



# SOUTH COUNTY CONNECTOR



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

### Staff Recognition / Updates

Throughout March, 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 2,444 rides in March - our **second-highest ridership month on record!** As of March 2026, we have realized a 60.05% ridership increase as compared to October 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. Special thanks to Deborah Stile, F/T Transit Team Member, for being so flexible and coming in on a couple weekend days to cover open shifts. Her commitment to the department is much appreciated!

A sampling of March Rider Surveys about the team (**100.00%** positive, with 307 surveys collected):

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

Mike R.: Mike is great! Very considerate, he walked me down the icy driveway...thanks! (5 stars)

Tyler W.: Driver was very very kind and talkative. Would love to have him again! (5 stars)

Messiah V.: Another great ride (5 stars)

Dan F.: Daniel is a great driver and lovely to chat with, thank you! (5 stars)

Paul P.: Excellent ride home from Great Barrington with Paul this afternoon. Thank you very, very much. (5 stars)

Deb S.: So appreciative of this service and Deb is great company! (5 stars)

For our leadership team, March was a time to continue the routine and adjust to the updated team structure which took effect in mid-January, where each Team Leader now has their own direct reports. While currently less prominent due to our Team Leader vacancy, 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.

We had some difficulty with our operations software, TripShot, which caused significant challenges during the first half of January. The issues are partially resolved 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 29, 2026 which we expect will solve these issues.

We currently have no external openings as we evaluate candidates for the vacant Team Leader position. We are looking to see how our new On Demand Team Members settle in and whether any scheduling gaps remain before hiring any additional On Demand TMs (ODTMs). We have met the minimum headcount for On Demand, and have the ability to hire up to 3 additional ODTMs as needed. This puts us in a strong position headed into the 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter of FY2026!

	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 Handling Assistant (Senior Tax Work-off)	1	0	1	0
Admin. Support Assistant (Senior Tax Work-off)	1	0	1	0
Graphic Design Assistant (Senior Tax Work-off)	1	1	0	0
Accounts Coordinator (Senior Tax Work-off)	1	1	0	0
F/T Team Members	2	2	0	0
P/T Team Members	4	4	0	0
On Demand Team Members	Min. 6 Up to 10	6	1	Min. 0 Up to 3
Total	Min. 22 Up to 26	19	3	Min. 1 Up to 4

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. Although this work has been temporarily paused while we seek to fill the current Team Leader vacancy, 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. More 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 (02/26 vs. 03/26)

	February 2026	March 2026	% Change
Total Ridership	2,281 <sup>1</sup>	2,444	+7.15%
On Time Performance (<10min Late) <i>Goal: 95%+</i>	96.56%	95.20%	-1.41%
Excessively Late Rides (>15min Late) <i>Goal: &lt;1.5%</i>	0.84%	1.31%	+55.95%
Driver Hours	800.37	837.78	+4.67%
Pittsfield Service Ridership	48	45	-6.25%

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<sup>1</sup> Revised total following completion of reconciliation.

Year-over-Year (03/25 vs. 03/26)

	March 2025	March 2026	% Change
Total Ridership	1,982	2,444	+23.31%
On Time Performance (<10min Late) <i>Goal: 95%+</i>	96.34%	95.20%	-1.18%
Excessively Late Rides (>15min Late) <i>Goal: &lt;1.5%</i>	1.18%	1.31%	+11.02%
Driver Hours	694.67 <sup>2</sup>	837.78	+20.60%
Pittsfield Service Ridership	15	45	+200.00%

Ridership increased by 7.15% in March over February, despite software and tablet challenges. Unfortunately, those software challenges did result in a dip in On Time Performance and an increase in Excessively Late rides – however, both remained better than our Fiscal Year 2026 target goals, really underscoring the effort and quick problem-solving the team employed. Ridership was up 23.31% from March 2025. 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 phase of service improvements. This was only made possible through the collective teamwork of the entire Transit team.

Capital Update

**Ford E-Transit Expansion Vans** – We will receive two new expansion 2023 Ford E-Transit accessible vans for roughly the same cost of one 2025 van in mid/late April. 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.

**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.

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<sup>2</sup> Service was reduced for one week during March 2025 to allow for 3 days of intensive Team Training.

**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 in Spring 2027 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 April or May.

### **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 700 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 29, 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 trips that were requested 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 late 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.

**Pittsfield FLEX** - The Pittsfield shuttle service ridership declined slightly in March, with 45 one-way trips provided during the month of March 2026. This is down from February, which saw 48 one-way trips, and up from last March when we were only operating Pittsfield service on Mondays and Wednesdays, which saw 15 one-way Pittsfield trips.

On January 4, 2026 the Pittsfield Shuttle was re-launched as the Pittsfield FLEX. The service is now open to the general public on a space-available basis, and includes 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 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) has been communicating with Soldier On and obtained a flyer from them. Pending review by the Town Manager’s office, we will send it out to all member communities for sharing. 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 have a PDF file of the rack cards and will be sending it out in mid-April - 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.

**FY2027 Operating Grant Application** – In early 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, for which we are very thankful, we are going to be able to maintain current driver hours with our existing operations, assuming moderate personnel salary adjustments to account for Cost of Living increases and regional and industry pay rates.

**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

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