

Transit History of the Detroit Region

The following history of transit in the Detroit region is both a chronology of impressive growth in transit services as well as a disappointing decline and diminishment of transit service in the Detroit region. As you will see, the Detroit region once was a leader in public mass transit. In the last 50 years the Detroit region not only fell far behind the rest of the nation in mass transit development but it sacrificed much of what it once was.

It is not the intent of this chronology to dwell on the failures of the past. However, it is important to understand the history of regional mass transit to be better prepared to change that history and develop a new and vital regional rapid mass transit system.

Regional Transit History (1862 – 1956)

- 1862 – A Syracuse, New York based company forms the ***Detroit City Railway Company*** and begins construction of what would be Detroit's first passenger rail system.
- 1863 – The population of Detroit is about **50,000** and the land area of the city is **12.7 square miles**.
- 1863 – Detroit's first passenger rail system, horse-drawn trolleys, begins service on Jefferson Avenue on August 3, 1863. The initial service ran from Elmwood to Randolph. The fare was 5 cents, or 25 tickets for a dollar. On August 27, 1863 service began on Woodward Avenue, on September 12, 1863 service began on Gratiot Avenue and on November 25, 1863 service began on Michigan Avenue. All of the lines converged at Jefferson and Woodward Avenues.
- 1892 – On August 22, 1892 the ***Detroit Citizens Street Railway*** succeeds the Detroit City Railway and begins to offer electric powered streetcar service along Jefferson Avenue. Electric streetcars replace the horse-drawn trolley on Woodward and Mack by the end of the year.
- 1895 - Due to the improved power electric streetcar service expands into the suburbs.
- 1900 – The population of Detroit is **285,704** and the land area of the city is **28.3 square miles**. The Population of the **Tri-county region** is **426,829**
- 1901 – The ***DUR (Detroit United railway)*** is formed by a Cleveland syndicate from six Detroit area interurban operations.
- 1910 – The population of Detroit is **465,766** and the land area of Detroit is 39.3 square miles. The Population of the **Tri-county region** is **613,773**.
- 1919 – The Detroit Rapid Transit Commission prepares the first Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) recommending a multi-modal system.
- 1920 – The population of Detroit is **993,678** and the Population of the **Tri-county region** is 1,305,798.
- 1920 – Mayor James Couzens vetoes a bond issue to build a subway system and the override failed by one vote, keeping the city from developing a subway system.
- 1920 – Detroit voters approve Mayor Couzens' proposal to build and operate a municipally owned transit operation.
- 1921 – On February 1, 1921 the city began operation of the Municipal Operation, or the "***M.O.***" with 2 lines totaling 13 miles. By the end of 1921 the M.O. built an additional 52.6 miles of track, but still did not access the downtown area.
- 1922 – Led by Mayor James Couzens, the City of Detroit purchases DUR for \$19,850,000 and takes over streetcar operations becoming the largest municipality owned transit system in the country, with 363 miles of track, 4,000 employees and 1,457 streetcars and the ***Department of Street Railways (DSR)*** is formed.
- 1925 – The first buses start operating in the city.

- 1930 – The population of Detroit is **1,568,662** and the land area is **139 square miles**. The Population of the **Tri-county region** is **2,177,343**.
- 1931 – The Grand Trunk Western Railroad begins commuter service between Detroit and Pontiac, making the trip in 45 minutes.
- 1933 – Detroit voters approve a subway plan but the state advisory board refuses to recommend construction to the Federal government.
- 1934 – The DSR was operating 1,600 street cars on 19 routes.
- 1934 – DSR General Manager Fred Nolan begins a campaign to replace all street cars with buses.
- 1940 – The Population of Detroit is **1,623,452** and the land area remains at **139 square miles**. The Population of the **Tri-county region** is **2,377,329**.
- 1940s – The peak period for the Detroit regional transit system, with an annual ridership of 490 million that had choices of buses, street cars and commuter rail.
- 1945 – The DSR was operating with 908 street cars on 19 different routes.
- 1950 – The population of Detroit is **1,849, 568** and the land area remains at **139 square miles**. The Population of the **Tri-county region** is **3,016,197**.
- 1951 – A major transit strike lasting 2 months severely damages ridership.
- 1953 – The Detroit Metropolitan Area Transportation Study calls for a balanced system of highways and mass transit.
- **1956 – Detroit streetcar service ends after 93 years.**

Regional Transit History (1957 – 2006)

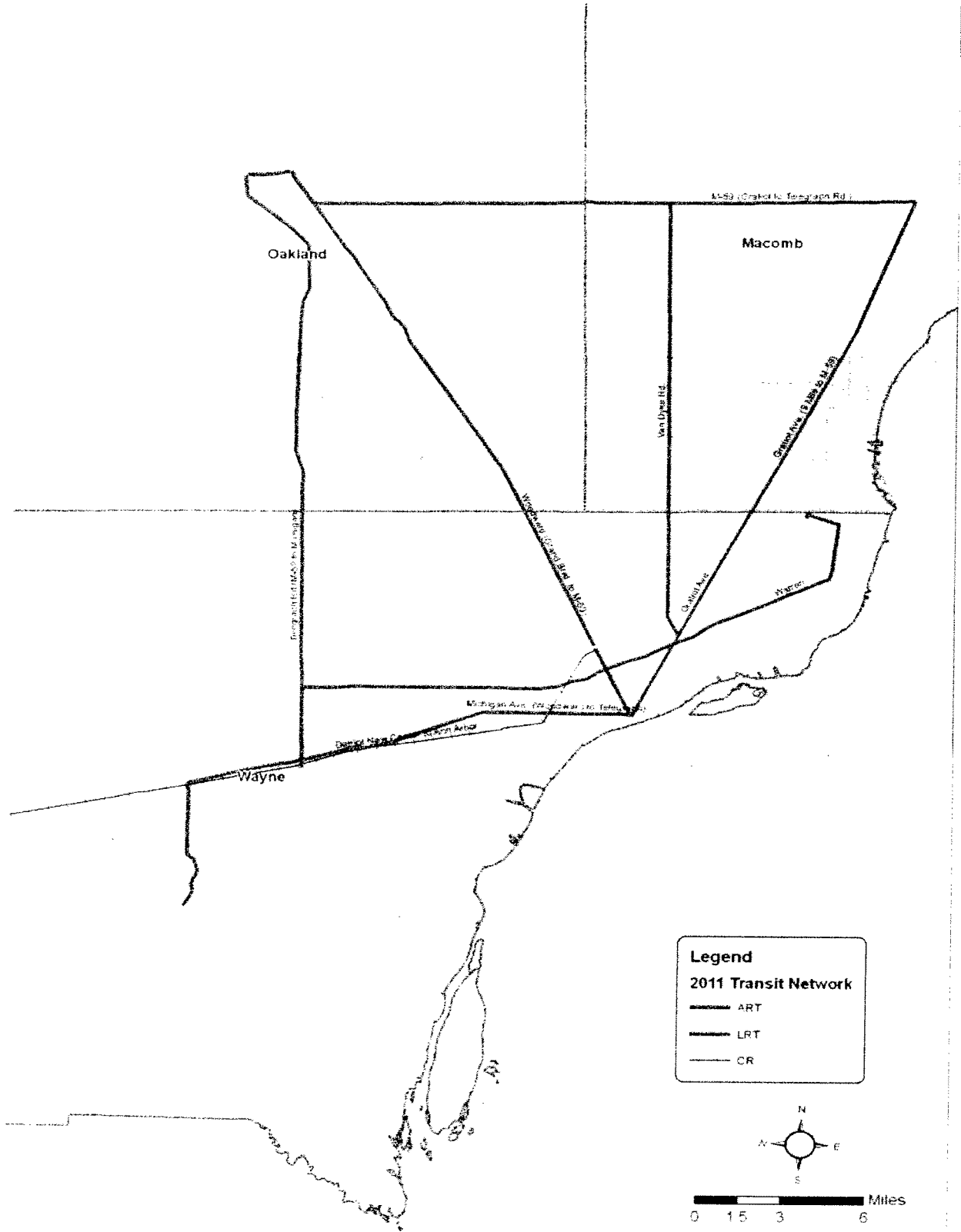
- 1958 - The ***Detroit Rapid Transit Commission*** publishes a plan that calls for a regional monorail system.
- 1960 – The population of Detroit drops to **1,670,144** and the land area remains at **139 square miles**. The Population of the **Tri-county region** grows to **3,762,360**
- 1967 – ***The Southeast Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMTA)*** is formed to take over the financially strapped suburban mass transit service in Wayne, Oakland and Macomb Counties, including the City of Detroit.
- 1969 – The ***Detroit Regional Transportation and Land Use Study (TALUS)*** recommends rail rapid transit in eight major region corridors.
- 1970 – The population of Detroit drops to **1,514,063** and the land area remains at **139 square miles**. The Population of the **Tri-county region** is **4,203,548**.
- 1974 – SEMTA takes over financial responsibility for the Detroit – Pontiac commuter service from the Grand Trunk.
- 1974 – The DSR is re-organized as the ***Detroit Department of Transportation (DDOT)***.
- 1976 – President Gerald Ford offers the Southeast Michigan \$600 Million to build a rail transit system. Other than the People Mover nothing was developed due to the lack of local/regional political support.
- 1979 – SEMTA approved a regional transit plan which includes the development of rail lines and an improved bus system. However subsidies were cut and the plans were never implemented. SEMTA soon reduced transit service and laid off employees.
- 1980 – The population of Detroit drops to **1,203,368**. The Population of the **Tri-county region** declines to **4,044,236**.
- 1983 – SEMTA terminates the Detroit – Pontiac commuter service.
- 1984 – SEMTA terminates the Detroit – Ann Arbor commuter service.
- 1984 – Regional leaders approve the Regional Public Transportation Consensus Plan, a refined version of the 1979 regional transit plan. The plan was never implemented.

- 1985 – AMTRAK offers matching funds to build a passenger rail station at Joe Louis Arena and to restart commuter service between Detroit and Ann Arbor. Local matching funds could not be developed and the proposed project was dropped.
- 1987 – The “People Mover” downtown transit line was built at a cost of \$67 Million per mile.
- 1989 – In an effort to provide effective and efficient public transportation in Southeast Michigan, through planning, and coordination the Mayor of the City of Detroit, the Chairman of the Macomb County Board of Commissioners, the Oakland County Executive and the Wayne County Chief Executive Officer adopted articles of incorporation for the *Regional Transit Coordinating Council (RTCC)*, on January 12, 1989.
- 1989 – SEMTA is reorganized, without the City of Detroit and renamed the *Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation (SMART)*.
- 1990 – The population of Detroit drops to **1,027,924**. The Population of the **Tri-county region** is **3,912,679**.
- 1994 – SMART and DDOT attempted to merge 5 routes but the project was cancelled.
- 1996 – SMART and DDOT establish a common regional bus pass. Further attempts to merge services fail.
- 1997 – The *Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT)* publishes a report recommending the restart of commuter rail service between Detroit and several regional communities at a capitol cost of \$2 million per mile. The recommendation was considered to be too expensive by regional leaders.
- 1998 – DDOT terminates its suburban service. SMART picks up the abandoned routes.
- 1999 – General Motors removes the commuter rail spur that is west of the RenCen to make room for a parking deck.
- 1999 - MDOT announces a plan to extend I-375 toward the river, eliminating downtown rail access.
- 2000 – The population of Detroit drops to **951,270**. The Population of the **Tri-county region** is **4,043,467**.
- 2001 – SEMCOG adopts a Regional Transit Vision for the 7-county region.
- 2001 – The Detroit Regional Chamber spearheads legislation to create a *Detroit Area Regional Transportation Authority (DARTA)*.
- 2002 – Legislation to form DARTA is vetoed by Governor John Engler.
- 2003 – In May of 2003 DARTA is formed through an interlocal inter-government agreement (IGA) that includes the City of Detroit, Wayne County, Macomb County, Oakland County, Monroe County and SMART. The agreement proposed that the parties utilize existing constitutional and statutory law to establish more effective and efficient public transportation services. Under this agreement the parties agreed to transfer to DARTA powers, duties, functions, responsibilities and authority essential to providing quality public transportation. However, under this agreement DARTA could not levy taxes nor could DARTA bind any Michigan municipality to any obligation without the consent of that municipality.
- 2003 - In November of 2003 a lawsuit was filed by AFSCME, Michigan Council 25, charging that the RTCC did not have the authority to enter into such an agreement. DARTA continued to operate through months of litigation and appeals.
- 2003 - SEMCOG convenes the Transit Impediments Committee of Elected officials.
- 2005 – SEMCOG announces that they will conduct a study to evaluate the opportunity to develop an Ann Arbor to Detroit commuter line that would include a stop at/by Metropolitan Airport, consolidating two previous studies.
- 2006 - In May of 2006 the Michigan State Supreme Court decision dissolved DARTA and the IGA.
- 2006 - In June of 2006 the RTCC hired a CEO (John Hertel) to direct the planning and development of a Mass Transit program in Southeastern Michigan. The RTCC through its project “*Detroit*

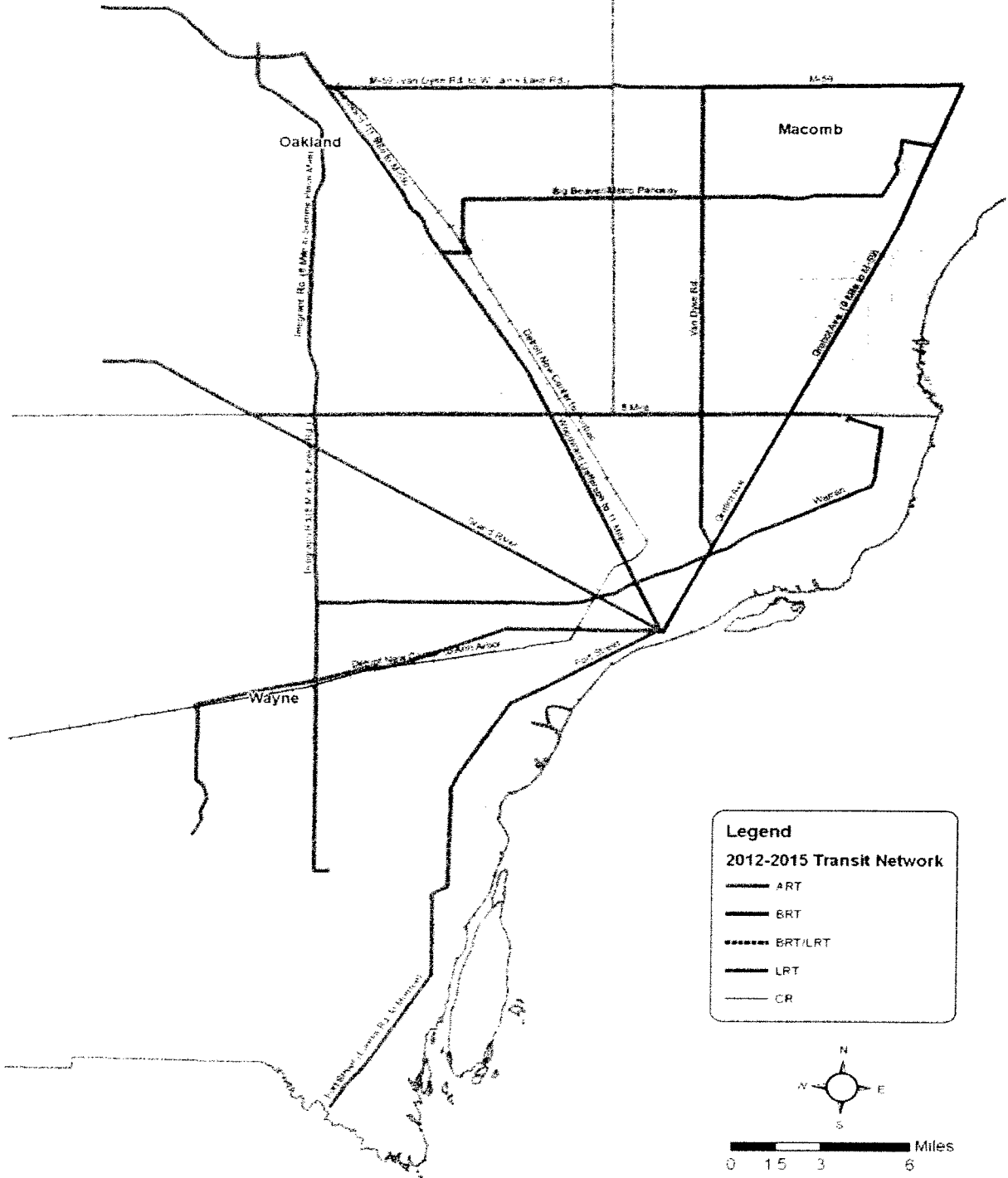
Regional Mass Transit” seeks to provide a Comprehensive Regional Transportation Service Plan for seamless, reliable, convenient and cost effective public transportation.

- 2006 – In September 2006 DDOT initiates the Detroit Transportation Options for Growth Study (DTOGS) for the purpose of developing rapid transit on major Detroit transportation corridors.
- 2006 – In December 2006 SEMCOG determines that the results of the Ann Arbor to Detroit study would not be competitive enough in a highly competitive Federal grant program to receive Federal funding. Instead SEMCOG proposes a 3-year demonstration project to build ridership patterns.
- 2007 – In August the RTCC BOD unanimously approved the Detroit Regional Mass Transit *Vision Document*, the first milestone in the development of the Regional Transit Plan.
- 2008 – In December the RTCC BOD unanimously approved the Detroit Regional Mass Transit *Comprehensive Regional Transit Service Plan*. They also tasked John Hertel to develop plans for the organization of a *Regional Transit Authority* and *dedicated regional funding* by June 30, 2009.
- 2008 – In late December the Michigan legislature passed a series of bills enabling the forming of private, non-profit entities to build and operate a light rail service.
- 2009 – In January the Governor signed the enabling legislation.
- 2009 – also in January M1-Rail was launched as a private, non-profit entity to build and operate a light rail line on Woodward which is targeted for operation in late 2010 or early 2011.
- 2009 – In March it was announced that SEMCOG received an Earmark in the 2009 Federal budget to help finance the Ann Arbor to Detroit commuter rail service, which is targeted to begin operation in November 2010.

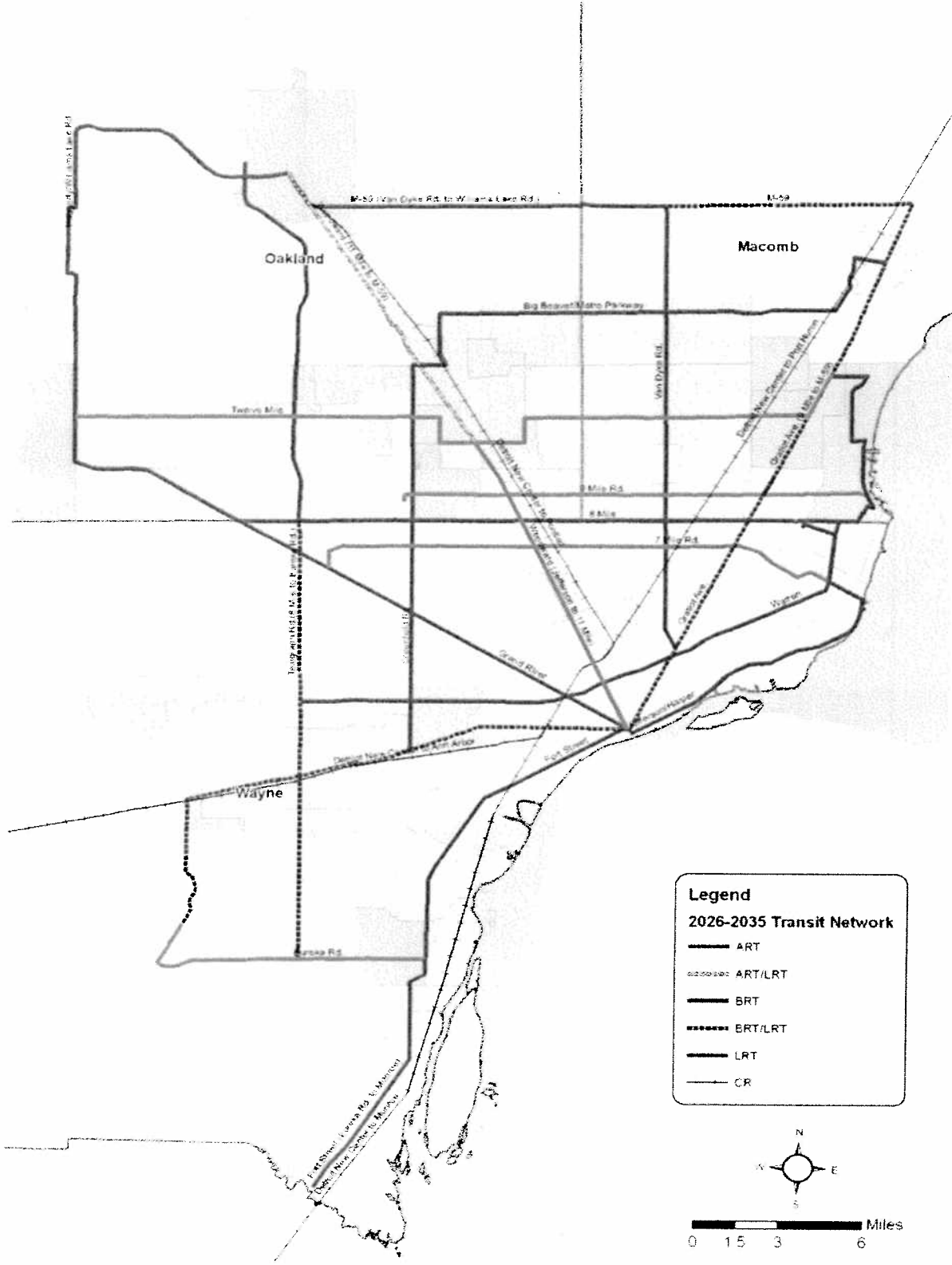
Potential Multi-Modal Service - 2012



Potential Multi-Modal Rapid Transit Service 2012 – 2015



Regional Rapid Transit Vision for 2035



Legend

2026-2035 Transit Network

- ART
- ART/LRT
- BRT
- BRT/LRT
- LRT
- CR

0 1.5 3 6 Miles