



2026 APTA Outstanding Public Transportation System Award

Summary

Valley Metro and our region earned the 2026 APTA Outstanding Public Transportation System Award by delivering measurable improvements across the organization—from safety and reliability to customer experience, ridership, accessibility and employee engagement. These accomplishments demonstrate a region that continues to grow, innovate and deliver results for the communities it serves.

Key metrics

- 41.7 million passenger trips in FY26 (8.7% growth over FY25)
 - 3.3 million additional rides as compared to FY25
- Bus on-time performance improved to 90%
- Rail on-time performance improved to 81%
- 35-mile, two-line light rail system serving the region, with three extensions opening in the last four years
- From FY24 to FY25, rail passenger assaults decreased 55%
- From FY24 to FY25, bus operator assaults decreased 60%
- Achieved an all-time high of 89% rider satisfaction rating according to the 2026 Rider Satisfaction Survey

Customer experience

Valley Metro continued improving customer experience through enhanced service, technology and frontline support.

- Achieved an all-time high of 89% rider satisfaction rating per 2026 rider survey
- Ridership grew by 3.3 million trips (8.7%) over FY26
- Introduced an AI Virtual Transit Agent to provide 24/7 customer support and trip planning
- Modernized fare payment with Smart Fare, ensuring riders never pay more than the daily, weekly or monthly fare cap

Safety, security and reliability

Valley Metro strengthened safety, security and reliability through strategic investments, stronger partnerships and operational improvements.

- Decreased security incidents through investments in our workforce, PD partnerships and behavioral health integrations
- Safety enhanced through increased training and analysis, helping to reduce high-severity bus crashes by 23% in FY25, and in our rail system design
- Service reliability improved thanks to collaboration with our cities, service providers, operators and union
- Through a reliability-centered bus maintenance program, tripled our distance between failures
- Rider satisfaction with cleanliness reached 83%

System growth and innovation

Valley Metro continued expanding regional mobility while meeting growing demand for transit.

- Expanded the rail system by 10 miles, introduced a two-line rail network and increased peak frequency to every 12 minutes
- Overall ridership increased 8.7%, more than doubling the previous year's growth
- Light rail ridership increased 19.7%, adding nearly two million trips in FY26
- Bus ridership grew by 1.6 million trips, with continued growth across local and Express/RAPID services
- Continued planning for the region's first comprehensive Bus Network Redesign in more than 20 years

Financial management

Through a commitment to transparency, accountability and fiscal sustainability, Valley Metro, with the guidance of our Board, continues to strengthen its financial position.

- In-housing maintenance initiatives are projected to save more than \$2 million annually (thus far and thanks to the work of the Board Subcommittee)
- Adopted an FY27 operating budget that maintained service while remaining 1.2% below the previous year's budget
- High marks for our financial and audit reporting from national association and peers

People and community

The award reflects Valley Metro's investment in our people and the accessibility of our current and future system to the local community.

- Expanded accessible transportation options, helping seniors and people with disabilities travel more independently through paratransit, RideChoice, the Valley Metro Connect app and in-community eligibility assessments and travel training
- 84% of employees participated in the agency's first Culture Survey
- Learning & Development programs achieved a 75% participation rate
- Thousands of community members helped shape future transit investments through public engagement efforts that meet our community where they are

Core message

This award was earned through the collective efforts of our people and our partners. Whether in operations, maintenance, safety, capital program delivery, customer service, administrative support or our partners who help create and fund our regional network, every division and collaboration played a role in earning this recognition.

- Every improvement was driven by a commitment to bettering the rider experience and our stakeholder relationships, embodying our mission of Connecting Communities and Enhancing Lives.
- This recognition reflects the work of every team member across the last three years.
- This award is a [recognition](#) among stellar peers and out of 30 transit agencies of our size nationwide.