



FARE-FREE FUTURE FOR FLORENCE

A Milestone Step for Mobility in the Pee Dee

On August 11 PDRTA launched fare free bus service across Florence County marking a milestone moment for public transportation in our region. This change, supported by Florence County Council and community partners, eliminates fares for all local riders while removing barriers to mobility and reinvesting savings directly into service reliability and fleet replacement.

“This is a great day, a big day for public transportation in Florence County and for PDRTA” said Don Strickland, Executive Director. “People say fare free? It is a lot more than just a free ride. It means better access to work, medical care and opportunity for thousands of residents.”

The launch was commemorated with two public events, a Farebox Smash Ceremony, on Friday August 8, where local leaders, state legislators, media and community partners gathered outside the Florence County Schofield Judicial Center to retire fare collection once and for all. The symbolic smashing of the farebox marked the start of a new era for public transit in Florence County.

On Monday August 11 the PDRTA Transit Center welcomed passengers, board members, county officials and staff for a community celebration.

Why Fare Free Matters

Following months of study and close collaboration with Florence County Council, the decision to eliminate fares was made. This change brings several important benefits:

- Faster boarding and better on time performance with no fumbling for passes or change
- More money for families riders save \$1 to \$1.50 per trip which adds up quickly for those traveling multiple times a day
- Safety for drivers and passengers removing cash collection reduces risk and eliminates situations where drivers feel compelled to pay for passengers out of pocket
- Savings reinvested in the fleet avoiding costly farebox replacements at nearly \$22,000 each allows almost \$1 million annually to go toward replacing aging buses
- Greater mobility with nearly 77 percent of riders lacking access to a vehicle fare free ensures transit remains a lifeline to work medical appointments and opportunity



“Fare free really does not break it down the right way” said Florence County Council Chairman William Schofield. “It is about being fiscally conservative reinvesting in buses instead of machines and putting nearly \$1 million back into the system each year. That is a win for everyone.”

A Shared Vision for the Future

County leaders echoed the broader community impact. “This is huge for economic development for our medical community and for building a safe healthy thriving Florence County for all” said Kevin Yokim, Florence County Administrator.

With Florence now joining Chesterfield, Darlington, Dillon, Marion and Marlboro Counties as fare free service areas the entire PDRTA system is unified under a model that puts access first.

“This is about more than rides” Strickland said. “It is about removing barriers creating opportunity and making transit work better for everyone. We are proud to celebrate this moment with Florence County and we are excited about the stronger more connected region it will help us build.”





Passenger Voices: A Video That Speaks for Itself

Perhaps the most powerful part of this launch is hearing directly from the passengers whose lives are touched every day by public transit. As part of the celebration, we interviewed passengers and made a video to capture what fare free really means to the people who ride with us every day. Instead of numbers or reports this video shares voices and stories straight from the community.

One rider described using the bus daily to get to work and medical appointments, expressing heartfelt thanks for making this possible. Another passenger, who has been riding for more than 30 years and even bringing her children along, reflected on how the service has always been a lifeline for accessing doctor appointments, shopping and so much more. A veteran offered his gratitude for the support transit provides, while a young woman explained that fare free gives her peace of mind and less stress as she travels to and from work. Others spoke about how saving even a few dollars a

day makes a tremendous difference, especially for those who previously struggled to afford transportation to a job or appointment.

Together, these stories remind us that fare free is not just about policy or numbers. It is about people, their families and their ability to access needs and opportunity.

Click the photo above to check it out!



FARE FREE FLORENCE

Starting August 11th, all PDRTA services in Florence County will be FARE FREE!

No passes.
No change.
Just ride!

Made possible by Florence County



Questions? Contact us at 843-665-2227, Option 2 or email us at info@pdrtac.org



STATE MASS TRANSIT FUNDS STALLED *SINCE 1987*

51 Years of Service in the Pee Dee

Since 1974 PDRTA has been serving six counties across the Pee Dee region with dependable public transportation. As the largest regional transit authority in South Carolina, PDRTA provides access to jobs, healthcare, schools and opportunity for thousands of riders each year. We have grown with the needs of our region but state funding for transit has not kept pace.

The State Mass Transit Funding program provides annual financial support to local transit agencies through SCDOT. These funds are vital for maintaining and expanding service in every corner of our state.

The challenge is that the state allocation has remained **frozen at 6.5 million dollars since 1987**. Back then only **7** transit agencies shared that support. Today there are **34**. What was once 6.5 million is now equivalent to 2.7 million in today's dollars. The result is that agencies like ours must stretch limited resources further than ever before while demand continues to rise.

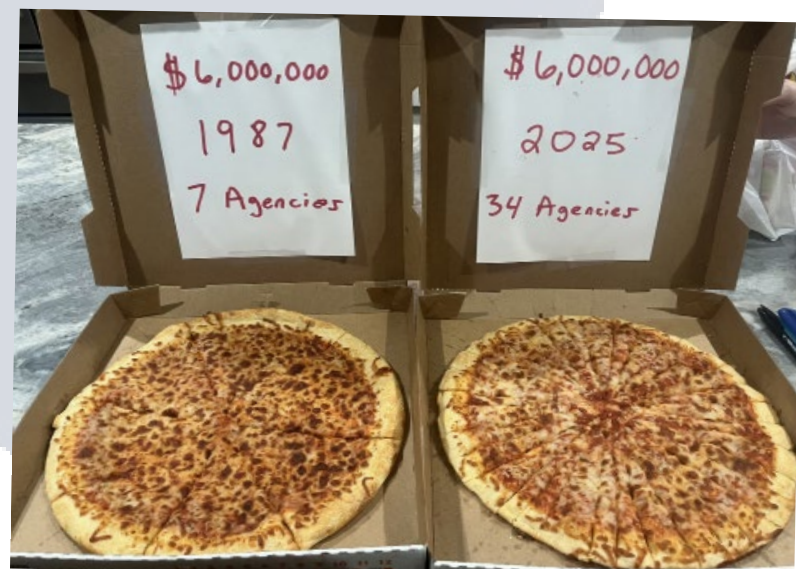
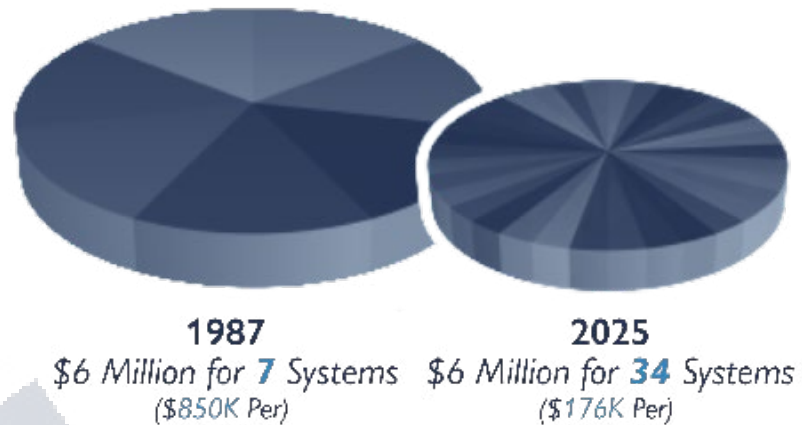
South Carolina is Falling Behind

While our passengers depend on transit for work trips and millions of rides each year South Carolina funds **less than 3%** of total transit costs. Neighboring states like North Carolina, Georgia and Florida invest much more. If our state had kept its original commitment to transit the current level of support would be more than 80 million dollars a year instead of the 6.5 million that it has been for 38 years.

What This Means for the Pee Dee

For PDRTA, this shortfall limits how many vehicles we can replace, how far we can expand service and how many residents we can reach in the rural communities we serve. Every dollar that we do not receive means fewer buses, fewer routes and fewer opportunities for the people who rely on us.

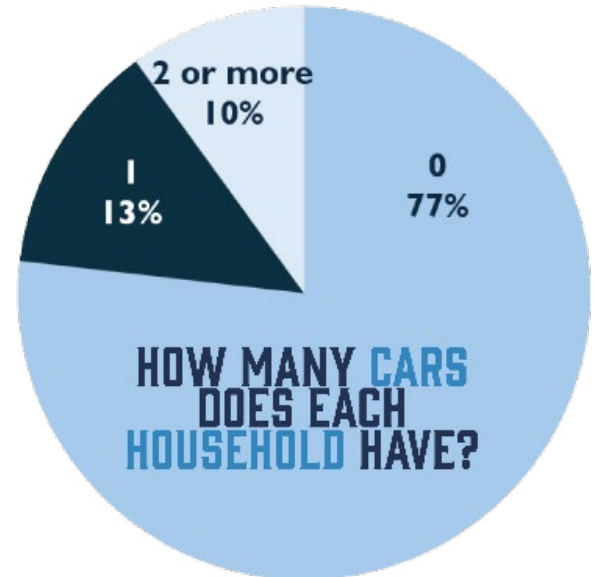
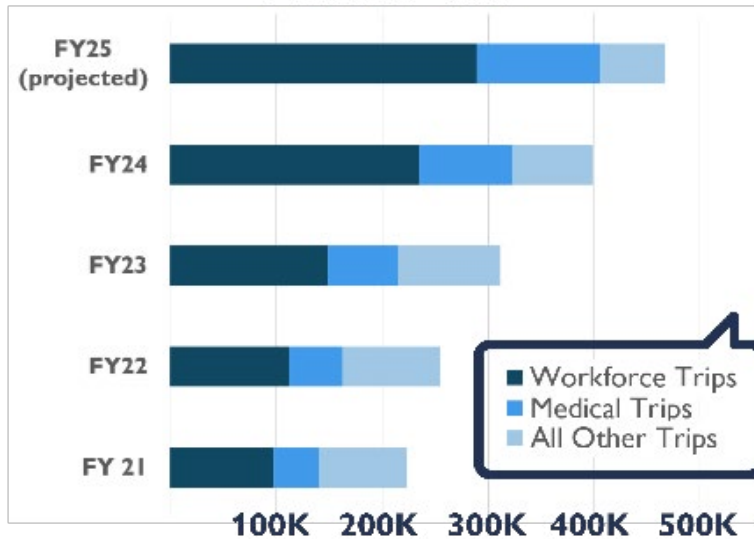
In 2024 PDRTA provided nearly 400,000 passenger trips across the Pee Dee and survey results show just how essential these rides are. Over 59% of trips are dedicated to connecting workers with their jobs while another 23% of passengers reported they are unemployed and actively seeking employment. Healthcare trips account for 22% of rides with patients relying on us to reach essential treatments and preventive care. With one in five Americans expected to be 65 or older by 2040 the need for long term healthcare access and mobility independence will only grow. Our healthcare partners already depend on our role in providing that vital connection. The remaining 19% of all other trips includes all other necessary life connections, like shopping and education.



Our survey also revealed that 77% of passengers live in households without a car making public transit their only source of independence and mobility. Passengers and our underserved communities are telling us they want more. 43% said they would ride more often with expanded evening and weekend service and 42% pointed to the need for more stops and routes.

Without stronger state support the burden continues to grow heavier for local governments and for PDRTA as we work to meet both today's needs and tomorrow's demands.

ANNUAL PASSENGER RIDERSHIP & SURVEY DATA



Data collected from 2024 Passenger Surveys

The Solution is Clear

South Carolina must increase transit funding to at least 80 million dollars annually. That level of investment would:

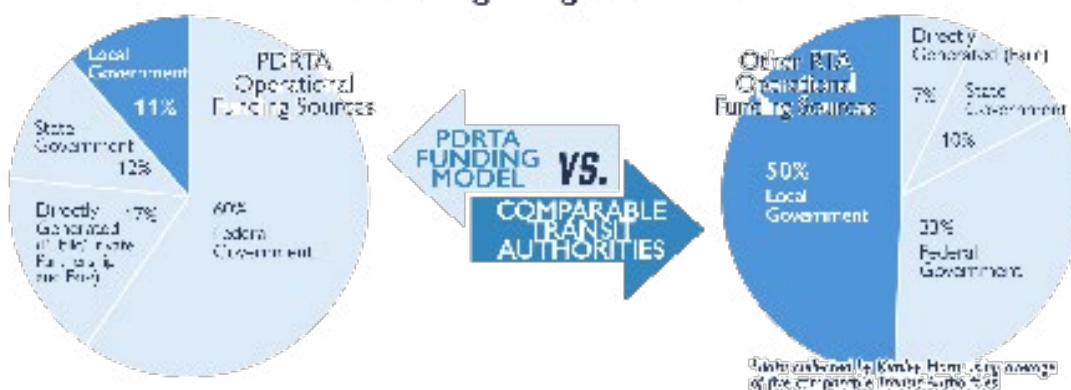
- Add 2 to 3 million rides statewide every year
- Support 20 to 40 new vehicles annually
- Unlock 25 million in federal matching funds to expand service in rural areas
- Strengthen local economies by improving access to jobs and opportunity

Moving Forward Together

At PDRTA we remain committed to connecting people to work, education, healthcare and opportunity across the Pee Dee. But the math is simple. If state transit funding does not move forward South Carolina risks falling even further behind our neighbors.

A stronger investment in transit is not just about buses. It is about building stronger communities and a stronger future for our state.

Other RTAs receive an average of 50% local funding where PDRTA is getting below 12%



CONNECTING THE PEOPLE OF THE PEE DEE

Tri-County Park Group Strengthens Transit Access in the Pee Dee

On July 9, PDRTA received a generous \$30,000 contribution from the Tri-County Park Group to support public transportation in the Pee Dee. This gift demonstrated their commitment to expanding access, creating opportunity and investing in the future of our region.

The funding is directed to Dillon, Marlboro and Marion Counties, where reliable transit is helping remove barriers that often stand between residents and steady employment. With the benefit of a 3-to-1 federal match, the \$30,000 contribution grew to an impressive \$120,000 impact.

This investment highlights the essential role public transit plays in connecting people to jobs, fueling economic growth and supporting families and communities across the Pee Dee. PDRTA is truly grateful for the Tri-County Park Group's vision and leadership in making this possible.

By bringing resources directly to employers like Harbor Freight, PDRTA is helping ensure that transit services are not only available but understood and used by the people who benefit most. Together with community partners and local businesses, we're building stronger pathways to jobs and opportunities across the Pee Dee.



FMU Route 7 Returns for the Fall Semester

Friday, August 22, PDRTA joined students at Francis Marion University's First Friday event to share information about our services. We had the opportunity to meet several international exchange students who were especially excited to learn about using PDRTA to reach resources outside of campus, all convenient and free.



Just a few days prior, on Monday, August 18, PDRTA's FMU Route 7 returned to service. The route runs Monday through Friday while school is in session with breaks during the winter and summer intersessions. The service begins in Florence and connects FMU students and the community to over 250 key destinations throughout Florence through the Florence Transit Center.

As part of ongoing route efficiency and evaluations to better serve, Route 7 no longer extends into Marion County due to low ridership on that portion of the route. PDRTA remains committed to our passengers and intends to use our resources in the most meaningful and impactful way. With the right funding, we plan to improve and reinstate services that provide intercounty connections in a way that best supports passengers.





PDRTA Joins the New Hopewell Baptist Rice Festival and Parade

A few weeks ago PDRTA was proud to participate in the New Hopewell Baptist Church Rice Festival and Parade, led by two of our dedicated bus operators, Azalee McPhail and Levern Smith. Azalee has been with PDRTA for over 30 years, currently driving our Society Hill Commuter Route, while Levern is a driver in Chesterfield County. The parade featured a vibrant lineup of local organizations, with community members lining the streets to cheer and follow the procession to the festival, where groups like CareSouth offered free services.

Connecting Communities: Society Hill Commuter Route

PDRTA's Society Hill Commuter Route, driven by Ms. Azalee McPhail, runs Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. This route connects Society Hill, Darlington and Hartsville. It provides convenient access for passengers to destinations like Walmart in Hartsville, the Dollar General Market in Society Hill and connections to the HART and DART routes. Azalee's enthusiasm for serving passengers is evident, bringing some of her regular passengers along with her to ride in the parade to the event.

Cheraw Connect: Serving Cheraw Residents

Cheraw Express, driven by Mr. Levern Smith, is a weekday route running Monday through Friday, 7:00am to 6:00pm. This route connects passengers to key destinations such as Walmart, Northeastern Technical College, McLeod Health, CareSouth, IGA, apartments, neighborhoods and more! Levern's dedication helps residents access healthcare, education and daily necessities.

Celebrating Community and Transit

At the festival, PDRTA shared information and handed out route information to event attendees. The event's MC gave a lively shout-out, encouraging everyone to ride PDRTA's free services, highlighting the

accessibility and convenience of our routes. We are thankful to our PDRTA team and bus operators for their dedication and passion for helping people get where they need to go!



NEXT STOP: SOCIETY HILL TO HARTSVILLE & DARLINGTON



The Society Hill to Hartsville and Darlington Commuter route is fare-free, wheelchair accessible and runs on Mondays, Wednesdays and Friday.

This route features **key destinations** like shopping at Walmart in Hartsville, the Dollar General Market in Society Hill and it also connects to other routes like the HART route in Hartsville and the DART route in Darlington.

About PDRTA: Since 1974, PDRTA has been the largest regional transit system in South Carolina, serving six Pee Dee counties with 44 routes and nearly 400,000 annual trips. We focus on connecting people to work, healthcare, shopping and community life. All fare-free and accessible.

GET ON THE BUS AND RIDE WITH US!

Call us at (843)665-2227
or visit www.pdrta.org

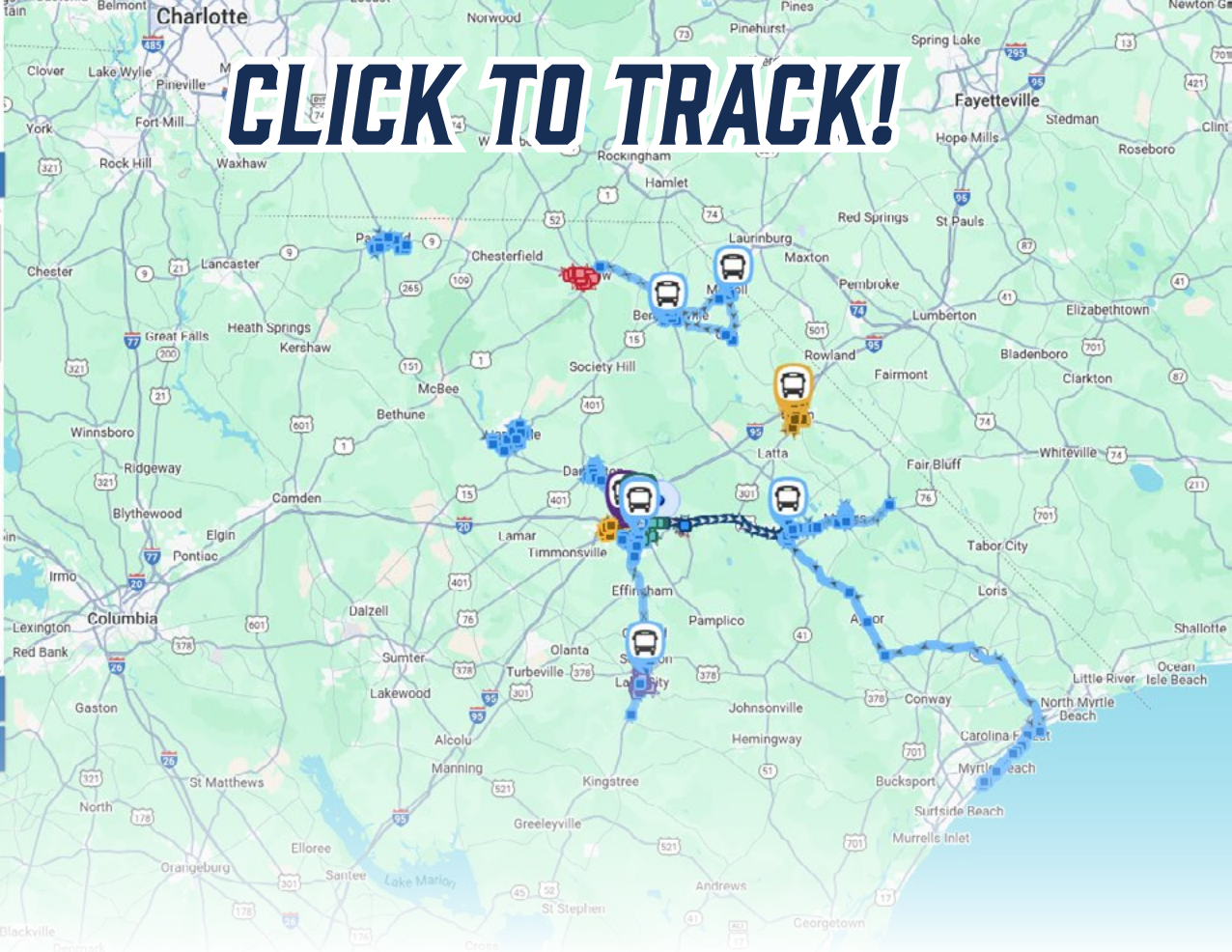
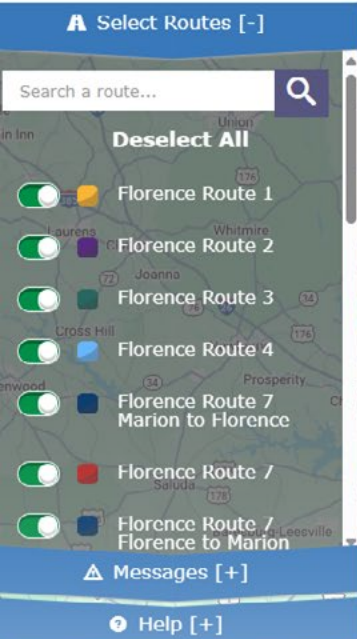


Please note that the final day of Saturday service on the DART route was Saturday, August 2. Passengers should plan their trips accordingly, as DART service will now operate Monday through Friday only.



Get the mobile app:  

CLICK TO TRACK!



Track PDRTA Live with the Spot ETA App

If you don't already know, PDRTA offers real-time bus tracking through the Spot ETA app, giving passengers or anyone instant access to live information about our routes and schedules.

Whether you're commuting to work, heading to an appointment or exploring the community, the app helps to plan trips with confidence and convenience.

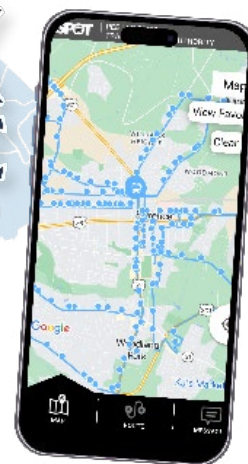
Using the app is simple. Just download "ETA Spot" from your mobile device's app store, scan one of our QR codes found on the bus and other locations or click the link directly from our website: <https://pdrta.org/track-my-ride#route-overviews> - or <https://pdtransit.etaspot.net/>

Once you're in, you can see live bus locations, estimated arrival times and route information for PDRTA services across our six-county service area.

Spot ETA is more than just a schedule. It provides a live feed of the buses, making it easy to track where your bus is, anticipate delays and adjust your trip as needed. Passengers can also explore PDRTA's coverage area and learn about all the communities we serve.

We've noticed that more and more passengers are relying on apps like Spot ETA to stay informed. By sharing this convenient tool, we're helping make public transit more accessible, predictable and user-friendly for everyone.

Don't miss out! Download Spot ETA today and take control of your next PDRTA trip!



OUR DRIVING FORCE



Celebrating Our Transit Operations Ambassador - Congratulations to Cornelius Cribb

PDRTA is proud to recognize Cornelius Cribb as the Transit Operations Ambassador for Fiscal Year 2025-2026. This honor is awarded to an employee who consistently demonstrates excellence in service, professionalism and dedication to our riders and community.

Cornelius has built a reputation among passengers and coworkers alike for his positive attitude, reliability and genuine care for the people he serves. He goes above and beyond to ensure every rider feels welcomed, respected and safe. His ability to quickly solve challenges, support his teammates and maintain a calm and courteous demeanor makes him a shining example of PDRTA's mission in action.



Whether he is assisting a first time passenger, responding to a schedule change or lending a hand to a fellow driver, Cornelius approaches every task with enthusiasm and commitment. His leadership behind the wheel and his daily interactions with the public reflect the very best of who we are as an organization.

We are grateful to have Cornelius as part of the PDRTA team and congratulate him on this well deserved recognition. He truly embodies the spirit of a Transit Operations Ambassador!

PDRTA Team Joins United Way's Day of Caring

On September 19, our PDRTA team proudly joined hundreds of volunteers across Florence County for the annual United Way Day of Caring. This event brings businesses, organizations and community members together to complete service projects that make a lasting difference.

The event began with a breakfast kickoff where it was announced that over 300 volunteers were signed up to



serve at project sites across Florence. PDRTA registered for three projects, with the majority of our team helping at the Leatherman Senior Center. There, our employees packed and delivered meals as part of the Meals on Wheels program, which provides nutritionally balanced meals to homebound seniors.

For many of these seniors, Meals on Wheels is more than just a hot meal, it is a vital service that fights hunger, promotes health and reduces isolation. Our team was inspired by the spirit of community service by their staff and volunteers.

Passenger Survey Week is Coming

Passenger Survey Week is almost here! From Monday, November 3 through Friday, November 7 our team will be riding along on across all six counties to distribute and collect our annual passenger surveys. This is a vital opportunity to hear directly from the passengers who rely on us every day. Drivers, please be aware that our PDRTA team will be on board during this week. The schedule is as follows:

- Monday 11/3 - Florence
- Tuesday 11/4 - Marlboro
- Wednesday 11/5 - Darlington
- Thursday 11/6 - Chesterfield
- Friday 11/7 - Dillon and Marion

A sign-up sheet will be shared internally in the coming weeks along with additional information as the dates approach. When you sign-up we need to cover shifts in minimum increments of four hours and encourage you to pair up with a teammate for your shift so you can collect feedback and engage with passengers together. With fare-free service and increased ridership, some buses may have standing room only.

Your cooperation and awareness will help ensure the survey process goes smoothly and that passengers feel comfortable providing their input. If you are part of an organization that would like to get involved, please reach out, we welcome all extra hands to help collect this important feedback!

**Save the Date:
Quarterly Safety
Training**

Our next Quarterly Safety Training for PDRTA employees is coming up October 17th! These sessions keep our team connected, informed and focused on safety, policy and operations. Exact date will be announced soon, stay tuned.

**Employee and
Board Member End
of Year Celebration**

Mark your calendars for Friday, December 5! PDRTA's end of year Employee and Board Member Celebration will be held from 7 to 10 pm at The Market on Pearl, 103 Pearl Street, Darlington. Enjoy food, music, prizes and fun as we celebrate another successful year together.

**PDRTA EMPLOYEES
AND BOARD MEMBERS!**

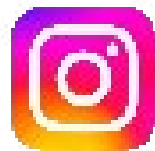
You're Invited!

END OF YEAR CELEBRATION!

**Friday, December 5th from 7-10pm
The Market on Pearl**

103 Pearl Street, Darlington, South Carolina 29532

All are welcome to bring one guest. Please RSVP by November 21st so we can plan accordingly.



FOR NEWS AND UPDATES

NEXT STOP?

Mark your Calendars for Upcoming Dates!

10/14 - 9-12 - ESL Florence Adult Ed Field Trip
10/16 - PDRTA Board Meeting
10/24 - 6-830pm - FCED Trunk or Treat 2025 - Florence County Complex 180 N Irby Street
11/1 - SC Pecan and Music Festival
11/3 - 11/7 - Passenger Survey week
Monday 11/3 - Florence
Tuesday 11/4 - Marlboro
Wednesday 11/5 - Darlington
Thursday 11/6 - Chesterfield
Friday 11/7 - Dillon and Marion
11/7 - Carver Elementary Transportation Fair
11/11 - Veterans Day - Admin Closed - Normal Service on all PDRTA routes
11/27 - Thanksgiving Day - Admin Closed - No Service - No Service on all PDRTA routes
11/28 - Day after Thanksgiving - Admin Closed - Normal Service on all PDRTA routes
12/5 - 7-10pm - Employee End of Year Celebration - at the Market on Pearl in Darlington
12/24 - Christmas Eve - Admin Closed - Normal Service on all PDRTA routes
12/25 - Christmas Day - No Service - No Service on all PDRTA routes
12/26 - Day after Christmas - Admin Closed - Normal Service on all PDRTA routes
12/31 - NYE - Admin Normal - Normal Service on all PDRTA routes
1/1 - NY - Admin Closed - Limited Service - Myrtle Beach & workforce routes only



For more updates and information, follow us on social or view our website at www.pdrta.org

SCHEDULE AHEAD for 2025

VETERANS DAY-NOVEMBER 11
NORMAL Service Hours on all PDRTA routes.

THANKSGIVING DAY-NOVEMBER 27
NO service on all PDRTA routes. Normal schedules will resume Friday, November 28th.

ROUTE 7 / FMU BREAKS
Route 7 / FMU - CLOSED mid December through early January.

CHRISTMAS EVE
NORMAL Service Hours on all PDRTA routes.

CHRISTMAS DAY
NO service on all PDRTA routes. Normal schedules will resume Friday, December 26th.

NEW YEARS EVE
NORMAL Service Hours on all PDRTA routes.

2026 NEW YEARS DAY
ONLY routes serving Myrtle Beach and Workforce locations will be operational.

Help shape
the future of
transportation
in the Pee Dee!



TAKE THE SURVEY TODAY!



Feedback? We value your input!
Share your thoughts, suggest improvements.

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lleonard@pdrta.org

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