



# SOUTH COUNTY CONNECTOR



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

### Staff Recognition / Updates

Throughout the month of April, 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 2,415 rides in April!

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 Robert Unda, one of our newer On Demand Team Members, for covering so many of our open shifts and showing up with such positivity!

A sampling of April Rider Surveys about the team (**98.63%** positive, with 293 surveys collected):

Ryan S.: Wonderful ride to work with Ryan today. Thank you for getting my Friday off to a great start!! (5 stars)

Messiah V.: Messiah is very professional (5 stars)

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

Bonnie M.: Bonnie is always lovely as a driver and a conversationalist (5 stars)

Michael R.: Outstanding transportation, friendly personality ... thank you so much (5 stars)

Jess J.: Jess is the best! (5 stars)

For our leadership team, the past few months have provided an opportunity 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!

Implementation of the department's new Via operations software began during April, including staff training and the transition into live service at the end of the month. Team members across

operations, dispatch, and driving staff showed significant flexibility and patience throughout the transition process. Kudos to the entire operations team on working together, learning from and supporting each other, and asking questions to their leaders whenever needed. While the implementation required temporarily dedicating some driver hours toward training and onboarding, the new platform is already improving various operational service aspects, especially with increasing the percentage of rides shared with another rider, in addition to rider communication. We are excited about the opportunities Via provides to improve service reliability, trip management, and the overall rider experience moving forward.

We currently have an opening for a F/T Operations Team Leader (Vehicle Maintenance/Safety Coordinator focus) and a Cash Counter (Senior Tax Work-off - 2 hrs/week = \$1,500 annual property tax rebate for Gt. Barrington Seniors). 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	1	0	0
Graphic Designer (Senior Tax Work-off)	1	1	0	0
Accounts Coordinator (Senior Tax Work-off)	1	0	0	1
F/T Team Members	3	3	0	0
P/T Team Members	4	4	0	0
On Demand Team Members	Min. 6 Up to 10	7	0	Min. 0 Up to 3
Total	Min. 22 Up to 26	21	0	Min. 2 Up to 5

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.

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 continue strengthening the South County Connector system and growing ridership in a better, more robust way.

Ridership

Month-over-Month (03/26 vs. 04/26)

	March 2026	April 2026	% Change
Total Ridership	2,444	2,415	-1.19%
On Time Performance (<10min Late) <i>Goal: 95%+</i>	95.20%	95.94%	+0.77%
Excessively Late Rides (>15min Late) <i>Goal: &lt;1.5%</i>	1.31%	1.29%	-1.53%
Driver Hours (Excluding Pittsfield)	837.78	922.32	+10.09%
Pittsfield Service Ridership	40	49	+22.50%

Year-over-Year (04/25 vs. 04/26)

	April 2025	April 2026	% Change
Total Ridership	2,260	2,415	+6.86%
On Time Performance (<10min Late) Goal: 95%+	95.85%	95.94%	+0.09%
Excessively Late Rides (>15min Late) Goal: <1.5%	1.00%	1.31%	+31.00%
Driver Hours (Excluding Pittsfield)	876.33	922.32	+5.25%
Pittsfield Service Ridership	11	49	+345.45%

Ridership decreased by 1.19% in April. This was largely due to both an increase in multi-Town rides (longer-distance trips) and our pulling some driver hours for driver training with our new software, Via. Ridership was up 6.86% from April 2025 - a solid gain for April, year-over-year.

By focusing on the essentials - consistency, communication, and reliability - we were able to maintain our progress as we continue to build out our service and team to prepare for the next phase of service improvements, including the increased ridership enabled by our new operations software going into May and June. This was only made possible through the collective teamwork of the entire Transit team.

Capital Update

**Ford E-Transit Expansion Vans** – We received two new 2023 Ford E-Transit accessible vans for roughly the same cost of one 2025 van, in 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.

**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. In late April, [awards were announced by MassDOT](#) for six vehicles – allowing us to receive six new 2023 model year Ford E-Transit accessible vans for roughly the same cost of three 2026 vans. Two replacement vehicles were awarded to Stockbridge, two to West Stockbridge, and two to Great Barrington – each to replace one vehicle with two lower-range 2023 electric vans. At the time this report is being written, West Stockbridge’s local match has been approved at their Town Meeting; Stockbridge’s local match is pending and will be voted on at their Town Meeting on May 19; and Great Barrington’s local match is not currently moving forward after the item was pulled from the warrant prior to a vote being taken due to broader Proposition 2½ override-related budget considerations. Alternate options are being explored by RTAC members that may be able to cover the Great Barrington vehicles’ local match.

### **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 was selected: our new software provider is Via Transportation, LLC. Via supports over 700 transit operations with their operations software. The software was implemented in regular service on April 29, 2026 and has been well-received, especially from the senior community. This is an exciting milestone—the new software provides 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 South County Connector-branded smartphone app, and allows us to 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 mid-February while we continue to search for a space that meets our needs.

### Projects Update

**Operations Dashboard** - Daniel Rose-Levine, Transit Systems Specialist, has been working on the Operations Dashboard project for a number of months - the goal is to link the Dashboard directly to Via data, 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 increased in April, with 49 one-way trips provided during the month of April 2026. This is up from March, which saw 40 one-way trips, and up from last April when we were only operating Pittsfield service on Mondays and Wednesdays, which saw 11 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 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) will be sending out a flyer in mid-May to each community. The flyer details transportation services provided by Soldier On, including the VA-related service. 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, will be updating our Service Information Brochures in May to incorporate new service information from Via, 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 and delivering them in the coming weeks - 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. A design has been selected internally. We are exploring the feasibility to include this in the FY2027 budget. 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. This project is currently under review by the Great Barrington Town Manager's office and will be revisited in June.

**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. This project has been paused until FY27.

**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 are very thankful to MassDOT for their continued funding and support.

**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. Unfortunately, the application was not selected for funding. The program was highly competitive and available funds were exhausted shortly after the application portal opened.

**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 LMI fares within the Transit Department’s 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 worked with West Stockbridge and BRPC, who facilitated a public hearing on March 30 relating to the proposed project + application. The application was successfully submitted in April. We will keep RTAC members updated as this project progresses.

**Massachusetts Council on Aging (MCOA) FY2027 Grant Application** – The South County Connector is seeking to work with participating South County Connector member communities and their respective Councils on Aging to apply for MCOA funds for a joint transportation demonstration project benefitting Seniors & Persons with Disabilities, piloting a decentralized approach to service deployment. Each participating community's Council on Aging will be a direct partner in the planning, coordination, and delivery of services.

In April 2026, 65% of South County Connector ridership consisted of seniors and persons with disabilities across the seven member communities. Communities furthest from the Great Barrington operations hub - where vehicles are currently centrally dispatched - consistently experience the greatest constraints on service availability and response time, especially in relation to same-day trip requests, which are integral to seniors' quality-of-life. A decentralized model addresses this directly by positioning dedicated vehicles closer to the communities they serve.

One component of the demonstration project would support continuation of the Pittsfield Medical Transportation program, which has served seniors and persons with disabilities across member communities for over three years, expanding from two days per week to five days per week over that period.

Great Barrington, as host community and lead applicant, would serve as the coordinating entity. Proposed community groupings and coordinating COAs are as follows:

- Great Barrington & Egremont (\$25,000 each/\$50,000 total) - coordinated with Great Barrington and Egremont COAs (Mon-Fri 8:30 AM - 4 PM)
- New Marlborough & Monterey (\$25,000 each/\$50,000 total) - coordinated with New Marlborough and Monterey COAs (Mon-Fri 8:30 AM - 4 PM)
- Stockbridge, West Stockbridge & Richmond (\$25,000 each/\$75,000 total) - coordinated with Stockbridge, West Stockbridge, and Richmond COAs (Mon-Fri 7 AM - 7 PM)

Total potential funding: \$175,000 across 7 applications

Implementation would require hiring up to 6 additional part-time operators, with a total of up to 8 part-time operators across the service. Recent hiring efforts for part-time and on-demand drivers have been successful, and existing on-demand drivers may be candidates to transition into part-time positions as the field demonstration project is implemented.

This demonstration project is designed to operate largely outside peak service hours, allowing the existing fleet to be utilized without requiring additional vehicles.

This configuration is illustrative. Input from member communities and their Councils on Aging is welcome as the proposal is refined.

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!

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