

January 25, 2024

Honorable Lawrence "Larry" Grooms, Chairman
Senate Transportation Committee
203 Gressette Building
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Honorable, Shannon S. Erickson, Chairman
House Education & Public Works Committee
429 Blatt Building
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Re: 2023 Public Transit Annual Report

Dear Chairmen:

On behalf of the South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) please accept the Agency's submittal for the "Office of Public Transit Annual Report" for 2022. Pursuant to SC Code of Law, Sections 57-3-40 (C) and 57-3-210 (B) (2), the Office of Public Transit is required to provide this report to the Committee Chairmen of House Education & Public Works and Senate Transportation.

Prior to 2014, SCDOT was granted through Proviso 117.72 the opportunity to combine the statute-required Annual Report and the Mass Transit Report into the Annual Accountability Report. In 2014, the Annual Accountability Report was streamlined and could no longer contain the "Annual Report" or the "Mass Transit Report." The Annual Report was previously submitted and the Office of Public Transit Report is attached, which fulfills this reporting requirement.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Christy A. Hall, P.E.
Secretary of Transportation

CAH:jlh

Enclosure





South Carolina Department of Transportation

OFFICE OF PUBLIC
TRANSIT

2023 ANNUAL REPORT

SUBMITTED
JANUARY 2024

SCDOT OFFICE OF PUBLIC TRANSIT

2023 ANNUAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Key transportation strategies identified in South Carolina Department of Transportation's (SCDOT) Strategic Plan focus on asset management while developing multimodal options for all residents and visitors, including public transportation. SCDOT's Office of Public Transit (OPT), in coordination with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and local and regional partners throughout the state, plans, programs, and administers the statewide delivery of rural and urban general public transit services and transit services for seniors and individuals with disabilities.

Pursuant to SC Code of Law, Sections 57-3-40 and 57-3-210, the OPT is required to develop and submit the annual Office of Public Transit Report to the General Assembly. Included within the Report is an analysis of (1) annual accomplishments and progress, (2) a funding plan and (3) a five-year transit plan.

SECTION 1: ANNUAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Public transit is a core component of South Carolina's multimodal transportation network. Most counties in South Carolina have public transit service in at least a portion of their county. In 2023, South Carolina's public transit service providers operated 718 vehicles and provided just over **8 million passenger trips**.

Establishing, financing, and sustaining effective, statewide, publicly-operated transit service in urban and rural areas continues to be a major challenge, while at the same time one of our biggest accomplishments.

Below are a few highlights from 2023:

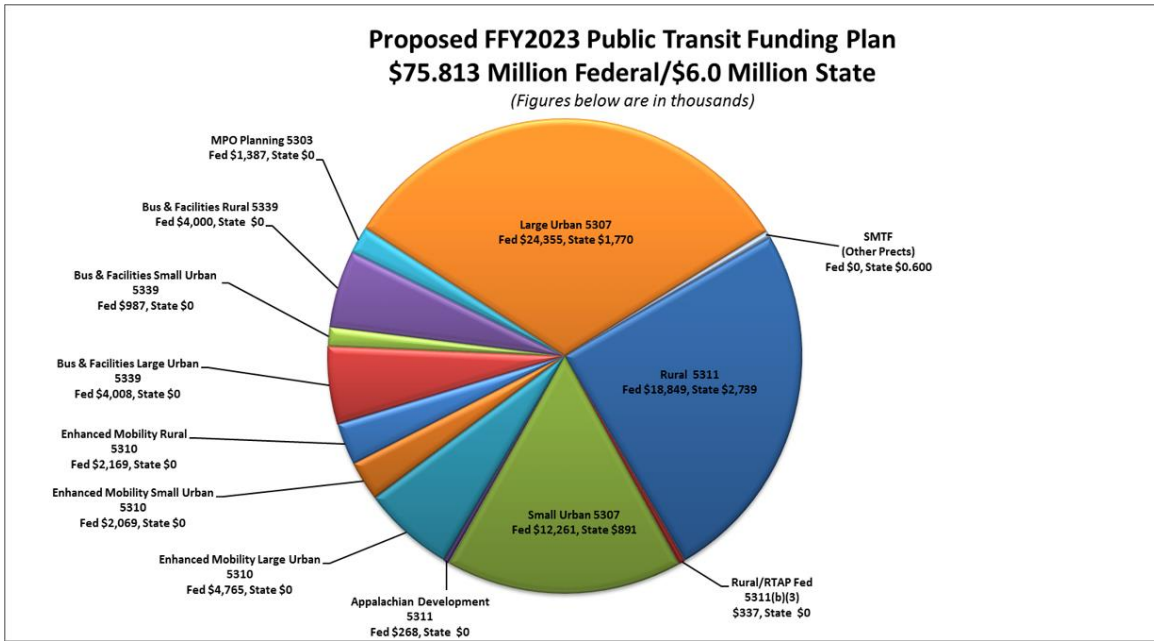
- In 2023 SCDOT was awarded a **\$15.4 million** discretionary grant for Buses and Bus Facilities. This grant will be used to **replace public transit vehicles** over the next several years. SCDOT tracks the useful life of all vehicles purchased through formula awards. It has become evident that the majority of vehicles operating throughout the state have exceeded or are approaching their useful life. This results in **higher maintenance costs** and in some instances the **inability to provide service**. SCDOT initiated a statewide Vehicle Utilization & Needs Assessment Study to ascertain findings and recommendations. This information was utilized to inform the agency's Transit Asset Management Plan required by FTA. Based on these findings plus the slow down and deficiencies in supply chains, the **need for new vehicles remain high throughout the state**.
- In April 2020, SCDOT made available to the rural transit providers the first round of CARES Act funding, which was roughly equivalent to their total annual federal allocation. A second round of funding was released in October 2020, with the final round released in October 2021. As of December 2023, **97.61% of the fully allocated CARES Act funding** for rural transit agencies had been invoiced and paid out. SCDOT continues to work with the State's Executive Budget

Office and Office of the State Auditor to ensure compliance with the evolving processes of documentation and proper oversight of the Federal CARES Act funding. OPT intends to close out CARES Act funding in 2024. The federal **Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA)** was signed into law on November 15, 2021. The act included provisions related to federal-aid highway, transit, highway safety, motor carrier, and rail programs of the U.S. Department of Transportation, and provided an **additional 25.6 percent** in federal transit funding to South Carolina.

- In October 2023, **OPT was reorganized** to ensure FTA functions are being performed to the highest ability and transit agencies needs are being met efficiently. The new organizational structure utilizes a regional approach that empowers each subject matter expert to be hands-on in OPT's **mission to implement and administer transit programs.**
- Along with organizational changes, OPT began **implementing process and workflow development improvements.** These reforms will better align to FTA and SCDOT policies. OPT staff is being cross-trained for **succession planning** and the new processes include SCDOT staff from other divisions to **strengthen internal controls.** The revised processes and workflows will allow OPT to be **proactive** for the transit riders of South Carolina by providing **project planning,** research, administrative oversight of state and federal assistance programs, **evaluation of existing and proposed programs,** technical assistance and coordination of mass transit projects statewide.
- SCDOT continued to facilitate interagency and public-private transportation coordination efforts, with the ultimate goals to **enhance economic development efforts, reduce overall public and human services transportation costs,** and maintain or enhance the delivery of transit services across the state in a fiscally sustainable manner.
- In 2023, SCDOT made available almost **\$3 million to the rural transit** providers the FTA's **American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act funding.** 23 rural transit agencies received funding based on the allocation formula used under the CARES Act funding.
- SCDOT has been **managing the day to day engineering** of South Carolina's largest transit project, the Lowcountry Bus Rapid Transit (LCRT) since 2022. In October 2023, **OPT assumed management of the LCRT.**

SECTION II: FUNDING PLAN

The SCDOT Commission approves the Transit Funding Plan containing both state and federal transit funds. The charts below display the \$6.0 million in state transit funding and \$75.813 million in federal transit funding as approved by the SCDOT Commission. Additional information can be found in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). It is referenced in Section III of this report and can also be located at: <https://www.scdot.org/inside/planning-stip.aspx>.



SECTION III: FIVE-YEAR PLAN

SCDOT recognizes that South Carolina’s transportation system is essential to the economic health of our State. SCDOT uses two plans to address transit across the state - STIP and the 2040 Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan (SMTP). These plans are explained below.

The STIP is our six-year transportation improvement program for all projects or program areas receiving federal funding. The STIP covers all federally funded improvements with approved funding. SCDOT expects to begin these projects in the next six-year period, and is revised on a continual basis to reflect the latest program and project information. The SCDOT Commission, as well as the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and FTA, approve the STIP. The STIP is a fiscally-constrained plan based on financial budgets phased over the life of a project. This document is located at: <https://www.scdot.org/inside/planning-stip.aspx>.

The 2040 SMTP is the state’s twenty-five year Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan. The SMTP, including the Statewide Transit Plan, is updated every five years with intermittent annual reviews. It focuses on maximizing South Carolina’s limited funding resources, maintaining the state’s position in the global marketplace, and efficiently moving both people and goods. This plan was developed in conjunction with SCDOT management, staff, and transportation partners and stakeholders. The process included several major components that encompass public transportation, including:

- **Statewide Public Transportation Plan Update** – overall public transportation plan for the state of South Carolina, summarizing existing services, needs and future funding programs.
- **Multimodal Transportation Plan** – overall plan inclusive of all modes of transportation.

The current 2040 MTP Update was approved in July 2020 and is located at: <https://www.scdot.org/Multimodal/default.aspx>.