



TheRide 2045

Plan Guidance Report

July 28, 2021

Left Turn Right Turn

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1 – Introduction

This Plan Guidance Report presents the guiding framework for the development of TheRide 2045, a long-range plan for the Ann Arbor Area Transportation Authority (AAATA). The framework outlined here sets out how analysis throughout the project will be framed and how decisions will be made. The development of strategic options and the evaluation of those options will be based on the guidance of this framework.

This Plan Guidance Report is intended to be a living document throughout the project. As new understandings are developed, the guiding framework may be adjusted and refined.

2 – Strategic Framework

2.1 – Board’s Vision and Goals

The Board of Directors defines the outcomes/goals that TheRide is supposed to be achieving in the future (i.e. Ends Policies). The “vision” for the plan is to achieve, or make headway on achieving, all of these outcomes, at least to some degree. To be clear, the Board has identified what TheRide will achieve, not how the goals should be achieved. It is the role of this planning process to make recommendations about the best way to achieve the Board’s goals in consideration of the constraints and situational context TheRide must work within. A challenge for any planning process is to help balance a community’s aspirations with what it can realistically accomplish.

The Board seeks public feedback on its outcomes/goals to ensure they accurately reflect the aspirations of the community, residents, and passengers. While public comments to-date tend to focus on attributes of future services and the priorities of various groups, any feedback that suggests a change and update to the Board’s goals will be forwarded to the Board for its consideration.

The core geographical scope of evaluation for this plan covers the three member municipalities of TheRide: the City of Ann Arbor, the City of Ypsilanti, and the Township of Ypsilanti. Options will be evaluated based on their ability to achieve the vision and priorities defined in the guiding framework within the member municipalities. However, the scope of analysis will cover adjacent municipalities where the expansion or continuation of services might reasonably enable the following guidance to be better achieved in the member municipalities, or where current residents are already using TheRide’s service. This might include the exploration of an expanded service area or member representation within TheRide. Regional connectivity to best accommodate broader travel patterns will also be explored.

The Board establishes its Ends policies within its Vision for public transportation:

A robust public transportation system that adapts to the area's evolving needs, environment, and quality of life.

The Board of Director's Ends (outcomes/goals):

1. AAATA exists so that an increasing proportion of residents, workers, and visitors in the Ann Arbor-Ypsilanti Area utilize public transportation options that contribute to the Area's social, environmental and economic vitality at a cost that demonstrates value and efficient stewardship of resources.

1.1. Residents in the area have equitable access to public transportation services that enables full participation in society.

1.1.1. People with economic challenges have affordable public transportation options.

1.1.2. People with disabilities or mobility impairments, seniors, minors, and non-English speakers have equitable access to opportunities and destinations in the area.

1.2. Public transportation positively impacts our environment.

1.2.1. Public transportation options are increasingly chosen over use of a personal car.

1.2.2. Public transportation options minimize energy use and pollution, and conserve natural resources.

1.2.3. Public transportation options produce conditions favorable to more compact and walkable land development.

1.2.4. Relevant public policy is transit supportive.

1.3. Public transportation positively impacts the economic prosperity of the area.

1.3.1. Public transportation facilitates labor mobility.

1.3.2. Students can access education opportunities without need of a personal vehicle.

1.3.3. Visitors use public transportation in the area.

1.3.4. Public transportation connects the area to the Metro Detroit region.

1.4. Passengers are highly satisfied with public transportation services.

1.5. Residents of the area recognize the positive contributions of public transportation to the area's quality of life.

2.2 - Board's Planning Framework

The Board of Directors has also created a planning and governance framework within its governance policies that primarily focus on funding and defining the planning process itself. The key policies are summarized below:

1. **Strategic Framework** As a long-term planning exercise, the process and outcomes of this study must show progress towards the Board's defined Ends. Part of that process includes defining multi-year plans that include the best available information on financial implications, and clear staging plans that will allow staff to recommend changes to the Board based on new information over time. This plan must be prudent and in line with common business practices and must also identify and evaluate risks for staff to manage. ¹
2. **Financial Planning and Stewardship:** In developing a long-term plan, it is always necessary to balance short-term financial constraints with longer-term aspirations. This means that the plan must be financially realistic, even if based on financial resources or funding sources not currently available. This long-term plan should not be constrained by the current financial environment but must be developed with clear assessment of financial requirements, potential funding sources and levels, and consideration of the risk to the plan and its alternatives if additional funding is not secured. Ultimately, the plan must demonstrate value and efficient stewardship of resources, and be based on realistic and transparent financial assumptions.²
3. **Public and Stakeholder Involvement:** Public and stakeholder engagement is a cornerstone of the Board's approach, and vital to the development of this long-term plan. The planning process must meaningfully engage riders, residents, stakeholders, partners, and staff. There should be good communication and transparency to the planning process and rely on and develop collaborative partnerships with community stakeholders.³

¹ Board's policy #2.4-2.4.8, 2.10.1.3, 2.0

² Board's policy #2.4, 2.4.3, 2.4.5, 2.4.8, 2.5

³ Board's policy # 2.1.3, 2.1.4, 2.2.1, 2.9, 2.9.4, 2.9.5

2.3 - Other guiding documents

In addition to complying with and supporting the Board's policy Ends, the plan will also build on previous and current planning studies addressing long-term planning for TheRide. Specifically:

- 0 TheRide's Corporate Business Plan set three medium-term priority areas for the organization:
 - Planning for the future (including developing a long-range plan, advocacy strategy and expanding terminals)
 - Servicing customers (including enhancing fare collection and fare structure and expanding real-time information)
 - Modernizing TheRide (including implementing recommendations from a 2019 paratransit study, reviewing sustainability of bike share, and conducting a propulsion study)

- 0 The 2018 Paratransit Study provides three strategic takeaways for A-Ride and GoldRide:
 - Enhance efficiency
 - Tighten eligibility policies
 - Increase administrative support and focus on paratransit

- 0 The 2018 Fare Study provided a fare structure review that assessed the current state and found it to be too complex but with strong third-party pass programs. Key recommendations include:
 - Establish indicator that initiates fare increase
 - Procure smart card + Mobile ticketing
 - Shift to offboard enforcement
 - Transition to a time-based fare
 - Eliminate or adjust various fare products

3 - Public and Stakeholder Input

The interests and aspirations of the general public and passengers are an important input into the planning process. **Public and stakeholder engagement** was initiated in 2019 and further public and stakeholder engagement has occurred in 2021. The What We Heard (Round 1) Report summarizes the feedback received and further details the engagement process. The timeline of engagement has spanned from prior to the Covid-19 pandemic to during it, resulting in changing priorities for respondents. The pandemic

will leave lingering effects on travel behavior and transit that must be considered in this plan. However, even in the near-term, the post-pandemic conditions will more closely resemble pre-pandemic conditions at TheRide as compared to pandemic conditions. In the 25-year horizon, this is even more so the case.

This Plan Guidance Report attempts to reconcile this reality by focusing predominately on pre-pandemic visions but also attempting to consider what new priorities will linger over the long-term.

Staff too, provide a great deal of knowledge, drawn from years of on-the-ground service and administration of the system. They are able to provide specific insight into challenges and opportunities to help TheRide develop over the next 25 years.

The key considerations reflected by the public, partners, and staff echoed the themes and areas of importance highlighted by the Board's Ends. These will be important to consider in developing the plan. The key considerations include:

- **Be an attractive transportation option**

The overarching priority for the Board, which was echoed unanimously by customers, stakeholders, and staff alike, is that public transportation be a viable and increasingly selected mode of travel for travelers. Thus, success of the plan will revolve around increasing modal share of TheRide services within the community, and specifically trips per capita. To get people out of cars and choosing public transit, the Plan will have to address customers' service design concerns:

- More reliable off-peak service including extended service span
- Enhanced quality of experience including customer amenities
- Increased service frequency
- Faster trips
- More reliable service

- **Be a fully integrated public mobility provider**

Many stakeholders emphasized the importance of providing a variety of services to meet the diverse travel needs of the community. This desire was also expressed as growth towards becoming a mobility-as-a-service provider for a streamlined user experience and for better planning integration around diverse internal and external services.

- **Organizational sustainability**

TheRide's stakeholders felt that the organization needed to be financially sustainable over the long-term to ensure it is able to continually operate and support the community. This includes having the finances necessary to grow and develop.

- **Focus on integrating transit infrastructure to surrounding community development**

Stakeholders specifically voiced desires that fit within a general vision for influential community collaboration. There is a desire to improve external elements that have a significant bearing on transit success such as land use/transportation policy; improved access and maintenance of stops and supporting infrastructure, and better regional collaboration.

- **Enhance regional connections**

Customers and stakeholders specifically focused on the importance of establishing better regional connections.

- **Contribute to affordable and equitable communities**

The public and stakeholders expressed a desire to help improve affordability and equity through the provision of affordable and high-value transportation and by working to reduce inequities in transportation along income, racial and ADA-related perspectives.

- **Efficient service provision**

Public feedback leans toward improved frequency over increased coverage of the service. With fixed resources, that means focusing on improving system efficiency. This focus on service efficiency also captures frequently cited visions for better matching of service to demand, such as on high demand corridors, efficient use of service different modes and a network that meets the travel patterns of current and potential customers.

4 – Planning Methodology

The development of the recommended solutions and initiatives for the TheRide’s 25-Year Long-Range Plan will be based on an assessment of the current state of the service and the future context within which service might operate against the Board’s Ends. This will include the identification of gaps and opportunities and a staged plan that continuously progresses towards the approved Ends.

The development of the plan will rely on the construction and evaluation of plan options – amalgams of individual solutions and initiatives that together form a comprehensive plan that effectively advance the board’s vision. These plan options will vary according to the prioritization of specific gaps or opportunities or themes related to the Board’s Ends Policy such as access and equity, environmental sustainability, economic development and transit mode share growth.

The following figure provides an overview of the planning methodology to be employed in developing the plan.

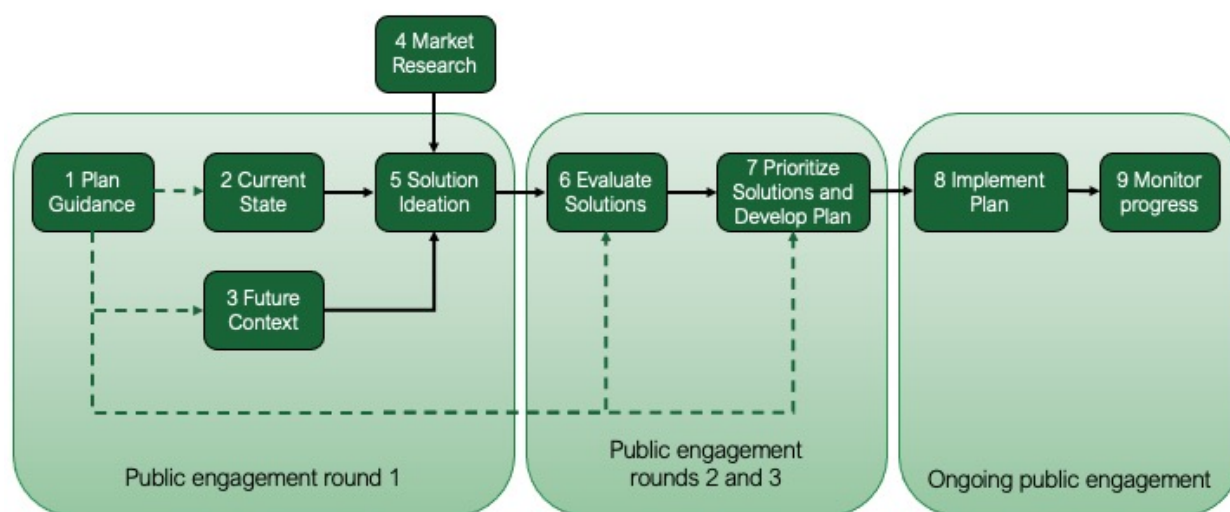


Figure 1 - Overview of Planning Methodology

The Plan Guidance (1) will be the guiding document for the entire project, informing areas of focus for research and analysis and establishing how solutions are evaluated and prioritized. The Current State and Future Context (2, 3) will result in a clear understanding of TheRide’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges (SWOC) currently and in the future. Potential solutions (5) will be generated based on the SWOC analysis, market research, and the first round of public and stakeholder engagement. Evaluation of the solutions (6) and then final selection and prioritization (7)

will be informed by the Plan Guidance and additional public engagement. Following implementation of the plan (8), progress will be monitored and informed by ongoing public engagement.

The following categories of solutions will be considered in Step 5 of this planning project:

Potential Solutions

- **Network elements**, including routes and services, higher-order transit connections, and other regional connections;
- **Fleet and facilities**, considering potential trends in fleet *electrification*, *autonomous vehicles* and needs for garage and customer facilities including transit terminals and stops.
- **Technology and fares**, including innovations in *fare payment technology*, *customer information*, and *microtransit*;
- **Service Design and Scheduling**, including all non-spatial features of fixed route service provision and scheduling practices
- **Delivery models**, including *family of services*, and *alternative delivery and contracting options*;
- **Governance**, including evolving *key partner relationships* and the overall structure of the organization;
- **External transit-supportive objectives**, including collaborative or advocacy strategies in concert with land use and transportation planning processes;

The solutions will be assessed in two stages. First, solutions will be evaluated individually and at a higher level to ascertain the value they bring to the organization.

Next, solutions will be combined to form more comprehensive plan options. Plan options will be clearly defined and characterized to facilitate public review and input – with consistent communication and transparency of evaluation. Each plan option will be comprehensively evaluated against the Board’s Ends and will be presented to allow the public and stakeholders to assess the priorities of the progress towards the Board’s Ends.

The framework outlined in TheRide’s Corporate Business Plan will be employed at both stages as follows:

Evaluation Lens for Step 6	Individual Solutions	Plan Options
Organizational Alignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does this idea help to advance the Board’s desired outcomes? To what degree? • Does it mesh with what TheRide does, for whom and at what cost? • Is this focusing energy on future goals, or reactionary? • Does this idea provide an alternative to a different solution that is focused on a different End? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the plan option effectively advance <i>all</i> of the Board’s desired outcomes? What quantitative and/or qualitative key performance indicators demonstrate this? • Does it mesh with what TheRide does, for whom and at what cost? • Is the plan option moving TheRide forward strategically?
Roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the idea within TheRide’s legal mandate, or is it the responsibility of another group? • Does TheRide have direct control, or can the organization only influence others? • Is this idea more appropriate for another organization? Is partnering a possibility? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What elements of the plan option are reliant on the support of other organizations? • What level of external support and involvement is required to achieve success?
Risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What risks does the idea bring with it, now or in the future? Are those risks acceptable? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What risks does the plan option carry that may impact achievement of the desired outcomes? • What risks does the plan option introduce to the organization, now or in the future?

<p>Value and Affordability</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the funding requirements to implement and support this solution? • Is this a good use of limited funding or time (cost/benefit, ROI, etc.)? • What trade-offs are implicit or not immediately obvious? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the funding requirements to implement and support this plan option? • Is this a good use of limited funding or time (cost/benefit, ROI, etc.)? • Does the plan option demonstrate value and efficient stewardship of resources? • Is the plan option based on realistic and transparent financial assumptions?
<p>Capacity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does TheRide have the expertise to pursue this idea now or in the future? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does TheRide have the expertise to pursue this plan option now or in the future? • Does TheRide have the capacity of resources to pursue this plan option now or in the future?
<p>Sequence and Readiness</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How ready is the solution to proceed? • Is there a risk of proceeding too soon? • What are the impacts of deferral? • Is this urgent to TheRide and its goals, or someone else? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be considered in the development of the implementation plan for the recommended option.
<p>Public Commitment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What commitments have been made regarding this this solution? Within what timeframe? • Are other external stakeholders involved in the execution of this solution and to what extent? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the plan option deliver on commitments made? • What level of support will the plan option garner?

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