



SOUTH COUNTY CONNECTOR



Tate Coleman, Director of Public Transportation Transit Department Director's Report - November

Staff Recognition / Updates

During the month of November, there were a number of staffing changes, which were handled by staff as best as possible. Newly appointed Operations Manager Asa Mervis (promoted from Asst. Operations Manager) stepped in to fill a lot of the gaps, as did Operations Team Leader/Team Trainer Michael Richter, and our new Operations Team Leaders Deborah Stile and Messiah Vision (both are returning leadership team members with a plethora of experience!). They stayed longer on their shifts, worked extra days, and supported each other in a very commendable way. I am impressed with their level of dedication to our service, our riders, and our community.

Messiah Vision, who served as P/T Volunteer Driver Program Development Researcher until late November, has completed his volunteer driver program research and wrapped up his report. Throughout December, Messiah will be spending time within his new full-time role finalizing a volunteer program pilot design, working closely with Asa (Ops. Mgr.), Lin (RTAC Monterey Rep.), and the Massachusetts Council on Aging (project grantor). Our tentative launch date for volunteer driver program recruitment is early/mid January.

I am excited to share that our Transit Systems Specialist, Daniel Rose-Levine, has returned to a half-time 19 hour/week position with the department! During the month of November, Daniel caught up the department on all overdue reporting (July-October) and implemented additional reporting automation processes. Daniel is working on some important projects for us, including the new Operations Dashboard, process improvements to reduce driver and dispatch time spent on repetitive tasks, and automation of no-show/late cancellation suspension notices (including information on how to appeal, and contact information if they believe the notice was sent in error). Daniel has also added a new automation which sends folks emails after each no-show/late cancellation, so that they are aware of the policy and how their no-show/late cancellation impacts the department prior to reaching the threshold of three instances in 30 days. We hope this will help better pre-emptively address issues as they occur.

We currently have openings for 1 P/T Driver (\$21.75/hour) and 2 On Demand Team Members (\$21/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 either of these positions, 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	5	1	1
On Demand Team Members	5	1	2	2
Total	21	14	4	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). Starting in January, completion of an operational restructuring will also assign 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 January 4, 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 in 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 (10/25 vs. 11/25)

	October 2025	November 2025	% Change
Regular Service Ridership	1,543	1,589	+2.98%
Regular Service Hours	959.24	872.80	-9.01%
Pittsfield Service Ridership	26	35	+34.62%

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

	November 2024	November 2025	% Change
Regular Service Ridership	2,239	1,589	-29.03%
Regular Service Hours	878.16	872.80	-0.61%
Pittsfield Service Ridership	10	35	+250.00%

Since stepping into my new role as Director of Public Transportation on November 10, my focus has been on learning what works and what doesn't with current operational policies and procedures, and later in the month I began to collaboratively design strategies to improve processes where necessary. We expect that ridership gains will come once we implement these process improvements—but we have to make sure operations are fully stabilized, and team members fully trained, before marketing the service to additional members of the community.

Capital Update

Ford E-Transit Van - Delivery of the new electric ADA-accessible Ford E-Transit van has been indefinitely delayed due to manufacturing issues, according to MassDOT. We are working with MassDOT to develop alternate solutions, if necessary. I hope to have an update on this by next month.

Communications System - We will be retiring our CB radio system in the coming weeks and implementing a new satellite communications system using Garmin InReach Minis, in conjunction with Kyocera DuraForce Pro 3 Push-to-Talk Cellular-Based Radio system. This will help us reduce costs and 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 will be working 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. Our goal is to put the RFP on the street by early 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 mid-December.

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 later this month 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 mid/late December.

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 will be 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 is off to a slow start, with 35 one-way trips provided during the month of November 2025 (18 service days during the month, since the service did not run on Veteran’s Day or Thanksgiving – so appx. 2 one-way trips per day). This is up from October, which saw 26 one-way trips, and last November when we were only operating Pittsfield service on Mondays and Wednesdays, which saw 10 one-way Pittsfield trips. In coordination with Melanie V. (Egremont) and Joan P. (Gt. Barrington COA), we are working on an updated service design model for the Pittsfield service based on rider and community feedback, which will launch January 4, 2026.

Some aspects of this updated design will include:

- Reduced fares (\$6 one-way, same cost as a multi-town ride);
- Opening up the service to all SCC communities, including non-seniors, on a space-available basis;
- Lifting the medical-only ride restriction for any remaining capacity the day of/day before;
- Permit Stockbridge and West Stockbridge residents to book one-seat rides to/from Pittsfield (in addition to Great Barrington & Egremont) since their communities are en route;
- Re-aligning times so that the shuttle will depart South County around 7:30 AM; 9:30 AM; 11:30 AM; 2 PM which provides complementary service to the free BRTA Route 921 Express bus, which departs Great Barrington at half-past even hours (6:30 AM; 8:30 AM; 10:30 AM; etc.);
- Re-distributing 10 hours of Pittsfield service operator time into general SCC local service, which will allow dispatch to override the shuttle times up to 5 times per week to bring a senior/disabled rider to/from their appointment at a more convenient time to them, if the every 2 hours service does not meet their needs (e.g., 10 AM appointment when Pittsfield arrival options are 8:30 AM or 10:30 AM).

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 the coming weeks 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 explore a potential 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. Responses showed high interest in an on-demand transit service connecting Hillsdale with Great Barrington. We will continue coordinating with Hillsdale in the coming months to determine a pilot design and cost.

Non-Profit Status – I have been working with the Town to either partner with a local non-profit so that the department can receive 501(c)(3) pass-through status, or alternatively to set up a “Friends of the South County Connector” organization. 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 or March 2026.

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!

Tate Coleman

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