

### Overview of Transit in the Baltimore Region

Public transportation, or transit, can be defined as a system that moves people to their destinations in an efficient, affordable way. Public transportation systems in the greater Baltimore region include buses, trains, ferries, light rail transit, bus rapid transit, paratransit, and metro services that are available for use by the public and generally run on a scheduled timetable.

Planning for the development of new or expanded transit service in the urban, suburban and rural communities that make up the greater Baltimore region should take into consideration its wide-ranging benefits. Public transportation systems create a groundwork on which our communities may thrive – becoming healthier, more livable and more prosperous in a number of ways. Here are just a few of the benefits quality transit service can bring:

- Better health
- Cleaner air and reduced greenhouse emissions
- Improved mobility
- A more equitable transportation system
- Economic benefits to the community
- Improved commuter productivity

Prior to the pandemic, nearly 300,000 public transit trips via bus and rail and 9,000 paratransit trips were taken daily throughout our region (MDOT MTA, 2020). Although factors such as new patterns of working and schooling from home, health concerns, and driver shortages during the global pandemic have significantly affected transit ridership overall – and recovery has only

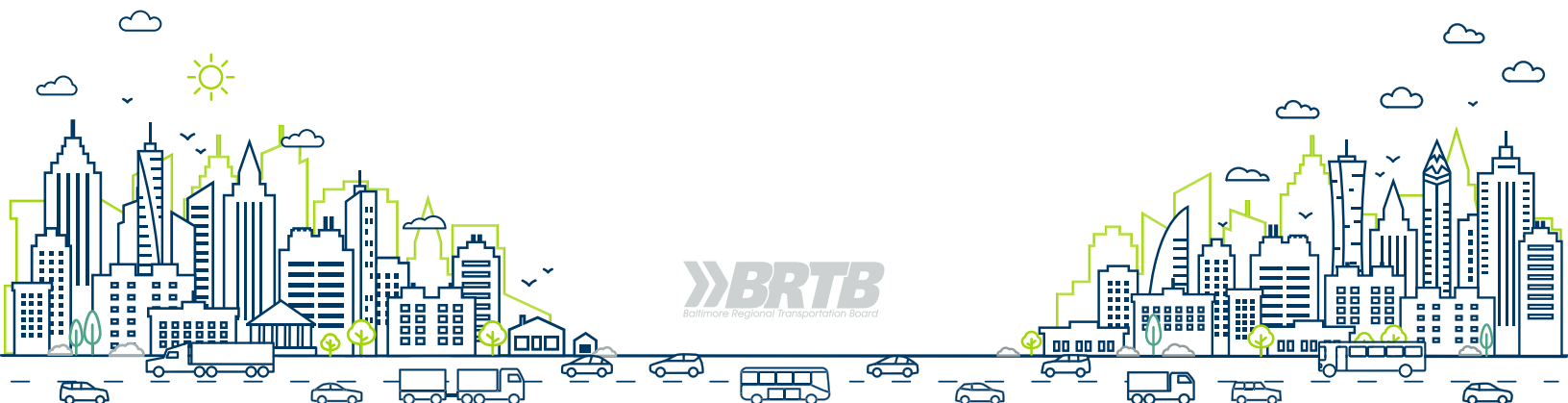
just begun – approximately 170,000 residents and commuters in the region continue to rely on transit to get to work.

Multiple transit operators at the state, county and private levels serve the greater Baltimore region, providing both fixed route and demand-response service. MDOT Maryland Transit Administration (MDOT MTA) operates local service and commuter service within the Baltimore region, service to Union Station in Washington, DC, and connections to Amtrak, Greyhound, and origins/destinations outside of the Baltimore region.

Locally Operated Transit Systems (LOTS) typically operate within jurisdictional boundaries and provide both fixed route service and on-demand service. On-demand service is generally provided for older adults and people with disabilities when the transportation service provided is unavailable, insufficient, or inappropriate to meeting these needs. Operators include the local jurisdictions in the region as well as non-profit providers that receive grant funding administered by MDOT MTA. While the majority of transit services in the region collect fares from passengers, some local services are free to riders.



Focus on essential workers during the pandemic has increased collective awareness of the core value of transit to communities and the need for reliable, efficient and affordable transit as a critical service. Any planning for new or enhanced service should include an



evaluation of equitable access to opportunities including jobs, recreation, schools, and health care, as well as differences in access times by transit modes. The Baltimore region is home to many households who depend on transit to get to work, school, healthcare and social activities.

Transit agencies in the Baltimore region and across the United States have struggled with decreased ridership, difficulties with operator hiring and retention, and other challenges to operations as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, these struggles also provide an opportunity for transit agencies to develop new solutions to

increase ridership, improve operations, and plan for improved access for those who need it most. Transit agencies in the region and around the country have developed strategies to attract and retain riders in a number of creative ways:

- adjusting routes and service, offering less service during historic rush-hour times and offering more service at other times to locations such as medical appointments, highly trafficked areas, or sports and entertainment events;
- offering increased starting pay, sign-on and retention bonuses, referral bonuses, increased benefits and skills training to attract and retain transit operators and other staff; and

- adjusting fare policies to offer reduced prices, free fares and flexible passes to better serve lower-income communities and essential workers, as well as to attract new suburban commuters.

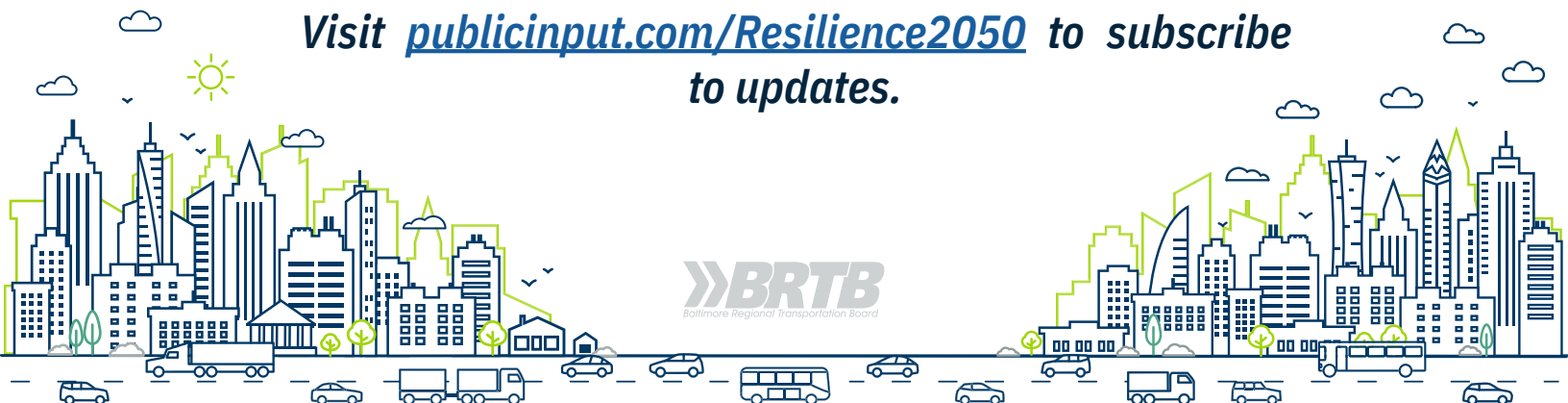
The Bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act includes the first significant federal investment in public transportation since 1981, and devotes a larger share of funds to transit - \$39.2 billion over the next four years - in the history of the program. These investments create an opportunity to reshape the transit landscape both nationally and regionally.

The Baltimore Metropolitan Council (BMC) and Baltimore Regional Transportation Board (BRTB) work together with our local and state members in coordinating and promoting transit and human service transportation planning in the Baltimore region. We provide technical assistance to the LOTS, conduct studies to implement regional transit plans, and support ridership recovery efforts.

Public transit serves those who live, work and visit Maryland. Transit providers are taking stock of the pandemic's impact and attempting to address the challenges that our communities are facing. At the same time, our regional transit agencies continue to plan new and expanded services for more access and greater inclusion for all riders within the Baltimore region. While change sometimes takes a while, the industry's response to the uncertainties of the last two years reveals a commendable level of resilience and innovation, and we as a region will continue to strive to rise to the occasion.

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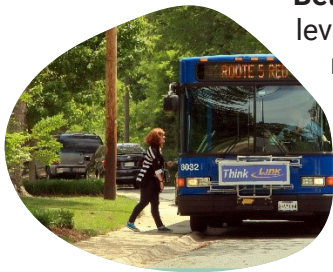


## Transit White Paper

### Introduction

Public transportation, or transit, can be defined as a system that moves people to their destinations in an efficient, affordable way (Remix, 2021). Public transportation systems include buses, trains, trams, trolleys, ferries, light rail transit, bus rapid transit, paratransit, and metro services that are available for use by the public (FTA, n.d.). Transit services generally run on a scheduled timetable, though it should be noted that a smaller number of public transit systems also provide service on demand.

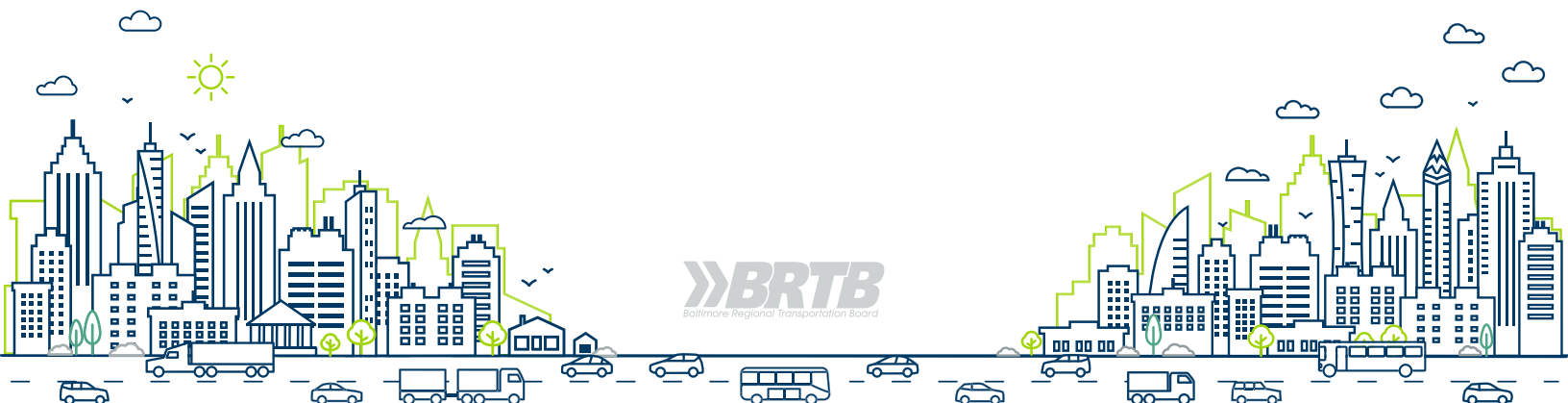
Planning for the development of new or expanded transit service in the urban, suburban and rural communities that make up the greater Baltimore region should take into consideration its wide-ranging benefits. Public transportation systems create a groundwork on which our communities may thrive – becoming healthier, more livable and more prosperous in a number of ways. Here are just a few of the benefits quality transit service can bring:



- **Better health.** Public transit riders tend to have increased physical activity levels as compared to their peers. Since transit riders often walk, bike or take microtransit (i.e., shared scooters or bicycles) to and from their transit stops, they often can achieve an average of 40 minutes of daily activity for each day they ride transit. Increased levels of activity, better access to health services, promotion of better air quality, and decreased injuries from car crashes can lead to better physical and mental health outcomes (Health Affairs, 2021). Access to high quality public transportation may also promote health equity by increasing access to healthier food options, medical care and other essential services, and employment opportunities

for communities that do not have equal access to these fundamental daily necessities (Health Affairs, 2021).

- **Cleaner air and reduced greenhouse emissions.** The more people ride transit, the fewer cars on the roads that lead to congestion, which in turn reduces emissions. Public transit produces significantly lower emissions per passenger than private vehicles, particularly with the emergence and growth of hybrid and electric transit vehicles. Less fuel burned translates to cleaner air. Approximately 85% of the greenhouse gases caused by transportation are caused by daily auto commutes. An individual choosing transit over driving can save up to 20 pounds of carbon dioxide emissions every day (Remix, 2021).
- **Improved mobility.** Inter-city and regional transit systems help riders move throughout the Baltimore region no matter where they start their trips. Because a significant number of residents in our region do not own a car or have the capability to drive, public transit provides an option to help connect people to their destination.



- **A more equitable transportation system.** New or expanded public transportation infrastructure may decrease disparities in access to employment, essential services and recreational opportunities for residents and visitors with low incomes, individuals with disabilities, and older adults. However, new public transportation stops or station areas can make a neighborhood more attractive, potentially leading to increased rents and displacement of long-time residents. Policies must be in place to support transit-oriented growth while also preserving affordable housing (NASEM, 2022).
- **Economic benefits to the community.** Every dollar invested in public transportation can yield \$5 in economic gains in the community (APTA, n.d.). This includes employing a workforce to implement planned improvements, supporting businesses near stops and station areas, and attracting workers and visitors alike.
- **Improved commuter productivity.** As opposed to workers being fully focused on driving during their commute, riders of public transportation have the ability to be more productive during their commuting times. People who ride transit can sleep, read, work remotely or relax on their way to and from work (Remix, 2021).

## Overview of Transit Trips in the Baltimore Region

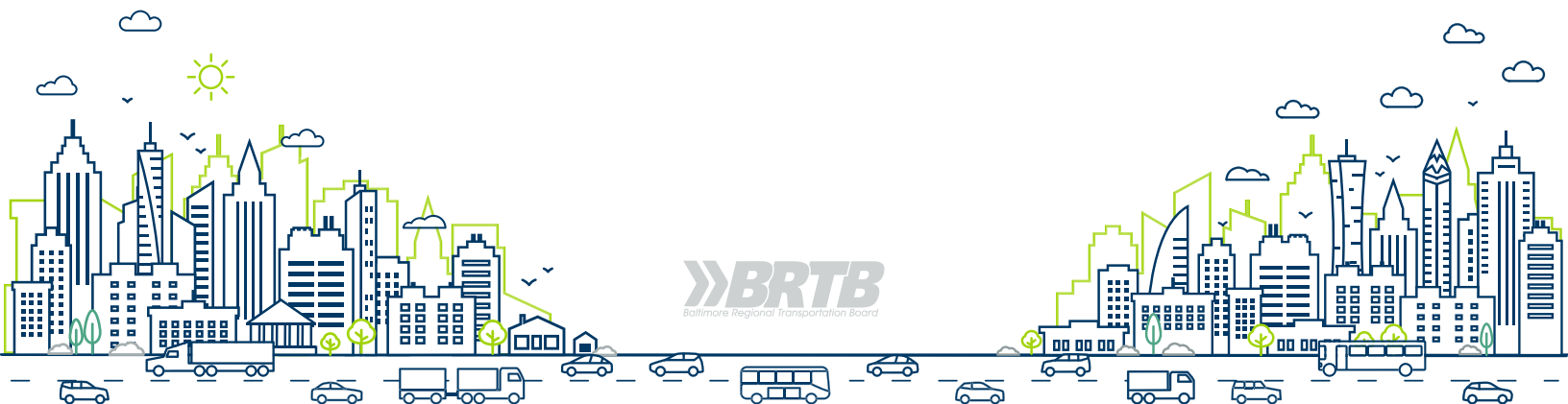
Public transportation supports residents, businesses and communities in our region by helping to provide connections to jobs, education, family and friends, recreation, healthcare and other services. Transit services that connect people to their destinations in the urban, suburban and rural cores of our region contribute to community vitality, help create a more equitable transportation system, improve air quality, foster economic growth, and support better health outcomes for an improved quality of life.



Prior to the pandemic, nearly 300,000 public transit trips via bus and rail and 9,000 paratransit trips were taken daily throughout our region (MDOT MTA, 2020). Although factors such as new patterns of working and schooling from home, health concerns, and driver shortages during the global pandemic have significantly affected transit ridership overall – and recovery has only just begun – approximately 170,000 residents and commuters in the region continue to rely on transit to get to work.

Transit trips make up approximately 3 percent of trips by all modes of travel in the Baltimore region, led by the urban and suburban activity centers (BMC, 2020). This may not seem like a large share; however, transit connects thousands of Maryland residents daily to jobs in the suburbs, Baltimore, DC and beyond.

Table 1 summarizes trip purpose data for bus, rail, and paratransit trips in the Baltimore region. Almost two-thirds of trips taken by rail in the Baltimore region are for commuting purposes. While almost 30





percent of trips taken by bus are to and from work, a higher percentage of riders also take the bus to shop, conduct personal business such as medical appointments and to socialize. Over half of paratransit trips are for personal business, while 10 percent of such rides are to and from work.

**Table 1. Trip Purpose for Bus, Rail, and Paratransit Trips in the Baltimore Region**

TRIP PURPOSE	BUS	RAIL	PARATRANSIT
Work	29.8%	61.4%	10.7%
Shop/Meal	25.7%	14.4%	18.5%
Personal Business/Other	22.5%	12.9%	55.5%
Social/Recreation	11.5%	5.9%	5.7%
School	10.5%	5.4%	9.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: 2018-2019 Maryland Travel Survey

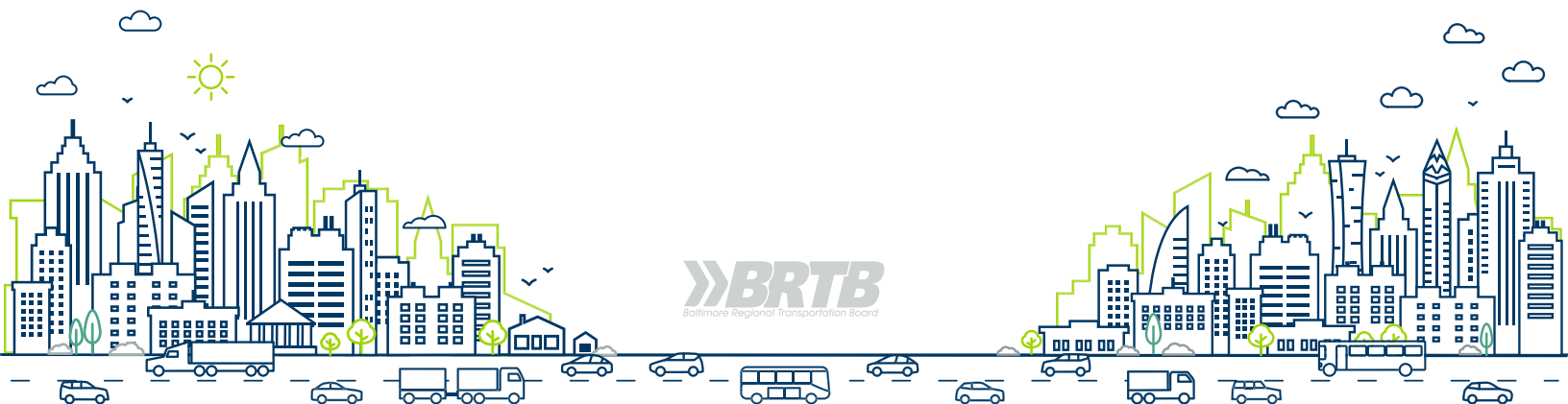
## State, Regional, and Local Transit Plans



As the Metropolitan Planning Organization for the Baltimore region, the Baltimore Regional Transportation Board is required to update and approve the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) every four years. In addition to the requirements of the LRTP, a number of plans guide the vision and goals for transit at the state, regional and local levels. The Maryland Transit Administration (MDOT MTA) develops the state and Central MD regional plans. Local agencies also create transit development plans. Each of the plans provide either a broad framework for overall network and service improvements or project-specific implementation. Regardless of the scope, all of the state, regional and local plans include common themes of improving transit network connectivity, operational efficiencies, equity and accessibility, and rider experience.

## Maryland Statewide Transit Plan (2022 Draft)

The [Draft Maryland Statewide Transit Plan](#) provides a vision for improving public transportation over the next 50 years, with attention to regional context and mobility needs across the state. The vision and goals of the plan will be achieved through the strategies identified by the MDOT MTA with input from the public and collaboration with local and regional stakeholders, jurisdictions, and transit providers. This plan provides a broad framework to ensure Maryland's transit system can meet and exceed the needs



and expectations of its riders. It also defines a vision, goals, strategies, and future connections for transit across Maryland and its rural, suburban, and urban regions. MDOT MTA will finalize the plan later this year.

## Connecting Our Future: A Regional Transit Plan for Central Maryland (2020)

The [Central Maryland Regional Transit Plan](#) is a plan for improving public transportation in the region over the next 25 years. The plan presents goals, objectives, and initiatives to enhance transit service, support the economy, and reduce impacts to the environment. The plan addresses both traditional transit and new technologies, discusses short-term investments including bus lanes, and identifies policies to improve connections between systems. A central focus of the plan is increasing transit access for the region's residents, particularly those in historically underserved communities. The plan strongly emphasizes network connectivity and identifies and prioritizes 30 corridors to further evaluate the need for additional transit investments. These corridors serve as the backbone of the regional transit network.



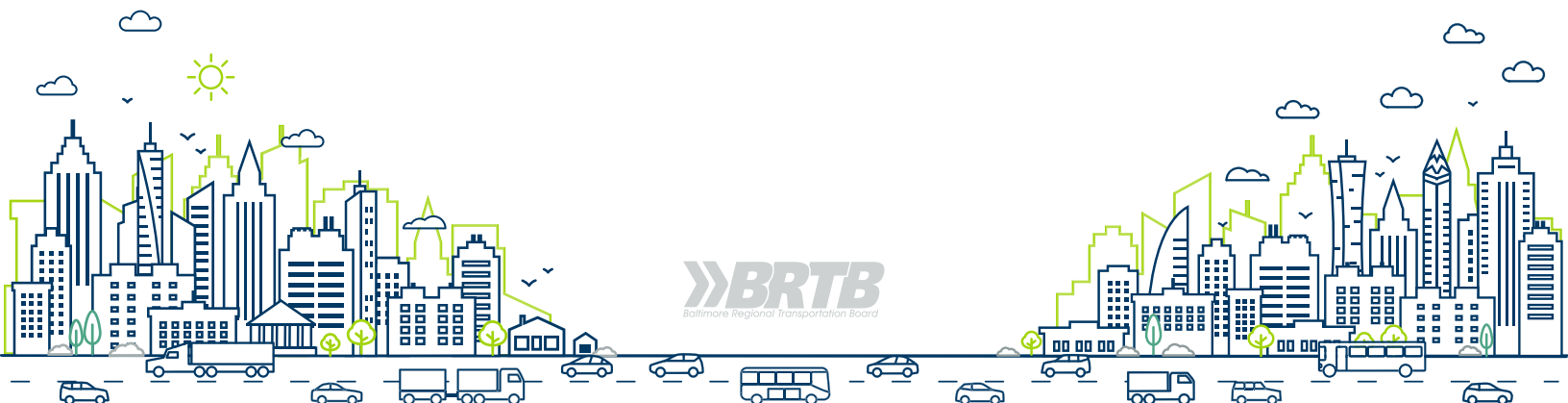
## Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan for the Baltimore Region (2019)

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) administers a grant program titled Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities, better known as Section 5310. This grant program requires that projects selected to receive Section 5310 funding must be included in a locally developed, coordinated [public transit-human services transportation plan](#). While the plan is only required under the Section 5310 program, FTA guidance states that a coordinated transportation plan should also incorporate activities offered under other programs sponsored by federal, state, and local agencies to strengthen its impact (FTA, 2022).

This plan includes information on a variety of transportation services offered in the region and provides strategies and potential projects to meet transportation needs and improve mobility. The plan emphasizes mobility solutions for older adults, people with disabilities, veterans, people with lower incomes and young people with limited access to transportation. It often provides recommendations for improved access and expanded service for riders.

## Local Transit Development Plans

MDOT MTA requires the Locally Operated Transit Systems (LOTS) in Maryland to conduct a Transit Development Plan (TDP) planning process, typically every five years. Extensive collaboration of local leaders and experts, transit riders, stakeholders, advocacy groups and community members informs the



TDP planning process. A completed TDP formulates or builds on transit goals and objectives, assesses current transit services, identifies unmet transit needs, and develops actions to address the objectives within the five-year period. It also provides a roadmap for implementing identified service or organizational changes, improvements or expansion. A brief summary of existing or ongoing regional and local TDPs follows.



[Baltimore City Transit Development Plan \(Draft 2022\)](#): The Department of Transportation is currently preparing a TDP for its Charm City Circulator bus service and the Harbor Connector ferry shuttle service, which includes route optimization recommendations to the existing service. The TDP will serve as a strategic guide to address the city's changing transit service needs by prioritizing service improvements and outlining possible service changes.



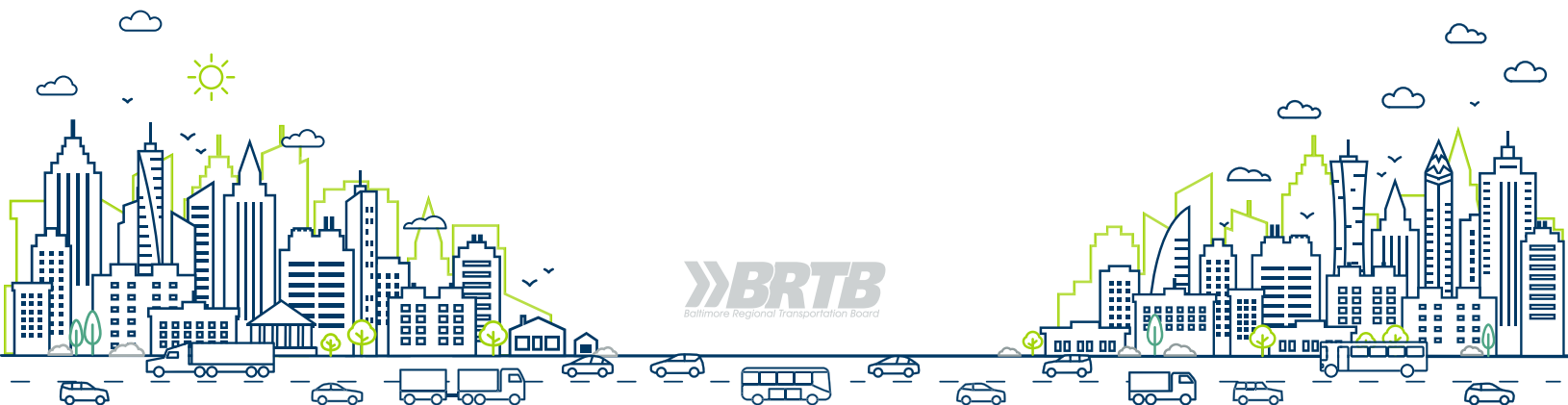
[Baltimore County Transit Development Plan \(2021\)](#): While previous TDPs focused primarily on services provided through CountyRide, the current plan recommendations go beyond CountyRide services, and include strategies for expanding locally operated transit and microtransit services. This TDP includes a discussion of the planning process and funding of the recently operational Towson Loop, a fare-free service with two routes connecting key destinations in Towson.



[Central Maryland Transit Development Plan \(2018\)](#): This is the first regional transit plan to encompass the multi-jurisdictional region including Anne Arundel County, Howard County, Northern Prince George's County, City of Laurel, and the Regional Transportation Agency of Central Maryland (RTA). Service improvements resulting from this plan include free fixed route fares for seniors and individuals with disabilities, the addition of three new routes, increased service frequency to 30 or 60 minutes on all routes, and new or expanded Sunday service. Fleet upgrades have included implementation of on-board technology, including automatic vehicle location, automated passenger counters, real-time bus information and crowding data via Transit App, and mobile fare payment options.



[Harford Transit Link Transit Development Plan \(2018\)](#): Harford Transit Link's mission is to provide "the public with a safe and efficient transportation system that increases access and mobility, reduces congestion, improves the environment and supports economic development, thereby enhancing the quality of life throughout Harford County." Implementation of the TDP to date has included increased fixed route and demand response services, development of color-coded bus schedules and materials in English and Spanish, block grants awarded for amenities such as bus shelters and electronic LCD screens, a free tracking app and vehicle upgrades.



## Transit Service in Our Region

Multiple transit operators at the state, county and private levels serve the greater Baltimore region, providing both fixed route and demand-response service. MDOT MTA operates:

- local service and commuter service within the Baltimore region;
- service to Union Station in Washington, DC via MARC;
- connections to other transit modes including Amtrak and Greyhound; and
- connections to other origins/destinations outside of the Baltimore region on the Eastern Shore, Frederick, Northern VA, Delaware and Philadelphia.

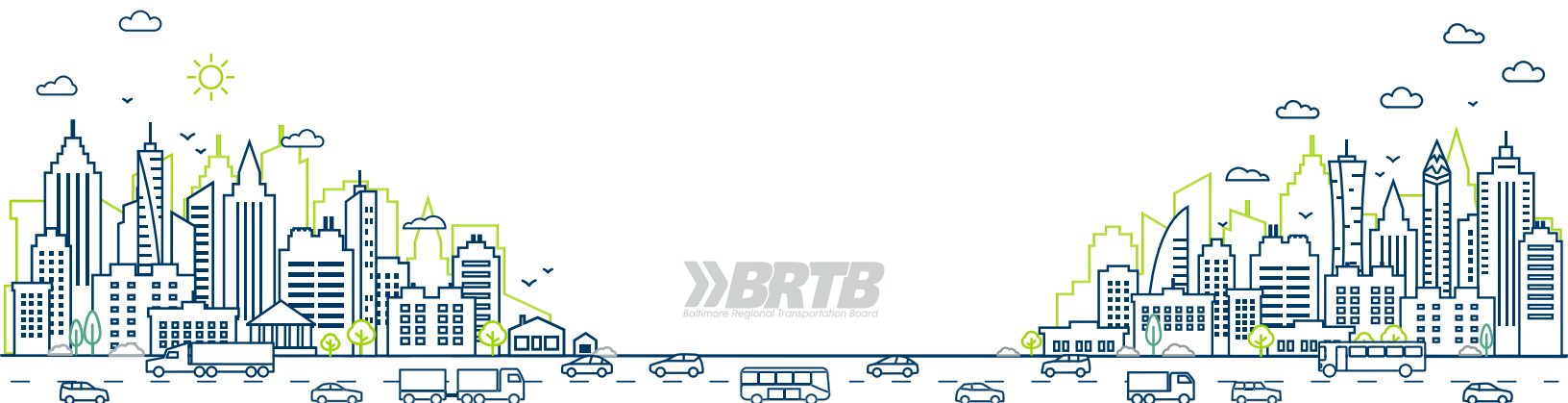


Local services typically operate within jurisdictional boundaries, though one regional provider includes service to multiple counties and two providers cross county boundaries from York County, PA to Baltimore County and from Queen Anne's County to Annapolis. While the majority of transit services in the region collect fares from passengers, some local services are free to riders.

## Maryland Transit Administration

**MDOT MTA** provides fare-based local transit service throughout the Baltimore region and commuter service to both the Baltimore and Washington DC regions. MDOT MTA operates the following services:

- CityLink local bus is a color-coded, high frequency service forming a grid that radiates out from downtown Baltimore City. LocalLink is local bus service that operates on neighborhood streets and provides connections between the CityLink routes.
- Express BusLink bus offers limited stop service connecting suburb-to-suburb and suburb-to-downtown including connections to and from West Baltimore MARC, Tradepoint Atlantic, job centers in Cockeysville, Northeast Baltimore and Johns Hopkins Bayview, among others
- Commuter Bus offers routes that bring people from outlying regions into downtown Baltimore as well as reverse-commute service from central Baltimore to growing suburban job centers
- Light RailLINK provides service from Hunt Valley to BWI
- Metro SubwayLink offers service from Owings Mills to Johns Hopkins Hospital
- MARC commuter rail includes two lines that connect Union Station in Washington, DC to Baltimore (Camden Line) and Perryville (Penn Line). The Penn Line also offers weekend service.
- MobilityLink is a demand-response paratransit service for individuals unable to use the MDOT MTA fixed route system



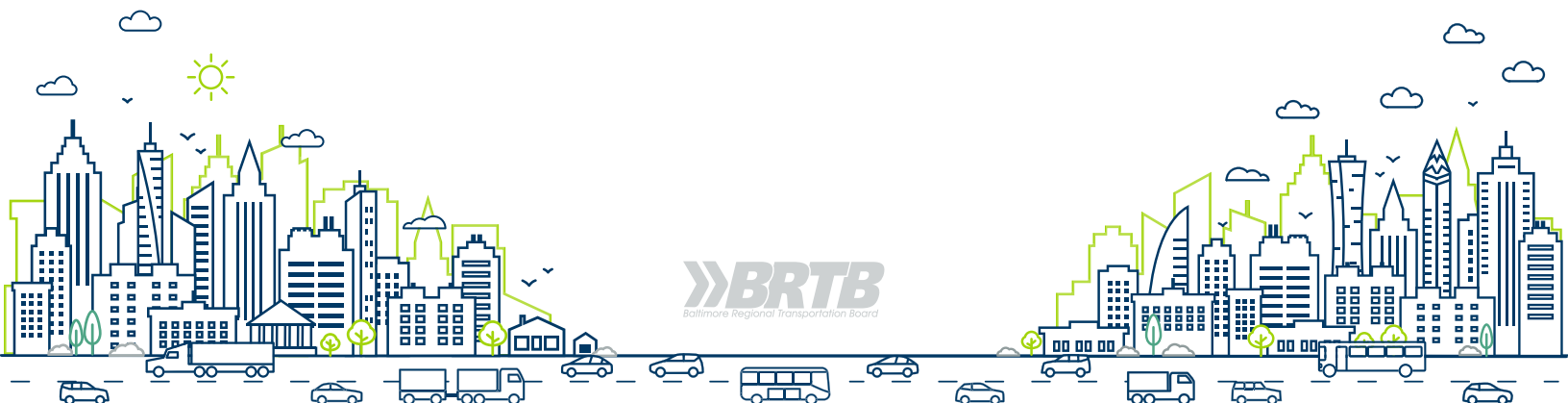


- MDOT MTA provides service to and from Baltimore City Public Schools via the BaltimoreLink plan

Improvements to MARC rail service and the BaltimoreLink bus system have helped to attract and retain riders, and MDOT MTA Core Bus service has retained one of the highest ridership levels in the U.S. throughout the COVID-19 pandemic (STP, 2022).

## Regional and Locally Operated Public Transit Systems

- **Annapolis Transit** is a free service with multiple fixed routes operating within the City of Annapolis and surrounding areas in Anne Arundel County. A free downtown shuttle service moves individuals from the City's four parking garages throughout downtown Annapolis. ADA paratransit provides services to older adults and persons with disabilities who are unable to use the fixed route service. Annapolis Transit connects with MDOT MTA's BaltimoreLink and Commuter Bus services.
- **Anne Arundel County Transit** provides free transit and commuter solutions through eight fixed routes and two shopper shuttle services to points outside the City of Annapolis. It also operates a taxi voucher program and demand response service for elderly residents (55 and over) and residents with disabilities. The South County Call N' Ride service is an on-demand transit service provided in three zones connecting south county residents to northern county service areas. The North County Call N' Ride service is an on-demand transit service connecting north county residents to north county service areas. Anne Arundel County Transit connects with MDOT MTA's MARC Train, Light Rail, BaltimoreLink, and Commuter Bus routes.
- **Baltimore City's Charm City Circulator (CCC)** offers free shuttle service along four routes in the central business district. The Harbor Connector is an extension of the CCC and provides free maritime transit service connecting six piers. The CCC consists of fixed route service in the downtown area, and connects with MDOT MTA's BaltimoreLink, Commuter Bus, Metro, Light Rail, Mobility paratransit, Call-A-Ride taxi access, and MARC Train.
- **Baltimore City Commission on Aging and Retirement Education (C.A.R.E.)** provides free 24-hour, general purpose, curb-to-curb taxi service for residents who are 60 years of age or older and persons with disabilities.
- **Baltimore County CountyRide** is a fare-based demand-response transportation system for general-purpose trips supporting adults 60 years of age or older, persons with disabilities (ages 18 and older) and rural residents of all ages.

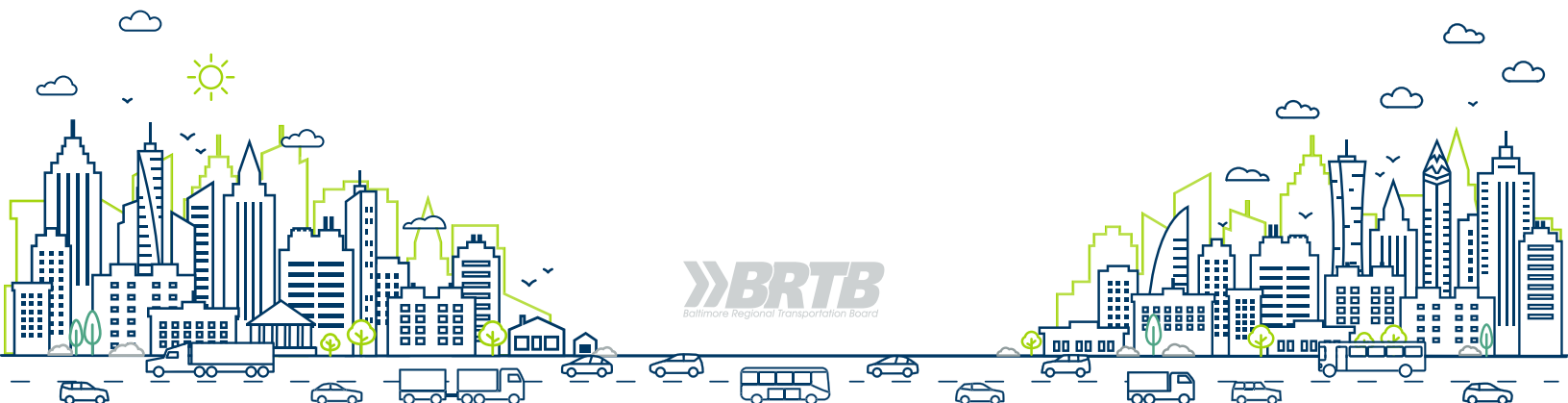


- **Baltimore County Towson Loop** is a free transit circulator service offering two routes that quickly and conveniently connect residents, commuters, students, and visitors to stops throughout Towson's central business district.
- **Carroll County Trailblazer** offers nine fare-based deviated fixed routes within Carroll County. All Trailblazer routes may be deviated up to  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile for riders, including visitors, with or without disabilities. Carroll Transit System, operated by Ride With Us, also offers a door-to-door demand response service to locations within Carroll County.
- **Harford Transit LINK** provides seven fare-based fixed routes that provide service to destinations throughout Harford County. Harford Transit also provides demand-response transportation services to the general public, the elderly, and persons with disabilities who reside in the County. The LINK connects with MDOT MTA's MARC Train, Metro, Commuter Bus, and regional Greyhound service.
- **Queen Anne's County Ride** offers fare-based service operated by the Department of Aging with three weekday deviated fixed routes (also up to  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile), including service to Annapolis. Door-to-door, demand response services are also available to individuals with disabilities who are not served by or who cannot use the deviated fixed route bus services. Veterans living in Queen Anne's County are eligible to receive free on-demand service to mental, medical or behavioral health appointments.
- **The Regional Transportation Agency of Central Maryland (RTA)**, managed by First Transit and overseen by the Howard County Office of Transportation, provides 15 fare-based fixed bus routes in Howard County, Anne Arundel County, Prince George's County and the City of Laurel. RTA Mobility is a curb-to-curb, shared ride transportation service for passengers who are unable to ride the fixed route transit system due to a disability or age. RTA Mobility provides two types of service: ADA and General Paratransit. In Howard County, RTA connects with MDOT MTA's MARC Train, BaltimoreLink, and Commuter Bus routes.
- **Rabbit Transit**, based out of York, PA, offers a fare-based commuter route from York to Towson on weekdays.



## Private Transit Providers

- **Amtrak** operates daily inter-city passenger trains with stops in the region, including the high-speed Acela and Northeast Regional service along the Northeast Corridor from DC to Boston. Amtrak also operates seven additional daily services and one triweekly service to Miami, Savannah, New Orleans, Charlotte, and Chicago.



- **Megabus** offers service from the White Marsh Mall to destinations including New York, Philadelphia and Washington.
- **Greyhound** offers service from four stations in the region to multiple destinations within and outside of Maryland.
- **Non-Profit Providers** mainly operate under two MDOT MTA-administered grant programs. The Maryland Jobs Access Reverse Commute (MD-JARC) grant program is designed to connect targeted populations with employment areas that have experienced significant growth. The Maryland Senior Rides Program offers grants to non-profit organizations to encourage and facilitate the development of volunteer transportation services for low-income to moderate-income seniors. FTA's 5310 program provides formula funding to states to assist private nonprofit groups in meeting the transportation needs of older adults and people with disabilities when the transportation service provided is unavailable, insufficient, or inappropriate to meeting these needs.

## Regional Transit Planning Considerations

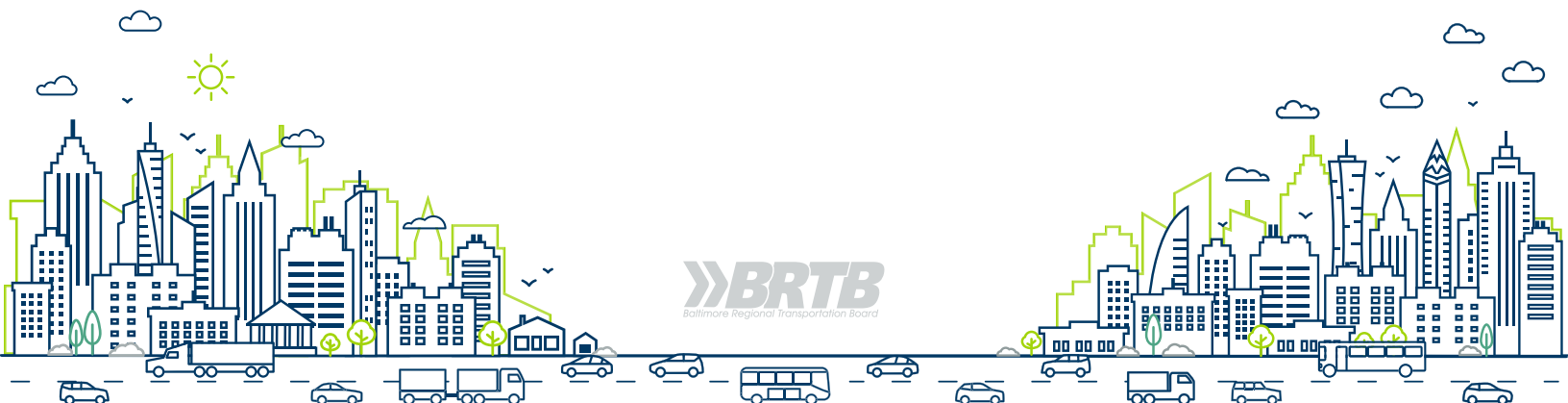
Focus on essential workers during the pandemic has increased collective awareness of the core value of transit to communities and the need for reliable, efficient and affordable transit as a critical service.



*While the greater Baltimore region is home to 45 percent of the state's population and 51 percent of the state's jobs, a commute to work by transit currently takes, on average, 71 percent longer than by personal vehicle (MDOT MTA, 2022)*

Any planning for new or enhanced service should include an evaluation of equitable access to opportunities including jobs, recreation, schools, and health care, as well as differences in access times by transit modes (Morales-Burnett, 2021).

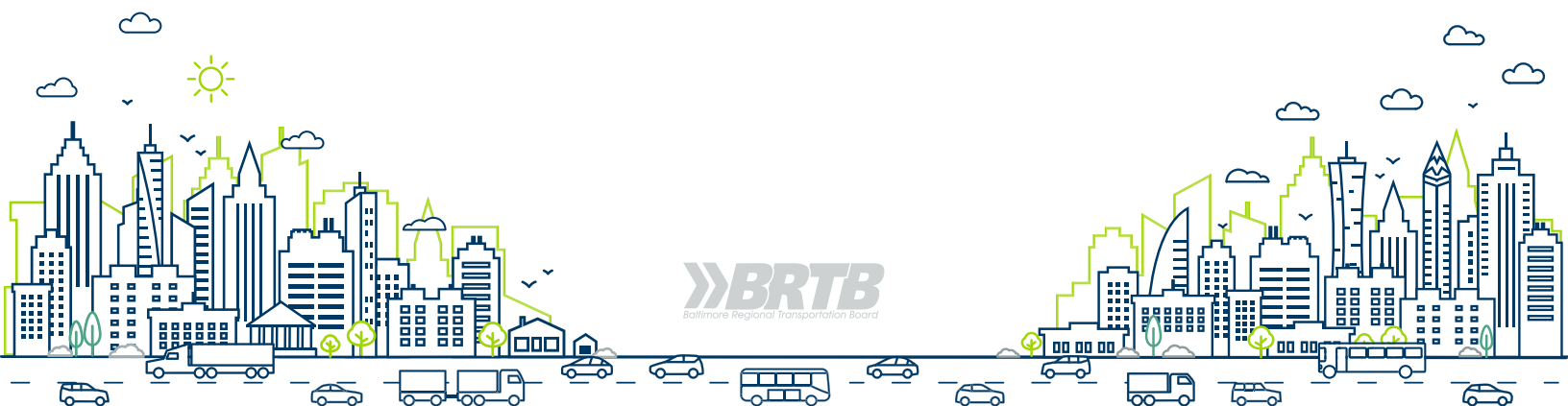
- Residents of low-income households, defined as those with incomes below 200 percent of the poverty level, represent 21.4 percent of the population in the region. Concentrations of low-income households exceed 46 percent in some areas of Annapolis, Baltimore City, Baltimore County and Harford County (BMC, 2022). While the COVID-19 pandemic caused a dramatic drop in transit ridership, essential workers and workers with low incomes continued to rely on public transportation. However, many destinations in the region are still inaccessible by transit, and residents without access to cars or other affordable transportation modes are likely to have reduced access to jobs and services.
- People of color represent an average of 44.3 percent of the greater Baltimore population. In census tracts throughout some the region's urbanized areas, people of color represent 59



percent to 100 percent of the population (BMC, 2022). Although workers in communities of color are more likely to commute by transit than by other modes, lack of access to frequent service – service that runs every 30 minutes or less – contributes to significantly longer commuting times and also to reduced access to education, healthcare, community activities, and other essential trips.



- The population of persons living with disabilities in our region is 11.8 percent. Some census tracts in the region have concentrations of persons living with disabilities as high as 23 percent (BMC, 2022). It is essential that people of all cognitive and physical abilities have safe, accessible and affordable transit services that provide connections to jobs, education, healthcare, housing and participation in community life.
- Residents aged 75 and up represent 6.4 percent of the population in the region. In many census tracts throughout the Baltimore region, the population of older adults is 22 percent or greater (BMC, 2022). According to AARP, the vast majority of older adults, nearly 90 percent, choose to age in place in their homes and communities. Convenient, affordable and accessible transit services are critical in enabling older adults to live independently.
- There are multiple concentrations of zero-vehicle households in both urban and rural locations throughout the region. While the regional average of households without vehicles stands at 10.5 percent, nearly 30 percent of households in Baltimore City do not have a car (BMC, 2022). While transit service may be available in neighborhoods with higher concentrations of zero-car households, lack of efficient transit connections to some job centers leaves many jobs in the region out of reach for workers without cars.
- Populations with Limited English proficiency, meaning residents over 5 years old that speak English “not well” or “not at all,” live throughout the greater Baltimore region. Higher concentrations of residents with Limited English proficiency ranging from 8 to 20 percent of the population live in areas of Anne Arundel County, Baltimore City, Baltimore County and Howard County (BMC, 2022). It is imperative that transit service operators provide language-specific and easily accessible resources and materials to better serve riders with limited English proficiency.



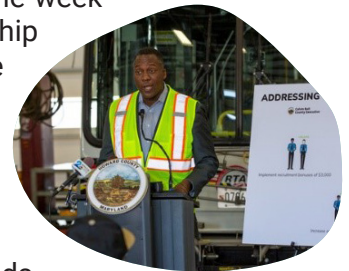


## Factors and Trends

Transit agencies in the Baltimore region and across the United States have struggled with decreased ridership, difficulties with operator hiring and retention, and other challenges to operations as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, these struggles also provide an opportunity for transit agencies to develop new solutions to increase ridership, improve operations, and plan for improved access for those who need it most.

### Transit Ridership

Nationally, transit ridership was about 39 percent of pre-pandemic levels for the week ending April 9, 2022. Public transit ridership has not made a steady recovery; ridership levels have rapidly risen and fallen in response to COVID-19 levels across the country. In the last three months alone, ridership has fluctuated nationally from 34 percent to 51 percent of pre-pandemic levels (APTA/Transit, 2022). Travel patterns have continued to fluctuate, and factors such as changing commute patterns, travel demand at peak hours and car traffic bouncing back from the lows of 2020 have created unpredictable conditions. Such rapid changes and fluctuations can make it difficult for transit agencies to keep up with service needs to connect the greatest number of riders to their destinations in this new era.



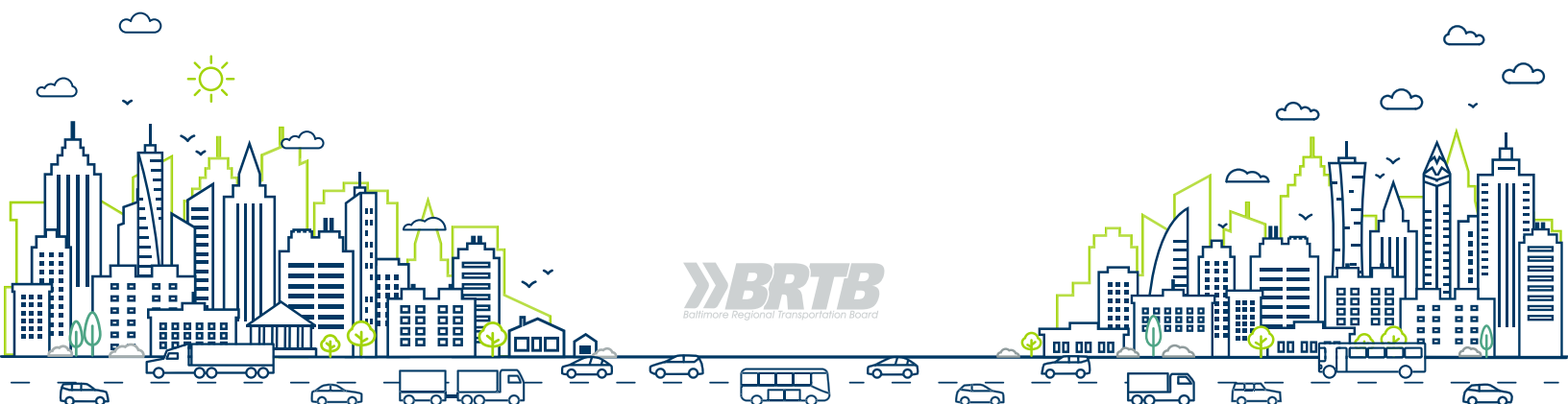
To attract more riders, some transit agencies have responded by adjusting bus and subway routes and service, offering less service during historic rush-hour times and more service at other times to locations such as medical appointments, highly trafficked areas, or sports and entertainment events (T4A, 2022).

### Transit Employee Shortages



Attracting and retaining skilled employees, particularly operators, is an ongoing challenge for transit agencies. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this challenge, creating shortages for many positions across the transit industry's workforce. Safety and health concerns prompted by the pandemic have driven some workers away from frontline jobs driving vehicles and interacting with customers in favor of adjacent transportation work, like package delivery or ride-hailing. At the same time, focus on essential workers during the pandemic has increased awareness of the core value of transit to communities.

In a February 2022 survey conducted by the American Public Transportation Association, 92 percent of responding agencies indicated that they are having difficulty hiring new employees, and 66 percent indicated they are having difficulty retaining employees (APTA, 2022). There was little difference between





*In a February 2022 survey conducted by the American Public Transit Association, 64 percent of responding agencies had cut service in the last 6 months due to operator shortages. These challenges affect potential rider perception of transit reliability and therefore, ridership recovery.*

larger and smaller agencies in terms of the difficulty of hiring and retaining employees. In order to attract and retain employees, transit agencies both regionally and nationwide have been offering increased starting pay, sign-on and retention bonuses, referral

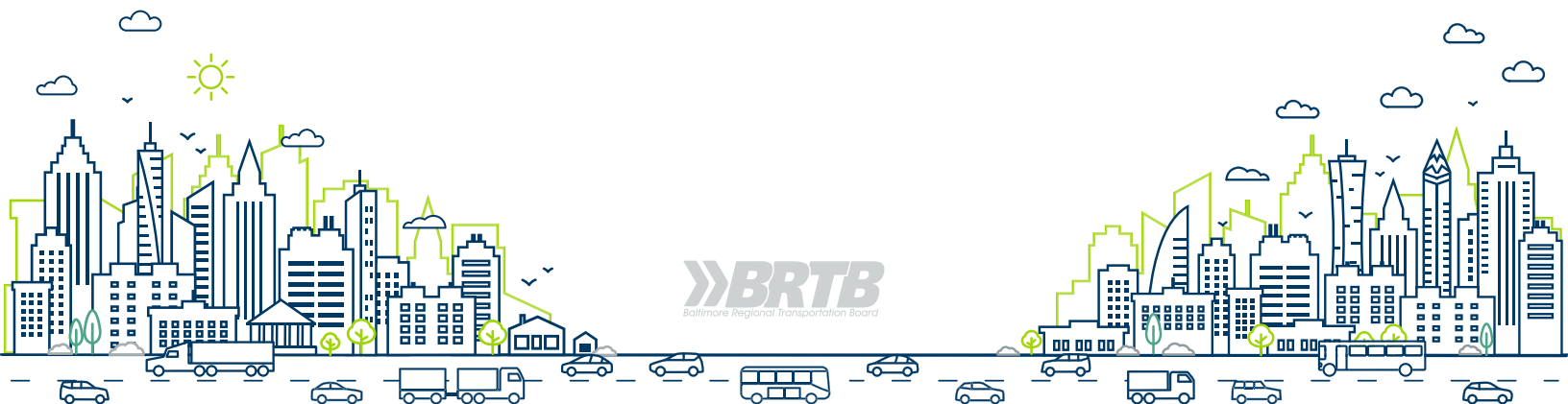
bonuses, increased benefits and skills training. However, this issue continues to be a significant challenge.

## Fare Policies

Frequent, reliable service with few transfers may make public transit more appealing to drivers. However, during the pandemic, many transit agencies both regionally and in cities from Washington to Boston to Chicago, have offered reduced prices or free fares to better serve lower-income communities and essential workers, as well as to attract new suburban commuters (T4America, 2022). Some agencies found that zero-fare policies translated into a lessening of the pandemic ridership drop and, in the case of Richmond, a ridership increase from pre-pandemic levels. Fare-free policies might be most effective when combined with social support systems to ensure a safe and secure experience for all riders. For example, Los Angeles Metro is working with a nonprofit to provide riders without a fixed place to sleep with access to affordable housing and healthy food (Morales-Burnett, 2021).

While not every system would be able to move to a zero-fare model, there are additional innovations that may deliver similar results to better serve and attract riders. Annapolis Transit has been offering a reduced fare program for seniors, persons with disabilities and students for over a decade. Since the onset of the pandemic, revised fare structures and simplified fare structures have been gaining in popularity, especially among transit networks that have adopted smart fare collection systems. These systems make it easier to cap fares and/or offer fare free service to specific populations. Transit agencies that have recently adopted smart fare systems have also launched fare capping – both temporarily and permanently - in cities such as San Diego, Omaha, Edmonton and Honolulu (Morales-Burnett, 2021). A fare cap was also temporarily offered in the Baltimore region via RTA's newly adopted Transit app.

Offering flexible and discounted mobile options for paying fares not only improves equitable access, but also may simplify the overall rider experience. In order to accommodate the occasional office commuter, MDOT MTA rolled out CharmFlex in August 2021. CharmFlex offers three-day and 10-day passes



to users of the agency's CharmPass mobile fare payment app. CharmFlex passes can be used on either consecutive or non-consecutive days, are good for 12 months on all MDOT MTA services, and are discounted 15 percent from the price of a day pass or single-trip fare.

## Demand Response and Microtransit

One of the goals of the Statewide Transit Plan is to provide fully accessible transit for people of all cognitive and physical abilities. In some areas throughout the region, in part due to a shortage of drivers, there are evening and weekend service gaps, lack of service to some locations, or the need to make reservations during operating hours well in advance.

Early in the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, some providers used their demand response and paratransit fleets to provide free rides for vaccination. Other service providers waived age and physical ability requirements usually associated with their door-to-door demand-response services to provide rides to anyone who needed to get vaccinated (Mader, 2021).

Since then, various service providers have been exploring the potential to mix fixed routes and microtransit service to create a stronger transit network. In Portland, for example, buses provide high frequency, all day service on core routes, complemented by microtransit in areas on the edge of the core service area.

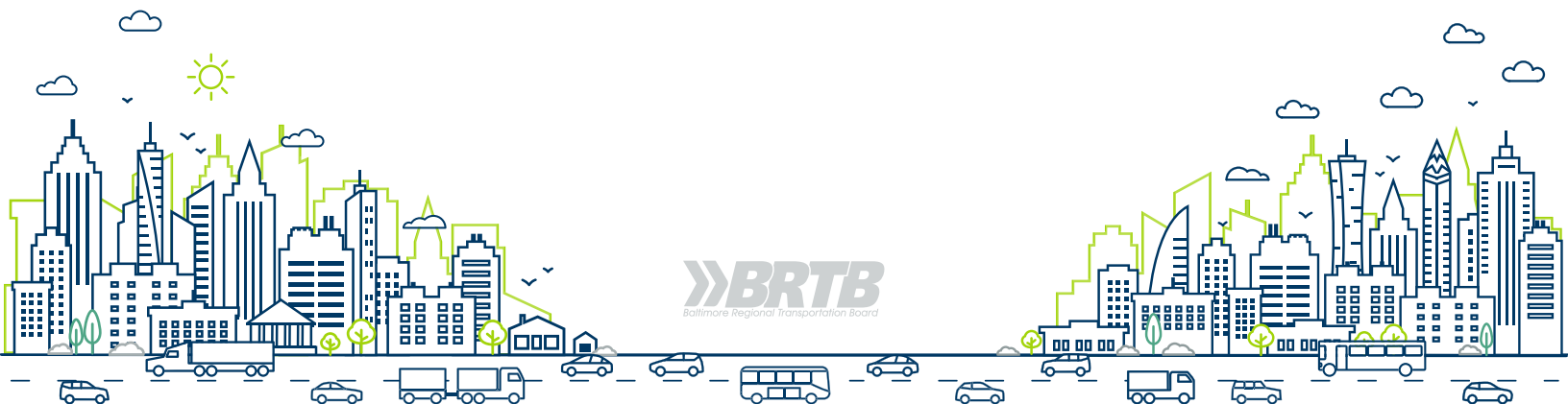


*Microtransit refers to small-scale, on-demand public transit services that can offer fixed routes and schedules, as well as flexible routes and on-demand scheduling.*

Microtransit could potentially help ridership grow to complement fixed route levels, or serve areas that do not warrant fixed route frequency, particularly in rural areas. In Oklahoma, four local providers teamed to launch PICK Transportation in June 2021. Funded by a \$1.5 million grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT), the 24-month pilot program offers on-demand, curb-to-curb service Monday-Friday from 5PM-10PM, and on Saturdays from 10AM-2PM, expanding the hours of transit availability in 21 rural counties (Mader, 2021).

## Transit Financing

Nearly all transit funding in Maryland comes from either federal, state, or county government sources. MDOT MTA manages a number of funding programs and technical assistance to the LOTS in the region (MDOT MTA, n.d.). Much of existing transit budgets are committed to operating and maintaining the current transit system and its infrastructure. As a result, implementation of new strategies, expanded services, and capital projects may require either new funding sources or the reallocation of existing funds as well as equitable prioritization based on the greatest needs (MDOT MTA, 2022).



The Bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act includes the first significant federal investment in public transportation since 1981, and devotes a larger share of funds to transit - \$39.2 billion over the next four years - in the history of the program.



*On April 6, the Federal Transit Administration allocated \$20.2 billion in transit funds for FY 2022 associated with the Bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. Maryland ranked #10 in allocated funds as the recipient of \$348 million to help modernize our transit systems.*

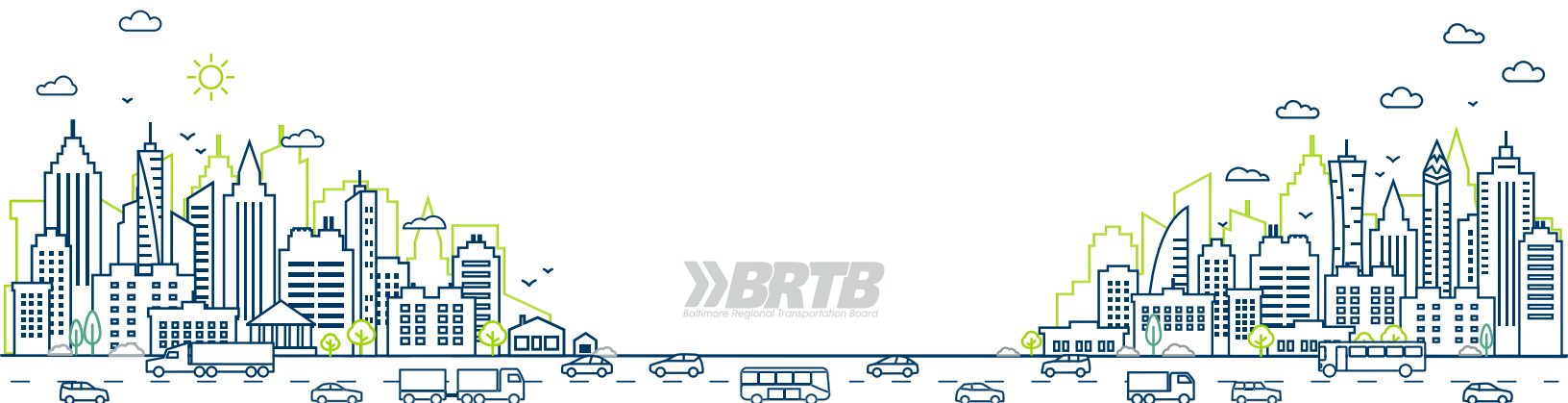
This includes funds to help address a repair backlog, which the USDOT estimates is more than 24,000 buses, 5,000 rail cars, 200 stations, and thousands of miles of track, signals, and power systems (White House, 2021). It will also help expand transit systems, support clean transit options, and increase accessibility for older adults and persons with disabilities. These investments create an opportunity to reshape the transit landscape both nationally and regionally.

## Baltimore Region Transit Governance and Funding

In 2021, Baltimore Metropolitan Council (BMC) staff managed collaboration with the Baltimore Regional Transit Board (BRTB) and regional stakeholders to conduct a Baltimore Regional Transit Governance and Funding Study. The study was designed to identify alternatives for the structure, organization, and funding of public transit in the Baltimore region. Based on an understanding of transit's historical development in the region, realistic constraints, and creative opportunities for change, the study presented six alternate governance model options.



During the 2022 Maryland Legislative Session, the House introduced HB 1336: Establishing the Greater Baltimore Transit Governance and Funding Commission. The bill calls for the creation of a commission to study and make recommendations relating to the funding, governance, and performance of mass transit in the greater Baltimore region. It also requires the Commission to submit to the Governor and the General Assembly an interim report of its findings and recommendations by December 1, 2022, and a final report by December 1, 2023. The bill passed both Chambers on April 8, 2022 and has since been submitted to Governor Hogan for consideration.





## *What is the BRTB doing to Support Regional Transit?*

The Baltimore Metropolitan Council (BMC) and Baltimore Regional Transportation Board (BRTB) work together with our local and state members in coordinating and promoting transit and human service transportation planning in the Baltimore region, and by providing technical support to these providers through an array of studies and tasks.

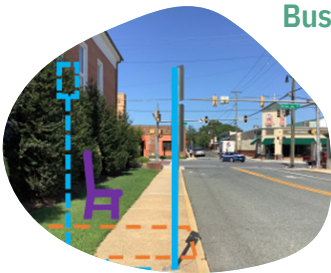
### Regional Transit Plan Implementation

Implementation is underway on a number of the strategies identified in the Regional Transit Plan for Central Maryland, including the first of the 30 Regional Transit Corridor studies identified in the plan. MDOT MTA is leading evaluations of two early opportunity corridors including an East-West corridor between Ellicott City and Bayview and a North-South corridor between Towson and downtown Baltimore. BMC is leading a pilot feasibility study of a mid-opportunity corridor connecting Howard and Anne Arundel Counties. The BMC pilot includes an assessment of land use and zoning updates that would support the development of transit, as well as an early screening against potential funding source requirements. This pilot will serve as a model for additional corridor feasibility studies led by BMC.

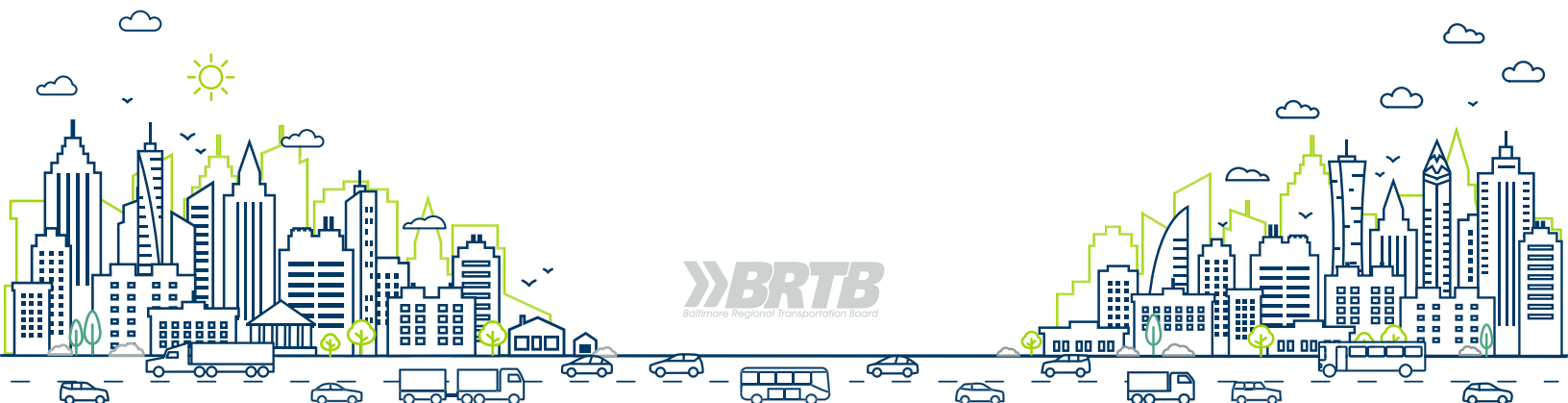
### Regional Transportation Performance Dashboard

BMC staff and consultant Cambridge Analytics are currently developing metrics for a regional transportation performance dashboard. Uniform data reporting is required for FTA grant recipients receiving funding from the Urbanized Area Formula Program (5307) or Rural Formula Program (5311). Each provider is required to submit data to the National Transit Database (NTD) in uniform categories to support local, state and regional planning efforts. While reporting requires the same inputs, data collection methodologies vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, creating a challenge. This dashboard project represents an opportunity to standardize transit data collection and use.

### Bus Stop Inventory



BMC staff and consultant KFH Group are also nearing conclusion of a task to create a detailed inventory of over 1,500 bus stops serviced by the LOTS; conduct ADA accessibility evaluations; build a GIS-based bus stop database that can be analyzed, updated, and prioritized; develop recommendations for improvements; and provide cost estimate guides. The LOTS have been receiving individual deliverables throughout the month of April.



## LOTS Skills and Technical Support

MDOT MTA recently completed a survey of the LOTS and MDOT MTA bus mode staff to assess the technology and skills available at their agencies. Based on the results, MDOT MTA prepared a report and recommendations to address such needs in the following categories: technical assistance; data management; training; regional policies, guiding documents, and research; procurement; and tools and software. In FY 2023, BMC staff will lead several tasks to support the LOTS and MDOT MTA bus modes based on priorities they selected from these recommendations earlier this year. These projects include:



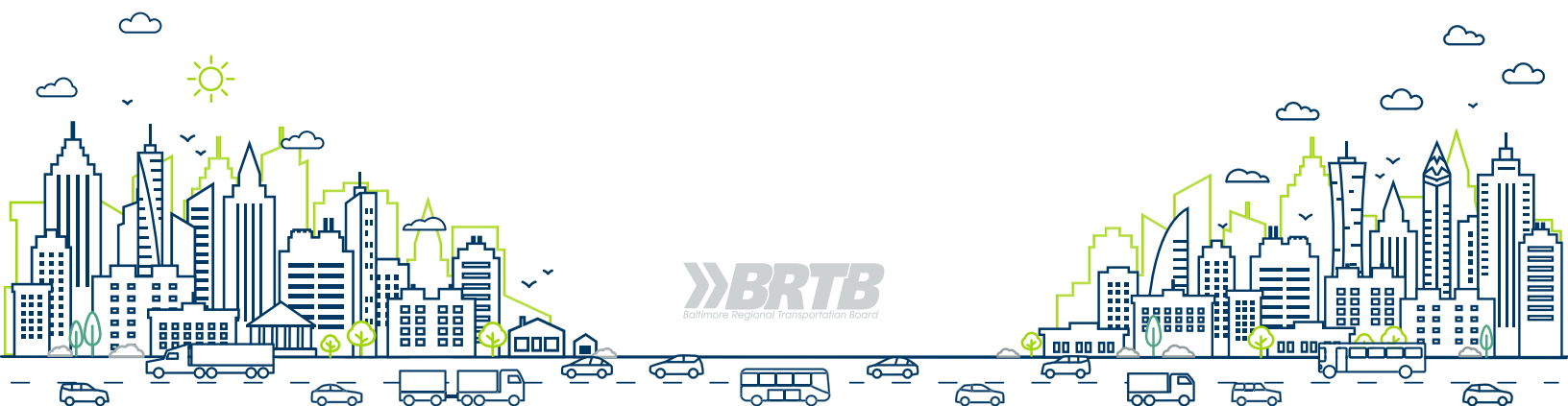
- a project to identify common regional data standards and needs (informed in part by the transportation performance dashboard)
- assessment of implementation of training opportunities in coordination with MDOT MTA and the Transportation Association of Maryland
- a study that includes a review of transit fare policies.

## Human Services Transportation Coordination

Another FY 2023 task will evaluate the potential for a consortium among human services transportation providers and identify opportunities to provide service connections and/or joint capital projects to improve mobility for older adults, people with disabilities, people with lower incomes, and others with limited access to transportation. While there are an array of transportation resources in the region, there are also various unmet needs, service gaps, and opportunities for improvements. Aging riders and those with disabilities may benefit from emerging technologies that improve their first mile/last mile travel and overall transit experience. Riders stand to benefit from innovations that improve communication, wayfinding, and stop or station amenities, create easier boarding processes, and simplify transfers between systems and counties.

## Support Continued Transit Ridership Recovery

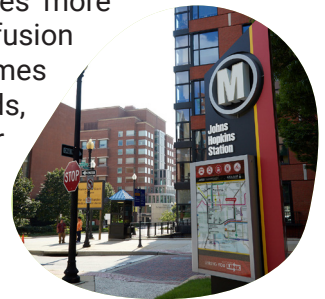
The pandemic led to a well-documented drop in transit ridership and a reevaluation of individual and community travel needs in our changed society. In response, an additional upcoming task led by BMC staff will engage focus groups and study best practices for retaining and gaining regular transit passengers for all services throughout the region. This will include research and documentation of best practices of peer transit providers. It may also include recommendations to develop metrics for access improvements, multi-modal incentives that may be applied regionally, and regional public outreach strategies.



## Conclusion

The challenges faced by transit agencies were greatly exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic; transit agencies and professionals found themselves quickly adapting to the new landscape of transit. Agencies needed to become more nimble in their response to dramatic drops in ridership, changing rider patterns and fluctuating recovery, all while continuing to improve access for those who need it most – particularly essential and low income workers. The more people are able to access and ride transit to the places they live, work and play, the fewer emissions produced on the roads.

Public transit serves those who live, work and visit Maryland, yet challenges such as continued operator shortages and subsequent impacts to service persist. While service gaps or delays have very real current impacts to equitable access and opportunities for riders, such interruptions may also contribute to riders' long-term perceptions of reliability. All of these factors will remain challenges for the conceivable future. Transit providers are taking stock of the pandemic's impact and attempting to address the challenges that our communities are facing. At the same time, our regional transit agencies continue to update technologies, hiring and retention practices and plan for service that provides more access and greater inclusion for all riders within the Baltimore region. The infusion of funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act comes at a crucial time, as agencies learn to be more agile to changing transit needs, mitigate operator shortages, and incorporate newer technologies to better inform and communicate with passengers. While change sometimes takes a while, the industry's response to the uncertainties of the last two years reveals a commendable level of resilience and innovation, and we as a region will continue to strive to rise to the occasion.

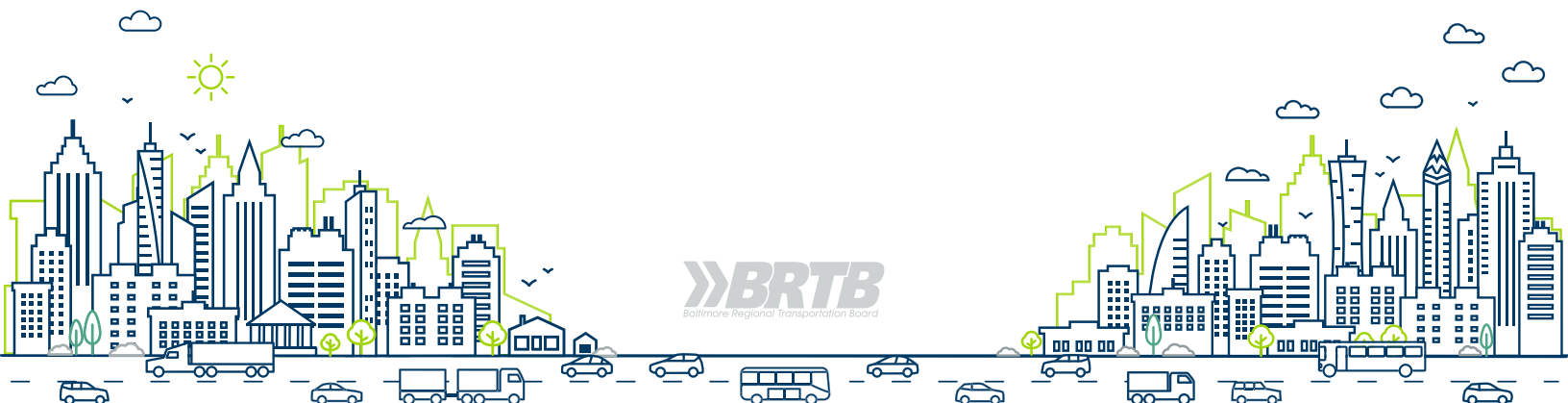


## What's next?

Check [publicinput.com/resilience2050whitepapers](https://publicinput.com/resilience2050whitepapers) over the coming months for more white papers on these and other topics!

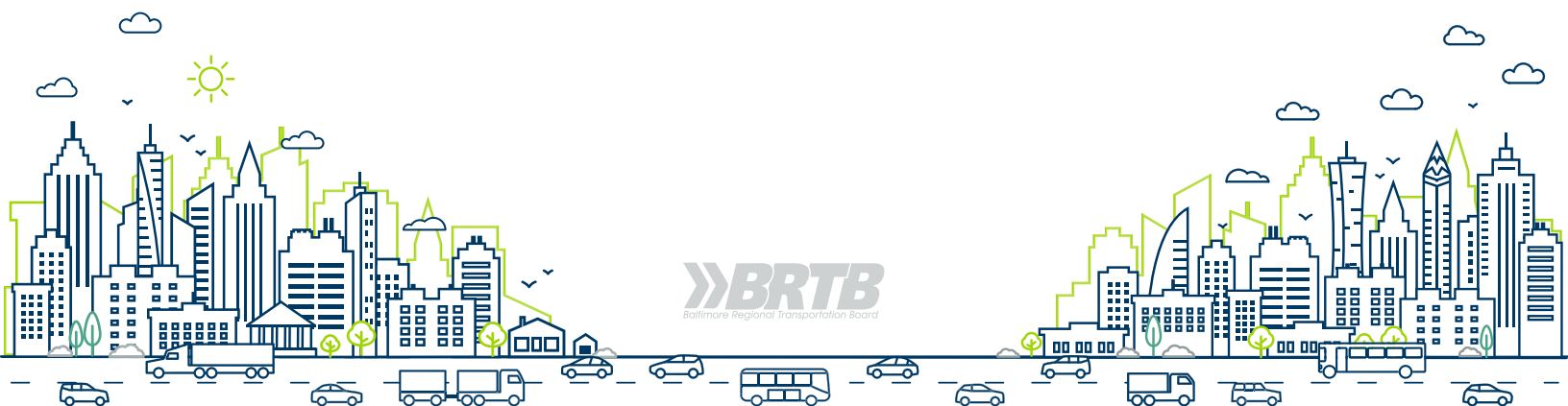
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