



SOUTH COUNTY CONNECTOR

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



Staff Recognition / Updates

July marked a significant deterioration in staffing capacity, with the department ending the month with 14 vacancies (7.9 FTE) across 28 budgeted positions (leaving 3.1 FTE remaining out of 11 FTE total). This represents **over two-thirds of the department's budgeted FTE capacity currently vacant or with staff currently in resignation notice periods**. Despite these challenges, the remaining team demonstrated remarkable flexibility and teamwork. Additional details are provided below. Ridership came in at 2,228 rides. That is down 15.1% from May 2026, and down 11.1% from June 2026. The team managed through it very well given the circumstances.

Thank you to our On Demand Team Members who have been so flexible in picking up additional hours whenever they are able, especially Deborah Stile, who has taken on full-time hours for the month of August; Robert Unda, who has been extremely flexible and is working a full 19 hours/week; Ron Goldberg, who has stepped up to cover four weekly early-morning driving shifts; and Tyler Weinstein, who is working two full days a week. Our continued operations have been made possible by these On Demand folks who have really helped pick up the slack wherever possible. Deborah and Tyler will be moving back to regular On Demand status beginning in September due to other commitments they have – their assistance over the past couple months has really been invaluable and much appreciated.

I want to recognize Michael Harrigan, one of our Part Time Team Members, for his exemplary defensive driving skills. Michael was in a non-preventable accident in July, where he helped avert a potentially life-threatening accident, with the only damage on our side being to the side of one of our vehicles. The Town received an email from a rider who was on board at the time of the accident, who shared that she is “absolutely convinced that the defensive driving and great reactions of the South County Connector driver, Mike H., are what prevented the three of us in the van from being severely injured or killed.” Michael was recognized by State Representative Leigh Davis for his outstanding defensive driving skills, with a personal letter and a proclamation signed by her and the Speaker of the House. As our longest tenured Team Member who has served the Department since its inception, Michael is an absolute joy and pleasure to have on the team. We are so thankful for his positive attitude, professionalism, and always-alert presence on the team.

I also want to recognize Messiah Vision, who was named Interim Operations Manager effective July 2, 2026. Messiah has been with the SCC for some time and has shown real leadership in his role as Operations Team Leader. Messiah has been doing an absolutely phenomenal job keeping things running as smoothly as possible.

On the open positions front: as of this writing, we have not received approval from the Town Manager to post any of our 14 vacancies (the one posting for an Operations Team Leader, which has been active since February, is no longer active as the role is being reassessed as part of the restructuring). The Town Manager's office is conducting a restructuring of the Transit Division into the Transportation Department. In the interim, we have reduced service, eliminating all service after 5 PM and suspending the Pittsfield FLEX service.

This will be my last Director's report – my last day with the Town will be August 13. I have accepted a role as the Scheduling & Service Planning Manager at a mid-size transit agency, where I will be leading a team and working on scheduling and service planning for their fixed-route bus and streetcar system. I have very much enjoyed working and volunteering with you and the Town over the last eight years, and will do my best to build on current documentation over the upcoming two weeks for continuity of operations, and to make sure information is available and accessible for the next Director.

A sampling of July rider surveys about the team (**99.2%** positive):

It's always so good for me to ride with Mike. He's so kind and helpful and such a wonderful driver.. (5 stars)

I love riding with Ryan. He's so careful has a really nice energy. It's very nice and a good driver. (5 stars)

Very nice ride to work with Bonnie this morning. Thank you. (5 stars)

Great ride with Tyler this morning. Thanks!! (5 stars)

Staffing (As of August 2026, including pending vacancies)

In addition to recruitment delays, retention of frontline driving staff has been impacted by compensation competitiveness. Several recent departures and recruitment challenges have been associated with higher-paying opportunities elsewhere. Prior to the current staffing decline, I had recommended reviewing driver compensation levels to better align with the regional labor market and improve recruitment and retention.

While the total vacancy count is significant, the impact is concentrated among core full-time operational positions. Five of seven full-time leadership and driving positions are currently vacant or will be vacant pending imminent notice period completions, leaving limited capacity for daily supervision, dispatch coverage, training, and service recovery.

Position	Budgeted	Filled	Pending / Trainees	Open
F/T Director of Public Transportation	1 (1 FTE)	0 (0 FTE)	0	1 (1 FTE)
F/T Operations Manager (70%-80% Driving & Dispatch)	1 (1 FTE)	1 * (1 FTE)	0	0 * (0 FTE)
F/T Operations Team Leaders (80%-90% Driving & Dispatch)	3 (3 FTE)	0 * (0 FTE)	0	3 * (3 FTE)
P/T Systems Specialist	1 (0.5 FTE)	1 (0.5 FTE)	0	0 (0 FTE)
P/T Cash Revenue Auditor	1 (0.1 FTE)	0 (0 FTE)	0	1 (0.1 FTE)
Graphic Designer (Senior Tax Work-off)	1 (0 FTE)	1 (0 FTE)	0	0 (0 FTE)
F/T Team Members (Driving & Dispatch)	2 (2 FTE)	1 (1 FTE)	0	1 (1 FTE)

Position	Budgeted	Filled	Pending / Trainees	Open
P/T Team Members (Driving & Dispatch)	7 ** (2.9 FTE)	2 (0.6 FTE)	0	6 (2.3 FTE)
P/T Vehicle Operator - MCOA (For New Marlborough MCOA Grant)	1 ** (0.5 FTE)	0 (0 FTE)	0	1 (0.5 FTE)
On Demand Team Members (Driving & Dispatch)	10 *** (0 FTE)	8 (0 FTE)	0	2 (0 FTE)
Total	28 (11 FTE)	14 (3.1 FTE)	0	14 (7.9 FTE)

* Messiah Vision, Operations Team Leader, has been named Interim Operations Manager, effective July 2, 2026 through August 31, 2026.

** The number of budgeted P/T Team Members has increased due to the FY27 New Marlborough MCOA Award and right-sizing for existing P/T Team Members who work fewer than 0.5 FTE / 19 hours/week.

*** On Demand Team Members do not have a set weekly schedule, instead picking up open shifts as available, due to vacancies, call-outs and full-time/part-time team members' time off. Many On Demand Team Members regularly work 4-10 hours/week, although have no FTE account assigned and no guaranteed hours.

At the time of writing on 08/03/2026, we are still awaiting approval from the Town Manager's office to post and begin recruitment of any vacant positions (a posting on the Town's website for an Operations Team Leader role is no longer active, as the role is being reassessed as part of the restructuring). I requested approval from the Town Manager to open requisitions for 7 existing and anticipated vacancies on June 2, and have not yet received approval to post any open roles, even though our staffing situation has deteriorated further. I have been informed that the restructuring planned to take effect August 10 will eliminate some positions and realign others. I have been actively reviewing the proposed restructuring with the Town Manager and emphasizing the importance of maintaining safety and customer-centric service reliability throughout the transition.

It is important to note that current service levels have only been sustained through the exceptional flexibility of several On Demand Team Members who have significantly exceeded their typical hours in recent weeks. This reliance on informal, above-and-beyond coverage is not a sustainable operating model, and service levels would be at serious risk without their continued willingness to do so.

Unfortunately, due to the lack of hiring approvals, and a few additional upcoming staff transitions and resignations, I expect there will be additional service reductions needed by early/mid-September, likely reducing hours to Monday-Friday 8am-4pm or similar. Even if roles were posted today, it would take at least 4-6 weeks to hire and train drivers and 6-8 weeks to hire and train leadership staff, exceeding the timeline of the upcoming transitions and resignations.

Ridership

Last Month + Last Year Comparison

Performance Measure	Jul 2026	Jun 2026	Jul 2025	07/26 vs. 06/26	07/26 vs. 07/25
Total Rides (Unlinked Passenger Trips)	2,228	2,505	1,499	-11.1%	+48.6%
On-Time Performance (< 10 min late) Goal: 95%+	98.0% *	98.8% *	93.6%	-0.8%	+4.7%

Performance Measure	Jul 2026	Jun 2026	Jul 2025	07/26 vs. 06/26	07/26 vs. 07/25
Excessively Late Rides (> 15 min late) Goal: < 1.5%	1.4% *	0.7% *	1.9%	+100%	-26.3%
Pooled Ride Percentage	45.6%	46.1%	23.7%	-1.1%	+92.4%
Revenue Hours (excl. Pittsfield)	764.0 **	831.2 **	768.8	-8.1%	-0.6%
Pittsfield FLEX Rides	62	54	—	+14.8%	—
Unmet Trips (Seat Unavailable & Unaccepted Proposal)	1,005	591	—	+70.1%	—
Trip Denial Rate (Unmet Trips / (Operated + Unmet + No-Show))	30.6%	19.4%	—	+57.2%	—

* On-time performance continues to be a work in progress from a reporting standpoint. We are still fine-tuning our OTP methodology in partnership with Via and expect more stable figures in the coming months.

** With Via, we now have the ability to more accurately track “revenue hours” rather than “driver hours”. “Revenue hours” is the more standard industry metric. The numbers may not quite be an apples-to-apples comparison.

July came in at 2,228 rides, down from May's record of 2,624. The decrease is primarily due to reduced operating capacity resulting from the department's current very limited staffing levels, which have declined to 14 vacancies across 28 budgeted positions. On-time performance remained steady at 98.0%, exceeding our goal of 95%.

In July, 1,005 requests went unfulfilled (622 seat unavailable + 383 unaccepted proposals where the offered time was too far from what the rider needed), yielding a denial rate of 30.55%, up from 19.43% in June and 15.35% in May. This reflects the greatly reduced capacity we experienced with reduced driver hours, especially in the later part of the month. Once recruitment begins, restoring staffing capacity will take several months due to the required hiring and training timelines. In the interim, service capacity will be progressively more constrained.

Capital Update

MassDOT Vehicle Grant – Six replacement Ford E-Transit accessible vans were awarded in April, two each to Great Barrington, Stockbridge, and West Stockbridge, for Spring 2027 delivery. Stockbridge's local match (\$18,205) was approved at their May 19 Town Meeting. West Stockbridge's was previously approved. Great Barrington's local match is anticipated to be funded by Berkshire Health Systems (BHS) through a collaborative partnership designed to improve transit access to/from BHS facilities in Lee, Lenox and Pittsfield via the Pittsfield FLEX. We are very thankful to BHS for this upcoming mutual partnership. Thank you to Jenn Goewey, Director of the Southern Berkshire Rural Health Network, for facilitating!

Projects Update

Operations Dashboard – The dashboard is [now live on our website!](https://socoride.org/dashboard) Daniel Rose-Levine (Systems Specialist) worked through challenges translating historical data from TripShot into Via's format. It is publicly available at socoride.org/dashboard and updates frequently data from Via. Note that some final adjustments are still being made, and there may be some errors. Please let us know if you notice any potential data issues.

Multimodal Connectivity – During the month of June, I worked with BRTA and Via to integrate BRTA's fixed-route GTFS feed into our rider app, allowing for flexible mode-choice routing, where riders can book an integrated trip including both the South County Connector and BRTA buses.

Riders are also referred to consider BRTA buses when the trip is convenient, or when capacity is not available on our service (for example, when traveling between Great Barrington and Stockbridge centers). This feature is now live in the South County Connector app.

Transit Operations Manual – In coordination with Operations Leadership, I have spent a few months drafting and refining a comprehensive Transit Department Operations Manual, which covers operational policies and procedures ranging from quarterly shift bid procedures, to attendance policies, to driver expectations, to accident/incident protocols, rider policies, reporting requirements and others. We sent a draft to the Town Manager's office for review on May 6. After a follow-up in mid-May and again in July, we have not yet received any feedback or approval to distribute the Manual to the team. I will continue to follow up on this prior to my departure, as having these policies and procedures clearly documented will be paramount to ensuring safe and reliable continuous operations.

Vehicle Wrapping & Visibility – We've been working with our volunteer graphic designer, Bill Cooke, on a vehicle wrap design to make SCC vehicles more recognizable out on the road. An internal design has been selected, and we're exploring the feasibility of including this in the FY2027 budget.

Service Information Brochures – Updated brochures incorporating new Via booking information should be completed by the Systems Specialist before the end of August. We'll have updated materials out to senior centers and community locations as soon as they're ready.

Hillsdale, NY Service Pilot – The Great Barrington Town Manager has directed that this pilot will not proceed at this time. The Hillsdale Town Board had approved a resolution in February to move forward with this project.

Operations Center – The department is still operating out of the Great Barrington Town Hall's basement following our relocation in mid-February. The search for a permanent space that meets our operational needs and budget has been paused by the Town Manager. Air quality and radon testing has been requested by the Town Manager's office.

Grants & Community

MassDOT Microtransit & Last Mile Grant (\$600,000) – Awarded. This confirms FY2027 operating funding and is the foundation of our budget for the coming year. We are very thankful to MassDOT for their continued support!

MCOA FY2027 Grant Applications (\$25,000) – A \$25,000 grant was awarded to the Town of New Marlborough for enhanced senior transportation services for New Marlborough residents. I recently met with New Marlborough's Director of Senior Services, Prudence Spaulding, and their Selectboard Chair, Tara White, to discuss next steps for this award, which will include hiring a limited-term 19 hour/week driver dedicated to New Marlborough.

CDBG Application (\$190,000) – Successfully submitted in April in partnership with the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission and the Town of West Stockbridge. If awarded, this would fund fare-free service for low- and moderate-income residents, a dedicated vehicle in West Stockbridge, and additional driver capacity for workforce trips including late-night service. Awaiting decision.

Volunteers in Medicine Partnership – Our intercity medical trip service through VIM is currently suspended due to a staffing shortage. Details and scheduled trips are posted at socoride.org under "Intercity."

Soldier On Referral Program – We continue to refer any veteran calling in for VA Medical Hospital transportation to Soldier On (Pittsfield), who provide this service free of charge to all Berkshire County veterans. Information was distributed to all member communities in mid-May.

Outstanding Items Requiring Continued Attention

Staffing & Recruitment – Recruitment for vacant Transit positions remains pending while the departmental restructuring process is underway. Given current staffing levels and hiring/training timelines, continued monitoring will be needed to assess impacts on service levels, operational coverage, and necessity of additional service reductions.

FY2027 Benefit Cost Allocation – During FY2027 budget discussions, the Transit Department was directed to include a \$180,000 offset for benefit costs within the seven-town transit budget. The current Transit budget (with revisions following the MCOA award notifications) includes \$116,691 for Fringe Benefits, including coverage-related costs associated with driver/dispatch paid time off. Based on available information at the time of budgeting, the \$180,000 offset exceeds the currently identified Transit fringe benefit costs by approximately \$64,000.

A reduction of this magnitude would have operational implications, potentially requiring reductions equivalent to approximately 1.4 part-time vehicle operator positions, or approximately 8,000 annual rides based on current service productivity. Final benefit cost allocation methodology, including review as to whether grant-funded positions are eligible for pension plans, and any resulting budget adjustments should be confirmed to make sure there is alignment between allocated costs and available transit resources.

Department Restructuring & Positions – In an initiative led by the Town Manager's office, the Transit Division is transitioning into the Transportation Department structure. Continued review will be needed to make sure position classifications, staffing levels, and operational responsibilities align with the needs of the service.

Operations Facility – The department remains temporarily located in the Town Hall basement following the February relocation. The search for a permanent operations facility remains paused, and future planning should continue to identify a location that meets operational, safety, and customer service needs.

Service Capacity & Regional Expansion Priorities – Due to current staffing constraints, some service reductions and paused initiatives remain in place, including the Pittsfield FLEX suspension, Intercity Medical Trip suspension, and Hillsdale, NY pilot pause. Future leadership should reassess these services as staffing capacity is restored.

Intermunicipal Agreement (IMA) – The FY2027 Intermunicipal Agreement with participating member communities was expected to be distributed prior to July 1, 2026, with execution to follow thereafter. Following direction received in mid-July, Chris Rembold, Assistant Town Manager, and I prepared an initial draft for review. A revised draft was subsequently prepared by the Town Manager and returned for review. I have reviewed the revised draft and provided comments. As of this writing, the agreement remains under review by the Town Manager's office. Completion and execution of the agreement will be an important next step for FY2027 operations funding and service continuity.

Potential Turnkey Operations Contracting Model – Following discussions with the Town Manager and Assistant Town Manager, I recently contacted several potential providers to gather informal information regarding a potential turnkey operations model for the South County Connector. Under this approach, the Town would retain a Transit Director, Transit Manager, or Service Planner role responsible for contractor oversight, service planning, strategic direction, and coordination, while operational responsibilities such as staffing, daily operations, and workforce management would be managed by a contracted provider. As of this writing, preliminary information received appears generally promising, although additional evaluation will be needed. I expect to receive additional information prior to my departure on August 13 and will provide any relevant materials and findings to the Town Manager's office for continued review.

I want to thank the Great Barrington Selectboard, member communities, Rep. Leigh Davis, community partners, and the South County Connector team for their support over the past few years. It has been a privilege to serve the Town in capacities across the Accounting Department and Planning Department, and to help plan, build and grow the Transit Department (South County Connector) into what it is today. I am confident the program has a strong foundation for continued success if decisions continue to prioritize safe, reliable, and customer-focused service.

Please feel free to reach out to me directly with any questions. I am grateful for the opportunity to have worked with all of you, and I look forward to seeing the continued growth and development of the South County Connector in the years ahead.

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