

Region of Waterloo
Transportation Services
Transit Services

To: Sustainability, Infrastructure, and Development Committee

Meeting Date: February 10, 2026

Report Title: Grand River Transit Ridership Update – 2025 Year End

1. Recommendation

For information.

2. Purpose / Issue:

This report outlines GRT's 2025 year-end performance and provides updates on GRT Business Plan initiatives that improve speed, reliability and ease of use to help diversify ridership and revenue.

3. Strategic Plan:

Ridership reports share GRT's progress on meeting the goals of the Strategic Plan's climate aligned growth priority and GRT's Business Plan priorities.

4. Report Highlights:

- GRT's 2025 ridership was 22.1 million, slightly exceeding the initial forecast of 21.9 million. This is a 16% decrease compared to 2024 (26.2 million). Decreases in ridership were mainly due to reductions in the local student population. While ridership appears to be stabilizing, 2026 ridership projections will be updated before the mid-year council report when new enrolment numbers are received from post-secondary partners. The upcoming academic year is anticipated to be impacted by new immigration policies and revised international student caps announced by the federal government in late 2025.
- In 2025 GRT delivered over 1.3 million conventional bus trips through 17 million kilometers of bus service. These trips moved passengers more than 148 million kilometers and bus trips prevented an estimated 3.7 million kilograms of greenhouse gas emissions compared to personal vehicle travel.
- ION light rail on-time performance in 2025 was 95.3%, slightly exceeding 2024 performance of 95.2%. Bus on-time performance in 2025 was 73.8%, similar to 2024 (73.7%).

- **Improving bus on-time performance:** In 2026, GRT is expanding the transit priority network and adjusting schedules to manage the impact of major construction projects.
- Over 199,500 GRT MobilityPLUS trips were delivered in 2025, up 16% from 172,000 in 2024. The year-end undelivered rate was 2.3% of trips, which matches 2024 performance.
 - **MobilityPLUS modernization:** A contract will be awarded in early 2026 to modernize GRT's trip management software. This upgrade is anticipated to reduce the rate of unmet trips and improve the customer booking experience – key priorities of the GRT Business Plan.
- GRT investments in transit infrastructure, customer-focused amenities, and demand-responsive service changes are part of a comprehensive strategy to stabilize and grow ridership by improving the experience for all riders:
 - **Bus stop upgrades:** 62 concrete landing pads and 21 shelters were installed in 2025. System-wide stop accessibility (i.e., hard surface landing pads) is now 83%, up 2% from 2024. Accelerating stop accessibility improvements is a priority for the 2026 transit infrastructure program.
 - **Frequency and new coverage:** Midday summer service for Route 201 was increased to every 10 minutes for consistent schedules year-round. Route 302 ION Bus service was increased to match weekday ION LRT service for seamless connections between Cambridge, Kitchener and Waterloo. Route 50 now provides new coverage to the east end of Myers Road to serve growing residential neighbourhoods by Branchton Road.
 - **Chicopee Bus Loop:** A new bus loop, stop, and shelter were constructed in 2025 and entered service in January 2026. Route 27 now connects Chicopee Ski and Summer Resort to 301 ION light rail and 302 ION Bus at Fairway Station, linking riders from across the Region to a key community destination.
- GRT has launched several new strategies to diversify ridership and revenue:
 - **GRT Pay expansion:** More than 400,000 fare products were sold under this expansion since launch in April, and total sales exceeded \$1.2 million for 2025. GRT Pay options will be further expanded in 2026 and customers will be surveyed to understand the uptake and experience for new and existing customers.
 - **Township transit strategy:** GRT has applied to the Ontario Transit Investment Fund to introduce new services for North Dumfries and Wellesley, and improved services for Wilmot and Woolwich (TSD-TRS-25-

009). Staff anticipate an answer on funding by Spring 2026, with initial launch as early as Fall 2026.

5. Background:

Staff provide regular updates on key performance measures aligned to the GRT Business Plan.

Appendix A, Performance Dashboard illustrates GRT's ridership for 2025 compared to the previous year, and other key performance metrics.

GRT ridership has grown by at least 9% since 2015 (20.3 million) and at least 1% since 2019 (22 million). In 2024, GRT's ridership methodology was updated to reflect new best practices for fare system data, leading to a 10% decrease compared to previous methods. Publicly reported 2015 and 2019 values are based on the old methodology, and it is not possible to recalculate historical years using the new method because they predate the electronic fare system. This means ridership growth in 2025 compared to 2015 and 2019 is likely greater than reported. Also in 2024, GRT increased the transfer window from 90 minutes to two hours, impacting ridership comparisons to previous years.

Transport Canada's annual report highlighted post-pandemic ridership recovery for urban transit systems across Canada was approximately 84% of 2019 levels in 2024, and Statistics Canada reported similar trends in 2025.

2025 ridership has exceeded 2019 levels, demonstrating the Region's sustained investment in transit services has helped GRT remain resilient and competitive as work, migration, and travel patterns have changed post-pandemic.

6. Communication and Engagement with Area Municipalities and the Public

Area Municipalities: Ridership updates and other performance measures are shared with area municipalities on cross-functional projects.

Public: Ridership and other performance measures will continue to be shared with the public on the GRT website.

7. Financial Implications:

	Current Year	Future Year(s)
Budget Impact?	No impact	No impact
Capital Plan Impact?	No impact	No impact

No new information has come to light through this update that impacts the approved 2026 budget. Full 2025 reporting of financial results will be available in May 2026.

8. Conclusion / Next Steps:

Moving forward, GRT will share ridership reports and system performance updates to Regional Council on a mid-year and year-end cycle.

Public performance data, including ridership, will continue to be routinely posted to GRT's performance webpage (grt.ca/en/about-grt/performance-measures).

9. Attachments:

Appendix A: 2025 Performance Dashboard

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