



# Transit Needs Assessment

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## Overview of Needs Analysis

The Grand Rapids area has a long history of public transportation dating back over 135 years from horse-drawn carriages, to streetcars, to buses. Transit is an integral part of a multi-modal transportation system providing an alternative to personal vehicles and increasing access to jobs, healthcare, and other services and destinations for residents and visitors. As the region grows and faces escalating road congestion and its associated effects, such as worsened air quality, the significance of transit will continue to grow. Transit also plays a vital role in promoting affordable housing developments, facilitating efficient land use, and enhancing accessibility for both ADA compliance and the aging population.

## Process for Determining and Addressing Needs

To determine regional transit needs GVMC staff met with The Rapid to discuss their capital improvement plans, planning studies, emerging issues, and challenges they see to meeting transit needs. Staff also reviewed The Rapid's studies and plans as well as the Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plans that cover the rural transit providers in the region to inform the needs discussion. GVMC is represented on the Transit Master Plan's Technical Advisory Committee.

## Identified Needs

In 2021, The Rapid implemented recommendations from a Comprehensive Operations Analysis, which had the goal of maximizing resources within the current Rapid service area. The focus was on providing frequent service on key corridors and filling gaps in the existing transportation network, including through the implementation of on-demand service focused on lower density industrial job regions. Looking toward the future of their transit service in identifying needs and priorities, The Rapid is in the process of completing multiple studies and plans. These include the Transit Master Plan (TMP) (ongoing), the Transit Technology Strategic Plan (ongoing), and the Zero Emissions Bus Transition Study (future).

### Need 1: Transit Master Plan (TMP)

The TMP is The Rapid's long-range plan, which is a 20-year horizon visionary study for public transportation that will guide future development of The Rapid's current service area of East Grand Rapids, Grand Rapids, Grandville, Kentwood, Walker, and Wyoming, as well as into other locations outside the six-cities in Kent and the adjacent Counties. The plan will illustrate how The Rapid stacks up against comparable systems and help identify ways The Rapid can enhance their services, attract and retain riders, increase efficiency, and lower costs based on peer best practices. The TMP development began in January 2023 and will conclude in early 2024.

The guiding principles of the Transit Master Plan are:

- Community: We reflect you and your needs.
- Resilience: We plan for action.
- Convenience: We serve for user experience.
- Internal Workforce: We value employee personal growth.
- Adaptability: We're future-flexible.

While solutions for these core areas need to be identified, they may include some of the following:

- Implement regional transportation service, including West Michigan Express, providing commuter service between Grand Rapids and Holland.

- Provide enhanced first mile/last mile service, including overnight service.
- Strengthen land use and transit connections and promote Transit Oriented Design projects.

More information about the TMP can be found [here](#).

## Need 2: Transit Technology Plan

The Rapid is also currently developing a Transit Technology Plan. This is a strategic plan which will look at customer-based transit technology that The Rapid currently utilizes and what improvements could be made. The study is currently ongoing and will conclude in the fall of 2023.

## Need 3: Zero Emission Bus Study

The Zero Emission Bus Transition Study is a future study that will look deeper into the [Zero Emission Bus Plan](#) that The Rapid currently has. Because of the ever-changing technology behind zero emission strategies, The Rapid plans to continue to look further into how they can incorporate renewable natural gas (RNG) into their bus fleet. A large part of The Rapid's capital needs is to transition 100% of the vehicle fleet into compressed natural gas (CNG), fueled by renewable natural gas (RNG) from the City of Grand Rapids' biodigester. In the Zero Emission Bus Transition (ZEB) Plan, hydrogen fuel cell technology was identified to begin this transition, with the goal to be fully transitioned to CNG by 2050. The Rapid will continue to revisit its ZEB plan as bus technology and regional transit needs change. Funds to update this study have already been identified, and The Rapid anticipates that this plan will commence sometime within the next year.

## Need 4: Rural Transit Needs

Identified in the Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plans that cover the GVMC region, the following needs relate especially to rural transit services and users:

- Regional connectivity
- Expanded transportation services related to trip purposes, times, and destinations
- Improved and expanded outreach, marketing, and education
- Improved coordination among transit providers and with land use/development
- Improved supporting infrastructure (sidewalks, curb ramps, paved stop pads, etc.)
- Additional funding

More information about the Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Plan can be found [here](#):

## Costs to Address the Recommendations

Transit projects programmed in the FY2023-2026 TIP total \$71,055,795. The Rapid's illustrative list contains \$736,982,342 in unfunded illustrative projects, which demonstrates how the need for transportation funding significantly outweighs available resources. The list of The Rapid's illustrative projects can be found [here](#).