

# 2023 REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY



# A LETTER FROM OUR LEADERSHIP



**Dawn Distler,**  
**Chief Executive Officer**

A blue ink signature of Dawn Distler, written in a cursive style.

On behalf of the team and board of METRO RTA, we are proud to introduce our 2023 annual report. Last year, our annual letter focused on METRO's growth; we acquired new, state-of-the-art buses, exceptional team members, and valuable diverse partnerships. This year, we focus on the impact those elements had in allowing METRO to push boundaries, meet challenges, and explore opportunities like never before. 2023 was a testament to how much is possible with the right team and the right strategy. Through perseverance and teamwork, we define METRO through our actions and initiatives.

**We look for unmet needs** where we can make a difference. For instance, this was METRO's second year with 365 days of service. Providing this service for our transit loyal passengers has been a top priority for METRO. The increased ridership we have seen, especially on holidays, ensures that we are progressing in the right direction to remove transportation barriers for our community.

**We identify and engage with strong partners** who can work closely with our team to drive progress. This year we brought together key community leaders to look at how bus rapid transit (BRT) service can bring increased transportation amenities and be an economic driver for our community.

**We invest in data-driven tools** that allow us to target our resources effectively and hold ourselves accountable for results. In June, we launched our Reimagine METRO network redesign along with fare capping for our transit loyal passengers, providing better service at the most economical rate using key data on racial and wealth disparities to help programs respond to these barriers.

**We remain flexible** to maximize our impact, branching out in new directions as conditions change. After the passage of major legislation with historic funding for transportation investments, we worked with our legislative and FTA Region 5 partners to navigate the programs and submit strong applications for federal funding. This resulted in almost \$38M of federal investment for our much-needed and anticipated new Maintenance and Operations Facility, which will provide our team with premier tools to deliver essential services to our community.

**We lead from the front,** taking on difficult issues without hesitation and exhibiting strength in the face of opposition. We work hard to ensure we have a seat at local, state, and national tables so public transportation is always considered in the conversations shaping our region.

**We are proud** of the approach we bring to our mission, and we are thankful for community partnership in bringing premiere public transportation services to this region. These partnerships fuel all the work we have done to enrich lives and create opportunities for the greatest number of people we serve.



**Robert DeJournett,**  
**Board President**

A blue ink signature of Robert DeJournett, written in a cursive style.

# BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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City of Cuyahoga Falls

**Gary Spring**  
City of Stow

**John Valle**  
City of Akron

# OUR PARTNERSHIPS

- Access, Inc.
- Adult Protective Services
- Age Friendly Akron Summit
- Akron Blind Center
- Akron Children's Hospital
- Akron Civic Theatre
- Akron Metropolitan Housing Authority
- Akron NAACP
- Akron Public Schools
- Akron Police Department
- Akron-Summit County Public Library
- Akron Urban League
- Akron Zoo
- Allstate
- American Public Transportation Association
- Akron Metropolitan Area Transit Study
- Arts Now
- Association of Travel Instruction
- Barberton Public Library
- Bridges of Summit County Initiative
- Bridges Out of Poverty
- CANAPI
- City of Akron Commission on Aging
- Cleveland Clinic Foundation
- Community Action Akron Summit
- County of Summit ADM Board
- CSE Credit Union
- Cuyahoga Falls Public Library
- Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad
- Direction Home Areawide Advocacy Council
- Delta Dental
- Department of Job and Family Services
- Downtown Akron Partnership
- Elevate Greater Akron
- Everside Health
- Fairlawn Area Chamber of Commerce
- Full Term First Birthday Community Action Team
- GAR Foundation
- Goodwill Industries of Akron
- Greater Akron Chamber
- Highland Square Neighborhood Association
- Jobs for Ohio's Graduates
- Kenmore Neighborhood Alliance
- Leadership Akron
- Life Services
- Lincoln Financial
- Living Green Task Force
- Local Emergency Planning Committee
- Medical Mutual of Ohio
- NEORide
- Northeast Ohio Travel Trainers
- Ohio Erie Canal and Railway
- Ohio Public Transit Association
- Ohio Transit Risk Pool
- Oswald
- Project Ujima
- RAISE Good Jobs For Greater Akron
- Reentry Coalition of Summit Portage & Medina
- Safe Kids
- Senior Independent Living Council
- Summa Health
- Summit County Adult Protective Services Interdisciplinary Team
- Summit County Public Health
- Summit County Suicide Prevention Coalition
- Senior Independent Living Council
- Stark State College
- Stow-Munroe Falls Public Library
- Summit County Drug Task Force
- Summit County Stand Down
- Summit Metro Parks
- Summit Lake CDC
- Summit County Probate Court
- TL Worldwide
- Towpath Credit Union
- Twinsburg Public Library
- The University of Akron
- United Way of Summit County
- Women's Transportation Seminar
- 330ToGo



# AKRON ART MUSEUM PARTNERSHIP

METRO strengthened its partnership with the Akron Art Museum with its featured 2023 Keith Haring: Against All Odds exhibit. The Art Museum launched the exhibit in April of 2023 which ran through the end of September. METRO assisted with funding for a wrapped bus and allowed stickers on shelters and at the Robert K. Pfaff Transit Center, in exchange for a yearly museum membership for all team members and a space to host an employee event at the museum in August.



# A NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM

METRO was pleased to host a team member "night out" at the Akron Art Museum in August. The event featured heavy appetizers and sweets, a DJ with a dance floor, and a photobooth with props. Team members had the opportunity to view the exhibit and shop at the museum's gift shop.





# CONGRESSWOMAN SYKES

In January, U.S. Congresswoman Emilia Sykes toured a proposed METRO RTA route from the Reimagine Network that was designed to expand access to public transit across the region. The network redesign plan, implemented in June 2023, provides frequent and convenient service in high-ridership corridors and markets where public transit is essential. Sykes proudly supports public transit and its benefits to our communities. Thank you, Congresswoman!



# EAGLE SCOUT PROJECT

Cymon was working toward earning his Eagle Scout badge; to do so, he was tasked to finish a project that helps an organization. He chose to build purple martin birdhouses for METRO's Kenmore property! Purple martins are great birds to have around; they like to eat mosquitoes and help keep the population down, benefiting team members at METRO. Cymon did a fantastic job of designing and constructing these houses. Hopefully, METRO will have some new tenants very soon!



# FREE FARE WEEKENDS



METRO once again offered free fares on Saturdays and Sundays in June, July, and August to foster community engagement and ease the transition for riders adapting to system updates implemented in June. By waiving fares on weekends in the summer, METRO not only aims to alleviate financial burdens for riders, but also encourages increased utilization of public transportation during the warmer months, promoting sustainable and eco-friendly commuting options to regional events.

Free Fare Summers increased ridership on Saturdays in June, July, and August by approximately 40%, compared to average Saturday ridership in January-May 2023. Sunday ridership saw an approximate 47% increase compared to the same timeframe. The increase in ridership is attributed to both free fare weekends and the Reimagined Network, launched in June.



## AKRON CHILDREN'S HOLIDAY TREE FESTIVAL

METRO participated in the annual Akron Children's Holiday Tree Festival, creating a tree and wreath from repurposed jewelry, sponsored by Access, Inc. The tree decor won a special honor ribbon. Since its beginning in 1982, the Holiday Tree Festival has raised more than \$7 million for the hospital's patient care programs, education, and research.





# NAME THE BUS WITH 330TOGO



METRO had the pleasure of hosting 330ToGO, a popular Facebook-based variety and news platform, at its Kenmore property to discuss two new electric buses in the fleet. 330ToGO hosted a "Name the Bus" contest on their platform where viewers could suggest names and then place their vote on one of METRO's top five favorite. The public chose "dEvo," as a homage to the group from Akron while showcasing the electric vehicle. METRO employees voted on names for the second bus. In 2023, "dEvo" and "Flash Boardin'" joined METRO's fleet alongside two other EV's, Jolt and Volt.

# MINORITY HEALTH FAIR

The Minority Health Fair returned to the Robert K. Pfaff Transit Center in April of 2023. Summit County Public Health's annual event brought 20+ vendors to the Transit Center, with a plethora of resources, health screenings, giveaways, free haircuts, a DJ, and more.





# REIMAGINE METRO

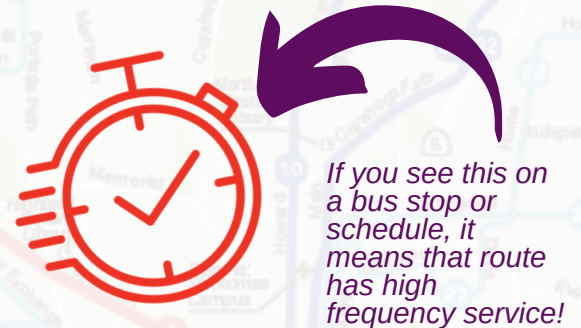
IT'S EASY  
IF YOU TRY!



In 2021, METRO began working on a plan to improve its bus network. The Reimagined Network is a service plan for METRO's fixed-route bus network that seeks to make transit more useful to more people by expanding access to more destinations and opportunities. It was designed to provide frequent and convenient service in popular places, where many people need to travel, while continuing to offer lifeline services in places where transit is essential. From 2021 to the beginning of 2023, METRO conducted three rounds of outreach with the public and stakeholders on the Reimagined Network, refining the design after each round. On March 28, 2023, METRO's Board of Trustees approved the changes unanimously. The Reimagine METRO network was put into service on June 4, 2023.

## The key features of the Reimagined Network include:

- Streamlined Service
- 5 new high-frequency 15-minute corridors
- 3 new 30-minute routes
- New regional connections to Brimfield and Cuyahoga County



*If you see this on a bus stop or schedule, it means that route has high frequency service!*

## OUTREACH

- 248,000 Postcards to Summit County Residents
- 747 Online Survey Responses
- 400 Oral/Written Comments
- 34 Outreach Events
- 10 Inreach Events
- 5 Focus Groups
- 3 News Stories
- 2 Stakeholder Workshops
- 2 Webinars
- Website Updates
- Social Media Posts
- Vendor Fair Launch Day

# METRO's routes were officially "Reimagined" on June 4, 2023!

On launch day, team members from all departments sported bright green t-shirts and served as transit ambassadors at the event, answering passenger questions and getting them where they needed to go. Team members were also stationed at high-traffic bus stops and assigned routes throughout the first week to assist passengers. Passengers were also invited to join the launch day vendor fair, featuring 20+ vendors, a DJ, interactive family-friendly activities, a photobooth, and more.

## WHAT ARE OUR PASSENGERS SAYING?

"Whoever is the architect behind the brilliant upgrade to METRO should run for President. I think it's the best change I've seen in public transportation in my lifetime and besides here I've lived in Phoenix, Atlanta, and Southern California all while using Public Transportation. This is by far the best re-imagining I've ever seen. I've been able to pick up extra shifts at work and get around the area twice as much as before these changes. Thank you!"  
-Scott

"I am from Akron, and I've been riding METRO my whole life. METRO makes my life a lot easier, even just knowing it's there when I need it. I'm also ready for the upcoming METRO changes; it's been a long time since a change happened, and a new route by me is going to run every 30 minutes."  
-Tim

"I used to live in D.C.; I walked and rode transit to get everywhere. I'm excited to get back to that with the changes that have been made. It's going to help me keep my independence. I won't have to get a ride during the weekends. I'm really excited to go to Brimfield and Cleveland, and I can always make another connection from there. This is going to be wonderful."  
-Gwen



SCAN ME

"It's easy if you try..." Wait, is that a John Lennon reference? Yes, yes it is. Team members participated in a parody version of "Imagine" for Reimagine METRO. Scan the QR code to watch!



# COME DRIVE WITH (B)US: THE SEQUEL

After 2022's successful "Come Drive with (B)us" hiring event, METRO released a sequel! Come Drive with (B)us: The Sequel took place at METRO's Administrative Offices. Attendees who filled out applications were pre-screened in advance and interviewed upon arrival. They were also shown how to secure a mobility device and had the opportunity to test drive a bus around the property. As a way to streamline the hiring process, METRO also offered physicals and drug testing on-site on the two days following the event. The Sequel was heavily promoted on social media, primarily Facebook. Of the 95 attendees who applied, 63 were offered a job following successful physicals and screenings. 18 operators were officially hired following the event.

Come Drive with (B)us has been nationally recognized in the transit industry as an innovative recruitment tool that gets applicants behind the wheel before they even accept a job offer.



**COME DRIVE WITH (B)US - METRO IS HIRING MORE BUS OPERATORS**

**THE SEQUEL**

**OPEN HOUSE**

**WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 22**

**7 AM - 7 PM**

Can't make it? Apply online at [yourMETRObus.org](http://yourMETRObus.org) or text "HIREME" to 3305166060

**METRO** 330.762.0341 YOURMETROBUS.ORG

METRO RTA Administrative Offices  
416 Kenmore Blvd., Akron 44301

# TRANSIT EMPLOYEE APPRECIATION DAY

METRO celebrated Transit Employee Appreciation Day on Friday, March 17. METRO rolled out the red carpet, acknowledging that transit employees are rockstars, and set up a selfie station with props. Team members were also given paper METRO bus piggybanks stuffed with goodies!





# REBRANDING METRO

The decision was made to rebrand our services alongside Reimagine METRO's June system redesign to highlight the families of service that we offer and create a clean and cohesive look that amplifies METRO as a brand.

METRO rebranded its website and social media handles to be less dependent on geographical location and to give our riders a sense of ownership when it comes to riding METRO. It is YOUR METRO bus, after all.

[yourmetrobus.org](http://yourmetrobus.org)  
[@yourmetrobus](https://twitter.com/yourmetrobus)

Families of service were also rebranded, renaming traditional fixed-route service METRO Direct, services requiring qualifying factors that you must select METRO Select (METRO Scat, METRO Call-A-Bus, METRO Works/Flexride), and the legally-mandated paratransit service, METRO ADA. Bus Rapid Transit is a high-quality bus-based transit service that is fast and efficient and may include dedicated lanes, busways, traffic signal priority, off-board fare collection, elevated platforms, and enhanced stations. METRO is currently exploring BRT options.



Each service has a dedicated color, visible in METRO's new horizontal and circular logos. METRO is in the process of rebranding its entire fleet.

**METRO**  **SELECT**

**METRO**  **DIRECT**

**METRO**  **ADA**

**METRO**  **BRT**



**METRO RTA 11**

# BUS RAPID TRANSIT

## METRO BRT

Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) is an advanced, high-quality transit system that delivers safe, fast, and comfortable service. Improvements you may find include fewer but improved stops, traffic signal priority, off-board fare collection, and elevated platforms.

In 2023, METRO, along with local Stakeholders, worked to identify a designated corridor for Bus Rapid Transit service. Once a corridor is identified and funding is secured, Greater Akron could see a (BRT) investment that improves the transit experience, economic development, and quality of life.

Throughout the year, the METRO team conducted six public meetings to address concerns, answer questions, and solicit feedback to understand the needs of our community members.



*Frequent Service*

*Infrastructure Enhancements*

*Improved Amenities*

## BRT FEATURES

- Enhanced station lighting for improved safety
- Raised platforms for easier access
- Improved bike accommodations
- Offboard fare collection
- Installation of new and improved sidewalks



# HOLIDAY INITIATIVES

METRO celebrated Giving Tuesday, the Tuesday after Thanksgiving that encourages people to give back, at the RKP Transit Center alongside other vendors, passing out free hats, gloves, and scarves to passengers. METRO also participated in Goodyear's annual Toys for Tots drive, partnering with two local home daycares. Two buses traveled to the Goodyear Hangar to drop off gifts donated by team members, friends, and family, and allowed the daycare attendees to meet with Santa and see the decorated hangar and blimp!

METRO's Transit Police department also participated in Shop with a Cop and Operation Santa's Sleigh, Light Ohio Blue's event, which aims to bring joy to patients at local hospitals.



# RIDE WITH PRIDE

METRO participated in and sponsored Akron's Pride Equity March and Festival in August. Team members, friends, and family joined the Equity March before enjoying the festival that followed.

Every year, METRO follows up the end of the Equity March with a bus to block off the street for the festival, also serving as a cooling station for the public in the August heat.





# MAINTENANCE & OPERATIONS FACILITY

On Friday, June 23, METRO was awarded a Bus and Bus Facilities Grant by the Federal Transportation Administration (FTA), totaling \$37,808,113 for the construction of a new Maintenance and Operations Facility on the existing Kenmore Blvd. campus. METRO would like to thank the offices of Senator Sherrod Brown, Representative Emilia Sykes, and Senator J.D. Vance for their letters of support to the FTA, as well as the continued support from the communities and organizations we serve.

On Monday, November 20, METRO was joined by Senator Sherrod Brown, Congresswoman Emilia Sykes, Summit County Executive Ilene Shapiro, City of Akron Mayor Daniel Horrigan, American Public Transportation Association (APTA) President & CEO Paul Skoutelas, and METRO Board of Trustees President Robert DeJournett to celebrate the groundbreaking of the new facility. Prior to the ceremonial groundbreaking, Dr. LaDonna BlueEye was welcomed to the stage to recite an Indigenous Land Acknowledgement.

The purpose of this project is to support current and future operational needs by providing adequate facilities to maintain a state of good repair and improve efficiencies for METRO's maintenance and operational functions. The building will consist of a 107,138 square-foot steel-framed structure consisting of two main functional areas for operations and vehicle maintenance, a new visitor parking lot, a reconfigured employee parking lot, and a Commercial Drivers' License training pad. Operations are slated to begin in 2025.



# BUS DONATION TO FOREVER R CHILDREN

Forever R Children is a non-profit organization committed to ensuring no child or family goes hungry and without proper clothing. While out on food distributions within the community, founder Robert Ford often heard the same request: a place to take a shower.

In April, METRO donated a fully operational bus that had reached its FTA-regulated lifespan at METRO to Forever R Children. Kamper City in Peninsula is currently in the process of renovating the bus, which upon completion will provide 30 to 35 seven-minute showers per five-hour shift. Renovations are expected to be completed around April 2024.

METRO has also committed to providing routine maintenance assistance to the bus once in operation. Other community organizations have also partnered with Ford to help bring what he calls “a caravan of love” to the area’s residents.



# THINK OUTSIDE THE BUS: A PODCAST

2023 was the year for reimagining METRO. Part of that exploration was finding new ways to reach our transit-loyal riders, non-riders, transit enthusiasts, and those who like to listen in on all things METRO.

What better way than our new podcast, Think Outside the Bus on Spotify. Episodes may highlight a METRO team member or a different department, look at transit initiatives, and update listeners on what is happening in and around METRO buses. We talk with riders and community leaders and ask them their opinions on METRO, as well. Tune in to hear what's going on with Tatia and Molly, the podcast hosts!

LISTEN ON



SCAN ME



**METRO RTA 15**



# OPTA AWARDS 2023

Congratulations to our incredible team members who received this year's awards at the Ohio Public Transportation Association conference in Columbus.

Operations Supervisor Shawn Craig won the Community Impact Award - thank you for all you do to keep our passengers safe, Shawn!

Operations Administrative Assistant and previous Operator, Ricky McDaniel, won the Lifetime Achievement Award - thank you for sticking with us and acting as a field general for our daily operations, Ricky!

Lastly, METRO as an agency also won the Milestone Award for our hands-on Come Drive with (B)us campaign, which garnered national attention as a way to get quality operators in the doors of transit agencies.

Thank you to our team members for all you do for METRO & OPTA for hosting.



## AUDITOR OF STATE AWARD WITH DISTINCTION



Congratulations to METRO's CFO Angela Neeley and our Finance and Employee Engagement teams for earning the Ohio Auditor of State Award with Distinction. This prestigious award was presented for excellence in financial reporting related to Comprehensive Annual Financial Reporting and compliance with applicable laws for the fiscal year ending in 2022.

Thank you for your diligence and hard work!



# METRO TRANSIT POLICE



METRO's Chief of Transit Police, Shawn Metcalf, was accepted into Leadership APTA in 2023. Leadership APTA (American Public Transportation Association) is about developing and supporting exceptional senior and executive leaders within APTA and the transit industry. Over the years, program alumni have made outstanding and visionary contributions to APTA, the industry, and their own organizations and communities. Chief Metcalf also serves as METRO's Director of Safety and Protection. Shawn and his team reduced preventable accidents and lowered employee injuries over a three-year span, which helped to propel METRO to the 2021 APTA Safety and Security Gold Award for mid-size agencies. METRO applauds Chief Metcalf for his accomplishment of being accepted into Leadership APTA, a very prestigious and competitive program.



## *Leadership APTA*

## *Night Out Against Crime*

METRO participated in Night Out Against Crime in August. This yearly campaign allows residents to freely communicate with law enforcement, city officials, and different community organizations. All 10 wards in Akron are serviced by METRO, and various team members were able to visit each ward that evening.

Part of METRO's transit police department, Officer Dietra Goggins attended five Night Out Against Crime events and spoke with local community members.



## *Crisis Intervention Training*

Officers Dietra Goggins and Reuben Woodruff received certification upon graduation from a Crisis Intervention Program (CIT50) in April. CIT is a community-based approach to improve the outcomes of encounters between law enforcement and individuals with mental illness. CIT works to connect law enforcement, mental health providers, and hospital emergency services with individuals with mental illness and their families to improve communication, identify resources for those in crisis, and ensure safety.



METRO, under the leadership of Chief Shawn Metcalf, was once again awarded the Safe Operations Award/Recognition (SOAR), Division I for prioritizing safe transportation for our riders!

# DIVERSITY, EQUITY, & INCLUSION

In 2022, METRO created a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) position, Chief Culture Officer, for its leadership team. DEI values were reflected in several initiatives and partnerships throughout 2023.

In January, METRO team and Board members attended Akron Urban League's Annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Breakfast. METRO also hosted an internal supplier diversity initiative to provide training on implicit bias and micro-aggressions internally to procurement staff and leadership. Resources and improved measures were put in place to assist staff with being intentional in utilizing businesses that are under-served and underutilized. Team members set goals to increase METRO's spend with minority, local, small, women-owned, veteran-owned, and LGBTQ vendors.

In October, Tatia M. Harris, Chief Culture Officer at METRO, participated in a panel at the American Public Transportation Association's (APTA) TRANSform conference with other transit executives to discuss "Future-Proofing a Diverse Workforce." Tatia shared thoughts with the panel and attendees on the opportunities and challenges in building and sustaining a diverse and dedicated transit labor force in a shifting labor market.



In November, METRO partnered with G. Stephens and Independence Construction to host an event at the Akron Public Library, providing an opportunity for minority businesses to learn about upcoming projects, and empower business owners with resources, partnerships, and equitable solutions to securing contracts. In December, METRO hosted a similar event, adding the City of Akron to the partnership, to provide resources to remove barriers in securing contracts by teaching skills such as reading RFPs, reading blueprints, identifying work, writing proposals, identifying gaps, and connecting them to resources.

METRO also converted a floating office space into a Wellness Room, providing privacy and space for prayer, meditation, reflection, or lactation. METRO hopes this accommodation allows employees to feel comfortable bringing their authentic selves to work.


As a major employer in Summit County, METRO values partnerships that empower, educate, uplift, and inspire the community. METRO continues to work with team members and community partners to break down barriers, build relationships, and provide resources and opportunities that improve the quality of life for all.




# 365 DAYS OF SERVICE

## 2023 HOLIDAY RIDERSHIP


### NEW YEAR'S DAY

3,344 boardings  57%


### MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. DAY

10,937 boardings  174%


### MEMORIAL DAY

6,149 boardings  31%


### INDEPENDENCE DAY

9,135 boardings  113%


### LABOR DAY

9,181 boardings  79%


### THANKSGIVING

4,102 boardings  106%


### THANKS-FRIDAY

13,007 boardings  56%

### CHRISTMAS EVE

5,300 boardings  48%

### CHRISTMAS DAY

5,294 boardings  346%

\*Holiday ridership shows fixed-route data only.

\*\*Percentages reflect increases in holiday ridership compared to 2022 ridership.

## 2023 AT A GLANCE

**4,036,072** boardings

**297,852** student boardings

**4,182,520** miles traveled

**17,857** bikes transported

**332,858** Customer Care responses to inquiries about fixed-route and demand response services

**533,528** social media impressions

**365** days of service

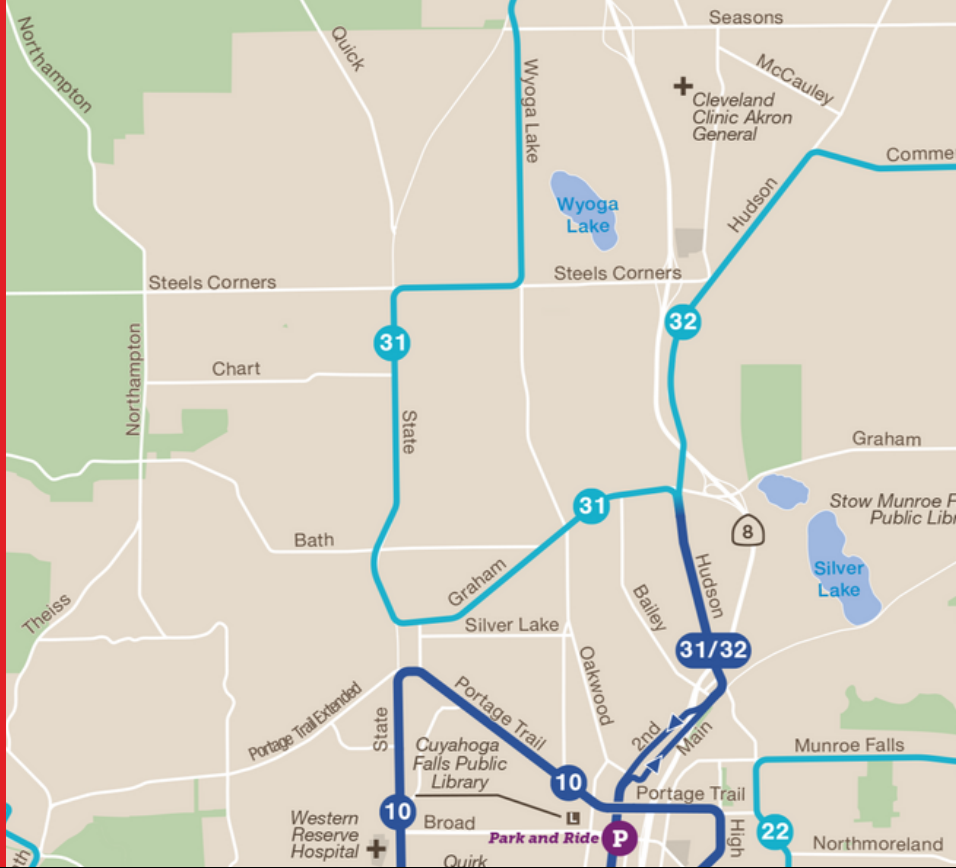
**14%** of boardings used EZfare tickets

**3** Operators achieved 20+ years of safe driving (years without preventable accidents)

**108,608** miles between preventable accidents

## OUR MISSION

METRO Regional Transit Authority enhances the quality of life for our community by providing innovative transportation that is safe, dependable, cost-effective and customer-focused... now and into the future.



# STAY CONNECTED

[yourmetrobus.org](http://yourmetrobus.org) | 330.762.0341

@yourmetrobus

