A light gray background map of a city, likely San Francisco, showing a dense street grid and a prominent river (the San Francisco Bay) winding through the center. The map is oriented with the river flowing from the top right towards the bottom left.

# REGIONAL COORDINATION STUDY

BY THE **m**vingforward POLICY TASK FORCE

# REGIONAL COORDINATION STUDY

BY THE  
**movingforward**  
POLICY TASK FORCE

Moving Forward is an initiative led by business and community leaders to ensure the creation of a regional transportation solution through a cohesive community effort.

Since May 2019, the Moving Forward Mobility Policy Task Force has studied models of regional coordination around the provision of transit. The Task Force considered the regional coordination models of seven peer and aspirational regions from across the country. The Task Force's goal is to provide an understanding of how Middle Tennessee undertakes coordination on the provision of transit compared to how other regions have collaborated across jurisdictions to provide transit options.

When the Let's Move Nashville transit plan failed at the polls in Nashville/Davidson County in 2018, one criticism of the plan was that it was not regional. This critique noted that the proposed light rail lines did not extend to the outer portions of Davidson County, much less to the outlying counties where commuters add vehicles to roads and interstates (over 50 percent of employees commute across county lines in Middle Tennessee every day).

The plan to offer transit across Middle Tennessee can be constructed in a number of ways – with an emphasis on light rail or bus rapid transit, with varying cross-town or cross-region routes, etc. The Moving Forward Mobility Policy Task Force was interested, however, in stepping back to assess what structures and processes are currently in place in Middle Tennessee to ensure regional coordination to implement regional transit and then comparing those structures and processes to those in other regions.

## THE TASK FORCE FOCUSED ON FIVE POINTS OF COORDINATION TO CREATE A REGIONAL TRANSIT SYSTEM

1. REGIONAL GOVERNANCE OR COORDINATION STRUCTURES
2. PLANNING FOR TRANSIT
3. SECURING AND DISTRIBUTING FUNDING FOR TRANSIT
4. IMPLEMENTING/CONSTRUCTING TRANSIT
5. OPERATING TRANSIT

The Task Force strived to identify regions that were peers or aspirational in nature. While the Nashville region is in the early stages of creating a regional transit system compared to most of the study regions, this positions Middle Tennessee to learn from the experiences of others. After careful consideration, the Task Force chose to study Atlanta, GA; Charlotte, NC; Denver, CO; Indianapolis, IN; Raleigh, NC; Seattle, WA; and Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN. Representatives from the selected regions of study provided the Task Force with historical overviews and imparted best practices and lessons learned from their respective experiences with regional transit solutions.

**movingforward**

*Moving Forward champions mobility, of which transit is one component but not the sole solution to Middle Tennessee's congestion and the stress it puts on the lives of Middle Tennesseans. For the purposes of this report, Moving Forward has elected to focus narrowly on transit – understanding it is one solution among many, but noting that transit is a solution that is currently under-developed in Middle Tennessee and worthy of focused study.*



## NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE



## ATLANTA, GEORGIA

### SIZE OF REGION

**7,484 square miles**  
14 counties

### SIZE OF REGION

**3,024 square miles**  
10 counties

### POPULATION

**2.1 Million**



### POPULATION

**4.6 Million**



### DEDICATED FUNDING



**None.**

Failed referendum for dedicated funding in 2018.



**Yes.**

Sales tax.

### TRANSIT PROVIDED

**Regionally** : one commuter rail line; Ten regional bus routes in traffic; Vanpool and carpool.

**Locally** : bus in traffic in Nashville/Davidson County and some smaller outlying cities.

### TRANSIT PROVIDED

Rail, bus, streetcar, and regional bus service in outlying counties, ADA paratransit services.

### SEPARATE LAYER OF REGIONAL GOVERNANCE - A DISTRICT WITH TAXING, CONSTRUCTION AND OPERATION AUTHORITY



**None.**



**None.**

The four governments included in MARTA have the ability to individually raise taxes, per voter approval, for transit projects. The creation on the Atlanta-region Transit Link (ATL) in 2018 is a move towards a more coordinated regional effort on taxing, construction and operations.



## CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA



## DENVER, COLORADO

### SIZE OF REGION

**1,783 square miles**  
*3 counties*

### SIZE OF REGION

**2,400 square miles**  
*10 counties*

### POPULATION

**1.5 Million**



### POPULATION

**3.3 Million**



### DEDICATED FUNDING

☒ **Yes.**  
Sales tax.

### DEDICATED FUNDING

☒ **Yes.**  
Sales tax.

### TRANSIT PROVIDED

Light rail; local bus;  
"Express routes" (commuter bus); shuttles.

### TRANSIT PROVIDED

Bus, rail, shuttles, ADA paratransit services,  
demand responsive services like FlexRide,  
and vanpools.

### SEPARATE LAYER OF REGIONAL GOVERNANCE - A DISTRICT WITH TAXING, CONSTRUCTION AND OPERATION AUTHORITY

☐ **None.**

### SEPARATE LAYER OF REGIONAL GOVERNANCE - A DISTRICT WITH TAXING, CONSTRUCTION AND OPERATION AUTHORITY

☒ **Yes.**  
The Regional Transportation District (RTD) is the eight county regional authority operating public transit in the greater Denver region. RTD has the authority to collect transportation funds and act autonomously when prioritizing regional projects.



## INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA

### SIZE OF REGION

**1,520 square miles**  
8 counties

### POPULATION

**1.9 Million**



### DEDICATED FUNDING



**Yes.**

Local income tax.

*Note: this is not available in TN*

### TRANSIT PROVIDED

31 bus routes plus paratransit.  
One BRT line - the Red Line that currently operates within Marion County. Planned extensions will take it to outlying counties and cities. Purple line and Blue line (to airport) to follow.

### SEPARATE LAYER OF REGIONAL GOVERNANCE - A DISTRICT WITH TAXING, CONSTRUCTION AND OPERATION AUTHORITY



**None.**



## TWIN CITIES, MINNESOTA

### SIZE OF REGION

**3,000 square miles**  
7 counties

### POPULATION

**3 Million**



### DEDICATED FUNDING



**Yes.**

Dedicated state funds, motor vehicle sales tax, and county sales tax.

### TRANSIT PROVIDED

Buses, light rail, commuter rail, resources for those who carpool, vanpool, walk or bike.

### SEPARATE LAYER OF REGIONAL GOVERNANCE - A DISTRICT WITH TAXING, CONSTRUCTION AND OPERATION AUTHORITY



**Yes.**

Metropolitan Council serves as the transit authority for the region. Met Council's board decides project funding needs and priorities. Metro Transit (under Met Council) manages construction and operations in the region.



## RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA

### SIZE OF REGION

**5,510 square miles**  
11 counties

### POPULATION

**2.2 Million**



### DEDICATED FUNDING



**Yes.**

Sales tax, nominal vehicle fee.

### TRANSIT PROVIDED

Bus service, Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) is planned.

### SEPARATE LAYER OF REGIONAL GOVERNANCE - A DISTRICT WITH TAXING, CONSTRUCTION AND OPERATION AUTHORITY



**None.**



## SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

### SIZE OF REGION

**6,290 square miles**  
4 counties

### POPULATION

**4.2 Million**



### DEDICATED FUNDING



**Yes.**

Sales tax, vehicle registration fees, and property tax.

### TRANSIT PROVIDED

Light rail, heavy rail, and bus rapid transit (BRT).

### SEPARATE LAYER OF REGIONAL GOVERNANCE - A DISTRICT WITH TAXING, CONSTRUCTION AND OPERATION AUTHORITY



**Yes.**

Sound Transit formed to represent the four-county Seattle region and has collection authority to fund transit in the region.

# NASHVILLE

## MIDDLE TENNESSEE REGION

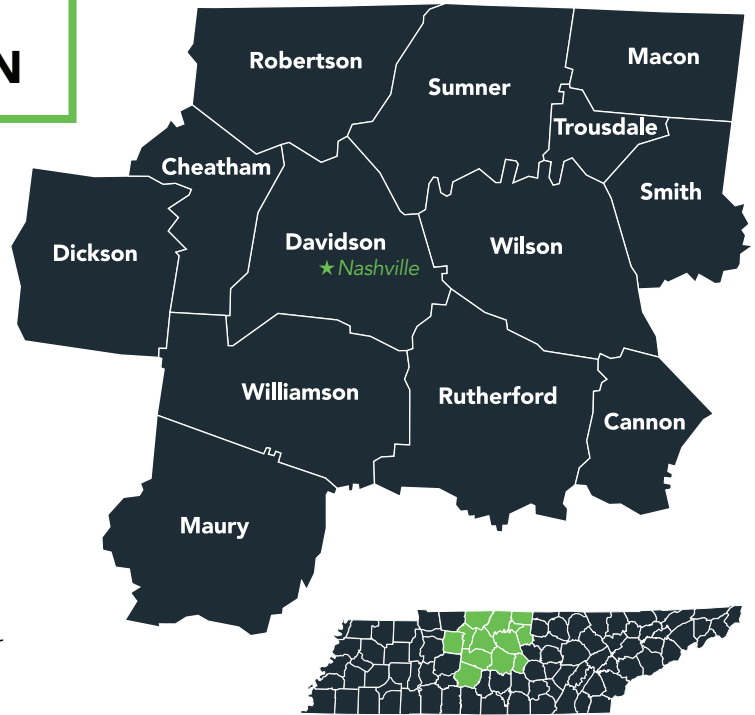
Before discussing how the peer regions coordinate across governance, planning, funding, construction and operation of transit, it is best to review where the Nashville region is currently situated in the transit conversation and what assets it has to create regional transit to address the region's growing mobility needs.

### CURRENT MIDDLE TENNESSEE REGIONAL COORDINATION STRUCTURE

Several governmental entities play roles in planning, funding, constructing and operating regional transit in Middle Tennessee. The peer region research conducted for this study revealed that this is common. In fact, it is rarer for one regional organization to lead transit planning; levy, collect and disburse revenue for transit; and construct and operate transit.

In Middle Tennessee, transit planning, implementation and operations occur in partnership between the Regional Transportation Authority of Middle Tennessee (RTA); the Greater Nashville Metropolitan Planning Organization (the MPO, housed within the Greater Nashville Regional Council); and the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT). When geographically relevant, these parties coordinate with the efforts of the Clarksville Urbanized Area MPO. The Middle Tennessee Region also benefits from a unique entity, the Middle Tennessee Mayors Caucus, which provides a space for the region's city and county mayors to discuss a myriad of issues facing the region. The Mayors Caucus has proven to be a successful forum for creating a vision for transit.

The Regional Transportation Authority of Middle Tennessee (RTA) was created by state statute in 1988 to plan and develop a regional transit system. The members of RTA include Davidson, Dickson, Montgomery, Robertson, Rutherford, Sumner, Williamson and Wilson Counties. The RTA operates Middle Tennessee's only existing regional transit – vanpools, express buses and the WeGo Star commuter rail, each of which is described in greater detail in the Operations section below. In 2008, the Nashville Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA, later rebranded as WeGo), became the managers of RTA's regional services,



acknowledging a level of coordination needed between Nashville/Davidson County as the center of the region with the broader Middle Tennessee region. Cities and counties in the RTA service area may join the WeGo RTA board by paying dues based on population. However, these jurisdictions are responsible for additional fees to fund the operation of any services within that jurisdiction. In recent years, some cities and counties have publicly discussed if they should continue to pay dues and be a member of the RTA. The debate has generally surrounded if the jurisdiction is receiving or would like to expand benefits of transit.

The Nashville Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) was formed in the 1960s, at which point, it included only Nashville and Davidson County. Today it has grown – as the region's population has grown – to encompass Davidson, Maury, Robertson, Rutherford, Sumner, Williamson and Wilson counties.

MPOs are created by federal law in all urbanized areas with populations over 50,000 to conduct the work of planning and prioritizing the region's transportation projects for federal funding. Given that MPOs are required for urbanized areas with over 50,000 residents, all of the regions studied in this report have a MPO that is charged with leading regional transportation planning.

The Nashville Area MPO is housed within – and staffed by – the Greater Nashville Regional Council (GNRC), a change made in 2017. Being housed within GNRC brings GNRC's other areas of expertise – land use planning, economic and community development – to bear on the multi-modal transportation planning conducted by the Nashville Area MPO. The GNRC's board is comprised of county and city mayors from across the region. While the Mayor's Caucus, described below, provides a forum for mayors in the region to discuss emerging issues, the GNRC and RTA boards have decision-making power around planning and operating transit in the region.

The Tennessee Department of Transportation's (TDOT) portfolio includes roads, transit, aviation, waterways, railroads and cycling and walking. TDOT is engaged in multi-modal planning for facilities on interstates and state routes; funding of projects; implementation/construction of projects; and operations and maintenance of interstates and some state routes (sharing responsibility on state routes with local jurisdictions). TDOT's investment and work in transit is limited, with its primary focus on the use of roads and bridges for single occupancy vehicles and for freight.

The Clarksville Urbanized Area MPO encompasses Montgomery County (Clarksville) and part of Kentucky. It has the same charge as the Nashville Area MPO and the two MPOs often collaborate.

The Middle Tennessee Mayors Caucus was formed in 2009 by then-Nashville Mayor Karl Dean, having seen a similar model in Denver, Colorado. The Caucus serves as a forum for nearly 70 Middle Tennessee city and county mayors to discuss issues impacting the region and formulate strategy to benefit the region. The Mayors Caucus also prioritizes legislative issues for GNRC. The Mayors Caucus was a critical early venue for the creation of a shared regional transit vision and the Mayors Caucus, which has its own lobbying efforts at the state, played a crucial role in passing the IMPROVE Act, providing a path for funding for transit in Middle Tennessee (discussed below in the Funding section).

## CURRENT MIDDLE TENNESSEE TRANSIT PLANNING

As noted above, there are multiple entities tasked with planning for transportation and/or transit. This may appear duplicative, but the entities work closely together and provide complementary perspectives. The existence of multiple agencies with planning authority operating in a region is not unusual, especially with each region having a federally-designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) that coordinates with other stakeholders. Beyond the Middle Tennessee Region, the Denver and Atlanta regions are examples of multiple transportation planning authorities working in conjunction with one another to develop regional plans to meet transportation needs.

In the Denver region, the Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG, which is the Denver region MPO), along with the Denver Regional Transit District (RTD), handle regional transportation planning for the region. Involving even more coordination between agencies, the Atlanta region relies on the Atlanta Region Commission (ARC – which is the Atlanta MPO), Atlanta-Region Transit Link Authority (ATL), Georgia Regional Transportation Authority (GRTA), and the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) for regional transportation planning efforts.

Housed within the Greater Nashville Regional Council (GNRC), the Nashville Area MPO produces and implements a regional transportation plan (RTP) every five years, which is required for the MPO to be able to draw down federal funds for transportation and transit. The RTP considers regional transportation needs for the coming twenty years including transit proposals, but also the needs of single occupancy vehicles, freight, active mobility options (biking, walking) and smart technologies to improve transportation efficiency. All of the transportation planning in the RTP is set within the large context of land use planning - where will populations live and work - as this impacts commuting and other types of trips.



Finally, as the core of the region, the WeGo plan, titled *nMotion*, details the vision and strategy for creation of enhanced transit (and how transit interacts with other modes) within Nashville/Davidson County. The *nMotion* plan is adopted into the regional transportation plan.

Comparing Middle Tennessee to other regions in the study, Middle Tennessee has two particular advantages in terms of planning for transit. First, unlike much larger regions (by population or geography), Middle Tennessee has just two MPOs – the Nashville Area MPO housed in GNRC and the Clarksville Urbanized Area MPO. Other regions have many more planning entities. Furthermore, the Nashville Area MPO and the Clarksville Area MPO have a close working relationship with both MPOs recognizing the regional nature of the economy, its workforce and the complex commuting patterns this creates.

One additional advantage that Middle Tennessee has is the shared commitment of the region's mayors to improved transportation options. The city and county mayors that serve on the boards of the RTA, GNRC, and the Mayors Caucus have devoted years of study (and to education of their constituents) to increase transportation options. This is reflected in decisions they have made on transportation priorities and in support of cities and counties seeking to expand transportation options to include transit. It is worth noting that there is a wide variety of political beliefs among the mayors in the Mayors Caucus, but the members share a commitment to increasing mobility options for the residents of the region. The Middle Tennessee Mayors Caucus was modeled after a similar group in Denver, but is not a common feature among other peer regions.

## CURRENT MIDDLE TENNESSEE TRANSIT FUNDING

The Middle Tennessee region's transportation funding structure depends heavily on federal funds, which flow through the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) to MPOs. The challenges inherent in federal funding are not unique to Middle Tennessee – the federal gas tax has been flat for many years and the Highway Trust Fund is underfunded compared to the need for maintenance, repair and expansion of transportation systems across the country. Metro Nashville/Davidson County government acknowledged declining funding from the federal government in the Let's Move Nashville transit plan and funding proposal, which included the assumption that the federal government would provide just 20% of the total funding and revenues in Nashville/Davidson County would cover the rest. What is unique to Middle Tennessee is that – without a dedicated source of funding to match to federal funding – the region has less access to federal funds for which a local match is required.

Meanwhile, on the local level, while many jurisdictions provide funding for transit (either through their county's provider or as dues to be part of RTA), it is well established that local funding through a city or county's operating budget cannot be the sole source for improving transit. From schools to public safety to libraries, parks and amenities, there are too many competing demands on local revenue sources. That understanding – paired with the realization that the federal government is not contributing as much to transit projects as it has in the past – drives jurisdictions to seek dedicated funding for transit. Locally, WeGo experienced this in the Metro Nashville/Davidson County's FY20 budget, where WeGo experienced a net loss of approximately \$8 million. Increasing personnel costs combined with the loss of some funding from the state put WeGo in the position of approaching Metro Nashville/Davidson County with a shortfall in a year where Metro's budget was already stretched across many priorities. Metro government did not make up the shortfall and WeGo instituted fare increases and service cuts to make up the difference.

In addition to federal funding, two state laws – legislation in 2009 empowering RTAs and the 2017 IMPROVE Act – provide paths for Tennessee counties and cities to seek dedicated funding for transit.

In 2009, legislation was passed that enabled Regional Transportation Authorities (including the Middle Tennessee Regional Transportation Authority) to develop a regional transit plan that would be funded through local, dedicated taxes. Per the legislation, an RTA may create a special district comprising all or only portions of the RTA (meaning it could encompass just a portion of a city or county). Under the law, there are three paths for dedicated funding for the special district.

- 1. EACH LOCAL GOVERNMENT INCLUDED IN THE SPECIAL DISTRICT HAS THE OPTION OF RAISING ANY LOCAL TAX AUTHORIZED BY LAW WITH THE FUNDS ALLOCATED TO THE RTA TO FUND THE REGIONAL TRANSIT PLAN. THEY WOULD DO THIS FOLLOWING THE PROCEDURE FOR RAISING TAXES DICTATED BY STATE LAW FOR THAT TYPE OF TAX - REFERENDA, ACTION BY THE LOCAL LEGISLATIVE BODY, ETC. THE LOCAL GOVERNMENTS INCLUDED IN THE SPECIAL DISTRICT MAY ALSO OPT OUT OF PARTICIPATION WITH NO OBLIGATION TO RAISE ANY TAXES.**
- 2. EACH LOCAL GOVERNMENT INCLUDED IN THE SPECIAL DISTRICT HAS THE OPTION OF RAISING TAXES THROUGH REFERENDUM.**
- 3. FINALLY, THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY IS AUTHORIZED TO RAISE TAXES WITHIN A SPECIAL DISTRICT. PRIOR TO RAISING SUCH TAXES, THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY MUST: A) RECEIVE FORMAL REQUESTS THROUGH LOCAL RESOLUTIONS CALLING FOR SUCH TAX INCREASES, OR B) RECEIVE THE RESULTS OF NONBINDING REFERENDA.**

## FEDERAL FUNDING

The federal gas tax rate is 18.4 cents per gallon, with 15.44 cents being allocated to a highway account and 2.86 cents allocated for a mass transit account. This rate was last raised in 1993. The federal diesel tax rate is 24.4 cents per gallon, with 21.44 cents being allocated to a highway account and 2.86 cents allocated for a mass transit account. It is important to note that both gas and diesel tax are flat and do not change with the fluctuation of gas and diesel prices. When distributing these federal funds to states the Federal Highway Administration utilizes a formula that considers needs based on road and bridge infrastructure and ridership usage among other factors. Federal funds are also available to the states through grants. Federal funding for transportation is actually a partnership between the federal and state levels with 80% of project funding coming from federal funds for state roads and 90% of project funding coming from federal funds for interstates, with the state matching the respective remaining amounts for each project type.

Whichever of the three paths is taken, only taxes that are already authorized by state law for the jurisdiction may be raised for transit; a new type of tax may not be added.

To date, there has been no effort by the Middle Tennessee RTA to create a special district. It is worth noting that when this legislation became law, there was no adopted transit plan – no nMotion – for Nashville/Davidson County to act upon with the 2009 legislation. Between the adoption of the 2009 legislation and the 2015 adoption of the nMotion plan, there was also turnover in mayoral seats in Middle Tennessee, suggesting there could be a lack of awareness of the opportunity. Finally, when nMotion was adopted in 2015, conversation was building around a fuel tax increase and the opportunities that could provide for transit funding. At any rate, the 2009 law remains an option for dedicated funding.

Middle Tennessee transportation and transit investments also benefit from having state gas and diesel tax funds, which were increased with the IMPROVE Act in 2017. Then-Governor Bill Haslam proposed the IMPROVE Act to raise fuel taxes and to provide local options for funding transit plans. As enacted, the gasoline tax was raised by 6 cents and the diesel tax was raised by 10 cents (with a three-year phase-in for both taxes). The fuel tax revenue is, however, primarily dedicated to construction and maintenance of roads and bridges. The legislation allowed some funding to be allocated to transit projects. Currently, the allocated amount totals to approximately \$21 million annually and it must be spent on transit investments that are non-operational and non-administrative in nature. Locally this funding is obtained through grant applications with an award limit of \$3 million annually per project.

While the IMPROVE Act did not channel significant funds to transit projects, it did enable counties with a population of over 112,000 people and cities with over 165,000 people to hold local referenda to fund a transit plan. The language on the ballot must include the projects and services to be funded, the taxes that will be increased, and such language is limited to 250 words. Participating cities and counties are limited to raising the following local taxes if they are already collecting the tax: local option sales and use tax, local business tax, motor vehicle tax, car rental tax, hotel occupancy tax, and residential development tax. The breadth and mix of potential taxes in the IMPROVE Act is an asset and opportunity for jurisdictions seeking dedicated transit funding in Middle Tennessee. Many peer regions are limited to fewer potential funding sources. Moving Forward has previously conducted research on the buying power (how much money could be generated) by various revenue sources available through the IMPROVE Act.

With the above restrictions on which cities and counties may hold referenda for dedicated transit funding, four counties in the Middle Tennessee RTA were excluded: Cheatham, Dickson, Maury, and Robertson. Legislation has been filed since 2017 to include these counties, but following the defeat of Davidson County's referendum, such efforts have stalled.

In addition to not including all of the counties in the region, the IMPROVE Act also does not facilitate simple coordination of counties seeking transit funding at the same time. Counties must devise plans and funding strategies for a referendum solely for that county and implementing a regional transit system may falter with the failure of even one county's plan. Put another way, the IMPROVE Act provides for county-by-county referenda – not precluding regional collaboration, but not envisioning or facilitating it either. The peer regions research revealed that the Middle Tennessee model – counties and cities may work together, but it is not required per a separate level of regional transit governance – is common.

Due in part to the rules of the IMPROVE Act, the plan for Nashville/Davidson County's transit referendum, Let's Move Nashville, was criticized for failing to address regional transportation challenges. While Let's Move Nashville was based on the regional RTA/MTA nMotion plan, the initial proposed bus and rail infrastructure projects ended at or before the county line. While regional mayors knew that transit in Nashville/Davidson County – as the hub of the region – was a necessary first step and part of a larger regional plan, it was difficult to convey that point to voters when the funding was simply for one county. The Let's Move Nashville plan failed at the ballot box in 2018. This left the outlying counties that had been planning their step into transit implementation waiting for the center county to announce when it would seek funding again.

## **CURRENT MIDDLE TENNESSEE TRANSIT CONSTRUCTION**

The Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) handles transportation project planning and construction on interstates and state routes, with some state route work delegated to local public works departments. There is no entity or mechanism in place specifically to facilitate construction of transit projects that cross jurisdictional boundaries in the region.

## **CURRENT MIDDLE TENNESSEE TRANSIT OPERATIONS**

The transit operator in Nashville/Davidson County is WeGo (the Nashville MTA). The Regional Transportation Authority (RTA – branded WeGo) operates regional transit. RTA operates 10 bus routes out of downtown Nashville reaching the cities of Clarksville, Dickson, Franklin, Gallatin, Hendersonville, Joelton, La Vergne, Murfreesboro, Smyrna, Springfield, and Spring Hill. RTA connects riders with 44 routes provided throughout Davidson County. RTA's rideshare program also organizes vanpools and carpools for commuters throughout Middle Tennessee. RTA also oversees the WeGo Star regional commuter rail, which connects Davidson and Wilson counties. There are also other smaller local operators in the surrounding counties.

## **CONCLUSION - MIDDLE TENNESSEE'S CURRENT POSITION**

The Middle Tennessee region benefits from the dedication of the mayors across the region and from a planning process that has created a shared vision for the future. It has yet to address, however, how to generate funding that could be used for projects that cross county boundaries to build a regional transit network that addresses the regional economy. No entity exists to facilitate construction of new transit efforts across county boundaries. While RTA exists for operations of regional transit, it is not currently to scale to operate advanced, regional transit investments.

# COMPARING MIDDLE TENNESSEE TO PEER AND ASPIRATIONAL REGIONS

*TURNING FROM MIDDLE TENNESSEE, THE FOLLOWING SECTIONS CONSIDER MODELS FROM OTHER REGIONS ACROSS THE COUNTRY ON THE FIVE POINTS OF REGIONAL COORDINATION:*

1. **REGIONAL GOVERNANCE OR COORDINATION STRUCTURES**
2. **PLANNING FOR TRANSIT**
3. **SECURING AND DISTRIBUTING FUNDING FOR TRANSIT**
4. **IMPLEMENTING/CONSTRUCTING TRANSIT**
5. **OPERATING TRANSIT**

Conversations with the peer regions indicate that all regions are attempting to address the same issue – an economy that is regional in nature, drawing employees and freight across and around the region and requiring regional collaboration, but is constrained by relatively arbitrary municipal and county boundaries. Most, if not all, of the peer regions have aspects of regional coordination or are in the process of creating the regional coordination. The regions coordinate around some combination of governance, planning, funding, construction, and operations. This report highlights specific regions per each category (governance, planning, funding, construction, and operations) with findings relevant to Middle Tennessee to inspire discussion on where the Middle Tennessee region should explore enhanced regional collaboration as our transportation needs continue to grow.

## REGIONAL COORDINATION

Discussion with peer and aspirational regions revealed variation in their models for regional coordination or governance structures.

Representing one end of the spectrum is Minneapolis/St. Paul's "Met Council" – established in 1967 and taking on land use and transportation/transit planning in 1994. The Met Council is arguably the most extensive and comprehensive regional governance infrastructure, with an elected board, the authority to collect funding, and a tight link between land use and transportation/transit planning.

Meanwhile, Charlotte, North Carolina has collaborated across multiple entities, but it does not have a formal regional governance group. Rather, partners in the Charlotte region will soon release a RFP to conduct a regional "Mobility and Transit Study" to include governance and funding recommendations.

Here are the findings on models of regional coordination.

### SEPARATE LAYER OF REGIONAL GOVERNANCE

#### NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE



✗ None.

#### ATLANTA, GEORGIA



✗ None.

Currently, the four MARTA governments have the ability individually raise taxes, per voter approval, for transit projects. The creation on the Atlanta-region Transit Link (ATL) in 2018 is a move towards a more coordinated regional effort on taxing, construction and operations.

#### CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA



✗ None.

#### DENVER, COLORADO



✓ Yes.

The Regional Transportation District (RTD) is the eight county regional authority operating public transit in the greater Denver region. RTD has the authority to collect funds and act autonomously when prioritizing regional projects.

#### INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA



✗ None.

#### RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA



✗ None.

#### SEATTLE, WASHINGTON



✓ Yes.

Sound Transit formed to represent the four-county Seattle region and has collection authority to fund transit in the region.

#### TWIN CITIES, MINNESOTA



✓ Yes.

Metropolitan Council serves as the transit authority for the region. Met Council's board decides project funding needs and priorities. Metro Transit (under Met Council) manages construction and operations in the region.

## **CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA**

The Charlotte regional coordination structure includes multiple authorities working in concert. The Charlotte Regional Transportation Planning Organization (CRTPO) is the federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), which coordinates transportation policy for local governmental jurisdictions within the Charlotte Urbanized Area. The Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS) is the transit agency for the region and a department of the City; it is ultimately in charge reviewing and recommending plans for the region. The Metro Transit Commission (MTC) is a separate authority that adopts the plan. MTC is comprised of the city of Charlotte and other towns within the county, and is chaired by the Mayor of Charlotte. While the MTC adopts the plan and plans the allocation of funding to implement the plan, each city's legislative body must approve the funding. MTC has the authority to create inter-local agreements to construct and operate transit across jurisdictional boundaries. Charlotte relies on a half-cent sales tax (that was approved by a voter referendum in 1998) to fund its transit investments. Sales tax is generated across the county and the MTC decides how to spend it.

The region also works with the Centralina Council of Governments (CCOG). This regional organization includes 16 jurisdictions, including some in South Carolina, and focuses collaboration around a wide range of governance issues. Currently, CCOG, CATS and MTC are issuing a RFP to do a regional "Mobility and Transit Study" to include governance and funding recommendations. This action would allow the region to move towards a multi-county referendum in the future if desired.

## **DENVER, COLORADO**

The Regional Transportation District (RTD) is the regional authority operating public transit in the greater Denver region. The RTD was created in 1969 through state legislation focused on regional transportation planning and is a political subdivision of the State. The RTD has grown over time as more municipalities have joined; it currently has a service area of 2,400 square miles, which are split into sub-districts. The RTD has an elected, fifteen-member board of directors, which is unique because throughout the country, the overwhelming majority of regional transportation authority boards are appointed. The board is elected to four-year terms with the executive board being a year to year cycle. RTD has the authority to collect transportation funds and act autonomously when prioritizing regional projects, however, the State performs an audit every three to five years.

## **MINNEAPOLIS-ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA**

The Metropolitan Council (Met Council) is the regional policy-making authority in the Twin Cities region. Transportation is one of the essential services provided by the Met Council, which is the Metropolitan Planning Organization that serves the Twin Cities seven-county metropolitan area. The Met Council not only plans transit, it also heads up implementation/construction and operations (through the operating division "Metro Transit"). The Met Council authority is comprised of a seventeen-member board, representing sixteen districts across the region. Met Council has a very close affiliation with the state of Minnesota, but was formed to undertake regional planning. In 1994, state legislation was passed to give the Met Council transportation planning, operations, and construction authority in the region. The Met Council's service area includes seven counties and 181 cities/townships. The city of Minneapolis is currently creating the Minneapolis Transportation Action Plan to implement the transportation vision of the city's general plan, Minneapolis 2040. Proponents of regional transit coordination look to the Met Council as one of the most comprehensive examples in the country.

## SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

The state of Washington considers transit to be a local responsibility and allows for the formation of transit boards or agencies to further that work. In 1993, Sound Transit formed to represent the four-county Seattle region. Sound Transit has collection authority to fund transit in the region. The taxing district is comprised of the largest populated areas within the four-county region. Sound Transit is governed by an 18-member Board made up of local elected officials and is authorized by state law to identify ballot measures for voter approval of regional transit projects. There is also agreement between Sound Transit and King County Metro for services within the King County service area. King County Metro operates bus services within King County, but also operates and maintains Sound Transit's light rail within King County.

## REGIONAL COORDINATION TAKEAWAYS

*While many transit proponents laud models of regional governance (regions with an additional layer of government that can plan, levy funding, construct and/or operate transit), these models are somewhat unusual. Denver, Seattle and Minneapolis have variations of a regional governance model, but the remaining regions in this study - Indianapolis, Charlotte, Raleigh and Atlanta - do not. It's also worth noting that many of the regions with regional coordination models are successful in providing transit regionally; the lack of regional governance has not slowed their success. Given that regional coordination is more common, the Middle Tennessee region is well-situated for coordination and cooperation across the region with just two MPOs and an active, unified Mayors Caucus. Moving Forward also noted that the late-2019 launch of the Regional Transportation Plan planning effort featured Governor Bill Lee discussing the need for Middle Tennessee mobility solutions. The RTP kick off was attended by state legislators, local legislators and mayors from throughout the region.*

# PLANNING

The transportation plan – reflecting a clear understanding of the regional nature of transportation – is critical to the success of regional transit. Urbanized areas with populations over 50,000 are required by federal law to undertake and maintain the transportation plan for the area. The organization responsible for these transportation plans is called a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). Federal funding for transportation is channeled through MPOs for funding that supports projects laid out in long-range and short-range transportation plans. The selected study regions all have MPOs responsible for regional transportation plans, however, in some cases other regional authorities play a role in developing transportation plans for the region.

## PLANNING ENTITY

### NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE



**Greater Nashville Regional Council,** which houses the Nashville Area MPO.

### ATLANTA, GEORGIA



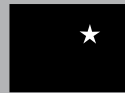
**ARC is the MPO for the region.** The MPO region is 21 counties. In 2018 the Atlanta Transit Link was charged to develop a 6-yr (short-range) and 20-yr (long-range) regional transit plan.

### CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA



**Charlotte Regional Transportation Planning Organization (CRTPO);** The Charlotte Planning, Design & Development Department is the lead planning agency for CRTPO.

### DENVER, COLORADO



**Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG);** **Denver Regional Transit District (RTD)**

### INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA



**Indianapolis MPO**

### RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA



**NC Capital Area MPO** (Wake Co and parts of surrounding counties).

### SEATTLE, WASHINGTON



**Puget Sound Regional Council**

### TWIN CITIES, MINNESOTA



**Metropolitan Council**



## **ATLANTA, GEORGIA**

The Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) is the MPO for the region. Its boundaries include all or parts of 21 counties surrounding the city of Atlanta. In 2008 ARC established the Regional Transit Committee (RTC), which replaced the region's Transit Implementation Board, and until 2018 was the authority charged with advancing regional transit policy and coordination of regional transit operations.

In 2018 state legislation was adopted to create the Atlanta-region Transit Link Authority (ATL), which will be responsible for developing and maintaining a regional transit plan (the MPO is responsible per federal legislative mandate). Currently, an agreement is being created, including Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC), Atlanta-region Transit Link Authority (ATL), Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT), and Metro Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) to define roles in delivering transportation infrastructure for the region.

## **CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA**

The Charlotte Regional Transportation Planning Organization (CRTPO) is the federally designated MPO for the Charlotte Urbanized Area, which is responsible for coordinating transportation policy for local governmental jurisdictions within the Charlotte Urbanized Area. The Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS) and the Metropolitan Transit Commission work in conjunction to recommend and review transportation plans within the region. These two entities are subdivisions of the City of Charlotte and work with the city and surrounding jurisdictions on transportation planning and implementation.

## **DENVER, COLORADO**

The Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG – which is the Denver region MPO), along with the Denver Regional Transit District (RTD) handle regional transportation planning in the Denver area. The Denver Region Council of Governments (DRCOG) approves planning efforts and is responsible planning for short-term needs through the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and the long-term vision for the region through the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP).

In 2004, the seven-county region passed “FasTracks” - a 12-year, \$5 billion project, which allowed RTD to build their regional system once the referendum was approved. This was a very specific plan that identifies seven multimodal transit corridors throughout the region. Representatives from RTD found that the success was due in large part to being very specific with planning efforts throughout the region.

While the RTD model – and its results in creating a regional transit network – have been praised, many have noted that transit within Denver has lagged behind. Denver Mayor Michael Hancock's staff have been working on the Denver Moves Transit plan for the past two years to improve transit access and function within the city. Recently, DRCOG, CDOT, RTD and the Denver Metro Chamber joined to create the Mobility Choice Blueprint. This coordinated effort will assist the Denver region in identifying how to best plan, prepare, and invest in regional transportation in effective ways to meet the needs of the future.

## MINNEAPOLIS-ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

Met Council serves as the MPO for the region and is responsible for transit planning in the region per state law. The governor appoints the Met Council board. The Met Council has found regional success in combining transportation planning, operations, and implementation, however, the Met Council is one of only a few MPOs across the country that have successfully combined these functions.

Met Council is also home to the Transportation Advisory Board, which includes state, regional, and local officials, transportation providers, and community members. This board contributes to the region's transportation planning efforts and recommends projects for federal funding.

## PLANNING TAKEAWAYS

*Again, Middle Tennessee is in line with peer and aspirational regions in its regional transportation planning model. The Greater Nashville Regional Council, which houses the Nashville Area MPO, is responsible for producing and implementing a regional transportation plan (RTP) every five years. The RTP considers regional transportation needs twenty years in the future for the MPO area. This process also allows for other agencies' complimentary plans to be considered and included in the RTP process, most recently seen in the inclusion of Nashville/Davidson County's nMotion plan. GNRC works closely with the Clarksville Urbanized Area MPO. As with the findings in the Regional Coordination section, we find that Middle Tennessee's peer and aspirational regions have similar planning models and are able to use these models to achieve success in planning and implementing regional transit solutions.*

# FUNDING

The one feature shared by all of the peer regions was dedicated funding. The dedicated funding sources vary by the project type, funding need, and by the political climate of a region, with sales tax being the most common source. The collection and allocation of transportation and transit funds also differs from region to region. Some regions' collection authority resides with counties or localities throughout the region and these individual entities do (or intend to) create cross-jurisdictional agreements to coordinate funding to support transit that crosses jurisdictional boundaries. In other regions, special districts made up of multiple counties or localities have the authority to levy and collect taxes to distribute funding. This section describes how each of the study regions have chosen to fund transportation/transit throughout their respective regions.

## FUNDING

### NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE



#### DEDICATED FUNDING



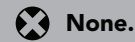
**None.**

Failed referendum for dedicated funding in 2018.

#### INITIAL DEDICATED FUNDING APPROVED

**Not applicable.**

#### FUNDING ACROSS JURISDICTIONS



**None.**

### ATLANTA, GEORGIA



#### DEDICATED FUNDING



**Yes.**

Sales tax.

#### INITIAL DEDICATED FUNDING APPROVED

**1971**

#### FUNDING ACROSS JURISDICTIONS



**None currently.**

Participating MARTA governments have the authority to raise sales tax to fund transit, subject to voter approval. The creation of the ATL is a step in the direction of a more coordinated transit funding by allowing counties outside of MARTA governments the ability to hold referendum for transit funding through sales tax increases.

### CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA



#### DEDICATED FUNDING



**Yes.**

Sales tax.

#### INITIAL DEDICATED FUNDING APPROVED

**1998**

#### FUNDING ACROSS JURISDICTIONS



**None**

While the Metropolitan Transit Commission (MTC) is a multi-jurisdiction entity that adopts the regional transit plan and allocates funding to implement the plan, the funding must be adopted by each jurisdiction. Then MTC can create inter-jurisdictional agreements to deliver transit projects.

### DENVER, COLORADO



#### DEDICATED FUNDING



**Yes.**

Sales tax.

#### INITIAL DEDICATED FUNDING APPROVED

**1973**

#### FUNDING ACROSS JURISDICTIONS



**Yes.**

Denver Regional Transit District (RTD) has taxing and collection authority. The RTD board makes transit funding decision in the region.

## ATLANTA, GEORGIA

Until 2016, MARTA (City of Atlanta, and the counties of Fulton, DeKalb, and Clayton) levied a 1 cent sales tax for transit service funding. Counties in the Atlanta region that are not MARTA governments have historically dedicated transit funding from their respective general fund budgets. In 2015, state legislation enabled the city of Atlanta and surrounding counties the option to levy an additional 1 cent tax for transportation only, subject to the approval of electorate. If a tax increase is passed for roads or bridges, the tax must be renewed by referendum every 5 years; for transit, the renewal referendum is every 30 years.

As a result of the 2015 state legislation, the City of Atlanta received approval from voters for a .5 cent sales tax increase to address identified transit projects. Other participating MARTA counties and counties outside of MARTA are now considering referenda to address increased transit needs in their respective counties.

In 2018, the Atlanta-region Transit Link Authority (ATL) was established through state legislation. As a result of this legislation, the thirteen ATL counties throughout the Atlanta region have the authority to individually levy a 1 cent sales tax to be used for specific and voter-approved transit purposes. To date, none of the thirteen participating counties have exercised this authority.

## INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA



### DEDICATED FUNDING



Local income tax.  
*Note: this is not available in TN*

### INITIAL DEDICATED FUNDING APPROVED

**2016**

### FUNDING ACROSS JURISDICTIONS



While Indy Connect exists as a partnership of Indianapolis MPO, IndyGo and the Central Indiana Regional Transportation Authority (with other, non-governmental partners) to support regional collaboration, each jurisdiction must vote for its own funding and then enter into agreements to connect transit to Indianapolis.

## RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA



### DEDICATED FUNDING



In Raleigh/Wake County Primarily sales tax and nominal vehicle fee.

### INITIAL DEDICATED FUNDING APPROVED

**2016**

### FUNDING ACROSS JURISDICTIONS



The money raised in the county stays in the county. Elected officials could vote to have some funding go out-of-county to achieve larger regional goals.

## SEATTLE, WASHINGTON



### DEDICATED FUNDING



Sales tax, vehicle registration fees, and property tax.

### INITIAL DEDICATED FUNDING APPROVED

**1996**

### FUNDING ACROSS JURISDICTIONS



Through taxing measures, funding is brought in and spread back out throughout the region for transit projects through sub-area equity, which requires a portion of the monies raised to remain in the area from which they were collected. There are five sub-areas within the region.

## TWIN CITIES, MINNESOTA



### DEDICATED FUNDING



Dedicated state funds, motor vehicle sales tax, and county sales tax.

### INITIAL DEDICATED FUNDING APPROVED

**1967**

### FUNDING ACROSS JURISDICTIONS



Transit throughout the Metropolitan Council district is largely dependent on dedicated state funds and a motor vehicle registration fee. The Transportation Authority Board decides how these funds support transit throughout the region.

## **CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA**

In 1998, the State of North Carolina gave Charlotte the authority to raise a .5% sales tax for transit and gave surrounding counties the authority to raise a .25% sales tax increase. This smaller tax increase authority was given to the surrounding counties so they would be enabled to join the transit discussion if they so desired. The initial transit funding plan was 25% city funds, 25% state funds, and 50% federal funds.

The Charlotte region, like many regions studied for this report, is largely dependent up sales tax to generate funds for regional transit. This can be a volatile source of revenue given the fluctuating nature of the economy. This region experienced that volatility during the recession and also lost part of the state portion of funding when the state legislature's composition shifted to a more tax-adverse stance. This loss of funding led to delays in project construction and led to a transit tax recall effort that failed.

When the region is deciding how to best spend transit funds, the counties in the region have the authority to enter into inter-local agreements with other counties. With the sales tax generated across the county, the MTC decides how to spend it with individual jurisdictions' legislative bodies approving the MTC recommendation or seeking changes to the MTC recommendation.

## **DENVER, COLORADO**

In 1969, Colorado passed enabling legislation to allow a .6% sales tax increase for seven counties in the Denver region. In 2004 an increase to 1% was enacted for "FasTracks." This regional project was a \$5 billion investment over a twelve-year project period.

Transit funding in the Denver region comes from three buckets: sales tax, transits fares, and federal funds. Dedicated sales tax makes up 60% of transit need funds, with transit fares and federal funds making up 20% each. From a funding perspective, it is important to note that the RTD board does not need legislative approval for sales tax increase and acts autonomously when deciding which projects to fund at the appropriate time.

## **INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA**

In 2014, the Indiana General Assembly passed enabling legislation to allow central Indiana counties to dedicate an income tax increase of .25% for mass transit projects. In 2016 Marion County, Indiana voted to support an income tax increase to improve the city's transit system, and in early 2017 the Indianapolis City Council enacted the tax dedicated to transit. To date, no outlying counties have undertaken a campaign to raise income tax for transit.

## **RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA**

The Raleigh, NC region has a few avenues available for transit funding. The region has a .5% sales tax and a vehicle fee that was increased from five dollars to fifteen dollars available for funding. In this region, each county collects funds to build out its own transit plan and the money raised in the county stays in the county. Elected officials could vote to have some money go out of county to achieve the larger regional goals. When addressing transportation needs in this region, referendums are utilized to vote on funding and not for a specific transit plan.

## SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

Seattle has a few different taxing measures available for transit funds. The Sound Transit District utilizes vehicle excise taxes, sales tax, and property tax to make up just over half of the transit funds necessary for services within the district. The remaining funding comes from federal grants, fares, and other miscellaneous revenue.

Sound Transit has a collection authority of 1.4% sales tax. They also have available a car registration expansion that equates to a \$110 tax for every \$10,000 of vehicle value. A property tax measure has also been implemented that requires a \$100.00 tax increase for every \$400,000 of home value. Through these taxing measures funding is brought in and spread back out throughout the region for transit projects through sub-area equity, which requires a portion of the monies raised to remain in the area from which they were collected. There are five sub-areas within the region.

## MINNEAPOLIS - ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

The Minneapolis - St. Paul region is very dependent on state funding for transit and each project may have its own unique funding mechanism. The region's on-demand and ADA mobility services, and LRT operations are paid for through state legislatively-appropriated funds. State statute requires the state to pay 50% of LRT operations, however, no requirement exists for commuter rail or BRT. It is important to note that appropriations have not always fulfilled the state obligation. Federal funds are used for preventive maintenance in the operating budget.

The Twin Cities region relies heavily on the State's Motor Vehicle Sale tax. The Metropolitan region receives 36% of all state-wide motor vehicle sales tax revenue, making up approximately 44% of transit funding. This region also utilizes transit fares and has the authority to use county sales tax funds for highways and transitway operations. Through these taxing measures and funds, disbursement for projects funding is decided by the authority board under the Met Council.

## FUNDING TAKEAWAYS

*The peer regions considered in this study all have dedicated funding for transit, but if and how they coordinate funding for transit investment across jurisdictional boundaries varies. Some have regional governance structures that allow for funding to be allocated across jurisdictions. Others have the option to work across jurisdictions with agreements between the jurisdictions – the model that Middle Tennessee would be likely to use.*

*The Middle Tennessee region has the ability raise taxes for transit funding on a county by county basis (through the IMPROVE Act) or through a RTA-created district (across jurisdictions). Cross-jurisdictional agreements between counties could be used to fund and build out transit infrastructure.*

# CONSTRUCTION

Residents may find the process of planning and securing funding to be arduous, but at the point of beginning transit construction, the public may still be looking at multiple years before the completion of any major project. The review of peer regions revealed that successful construction/implementation of transit lies in having entities and staff with significant transit construction expertise. Representatives from Seattle even noted that the way their region had timed its referenda and resulting transit build out – one referendum and slate of projects after another – had the positive benefit of keeping their construction firms lined up for the ensuing batch of projects, which resulted in continuity and the improved efficiency in construction that comes from consistent work and continuous learning.

## CONSTRUCTION ACROSS JURISDICTIONS

### NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE



WeGo Star commuter rail, which uses existing rail line. Any construction has occurred through agreements between jurisdictions.

### ATLANTA, GEORGIA



MARTA has completed transit construction crossing county jurisdictional lines.

### CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA



Commuter buses cross jurisdictions, but no heavy construction yet crossing county lines.

### DENVER, COLORADO



Denver Regional Transit District (RTD) handles transit construction throughout the region.

### INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA



The Red Line BRT was launched in September 2019; its first phase exists solely within Marion County. Extensions to Hamilton and Johnson Counties (planned future phases) will depend on local jurisdictions committing local funds for construction and operation.

### RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA



No heavy construction yet crossing county lines.

### SEATTLE, WASHINGTON



With voter approval in three referendums since 1996, Sound Transit has lead the most expansive transit system construction in the country.

### TWIN CITIES, MINNESOTA



Met Council and Metro Transit manage implementation and construction of transportation projects in the region. Formed in 1998, Metro Transit successfully completed its first regional transit project in 2004.

## ATLANTA, GEORGIA

The Atlanta region has one major transit operator with significant construction experience – the Metro Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA). In 1965, the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority Act passed, giving the region a path to a regional transit system. In 1972, MARTA purchased the Atlanta Transit System, the city's main bus system, but it is important to note that construction on transit infrastructure was not completed until 1979. Within seventeen years, MARTA had successfully completed over twenty major projects including bus or rail service.

MARTA has successfully completed transit system projects that cross county jurisdictional lines within the City of Atlanta and the three surrounding counties of Fulton, Dekalb, and Clayton. The City of Atlanta successfully built a 2.2-mile streetcar loop, however, recently turned over the operations and maintenance of the streetcar to MARTA. Any future construction of the streetcar system will also be handled by MARTA.

## DENVER, COLORADO

The Regional Transportation District (RTD) handles transportation implementation and construction in the Denver region. In 1969, RTD was created through legislation to serve a 2,342 square mile district serving all or part of eight counties. The RTD gradually acquired bus services throughout the region and in 1994, RTD successfully completed construction on the region's first light rail line.

RTD continues to manage transit implementation and construction throughout the region. RTD includes a "capital programs" group that heads transportation design, engineering, and construction of projects. Occasionally, RTD and the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) will partner on projects through an inter-governmental agreement. In 2006 – 2007 RTD partnered with CDOT on an LRT project, building a light rail in conjunction with a new interstate addition. This project was the first P3 project of its kind in the United States.

## MINNEAPOLIS - ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

Met Council and Metro Transit manage implementation and construction of transportation projects in the region. Formed in 1998, Metro Transit successfully completed its first regional transit project in 2004 and has since successfully completed light rail, commuter rail, and bus projects throughout the Twin Cities region. The importance or need of construction projects throughout the region is decided upon by the Transit Authority Board, which is part of the Met Council.

## CONSTRUCTION TAKEAWAYS

*The review of peer regions found that efficient, quality construction – and the expertise needed to achieve success – is acquired over time. Many regions have capitalized on usually one major construction authority to deliver large scale projects and many spoke of mis-steps and lessons learned along the way. While Middle Tennessee has a history of successful delivery of large-scale road and bridge projects, the region does not currently have an entity with experience constructing transit projects. During the debate around the Let's Move Nashville plan, the question of who would be accountable for constructing large-scale transit investments arose. That question has yet to be resolved.*



# OPERATIONS

Effective transit operations are critical to the vitality of a region's transportation system – to build confidence in the current transit system and confidence that money spent on new transit investment will be well-managed. In each region studied for this report, there is generally one regional operator that coordinates with smaller operators in outlying cities. The one regional operator often has significant experience developed over time in working across modes and across communities.

## OPERATIONS

### NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE



HIGHER-ORDER TRANSIT CONSTRUCTION  
COMPLETE AND OPERATIONAL

**2006 - WeGo Star Commuter Rail**

#### TRANSIT PROVIDED

**Regionally :** one commuter rail line; Ten regional bus routes in traffic; Vanpool and carpool.

**Locally :** bus in traffic in Nashville/Davidson County and some smaller outlying cities.

#### OPERATION ACROSS JURISDICTIONS

Through WeGo (the Regional Transportation Authority.)

### ATLANTA, GEORGIA



HIGHER-ORDER TRANSIT CONSTRUCTION  
COMPLETE AND OPERATIONAL

**1979**

#### TRANSIT PROVIDED

Rail, bus, streetcar, and regional bus service in outlying counties, lift van service.

#### OPERATION ACROSS JURISDICTIONS

MARTA operates transit crossing county jurisdictional lines, operating a bus, rail, and streetcar transit system, which includes 48 miles of rail, 2.7 miles of streetcar tracks, and over 1,000 miles of bus routes throughout the Atlanta region. State Road and Tollway Authority (SRTA) operates a regional bus service.

### CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA



HIGHER-ORDER TRANSIT CONSTRUCTION  
COMPLETE AND OPERATIONAL

**2007**

#### TRANSIT PROVIDED

Light rail, local bus, "Express routes" (commuter bus), shuttles.

#### OPERATION ACROSS JURISDICTIONS

Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS, a department of the City of Charlotte) leads operations for the City of Charlotte and for the commuter bus routes that extend over jurisdiction boundaries in to the region.

### DENVER, COLORADO



HIGHER-ORDER TRANSIT CONSTRUCTION  
COMPLETE AND OPERATIONAL

**1994**

#### TRANSIT PROVIDED

Bus, rail, shuttles, ADA paratransit services, demand responsive services like FlexRide, and vanpools.

#### OPERATION ACROSS JURISDICTIONS

The Regional Transportation District (RTD) is the main operator throughout the region, providing bus, rail, and shuttle services, which include over 100 miles of rail track and over 10,000 bus stops to service 140 bus routes.

## ATLANTA, GEORGIA

The Atlanta region has operated transit on a regional level since 1979. Founded in 1971, MARTA is the oldest transit agency and main operator in the region. It is a state-operated transit authority of four member governments: Atlanta, and counties of Fulton, Dekalb, and Clayton. MARTA operates a bus, rail, and streetcar transit system, which includes 48 miles of rail, 2.7 miles of streetcar tracks, and over 1,000 miles of bus routes throughout the Atlanta region.

Until recently Georgia Regional Transportation Authority (GRTA) also operated a regional bus service for commuters from suburban areas in thirteen service area counties. Operations of the bus service were recently turned over to the State Road and Tollway Authority (SRTA). It is important to note that GRTA and SRTA operate with the same staff, but report to different authority boards. The bus operations are expected to be turned over to Atlanta-region Transit Link Authority (ATL) in the future to facilitate the efforts branding and bringing the authorities together under the ATL umbrella. There are also nine other transit service operators throughout the region that are managed by their respective county governments. The expectation is that these smaller transit operators will be brought under the ATL umbrella for improved operations coordination and efficiency.

## INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA



HIGHER-ORDER TRANSIT CONSTRUCTION  
COMPLETE AND OPERATIONAL

**2019**

### TRANSIT PROVIDED

31 bus routes plus paratransit. One BRT line - the Red Line that currently operates within Marion County. Planned extensions will take it to outlying counties and cities. Purple line and Blue line (to airport) to follow.

### OPERATION ACROSS JURISDICTIONS

IndyGo is the operator for Marion County (Indianapolis). Other counties will hold competitive bidding processes to contract with transit service providers.

## RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA



HIGHER-ORDER TRANSIT CONSTRUCTION  
COMPLETE AND OPERATIONAL

**Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) is planned.**

### TRANSIT PROVIDED

Bus service, Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) is planned.

### OPERATION ACROSS JURISDICTIONS

None. Operation occurs by jurisdiction - GO Raleigh.

## SEATTLE, WASHINGTON



HIGHER-ORDER TRANSIT CONSTRUCTION  
COMPLETE AND OPERATIONAL

**1999**

### TRANSIT PROVIDED

Light rail, heavy rail, and bus rapid transit (BRT).

### OPERATION ACROSS JURISDICTIONS

Sound Transit has been the main regional transit operator in the Seattle region, with a focus on high capacity transit including light rail, heavy rail, and bus rapid transit. King County Metro is the primary bus service operator in the region providing over 400,000 daily rides through bus service in the Seattle area.

## TWIN CITIES, MINNESOTA



HIGHER-ORDER TRANSIT CONSTRUCTION  
COMPLETE AND OPERATIONAL

**2004**

### TRANSIT PROVIDED

Buses, light rail, commuter rail, resources for those who carpool, vanpool, walk or bike.

### OPERATION ACROSS JURISDICTIONS

Metro Transit, which operates under the Met Council oversees a system comprised of 132 routes made up of bus, light rail, and commuter rail operations.

## DENVER, COLORADO

The Denver region has operated transit on a regional level since 1994. The Regional Transportation District (RTD) is the main operator throughout the region, providing bus, rail, and shuttle services, which include over 100 miles of rail track and over 10,000 bus stops to service 140 bus routes. RTD evaluates their transit system to make operation service changes for optimization three times per year. RTD recently added flex ride / micro transit that serve twenty-one low ridership areas throughout the region, specifically addressing first-mile and last-mile service.

## SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

The Seattle region began operating regional transit services in 1999. Formed in 1993, Sound Transit has been the main regional transit operator in the Seattle region, with a focus on high capacity transit including light rail, heavy rail, and bus rapid transit. By the year 2040, Sound Transit will operate more than 115 miles of light rail, 89 miles of commuter rail, and 45 miles of bus rapid transit (BRT). There are also five local transit providers in the Seattle Region focusing on local bus service. King County Metro is the primary bus operator in the region providing over 400,000 daily rides through bus service in the Seattle area. King County Metro has also operated and maintained Sound Transit's light rail within the King County area through an agreement since 2009.

## MINNEAPOLIS - ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

Since 1998, Metro Transit has been the main transportation operator in the Twin Cities region and is one of the largest transit systems in the country. Metro Transit operates under Met Council and they own and operate most of the region's transit services. The system is comprised of 132 routes made up of bus, light rail, and commuter rail operations. The system averages a daily ridership of 260,486 and covers over 900 square miles in the Twin Cities area. Recently, Arterial Bus Rapid Transit (ABRT) was implemented in the region, which upgraded the best performing urban routes, to increase overall ridership. It is important to note that there is no dedicated right of way throughout these routes.

## OPERATION TAKEAWAYS

*Unremarkably, each of the peer regions expanded operations – capacity and expertise – as they grew. To understand where Middle Tennessee sits in comparison, the region has a regional transit operator – the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA, also branded WeGo). It is worth noting, though, that the RTA does not have its own staff. It is staffed by the MTA, also branded WeGo. In peer regions, the regional operations entity is staffed and otherwise resourced to successfully provide transit across the region.*

# CONCLUSION

During the Let's Move Nashville transit campaign, the plan was criticized for not being sufficiently "regional" in nature. That critique – and Moving Forward's commitment to regional mobility solutions – prompted this study of how Middle Tennessee is poised to act regionally to create transit compared to peer and aspirational regions. The review of peer regions revealed, however, that there is no single model for how a region should structure its decision-making bodies, its planning, its funding, construction or operations to create a regional transit system.

There are regions that have created regional entities that encompass all or portions of multiple cities and counties to conduct governance, planning, funding, etc., on the regional level. There are as many regions, however, that work with the federally-required MPO to conduct planning and then use inter-governmental agreements to work across jurisdictions. This is a model that has been successful in peer regions and is a model that Middle Tennessee is well-suited to replicate.

The Middle Tennessee region possesses many of the tools needed for regional transit success. Our regional coordination efforts are comparable with many of our peers, with successful coordination among the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA), the Greater Nashville Regional Council (GNRC), the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT), and the Middle Tennessee Mayors Caucus. The Nashville region already has a regional transportation plan - the Greater Nashville Regional Council's (GNRC) Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), and the ability to adopt local or corridor transportation plans into the RTP.

The tool that the Middle Tennessee region does not possess is dedicated funding for transit. The region has paths – the 2009 RTA legislation and the IMPROVE Act – for voters to secure dedicated funding, but until that funding is present, the future steps of construction and operations are moot.

As the Middle Tennessee region grows, the need for effective and reliable mobility options grows more pressing. Creating more mobility options through transit continues to be one of the top priorities of regional leadership. This study revealed that other regions with the same types of partners and relationships have made significant, successful transit investments that benefit their communities today. Middle Tennessee has the tools for successful coordination. The focus needs to remain on developing compelling transportation plans that benefit the region's residents and a continued effort to secure securing dedicated funding to convert the plans to action.



## WOULD LIKE TO GIVE A SPECIAL THANKS TO:

**MICHAEL SKIPPER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Greater Nashville Regional Council – Nashville, TN

**STEVE BLAND, CEO**

WeGo Public Transit – Nashville, TN

**DOUG HOOKER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Atlanta Regional Commission - Atlanta, GA

**TAIWO JAIYEoba, ASSISTANT CITY MANAGER**

City of Charlotte, NC

**DAVE GENOVA, CEO**

Denver Regional Transit District – Denver, CO

**MARK FISHER, CHIEF POLICY OFFICER**

Indy Chamber – Indianapolis, IN

**AMY VENNEWITZ, DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION SERVICES**

Metropolitan Council – Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN

**DAVID HOWARD, CHIEF DEPUTY SECRETARY**

North Carolina Department of Transportation

**JOSH BROWN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Puget Sound Regional Council – Seattle, WA

**JOE MILAZZO, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Regional Transportation Alliance – Raleigh, NC