



SOUTH COUNTY CONNECTOR



Tate Coleman, Director of Public Transportation Transit Department Director's Report – February 2026

Staff Recognition / Updates

Throughout February, the whole team once again focused on reinforcing best practices, consistency, and reliability. Thanks to the team's hard work and dedication, the department provided 2,304 rides in February - our highest ridership since October 2024!

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. Special thanks to Rob Hewins, P/T Transit Team Member, for being so flexible and coming in on a couple extra days to cover some open shifts - all with a smile and high praise from riders. His commitment to the department is much appreciated!

A sampling of February Rider Surveys (98.78% positive, with 332 surveys collected):

Ryan S.: Perfect. Thank you. Flawless customer service. (5 stars)

Mike R.: Mike is a wonderful driver, appreciate his kindness and safe driving. (5 stars)

Asa M.: Excellent ride to work this morning with Asa. Thank you very much for getting my day off to a fantastic start!! (5 stars)

Messiah V.: Wonderful ride, this man is all about kindness and being professional. (5 stars)

Dan F.: Very pleasant ride home from the Big Y with Daniel this morning. Thank you very much. Hope everyone keeps warm this weekend. (5 stars)

Bonnie M.: Bonnie is such a pleasure! (5 stars)

For our leadership team, February was a time to get into a routine and adjust to the updated team structure which took effect in mid-January, where each Team Leader now has their own direct reports. The updated team structure is already working out much better, allowing 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, Operations Team Leader, for coming in on his days off and cleaning off every vehicle after each of our recent large snowstorms – this was far above and beyond expectations. The whole team (and also the riders!) were so thankful for his snow-clearing acts of kindness!

We had some difficulty with our operations software, TripShot, which caused significant challenges during the first half of January. The issues remain unresolved on the TripShot side, but we have successfully developed workarounds which allow us to remain at about 80%-90% productivity. Our expected new software launch date is April 24, 2026 which we expect will solve these issues.

We currently have openings for a F/T Operations Team Leader - PM Shift (\$53,000 - \$55,000+); a Cash Revenue Auditor (Senior Tax Work-off - 2 hrs/week = \$1,500 annual property tax rebate for Gt. Barrington Seniors); and up to 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. Please refer anyone interested in joining our team to <https://www.socoride.org/employment>, and 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	2	0	1
Systems Specialist	1	1	0	0
Cash Revenue Auditor (Senior Tax Work-off)	1	0	0	1
Graphic Designer (Senior Tax Work-off)	1	1	0	0
Administrative Assistant (Senior Tax Work-off)	1	0	1	0
F/T Team Members	3	3	0	0
P/T Team Members	5	5	0	0
On Demand Team Members	Min. 6 Up to 10	2	4	Min. 0 Up to 4
Total	Min. 23 Up to 27	16	5	Min. 2 Up to 6

Each of our Operations Team Leaders has a specific focus: Messiah Vision (Volunteer Driver Program Coordinator), Michael Richter (Team Trainer), and the currently vacant Team Leader position carries the Vehicle Maintenance & Safety Coordinator focus (currently, Messiah and

Mike R. share the Vehicle Maintenance & Safety Coordinator duties). 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 have been working on collaboratively developing Individual Growth Plans (IGPs), first for themselves with our Operations Manager, and then with each of their direct-report team members. Set weekly team schedules began February 1, 2026.

I believe the team is excited about these developments. It is evident that bringing more structure to operations in this way, which also lends more consistency to driver support - and therefore rider experience - is already paying dividends. 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 (01/26 vs. 02/26)

	January 2026	February 2026	% Change
Total Ridership	2,029	2,304 ¹	+13.55%
On Time Performance (<10min Late)	93.71%	96.56%	+3.04%
Excessively Late Rides (>15min Late)	1.68%	0.84%	-50.00%
Vehicle Revenue Hours	819.78	800.37	-2.37%
Pittsfield Service Ridership	67	48	-28.36%

¹ Appx. 21 unlinked passenger trips included in this count were performed, but not recorded in TripShot due to ongoing system issues.

Year-over-Year (02/25 vs. 02/26)

	February 2025	February 2026	% Change
Total Ridership	1,910	2,304	+20.63%
On Time Performance (<10min Late)	92.17%	96.56%	+4.76%
Excessively Late Rides (>15min Late)	3.32%	0.84%	-74.70%
Vehicle Revenue Hours	813.50	800.37	-1.61%
Riders per Hour	2.48	3.12	+25.81%
Pittsfield Service Ridership	14	48	+242.86%

Ridership increased by 13.55% in February over January, despite software challenges, a snow day closure, a short month, a Holiday, and a number of team members out sick throughout the month. In addition, ridership was up 20.63% from February 2025 - a particularly impressive feat considering the resource levels. This is quite an impressive testament to the team's hard work and dedication!

By focusing on the essentials - consistency, communication, and reliability - we were able to maintain our progress month-over-month as we continue to build out our service and team to prepare for the next stage of service improvements. This was only made possible through the collective teamwork of the entire Transit 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 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 receive two new 2023 Ford E-Transit accessible vans for roughly the same cost of one 2025 van in late March. Part of the justification in requesting this change to two vehicles rather than one older model was 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 is continuously interfacing with drivers and reporting any pros and cons with the new system, so that we can continuously iterate and ensure communications are as seamless as possible. So far, the new communications system has been working well.

Technology Hardware Upgrade – The Transit Department was awarded funding in Fall 2025 through the Town of Sheffield’s Digital Equity grant to purchase two new computers as well as new ruggedized Mobile Data Terminals (MDTs) for installation in vehicles. This upgrade work is currently underway, and will greatly improve our technological capabilities through better equipment. We are very thankful for the support from the Town of Sheffield.

FY2027 Capital Requests - In mid-November, we applied for four (4) replacement vans through the MassDOT Community Transit Grant Program accessible vehicle 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 have met or will meet 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 per vehicle. MassDOT and Federal Transit Administration will cover the remaining 85% of vehicle cost, if awarded. We should receive an update on our application in late March or early April.

Request for Quotes (RFQ) Update:

Operations Software RFQ - In January, staff solicited quotes from four transit operations software vendors following MGL Ch 30B regulations. The department received three proposals in response. A preferred vendor has been selected, and transition work is underway. Our new software provider is Via Transportation, LLC. Via supports over 300 transit operations with their operations software. Staff are working with the new vendor to get things set up and the team trained, with an expected in-service start date of April 24, 2026. This is an exciting milestone—the new software will provide us with many new features that will improve the efficiency of our service, including trip-booking windows, automated call/text reminders to riders the night before and when the driver is on the way, a branded smartphone app, and automatically track the number of requests that were entered but went unfulfilled.

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 better fits within our department’s budgetary needs after our current space’s rent unexpectedly increased by 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 moved its offices to the Great Barrington Town Hall basement in mid-February while we continue to search for a space that meets our needs.

Projects Update

Operations Dashboard - Finalization of the Operations Dashboard has been paused until our new software is set up and operational. Daniel Rose-Levine, Transit Systems Specialist, has been working on this project for a number of months - the goal is to link the Dashboard directly to Via data through an API connection, with historical data uploaded statically. This will allow data to update automatically from the operations system on a daily basis rather than requiring staff to manually download data from TripShot and upload it into the dashboard's back-end each day, which will greatly increase timeliness and reliability. We expect to have the dashboard operational by mid/late May.

Service Alerts Notification System - We have set up a Google Group-based South County Connector service alerts notification system. It is now live, posted on our website, and 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.

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 FLEX - The Pittsfield shuttle service ridership declined in February, with 48 one-way trips provided during the month of February 2026. This is down from January, which saw 67 one-way trips, and up from last February when we were only operating Pittsfield service on Mondays and Wednesdays, which saw 14 one-way Pittsfield trips.

On January 4, 2026 the Pittsfield Shuttle was re-launched 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 is 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! Messiah Vision (Operations Team Leader) is working on a one-pager, which has been drafted and under review. The flyer details the VA-related service provided by Soldier On. Once set, we will distribute 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.

Service Information Brochures & Business Cards - Our Volunteer Graphic Designer, Bill Cooke, has updated our Service Information Brochures for distribution to senior centers and other locations that would benefit from providing take-home information about South County Connector transit services. We will be printing the rack cards during the Week of March 8th - please reach out if you're interested in receiving materials to distribute!

Vehicle Wrapping & Visibility – I have been working with Bill Cooke, our Volunteer Graphic Designer, to increase distinctiveness and visibility of South County Connector vehicles through vehicle wrapping, and potentially getting all the vehicles painted in the same solid color. Initial designs are coming along nicely - we're hoping to get our new E-Transit vehicles wrapped prior to arrival. This initiative has come out of feedback and suggestions from riders and drivers.

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 have collaboratively developed a preliminary service design for a 1-year pilot. In early February, I presented to the Hillsdale Town Board about the proposed pilot for FY2027. Their Town Board [approved](#) a resolution approving the pilot to move forward.

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 (\$18.2M 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 have allowed 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. With a partial award of \$600,000, we are going to be able to maintain and marginally increase driver hours with our existing operations, assuming moderate personnel salary adjustments to account for Cost of Living increases and regional and industry pay rates. We should know the results of this application in February 2026.

FY2027 Draft Operating Budget - The Transit Department's draft FY2027 Operating Budget, as recommended by the Great Barrington Town Manager has been published as a part of the Town's Proposed FY2027 Operating Budget. Some numbers have changed given our recent \$600,000 Microtransit and Last Mile grant award from MassDOT for FY2027. The revised document has been submitted to the Town Manager's office for their review. The draft budget could be subject to some staffing-level adjustments (upward or downward) based on the MCOA grant application.

Municipal Assessments – For FY2027, 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 were distributed to member communities on January 21. The assessments are as follows:

- Great Barrington: \$95,000 (cash) + appx. \$25,000 (benefits) + (2) replacement vehicles
- Sheffield: \$25,000 (cash)
- Stockbridge: \$15,000 (cash) + (1) replacement vehicle
- New Marlborough: \$15,000 (cash)
- Monterey: \$12,000 (cash)
- Egremont: \$10,000 (cash)
- West Stockbridge: \$5,000 (cash) + (1) replacement vehicle

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.

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Application – The Transit Department is partnering with the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission and the Town of West Stockbridge to include \$190,000 in a CDBG grant to fund fare-free transit services for low and middle income (LMI) residents, with a focus on seniors, persons with disabilities and members of the local workforce. Specifically, if awarded, the 18-month grant would fund:

1. Prepayment of all LMI fares within the Transit Department's full service area, with any priority going toward West Stockbridge residents (100% free to ride)

2. A dedicated vehicle stationed in W. Stockbridge at certain times of day/week - to better serve as same day demand-responsive service for LMI populations in those communities
3. 2 full-time drivers (or 4 part-time drivers) added to the South County Connector service dedicated to LMI workforce riders for 12 months -- including late night service (we have seen this is a significant need for hospitality, healthcare, and service industry workers, through data collected from previous demonstration projects)

The Transit department will be working with West Stockbridge and BRPC, who will facilitate public hearings in the coming weeks on the proposed project + application. We will keep RTAC members updated on this front.

Massachusetts Council on Aging (MCOA) FY2027 Grant Application – The Transit Department is exploring a potential joint MCOA grant application that would pilot a decentralized service model for seniors and individuals with disabilities across South County Connector member communities. The concept would pair communities to share a dedicated vehicle serving primarily seniors and persons with disabilities, with the goal of improving same-day availability, supporting special trips (such as grocery runs), and increasing flexibility for longer-distance medical transportation. This concept is a work in progress as we continue to evaluate potential service design options for a FY2027 MCOA demonstration project application.

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 our way soon. Thank you for your continued support!

Tate Coleman

Tate Coleman
Director of Public Transportation
Town of Great Barrington, MA
tcoleman@townofgbma.gov