

LA CROSSE AREA REGIONAL TRANSIT AUTHORITY FEASIBILITY STUDY

06/01/2026

Condensed Executive Summary

[Read the Full Study at lacrossecounty.org/mpo](https://lacrossecounty.org/mpo)
Under Planning and Programming > Modal Planning

The La Crosse Area Planning Committee (LAPC) studied the feasibility of establishing a Regional Transit Authority (RTA) as a mechanism to strengthen mobility, coordination, and funding for public transportation across the region. This study assessed the potential for more equitable and sustainable funding, governance, and operational structures that support both urban and rural areas within the region.

What is an RTA?

Regional Transit Authorities are independent, multi-jurisdictional agencies with the authority to plan, fund, and coordinate public transit across municipal boundaries. They oversee interconnected systems such as a regional network to improve mobility and ensure seamless travel throughout a designated geographic region.

Governance Scenarios

Four feasible governance scenarios emerged during the study process, with variations in geographic scope, representation, administrative complexity, and alignment with existing service delivery models. Each scenario reflects a model that could be implemented depending on the final structure of RTA enabling legislation.

Each of the four structures outlined as part of this RTA Feasibility Study would be a significant improvement over existing conditions in areas such as funding, coordination, and planning. However, each RTA structure also has its own specific benefits and challenges when compared against one another

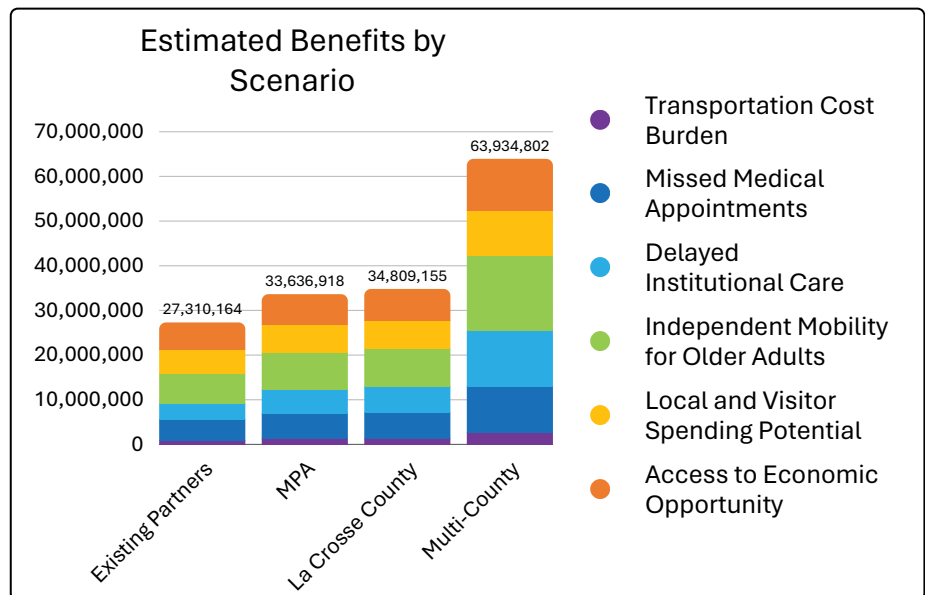
	Advantages	Disadvantages
Existing Municipal Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Allows closer coordination among existing urban transit services in the La Crosse Region• Limits administrative complexity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Limited ability to address rural mobility needs outside participating municipal boundaries
Metropolitan Planning Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Well-aligned with regional mobility needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Would omit some areas of La Crosse County outside the MPA boundary
La Crosse County	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Centralized allocation of resources across services• Supports integrated urban and rural service markets	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Trade-offs between meeting urban and rural priorities• Equal governance representation
Multi-County	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Governs across both urban and rural contexts• Potential for Transit Commission as a transitional model	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May not allow taxing authority under future RTA enabling legislation

Economic and Community Benefit

As part of this study, an Economic and Community Benefit analysis quantified the value of benefits that are feasibly attributable to public transit across each of the scenario geographies. These planning-level dollar estimates reflect a variety of regional data inputs, including travel purpose data, individual and household demographic information, employment data, sales tax revenue and spending data, and more. These data inputs were further scaled by applying transit mode share, or the percentage of all trips currently made using public transit, to understand what regional activity can be attributed to transit use, in accordance with industry research and best practices.

These order-of-magnitude estimates are intended to aid in understanding potential benefits and are not precise forecasts.

More information on this analysis is available in Technical Report 3.



Return on Investment

Comparing these benefits to the level of investment required to provide transit service under each scenario, benefit-cost ratios range from approximately 4 to 5, indicating that each scenario produces \$4 - \$5 dollars of estimated benefit for every dollar of investment.

Benefits of RTA Formation

Currently, each transit system in the region operates separately, which can make regional travel across municipal borders more complicated for riders and more expensive for local governments. RTAs work in partnership with local transit providers to streamline services, reduce duplication, and improve regional connectivity for riders.

RTA Enabling Legislation

Multiple recent proposals in the Wisconsin legislature have aimed to enable RTAs. Recent attempts have included the ability to raise local sales taxes at up to 0.5% (half-cent). Considerations for future legislation may include:

- Desired geography for RTAs in state law
- Desired local funding sources (sales taxes or other)
- Uses of funding (transit or broader mobility needs)

This legislation would allow the region to better coordinate in the planning and funding of public transit services.