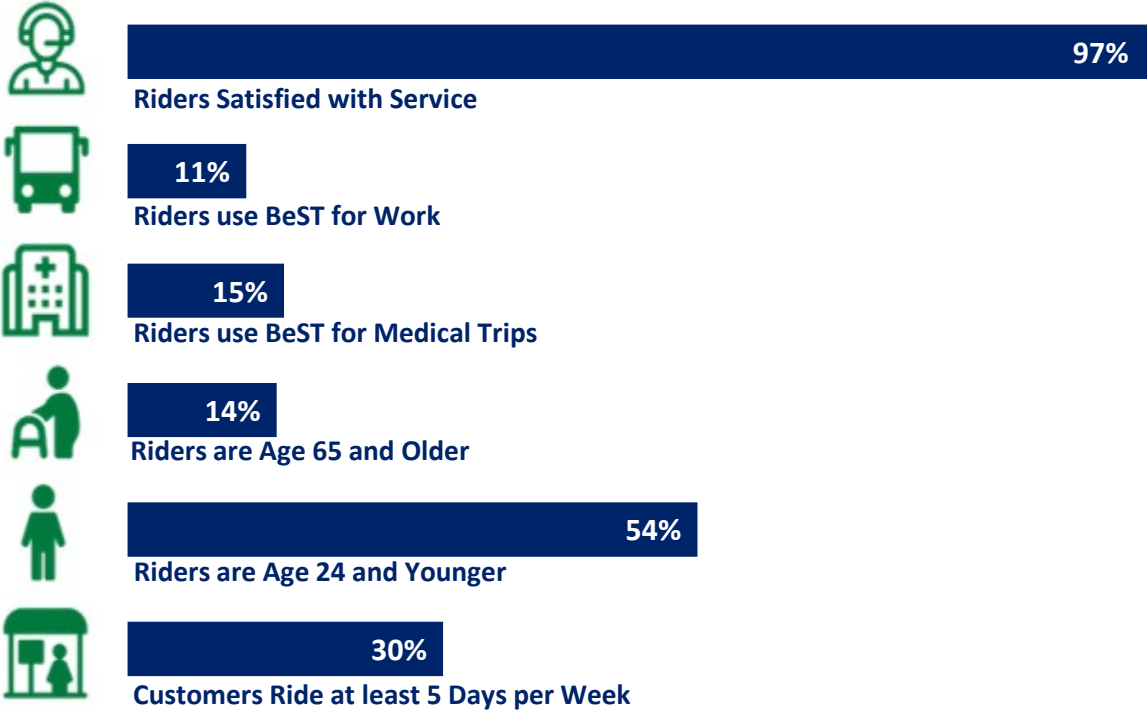


**ENDLESS MOUNTAINS TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY
(EMTA, BeST)
PERFORMANCE REVIEW EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**



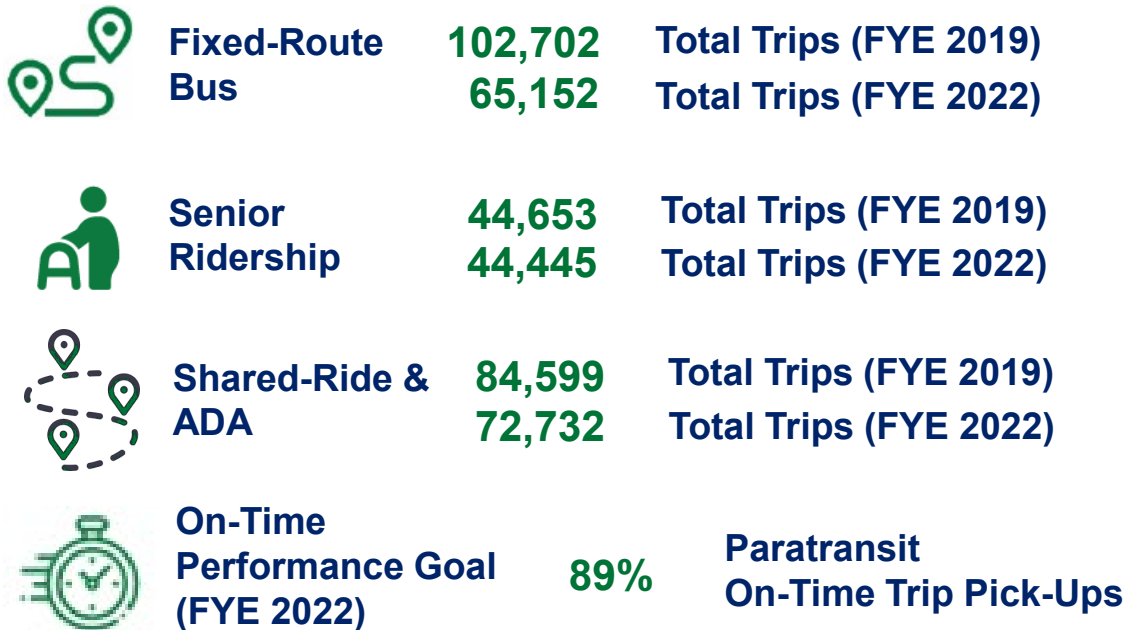
FIXED-ROUTE RIDER PROFILE



Source: 2018 Customer Satisfaction Survey

COMMUNITY IMPACTS

SOCIAL



Source: FYE 2022 dotGrants and Agency Reporting

COMMUNITY IMPACTS

ECONOMIC



88

Local Pennsylvania Jobs (FYE 2022)



\$1.8M





Operator Salaries and Wages (FYE 2022)

\$17.11

Average Fixed-Route Hourly Driver Wage (FYE 2022)

Sources: FYE 2022 dotGrants and Agency Reporting

ACT 44 PERFORMANCE METRICS

	TARGET (2021)	ACTUAL (2021)	OBSERVED (2022)	FUTURE (2027)
 <p>INCREASE Passengers / RVH</p>	7.12	2.28	2.92	3.23
 <p>CONTAIN Operating Cost / RVH</p>	\$78.79	\$70.93	\$83.35	\$96.63
 <p>INCREASE Operating Revenue / RVH</p>	\$8.29	\$5.20	\$5.06	\$5.87
 <p>CONTAIN Operating Cost / Passenger</p>	\$11.07	\$31.10	\$28.51	\$29.96

BEST PRACTICES

- BeST maintains a route guarantee for campus shuttle service.
- BeST leads collaboration efforts when pursuing joint discretionary grant opportunities.
- BeST launched a social media campaign to fill critical maintenance vacancies.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

- Create a service standards policy, including a goal for on-time performance.
- Ensure timely submittal of shared-ride reimbursement invoices.
- Develop an internal controls process to ensure financial information is reported accurately, consistently, and timely to oversight entities.

BeST PERFORMANCE REVIEW EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Other Fixed-Route Performance Statistics	FYE 2019	FYE 2022
Operating Revenue / Operating Cost	8.9%	6.1%
Operating Cost / Total Vehicle-Hours	\$71.22	\$76.65
Operating Cost / Total Vehicle-Miles	\$3.46	\$3.65
Total Passengers / Total Vehicle-Hours	4.42	2.69
Operating Cost / RVM	\$3.73	\$3.73
RVM / Total Vehicle-Miles	92.8%	97.7%
RVH / Total Vehicle-Hours	88.3%	92.0%
Operating Subsidy / Passenger Trip	\$14.68	\$27.24
Farebox Recovery	3.5%	2.4%

Note: Does not include ADA Paratransit Operating Statistics

Fixed-Route Annual Operating Statistics	FYE 2019	FYE 2022
Vehicles in Maximum Service (VOMS)	11	10
Operating Cost	\$1,653,678	\$1,857,451
Operating Revenues	\$146,467	\$112,800
Operating Subsidies	\$1,507,211	\$1,774,651
Total (Actual) Vehicle-Miles	478,069	509,485
Revenue Vehicle-Miles (RVM)	443,808	497,608
Total Vehicle-Hours	23,218	24,232
Revenue Vehicle-Hours (RVH)	20,495	22,284
Total Passenger Trips	102,702	65,152
Senior Passenger Trips	14,046	10,063

Note: Does not include ADA Paratransit Operating Statistics



BeST Fixed-Route Bus in downtown Towanda, PA

FLEET SNAPSHOT



67	40	Light-Duty Buses
Total	6	Vans
Vehicles	21	Minivans



**Light-Duty
Bus**

37,000

Estimated Annual
Miles per Bus



Van

31,000

Estimated Annual
Miles per Bus



Minivan

32,000

Estimated Annual
Miles per Bus

Source: 2023 Capital Planning Tool and FYE 2022 dotGrants Reporting

HIGH-LEVEL FINANCIAL INDICATORS

FYE 2019

6.1%

FYE 2022

20.3%



**Total Reserves /
Total Operating Expenses**

FYE 2019

\$0.56

FYE 2022

\$0.67



**Effective Fare (Total Fare
Revenue / Passenger Boardings)**

Source: dotGrants Reporting



Performance Report

Transit Performance Review

**Endless Mountains
Transportation Authority
(d.b.a., BeST)**

November 3, 2023

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Preface

Pennsylvania law requires transit agency performance reviews and five-year performance targets to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of service

COVID-19 disproportionately impacted transit-dependent populations

Transit agencies have navigated new requirements, higher costs, and shifting travel demand

A “new normal” for transit systems seems to be emerging, but uncertainty and volatility remain

PennDOT will reevaluate performance targets when the long-term impacts of the pandemic are known

Act 44 of 2007 and Act 89 of 2013 increased funding for public transportation in Pennsylvania. The laws also required transit agencies to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery through increased ridership, revenue, and cost containment. PennDOT evaluates every fixed-route transit agency in the Commonwealth through a performance review at least once every five years to determine how well the agency satisfies these requirements. Act 44 also requires PennDOT to develop five-year performance targets for each agency as part of the performance review process.

Beginning in February 2020, COVID-19 caused significant social and economic disruptions as workplaces closed and people limited travel and gatherings to reduce the spread of the disease. The adverse impacts throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania were profound. The health and unemployment effects of COVID-19 disproportionately impacted senior, disabled, and low-income populations. These individuals also rely heavily on public transportation to meet their essential travel needs.

The impacts of COVID-19 on the public transportation industry were also severe. Ridership decreased by more than 90 percent at some agencies during April 2020. Revenues dropped as agencies opted to waive fares to limit bus driver interactions and possible disease transmission from the handling of tickets and currency. Agencies increased the frequency and extent of bus cleaning, which increased operating costs. Some agencies furloughed drivers as they reduced service in response to plummeting passenger demand.

By late Summer 2020, transit agencies had begun to stabilize from the initial impacts of COVID-19, only to have statewide infection rates soar in the fall and winter. As COVID-19 lingered and mutated for more than three years, its impact on travel patterns became less severe, but its influence never fully subsided. By early 2023, post-pandemic travel patterns began to emerge and stabilize, but the long-term effects of the pandemic on transit remain unknown.

Many of the ridership, revenue, and operating cost trends used to develop this transit performance review report, including five-year performance targets, rely on information that predates the pandemic. PennDOT will continue to monitor the impacts of COVID-19 and reassess the transit agency’s five-year performance targets when the long-term effects of the pandemic are known. If the performance targets are revised, they will be published as an addendum to this report.

Introduction

Purpose

Act 44 requires local transportation organizations that receive state operating assistance to participate in periodic reviews to assess agency performance. PennDOT established a framework for conducting performance reviews with local transportation organizations to:

- Assess efficiency and effectiveness of service, financial stability, and general management/business practices;
- Agree to five-year targets for Act 44-mandated performance criteria;
- Assist agencies in developing an action plan that addresses opportunities for improvement and ways to achieve performance targets;
- Provide technical assistance to implement the plan at the request of the transportation organization; and
- Reassess each organization on a five-year cycle.

The reassessment at the end of each five-year cycle is to evaluate:

- Whether the organization met the agreed-upon performance targets; and
- The sufficiency and effectiveness of actions taken by the organization to improve performance and management practices to meet performance targets.

This report presents the Endless Mountains Transportation Authority (EMTA, d.b.a. BeST Transit, BeST) review, conducted on September 14, 2022.

Performance Review Process Steps

The performance review process is a collaborative effort between the transit agency and PennDOT.

As shown in **Exhibit 1**, the performance review process assesses BeST's unique challenges and changes since the previous performance review, the accuracy and reliability of reported data, implemented practices, additional opportunities for improvement, and realistic targets to attain before the next review.

Exhibit 1. Performance Review Process Steps

Key to Responsibilities: **PennDOT** **PennDOT + Transit Agency** **Transit Agency**

1.	Notify agency of performance review schedule and request supporting documents.
2.	Review available data and request additional information.
3.	Agree upon a set of peer agencies for comparison.
4.	Review the most recent customer satisfaction survey.
5.	Assess Act 44 variables, including current performance, targets from the previous review, and Action Plan implementation.
6.	Conduct Act 44 performance criteria analysis.
7.	Interview agency management, staff, and governing body.
8.	Perform supplementary data collection and reconciliation.
9.	Evaluate performance, financial management, and operations.
10.	Report results and determine agency compliance with performance requirements.
11.	Develop the performance report.
12.	Develop, implement, and monitor a five-year Action Plan.
13.	Provide technical assistance, if required, to help meet five-year performance targets.

Agency Overview

Endless Mountains Transportation Authority (EMTA) was formed in 1980 as a municipal authority to provide rural fixed-route and demand-response services in Bradford, Sullivan, and Tioga Counties.¹ In 2014, EMTA rebranded as Bradford, Sullivan, and Tioga Transit Serving the Endless Mountains (BeST) (**Exhibit 2**). BeST is governed by a nine-member Board of Directors representing its three service-area counties. Since 2011, EMTA/BeST has contracted with the River Valley Transit Authority (RVTA) in Williamsport, PA, and the Crawford County Transportation Authority (CATA) in Crawford and Venango counties for management services and support on special projects. BeST has an administrative facility and maintenance garage with outdoor storage in Athens (Bradford County) and Mansfield (Tioga County). Additionally, BeST leases administrative and customer transfer space in Towanda (Bradford County). BeST provides circulator fixed-route service (Mountie Express) for Mansfield University in Tioga County. BeST maintains ten bus shelters throughout the three-county area.

Exhibit 2. BeST Fixed-Route Bus in Towanda, PA

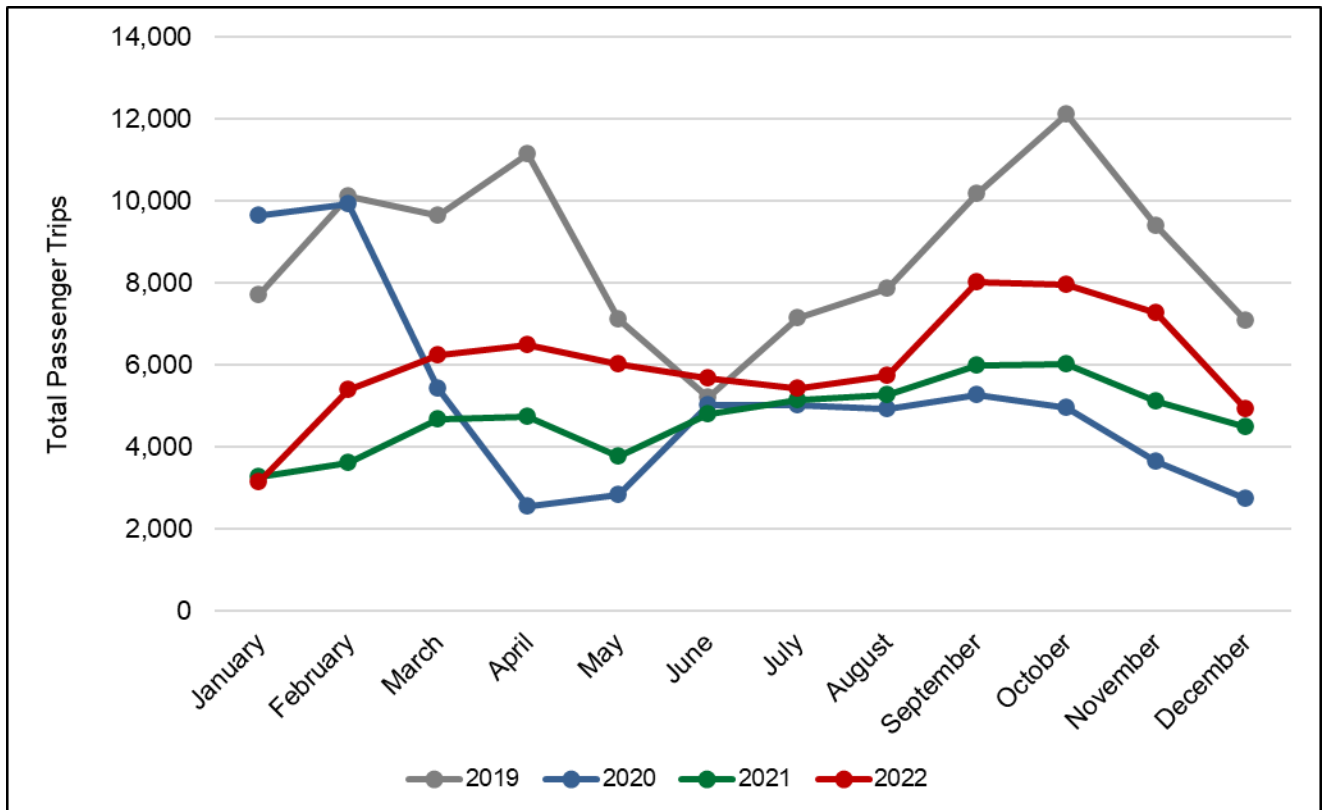


In Fiscal Year 2021-22 (FYE 2022), BeST had 10 fixed-route vehicles operating in maximum service (VOMS) and provided 65,152 fixed-route passenger trips. BeST had 40 VOMS for demand-response service that delivered 1,352 ADA complementary and 71,380 shared-ride trips. Of the 71,380 shared-ride trips, 30,667 or 43.0 percent were funded by the Medical Assistance Transportation Program (MATP).

¹ The original founding charter included Susquehanna and Wyoming counties. These counties are not included in BeST service area as of 2022 performance review.

Like most transit systems nationally and across Pennsylvania, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted BeST’s ridership beginning in March 2020. BeST began to reclaim ridership in 2021 as senior centers resumed normal social activities and Mansfield University returned to in-person classes. Monthly fixed-route ridership stabilized in 2022, but remains below pre-pandemic levels (**Exhibit 3**). The normal pattern of decreases in ridership during the summer months is attributable to summer break at Mansfield University.

Exhibit 3. Monthly Fixed-Route Ridership, 2019–2022



Community Impacts

Public transportation is a vital service to the community. It provides mobility options and increases access to jobs, medical facilities, food stores, schools, and other economic destinations.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the critical nature of public transportation to individuals and their communities. Essential workers and those most reliant on public transportation services continued to ride throughout the pandemic while many former commuters and individuals in professional service jobs continue remote work and are not using the service like they might have pre-pandemic.

Customer Satisfaction Survey

In November 2018, BeST conducted a fixed-route customer service satisfaction survey (CSS). Based on the number of respondents and the survey results, the total number of individual

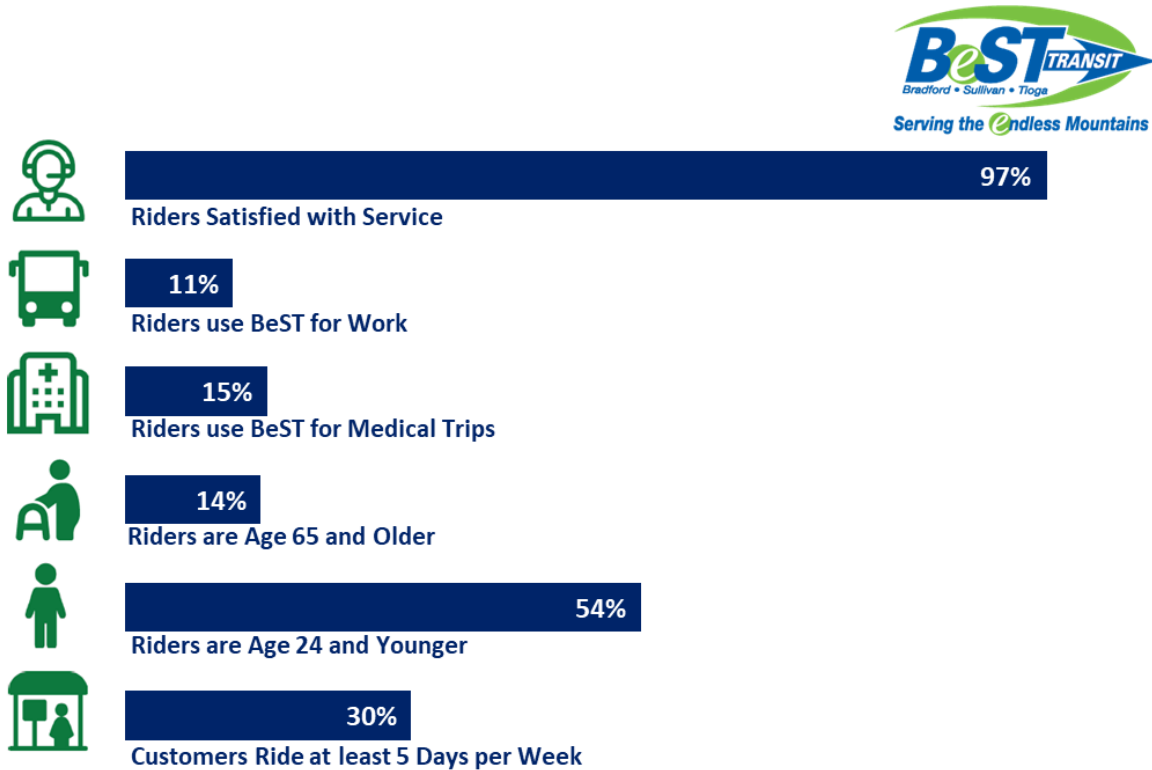
riders is estimated to be between 300 and 700. The survey had a margin of error of less than 3.7 percent, for an average of 500 individual riders.

The survey results were aggregated to determine average satisfaction scores. Top-ranked measures included: driver courtesy and friendliness, comfortable bus seats, and safe and competent drivers. Lowest-ranked measures included: frequency of weekend service, telephone customer service, and comfort at bus stops.

BeST Rider Profile

The CSS provides insight into rider characteristics and customer preferences (**Exhibit 4**). Respondents from the 2018 survey indicated a 97 percent satisfaction level in their overall experience riding BeST, and 30 percent of customers who frequently use BeST ride at least five days per week. Fixed-route bus is an essential service for many riders.

Exhibit 4. Fixed-Route Rider Profile



Source: 2018 BeST CSS

Economic and Social Impacts

BeST benefits the local economy and the communities it serves through the expenditure of public funds and fare revenue, by supporting jobs in transit operations, and by purchasing services and goods (**Exhibit 5**).

In FYE 2022, BeST spent approximately \$2.3 million in total wages: \$1.8 million for operators, \$570,000 for maintenance personnel, and \$264,000 for general administration staff. BeST currently employs 75 individuals and outsources management functions to RVT. Contracted management supports 13 positions at RVT, bringing the total employment number to 88. There

In FYE 2022, fixed-route bus and demand-response ridership returned to 63% and 86% of pre-COVID levels.

are 30 bus drivers employed in Bradford County and 24 bus drivers employed in Tioga County, which supports Mansfield University service. BeST employs three mechanics in Bradford County and two mechanics in Tioga County. BeST had an average fixed-route driver wage of \$17.11 per hour in FYE 2022, which translates to an annual income of approximately \$35,600, excluding overtime pay.

Based on an estimated 500 pre-pandemic unique riders (FYE 2019) and a total of 102,702 passenger trips, the average fixed-route passenger took 205 trips during FYE 2019. Post-pandemic ridership is approximately 63 percent of pre-COVID levels. As of FYE 2022, BeST reported 65,152 total fixed-route passenger trips and 651,520 total fixed-route passenger-miles. Typically, agencies set a fixed-route on-time performance² goal as a measure of service reliability. At the time of the 2022 performance review, BeST did not track fixed-route bus on-time performance.

In FYE 2022, BeST provided 71,380 shared-ride trips and 1,352 ADA paratransit trips, for a total of 72,732 demand-response trips. Post-pandemic ridership for demand-response services is approximately 86 percent of pre-COVID levels. The authority's subcontracted shared-ride trips accounted for an additional 4,360 trips. Lottery-funded senior citizen trips were 48 percent of the total shared-ride trips. The remaining trips consisted of 6,331 Persons with Disabilities (PWD) trips, and 30,667 other medical trips. BeST had an 89 percent on-time pick-up for shared-ride services.

² On-time performance is a service reliability measure based on how frequently a vehicle arrives within a specific range of its scheduled arrival time.

Exhibit 5. Economic and Social Measures



ECONOMIC



88

Local Pennsylvania Jobs (FYE 2022)



\$1.8M

Operator Salaries & Wages (FYE 2022)

\$17.11

Average Fixed-Route Driver Wage (FYE 2022)

SOCIAL



102,702

Fixed-Route Trips (FYE 2019)

65,152

Fixed-Route Trips (FYE 2022)



205

Annual Trips per Rider (FYE 2019)



2,054

Annual Miles per Rider (FYE 2019)

84,599 Paratransit Trips (FYE 2019)

72,732 Paratransit Trips (FYE 2022)



On-Time

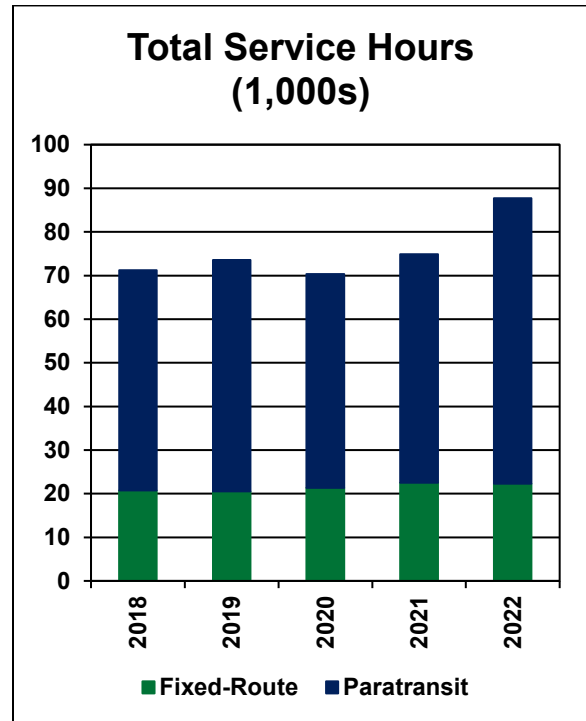
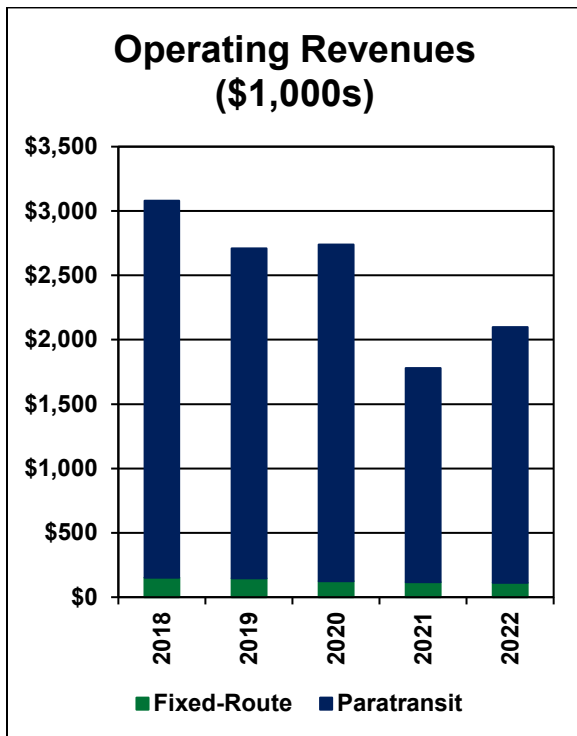
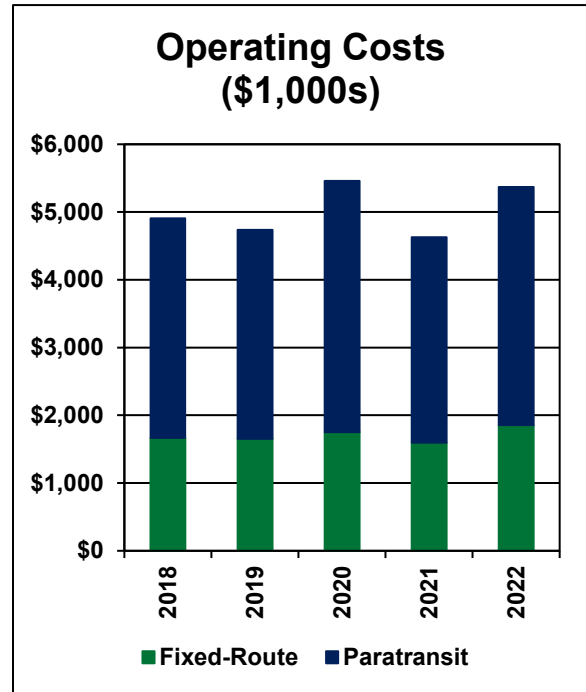
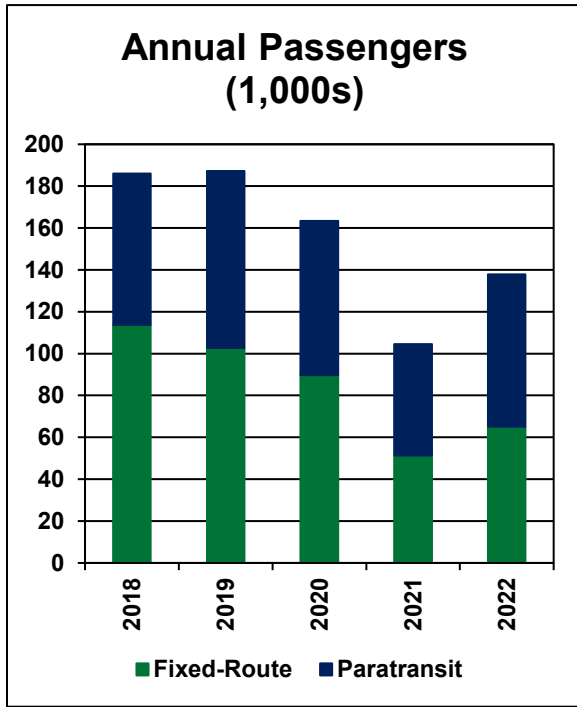
Performance 89%

Paratransit On-Time Trip Pick-Ups (FYE 2022)

Source: dotGrants, Ecolane, and agency-reported values.

Agency Trends

Annual Operating Statistics



Note: **Appendix A: Data Reconciliation** on page 22 provides reconciled values between dotGrants and the National Transit Database (NTD).

Financial Health

Transit agencies in good financial health typically have diverse revenue streams, build sufficient operating reserves, and prioritize long-term financial sustainability. BeST operated with a balanced budget during FYE 2022. Total transportation services cost approximately \$6.0 million to operate. BeST earned approximately \$2.7 million in revenues and required roughly \$3.2 million in subsidies to offset operating deficits (**Exhibit 6**).

Exhibit 6. FYE 2022 Operating Budget Summary

Fiscal Year End 2022	Fixed-Route	ADA	Shared-Ride	Non-Public	Total
Total Operating Expenses	\$1,857,451	\$42,176	\$3,470,472	\$628,961	\$5,999,060
Total Revenue	\$112,800	\$1,898	\$1,982,949	\$628,961	\$2,726,608
Total Federal Subsidies	\$622,230	\$20,139	\$1,487,523	\$0	\$2,129,892
Total State Subsidies	\$1,063,475	\$20,139	\$0	\$0	\$1,083,614
Total Local Subsidies	\$88,946	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$88,946

High-Level Financial Indicators

As shown in **Exhibit 7**, at the end of the FYE 2022, BeST had carryover subsidies (cash reserves) equal to 20.3 percent of its total annual operating costs. These cash reserves are attributable to an influx of federal COVID relief funds for operating expenses, which enabled the authority to build its state operating reserves from \$287,000 in FYE 2019 to \$1.0 million as of FYE 2022.

BeST has a \$750,000 line of credit with a local bank that is available for short-term use to maintain sufficient cash flow. BeST has an outstanding balance of \$512,034 on its line of credit (FYE 2022). September 2022 month-end accounting statements show negligible amounts in accounts payable and accounts receivable over 90 days.

Fixed-route operating revenues recovered 3.5% of annual operating costs before the pandemic.

Before the pandemic, BeST had a farebox recovery ratio of 3.5 percent. The Authority's contract with Mansfield University generates nearly half of total fixed-route revenues. For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2022, farebox recovery decreased to 2.4 percent due to the impacts of the pandemic on ridership. Post-pandemic fixed-route ridership for BeST had rebounded to 63 percent of its pre-COVID-19 ridership. Mansfield University ridership in 2022 was 54 percent of 2019 levels.³ Although the fare

adjustment policy suggested that BeST raise its base fixed-route fare for the 2022-23 fiscal year due to an increase in the federal rate of inflation, the Authority has yet to initiate an increase as of June 2023.

³ Mansfield University has experienced declining enrollment and a reorganization with two other state universities, which impacted travel patterns.

FYE 2019 is the last fiscal year before the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on ridership, revenues, and operating costs. Fixed-route operating subsidy per passenger trip increased 85.6 percent from \$14.68 in FYE 2019 to \$27.24 in FYE 2022. The increase in federal subsidies offset the loss of passenger revenue.

Exhibit 7. High-Level Financial Indicators

Indicator	Value		Assessment Criteria / Rationale	Source
	FYE 2019	FYE 2022		
Total Reserves / Annual Operating Cost	FYE 2019	FYE 2022	A combined target of 25%+ provides liquidity to cover unexpected cost increases or service changes without incurring interest fees from loans.	FYE 2019 Audit FYE 2022 Audit
	6.1%	20.3%		
Credit Available / Annual Payroll	30.7%		Only necessary if combined carryover subsidies are less than 25% of annual operating costs. This ensures that the agency maintains sufficient cash flow and liquidity to pay all current bills.	FYE 2022 Audit
Accounts Payable (AP) 90+ days	0.0%		Target should be 0% over 90 days. Larger values indicate cash flow concerns.	August 2022 agency-reported value
Accounts Receivable (AR) 90+ days	0.0%		Target should be 0% over 90 days. Larger values can cause cash flow problems.	August 2022 agency-reported value
Debt / Annual Operating Cost	9.5%		Target should be 0%. Low debt amounts reduce interest expense.	FYE 2022 Audit
Farebox Recovery	FYE 2019	FYE 2022	Typically, the target should be 12%-15% or higher. The drop in ridership associated with the COVID-19 pandemic significantly reduced farebox recovery.	FYE 2019 Audit, FYE 2022 Audit, and dotGrants
	3.5%	2.4%		
Effective Average Fare	\$0.56	\$0.67	Total fare revenue / total passengers. Effective fare calculates the actual value of fares per passenger trip and is an indicator of when fares might need adjustment to offset increases in operating costs.	FYE 2019 Audit, FYE 2022 Audit, and dotGrants
Operating Subsidy per Passenger Trip	\$14.68	\$27.24	Indicates the subsidy requirement to offset operating losses per passenger trip.	FYE 2019 Audit, FYE 2022 Audit, and dotGrants

Safety

Industry practices dictate a holistic approach to safety that includes the principles of Safety Management Systems (SMS). At this time BeST is not required to develop a Federal Transportation Administration (FTA)-compliant Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan (PTASP).

Capital Asset Management

PennDOT verifies asset conditions by reviewing Capital Planning Tool (CPT) records and interviewing transit agency management, operations, and maintenance staff. Transit Asset Management (TAM) is a systematic process that allows agencies to track assets, forecast asset conditions, and plan for asset maintenance or replacement. This FTA-required process accounts for the entire life cycle of a capital asset (e.g., facilities, equipment, rolling stock, and infrastructure) used for public transportation, from procurement through operations and maintenance to disposal. A critical element of the TAM process is the inventorying and assessment of asset conditions.

Detailed inventories of the fleet and other capital assets indicate when assets should be scheduled for replacement. This process is key for efficient coordination with local funding contributors. PennDOT recognizes a revenue-vehicle asset as eligible for replacement when it reaches its useful life in years and miles. The estimated service life (ESL) for a vehicle depends on its size, fuel type, and seating capacity:

- Large, heavy-duty bus ESL is 500,000 miles and 12 years;
- Medium-duty bus ESL is 350,000 miles and 10 years;
- Light-duty bus ESL is 150,000 miles and five years; and
- Van/Minivan ESL is 100,000 miles and four years.

As of June 2023, BeST had a fleet of 67 total vehicles in service.⁴ The fleet consisted of light-duty buses, vans, and minivans. As shown in **Exhibit 8**:

- Light-duty buses accrued an average of 37,000 annual miles;
- Vans accrued an average of 31,000 annual miles; and
- Minivans accrued an average of 32,000 annual miles.

Exhibit 8. June 2023 Fleet Utilization Snapshot

Vehicle Type	Fleet	Average Age	ESL Requirements		Annual Miles	
			Years	Miles	2023 Average	ESL
Light-Duty Bus	40	5	5	150,000	37,000	30,000
Van	6	3	4	100,000	31,000	25,000
Minivan	21	6	4	100,000	32,000	25,000

⁴ BeST has two American Heritage Trolleybuses that are not used in regular service. These vehicles were excluded from the fleet utilization assessment.

Based on current odometer readings and estimated yearly mileage, BeST’s light-duty buses, vans, and minivans all accumulated more than 30,000 annual miles—exceeding the annual mileage required to be eligible for replacement at the end of their ESL in years (five years for light-duty buses and four years for vans and minivans). A typical minivan reaches its ESL in miles in just over three years.

As shown in **Exhibit 9**, 75 percent of the fleet is assigned to demand-response services. Fixed-route buses have a 41 percent spare vehicle ratio. FTA guidance recommends that agencies maintain a 20 percent spare vehicle ratio. However, BeST keeps additional spare buses in Tioga County to accommodate fleet needs in the event of a major mechanical breakdown for Tioga County routes, including the Mountie Express operating at Mansfield University.

Exhibit 9. June 2023 Spare Ratio Snapshot

Primary Mode	Total Vehicles	VOMS	Spare Ratio
Fixed-Route Bus	17	10	41%
Demand-Response	50	40	20%

If current utilization levels continue, with vehicles operating past their estimated useful life in miles, BeST should continue to ensure preventative maintenance occurs on schedule.

Act 44 Performance Review Findings

Prior Performance Reviews

On prior performance reviews, BeST took action to increase fixed-route ridership and revenues and contain growth in operating costs. Specifically, BeST accomplished the following as part of prior action plans:

- Implemented Ecolane scheduling software to optimize shared-ride pick-ups.
- Adopted fixed-route performance standards.
- Updated the agency strategic plan to include Act 44 performance targets.

Current Performance Assessment and Findings

The current performance assessment reviews the agency’s progress in achieving its five-year performance goals and identifies additional steps to improve performance. The 2017 performance report established performance targets for the fiscal year ending on June 30, 2021, based on the following annual goals (**Exhibit 9**):

- Increase passengers per revenue vehicle-hour by 2.0 percent per year;
- Increase operating revenue per revenue vehicle-hour 2.0 percent per year;
- Contain growth in operating costs per revenue vehicle-hour to 3.0 percent per year; and
- Contain growth in operating cost per passenger to 1.0 percent per year.

Exhibit 10. FYE 2021 Performance Assessment

Act 44 Performance Metrics	Annual Performance Goals	Performance Assessment	
		FYE 2021 Targets	FYE 2021 Actual
Passengers/RVH	2.00%	7.12	2.28
Operating Revenue/RVH	2.00%	\$8.29	\$5.20
Operating Cost/RVH	3.00%	\$78.79	\$70.93
Operating Cost/Passenger	1.00%	\$11.07	\$31.10

Note: Green indicates meeting a performance target.

In early 2020, RVTA experienced significant turnover in management that impacted oversight responsibilities for BeST, including addressing Action Plan recommendations. Several 2017 Action Plan items remain incomplete. RVTA leadership changed again in early 2023.

The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting changes in travel behavior adversely impacted BeST’s ability to achieve its 2021 performance targets. Ridership and revenue decreased significantly from March 2020 through 2021, while costs increased due to COVID mitigation measures (e.g., additional cleaning of vehicles, facilities, equipment, etc.). BeST successfully met its five-year performance target for operating cost per revenue vehicle-hour.

Future Performance Goals

Background

Act 44 requires that PennDOT and transit agencies establish five-year performance targets for each of the four Act 44 metrics for fixed-route service:

- Passengers per Revenue Vehicle-Hour
- Operating Cost per Revenue Vehicle-Hour
- Operating Revenue per Revenue Vehicle-Hour
- Operating Cost per Passenger

Setting performance targets for these metrics and regularly reevaluating performance is intended to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery. To keep pace with increases in operating costs, Act 89 requires agencies to maintain a policy for adjusting fares for inflation. BeST measures the price of its base fare against the federal rate of inflation since the date of its last base fare increase to determine whether an increase is warranted. The Authority's fare adjustment tool recommended an increase for the 2022-23 fiscal year to keep pace with inflation. BeST has yet to initiate a fixed-route fare increase.

PennDOT uses the most recently audited and agency-verified values for passengers, operating costs, and operating revenues as the baseline for developing performance targets. The 2023 performance report used the FYE 2022 audit to develop performance targets. Five-year targets are then set based on realistic and achievable expectations of improvement.

BeST Goals for FYE 2027

PennDOT based BeST's future-year performance targets on the most recently available financial year (FYE 2022). Over the next five years, BeST must work to achieve the targets shown in **Exhibit 10** to ensure continued eligibility for full Section 1513 funding.

Exhibit 11. FYE 2027 Performance Goals

Performance Criteria	FYE 2022 Observed	FYE 2027 Goal	Target Annual Increase
Passengers / RVH	2.92	3.23	2.00%
Operating Revenue / RVH	\$5.06	\$5.87	3.00%
Operating Cost / RVH	\$83.35	\$96.63	3.00%
Operating Cost / Passenger	\$28.51	\$29.96	1.00%

PennDOT will continue to monitor the impacts of COVID-19 and reassess the transit agency's five-year performance targets when the long-term effects of the pandemic become known. If the performance targets are revised, they will be published as a supplement to this report.

Functional Review

Identifying Opportunities for Improvement and Best Practices

Functional reviews catalog best practices to share with other transit agencies and identify opportunities for improvement that should be addressed in the Action Plan. The performance review process includes assessing agency operations, management, and governance. PennDOT analyzes agency policies, programs, practices, and peer statistical comparisons to identify areas for review. The document review and peer comparison inform the performance discussion with agency leadership and staff. The outcome of the functional review is a collection of best practices potentially applicable to other Pennsylvania transit agencies and a list of opportunities for retaining and promoting ridership, ensuring long-term financial sustainability, and other opportunities for improvement.

A recommended Action Plan template is found in **Appendix B: Action Plan Template** on page 24 and the determinations and findings of the Act 44 peer review are found in **Appendix C: Act 44 Peer Comparison Analysis** on page 26.

Retain and Promote Ridership

Service must be responsive to community needs to achieve optimum service levels. Before the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on ridership, transit systems nationwide faced lower ridership as gas prices fell and ridesharing companies competed with fixed-route systems. The rise in work-from-home practices, which increased due to the COVID-19 pandemic, adversely impacted commuter and discretionary travel demand. As transit agencies work to restore ridership to pre-pandemic levels, actions that focus on raising the awareness of service, enhancing the customer experience, and improving service efficiency help retain and attract ridership.

Best Practices

1. None.

Opportunities for Improvement

1. **Create a service standards policy, including a goal for on-time performance.** BeST operates a flag-stop fixed-route system with seven routes. With the exception of Tioga County service around Mansfield University, fixed-route service is infrequent. BeST has no productivity thresholds to monitor route performance that would trigger potential adjustments or service reliability metrics like a goal for on-time performance. BeST should create a Board-approved service standards policy that sets the base productivity for its fixed-route services in Bradford, Sullivan, and Tioga counties and a goal for tracking on-time performance. New Fixed-Route Intelligent Transportation System (FRITS) hardware on the Authority's buses will enable BeST to monitor route productivity, introduce real-time bus tracking, and track on-time performance.

Management can develop customized reports to inform the Board on route productivity levels through the FRITS Business Intelligence portal.

2. **Conduct a customer satisfaction survey (CSS).** BeST last conducted a CSS in 2018. Since then, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected vulnerable populations, including seniors, and travel needs have changed. BeST should conduct a new CSS to gain customer insight into rider preferences and potential improvements it can make to enhance the customer experience and increase the attractiveness of using the service.
3. **Update online and printed maps to include additional information, including fare zones and familiar landmarks.** Currently, BeST only has real-time bus tracking for the Mountie Express and a simple map of Route 25 available online. Because BeST operates a flag stop system with long headways, providing detailed route maps with familiar landmarks will improve the customer experience by showing where passengers can catch the bus and ensure they have the correct fare if they cross a fare zone. An overall system map would allow riders to see transfer points between routes. This could attract new passengers who might be unaware of BeST coverages and their proximity to a BeST route.
4. **Develop a framework to measure the effectiveness of marketing activities.** BeST should update its marketing plan to include marketing goals and performance metrics to assess the return on investment of marketing and promotional activities. By developing a framework that ties activities and budgets to the Authority's marketing goals, BeST can accurately inform budget decisions when allocating resources to marketing activities. Performance monitoring will enable BeST to measure the success of its efforts and help determine how often to schedule events.

Ensure Long-Term Financial Sustainability

Sound financial management is critical to ensuring the viability of transit services. Agencies often undertake multiple major expenditures on limited budgets. This includes financing major capital facility projects, fleet replacement, and funding recurring costs, including operations and maintenance, annual fringe benefits, fuel, utilities, and cleaning. Steps to ensure long-term financial sustainability include improving farebox recovery, diversifying revenue streams, right-sizing service to resources, and implementing cost-control measures.

Best Practices

1. **BeST maintains a route guarantee for campus shuttle services.** BeST has received between \$50,000 and \$60,000 annually for campus shuttle services. Despite lower enrollment at the university, BeST has maintained a higher cost recovery for its Mansfield route due to a negotiated fixed rate for service.

Opportunities for Improvement

1. **Ensure timely submittal of shared-ride reimbursement invoices and monitor progress as a metric of contractor performance.** BeST maintains a \$900,000 line of credit that the Authority has relied on to cover late reimbursements to pay invoices. BeST should minimize credit-based financing for short-term cash flow by ensuring its shared-ride reimbursements are completed and submitted on time. The Authority should

include timely submittal of financial materials as a metric for monitoring contractor performance.

2. **Develop and incorporate as part of its management contract an internal controls process to ensure financial information is reported accurately, consistently, and timely to oversight entities.** BeST received a corrective action plan to address material weaknesses identified in the FYE 2021 audit, including late submittals of financial statements for the year-end audit and late submittals of quarterly expenditure statements to MATP. Additionally, BeST's required audits frequently miss the due date of December 31. This results in a significant delay of payments from the state and requires BeST to draw from its line of credit to finance daily operations. During FYE 2022, BeST paid \$17,701 in debt service. Internal controls would formalize policies and procedures for the timely, accurate, and consistent reporting of financial information to oversight agencies. BeST should incorporate internal controls as performance standards in its next management contract and consider including potential remedies such as liquidated damages for missing financial deadlines.

Identify Other Opportunities to Improve Performance

There are additional opportunities to enhance agency performance. Actions that prioritize Board education, strategic planning, workforce management, and partner agency collaboration improve overall agency functions. Actions that target organizational improvement promote efficient and transparent administration. Advocacy with stakeholders and funding partners on behalf of the agency builds stronger community ties. Goal-oriented actions help inform management and the Board's investment decisions related to significant capital investments and new information technologies.

Best Practices

1. **BeST leads collaboration efforts when pursuing joint discretionary grant opportunities.** In 2022, BeST applied for a Department of Economic and Community Development (DCED) Commonwealth Financing Authority (CFA) Multimodal Transportation Fund grant in partnership with Sullivan County and secured funding for the County's first bus shelter. In March 2024, the new ADA-compliant bus shelter will mark Sullivan County's first fixed stop for passengers waiting for service that connects Dushore to Mildred and Laporte.
2. **BeST launched a social media campaign to fill critical maintenance vacancies.** BeST developed job advertisements targeting different age demographics to fill mechanic and maintenance vacancies. Each post included a QR code to direct applicants to a third-party website hosting the Authority's advertisement. In addition to tracking the number of online applications, BeST monitored website traffic data to assess the effectiveness of its social media campaign.

Opportunities for Improvement

1. **Incorporate PPTA PennTRAIN Board Training as part of regular Board meetings.** BeST has an active Board engaged with initiatives such as pursuing joint grant opportunities, evaluating opportunities to establish new and reinstate former services,

and directing special projects to advance regional interests (in a separate contract with the Crawford Area Transportation Authority's General Manager). The Board could reach its full potential and enhance governance by taking advantage of PennTRAIN, free online Board training modules that cover a transit agency's primary roles, responsibilities, and functions. Other Pennsylvania transit agencies have incorporated PennTRAIN Board Training modules as part of a Board Education Program, new member onboarding, or routine refresher training as part of regularly scheduled meetings.

Appendix A: Data Reconciliation

The performance review process reconciles NTD data to audited, agency-reported dotGrants legacy budgets to ensure the data presented in this report are consistent and accurate. Certified audits, financial statements, and other agency-generated reports are examined to identify discrepancies in financial and operating statistics. Any discrepancies discovered are verified and appropriately reconciled with agency management before determining Act 44 performance metrics and establishing new performance goals.

Ridership	FYE 2015	FYE 2016	FYE 2017	FYE 2018	FYE 2019	FYE 2020
NTD	150,488	133,819	119,686	113,520	102,702	89,681
dotGrants	150,488	133,819	119,686	113,649	102,702	89,681
Variance	0	0	0	129	0	0
Percent Difference	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Adjusted Value	150,488	133,819	119,686	113,649	102,702	89,681
Operating Costs		FYE 2016	FYE 2017	FYE 2018	FYE 2019	FYE 2020
NTD	\$1,379,082	\$1,409,601	\$1,479,937	\$1,666,150	\$1,653,678	\$1,750,313
dotGrants	\$1,479,082	\$1,409,601	\$1,474,936	\$1,666,150	\$1,653,678	\$1,750,313
Variance	\$100,000	0	(5,001)	0	0	0
Percent Difference	7%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Adjusted Value	\$1,479,082	\$1,409,601	\$1,474,936	\$1,666,150	\$1,653,678	\$1,750,313
Operating Revenue		FYE 2016	FYE 2017	FYE 2018	FYE 2019	FYE 2020
NTD	\$155,926	\$142,200	\$148,696	\$152,725	\$147,389	\$126,447
dotGrants	\$161,046	\$146,368	\$147,771	\$151,975	\$146,467	\$125,247
Variance	\$5,120	4,168	(925)	(750)	(922)	(1,200)
Percent Difference	3%	3%	-1%	0%	-1%	-1%
Adjusted Value	\$161,046	\$146,368	\$147,771	\$151,975	\$146,467	\$125,247
Revenue Vehicle-Hours		FYE 2016	FYE 2017	FYE 2018	FYE 2019	FYE 2020
NTD	20,308	20,741	20,630	20,694	20,495	21,334
dotGrants	20,308	20,741	20,630	20,731	20,495	21,334
Variance	0	0	0	37	0	0
Percent Difference	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Adjusted Value	20,308	20,741	20,630	20,731	20,495	21,334

The following Act 44 performance metrics were calculated for BeST.

Act 44 Adjusted Metrics	FYE 2015	FYE 2016	FYE 2017	FYE 2018	FYE 2019	FYE 2020
Passengers/RVH	7.41	6.45	5.80	5.48	5.01	4.20
Operating Revenue/RVH	\$7.93	\$7.06	\$7.16	\$7.33	\$7.15	\$5.87
Operating Costs/RVH	\$72.83	\$67.96	\$71.49	\$80.37	\$80.69	\$82.04
Operating Cost/Passenger	\$9.83	\$10.53	\$12.32	\$14.66	\$16.10	\$19.52

Appendix B: Action Plan Template

Part 1 – Actions to Retain and Promote Ridership

Recommendations from Narrative Starting on page 18.	BeST Action	Estimated Initiation Date	Estimated Completion Date
1. Create a service standards policy, including a goal for on-time performance.			
2. Conduct a customer satisfaction survey (CSS).			
3. Update online and printed maps to include additional information, including fare zones and familiar landmarks.			
4. Develop a framework to measure the effectiveness of marketing activities.			

Part 2 – Actions to Ensure Long-Term Financial Sustainability

Recommendations from Narrative Starting on page 19.	BeST Action	Estimated Initiation Date	Estimated Completion Date
1. Ensure timely submittal of shared-ride reimbursement invoices and monitor progress as a metric of contractor performance.			
2. Develop and incorporate as part of its management contract an internal controls process to ensure financial information is reported accurately, consistently, and timely to oversight entities.			

Part 3 – Other Opportunities for Improvement

Recommendations from Narrative starting on page 20.	BeST Action	Estimated Initiation Date	Estimated Completion Date
1. Incorporate PPTA PennTRAIN Board Training as part of regular Board meetings.			

Appendix C: Act 44 Peer Comparison Analysis

Peer agencies were identified through a collaborative process between PennDOT and BeST management using criteria defined in Act 44 and NTD data from the most recently available year, FYE 2020. The systems identified for peer comparisons are:

1. Western Piedmont Regional Transit Authority (WPRTA), Conover, NC
2. Zia Therapy Center, Inc. (ZTranz), Alamogordo, NM
3. Monroe County Transportation Authority (MCTA), Swiftwater, PA
4. Hill County Transit District (The Hop), San Saba, TX
5. Fayette Area Coordinated Transportation (FACT), Uniontown, PA
6. Estuary Transit District (ETC), Centerbrook, CT
7. Schuylkill Transportation System (STS), Pottsville, PA
8. Area Transportation Authority of North Central PA (ATA), Johnsonburg, PA
9. Warren County Transit Authority (TAWC), Warren, PA

Passengers per Revenue Vehicle-Hour: Motor Bus (MB)

System	FYE 2020 Single Year		Five-Year Change Since FYE 2015		
	Value	Rank of 10	2015 Value	Annual Rate	Rank of 10
Western Piedmont Regional Transit Authority	5.01	5	8.92	-10.91%	8
Zia Therapy Center, Inc.	4.40	7	6.24	-6.77%	5
Monroe County Transportation Authority	8.27	2	7.33	2.45%	1
Hill Country Transit District	7.97	3	13.63	-10.19%	6
County of Fayette	3.61	9	6.65	-11.50%	9
Estuary Transit District	2.28	10	4.25	-11.70%	10
Schuylkill Transportation System	8.90	1	11.98	-5.78%	3
Area Transportation Authority of North Central PA	4.96	6	6.92	-6.46%	4
Warren County Transit Authority	5.80	4	6.20	-1.33%	2
Endless Mountains Transportation Authority	4.20	8	7.41	-10.72%	7
<i>Average</i>	5.54		7.95	-7.29%	
<i>Standard Deviation</i>	2.18		2.84	4.76%	
<i>Average – 1 Standard Deviation</i>	3.36		5.11	-12.05%	
<i>Average + 1 Standard Deviation</i>	7.72		10.79	-2.53%	
Act 44 Compliance Determination	In Compliance		In Compliance		
Compared to the Peer Group Average	Weaker		Weaker		

Operating Revenue per Vehicle-Hour: MB

System	FYE 2020 Single Year		Five-Year Change Since FYE 2015		
	Value	Rank of 10	2015 Value	Annual Rate	Rank of 10
Western Piedmont Regional Transit Authority	\$3.14	9	\$6.15	-12.56%	10
Zia Therapy Center, Inc.	\$2.50	10	\$4.41	-10.72%	9
Monroe County Transportation Authority	\$11.66	2	\$8.44	6.69%	2
Hill Country Transit District	\$4.23	8	\$6.13	-7.17%	7
County of Fayette	\$6.80	4	\$11.27	-9.60%	8
Estuary Transit District	\$4.48	7	\$6.12	-6.06%	6
Schuylkill Transportation System	\$28.09	1	\$10.22	22.40%	1
Area Transportation Authority of North Central PA	\$10.19	3	\$9.51	1.39%	4
Warren County Transit Authority	\$5.09	6	\$4.15	4.17%	3
Endless Mountains Transportation Authority	\$5.87	5	\$7.93	-5.84%	5
<i>Average</i>	\$8.21		\$7.43	-1.73%	
<i>Standard Deviation</i>	\$7.57		\$2.43	10.66%	
<i>Average – 1 Standard Deviation</i>	\$0.63		\$5.01	-12.39%	
<i>Average + 1 Standard Deviation</i>	\$15.78		\$9.86	8.93%	
Act 44 Compliance Determination	In Compliance		In Compliance		
Compared to the Peer Group Average	Weaker		Weaker		

Operating Cost per Revenue Vehicle-Hour: MB

System	FYE 2020 Single Year		Five-Year Change Since FYE 2015		
	Value	Rank of 10	2015 Value	Annual Rate	Rank of 10
Western Piedmont Regional Transit Authority	\$61.84	2	\$88.23	-6.86%	1
Zia Therapy Center, Inc.	\$49.52	1	\$55.58	-2.28%	2
Monroe County Transportation Authority	\$127.62	10	\$88.84	7.51%	10
Hill Country Transit District	\$81.23	6	\$67.61	3.74%	8
County of Fayette	\$74.82	5	\$68.11	1.90%	4
Estuary Transit District	\$66.79	3	\$55.48	3.78%	9
Schuylkill Transportation System	\$108.64	9	\$98.49	1.98%	5
Area Transportation Authority of North Central PA	\$81.60	7	\$73.38	2.15%	6
Warren County Transit Authority	\$73.27	4	\$78.99	-1.49%	3
Endless Mountains Transportation Authority	\$82.04	8	\$72.83	2.41%	7
<i>Average</i>	\$80.74		\$74.75	1.28%	
<i>Standard Deviation</i>	\$22.60		\$14.15	3.95%	
<i>Average – 1 Standard Deviation</i>	\$58.14		\$60.61	-2.67%	
<i>Average + 1 Standard Deviation</i>	\$103.33		\$88.90	5.24%	
Act 44 Compliance Determination	In Compliance		In Compliance		
Compared to the Peer Group Average	Weaker		Weaker		

Operating Cost per Passenger: MB

System	FYE 2020 Single Year		Five-Year Change Since FYE 2015		
	Value	Rank of 10	2015 Value	Annual Rate	Rank of 10
Western Piedmont Regional Transit Authority	\$12.35	4	\$9.89	4.55%	2
Zia Therapy Center, Inc.	\$11.26	2	\$8.91	4.81%	3
Monroe County Transportation Authority	\$15.42	6	\$12.12	4.94%	4
Hill Country Transit District	\$10.20	1	\$4.96	15.51%	9
County of Fayette	\$20.72	9	\$10.25	15.13%	8
Estuary Transit District	\$29.28	10	\$13.05	17.53%	10
Schuylkill Transportation System	\$12.21	3	\$8.22	8.24%	5
Area Transportation Authority of North Central PA	\$16.47	7	\$10.60	9.20%	6
Warren County Transit Authority	\$12.63	5	\$12.74	-0.17%	1
Endless Mountains Transportation Authority	\$19.52	8	\$9.83	14.71%	7
<i>Average</i>	\$16.01		\$10.06	9.45%	
<i>Standard Deviation</i>	\$5.84		\$2.39	5.98%	
<i>Average – 1 Standard Deviation</i>	\$10.17		\$7.66	3.47%	
<i>Average + 1 Standard Deviation</i>	\$21.84		\$12.45	15.42%	
Act 44 Compliance Determination	In Compliance		In Compliance		
Compared to the Peer Group Average	Weaker		Weaker		

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