023 was going to present some unexpected twists and turns. And it just so happens that we ended up working on some exciting new projects.

I decided it was time for BRTA to make some resolutions. These resolutions had to do with organizational improvement. We asked ourselves how we could improve our operations to benefit our loyal customers and our region. These resolutions shaped our actions for the year.

As of July 3, 2022, our resolutions were to:


Grow ridership beyond pre-Covid levels.

Maintain stable staffing for operators, mechanics, and maintenance crews sufficient to meet our daily requirements.

Place new, large, hybrid electric buses in service and help reduce our carbon footprint.

Connect our service with that of other RTAs.

Let's start with ridership. In FY2023 BRTA was just 3% shy of pre-Covid ridership numbers. Route cancellations caused by workforce shortages factored into not achieving our goal. Workforce shortages is not just a BRTA problem, it's a national problem. For us, there's a shortage of people with Commercial Driver's Licenses (CDL). Compounding the shortage has been



the lack of CDL training programs in the Berkshires. We're working on making more CDL training available, including offering our own. Creating a pipeline of drivers with CDL licenses will impact the entire region!


At the end of FY2023 BRTA received notification from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) that \$2,212,747 to fund the purchase of two 35' heavy duty Gillig Diesel-Electric Hybrid buses was awarded—another step toward reducing carbon emissions.

We're having productive discussions with Pioneer Valley Transit to see what a connector service might look like. It looks like the day will come when Berkshire residents will be able to take the connector to Springfield.

We've been working hard to be more responsive to our passengers' needs. A lot of our efforts are dependent on factors outside our control. Will we get the bump in state funding we're anticipating in the FY2024 budget? Will we be able to convince more educational programs to include CDL training?

Here's hoping for a robust FY2024!

Best regards,
Robert Malnati



SOLVING A CRITICAL SHORTAGE: CDL OPERATORS

You've read about the shortage of drivers with CDL licenses. This is a regional problem that impacts residents and businesses. If you own a business, you need drivers with CDLs. Municipal governments need employees with CDLs to transport kids to school, plow the streets, deliver services. Drivers with commercial drivers' licenses are critical to economic growth.

BRTA and a state agency have been working on a solution. BRTA's Accem Scott has been teaching CDL permit classes at MassHire. Once drivers have their CDL permit and express a desire to work for BRTA, they are hired and paid during training to obtain their CDL with passenger endorsement—required for transporting people. They are then on their way to becoming a BRTA bus operator.

More drivers with CDLs means fewer cancelled trips and eliminated routes. More people have transportation to get to work. More public transit connects the unemployed and underemployed with opportunities to fill the 1,200 job vacancies currently available. Significantly increasing employment numbers boosts the regional economy.

BRTA has placed recruitment ads on our buses, our website, and on social media. Key messaging includes the opportunity for BRTA operators to rise to the top of the pay scale within six months and receive 100% employer-paid health insurance premium coverage. At the completion of a probationary period, drivers also receive a \$500 bonus.

The problem with too few CDL operators has not been completely solved, but BRTA is making progress. BRTA continues to encourage more organizations to offer CDL training and to spread the word about CDL's importance.



3,000+

CDL job vacancies in MA



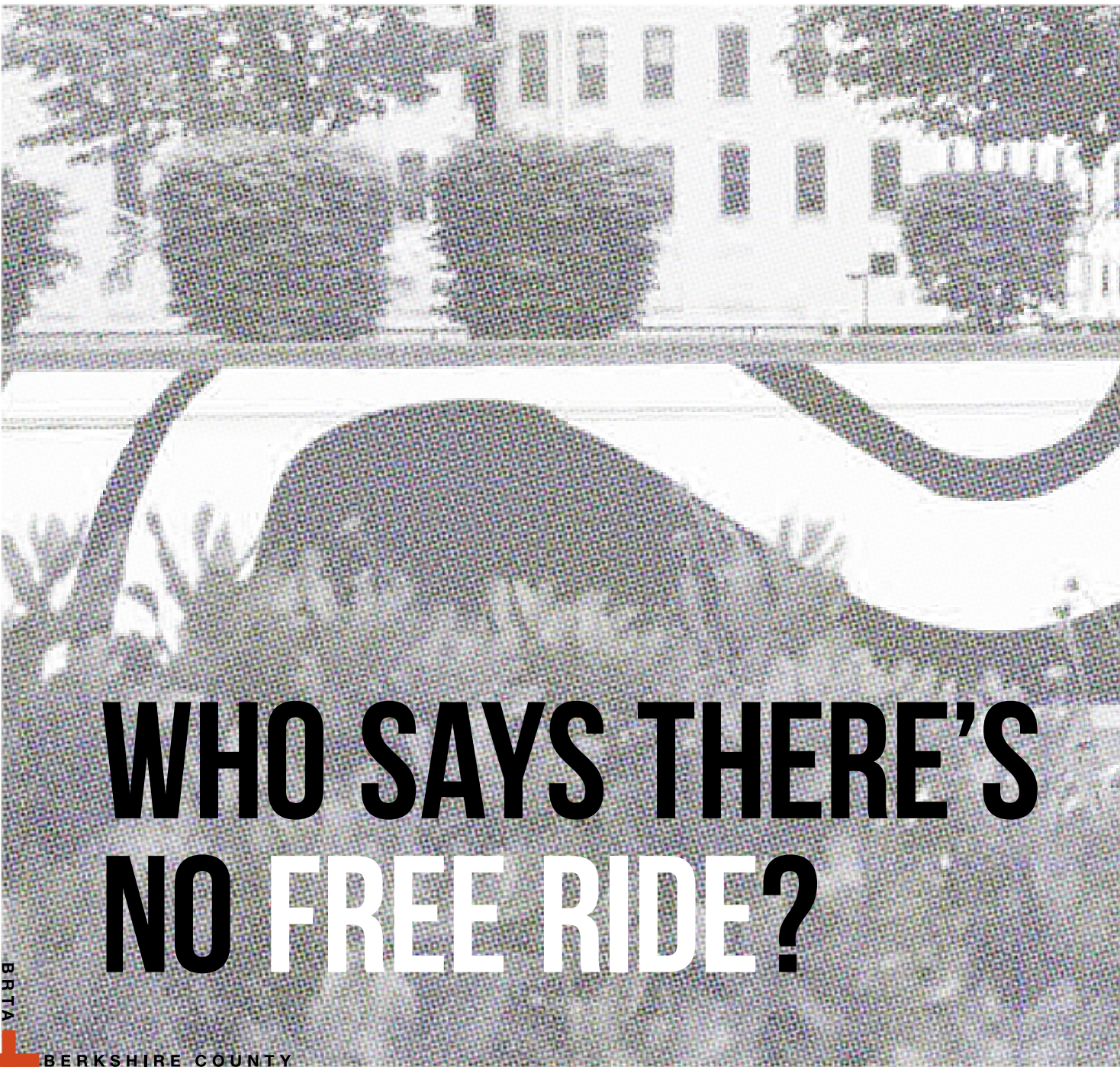
100%

BRTA health insurance premium coverage after 6 months



\$500

BRTA bonus for drivers



WHO SAYS THERE'S NO FREE RIDE?

BRTA



BERKSHIRE COUNTY



A statewide **Try Transit** event offered free rides on many of the state's municipal transit buses, including BRTA. Berkshire County residents were treated to free rides between November 25 and December 31, 2022. The BRTA's results were impressive: a total of **53,930 riders** rode for free, bringing ridership up a whopping **36%** over the previous year during the same time.

Turning to fare-paying ridership, FY2023 showed impressive gains since the Try Transit event. January through June 30 ridership outperformed month-to-month comparisons from the previous year. Overall, FY2023 ridership was up 24% over FY2022. Close to a half million passengers used BRTA to get where they needed to go in FY2023.

BRTA management is encouraged by these numbers but recognizes there's more opportunity to grow ridership. Offering more evening and weekend service would dramatically increase the number of people choosing to ride the bus. We are cautiously optimistic that the FY2024 state budget will offer much needed funding increases to regional transits.


MOVING TOWARD ZERO EMISSIONS

BRTA received word of discretionary grant awards in FY2022 and FY2023 that would fund the purchase of five diesel electric hybrid vehicles. These heavy duty, larger vehicles will build the Authority's capacity to handle the growth in ridership. These buses will add significantly to BRTA's commitment to operating an environmentally cleaner fleet—and working toward our longer-term goal of a zero emissions fleet.

BRTA management has been asked why we continue to purchase hybrids versus all electric vehicles. Since 2020 we have commissioned three feasibility studies to determine whether electric vehicles are an option. All three reports concluded that our current route length and daily service time requirements would not support a transition to battery/electric fleet.

In addition, heating in the winter and cooling in the summer drastically reduce the batteries' daily range.

We are currently exploring the possibility of hydrogen fuel cell technology that could provide a daily range similar to the diesel electric hybrids we will be operating for the time being.

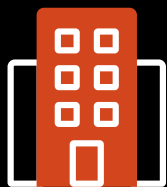
The background is a solid green color. There are two large, stylized, curved shapes that resemble a thick 'U' or a partial circle. The top-left shape is white with a grey, textured cloud pattern inside. The bottom-right shape is also white with a grey, textured cloud pattern inside. The text is centered in the green area.

**This announcement means
more clean buses, less pollution,
more jobs in manufacturing and
maintenance, and better commutes
for families across the country.**

PETE BUTTIGIEG

U.S. Transportation Secretary

THE 



LARGER ROLE

OF PUBLIC



TRANSIT



BRTA transports people to and from 13 communities in a largely rural region most days of the year. We provide a lifeline for many of our residents. They depend on bus service to help them access basic needs: food, health care, family, friends, education.

Public transit is a great equalizer. People of all means can access transportation. K-12 students can buy a student 30-day pass for \$26. College students can buy a semester-full of rides for \$250. Reduced fares are available for people ages 60 and older; people with Medicare cards; people with disabilities and a Mass Access Pass.

Free rides are available to Personal Care Attendants while riding with their patient and to children ages five and under.

Public transit helps prevent isolation and provides a feeling of independence for our riders. Bus operators make connections with their customers. They notice when their regular riders aren't on the bus. There is a real sense of community on many of the bus routes.

PUBLIC TRANSIT IS A GREAT EQUALIZER.

BRTA meets regularly with social service agencies, community development organizations, and health care providers to discuss ways to help mitigate transportation shortfalls due to chronic lack of funding in Berkshire County.

We teach people how to ride the bus through our Travel Training service. We have friendly customer service agents who can answer questions for beginning riders. New bus stops are being installed to help answer riders' questions like, "Where do I stand when waiting for the bus?" and provide information showcasing the bus routes on a particular street.

As BRTA approaches its 50th anniversary, we intend to redouble our efforts to make sure our customers, new and long-standing, know how much we appreciate them.

OUR LONG-TIME



BRTA CHAMPION



*She's a loyal BRTA
passenger and advocate.
Learn why the BRTA
is so important to Patti
and why Patti is
important to BRTA.*

There are many people living in the Berkshires who depend on the BRTA to get where they need to go. Patti is one of them. BRTA's travel trainer, Julie Davine, says Patti knows all the routes and every bus number.

Patti has been taking the bus since 1991. She depends on the BRTA to get around. When the buses aren't running on Sundays or holidays, Patti knows she'll be staying at home.

Wondering where Patti goes besides grocery shopping and appointments? She's an avid arts patron. She frequents the Berkshire Museum and the Clark Museum. She's been a member of both since 2015.

Patti is a shopper. Throughout the year she shops at Target and TJ Maxx. But one of her favorite shopping outings is going to tag sales in the summertime. She particularly loves the ones held at area churches. She's also a regular shopper at the Farmer's Market in the Sears parking lot.

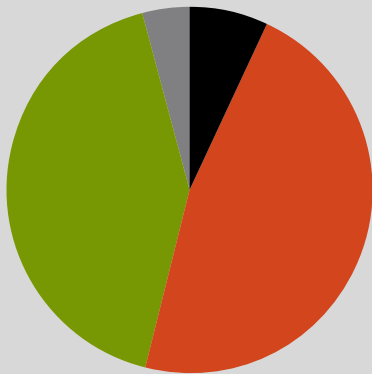
When Patti's riding the bus, you'll see her sitting in the front. Guess that's how she knows every BRTA operator. If you ask her about her favorite, she'll say, "All of them." That probably comes as no surprise. The BRTA connects Patti to the things that make her life fulfilling.

Patti shows up at transportation hearings, writes letters, and advocates for public transit. She isn't shy about changes she disagrees with.

If you see Patti on the bus or out and about, please thank her for work on behalf of all of the Berkshire residents who depend on the bus.

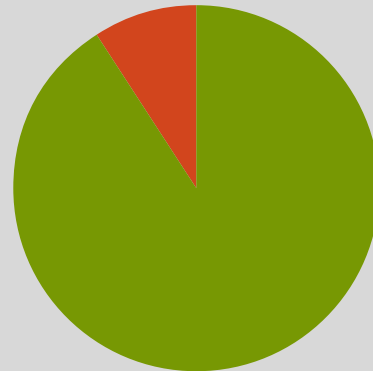
BY THE NUMBERS

**Total Operating + Non-operating
Revenues of \$8,936,332 by Source**



- Transportation revenues 7%
- State & local operating grants 47%
- Federal operating grants 42%
- Other 4%

**Total Operating + Non-operating
Expenses of \$8,874,967 by Source**



- Transportation services 91%
- Administration 9%



TOTAL RIDERSHIP

Fixed Route
486,016

Paratransit
23,948



1,599

Average
customers
per day

BRTA TRIP HISTORY

	FY21	FY22	FY23
Bikes	3,938	4,245	5,266
Mobility Devices	1,940	1,573	1,998
Total	5,878	5,818	7,264



BERKSHIRERTA.COM