



SOUTH COUNTY CONNECTOR



Tate Coleman, Director of Public Transportation Transit Department Director's Report – December 2025

Staff Recognition / Updates

Throughout December, the whole team focused on reinforcing best practices, consistency, and reliability. Through everyone's hard work and dedication, the department crossed back over the 2,000 monthly rides mark for the first time since March 2025!

For our drivers, this focus meant more consistent communication with dispatch when running behind, taking a more proactive approach to troubleshooting potential issues, and showing flexibility with covering shifts that did not fall on their usual workdays while we trained a couple new part-timers.

For our leadership team, December was a time to prepare for the updated team structure taking effect January 4—where each Team Leader will have their own direct reports. We're all looking forward to this updated structure, which will allow increased accountability and team member recognition, clarity on each person's primary contact, and (most importantly), a dedicated weekly time for the team member and their leader to address any questions, concerns, or recognition one-on-one. A shout-out to Messiah Vision, our newest Operations Team Leader, for being so flexible throughout December—he covered all sorts of driving and dispatch shifts, with a different schedule each week. All with a smile and many compliments from riders!

We currently have openings for 3 On Demand Team Members (\$21.75/hour). See below for an overview of all currently filled and open positions.

The leadership team is conducting interviews for these open positions on a rolling basis. If you know anyone interested in joining our team, please refer them to our website

(<https://www.socoride.org/employment>) and feel free to let us know you've referred them!

| | Budgeted Positions | Filled Positions | Pending/ Trainees | Open Positions |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Director of Public Transportation | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Operations Manager | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Operations Team Leader | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| Systems Specialist | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Cash Revenue Auditor | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| F/T Team Members | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| P/T Team Members | 7 | 6 | 1 | 0 |
| On Demand Team Members | 6 | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| Total | 22 | 16 | 3 | 3 |

Each of our Operations Team Leaders has a specific focus: Messiah Vision (Volunteer Driver Program Coordinator), Deborah Stile (Vehicle Maintenance & Safety Coordinator), and Michael Richter (Team Trainer). Completion of an operational restructuring has also assigned team members a specific direct leader/mentor based on who most aligns with their typical work schedule, who will be their main point person and support. Team Leaders will be responsible for collaboratively developing Individual Development Plans (IDPs), first for themselves with our Operations Manager, and then with each of their direct report team members. Set weekly team schedules will begin on February 1, 2026.

I believe the team is excited about these developments. I am looking forward to bringing more structure to operations in this way, which will also lend more consistency to driver support - and therefore rider experience - and a more even distribution of the leadership workload.

I'm really excited to ring in the New Year with such a dedicated and caring team of drivers, dispatchers, support staff, and leaders. Once the process improvements are more fully implemented as we move through January, I'm looking forward to seeing how we can collectively build back the South County Connector system and ridership in a better, more robust way.

Ridership

Month-over-Month (11/25 vs. 12/25)

| | November 2025 | December 2025 | % Change |
|------------------------------|---------------|---------------|----------|
| Total Ridership | 1,574 | 2,011 | +27.76% |
| Regular Service Hours | 872.80 | 787.80 | -9.74% |
| Pittsfield Service Ridership | 35 | 66 | +88.57% |

Year-over-Year (11/24 vs. 11/25)

| | December 2024 | December 2025 | % Change |
|------------------------------|---------------|---------------|----------|
| Total Ridership | 2,139 | 2,011 | -5.98% |
| Regular Service Hours | 892.67 | 787.80 | -11.75% |
| Pittsfield Service Ridership | 26 | 66 | +153.85% |

By focusing on the essentials—consistency, communication, and reliability—we were able to significantly increase ridership month-over-month even while operating fewer regular-service hours overall. (Note that some Pittsfield hours were used for in-town Great Barrington/Egremont rides on a handful of days during operator downtime). This was only made possible through the hard work and dedication of the whole transit department team.

Capital Update

Ford E-Transit Expansion Vans – Due to an indefinite delay on delivery of the 2025 Ford E-Transit van awarded by MassDOT, I asked MassDOT whether an older model may be available more immediately. Because the 2023 Ford E-Transit accessible van model currently costs approximately half of the 2025 model per MassDOT's contract, we were able to successfully request an amendment to our award: we will be receiving two new 2023 Ford E-Transit accessible vans for roughly the same cost of one 2025 van in January or February. Part of the justification in requesting this change to two vehicles rather than one older model is that the range is more limited on the 2023 model. We are extremely appreciative of MassDOT's support and assistance with finding a solution which allows us to increase the size of our accessible fleet in a timely manner.

Communications System – In December, we retired our CB radio system and implemented a new satellite communications system using Garmin InReach Minis, in conjunction with a

Kyocera DuraForce Pro 3 Push-to-Talk Cellular-Based Radio system. This will help us reduce costs in the long run, and lifts office location constraints while filling in gaps in our current communications network using satellite technologies. The leadership team will continuously interface with drivers and report any pros and cons with the new system, so that we can continuously iterate and ensure communications are as seamless as possible.

FY2027 Capital Requests - In mid-November, we applied for four (4) replacement vans through the MassDOT Community Transit Grant Program accessible vehicles grant opportunity. These vehicles, if awarded, would be delivered late next year and replace two vehicles owned by the Town of Great Barrington, one owned by the Town of Stockbridge, and one owned by the Town of West Stockbridge, all of which already have or will have met their maximum useful life by December 2026. Each of the three communities committed a 15% local match share for their replacement vehicle(s) - \$18,205 each. MassDOT and Federal Transit Administration will cover the remaining 85% of vehicle cost, if awarded. We should receive an update in February 2026 on our application.

Request for Proposal (RFP) Update:

Operations Software RFP - During the month of December, I worked closely with operations staff to develop a new operations software RFP, making sure we cover all relevant necessary software functions in the RFP that are not covered by our current provider, TripShot. Our current software agreement is active through April 30, 2026. We plan to put the RFP on the street in the first or second week of January, and to award a new contract in mid-February.

Operations Center RFQ - During early/mid November, staff solicited quotes for new spaces that would better meet the needs of our growing operations and with rent that would better fit within our department's budgetary needs after our current space's rent unexpectedly increased 50% in November. Staff selected the lowest responsible quote. However, after initially drawing up a draft lease, the Town determined that entering into an agreement with the new space's landlord would create a conflict of interest. The department is now working on updating the RFQ, which will be re-released in early/mid January.

Projects Update

Operations Dashboard - Daniel Rose-Levine, Transit Systems Specialist, is currently beta-testing our new operations dashboard prior to launch. RTAC community representatives will be receiving an email with a link to the dashboard in early January once it goes live, and will be asked to provide any feedback they might have. Once that feedback is incorporated, the department plans to embed the live dashboard on our website for the general public to view.

Service Alerts Notification System - We are working on setting up a Google Group based South County Connector service alerts notification system. It is currently in the testing phase; RTAC members should have received an invitation to join. I am in the process of training the leadership team on how to use the platform, and of developing guidelines for what type of

service changes/updates/interruptions should trigger a service alert. This notification system, once live, will be open to any member of the public to subscribe to (with options to receive every notification, or a daily/weekly digest), as long as they have a Google Account. This will also be integrated with our website once fully launched in early/mid January.

Volunteers in Medicine Partnership - In late November, we formally began our partnership with Volunteers in Medicine to provide long-distance medical trips for VIM patients headed to/from Pittsfield, Springfield, Worcester and Boston, funded through a MassDOT Fair Share Amendment operating grant awarded to VIM. When possible, we are opening up available door-to-door capacity on these trips to the general public, with scheduled trips and details posted on the South County Connector website under the “Intercity” tab.

Pittsfield Shuttle - The Pittsfield shuttle service picked up in December, with 66 one-way trips provided during the month of December 2025. This is up from November, which saw 35 one-way trips, and last December when we were only operating Pittsfield service on Mondays and Wednesdays, which saw 26 one-way Pittsfield trips.

On January 4, 2026 we will re-launch the Pittsfield Shuttle re-branded as the Pittsfield FLEX. The service will now be open to the general public on a space-available basis, and include non-medical rides in addition to transportation to medical appointments as space allows. You can find out more about the Pittsfield FLEX at <https://socoride.org/pittsfield-flex>.

The goal of these service adjustments are to increase ridership and viability of the service as a longer-term solution, and to integrate it better within the regional transportation network.

VA Medical Rides – Per the recommendation of MassDOT during a recent coordination check-in, we contacted Soldier On (in Pittsfield) to understand what services they provide and to make sure we would not be duplicating anything they currently offer. It turns out that Soldier On already provides free rides to/from VA Medical Hospitals for veterans within Berkshire County, including all South County communities! Staff will be working on a one-pager in early January detailing the VA-related service provided by Soldier On, and then distributing it to all SCC communities. We will not be moving forward with starting a VA service ourselves, but will be happy to refer any veteran who calls in to Soldier On.

Hillsdale, NY Service Expansion - We have been working with the Town of Hillsdale, NY to plan a FY2027 service pilot, which could help increase regional coordination as well as allow us to explore inter-state partnerships, and also with subsidizing the administrative costs of our department’s operation. Hillsdale recently completed a resident on-demand transit interest survey, which I assisted them with designing. They received 251 responses, 195 of which were from Hillsdale residents – or approximately 10.65% of the Town’s population. Over one third of the Town’s seniors responded to the survey. Responses showed high interest in an on-demand transit service connecting Hillsdale with Great Barrington. We will continue coordinating with Hillsdale and NYSDOT in the coming months to determine a pilot design and cost.

Non-Profit Status – I have been working with the Town to set up a “Friends of the South County Connector” organization so that the department can receive 501(c)(3) pass-through

status. This would open us up to many additional foundation grant opportunities that require 501(c)(3) status to be eligible to apply.

FY2027 Operating Grant Application – In mid-November, we submitted our FY2027 joint Community Transit Grant Program Operating & Mobility Management and Microtransit/Last-Mile connectivity grant application (\$18.2 M in Fair Share Amendment and Federal Transit Administration S. 5310 funds available) with a total request of \$1,568,600.00. If fully funded, this FY2027 funding level would allow the system to expand service hours to 5 AM – 12 AM daily (adjusted seasonally), double operator capacity within existing communities, fully support open-to-close supervisor/dispatch coverage, and expand the system to three other communities. If partially funded, we would need about \$560,000 to maintain existing operations, assuming a moderate adjustment to member communities’ contributions for next year to account for Cost of Living adjustments for the team. We should know the results of this application in February 2026.

Municipal Assessments – For FY2026, the department has requested that annual municipal assessments generally remain level-funded. This approach is intended to provide budget stability for member communities while the department focuses on implementing operational improvements and pursuing state and federal funding to support system growth. Assessment notices will be distributed to member communities in the coming weeks.

Rural & Tribal Assistance (RTA) Grant Application – This Fall, the Transit department applied for a \$975,000 Rural & Tribal Assistance (RTA) USDOT grant application. The proposed project would document the total capital and infrastructure costs required for SCC to expand to cover all 13 communities in Southern Berkshire County, as well as communities in Columbia County, NY and destination service to Litchfield County, CT. This would include both “bought” assets—such as transit vehicles, software, hardware, and maintenance tools—and “built” assets—such as land, facilities for vehicle storage and repair, charging and fueling stations, and wash bays. If awarded, consultants will conduct demand modeling, fleet sizing, and facility siting, and will produce cost estimates that form a phased implementation blueprint. Legal assistance could establish an independent governmental entity structure capable of holding assets and receiving federal transit funds. We expect to receive an update on the status of this grant in the coming weeks.

Please feel free to reach out to me directly with any questions. I look forward to continuing to work with everyone, and to the exciting new developments coming in 2026. Thank you for your continued support!

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