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FY23 ANNUAL REPORT

Williamsburg Area Transit Authority

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Letter from the Executive Director



This is an exciting time for the Williamsburg Area Transit Authority and the community it serves, and I am happy to submit this report to highlight our financial strength, service successes, and future initiatives.

First, I want to recognize the dedication of the employees to our mission of providing safe and reliable transit service. It is apparent to me how much they care about our passengers. They build relationships and seek to improve riders' experiences every day. Increased recruitment and high retention of our operators are testaments to the positive climate of the WATA team and its commitment to our mission.

Overall, WATA is operating effectively and improving steadily. We are almost out of "recovery mode" from the pandemic and close to achieving our ridership numbers from 2019. We made enormous improvements in FY23 to customer experience and safety with technological upgrades like the Transit app and improved cameras. We also made enormous progress in the design and funding of two major construction projects which will be complete in FY26. And with community engagement and input, we began crafting our 10-year Transit Strategic Plan which we will release in FY24.

I would like to thank the community leaders and WATA Board of Directors for recognizing the importance of our service and providing invaluable support and direction. WATA is proud of its accomplishments and excited to extend our services to all of those who live, work, and visit the Historic Triangle.

Section 1: In the Community



WATA has been a staple of the Greater Historic Triangle since 1977. Through social media, print marketing, and digital marketing, we reach our customers and stakeholders in a variety of ways. However, we are convinced there is no better way than interacting directly with our community.



State of Transit: Transit Means Business

WATA, Hampton Roads Transit (HRT), and Suffolk Transit hosted the State of Transit: Transit Means Business summit on November 28th, 2023. More than 200 people attended the inaugural event at Hub757 in Suffolk. This event aimed to explore the future of public transportation in the Hampton Roads area and its important connection to workforce development. Everyone who attended was able to network with transportation industry experts and professionals interested in seeing public transportation thrive.

Transit Advocacy Day

WATA attended Hampton Roads Transportation Planning Organization's Transit Advocacy Day on Thursday, May 4, 2023. Regional Transit Advisory Panel (RTAP) members experienced a day in the life of a transit rider and learned more about the need for sustainable funding for public transit.

Community Events

WATA provided three fare-free days: Election Day, Transit Equity, and Earth Day. We also provided free fares to bike riders on National Bike to Work Day.

WATA participated in William & Mary's orientation week, the Greater Williamsburg Chamber of Commerce Christmas Parade, and provided transportation for AVAdventure's Great Williamsburg Adventure Race. We also participated in three job fairs in the Williamsburg and Newport News area.



Section 2: Our Services



Background

Considered by many to be the first year of post pandemic recovery, WATA faces many challenges in a rapidly changing environment. From safety sensitive guidance to significant changes in travel patterns, COVID reshaped the market for transit agencies across the globe. During the pandemic WATA was forced to reduce services due to staffing challenges and safety measures implemented. In fiscal year 2023 WATA looked to stabilize its services with a focus on finding a way back to pre-COVID service levels.

While ridership is not the only goal of a transit agency it can often be a good indicator of the usefulness of transit services. WATA had its best year in FY2011 boasting just over 1.1 million unlinked passenger trips. Ridership numbers remained fairly consistent until FY2016 when numbers began to drop. A number of factors are to be considered in transit ridership including the state of the economy, the cost of owning a vehicle, and unemployment rates.



When COVID hit WATA reduced total transit services by almost 40%, comparatively fixed route ridership took a similar hit. However, during the same 4-year span paratransit ridership saw an increase of 33%. WATA attributes this growth to the fact that services were fare free during the pandemic, as well as its participation in the One Call program.

For many of the reasons stated above WATA uses fiscal year 2019 for comparisons of service, this is considered the last year of normal service.

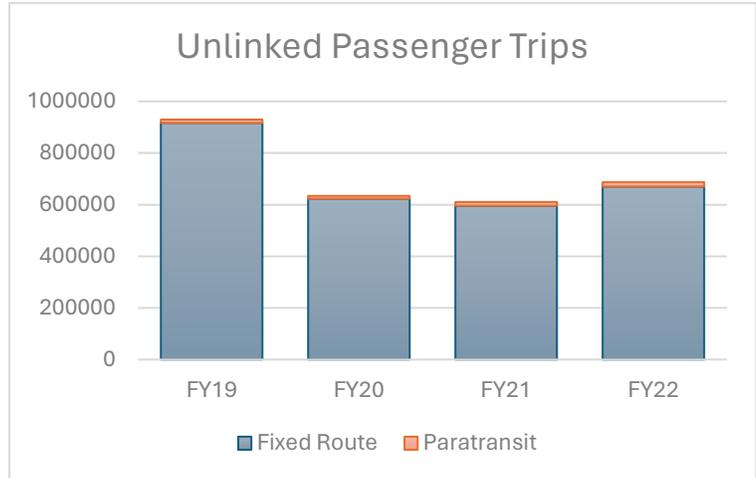


Chart 2.1 shows the unlinked passenger trips during each of the years impacted by the pandemic.

Routes

In fiscal year 2023 WATA operated 11 different fixed route services in a service area ranging from the Lackey and Lee Hall areas in the south, to Toano in the north. WATA estimates that 60% of the total resources are geared towards services with a defined goal of increasing ridership. On the flip side of that an estimated 40% of resources are spent on services that are coverage oriented, generally operating in less densely active areas.

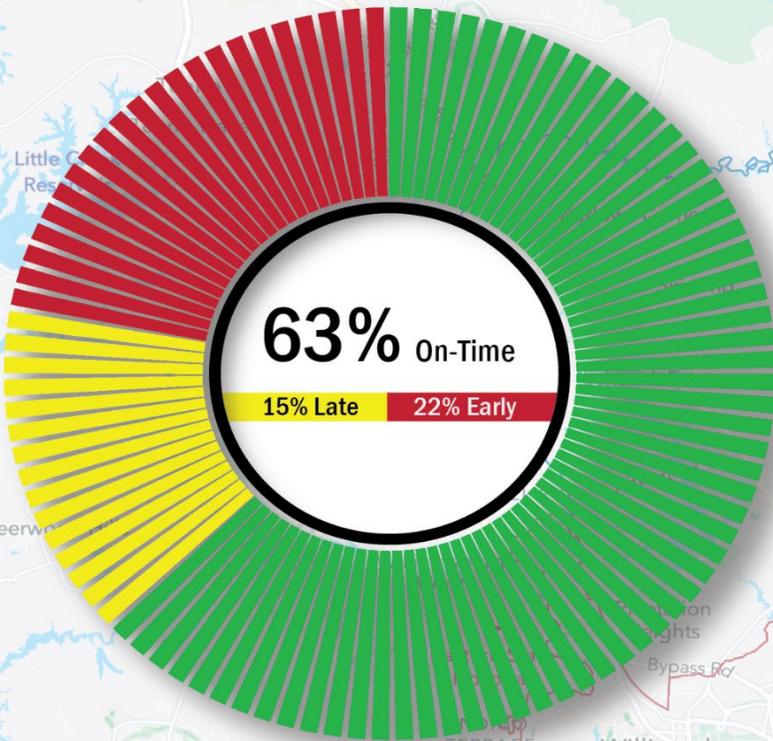
WATA routes include:

- Route 1: Lee Hall
- Route 2: Richmond Rd
- Route 3: Merrimac Trail
- Route 4: Longhill
- Route 5: Monticello
- Route 6: Jamestown
- Route 7: Mooretown Rd
- Route 8: William & Mary
- Route 9: Toano
- Route 11: Lackey
- Route 12: Ironbound

Each of WATA's routes requires a single vehicle to operate with the exception of Route 12, which also operates a frequency service using a second bus. Even though the pandemic created many challenges and gave us a "new normal," WATA has embraced every challenge and created opportunities to grow.

Fiscal Year 2023

286 Bus Stops



On time performance is a critical measure in public transportation, where being early is not a good thing. WATA measures it's on time performance through the APC system, buses are considered on time when they are zero minutes early and up to 5 minutes late. All times are measured by departure.

WATA reports performance data to state and federal organizations. There are several key performance indicators but some of the common ones are vehicle revenue miles (VRM), passenger miles traveled (PMT) and vehicle revenue hours (VRH).

Operated



814,402 VRM



3,375,049 PMT

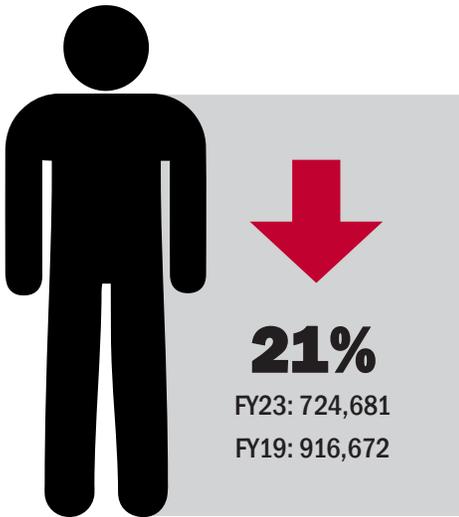


41,553 VRH



12 of 23 VOMS

In fiscal year 2023 WATA utilized 12 vehicles operated in maximum service (VOMS) for fixed routes. This is compared to the 23 vehicles available in maximum service (VAMS). This metric is used in larger fleets for meeting FTA guidance on spare ratio.



Unlinked Passenger Trips

While there are many KPI that are important to a transit agency, ridership is the most widely used statistic when discussing public transportation services.

As mentioned previously WATA is still operating at a significant reduction in services compared to fiscal year 2019 pre-COVID levels. One of the areas of growth that WATA is forecasting in fiscal year 2024 is bringing back all pre-pandemic operating levels. WATA estimates that as additional services return and ridership becomes more useful to more people, ridership numbers will also return to pre-pandemic levels.

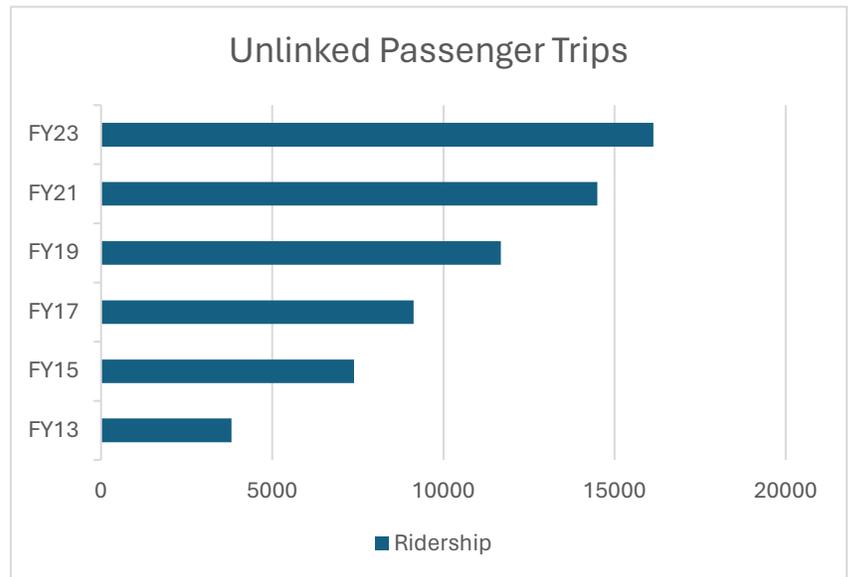
Even though ridership on fixed route services appears to be a work in progress, WATA has seen significant growth in ridership and usage of its paratransit services.

Paratransit

Any transit agency that operates a fixed route service is also required to operate a paratransit within 3/4 mile of any fixed route. Paratransit services are operated as a door-to-door pre-scheduled service for those that are unable to use fixed route services. While fixed route services took a hit during the pandemic, WATA’s paratransit services saw a significant increase in growth.

Paratransit services consumed have grown over 324% since fiscal year 2013. This growth rate has created its own set of challenges for WATA both in terms of staffing and fleet vehicles.

Some of the continued growth could be attributed to WATA’s contributions to the One Call center. This is a group of agencies working collaboratively to fill the needs of our community. With One Call being a fairly new function for WATA there is no information to suggest that paratransit services are finished growing. Paratransit is only one of the areas where WATA sees significant growth potential.



While paratransit services operate under some additional guidance, it is important to note that both WATA’s fixed route fleet and paratransit fleet are all outfitted with the equipment required to carry passengers with wheelchairs or other mobility aids.

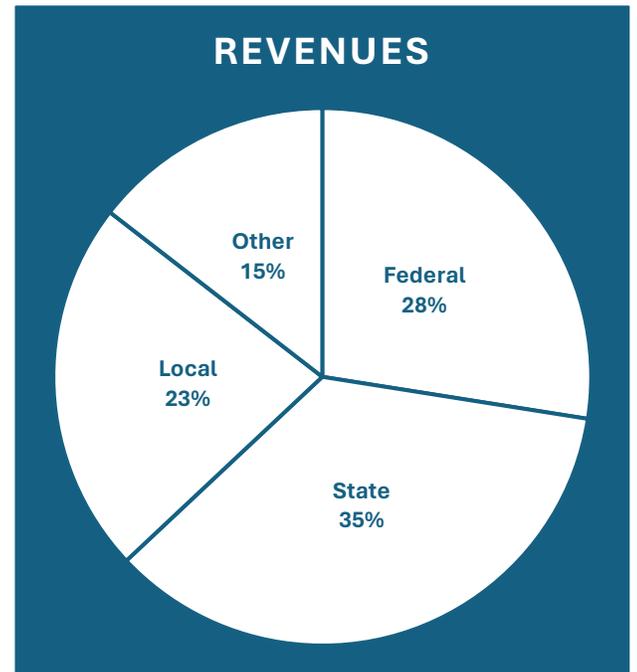
Section 3: Financials

Written into the code of Virginia in 2008 WATA was established as Williamsburg Area Transit Authority. The Authority is funded through a mix of federal, state, and local dollars. As designated partners, WATA receives their local contributions from James City County, the City of Williamsburg, York County, and the City of Newport News.

Each year as part of the budget process WATA requests assistance from the three main revenue sources. Requests are scored against the last audited financials available. This typically means that operating applications are based on financials two years in the past. For Example:

If WATA is applying for FY25 funding from federal and state sources, then the application reviewers are using FY23 data as the last audited financial statement of the agency.

With the state match capped at 30% of the last audited financial statement, this is where it becomes critical to have the local contribution.



Due to the nature of public transportation as a business, WATA has three categories that account for most of the spending agency wide. Fuel, vehicle maintenance, and operator salaries accounted for 77% of the total expenses for FY23.

	Full-Time	Position Count	Pay Grade
Admin	Executive Director	1	24
	Director of Planning & Admin	1	17
	Budget Management Specialist	1	13
	Marketing & Admin Specialist	1	13
	IT Administrator	1	15
	Transit Planner	1	13
Operations	Director of Operations	1	17
	ADA Coordinator	1	13
	Transit Supervisors	4	13
	Safety & Security Supervisor	1	12
	Transit Dispatcher	3	9
	Lead Drivers	3	10
	Bus Operator (Fixed Route)	42	9
	Bus Operator (ADA)	5	9

Figure 3.2 shows the full-time staffing plan and compensation schedule.

	Part-Time	Position Count	Pay Grade
Operations	Customer Service	4	7
	Bus Operator (Fixed Route)	10	9
	Bus Operator (ADA)	4	9

Figure 3.3 shows the part-time staffing plan and compensation schedule.

WATA experienced unusual and significant staff turnover in FY23 from top to bottom in the organization. However, even with limited human capital, staff were still able to push forward with several important initiatives.

For capital funding WATA had two significant projects which accounted for the majority of capital expenses, coming in just over \$2 million dollars. In a typical fiscal year WATA would be investing in rolling stock purchases. However, with the impacts of the pandemic WATA was forced to make adjustments to the fleet replacement plan, which will result in the next rolling stock purchases taking place in fiscal year 2024.

WATA also invested capital funds into its Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS). These technologies live mostly on the vehicle fleet and provide critical service data, as well as passenger information. The project cost \$1.2 million in the initial capital investment.



In Fiscal Year 2023, WATA spent almost \$850k on the design of two transportation facilities. In the works is a remodel and expansion the Operation & Maintenance facility, as well as brand new Northern Transfer Facility. The new facilities are both on schedule to contract for construction in FY25.

Section 4: Growth & Initiatives



Despite all of the challenges created by the pandemic, there is plenty of excitement around the future for WATA. As WATA looks to adopt a new Transit Strategic Plan (TSP) in FY25, there have been several recent and future initiatives to support our forecasted growth.

Transit Strategic Plan



Evolving WATA is an opportunity for residents, institutions, and leaders in the region to review, consider, and perhaps make a significant shift in the direction of its transit service over the next 10 years. Our brand combines the feel of WATA's current services with an upside blue triangle to represent our regional community identity as America's Historic Triangle. The name Evolving WATA was carefully chosen to reinforce the

message that we are using this process to understand how we as a transit system can better adapt to the environment around us as it continues to grow and change.

In the TSP WATA stakeholders have spoken and decided that WATA should invest additional resources in services geared towards ridership. Over the course of the next 8 years WATA stakeholders will invest an additional 50% of their resources in improving frequency on existing routes in order to make them more useful to more people.

Technology

While it is important that WATA offer services which are useful to our community, those services must be convenient to access and use. Therefore, WATA set forth to invest \$1.2 million dollars in funding to improve the on-board vehicle technologies. This initiative gives WATA the opportunity to provide passengers with real time vehicle tracking, infotainment systems, mobile ticketing, and additional functionality for possible expansions down the line. It was important to provide information in this capacity so that riders are not left grasping for information and are provided with service alerts as events take place on our roadways in real time. This initiative was completed in July of 2023, with the exception of mobile ticketing which will be coming soon!



Facilities



WATA is currently investing heavily in two new transportation facilities which will improve overall operations as well as our outreach and footprint in the local communities.

In FY23 WATA continued to move forward in the design process for the Operations and Maintenance facility, which will include a full remodel of the existing structure as well as expansion space for administrative tasks, as well as maintenance space. Since the current facility was not built originally for transportation operations, WATA has adapted over the years, but will finally have a space that meets its needs. Some highlights of the new facility include:

- New maintenance bays with fall protection, and the ability to expand further in the future.
- Expanded admin space with new conference rooms and a training/ meeting space.
- Preliminary infrastructure and preparations for electric vehicle charging, both light and heavy-duty vehicles.
- Better amenities for operations staff include a small gym, as well as indoor/ outdoor break areas.



WATA historically has partnered with local business to host a location for passengers to transfer routes in the northern part of its service area. Now with the new investments WATA is establishing its own footprint in the community and creating a space that provides the appropriate level of amenities to its passengers. Significant strides were made in FY23 to progress the design of this facility. WATA anticipates the new facility hosting an indoor/ outdoor passenger waiting area, electric vehicle infrastructure, real time passenger information displays, as well as a safe and inviting environment.

The new facility will also include some operational benefits as WATA will have a ticketing and information office, administrative space, and space for spare vehicles in case of an emergency.

Both facilities are currently on track for procurement in FY26, with anticipated completion roughly 2 years later.



Special thank you to everyone helped make FY23 a successful year for WATA. There are no small parts when it comes to operating a service that impacts a community in so many different ways.

Thank you!



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